

CVG Virtual Visits 2020: Visit 12, Hallaton, Allextan and Belton (Leics / Rutland)

After Withcote we go to **Hallaton**, described by Simon Jenkins as “the prettiest (village) in Leicestershire and knows it.” It has extensive earthworks related to its former castle, a couple of old pubs where we should find some ambiance and lunch; it also has a grand Jenkins two starred church, a museum, a village green surrounded by old stone cottages and a very distinctive village cross. The museum seems to be open (in normal times) only at weekends but could be worth a trip in itself and the village is certainly worth walking around.

The church of St Michael is “one of the most imposing of Leicestershire village churches” with work from several centuries though the Decorated period predominates. Of special note is the ornate north aisle with a north east corner turret. Jenkins notes that “the window tracery is like a cluster of balloons kept aloft only by the ingenuity of the masons”. The church also has a Norman tympanum, a Norman arcade and behind the altar there is an archway leading to a spiral staircase set in the wall. Where did it go to and why? Various theories have been advanced but it may be related to the fact that in medieval times there appear to have been two rectors who operated separately within the one church.



Hallaton St Michael



Village Green and its Butter Cross

More details and photos at <https://www.leicestershirechurches.co.uk/hallaton-church-st-michael-all-angels/> and notes on the church’s architecture at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1360624>

From Hallaton it’s a short hop to the tiny hamlet of **Allextan** and its church which is under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. From the outside it looks like any English village church that has had an extensive Victorian restoration, but inside there’s a surprise with its vigorously ornamented two bay late Norman north arcade which Pevsner says was “rediscovered in 1862 and found unsafe” then carefully rebuilt “and is splendid to look at still.” So despite Allextan being a tiny village of a few houses it must have originally had a north aisle which was pulled down, perhaps after plague had reduced its population, and the arcade must have been incorporated in the nave wall. Then in 1862 it was rediscovered and the church enlarged with north and south aisles added. Yet it was still a tiny village so why the

need for any expansion? But it is good to see the arcade liberated from its erstwhile hiding place.

More information and photos at <https://www.leicestershirechurches.co.uk/allexton-church-st-peter/> and details on its architecture at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1061661>



Allextion St Peter



Belton St Peter

Across the A47 and within walking distance from Allextion is another prosperous looking picture book village, **Belton in Rutland**. Last time I visited its church it coincided with the Ladies weekly coffee morning so we got a free coffee and lots of gossip, regrettably mostly about a recent spate of burglaries in the village. Still the coffee was very welcome. As usual the church has work from all periods and was restored in the C19. The oldest part of the church is the south arcade, built around 1190, and there is more 12th-century stonework in the lowest part of the nave walls. Local tradition says that the church has been ravaged by fire on two occasions and there are discoloured stone pillars within to prove the rumours. Other things to note include a peculiar piscina incorporating a monstrous head and notable grotesques and gargoyles, particularly on the tower.

More information and photos at <https://www.leicestershirechurches.co.uk/belton-in-rutland-church-st-peters/> and notes on the architecture at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1214903>

If we have time there is another medieval church very close by at **Wardley**, another small hamlet. The church is also in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.



Wardley St Botolph