

**A guide to**

# **St. Vigor's Church Fulbourn**



**2019**

## History

There has been a church in Fulbourn from at least Norman times. Whether there was one here much before that is a matter of speculation, though a Saxon cross-head was found under the floor of the nave at the time of the church's restoration in 1869. There is also what is thought to be a Saxon coffin-lid, now fixed to the wall of the church under the tower arch.



At some stage in its early history, Fulbourn became two separate parishes, each with its own church, All Saints and St Vigor's. All Saint's church was ruined in May 1766, when its tower collapsed on to the nave and chancel.

## The Chancel

The **East Window** has been admired for its elegant proportions and originality of design, while the two-light window in the south wall deserves special notice for its excellent tracery. Like the remainder in the Church, the stained glass is modern.

The fifteenth-century **cadaver tomb of John Caraway**, Rector from 1395 to 1441, is still in its original position on the North side of the Sanctuary. Its great interest derives from:

- its being the earliest tomb containing a single figure without an effigy above
- the only stone cadaver in a wooden tomb
- the earliest in any parish Church.

He left an estate in Fulbourn to the poor of St Vigor's parish.

On the floor is the magnificent **brass to William de Fulbourn**. He was Canon of St Paul's Cathedral and a chaplain to Edward III. He may also have been a Baron of the Exchequer. This is the earliest brass showing an ecclesiastic vested in a cope.

Just to the West of this is another, smaller **brass to the memory of Geoffrey Bishop**, Vicar of All Saints from 1425 to 1486. It was rescued from the ruins of that Church. He left land and buildings for the benefit of the Church and poor of his parish. Both this benefaction and that of John Caraway are still distributed in the village.

Also in the chancel are some **medieval choir stalls**, some with poppy-heads and other carvings.

On the North wall may be seen a **leper-squint** (now blocked up). Originally this was on the outside of the Church before the chapel on the north side (now occupied by the organ and the choir vestry) was built.

On the **chancel ceiling** are ancient carved bosses, removed from the original nave roof at the time of the restoration. They depict the coats of arms of Fulbourn, of the Sees of Ely and London, and of various manors of Fulbourn, as well as the emblems of the Crucifixion. The head of a Christian King appears towards the west of the south side, while facing it on the north side is the head of a Bishop.

The **chancel screen** was erected in 1897 in memory of Charles Watson Townley of Fulbourn Manor, Lord Lieutenant of the County, by members of his family. The medieval rood-screen which was still here in 1747 has entirely disappeared.

## **The Nave**

The appearance of the Nave was changed considerably in 1997 by the removal of two rows of pews at the front, making room for the new central Altar and its platform. Before this the priest at the Altar was some forty feet from the nearest member of his congregation! The Altar and communion rails are removable to make room for informal Services and concerts.

**The pulpit**, on the North side, is notable for two reasons:

*Its intricate carved woodwork.* The former dates from the early or middle fourteenth century, and is believed to be the earliest example of an oak pulpit in the county. It may have been part of the original rood-screen of All Saints Church. It is octagonal, with open panels, the heads canopied and trefoiled under, and the spandrels filled with orchids etc.

*Its two painted panels.* These represent Saint John the Divine exorcising poison from a cup, and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, about whom Charles Kingsley sings in *The Saints Tragedy*. These panels were rescued from All Saints Church (where they may have formed part of the rood-screen) and for many years hung in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. They were brought back to Fulbourn in 1923.

The **south transept**, originally a transeptal chapel, was added about the middle of the fifteenth century. It contains a large Chest Tomb, which rests on the original altar step. On top of the tomb are life-size relief carvings of a man and woman in Tudor dress. There is no script to identify the figures. However there are grounds for suggesting they depict **Edward Wood** and his wife **Elizabeth**. Edward was a substantial landowner (and a Lord of the Manor) in Fulbourn who died in 1599. His wife died almost 9 years later in 1608.

The tomb almost certainly had stone carvings around all four of its sides; but two of them are now concealed because the tomb is set hard against corner walls. It is possible that the tomb was moved to St Vigor's from All Saints Church after the latter collapsed.

The **south four-light window** of late Perpendicular style contains stained glass in memory of Richard Greaves Townley, who died in 1888 at the age of 36. The family pews were for many years in this south transept.

On the east wall of the transept there is a large black marble tablet to Tyrell Dalton, Esq, a well-known jurist who was at one time owner of the Manor. He died in 1682. nearby is a late eighteenth-century wall tablet to William Greaves Beaupre Bell, who bought the manor in the eighteenth century and was commissary of Cambridge University for many years. This tablet was no doubt originally a larger and more elaborate memorial than the present meagre one.

Three small brasses are affixed to the wall at the junction of the transept with the Lady Chapel; these were taken up from the floor many years ago and fixed to a board which hung in the north aisle. The board having become worm-eaten, the brasses lay for some time in the vestry before they were mounted in their present position about 1975.

On a shelf round the corner into the Lady Chapel is **The Fulbourn Virgin** - an oak figure, nine and a quarter inches tall, of the Madonna and Child. It is unique because the child is held with his front facing his mother. Only the back of the child's head is to be seen; his right arm reaches up to her left shoulder and his right knee is crooked round her waist. Her hands are clasped across the small of his back. The Victoria and Albert Museum has identified the statue as English work of the fourteenth century.

The figure was found in 1972 in the garden of No 2 High Street, by workmen adapting a row of houses into shops. It had been used as a doorstep, and then as a marker on a dog's grave. One of the workmen rescued it from a bonfire he was making of rubbish. The figure was given a wax bath to preserve it by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Cambridge. It was mounted in the church in 1975.

The **north arcade of the nave** has plain octagonal piers of more massive character than those of the south, later in date and rough in execution. The arches appear to be older, but are probably copies of an Early English original. The western arch is certainly Early English and no doubt part of the original church.

The style of architecture of the **north aisle**, as well as of other parts of the building, makes it almost certain that William de Fulbourn was responsible for much of this work; and it can therefore be dated in the second half of the fourteenth century. The double cusping in the windows of the north aisle is reproduced in the canopy of the brass of William de Fulbourn in the chancel. Where the second window from the west is now, there was a door into a north porch, done away with in 1869.

### **The South-West Porch**

The porch is of medieval origin and was built to take the place of an earlier porch half-way along the south aisle. The small room over the porch, sometimes erroneously called a parvise, together with its new roof and chimney are partly conjectured restorations and partly new. There is a small quatrefoil opening over the inside of the doorway leading into the

Church which gives a view down the south aisle. This opening enabled the priest in the little chamber to watch the lamp burning before the altar in the south transeptal chapel.

## **The Tower**

The tower is almost all Early English, and suffered less from alteration and repair in later periods than the rest of the fabric. Its chief enemies have been age and the decay of the clunch, of which material it was built almost entirely in the first instance. The western doorway is the original one. The tower was restored as far as possible to its original form and design, though no attempt was made to restore the spire. The windows, with the exception of the lower one on the western side, are exact reproductions of the old work. This west window was a late Perpendicular insertion, and so decayed that a new one was necessary. A double lancet was therefore substituted, with the twofold object of strengthening a weak point and restoring a window such as might well have formed part of the original design.

The lower part of the tower screen was erected in 1869; some tracery taken from old seat fronts has been inserted in the panels. The upper part of the screen was put up in 1982 when a ringing chamber was made above what was for a while the priest's vestry. (The vestry formerly led off the chancel; this has been made into two rooms for the Sunday School.)

The tower contains eight bells, recently (1980) re-hung in a modern frame. The tenor weighs 11 cwt. The two small (treble) bells were given in 1921 by Reuben Moore, churchwarden from 1882 to 1923, in memory of those Fulbourn men who gave their lives in the First World War. On the top of the tower there is a small clock bell under a shelter. It has been dated about 1500. The appearance of the top of the tower was improved by the addition of a small parapet.

On the west wall of the nave and adjacent to the tower arch there is the remains of a stone seat, which may once have continued all around the walls, upon which the invalids and children used to sit; hence the saying, *'the weakest go to the wall'*.

On the north wall under the tower arch is a stone coffin-lid, which is perhaps of Saxon origin. It was found doing duty as a window-sill when the Church was restored in 1869.

## **Acknowledgements**

This article is essentially the work of Don Crane, although it has been abbreviated and amended to take account of some changes made in the Church in 1997. Mr. Crane received considerable help from two previous guide books, both by former Rectors, Rev. J. V. Durell and the Rev. A. B. Swallow. He also used notes left in manuscript form by another Rector, the Rev. T. H. Hennessy. Arthur W. Blomfield, the architect employed on the 1869 restoration, wrote an account of the Church, both before and after its restoration; and this too proved very helpful. Don Crane was born in Fulbourn, and (apart from wartime service in the army) lived all his life in the village, working in the University Library. He served the Church in many ways, being at different times Organist, Youth Leader, Captain of the Bellringers, Churchwarden, and for many years Editor of the church/village magazine. He built up a considerable knowledge of local history, which found outlets in numerous magazine articles and in a series of small books. He died in 1994.