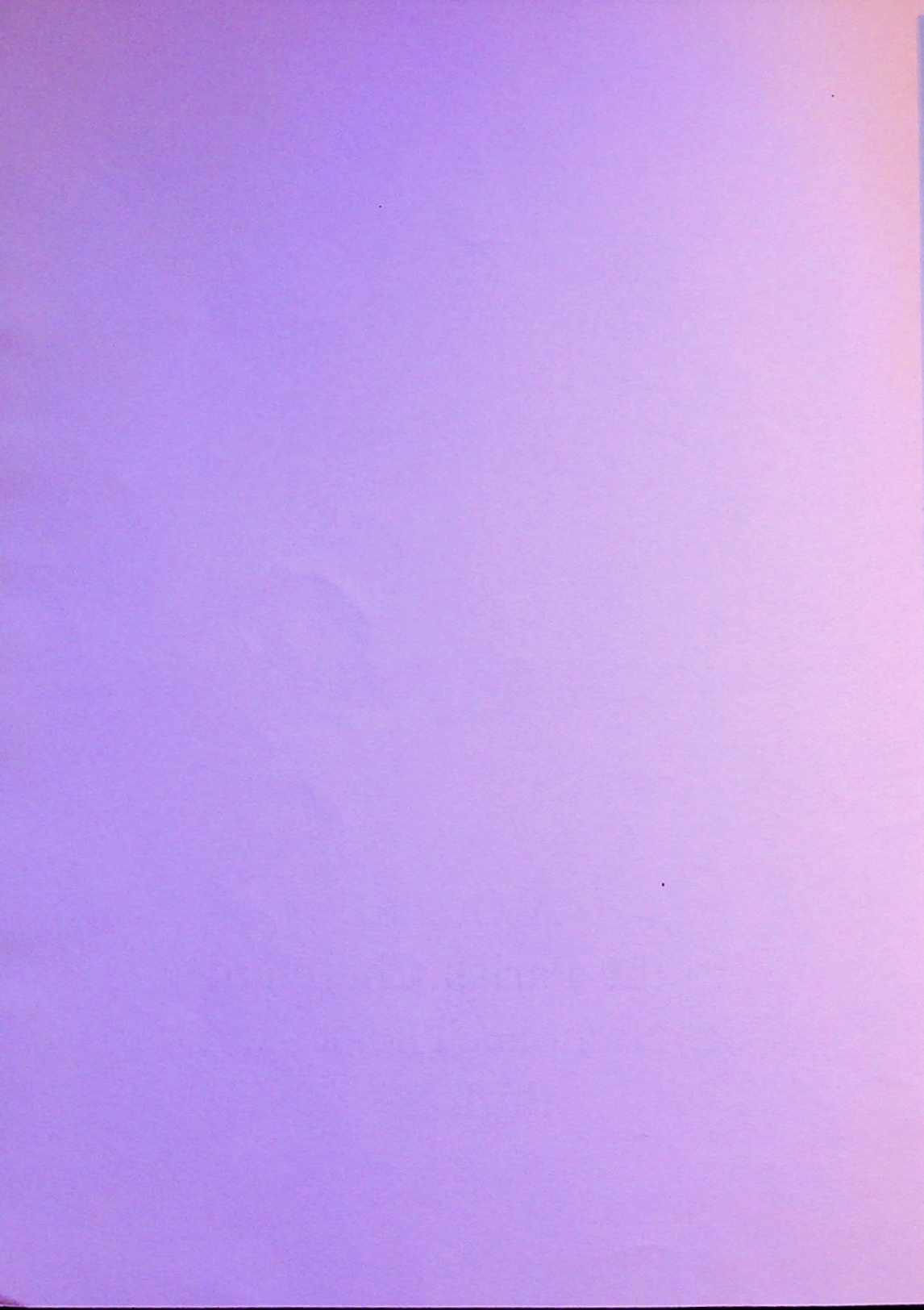




A Guide  
to the Parish Church of  
St. Nicholas Thelnetham  
Suffolk



There was already a church here at the time of the 'Domesday' survey in 1086. But much of the present building dates from the early 14th century.

#### Looking at the church from the outside

The walls are faced with flint, an abundant local material, and Barnack stone (from Northants) for the buttresses and other outside stone-work. The windows are in the Decorated style, apart from one in the Chancel and one in the Tower. The windows contain a large amount of old crown and cylinder glass, as well as occasional fragments of medieval coloured glass.

The South aisle was built in the time of Edmund Gonville, founder of Gonville Hall – later Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge – who was Rector here in 1320. The five-light East window of this aisle has fragments of 14thC glass including pheasants and *grotesques* with wings. There are two fine two-light windows in the south wall, one with pointed-trefoiled lights and three circles with quatrefoils, similar to the South windows at nearby Rickinghall Inferior. The five-light East window to the Chancel has intersecting tracery with ogee (convex-concave) arches.

The tower has three stages with an embattled (indented) parapet. It has a two-light Perpendicular West window with an empty niche above; a small circular quatrefoil window to each face of the 2nd stage, and two-light windows with intersecting heads to the top stage.

The South porch has diagonal buttresses, a simple pointed arch to the doorway, two Y-tracery windows with hood-moulds over, and a shallow-pitched roof with a gable-end cross. The South door has quarter-round mouldings and leafy headstops with an empty cinquefoil-headed niche above.

#### Looking at the inside of the church

Just inside the door is the plain 14thC octagonal font of Barnack Stone.

Behind the font is a fine stained glass window with, from left to right, John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, Christ with A and Ω (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), and Peter baptizing one of the first non-Jewish converts to Christianity. In the tracery above can be seen Noah's Ark, and the letters X and P superimposed which are the first two letters of Christ in Greek.

The South aisle is joined to the nave by a 14thC **arcade** in 4 bays with octagonal piers. In the South-East corner there is an elaborate **piscina** (basin for washing the Communion cup and plate) which has however been much restored. It has a pointed trefoil arch enriched with dog-tooth ornament, and a gable with ballflower ornament. Very little remains of the carved stone sill to the East window. although the moulding of an angel on the window ledge by the pulpit may have been part of it. There is also a **piscina** and **sedilia** (stone priest's seat) in the Chancel. The Chancel and South aisle both have medieval **altar stones**, of Barnack stone, with recut consecration crosses, which were recovered from the church floor and churchyard respectively in 1895 and mounted on carved oak frames, made from an ancient red pollard oak also grown at Coney Weston.

Beside the North door of the Nave is a **stoup** (basin for holy water). The stairs to the old **rood loft** (where candles were lit before the great Crucifix which hung in the arch above) remain, behind the pulpit. The bottom doorway is 14thC but the upper one is Tudor. A large **squint** (for viewing an altar) at the South-East end of the Nave has below it a small brass with an **inscription** in memory of Anna, wife of John Caley, ca 1500. The section of medieval carved wood fixed to the wall nearby may have formed part of the rood loft. The present oak **Chancel screen** dates from 1907. It was the gift of Sir Jeremiah Colman in memory of his uncle Henry Button, for many years Churchwarden, and of other members of the Button family.

On the South wall of the aisle there is an alabaster and marble **monument** to Sir Henry Bokenham, who died in 1648 and who was High Sheriff of the county in 1630, and his wife Dorothy. The Bokenham family were Lords of the Manor of Thelnetham from the 14th-18thC. Anthony Bokenham was Rector from 1639-45 and Cleare Bokenham was Rector from 1666-70. The monument still shows traces of the original colour. It consists of demi-figures

of the couple in a niche with looped-up curtains, and a son and daughter below in oval niches. Overhead is a broken pediment enclosed in a cartouche of arms with a double crest.

In 1871-2, soon after the Rev. John Sawbridge had succeeded his father as Rector, the interior was 'restored' under R.M. Phipson, the diocesan architect, who also designed the new Church school of St. Helen which opened in 1872. Carved oak benches and a carved pulpit in oak were installed, replacing the old square pews and the three-decker pulpit with sounding-board. Note the fine details in the carving of the pulpit and the pew-ends in the Chancel. The gallery was removed from the west end of the church, the floors were repaved with Minton tiles, and the Chancel and Sanctuary raised by five steps. Notice the symbols of Christ's sufferings on the tiles in the Sanctuary. In 1895 a new roof of Spanish Chestnut (locally grown at Coney Weston) was put on the Chancel, covered with stone-slate from Colley Weston (Northants). In 1906 new oak roofs were put on the Nave and South aisle, also covered with Colley Weston stone slate.

In the Chancel the oil painting of St. James by Benvenuto da Garofalo, copied by Pompignoli, was the gift of Rev. W.H. Finlayson, Rector, in 1939. On the North wall of the Nave, there is a fine circular high relief carving in walnut on a background of mahogany depicting the Flight into Egypt (of Mary and Joseph with the infant Christ), possibly Italian of the 18thC, given by the Rev. W.H. Finlayson in 1946.

In the church's possession are a chalice, flagon and two silver salvers which were the gift in 1744 of Edmund Tyrell, who was Lord of the Manor at the time.

The belfry and the louvre-windows of the tower were restored in 1907 by the Rector, the Rev. J.S. Sawbridge, who also rehung the five bells in a new cradle, and provided new ladders to the top of the Tower. The 2nd and 3rd bells, which were badly cracked, were recast by Mears and Stainbank of London in memory of his parents. Both have the inscription 'Holiness unto the Lord'. The 2nd bell also has the inscription: Cantate Domino Canticum Novum ('O sing unto the Lord a new song', from Psalm 96). In 1986 another

of the bells, dating from 1603, being cracked, was replaced by one from Shipmeadow church and put on display by the North door.

The Churchyard extension at the Eastern end was consecrated by the Bishop of Ely in 1912, this part of Suffolk being then in the Diocese of Ely. In the Churchyard are the 1921 War Memorial Cross of grey Cornish granite, which was unveiled by H.H. Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, and the graves of the Sawbridges and of the writer Middleton Murry, in whose memory the heating system in the church was given in 1959 by his wife Mary.

The Church is named after St. Nicholas, who was supposed to have had a special concern for sailors and for children ('Santa Claus'). It stands close to where the rivers Ouse and Waveney, which divide Norfolk and Suffolk, rise from the same spring, and flow eastward and westward, the one to St. Nicholas, King's Lynn and the other to St. Nicholas at Great Yarmouth.

At least three medieval guilds are known to have existed at Thelnetham – societies with a social cum religious purpose. In addition to that of St. Nicholas, a guild of St. John Baptist is mentioned in 1464, and one of St. Peter in 1519.

The Register of Births and Marriages dates from 1538. Rectors of Thelnetham are ex officio Lords of the Manor of the 'Rectory of Thelnetham Manor', one of four manors of Thelnetham dating back to Norman times. The Survey in 1086 mentions the church and 20 acres free land in alms. This, together with land added at the Enclosures in 1819 accounts for the 23 acres of Glebe that was still in the church's possession in 1927.

About forty yards west of the church tower a semi-circle of limes marks the site of the old Parsonage which was demolished when the Rev. E.H. Sawbridge built a new one in 1841. Soon after this he built the first school, which was later adapted for a teacher's house.

Cross Green in Thelnetham owes its name to a preaching cross erected in accordance with the will of John Cole, who left 10s for it in 1527. 'I will have a new cross made... where the gospel is said upon Ascension Even.' Showing a concern for both the spiritual and the physical needs of the village he also left land to provide 'yearly a bushel and a half of malt to be brewed

and a bushel of wheat to be baked to find a drinking upon Ascension Even everlasting for the parish of Thelnetham to drink at the cross aforementioned.' The base and 1ft of the shaft can still be seen in the grounds of Evergreen Oak.

John Fulton  
Rector  
Easter 1993

#### A LIST OF THE RECTORS OF THELNETHAM

##### Rectors

1320 Edmund Gonville  
1334 William Gonville  
1469 Thomas Breton  
1470 John Raumessey  
1479 William Fyncham  
1491 Henry de Burgh  
1508 Henry Aubrey  
1516 William Rychers  
1540 George Lytton  
1563 William Baxter  
1595 John Ponder  
1603 Robert Cooke  
1612 Robert Dade  
1636-39 Anthony Samms  
1639-45 Anthony Bockenham

##### Patrons

John de Thelnetham  
  
John Bokenham  
  
George Bokenham  
  
Nicholas Rookwood  
Edmund Bokenham  
  
Sir Henry Bokenham

1645 George Swall	
1650 John Fenton	Wiseman Bokenham
1659 John Ward	
1665 John Simpson C.	
1666-70 Cleare Bockenham R.	
1685 Samuel Rye C.	
1698-1722 Samuel Rye R.	Richard Bokenham
1722 Maurice Alexander R.	Thomas Tyrell
1723-34 Samuel Rye C.	
1734-53 John Bridge R.	
1754-57 Henry Christian C.	
1755 Thomas Batman	Robert Browne
1758-1811 Charles Browne	
1811-14 J.T. Bird C.	
1814 Charles Roberts C.	
1815 ?ham Case C.	
1816-33 Charles Browne C.	
1833-39 E.H. Browne C.	
1839-60 Samuel Coleby R.	S. Coleby
1839-59 E.H. Sawbridge C.	
1860-70 E.H. Sawbridge R.	E.H. Sawbridge
1871-1925 J.S. Sawbridge	
1925-26 Rt. Rev. F.H. Beavan, former Bishop of S. Rhodesia	
1927-35 C.E.L. Cowan	
1936-46 E.H. Finlayson	
<b>1947-48 E. Smithies</b>	
<b>1949-50 E. Hopkins Jones P-in-C</b>	
<b>1951-56 Harold Grayson P-in-C</b>	
1956-81 A.A.H. Radice P-in-C	
1982 G.J. Parker	The Bishop
1990 J.W. Fulton	

*C: Curate; R: Rector; P-in-C: Priest in Charge*