

St. Mary's, Reepham

Many people consider Reepham unique in having two Churches, St. Mary's, Reepham, and St. Michael's, Whitwell, which stand end to end in the churchyard. How many realise that at one time there were three? All Saint's, Hackford was destroyed with the surrounding houses in a disastrous fire in 1543, the tower was demolished in 1790 and today only a fragment remains. A visitor to the churchyard entering from the Market Place will find the ruin on their right-hand side between the pathway and the back wall of the Town Hall.

There was probably a Church on the site in the 11th century. Certainly, a major rebuilding took place in the 13th century. The tower is the oldest part of the present building, it is believed that it also formed a porch joined to the south wall of the nave by an annexe. A weather-course can be distinguished in the stonework of the tower north wall representing the line of a low-pitched roof from the porch. The door of the present vestry has much decorative work on the nave side and inspection reveals that the hinges have been inverted and refitted, indicating that previously the door faced the other way as it would if it formed the entrance door. The nave piers are octagonal; the arches on the north side are decorated in style – 14th century while the ones on the south side are Early English – 13th century.

Peculiarly, the southern piers have a mixture of octagonal and circular capitals and bases. This suggests that the mix-match must have occurred during the drastic 14th century remodelling of the Church.

The present south porch is 15th century.

In 1790, partly financed by the sale of the Great Bell from the tower, another great alteration was made. The clerestory walls and windows above the aisle roofs on either side of the nave were removed, and a lower-pitched roof, extending right across the aisle walls, replaced the earlier roof. At the same time or afterwards the Church windows were replaced with wooden frames.

In 1867 the east window of the chancel replaced an earlier wooden one; and in the 1880s the other chancel windows were re-restored.

In Edwardian times stone mullions replaced the 18th century nave windows. Unusually, the chancel is on a lower level than the nave. It was heavily restored towards the end of the 19th century, when a new chancel arch was introduced, the windows renewed, and the floor tiled.

On the north wall is a fine canopied tomb of William de Kerdiston II, who fought at Crecy in 1346 and died in 1361. He lies in full armour on a bed of cobbles, this is unusual and there are a number of theories as to the use for such a resting place.

One theory is that it came from Roman times as Mars the God of War was often portrayed on such a setting.

William de Kerdiston III, son of William II, and his wife Cecilia Brewes of Salle, are commemorated by a fine large brass in front of the altar rail. The armour worn by the son differs little from his father's, which seems to confirm that it is the warrior of Crecy who is represented by the sculpted figure of the tomb.

The final item worthy of note is the Norman font of Purbeck marble, supported by five slim 15th century columns.

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