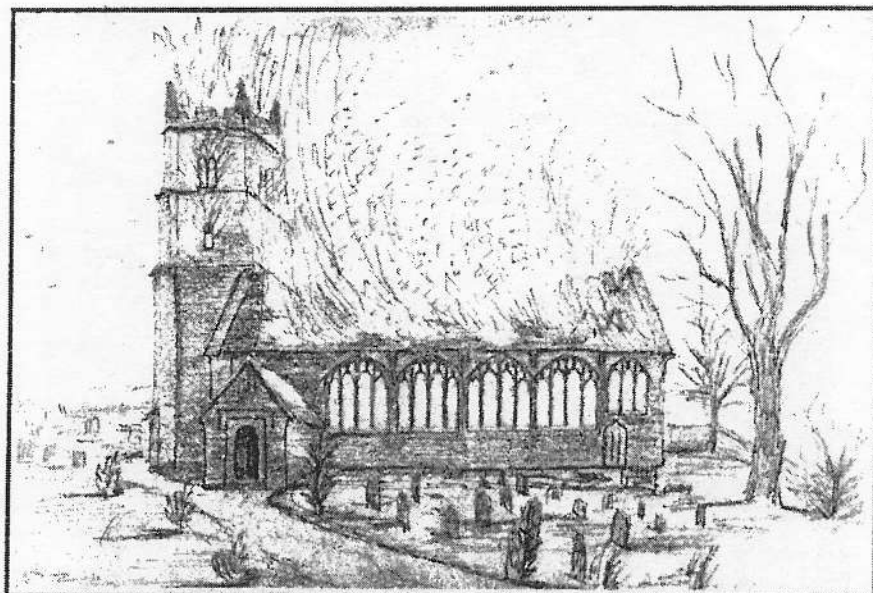


# Lamerton Church Fire 1877



HELEN HARRIS  
With an account of the bells by GEOFFREY C. HILL

PUBLISHED BY  
FRIENDS OF LAMERTON PARISH CHURCH

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HENRY JOHN PHILLPOTTS, VICAR. INSTITUTED 29<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 1860.

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### Foreword

This booklet about the great fire at Lamerton, near Tavistock, has been produced by a group of parishioners under the enthusiastic leadership of Mrs Frances Moore.

It has a message for the present day as great faith, vision, courage and hard work were shown by all in Lamerton and the surrounding area in the rebuilding of their church. The Rev. Henry John Phillpotts must have been a very special person; he witnessed first the destruction of his newly restored church and then the creation of the new one.

Special thanks are due to the well known author, Mrs Helen Harris, for the text and to Mr Geoffrey C. Hill for the account of the bells.

After expenses have been met all proceeds from the sale of this booklet will be given to the Lamerton P.C.C. for the maintenance of St Peter's Church.

Written by John Killingbeck

## Preface

During early 1991, while doing some sorting-out in order to make good ravages of the weather, one of Lamerton's team of ringers opened up an old chest in the belfry. In it he came across a very damp, faded foolscap cash book, in which were pasted numerous lengthy newspaper cuttings. He took the book home and carefully dried it out, and then passed it to Churchwarden Mrs Frances Moore. The cuttings, it was found, related at length the details of a disastrous fire of 1877, in which the church was destroyed. The calamity was heightened because a costly restoration of the building had been completed in just the previous year, nevertheless, the vicar and parishioners did not waste time lingering in despair. Almost before the embers had cooled resolutions were being taken on rebuilding and on raising the necessary money. Their positive spirit, and the remarkable degree of determination and faith that prevailed is shown by the fact that within six months the bulk of the funds had been raised and work had begun, and in just over two years from the fire, all was completed.

The contents of the cuttings book comprise reports from current newspapers, viz.: *The Western Morning News*, *The Tavistock Gazette*, *The Western Daily Mercury*, *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette Daily Telegram*, *The Guardian*, and other extracts and mementoes. Mrs Moore felt the collection to be so valuable that it should be deposited in the west Devon Record Office. But before she took this step she invited me to look at it, with a view to producing a brief account of the events. The following is the result.

H.H.

## ONE

### The Fire

The parish church of Lamerton, three miles north-west of Tavistock, stands in a prominent position just north of the village. All around it extend the undulating farm lands of west Devon, which rise in the north of the parish to nearly 1,000 feet, and fall in the south along the valley of the little River Lumburn, tributary of the Tavy and ultimately of the Tamar. There was certainly a church here in the 12th century, and probably earlier, before more substantial building works were undertaken. These resulted, in the 14th century, in the construction of the existing tower, and, in the 15th century, in the completion of a new spacious church building, dedicated to St. Peter.

By the middle of the 19th century, with the activities of the local mines and many employed in agriculture, this rural area had increased in population. In the 1871 census, Lamerton had 1,333 inhabitants. Under the incumbency of the Rev. Henry John Phillpotts, Lamerton Church, capable of accommodating around 400 people, was well attended. It contained numerous treasures, including a handsome font, reredos, stained glass windows, and a striking monument to the Tremayne family (former possessors of the manor) dating from 1588. The tower contained six very fine bells, recast in 1845 and valued at £600. The church building itself, however, had fallen into a very bad state of repair, and the decision was taken to restore it. Due largely to the efforts of the vicar, funds necessary for this were raised, and from November 1875 the congregation met for services in the nearby Sunday School (the former ancient priest's house) while the work proceeded. By the summer of 1876 the restoration was complete, at a cost of £1,369 3s. 9d., and on Thursday 20 July the church was reopened. The result was a joy to see, and satisfaction for all who had subscribed to the work, which included pitch pine re-seatings and the almost entire renovation of the roof. A beautiful stained glass window was also put in the tower by Mr Reginald Gill, in memory of his mother. In addition, a new organ was provided, erected in the north-east corner of the church by Messrs. Bryceson, Brothers, and Morton, at a cost of £180. It was described as 'an effective instrument and a material ornament to the church'.

Just over a year later, however, on the wild and windy moonlit night of Monday 19 November 1877, disaster struck when a raging fire broke out, and the recently restored church was burnt down.

The most likely cause of the fire seems to have arisen from measures being taken in caring for the new organ. In order to keep it dry during prevailing wet weather a small paraffin lamp was currently being kept burning just inside the instrument. The lamp had been specially made for the purpose, it stood on a cast iron plate and had an iron chimney. On the Monday, at about 8.30 p.m., the sexton, George Robins, went to the church to put fresh oil in the lamp, and left it burning in its usual place. Before leaving he looked around the building, and everything appeared to be in order. However, between 9 and 10 p.m., Mr Eastcott of the adjacent Court Farm noticed a light in the church. In a few minutes it became much brighter and the farmer, realising that the place was on fire, raised the alarm. The ensuing events were described in *The Western Morning News* of 21 November 1877 as follows:

'The vicar, having been apprised of the circumstance, the church was quickly entered, and it was found that not only was the organ on fire but that the flames had obtained a complete mastery over the instrument. The pipes acted as conductors for the flames, which, ascending them, very quickly ignited the large wooden beams of the roof. The varnish upon the organ increased the fury of the fire, and was soon blazing fiercely. The heat by this time had grown so intense that those who were in the church were compelled to withdraw. The sexton then broke in the east window, which was quite close to the organ, and large quantities of water were constantly poured in on the flames. It soon appeared evident that the edifice was doomed to destruction, for nearly all the fittings were of wood, that would easily catch fire and burn with great rapidity, and in less than three-quarters of an hour after the breaking out of the fire the whole fabric was an immense furnace, the flames of which were seen for miles around. The roof fell in with a terrible crash, and shortly afterwards the four arches on the eastern side, and the massive granite pillars from which they sprang, were so scorched with the heat that the whole fell against the northern wall, injuring it a great deal, and most of the pillars were shivered to pieces.



The wind at this time was very high indeed, and fanned the fire considerably. The flames had also reached the tower through a large open archway between it and the church, and burnt all the woodwork.

The heat was so great that the six large bells were entirely melted; indeed, the metal ran down the tower, which is a complete skeleton, in streams. Not before the church was almost an entire wreck, and everything that was at all inflammable had been consumed, did the engine from Tavistock arrive. Its services, however, had it been there when the fire first broke out would, in all probability, have been useless, in consequence of the rapidity with which the flames ran over the building. The engine poured a large quantity of water over the burning embers, but everything inflammable inside the sacred edifice, including the handsome pulpit and lectern, were destroyed and although the granite pillars and arches on the western side are still standing, yet they are much charred and cracked with the heat, and are in a very insecure condition, and, to all appearances, cannot withstand anything like a strong wind. The walls, too, were much shattered, and only two or three of the very ancient tablets which had stood in the church for so long were to be seen on the walls. One of the monuments remaining was that of the Tremayne family. Most of the windows are so damaged as to be of no service. Nothing but the four walls and the tower remain, everything else being in ruins. The fire had been considerably subdued by eleven o'clock, but the firemen and others did not leave until early yesterday morning'

The vicar later described how, at the time of the outbreak, he had been at home in the Vicarage, sitting together with his wife reading, when at 10 minutes to 10 o'clock the doorbell was rung violently. Immediately the servants rushed into the room to tell him the church was on fire. Mr and Mrs Phillpotts hurried to the church and from the little door they could see the whole organ on fire right to the top, touching the roof which was soon also ablaze. A member of Mr Eastcott's family offered to fetch the fire engine and the vicar agreed, but as there appeared to be some difficulty with the horse and he thought he could manage it better, the vicar himself took the animal and galloped off to Tavistock for the engine.

Another newspaper report (unidentified, but probably The Tavistock Gazette) of 23rd November described the mustering of the fire brigade:



'The fire brigade was immediately summoned by the tolling of a bell, and in a very short time they were assembled and the engine got out. But in consequence of some difficulty experienced in horsing the engine, a delay ensued, which by many was considered unreasonable. After the four horses were harnessed there was no further delay in starting the brigade...'

Mrs Phillpotts, who watched the fire's progress from the time it was discovered, said that before her husband could get out of the village the flames were right up through the roof. Flames were coming from the east window, and when that was broken a draught spread them to the tower, which became like a huge furnace. Such was the sight that met the Vicar when he returned from Tavistock at 10.30 p.m. Buckets of water would have been useless, and there was doubt if even a large stream of water at one end would have been effective once the fire had taken hold. Indeed, despite having water available and many willing hands, there was initial reluctance to apply it for fear of cracking the granite pillars. Before long, however, it became necessary to use water to prevent the fire spreading to nearby Court Farm and the Vicarage, by which time it was found that the pillars had already cracked all the way down due to the heat.

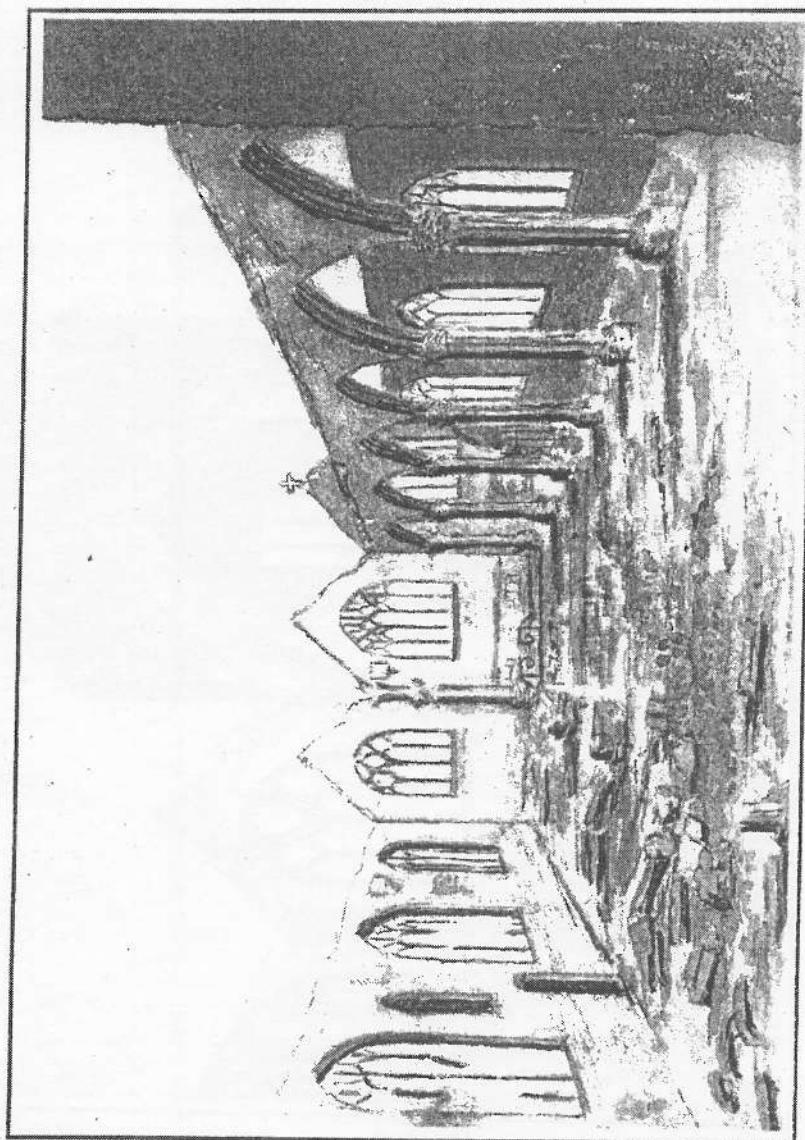
When daylight came, the former edifice was seen to be but a shell. The north wall, said to have been not very straight before, was now very much out of perpendicular. Apart from the south porch which mainly escaped the inferno and where – amazingly – notices still hung on the board, only the bare walls and the tower were left standing. The Vicar and the parishioners viewed the smouldering remains with sorrow. Yet, although their building had been destroyed, there was thankfulness that no human lives had been lost. Neither, happily, had there been any impairment of the church's spiritual vigour, as subsequent events were to show.

## TWO

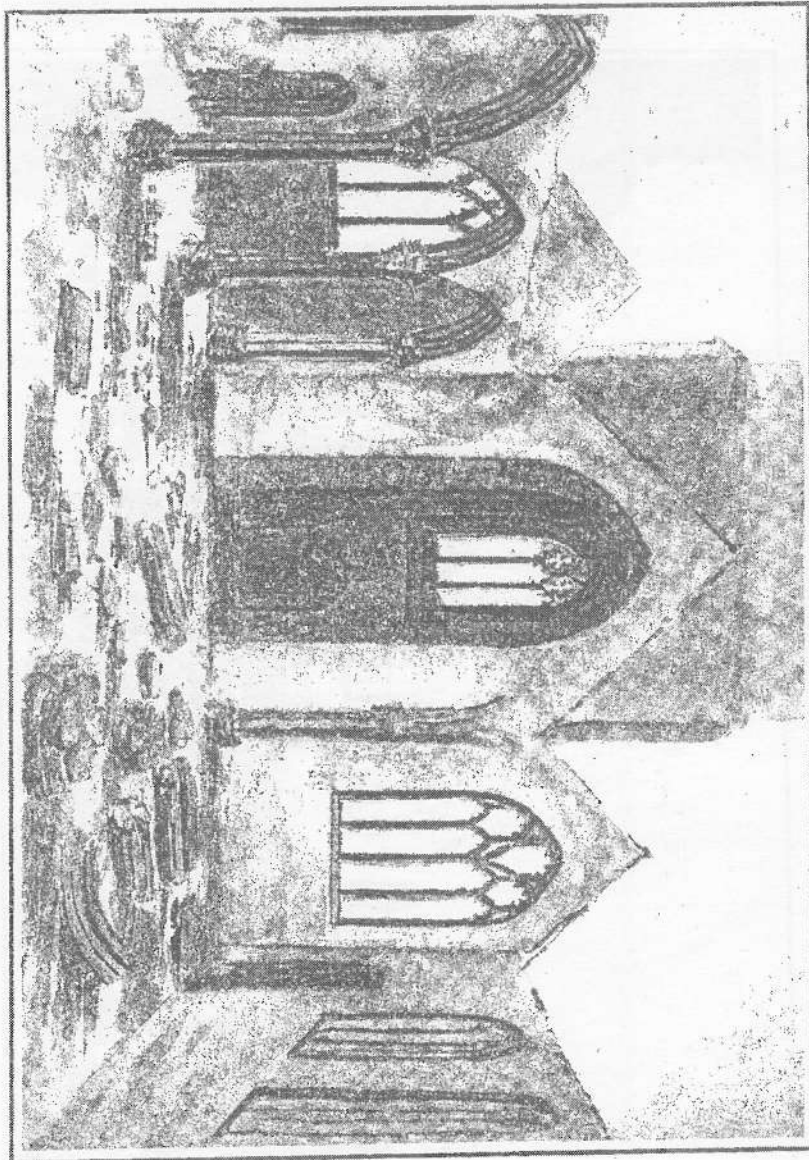
### Rebuilding

Before the week was out, on the afternoon of Saturday 24 November, a meeting was held in Lamerton Schoolroom to consider the rebuilding of the church. The patron of the living, Mr J. Tremayne M.P., presided. The vicar and other clergy of the deanery were present, as well as many other people, including Messrs Reginald Gill, Henry Tremayne, W. Chowen, Roskelley, Ellis, Weeks, Rowe, Collard, Rowland, F. Gill, Chubb, F. Ward, Mill, Eastcott, Easterbrook, Griffin, Smale, H. Perkins and J. Perkins. In his opening speech the chairman spoke of the calamity to the parish in the destruction of its beautiful church, with all its old associations, and especially as it had been so recently renovated and restored by the energy of the vicar after so much labour. He asked all to agree that it was their duty to lend assistance towards again restoring and rebuilding their old church as soon as possible on the same lines in the same style as the old building. Mr Tremayne expressed his sympathy to the vicar and the parishioners, and he read aloud a letter received by the vicar from the Bishop of Exeter. It ran: 'I am exceedingly sorry to read the news of your great misfortune. Just after you have made your church so very nice to have it all destroyed is indeed a blow, and I feel for you with all my heart. Of course you will have to set to work at once to get the necessary funds to rebuild the church. It will take some years, no doubt, but no time should be lost. I will promise you £50, and you must get your people together, and you must appeal to all the landowners of Devon. Do not lose heart. Tell your wife my heart is with her and you.'

As the meeting proceeded the vicar reported that a visit had been made by the surveyor for the West of England Fire Office, by whom the church was insured, and it was hoped that the full £2,200 in respect of the building and organ would be paid. Some subscriptions had also been promised amounting to nearly £400, and there was a balance of £118. 14s. remaining from the recent restoration fund. This gave a sum of about £2,700 with which to start anew. A resolution, proposed by Mr Weeks, was carried, to the effect that a new church should be built forthwith 'in no respect inferior to the older one'. And Mr William Rowe moved another resolution that was carried – that all those who had been in the



View of the east wing after the fire



View of the west wing after the fire

habit of worshipping in the old church should be asked to collect funds, far and wide, for the new church. He said that for Mr Phillpotts he felt much sympathy – 'the service was conducted so nicely that not only was the church attended by the parishioners but visitors constantly came from Tavistock, and Methodists who went there were quite delighted with the service'.

On the following day the Lamerton congregation reverted again to the schoolroom for its Sunday morning service, and in the afternoon the vicar addressed a large gathering within the church's ruins. A collection was taken for the building fund. It also became known that, fortunately, the communion plate and registers had escaped the fire and were safe in the Vicarage, where the vicar had been in the habit of keeping them in his own custody.

The next day a large meeting of clergy (initially without Mr Phillpotts) and people of the deanery was held in Tavistock Guildhall to discuss ways in which Lamerton might be helped. Further subscriptions were announced which brought the total of gifts so far raised to about £1,000. As was the custom of the day, the precise amounts donated by each individual were stated ('besides various smaller sums'). Whilst not a procedure that would find favour now, doubtless it brought its advantages! A resolution was passed in favour of each parish having the opportunity of contributing to the restoration fund, by means of an offertory collection. Mr Phillpotts, called into the meeting to hear the news, expressed deep gratitude.

So successful were the efforts of the vicar and parishioners in obtaining early subscriptions that within less than a month a public meeting was called for the afternoon of Saturday 15 December, in Lamerton schoolroom, for selection of an architect and to discuss rebuilding. The vicar presided, and began by reading letters from the Duke of Bedford, Lord Fortescue, and Mr Tremayne M.P., all expressing regret at not being able to be present.

Lord Fortescue (Lord of the Manor of Lamerton), who contributed £100, writing from Castle Hill in north Devon, feared that the sum reported to have been raised so far would not nearly suffice to restore the church to



anything like its condition before the fire. He wrote: 'I am clearly of the opinion that though, of course, the immediate restoration of the whole church would be desirable, it is by no means indispensable to the seemly and edifying performance of divine worship there.' He felt that if funds were not forthcoming to carry out everything that was desirable at once, what was done should be well done, and too much should not be attempted, 'so as neither to scamp any part of the work nor incur debt'.

Mr Phillpotts announced that subscriptions so far raised amounted to £2,550, and the good news was also given that the West of England Insurance Company had agreed to pay the church's claim in full. Discussions then turned to the principal business of selecting an architect. Various offers for the work had been received, including one from Mr Piers St Aubyn, who tendered his services as follows: 'I see that you and your parishioners are taking steps to make good the dreadful calamity that has fallen on you, and that you are asking for subscriptions to carry out the rebuilding of Lamerton Church. I feel a certain amount of delicacy in making this offer as possibly it may be misunderstood, nevertheless, if it suits their views to engage me as their architect I should wish you to say to your parishioners that it will give me great pleasure to contribute my services as an offering to the Church, and that I would only charge the actual out of pocket expenses I might incur in carrying out the work.'

Mr St Aubyn's offer was warmly received, and acceptance recommended in another letter that was read, from the Rev. William Gill of Venn, who regretted his unavoidable absence from the meeting. Mr Gill wrote: 'If, as a Lamerton parishioner, I may be allowed to express my wish in writing, I would say that my vote would be given for accepting Mr St Aubyn's offer, and for rebuilding our church from the present foundations as near like the old one as can possibly be done. One great advantage in accepting Mr St Aubyn's offer appears to me to be that he knew the old building well, and could make any alteration that might be deemed requisite with greater economy and correctness than any average architect could possibly do.' Despite a view expressed by Mr Edwin Collard, advocating the payment of an architect, which he believed would be less likely to cramp the action of the working committee, acceptance of Mr St Aubyn's offer was proposed and seconded, and the motion carried.

On Thursday 27 December a meeting of the Church Building Committee was held to receive the architect's report. It was resolved that the north wall should be taken down, the church floor raised to the level of the tower floor, that there should be an oak roof – as before, and the tower be made in proportion to the church. All the granite arcades were condemned as worthless. Mr St Aubyn gave £6,000 as an approximate estimate for the rebuilding. It was also agreed to advertise for tenders for the granite work, and to write to various firms on the matter of casting the bells. Reporting the meeting, The Tavistock Gazette regretted to add that 'Mr St Aubyn caught a very severe cold on Thursday in the ruins'.

Meanwhile, subscriptions continued to come in for the building fund, and these were listed each week in the press – the names of donors and the sums given, in descending order of value. Except for £200 given by the Duke of Bedford, £100 appeared as maximum amounts. Probably due to an appeal letter from the vicar, Mr Phillpotts, published in The Guardian early in December, donations came from near and far, including commended offertories from churches in the deaneries of East and West Tiverton, from individuals as far away as London and Newcastle, and even from abroad. One list included the item: 'Drawings by Mrs Phillpotts, £1 16s. 6d.' A poem, 'Lamerton Burnt Church', written by a popular authoress, Mrs Charles, and illustrated by a picture previously published in *The Graphic*, was on sale in Tavistock, price 6d., but whether or not the fund benefitted from any proceeds is uncertain.

By March 1878 Messrs J. Warner & Sons of London had been selected to cast the new bells – a peal of six of 45 cwt total weight, including an 11 cwt tenor, and specifications and drawings for the rebuilding were available for viewing at the Vicarage previous to tenders being invited. These resulted in Mr W. Miller being appointed Clerk of the Works, and Messrs Blatchford & Sons, of Crelake, Tavistock contracted to carry out the rebuilding, which commenced in early summer. By August the north wall was beginning to rise, and high quality granite had been brought from Gunnislake for the windows. The joints and sills of the north window, and the north doorway, were already in place. Blatchfords were expecting that the tower would be roofed and ready for the bell cage in less than six weeks. The bells had already been cast by Warners, who included in the process metal saved from the wreckage of the older ones.



Soon the bells were in position and on Tuesday afternoon, 8 October, a special service was held in the partially rebuilt church to celebrate their erection in the tower and to give thanksgiving for the harvest. Unfortunately the weather was poor, but there was a 'fair attendance' (mostly with umbrellas) at the service, which was conducted by the vicar (who also gave the address) assisted by the Rector of Lifton, with Mrs Weekes of Willestrew at the harmonium. At the close of the service several peals were rung by Mr Bannister's team of professional bellringers from Devonport, and also by the Lamerton ringers. A public tea was held afterwards in the schoolroom, and in the evening an 'interesting entertainment', in which the Rev. Phillpotts and others took part.

Much work still remained to be done, however, on the church building. While the north wall had been built from foundation to a considerable height, and the greater part of the walls on the north-east and north-west of the building were also constructed, the northern arcade had to be erected from new foundations embedded 4 feet in the ground, and the much injured southern arcade had to be demolished and rebuilt. The surviving 8 foot tower pinnacles were to be replaced by others double the height. It was not expected that all would be complete before 1 January 1880.

# Camerton Church Opening.

This Parish Church will be Opened,

AFTER BEING RE-BUILT,

On Thursday, January 29th, 1880.

MORNING SERVICE AT 11.30, WITH HOLY COMMUNION.

SERMON BY THE

**HON. BISHOP OF EXETER**

PUBLIC LUNCHEON

At 1.30; Tickets 2s. 6d.

AFTERNOON SERVICE AT 3.15, WITH SERMON

BY THE

REV. PREBENDARY KEMPE.

**A B B C C E E**

At 4.30; Tickets 1s.

EVENING SERVICE AT 6.30. SERMON BY THE

VEN. ARCHDEACON EARLE.

People are requested to apply to the Vicar beforehand for Luncheon Tickets, in order to secure places.

TADELOCK PRINTING COMPANY, LIMITED.

## MORNING SERVICE.

PROVERB PSALMS XX., cxxvii.  
Lament, Nehemiah ii.  
JUBILATE.  
PRAYERS TO THE COLLECT.  
ANTHEM....."I was glad"  
"I was glad when they said unto me, we will go into the house of the Lord, for there is the seat of judgment, even the seat of the house of David."  
"O pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and peaceableness within thy palace."—Amen.  
AFTER-COMMUNION SERVICE.  
BROTHER, Ephes. ii. 19.  
GOSPEL, Luke ii. 41.  
HYMN 215, A. & M., "The Church's one Foundation."  
Sermon, by the Lord Bishop of Exeter.  
Ever Concessions.

## AFTERNOON SERVICE.

CANTUAL LAMENT.  
ANTHEM....."Hear the voice and prayer"  
"Hear the voice and prayer of thy servants, which they make before thee this day, that thine eyes may be open towards this house, day and night; ever towards this place, of which thou hast said, my name shall be there, and when thou hearest here mercy upon them."  
Sermon by the Rev. Prebendary Kempe.  
HYMN 357, A. & M., "Lift the strain."

## EVENING SERVICE.

HYMN 356, A. & M., "Christ is made our sure foundation."  
CHORAL EVENING SERVICE.  
PROVERB PSALMS XXXV., cxi., cxxii.  
Lament, I Chron. xxi.  
M. Lament, I Chron. xxi.  
SOP LAMENT, Rev. xxi.  
DRESS MINISTERIAL.  
ANTHEM.  
"O Praise God in His Holiness. Praise Him in the firmament of his power, Praise Him in the multitude of his might, Praise Him in the glory of his majesty, Praise Him in the beauty of his holiness. Let them rejoice in their work. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise God in His Holiness."—Amen.  
PRAYERS.  
HYMN 240, "Pleasant are Thy Courts above."  
Sermon, by Ven. Archdeacon Earle.  
HYMN 375, A. & M., "Now thank we all our God."

### THREE

#### Completion and Celebration

Through the following year, 1879, work on the church continued. With the remainder of the necessary money raised, it was reported in October that the building would soon be ready for divine worship. A striking feature of the interior was the enlargement of the chancel, an alteration specially requested by the vicar, in order to provide more room for communicants, the space in the previous arrangement having been very small. The stonework of the old east window (except the mullions) had been preserved and the end had been extended 8 feet, thus giving the extra space needed and added grandeur to the building. A five light painted window, designed by the Rev. J.B. Wollocombe, Rector of Stowford, and prepared by Lavers, Barrand & Westlake of Bloomsbury, had been inserted at a cost of about £160. A beautiful reredos depicting the Lord's Supper was being made in opaque glass by Jas. Powell & Son. Slightly tinted Belgium glass windows were the work of Fouracre & Son, Stonehouse. Oak was being used for the roof's open ceiling, for the seats, and for the pulpit.

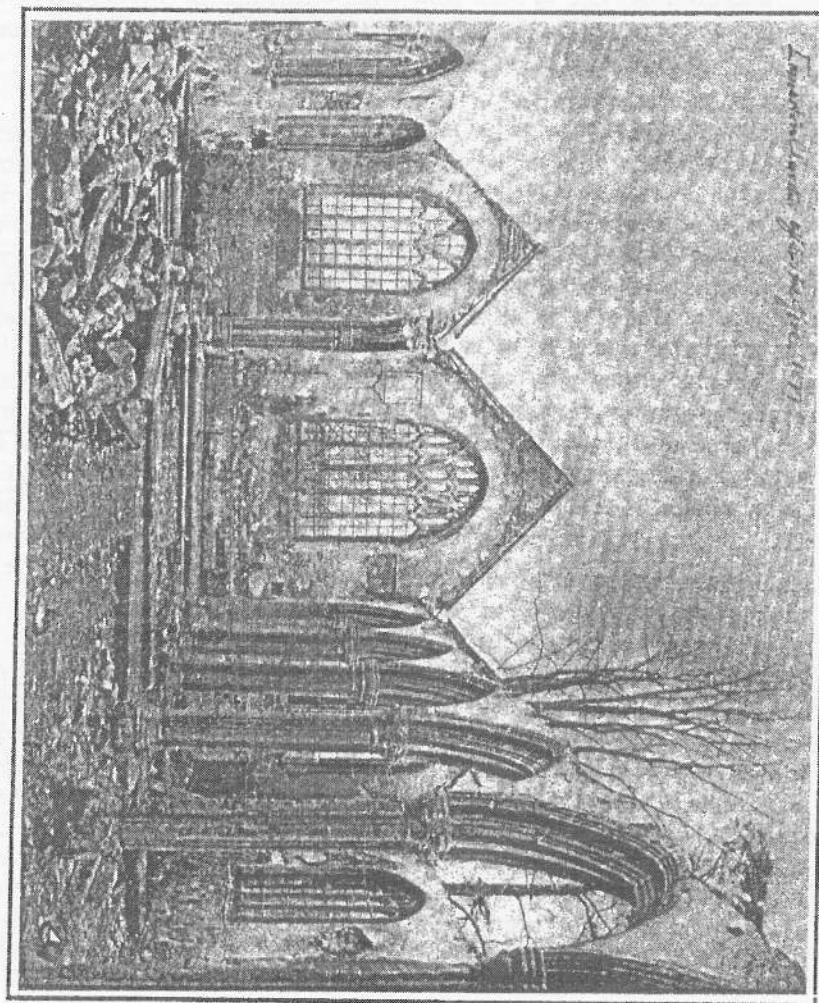
The graceful Gothic arches of the arcades and the pillars supporting them were made of finely wrought Gunnislake granite, the work of Mr James Taylor of Gunnislake. The new font (a reproduction of the old one, from a design obtained by putting together pieces of the original), the base of the pulpit, ornamental crosses on the roof, and the steps, coping and chimney were also the work of Mr Taylor, using stone supplied by the Tamar & Kit Hill Granite Co Ltd, principally from their Kit Hill Quarry. Some of the original monuments within the church, including that of the Tremayne family, had survived the fire and were being restored, but many had been destroyed or severely damaged.

By the new year all was ready for the church's reopening, which was arranged for Thursday 29 January 1880, with a day of celebration. The programme comprised morning service at 11.30 a.m., with holy communion, and a sermon by the Bishop of Exeter, which was followed by a public luncheon at 1.30 p.m. (tickets 2s. 6d.). There was then an

afternoon service at 3.15 p.m. with a sermon by Prebendary Kempe, a public tea at 4.30 p.m. (tickets 1s.) and finally an evening service at 6.30 p.m. when the preacher was Archdeacon Earle.

Many clergy, from other parishes in the deanery and elsewhere, were among the attendance, which was larger than could be accommodated at one time at the luncheon, held in the schoolroom. This meal provided the occasion for speeches and toasts. The vicar made the initial move in proposing the health of the bishop, 'whose only fault' he said, was 'that he expected everybody to work as hard as himself' (laughter and applause). The bishop then rose to reply, and made a lengthy speech. This complimentary oration, the report of which alone occupied no less than seven column inches of minute type in *The Western Morning News* of 30 January, praised the work of the vicar and the parishioners in raising the money and having the church rebuilt 'handsomer than before'. The part played by the vicar, and his character, were extolled to almost embarrassing extent before the speech ended with a toast by the bishop to Mr Phillpotts. With other speeches and toasts following there must have been quite a rush for everyone to reassemble in church in time for the afternoon service.

One important feature of the church's re-equipment – the new organ – was not in place in time for the building's re-opening, when 'an American organ' had to do duty. By the summer, however, when the church had become thoroughly dry, the new instrument, built by Messrs Walker & Sons of London, had been installed. Estimated to have cost around £340, it comprised two manuals – a great of 56 keys and 7 stops, and a swell of 56 keys and 5 stops, also a pedal bourdon and four couplers. A special event to mark the organ's opening was held on 24 June, with services at 3 and 7 p.m. An organ recital was given by Mr D.J. Wood, organist of Exeter Cathedral, and a public tea was held on the lawn in front of the Vicarage.



## The Bells of Lamerton

Geoffrey C. Hill

Little is known about the bells of St Peter's Church, Lamerton prior to the devastating fire of 1877. However, the tower is the oldest part of the church and has been dated from Edward III's reign (1312 - 1377), the rest of the church being from Henry VII's (1457 - 1509).

The tower window shows the old decorated style, which confirms the earlier date and, because of the importance of Lamerton in earlier times, one assumes that the tower has always had bells.

The bells could well have been made by Exeter Foundry which thrived under a series of different owners for a long period. One can only speculate over which owner was responsible for casting Lamerton's early bells. However, Robert Norton cast the beautifully inscribed tenor bell at All Saints', Dunterton - so perhaps his work was evident at Lamerton too.

The later bells could well have been cast by the famous Pennington family of nearby Stoke Climsland. The Penningtons had a profound influence on bell ringing in the west country; countless churches in Devon and Cornwall commissioned their work, particularly in the latter half of the 18th century. Many still possess their bells today. Milton Abbot has a complete ring of six, and the five heaviest bells at Sydenham Damerel were also cast by them in 1779.

By the mid 1850s the six bells at Lamerton were in a bad state of repair. One of the clappers needed attention and the tenor bell was cracked.

However, a new set of bell ropes was supplied during this time, which suggests that the tower boasted an active team.

By 1870 the bells were badly in need of restoration and an estimate for their repair was obtained from Messrs. Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel, London (they having cast a clock bell for Christ Church,



Brentor only a few years before) who agreed to do the work for £336.

The restoration of Lamerton Church in 1876 cost £1,369 3s. 9d. Just over £100 was left over and, as this fell short of Mears and Stainbank's estimate, the project of restoring the bells was shelved. A disappointment for the ringers but one which turned into a blessing.

On the evening of Monday 19 November, 1877 the church was destroyed by fire. The flames consumed the historic ring of bells and a beautiful stained glass window in the tower which had been given by Mr Reginald Gill in memory of his mother. The latter had only been in place since Whitsun of that year. So intense was the heat that the bells melted in position and bell metal could be seen streaming down the tower.

The tower had acted like a huge flue which was accentuated when the north door of the church was opened. This had been done to allow the diverted leat, from the meadow adjoining the church, to flow directly into the burning edifice but sadly nothing could be done to assuage the raging inferno.



## The New Bells

The whole village was devastated at the loss of their Parish Church but, determination being strong, fund raising began immediately and the response was tremendous.

The bells project, having being shelved in the previous restoration, was now given first priority. The diocesan advisor on bells and belfries was asked to visit the church. On the first Saturday in February 1878 Mr William Bannister of Devonport came to Lamerton. On his advice estimates were obtained from Messrs. Mears and Stainbank, John Taylor and Co. of Loughborough and John Warner and Sons of Cripplegate, London. John Warner and Sons were the leaders in their field and possibly the firm favoured by Mr Bannister. Warners' estimate for casting and hanging the bells was £500 and the contract was subsequently given to them.

Some of the old metal was salvaged from the debris and this, together with the old tenor bell (which had fallen without melting) was sent up to London and re-used in the casting of the new ring.

On the new tenor bell they placed the suitable latin inscription, "*E FLAMMA RESURGIMUS*", (we rise again from the flames), and, on the other side, the names of Mr T. Roskilly and Mr J. Ellis, (the church wardens) with the date, 1878. The other five bells all bear the founder's name and the date around the crown. The measurements of the bells, together with their notes and weights are:—

	INCHES	NOTE	WEIGHT (cwt/qtrs/lbs)
Treble	28	E	5.0.3
2nd	30	D	5.3.16
3rd	32	C	6.3.3
4th	34	B	7.2.24
5th	36	A	8.1.18
Tenor	39	G	11.1.26

The bells were hung at a height of some 60 feet from the ground in a belfry measuring 11.5 feet by 10 feet. The work of hanging them was carried out by Mr S. Hill who was sent down especially for the job by Warners.

The work completed, the new bells were inaugurated during the harvest festival service in the autumn of 1878. The day's proceedings commenced with the Lamerton ringers:— Messrs. S. Sly, E. Sly, W. Burrows, H. Brown, G. Rowland and J. Stacey. The service was held in the ruins of the church by the vicar of Lamerton, Rev. Henry J. Phillpotts and assisted by the Rector of Lifton, the Rev. W.W. Martyn. Also invited were Mr Bannister and the experienced bell ringing team from Devonport who rang an excellent course of "Gransire Doubles" after the service. The ringers were:— Messrs. Bannister, W. Travis, J. Baxter, J. Easterbrook, W. Ford and J. Taylor. Everyone was later entertained at a public tea in the schoolroom, during which the Devonport men rang handbells.

And so the bells remain today, rung regularly by a dedicated team of ringers — their efforts proclaiming that St. Peter's is very much alive in it's praise for God.