



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



ST ANTHONY'S CHURCH

St Anthony-in-Roseland,
Cornwall



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CONSERVATION TRUST

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St Anthony-in-Roseland, Cornwall

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by GEM Trinick

INTRODUCTION

Cornwall provides beautiful settings for many of its churches, and none more so than those which stand at the edge of tidal creeks: Mylor, St Just-in-Roseland, St Winnow, St Michael at Porthilly near Rock and the other St Anthony, St Anthony-in-Meneage. Yet from the road leading down to Place Quay, or from the St Mawes estuary, one does not see a church at St Anthony but rather the long white-painted house of Place, with stables and a cottage beside it. The house has a central carriage porch beneath a tall tower, which is itself topped by a spire which splays out at its base (known as a broach spire). The group of buildings forms an impressive ensemble and it is only at a second glance that one notices a taller spire, also of the broach variety, rising just behind the house and shadowed by the thick woodland which climbs high above it. The reason for this self-effacing position of the church, almost hidden behind – and subordinate to – the big house, lies in its long history.

*Front cover: Monument to Admiral
Thomas Spry, d.1828 (Boris Baggs)
Left: The chancel, looking east
(Boris Baggs)*

HISTORY

There may well have been a little chapel founded here by the Celtic missionaries who arrived from Brittany, and from Ireland, in the 7th century; and it is probable that soon after the Saxon King Athelstan's invasion of Cornwall, in the year AD 933, a small church had been built, for the Saxon diocese of Crediton certainly held land here. In 1043 the Bishop moved his seat from Crediton to Exeter, and thereafter the Bishop of Exeter ruled Cornwall, which became one of the diocese's several archdeaconries. The Bishop held a large estate in the Roseland peninsula, based at Tregear north of Gerrans, and a church may, as the Cornish historian Hals asserts, have been built at St Anthony by Bishop William Warelwart, c. 1124. However, the first written record of the church's existence occurs in a charter of King Henry II which records that, at some date between 1138 and 1155, Bishop Robert Chichester gave the parish of St Anthony (both its land and its tithes) to the Augustinian Priory of St Mary at Plympton in Devon, which stood at the head of the estuary of the River Plym. The church appears to have been dedicated to St Antoninus, King and Martyr, and the Prior of Plympton established a 'cell' there, a small daughter church of his Priory, initially with two 'black' canons.

A century passed with no further record until Bishop Walter Bronescombe, one of the greatest Bishops of Exeter, visiting his manor of Tregear nearby in October 1259, came thence to St Anthony and rededicated the church,



denominating it St Anthony-in-Roseland, Plympton Priory being recorded as patron of the living. From this modest start the little monastery appears to have grown slowly, being valued at £3 per annum in 1291; but 40 years later it suffered a setback when French pirates, landing at St Mawes, attacked the church and its domestic buildings. Bishop John Grandison authorised their full repair in 1338. What one sees today is essentially a cruciform church of the 13th century, with a stumpy central tower instead of the usual tall tower at the west end of the nave.

For the next two hundred years St Anthony continued as a daughter house to Plympton Priory, a rich foundation which owned much

land in both Devon and Cornwall. St Anthony church only had to serve a small population, and remained small in size; but it seems that the number of canons increased to a handful. Accordingly there grew up a modest group of monastic buildings, providing accommodation for the priests, one of whom was denoted Prior, for their lay workers, and for the giving of help and hospitality to seamen who had been paid off at St Mawes and were awaiting a new passage.

St Anthony also succoured pilgrims, perhaps on their way to St Michael's Mount. In 1435 Bishop Edmund Lacey granted an indulgence, of 40 days' freedom from penance, for pilgrims who visited St Anthony and contributed to its maintenance. But a century later, with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, all this came to an end. In 1538 the surrender of the great priory at Plympton meant the end of its daughter house at St Anthony. The land and its tithes were vested in the Crown and the priests pensioned off.

The demesne lands were leased to a yeoman farmer in 1540, and part of the church and much of the domestic buildings pulled down and the materials removed. The stone helped to build King Henry's new castle at St Mawes. The remains of the domestic buildings were made into the first Place house, to the north of the church, marked on a map of 1597 as 'Mr Davies House', Nicholas Davies being the then lessee. It was this house, with its successive alterations and additions, which has ever since masked the church from view.

The CHURCH

The parishioners of St Anthony still loved – and needed – their church. They succeeded in claiming the nave and the transepts, but the chancel, having belonged wholly to the priests, was seized first by the Crown, then by those to whom the Crown granted the land, and pulled down. The monks' refectory survived, however, being needed to support the north wall; and it still exists as part of the house, being connected directly to the church by a door which opens into the nave. The church, reduced in size to its nave and transepts, thus became T-shaped. Hence the local verse:

*'St Anthony church in the form of a T
The parson doth preach in the belfree.'*

It remained in this reduced state until 1850, gradually falling into disrepair; indeed part of the tower appears to have fallen down about 1700, when the single bell, recorded as being in the tower in the reign of Edward VI, was destroyed.

The restoration of the church was due to two people, both of them men of drive and vision. After the Dissolution the property passed through several families, Godwin, Fortescue, Vyvyan, and from 1649 the family of Spry. The Sprys, already prosperous, became substantial landowners by marriage, gained riches by business ventures and rose in the social scale as naval officers, producing two admirals in succession. When Admiral Thomas Spry died in 1828 his eldest son Samuel, then aged 24, inherited Place. He entered Parliament as MP

for Bodmin in 1832, was knighted and became a county magnate. In the 1840s he rebuilt Place house, much as it stands today, and then turned his attention to the church, which he felt should match the standard of the new house.

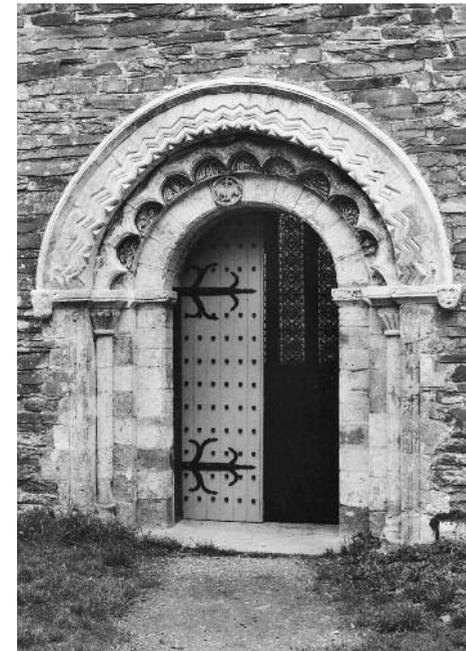
He turned for advice to his cousin, The Revd Clement Winstanley Carlyon, Rector since 1836 of the 'plum' living of St Just – which included the township of St Mawes – who was also the incumbent of St Anthony. Carlyon was typical of the enthusiastic amateur church restorer of the day and had done much work at St Just, not all of it aesthetically successful. He liked to do things with his own hands, principally in carving rather clumsy pews in both churches. But he recognised at least that here was a rare survival of a 13th-century church, very different from most Cornish churches which were wholly rebuilt in the latter part of the 15th century. Only a handful of drawings by Carlyon have survived, including a charming view of the interior of the church before restoration, cluttered with simple box pews. His work was deemed unscholarly at the time but it is largely true to the character of the monastic church.

The principal task was to rebuild the chancel, which had become the site of a chicken run. Workmen removed nearly six feet (1.8m) of earth which had accumulated here and round the walls of the nave, and the original footings of the chancel walls were uncovered. Nor was this all, for before the spot where the altar had been

were found two skeletons, their feet pointing to the east, with two coffin-shaped slabs of slate, each incised with a cross, and two massive granite coffins. The skeletons were reverently reburied, each covered by one of the slate slabs; but the coffins were put out into the churchyard, where one survives, the other having been built into an adjoining wall. The skeletons are believed to be those of two monks of St Anthony, whose office merited burial before the altar. The earlier was Peter de Antonio, who became Prior of the mother house of Plympton, and died soon after 1273. He had spent his early days at St Anthony and asked to be buried there. The second was much later in date, David Berclay who also became Prior of Plympton and died about 1507. He had probably 'got past it' for he was authorised to retire to one of the Priory's daughter churches, until arrangements could be made to put right the finances of the Priory, plunged into debt by the expensive habits of its members.

Once reburial had been accomplished work began. In 1849 a relative, Miss Carlyon of Tregrehan near St Austell, laid the foundation stone. The eastern arch, giving access from the crossing, was unblocked, the chancel rebuilt and the church restored to its original form, using freestone and granite carefully chosen to match that used in the body of the church. This work was well done, as was that to the tower, which was raised by about two feet (0.6m) and then surmounted by a broach spire, similar in design

to, though larger than, that on the central tower of the house. A new single bell was cast at Francis Dingeys' foundry in Truro and hung in place of the former bell. The whole church was re-roofed in Delabole slate, the trusses and wall-plates, with chevron and dog-tooth patterns, being of softwood and tin-plate cleverly stained to imitate oak. The old paving of the floor was replaced with Minton tiles, the windows were filled with stained glass, and – in particular – the



Spry family's memorials were brought together in the north transept, adjoining the family pew, and romantically lit by glazed panels in the roof.

The nave is entered by the south door, and this impressive entrance is the principal decorative feature of the building. The grand Romanesque doorway, built of Caen stone from Normandy, was almost certainly brought from Plympton Priory when the church was built, since the Priory Church was then being rebuilt in the Early English style. The transport of the stone would have been comparatively simple since both churches stood close to tidal water. There are three orders in the arch, the outermost with zig-zag outlined by a plain hood mould supported by carved heads at its base. The middle order is cusped, each cusp carved with a leaf. The inner is a plain arch with wedge-shaped voussoirs. One of these, slightly off centre, is carved in relief with the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God. The stones which make up this inner order appear slightly different to the Caen stone of the rest, and were probably brought from the greenstone quarry of Pentewan, on the coast west of St Austell, at the 1850 restoration, to embellish the already handsome doorway. A drawing by Carlyon shows the doorway as he intended it to be, but the *Agnus Dei* stone turned out to be smaller than the rest of the voussoirs. To save recarving it the masons made up the arch by cutting one voussoir larger than the rest, so there is no central keystone and the carved stone is off-centre.

Below: The tower crossing looking into the spire (Boris Baggs)

Right: The interior looking east (Boris Baggs)

INTERIOR

Inside the church the most beautiful feature is the crossing, which survives from the 13th-century building. The east and west arches are symmetrical, the inner moulding being carried on slender shafts with roll-moulded bases and foliate capitals. The north and south arches, also symmetrical, are carried on foliate corbels without shafts below them. These arches, so delicate yet so strong, are amply sufficient to carry not only the weight of the tower, but also of the substantial spire added to it at the restoration.

The restored church is lit by lancet windows, all framed in granite, which seem to have more or less followed those in the unrestored building,

where these had survived. A tracery quatrefoil window is in the south wall and an elaborate roundel, containing three circles enclosing quatrefoils, high on the north wall. There are also four tiny quatrefoils, set high in the four walls above the arches of the crossing.

The pulpit and the clergy stall, both of elm and new made at the restoration, are rather lumpish, as is much of Carlyon's woodwork. The painted wooden reredos is of the same period, set low beneath the east window but with panels rising either side inscribed with the Ten Commandments. The simple granite font, with a plain octagonal bowl and stem, is also of this date.

The collar beams of the roof trusses are painted with Biblical texts but not apparently in any regular sequence. There is a good deal of heraldic painting; the Plantagenet arms are under the tower but, for the rest, the arms are those of the Spry family and the families with whom they had married. Set in the tiles of the floor, centrally under the tower, is a shield with the arms of Sir Samuel Spry, who had paid the greater part of the cost of the restoration of the church.

In the east wall of the south transept is a trefoil-arched piscina, but its bowl is now missing. There is a plainer piscina in the east wall of the north transept. But it is a group of monuments to members of the Spry family which provide the principal feature of the interior of the church. There are ten of these.



- The earliest is an elaborate black marble tablet for Mary (Gayer), the first wife of Arthur Spry, who died in 1656, with a separate armorial cartouche above it.
- A marble tablet for Arthur Spry's father, George, 1658, with a similar cartouche.
- An almost identical tablet, and cartouche, for Arthur's second wife, Lucia (Hele), 1670.
- Arthur Spry's elaborate marble monument of 1685, typical of the local grandees' memorials found in West Country churches. The inscription is on a convex oval tablet with a skull incised at its foot, and surrounded by a wreath, a winged cherub's head above. This tablet is

framed within pilasters with Ionic capitals on either side. The pilasters stand on a heavy moulded plinth supported by lion's mask consoles. An oval tablet of polished red marble on the apron below the shelf, where usually the decease of a wife would be recorded, is not inscribed for Arthur had outlived both his wives. The capitals of the pilasters support a heavy semicircular pediment decorated in egg and dart pattern with stylized leaves.

■ After a gap of nearly a century there follows the beautiful white marble memorial, sculpted by Richard Westmacott the Younger, to Sir Richard Spry, Admiral of the White, 1775. A seated figure of Britannia, leaning on an urn



which bears Spry's arms, with a Union Jack on the shield lying at her feet, is complemented by a stern view of one of the Admiral's ships carved in low relief.

■ Sir Richard never married and Place passed to his sister's son, Thomas Davey, who took the additional surname of Spry and had as successful a naval career as that of his uncle. He was promoted full Admiral a few weeks after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and died in 1828. His memorial, sculpted by H Hopper, is the grandest in the series. Its surround projects into the transept, providing a frame like that of a tomb chest, with an arched upper part within which, in white marble, is the Admiral's large memorial tablet, his arms above surmounted by flags and naval trophies. The tablet is supported by figures carved in full relief of a barefoot young sailor with a coil of rope, and a scarcely draped girl holding a boat's rudder. The monument is deeply impressive, its framed surround less so.

■ The Admiral's son, Sir Samuel Spry, who had commissioned the restoration of the church, completed in 1851, died in 1868. He is commemorated by a simple brass tablet, inscribed with his arms.



■ Richard Spry, 1875. A white marble tablet, signed by A Trentanove, in shallow relief, showing an angel bearing a sword in front of the closed doors of a tomb.

■ John Samuel Spry, son of Sir Samuel, 1915. A simple white tablet with a shield of arms.

■ His daughter Gwavas May Spry, who married Lt Colonel Duncan Grant-Dalton. She died in 1955, her husband in 1969. Their tablet, with a curved top and base, has their armorials carved on a grey ground.

St Anthony provides a good example of a 19th-century restoration, by an amateur clergyman architect and an autocratic squire, not – as so commonly – of a 15th-century or later church, but of a rare survival of a church of the 13th century, the plan and the character of which are still apparent today.

For more than three centuries the church was maintained by the Sprys and, after the marriage of Gwavas Spry, by her husband's family the Grant-Daltons. Eventually the maintenance of a remote church in a parish with a tiny population, willingly assumed by the late Major ND Spry-Grant-Dalton, became too great a burden, and the vesting of the church in The Churches Conservation Trust in August 1991 has assured its preservation.

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 335 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

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Opposite, left: Monument to Sir Richard Spry, d.1775 (Christopher Dalton)
Opposite right: Monument to Richard Spry, d.1875 and Mary Spry d.1861 (Christopher Dalton)
Back cover: 13th-century carved capital beneath one of the tower arches (Christopher Dalton)