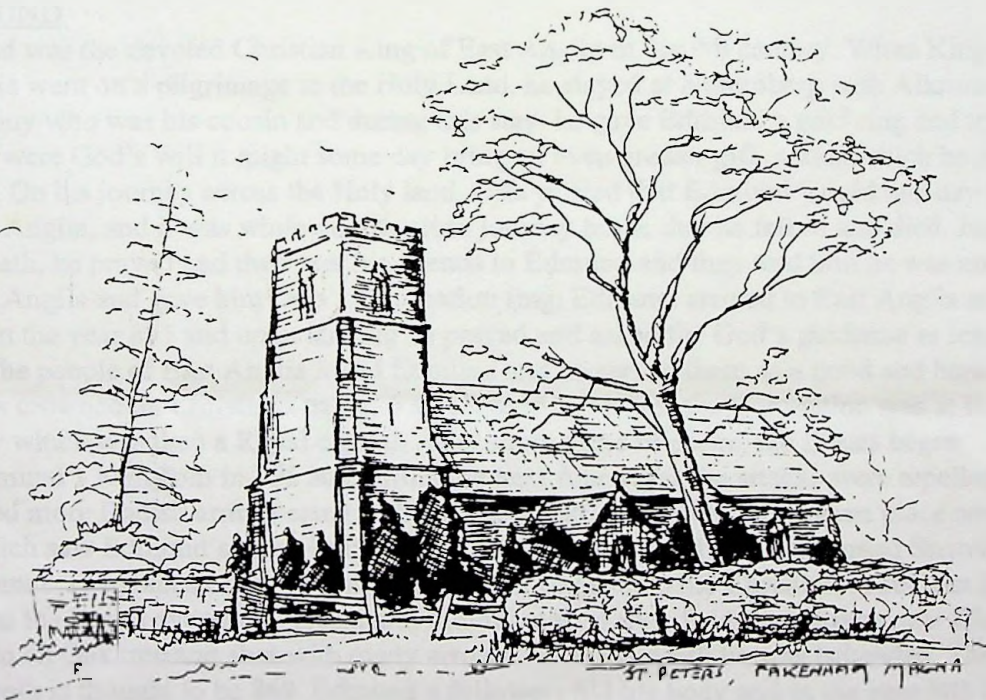


**HISTORY OF AND GUIDE TO
SAINT PETER'S CHURCH
FAKENHAM MAGNA**



By Edward Wortley (Parish Local History Recorder).

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ORIGINS OF RELIGION IN EAST ANGLIA

King Redwald was asked by King Ethelbert of Kent to introduce Christianity to East Anglia, but it was his son King Sigerbert who in AD 633 started a religious community at Bedricsworth which later became Bury St Edmunds. During the reign of Sigerbert, Fursa came to East Anglia from Ireland and later he went to Gaul, now France, where he founded a monastery at Lagrey. Felix who was a Burgundian by birth, and on arrival in Canterbury was told to go to East Anglia and start a Christian ministry. Later Felix was consecrated by Archbishop Honorius for his work in spreading the faith in pagan Saxon East Anglia.

KING EDMUND

King Edmund was the devoted Christian King of East Anglia in the 9th century. When King Offa of East Anglia went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he stayed at Nuremberg with Alkmund, King of Saxony who was his cousin and during this stay, he gave Edmund a gold ring and told him that if it were God's will it might some day bring an even greater gift, a trust which he must never betray. On his journey across the Holy land, Offa prayed that Edmund would one day be King of East Anglia, and it was while on his return journey home that he fell ill and died. Just before his death, he prayed and then sent his friends to Edmund and they told him he was now King of East Anglia and gave him Offa's Coronation ring. Edmund arrived in East Anglia at Hunstanton in the year 855 and upon landing he prayed and asked for God's guidance in leading his people. The people of East Anglia loved Edmund and he served them as a good and honest King. He was crowned on Christmas day 856 and legend has it that the Coronation was at Bures near Sudbury which was then a Royal capital. After some years of peace, the Danes began attacking Edmund's Kingdom in 865 and during the next four years the attacks were repelled until more and more Danish armies came and a massive battle is said to have taken place near Thetford, which saw Edmund's army beaten by the Danes. Local tradition has named Snarehill as the battle ground. The Danes offered Edmund his life if he gave up his Christian belief, but he would not and the Danes eventually found him hiding under a river bridge at Hoxne near Diss. He was tied to an Oak tree and shot with many arrows. After his death he was beheaded. The date of his death is thought to be 869. Edmund's followers hid his body and in the year 903 it was taken to Bedricsworth (Bury St Edmunds) and a large wooden Church was built for it to be placed in. The famous Bury Abbey had construction begun in 1032 and was dedicated by Archbishop Agelnoth to the honour of Christ, the blessed Virgin Mary.

ORIGINS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

It is generally accepted that by the 9th century a Saxon settlement was established along the banks of the river Blackbourne, and its site is thought to be in the centre of the present village. The original Saxon Church is thought to be in existence by the late 9th or early 10th century. It has been the custom of the Christian Church, for centuries to dedicate its consecrated buildings to Saints and Saint Peter is honoured by this building. The life of Saint Peter, one of our Lords disciples, Peter was a fisherman on the sea of Galilee and lived at Capernaum with his wife and mother-in-law whom Christ healed of a fever. Jesus called Peter along with his brother Andrew to serve in his ministry, and they were the first two of the twelve disciples called to his apostleship.

Jesus spoke these words to Peter "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church. I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" and it is from these words that the keys symbol is that of Saint Peter (see the banner in the chancel of the Church). Peter is considered the disciple closest to our Lord Jesus and therefore appears in all four New Testament Gospels of the Bible and after our Lord's death he takes the lead of the disciples and for the first part of the New Testament book. The Acts of the Apostles he appears as their leader. Little is known of Peter in his later years but it is known that he met his death in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero and was crucified upside down as he considered it not proper that he should die the same way as his master. The date of his death is unknown but most historians put it between AD60 and AD64.

THE EXTERIOR OF THE PRESENT STRUCTURE

The Tower. This was built in the 14th century and around its base can be seen fine napped flint chequerwork and above this are angled stepped buttresses on the western corners, and these extend to the point where the belfry is situated. The belfry has three decorated windows facing each way except the east which instead has a small lancet window. Above the windows can be seen the rain water spouts which are known as gargoyles, these are animal faces which date from medieval times when people had a suspicion that the devil in various forms was trying to enter the interior of the church, so it often became the practise in those days to put strange faces of dragons and animals etc on the outside of the building and hence the faces on the tower of this church. At the top of the tower can be seen the typical turret pattern of stone work.

The Nave. This is the same width today as it was when began in the late 10th century and its walls are of local rubble and stone construction with the odd salvaged piece of Roman brick. A unique survival from the Saxon period is found on both the north and south walls near the junction with the chancel and this is the long and short quoins, these are stone slabs laid horizontally and vertically in the wall and can be clearly seen. On the north side can be seen a blocked up Norman slit window and another is found partly blocked by the porch on the south side. The windows are of the plate tracery geometric Y shape and date from the 14th century. The whole church was extensively restored in 1859 and the 13th century north entrance door was blocked up at this time. The original thatched roof was replaced by one of tiles again during this restoration

The Chancel. The present one was built in the 13th century and replaced the original and narrower one. The lancet windows on the south side are 13th century work with later glass (see interior of chancel for details of glass) the fine 19th century east window was installed during the years 1866-67. The stone work of the original sanctuary bell door can be seen on the south side, the door being taken out during the 1859 restoration. long disused).

The Vestry. Erected in 1859 along with the stoke hole for the original heating system (long disused).

THE INTERIOR OF THE PRESENT STRUCTURE

The Porch. As already mentioned this was rebuilt using much of the original materials, and to the right of the main door can be seen a recessed area in the corner which contains a basin or stoup as it is more commonly referred to. It was in this that the Holy water was put and as people entered the church to take mass they dipped their fingers in this water and made a sign of the cross to remind themselves of their baptism. After the reformation many stoups were destroyed and the Puritan movement was responsible for the removal of many of them but thankfully this one at Saint Peter's has survived and the rebuilding of the porch also saw it being incorporated in its correct position. The south door was newly installed during the rebuild but the original 14th century handle from the old door complete with its mask boss was fitted on it. This handle is of a type known as a sanctuary knocker. this phase stems back to the days when offenders took sanctuary in the church until their trial came about.

The Tower. On the north wall can be seen a 13th century grave slab and on the west wall can be seen two more which are late 11th or 12th century with fine florated crosses on them. On the stonework around the tower spiral staircase door can be seen scratched dates of 1617 and 1799. Owing to badly worn steps and no hand rails, it is not advisable to go up the tower which contains three bells, but these have not been rung as a peel since 1959 owing to the extensive repairs needed to the staging that they are hung from. As the bells cannot be seen details of them are given below.

Treble bell, diameter 26 1/8 inches, weight 4 Cwt and was cast in Bury St Edmunds around 1500 and is therefore pre reformation.

Second bell, diameter 31 7/16 inches, weight 5 Cwt and was cast by Stephen Tonni of Bury St Edmunds and dated 1572.

Tenor bell, diameter 31 7/16 inches, weight 5 Cwt 3 Qtrs. and was cast by Robert Gurney of Bury St Edmunds and dated 1667.

Owing to the high cost involved it is unlikely that the bells will be restored to ringing condition in the near future.

The wooden screen between the tower and nave was put up in 1960 and in order to stop draughts in winter, the glass above this screen was erected in 1995 with a generous donation from Mr Frank Balaam, a former resident of Fakenham Magna who now lives in Sydney Australia along with his daughter and family. This new screen was dedicated on 7th January 1996.

The Nave. This was fitted with new pews and pulpit during the 1859 restoration.

The Font is over 600 years old and has paterae roses on the base. The cross carved on one side of the bowl is Victorian. The wooden cover to the font was dedicated in 1919 in memory of the men from the village who did not return from the First World War. A printed board at the rear of the nave gives the names of forty-two local men from the village who fought in that conflict and on the north wall can be seen the village memorial tablet in memory of ten of those men who gave their lives for King and country, another tablet can be seen on the south wall and this is to the memory of Arthur Berry who died in action on 24th March 1917.

The memorial on the north wall opposite the main door was dedicated on Sunday 7th May 1995 and is to the memory of Alan Winch, a resident of Fakenham Magna who loved and regularly worshipped in this church and his loving family had this fitting memorial placed above the pew he always sat in.

On the south wall can be seen a copy of an illustrated map of the Euston Estate and this was given to the church by their Graces The Duke and Duchess of Grafton on the occasion of their Golden Wedding celebrations held on 18th October 1996. The original copy of this painting was done by Bury St Edmunds artist, Stephen Oliver and hangs in Euston Hall.

The Lectern was given in 1926 by the then rector, The Reverend Bewley Caton in memory of his parents.

The now blocked stairway to the rood above the screen is the small recess in the north wall just before the screen. The rood screen is mainly 15th century with fragments of colour showing that it must have been beautifully painted at one time. The centre arch was installed during the 1859 restoration and this was expertly blended in with the original work. The rood screen was the dividing line in the church between the congregation in the nave and the priest in the chancel. Originally on top of the screen stood a large crucifix which in many cases was flanked by figures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John.

The Reformation, in 1534 King Henry VIII broke away from the Pope and installed himself as head of the English Church. During the reign of his son King Edward VI (1547 - 1553) and his daughter Queen Elizabeth I (1558 - 1603), England became a Protestant country and images of Rome were removed from churches. In 1561 Queen Elizabeth I made a Royal order allowing church screens to remain but the rood and figures should be taken down.

The remains of medieval wall paintings were discovered when repairs were made in 1958 to the interior plaster walls of the nave, but these were so faded and incomplete that restoration was considered not feasible and they were covered over by new plaster.

The pulpit and pews were all put in during the 1859 restoration. The pews in the back of the church were removed in 1980 so that a clear space for gatherings could be made available.

The Chancel. The interior of the 15th century chancel was much altered during the 19th century. On the north and south walls as you enter are to be seen 19th century colonnettes and below these are angels. The organ was installed in 1869 and was given by the then rector the Reverend E. J. Morgan. The fine table tomb on the north side is that of Reynolds Taylor who died in 1692, he was Lord of the manor and also a generous benefactor to the village and church. On the front of this tomb is a detailed genealogy plus seven coats of arms from the Taylor family. The two 18th century chairs standing in front of the Taylor tomb are Bishops chairs and when the Bishop or some other important member of the church was visiting for a service, they would sit on these chairs. (it is advisable that visitors do not sit on these chairs as they are in a weak condition owing to their age). The cross keys banner of Saint Peter can be seen to the left side of the east window. This banner along with alter cloths and a church edition of the Holy Bible, Common prayers and hymns was given to the church again by Reverend Morgan upon completion of the 1859 restoration. The very fine east window showing a multitude of scenes from the Bible was installed in 1867-68 by the London firm of Lavers & Barraud and well known author on stained glass, Birkin Howard described it as 'Possibly the best Lavers & Barraud glass of its date in Suffolk'. After 1868 the firm became Lavers, Barraud & Westlake and examples of their glass are found in many Suffolk churches

On the floor behind the alter can be seen memorial tablets to John Barker who died on the 11th March 1809 and John Smyth who died on the 8th January 1823, both were former rectors of this church. The Piscina, this is situated at the top of the south side and is a basin where the communion vessels were washed after a service and the water used for washing these ran down to the church yard which being consecrated ground was the custom for blessed water to return to earth.

The Piscina in this church has had a sedilia added next to it and these are three stepped seats which were for the priest and deacons, the priest sitting on the tallest one as a sign of importance. On the floor between the sedilia and choir stalls can be seen the memorial tablet again to Reynolds Taylor and it is thought that this may have been moved to this spot during the 1859 restoration as it would have almost certainly been near the memorial tablet tomb already mentioned.

The south side window near the piscina contains fragments of glass from the 15th century. The next window is dedicated to Saint Ethelreda who was the daughter of a 7th century East Anglian King. Born at Exning near Newmarket, she became a nun and founded a nunnery at Ely and when this was built she became its first Abbess. After her death her body remained incorrupt (no sign of decay) and its healing power resulted in Ely becoming a very important centre for Pilgrims. Later the great Cathedral at Ely was begun in 1083. Because of its christian importance Ely became a Bishopric Diocese and in 1837 the western part of Suffolk was transferred from the Norwich Diocese to the Ely Diocese and in 1897 which was Queen Victoria's diamond Jubilee, this window depicting St Ethreda was unveiled. In 1914 the Diocese of Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich was formed with Saint James church in Bury St Edmunds becoming its Cathedral and Saint Peter's Fakenham Magna was naturally put into the new Suffolk Diocese. The final window in the Chancel is dedicated to Edmund King and Martyr who is already mentioned on the first page of this guide.

Church Register. This dates from 1559.

The churchyard. Like so many churchyards this one has grass cutting done in a way that wildlife and nature conservation is fully encouraged.

In 1966 when drainage repairs to the church were being undertaken the remains of a mass burial from the Black death (Plague) circa 1348 were discovered and reinterred.

The attractive west or front wall to the churchyard was rebuilt in 1993 and the fine Tudor north wall was restored by its owner at the same.

Fakenham Magna is only a small village and the site of this church has seen Christian worship for over one thousand years. Like so many village churches the congregation at this one is unable to meet all the expenses of maintaining the fabric of the building and any donation is greatly appreciated.

(Edward Wortley 1997).

The compiler of this church history guide is local history recorder for the Parish of Fakenham Magna and is always interested to hear of any historical information in relation to the church and the village of Fakenham Magna. Please telephone 01842 752224 should you be able to help in any way.

SAINT PETER'S CHURCH, LIST OF RECTORS FROM 1275 TO THE PRESENT DAY.

- 1275 Pett.
1287 John De Bercham.
1296 Thomas De Somerbury.
1315 Adam Gerard.
1318 Robert Ostage.
1349 Ralph Bryd. Came from Icklingham.
1375 John Costard.
1396 Thomas Crow.
1398 William Fyston.
1419 John Cowpere. Came from Glemsford.
1427 William Ady.
1461 John Masham.
1474 Peter Coket.
1487 Thomas Smyth.
1489 Thomas Adamson.
1513 William Taylor
1518 James Platt.
1555 Robert Partrickle.
1564 Edmund Nunne.
1591 Henry Rewse.
1631 John Frost.
1661 John Gyles.
1667 Stephen Camborne.
1678 Robert Rushbrooke.
1723 John Bird.
1745 Robert Andrews.
1762 John Barker Jnr.
1803 Charles John Smyth.
1827 George Frederick Tavel.
1828 James Devereux Hustler.
1829 Barvick John Sams.
1834 Augustus Fitz-Roy.
1857 Edmund John Morgan.
1887 Redmund Bewley Caton.
1930 Although retired, R.B. Caton remained in office.

1934 Edward Nathaniel Needham-Davies.

1963 Wynne Wallace Price Rhys.

1977 Peter Michael Hickley.

1980 Roger Milton Whitehead.

1990 Elizabeth Sally Fogden.