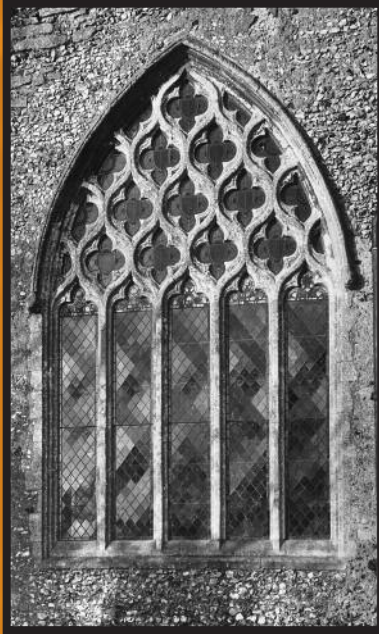




THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

Icklingham, Suffolk



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CONSERVATION TRUST

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Icklingham, Suffolk

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

by Roy Tricker (Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust 1991–2002, church enthusiast, historian and lay canon)

HISTORY

The village of Icklingham is situated along the A1101 road from Bury St Edmunds to Mildenhall, near the river Lark and the south-western border of its large parish of about 6,750 acres (2730 hectares). Much of the parish is reclaimed Breckland, stretching some 4 miles (6.4 km) northwards from its southern tip near Lackford to the war memorial beside the A11, which was built in 1921 by the Earl of Iveagh and marks where the three Elveden Estate parishes of Elveden, Eriswell and Icklingham meet.

Icklingham appears to have been a very early settlement. The ancient Icknield Way borders the parish on its western side and it is possible that the name of the village may have links with the Iceni tribe. This is shown in the village sign outside the flint churchyard wall, depicting the towers of Icklingham's two churches, with Roman soldiers and Boudica in her chariot. A wealth of Roman remains have been unearthed here, including coins of 3rd-century date, part of a Roman settlement and two lead cisterns inscribed with early Christian symbols, believed by some to have been baptismal fonts, although others dispute this. It is thought that the Roman settlement here lasted until the 5th century, whilst in the adjoining parish of West Stow is an Anglo-Saxon settlement dating possibly from the 4th century. The lane which passes the eastern end of All Saints' churchyard leads directly to an ancient track known as 'Pilgrim's Path'.

Front cover: A saint in 14th-century stained glass (Christopher Dalton)

Left: The 17th-century pulpit and 15th-century screen base and benches (Christopher Dalton)



What is now Icklingham parish was once two separate parishes and both ancient churches remain, about half a mile (0.8 km) apart. The boundary which divided the two parishes is still marked on the front of Flint House, along the main road. Both churches have shared the same parish priest since 1786, although it was not until July 1972 that the parishes were officially united and All Saints' church retired from regular parochial use. It had been used less and less over the past 100 or so years, although in 1851 both churches held one service every Sunday, alternating between morning and afternoon.

All Saints' was vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust in November 1973, since when various repairs and conservation work have been carried out under the supervision of Henry Freeland, of Tony Redman (the Whitworth Co-Partnership) and latterly of Shawn Kholucy. St James' church, in the centre of the village, is now the parish church and is part of the Mildenhall Team of parishes.

All Saints' church is one of the unspoilt delights amongst Suffolk's 500 mediaeval churches and is like a time capsule, forming a treasure-house of ancient and beautiful craftsmanship in stone,



wood, glass, thatching and ceramics. For many years it was like the poor relation of St James' church, which was in the centre of the community and therefore had greater use and attention. Unlike St James' it has been left largely untouched by 19th-century restoration, although in 1895 the church was cleaned, repaired and partly re-thatched, and in 1903 the Earl of Iveagh paid for further renovation, when the nave and aisle roofs were renewed and re-thatched.

The church stands in an elevated position on the highest ground in the village, at its eastern end,

the bold tower being visible for some distance. An account of 1778 describes its setting, even in those times, as being 'extremely bleak'. The church must then have looked very much as it does now, on its lonely knoll but without any of the houses built during the last 200 years. Parts of the flint wall surrounding the churchyard have been found to be of considerable age, and possibly mediaeval.



EXTERIOR

Looking at the exterior and its architecture gives some indication of how this building grew and developed over the centuries. A glance at the north wall of the **nave** shows that its masonry (and maybe also part of the chancel) is that of an 11th-century church. Some of the original masonry remains, with the flints and stones set in roughly horizontal layers, and there are two small blocked and very simply-fashioned early-Norman windows.



A major reshaping and enlargement of the small Norman church took place between c. 1270 and c. 1350, when the tower and south aisle were built and larger windows were inserted into the nave and chancel. The profusion of fine windows of this period and the variety of their tracery are rare survivals in a Suffolk church.

The sturdy **tower** stands at the west end of the south aisle and, judging by its windows, was completed before the aisle. Traces of the putlog holes for the wooden scaffold poles used by its builders may be seen in the walls. The large double 'Y'-tracery belfry windows suggest a completion date around 1300. The stage below is lit by a circular quatrefoil (four-lobed) window and the bottom stage has a single trefoil-headed window, flanked by the remains of large corbel heads – the northern one is a splendid figure with a bent arm. The hood mould framing the arch of the west doorway also rests upon worn corbel heads. Beneath the plain parapet is a band of small stone quatrefoils, and superb gargoyles which throw the rainwater clear of the walls.

The rich variety of tracery in the **windows** shows the evolution of Decorated architecture from c. 1280–1340. Simplest of all are the single, trefoil-headed low-side windows, westwards in the chancel. Two triple windows, beside the porch and in the nave north east, have simple intersecting tracery of c. 1280–1300. Later the arches of the window-lights and tracery were

embellished with cusping, forming lobes, as in the south-east aisle window. More intricate tracery then developed, as in the north and south chancel windows, with their elegant curvilinear tracery and the fine three-light east window. The largest window is the five-light east window of the aisle, which has net-like reticulated tracery of c. 1330, a design also used in the double north nave window. The west window of the nave was added some 150 years later, in the Perpendicular style.

The three **doorways** are also of the first half of the 14th century. The priest's doorway is in the north chancel wall. The north nave doorway has



a continuously-moulded arch and its southern counterpart, with its deeply-moulded arch, has large worn corbel-heads, of which the west has an example of fine headgear. Parts of this door are ancient and may well be original.

Another feature of this period is the distinctive **ball-flower** ornament, which can be seen in the decorative stone course along the top of the south aisle wall, beneath the eaves.

The south **porch** was added during the Perpendicular period of the 15th century, as is seen in its lateral windows and outer entrance arch which is flanked by corbel heads. The eastern head is crowned and has a forked beard; the western has a decayed face but the collar remains.

A remarkable feature of All Saints' is that, with the exception of the tower, the roofs are entirely of **thatch**. Before the 19th century many East Anglian churches and cottages had thatched roofs, made from reeds which grew in quantities on the Broads, river banks and Fens. The nave, aisle and chancel roofs were re-thatched with Norfolk reed in 1999.

Exterior from the east, showing the splendid tracery in the east windows

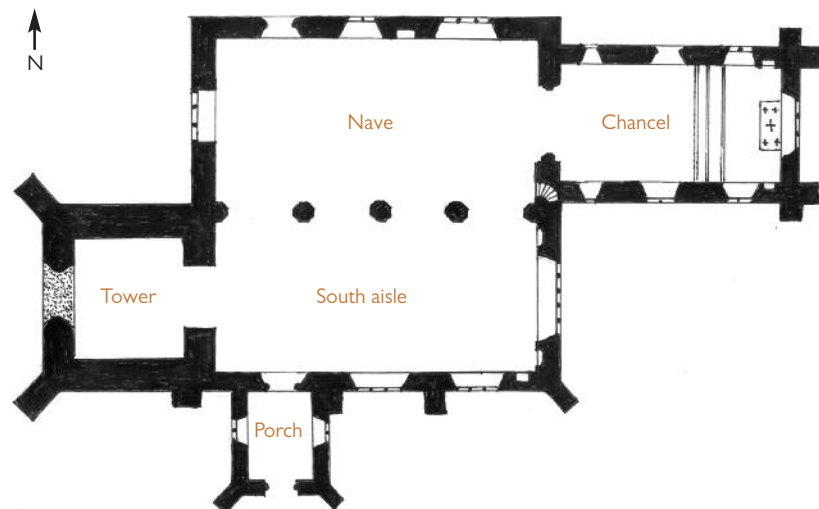
INTERIOR

The unforgettable interior of All Saints' is steeped in atmosphere. Here beautiful architecture and exquisite craftsmanship are bathed in light from the clear glass in the windows. Because what is old has been left rather than replaced, albeit a little the worse for wear, there is a great feeling of rustic antiquity and of uncluttered spaciousness.

A 14th-century **arcade**, with slender octagonal piers, divides the aisle from the nave. Its arches are framed by hood moulds each side. The timberwork of the **roofs** was restored in 1895 and 1903. The panelled wagon roof in the chancel is probably of the former date, but its plain 14th-century cornices have been retained

at the tops of the walls and the panelling hides an original roof of 14th-century timbers. The nave and aisle roofs have scissor-bracing, through which the thatch is visible.

At the west end of the nave once stood a small musicians' gallery, and a brick floor beneath it was believed to have been broken by the horses of Puritan soldiers who used the church as a stable. The gallery has long gone and the floor has been replaced. The former was still standing in 1829 when D E Davy visited the church and noted that 'under the gallery stands an engine'. This was probably the parish manual fire engine, similar to the one still preserved at Worlingworth church



near Framlingham in Suffolk. Now at the west end is a complete 13th-century stone **coffin** with a handsome foliated cross on its lid. This was probably the last resting place of a priest, or somebody very important. Beneath the west window is a crude, possibly 16th-century **parish chest**, with evidence of its former three locks, for which the rector and churchwardens each had keys, so that all needed to be present to open it.

All Saints' magnificent early-14th-century **chest**, surrounded by exquisite iron scrollwork and believed to be one of the finest of its kind in existence, may now be seen in St James' church. Also at St James' is a humbler treasure from All Saints' – some reed **tussocks** (used as stools or kneelers) which are believed to have been the thick roots of reeds which were dug out, like turf, from Icklingham Fen.



In the floor nearby is a **ledger slab** commemorating Susanna, widow of Gamaliel Ransome, formerly of Bracondale, Norwich, who died in 1828.

The 14th-century **font** has an octagonal bowl resting upon five columns. Each traceried panel of the bowl has a design in Decorated architecture which is different from the rest and this font is like a small textbook of early-14th-century window design.

Beneath the tower is a 19th-century **bier**, which transported the coffin at funerals. The tower contains three **bells** in a 19th-century oak frame. Two of these have Latin inscriptions and were cast in Norwich in the 15th century. The third was cast by John Draper of Thetford in 1608. The simple **tower arch** pierces a wall which is almost four feet (1.2 metres) thick.

The south aisle contains much high-quality craftsmanship in stone. Along the top of its

north and south walls are carved stone **cornices**, beautifully decorated with quatrefoils, ball-flowers, foliage designs and animals. In the south wall, near the east end, is a cinquefoil-headed **piscina** recess. Into its quatrefoil drain was poured the disposable water used when the Eucharist was celebrated at the former altar nearby.

The splendid **east window** of the aisle has an internal hood mould studded with flowers and foliage. It is flanked by two sumptuous **niches**, built to contain statues of the saints who were honoured at the altar here. Although now but fragments of their former glory, what remains is of great beauty. They still bear traces of their mediaeval colouring, are flanked with pinnacles and are quite different from each other in design. The southern niche has a crocketed triangular top above its cinquefoil ogee-shaped arch. The canopy inside is vaulted and has a central boss. It appears that there were two creatures at the base and the sides are covered with floral designs. Its northern counterpart has two-light traceried panels at the sides, which terminate in crocketed gables. The central canopy, which was also vaulted, is now lost.

The 17th-century **pulpit**, with characteristic carving of the period, was once part of a three-decker arrangement. What was almost certainly its **reading desk**, looking like a large box pew, is now in the south aisle, near the entrance. The pulpit base has been renovated, but the

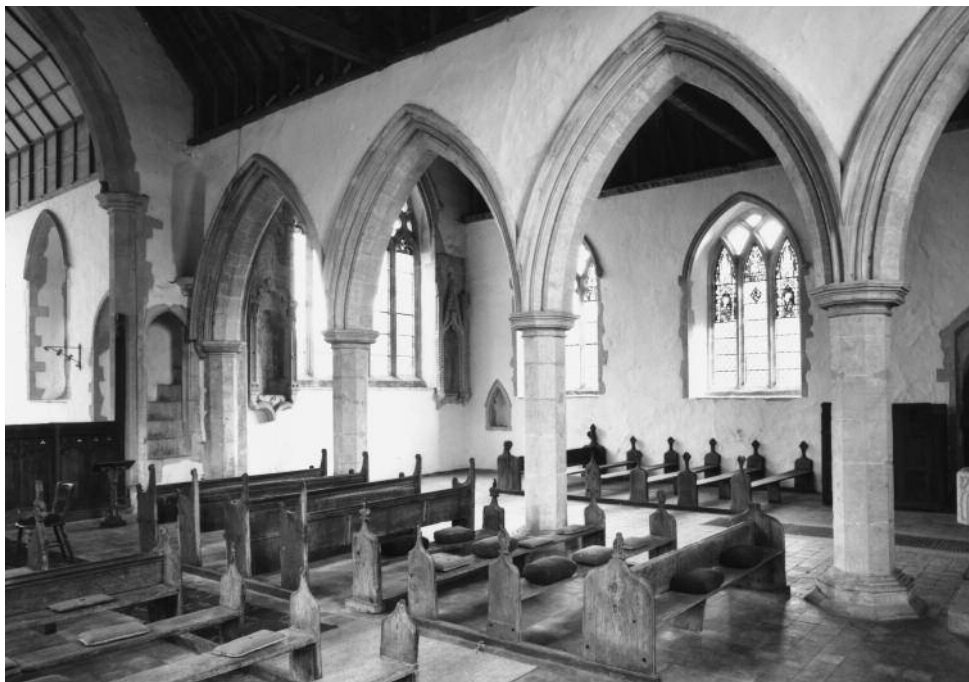
balustrade is original. The window sill beside the pulpit has been lowered to form a **window seat**. West of it is an **aumbry** (or cupboard), which preserves its mediaeval wooden frame and door.

Most of the **benches** in the nave and aisle are 15th century and show signs of wear caused by over 500 years of use. They are backless, their ends having mostly small terminations, although a few have larger poppyhead ends and one has flat-topped ends. Indeed they are such a mixture of sizes and styles that one could be forgiven for thinking that some might have been imported from other churches. Four benches on the south side of the nave have 17th-century ends.

The south door is secured by a great wooden **bar**, which effectively removes the need for locks. The pillar **almsbox** nearby probably dates from the 17th century.

Beneath the chancel arch stands the dado (or base) of the 15th-century **rood screen**. Its original traceried panels have now lost all traces of their former paintings, but exquisite little carvings survive in the traceried panels near the top, including two birds, one of which is a pelican, pecking at her breast to feed her young with her own blood – a symbol of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The gate is a 17th-century addition but beneath it the original base still continues unbroken across the entrance – an unusual feature; it is 10½ inches (27 cm) deep. Above this dado, openwork traceried panels





Left: Interior looking south-east to the roof-loft stairs, south aisle niches and the array of benches (Christopher Dalton)

Below: Saint with palm in 14th-century stained glass

would have risen to the rood loft, along which it was possible to walk. Access to this was gained by means of the **rood-loft staircase**, which still remains to the south of the chancel arch, its upper entrance opening onto the loft. The **sockets** in the stonework of the arch above the capitals show where the rood beam fitted, upon which were fixed the great Rood (Christ crucified and flanked by his mother and St John). Maybe the notches nearer to the summit of the arch had something to do with the fixing of the rood, or possibly with a painted tympanum fitting into the top of the arch.

Set in the chancel floor are three old **burial slabs** with indents showing where brasses once fitted. All three had inscriptions, and one also had a shield and another a figure. A further slab with the indent for a brass inscription may be seen to the south of the altar. In the south sanctuary wall is a trefoil-headed **piscina** recess and the nearby window sill has been lowered to form **sedilia**, where the Celebrant, Deacon and Subdeacon could sit during parts of the mediaeval High Mass.

The **communion rails** are probably of 17th-century date. Archbishop Laud in 1634 ordered that altar tables should be railed in so that dogs could not 'defile' the sanctuary. Woodwork of a similar date now forms a **reredos** behind the altar and can also be seen in the panelling in front of the altar table. Maybe this was reused from the old box pews which D E Davy noted as being here in 1829. In the north wall of the sanctuary are two **aumbries**, possibly once used for the storage of Communion plate and other valuables.

The small single trefoil-headed windows each side towards the west end of the chancel were **low-side windows**, through which a bell was sounded at the climax of the daily Mass, so that on hearing it those unable to be present could pause and join in prayer.

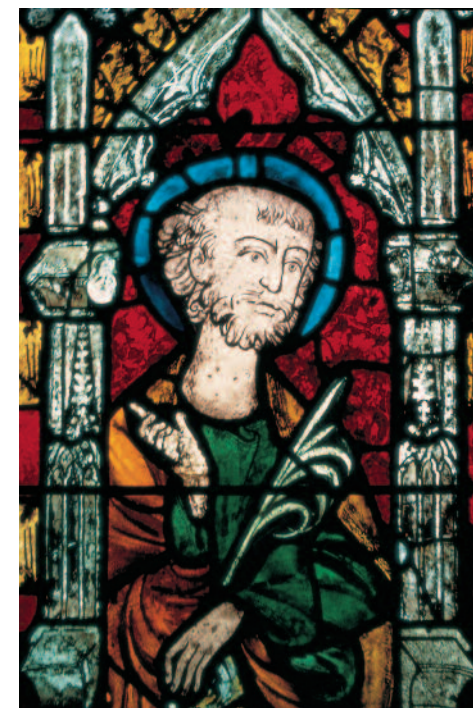
Areas of the chancel and sanctuary floors contain a large and very rare collection of early-14th-century **encaustic tiles**, forming patterns with a variety of linear designs, including cinquefoils in circles, foliage, lions' faces, pairs of little birds and a few human faces. Similar tiles may be seen in the floor of Prior Crauden's Chapel in Ely

Cathedral. Many are now very worn and visitors are asked not to tread on them.

In the windows of the church are remains of their original 14th-century **stained glass**, most of which was destroyed by the Puritans in 1643–44 in their zeal to rid churches of what they called 'superstitious pictures and inscriptions'. Fine canopies (once set over figures of saints) survive in several windows, showing beautiful architectural designs. Some of the borders have tiny birds, looking like spread eagles.

In the window east of the porch two saints remain, but with later faces; one carries a palm and the other a staff. In the south-east chancel window is a saint with a spear (possibly St Thomas) and a shield with the arms of England. There are tiny birds in the borders and an angel with a censer in the tracery. The south-west window shows a saint with a belt or purse and the figure of St James the Great, with his scallop shells and pilgrim's staff; there are also birds in the borders and two censuring angels above. The lovely foliage in the tops of the five lights of the south aisle east window suggest that this might have been a 'Jesse Tree' window, which showed the family tree of Jesus back to Jesse, all seen in the branches of a tree. Some of the inscriptions have been placed here from elsewhere in the church. Although the canopies and figures in these windows are mostly *in situ*, some of the glass may have been moved around, e.g. the coat of arms, which now sits beneath a canopy intended for a saint.

All Saints' is a rare and beautiful survival – a church which 'the Victorians (almost) forgot'. Whether just sitting alone and absorbing its atmosphere when there is nobody else around, or attending an Advent Carol service by candlelight, when the church is packed with people, those who come here rarely forget the experience.



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 335 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St Mary, Rickinghall Superior
7 miles SW of Diss on B1113

St Andrew, Sapiston
7 miles SE of Thetford off A1088

St John the Baptist, Stanton
9 miles NE of Bury St Edmunds off A143

All Saints, Wordwell
6 miles N of Bury St Edmunds on B1106

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Right: The rood-loft staircase in the south-eastern corner of the nave

Back cover: The east window of the south aisle with its net-like 'reticulated' tracery (Christopher Dalton)