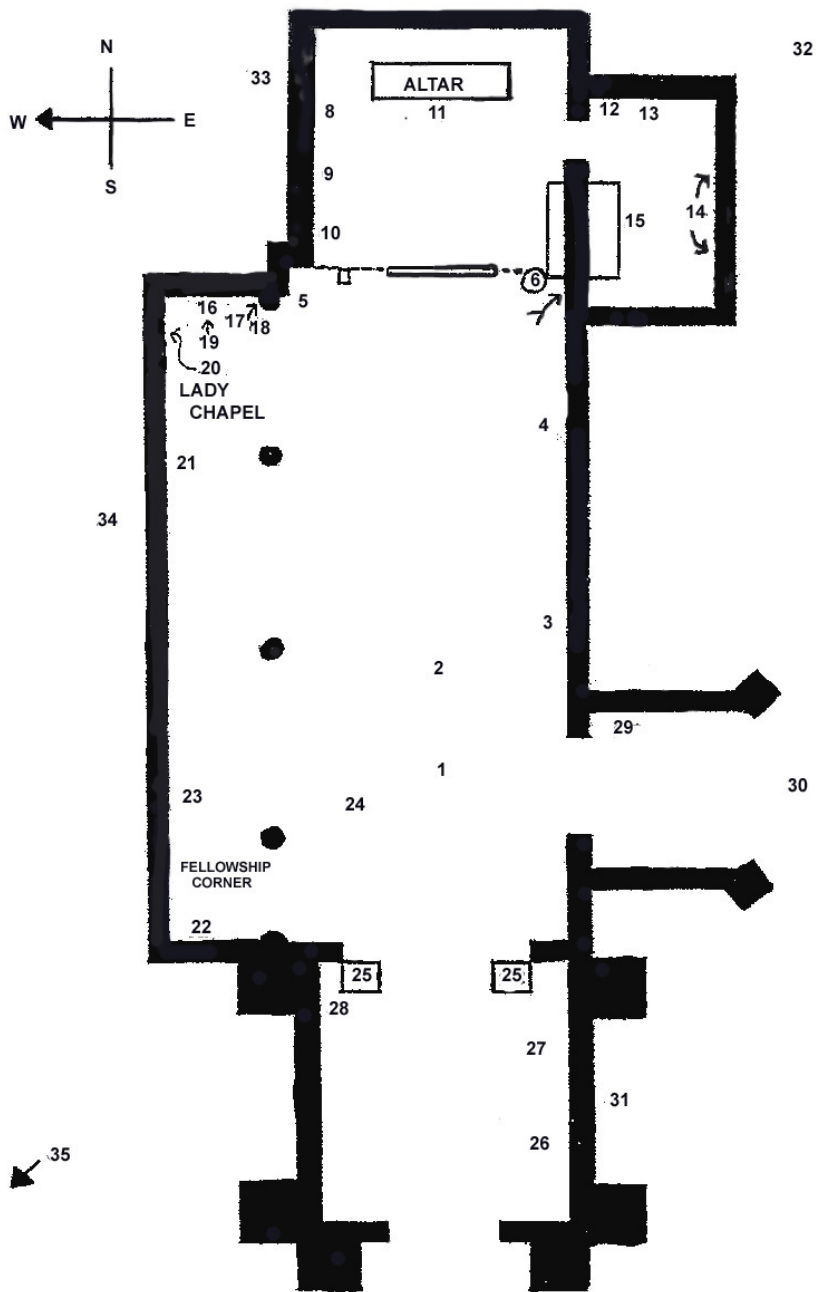


**St. Christopher's Church
Lympsham, Somerset**



A contribution towards the printing costs of this leaflet would be appreciated.
Thank you.

in The Parish of Three Saints



RECTORS OF LYMPSHAM

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|
| 1274 | Bartholomew de England | 1661 | Peter Cox |
| 1275 | Stephen de Sancto Georgio | 1695/6 | John Gardiner |
| 1275/6 | John de Harderne | 1710/1 | John Mead |
| 1309 | Edmund de London | 1717 | John Taylour |
| 1321 | Richard de Thistledon | 1737/8 | Bertie Henley |
| 1324 | William Coude | 1741/2 | Samuel Steer |
| 1336 | Robert Trippe | 1744/5 | James Upton |
| 1393/4 | John Ergham | 1750/1 | John Coles |
| 1397/8 | William Staunton | 1785 | Francis Parsons |
| 1402/3 | John Parys | 1798 | Robert Carr |
| 1436 | John Storthwayt | 1804 | John King |
| 1451/2 | Hugh Sugar | 1809 | Joseph Adam Stephenson |
| 1489 | William Bokett | 1837 | William Rowley |
| 1500 | Thomas Gilbert | 1844 | Joseph Henry Stephenson |
| 1503 | William Wylton Bulloke | 1901 | Herbert Stephenson |
| 1526 | Thomas Evesham | 1912 | John Whish |
| | Philip Tylne | 1939 | Herbert Evans |
| 1564 | Arthur Collyns | 1950 | Thomas Ford |
| 1603/4 | Benjamin Heydon | 1969/72 | Trevor Wright, Curate in Charge |
| 1607 | William Langton | 1972 | Arthur Bishop |
| 1616 | Elizaeus Snook | 1975 | William Tuckey |
| 1619 | William Sclater | 1982 | Jeremy Wells |
| 1627 | Hugh Halswell | 2000 | Martin Lee |
| | | 2009 | Simon Lewis |

If you have found this leaflet of interest and would like to support The Friends of St. Christopher's, the Rector and Churchwardens would appreciate hearing from you. Any fund raising ideas or offers of help would be warmly welcomed. Thank you.

THE ADVOWSON

The 'Patron' is the person with the right to 'present' a clergyman to the Bishop for appointment to a living. He has this right by virtue of being owner of the 'Advowson' of that living. Not surprisingly, the earliest recorded owner of the Lympsham Advowson was the Abbey and Convent of Glastonbury. This is clear from the appointment of John de Harderne in 1275/6.

The disposal of the advowson following the destruction of the Abbey in 1539 is uncertain. Lympsham was amongst the manors granted to Edward, Duke of Somerset, so it may have either passed to him or been at his disposal. The next certain record of the owner of the advowson is not until 1564. By that year, it belonged to Sir Christopher Kenn of Kenn, just south of Clevedon. Sir Christopher Kenn died in 1593. The advowson may then have passed to trustees, as the next presentation in 1603/4 was by Sir Nicholas Stallinge Kt on behalf of John Stocker of Chilcompton and George Upton.

By the next presentation in 1607, the Kenn family's ownership is re-established, for William Langton was presented as Rector by James I on behalf of the minor, Elizabeth Kenn. Elizabeth Kenn was the daughter and heir of Sir Christopher Kenn and married Sir John Poulet (or Powlett) of Hinton St. George in 1613. Elizabeth Kenn is recorded as having been so impressed by the piety of William Sclater that she presented him to the living of Lympsham in 1619.

The advowson remained in the Poulet family for over 200 years for it did not change hands again until Joseph Adam Stephenson was presented in 1809 by the fourth Earl Poulet. The Earl died in 1819 and it seems likely that Joseph Adam Stephenson bought the advowson between 1809 and 1819.

In 1834, Joseph Henry Stephenson inherited the advowson from his father and, in 1901, his eldest son, Henry S.G. Stephenson, inherited it from Joseph Henry. H.S.G. Stephenson was ill when the living next fell vacant, so King George V made the presentation in 1912.

H.S.G. Stephenson died in 1933 and his son, Bertram H.S. Stephenson, inherited the advowson. He may have sold it to Frederick James Stephens of Gerrards Cross, for it was he who made the presentation in 1939. Frederick James Stephens still owned the advowson in 1950, but there is no record of when it changed hands after that date, only that, by 1972, the advowson had passed to the present owner, the Reverend Professor Frederick James Stephens Evans.

Legislation passed in 1924 means that the advowson can now no longer be sold. Since 1st. November 1984, Lympsham has been in the United Benefice with Brent Knoll and East Brent. The Patron is now the Archdeacon of Wells (1st Turn) and the Bishop of Bath and Wells (2nd. & 3rd. Turns).

HISTORY

Lympsham, or Lymplesham as it used to be, was given by the Saxon King Ine to the Abbot of Glastonbury in 690 AD. The parish remained one of the Glastonbury Abbey Estates from that date until the Abbey was destroyed in 1539.

As the property of an ecclesiastical establishment, there must have been a place of worship used by abbots when they visited to check their crops and their tenants' souls. Despite this early reference, the earliest reference to the Church is not until 1235. In that year, the abbot made a survey of the Abbey Estates and listed the animals which the Church was permitted to herd with the Abbey Stock.

The earliest traced reference to a Rector of Lympsham was not until 40 years later: on 24th. September 1274 Edward I appointed Bartholomew de England, Rector of Lympsham. The appointment was made by the King because the Patron (the Abbot and Convent) had failed to recommend anyone to the bishop for appointment to the living of Lympsham when it fell vacant. So there was certainly a Rector of Lympsham before 1274.

The Rector of Lympsham has been appointed by the monarch on four occasions: again, for the same reason in 1275; by James I in 1607 when the patron was a minor; and by George V in 1912 when the patron was ill. A list of Rectors and Patrons is given at the end of this booklet.

There is no record of when the Church was built, but the bold mouldings on the capitals (heads) of the pillars separating the nave from the north aisle suggest a date of around 1400 AD. There is no doubt, however, that there was an earlier building on this site, possibly north of the north aisle, the north wall of the present Church being the south wall of the original building.

The Church has been extensively restored, principally through the generosity of the Stephenson family. It was restored in 1820 by Joseph Adam Stephenson (Rector 1809 to 1839); by his son Joseph Henry Stephenson on several occasions during his rectorship (1844-1901); and finally his grandson, Edmund Herbert Stephenson (Rector 1901– 1912) in 1909. The three Stephensons were Rectors of Lympsham for 97 years between 1809 and 1912. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Stephensons left their mark, not only on the parish, but, as we shall see, especially on St. Christopher's Church.

The numbers in brackets in the following description of the Church refer to the corresponding numbers on the plan on the inside of the front cover.

THE CHURCH

Stand in the nave (1) opposite the south porch (where you came in) facing the altar. Now take a look around. Immediately in front of you is a fine brass chandelier (2), the work of John Bayley of Bridgwater, and dated 1744. It was bought in 1901 in memory of Joseph Henry Stephenson and is reputed to be inscribed to that effect.

Look up and see the fine waggon roof, so common to West Country churches and so called because it resembles the framework which supports the canvas of a covered waggon. Not so common are the texts around the walls and over the arches forming part of the carefully preserved Victorian décor.

To your right on the south wall are two memorial tablets (3 & 4); the nearest one (3) and another to the left of the lectern (5) were, until 1984, the only two memorials in the Church to persons other than the Stephenson family. There are now several others in the recently and tastefully restored clear glass windows on the north and south walls and the west wall of the south aisle.

THE PEWS

Now walk up the nave past the carved oak pews. These were a gift from Joseph Henry Stephenson in 1894, costing £965 and originally seating 340 persons. Note the variations in design of the pew ends.

THE PULPIT & ROOD STAIR

Instead of going up the chancel steps, turn right to admire the pulpit (6), carved by Thomas Cox of Lympsham in 1845. Thomas Cox, a carpenter by trade, was born in 1823 and was Bailiff and life-long friend of Joseph Henry Stephenson.

On the south side of the pulpit, inscribed 'Thomas Cox 1845', note the Rood Stairs (7) in the south wall beside the pulpit. This means that there was once a screen, probably of carved wood, beneath the chancel arch separating the nave from the chancel.

THE CHANCEL

Now return to the foot of the chancel steps and enjoy the finely plastered ogee roof, shaped like an upturned rowing boat. The chancel was extensively restored in 1909 in memory of Joseph Henry Stephenson with funds collected locally by his son, and Rector, Edmund Herbert Stephenson.

LYMPSHAM VILLAGE

Now you have seen the Church, spare a moment for the Village.

If you leave the churchyard by the west gate, opposite the Manor, pause to note the pinnacled and turreted Manor House rebuilt by Joseph Adam Stephenson around 1820. Walk down the road away from the Church to the present school (Lympsham First School) fronted by the Manor Hall built in 1875 by Joseph Henry Stephenson.

The Manor Hall was built in the same Gothic style as are many other cottages built by our benefactor between 1863 and 1895. Their building was supervised by his bailiff, Thomas Cox, who made the pulpit. The Stephenson Cottages can be recognised both by their style and, in most cases, the Old English 'S' over the porch. It is worth walking round the building (outside of school time) and noting the several coats of arms and other decorative architectural features.

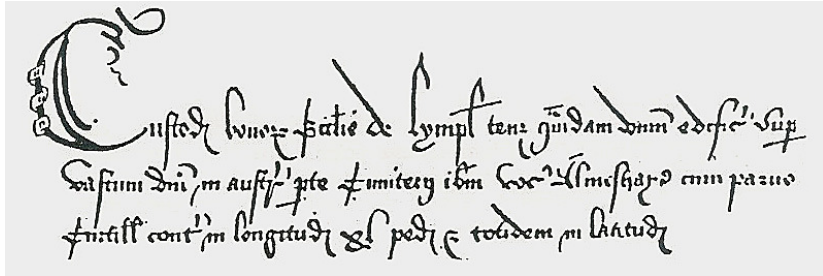
If you leave the churchyard by the kissing gate in the south east corner, you will be in front of a typical 'Stephenson Cottage' which stands almost on the site of the original village school, built in 1820.

Walking away from the Church, the next house in the road is the Old Forge. Over the large Gothic arched doorway decorated with horseshoes, is a stone tablet. It is inscribed 'Lympsham Parish Stables' and was built by Joseph Henry Stephenson to stable the horses of those attending his services. Next door, Lympsham House, used to be the village store which, with the forge, is one of the older buildings in the parish, both probably little changed since they were built. Opposite is a stone monolith, originally designed as a gate post to the Manor but used to support a gas light: it now serves as decoration only.



THE CHURCHYARD

The older stones are now to the east and the north of the Church, although we know from the Glastonbury Abbot's Survey of 1515/6 that the cemetery was originally south of the Church. The following is a facsimile of the original record made by the Abbot's surveyor:



From Egerton MS 3034 reproduced with permission of the British Library.

The translation reads:

'The Wardens of the good church of Lymplesham hold a huge building of the Lord from the same Landlord. On the south side of the same place is a cemetery, called Almeshaye, with a small yard adjacent 12 paces long and of the same width.'

The Stephensons are buried along the south east boundary near the kissing gate (32); somewhere, probably east of the Church, is the grave of Captain Rogers. He rescued the shipwrecked Alexander Selkirk, who later drew on his experiences to write 'Robinson Crusoe'.

Walk round the east end of the Church and then along the north wall. Note the walled-up windows in the north of the chancel wall, apparently discovered in 1931 (33). Further along the north wall, about the middle of the aisle, is a walled-up doorway (34); this may be evidence of an earlier Church having an entrance in the north wall.

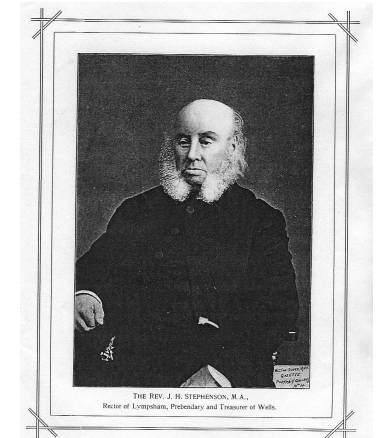
Before you leave the churchyard, walk over to the far north west corner (35) and read of the tragedy which struck the Stone family over 100 years ago. Four children aged 3, 5, 7 and 9 years died of diphtheria between 10th. November and 24th. December 1880: a reminder of how fortunate we are today.

Note the corbels on the north and south walls of the chancel which are believed to be faces of Edmund Herbert Stephenson and his wife.

The memorials on the north wall are:

- nearest the altar (8): to Elizabeth Stephenson, nee Gurdon, wife of Joseph Adam Stephenson;
- in the middle (9): to Elizabeth Stevenson, nee Cheyney, wife of Rev. Christopher Stephenson;
- and Elizabeth Stephenson, sister of Joseph Adam Stephenson.

The memorial nearest the lectern (10) is to Joseph Henry Stephenson and contains details of the many offices he held.



**Portraits of Joseph Henry Stephenson
Rector and Parish Benefactor 1844 – 1901**

THE EAST WINDOW

Pause before the altar to admire the fine east window (11 which depicts the theme 'Suffer Little Children' and is another Stephenson gift; the faces of the saints are those of members of the Stephenson family. The window is by O'Connor, dated 1803, and is inscribed 'In memory of George Jenkins Dodgson who died in Burdwan, East India.' The reference has not been traced.

THE VESTRY

This is now locked: the door was fitted in memory of Bill Torrington. Inside the vestry is a portrait of Joseph Henry Stephenson and opposite is one of the four tablets (12) which are in memory of the Stephensons' more remote forebears, the Stillingtons. The tablets are in fact genealogical recitations which explain the Stephensons' collateral relationship to the Stillingtons, from whom they inherited their fortune. The Stephenson Coat of Arms is depicted in stone (13).

The windows in the vestry (14) are to saints whose names coincided with those of the Stephenson family. On the back of the organ (15) is a list of the Rectors of Lympsham.

THE NORTH AISLE

Now go back to the chancel, down the steps and turn right past the lectern into the east end of the north aisle. On the east wall of the north aisle is a stone cross (16) of unknown, though undoubtedly ancient, origin.

Below and to the right is a restored piscina (17). It looks like a small stone washing bowl and this is precisely what it was and, with a drain to the outside, it was used for washing the chalice. Just to the right of the piscina is a walled up hagioscope or squint (18). There was once an opening cut through the chancel wall so that worshippers at the east end of the north aisle could have a 'squint' at the altar. You should, from this description, be able to work out where the opening used to be.

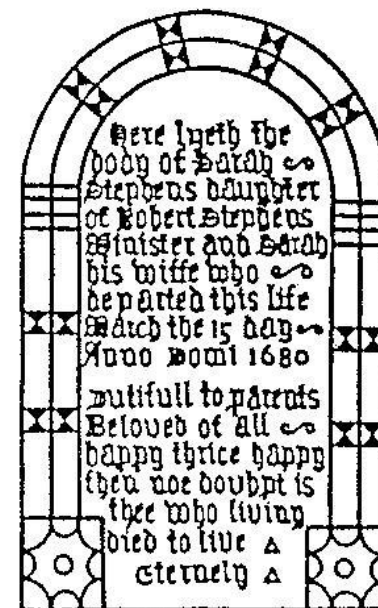
Above the stone cross is a window dated 1893 (19) dedicated to the memory of Catherine Emma Mary Stephenson, Joseph Henry Stephenson's fourth child, who died in 1890. Adjacent on the north wall is her memorial tablet (20).

In 1992, this area was converted to a Lady Chapel; the altar was made by Mr. Rowland Maltby from the ends of pews removed at a much earlier date. The altar rail and kneeler were generously donated by the Lympsham Methodist Chapel, when sadly this closed down.

Now look west down the north aisle and note the finely panelled roof which was part of the restoration of the aisle in 1845. The Latin inscription on the brass tablet in the niche in the north wall (21) records how the aisle was restored and renovated in 1845 by Joseph Henry Stephenson with the help of many inhabitants. Before restoration of the aisle, this niche is said to have been a recess for a seat reserved for the Abbot of Glastonbury on his visits to Lympsham.

THE SOUTH PORCH

As you leave the Church by the south porch, spare a moment for the old gravestone behind the door, in memory of Sarah Stevens (29). Dated 1680, it is the oldest memorial in the Church and was, until recently, propped against the outside of the vestry. It is so well preserved that it must have spent most of its 300 plus years protected from the elements. It was probably moved outside of the Church (the chancel perhaps) during one of the restorations. The wording is unusual, see if you can make it out.



As you leave the porch, look up over the entrance at the sundial made by John King of Bristol and bought in 1839 at the cost of four guineas (30). Sundials were indispensable before the days of radio as a means of putting clocks right.

Also step further back and see if you can distinguish the date on the walled-up windows of the second stage (31) of the south face.

THE BELLS

The third stage of the tower is the Belfry. The St. Christopher's Peal originally consisted of five bells and, until 1864, four of them were dated 1696, 1734, 1794 and 1825 with the fifth undated. These five were recast at Joseph Henry Stephenson's expense by George Mears and Co. in 1864. The sixth, the treble, was added in 1878 and in the belfry it is perched on top of the other five. Its position is recognised by the inscription which reads:

'The Rector placed me here on high,
That we might sound with fuller cry,
And sing above the Heavenly Host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.'

The Rector was, of course, Joseph Henry Stephenson.

Until 1990, the bells were at the top of the tower; then, to relieve stress on the building, they were lowered to the third stage of the tower and rededicated in 1990 (28).

THE CHURCH PLATE

A plain silver dish 8.5 inches in diameter, inscribed 'RH, WM, CW (Churchwardens) 1742.

A silver flagon hallmarked 1773. Churchwardens' accounts for 1778 record the payment of the balance of the cost of a new silver flagon which could not be raised by subscription.

An Elizabethan chalice 7.5 inches high and hall-marked 1577

(The above three items are kept in bank vaults for safety.)

A new chalice presented in 1943 in memory of George Thomas Collings and his wife, Augusta Collings.

A further chalice has been given recently for use at weekday services.

Look down the aisle from here and admire the window on the west wall, noting the two roundels (22) of uncertain date. On the right is St. Christopher and on the left a church on a rock. See also the capitals (the heads) of the pillars or shafts separating the aisle from the nave. As mentioned before, it is the design of these which sets their date around 1400.

Walk on down the aisle to the war memorial (23). Above it is the diamond shaped hatchment of the Stephenson coat of arms. In 1992 this area was altered to provide a Fellowship Corner which is widely used.

THE FONT

Now return to where you started, past the ancient tub font, decorated with Norman zigzag work (24).

For centuries local children have been baptised in this font and, for as long as people can remember, it has 'sat' towards the back of the Church near the choir vestry.

Many years ago a metal band was fixed around the limestone bowl and gradually, over time, this band rusted and contracted, resulting in the bowl developing cracks.

In 2009 a survey was commissioned and repairs were planned, but when the metal band was removed in the stonemason's workshop, there were disastrous consequences!

Following research, it was discovered that the font is Norman, dating from the mid to late twelfth century: when Henry II, father of Richard the Lionheart, ruled over England and when Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered.

The font is believed to be one of only two surviving fonts of this kind in the country. Therefore, as it was not only a key part of Lympsham's heritage, but also an important, historical artefact, an appeal was launched in 2010 to raise the sum necessary to restore and preserve the ancient font.

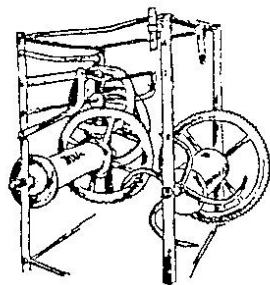


Despite over £5,000 being required, the generosity of Parishioners and visitors has enabled the font to be returned 'home' in one piece and is now back 'in use.'

THE SINGING GALLERY

Standing in the nave (1) with your back to the altar, note the singing gallery. At the vestry meeting (meeting of Church ratepayers) held on 29th. October, 1791, it was resolved to erect a singing gallery and meet the cost from the Church rates. In the Churchwardens' accounts, the cost was recorded as thirty guineas. This original gallery was enlarged in 1836 and the occasion is recorded on the west rail of the gallery, seen from inside the tower. The Churchwardens' names at the time were Robert Petheran and Christopher Gurdon Stephenson. The latter died the same year, aged only 23, the elder son of Joseph Adam Stephenson. Below the gallery are the Churchwardens' seats (25) raised so that they can keep an eye on the congregation.

The old clock frame in the gallery is most interesting and is probably one of the thirty or so oldest remaining clocks in England. The clock was probably originally made as a field gate clock dating from the early 1600s and later (late 17th. Century or early 18th. Century) converted to a Turret Clock.



THE TOWER

Doors to the vestry and tower are kept locked for safety reasons. On the south wall is a memorial tablet to Joseph Adam Stephenson (26) and also a wooden tablet (27). It is dated 1727 and records the Church charities existing at that time.

In November 1991, the west doors were renovated and new interior doors fitted in the memory of Bert Bray, Churchwarden. The door to the upper stages of the tower is locked for safety and security reasons. There are four stages: the first is the ground floor or choir vestry; the second is the ringing chamber; the third is the belfry and the fourth is the clock room.

The tower is 88 feet high and is some 2 feet 3 inches out of perpendicular and has been so for centuries. Tradition has it that work to arrest the lean was funded by Charles I in 1633. The date (28) is faintly discernible on the walled-in windows of the second stage on the outside of the south wall of the tower.

There is no record of when the tower was built, though recent research dates it at about 1421.

THE CLOCK

The Clock Room houses the clock now in use. The present clock is dated 1849 and was made by Thomas Hale and Co. of Bristol. Reference to the accounts shows that until 1846 there were bills for the repair of the old clock almost every year since 1752. There are, however, no references to repairs in 1847, 1848 or 1849, so it is likely that the old clock was out of order for three years before being replaced in 1850.

The cost of the clock was £60 and, as there is no entry in the Churchwardens' accounts, it seems likely that the supposition that it was the gift of Joseph Henry Stephenson is correct.

In May 1991, the clock was motorised in memory of John Powles by Kenneth Woodley CMBHI of Newton Poppleford, Devon.