

# A SHORT CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF STOKE DAMEREL PARISH



## MAP SHOWING “*STOUCHE DAMBRELL*” CHURCH IN 1591

[Probably drawn by Robert Spry]

Details of the first building to be erected on the site of the current Stoke Damerel parish church are unknown but some structure, possibly in timber, may well have existed even before the Norman Conquest.

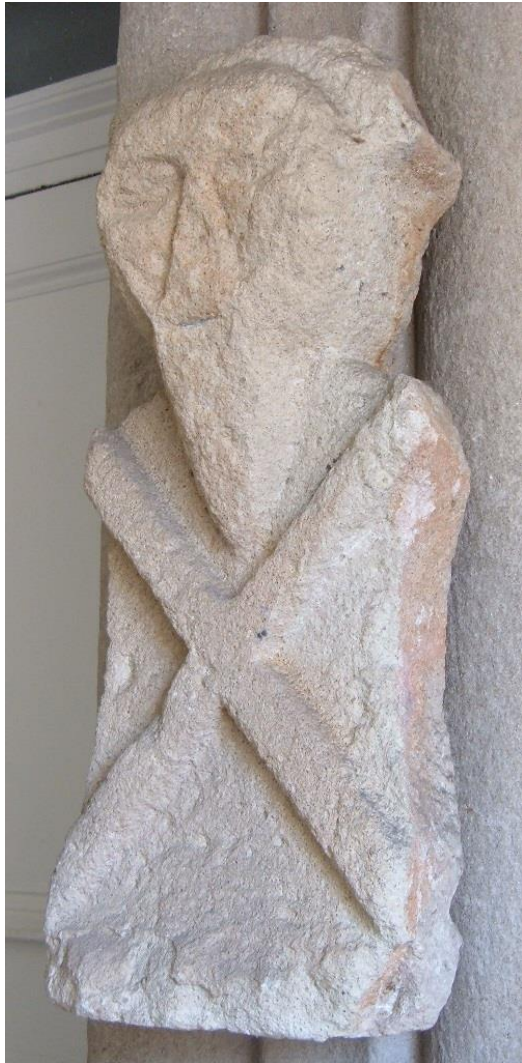
The present building has no known official dedication to any saint, so has always generally been referred to as Stoke Damerel Church or even, by many who live locally, as *The Mother Church of Devonport*.



## FIRST PAGE OF FIRST STOKE DAMEREL CHURCH MAGAZINE - JANUARY 1878

[Copyright – Stoke Damerel parish church]

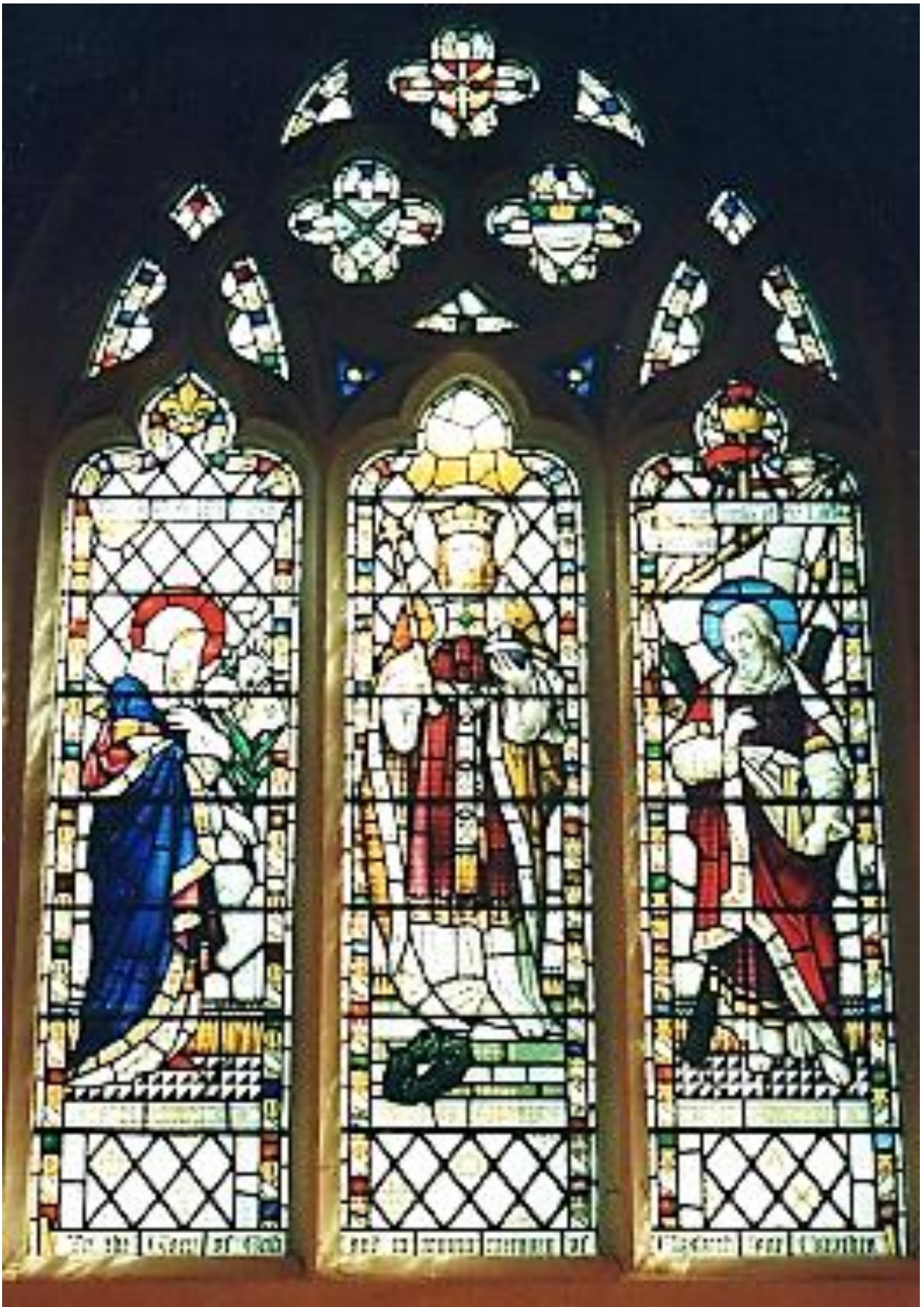
However, the name of St. Andrew may have been an early unrecorded dedication, especially as the building would generally then have been approached by many worshippers from the adjacent tidal creek. From the early years of the twentieth century the building was referred to as the church of St. Andrew and St. Mary. There are two carvings in the South Porch, thought to date from the late fifteenth century, which are reputed to be representations of St. Mary and St. Andrew.



## **REPUTED REPRESENTATIONS OF ST. ANDREW AND ST. MARY**

[Both photographs - copyright – Tony Barnard]

In the latter years of the twentieth century, or the early years of this century, for reasons unknown, St. Luke seems to have replaced St. Mary when referring to the church officially. Considering the uncertainty this has created, we may be safest continuing to just speak of Stoke Damerel Church. However, the stained-glass window in the Chancel at the East End, inserted in 1923, has depictions of St. Mary and St. Andrew on either side of the central image of Christ. Considering the age of this window, this surely weakens the argument for the later inclusion of St. Luke instead of St. Mary. However, when mentioned, we now refer to all three saints.



**1923 EAST WINDOWS WITH REPRESENTATIONS OF ST. MARY,  
CHRIST AND ST. ANDREW**

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

The following brief chronological listing outlines some of the known important and interesting aspects of the church and locality over the centuries.

**1086** – The Domesday Book mentions *'Stoches'*, having 974 acres and 25 inhabitants, previously owned by Brismar the Saxon. The word is thought to mean a dairy farm [or possibly a fortified place]. After the Norman Conquest, King William I had given the land to Robert D'Albermarle, who was Lord of Aumale in Normandy. [Albemarle Villas, half a mile from the church, commemorates the name of this family from which the word Damerel is derived].

**1174 – 1183** – Listed as *'Stokes'* in the Index of Rolls & Charters.

**1281** - Assize Rolls – Listed as *'Stok Aubermarl'*.

**1288-91** - Taxation of Pope Nicholas, land recorded as *'Ecclia de Stok'* and valued at £3.6s.8d.

**1292** – The church was recorded in the "Taxatio Ecclesiastica".

**1310** – First known Rector of Stoke Damerel parish church – Henry le Megre.



## ENTRY FOR HENRY LE MEGRE ON RECTORS BOARD

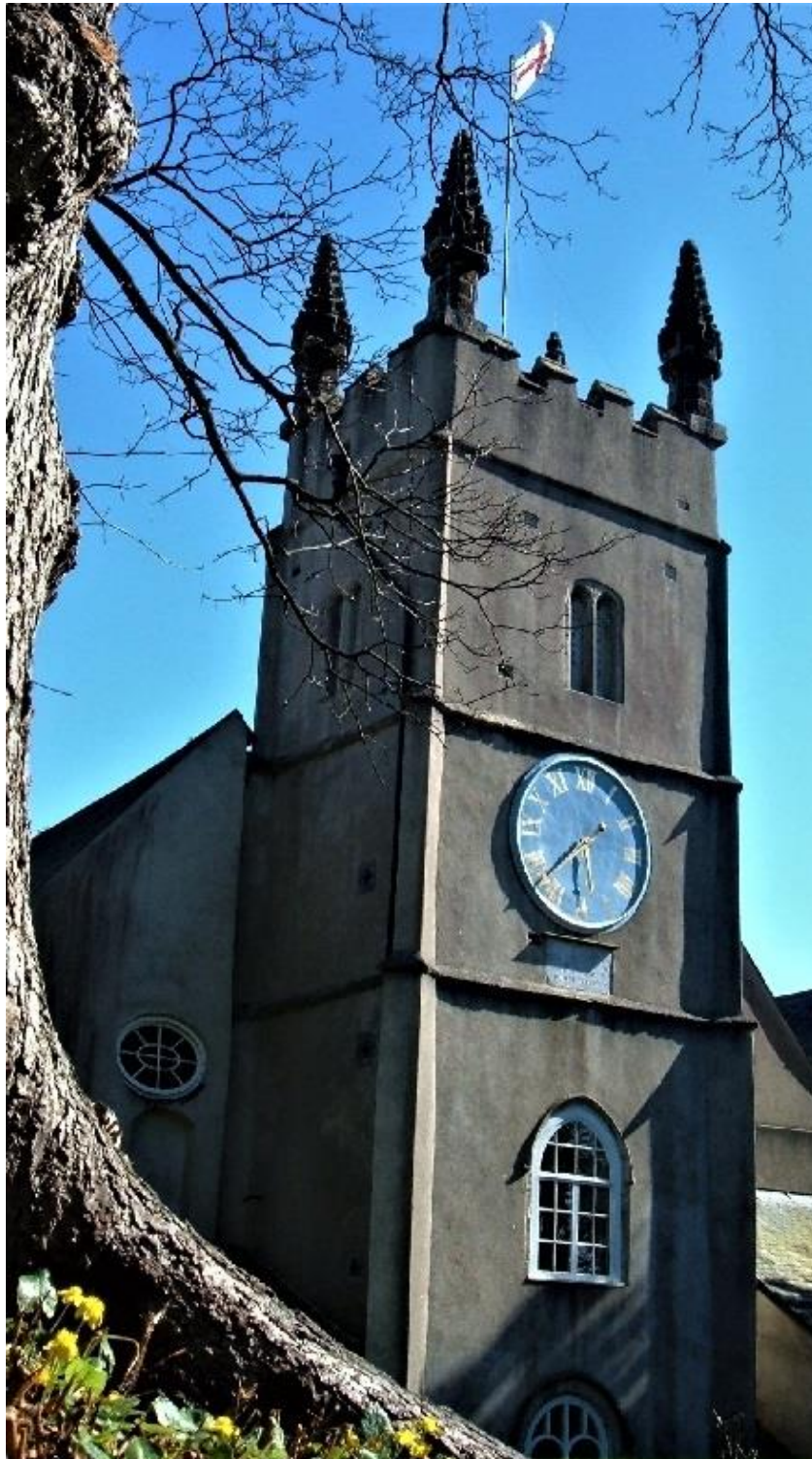
[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1311** – In Episcopal records – *‘Stoke Daumerale’*.

**1316** – Feudal Aids – listed, as *‘Stoke Daumarle’*.

**1332** – Considered to be an “important parish”. Tax assessment on moveable goods – 17 names from the parish, paying 17 shillings and 8 pence – a low amount but more than some inland rural parishes.

**1361** – In Feudal Aids - listed as *‘Stoke Daumarle’*.



**THE 15<sup>th</sup>. CENTURY TOWER OF STOKE DAMEREL CHURCH**

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1400's** – Rebuilding in the perpendicular style was undertaken – consisting of a chancel, nave and a rectangular tower, which probably included the first bells. Parts of this building may still remain. The largest portions are thought to be the tower, north porch and much of the external walling to the northern side of the building, including the stone arch around the opening leading from the church through to the modern Parish Centre. Additionally, the carved stone heads possibly depicting St. Mary and St. Andrew, which are mounted on the columns in the South Porch, may date from this period.

**1525** – First road constructed to the church from Mill Bridge. Prior to this, field paths were the only method of access to the building by land.

**1553** – Devon County Commissioners – Inventory of church goods indicates that 'Stoke Damerel' tower has four bells.

**1500's** – By the end of this century the spelling of Stoke Damerel had generally been fixed as we know it today.

**1595** – First dated church registers under Rector German Goldstone Snr., in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

**1667** – Stoke Damerel Manor was sold by Sir Edward Wise to Sir William Morice.

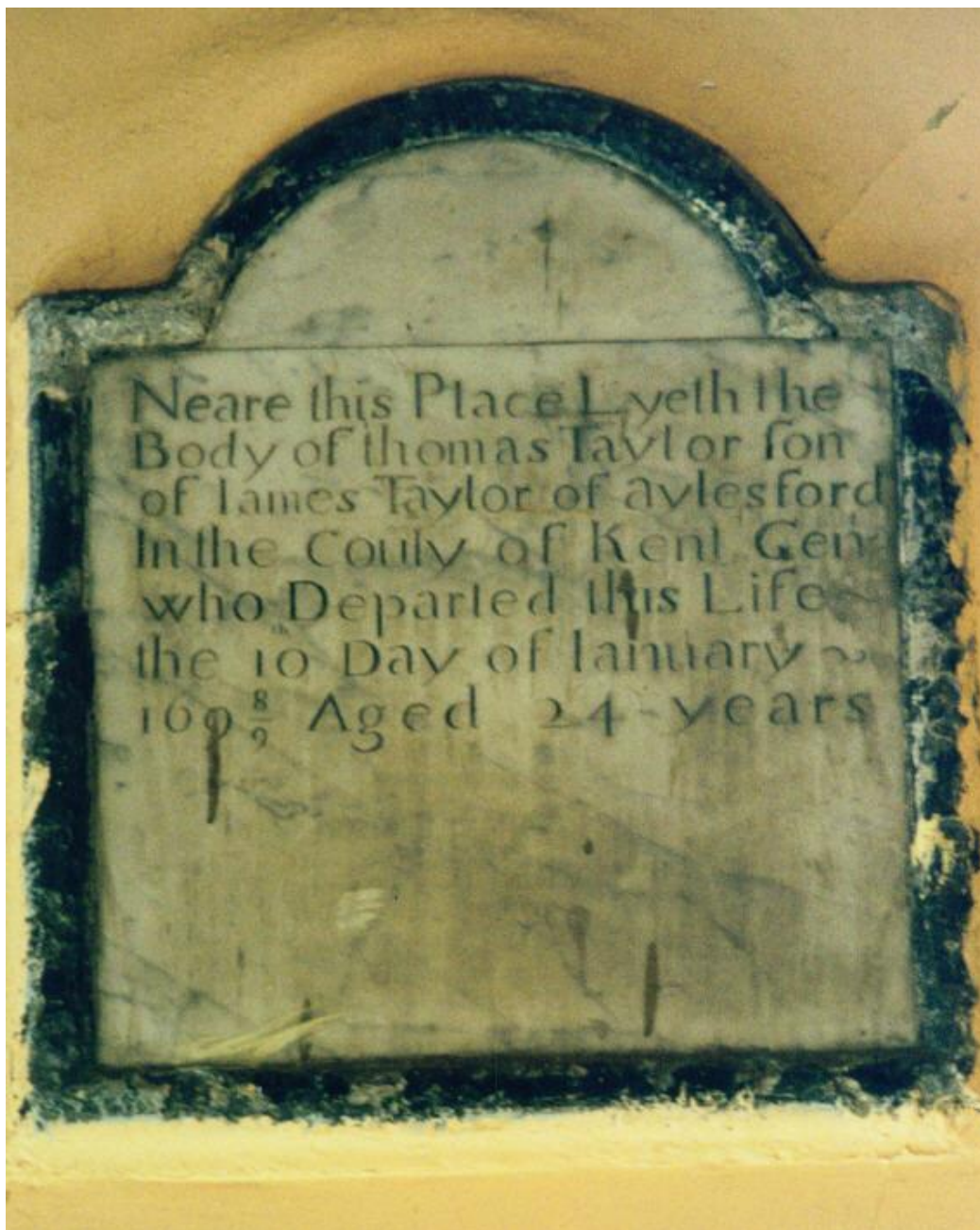


**SIR WILLIAM MORICE**

[Painted by Jacob Huysmans between 1650 and 1679]

**1690** – Following an earlier suggestion from Sir Walter Raleigh to King Charles II, King William III [of Orange] ordered construction of the first naval dock, located on the River Tamar within the parish of Stoke Damerel. From then until 1780, Stoke Damerel Parish and Manor were responsible for the government of the area known as Dock [later to be re-named as Devonport]. The population of the parish of Stoke Damerel grew rapidly and within 100 years was the largest town west of Bristol.

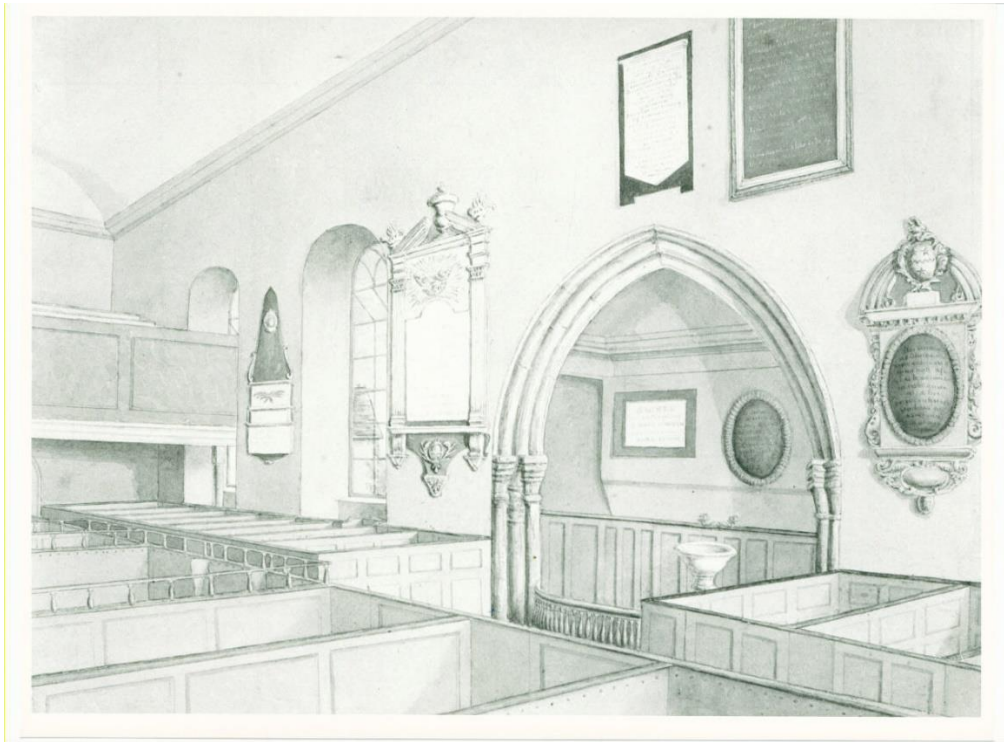
**1698 or 1699** – Memorial to Thomas Taylor, located on the wall, high above the south door into the church – the uncertainty of dating may show the difference between the old Julian calendar then used in England and the newer Gregorian calendar in use on the continent.



**MEMORIAL TABLET TO THOMAS TAYLOR**

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1715** – A second aisle was added to the church building and box pews installed. Richard Young of the dockyard was instrumental in this. His memorial tablet can still be seen in the church, on the North Wall.



## **RICHARD YOUNG MEMORIAL [BETWEEN WINDOW AND ARCH]**

[Copyright – Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1733** – Mary Grey and Bampfylde-Moore Carew were married at Stoke Damerel Church. Although his father was a respectable priest, Carew took up the bohemian style of life and claimed to be “*King of the Beggars*”. The title page of his memoirs describes him as “*the Noted Devonshire Stroller and Dogstealer*”. He was generally considered to be a rogue, vagabond and imposter.



## **BAMPFYLDE MOORE CAREW**

[Eighteenth century engraving]



**1742** – Sir John St. Aubyn, Bart. became the Lord of the Manor.

**1750** – A third aisle was added and extensive renovations undertaken. The first gallery and three-tier pulpit installed; The Rector's Vestry was created in the base of the tower and the main entrance into the church was moved to the south. The church building became greater in width than length. The Admiralty provided materials used inside the building.



### **EXTENDED CHURCH WITH THREE-TIER PULPIT AND REAR GALLERY**

[Copyright - Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1760** – Glebe land reduced to only 17 acres. The remainder had been sold to the government for £3987.15s.0d. – The church may have had to do this following the possible loss of investments in the infamous ‘South Sea Bubble’.

**1760’s** – Visit to Stoke Damerel by the Wesley brothers. Charles Wesley preached to 4,000 in the churchyard.

**1772** – Tobias Furneaux sailed with Captain Cook to discover New Zealand. Furneaux charted Tasmania [He gave names to Eddystone Point, Mewstone, and Swilly Bay] and went on to be the first man to circumnavigate the world in both directions. His tomb is in the churchyard opposite the North Porch. A number of Furneaux family memorials can be seen inside the church on the North Wall. The family lived in, the now demolished, Swilly House.



## MEMORIAL STONE TO TOBIAS FURNEAUX

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1780** – Commissioners took over the governing of Dock, jointly with Stoke Damerel Parish Vestry, and this arrangement continued until 1837.

**1788** – Philip Smith [Dockyard Clerk] was murdered in the churchyard by John Richards and William Smith [Dockyard workmen]. This was considered to be revenge by Richards for being discharged by Smith. Both were hung at Heavitree. Their bodies were returned to Stoke and hung from the Millbridge gibbet for seven years or more.



## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ETCHING SHOWING GIBBET AND CHURCH

[Copyright-- Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1788** – The church bells were re-hung as a peal of six, although the Rector, Edward Blackett, suggested only one large tenor bell be hung as *“six bells would be productive of more idleness and drunkenness than is in the Parish already...”*

**1789** – George III visited Dock and the new bells were first rung as his carriage passed by the church.

**1794** – Battle of ‘Glorious First of June’ against France in the Atlantic Ocean. French lost most men but 130 grain ships got through from the U.S.A. to France. A memorial to Lieutenant Buller, who died in the battle, is in the church on the West Wall.



## **MEMORIAL TABLET TO LIEUT. WILLIAM BULLER**

[Copyright-Tony Barnard]

**1796** – Edward Jenner carried out experiments to protect against smallpox. The word ‘vaccine’ was suggested by his friend, Doctor Richard Dunning of Albemarle Villas. A memorial tablet to members of the Dunning family is located on the North Wall, over the opening leading through to the Parish Centre.

**1797** – The Military Hospital was built on the side of the tidal creek opposite the church. This is now Devonport High School for Boys.

**1801** – First national census undertaken. Dock population – 23,747; Plymouth – 16,040; Stonehouse – 3,407.

**1804** – Samuel Phelps was born in St. Aubyn Street. When orphaned at the age of 16 he went to London to try and make his fortune. He became an acclaimed tragic actor and founded Sadlers Wells in 1844.



## **SAMUEL PHELPS**

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**1810** – ‘Saucer-eyed’ ghost seen in the churchyard – claimed to be a deceased waterman anguished over the speed of his widow finding new love.

**1811** – The clock was installed into the West face of the tower.

**1813** – At the election of churchwardens, ‘Dockyardsmen’ exercised their electoral rights by nominating their own warden, John Coulter, in opposition to the parishioners’ choice. Coulter was duly elected [480 votes to 360].

**1815** – Napoleon Bonaparte detained on board ‘Bellerophon’ in Plymouth Sound. Stonemason John Boynes drowned while trying to get a glimpse of Napoleon. Boyne’s tombstone is in Stoke Damerel churchyard.



### **TOMBSTONE OF JOHN BOYNES**

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1823** – Townspeople petitioned for Plymouth Dock to be re-named Devonport.

**1827** – The gibbet finally collapsed after more than 35 years. Snuff boxes and other items were made from the wood as ‘souvenirs’.

**1828** – Rector Thomas Williamson died. Curate John Hawker had been expected to become the next Rector, having served as Curate for many years, but he was dismissed by the Lord of the Manor who appointed his relative. Rev. William J. St. Aubyn [known as the BAD St. Aubyn]. Hawker then set up Eldad chapel, later to be replaced by St. Peter’s Church in Wyndham Square.

**1830** – A Guide to Plymouth was published. Stoke Damerel Church was not liked – *“Few public buildings possess so little pretence to architectural distinction, while the monuments are proof of affection rather than taste”*.

**1830** – Lights spotted in the churchyard at night by local residents – Body snatchers were at work and were followed. They took corpses from the churchyard to a villa in Mount Pleasant occupied by Mr. Gosling and others – They were all caught and transported.

**1831** – First Cholera epidemic in Britain. The same year gas lighting was installed in Stoke Damerel Church. [Electric lighting was later installed in 1904]

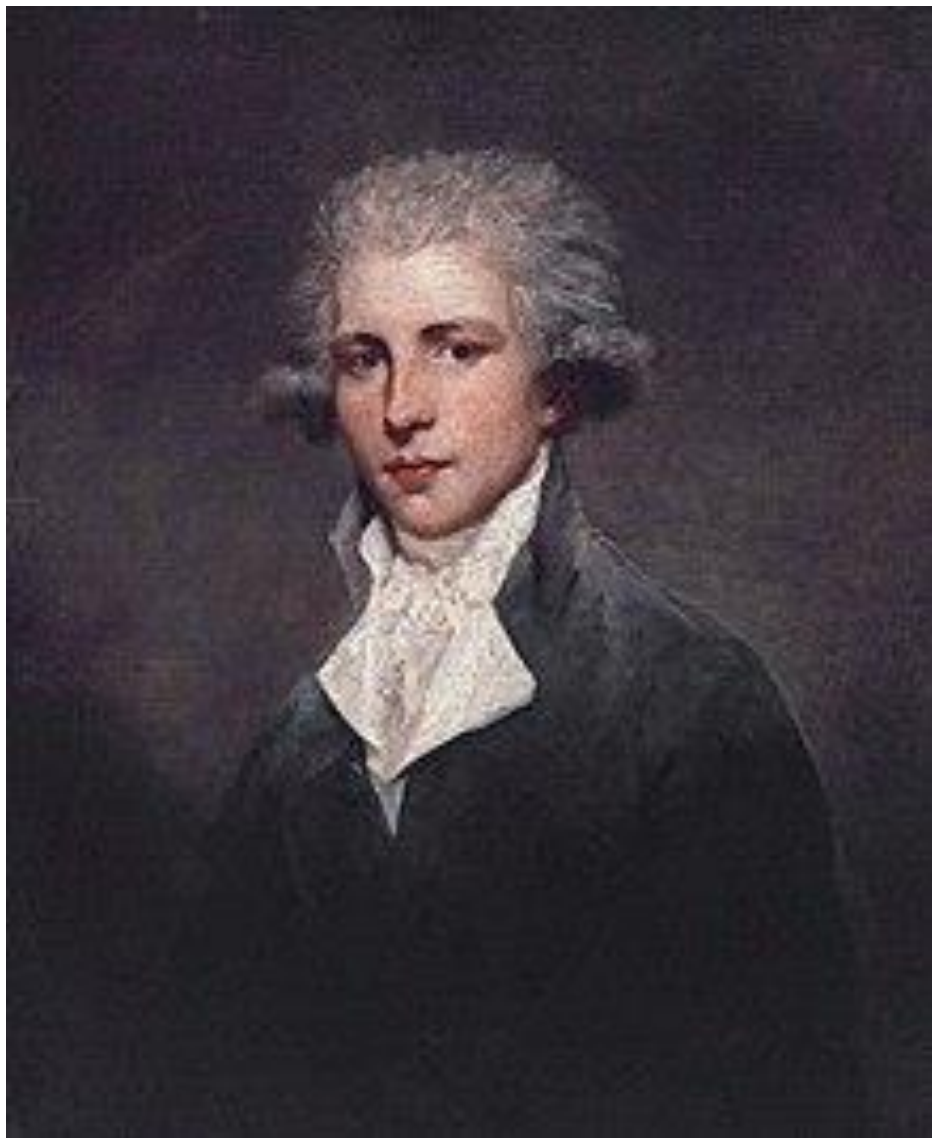
**1831** – Charles Darwin stayed in Devonport from October to December awaiting improvements in the weather before sailing on HMS Beagle to South America. Darwin wrote that the waiting was “*The most miserable which I ever spent*”.

**1832** – Anatomy Act passed – brought about by grave robbers actions around the country [especially churchyards like Stoke Damerel].

**1832** - Cholera epidemic reached Stoke – 700 died in the area.

**1834** – Dispute over occupation of pews. Parishioners fought to see the Bishop. Blows and kicks were exchanged in church.

**1834** – Sir John St. Aubyn presented his famous mineral collection to the Civil and Military Library of Devonport.



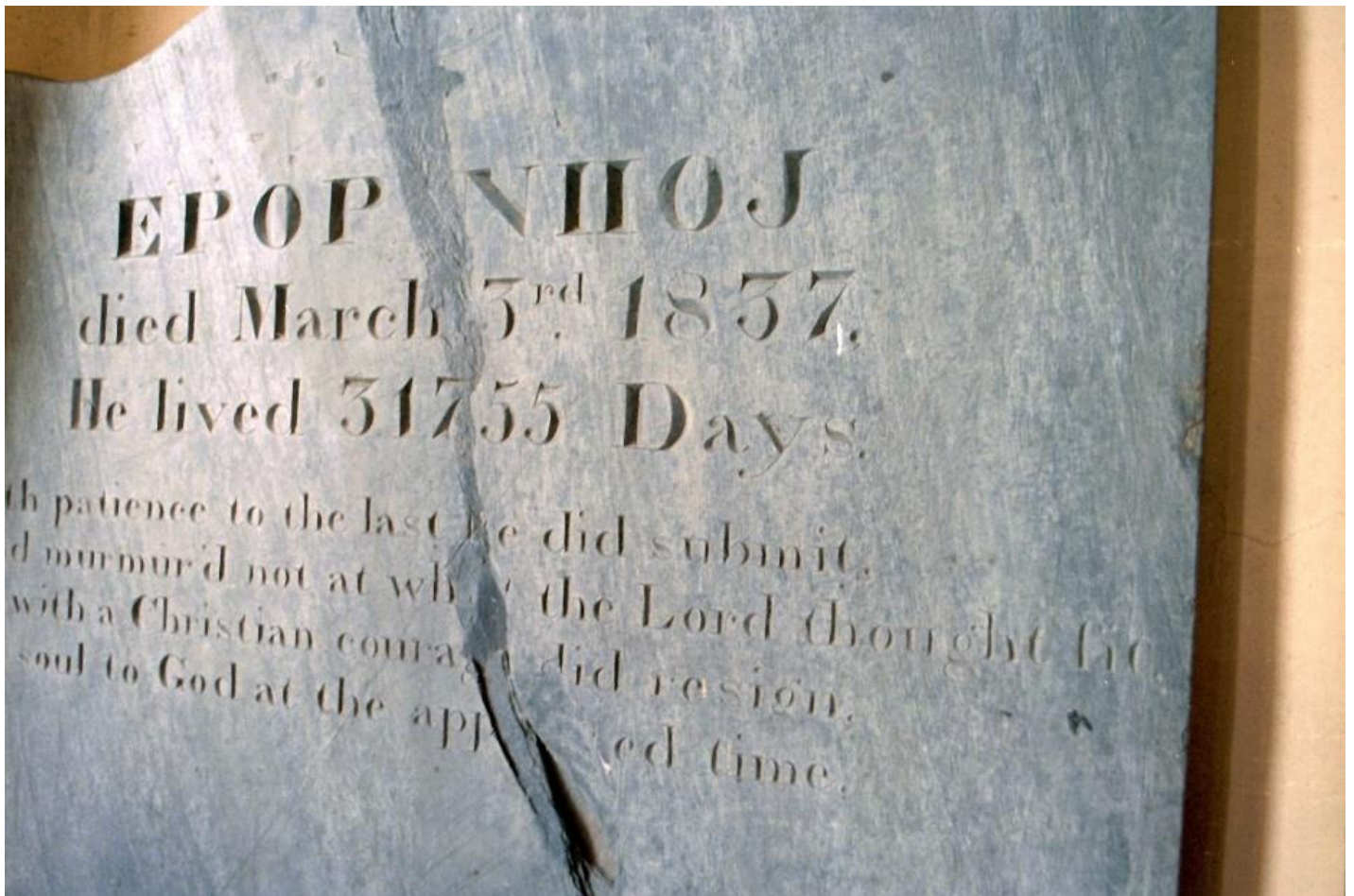
**SIR JOHN ST. AUBYN (By Sir Joshua Reynolds)**

[Downloaded from Wikimedia Commons – copyright free]

**1836** – A two manual organ was purchased and erected in the rear gallery.

**1837** – The municipal borough of Devonport was created by Royal Charter. Edward St. Aubyn [Steward of the Manor of Stoke Damerel, son of Sir John St. Aubyn and brother of Stoke Damerel's Rector] was elected first mayor of the borough. His father donated the mace.

**1837** – John Pope died – his tombstone is now in the church on the West Wall. His name is spelt backwards, and his age is given in days, apparently to confuse the Devil. He was buried vertically to be the first to rise on judgement day.



### **TOMBSTONE OF JOHN POPE**

{Copyright-Tony Barnard}

**1838** – Protest against Rev. William J. [The BAD] St. Aubyn's attempt to raise the 'rate' to cover the cost of church restoration. "*Crowd of youths and idle persons jumped on the seats, jostled in the aisles and filled the church with indecorous cries*" However £800 was raised and then the 'rate' was abolished.

**1849** – Cholera epidemic. 1,894 died in the area.

**1851** – Great Exhibition in London. Stoke Damerel church pulpit was one of the exhibits at that event.



## **PULPIT FROM THE GREAT EXHIBITION**

[Copyright-Tony Barnard]

**1864** – Edward St. Aubyn, the first mayor of Devonport, gave the mayor's chain of office to the Corporation.

**1868** – New Chancel built alongside original at the East End of the church.

**1868** – Robert Falcon Scott [of the Antarctic, a distant relative of Sir Walter Scott and father of Sir Peter Scott, the famous naturalist] was born. He was baptised at Stoke Damerel Church, his family living at Outlands. He reached the South Pole in 1912 only to discover that he had just been beaten to the Pole by a Norwegian team of explorers. He and all other members of the British expedition perished on the return journey across the frozen wasteland of Antarctica.





## **CAPTAIN ROBERT FALCON SCOTT**

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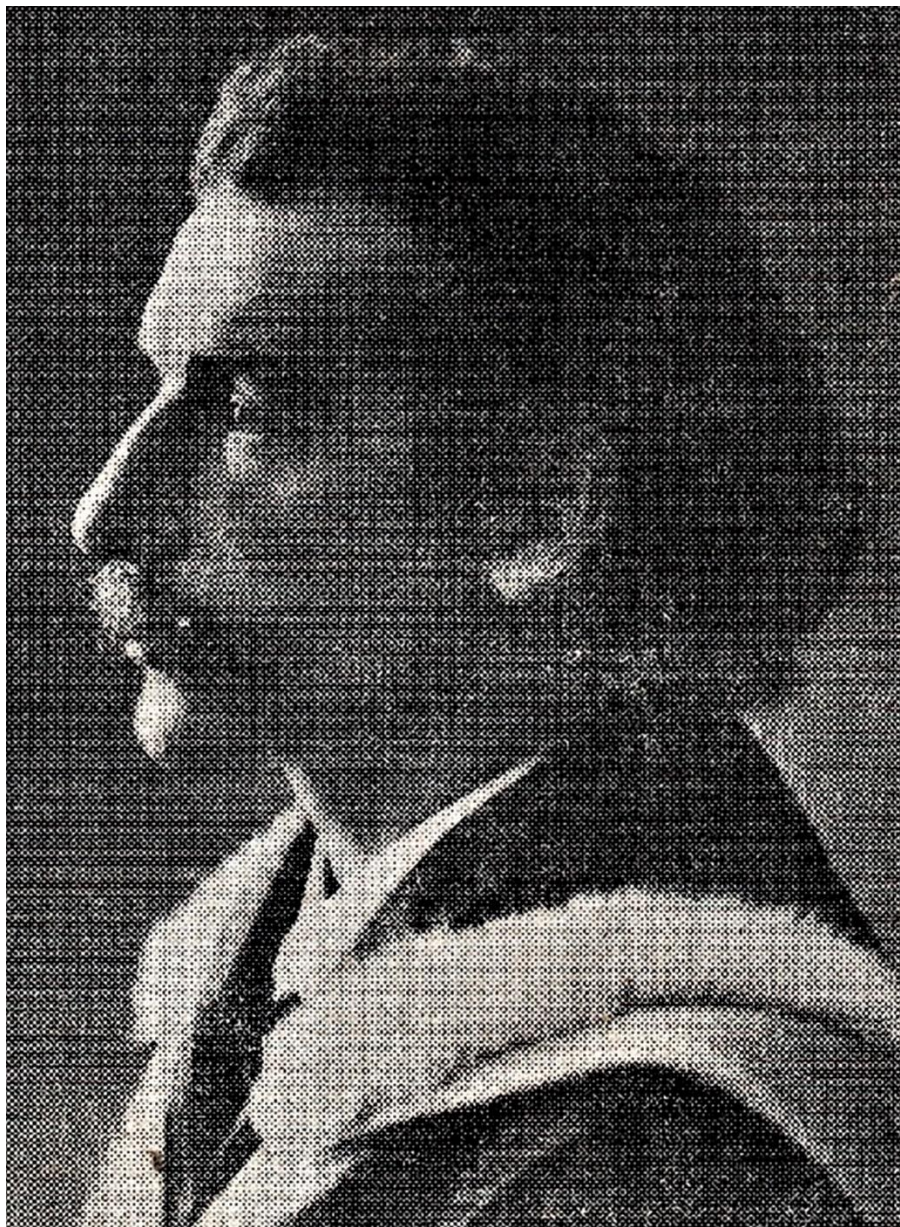
**1871** – Burials in churchyard limited to walled graves and vaults only.

**1872** – Smallpox epidemic. 448 died in the area.

**1873** – Organ moved from rear balcony to current position.

**1874** – 10 year old Harry Morton was appointed church organist and held the post for five years. His mother was choir mistress. However the organ could not be played for three weeks. The previous organist had been sacked and refused to give back the key. Morton later became famous as a local broadcaster and concert organist He was also organist at the (now Minster) church of St. Andrew in Royal

Parade for many years until his retirement in 1958 only three years before his death at the age of 97.



**DR. HARRY MORETON**

[Copied from 1956 concert programme. Copyright-Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1878** – First Stoke Damerel church magazine published.

**1879** – Battle of Rorke’s Drift in South Africa. Approximately 150 British Troops were attacked at the Mission Station by up to 4,000 Zulu warriors. The British lost 17 men. 15 were wounded, including Sergeant Francis Atwood who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He was brought back to the Military Hospital opposite Stoke Damerel Church. His memorial is located on the South Wall of the church.

**1891** – ‘The Great March Blizzard of the West’ hits the South West of England. 200 perished, along with thousands of animals. Captain Andrew Haggard [brother

of the novelist Ryder Haggard] was based in Raglan Barracks and wrote to The Western Morning News -”...whatever the cyclone might do in the way of lulling occasionally down at the Raglan, on the top of Stoke Hill it blizzed all night with perfect impartiality.” At Stoke Damerel Rectory, then at Wingfield Villas, the storm sent a large chimney stack crashing through the roof into the drawing room –“doing great damage to some valuable furniture.”

**1893** – Leslie Hore-Belisha was born in Devonport and lived in Albemarle Villas. He was the Member of Parliament for Devonport between 1923 and 1945. He was responsible for the introduction of Belisha Beacons in 1934 when he was Minister of Transport.



**BARON HORE-BELISHA**

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**1899** – Paradise Road was widened taking up part of the churchyard.

**1903** – St. Mary’s Lady Chapel, Crypt and Vestries were built in Collingwood Road. These were the only parts of the proposed Anglican Cathedral to be constructed and were eventually demolished in 1967.



## PHOTOGRAPHS OF RECTORY AND ST. MARY'S CRYPT

[Copyright – Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1911** – Guy Burgess [spied for USSR during the Cold War] born in Devonport.  
He died in 1963, at the age of 52, in Moscow.

**1914** – Devonport and Stonehouse amalgamated with Plymouth.

**1916** – Battle of Jutland on First of June, in the Baltic, against Germany. Britain suffered most casualties but German fleet trapped in port for remainder of conflict. A number of those who perished are listed on our War Memorials.

**1922** – Reverend Masterman became Rector of Stoke Damerel.



## BISHOP MASTERMAN, RECTOR OF STOKE DAMEREL

[Copyright-Stoke Damerel parish church]

**1923** – Reverend Masterman became first *Bishop* of Plymouth.

**1924** – The mineral collection of Sir John St. Aubyn was passed from Devonport Civil and Military Library to its present location at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

**1925 onward** – Some of the twentieth century choir pews, the first Rectors Board, a Litany Desk and both Stoke Damerel church timber War Memorials are considered to be important pieces by local carver Violet Pinwell, who's work can be seen in over 100 churches in the South-west, including Truro Cathedral.



**VIOLET PINWILL**

[Downloaded from WordPress.com]

**1933 and 1936** – Hugh Ruttledge led two unsuccessful expeditions to climb Mount Everest. He lived in Stoke during the later years of his life. A small wall tablet in his memory can be found on the West Wall of the church.

**1935** – Dockyard engineering worker Bert [Stormy] Medland elected as first Lord Mayor of Plymouth. In 1945 he became the Labour MP for Drake Ward.

**1936** – Stoke Damerel Churchwarden Walter Littleton elected second Lord Mayor of Plymouth. His name is inscribed on the Lord Mayor’s pew frontal [currently in storage], below the city coat-of-arms.



### **LORD MAYOR'S PEW FRONTAL**

[Copyright – Tony Barnard]

**1963** – The City Council took over the churchyard and flattened gravestones.

**1974** – Pat Gray publishes “Stoke Damerel Parish Church – A History”

**1977** – Lead stolen from organ loft roof. Hele & Co. repaired the organ.

**1977** – Bells re-hung as peal of eight.

**1977** - Pat Gray’s History of Stoke Damerel, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition, sold at 20d. per copy.

**1986** – Stoke Damerel Parish Hall was declared unsafe and was closed. The Parish Hall and the Church of England Men’s Club building were subsequently both demolished. The new Parish Centre was then built adjacent to the church.

**2016** – Major works undertaken including new lighting and floor being re-laid to one level in limestone, with underfloor heating.

**2018** – Reverend Keith Robus R.N., formerly Chaplain of Britannia Naval College, Dartmouth, becomes the 46<sup>th</sup>. Rector of Stoke Damerel parish church since the year 1310.



**REVEREND KEITH ROBUS R.N.**

[Copyright – Stoke Damerel parish church]

**2020** New sound and camera system installed which allows Stoke Damerel parish church to broadcast church services live, to the world, via ‘YouTube’.

**2021** Second Rectors Board created by local wood carver, Eric ???, using oak from redundant 1930’s pew [original carved by James B. Hunt] combined with oak from redundant 1950’s altar rail [original carved by Violet Pinwill]



## SECOND RECTORS BOARD

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