

Small Pilgrim Places Journal 28:

St Andrew's, Winston, Darlington



St Andrew's Church, Winston

In County Durham the village of Winston, between Bishop Auckland to the northeast and Barnard Castle to the southwest, derives its name from the Anglo-Saxon "wines tun" or Wine's settlement. Standing on a mound high above the River Tees on the edge of the village is St Andrew's Church, a Grade 1 listed building approached along a quiet lane, bordered by houses, that ends at the churchyard gates.

I was lucky to have a look inside: the building was due to be shut the following day for some repairs to the roof. This was the last day before the church would be closed, having opened once a week for two hours once COVID restrictions allowed. But despite negotiating these, and evident preparations for the repair work, I managed to get a good impression of the church, which normally holds services every Sunday.

Originating in the 13th century, and incorporating some stones used in Roman buildings, it was extensively restored in Victorian times, when a new, steeply-pitched roof of Welsh slate was installed. A sandstone tower with an octagonal belfry and ball finial was added, together with a south porch and north vestry. Some medieval stonework remains on the north wall. On the south wall is a blocked priest's door.

One of the striking features inside is the east window, where three lancets take up nearly the whole wall above the altar and reredos and filter light through beautiful patterned stained glass. Another point of interest is the font, possibly dating from the 14th century, bearing a circular bowl with a relief of a couple of fierce fighting dragons locking jaws, rather incongruously set amongst some flower and tracery motifs. Interpretation boards near the entrance tell the story of the church and the locality, reaching back to Roman times.

Surrounding the church is a graveyard from where the ground slopes steeply down to a field and then, across the River Tees, to Yorkshire beyond. I sat for a drink on a conveniently placed millennium bench just below



Above - The East window
Below - Fighting dragon on the font



the church wall, then followed a path winding down the hill and then along the riverbank towards a road bridge.

Here, so I had been told, in 1988 a Spitfire had flown under the 34m arch, skimming just above the water at 250mph. It seemed an unlikely story, but sure enough, as I crossed the 18th century bridge (which when built boasted the widest span in Europe), there on the far parapet was a small, well-fondled metal model of the plane overlooking the river below. I retraced my steps along the bank to a point where I could gauge the width of the sandstone arch. To fly a plane with a wingspan of over 11m through that arch at almost ground level was certainly a dare-devil feat!

Ali Green



Inspecting the metal figure of the Spitfire