

## Small Pilgrim Places Journal 44:

### St. Peter's Church, Langton Herring, Dorset

March brings days that can be summer-warm in the sunshine and winter-cold in the shade. On such a day, under a uniformly blue sky without even a fist of a cloud, I walked a short section of the South West Coastal Path from Wyke Wood, not far from the Dorset coast, towards the village of Langton Herring on a pilgrimage to St Peter's Church.

Skirting the wood on a well-signposted footpath, I enjoyed far views across pasture and arable land, where new-born lambs were enjoying the spring warmth and new cereal crops were sprouting bright green. Before long I could make out a wedge of sea in the distance – West Fleet, with Chesil Beach beyond and then the English Channel.



*A glimpse of The Fleet from the footpath leading to Langton Herring*

Crossing a footbridge over a small stream, I found several footpaths offering a choice of routes up to the village, which stands on a ridge overlooking the Fleet. I took one that led across a damp pasture where the glossy leaves and developing pale green umbels of Alexanders lined the still bare hedgerows. A lane then took me westwards to the centre of the village where the church stands next to the Elm Tree pub, said to have played an important part in the smuggling activities of past generations.

St Peter's is perched on a tight, steep bend in the narrow lane. I entered through a door in the squat three-storey tower, pierced by narrow lancets and topped by battlements. The first thing I noticed in the porch was a box for collecting food bank items; the second was a plaque marking Langton Herring as a "Thankful Village". In fact it's a doubly thankful village, where no-one in the services lost their lives in either World War. However, the community has not escaped tragic loss: in 1852 four young boys were overcome with fumes whilst playing in a local limekiln. to their deaths.



*The church of St Peter's, Langton Herring*



*The chancel and east window*

On into the nave another item that caught my attention was a certificate declaring that St Peter's is the proud recipient of an Eco Church Bronze award, given in recognition of the congregation's "efforts to care for God's earth". Indeed I could see these efforts evidenced in the churchyard, where the sward has been allowed to blossom with spring wildflowers including primrose, celandine and speedwell, whilst the boundary walls are covered in Rustyback Fern. Anthills have been left undisturbed, and provide scattered grassland micro-sites that benefit a range of grasses, herbs and wildflowers as well as being a great food source for Green Woodpeckers and other birds and small

There is thought to have been a church on this site since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century and some sections of the walls date from this period. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw considerable updating and additions, including the vestry, south aisle and clock (still ticking). One addition that caught my eye was a colourful model boat, in full sail, suspended from the nave roof. It seemed a fitting reminder of the church's patron saint (even if Peter's vessel would have looked rather different), and also of its location just a short distance from the coast.



*A model sailing ship suspended from the roof of the nave*