

This private chapel stands beside Ayshford Court, the owners of which built the chapel in the fifteenth century. It was a fashion in the west country for houses to have a private chapel for daily worship; the parish church being used for major festivals and rites of passage. In this case the parish church is at Burlescombe, some three miles away, where many members of the Ayshford (Ashford) family are buried and commemorated. Ayshford is first mentioned in a charter of AD 958 and later in the Domesday Book of 1086, although the existence of a chapel is not mentioned until 1282.

The chapel is built of limestone from Westleigh quarry and laid as rubble. The putlog holes, where wooden scaffolding was built into the walls as work progressed, remain visible on the outside. Once the scaffolding was removed, the holes were infilled with small decorative Beerstone panels of quatrefoils. Externally the chapel is a single rectangle with Perpendicular windows. The slate roof is nineteenth century, after the opening of the nearby Grand Western Canal made it easy to transport Welsh slate via the Bristol Channel. The single bell in the turret dates from 1657 and is inscribed 'The Bell is Henry Ayshford's'.



## Interior

Inside, a single wagon roof spans the simple interior, whilst the division between nave and chancel is formed by a wooden screen. The roof dates mostly from the nineteenth century but reuses medieval bosses. Most are foliate but one, to the south of the altar carries a rebus, or pun on a name, including a sheep, a letter T and a circular object. The screen appears to retain its medieval paint but in fact the screen itself is nineteenth century and its unknown designer cleverly reproduces the traditional alternate designs of red and green so often found on medieval Devon screens.

There are two monuments of note. Dominating the nave is a hanging wall tablet to John Ayshford who died in 1689. At the top is his shield of arms with intricate mantling whilst at the bottom are five crimson-lipped cherubs. At the base is the Ayshford arms again, impaled by the arms of Knightly. The unusual objects on the Ayshford shield are the heraldic representation of ash keys from the tree which gives the family its name.



Late seventeenth-century cherubs



Medieval boss

In the chancel is a chest tomb to Henry Ayshford who died in 1666 aged 1 year and 9 months, carrying an inscription on the top and a rhyme on the side. In front of the altar is the worn ledgerstone to Henry Ayshford, carved in very soft yellow sandstone.

The stained glass is of special interest. In the bottom of several windows are the intertwined initials JT (and in one the date 1848). This is the mark of John Toms of Wellington a stained-glass designer for many local churches. The ribbon text motif was used by many national studios, but here Toms has put his own slant on it to great effect. The Sanford family, successors to the Ayshfords, employed him at many of the churches in their patronage. The nave windows represent the twelve apostles, although it is difficult to identify each one. St John the Evangelist with his chalice and St Peter with his keys are both on the south side. On the north we can identify St James the Less carrying a saw next to St Andrew and St Matthew with his moneybag (he was the tax collector) next to St Thomas holding a set square.

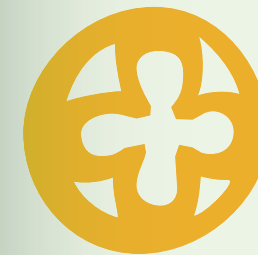


Figure of St Matthew by John Toms

Above the west door are two stone fragments of *memento mori* from an eighteenth-century monument. One figure holds a skull, whilst the other holds an hourglass. Both are much weathered so have spent some time outside and must have come from a very grand monument indeed.



Eighteenth-century stone fragments



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## Ayshford Chapel, Devon

a guide to its history

## Also in Devon

### St Andrews, South Huish, Kingsbridge

The skeleton of the tower and walls is all that remains of this fine medieval church. In 1866, a windowpane blew in during divine service. The vicar took this as a bad omen and stripped and dismantled the church (ruin, open daily).

