

THE CHURCH OF ST MARY & ST. BOTOLPH, WHITTON.

Location.

Whitton Church for most of its history would have been situated in open countryside, very much a village church and it remained so until the 1950s when Ipswich and its environs gradually spread further and further afield and Whitton became a suburb. A large housing estate was built which eventually reached right up to the church itself. The old rectory (now a private house) has had a large part of its garden and glebe land used for building houses and a roadway. The churchyard now borders onto the playing fields of Ormiston Endeavour Academy. On the north side of the church is open countryside and originally this would have been the scene all around Whitton Church.

A short history

There has been a Church at Whitton for many, many years. The Domesday Book (1086) has Widetuna (Whitton) listed as having a church. However, no remains of a church earlier than the 13th century have been found, so it can only be concluded that if there was a Norman church here, it was pulled down in the 13th century and replaced. The 13th century church was a small rectangular building probably constructed from the mid to late 13th century in the Early English style.

The parish of Thurleston was united with Whitton during the incumbency of Thomas Benson (1514). Thereafter the church at Thurleston seems to have fallen into disrepair and was for several centuries used as a barn. The barn was finally pulled down in 1862 when materials were taken away to construct the new south aisle at Whitton. The Victorian restoration copied the style of the Early English period. In 1850 the Chancel was remodeled and the Nave extended to incorporate the old internal bell and a large north aisle was built. The old Flemish bell was then re-hung in a new external turret at the west end of the Nave above the spot where it had once hung internally. The church was again enlarged in 1862 with the addition of a South Aisle and the present tower was added, crowned by a stone broach spire capped with a carved finial. This tower also serves as the South Porch entrance. The doorway is of 13th century date and possibly was brought to Whitton from the ruined Thurleston medieval church of St. Botolph that was demolished at this time and plundered for materials for the reconstruction. The Flemish bell was re-hung in the new tower. It is the earliest dated bell in the county and was cast in 1441. It bears the inscription "Ave Maria gratis ano MCCCCXLI".

The last major alteration to the building was the addition of a vestry in 1901.

There has been some confusion in the names of the two Churches over the years. In some records the church at Thurleston was named as St. Botolphs and the Church at Whitton as St. Mary, and in other records it has been the reverse, it is now believed that the former version was correct. In 1990 the issue was settled once and for all when the name was officially changed to incorporate both names and the church dedication became St. Mary and St. Botolph. The church is now a Grade II listed

building, has a large surfaced car park and is floodlit at night, marking it out as a beacon of hope within the community.

Church Interior.

South Aisle:

This contains one of the Church's beautiful stained-glass windows by the firm of William Preedy of Worcester which represents Christ's Resurrection and Ascension with the Latin inscription "ad finem es to Fidelus" Beneath the window is a , brass plaque in memory of Charles Steward with the following inscription 'To the glory of God and in memory of Charles Steward by whom this Church was mainly restored, who died on the 5th day of July 1867.'

The South Aisle became the Lady Chapel in a further restoration in 1980. The altar is an Elizabethan Holy Table. All churches had to provide these to replace the stone altars made illegal during the Reformation. Our example is a simple, plain structure and served for many years as a vestry table before being incorporated into the new chapel.. On this altar stands a small red wooden cross holding a carved Spanish Ivory Crucifix believed to be of the 17th century. This came from Akenham church where it had been damaged by vandals. It was brought to Whitton for safe keeping after being repaired. For many years it has been a focus for prayer and devotion on the altar in the chapel. It happily symbolises the union between the two parishes and is taken back to Akenham whenever a service is held there. Above the Lady Chapel Altar hangs an Italian 17th Century painting depicting The Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus with St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist, in the style of the Italian artist Luca Geordano. We know of the existence of two identical copies which may be contemporary. On the south wall is an Icon of 'The Transfiguration', which is the door of the Aumbry, a locked cupboard holding the reserved sacrament. This icon was painted by Fr. David of Skete Monastery of St. Seraphim, Dunton, near Fakenham.

The Nave:

On the pillar to the right of the Chancel steps, next to the pulpit, is a small 19th century Eastern European icon of Jesus. To the left of the Chancel steps there is the Mother's Union banner made in the style of an icon by Isabel Clover in the early nineteen seventies. On the pillar next to the banner is another 19th century Eastern European icon of Mary with Jesus..

The pews are all 19th century. In the nave the pews have doors and are made of oak (as are the ones in the south aisle but without doors). These were the better seats which were subject to pew rents. The space behind the back pew in the nave was the site of the internal bell tower.

The large West Window is also by John Hardman of Birmingham and depicts the Works of Mercy, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor etc. The inscription informs that these are the expected virtues of a Christian. Three angels adorn the window one of which, on the right, is regarded as especially well drawn. This Window was also erected to the memory of Mr. Charles Steward and the expenses were defrayed by sixty three of his friends.

North Aisle:

Traditionally the cheaper pitch pine pews in the north aisle were the free sittings for the village poor. On the wall at the back of the North Aisle is a Roll of Honour which records the inhabitants of Whitton Village who died in the Great War 1914-18.

At the front of the aisle adjacent to the font there is a stained glass window by the firm of William Morris. The window was given in memory of Mrs. Florence Dorothy Horsfield who died on the 8th May, 1922. The brass plaque on the window sill was added in memory of her husband Col. George William Horsfield who died on the 25th January 1950. On the ledge below the window is a glass case holding a Remembrance Book. In keeping with the tradition that Baptism is the first Sacrament the Font was originally at the back of the Church. It was moved during the 1980's to its present position in front of the choir and organ vestry. It is 19th century and has a circular arcaded bowl and an ornate wooden cover.

The Organ:

Behind the font is a pipe organ which was installed in 2002 replacing a very basic Allen electronic instrument. It was generously given to Whitton by Melbourne (near Cambridge) Baptist Church. It was installed in Melbourne, by Miller and Sons of Cambridge around the middle part of the 19th century and was a re-build of another instrument by an unknown builder.

The Vestry:

This is the robing room for priests and contains the vestment chest and altar frontal cupboard. Much of the history of the evolution of the church is recorded in photographs and paintings hung on the walls. There is a Victorian cast iron fireplace which was the only source of heating before central heating was installed. The vestry was built in 1901 and as it is sited over the old boiler room, it is reasonable to assume that both were contracted at the same time and central heating installed (solid fuel boiler). It was extended in the early 1960's.

The Chancel:

The Chancel Roof retains the original 13th Century roof- beams. These beams extend behind the wagon roof boarding in the nave as far as the back pew and mark the extent of the original church. There are two ancient wrought iron hooks in the Chancel eaves. The wooden altar brought from St. Mary's church in Camberley, Surrey in the 1980's, replaced a simple wooden structure.

The clergy reading desks have tracery fronts and incorporate mediaeval woodwork. Under the seats are misericords, little half seats for the priest to perch on during long services. At the back of the choir stalls, on each side, there are carved faces of a man and woman. Experts consider one and probably both to be medieval and they may indeed be a relic from the two original church benches that once would have been placed on the wall on each side of the nave so that, before the days of pews, the 'weakest could go to the wall' and sit down.

In the south wall of the Chancel are two small stained glass windows: the first is inscribed Faith and is of striking colouring in a most unusual shade of green.

In the south wall of the Sanctuary is a simple thirteenth century piscina (a small sink for the cleansing of the holy vessels and the disposal of the water used in the Mass). The fact that this has survived shows that this part of the wall is original to the 13th century church. Its position in the wall indicates that it belongs to a time when the church floor was all at one level and since the floor of the Chancel and Sanctuary were raised the Piscina is now at the wrong height.

The Willett family of Whitton Lodge gave the four small round windows in the south sanctuary wall to the church in the 1960's. They are quite clearly ecclesiastical and depict Jesus, Mary, St. Paul and St. John. They are early Victorian glass, probably 1840-55 but certainly not earlier than 1830. The great east window, depicting the Last Supper is by John Hardman who set up his firm in Birmingham in 1845 under the patronage of the famous architect Pugin. The window is recorded by a brass plaque beneath as in memory of Canon William Howarth who died in 1875. However, it is probable that the window was placed here before his death, as it is contemporary with the great west window, also by Hardman and in memory of Charles Steward.

The 'soldier window' in the south chancel wall, again by Hardman, is dedicated to the memory of Howarth's eldest son who was killed in 1865. Probably all three windows were commissioned at the same time to complete the restoration and enlargement of the church and became memorials later.

On the east wall are two recesses, which have the Ten Commandments on grey slate. They were an ugly product of the Victorian Restoration and replaced earlier wooden panels containing the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. In the redecoration in 1980 they were covered with gauze and painted over because, although they were considered to be of historic value, they were also considered an eyesore to be sympathetically hidden. The gauze and paint cover thus preserves them for history.

To the left of the altar is a simple Tudor parish chest with three keyholes. In this chest would once have been placed the valuables of the parish, service books and registers particularly. The three locks were an early form of double signed cheque security as three people had to be present to open the chest. Adjacent to the chest is the Bishop's throne. This has the distinction of being the original throne made for the Cathedral in Bury St. Edmunds in 1914 when this Diocese was created. It was removed to Whitton during the 1960's after a new throne was constructed.