

Guide to St Lawrence Church, Willington

This Church is a holy place, as well as a beautiful old building. It is a place of faith where people come to worship God and draw closer to Him. The Church here is alive, loved and used regularly, by people who are committed to following the way of Christ.

There has been a Church here since the twelfth century, if not before, but much of the building you see today dates from a rebuilding in late Gothic style in the sixteenth century by Sir John Gostwick, the lord of the manor, and restoration by the Duke of Bedford in the nineteenth century. Generations of Willington inhabitants have worshipped in a church on this site. Some have their names carved or written on the walls, tombs or floors. These include all those who died in the two world wars, members of the Gostwick family, and some vicars, including the Reverend Augustus Orlebar, who was vicar here for 54 years. Many are known only unto God.



1. Porch

Traditionally porches were used for some business meetings and for the start of some services. There are carvings of the Tudor rose here and elsewhere in the church. You will also find a list of service times, notices on the walls and a place to leave prayers.



2. Bell tower and kitchen

The tower holds six bells, the earliest of which dates back to 1591. The five old bells were recast by Mears and Stainbank in 1898, and a sixth bell was then added. The belfry is not open to the public. The new kitchen was installed in 2008 and was funded by local fundraising and grants.



The grid iron symbols on the doors symbolise St Lawrence, to whom the church is dedicated. He was roasted to death for his faith on a grid iron in AD 258.



3. Nave

This is the main part of the church. The pews were restored in the nineteenth century but there is some Tudor carving on the end panels of some. Memorials to several former vicars can be seen here and in the rest of the Church. Notice also the wooden Tudor roof.



4. Font

The font is Victorian. Children are baptized here to symbolize that they are entering the Christian family. In many churches the font is in the nave, but this one was moved to its present position in 2008.



5. North aisle, aumbry and entrance to former rood loft

The chapel in the north aisle is a place for quiet prayer. The little stone shelf or niche on the right is an aumbry for holding a jug of holy water. The small doorway leads to a narrow spiral staircase which used to lead out on to a rood loft between the nave and the chancel. On the wall



of the north aisle is a board listing Willington vicars and patrons. The list goes back to 1229 when Newnham Priory was patron and Nicholas de Wileton became the first resident vicar. Near this is the lid of a thirteenth century coffin.



6. Pulpit and hour glass shelf

Opposite the Victorian oak pulpit is a small shelf where there used to be an hour-glass to remind the vicar when it was time to finish the sermon!



7. Chancel, choir stalls, and Gurney stove

This part of the church has some elaborate Tudor wood carvings in the roof and a Tudor doorway in the south wall. The choir stalls were added in the nineteenth century. The Gurney stove was originally coal fired, but is no longer used for heating. It was restored and moved to this position in 2008.



8. Organ

The organ was installed by Michael Young of Dunmow in 2012 as a replacement for the previous organ. It was made by Brindley & Foster in 1900 and brought here from Bushey United Reformed Church with removal and installation costs met through grants and local fundraising.



9. Gostwick chapel

This chapel contains tombs and monuments of the Gostwick family, who were lords of the manor here for about 200 years from 1529. Notice the medieval floor tiles. A copy of the funeral helm of Sir John Gostwick, the first Gostwick lord of the manor, is on display near to his tomb. The original is in the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. Sir John Gostwick also built a new manor

house and the nearby dovecote and stables, now cared for by the National Trust.



10. The sanctuary, east window, piscina and carvings

The altar stands on a nineteenth-century tiled Minton pavement copied from original medieval tiles, which may have come from Warden Abbey. The tiling extends into the chancel. The large fifteenth century east window, may, along with some other materials, have come from a nearby monastery following its dissolution. The east window has stained glass from 1884 provided by Heaton, Butler and Bayne and depicting the Ascension. The carvings either side of the window, the stone altar slab behind the present altar and the piscina in the south wall appear to pre-date Sir John Gostwick's rebuilding.