

Forum Historical Environment Report: July 2022

Thanks to member Ruth Stables' suggestion, 13 of us were lucky enough to enjoy a visit to St Mary's Church, Wycliffe this month (apologies to the two members who did not find the church in time). Here Churchwarden Keith Miller welcomed us with unexpected refreshments after aiding with the quite tricky parking situation in the narrow village streets. For 14 years Keith has held his position, all the while assimilating vast amounts of knowledge which he imparted to us in a clear and well-presented way.



The present Church dates from the 13th century, although written evidence suggests it is on the site of an earlier building. While the stained glass windows at each end, and the beautiful ceiling, date from the twentieth century, many much earlier features remain: upon entering the building at the west end a 7th century cross is displayed; an 11th century font, probably the very one where John Wycliffe was christened, remains next to the main altar (itself a rare stone survival from the 13th century); the tomb of an early rector who died in 1456 remains in the chancel; the side windows, partly destroyed in the reformation, retain some 14th and 15th century stained glass. By contrast several of the choir stalls and pews retain their mouse carvings which date them to 1949, the work of Robert Thompson (the 'Mouse Man').



Keith took us through the life of Wycliffe's most celebrated native, the reformer (and 'heretic' according to 14th century church leaders and his own family) John Wycliffe. 'Not an easy man', as Keith admitted, Wycliffe spoke out about what he saw as the corruption of the Church (the use of religion to sell pardons, preaching in Latin and the acceptance of transubstantiation, for example) and was so reviled by the establishment that after his death his body was dug up and burnt, with his ashes hurled into the river. History has been kinder to John, although Keith lamented a recent loss of knowledge in Britain concerning the man who set in motion the translation of the Bible into English. There was some discussion as to whether John actually took part in the translation and, if so, how much is his work.



Before concluding with a walk round the Church during which he answered many further questions, Keith spoke with great passion about his disappointment that so many of the fine Churches of England remain, but unloved and little-used. The group agreed with Keith's sentiments, but applauded (literally as well as metaphorically) his refusal to let such a fate befall Wycliffe, which he sees remains open to the public on a daily basis. Anyone who has not yet visited the Church may do so in the assurance that they will be made welcome and find much to enjoy and contemplate.

There will be no meeting in August but we resume at 10.00 on Thursday September 8th with a village walk round Eggleston, to be led by Nicky Grace. Thank you Nicky and full details will follow to Group Members. If you wish to be included among these, please contact Tim Meacham on simontimothymeacham@gmail.com or by phone on 07847 182554.

Tim Meacham. 10/2/22.