



About St John's

St John's is a typical Fenland church, lying beside the long straight B1166 road, close to where the counties of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk meet. In Fen country horses and cattle were driven along roads or tracks called 'droves'; Parson Drove was one of these. Originally the village was a chapelry of Leverington, known as Leverington-Parson Drove, but became a parish in its own right following the Leverington Rectory Act of 1870. This created the two parishes of Parson Drove and Southea with Murrow.

The small community was one of the last villages in England where woad – an organic blue dye used in police uniforms – was produced commercially. The diarist Samuel Pepys had relations living here, and recorded a visit on 17 September 1663 'to Parson Drove, a heathen place, where I found my Uncle and Aunt Perkins and their daughter in a sad, poor cottage, like a barn or stable, peeling of damp'.

The church of St John the Baptist, known as 'the old church', consists of a clerestoried nave, north and south aisles, north and south porches and a west tower. It is built mainly of rubble and brick but the tower is partly faced with Barnack stone. The earliest part of the present fabric is the 13th-century north doorway. The most notable change over the centuries occurred when the original chancel was taken down after floods in 1613.

The Emmanuel church built for Southea with Murrow in 1873 became the parish church for the whole of Parson Drove. St John the Baptist was declared redundant and transferred to the care of The Churches Conservation Trust in 1974.

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Access

Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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Church of
St John
the Baptist

Parson Drove, Cambridgeshire



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1 The church is entered through the 15th-century **south porch**.

2 The octagonal **font** dates from the 15th century and the bowl is adorned with eight different traceried designs.

3 The **tower** has a fine vaulted ceiling which is decorated with bosses carved with foliage, two human faces and a Tudor Rose. The easternmost corners of the ceiling are supported by corbels also depicting two human faces. At the centre is a circular opening for hoisting the **bells**; much of the framework supporting the five bells (which were cast in Downham Market in 1878) is original 15th-century work.

4 The impressive nave **roof** is supported by its original cambered tie beams, dating from the 15th century, and the notches into which the purlins of the original roof would have fitted are still visible today.



5 There are 18th- and 19th-century **ledger slabs** in the floor of the aisles and naves, one of which tells of Abraham Ulyat. He was the churchwarden here and in 1825 he had the church interior 'fresh painted and ornamented'. He died in 1840 at the age of 75. He lost his first wife, Ann aged 21, in 1792, his second wife, Lydia aged 27, in 1799 and his third wife Susannah aged 59, in 1839.

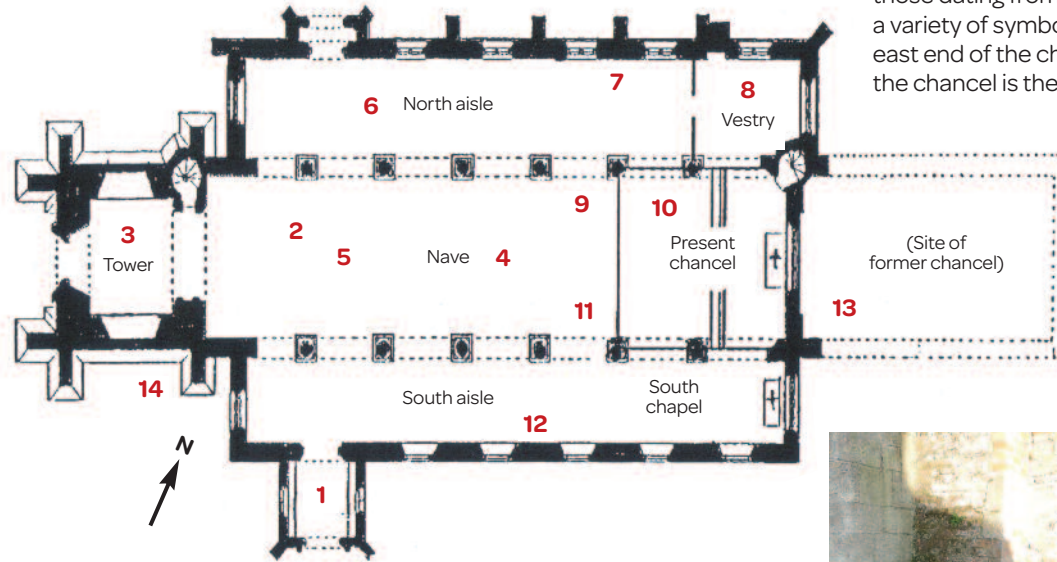
6 The **north aisle roof** has a 17th- or 18th-century timber framework, whilst the south aisle roof was entirely renewed in the early 19th century.

7 The **windows** in the easternmost section of the north aisle contain 15th-century **stained glass** showing the emblems of the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Sacrament and the Priory of Ely.



8 The easternmost section of the aisle now forms a vestry with its own **Victorian fireplace**.

9 John Peck, who has a **wall plaque** on the north side of the nave, was a farmer and grazier, who 'devoted 40 years of his life to the improvement of drainage, productive powers, roads, peace and happiness of his adopted place of residence and of a wide surrounding district'. This memorial was erected by a few of his friends 'in testimony of his talents and services and of their sincere respect'. He died aged 65, in 1851 and an **obelisk** near the entrance to the churchyard marks the place where he is buried. His extensive diaries record his work and are in the care of Wisbech Museum.

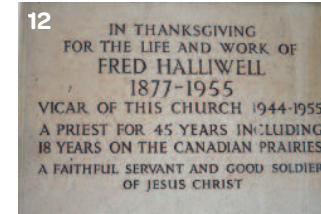


10 The **benches** in the nave and the **chancel stalls** date from the 19th century.

11 The **pulpit** of 1637 is adorned with beautiful 17th-century Stuart woodcarving. The base is of a later date and the pulpit itself was probably part of a two- or three-decked arrangement.



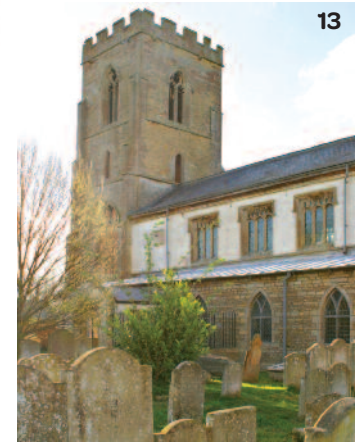
12 The Revd Fred Halliwell was Vicar from 1944 until his death in 1955 and a **wall plaque** commemorating his life is situated in the south aisle. His eleven-year incumbency seems short in comparison with that of the Revd Frederic Jackson who first arrived as curate



in charge in 1844, became the first Vicar when Parson Drove attained parish status in 1870 and remained until 1904 – a period of 60 years. It is said that during 43 of these years he never missed a service in the church.

13 The churchyard contains many fine **headstones** and those dating from the 18th century are adorned with a variety of symbols which signify mortality. At the east end of the churchyard fixed to the east wall of the chancel is the **headstone** of the Revd Henry

Pujolas who was an ejected Huguenot and ministered here for nearly 60 years, dying aged 90 in 1750. His headstone displays fine carvings of cherubs, trumpets, crowns, hourglass and skulls.



14 Set in the top of the exterior stone plinth which runs around the base of the church, two unusual **recumbent figures** may be seen; one on the west side facing on the south-east buttress and a similar figure on the corresponding position on the north side.