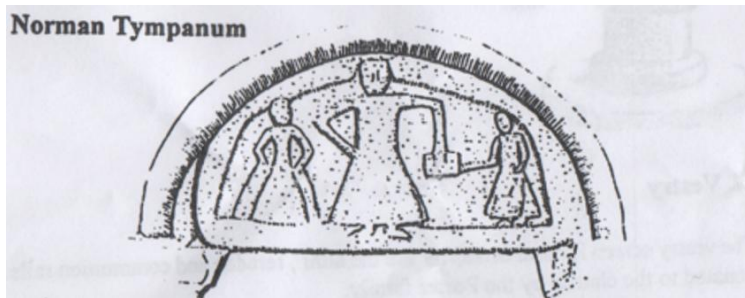


DANBY WISKE CHURCH HISTORY



Norman Tympanum



We are indebted to the artist A M Alderson for providing the illustrations and additional information for this booklet

BRIEF HISTORY

Danby Wiske dates back to Saxon Times, when it was known as Denebi. Although there are no records there was almost certainly a Saxon church on this site.

The name Wiske is derived from the Old English word 'wisca', which translates into "watery meadow". It refers to a low-lying, grassy area, often adjacent to a river. Thus, "Danby Wiske" means "village of the Danes by the water". It was part of the Viking Wapentake administrative area called Allertonshire.

The church is unusual in that the dedication is unknown; the records were apparently destroyed when the Scots regularly raided the North in the 12th Century.

The Battle of the Standard in August 1138 was the first major engagement between the English and Scots since the Norman Conquest. It's occurred somewhere in the locality of its memorial one mile west of Danby Wiske. The Scots were defeated by an English Army lead by Archbishop Thurston of York who united the army for the first time under one Standard (a central mast carrying the consecrated banners of the Minsters of York, Beverley and Ripon)., It is probable that there were skirmishes close to Danby Wiske, and that soldiers fleeing the battle's rout would have passed through the area.

The original early Norman church (probably just a nave and Chancel) was incorporated into the later Norman/Early English building we see today; and at the end of the 12th Century a north aisle with an arcade of three arches was built, and the south nave rebuilt.

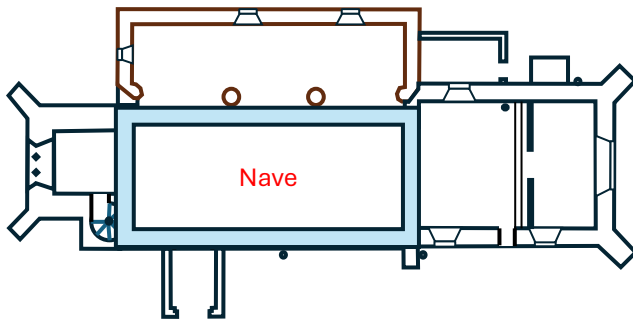
After Bannockburn in 1318 the Scots struck south towards York. Many churches and villages were destroyed; and Danby Wiske church suffered considerable damage.

Lazenby, ½ a mile north of the church, was a thriving medieval village before being abandoned. The earthwork remains of this deserted 14th Century settlement (surrounding Lazenby Hall) feature visible rectangular house platforms, sunken roads, enclosures and fishponds. This ancient monument is visible from the road just after passing over the river Wiske when heading east from Danby Wiske.

In the 14th Century the Church was extensively rebuilt using ashlar sandstone and rubble; and roofed with Welsh and Westmorland slate. The north aisle and Chancel were rebuilt; the Nave roof was raised, and Clerestory walls (with high level windows) were added. The tower was built in the 15th Century.

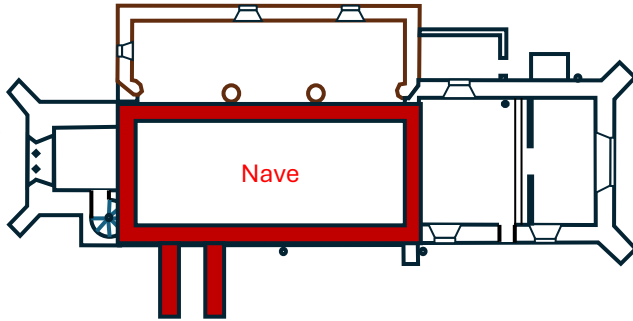
Originally the village of Danby Wiske was south of the church and the adjacent Old Rectory (opposite where the 'Coast to Coast' path meets Mounstrall Lane). The village was moved to its current location north of the church in 1718 due to an outbreak of the plague.

Most local churches were initially timber buildings. The trend to rebuild in stone is datable to the period 1050-1150.



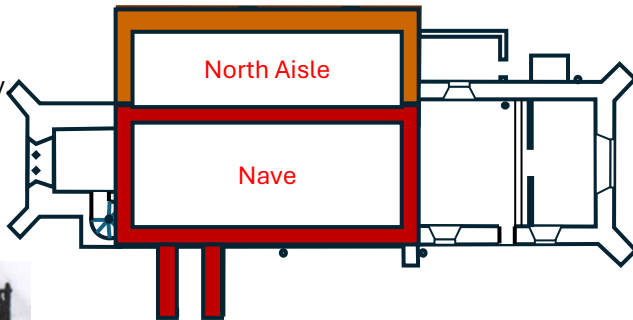
12th Century or earlier

Likely to have been built on the original footprint. Stone was also used at the base of the porch walls



13th Century

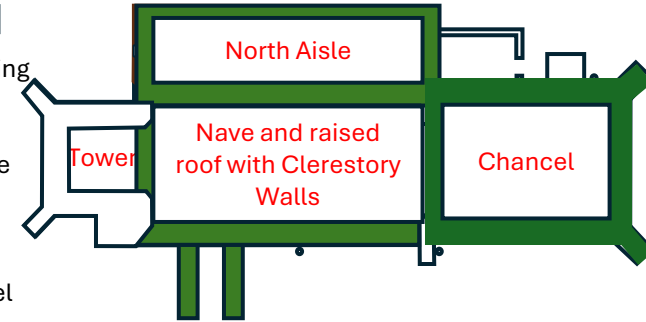
Late 12th/ early 13th century North aisle added
Detail of chancel unknown
Lancet window inserted at the east end of the nave wall.



DANBY WISKE CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

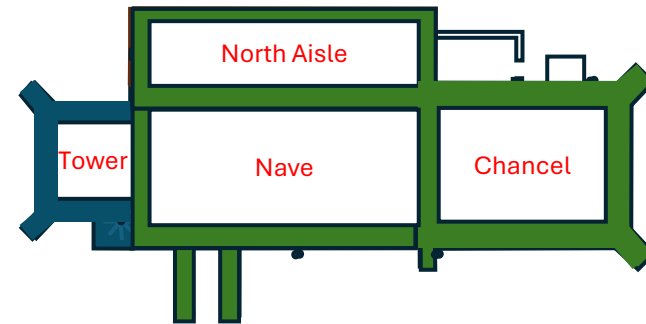
14th Century

There was considerable building work in the 14th Century, including:
-Rebuilding the north aisle, the chancel and much of the external walls.
-A raised Nave roof and Clerestory walls with high level windows.



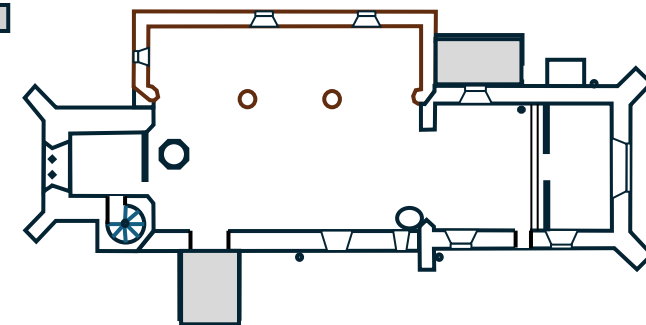
15th Century

The tower was added



Later

More recent additions include:
-An 18th Century brick porch with rendered walls, incorporating older stone raised verges and shaped kneelers.
-A Boiler house



The church is a Grade One listed building

There was considerable building work that is attributed to the 14th Century. This included:
 -Rebuilding the north aisle, the chancel and much of the external walls.
 -and the base of the porch.
 - A raised Nave roof and Clerestory walls with high level windows was added to let in more light (as stained glass alone made churches very dark).

After Bannockburn in 1318 the Scots struck south towards York. This church suffered considerable damage at this time. There was the despoliation of Muriel's memorial and burn marks that are still visible.

12 th Century or earlier
13 th Century
14 th Century
15 th Century
Later



Stone 'Effigy of the Lady' c1290 (a tomb cover and memorial to Muriel first wife of Sir Brian FitzAllan, a commander in one of Edward I's campaigns against the Scots) was previously used as a lintel above the door into the tower

The aisle is on the north side of the nave, where it was customary to have no burials.

Stalls with re-set Jacobian panels with Arabesque carvings and inscribed 1640

The tower was a 15th Century addition.

Norman Font. Original church structure likely to be just a nave and apsidal chancel

From 1558 Roman Catholics were legally excluded from full citizenship, but recusancy survived longer in N.Yorkshire. The woodwork behind the altar is attributed to the vague conservatism of this time

East window is not original, it is a restoration

Part of south nave walls is rubble work from the Norman Period
 It has an arcade of three arches and is transitional in style between Norman and Early English

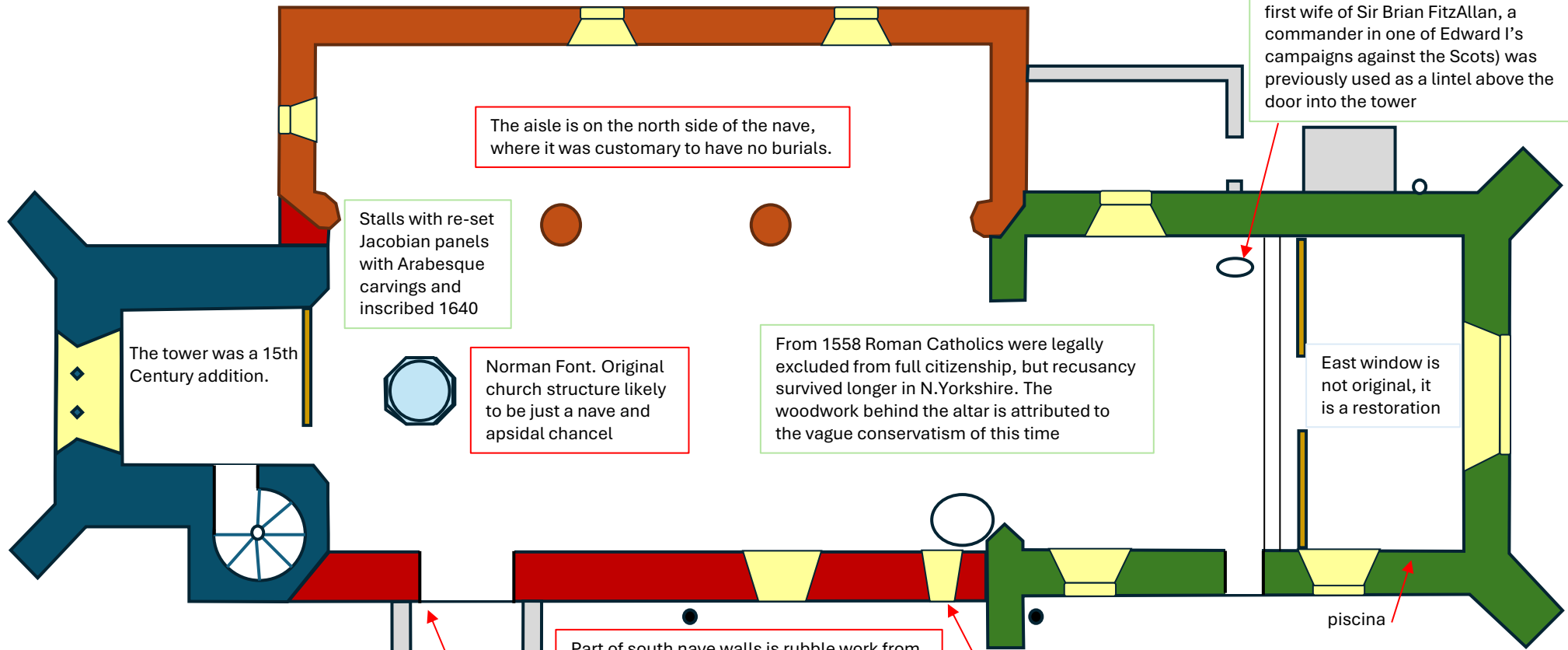
1050-1150 Norman arch, oak door and tympanum (representing the judgment stone)

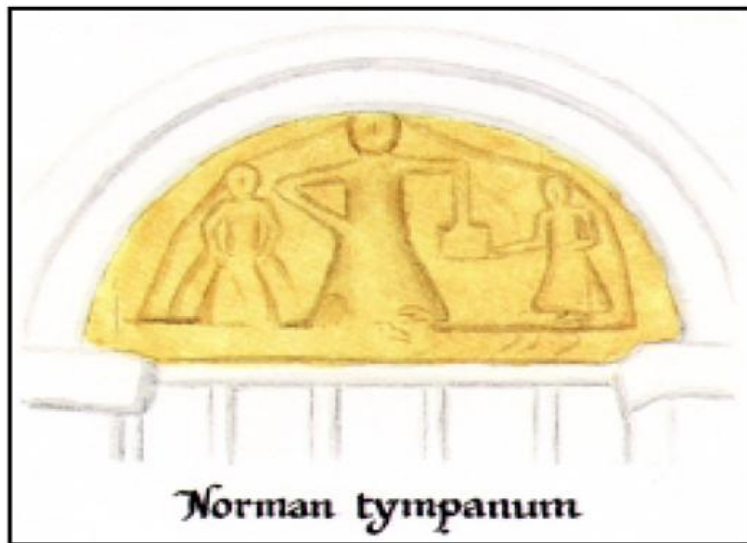
lancet window

13th century reforms stressed a separate space for the priest and the celebration of mass at a high altar. The chancel was probably reshaped then. The piscina (stone basin) and lancet window (tall narrow with pointed arch) date from this time.

The oak altar, reredos and communion rails and vestry screen were made by Robert "Mouseman" Thompson of Kilburn

piscina





1. Norman Tympanum

The decorative stone over a church doorway, bounded by a lintel and arch is known as a Tympanum. The Danby Wiske Tympanum is over the south door (made between 1090 & 1120). It is the only Norman Tympanum still in situ in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

The stone carving is supposed to represent the weighing of the soul. The central figure is the Angel of Judgement holding with one hand a soul which has been brought in to receive judgement. In the other hand he holds a balance: in one scale are the good deeds of the deceased and in the other scale his evil deeds. The latter scale is the heavier and the prisoner is just about to be sentenced when the Angel of Mercy slips his finger under the scale heavily laden with sins and causes the other scale to descend. Thus, the prisoner is acquitted.

Another train of thought suggests the figures are symbolic depicting the parable of "The wise and foolish virgins". The central figure representing the bridegroom (Christ). That on the left, the foolish virgins and that on the right a wise virgin. It was probably intended to give the message "WATCH THEN, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW THE DAY OR THE HOUR" (Matthew 24:13)

The Tympaneum is there to remind the congregation as they enter that the day of judgement is inevitable; and unless the Angel of Mercy (Jesus Christ) saves them, the evil deeds of life will weigh so heavily against them as to ensure just condemnation.



2. Norman Font

The font basin is early Norman, the bowl being unusually large and fine. This simple; but massive stone font is one of the very few in this area to survive from the early times.

Such symbols of the Roman Church were a popular target for destruction by extremists during both the Reformation and Cromwell's Protectorate. This font must have been carefully hidden away until the threat from iconoclasts had abated.

3. VESTRY

The vestry screen is 'mouseman' from Kilburn, as are the altar, reredos (the screen behind the altar) and communion rails. All of these were donated to the church by the Porter family.

4. JACOBEBAN PANELS

The stalls in the west end of the church are made of oak and include some reset Jacobean Panels. These have interesting Arabesque carvings on them.



The names of church-warden's John Fall and Christopher Kirkeby are inscribed dated 1640. A similar design may be seen at St Mary's, Leake and St Lambert's, Burneston dated 1627.

5. NORMAN AND EARLY ENGLISH ARCADE

The north aisle was built at around the end of the 14th century in a traditional style between Norman and Early English and has an arcade of three arches.

A raised Nave roof and Clerestory walls with high level windows were added in the 14th century to let in more light (as stained glass alone made churches very dark).

6. THE CLERESTORIES

A clerestory is the upper part of the nave, containing a series of windows, clear of the roofs of the aisles, admitting light to the central parts of the church. One was built over the north arcade in the 14th Century and another on top of the south wall to correspond with it.

7. COATS OF ARMS

The arms of Geoffrey le Scrope of Masham and his son Henry, who claimed the Lordship of Danby Wiske are in the top of the window behind the pulpit in the chancel. The addition of a three-point label distinguishes these from the senior branch of Bolton.



The Scrope arms are well known because of a dispute in the Court of chivalry between Scrope and Grosvenor. It began in 1385 when Sir Richard Scrope of Bolton found Robert Grosvenor of Cheshire wearing his coat of arms during a military expedition to Scotland. The matter was finally resolved in favour of Scrope in 1390. Many notable people gave evidence and a Canon of Aske testified that the Scrope arms were in glass windows and wall paintings in over forty churches. Danby Wiske was probably one of these.

The arms of Warren, Earl of Surrey, are at the top of the chancel window inside the rails to the south. The reason for these arms being here is not known, although there is the possibility of a link with Matilda.



Display of the Royal Coat of Arms of 1683 became compulsory after the restoration of Charles II. The Arms on the chancel arch in Danby Wiske church were donated by Sir William Blakiston who for a while held Danby Wiske Manor. He was married to Mary Calvert, the daughter of Cecil Calvert to whom the charter of Maryland was granted by King Charles I in 1632.



Charles II Royal Arms

The Blakistone family continued to be linked to the Danby Wiske church and in 1698 Gabriel Blakistone was the Rector.

8. TOWER

The tall Perpendicular 15th Century tower with good ashlaring* and an embattled parapet, has three cast bells and is entered at the south-east from the vestry. There is no general access to the tower as the stair threads are very narrow, steep and uneven.

The low doorway used to have the life-size Effigy of Matilda (see section 9). It was used for many years as the lintel over the door leading to the belfry. It is said that the bell-ringers got tired of bumping their heads and chipped away part of the stone. A church faculty approval dated 14th February 1939 authorised its removal to its present position in the chancel.

Unusually, all three bells were recast by John Taylor of Loughborough in 1940. The bell frame was also cast at this time. The clapper weights are 4% of the bell.

1st Bell: 3 ¼ cwt + 25lb (176kg), 26” diameter. Note D# sixth octave. Treble bell.
Inscribed- “Sono Omnibus Placere Ikay Ithorne Ward 1760”

2nd Bell: 4 cwt + 8lb (207kg), 28” diameter. Note C# sixth octave.
Inscribed “God save his church 1663”

3rd Bell : 5 ½ cwt +5lb (279kg), 31” diameter. Note B, fifth octave. Tenor bell.
No inscription.

The Bells are rung full circle by a band of ringers (Campanologists) in the ringing chamber on the floor below the bells. A small cord goes down from there to the ground floor to enable start/stops signals to be given to ringers from the vestry. The treble bell can also be chimed from the vestry.



*Ashlaring- the short upright quartering fixed in garrets between rafters and the floor, to cut off the angles formed by the rafters (ref OED)

9. MATILDA'S EFFIGY

The life-size Effigy of Matilda, widow of Brian Fitz Alan of Bedale c. 1340 was once the cover of her tomb, and has small shields sculptured on her dress.



Brian Fitz Alan 1243-1306 was Lord of Bedale and eventually Custodian of the Realm of Scotland. Effigies of himself and his first wife Muriel are in St Gregory's Church, Bedale. Matilda was his second wife and opinions vary as to her ancestry. One source suggests that she was a daughter of John Balliol, King of Scotland, whose wife was Isabella, daughter of John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey.



10. CHANCEL

The East Window is not the original, but a restoration. The picture of Jesus Christ is above that of a pelican symbolizing Jesus Christ's sacrifice. It shows how a mother pelican wounds her own breast to feed her dying chicks with her blood, reviving them. This symbolizes Christ's crucifixion and the Eucharist (Holy Communion).



PISCINA- The stone basin near the altar. It was used in pre-Reformation era (roughly 14th–early 16th century) for draining water used in the Mass.



An AUMBRY is typically a secure, recessed cupboard or safe built into the wall of a church, located near the altar. Here just the recess has survived and unusually it is in the south wall (generally, they are in the north chancel wall). They were used to store sacred vessels, holy oils (chrismatory), books, and, in some Anglican traditions, the consecrated Blessed Sacrament.

11. CARVED CROSS

The stone displayed in the north east of the chancel was discovered embedded in the north wall in 1938. It appears to be a fragment of a 8th/9th century carved standing cross, which the Northumbrians raised to commemorate an event or mark a place where people gathered to hear monks sent on preaching tours- perhaps at Godspell (Gospel) Hill which is about ½ mile south east of the church. This is the era after St. Cuthbert's death; and may have been associated with the Lindisfarne monks who looked after his body. As a relic of these times, being incorporated (hidden?) at the time of construction, or later during rebuilding, probably had significance. Was the church once known as St Cuthberts?



Near to the cross are pieces of burnt stone which are believed to be from the destruction at the church when the Scots invaded after Bannockburn in 1318.



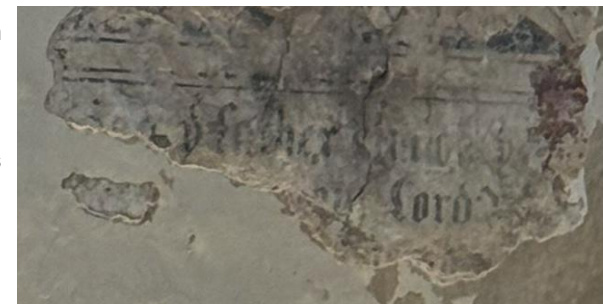
12. WALL ART

Redecorating, in 2026, has exposed fragments of wall art likely to date from the 14th Century when the church underwent extensive rebuilding. Originally the whole of the south nave wall; and possibly the window reveals as well, would have been painted. There are traces along several parts of the wall; but the clearest example is a floral pattern next to the lancet window at the east end of the nave.



The English Church Reformation, which started in 1517, rejected Catholic practices and replaced wall art with biblical text to refocus worship.

At the south end of the wall Black painted lettering in Gothic minuscule font has been discovered. This is typical of the post reformation text which was used to cover medieval paintings. This part of the wall is mainly constructed from Norman rubble and is very fragile. Restoration and preservation work is ongoing.



KNEELERS

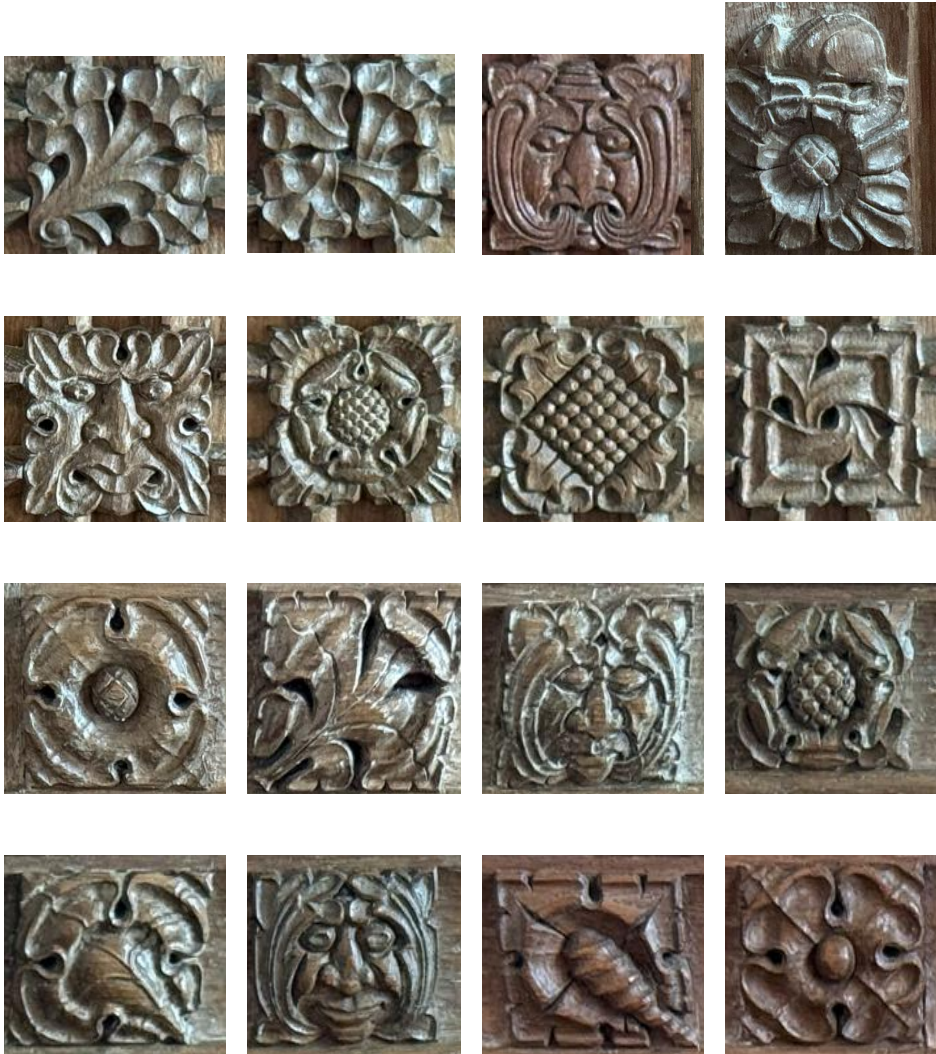
A kneeler is a cushion (also called a tuffet, hassock, genuflexorium, or genuflectorium) used for resting in a kneeling position during Christian prayer, meditation and worship. Kneeling expresses submission, penance, and humility- all integral parts of worship,

There are over a hundred cushions in the church, each hand made. On the rear are dedications and the maker's name.



CARVINGS

The oak altar, reredos and communion rails and vestry screen were made by Robert "Mouseman" Thompson of Kilburn. They contain many fine carvings. Perhaps surprisingly they include the 'green man' which is a sculptural motif found in many cultures and often represents rebirth and the cycle of growth.



ST CUTHBERT'S CORTEGE AND DANBY WISKE

Allertonshire east of the River Wiske, included the parish of Lazenby, and was granted to St Cuthbert in the 7th century (to use as a staging post on his journeys between York and Lindisfarne) and it remained as an outlier of the Bishopric of Durham after the Norman Conquest. St Cuthbert died on the Farne Islands in 687; and his body was looked after by the monks at Lindisfarne. But in June 793AD the Vikings attacked the monastery and although most of the monks survived, they lived in constant fear of further attacks.

In 875, the monks of Lindisfarne fled, alarmed by the threat of a Danish invasion. They took with them the body of Saint Cuthbert; and in 883 settled at Chester-le-Street. Due to renewed Danish threats the monks moved to Ripon in 995. After a few months they headed north again until they found refuge at Durham. There they built a new stone church, the predecessor of the Cathedral.

That final journey was recreated 1000 years later, in 1995, when a replica of St Cuthbert's coffin was carried by a cortege from Ripon to Durham. They followed the ancient pathways; and passed Danby Wiske church on their journey north.

THE COAST TO COAST PATH (C2C)

Danby Wiske is one of the churches and religious sites seen by the thousands who walk the C2C, following Wainwright's route. Sites to the west include:

- St Bee's Priory: 12th-century
- St Leonard's Church, Cleator: 12th-century
- St Stephen's Church, Kirkby Stephen: "the Cathedral of the Dales"
- Methodist Chapel, Keld
- Marrick Priory (near Reeth)
- Marske Church, Swaledale
- Easby Abbey (near Richmond)
- St Mary the Virgin, Richmond
- St Mary's Church, Bolton-on-Swale

- And to the east:

- All Saints Church, Ingleby Arncliffe
- St Peter's Church, Osmotherley
- St Hedda's Church, Egton Bridge
- Littlebeck Methodist Church
- St Stephen's Church, Robin Hood's Bay
- Whitby Abbey: Whilst not on the C2C it is close to Robin Hood's Bay and the 7th-century ruins are visible near the end of the journey