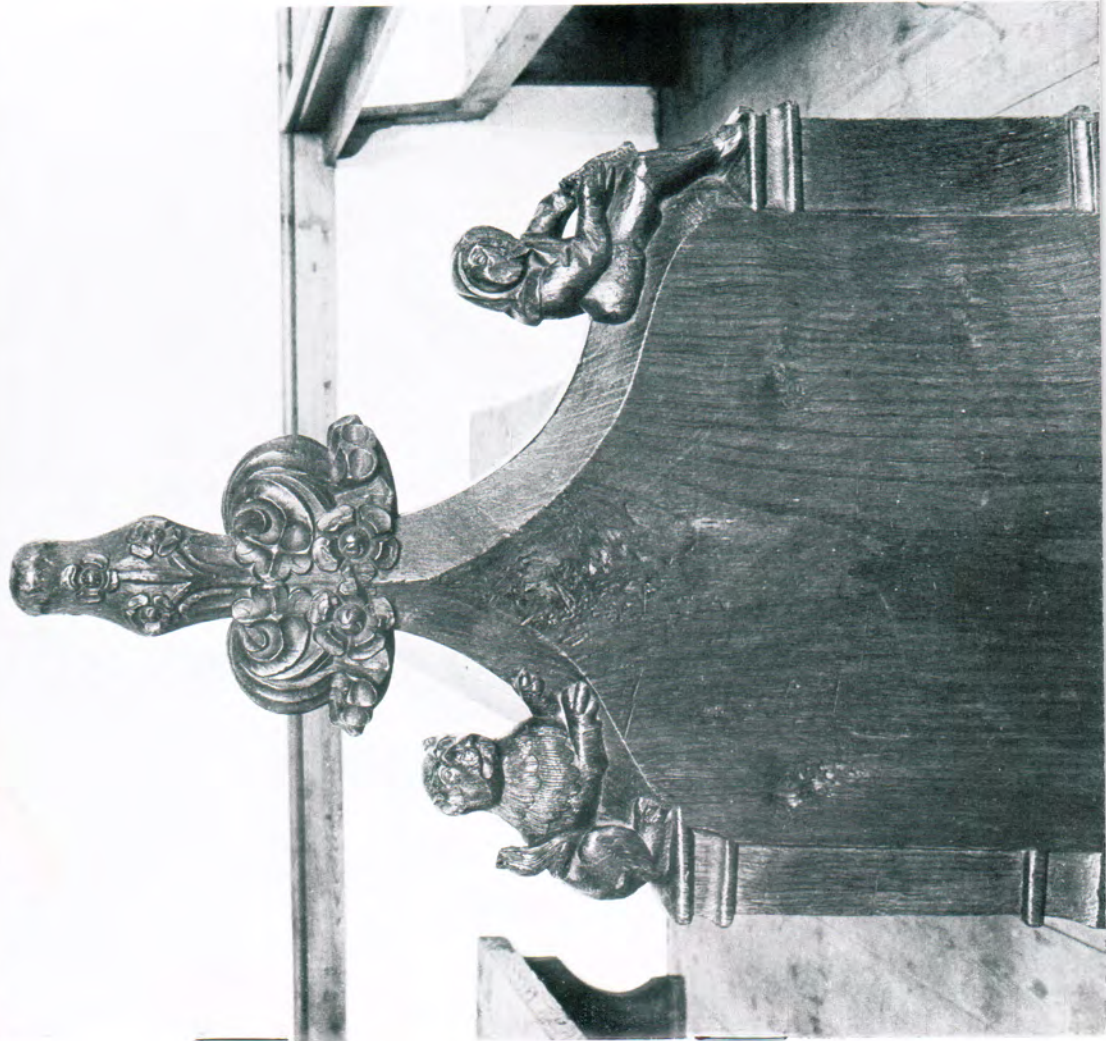
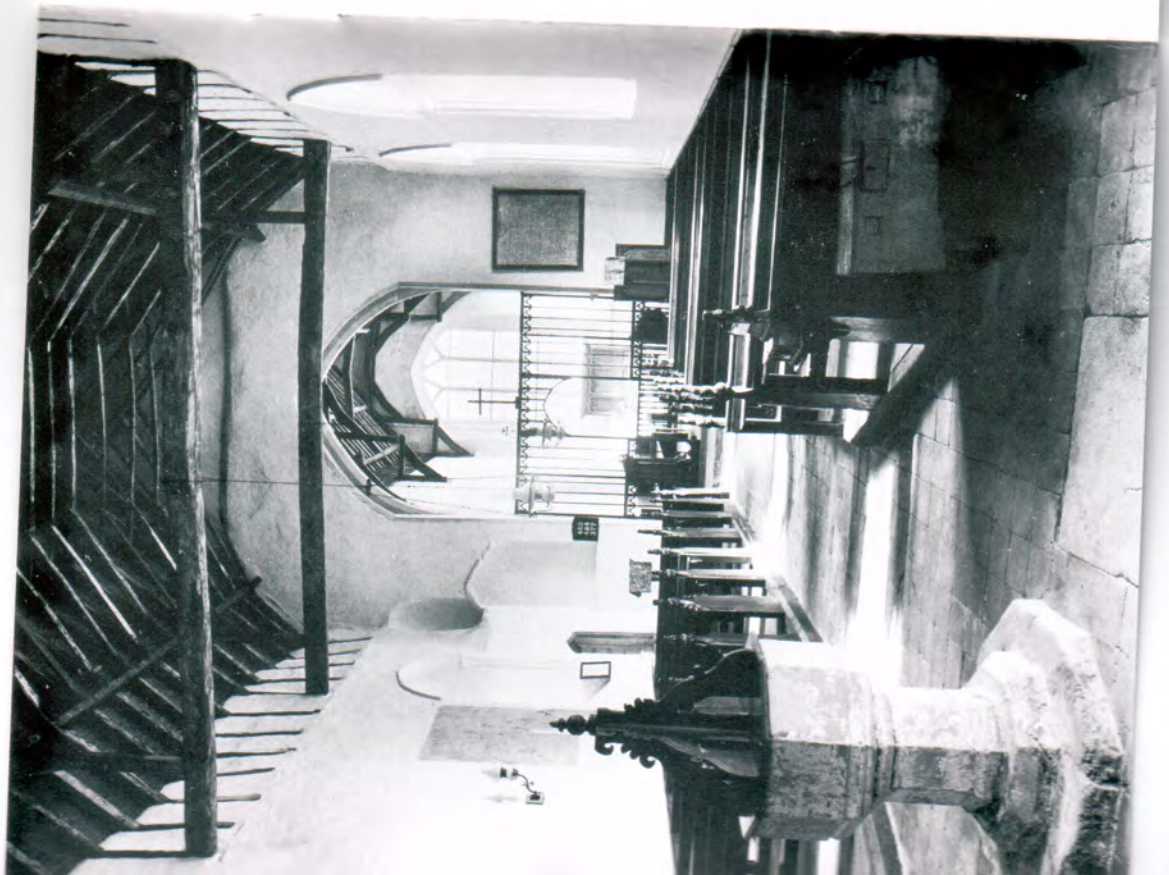


REDUNDANT
CHURCHES
FUND

ALL SAINTS',
THURGARTON,
NORFOLK

40 pence





Thurgarton church, like most mediaeval churches in the county of Norfolk, is built of flint rubble with stone dressings. Its roof of thatch, recently renewed, is the kind of covering it would have had in the Middle Ages. It has a solitary setting, on a hilltop above the hamlet; its near neighbours are Thurgarton Old Hall to the west and a charming early Victorian estate cottage to the east by the crossroads. Perhaps the best view from this picturesque site is to the north, with the tiny village of Sustead and its round-towered church in the distance. In this part of Norfolk settlements lie quite close together, and it is noticeable that several in the neighbourhood have their church just outside the village. In the case of Thurgarton, it is uncertain - in the absence of archaeology - whether there has been population movement or if the church occupies a pre-Christian holy site. Attempts to link the settlement to the pagan Thor are incorrect; Thurgarton derives from a personal name "Thurgars' Place".

As seen today the church is largely 14th century but retains an earlier core. The only two mediaeval walls leaving money to specific building projects are both for glazing; in 1497 John Mekyson bequeathed to the 'reparation' of a window in the chancel; and in 1527 William Crowe left 'three comb of malt' for glazing a window on the south side.

The church is approached from the south through a churchyard containing a number of tombstones of a type typical of the area, including many good 18th century examples.

On its south side the nave has three early 14th century windows, with cusped flowing tracery and nicely shafted inside. These represent the

refashioning of an earlier nave probably around 1350. Also at this time the doorways and north window were inserted in the nave, but evidence of an earlier date for part of the building is found in the two lancet windows, probably of the early 13th century though restored in the 19th, in the west wall. These formerly flanked the round west tower which fell in 1822. Inside, high over the tower arch, there is some evidence of an opening from the tower, often taken as a sign of a pre-Conquest date.

The vestry at the west end was built by the architect, Charles Brown, under a faculty of 1923. The 14th century porch, replastered in 1899 and sheltering the principal entrance, formerly bore the date 1671 which presumably referred to earlier repairs. After the fall of the tower, the upper part of the porch was used as the belfry. It formerly housed two bells, one dated 1823 and the other cast by Thomas Mears II of London in 1836, but only the latter remains. The south doorway is flanked by label stops with carved faces.

The chancel has a confused building history. Its east gable appears to have been rebuilt and heightened in 18th century brick at the same time as the present Gothic east window was provided. It has an unusual flying buttress to the south-east corner. The chancel had a building adjoining its north side, presumably a chantry chapel, as shown by the fragments of a string course high on the outside wall; inside there is a wide blocked archway. Scattered in the walls are local conglomerate stone, containing iron, amongst the flints. On the north side of the church are remains of the lime plaster which originally covered the whole of the walls outside as well as in. In the south wall of the chancel are a priest's door, a 'Y' traceried window of the very early 14th century and a wide 15th century two-light window, the glazing of which may be that referred to in the will of 1497 ('reparation', in the mediaeval context, could refer to the completion of a new window).

Inside, the church is light and airy. A good view of the thatching, the work of Mr A D Mindham in 1984-5, may be had from the inside. Until then the roof had been obscured by matchboarding of 1878-9, part of the re-thatching done at that time. Most of the remarkably slender timbers of the nave roof appear to be of mediaeval date. The unusual hammer-beam roof in the chancel is probably 17th century.

To the west of the south doorway is a small ledge for a statue; on the other side are remains of a late 16th or 17th century wall text in 'black letter'. After the Reformation, when the statues and much of the colouring of the mediaeval church were removed, wall paintings were introduced to adorn the newly white-washed walls as well as to provide instruction for the people. The font stands alone, with the nave pews tapering away from it. It has a plain octagonal bowl and stem and probably dates from the 14th century rebuilding campaign; the sides of its bowl would originally have been painted. The cover has attractive carving with flat voluted brackets topped by an acorn finial, possibly dating from about 1700. At the north-west corner is a triple-locked wooden chest (the vicar and church-warden would each have had one key) of the 15th century, with iron bindings for security.

Halfway down the north wall of the nave is a carved wooden tablet recording the names of the six Thurgarton men who did not return from the Great War. Further along are two small niches for statues, one with cinquefoiled cusping of its head, probably marking the site of a mediaeval altar. Above these niches is another fragmentary text.

In the north-east corner of the nave is a complete rood stairway. This enabled the sexton to reach the rood-loft above the mediaeval screen to light and renew the candles. The lower entrance is rebated for a door and retains hinges. The narrowness and steepness of the steps make a liturgical use of the rood-loft here seem unlikely. The original screen was sold to raise funds for restoration of the church in 1897. Its successor, with carving patterned on that of the old screen, was made by the rector of the time, the Rev Edward Windsor Sandys-Reed. A curious niche in the east wall of the nave to the left of the chancel arch was probably a recess for a reredos above the site of a guild altar (corresponding to that on the other side); it is unlikely to be the remains of a former window dating from the time of a narrower chancel, because there are no traces of it on the outside wall. A pierced ledge, on the face of the south side of the chancel arch, may have been intended for a rood to work the Lenten veil that used to cover the rood, the great crucifix, during the mediaeval Holy Week. The 19th century pulpit partly obscures a niche for a mediaeval piscina to enable a priest to wash the chalice at Mass, showing that there would have been an altar here.

Hanging behind the pulpit is a late 17th or early 18th century Commandment board, a local product, with DEUS in a 'glory' at its top. The nave has a delightful variety of floor coverings - bricks, pattens, stones and one notable ledger slab, to Elizabeth (1732) and William Spurrell (1761):

He was a Father to the Fatherless
He helped the Widows in their Distress
He never was given to Wordly Pride
He lived an honest man and so he dy'd
They was tender parents our Loss was great
We hope that both eternal Joys will meet.

A special feature of this church is the fine collection of 15th century bench-ends. Many have poppyheads, others figures. On the north side, the first one from the west has a seated man with a lute, another a tun or barrel (a play on the village name), a third a lion creeping up on a man playing bagpipes(?), whilst another has an elephant with a howdah on its back. This motif is also found in Norfolk at South Burlingham, possibly carved by the same hand as at Thurgarton, and at South Lopham. On the south side, the westernmost bench-end has a seated figure with what may be a stole draped over his knee (a priest?); there is another tun and there are two dragons, one having a man's head between its feet. Another end has a hunter creeping up on dogs fighting.

The chancel has a 14th century piscina and sedilia seats for the clergy to use at Mass in its south wall. Note that the floor levels have subsequently been changed. Above the 17th century Holy Table is an early 20th century reredos with the Alpha and Omega (first and last) motif, and the Instruments of the Passion: lance, spear, nails, scourge, pincers, hammer, and Crown of Thorns. The communion rails date from the 18th century.

Owing to the decline in the population the church was closed in 1980 and vested in the Fund in March 1982. Since that date the roof has been rethatched as mentioned above, and a full programme of repairs carried out, including lime-washing of the walls, by Messrs Atthowe under the supervision of Mr Neil Birdsall.

A great deal of work has been done by local supporters in keeping the churchyard and the church neat and tidy.

The Fund was established in 1969 to preserve Church of England churches no longer needed for regular worship but which are of historic and/or architectural interest. The Fund's main income is provided by Church and State but the constantly increasing number of churches entrusted to it (232 in August 1987) means that its resources are severely stretched. Contributions are always gratefully received and if there is no money box in the church, please send your donation to the Fund.

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