

MARWOOD CHURCH

A History



compiled by Graham Edwards

Marwood Church

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Plate 1
South Elevation viewed from Marwood Gardens
Photograph by courtesy of S Gosling



Plate 2
East Elevation of the Nave with the Lychgate viewed from the car park. The building on the left (Lychgate Rooms) is the former Church House which today is the home of a greater horseshoe bat colony.

Location

The Parish Church St Michael and All Angels is situated on a spur of land between two streams to the west of the village of Guineaford with the stunning private Marwood Hill Gardens on two sides with open fields beyond . On the east side is the Lychgate, a small carpark, a grassed area with large trees and a bench. Adjacent to the Lychgate is the old Church House.

The church is surrounded by its large churchyard which includes trees of various sizes and species. The church is located within Marwood Conservation Area.

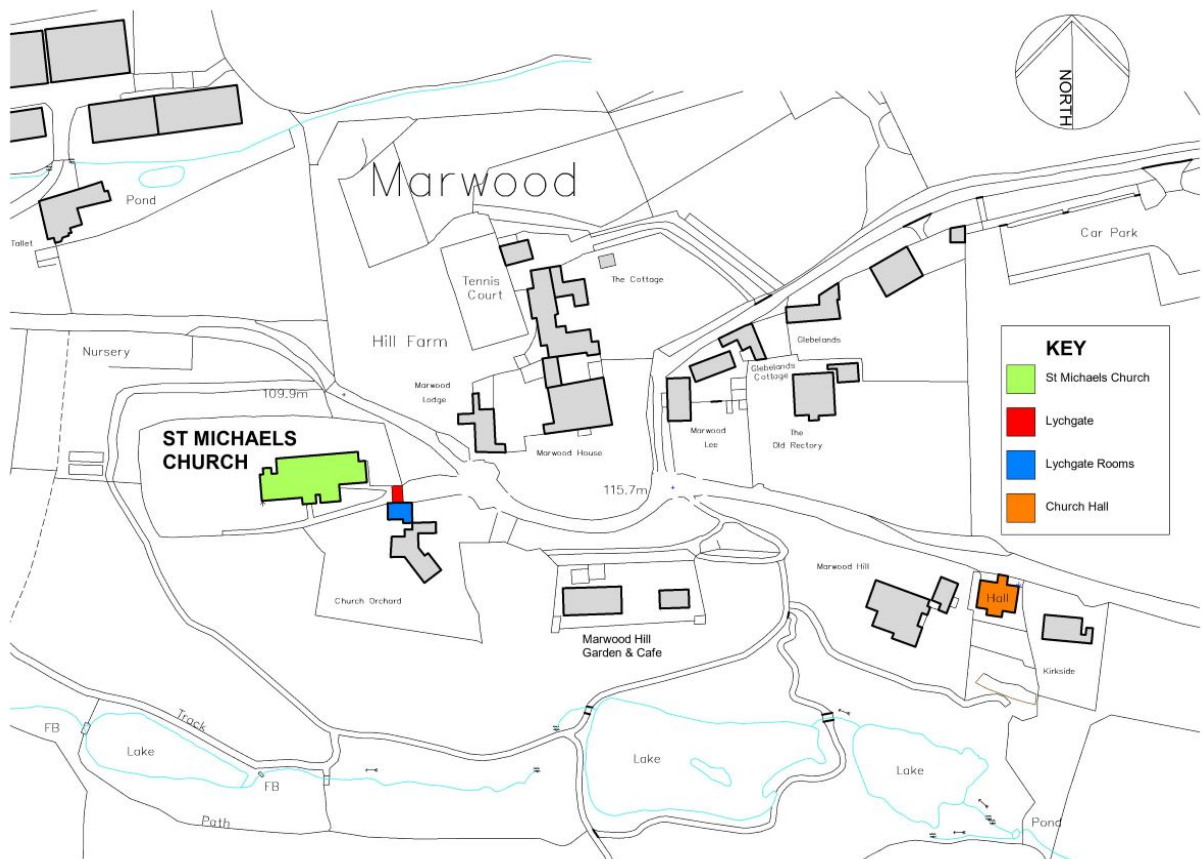


Plate 3



Plate 4
View of church from the East



*Plate 5
View from the tower looking East*

As one approaches the church, glimpses of the tower are clearly seen from the lanes and countryside nearby. These views are valued by the congregation, the wider community and the many visitors to both Marwood Gardens and Marwood Church.



*Plate 6
View from the tower looking West over farmland, wind turbines towards the coast.
The tower is visible from a large area of countryside.*

Structural History

The C13 church was originally cruciform with a wagon roof. It is constructed mainly of local siltstone and sandstone with later copings, tower stair treads, window tracery, door arches and reveals, and the arcades in limestone. Internally the church has white-painted walls except the south transept, where the plaster was removed to allow the walls to dry which makes the Lady Chapel rather dark. The main passages are paved with slate and covered with burgundy-coloured carpet, whilst the seating areas have wood block flooring.

The Domesday survey of 1086 mentions the presence of a church in Marwood (Cherchemerewode or church of Merewood).

In 1309, the Bishop of Exeter ordered the parishioners to enlarge their church within a year from the feast of St Michael or suffer a fine of £10, as not all the parishioners could enter the church for Divine Service. The chancel, south transept and south wall of the nave are C13. In C15, the north transept was incorporated into a newly added north aisle, and the north wall of the nave replaced with an arcade in the perpendicular style with decorated capitals. A tower was also added to the west end of the nave. The west end of the north aisle appears to have been rebuilt in 1763 as dated externally.

In 1520 Sir John Beauple became rector and during his incumbency he donated and had erected an oak rood screed across the north aisle and chancel with the loft door and stairs in the south transept. In about 1850, the Rev Riley ordered the removal of the nave section of the rood screen and the loft stairs, presumably due to the screen's poor condition. The loft door opening was also stoned up.

About 1858-9, during the incumbency of Rev Frederick Collison, restoration and alteration works began on the church, principally a new chancel roof to match the existing, the removal of some of the box pews, the provision of a reredos, a drainage trench around the chancel and a new font.

The belfry was reopened in 1891 after repairs were made to the tower roof and the belfry in connection with the repair and re-hanging of the bells.

In the same year, during the incumbency of Rev William Pryke, the architect Edmund Sedding produced a scheme for major repairs that were undertaken in 1903-4. Repairs included an extensive renovation of all the roofs (excluding the chancel), removing all ceiling plaster, a concrete floor provided throughout with wood block flooring under the seating, the remainder of the rood screen dismantled, repaired and re-erected, new heating system and oil lighting and a new organ. The main building works were undertaken by builders H Burgess at the cost of £950. The Bishop of Exeter Dr Archibald Robinson re-dedicated the restored church in May 1904.

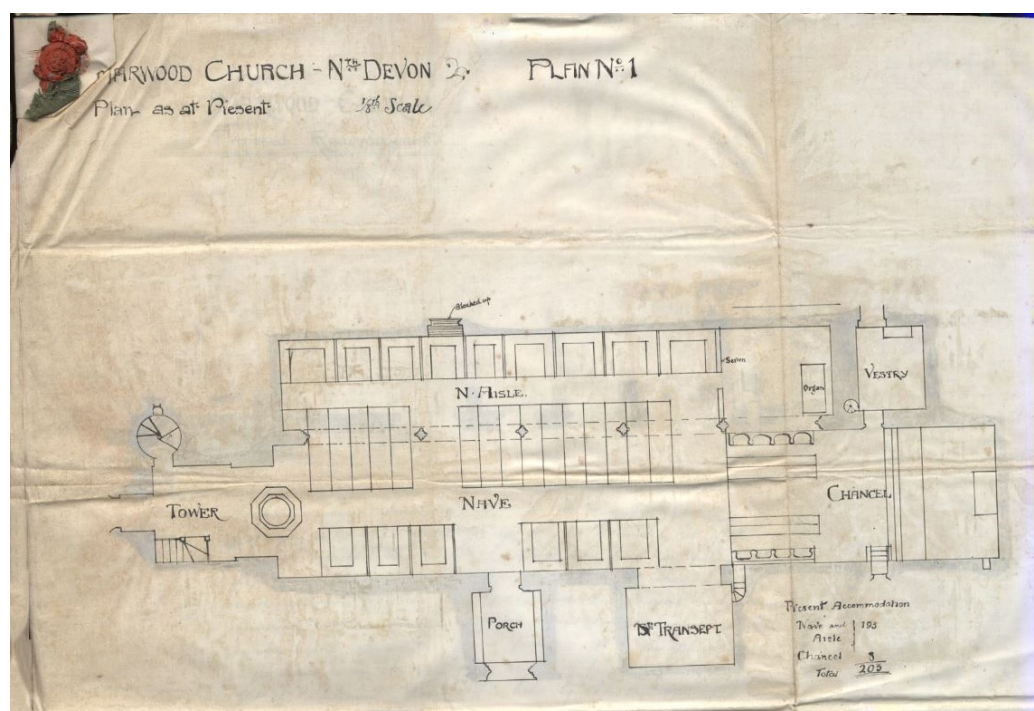


Plate 7

A drawing by Edmund Sedding FRIBA- 'As Present' - from the faculty of 1903 showing the old box pews as well as the existing benches.

Total seating 203

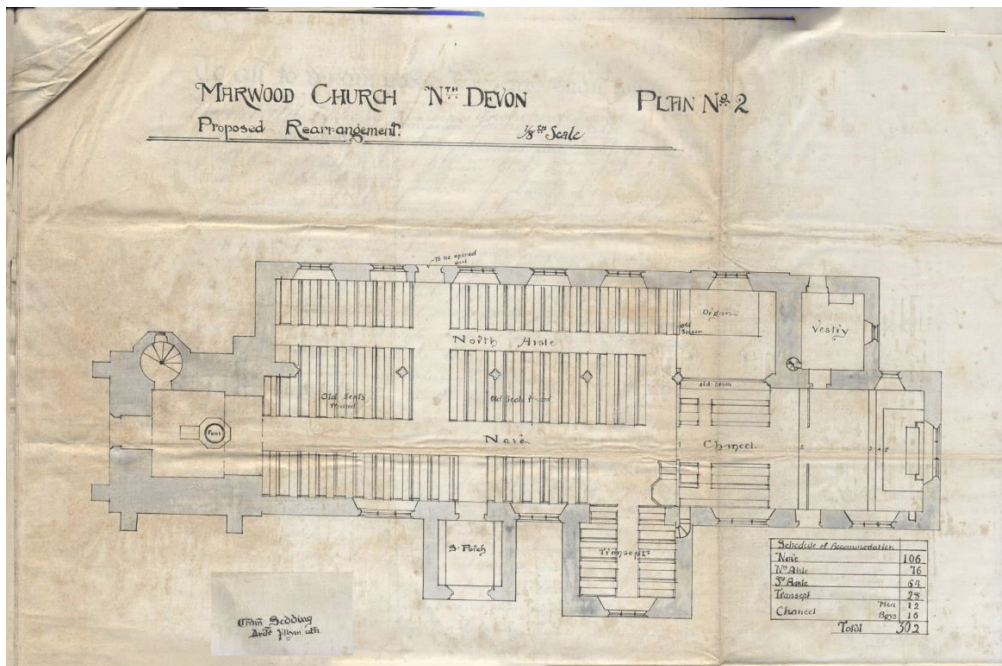


Plate 8
Edmund Sedding's drawing of the 'Proposed Rearrangement' from the faculty of 1903 showing the old box pews removed and replaced with benches.

Total seating 302

In 1939 during the incumbency of the Rev Claude Skene further alterations were started, suspended during the Second World War and recommenced in 1947. These involved deathwatch beetle treatment to ancient woodwork, re-erecting the sundial, lowering the priest's door and widening the gutter/path outside.



Plate 9
From the nave looking towards the east window

The church is adjacent to the nationally-known Marwood Hill Gardens created by Dr Jimmy Smart in the late 1950s. It attracts many visitors from around the world, a good many of whom visit the church which can be seen from the gardens. The visitors book bears witness to this and is full of comments: 'welcoming', 'peaceful', 'beautiful', 'stunning woodwork' and 'well looked-after' etc.

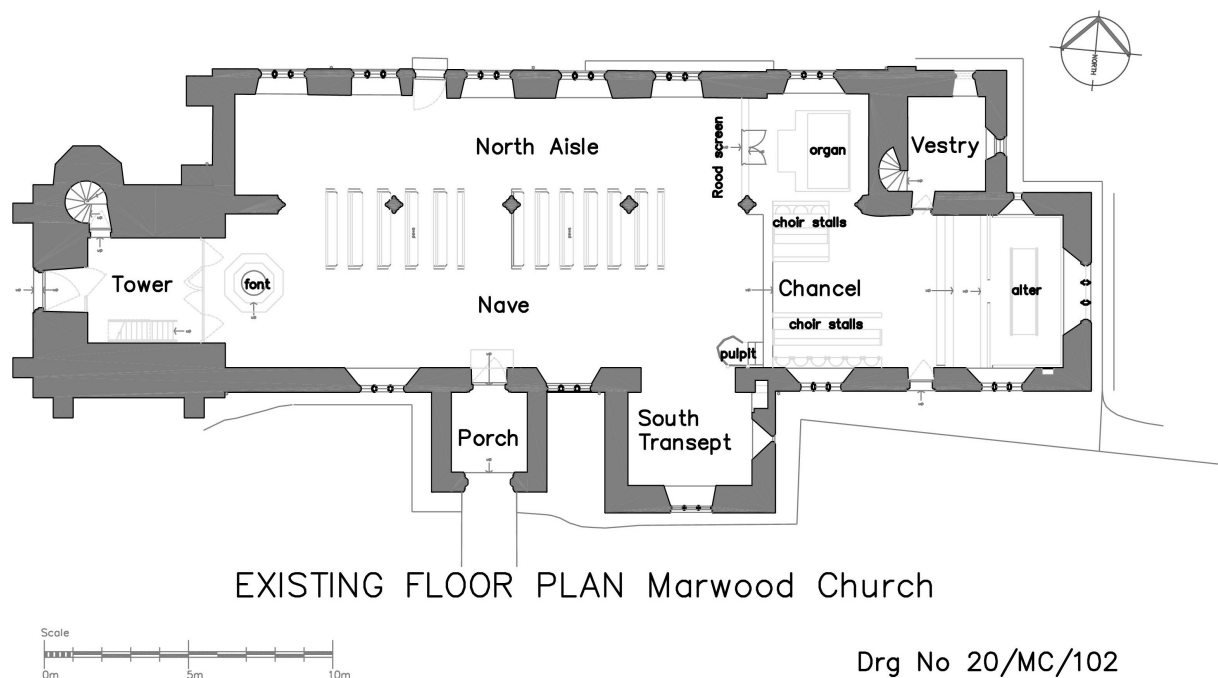


Plate 10

The Church of St. Michael is Grade 1 listed. The interior has deteriorated due to roof leaks and water penetration over many years but this does not detract from its splendour, although it has resulted in inclusion in the Heritage at Risk Register.

The C13 church has wagon roofs with the north aisle still retaining its carved bosses. The C13 fabric includes a trefoil-headed piscina on the south wall of the chancel, two lancet windows in the chancel and one in the south transept. The south entrance from the porch is through a C14 arched doorway. The tower has set-back buttresses to the first stage, and contains six bells cast in 1771 and a pentagonal stair turret to the north side.

The screen at the top of the North Aisle

The beautiful early C16 rood screen is thought to be one of the best in the country. It originally stretched the full width of the Nave and North Aisle, generally thought to be dated between 1535 and 1540.

E.D.A.S. notes of 1847 state 'screen and rood loft nearly perfect'. Sometime before his death in 1853, the Rev Richard Riley ordered the removal of the chancel section of the screen. Only the north aisle section remains, with its Renaissance decoration motifs, tracery and ribbed, finely pierced and decorated coving. The area between the groining of the fan vaulting is carved with ornaments of Renaissance character.

On the lower panels of the doors is inscribed 'SIR JOHN BEAPUL PSON OF MEREWODE' the assumed benefactor, who was the rector for Marwood 1520 to 1561.

The richly decorated front of the rood loft was removed in 1852 and packed away in the tower but had disappeared by 1924. The back of the rood loft still remains with panels of Renaissance carvings, although it is thought possibly to be a C18 reproduction.

In 1904, the screen was dismantled because of its poor condition and removed by Walter Thetford, architectural carver of Barnstaple, to his workshop. The parts affected by dry rot were replaced with good quality oak, carved to match existing sections. The screen was re-erected in its original position ready for the re-dedication of the church in June 1904. The major refurbishments were carried out under the direction of Edmund Sedding the well-known church architect of London and Plymouth.

During the 1903-4 refurbishments, the rood loft steps and door opening were uncovered in the south transept.



*Plate 11
C16 rood screen in the North Aisle*



*Plate 12
Rear of C16 rood loft above screen.*



Plate 13 Doors & lower panels of screen



*Plate 14
The rood screen cornice is delicately pierced and carved with foliage.*



*Plate 15
Rood loft steps and door opening, spiral timber stairs up to the door have long gone.*



Plate 16
Trefoil-headed piscina adjacent the altar.



Plate 17
C16 bench ends,
This end depicts an angel above a bagpiper.



Plate 16A
Close-up of the C13 piscina bowl.

In the chancel's south wall, close to the altar is a C13 trefoil-headed piscina. The bowl is circular and surrounded by eight leaves.

The vestry notes state that the floor in the altar area of the chancel was raised in 1858-9 [by approx. 2ft 5in (728mm)]. One can therefore assume that the piscina was raised at the same time.

The church has eleven C16 benches and two bench fronts, thick oak-planked, gnarled and twisted with age. All have exquisite carved ends, twenty six in total. The bench front and backs are also carved. The carvings are seen in a range of styles, some denoting figures, preachers, shields, plants, angels, bagpiper, saints, animals including a fox, each framed by floral or foliage design.



Plate 18

The present 1859 font carved in a medieval style.

During restoration works in 1938 the bowl of the previous C12 font was found buried beneath the new one. It appears this was a curious habit to which C19 ecclesiastics were somewhat addicted. The font's pedestal was used to support the pulpit when repositioned in 1891. The C12 font was at some time positioned in the north aisle as can be seen by a rebate matching the bowl cut in the column. See plate 21



Plate 19

C12 font carved from a single block of stone

The church has been in the patronage of St John's College, Cambridge since 1715.

In May 1859, Ann Tyrell, sister of Bishop William Tyrell, a former student of St John's, presented a new circular font carved in a medieval style during the early Victorian era. The bowl is decorated with foliage and corbelled mitred heads.

The font was made by Pulsford Masons of Barnstaple and carved from French Caen limestone supported on four Devonshire marble colonnettes gifted by the Rev Collinson's mother.

On the lid of the font sits a sculpture by John Robinson (1935-2007) depicting the Prophet Simeon blessing the boy Jesus at the time of His presentation in the Temple. It was presented in 1970 to the church by the sculptor who at the time lived locally. Some of his other work can be seen in Marwood Hill Gardens.



Plate 20

Repositioned pulpit with Jacobean carvings.

The C12 stone font shaft was turned upside down to support the pulpit.



Plate 21
Rebate in column for the C12 font bowl



Plate 22
West end North Aisle depicting a large George III plaster royal arms.



Plate 23
South Transept C13 lancet window

During the renovation works of 1903-4 a C13 lancet window in the east wall of the South Transept was found and unblocked. It was restored and glazed with clear glass by Henry Burgess the builder.

However, Arthur W Hunt Esq of Shrigley & Hunt, stained glass designers & manufacturers of Lancaster & London, visited the church in 1903 and asked the Rev Alfred Johnson to accept the gift of stained glass for the lancet window, dedicated to the former incumbent Rev William Pryke 1893-1900 the instigator of the restoration fund.

The new glass was installed in 1904, the first stained glass in the church. It depicts Mary with the infant Jesus and John the Baptist



Plate 24. The stained glass east window depicts the three archangels standing proudly, Saints Gabriel, Michael and Raphael.

The window is dedicated by Rose Heyworth in loving memory of her husband Lawrence Heyworth, her mother Susan Rodon Bates & her step-father John Bates, all of Whitefield in this parish 1910.

In 1847 the window was described as a triple lancet being without tracery. This was changed during the 1858-9 restoration at the direction of John Hayworth (architect for the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society) when the window was renewed including stone tracery.

The south window in the south transept was unveiled in 1916 and dedicated, by his mother, to Captain Heyworth Potter Lawrence Heyworth killed in action at Gallipoli in 1915.

Both windows were made by Percy Bacon Brothers who produced stained glass windows in London for churches world wide. Their name can be seen etched into the stone plinth at the base of the right hand light of the east window.



*Plate 25
Tablet inscribed to Ann Chichester*



*Plate 26
Monument in the memory of William Parminster*

The marble wall tablet with Ionic colonnettes on the east wall of the north aisle in Plate 25 is inscribed to Anne Chichester of Westcote who died in 1664.

The marble wall monument above the north door in the north aisle in Plate 26 is inscribed in memory of William Parminter Esq, Inquisitor General for the Hon South Sea Company in Terra Firma (who died in Panama in 1737 aged 36) and other members of his family. Inscription continues: 'This monument having lost its hold on the wall where it had been fixed, fell on the floor and was much mutilated'. A grateful recollection of a respectable Ancestry imposed the necessity of its re-erection on a Surviving Descendant 1821. The monument has Corinthian columns surmounted by seated figures each side of a shield and an urn.



Plate 27
Monument in the memory John Thorne



Plate 28
Monument in the memory William & Anthony Peard

The monument in Plate 27 with urn and pedestal over Doric columns and frieze, on the north wall of the aisle, is by John Berry (the mason who carved the sundial) in memory of John Thorne of Ley who died in 1763. Beneath is a medallion with palmettes and an hour glass.

A slate plaque set in a marble surround towards the west end of the nave's south wall in Plate 28 is inscribed to William & Anthony Peard who died in 1652 aged 16 and 19. The Peards were a mercantile family, Oliver Peard was Mayor of Barnstaple in 1565 before trading as a linen merchant in Tiverton and George Peard was the Member of Parliament for Barnstaple in 1640.

Within the marble surround are two carved busts resting on a table with hour glass and skull. Each side of the plaque are roundels with references to biblical scripts which appear to be a hand holding a sickle cutting down a flower on the left and a hand sowing grain on the right. The shields, busts and roundels on the plaque are painted. The top shield depicts two wolves passant (striding) in pale sable (black) which is the Peard family coat of arms.

The biblical inscription on the left roundel is 1 Peter 1:24-25, 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever'. The biblical inscription on the right roundel is 1 Corinthians 15:36. 'How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies'.



Plate 29
The Reredos

During the 1891 restorations a reredos was made from box pews (in particular the Whitefield pew) being removed from the chancel, the sounding board from above the pulpit and the wainscoting from behind the pulpit. The pulpit was lowered and moved to under the chancel arch at this time. The adjacent wainscot was made from the remaining box pews from the chancel. The works were undertaken by a local carpenter Mr W. Worth and Sons.

Over the south porch door of the church is an ornate sundial by John Berry (a former parishioner of Marwood) dated 1762.

The Exeter Daily Gazette of April 29th 1891, gives an account of this dial and its maker -

‘... John Berry, a mason of Marwood, who died on February 20th 1790, aged seventy-three. He is still remembered, as the local masons trace their skills through two or three generations back to him. His sundials may be seen over the church porches in the neighbourhood, and in the gardens of private houses. The Marwood dial has one curious feature, the style carries a needle placed about four inches from its upper extremity, and by its shadow shows the position of the sun in the zodiac. The signs of the zodiac are shown on the dial, and also the hour of noon at Vienna, Berlin, Jerusalem and other places.’

As stated in the Gazette the dial is unusual as it tells the time in eleven parts of the world and the position of the sun in the zodiac at different times of the year. The dial has winged heads at the top corners above the date, there is a sun face at the gnomon root surrounded by *Tempus fugit mors venit* and *Nos ut umbra* (Time flies, death comes, we are like a shadow).

The sundial was dislodged in a terrible gale in May 1897 breaking into several pieces and thought to be beyond repair. However by April 1939 it was repaired and re-erected in its original position on the porch. Christopher St. J. H. Daniel, the founder of the British Sundial Society, was curious as to how a local stonemason in Marwood was able to produce such detailed mathematical objects. He suggested that as Marwood Parish Church is in the patronage of St. John's College, Cambridge it is more than likely that the incumbent would be a Fellow of the College versed in the classics and mathematics. Thus, Berry's achievements may have been derived from the good offices of such a tutor.

John Berry has sundials on no fewer than thirteen other local churches all displaying a high standard of craftsmanship. The Berry family's monument is also unusual as it is mounted externally on the SE buttress of the tower.



Plate 30
Vestry stairs.

During the alterations to the vestry in late summer of 1891 old spiral stairs built into the thick stone wall were uncovered, thought to have provided access to the priest's living room above. At this time the ceiling was raised.



Plate 31
Southern entrance and porch with John Berry's sundial over



Plate 32.
John Berry's sundial on the south porch

The cracked face is held together with rusting steel screws and iron holdfasts around the perimeter, after being re-erected in April 1939.

The existing steel gnomon appears not to be Berry's original as it is without a nodus, as stated in the Exeter Daily Gazette 1891, and is rusting away at its fixings.

Due to the location of the church being west of the Greenwich Meridian the time shown on the dial is 16min 21sec behind GMT/UTC.

The churchyard was extended to the west in 1878 onto the former bowling green. This new lower section contains war graves from the First and Second World Wars. The parish war memorial is also situated in the churchyard and is the centre of the service on Remembrance Day.

Plate 33. Harry Hems' Carrara marble sculpture.



In the lower section of the churchyard is this impressive artistic memorial of a standing angel in front of a Calvary cross on a plinth all carved from a single piece of white Carrara marble by the well known sculptors Harry Hems and Sons. The monument is in memory of Elizabeth Jury who died in childbirth May 1897. The monument stands eight feet high above the plinth.



*Plate 34
The lower churchyard also includes one wooden cross to an unknown soul about 1920-40.*

The tower contains six fine-toned bells.

There were four bells when the Church Goods Commission made their report in 1552 and five bells in 1727. Today there are six bells all originally cast by Bilbie of Cullompton in 1771, the cracked treble was re-cast in 1891 by John Warmer & Sons. All the bells were re-hung in October 1891.

In 1971-2 the bells' cannons were removed and replaced with bolts by John Taylor's Bell Foundry in Loughborough, Leicestershire and were re-hung by John Taylor & Co in 1972. Taylor's notes are shown in Plate 35.

Each bell is individually inscribed, in most cases with the name of their generous benefactors, below:

1. Thomas Watts, John Kelley, William Berry, George Smyth, Thomas Heath. J Bilbie fecit 1771
2. Thomas Hartnoll, John Lamprey, John Mules. J Bilbie fecit 1771
3. Mr Thomas Sharland & Mr George Horwood, church wardens. J Bilbie fecit 1771
4. Thomas Bilbie of Cullompton cast us all 1771.
5. George Ley senr, George Ley jnr Esq. J Bilbie fecit 1771
6. The Rev Richard Harding, rector 59 years. God preserve our church and King.

MARWOOD BELLS CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS

NUMBER	DIAMETER	FOUNDER	YEAR	WEIGHT AFTER TUNING
TREBLE	2' - 7 ³ / ₄ "	JOHN WARNER & SONS, LONDON	1891	6-0-23
SECOND	2' - 7"	THOMAS BILBIE, CULLOMPTON	1771	5-2-26
THIRD	2' - 10 ¹ / ₄ "	THOMAS BILBIE, CULLOMPTON	1771	6-0-9
FOURTH	2' - 11 ¹ / ₄ "	THOMAS BILBIE, CULLOMPTON	1771	6-3-12
FIFTH	3' - 2 ⁵ / ₈ "	THOMAS BILBIE, CULLOMPTON	1771	8-2-2
TENOR	3' - 8 ¹ / ₂ "	THOMAS BILBIE, CULLOMPTON	1771	13-2-12

THE PITCH OF THE TENOR BELL IS 687 HZ WHICH CORRESPONDS TO THE NOTE F ON THE INTERNATIONAL PITCH.

THE BELLS WERE REHUNG BY JOHN TAYLOR & Co IN 1972.

Plate 35



Plate 36

Late C15 perpendicular wreathed foliage capital to the clustered columns of the Beerstone arcade.

The capital at the west end of the arcade has a Green Man, fruits and stiff leaves. The north aisle was built in C15 and repaired in 1640 and 1763, according to the dates on the gable stonework as reported in the Vestry notes (page 130). During the 1903-4 restoration, according to a report in the Marwood Church Monthly, June 1904, 'the defective arcade and walls have been made perpendicular again.'



Plate 37

Ceiling bosses in the north aisle have shields, stiff leaves and other motifs.

The plastered ceilings were removed from the north aisle, nave and south transept wagon roofs during the 1903-4 restoration to reinstate the roofs to their original state and to allow air circulation around the roof timbers.



Sources

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DAC faculty 18th June 1903 & Edmund Sedding's drawings and his letter to the Churchwardens. *Marwood Past and Present* (Marwood Church guide)

North Devon Records Office, Marwood church records

North Devon Journal May 19th 1904

Exeter Daily Gazette 1891

Photo of south elevation of the church by C. Gosling

Beatrix Creswell's Notes 1924

Devon Churchland Marwood Church guide

Compiled by Graham Edwards