



The Little Dart Mission Community

To know Christ and make Him known

Chulmleigh Parish Church St Mary Magdalene

Walking Tour



In the Diocese of Exeter



pray



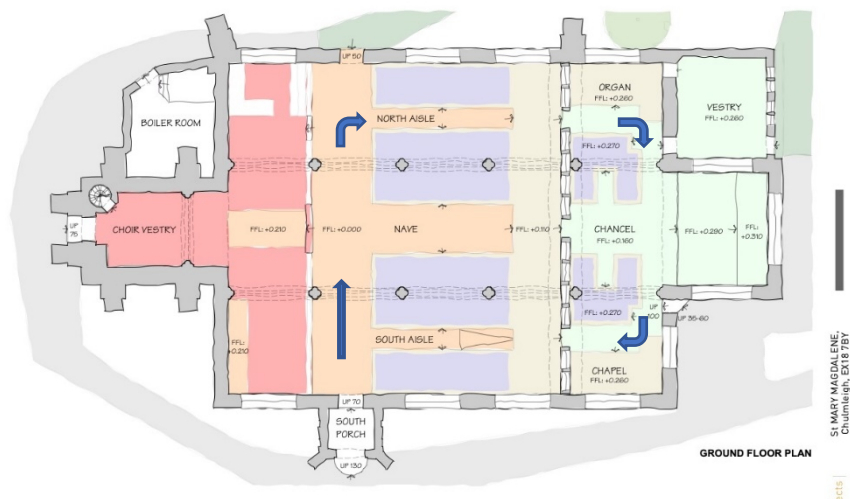
grow



serve with joy

Welcome to St Mary Magdalene Church

This guide to the church takes a circular (clockwise) tour of the building. Please look out for more information as you walk around the church.



Plan of the Church based upon plan from Jonathan Rhind Architects

Background Information

A church has likely stood on or near this site since Anglo-Saxon times. Historical evidence indicates this may have been a Minster Church. The word 'minster' means 'great church' in Anglo Saxon. They were important centres of Christianity, with many clergy who travelled out into the Minster's extensive territory to preach, baptise, and say Mass. Saxon churches were filled with brightly coloured wall paintings, known as murals, depicting the stories from the Old and New Testaments. In a time when services were conducted in Latin and largely only priests and monks were literate, these paintings were used to teach the scriptures. The priest pointed out the relevant story as he preached or read from the

bible. The only hint of this early church building is the Anglo-Norman stone above the South Porch Door, depicting Christ holding a snake.

The church was rebuilt again in the 11th/12th century. As an important centre for Christianity, a larger building may have been needed to accommodate a growing number of priests due to the expanding functions of the church. The new church would have been built in a style called *Romanesque*. Typical features of this style of architecture were the semi-circular arches around doors and windows, and immense walls with very few windows. The stonework was decorated with sculptures of biblical characters and saints and the tradition of wall paintings continued.

Sadly, the evidence for and layout of these earlier churches is hidden beneath the existing church building. However, stone from the 11th/12-century church has been found in the walls of the current church, and the stone tracery around some of the church windows.

From the 13th to the 16th century the church functioned as a Collegiate Church supporting a parish priest and five prebends (church officials with a status lower than a priest) funded by the income from local farms. We cannot be certain what the roles of the prebends may have been. They may have carried out parish duties on behalf of the parish priest or said masses for the souls of the dead, in particular the forbears of the Lords of the Manor, the Courtney Family. Or they may just have been loyal retainers of the Courtney's who benefited from the income of a prebend without undertaking any of the religious roles or duties. The church continued to have an important role in heading up a rural deanery and acting as the mother church of four former chapels.

The late 15th/early 16th century was a period of prosperity for Chulmleigh. The end of the Wars of the Roses brought stability and

wealth from the textile trade and was used to build a new and enlarged church in the *Perpendicular* style. The building work was carried out in two phases between 1475 -1500 and 1520 -1530. The first phase was the building of the existing church, and the second phase was the building of the tower and the south porch. The Perpendicular style of architecture was characterized by open interiors which were flooded with light, and vertical columns taking the eye up to the roof. Wall space was given over to large windows and pointed arches (known as Gothic arches) above the doors and windows. As you look around the church you will see all of these features.

It is difficult to know what the interior of the church originally looked like. Before the Reformation churches were often highly decorated with wall paintings and murals and the church may have contained up to six altars and side chapels located in the chancel and aisles, all of which have long since disappeared.

The church was again extensively renovated in 1870 – 1881 by noted ecclesiastical architects Edward Ashworth (responsible for the tower restoration) and J.F. Gould (responsible for the church building work). Much of the external fabric of the church was replaced including the re-building of the north and south walls. The whole of the interior was remodelled and refurbished in the *Gothic* style to create a medieval ethos, in the process sadly destroying many of the original medieval features of the church. This may explain why there are very few remaining wall monuments within the church.

Other work has been undertaken in the 21st century to install a servery and to create more space at the front and rear of the church. Work is now underway to provide much-needed facilities and space for church and community use.

Church Tour

As you begin the tour look to your left and you will see where the church floor has been removed due to dry rot. This provides a unique opportunity to see the foundations of the building. Amongst the debris, we have found stones dating from the earlier 11th/12th-century church which once stood on this site.

Continue along the back of the church and turn to look down the central aisle to the front of the church. You are looking east towards the Altar. This part of the church, where the congregation sits, is called the Nave. Note the large wooden screen which separates the Nave from the Chancel (the area originally reserved for the priests), the columns which are holding up the roof, and the arches which separate them. The columns and arches and the roof are among the oldest surviving parts of the church, and they date from the late 15th century (1475 -1500).



Now, look up into the roof. Notice its shape. It is called a barrel-vaulted or wagon roof because its shape suggests a covered wagon or a barrel vault.



The roof still has the original medieval bosses which decorate the timbered roof joints. They are hand carved in a variety of designs but also include several faces, all different, including some with beards.

th sides of the aisle are a rare survivor and a reminder of the church's Roman Catholic past.

The pews, designed by John Ford Gould and possibly carved in Harry Hem's Exeter workshop, all date from the 1870s and are in a style known as *New Gothic* which took its inspiration from the medieval period. These pews would have replaced large box pews from an earlier period (18th century). It was the custom for families to rent their pews from the church. As you walk down the north aisle look out for the initials carved on the top of the pew ends.



Now turn to face the rear of the church. Here you will see a huge arch that leads on through into the tower and to the West Door. On either side of the arch were formerly two large windows (now only visible from the exterior of the church). These were blocked up in the 18th century to enable galleries to be inserted on either side of the western wall. These galleries were probably removed during the 19th-century restoration of the church.



Above the balcony is the great west window, dedicated to Elizabeth Davy (died 1844), the wife of a local doctor, which depicts St Anne, St Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary, and St Mary Magdalene. Below is the font which dates from the 19th century.

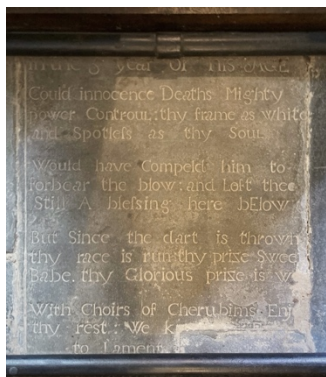


The church tower was built some twenty years later than the church, perhaps to replace a smaller, pre-existing tower. It dates from the early 16th century (1520 -1530). Standing about 100 feet tall it is a very fine example of the Perpendicular style, designed to impress and dominate the local surroundings. It holds eight bells (the original six cast in 1718 by Evan and William Evans of Chepstow, each with an inscription and the name of the donor. Two further bells from the Croydon foundry of Gillett and Johnston were added in 1924 in memory of local men who fought and died in the 1914 -1918 war. A clock room is accessed by a stone spiral staircase, which continues up to the roof, with fine views over the

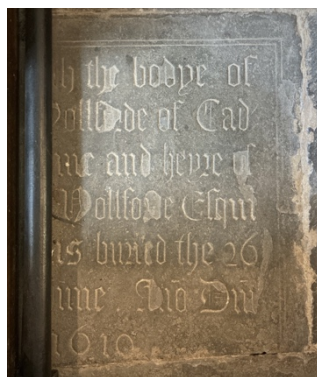
surrounding countryside. The tower contains the oldest door in the church also dating from the early 16th century.

Continue along the back aisle. Notice the plain window in the servery dedicated to Madelaine Allen (died 1981) a former Church Treasurer.

By the side of the north-wall door is a wooden board with the names of all the Chulmleigh Rectors from 1308 until the present day. Notice the names. Many of these are French and would have been the descendants of the families who came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066. Notice the gaps in dates from 1527 to 1593. Whilst we can never know for certain why these gaps occurred this was an unstable period for parish churches as the reforms introduced by Henry VIII and his children, known as the Reformation, occurred during this period. All priests were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the monarch as Head of the Church of England. Priests who refused were turned out of their churches creating vacancies in parishes.



Turn right into the North Aisle. Under your feet are several **Ledgers** or stone tablets that mark burials within the church.



All the aisles and the chancel (the area behind the screen) contain burials. Some of the earliest ledger stones date back to the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (who died in 1603). Burials continued in the church during the 17th to 19th centuries up until the Burial Acts of 1850, when burials under church floors were forbidden on grounds of space and hygiene.



On the left are two 20th - century stained glass windows; the first dedicated to William Martin (died 1935) of Colleton Barton, a wealthy landowner, and farmer, depicting Jesus' instruction to St Peter to "feed my lambs"



and the second window depicting Jesus blessing the little children, dedicated to Miss C. Gillies (died 1981) a former Chulmleigh school mistress and Sunday School teacher.

In front of you is the pulpit, which is a raised stand for preaching. It is raised well above the surrounding floor so that the preacher can be seen and, in the days before microphones, heard. This pulpit dates from the 1870s and was part of the major Victorian renovation of the church, replacing an earlier canopied 18th-century pulpit that still exists and can be seen in the Chulmleigh Congregational Church.



The existing pulpit was designed by Robert Medley Fulford and probably carved by Henry Hems, who may also have produced the pews in his Exeter workshop. It is a good example of the style known as Victorian gothic with its elaborate decoration and carvings. Under the book stand is the carved figure of St Mary Magdalene and if you look carefully on either side of her there stand four male figures representing the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

As you continue past the pulpit stop to look at the Rood Screen.



This is a survivor of the original 15th/16th century interior and a link back to the church's pre-Reformation heritage. The background to the Reformation (the 1530s – 1540s) is King Henry VIII's need for a male heir and when the Pope refused to grant him a divorce from his wife Katherine of Aragorn, he took matters into his own hands and in 1534 he broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, declaring himself Supreme Head of the Church in England.

This decision initiated the reform of English religion known as the Reformation. One of the outcomes was that all English cathedrals

and churches ceased to be Roman Catholic and were ordered to remove and destroy their rood screens and rood crosses, paint over their wall paintings and remove statues and other items which were considered Papist. We do not know for certain why this and similar screens in North Devon have survived. Theories include the remoteness of this part of the country from reformers and the reluctance of local people to destroy such beautiful objects.

The name 'rood' refers to the crucifix which would once have stood on top of the screen, usually surrounded by the figures of the Virgin Mary and St John. The screen would have been brightly painted and surmounted by a rood loft or gallery, which had a variety of purposes including a place from which the Gospel was sung or spoken. Although the paint has faded some traces can still be seen.

The screen is decorated with carved roses, acanthus leaves, shields, and male faces wearing a crown or coronet. The southern end of the screen was rebuilt in the 19th century when the long south wall was rebuilt. On top of the screen stand the four evangelists. They are of European origin and may date from the 17th century.



Now pass through the screen. On your left is the northeast chapel occupied by the organ, a substantial oak framed instrument with medieval style coving above the organist seat. Installed in 1886 this fine instrument was built by Foster & Andrews of Hull.

The window, partly obscured by the organ, depicts John the Baptist and Saints Peter, Paul, and John and is one of the three east windows dedicated to the Revd George Hole (d. 1859)

You are now standing in the chancel. Note the two wide arches on either side of the chancel. These are part of the 15th-century interior of the church and are built in a style more common in northern France, perhaps influenced by mercantile relations with Europe or even French stone masons.



The chancel is dedicated to the Revd George Hole, the third generation of his family to become Rector of Chulmleigh. It was George Hole who commissioned the rebuilding and refurnishing of the church and chancel, although this work was mostly completed following his death in 1859 by his son-in-law and successor as Rector, the Revd G. C. Bethune.

The chancel with its decorative floor tiles, marble step, communion rail, reredos (screen behind the altar), and the choir stalls, designed by John Ford Gould and probably carved in Harry Hem's Exeter workshop, are all very good examples of the Victorian love of the Gothic style.



Note the great east window in front of you depicting the Ascension of Christ, with the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove at the top of the window. This is the second of the windows dedicated to Revd George Hole.

To the right is a small window with the arms of the Hole family and Exeter Cathedral. With their vibrant colours these windows are all fine examples of 19th-century stained glass.

The altar table dates from the early 20th century and was given by the Bethune children in memory of their father and mother.



To the right of the chancel is a former chapel. It contains an important early 18th-century monument erected in 1706 by Joanna Bere, daughter of Thomas Bere, Lord of the Manor of Huntsham in Devon. She married Humphrey Bury, of Colleton, Chulmleigh in 1679. The monument is to the memory of four of their children: John who died on 18th October 1695 aged 14, Arthur who died on 30th April 1701 aged 16, Humphrey who died on 20th April 1701 aged 14 and Gertrude who died December 1691 aged 9 years. At the time Joanna erected the monument three of the seven children,

Christian, Anne, and Thomas were still living. The monument was repaired and conserved in 2018.



Note the two stained-glass windows. The window on the eastern wall depicts Jesus blessing the little children and is the third window dedicated to Revd George Hole.

The window on the south wall dates from 1885, dedicated to local doctor John Adams Tidboald and his wife Susan. It depicts Christ healing the sick.

To the left of the window is one of the only three monumental brasses mounted on the church walls. This brass plaque is in memory of Richard, fourth son of Newell and Anne

Yarde Connop, who died at sea, aged 23 years in 1886.

Now exit the chapel through the screen and you are in the South Aisle. This wall was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century. Traces of the earlier 11th/12th-century medieval church survive in some of the stonework and the stone tracery of the windows (best seen from outside the church).



The early twentieth-century stained glass windows depict St Cuthbert, St Martin, and St Boniface dedicated to the Revd Marsden Gibson, Rector of Chulmleigh from 1894 until he died in 1901, and the St Cecilia window dedicated to Margaret Hanson, (died 1917), the first Chulmleigh Girl Guide Captain and a VAD during the Great War, she was the daughter of Chulmleigh doctor Edgar Hanson.

You are now back at the start of the tour.



Step out into the porch, which is also a survivor of the early 16th century, built in the same period (1520 to 1530) as the tower. If you look above the church door you will see a round stone plaque depicting Christ holding a snake.

This is probably the oldest surviving part of the church and maybe Anglo-Saxon or early Norman.



Another clue to the age of the porch is the niche on the front of the porch, where before the Reformation, a statue of a saint, perhaps St Mary Magdalene, would have stood. There is also evidence of a water stoup on the porch, which was probably removed at the same time as the statue.

This concludes the tour of the church which we hope you have enjoyed.

Today St Mary Magdalene Church is home to a vibrant and growing community of Christians, offering a contemporary style of worship and reaching out to the community.

In addition to the Sunday Worship, we have a programme of regular activities to which everyone is welcome. These include our weekly 10 am Holy Communion Service followed by our Wednesday Café

which runs until 2pm, a Walking Group, Family Friendly activities through the year and social events.

If you would like to find out more, please see the posters on the church notice board for details.

***“Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?”
John 12:21***

Acknowledgments:

Sue and Lawrence Kelland, Report on Conservation Work to Monument to the Four Bury Children

South West Archaeology Ltd., Heritage Assessment of the Parish Church of St Mary Magdalene Chulmleigh

Robin J. Burls, A Short History and Description of the Parish Church of St Mary Magdalene, Chulmleigh