

A TOUR THROUGH ST NICHOLAS CHURCH

As you open the late 14th Century door which replaced a decrepit earlier one you find yourself in the South Aisle. Before proceeding towards the side altar, take a close look at the stone carving embodied in the wall on your left just past the window. Kendrick in 'Anglo Saxon Art to 900 A.D' describes it as 'A noble mask type of carving in most austere and formidable guise. I rank this as nothing less than a masterpiece, for it is conceived and executed in the grandest traditions of the barbaric style. This is a truly admirable and remarkable lion mask showing a fine example of the ribbon-necked beard'.



The South Aisle

Now turn back and proceed up the south aisle noting how the 14th Century walls have tilted to the south. The Font is late 15th Century on an octagonal stem with a modern bowl. On the wall you will pass the impressive list of 52 Rectors who have served this Parish well over the last eight centuries, and next to this a small carved head.

Beyond the 1914-1918 War Memorial Plaque, there is a large decorated memorial to the Reverend Castel Sherrard, his wife and eight children, with a stained-glass window and further bronze and copper plaques to other members of the family. (See ref. under The Parish Church).

The Piscina to the right of the Altar is 14th Century, and the attractive oak chest with a lozenge decoration is 17th Century. Note also the carved head below the arch stop of a woman wearing a wimple. There is a description (not visible) cast in the lead of this aisle which records 'E. Yardy Churchwarden April 4th 1759 W. Everell Plumber'.



The Tower

The large West Double Doors are still used for Weddings and Funerals. The floor above where you are standing is reached by a spiral stone staircase of 56 steps (one of which is carved with the date 1687) and houses the clock which was reconstructed from a 30 hour to an 8 day working by James Dann, Clockmaker of Wisbech 1885. It has had several overhauls since then, the latest being in 2000 when the winding system was motorised and in 2005 when the opportunity was also taken to regild the face. There is also a small door in this room giving access to the Nave Roof. The next floor up, a further 14 steps houses the four Church Bells which are chimed every Sunday using the four visible hammer ropes.

The casting details are as follows:-

1595 Com Com and Preay Watts of Leicester

1595 Searve God and Obey thy Princ Watts of Leicester

1863 J Taylor and Co. Founders Loughborough

1736 Omnia Fiant Ad Gloriam Dei... Gloria Deo Soli...Tho. Eayre.

Above this floor a pair of ladders gives access through a heavy leaded trapdoor to the roof which is surrounded by a castellated parapet guarded at each corner by a well weather-worn 15th Century Heraldic Beast. The Tower itself is late 15th or early 16th Century from where it is possible to see the outline of the Lantern Tower of Ely Cathedral on a clear day.



The Nave

Before proceeding up the Nave, pause for a moment and enjoy the natural light in the Church. This is as a result of the absence of a large amount of stained glass. The explanation for this springs from the English Civil War (1642-1648). Legend has it that the Stained Glass Windows were removed and hidden by troops loyal to King Charles 1st in order to prevent their destruction by Cromwell's Roundheads. The troops were later killed in a skirmish and so the location of the windows became unknown. The windows have never been found! Another feature enhancing the light in the Nave are the exceptionally large Clerestory Windows. These

additions were made at considerable cost between 1595 (date of two of the bells) and 1615 (date on the beam above the rood screen) and are distinguished by the unusual device of continuing the nave roof battlements around the tower. As you slowly walk up The Nave—which is originally 12th/13th Century—you will notice the 38 carved Poppy Heads at the end of the main pews. Two of these are of particular importance.

1. The fourth from the front on the south side which depicts three heads – a bearded male in the middle, a woman with a square head-dress and caul and a woman bridles with stalks of foliage.
2. The third from the front on the north side which shows three birds with the head of the middle one unfortunately missing.

Now note the high door above the Pulpit which is accessed by a small door below (but please refrain from doing so as it is dangerous). This door originally was used to approach the Gallery Walkway above the 15th Century elaborately carved Rood Screen. On either side of the screen are two important frescoes dated c1450. The one on the left shows Mary Magdalene, wearing a black tunic and white cloak, standing beneath a canopy with her right hand raised and holding a covered cup in her left hand. The drawing is outlined in black and red and the partly worn away inscription below reads 'Sancta Maria Magdalana Intercede ProNobis'. (Saint Mary Magdelene Intercede for us). The one on the right shows Christ rising from the tomb and a kneeling figure of a Priest. Christ is depicted undraped to the waist with his hand across his body and emerging from a rectangular moulded tomb.

There are scrolls at the side of the praying figure but the inscription is obliterated. It is thought that Beverley Nichols paid for the conservation of these frescoes in the 1950s.

Before continuing the tour through the rood screen into the Chancel, walk into the North Transept past the Pulpit to the small door already mentioned. This door also leads to a room above the Chapel (more of which later). The origins of this room are still being debated as it is thought that at one time it could have been the living quarters of a Resident Monk, or more likely a Treasury. If the latter, then it would have been unique in the Village Church in the whole Diocese. The jury is still out! Next to this door you will see a large decorated stone bracket which is likely to have supported a figure of the crowned Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus. Immediately above the bracket there is a blocked-off window. The tracery at the top is special as it has been carved unusually from a single piece of stone.



The Vestry

The Vestry and North Transept were used as a Schoolroom in the early part of the 18th Century and a doorway was cut through the north wall—the marks of which are still visible from the outside. There is an inscription on the exterior window-sill 'PA 1776 CW' which possibly records the alterations to the building when the school closed.

The vestry has a Double Ambry in the North Wall. The safe contains, amongst other things, the most recent Parish Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths. The oldest entries go back to 1578. Now return and make your way through the Rood Screen and into the Chancel.



The North Aisle

There is a small memorial plaque on the north wall to Charles Brooks who was the organist for 20 years. The organ itself was made by Claypole and Son of Peterborough. To the immediate left of the Organ at floor level is an unexplained feature of an Arch Respond. It has three shafts on a 13th Century base and is obviously not in its original position.

The Chancel

The Chancel was constructed in the early 14th Century with 15th Century rebuilding and lengthening. Of immediate interest is the empty Monument on the North Wall. This is early 17th Century and is said to have displayed at one time the Castell Arms. The form of the Monument is best suited to a husband and wife kneeling and was possibly in memory of Robert Castell who died in 1619 and his wife although no inscription survives. The Castells held land in the Parish from at least the 14th Century until the male line died out in 1658, the heiress marrying into the Sherrard family who were a power in the village until shortly after 1946 (William Sherrard was Rector 1661-1691).

Note the four Gravestones in the floor with the oldest dating from 1725 and the Memorial Silver Plaque of the Second World War near the Chapel door. The two Grotesque Carved Heads in the opposite window recesses near the Communion Rail are also interesting. The Communion Table is 17th Century with bulbous turned legs, but the upper stages and top are modern. Now proceed to the Sanctuary. In the south wall is a Double Piscina. The purpose of this feature was to provide somewhere for the Sacred Vessels (Chalice and Paten) to be washed in separate basins. Because the water was deemed to be Holy by virtue of its having touched the consecrated Blood and Flest of Christ, a drain was provided in the wall to prevent any falling into improper hands. The low wall to the right of the Piscina is in place of a Sedilia where officiating Clergy could sit. On the north wall of the Sanctuary was a double lockable cupboard or Aumbry, and it is here that the Service Book and Sacred Vessels were kept when not in use.

Note the two large stencilled slate slabs with the 10 Commandments and Apostles Creed either side of the altar and a smaller one behind the altar 'Do this in Remembrance of Me'. These were created by Henrietta Wingfield (1804-1887).

The final room to visit is the Chapel which is through the door in the north wall of the Chancel.



The Cavell Chapel

Switch on the lights and marvel at the Vaulted Ceiling. One hypothesis suggests that in medieval times this small room was used as a Resident Monk's Cell with both an external door and an internal one into the Church. It also had its own stove and a staircase to a bedroom. This upper room has long gone in its old form and the cell had been derelict for many years before its conversion in 2006 as The Cavell Chapel in memory of Nurse Edith Cavell who was executed in the First World War.

Members of her family are buried in the Churchyard including Alexander who was Rector of Glatton from 1931-1936. The body of Edith Cavell is buried in the grounds of Norwich Cathedral. Her last words were 'I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone'. The refurbished Chapel was dedicated at a special service as The Cavell Chapel on 18th February 2007 when many members of the family were present.

The Churchyard

The Sawtry History Society completed a register of the graves in the Churchyard for the Community Archive, which will be of considerable interest to the many visitors who search for their ancestors. Several of the Headstones have Listed Protection.

Some notable graves are :-

1. The Cavell Family which is between the path and the South-East corner of the Chancel.
2. Kathy Coles nee Cavell is buried with her husband Frank (who had a farm in Glatton) near to the path between the West Door and the gate.
3. The grave of John Ward Edis who was burnt to death on 11th June 1874 aged 27 years possibly in a thatch fire. The grave is easily seen from Church Road over the Wall.



Before leaving, it is worth having a quick look at the Ornamentation below the Parapet on the South Isle. At the West End there is a Ball Flower Decoration of the 14th century, but the Frieze of Grotesque Heads east of the South Door is earlier.

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