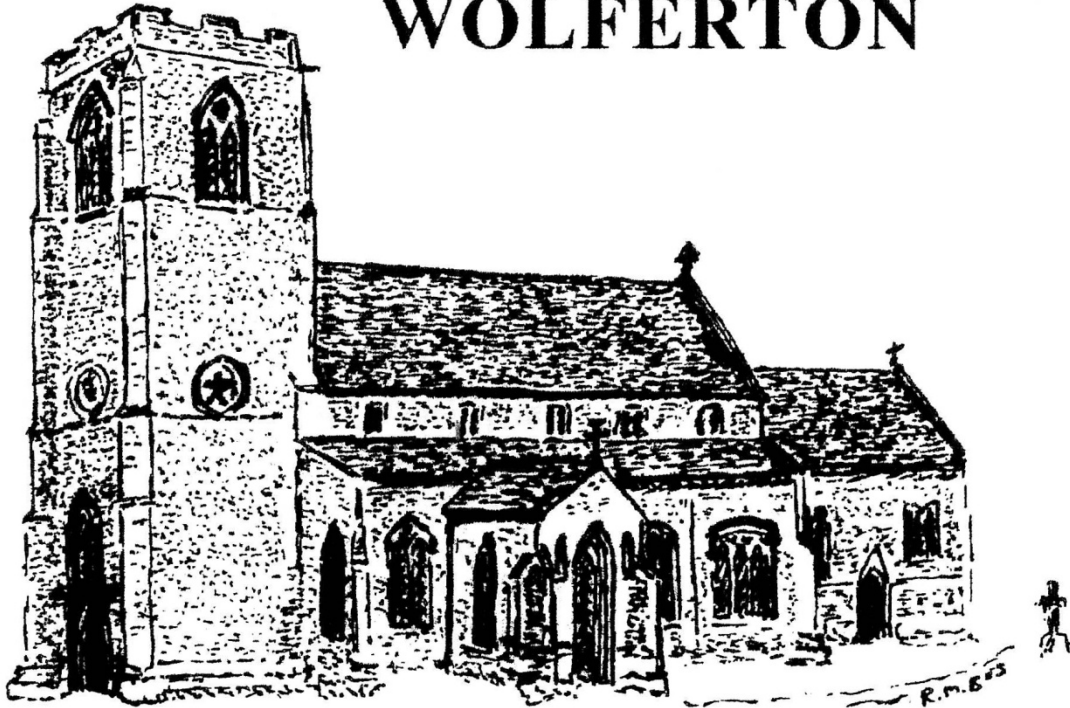


WOLFERTON



St Peter's Church, Wolferton.

This is a large church for a tiny village, and always has been so. The stone coffins displayed just inside the door are earlier than the main features of the church. St Felix brought the gospel when he landed at Babingley in 636AD and local tradition maintains that he preached on the hillside here. People came from many Norfolk villages to hear him and then to be taught the faith at Flitcham (=Felix's homestead). So the first church on this site would have been a wooden framed building which was replaced by others until early in the 14th century when the present walls were built, using carstone dug from the hillside where Felix had first preached. At that time the sea shore was near the church and limestone was brought by boat to construct the window frames.

The tower has belfry openings typical of the Decorated Period, about 1310 - 1340. The circular windows in the silence chamber are an attractive feature typical of the period. A stone turret gives access to the bells. There are only two in a belfry designed for 4 bells.

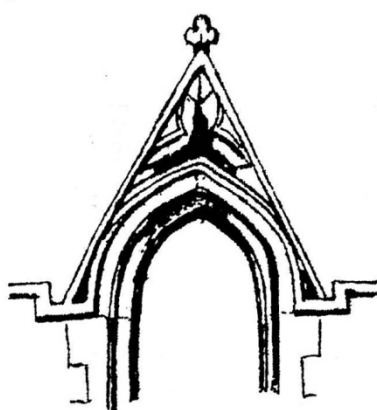
A former fireplace in the tower had a chimney emerging on the south face of the tower just above head height. This could have been used to bake the wafers, but alterations have been made to it since.

The curvilinear tracery of the windows are an excellent design of the early 14th century, especially the east window, but some have been altered

since then. Such quality in the east window suggests a wealthy and important donor, and we find that the Patron of that time was one of the de Tatershale family, who were also patrons of Sandringham. Notice the lumps of carstone in the walls although they are mostly made of small pieces of 'shell carr'. At that time it was possible to quarry substantial blocks of carstone, but now only thin pieces can be obtained.

The porch is particularly fine for such an early date. It has large Decorated Period windows and doorway. Most Norfolk villages had their porch added nearly 100 years later than this one.

Fig. 1



The priest's doorway into the chancel has a decorative ogee arch above (Fig. 1). Some of the best stonework in Norfolk was done in the period just before the Black Death of 1349.

A low side window will be seen next to the priest's doorway. Holes in the stone frame show how it once had vertical iron bars. One theory about this strange feature is that it was used by the priest to hear confessions from those disallowed from entering the church. A record exists of an

ecclesiastical visitation in the time of Henry VIII saying - "We think it best that the places where the friars have been wont to hear outward confessions of all comers, be walled up and their use forbidden forever".

A fire in 1486 damaged the interior and the arcading and the piers particularly on the north side still show a pink tinge caused by the heat of that fire. Some stones in the lower part have been replaced to remove that discolouring. We know the date, because Bishop Goldwell allowed a special collection of alms in the city of Norwich and the Diocese for the repair of Wolferton Church in that year.

Octagonal shafts similar to the piers stand beside the north and south doors (Fig.2). They were to take a bowl of holy water for the faithful to dip a finger and to cross themselves in as they enter. This practice was discontinued at the Reformation. In fact the one near the south door is a Victorian copy of the genuine one which is near the north door. There is another in the south porch.

Four consecration crosses have survived, although severely mutilated. One on the north wall has a stylised leaf emerging from it (Fig. 3) to signify that the wood is springing into life as a symbol of the life giving

cross of Christ. In early medieval times there was much symbolism connected with the wooden cross. In this case there was a major rebuild of the church around 1340 and it was followed by a visit from the Bishop of Norwich to consecrate the walls in 12 places thus signifying that the church is founded on the teaching of the 12 apostles.

The font has a huge bowl and you may detect the damage to the rim where the medieval lock was fixed. The pink colour on the stone is derived from the heat of the fire. It now has a sumptuous font cover which rises to a great height. This font cover was given by the parishioners to mark the 1887 Golden Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria's reign. The Royal Arms for Queen Victoria were embroidered by the Rector's daughter in 1844 and are now framed and displayed on the south wall.

The rood stairs behind the pulpit are well preserved and lead to a renewed rood loft with beautiful vaulted coving which is an excellent piece of restoration work. The shafts of the screen are medieval, but the extent of the Victorian restoration can be detected from the east side. The 12 medieval paintings from around 1490 are too faint to interpret.

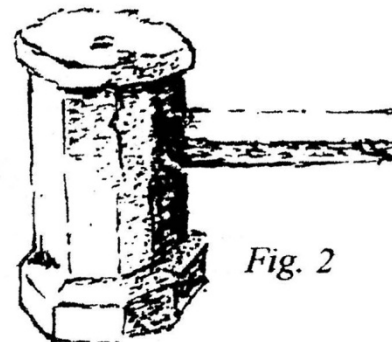


Fig. 2

The doom painting above the chancel arch was discovered in 1886 under a layer of whitewash. At that time they repainted the central figure of Christ throned in glory and giving the sign of blessing. On either side there is an angel swinging a censer on chains to cleanse the righteous and another with a candle to show light to those in darkness. Below are two flying angels with trumpets, sounding the last trump, and two others holding banners which bear the emblems of the Passion. This painting should be viewed in context with the medieval crucifix below. It illustrated Hebrews 2.9. - "We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour".

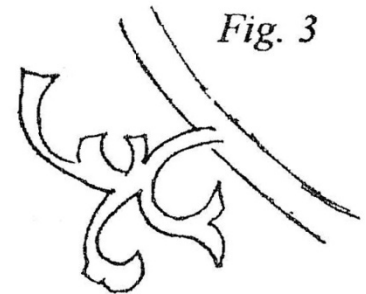
The roof and clerestory were rebuilt after the fire. The tie beams, the carvings in the spandrels and the 12 apostles standing in niches are all of the 1486 restoration. The crowned angels holding shields above the clerestory windows were added 400 years later, when Sir Arthur Blomfield directed a major restoration in 1886 at the expense of the Prince of Wales (later to become Edward VII).

The Willis organ was bought by the Prince of Wales. Henry Willis made an organ for the 1851 Exhibition, and became a well known organ builder.

His biggest organ was built for St Paul's Cathedral. He was followed by three generations of his descendants, also called Henry Willis.

The triple sedilia in the chancel is particularly fine and with it is a large piscina with a 4 petal flower drain. Round shafts separate the 3 clergy seats which are stepped in order of precedence.

The parclose screens are both very fine. The one in the south aisle is the earlier one being late 14th century, and has most wonderful wood carving. Small faces look down from above the beautiful curving shapes. The north chapel screen is slightly plainer and is late 15th century. Both chapels have a few Bawsey tiles in the floor.



Floor slabs to note - Amy Durrant, who died in 1743 and has a vast slab in the north aisle with inscription worth reading. Her husband was a furrier and died a year later and had his name added to the slab. In the south aisle there is a slab for Joseph Balldin who died in 1751. His crest is a cockatrice; a creature with a cock's head and dragon's tail.

The east window depicts Christ's ascension into heaven with two angels holding a jewelled crown. The tracery lights illustrate Revelation 5.12. - "Worthy is the Lamb...." With the Agnus Dei at the top. In the centre we see two angels holding the crown above the ascended Lord. The south aisle window has glazing of 1886 which shows St Peter worshipping the Lord Jesus and the Baptism of Cornelius.

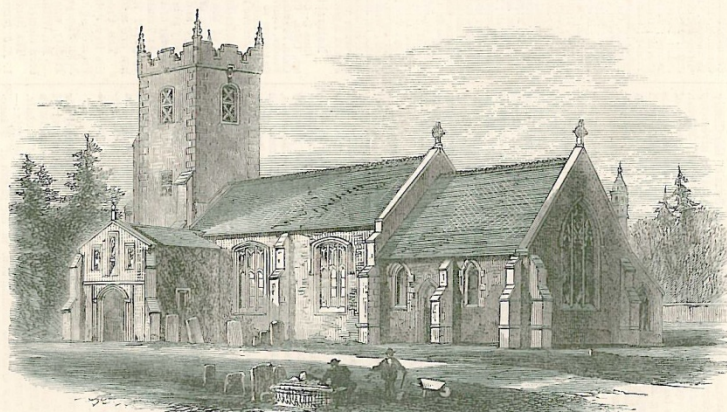
The stone coffins just inside the entrance are typical of the Early English period and consequently predate the main features of this church and survive from the earlier building on this site. Set in the floor near them is a medieval altar slab which is marked with 5 crosses to signify the 5 wounds on Christ's body. The ancient pammments around the font are also noteworthy.

The alms box is unique. The lower part was renewed long ago and bolted to the really ancient box which has an iron lid with interesting studs and strapping.

*This leaflet was compiled for Church Tours in 1998 by
Richard Butler-Stoney.*



VIEW NEAR SANDRINGHAM, LOOKING NORTH-WEST TO DERSINGHAM AND THE RAILWAY AT WOLFERTON.

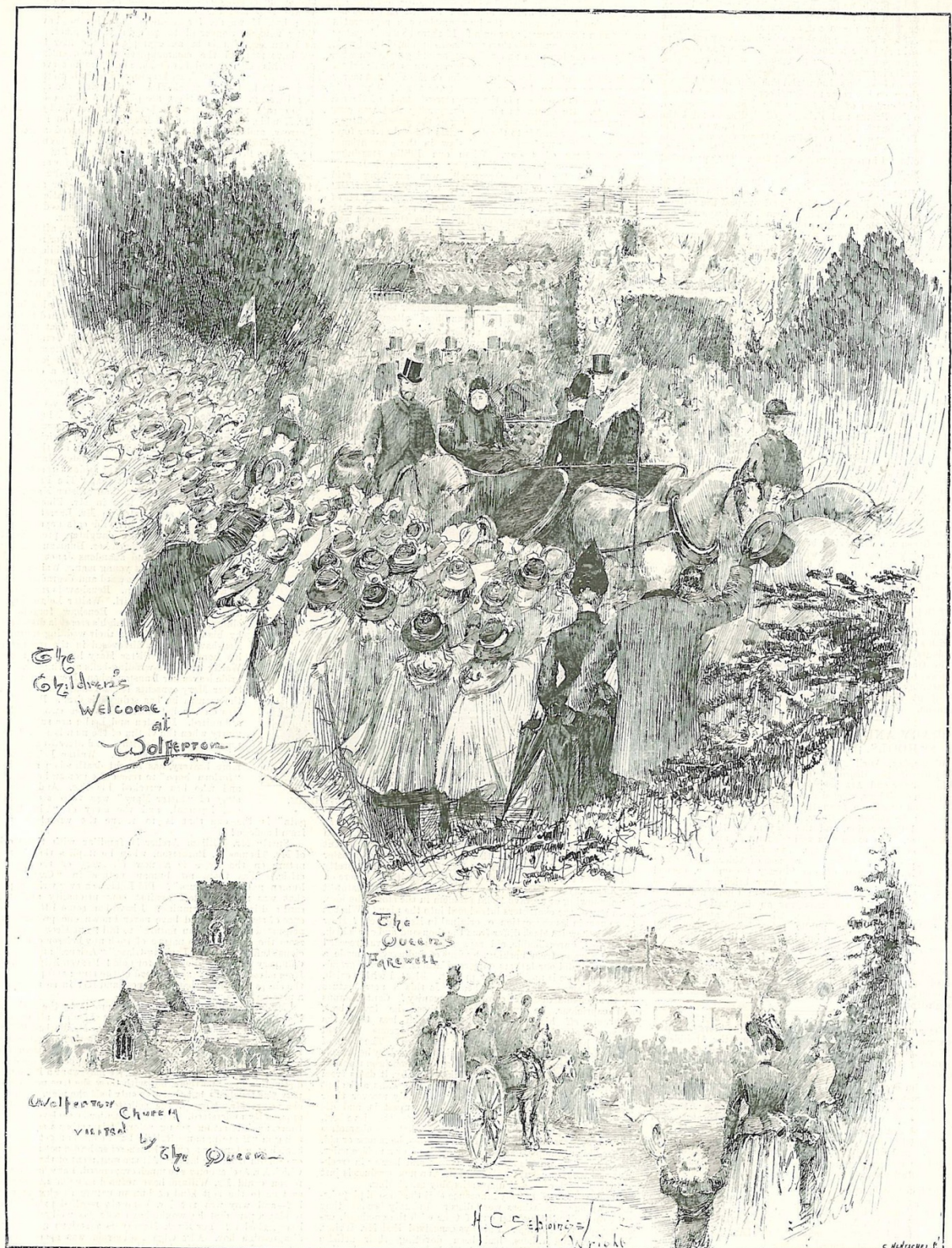


SANDRINGHAM CHURCH.



WEST NEWTON, FROM THE DEER PARK, SANDRINGHAM.

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THE QUEEN'S VISIT TO SANDRINGHAM.