



From "Wisbech In the Isle of Ely" 1827 by William Watson.

WALSOKEN seems to have bequeathed nothing of much importance to historical inquiry. It had formerly a manor called the Marshes, from the family of De Marisco Rye Col. Watson, but which would be readily solved by a hasty inquirer in the fact of it having been originally marsh. We have already noticed the several large inundations which have at times almost swept this parish away, and at a period when such were prevalent, this manor must have often been a marsh. Like most of this kind of property, we may trace it back to the church. Another manor called Popenhoe, larger than that of the Marshes, existed in this parish. It was given to the Abbey of Ramsey by Ailivin Duke of the East Angles.

It was given by Henry VIII as Walsoken manor, with the rectory, to Sir Thomas Wriothesly and Sir Richard Southwell, and has since passed to various proprietors. Walsoken derives its principal importance from its vicinity to Wisbech. The village itself which is about a mile and a half to the north of Wisbech, is a poor place, with a very few inhabitants. The portion of the parish, however, which adjoins Wisbech is pleasant and populous, containing about 2000 inhabitants, with excellent houses along its main street, or road. This part of Walsoken has been principally built in the present century, and it is chosen as a residence, not only for its pleasant country aspect-immediately adjoining the town, but for a certain leniency of rates, which give it the advantage over its older and more expensive ancestor. There are extensive remains of embankments in this parish, besides large mounds which have the appearance of tumuli. The church is the only important object in the parish. It bears the architecture of various ages, beginning at the Norman, circa 1100, and ending with the Perpendicular, circa 1400.

Externally it is not very imposing, as the tower seems completed in a style inferior to its commencement, and is finished with a heavy spire, inadequately relieved with the small stunted pinnacles which terminate the angular buttresses. Almost all the windows are Perpendicular, those in the aisles being mostly flat-headed. The clerestory, containing in all fourteen Perpendicular windows, is battlemented and pinnacled between each pair of windows, with a sacristy bell to the east. The roof was formerly of a much higher pitch. There is a porch on the south surmounted with a good cross. The vestry, which is attached to the south side of the chancel, seems formerly to have been a chapel. There is also a doorway of the Transition period attached to the south aisle. The tower in its two lowermost stories contains beautiful Transition, lancet, and trefoil arcades, -with a round-headed doorway splayed with Early English mouldings and three pillars. The third story, which occupies nearly half the height of the tower, is traversed by vertical bands, between which and reaching about half their height is a plain lancet arcade of not much elegance.

The upper story has four Perpendicular windows. The tower is banked with octangular buttresses, and is battlemented at the top. The interior has many claims on the attention of those interested in the progress of church architecture. The nave is Norman, being the most interesting specimen of the style in Norfolk, except Norwich Cathedral. There are six pillars, alternately round and hexagonal, on each side, and two responds. The arch moulding towards the nave is zig-zag, with a zig-zag soffit. The roof of oak is of the Perpendicular period, with angels on the transome beam and niched figures on the bracket. The tower communicates with the church by a lancet arch and at the other extremity of the nave, communicating with the chancel, is a beautiful and celebrated specimen of Transition work.



Cotman has given this arch in detail in his etchings of Norfolk antiquities, and it has otherwise engaged the attention of antiquaries. The arch springs from six banded pillars, and has a soffit exquisitely worked with zig-zags and ornamented with a kind of cusp, which stands out from the under lace of the arch. There are the remains of the old carved oak seats and miserere in this part of the church. There is an aisle on each side of the chancel which have formerly been chapels, having their screens remaining. The screen which separates the chapel from the south aisle is attached to a decorated arch, and is a very rich specimen of Perpendicular work. The interior of the chapel contains an exquisitely caned oak roof. On the north side is another chapel, much larger than the southern one, but with less remains of former beauty about it. Some stained glass in the windows seem to show that a coloured window formerly ornamented this division of the church. This church contains the remains of the ancient fittings, which have been cut and converted into modern pewings.

The old oak caning, still visible on these oak seats, is of a higher character than usual, and the finials are beautifully wrought. The arm-rest of the seat was ornamented with a standing figure of a beast, a bird, or a man, and two or three interesting specimens of this elegant but not very common feature are preserved. The ends of the seats towards the aisles and nave seem to have been ornamented with a carved niche containing a figure, and though a specimen or two appears to remain, they are so boarded up as to be altogether out of observation. The last object we shall notice in this church is the font famous and beautiful example of highly decorated Perpendicular work.

It is octangular, and is formed of hard oolitic stone. Each side has a carved grained niche, with crocketed ogee arch and expanded finial, behind which is a sort of cusp work in very good taste. Seven of the niches are occupied with the sacraments of the Catholic Church, and the eighth contains the crucifixion. The base is occupied with eight standing figures, also in groined niches, with crockets and finials, and above is a series of angels, eagles, and other decorations. The whole forms as enriched a specimen of its period as is to be found. Round the base is this inscription: "Remember the soul of S. Hoynter, and Margaret, his wife, and John Benforth, Chaplin." Walsoken had formerly its guilds, and a chapel apparently belonging to one of them was situated near the Gull, about three-quarters of a mile east of the church. The population in 1841 was 2562.