

trefoil window has been inserted in the blocked north doorway of the nave, the outline of which can be seen outside.

- *Ledgerstones*

Ledgerstones are the flat stones placed over a grave inside a church, usually incised with the name and dates of the deceased. They are often decorated with heraldry and many include interesting inscriptions about the person, their family and their life in the local community. Over 250,000 survive, mainly in parish churches, and most date from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries. The stones used are often from a local or regional source and the carving of the letters and any decoration is of high quality and a readily visible demonstration of the letter cutter's art. A family group of ledgerstones may well be their only visible memorial, if their house has disappeared.

Hidden underneath the carpet on the south side of the sanctuary are three large ledgerstones to the Hunne family: Thomas Hunne who died in 1689; his first wife Susanna who died in December 1658 and their son, Tobias, who died aged 22 in December 1680; and his second wife Mariae who died in February 1683. Photographs of these stones are available to view.

- *Aumbry*

An Aumbry safe to hold the Reserved Sacrament was installed in the north wall of the chancel in 2006.

Twentieth century

In 1993 English Heritage took the decision to render the church tower. Their representatives claimed that flint towers were originally finished in this manner. Reaction to the finished product was not favourable. Complaints poured in from local people and specialist historians alike, some of whom had originally supported this move which was now considered by many an act of vandalism. English Heritage responded to the pressure by offering to remove the work and re-

point the tower in the traditional manner at no cost to the parish. The Parochial Church Council considered the offer but declined to accept it. It was believed that the investment of so large a sum of public money, £20,000 plus the cost of removing all the new render, could be made only at the expense of other churches' funds for urgently needed repairs. So the white tower remains, a unique symbol to remind us all of the need for more study, more cooperation and a sharing of knowledge, leading, hopefully, to a greater awareness and more careful restoration of our ancient churches. Thankfully, as the years pass, the brightness of the render has faded and been softened by the weather.

The churchyard

Selected areas of the churchyard are deliberately left apparently untended to act as a refuge for wildlife. The range of plant species to be found is pleasing, but not exceptional. A wide variety of bird species make use of the area for feeding. Butterflies, whose numbers rise and fall, can often be found amongst the grasses and flowers of this sacred space. As in any ancient churchyard, there are memorials of some interest, and a walk around the headstones will be rewarded with names and dates that evoke parts of our history. For Family History researchers a detailed list of the memorials is available for inspection inside the church.



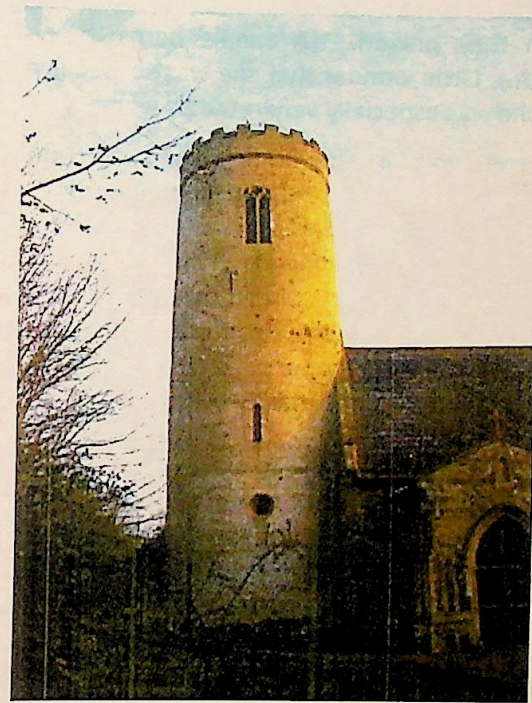
Hearing Loop covering the nave area of the building is also available during services.

Open doors and accessibility

The Church doors are open morning to evening every day so that anyone can use the Church for private prayers or just to visit.

The Church has wheelchair access at the main door and chancel step, and an audio

The parish church of Ilkeshall St. Margaret



*Benefice of South Elmham & Ilkeshall
Diocese of St. Edmundsbury & Ipswich*

The legend of St. Margaret of Antioch



St Margaret of Antioch seems to have been the creation of the pious mediaeval imagination. Nonetheless, or because of this, her cult was one of the most popular of the Middle Ages. According to her legend she would protect pregnant women and their infants in childbirth; those

invoking her on their deathbeds would enjoy divine protection; and those who burn lights or dedicated churches to her would receive anything useful for which they prayed. (A candle burns daily in this church.) Little wonder that she was so well loved and that she was especially venerated by women.

Margaret was a shepherdess and a convert to Christianity, who refused the demands of Olybrius, governor of Antioch. Among her many torments and tortures the most compelling image for mediaeval artists was when, having been swallowed by a dragon (the devil), she made the sign of the cross, the dragon burst apart and Margaret emerged unscathed. Many were converted to Christianity by her preaching.

The Serpent line

This village and its church bear the dedication to St. Margaret, and lie adjacent to the so-called "Serpent line" which runs from St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall to the north Norfolk coast. Along this "line" lie numerous churches dedicated to those saints who battled dragons, and this area has more than its fair share with two churches dedicated to St. Margaret of Antioch (here and at St. Margaret South Elmham), two to St. Michael, (Rumburgh and St. Michael South Elmham), and one to St. George at St. Cross South Elmham.

The round tower

Ilketshall St. Margaret is one of one hundred and eighty round tower churches in England, only six of which are outside East Anglia. It consists of a round west tower, nave, chancel and south porch. The roof is of slates, the pitch of an earlier thatched roof can be seen against the tower.

The tower (49'6" high) is a complete circle within, showing that it was built at the same time as the church - many other round towers were built onto existing churches. Local flints are the main building material with later brick buttresses at the east end. Some historians date it no earlier than the twelfth century, but one round tower expert, W.J. Goode, is convinced that the tower, up to the base of the belfry, and most of the church, are Saxon - probably just before 1000 AD.

Saxon origins

The overall shape of the church, tall, long (65'5") and narrow (17'4"), with a short bell tower, points to the middle Saxon period, 900-1000 AD. The church walls are less than 3' thick which also favours the Saxons over the Normans who built wider churches (over 20') with thicker walls and taller bell towers. The flints are of all sizes, shapes and colours, set in large amounts of mortar, with little or no attempt at selecting and coursing, as seen in late Saxon and early Norman churches.

The south west corner of the church shows no signs of the dressed stone quoins which are a hallmark of the Norman period. It is built of large and cut flints with some large, rough blocks of stone - *erratics*. There was no dressed stone in East Anglia until the Normans imported it, mostly from Caen. South of the tower is a quarter round *fillet* of flints which dates the tower to the pre-conquest era. Both *fillet* and quoins on the north west side are covered by the stair turret. On the north and south sides of the tower, 10' from the

ground, are two Saxon circular, double splayed, windows. The slit windows above are of a type favoured by Saxons as well as Normans.

Hidden evidence

Before the internal restoration of the early 1980's, W.J. Goode recorded evidence of four Saxon belfry windows (inside the tower) below the present belfry - all round headed and built of flints. The west window is still there but is much reduced in size and framed in dressed stone on the outside.

Later additions and alterations

• *Windows and tower stairs*

The chancel windows are early English, thirteenth century, as is the south doorway with its pointed arch and continuous moulding. The present belfry windows are fourteenth century decorated period, as are the south facing, ground floor, windows of the tower. The nave windows are fifteenth century, much restored and the tower staircase was probably added at this time.

• *Font, Altar rails, Pews, Pulpit and Royal Arms*

The font is fifteenth century - an octagonal basin, with alternate roses and blank shields, supported by eight angel heads on a pedestal around which are four empty plinths. This may be an East-Anglican lion font with no lions. The flat wooden top is Jacobean, early seventeenth century, as are the altar rails with their fine turned balusters. The pews and pulpit are Victorian. The Royal Arms above the tower arch are those of the Stuart Queen Anne and dated 1704.

• *Priest's door, Piscina and north door*

The priest's door, south of the chancel, has an external cinquefoil headed ornamental band above, possibly eighteenth century gothic. The cusped head over the door is similar to that over the piscina under the south east chancel window. A nineteenth century round

The Crucifixion (south wall)

Wall paintings of Christ had many applications, their very presence defining the buildings and people as Christian. Representations of Christ in Majesty, Christ on the Cross, Christ Resurrected and Christ in Judgement narrated the Gospel promise of salvation and life eternal. These wall paintings provided a reminder to the faithful of the core stories of the faith. Images of Christ provided a focus for devotion, and a sequence of pictures about the Infancy or the Passion allowed both scriptural and legendary incidents to be depicted. These Jesus tales were commonly painted on the walls of the nave, and took the viewer on a spiritual progression from delight to despair and then on into hope.



The Passion sequence provided a visual commentary for Holy Week and Easter, and the priest would no doubt have used them to illustrate his preaching. The liturgical ritual began on Palm Sunday and became more intense as the days progressed. On Maundy Thursday, after the Mass, the church hangings were taken down and the altars stripped of their linen, recalling the stripping of Jesus before his crucifixion. Good Friday was a day of solemn mourning when the whole story was (and still is) read aloud. A consecrated host (wafer or bread) from the Thursday Mass was then placed aside in an Easter sepulchre, re-enacting the burial of Christ, remaining there until Easter Sunday.

The Descent from the Cross (south wall)

Wall paintings of the Passion of Christ provided the imagery for the faithful to, in the phrasing of the 14th century spiritual writer Richard Rolle of Hampden, see, think and see again in their mind's eye the stories and their meaning. Rolle instructed his readers to think how they spent Good Friday and pray "*Lord, I ask mercy and forgiveness, for thy mercy and thy pity.*"

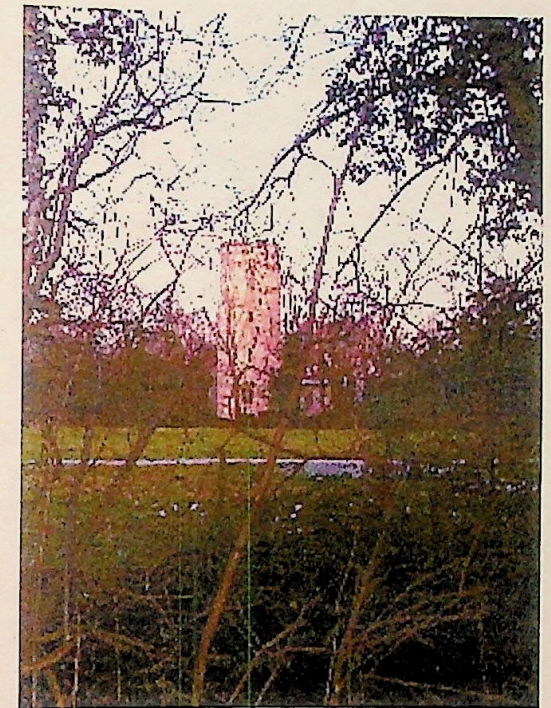
The wall paintings were not picture-book Bibles for the illiterate, but reminders of baptismal promises and proclamations of belief, leading believers into deeper spiritual truths.



We can only surmise how the images that were seen in this church by T Hugh Bryant at the start of the 20th century actually appeared, but we know their purpose. They existed to nurture and increase the faith of their viewers, and maybe by extension, as we recall their existence, they will nurture our own.

Further reading: *Medieval Wall Paintings* by Roger Rosewell, 2008. Pub. ISBN 978-1-84383-368-0

The lost wall paintings in the parish church of Ilketshall St. Margaret, Suffolk



*Benefice of South Elmham & Ilketshall
Diocese of St. Edmundsbury & Ipswich*

The "Lost" wall paintings

It is somewhat unusual to find a church guide leaflet that describes items that the visitor can no longer see, yet many historical writings speak of things that no longer exist, and it is only by having those descriptions that we are made aware of part of the story of the place.

That the Romans were active in this district is evidenced by Stone Street running from Bungay to Halesworth, and by the mound upon which is built the church of Ilketshall St. Lawrence. The magnificent Nonsuch Palace built by Henry VIII is only known through some scattered ruins, a few contemporary descriptions and three drawings. So too the wall paintings here in this church, which would originally have covered all the surfaces.

For their existence we rely upon a short paragraph in Volume II of the County Churches series published by George Allen & Company in 1912 which covers the Churches of East Suffolk.

In describing the church of Ilketshall St. Margaret the author, T Hugh Bryant, notes that there are "*Mural paintings on N. wall of St. Christopher and Henry VI., and on S. wall, the Crucifixion and Descent from the Cross.*" The paintings were clearly still visible at this time but no records exist in the church's documentation of when they were covered over by lime-wash. By the time H Munro Cautley, the former Diocesan Surveyor, produced his "*Suffolk Churches and their Treasures*" in 1937 he dismissed the church as "uninteresting" and mentions only the round tower, typical font, scratch dial, Stuart altar rails and Arms of Queen Anne dated 1704.

Saint Christopher (north wall)



entered the building.

Medieval legend describes him as a tall, strong man who declared that he would serve only a person of supreme power. First he went into the service of a king, but the king was not supremely powerful because he feared Satan. So then Christopher became the servant of Satan, but Satan turned out to be fearful of the cross, so Christopher resolved to serve Christ. A hermit told him that one way he could do this and use his strength was to help the weak cross a river. One of those he helped was a child who grew heavier and heavier as Christopher carried him. The child revealed that he was Jesus Christ and that he was carrying the weight of the world.

The above image from Slapton church in Northamptonshire gives an indication of how this church's painting may have looked. The saint's staff is turning into a living tree, a miracle that happened when Christopher had been baptized by Christ. The river is populated by fish, and in the bottom left-hand corner there is a small mermaid holding a mirror.

Henry VI (north wall)

On the old Rood Screen in the church of St Helen, Gateley, Norfolk, is this image of "The Blessed Martyr Henry VI" Never canonised as a saint, Henry became popular with supplicants soon after his mysterious death in the Tower of London on 21st May, 1471. Devout and modest in his lifetime, Henry's humility of manner and dress was well documented, and during his incarceration in the Tower following his defeat in the Wars of the Roses, he experienced several mystical visions. After his death he began to be viewed as a martyr, and a total of 21 miracles were attributed to him which led Pope Julius II to set up an enquiry into the claims.



His depiction in churches is not common, and that his portrait was painted on this church's north wall implies that he was the subject of some local devotion.

A prayer of Henry VI

Receive, O compassionate Father and merciful God Almighty, the prayer of me thy most unworthy servant; and let my supplications, which I offer before Thee and thy saints, come unto the ears of thy mercy.

Amen.