



*Before vandalism and repair.*



# ST PETER'S CHURCH

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WOLFHAMCOTE  
WARWICKSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

*Registered Charity No. 258612*

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO  
ST PETER'S CHURCH,  
WOLFHAMCOTE, WARWICKSHIRE

*Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.*

*Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.*

*Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).*

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## ST PETER'S CHURCH

WOLFHAMCOTE, WARWICKSHIRE

by L.W. HERNE (*additions by A.R. PIKE*)

WOLFHAMCOTE CHURCH is situated in Warwickshire near the River Leam which forms the boundary between the county and Northamptonshire. The church stands on its own between the embankments of the abandoned Great Central Railway and the London and North Western Railway's Weedon–Leamington branch and the Oxford Canal. To the west of the church, the original course of the canal can be traced, before it was straightened in 1834. Between the church and canal lies the site of the village, abandoned when the land was converted to sheep farming about 1500. The site is approached by a private road from Braunston on the A45 and by a public road from the A425 through Flecknoe village. Bridge 97 on the Oxford Canal is nearby.

Wolfhamcote derives its name from the Saxon 'Ufelme's manor', its first recorded overlord. According to Domesday Book (1086) the manor was part of the estate of Turchil of Arden, one of the few major Saxon landowners to survive the Norman Conquest. It had a priest and about 25 householders, a population of about 100 in all. Turchil's estates passed by marriage to the Verdons and then to the Ferrers family. Wolfhamcote later came into the hands of the Langleys. In 1248 Geoffrey Langley appointed a priest to the living and in 1256 Walter acquired the manorial rights subject to attendance at the court leet in Flecknoe. The lordship passed by marriage from the Langleys to William de Peyto in 1334. This family retained the manor for nearly three centuries until 1614 when it was sold to their tenant Robert Clerke.

The changing fortunes of the settlement were revealed by an archaeological investigation of the village site, organised by the Deserted Mediaeval Village Research Group in 1955. This showed occupation since the Saxon period but mostly in the 12th and 13th centuries. Various mediaeval finds such as pottery, spindle whorls, knives and buttons were found. The subsequent population decline was probably due to reduced employment caused by the deterioration of the climate in the 14th and 15th centuries, when the waterlogged soil became increasingly difficult to work. It was probably during this period that the village street was built up with a new cambered layer of clay with ditches either side which helped to drain away the rainfall. A Government Inquiry in 1517 disclosed two specific acts of depopulation, describing the village as *in ruinam positam* (in complete ruin): in 1501 John Ferrers had enclosed 30 acres for a sheepfold and six tenants had to leave the village, and in 1510 Richard Quayney had taken on 40 acres and another six tenants left.

Already by the 15th century Flecknoe, Nethercote and Sawbridge, hamlets in Wolfhamcote parish, had their own chapels because of their distance from the parish church. By 1641 the corn market had revived and arable cultivation was resumed. The ridge and furrow pattern of the old open field system of farming is still clearly visible in several fields near the church. But people did not return to live in Wolfhamcote, although the vicarage was rebuilt. In the 18th century Dugdale's editor wrote 'There are two farms and a cottage' (presumably the former vicarage which stood west of the church, the present cottage and the Hall, built in the 17th century). Today the earthworks of the former village are clearly visible in the field north of the church and consist of the remains of streets, enclosures and rectangular house sites. The remains of a fishpond are visible close to the stream near its confluence with the Leam. Nearby is the hexagonal outline of a moat, which may be the site of Wolfhamcote's mediaeval manor house (although there is another probable

moated site just west of the Hall). In the field immediately west of the churchyard can be seen the rectangular outline of the former vicarage, replaced by a new one built in 1873 some distance to the south-west of the Hall. The tithe barn, now somewhat dilapidated, still stands next to the old vicarage site. Just across the River Leam, in Northamptonshire, is the site of another deserted village; Braunstonbury. Despite their proximity to each other the two settlements seem to have led fairly separate existences.

The right of presentation to the church, the advowson, was separated from the manor when Sir John Peyto sold it to Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick in 1365. He in turn passed it on to the Canons of St Mary's, Warwick in 1385. They found the vicarage in a dilapidated state and the income depleted by the decline of agriculture and built a new vicarage with stables and tithe barn, west of the church.

When the monasteries were closed by Henry VIII and their properties confiscated, the church at Wolfhamcote came into the hands of the Crown. It was granted to Christopher Hatton in 1585 and then to Thomas Spenser in 1596. The Raynsfords held it in the 17th and 18th centuries until Richard Tibbits bought it in 1794. Another member of the family, Charles Tibbits of Barton Seagrave, Northants, acquired the manor in 1826, thus reuniting the church and the manor.

## THE CHURCH

Domesday Book mentions a priest at Wolfhamcote but only the font has survived from the church at that time. The earliest stonework in the present building appears to be in the lower part of the tower. It dates from the 13th century when the Langley family were patrons of the living. The nave was completed in the 14th century by one of their successors; the 15th century clerestory must have been the work of the Canons of St



View from south-east showing the Hood Mausoleum

Mary's. Warwick. They were also responsible for installing the great bell inscribed 'IN MULTIS ANNIS RESONET CAMPANA JOHANNIS' meaning; 'May John's bell for many year's resound. It was cast in London c.1450 by John Sturdy and marked with his sign, – a cross made up of four fleurs-de-lis. The smaller bell made by Pack and Chapman of Whitechapel is of much later date, 1780.

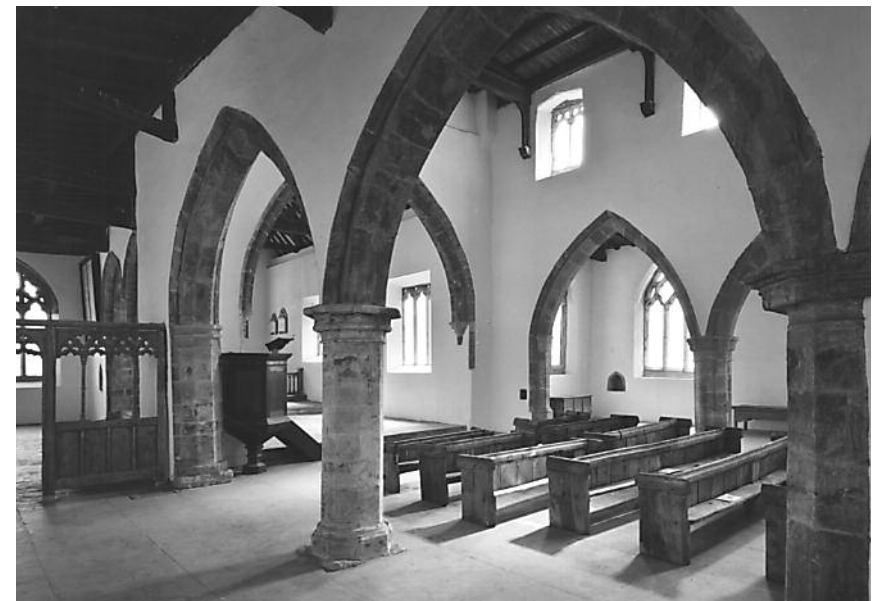
The north-western tower has tall pointed windows in the belfry stage and smaller ones above the level of the stepped buttresses. It was reconstructed in the late 17th century and the date 1690 and the initials of the vicar and churchwardens are still visible on the battlements when the light is right. The windows with two mullions and no tracery in the north aisle wall date from this period. On the south side the chancel wall has been refaced; it has two square mullioned windows, one of the 15th-century date, the smaller one a 19th-century copy. Between them is a doorway giving entrance to the church when the main doors are closed. The windows of the south aisle have retained their attractive reticulated tracery from the 14th century and the traceried east window of the north

chapel is of similar date. The porch has a stone slab, possibly part of a child's coffin, set into its western wall outside.

The last major alteration to the church occurred in 1848. Lady Hood wished to erect a family vault for the remains of her husband Samuel Tibbits Hood. The chancel was enlarged and a new east window in Victorian Gothic style was built above the level of the mausoleum. This involved the unfortunate loss of all the old heraldic glass depicting the arms of the noble families connected with Wolfhamcote.

## INTERIOR

The interior of the church is spacious and well-lighted by windows now 'glazed' in translucent plastic because of recurrent vandalism. The south aisle dates from the 14th century but the piscina is 13th century work and could be a survival from the earlier church. The Norman font was also preserved and it has been cemented over to hold it together. The aisles are separated from the nave by arcades of chamfered arches resting upon octagonal pillars with rounded capitals. Pevsner states in *The Buildings of*



*Warwickshire* that the northern arches are earlier, dating from the late 13th century. The tower occupies the last bay of the north aisle, so that the most westerly arch is cut short. He suggests that an internal rebuilding of the tower was intended but never carried out. The ringing chamber is entered through a very tall pointed archway. The old wheel of the larger bell was fixed to the wall when a modern replacement was installed.

The north chapel is entered through the 14th-century wooden screen. The upper part of the screen is divided by slender pillars with intersecting round arches and the spaces are filled in with trefoiled tracery. The north chapel contains memorials to the Clerke and Tibbits families and evangelical texts painted upon canvas. There is a piscina with an aumbry for communion vessels still painted in the terracotta shade of the 1903 redecoration; the stone altar has been added recently.

The chancel arch is tall and on either side is a carved head. The wooden stalls were destroyed when the church was vandalised after the closure in 1950, but the 17th-century carved sanctuary rails and communion table were successfully repaired. In the sanctuary there is a small brass tablet, dated 1687, in memory of the wife of the Reverend Thomas Benyon, vicar of the parish. The tombstones in the floor of the choir mark the graves of members of the Raynsford family. On the walls are tablets in memory of members of the Tibbits family, Charles who bought the manor in 1826 and Richard's granddaughter, Mary, who became Lady Hood and a generous benefactor of the church.

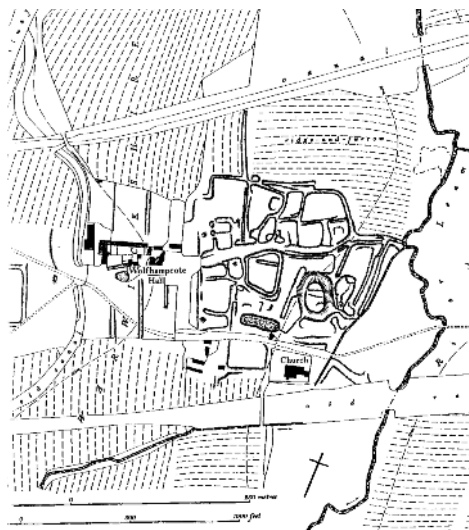
The pulpit is hexagonal with an inlaid design in paler wood. It has a hinged door and a reading desk. It is reputed to have been made in 1790 for another church and later brought to Wolfhamcote by Lady Hood to replace a roughly constructed pulpit made from one of the benches. Beside the pulpit are three monuments set in the floor in memory of



*The chancel today.*

Michael Clerke, George Tibbits and the Reverend Thomas Geldart, vicar of Wolfhamcote. Above the chancel arch is the royal coat of arms of Queen Anne, skilfully restored by Mrs Eve Baker.

The church contains some remarkable woodwork apart from the 14th century screen already mentioned. Ten of the 14th- or 15th-century carpentered oak benches have survived. One has a carved end with two partially completed rosettes at the head. The box pews which once filled the aisles were wrecked by vandals but the ancient parish chest and the bier fortunately escaped destruction. The roofs contain timber of several periods; the aisles have some mediaeval beams but most belong, like those above the nave, to the period of rebuilding at the end of the 17th century. The chancel roof was reconstructed in 1848 and includes material from the 15th century onwards.



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Wolfhamcote Church has been described as the church that refused to die. The village that supported it has long since disappeared.

Other settlements in the parish now have their own chapels and Wolfhamcote is only rarely used for worship. However, local people with national support have more than once helped to save the church from decay and destruction. The Friends of Wolfhamcote Church, together

with the Friends of Friendless Churches, began a programme of repairs. The Churches Conservation Trust assumed responsibility for the church in 1972 and has carried out further repairs, initially under the supervision of Mr L. F. Cave and subsequently by Mr Peter McFarlane. The church is loyally served by a wide circle of friends who organise an annual concert or similar event around St Peter's Day, 29 June.

L. W. Herne

(revised edition with additions by A. R. Pike)

## SOURCES

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