

CHURCH VISIT GROUP

On a pleasant October morning, the Church Visit Group headed off to visit two very different churches - both largely unaltered since their construction.

Our first stop (via the coffee shop for some!) was at Yelverton, to visit the Victorian church of St Andrew. Before the eighteenth century, this was merely barren moorland and farmland, within the parish of Buckland Monachorum. By the late 1880's buildings had begun to spring up and Yelverton Station was constructed in 1885, bringing in many visitors to experience the delights of Dartmoor. Inevitably, a church was needed to fulfil the spiritual needs of locals and visitors, with the Methodists being the first, in 1866.

In 1891 a local architect, Charles King, was commissioned to build an Anglican church for 130 people. This first wooden structure was dedicated in 1895, but soon proved too small. It is now the attractive Parish Hall, adjacent to the church. Money was raised and land donated and in 1909 Sir Charles Nicholson, of the London firm Nicholson & Corlette, unveiled his plans for the new church.

Sir Charles Nicholson specialised in designing ecclesiastical buildings and war memorials. His work included 42 new churches, 9 new chapels and work on 9 cathedrals. He also took on the restoration of many medieval churches and designed church furnishings. Yelverton is considered to be one of the best examples of his work, and the interior shows the influence of the Arts & Crafts movement. Inside, the church is beautifully light and airy, with the whole interior being lined with slabs of warm, golden Ham stone. Nicholson didn't like stained glass, so most windows are clear, nor did he like pews, preferring wooden chairs. We were struck by the colourful roof decoration – red and green in nave & aisles, red and blue in chancel, with black chequer work. There are also some delightful nature carvings on the choir stalls by Violet Pinwill. (See photo.)

From here we drove down the pretty route to Bere Ferrers, where the 14th century church of St Andrew has one of the most striking settings in Devon, right on the banks of the River Tavy. The present church was built by the de Ferrers family, helped by the revenues of the Bere silver mines, and completed in 1333. Much of what we can see today is unaltered 14th century work. The east window contains some of the oldest medieval glass in Devon. It was here that in 1821 Charles Stothard, while making drawings of the window, standing on a gardener's ladder, fell to his death when a rung broke. Poignantly, he had in his pocket a note from his wife telling him to "take care not to fall from high places!"

The church contains a number of effigies, including those of Sir William de Ferrers and his wife from the early 14th century – with details such as belt buckles still visible. (See photo.) The late-Norman font, big enough for total immersion, is supported on remarkable shell-like projections. The ancient oak pews were installed at the beginning of the 16th century by Lord Willoughby de Broke, and show his coat of arms. We were amused by the 17th century fireplace in the transept to keep the Lord of the Manor warm, with the large 'squint' opposite for him to view the altar. There is a moving memorial to ten New Zealand soldiers who were killed at Bere Ferrers railway station in 1917. They got off their troop transport

train, believing they were alighting at Exeter to receive food rations, but were on the wrong side & were all killed instantly by an express train travelling in the opposite direction.

Our local churches have so much of interest to explore. Should you wish to join us, please contact me.

Liz Hext.