

12 interesting things to see: 12 puzzles to solve.

There's a floor plan on the back page of this guide.

This guide is for visitors and any wanting to know more about this building and the church.

This church is dedicated to St Matthias. His statue flanked by 2 angels is over the North porch, just off the Babbacombe Road. Following Jesus' Ascension to heaven and after prayer, Matthias was chosen by lot to be one of the 12 apostles, replacing the traitor, Judas Iscariot. St Matthias served as a missionary and was martyred.

1 Enter and look up

When you enter the church stand by the double glass doors and first of all look up at the ceiling.

It looks like an upturned boat. Many years ago, shipbuilders would make this sort of roof for churches. This is why the main part of a church is often called the 'nave' (the same root word for Navy).

Walk along the centre aisle. High up on the wall over the central stone arch and its red painted wall, you'll see a dark wooden arch. It has a cross with a crown at the top, reminding us of why this church is here.

The Christian faith is all about Jesus – God who become human - who was crucified to enable us to be reconciled to God. He rose from the dead, as the King of Kings. There are two life-sized angels whose wings stretch out on either side of the great arch. This may not always be clear if the church internal lights are not on



This wooden arch known as a screen was given in memory of John Snelgrove who died in 1903. It is carved from oak trees grown in the neighbourhood of Exeter.

More information about the building and history of the church is set out at the end.

Question 1

How high do you think the church ceiling is?

2 The Font

On the left of the stage (dais) at the front of the church you'll find the octagonal Font.

A font is actually just a bowl to contain water for baptising people. Baptism is the outward marker of belonging to the Christian family. Washing with water is a symbol of cleansing – remembering the promise of forgiveness that Jesus gives us. It's also a symbol of refreshing – remembering the way that the life-giving Holy Spirit comes to live within every Christian. We still use this font for baptisms, though sometimes we go to a local beach, Meadfoot, to use the sea!

This font was originally sited near the North door and moved in the 2019 refurbishment to make it more visible. It was given by the family and friends of the Rev. Thomas Nash Hicks, the first Vicar of St. Matthias' under whose guidance and dedication, over 24 years, the church we see today grew in size from a smaller chapel.



Question 2
Have you been baptised?
(or christened, it's the same thing)
If you have,
what does it mean to you now?

3 The Pulpit

On the opposite side of the stage is the Pulpit.

The pulpit was the traditional place for someone to 'preach' from – explaining how the Bible relates to our lives today. It is high up partly to make it easier to hear (before microphones) the speaker and easier to see (before large screen cameras) the speaker. Partly it's because Christians consider the Bible – also known as 'God's Word' is extremely important. It is the main way God speaks to us. These days however we use a movable lectern on the stage.

The panels around the side of this alabaster and marble pulpit contain figures of famous preachers. There is St. Paul, the 4th century preacher John Chrysostom, Jesus himself and two others.

Above the pulpit is a carved oak sounding board placed in memory of Mrs. Snelgrove in 1915. You'll find another place, in the chancel and beyond the communion table, which reminds us how important the Bible is to Christians: The brass eagle on a pillar carries a large Bible, symbolizing the carrying of the 'Good News' (or 'gospel') about Jesus to the corners of the earth.



Question 3

Can you spot two birds amongst the alabaster figures and how do they help us decide which one is Noah and which one is Elijah?

4 Last Supper Window

From the pulpit, look towards the wall of new storage cupboards nearest to you and the window above it.

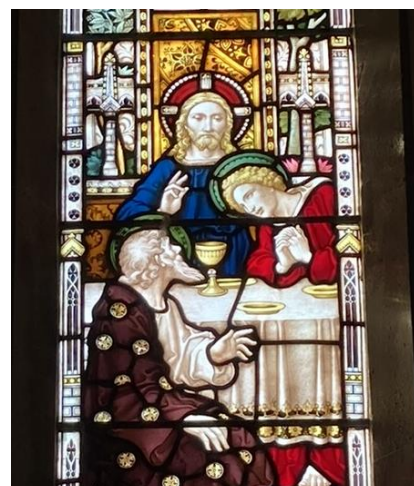
The main scene of this South Transept window is of Jesus sharing his 'Last Supper'.

This meal was the traditional Jewish Passover Meal that Jesus shared with his friends, the night before he died. The bread and wine they shared was given a new and special meaning for the early church. The broken bread that had recalled the sacrificed lamb in the Passover meal that enabled the Jewish people to break free from slavery in Egypt many centuries before was now somehow 'his body' – pointing to his sacrifice on the cross as the new 'Lamb of God' to enable us to break free from the 'slavery of sin'. That is all the things we do wrong that affect us and everyone and everything around us. The wine symbolised Jesus blood which was his sacrifice of his life for us.

Christians today remember Jesus doing just, by eating a token of bread and drinking a taste of wine at a service called Holy Communion. It's considered such a special 'meal' that we lay out the bread and wine in silverware on a special table that is covered with a white cloth. Some churches call this an 'altar'.

Question 4

In the window, how many people are sat at the table?



5 Choir stalls

From the communion table, move past towards the main East window. You are now in what is called the Chancel. As you go past the choir stalls, take a look at the intricate carving – though be careful not to trip over any steps or wires from the modern PA system! We don't have a choir who sit in these stalls these days, but we all enjoy singing out God's praises!

There are some traditions that St. Matthias, the patron saint of this church and one of the early apostles, took the message of the Jesus to the people of Ethiopia and that area of Africa in the first century.



The Chancel area you are in now was originally smaller and built in scale with the original chapel. As the church grew the chancel became too small. John Snelgrove, whose name recurs frequently in this period of the Church's history, suffered the loss of his son, James, at the age of 17 and nearly twenty years after the church was built the chancel was enlarged in 1885 at Mr. Snelgrove's expense and dedicated to his son's memory.

The dwarf walls at the entrance to the Chancel are of alabaster capped with red Ogwell marble. The chancel gates of wrought iron are in the Art Nouveau style of the turn of the century. The letters I H C and X P C are based on the Greek word for Jesus Christ. These gates were dedicated at the Church's Jubilee of 1908.

The lighting of the Choir Stalls was carried out in memory of Eric Watson, Warden of this church 1970-1980, a gift from his family and his fellow-warden.

Question 5

**How many wooden carved heads can you find?
Can you find one that could be from Ethiopia?**

6 The Reredos

Go through the chancel to the far end of the church, the conventional altar. Please mind the various levels and steps.

A Reredos is an ornamental screen covering the wall at the back of an altar. This is now the far end of the church. It is an amazing piece of carving from pure alabaster.

The three central panels record the Sacrifice and Triumph of Jesus in the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. The prophets Isaiah, Elijah, John the Baptist and Daniel divide the panels.

Notice on the shields below the panels the many symbols of what happened to Jesus on Good Friday – there is a whip, nails, crown of thorns, outer garment, dice, a ladder and the spear that was used to ensure Jesus was dead.

There are also beautiful mosaics of angels (with challenging words written beneath them) and cherubs on the walls and fine floor tiles.



Directly above the altar is the East window with strong blue colours. It depicts several scenes of Jesus' rising from the dead on the first Easter day, and some of the people he met.

The inscription on the window is unfortunately hidden screen, but reads "*I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall live*" (John 11.25-26) This has the oldest glass in the church, and carries perhaps the most important message of all.

The Reredos was given in memory of John Spencer Meade who died in 1884.

The window was re-leaded and renovated in 1998, funded by the Friends of St. Matthias' through a generous gift in memory of Peter Myott.

On the right side of this area is a sedilia (from the Latin for a seat). These were permanent and often ornate items in a church from the 12th century onwards, used by the priest, the deacon and the sub-deacon, but in this church, they are not graded in height. Beyond them is the 'credence shelf' for the wafers or bread, and wine used in Holy Communion services. We rarely use this space now, taking communion at the stage.

On the left side is a window showing Jesus welcoming children

Question 6

One shield as a snake curled around a pole. What is this about and where might you see it on the high street?

7 St. Francis chapel

Go through the new glass doorway into the small chapel. It holds another small Communion table, with a wooden carving of the Last Supper above it. This was originally from a church in Exeter.

Notice the fine stained-glass windows, one on a side wall dedicated to St. Francis and the other above the communion table on the theme that "*those who sow in tears shall reap in joy*". This small Chapel is kept as a place for quiet worship and prayer.

Why not share something with God now? You could light a candle too as part of your prayer.



This chapel was originally the clergy changing room and was re-ordered in 1926 by the efforts of Major Garrett (who as Borough Engineer designed Torquay Pavilion) and a church worker, Mrs. Kitchen.

Question 7

How many birds are there in the Saint Francis window?

8 Organ

Walk through the small chapel and out into the Nave of the church down a short wooden ramp.

You will see the Organ console. Originally the console was in the chancel underneath some of the organ pipes there. But the pipes there, with the other bank of them in the south transept, are now operated electronically.

As you'll have seen in the chancel, as well as the organ we often use a piano and several other instruments to lead more modern songs and hymns of worship to God.

The original organ was built in 1885 by Hill & Son (builders of the Westminster Abbey organ) at a cost of £1,100. It was re-built and enlarged by Rushworth and Draper in 1923, had a major overhaul and a further enlargement in 1949 as a memorial to Mr. W. L. Twinning who had been organist here for 41 years. It was substantially rebuilt again in 1975 when the organ console was moved to the North Transept. It is regarded as one of the leading organs in this country and several concerts are held in the church each year with organ music.

Behind the organ seat there is a window in memory of Briscoe Hooper, father of Henry Dundee Hooper, "*for 38 years legal adviser to the town.*" The window depicts Moses with the Ten Commandments and John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, who suffered martyrdom

at the stake in 1555. A separate marble tablet in the church recalls a sad series of events for Henry Dundee Hooper; the death of his wife, 2nd daughter and son, all within 18 months. He bequeathed the proportion of his estate to the church of St Matthias

On the wall on the right of the organ is a window showing Jesus calming the storm.

Walking along that side of the church, the North side, are 3 windows. The middle one has at the top the coat of arms of Queen Victoria, VR. Beneath are the figures of St. Ethelbert who became King of Kent about 560, and his wife St. Bertha who was a Christian. King Ethelbert was himself baptised by St. Augustine in 597. This window was put up to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897.



Question 8
How many, to the nearest thousand, organ pipes you think there are?
Remember you cannot see them all.

9 West doorway

Walk into the centre of the nave again and walk towards the main glass West double doorway. Above the carved oak screen there is a huge triple window. It represents the first part of an ancient Christian song called, in Latin, the '*Te Deum Laudamus*' which means, '*We praise you, O God*'.

Angels and all sorts of people are called upon to give honour to God, our creator, Saviour – or 'rescuer' in Jesus, and life-giving and comforting the Holy Spirit.

Why not take a look at the '**What's on**' noticeboards beside you, or pick up a Welcome booklet that details some of the worship services and activities that you would be most welcome to come to.

Below the screen on the right-hand side is a small glass inset table in memory of the Rev. Neville Rose-Price, Vicar here 1965 - 1970. On it lies a Memorial Book. It is open to show the names of those who died over the years in this particular month.

Question 9
The wooden screen continues the theme with carved angels along the edge: how many can you count?



10 War Memorials

Facing the church from the entrance, now walk along the south wall, nearest to the Hall.

You will see the stone War Memorial to all who died from this parish of Ilsham in the 1914-1918 War. A little farther on there is a carved wooden angel memorial to two brothers Gerald and Laurence Russell who both died in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War.

All around the church you will come across other memorial plaques and windows to people who have died. Do read them to remember the lives and people of this local community.

There are very few recent memorial markers here, and there is no graveyard either. However, many people still value having a funeral service in this special prayerful place. Please do feel free to contact the church office for more information about how we might help you if you are recently bereaved.



Question 10
On the War Memorial for the First World War, there are a list of names from just Ilsham parish who died. How many can you count?

It's time for two outside points of interest now – and two more puzzles to solve...

11 Foundation Stone

Go out of the church into the 'Linkway' between church and hall. (There's a disabled toilet here with ordinary toilets on the floor below.). Go out of the glass doors (you'll need to push the square button to open the doors) for a short way down the ramp and look towards the church hall and the middle central pillar between the 2 windows facing the ramp. Halfway down you will see the cornerstone of the Church Centre laid on 20th October 1985, which has the words from 1 Peter 2: 4 in the Good News Bible version, "*Come to the Lord, the living stone.*"

These words were chosen because this was also the part of the bible that was used in a talk by the then Vicar of Okehampton, the Rev. Prebendary Downall, when the church was first opened in 1858! It was consecrated on the 14th October 1858 by the Bishop of Exeter, the Rt. Rev. Henry Phillpotts (who lived at Bishopstowe, until recently the former Palace Hotel on the Babbacombe Road).

They're important words for each of us today too. Jesus invites us to build our whole lives on him, and his teaching. If you want to explore what that might mean for you, we'd be delighted to meet with you and talk about that. Or why not book onto our next 'Alpha' course, which explores what the Christian faith is all about.



Question 11
The cobblestones of the Piazza you see before you have a special designed within a circle created in the centre. Why do you think it is shaped like that with 3 points?

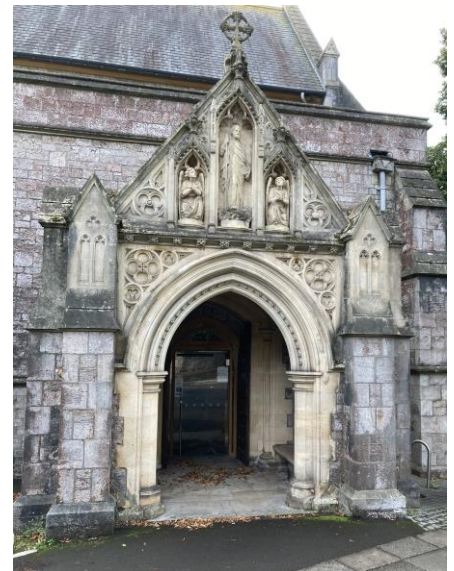
12

St. Matthias statue

Finally, walk around to Babbacombe Road and the North porch, the doorway on the roadside of the church. (We tend to keep this entrance for people with mobility difficulties or pushchairs. Sometimes homeless people sleeping here at nighttime)

Above the doorway is a statue of St. Matthias, to whom the church is dedicated. He served as a missionary – to parts of Turkey and maybe Ethiopia too and was martyred around AD 80.

As a foundational member of the very first Christian church, it's great to know that the Church family has now grown right across the world – with almost 2 billion people. You too can be part of that huge family of people who know the love God has for them and joy and purpose of the Christian life. Contact us anytime, and you are most welcome to join in any of the services and events we have.



Question 12
What book you think he's carrying and why?

How did you get on with the puzzling questions?

The answers are on the next page

A short history

In the heart of Wellswood, St Matthias witnesses to the Wellspring – Jesus – the source of ‘living water’ who invites us into life in all its fullness. We aim to do that first and foremost by being the church, the people Jesus calls us to be – demonstrating His love and care for one another, seeking to love and serve our families, friends, community and networks

But the church as a building plays an important part of that witness too. Over the last 160 years, it has evolved and adapted to meet the needs of the church and wider community including the Church centre complex which many local clubs, schools and groups currently enjoy

The site of the church was given by Sir Lawrence Vaughan Palk and his son Lawrence Palk, MP, both leading Torquay residents, in the 1850s. This was a time of major development of Torquay, being very popular in the Victorian era for holidays. There was a big expansion with the opening of Torquay Railway Station in 1859 with villas and hotels spreading up to Wellswood. St Matthias was originally built as a Chapel of Ease, a subsidiary Chapel, of St. Mark's Church, Torwood. It became an independent church and parish in 1880. In 1974, the Rector of St. Mark's became Priest-in-Charge of Holy Trinity Church. A few years later these two churches were closed and in 1979 the Vicar of St. Matthias' became Rector of the enlarged parish of St. Matthias, St. Mark and Holy Trinity, now operating from the one church building of St. Matthias.

The foundation stone of the church, then St. Matthias Chapel, was laid on Easter Monday, 13th April 1857. It was designed in the decorated style, by Anthony Salvin, a leading exponent of the Gothic Revival. It was built by local builders, John Tapley Harvey and William Harvey. It was consecrated on the 14th October 1858 by the Bishop of Exeter, the Rt. Rev. Henry Phillpotts (who lived at Bishopstowe, until recently, the former Palace Hotel on the Babbacombe Road).

The present church is considerably larger than the buildings of 1858. The South Aisle was added in 1865 and the Chancel enlarged in 1885. The main change in the considerable enlargement of the church in width, height and length, the formation of the West end and the addition of the North Porch were undertaken in 1894 by the notable Church Architect, John Loughborough Pearson, who was also the architect of Truro Cathedral.

The Wellspring Project was the next stage of the evolution for the building, making the 19th century church building more suitable for 21st century needs.

- Addition of glass doors to the West entrance taking away the 'closed' impression and creating a bright, welcoming view into the church
- Removing the pews in order to replace with wooden chairs which would meet the needs of our more informal worship and be a welcome space for use by the community
- Moving the marble font from the back of the church to the front enabling the whole congregation to take part in baptismal services
- Creating a small café and freeing up the back of the church to have a comfortable sofa seating area to accommodate small gatherings and socialising
- A new large piazza area was created leading up to the west doors with two tv screens either side of the west doors advertising upcoming services and events.

We sensed God directing us throughout this whole project and we continue to pray that St. Matthias will remain a 'beacon of light' in years to come where many will find Christ as their Saviour.

The answers:

1. Approx 70ft – over 21m
2. You will know the answer to this one
3. Raven is Elijah who was fed by ravens. Dove is Noah (here holding a model ark). Noah sent out a dove to find dry land after the flood.
4. 12 plus Jesus
5. 6
6. In the desert when the Israelites fled Egypt, many had snake bites. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole and everyone who looked up at the snake was healed. In the Christian church it is a symbol of looking to God for spiritual healing and life. Generally it has become a symbol of reliance on health treatments. It is often found outside pharmacists and hospitals.
7. 9
8. 4722!
9. 8
10. 12 – and that is from only one small part of the parish 😊
11. A Celtic Christian design to remind us of our God in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
12. The Bible – the book containing the good news of Jesus.

