

A Guide to the Parish Church of All Saints, North Wootton

A warm welcome to All Saints Church, North Wootton. A church has stood on this site, at the heart of the village community, for at least 800 years. It lies in the benefice of North and South Wootton, within the Lynn Deanery in the Diocese of Norwich

Most of the fittings from the church of 1853, however, remain. The large font with foliate decoration is, like the building itself and most of its decoration, in the Early English style. The oak pews are plainly decorated and surmounted by somewhat fussy brass chandeliers. By contrast the choir stalls and pulpit are in the more elaborate 'Decorated Gothic' style and probably date from the rebuilding. The small war memorial is situated, somewhat unusually, inside the church on the north wall and has almost as many names for World War 2 as World War 1. This reflects the growth of the village during the inter-war years. In the year 2000, to commemorate the Millennium, the Parish Council erected a small stone cenotaph elsewhere in the village.

The Stained Glass

All Saints Church is particularly rich in late Victorian stained glass. That in the triple lancet above the altar was made in the workshops of Ward & Hughes of London to the design of Henry Hughes. It was inserted in 1878. Depicted are the shepherds worshipping the infant Christ, the eleven disciples at his Ascension and the three women at the empty tomb with the Angel of the Resurrection.

The remaining glazed windows were produced in the same workshop between 1883 and 1907. The one in the north wall of the chancel depicts Jesus and the disciple John at the Last Supper. This, together with the window in the south wall showing Christ talking with the Samaritan woman, was dedicated by his widow and children to the memory of William Wilcox Clarke, Rector for 47 years (1834 to 1881) who died in 1887. William's sisters dedicated the window in the north wall of the nave nearest the pulpit to him. It shows Jesus with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus. The glazed and stained window in the south wall of the Nave showing a lady giving loaves of bread to the hungry and dated 1900 commemorates Clarke's widow Lillias, described on a scroll as a 'succourer of many'. Lastly, the central window in the Nave was dedicated by his parishioners to Clarke's successor, Henry Edward Suckling, Rector from 1881 to 1907. It shows children picking wild flowers and giving them to Jesus.

Recent changes

During the past 15 years there have been several improvements designed to make the building more user-friendly. In addition to a kitchen and toilet they have included a children's teaching room in the tower space, a sound reinforcement system, greatly improved heating, a folding projection screen and better lighting, almost all funded by money raised from parishioners. The changes also involved the removal of some pews to provide space for mothers and toddlers during services. The most recent improvement has been a new roof on the north side of the church, including the vestry, which cost £30,000 and was completed by a local firm (Pikestaff Building Services) in January 2011.

John Smallwood 2011



North Wootton - Parish and Benefice

Parish churches were built for the honour and glory of God and tell us a great deal about the history and character of the communities they serve. A tablet in the porch shows the list of North Wootton clergy starting in 1300 when the living was a Vicarage (vicars, as opposed to rectors, only enjoyed a small portion of the tithes due to the Church). In that year Jeffrey de Castre was installed by the patron, the Prior of Wymondham. In 1921 the livings of North and South Wootton were amalgamated to form a single benefice, when A.R.H. Johnson, who already held the living at All Saints, became the first joint Rector. The patronage of All Saints now lies with the Howard family (Lords of the Manor Rising), whereas at St Mary's, South Wootton, in the same benefice the Crown is patron.

The Local Community

In the last 50 years North Wootton has developed into a large suburban village, many of whose residents earn their living in Kings Lynn. Despite the 'progress' towards suburban uniformity the essential identity of the village as a farming community still survives. At the 1851 census the population of North Wootton was only 188, that of South Wootton 164. The 1672 Hearth Tax returns had recorded 33 households in North Wootton but just 21 in its neighbouring village. Until the arrival of the railway in 1862 the village remained, as it had been from its emergence as a distinct community by the thirteenth century, dependent on what nature had to offer. Access to both common and marsh grazing through the acquisition of 'common rights' had been vital to the local farmers. Tidal creeks gave direct access to the rich fisheries of the Wash and provided brine for the Late Saxon and early medieval salt industry. A major change in the landscape occurred during the mid 19th century when the re-alignment of the River Ouse outflow added a considerable area of former salt marsh to the parish and shifted the river about a mile to the west.

Wootton - the origins of the village

The Domesday Book (1086) provides the earliest documentary evidence for 'the Woottons'. The name Wdetuna (Wootton) is both common and self explanatory. It means the 'tun', or farmstead in the wood. While the name is Old English rather than Scandinavian, the archaeological evidence at present suggests that Anglo Danish settlement began in the tenth century.

In Domesday Wootton appears as a single Royal Manor managed by Godric, the King's agent in Norfolk. Farming, fishing and salt, processed on the tidal marshes together with possibly some iron working, provided a living for its 39 households. There is no record of a church. North Wootton, as a separate entity, first appears in a Pipe Roll (exchequer document) for 1166. A church on the present site by this date seems likely, but Medieval All Saints appears, from a nineteenth century print reproduced below, to date from the early years of the 13th century

Medieval All Saints and Post Reformation decay



All Saints Church c.1830 by Ladbrooke. The medieval Chancel has been demolished and a wall built blocking the original Chancel arch. Some attempt has been made to buttress the east end. The purpose of the timber outbuilding is uncertain. A single lancet survives in the south wall. The leaded nave roof seems in danger of collapse, a fate that has already overtaken part of the tower. There is no evidence for any features pre-dating 1250

The church you see today was constructed between 1850 and 1853 for the Hon. Mrs Mary Howard at a cost of £2,300. The architect was Anthony Salvin. Between 1845 and 1849 he had already carried out a somewhat fanciful restoration of St Lawrence Church, Castle Rising. His other work in Norfolk included a restoration of Norwich Castle.

The Churchyard

The substantial sub-rectangular churchyard was 'closed' in 2001 apart from further burials in family plots and the deposition of ashes. It is bounded by an attractive wall made up of a mixture of materials including chunks of Oolitic limestone from the East Midlands, some probably salvaged from the original church. The lime, ash, and chestnut trees provide an impressive context for the building and support a large and active rookery.

The Exterior

Norfolk churches, especially those in what had been small villages, tend to be a mixture of architectural styles. This is not so here. All Saints was rebuilt entirely in a simple Early English (Gothic) style, deliberately replicating throughout its structure a building of c.1250. Despite the repairs of 1834 no attempt was made to retain any architectural feature from its medieval predecessor or any of its fittings. The building is a confident essay in Gothic Revivalism. Bath stone was used throughout for windows, arches and quoins, although carrstone, including locally acquired grey silcrete, features in the facing of the building.

The tower has a blank arcade at its second stage. Plate tracery has been used for the bell openings and for alternate windows in the nave. Those elsewhere in the church, including the entire chancel and those in the tower, consist of simple lancets. Access to the tower roof is via a turret stair with a conical roof and weather vane. There is a single bell which is rung regularly. The western aspect of the church is particularly pleasing. The fine west door is flanked by two empty niches, the tower itself by substantial buttresses. There are also floriated gable crosses on the nave, chancel and porch.



The Interior

The timber roof trusses of the simple nave is supported by a series of stone corbels. Alternate corbels on each side of the nave have been carved into heads reflecting, albeit somewhat stiffly, the medieval style adopted throughout the building. The corbels supporting the roof of the Chancel are all carved, half with medieval style heads and half with an Early English style foliate design. The glazed tile floors in the interior conform to the 13th century atmosphere of the building as a whole. The sole exception are the tiles in the porch, which are of a type that occurs from the 16th century onwards and may have been salvaged from All Saints' medieval predecessor.

The gallery was not part of the building of 1853, but was installed in 1986-87. Its front incorporates parts of the choir pews from the redundant church of Fornsett St Peter, 10 miles south of Norwich. At the same time the original small organ housed in the vestry arch was moved to Woodton Parish Church close to Fornsett. The present organ, sited in the gallery, was made by Harrison and Harrison of Durham for a new church at Great Lumley, but it was installed and rebuilt here instead by the present organist, Basil Blackburn, in 1987. The original painted reredos has been re-positioned in the tower space at the west end of the church, which is used both for extended seating and as a coffee area.