



Welcome to St. Mary's Church, Flowton

We hope that you will enjoy its beauty and interest, and also its atmosphere of antiquity, peace and devotion. Above all, we hope that you will feel at home here, because St. Mary's is not just an ancient building, but it is a living centre of Christian worship – the purpose for which it was built over 700 years ago. Like all churches, it is a shrine built for God's glory – it is the Father's House; that is why the people of this tiny community cherish and care for it as they do. It is a place in which people of all faiths, or of none, can find peace and inspiration, and where Christians, whoever or whatever they are, can look upon as "Home".

FLOWTON is a small parish about 6 miles north-west of Ipswich. Its name appears to derive from "FLOCCTUN" – meaning a flock (or sheep) farm. Over the centuries the name has developed thus: Flocctun – Flokton – Flochetuna – Floctun – Flohtun – Floughtone – Flowton.

It is a small village and its population (just over 100 people) lives in scattered farms and houses and in a few modern homes near the church, which is situated at the northern end of the parish. There were a few cottages in the vicinity of the church, but Flowton has never been very large, which may be why the older signposts, which direct us to this very lovely corner of Suffolk, say "Flowton Church".

The visitor who discovers this small wayside church near the junction of the roads will enjoy a building which has great charm and antiquity, but which has been made to live and is greatly loved by its present-day custodians.

What to see outside the church

The SITUATION of this church is one of its attractive features which is worth pausing to enjoy. It is a peaceful and very rural setting, overlooking pretty and undulating countryside, which seems a far cry from the busy world of industries and cities. St. Mary's stands on quite high ground. The lower extension to the churchyard is an addition made through the generosity of the Watkins family. The churchyard is trim and attractive and we enter it through a simple wooden lych-gate.

The church FABRIC displays a variety of mellow colours in the building materials used; the tiled roofs and cap to the tower, the new brick in the porch and south buttresses, the mellow Tudor brick in the rood-loft staircase turret and the tracery of the window beside it. Whole flints and stones may be seen in the rubble walls of the nave and the chancel, knapped (split) flints face the lower stage of the tower, and the south face of the porch has timber and cream rendering.

The building that we see today appears to have grown during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Several of its windows have the simple “Y” tracery of the early Decorated period of architecture, in use around 1300. The west window of the tower is of this period, also most of the nave and chancel windows. The handsome three-light east window shows a later development of the Decorated style (c.1330) and has beautiful “reticulated” (net-like) tracery, which is filled with four-lobed shapes called quatrefoils. The hood-mould which frames its arch rests upon original corbels in the shape of animal heads.

During the late 15th century the large rood-loft stair turret was erected, using brick and stone, on the south side of the nave, and it was probably at this time that the large adjacent three-light window, with its Tudor brick tracery, was added. This is the one window in the church which uses the Perpendicular style of architecture.

On both the nave buttresses east of the porch are mediaeval MASS-DIALS carved into the stonework. These were used to fix the times of services before the days of clocks.

On the walls and floors of the church are memorials to people of the past who have been associated with this parish. Two 19th century wall-plaques on the east wall commemorate the Rev. John Adeney and his wife. He was responsible for building, in 1858, what is now the Old Rectory. The War Memorial on the north side of the nave bids us remember two Flowton folk who perished in World War 1, and another killed in World War 2. The four 17th century ledger slabs in the floors commemorate Thomas Bull (1649) and Robert Derehaugh (1612) near the Communion rail; also William Boggas (1643) and another W.Boggas aged 2 (1646) in the nave. Thomas Bull and William Boggas feature in the Civil War Accounts of Taxation in Flowton. Thomas Bull was appointed a Constable with William Woodruffe in May 1645 and they had to report “whether the monthly fast be strictly kept in your place”.

Amongst the church plate is an unusual chalice made in 1809, a paten of 1607, and a chalice of 1858 from the redundant church of St.Stephen’s, Ipswich, which was transferred here in memory of the Rev. Ronald Francis (Rector 1968-81) who was tragically killed in a car crash.

The pulpit, with its appropriate inscription, was installed in 1958. It was designed by H.Munro Cautley and was made by Ernest Barnes of Ipswich.

Beneath the bookrest of the priest’s stall has been incorporated a piece of 17th century woodwork, maybe from a former pulpit or pew. The Communion rail is also in the style of the 17th century, but this has been renewed.

The sanctuary has been attractively re-floored and the altar frontal adds a pleasant splash of colour to the interior. The altar and frontal were made in 1900 (the frontal given by Mrs Barker, wife of the Rector of Bramford). At this time also a new roof was placed on the north side of the nave, new floors were made for the pews to stand on and three feet of wainscoting (some of which remains towards the west end of the nave) was fitted around the walls; the interior was repainted and equipped with new hanging brass lamps. The Reverend E.F.Best (Rector 1897-1921) acted as his own architect and may also have supervised the 1906 refurbishing, when the nave benches were inserted.

The wooden cross, which stands upon the altar during the week, was the gift and handcraft of Nicholas Carter. The kneelers at the Communion rail were the gift and work of Mrs Betty Dunnett and were dedicated on Low Sunday 1984. They, together

with the embroidered kneelers in the chancel, show tasteful and colourful craftsmanship of our own time.

The embroidered cloth on the lectern was sent from Makele, Ethiopia by Sally Francis when she was doing medical relief work there. It helps us to remember Christians in other parts of the world.

The beautiful 14th century tracery of the east window can be further appreciated from inside. In the wall to the south is a simple piscina with sexfoil drain, into which was poured the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist. The wooden lintel, over the vestry entrance, is attractively carved with leaf spandrels, in the fashion of the 15th century, although much later.

The north doorway of the nave has a very simple arch and may well be late 13th century. To the north of the chancel is the commodious brick VESTRY, added during the late 18th or early 19th century. Its large eastern sash window gives it a very domestic appearance. It may be that this vestry also served as a schoolroom for Flowton children.

The unbuttressed western TOWER, with its flint walls, receding stages, 18th century brick parapet and perky tiled pyramid cap (complete with a doorway to the roof), was at one time a stage higher. The small quatrefoil upper windows were designed to give light to the ringing chamber, above which was the bell chamber and probably an embattled parapet. In 1747 a faculty was granted for the two smallest of the three bells to be sold in order to "rebuild the steeple", because many stones had fallen from its north wall, and its east wall had such a frightening bulge that it was in danger of collapsing into the nave. It must have been at this time that the tower was reduced in height. On the east face may be seen the marks showing the original ridge of the nave roof, which may have originally been thatched.

An unusual feature of this tower is that its moulded 14th century doorway is on the south rather than its west side. The west face is rather grand, because large 14th century cinquefoil-headed niches, which preserve the original pedestals upon which their former statues stood, flank its simple two-light window.

1978-84 saw much restoration work on the external walls, buttresses and windows, and particularly on the rustic south PORCH, whose sides have been carefully renewed with brick. Its south face has a timber frame, filled with cream-coloured rendering. Some of the timbers here are original and may well be 600 years old, particularly those in the wooden entrance arch.

We enter the church by means of an early 14th century south doorway. There are traces of graffiti carved on its jambs (sides), some of which are of considerable age.

What to see inside the church.

Although St. Mary's is not a large building, it does feel spacious and quite lofty. Light floods in through plenty of clear glass in the windows and the walls are whitewashed. (Repairs to the chancel ceiling in the 1990s led to the walls there being painted a pink which gives a welcome feeling of warmth to the church on cold winter mornings.) The brick floor of the nave adds to the charm of this interior, which has several features of beauty and antiquity from different periods.

Beneath the tower is a gallery with a small front under the tower arch. This is probably 18th century and was used by the people who provided the music for the services. A visitor to the church in 1859 noted that it was occupied by two singers, also two men playing the bass viol and flute. A rather rustic door leads to the tower base. A glance at the south doorway in the tower reveals the tremendous thickness (about five feet) of the tower walls. The ladder from the gallery to the belfry, with its crude and very worn treads, may well be mediaeval; it rests upon an ancient beam across the north-west corner of the tower. The single bell above was cast by Thomas Mears of London in 1823 and weighs 6³/₄cwt.

The roofs of the nave and chancel are supported by mediaeval tie-beams and king-posts, terminating in four-way struts and dating probably from the 14th century. There are several mediaeval king-post roofs in churches in this locality. The northern wall-post supporting the chancel tie-beam rests upon a lovely 14th century corbel in the shape of a grotesque head with a protruding tongue.

The font is 13th century and is placed at the west end, near the entrance, to symbolise our entry into the Christian Family by Holy Baptism. Its octagonal bowl has a pair of shallow arches in each face and rests upon a circular stem and a later octagonal base. It is crowned by an attractive 17th century cover with radiating scrolls.

The benches west of the doorway date from a restoration which took place in 1878. At this time some of the windows, which had been blocked up, were re-opened and re-glazed. When the Perpendicular window in the nave was reglazed a piece of glass with the glazier's mark of 1878 was discovered (and included in the re-glazing with the modern glazier's mark on another pane). The plain-ended benches were installed in 1906 to replace the old box-pews.

On the south wall to the east of the door is the fragment of a mediaeval wall-painting, which was discovered in 1973. Looking at its faded pigments, we are reminded that before the Reformation the church was full of colour and carving, representing a variety of visual aids to educate the mediaeval Flowton folk, who could not read and were not Latin Scholars. An important feature at that time was the carved and painted rood-screen beneath the chancel arch, which was crowned by the rood-loft, along which it was possible to walk to tend the candles in the candle-beam which burned beneath the great Rood (Christ crucified, flanked by His Mother and St. John). Money was left in 1510 for the painting of the candlebeam in this church. The screen, Loft, Rood and candlebeam have long disappeared, but the moulded capitals of the chancel arch have been cut away in places in order to accommodate part of this rood-complex. The blocked entrance to the rood-loft staircase may be seen in the south wall nearby, the staircase being in the turret behind it.

Much of the colour and carving disappeared at the Reformation in the 16th century, when services were in English and there was less need for the visual aids, and again under the Puritans in the 1640s. William Dowsing, the puritan inspector of churches, visited Flowton in 1643 and gave orders for the removal of a "holy water fount" (probably the piscina) in the chancel.

When the antiquarian, David Elisha Davy, visited the church in 1829, the nave was furnished with irregular box-pews, with a few open benches at the west end. Flanking the chancel arch were the Lord's Prayer and Creed, and the Ten Commandments were fixed to the south wall.

Thank you for visiting St. Mary's.

Before you leave, please find time to pray for the work of the Church in this parish. The church stands at the heart of the village and of village life; everybody has helped to raise the money for the ongoing major repairs. Autumn 2000 saw the repair and refurbishment of the Vestry, which is used for village meetings, polling, etc; in Spring 2001 the font was repaired, and during Autumn and Winter 2001 the chancel windows have been reglazed, being re-dedicated on June 30th 2002. Much of the cost of the window repairs was donated by local folk in memory of loved ones some of whose names and dates are inscribed on panes inserted into the large southern Nave window.

In Summer 2002 the nave walls were repaired and redecorated.

In Spring 2003 an anonymous donor commissioned Nicholas Carter to carve the two welcoming signs at the lych gate.

In Autumn 2004 a new heating system was installed – this was partly in memory of a former member of the village community, Barbie McDowell, who had been in a wheelchair for many years. Barbie said that the best welcome that could be given to visitors who could move around very little was a warm church.

We hope that you will return in future years to see how the restoration has progressed.

May God go with you as you leave St. Mary's.

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