



St Peter's Alvescot

**Originally dedicated to
St Nicholas from the
1100s until the early
1200s.**

The History.....

William, Bishop of Exeter, allowed Richard de la Mare to build “the chapel of Alvescot” between 1108 and 1123. The chapel was to be subject to the “mother church of Bampton” so all burials were to take place at Bampton and a footpath, a corpse path, probably existed between the two churches - although lost today in a network of paths around the airbase.

The mound on which the church stands has probably been a place of worship for over two thousand years and, possibly, earlier churches stood here. The fabric of this church contains Saxon and Norman architecture plus even some Roman bricks.

Norman names are recorded for builders and a chaplain, Amoury de Hilcombe, in 1229, but financial responsibility for the church and parish is first recorded in 1267 with a Rector, Robert Oldman. Sometime around this period the church dedication was changed from St Nicholas to St Peter.

..and the Building Features..



The nave shows the roof line has been raised as the corbels now sit isolated towards the top of the wall.

The font is 12th or 13th century, a square stone bowl with shafted corners and a base with a narrow band of nail head design around it; sited at the entrance to the church and significantly for entry into Christianity.

The chancel arch design matches the tower arch design.



The carved head corbels would have originally supported the roof cross members which are the medieval originals. The roof tracery is, however, Victorian.

There are four corbels each side dating from the mid to late 14th century. The roof was remodelled and raised during restoration in 1872-73 by W. Slater and R.H.Carpenter who were probably responsible for the tracery design.

The tower arch is a double hollowed chamfered design and either side are marble monuments to the Goddard Carter and Adams families who died in the 1720s to 50s. Goddard Carter died on 22nd October 1725 leaving £5-00 for apprenticing poor children in the parish and £5-00 for the support of a school in the same parish.



The external view below shows the Perpendicular Gothic (1350 - 1450) west window in the tower, and a second large Perpendicular Gothic window in the south wall of the nave.

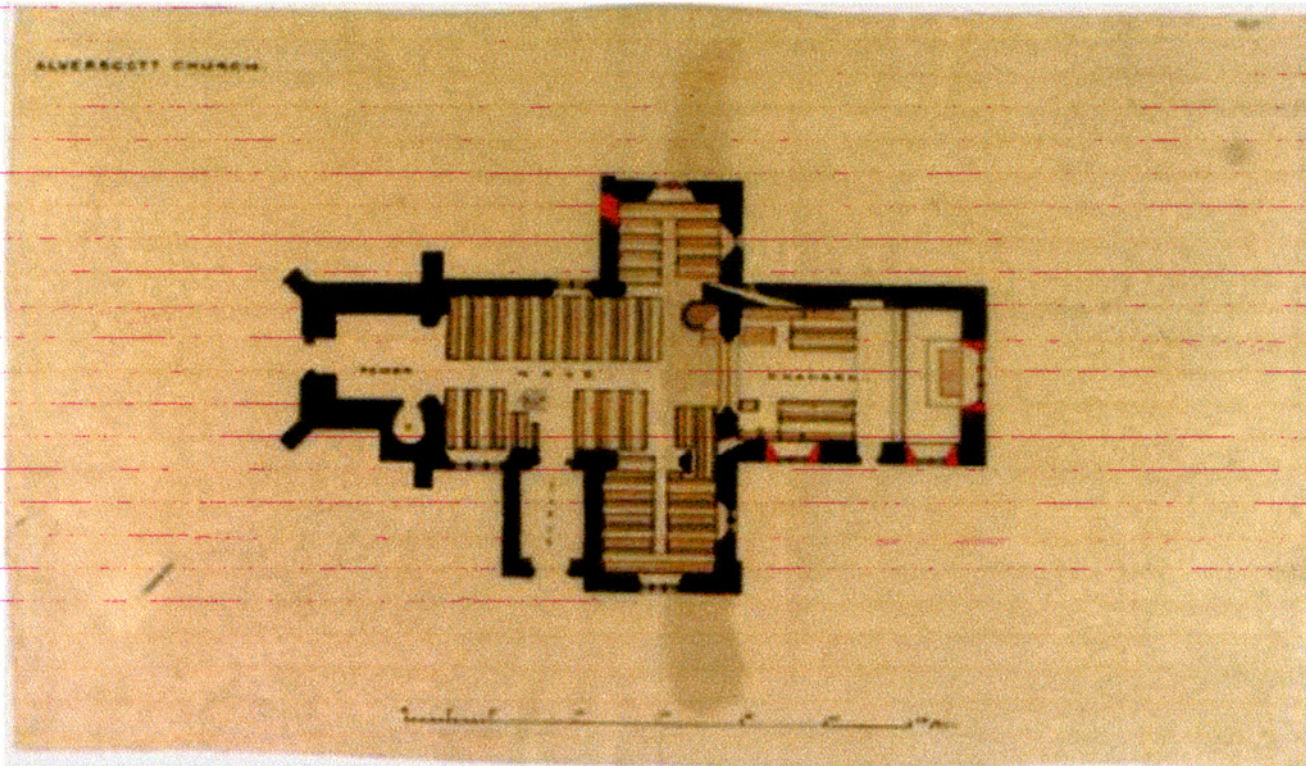
Between the two windows is the stair projection.

The diagonal buttress on the tower corner is shown but merges with the wall.

The church was originally a cruciform design without a tower. The tower was built after John Bonde left 100 sheep in 1498 to fund it.

The tower is three-stage 15th century with diagonal external buttressing and a south west stair projection.





ALVESCOT, St. Peter (1871-1872)

ALVESCOT

groundplan created by SLATER (WILLIAM) & CARPENTER (RICHARD HERBERT)

The plan, above, drafted by the Victorian restorers, shows the two squints, or hagioscopes, in the north and south transepts which were discovered during the 1872-73 restoration work. The squint in the north transept is 1.6 metres long.

In medieval times churches had several altars often dedicated to different saints. The squint allowed a view of the high altar so that the lifting of the sacrament could be viewed or co-ordinated throughout the church.



The carved oak pulpit stands at the opening to the north transept, see the plan left, and dates from 1871. It is mounted on a stone pedestal with three steps. Carved around the top of the pulpit is "Thy watchman shall lift up the voice" but not for too long as an iron hour glass holder protrudes from the stonework close to the preacher's right ear.

The 13th century niche with a cinquefoil arch was uncovered during the Victorian restoration.



Special Items to look for...

Above the pulpit and dating from 1871, this hour glass holder would have allowed the preacher to hear the sand running through it. He would have had no excuse for extending his sermon beyond the allotted time.



The south transept also has a long, 1.5 metre, squint allowing a fine view of the high altar.

Additionally, it contains a 13th century piscina for rinsing the chalice, note the drain hole, and the trefoil head.



Probably the most important artistic work in the south transept is the window of the sower and reaper by Burne-Jones installed in 1910.

Both designs are considerably earlier as he died in 1898.





The Arts and Crafts Movement with Burne-Jones, Rosetti and William Morris was well represented in this area as William Morris rented the manor at Kelmscott. They worked on several churches with George Edmund Street, the Diocesan Architect, and William Morris argued with him over the restoration of Burford Church. That argument led directly to William Morris establishing the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1876. S.P.A.B. is still active today.

The south transept also contains this brass wall memorial to the Malorye family dated 1579. Alice Malorye is wearing a dress with a ruff and puffed sleeves, an embroidered kirtle and a french hood. The man is wearing a long gown with a ruff and the children are dressed similarly.

The arch pillars leading into the south transept show traces of the wall painting which would have decorated the entire church in medieval times.

The view through the squint shows the reredos behind the high altar.



Parts of the original 13th century reredos have been built into the north wall of the chancel beside the altar and the present reredos, right section shown above, is a painted stone and marble three "cinque cusped" arch design dating from 1728 - 1871. The arches are supported on four columns and the gilded and painted designs are inside three arches. The left one has a passion flower crown around the letters "IHS", the traditional Greek abbreviation of IHSOUS for Jesus. In the centre one is a cross with flowers in a quadrant background and the right one, above, is a blackthorn crown



.....The two arched alcoves, left, on the north wall which might have contained bells, relics or, it has been suggested, the hearts of people revered or prayed for in this church.

around the letters "XPC" which is the Greek abbreviation of XPICTOS or Christ.

The chancel contains several interesting features which are a puzzle to us today.

There are wall designs, like the one above middle left..... And

Also on the north wall of the chancel is a low-level window, right, with a book rest set into the wall. It has been suggested that this might have been a leper window or a squint for those outside not allowed into the church to witness the sacrament.





Before you leave, do look at the various marble and sculpted memorials in the nave. The names, dates, relationships and chronology of the one above are interesting in themselves.



The work of others is acknowledged in producing this guide, namely the authors of the guide existing in the church, Victoria County History and others.

Derek Cotterill 2010.

Note: Restoration work on this church is scheduled for 2011 followed by redecoration. This guide will be updated and checked afterwards.

The various stone markings and carvings are worth study. They look like graffiti but did have significance at one time. The meaning of the arm and hand, above left, defies explanation but the cross with the circular ends, centre, was supposed to ward off evil spirits and witches while the cross, right, may have been a Crusader cross. Legend tells us that Crusaders left a cross upon departure and added another upon return - there is only one here!

On the right is a mass dial, a sundial on an external buttress to indicate the times of services.