

WORFIELD CHURCH VISITORS GUIDE

Welcome to Worfield Church. As you walked up the church path you may have been struck by the sheer size of the church and its steeple. Twenty years ago the steeple was crumbling and the church bells were deemed too dangerous to ring. A huge sum of money had to be found to do the work and for a while it felt as though there was always some fundraising scheme going on. Thankfully the money was raised and the bells can be heard every Sunday.

Worfield Church stands as you see it today because of the efforts of parishioners over the generations to maintain and improve it as a living church, a place of worship and a focal point for the parish. We hope you enjoy your journey of discovery of the treasures of this lovely old church.

The guide will take you in a clockwise direction around the Church starting at the main door. Look left and on the wall facing you are the old bell clappers. There are six bells in the tower and most of them were cast in the seventeenth century. The sixth bell bears the inscription "I to the church the living call and to the grave doth summon all." In earlier times when the bell was tolled at a funeral it was rung for each year of a person's life. The belltower itself was largely rebuilt in the fifteenth century though the lower parts of its north wall may be fourteenth century.

A plan of the kneelings in the church rests at the top of the ramp and indicates the former position of an organ gallery and a smaller gallery, for the psalm singers, on the North side of the church.

Walk on until you come to the stairs to the new gallery. At the bottom of the stairs is a hole in the stonework. This was an outside wall in the thirteenth century and may be part of the first stone-built church when a nave and tower were built. The hole is a leper squint so that the lepers who were kept outside the church could hear and see the services. We can therefore deduce that the church must have been much smaller than it is now in order for them to do this.

Climb the stairs if you can but if not then move out into the central aisle so that you can look up at the artefacts on the wall.

When you reach the top of the stairs you will notice a fine pair of wooden doors on the wall to your right. These date from the twelfth century and could be the original church doors. There are only five of these "picture doors" left in England. Not only are they beautiful but they are historically important because this is the earliest use of ironwork for decoration, iron replacing skin for decoration.

To the right of this is a Bromley Davenport hatchment of 1834. Hatchments were a funeral representation of the arms of the deceased and were hung outside the deceased's home for 6-12 months before being moved to the church.

Looking down from the gallery you get an idea of how the church has grown.

- From the earliest stone building roughly where you are standing, the church was extended eastwards in the late thirteenth century. Look straight ahead and you will see at the right hand side of the screen a pillar partly encased by stonework dating from this period.
- Two outer sections were added in the fourteenth century.
- The fifteenth century saw extensive work on the tower and the addition of a spire.
- In 1861/2 the Victorians carried out a range of alterations including an extension to the altar area, removal of box pews and replacement of all windows except the east window of the south aisle
- In 2004 a gallery and meeting room complex known as the Madeley Room, completes the alterations

Walking across the back of the church you cannot fail to notice the impressive two memorials to the members of the Bromley family. The memorials are carved from alabaster and they were both decorated. Look on the pillar of Edward Bromley's tomb (the one with a canopy) and you will find early graffiti - some dating back to 1691. The Bromley family can be traced back to the thirteenth century in Worfield and their link with the present day continues by marriage into the Davenport family.

Just beyond the Bromley memorials near to the altar in this north side chapel (the Lady Chapel) is a very old stone set in the floor. This commemorates John de Worfield and dates from the seventeenth century. Sadly the stone is very badly worn and cracked.

If you walk across to the centre aisle you will see the pulpit which was part of the Victorian improvements. Walk behind the pulpit and you will see a wooden cross brought back from the First World War. It is a poignant reminder of the lives sacrificed, a list of which is on the opposite wall of the aisle – such a long list for such a small population.

Just below the list of men lost in WW1 is a plaque to the memory of Sir Oliver Leese, of the Eighth Army, who replaced Montgomery as head of the North Africa campaign in the Second World War. It is because of this connection that the Eighth Army British Legion flag from the Wolverhampton branch, hangs near the altar. Sir Oliver Leese retired to Worfield after the war and became a noted horticulturist specialising in the growing of cacti.

Turn now towards the altar and in front of you is a screen. This was thought to be Victorian and nearly swept away in another round of improvements but thankfully was left. In fact, the lower part of the screen is medieval. Look closely and you will see the join. Was the medieval base part of an early communion rail and has it been moved? If not, is this point more or less the eastern extent of the church in medieval times? The top half of the screen was around the Bromley tombs when they were in their original position in the Lady Chapel.

Walking up towards the altar there are many plaques commemorating illustrious members of the parish. There are several to various members of the Davenport family, indicating the important role that family has had in the life of the church. The Whitehills' plaque contains a delightful inscription.

When you reach the east end of the church, look left and you will see a plaque commemorating Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The carved screen behind the altar was given in memory of the Jubilee. To the right of this is a carved wooden chest (age unknown.)

As you walk back out of the altar area turn left when you reach the wooden screen. Part of the window above the altar table in this south chapel (St Nicholas' Chapel) dates from the fourteenth century. Look for the depiction of the crucifixion. To the right is a king (said to be Richard 11) and to the left a bishop (said to be Bishop Scrope of Lichfield). Until early in the twentieth century Worfield was part of the Lichfield diocese. Near the door is a relatively modern font given by Thomas Smythe of Hilton.

When you leave the church turn left and you will see a medieval sarcophagus or stone coffin. Two questions and no answers, I am afraid. Obviously someone important was buried here, but who? The stone is not local so where did it come from?

As you wander through the churchyard you will see some familiar names, some of which you have already met in church and many of families you will recognise as still living in the area. It is interesting to follow the church wall round the back of the church to see the two vaults which lie behind the wall.

Walking down the path to the gate you will notice a lovely old building to the right. Not owned by the church it was once the Worfield Grammar School.

We hope that you have enjoyed your visit and will come back and share our worship.