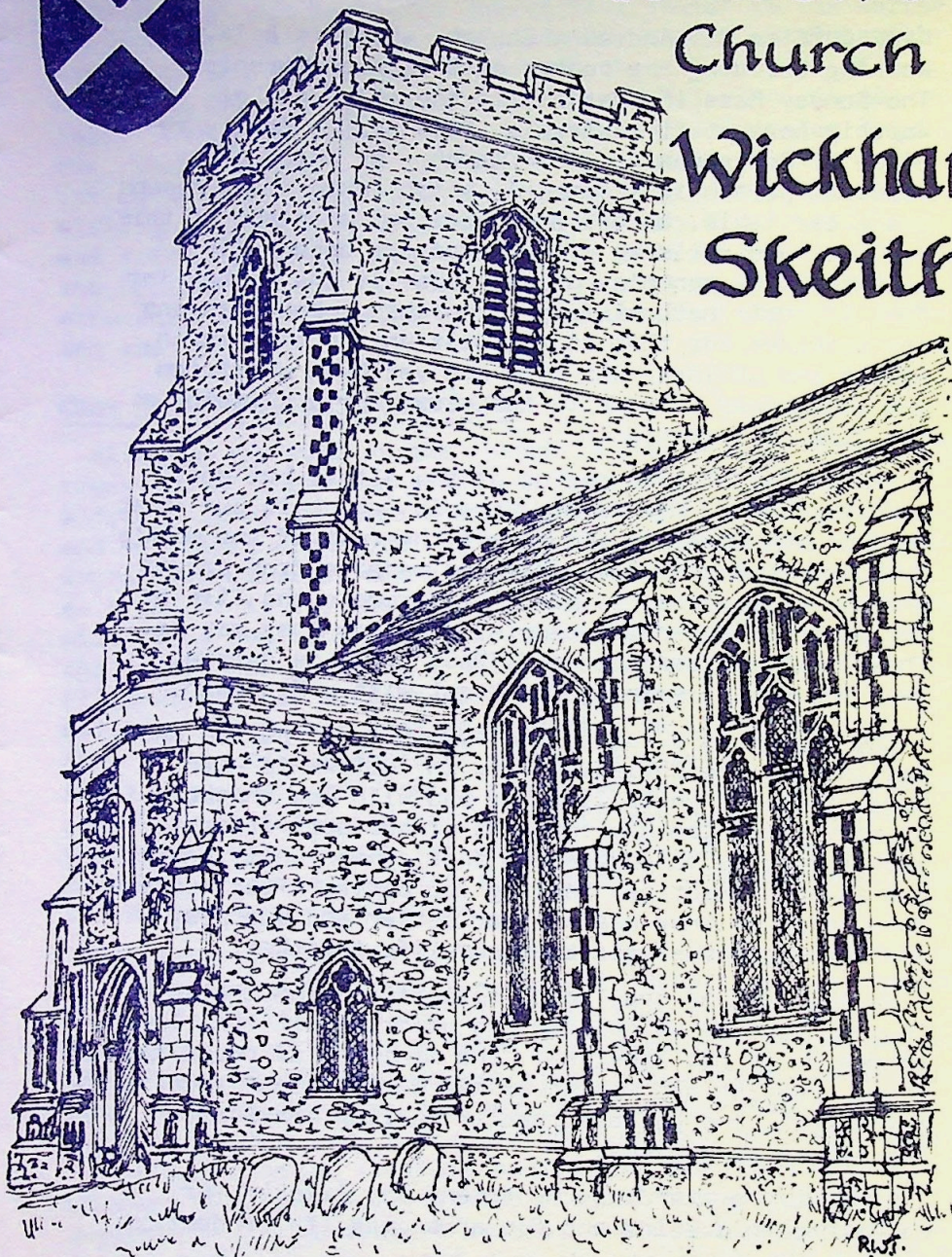




# Saint Andrew's Church

Wickham  
Skeith



## A Brief Guide

## Introduction - by the Parish Priest,

WELCOME to St. Andrew's Church, which is a living, working building - a centre of Christian Worship. The Sunday Mass (Eucharist) is the chief Act of Worship here at St. Andrew's. This is the family reunion of God's Family (the Church - of which every baptised person is a member), which takes place around the altar table. No-one need feel out of place at this service, and children of all ages are especially welcome. They can play on the floor if they wish - for that is their natural form of worship - and cushions are provided for them at the west end of the church. Adults and children who have not yet been confirmed are encouraged to come to the altar for a blessing at the time of Communion.

The Christian life begins at the altar, but does not stay there. Our Sunday worship (which is our first work of the week) should direct the rest of the week's activities. God's life, which we receive from prayer and the sacraments, is meant to permeate the life of the parish, and of its people, wherever they may be. That is why we use the word "MASS" - it is derived from the Latin, meaning "Sent out with a Mission".

The Church is a family and community of people who try to live the Christian life in fellowship with each other. We unite with God and with one another at Holy Communion and the rest of our activities together help us to understand this common unity and to put it into practice. Meeting for coffee after Sunday Mass helps us know one another better and our prayer and house groups strengthen our life together.

We are part of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, because we believe and practise all that Jesus handed on to his apostles. The ministry of reconciliation, healing and wholeness has an important role in our church, and we have regular healing services in the summer at Wickham.

I am very grateful to my friend Roy Tricker for compiling this Guide and for arranging its production.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU.

FR. PHILIP T. GRAY.  
(Priest-in-Charge).

## Saint Andrew's Church, Wickham Skeith.

This ancient and beautiful church is situated in the north-eastern part of its scattered and picturesque rural parish of greens and farmsteads. It stands about a quarter of a mile from the village street, at the end of a cul-de-sac lane, behind the nearby Hall, but otherwise quite on its own. The churchyard is unusually narrow from east to west (allowing very little space at these ends of the church), although it has been extended considerably to the north and south. Although a church existed here at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, most of what we see in the structure of the present building dates from the late 1300s and the 1400s.

### WHAT TO SEE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

Although the plan of the church is very simple (comprising tower, nave, north and south porches, and chancel), St. Andrew's is by no means a small building. It is a sturdy and venerable structure, of dignified proportions, with an impressive exterior which is worth standing back to enjoy as a whole, in its charming setting. Here we see a pleasing mixture of building materials - the flint-rubble walls of the tower incorporating a variety of colours and textures. Flint-rubble may also be seen in the chancel, also the remains of the former plaster rendering on its north wall. Many of the flints employed in the nave walls have been split to expose their shiny cores, whilst beautiful flushwork panelling in stone and knapped flint may be seen in the porches, also a little restoration in brick in the porch parapets - all set against the greens of the churchyard and the surrounding countryside.

The western TOWER is bold and sturdy, giving an impression of tremendous strength - which it doubtless has, because the walls at its base are almost 6½ feet thick! It is strengthened at all four corners by diagonal buttresses, which have simple chequer patterns in flushwork. Above the late 14th century west doorway is a trefoil-headed niche, which once sheltered a statue; this is made of chalky "clunch" - a material which weathers badly. The two-light belfry windows have curved (Decorated) "ogee" tracery, beneath depressed (Perpendicular) arches, and so may well date from the period just after 1360 when the one style was evolving into the other. There are Tudor bricks however in the

masonry above them, and more in the walls inside the tower here. Intriguing mediaeval gargoyle faces peer out from the base of the embattled parapet; these throw the rain-water clear of the tower walls. The northern creature is holding his mouth open with his hands. Three small windows on the south side light the staircase which ascends the tower in the thickness of the wall at the south-east corner.

The three handsome windows each side of the NAVE are at least 100 years later than the tower and show the Perpendicular architecture of the late 1400s. These are three-light windows, divided horizontally by embattled transoms. Between them, the nave is strengthened and enhanced by elegant buttresses, with simple flushwork. Notice on the south-east buttress, traces of three Mass Dials, which fixed the times of services before the days of clocks. The faint rays of the lowest of these are about 4 feet above the ground, a circle with a central hole about 2 feet above this marks another, whilst a third may be seen higher up. On the north side, at the east end of the nave, is the abutment for the rood-loft staircase.

The CHANCEL is smaller and humbler than the nave and its masonry appears to be much earlier. This, of course, was maintained by the Rectors of the parish, who were the monks of St. John's Priory, Colchester. Its east window however is similar to those in the nave, but the side windows are two-light Perpendicular ones of the 15th century, with Tudor bricks above their arches. By contrast, the southern priest's doorway has a very simple arch, which must be 13th century (and another Mass Dial may be seen here). On the north chancel wall is a much-worn (but still very pleasing) wall-plaque, which bore a Latin inscription to Anthony Braham, who died in 1713. Originally there was a coat of arms above it and a table tomb, surrounded by iron rails, beneath. In 1831 these were described by David Elisha Davy as being in a disgraceful state, and all traces of them have long since disappeared. Two to the east of the church are two coped burial-stones, which are of considerable age.

St. Andrew's is fortunate in possessing two splendid 15th century PORCHES. The north porch shows superb Perpendicular architecture. It is lit by tall two-light windows, flanked by original carved corbel faces. The

eastern and western parapets have been renewed with brick, but beneath these are grand gargoyles. The north face is a mass of flushwork panelling in flint and stone, with shields and tracery in its parapet, beneath which is a canopied niche, which has a miniature stone-vaulted ceiling. Above the entrance is a frieze of crowned "AMR" emblems, (Ave Maria Regina, or Hail Mary, Queen) shallowly carved in stone, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The central emblem is the "IHS" monogram of Our Lord's name. The tall entrance arch is framed by a square hood-mould, with blank shields and foliage in the spandrels each side of the arch. Notice the graffiti, carved in the 1700s, in the stonework of the responds (sides) of the entrance.

John Brakestret left 6s.4d for the building of the south porch in his will, dated 1459. This was originally two storied and its staircase was in the angle between its west wall and the nave. Small two-light windows, with curved "ogee" tracery, light its lower stage and a tall single southern window, set in stone, originally gave light to the parvise room above. Good 15th century gargoyles (the eastern one holding its mouth open) may be seen at the base of the side parapets. The south parapet (like the porch itself) has been restored, but we can still see the bases of the three pinnacles which crowned it. Flushwork on the lower part of the south face surrounds the entrance arch, the square hood-mould of which rests upon original corbel heads (of a man with a trendy hairstyle and a bishop) and has shields in the spandrels. More 18th century graffiti appears in this entrance.

Inside, with the absence of the intermediate floor, the porch is remarkably lofty. The 14th century south doorway contains a fine and sturdy door, beautifully carved, which has opened and closed to admit worshippers and pilgrims for maybe 400 years.

#### WHAT TO SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH.

The interior of St. Andrew's is lofty and gloriously light, there being no stained glass in the windows. The spacious NAVE, which is 54 feet long and 28 feet wide, is crowned by a massive single hammerbeam roof, resting upon stone angels each side, some of which carry knotted scourges - an emblem of the Passion of Our Lord. There were probably also hovering angels at the ends of the hammer beams. More beautiful 15th century carving may be seen in the 16 bosses, where the principal rafters intersect. Here we see flowers and foliage,

two angels holding shields with crosses, two bearded faces, also a "Green Man", with foliage sprouting from his mouth (on the north). Facing these (on the south) are two female faces and a face with a protruding tongue. These are all beautifully preserved and we could be forgiven for assuming them to be Victorian, but they were all there when David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1819, as were also the large male and female corbel faces upon which rest the moulded capitals of the chancel arch. He has flowing hair, a moustache and a small beard; she has a head-dress and collar. The beautifully moulded 14th century arch was originally framed by a hood-mould, of which only the base remains each side, also the small corbel heads upon which it rests. Note also in the stonework of the south side of the arch (facing south-east) traces of graffiti, of considerable age,

Beneath this arch stood the carved and painted rood screen. In 1726, Tom Martin noted that the base of the screen remained in situ, with eight saints painted upon it (four each side). It was still there in 1819, when Davy noted that the heads of the saints had been defaced (doubtless during the Puritan 'purge' of the 1640s). All traces have now disappeared. Jutting out above the screen was the rood-loft (or gallery) along which it was possible to walk, mainly in order to tend the many candles that burned beneath the great Rood (Christ crucified, and flanked by his Mother and St. John) which stood above it. All lofts and Roods went during the 1500s, but the rood-loft staircase remains in the north nave wall nearby, with its upper and lower entrance arches.

Beneath the loft, and flanking the chancel arch, were small altars, often maintained by local Guilds, or sometimes by wealthy families as Chantries, where the Mass could be offered for departed forebears. These were dedicated to saints, whose statues would have been placed in the niches each side of the chancel arch. The north side has a set of three, with trefoil heads and pedestals, whilst the massive niche to the south is now but a shadow of its former glory, although one of its carved spandrels may still be seen. We know that there was an altar on this side because in the south wall, hidden behind the organ, is a piscina, into which the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist was poured.

From inside the church we can further admire the graceful nave windows, with their fine tracery. These once glowed with mediaeval stained glass, much of which was smashed up

by the Puritans in 1643. Their inspector, William Dowsing, visited the church on January 26th, and records, "We brake down 15 Popish pictures of Angels and Saints (?in glass) and gave order for taking 2 Crosses; one on the steeple and the 2nd in the church". In 1724 there were fragments of several pictures of saints in the nave and chancel windows and in 1831 there were remains still to be seen in the chancel and in a south window of the nave.

The octagonal font (placed at the west end, near the entrance to symbolise our entry, through Holy Baptism, into the family of the Church) was fashioned in the late 14th century and, although very badly mutilated, is still a beautiful piece of stonecarving. Around the stem were winged creatures (now only their wings and feet remain) alternating with wild hairy men known as wodewoses. Beneath the bowl at the eight corners are pomegranates in foliage and in the panels of the bowl we see a pleasing array of 14th century traceried patterns, with architectural motifs of the period.

At the west end is the rather crude and domestic-looking musicians' gallery, supported upon square pillars and having a cupboard and staircase on the south side, whilst beneath it on the north side was at one time a small vestry. The gallery was erected in 1808 at a cost of £25, although the wooden tracery which embellishes its panelled front is later. Above it once hung the Royal Arms of King George II. Beneath the gallery is a 19th century bier, for transporting the coffin at funerals.

The lofty NORTH PORCH has original 15th century timbers in its roof. It contains a small 16th or 17th century trunk-type chest and a sturdy mediaeval door into the church. Etched into the clear glass of the western window here we see a pair of Suffolk shire-horses and a memorial inscription to Clifford Cutting - Churchwarden, 1944-1986. Also here we see three photographs, including one of David Mayes, Sexton and Bellringer here, also a list of Vicars of Wickham Skeith from 1322 and a framed copy of the Wickham Parish Almanack for 1889, which was restored by Mr. Andrew Beckwith in 1989. The Almanack gives a text for each day of 1889 and reflects the religion of the home and individual devotion which was so much a characteristic of Victorian times. It also gives the Royal Birthdays of Queen Victoria, the Prince and Princess of Wales and Prince Albert. It was edited by the Rev'd Charles Bullock of St. Nicholas Worcester, from the "Fireside Magazine".

The church underwent a thorough restoration in 1856-7, for which a 6d in the £ parish rate was levied towards the cost of about £500 which was needed. At this time the lead from the roof was sold to a Mr. Neal of Eye and the present slate roof was erected, the roof-timbers repaired, the stonework of the windows restored and other work was done. The accounts name the architect as "Mr. Penning" (possibly meaning Edwin Pennington of London) and much of the work was carried out by a Mr. Clarke. It was probably at this time that the nave benches, with their poppyhead ends, were installed. A careful look at the seating however reveals that some 18th century panelling (probably from former box-pews) has been re-used beneath the seats, particularly in some of the southern benches; also that seven benches have preserved their 15th or 16th century backs, which are lower than the rest and are decorated with simple carving. A few of the seats themselves are also ancient. The tall pulpit appears to have been a later addition, altered to match the choirstalls, and possibly second-hand from another church. The Churchwardens Accounts record a payment of three guineas for "supplying pulpit" in the year 1896. The banister for its stairs, however, seems to be earlier and may have belonged to its predecessor. Notice the 17th or 18th century wainscoting along the wall nearby.

The organ, which has two manuals and pedals, was installed here by Mr. F. Norden in 1928, but is a much older instrument, made in the late 18th century and bearing the name of J. Soane & Sons of Bath. It was repaired during the 19th century by Henry J. Rummens of Brixton.

The CHANCEL has a plaster ceiling which may well be 18th century, but the 15th century wooden cornices remain at the tops of the walls. The choir-stalls have similar poppyhead ends to the nave benches and their fronts have simple tracery. The priest's stall, which has a simple linenfold pattern in its front, was given in memory of Margaret Jones in 1932.

A set of 17th century Communion Rails divides off the sanctuary; these originally surrounded the altar on three sides. The altar itself is a Stuart Communion Table, upon which the Holy Eucharist has been celebrated for over 300 years. It is furnished with a cross, given in memory of

James Rudland Merriman (died 1967) and two short candlesticks - a recent gift, in memory of Stephen and Matthew Pearmain. The small chair on the north side of the sanctuary dates from the 1600s. The credence table, in tasteful modern woodwork, was given in 1972 - a memorial to Dorothy East.

In the south wall is a beautiful piscina from the 15th century, with foliage and a flower carved in its spandrels. The stone reredos may well date from the 1856-7 restoration. Here we see three richly carved quatrefoil panels, with a cross at the centre. Each side of these are inscribed the Commandments, Lord's Prayer and Creed, as was the custom in all churches from the Reformation to the second half of the 19th century. The set in the church in 1724 were fixed against the north wall and were painted upon pieces of ancient woodwork, described by Tom Martin as having formerly been used as something else.

A door in the thickness of the wall where the nave and TOWER join, leads to the newel staircase of 45 steps which gives access to the first stage of the tower and to the bell-chamber. A blocked doorway at the foot of the stairs once gave access to another stairway, leading to the upper chamber of the porch.

The ring of six bells were rehung in a new wooden frame by George Day of Eye in 1892. There is a long-established tradition of bellringing here and at the beginning of the present century Wickham Skeith and nearby Thornham Magna were amongst the leading six-bell towers in the country. The treble and second bells were cast by Thomas Osborn of Downham Market in 1780; he also made the fifth bell in 1797. John Darbie of Ipswich cast the fourth in 1669 and John Draper cast the tenor (which weighs 10½cwt) in 1627. The oldest bell is the third, which was made by John Driver and James Edbury of Bury St. Edmunds in 1615.

Hanging in the base of the tower are framed records of peals rung here between 1896 and 1901. It is here in the tower base that we can appreciate the tremendous thickness of the tower walls (about 6½ feet). The 15th century west door into the nave has three traceried panels, with foliage, flowers, creatures and a human figure in their spandrels, also the Pelican, pecking at its own breast to feed its young with its own blood - symbolising Christ's sacrificial love for all mankind, especially in the Eucharist, where he feeds us with his Body and Blood.

FLOOR-SLABS AND MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS, commemorating people of the past who were part of this church and parish, may be seen as follows:-

In the tower base are three mediaeval burial slabs, one of which has the indents of what must have been a very fine brass, with an effigy, inscription, four shields and a border. Also here is the ledger-slab (formerly in the sanctuary) of Sir John Platt, who died in 1705.

West of the font is a burial slab (of about 1530) which contained the brasses of a husband and wife, two groups of children and an inscription. Only the brasses of the lady and the three daughters remain. All of the figures were here in 1724, although the inscription (which would have identified them) had already gone.

In the south sanctuary floor are three black ledger-slabs, which are set together and are unusually "linked" by incised buckles. The central slab commemorates Jane Harvey (daughter of Sir George Le Hunt of Little Bradley) who died in 1644. Her husband, Edmund, is commemorated to the south (died 1664) and Henry, her son, who also died in 1664, lies to the north.

A marble plaque on the south nave wall commemorates Mary, daughter of Edward Sheppard, who died in 1845. She was the wife of Thomas Bedwell and (later) of Samuel Mayhew. A brass plaque near the north doorway bears the names of six people from the parish who died in the First World War.

#### SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AT ST. ANDREW'S.

The 20th century life of Wickham Skeith church and its ministry shows what a thoroughly "comprehensive school" the Church of England is! Up to 1986, it was firmly set in the Evangelical tradition and one of its past incumbents left the Anglican Church to become a Free Church preacher because he felt that the Church of England was not Protestant enough!

From 1954-1974 the living was united with that of Cotton, and then from 1974-1979, it was held with Wetheringsett, Thwaite and Stoke Ash - all Evangelical livings. Following further pastoral reorganisation,

Wickham was cared for by the Rev'd Maurice Darwin, a retired priest who lived in Ipswich.

After many consultations, Father Philip Gray, Vicar of Mendlesham, was licensed as Priest-in-Charge of Wickham Skeith in May 1986. Mendlesham is the Anglo-Catholic centre of the deanery, and so vestments, candles and a regular Sunday Eucharist were introduced at Wickham Skeith. A modern green and white set of vestments were donated by the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. This is the oldest devotional society in the Church of England for priests and laity, founded in 1862 to honour Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of his Body and Blood. The Confraternity also donated a ciborium (a cup-shaped vessel with a lid, to hold the consecrated wafers used at Holy Communion). The older vestments (green, red, purple and white) came from All Saints Plymouth when that church was closed and demolished.

The wrought-iron candlestick by the font contains the Paschal Candle. This candle symbolises the Risen Christ and stands at the entrance to the chancel from Easter Sunday until Pentecost. The five grains of incense set into it represent the Five Wounds of Christ that St. Thomas insisted upon seeing. The candle stands by the font because in Baptism we begin to share Our Lord's risen life and the Baptismal Candle given to the newly-baptized is lit from it. At funerals the candle stands at the foot of the coffin, for we commend all the dead in Christ and all the dead whose faith is known to God alone, to the Risen Lord.

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Those who love this ancient church and who use it are glad that you have come to visit it, and hope that you will feel very much "at home" here in our Father's House. Please feel free to enjoy its features of beauty and interest, also its atmosphere of prayer and devotion. Please pray for the priest and people whose Spiritual Home this is, and who would welcome with real gratitude any contribution that you can spare, to help them keep their ancient church intact and beautiful for future generations to use and to enjoy.

. . . . . May God bless and keep you . . . . .

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the encouragement, advice and expertise of Father Philip Gray, also Cynthia Brown, Peter Northeast and George Pipe. Thanks are also due to the Staff of the County Record Office for the use of their facilities, and to the Technicians at Copleston High School, Ipswich, for printing and assembling the booklets.

Roy Tricker,  
November 1990.