

## Statement of Significance

The church and churchyard are set high on a hill on the edge of Instow, where the rivers Taw and Torridge meet. Instow means ‘the holy place of John’ and it is thought that the church was originally dedicated to John, the brother of the Celtic saint Nectan. It is exposed to severe weather from autumn until late spring, as it is one of the highest points facing the estuary and Bristol Channel.



*Photo 1: The church in its setting*

The church is located close to cottages and the community school. The main residential area is now over a mile away.

Instow beach was commandeered by the military during World War Two, as a practice ground for amphibious landings. The Royal Marines continue to use RM Instow today.

## The church building

The Grade I listed church was rebuilt in the late 13<sup>th</sup>/early 14<sup>th</sup> Century and restored by William White in 1872-3. The building is constructed of rubblestone with ashlar dressings and slate roofs with coped cable ends.

The tower is 53 feet and nine inches high. The north transept was replaced by a north aisle in 1547 with a wagon roof and dedication to the donors on the pillars. These read *In yere of oure Lorde God MDXLVII Richard Waterman and Emma his wyf.*



*Photo 2: Looking towards the chancel from the tower screen*



*Photo 3: Looking towards the west, from the chancel*

## Contents of the church

The font is Norman, as is stonework in the transept and some walls. The floor has several Georgian tombstones and Barnstaple clay tiles in the aisles. The church is known for its spectacular stained glass and beautiful furnishings.

The richly carved chancel screen dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1906) and echoes medieval designs. It was carved by Rashleigh, Pinwill & Co (the notable Devon female woodcarvers), to the design of architect Edmund H. Sedding. The nave section is dedicated to Mary Olivia Jenkins (died 1906), wife of the Revd W.T.L. Jenkins, Rector. The north portion was installed later (there is a Faculty record from 1911), and commemorates Chamberlain Henry Hinchcliff (died 1891) and his wife Matilda (died 1911) and was the gift of their daughters.

The choir stalls are also by Rashleigh, Pinwill & Co, their dedication is recorded in a newspaper report of 1914, stating that some *very finely carved oak stalls with bold poppy heads, all varied in pattern were an immense improvement to the church*.

The nave, north aisle and south transept were reseated in the 1873 restoration. The pews were removed from the south transept following a Faculty in 2014.

The tower screen probably dates from the restoration of the tower in 1932.

## Significance for mission

The church is of considerable interest to the community and has many tourist visitors (the Tarka Trail and South West Coast Path pass through Instow). There are two services per month, with attendance averaging 26 people. We are one of three congregations making up the Taw and Torridge Estuary Churches mission community (with Fremington and Westleigh). Our new mission community priorities focus on developing worship, engaging with families and outreach to the community. We have an increasing programme of events and would like to make best use of the church building to support our work with the community and congregation.

## Impact on significance of the area affected by the proposal

We propose to create a flexible space in the south west corner of the church, which can be used for information displays and to provide an additional social area. It will improve the welcome to the church building and also increase space around the font for baptisms.

The furnishings and contents of the south west corner will be affected by the proposal, specifically a small number of pews, the tower screen and the font.



## The font

At present, the area around the font is crowded, with a variety of freestanding shelving and tables being used for storage and to display information (photo below). While the proposal will not result in any changes to the font itself, it will improve its setting by reducing clutter and providing additional space for baptisms.



*Photo 4: The font, freestanding furniture and the south door*

## The pews

We propose to remove three rows of pews and a frontal from the area behind the font (see photo 2). The pews were installed in the 1873 restoration. They are plain, fairly standard pine pews, with plain seats and a single roll around the back of the top rest and on the end returns.

These pews are used very infrequently. The rear pew is cramped, due to the way it fits around and in front of the tower screen.



*Photo 5: The pews proposed for removal*





*Photo 6: Pew end*

Removal of the pews in this area will have a negative impact on the interior as a whole, due to loss of part of the set. We did consider whether it might be more suitable to have a flexible space in the north west corner, however this would be more visually disruptive and these pews are in more frequent use. Overall, we feel that removing three pews and the frontal from this area represents a modest change to the church interior.

The pews are mounted with brackets onto a parquet floor (there is no platform). We propose to repair the small holes left by removing the brackets with a wood filler, then lightly sand and oil the floor.

Where the pew ends are wall mounted, we propose to remove these and appoint a contractor to make good the lime plaster.

The first pews has a plaque mounted on it. This does not appear to relate to this particular pew (and this is unlikely to be its original location), so we propose to relocate the plaque to the other rear nave pew.



*Photo 7: Plaque in memory of William Branton*



*Photo 8: Proposed new location for plaque*

## The tower screen

We feel that there will be a positive impact on the tower screen, as it will be more visible. There is currently a crude boxed in area between the back pew and the screen, with a fire extinguisher mounted on it. We are fairly certain that there is nothing in this plywood box, which could be easily removed. **The fire extinguisher will be relocated to ?**

We plan to use freestanding display screens, positioned close to the south wall, to provide information and temporary displays (for events such as heritage open days). These will not obstruct the tower screen, or access into the tower.

### Sources:

Wilson, H. (2021), *The Remarkable Pinwill Sisters*

Devon Churchland,

<https://devonchurchland.co.uk/description/instow-church-of-st-john-the-baptist-description/>

National Churches Trust

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/church/st-john-baptist-instow>

Historic England, National Heritage List

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1107600> (Appendix 1)

North Devon Journal, 2 July 1874 (Appendix 2)

Western Times, 23 September 1932 (Appendix 3)



## Appendix 1: National Heritage List for England Entry

Heritage category: Listed Building  
Grade: I  
List entry number: 1107600  
Date first listed: 25-Feb-1965  
List entry name: Church of St John the Baptist  
National Grid Reference: SS 47975 30987

### Details

INSTOW RECTORY LANE, Instow Town SS 43 SE 1/90 Church of St John the Baptist 25.2.65 GV  
I Parish Church.

Late C13/early C14 fabric to chancel. Perpendicular nave, west tower, south transept and north aisle, the latter added in 1547. Restored 1872-3 by William White. Stone rubble with ashlar dressings. Slate roofs with coped gable ends. West tower, nave, chancel, south transept and porch, north aisle. West tower of 3 stages. Short diagonal buttresses and embattled parapet with tall rectangular stair turret on south-east side. Single light bell-openings with louvres, cusped-headed to top stage, ogee-headed to 2nd stage on north and south sides, the latter with straight-headed single light window to base. Perpendicular 4-light window to west side with human head corbels to pointed arched hoodmould above. Perpendicular doorway with hollow-with-cyma recta moulded surround. Nave south side has 2 straight-headed windows that to left of 2 cusped-headed lights, that to right of 3 rounded-arched lights, both with hoodmoulds, flanking south porch. C19 pointed arched doorway with door of 2 boarded leaves, the upper part glazed with stained glass leaded lights. Plain chamfered pointed arched inner doorway. Unceiled porch waggon roof without mouldings. South transept window of 3 trefoil-headed stepped lights with pointed arched hoodmould. 2-light window on east side with quatrefoil tracery to head of 2 ogee-headed lights. Chancel south side has 2 cusped-headed light window with Y bars to left and tall single light lancet renewed in C19 to right of cusped headed priests doorway. 2 C19 straight-headed windows to east end of chancel and north aisle. 4 straight-headed early C16 Perpendicular windows to north side of north aisle with gentle ogee heads to the lights. Slightly projecting rood loft stair turret with segmental arched doorway. 2 buttresses towards west end. 3-light C19 window at west end of north aisle.

Interior: continuous north arcade of 4 bays with Pevsner 'A' type piers with foliated capitals to chancel pier and respond. Capitals to nave piers record erection of north aisle by "Rycharde Waterman (and) Emma His Wyf" in 1547. Ceiled waggon roof to north aisle with carved bosses at each intersection of the moulded ribs and longitudinal members, and

carved timber wall plates. Similar roof to south transept with single moulded rib and crenellated timber wall plates with carved decoration. C19 chancel roof and some reused timbers to arch-braced nave roof. Unmoulded semi-circular headed tower arch. C19 sedilia and piscina. Chancel floor retains patterns of Barnstaple tiles. C19 chancel and C20 nave furniture including timber screen of 1906-11 across nave and north aisle. Lead-lined bowl to Norman font of block-capital shape on round stem. Section of probably reused C17 communion rail to west end tower gallery with turned balusters and moulded handrail.

Monuments: 2 C17 wall monuments in south transept east and west walls to Downe family, father and son respectively. East side, square tablet with Ionic colonettes and skull in base. West side, swan-necked pediment with central shield above medallion with bust of male figure in bold relief, leaning on skull and clasping book. Verse plaque below. Wall monument, north wall of north aisle by J Kendall of Exeter to Humphrey Sibthorp, botanist, d.1797. At east end of north aisle, tablet with moulded stone surround to Rebecca Prince d.1685 with oval tablet above to Frederick Holmes d.1822.

Stained glass to north aisle and chancel east windows, to chancel lancet to H Hinchcliff d.1906, to south transept east side by Myer and Co. to James Edward Allen (1886) and on south side to Richard White and Wife (d. 1884 and 1906). South side of nave to Thomas Lock (d.1860) and Captain Leonard Slater (d.1914).

Listing NGR: SS4797630989

## Appendix 2: Article from the North Devon Journal, 2 July 1874

### *Restoration of the Parish Church*

*The parish church of the pretty watering-place of Instow was on Wednesday last week crowded at both morning and evening services, which were held to celebrate the conclusion of the excellent work of restoration that has been going on there for some time past. Many of the congregation came from the adjoining villages and also from Barnstaple. The church, which was built about the year 1500, and is of the late Perpendicular style, was in a very ill-conditioned state, when it was agreed, two or three years ago, that the building should be restored to somewhat of its original simple beauty, and made a pleasant and comfortable place of worship. The edifice, dedicated to St John Baptist, consists of nave, a chancel, a north aisle, and south transept, with a tower and a west end, and the work of restoration has consisted of the thorough reparation of the building, and the removal of the west end gallery in front of the tower, and the west end thrown open. The church has been re-seated with low modern seats in the place of the old high pews. The whole of the nave and the chancel has been re-roofed, and new floors have been laid. Besides this there is a new chancel painted window (representing the crucifixion) and a new simple reredos, consisting of carved white stone, with a large cross cut in the centre. The whole of the church, which will accommodate over 300 persons, has been pointed outside, including the oblong tower, and the only thing remaining now to make the church and its surroundings a picture is the renovation of the seemingly neglected churchyard. The whole work of restoration has cost about £1,200 and the fund is minus only about £100, which must be very gratifying to the ladies and gentlemen of Instow and neighbourhood, who took the work in hand, the former being especially indefatigable in their exertions. The architect was Mr White, of London, and the contractors Messrs. Howard and Squires of Bideford.*



### Appendix 3: Article from the Western Times, 23 September 1932

#### *Instow church restoration scheme*

*At a meeting of Instow Parochial Church Council, over which the Rector (Rev. H. Somers Cocks) presided, it was decided to make an immediate appeal for funds for the restoration of Instow Parish Church and to circularise residents of the parish and others.*

*The work of renovating the roof of the north aisle of the church is to proceed at once, but probably the repair of the tower will not be undertaken until next spring.*

*Lady Rosamond Christie has generously undertaken to see to the renovation and improvement of the organ of the church in memory of her late husband, Mr Augustus Langham Christie, and she has also offered to bear the costs of the restoration of the lychgate at the entrance to the church.*