

St Helen's Church Amotherby



The Tower

This is the oldest part of the present structure, along with the south door. The tower was rebuilt about 1500 using masonry from earlier centuries. It has neither buttress nor string course and the windows are square headed and mullioned.

The west door into the tower has a Norman arch with some later Early English decoration. In Norman times the nave could be entered through the tower, but this door was blocked up during the 19th century reconstruction. The fine Norman arch can be seen from inside the tower.

The tower holds two bells, both mediaeval; one is inscribed I.H.S. and the other, CAMPANA BEATE HELENE (The bell of Blessed Helen.)

The South Door

Is probably the oldest part of the building and is a noteworthy example of late Norman architecture.

The Nave

The nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1871 in an effort to improve upon the original Norman style and witness to the frequent use of dog-tooth ornamentation on the round headed arches.

During the reconstruction several ancient burials were discovered under the church. The most interesting, as reported by the local newspaper, was one of a young woman, lying under a heavy stone slab carved with a human face.

“At the head of this grave, and apparently on the same level... was a stone pavement, the stones of which were covered with between two and three inches of burnt matter, with a large quantity of charcoal all around... Among the burnt matter was an iron blade greatly corroded, as if the end of a dirk, the point being gone – in fact such a weapon as would be expected to accompany an Anglo-Saxon burial.”

The stone slab can be seen in the porch.

The pew-ends, pulpit and font were designed and carved by the Revd. C. P. Peach, vicar from 1834-1886

The Chancel and Sanctuary

On the south side of the sanctuary is an effigy of a knight in armour. the figure was discovered under pews and moved here in 1871 and is therefore, not in its original position. The arms on the shield are those of the Bordesden family who lived in the parish at Newsham in the 14th century The effigy is of Sir John de Bordesden; a turbulent character

who was ex-communicated briefly in 1303 and died in 1329. Sir John was involved in lengthy dispute with the Prior of Old Malton over grazing rights between 1307 and 1310 and his men were repeatedly skirmishing with those of the Prior. His effigy, dating from approximately 1330, is quite unique in as much as it is one of only seven known showing a knight wearing surcoat with sleeves, most are without sleeves.

The tomb on the north side of the sanctuary was found in the churchyard near the tower in 1871. It bears an inscription in Norman French, the language of the upper classes in England until about 1400 –

“ICI GIT WILLEM DE BORDESSEN PRIZ PUR LA ALME”
Here lies William de Bordesden, pray for his soul.

He was either the brother or nephew of Sir John, and died about 1340. The grave cover displays a fine foliated cross.

The lancets of the east window contain glass designed by the Revd. C.P. Peach. The altar was presented in memory of the Revd. Canon Harry Ward, vicar from 1893 — 1934.

Reordering of the chancel took place in autumn 2005 with the removal of the disused choir pews, the levelling of the resulting area and the transfer of the Lady Chapel altar to serve as a nave altar, bringing priest and people much closer together in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Baptismal Font

The original baptismal font, which can be found just outside the porch, is made of stone and is thought to date from the 11th – 12th centuries. It is listed in Cox & Harvey (1907) as a baptismal font of the Norman period, although this same source suggests that the font "may be Saxon".

The present font made of Hildenley stone is supported by a thick central shaft and is surrounded by eight smaller ones of marble. It was designed and carved by the late Rev. C.P.Peach around 1870. The basin well has a central drain and the upper rim has holes corresponding to the hardware of an old font cover.