

## St Denys' Church Aswarby

### Key historical facts for education groups

The Church is a Grade 1 Listed Building. Its oldest parts are the south doorway and the spacious font, which are all that remain from the Norman church of Henry I's reign (1100–1135). An earlier church stood here in the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042–1066).

**The spacious Norman Font** has an unusual feature. Its four corner shafts end in leafy finials, which seem to clasp its bowl. Rectors have baptised the infants of Aswarby at the same font since the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

**George Bass (1771–c.1803)**, Naval Surgeon and Explorer who explored 600 miles of the south-east coast of Australia and circumnavigated Tasmania, proving that it was an island, was probably born at Grange Farm (since rebuilt) where his father farmed, at the north end of Aswarby. Bass who the Bass Straits in Australia are named after was christened in Aswarby Church font on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1771. In 1740 his father, also named George, a prosperous farmer and twice churchwarden of Aswarby, had also been christened in it. His "Table Tomb" lies outside the south wall. There is a memorial to George Bass by the doorway.

**The interesting box pews** date back to 1847. Churches were cold in winter, and these pews made conditions more comfortable for the congregation, keeping out draughts and dogs.

The high **Manorial Pew** faces the Pulpit, which has a finely carved relief of the Whichcote and Banks arms. The motto of the distinguished Whichcote family is "Juste et Droit" (Just and Right).



Beneath this Manorial Pew is the Chantry Chapel, with its piscina (drain) near the vanished altar at which prayers were offered for the souls of the former Lords of the Manor, the Kymes, Umfravilles and Tailbois.

At the West end of the North Aisle there is a raised platform protected by a C17th iron railing, beneath which is the burial vault of many of the Whichcote family.



Nearby and above the Tower arch there are two diamond-shaped painted hatchments with another in the North aisle, about five feet square, with the arms of a departed member of the Whichcote family. The two on the tower commemorate the death of Sir Thomas and his wife, Diana, daughter of Edmund Turnor. The background, black or black-and-white, shows whether the deceased was married, widowed or widower, bachelor or spinster. This hatchment would be placed above the principal doorway of Aswarby Hall for 12 months, as a notice to visitors of the recent death, and later laid up in the church, a custom which preceded the modern practice of inserting an obituary in *The Times*.



**The most beautiful monument is that of Lady Whichcote, née Marian Beckett who died in 1849.** This lovely figure is seated, reading a book inscribed with the Lord's Prayer. By her side there is an oil lamp with the coil of a snake, which is the symbol of eternity. This wall monument was the work of Thomas Campbell. Marian died tragically after her carriage overturned on the bend of the north drive by the canal. The horse bolted when the groom closed the gate at the north lodge with a click, frightening it. It galloped towards the hall with no one in control.

**There are three church bells within the steeple.** One of them dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century with an inscription, "Saint Denys pray for us". A second dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It was made in Stamford, Lincolnshire and is inscribed "God save the King, Thomas Norris made me 1668". The third bell is dated between 1589 and 1620, inscribed "Jesus be our hope". All these inscriptions are in Latin. At funerals, nine "Tailors" (Tellers) tolled for the death of a man, and six were the knell for a woman.

**There are a range of materials available in the Church which provide more information about the history of St Denys' Church, George Bass and the history of Aswarby village.**