

The Church of St. Nicholas, Leeds

There has been a Christian church at Leeds, Kent since Saxon times at least and part of the Saxon church remains in the present Grade I listed building as the North aisle arcade. The tower is a massive Norman structure and the nave is believed to date not much later, though with alterations in the 13th Century. The chancel and North and South chapels date from the 15th century, with alterations in the 16th or early 17th Century. A key internal feature is the wooden rood screen extending the whole width of the church; dating from the fifteenth century it was very well restored in the 19th century.

Another important asset is to be found in the belfry – the oak bell frame is one of the earliest surviving ten-bell frames in the country. The oldest bell was cast in 1617 by Joseph Hatch of Broomfield. The church was the base of the famous 18th band of ringers led by James Barham, whose grave is in the churchyard.

Records show that from shortly after the founding of Leeds Priory in 1119 until 1536, shortly before its dissolution, Leeds church was under the control of the Priory – the richest of the Kent houses of the Augustinians.

The churchyard contains an ancient yew which probably dates to a pre-Christian era, indicating that the site, in common with other churchyards on the Greensand ridge, has an exceptionally long religious affiliation. The church is within the parish of Leeds & Broomfield, and in a joint benefice with the parishes of Hollingbourne and Hucking under a Priest-in-Charge.

The church is normally open from 9.00am until 4.30pm daily and visitors are always welcome.