

**The  
Restoration of  
Ringsfield  
Church**

*60p*

Proceeds from the sale of this booklet will be  
given to All Saints Church, Ringsfield.

THE RESTORATION OF RINGSFIELD CHURCH

A Commemoration of the Restoration and Enlargement  
by William Butterfield in 1883

by

Ted Goodwyn and Verity Montagu

1983

Photographs and cover printed by Bidnall's, Beccles.  
Text printed by P.H. Duplicating Service, Bungay.

## CONTENTS

	Page
Victorian Church Restoration	3
Restoration of Churches in this Locality	4
Ringsfield Church before Restoration	8
The Garden Family and Ringsfield	11
William Butterfield	17
Purpose, Plans and Details of the Restoration and Enlargement	21
Subsequent Additions to the Church	25
The Friends of Ringsfield Church	27
Notes on some of the Photographs	28

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge with thanks permission from the Norfolk Record Office to print two of Butterfield's drawings (reduced to about one quarter of the size of the originals).

---

## VICTORIAN CHURCH RESTORATION

---

Church building and restoration was an outstanding and typical activity of the Victorian age. Between 1840 and 1876, 1,727 churches were built and 7,144 were restored, at a total cost of £25,548,703 (1). The restoration and enlargement of Ringsfield Church is an example - and, as this booklet tries to show, a very interesting example - of a great national movement.

Many reasons may be adduced for this astonishing upsurge. The Oxford movement was a strong influence. A more direct influence was the Cambridge Camden Society which included among its patrons or members, two archbishops and sixteen bishops and which advocated Gothic as the only Christian style of architecture.

One urgent reason was the rapid growth of population and the development of cities. Another was the building, during the first half of the century, of Nonconformist chapels in countless towns and villages. This was a challenge the Church of England could not ignore. Emulation, too, must have had an influence in rural England; for if a village church was restored, neighbouring parishes would desire a similar improvement. But perhaps the strongest reason was the intense religious seriousness of the age, seen in the Victorian Sunday, in the multifarious societies inspired by religious motives, in the children's stories, tracts, periodicals and improving novels which poured in a didactic stream from the rapidly expanding press. "Christianity ought to be the overriding actor in the nation," wrote the editor of "The Beccles and Bungay Weekly News" in 1859, "and the press should be its agent."

The popular Victorian novelist Charlotte Yonge took as her literary motto "Pro ecclesia dei". Clergymen abound in her books; the building and restoration of churches is a frequent theme - an unlikely theme in any other period! She condemned the old high pews both as a

(1) Figures from "The Victorian Church" by Owen Chadwick.

temptation to lax behaviour during divine service and as offensive symbols of social distinction in an age of growing democracy, when agricultural labourers no longer wore smocks at church.

The alteration of pews was the most common feature of Victorian restoration. Another was the removal of the galleries added to so many churches during the previous century. Both these changes were standard practice in Butterfield's restorations and he made both at Ringsfield.

Victorian restoration was partly a matter of adapting churches to the needs of a changing society.

-----

#### RESTORATION OF CHURCHES IN THIS LOCALITY

Investigation of thirty churches within five or six miles of Ringsfield reveals the significant fact : every one was restored during the Victorian period.

The extent of restoration varied much, as did the cost. In a few churches, "restoration" was confined to alteration of pews and some floor tiling, whilst in others galleries were removed, windows had stained glass inserted, and important features were altered. Thus Brampton had a new pulpit in 1857, and a new screen in 1883, Shipmeadow a new roof in 1856, Gillingham an additional aisle in 1869, Mutford a new porch in 1891. To detail the alterations made in all thirty churches would require several pages; and in some of them restoration took place in several stages.

*Ringsfield Church: North side.*



*Interior: The Nave.*



*The Tudor Porch*

## RESTORATION OF CHURCHES IN THIS LOCALITY (*contd...*)

The costs ranged from two or three hundred pounds to several thousand pounds. In towns, many people contributed to restoration funds, but in villages well-to-do rectors or the landed gentry, or both, bore the brunt. Nor can it be accidental that the restoration movement in this locality reached its peak when agriculture, after prolonged depression, enjoyed prosperity for nearly twenty years in "the golden age of British agriculture".

A few churches were restored in the first Victorian decade, but it was in the mid-fifties that the movement strengthened and then continued unabated for about thirty years.

Some churches in this locality restored in the 1840's:  
Rushmere, Shadingfield, Toft Monks.

In the 1850's: Beccles, Brampton, Gillingham, Kirby Cane, Shipmeadow.

In the 1860's: Broome, Ellingham, Flixton, Geldeston, Hedenham, Ilketshall St. John, Wissett.

In the 1870's: Bungay St. Mary, Ilketshall St. Lawrence, North Cove, South Elmham St. Margaret and St. Mary, Spexhall, Worlingham.

In the 1880's: Aldeby, Barnby, Burgh St. Peter, Ditchingham, Ellough, Raveningham, Ringsfield, Westhall, Wheatacre.

Thus the enthusiasm for church improvement hereabouts continued through the Victorian period; and of those restorations, Ringsfield's was perhaps the most radical and remarkable.

It is worth adding that in many of these villages, schools were built during the same period. Grants were available but the bulk of the money came from local subscriptions. Ringsfield gained its school as well as its restored church. It owed both to the generosity of the Garden family.

## RINGSFIELD CHURCH BEFORE RESTORATION

---

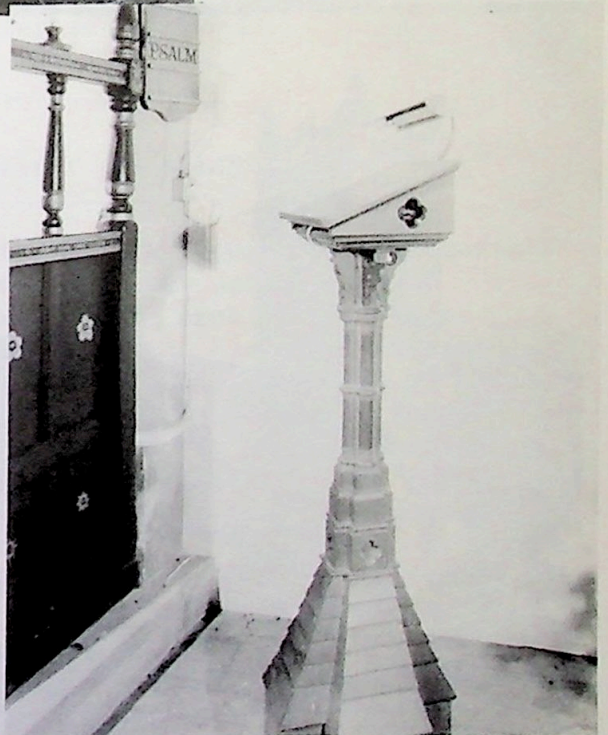
Important additions and alterations were made to Ringsfield Church during the six centuries before its restoration. The present tower - was there an earlier one? - was added in the 15c. The porch is probably Elizabethan. Several interior alterations may be 17c. : the pulpit, the carved pews, the curious screen with Latin inscriptions. William Dowsing, the zealous agent for implementing the Parliamentary order "for taking away all scandalous pictures out of churches", recorded in his Journal (1643) the removal at Ringsfield of "the sun and moon and Jesus in capital letters and two crosses on the steeple". The gallery, described by Suckling as "hideously ugly", was probably an 18c. addition. But that century was more a time for building handsome rectories than for adorning churches - Ringsfield was typical; Rev. Abraham Dawson (1755-89) built its rectory, originally three-storied.

An etching of 1818 by the Suffolk antiquarian, David Elisha Davy, provides good evidence for the exterior. He shows the porch much as it is now and the thatched roof in poor shape, with an ominous sag between nave and chancel. Prominent in the roof is a large dormer window, perhaps inserted to light the gallery. The three windows in the south walls of different shapes and sizes, look curiously irregular. The tower as depicted by Davy, a careful draftsman, differs in some details from the tower as it is today. Alterations were probably made in the time of Rev. Robert Whiting for on a corner-stone is chiselled "W. Suggate 1850".

His "Journal of Excursions in the County of Suffolk 1823-44" (1), recently discovered and published, contains this entry : "Wed. May 19th. After breakfast we drove to Ringsfield, where I wanted to get the brass on the outside

(1) Davy visited Ringsfield again in 1830.

*The ancient Font*



*The Lectern*

*Interior before Restoration*



*Ringsfield Church in 1818*

## RINGSFIELD CHURCH BEFORE RESTORATION (contd....)

of the church which I had before omitted to take .... the inside is singularly ornamental; the ceiling is painted to represent the heavens and in one part there is a painting of the celestial sphere; the whole was done at the expence of a former Rector, whose tomb still remains in the chancel". The brass is to Nicholas Garneys c. 1600 - another important addition - and the rector referred to is Rev. Nicholas Gosling.

A photograph of the interior taken some time before the restoration, though badly blurred, shows several features Butterfield retained, adapted or removed. The screen was, perhaps reluctantly, retained. The finely carved pulpit was retained, but its canopy was raised. The pews differ in height; some high ones are in the chancel. Butterfield reduced them to a common height and he removed the clumsy wooden structure of cross-beams and uprights dividing nave and chancel. In this photograph, the interior looks an interesting muddle.

---

## THE GARDEN FAMILY AND RINGSFIELD

---

Memorials of the Garden family are prominent in Ringsfield Church - a mural tablet to the first John Garden of Redisham Hall, another to his wife Anne, and a large tablet to the second John Garden and his wife. Stained glass windows commemorate John Lewis Garden, his wife and two of his sisters. A brass plate commemorates another sister, Mary Elizabeth, wife of Robert Chapman Whiting, whose father had been rector of Ringsfield. And in the churchyard is the large and elaborate family monument.

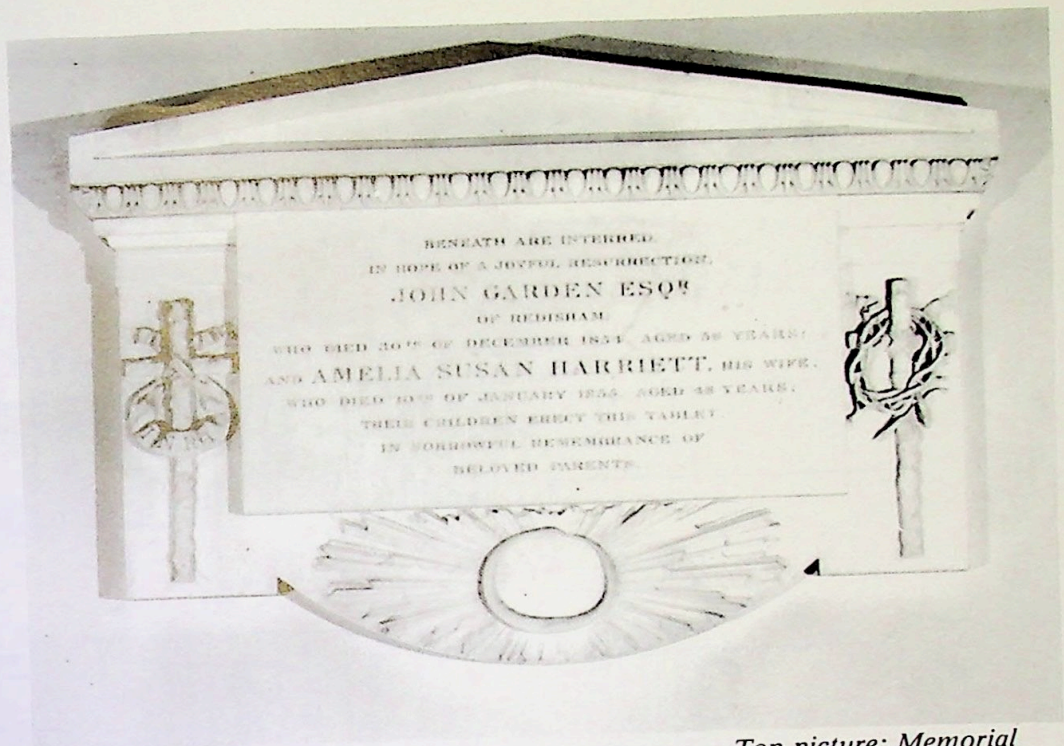
The connection between the Gardens and Ringsfield lasted almost a century, through four generations. John Garden acquired the Manor of Ringsfield in 1808 and built Redisham Hall soon afterwards. He died in 1820. His son,

also John, was High Sheriff of Suffolk in 1834, a year of tension and disorder after the passing of the new Poor Law Act. An active J.P., he led support for the introduction of a county Police Force. John Garden the second had a family of three sons and four daughters.

The eldest son, John Lewis Garden, was a man of sporting interests, a steward at Beccles races when only twenty-four. He married Princess Caroline Murat, a grand-niece of Napoleon Buonaparte, soon after the overthrow of the Emperor Louis Napoleon. She had a son by a previous marriage, who came to Redisham Hall with her and briefly attended the Fauconberge School at Beccles. The Princess's "Memoirs" show that she found life in rural Suffolk tediously dull; and as her husband spent time abroad big game hunting, it appears that neither had much interest in Ringsfield. Fortunately for the village, the interest and generosity of the Misses Garden more than compensated for the squire's neglect. They paid for the building of the village school. The window commemorating their most generous act is inscribed: "To the glory of God and in memory of Emma Margaret Garden and Susan Harriet Garden who restored this church A.D. 1883".

After John Garden's death, his sisters left Redisham Hall, but his two daughters continued the family involvement in village life. At the annual Flower and Horticultural Show in 1894 - there were 280 exhibits and sixty-eight children brought bunches of wild flowers - they gave a "Lucky Bran Tub", from which ninety children had a free dip. (This happy occasion ended with Rural Sports and a donkey race). Three years later, they entertained the villagers in the schoolroom with music and a farce, in which they acted, "Done on Both Sides".

The long connection of the Garden family with Ringsfield ended with the death of the Princess in 1902. Her son moved to Westhall Hall.



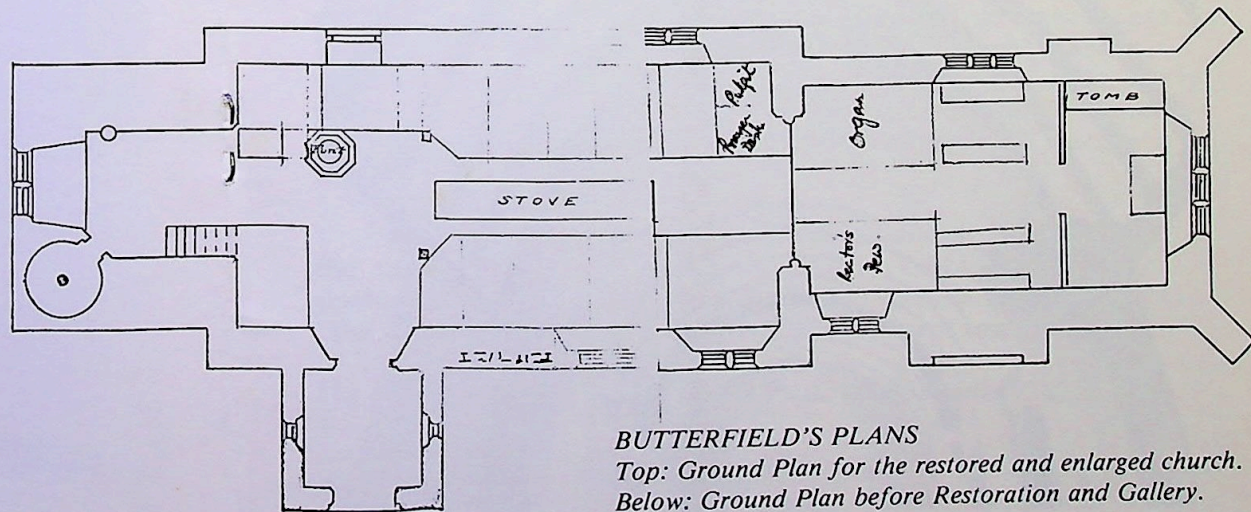
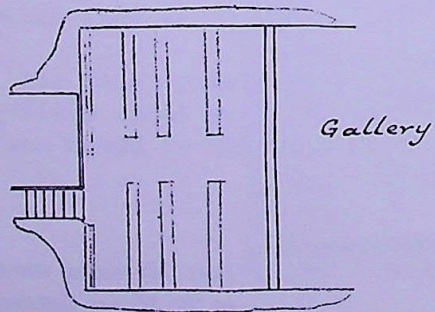
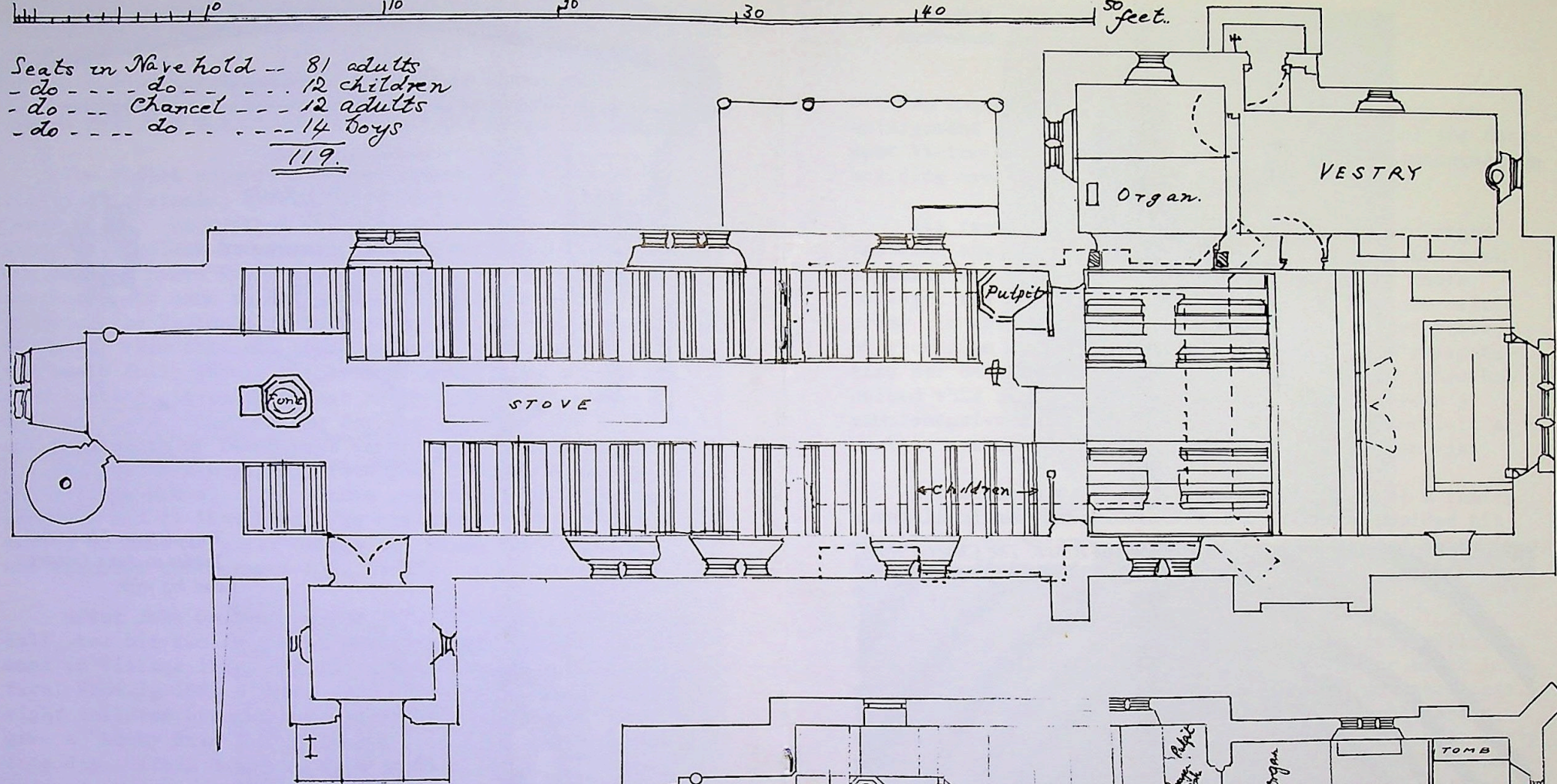
*Top picture: Memorial Tablet to John Garden and his wife.*



*Left: Memorial window to the Misses Garden.*

10 20 30 40 50 feet.

Seats in Nave hold -- 81 adults  
 - do - do - - - 12 children  
 - do - Chancel - - - 12 adults  
 - do - do - - - 14 boys  
119.



**BUTTERFIELD'S PLANS**

Top: Ground Plan for the restored and enlarged church.

Below: Ground Plan before Restoration and Gallery.

*William  
Butterfield*



*Below: The Chancel Roof.*



## WILLIAM BUTTERFIELD

William Butterfield, architect of the restoration and enlargement of Ringsfield All Saints, was one of the foremost Victorian architects. He was especially concerned in building new churches and in restoring old ones.

His reputation suffered severely in the prolonged reaction against all things Victorian. One of his most striking and original buildings, the chapel of Keble College, was singled out for particularly hostile criticism. In the re-appraisal, over the last thirty years, of Victorian art and architecture, Butterfield's reputation has been largely re-established. John Betjeman has helped this renewed appreciation and Paul Thompson's comprehensive study (1) enables us to see Butterfield's work as a whole and in relation to the Victorian age.

Butterfield was born in London in 1814, of a family evangelical and prosperous. His upbringing moulded his character; he became, and remained, serious and abstemious, formal in dress and manners, indefatigable in work and study. He did not marry.

After a brief apprenticeship to a builder, which may have been a source of his later preference for brick in new churches, he decided in 1833 to become an architect. It was a propitious moment for an architectural career, especially for the church architect, during the next sixty years an unprecedented number of churches, church schools and parsonages were to be built and restoration became a prolific field.

A focus for the new interest in church building was the Camden Society founded in 1841 by Cambridge undergraduates but soon enjoying wide and influential support. "The Camendians were concerned for decoration, ritual,

(1) "William Butterfield". Paul Thompson (1976)



*Pulpit and Pews*

WILLIAM BUTTERFIELD (contd....)

designed all the furnishings except the hanging lamps.

His restoration work was spread all over the country. In Suffolk he restored churches at Lawshall, Bacton, Great Waldringfield, Ipswich, Sudbury (both St. Gregory's and St. Peter's) and Ellough. There was a great difference between his work in designing new churches and restoring old ones. In the former, he developed and expressed a highly personal style; in the latter, subordinating his own preferences, he sought to preserve the essential features of the original. The challenging task at Ringsfield was to design a new chancel whilst restoring an ancient nave - and yet preserve an architectural unity. He did impose upon the interior a radical change in accordance with one of his leading principles. The photograph of the former interior shows the altar then was not at all what Butterfield made it in the restored and enlarged church - the principal feature, the visual focus for devout attention.

The motto of Charlotte Yonge, "Pro ecclesia dei" might well be applied to Butterfield's life and achievements. The church he served was the Church of England.

-----

#### PURPOSE, PLANS & DETAILS OF THE ENLARGEMENT & RESTORATION

---

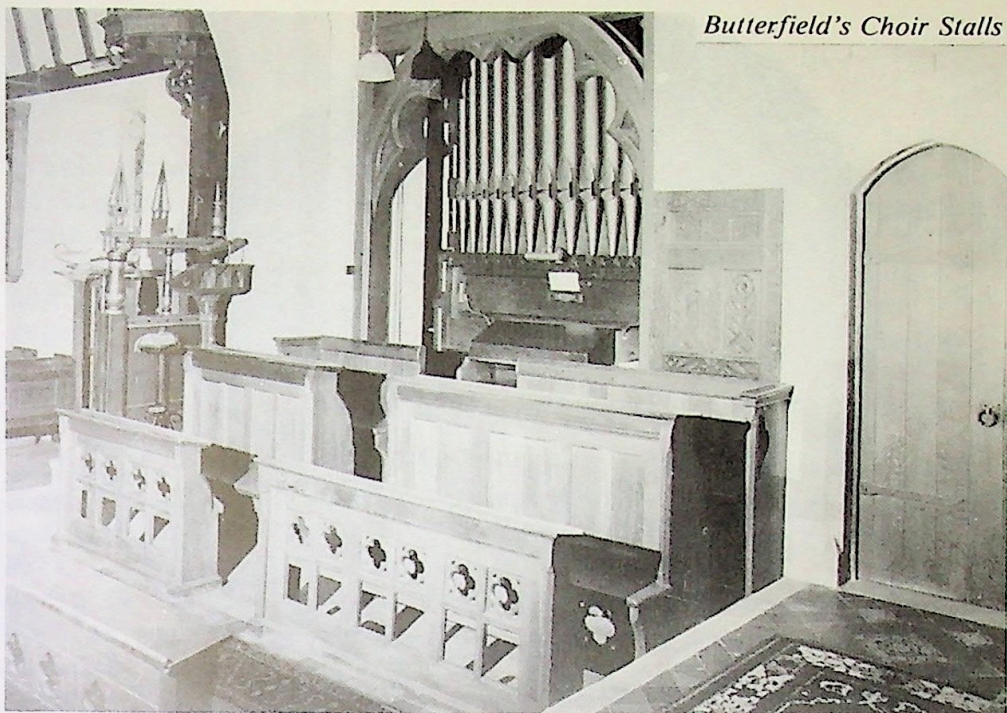
By 1883, with the general trend towards greater village attendance at church. Ringsfield's was, no doubt considered "insufficient for the requirements of the parishioners". A quick glance at Butterfield's plan of the old church also shows an unsatisfactory distribution of worshippers, with only a few box pews in the nave and probably a large crowd of Sunday-booted children upstairs in the gallery and behind the reproving glances of the ladies, and this extended right over the entrance and across the nave and was lit by a dormer window. (See old print). Butterfield's new plan firmly puts the children to the front of the nave

right up to the chancel screen after allowing for fourteen boys in the choir. He also provides for eighty-one adults in the nave and a further twelve in the choir making a total of 119 sittings.

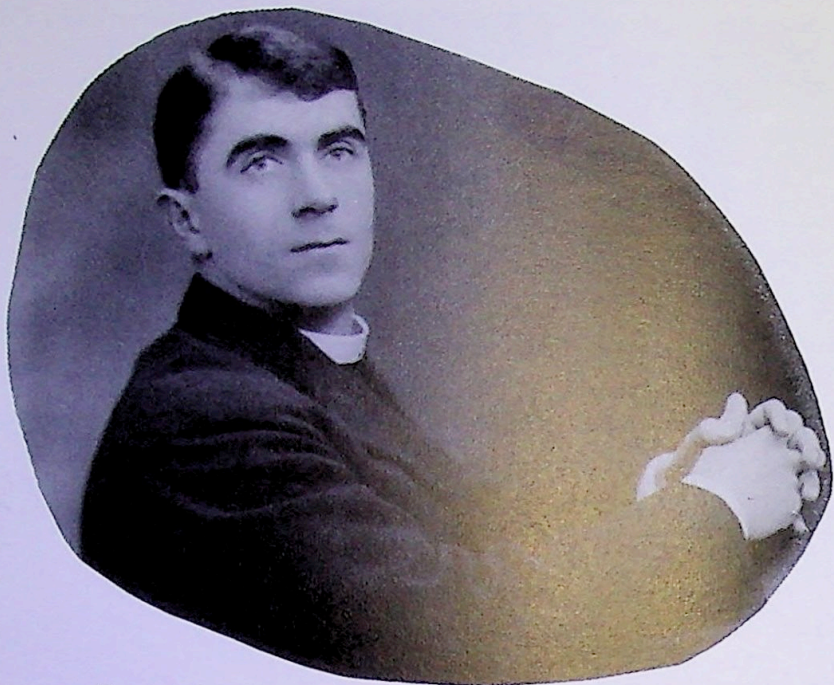
The faculty of 4 Aug. 1883 gave permission to lengthen the nave, to build a new chancel, organ chamber and vestry besides taking down the West gallery. This very ambitious scheme had been unanimously approved at a vestry meeting on 16 June, the total cost being estimated at £2,300 of which the sum of £1,979 had already been raised or promised, and the remainder "will be provided by divers well-disposed and pious persons". The Rector, according to the East Suffolk Gazette, in his Christmas message was appealing to personal friends and acquaintances to help him "raise £560 still needed to open the Church in Jan. next free from debt" (about £2,000 had been raised locally by then). It is possible that the total sum was never realized as there is one item from Butterfield's description of work missing. This is the provision of kneeling boards to match the new seats. His proposal that "a new Bible Desk is to be formed out of the materials of the present Reading Pew" does not appear to have been carried out as there is a contemporary lectern. This, perhaps was felt to be more in keeping with the rest of the new work. Butterfield however was careful when restoring churches that nothing good or ancient should be needlessly lost and he made provision for re-using the carved and painted woodwork (see pew ends and chancel screen).

Ringsfield is an excellent example of many of Butterfield's views. The design of the new chancel, organ chamber and vestry all exemplify his aim to take the eye naturally towards the Altar. The graded steps, the receding rafters in the roof of the chancel and sanctuary with plain plaster in between, the organ chamber and vestry unobtrusive and on the North side are all typical. He also designed plainer glass windows of a green tint as he wanted the nave to be lighter than the chancel - these have since been altered.

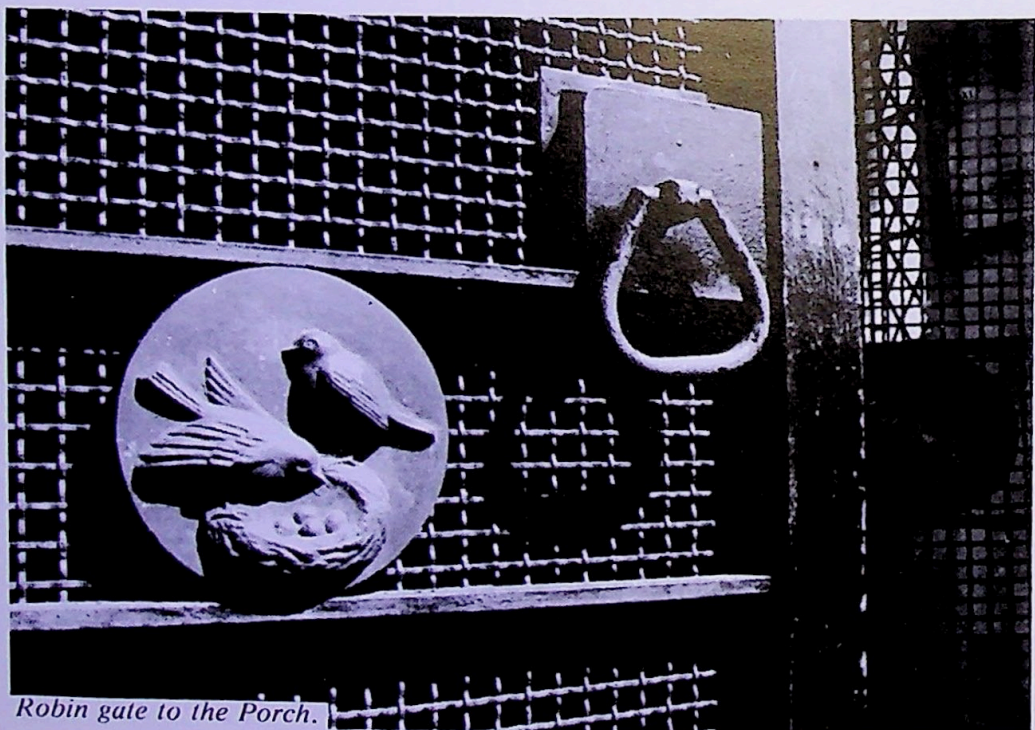
*Butterfield's Choir Stalls*



*Altar with Frontal*



*Canon H.S. Verrells, Rector of Ringsfield 1933-70.*



*Robin gate to the Porch.*

## PURPOSE, PLANS, DETAILS .... (contd....)

We have also benefited from his belief in good ventilation around the base of the church. He insisted on digging away all surplus earth against pier bases and ensuring that damp courses and airbricks were above ground level, even if this entailed underpinning. Good dry flooring with tiles, and heating systems were also recommended. There is evidence of all this at Ringsfield though he was able to keep the existing Porritt's stove in the floor of the nave. He made sure the new chancel was built of "best hard-burnt bricks with Bath stone angle quoins and dressings". (The original had been constructed of brick rubble). The doorway was enlarged and the porch retiled but otherwise was not altered except for a new step necessitated by the excavation of earth in the churchyard. The existing monuments were kept as near their original positions as possible, the Shelford tomb in the sanctuary being refixed at ground level. The Garneys monument was moved in its entirety to the same relative position on the outside of the chancel on the wall. Four gravestones have been re-set into the new bank at the East end and the vault of the Garden family on the North side was mentioned for special care to be taken. The organ chamber now projects just beyond it.

-----  
SUBSEQUENT ADDITIONS TO THE CHURCH

The most obvious additions since the Restoration are the commemorative windows. Those on the North side are dedicated to members of the Garden family. The East window was originally much more Victorian looking, but was re-set in 1883, substituting plain antique quarries for a mass of coloured glass which it was felt detracted from the figures and also made the chancel too dark.

The windows on the South side have also been re-glazed with clear glass - they were previously a greeny

colour as in the porch window. The inserts have been given in memory of various occasions. The Garnèys' shield in the window near the lectern, dedicated in 1958 was the gift of Mrs. Wattleworth (née Garneys) thus providing a link with one of the earliest recorded benefactors of the church. In 1450 Peter Garneys bequeathed 13s.4d. towards the "new steeple". The two roundels in the central window are 15c. Flemish and Dutch, the only old glass in the church and were dedicated in 1967. The Magdalene College crest in the first window commemorates the link with the Patrons.

The sundial was restored and a new inscription stone was let into the porch in Coronation year, which also was the occasion of the re-thatching, and the planting of the silver birches and two yew trees near the tower. The wrought iron gates were made in 1964 by Mr. Moore of Brandeston - his wife designing the copper plaque depicting the robins. He made the cross which had been taken from village to village in the diocese for the previous ten months to mark the Cathedral Jubilee.

In 1957 the bell frame was renewed and the two ancient bells rehung at the expense of Miss A.M. Pearson of Lowestoft whose father and grandfather had both been former Rectors. (The tower window is in memory of her mother whose father the Rev. Arnold had been Rector during the Restoration). At the same time a third bell was presented by Mr. G. Palgrave Brown of Redisham Hall. This same benefactor also gave the present organ and later the electric blower for it. Two wooden candlesticks were made from the timber of the old bell frame. There is also a modern oak lectern.

The Bishop's chair in the vestry was bought by the proceeds of the Mothers' Union Working Party. Several smaller items were contributed by the Children's service that was held for several years during Canon Verrell's tenure.

## THE FRIENDS OF RINGSFIELD CHURCH

---

Motto:

"Adorning the Fabric and adding to its refinement".

It is seldom that such a tiny parish church can boast of such a grand Association, but All Saints Ringsfield has indeed been blessed with one since 1949, and much of its present good state is evidence of the Friends' generosity and care over the past thirty-four years.

The now historic incident of the robins nesting in the lectern and the subsequent national publicity this aroused, to be followed shortly after by the preparations for the Quincentennial celebrations made the Rector, The Rev. H.S. Verrells, aware of the immense goodwill and interest of past and present well-wishers and the formation of the Friends was a natural outcome. The first President was Sir Henry Willink, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, (our patrons) and during his tenure he came frequently to the Annual Service. For over nineteen consecutive years too, the Rev. Gordon Paget travelled from all over England to play the organ for this Service.

The Friends have given extensively to the Church, both with contributions towards major works like re-thatching and repairs to the fabric; they also provided the electric heating, thus relieving the Rector of having to light the oil stoves hours before service. Indeed one of their first expenses was replacing the oil lamps by electric light. All the re-decorating and a great deal of adornment in the form of sanctuary carpet and pew seat cushions are due to them. Individual friends have also added greatly to the Church as we see it today. The altar frontal was one such gift, as was the light over the lectern and pulpit. Latterly the Friends have contributed a machine to cut the churchyard grass.

The annual meeting takes place in early July and is a very informal affair. Evensong is followed by a short business meeting and then refreshments and it is hoped to continue this for many more years, if new friends will replace those lost.

During these difficult times for the Church, Ringsfield is indeed lucky to have Friends, and their continuing support and love of the little thatched church in the valley is much appreciated.

-----

NOTES ON SOME OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Page 5. Interior - taken during the Flower Festival of 1981.

Page 9. The Font was moved to its present position by Butterfield (see Plans p. 21-25) with a surround of decorative tiles.

Page 16. The Chancel ceiling shows "the four-sided linear grid characteristic of Butterfield's late style" (P. Thompson : "William Butterfield").

Page 19. Rev. F.M. Arnold was keenly interested in the village school. He introduced choir vestments soon after the restoration.

Page 24. The design commemorates an event which received national publicity : a pair of robins built a nest in the lectern ; "The robins began to build during Holy Week (April 10-16) and left the nest unfinished for nearly three weeks. Early in May it was found that the nest was completed. By the evening of May 3rd four eggs had been laid and later there were six. .... The mother bird sat peacefully through all services. Visitors usually caused her to fly off, but she grew accustomed to the rector and his whistle. The male bird flew in and out ... "

(from an article by Canon Verrells in "The East Anglian Magazine" July 1949).

The following photographs are by RICHARD LANG of Beccles

The Tudor Porch : The Font  
Memorial Tablet to John Garden and his wife  
Memorial Window to the Misses Garden  
The Chancel ceiling : Pulpit and Pews  
Altar, Reredos and East Window : Choir Stalls  
Altar with Frontal : Robin gate of the Porch.

