

## **St. Peter's Church Daylesford • Gloucestershire**

### **BACKGROUND**

You are very welcome indeed to the parish church of St. Peter's here in the beautiful Cotswold village of Daylesford. Please feel free to visit the church and enjoy this ancient church building. Ponder on the many who, throughout the centuries, have been baptized in its Font and married in its Chancel, have worshipped and been taught of Our Lord Sunday by Sunday, and who have been committed to God's judgment and mercy after their death.

During the time of the Rev. Roger Morgan the parish became a benefice with the neighbouring parish of Kingham, and Rev. Morgan became Rector of both. In December 1979 Kingham, Daylesford, Churchill and Sarsden parishes were formally joined to make one Benefice under one Rector. Sarsden chapel was made redundant in November 1992.

Finally, in May 2001, this four parish Benefice joined with Chipping Norton and the parishes of Salford, Little Compton, Little Rollright, Chastleton and Cornwell to form the Team Benefice of Chipping Norton under a Team Rector, Rev Stephen Weston and Team Vicar responsible for Kingham, Daylesford, Churchill and Sarsden parishes, Rev. Tony Cannon.

In January 2001 Daylesford voted to make St. Peter's church redundant and combine with the parish of Kingham, though as of March 2005 the legalities have still not been finalised by the Church Commissioners. Negotiations are being carried on with a local benefactor with the aim of totally restoring the building.

### **Location and setting**

This compact but elegant and complex church, designed by the renowned architect J L Pearson, is a hidden High Victorian gem. It is set back from the minor road which runs through the tiny village of Daylesford, off the A436 from Stow to Chipping Norton in Gloucestershire. There is a small space for car parking adjacent to the path, which leads through a tunnel of overhanging branches affording just a glimpse of the church beyond.

The churchyard is small and well-maintained, enclosed by a stone wall, with iron railings lining the path from the lych-gate to the road. The Grade II listed lych-gate is finely detailed. It has an open timber-framing with good carved tracery supported on stone dwarf walls, and a hipped roof with lantern and finial cross. It was probably also designed by Pearson. There are several yew trees of some age and bushes to all sides except the western edge, which faces onto the Old Rectory with access through an iron gate.

There are headstones and monuments from the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and a number of particularly fine 19th-century Grade II listed monuments, including large Gothic monuments to Henry Grise-wood, Harman Grise-wood and the splendid neoclassical Coade-stone urn monument inscribed simply "Warren Hastings 1818", considered one of the finest monuments of this type.

### **Building history**

The original Saxo-Norman church (mentioned in Domesday, possibly a minster) had a radical restoration, indeed almost a complete reconstruction, by Warren Hastings in 1816. The current building, designed by Pearson, was built in 1859-63, with no expense spared, by the benefactor Harman Grise-wood. The south doorway is the most obvious survival from the Norman church. The building is basically unchanged.

The manor belonged to the monks of Worcester from the 10th century, and the Hastings family held it from the late 12th century at least. There is a moated site (SMR 6287) 140m to the north of the church, a possible deserted medieval, village to the east (SMR 6288) and the possible remains of a mill (mentioned in 1275) site adjacent to the old Rectory. The site is thus of very high archaeological significance.

Ground Plan: 2-bay nave with transepts at the crossing, tower, chancel, south porch and north-east vestry.

Dimensions: Nave and chancel 18m (65 feet) x 5m (16 feet).

General Description: The church is Early French Geometrical in style and vigorously High Gothic in character. It is embellished with a wealth of detail; the sculptor whose hand is detectable throughout the church was Thomas Nicholls, most well-known through his work with William Burges.

The tower is the dominating feature, almost too large and powerful for such a small church, which feels as if is being stretched upwards from its tight footprint and needs the weight of the tower to anchor it down.

The steep stone spire is pyramidal, with fish-scale decoration. The belfry stage has two-light openings with delicate tracery and quatrefoils in the heads, beneath tall gablets protruding from the sloping faces of the spire. As with all the highest points there is a cross finial. On the north side is a stair turret with a tall conical roof and lombardic arcading under the eaves, the walls pierced by slits and with a door in the base flanked by sandstone columns with foliate limestone heads.

There is a raking plinth and string courses at the springing of the window arches and at eaves height, with zig-zag and billet carved decoration. The other roof lines all meet slightly below another string course at the base of the belfry. The rainwater goods are unusual, with lead lining within hardwood framed gutters; this may be a cause of the damp problems, along with slipped slates.

The transepts are symmetrical but not identical. The north gable is pierced by a large rose window and an arcade of five cusped lancets beneath, the three intermediate lights blind. The south gable also has a rose window but has two tall two-light windows underneath. There is a string course at eaves height and another at sill level which runs unbroken around the whole building.

The nave has clasping buttresses at the west end with quatrefoil and foliate decoration flanking the bar tracery of the two-light window, with a central quatrefoil within a circle in the head. The side walls are each pierced by a two-light pierced tracery window, with a pointed doorway in the north wall at the west end and a south porch opposite this (see below).

The chancel is the most ornate part of the building as one might expect, with the east face particularly elaborate. It is framed by clasping buttresses, with a 3-light east window divided by limestone shafts and flanked by engaged red sandstone columns with finely carved foliate capitals. The continuous string-course is stepped up below the window, with a blind quatrefoil arcade below.

The mouldings of the capitals are continued left and right as a string-course with naturalistic floral decoration terminating in dragon-like beasts. There are blind trefoils above each light with foliate central bosses, and a pointed canopy over each with engaged finials at the apexes. Each canopy is flanked by decorated engaged colonettes with clasping dragon-like beasts at the base.

There is a 2-light plate tracery window adjacent to a doorway in the vestry north wall, and a projecting cross-gabled chimney. As with the other doors, the plank door has decorative hinges, flanked by sandstone columns within a roll-moulded pointed arch. There is a boot scraper left of the door.

The porch has the same steep roof profile as elsewhere in the church, with a cross finial for extra vertical emphasis. The heavy timber framing of the roof has nailhead decoration, vigorously carved.

The doorway is flanked by paired nook shafts with foliate capitals from which the roll-moulded arch springs, with an outer order of dogtooth. The interior of the porch is extremely ornate, with pairs of small windows flanked by miniature marble nook-shafts in the side walls, between which are a sculpted Agnus Dei and a Pelican feeding its young. There are also stone benches.

The inner doorway is clearly from the Norman church and re-set here. It is late 12th- or early 13th-century in date, with keeled shafts and stiff-leaf capitals, and a chamfered, only very slightly pointed arch, with a hollow-moulded and keel-moulded hood with foliate stops over. It has clearly been renewed in parts.

Moving inside, the inner doorway has a segmental-pointed arch with roll-moulded and chevron decoration. There is a matching segmental-pointed surround to the north door opposite, with ogee moulding at the top and engaged columns with foliate capitals either side.

The interior is packed full of detail, all of the highest quality. The pointed west tower arch has a brown marble column against the inside face of the arch with foliate limestone capitals, and green marble columns with foliate capitals in stepped reveals either side. There are similar arches to the transepts and chancel, and quatrefoils upper right and left of all four archways.

The west window has central free-standing marble columns behind. All the other window surrounds and arcading match those on the exterior, but with flanking columns in pink or grey marble.

Ornate wrought iron screens divide the crossing from the transepts, with highly ornate foliate, gilded and painted cast ironwork. 2 candelabra rise from each screen with original gaslight fittings, matching original wrought iron wall-hung candelabra in the nave. The floors are laid with red and black tiles.

The north and south walls of the sanctuary have a foliate cornice above blind arcading, and chip-carved decoration within repeated semi-circles above the cusped inner arches of the east window. There are panels of geometrical multi-coloured mosaics in white, brown, green and black marble at the east end below these.

There is a sedile set into the south wall of the sanctuary, which has Geometric coloured tile flooring. Stone barrel-vaulted roof to chancel, wood herringbone pattern barrel-vault to the north transept. Scissor-braced roof to south transept. The nave has a pointed heavy-timber roof with braced collar, some principal rafters with billet decoration.