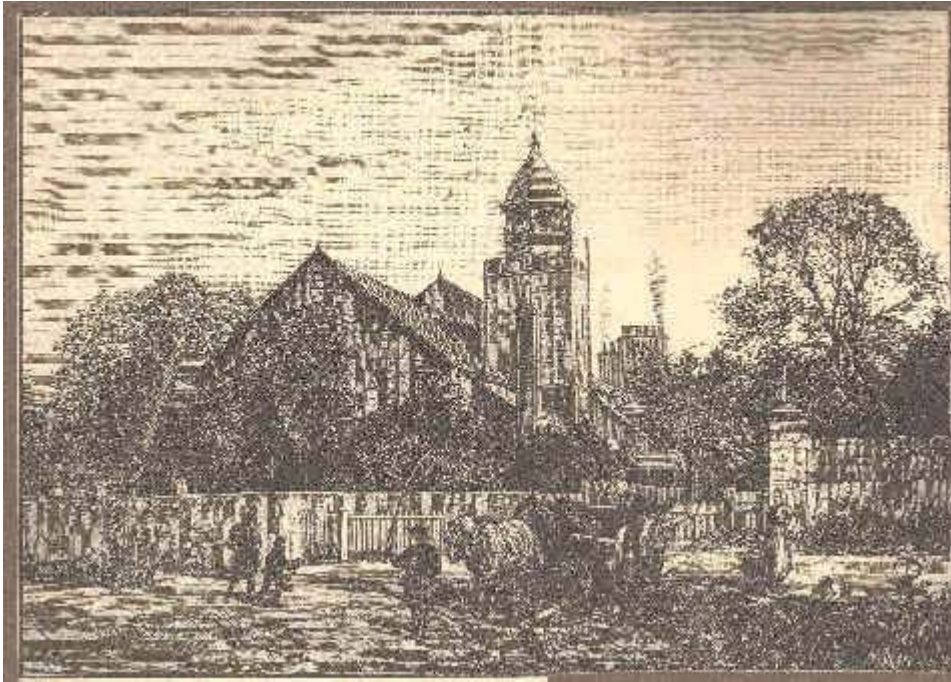


St Peter's Church, Petersham



The earliest record of the village is in 666AD when certain lands were endowed to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter's at Chertsey. The name Petersham is not derived for St. Peter as, in Saxon times, it was called Piterichesham which means a home or enclosure of Patricius or Patrick. But the name Petersham was in common use by the 16th century.

It is probable that there has been a church on this site since Saxon times as the 1086 Domesday Survey entry for Petersham suggests by its phraseology that the church there then had been restored. In 1266 a Norman church was built of which only part of the chancel is left and the oldest visible portion of the church today is the blocked 13th century lancet window in the chancel, which can be seen from outside the church. In 1505 the body of the church was rebuilt – except for the chancel - and possibly enlarged so that the building became rectangular in shape and measured 15ft.6ins. by 43ft. Small transepts and a north gallery were added in around 1600.

Early in the 17th century, north and south transepts were added along with the tower at the west end which is of red brick. The gallery in the north transept was added shortly afterwards. In 1790 the west porch and vestry were added and the upper half of the tower rebuilt. The music gallery at the west end was probably erected about 1800.

More major alterations took place in 1840 when the south transept was enlarged to its present size and its galleries put in. The enclosed staircase against the west wall was built and many other repairs and alterations carried out. These alterations included new pews and, with the rearrangement of the old ones, 362 sittings were provided. St. Peter's had now reached its present shape – an irregular cruciform measuring internally from north to south 62ft and east to west about 38ft.

In 1874 the chancel was completely refurbished under the direction of John Gilbert Scott (son of the ecclesiastical architect Sir Gilbert Scott) whose residence was the Manor

House, Ham and who had, the previous year, proposed a plan for the structural improvement of the chancel but the parishioners had turned it down. A chancel screen was erected in 1899, but was removed in 1972 along with 2 box pews that obscured the altar.

The font dates from 1740; the pulpit was made locally, by carpenter John Long, in 1796 and the reading desk is probably of the same date. The Royal Arms under the chancel arch are of George III from 1810. The adjacent shields, of local work, were placed there on 1898 and represent, from left to right, the keys of St. Peter, the arms of the diocese of Canterbury and those of the diocese of Rochester. The arms on the east wall of the north transept those of the Earls of Dysart who were the owners of nearby Ham House. The present organ was purchased in 1914. One of its predecessors, from 1838-53, had been a barrel organ which provided hymn tunes. The lower part of the present tower probably dates from 1505 and in the wooden belfry there is a bell which bears the inscription "Bryan Eldridge made mee" and the date "1620", when it was cast at Chertsey.

The unique feature of St. Peter's are the Georgian box pews. Few now survive in churches and none so close to London. A fee used to be charged for each family pew, but there were not enough to seat all the members of the parish and one vicar in Georgian times noted that parishioners were 'constantly complaining of the injustice of their being obliged to contribute to the Church rates, without the power of obtaining a sitting in the Church.'

The church sustained some damage in the Second World War and restoration work was carried out during 1949-51. The city of Vancouver, British Columbia, gave a substantial amount towards the cost of the repairs.

The churchyard was originally much smaller than it is today, having been enlarged eastwards in 1801 and northwards by 2 strips of land - firstly in 1867 and again in 1919. Its oldest headstone is that of Mary Karze, 1686.

St. Peter's has strong associations with many famous and interesting people in the past, some of whom are mentioned below.

Mystery surrounds the supposed marriage at Petersham in 1664 of Prince Rupert of the Rhine, cousin of Charles II. His supposed wife was Lady Francesca Bard, mother of his son Dudley Bard who was born c.1666. A document exists which seems to be their marriage certificate, signed by the then minister of Petersham, and Lady Francesca often claimed that they had been married. Unfortunately the parish registers are incomplete and the true story will probably never be known.

1718 saw the marriage of Lady Jane Hyde, the daughter of the Earl of Rochester. She was a great beauty and was written about by Swift, Gay and Pope amongst others. Her portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller hangs among the "Beauties" at Hampton Court Palace.

A marriage, with royal connections, which certainly took place was that between the future Earl of Strathmore and Nina Cavendish-Bentinck of Forbes House, Ham Common on 16th July 1881. The youngest daughter of this marriage, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, married the Duke of York in 1923 and became Queen Elizabeth in 1936 when he succeeded to the throne as King George VI.

People Buried or Commemorated in the Church/Churchyard

Mary Berry (1763-1852) and Agnes Berry (1764-1852)

These unmarried sisters were friends and correspondents of the author and diarist Horace Walpole, who left them Little Strawberry Hill, in his will. They lived at Devonshire Lodge, Petersham and are buried in the churchyard. Mary Berry was a gifted authoress and editor.

Mary Burdekin (d. 1772)

A pastry-cook with a shop in Hill Street, Richmond. She is said to be the original maker of Maids of Honour pastries. She is buried in the churchyard.

George Cole and his family are commemorated in the monument in the chancel erected in 1624. He was a barrister and a member of the Middle Temple. He married his wife Frances at St. Peter's in 1585. The family vault is under the chancel.

Theodora Jane Cowper (d.1824)

The cousin of the poet William Cowper. They had a great love for each other, but her father would not allow their marriage because of their close relationship. Cowper addressed her in his poems as "Delia". Her grave is in the churchyard.

Sir John Whittaker Ellis (1829-1912)

Sir John is buried in the churchyard and has a plaque in the north chancel. He was Lord Mayor of London 1881-2 and the first mayor of the Borough of Richmond 1890-1. He lived at Buccleuch House, Petersham from 1887-1901.

Sir Thomas Jenner (1637-1707)

He was made Recorder of London in 1683 and Justice of the Common Places 1706-7. He had been a staunch supporter of the Catholic King James II and his career suffered under his Protestant successors. He died at his home, Montrose House, Petersham and is buried in the churchyard. There is also a plaque to him on the chancel wall.

Elizabeth, Duchess of Lauderdale (d.1698)

A clever and ambitious woman, she was Countess of Dysart in her own right, having succeeded her father, William Murray, the owner of Ham House. She married Lauderdale at Petersham in 1672. He was a member of the notorious Cabal ministry of Charles II and amongst his titles was the one of Baron Petersham. She is buried with other members of the Dysart family in a vault under the chancel.

Captain George Vancouver (1758-1798)

The famous maritime explorer is buried in the churchyard and has a memorial tablet in the church. He sailed with Captain Cook to Antarctica and was with him on his last fatal voyage to the Pacific. He discovered Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. He wrote his **Voyage of Discovery** when lodging in the village at, it is thought, The Glen, a cottage in River Lane, Petersham.

Further reading

- Cloake, John **Richmond past: a visual history of Richmond, Kew, Petersham and Ham.** 1991
- Dunbar, Janet **A prospect of Richmond.** Rev. edition 1979
- Mills, R.S. **Petersham people and stories: three talks reprinted from the Richmond Herald.** 1949
- Warren, Charles D. **History of St. Peter's Church, Petersham, Surrey.** 1938

More information on St Peter's Church and other places in Petersham is available from the Local Studies Collection.