

St Michael's Beccles Church Guide



£4.00

Having been a visitor and pilgrim ever since I first admired it as an eleven-year-old in 1958, it is a tremendous pleasure to help produce a guide to this mighty 'gem' of a church - one of the ecclesiastical giants of East Anglia.

Its massive bulk (rebuilt by hand from c.1350 onwards) covers an area of some 9,000 square feet [c.840 sq metres] and its mighty, albeit unfinished. The bell-tower, begun about 150 years later, rises 97 feet [c.30 metres] and not only dominates the centre of this historic market town, but also graces the Beccles skyline when viewed from the surrounding countryside - particularly from the North.

Here we are in touch with living history, as people from different generations and Christian traditions have altered it and left their mark upon it - from the worn old Font of Dorset stone, where Beccles folk and their young have been baptised for 800 years, to the ingenious Undercroft complex created in 1981-2.

Marvel at exquisite craftsmanship from many periods, including one of the grandest porches in the Eastern Counties, the gigantic seven-light East and West windows of the 1400's a kaleidoscope of colour in late 1800's glass and 150 feet of continuous roof remade after the church was gutted and destroyed by fire in 1586.

A host of memorial inscriptions in the floors and windows, on the walls and in the church-yard speak of real people of the past who have been part of this church and community: above all, this is no museum or ancient monument, but is a living, working building - still in daily use as a nucleus for Christian worship, witness and hospitality - the purpose for which it was built and which it has served continuously for over hundreds of years. As such it is a sermon and sacrament in craftsmanship - a Holy Place, made sacred by centuries of peoples' prayers and care.

Those whose Spiritual Home this is are glad that you have come to see it. Please make yourself thoroughly at home here in our Father's House. Hopefully this book will help to show you some of its treasures and the selection of photographs will give you pleasure as you look back on your visit.

Please pray for its present-day custodians and accept their gratitude for any contribution that you have kindly given - which will help maintain St Michael's intact and beautiful for future generations to use and to enjoy,

May God bless you,

Roy Tricker B.E.M.

Licensed Reader, Author, Church Historian and emeritus Lay Canon

Church Guidebook: 9th Edition © 2022 - published by the Parochial Church Council

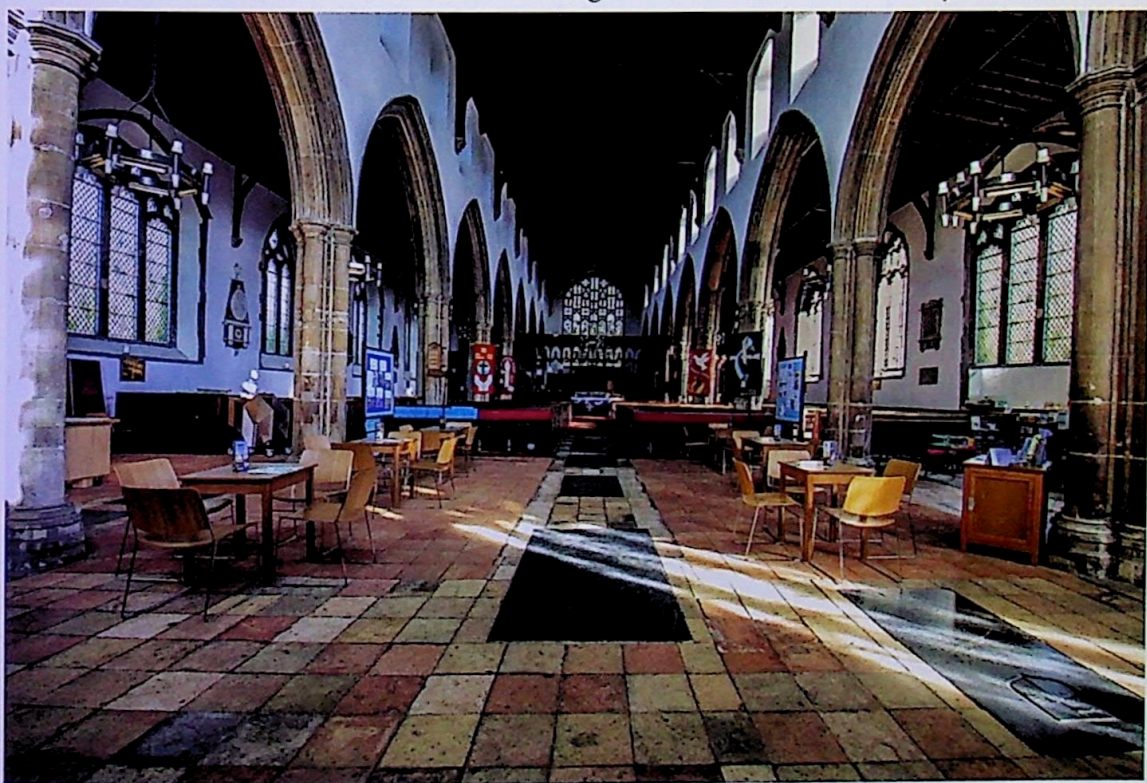
Welcome to St Michael's

The jewel in the crown of this picturesque, vibrant Market Town, which gloriously proclaims, just by being here, the Love of God for His creation and for each one of us - inspiring us with the very best of people's skills through the centuries, because nothing but the best was, or is, fit for the House of God. Church buildings are like people - they, and we are the products of much love and care, but have suffered a few bumps and bruises as well - and this is true of St Michael's!

Visitors soon become aware of the signs of the very active life of the living Church whose home it is, who serve God and Beccles in a variety of ways, from meaningful worship, friendly fellowship and hospitality to popular concerts and recitals (sometimes with international musicians) and much else.

This is an amazing and sacred place, where people of all faiths or of none, may find peace, beauty and inspiration, and where Christians - whoever or whatever they are - may look upon, as 'Home'!

We hope that you will enjoy exploring St Michael's. Our Church Family will make you very welcome at any of our services, or if you are seeking a Spiritual Home; Jesus Christ, whom this building is all about, makes everyone welcome!



How Old is the Church?

Like most old churches, St Michael's has gradually evolved and contains work of many periods. The major landmarks in its long history are as follows:-

1086 – The Domesday Survey mentions one church in Beccles, with 24 acres of glebe, in the patronage of the Benedictine Abbey at Bury St Edmunds, which indicates that it was already well-established, so it is possible that Christian worship has taken place on this spot for 1,000 years or more, although no evidence of this Saxon church has survived in the present building.

The 1200s – The bowl of the font dates from this time, also possibly parts of the priest's doorway incorporated into a later arch.

c.1330-1450 – The body of the church that we see today took shape, maybe incorporating parts of the earlier building. A will of 1369 bequeathed money for the fabric of the new church. The tracery patterns in the windows shows the gradual evolution of the Decorated Style of architecture into the Perpendicular Style, which took place during this period, and which was well-developed when money was left towards the sumptuous south porch in 1455-6.

The 1500s – The great detached bell-tower grew c.1515-47, but was never finished. The Reformation was transforming the church and its worship and on 21st May 1556, the Protestant Martyrs, John Denny, Thomas Spicer and Edmund Poole were burned together at one stake in the Old Market Place, for their loyalty to its principles.

On **29th November 1586** (the eve of St Andrew) the interior and roofs of the church were completely gutted by a disastrous fire, which also consumed more than 80 nearby houses. Nevertheless Beccles valued its parish church, which was restored and re-roofed.

The 1600s - 1858 – Despite the fire damage, **William Dowsing**, in his Puritan purge of 'superstitious images and inscriptions', still found much to destroy on 6th April 1644 - including 13 or so crosses, about 40 'superstitious pictures', and some offending inscriptions.

By the **late 1700s**, the interior was filled with high box-pews; there was a west gallery containing the organ. Under this gallery (in the nave), the town's fire engine was housed behind a screen. The 'three-decker' pulpit stood centrally where the nave and chancel joined. A south aisle galley was added in 1826.

1859 – The interior was transformed by a thorough restoration and re-ordering by Messrs Godbolt of Brockdish to the designs of JH Hakewill of London. New seating, chancel furnishings and floors were installed, the roof repaired and the stonework of some doorways and windows renewed where necessary. More windows were completed in the following years.

1913–1925 – The three screens, designed by HJ Green, arrived during this period. In 1920 the south chapel was furnished as the War Memorial Chapel.

1981–2 – The undercroft, designed by Fielden & Mawson of Norwich, was built outwards from (but lower than) the west end of the church, providing much-needed facilities for the church and community.

2020–21 - The font was moved from the west end of the nave to a new position near the south door. The western section of the nave was cleared of seating to become a spacious gathering-place, with a new servery in the western part of the north aisle, installed by MS Oakes to the designs of Philip Orchard.

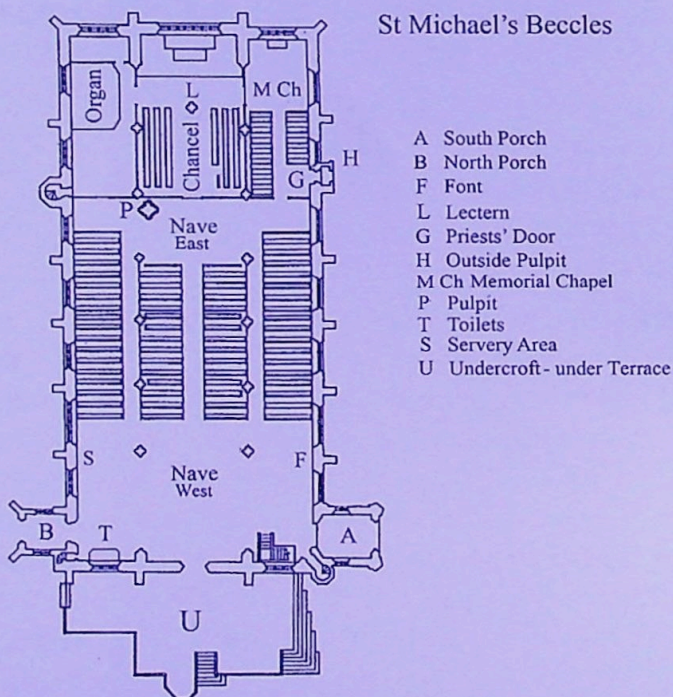


The bowl of the Font dates from the 1200's - making it one of the oldest artefacts in St Michael's.

Two other places of worship existed in Beccles in mediaeval times.

The Chapel of St Peter, the Patron Saint of fishermen, stood near Old Market, north of St Michael's. It was independent of the parish church and, like similar chapels, was seized by Henry VIII at the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 and given to William Rede who built a house there. St Peter's House now stands on the site, and remains of the chapel still survive in the present building. In the mid 1700s, when Mr Crowfoot, a tanner, who lived there, showed the antiquary, Tom Martin, ruins of part of the wall of the former church.

Another mediaeval church, St Mary Endgate, stood in the south-east of the town. By the 1500s what had been the village of Endgate (or Ingate) had grown and extended to join neighbouring Beccles and in 1577 Queen Elizabeth I gave order for the church to be demolished and money from the sale of the bells, lead, masonry, etc. was to be given or lent to the people of Dunwich in commiseration for the loss of their town & port.. When Tom Martin visited the site in 1750, the metre high ruins of two sides of its tower remained. Some fragments of ornamental masonry, believed to have come from it, may be seen built into the wall of a nearby builder's merchant at the corner of Ingate and Fredericks Road.



What to See Inside the Church

It is worth taking a little time just to sit, drink in and marvel at the vastness of this great church, where light from the clear glass of many of the windows falls upon a variety of interesting features, from many periods, including our own.

The ground-plan of the building [*opposite*] - excluding the porches, is in fact one mighty rectangle – 148ft [45m] long, 60ft [18m] wide and 45ft [c14m] in height to the apex of the nave roof.

There is no structural division between nave and chancel and the interior is punctuated by graceful arcades of eight bays which divide the north and south aisles from the nave. The two western bays are lower and narrower than the rest. Above them, the Clerestory windows do indeed provide a 'clear storey', lighting the upper part of the church, especially the nave roof. What was probably a glorious mediaeval roof perished in the great fire of 1586 and was replaced shortly afterwards by this simple and rather basic single-hammerbeam roof (strengthened by later tie-rods), which is nevertheless a fine and sturdy piece of craftsmanship, stretching unbroken for the entire length of the church and spanning a considerable width.

The elegant tracery patterns in the stonework of the many windows form a textbook of window designs in use between c.1330 – 1450.

With very few exceptions, each design is different from any other. Most glorious of all are the vast seven-light east and west windows. Before **the** fire, we think that the arches of the four-light windows facing each other nearest the screens may have been open arches, leading to small chapels, possibly for two of the six Guilds that were attached to this church.

Near the South Porch entrance stands the Font - (pictured on page 3) symbolising our entry, by Baptism, into the Family of the Church. The worn octagonal bowl, of Purbeck marble, with simple shallow Early English arcading, dates from the 1200s, which makes it the oldest visible feature inside the church. The limestone base, shaft and capital supporting the bowl are later additions. On the wall near the South Porch entrance is a list of recorded Rectors and their Patrons of St Michael's from the year 1291. In the mid 1800s, the church embraced the Anglican Evangelical tradition and since c.1910 the Evangelical Simeon's Trustees, as Patrons of the living, have appointed its clergy.

A doorway at the south-west corner gives access to the stairway to the parvise chamber above the south porch. This originally provided accommodation when needed for a priest or church official. In the 1700s and early 1800s it contained a valuable library of books, then for a while served as the choir vestry.

Look, high up over the doorway, for the tiny peep-hole or 'squinch' window, with its exquisite miniature tracery, which gave the occupant a clear view into the church beneath. Near the squinch window are the funeral hatchments for William Crane (1691) and Robert Brownrigg (1699).

Above the north door are fixed the Royal Arms of King Charles II (dating probably from 1660 when the King made their display obligatory in churches).

Originally painted on both sides and pierced, they could be seen from both the Chancel and the Nave and were probably suspended where Nave and Chancel joined, which was the King's preferred position for them. They were later removed and stored for a time in the tower. On their rediscovery, it was found that their obverse side was in better condition than the front, so they were restored, using the obverse as the front face - hence the Lion's and the Unicorn's positions are reversed.



Most of the furnishings that we see in St Michael's today date from the very thorough and much-needed Victorian restoration and re-ordering. Most of this restoration took place in 1859, the church having been closed for seven months. Before this restoration, the interior was furnished with unsightly box-pews, described as being 'of the worst description'. There was a 'cumbersome' gallery in the south aisle and a west gallery accommodated the organ and choir. The three-decker pulpit was in a prominent central position between the nave and chancel. Furthermore, a wooden partition divided off the western bays of the nave, creating a storage area which contained, amongst other things, the parish fire engine!

The box-pews were replaced by oak benches in the nave and aisles, A beautiful oak pulpit, with rich traceried panels and a 'wineglass' stem was installed, allowing the preacher to be seen and heard.

The east and west windows, and other stonework, were restored, the galleries and western partition were removed and the organ moved to it's current position. The work was carried out to the designs of John Henry Hakewill, a London architect of national repute, who designed St Peter's Church in Bury St Edmunds and the rebuilding of Thurston Church.

The Beccles contractors were Messrs Godbolt, of Brockdish, near Harleston

The church from the North West showing the North Porch





The elegant chancel screen, with its delicate openwork traceried openings, crowned with wooden vaulting and a richly-carved cornice (all in true East Anglian 15th century fashion) was given by the Crowfoot family. It was designed by Herbert J Green of Norwich and a faculty was granted for it in 1913. Mr Green's plans for the south chapel and north aisle screens were carried out in 1920 and 1925 respectively. St Michael's mediaeval rood and parclose screens, which stretched the breadth of the church and enclosed the north and south chapels, perished in the fire of 1586. Surmounting them were lofts, or walkways, with beautifully carved parapets, giving access for people tending the many candles burning in honour of the great Rood (Christ crucified, flanked by His Mother and St John) which was placed above. Roods and lofts were demolished by Law in the 1540s, but the doorway to the loft staircase and roof is still visible in the north wall. The handsome 19th century oak Lectern is in the form of an eagle with outstretched wings, supports the Bible, which is read here, and reminds us that the Word of God should not only be read, but spread!

Hakewill's design and Godbolt's superb craftsmanship of 1859 may be enjoyed in the beautiful choir stalls each side of the chancel. In true mediaeval fashion, their ends terminate in three-lobed poppyheads carved with vegetation motifs, including oak, ivy, sycamore. The bench ends show the four evangelists - the angel of Matthew, the lion of Mark, the bull of Luke and the eagle of John (but not in strict order) With more angels, and several 'Pelicans in their Piety' all beautifully carved. Legend has it that the pelican fed it's young on the blood pecked from it's own breast, and is symbolic of Our Saviour. A Paschal Lamb and other animal motifs can be seen in the armrests display of a variety of angels, birds, animals and mythological creatures.



The carvings, seen on the choir stalls are well over a century old



In 1859, the floor of the chancel was raised one step above that of the nave and was paved with Minton's tiles. Further steps rise to the sanctuary, containing the High Altar where bread and wine are consecrated and shared in obedience to Our Lord's command at his Last Supper, nearly 2000 years ago. The east wall behind the altar is lined with traceried stone panelling, flanking the central arcaded reredos, which was made in 1886 to the designs of Benjamin Ferrey, another London architect whose work may be seen nationwide. The pair of chairs and prayer-desks on the south side of the sanctuary show tasteful 20th century craftsmanship, Adorned with the Beccles Coat of Arms & Municipal Seal of the Borough, they commemorate former Churchwarden, Mr A. E. Bunn (d. 1959) and Mr G. E. Brown, a former Mayor of the town and Alderman.

On the north side of the chancel, beside the door to the clergy vestry is the front of what must have been a magnificent tomb of John Rede, a Mayor of Norwich, whose descendants played an important part in the town's affairs during the Reformation. He died in 1502 and his tomb was one of the few things in the church to escape the fire. The Victorians, who moved it here from the north aisle, had to shorten it by removing one of the sons to fit it into the corner. There are now seven remaining sons and three daughters, known as 'weepers', mourning the loss of their father.



John Rede's tomb, with ten of his children - one was removed to fit the space !

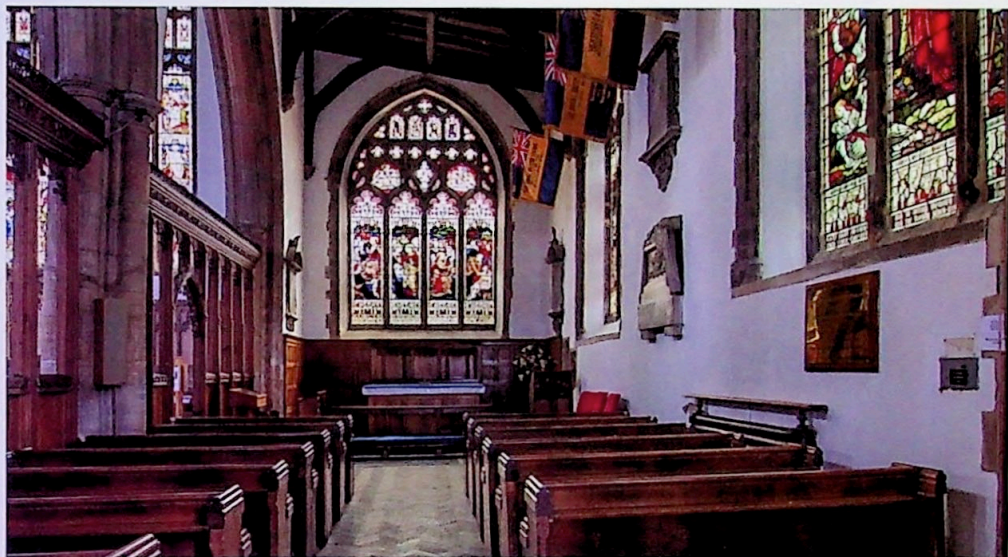
The **Organ** occupies much of what was the north aisle chapel. A three-manual instrument, built by the renowned George Pike England in 1757 for St James' Clerkenwell in London. In 1796 it was dismantled and rebuilt on a West Gallery here at St Michael's. In 1859 it was rebuilt at the east end of the north aisle as a two-manual instrument by Messrs Bishop, Starr & Richardson.

By the mid 1930's the ravages of time and woodworm had made it virtually unplayable and it was restored by Rushworth & Dreaper of Liverpool in 1938. By 1975 it was again choked with dust and Norman Nicholson, then Organist, had it renovated by W. A. Boggis of Diss, adding a large Pedal Reed stop. In 1981 a 4ft Principal was added to the Pedal Organ in Mr. Nicholson's memory. Within the case there are almost 1,400 pipes ranging in size from 10 cm to those which almost touch the roof immediately above the instrument.

There was originally a south chapel (maybe the Lady Chapel) at the east end of the south aisle. The 15th century recess for its quatrefoil (four-lobed) piscina drain remains in the south wall. Here disposable water used at the mediaeval Masses celebrated at the nearby altar was poured. During the early 1800s the western part of the chapel and part of the adjoining aisle were fitted up as a

Court (entered directly through the priest's door), probably for the transaction of parish business. In the 1859 restoration, the chapel was fitted with children's benches, facing north, with a small vestry at its east end. The benches were removed in 1920, when this area reverted to its original use and was then furnished as the War Memorial Chapel with screen-work and furnishings, mainly to the design of Herbert J Green of Norwich. The chapel was seated with chairs until 1959, when three front benches from each side of the nave were redesigned to provide the seating we see today. A Memorial Book, with pages beautifully inscribed with the names and details of those who lost their lives through War is on display permanently in a glass case in the chapel.

In the inner wall near the priest's doorway is the entrance to a stairway which gave access to the roof of the little porch above the doorway, which may have been used as an outside pulpit. The stairs may also have led to the loft above the chapel's former parclose screen.

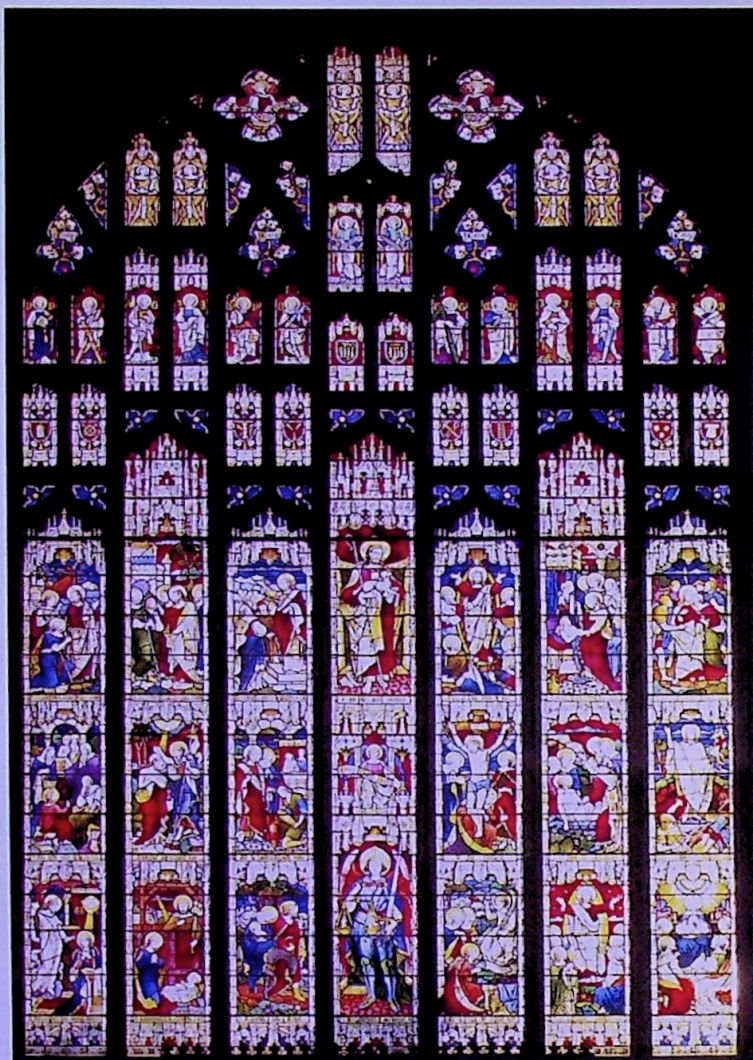


The Memorial Chapel

Stained Glass

Sadly, none of the rich mediaeval glass which would have filled these windows has survived. This provided a kaleidoscope of colour, artistry and 'visual aids' for people who could not read nor understand the Latin of the Scriptures and services. St Michael's possesses some excellent 19th century glass, by Messrs Heaton, Butler & Bayne, of Covent Garden, London – a firm with a prolific output and a reputation nationally for work of the highest quality.

EAST WINDOW – This massive seven light window, has an amazing array of Church teaching in visual-aids! The centre light shows Jesus the Good Shepherd, with Michael, our Patron Saint beneath carrying his scales, for weighing souls.



In the six flanking lights are eighteen episodes from Our Lord's life – from the Annunciation to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In the tracery above are the Twelve Apostles, with their emblems, the Instruments of Christ's Passion and the company of Angels.

The glass which cost £500, was given in 1887 in thanksgiving for 50 years of Queen Victoria's reign.

SOUTH CHAPEL, EAST – In the four lights we see the **Sermon on the Mount**, the **Healing of the Leper**, **Jesus with the Children** and the **Good Samaritan**. In memory of Dr William Edward Crowfoot (d.1887) and his wife Ellen (1870). The Crowfoots were a prominent Beccles medical family, who were generous benefactors to this church.

SOUTH CHAPEL, SOUTH-EAST – The three lights show **Dorcas** (from the Acts of the Apostles), the **Blessed Virgin Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth**, and **Jesus with Mary of Bethany and her sister Martha**. In memory of Mary Crowfoot (died 1891).

SOUTH CHAPEL – SOUTH-WEST – **Jesus inviting the people, including the sick, to ‘Come unto me’**. In memory of Canon John Rowsell - Rector from 1882-1909.

NORTH CHAPEL – EAST (Now a Vestry) – The **Sacrifice of Isaac**, **Jesus calming the Storm**, the **Raising of Lazarus** and **Jacob’s Dream at Bethel**. In memory of the Revd John Rustat Crowfoot, vicar of Wangford and Reydon (died 1875). Interestingly one section of the text beneath the Isaac scene has been inserted upside-down!

MEMORIALS

Memorial inscriptions on the walls and in the floors of the church commemorate a host of people of the past who were part of this church and community. Some are fine pieces of craftsmanship and many have inscriptions that are worth reading.

Brass inscriptions, (originally in the floor and now re-set on the nave’s west wall) commemorate John Denny (1620) and his wife Jane (1612).

The many wall plaques include one to Robert Davey – Schoolmaster and Freemason – who died a ‘victim of the stone and gout’ in 1797 (north aisle); another, by the noted sculptor Francis Chantrey, celebrates Dr Joseph Arnold, a famous Naval Surgeon and naturalist, who died in Sumatra in 1818 (south chapel), and in the south aisle are commemorated several of the town’s ‘surgeons’, including William Crowfoot (died 1820) and his descendants.

Other worthies are commemorated on ledger slabs in the floors, some with beautiful incised coats of arms, including 17th century members of the Leman family.

CHURCH TREASURES AND REGISTERS

Amongst the church plate (which is in safe-keeping and not on display) are two exquisitely-worked chalices and patens made by Peter Peterson of Norwich – one set made in 1569 and the other in 1570 – also a silver flagon of 1727.

We also possess a copy of the 1549 black letter First Prayer Book of Edward VI. Our Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials date from 1586 - the year of the Great Fire: Registers are deposited with the County Record Office at Lowestoft. Pre-1586 Records were sadly destroyed in the fire, together with 80 houses, and most of the church building. Only the stone faced walls and pillars survived. The registers contain **two** interesting entries:

May 11th 1749, Revd Edmund Nelson, Curate of Beccles married Catherine Suckling, daughter of the Revd Maurice Shelton Suckling - Rector of Barsham (near Beccles)

Edmund and Catherine moved to Burnham Thorpe, where he remained Rector until his death in 1802.

1749 marriages May
May 11th The Reverend Mr. Edmund Nelson,
Rector of Hillburgh in Norfolk and Mrs
Catherine Suckling of this Parish both
single persons. By Chancellours Licence.

December 15th 1783, the renowned poet and writer, Revd George Crabbe, who had been curate at Aldeburgh before becoming Chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire in 1782, married Sarah Elmy (daughter of James and Sarah Elmy of Beccles). George later became Rector of Muston, Leics and Allington in Lincolnshire, before finally becoming Rector of Trowbridge, until his death in 1832. Sarah died at Muston in 1813.

In a vestry, is the ancient Parish Chest, iron-bound and secured with the customary three locks - the Rector and Churchwardens each having a key, so that all three needed to be present for it to be opened.

Exploring the Exterior

There is much to see and enjoy outside an old church, and St Michael's is a prize example – its exterior is magnificent and unforgettable!

No other Suffolk church has a setting quite like this, from its sloping churchyard, high above the ground below and near the edge of a precipice, with incomparable views across the Waveney valley into Norfolk. Likewise the opposing view, as you approach Beccles from Norwich on the A146; St Michael's appears set high, and dominating the townscape.

Like most East Anglian churches, the walls are constructed of flint-rubble, with stone (originally brought from the East Midlands by water) for the windows, doorways, arcades and corner-quoins.

It was the sloping churchyard which gave rise to the ingenious idea for providing much-needed centralised meeting-rooms, toilets and kitchen facilities. Below the west end of the south aisle there existed a small crypt, used originally as a **Charnel-house** - or '*bone-hole*' and latterly as a heating-chamber. In 1981 the Norwich architects, Fielden & Mawson, drew up plans to enlarge the crypt northwards and westwards, below the church's west front, forming the versatile Undercroft which is used for a variety of functions and events in the life of the church and community, but without spoiling the integrity of the ancient church building. It can be entered from the churchyard, or from inside the church and its roof forms a splendid balustraded terrace, used sometimes for open-air worship and social activities, and providing a fine vantage-point for the glorious views.

Rising above the terrace is the church's wide and noble west front – a masterpiece of early Perpendicular architecture, seen in its three grand windows and great west doorway, and flanked by St Michael's two magnificent porches.

Although now rather decayed and little-used, the flint-faced, two-storeyed north porch is a fine piece of mediaeval craftsmanship. Its lower part (judging by the windows) appears to date from the 1300s, but it was transformed and heightened a century later. Its north face and parapet are embellished by flint and stone 'flushwork' panelling, capped by delicate stone cresting. In the spandrels flanking the entrance arch (above which is a single canopied niche) we see a mythical 'wodewose' (or wild man) with his club on one side, ready to attack a dragon on the other. Inside, it has a splendid lierne-vaulted ceiling, with carved

bosses showing beautifully-preserved human faces (including a mythical 'green man', with leaves sprouting from his mouth) and a central dragon-like creature. It shelters the church's rather sumptuously-moulded north doorway. Externally we can further appreciate the beauty and variety of the three and four-light windows in the aisles, their Decorated and Perpendicular tracery designs and patterns showing the development of architectural design between c.1330 – 1450. Two small incisions in the stonework of the second buttress west of the priest's doorway may well mark the site of former Mass-dials, where, in the days before clocks, people placed a stick whose shadow fell upon lines scratched into the stonework (but now weathered away) to calculate when to begin a service.

The turret for the rood-loft staircase, with its onion-shaped crown, abuts the north aisle. Opposite, on the south side, the priest's doorway is sheltered by a little embattled porch of the late 1400s. Its arch has spandrels carved with foliage, little flowers in the arch moulding and a hoodmould resting upon carved corbel heads. Inside, its ceiling is stone-panelled and studded with a variety of little flowers. The circular shafts and eastern supporting the inner doorway's 1400s arch may well be 200 years older. A blocked doorway in the wall above gave access to the roof, and it has been suggested that this may have been used as an external pulpit. If so, this is a very rare survival.

The east front of St Michael's, with its four-light windows flanking the gigantic seven-light east window, is well-worth pausing to admire. Beneath the east window, the lower part of the wall is faced with arcading in flushwork, above which is a frieze of little four-lobed quatrefoils and shields in flushwork, then the rather decayed and weathered remains of what must have been an exquisite frieze of 15th century carved stonework, punctuated by five niches, and displaying the arms of the Garneys family and those of St Edmund and his abbey at Bury. Right of centre, in a ring of circles (and now very worn), were the letters of 'MICHAEL' and, right of that, in similar rings 'ORA PRO NOBIS' (pray for us).

The splendid stone-faced **South Porch**, (pictured on the facing page) for which money was left to build it in 1455-6, is a masterpiece of mediaeval stonemasons' craft and is one of the finest in East Anglia. Exquisite design and craftsmanship of the highest quality may be enjoyed in its south face, flanked by pinnacle-crowned polygonal buttresses which are covered with niches that once held statues.



its wide entrance arch with intricately raceried spandrels on each side (look for the shield with St Edmund's crown and arrows on the eastern one), the three tall niches above and the carved and crested parapet (with the emblem of the Blessed Virgin Mary -containing in the design of the "M" all the letters of Maria) which crowns it, 10+ metres above the ground. A staircase turrett gives access to its upper parvise chamber and to the aisle roof. Inside is a beautiful triceron-vaulted ceiling, studded with what were intracately (but now very defaced) bosses. Figures in the gaping jaws of Hell can be deduced on one and, near the south doorway, a figure surrounded by rays - almost certainly the Blessed Virgin Mary. The grand inner entrance arch is itself adorned with canopied niches.

The Bell Tower

The crowning glory of St Michael's, and of the Beccles skyline, is the massive and magnificent bell tower, or campanile. It stands well clear of the church, to the south-east of it, on the highest and firmest ground in the sloping churchyard. The reason for building a tower which is 97ft (30m) high, 40ft (12.2m) wide at its base, and with an estimated total weight of 3,000 tons (2,722kg) in this position, and detached from the church is clearly because, in the words of an ancient document, "it was not safe to build the steepal on the cliff side!"

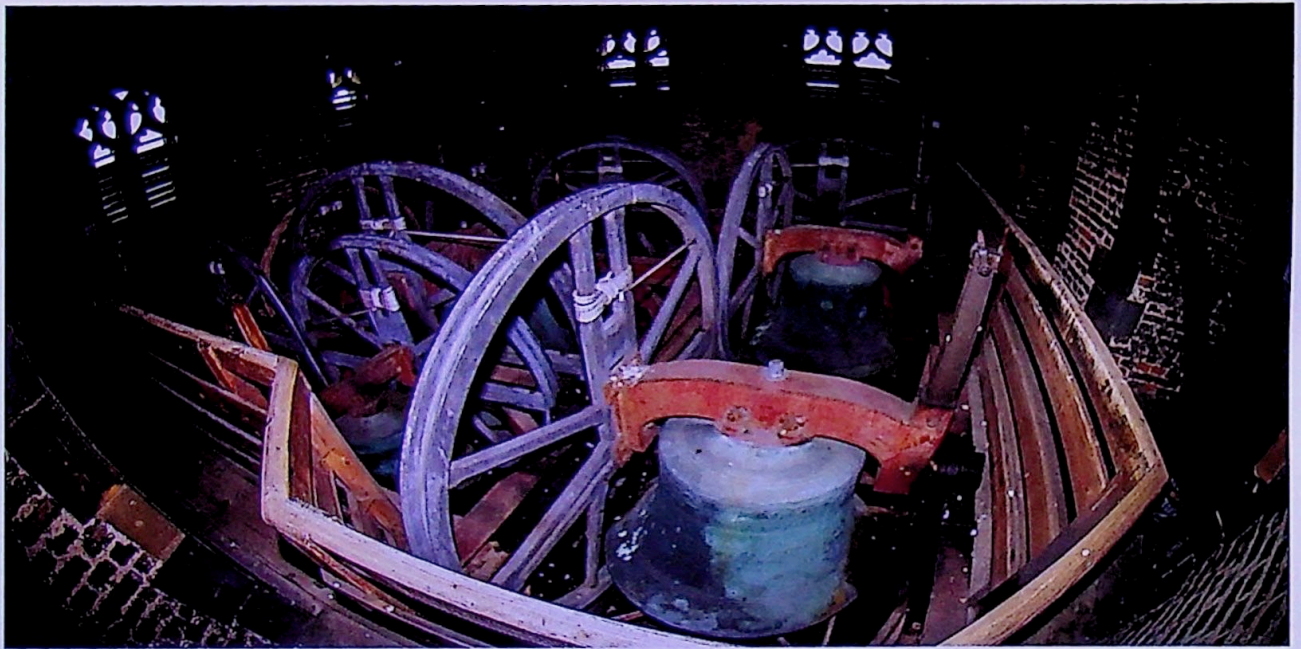
Several wills bequeathed money towards its construction - the first dated 1515 and the last 1547, which roughly indicated the period during which the tower gradually grew. The arms of the Bumstead, Rede and Bowes families indicate that they were generous benefactors. Unfortunately either the money ran out or the influence of the Reformation prevented the tower from being completed, and we must imagine it with an elaborate embattled stone parapet with corner pinnacles rising maybe another 25 feet (8+ metres)

What we see however is nevertheless breathtaking!. Walls 6 feet (2m) thick at the base constructed of flint rubble are faced internally with many Tudor bricks and externally by Roche Abbey stone. Its corners are strengthened (and its profile enhanced) by sturdy angle-buttresses at the four corners. Interstingly the tower is ascended by means of four newel staircases - one in each corner and in 122 steps in all. The top one in the north-east corner, terminates in a turrett, with an onion shaped cap, rising above roof level. Bold and massive this structure may be,

pictured opposite the detached Tower



but there is beautiful stonecarving here, in the plinth surrounding the base, the tall niches in the buttresses and, on the westarn side - in the grand entrance arch with its frieze of shields, three fine niches and the four light west window above. The lower north and south windows, having long-lost their original stone mulions and tracery, have received new and simpler wooden ones in recent years. Pairs of two-light late Perpendicular belfry windows enable the ten bells to ring out over Beccles and beyond. The bells were cast in Lester & Peck's Whitechapel Bellfoundry in 1762; the tenor bell weighs 25cwt (1¹/₄ tons) In the ringing chamber is a Bellringers' Gotch, [jug], with three handles, made by local potter, Samuel Stringfellow in 1872. It is inscribed, "When I am filled with liquor strong - Each man drink once, and singalong - Drink not too much to cloud your knobs - Lest you forget to make the bobs"



Faced with horrendous projected costs for vital repairs to the tower, the Church Family had no option but to have it declared pastorally redundant. Much to everybody's delight, it was handed over with great ceremony and celebration into the care of Beccles Town Council for the token sum of one 'Beccles' penny! It has since been beautifully restored and conserved under the superintendence of Bernard Fielden.

We are extremely grateful for Roy Tricker's help, who in turn acknowledges the work of authors of previous Guidebooks. We are also very grateful to Dr Barry Darch for his advice, to photographer Ian Hollingsworth and to the ever-helpful Staff of Suffolk & Norfolk County Record Offices, Norwich Local Studies Library and Lambeth Palace Library for the use of material in their care. *August 2022.*

The Parish of Beccles

	Rector
1291	Robert Filius Rogeri
1319	Gilbert de Ilkeshall
1323	Stephen de Holcote
1331	William Mitchell
1397	William de Ely
1405	Johannes Atte Gate
1422	William Olton LL.B
1458	William Osgodby
1467	Johannes Plente
1467	Thomas Leek A.M.

Patron

The Abbott of Bury St Edmunds

1314	Henry de Bromleye
1323	William Meresehall
1326	Johannes de Stantone
1375	Edmund de Welle
1403	Johannes Brampton
1419	William Alake
1457	Johannes Olton LL.B
1461	William Ascough
1467	Robert Pevesey
1503	Thomas Rede

Rector

1543	Thomas Yaxley
1546	Thomas Garnett
1552	Ralph Newton
1554	Thomas Whitby
1554	Ralph Newton
1562	Thomas Balkey
1574	George Buckley
1575	Thomas Nuce
1583	William Flemming
1583	John after Vaughan
1638	Richard Mileson
1640	John Crowe
1671	Thomas Armstrong
1715	Thomas Page
1764	Peter Routh
1785	Bence Sparrow
1823	Hugh Owen
1854	John Talbot Johnston
1872	Frederick Francis Tracy
1882	John Rowsell
1910	Frederick G Miller
1929	A. Ernest Thompson
1934	Harold Lea Birch
1945	Frank W Rideal
1950	W. R. F. Hares
1963	Malcolm D Sutton
1995	Andrew H R Thomas
2008	John N Beauchamp
2018	Richard Henderson

Patron

Anthony Rouse by purchase of the Abbot
Sir T Gresham and Wife
“
“
“
William Rede
Sir T Gresham and Wife
“
“
Dame Anne Gresham
The Crown
Mr Bence
Mr Bence
R Sparrow and Wife
“
“
The Earl of Gosford
The Revd E. Holland
“
“
Simeon's Trustees
“
“
“
“
“
“
“
“

Back cover - a shaft of sunlight from the Clerestory Window lights the Altar

