

# St. Nicolas Church

How many of us realise what a unique and ancient little Church we have in Hail Weston and how much effort has been expended by many local people to maintain it over the years?

The Church is nearly eight hundred years old with records showing that services were taking place in 1209.

St. Nicolas Church is a listed building; GRADE 2\*. It was first listed on 14th May 1959.

A few features of the building indicate that it dates back at least to the 13th Century; the shape and size i.e. a Nave and Chancel under one roof, has altered little since its foundation apart from the addition of the wooden Tower. Late in the 15th Century the upper part of the East Wall was rebuilt. In the next Century the South Wall of the Nave was partly rebuilt and the timber West Tower was added.

On the wall opposite the main door is a list dating back to 1286 AD of Rectors and Vicars which were shared with Southoe and in more recent years with Lt. Paxton and Diddington until December 1983. Hail Weston then joined with Gt. Staughton, later the parish was looked after by Buckden and in 2002 became part of a group of parishes with Southoe and Gt. Staughton.

For those interested, the following are some of the main features of historical and architectural interest.

## WINDOWS

In the North Wall is an original plain Early English (13th Century) small lancet window.

In the South Wall is a partly restored late 15th Century Window of three trefoiled lights with vertical tracery. In the same wall are two windows, the eastern one consisting of three centred lights in a square head is of the early 16th Century. There are also carved heads on the exterior stonework of a south wall window. The western window is mainly modern.

The large East Window is late 15th Century (perpendicular). It has three cinquefoiled lights. The glass is, of course, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Details of this are in the section on restoration work.

## ROOF OF NAVE AND CHANCEL

Some of the timbers in the roof are of late 15th Century or early 16th Century, extensively restored. The roof has four bays with beams, queen posts, collars, struts and braces, some of the beams being enriched with trefoils enclosing roses on the west face. Also note the carved beam.

## THE SCREEN

The Chancel is separated from the Nave by the lower part of an ancient screen. It is unclear as to when the top was sawn off, as it could have happened during the Reformation or during the Civil Wars period.

## THE ALTAR

This is an Elizabethan oak table with good legs and well carved top rail.

The Piscina on the south wall to the right hand side of the Altar is particularly unusual in that it has a double rather than a single arch. The basins are no longer there.

## BENCH ENDS

There are a few ancient bench ends in the Nave with plain 13th Century poppy heads; some fragments of the benches remain.

## THE FONT

This is a plain late 13th Century octagon, lead lined with moulded under edge; shaped stops and standing on a square base.



## BUTTRESSES

The massive outside buttresses indicate the early date of the building. Those at the two eastern angles have the remains of carvings (possibly lions) upon the top slopes.

## THE BELLS

There are three bells all of which are inscribed.

The first says "Christopher Graie made me 1555".

The second says "Fear God and obey the Queen 1589". (There is an identical bell Glatton Church.)

The third says "John Taylor and Co. Founders, Loughborough 1884".

It seems that the third bell was a replacement bell as records show that in 1709 there were three bells.

## THE CHURCH PLATE

A pewter chalice of 17th Century date was sold in 1907 by the Church to the Cambridge Museum.

There is a silver cup, patten and silver mounted glass flagon both inscribed "Hail Weston Church on its restoration 1884". (Hallmarked 1885.)

## THE TOWER

The Tower, a later addition to the medieval church represents a type familiar in Essex and Kent but unique in Cambridgeshire.

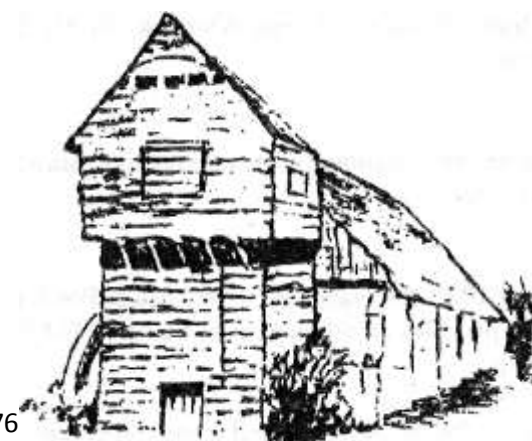
Pictures of the earlier tower (see right) do not reveal the same upper slopes that are there today.

Pevsner considers it to be 15<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier.

It has been taken down and rebuilt, re-erecting the massive old timbers upon a new stone base.

Formerly the tower was covered with rough weather boarding which has been replaced with cedar shingles.

The upper slopes of the tower were reclad in the Summer of 1976 at a cost of £1,500. The lower part was replaced in 1991.



## RESTORATION AND IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CHURCH

In 1884 the Church was completely restored at a cost of £1,000. At this time the trusses and new timbers to the roof were incorporated over the Nave and the Porch was relocated.

The stained glass East Window was erected by Henry Shadforth in memory of his wife who died in 1912. The wording on the window is as follows:

"To the Glory of God and in memory of Edward Reynolds of Paxton Hall died 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1888 and of Alice his widow (afterwards wife of Henry Shadforth) who died 1<sup>st</sup> October 1912 largely instrumental in the Restoration of this church AD 1884. The window was dedicated in 1915. The cartoons were drawn by George Daniels B. A. and the window was made by Clayton and Bell of London.

The oil fired heating system still currently in use was installed in September 1955 at a cost of £736.00, the boiler housing was repaired at the same time.

In 1974 the oak panelling at the back of the Altar was installed by Dora Mildren and her brother in memory of their parents Charles and Irene Banks.

The current organ was built in 1975 by Roger Henthorne, Priest, and the case was made by Mr. Victor Irons, a local resident

In 1976 the old oak gate was replaced by a new wrought iron one. The gate was given by Mrs. Adlam in memory of her husband who was Church Warden for many years. In each corner of the gate is a set of initials FC: GW: EF: and BA thus recording four individuals who did much to help the Church. Frank Catling (Church Warden), George Whitlock (Vicar), Eric Foxley (Church Warden) and Bernard Adlam (Churchwarden).

In 1983 the external drainage system to receive rainwater was replaced to discharge into a new soakaway at a cost of £1,500.

In November 1985 the main church and South Porch roofs were completely stripped and retiled with second hand peg tiles on felt battens at a cost of £14,000.00 This money was raised by village functions and donations.

In addition the following grants and loans were received:

£2,000 from the Historical Churches Preservation Society (Grant)

£2,000 Loan from Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust which was paid back over 4 years. £1,000 Loan from the Incorporated Church Building Society paid back over 4 years. £250.00 per annum grant from the Parish Council for four years.

In December 1988 the whole of the rainwater gutters and downpipes were renewed in cast iron at a cost of £2,400.00. However there were still many parts of the church fabric which needed urgent attention at that time- walls, stonework to the East Window, the tower buttresses and stone base and the blue brick drain to name a few.

In the Autumn of 1990 an unexpected legacy from the estate of the late Miss Mary Adeline Victoria Halford, of Oxford, made it possible to do extensive restoration work on the church. All the outstanding work (see page four) was put in hand and completed in the Summer and Autumn of 1991.

The east wall pointing and stone replacement; the stonework of the East Window; the stonework beneath the tower; the reshingling of the lower part of the tower, and work on some of the supporting framework; the replacement of the blue brick gutter by a French Drain: all this work was done!

A considerable amount of work was done on the windows. All the leadwork for those on the south side was totally replaced, as was that in the north chancel wall, together with its stonework. The remaining windows were reglazed as required.

Further, the interior of the church was repaired and redecorated, carpeted throughout (apart from the sanctuary), and thoroughly cleaned.

Miss Halford was a regular visitor to Hail Weston as a child, coming to stay here with her grandmother Mrs Lee, in the earlier part of the last century.

A Thanksgiving Service was held on Sunday 17th November 1991 and was attended by a large number of village people, together with the Rural Dean and other visiting clergy. Flowers were laid on the grave of Miss Halford's grandmother, Mrs. Eliza Lee, which is situated to the northwest of the church. Tea was served in the Village Hall after the service.

A plaque commemorating Miss Halford's bequest and the restoration work has been placed by the south door of the church.

The complete refurbishment of the churchyard wall to the High Street and a new accessible path have also been completed.

#### THE CHURCH AND ITS ACTIVITIES

In the early part of last century the church was involved in many activities. Notes from the Preachers Book dated 1920-23 give us a little information about the time. The Census of 1921 gave Hail Weston with a population of 255 (a drop since 1881 when there were 348 villagers).

#### VILLAGE SCHOOL

This was a Church School. In 1921 there were 45 children in the school; 26 Boys and 19 Girls.

The Sunday School had 27 children; 19 Boys and 8 Girls.

The School (now the village hall) remained an important part of village life until it closed in 1966.

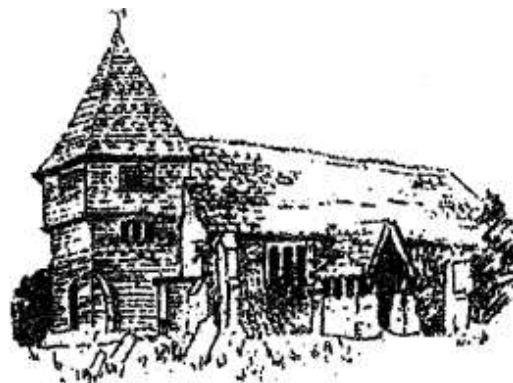
#### CHURCH CHOIR

Until 1985 there was a large choir. The notes in 1921 give us information that choir salaries were £14.19.3d whereas the Church Insurance only cost fl.19.2Vkl For many years there were 8 ladies and 10-12 men. Mrs. Peacock was the last lady member. The last male member of the choir was Mr. Frank Catling who retired in 1985. He had been Manager of the Church School in Hail Weston until 1966 and was Church Warden for 46 years. There is a plaque to his memory near the pew where he used to sit (under the North Window).

The Mothers Union was founded in 1913 by Mrs. Charles Banks. It played an important part in the village and celebrated its fifty years in 1963. It sadly closed in the mid seventies. The blue banner still, stands by the Altar in the Church.

#### THE FUTURE

Currently (2020) we are fundraising to put in basic facilities and to re-order the church internally to create space for church and community activities, whilst preserving the historical features and character of this lovely, unique and sacred place.



St Nicolas Church has been at the centre of Hail Weston village life for 800 years.

Will the church still be here in another 800 years?

Without much more regular support from all villagers this lovely little church will not be able to survive as a worshipping community.

Can you spare a little time or money each month to ensure that we hand on a thriving church and building to future generations?

The future lies in our hands.