

Church Crawler's Visit 22nd July, 2015

ST BOTOLPH'S CHURCH IKEN - Introduction and Brief History

The Church is an iconic landmark. You can look across from Shape across the reeds and see the tower glinting in the evening sun. It is not just the setting which makes Iken so special it is its association with St Botolph who founded a monastery here in AD 654.

This promontory overlooking the River Alde is one of the Country's earliest Christian sites it is thought that St Botolph himself first brought the faith to the site of Iken. The Anglo Saxon chronicler records for the year 654 "in this year Anna the Christian King of the East Angles was slain and Botwulph (Botolph) began to build the minster at Icanhoh". A Saxon minster was a nucleus of Christian worship, witness and learning for a wide area. It was staffed by a community of monks or a group of priests and from it missionaries travelled to spread the faith and to establish satellite churches. Botolph remained at Icanhoh as its Abbot until his death in 680. It is recorded that he was buried by his disciples on June 17th and this has remained his annual Feast day.

In 870 the Danes destroyed the monastery. It is thought that a stone memorial cross was built part of which can be seen in the church. It is thought that a wooden church was rebuilt in the 900's and was dedicated to the Saint.

1070 - 1110 The early Norman flint rubble nave was built and also a chancel. The foundations of a Norman chancel Arch were discovered in 1977 beneath the present one.

1400's Robert Geldeney and William Baldwyn bequeathed money toward the building of the western tower. Four bells which were made for the tower still ring out from it. Three bells were cast around 1465 and one around 1507.

1500's The reformers in the mid 1500's adapted the interior to cater for the needs of the reformed church. The rood screen and loft was destroyed, wall paintings were whitewashed over and other adjustments were made. In 1547 a pulpit and lectern were purchased.

1643 Stained glass, carvings and inscriptions were destroyed during the Puritan purge.

In the early C19 David Alisha Davy, annotator of Suffolk Churches, made visits to Iken and gave ideas at how the church had developed from the 1600's. Only 12 feet of the chancel was in use and roofed. 15 feet was in ruins. A stable had been erected against the North wall to accommodate the horses of parishioners who travelled some distance to worship.

1845 The circumstances for the Church improved with a new Patron from Kent and in 1846 a new Rector was appointed and the Anchorage was the new rectory. The Patron and Rector set about restoring the church.. A new chancel was built on the medieval foundations at a cost of £500. The architect was from Kent, John Whipcord, who also designed the Grand Hotel at Brighton. The chancel is faced with Kentish ragstone instead of local flints. By 1859 the refurbishment was complete. A grant was given by the Incorporated Church Building Society on condition that a proportion of the pews were free, without rent, for the poor.

C20 1938 The Rev's Charles Reeve from St Katherine's Rotherhithe was appointed and he came firmly rooted in the Anglo Catholic tradition and he made St Botolph's a centre for sacramental worship in this tradition.

In 1942 the entire village was evacuated as it was used for a centre for battle training. Father Reeve conducted his last mass for a congregation of one.

The Church reopened in May 1947. There was some damage from a falling tree and a mine blast.

1950's The Parishioners did much to make their church functional and beautiful again. The alter was restored and lengthened. A new organ was introduced.

4th April 1968 Tragedy struck when during tree felling in the Churchyard sparks from burning logs set fire to the thatch on the nave roof and reduced the nave to a blackened ruin. The chancel survived.

WHAT CAN YOU SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH?

Nave For 20 years until 1988 open to the elements. Chancel entrance partly filled and chancel used. The Community raised thousands of pounds for it's restoration.

Behind glass you can see faint red colouring evidence of earlier wall paintings.

Round Headed arch in North nave is blocked internal splay of a second Norman Window, which would have matched its companion visible externally, to the east.

ROOD LOFT staircase 15th century opening is still in place.

Each side of the Chancel arch before the reformation were side alters and on the South Side is a beautifully carved 15th century **NICHE** or recess probably containing a statue or painting of the Saint the Chapel was named after.

In the South side you can see a **PISCINA** with octofoil (eight-lobed drain) in a cinquefoil-headed niche. This was for the disposal of the water used by the Priest to wash his hands at the Eucharist celebration at the alter.

FONT Is 15th Century and was repaired with an anonymous donation. Take a look at the decoration. Around the stem are 4 lions and below angels with outstretched wings. In the eight panels of the bowl are the emblems of the four evangelists alternating. Lions decorating fonts are quite common in East Anglia.

with angels. Take a note of clothing and head gear.

SAXON CROSS-SHAFT This is the Church's most ancient treasure and dates from the late 800's or early 900's. Maybe it was to mark this site as a holy place and to commemorate St Botolph and his minster after the destruction of the Danes.

COMMANDMENT BOARD Beneath the Tower dating from c.1853. The was originly on the chancel's east wall.

BELLS The Church bells still ring out. Three date from around 1450 and the tenor bell around 1500 – 1515

CHANCEL All furnishings are entirely 19th and 20th century.

The BENCHES were given to the church by the cathedral of Bury St Edmunds in 1970 and were designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott between 1865 – 9. They were restored in 1998 and 6 new ones made.

ALTER, REREDOS AND PANELLING constructed in the 1950's and dedicated in 1959. The reredos is based on The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci.

THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

“Idyllic and dramatic situation of St Botolph's is unforgettable”!

The chancel is faced with blocks of Kentish ragstone and has a tiled roof in contrast to the thatched roof of the nave.

The earliest part of the Church is the Norman Nave. In the North Wall you will see a tiny slender original slit window. It's arched head is fashioned with a single piece of stone. Tower is mid 15th century.

The South Porch is 15th Century and what does remain is the flushwork panelling surrounding the perpendicular entrance arch. A careful look at the stonework to the left and right of the entrance reveal faint traces of two Mass Dials of which the right hand dial is larger and clearer. These dials fixed the time for a service to begin before the day of clocks.

Sources

Pamphlet: St Botolph's Iken compiled by Roy Tricker October 1995

Pamphlet: Churches of the Alde & Ore Valley. Angela Singleton The Alde and Ore Association

Notes compiled by Jan Derham