



About St Michael's

St Michael's does not occupy an ancient site, but was founded in the 19th century to serve the community which grew up around the nearby prison. A prison and church was first proposed by Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1805, to house war prisoners captured in the Napoleonic Wars of 1803–15. Construction of the prison began in 1806; and the church followed in 1812–15.

The church was to be 'executed upon the plainest and most economical style possible', accommodating 500–600 people. The original designs, by John Walters, were for a simple rectangular building with a bell turret; however, the plans were revised to include a bell tower and galleries. French and American prisoners of war assisted with the building works, and were paid 6d a day for their labour.

Divine Service was first performed here in January 1814. Soon afterwards, in 1815, the War Prison closed and many of the officers and their families left the area. The church survived, however, to see the community spring to new life after the prison reopened, for convicts, in 1850.

In 1868–76, after a fire, the church was restored by R M Fulford. Further improvements followed in 1908–10, under E H Sedding, when the east end was enlarged and the original high roof was replaced. The walls were lowered and a new roof, supported on arcades, was inserted within the shell of the original building.

In 1994, owing to the high cost of maintenance, the church was declared redundant and was transferred to the care of The Churches Conservation Trust in 2000; it has since been extensively repaired. St Michael's remains available for occasional services and events.

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Access

Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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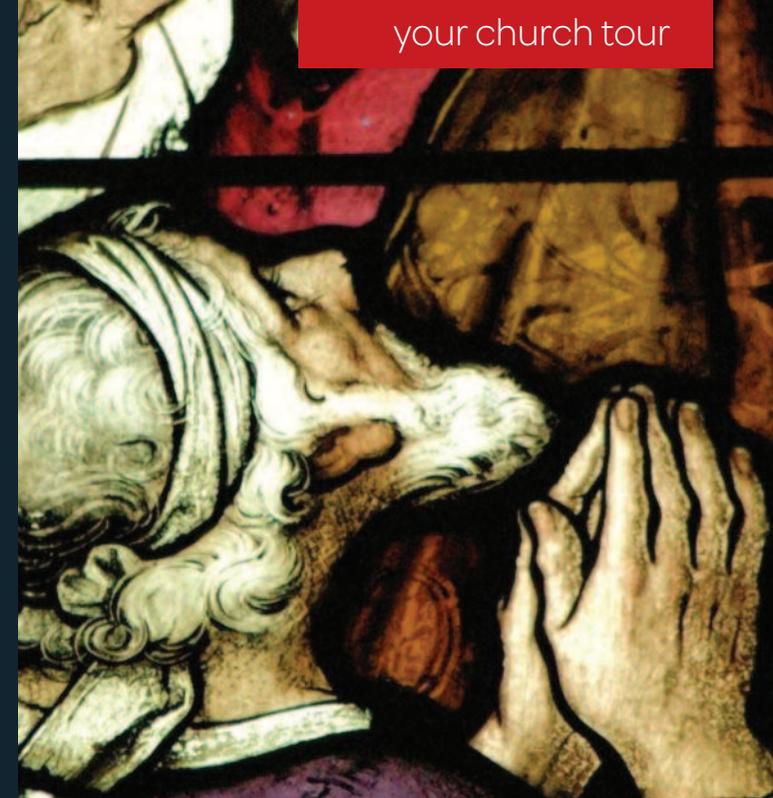
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Church of St Michael and All Angels

Princetown, Devon



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1 The **font** stands immediately within the doorway of the church, symbolising entrance to the Christian community through Baptism.

2 Looking across the church, notice the great width of the **nave** and the narrow **aisles**. These were created by the insertion of the **arcades**, with their tapering piers and chamfered double arches in 1908–10. The almond-shaped **internal windows** with open tracery above the arches are an unusual feature.

3 A 19th-century Gothic **altar table** stands against the west wall. This was supplanted by the present altar in the 20th century; redundant church furnishings like this often survive in churches and provide valuable evidence of changing tastes.

4 Above the altar table, traces of a **blocked archway**, partially obscured by the walling of the north arcade, reveal that the building was originally open for its entire width.

5 The **windows** of the nave, with their simple 'Y'-tracery, also survive from Walters' original building. The walls were originally higher, perhaps to allow headroom in the galleries, but were reduced to their present height during Sedding's alterations.

6 The **pews** or open **benches** are of an unusual type for Devon; they are typical of the Victorian fashion for 'honest' construction, with 'Y'-shaped bench ends and exposed joints. The benches probably date from R M Fulford's mid-19th-century restoration and replace earlier seating, which included some enclosed 'box pews' reserved for officers and their families.

7 In the north aisle is a large wall **monument** to Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt (1762–1833), founder of Princetown, its church, and its prison. The inscription states that: *'His name and memory are inseparable from all the great work on Dartmoor and cannot cease to be honoured in this district'*. The monument now stands behind one of the inserted arcade piers and is difficult to read.



8 The large late 17th- or early 18th-century **pulpit**, decorated with carvings of the four evangelists, was purchased from St Sidwell's Church in Exeter, at its rebuilding in 1814, and is a fine example of its type.



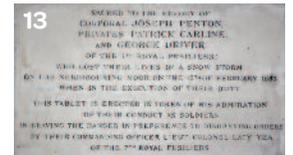
9 The **chancel** still retains furnishings designed by R M Fulford in the 1870s, including the frontals to the **choir stalls** and the **vicar's stall**. These were retained after the addition of the present chancel in 1908–10. Unfortunately, Fulford's **choir benches** were removed in the 20th century, though one survives, loose, in the vestry.

11 The **stained glass window** in the east wall of the chancel was installed in 1910; a gift from the 'National Society of United States Daughters of 1812', to commemorate the American prisoners of war held at Princetown between 1813 and 1815. The window was made by Mayer of Munich and depicts scenes from the Life of Christ (cover), culminating in his Passion, Resurrection and his Ascension in the central light of the window. It is now believed that 271 American prisoners died while in captivity at Dartmoor.



12 The two-manual **organ** was built by Frederick Tucker of Plymouth and is unfortunately now derelict. It is flanked by British, French and American flags, the former donated by HMS *Brilliant*, one of the ships involved in the Falkland Island Conflict, in 1982.

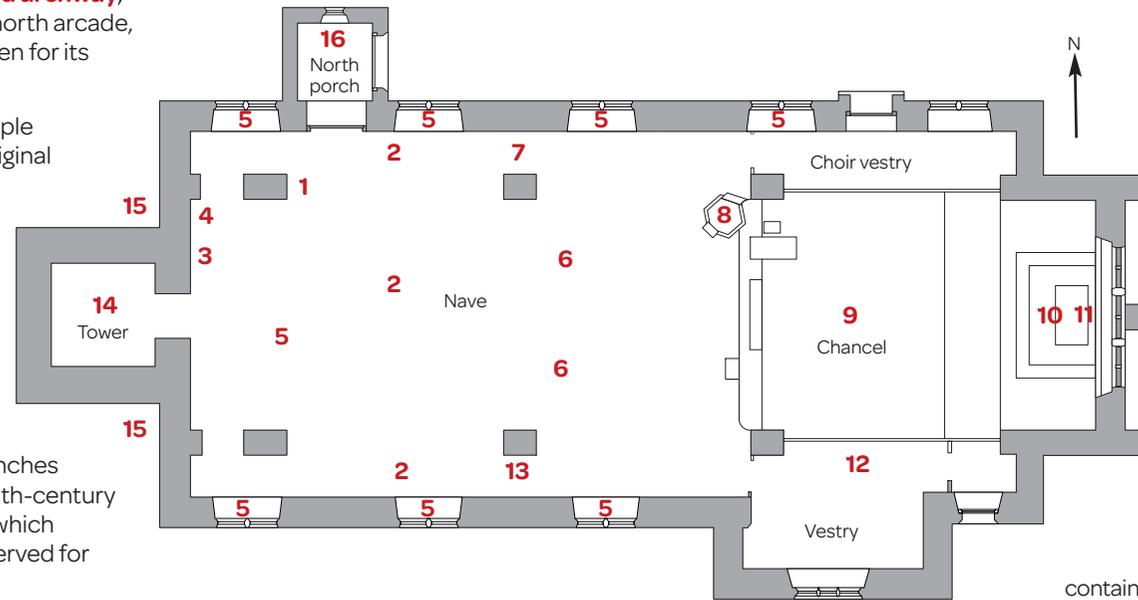
13 In the south aisle is a touching **wall monument** to three men of the 7th Royal Fusiliers, who perished in a snowstorm on the moor while *'braving the danger in preference to disobeying orders'*.



14 The **tower** is in 'Gothick' style typical of the Regency period, with arched windows containing 'Y'-tracery, quatrefoil windows below the belfry and obelisk pinnacles at the summit. The east wall still shows the scar of the original roofline of Walters' church, altered in 1908–10. The bells for the tower had been cast, but not installed, by the time of the closure of the prison in 1815; they were hung instead in the dockyard chapel at Plymouth.

15 The tower was originally flanked by a porch and a vestry on either side. Blocked granite **arches** serving these (and perhaps also gallery stairs) are visible on either side of the tower.

16 The present entrance and **north porch** date from the early 20th-century alterations.



10 At the east end of the chancel the earlier altar table (mentioned above) was replaced in the 20th century by an '**English altar**' enclosed by a '**dossal**' and '**riddells**' (rear and side curtains) supported by four **riddell posts**. This reflects late 19th- and 20th-century enthusiasm for late-medieval English liturgy and furnishings.

