

St Peters Church, Tawstock

This predominantly 14th-century church provided an excellent opportunity to follow up the lecture of Dr Clive Easter and see work of the monumental masons, the Jewells of Barnstable, commemorating the wealthy Wray and Bouchier family who owned the neighbouring Tawstock Court. The church also features extremely fine woodwork in the barrel vaulted ceilings, rood screen, choir screen, manorial pew, bench ends and gallery.

The early 16th-century chancel screens consist of tall narrow lights with tracery and an elaborately under-carved cornice decorated with an unusual black resin, but was not designed to carry a rood loft. In the spandrels of the doors are Renaissance-style profiles possibly from Franco-Flemish pattern books.

Perhaps the most striking piece was the large rectangular 16th-century canopied manorial pew decorated with carved knots: the emblem of the Bouchier family. A 19th century photograph shows the manorial pew abutted by rows of pews, however in its current isolation it looks particularly strange with similarities being drawn to beds of the period, in particular one viewed by some members at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (see *Newsletter* No. 61 pp. 11–23. Ed.).

The canopy is of segmental panels, carved and painted and supported in front by two carved pillars. Two walls are panelled, with a small door to the rear of one, (hence it has sometimes been referred to as a 'confessional'). A similar door can be seen in the Lulham family pew, Madley, Herefordshire. It has also been referred to as a reader's box and features a small reading shelf. Household accounts of Bouchier family survive and are published.

Another unusual survival is a 16th-century gallery, in the north transept. It may have been moved, having previously been a minstrel's or other gallery in another part of the church, or possibly from the original manor house. The sill is carved with a running floral design, and the rail is ornamented with carved paterae in two rows.

The church has a number of good 16th- and 17th-century bench ends typical of the area, and a very fine carved eagle lectern that may be one of a group in the area that Roderick and Valentine Butler are working on.

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