

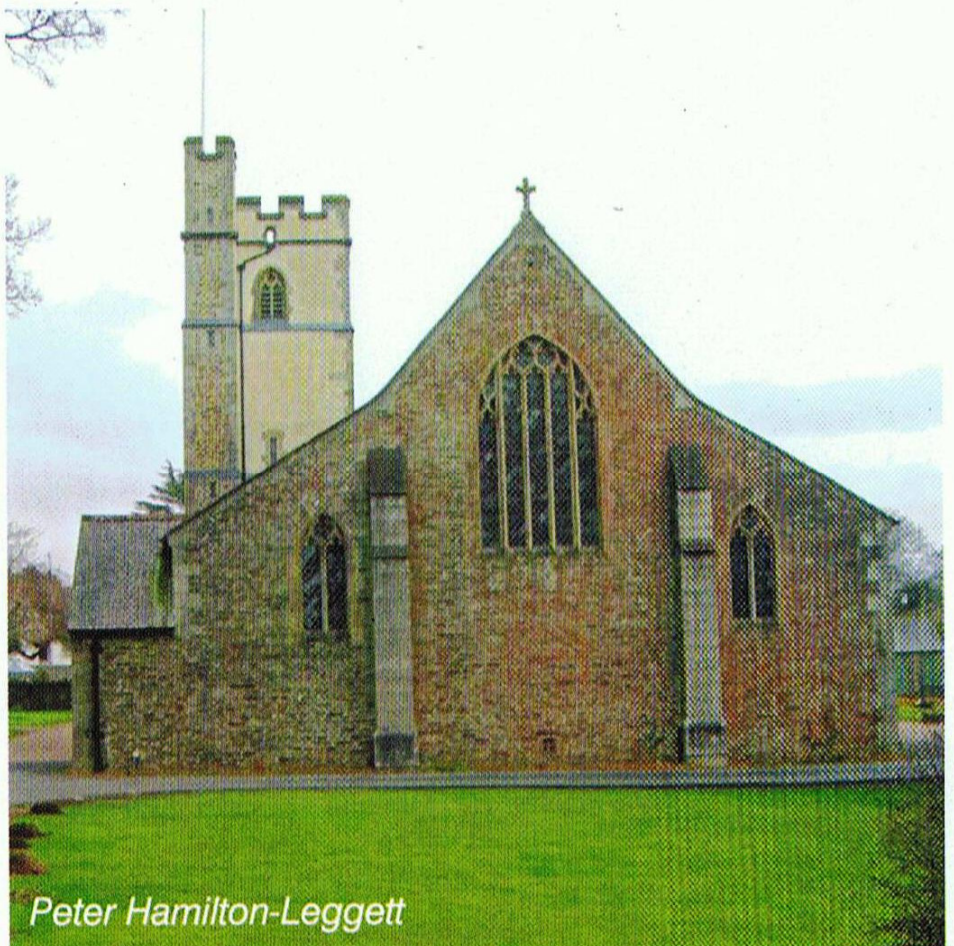
ST PAUL'S CHURCH, YELVERTON

by
Peter Hamilton-Leggett

Before the eighteen hundreds the area that is now called Yelverton was merely barren moorland and farmland within the ancient parish of Buckland Monachorum. How extraordinary then that Arthur Mee should write that Yelverton was "*one of the villages Francis Drake must have known as a boy*" ('The King's England': Devon 1938). By the late 1880's a nucleus of buildings had begun to spring up and Yelverton Station had been constructed (1885) – the attractions being the bracing fresh Dartmoor air that many doctors raved over and as a gateway to 'explore' Dartmoor. It was therefore inevitable that a church was needed to fulfil the spiritual needs of both the inhabitants and many visitors alike. The Methodists arrived first (1866) and had constructed two churches before the present St Paul's was completed. The Catholic Church was built in 1929.

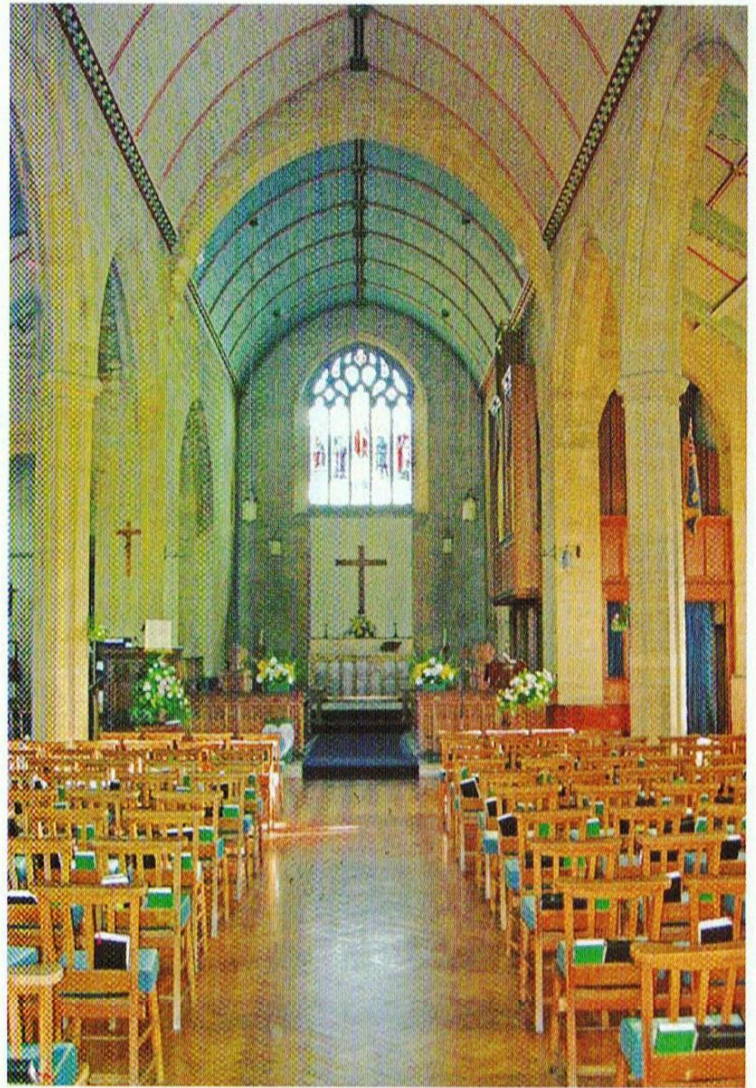
In 1891 a local architect, Charles King, who had designed his own house (Drake's Leat) was commissioned to build a church for 130 people. Four years later the wooden structure was dedicated by Bishop Knight Bruce. The Bishop of Exeter took the first Confirmation Service on the 10 November 1899. Among the clergy present was the Revd Sabine Baring-Gould. Extra seats were soon called for and yet another 60 were added in 1902 to cater for the summer holidaymakers. It soon became clear that this building was inadequate for the growing needs of Yelverton.

The idea of a more permanent stone structure persisted and in 1907 the Misses Bayly of Elfordtown donated £515 and half an acre of land. A meeting, held in 1909, raised nearly £3000 and Sir Charles Nicholson, of the London firm Nicholson & Corlette, unveiled his plans for the new church. Nicholson was a very prominent church architect, who was at the height of his profession. Messrs Pethick Bros won the building contract and generously offered to



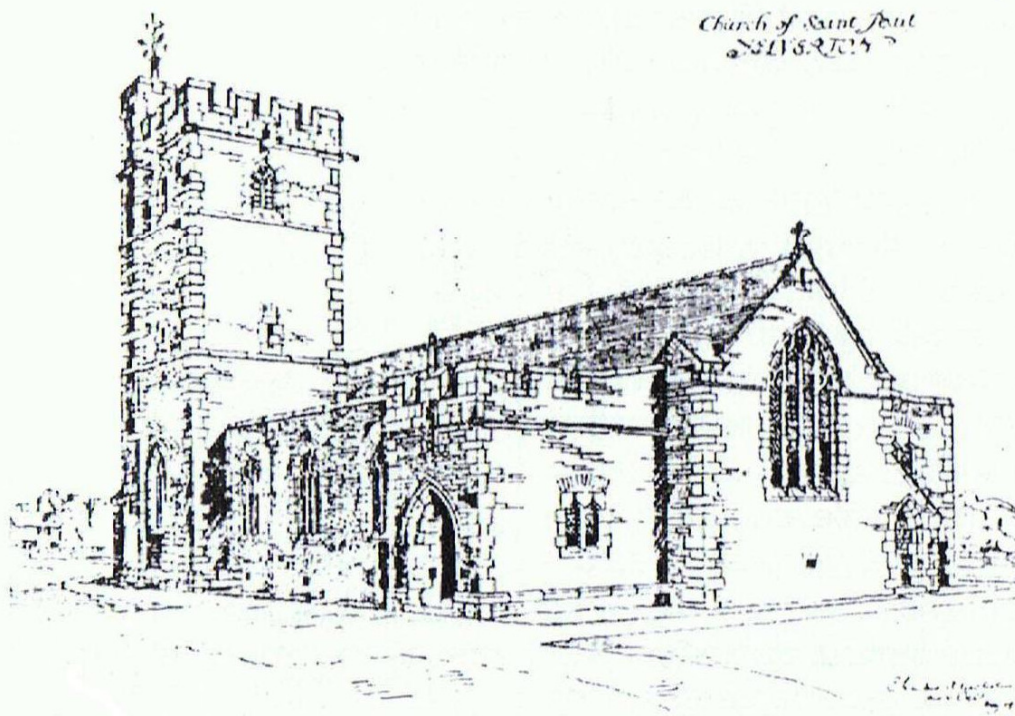
Peter Hamilton-Leggett

donate the granite for the external quoins. The local Yennadon stone rubble from Dousland was given by Sir Henry Lopes. The inscription on the foundation stone reads: *"To the glory of God, this stone was placed by Archibald, Bishop of Exeter, August 8th AD 1910."* The stone can be found at the base of the tower which is built over the Lady Chapel. The tower is about 65 feet tall with a concrete roof and battlements. It houses a single bell by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon which was given in memory of Mary Whitmarsh in 1949. Measuring 27 inches in diameter, it weighs nearly 5cwt and is hung dead with a chiming clapper. The final cost of the finished church was £5689, a mere £189 over the final budget, and all the money had been promised before completion. Bishop Trefusis of Crediton dedicated the church on 10 July 1912.



Nicholas Pevsner (Devon 1989) liked the interior – *"The type of interior is Devonian*

... the sense of smooth surfaces as something pleasurable in itself belong to our century. The whole church is lined with slabs of buff-coloured Ham Hill stone." J.M. Slader also enthused about the building in his *Guide to Devon Churches* (1968): *"The only pre-1939*



*Church of Saint Paul
YELVERTON*

church to approach the best of the nineteenth century is Yelverton ... its colourful roof decoration – red and green in nave and aisles, red and blue in chancel, with black chequer work – imparts a freshness and widely contrasts with the roofs of the Victorian era." Praise indeed for a much under-rated building.



*One of the Poppyheads
- PHL Archive*

In 1915 the Misses Bayly commissioned Miss Violet Pinwill to carve the oak choir stalls. Arthur Mee (‘King’s England’: Devon 1938) notes: *“On the striking poppyheads of the choir stalls are flowers and leaves, a caterpillar nibbling at a berry, a snail on a slow expedition of discovery, and birds blithely singing in the boughs.”*

Sir Charles Nicholson was not in favour of stained glass and, on the whole his wishes have been fulfilled. The first window, on the south side, was erected in 1929 to the memory of Richard and Mary Rodd. The East window* behind the altar is dedicated to the preservation of the church and loved-ones during World War II 1939-1945 and, in 1950, the east window in the Lady Chapel was erected in memory of Agnes Katherine Harvey. All the other windows remain as Nicholson intended.

The only item still remaining from the original wooden church, now St Paul’s Church Hall, is the pulpit, which was made in Buckland Monachorum for £20. A brass above the organ is inscribed *“Walter Deeble Boger, of Wolsdon, Cornwall, died at Burrdown, Yelverton 1909.”* Boger, a barrister, was High Sheriff for Cornwall and lived in the family home of Wolsdon, Anthony before retiring to Yelverton. His sister, Jane, gave the organ in his memory. Nicholson & Co of Worcester built it in 1914. His brother officers of the Royal Munster Fusiliers gave the altar in memory of Colonel David Johnston in 1927. Col Johnston had named his Yelverton house Munster. On the 12 May 1937 a flagpole was erected on the tower to commemorate the coronation of King George VI. This was replaced in 1953 for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and again in May 1997 in memory of Jack Pringle, whose Hurricane had clipped the tower after taking off from RAF Harrowbeer on 28 May 1944 – the pilot died in the accident. Despite falling masonry, the vicar continued with the morning service. The red light on the tower was replaced by a black & white board to increase visibility. The Air Ministry paid £98 for the repairs. On 24 Jan 1957 the tower was struck by lightning causing as much damage as the 1944 accident. In 1964 local carpenter, Ron Price, made a large wooden cross that was erected high above the altar. It cost £1672 to repair the tower in 1978 and a considerable amount more in 2008 - just over £100,000 – about eighteen times the cost of the original church! Ken Farham’s expertise was called upon to stop the terrible damp that was causing major problems. Amongst extensive work he

LIST OF INCUMBENTS

Priests in charge

1929 Arthur Allen
1931 Herbert Harvey

Vicars

1935 Herbert Harvey
1945 Richard Welchman
1954 Thomas Grigg Smith
1959 Thomas Watkins
1967 Thomas Owen
1974 Peter Camp
1982 Robin Ellis

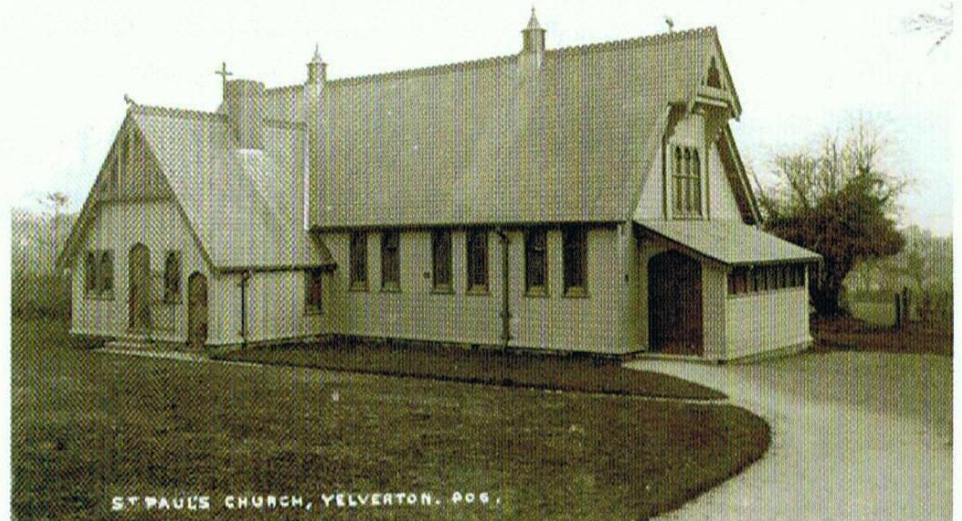
Rectors (Yelverton Benefice)

1987 John Ellis
1989 Graham Witts
1994 Richard Tebbs

Priest in charge (West Dartmoor Benefice)

2008 Nick Shutt

also applied a limewash on two sides of the tower giving it a more distinguished look. The BBC Home Service broadcast Evensong from St Paul's in October 1960 and the colourful hassocks were made by members of the congregation in the 1980's under the guidance of Joan Price. In 1987 the church became a Grade II listed building.



Original 1891 Wooden Church - PHL Archive

Buckland Monachorum remained the mother parish and Curates took the services but in 1923 a revolt was taking place – Yelverton residents wanted to break away from Buckland. The Western Morning News (3/2/23) reported: *"its community having grown wonderfully in the last few years, is now large and important enough to have the management of their own parochial affairs, and ought not to be subject to the control of the small but ancient community at Buckland Monachorum."* Buckland contributed nothing towards the upkeep of Yelverton whilst Yelverton paid contributions for both churches. Curates under the Vicar of Buckland were responsible for all the services until 1927 when the Bishop of Exeter intervened and Yelverton became a conventional district with a Curate-in-charge appointed directly from Exeter. This row was to linger on until 1935 when Yelverton became a separate ecclesiastical parish. Even then Buckland was not happy and the PCC demanded that the Saxon font that they had given in 1908 be returned. The new font, with rhythmical leaping fish motifs was designed by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1936. Made of Bath Stone it was a gift from Lieutenant Colonel R.C. Norrington, a churchwarden, in memory of his wife. In 1984 a garden of remembrance was created for the burial of ashes. The church has no graveyard and burials take place at Buckland Monachorum.

Local workmen built the vicarage, to the south of the church in 1933-4. The Vicar of Walkhampton, Rev Herbert Harvey, became the first Vicar of Yelverton and moved into the new vicarage.

With the decline of those entering holy orders and dwindling congregations parishes have had to amalgamate. Since 1987 Yelverton has absorbed Walkhampton, Meavy and Sheepstor. In August 2008 the Yelverton Benefice changed its name to the West Dartmoor Benefice.



* Since this article was written it has been discovered that the East Window was designed by E.R. Phillips of Osborne & Phillips, Stained Glass Studios, 20 York Street, Plymouth. Very little is known about this firm who were more usually listed as decorators!