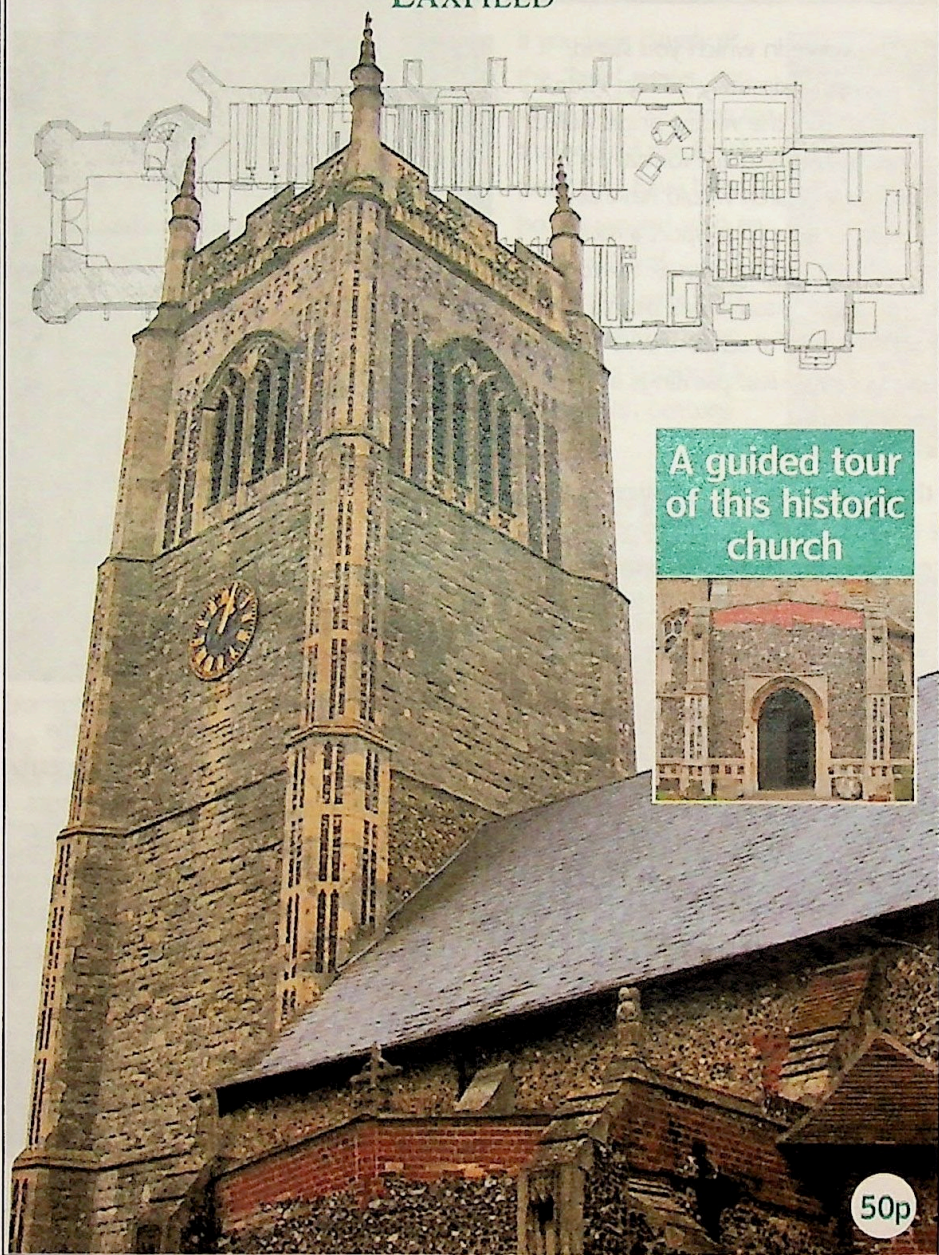


# ALL SAINTS CHURCH

LAXFIELD



A guided tour  
of this historic  
church



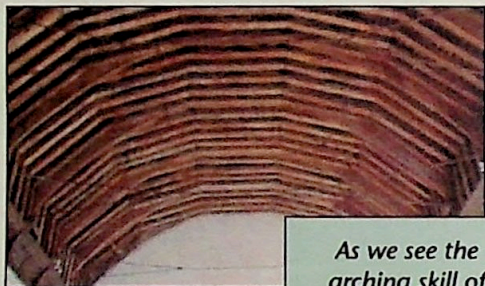
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# We are welcomed into God's house

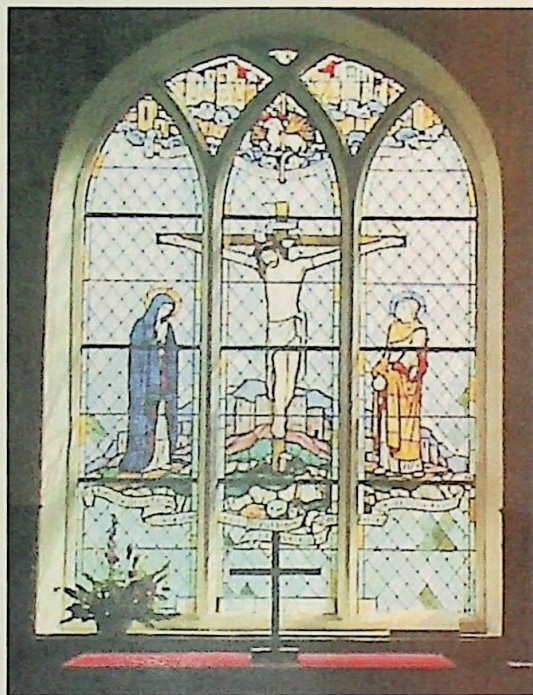
We are welcomed into a relationship with God himself.  
May we come with gladness and hope.

The **nave** in which you stand, at approximately 36 feet wide, is one of the widest single aisled churches in East Anglia. Normally a 14th century church would have at least another aisle to support a roof of such width. If you look up at the roof, you will notice massive oak beams formed like pairs of scissors, and the remains of some leaf paintings at the chancel end.

At the end of the beams, notice how the master carpenter has carved some faces – not angelic or saintly, but no doubt a likeness of someone he knew.

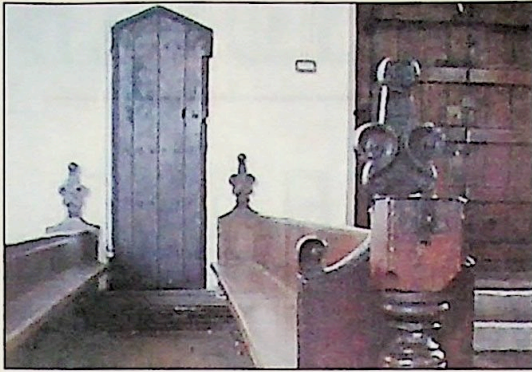


*As we see the arching skill of human hand, help us to ponder the power of God, and then may we learn to be still in the quietness.*



It is likely that the **windows** lost the majority of the stained glass in the early 1600s. There are very small fragments of coloured glass in the top of at least two. Can you make out which is the oldest window? Experts advise that it is the one behind the pulpit. The east window is dated 1938.

As you walked through the **porch**, did you look up and see the remains of a vaulted ceiling? Experts disagree



about whether there could have been a room above – the priest’s room – where the churchwardens would have met and dealt with parish affairs. Inside the church, face the main entrance and look to the left. Notice the small door behind which there is a staircase – where did it lead if not to that room?

The variety of **pews** in Laxfield church is the subject of great interest and debate. The oldest are medieval and made before the middle 1500s. Examples are easily identifiable behind the ‘box’ pews. Can you find the pew end with a carving of a chalice and wafer? Notice the tiled areas amongst these pews, all that remain of the original fireplaces.



The ends of the pews made a little later have poppy head carving.

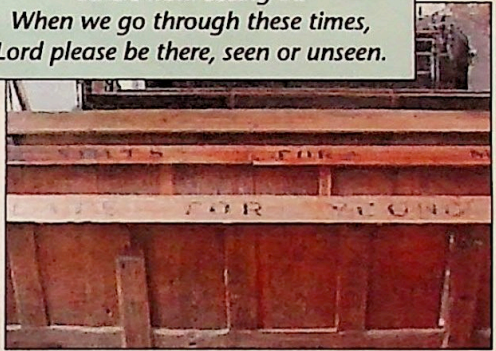
The ends of the pews made a little later have poppy head carving.

They are plainer, and records tell us that they cost seven and a half pence each to make. Notice the holes for tapers in each of the pew ends.

If you look closely at the ‘**box**’ pews, you will notice that these are the original medieval pews that have been boxed around with an assortment of panelling, in order to create ‘family’ pews that were fashionable in the 18th century.



*Sometimes we feel boxed in, prevented from seeing out, and preventing others from seeing in. When we go through these times, Lord please be there, seen or unseen.*

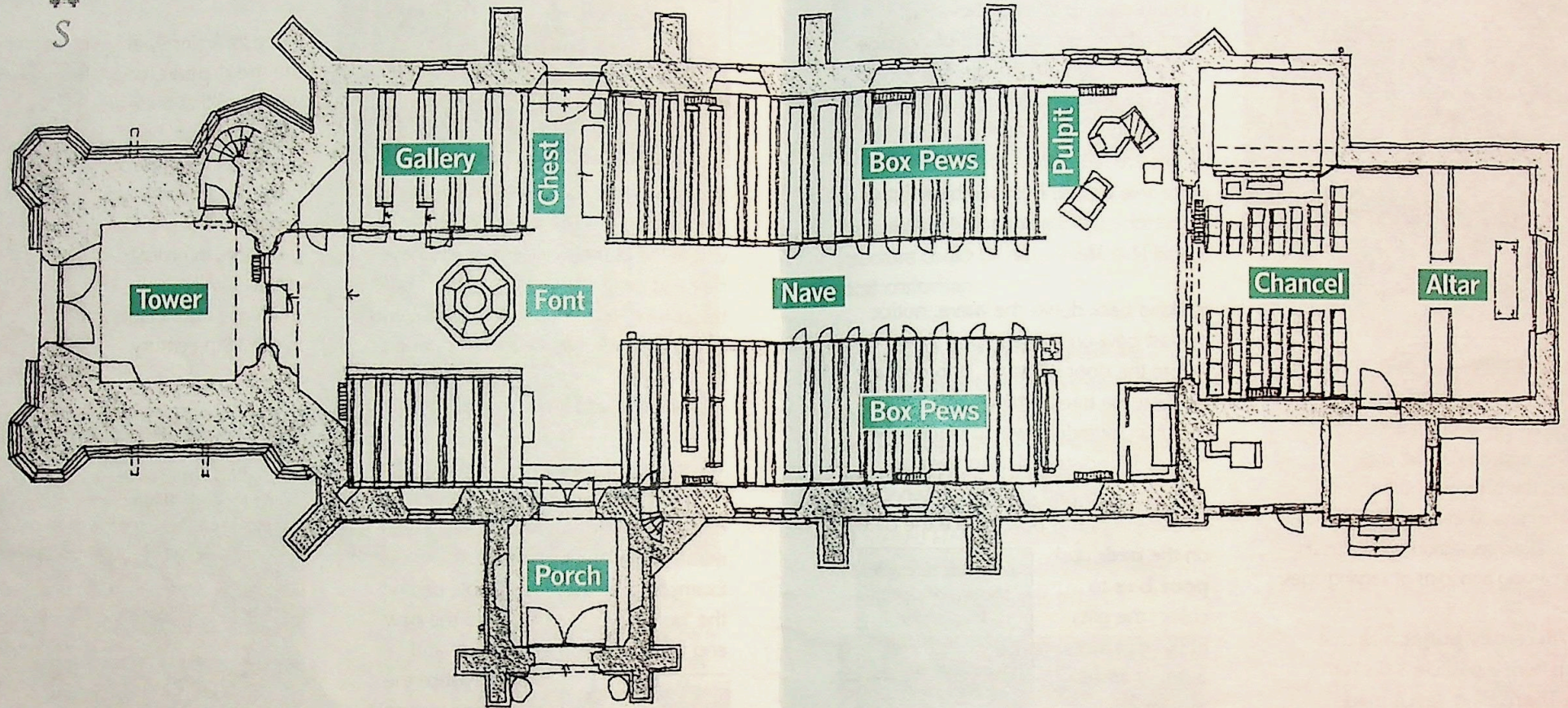
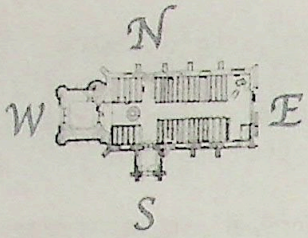


As you can see from the writing, the ‘**gallery**’ was created in the early 19th century for young men and boys, who were given free education on condition that they came to church on Sundays.

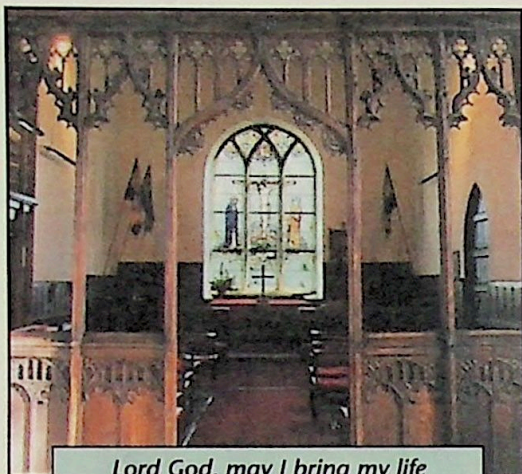


# ALL SAINTS CHURCH

LAXFIELD



Architectural plan of church by M Thomas RIBA



*Lord God, may I bring my life to your altar. Help me to serve you every day, and may the light of Jesus Christ pour into my life.*

The **chancel screen**, which probably dates from the 16th century, has been altered over the years, making it narrower, and then wider again following the collapse of the chancel sometime around the turn of the 19th century. Close inspection of the screen reveals carving and joins of varying ages.

The 17th century **pulpit** is all that remains from a possible 3 decker pulpit. The reading desk is made with the same panelling, with the exception of the top. The 'ladies' holding this top are thought to have been carved by sailors returning from the South Seas, with tales of what they had seen there.



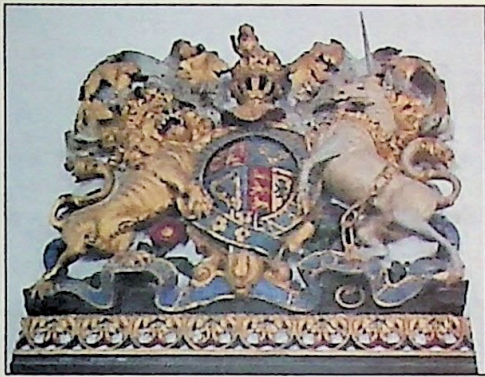
There are 26 burials under the green carpet in the **nave**, including a William Dowsing (1614) and a Sybille Dowsing (1675) who are most probably relatives of the notorious William Dowsing. There is however no record of damage to Laxfield church done by him – this was likely to have been done in the 16th century. There are no brasses, so visitors are requested not to move the protective carpet, but look behind the pulpit for a wall brass that reflects a remarkable life.

Walking back down the **nave**, notice the last pew on the left hand side before the door it has an 18th century ledge at the back, where on Sundays the churchwardens would place loaves of bread for distribution to the poor, provided they had attended a service. At the end of this pew, notice the date on the **pedestal**

**poor box** to collect the gifts of the rich for distribution to the poor.

*May we, through the gift of God's love, show compassion to all whom we meet.*

As you stand in the nave, look north-west and walk towards the **coat of arms of Queen Anne**. These were originally placed above the chancel arch and the hooks are still visible. On the morning of the first flower festival held in this church



in 1960, they fell and smashed on the ground. Fortunately the wooden structure could be repaired by a skilled local craftsman.

Underneath the arms you will see a **wooden chest**. Records inform us that this was made in the 15th century when money was left for a 'new chest'. Beside the chest is a metal safe, known as a Wellington, made from the metal of melted French cannon after the battle of Waterloo. Both chests were used for storing church records.



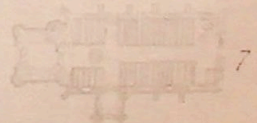
The great treasure of the church is the early 16th century **font**, known as a Seven Sacrament Font. There are eight panels, the eighth depicting the baptism of Christ. Standing with your back to the chancel, looking at the font and proceeding to your left, the sacraments are: marriage, baptism, confirmation, ordination, mass, penitence and unction (death).

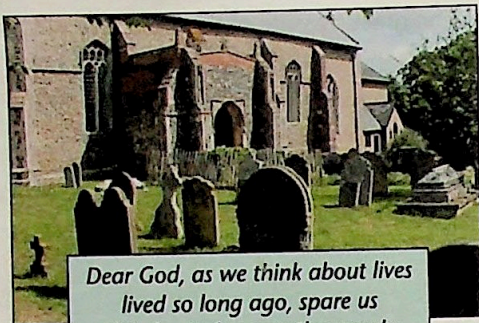


*We acknowledge and give thanks for all whose lives have been nurtured in this church. May our faith grow with each stage of our life.*

At the back of the church, to the left of the window, is the **cupboard** used in the past for processional banners. Now, minus its door, it only contains the banner of a former Laxfield boy scout troop.

When you leave the church, you will notice two large stones on either side of the entrance. Might they have been used to assist people to mount their horse?





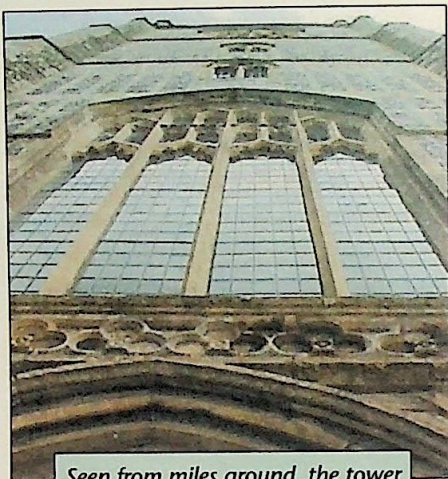
*Dear God, as we think about lives lived so long ago, spare us this day to become the people you would have us be.*

The **churchyard** was closed around 1900, and only those with purchased spaces were buried after this date. There are 236 memorials, the earliest dating from 1703, the latest from 1922. Near the railings adjoining Church Walk, you will find a memorial to a father, mother and seven of their children.

Descendants of the people buried in the large raised tomb near the porch are still benefiting the church today, and the church is very grateful for regular donations from a family trust, a legacy dating back to 1792.

Before you leave the church, take time to look up at the magnificent west front

of the **tower**, immortalised by the late John Piper in a picture now in the Tate Gallery. This front is quite different from the rest of the tower, and is one of the finest examples of flint flush work in the county. Lightning has struck the tower a number of times, most recently 1974, just after a baptism. Miraculously nobody was hurt. The beautiful clear glass of this west window floods light into the church on a sunny day.



*Seen from miles around, the tower points our gaze to heaven. May our lives point others heavenwards also.*



*We are very grateful to the the staff and pupils of All Saints Primary School, Laxfield who have helped with the production of this guide in March 2006.*

*We are also very grateful to Bernard Mills. Further and more detailed historical information about the church can be found in Canon Ronald Marchant's authoritative publication, 'A Short Guide and History' which is available in the church.*

*Why not complete your visit by visiting Laxfield museum, situated opposite the Church in the Guildhall, open every weekend and bank holiday from 2pm – 5pm, May to September:*