



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

SOUTH ELMHAM
SUFFOLK



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.50





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ALL SAINTS' CHURCH
SOUTH ELMHAM, SUFFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

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ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

SOUTH ELMHAM, SUFFOLK

by ROY TRICKER

This unspoilt corner of rural north Suffolk, known locally as 'The Saints' comprises six South Elmham parishes (villages where the elms grew), each named after the patron saint of its parish church. Eastwards of these parishes are the four Ilketshalls, with four more 'Saints'. What were once seven South Elmham parishes, together with nearby Homersfield and Flixton, made up an ancient deanery and township which was given in the late 7th century to the Bishops of Dunwich. They evangelised much of this part of Suffolk and subsequent Bishops of East Anglia held all the South Elmham deanery manors. The remains of the Saxon minster church, which provided a nucleus of worship, study and missionary activity in the area, may still be seen in the adjoining parish of South Elmham St Cross. It is thought that the Bishops of East Anglia transferred their centre of activity to North Elmham, in Norfolk about 750, thence to Thetford in 1075 and finally to Norwich in 1094.

The parish of South Elmham All Saints was united with its neighbour, St Nicholas, in 1557 and the combined parish of South Elmham All Saints-cum-St Nicholas was formed in 1737. St Nicholas' church had been abandoned about 1620. It stood about half a mile westwards of All Saints' church, near the road to St Cross. It seems that a small portion of one of its walls was visible in the 18th century, although John Kirby wrote in the 1730s that it was 'so entirely demolished that hardly any rubbish of it remains'.

Some experts believe that the stonework of 14th and 15th century windows and Norman doorways which now adorn the grounds of the former All Saints' Rectory (these are on private property and are not open to the public) and maybe also the 15th century windows, porch, etc, incorporated into St Peter's Hall, could possibly have come from St Nicholas' church. If so, it must have been a building of considerable beauty and interest.

All Saints-cum-St Nicholas parish comprised about 1,694 acres and had a small scattered population (239 in 1831 and 195 in 1931). The secluded position of All Saints' church, in an area containing so many small villages with small churches, was the main reason for the building's retirement as a parish church and its vesting in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust in 1978. Its former parish is now part of the vast South Elmham and Ilketshall benefice, where eleven parish churches serve a total population of about 1,600.

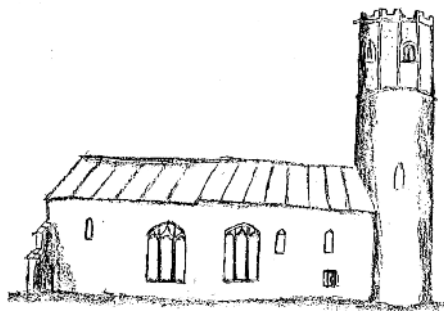
Repairs were carried out in 1980 under the supervision of Mr Michael Gooch RIBA, including the repointing of the tower, relaying of the chancel, nave and porch roofs and the recovering of the south aisle roof with stainless steel. Further structural repairs were executed in 1995 under the supervision of Mr Shawn Kholucy.

EXTERIOR

All Saints' church stands in a secluded setting, beside a 17th moated farmhouse, at the end of a cul-de-sac, about one-third of a mile from the road which runs from Halesworth to Flixton. Here, in a very beautiful English country churchyard, a variety of plants and grasses flourish which are now rare in East Anglia. This churchyard is maintained by volunteers under the auspices of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust as a wildlife sanctuary. It also contains some well-carved 18th and 19th century headstones.

The walls of the church are built of flint-rubble, gathered from the fields. The layered masonry in the lower parts of the **north wall** shows that the

core of the nave and chancel are over 900 years old. Set into the base of the north-west corner of the nave is a rounded Norman shaft and capital, maybe reused from elsewhere in the church. Most of the unusual array of windows on the north side were renewed when the building underwent a major restoration in 1870. The three small late 13th century upper windows



All Saints from the north, as drawn by DE Davy in 1814



Isaac Johnson's picture of All Saints from the south c.1818

are reproductions of the originals, whilst the two small Norman style windows do not appear in Davy's sketch of 1814, which reveals that the present large two-light windows in the style of the early 14th century replaced a pair of three-light 15th century Perpendicular windows.

The **south aisle**, which stretches the entire length of the church, was added about 1300 and is lit by double windows, with 'Y'-tracery. Most of their stonework was renewed in 1870, when a three-light, square-headed window east of the porch was replaced by the present one to match the others. The triple-light east window of the chancel is also of c.1300; above it is a cinquefoil-headed recess. Above the lean-to roof of the aisle is a narrow clerestory, with five single windows which were reopened in 1870, having been blocked up for many years.

The **south porch** was added during the 15th century. Although greatly restored, it has attractive flint and stone chequerwork on its south face. Its entrance arch is framed by a drip-stone, resting upon beautifully carved male and female corbel heads. In the stonework to the left of the western corbel head is a Mass dial, which was used before the days of clocks to indicate the time to begin a service. Another may be seen about three feet (0.9 metres) from the ground, to the east of the entrance. The porch shelters the south doorway of 1870 – a replica of the original Norman doorway which it replaced.

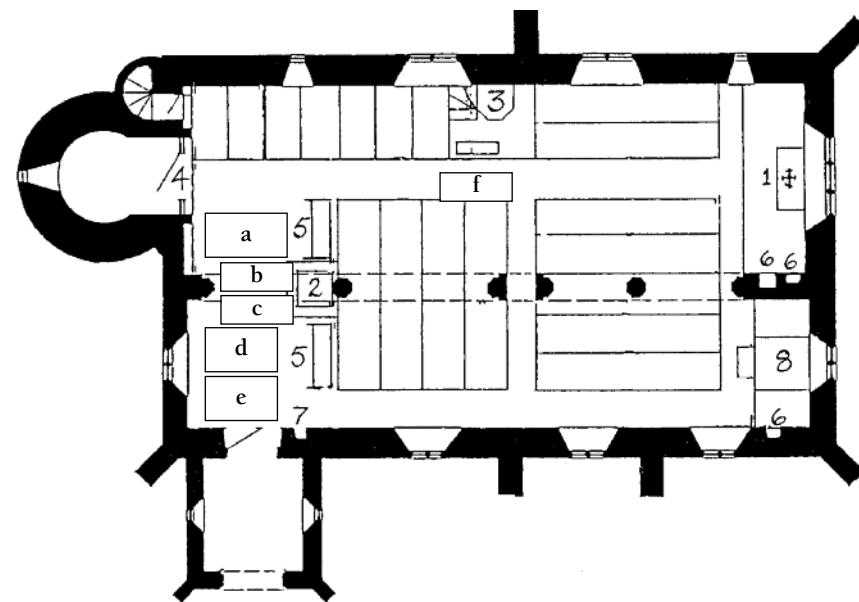
The circular western **tower**, now 39½ feet (12 metres) in height, has a long history. Its lower 24½ feet (7.5 metres) up to the string-course has

evidence to suggest that it could well be Saxon, although the Normans appear to have added the ancient window openings which remain, namely the single west window and three single windows lighting the chamber above, which are interspersed by smaller windows (as may also be seen in the tower at Holton St Peter). Drawings by David Elisha Davy (1814) and Isaac Johnson (published 1818) show the round tower rising almost to its present height and then crowned by an octagonal belfry stage and an embattled parapet. Probably in 1830s the octagonal part was removed and the circular part received a tall, unembattled parapet. What had become the upper stage, above the level of the nave roof, had belfry openings which were blocked with red brick.

By 1912 the tower had become very dilapidated. Its upper stage was out of perpendicular and was encircled by an iron band in order to keep it from bulging. A faculty was granted in 1912 for its restoration, which was paid for by the rector, the Revd Horatio Millett, as a memorial to his sister Juliet who had died recently. The rubble facing was removed from the top 14 feet (4.3 metres) and was replaced. The walls were raised and a new embattled parapet formed; also four new belfry windows and two new string courses were made. A staircase turret was built and a new doorway cut for it in the west wall of the nave. The architect for this work was A Michael Durrant of Rye, Sussex. Although not well known as a church architect, his work may be seen in the partial rebuilding of Holy Trinity Church, Broadstairs to his designs in 1915.

INTERIOR

Interesting 19th century craftsmanship blends with work of much earlier periods in this bright and distinctive interior. It is noteworthy that not only are the chancel walls the same height as those of the nave, but also that the chancel 21½ feet (6.5 metres) in length is only 4½ feet (1.4 metres) shorter than the nave (26 feet, 7.9 metres). Each is divided from the south aisle by two-bay **arcades**, of c.1300, resting upon octagonal piers with moulded capitals. A smaller arch of 1870 pierces the section of wall between the two arcades. In 1814 there was a doorway here which gave access to the former rood-loft staircase. The eastern respond of the nave arcade appears to have been cut away, maybe for a former niche since destroyed.



Plan of All Saints' Church

- 1 ALTAR
- 2 FONT
- 3 PULPIT
- 4 17TH CENTURY PANELLING UNDER TOWER ARCH
- 5 BENCHES WITH CARVED CREATURES
- 6 PISCINA
- 7 HOLY WATER STOUP
- 8 ORGAN

Memorial slabs in the floors

- a Burial slab of John and Jane Throckmorton
- b Burial slab with indent of brass inscription
- c Burial slab with indent of brass inscription
- d Worn ledger slab, possibly of Hannah Dinsdale
- e Ledger slab of Robert and Margaret Harvey
- f Ledger slab of Robert and Margaret Davy

The 11th century **tower arch** is filled with an elaborately carved 17th century **door and panelling**. Its origin is uncertain but it was probably the carved panelling which D E Davy noted in 1830 as having been placed against the east wall since his previous visit in 1814. Immediately above is a semicircular headed **upper doorway** – renewed with stone on the nave side in 1870, but original when seen from inside the tower. This provided access by ladder to the upper stages of the tower before the staircase was built in 1912, enabling the tower to provide refuge and safe storage in former times, with the ladder taken away. South of the tower arch is an **arched recess**, now forming a seat. Its counterpart contains the doorway to the tower staircase, with the adjacent bench duly adapted in rather a novel way to provide access to it.

Davy in 1814 found three bells in the tower, but when he returned in 1830, two of these, including the tenor, had been placed on the belfry floor; these were later sold to Southwold church. The **bell** which now remains is inscribed 'A.D. 1603' and was probably cast at the Brend bell-foundry in Norwich.

The lean in the **south aisle wall** may well add to the charm of the interior, but also indicates the presence of long-term structural problems caused by movement in the east wall and elsewhere in this aisle. Before 1870 there were no buttresses to strengthen the south wall and the **south aisle roof** was completely renewed in that year. Beside the entrance is a niche for a **holy water stoup**.

The arch-braced **nave and chancel roofs** retain older timberwork. The nave roof is very plain and may date from the 16th or 17th centuries, whilst the chancel roof, although much renewed, incorporates some of its 15th century timbers. The **floors** are paved with an interesting mixture of gault bricks, square pammments and glazed 19th century tiles.

The massive **font bowl** (33 inches (0.8 metres) square) probably dates from c.1200 and stands upon a large circular shaft, with four smaller shafts at the corners. Three sides of the bowl have simple concave scalloped patterns, but the side which is not immediately visible has crude zigzag lines. There is a font of similar date at South Elmham St James.

On either side of the font are low **benches**, which have been made up from mediaeval benches. The keen eye will detect that two of their four 15th century ends were designed to be placed against a wall. The four



17th century panelling now forming the tower screen

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)



Stone reredos – 1870

(RCHME)

creatures which form their armrests are delightful, especially the dog with large floppy ears and the strange, long-necked creature opposite him.

The **seating** in the church took its present form in 1870 and much of the woodwork in the church is of that date. In 1814, Davy found the church to be 'ordinarily pewed and fitted', presumably with 18th century box-pews. Some of the woodwork from these has been incorporated into the backs of the nave and south aisle benches. A careful look at the bench-ends, with their simple buttresses and carved poppyheads, will reveal that the upper parts of five on the south side of the nave gangway and five more in the south aisle are work of the 15th century. It is clear where the old work has been skilfully joined, where the buttressed sides have been carefully renewed in places, and where the holes for tapers in the tops of the poppy-heads have been filled in. The other bench-ends were modelled upon these survivors in 1870, when the church was furnished for a population of 270 villagers. The choir stalls would seat a very large choir, but it was often the case that the village children sat here before the days of



South aisle showing the font and organ

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

surpliced choirs in country churches, which were then thought of as very 'high church' innovations.

The **sanctuary furnishings** indicate that All Saints was a rather 'low church', with a very small sanctuary area, a tiny altar table and a simple stone reredos, with the 'IHC' and 'XPC' monograms for Our Lord and a central patterned circle with a cross and the text 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. The mediaeval sanctuary would have extended westwards to the central pier of the chancel arcade. In the south wall are two mediaeval **piscinas**, into which was poured water used at the Eucharist. At its proper height is a 14th century piscina beneath a trefoil-headed niche, with a small renewed recess immediately to the west. Further east and lower down is a large recess with an earlier piscina drain.

A **piscina in the south aisle**, beneath a cinquefoil-headed 14th century niche, shows that there was once an altar here. Its drain is unusual, having four holes for the disposal of water. A distinctive little organ, with a single manual and pedals, was made to fit the east end of this aisle by Eustace Ingram in 1884.

The **pulpit** was made in 1870s, although Davy noted that its predecessor was also square. A brass plaque inside it states that its carved panel with the 'IHS' monogram, set in flowers and leaves, was made and presented on 9 November 1878 by Lucy H Bloxam, who also contributed many designs 'for the decorative portions of this church'.

Three windows in the south aisle contain interesting **stained glass**. Its east window displays two shields, with the arms of John Throckmorton, who died in 1507 and his wife Jane (daughter of Henry Baynard of Spexhall). They lived at a house called the Grange and their arms were at one time displayed in brass on their burial slab.

The window east of the entrance is fitted with jumbled fragments of 15th century glass, including part of the angel with a harp, a hand holding an orb, fragments of figures, inscriptions, etc. Eastwards of this is the memorial window, by Jones & Willis, of George Frederick Durrant, (churchwarden) who died in 1890. It shows the Baptism of Jesus, and Jesus with the children.

The small north-west window in the nave contains two roundels of 16th or 17th century Flemish glass showing female saints – one carrying flow-

ers, with a child beside her (said to be St Dorothy) and the other carrying an arrow and a boat (said to be St Ursula). Amongst the mediaeval fragments also in this window is a delightful little bird.

MEMORIALS

At the west end of the church are three **burial-slabs**, with indents of former brasses. The largest had brass effigies of a husband and wife, an inscription and four shields at the corners. This may well be the burial-slab of John Throckmorton (1507) and Jane his wife. The two smaller slabs have indents for brass inscriptions.

The following **ledger-slabs** may be seen in the floors:

- Near the entrance. Robert Harvey, formerly of Ditchingham (1756) and Margaret his wife (1765).
- Beside it is a ledger-slab which is so worn that most of its inscription is now lost. Perhaps this was the slab seen by Davy in the porch floor, commemorating Hannah Dinsdale (widow of the Vicar of Kinoulton, Northants), d.1746.
- On the nave floor, towards the east, a black slab commemorates Robert Davy of Ditchingham (d.1678), his wife Margaret (née Prime of Halesworth) (d.1709) and five of their children who died at a comparatively young age. This slab was originally set as a plaque on the wall and above it was a shield, with their coat of arms, also the **stone crest**, with a helmet and elephant's head, which may now be seen above the doorway to the tower staircase.

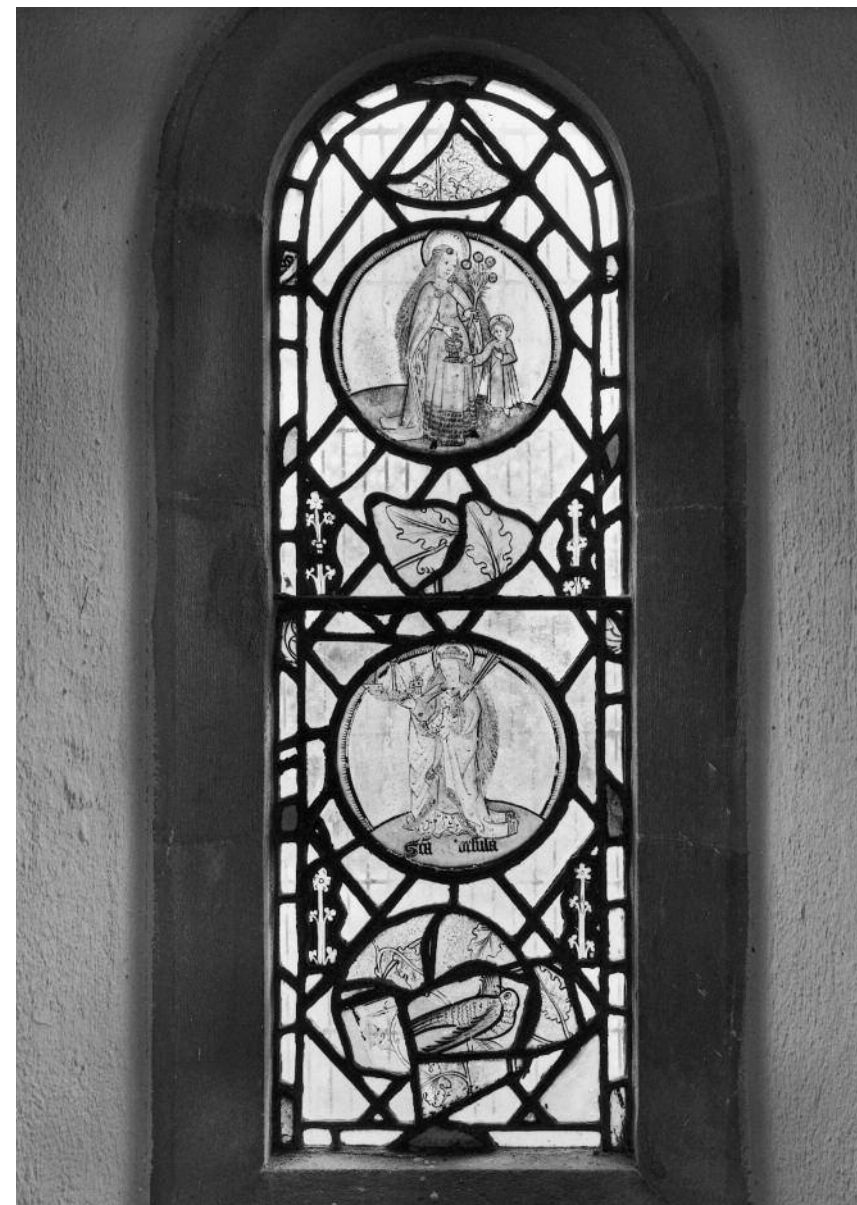
Two brass plaques on the walls commemorate two 19th century rectors who left their mark upon this building.

- One near the tower arch records the restoration of the tower in 1912, in memory of Juliet Anne Millett, by her brother Horatio, who was rector here from 1882–1917. They are buried together near the north-east entrance to the churchyard. Having been a naval chaplain from 1871–80, then curate of Holton and curate in charge of Winfarthing, Norfolk, he spent most of his ministry here in this parish. He died in Sussex.
- A brass plaque on the north chancel wall commemorates his predecessor, the Revd Samuel Blois Turner, rector here from 1861–82. He had

previously been vicar of Linstead Parva (from 1832) and Linstead Magna (from 1838). As the inscription records, it was he who promoted the restoration of the church in 1870 and who provided most of the money to pay for it. He also had a new rectory (now the Old Rectory) built in 1862 at a cost of £1,600. This was designed by Ewan Christian, an architect of national repute, who was also responsible for the building and restoration of many English churches. Although no records have yet been discovered which could confirm this, it is just possible that he supervised the restoration of the church in 1870.

Front cover: Church and churchyard from the south east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)
Back cover: Interior looking westwards (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

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North-west nave window

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)