

Small Pilgrim Places Journal 35:

Christ Church North Brentor to St Michael de Rupe, Brent Tor

The villages of North and South Brentor, in the Diocese of Exeter, boast two Small Pilgrim Places, both recent additions to the Network: Christ Church in the village of North Brentor and the Parish Church of St Michael de Rupe ("of the rocks") on the summit of Brent Tor.

The hospittaler of both churches, Christopher Pancheri, kindly emailed me an annotated map of the cross-country route between the two churches, and onward to Lydford which has the next church along a new pilgrimage route now being planned, The Archangel's Way. "The illustrated map", Christopher wrote, "has been designed by the artist Dru Marland and will be used in the publications for the route."

I walked the mile-and-a half or so between the two churches just before St George's Day, a time when spring in England is in full, colourful bloom. These sites being on the edge of Dartmoor, the season is a little behind more sheltered lowlands, but there were nevertheless plenty of flowers along the way, including the bright yellow of gorse with its coconut scent, the first few Red Campions showing shades of pink, and the delicate pale mauve of Heath Violets on the close-grazed moorland sward.



The glebe field and pond, North Brentor

My starting point was at Christ Church, set in the middle of the small village of North Brentor, opposite a glebe field with a pond and small stream running with crystal clear water. As I entered the churchyard, the most impressive exterior feature was the tall tower on the west end, constructed of the same random stone with faced granite quoins and window dressings as the rest of the

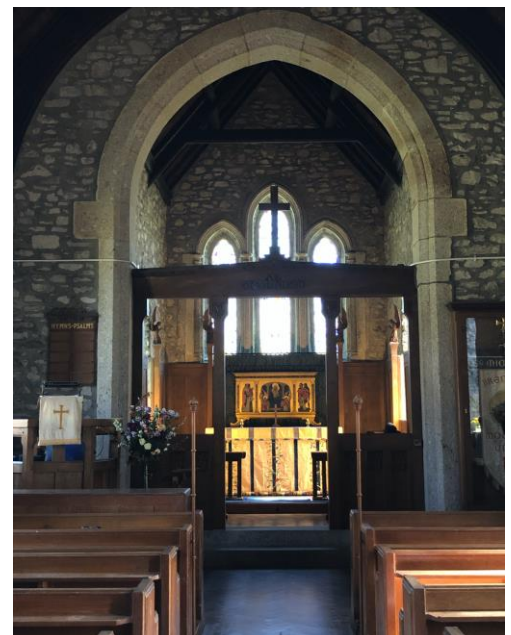
building. Circumnavigating the church I came across some little patches of flowering Snakeshead Fritillary, no doubt planted here to make a welcome addition to the lawned areas overlooked by trees.

A porch leads into the nave, where timber dominates: under the roof are open joists, and the nave is furnished with timber pews and separated from the short chancel by an oak rood screen. On the east wall is an eye-catching painted reredos, a triptych featuring the Virgin and Child that glistened gold in the morning sunlight.

With my doughty companion, Alfred the Small, I set off southwards, along rural lanes and footpaths which gradually gained altitude to give far-reaching views back to Christ Church and the sunny slopes of Dartmoor. Now and again I glimpsed the



Christ Church tower



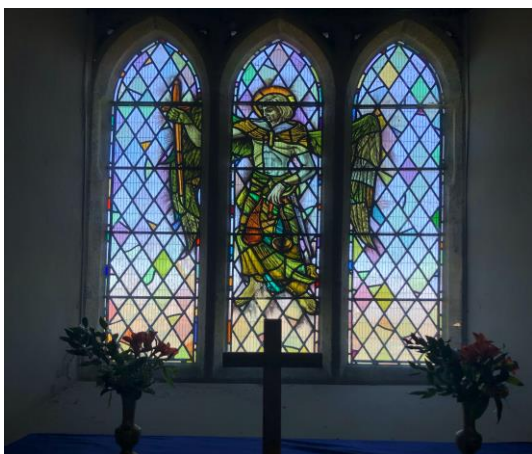
Looking towards the east end of Christ Church



Reaching the summit of Brent Tor

view repaid the climb and the effort of standing upright. Green, hedged pastures sloped down in every direction, with the soft browns of the moors in the far distance above a cloudless blue sky. Other walkers were sitting around the largely 13th century church with its squat, square tower, or on the scattered rocks, taking in the sunshine and the stunning vistas towards Dartmoor, the Tamar Valley and Bodmin Moor.

Stepping through the porch door I entered the nave, a plain and simple space furnished with half-a-dozen rows of pews. The most impressive feature for me was the east window depicting the Archangel Michael, and



The stained glass east window depicting St Michael

tower on Brent Tor, but the path took us on a meandering route around the contours of the hill before eventually allowing us access to climb to the summit atop steep, gorse-dotted slopes. And just on cue, the first swallow of the season, harbinger of warmer days ahead, swooped into view.

Dominating the rocky volcanic outcrop is the tiny church of St Michael de Rupe, originally founded by the monks of Tavistock Abbey a few miles to the south, and set amidst the remains of an Iron Age hill fort. Strong winds obliged me to hold on to my hat as well as to the puppy, but the



St Michael de Rupe Church

and installed in 1971. A knowledgeable friend has since told me that this is one of 14 windows that James Paterson designed for churches, mostly in Devon. He said, "The St Michael window has clear or tinted glass as a background which allows the figure to dominate, and from some angles it appears 3-dimensional emerging from its setting. Many designs of St Michael are very traditional - in armour with sword and/or scales and spearing a dragon. This is very different in that the sword is seen as a symbol of the cross and it is not centralised. And no dragon. Paterson was the principal of Bideford School of Art for 20+ years, and is well known for his painting skills. I think he taught himself the challenge of making stained glass as well as designing it."

On my first glimpse of the church from some distance I had assumed it was ruinous, but it is actually very much intact and services are held there between Easter and the end of

September – weather permitting. In fact Christopher later emailed me to say, "*I was up at St Michael's this morning for the Ascension Day service and we all trooped outside at the end to sing.*"

Ali Green