

PARISH CHURCHES



St Peter Port Church

ST PETER PORT CHURCH (SANCTI PETRI DE PORTU)

St Peter Port takes its name from its parish church and the 'Town Church', as it is known throughout the island, is also the mother church of the Bailiwick.

Channel Islands churches have a style which is all their own. There is little to be seen of the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. Stand beneath the tower with its massive granite piers, sturdy ribs and central oculus, through which bells are hauled up, and the building looks all of a piece.

Yet it was built and rebuilt over more than two hundred years, the major work being completed by 1475. The nave is the oldest part, its heavy walls pierced by an arcade when the aisles on each side were added. The corner in which the font stands is chamfered, so close did the houses of medieval St Peter Port crowd round their church.

It was for this reason that the last major extension, the 'south transept', had to be built about the churchyard, the only space available. This gives a peculiarly unbalanced shape to what was once a cruciform building.

On the pillars adjoining the Brock Chapel are stone brackets which once supported the floor of a gallery where the ecclesiastical court met, though this unique institution still meets every week to grant probate and marriage licences.



Vale Church

ST SAMPSON'S CHURCH

On the 1787 map, St Sampson's Church is shown on the shore at one end of the Braye du Valle, the Vale Church being at the other end of the tidal inlet, on the opposite bank.

St Sampson's, claimed to be the oldest Parish Church in the Island, stands on or near the site where St Sampson first landed as a pioneer missionary from Dol, in Brittany, about the year 550 AD, and has been a Christian site for worship ever since.

The present church dates from the 12th Century, at which time it consisted of nave and chancel only. Work has been carried out over the centuries, however the church was substantially complete by 1350.

The tower has a saddleback roof and the church is of a rugged style like no other in the Island, though similar to St Brelade's in Jersey and a church at Mont St Michel.

In 1973 the North Chapel was dedicated to the memory of St Magloire, cousin of St Sampson. A pre-Reformation chalice and other relics found in the tower in 1913, included a crucifix, censer and candlesticks, are now displayed in St Magloire's chapel.

The old regimental colours of the 2nd (North) Regiment of the Royal Guernsey Militia were placed in the church in May 1887.

VALE CHURCH (ST MICHEL DU VALLE)

The Vale Church stands on a hillock rising above L'Ancrese Common. Until the beginning of the 1800s, the church stood at the edge of a tidal inlet, the Braye du Valle, which divided the Clos du Valle from the rest of Guernsey, and a ring in the churchyard wall tells of the days when people came to church by boat.

The present chancel dates from about 1140 - 60 and the choir and sanctuary are fine Romanesque, the work of Benedictine Monks from Mont St Michel in Normandy, who founded a priory here around 968 AD. Some time between 1028 and 1034, Duke Robert of Normandy, the father of the Conqueror, gave half the Island, including the Vale, to the Abbey. A papal document dated 1155 AD mentions the Vale Priory among its possessions.

There is a good peal of 6 bells and examples of work by local craftsmen can be found among the stained glass. In the east wall to the right of the altar, is a very early example of an impressively large piscine. Wall piscinae did not become common until the 12th century and there are only seven from this period in all England. Look for the spaniel's head over the pulpit and discover tales of murder, piracy and shipwreck in the churchyard.



Castel Church

CASTEL CHURCH (ST MARIE DU CASTEL)

Pagans, Pirates and Romans have all been linked with the site now occupied by Castel Church.

Outside the main door can be seen the Neolithic Statue Menhir found under the floor of the church during the 19th century. At its foot lie the stone seats for the official of the medieval court of Fief St Michel.

The church of 'Our Lady of Deliverance' to use its ancient title, was first mentioned in a papal document dated 1155. The earliest part of the church is the western half of the north aisle, dating from the last half of the 11th century or the first quarter of the 12th.

Internally there are a number of interesting features: in the north chancel, 13th century frescos and a medieval stone credence, and an hagioscope piercing one of the tower pillars; in the south chancel, an ancient piscine, a blocked up priest's door and a 'hole in the wall', thought to be the remains of a cupboard where the altar vessels were stored. Church Registers date from 1674.

Externally, growth of the building can be gauged by a number of blocked doorways and reconstructed windows. Alternatives to the church building have been accompanied by other variations which can be seen reflected in the list of Rectors. The list begins in 1262, and encompasses Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Calvinist and Anglican clergy.





St Andrew's Church

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH (ST ANDREW DE LA POMMERAYE)

St Andrew's (of the apple Orchard) stands on the western slope of a small tributary of the Talbot Valley . On the other side of the road is a spring La Fontaine de St Clair, the waters of which were said to have curative powers, particularly of ailments of the skin.

The church is one of the smallest in Guernsey and originally consisted of a nave and chancel only. There is little doubt that the walls of these date from the 12th century but, French slate now replaces the early wooden roof and the stone vaulting was added in the early part of the 13th century.

The north aisle and tower are 15th century additions, which more than doubled the size of the original building, but of the medieval fittings nothing now survives with the exception of the bowl of a piscine which is of an unusual design the only one of its kind in the Channel Islands.

There are three bells which are rung to indicate the services.

The parish registers go back to 1574 through those for the periods 1599-1603 and 1616-1619 are missing.

TORTEVAL CHURCH (ST PHILLIPE DE TORTEVAL)

The original church, demolished in 1816, stood in the same churchyard but a little further to the east.

The name of the parish probably originates from the twisting valley that runs down from the church to the east coast near Fort Grey, and it is likely that the church probably stood on or close to a sacred spring.

The resources of the parish, which must always have had the fewest inhabitants, were not only unable to provide any of the gifts which enlarged other churches but were not even able to keep it in good enough repair to ensure its survival. The States of Guernsey paid for the rebuilding and employed the architect John Wilson, who designed the very differently styled St. James the Less in St. Peter Port.

Torteval Church was originally planned as a Calvinist style chapel but has now been refurbished in the Anglican manner and the spire, which can be seen from afar, is unusual in that it is a round tower.

Alone among Channel Island parishes, Torteval possesses a medieval bell that has survived both the Reformation and the demolition of the church for which it was cast. The church has a peal of 3 bells.



St Saviour's Church

ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH (ST. SAUVEUR)

St. Saviour's is the largest of Guernsey's country churches and the one that most resembles the Town Church in the quality of its masonry. It occupies a commanding site above a deep valley and several megalithic stones can be seen in the vicinity, the north-eastern entrance of the churchyard, indeed, being flanked by a "Christianised" menhir on which a cross has been deeply incised.

Parts of the south wall of the nave and chancel date from the 12th century but most of the present building dates from the 14th and 15th centuries, though the tower was rebuilt in the 17th century after it was destroyed, it is believed, by lightning.

What is now the vestry was built in the early 18th century to house the parish artillery.

In the little stone-paved footpath which leads into the churchyard from the south-west, is a stone bench, once the meeting place of the feudal court of Jean Gaillard. Whilst in the churchyard, the oldest grave yard, dating from 1602, records the death of Nicholas Torode and is upside down and back to front.

The church registers date back to 1528, though the first 30 years are incomplete. Curious leather mugs used for taking the collections date from 1813 and a 17th century alms-box is also on display.





Forest Church

ST. PETER'S CHURCH (ST PIERRE DU BOIS)

Set on the side of a valley, this lovely church can be seen to the best advantage as one approaches the green with its parish war memorial.

While giving the impression of being a typical 15th century building, symmetrically planned and built more or less in one operation, this is certainly not so. The south aisle is the earliest part of the existing church, pre-dating the chancel by a few years, and was probably built around 1375. The rest of the church dates from the 14th and 15th centuries.

It is now furnished in Victorian style. An old seating dated 1710 shows that the men and women sat separately, being parted before entering in the church through different doors.

In the porch beneath the tower, is a large slab which was probably the original altar stone. Traces of the consecration crosses can be seen and also of the depression cut for the monumental brass when it was put to use as a tombstone at the reformation.

The tower now holds thirteen bells, ten of which form the largest peal in the Channel Islands. The church registers date from 1628 but they are not regular until 1653, when the burial registers commenced.

FOREST CHURCH (STE MARGUERITE DE LA FORET)

The Forest Church, stands on the high plateau of the south of the Island. The cluster of houses known as Le Bourg probably grew up around the church rather than the church being built to serve an existing village.

The first part to be built was the south-east corner and incorporates massive stones that were once part of a dolmen. The church itself consists essentially of two parts; a 13th century nave, central tower with spire and chancel and a 15th century north aisle. The simple arcading which divides the interior of the church is thought to be constructed of Chausey Island stone which, being softer than the granite, was capable of being carved.

The original entrance to the church was on the south side. The present main door, on the north side, was the women's entrance in the middle ages, the main south door being reserved for men and boys.

In 1891 there was a complete restoration of the church interior. The floor was lowered by 17 inches, and the sanctuary and chancel were left higher than the new nave.

Musical instruments, now displayed by the north door, led the singing in the church prior to 1868 when the first pipe organ was installed. The church contains a well preserved 16th century piscine and in the tower are six bells hung for change ringing.



St Martin's Church

ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH (ST. MARTIN DE LA BELLOUSE)

The church stands on an ancient holy site from which two springs emerged, one of which, La Fontaine de la Bellouse, was reputed to have healing properties. A reminder of these earlier times, an ancient statue-menhir known as La Gran'mere du Chimquiere, now stands at the entrance to the churchyard where it was erected in the mid-nineteenth century having been broken in two by an over zealous church warden.

The present church dates from between 1225 and 1250. It is thought that the nave, tower and chancel were all built together, while the north aisle was added later.

The south porch dates from the 1520s and is flamboyant in style, inside are the stone benches on which members of the Douzaine (Parish Council) sat for their meetings until 1869. Inside the south door is the font, the only one in Guernsey dating from before the Reformation. The oak pulpit in the Breton style dates from 1657 as does the lectern, the carvings on which are worth close examination.

Prior to the introduction of an organ in 1879, music was provided by a church band, a clarinet from which is displayed in the church. The organ was rebuilt in 1982/3 and the organ screen was designed and built locally, as were the east and west windows, certainly worth more than a glance.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the Dean of Guernsey and to the Rectors of the various churches for their kind assistance while additional material has been gleaned from 'Channel Island Churches' by John McCormack and the Shell Guide to the Channel Islands.

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