

ST MARY'S CHURCH, SAMPFORD SPINEY, DEVON

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Thought to have been built as a chapel to the manor house, first mention of the building was in 1257. In the Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV (1289-1291) the Chapel of Sampford was taxed at 40 shillings (£2). Between 1334 and 1547 it belonged to Plympton Priory. The Abbot would have sent out a monk to perform a service perhaps once a month and on special holy days. Being in Latin the parishioners may not have understood the mass but they would certainly all have been



present. With the Dissolution of the Monasteries Henry VIII stripped all the assets from Plympton Priory. In October 1547 King Edward VI granted to the Dean and Chapter of Windsor the church at Plympton with the chapels of Plymstock, Wembury, Shaugh, Sampford Spiney, St Maurice and Brixton. Since 1538 the Sampford tithes had been rented to Thomas Whitehedde on a 25 year lease. Between 1735 and 1867 the Curacy of Shaugh Prior was united with Sampford Spiney. Services were rather random as we can glean from the various returns the clergy sent to the bishop. In 1744 the Rev Thomas Alcock writes that he resides in St Budeaux and had a curate (Merefield) living at Shaugh who preaches "once every Lord's day" and that *"The Holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered four times a year"*. *"The parsonage is not lived in because of its state of repair"*. He also notes that there are 18 families living in the parish. In 1797 little has changed save there are now 25 families. In 1821 J W Pearce writes that there is no house of residence. In the 1851 Religious Census Percy Rogers, curate and officiating minister, noted that divine service is



performed alternatively in the morning and afternoon. He goes on *"I give the average attendance for 6 in place of 12 months as the former period embraces the time I have served as curate. From the situation of the church the average attendance is much greater in summer than during the six months of winter which my return embraces"*. The attendance figures he gives were 60 in the mornings and 80 in the afternoon.

THE CHURCH EXTERIOR

The present church is of Roborough stone with granite dressings. The late Perpendicular tower, which rises in three stages complete with large crocketed pinnacles, is of typical Dartmoor design. The church was enlarged in the sixteenth century when the porch, south aisle and tower were added.



The crossed keys motif on the tower is said to represent Plympton Priory, dedicated to St Peter, but this is doubtful as the tower seems to have been built after the church was owned by the Dean & Canons of Windsor – maybe the carved stone was re-used by the builders. On the other hand R Hansford Worth has suggested that the motif could be the Papal Arms and nothing to do with the Priory. This is much

more likely as the crossed keys are behind a shield which is unknown for St Peter. Lower down is an **M**. As inverted **Vs**, it stood for 'Virgo Virginum' (Virgin of Virgins) and as an **M** it represents 'Maria', again a reference to the Virgin Mary. This medieval symbol was used until well into the eighteenth century. The original dedication was therefore probably to the Virgin Mary but became lost. It has been known as St Mary since about 1873.



THE CHURCH INTERIOR



There is a fine raised wagon roof of open timbers. The north transept is the earliest and most interesting part of the church. Here are two Early English lancet lights, medieval encaustic tiles with pierced geometric designs, a carved head, a piscina and a fine canopied niche of a 14th century tomb which at one time had an effigy perhaps of the de Spineto family.

By the time that Thomas Boggis became rector the church had fallen into disrepair and was certainly in need of care. Restoration took place in 1867. His son, Prebendary RJE Boggis records, "*My earliest memory of Sampford Spiney is watching men stripping the monolithic pillars of their whitewash as part of the*

church restoration work. Of course the high pews went, to be replaced by pitch-pine; and also the west gallery, to which, according to statements then current, the clerk was wont to climb, announcing, 'Let me sing to the glory of God . . .' No one else was tolerated, if attempting to spoil the solo." (Boggis 1947). Some of the old bench-ends have been used for the screen by the tower. The new rector seems to have thrown himself into the task remonstrating that the pews were too close together making it



impossible to kneel or even sit with comfort. He conducted most of his correspondence from 2 Bedford Villas, Tavistock, where he lived as there was no proper rectory in Sampford. The journey each Sunday took an hour each way in a horse-drawn carriage. It was in 1867 that the parish became greatly diminished when some 400 inhabitants were taken from it and added to the parish of Horrabridge. This left only 150 in Sampford Spiney hence part of the restoration also included removing some of the seats. The work was supervised by the Plymouth architect Alfred Norman. Other work included the re-roofing of the south aisle and the chancel. The total restoration bill was £650. The old glass windows were replaced with the diamond patterns that we see today. The vestry was also added at this time. The Rev Boggis bore the costs of the chancel repairs and the Misses Parlby's paid for a new porch. The only scheme that was not carried out was the re-pointing of the tower as funds had run out. The church re-opened for services on Tuesday 11 Feb 1868.



The chapel in the south aisle has a finely carved modern reredos. The granite font is 16th century octagonal with shields on the panels with cross & saltires. Probably made by the same hand as that at Walkhampton as they are almost identical save that the plinth is the right way up here! There is a plain & simple pulpit and lectern.

According to Prebendary Boggis, his father *"introduced a novelty – a musical instrument, to wit, a harmonium; or rather he had two instruments, for his moorland church was so damp, that when one was out of working order, another was brought from home to replace it for a while. The effect of the dampness was that some notes would refuse to behave aright and would continue to cipher; and sometimes it was my function as a little boy to stand by my mother as she played, and pull up any notes that stuck down."* The same source records that, *"after some years a pipe organ, one of Schnetzler's, was purchased, and my sister presided over the music, and regularly drove out [from Tavistock] every week to practice her mixed choir of men, women and young people."* Public subscription paid for the organ and permission was granted in 1875 to remove some seats to house it. John Snetzler [or Schnetzler] was a Swiss organ builder living in London. Beside his large cathedral organs he also produced smaller pipe organs. It is presumed that the one acquired by Sampford Spiney was second or third hand. Snetzler died in 1785. This maybe the pipe organ that Hele's of Plymouth serviced in 1899; however by 1924 Hele's had written to Mrs Calmady stating that they *"regret to have to report that this instrument is almost ruined by neglect in*



providing sufficient protection against damp". After much correspondence Messrs Hele reluctantly agreed to accept what remained of the organ to write off the account. For a while the music was supplied by a Harmonium but later an electronic organ was purchased. By the late 1990s both were inadequate. In 2001 the old organ from St Endellion Church, North Cornwall was donated and Peter Bazeley from Lamerton, installed it. Sadly age and damp have seen the organ deteriorate.

The Elizabethan chalice was made in Exeter in 1572 and is the oldest in the deanery – being the only one the church possesses it is still in use today. An earlier one must have been 'lost' as in 1553 the Church Goods Commissioners wrote, *"and one chalice committed to the custody of John Richards, Nicholas Rede and other parishioners there . . ."*.

There is also a medieval style flagon that was purchased by subscription in 1869.

Of interest are two hatchments that hang in the church. A hatchment would be suspended on the front of a deceased person's house for a period of mourning before being transferred to the church. These two are dated 1801 (Humphrey Hall) and 1817 (Lt Col Maine Swete Walrond).



The only stained glass window is behind the altar. It was given by Elizabeth Ann Henry in memory of her husband Lancelot, whose father, James Henry, was rector for 35 years.

The work was carried out by J Powell & Son (their sign being a hooded monk) to a design by C Rupert Moore (1904-1982).



The church possessed three bells in the 1553 inventory. These were recast by the Penningtons at different times – the 3rd read "Ambres Fortesqe + Io + Gode Wardens 1674"; the 4th "John Boowman John Denning gent Chvrch Wardens 1653" and the the tenor "Waltr King CW Richd King Sdman 1764". In 1890 two new bells by Llewellyns & James of Bristol were added. Both bear the name of the rector – James Henry and were donated by John Godden. In 2008 the ring of 5 was completely remodelled. The old tenor bell was melted down to produce two new Whitechapel bells, giving a peal of six. The two new bells are inscribed *"Deo Gloria - The Campbells of Eggworthy"* and *"The Pugh and Spedding families - Revd Geoff Lloyd Rector - Mrs Rosalind Pugh Churchwarden - Sir Peter Badge Churchwarden and The Harland Family"*. The six bells rang out again in 2009.



The original manor was owned by the Spinnet or De Spineto family and later by Walter de la Putte. Sir Francis Drake purchased the manor in 1581 and left it in his will to his second in command Jonas Bodenham, who sold it back to Francis Drake's brother Thomas. It eventually passed to the Bidgoods and then the Halls of Manadon. Then, through marriage, to the Parlby family. None of these families ever lived in Sampford Spiney but merely rented out the manor and various farms.

The graveyard is a picture in the spring being full of wild flowers. There are few gravestones of merit but there is a large mausoleum. When Ann Maria Jane Godden died in 1887 her husband John had a polished granite mausoleum built in her memory. She was Dutch and her father was governor of Curacao in the West Indies. It was here that she met the twenty year old John, a mining engineer, who was busy making his fortune from a vast deposit of guano that he had discovered there. He had six children by her and a further four with his second wife. His connection with Sampford Spiney was by his father who had been manager of North Wheal Robert Mine and lived at Court House. John had a sister and six brothers. The mausoleum is rather a mismatch of classical features but nevertheless still retains a certain charm. Still in use, the inside is fitted with shelves to hold the coffins.



The Parsonage, the residence of a parson who is not a rector or vicar, as provided by the parish, and glebe lands are very old but were never occupied by any of the rectors of Sampford Spiney. As was mentioned earlier this church was always held in plurality with other parishes, including Shaugh Prior. The Parsonage and Glebe land was sold in 1878 for £17. The house was almost a ruin as it had not been lived in for a long time. Today, much restored and rebuilt it is now called Stourton Farm.

THE RECTORY

When James Henry was appointed rector in 1885 he had obviously been promised a new rectory. In a letter dated 18 December 1889 the 85 year old Rev John Hall Parlby, the Lord of the Manor, wrote to James Henry, "*I fully enter into your views respecting a site for the Rectory House and am also sure of the family of Colliers determination to raise objections . . . I wish indeed we could come to some understanding with the parishioners who are well dispersed toward the church without spending money . . . I should like to look over that side of the parish with you when the weather is better but at present could not venture to take the risk of exposure being too infirm . . .*"

Somehow both the rector and Hall Parlby managed to get a new rectory built and sometime after 1891 the Henry family moved in. The house was built in the Arts and Crafts style. On the floor by the front door is the date 1899 picked out

in pebbles and, to the right is another diamond, this time bearing the initials JH for James Henry. Most of the building costs were covered by a £2000 grant from the Church Commissioners.

Once built, the couple held numerous church events within the rectory grounds. On 10 February 1920, aged 79, James died. The couple had been married 64 years. The funeral at Sampford Spiney was conducted by his nephew, D W Henry, vicar of Milton Abbot. He lies buried in the churchyard close to the entrance path.

Already the idea of combining the parishes of Sampford Spiney and Horrbridge was being considered and the death of James meant that a joint benefice could now go ahead. The present incumbent of Horrbridge was Benjamin Jones. He had arrived in 1895, just after the new church of St John the Baptist had been completed. The London Gazette (21 June 1921) stated that the new Benefice would be styled 'The United Benefice of Sampford Spiney with



The Revd James Henry



The Revd Ben Jones

Horrbridge' and 'that upon the said union taking effect the Parsonage House at present belonging to the said Benefice of Horrbridge shall become the house of residence for the Incumbents of the United Benefice'. The Rev Benjamin Jones took over as Rector until he died in 1942.

This now left the Rectory in Sampford Spiney redundant and it was sold to Sophia Henry who renamed it The Knoll. Seven years later her son William Launcelot Henry put the property up for sale. The agents, Oats, Partridge & Co, described The Knoll as a '*charmingly placed residence . . . in an elevated position, well-sheltered, and overlooking the valley, with lovely views . . . a substantial, well-constructed,*

stone-built residence, of commanding design, approached by carriage sweep, in grounds of about two acres, with garage, &c., and containing on the ground floor tiled entrance hall, three reception rooms, and cloakroom, kitchen, scullery, larder &c., with five large bedrooms, bathroom (h & c), large airing cupboard on the first floor. There is an outside W.C. and strongly built storeroom – vacant possession . . . to be sold by auction’. Terence Fox purchased it. In the late 1940s, the property was sold to Mr & Mrs Scott Norman. They had moved from Paisley where their house was called Northlands. It seemed only logical to them that The Knoll should be renamed Southlands. They purchased some extra fields and set about creating woodland. The present owners purchased the house from the Normans, making numerous alterations to the property that had been built for the only residential rector that Sampford had ever had.

THE OLD POOR HOUSE

It was probably called the Church House either due to its proximity to the church or, perhaps, as a private house of charity let by the Lord of Sampford Spiney Manor. The parish registers between 1815 and 1830 list various paupers as living there. The 1841 Tithe lists the building as the Church House in the ownership of the trustees of the late Humphrey Hall and occupied by John Spurrell. The 1851 census lists the building as the Poor House. In 1861 it was the Church House, 1871 the Church Cottage and 1881 Hall Old Poor house. When Huckworthy School closed the Rev Hall Parlby came to the rescue and offered the old Poor House/Church House as the new school. In a deed dated 11 Feb 1888 the Rev John Hall Parlby conveyed the building to the trustees for (a) the Board School, (b) use by the Rector for Sunday School and (c) the holding of parochial meetings (before which they had usually been held in the church). In just under six months rudimentary conversions had taken place and the building was ready to house fifty pupils. As the school progressed numerous other additions and alterations took place.

The school logbook finishes in 1923 when the school finally closed down and the few pupils left either went to Walkhampton, Horrabridge or Whitchurch. The building continued to be used for PCC meetings and as a small village hall. The building had never belonged to the church and had been used by Devon County Council as a school yet it was the Church Commissioners who offered the building to the parish for £1. At the time the PCC did not want the liability so



The cross on the green with the Old Poor House behind

the Commissioners sold it on the open market in 1974. It is now a private dwelling.

References

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LIST OF KNOWN INCUMBENTS

1612	Humphrey Reynolds
1639	Obadiah Reynolds
1694	John Jago
1735	Curacy of SS united with Shaugh Prior
1735	John Jago
1741	Thomas Alcock
1758	Samuel Forster
1798	William Smith
1806	Samuel Pearce
1867	Act of Plurality—SS has its own Rector
1867	Thomas Boggis
1885	James Henry
1921	SS united with Horrabridge
1921	Benjamin Jones
1941	Edward Royle
1955	George Ridgeway
1976	Terry Freeman
1989	Colin Furness
2004	Geoff Lloyd
2009	SS & Horrabridge unite with the West Dartmoor Benefice
2009	Nick Shutt

On the 28 June 1921 Sampford Spiney united with Horrabridge. Since 2009 Sampford Spiney & Horrabridge joined Yelverton, Walkhampton, Meavy, Sheepstor and Princetown to form the West Dartmoor Benefice with the Prebendary Reverend Nick Shutt as the Priest-in-Charge.

