

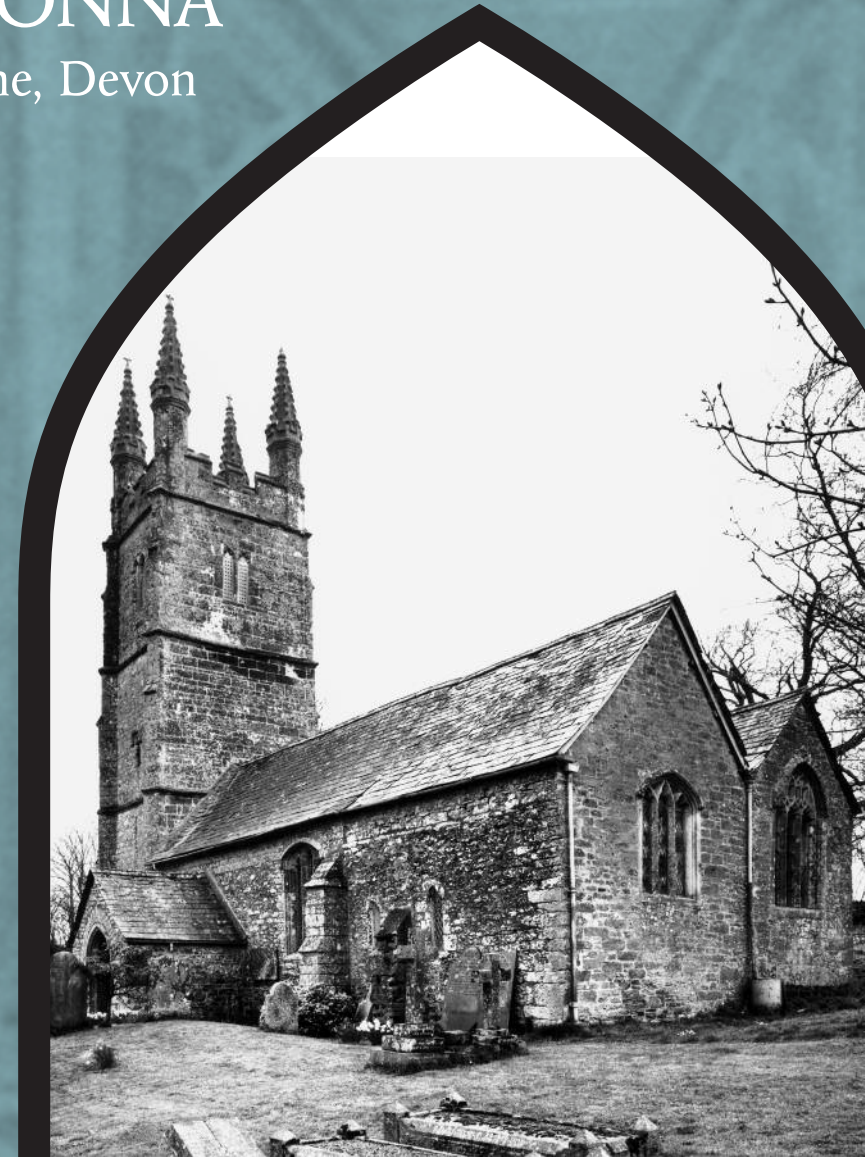


THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# THE CHURCH OF ST NONNA

Bradstone, Devon



THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST

1 West Smithfield London EC1A 9EE

Tel: 020 7213 0660 Fax: 020 7213 0678 Email: [central@tcct.org.uk](mailto:central@tcct.org.uk)

[www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk) Registered Charity No. 258612 Summer 2005

£1.50

*Bradstone, Devon*

# THE CHURCH OF ST NONNA

*by JGM Scott (Prebendary Emeritus of Exeter Cathedral, retired country parson and amateur local historian with a special interest in Devon churches)*



*Front cover: St Nonna's from the south-east, showing the early windows in the chancel and the later masonry at the top of the south wall and east end (Christopher Dalton)*

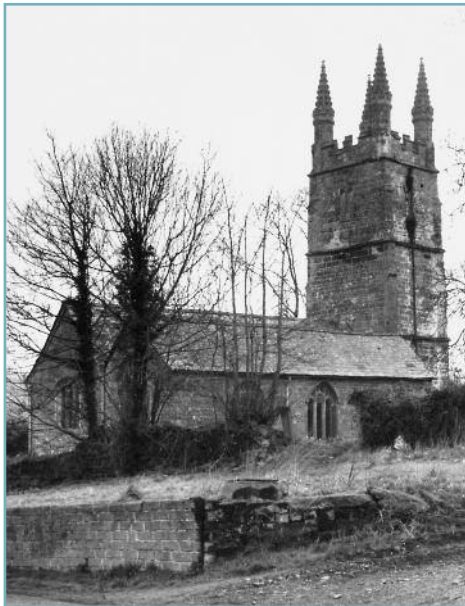
*Left: The interior looking east during the 1998 restoration (Christopher Dalton)*

Bradstone lies on the Devon side of the Tamar, close to the road between Tavistock and Launceston. The place took its name from a 'broad stone', a stone which is still to be seen about 200 yards (183 metres) east of the church, in a hedge beside the lane on the far side of the Barton. It is about 11 x 6 feet (3.5 x 2 metres) and may have been a prehistoric standing stone or 'menhir'. Bradstone has never been a big community, but it had some importance since it lay close to the ancient trackway into Cornwall which forded the Tamar where Greystone Bridge now stands; the trackway, now a lane, still forms the southern boundary of the parish.

Snugly sited on a south-facing slope at the head of a combe, this settlement probably existed before the arrival of the Saxons, and the dedication of the church to St Nonna suggests that there was a Celtic community here. Tradition has it that St Nonna came from Pembrokeshire, where her son St David was born and where there is a well bearing her name just outside the town of St David's, and that she lived for part of her life at Altarnun on Bodmin Moor where the church is dedicated to her; however, some doubt has been cast as to whether the mediaeval dedication of Bradstone church was to her. We know that about 970 Ordgar, the Ealdorman in Devon under Edward the Confessor, set free 10 slaves at Bradstone where he was lying sick, so there must then have been some kind of manor house and probably also a church or oratory. Domesday Book in 1086 recorded that before the Conquest it had belonged to King Harold, and now belonged to Baldwin the Sheriff: it contained 17 villagers, 4 smallholders and 4 slaves. In 1850 the parish contained six farmers, a miller and a smith and wheelwright. Today there is no village as such, and there may never have been one, though there was an inn on the old road at Felldownhead to refresh travellers after their steep climb from the river crossing.

## EXTERIOR

St Nonna's stands beside the early-17th-century Manor House, now a farmhouse and known as Bradstone Barton, with its picturesque gatehouse the pinnacles of which complement those on the church tower to create a dramatic skyline. For many centuries the Manor belonged to the Cloberry family, and it was they who built the present house. The church was dedicated by Bishop Walter Bronescombe on the 2 October 1261, and served the needs of the parish until it was declared redundant in 1996.



Outside, the church walls show at least three stages of building. The south wall appears to date from the 11th or 12th century, built of local rubble masonry, with small lancet windows and a round-headed doorway. The tower is of c. 1500, and the north aisle, built of squared blocks of Hurdwick stone, has three-light granite arch-headed windows of the 15th or 16th century, the east window rather more elaborate than those on the north and west. Probably at the time of the addition of the north aisle, the south wall of the nave was raised by some 3 feet (0.9 metres), again using the Hurdwick stone, a square-headed window put into the east wall and the three-light window inserted into the south wall east of the porch, while the small lancet windows in the chancel were allowed to remain. The roofs are all covered with Delabole slate. The churchyard contains some good local slate headstones and a very handsome pair of gate piers flanking the entrance from the Barton.

The **tower**, about 70 feet (21.3 metres) high, belongs to the late 15th or early 16th century which was the great period for tower-building in the West country. It is built of ashlar from Hurdwick near Tavistock and has buttresses at the corners; these for some reason are not at exactly the 135° angle which one might expect. The granite pinnacles are typical of west Devon, large and octagonal, standing on turrets with panelled faces: there is an internal stair in the north-west corner. Like the one at neighbouring

Dunterton, this tower must have cost a great deal to build in comparison with the rest of the church, but the two are quite different in style and material. Instead of the more usual louvres the belfry openings have pierced slate shutters.

The **porch** dates from the 15th or 16th century and is plain except for carved bosses in the roof; the central one is a 'Jack-in-the-Green' – the face of a man with leaves coming out of his mouth. This is a very popular motif in mediaeval

folklore, and is believed to have associations with fertility; nevertheless, it often appears in churches and cathedrals. Inside is a fine Norman doorway with palmette decoration on the capitals either side, into which a smaller 15th-century granite doorway has been fitted.

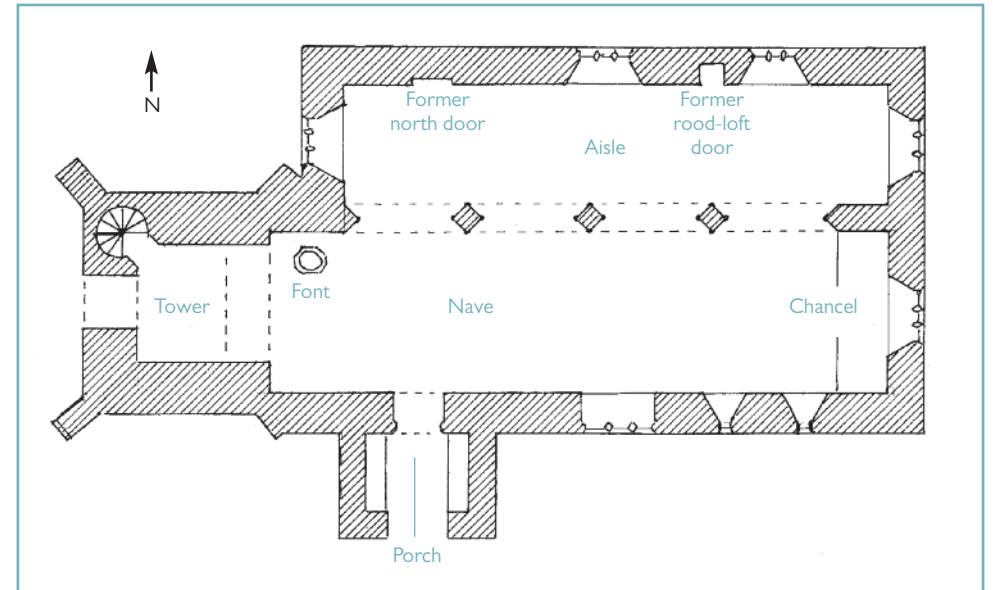
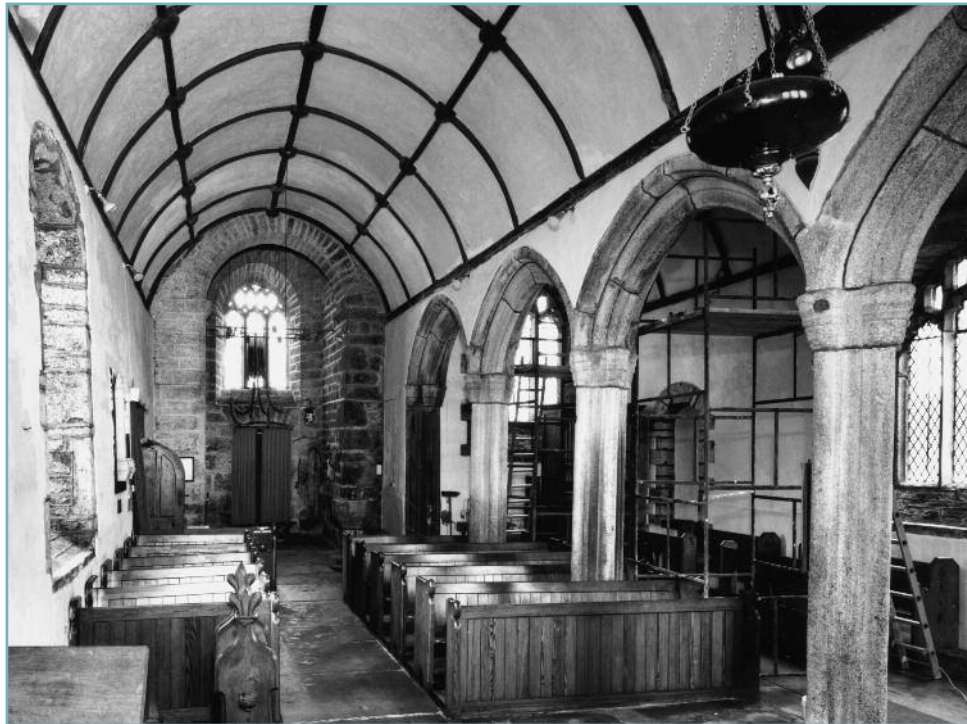


*The interior, looking west towards the tower, while the restoration of 1998 was in progress (Christopher Dalton)*

## INTERIOR

Inside, the church consists of the nave and chancel, tower and north aisle. The nave, north aisle and chancel have typical West country 'waggon-roofs' with bosses carved in foliage patterns: the nave and aisle roofs are 15th or 16th century, but the roof of the chancel was replaced in the 19th-century restoration. Immediately inside the door on the right is a

**holy-water stoup** in a niche very simply made with a triangle of three flat stones. To the west, the tower opens into the nave with a tall unmoulded arch. The octagonal **font** is of granite, very simple but almost certainly mediaeval; its base is much worn and may be older. On the north of the nave is an **arcade** of four granite arches and piers with simply carved



capitals; arcades of this kind were being made in quantity on Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor during the 15th and 16th centuries, and may even have been made to be sold 'off the shelf': they can be found in churches from the Exe to Land's End, and from the Bristol Channel to the South Hams. The floors in the church consist for the most part of large slabs of Delabole slate.

In the **north aisle** is the north doorway, blocked up as so many of them have been since the Reformation. They were important in mediaeval times for processions, and there was a superstition that the north door should be opened during a baptism 'to let the Devil out'. Further to the east is the doorway, now also partially blocked, the stair of which led to the rood loft on top of the screen. The upper doorway is still visible, though the stair itself has been filled in: part of the screen was still in existence in 1849, but was swept away in 1893 and a new screen put in its place. This, described by Dr WG Hoskins as an 'atrocious', has now vanished in its turn. At the east end of this aisle the area below the window has been cut away, probably for the reredos of a side altar, and there is a simple square recess with a piscina to the south of it, where the vessels were

washed after Communion. The wall-plate on the north side is carved with a running foliage design.

In the **sanctuary**, the oak panelling (1925) and the communion rails (1942) are the best wooden furnishings in the church. On the south side of the chancel is one of the most remarkable features of the church – a male head, bearded and open-mouthed, and wearing a crown or coronet. It is obviously very primitive and almost certainly very ancient – it has an almost Norse air – but its origins are quite obscure. It may have been a corbel supporting one end of the rood beam of the 13th-century church – the opposite corbel would have gone when the north aisle was added – but it is not clear even whether this is its original position, or if it was found elsewhere and placed here during one of the restorations. The arches over the lancet windows in the chancel are seen on the inside to be semicircular, and may be older than the stonework on the outside. On the east wall to the right of the altar are traces of wall painting.

Apart from those in the sanctuary, the **furnishings** are all very simply made in pitch pine, and date from the 1893 restoration which brought about the destruction not only of the screen but also of 16th-century oak benches



Left: The 19th-century watercolour of the interior looking east, showing the remains of the mediaeval screen with painted boards above, a tall pulpit and sounding board, and the unusual font cover (Christopher Dalton)

Right: The mediaeval octagonal font (Christopher Dalton)



with carved ends, carrying various devices including the arms of the Cloberry family: some fragments of mediaeval stained glass also vanished from the east window of the aisle. They included a figure of the Virgin and the Cloberry coat of arms. A delightful 19th-century watercolour exists illustrating the interior as it was before 1893. This shows the screen with boards mounted above it carrying the royal arms, creed and commandments, the box pews and earlier benches, all sadly replaced in this ecclesiological correct restoration, and an unusual font cover with panelled doors and an ogee-shaped carved open top.

The **organ** is a small chamber organ; the manual has been modified, and it may have been converted from a barrel organ such as was used in many churches during the 18th and 19th centuries. Alternatively it may have come from one of the neighbouring big houses.

There are six **bells**. In the Inventory of 1553 Bradstone was listed with four bells: in 1827 these (or their successors) were recast into a

ring of five by William & John Taylor of Oxford, and cast at Buckland Brewer where John was working at the time. In 1927 a new Treble was added by Mears & Stainbank of Whitechapel. The inscriptions are:

- Treble** MEARS & STAINBANK, FOUNDERS, LONDON  
WHEN I CALL FOLLOW ME. 1927.
- 2nd** \*I MEAN TO MAKE IT UNDERSTOOD  
ALTHO' I'M LITTLE I AM GOOD\* 1827.
- 3rd** +SQUIRE ARUNDEL THE GREAT MY  
WHOLE EXPENCE DID RAISE NOR  
SHALL OUR TONGUES ABATE TO  
CELEBRATE HIS PRAISE+  
W: AND J:T: 1827.
- 4th** +THIS PEAL WAS RECAST BY W: AND  
J: TAYLOR OXFORD AD 1827+
- 5th** +CALL A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY +  
W: AND J:T:OXON. 1827.
- Tenor** +W<sup>m</sup>:JEFFERY AND WALTER WEEKS C:  
WARDENS WHO GAVE TEN POUNDS  
TO THESE BELLS.

The weight of the tenor is about 7 hundredweight (356 kg). The bells were hung in an oak frame by Harry Stokes of Woodbury in 1913; the treble is in a cast-iron frame.

Squire Arundel, who seems to have been at least on a par with the Almighty in Bradstone's estimation, was the owner of the Lifton estate. In the same year, 1827, he also gave £50 towards the recasting of Lifton's bells by the same founder as those at Bradstone.

Bradstone is not rich in **monuments**; there is only one example from the 19th century inside the building, but three interesting slate slabs are fixed to the walls outside. To the west of the porch is one inscribed:

*Here lyethe the bodye of John Coumbe buried the 16 of November beinge 6 score years of age anno domini 1604.*

On the east wall of the porch is a tablet, handsomely-carved but rather ineptly laid out as the carver ran out of space and some of the words run into the border, using very small lettering. It is to Richard Coumbe, who died in 1743. A verse reads:

*Reader beneath this stone doth lye  
One who in his best strength did die  
When death presents his fatal hand  
Who can his Conquering power withstand  
Grim death soon Summon'd him away  
And his Sun set even at noon day.*

To emphasise the point, there is a clock-dial carved at the top of the tablet, with its single hand pointing at noon.

On the wall of the nave just east of the porch is a badly worn and broken slate slab, now only partly legible. The outer inscription reads:

*Here lies y<sup>e</sup> Body of Anne y<sup>e</sup> wife of John Keall of this Parish who was Buried y<sup>e</sup> 21 day of March Anno Dom. 1730 Aged 22.*

There is a verse in the middle of the stone, but it is not all legible.

There was formerly a ledger slab to another Robert Combe and his wife, dated 1692, in the floor of the aisle, but it is no longer visible.

The parish of Bradstone is now united with Kelly, and the combined parishes have a population of less than 200. They are linked with Lifton and Broadwoodwidger, and in 1996 St Nonna's was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust, under which the building has been put into good structural order.

# THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 330 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk).

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

## NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St James, Luffincott  
8 miles N of Launceston off A388

Holy Trinity, Torbryan  
5 miles SW of Newton Abbot off A381

West Ogwell Church  
3 miles SW of Newton Abbot off A381

© The Churches Conservation Trust 2005

