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'HITCHAM
A Landscape, Social and Ecclesiastical History of a Suffolk Clayland
Parish'
by Edward Martin
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ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, HITCHAM

The massive fifteenth-century tower dominates one's first view of the church and it is particularly impressive when seen from the road winding up the valley from Bildeston. Although its size is impressive, the tower is restrained in its decoration, being plain except for strips of chequer-pattern flushwork on its angle buttresses (a pattern repeated on the castellated top of the nave).

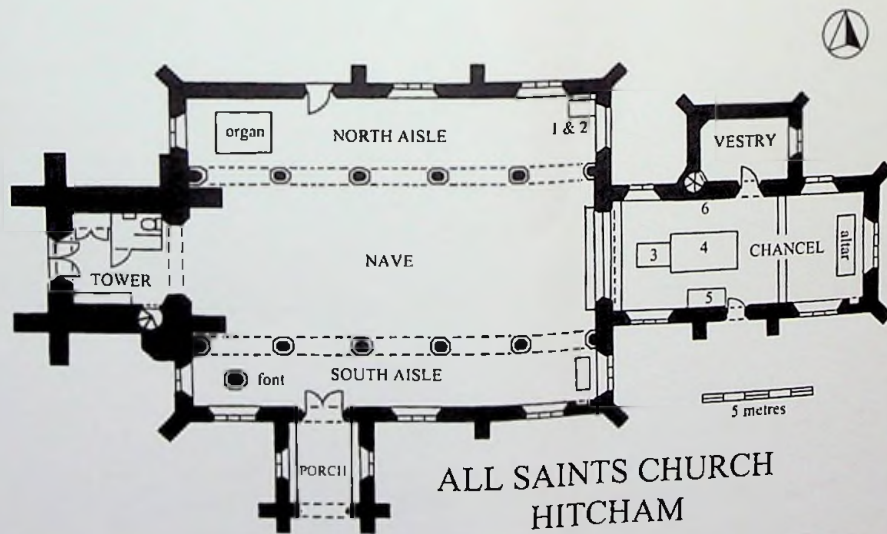
As at nearby Cockfield, the tower buttresses descend into the church, perhaps indicating towers that were free-standing when built. In contrast to the tower, the south porch is a splendid piece of fifteenth-century work, ornamented with trefoil-headed flushwork panels and niches for statuary above the door and in the buttresses. The large entrance doorway is decorated with carved crowns and lions' heads, with shields in the spandrels with symbols of the Trinity (left) and the Passion (right). Sadly, these shields were mutilated during some episode of Protestant passion.

The south door into the church is of the same date and is decorated with carved shields and crowns, with roses in the spandrels, a lion stop on the left side, and a mutilated wild man with club, within a picket fence, on the right.

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Cover photographs by Allan Scott

The carved decoration on the wooden door is very similar to that at Bildeston church. The design of the porch also closely resembles those at Bildeston, Preston and Felsham and they are probably all by the same mason. Wills of 1470 and 1471 refer to glass for a porch at Felsham, perhaps indicating the date of porch construction there. The rector of Hitcham at that time was Thomas Fysshier and, perhaps significantly, in his will of 1505, he requested burial in the Hitcham porch, asking his executors to 'bye a litell marble stone to be sett in the wall at my sepulture and theryn to be sett a pece of laton¹ and theryn my name and the day of my sepulture so as my good frends may have remembrance to pray for my soule and the letters theryn to be gilte.'



Plan of All Saints' Church, based on one kindly made available by Philip Orchard of The Whitworth Co-Partnership

KEY: 1 Wall monument to Sir George Waldegrave (d. 1637); 2 floorstone with indents for a lost brass to George Waldegrave (d. 1551) and his wife Mary Frances (d. 1562); 3 floorstone with indents for a lost brass to Sir John Spring (d. 1547); 4 floorstone with indents for a lost brass to Dr William Cooke, rector of Hitcham (d. 1522); 5 floorstone with indents for a lost brass to a priest, possibly Thomas Remund, rector of Hitcham 1413–38; 6 wall monuments to the Revd Professor John Stevens Henslow (d. 1861) and the Revd Canon Alexander Ronald Grant (d. 1903).

1 Latten, an alloy of copper and zinc.

Whether or not his executors heeded his request, no such stone now exists. However there is a brass inscription recording that the porch was restored in 1882–3 'by parishioners and friends in loving memory of the Revd J.S. Henslow, Professor of Botany in the University of Cambridge and the beneficent Rector of Hitcham'.

Inside the church, the first impression is one of light but also of plainness once again. The nave (below) is separated from the two outer aisles by the simple octagonal stone pillars of the five-bay arcades that probably date from the mid to late fourteenth century. A half-pillar at the east end of the north aisle has small holy water stoup set into it. In the north clerestory above the piers is a rare survival of original quatrefoil windows; on the south side these have been replaced by arched windows with plain median mullions. Above these is a fine double hammerbeam roof, which is described in more detail below. The aisles have fifteenth-century roofs, which are also described more fully below.

The interior of the church, viewed from the new gallery at the west end



The font was installed at west end of the nave in 1878, but was moved to its present position in the south aisle in the 1930s by Bishop Maxwell-Gumbleton. It replaced an earlier font that was described in 1826 by the antiquarian David Elisha Davy as being octagonal with a vine branch, with leaves and grapes around the middle of its bowl.

Most of the old 'high-backed pews' in the church were also removed in a major restoration in 1878 and new benches were installed.² The pews in the south aisle were recently acquired from a redundant church. The eighteenth-century pulpit has a tester or sounding board above it that was created in 1937 from the top of a table used in the vestry. The colourful wooden font cover is inscribed in memory of William Morriss Brown, 'an honoured parishioner, church warden and father', and grocer of Hitcham, who died in 1943, aged 85.

The west gallery was also removed in 1878 and an organ was added in 1889 – located at first in the chancel, it was later moved to the south aisle and then to the rear of the church in the 1930s by Maxwell-Gumbleton.³ It was completely rebuilt in 1976 by Bishop and Son of London and Ipswich, with pipework by Benjamin Flight, and in 2020 it was moved again to the north aisle, where it was again restored and rebuilt by Bishop and Son.⁴

According to the Revd Canon Grant, the rector at the time of the 1878 restoration:

2 In 1882 the rector stated that 'The church was seated with carved oak seats of the fifteenth century, the carving of which was very good. Most of those seats were mutilated for the purpose of being converted into pews, the carved poppy-heads being sawn through to let in the deal sides of the pews. At the restoration these seats had to be removed for a time, being unfit in their then state for use. They were all preserved under the idea that some day there might be the means of restoring them' – 'General Meeting – Hitcham, Bildeston and Chelsworth, Sept. 7, 1882', *PSIAH*, vol. IV pt. 2, 1886, p. 317.

3 *Suffolk Chronicle* 11 May 1878, *Ipswich Journal* 9 Sep. 1882 and 18 Jan. 1889.

4 Note from Simon Pullen of Bishop & Son: 'When the full compass sound board was provided for the Swell organ in 1976 there was a spare slide (space for another stop). The casework was also provided at this time and designed by John Budgen. The work at the workshop as well as the church was in the very capable hands of Gerald Daines – who rejoiced in the nickname of Digger, although he amusingly styled himself 'Dygre'. As a mark of affection, a stop of suitable antiquity has been included, as a mark of esteem and respect by the present staff who remember him fondly. Uniquely we have called it Dygre Diapason 8.'

'Among other things which at the restoration had to be obliterated, were some mural paintings, which seemed to have occupied spaces between the nave arches. There was only one that could be made out, and that was in the arch exactly opposite the door. There was an appearance of colour on the plaster, and when it rained and the plaster was washed off, the colour deepened, and a friend of his, who had done something of the kind before in his own church, with very great difficulty took off the outer plaster, and discovered a painting below, which was that of a large and very fine head. Over the head had been put at first a coat of plaster, and upon it a text in black letters. They found some traces of the text, but it was impossible to make out what it was. There was extreme difficulty in taking off the outer plaster in such a way as to avoid injuring the painting below. That was the only painting they could make anything of. This head was impossible to restore, it was so much obliterated, and he really believed it was about the only thing of any antiquity which was destroyed in the restoration of the church!'⁵

The painting that now hangs on the wall of the south aisle (described as 'formerly in the possession of a Bishop of Bath and Wells') was placed there by Bishop Maxwell-Gumbleton. It is clearly derived from an 'Adoration of the Kings' by Rubens (1577–1640), being similar, but reversed, to that in King's College Chapel, Cambridge. Maxwell-Gumbleton also installed the Royal Arms in honour of King George VI's coronation in 1937 (this was magnificently restored recently by Malcolm Currie).⁶ The wooden angel over the north door is relatively modern, formerly in The Old Guildhall, it is thought to have been carved by Mary March-Phillipps of Hitcham Hall in the 1890s.⁷ The wall monument at the east end of the north aisle commemorates

5 General Meeting – Hitcham, Bildeston and Chelsworth, Sept. 7, 1882; *PSIAH*, vol. IV pt. 2, 1886, p. 318.

6 Maxwell-Gumbleton was also responsible for the planting of an oak tree on Church Green to mark King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935.

7 The Revd Ted Wetherall, rector of Hitcham (letter 1 Mar. 1990) recalled that the angel 'had been over a door at the back of The Old House [now The Old Guildhall] but was bought and given to the church when the house was being sold... it was there when the Jeffares family moved in the 40's. They found various bits of carved wood around the house, and supposed them and the angel perhaps to have been carved by Mr Scott, whose house it had been. More likely, I would think, it had been carved by his wife, formerly a Miss March Phillipps and living at Hitcham Hall, who had taught wood carving at evening

Sir George Waldegrave of Wetherden Hall (d. 1637). On the floor below it is the stone indent of brass memorial to his grandparents, George Waldegrave (d. 1551) and his wife Mary Frances (d. 1562) and their children.⁸

The floor of the chancel is notably higher than that of the nave and separating the two parts is the lower part of a fine mid-fifteenth-century rood screen with painted panels depicting angels bearing the Instruments of the Passion. From north to south these are:

1. The Scourge – upraised in the left hand of the angel, its knotted thongs dangling by his arm.
2. The Pillars of Flagellation – with cords about it.
3. The Spear
4. Apparently the Seamless Robe – held up in the angel's two hands.
5. Half blank, defaced.
6. Damaged, but probably the Cleft Reed for the sponge of hyssop.
7. The Nails and the Hammer.
8. Almost certainly the Crown of Thorns held in both of the angel's hands. (In the nave a poppy-head finial of a pew is carved as an angel holding a crown of thorns in this way)

In 1461 Henry Qwarry left 10 marks towards a newly-built reredos (tabulo) and it may be that the screen was erected at same time. In 1524 Thomas Scorrell left a croft to pay for a repair of the 'boording [on] the bak syde of the Roode of the Candyll beame next the chancell'.

The south wall of the chancel must have been unstable because in 1741 the antiquarian Tom Martin of Palgrave visited and noted that 'the chancel is supported on the south side by two new brick buttresses, on one of which is this inscription: July 1716 Nicholas Clagett DD Rector'.⁹ The problem got worse, with the south wall 'very much out of the perpendicular', and the east wall in very bad repair, so in restoration works undertaken in 1878 by Mr Robert Tooley of Bury St Edmunds, under the supervision of the architect

classes in the village school, around, I would suppose, 1900. Mary March-Phillipps was born c.1859 at Agra in India and was living with her aunt, Miss Florence March-Phillipps, in Hitcham Hall in 1881 and 1891; she married John Charles Scott in 1898 and died in 1930.

- 8 In the seventeenth century the antiquarian William Blois (1600–73) recorded 'a little stone for... Francis a woeman' (SA(I) GC17/755: Blois vol. III, Church Notes, p. 320).
- 9 SA(B) E2/41/8b: Tom Martin Church Notes Suffolk, vol. 11b.

George Edward Pritchett (1824–1912) of London, the south and east walls of the chancel were taken down and rebuilt (a photograph in the church shows the chancel roof precariously supported by worryingly thin wooden props).

According to the Revd Canon Grant 'the remains of the old window were found built up in the east wall, and this was very much in the style of the window which now replaced it'.¹⁰ Another contemporary account refers to the finding of a fragment of a 'wayside or churchyard cross' (claimed as 'ninth-tenth century') in the south-east buttress of the wall; also fragments of a cist, a Barnack stone cross, 'part of the old reredos' and a piece of the base of a font; 11 but unfortunately all of these pieces were subsequently lost. Grant also added a bit of symbolism to the chancel with its steps: five steps up to the chancel to represent the sacraments of Confirmation, Penance, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction, and two steps up to the sanctuary to represent the major sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism. To complete the restoration, the chancel was paved with Maw's encaustic tiles. The chancel roof with its unusual arched wooden ceiling is described more fully below.

The lost brass in the large stone indent in front of the altar commemorated Dr William Cooke, rector of Hitcham from 1500 until his death in 1522. He requested burial here in his will and directed that 'I will have a gravestone of marble to be bought by myn executors of the price of six pounds, three shillings and four pence and lade ther upon me'. A second large indent held a brass commemorating Sir John Spring of Hitcham (d. 1547).¹² Near the south door is an indent of a priest under a canopy, which possibly

10 'General Meeting – Hitcham, Bildeston and Chelsworth, Sept. 7, 1882', *PSIAH*, vol. IV pt. 2, 1886, p. 316.

11 *Suffolk Chronicle* 11 May 1878.

12 The Breviary of Suffolk (British Library Harleian MS 3873, p. 55) records the lost inscription as: Hoc tegitur saxo Johannis Spring miles qui quidem Johannes obiit 12 die mensis Februarij anno Christo nato millimo cccccxlvij cujus anime prospitietur Deus amen. It adds that 'This epitaph is in Hitcham church, under his statue all armed, in brasse, 2 escocheons, 1 Spring's single coat, the 2nd Spring empaled Waldegrave & Mouchancy, quarterly'. The 2nd shield was still in position in the seventeenth century when seen by the antiquarian William Blois. He also recorded a lost stone to 'Sir William Fenis [with an inserted note: 'qu. if not Sir Robt.']] miles et Dom. Elianor uxor ejus qui Gulielmo obit. 1509', but he noted its shields were 'reav'd', i.e. stolen (SA(I) GC17/755: Blois vol. III, Church Notes, p. 320). This stone actually commemorated Sir Robert Fynes of Wetherden Hall who, in his will of 1509, requested burial in the church.

represents Thomas Remund, rector 1413–38. There is also an armorial floorstone to Dr William Battie, rector 1667–1706 (when Tom Martin visited in 1741 he recorded that 'A Hatchment hangs over the stone' – but no longer). A wall monument by the important sculptor Thomas Woolner RA, commemorates Hitcham's most famous rector, the Revd Professor John Stevens Henslow (d. 1861).¹³ The wooden bishop's stall or throne was installed by and for M.F. Maxwell-Gumbleton, suffragan bishop of Dunwich 1935–45 and rector of Hitcham 1935–48;¹⁴ lesser stalls for the churchwardens were also provided, which are now at the rear of the church. On the north side of the chancel there is a double-storeyed medieval vestry that was restored from a ruinous condition in 1987. This has a bricked-up fireplace and a spiral staircase in one corner that leads to an upper chamber. The chamber's floor had to be lowered in the restoration, so it now covers the upper part of the lower window (heavily barred for past security purposes).

THE NAVE ROOF

The impressive double hammerbeam roof is a complex amalgam of two distinct periods of work. As originally built, this was a mid-fifteenth-century double hammerbeam roof similar to the one that still exists at St Mary Quay in Ipswich and could well be the product of craftsmen from Ipswich. The roof was however almost completely rebuilt in the early seventeenth century and put back together with a number of new components. The clearest survivals of the original roof are the wall posts with the mutilated remains of figures, probably saints. The hammerbeams may also be original and the bare ends of the upper ones, marked with nail holes, may originally have been adorned with the figures of angels. The ends of the lower hammerbeams were uncomfortably adorned in the seventeenth century with a series of oval wooden plaques surmounted with crowns, and bearing various royal emblems – and, on one, the initials 'I.R.' for King James I (see illustrations at the top of the next page).

¹³ The important Hadleigh-born sculptor and poet, Thomas Woolner RA (1825–92), a founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who sculpted busts of many notable people of the time including Darwin. His bust of Henslow is in the Cambridge Herbarium.

¹⁴ The back of the throne bears 3 shields bearing these arms: 1 (left, surmounted by a bishop's mitre) the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich; 2 (middle) Dunwich (interpreted from its medieval seal); 3 (right, also surmounted by a mitre) Gumbleton.



Some of the seventeenth-century royal emblems on the beams of the nave roof

The intermediate trusses between the double hammerbeam ones are 'false hammerbeams' with short hammerbeams arch-braced to the tiebeams and supported below by scrolled brackets. Vigorously carved into the end-grain of the short hammerbeams are a series of grotesque masks of high craftsmanship. Both the masks and the brackets are seventeenth century in date, though the hammerbeams themselves may be fifteenth-century in origin. Notable among the other seventeenth-century additions are the pendant knobs on the centres of tiebeams, and a higher series of simpler pendants hanging from the junctions of the principal rafters at the apex of the roof (possibly replacing the original attachments for kingposts, as at St Mary Quay). The carved strapwork panels in the spandrels behind the hammer posts are also seventeenth-century additions.

Some of the seventeenth-century grotesque masks on the nave roof



The nave roof was the responsibility of the parishioners of Hitcham and there are a number of will bequests in the 1450s and 1460s from Hitcham people towards work in the church (1451 Richard Walkefar 'to the fabric of the church 6s 8d'; 1455 Thomas Crowe 'to the repair of the church 20d'; 1459 Margery Crowe 'to the emendation of the church 7s 8d'; 1460 Roger Charite 'to the repair of the church 6s 8d'; 1461 Richard Wederton [Witherton] 'to the necessary repair of the church 13s 4d'; 1462 Peter Qwyntyn 'to the repair of the church 20d'; 1464 Cecily Crowe 'to the repair of the church 20d'). These bequests may well have been towards the building of the original hammerbeam roof. This suggests that the building of the nave roof was very much a collective effort by the people of Hitcham.

Possibly the prime mover in this group was Richard Witherton esq. of Wetherden Hall. Witherton was a gentleman with a fairly high-status administrative and military past. In his will, dated 1 July 1461, he requested burial 'in the body of the church of Hitcham before the image of the crucifix', i.e. in front of the rood screen and in a prime place below the new roof.¹⁵ He requested that his tomb be made 'according to the fashion (forma) of that of William Cressener esq. in the church of the friars in Sudbury'.¹⁶

Unfortunately neither tomb survives, but Witherton may have intended his monument to show him in armour, for one of his last bequests was of a 'complete suit of body armour which used to be my own' to John Clopton esq. of Kentwell Hall in Long Melford whom he wished to appoint as supervisor of his will. Perhaps it is that armour that Clopton is wearing in his portrait in the stained glass in Melford church.

Witherton's widow Joan was to provide a suitable chaplain to celebrate divine service in Hitcham church for his soul and the souls of his parents and benefactors, for two years after his death. Joan was remarried not long afterwards to Sir Robert Fynes (Fenys or Fiennes; a younger son of Sir Roger of Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex). In her will of 1466 she requested burial beside Witherton in Hitcham church and left 'to the repair

of the church 3s 4d'.¹⁷ At least one of the rectors in this period also seems to have contributed to the work. Dr Thomas Bett(ys), rector from 1438 to 1452, left 40s in his will (dated 1452) to the fabric of Hitcham church.

The reason for the rebuilding of the roof in the early seventeenth century is unclear. A structural problem may have arisen or it could just have been an effort to enhance the appearance of the roof. It is likely that the original decoration in the form of the figures of saints and angels had been defaced or removed at the time of the Reformation and the roof may therefore have appeared very plain. A possible stimulus for the work may have been provided by the activity in Hitcham's woods around 1608. A serious fire had occurred in Bury St Edmunds in April 1608 and as part of the royal relief for the town King James granted the town 500 loads of wood from the royal woods at Hitcham in a charter dated July 1608. These woods were in the northern part of the parish - Westhey or Hitcham Great Wood, Oxney Wood and Easthey or East Wood. The manor of Hitcham had been in royal hands since 1559, when Queen Elizabeth acquired it through a forced exchange of properties with the bishop of Ely. It is possible therefore that the rebuilding of the roof was actually sponsored by King James himself, as manorial lord and perhaps as a way of compensating the people of the Hitcham for the loss of so much of their timber to Bury. The plaque with King James's initials could therefore be a direct reference to the instigator of the work.

However, in 1603 King James had granted a life lease of the manor (though presumably excluding the woods) to Sir Robert Hitcham, who, despite his name, was not a local man but a native of Levington, near Ipswich. The clever son of a yeoman, he became a successful lawyer in London. In 1603 he was appointed attorney-general to Queen Anne, the wife of King James I, and was knighted in 1604. He was made a king's serjeant in 1616 but did not rise further in the legal profession, though he appears to have been very successful financially. His land purchases culminated in the purchase of the castle and manor of Framlingham from the Duke of Norfolk in 1635 and he chose to be buried beside the dukes in Framlingham church in 1636. His acquisition of Hitcham was presumably because of the name and it is possible that he contributed to the rebuilding of the nave roof as a demonstration to his ancestral parish of his new-found wealth.

¹⁷ Will of Johanna Fenys of Hitcham, dated 16 Jan. 1466, proved 1466 NCC (N.P. 124 Betyns). Sir Robert subsequently remarried Eleanor, the daughter of Sir William Jenny of Knodishall and Theberton, a Judge of King's Bench.

¹⁵ Northeast and Falvey 2010, pp. 101-2, no. 181.

¹⁶ In the seventeenth century the antiquarian William Blois recorded a monument in the church to 'Wetherton et Johanna uxor eius' (SA(I) GC17/755: Blois vol. III, Church Notes, p. 320). William Cressener esq. of Boxted was buried in the Friars' church in Sudbury in 1454 (will dated 31 Mar. 1454, proved 10 May 1454 PCC). He was married to Margaret, the widow of Richard, Lord Scrope of Bolton and the daughter of Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmorland.

Another contributor to the new roof may have been Sir George Waldegrave of Wetherden Hall (c.1570–1637). As the chief inhabitant of the parish, he may have felt a need to show munificence in the face of rivals such as Sir Robert Hitcham. Never a great achiever politically, he was MP for Sudbury in 1597 and was knighted in 1603. His will, dated 1633, does however reveal that he held leases of 'Easthay and Oxenhaye woods, being the King's Majesty's woods in Hitcham.' This would have given him control of some supplies of timber.

THE AISLE ROOFS

The aisle roofs, like the nave roof, also seems to be amalgam of two periods of work. Most of the structure looks as if it is late fifteenth or early sixteenth century in date, the principal structural timbers being decorated with carved crenellations as is common at that period. However the horizontal boards that hide the junctions between the wall plate and the rafters bear curved vine scrolls that are more typical of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The cresting that surmounts the boards also points to the same date. The bosses applied to the intersections of the rafters and purlins are late medieval in form, but some bear carvings of men's heads that would fit, stylistically, better with a date of around 1600 than 1500 (see next page). At the east end of the south aisle, one of the short wall posts supporting a rafter brace has a plaque attached to its base that bears a crown over the initials 'CX', standing for King Charles I (below). Altogether the evidence suggests that a late medieval roof was rebuilt in the early seventeenth century and some new elements were added. The style of carving is different to that of the nave date, suggesting either a different date or different craftsmen. The plaque with the initials of King Charles suggests that the work may have been as late as the 1620s or 1630s.

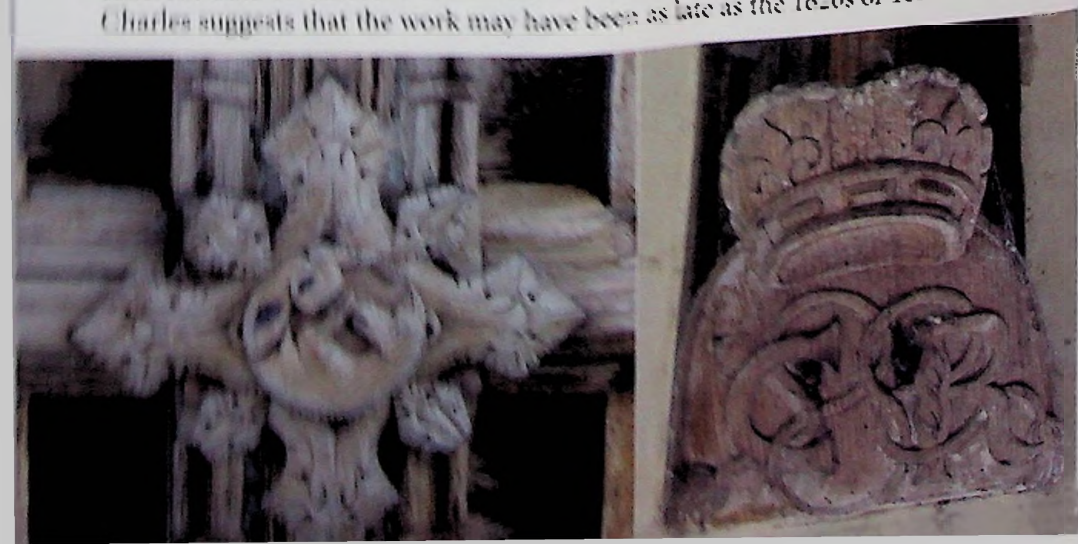


Some of the bosses and plaques ornamenting the nave roofs

THE CHANCEL ROOF

The sixteenth-century chancel roof is an interesting development of the 'false hammerbeam' type of roof in which the ends of the hammerbeams are joined by moulded purlins – one on each side of the roof giving a strong horizontal line across the bottom third of the roof. Curved braces rise from the wall plate to the hammerbeams and from the hammerbeams to the apex of the roof, but only the outer edges of these are now visible, as the gaps between the braces have been infilled with horizontal boards. This gives a bipartite ceiling made up of two concave sections separated by the longitudinal purlins. Further horizontal divisions are provided by smaller purlins in the upper curved sections and the central ridge piece. Vertical divisions are provided by the edges of the braces, which appear as narrow ribs. The overall effect is of a wooden ceiling divided into a series of rectangular panels, with carved bosses covering the intersections.

The carved bosses are a mixture of purely decorative ones, with lozenges and arcs filled with floral and foliage forms, and



*Right: Heads of a man and a woman on bosses in the chancel roof.
(Photographs by Malcolm Currie)*

more elaborate ones with human faces and angels. Particularly notable are a fine male head, probably representing Christ, and a woman's head, probably intended to represent St Mary (next page).

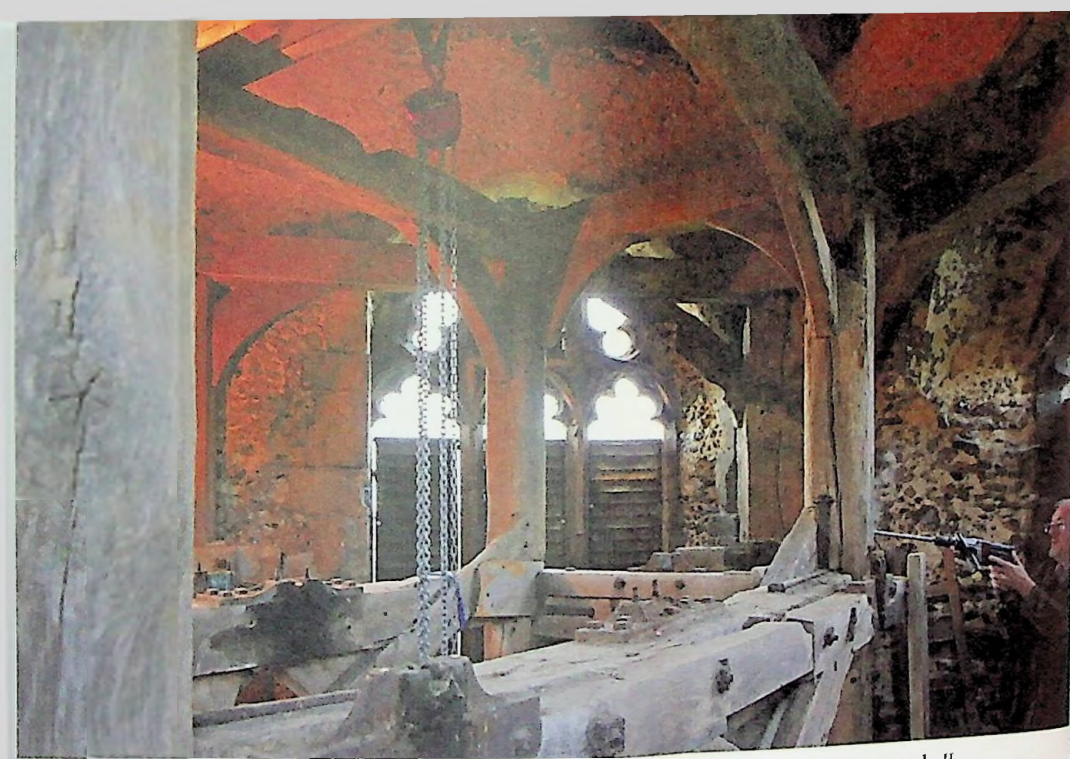
A very similar roof covers the chancel of Rattlesden church (this, like, Hitcham, was under the patronage of the bishops of Ely) and it is very likely that they are the work of the same craftsmen. Roofs of a similar construction also occur in Hengrave Hall (near Bury St Edmunds) where instead of wooden boards, plaster ceilings have been applied across the braces, following their curves but totally hiding them. This treatment leaves only the moulded hammerbeam purlins visible, rather like cornices - leading to them being termed 'cornice-purlin' roofs. At Hengrave the roofs date from around 1530 and it is likely that the Hitcham and Rattlesden roofs are not far distant in date.

As the structure of the chancel was the responsibility of the rectors, it is among them that we should look for a commissioner of the roof. In an early sixteenth century context there are two main contenders: Dr William Cooke and Dr Thomas Pelles. Dr William Cooke, DCnL, was rector of Hitcham from 1500 to 1522, but also held a string of other benefices and offices (rector of Bildeston, Sprowston, Garboldisham, Burton Latimer, canon of Ripon, prebendary of Thorpe, master of the Hospital of St Michael at Well, and vicar-general of the Diocese of Durham). Interestingly, his gravestone occupies pride of place beneath the new roof. His many church livings would certainly have given Cooke the wealth to build a new nave roof. The other possible instigator, Dr Thomas Pelles, DCivL, was a yeoman's son from east Suffolk. He was rector of Hitcham from 1522 to 1550 and of Glemsford from 1518 to 1550; he was also chancellor of the diocese of Norwich from 1530 and also of the diocese of London. He too would have had the wealth to commission the new roof, though it does seem that he preferred Glemsford to Hitcham, rebuilding Glemsford rectory and requesting burial in the church there in 1550.

THE BELLS AND BELLFRAME IN THE TOWER

For a hundred years the bells of Hitcham church were silent because of the instability of its old wooden bellframe. But with the aid of a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a project entitled 'Restoring Henslow's Bells', this has now been rectified. It started in 2019 with the bells being lowered for restoration (Fig. 11.19), enabling the old bellframe to be examined more





Dr Martin Bridge taking samples for dendrochronology dating from the empty bell frame.

easily and providing an opportunity to take samples for dendrochronology (tree ring dating). Dr Martin Bridge of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory was commissioned to do it and this is his summary of the work:

'Six of the nine cores taken from various elements of the frame dated. Interestingly, their ring sequences did not generally match each other well, with a couple of exceptions, and this may hint at timber being gathered from several sources, or it may just be a result of the short overlaps between series. As in many cases however, a site chronology formed from the individual dated pieces gave much stronger matches with the reference material than the individual sequences. Sapwood disintegrated in the few cases where it survived on the timbers, leaving only sapwood-heartwood boundary (h/s). The mean h/s boundary date for five samples was 1507, which would produce a likely felling date range for the group of 1516-48, which can be modified in light of some later h/s dates to 1519-48. This date range can be refined with the use of Bayesian sapwood modelling, using OxCal, to 1520-29.'

In addition, he reported:

'The possible source area of the timber was explored further, as the matches found were not with particularly local chronologies. When the t-values¹⁸ are mapped there is a visual impression of a Midland or Central Southern England source, and new methods of approaching provenancing also suggest these areas.¹⁹ This is all speculative at this stage.²⁰

The importation of timber from afar is surprising as Hitcham then had several large woods of its own: Hitcham Great Wood (Westhey, 160a. in 1251; 194a. c.1630; trees were felled here for the rebuilding of Bury St Edmunds following a great fire in 1608 and at least 500 trees were felled in 1656; it was sold in 1855 as 'abounding with thrifty oak timber and underwood'), East Wood (Esthey, 80a. in 1251; 92.5a. c.1630) and Oxney Wood (Oxenhey, 40a. in 1251; 44.5a. c.1630).

Dr John Eisel, former Steward of the Library of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, has kindly contributed this description of the frame:

'It consists of four pits set around a central pit, diagonally in the tower, and so designed for five bells. The north-west pit was subsequently altered to carry two bells, hung mouth to mouth. The ends of the centre pit are cross-braced, as can be seen in the photo, while the trusses at right-angles, the longer sides of the pit, are of scissor-braced form, common in East Anglia.'

The dendro date fits well with the available documentary evidence. In his will of 1522, Dr William Cooke, rector of Hitcham, gave 40s 'towards a litill bell to hang in the stepull of Hecham so the township will b[u]y it within the space of a yere after my departure'.²¹ And, most significantly, in December 1524 John Bowell the elder of Hitcham made a bequest in his will of 13s 4d 'to the makinge of the bellframe'.²² The township must

¹⁸ T-values are results from statistical hypothesis tests that are used to analyse datasets.

¹⁹ Bridge and Fowler, 2019.

²⁰ Bridge 2019.

²¹ TNA PROB11/20/342.

²² SA(B) IC500/2/17/74: will of John Bowell (Bowyll) dated 10 Dec. 1524, proved 14 Mar. 1524/5.

have acted on these bequests because by 1553 Hitcham had managed to amass four 'Great Bells' in its tower.²³ It is likely that the frame was built with the intention of hanging four bells, as its design is similar to 'hollow-square' frames found in Norfolk, where four bell-pits are arranged around a vacant central space.²⁴ A 'hollow-square' frame at Topcroft in Norfolk has cross-braced trusses, described as 'unusual', which are similar to those on Hitcham's central rectangle.²⁵ The placing of the bellframe diagonally in a square tower is also less common feature, but is recorded in some places such as Deopham in Norfolk.²⁶ At Hitcham the frame was later adapted to take six bells by putting a bell into the central 'hollow square' and then by fitting two smaller bells into one of the side bell-pits.

Curiously, there must have been bells there before the sixteenth century because, in his will of 1491, John Lever of Hitcham left 3s 4d to 'the reparacion of the bellys in Hecham cherche'.²⁷ Later, in 1741, the antiquarian Tom Martin noted six bells at Hitcham, and in 1826 another antiquarian, David Elisha Davy, recorded five.

Hitcham's existing six bells are however, considerably younger than their frame. The two oldest were cast by Henry Pleasant (d. 1708) of Sudbury (one is dated 1697); two were cast by Thomas Gardiner (d. 1762) also of Sudbury (one bell is dated 1744 and the other 1755); and two by Thomas Mears the younger of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London (both dated 1837).²⁸ The bells are inscribed thus:

- 1 & 2: THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FOUNDER 1837.
- 3: WILLIAM + POWELL + WILLIAM + EVERETT +
CHURCHWARDENS.
- 4: HENRY + PLEASANT + MADE + ME + 1697 + WP +
WE + CHURCHWARDENS (Fig. 11.18).
- 5: THOMAS GARDINER SUDBURY FECIT 1755 +
I-FIELDGATE R-KEMBALL C.W.

²³ 'Church Goods in Suffolk No. XLVII' [1553], *EANQ*, n.s. III, 1889-90, p. 287.

²⁴ Cattermole 1990, pp. 114-21.

²⁵ Cattermole 1990, pp. 117 and 120.

²⁶ Cattermole 1990, pp. 123-4.

²⁷ SA(B) IC500/2/13/101: will of John Lever, dated 25 July 1491, proved 23 Mar. 1491/2.

²⁸ Raven 1890, p. 202; and for more details of the bellfounders, see Cattermole 1990, pp. 192 and 199.

- 6: THOMAS GARDINER FECIT 1744 + I-FIELDGATE +
I-KING + C.W.

The bellframe has had several alterations, but it was the two 1837 bells which started the serious damage as there were now four bells, all swinging in the same direction. In 1883 George Bullock, bell hanger, was called in and left his name on the tower steps.²⁹ Then Henry Bowell & Son of Ipswich, bell hangers, re-hung the tenor bell, leaving their card on the ringing floor panelling with the date 1892.³⁰ Pencilled graffiti on the tower steps record Harvest Thanksgiving Peals that were rung in 1915, 1916 and on the 25 September 1919 – the last by E. Dickerson, J. Dickerson, H. Lister, H. Lister and W. Reynolds.³¹ But by the 1920s the frame was declared unsafe as it was acting like a battering ram within the tower and the bells were secured in a locked position in 1926. Various attempts were made to continue to ring, including adding a homemade chiming system (which was probably how the 1697 bell became cracked) but the bells fell silent.

In the restoration project the old ringing floor became the new bellry, with a new cast iron frame for the bells built and installed by John Taylor and Co. of Loughborough.³² The original wooden bell frame on the floor above it has been left intact. The cracked 1697 bell went to Soundweld Ltd of Newmarket for specialist welding, before renovation with the other bells by Taylors. With the donation of a new treble bell, cast in January 2020, and a rehomed second treble bell, dated 1887, originally in Lindfield church in Sussex, Taylors hung eight bells in the new frame, enabling Hitcham to ring a full peal for the first time.

A musicians' gallery in the lower part of the tower, demolished in 1878 as unsafe, has been rebuilt as the new ringing floor, and to accommodate it the organ was moved to the north aisle. When the access doorway to the musicians' gallery was reopened it was discovered that the plaster lining of the doorway was still intact and that there were four names (George Fisher, George Death, Daniel Dickerson and John Carnal?) written in pencil on the plaster together with that of the then rector, the Revd A.R. Grant. Also

²⁹ George Bullock, millwright, engineer and church bellhanger of Ipswich.

³⁰ Henry Bowell, bellhanger of Wykes Bishop Street, Ipswich. His son Alfred was both a bellfounder and a bellhanger at the same address in Ipswich.

³¹ Probably these were young men of the village: the brothers Ernest and John Dickerson, brothers Hector and Harry Lister, and William Reynolds.

³² <http://taylorbells.co.uk/project/hitcham-suffolk/>



Fig. 11.19 – The Hitcham bells resting at the base of the tower in 2019, awaiting transport to John Taylor & Co., The Loughborough Bell Foundry, for restoration.

perilled on the door archway were 21 strings of numbers, starting with 123456. This was a 'ringing method', the numbers setting out the order in which the bells were to be rung. With the help of the present-day bellringing community this 'method' was identified as an old tune called 'Double Court Bob Minor' that was first published by William Shipway in his *Campanologia* of 1816, confirming that the gallery had been used as a ringing floor before.

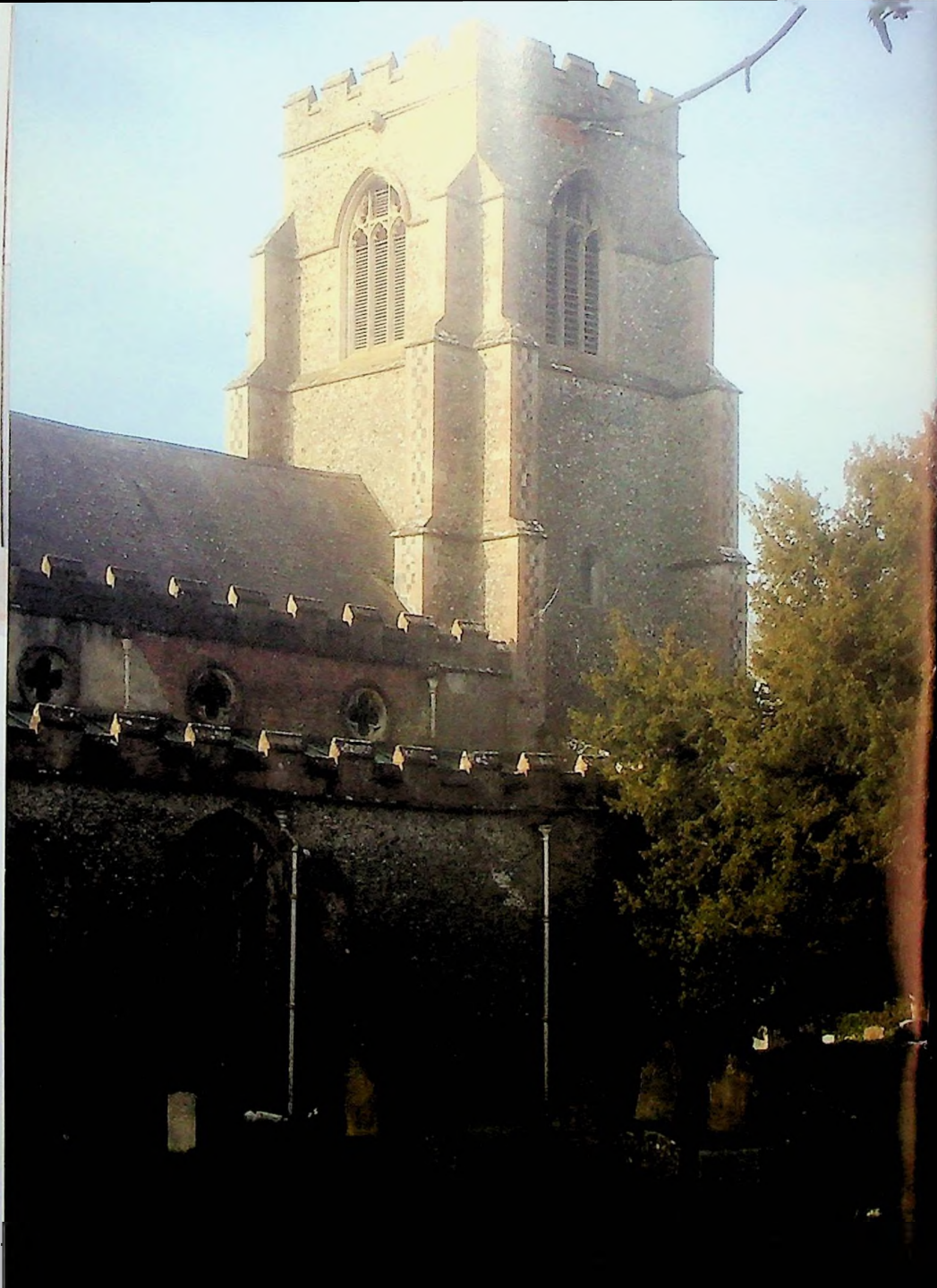
Lastly, with additional financial help from Viridor Credits, a WC and Eucalyptus were built in the room at the base of the tower created by a new oak screen across the tower arch. Cubitt Theobald Ltd, builders and painters, did both projects with the architect Philip Orchard. The £340,000 restoration project was finally completed in early 2021, its completion having been delayed by the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic.

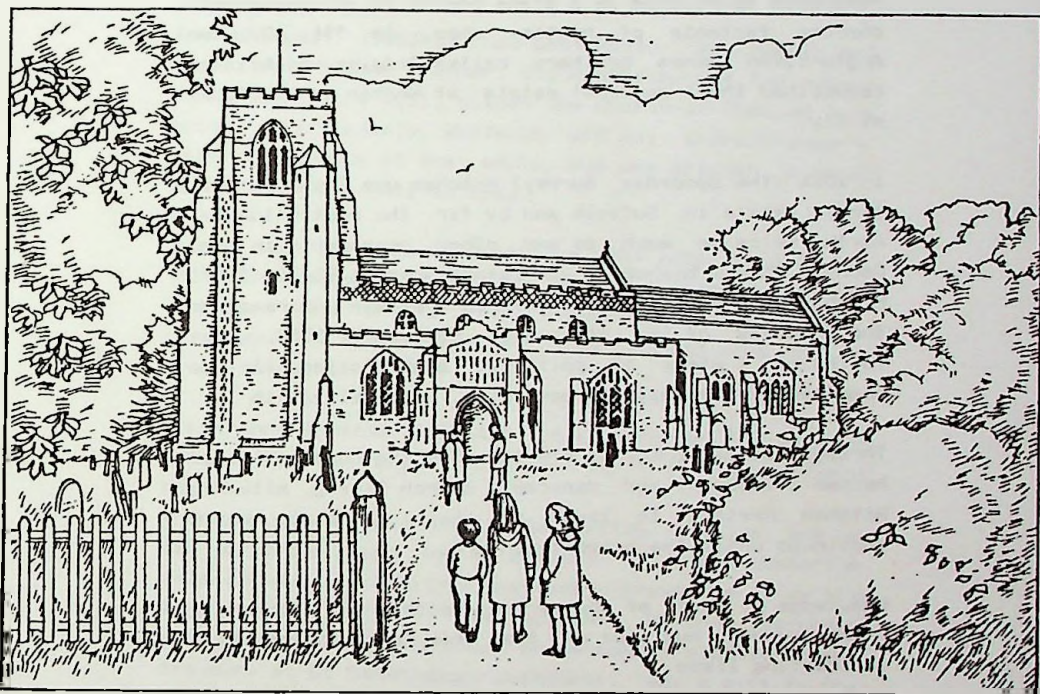
None of this work would have been possible had it not been for David Turner, who as churchwarden oversaw the restoration of the vestry, porch and tower roof between 1987 and 1999, and was instrumental in the foundation of The Friends All Saints' Church Hitcham in 1998. The

Friends raised the money for a major restoration programme in 2002–3 which included the repair of ten windows, timber treatment, internal plaster repairs, the stripping of emulsion paint before total redecoration, and the overhaul of the electrical wiring, heating, lighting and audio systems. All of this left the church in a sound structural and decorative condition enabling the Tower Project to take place. Nicola Currie, as secretary of the Friends was personally responsible for raising all of the £340,000 for this project in two years, through The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Viridor Credits, other charities and some generous private donations.

'Ship Graffiti' carved into the stone on the inside of the tower stairs door arch. This ancient graffiti was probably a 'prayer' for the safe return of a ship or for those feared lost at sea







All Saints' Church, Hitcham

SOME RECTORS OF HITCHAM

Although there is archeological evidence of Roman settlement in the village, the first known written reference to Hitcham as a place occurs in an exceedingly obscure footnote of history when, in 996 AD, two Anglo-Saxon thanes, brothers called Godwine and Aelfmar bequeathed their paternal estate at Hecham to the Abbey at Ely.

In 1086 (The Domesday Survey) Hitcham was Ely's largest single estate in Suffolk and by far the most valuable, worth twice as much as any other possession in the County. When a bishopric was established at Ely in 1109, Hitcham became part of the Bishop's estate and remained the property of the Bishops of Ely until 1559, when, following a piece of political arm-twisting, it was acquired by the reigning sovereign, Queen Elizabeth I.

Through the patronage of Ely and then the Crown, Hitcham became a valuable and desirable church living, allowing Hitcham Rectors to live in style; a state which continued until the present century.

Knowledge of most of the earlier Rectors of Hitcham is rather scant, but some of them seem to have led quite interesting lives.

Adam Easton (1392-98) was originally a Benedictine monk in Norwich and went to Avignon as Cardinal's secretary in 1368. He was given a Cardinal's hat himself in 1381 but fell foul of Pope Urban VI, was deprived of his Cardinalship, imprisoned and tortured and narrowly escaped having his head removed. (Clearly, the Pope had been deeply offended.) He bounced back into favour with Pope Boniface IX and when Rector of Hitcham was also Archdeacon of Shetland, Orkney and Dorset and Prior of Santa Agnese at Ferrara, a centre of the Italian Renaissance.

John Bremore (1398-1413) was a member of the papal household and secretary to the Antipope, John XXIII at Avignon and, presumably, didn't spend much time at Hitcham either.

Benedict Burgh (1453-66) went on to hold, amongst other offices, a chaplaincy to the king, and his scholarly translation of Cato's Precepts was printed by Caxton.

John Whytwell (1550-61) had been Rector of Lambeth and Chaplain to Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who, under Henry VIII, guided the Church of England into being. Fortunately, Whytwell did not share Cranmer's fate of burning at the stake, but was granted a royal pardon by Queen Mary in 1553.

During the religious upheavals of the later part of the 16th and early 17th century, Hitcham Church lost its brasses, most of its rood screen and many medieval treasures. The Rectors of that period also had a troublesome time.

Dr Lawrence Bretton (1620-43), it is recorded, "displayed great loyalty and affection for the established church."

This did not endear him to the Puritan faction, and he had billeted upon him a company of Parliamentary soldiers whose crudities eventually drove him from his Rectory and Parish. The splendid Hitcham Jacobean silver communion plate, now on permanent display in the Treasury at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, was a gift to the parish from Lawrence Bretton.

Miles Burkett (1643-60), Bretton's successor, was nominated to the living by the House of Commons. He had formerly been a High Churchman, but bending to the prevailing ecclesiastical wind, became an anti-sacramentalist, and proclaimed at the end of his incumbency at Hitcham that he had administered neither of the sacraments (Baptism or Holy Communion) during that period. He does seem to have been busy in acquiring property. In addition to buying up parcels of land in Hitcham, he purchased for the not inconsiderable sum of £1407. 14s. 7¹/₂d, the manor of Monks Eleigh. As befell his predecessor, Miles Burkett did not enjoy a happy and peaceful departure from Hitcham; the restoration of the monarchy and Charles II indicated another swing of the ecclesiastical pendulum and Birkett was replaced by John Anthill (1660-72), a moderate man holding opinions acceptable to the new regime. Burkett is reported to have lost his land, his money and his living, and to have died in poverty.

In 1665, the brother of Charles II, James, Duke of York, a royal admiral, happened to come ashore at Bawdsey on the Suffolk coast. He was told that the Rector there offered visitors a good cup of cider. Bawdsey could only afford its Rectors a modest living, but as the Duke had been so agreeably entertained, by the cider perhaps, he asked Mr Battie if there was any preferment in the County he would like to succeed to, remarking that he carried some influence at the court of his brother. Battie replied that to be Rector of Hitcham would make him a happy man.

In 1667, the year of Mr Anthill's death at Hitcham, the Duke of York was reminded of his promise by a conversation with his brother. The king was complaining that his ministers were vexing him with their squabbles about a living in Suffolk, on the disposal of which they could not agree. The Duke enquired the name of the place, which being mentioned he observed "It is two years since I promised it." "It is yours" replied the king, thankful to bring at least one dispute to an end.

The Lambeth register, 1667, in giving William Battie dispensation to hold Hitcham, notes that he was 'very well known to his Grace (The Duke of York) by some eminent piece of service he had done against the Dutch in their late Invasion'.

Dr William Battie (1667-1707) came to Hitcham bringing a sapling from his cider apple tree with him. He also became a Chaplain to Prince Rupert, a Prebendary at St. Paul's and a Chaplain to the King. It is not what you know, but who you know

Following the turbulent seventeenth century, the eighteenth was one of relative calm and quietness in church affairs in Hitcham.

Dr Nicholas Clagett (1707-26) was also Archdeacon of Sudbury, Preacher at St. Mary's, Bury, where he is buried, and probably seldom seen in the parish.

Joseph Coleman (1726-53) was also Rector of Bradwell in Essex.

Dr Bernard Mills (1753-88) was here for 35 years without troubling the parish records much. He was also Reader of St. Mary's, Bury 1745-57 and lecturer there 1757-66.

Henry Jackson Close (1788-1801) was a member of a small group of local men of substance, Trustees of the Stowmarket Navigation, who promoted the Act of Parliament which authorised the construction of the 15 locks of the river Gipping between Ipswich and Stowmarket. These enabled barges to carry coal upstream and grain downstream and thus helped to bring the industrial revolution to mid-Suffolk.

John Staverton Mathews (1801-37) had Hitcham Rectory, now Hitcham House, rebuilt in its present form, making it a fitting seat for a wealthy squire-parson. He is reported to have been popular in the village for his generosity and none too scrupulous attention to church matters. At the annual Tithe Feast, Mr Mathews used to open the proceedings with a popular song, the burden of which was:

"He that drinks strong beer and goes to bed quite mellow
Lives as he ought to live and dies a hearty fellow."

Sentiments loudly endorsed by his parishioners.

John Stevens Henslow, Regius Professor of Botany at Cambridge (1837-61). Hitcham's most celebrated Rector. (See separate leaflet)

Alexander Ronald Grant (1861-1903). Hitcham's longest serving Rector. Widowed shortly after arriving in Hitcham, Canon Grant, as he subsequently became, was assisted in his parish work by his formidable sister, Miss Flora Grant. On most Friday mornings Miss Flora would visit Hitcham School to hear children recite the Church Catechism. Canon Grant incurred the wrath of Hitcham farmers for allowing a building in the village, owned by the Church, to be used for a meeting of farm workers during the farm lock-out and dispute of 1874. In 1884, the Rector's nephew, Alfred March-Phillips, who lived at Hitcham Hall, was taken to court by a Hitcham farmer for damaging a crop of clover seed during a pheasant shoot. Relations between Church and village in

the nineteenth century were never cosy.

Robert Russell Cobbold (1903-26) shared grief with many other Hitcham families through the loss of two of his sons in Flanders in the 1914-18 War. He also suffered from a distressing weakness of the bladder and had, cunningly concealed in the Vestry, a china chamber pot, the only known example of interior domestic plumbing to have appeared in Hitcham Church.

Richard Huggard (1926-35). An Irishman, believed by the ladies of the village to have kissed the Blarney stone.

Maxwell Howfray Maxwell-Gumbleton (1935-49) Formerly Bishop of Ballarat in Australia, Maxwell-Gumbleton was Rector of Hitcham, Archdeacon of Sudbury and the first Suffragan Bishop of Dunwich. Not a man to hide his light under a bushel, he had a custom-built bishop's throne installed in the chancel complete with his own coat of arms. The Bishop considered the ideal committee to consist of three persons - one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, one who never attended and himself. At the end of P.C.C. meetings, having dealt with the agenda to his satisfaction, he would ask, in one breath, "Any other business?"...."No"... "Good night" and would be gone before anyone had time to open his mouth.

James Albert Smart Large (1949-1959) had the unenviable task of following the Bishop. He took over the parish but not the Rectory. The Bishop had disposed of that. Mr Large was the first Rector of Hitcham required to live in a modest house on a modest income.

Cecil Edward (Ted) Wetherall (1959-91) had added to his incumbency Bratterham (for a time), Kettlebaston, Little Finborough and Preston St. Mary. Canon Wetherall, following his retirement, accepted an invitation to become Assistant Chaplain in Athens, in a country which he has come to love almost as much as he did Hitcham.

A COMPLETE LIST OF THE RECTORS OF HITCHAM

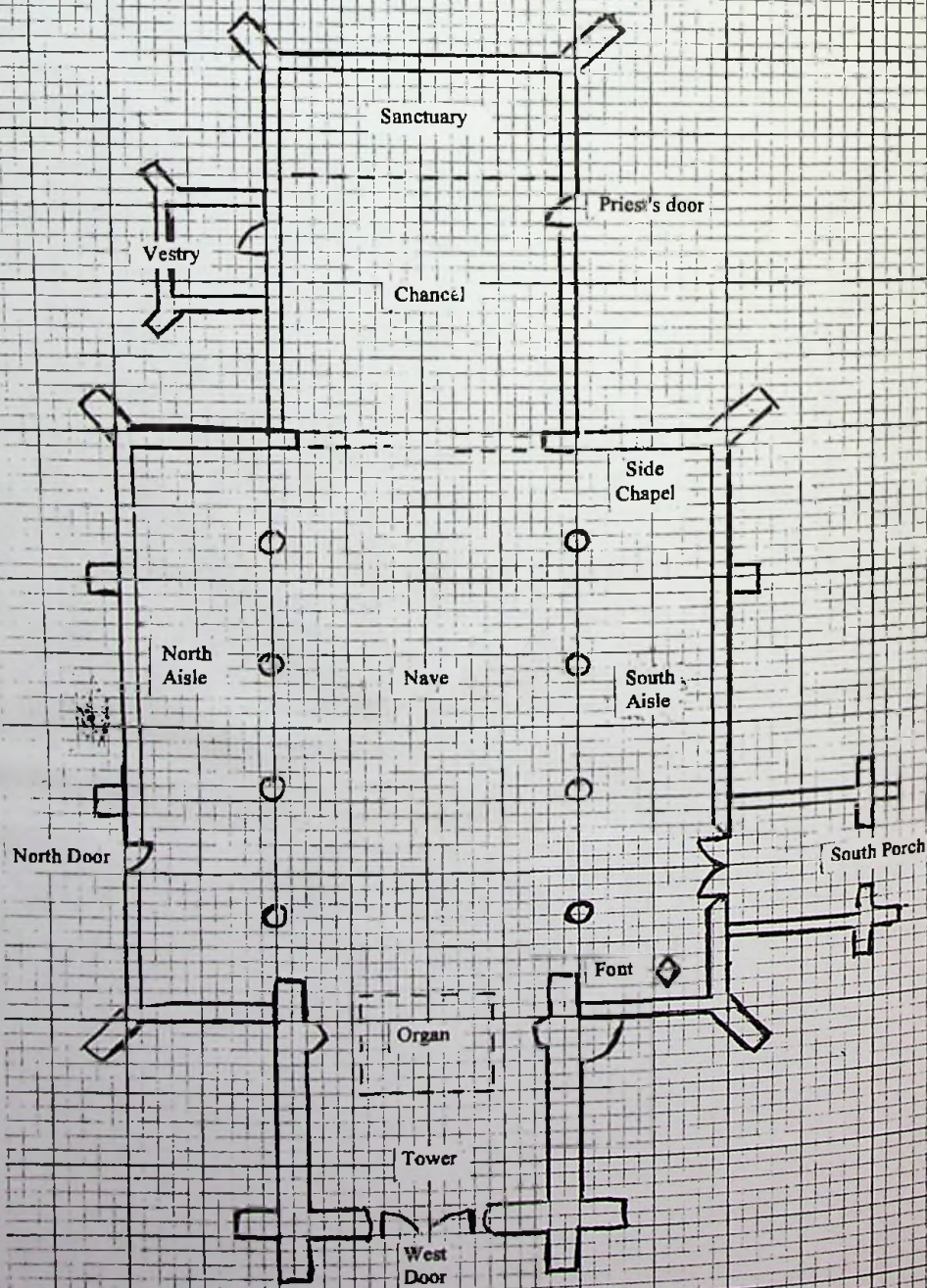
1281	NICHOLAS DE WARE	1561	JAMES BARWICK
1311	RICHARD DE STANHOE	1585	WILLIAM BARWICK
1315	JOHN DE THIRSTON	1620	NICHOLAS LOUND
1324	WILLIAM DE DALLYNG	1620	LAWRENCE BRETTON
1327	ROGER BOURT	1643	MILES BURKETT
1332	HENRY DE EDENESTOWE	1660	JOHN ANTHILL
1333	THOMAS DE BRAYDSTON	1667	WILLIAM BATTIE
1337	MARTIN DE IXNYNG	1707	NICHOLAS CLAGETT
1350	RICHARD DE NORTH CREEK	1726	JOSEPH COLMAN
1377	THOMAS DE CASTRO BERNARDI	1753	BERNARD MILLS
1383	JOHN IKLYNGTON	1788	HENRY J. CLOSE
1388	JOHN SKELYNGTON	1801	JOHN S. MATHEWS
1392	ADAM EASTON	1837	JOHN S. HENSLOW
1398	JOHN BREMORE	1861	ALEXANDER GRANT
1413	THOMAS REMUND	1903	ROBERT COBBOLO
1438	THOMAS BETTYS	1926	RICHARD HUGGARD
1453	BENEDICT BURGH	1935	MAXWELL HOWFREY MAXWELL-GUMBLETON
1466	THOMAS FYSSHER	1949	JAMES LARGE
1500	WILLIAM COOKE	1959	EDWARD WETHERALL
1522	THOMAS PELLE	1993	STANLEY MONTGOMERY
1550	JOHN WHYTWELL		

*The
Church Guide*



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
HITCHAM

PLAN OF ALL SAINTS' CHURCH



WELCOME TO ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, HITCHAM

Invariably the first question visitors to Hitcham Church ask is "How old is it?"

If there is anyone around to give an answer, the reply is likely to be "about 700 years." This answer is based purely on the architectural style much of the church is built in; we have no record of when work began or who built it.

This date, the 1300s, does not mean, however, that there was no church in Hitcham before then. Domesday Book (1086) records that Hecham, as we were known then, had a church with an endowment of 2 acres.

Whether the site of the pre-conquest church is the same as the present one is open to question for an alternative site is possible. Elsewhere in the village lies an ancient Christian burial ground with the remains of a building dating from the 10th century.

Hitcham is one of the largest parishes in South Suffolk. Now 3872 acres, before 1934 it was 4270 acres (including a detached part of Brettenham that was reunited with Hitcham in 1885). However, it is likely that Anglo-Saxon Hitcham was even larger, as topographical and manorial evidence suggests that Wattisham was once part of Hitcham; this would enlarge Hitcham to 5165 acres, making it even larger than Long Melford (5185 acres) and Stoke-by-Nayland (5277 acres).

Around 1000 AD two Anglo-Saxon thanes, brothers called Godwine and Aelfmar, bequeathed their paternal estate at Hecham to the Abbey at Ely. Godwine, who was wealthy enough to have his own steward and goldsmith, also gave the Abbey his estate at Hoo. In 1086 Hitcham was Ely's largest single estate in Suffolk and by far the most valuable, worth twice as much as any other possession.

When a Bishopric was established at Ely in 1109, Hitcham became part of the Bishop of Ely's estate and, incidentally, a cause of friction between the Bishops of Ely and the Abbots of St Edmundsbury who were irritated by a powerful neighbouring potentate grabbing income

from within their own territory. (The Liberty of St Edmundsbury, controlled from the Abbey at Bury St Edmunds, encompassed much the same territory as that which later became the administrative county of West Suffolk.)

Hitcham remained in the hands of the Bishops of Ely until 1559 when it was acquired by the Crown through a forced exchange; in other words, Queen Elizabeth squeezed the bishop until he coughed up his valuable property at Hitcham.

The patronage of Hitcham Church, which includes the right to appoint the incumbent, also belonged to the Bishops of Ely and they chose to bestow the living, a Rectory, on favoured up-and-coming clerics, most of whom probably never even visited Hitcham. (See "Some Rectors of Hitcham" booklet.) The actual work of the church in the village would have been undertaken by lowly priests whose hopes of preferment were slight.

In the absence of any important secular lords in medieval Hitcham, the impetus for church building could only have come from the bishops, the rectors, the priests and the ordinary farmers of the parish. The present church reflects this in that although it is large (as we have seen, the parish was large) and well built, it is not overly ornate. There is none of the superb carving and ornamentation that can be seen at Lavenham and Long Melford and which was paid for by rich secular benefactors. Our inheritance, however, is a church of perfect proportions when viewed from outside, and from the inside, an interior of chasteness and restrained austerity.

Building the Medieval Church

As with most churches of its age, Hitcham church has no footings (foundations); the builders simply dug a shallow trench and built upwards from there relying on the weight of the masonry and the accuracy of their plumb lines and measuring sticks to keep it standing. As indeed it has, for 700 years. The walls are about 3ft thick but it is not difficult to burrow a hole beneath them and push through a pipe or cable.

The walls themselves are courses of rubble comprising flint and any other stone that was lying around. There are remains of stone pits in the wooded area to the south of the churchyard where useful flints were abundant. The dressed stone forming the buttresses, corners and window and door surrounds would have had to be imported from quarries in central England. Building the church was a slow job. The mortar used was a mixture of burnt lime and sand which was very slow to set. If course upon course were built up too quickly the whole lot would slump down. Work had to be suspended in winter in case of frost damage. But slowly and painstakingly the work proceeded. The massive tower was built independently as a free-standing structure, as the two internal buttresses show, and the nave not extended westward to reach the tower until the builders were satisfied that it would not fall.

Many visitors remark on the skill of the medieval masons and their remarkable engineering achievements.

In 1999, as part of a recent restoration programme, a portion of a large oak beam, which supported the tower roof, had to be replaced. The piece of new timber weighed three quarters of a ton and a large industrial crane had to be brought in to hoist it into position. The original timber would have weighed about two tons and the medieval craftsmen hauled that up using ropes and wooden pulleys. No mean feat.

Although the 14th century builders must have worked to a plan, the church was far from completed when they had done. In fact, churches are seldom 'finished'. Subsequent generations often feel the need to make additions and alterations driven by changes in fashion and patterns of worship.

In the 15th century many alterations were made to Hitcham church. Note the varying designs of the windows. But most important was the addition of the south porch. This splendid piece of 15th century work (described by English Heritage as a "world beater") is similar to porches at Bildeston, Preston and Felsham and must have been created by the same hand.

In the late 14th and early 15th centuries it became the practice for

official functions to be conducted at the church door. Marriage services and the churching of women took place there as well as legal pronouncements. To enhance the solemnities of the occasions as well as providing shelter from the weather, elaborate and beautiful porches were created. Although most of these official practices have since been moved elsewhere, the church porch is still the legal place for displaying public notices, hence the clutter of documents pinned up on either side.

It must be remembered that until 1534, Hitcham Church was Roman Catholic. Of great importance in the 15th century was the Cult of the Rood. The rood was a depiction of Christ crucified, often accompanied by Mary, his mother and St John, his favoured disciple. These three large impressive statues were erected high above the rood screen, which separated the chancel from the nave. Elaborate rituals and processions were enacted, particularly at Easter, and many churches were enlarged so that these ceremonies could be satisfactorily performed. It seems possible that at Hitcham the height of the nave was increased to accommodate the rood and to allow extra light into the church by inserting the clerestory windows on either side. The side aisles also may have been widened to allow room for processions.

When the Reformation prevailed in the 16th century, the rood and rood screen were amongst the first of the 'superstitious' fittings to be removed and destroyed. Happily, at Hitcham, parts of the original screen survived, although greatly defaced, and these are now the two panels standing on the chancel steps.

The medieval church must have been more colourful than it is now. Many statues and images would have been in selected positions both inside and outside the church. Outside, their niches are all that remain. The windows would have been of stained glass depicting biblical scenes and the walls would have been vividly painted with similar pictures. On the chancel arch, above where the rood was, there was a doom picture depicting the Day of Judgement and the perils that awaited hardened sinners. Nearly all of these were destroyed on the orders of the Reformed Church of England.

The common people in pre-Reformation times were not permitted

access to the chancel and the sanctuary (where the high altar is). These were the priests' preserve and they entered the church by the priests' door on the south side of the chancel. The rest of the church was the people's domain. They had to maintain and decorate it and were allowed to use it for a variety of communal purposes. Hitcham is believed to have had two medieval guilds. These were religious guilds, probably named after a saint, but run by the laity and whose main purpose was the upkeep of their part of the church. The house near the main churchyard entrance, now called 'Old House' was once the medieval guildhall of Hitcham where the guilds met and worked.

Changes following the Reformation

During the early years of the Reformation everything that was regarded as superstitious or not authorised by scripture was removed from the church or defaced in situ. This iconoclasm meant the loss to Hitcham of its rood, its statues, its brass plates in the floor and the angels fixed to the hammerbeams in the roof of the nave.

The roofs of both nave and aisles are of particular interest in that much of the workmanship seems to date from the early 17th century. Indeed that date is confirmed by the monograms J.R. and C.R. which state that the work was begun in the reign of James I and completed during the reign of his son, Charles I. A peculiarity is that the technique of the double hammer beam used in this restoration harks back to methods used a couple of centuries before, and where the angels might have been expected to reside, the restorers fitted prosaic oval plaques with contemporary royal and secular emblems.

It has been suggested, however, that the roofs might have been damaged by fire and that the workmen were merely making good, renovating what they could and replacing what they had to. The pineapple pendants are clearly Jacobean, but the grotesque faces (now popularly called 'green men') are surely of an earlier, more imaginative age.

From this period until the middle of the 19th century nothing