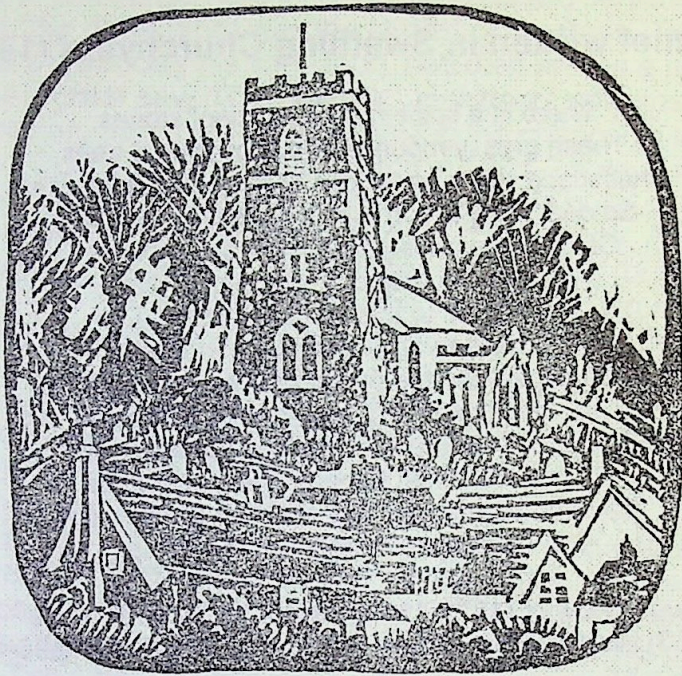


# ST MARY'S

*Sweffling*



## *Some notes for pilgrims*

This booklet is issued free with the hope that you will make a donation, however small, for the upkeep of this church. A collecting box will be found on the left of the main door.

## Sonnet written in Sweffling Churchyard (1899)

There is a spirit in these ancient stones,  
These grassy mounds and immemorial trees  
That scace seem conscious of the passing breeze,  
So deep they brood above the sleeping bones  
Of happy mortals eased of toilsome breath,  
A Power not alien to this gentle vale,  
Not alien to this quiet folk that fail  
In no observance due to life or death,  
The spirit and the power of lives that pass,  
Their labours ended, and their laughter fled,  
To mingle with the dust their hands have tilled,  
To take their rest beneath the silent grass  
Their fathers planted, and their sons shall tread,  
The measure of man's destiny fulfilled.

**John Cowper Powys (1872-1963)**, whose brother Theodore (1875-1953) lived at White House Farm, Sweffling (circa 1898-1902).

The first impression cue has of the church is its clean lines and total absence of large tombs which are usually found in churches. The reason for this is probably that the village had within its parish 3 small manors in which very few of their owners actually lived. They therefore did not spend a great deal of money on the church, as they would have done if they were going to be buried there. The manors mainly formed parts of larger estates and were looked after by stewards. One Lord of the Manor who was in fact buried here in 1748, was Richard Jenkinson whose manor of Dernford was the largest of the three. Twenty-eight years previously his son, John, had died and as a note in the burial register says, "The said Mr. Jenkinson, notwithstanding he was patron, paid 13s. 4d. for breaking the chancel to bury his said son." During repairs to the church in 1971-2 a vault was discovered on the South side of the chancel and it is quite possible that this could contain the remains of John Jenkinson, Anne his sister (buried 20th June 1724), another son Samuel (buried 17th May 1727), as well as their father. The person who wrote these derogatory remarks about his patron was presumably the rector. Another rector who himself came in for criticism was Hugh Braudreth who came under the jaundiced eye of a committee set up in 1642, headed by the Earl of Manchester and entitled "a committee to remove scandalous ministers in the seven associated counties of Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Herts., Cams., Hunts., and London. Our friend Hugh was removed (or sequestrated) around 1644, but managed to keep the job in the family as he was succeeded by his son Robert. He, in his turn, was succeeded by Lawrence Eachard who had suffered the same fate at Yoxford. The earlier trouble within the church caused by the two acts of supremacy of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, seems to have passed by without any of Sweffling's rectors being removed as they signed their acceptance.

Having given some reason for lack of memorials perhaps we could look at what there is to see. Until the commonwealth the chancel (C. 1300) and nave were divided by a rood screen and loft with a staircase giving access to the rood loft and the rood (crucifix) itself. The lower part of the screen with the Queen Anne arms upon it (now on the North wall), survived until the mid-nineteenth century.

It will be noticed that the nave and chancel are of the same width. The chancel roof was completely rebuilt in 1832 when the old lead roof was replaced with slate and all the timbers renewed. The lead was sold for £42 8s. 10d., which helped to pay off the £100 which this work cost. Included in this cost was the replacing of all the pews of the church with ones of red deal. The fronts of the old pews were used to case the walls and the old oak seats were made into joists for the floor. The renewed East window illuminates the altar and sanctuary in which is a pair of fine chairs, one dated 1622. Also within the sanctuary on the South wall is a fine piscina, the lower part of which was damaged when the font, now in the nave, was set into the lower part of it. It was described as such when the antiquarian D. E. Davy visited Sweffling church in June, 1844. The octagonal C. 13 font is made of Purbeck marble and has plain recessed arches on its sides. The base is modern.

The deep lancet windows will be noted in the chancel. If you look closely at the Lord's Prayer and Creed etc. painted on the wall of the nave, you can see underneath it an earlier presentation in a older form of script.

The chamber organ, now at the West end of the nave, was purchased in 1925 at a cost of £22. It replaced an earlier "American Organ" which was acquired around 1890. The organ is the work of Samuel Parsons of London. It has a straight, rather narrow pedal board, 5 stops, a pedal coupler, a swell pedal and, unusually, a retractable keyboard

When a gentleman visited the church in 1860 he noted "a meritorious choir upon a new gallery at West end." This gallery survived until 1889, when, as the new pews provided in 1883 were sufficient for all the congregation, it was decided to take it down. When our friend Mr. Davy was here in 1844 he also noted that "the arch from the nave into the steeple has lately been enclosed and some painted glass, which had been collected and kept at the parsonage, has been placed therein." The vestry on the North side of the church was originally built as a schoolroom in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The church tower contains 6 small bells:-

1. The Jubilee bell, cast by John Warner of London, 1887
2. Thomas Mears of London, fecit 1831
3. Thomas Gardiner, Benhall, fecit 1718
4. T. Mears, fecit
- 5,6. Thomas Gardiner, Benhall, fecit 1716

The tower also has a Sanctus bell window and around the top of the tower you will notice the flushwork decoration.

In a survey of church goods made between 1537-1552 this church is listed as having 3 great bells and "a chalyce wayinge X oz." This chalice has survived whereas the bells have not. The most important thing of all to survive is the C. 14 leather chalice case which was discovered in the church in 1899 and has five shields tooled on the lid. It is now in Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich.

Probably the most architecturally interesting part of the building is the South porch. Over the entrance will be noted 3 now empty niches and on the spandrels (sides of the archway) you will see an emaciated "dragon and a wild man" as one authority puts it or "St. George and the Dragon" as another puts it. We also see some decomposing lions. The embattled top of the porch, with its flushwork, has the letters S and M in flints, to remind us of our patron saint.

The church was thoroughly renovated in 1971-2, when the tower was strengthened to permit the bells to be rung, the interior repainted, the organ moved from the South side of the chancel to its present position and the new stairs provided to the ringing platform. The new lights, given by a member of the congregation, were electrocuted in 1975.

If we can believe the survey carried out in 1603, this parish had 76 communicants, which included the entire adult population of the village and had no recusants. This was taken when the rector was John Leigh who was, himself, the patron of the living. Later in the same century (1650) the local nonconformists formed their own church near what is now the "White Horse" and a century later moved to larger premises at Rendham which, alas, have just (1977) had to close through lack of support.

This short note on the church will best be brought to a close with a quote from the parish magazine of July 1932, when the rector, Rev. G. C. Vyse, wrote - "Due to the help of many kind donors .....we have once again our old friend the weather vane back in its place on the church tower; very faithfully it told us which way the wind was blowing - if it could direct a few more parishioners into the church, it would be more useful still." I think the present rector, churchwardens and P.C.C. could only follow that with a hearty "hear-hear."

### RECTORS OF SWEFFLING

1322 William de Aldeby  
1325 Robert de Brusyard  
1351 Hugo Dust  
1389 John Hacon  
1389 Richard Bruys  
1392 Richard Warwyk  
1395 Robert Bate  
1431 Thomas Joye  
1451 William Hamond  
1463 John Haylok  
1488 Jacob Walton  
1497 John Walton  
1510 William Baiteman  
1533 Robert Legate  
1540 Charles Griffinson  
1569 Philip Tilney  
1573 John Leygh  
1620 Hugh Braudreth  
1646 Robert Braudreth  
1662 Lawrence Eachard  
1695 William Green  
1717 Henry Gifford  
1737 Fynn Dove  
1778 William Copland

1882 Richard Peek  
1890 Holmes Ruxton  
1898 George Clennel Rivett-Carnac  
1913 William Benjamin Greer  
1919 Hugh Keys Moore  
1922 Charles Bon sing Ratcliffe  
1923 John Fishwick Pemberton  
1932 Griffin Charles Vyse  
1941 Charles Thomas Lynch  
1949 Maurice Gaskell Sykes  
1958 Albert Tong  
1969 Cyril D. R. Stevens  
1995 Martin E. Percival  
2002 Jonathan Olanczuk  
2017 Martin E. Percival

1977 Bryan Sedge wrote & printed this guide with the help of  
The Archivist and staff of the Suffolk Record Office, and

*Jean de Gale, for design & cutting of the lino block and  
David de Gale, for translation of latin texts  
Chester Bolton, for loan of Parish Magazines, 1925-33*

2019 Reprinted (with corrections).