

Visit to Stow minster, 22nd of July

On Thursday the 22nd of July the Architecture group visited Stow Minster near Sturton by Stow. The church of St Mary's in Stow is an exceptionally large church for such a small village. Stow has always been a rural place but in the 10th century it was the centre of a large Estate belonging to The Saxon Bishops of Dorchester on Thames. It was here that Bishop Aelfnoth built this church in about 975 A.D. as it was the head Minster or mother church for the Lincolnshire part of this large diocese.

The original Church built by Bishop Aelfnorth was largely destroyed by fire in the 11th century and was rebuilt by Bishop Eadnoth (1034-1050) and later expanded by Leofric, Earl Of Mercia and his well-known wife Lady Godiva. The church lost its place as the mother church when the see was moved to the new cathedral in Lincoln in 1073.

Local guide David, Church warden for the church, described to us the outer structure of the church and its various phases of construction. Although the church was started in 975 there have been several additions and changes in the 11th 12th and 15th centuries as well as significant alterations in the Victorian period. In particular he pointed out the three different window Styles visible in the south transept dating from Saxon, Norman and mediaeval periods. The smaller windows were designed to be high up and quite small to prevent people breaking into the church.

Although the present church dates from around 975 it is possible that a Saxon church stood nearby even before the present building. According to legend St Etheldreda (632-679) rested at a place called Stow while travelling from Northumberland to her refuge at Ely. It is speculated that St Ethelreda may have stopped at this location although there exists another stow in southern Lincolnshire.

Our Guide described the interior features of the church including the mediaeval font dating from the 13th century. It was remarked that none of the carved decorations on the font were specifically Christian symbols some perhaps were Pagan.

The Easton transept has been significantly remodelled during the Victorian period including a replacement of the large windows at the Eastern end. The roof structure has also been completely rebuilt in the Victorian period with a new vaulted roof structure.

The North transept reveals a well-preserved Saxon arch doorway with typically large single stones. In Aelfnoth's church this doorway would have led to an aisle or chapel but now to the vestry.

We thanked our local guide David for providing us with a most enlightening description of the history and features of this magnificent example of a late Saxon church, a most interesting visit and window into the past.

Geoff Sherman