

# Lanivet church



This issue

Results of  
archaeological survey  
at Lanivet church

## Digging into village history

Our parish church in Lanivet dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Or does it?

Works undertaken in 2022 to bring water and sewerage pipes into the church, via the north and west walls of the north aisle, enabled an archaeological investigation to be carried out which suggests that the first build in stone probably happened as early as c1160.

## Fascinating historical finds

Lanivet church has yielded four significant archaeological results:

- An understanding of the North Aisle's physical and chronological development;
- The related Medieval window insertion/replacement schedule with post-Medieval repairs identified;
- A comprehensive overview of the Tower foundations;
- Evidence of what may be a late Medieval wall which may give a rare indication of a Medieval graveyard.



1 Excavation at Lanivet Church north and west wall

Archaeologist Rupert Achilleus of Archimedes Archaeological Consultants, Penzance, was commissioned by Scott & Co Chartered Surveyors and Historic Building Consultants to undertake the investigation. He has concluded that the earliest stone nave (in the same place as the present central nave) was probably 80ft x 20ft, with 5ft thick walls, and was built in c1160 along with the 66ft long north aisle. A chantry chapel extension was added in 1190.

A “new” north aisle was added in c 1240 and extended in about 1290 to introduce the present east window and an adjacent window.

In 1314 the north aisle windows were largely replaced and the tower may have been built at this time. Between then and 1420 the remaining windows were added. To the casual observer, the windows in Lanivet church seem the same, but again it is a case of similar but different! And, of course, windows are frequently repaired as required throughout the life of the church building, in Lanivet notably during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with some reglazing during the Victorian renovations of the interior in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The construction principles of Medieval churches in Cornwall are markedly similar. There are about 12 phases in total between 1160 and 1500. This uniformity is a product of the overall influence of the Diocese of Exeter on plan type; the effect of masons’ Guilds requiring a nationwide uniformity of practice and practical limitations.

The best clues for dating purposes lie in the thickness of the walls – and changes in masonry style to 3ft wide wall occurred in about 1320. And so it is in Lanivet.

From phase 1 (c1160), we have the extended north aisle in c1240 and, during the incumbency of the first recorded Rector Stephen Heym, the south aisle in c1290 – doubling and tripling the size of the church to accommodate a huge increase in congregation. There is a gap in works between 1314 and 1360, encompassing the years of the 1316 great famine and the years of the black death.

This is, of course, just touching the tip of the iceberg. There is so much still to discover and understand about the history of our church – let us hope it won’t be too long before more investigations can take place.

For more information about the history and heritage of Lanivet church visit:

<https://www.bodminway.org/lanivetchurch>