

A Guide to Avening Church

The Church of the Holy Cross, Avening is one of the most interesting and best preserved of the ancient Churches in the Cotswolds. It has great attraction for architectural historians and is much admired by visitors from all parts. Dedicated to the Holy Rood, or Cross, in 1080, it has had additions and alterations made in the following centuries in successive architectural styles, as can be seen from the plan and models in the church.

The Main Doorway

As you enter by the main porch, notice the handsome Norman doorway with characteristic dog-tooth moulding similar to the contemporary arches in Gloucester Cathedral.

This arch is supported by two twisted pillars of unusual Norman design, but similar to those in Durham Cathedral. A handsome perpendicular doorway has been skillfully blended with this Norman work.

To this early English porch a parvise, or upper priest's chamber was added in the 15th century. It was approached by an outside stairway, now removed, and another doorway (now blocked) probably led to the Rood loft. The floor was recently removed to expose the Norman arch.



The Nave

As you enter you stand in the original Norman Church consisting of nave, tower, and half the present chancel.

On the north side is a small Norman aisle, the roof of which once gave access from an outside staircase to the Rood loft, and later to a gallery running along the north and west of the nave but removed in 1902.

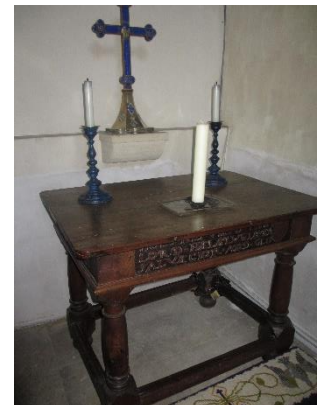
The timber roof dates from the 14th century. Evidence of the existence of a Rood can be seen on the east wall of the nave.

The figures were removed at the Reformation, and the loft in 1829.

On the east wall of the nave are to be seen two small chevron arches. One, on the left; is incomplete. But here once stood two parish altars.

On the right an oak Commonwealth table, formerly used in the chancel, bears the date 1657.

The handsome gilt cross is a memorial to a pious parishioner, a gilt-framed account of whom stands in the piscina.



Tower

The massive tower is an example of pure Norman work except for the top storey, which was added late in the 14th century.

The two high splayed windows are interesting and were once outer windows.

There is a similar one blocked up in the north of the choir.

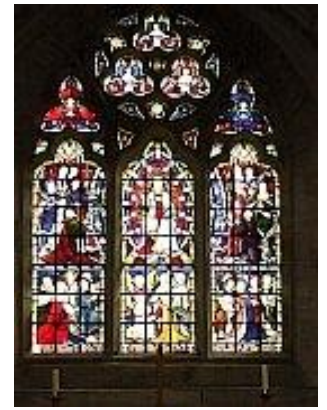
There are six bells in the tower.

In the north-west pier of the tower a doorway is seen which gave access to an Anchorite cell of which little is known



Windows

The original windows have everywhere been replaced by later stonework between the 13th and 16th centuries. All the glass is modern and the somewhat uncommon subjects and treatment deserve attention.



Chancel

The chief feature to be admired there is the fine groined stone roof, the vaulting ribs of which, in the eastern portion, were skillfully made to harmonise with the earlier vault when the Norman part of the choir was extended eastward.

The ribs carry two fine carved bosses.

Several past Rectors lie buried beneath the floor and numerous vaults exist under the Church.

The pulpit, which originally stood in Shrewsbury Abbey, was given by Mr Pollock.



Transepts

The north and south walls of the tower were pierced when the two Early English transepts were added to the Church.

That in the north is known as the Bridges' aisle, after Henry Bridges, whose effigy is seen on his monument.

He was an interesting character, having been a pirate, smuggler and highwayman, but on being pardoned by James I, he settled down in Avening.

The south transept, or Driver's aisle, so called from the elaborate monuments, has been recently restored and now houses two "arts and crafts" style pieces of furniture, made by George Buchanan, an Avening craftsman; they were designed, one to house altar frontals, and the other to house church stores and archives.



Chapel

In the outside angle, between the north aisle and the choir, there once stood a Lady Chapel. The door opening into it from the choir is now blocked up. The eastern foundations and the piscina are still to be seen outside. Pieces of molten metal from the site are probably evidence of its destruction by fire. It is thought that the extension of the chancel was made to replace this chapel.



Fonts

The present font is modern and replaced an earlier one now placed in the north transept; but, built into the wall by the main door, are two fragments considered to be part of the original Norman font.

The six figures may represent the Apostles, as these are commonly used for decoration at this time.

The smaller fragment was thought by Fosbury to be Adam and Eve, often associated with original sin and baptism.



Millennium Cross

In the year preceding the Millennium year a committee was formed in Avening to determine how best to mark this very special year. Members of many village groups joined the committee which was chaired by Rev. Celia Carter, and together the plans were laid.

A local Celebration with an open air medieval play telling the Matilda story was planned and memorial mugs for the children were ordered.

The pubs helped us to celebrate in style with a hog roast and many people dressed in mediaeval costume for a grand night together, as always accompanied by good music from the village.

It was also decided that a good way to leave the mark of the year 2000 in the village for the next thousand years was to commission a new Cross to stand opposite the gate in the churchyard.

The idea was to provide a focus outside the church for use particularly on Remembrance Sunday but also for those members of our community who might feel uncomfortable in the church but who whilst going through difficult times might need a quiet place to draw aside and reflect.

The sculptor Sebastian Brooke, then working from his workshop at Miserden was commissioned to create and erect the Cross.

The theme of the carving around the Cross is Avening Past and Present. So there are scenes of sheep shearing mixed with modern things such as the playing field, the post office and the school.

The WI paid for a new seat which was sited near to the cross and provides just such a respite.

More recently the village children helped to plant bulbs and pansies below the Cross which come out at Easter and draw attention to the Living Cross of Christ.

The Millennium Cross now stands at the entrance to the churchyard in celebration of all that Christ stands for in our lives.

