

all saints church waterden

An Ancient Hidden Norfolk Gem



Painting by Alan Schmidt
© Fr Clive Wylie SCP



Foreword

My young and expanding family and I were lucky enough to live at Waterden Farmhouse for nearly a decade from December 1998. Back then, as now, All Saints' Church only had one service a month during the summer (the church has no electricity) and its ever-popular Christmas Eve candlelit service, with some worshippers crammed into the old box pews and the rest squeezed into the rear of the church.

We never drove to church and the walk became, for us, part of the ritual. All three of my daughters have been christened in the beautiful, simple font. I was lucky enough to buy a hauntingly calm painting of the font by contemporary artist Gerard Stamp.

What do I love more than anything in this church apart from its intimacy and tranquility? It has to be the painted inscription board above the junction of the nave and the chancel: "Lo, I am with you alway".

Tom Leicester

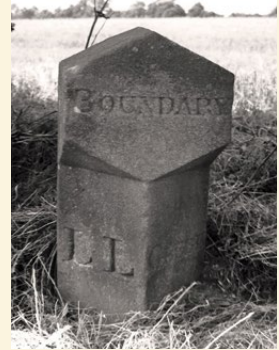
The Earl of Leicester, August 2019

A rural gem of a church © John Fielding



A rural gem of a church

All Saints' Waterden is an ancient, mysterious and spiritual place. Waterden derives from "Waterdenna", the name of the village in the Domesday Book of 1086, meaning a "watery valley" in Anglo-Saxon. Domesday does not record that Waterden had a church then and the exact origins of the present building are unknown.



An old boundary marker

Just as the origins of All Saints' are a mystery, so is much of its subsequent history. The evidence is patchy but it points to a building which has undergone many ups and downs. The rare and fascinating architectural hodgepodge that we see today is the result of perhaps 1,000 years of use, neglect and revival – all partly reflecting the fluctuating fortunes of the congregation.

All Saints' fabric and the records suggest several major phases in the evolution of the church from early modern times. Extensive changes in the 17th century probably indicate that the building had fallen into disrepair and even disuse, perhaps associated with the decline of the village.

The Great Gale of 24th March 1895 caused much damage when a tree fell on the church. All Saints' did not reopen until extensive work was completed in 1900. The floor was repaired in 1923. The church suffered further damage in the storms of 1953. Significant repairs were undertaken in the 1970s, 1992-94 and 2005-6. Most recently, a thorough restoration was carried out with the generous help of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Norfolk Churches Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Geoffrey Watling Charity and the Holkham Estate in 2018-19.

A boundary stone on the right where the track to the church joins the churchyard marks the point where church lands meet lay lands. It symbolises how All Saints' antiquity, mystery and remote rural location create a special atmosphere of spirituality. Alan Bennett has written affectionately about All Saints and Osbert Lancaster has drawn it evocatively. Today this modest but intriguing little church thrives again as a place of Christian worship, peaceful contemplation and community identity.



The building

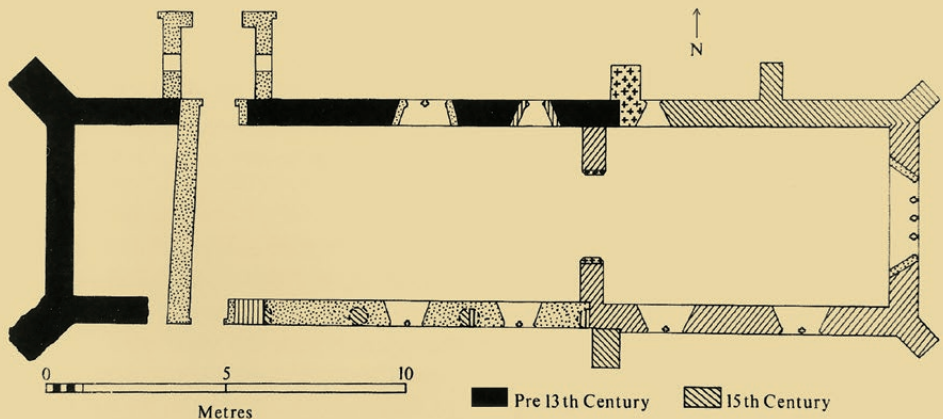
All Saints' is Grade II* listed. It is built mainly from brick, flint and rubble. From the outside, it has three main visible elements: the chancel, the nave, and ruins at the west end. Overall, the relative proportions of the chancel and nave are a bit unusual, the chancel being wider than the nave and a little longer than normal.

The ruins at the west end were thought to be the remains of a fallen tower. A more convincing explanation is that they formed part of the nave. A small bell-cote perches on top of the nave where the end wall has been filled in.

There is a less obvious but highly intriguing feature on the south side. Traces of arches can be seen in the wall of the nave, filled in with rough material and odd windows. Archaeological excavation has revealed the outlines of a side aisle and chapel built out on the south side of the church. The aisle probably dates from the 14th century and the chapel may be older. Today the arches only hint at what was there. The south side also has a door, opposite the main entrance and porch on the north side.

Oddities are equally abundant inside. It has been suggested that some features, such as the clerestory (five small windows high up, four of them blocked), are Anglo-Saxon. This is now thought only to be a possibility.

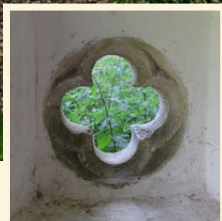
All Saints' interior showing periods of construction





Main: An ancient, mysterious church © Jeremy Whigham

Right: A quatrefoil widow in the porch captures the light © Lucy Hodges



The oldest features seem to be the two doorways, which are 12th century. The chancel arch may also be 12th century. Much of the rest of the building is Early English (13th century).

The 2018-19 restoration uncovered traces of a wall painting above the font and on the south side of the nave revealed more of two arches which were probably part of the lost south aisle.

In the 17th century the nave was shortened, the west wall built and the north porch rebuilt. At the east end the medieval window was filled in and replaced by a distinctly period four-light window. Two windows on the south side of the nave and one in the south side of the chancel were also replaced, as was the large window on the north side of the nave. The nave roof was reconstructed at the same time.

Among the interior fittings, the box pews are 19th century and the plain octagonal font, squeezed between the north door and the back pew, is 14th century. There are 10 memorial slabs and a small brass plaque affixed to the lectern.



The vanished village

All Saints' was an essential part of the medieval village. The centre of the village was to the north-east of the church, approximately where the farm is today.

A track, part of which is still a public footpath, linked the church and the village, running along the far side of the small stream which is the western boundary of the churchyard. There is a footbridge across the stream, accessible in the north-west corner of the churchyard. This was probably where villagers entered the church.

Archaeological research has revealed the outlines of houses, fields, a village green and a manor house. The surviving ponds were probably fishponds to help feed the village. Domesday indicates a small settlement and it seems Waterden remained that way. By the 16th century it was no longer ranked as a separate village for taxation. Successive prominent local families owned the land until Sir Edward Coke bought it in 1604, by which time enclosure of the land had probably begun.

Sir Edward was an ancestor of the Earls of Leicester, whose seat is at nearby Holkham Hall. The land remains part of the estate of the Earls of Leicester and today broadly corresponds to what is known as Waterden Farm.

Land continued to be enclosed into the 18th century. The village vanished and evolved into a manor house and farm buildings but Waterden was never depopulated entirely. In 1861 the census recorded a population of 44, conceivably the highest ever. Most, however, lived in only the farmhouse and the rectory and some were workers on the farm who came from neighbouring villages.

The 16th century manor house was demolished and replaced by the existing farmhouse in 1781. The barn, which can be seen from the church, is very old in origin and contains some masonry, including carved beasts and gargoyles, which may have come from the church. In the early 19th century the farm buildings were described as 'perhaps the finest set of farm premises in Great Britain'.



The parish

All Saints' is a Chapel of Ease in the Parish of South Creake with Waterden and is part of the Creakes Benefice. At different times over the centuries, however, Waterden parish has either stood alone or been associated with others such as Egmore and Holkham. Graves ranging from the medieval to 21st century burials demonstrate a continuity of purpose and devotion.

The earliest name we have for a rector is from about 1260. The last rector left or died in the mid-1950s. The rectory, now known as the Old Rectory, was built in 1850. It lies just to the south of the church and is part of the estate of the Earls of Leicester, who are patrons of All Saints'.



How to find

All Saints' Waterden

The church is among trees 100 yards off Waterden Lane down a grass track. It is signposted from the B1105 Fakenham - Wells road and the B1355 Fakenham - Burnham Market road.



Parking

Parking is in the small car park just inside the entrance from the lane or on the verge of the lane.

Accessibility

The grassy track from the lane and car park is quite rough and may not be suitable for wheel chair users and people with disabilities.

Opening times and services

The church is always open. We have regular services in the summer and a Christmas Eve Carol Service.

More Information

www.waterden.org    @creakesbenefice

Friends of All Saints' Waterden

www.waterden.org/foasw  @foasw

If you wish to make a donation to All Saints' Waterden, please scan the code.



all saints church
waterden



Geoffrey Watling
Charity



This booklet is made possible by a generous grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

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