



About the church of St Mary

The tiny church of St. Mary, Lead, stands alone in a field some way from the main road. Its history goes back to the eleventh century but there may have been a church on the site earlier than this. The name Lead is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word hleodu or 'wooded shelter'.

The Tyas family were recorded in the Domesday Book as holding the manor of Lead, the farmhouse nearby probably indicates the site of the original manor house. Some members of the Tyas family are buried within the walls of the church and some of the commemorative stones can be seen today in the floor.

The area surrounding the church was the site of the notorious Battle of Towton, fought on Palm Sunday, 1461 and reportedly one of the bloodiest battles ever to be fought on English soil. One of the pivotal events of the Wars of the Roses, some chroniclers claimed that as many as 28,000 men were killed.

The church today is a simple structure of one room but there is evidence that a chancel originally stood at the east end of the present building. The date of its demolition is not known. The interior of the surviving church however, is evocative and a real treasure awaits those who have made the trek across the field and walk through the door.

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Church of St Mary

Lead, North Yorkshire



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The historic Church of St Mary

10 things to see before you leave...

- 1 Inscriptions on the back of the **south door** record some interesting episodes in the church's history. An early inscription declares that the church was restored in 1784. The door itself probably dates from this time.
- 2 The **font** is Norman, has a round bowl and a stem of intriguing design. The stonework is much eroded.
- 3 Several biblical **texts** survive on the walls. They appear to have been rewritten and some feint original lettering can still be seen.
- 4 The **benches** in the church are simple and may date to the late medieval period with some later alterations.
- 5 The three-decker **pulpit** dates to the eighteenth century, the multiple levels being typical of the period. The three storeys were intended for the parish clerk, the reader and the minister respectively.
- 6 In the floor immediately in front of the altar are some **ledger stones** with heraldry and written inscriptions. Dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, they incorporate the heraldic shield of the Tyas family, who held the manor and were buried within the walls of the church. One of the stones has the shape of a chalice incised into the surface suggesting the grave of a local medieval priest.
- 7 **Stone altar and cross slab.** Stone altars were banished from English churches in the 16th century Reformation. The law required their replacement with a wooden communion table – the Protestant tradition. This altar retains consecration crosses on the surface and a bracelet cross slab decorates the base. This slab may originally have formed a small coffin lid, possibly made for an infant.
- 8 A small piece of **stained glass** in the east window records this generous gift of the Richard III Society in 1982.
- 9 The **windows** in the church all incorporate tracery typical of the 14th century and in the style known today as 'Decorated Gothic'.

- 10 **Roof timbers.** Some of the timbers are more modern but the tie-beams – those across the width of the church – are probably of the 18th century.

