



## History Guide to Wyberton Church

You may be surprised that the church seems to be on the wrong side of the main A16 road but you are, however, in both the geographical and historical centre of the parish of Wyberton.

The Domesday survey lists Wyberton as having a church in 1086. Nothing further is known about that building but the one that you see today had its origins in the 13th century. This church is one of only four English churches dedicated to the French saint, Leodegar. Although some of that original church remains, the remainder of the body of the church dates from the 15th century with a Georgian apse in place of a chancel. We now invite you to make your way around the interior of the church and have identified some of the main items of interest. Its history is surprisingly well documented.

If you start at position (1) you are standing under the centre of the tower in that C13 church. That was the central tower in a church that was of cruciform shape, with transepts and chapels and a long chancel. In 1419 the Rector, John Stokes, found that the tower had collapsed together with most of the nave, leaving only the chancel almost intact. Now turn towards the altar and look at the gigantic pillars (2). These pillars together with the large archway are part of that C13 church. Note how the pillars lean outwards as they would have been supporting the weight of that tower. Walk a few paces down the nave and you can see on either side the bases of two more gigantic pillars, marked (3) on the plan. Together these make it possible to envisage the scale of that early tower and crossing. Although this is all that remains standing of that C13 church, the fallen masonry was reused to build a new church; essentially the one you are now standing inside. Looking first at the pillars along the nave, those on the north side are built from reused curved stone columns (4) whereas along the south are hexagonal (5). At the west end of the church is the tower, under which you entered this church building. Again this is all constructed by using the stone from that original church. Around the walls of the nave and aisles there is occasional evidence of C13 stone trefoil frieze set into the walls. The history of this rebuilding is recorded owing to legal proceedings at the Chancery Court relating to the payment of the London stone-mason engaged for the purpose. Looking up at the roof of the nave you are seeing oak timbers that have been in place since C15. This is one of the finest features of this church. It has moulded tie beams with wooden angels and corbels – all part of that original C15 roof. The tracery of the windows in the aisles and the clerestory are also C15; most have Victorian glazing. Return to the east end of the church. In 1760 the rector, Dr John Shaw found that the pillars of the chancel were leaning alarmingly. Fearful of another collapse, he obtained permission to demolish the large chancel and in its place erect a smaller structure, the Georgian brick-built apse that we see today, constructed at the same time as the nearby Rectory, now called Wyberton Park, was re-fronted. For many years the three windows in this apse were blocked up, but in 1973 the interior of the church was transformed by reinstatement of glazing in the two side windows. A bequest enabled purchase of sections of the east window of St James' Church in Boston, at the time of its demolition. The simple figures depict St James and St Guthlac on the left (6) and St Hugh and St Botolph on the right (7). Above the altar, between the two windows a late C18 reredos (8) contains the text of the Ten Commandments and the Our Father.

Another clue to the history of this church is in the changed floor levels where there are steps down into the nave and up into the sanctuary. These result from decisions first during the C15 rebuilding to raise the floor level – possibly to strengthen the foundations – but then to lower it again during the C19 when underpinning was required to stop the side aisles from collapsing. It was during this latter work that the extent of the original C13 church building was revealed, along with the piers

of those earlier pillars (3) by the lectern and pulpit. This restoration was carried out under instruction of architect, George Gilbert Scott. The pews would have been removed at this time. Side doors and porches, thought to be unsightly, were also removed. Evidence of one of them is visible from outside the building on the south side. The pulpit dated 1881 is dedicated to the rector, Rev Charles Moore who died before completion of the work.

The church has two fonts. One is a C 14 century bowl (9) that is no longer in use owing to the fragility of its stonework. A C 15 font, (10), on a tall base is currently used for baptisms. This was obtained from a redundant church in Norwich. Other items that you may like to note inside this building are listed below: In the north aisle, on a window ledge, are two interesting stone corbelheads (11) that were recovered from the churchyard in 1956 by the gravedigger. These were later dated as being of the Norman period so may be all that remains of the church mentioned in the Domesday Book. Nearby on the wall is a charities board (12) dated 1794 with painted text. On the floor of this aisle is an incised C 14 slab (13) depicting Adam de Frampton and his wife Sybill. This is made of black Tournai marble but, sadly, is much worn. In the tower the belfry contains three C 17 bells. It can be accessed if required through the narrow stairway (14) but permission must be sought from the Churchwardens or Rector. The framework of the bells is not strong enough for them to be properly rung now. The newest structural addition to this building was the creation of a screen (15) at the time of the recent millennium with interior doors to enhance the entrance into the church.

**Compiled by Alison Austin.**