



From The Fen & Marshland Churches by Reverend J Davies; Rector of Walsoken

The Parish Church of Walsoken is equally interesting to the student of architecture and the antiquarian; To the former, from the grandeur and beauty of its main design, and to the latter, from its numerous illustrations - extending from the 12th to the 16th century - of ancient art and manner.

The manor of Walsoken was given in the year 1069 by Ailwin, Duke of East Angles, to the abbey of Ramsey, in Huntingdonshire, and the Church doubtless owes its origin to the large resources of that wealthy foundation.

The Western tower entrance, the Nave & Chancel are pure Norman of the latter period. This portion of the church was built in the first half of the 12th century. The view as the visitor enters by the west door is very striking. The Noble arcades of the Nave with its massive pillars alternately circular and octagonal and its richly moulded semi-circular arches springing from capitals of varied design; The fine chancel arch with rich normal mouldings, but yet slightly pointed, indicating a time of transition; the lofty clerestory of the latter gothic or perpendicular style; the flat but finely formed timber roof with figures in the brackets; and the beautiful screen before the south chapel - an exceedingly fine specimen of mediaeval art - altogether produce an architectural effect that can hardly be surpassed except in our cathedrals.

The old normal aisles were replaced about the year 1320 by the present ones which are, with the south porch, in the style of middle or decorated gothic.

An important change was made in the church in the middle of the 15th century. The present clerestory, the roofs, except that of the north aisle, and the east window belong to this period. These portions of the church are of the latter or perpendicular Gothic, but the east window is not a good example of this style. It was originally a triplet, and the outer jambs of the more ancient design still remain, suggesting at some future time a restoration of its original form. corresponding to the beautiful early English window above the western entrance.

The archaeologist will notice with interest the trefoiled eyelet hole, high above a piscina in the lady chapel, and the arched recess in the same chapel near its south door. It is difficult to explain their use. The Normal aumbry in the chancel, the curious heart reliquary in the wall of the north aisle, the stairs behind the pulpit leading to the ancient rood-loft, and the projecting ledge against the east wall of the south chapel - where probably a great bible was placed - all deserve careful attention.

The font is a noble specimen of the highly decorated type. It is octagonal in form. Each side has a groined niche, richly carved, with a crocketed ogee arch and large finial; The niches containing a sculptured representation of the Seven Sacraments of the Romish Church and the Crucifixion. The base has also groined niches, occupied by figures of saints, and enriched with crockets and finials. Round the base in an inscription "Remember the souls of S. Homiter and Margaret his wife, and John Beforth, Chaplain" with the date "1544" in Roman letters.

The external aspect of the church is fine, but not equal to that of the interior. At the west end is a massive tower of four stories, pinnacled and surmounted by a spire. The two lower stories are early English and have shafted arcades of good design continued round the angular turrets. The upper



stories are loftier, but not so well formed, the ornamental part degenerating into a mere shallow lancet panelling. The clerestory has battlements, and crocketed pinnacles between the windows. At the east gable is a neat bell-cot for the Sanctus bell. The vestry has apparently been formed out of the south aisle of the chancel, and has a priest's chamber in the upper story. The windows belong to the latest or debased period of Gothic architecture, having square mouldings, with plain vertical mullions. This part of the exterior and the fine Norman arch of the west entrance represent the two extreme points of the ecclesiastical architecture of the middle ages.