

Exploring

SAINT MICHAEL'S
C H U R C H



B R A N T H A M

S U F F O L K

Exploring St Michael's Church, BRANTHAM.

WELCOME TO SAINT MICHAEL'S - to a living, working building, which is no mere ancient monument but is still in regular use for the purpose for which it was built nearly 700 years ago. Many generations of Brantham folk (including our own generation) have altered and beautified it and have left their mark upon it. Like the Faith that it proclaims, St Michael's continues to develop and evolve, yet it remains a Holy Place, made sacred by centuries of prayer and care.

Those whose Spiritual Home this is are glad that you have come to see it. We hope that you will enjoy exploring it and that this little Guide may help to point you to some of its history and treasures. Above all, we hope that you will feel thoroughly 'at home' here in our Father's House. May God bless and protect you.

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Some Landmarks in the Church's History.

The 1000s. People may well have worshipped on this lovely elevated spot, overlooking the Stour Valley for a thousand years. It is recorded that King William II (reigned 1087-1100) placed the church in the care of Battle Abbey, Sussex.

c.1320-40. What little visible mediaeval work (i.e. the remains of the south nave windows, the north arcade and the nave piscina) appears to date from this time, suggesting that the earlier church was enlarged, re-ordered or rebuilt during this period.

c.1800-1869. The *Ipswich Journal* noted in August 1805 that the church had recently been repaired, thanks to the generosity of the rector, the Revd Dr Rhudde, Thomas White of Tattingsstone and some of the parishioners. The Revd Durand Rhudde, DD, was also rector of East Bergholt, which had been united with Brantham for several centuries and remained so until 1855. He had been Lecturer at St Dionis Backchurch in the City of London and vicar of St Thomas Southwark, before coming here in 1782. When he died aged 86 in 1819 he was also rector of Great Wenham and Chaplain in Ordinary to the King. Dr Rhudde was the grandfather of Maria Bicknell who was later to marry the East Bergholt artist, John Constable. The newspaper also reported the 'further embellishment of a large and handsome picture as an altarpiece, painted under the permission of the Revd Rector, by Mr John Constable. The picture is in size 7 feet by 4 feet; the design is taken from St Mark, chap. 10 ... Our Saviour blessing the young children'. It was praised as being 'the unassisted production of a young artist, from his own self-taught genius'.

David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1806 and his notes tell us that it then comprised a chancel, nave and tower. Isaac Johnson's sketch of the church, made before the c.1805 repairs, shows the demolished north aisle, with its gabled roof and porch, also the tower at its full height, with battlements and corner pinnacles. Davy noted that the nave walls were rendered and the chancel's brick walls were whitewashed. The north aisle (noted by William Blois in the 1600s as containing the defaced tomb of Sir Humphrey Wingfield, who died in 1545) had been taken down and the nave's north wall had wood-framed windows. The tower had received a new parapet of white bricks. Maybe all this was part of the c.1805 restoration, when the church received a new set of 'neat and uniform' box-pews and its floor was laid with white brick. Both nave and chancel had arched plaster ceilings and the hexagonal pulpit was of inlaid deal. The Communion Table was 'raised on steps and railed off' and the sanctuary walls were lined to a height of about 12 feet with wainscoting 'in imitation of a gothic screen', which framed the new Constable painting in the centre, flanked by four panels containing the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Commandments. Davy also noted that 'the font is not yet erected'.

When Davy returned in 1825, he noted and sketched the piscina in the chancel and wrote of 'some tolerably perfect specimens of stained glass' in the first window on the south side from the east end. Then there were two complete figures - a bishop with mitre, with crosier in his left hand and his right hand raised in blessing, and a crowned figure with an arrow in his right hand (clearly St Edmund). He also drew a rough plan of the church,

showing north and south porches

Henry Davy's etching of the exterior from the south-east in 1846 shows the two eastern nave windows much as they are today. The walls are all rendered, the shortened tower has a plain parapet and a single eastern belfry window is visible, there is a humble plastered south porch and in the chancel is a small high-set south-west window and the top section only of what was a three-light east window with intersecting tracery. It is also clear that the tower and chancel are in line with each other but are out of centre with the nave, which had been widened southwards.

By the 1860s, the church was badly in need repair and the result of its very thorough restoration in 1869 was described at the time as being 'to all intents and purposes a new structure'. The *Ipswich Journal* called the unrestored church 'a somewhat mean building, injudiciously repaired', the north nave wall, with its wood-framed windows, being internally and externally 'wretched in the extreme'. A visitor to a service in May 1859 wrote that the interior was (with the exception of Constable's altarpiece) 'as plain as drab-coloured walls and deep pews of varnished deal can make it!' He also lamented that the congregation (with the exception of the schoolchildren) was only 60 people. The Revd Samuel Carter was described as 'a compound of the billious and the nervous', whose sermon was 'read from a cumbrous manuscript held in the hand throughout'. On the Census Sunday in 1851, when the parish was still consolidated with East Bergholt, there were 59 adults present in the morning and 128 in the afternoon, with 41 scholars at both services. The Holy Communion was celebrated six times per year with an average of 40 communicants.

1869. This was the year when St Michael's received its major restoration and the crowds of people attending the Re-Opening Services on Michaelmas Day (September 29th) would have been amazed at the transformation which had taken place. The rector, the Revd SR Carter, who spearheaded the work of restoration, was absent from the celebrations because ill health necessitated him being out of the country.

Edward Charles Hakewill, an architect of national repute, was chosen to design and supervise the work. He had come to live at Playford near Ipswich and his father, Henry and brother, John Henry, were also respected architects. He restored at least 15 Suffolk churches, including Rushmere, Wickham Market, Stonham Aspal and Grundisburgh. The builder was Henry Luff of Ipswich, who worked on several Hakewill projects and acted as his Clerk of Works.

Although Hakewill retained as much of the original fabric and salvageable mediaeval features as possible, so much of what we see in the structure of the building is of his design. Because the approach to the church was from the north, he took great pains to make this side of the church attractive, removing the c.1800 patching up to reveal the long-hidden arcade and adding a new north aisle and porch. He totally rebuilt the chancel, reusing some old timbers in its roof and placed the attractive polygonal vestry/porch in the angle where the nave and chancel meet on the south side. The two south nave windows were preserved and a third was added to the west of them. The south porch was taken away. He transformed the stumpy tower by rebuilding the top part. He removed 8 feet of masonry and replaced this with 14 feet of new masonry, bringing the height up to about 70 feet. In his designs he deliberately used the Decorated Style of architecture, fashionable in the first half of the 14th century - the date of the surviving mediaeval features.

An *Ipswich Journal* reporter wrote of the interior, 'What is but a small church has a remarkably spacious appearance because no space is wasted and nothing occurs to break the view in any part of the edifice'. Hakewill did indeed create here a dignified and devotional interior, with fine roofs and windows, a soaring chancel arch and tasteful furnishings. He replaced the box-pews with benches of English oak, floored the chancel with Minton's tiles, moved the Constable painting to the west end of the south wall and designed a new octagonal font with zig-zag moulding on its bowl and a pedestal with clustered columns of stone and black marble. The church still lacked communion rails and a pulpit.

The preachers at the Re-Opening Services were both Fellows of Emmanuel College Cambridge, the Patrons of the Living - the Revd Octavius Glover in the morning and the Revd W. Denton Attwood (who had cared for the parish in the rector's absence) in the

afternoon. The collections totalled £15 8s.6d – a considerable amount at that time.

1894–1901. A new organ, by Norman & Beard, was installed in 1894 and in 1897, through the generosity of Col Montague Browning of Brantham Court, the remarkable lych-gate was erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. This beautiful example of the 'Arts and Crafts' movement was designed by Edward Shroeder Prior, a pupil of Richard Norman Shaw and later Master of the Art Workers' Guild. His magnificent church of St Andrew, Roker, Sunderland, is one of our finest early 20th century churches. In Suffolk he created an even larger lych-gate at Kelsale church and he sympathetically restored the great church at Framlingham. He also designed Brantham's pulpit, given by Charles Berjew Brooke (Director of the British Xylonite Company) of Brantham Place and Aberdeen Park, Highbury N5, which was dedicated on October 14th 1900.

1950 onwards. St Michael's contains much fine craftsmanship from the past 50 years which takes its place alongside that of past ages. The Ipswich architect, Basil Hatcher, designed the lectern, installed in 1951, the choir vestry, built to the south of the nave in 1958, together with the aumbry in the chancel. (He also designed Chelmondiston Church and St Francis, on the Chantry Estate, Ipswich). In 1959, Hakewill's 1869 font was replaced by the mediaeval font from the 'retired' Ipswich church of St Mary at the Quay and in 1963 new front benches were provided for the choir stalls and the old ones given to Leiston Abbey (then the Diocesan Retreat House).

Cecil Beardsmore Smith designed the new Communion Rails which were given by Lady Susan Birch in 1967. Also in that year the weathervane was purchased from Manningtree for £25. Manningtree's eccentric and atmospheric little church (also dedicated to St Michael and built in 1616 as a chapel-of-ease to Mistley), was condemned as unsafe and demolished in 1965. The present organ was built in 1969 by Bishop & Son. Its predecessor was sold to Wissett Church, near Halesworth, thus freeing the east end of the north aisle for use as a Lady Chapel, to the designs of Jack Penton of Thorpe Morieux.

In 1977, after the return of the St Mary at the Quay font to its original home, the church acquired the 14th century font from the church of St Martin at Palace, in the city of Norwich, which closed in 1974 and is now the Norfolk Probation Centre.

Exploring the Exterior.

It is worth taking time to enjoy the exterior of St Michael's in its superb **SETTING**. approached along a pretty lane and with views across the delightful valley of the Stour into Essex. The **CHURCHYARD WALL** beside the road, built in 1869, incorporates several pieces of dressed stone, maybe salvaged from the church during the restoration. We enter the churchyard through Brantham's amazing **LYCHGATE**, given in 1897 to commemorate 60 years of Queen Victoria's reign and a wonderful creation of Arts and Crafts design by E.S. Prior. Its lower parts are of flint, whilst the roofs at the ends are curved and have curved eaves. The woodwork in the side openings, arch braces and purlins is embellished with leaf-trail carvings and the ridge-beam at the top is studded with flowers.

Although much of what we see in the church itself is work of 1869, the building has great character dignity and beauty, with handsome proportions and yet very much the 'feel' of an English country church. Like many Suffolk churches the **WALLS** are built of flint-rubble, including whole and split flints, cobbles and other stones, and several chunks of brown septaria – our local building material which was mined from the coast and marshes between Orford Ness and the Naze. It is not very durable and has caused the collapse of several church towers in East Suffolk, including nearby Shotley.

The western **TOWER**, rises some 70 feet and it is worth crossing to the new churchyard to see it in all its glory from the west. The core of the lower stages is mediaeval but the west window, the two single windows in the intermediate stages and the belfry windows, with their elegant flowing tracery, are all of 1869, as is the parapet, which is faced with simple quatrefoil (four-lobed) patterns in flint and stone flushwork. Friezes of little 'ball-flowers' (a motif used in the early 1300s) may be seen beneath the parapet and adorning

the four corners of the belfry stage. Two handsome gargoyles peering out from beneath the western parapet. They throw rainwater from the tower roof clear of the wall and on the weathervane above, the winged figure of St Michael surveys the Suffolk and Essex countryside (including his former Manningtree home) from his splendid vantage-point.

Hakewill deliberately used the architecture of c.1320-30 to match the original work that remained and his 'new' NORTH AISLE and CHANCEL windows have fine 'decorated' tracery. Their arches have dripstones (to deflect rainwater) which rest upon carved foliage corbels and are further framed by patterns in stone and knapped flint above. The nave roof descends to embrace the north aisle in one single sweep (as in several Sussex churches). The two-light chancel windows are set high, above a string-course, which cleverly enhances its noble appearance and the great five-light east window has angel corbels. Hakewill's polygonal and porch-like VESTRY is an attractive and rather eccentric addition.

The south wall of the NAVE is mostly original mediaeval work, as are its two eastern windows, with their reticulated (net-like) tracery of c.1330. Hakewill added a third window to the west - an exact copy of its mediaeval neighbour. The nave roof was continued down in 1958 to embrace Basil Hatcher's rustic CHOIR VESTRY, which has rendered walls and a timber-framed window. Set into its walls are three beautifully preserved 14th century stone corbel faces, originally elsewhere in the church, but now where we can see them close-up and enjoy genuine 14th century hairstyles, headgear and expressions!

We enter through Hakewill's NORTH PORCH, with its tall gabled roof and eccentric three-light side windows, which shelters a large moulded entrance arch, also of 1869.

What to See Inside the Church.

Inside, St Michael's is colourful, lofty and spacious and yet feels lived-in and used. Here we see that the broad nave has been extended southwards, because it is OUT OF CENTRE with the tower and chancel. The tower's south-east BUTTRESS protrudes into the nave and the keen eye will detect that the nave's mediaeval south wall leans slightly outwards.

The TOWER ARCH is 14th century and the sensitively-restored four-bay NORTH ARCADE is mostly mediaeval work. By contrast, Hakewill's flambyant CHANCEL ARCH has short stone and marble columns resting upon dramatic figures of S. Michael slaying the dragon (north) and Gabriel with the lily emblem of the Blessed Virgin Mary (south).

A fine ROOF of 1869, supported by tiebeams and crown-posts, spans the broad nave. The chancel has an arch-braced collarbeam roof which may well incorporate timbers from the old chancel roof.

In the south-west corner is the colourful ORGAN case, emblazoned with four shields which display the arms of the province of Canterbury, Battle Abbey (in whose care the church was in mediaeval times), Emmanuel College Cambridge (Patrons of the Living) and the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. The detached console is at the west end nearby. This versatile instrument, built here by Bishop & Son in 1968, has two manuals, pedals and 14 speaking stops. Much of the pipework of the 'Great' section of the organ came from Christ Church, Forest Hill, London SE23 - an instrument by Brindley. The Swell organ was added by Bishop & Son in 1983.

The single BELL in the tower was cast by Miles Graye of Colchester in 1651, unusually during the time of the Commonwealth, when Oliver Cromwell was 'Lord Protector'.

At the west end, near the entrance (to symbolise our entry, by Baptism, into the Family of the Church) is the beautiful octagonal FONT from the church of St Martin at Palace in Norwich. Generations of 'Norridders' were baptised in it for over 600 years, but Brantham folk only since its arrival in 1977. Its bowl panels have quatrefoils in circles and the stem has traceried panels (like little 14th century windows) between circular shafts.

Hakewill's nave BENCHES, of English oak, have straight-topped ends, but his CHANCEL STALLS have poppyhead ends, with the emblems of the Four Evangelists; on the south

side of the chancel we see the Angel of St Matthew and the winged Lion of St Mark, whilst the northern stalls (showing the winged Ox of St Luke and the Eagle of St John) are now beside the south wall of the nave. The later stall-fronts of 1963 (in memory of Edmund and Lilian Stanley) now stand beside the north aisle wall.

The east end of the aisle was made into the **LADY CHAPEL** in 1969 to the designs of Jack Penton. Its altar (which also serves as the nave altar), Communion rails and suspended cross were made by William James Barber Cobb, a talented local craftsman (who also made the frontal case under the tower). The cross's bronze stay, symbolising light and glory radiating from the cross, was fashioned in the forge of Hector Moore.

In the chapel's south wall is a worn 14th century trefoil-headed **RECESS**, which may have sheltered a piscina, or possibly a Holy Water stoup which was once near one of the entrances. A beautiful 14th century **ANGLE PISCINA** survives beside the south-east nave window, its graceful cinquefoil-headed (five lobed) arch and half-arch resting upon a circular stone shaft. It once contained a drain into which was poured the disposable water from the Masses celebrated at the nearby altar. There were once side altars flanking the chancel arch, in front of the mediaeval rood-screen. The windowsill here has been lowered to form **SEDILIA**, where the celebrant, deacon and subdeacon could sit during certain parts of the Mass. Hakewill carefully reproduced this mediaeval work in the **CHANCEL SEDILIA AND PISCINA** (with drain), to the south of the High Altar.

Brantham's remarkable **PULPIT** was given by Charles Berjew Brooke in 1900. Designed by E.S. Prior, it has intricate carving of a mass of foliage, said to represent the Glastonbury Thorn. The **LECTERN**, opposite was given in memory of CB Brooke (Jr), who died in 1951, his wife Maude (died 1944) and his son, who was killed in action in 1916. It was designed by Basil Hatcher in 1952 and has attractive openwork tracery. Woodwork of considerable age has been incorporated into the **SEAT** on the north side of the chancel, which was given by Mrs F Portway (of Braham Hall, Cattawade), in thanksgiving for her sons' safe return from World War 1.

On the south chancel wall is a full-scale photographic copy of the **CONSTABLE PAINTING**. The original is on loan to Emmanuel College Cambridge; it was painted in 1805 and is entitled 'Christ Blessing the Children'. The artist was later to marry the rector's grand-daughter.

Near the piscina in the south wall of the sanctuary is the small **AUMBRY** where some of the consecrated bread and wine from the Eucharist may be reserved so that it can be taken to the sick and dying. It was made in 1958 and its door is carved with the Lamb of God emblem. The light which shows that the Sacrament is reserved here is in a beautiful wrought-iron hanging **LANTERN**. This arrived much later, as the Faculty for the aumbry laid down several conditions regarding the reserved sacrament and stated that there must be no light to indicate its presence. Suspended above the High Altar is the **SANCTUARY LAMP** of nickel-bronze, designed and made by John Grenville and given in 1963. Its red light reminds us that this is a holy place. The riddel-posts and curtains behind the High Altar were made in 1956.

The panel of **15TH CENTURY STAINED GLASS** in the south-east nave window is a kaleidoscope of jumbled fragments which were moved here from the Lady Chapel in 1980. A careful look reveals a variety of fragments from different scenes, including two censers, three (later) initials, leaves, pinnacles, part of a hand, a central finial, etc., also parts of two saints - the mitred head and right hand of an archbishop (with a primatial cross) and the upper part of another person. In 1825 these figures were described as 'tolerably perfect specimens' - the second person was undoubtedly St Edmund, who wore a crown and carried an arrow in his right hand.

The **1869 GLASS** in the chancel windows is by the London firm of Lavers, Barraud & Westlake and is full of angels. The great east window shows Christ, flanked by Michael and Gabriel, and other angels. In the three northern windows are angels with messages (west-east) - to Philip, to Cornelius, to St Paul in prison, to Mary at the Annunciation and to call the Holy Family out of Egypt (showing Joseph and his carpenter's bench).

The 1869 glass in the west window showed the Baptism of Jesus, but this has been replaced by a scene of John the Baptist preaching repentance, in glass of c.1920-30.

Memorials.

Many of the furnishings and adornments were given as memorials to people who have been part of this church and community. Some have been mentioned above and others have inscriptions which are worth reading. There are also slabs in the floors and plaques on the walls which commemorate Brantham people of the past.

The FLOOR SLABS are as follows:-

1. Mediaeval burial slab with indents for brasses of a beautiful foliated cross, four shields and an inscription around the border. This possibly covered the body of an important ecclesiastical personage. (*Beneath the west bay of the arcade*).
2. Black ledger slab (partly hidden) to JEREMIAH BIRD (1750) and MARTHA (1745). (*By the south door*).
3. Black ledger slab to THOMAS (died 1679, aged 8 years), MARTHA and ABIGAIL WINGFIELD, children of John and Mary Wingfield. (*Under tower*).

William Blois noted in the 1600s the tomb of Sir Humphrey Wingfield (1545) and ledger slabs to his son, Robert and grandson, Humphrey, also to Gregory Adgore (1507).

The following memorial PLAQUES may be seen on the walls:-

1. The Revd HR COLE (rector 1892-1924), in whose memory the Schoolroom (given by the Revd J.P. Boyer, rector 1887-90), was restored. (*South of tower arch*).
2. Brass plaque to the Revd ROBERT CARTER (rector 1856-87). (*Chancel, north-west*).
3. CHARLES BERJEW BROOKE of Brantham Place (1922). (*Chancel, north*).

Roy Tricker.
June 2009.



Isaac Johnson's sketch, before 1805.



Henry Davy's etching of the church in 1846