

St Oswald's

A brief history of Lythe's Parish Church by Johannes Secker

St Oswald's Lythe is a Grade I Listed Building and is reckoned to be one of the "unsung architectural glories of the North of England" (Peter Burman). It is the Parish Church of the Civil and Ecclesiastical entity of Lythe. In that sense it is open and available to all who live in the Parish of Lythe. The Incumbent and members of the Parish Church Council are there to serve the entire community, believer and unbeliever alike.

In its present form the church as we see it, is the result of the latest restoration of 1910/11 by Sir Walter Tapper with the patronage of the 3rd Marquess of Normanby. It has a long history, going back more than a thousand years.

Borrowing liberally from **A Guide to the Church and Parish of St Oswald, Lythe**, by a recent Incumbent, we find that "Lythe" means "on a hill" and that the Manor of Lythe originally extended to some 40 square miles, and included the parishes of Egton, and Ugthorpe. The Parish Church of St Oswald as it stands is a landmark visible for miles from both sea and land.

In the DOMESDAY BOOK (1086 AD) we find a reference to the Manor of Lythe, then held by one Nigel. There is no mention of a church at this point, but a few years later, about 1100, Robert Fossard, Nigel's son, is recorded as making a grant of the Church of Lythe to Nostel Priory (nr Wakefield). And in 1154, on an ancient document, there appears the name of Robert, Priest of Lythe, the first of a long list of incumbents, as recorded now on a special memorial board on the west wall of the church behind the baptismal font. This list includes no less a figure than John Fisher, who later became Bishop of Rochester, and eventually Cardinal, and was executed as a Catholic, for treason in 1535.

Turning to the fabric of the building, it has been clearly established by church historians and architects that the east wall of the present chancel and the lancet windows (but not the stained glass) date back to the 13th century, as does the entire north wall and the buttresses that support it. And the north doorway, clearly visible directly opposite the 20th century doorway main entrance, is a striking example of 12th/13th century stonework and design.

In addition, there is the 'hard' evidence of the old carved stones that were discovered in the foundations of the medieval church at the time of the latest restoration. There are 37 Anglo-Scandinavian carved stones dating back mainly to the 10th century. These Viking Stones are mostly funeral monuments from a Christian graveyard, and they form the largest and most important collection in our country. Tantalisingly, there are two pieces dating back to the 9th century which have been identified as Anglo-Saxon, possible evidence of a stone Anglo-Saxon church building. In addition, there are some 50-60 pieces of Medieval English carved stones from a later date, 12-13th century, mostly architectural in character, including a Green Man corner stone. The display of Viking and Medieval English Stones at the back of St Oswald's

Church is recognised as a prime example of good presentation, curation and care of historical materials.

In summary, St Oswald's Church has a very long history. St Oswald's Church is first and foremost a place of Christian worship but it is not only the Parish Church, it is also a very significant historical monument. It needs and deserves the support of all of us who live in this Parish, church-goers and none church-goers alike, particularly now as we embark once again on an important and vital restoration project, the details of which have been published and can be found on the Notice Board in the church.

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St Oswald's Lythe



Buttresses supporting the north wall



East wall of the chancel with lancet windows



North doorway