

The Tower

The tower, uncommonly, is built inside the church using the original west side as one of the walls, which contains a set of Early English lancet windows. It is thought that the tower was built internally so as not to obstruct the path of processions circling the church – note change in level down to the roadway.

The Belfry

The belfry contains a peal of six bells, gifted by the Lord of the Manor, John Nourse, in 1680. The sanctus bell is dated 1674.

The Clock

The clock is thought to be the workmanship of Edward Hemins of Bicester in the 17th century. However parts of the mechanism suggest it may be older than this. It has recently been overhauled and left in 'moth ball' storage condition. Note the single-handed face on the north wall of the tower.

Minstrels' Gallery

This was probably constructed in the late 18th or early 19th century. We have never had a fixed organ in the church.

Medieval Wall Paintings

The nave walls retain much early 14th century red masonry decoration and on the north wall, above a blocked doorway, is an early 14th century painting of St Christopher, uncovered in 1930. The painting is significant, primarily because it may be the earliest surviving example of its subject. It shows St Christopher with Christ on his shoulder, walking through a stream whilst fish and octopus surround his feet. The inscription, curiously written in Norman French, translates to: *'Look upon this image and verily on this day you shall not die an evil death.'* Also note the floral design over the south door.

In 2010 a major renewal and refurbishment project took place, principally to replace the roof – hence the new lime plaster and blue lime wash finish on the ceiling. During this project, parts of a major painting depicting the Crucifixion scene were discovered behind and above

the rood beam. Unfortunately, it was only visible from a high level scaffold platform. The heads of John the Evangelist, Mary mother of Christ, and Christ's hands nailed to the cross were clearly visible.

A painted inscription above the south entrance door was also discovered, previously hidden by a ceiling. It reads:

'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools for they consider not that they do evil.' Ecclesiastes 5:1

Pews

The ancient pews in the nave are worthy of note. The 15th century wooden benches in the chancel have carved heads and sides. They display the symbols of the pelican (the sacrifice of Isaac) and of the Passion, as well as a poppy-head design. The later 18th century pew doors have recently been preplaced having been found in a cupboard under the stairs, at the time of the roof renovation!

Hatchments and memorials

There are 17th century ledgers and the late 18th century hatchments bear the arms of the Weyland family, who owned Woodeaton Manor from the mid-18th century until 1912. They also have a vault in the churchyard, on the east side. Memorials also exist for the Nourse family who were Lords of the Manor in the 17th and 18th centuries. Of note is a marble wall memorial to Anne Nourse who died in 1669, with pilasters and pediment.

Nave and Chancel

There is an early 13th century window on the north side of the nave with Y tracery; the other windows are in the Perpendicular style. The tall, mullioned and transomed window dates from the 15th century. The nave roof has some 13th century timbers, the remainder being 14th century.

There is a Priest's Door in the south wall of the chancel, also Early-English and best seen from the outside.

The chancel arch is 14th century and the rood screen is ear-

ly 16th century, with linenfold panelling and tracery. Traces of the original paintwork can be seen on the screen.

The chancel contains a 13th century trefoiled piscina and a stone sedilium.

The nave contains an Early English font and 18th century panelled manorial pew, pulpit and canopy and reading desk. The manorial pew, complete with door, is on the left-hand side of the nave, its high panelling gave privacy to the family during public service. Its half-panelled walls with hat-pegs to each pew suggest the early Post-reformation church set within the old mediaeval walls.

An old oak staircase leads to a minstrels' gallery dating from the end of the 18th century. The gallery itself is built on the two massive pillars of the tower and is backed by a partition wall, behind which, on the second storey and behind the vestry, is the ringing chamber.

The Rood Beam

The nave of the English medieval parish church was used as a general parish room and therefore it was a matter of religious propriety that the chancel should be separated from the nave by the chancel screen. Usually the screen was executed in oak, and its top supported by a loft, reached by stairs, from which, perhaps, parts of the mass were conducted. Above the loft there ran a great oak beam upon which stood carved representations. The Cross of Christ is known by its Saxon name of the "Rood". Several English oak screens and lofts survived the Reformation, but very few rood beams remain, and none remain complete with cross and figures as originally set up.

In Woodeaton, on 16 May 1957, the flat plaster ceiling was taken down from the nave revealing the mediaeval roof timbers, the apex of the chancel arch, and the oak rood-beam but without its cross and attendant figures. The beam, which is coloured pale red, reaches from the north to south walls of the nave, immediately over the chancel arch, and against the wall above the arch. Strips of elm board were removed from the beam which was found to be in its original position, and upon which there is a black letter inscription of the early 15th century; this was restored by the superimposition of lettering in black and white sometime just before the Reformation. The inscription reads:

‘VENITE BENEDICTE PATRIS MEA ITE MALEDICTE IN IGNEM INTERNAM.’

Come ye blessed of my father; go ye damned into the eternal fire.

Brief History of the Manorial Families

Woodeaton Manor has always been closely linked with the church. There have been some notable owners of both the manor and the church. In 1086 Eynsham Abbey acquired control from Richard d'Ivry until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, after which it was owned by a series of purveyors of monastic lands.

Perhaps the most notable tenant of the manor was Richard Taverner (famed for the translation of the Bible) between 1536 and 1554. He was also a Member of Parliament and High Sheriff of Oxfordshire. He died in 1575 and is buried in Woodeaton.

In 1625 the manor house was sold to John Nourse, whose family had acquired all the land bar one acre by 1705; retaining it under the Weyland name until 1902. The current manor house was built in 1775, replacing the Tudor manor house commissioned by Richard Taverner in the 1550s and repaired by John Nourse in 1676. The BBC bought it in

1940 and sold it to Oxfordshire County Council in 1948, from which time it has remained a school.

Past Rectors

Past notable rectors include Robert of Winchelsey, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1294 and Francis Bradshaw, Fellow and Vice President of Magdalen College between 1605 and 1653

Roof Repair

2008 saw the start of the roof repair project, necessary to protect the 14th century walls and interior from rain damage. Local fundraising and grants from both English Heritage and Oxford Historic Churches Trust made the project possible. Additionally there were other refurbishments such as safer access to the tower and stabilisation of the wall paintings. It was completed in autumn 2010.

The Church of the Holy Rood features in 'Oxfordshire's Best Churches', Richard Wheeler, Fircone Books 2013.

See also:

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol5/pp309-317>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodeaton>

The Church of the Holy Rood, Woodeaton

We welcome you to our church and our village.

The church is first historically referenced in 1228. It is a Grade I listed building, largely constructed in the 13th and 14th centuries. It is thought that there had been two church buildings on this site previously; one timber-framed Anglo-Saxon church and then a smaller stone-built church. The main fabric of the nave was probably built between 1250 and 1275 whilst the tower was inserted during the 14th century, supported by the west nave wall and two inserted octagonal piers. The chancel arch is 14th century. The South porch was added in the 17th century.

Holy Rood contains a number of unusual attributes: medieval wall paintings, a minstrels' gallery, a manorial pew and doom inscriptions.