



About St Peter's

St Peter's church was built in about 1250, when Preston was a small village to the north of Brighton, where the ancient drover's road crossed the River Wellesbourne which now runs beneath the main London Road.

A church was recorded at Preston (which means 'Priest's place') in Domesday Book of 1086, but nothing remains of that building. The present church is mainly 13th century, and consists of a nave, a chancel and a west tower. The entrance porch on the north side and the vestry on the south side were added in the 1870s.

Preston was a very large rural parish, stretching across the north of Brighton and including Preston Barracks. During the Napoleonic Wars soldiers were married and had their babies baptised at St Peter's, and many of them were buried in the churchyard.

Until 1872, the church was filled with tall box pews, which could accommodate 216 paying worshippers (pews were rented), and there were 116 free seats (backless benches) for the poor.

The 13th-century wall paintings once covered the whole of the wall above and around the chancel arch. They were whitewashed over during the Reformation in the 16th century, and rediscovered in 1830. Sadly, they were damaged by a disastrous fire in 1906, and only three fragments now remain.

By the early 20th century the expansion of Brighton meant that the church had become too small to accommodate its growing congregation, and eventually a new, larger church – St John's – was built nearby. In 1990 St Peter's passed into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust.

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With our help and with your support they are kept open and in use – living once again at the heart of their communities.



Access

Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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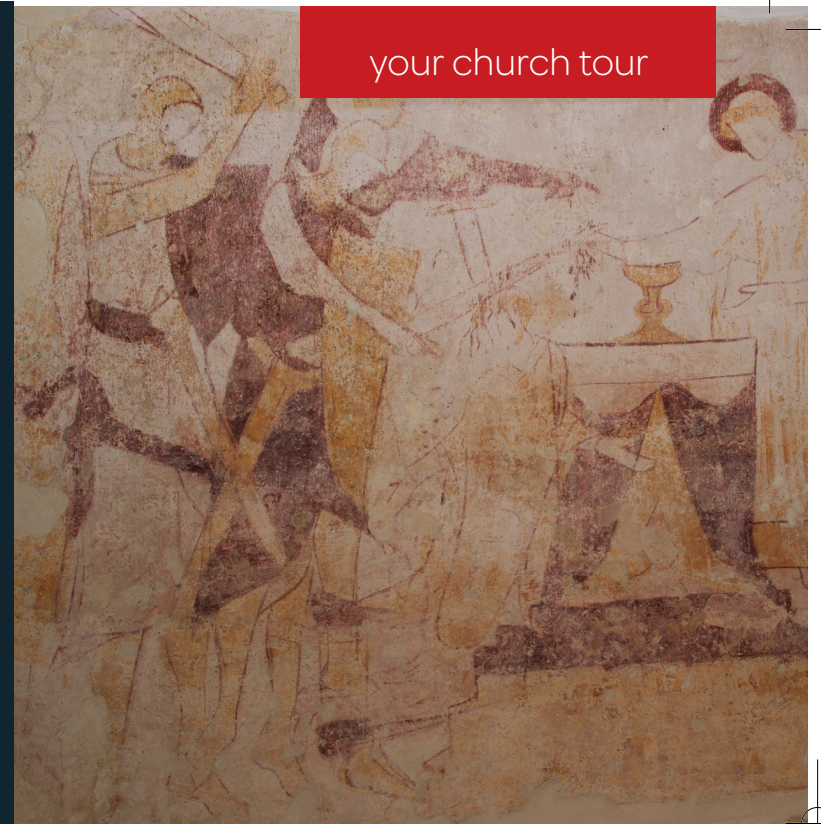
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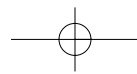


Church of
St Peter

Preston Park, Sussex

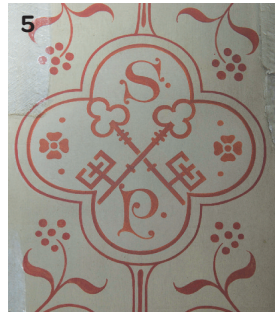


THE CHURCHES
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1 This **wall plaque** commemorates Isaac Gold, who was murdered on a London to Brighton train in 1881. His murderer was caught, partly through the publication in a newspaper of the first artist's impression of the suspect to be used for this purpose.



2 This is a **wall painting** of the Nativity. The dark 'bowl' shape near the top, is Jesus' crib, and the circle is his halo. To the right is the head of an ox. The painting originally included shepherds, a star and a donkey, but was badly damaged by the fire in 1906. The cause of the fire is unknown.

3 The murder of Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, by the knights of Henry II, is depicted in this **painting** (cover). Beckett is the very pale figure kneeling at the altar, and on the right is his chaplain Edward Grimfer. On the left are the four knights with their swords drawn. A cult developed quickly after the murder, and many churches had a similar painting.

4 All the **wall plaques** and **stained glass windows** in the chancel commemorate members of the Stanford and Macdonald families who lived in Preston Manor. The first two windows on the left commemorate father and son, Colonel Donald Macdonald and Captain George Macdonald, who both served in the 19th Regiment, with their Colours.

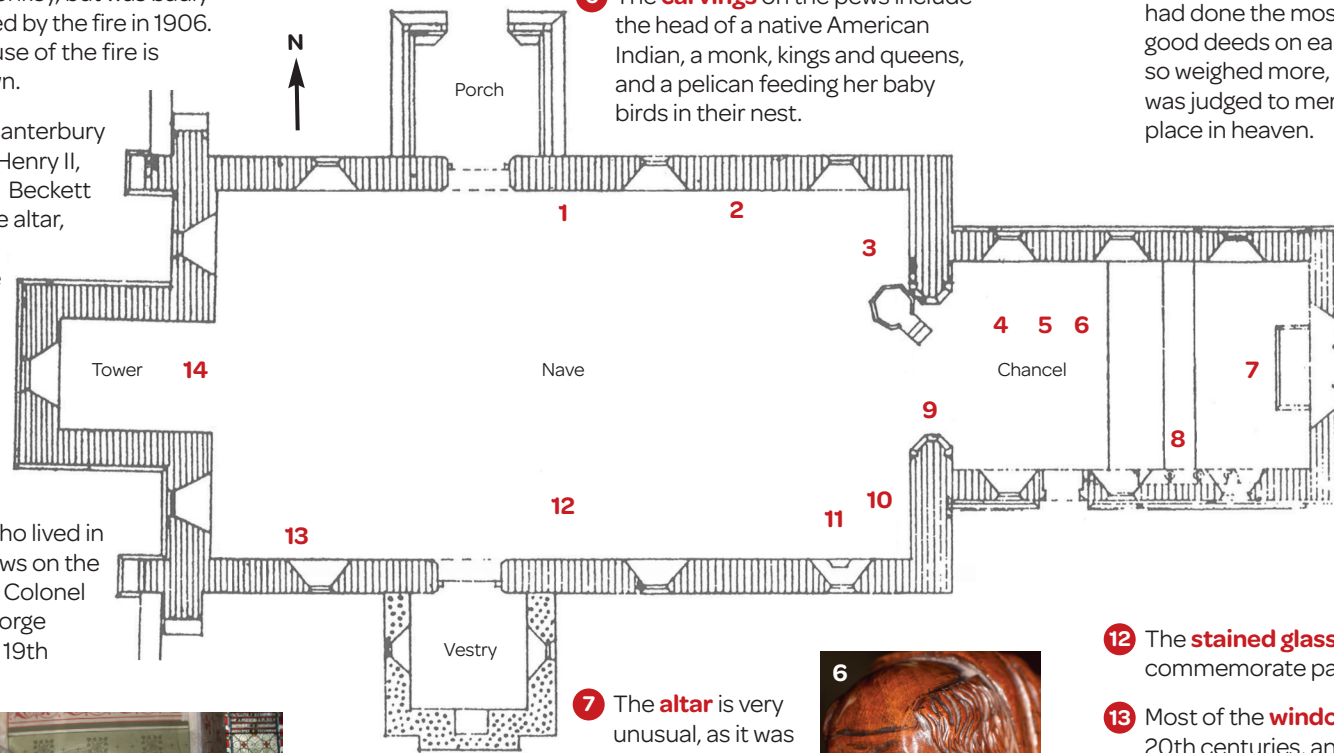
The Stanford windows, opposite, feature the shield from the family coat of arms in gold and black, showing three bugle horns and three Sussex martlets (heraldic swallows with no feet), with the black bull's head from the crest above.



5 The **stenciling** on the chancel walls is Edwardian. On two of the window recesses can be seen the 'crossed keys', the symbol of St Peter who, the Bible says, holds the keys to heaven. Above the chancel arch (with the altar behind) is the tree of life, with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – Alpha and Omega – denoting the beginning and the end.



6 The **carvings** on the pews include the head of a native American Indian, a monk, kings and queens, and a pelican feeding her baby birds in their nest.



7 The **altar** is very unusual, as it was originally the chest tomb of

Edward Elrington, who lived in Preston Manor and died in 1515. It was moved from the north wall to its present position during the restoration of 1877. The carvings on the front and sides are coats of arms of the many families associated with the Elringtons.



8 Three **sedilia** in the wall to the right, are seats where the priests sat during the medieval Mass.

9 A 17th-century **memorial stone** in the floor beneath the chancel arch marks the burial place of Grace Cheynell, who died on 15 January 1696. Her husband, Dr Francis Cheynell, was known as the 'troublesome Puritan Vicar' who retired to Preston.

10 The **wall painting** of St Michael weighing souls was a popular medieval image. The light-coloured soul had done the most good deeds on earth, so weighed more, and was judged to merit a place in heaven.

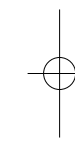
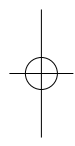


11 The **font** is made from various pieces of stone, and dates from the 18th century. The 13th-century **piscina** in the wall nearby was used by the priest to wash his fingers before Mass.

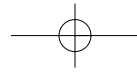
12 The **stained glass windows** and **plaques** in the nave commemorate parishioners and visitors to Brighton.

13 Most of the **windows** date from the 19th and early 20th centuries, and were made by Lavers, Barraud & Westlake. This one depicts the Good Samaritan.

14 There are three **bells** high up in the bell tower. They were re-cast by Gillet and Johnson of Croydon after the fire. In the north wall of the tower is a **memorial** to Elizabeth, infant daughter of Sir Richard Shirley, who died on 23 April 1684. She was baptised on 22 April and buried on 26 April.



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