

Church of St. Lawrence Lackford



**A Brief History
By Sylvia Myles**

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The Main Structure

In 1086 the Domesday Book records a church at Lackford with 20 acres of glebe land. The 'footprint' of this, or a slightly later Norman church is still there. This Norman church comprised a chancel, 13 1/2 feet square, a central tower, 15 feet square and a nave nearly 19 feet wide by 40 feet long. The nave extended as far west as the present one, and is shown by blocked lancet windows either side of the south door. The higher arch of the south door is also Norman. Churches at Pakenham and Ousden are local examples with surviving central Norman towers.

In the 1200's the chancel was rebuilt, in the Early English style, with internal arcading, a piscina (used for washing the Communion vessels, and which had a drain) and 13th century sedilia (seats for the officiating clergy during parts of the Mass) on the south, and the lancet window, door and tomb recess on the north. There are carved heads over the lancet windows and in total 18 of these beautiful carvings throughout the church. During the same century, a chapel was added at the east end of the original north aisle on the north side of the tower. This explains why the arch is different in its details, including a stiff leaf foliage capitol, from the other three arches. There is a squint through the wall, incorporating a piscina at the chapel end - evidence of an altar within the chapel. The purpose of the squint was to allow the altar servant in the north aisle to see what the priest was doing at the main altar, and co-ordinate his movements as the mass progressed.



In the 1300's, a major reconstruction took place. The central tower was reduced in height and incorporated into the nave.

Evidence of this is shown by the extra thickness of the north and south ends of the nave walls. A new tower, with stair turret, was built at the west end of the nave. An aisle, with a three-bay arcade was added to the north of the nave. A new inner arch made for the south door and the porch built using large blocks of stone.

In the 1400's, the east window was replaced by a three-light one in the Perpendicular style. The Tudor period is marked by the addition of brick battlements to the tower. Although there is no documentary evidence, it may be that this was also the period

when the north aisle and chapel were demolished. The arcade was described in the early 19th century, as being '...blocked up with brickwork', with a square headed window in each former arch.

Apart from continued neglect, very little more happened to the structure of the church until the 1860's. David Davy noted in August 1829 that '...the church is in very bad repair, very dirty, and the churchyard over run for a great part of it with nettles and other weeds. In his journal, he adds '...I have not seen a place of religious worship in Suffolk so utterly neglected as this is..' This would have been during the time of Revd Thomas Ellis Rogers, Rector from 1807 to 1844.

In 1863 Revd James Richard Holden became Lord of the Manor and Patron of the church, and became Rector 1867-76. During this time he built the present Lackford Manor on the site of the former Rectory, where his widow lived until her death in 1880. He paid for a complete restoration of the church in 1868-70 and built the village school in 1871, (now part of the Old School House). The work of church restoration included opening up the blocked arcade; building a new aisle on the foundations of the earlier one; replacing all the thatched roofs with tiles, which on the north side took the form of a 'catslide' over the nave and aisle; new flooring, benches and stained glass windows.

The Revd John Shuttleworth Holden came to Lackford as curate to his uncle in 1873. He inherited the 2,300 acre Lackford Estate in 1876 and was Rector from 1876 to 1924. He continued to live in Lackford until his death, aged 96 in 1944. He placed the stained glass in the north aisle windows in memory of his uncle James after 1876.

Recent Renovations

Little more major work was necessary on the fabric of the church for a hundred years, when stonework to the porch arch was repaired in 1978, at a cost of £1100.

In the early 1980's it became clear that the old gas lighting system had deteriorated to the point of being dangerous. It was decided to install electricity, using the old gas brackets to provide low-level light, with flood lamps to illuminate the roof timbers.

The north side of the nave roof required re-tiling in 1998 at a cost of £20,000, due to extensive break-up of the tiles caused by the action of frost on moisture held by an extensive covering of moss. Funding was obtained from the Landfill Tax scheme.

In October 2002, work started on re-plastering and painting the nave ceiling, but as work began it became clear that the entire roof of the nave was unsafe.

The original beams were sagging under the weight of tiles, and several were splitting, some appeared to have been half sawn through to make them fit, presumably by the workmen restoring the roof in 1868. This weight and movement of the roof also appeared to have forced the top of the arcade outwards. Problems were also found where the north aisle extension beams had been joined to the nave beams, resulting in further weakness.

Several solutions were considered, but in the end it was decided to remove the tiles, and build a new timber frame above the original beams. The original beams were then suspended by steel straps from the new frame, so that after the lath and plaster was repaired, the interior of the roof was the same height and appeared similar to the old ceiling. New tiles were laid on the new beams, and the roof is now about the same height as the original thatch. Repairs were estimated to cost £181,000.

The PCC, with the support of the Community Council, set about formulating a plan to raise this vast sum of money. It was decided to take a long term view, and with no other public building within the village, aim to eventually convert the nave to serve as a meeting room for the whole community. It was considered that this would be the appropriate way to preserve this unique and beautiful ancient church. Outline plans to convert the nave have been drawn up for the Community Council by the PCC's architect, and approved in principle by a visit of the Diocesan Advisory Committee on 10 July 2007.

As part of this proposed conversion, it was suggested that priority should be given to convert the base of the tower into a meeting room to hold up to 20 people.

The small village community worked together for three years to raise over £7,000 through a variety of fund raising events; not a huge amount compared with the overall target, but nearly everyone in the parish was involved in some way, which was a great achievement. The major portion of the money came from the English Heritage Lottery Fund, with smaller, but greatly appreciated amounts from Suffolk County Council, Sir Frederick Hiam Charitable Trust, Council for the Care of Churches, the Penge Corps of the Salvation Army, VAT refunds from the Listed Places of Worship scheme, and several private donations, up to £500, from generous individuals.

During the three years the church was closed, the two regular monthly services were held in Flempton church by kind invitation of the churchwardens. However, three open-air services each year were held in Lackford churchyard, the Pets' service, Rogation Sunday and Harvest Festival. On each occasion the congregation was favoured with fine weather. The nave roof restoration was completed in the autumn

of 2005, and the first service, of celebration and thanksgiving was held on 30 October.

In 2008, the quinquennial inspection revealed urgent repairs were needed to the tower roof. The wooden access hatch had rotted beyond repair, the sealed surface of the roof had deteriorated and was leaking, and the tower window shutters needed mending. The cost of this work was estimated at £10,600. Another fundraising campaign was begun, and grants were awarded by the Ganzoni Charitable Trust, the Scarfe Charitable Trust, the Alfred Williams Charitable Trust,

Chancel

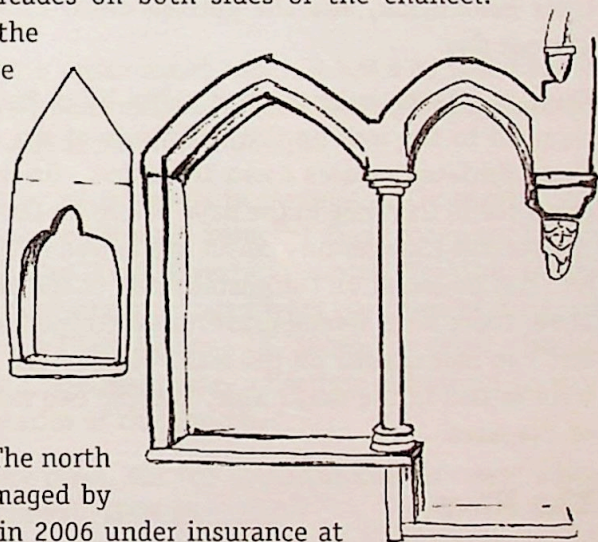
In earlier times and up to 1923, it was the responsibility of the rector and patron to keep the chancel in good order and repair. At one time, the chancel was connected to the nave by a central tower. The architecture is from the 13th century (Early English). The high-pointed chancel arch was remade during the restoration of the church in 1868. At one time, the Arms of Charles 1 hung over the original east arch, but was probably removed when the arch was altered in the 19th century. Until the restoration, the communion table (altar) was railed off, as today, but not raised.

There are curious Early English arcades on both sides of the chancel.

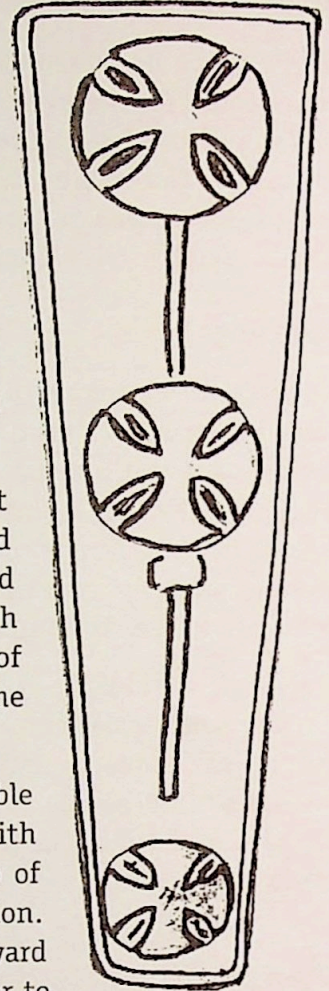
On the south side, the arches of the arcade are uneven and form the canopies to the sedilia and piscina.

On the north side, the arcade is carried over a stone seat and onto the Easter sepulchre.

There are two 13th century lancet windows in the chancel, facing each other, one in the north wall and one in the south; both with matching Powell's pressed glass dating from the 1868 restoration. The north lancet window was extensively damaged by vandals in 2004, and was repaired in 2006 under insurance at a cost of £1700. This prompted two decisions, firstly to protect all windows from possible future damage by fitting stainless steel mesh window guards at a cost of £7700; and to remove all the overgrown box shrubs, on the north and west sides of the graveyard, which had given the vandals cover. These works were carried out in 2006 and 2007.



On the north side of the chancel is a Priest's Door, formerly leading to the outside, but now leads into the small vestry built during the 1868 restoration. On the right of this door is a low, plain arched tomb recess, which may have originally contained the tomb of an early priest, or patron who rebuilt the chancel. Before the Reformation, this was probably used as the Easter Sepulchre, where consecrated bread and the altar cross were kept from Good Friday until Easter Day. Jesus was often referred to as St Saviour, and in 1533, Edward Pryke gave the church a cow to be rented out '...to fund a light (candle) before St Saviour'.



On the east wall, close to this tomb recess, and to the left of the window is a very tall niche under a cinquefoiled arch where the statue of St Lawrence would have stood before the Reformation. Two brass plaques on the north face of the chancel arch list all the rectors, the year of their institution, and the patrons since 1326 up to the present day.

There is a 13th century coped coffin lid of Purbeck marble clamped to the wall on the south side of the chancel with three floriated crosses down the spine. Originally, two of these coffin lids were in the nave before the 1868 restoration. The second 13th century coffin was moved to the churchyard and can be found on the eastern side of the porch. Prior to 1868, there were several gravestones on the floor of the chancel and two monuments on the wall. Most of the floor stones were removed, but two were re-laid in the north aisle, and the two monuments re-sited on the south wall of the nave.

The Nave

The nave is the main body of the church where people sit (or before the 1868 restoration, stood), and in medieval times would have been used for most public occasions in the parish. Often, churches were built larger than the local population could ever fill; this was because the church was probably the only communal building and would have been used for meetings, feasts and dances as well as for

worship, weddings, baptisms and funerals. The people of the parish were responsible for the upkeep and repair of this part of the church.

At one time the nave was much shorter at the east end, which was separated from the chancel by the central tower. Removal of the tower and its rebuilding at the west end of the nave sometime in the 14th century effectively incorporated the base of the original tower into the nave, increasing its length by around 18 feet. In this reconstruction, the western arch of the old central nave was removed entirely, and the piers to the eastern arch cut away to provide wider access to the chancel and clearer view of the altar.

On the south side are two Y-tracery windows dating from 13th century, the side columns of one show it to be a high-status construction. It has a stepped sill forming a sedilia, with a piscina on the right-hand-side showing there was an altar there in medieval times. All this is evidence of a pre-reformation nave altar, probably for the gild of St John the Baptist, to whom John Rambylowe gave a brass pot in 1484. During repairs to the nave roof in 2004, a broken, life-size head of a statue of John the Baptist (evidenced by the hair painted bright red) was found in rubble packing the old central tower wall. The statue of the Baptist probably stood near this altar.

Against the south wall is the Bevington organ dated 1882. It has a 25 pedal board with tracker action and was pumped by hand until an electric blower was connected in 1989, using a bequest under the will of Mrs Violet Gough.

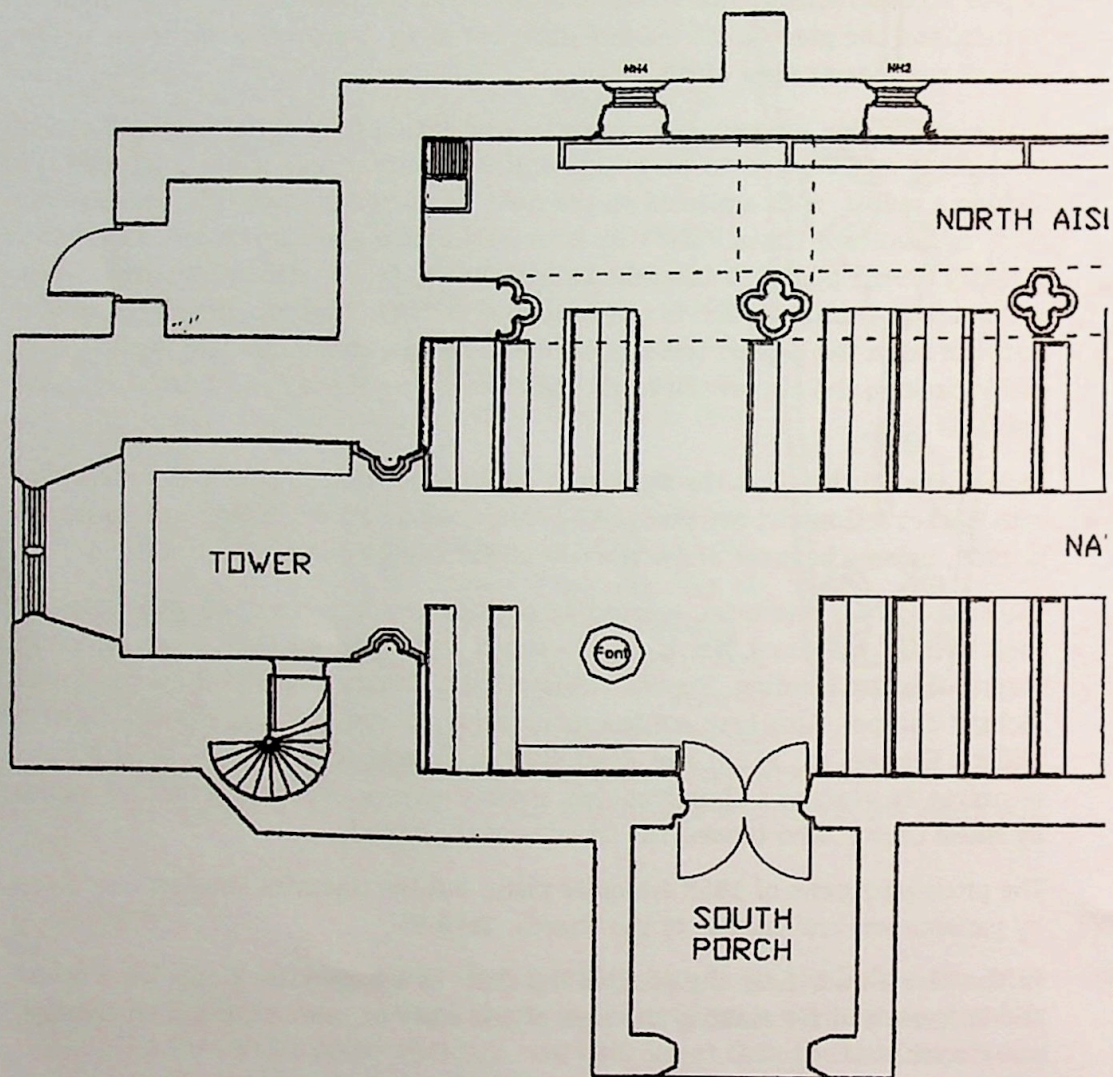
The 1914-18 War Memorial, erected by parishioners in memory of those who lost their lives in the Great War is on the south wall; Sergeant Cecil Foreman, Lance Corporal Herbert Harding, Private William Kidd, Private Frederick Meekins, Driver Richard Sharpe. Also here are the monuments, moved from the chancel, to Revd William Greaves (d. 1783) and Revd William Greaves (d. 1806). A small plaque, recording 25 years as a Churchwarden, commemorates a lifetime of faithful service by Millie Carver, who tended the interior of the church.

The pitch-pine pews of 1868 are quite plain, but the colourful kneelers were made by parishioners and friends of the church, 1990-95.

In the south wall, near the door, is the shaft of a holy water stoup, used before the Reformation for making the sign of the cross on one's forehead on entering the church.

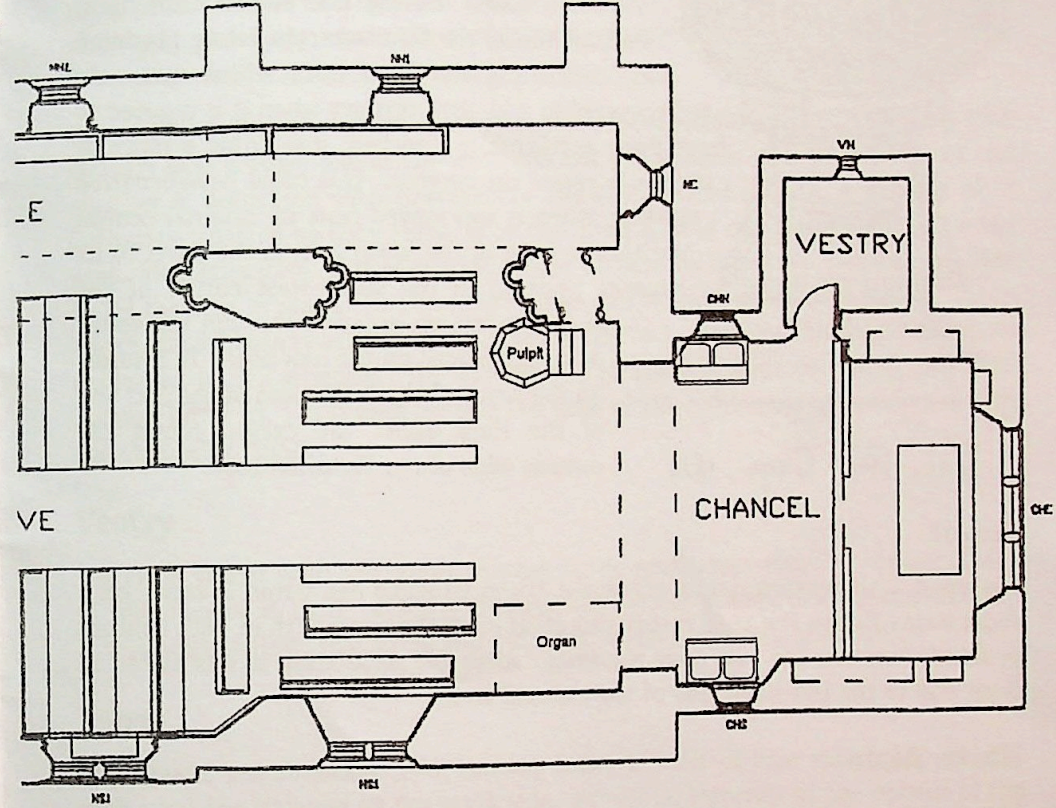
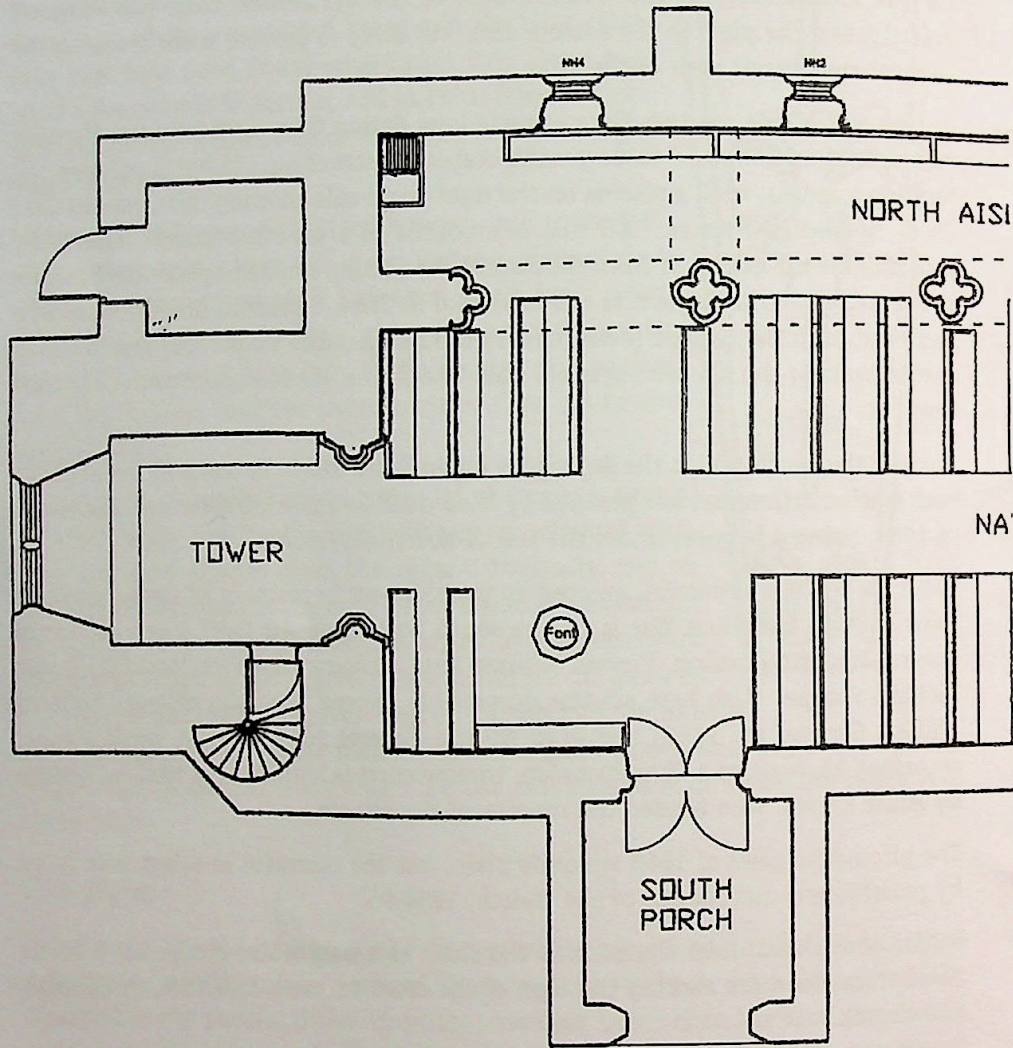
Plan of Lackford Church

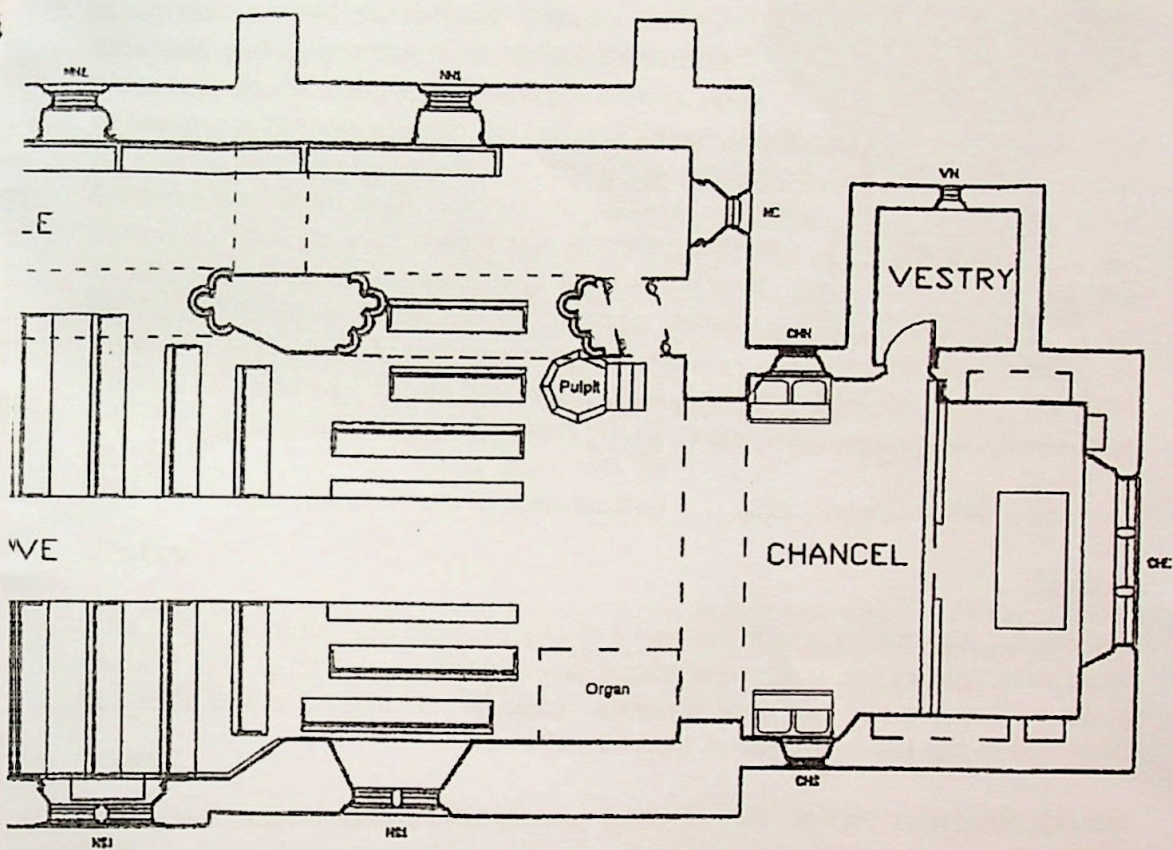
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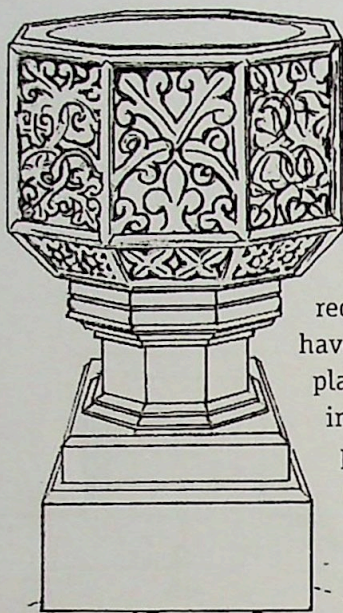
Plan of Lackford Church

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Font



Font, from Gage, 1838

The 14th century octagonal stone font is an excellent example, with tracery panels richly sculptured with different foliage patterns, including ivy and roses. It has a deep lead-lined bowl and moulded stub shaft resting on a Victorian base. During the Reformation or in Puritan times, the font was completely plastered over, concealing its decoration, which was only rediscovered in mid-18th century when it is reputed to have been accidentally knocked, dislodging a piece of plaster to reveal the carving. This could have occurred in 1868, when it was moved from its original central position in front of the tower arch in the nave, to its present position in the south-west corner of the nave, to the left on entering through the south door, and placed on the new base. The words, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' are carved round the outside edge of the Victorian base.

Pulpit

The small 17th century simple octagonal Stuart panelled oak pulpit is raised on a short stem. Before the 1868 restoration it stood in the usual 17th or 18th century position, between the two nave windows. After the restoration it was placed in front and to the left-hand side of the chancel arch.

North Aisle

The original north aisle and chapel were pulled down in the 16th century, and the arches of the arcade were bricked up.

The squint and piscina, which were used before the Reformation, have sharply gabled trefoil arches on Early English shafts at both ends.

The north aisle has a three-bay arcade and a thicker eastern-most pier within the walls of the old central tower. There is no clerestory (upper level of windows above the level of the aisle roof), but the aisle has four single lancet windows along the

north wall and one in the east end. They are partly stained and three have fragments of Latin inscriptions, dating after 1876. Beside the east end window and outside can be seen a short piece of string course several feet above ground, which was probably part of the original north aisle wall.

The three matching pointed arches are from the Decorated period (later Gothic, 14th century), and there are no others exactly like these in Suffolk. The eastern arch, within the old central tower area, leads into the east end of the present north aisle, and previously where the earlier north chapel would have been, has a leaf decoration on the outer sections of the capitals.

Along the north wall are 19th century benches incorporating some interesting 15th century bench ends; one at the west end has the remains of a carved animal and another is decorated with fine tracery and a crocheted panel. A carving of St Catherine, spotted by Clive Paine, is on the lower part of one bench end, below the seat. Unfortunately, part is missing where carpenters had sawn through her face to fix the seat in place. However, her crown can be seen above and the wheel (on which she was martyred) can be seen below the seat. Perhaps the chapel altar was dedicated to St Catherine. The gravestones of Thomas Wade (d. 1679) and Revd Richard Prime (d. 1713) were set into the floor of the north aisle after removal from the chancel in 1868.

Vestry

The small vestry, with one lancet window facing north, was added to the north side of the chancel in 1868. Entry is through the former priest's door to the chancel. It was built of flint, free stone and red brick under a red clay tiled roof.

Tower

The square, unbuttressed, 14th century tower is built of flint with stone quoins, with a bulging staircase on the south side. At regular intervals up the outside of the flint work are flat stones that had been used to fill-in the 'put log' holes after they had been used for inserting the wooden scaffold poles as the tower was being built.

In the upper part of the tower, above the third string course, the belfry has Y-tracery windows on all sides. The stepped redbrick battlements with pinnacles were added in the 16th century. The inside of the tower measures 9feet 4inches by 9feet 6inches, and the walls are 3feet thick. The lower west side of the tower has a two-light Decorated Y-tracery window.

During the Archdeacon's visitation on 15 July 1786 and again on 6 August 1789, it is interesting to note that he ordered that the west window was to be unstopped and re-glazed with quarries, as were other windows which were to be unstopped above 20 inches from the ground.

In the 19th century, the bell openings were renewed. There is a single bell on which is inscribed, "Thomas Newman of Norwich made me in 1735".

Porch

The mid 14th century porch is built mainly of free stone with some pieces of flint, and originally had a thatched roof. The thatch was replaced in the 1868 restoration with red clay tiles, and a line of red brickwork added to the top of the walls.

Inside, it has stone seats along each side and is considered to be original up to the sill above these seats. However, there is evidence that some of the stone work has been restored and maybe there was a window in the east side. The stone arch columns at the entrance to the porch are chamfered all the way round. There is a Norman arch showing the inside of the church door and above that is a round hood moulding.

The grave stone of Thomas Larmoth (d. 1666), and his wife, was moved from the nave and set into the floor of the porch in 1868. There were four other stones dating from 1621-24 that did not survive the restoration.

Over the main church door, dating from 1868, is written:

*This is none other but the House of God
and this is the Gate of Heaven".*

Stained Glass

All the stained glass dates from after 1868, and was added as part of the continued enrichment of the building and worship.

The east window in the chancel was designed in 1871 by Henry Holiday, for James Powell and Sons of Whitefriars, to be erected in Clapton Church, London. The design was revived here, and shows Christ blessing parents and children. Berkin Harwood describes it as '...an early example of the change from medieval to classical figures, and the softer tertiary colours of the Aesthetic Movement'.

As noted earlier the north and south chancel windows have Powell's coloured pressed glass.

At the top of the easternmost nave window is a tiny figure, possibly of an abbot or early patron, all that remains of the medieval glass.

In the aisle, the four windows on the north side have five roundels of glass and Latin inscriptions which record that Revd (James) Holden died 13 November 1876. The symbols are the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), St Mathew (Angel with book), St Mark (winged lion), St Luke (winged bull) and St John (eagle). The east window in the aisle is fitted with plain glass.

The tower (west) window is probably by Powell of c. 1870 with wheat and vine motifs, symbols of bread and wine at Holy Communion.

Much of the detail in this history and description of Lackford church was discovered by Clive Payne, Suffolk church historian, during a visit on 6 July 2007 to give one of his famous lectures, 'Let loose in your church', when several previously unnoticed features came to his attention. He identified the life-size head of a statue of John the Baptist, which had been found in rubble infill to the crossing wall, from its red painted hair. He identified the Powell's glass, the small figure in the top of the nave window, and became greatly excited by the discovery of the bench-end carving of St Catherine in the north aisle.

Churchyard

The church sits in the centre of about an acre of land surrounded by trees. In the 1870's the Revd James Holden planted beech trees, and along with limes and oaks, many still survive. One of the biggest of these beech trees, which grew just 40feet to the south of the tower, was brought crashing down onto the church in a south-westerly gale in 1980; thankfully the only damage caused was to the brick battlements, which were soon repaired. Many bones were found in the crater left by the tree roots, and these were re-interred with all due reverence by Revd Lawrence Pizzey.

When the overgrown box shrubs were cut back in 2007 a number of 'hidden' gravestones were exposed, including a cluster of small plain stones without inscription at the west end, and the Holden family graves in the north-east.

Outside the porch there is a 13th century coped coffin slab, that is now broken into three places, above a stone coffin. Several other ancient and interesting graves can be found, but some of the inscriptions are so weathered that it is impossible to read them, and sadly there is no written record.

Since WW2, the churchyard was regularly mown and tended by the churchwardens, assisted by a rota of families taking responsibility during the main months of grass growth. During the 1990's Dick Gough carried on with little help until his disabling illness in 2002. In 2008 the Churchwardens took advantage of the Probation Service 'Unpaid work scheme' to keep the churchyard mown and tidy. The churchyard now has an open aspect with delightful views over the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve at Lackford Lakes.

Lackford Parish Priests

In over 800 years from 1202 to 2009 there are 57 priests recorded for Lackford church.

1202 Bartholomew The Priest	1480 Robert Kent MA	1867 James Richard Holden MA
1291 Robert de Cresswell	1503 Henry Kittilton	1876 John Shuttleworth Holden MA
1318 Hugh Jakes	1513 Thomas Hunte	1924 H W Kingsly
1326 Hugh de Liveryngton	1540 Robert Evans	1939 S Osborn
1327 Richard Wakelyn de Helyngton	1542 Thomas Moody	1941 Canon J Hind
1361 Thomas de Tyngewyke	1551 Robert Peacock	1947 A Taylor
1388 William Blaketon MA	1553 John Stacy	1949 W J Parker
1416 Thomas Lewisham	1560 John Helme	1954 J B Mayall
1418 Geoffrey Bakere	1569 John Parke	1955 F Fuller
1439 John Heygham LLB	1587 Edward Kyrke	1958 A J Talbot-Easter
1442 John Sadyngton	1613 Francis Godfrey	1960 A C E Widdicombe
1454 John Manyngtham MA	1630 Symon Jackson	1962 G F S Kenyon
1457 John Aylwyn	1640 William Hall DD	1968 W Lloyd
1460 William Lax	1662 Thomas Stevens DD	1969 Canon A 'Jack' Bennitt
1470 William Kimberley	1677 Jeremiah Stannard	1979 Lawrence R Pizzey
1471 Edmund Alyard	1687 Richard Prime	1987 Robert W Clifton
1472 William Aphecoe	1714 Jacob Reynolds	1998 David P Burrell
	1752 Robert Long MA	
	1761 Lichaël Marlow	
	1795 William Greaves	
	1807 Thomas Ellis Rogers	
	1844 Algernon Peyton	
	1853 Thomas Hurford Siely	

Acknowledgements and references

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6. Birkin Haward, Nineteenth Century Suffolk Stained Glass; 1989
7. Birkin Haward, Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades, 1993
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Countless generations of Lackford folk have worshipped in this lovely old church, their lives measured by its services of Baptism, Marriage and Burial. They have cared for it, enabling us to enjoy its beauty, tranquillity and sacredness today. We trust that future generations will accept the responsibility of protecting and ensuring that the priceless treasure of this ancient and unique building continues to enhance and enrich this quiet Suffolk parish.

In compiling this guide, I would like to thank Clive Paine for his inspiration.

The profits from the sale of this guide will be for the maintenance of Lackford Church.

Sylvia Myles
Lackford
2009



