

Artifacts

The church artifacts, like the building itself, are representative of the many centuries that the church has stood here. Perhaps the earliest items are three carved wooden dummy candlesticks with traces of original paint and gilding. They are believed to predate the Reformation (pre-1530) when wax candles were very expensive and so dummy ones were used instead. They are said to be unique in this country and were loaned to Canterbury Cathedral for a display a number of years ago.



The Church also possesses a silver chalice and paten dated 1635 with 'The Communion cup of the Chappell of Catcott' engraved upon the cup. Kept elsewhere for safe keeping, they are still used every month at our Holy Communion service. Other artifacts include a pewter flagon dated 1732 and a pewter inkstand of the same age. There are also two 18th-century pewter plates by Richard Goring of Bristol and an early 18th-century pewter vase by the London Compton family. In terms of historical books, as well as christening, wedding and burial registers dating back over 100 years, we also have a large priest's prayer book of the early Victorian era and some equally old bibles. It is interesting to note that, in the Victorian prayer book, the name of Prince Albert has been crossed out. It is somewhat ironic that the same is now happening to current prayer books which contain the name of Elizabeth the Second.

Services

We host a Holy Communion service on the first Sunday of each month and a contemplative Service of Quiet on the third Tuesday of each month.

Holy Communion (BCP)

Held on the first Sunday of every month at 9.30am.



Service of Quiet

Third Tuesday of every month at St Peter's Church Catcott 7pm
This is a quiet space for contemplative reflection for half an hour.



St Peter's Church, Catcott



History

The current Church of St Peter in Catcott dates back to 1292, during the reign of Edward I, although it incorporates within its fabric Saxon and Norman features from an earlier church. There are Saxon windows in the tower. A Norman font sits opposite the south door.

St Peter's was one of seven churches sitting along the western Polden Ridge which belonged to Glastonbury Abbey, prior to its dissolution in 1539. The priest lived in the cottage to the south of the church wall. The nearby Tarry House also belonged to the abbey and was used as a hunting lodge by the abbot.

With the suppression of the abbey came a period of great upheaval locally. Many of the former Roman Catholic churches simply became Anglican parish churches, but there was some argument as to whether Saint Peter's was a chapel of ease or a chantry. If it was a chapel of ease intended to provide a local venue for church services, to save the folk of Catcott having to walk all the way down into Moorlinch for their services, then it would be permitted to continue as such. If it was classed as a chantry then its purpose was private, where prayers were chanted in memory of a wealthy benefactor. In this case, it could be sold off to further fill the Crown's coffers. Initially this is what happened.

It was purchased by William Coke of nearby Manor Farm in 1551. He proceeded to use it as a cattle shelter and stripped out doors, windows and fittings to prevent angry locals from continuing to hold services there. The local priest and churchgoers complained to the courts and eventually Coke was summoned to trial before the Star Chamber in London. There he was ordered to repair the church and return it to use as a chapel of ease, but he was clearly a stubborn man because he spent 13 months in Fleet prison before agreeing to comply.

Thereafter St Peter's was used for public services whilst being privately owned by the Lords of the Manor. However, burials were not allowed, and took place at Moorlinch. The ownership was only transferred to the Church of England in the 1920s.

Saint Peter's is very much a physical record of over one thousand years of our local history. From its Saxon windows to its Norman font, from the 13th century tower, chancel window and priest's door to the Tudor roses on the bosses of the chancel roof, from the locally crafted Jacobean pews, pulpit, wall paintings and village stocks to the Victorian vestry and private pew. So many generations have walked on these flagstones and left their mark on this building. It is a precious heritage that we strive to protect and keep in use, as it has been for the past millennium. To this day it celebrates local births, marriages and lives lived, as well as regular services.

Chancel

Much of the chancel is 13th century. The window in the north wall and the priest's door in the south wall are certainly 13th century work. The chancel ceiling is a 15th century barrel roof and contains bosses with original Tudor roses. The east and south windows in the chancel are also believed to be 15th century. Beneath the altar are five very old coffins, one of them seven feet long!

Nave

The nave of the church is almost entirely early 17th century Jacobean work.

The seating, pulpit, lectern and candelabra were all made by local carpenters in the early 1600s and little has changed since. Its simplicity is its strength.

The wall paintings, like the furniture, are over 400 years old. It is believed that they were plastered over during the Reformation or Oliver Cromwell's time and only relatively recently uncovered.

The vestry and Ruston Pew, which act as a buttress for the north wall, were built about 200 years ago, in the early Victorian era.

In the centre of the church stands the Norman font. Older than the existing church building, this is believed to be between 800 and 900 years old. It is still used to this day.

Looking towards the western end of the nave one can see a very unusual feature at the ends of the pews. These are extensions which pull out to form bench seats for servants and children. We can imagine that they would have been very useful in the days when the church was often packed out. In fact, the last time that they were used was only a few years ago, during the funeral of a much loved local person, when we managed to squeeze 140 people in!

The 17th century musicians' gallery looks very much as it would have done some 400 years ago, though much of it had to be replaced some 50 years ago due to woodworm. Some of the balusters to the front rail are original however.

On the wall above the gallery you can see a rather crudely painted Royal Coat of Arms of King George the third dated 1792.



Tower

The lower part of the tower is 13th century. That includes the narrow wooden door and the winding stone steps behind it which take you up to the first level. It is believed that the upper part of the tower was added in the 15th century.

There are two bells in the tower. The larger one, housed within the top level is dated 1716 and made by the Bilbie foundry in Chewstoke. The smaller Sanctus bell hangs in the white housing on top of the tower. There is no date on it but it is believed to be pre Reformation, so it may be more than 450 years old.

The views from the top of the tower are tremendous, providing a 360° view of the village, the Brue Valley, the Mendip Hills, with Brean Down and the Welsh hills in one direction and Glastonbury Tor and Wells in the other.

The 2020 Stitch in Time Tapestry



In the latter part of 2020 we commissioned a village tapestry, to be hung in the church. Over 40 villagers, the youngest 8 and the oldest 80 plus, stitched, painted, wove etc an 8inch by 8 inch square on a theme of something that summed up 2020 for them.