

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH, ALDRINGHAM.

Visitors to St Andrew's will not easily forget its remote and beautiful setting - there is no other in Suffolk quite like it! The journey there is indeed a pilgrimage because it is just about invisible from any road and were it not for the helpful signpost from the B1353 road to Thorpeness a stranger would deserve a prize for finding it! About ½ mile of cul-de-sac road brings us to an attractive, tree-shaded corner, with just the 1890s almshouses to keep the little towerless church company. St Andrew's stands very near to its parish's south-western border with Aldeburgh parish.

Compared with the many grand and glorious churches in Suffolk, St Andrew's is humble and unprepossessing, with few mediaeval features remaining, yet there is no such thing as an 'ordinary' church and there is so much here to fascinate and inspire us. Above all the way in which it is loved, wanted and regularly used for Christian worship and witness - the purpose for which it was first built at least 800 years ago. This is no mere museum or ancient monument, but is a living, working building, inspiring us with its beauty and with a daily welcome for its visitors and pilgrims.

Churches are like people - each is a unique character, worth getting to know and love. Like us they are the result of a great deal of love and care and also a few knocks and bruises as well. St Andrew's has had more than its fair share of the latter and has been greatly altered over the years. To understand this we explore.

Some Landmarks in the Church's long History.

1183 - Saxon church may well have existed here (Saxon pottery and artefacts have been discovered nearby). In 1183, Leiston Abbey was founded by Sir Ranulph de Glanville, Chief Justiciar (political and judicial officer) of England, who had founded Butley Priory in 1171). In 1183 he gave the parish of Aldringham, with its income and benefits, into the care of the Leiston monks Leiston, who may have built (or rebuilt) this church. As 'rectors' they were responsible for maintaining the chancel of the church and for appointing and paying a priest (the vicar) to minister to the people 'vicariously' on their behalf. They may have also helped the parishioners in their responsibility for maintaining the rest of the church.

c.1200-1500 - The core of the chancel dates from the 1200s and work of this period may still be seen in the pillar piscina, the priest's doorway and the small single window beside it. The earliest work in the nave is the south doorway of c.1300, although the cores of its north and south walls may be older. The nave once extended further westwards and there was a fine and lofty western tower (possibly built in the 1400s) which was visible for miles over the heath-land. There was also a south porch (not the present one) and in the 1400s most of the present windows were made, in the Perpendicular style of architecture. The late 1400s also saw the addition of the rood-loft staircase abutment on the south side.

1537 - Leiston Abbey was dissolved and the property was given to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. The parish of Aldringham became a 'Perpetual Curacy' (rather than a vicarage), whereby the bishop granted its priest a special licence to minister and he could only be removed if the bishop revoked his licence.

1687-1842 - It was during this period that the church became a partial ruin and a large part of the great tower must have collapsed. All was not well in 1687, when a faculty was granted to sell two of the church's three bells. Four pictures show the church's exterior before its transformation in 1842. Isaac Johnson's (?c.1780) sketch from the south-west shows just the west face of the tower collapsed, with the rubble lying beneath, the newel staircase exposed in the south-west corner and the south wall of the nave complete. His later sketch from the south (published in 1818) shows most of the north face and a little of the east side of the tower standing, also more of the north nave wall remaining than the south. This is also seen in Michael Angelo Rooker's view of the church from the west in 1796, where we see the timber-framed western wall of the part of the nave that was used, with the little wooden bell-frame fixed to it, also great chunks of fallen masonry from the tower. The painting of 1842, which hangs in the church, shows a slightly different view of the church in its setting, showing what a small part of it was roofed and in use. In 1835 the advowson (patronage) of the living and the right to appoint its incumbent was up for sale and in 1839 the patronage of Aldringham, Linstead, Ubbeston, Cratfield and Laxfield were purchased for £4000 by the Revd Edmund Hollond of Benhall Lodge.

David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1808 and his notes give us some idea of what he found here. The chancel was then thatched with reed; the Communion Table was raised on one step and there were no communion rails. The nave was originally 52 feet long, but only 20 feet of it was roofed (with tiles). The pulpit stood in the nave's north-east corner and he described the seats as 'substantial, of oak, carved', suggesting that the mediaeval benches may have survived. The present font stood against the west wall and the rood-loft stairs were visible in the south wall. Between the nave and chancel he noted the remains of a painted rood screen. Only the north wall of the tower remained. Davy noted that 'it appears to have been very lofty - square, of flints, with buttresses at the angles'. The bell by then was hanging in the north-west angle of the nave.

1842-1872 - On 23rd March 1842 the Incorporated Church Building Society awarded a grant of £50 towards the repair and enlargement of the semi-ruined church and on 30th April the *Ipswich Journal* published an appeal for donations towards the estimated cost of £200. It stated that the church was 'almost wholly in ruins; some time since the tower fell and crushed about one half of the body of the edifice', and that insufficient accommodation for the worshippers 'induces an attempt to restore a portion at least of the present ruins', but as the people of Aldringham cum Thorpe was 'mostly poor fishermen and agricultural labourers', they badly needed donations. They had already received £10 from the Bishop of Norwich, £5 from Archdeacon Berners, £50 from the ICBS, £20 from the Revd Edmund Hollond (patron), £5 from the Revd Richard Bond (Perpetual Curate) and £3 from the Revd H Dowler (vicar of Aldeburgh, who acted as assistant curate and looked after the parish).

Later that year Aldringham folk were to see their church transformed. The ruins were removed, the church was thoroughly restored and the nave was extended some 20 feet westwards. The designs were made by a surveyor named Charles Kemp and the work was executed by James Smyth, the Aldeburgh builder.

D. E. Davy returned to Aldringham in 1848 and was amazed at how different it was. He wrote, 'It was just 40 years ago since I was in this church and I can hardly conceive it was the same. In 1808 it stood exposed on the heath, with scarcely a

shrub near it; it is now surrounded with plantations and the land is cultivated up to the churchyard. The remains of the old steeple have been taken down and a plain but convenient edifice has " been made out of the remnant of the old church'.

He measured the church and described it as 'a simple parallelogram, 61ft 6ins long and 20ft 3ins wide'. The Communion table was railed round on three sides and the pulpit and reading desk stood in front of the rails, one on each side. Flanking the east window were the Ten Commandments on two framed boards and beneath it hung the Royal Arms. The south side of the nave had box pews and some of the old benches filled the north side. The west end was equipped with 'deal stools for the school children'. The structure of the building (apart from the later porch and vestry) was more or less what we see today.

When the Religious Census was made in 1851, Aldringham had one service, in the afternoon, at which about 100 people were present. The church could seat 140 people free of pew-rents and a further 83 who could afford this luxury. The only morning services were the quarterly services of Holy Communion, which averaged 14 communicants. The Perpetual Curate, the Revd Richard Bond, was also curate of Pulham Market, where he resided, so the Revd Henry Dowler, vicar of Aldeburgh, acted as curate here, and received the benefice income for his services.

A further restoration took place in 1872, when the south porch was added, also some extra buttresses and the present seating. This cost about £200, but exact details of the architect, contractor and exactly what was done, have still to be discovered.

The 1890s - The arrival of the Revd Charles du Gard Makepiece in 1890, from his curacy at the Evangelical stronghold of St Mary's Islington, began a new chapter in the life of the church. More changes were to take place inside the building, thanks to Letitia Gannon who, with her brother Edward, lived at Stone House. Edward died in 1894 and in July 1895 the east window was given in his memory. The glass is by the London firm of Alexander Gibbs. Although prolific and well-known for their glass, it is not so well-known that they also branched out into church furnishings and we see in this church interesting examples of their craftsmanship. They designed and made in 1895 the pulpit, altar table, Communion rails and the reredos. Letitia Gannon died in November 1896 and Alexander Gibbs was commissioned to make the stained glass in the west window in memory of her.

Since then much has been done to maintain and beautify the church. The major structural work has been the creation of the northern extension in 2003.

Exploring the Exterior.

Visitors enjoy the church's unforgettable SETTING - a peaceful and idyllic oasis of quiet and beauty, at the end of a road which leads nowhere else, and in a large and picturesque CHURCHYARD, which was extended southwards in 1919 and consecrated on 24th July.

In the southern section an avenue of shrubs leads to the elegant War Memorial crucifix, where the death of Lieutenant Alexander Walter Ogilvie is recorded. He was the son and heir of Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie of Sizewell Hall, whose vision, wealth and hard work created the remarkable village that we know as Thorpeness (and whose mother, Margaret, founded the nearby almshouses in 1887). Neatly-planned hedges divide off the areas east and west of the memorial, where Glencairn (died 1932), his

first wife, Helen (died 1926) and other members of his family are buried, some beneath chest-tombs. The tasteful design of these memorials may well be the brainchild of G. S. Ogilvie himself, who commissioned his architect friends, William Gilmore Wilson and later F. Forbes Glennie, to transform his ideas for the eccentric buildings which make Thorpeness so special into workable reality.

Near the west end of the church are graves of the Garretts of Aldringham House, who were part of the family whose thriving engineering works transformed Leiston into a thriving industrial town.

Away to the north-west is the eccentric gothic sarcophagus tomb of Edward (died 1894) and Letitia Gannon (died 1896). They lived at Stone House and were generous benefactors to this church and parish.

The CHURCH itself is a simple, single-celled building, with a south porch (added in 1872) and a northern extension of 2003. The chancel and 20' of the nave remain from the mediaeval church and the western c.20' of the nave was built in 1842. The old nave stretched a further c.12' westwards of this, to the lofty western tower.

Like most Suffolk churches, the walls are constructed of flint-rubble, gathered from the fields and partly covered with cream-coloured render. The mediaeval part of the nave is lit on the south side by two double Perpendicular windows of the 1400s (one flanked by original animal corbel heads), eastwards of which is the abutment containing the stairs to the former rood-loft which was above the rood screen inside the church. Here is a plaque recording eight Aldringham folk who died in World War 2. The chancel on this side has a blocked priest's doorway and a small single window, both of the 1200s, also a larger double 15th century window. The small square apertures in the walls, near the base of the windows, are 19th century ventilation openings, leading to vents inside the church.

Much of the stonework of the three-light east window was renewed in 1842, but the mediaeval masonry of the east wall is interesting because it contains chunks of coralline crag, a buff-coloured limestone which was quarried around Orford and may be seen in a few churches and other buildings in this part of Suffolk, especially in the towers at Chillesford and Wantisden. Unusually the north side of the church has only one double Perpendicular window.

The 2003 extension, with its flint-rubble walls and brick buttresses, has been tastefully designed and blends with the rest of the church. Here work of our own times rightly takes its place alongside that of ages past.

The 1842 west wall has a three-light window which matches the east window and is flanked by buttresses which are crowned by octagonal stone pinnacles. The single bell in the bell-cot above was made by Thomas Mears of Whitechapel in 1842.

The porch was added in 1872. The stonework of the south doorway was mostly renewed in 1842, but the corbel-heads upon which its hoodmould rests are at least 600 years old.

What to See Inside the Church.

Most of the craftsmanship inside this little rectangular space (c.62' X 20') dates only from the past 170 years, with just a few mediaeval treasures to remind us that people have worshipped on this spot for 800 years at least. There is also much to

remind us that this is still a living, working building, which is loved and tended by a vibrant Church Family who worship here.

Above our heads is a simple plaster-ceiled ROOF, with tie-beams beneath which are simple openwork spandrels. The SEATING dates from 1872 and the benches have simple trefoil poppyhead ends. At the west end are raised seats, with ironwork supporting their front bookrests. The panelled wainscot lining north and south walls may incorporate woodwork from the 1842 box-pews.

On the south wall, near the entrance, hangs the PAINTING OF THE CHURCH IN 1842, just before it was restored, showing the old nave and chancel roofs, the ruined nave and the fragment of the mighty tower. Beside it is a WINDOW FROM ST MARY'S CHURCH, THORPENESS, which was brought here when that church closed for worship, together with the CREDENCE TABLE and PRAYER DESK. This fascinating Italianate 'Arts and Crafts' building, designed by G.S. Ogilvie, with plans drawn up by W.G. Wilson, was completed in 1936 and remained the property of the Thorpeness Estate. The building still stands (its Romanesque exterior and central tower having a rather 'continental' feel), but now has a new residential lease of life.

In its rightful place near the entrance (symbolising our entry, by Holy Baptism, into the Family of the Church) stands the octagonal FONT, in which Aldringham babes have been baptised for maybe 600 years. This splendid piece of mediaeval stonecarving is of a type which is common in East Anglian churches. Its stem is strengthened by buttresses and guarded by lions and beneath the bowl are angels with elegant wings. In the eight panels of the bowl are the emblems of the four Evangelists, alternating with angels, bearing shields. Working clockwise from the north-west, we see: the Angel of St Matthew (north-west); blank shield (north); winged Lion of St Mark (north-east); shield with book (east); Eagle of St John (south-east); shield with rose (south); winged Ox of St Luke (south-west); shield with chrismatory (west). This vessel, with its roof-like lid, contained the Holy Oils which were used (and still are in many churches) for anointing at Baptism, Confirmation and for healing of the sick. The FONT COVER is a tasteful piece of 1920s woodcarving, in memory of Amy and Mary Roxburgh, who died in 1925 and 1927 respectively.

By the wall on the south side of the sanctuary is the shaft of a rare PILLAR PISCINA, dating from c.1200. This would at one time have supported a drain into which the disposable water used at Holy Communion was poured.

Through the generosity of Miss Letitia Gannon, the PULPIT and LECTERN, the COMMUNION RAILS, ALTAR TABLE and REREDOS were made for the church in 1895 at the London workshops of Alexander Gibbs. As befitted a church in the Evangelical tradition, the rather lavish arcaded woodwork of the reredos enclosed a central panel with the IHS monogram of Our Lord's name, with the Greek letters Alpha and Omega beneath (for God, 'the First and the Last'), flanked by panels inscribed with the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Ten Commandments.

The single window in the chancel has STAINED GLASS showing St Andrew, with his 'X' shaped cross, which is a memorial to Edward Fraser Stanford, of The Stone House, who died in 1944.

The EAST WINDOW has rich Victorian glass by Alexander Gibbs Jr, given in July 1895 by Miss Letitia Gannon in memory of her brother Edward, showing Jesus feeding some of the 5000, and the lad with his basket of fish.

The glass in the WEST WINDOW was made by Gibbs in 1897 in memory of the generous Miss Gannon, who had died in November 1896, aged 81. Here is portrayed the Healing of the Paralysed Man, which is indeed fitting because, as its inscription tells us, Miss Gannon was herself 'helpless and paralysed during 11½ years'.

Memorials

The following memorial inscriptions commemorate people of the past who were part of this church and community.

In the floor in front of the altar is a LEDGER SLAB to Alex Osborne (1738), his wife Jane (1756) and their daughter, Mrs Barker (1805).

A variety of PLAQUES on the walls include:-

1. Wooden plaque, with carved bust, to Captain Stephen Garrett (killed in 1915).
2. Wooden plaque to Emma, the second wife of Frank Garrett (1916). Carved by her husband, Frank in 1917.

Mr Garrett carved these plaques to his wife and son on the north wall of the sanctuary, with their letters skilfully carved in relief.

3. Alderman Frank Garrett, J.P. (died 1918) was churchwarden here for 33 years and a plaque in memory of him and of his first wife, Mary Anne (died 1897) is in the blocked priest's doorway on the south side of the chancel.

4. A bronze plaque beneath her husband's memorial window commemorates Kathleen Stanford (1936).

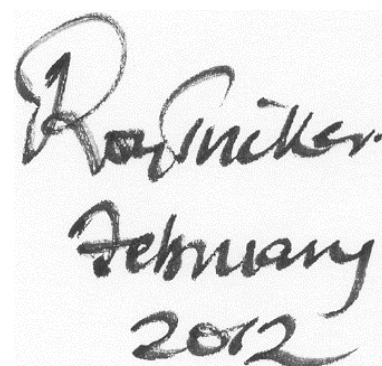
5. An attractive marble and bronze plaque on the north wall commemorates Edward Stanford of The Stone House (1917) and Caroline Elizabeth (1933).

6. Helen, the first wife of Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie (died 1926) has a brass plaque on the south nave wall. His second wife - a clergyman's widow, whom he married in January 1927 - has no memorial. In 1929, after a series of disagreements, he packed her off to her daughter in Devon!

7. Near the door is a plaque to Fergus Menteith Ogilvie (Glencairn's younger brother), who died in 1918.

8. A marble War Memorial plaque on the north nave wall records the names of 11 Aldringham parishioners who died in World War 1.

9. To the west of this, a small bronze plaque commemorates Lieut. Michael Hitchcock, who died at Basrah, Iraq in 1947.



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February
2012