

St Peter's Church, Port Isaac

Things are very different today to the early days in the life of St Peter's Church. Even though it is the only place of worship in the village today, it is home to only a small congregation. However, this small village Church does hold a special place in the hearts of many local people and the village is friendly and supportive of the Church and its work.

The Church of St Peter was built as a Chapel-of-Ease in the Parish of St Endellion in 1884 at a cost of £1771. However, the incumbents of Endellion took little interest in the needs of Port Isaac. It wasn't until two years after the creation of the new Diocese of Truro in 1877 when the then rector of Endellion, William Hocken, died that the Bishop, Frederick Benson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, took a personal interest in the pastoral provision for Port Isaac. He sent a newly ordained Deacon, Frank Carter, to provide services in the village.

Within a week of arriving Carter was holding services in the then Lifeboat House on Fore Street. In a memoir contributed to Thomas Taylor's history of St Endellion in 1929, Carter commented, "It was, I suppose, the first time for an indefinite period that the message of the Gospel had been preached to these people in the name of the Church of England." This reveals all too clearly that, ignored by the established Church, Port Isaac had for more than a century been prominent in the Methodist revival, amply fulfilling John Wesley's description of it as "the liveliest place in the circuit".

Carter extended his work to Port Gaverne and Port Quin and when a new Rector of Endellion was appointed in 1880 he was allowed to continue this work. Financial support was secured by his appointment to one of the vacant Prebends at Endellion. This enabled Carter to arrange for the appointment of an assistant, Mr Bree who looked after Port Isaac whilst Carter extended his missionary activity further afield, starting a beach mission at Polzeath.

In 1884 Carter moved to become Canon Missioner in the wider Diocese. His successor as Prebendary at Endellion was Arthur Palmes, the Vicar of Bodmin. Palmes continued supporting the work of a curate in Port Isaac and a succession of assistant curates of Bodmin served, in effect, as curates of Port Isaac during the period up until 1913.



St Peter's Church being built in 1882 - note the five windows at the front that were replaced by just three windows in 1932

Photo courtesy Liz Brown

St Peter's as a Chapel

Meanwhile work started on the provision of a dedicated building for worship in Port Isaac. Bishop Benson had encouraged contributions towards such a venture in 1881 in the course of a sermon preached at Endellion. Building started in 1882 and the Church was dedicated on August 5th 1884 by Benson's successor, Bishop Wilkinson. The total cost was £14,000 and the building materials were granite and stone and the style adopted was Early English. The Church had a chancel, nave, north porch and a turret containing one bell.

Originally the west end wall was constructed with five lancet windows. By 1932 the condition of this wall was so dangerous because of subsidence caused by an old mine digging at the junction of Trewetha Lane and Back Lane, traditionally known as Mine Pit Corner, that it had to be taken down. When rebuilt the west end contained the present three windows instead of the original five.

The earliest service book still in existence for St Peter's begins in 1888 with the coming of a new Curate, Ernest Drewe, Bree's successor. Two regular services were held at 11.00am and 6.00pm every Sunday with an occasional afternoon service. The new rector, RH Treffry, occasionally appeared as a preacher but in the main left things to be run by the Curates who were technically assistants to the Vicar of Bodmin.

The new Parish

In 1913, Port Isaac gained its first Vicar and became a Parish Church (though more recently it has returned to St Endellion Parish).

The creation of a new Parish was a relatively rare event: only two new parishes were created in Truro diocese during the twentieth century, Port Isaac and Newquay. The most important requirement was a permanent endowment to pay the new incumbent. At Port Isaac this was provided through the generosity of Arthur Palmes, by this time the Vicar of Lustleigh in Devon but still a Prebendary of St Endellion. With the consent of the patron, Athelstan Riley, Palmes granted away the tithe income of his Prebend as an endowment for the new Parish.

The first Vicar, William Turnavine Martyn, was appointed in 1913. Martyn spent the rest of his life in Port Isaac until his retirement in 1937 and then as an assistant to his successors. The diocese purchased a property, then known as Tresythcarne, as a vicarage in 1919 at a cost of £700. This property survives as Castle Rock View, on the coast path.

The New Parish Church

St Peter's, now the Church of its own Parish, rather than a Chapel within Endellion, received the embellishment of stained glass for its East window soon after Martyn arrived as Vicar. The Misses Regnart presented two new window lights in memory of their brother and sister, Sir Horatio and Cornelia Regnart who had both died in 1912. These memorial lights flank the central image of the Crucifixion. The central glass is of superior workmanship but its origins, which perhaps go back to the building of the church in the 1880s, are obscure.

Few of William Martyn's successors as Vicars stayed long in Port Isaac, an exception being Mr Townend, appointed priest-in-charge in 1955, who served until his retirement in 1973. In anticipation of his appointment the existing vicarage was sold and another house, Sudbrooke House (now called The Old Vicarage) in Trewetha Lane bought instead. In 1984 Port Isaac was again re-united with Endellion (and St Kew) in a new United Benefice with Peter Fryer, a Rector, living at Endellion and in 2007 these three parishes joined together with St Minver in a new Cluster of North Cornwall Churches.



Vicars and Priests-in-charge of St Peter's, Port Isaac

William Turnavine Martyn 1913-1937
 C W Stenson-Stenson 1937-1945
 W Atterbury Thomas 1946-1950
 F B Soady 1951-1953
 N A F Townend 1955-1973
 Clarence Simpson 1974-1977
 F J W Maddock 1978-1979
 Paul Foot 1980-1983

Rectors of United Benefice

Peter Fryer 1984-1990
 Michael Bartlett 1991-2006

Priest-in-Charge of North Cornwall Cluster

John May 2007-

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