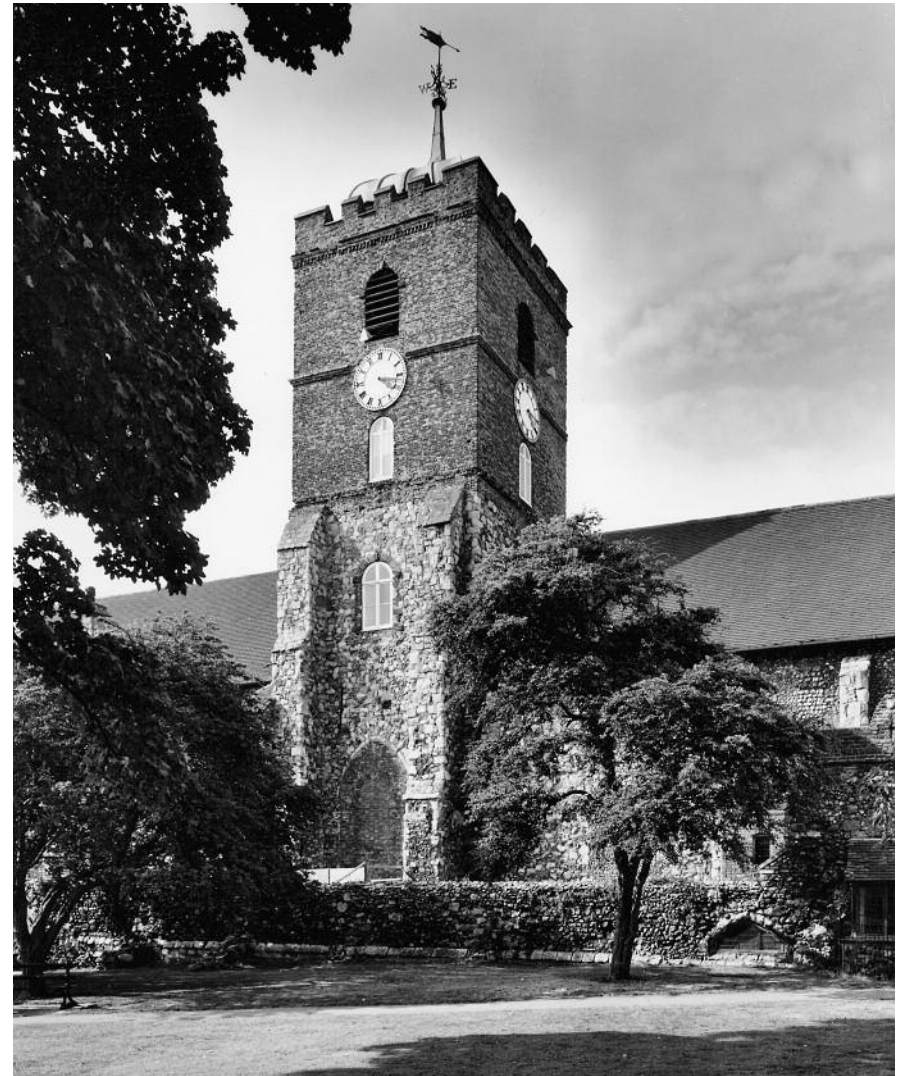


ST PETER'S CHURCH

SANDWICH, KENT



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.50



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
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ST PETER'S CHURCH
SANDWICH, KENT

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ST PETER'S CHURCH

SANDWICH, KENT

by ROY TRICKER

St Peter's church stands in the heart of this fascinating town and Cinque Port of narrow streets and ancient buildings. Sandwich, the 'wic' (probably meaning market town) on sandy soil, has three interesting mediaeval churches which, with the ancient chapel of St Bartholomew's Hospital, make it a haven for the church enthusiast.

St Peter's has had a long and eventful history, and people from a variety of periods and Christian traditions have moulded the character of the building which stands today. There was a church here around 1100, which may have extended eastwards as far as the present tower. Part of it survives at the west end of the nave. It is thought that much of the Norman church was destroyed by the French in 1216 and rebuilt later in the 1200s, perhaps by the Carmelite Friars from Normandy.

Work of the 13th century is to be seen in the base of the tower and in the clerestory windows above the arcades. Probably a thorough rebuilding took place at this time, when the nave was widened and narrow aisles the width of the south aisle were added, with their arcades and with clerestory windows above their lean-to roofs. The central tower was erected and a new chancel to the east of it. The stonework in the vaulted undercroft to the south of the chancel may be of similar date.

As Sandwich rose to the height of its prosperity as a Cinque Port in the 14th century a further and more ambitious remodelling of St Peter's took place. The narrow north aisle was taken down and rebuilt about six feet (1.8 m) wider. It was given a new gabled roof and handsome Decorated windows. The south aisle was not widened and the north clerestory windows were left, but now appear inside the church. The chancel was also given handsome Decorated windows. Towards the end of the 1300s the chantry chapel for Thomas Ellis and his family was



The north aisle looking eastwards

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

built at the east end of the south aisle. The mediaeval fabric of the church was completed by the addition of the Perpendicular north porch in the 15th century.

During the brief reign of Queen Mary (1553–58) 'the Parson of St Peter's was confined to his house for saying Evensong in English'. Sandwich later became a sanctuary for Protestant refugees fleeing persecution on the Continent. St Peter's welcomed the Fleming and Dutch refugees, allowing them to hold their services here. In 1564, when there was a severe plague, the church was handed over to these people for their use, so that they could all be together and hopefully prevent the spread of infection. It may well be that about this time the south vestry was renovated and given its distinctive Dutch gable and the undercroft beneath it refurbished.

The 17th century saw the decline of Sandwich and its prosperity as the Haven gradually silted up and the influence of the port decreased; it was also a time of tragedy for St Peter's. A warning was given in 1641 that 'the Tower and Steeple of St Peter's Church in this Towne ... which is an ancient and principall Sea Marke of great consequence to all manner of ships ... is very much splitt and cloven and thereby become very dangerous and ruinous'. The cost of its repair was estimated at £1,500 but 'the parishioners ... are in noe wise able to undergoe that charge'. Some 20 years later, at 11.15 pm on 13 October 1661, the upper stages of the tower came crashing down, destroying the south aisle and causing a great deal of further damage. Two sermons had been preached in the church earlier that day and it is recorded that 'had it fell at the time when the people were there, the chiefest of the town and parish had been killed and buried under the rubbish and stones and timber ... The rubbish was three fathom deep in the middle of the church, the bells underneath it. Two or three rods long it lay'.

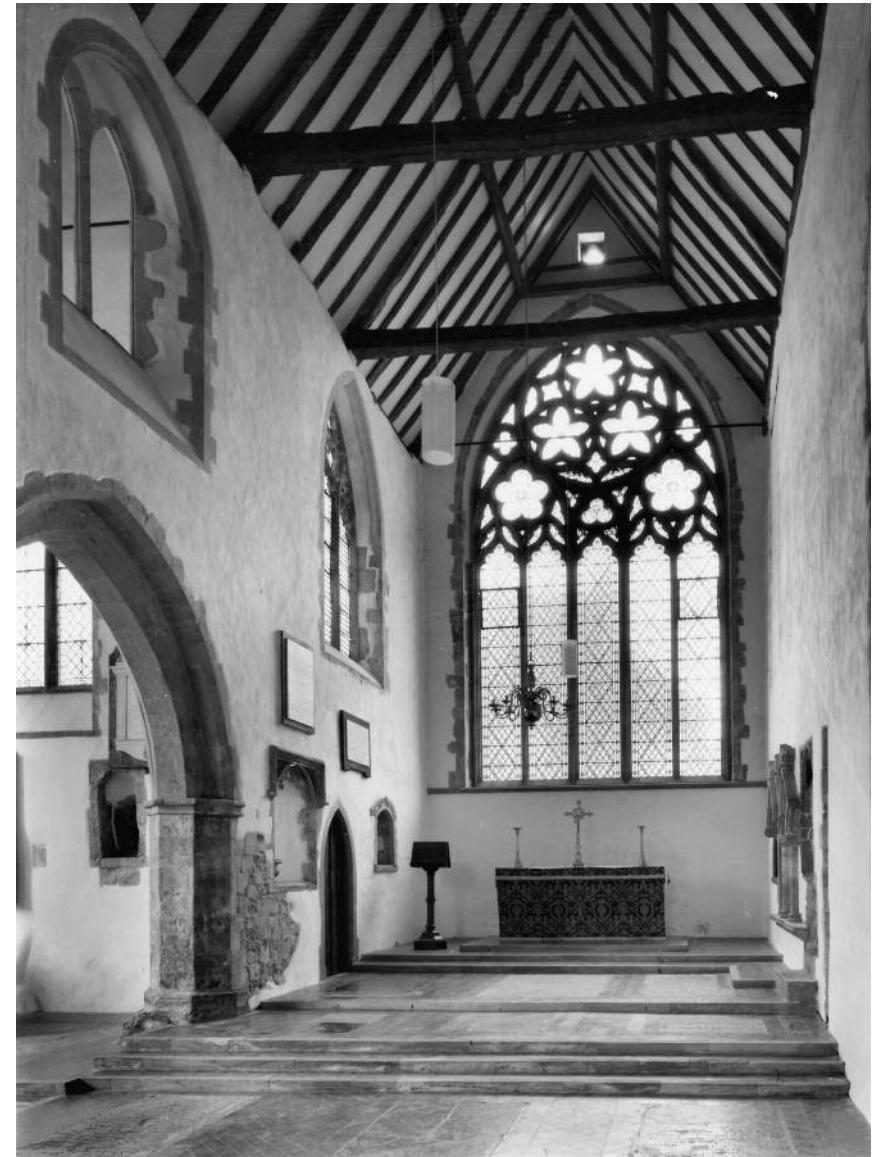
The upper stages of the tower were rebuilt within the next few years, the bricks used having been made, it is believed, with mud from the Haven in order to save expense. The tower was crowned with a squat bulbous cupola – a feature often seen in churches in Holland, but a rarity in England – although another, erected in 1745, may be seen at nearby Woodnesborough. The south aisle and its eastern chapel were

not rebuilt. The arcade was filled in with rubble from the ruins and was pierced by small, brick-lined windows which were subsequently filled in, and the lower parts of the ruined aisle walls were left.

By 1792, the east window of the north aisle had been blocked up, as also was the north chancel window although its original stonework and tracery remained. A ring of eight bells was cast by William Mears in 1779. The clock which had been placed in the tower was the property of the Corporation. The interior was full of box pews and at the west end of the north aisle was a gallery containing more pews, erected by their occupants. The pulpit and reading desk were set against the north wall, about half-way along the north aisle (in front of the central tomb-recess). By c.1800 St Peter's was one of the few churches at the time to be the proud possessor of an organ. William Boys in 1792 noted the worn tomb of John Grove beneath its arched recess in the ruined south aisle and was instrumental in having it moved from this position to the west end of the north aisle.

During the long incumbency (1851–92) of the Revd Horace Gilder, St Peter's, which had become rather dilapidated, was restored by gradual stages. In the winter of 1866–67, heavy gales did considerable damage to the south-west gable end and it was thought that the west front was in danger of collapse. An appeal for funds was made and by September 1868 the two western gables had been rebuilt and new and handsome windows inserted, along with a new three-light window to the west of the porch. The organ had been repaired, the chancel improved and the choirstalls rearranged. A keen supporter of this work was the Revd Henry Maugham, who was curate here from 1867–70. The Rural Dean on his visitation recommended that the 'ruined building to the north of the chancel' be restored and converted into a 'suitable vestry room', and also that the east gable of the north aisle be restored and its blocked window opened out. In 1875 it was proposed that alterations be made to some of the seating and the box pews formerly used by the Girls' National School be removed and replaced by open benches facing east.

The year 1878 saw the publication of a notice stating that the Rector proposed to restore the chancel, the north vestry and the room over



The chancel, with its handsome east window

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

the crypt at his own expense, hoping that the parishioners would then be able to raise funds to restore and re-tile the roofs, re-floor the church, renew the drainage, install heating and provide the aisle windows with mullions and tracery. Plans were drawn up by William White of London, a Gothic Revival architect of national repute who designed All Saints, Notting Hill and St Saviour, Aberdeen Park (London), Lyndhurst (Hampshire) and several other churches. He may well have been the architect for the 1868 work at the west end too – he was working on the chancel of St Andrew's Deal in 1867 and restoring Adisham Church in 1869. His fine east and north-east aisle windows were inserted and also the chancel east window, but his plans for the north vestry did not materialise, and neither did later plans made for it in 1915 by Martin Travers. The present stairway to the undercroft appears to be a modification of his design. By 1883 the nave had been re-floored and new benches had replaced the box-pews which the Rural Dean had described as 'unseemly and inconvenient'. The pulpit was finally moved from its position in the north aisle to the south-east corner of the nave.

St Peter's continued as a parish church until 1948, when the three Sandwich parishes were united, St Clement's became the parish church and St Peter's was closed for regular parochial worship and use. In 1952, the Parochial Church Council offered it to Sir Roger Manwood's School for use as their chapel.

When, in 1973, it was clear that the tower needed stabilising and the roof-tiles replacing, the work was way beyond the combined resources of school and parish. In October 1974 St Peter's was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust) and, under its care, with the welcome aid of grants from the former Sandwich Borough Council and from Kent County Council, considerable repairs have been carried out under the supervision of Anthony Swaine and later of Jonathan Carey, architects.

Since 1990, spearheaded by Mr Roy Hodgson MBE, the Sandwich Development Fund has worked with the Trust to promote and develop this church to serve and inspire Sandwich people and its visitors. The ruined south aisle has been turned into an attractive garden where

people may sit and rest. The interior has been developed as an educational resource, with facilities for the study of heraldry and genealogy and for brass rubbing. The undercroft has been cleaned and the spacious church interior provides an excellent venue for exhibitions. Parts of the long-dismantled organ, which had been purchased by a Sandwich resident, were rebuilt to form a small single manual instrument with four stops, which was generously given back to the church in 1997. So St Peter's, which has stood as a symbol of light and hope for a thousand years, continues its very active ministry in the 21st century.

EXTERIOR

The tall tower of St Peter's is a major landmark on the Sandwich skyline, visible for some distance over the flat countryside which surrounds the town. Opposite the west doorway is some **masonry from the chapel of St Thomas' Hospital**, carefully re-erected here in 1923 and incorporating an elegant 14th-century window. The Hospital was founded in 1392 by Thomas Ellis, whose tomb is inside the church.

The **War Memorial**, north-west of the porch, commemorates the dead of the two Great Wars, the Korean War and the Falklands Conflict. Designed in 1919 by Omar Ramsden, it has a fine central figure of St George in bronze relief.

The fabric of the exterior of the church illustrates several different styles and periods. The walls are faced with flints, Kentish ragstone in the porch, other dressed stone either used or re-used, bricks of varying vintage, including mellow 16th-century bricks in the south vestry and 17th-century bricks made from the Haven mud in the upper stages of the tower.

The present **north aisle** wall was erected c.1330–40 and was punctuated by seven three-light windows, now bereft of their original mullions and tracery. Five now have simple 18th- or early-19th-century wooden mullions. Only the westernmost (1868) and easternmost (1878) windows received new tracery, as did the fine four-light east window when it was unblocked in 1878. The stone abutments beneath two of the north windows were made to contain the tomb recesses inside.



St Peter's from the south-east

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The masonry of the **north vestry** is mediaeval; it has a 14th-century entrance and traces of an eastern window. It may have been built as a sacristy, or possibly as a small chapel.

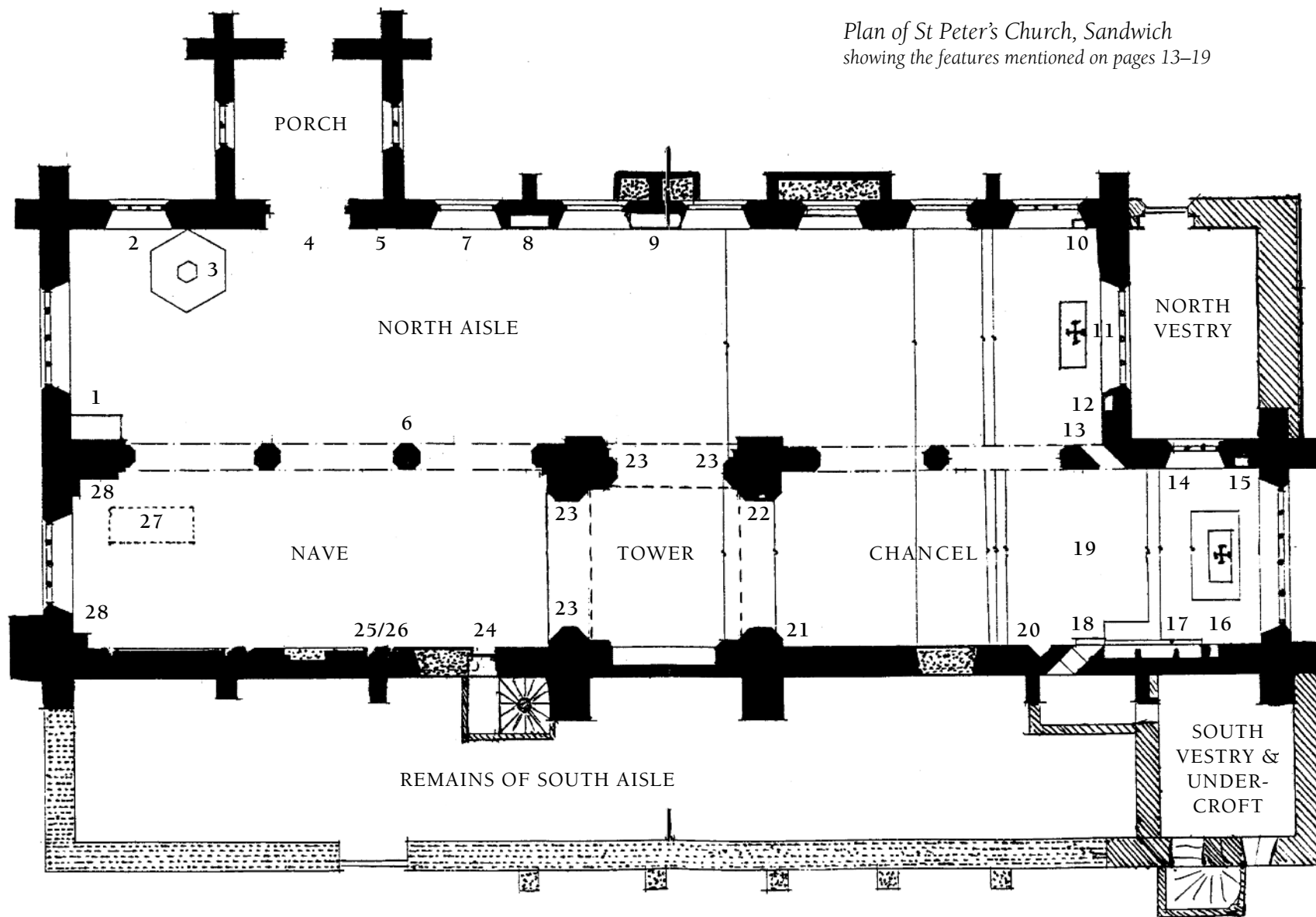
Original 14th-century tracery survives in the three-light north window of the **chancel**. The great east window of five lights is a noble re-creation of the 14th-century style. It almost fills the east wall, which is faced with ashlar stone. This stone facing was not a 19th-century idea and William Boys noted it in 1792.

South of the chancel is a two-storeyed building, with a **vestry** above a vaulted **undercroft**. The ancient flint building was altered probably in the late 1500s, when it received its simple domestic-looking upper windows and attractive Dutch gable – perhaps for the Dutch Protestants who were using the church. The undercroft beneath, which can be seen through the simple arched openings which light it, has a double central pillar supporting a groined ceiling of four compartments of original 13th-century stone infilled with 16th-century bricks. It is possible that this chamber extended further westwards at one time.

Some 5–10 ft (1.5–3 m) of flint walling, the bases of the buttresses which supported it, the south doorway and (inside) the remains of Sir John Grove's tomb-recess are all that remain of the **south aisle**, which was not rebuilt after the collapse of the tower in 1661. Behind these rise the lofty walls of the nave and chancel, which incorporate much reused stone. Two bays of the blocked **nave** arcade are visible, above which are two pairs of clerestory windows – 19th-century renewals of the original late-13th-century ones.

The **tower** has a large blocked south window and a 17th-century window framed with brick above it, in the mediaeval lower stages. The upper stages are entirely of brick and were rebuilt shortly after 1661. Their windows are all round-headed openings, in the neo-Classical architecture of the period. The top of the embattled parapet is 80 ft (24.4 m) above the ground and behind it rises the lead-covered cupola, which terminates in a large weathervane some 100 ft (30.5 m) above the ground. On the north side of the tower, beneath the parapet, is a hopper-head dated 1779. The present clock, made by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon in 1887, was rebuilt in 1966. To the south-west

*Plan of St Peter's Church, Sandwich
showing the features mentioned on pages 13-19*



of the tower is an unusual staircase turret which rises to the level of the ringing chamber. Here every day the Curfew is rung immediately after the clock has struck 8 pm.

The **west front** has two large and handsome Decorated windows and a wide west doorway – all renewed in 1868. The entrance to the church is through the embattled 15th-century **porch**, built of Kentish ragstone and lit by renewed two-light east and west windows. The floor is paved with several ancient burial slabs, one of which has the indents of what must have been a fine set of mediaeval brasses. The porch shelters the 14th-century north doorway.

INTERIOR

The absence of furnishings enables a greater appreciation of the size and proportions of this church of many vistas, which has much of beauty and is refreshingly light. The nave is 46 ft (14.0 m) long, the area beneath the tower 23 ft (7.0 m) and the chancel 47 ft 6 in (14.5 m), making a total length of 116½ ft (35.5 m). The north aisle is 102 ft (31.1 m) long and is 2 ft (0.6 m) wider than the nave, the total width across them both being 42 ft (12.2 m).

The **arcades** have pointed arches resting upon octagonal piers, with moulded capitals and bases. The three-bay nave arcade and two-bay chancel arcade date probably from the late 1200s, as do the pairs of former clerestory windows above, which the rebuilding of the aisle in the 1300s brought inside the church. Two-and-a-half bays of the former south arcade may be seen in the south nave wall; also the eastern respond of the arch to the former south chapel remains in the chancel wall. Sturdy eastern, northern and western arches support the central tower; on its south side is a large blocked window.

The **roofs** are masterpieces of timber construction and, although not elaborately carved like many 15th-century roofs, their 14th-century design and many original timbers remain. The nave and aisle roofs are strengthened by crown-posts, resting upon tie-beams, whilst the chancel has a simple open roof with tie-beams.

Individual features are described in the order in which they are numbered on the plan.

North aisle

1. The **tomb of Sir John Grove** in the south-west corner was brought here from the south aisle by William Boys in the late 1700s. The tomb chest (c.1450) is enriched with hanging shields and is about 100 years later than the effigy of Sir John which rests upon it. This benefactor to St Peter's is dressed in chain mail, now sadly decayed, incomplete and facing the wrong way in order to hide even more damage.
2. The **list of Rectors**, painted by Rigden & Son in 1906, was compiled by Thomas Frampton – once vicar of Platt near Sevenoaks, who had retired to Dover – who traced them back to 1174.



The triple sedilia and piscina in the sanctuary wall

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



Tomb recess in the north aisle

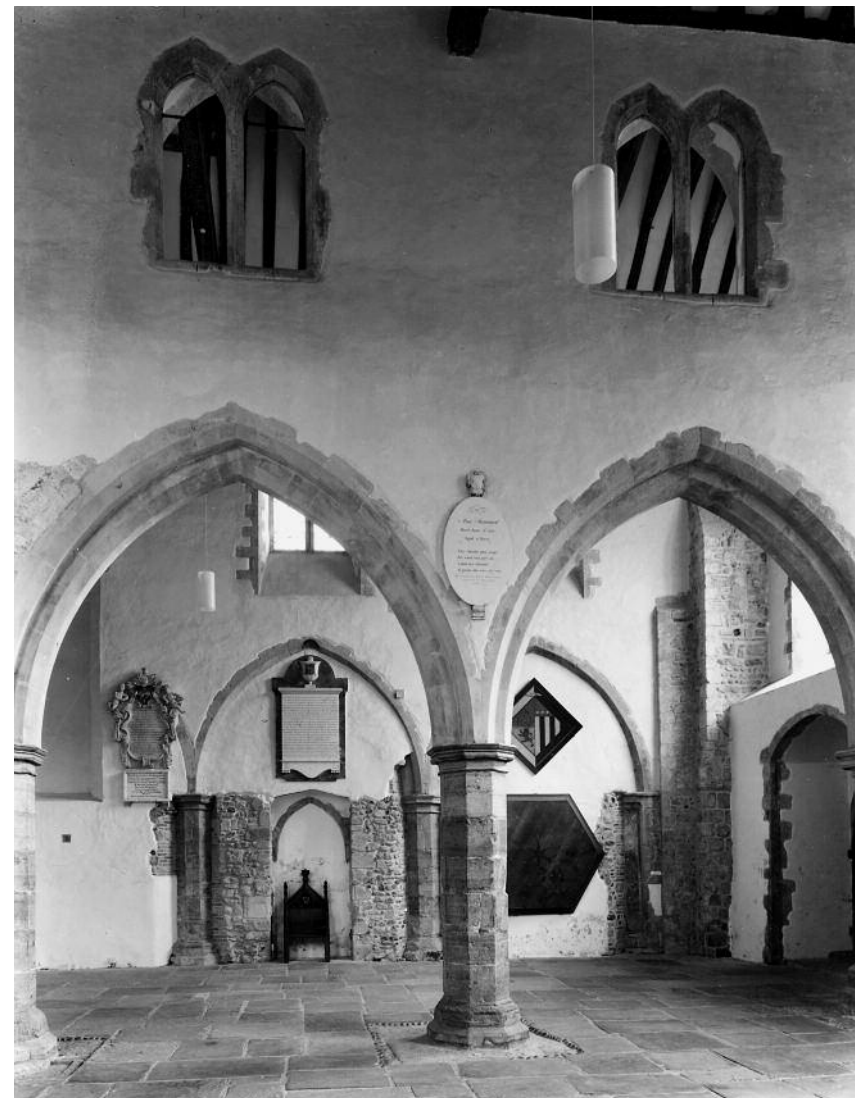
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

3. The 19th-century hexagonal **font** is placed symbolically near the door.
4. The **arched recess** above the entrance may have given access to the porch roof, or even to a former chamber over the porch.
5. The **royal arms** at those of King Charles II (c.1660).
6. Traces of **wall paintings** have been revealed above the arcade. These appear to be patterns of shields emblazoned with red crosses, the emblem of St George.
7. The **westernmost of the three tomb recesses** in the aisle wall, each one a fine piece of 14th-century architecture, has an ogee-shaped arch, its hood-mould and flanking pinnacles resting upon carved human heads. The tomb has hanging shields in quatrefoils and probably dates from c.1340.
8. The **central tomb recess** is an elaborate piece of stonecarving, with shields in rich tracery showing the arms of the town of Sandwich and of the Septvans family, suggesting that this is the tomb of Thomas Elys, merchant draper, mayor in 1370 and 1372 and founder of St Thomas' Hospital. His chantry chapel founded in 1392 stood at the east end of the south aisle, where three priests, one of whom was to be a schoolmaster, were to say Mass for his soul. The chantry school survived there until 1547. One of its former pupils was Roger Manwood who in 1563 founded the Free Grammar School to take its place.
9. The **eastern tomb recess**, with the remains of what was a fine canopy, contains the effigies of a 14th-century gentleman and his lady, resting upon a tomb with shallow niches. These may be John Ellis and his wife (c.1360), or possibly members of the Ive family.
10. In the wall towards the east end of the aisle is an **aumbry** (or cupboard) recess, for storing valuables. Its sides are rebated for a door, the hinge-hooks of which still remain.

11. On the east wall of the aisle is a **painting** of Our Lord carrying his cross. Mary Magdalene is weeping, the Virgin Mary has her hands folded and a hound accompanies the party. It is thought to be a 17th-century Flemish painting, possibly based upon Van Dyck's 'Christ Bearing the Cross', now in St Paul's church, Antwerp, Belgium.
12. In the wall to the right is a **niche** for a statue.
13. A **squint** through the thickness of the wall gave mediaeval priests at the altar here a clear view of the High Altar. On the chancel side, this opening has a 14th-century arch, with carved foliage in the spandrels.

Chancel and beneath the tower

14. The north door leads to the mediaeval **north vestry**. This is now used as a storeroom, but in its south wall is a rebated arched recess, containing a drain and the remains of a stone shelf.
15. The **recess** in the north chancel wall may have been an aumbry, or possibly an opening into the vestry.
16. In the south wall is a trefoil-headed **piscina** recess. Into its drain was poured the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist.
17. Beside it are the triple **sedilia**, providing seats for the celebrant, deacon and subdeacon at a mediaeval High Mass. Much of the stonework in the trefoil-headed arches here was renewed in 1878, but the circular shafts upon which the arches rest are original and have foliage capitals.
18. The upper part of the **opening to the south vestry door** is the former squint to the south chapel, matching that on the north side. The stonecarving is worn but very beautiful, with little faces in the spandrels at the top.



View southwards, through the north arcade, to the blocked south arcade

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

19. Suspended from the chancel roof is a brass **chandelier**, equipped for ten candles.
20. West of the south vestry doorway is the eastern **respond** (half-pier) of the arch to the former south chapel.
21. A stone **Benefactions Plaque** of 1792 records generous gifts of land and money to the three Sandwich parishes during the 1600s and 1700s, the annual income from which was given to the poor.
22. The **tiny niche** in the northern respond of the eastern tower arch probably contained a candle or a votive light.
23. In the responds of the western and northern tower arches are notches, indicating where the timbers of the former rood-screen and parclose screen fitted.

Nave

24. The **doorway in the south wall** leads to a wooden spiral staircase, built around a single circular tree-trunk, which gives access to the ringing chamber of the tower. The eight bells were cast by William Mears before he became a partner in the Whitechapel Bellfoundry. They were cast in 1779 and hang in an earlier timber frame (made for six bells) which has been adapted to accommodate them. Each bell is inscribed with a little rhyme or platitude:

Treble: 'I mean to make it understood. That tho' I'm little. Yet I'm good'.

2nd: 'To honour both God and King. Our voices shall in concert sing'.

3rd: 'Whilst thus we join in chearfull sound. May love and loyalty abound'.

4th: 'Music is medicine to the mind'.

5th: 'In wedlock bands all ye who joyn with hands and harts unite. So shall our tunefull tongues combine to laud the Nuptials Rite'

6th: 'Peace and Good Neighbourhood'.

7th: 'Ye ringers all that prize your health and happiness. Be sober, merry, wise and you'll the same possess'.

Tenor: Much of its inscription has gone. This bell has a diameter of 45 $\frac{3}{8}$ in (1.2 m) and weighs 15 cwt. 3 qr. 9 lb (805 kg).

25. Now fixed to the south nave wall is the massive **sounding-board**, 6 ft 6 in (2.0 m) across, which formed a canopy for the 17th-century pulpit. Its purpose was to project the preacher's voice outwards rather than upwards so that he could be heard.
26. Above it is a diamond-shaped **hatchment** – probably for Francis, wife of the Revd William Wordsworth, who died in 1813. Hatchments were displayed for a time outside a deceased person's home, before being placed in the parish church.
27. Sandwich's red **fire engine** was purchased in 1874 and was in use in the town until 1913. It arrived for display at St Peter's in 1982.
28. At the west end of the nave, on each side, are the beginnings of the side walls of the slightly narrower **Norman nave** of c.1100. The stone imposts are clearly Norman and a reminder that Christian worship has been offered on this site for 900 years.

Memorials (other than those already described)

In the north aisle floor is part of a 14th-century **burial slab**, with the remains of an inscription round its border. Another slab, further east, has a **brass coat of arms and inscription** to Thomas Gilbert, who died in 1597. Amongst the **ledger slabs** in the floors are some to the Verrier family in the chancel.

The following **wall plaques** are of interest:

In the north aisle –

- THOMAS JENKINSON (1801)
- MARY, wife of WALDRAM OLIVER (1744)

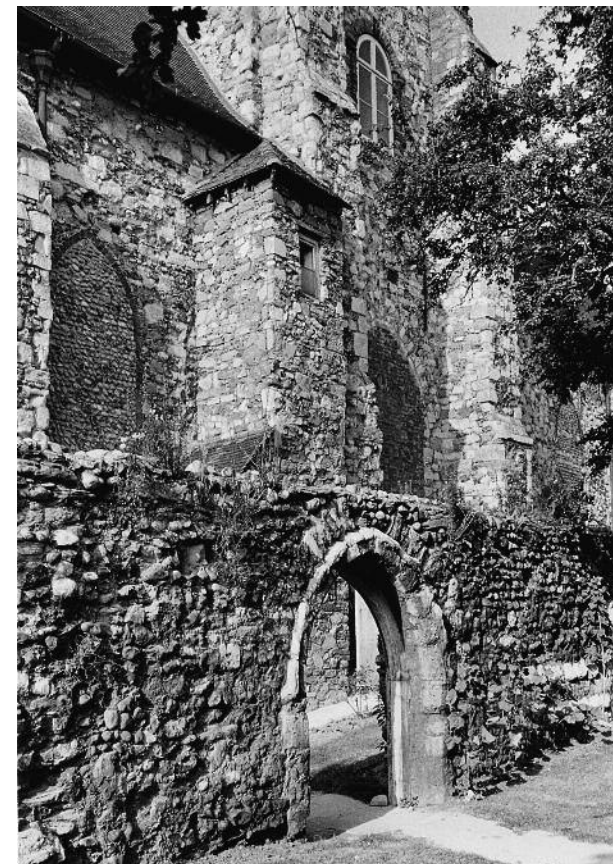
- The lovely cartouche with drapes and cherubs to HENRY and MARY WISE (1769 and 1772), with their daughter ELIZABETH, wife of WILLIAM BOYS, who died aged 23
- The cross brought from the wartime grave in France of Major R D HARRISON (1917)
- Plaques to ANN STANNARD (1795) and members of the FERRIER family.

In the nave –

- To GEORGE BAKER (1790)
- To VALENTINE JEKEN (1678 and twice mayor)
- To MR YOUNG JEKEN and his family (1770)
- KATHERINE HARVEY (commemorated on the south chancel wall), died in 1807 aged 25. Also commemorated on this plaque is William Maundy Harvey, who died at sea in 1813 – and the precise latitude and longitude of his burial-place in the Atlantic Ocean are given.



Fourteenth-century lady and gentleman in the north aisle (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



Base of tower and remains of south aisle from the south-west (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Front cover: The tower of St Peter's from the south-east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).
Back cover: View westwards from the high altar (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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