



AUTUMN 2025 NEWSLETTER



St Mary's, Nettlestead

Suffolk Historic Churches Trust

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under the "Latest Newsletters" tab**

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

This year's Suffolk Churches Day on Sept 13th was a memorable day in many ways. For the first time in many a year the heavens opened on us after a dull day turned into storm in the afternoon - I was sent one photo from the Haughley Choir of the cyclists surrounded by white hail and another from our former Trustee Robert Williams of his 1926 Bentley grounded in a torrential downpour. And memorable because for the first time our 'Ride & Stride' cyclists & walkers and our 'Pedal & Drive' vintage & classic car drivers were joined by a plucky band of 'Steeple to Steeple' horse riders who rode a long circuit past seven churches in the countryside round Bildeston. An especial effort was made in Great Finborough who celebrated 50 years since their pioneering cycle ride with cyclists, cars, horses & even half a dozen marathon runners!

Despite the weather a fun day was had by all and returns to date tell us that we should match last year's total of £200,000.

The Trustees are hugely grateful for the hard work of all the volunteers who made it happen - the 500 Area & Local Bike Ride Organisers and the hundreds of cyclists all over Suffolk some of who lapped up the miles between 30 or even 40+ churches; for the work of the seven Pedal & Drive committee members and the 110 drivers who braved the conditions in their wonderful old cars; and now for the efforts of the three ladies who orchestrated Steeple to Steeple and the 27 riders who rallied to the cause - some quite saddle sore after 17 miles!

And what all that fundraising means is that the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust has been able to step up our level of grant giving to help maintain Suffolk's wonderful legacy of churches & chapels. Our last grants meeting - with a bit of carry forward - was able to give a record £93,000 to 17 churches.

Of course our church buildings need a lot more money than we alone can provide so we will be increasingly focussed on finding ways of helping those doughty churchwardens & elders tap into other sources of funding.

Finally a thank you to all our supporters.

Geoffrey Probert

SPRING FIELD DAY SATURDAY 10TH MAY 2025

Thirty Friends of Suffolk Historic Churches Trust enjoyed a day exploring three of the county's most interesting and diverse parish churches, each led by a knowledgeable church member. The annual event (along with the Winter Study Day that is held at Haughley Park) gives our supporters the opportunity to learn more about church history, whilst exploring unfamiliar buildings.

We began the day at All Saints, Crowfield. Walking down the track from the road, past sun-dappled spring woodland, we turned through the gateway to a breathtaking sight. This unexpected little gem, looking like a fairy-tale cottage with its partial thatched roof, really does have "the wow-factor"!

Our guide was the church Treasurer/Secretary Stewart White who told us that the church was mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086. In 1447 documents also mention the church, and the porch, with its carved woodwork and the doorway, date back to the 16th century. The church was listed under the parish register for nearby Coddensham in 1543, (only getting its own register in 1870).

The hammerbeam roof dates to the late C15th and the timber chancel arch is very rare - and unique in Suffolk.



In 1674 the church was reported as 'much decayed and ruined' and locals as 'backward and lawless' ...and the ongoing disagreements with Coddensham, lasted for the next ten years. As a 'Chapel of Ease', in 1676 the Bishop of

Norwich ordered repairs to be made to Crowfield church, and that ornaments should be bought. £60 was spent – around £200,000 in today's money.

Like so many of our churches, All Saints was rescued in Victorian times with extensive restorations paid for Lady Middleton of nearby Shrublands Hall, in memory of her husband Sir William. The work was carried out by local builder Mr Gibbons, and three generations on, the Gibbons family still live in the village.

The bell-tower was replaced, and the boxed pews were replaced with pews with carved pew-ends (each carved with different fruit and foliage). One medieval pew end remains.

The church is Grade Two* Listed and eventually became a separate parish to Coddensham in 1923.

In 2015 a new cross was made for the top of the church roof and embedded in it is a 10p coin that will show future generations exactly when it was created.

Although the congregation is small the church is much visited as a public footpath is near, but the church has financial challenges as they cope with dry and wet rot, deathwatch beetle and incorrectly applied limewash which is cracking and will need replacing. All at a total cost of £100,000!

(The church holds a popular three-day flower festival each August Bank Holiday weekend – the theme this year is “Time”.)

We moved on then to St Mary's, Coddensham, an impressive Grade One Listed church standing proudly overlooking a beautiful valley, with the Old Rectory on the opposite hill. It is surrounded by one of the best wildflower sites in the country with hundreds of cowslips on the day of our visit. We were met by local guide David McDonald.... and the end of a friendly coffee morning.

We started outside and David pointed out the unusual angle of the church tower compared with the main building and explained it could either be so that north door faced the village street, or because of its hillside location. The tower was built over many years, and has a 13th century base, 14th century middle while the top is 15th century. Roman bricks can be spotted throughout the walls.

One wall has a semi-circular red brick protrusion which was the original rood screen turret, built in 1535, just five years before they were banned! The Chancel, built in the 11th and 12th century, was extended in the 13th and clerestory windows added – you can still see the line of the original roof.

We then moved inside St Mary's, and admired the long chancel, the C15th double hammerbeam roof, and the clerestory windows, which allowed light to stream into the nave. The angel heads are mostly 19th century.



You can still see the traces of pre-Reformation red paint on the pillars, along with ancient graffiti – some of 15th century knights with shields and swords.

The pulpit with a tiny door, is Jacobean on a Victorian base and was originally part of a triple-decker pulpit. The Chancel is at an angle to the nave, which could be because of the lie of the land, or could be to echo the angle of Christ's head on the Cross.

In the Chancel is a panel from the original rood screen, carved in 1570 and there is a 14th century carved piscina.

This was William Dowsing's church and six of his children were baptised here. Perhaps that was why little damage was done in St Mary's, Coddenham when he and his Puritans rampaged through the churches across the county?

We travelled finally to nearby Hemingstone, to assemble in The Hut, a Great War hut used as a much-loved community building, where the WI served delicious cakes, tea and coffee to us as we ate our packed lunches.

A complete contrast to the morning churches, St Gregory's is a small 14th century church built of timber and flint, one of only four in Suffolk named after this saint. Our guide was local historian, Chris Codd, and she showed us the floor pattern, based on a sunrise theory, and the 'new door' - installed in 1530! The plain glass of the large east window was once half covered over, probably to give it strength

because its expanse was supported only by its tracery. The shape of the windows show they date from 14-15th century.

As the bell chimed the hour, we were told it was one of the church's two medieval bells, that had rung out across the village for 600 years.

On the walls of the narrow and modest church were painted texts, and over the altar were prayers hand-painted 100 years ago onto tin panels.

William & Mary's Coat of Arms are on the west wall, with the Martin hatchments hanging in the tower space (these were placed outside Hemingstone Hall (the family seat) following a death and then moved into the church between one and twelve months later.)

Chris had kindly arranged for the heavy cover to the strong room door, with stairs leading to the bell tower and clock, to be set to one side so we could see it.

She also explained about the 1585 William Cantrell memorial and the family's links to Framlingham Castle, Queen Elizabeth 1st, St Edmundsbury Cathedral, the Restoration, and Catholicism. A small chapel 'Ralph's Hole' was built on the side of the church by Ralph Cantrell, Williams's nephew, and it has a squint hole to look through. It is thought that, as it doesn't line up with the altar as is usual, he built it so that he could abide by Queen's order to attend the parish church, conduct his own service but still not actually enter. A good English compromise or a clever way round the rules against Catholic worship perhaps?

St Gregory's church still has a Rood Beam, on top of which are the holes for the Great Rood etc to be attached in the past, and a hollow-sounding wall implies that a rood staircase may be hidden within it.

A lovely touch was the 'Welcome to SHCT' sign' - thank you!



Indeed, thank you to everyone who made it a very special day, especially the volunteer guides and the Trust's Education Trustee, Jamie Norman who, stuck in a plane on an Edinburgh airport runway, wasn't able to enjoy the event he had organised.

Rachel Sloane
Hon Publicity Officer

RIDE AND STRIDE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

We had a busy build-up to the Bike Ride Day this year. It is still too early to quote numbers for the fundraise on the day, but there is a confident feeling that the turnout was a good one.

The weather was kind up until about 4pm when the heavens opened up with rain that only the farmers and gardeners were grateful for. Luckily most of our cyclists and walkers has finished their day, though I believe some of the open-topped vintage cars got caught out.

We had a Steeple-to-Steeple horse ride near Semer. A first, and it proved to be a popular event. We hope to develop this further next year.

Colneys again came up with a novel idea – dressing up as bishops! Cycling must have been quite uncomfortable in the wind!

This year our celebrities were Ipswich Town Football Club. The Club prides itself on its social engagement in the County and we were delighted to have their support for this day of fundraising for our charity. We thank the Club ambassadors Peter Over, Matt Holland, and Simon Milton for their time and enthusiasm. We had a photo shoot in the grounds of Portman Road and later at St.Mary at Stoke on the same day.

A long service award was given to Steve Barrett at St. Edmund, Kessingland in August. This was an interesting story. Steve, when he was a young policeman, was persuaded by the late Frances Parkinson, to cycle out to other counties to spread the word of the Historic Churches Trust which at the time was very much in its infancy in Suffolk. Steve cycled to Hastings in Kent, Oxford, and Leicester. Quite a journey on a bike. The original bike is still in pristine condition 50 years later. Little did Steve know that he would be helping start a countywide Historic Churches Trust with a Ride & Stride Day that to this day is enjoyed throughout the

land, importantly raising millions for our cherished historic churches. Steve Barrett went on to be interviewed on Suffolk Radio where he told his amazing story.

Several certificates were awarded to fundraisers in the Ixworth area. Again, we are extremely grateful for all those involved there over the years for their dedication and help.

Our thanks go out to our new Area Organisers in Hadleigh, Halesworth, and Ipswich for taking on their new responsibility so enthusiastically. We will be seeking a new Area Organiser in Samford.

We will have a better idea of our fundraising efforts in a couple of months and these details will be circulated as and when.

Thank you again for all your support and for your participation on the day.

Simon Ronan
Chairman Ride and Stride

RIDE AND STRIDE – THE EARLY DAYS



How did a successful fundraising idea in Suffolk, thought up by, among others, an Aldeburgh lady, Frances Parkinson, spread across the country so that this year, thirty counties will take part?

The Suffolk Historic Churches Trust started the annual Sponsored Bike Ride (now known as Ride and Stride) around churches in 1981 and has many long-serving supporters, who have taken part either as church volunteers welcoming people as they journey, or cycling and now, walking or running. It is always held on the second Saturday in September.

A retired police officer and now a well-known beekeeper, Steve Barrett, from Kessingland, Suffolk, whose honey is used by celebrated chef, Raymond Blanc, was involved in those early days and helped to make it an annual event.

"In the 1980's I was the village policeman at Kessingland and I took part in every sponsored bike ride that I could. I was a 26-year-old fit policeman when I was approached by Frances Parkinson who asked if I would be an ambassador for the Trust and take messages to Bishops in various counties. I loved old churches and admired the work Frances did. She was a real can-do person and when she had a bee in her bonnet, she would get things done. As the day of the Ride approached, she asked me to take a message to the Bishop in Hastings to encourage the county of Kent to take part in the ride.

"I started from Kessingland at about 7.30 in the morning and cycled to the Dartford Tunnel where they then had a lorry that took bikes across, while the rider would sit in the cab with the driver. We got safely to the other side and it wasn't long until I was cycling through the village of Battle where I stopped at the pub for a beer. The local vicar was also there and spotted the Trust stickers on my bike and complimented on taking part – and on my long ride that day from Suffolk!"

The next year Frances asked Steve to do the same for the county of Oxford.

"She had arranged overnight accommodation first with 'Rick the Vic' at Bury St Edmunds and I had a good night there and I even had a go at playing the cathedral organ. In Oxfordshire I stayed with the High Sheriff and I remember she had a butler who ran me a bath before I met the great and good of Oxford where I told them about the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and what they did."

Steve's final mission was to take messages to Leicester, cycling there in a day from Kessingland church.

"I was tasked with singing the praises of our work with local cyclists and the money they raised to help maintain our lovely churches. Frances was a big player in the Historic Churches Trust, especially in Suffolk, and wanted to get the messages out to all the other counties and her keenness to do all that shows how successful they are today. I am very proud to be part of it."

The Chairman of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride Committee, Simon Ronan, recently presented a Long Service Certificate to Steve Barrett to thank him for his support over so many years. (Steve's bike is a handmade Claud Butler, in beautiful condition, and over 40 years old).

Anne Gray has told us that Revd. Wake, Rectpr of Great Finborough, Harleston and Onehouse, started the Cycle Chase in the Stowmarket Deanery and that she took part in the first one on 23rd June 1979 with the idea being to visit all 22 churches in the deanery. Participants chose their own charities and they were "signed in" at each church, as now. She and her husband visited all 22. She said it was repeated the following two years although she didn't take part in 1980 as she was expecting her second son – who she took on the back of the bike in 1981! She thought Hadleigh had done something similar in 1981. Her husband was a Trustee of the SHCT and was very excited when the Trust decided to take over the event and run it throughout the county and they both took part in the 1982 SHCT event.



Revd. Hugh Wake

ITFC legends helped launch the big annual Suffolk churches fundraising day.

This year's Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride and Pedal and Drive event, that was held on **Saturday 13th September**, was launched with the help of some Ipswich Town Football Club legends, now Ambassadors to the Club.

The ITFC Ambassadors, Simon Milton, Matt Holland and Peter Over, met Simon Ronan, the chairman of Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride, and Sarah Milner, the Ipswich Area Organiser at Portman Road for a photo shoot in the ground and to show their support for this annual event.

The team then went to St Mary at Stoke church, Ipswich, to help promote Pedal and Drive, a sister event to Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride, for vintage and classic cars. They were joined by Jono Benson's Rolls Royce, and Rev. Kay Palmer.



The choir taking part in Ride and Stride



St Mary's church choir, Haughley.

A total of eleven Haughley cyclists took a circular route of about 20 miles, leaving Haughley at 10.00 and visiting churches at Harleston, Onehouse, Buxhall, Rattlesden, Felsham, Gedding, Drinkstone and Shelland. They were expected back at Haughley around 16.30.

Four of the eleven cyclists are Haughley choir members and will join with the choir at the four churches where the choir are singing. Cyclists and non-cyclists met up at Buxhall Church at 11.00 where the choir had its first "sing". The choir also sang for about 20 minutes at Rattlesden, Felsham and Gedding. They sang, mainly unaccompanied, a variety of hymns, anthems, Taize. This year they also sang to recorded accompaniment Faure's Cantique de Jean Racine and a couple of Gospel Songs.

They enjoyed a light pub lunch in Rattlesden to lubricate their voices in preparation for the afternoon singing.

How it started

It all started in 1998. We were younger then! Haughley choir has participated in what is now called the "Ride & Stride" almost every year since then. We even continued during the Covid years when we weren't allowed to enter churches. Instead we sang, suitably socially distanced, outside each church we stopped at.

Back in 1998 when we started, the majority of the choir were on bikes and the remainder travelled by car from church to church. With the advancing age of choir members we now have more travelling by car than cycling between churches. Over the 28 or so years we have sung in over 40 different churches within a 10 mile radius of Haughley.

We have sung in smaller, beautiful, remote churches such as St Mary the Virgin Langham (accessed across rural fields) and St Mary's Badley (half a mile or so off the main road). The acoustics at Badley were so good (no traffic noise just the sound of a few birds) that we revisited the church to make a recording of several Taize songs. And, of course, we have cycled to and sung at several of the impressive larger medieval churches such as St Andrew's Great Finborough and St Mary's Woolpit.

The Experience

For those cycling we have had wonderful days cycling across our beautiful Suffolk countryside, usually in fine September weather. Cycling in the knowledge that we are helping to raise funds for the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and our own local church. And, what a privilege it is for our choir to have the opportunity to sing in these beautiful churches.

David Fleetwood, longstanding Haughley choir member and local bike ride co-ordinator.

THIS YEAR? Well, it hailed.... but they did get presented with a certificate of thanks from our Chairman Geoffrey Probert!



RIDE AND STRIDE – 13TH SEPTEMBER 2025

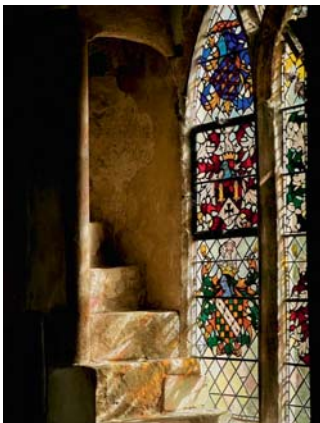
PHOTO COMPETITION

Thank you to everyone who sent us photos of their Ride and Stride Day. There is a Gallery of them on our website.

Congratulations to the winner of our Ride and Stride photo competition for a lovely set of three images. We asked for one of a church or church architectural detail, a favourite photo and a selfie of you celebrating when you complete your journey.

The winner was William Armitage who will receive a £50 book voucher.

"Here is my entry for the Ride and Stride photo competition. The first photo is of the rood stair at Whepstead, the second is of my friends looking at the monuments at Little Saxham, and the third is of all of us in the stalls at our final church of Rushbrooke to whom we donated 50%".



PEDAL AND DRIVE



The heavens opened for the rally and tea at Lavenham at the conclusion of Pedal and Drive but the Chairman was still able to award the various prizes to an enthusiastic if damp gathering, most of whom were huddled in the Sports Pavilion!

STEEPLE TO STEEPLE



2025 saw the launch of a new fun ride as part of the Ride & Stride event. 27 horses took part in a guided ride starting from The Lindsey Rose. The riders were seen on their way with a blessing from the Revd. Nicola Tindall, Rector of six of the seven churches visited by the riders. They rode to Lindsey, Semer, Whatfield, Naughton, Nedging, Bildeston and Chelsworth churches. Refreshments were served at St Mary's, Nedging and the riders then lined up in front of the church as above before continuing on their way to Bildeston.

GRANTS COMMITTEE NEWS

In April 2025 grants totalling £52,000 were made to the following nine churches:

St John, Beck Row
St Mary, Bedingfield
St Mary, Dalham
St Bartholomew, Finningham
St Andrew, Layham
St Mary, Lidgate
St Peter, Moulton
St Mary, Old Newton
All Saints, Sudbourne

In June grants totalling £55,750 were made to the following eleven churches :

All Saints, Ashbocking
St Mary, Bildeston
All Saints, Crowfield
St Mary, Debenham
All Saints, Eyke
St Peter, Henley
All Saints, Little Bealings
St Mary, Parham
St Mary, Stratford St Mary
All Saints, Stuston
St Margaret, Westhorpe

In October seventeen grant applications were received, equalling the record for any one quarter. Grants totalling £93,350 - a new record - were made to the following churches :

St Nicholas, Bedfield
St Mary, Bildeston
Holy Trinity, Blythburgh
St Peter, Brampton
St John, Butley
St Peter, Copdock
St Martin, Fornham St Martin
St Margaret, Herringfleet
All Saints, Holbrook
All Hallows, Ipswich
St Margaret of Antioch, Linstead
St Botolph, North Cove

All Saints, Rede
All Saints, Saxtead
St Peter, Spexhall
St Andrew, Tostock
St Peter, Wenhaston

John Devaux DL, Grants Committee Chairman

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Annual Friends Meeting 6th October 2025 at Haughley Barn

The usual business of the AGM began the meeting and as ever the evening finished with a very tasty supper with new caterers this year. In between we were very well entertained by the lovely Roy Tricker who spoke to us on “High Churches and High Churchmen in Suffolk.”

The 18th and into the 20th centuries saw two much needed movements breathing new life into a “sleeping church” (depicted literally by Hogarth’s 1728 cartoon “The Sleeping Congregation”): the Evangelical Revival and the Catholic Revival. Although Roy’s talk focused on the latter he gave architectural examples of both. The Catholic Revival, a.k.a. The Oxford Movement, can be traced to John Keble’s Assize Sermon in Oxford in 1833. It paved the way for Victorian Restoration after decades of neglect. It gave rise also to Anglo Catholicism, stemming from the belief that the Reformation, although justified in some ways, threw out the architectural and liturgical babies with the bathwater.

Suffolk churches well worth a visit which were “Catholicised” include: **Barsham** near Beccles with wonderful craftsmanship by FC Eden, including beautifully designed aumbry door, a notable Anglo Catholic hallmark. **Kettlebaston** - so catholicised in its devotional interior as to provoke a riot involving Bildeston Baptists, an ultra-Protestant clergyman from Hertfordshire and the local police! **Swiland**, with its sumptuous reredos and eccentric tower designed by JS Corder in 1887 was instigated by the Rev’d RH Faulconer, who then went on to Trimley St Mary to apply his magic. **Chevington**, of which we saw three contrasting pictures of this cradle of country Catholicism, the final one showing the chancel’s transformation in 1983, described by the then Rector as “Cistercian austerity”. **Mendelsham**. A present day bastion of Anglican papalism with its Blessed Sacrament altar of the 1980s containing saintly relics. **Eye** - with work by Sir Ninian Comper where Father Rea (1934-67) took part in Anglican/ RC unity discussions. **St John Felixstowe** by Sir Arthur Blomfield - 1890’s seaside high church and glorious **St Mary Elms Ipswich** combining the third oldest door in

England with a strongly Catholic and devotional feel including a beautiful contemporary statue of Our Lady. **Leiston**. Cruciform barn of a church by EB Lamb in 1853 for Evangelical worship then transformed for Anglo Catholic worship in 1874, then transformed again in 2005 for the modern liturgy in the round with its versatile space.

For context and contrast, photographs of notable Evangelical churches were shown: **St John's Chichester** with its communion table hidden behind the pulpit ; and on our doorstep, **St Andrew's Felixstowe**, the Rev H Barker Greene's reinforced concrete Church, built between 1929-31 (the first in England) - with the words behind the Holy Table: "He is not here: He is Risen".

Roy's brief also was to talk about High Churchmen (but what talk of Roy's would omit personalities anyway?!). The Oxford Movement notwithstanding, centuries of hostility towards Roman Catholicism did not suddenly evaporate. Considerable courage was needed by practitioners of high churchery. The 1871 Public Worship Regulation Act saw the imprisonment of some Anglo Catholic priests. Happily, the public outcry soon stopped such measures although poor Father Gay of St Matthews Ipswich's importing nuns from a Convent in East Grinstead was too much for the local Protestants, so the nuns had to go. Other heroes included the Rev Edward Phipps (1854-84) practitioner of quiet non-extreme country Catholicism; an unsung Saint of Suffolk, Father Waskett of Hundon (1929-81) renowned confessor and counsellor, whose fractured hip caused his retirement at 91; and Father Hargrave Thomas at Needham Market 1925-84, a dynamic and eccentric Christian socialist priest. At the 2024 AGM we were treated to the Reverend Professor John Morrill's talk on "Oliver Cromwell and iconoclasm in 17th century Suffolk." The good Professor, ordained into the Catholic priesthood at the RC cathedral Norwich last November, is acknowledged as probably the leading scholar in the world on Cromwell. Roy Tricker's talk was no less informed or scholarly and was infused with his characteristic zeal, affection and humour - noting at the end the following from a church in Norwich "Smoking is not allowed on this premises - except Incense."

Our heartfelt thanks to Roy - and to SHCT Friend Tony Hutt and our newfound IT supremo, who made sure everything worked.

Jamie Norman.

Trustee Sesi Turnbull reviews

The Building Stones of Suffolk and the people who worked them by Tony Redman published by The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History.

For those of us lucky enough to live in Suffolk, we know we have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to pre-Reformation churches. The Suffolk tally tops 500 and includes some particular jewels such as Holy Trinity Long Melford, St Edward King and Martyr, Southwold and Holy Trinity Blythburgh. But now a new book has landed which illuminates just how extraordinary Suffolk churches are, as most were built using a rich array of local materials from flint to compacted chalk and even ballast taken from the holds of ships where it helped stabilise the vessel. Their walls are formed from a patchwork of what was available and what the great movements of the earth beneath our feet had brought to the surface.

Step forward the Reverend Tony Redman who is deeply fascinated by the stones used to build Suffolk's places of worship. Tony, a chartered surveyor, explains that he was just curious about the buildings he encountered in the county. When he enquired about the many different stones he found tucked in among the flint in the parish churches of Suffolk, there was no satisfactory explanation, and he even spotted a Facebook post advising that it was all flint, so why bother? That was enough to start Tony on his journey of discovery to find out more about 'The Building Stones of Suffolk'.



Tony Redman shows us that a building can be read like a book, using the tools he gives the reader. He first of all establishes the different types of local stone that can be found in Suffolk itself, and here lies the reason why Suffolk churches have such a distinctive character. East Anglia did not have plentiful supplies of freestone - the fine grained stone which could be cut or chiselled in any direction to be used as the cornerstones of buildings. The book reveals that much of the freestone used to create the quoins or external cornerstones of many Suffolk churches came from a variety of sources including Caen in Normandy as well as Barnack stone from close to Stamford in Lincolnshire and Ancaster stone from the

same county. This stone could be shaped and carved to be used to create windows, but improvisation was often key in building the walls. Local masons used whatever came to hand, including cut or snapped flint, old red sandstone, granites, quartzite pebbles and spoil or repurposed material taken from older buildings nearby.

St James Dunwich is a perfect example of this. It has a leper chapel in its grounds, and the remains of the exterior of the east end of the chapel contrasts creamy Caen limestone and darker Septaria which was believed to have healing qualities.



The inner skin of the leper chapel apse, though, is completely different. Here, 17 different types of stone are easily identifiable, and the nearby church has even more types of stone in its walls, which were refaced at the behest of a local family in the late nineteenth century. The architect working on the renovations obviously revelled in the glorious diversity of his raw materials, which included stones apparently borrowed from the adjacent ruined leper chapel. Much of this borrowed stone is cut to reveal its beauty and to contrast with the other stones, and Tony points out that the architect's intention was clearly to delight.



St James, Dunwich

Other more significant objects find themselves used in Medieval churches. Iken church has a Saxon cross on display which was found in among the flints buried in a wall. And several Suffolk churches such as Stowmarket and Kettleburgh have door thresholds made from Purbeck stone mensas or altar slabs. Stone altars were forbidden in the mid sixteenth century during the English Reformation, as they were seen as symbolic of a sacrificial mass, and they were replaced with moveable wooden tables. But the fossils in the Purbeck stone were believed by the more superstitious to be souls trapped as they had not repented of their sins before death. By putting the slabs close to the entrance to the church, these served as a covert reminder urging parishioners to repent of their sins before it was too late. This is the kind of granular detail which Tony Redman provides us with in this detailed book, and he uncovers layers of folklore and geology to bring church buildings to life.

Of course, we have to thank the lack of plentiful freestone suitable for carving into cornerstones for a very special feature of Suffolk's architectural landscape. Round towers required no precise cornerstones to use as their foundations. Perfectly suited to being constructed from pebbles, small pieces of stone and cut flint, these distinctive and much-loved landmarks use a humble jumble of materials.



Harkstead church tower © Tony Redman

Tony Redman definitively and authoritatively shows us that the building stones of Suffolk are not all about flint, and that the reality is a great deal more rich and diverse than that. But still, the last word should go to that durable and resilient material, for walls made with an abundance of cut or knapped flint give a depth and beauty to so many Suffolk buildings. Tony points out that it was a 19th century palaeontologist, JS Bowerbank, who first suggested that flint may have been formed from the fossilised skeletons of sea sponges and microscopic organisms deep on the ocean floor, and that theory is generally accepted today.

Those glassy, fiercely hard surfaces - often worked into unusual shapes - give the flint its dark glamour and create the special buildings which we know and enjoy in Suffolk. It is this enduring beauty which Tony Redman's book so compellingly captures in this book, which elegantly combines the science, romance and folklore of the stones which create Suffolk's historic buildings.

Copies of the book are available from The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. £25 + £5 p&p. (£20 for SIAH members)

Sesi Turnbull

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A Coastal Cluster

There is an "other worldly" beauty to the coastal countryside between Orford and Felixstowe with its rolling fields and quiet sandy roads with very few houses, yet with a number of fine churches to visit. A morning will take in 3 of them followed by a pub lunch on a glorious stretch of the Deben Estuary.

St Mary the Virgin, Bawdsey sits proudly and fittingly alongside the main street in this hamlet, perhaps best known for boasting one of the few post-boxes in the UK with an Edward 8th cipher. The church was gutted after Guy Fawkes' Day 1841 when 2 bricklayers turned pyromaniacs inadvertently set fire to the tower. The latter was included in the rebuilding of much of the church and from the south-west corner of the churchyard, lives up to the neck straining best in the category.

Inside, the 13th century arcades survived and were built into the new outside wall. Much is evidently Victorian and Edwardian in appearance although there is an unusual 18th century font and on the south wall, a fine display of 13th century embroidery.

Its restoration is largely thanks to the generosity of the Quilter family, especially its late 19th century head Sir Cuthbert, MP for Ipswich and a keen brewer. His magnificent tomb to the west of the church reflects his well-known sense of position in society. It is consistent too, as he saw it, with the affront to the established order by the Rev Gregory marrying two housemaids in succession after the death of his first wife. In retribution, Quilter attempted to deny access to the ferry by building a new road, which Gregory ignored by taking his horse and carriage up the drive and picnicking in front of the Manor- surely as good as any episode of Trollope ?

There is a memorial to Edith Cavell's uncle Edward on the north wall and with a nod to Bawdsey's history, some RAF flags and memorabilia.

All Saints Hollesley

All Saints sits in the middle of the village, on the southern tip of the Sandlings Peninsula. There's been a church on this site since before the Conquest but it was the Norman Barons, notably the Bigods of Framingham Castle and, more recently, cheese fame, who put it on the map.

An original 13th century aisle or arcade was discovered when a new north aisle was added to complement the major restoration of 1886.

There is much to delight. The south door is from about 1300. The windows are mostly Perpendicular bar one Y tracery by the South and a couple of Lancets to the West. The font bowl panels contain Tudor Roses and are supported by buttresses round the shaft. The 17th century leaves behind a fine Jacobean pulpit and on the North wall a Charles 2nd coat of arms. The Communion rails are 18th century. The eight bells, the last cast in 1938, would be a treat at any Service. From the 1980's, a striking Nativity scene is depicted in the east aisle window - bursting with flowers and bright colours and most unusually, a mouse at the feet of the Virgin Mary.

All Saints' piece de resistance, however, must be its Benches - not quite up to Dennington itself but in the same league, with seven 15th century originals in the aisle complemented by some outstanding modern recreations - including by Henry Munro Cautley the great Diocesan architect from 1911 to the 1950's.

All Saints Ramsholt.

Perhaps there should be a law holding that a church's beauty and tranquillity are in inverse proportion to its accessibility. One such is surely All Saints Ramsholt, one of only 38 round towered churches in Suffolk, at the end of a long quiet lane turning into a track. In our case, that wasn't the end of the story as we had to navigate around the carrot harvest and several large tractors and trailers - better than the Archers - only adding to our sense of bucolic isolation. But it's the estuarial setting that hits you with the Deben less than half a mile to the south - so beautiful that a would-be benefactor made being buried vertically a condition of his bequest.

Amidst the wildflowers in the church yard admire the Priest's door to the right of the 19th century brick porch and, once inside, via a Norman doorway, enter the almost oval tower. Nearby a 13th century stone coffin and a 15th century font.

By the 1840s, All Saints had fallen into such disrepair that the walls were as green inside as the grass outside, and an owl had taken up residence.

Enter you might think the Gothic revival. Not a bit of it! Instead, in 1851, tan coloured box pews and a triple-decker pulpit redolent of Georgian times. We don't know why or who did it. But in the same way that Suffolk lacks a motorway isn't it marvellous sometimes to be a backwater of England and behind the times?!

Sensitive and thorough restoration in 1913 was carried out by Lady Mary Anne Quilter, widow of our friend Sir Cuthbert.

To this day, no electricity but that simply adds to the wondrous simplicity of this Holy place.

Jonathan Miller once observed that the English public would walk through slime in order to see an Earl watching Coronation Street. Much less effort is needed to see this gem - 0.6 miles along a mildly bumpy track- but it is absolutely worth it for all who love our churches.

5 minutes in a car and 25 minutes walk will take you to the Ramsholt Arms with its southerly views of the Deben. In our experience excellent food, good choice of beers, decent wine list, friendly service and reasonably priced.

Who needs Stansted Airport with this on our doorstep?!

Jamie Norman.