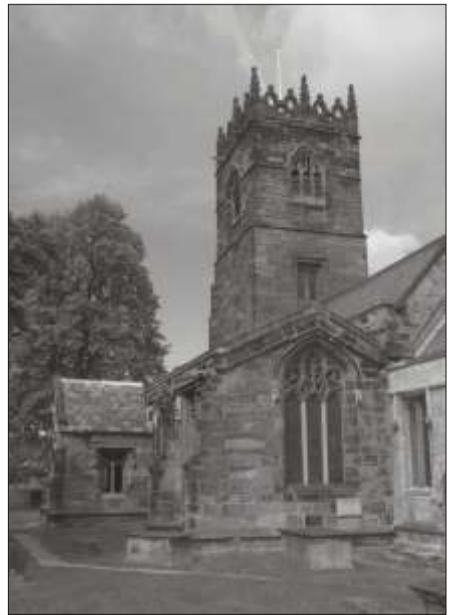


A Guide to All Saints Church

Aston cum Aughton



Welcome to our church. About 700 AD, the people of Aston embraced Christianity and built a church; probably of wood and wattle. It is recorded in the Domesday Book “*a church is there, and a priest*”. There are traces of that church beneath this building.

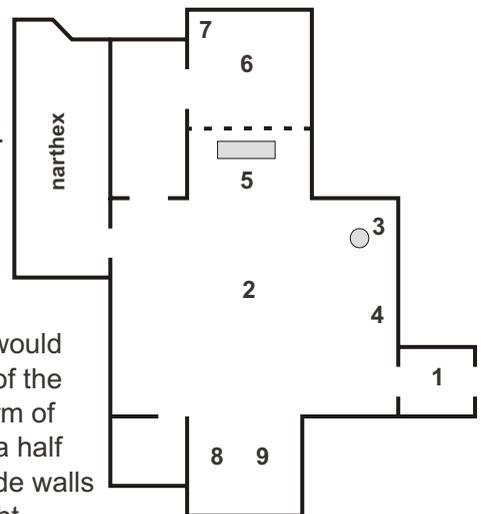
The Norman Lord erected a Hall and rebuilt the church in stone. Since then the building has been extended a number of times but some of the original early 12th century stonework remains. What you see now is the result of changes which have taken place over the last 900 years. The history of the church building cannot be separated from the history of the people who have worshipped here because God’s people are the Church.

The Porch (1)

The porch was constructed in the 14th century. The badly eroded figures on either side of the entrance are effigies of King Edward III and Queen Phillipa. This dates the porch to no later than 1369 - the year the Queen died. A 1900 newspaper reported that the carvings were in near perfect condition but the acid rain later in the 20th century has almost obliterated them. It is probably that the stone benches were used when teaching children, before the village had a school.

The Nave (2)

Face the altar and imagine what the church would have looked like when it was built. The end of the church facing you would have been in the form of an apse (a semi-circular wall with a roof like a half dome) with the altar under the dome. The side walls were just beyond the piers on the left and right.



Behind you there would have been the west wall. Narrow slits in the walls would have given a little light which would have reflected from the lime washed walls. The decorative stonework would be coloured in red, blue and yellow paint. Rushes would have covered the earth floor and a patch of disturbed earth would indicate a recent burial.

The piers are different styles and the south-east arch is early Gothic while the others are typical Norman rounded style. The pews, which came second hand from Holy Trinity church in Rugby, replace the original 1771 oak ones which were fixed to wooden flooring. Move towards the north side (left) and see the Great War memorial plaque on the wooden screen wall of the clergy vestry. The writing on the north wall dates from 1604. It was revealed when the plaster was being removed from the wall in the late 20th century. The new oak door in the north wall leads to the 1989 built Narthex which provides toilet, kitchen and a meeting room. The doorway set in concrete gives access to the Victorian era choir vestry. This corner was the Melton family's Requiem Chapel. Memorial brass plaques from here are now in the chancel.

The Font (3)

Move over to the font which dates from about 1400. It was moved from under the tower to its present location in 1957. The carved figures on the base are thought to represent King Herod, intent on killing the baby Jesus and a guardian angel warning Joseph to flee with the Holy Infant to Egypt. The window in the east wall above the Village War Memorial was salvaged from the old Aston Hall which was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day 1771. It depicts the Arms of the Darcy family (and families related by marriage) who were Lords of the Manor.

This corner used to be the Lady Chapel and in medieval times an altar stood against the wall. There is a piscina (stone basin used for washing the Communion vessels) built into the south wall. The Lady Chapel was a favoured burial place and a number of Rectors are buried here.

South Wall (4)

On the south wall are two plaster reliefs. One is of Rector William Mason. There is a monument to him in the chancel and a much grander one in Westminster Abbey's Poets Corner. The other is of his friend Thomas Grey (the poet who penned 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard'). A verse generally omitted from that poem was found on a board in the summer house of Mason's Rectory (the large building opposite the west end of the church).

The Sanctuary (5)

Enter the sanctuary and see on the north side a 19th century copy of a 4th century Florentine relief of the Madonna and Child. The other two parts of this work are in a St Petersburg museum. The old chairs are typical of their period and the modern

oak chair was commissioned in 1988. Move into the choir area of the chancel. The door in the north wall (originally used by the Clergy) now gives access to the choir vestry and the one in the south wall was the Lord of the Manor's entrance. A path outside leads to the 16th century gateway of Aston Hall.

The Chancel (6)

The chancel was built for William de Melton, Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor of England. He bought the Manor of Aston and built a Hall as residence when visiting this part of his Archdiocese in 1332. The original apse was removed, the Gothic style arch constructed and the church extended. This extension differs from the rest of the church in that the outside is faced with limestone. The altar was placed under the east window which is why there is a squint (an angled opening) to the right of the chancel arch. This gave a view of the altar from the south aisle. The altar, which may date from Saxon times, was about two foot wider than it is now. During the Edward VI purges it was taken out of church and hidden to prevent its destruction.

Memorials (7)

In the choir, there are a number of memorials. On the left side of the chancel arch is a brass memorial to Sir John Melton (the last Melton Lord of the Manor) and his coats of arms. He died during the reign of King Henry VIII. Dorothy Melton inherited the estate and married a George Darcy. The Darcy's resided in Aston for many years and the last of them, Good Sir John, inherited the Manor in 1602. He married four times (see the effigies of him and his first three wives). He was left without a heir and his fourth wife outlived him. The widow married Sir Francis Fane and continued to live in Aston. The monument to their '*many sonnes and daughters*' is on the south wall.

The Tower (8)

At the west side of the nave is a square bay. This is the base of the tower which was erected sometime between 1350 and 1450. It is part of the Melton additions to the church. The tower is about eighty feet in height and overlooks all other buildings in the Parish. It had many uses over the centuries. In its early days it provided a look out and refuge in times of trouble. Flattened musket balls found outside its walls are evidence of that. It was also used as a temporary gaol to hold people awaiting trial.

In about 1790, a gallery was erected in this space. It lasted about 90 years and during that time it was used by musicians, provided space for additional seating and was home to a barrel organ. On the wall are large boards recording charitable bequests. By today's standards the amounts seem trivial but when they were made, a worker was earning about £10 a year. Much of the original investments were lost but Aston Charities still aids needy parishioners and local groups.

The ground floor is now used as an extension of the main church. Before that an ornate wooden screen divided it from the nave. The screen was a memorial to the local men who had lost their lives in the Great War. On the north wall are some brass plaques. They are memorials to the Verelst family who were the last of the Lords of the Manor. Harry Verelst succeeded Clive of India as Governor of Bengal and when he retired he first rented and then bought the Manor in 1770. In 1928 the Manorial Estate was divided up and sold off - the Aston Hall being converted to a women's mental hospital. It is now the Aston Hall Hotel.

The Bells (9)

On the south side are the three bell ropes - one for each bell striker. In the ceiling are six rope holes. In around 1552 there were six bells and the holes indicate that the bells were swung. Unfortunately the foundations are not very solid and swinging the bells also rocked the tower. There are now just three bells, two of which date from 1784. One of them is connected to the Parish clock and strikes the hours. The clock is weight powered and requires winding two or three times each week. In the mid 20th century, mining subsidence caused the tower to tilt away from the nave and that stopped the pendulum from swinging. Later the tower tilted back to the perpendicular and the clock became operational again.

The Clergy and Church Council hope you have enjoyed your visit to Aston Parish Church. Although ancient, All Saints is not just a monument to a past age - people have been worshipping on this site for more than a millennium and continue to do so. We extend an invitation to attend our services which are held as follows:

Sunday	8am	Holy Communion
	10am	Parish Communion* <i>(family service on 1st Sunday in month)</i>
	6.30pm	Evening Service <i>(Parish Communion of 1st Sunday in month)</i>
Wednesday	9.30am	Holy Communion*

* Refreshments are served in the Narthex after these services.

This guide has been produced by All Saints Church, Aston cum Aughton with support from Rotherham Churches Tourism Initiative (RCTI).

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