THE EXNING STORY

A celebration of 1350 years of Exning as a Christian site

THE EXNING STORY

Cover:
Saint Martin's Church from the A45
drawing by Robert Wix

THE EXNING STORY

The history of Exning
by Peter May

A guide to St Martin's Church
compiled by Roy Tricker

Drawings by Robert Wix

Additional material
by Cedric Catton

The Parochial Church Council of Exning w. Landwade
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by the Archbishop of Canterbury

I am delighted to send my congratulations to the Parish of Exning on your 1350th anniversary celebration. Such an occasion is a vivid reminder of the enduring quality and relevance which has enabled the Christian faith to survive and flourish.

It is good to be reminded that we are stewards of an inheritance that has been handed down through many centuries. But our Christian calling is always to use and build on our inheritance. So I pray that as you celebrate the distance you have travelled, you will be strengthened and inspired for mission and ministry ahead.

Lambeth Palace
November 1985

† Robert Cantuar

Introduction

The year 1986 is a very special one in the life of the Parish of Exning. We are celebrating the 1350th anniversary of Exning as a Christian site. In 636, St Felix came to Exning and baptised the family of a Saxon royal family, King Anna. Among those in the family was Etheldreda, who went on to found Ely Cathedral. Two of Etheldreda's sisters, Wendred and Sexburgha, are still remembered in Exning. It was at the well named after Wendred that the baptism may have taken place, and this well (or spring, which more accurately describes the site) has many stories and legends of healing and cursing attached to it. Sexburgha later followed Etheldreda as Abbess at Ely in the year 679, following Etheldreda's death.

The story of Exning is fascinating. It has always been just a little different to that of the usual village, with a history of independent thought and action and colourful incidents and characters. I am very grateful to Peter May, a notable local historian, for the historical story of Exning and to Roy Tricker for his description of the Church. We now have in this one volume, I believe, a worthy document of a definitive nature to celebrate this historic period in the ongoing life of Exning.

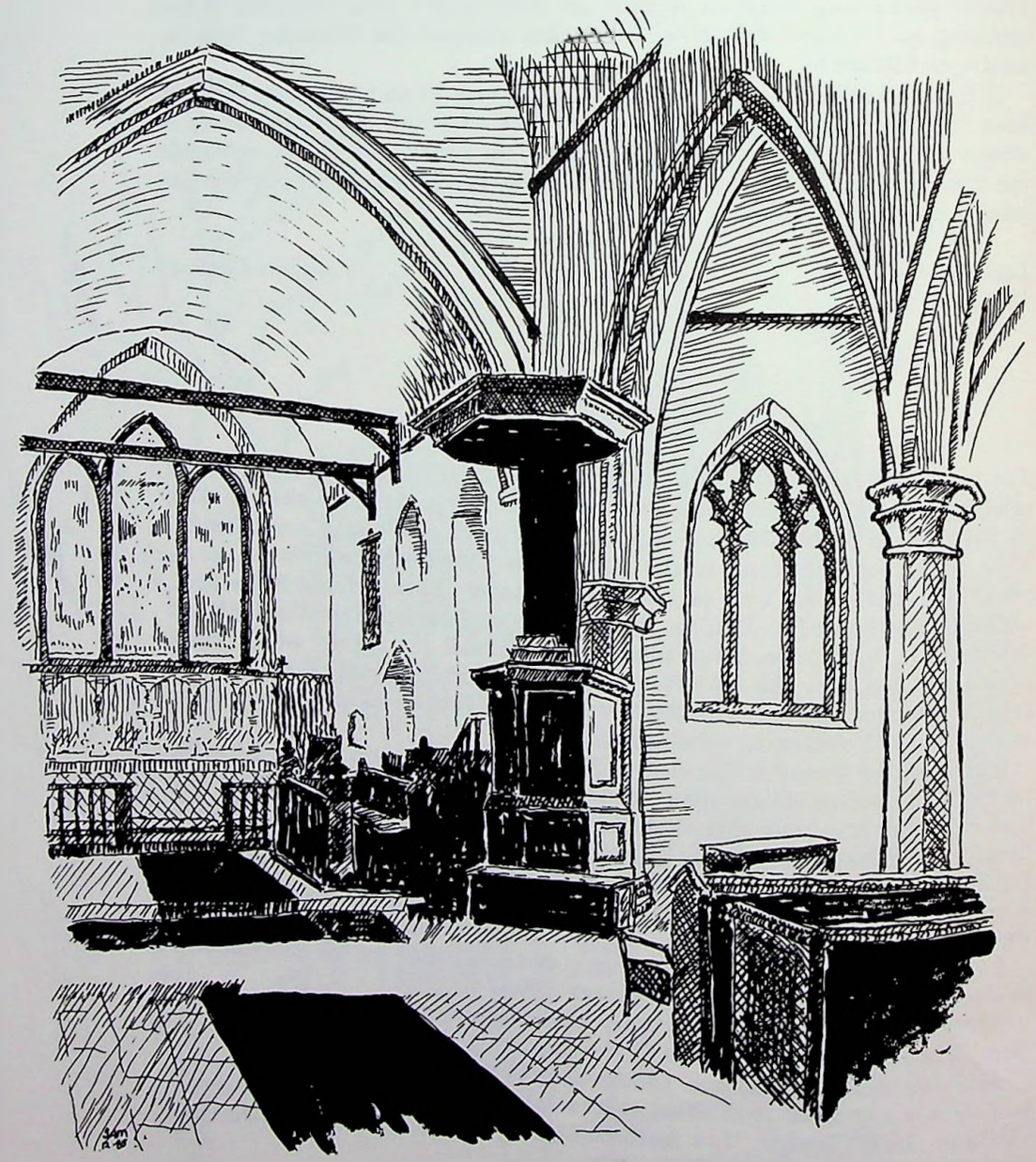
I am most grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his introduction to the year of celebrations that will mark 1986.

The Church Guide and the History have been enlivened and enhanced by 'Sam' Wix's splendid drawings and John Jacobs' archive postcards.

Also my thanks go to the 1350th Committee who have laboured long to produce a year to remember: Deidre Burton, Bob Desborough, Richard Clarkson, Jack Claydon, Ted Rosbrook, Fred Watts, Joan Conway-Jarrett, Guy Pidsley, Ray Hayes and Peter Wake.

January 1986

Cedric T. Catton, Vicar



The Pulpit and Chancel of St Martin's

A brief guide to the Parish Church of St Martin, Exning

Compiled by Roy Tricker

with amendments and additional material by Cedric Catton

Exning's fine parish church of St Martin of Tours, about whom we can read on page 18 of this book, has an attractive and slightly elevated position in the village. Its spacious churchyard is surrounded on three sides by roads and the building is fittingly at the heart of the village which it has served for maybe a thousand years. Its lofty tower (which points to where mediaeval people thought heaven was) not only dominates this area of the village but also looks magnificent, rising out of the trees, when viewed from the Newmarket bypass. Exning is in the strange position of being within the county of Suffolk, but being bordered on three sides by Cambridgeshire. It may be said that St Martin's has the flavour of a Cambridgeshire church and many of its architectural features are more widely seen in that county than in Suffolk — the Decorated style of architecture predominating.

We know that a church existed here in 1087, because the patrons of the living were Battle Abbey in Sussex and it is almost certain that there was a church on this spot in Saxon times. It is thought possible that St Felix, who brought Christianity to East Anglia, founded the church of St Martin at Exning in 636.

The tower

There is known to be Norman masonry in the tower and the architect who inspected it in 1959 found a consecration cross, which may be of Norman date, in a lintel of a doorway some way up the tower. The tower has, like the rest of the church, undergone many alterations and possibly what early stonework there is has been reused and, in a parish where Roman remains have been discovered, it is no surprise to learn that Roman masonry is also incorporated in the tower.

It will be noticed how lofty this is. Its height is 75 ft, which is approximately equal to the width across the church from the far walls of the two transepts and it could almost be said that the tower is disproportionately high when compared with the rest of the church. Looking at the exterior of the tower it becomes clear that has happened. If we remove the

present belfry stage, the proportions become more what we are accustomed to in churches of this period. The stage below the present belfry is lit by large two-light windows, with 'Y' tracery (*c.*1300), which are contemporary with the small single windows beneath them and were almost certainly the original belfry windows. The tower was then heightened during the first half of the fourteenth century, when the present belfry stage and embattled parapet were added and the three-light west window was inserted. This was probably done just after the transepts were added and the common denominator of 75 ft may well have been in the mind of the architect who designed this heightening.

Notice the *gargoyle* heads beneath the parapet, which throw the rainwater from the roof clear of the tower walls. The wooden cupola which crowns the tower is probably eighteenth century and contains the clock bell.

Beside the simple west doorway is a *monument* (1713) to John Huske and to the south of the doorway is a far more ancient memorial — a *thirteenth-century coffin*, which probably contained the remains of some notable person in the parish, maybe a former priest.

The chancel

The core of the chancel is work of the twelfth century. This was revealed when builders restoring it in 1909 discovered two early lancet (single) windows and an early priest's doorway in the south wall. Traces of the windows can still be seen in the exterior wall on the south side. The style of the windows is Early English (1190–1280). Although much of the stonework in the windows has been renewed, it is possible that several of these were replacements of originals. The early priest's doorway was replaced in the fifteenth century by the present one, in the Perpendicular style. The triple-lancet east window is comparatively modern and replaced a large Perpendicular window. Beneath it is a pleasant monument to the Reverend Robert Peachey, a former vicar, who was also a Fellow of Pembroke Hall, Keeper of the Public Library and Protector of the University of Cambridge.

The north and south transepts

The north and south transepts make the church cruciform in shape. Mediaeval church designers were no fools and in those days the church building itself served as the common peoples' manual of religious education. They could learn from the carvings, pictures and designs in the church the fundamentals of the faith, which might not be so clear to them in the Latin services. Here the church itself is a cross, the emblem of Christianity, embracing all faithful people. These transepts

are work of *c.*1330–40, which is the date of the elegant four-light windows in their north and south walls. These are fine examples of the Decorated style of architecture and have reticulated (net-like) tracery. The other transept windows are also in the Decorated (early fourteenth century) style.

The nave and aisles

The nave and aisles underwent much restoration in the nineteenth century; their windows and the north doorway were renewed in 1863–64. The Decorated style also appears in these windows. There are no clerestorey windows in the walls above the aisles, which is unusual. The level of the original roof-ridge of the nave can be seen on the east wall of the tower. It has been suggested that the church may have had a thatched roof before 1812, when the walls were slightly heightened. We know that new roofs were placed on the nave, aisles and transepts in 1820–21; an account of the church written in 1832 mentions that beneath the north aisle roof could be seen scratched in the wall 'John Crane of Burwell, July 18th 1821. Repairer of this church'.

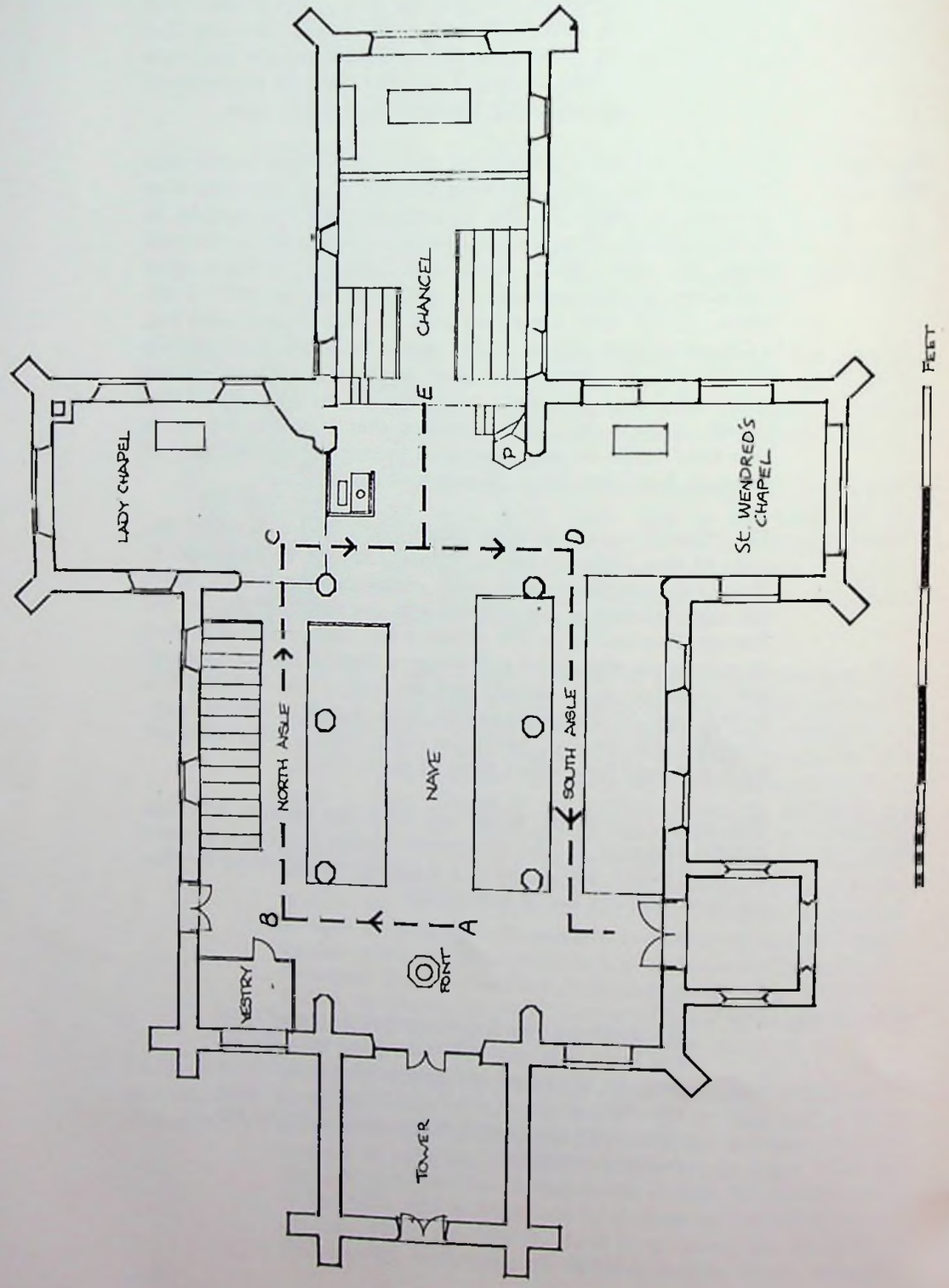
The chancel

The chancel roof was tiled about 1820. This was under the care of the Lay Rector — William Bryant of Newmarket. We must remember that until comparatively recent times the maintenance of the chancel was the responsibility of the Rector (in some cases the parish priest and in others a priest or a layman who lived elsewhere — Exning has a Vicar and not a Rector as its priest) and the rest of the building was in the care of the parishioners. This explains why in many churches the chancel (as is the case here) is of a different style and date from other parts of the building.

The south porch

The south porch, by which we enter the church, was also greatly restored in the nineteenth century. This is a two-storeyed porch with a parvis (or priest's room) above it. This has been restored and is now in use.

We welcome you to this ancient house of God and hope that you will enjoy your visit. Please pray for the priest and people here and, if you are able, spare a small contribution to help them keep this church intact and beautiful for future generations.



THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

A large fourteenth-century doorway gives access to the bright and spacious interior, where judicious twentieth-century workmanship has been successful, particularly in the tasteful use of colour. Notice the holes in the sides of the doorway into which slotted the huge wooden beam used to bar the door in mediaeval times.

The interior has changed somewhat since 1734, when a visitor recorded that the ceilings then had early seventeenth-century paintings of 'spread eagles, lions, bucks and other odd fancies'. The Royal Arms then had a place of honour over the chancel arch and above the communion table were framed the Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed and Ten Commandments. The interior was redecorated in 1736 and in 1828 the parish fire engine was kept at the west end of the south aisle.

Nave

('A' on plan) The aisles are separated from the nave by *arcades* of four bays, which are supported by octagonal piers. There are also arches to the transepts at the ends of the aisles. These are fourteenth century, as is also the octagonal *font*, which has shields and foliage crosses in the panels of its bowl. The font is placed at the west end, not far from the entrance, to symbolise our entry into the church of Christ through baptism. Also at the west end is a seventeenth-century *gallery* which, when it was restored in the early nineteenth century, was called a 'singing gallery'. It now contains the organ and its paintwork is, of course, modern. On it can be seen the *Royal Arms* of King George III, dating from 1817. An earlier set of Royal Arms of George II hang on the south aisle wall nearby.

Sanctus-bell opening

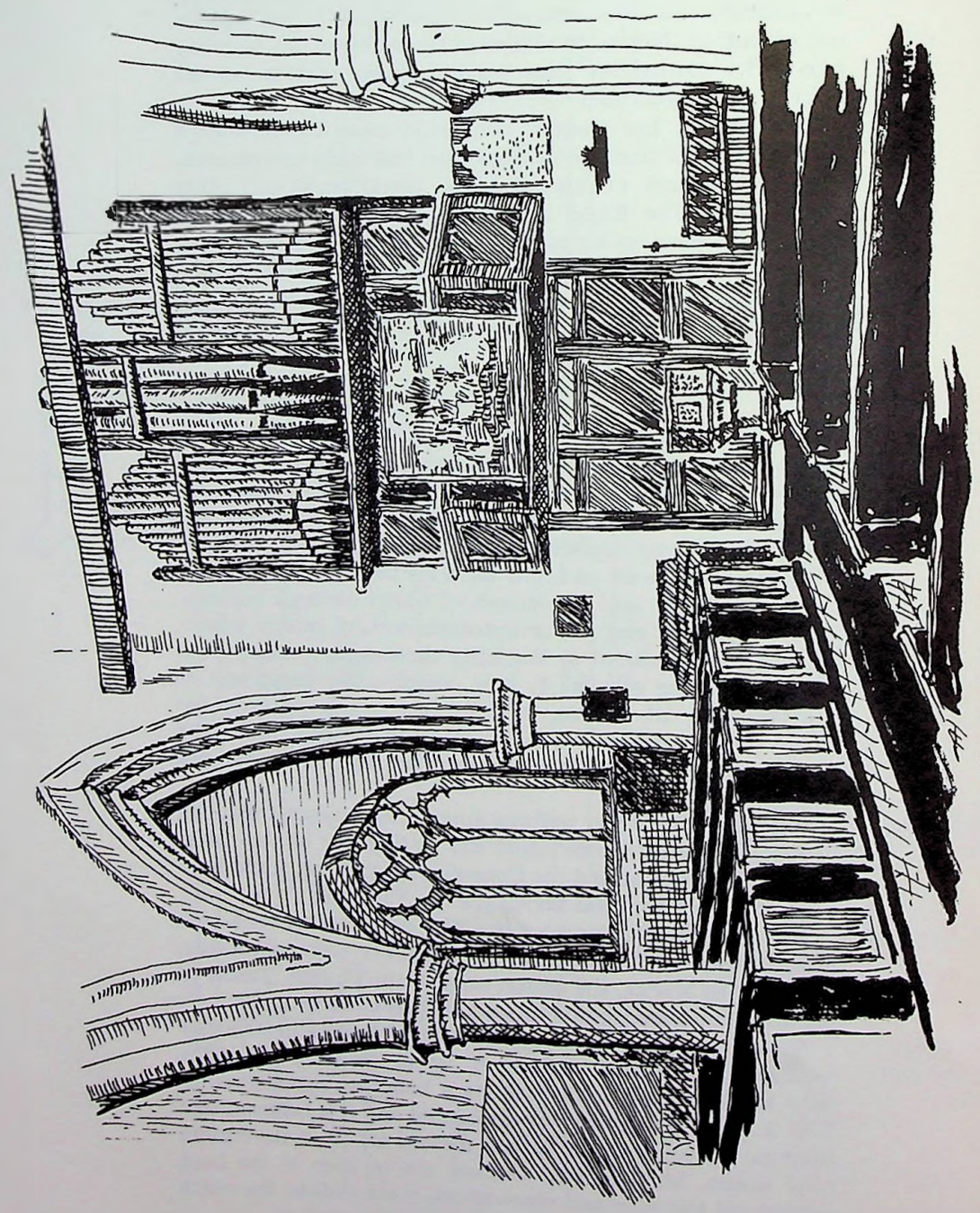
High up in the tower wall is a *sanctus-bell opening*, through which the person whose job it was to ring one of the tower bells at the Sanctus and the Consecration at Mass, could have a clear view of what was taking place at the altar.

('B' on plan)

Beside the north doorway is a fine canopied *niche*, which has fifteenth-century tracery. It was built to contain a statue, maybe of St Martin, the patron saint of the Church. Traces of mediaeval colouring could be seen on this niche in 1828.

Pew ends in nave and aisles

Several of the *benches* in the nave and aisles incorporate mediaeval woodwork. Fifteen in the centre gangway of the nave and six in the south aisle have linenfold panelled ends. This is sixteenth-century workmanship and it is believed that some on the south side may have formed panels of the former rood screen. More ancient timbers can be seen in the back benches of the nave and some of the plain ends to the north aisle benches may date from the seventeenth century.



Looking west — Gallery and Organ

Transepts

North transept ('C' on plan)

Much of interest can be seen in the light and spacious transepts, thanks to judicious restoration in our own times. The *north transept* is beautifully furnished as a Lady Chapel and there is a mediaeval *niche* for a statue above the altar. This

Lady Chapel

altar is a good seventeenth-century *communion table* and its adornments are a fine tribute to twentieth-century craftsmanship. Notice the crown and arrows of St Edmund, our East Anglian king and martyr. This chapel was formerly filled with the organ, which was removed and rebuilt at the west end of the church in 1965. Against the west wall of this transept is a superb mediaeval *stall*, which was one of the 'return' stalls in the chancel. Most mediaeval chancels were arranged in the collegiate fashion, with the clergy stalls at the western end, facing east with their backs to the rood screen. This old stall is somewhat battered, which is not surprising as it is 500 years old. We can see that there were two-light traceried panels in the front. Notice the faces at the terminations of the ends. Nearby is a most unusual framed and painted *hatchment*, commemorating Francis Robartson, of Riesenprice, Lincolnshire. The fascinating epitaph to this man is worth reading. He was a person 'of worth and virtue—heaven's heraldry'. He was buried under a flat stone somewhere inside this church. On the north side is a plaque, marking the stairs to the vault of Francis Shepheard (1736). The eastern window has an internal hood-mould, resting on corbel heads.

South transept ('D' on plan)

The south transept was restored in 1971, when several interesting features, hidden for centuries, were discovered in its walls. In the east wall, south of the window, is an *aumbry* (a cupboard for storing the sacred vessels and other valuables).

St Wendred's Chapel

It once had a strong door and we can see where this fitted. In the south wall is a trefoil-headed *piscina*, which has dog-tooth moulding (a motif much used in the first half of the fourteenth century) in its arch. It retains its quatre-foil drain.

Heart monument

To the west of this is what must be the most exciting twentieth-century discovery here. It is an ogee-headed recess which, although now somewhat decayed, was clearly divided into two compartments. It contains two sets of hands, each clutching a heart. One is smaller, indicating a husband and wife. This is a rare example in East Anglia of a *heart monument*, marking the burial-place of a person's heart. Occasionally when a person died or was to be buried away from home (maybe on a battlefield or in a place of honour) he left instructions that his heart should be carefully removed, taken back to his parish church and buried there. The place would be marked either by a tiny effigy of the person or by a heart (sometimes held in the hands, as here). So we have a couple whose hearts obviously (both physically and metaphorically)

lay together and in Exning. We do not yet know their identity or their story. Maybe they were separated by battles far away, but whatever did happen their hearts were reunited and lay together near this recess. Heart burials are rare in East Anglia, but a few others can be seen, particularly in south and west England. A heart burial was discovered in a metal jar beneath a tomb at Holbrook, near Ipswich. Even in the nineteenth century, the great Thomas Hardy's heart was taken and buried in his wife's grave at his home village of Stinsford, Dorset.

St Wendred's Chapel

In this chapel can also be seen a seventeenth-century *table* and two plain seventeenth-century *benches.* In the floor near the entrance to this transept from the south aisle is a thirteenth-century stone with a cross, which is probably a *coffin lid.* Maybe it fitted the coffin outside the west door.

Chancel and Sanctuary

('E' on plan)

Separating the nave from the chancel in mediaeval times was the rood screen, above which was the great Rood (a crucifix, with Our Lady and St John), reminding the worshippers of the central fact of the Christian faith — Christ crucified. At the top of the screen was the rood-loft, along which it was possible to walk. All trace of the screen has gone (except maybe woodwork reused in some of the bench ends), but the *staircase to the rood-loft* remains. Its entrance (hidden until 1909) is on the north side, east of the chancel arch. A hole high up in the opposite wall gave access to the loft of a parclose screen which divided off the south transept.

The Lectern

The *pulpit* is believed to be early eighteenth century. Before 1909 it was a 'two-decker' arrangement with a large reading desk beneath it. When it was altered two sets of candlesticks which were fixed to it were thrown away. They eventually found their way to a Cambridge museum and were returned to Exning. They are now in use on the high altar. Also in 1909 the large eighteenth-century box-pews (maybe for the lay Rector) in the chancel were removed and their woodwork was reused — some in the *panelling* behind the present choir stalls. Beside the pulpit is a good seventeenth-century *chest*, where valuables were kept.

The *communion rails* are seventeenth century and may be some of the many erected by order of Archbishop Laud for the purpose of keeping animals out of the sanctuary. It is interesting to speculate on the original place for these rails in the Church. They are 18 ft 6½ in. long and would fit exactly east to west across St Wendred's Chapel, indicating an altar of great importance there, associated perhaps with the double heart tomb.

The two *Jacobean chairs* in the sanctuary are also fine examples of this period.

Easter tomb

On the north side of the sanctuary is an *altar-tomb* of Purbeck marble, which has the indent for a former brass on its flat top. The position of this tomb shows that it was the burial-place of somebody important, maybe a former priest. It dates probably from the fifteenth century and it may also have been used as an Easter Sepulchre, where the Blessed Sacrament was placed from Good Friday to Easter, to symbolise Our Lord's burial. This tomb was excavated during the early years of the nineteenth century and the dark brown earth beneath it was found to contain a few crumbling bones and some 'pins' which may have been attached to clothes or vestments.

Double piscina

In the south wall is a *double piscina* beneath two plain arches which have obviously been restored, but which are divided by their original roughly-hewn central shaft. The water from the cleansing of the sacred vessels and the priest's hands at Mass was poured down these drains. This piscina dates from the reign of Edward I (1272–1307) because it was during that time that two separate drains were ordered (one for the ablutions and the other for the lavabo) and after that time the ablutions have been consumed by the priest.

Organ

The *organ*, which is operated from a detached console, was originally built by Harper, but was rebuilt by Cartwright and Johnson in 1965. The action is electric and there are two manuals and pedals, with 16 speaking stops.

Bells

The tower contains a peal of six *bells*. The tenor was cast by C. and G. Mears in 1845 and the rest by John Draper in 1623. The weights are as follows: Tenor 14 cwt, fifth 10 cwt, fourth 8 cwt, third 7 cwt, second 6 cwt, and a new treble, added in 1982, 5 cwt.

The clock bell was originally given by Francis Shepheard in 1736, but was recast by Mears of Whitechapel at the same time as the tenor bell.

Plate

Amongst the church *plate* is an Elizabethan chalice, also a paten made in 1637.

Registers

The *registers* of the church can be traced back to 1558.

Pyx

It is interesting to note a remarkable discovery which was made at Exning in 1845. Not far from the church was unearthed a mediaeval *pyx* (the receptable in which the Sacrament was reserved), together with some candlesticks and other ornaments, which had been hastily buried at the Reformation. The pyx was made of an alloy called latten. It was a lockable covered cup surmounted by a conical spire, of early fifteenth-century date and about 11 inches high. Unfortunately we do not know what happened to these treasures; obviously they have been lost in the mists of time — or the auction rooms!

Compiled by Cedric Catton

The Legend of St Wendred

In the days before Newmarket existed, Exning was the most important town in the area. Some think that here was the palace where lived King Anna, King of East Anglia, and his large family, which included three daughters: Etheldreda, who founded Ely Cathedral; Sexburgha, who married the King of Kent; and WENDRED.

Inevitably historians differ about Wendred and enquiries to the Vatican have yielded little further information. However, it would seem that thanks to the learned visitors who called on her father, Wendred built up a vast knowledge of herbs and medicines. She is said to have loved animals and wild creatures were not afraid of her — indeed they sought her company. While there is no existing proof of any miracles, it is certain that this Princess put her knowledge to good use. She used the waters from the spring, where she and other members of her family were christened, for bathing the wounds of injured people and even animals. To some people she seemed a saint as she had time to listen to their troubles.

When the family was dispersed through marriages and death, Wendred went to March, where for some years she headed a community for the treatment of the sick. The parish church in March is dedicated to her, and it was in this church that her funeral service was held, apparently an occasion of breathtaking splendour.

Years later Ethelred II decided that Wendred should have a more suitable resting-place in Ely Cathedral, but at that time the Danes frequently came over to pillage and plunder along the eastern coast, and nothing was done about Wendred's coffin. In 1016, when the raids by the Danes were even more fierce, it was thought that perhaps Wendred's body might perform a miracle of protection. Her coffin was taken to Ashingdon, near Southend, where a battle was in progress, with the predictable result that the Danes carried it away.

As King Canute examined the beautiful workmanship of the casket, something touched his heart, and Wendred made some impact after all. Hitherto the Danes had only come to destroy and pillage. Now King Canute saw to it that scholars and craftsmen from England shared their knowledge with his people. He returned Wendred's casket to the Kentish people, became a Christian himself, and there was peace with the Danes.

Back home in Exning a few pilgrims continued to visit the spring and called it St Wendred's Well. Sometimes in a hot summer the spring dried up and the pilgrims preferred to go to Walsingham through Newmarket. Strangely, in the autumn of 1985, the spring dried up again, and this has reminded people of St Wendred and of the ancient curse on those who steal the water.

No stone or signpost marks the spot and it had become overgrown because of general disinterest, although in the 1960s a trainer firmly believed that the water which flowed into a nearby pond was beneficial to his lame and ailing horses.

Though there is little to see except water welling up in a muddy pool, recently more interest has been shown in the well and the present Vicar uses water from it for the parish baptisms. It is on private ground and we should be thankful that it survives and has not been built on.

St Martin of Tours

In the fourth century Bishop MARTIN OF TOURS was a figure of great importance and his influence was felt from Ireland to Africa and the East.

He was a soldier's son, born in about 315 in what is now Hungary and brought up in Italy. When a young officer in the army he became a Christian and about 339 asked for his discharge. 'I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight.'

After his discharge he spent some time in Italy, Dalmatia, and as a recluse on an island off the Ligurian coast; in 360 he founded the first monastery in Gaul at Ligugé. About ten years later he was made bishop of Tours, and the solitary place near where he lived became another monastery. He was the father of monasticism in France, his example and encouragement leading to the establishment of many communities throughout the country.

As an evangelist in rural Gaul, Bishop Martin travelled to the remotest parts of his diocese, on foot, on donkey-back, or by water. His reputation as a preacher, wonderworker and a man with awe-inspiring spiritual power spread far and wide. He was one of the first holy men who was not a martyr to be publicly venerated as a saint.

St Martin died at over eighty years of age at Candes near Tours, and in England many churches, including St Martin-in-the-Fields in London and, of course, our own, are dedicated in his honour.

Church Lane, Exning — the Church from the 'cut-through'

(above) *Exning Church — viewed from Church Street*

(below) *Interior of Exning Church — taken before the organ was moved to the west end*

Church Street, Exning, c.1925 — looking towards Cotton End from the Church

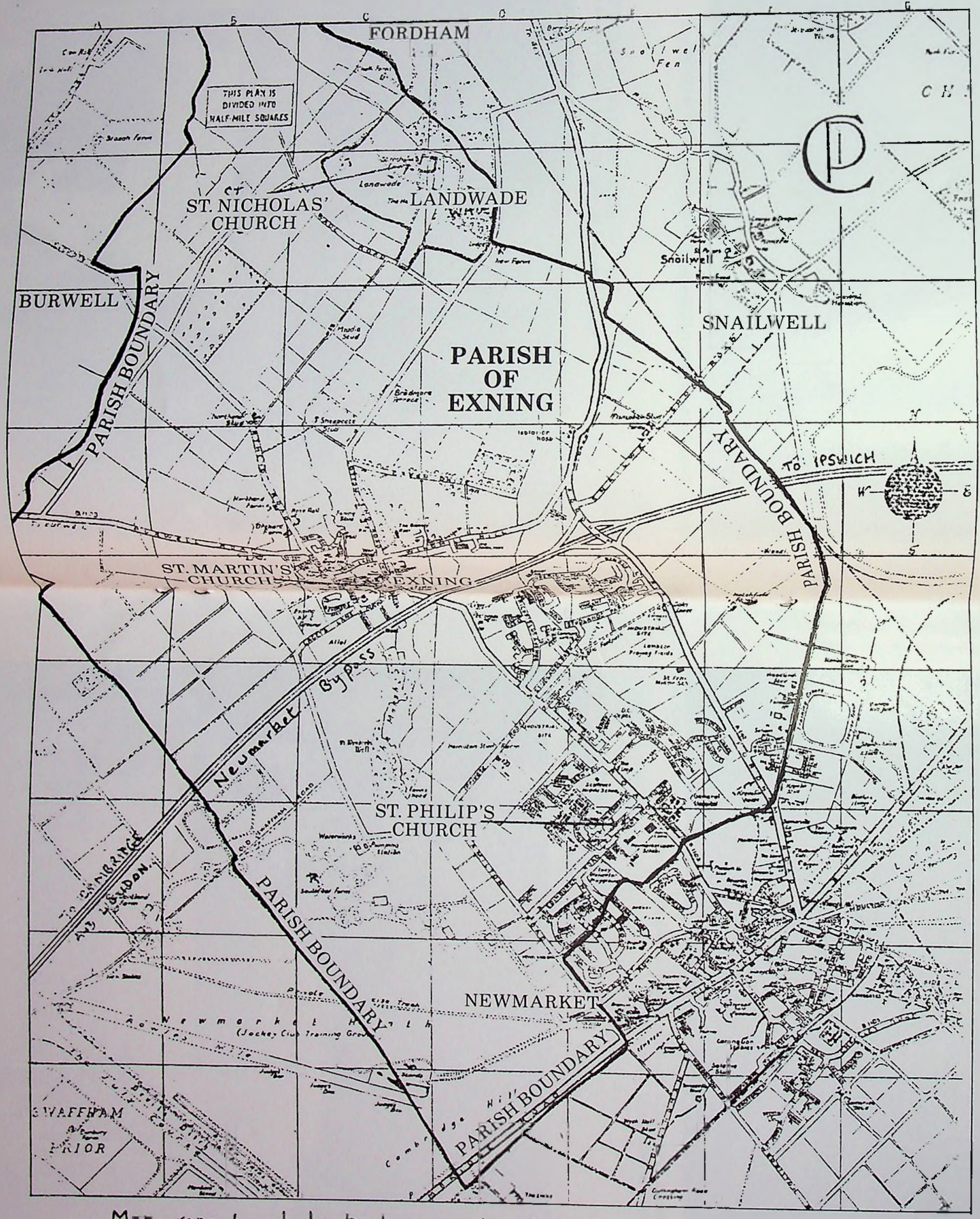
(above) *Church Street, Exning, c.1925 — the cottages opposite the present garage*

(above) *Swan Lane, Exning, c.1925–30 — looking towards the Post Office*

(below) *Swan Lane, Exning, c.1925–30 — looking towards the War Memorial; Hestaire's is on the right*

(facing left) *Church Street, Exning, c.1925*
Ducks Lane is to the left of the man with the bicycle.
Note: the building on the left no longer exists.

PARISH OF EXNING with LANDWADE

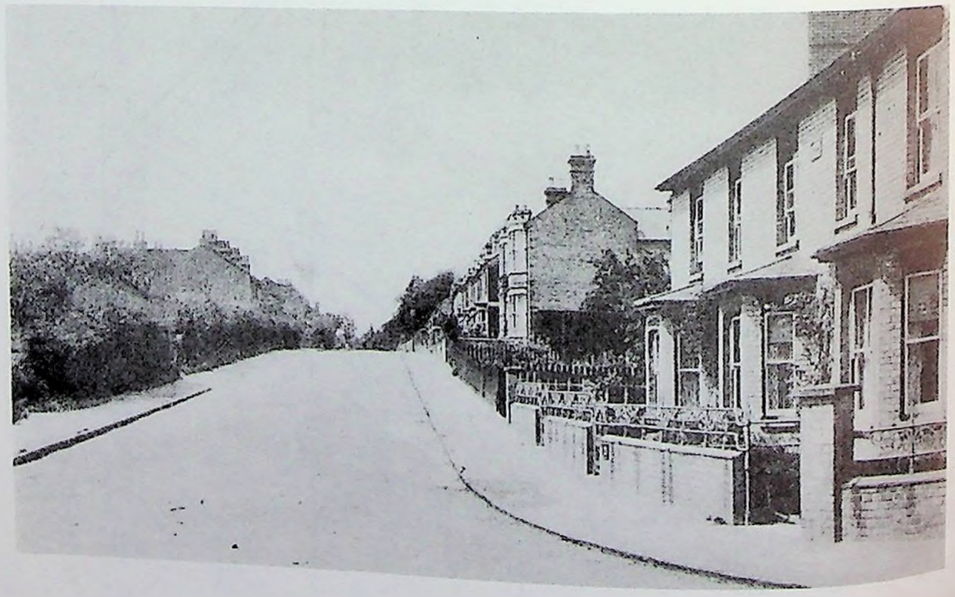


Map reproduced by kind permission of G.I. Barnett and Son Ltd.

Note how much of Newmarket is included in the Ecclesiastical Parish.

(above) *Laceys Lane, Exning — looking towards the Church from the Burwell end of the lane*

(below) *Laceys Lane, Exning — looking up the lane from Ducks Lane/Chapel Street corner, before the existing houses on the left were built*



(facing right) *Oxford Street, Exning, c.1925 — looking towards the junction of Burwell Road and North End Road*

The Avenue, Exning — now Cotton End Road towards Landwade

(above) *Exning House — this is now Glancly Rest, Old People's Home*

Burwell Road, Exning from North End corner — Note steam engine coming from Burwell

(above) *Ducks Lane, Exning — looking from the ducks towards the Church before St Martin's Close was built*

(below) *Beechwood, Exning — now a modern housing development, the stables and house have been pulled down*

THE HISTORY OF EXNING
from before the Norman Conquest to the nineteenth century

by Peter May

with a postscript on the twentieth century by Cedric Catton

BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST

In very early days geographical features played a much more important part in the settlement of peoples than they do today. What we now know as Exning, in the millenium before written records became available, lay, with what is now Newmarket, in a narrow chalk belt between the afforested clayland of West Suffolk and the swampy Fenland of Cambridgeshire. People tended at first to travel *through* this belt, along a pair of parallel tracks, rather than to settle permanently in it. One of these tracks, later known as The Street, ran from Little Wilbraham, along what is now the bypass, through Exning, Snailwell, Chippenham and Badlingham; the other, later known as the Icknield Way, ran through Newmarket, Kentford and Lackford — both eventually joining the London-Norwich road, now the A11. Burials in Edinburgh Road and in Fordham Road, and cinerary urns on the Heath show that there was a Bronze Age presence in the area, though there is little evidence of any real settlement. It is only in the Roman period (AD 43–410) that we find signs of development at Exning; Roman wells have been detected in the Hamilton Stud area, and a second century barn dwelling, later enlarged, has been excavated at Landwade. These and surviving Roman pottery and coins point to a straggling settlement in the Hamilton Stud area. Near the end of the Roman period or perhaps later the famous Devil's Dyke was constructed; in spite of recent detailed research, it is still uncertain for what purpose it was actually built. An inhumation cemetery on Windmill Hill suggests that the Anglo-Saxons arrived early in Exning and had established themselves there by the sixth century. It can no longer be claimed, as it was by earlier historians, that the place name Exning is associated with the Iceni tribe. We are now told that Ixning (the earlier spelling) is a later form of Gyxeningas, meaning 'Gixa's people'; and so we may be sure that Gyxa was the family name of the Anglo-Saxons who first settled in our village. No doubt one of the operative factors in the settlement was the plentiful supply of water from its springs (later called The Seven Springs), another the trackway which ran through the chalk belt at Exning.

It had been thought possible that Boudicca (Boadicea), the queen of the Iceni, and, later, Anna, king of the East Angles, had their royal palaces at Exning, but this is now considered unlikely. Boudicca seems to have had her centre of operations further north — Exning was on the western fringe of

her territory. Anna's capital appears to have been in East Suffolk, perhaps at Rendlesham, and he may have been associated with Sutton Hoo. Blythburgh claims to be the site of his burial.

The legend that Etheldreda was born 'at a famous place called Exning', in about AD 630, is to be found in a twelfth-century document, *Liber Eliensis*, written by John of Ely some 500 years after her birth. Her connection with Exning illustrates very well the way in which a simple statement is expanded through the centuries into a popularly accepted tradition. A history of Exning, published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1832, full of folk tales and local stories, knows only that she was born at Exning. Fifty years later Kelly's Directory adds 'and was baptized at the Seven Springs'. In the twentieth century 'the Seven Springs' have become 'St Wendred's Well'; and it is now commonly believed that it was St Felix, the famous bishop evangelising East Anglia at the time of her birth, who actually baptised her. In such ways is local history made.

The name of the well has also changed through the years. It seems originally to have been St Mildred's Well — St Mildred was a cousin of St Etheldreda; at any rate in 1530 John Colyn left 3s. 4d. 'to the mendinge of the lane towarde St Mildrede'. It appears to have been called St Mildred's Well up to the beginning of the nineteenth century — locals in 1828 were in fact calling it Minzin Well. The first edition of the One Inch Ordnance Survey map of 1836 calls it St Mindred's, and successive editions repeat this until the 1925 edition when it has become St Wendred's Well, and so it remains today. No one knows anything about St Wendreda — there is only one church in England dedicated to her, that at March, also in East Anglia. We may note that before the Enclosure Award of 1812 a lane called Marsh Lane ran from St Mary's Square in Newmarket across what is now the Upper School playing-fields to the well; the present Exning Road was known then as Newmarket *Upper* Road.

Unfortunately the pages of Exning's history from Etheldreda's birth in AD 630 to the Norman Conquest in 1066 are a complete blank.

NINE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

When King William conquered England in 1066, he claimed all land for the crown. Much of it he kept for himself, the rest he parcelled out to his barons who in effect became his tenants-in-chief. The greater part of Exning (called in Domesday Book Esselinga) he retained for himself, putting one Godric in charge, to 'farm' it for him. The rest, about 180 acres, he gave to one of his barons, Count Alan, whose sub-tenant was his steward called Wymarc; the count held another 80 or so pieces of land in Cambridgeshire (Exning is in the Cambridgeshire section of the Domesday Book).

That book and its satellite survey, *Inquisitio Eliensis*, gives us a good picture of what Exning was like 900 hundred years ago. Surprisingly its population then seems to have been about 400; it was about the same in the seventeenth century and only 566 in 1801 — numbers began to rise dramatically only in the mid nineteenth century.

The 88 families in Exning (the standard multiplier of 4.5 gives us a population of 396) were drawn from four different classes. At the top of the social ladder (we omit the king, Count Alan and their stewards who were non-resident) were seven 'freemen'. They had land of their own which they could dispose of without reference to the king; in return for living on his land they were required to supply cartage for the king when necessary. On the next rung down were 'villeins' or villagers; there were 39 of these in Exning, major tenants with perhaps seven or more acres of land apiece. Below them were 'bordars' or smallholders, 34 in all, with perhaps two or three acres of land each. By custom both villagers and smallholders were required to supply conscript labour in the king's and Count Alan's fields, especially at harvest time, in return for living on the land. Finally at the very bottom of the social ladder, with no rights and no privileges and no land, were 15 'serfs' or slaves.

It is not certain how the Domesday Book compilers assessed the wealth of the various places in the Hundred (Staplehow) in which Exning was. One item that was certainly important was the number of plough teams owned by the villeins (villagers); clearly the more plough teams were available, the more productive the land, productive that is for the king and Count Alan. In Exning the 39 villagers owned between them 27 plough teams, far more than any other village in the Hundred (for example Burwell, Soham and Chippenham) — a plough team is thought to have consisted of eight oxen. Although primarily and almost entirely arable, there were no less than over 300 sheep, over 60 pigs and 13 horses, not to mention the oxen of the plough teams and 30 other cattle. It was by far the wealthiest village in the Hundred. Sheep, I suppose until fairly recently, have always been a feature of the Exning landscape, for in 1810 the five major tenants of Sir Charles Cotton claimed between them rights of sheepwalk for over 2,000 sheep, and according to the 1841 Census there were no less than nine shepherds living in Exning in that year. The stream running through the village was also a source of wealth, for there were four water mills for grinding the corn from the fields. From the stream there was also an annual catch of over 8,000 eels, even more than Soham where there were seven fishermen who presented fish to the king three times in the year. Eels were evidently a feature of fenland and near fenland villages; there must have been quite a few anglers in Exning at the time of the Norman Conquest!

At the time of the Conquest Exning clearly seems to have been flourishing and prosperous, but something happened to destroy the prosperity between 1066 and 1086. In 1066 it was valued at £56; when Godric received it as the king's bailiff it was worth only £12 (it was back at £54 in 1086). It has been suggested that the reduction was due to the Revolt of the Earls in 1075; the revolt was hatched at the wedding feast of Ralph, the Earl of Norfolk, at Exning. The king may have seized Exning and ordered a drastic scorched earth policy as punishment for the revolt against him, a revolt which occasioned a popular rhyme:

There was that bride-ale
That was many men's bale.