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**MORWENSTOWE
CHURCH**

BY

PHILIP DOCTON MARTYN

—
FIFTH EDITION
—

Morwenstowe Church

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CHURCH EXTERIOR AND VICARAGE

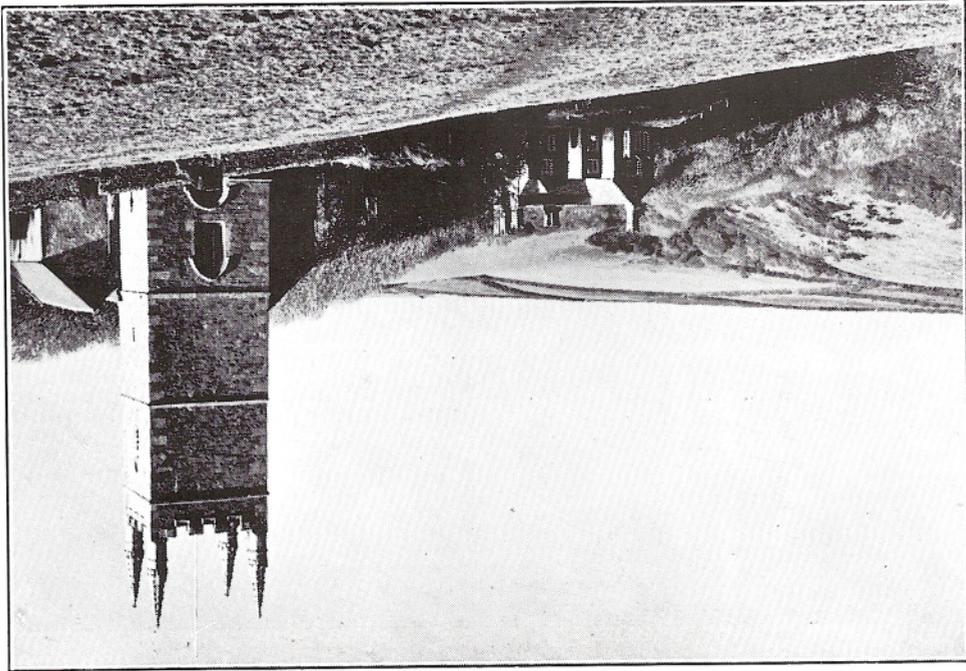




Photo by W. Grenfell Webster, Esq.

MORWENSTOWE CHURCH
HIGH ALTAR

Morwenstowe Church

The Church of S. Morwenna is superbly situated, almost in a dell, between cliffs towering to a height of 450 feet on either side; at its side, in the valley, runs a slow-running brook between heather and gorse covered banks, and before it lies a vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Its tower is a landmark to passing ships; whilst the sound of its bells strikes a chord of solemn and peaceful memory to the listening sailors.

Welcome! wild rock and lonely shore,
Where round my days dark seas shall roar;
And thy gray fane, Morwenna, stand
The beacon of the Eternal land.

This fine old Church, partly Norman in its architectural details, is of great interest to the ecclesiologist and the antiquary.

It was appropriated by Peter Quival, Bishop of Exeter, in 1290 to St. John's Hospital at Bridgewater, when the value of the Rectory, Vicarage, and Tenths was given as £13 6s. 8d.

Its endowment still exists in the Registry of the Diocese of Exeter. From it we gather that the arrangement made by the Monastery in 1290 of the appointment of, and provision for, a perpetual secular Vicar with the small tithes of the parish was inadequate for his needs and therefore was opposed to the decree of the Lateran Council; accordingly it records "that the monks of S. John at Bridgewater, in whom the total tithes and glebe-lands of the parish were then vested, had agreed, at the request of Walter de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter, to further endow the altar-priest with the consecrated ground lying to the west of the court and crofts of the Parsonage of the aforesaid Church, up to the old way leading to the sea, and down to the stream in the valley, with two crofts by the Church on the north, and the rest of the land there up to a certain fountain of John, containing four acres and more of land; with a full tenth of the great tithes of the vill of Stanburie and of the three vills of Tunna-combis" (*i.e.*, Tonacombe, as it is now spelt).

The striking point in this ancient endowment dated A.D. 1296 is that the Church is therein referred to by name as an old and well-known structure. To such a remote era, therefore, we must assign the Norman relics of antiquity which still survive.

To the Rev. Robert Stephen Hawker, the noble-hearted though eccentric Vicar of the

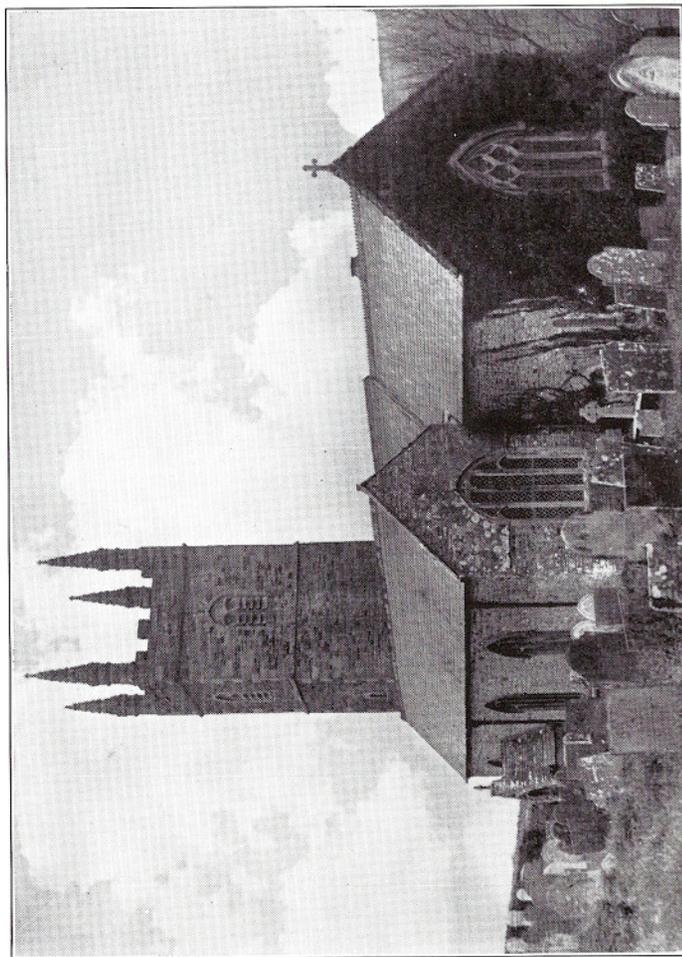


Photo by W. Grenfell Webster, Esq.

MORWENSTOWE CHURCH

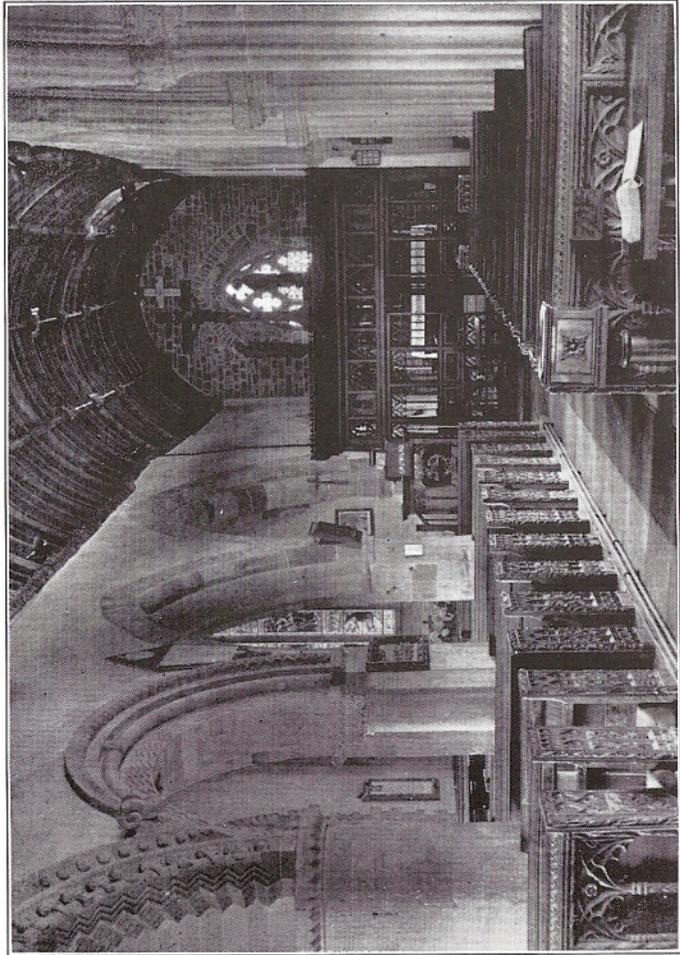


Photo by W. Grenfell Webster, Esq.

MORWENSTOWE CHURCH

parish from 1834 to 1875, whose name will always be associated with the parish, must we turn for the legend of S. Morwenna. He tells us: "There dwelt in Wales in the IXth century a Keltic king, Breachan, and Gladwys was his wife and queen. According to the record of Leland, the scribe, they had children twenty-and-four, either their own, or according to the usage of those days, the offspring of the nobles of their land, placed for loyal and learned nurture in the palace of the king, and so called the children of his house. Of these Morwenna was one, and S. Nectan, of Welcombe, was another. Morwenna grew up wise, learned, and holy above her generation. Now so it was that when she had grown up to saintly womanhood, that Ethelwolf, King of Saxon England, besought King Breachan to send Morwenna to become the teacher of the Princess Edith and the other daughters of his house. She came; she sojourned in his palace long years; and so gladdened the King by her goodness and her grace, that at last he was fain to give her whatsoever she sought. "Sir," she said, "there is a stately headland in far Cornwall, called Hennacliff, or the Raven's Crag, that I have said in my vows, 'Would to God that a font and altar might be built among the stones of yonder hill!' "Give me then, I beseech thee, my Lord the King, a Stowe for a priest in the scenery of my prayer?" Her voice was heard! Her entreaty was fulfilled; and at her cost and impulse the earliest structure of the IXth or

Xth century was erected, linked with her name—the Church of S. Morwenna—the bourne of many a pilgrim to the west still after ten whole centuries of time.”

Beside the priest's door in the Sanctuary is a wall-painting of S. Morwenna giving benediction to a kneeling priest (circa. 1250); placed here as if her blessing and prayers are still being offered for every priest officiating at her shrine.

At one time the name of the parish was sometimes spelt Moorwinstow, associating it with a moor; but Mr. Hawker would have none of it, asserting, “I know that Morwenna lies here: I have seen her, and she has told me as much; and at her feet ere long I hope to lay my old bones.”

Like all old Cornish Churches, the interior walls are covered with plaster, and it is highly probable there are other wall-paintings still hidden, especially on the north wall opposite the entrance.

The Church consists of chancel, nave and north and south aisles. The chancel is Early English with later angle buttresses. The three westernmost arches of the north arcade are good late Norman. The second arch is one of the finest of that period in any country Church. The capitals of the pillars have

delicate chevron work. A friend was being shown this work by Mr. Hawker one day, and he remarked: “What fine zigzag work!” “Zigzag! Zigzag!” replied Mr. Hawker, in indignation, “Why those ripples represent the waves on the sea of Galilee.” There are four orders in this arch, two chevron, one of heads, and above another of bosses. The heads are remarkable. Those of bird, hippopotamus, and man are repeated all round. There is a fine head of an antelope and some human faces; one grotesque face represents the grin of Arius; which is again repeated in the north aisle, together with the head of a hippopotamus. The two arches of the north arcade further east are Early English (circa 1220).

The three westernmost arches of the south arcade are about 1560, at which period the old Norman doorway was taken down and rebuilt as the entrance of the then enlarged Church, with porch. Over the outer entrance of the porch the builders took the liberty of placing the outermost arch of the Norman doorway only and leaving its corresponding pillars with the remainder of the archway inside the porch over the interior doorway. There are four orders of the ornament in the porch. The order over the entrance door is a band of chevron flat and inverted, a string of roses springs from two animals, and at each corner is a grotesque head. Over the interior doorway is an arch richly moulded, and

ornamented with a variety of heads. These are surmounted with zigzag ornament similar to that over the outer entrance.

The weathering of the stones of the interior doorway is interesting as it occurred when it was the entrance door of the early Norman Church.

Thomas Kempthorne, whose home was at Tonacombe in the parish, already mentioned, was Vicar of the parish from 1559 to 1594 ; during his ministry many improvements were made in the Church ; The south aisle was built, and dedicated to S. John the Baptist ; the magnificent wagon-roofs ; a chancel-screen of most beautiful workmanship (Gilbert's History of Cornwall) ; and seats provided for the parson, clerk, and some others, one of which bears his initials, T.K. On another seat is the inscription, "This was made in the year of our Lord God 1575."

The south arcade was partly rebuilt in the seventeenth century. The first two pillars are of granite ; on one the capital bears the date 1664 in Roman numerals, though it is usually misread 1564 ; and on the other the inscription : "This is the House of the Lord." This inscription is upside down. The three other pillars of the south arcade are of Polyphant stone.

A very interesting question is, whether the portion of ground now spanned by the granite

arches was formerly disused, or whether it formed a Baptistry or other building in connection with the Church, such as priests' chambers, etc. That it was separated is evident by the discovery of a portion of a wall still adhering to the westernmost of the granite pillars.

The original screen was removed by one of the churchwardens in 1825, but parts of it were rescued and re-erected by Mr. Hawker in 1845 ; to be again removed when the Church was restored in 1878, and again replaced, all that was left of it, in 1906.

Incorporated into the present screen are the carved heads of the bays of the original screen, also the exquisite carving of birds, animals, and leaves from the original cresting.

The 'Carvure' on the wall of the chancel was, according to some, part of the early screen ; according to others, that it was brought here from North Tamerton by Mr. Hawker. Mr. C. E. Byles, in his "Life and Letters of R. S. Hawker," tells us that a friend proposed there was no such word as Carvure ! "If no such word," replied Mr. Hawker, "it is time there should be. I invent it." It is a curious piece of symbolism. A dove proceeding from a mouth typifies the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father through the Son. The head of the Father is now missing. A castle on a rock, attacked

by a dragon and protected by the dove, represents the Church defended by the Holy Ghost from the onslaught of Satan.

The Church is fitted throughout with substantial oak benches or seats, date about 1568, with carved bench-ends, so characteristic of Cornish Churches, in flowing arabesque or floriated designs, all carved with some degree of vigorous effect and much pains.

The rude font is Saxon. It is singular in its design, having an oval body banded around the middle with a cable moulding. It is probable that it is from the still older Church on the same site. The roughness of the basin, and the outer irregular incised cable suggests that tools of the rudest kind made it. The square basement of Polyphant stone on which it rests, partially moulded and otherwise ornamented, is of a much later period.

A very noble granite arch opens into the tower chamber of the belfry, supporting the tower ; from its step looking towards the east end, it is noticeable that the Church is somewhat one-sided. Mr. Hawker was again ready with mystical meaning and said: "As Christ upon the Cross, His head inclined, so His sanctuary is built with an inclination to one side."

In 1904 when so much restoration work was carried out, it was felt that Mr. Hawker's

memory should be perpetuated in the Church that he loved so well, and a stained glass window was installed: the principal figures in which are those of S. Morwenna, S. Nectan (the Patron Saint of Welcombe Church, which Mr. Hawker also served), and S. John the Baptist. Round these larger panes are grouped representations of the various scenes most intimately associated with his memory.

Poet-Priest as he was, Mr. Hawker expressed his devotion for his ancient Church in his beautiful poem, "Morwenna Statio.":

My Saxon shrine, the only ground
Wherein this weary heart hath rest :
What years the birds of God hath found
Along thy walls their sacred nest :
The storm—the blast—the tempest shock—
Have beat upon those walls in vain ;
She stands—a daughter of the rock—
The changeless God's eternal fane.
Still points the tower, and pleads the bell,
The solemn arches breathe in stone :
Window and wall have lips to tell
The mighty faith of days unknown.
Yea, flood and breeze, and battle-shock
Shall beat upon this church in vain :
She stands—a daughter of the rock—
The changeless God's eternal fane.

Some American admirers of Mr. Hawker presented the Church with a magnificent silver-gilt Chalice and Paten. The Paten on its under-side bears the inscription: "This

Chalice and Paten were presented to Morwenstowe Church in memory of the Rev. Robert Stephen Hawker, on the 50th anniversary of his death, August 15th, 1925, by American admirers of Princeton, New Jersey."

To commemorate the centenary of his appointment to the parish the Rood was erected in August, 1934, as a thank-offering to God for his work and inspiration ; for it should ever be remembered that Mr. Hawker was a pioneer and originator in the Anglican Church of rural synods, of the offertory, and of harvest thanksgivings, all of which having fallen into desuetude were first revived by him, and are now of general observance.

The west coloured window was erected by the parish in memory of the Rev. John Tagert, Vicar from 1876 to 1905. He was instrumental in raising nearly £2,000, mostly in small sums, to restore the Church.

At the east end of the north aisle, where so many of the owners of Tonacombe are buried, are two more coloured windows erected by the Martyn family.

The east window in the chancel was the gift of Baron Clinton and his wife.

There are also two lancet windows in the chancel. The north lancet to commemorate



A PELICAN FEEDING HER YOUNG
(A Boss in the Chancel Roof)

Photo by C. J. P. Cave, Esq.,
Stoner Hill, Petersfield

THE PELICAN.

Thus said the pious Pelican unto her thirsty young :
" Drink, drink, my desert children, be beautiful, be strong !
What tho' it be the lifeblood from my veins ye drain and dry ?
Ye will grow and glide in glory, and for me, O let me die."

1840.

R. S. HAWKER.

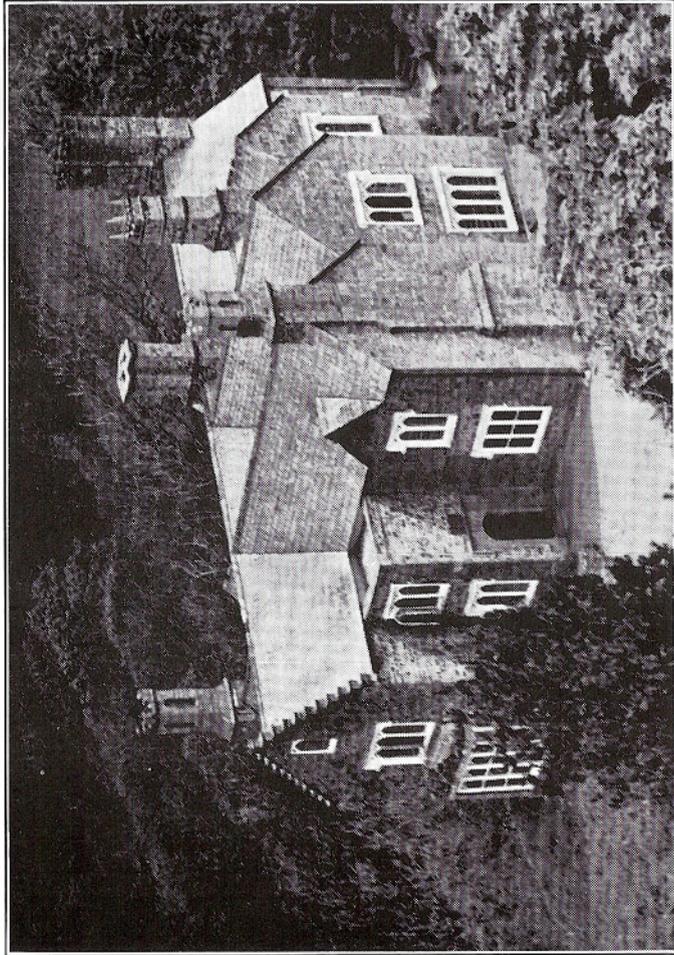


Photo by W. Grenfell Webster, Esq.

MORWENSTOWE VICARAGE (from Church Tower)

the restoration of the Church was given by the Rev. J. Tagert ; the south lancet is to the memory of the Rev. William Waddon Martyn, of Tonacombe, Rector of Lifton for over 37 years. Ob. 1900.

The piscina was found in an unusual manner. In the course of repairing the structure it was observed that the chancel wall on being struck at a certain place sounded hollow ; the plastering was removed and underneath was found an arched recess, which had been filled up with fragments of a detached piscina. This was carefully restored. Above it is a niche containing a little cross ; this is said to have been taken from a ruined wayside chapel at Longfurlong, Hartland, and given to Mr. Hawker.

The reredos, which was part of the 1904 restoration, contains three beautiful engravings by John Baptist Jackson, immediately above the altar, and at the top of the reredos an original drawing by Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, a painter of the late seventeenth century. These were given by Lawrence Martyn, Esq., then living at Tonacombe.

The communion plate of the Church is very interesting. In addition to the already mentioned gifts from America, there is a very large flagon, given by Oliver Rouse, Vicar of the parish from 1742 to 1781, a large Paten, "The gift of Grace Coryndon to ye

Church of Murwinstowe, 1728," and, most noteworthy, a covered Chalice with three rows of incised ornament, bearing the name "I. Coton," of Elizabethan date, approximating to Thomas Kempthorne's vicariate and possibly his gift.

The Church used to be entirely roofed with oak shingles instead of slate, *i.e.*, with tiles of wood. The Vestry wished that certain damage should be repaired with slates, but in a public appeal for help Mr. Hawker wrote: "This kind of covering was the wise and careful choice of our forefathers; it was used for the ark, and it was the death-bed of Our Lord; in the teeth of the Atlantic gales, this wooden roof suffers far less from the ravages of the weather than any slated Church on the coast of Cornwall." Many of these old shingles are still preserved in the parish.

The two-staged tower is fifteenth century. The bells were last restored under Oliver Rouse in 1753, and the Tenor bears his name. In 1902 two bells were added to the original four—one "In Memoriam. Robert Stephen Hawker, Vicar 1834 to 1875."

Come to thy God in time :
Come to thy God at last.

The other, "In Memoriam. Ann Elinor Shearme," which was obtained with a bequest made by her.

In the churchyard there is a granite altar tomb whereon is inscribed: "John Manning and Christiana his wife, who died in 1601, without living issue." Mr. Hawker tells the sad legend in his "Footprints of former men in Cornwall"; how that John Manning, of Stanbury married Christiana Kempthorne, the Vicar's daughter, amidst great rejoicings that a large estate and a high place for their future lineage at Stanbury had been blended in the twain. Five months afterwards John Manning was gored to death by a mad bull near his home; and his bride, maddened at the sight, became prematurely a mother and died.

The churchyard abounds in records of the shipwrecked, who, in the words of Mr. Hawker:

Come in paths of storm—they found
This quiet home in Christian ground.

In the old sailing-vessel days it was a well-known fact that any vessel inside Hartland Point, with an on-shore wind, was doomed; and the only thing to do was to follow along the coast and endeavour to succour the crew

From Hartland Point to Padstow Light
Is a watery grave, by day or night.

The burial registers of the Church have as many as eight successive entries of the burial of "An unknown sailor," with, wherever possible, a rough guess at his age.

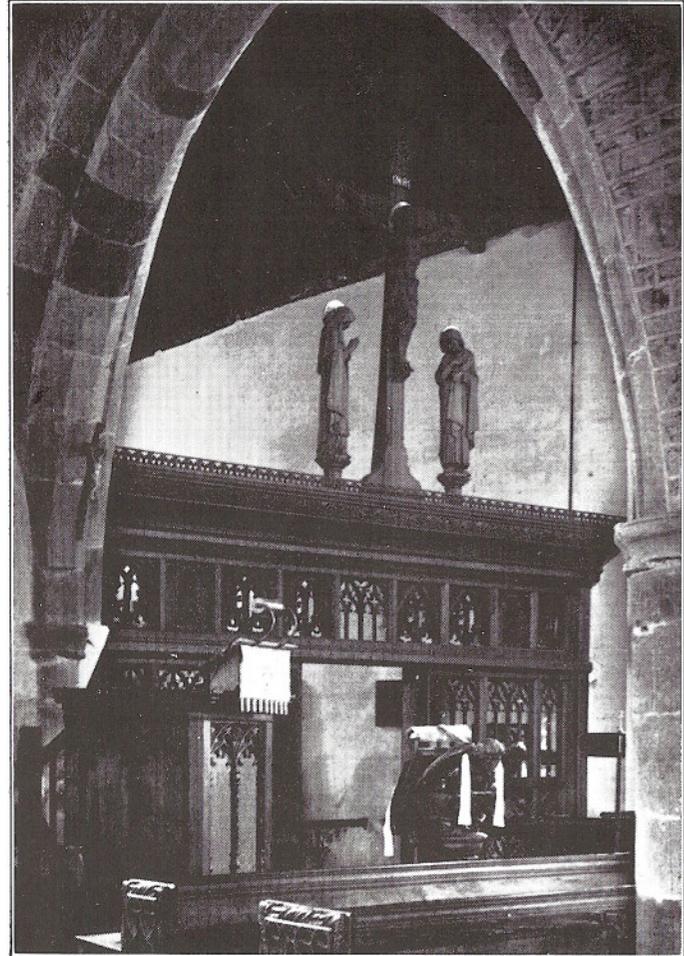
Mr. Hawker did a very great work for the shipwrecked, diligently searching amongst the rocks for human remains after some unfortunate vessel had been dashed to pieces. He buried more than forty, and buried them side by side under the trees by the upper wall of the churchyard. The figure-head of the "Caledonia," of Arbroath in Scotland, which was wrecked on September 2nd, 1843, he placed over the graves of the captain and crew, together with parts of three boats, but these have rotted away.

In October, 1924, a tall granite cross was erected to the memory of all these unknown sailors, bearing the words:

Unknown and yet well-known.

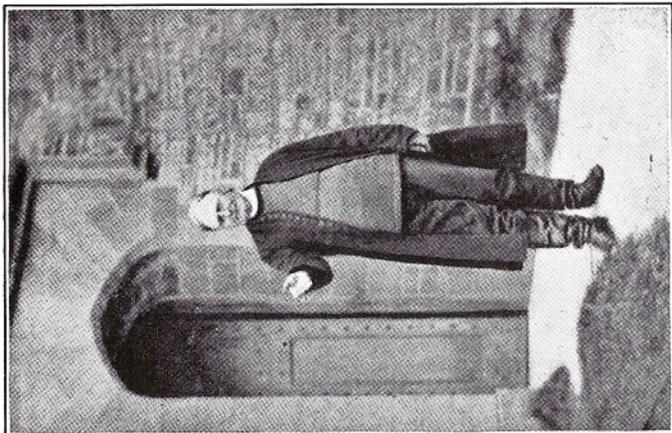
Near the Lych-gate is another granite cross on which the initials (C.E.H.) of Mr. Hawker's first wife are cut. She was buried inside the Church below the chancel step. Mr. Hawker brought this cross here from, it is said, the moor, where crosses were erected to mark the road for pilgrims. There used to be crosses to S. John and to S. James in the parish, which are now missing; also at Tonacombe there is a cross of a very early period which is of great interest, for it is an "Early British" cross, *i.e.*, before the Latin cross was introduced, and dates from about A.D. 250.

Outside the Lych-gate there are three

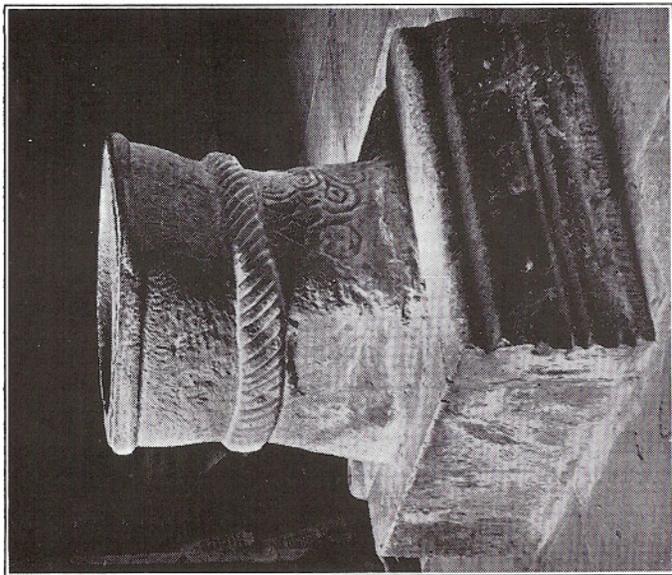


MORWENSTOWE CHURCH
ROOD SCREEN

Photo by W. Grenfell Webster, Esq.



Copyright
Thorn, Bude
Rev. R. S. Hawker at his Vicarage Entrance



SAXON FONT

MORWENSTOWE CHURCH

Morwenstowe Church

19

depressions in the pathway where three suicides or malefactors lie buried.

Close to the Church Mr. Hawker built a most beautiful and picturesque Vicarage, which he freely gave to the benefice. Over the doorway he placed a stone, bearing these words :

A house, a glebe, a pound a day,
A pleasant place to watch and pray !
Be true to church, be kind to poor,
O minister for evermore.

Its remarkable chimneys are copies of the various Church towers of the parishes wherein he had laboured before coming to Morwenstowe.

In the Vicarage garden stands the Holy well of S. John the Baptist, as mentioned in the endowment deed. Its waters are still always used for christenings.

The well of S. Morwenna, half-way down the cliff, is now dried up.

In the centre of the parish Mr. Hawker built a school for the children ; and, though but a poor man, at first he entirely defrayed the cost of running it.

No story of Morwenstowe could be written without continually mentioning Mr. Hawker's

name, for he 'made' Morwenstowe, for forty years he laboured there, and in his spare time writing his exquisite poems in the little hut on the edge of the cliff overlooking some sixty miles of the finest cliff scenery in the country, and generally being known as Hawker of Morwenstowe.

Money he did not covet ; but he has told us what he did wish for.

What is my wish ? Not that an echoing crowd,
Publish my praises on some distant strand ;
Not that the voices of some men be loud
With whom a strange and nameless man I stand :
'Tis the fond vision that some Western hand
Will turn this page—a native lip proclaim
Him who lov'd well and long the rocky land,
Hills of old Cornwall !! in your antique fame,
Oh ! that a voice unborn might blend my future name !

