

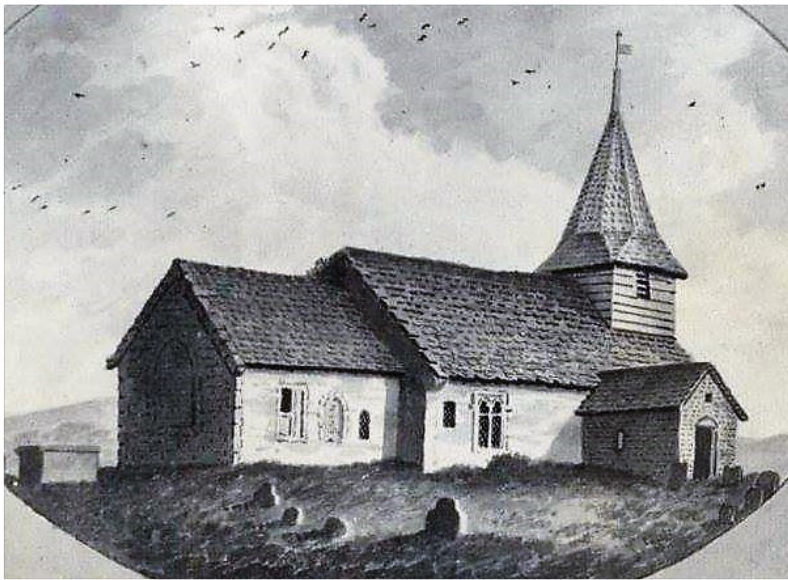
A guide to the churches of St Mary & St Peter, Pett & St Nicholas, Pett Level



Welcome to the churches of St Mary & St Peter, Pett and St Nicholas, Pett Level

The spire of our church in Pett stands as a landmark of the visible Christian Church for miles around. Rising nearly 250 feet above sea level, the church dominates the highest point in the village - and in daylight hours guides the seafarer into the safety of Rye Bay.

The Old Church



There has been a place of worship on this site in Pett since 1291, and the present building was built in 1864. The earliest records of a church in Pett (the 13th century spelling was 'Pette' or 'Putte') appears in the taxation of Pop Nicholas in 1291.

The old church was a brick and stone building of similar size, buttressed on the South side and with box pews as seen in this painting by the Rev in 1860

Plans for the new church

At a Vestry meeting held in the church in October 1863 a decision was taken to build a new church. Ten years previously

the minute book records that there was some disquiet as to the adequate seating accommodation in the church. Such slender evidence as this is the only clue that we have as to why an old church should give way to a new.

On February 18th 1864, the plans and estimate for the proposed church were passed. The estimate for the building was for £1,600. The money was soon found and an architect, Benjamin Ferry was chosen to draw up plans and Dove Brothers of Cloudesley Road, Islington won the contract to build the new church.

During the following twelve months there must have been mixed feelings as the ancient church was pulled down and the erection of the new edifice begun.

At any rate, the work was soon completed and on the 29th December 1864 the Rt Rev. A.T. Gilbert, Lord Bishop of Chichester, dedicated the new church.



The new building, made of brick and stone, is in the Early English Decorated style. The church consists of a nave, some 53 feet in length and 23 feet wide, and a chancel 24 feet by 16 feet with a vestry on the south side. There is a tower with a spire more than 75 feet high on the north side of the nave at the west end of the church.

The walls of the church are faced with local bluestone, quarried from the Marsham slope of the Pett ridge, with Bath Stone quoins (dressed angle stones) and a string course (a continuous projecting horizontal band in the outside wall).

The small tower is about nine feet square internally and forms an entrance porch to the church on the north side.

When the old Sussex Church was pulled down it seems that very little was deemed worthy to be saved. Perhaps there were no treasures of very ancient days, only a few things from two earlier centuries to link earlier Christian England with more modern days.

The Bell

The oldest of these is the bell - "music's laughter", as the poet Hood called it - and here hangs a mystery. It is dated 1641, with the inscription, "Robert Foster gave XVL toward me, 1641". On the north side of the chancel arch, however, there is a small brass, bearing the same date, which records that George Theobald gave a bell to the church. Of course there may have been two bells at one time, but it is a coincidence that the two dates are the same. The inscription on the bell may suggest that Robert Foster only made a contribution towards the bell or was responsible for the recasting of the existing bell that was given to the church by George Theobald. The inscription on the brass is this:-

bell with a free clapper, since 1865 it has also served as an hourly chime for the church clock.



This brass and some of the memorial plaques were moved from the earlier church. There is no mention of George Theobald on the bell that currently hangs in the tower.

*"Here lies George Theobald, a lover of bells,
And of this house, as that epitaph tells,
He gave a bell freely to grace the new steeple.
Ring out his praise therefor, ye good people.
Obit 10 Dei Martii 1641".*

The single bell is about 2 feet 6 inches in diameter and weighs about 6 cwts. Originally designed as a normal tolling



The Interior

The interior of the church is much like the inspirational original design of Benjamin Ferrey, without the Victorian heavy draperies round the altar and clear of painted boards depicting the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed.

The church is based on the Pugin style of Gothic revival, insomuch that Ferrey was one of Pugin's pupils and his influence can be seen in some of the decorative features.

The Font

On entering the church the first thing that catches the eye is the font. It was given by the Rev. Augustin Diones Geere. The Georgian font is octagonal on a fluted baluster stem. The outer sides of the bowl are inscribed in Latin which translated reads *"Given by Diones Geere of this very church Rector May 20 AD1753"*.

At the base of the fluted Sten is a plate inscribed *"This font, dated 1753 was restored in 1953 to the memory of Agnes Rose Lines"*.

There is a collar-beam roof in the nave consisting of four bays. The chancel arch is elaborately moulded, springing from square capitals each carved with foliage and four corbel heads. There are two polished marble columns on each side of the chancel arch similar to the nook shafts on the outside door of the church.



Supporting the braces on each side of the nave are more moulded capitals, four of which have a corbel head. Altogether there are 12 heads and it has been suggested that they represent the twelve Apostles.

The roof of the chancel is also of the collar-beam type supported by three arches. The ends of the arches are decorated with wooden shields representing the four

Gospel writers, a dove (Holy Spirit) and a lamb (Paschal). These were repainted by John Rootes at the end of 1958 when the chancel was reconstructed and the organ moved.



The Chancel & Altar

Benjamin Ferrey invented (around 1857) a cheap mode of stamping or incising stucco surfaces while wet. He used this process to good effect in the chancel of Pett church. The floor of the chancel is tiled in square patterns and there is one step from the nave to the chancel and two from the chancel to the sanctuary.

The altar is of pine, faced with oak and with a carved oak frontal. In the front is an elegant 17th century carved panel with two cherubs' heads in the centre. The origin of this is not known, but it is



thought to have come from another piece of church furniture.



The aumbry, for Reserving the Sacrament, has a carved door made from one of the old oak timbers from Westminster Abbey. The design and carving is the work of renowned local sculpture and illustrator Michale Renton.

On the top step to the sanctuary are three long embroidered kneelers designed and made by Mrs Joan Zeepvat. Crafted in exquisitely worked stitches, their theme is the Bread and Wine of the Holy Communion.

The Nave & Pulpit

The nave, tiled with black and red squares, has pitch-pine pews. The pulpit is made of stone and marble, and the fine oak lectern is in the shape of the eagle of victory. At the west end of the church is a war memorial commemorating the men of village who were killed in action during the two World Wars.

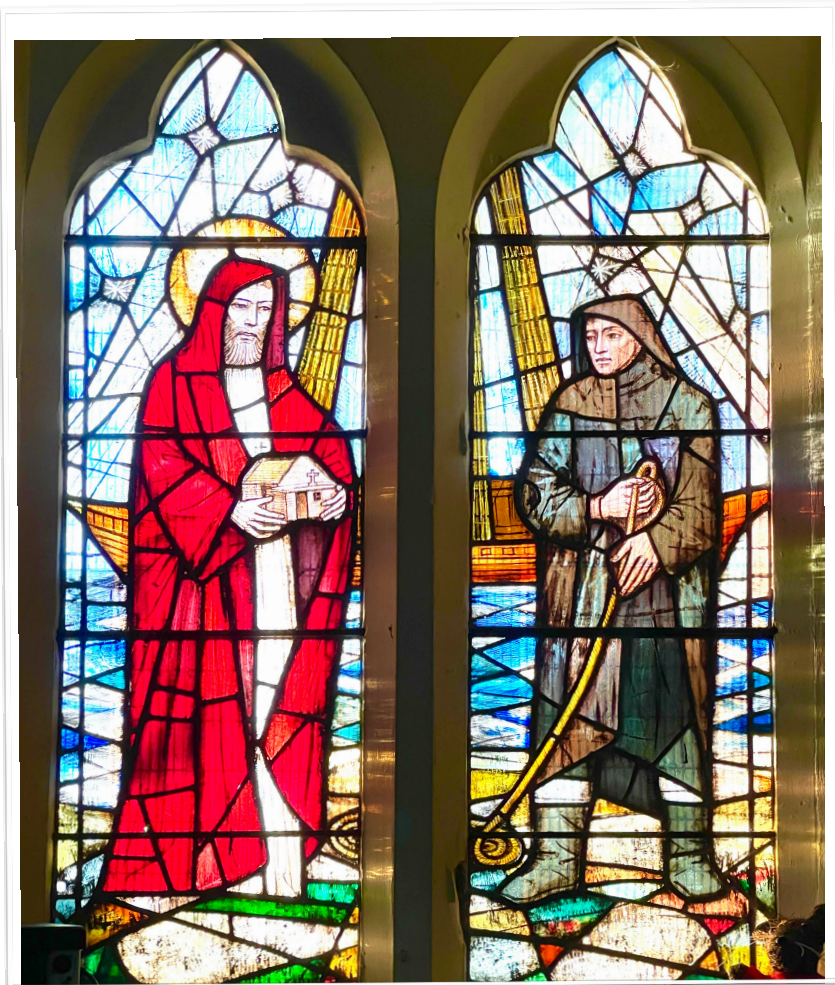
The turret clock was placed in the tower in 1865. It has a cast frame, brass gears and bearings and a seven foot pendulum. It was constructed by John Moore & Sons, Clerkenwell, London in 1829 and came to Pett from Denbies, Dorking.

Windows

The windows, memorials and furnishings in the church are a legacy of the love and generosity of parishioners from every age. There are eight stained glass windows in the church. The east window is by Charles A Gibbs and is dedicated to Anne, wife of the Rev. F Young (Rector). The window shows St John the Evangelist and St Peter, and Christ with two kneeling children.

The west window is the finest in the church and is by Lavers, Barraud and Westlake. It was made in 1872 and depicts the Sermon on the Mount at the top, and Moses with the Ten Commandments at the bottom. It is dedicated

'To the Glory of God, in memory of Henry Young, who died 1st December 1869, age 71, erected by his widow (Henry Young was a Patron of the Church)



The only window in the church not dedicated to a member of the Young family is that at the eastern end of the south wall of the nave, near the pulpit. The window was erected by Cecil, Lord Hawkesbury to the memory of the Medley family, formerly Lords of the Manor, and to his grandfather, the 3rd Earl of Liverpool.

The most recent window is that on the eastern end of the north wall of the nave. It is in memory of the Rev. Frederick Young, and represents St Nicholas with a lifeboatman on the shore. In the background there is an abstracted lighthouse and St Nicholas is holding a model of St Nicholas church down at Pett Level.

The artist was Lawrence Lee, (1909-2011), who was one of those responsible for the stained glass windows in Coventry Cathedral. Lee worked well into his eighties and died aged 101 in 2011. Many of his stained glass windows can be seen in churches across Sussex and Kent.

Memorial Tablets

The oldest memorial table in the church is in the chancel, above the vestry door. It is dedicated to Cordelia Sayer and has been attributed to Sir Richard Westmacott. Cordelia died in 1776 in Hastings and was, at her own desire, buried at Pett. "Fairwell, Cordelia. Sweet object of a mother's love. Dear as the name of daughter e'er could prove" is inscribed underneath the dedication.

On the south side of the chancel, in the recess by the organ, is a tablet in memory of Frances Ursula Pellew, who died in 1840. She was the granddaughter of Sir Edward Pellew, 1st Viscount Exmouth, and the daughter of George Pellew D.D, Dean of Norwich. There are several memorial tablets to members of the Wynch family, and the memorials in the nave are to Lieutenant Choyce William Moyses R.N. and to Frank Wickens of Gatehurst Farm.

By the north door of the churchyard is a medieval gravestone of interest. It bears two crosses in relief and is probably the lower part of a slab from which the top has long disappeared. A drawing of this is in the British Museum.

The Registers

The Baptism, Marriage and Burial registers date from 1606, with some years missing - such as the Civil War years. Preserved with them is a 'Glebe Terrier' - a handwritten inventory of church property by the then Rector Griffin Flud and dated 1615.

The parish registers give a wealth of information about the people of Pett and a rare glimpse of a bygone age. The Poor Books, too, tell us some interesting facts. We read that in 1746 '*£3.13.3 was paid to repair Pannel Bridge, in 1794 two hocks of mutton cost 7/-, a pair of shoes 3/6d, and a pint of wine 1/3d*'.

Every entry could tell a story, but three items in 1763 need little elaboration: -

*"For sending man and horse to Rye for Doctor to Dame Foster, 3/-;
Foster's nurse, 12/-;
Mrs Cramp for laying Dame Foster 7/6d"*

The Registers are now held at The Keep, in Brighton. For further information please email www.thekeep@eastsussex.gov.uk

Acknowledgments: -

John N C Taylor wrote a church guide in 2001, and this updated guide has drawn quite heavily on the text of John's version. For a more detailed history of the church of St Mary & St Peter in Pett and St Nicholas in Pett Level, readers are referred to Pett in Sussex: the story of a village, its Church and People, by John N C Taylor and published by Edgerton Publishing Services, Pett in 2004. Copies are available to purchase from David Penfold on 01424 813003.

St Nicholas Church

At the foot of one of the steepest hills in Sussex and on the westernmost edge of the border marshes is the church of St Nicholas, Pett Level.

Originally it was a Life Saving Rocket Apparatus station. The sum of £100 was raised to purchase the building from the Admiralty and many local people contributed to the furnishings.



On April 26, 1935 the Bishop of Lewes, the Rt. Rev. H.M. Hordern, dedicated the church to St Nicholas, the Patron Saint of sailors and children. Later on October 26, the Bishop of Chichester affixed his seal to the "Authorisation to hold Public Worship in the new Chapel of Ease to St Mary & St Peter, Pett".

From the early days there was an 8.00am Holy Communion every week and an Evensong held every Sunday.

The church closed in 1940 after the evacuation of civilians from the area and remained closed until the end of the Second

World War. St Nicholas reopened in August 1945.

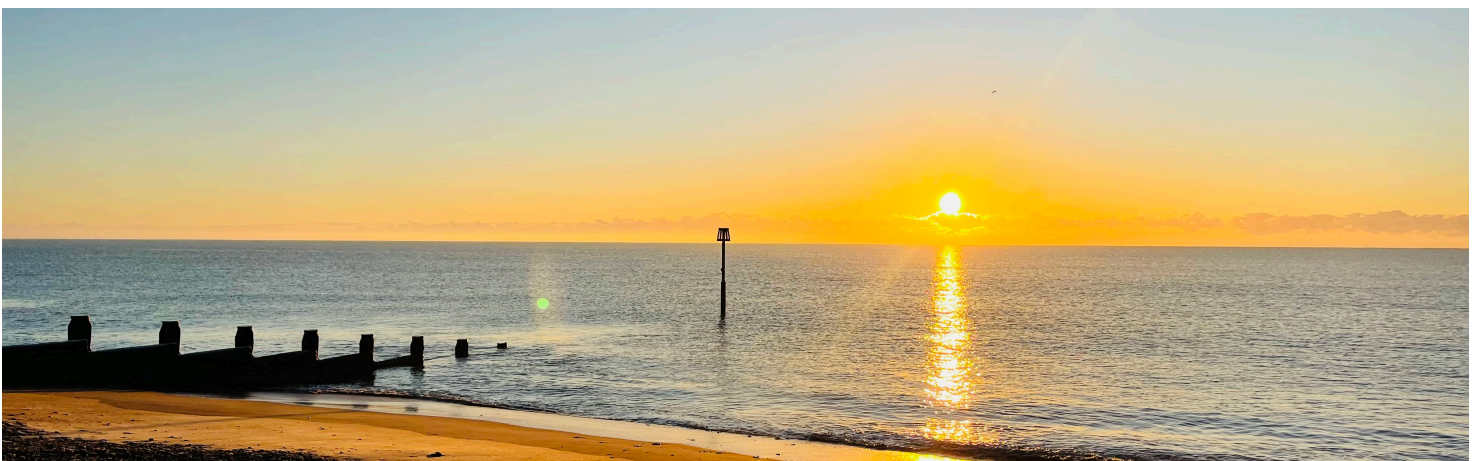
Since that time regular Holy Communion services have been held in this lovely spot, as close to the sea as any other church on our shores.

In 1959 a vestry and porch were added to complete this miniature place of worship.

The association with the Life Saving is a very beautiful one and surely no coincidence. The church is open everyday to welcome visitors from all over the world and where you can make yourself a tea or coffee and spend some time in silent prayer or contemplation.



An 8.30am Book of Common Prayer service is held every first Sunday of the month.





Preparing for Christmas in Pett Church.

Zeepvat
1995