



AUTUMN 2024 NEWSLETTER



**Ride and Stride/Pedal and Drive
Launch at Orford**

Suffolk Historic Churches Trust

Registered Charity No. 267047

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**As always, this Newsletter is also available on the Trust website
under the "Latest Newsletters" tab**

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It seems hard to believe that a whole year has rolled by since our great 50th anniversary celebrations of 2023. As I said in our last newsletter, the final results from the bike ride and our fundraising events swelled our finances and allowed the Trustees to agree to a higher level of grant giving by our Grants Committee – a timely increase as building costs have much inflated since lockdown and the needs of our glorious legacy of churches remain undiminished.

Two of our anniversary initiatives carried on into 2024. The first was the collection and publication on our website of Guides to Suffolk Churches. We have now uploaded 403 churches and over 800 guides. I am pleased that use of the site is growing and that when you google any Suffolk church you are likely to find the link to our site appearing. The second initiative was the distribution to the churches we have grant aided over the last 50 years of a celebratory plaque, customised to record the date and nature of our grant, or in most cases grants plural. I was surprised to learn from this exercise that several churches had received more than 10 grants and one church had even received 19 grants! But there again, we are there to help! I am pleased to say that we have photographs of our little blue plaque up in the porches of 425 churches and the photos are still coming in.

2024 has been a year of returning to business as usual. We held our annual service with a lovely evensong amongst the wonders of Holy Trinity Long Melford, when the Revd Henry Heath officiated, and Nigel Brown and his choir sang their hearts out. We were bathed in sunshine on September 14th for our annual Ride and Stride, when the lanes of Suffolk saw hundreds of cyclists pedalling like fury from church to church, and this year we had a record number of vintage and classic cars out to support the churches. As ever, it will be into next year before we know the results of their endeavours, but I would like to thank Simon Ronan's army of bike ride organisers and the committee of our Pedal and Drive car event for all their hard work.

On October 7th the Friends of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust gathered to hear the Trustees update and a fascinating talk by Prof the Revd John Morrill, Professor Emeritus of British and Irish History at Cambridge University. We were delighted that over 70 Friends attended. We so appreciate all the support we get from our Friends.

All in all, I am pleased to report that your Trust remains in rude health and continues to do all we can to support the churches and chapels of Suffolk, and the wonderful Church Wardens and Elders who look after them.

Geoffrey Probert

RIDE AND STRIDE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2024



Trustee, Mary Luxmoore-Styles outside Flowton church. The elephant and its baby on the weather-vane is because the travelling circus overwintered in the fields beside the church.

The Ride & Stride Day this year on 14th September was again, a lovely day, not too hot, sunny, and not too much wind.

Our fundraising campaign began with the launch at St. Bartholomew, Orford. We had a photo shoot there with our 2024 celebrity, the BBC correspondent, Nick Robinson. Together with our bicycles, it included a beautiful 1953 Rolls Royce, Silver Dawn, belonging to Jono Benson. This was to advertise the Pedal and Drive for the classic car rally.

The actual turnout on the day is always hard to calculate. Some churches saw an increase, and some a small decline. We will not know the final results for a few months yet. £40,000 is already in the bank.

My day started with the clowns from Levington. An idea of Ian Angus's to provide a bit of colour to our bike ride around the Colneys deanery.

Our sincere thanks must go out again to our local organisers who man the churches during the day and in many cases provide refreshments. It is so important that the churches are open on the day to welcome bikers, walkers, and cars.

This year we have sought to give out certificates of thanks for long service and effort in the fundraise. We presented to three local organisers in Ipswich in the Grade I listed Unitarian Meeting House. We will shortly be doing the same at St. Clare RC, in Framlingham.

It should be mentioned and congratulated on, that there was a record turnout for the Pedal and Drive with 110 cars participating and nearly £20,000 raised.

Simon Ronan



Nick Robinson, BBC political broadcaster, interviewed by Rachel Sloane, at the Launch of Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride/Pedal & Drive at St Bartholomew's Church, Orford on Saturday 27th July, 2024.

First of all, thank you so much for coming along. How did you end up with a home in Orford, Suffolk?

We came to this part of the world because we live in Highbury in north east London, and we used to come here for lots of holidays. One year we rented a place in Iken in an absolutely glorious summer. A perfect summer when, looking out on the water I fantasized about sailing, because although I'm not a sailor, I like the idea of sailing. Although you try to convince yourself that it's not actually going to be weather like that most years, you kid yourself. Some friends of ours, who live down the road from us in London, had a property here, and as we drove home, they said that the one opposite had come up for sale. We've been here ever since, so 12 years.

The pace in London is so different to Suffolk generally, never mind here in Orford....

Well, that's the joy of it! Pippa, my wife, often drives me up here and I work in the car, and the second we drive off the A12, everything goes.... phone down, laptop down, and suddenly all the worries of the world go, and it's lovely.

This is your local church?

Yes, it is and the joy of the church is that it's used, I mean, in the sense of not just used as a church, but it's also a lovely concert venue and we've seen a lot of concerts here, which we've loved.

It is really genuinely at the heart of the village. Funnily enough, if you said to me ten years ago, that I would wander around looking at old churches, I would have thought you were completely stark raving mad! Then, last year, we bought the Simon Jenkins 'Thousand Best Churches' book and we started to explore. The great joy of churches is the history is so fascinating. Whether you find a gravestone or some plaque on the wall, or an empty niche, a new thing, it's absolutely fascinating.

But churches can be daunting to people, can't they?

Yeah, they think that they've got to know the terminology. Do they know their nave from the apse, but, in the process of exploring, you learn it. But the joy is it's a history of people. In the end, churches are a history of the area. It's a history of wealth and the loss of wealth, and that's what makes them endlessly fascinating.

My mother's Jewish, my father's C of E, but never really practiced, and I married a Catholic, so I'm completely confused, ecumenically! I'm not religious, but you don't need to be. Know the history of your country, the history of your culture, history of society....

And people who never set foot inside their local church for a service, still value it as part of the history of their community...

Absolutely. I mean, literally, geographically, they are often at the centre of the community. They're a place that brings people together for births, deaths, marriages and they are a reminder of your roots. It is something, at least, that ensures that people like me, who will still be seen as an incomer in 20 year's time, have some sort of sense of place, that's the joy of it.

Can I briefly ask you about the day job? I called you a political broadcaster, but what would you say you were?

I just usually describe myself now as a Presenter on BBC Radio Four and now also a programme called *Political Thinking*, which is a conversation with a politician rather than a kind of newsy interrogation, often looking at their life. I'm a political journalist by trade. I was a producer for ten years, then a reporter, political editor, and then went into presenting but, you know, politics has always been my main thing.

It was very exciting to hear you this morning on the Today programme saying '...and from Ipswich, Nick Robinson'.

Well, it was a great favour of letting me broadcast from so near to home, but I'm doing them a favour as well. The director said, rightly I think, that one of the things we should all have learned post-Brexit, is that people in the big cities, London in particular, did not have enough of a sense of the mood outside the city. One small way of remedying that was to broadcast more often from outside Broadcasting House, so I quite often broadcast from Salford. My family is from there.

There was the odd listener who started to write in and said, 'is it a coincidence that Manchester United home games seemed to coincide with Nick Robinson presenting from Salford!' But there's a serious point as, being in Ipswich this morning, meant we could do something about the controversy around the pylons coming from Norwich down to Tilbury.

We've just had such a busy time for you, with the General Election... Were you surprised when suddenly an election was called?

It completely took me by surprise because, although I could use this formula about 'second half of the year', which technically allowed July 4th, nobody I knew thought they were going to do it because the Tories were so far behind in the polls, and because there were things that might get better for him and all these opportunities. We've seen Keir Starmer at the summit of Blenheim Palace, the NATO summit in Washington, the Olympic Games opening ceremony, and Rishi Sunak could have been at them... and he chose not to do it.

So it took me by surprise and made it quite stressful because we didn't know, when the election was called, whether all the leaders would agree to be interviewed. There was quite a lot of faffing around with

'I'll only be interviewed if he's interviewed first', etc. so it meant that, just to add to the stress, we had to effectively prepare seven half hour interviews simultaneously, but it was fun to do.

Okay, there's great expectations now for what's going to happen now. Any predictions of the big challenges ahead?

Yeah. How do you turn change expectations into reality?

This one word 'change' on his manifesto. The reason he did it, is it's what everyone can project onto that word... what change they want.

But, you know, one of the oldest cliches in politics is 'to govern, is to choose'. Take that electricity pylon story I was describing. People on the one hand want green power and they want it fast, and they want to be less dependent on Vladimir Putin, but also people don't want pylons going through their beautiful scenery. He has to choose and so the big question is, does he disappoint those people who want to change, because they don't like what's being delivered? Or, in the end, can he take people with him? And nobody knows.

How many prime ministers have you interviewed in your career?

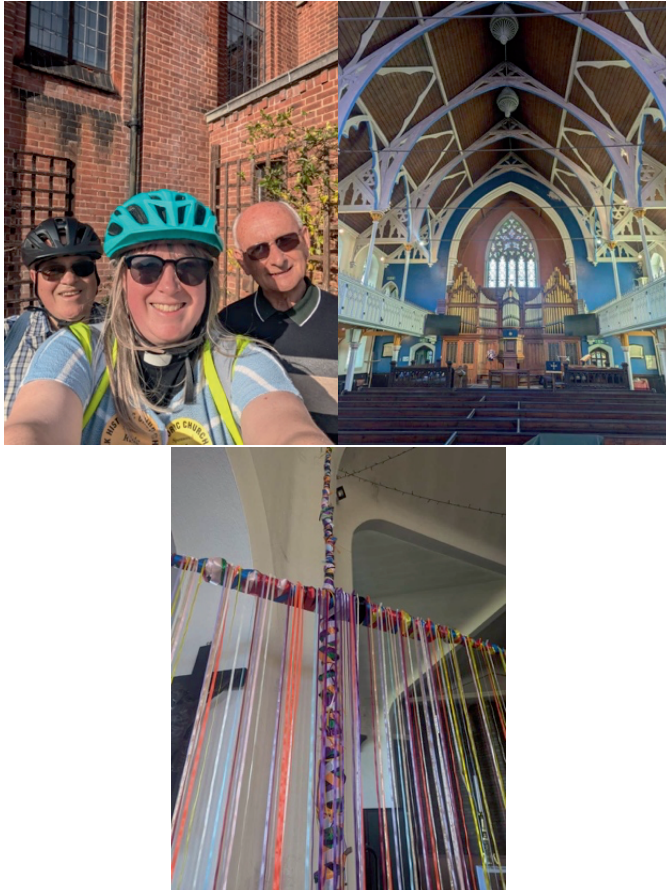
Well, let's see... I was a producer when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and when John Major was Prime Minister so really I interviewed Blair and Brown, Cameron, May, Johnson and Truss. So seven now ...and 11 elections.

Oh, that's a lot! Thank you so much for giving up your time today, Nick Robinson.

* * * *

Ride and Stride Photo Competition

This year the request was for "A selfie of you celebrating outside a church when you complete your journey, a church or chapel, or a church architectural detail, and your favourite photo of the day." The winning set of three (below) was taken by Rev Emma Haggart - the first time a vicar has won! She was raising money for the Trust and for All Hallows, Ipswich.



Emma's photos of Tackett Street, Ipswich and St Thomas' Church, Ipswich

PEDAL AND DRIVE

116 cars started out from seven different houses driving a set route around churches before converging on the playing field at Lavenham where they were given a delicious tea, champagne for the winners of their photo competition, highest fund raiser etc and were treated to a rousing speech by participant Griff Rhys-Jones.

Rachel Sloane, Hon Publicity Officer

Pedal and Drivers Outside Butley Priory



Griff Rhys-Jones at Lavenham



GRANTS COMMITTEE NEWS

QUARTERLY GRANTS 2024/5

In June the Committee considered eight applications. Grants totalling £27,100 were made to the following places of worship, six in the east of the county and two in the west –

St Andrew, Alderton
St George, Bradfield St George
St Michael, Framlingham
St Peter, Freston
St Mary, Horam
St Andrew, Kettleborough
St Margaret, Sylham
St Margaret, Cowlinge

At its autumn meeting to be held shortly the Committee will be considering seventeen applications.

John Devaux
Chairman Grants Committee

GRANTS AWARDED APRIL 2023 – JANUARY 2024

Total awarded £156,050 to 37 churches

Brandeston, All Saints	Roof repairs, gutters and ceilings
Brome, St Mary	Repairing floor joists
Brome, St Mary	Gutter work
Bucklesham, St Mary	Roof repairs and re-tiling
Bures Baptist Church	Window replacements
Clare Baptist Church	Repainting windows
Debenham, St Mary	Oil tank replacement
Felixstowe Baptist Church	Wall repointing
Gazeley, All Saints	Roof re-tiling
Gt Bradley, St Mary	Replace lighting with LEDs
Gt Bricett, St Mary & St Lawrence	Re-rendering
Henley, St Peter	Re-ordering
Herringswell, St Ethelberet	Roof, tower and gutter repairs
Hitcham, All Saints	Window repairs
Ipswich, St Margaret	Stonework and guttering repairs
Ipswich, St Mary at Stoke	Re-slating the roof
Iken, St Botolph	Replacement lighting
Kedington, St Peter & St Paul	Window, porch and doorway repairs
Kersey, St Mary	Replace lighting with LEDs
Langham, St Mary	Roof repairs
Lavenham, St Peter & St Paul	Roof and stonework repairs
Lawshall, All Saints	Tower beam stabilisation
Levington, St Peter	Render removal, drainage
Little Cornard, All Saints	Tower repairs
Lound, St John	Repairing and reglazing windows
Melton, St Andrew	Replacement lighting
Newbourne, St Mary	Re-tiling roofs
Raydon, St Mary	Repair soffit
Rede, All Saints	Replace lighting with LEDs
Rendlesham, St Gregory	Re-rendering east wall
Stoke by Clare, St John	Porch roof & masonry repairs
Stowlangtoft, St George	Architects fees for project
Walpole, St Mary	Flint and plaster repairs

Walsham le Willows, St Mary
Walton, St Mary
Weybread, St Andrew
Withersfield, St Mary
Wortham, St Mary

Replace weathervane mast
Roof repairs
Multiple repairs.
Repairs to the tower
Re-roofing the nave

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

In Suffolk there is a wide variation in practice regarding the leaving of churches open for visitors. The majority are left open. A minority remain closed. Many are open daily during daylight hours or during hours clearly stated outside the church. In some instances, while the building is open, a welcoming "Church Open" sign is displayed prominently for everyone to see.

A number of churches are only open on certain weekdays or on Sundays. One church which proclaimed that it was open to visitors every Friday, Saturday and Sunday turned out to be locked when visited mid-morning on a Friday.

A small number of churches are closed at all times save when a service is actually taking place.

In order to assist visitors many locked churches display a notice identifying the keyholders, together with a telephone number by which they may be contacted, from whom the church key can be borrowed. Not every parish will include parishioners who are in a position to assist in this way. A number of parishes, therefore, will indicate that the key is held at a nearby shop or public house from where it may be collected (during opening hours).

Then there is a small number of churches where the visitor is given no assistance. After a recent unsuccessful excursion to one such church it was discovered that a key to the church was held by a shop situated a mile from the church. There was no visible sign at the church to indicate that this was the position.

To be eligible for a grant the Trust requires that a church or chapel "must be accessible to the public". Either the church or chapel should be open or, if not, there should be clear signage to help the visitor gain access to the building. The church mentioned in the previous paragraph would not, it seems, meet this requirement.

While on the topic of open churches, it should, perhaps, be mentioned that most insurers prefer that the churches be open to visitors. Ecclesiastical Insurers say this –

“Where appropriate, we recommend that churches are kept open because of the positive effect that it can have on security. We support the Church of England Cathedral and Church Buildings Council’s drive to help churches be ‘Always Welcome’. There is no impact on the church insurance premiums if a church is open during daylight hours and proper risk assessments have been completed.”

John Devaux, Grants Committee Chairman

ANNUAL SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING – JULY 7TH 2024

There was a good turnout for a beautiful Evensong held in the stunning Holy Trinity church, Long Melford. The Revd. Henry Heath led the service and preached an inspiring sermon. The singing was lusty with a brilliant choir of 26 led by Nigel Brown. Trust members were made to feel very welcome. There was a very happy atmosphere with refreshments after the service that were much appreciated.

ANNUAL MEETING OF FRIENDS – MONDAY, 7TH OCTOBER 2024 AT HAUGHLEY PARK BARN, STOWMARKET

After a brief business meeting that included an explanation from Chairman Geoffrey Probert of the formation of the Trust, the celebrations for its 50th anniversary in 2023 and associated projects, fundraising and grants, a meeting of about 70 Friends and Ride and Stride Area Organisers, listened to a fascinating talk by Revd. Prof John Morrill on ‘Oliver Cromwell and Iconoclasm in 17th Century East Anglia’.

We learnt that:

- Oliver Cromwell actually spent only a few days in Suffolk, in Lowestoft and then Newmarket areas.

- Suffolk churches suffered more damage than anywhere else in England in the mid-1600s when William Dowsing undertook the destruction of symbols of Catholicism, on the orders of Cromwell.
- The detailed dairies left by Dowsing mean that research into the period is greatly helped.
- Dowsing, his deputies and his soldiers removed the inscriptions on tombs, (that asked for the Saints to pray for the deceased's soul, although the name was left intact), the steps up into the chancel, the communion rails, and any depictions of saints and angels on bosses, pews ends, stained glass etc.
- Some excessive destruction was done when the soldiers ran amuck.
- Some items were spared because of lack of time. The diaries show that sometimes five churches were visited in a day, with distances travelled in winter curtailing the plans.
- Chiselling took longer than smashing stained glass, and wall painting such as Doom paintings were just whitewashed over – to be rediscovered in more recent times (eg at Wenhaston)
- Church wardens would 'lose' the key to the church and would promise to make the changes demanded that they didn't agree with. Some waited to see what others did before obeying instructions.
- Some churches were revisited by Dowsing to complete the task.
- There were often compromises or a 'blind eye' was turned in some villages. For example, if a village had a church it could legally have two pubs – so one became Royalist and one Parliamentary. Catholics would sometimes hold two Baptisms, or have a Catholic burial in the local churchyard, but at night.

John gave us some local examples of iconoclasm. They included Ufford Church where Dowsing's diary lists that 30 items of 'superstition' were destroyed with 37 more to be done, and 40 wooden items were also destroyed. He returned with a small team of soldiers to chisel off the font carvings and level the steps.

In Suffolk, Dowsing was responsible for breaking windows in 92% of churches, 41% of requests for prayers for the dead, 39% of chancel steps and 21% of crosses and images of crucifixions. Organs were destroyed, and pews ends removed and given to the poor.

Why was so much destroyed? The destruction was undertaken to complete what began in the Reformation. A letter from 1643 explains the thinking was that success by Parliamentarians in the Civil War was assured if they carried out "God's work" and pleased Him by removing the remaining symbols of Catholicism. Proof? Victory at the battle of Nantwich was credited to the same day's destruction in churches in Orford, Snape and Sternfield!



Revd. Prof John Morrill

Rachel Sloane

Revd. Prof John Morrill is a Fellow of Selwyn College Cambridge, a Professor of Early Modern British and Irish History, and probably the leading scholar in the world on Oliver Cromwell.

SAVE THE DATE! WINTER STUDY DATE SATURDAY 22ND FEBRUARY

Details to be confirmed.

A day on The Marsh

The Romney Marsh Historic Churches Trust has been helping to preserve the fourteen churches and four ruined churches on the Marsh since the Trust's foundation in 1982. When St Augustine, Snave was declared redundant in 1983 it was saved from secular use by the Trust which is now entirely responsible for maintaining it. This year my wife and I were invited by friends who are Trust members to join the 2024 Members' Tour taking place on 7th September. Our speaker and guide was Joan Campbell. Author of the Trust's guidebook her knowledge of the churches is unsurpassed and her enthusiasm for her subject

infectious. Some fifty members and guests visited the churches at Brookland, Snargate and Fairfield.

From 10.00am we began to assemble at St Augustine, Brookland where coffee was provided. On the noticeboard facing the road a colourful poster proclaimed the 2024 Ride & Stride the following Saturday.

The talk commenced at 10.30am. At about midday a coach conveyed us to The George at Lydd for a ploughman's lunch. From there we were taken to Snargate and thence to Fairfield by a driver who was skilled in negotiating the narrow roads. Finally, we returned to Brookfield for tea and biscuits before going our separate ways after a hugely enjoyable day.

St Augustine, Brookland

The present building was erected in c1250 and is entered by the fourteenth century north porch with its barge boards and spandrels with quatrefoils. The upper and lower parts of the doorway are closed by wooden shutter gates,

We were able to look inside St Augustine's free-standing wooden, triple coned, octagonal bell tower. It is one of only five similar towers in England. (Two are in Herefordshire, one is in Worcestershire, and one is in Essex.) The tower was built in the second half of the 13th century as an open structure and was doubled in height to its present sixty feet and clad with shingles in the 15th century.

A late 12th century lead font is regarded as the church's greatest treasure. One of thirty remaining lead fonts in this country it is the only one to be decorated with two tiers of arcading including the signs of the zodiac and the labours of the months. The font is believed to retain its original plug. Securely mounted the font withstood a determined attempt to steal it some years ago.

Other treasures include an 18th century double-decker pulpit complete with its tester recently restored and put back in position by the Trust after many years' use as a table. The 18th century box pews are the highest in the Marsh.

In the southeast chapel a 13th century wall painting of the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket in 1170 was uncovered in 1964. Simon Jenkins compares the painting to the work of Paolo Uccello.

Amongst the other objects in the church is a "hudd", or graveside shelter, to protect the vicar while conducting burials in the rain.

Above the south door hang the Royal Arms of George II from 1739 cleaned and preserved in 1967 and again in 2006. The expression on the lion's face suggests it portrayed a local personage.

Access. The church is usually open 10am - 3.30pm. The church receives many visitors. Shortly before we arrived, a Belgian expert in sluices and drainage happened to be visiting and was able to discuss topics of mutual interest with our guide.

St Dunstan, Snargate

This 12th century church has interesting roof bosses, an early 16th century wall painting of a ship, and a lead plaque commemorating roof repairs in 1780 carried out by "T Apps, carpenter, and all his jolly men". Snargate is one of the many Romney Marsh churches associated with smuggling. In 1743 a large seizure of tobacco was made in the belfry and a cask of 'hollands' was found under the vestry table.

The Reverend Richard Barham, Vicar of St Dunstan from 1817 to 1829, was author of the Ingoldsby Legends supposedly written by a Thomas Ingoldsby. Barham once wrote: "The World, according to the best geographers, is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Romney Marsh."

Access. Advice depends on the website consulted. A key is held at the nearby Red Lion Inn.

St Thomas Beckett, Fairfield

The "most iconic" of all the churches on the Marsh this tiny building dating back to the 12th century now sits isolated in a field. Sheep graze around it. Prior to the 1960s, despite the existence of a causeway built in the early twentieth century, the church was often surrounded by water and only accessible by boat. There is a picture in the church of the building surrounded by floodwater in 1960. A modern drainage system now allows access all the year round. On the day of our visit the water level was low and the causeway was firm and dry.

Originally constructed with a wooden frame and walls of wattle and daub the walls were replaced with bricks in the 18th century. The nave roof is supported on a single crown post as is that of the chancel. The triple decker pulpit, box pews, oval text boards and commandment boards are all from the eighteenth century. The Trust had provided the funding for the internal redecoration completed shortly before our visit.

In the autumn of 2011 Fairfield church was used in the making of two films of Dickens' *Great Expectations*. One camera crew was advised that a mist machine would not be needed as the Marsh would provide its own mist. The advice was disregarded but the prediction proved to be correct.

Access. Again, the church receives many visitors and several arrived while we were there. It is normally locked. A large church key hangs on the gatepost of the driveway to the nearest house in the Appledore direction.

[Virtual tours of St Augustine, Brookland and four other Romney Marsh churches can be viewed on the Romney Marshes Historic Churches Trust website – www.romneymarshchurches.org.uk.]

John Devaux

St Augustine at Brookland



St Augustine's Font





St Thomas Becket at Fairfield

The Alde and Ore Estuaries

Rules in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden claims to be London's oldest restaurant. To an omnivore, its venerable menu choices are bewildering in their mouthwatering array. What to go for? Any of the above! The same can be said of Suffolk's 500 pre-Reformation churches in all their variety, but each uniquely wonderful.

Not a bad theme, perhaps, is to use the strap line suggested to the EADT some years ago as the motto for Suffolk - "County of Coasts and Culture". To that end, 3 delightful churches abutting the Alde and Orde Estuaries finishing with a decent pub lunch.

Iken Church can be seen distantly but clearly from the road into Aldeburgh, more closely from Snape Maltings and closer still in its majestic serenity from Iken Cliffs.

It does not disappoint on arrival despite a 1968 fire leaving much of it gutted. A new thatched roof covers the nave in between the tiled roof of the chancel, restored by the mid Victorians, and to your left, as an estuarial landmark, its 15th century Tower.

Go inside and you immediately notice the calcified rubble core that makes up the north and south walls - little plaster in the restoration but the raw simplicity seems absolutely in keeping with a church first on this site 1350 years ago, along with a monastery, founded by St Botolph. Likewise, the boarded waggon roof over the nave. Next to the fine font is perhaps its prize exhibit: the bottom half of a Saxon Cross, probably ninth century, discovered during the restoration.

But more important than the singular and accounting for St Botolph's huge number of visitors is the overall feel of the place: that of simplicity and peace in a glorious setting, nurtured by its splendid churchwardens and a sanctuary for all who enter it.



All Saints Sudbourne is almost a mile from the village at the end of a track clearly visible from the road, sitting comfortably in its space. Approaching it the Hertfordshire Spire with gilded weather cock will catch the eye of the expert crawler.

Inside, its Victorian restoration is clear from entering the North porch. However, there is much to enjoy from its Norman origins onwards, including a lancet window and blocked south doorway, a 12th century font bowl, a large 14th century piscina, the ornate tomb of Sir Michael Stanhope, an Elizabeth and Jacobean courtier, a very fine early 18th century pulpit and a collection of hatchments from 1677-1842 belonging to the Hereford and Hertford families.

For all its restoration and elements of grandeur All Saints retains a powerful simplicity and in its bucolic setting, just the job for a walk on Christmas morning, or for that matter, any day of the year.



All Saints, Sudbourne

Like Henry 2nd's castle down the road, Saint Bartholomew's Orford resembles a citadel on a hill but if anything imposes itself even more over the heart of this celebrated coastal village.

Outside, the ruined Norman chancel (see photo) is as striking as its massive 14th century West Tower but is much rarer. Until dissolution it was used as a church by the neighbouring Augustinian priory. What lay to its West was rebuilt or replaced from the early 14th century.

Without a separate chancel the nave is almost square but feels no less of a church for that. Surviving Dowsing's 1643 visit the inscribed C14th font is perhaps the standout with most unusually, on its East side, a Pieta in remarkable condition. Other survivors of iconoclasm include a Nativity altar piece by a pupil of Raphael's, Raphaelino del Colle, and some fine brasses and effigies of Orford merchants and their families.



In the vestry/organ chamber to the northeast, one can see around the windows the transition in decoration between the Normans simple carvings and their more elaborate successors - a rarity and a must see as part of the evolution of this ancient church.

St Bartholomew's has not been without some controversial additions in recent years, yet despite that, or even because of that, it feels very much a church that is meant to be used in our time - for worship, for the enjoyment of music, for its almost municipal role in the heart of this village and for the enjoyment of the humble church crawler as all bask in its 900 year old splendour.

For a good pub lunch after this crawl, one can do no better than the Jolly Sailor about 400 yards towards the harbour and opposite the car park. Open every weekday, it offers excellent pub food with friendly service and at a reasonable price.

Jamie Norman

