

St. Margaret's Church, Lowestoft

A Tour of the Building

A mediaeval church, rich in history, containing old and new treasures –

A mediaeval font

A modern Noah's Ark for children attending services

Plaques and memorials commemorating a former church, those who have died at sea or during the wars

Stunning stained glass windows

A pre-Reformation lectern

Memorial brasses

A modern carpeted dais

A gilded weathercock on the spire, which, until the modern wind turbine Gulliver was built, was the first thing in the British Isles to be touched by the sun as it rose each day

Our tour of St. Margaret's Church starts at the Font and proceeds around the building in a clockwise direction.

The mediaeval FONT, standing on three octagonal steps, has sixteen saints in the double-panelled niches round the bowl and eight saints on the shaft, a single saint on each of the sides. All the faces of these figures were axed beyond recognition during the Puritan regime when, in 1644, Francis Jessope carried to excess the orders given to him by the Earl of Manchester. The Font Cover was added in 1940 in memory of a former Rector. This location gives a good view of the Nave, which was built in the late 15th Century to replace a much earlier one dating from about 1100. Note the absence of a Chancel Arch.

The glass-topped case at the rear of the pews on the north side of the central aisle contains the Book of Remembrance which records the names of those whose cremated ashes are interred in the churchyard.

The BELFRY ARCH appears small when compared with the height of the Nave, but it would have been in keeping with the proportions of the original church, which extended as far as the third pillar from the west end. The present building dates from about the middle of the 15th Century. The Ringers' Screen was originally erected, as a memorial, in 1934, fourteen years after the peal of eight bells (tenor, 13¾ cwt.) was hung in 1920 as part of the Parish War Memorial. The screen and arch were glazed in 1999 as a memorial to a former Churchwarden and bellringer.

The long door in the wall to the right of the Ringers' Screen encloses a Processional Cross Locker. Next to it is a list of Vicars and Rectors since 1308. The title of "Rector" was not adopted until 1860.

On the walls near the tower there are lead tablets which were cast when the lead roof was repaired at various times in the 18th Century. They bear the names of the Churchwardens who were in office when the work was carried out. This tradition has been carried on by the recent addition of a tablet in memory of a Churchwarden, in 2006.

The Side Aisles are illuminated from the two west windows, which contain glass that was removed from the daughter church of St. Peter's, Lowestoft, when it was demolished in 1975.

The NORTH DOOR was erected in 1733 and bears the carved initials of the Churchwardens who had it put in.

At the beginning of the North Aisle you will find NOAH'S ARK, a children's area on the biblical theme, which is the creation of a former lady Curate, who devised it, in 2003.

As you walk along the North Aisle, you will notice the panels along the wall which recall local fishermen lost at sea between 1865 and 1923. Set in the panels are four Coats of Arms (from left to right):

- 1: Unofficial arms of the town and used before Lowestoft Corporation received its charter
- 2: Arms of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers
- 3: Arms of our Province, the See of Canterbury

4: Arms of our Diocese, the See of Norwich

None of the memorial stained glass on this side of the building is earlier than 1875. Like the west windows, the first window originates from the demolished church of St. Peter's, Lowestoft. The second window that you come to – that of St. Andrew – was made in Norwich in 1965.

The pillars along the North Aisle are of the period 1450-1500. Look carefully and you will be able to see the mason's mark, an inverted W.

There are two plaques on the north wall near the Chapel. One was presented to the Church by the captain and crew of the frigate H.M.S. Lowestoft in 1965. The other is in memory of those who served in the Royal Naval Patrol Service and who gave their lives in the Second World War.

Across the east end of the north aisle runs a SCREEN which was installed in 1923. (It is not a Rood Screen, as there is no Rood (Crucifix) above it). The intention to put a screen right across the Church, as there was originally, was later abandoned. It is known that some parts of the original screen existed in 1710, after which date no further references to it can be found.

The small narrow stairway in the north wall was originally used in the Middle Ages for access to the Rood-loft, but this is now dangerous and is not used. There was a similar stairway in the south wall before it was rebuilt in the 19th Century.

The WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL beyond the Screen has panelling on which are carved the names of 711 Lowestoft men who died in action in the First World War. The present furnishing, lighting and decoration of the Chapel were executed in 1965.

To the right of the Chapel Altar is the Aumbry, which was also removed from the now demolished St. Peter's Church, Lowestoft.

Walking past the Pulpit you approach the CHANCEL via a carpeted Dais, installed in 2007 in a project which was jointly financed by the Abbott Family Trust and donations given in memory of the incumbent's wife . In the Chancel you will notice the following special features of the east end of the Church:

The piece of mother-of-pearl in the centre of the Cross. The Latin for pearl is "margarita" and this is an allusion to our Patron Saint.

The Ship's Bell, specially mounted on a wooden base, which is used as a Sanctuary Bell during celebrations of Holy Communion.

The magnificent memorial East Window. (There is an explanation of the window on the north wall of the Chancel near the altar rail and a similar record of the depictions can be found hanging on the main pillar nearest to the Church door).

The two blocks of masonry high up on either side of the East Window. These were carved heads, which were defaced at the same time as the damage to the Font.

The stained glass of the south (right-hand) window, painted in 1819 by Robert Allen who had connections with the short-lived Lowestoft China Factory (1757-1803).

Turning round in the Chancel to face west, you have a full view of the Church's interior. In the roof you will see three styles of decoration: one for the Nave, one for the Chancel and one for the Sanctuary – each more elaborate than the one before. Notice the intricacy of the painting where the roof and walls meet, and the elaborate cresting on the beams. The inscription on the beams over the Chancel reads "Gloria tibi Jesu" and "Rex aeternae Glorae" (Glory be to thee, O Jesu, King of Eternal Glory).

Between 1870 and 1900 much work was carried out, including the removal of the box-pews and a three-decker pulpit, the renewal and colouring of the roof, the fixing of the carved angels, the introduction of choir-stalls and the relocation of the ORGAN from the west end to its present position – on the left as you leave the Chancel.

Since its relocation, the three-manual Organ has been rebuilt three times and now has 44 speaking stops and in excess of 2,100 pipes. The first appointed Organist of our Church was Robert Browne who was given the position at the early age of 14 years. He was succeeded by his son, also a Robert Browne, and between them they were the Organists at St. Margaret's for 95 years.

The brass LECTERN, located on the corner of the Dais, is one of very few (perhaps ten) pre-Reformation lecterns still in existence in England. It was buried for safety during Puritan times.

The crossed keys on the side altar on the south side of the Church beside the Organ are a reminder that this altar, too, was originally in St. Peter's Church, Lowestoft.

Some MEMORIAL BRASSES, all of which date from 1490-1540, can be seen set in the floor of the Central and South Aisles of the Nave. Most of the Brasses were defaced or removed by the Puritan Visitor but, for some unknown reason, in the South Aisle he left one intact, that of a merchant, although his wife, beside him, has been very ably decapitated. The brass that was removed was sold and cast into a bell which became the hour bell for the clock in Lowestoft Town Hall.

In 1871 the WALLS of the south side of the Church were found to be unsafe. The walls, buttresses and pillars were carefully taken down and then rebuilt. The pillars now rest on single blocks of stone, in contrast to those in the North Aisle.

As you leave the Church, you will notice in the ceiling of the PORCH, in the centre, an ancient method of representing the Trinity. Above the Porch is a room which gives impressive height to the main entrance to the building. This room is known as the "Old Maids' Chamber" because it was once occupied by two elderly spinsters. Outside the entrance, above the archway, are three statues, dating from 1900, showing, from left to right:

St. Felix, first Bishop of East Anglia (A.D. 618)

St. Margaret, the Patron Saint (martyred A.D. 278)

Herbert de Losinga, holding in his arms a model of Norwich Cathedral, which he founded on becoming the first Bishop of Norwich in 1094

On the outside of the building, the FLINT PANELS decorating the buttresses all around the Church are particularly fine, especially when we recall the tools used by the flint-knappers over five hundred years ago. The walls of the Church are cored with brick and faced with dressed flints, the space between the core and the face being filled with rubble.

The TOWER is built in the early Decorated style and dates from 1300-1370. The copper-covered Spire was put up in 1954 to replace the original lead-on-timber structure of 1483. The gilded weathercock atop the Spire was originally the highest point in this most easterly town and could justly claim to be the first thing in the British Isles to be touched by the sun as it rose each day. With the recent construction of the giant wind turbine, Gulliver, on a site in Lowestoft's former beach village, this is no longer the case.

Some Statistics for St. Margaret's Church

Length (including Tower): 182 feet

Breadth: 62 feet

Heights:

To the ridge of the Nave: 43 feet

To the top of the Tower: 70 feet

To the top of the Spire: 120 feet

NOTE: the following forms part of this guide in leaflet form but might perhaps be used elsewhere on the Web Site

St. Margaret

St. Margaret was allegedly born in Antioch in Pisidia (now Turkey), in the 3rd Century. Converted by her Christian nurse, she was expelled from home by her father, a pagan priest. A Roman Prefect wished to take her as his mistress, but she would have none of him. In an act of spite, he had her arrested, tried by his tribunal and then sentenced to death. After sundry tortures, converting at least 5,000 people to the Faith by her constancy, she was finally beheaded. Her bones are said to rest in Venice and Montefiascone.