

'Horseheath Parish Church'

Leaflet *by Rev. W.N.C. Girard, 1986*

Rev. Bill Gerard was the Rector of Balsham with responsibility for Horseheath 1985-1996, who did a tremendous amount of work to get grants to repair the Church.

HORSEHEATH PARISH CHURCH.

Thank you for visiting us; this leaflet may tell you things you know already as well as things about this Church you did not know. Take this leaflet with you as you walk around, and then take it home with you!

Parts of the Church, and how it is built.

Churches usually face EAST at the altar end (perhaps where the sun rose on the day building started) and so the other sides of the church are always called North (left), South (right) and West (behind you) as you face the altar.

Churches were rarely built complete to one design, they grew over the years with many different styles. Builders were not afraid to take down, and to rebuild, and there were no planning regulations then. First churches were usually simple wooden ones and here at Horseheath there may have been a more substantial Saxon one (before 1066) made of stones, but we do not know for certain. When churches were rebuilt the old stones were re-used and that is why they appear here and there in the masonry (look out for them with their shapes and curves and mouldings). This is not a natural stone area so stone had to come from a long way away and was expensive, that is why flint stones from the fields were used for the walls, held together with lime plaster.

Often the earliest part of the church is the Chancel wall in front of you with the big archway. This is because the first substantial church was usually just a single room structure; then an extension was put in (the Chancel with the altar in it) and the end wall pierced for an arch but otherwise left standing. With all the rebuilding of other parts that wall did not need to be taken down.

You stand in the Nave (after Latin for a ship as the church is the Ark of Salvation); in front is the Chancel (after Latin for official part) where the altar is; this church does not have any Aisles (lean tos added to the sides, from the Latin for an open space, porch or meeting place).

Walk about.

Start outside the Church (or do this when you go away). The walls, windows and roof of the Nave once were different. When in the late 1400s/early 1500s it was decided to make the windows much bigger, the pitch of the roof had to be changed (you can see the old line on the east face of the tower) and the walls heightened - so the roof is now flatter and there are battlements. Notice the re-used stones in the walls. The Porch is from the 1300s but has been rebuilt over the years; notice the date (1566) on the Sundial above the entry. The little basin in the corner of the porch is a Piscina (a washing up bowl or sink, so it has a hole in it for a drain), it does not belong here but once was inside the church.

Stand inside the Church between North and South doors. What you see now dates from the 1890s (Nave furniture and arrangement), 1880s (Chancel furniture), 1500s (Windows), 1700s (new roof timbers). Look around you. The engraved glass by the door is modern (it is of flowers which are named in the bottom right hand corner). Once there was a mass of stained glass, only little pieces are left as edging to the windows. The Coat of Arms over the door is really George I (1714-27) though it has 'III' added to it. There are carvings and initials on the roof timbers (JT - John Twinn, JS - John Swan - Churchwardens; WB the builder?)

Before the 1890s there was a gallery behind you with the organ in it; and small box pews with doorways; and a large 'three decker' pulpit; and benches at the back. Before that (try to imagine the 1500s) there were probably a few benches here and there but otherwise the church was clear. The big difference would have been the Rood Screen in front of you, separating the Chancel from the Nave. What you see today is the original medieval screen, repaired in the 1880s. But once there was a big gallery, loft or beam above this screen and on it stood a Crucifix (Cross with the figure of Jesus) and perhaps statues of Mary and John. To your left in the north wall you can see the doorway (now blocked up) and behind this was a staircase in the wall that came out at the top of the Screen.

Behind you, there is the Tower with now four bells, though once there were five. The Font dates to the 1400s, once it had a lid that could be locked and you can see the remains of the old iron staples so perhaps the lead of the font lining is also very old but the drain in the middle put in later.

Walk towards and into the Chancel. You go through the Rood Screen (Rood comes from Anglo-Saxon for Cross) and you will see the monuments and the altar table. Before 1550 there was a stone altar at the East end, and no monuments. There were people buried beneath the floor and there are traces of an old, 1445, altar tomb that was in the Nave or maybe at the entry into the chancel, we do not know for certain. Remember the piscina bowl in the Porch, this probably was in the south wall behind the monument where there is a 19th. Century replacement. Parts of the old stone altar were used as flooring stones, as also parts of one of the monuments (1586 one to the right).

The Glass in the East window is partly medieval and the two angel figures were probably made for this window, the shields are of the de Vere and the de Warenne families who were connected with the Parish. There is also an old communion table in the church, perhaps this dates from the 1550s when the stone altars were demolished.

There are many monuments and grave stones and brasses, some of the brass pieces have vanished over the years. The Knight in Armour brass is probably of Sir Wm. Audley d. 1365, who held land in Horseheath before it came into the hands of the Alington family. There are stones which have lost their brass plates and these are of the Alingtons from c.1445-1500. Two of the Alington family were Speakers of the House of Commons, and another was killed at Bosworth (1485) fighting for King Richard III. The two big monuments and the brass which has no head on it are all connected as follows:-

The 'double decker' tomb on the South (right) has below Giles Alington (1) d. 1522, and above his son, another Giles (2) d. 1586. The brass on the floor is of Robert, son of Giles (2) d. 1552. Also commemorated is Giles (3) d. 1572 but with no brass or figure. It is Giles (4) son of Giles (3) who has the monument on the North (left) side.

Once the right hand double monument was much more ornate and had a canopy and heraldry; these were taken down to let more light into the church and some of the pieces have been recovered and mounted on the walls; others were used as floor paving, and some figures that might have come from this monument are on a window sill. Traces of the old painting and gilding remain.

The left hand monument has had some figures cut away around the bottom sides (these represent the children of Giles (4)) and as Giles' wife was more noble than him she is shown on his right side. Actually the monument was built c. 1613 when she died and before his death in 1638.

Look at all the coats of arms with their various 'quarterings'. Alington arms by themselves are black and white 'billets' and you can see this set running through all the arms, as also Argentine (the cups) as in the 1400s Alingtons married Argentine heiresses. Giles (2) was the step-son-in-law of Thomas More through their second wives and through his children Giles (2) is an ancestor of the Queen Mother and so the Queen and Prince Charles.

After the Alingtons held Horseheath, there came the Bromleys, later Lords Montfort. They buried their dead in a lean-to building on the North side of the chancel, taken down in 1829 when the coffins were put in a vault beneath the Chancel floor, and a tablet fixed on the wall.

The Bromleys became financially embarrassed and had to sell the estates and they were bought by the Batsons in the 1770s.

What to do now.

This leaflet tells only a little about the Church; there is usually a detailed guide in the church which please do not remove. You will probably find other points of interest not here mentioned. Always use your imagination in a church, and sit quietly to try to 'listen' to what the building says about its past and the pageant of people who have come through it and still do. Remember us in your prayers before you leave; if you can join us in worship for that is what this place is for, the meeting point of things earthly and heavenly.

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