

## St Margaret's Church - UPDATE

During repairs to the church roof following the recent lead thefts a plaque recording earlier repairs to the roof was discovered. The wording reads

"THIS ROOFE WAS REPAYRED AT THE CHARGE OF PAVL WENTWORTH ESQ IN THE YEARE 1680"



St Margaret's Church [has its own website](#), which contains everything you may need to know about the church services, how to make arrangements for baptisms, weddings and funerals, and all other aspects of support provided by the church in our community.

The purpose of the remainder of this page is to give a short background to the history of the church in Wolston.

This unusual and interesting Norman church has a cruciform shape, rare for Warwickshire, and some features which, though not unique, are uncommon and make it well worth a visit.



There has been a priest in Wolston since Domesday. Soon after that, in the late C 11th, the church and some land were granted to the abbey of St. Pierre-sur-Dives in Normandy. The revenues went to the upkeep of the small monastic cell belonging to the Normandy abbey and to keep a priest in Wolston. When the Wigstons acquired the Priory after the Dissolution, the advowson to St. Margaret's remained with the Priory owners. Later, when the two estates were held by the same owners, the advowson passed to the lords of Wolston manor. The parish was originally much larger and included the chapelry of Stretton-on-Dunsmore and Princethorpe, which in 1696 became a separate parish.

The church's Norman door was moved to its present position when the church was enlarged in the C14th. Its weathered condition means there was probably never a porch to protect it. Round this favoured south door lie the grandest tombs of the most influential families, including some Grade II listed table-tombs for the Herne and Winterton families.

The font is of the 14th century, on a later base, and so dates from the enlarging of the church. The faces on the sides are all different and may have portrayed local people. Paley in 1884 thought that if the brown wash was removed, painting and gilding would be revealed. The marks of the lock still show on the rim, where it would have been secured to prevent local witches and 'cunning' men and women from stealing the holy water.

The cruciform layout of the church is unusual in this area. The original Norman church almost certainly consisted of a low tower, a short chancel and nave and a south transept. All that now remains of the original C11th building is the base of the tower. The chancel was extended in the C13th and in the C14th Alice de Breton rebuilt and enlarged the church.

On the south-west pillar is a Sheela-na-Gig, a carving of a woman with splayed legs and sexual parts exposed. Possibly a pagan fertility symbol, possibly a warning against lust or for warding off evil, there is a well-known, better-preserved example in the Norman church of Kilpeck in Herefordshire. This example is unusual in having another carving on the left-hand capital, possibly a crucifixion scene, and next to the Sheela-na-Gig another figure, probably male, grasping her arm, while a mask above the woman's head representing sin and damnation seems to be eating her. Both the carvings are badly eroded, more probably from when the tower collapsed than from deliberate damage.

The low church tower was raised in the C17th to create a belfry but there must have been some sort of earlier belfry, as the earliest of the ring of eight bells dates from 1350.

The pulpit is modern but from its predecessor the puritan ministers, Edward Lorde and Hugh Clarke, preached their anti-episcopal messages around the time of the 'Martin Marprelate' tracts. Clarke had many difficulties with the Bishop of Lichfield who wanted his own nominee to be instituted to Wolston. He pursued a vendetta against Clarke, first suspending, then excommunicating him and finally charging him with treason but the godly Clarke was acquitted and continued to serve at Wolston till his death in 1634.

The next year, 1635, the pulpit was the centre of a pew dispute between the two most influential men in Wolston. Sir Peter Wentworth had a large pew in front of the pillar opposite the pulpit, with a good view of both the preacher and the altar. He owned the Priory, while George Warner, the owner of Wolston Manor, but inferior in status to Sir Peter, was stuck in a pew on the south aisle corner, with both pulpit and altar hidden from view. This dispute was re-played ten years later in the civil war when the parliamentarian, Wentworth, snapped up the confiscated estate of the royalist Warner cheaply resulting in a suit over title at the Restoration.

Along the south wall of the south transept you can see a piscina, a single sedile and two tombs, all constructed as one piece in the early C14th. The man is possibly a knight but the effigy is very worn. The other is of a woman. The historian, William Dugdale, described the man as being bare-headed with a long gown, and the woman as having a wimple, an ample gown and a long cloak. They possibly represent the founders of a chantry in this chapel. In the north-east corner is a rather odd table-tomb, with a canopy, probably late C15th or early C16th, half-built into a wall. There was an inscription but it has gone. If anyone can explain the unusual shape of this tomb the Church Office would love to know!

The chancel was lengthened, possibly in the C13th. There is a fine piscina and triple sedilia on the south wall but the most unusual feature is the painted ceiling. The roof was heavily repaired in 1680 but the painting probably dates from 1760, following the rebuilding of the upper part of the tower, which fell in the previous year, destroying much of the roof. The tower was rebuilt with levies raised by the local church-warden, John Lickorish, and using stone from the nearby village of Bubbenhall. It still shows signs of the rebuilding, with rougher masonry below and smooth masonry in the upper section. A row of tombs to the Lickorish family stand outside the church by the path near the east end. When the chancel ceiling was replaced it was painted in glorious colours, the western part directly onto the boards, the eastern third painted onto canvas in brilliant blues and golds, now a bit faded, with metal stars and the crossed keys of St. Peter.



The stained glass in the church is all C19th or later. The window and the south-west end of the chancel is by Butler, who worked with Charles Earner Kernpe for a while before opening his own workshop.

The altar is 18th century but the altar rails are C17th and come from Rowington.

The Children's Chapel in the north transept has a wonderful window dedicated to two members of the Beech family, who fought in the Great War. The stained glass commemorates three saints associated with dragons: in the centre is St. Margaret of Antioch, the church's patron saint, with St. George on one side and St. Michael on the other. Margaret was said to have fought her way out of the dragon that had eaten her, using the cross which she always carried.

With thanks to the [Brandon, Bretford and Wolston History Group](#).