



A Guide
to the Parish Church of
ST. PETER HEPWORTH
Suffolk

How old is the Church?

There was already a church here at the time of the ‘Domesday’ Survey in 1086. But the present structure dates mainly from the 14th and 15th century. The chief material from which the church is built is flint, which is freely available locally. Cut stone dressings are used for the buttresses, arches and windows.

The Tower

Almost certainly there was an additional storey which was removed to prevent subsidence, probably when the tower was reinforced with tie rods. Their iron wall plates on the west face give the date of 1677. A pyramidal roof protects the bells, and the three belfry windows, presumably inserted in 1677, have plain brick arches. The clock chamber below is lit by early 14th century quatrefoil sound holes on three sides. Further down in the west face is a small window put in after the fire of 1898, to light the new ringing chamber. More ironwork is to be seen round the foot of the tower with its massive diagonal buttresses. The diary of Thomas King of Thelnetham records: ‘Hepworth Steeple screwed together with irons by Mr Bloomfield of Thelnetham, November 1828’. The clock was put up by Benson of Ludgate Hill in 1864. It was paid for out of Parish Charity funds and cost £62.

The Church from Outside

The Nave is of four bays divided by buttresses. In each bay except the second from the west, where there is a door on both sides, there is on either side a tall window of two lights in the Perpendicular style of the 15th century. The Chancel is of three bays, of which the first and third contain windows of two lights with reticulated tracery in the Decorated style of the 14th century. Here too the bays are separated by buttresses. The East window is in the same style as the other Chancel windows but has three lights. The stone coping of the gables of both Nave and Chancel, with their carved corbels (heads of Kings and Queens), were put in at the restoration of 1898-99. The door on the north side of the nave has 14th

century animal headstops to the dripstone above. There are a number of other worn headstops on the hood moulds of the windows.

The South Porch dates from 1896/7, built of materials from the original medieval one, including some 16th century moulded timbers. The old porch had a room above. The blocked-up entrance to the staircase can be seen just inside the door on the left. The porch escaped damage in the fire, as did the fine old oak door. Emma Osmond describes the scene on Easter Monday 1898: 'I went straight into the church, where Mr Sparkes, the clerk, and others were getting down the font-cover which was very old. The fire was just beginning to crack the plaster over the gallery. I suggested that the old door should be taken off its hinges... and in five minutes it was lying in the churchyard. By this time the roof of the nave had fallen in with a thundering crash, setting the old gallery on fire. The thatch caught light from inside and slipped off in two vast heaps. The porch was not injured at all.' The door has, just above its handle, a sanctuary knocker, which fugitives from justice could use to attract the attention of whoever was in the church. In the chancel are preserved two pieces of carved stone, fragments of a Norman scallop capital and a section of shaft (12th century) surviving from the earlier building. Notice also the empty niche with trefoil head above the South door.

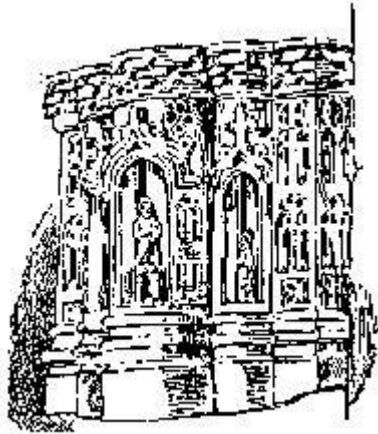
Inside the Church

When the old thatched roof burned down, J.S. Corder of Ipswich, the architect of the restoration, installed the fine oak double hammer beam roof with its richly carved pendants, in the characteristic medieval Suffolk style.

The plain pointed tower arch leading to the vestry may date from the 13th century.

The late 14th century font cover is our greatest treasure. At the time of the fire it stood on the old font in front of the north door which had been blocked up. It is an octagonal pinnacled spire of oak, 12'6" high, elaborately decorated with tabernacle work of

arches and tracery. There are spaces for statues, which it may have had before the image breaking of the Reformation. The Rev H. G. Hand had it restored by Mr Brooke, a carver from Hopton, in 1855. Several layers of paint were stripped off, several panels were replaced with copies of the old work, and a cross was placed on the top.



Access to the font is by opening two of the panels at the bottom which are on hinges. On the lower panels are little armed men coming out of doors, and even smaller men going into other doors. In baptism the child goes in as a defenceless babe and comes out as a fully armed soldier of Christ.

On the south wall is a piscina (stone basin for washing the Communion cup and plate) where a side altar would have stood. On the north wall near the pulpit can be seen the blocked up doorway of the staircase to the old rood screen. Every church in the Middle Ages had its rood (a figure of Christ on the Cross, flanked by figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. John). Beneath it would have been a screen dividing the chancel from the nave, with a loft (gallery) built above for the lighting of candles and the saying of masses in front of the rood. By the north door stands the ancient medieval chest, with its three locks.

The pews in the south west area of the nave date from the reseating in 1855 and are attractively carved. The lectern was given by Thomas Methold, of Hepworth House, in 1902. His son, Sir Henry Methold, was a skilled amateur wood carver and made the litany desk in memory of his father, and the pulpit in memory of two of his children who died in infancy. When Henry Hand came in 1851 the three-tier pulpit still stood on the south wall, halfway between the entrance and the chancel arch, there were box pews ‘for the magnates of Hepworth’ and there were still fragments of the old painted glass in the windows. The gallery, built in 1756, was still there, and its seating was included in the restoration of 1855.

The brass war memorial on the north wall was given by the women of Hepworth in memory of those who fell in the First World War. They chose the text:

They were a wall unto us
both by night and day

from 1 Samuel 25.16, which was the tribute of Abigail’s sheep-shearers to David’s men. A granite cross in the churchyard also commemorates those who died.

The wrought iron lampstands are used at Christmas. The ten handbells over the tower arch were given in memory of George Holden by his son Thomas at Easter 1926.

The Chancel

The barrel roof also dates from the restoration, as do the black and white marble paving and the wrought iron communion rail. The mahogany Communion Table with spiral legs and stretchers, came from Market Weston in 1888. The plain wooden cross behind was given by Mrs Hand in memory of her father and brother. The organ on the north side of the chancel was put up in 1892, and rebuilt after the fire. Nothing remains of the fragments of the piscina and sedilia discovered at the restoration of 1851-55.

The choir stalls incorporate eight 15th century bench ends with poppy heads, four of them with their original buttressed arm rests, rescued from the old seating in the Nave.

The stained glass window by Powell & Sons on the north side of the chancel was given in 1903 by Thomas Methold in memory of his wife Mary Ellen. It shows the angel announcing the Resurrection of Christ to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, as described in Matthew 28.1-8. The face of one of the women is apparently a portrait of Mrs. Methold, and her cloak is decorated with the family arms. The same heraldic device on a shield appears in the little low side window on the south side. The purpose of such a window was that, at the Consecration of the bread and the cup, a bell could be rung through the open window, so that 'people who have not leisure daily to be present at Mass may, wherever they are, in houses or fields, bow their knees' (Archbishop Peckham 1281).

The Bells

We have five bells. Before 1726 there were three. In that year Thomas Gardiner of Sudbury recast one of them and made two new ones. The third bell was made by George Mears and Co of London in 1864 and hung by George Bloomfield of Ixworth. The fourth bell was recast by William Dobson of Downham Market in 1825. The Tenor bell is the oldest. It is the work of Richard Brazier who was working at Norwich about 1470. It bears the inscription 'Petrus ad eterne ducat nos pascua vite' (May Peter lead us to the pastures of eternal life).

Some Interesting Facts

Nearly all the 39 acres of Glebe land were sold off in 1921. The Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials date from 1688, although all but the current ones are now kept at the Suffolk Record Office. The Patron (with the right to choose the Rector) has been Kings College Cambridge since 1790. The parish values their

continuing interest and support. The large bookcase at the back of the church came from Kings College Chapel.

Summary

As with all the fine historic churches of England, St. Peter's Hepworth reflects the zeal and devotion of Christians through the centuries who lovingly built and maintained it for the worship of God.

My prayer is that you, the reader of this Guide, may sense the presence of God here and be at peace with Him.

John Fulton
Rector

With acknowledgement to the late Rev. A.A.H. Radice, who wrote the notes on which this guide is based.

LIST OF THE RECTORS OF HEPWORTH

ca1086 Turston	1578 Richard Rushbrooke
ca1180 Walter the Priest	1579 Richard Sporle
1200 Berardus	1618 Robert Shepherd MA
In the reign of Henry III: Radulphus de Hepworth	1642 Robert Devereux
ca1240 Robertus de Neketon	1660 Robert Shepherd
1271 Jacobus de Neketon	1672 Richard Burrell
1303 Willelmus de Neketon	1721 Nathaniel Rye BA
1322 Johannes fil de Willi Thorald de Hepworth	1761 Martin Nunn BA
1333 Petrus de Buttele	1781 Robert Nunn BA
1349 Robertus Cok de Stebbyng	1797 William Moore MA
1356 Johannes de Thomeston	1810 John Hayter MA
1375 Richardus de Lawshall	1819 Edward Rene Payne MA
1401 Johannes Bury	1851 Henry George Hand MA
1413 Thomas Watlington	1883 William C Green MA
1420 Walterus Gerard	1910 Charles E Green MA
1459 Johannes Scole	1920 Norman C Smith MA
1499 William Atkinson	1935 Sydney Rogerson MA
1503 John Mindram	1938 Thomas H Soulby MA
1505 John Brundish	1939 Henry C Walker MA
1544 William Raynbirds	1947 Harold Grayson BA
1559 Peter Kilburne	1956 Anthony A H Radice MA
	1982 George J Parker LCP
	1990 John William Fulton MA