

A Guide to St John the Baptist Church Hooton Roberts



Welcome to the ancient, hillside church of St John the Baptist.

The first church was built by the Normans shortly after 1100 AD; in spite of the need to extend, repair and replace over the centuries, parts of the original Norman church can still be seen today.

'Hooton' derives from the Old English for 'farmstead on a spur of land'. It is quite a common name, with four examples in S. Yorkshire the others being Hooton Levitt and Slade Hooton in Rotherham, and Hooton Pagnell in Doncaster. To give an easily identifiable place name, the name of the landowner was added. In this case 'Roberts' is thought to refer to the two Robert de Hootons (father and son) who were Lords of the Manor in the twelfth century.

But it is with the owners of Wentworth Woodhouse that the village has been most closely linked to over the centuries. A descendant of the Robert's family, Isabella, married William Wentworth in the early 14th century, and much of the village and its surrounding land was owned by the Wentworth Estates as late as the 1960's.

Next to the church, the Manor House (now the Earl of Strafford pub) was for many years the dower house, where the widow of the owner of Wentworth Woodhouse would retire to live when her eldest son inherited the title.

The last Wentworth to occupy the Manor House was Lady Elizabeth Strafford, widow of Thomas, 1st Earl of Strafford, who was a key advisor of Charles I in the troubled times before the English Civil War.

In 1641, Thomas, who by this time was known as “Black Tom Tyrant”, was tried by Parliament and sentenced to death. He was convinced the King would save him, but the king failed to act and Thomas was beheaded in front of a huge crowd in May, 1641. He was thought to have been buried in Wentworth Church.

His widow outlived him for many years, residing in the Manor house until her death in 1688 at the age of 83. It is known that she was buried in Hooton Roberts church, as she stipulated this in her will, but her grave is unmarked.

In 1895, during work to the chancel floor, workmen found the bones of a man and two women. It was noticed that the male skeleton had a severed vertebrae to the neck, leading to the thought that Thomas had in fact been secretly buried here, and later both his wife Elizabeth and daughter Margaret were buried here with him.

The Porch

Notice the three grooves in the stone bench to the right **(1)**. It is thought these were caused in early times by archers sharpening their arrow heads and crossbow bolts on the stone.

The Tower

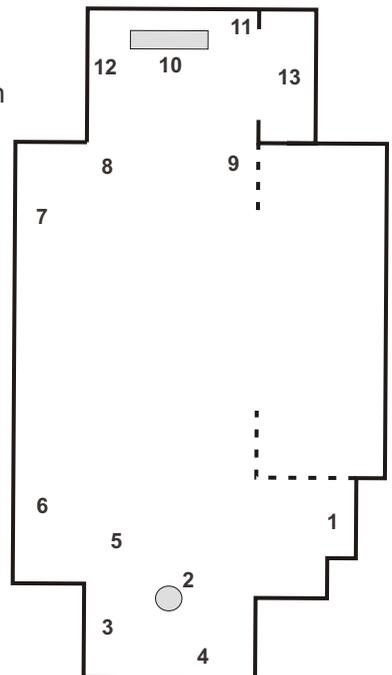
The tower was added to the church in the 15th century. In the base of the tower stands the octagonal font **(2)**, and on the north wall is fixed a wonderful monument to Charles Newby, who died in 1701 **(3)** see the cherubs, scrolls and the skull!

Under the west window is a rectangular, stone coffin lid, dating from about 1200 **(4)**. It has on it a large cross, with a chalice to one side and a book to the other, indicating that it is from the grave of a priest.

The Nave

On the floor at the west end (tower end) of the nave is a smaller stone coffin lid, with a cross carved on it **(5)**. From its size, this would appear to be from the grave of an infant.

Also at the west end, in the north wall, are the blocked remains of the north door, or 'devil's door', now used as a cupboard **(6)**. In medieval times, it was thought that when a person was baptised and became a Christian, the devil left their body (and the church) via the north door!



At the east end of the nave, on the north wall and close to the pulpit, is an ancient 'lancet' window. On the outside, the window opening is narrow, and has a pointed top. But see how the wall is deeply splayed from outside to in, allowing as much light as possible into the church. Notice also how the inside opening of the splay is round headed, in the Norman fashion.

The stained glass to the window is a rare example of 13th century glass (7), and depicts an Archbishop, with the head of a priest above and a skull and crossbones below. At either side of the round headed chancel arch stand the stone pulpit (8) from where the sermon is preached and the wooden lectern (9) where the Bible is kept.

The Chancel

Between the nave and chancel is a round-headed chancel arch. Go through the archway and up the three steps into the chancel. The chancel floor is raised higher than that of the nave, to signify that this area is more important. Here are the choir stalls, and up a further two steps is the most important place of all, the sanctuary, in which the altar and reredos screen are situated (10).

Look for the bird and two angels carved in the reredos screen. Above the altar is the east window, with stained glass from Victorian times showing the crucifixion. At the bottom, angels can be seen holding symbols of Christ's passion and crucifixion.

The piscina (11) is set in the wall to the right of the altar. Here in medieval times the priest would wash the communion chalice and plate in holy water. In the north (left) wall is another splayed, lancet window (12). Look through to see some of the lovely countryside which surrounds the church. Also on this wall are memorials to two former rectors.

South Chapel & Aisle

This is approached from the chancel via an ancient round arch. Some think that this is the original chancel arch, from Norman times, rebuilt in this position. The south chapel now houses the organ (13) originally there would have been an altar here. The entrance to the south aisle is from the nave, through an large, pointed archway with traces of nailhead decoration to each side. The south aisle contains three memorials to members of the Kent families.

The Vaughan Williams Link

The Revd Gatty, who was rector from 1888 to 1914 included within his circle of friends, the composer Vaughan Williams. He was a frequent visitor to the rectory, from where he took inspiration from the tranquility and magnificent views over the countryside. It is believed that during one stay he wrote 'Linden Lea', one of his more popular songs.

Exterior

Walk around the churchyard, and read some of the ancient tombstones. Look at the walls of the church, particularly at the back. There you will see the older stonework, virtually rubble, and the newer stonework which is made of carefully dressed ashlar blocks. You can see where the walls were raised in height, and you can also see the blocked-up devils door which once led into the nave. The pointed arched doorway at the front of the tower leads to the staircase inside the tower.

Look to the left of the church, and below you will see the old Manor House, which is now the Earl of Strafford public house.

Hooton Roberts Church Plate

Principal items of silverware of historic note are:

- 1) A late 18th century Sheffield Plate lidded flagon, the gift of Martha, wife of William Harrison, Rector of Hooton Roberts, 1767.
- 2) A Mexican or Peruvian silver chalice inscribed 'Hooton Roberts Church - given in memory of Reginald Alfred Getty (Rector 1888-1914) and Florence Emily, his wife, by their children, August 1932'. Reputed date circa 1540.
- 3) The Commonwealth Chalice and Paten. The Charles II chalice inscribed 'Ex Dono Roberti Tonstall Deo et Ecclesiae Sacrum' (The gift of Robert Tonstall: sacred to God and the Church). Dated 1671.
- 4) Charles I plate, given by the Countess of Strafford. Made in London 1625.

These items are now on display in Clifton Park Museum in Rotherham.

Thank You for Visiting

A prominent village church like this reminds us of the God who has come among us in Jesus Christ and, although Hooton Roberts is a very small village, this church continues to be a place of prayer and worship. You are invited to offer a quiet prayer of your own before you leave; and feel free to come along to any of our services.

Regular Services

Sundays

6.15pm

This guide has been produced by Hooton Roberts St John the Baptist Church with support from Rotherham Churches Tourism Initiative (RCTI).

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