

Interior fittings and features. The most striking feature is the square 12th century **font** resting on eight pilasters and a central column. Grotesque heads form the corners.



Equally remarkable is the 17th century **bier** (to carry coffins or shrouded corpses) kept in the south porch. It was given to the church 1611 by Henry Kidson, Rector 1570 -1613. The texts are derived from an archaic bible translation while at the ends are an hour glass and a skull.

The white marble memorial tablet on the north wall of the **nave** is to the Rev. Horace Hamond D.D. who is actually buried in Bath Abbey. The pews are of 19th century date as is the 'chequer board' tiling in the nave. The source appears to be Garrett Brothers of Brownhills, Burslem, Staffordshire.

The two manual organ in the **north transept** was built by R.A. Bower & Co. of Wroxham. The stained glass window in the **south transept** depicting the Annunciation was inserted in 1926. This transept retains its medieval **aumbry** and **piscina**.



The fine carved heads probably represent the donor and his wife. The **icons** in the aumbry are a gift from the local English Orthodox community who used the church while their present church at Babingley was being restored. One of the two prints is the Ladbroke view of c.1830 and an important source for the former appearance of the building. The other print is of the Episcopal Church at **Southbury**,

Conneticut with which St Mary's had close links during the 1980s. The 19th century pulpit is (2009) in the process of restoration.

The altar tomb on the north side of the **sanctuary** occupies what was probably a medieval '**Easter sepulchre**'. It is of Sir Thomas Winde who died in 1603. Winde was Lord of the Manor of Gaywood and held a great deal of land here, in Gaywood and in Terrington. On the north side is a particularly fine, three tier, **sedilia** with an adjacent **piscina**.



Sedilia in the chancel

The unusually rich **parish archive** is largely stored in the **Norfolk Record Office**. It includes the Register of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, with occasional comments on the circumstances of death and extends back to 1556. Churchwarden's accounts survive between 1762 and 1840 and from 1850 to 1856. The incomplete list of Rectors begins in 1349, the year of the Black Death (there were four Rectors in quick succession to 1358.). There is a Tithe Map of 1844 and an Enclosure Award of 1851, the latter is retained by the Parish as is the record of **Vestry Meetings** from 1875 to 1895 and that of the **Parish Council** thereafter.

John Smallwood 2009

St. Mary's Church, South Wootton – A Brief Guide

Welcome to St Mary's Church, South Wootton. This building has been at the heart of the village community for at least 900 years.



The Church and the Village.

Parish churches were built for the honour and glory of God, where the "Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of mankind may be worshipped by his people". They also reflect the history and character of the communities they serve. St Mary's, a Grade II* listed building, is by far the older of the two churches in the Wootton Benefice. It has unusual, even unique, features. It is largely built of locally sourced materials.

Although there is no record of a church in Wootton in the Domesday Book the earliest features almost certainly date to before 1100. Some parts of the church are built in the Late Saxon style. Its situation, on relatively high ground within a settled area and close to a 'manor house' (the Old Hall), is typical of many church sites. When built the outlook to the west was very different from today. St Mary's overlooked 'Wootton Marsh' with its salt pans, the principal source of wealth for the community. There is, however, no evidence here of pre-Christian activity.

We first hear of South Wootton in a tax document of 1182. By then both North and South Wootton had developed from the dispersed pattern of farmsteads at the time of Domesday into two distinct communities with 'greens' at their focus. By now there was a church in each village.

The Churchyard.

The Churchyard is closed for burials although there is still some space for the deposition of cremations. The Parish Council maintains the Churchyard, its walls and graves.

The War Memorial will shortly (2009) be renovated. In 2005 **South Wootton in Bloom**, a local organisation including both churchgoers and others laid out a '**sensory garden**' in the south western part of the churchyard.

The churchyard wall contains a great deal of re-used stone including a plaque inscribed JJC 1866.

There are some good headstones including a Hamond tomb of 1643 with a coffin slab on a brick plinth. Amongst the earlier stones laid to the west of the new porch is that of Henry Wake, Parish Clerk for 20 years, who died in 1777 aged 63.

Outside and Inside the building

The fabric: The building is a mixture of architectural styles and materials. The original structure shows much use of grey 'silcrete', brown carrstone and conglomerate. There is even some iron slag retrieved from local iron workings. Very little flint was used, a reflection of the geology of the immediate locality. Limestone imported from the east Midlands via the Fenland network of waterways was used for quoins (corners), window heads and traceries, and for most internal features when good quality stone was required. **Post Medieval** repairs and rebuilds, particularly in the tower and its adjacent nave wall show extensive use of brick. In places the lime mortar has been 'galleted', that is small pieces of stone have been inserted.



Example of Conglomerate

Why so small a church?

With the exception of the modern porch and vestry St Mary's was not enlarged after the middle years of the 14th century. The predominantly light and sandy soils of the parish favoured grazing rather than cultivation and restricted the size of the population that the land could support.

The combined effect of plague and, in the case of the Woottons, the decline of the local salt industry, hit settlements on this relatively marginal land particularly hard. For centuries the population of the village remained static and modest. Census returns for much of the 19th century show the population of South Wootton hovering at around 160. Rapid growth did not take place until the 20th century. However, St Mary's seems always to have been kept in reasonable repair even after the religious changes of the 16th century. Its use as a burial place for the prominent Hamond family was an advantage.

The tower: is an 18th century rebuild, with extensive use of brick, perhaps of a late medieval 3 stage tower. Further repairs took place after a serious lightning strike in 1881. There are three early 17th century bells, all made by Thomas Draper, a member of a bell-founding family at Thetford.

The 14th century south porch was modified in the 16th century with brick quoins above the stone originals and the replacement in brick of its upper gable. The head of the arch has been renewed relatively recently. Inside are stone benches.

The new porch: an addition completed in 1984. Peter Codling was the architect and Ray Birch the builder. In making the new door in the east wall of the tower two fragments of Norman roll moulding, in **Caen Stone** were recovered. A second doorway gives access to the neo Norman timber **gallery** of the 1840s retrieved from St Matterw's, Thorpe Hamlet, Norwich. It has interlacing arches.

The nave: the **massive buttress** in the north-east corner of



North buttress

the nave, the '**long and short**' work (limestone quoins set alternately horizontally and vertically) visible to the left of the 1984 doorway and the lower part of the **north wall** as far as the **north transept** all date to **before 1100**. Externally there is evidence of repair and re-facing. At one stage late medieval brick, possible reclaimed from elsewhere, was used to repair and heighten this wall. The 13th century **north door** was bricked up in the 19th century. There are faint traces of at least one blocked window.



The present **south wall** of the nave may either date to the 13th century when the chancel was rebuilt or, perhaps, to the 14th century remodelling. If so it is contemporary with the **south door**, the **two nave windows** and the **transepts**. The process of rebuilding may also have widened the nave.

The two small **transepts** are very unusual. Both have a blank east wall. The windows in the south transept match those of the nave. Reputedly, in pre-Reformation times they contained chapels dedicated to St Anne (north transept) and St Mary (south transept).

The chancel was rebuilt in the 13th century to reflect changes in ritual recently introduced that required more space. Slightly inclined to the north, it is out of alignment with the remainder of the church. This is not unusual. It may reflect, as may the alignment of the nave, the rising sun as observed when each part of the church was laid out.

Externally the east wall has putlog holes (to hold scaffolding). Both the crosses on the apex of each roof may date to the Victorian restoration.

The **chancel arch** seems contemporary with the east window. There are four windows in the chancel, each apparently of different date. The earliest is a single lancet, now blocked, in the north wall to the west of the door leading into the vestry. Dating to the 13th century rebuilding it may well be contemporary with the blocked north door in the nave.

The fine **east window** in the 'decorated' style probably dates to the earlier 14th century. The smaller of the two windows in the south wall dates to c.1300 and has simple **Y** tracery. The larger with its square hood moulding could be a 16th century replacement.

Roofing The distinctive nave roof of 1893 rests on contemporary bricks. The entire roof is now tiled although there are references in the Churchwardens' accounts during the 1830s to the removal of lead. The south porch roof, at least, was once thatched (as indicated by the gap between the tiles and roofline - see picture on right).



The vestry was built in 1896 as a mausoleum to the Hamonds, once a prominent Norfolk family: it was converted into its present use in 1951.

Marble grave slabs, commemorating several members of this family make up much of the floor of the nave.