THE WEST COUNTRY

EAST DEVON TREASURES

This is the Devon of quiet rolling countryside, where, away from the main roads, the 21st century seems mercifully distant. It is also a countryside of excellent though scattered churches, each with its own character, but each also having a ‘Devon’ feel. Features in common in several of them are beautiful and unspoiled rood screens showing Devon church art and craftsmanship at its best.

Ottery St Mary  St Mary

**Why visit:** Cathedral-like splendour  
**Where:** The College, near the library, EX11 1DJ

This is far and away the grandest church in east Devon, and one of England’s outstanding parish churches.

The site on which it stands had been part of a manor belonging to Rouen Cathedral in Normandy since the 11th century. In 1335 it was bought by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter, who almost entirely rebuilt the church that had stood here, using Exeter Cathedral as a model for much of the architecture. Even though it stands on a churchyard mound in the centre of the little town, the church does not overpower it. This is partly because the churchyard is large and the church is set away from the immediate buildings, and partly because the church is rather low. It has two towers, as does Exeter Cathedral.

Inside, the church is full of riches, but opinion is divided on the colour scheme that was adopted for much of the building in 1977. Some think the colours inappropriate; others that they bring an echo of medieval vibrancy to the church.

Bishop Grandisson’s work can be seen everywhere, and the bishop himself can be seen depicted on one of the bosses in the Lady Chapel. The bosses in the church are outstanding, depicting a huge range of subjects and all worth looking at.

The Dorset Aisle was added to the church in about 1520. It has superb fan vaulting with extraordinary pendants. The arcade capitals here are also remarkable, taking many shapes and forms.

Monuments include those of Sir Otho Grandisson (brother of the Bishop) and his wife, from 1359, shown under ornate canopies covered with shields. There is a remarkable clock with a brightly painted wooden face from Grandisson’s time in the church, and a wooden eagle lectern of the same date that is one of only a very few of its kind in England.
**Cullompton  St Andrew**

**Why visit:** Wonderful roof and outstanding screen  
**Where:** In Church Street, off Cullompton's main street, EX15 1JU

St Andrew’s is all of a piece, built of red sandstone in the 15th and 16th centuries. Its tower is handsome, with stepped buttresses rising to a battlemented parapet, and stone figures and a prominent clock on the west side.

The interior of the church is dominated by an extraordinary wooden barrel-vaulted roof, which stretches the entire length of the building. It is painted in blues, crimsons and golds, which bring out the intricate patterns of the timbers as they intersect. As wonderful, and as colourful, is the original wooden screen that spans the width of the church.

As if all this were not enough, the church has chapels and aisles containing superb craftsmanship. The Lane Aisle has exuberant fan vaulting and stonework, while the Moore Chapel may be more restrained but is also beautiful. There are figures and carvings everywhere in the church, and one truly unique item: a Golgotha. This consists of two huge, dark masses of oak, carved with skulls, bones and rocks. It would once have formed the base of the Crucifixion that stood above the rood screen. It is the only one of its kind to survive.

**Kentisbeare  St Mary**

**Why visit:** Rood screen; 17th-century gallery  
**Where:** On the junction of Priest Hill and Fore Street, EX15 2AD

The chequered tower of St Mary’s is striking and unlike any other in Devon. It is built from red sandstone and white Beer stone and dates from the 14th century. Most of the rest of the church dates from a century or so later.

The interior contains much of interest. At the west end is a handsome gallery dated 1632, while stretching across the nave and south aisle is a rood screen that is one of the best of its kind in Devon. It carries the arms of John Whiting, a merchant venturer who built the south aisle and who is buried there. He died in 1529 and is buried here with his wife, Anne. Also buried here is Mary Wotton, great-aunt to Lady Jane Grey.

**Plymtree  St John the Baptist**

**Why visit:** Rood screen  
**Where:** Opposite junction of Green End Lane, EX15 2JU

Most of the exterior of St John’s dates from the 14th and 15th centuries. It is a handsome church but it is the internal fittings that make it so interesting. Of these, the rood screen is the highlight. It was probably made in the 1470s and has a fan-vaulted top. The figures on the panels retain much of their original colour and include St Catherine, St John the Baptist and the Adoration of the Magi. In total there are 34 painted panels.

The church also has wagon roofs, excellent bench-ends, 17th-century altar rails and an 18th-century font.

**Tiverton  St Peter**

**Why visit:** Reminders of wealth from wool  
**Where:** St Peter Street, by the river, EX16 6RP

The tall, red sandstone tower of St Peter’s is an outstanding part of Tiverton’s townscape. It is a large church dating from the 15th century, with a south porch and south chapel added in 1517 by John Greenway, whose riches came from the wool trade. There are reminders of the source of his wealth everywhere on the southern part, with carvings of woolpacks, ships, figures and horses.

The memorial to Greenway and his wife Alice is inside the church, in the aisle that he built.

**Opposite page:** The grandeur of Ottery St Mary.  
**This page:** Cullompton’s colourful screen.

**Honiton  St Michael**

**Why visit:** Memorials; view from churchyard

**Branscombe  St Winifred**

**Why visit:** Norman church packed with interest