

ST. MARY'S

CHURCH

DENHAM

Rev'd. John Bridgen

Rector of Barrow and Denham

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, DENHAM

The Church

There has been a church here since Anglo-Saxon times. Denham Church is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. In 1141 Aubrey De Vere, the feudal overlord at that time, was killed in a London riot. His widow, Alice, sought refuge in the Priory of St. Osyth near Clacton, where her son William was an Austin Canon. In gratitude to the Priory for providing her with sanctuary she gave them lands at Dalham and Denham which she had inherited as a portion of her marriage dowry. From this time until 1539 when Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of the monasteries, the church belonged to St. Osyth's and was served by a chaplain. The farm house in the village known as Denham Abbot's is the site of the old Abbey tenant and refers to the Abbot of St. Osyth and not St. Edmundsbury. After the Reformation Denham passed through various lay owners coming eventually to the Lewkenors.

Some of the Nave and the plain northern doorway are Norman. Most of the Chancel and the fine East window are c14. The chancel and tower arches are both c15. There would have been a rood screen and one can still see where it fitted. The Lewkenors, who owned the estate from about 1570, found the church in generally poor repair and rebuilt it in the c16. They preserved a good deal of its late decorated and perpendicular character. And they added the entirely new Elizabethan brick chapel to the north side of the Chancel.

Pevsner says of the church 'Almost a c19 building'. This is because the church was greatly renovated

in Victorian times as a result of the Tractarian Revival. At this time the tower was built. Previously there had been only a small bell turret. The roof, porch, seating and pulpit, stone altar, lovely east window glazing and the fine organ also all date from this period. The organ was first placed in the church in 1868, was moved to its present position in 1981. It had previously been in the brick chapel. The church owns some Victorian communion plate, and an Elizabethan book of Homilies. The panelling which was placed around the sanctuary at this time was taken from Denham Hall. The church has one of the oldest bells in Suffolk, dating from the early c14. The church registers date back to 1539 and were placed in the care of the Suffolk Record Office in Bury St. Edmunds in 1979. The church was extensively repaired in 1977 and further repairs are planned, including the eventual renovation of the historic Lewkenor monuments. There are two former parsonages in the village: the Elizabethan one where Denham Priory now stands, and a later Victorian one which is now Vicarage Farm. The parish has been in plurality with Barrow since 1953, and the patrons of the Benefice are St. John's College, Cambridge.

The Lewkenors of Denham

The Lewkenor family, who were the first seignorial presence this small village had known came and went in three generations between 1570 and 1634. Sir Edward Lewkenor, the first of Denham moved from Sussex and settled here in Suffolk in the c16. He married Susan, daughter of Thomas and Marta Heigham. The north side chapel was built as a mausoleum family chapel for the Lewkenors. Sir Edward sat on seven Elizabethan parliaments and had been in the service of Queen Elizabeth I.

Monument of 1605

The large canopied monument is of Sir Edward and Lady Susan. Their eight surviving children kneel

in mourning behind them. Sir Edward and Lady Susan both died of smallpox at Denham Hall within two days of one another in October 1605. This monument was erected by their eldest son, also Sir Edward (the second of Denham). His wife Mary's tombstone can be seen on the chapel floor. The heraldic lozenge indicates that it is hers, but it has no inscription. Doubtless Sir Edward is buried beside her.

Monument of 1638.

The second monument is to their son, also Edward who died in 1634, again of smallpox, at the age of 20. This beautiful life size effigy in white marble was made by the Christmas brothers of London in 1638. Their signed inscription can be seen at the foot of the memorial. It was commissioned by Edward's widow, Elizabeth. It is one of the few monuments in Suffolk which has a family close helmet, which was originally placed over it on the wall. The helmet is now placed for safekeeping at the Moyses' Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds, but is displayed on special occasions at Denham Church. Attached above the helmet, making it quite unique, is the family emblem of a greyhound. It is doubtful whether the close helmet was ever actually worn, but it would have been carried in the funeral processions of all three Edward Lewkenors of Denham.

Edward Lewkenor the third was the last of the Lewkenors at Denham. (The other tombstone on the chapel floor is to Mary, his unmarried sister). Edward left only a baby daughter, Mary, who later married Sir Horatio Townshend of Raynham Hall, Norfolk. The Dame Mary Townshend charity which she bequeathed to the village is still in existence today.

Translation of Inscription on Monument of 1605

In this little sacred building lately built for the purpose of a dormitory lie buried in their separate graves that most distinguished man, Edward Lewkenor, gilded knight, and the choice lady, Susan, his wife, both of them illustrious by the splendour both of their parents and families, and both of them marked and adorned by piety and the band of all the virtues: of whom she died too soon, when she had scarce completed the course of 53 years, on October 2nd, 1605; he died on the next day, when he had completed 63 years.

Before he yielded to nature this excellent man performed many distinguished services in the royal hall, in parliament, in the State, and that faithfully and with the highest praise and approval of all good men. Amongst other reasons for just praise this reason chiefly stands out and deserves to be remembered everlastingly, that by his means the preaching of the gospel was brought into this small and obscure village, whose light and benefit he enjoyed to the end of his life.

His most excellent wife never fell away from a sincere profession of gospel truth, but commended it by many Christian virtues, modesty, chastity, kindness, pity for the poor, liberality towards all, and in such a happy state at last she died.

Therefore there is no doubt but that they both triumph in eternal glory, ardently awaiting the last resurrection, when this redemption shall be completed. They left surviving two sons and six daughters, truly an excellent offspring treading in its parents' footsteps and showing forth all the virtues of such parents of which you have a bright instance in that the eldest son caused this beautiful monument to be cut at his

own no small expense, and to be placed in this building in perpetual memory of his parents. They left also many friends and servants sad and mourning their death.

Translation of Inscription on Monument of 1638

Edward Lewkenor, worthy of his name and race, inheritor of his father's piety and virtue, of a noble, generous, excellent disposition, such as, reader, you might wish for you or yours: laden with all those good things which usually make this life desirable: adorned with the elegance of literature: ripe for heaven when he had not yet told 21 years.

The terminus of an ancient race, the last of a family of good report in this County of Suffolk, on December 27, 1635, he left an affectionate mother, a most beloved wife, with one little daughter, sole token of most chaste and most brief love, and all mortals who promised for themselves an ample crop of virtues.

His wife Elizabeth ordered his body, this once most beautiful garment of a yet more beautiful soul, to be buried under this marble in hope of immortality through Christ, a memorial not more of private affection than of public good: which, reader, when you desire, mindful of dust and death take thought for eternity without delay.

Denham

A glimpse of the past



The Church of Denham St John near Eye, Suffolk

These notes on Denham, prepared by Mrs Nora Coleman, involved research over many years using Churchwardens' Accounts; Manor Court Records; School Log Book (Denham); Elisha Davy and Henry Chittings' notes re Suffolk and Kellys Directory.


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Denham, Church and Village

The Domesday Survey of 1086, entry for Denham lists "a church with 12 acres" and lands belonging to Robert Malet, Roger Bigod and the Bishop of Thetford.

On a stone once outside on the east wall is inscribed "William de Kirksby placed me here." William was Prior at Norwich Cathedral 1280-90 AD and Court Rolls note "Building works at Denham & Elmham" in 1300: this dates restoration & re-building to a one-time much larger church with a tower and three bells.

A chapel to the north was maintained by the Bedingfield (Catholic) family and memorial stones now outside, may still be seen.

 In the church by the archway on the north wall is a carved stone figure, possibly a Bedingfield, with angels supporting her head. Under the altar can be found the indent of a brass to Anthony Bedingfield 1574 the son of Edmund, interesting as it is a palimpsest used more than once, the other part being at Yealmpton in Devon, with an inscription to Jacobus Weigheschede, a monk, c.1500. At Denham, there was once a memorial to William Harleston, Lord of the Manor of Denham & Flimworth who died 4 November 1480. His grandfather was Sir Hugh Laterall of Devonshire. In the days of Edward VI Denham church possessed "a Chalice weyinge Xlozs and Great Bells III.

High above the chancel arch hangs a good example of the Arms of Charles I inscribed C.R. 1637. A few end pew carvings and six misericorde seats remain in the choir stalls, the church being much restored in the 1870s and many items of interest and memorials were "lost" at that time.

The Parish Registers date from 1708, earlier ones apparently lost and most are at the Record Office at Ipswich.

By 1725 Henry Bedingfield owned farms in the area: 80 acres at Reading Hall, 81.338 acres at Denham College (now a farm to the north of the church occupied by Mrs Grace Last) or Denham Dungeon from lands nearby called Dungeon Wood. Site of his house and holme grounds is to the west of Denham College with a procession way to the north and east and another way from Denham to Southwood (South Green) on the south. Henry Roper farmed land to the south behind the church. Denham Hall, within a piece of ground called Denham Park, was long occupied by the Bedingfield family. Their crest is a 'greyhoundes collar' and this and other carvings "upon the gate hense carved in wood". The bridge with crests and carvings was made in AD 1576. (From Henry Chittings (died 1638) Suffolk Collections)

Goods and Ornaments belonging to Denham St John
1 July 1725

One pewter Flagon. One silver cup weight abt 10 ozs
One carpet (cloth) for ye Communion Table
One pulpit cloth and cushion
One linen cloth and napkin
One Holland Surplice
One good Bible and Common Prayer Book
Book of Homilies
Three Bells in good repair

Gardiner Willan
Vicar

ffras Bilney
James Clubb } Churchwardens

From Denham School Log Book
1892 March. Mrs Pyke visited and gave a hand basin soap and two towels to the school.
In May the rector's wife sent a hand basin and three towels
1898 January. Permission was given for a child to be absent while his boots were being repaired
1906 April. So much slate work has led to careless writing.
1911 There is too much repetition. The children are not tidy - Nor are the cupboards
October. Five children away all day picking acorns.
1915 July. School closed in afternoon for teacher to attend Red Cross Fete at Brome Hall.

1904 The mistress is trying object lessons: drawings made of a hyacinth; flowers and a snail were brought to school.

1911 The school garden dug ready for lessons.

1892 Dec 8th. Children gave a concert. The proceeds went towards a harmonium for the school.

1912 July. Examinations in reading writing and arithmetic. 6 children absent - found at Jumble Sale in the Vicarage!

From Kellys Directory 1929

Brett Robert - Reading Hall

Norman Henry - The Vicarage

Whatling Mrs - The Gables

Clarke Reginald - Vicarage Farm. Cook William - Blacksmith

Hammond Ernest - Farmer

Hart Jn (exors of) College Farm

Howlett George Standwell Farm

Johnson William Denham Hall & Grove Farm

Jolly Zephaniah - Thatcher

Last Philip - Farmer

Lewis Frederick Farmer

Norman Bertie - Green Man P.H.

Oakes Albert - Wheelwright & Parish Clerk

Risk James Post Office Farm

Rogers Annie (Mrs) Grocers shop & post office

Roper Henry Low Farm

Treen Rt. Wm. - Farmer

Westrup James & Sons Farmers Bush Farm

The Church Hall (old school) is used for Sunday School meetings, concerts and parochial purposes generally.

Denham no longer has a school or public house - but still a Post Office & Shop and an often used community centre. New houses mean an increased population but there are very few farmers compared even with 1929 although an orchard and thriving pig, chicken, cattle and sheep enterprises remain with cereals and sugar beet the main crops on arable fields.

About one mile away on the road to Eye we find Denham Street, rather oddly named as it consists only of a few houses and farms, where good crops of wheat barley and oilseed rape are grown and animals, mostly pigs, are produced.

The list of Priests begins with Gilbert de Melton, presented by the Prior & Convent of Norwich to Denham in 1323.

In 1617 Francis Tilney was presented by the King (James I) as Thomas Southwell - of the family whose responsibility it was - was too young to carry out the task. Today the church is cared for by the Rev. Anthony Lowe who lives in the ancient vicarage house close by the church at Hoxne.



DENHAM CHURCH.

Copy of Old View.

R. L. Childs, 1949.

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