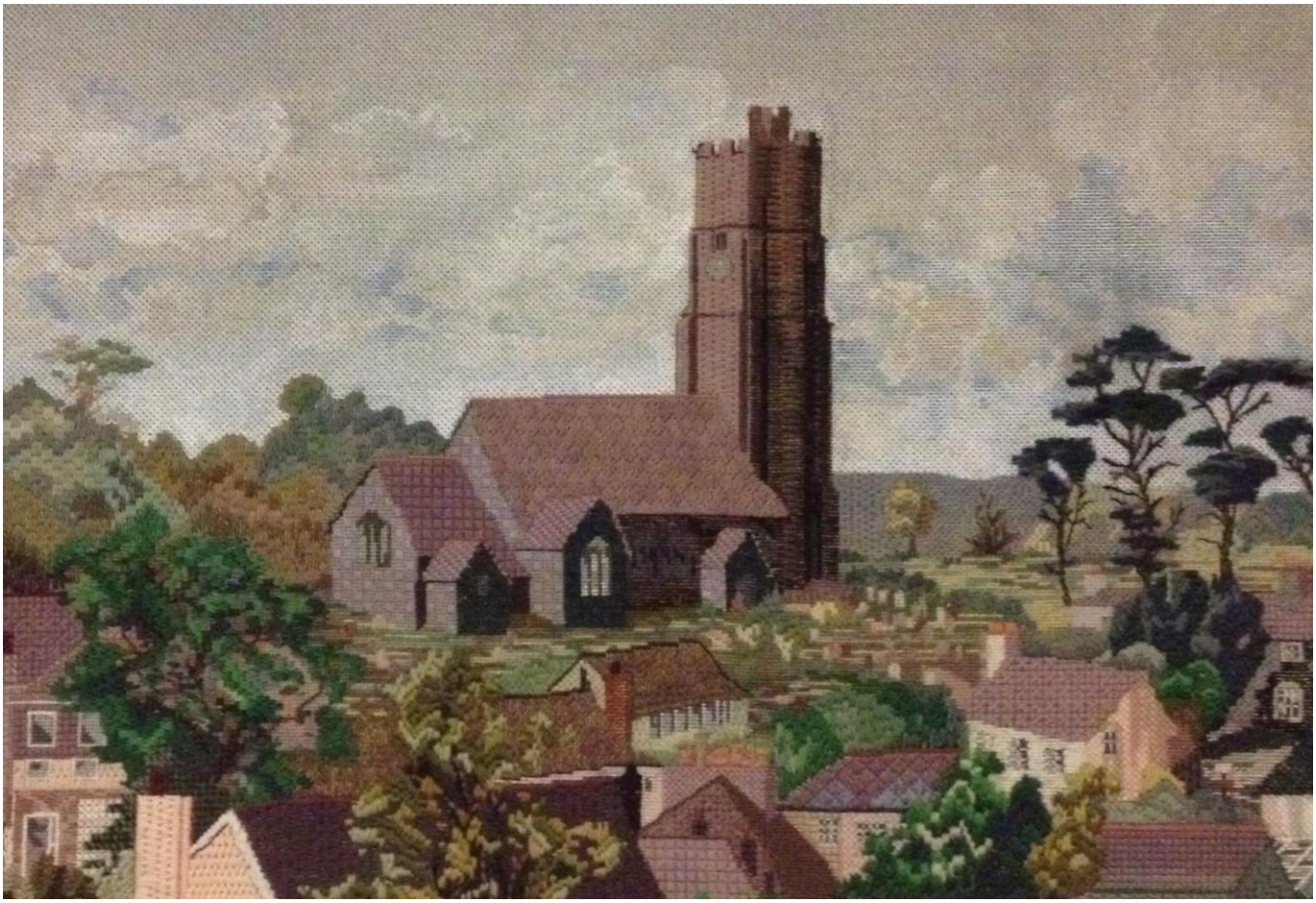
THE TOWER

ST PETER'S CHURCH

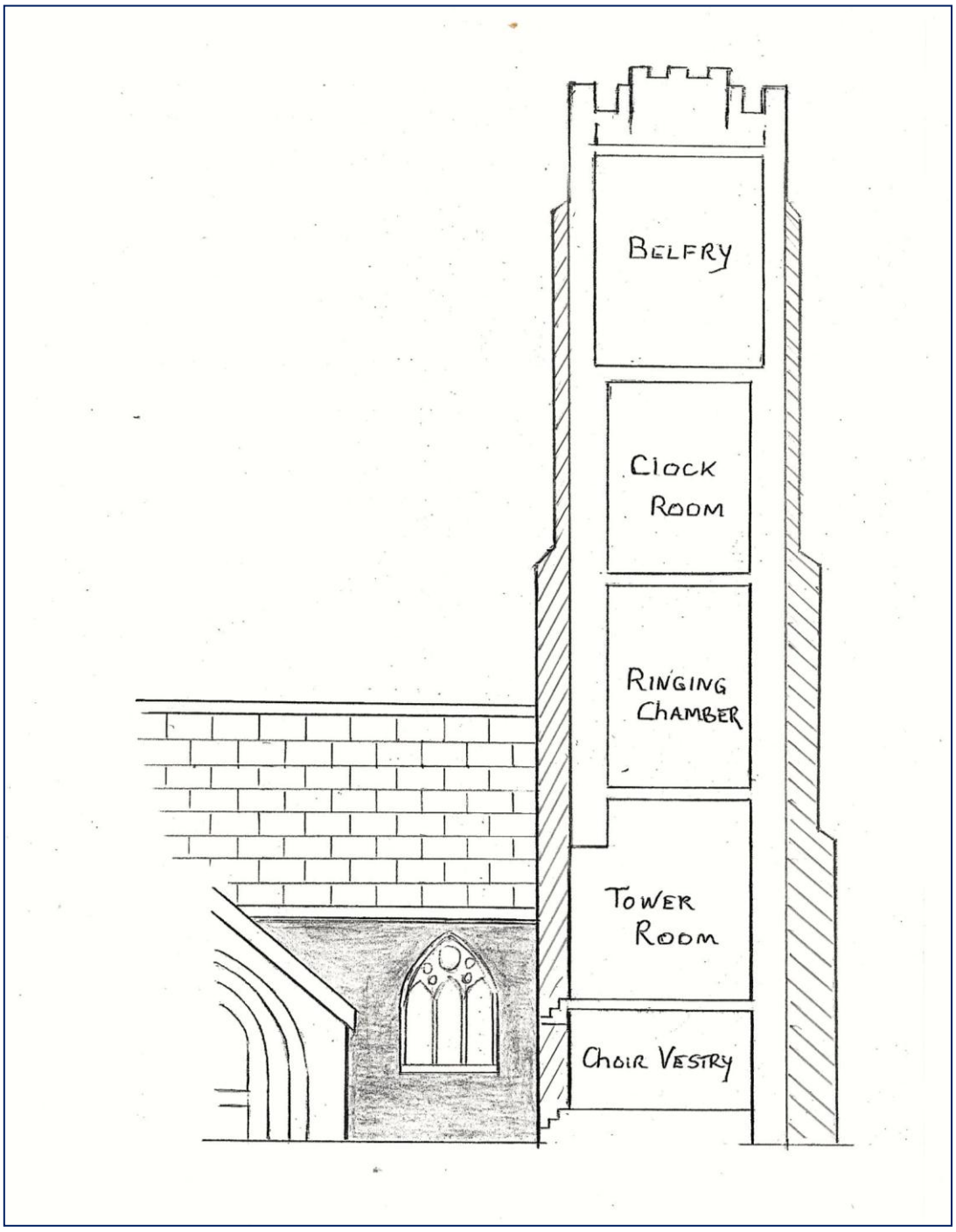
STOKE FLEMING



A HISTORY

2016

Diagram of Tower



This history has been compiled by Joslin Landell-Mills

The cover photograph is taken from a tapestry of the village stitched by Mrs Elizabeth (Liz) Stewart of The Gate House and Overstoke. By kind permission of the Stoke Fleming Village Hall Committee.

The tapestry is displayed in the Ron Harris Room in the Village Hall

The Tower, St Peter's Church, Stoke Fleming

Part 1. The Tower today and yesterday

The Tower of St Peter's parish church stands some 25 metres high on a rise above the surrounding countryside, tall and tapered like a sculpture on a plinth. The church is a Grade II* listed building within the Stoke Fleming conservation area in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As with many church towers, the one at St Peter's has not been rebuilt since medieval times. There have been minor alterations and maintenance; damp has been a particularly pressing issue. But by escaping the comprehensive 19th-century renovation of the church, the Tower, simple, austere and finely balanced, is the sole visible record of the church the original builders intended.

The position of this "fine tower", as Pevsner describes it, is striking. At about 123 metres above sea level its height singles it out from sea as well as land, making it a useful geographical marker. And it might also have been a refuge in turbulent times, although its crenellations would have been more fashionable than useful.

"Coast off Stoke Fleming", Sep 23 1828, by Robert Hurrell Froude
Reproduced with the kind permission of Devon Archives and Local Studies Service

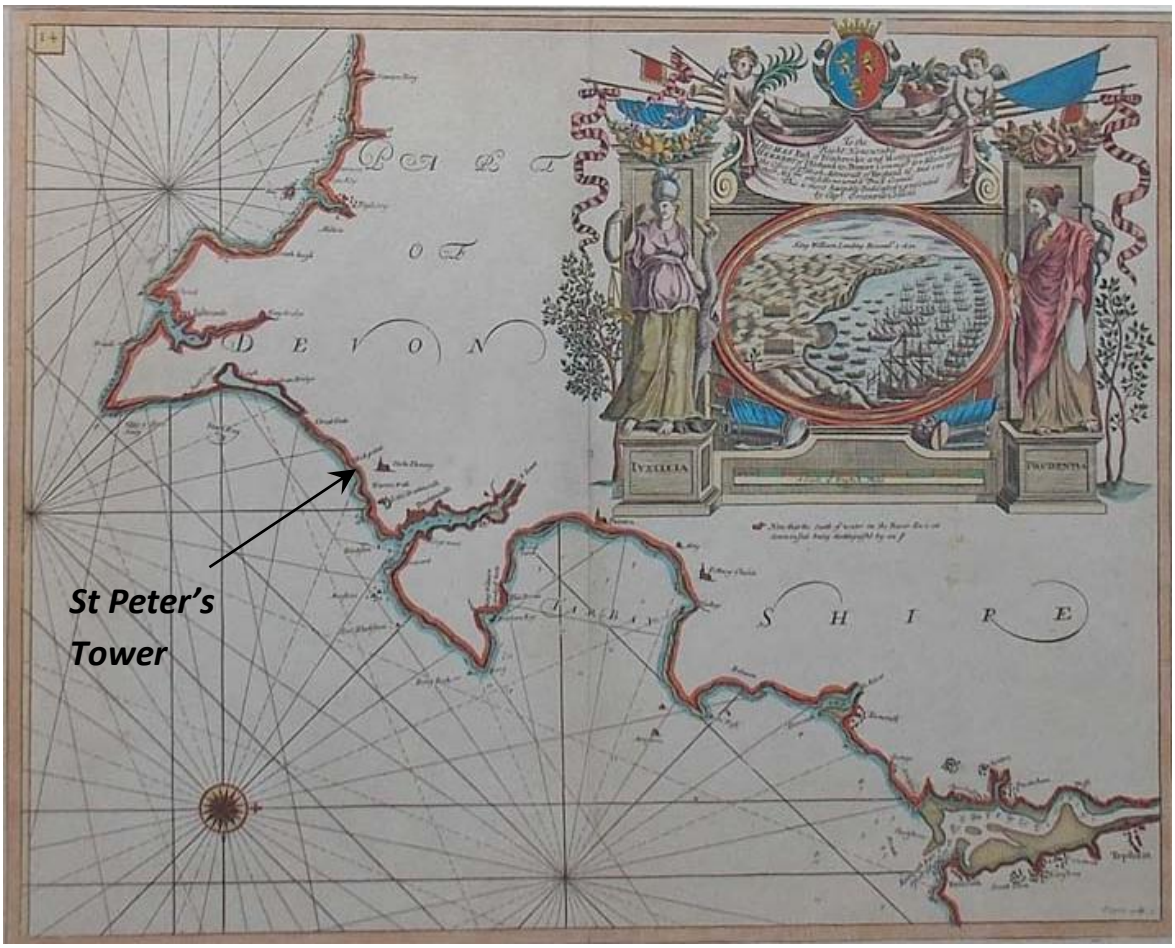
But uses emerge and evolve, and the Tower of St Peter's would almost certainly have been raised originally as a symbol of man's desire to be closer to God. Like the great medieval cathedrals, the early towers of parish churches were a visible celebration of religious faith, soaring "towards the clouds, and... towards the stars".

Today, it is hard to grasp fully the context in which the Tower was built, but the height that made it visible to the small, scattered community around it records an enormous local commitment. Not only would the time and effort involved in building such a structure have been taxing, but probably with none of the sophisticated technology – the hoists and the scaffolding – being developed then to build cathedrals, it will have been dangerous as well as costly. And it stands virtually unchanged today because it has been valued and maintained by this same small community.

A mark at sea

The Tower is likely to have been important to seafarers since it was built. Jeremiah Milles comments in 1530 "The tower is a considerable sea mark, and is visible at a great distance."

On a good day it is clearly seen three to four nautical miles away across Start Bay. It is hard to identify the entrance to Dartmouth harbour from the sea, and for over 600 years, until the Start Light and the Daymark Beacon on Down End were constructed in 1840 and 1864, respectively, the Tower was the most conspicuous local landmark to guide shipping towards the mouth of the Dart and away from the rocks on the western shore. This was particularly true when it was rendered in lime. It features on one of the earliest nautical charts of the British coastline, part of *The Atlas of the British Coastline* of 1693 produced by the hydrographer, Captain Greville Collins, RN, appointed by Samuel Pepys.



Today most navigation is based on satellite technology, but sailors are still taught to take bearings and plot their positions using a physical "three point fix". Naval officer cadets from the Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth crossing Start Bay and skippers hugging the western shore more closely will include the Tower with the Daymark to the east and the white cottages immediately to the west out of the harbour as their three conspicuous

landmarks to fix their position. The Tower is shown on all current relevant versions of Admiralty charts and listed as a Principal Mark in the Admiralty Channel Pilot.

And on land

The height of the Tower also makes it useful to those on land. The Carew family, landlords of Stoke Fleming for almost 300 years from about 1300, certainly used the Tower to watch and interfere with the shipping using the entrance to the Dart. Originally, the estuary and all maritime rights belonged to the lords of the borough of Totnes and in the early 16th century the Dartmouth Corporation leased the rights over the river from the King. But the Carews were close to the action. Their manor of Stoke Fleming then included Southtown, Townstal and Warfleet in modern Dartmouth and, crucially, St Petrox and the area around the mouth of the river, a pinch-point for potentially profitable shipping. John Leland, writing in 1534, says of Dartmouth castle "...yet I hard...it was caulyd Stoke Castle."

One can only speculate on what might have been seen from the top of the Tower. The men of Dartmouth racing past the church to Blackpool collecting men and women from the village as they went to defeat a Breton invasion from the sea in 1404? Perhaps the great crescent of the Armada hounded by the English fleet from Plymouth under Lord Admiral Howard and Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Drake as it crossed Start Bay towards Torbay in 1588 on its doomed way up the Channel. Or the *Mayflower* and the ineptly-named *Speedwell* limping into Dartmouth harbour for repairs in August 1620 before the Pilgrim

Fathers made their final and successful Atlantic crossing from Plymouth (without the *Speedwell*) in early September.

Did people see the Duchesse de Chevreuse, trying to break the Parliamentarian grip on the Channel during the Civil War and enter Royalist Dartmouth with two ships and a cargo of treasure for the monarchy, being sent back in an undignified merchant ship by a Captain Hodges and a young Mr Holdsworth? Did they see, in early January 1646, two regiments of Sir Thomas Fairfax's Parliamentarians marching the narrow lanes via Stoke Fleming in their successful bid to relieve Dartmouth?

During the days of sail, people on the roof of the Tower might have watched for pirates from Barbary preying on Dartmouth shipping bringing cod from Newfoundland and port from Oporto, seeking not so much their cargo as their crew for slaves. And by common repute the Tower was a vantage point, particularly in the 18th century, for warning smugglers bringing brandy and tea from France when the customs vessels were roaming the bay and the Revenue Men were loitering in the lanes.

In the Second World War, air and sea action will have been visible – planes passing over on bombing raids to Plymouth and patrols, convoys and destroyers. One stray bomb missed St Peter's by only some 100 yards. In 1944 a large area of coast and farmland adjacent to the village was evacuated to allow American troops to practise with live fire for the Normandy landings, and from the Tower villagers will have seen their exercises and the landing craft leaving Dartmouth for the June invasion. And, more recently in 2012, the west country stage of the Tour of Britain cycle race would have been visible as it passed through the village.

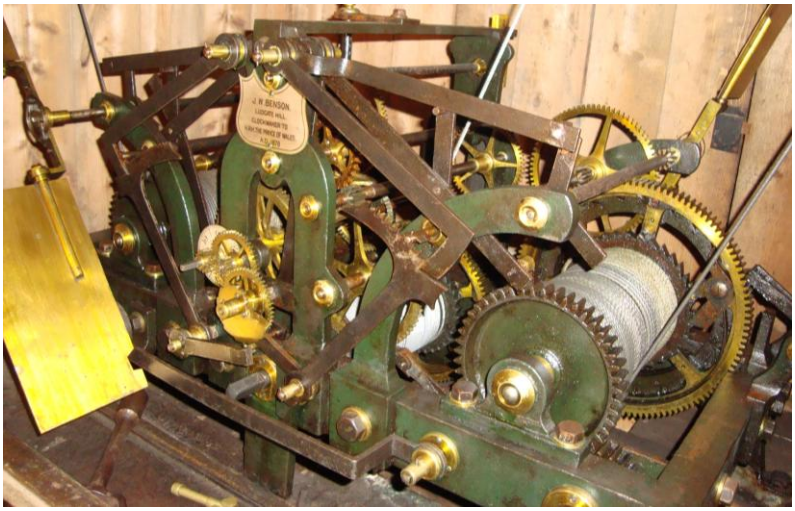
The church clock

The clock inaugurated in 1878 was given by Mrs Charlotte Clark of Redlap House, in memory of her husband Samuel Echalaz. Its hands and dial are covered in gold-leaf attached with size that is far more durable than paint and has been well maintained. The gilding was originally the gift of Mrs Buddicom of Redlap House in the 1880s; it was regilded in 1973 from a legacy left by

Arthur Barnes and again in 2016 by Tim Slade, owner of Redlap House at that time.

The clock, made by JW Benson of Ludgate Hill, London, has been going without a major refurbishment for more than 150 years. It is "a very fine Benson job" according to W Lloyd Attree of Dartmouth who maintained it in the 1970s. He was told by the Reverend Chalk that it was the earliest clock to have wheels cut with a steam-driven cutter rather than by hand and was very modern and efficient for its time. The clock chimes the quarters on two bells and strikes the hours on the tenor.

Originally, since the clock weights fell some 50 feet from the clock chamber to the ground floor, it only had to be wound weekly. This was no quick job and would have taken about 25 minutes. After 1915/16 and repairs to the floor of the ringing chamber, the weights fell only to that floor and the clock had to be wound twice a week. Between 1945 and 2016 this was done by a rota of bell-ringers and other village residents.



During an unusually heavy storm in late December 1879, William Grant, a young apprentice at Hole's jewellers in Dartmouth, was giving the clock its regular weekly wind when a mighty flash of lightning hit the Tower, punched through the side wall of the church and shattered the pillars of the gates to the churchyard. Had William been on the ladder up to the clock chamber, he would have been killed. As it was, he was briefly knocked unconscious, groped his way out of the church – how he could never explain – and ran across to the Green Dragon to recover.

Apart from this event, the clock has had an unremarkable life, only stopping a few times. In 2013, the girder supporting the weights was found to be corroded so the clock had to be stopped, when the annoyance of the village showed how much it was valued.

Under the 2016 restoration the clock was renovated and a new electric auto-winding movement installed. The original mechanism continues to function but with weights wound by electric motors instead of by hand; it could revert to being hand wound if necessary.

The bells

Church bells were important in medieval life. St Peter's had four bells in 1553 according to an inventory, and Jeremiah Milles, writing in *The Parochial History of Devonshire* refers to five in 1750. Both sources refer to them being kept in the Tower, Milles noting that St Peter's had "...a square tower at ye Westend in which are five bells." It is thought that the early village was sparsely inhabited over quite a wide area so the bells are likely to have been rung from the Tower so they could be heard. They were probably each rung for an individual purpose, such as calling to prayer, sanctus, tolling for the dead or for curfews, but there are no records to confirm this.

In 1777, six bells, cast as a peal, were installed in the Tower belfry by John, Christopher and William Pennington who had moved their foundry to Stoke Climsland, Cornwall three years earlier. (See Donors and Appendix 1 for details of these bells.) Some believe they were cast locally since Penningtons supplied bells to Stokenham at about the same time, but there are no signs of

a bell pit in the churchyard. It is thought more likely that they were brought from Stoke Climsland down the Tamar, using the quay at Cotehele, and then by sea, perhaps to Warfleet.

These bells have rung out from the Tower now for over 230 years. The year 1765 was the start of a bell-ringing boom and 1777 was at the height of a craze for change ringing in the south west, as Pennington's records of peals cast demonstrate. In the decade before 1781, Penningtons cast at least 36 rings of five bells or more. But over 1781-91, they were casting only 17, and from 1800 less than one a year. Their last surviving bell was cast in 1819.

The Tower's original bells were on full wheels and hung on a solid oak frame fastened with oak pins. This was attacked by damp and death-watch beetle and, after the bearings were re-brassed in 1871, work to strengthen the frame was carried out in 1887 and 1910. In 1924-8 the bells were completely re-hung in a steel frame by Gillett & Johnston, with the fourth bell being recast. But the steel was not galvanized, and the bell frame again suffered heavy structural damage from damp and age. Both the frame and the bells had a major refurbishment in 2016, and two new bells donated by Johnson Matthey Plc were added to create a full octave.

The bell-ringers

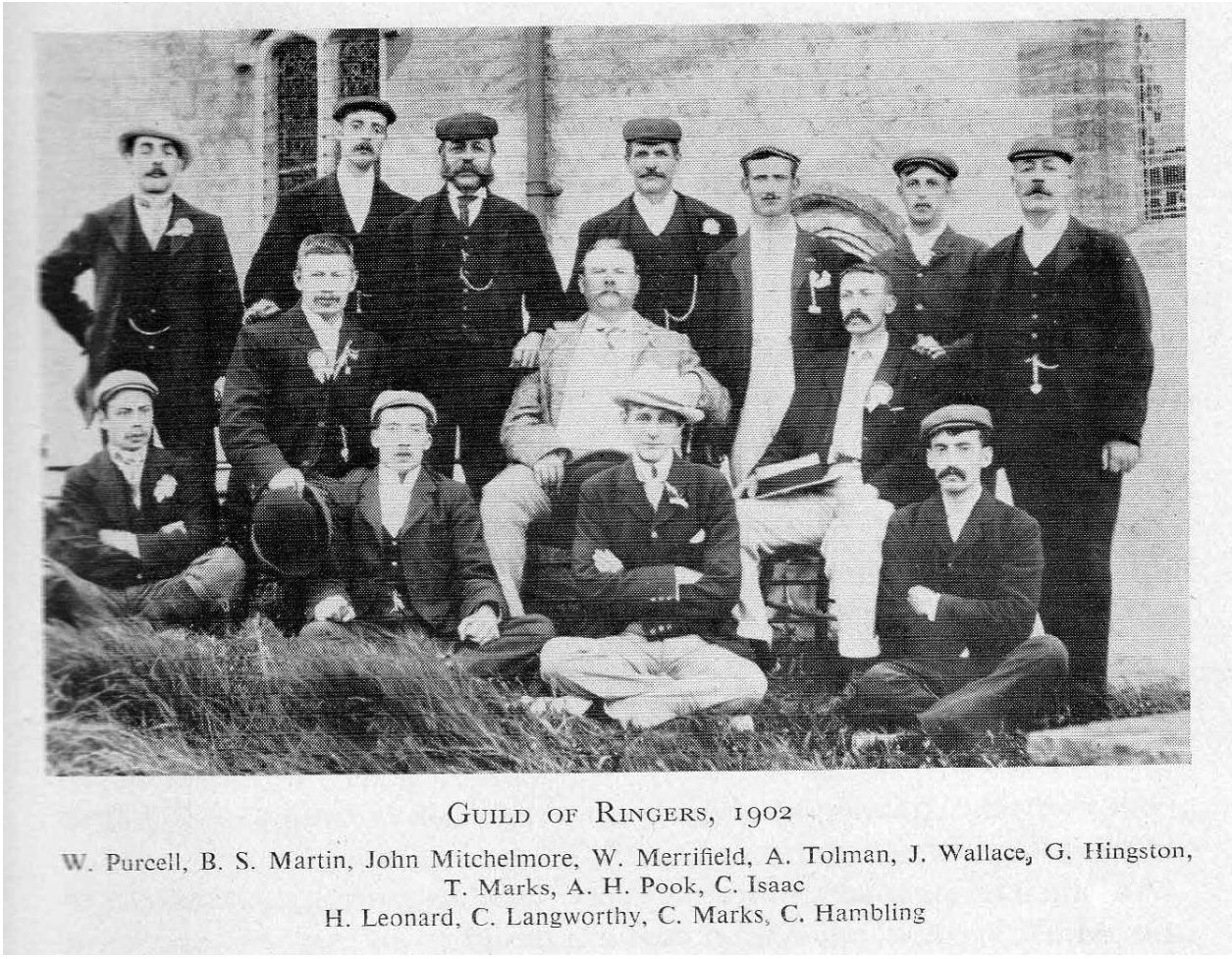
Towers have been used by bell-ringers at least since the 18th century when ringing became fashionable. St Peter's Tower is no exception and has had a long tradition of ringing since its six bells were installed in 1777.

Bell-ringing has evolved from being a simple technology focussed on the church before the Reformation. By the 18th century, as innovations made ringing easier and more exciting, there was a veritable boom in bell-ringing. Ringers in parish churches had always been laymen, usually craftsmen or labourers who tended to be fiercely independent. A craze for competition ringing, often for money, led to mounting resentment in the church as bells were increasingly used for profit, often sponsored by the local church inn. Reaction set in and by the mid-19th century paid ringing was virtually over, and compromises have brought the ringers back to the churches to ring for services and national holidays while continuing competition ringing, but for non-cash prizes.

Standoffs between the church and the ringers still occur occasionally, but St Peter's seems to have been immune to them and many ringers are churchgoers. Since the Second World War, the bells have been rung for church services and festivals as well as for weddings, and the tenor might be tolled for funerals. When the wind is in the right direction, the strike notes and sonorous tones of these Pennington bells can be heard from most of the parish boundaries and beyond, including Townstal, Redlap, Strete and Ash, two to three miles away.

Bell-ringing takes time to learn – up to three years – but is rewarding. Local ringers say they enjoy the comradeship and the sense of giving a community service through the church that is part of a tradition going back over 230 years in Stoke Fleming. Controlling a heavy bell with a single rope as it describes a full circle in two arcs many feet above you takes strength as well as skill and several ringers report looking forward to the sheer physical exercise. St Peter's tenor bell weighs twelve and a half hundredweight (bell weights are

still given in hundredweights). A bonus of having the skill is that you can take it anywhere, and many ringers join in with others as they travel.



GUILD OF RINGERS, 1902

W. Purcell, B. S. Martin, John Mitchelmore, W. Merrifield, A. Tolman, J. Wallace, G. Hingston,
T. Marks, A. H. Pook, C. Isaac
H. Leonard, C. Langworthy, C. Marks, C. Hambling

Bell-ringing is both limited and facilitated by the technology. Old bells were operated with a lever. The six bells installed in the Tower in 1777 were mounted on full wheels, allowing "full circle" ringing, when the bell is pulled and checked to rise to the top of the wheel in one direction, held, and then swung the full circle in the other direction. This means the bells can be rung louder and with far more control of intervals than the old bells. So much weight had to be hung from massive beams and could only be accommodated in the Tower which had the added advantage of allowing the sound to travel further.

As early as 1742 Benjamin Kennicott had identified bell-ringing as a "peculiarly English art", very different from ringing in most other European countries. The "method" ringing that emerged from the innovations in hanging bells was first recorded at Lincoln Cathedral in 1612 and is still practised in most of the

country. St Peter's bell-ringers are "call change ringers", as are most in Devon. In this system, the order of bells is varied by single changes called by one of the ringers instead of being rung to a predetermined system or method. Full peals rung according to the method system can last for three hours or more and are rung for special occasions. Normal change ringing "touches" or call-change peals take around ten minutes, so two to three can be rung before a church service.

Listeners can be deeply affected by the sound of peals. "I love to hear them spread out like a flock of birds" said one Tommy Darch in one memorable re-action.

St Peter's ringers belong to the Devon Association of Ringers and have competed, often successfully, in local competitions. Records show ringers are generally local, and can include several generations of a family – recent examples include the Dietzes, Elliotts, Skinners and Windsors of Stoke Fleming. In 1928 St Peter's bells were re-hung on ball bearings (rather than plain bearings) making them physically much easier to ring, and Emily Prescott (later Dietz) was one of the first women ringers in Stoke Fleming when she began to ring in 1934.

Stoke Fleming bellringers - 1970

J Dietz, Mrs E Dietz, D Skinner, Rev RS Chalk, C Elliott, C Dietz (capt), R Elliott

Part 2. The architecture

Like many parish church towers, St Peter's Tower incorporates a rich architectural heritage that is unique because it has survived far longer than local domestic buildings, which have undergone more comprehensive transformations.

Experts differ on quite how old St Peter's Tower is. English Heritage suggests the church could have been pre-Conquest and rebuilt in the 13th century. Architectural analysis points to an early 12th- or 13th-century construction, possibly heightened, as were the bays in the main body of the church, with a fourth stage in the 15th century. Its buttresses are set back with single-grooved "string courses" dividing the lower levels as in Transitional or Early English churches, but the buttresses end below the top stage and the top string course is hollow, both suggesting the top level could have been later.

If this is true, an early tower might have been built by the Flemings. Richard, son of Hlud the Fleming was paying Ralph de Mandeville knights' fees for Stoke Fleming in 1166. A survey made a century later of the Mohun's Dunster Castle – the Mohuns followed the Flemings as lords of Stoke Fleming from about 1224 – records a tower there called Fleming Tower, perhaps in memory of the Tower in their other property. The Tower was then perhaps height-

ened and the great west window added in the early 15th century by the Carews, landlords over about 1307-1575.

But Pevsner calls the Tower Perpendicular, which places it later, between the mid-14th to late-16th century. This would be consistent with a complete reconstruction by the Carews in the 15th century, when a surge in the restoration and renovation of parish churches occurred in Devon. Both St Andrew's church, Ashburton, and St Mary's, Totnes in the same parish were rebuilt then. In Totnes Roger Grawdon copied Ashburton's tower, particularly the buttresses and stair turret, placing it centrally in the facade as in St Peter's. At the lower level, the stone of St Peter's Tower is rubble, but the way it is coursed to the buttresses, corners and to the interior is thought to show an earlier, perhaps Norman, straight-sided and shorter tower enveloped in a later taller building.

Whether they reconstructed or only heightened the Tower, the Carews had the interest and the means to do it. Medieval Dartmouth had a particularly thriving ship-building and seafaring economy. As considerable landlords and justices of the peace the family constantly served for the King on commissions of enquiry, using its position to challenge the town's rights over the Dart sufficiently often for the Corporation to appeal against them successfully to the Court of King's Bench.

Despite this setback, and still focussing on trying to control the port, by the mid-16th century the Carews had briefly moved their manor house from what is now Rectory Lane in Stoke Fleming to a new building inside the Dartmouth fortalice at the mouth of the river. The move was doomed. The male line and the lordship of the Stoke Fleming Carews was to die out within 50 years, and their new manor house was used as a barracks and destroyed during the Civil War. But it demonstrated the Carew motivation. Raising the height of the Tower in the 15th century was not a display of religious faith or even power, but to create a vantage point from which to monitor the entrance to the Dart.

Exterior

The Tower rises tall, tapered and elegant at the western end of the main church, with fine proportions and simple, strong features following either the simple Norman or Perpendicular style.

Construction

Powerful buttresses are clamped back onto the walls around the four corners. These are a massive two metres wide at ground level, but taper to end below the top level that rises above them to large and well-spaced crenellations. Simple string courses define three levels, marking a well-balanced decrease in proportions. The buttresses strengthen the Tower's corners and the string courses throw rain clear of the walls, but both have an aesthetic as well as practical function.

Central on the north side, away from the prevailing south-westerlies and facing the village, a demi-octagonal external stair turret with a relatively new outside entrance (installed in 1874) rises to end slightly above the crenellations to accommodate the doorway on the roof

The strength, simplicity and balance of the profile of the Tower are emphasized by the consistency of its construction materials and style.

The Tower is built out of local shillet, or soft slate, with corners and buttresses of harder slate. The windows and the doors are of Dartmoor granite and red Dawlish or Ham sandstone. The roof is lead, supported by oak timbers. Waterspouts are zinc and there was a gilded weathervane that was twice blown down in gales and was replaced in 2015 with an aluminium pole. Since 1909 the roof has finally carried a lightning conductor that was renewed in 1972.

Shillett is friable. It doesn't lend itself to decoration, which contributes to the Tower's austere simplicity. The material is also porous and unlike the main body of the church is exposed in the Tower. Originally, like almost all medieval towers, it was limed, or "harled", to protect it from the weather, and there is still some evidence of harling on the south face above the kitchen roof. Churchwardens' accounts show lime possibly for the Tower being bought in 1781. If St Peter's Tower suffered the same fate as many Devon churches, the harling would have become unfashionable and been stripped off in the 19th century.

Despite the string courses and waterspouts, damp has been a perennial issue at least since the 19th century. There have only been two gaps. After references to attend to the masonry over thirty-odd years after 1824, in 1871 the Tower is pronounced "in good repair". But twenty years later complaints resurface, and in 1907, Charles Harper in *The South Devon Coast*, is pointing out that "ferns grow plentifully in the joints...to the very summit". These seem to have been dealt with by 1926 (a plaque in the Tower arch to the Reverend E. St Aubyn in 1912 records one stage in the battle against the damp) but by the 1960s the Tower is leaking again.

And the Tower is still damp, particularly after heavy rain. There have been several attempts to deal with it, and the plastic drain sticking out of the north-west louvres until 2016 was the outcome of one. Internal drainage was installed during the 2016 renovation to improve the situation.

The roof was re-leaded most recently in 1876. But the ancient oak beams supporting it have called for repeated renovation. They were first strengthened probably in the 1920s with two steel girders running north to south be-

low. In 1964, a second set of steel girders was installed below these, running east to west, and the ancient beams above were treated for death watch beetle in the early 1970s. The whole structure was again unsafe by 2016, when it was re-treated and the girders replaced with galvanized steel supports.

The windows and the doors of the Tower, of Dartmoor granite with granite and red sandstone in the stair turret, are simple, pleasingly placed and architecturally harmonious, either medieval or modern replacements often in ancient openings. While the early window surrounds of the main body of the church were replaced in the 19th century, many of the original surrounds in the Tower remain. The compatibility of replacements points to a pride in the original medieval style.

On the west face, a fine old door surround with a large 15th century Perpendicular window above balance each other within the first level. The door surround has an arch of Dartmoor granite with a single roll mould and capped with a single-grooved flat granite hood supported on sandstone stiles. The window above it has similar proportions, with a similar Dartmoor granite arch surround above the three-light window. At the next level, lighting the ringing chamber inside, is a narrow window with a 19th century machine-

cut granite surround with a hood mould, in what is thought to be an ancient opening. At belfry level is a paired window with louvres and a round-headed granite lintol, thought to have been installed with the bells in 1777.

The west door was closed in 1882 when the existing entrance facing the village on the north front of the church was made and in 1884 a path leading to it was added. The original door faced the prevailing weather which would have blown straight into the church and down the nave and is thought not to have been used a great deal. A "small rude porch" described by Sir F Glyne in 1845 was probably demolished in 1882 as well. At about the same time, in an effort to deal with rising damp, the burial ground, which had silted up against the west door, was dug away to expose the foundations around the west face. The height of the burial ground that is now further away, 1.3 metres above where the door was, shows how inaccessible it must have been. Today, there is a modern lancet window with a yellow Ham stone surround where the old door was.

The stair turret to the north was part of the original medieval building. It has six narrow openings lighting the stair with red sandstone surrounds and arched with possibly Norman lintols. The newel of the stair inside is red sandstone up to the clock chamber level and mostly white above. The main stair is shown on drawings of the 15th century church, but the outside entrance and steps were built in 1874 when the inside entrance from the choir vestry was closed.

Newel of Stair Turret

Stair window

Belfry lintols above clock

The east face at belfry level has paired windows with rounded granite lintols, whose granite mullions were replaced after the clock was installed below them in 1878. Although the clock was made to have four faces, its one face is directed towards the village and can be seen from most places. Adding the other faces would be costly and would not benefit many more people.

The south face of the Tower, towards the sea and taking the brunt of prevailing weather, has no openings. So any monitoring of sea traffic would always have been from the roof.

Interior (see diagram – inside front cover)

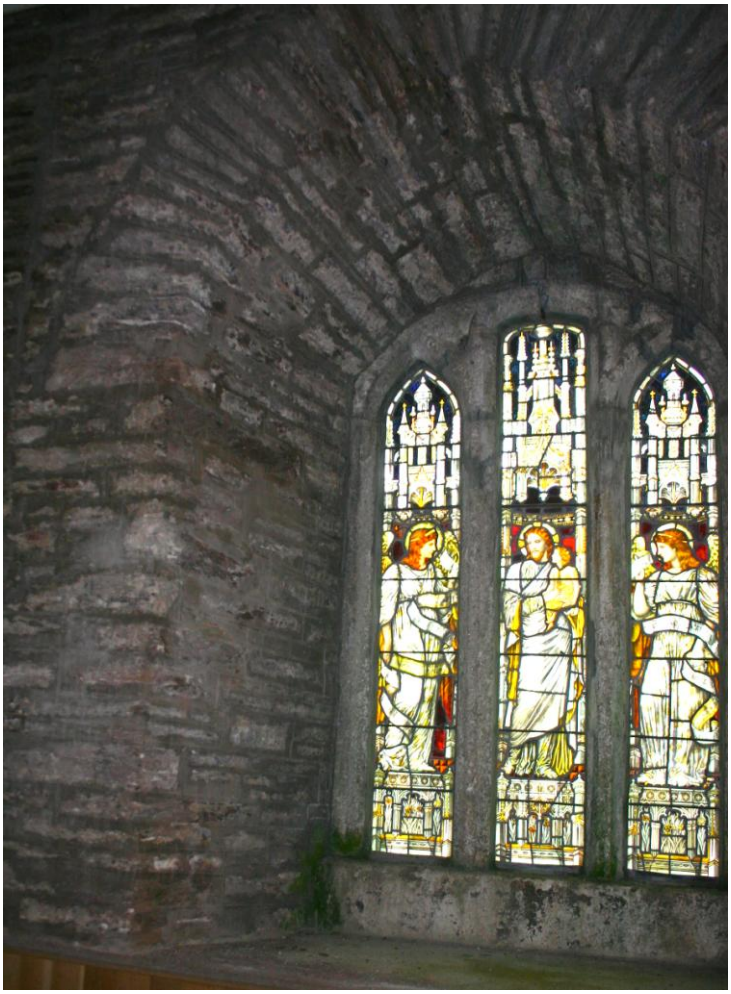
Ground-floor choir vestry. Unlike its exterior, the inside of the Tower at ground level is strikingly different to its original appearance. Early drawings show you entered the church through the west door, although there may have been a screen at the entrance to the nave to deal with draughts. After 1882, when the west door was blocked, this area became the baptistry, and later the choir vestry. Its wood panelling could now hide a medieval surround to the west door and the old opening to the stair turret.

On the north wall of the choir vestry are now housed a set of "Ellacombe chimes" that can strike the bells in the belfry. These were the brain-child of the Reverend Ellacombe of Bitton near Exeter in the 1820s. Their advantages are that they can be chimed by a single person, from the ground floor, and, an important consideration in the 1820s, avoid often disruptive ringers entering the church on Sunday mornings. St Peter's Ellacombe chimes were probably fitted in 1928. Until recently only the rope striking the tenor and the rack remained in the choir vestry while the hammers were in the clock chamber, but the full set was reassembled during the 2016 restoration.

Tower room. In 1871, during the church restoration, on a floor above ground-level in front of the west window and open onto the nave, a musician's gallery that might have functioned from the 17th century was removed to make way for a new organ. This is now in the north chancel. Today this area in front of the window is the Tower room and is useful as a meeting room. It has a glass screen and gallery in front, built in 2001. The money was donated in the 1980s by Edith McGuire in memory of her father, Fred Pook, who was a churchwarden continuously from 1924-52.

West window. The most striking feature of the Tower's interior is the great west Perpendicular window that lights the Tower room. It has a magnificent deeply splayed medieval arch with heavily incised grooves leading into the two-point obtuse arch. The glass of the window, which has three lights, and represents Our Lord with a little child in his arms flanked by two angels**,** was installed by Powell & Co. of Whitefriars in 1881. It replaced medieval glass, as did all the glass put into in the rest of the church during the 1871 restoration. But unlike in the rest of the church, the Tower's Perpendicular window surround remains.

The window was the gift of Mrs George Parker Bidder to commemorate her husband. George Parker Bidder, "the calculating boy", friend of Robert Stephenson and industrialist, died in 1878. He lived in Stoke Fleming parish at Ravensbury in Warfleet, but died before his family moved to Stoke House in Stoke Fleming.



But his wife and daughters lived there many years. Violet Hammond of Dartmouth remembers as a child seeing "Miss Bidder of Stoke Fleming" who "drove a pony trap... loved children and gave hay parties when everyone wore their sun bonnets."

Ringing chamber. Above the Tower room is the ringing chamber, where a new floor was installed in 1874, according to a message from the then rector Edmund St Aubyn found in a dusty old green bottle in a disused cupboard in about 2001 (see Appendix 2). The beams supporting the floor were thought to have been medieval. The new floor coincided with the blockage of the inside door onto the stair and the creation of the outside entrance to the stair turret. In many parish churches in the 19th century, the opposite occurred so that the clergy could monitor the behaviour of the ringers. The reconfiguration of the entrances in St Peter's suggests relations between the two were better than elsewhere.

Bottle from 1874

The floor was repaired and steel girders put in over 1915/16. This information, together with the names of the masons and carpenters doing the repairs, was in two more time capsules – a clear bottle and another green bottle hanging from joists under the floor and discovered during the 2016 renovation. The floor was completely replaced in 2016 and the supporting girders were turned so that the metal surfaces bearing on the stone were sound. The metal was coated with a heavy duty preservative.

Light into the ringing chamber comes from a single window thought to be in an old opening. It has a deep splay on the inside and an iron frame with possibly early glass was replaced in the mid-1960s with the present wooden frame.

No-one knows when bell-ringing was moved upstairs to the ringing chamber. It is easier and more accurate to ring bells with shorter ropes, so there will have been a strong incentive to ring upstairs since 1777 when the peal was installed. 1915/16 sets the date when the bells were definitely rung from the ringing chamber, since there are no holes for the ropes in the new floor.

But they are likely to have been rung from there since at least 1874. Before that, since the bells seem to have been kept in the Tower, they may have been rung from ground level.

Clock chamber. Above the ringing chamber, and accessible from the stair turret, is the clock chamber. This also had a new floor in 1874 according to the first time capsule with the message from the Reverend St Aubyn. It is thought that originally there would have been a ladder from the ringing chamber, removed sometime after the clock was installed in 1878 when the door from the stair was cut to facilitate weekly winding. W Lloyd Attree, in the 1970s, would work on the clock from the walkway around it in the clock chamber, clambering onto the top of the clock box to lubricate the tubes, an activity he remembers as not being dangerous if you were young.

In 1964 the decaying wooden beam from which the clock weights hung was supported with a diagonal steel girder. Since this had deteriorated by 2016, it was removed when the conversion to electric winding removed the need for the weights.

An interesting record of maintenance was found inside the old wooden box which protected the clock. These were mostly written in pencil on the inside of the box but with two small cards pinned up, one from 1887 and a second from 1935 and a sheet of paper recording regular maintenance from 1998 onwards. The earliest marking is from the original craftsman. "This clock was fixed by J Parr of London October 14th [18]78". (For more details see Section 3.)

Belfry. Above again is the belfry, whose floor was renewed in 1928 as part of refurbishment of the bells by Gillett & Johnston. The inside of the louvred windows to east and west have flat-headed hood-mould granite lintols and are machine carved, so could be contemporary to the installation of the bells, although the openings might be ancient. There is evidence in the stonework around the west louvres of the bells being removed this way in 1928.

The 2016 restoration

Over time, the beams supporting the floors and the roof of the Tower had been degraded by the damp, salt-laden atmosphere, woodworm and beetle infestations. These were treated and replaced. Steel girders fitted in 1915 and 1964, seriously corroded where they met the masonry, were also replaced with new galvanised structures.

An internal drainage system was installed to help remove rainwater from the roof, avoiding the walls and the Tower doorway, and the ugly plastic pipe protruding from the north-west louvres, partially responsible for this problem, was removed.

The louvres were renovated by replacing the corroded ironwork and re-cementing the slates. "Galebreaker", a fabric which helps to reduce the amount of wind-blown rainwater entering the belfry, was fitted on the inside of the louvres by the Ringers Working Party.

The electrics in the tower, light and power, were upgraded.

New foundation girders for the bell frame, only visible during installation in 2016

The steel bell frame fitted in 1928 was also corroded and had to be replaced. This now sits on a reinforced concrete ring beam integrated with the structure of the tower. The work involved cutting trapdoors in the lower floors to allow the clock and bells to be lowered through the centre of the tower. The steel girders installed under the ringing chamber floor in 1925 had to be repositioned slightly to make a gap wide enough for the tenor bell to pass through.

Bell frame under construction at Whitechapel Bell Foundry

The bells were given a major overhaul by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry who manufactured and fitted a new eight-bell frame and cast two new bells. These were donated by Johnson Matthey Plc (see below under Donors). The same foundry also restored and refitted the Ellacombe Chimes on the original bells. A new handrail on the stairs also improved access to the ringing chamber.

The clock was overhauled by the Cumbria Clock Company in their workshop near Crediton, electric auto winding was fitted; the face was repainted and the gold leaf replaced. The clock mechanism was relocated to the south-east

corner of the clock room to leave the route up through the centre of the tower clear for subsequent use. The external dial of the clock was replaced in its original position.

The redundant clock weights chute and an old boiler flue running up inside the tower to the roof were also removed, helping to make space for the new bells.

During re-decoration of the ringing chamber, a blocked up window was found on the east wall behind an asbestos sheet. This was probably closed during the 1871-2 restoration, when the roofs of the main church were restored and/or replaced and some of the back piers repositioned, both of which could have meant closing the window.

The building work was carried out by Elliott Construction, a local firm with family connections in the village. Elliotts had also fitted the floor of the Tower room in 2001. The architects were Heighway Field Associates, and the structural engineers were Paul Carpenter Associates.

On completion the three time capsules, one from 1874 and two from 1915, were replaced and a fourth giving details of the 2016 works was added. Stoke Fleming Primary School also added a time capsule of their own, reflecting life in the school in 2016.

Part 3. The People

Over the centuries, the Tower of St Peter's parish church in Stoke Fleming has survived gales, blizzards and lightning strikes as well as the quieter but equally sinister inroads of time into its medieval masonry. It stands today because of the care and craftsmanship of the local community. So many are now forgotten, but those we know of should be remembered. (The list excludes the major non-local workers mentioned earlier.)

The masons: WT Peek, mason, rebuilt the roof parapet in 1859-60, installed new lead on the roof in 1876, put new granite mullions on the window above the clock and in 1882 put in the belfry window.

John Henry Mitchelmore walled up the great west door in 1882 and two years later laid the main pathway to the north door with buff ornamental brick.

Local builders EH Ferris and Sons did the 1912 restoration.

"E. Lawson, apprentice mason, 1963" is written in pencil on a beam under the clock.

The cement around the roof girders is inscribed with the date, 1964, and names of the masons**,** Robert Harvey, Edward Lawson and Christian Dietz, whose son, John Dietz, was churchwarden and Captain of the Bell Tower during the 2016 renovation.

Phil Elliott of Elliott Construction built the Tower room gallery in 2001 and did the building work for the 2016 restoration (see above).

Carpenters and masons mentioned in 1915 bottle: Carpenters: JB Hambling Snr, CM Hambling, G Andrews. Masons: EH Ferris, W Ward, S Michelmore, F Wallis.

*The bell people***:** in 1871 Henry Hambling of Kingsbridge replaced the brass inserts of the bearings and strengthened the bell frame, strengthening the frame again in 1887.

Messrs Aggetts of Chagford restored the ropes and bosses for the bells in 1909, and in 1920 installed an additional girder to support the frame.

The clock people: 1879, William Grant, apprentice of Mr Hole, Dartmouth jeweller, was famously struck by lightning while winding the clock. According to the markings in the clock box, the clock was "put in thoroughly good order" in 1887 by Messrs Gillett of Croydon. BS Martin was the clockwinder from November [19]10 until July 25 and did some work on the clock at "Easter [19]29". Harold Adams Jewellers and Marine Opticians of Dartmouth are first mentioned on December 18th 1902 and another card shows they were still involved in Feb 1935. JB Warden appears several times (as JBW) and "J Smith & Sons, Clockmakers Derby", who eventually secured a regular contract to maintain and repair the clock, are first mentioned in 1940. The paper record shows that their engineer, Dave Clarke, serviced the clock annually from 1998 until Sept 2007; his exploits included abseiling down the outside of the tower in less than ideal weather to remove the hands of the clock when the dial drive seized. He later worked for the Cumbria Clock Company and was instrumental in the work carried out during the 2016 renovations.

Donors up to 2016

Gifts were an essential part of church budgets.

The installation of parish church bells was often financed by local landowners. Sir John Seale led the list in 1754, for financing the bells at St Petrox at Dartmouth Castle, then in Stoke Fleming parish. The six bells of St Peter's were funded in 1777 by four interrelated families. They were headed by the lord of the manor, John Henry Southcote, of Buckland-Tout-Saints and Stoke House, who had his own as well as his four-year-old son's name on the inscriptions. Thomas Leach of Combe, a Netherton son-in-law and Churchwarden, also included his four-year-old son William as well as himself. Henry Netherton of Riversbridge had his one-year-old son Henry Neal Netherton, a Neal as well as a Netherton heir, inscribed. Other inscriptions were the churchwarden, Arthur Oldrieve and George Goodridge, rector, who was a good friend of Southcote.

The 1887 re-hanging of bells was funded by Miss Mary Folliott Weymouth of Bowden and LR Netherton.

The west window was the gift of Mrs George Parker Bidder. Charlotte Clark, of Redlap House, donated the clock, dedicated in 1878. Its hands were gilded in the 1890s by Mrs Buddicom, of Redlap House, and again in 1973 from a legacy left by Arthur Barnes, recorded by the initials AB on the clock face. Edith McGuire financed the Tower room.

Donors for the 2016 renovation

This project was overseen by a sub-committee of the Parochial Church Council comprising: John Dietz (Tower Captain and churchwarden), Anne & Peter Bailey, John Harrow and Rosemary Shiffner. Rosemary Minshall was the Church Treasurer.

There were many generous donations from local people including: Anne & Peter Bailey; Alan & Judith Barnes; Sally & Edward Benthall; Cyril & Mabel Parker; Eric Pengelly; Philippa Pook; Lisa Shell; Tim Slade; Stoke Fleming Loam Rangers and Stoke Fleming Parish Council. Grants were received from the Heritage Lottery Fund; the Landfill Communities Fund, through Viridor Credits; and the Friends of St Peter's. Donations were also received from: Allchurches Trust; Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund; Devon Historic Churches Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; Idlewild Trust; and the Sharpe Trust.

Two new bells to create a full octave were donated in 2016 by Johnson Matthey Plc, to celebrate their 200th anniversary and in memory of their founder Percival Norton Johnson. Johnson Matthey Plc is a FTSE 100 British multinational speciality chemicals company and a leader in sustainable technologies. They develop and manufacture a wide range of high technology products, many of which provide environmental and quality of life products, including emission control catalysts and medical device components. Percival Norton Johnson, with his first wife Lydia, is buried under St Peter's chancel and lived in Stoke House from 1855 to his death in 1866. A stained glass memorial window is in the south wall of the church.

Appendix 1

Bells: weights and inscriptions (before and after 2016)

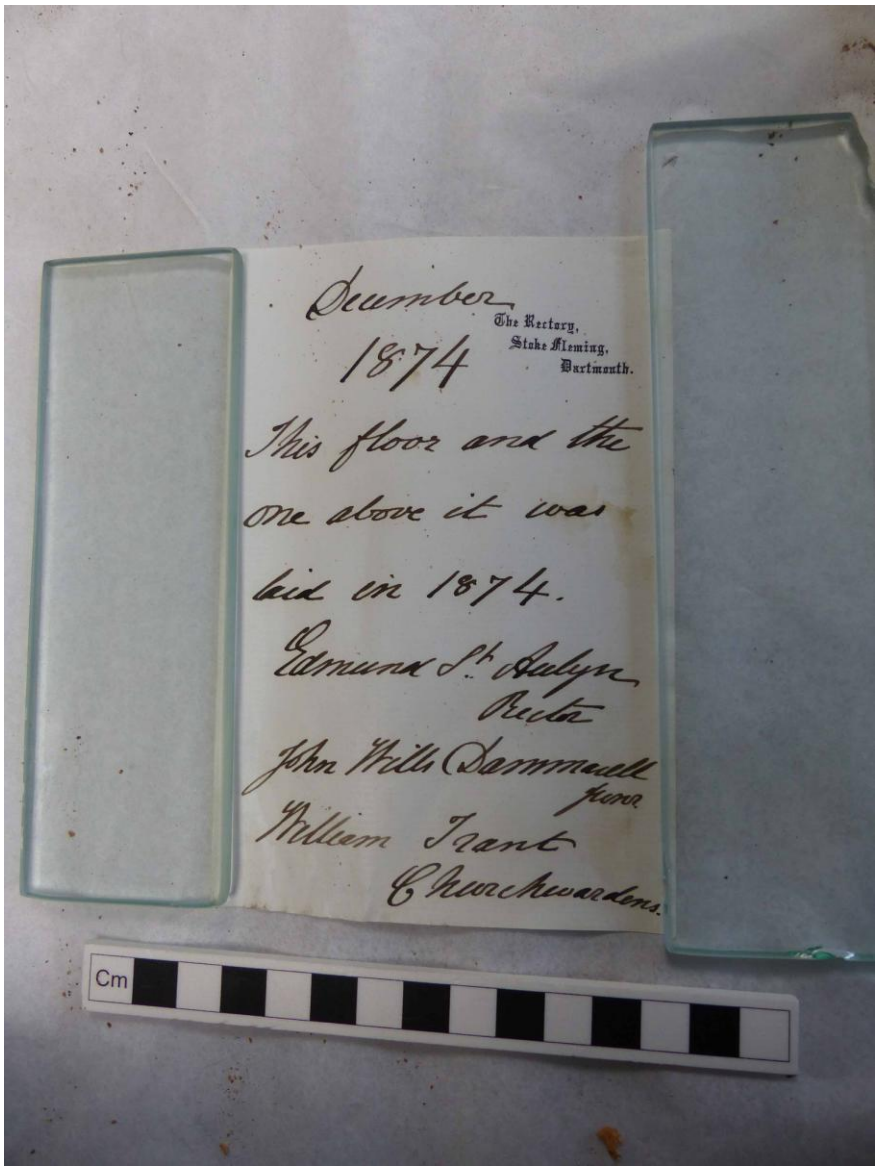
(Note: bell weights are given in cwt – qtr – lbs)

Bell	Approx Weight before 2016	Weight after retuning	Approx Note	Made by	Date
Treble		4 – 1 – 19	F	Whitechapel	2016
BICENTENARY GIFT OF JOHNSON MATTHEY PLC IN MEMORY OF PERCIVAL NORTON JOHNSON 1792 – 1866 FOUNDER OF THE FIRM					
Second		4 – 3 - 2	E	Whitechapel	2016
BICENTENARY GIFT OF JOHNSON MATTHEY PLC IN MEMORY OF PERCIVAL NORTON JOHNSON 1792 – 1866 FOUNDER OF THE FIRM					
Third	5 – 1 – 0	4 – 3 – 13	D	Penningtons	1777
I·P C·P W·P 1777					
Fourth	5 – 1 – 13	5 – 0 – 18	C	Penningtons	1777
I·P C·P W·P 1777					
Fifth	5 – 3 – 0	5 – 2 – 25	Bb	Penningtons	1777
I·P C·P W·P 1777					
Sixth	8 – 0 – 16	8 – 0 – 13	A	Gillett & Johnson	1928
RECAST BY GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON 1928 WILLIAM LEACH HENRY NEAL NETHERTON I·P C·P W·P 1777					
Seventh	8 – 2 – 14	7 – 2 – 14	G	Penningtons	1777
JOHN HENRY SOUTHCOTE ESQ^{R} IUN^{R} I·P C·P W·P 1777					
Tenor	12 – 2 – 17	12 – 1 – 6	F	Penningtons	1777
JOHN HENRY SOUTHCOTE ESQ^{R} GEORGE GOODRIDGE RECTOR THOMAS LEACH AND ARTHUR OLDREIVE CW I·P C·P W·P 1777					

Appendix 2

Messages in bottles

1874 Bottle:

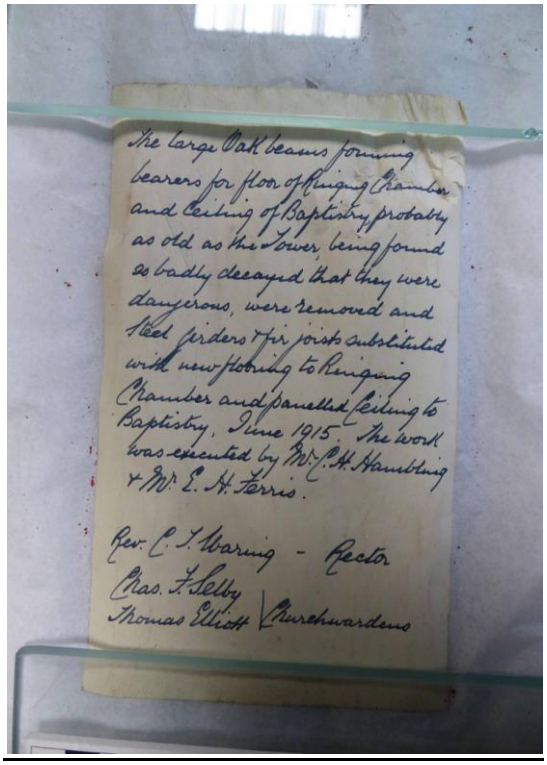


Text from 1874 Bottle – found in Ringing Chamber

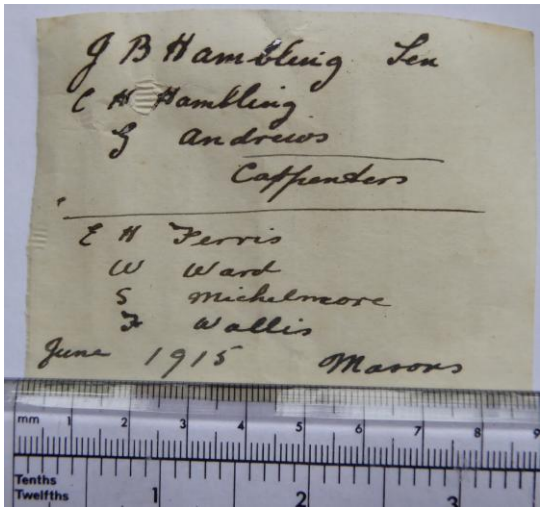
Contents of 1915 clear bottle

"The large oak beams forming bearers for floor of Ringing Chamber and ceiling of Baptistry, probably as old as the Tower, being found so badly decayed that they were dangerous, were removed and steel girders & fir joints substituted with new flooring to Ringing Chamber and panelled ceiling to Baptistry. June 1915. The work was executed by Mr C. H. Hambling and Mr E. H. Ferris."

1915 Bottle showing label



Rev C T Waring	Rector(1914-1918)
Chas Selby	Churchwarden
Thomas Elliott	Churchwarden
J B Hambling Snr	Carpenter
C H Hambling	Carpenter
G Andrews	Carpenter
E H Ferris	Mason
W Ward	Mason
S Michelmore	Mason
F Wallis	Mason



Text from 1915 bottle

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New treble bell, presented by Johnson Matthey Plc

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