

Summer Outing to Lockington Church

Members of the Friends of Charnwood Museum held a joint meeting with the Loughborough Archaeological and Historical Society at Lockington parish church. Roger Willson used St Nicholas's to illustrate the changing liturgy and use of space in English parish churches from the middle ages to the twentieth century.



He began by drawing attention to the current appearance of the interior where there was no vivid colour, the walls either had exposed stone or had a rendering in cream: no signs of wall paintings which once told bible stories to worshipers.

Over the centuries the position of the altar had moved from under the chancel arch to allow the priest to face the congregation as he celebrated mass to the post 1215 position where the mysteries of the Holy Communion took place at the eastern end of the chancel with the priest with his back to the people.

In the seventeenth century the rites of Holy Communion were around a table, not an altar, usually placed conveniently for the worshipers. To ensure respect for the Communion Archbishop Laud ordered the erection of rails to separate the communion table from the church to keep out dogs and prevent disturbances of the Communion.

During the 900 years life of the church no less than seven or eight major changes had occurred. These included additions of the north and south aisles to the nave, raising the height of the nave by building of a clerestory whose windows gave more light to the interior, the erection of the tower where a peal of bells was hung.

The addition of aisles allowed wealthy parishioners in the later middle ages to install chantry chapels where family tombs were accompanied by an altar and the priest was paid to say masses on behalf of the dead. At Lockington there is a fine example of Elizabeth Langham still showing its original colours. Chantries were screened from the nave because they were private. In the middle ages the nave was a meeting place even housing indoor markets.

No pews or chairs furnished the nave in the middle ages to allow elaborate processions. The elderly and frail sat on stone footings by the walls or columns in the nave - they were said to have "gone to the wall".

Between the chancel and the nave was rood screen displaying images to remind people of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

After the Reformation the importance of preaching in church required regular sittings for worshipers: box pews and an elaborate pulpit dominated the nave. At Lockington the two of the three decks of the pulpit survive and, although the screen between the chancel and nave was retained, the symbols of the crucifixion were eventually replaced by an

elaborate coat of arms of Queen Anne dated 1704 and tablets recording the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the creed.

Financial responsibility for the building was divided: upkeep of the chancel was the Rector's whereas the community paid for the nave.

The nave now has chairs and not pews or benches indicating the more flexible use of the building.

After an opportunity to take refreshments and look at the evidence of changes to the exterior of the church, Roger Willson gave a fascinating introduction to the documentation showing how and why it was appropriate to say 'The tradition of the Church is change.'

Mick Allen proposed a vote of thanks to the speaker and all who had made the visit such an enjoyable occasion.

Ian Keil