

welcome to st helena's church austerfield

Welcome to St Helena's, a wonderful example of a small Norman church. In 702AD Austerfield was the location of a Synod, a church meeting to settle a dispute between Alfred, the King of Northumbria and Wilfrid, Bishop of Ripon. It was then called Esterfield or Oustfield.



The Synod of Austerfield also attempted to decide the way that Easter Day should be calculated, either in the Continental or Celtic manner. The discussion was settled in favour of Wilfrid (later St Wilfrid) and the influence of Rome. This method of dating Easter remains the same today.

There was probably an earlier wooden building on this site but the present church was built by John de Builli in 1080, soon after the Norman Conquest. It was built as a Chapel of Ease to Blyth Priory, five miles south of the village. Until this time, people had to travel to Blyth for church services. Stone from the Roche Abbey quarries was used, brought by boat along the river and then by horse and cart. The church remained part of the Parish of Blyth until the 19th century, when a separate Parish of Bawtry-with-Austerfield was created. The church of Misson has recently been added and the three churches of this combined benefice share a Vicar.

Austerfield is well known for its connection with the Pilgrim Fathers, known as the founding fathers of America. William Bradford was born in the village and baptised in the church on 19th March 1589. He sailed on the Mayflower in 1620 and went on to become the Governor of Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts and was the second signer and primary architect of the Mayflower Compact in Provincetown Harbour. He was also a historian and his diary is the most complete authority for the story of the Pilgrims. The Bradford home was

The church was enlarged in the 13th century but by the 19th century the building needed substantial restoration work. This was completed in 1898 thanks to donations from the Society of Mayflower Descendants in the USA. Previously, the north aisle had fallen down and the nave arches had been bricked up. The restoration work revealed the wonderfully preserved Norman pillars you can see in the nave today. The north wall was rebuilt using the 14th century stone doorway and window tracery.

The Tympanum (1)

As you enter the church through the south porch, notice the impressive Norman doorway with zigzag beakhead moulding. It houses a wonderful tympanum which depicts a serpent-like dragon. An article by Revd Edward Dunicliffe in 1954 suggests it is 8th century, much earlier than the rest of the church. He relates it to the time of the Synod of Austerfield and its symbolic meaning to the calculation of the incidence of Easter Day.

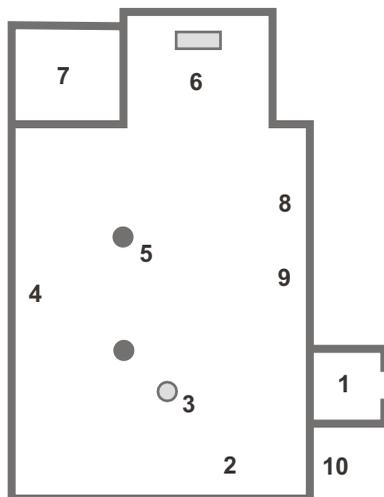
Lancet Windows (2)

The two small lancet windows at the west end of church are 13th century. The stained glass is later and depicts St Helena and St Paulinus. St Helena was the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine. She is said to have discovered the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified when she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. St Paulinus was an Italian missionary who converted Northumbria to Christianity, became the first Bishop of York, and was later made Archbishop of Rochester.

The Font (3)

The stone font is believed to be the original. It was recovered from a nearby farmyard where it had been used as a water trough.

William Bradford was baptised in this font - a stained glass window in the north aisle was installed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of this event. The first panel of the window shows Bradford outside the church, the second depicts the Mayflower and the third shows him as Governor of the new Plymouth Colony.



Royal Coat of Arms (4)

After Henry VIII became Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534, Royal Coats of Arms of the king or queen of the day were hung in churches. They were there to remind congregations of the close connection between the monarch and the church. These are the Arms of George II who ascended to the throne in 1727.

Sheila-na-gig (5)

The large carving at the top of the most easterly pillar in the north side of the nave is a Sheila-na-gig. This is a quasi-erotic carving of a female figure sometimes found in Norman churches. In fact, this example is one of only 16 recorded in England. The significance of these carvings is debated, they may be fertility symbols or warnings against lust.

The Chancel (6)

As you walk through the original Norman chancel arch notice the two faces looking out from the tops of the pillars at either side. The altar rail is Jacobean and the east window behind was built into the original 13th century stonework and was reset into the east wall during the 19th century restoration. Some of the stained glass in church, including the east window, is by Charles Earner Kempe. The window on the south side of the chancel is 14th century.

The Vestry (7)

There is a plaque in the vestry recording the first visit of 152 members of the Society of the Mayflower Descendants in October 1955. William Bradford wrote a manuscript called 'History of Plymouth Colony 1607-1642'. It was found in Fulham Palace Library in 1855 and given to the American nation in 1898 by the then Archbishop of Canterbury. A copy of the scroll recording the thanks of the Society of the Mayflower Descendants for this gesture can also found in the vestry.

South Wall Stained Glass Window (8)

The stained glass window on the south wall next to the chancel has 14th century stonework and depicts the three dioceses to which Austerfield has been affiliated with over the years. They are represented by their patron saints. The church was first in York Diocese (St Peter), then Lincoln (St Hugh) and now Southwell (St Mary).

War Memorial (9)

On the south wall of the nave is a bronze plaque commemorating those from the parish who were killed in the First World War. In 1996, a bronze memorial was erected to those who lost their lives in the Second World War.

Mass Dial (10)

As you leave church, turn right out of the porch and notice the mass dial (or scratch dial) on the corner buttress. You should see a small hole with lines scratched into the stone above it. Mass dials were an early form of sun dial. They were used by priests to tell the congregation and passing travellers the time of the next service. He would place a small stick in the hole and when the sun shone the shadow of the stick onto one of the lines, the next service would start.

**We hope that you have enjoyed your visit.
Please sign the Visitor's Book before you leave.**

Service Times

1 st Sunday	Holy Communion	11.15am
2 nd , 4 th & 5 th Sunday	Holy Communion	8.30am
3 rd Sunday	Family Service	11.15am

For further information please contact:

Revd Jonathan Strickland
The Vicarage, Martin Lane, Bawtry
Doncaster, DN10 6NJ

Telephone: 01302 710298 Email: jandjstrickland@btinternet.com



Text: Austerfield St Helena
Design: HERITAGE INSPIRED (www.heritageinspired.org.uk)

