

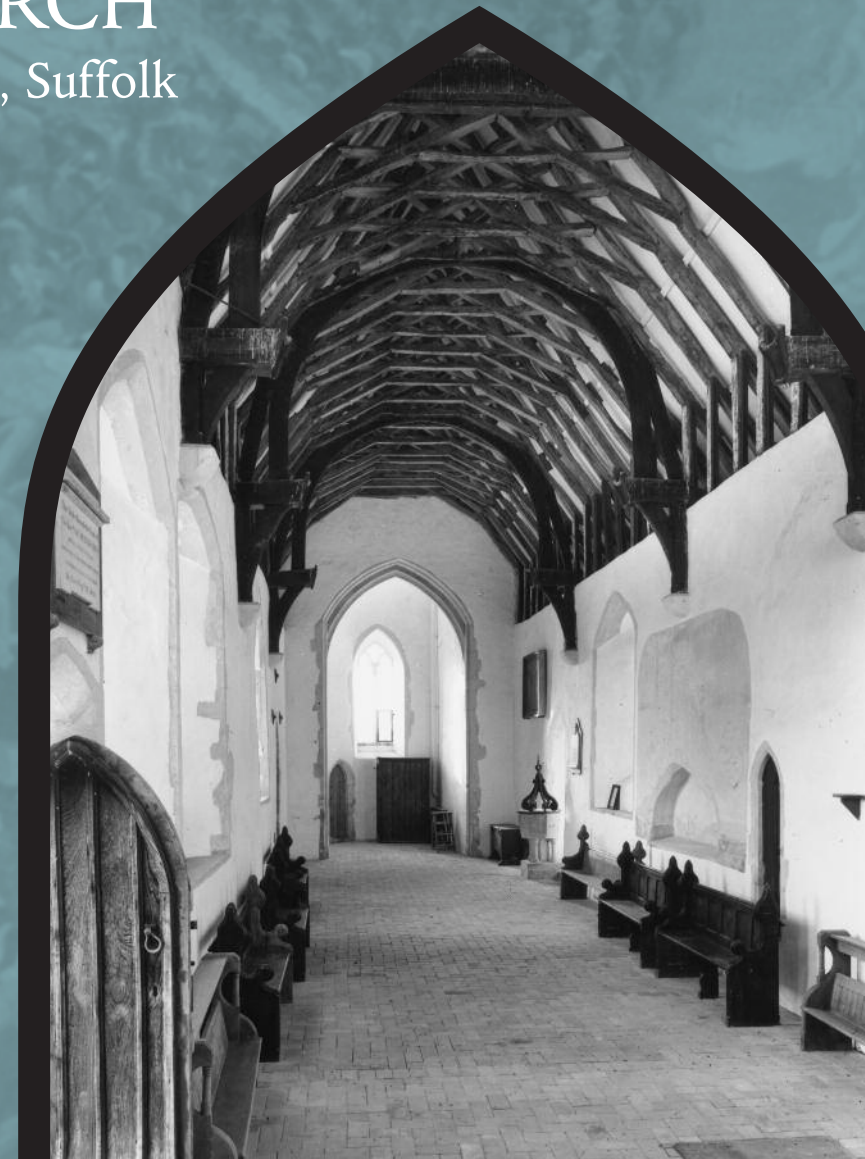


THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

Sapiston, Suffolk



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CONSERVATION TRUST

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Sapiston, Suffolk

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

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

INTRODUCTION

This ancient church, which stands well when viewed from the A1088 Ixworth–Thetford road that runs some distance to the west, has a low-lying position not far from the Blackbourne stream. The stream formed the south-western border of its former parish, which was mainly near the church, to its north, where earthworks can still be seen, with the original road running to the east. The name means village of soapmakers. Only half a mile away from the Norman church of Honington as the crow flies, St Andrew's is approached by means of a long drive, through fields and past gorse bushes. Its setting is memorable – a church in the meadows – near the white-painted Grange Farm House and beside its flint-faced former farm buildings, now converted into a house. The churchyard contains several 18th-century headstones, with cherubs' faces, especially to the south-west of the church. William Austin is buried there, the employer of pastoral poet Robert Bloomfield, whose *The Farmer's Boy*, published in 1800, sold 26,000 copies and led to his being much taken up in literary circles before being dropped.

*Front cover: Interior looking west
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Left: The 12th-century Norman
south doorway (Christopher Dalton)*



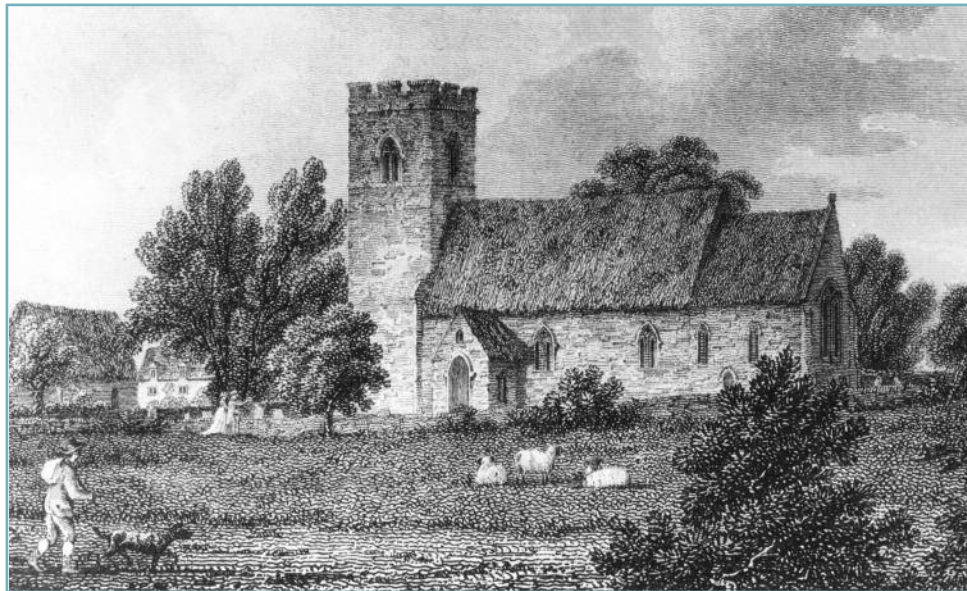
EXTERIOR

The church comprises a tower, nave and chancel of equal width, and south porch. Most of the visible features date from the late-13th- and early 14th-century remodelling, with hardly any of the 15th-century work usually so prominent in East Anglian churches. The core of the nave, and maybe much of the chancel, is Norman.

The rubble walls of the church contain an interesting mixture of mellow colours and textures: whole and split flints, a multitude of brown stones and pebbles, and many pieces of grey 'imported' stone, especially in the south

wall. Sections of layered masonry indicate that this is an early structure. The north and east walls of the chancel are covered with cream-coloured rendering. The roofs, like many others in the area, were once thatched as an old print (c. 1800) of the exterior shows. Maybe the thatch was taken away in 1847 when the church underwent restoration. It was reopened for worship on 4 March of that year.

The south side of the nave is lit by a 'Y'-tracery window, of c. 1300, and a late-14th-century window. On the north side are a 14th-century

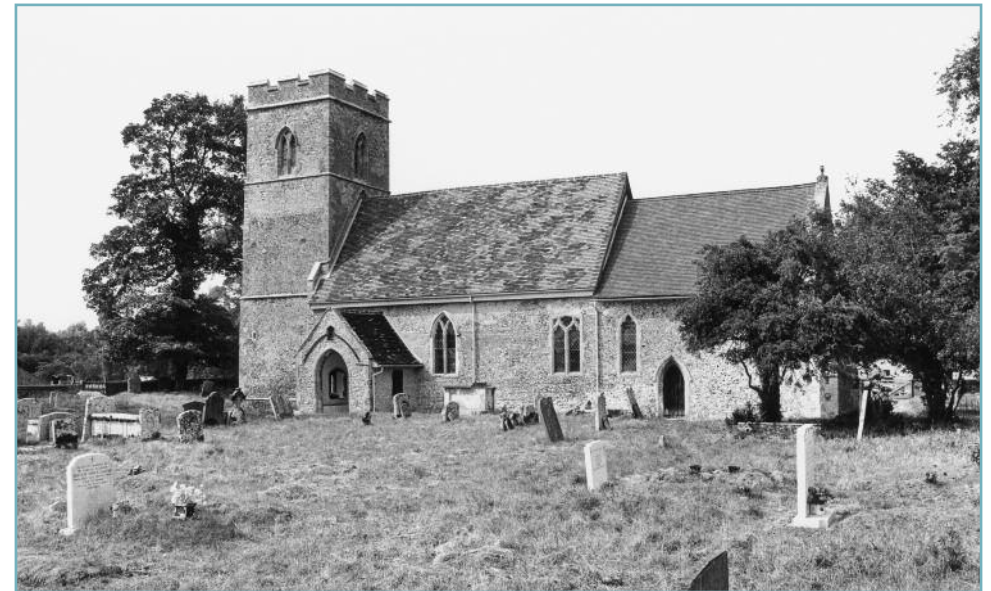


doorway, containing a mediaeval door, and a trefoil-headed single lancet window of the late 1200s. In the masonry towards the east end of the nave on this side are former apertures, framed with bricks, to light the rood-loft staircase inside.

Three more trefoil-headed lancets may be seen in the chancel; a fourth has been blocked, probably when the former lean-to vestry was erected on the south side in the 19th century, using the priest's doorway as its entrance from the chancel. The three-light east window has

elegant reticulated tracery, dating from c. 1330. The gable finial above appears to be mediaeval as well. The two iron rings in the wall beneath the east window are a reminder of the days when people travelled to church on horseback and tethered their horses here.

The square embattled western tower, which is unbuttressed and has slightly receding stages, was added to the Norman nave c. 1300. It has double belfry windows and a west window with the characteristic 'Y'-tracery of the period. The tiny rectangular windows in the south-west





*Left: The square embattled west tower of c.1300
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Right: The late 13th-century font with 17th-century cover
(Christopher Dalton)*

corner give light to the tower staircase. The south porch appears to have been added in the late 14th century. Its south wall batters outwards and there is a plain niche, no doubt for a statue, above the simply-moulded entrance arch. Neat square-headed Perpendicular windows pierce the lateral walls and in the floor are two worn 13th-century coffin lids with traces of their foliated crosses. This porch shelters a Norman doorway – a masterpiece of craftsmanship of the 1100s. There are two octagonal shafts each side, with moulded bases, supporting cushion capitals which, in turn, support two orders of roll moulding, punctuated with unusual motifs that have a slight resemblance to tongues, embellishing the grand semicircular head of the arch. The entrance itself is quite narrow. On each of the two outer cushion capitals are faintly scratched mass dials, which indicated the times of services before the days of clocks. There is a carved mediaeval head above the doorway.

INTERIOR

The interior is filled with light from the clear glass in the windows, enhanced by whitewashed walls. The chamfered head of the 14th-century **tower arch** dies into the lateral walls. There is no chancel arch and this makes the church appear longer than it actually is. The only division between nave and chancel is seen in the **roofs**. The nave roof has a mediaeval scissor-beam framework, dating from the 1300s or even earlier. This is strengthened by three 19th-century arch-braces, resting upon simple hammer beams. Over the chancel is a 19th-century boarded ceiling. The tower and the western section of the nave deflect slightly southwards from the rest of the building – probably indicating the extension of c.1300. The **font** has a plain octagonal bowl, resting upon a slender octagonal stem and supported by four circular shafts, with moulded caps and bases, which probably dates from the late 13th century. Its pretty 17th-century **cover** has eight radiating scrolls. On the wall nearby are the **royal arms** of King George II, whose Hanoverian shield appears to have been repainted over an earlier Stuart achievement.

Of the unusual assortment of **benches**, the larger ones, with beautifully-carved poppyhead ends, designed by J H Hakewill in 1854, were brought here from Ixworth church. One bench, made up of ancient timberwork, includes two very dissimilar poppyhead ends of c.1500.

Beside the entrance is a recess containing part of what was the basin of a large **holy water stoup**.



Beside the blocked north doorway are traces of a **consecration cross** (another may be seen directly opposite and two more face each other further eastwards on the nave walls). In the north nave wall is a shallow **arched recess** – probably marking the burial place of an important 14th-century worthy – above which are faint traces of what must have been a beautiful **wall painting**. The figure on the left clearly has a bow and some arrows, so this may well be part of a scene showing the martyrdom of St Edmund (frequently depicted hereabouts) who was put to death by the Danes in AD870. There appears to have been another figure to the right – and then the remains of the other consecration cross. Further east is the **doorway to the rood-loft stairs**, which still exist in the thickness of the nave wall.

The single **windows** of the chancel and the south-east nave window have unusually wide splays; the blocked south-east window of the chancel is recessed down to the floor and probably accommodated a seat for the priest to occupy during parts of the mediaeval Mass. Beside it is a delightful 14th-century **piscina**, containing an octofoil (eight-lobed) drain, into which the water from the washing of the priest's hands was poured. Its elegant trefoil-headed ogee arch has a miniature copy set into the window splay on its western side.

The sanctuary has a 19th-century tiled floor and a very worthy wooden **reredos** of 1887, with

elegant fretwork tracery in its arches which form a canopy over the gradine-shelf beneath. The altar is a sturdy 17th-century **communion table**, with a modern top. In the tracery at the top of the east window are a few fragments of the mediaeval glass which once filled this window.

The tower houses four **bells**. The treble was cast by John Draper of Thetford in 1628, the second by Thomas Newman of Norwich in 1730, the third by Thomas Draper in 1591 and the tenor is a 15th-century bell, cast at Brasyer's Norwich foundry, c.1480.

MEMORIALS

The War Memorial by Hanchet of Bury, on the north nave wall, records seven Sapiston men who died in the First World War (1914–18). A framed list of subscribers to it may be seen on the nearby window sill. The Revd Arthur Rogers – priest here for 25 years – who died in 1840, has a small plaque over the priest's door. Opposite, on the north chancel wall, is a good 17th-century memorial, crowned by two obelisks and a coat of arms, commemorating one John Bull, who died in 1643.

There are two 17th-century ledger slabs in the floor near the sanctuary step, both to

members of the Aldham family, who owned the manor here. That to Thomas Aldham (d.1640) has two large coats of arms, and the other, to Iana (daughter of William Crofts and Jane Poley and wife of Thomas Aldham) who died in 1632, aged 31, has six smaller incised coats of arms.

With Honington church so close, the two parishes were combined in 1972 and St Andrew's was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust) in 1974. Repairs have been carried out by the Whitworth Co-Partnership of Bury St Edmunds.



The royal arms of George II

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 the church 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.

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

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7 miles SW of Diss on B1113

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: Interior looking east (Christopher Dalton)

Back cover: Detail from 19th-century print (photograph J K Clayden)

