



THE PARISH
CHURCH OF
HOLY TRINITY
WISTANSTOW IN
THE DIOCESE OF
HEREFORD.

A HISTORY AND TOUR OF
THE CHURCH.

BY THE REV. ROGER J.B. TAYLOR

Welcome to the Parish Church of the Holy Trinity, Wistanstow in the diocese of Hereford.

The visitor enters the Church of the Holy Trinity through the South West door. The present South West doorway is clearly pre-reformation as there is the remains of a Holy Water Stoop in the inner door jam.

Facing you as you enter the church is the Font. The font is a somewhat small round basin on an octagonal stem, which rests on two steps. The little moulding around the font corresponds with that on the tower piers and is probably of the same period i.e. the 14th century.

Although the present church of the Holy Trinity was mostly erected from 1180 - 1200 A.D. it is a Saxon foundation. Before the Norman conquest of 1066 it was one of the ancient possessions of St Alkmund Church, Shrewsbury. King Edgar the Peaceable (959-975) endowed St. Alkmund's with ten Prebends (Cathedral benefice - revenue) one of which was the church of the Holy Trinity, Wistanstowe (old spelling).



King Edward the Confessor (1042 - 1066) gave this prebend to Godric Wiffesume on whose death Earl Roger gave it to his physician Nigel. The Domesday Book states that Nigel holds Wistanstowe of the King. When eventually the possessions of St. Alkmund's church went to found Lilleshall Abbey (east of Shrewsbury) in King Stephen's time (1135 - 1154) Wistanstowe passed to the abbey, under which it long continued to be held.

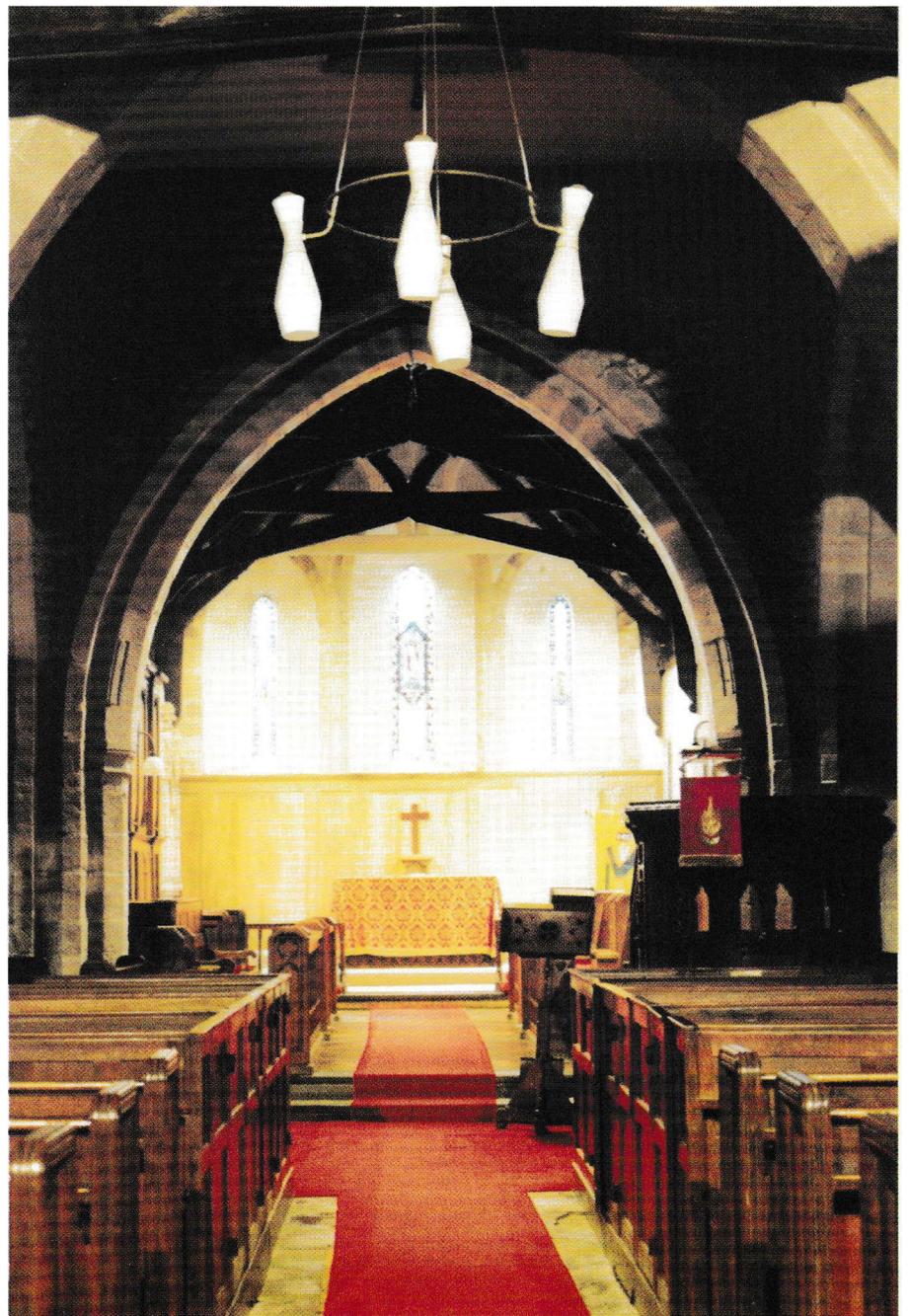
The present church dates from the latter part of the 12th century, and is cruciform in shape: a form of church architecture introduced into Britain by the Normans. It is an unusual shape for a small village church as the cruciform shape is usually associated with cathedrals. In the 14th century the tower was added to and the splendid roof of the nave, with its carved bosses and its quaterfoils in diamond panels is as old as the roof of Westminster Hall, which Richard II built. The rafted roofs of the north and south transepts are a little younger, and there is a fine mediaeval chest.

In 1874 the church, including the chancel underwent considerable restoration and a new porch was built in 1877-9. A vestry and Organ chamber were added in 1894: the church seats some 300 sittings. In the nave and the north and south transepts there are many old box - pews. Notice the original numbering on the fronts of the doors and small brass plaques denoting 'The Grove', 'Affcot Manor' etc on the rear. One can envisage whole households at church on Sunday, each having their own specific place. Dr. Cranage in his book on 'Churches of Shropshire' says of Wistanstow church, "There is a good deal of interest in this small cruciform church and a few of the architectural features are of real beauty".

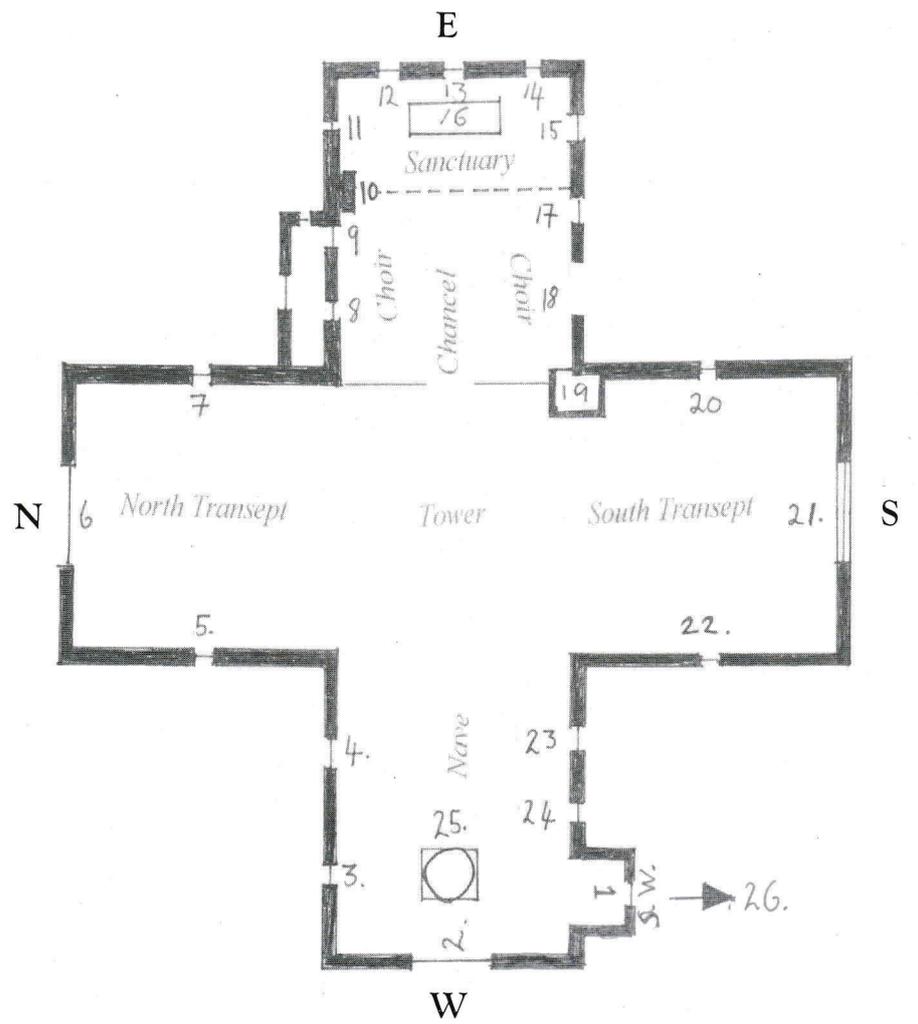


The church indeed has some very fine features, including some of the finest examples of stained glass windows. The St. Wystan Window (4) in the north wall of the nave and the St. Anne window (23) in the south wall of the nave (opposite each other) are very fine examples of the work of two famous stained glass artists, Mary Agness Rope and Margaret Rope. Both artists are famous for their works abroad as well as in Britain, including the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Shrewsbury. The cousins were stained glass artists of the 'Arts and Crafts Movement' which began towards the end of the 19th century. All Saint's Church Hereford has some very fine examples of Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope of the same family.

Arthur Mee, editor of 'The King's England Series', states that Wistanstow has in its name the echo of a pitiful tragedy and in its history a beautiful romance. It takes its name from St. Wystan, the fatherless heir to Wiglaf, a 9th century King of Mercia. It is said that at a council of peace, his uncle, professing to give Wystan an affectionate embrace, drew his sword and killed him. 'St. Wystan, a Saxon Saint, the son of Wimund and grandson of Wiglaf, King Mercia, became heir to the crown on his father's death. His cousin and godfather, Britfardus, however, was eager to secure the throne for himself, and sought to strengthen his claim by a marriage with Wimund's widow. This marriage was opposed by Wystan as being uncanonical and Britfardus invited him to a conference on the matter. They met on June 1st 850 A.D. on the spot where Wistanstow church now stands. As they were embracing, Britfardus, with the hilt of his sword treacherously dealt Wystan a fatal blow on the top of the skull. His body was taken to the well reputed and religious monastery of Repton, and there he was buried with suitable honor and great reverence in the mausoleum of his grandfather, King Wiglaf.' (from Alison's Thesis "The Norman Period 1066 - 1200"). St Wystan stands in a window as a golden haired boy in a red cloak taking the crown from his mother, who is dressed in blue, white and gold. Below is the scene of his martyrdom. Above is a group of buildings beside a river which may be to indicate his home and final resting place in Repton.



THE CHURCH PLAN



- (1) South West Porch: entrance to the Church
- (2) Window: "Suffer Little Children come unto me"
- (3) War Memorial: Memorial to the dead of two World Wars, 1914-18 & 1939-45
- (4) Window: St. Wistan
- (5) Window: In memory of Albert Goodman 1879 - 1958
- (6) Window: 'The Ascension'
- (7) Window
- (8) Minton Beddoes' family pew
- (9) Door: The door to the Sacristy
- (10) Organ
- (11) Window: Christ The King
- (12) Window: Mary, the Mother of Christ at the foot of the Cross
- (13) Window: Christ Crucified
- (14) Window: St. John at the foot of the Cross
(windows 12,13,14 form a triptych)
- (15) Window
- (16) The Altar: (The Lord's Table)
- (17) Door: This door is known as 'The Priest's Door.'
- (18) Window: Miriam, Hannah and Rachael
- (19) The Pulpit: From where the Word is preached.
- (20) Window: Espes (hope)
- (21) Window: The Resurrection
- (22) Window: Fides (faith)
- (23) Window: St. Anne (Restored, Christmas 2000, by donations from friends of the church)
- (24) Window
- (25) The Font: Where Christians have been baptised for many centuries
- (26) The Way to the Lych Gate.

In the South transept are wall paintings of texts from the Holy Scriptures set in decorative frames and are of the early 17th century. These were hidden by whitewash until the 19th century when they were restored in 1877 - 8. There were similar paintings in the nave but these were too worn to be preserved. They were mostly texts and a Royal Coat of Arms.

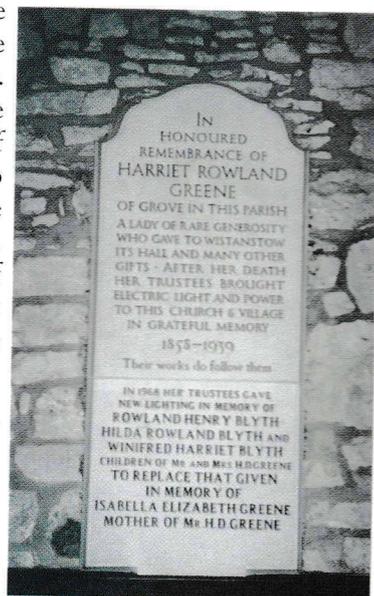
The West window is a memorial to Mr. J. Richards, and there are others to Miss Hilda Greene and the Dolbey family. The stained East windows form a Triptych memorial to the Rev. Christopher Swainson, and Elizabeth his wife, parents of the Rev. Edward Christopher Swainson M.A. Rector of the parish 1854 - 74.

There are some interesting stone memorial tablets placed in the walls of the church throughout. One of these tablets in the nave is to Harriet Rowland Greene of the Grove, who gave to Wistanstow its splendid village hall as well as many other gifts. After her death the trustees of her estate brought electric lighting and power to the church and the village.

Behind the choir stalls on the north and south walls of the Chancel are memorials to members of the Minton Beddoes family who can be traced back some 400 years.

Under the stone memorial tablets is their boxed family pew, still regularly used to this day. The trustees of the Beddoes of Cheney Longville continue to support the Church in many ways.

On the north west wall of the nave there is a brass memorial tablet to 23 men of the parish who fell in the two world wars of the last century. The great war of 1914 - 18 and the Second World War of 1939 - 45. This tablet was erected by relatives and the people of Wistanstow. On Remembrance Day each year the service of remembrance is held in the church around the memorial when the names of the fallen are read out.



The church tower was raised in the days of King Richard I but its bold arches and its battlements are of the 14th century. The tower houses the church bells which were restored in 1902 at the inauguration of the restored and enlarged 'Peal of Church Bells' on the 22 August 1902. The Rev. A. Lee spoke of the Church bells as being instruments to spread the knowledge of God and the gospel to call the people to Divine Worship; and he besought ringers to ever remember the sacredness of their important duties. He also spoke of the meaning and value of bell ringing at weddings, funerals and on other occasions.

The church clock was installed as a war memorial after the 1914 - 18 war. On the gable of the south transept is a piece of an ancient cross, and underneath is a sundial.



The central tower stopped at the lancet windows in the belfry. A change of masonry is noticeable at this height, but there is little to reveal the date. The top of the tower is probably 14th century. The roof of the tower dates from 1712 as an inscription on it reveals.

There are eight bells in the tower. In 1553 there were three bells. In 1758 a peal of six bells was cast by Rudhall. In 1903 the tenor bell, which was cracked, was re-cast, and two new bells added, the founder being Barwell of Birmingham. A tablet in the chancel dated 1904 recalls these restorations and additions. More recently, in 1974 all eight bells were sent to the bell foundry of Taylors of Loughborough to be completely re-cast, and at the same time the woodstocks were removed and put on bearings.

The visitor can enjoy a peaceful walk in the church grounds and sit for a while on one of the memorial seats taking in the tranquillity around them after their walk through the history of an ancient place of worship where prayers have been said for well over a thousand years. We hope that you have enjoyed your visit to our peaceful village and if you can, join us in an act of worship on Sundays, when you will be made most welcome. If there is someone you would like us to pray for please leave their names on the prayer cross in the south west corner of the church.

In the grounds of the church there are some restful spots where the visitor can find a period of peace and quiet.

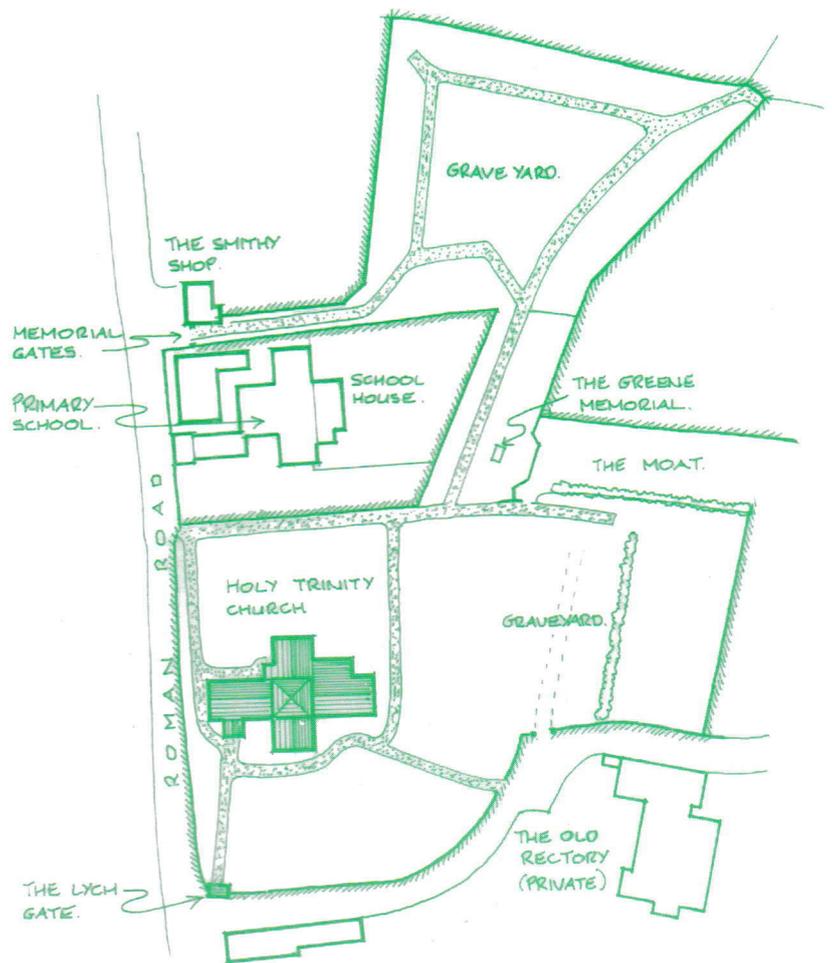
The churchyard is best approached through the south west corner where the old Roman road, 'Watling Street' passes through the village past the church. The churchyard was enlarged in 1899 and the register of burials dates from the year 1687. The modern south porch replaces one of wood which dated from 1733 as the churchwarden's accounts show.

A memorial to the Greene family in the north east of the grounds links the old and enlarged areas of the churchyard together. The memorial itself is an area of beauty and well worth some of the visitor's time.

One of the finest features of the exterior of the church is the rich priest's doorway in the south wall of the chancel. The priest may still enter the chancel through this door. It is a fine example of the transitional style from Norman to early English. The hooded moulding is early English dogtooth. There is a head on either side of the doorway and one is said to be that of a female crowned head. The doorway is recessed and has plain semi-circular arches, supported by nook shafts and the capitals are carved with shell like foliage with a grotesque head on the west capital. The abaci are a characteristic Norman form. It has been suggested that this doorway was originally in the south west wall of the church. (see the doorway like arch around the brass war memorial inside the church).



There are two churches in the parish of Wistanstow. The sister church to Holy Trinity is St Michael's and All Angels at Cwm head, about two miles north west of Wistanstow. Although St. Michael's is of a much later period than Holy Trinity, being erected about 1845, it is a haven of peace and quiet and a delight to visit. St. Michael's was built in the Norman style, and has a small tower with spire containing one bell. The East window is stained. The font is a Grinshill stone in the Early English style.



Map of Holy Trinity churchyard drawn by Simon Brown

A Blessing

May God make safe to you each step,
May God make open to you each pass,
May God make clear to you each road,
May God take you in the clasp of His own two hands;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you now and for ever. Amen.



St. Anne Window

Written & Researched by the Rev. Roger J.B. Taylor

Edited by Anthony Webb & Blanche McCorkell
in conjunction with members of Wistanstow Parochial Church Council
September 2001

Printed by Shropshire County Council Printing Services,
The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury.

Produced in partnership with local people through the
Discovery Links Project. This project worked to support
appropriate economic development of the Parishes around the
Secret Hills Discovery Centre through the Craven Arms
Community Forum.

