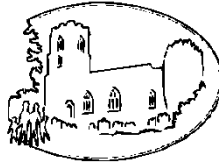


Suffolk
Historic Churches
Trust



AUTUMN 2018 NEWSLETTER AND ANNUAL ACCOUNTS



Herringfleet, St Margaret

**Re-thatching and chancel wall repairs nearing completion.
A major HLF supported project, also assisted with a grant from SHCT.**

Suffolk Historic Churches Trust

Registered Charity No. 267047

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

You will read, elsewhere in this Newsletter, details of the Review by the Taylor Commission which was set up by the Government to look into the sustainability of church buildings in the UK. Happily, the Review recognized the value of our churches, both for their heritage and historical importance and for the contribution they make towards their local communities. The Commission has now launched a Pilot Scheme to examine how the Government can best contribute towards the proper preservation and maintenance of these buildings as well as suggesting ways in which churches can be better used by their local communities; we should all be proud that Suffolk, together with Greater Manchester, has been chosen by the Commission to be one of the two counties where the Pilot Scheme should be conducted.

I share the enthusiasm held by the Taylor Commission that churches should always embrace the needs and desires of their local community when they carry out improvements and reordering but, at the same time, I trust that they will not forget the invaluable contribution our churches make towards the heritage of this country and they will ask the Government to encourage the Heritage Lottery Fund to continue giving generous grants for the restoration and preservation of that heritage.

Meanwhile we at SHCT are continuing to help the churches of Suffolk with their restoration and maintenance and during the past financial year we awarded grants to twenty-seven churches. Joy Rowe, Robert Hogg and John Carrington have retired from the Grants Committee since my last Message and I should like to echo Celia Stephens' thanks for the outstanding contribution they have all made towards the efficient running of the Grants Committee. I should like to make a special mention of Joy Rowe who has not only been an invaluable member of the Grants Committee but has also contributed so much to all aspects of SHCT since the early days of the Trust's incorporation.

This year our Spring Field Day took us to north-east Suffolk where we spent a most enjoyable day visiting All Saints, Darsham, Holy Trinity, Blythburgh, and St Edmund the Martyr, Southwold. I should like to thank Diana Hunt and Celia for organising a most enjoyable day and I am particularly grateful to Dr Alan Mackley for the most interesting talk he gave about the restoration of Holy Trinity, Blythburgh.

This year we were invited to share our Annual Service with the congregation of Trinity Methodist Church, Felixstowe. I should like to thank all those at Trinity Methodist Church for giving us such a warm welcome, the Felixstowe Community Choir for entertaining us with their delightfully joyous singing and Roger Fern for leading the Service and giving such an inspirational address.

You will read elsewhere the details of this year's forthcoming Annual Meeting of Friends, to which all of you and your guests are invited, and we are fortunate that Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has accepted my invitation to be the Guest Speaker. Please note that the evening will start earlier than usual and drinks will be served from 5.30pm onwards. I look forward to having a chat with as many of you as possible at what is always a most enjoyable evening and I am extremely grateful to Robert Williams and his family for allowing us to meet, as always, in the perfect setting of their magnificent Suffolk barn.

When you read this Message our annual Ride and Stride will already have taken place. I hope the sun shone and all those taking part enjoyed what is always a wonderful way of visiting some of Suffolk's beautiful villages and towns with their magnificent churches and at the same time helping us to contribute towards the cost of maintaining those churches. I am forever grateful to Patrick Grieve and his team of volunteers for organising this event which does so much to raise funds for, and the profile of, SHCT.

The past few months have seen several changes amongst the Trustees of SHCT.

John Carrington, Clive Paine and Robert Williams have retired and I should like to thank them for the time and expertise they have freely given during their time as Trustees. I am delighted that Clive will carry on lending his enthusiasm and knowledge to our programme of church visits and that Robert has promised to allow us to continue using Haughley Barn for meetings and events and thereby maintaining the wonderful support SHCT has always been given by the Williams family.

David Gould and Mike Kiely have been appointed as Trustees. David and Mike have already contributed substantially towards the smooth administration of SHCT and I am confident that we shall all benefit from their closer involvement with the Trust.

Finally, the forthcoming Annual Meeting will mark my last day as Chairman of Trustees and I should like to thank all those, who have served as Trustees and Officers of SHCT during my seven years of office, for the wonderful support they have given to me. I shall remain a Trustee and am looking forward to supporting Geoffrey Probert, under whose command I am certain SHCT will continue in rude health, from "the back benches".

Martin Favell

RIDE & STRIDE 2018

On 8 September again this year hardy souls young and old are in the highways and lanes of Suffolk pedalling their way to a cash bonanza for the Trust. Their reward is fitness, the smell of harvested and ploughed fields, the serenity of old churches and a sense of achievement. Last year the Ride raised over £160,000 including the Gift Aid recovery, the highest for four years. We will indeed be fortunate if we reach this figure again. As long as the enthusiasm of our riders and the generosity of the sponsors continue, and it shows no sign of abating, we stand a good chance. Without the revenue from this event, the work of our Trust would be greatly hampered. Please do all you can to encourage friends and family to take part or man the churches, and if you cannot ride, sponsor those who can.

To raise the profile of the Trust this year we are collaborating with the Suffolk Automobile Club who are holding a rally of veteran and classic cars on the same day, calling at churches and all gathering on the green at Long Melford for tea. All donations from the event will go to the Trust. Our thanks to Piers Hart for arranging what should be a great spectacle.

Patrick Grieve Chairman, Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride

SPRING FIELD DAY – SATURDAY, 12 MAY 2018

Our group gathered at Darsham on a reasonably sunny day. The welcome extended to us by this small community was very warm indeed. Tea, coffee, first class cakes and scones started the day in just the right way.

Celia Stephens opened proceedings with the good news that Clive Paine, so many times a leader of a Field Day, is making a good recovery from his stroke last year.

Ron Reeve, Darsham's archivist, told us that there had been a church on this site for a thousand years. The King owned the village after the Normans arrived but it was run by the Benedictine monks of Cluny, although by the 15th century monks at Thetford were in charge. There have been significant changes to the building, especially during the Victorian age, but on the North wall a Norman doorway remains clearly visible and when the East wall was rebuilt in the 19th century and a new window installed, it was a Victorian interpretation of a Norman window. In 1643 Dowsing arrived and it is thought he was responsible for the destruction of the West window because fragments of medieval glass were found on the ground outside. In 1999 restoration work revealed a rood staircase with an unexpected surprise: there were three human skulls on the top step. They were dated as 14th/15th century. They were reburied in the churchyard following a service using 14th century liturgy.

In the Chancel we saw a well polished brass of Anne Bedingfield who died in 1741 aged 80; unusually she was depicted in outdoor clothes, clutching a large handkerchief in one hand. The bell from HMS Darsham, a minesweeper, is displayed in the church. The parish had provided comforts for the ship's company over many years so when she was scrapped the bell was offered to Darsham. Thus, it has a safe resting place in a small Suffolk church, the condition of which testifies to the determination of a small, scattered community to retain and maintain a building which includes them in a thousand years of history. To emphasise the point, Ruth Whittaker gave a brief resumé of the advent of the loo and kitchen which were installed between 2013 and 2015. It was she who led the team which won a large grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. They all had to overcome so much red tape in those two years that when Libby Purves and Paul Heiney officially opened the loo they had to cut their way through yards of encircling red ribbon! Since 2015 teas have been served in the church regularly and there have been over a thousand extra visits to the church since the facilities were opened. Here indeed is a church building for a whole community every day, not just Sunday.

We moved then to the great Cathedral of the Marshes - Holy Trinity, Blythburgh, where Dr. Alan Mackley, author of "The Saving of Blythburgh Church" told a startling story.

By 1870 umbrellas were needed inside the building to protect not only from the rain but also from flying glass and falling angels. The church was rebuilt in the 15th century when Blythburgh was prosperous but as that prosperity declined it became more difficult to maintain such a large building. In 1577 the spire fell down in the Great Storm which also killed a local man and a boy. Dowsing arrived in 1644 and did all the damage he could including among the images on the font and the roof Angels. A fire in 1676 wiped out the village and successive Lords of the Manor had no interest in the church building.



St Edmund, Southwold – one of the churches explored during Spring Field Day
(Image credit: Simon Knott; suffolkchurches.co.uk)

In the 19th century plans for restoration were afoot and then the troubles really began. Essential work was estimated to cost £5,000 (somewhere between £500,000 and £2 million today) and funds stood at £44. The patron, Sir John Blois, was responsible for maintaining the Chancel but he and the church authorities could not agree exactly what constituted the Chancel, so it was agreed that two sets of accounts would be kept, which they were. However, with the Vicar, Mr Sykes, at odds with the patron and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) with their architect, Philip Webb, also involved largely on Sir John's side, work did not proceed smoothly. However, at a cost of £1,000, box pews were removed revealing the medieval benches, there was a new roof on the south aisle, some windows had been replaced and some plaster renewed, and in 1884 on Easter Day the church opened for the first time in two and a half years and the Bishop of Norwich preached. Much remained to be done but everyone was exhausted. In 1889 Rev. Oakes arrived: he questioned the Bishop's involvement, fell out with the parish, the architect and the patron, progress stalled. In 1895 SPAB came to look again, in 1897 a new vicar arrived, and in 1901 they had some money in the bank. However in 1905 another architect was appointed but the Archdeacon and SPAB fell out so not much happened except that SPAB finally withdrew from the fray after twenty-five years of intervention and argument.

After the First World War the Diocesan Advisory Committee was established and a more balanced approach was adopted and the appropriate work completed. How the church survived all this one cannot say but we are grateful it did so that one of Suffolk's best loved churches continues to delight and inspire visitors. Perhaps the lesson to us all is never to give up.

After enjoying our lunch at the back of this glorious church we set off for our final destination to learn about some very significant reordering in the church of St Edmund at Southwold, a herring church - that is, it paid its dues to the monastery in herrings. Shirley Cordeaux explained that some of the pews had been removed from the back of the church to provide a community space and facilities including loos and a kitchen. Matching limed oak chairs and cupboards for hymn books and the children's toys were also provided. The work has been carried out to a very high standard and seems to fit well in this ancient building. It did take fifteen years to raise the necessary funds and acquire all the appropriate consents. There were some objections to the proposed reordering from amongst the congregation but now the work has been completed it seems that everyone is pleased and delighted that the church is more accessible to the wider community. Having spent some time admiring this modern craftsmanship we had time for only a quick tour of this magnificent church, which was built in a single operation between 1430 and 1460. The powerful tower has fine flush work and the two-storey porch is one of the finest in Suffolk, with delicate flush work and flint chequers. The centre niche over the door contains a carving of St Edmund by Andrew Swinley (1989). Inside, the font cover was made in the 1930s to replace that destroyed by Dowsing in 1643.

The famous rood screen is beautiful and interesting. The most recent theory is that it was built in the church as there is no indication that it was ever moved in pieces. Decorated by the Norwich School of painters it is, very unusually, decorated on the east side too. The north aisle section is painted with the nine orders of angels. Some think that the decoration on the south aisle screen is different from that of the north aisle and that it is by a different artist and, interestingly, the theme of Old Testament Prophets is unusual in East Anglia. The 15th century pulpit was refurbished in the 1930s and the lectern is a copy of one in York. The angles in the hammer beam roof are largely Victorian; the roofs were reconstructed in the 1860s, but not changed. It may be that the Angels at the west end are original.

Of course, at the back of the church we admired the statue of Southwold Jack. He used to strike the hours on the clock, but no longer. He is dressed as a Man of War on the Yorkist side in the Wars of the Roses, and we were asked to note how bloodshot were his eyes! Our whistlestop tour was crammed with interest and left us feeling that there was a lot more to appreciate and understand but it's always the same with churches: one never stops learning and perhaps that is the enigma which fascinates those of us who enjoy these visits each year.

Diana Hunt

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 5 APRIL 2018

	Unrestricted Income Fund 2017-18 £	Designated Funds 2017-18 £	Restricted Funds 2017-18 £	Total Funds 2017-18 £	<i>Total Funds 2016-17 £</i>
Income					
<i>Donations and legacies</i>					
Annual donations	14,807	-	-	14,807	12,932
Other donations	1,817	-	-	1,817	62,750
Tax reclaimable and repaid bank charges	20,745	-	-	20,745	12,408
Legacies/donations in memoriam	-	2,600	-	2,600	19,929
<i>Activities for generating funds</i>					
Investment income	607	-	-	607	1,863
Fundraising events	74,346	-	72,620	146,966	138,618
Total incoming resources	112,322	2,600	72,620	187,542	248,500
Expenditure					
Raising funds	14,075	-	-	14,075	9,558
Net incoming resources available for charitable application	98,247	2,600	72,620	173,467	238,942
<i>Charitable expenditure</i>					
Direct charitable expenditure	77,916	11,666	72,477	162,059	232,600
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources before transfers	20,331	(9,066)	143	11,408	6,342
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources	20,331	(9,066)	143	11,408	6,342
Unrealised investments gains/ (losses)	-	6,370	-	6,370	56,596
Net movement in funds for the year	20,331	-2,696	143	17,778	62,938
Total funds brought forward	227,210	487,767	107,883	822,860	759,922
Total funds carried forward	247,541	485,071	108,026	840,638	822,860

BALANCE SHEET AT 5 APRIL 2018

	Unrestricted			Total	Total
	Income	Designated	Restricted	Funds	Funds
	Fund	Funds	Funds	Funds	Funds
	2018	2018	2018	2018	2017
	£	£	£	£	£
Tangible fixed assets	104	-	-	104	104
Investments	-	378,784	-	378,784	372,413
	104	378,784	-	378,888	372,517
Current assets					
Debtors and accrued income	10,516	-	-	10,516	18,687
Cash at bank and on short term deposit	370,843	106,287	108,026	585,156	561,622
	381,359	106,287	108,026	595,672	580,309
Creditors:					
amounts falling due within the year	(133,922)	-	-	(133,922)	(129,966)
Net current assets	247,437	106,287	108,026	461,750	450,343
Net assets	247,541	485,071	108,026	840,638	822,860
Represented by:					
Restricted fund					
James Mair legacy fund	-	-	108,026	108,026	107,883
Unrestricted fund					
Income fund	247,541	-	-	247,541	227,210
Designated funds:					
Capital fund	-	23,113	-	23,113	30,779
Reserve fund	-	378,783	-	378,783	372,413
Margaret Gilbert legacy fund	-	18,269	-	18,269	18,576
Anthony Wheeler legacy fund	-	64,906	-	64,906	65,999
	247,541	485,071	108,026	840,638	822,860

SUFFOLK CHURCHES RIDE AND STRIDE 2018 LAUNCHED

(previously known as the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Bike Ride)

A vintage car and a family history society helped to launch this year's Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride, which will be held on Saturday, 8 September.

Thousands of people take part every September, walking or cycling between churches, or signing in participants at churches, sponsored by family and friends. Participants choose their own route from over 600 churches that are open for the event, as many or as few as they wish. Sponsorship money is divided equally between their chosen church and the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, that gives grants for repairs to churches and chapels.

"This year we have invited the Suffolk Automobile Club to join in the Ride and Stride event, visiting churches on the day with veteran cars, attracting attention and contributing to our funds, not by sponsorship, but as paying guests. It should all add to the fun of this family event, which is open to all," said Patrick Grieve, the Chairman of Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride. "Our ancient churches and chapels need constant care and maintenance as the government pay nothing. We depend on the generosity of Suffolk people. Contact your local parish organiser or our website – shct.org.uk - for details. It is fresh air and fun for the family and a great day out."

Last year £160,000 was raised by the event, and donations and sponsorship can also be collected via JustGiving.

Piers Hart and his 1929 Alvis Silver Eagle sports tourer, members of Suffolk Family History Society and Ride and Stride organisers met at St Edmund's church in Southwold, to help announce that sponsorship forms and details of this year's Ride and Stride are now available.

"We are happy to be taking part in this event, as churches play such an important part in family history", explained Amanda Straderick, treasurer of the Lowestoft Group and Administration Trustee for the Suffolk Family History Society. "Many of life's events take place in them: baptisms, marriages and burials. Families often attend Sunday school and other special events. To be able to visit these churches and look round where such events took place is like walking in your ancestors' footsteps. And long may it continue."

The annual Ride, which began in Suffolk but has now spread across England, appeals to families, local history lovers, keen cyclists and walkers, church supporters and those who just enjoy an annual trip around the villages and towns of Suffolk.

Cyclists and walkers can get more details from Suffolk churches or via their SHCT Ride and Stride Local Organisers, by phoning 01787 883884 or <http://www.shct.org.uk/>

Rachel Sloane

THE ANNUAL SERVICE 2018

This year we went to the seaside. The spacious Felixstowe Trinity Methodist church was nearly full and the warmth of the reception was matched by the weather and the welcome from the local congregation and our Chairman of Trustees, Martin Favell.

SHCT representatives from all parts of the county joined the usual worshipping community of Trinity Methodist church. The singing of traditional favourite hymns such as "The Church's One Foundation" was bolstered by the Felixstowe Community Choir. The choir sang two special pieces including the very lovely spiritual "Go down Moses". It is not always at our services that we have the words displayed on large monitors as well as in the service sheet.

The service was very sympathetically led by Roger Fern, who used all his teaching and preaching experience to speak eloquently before each reading, giving its context and preparing us for a fuller understanding of its meaning. His address reminded us of the importance of our church buildings in our community life and in our religious life. They are the bond for the people of God. They are a national resource, with which Suffolk is particularly blessed. There is an importance of "place" in the Bible and we should thank God for the work of the Trustees and all those who help preserve our places of Christian worship. He used the sermon of Bishop Michael Curry at this year's royal wedding to illustrate how we can be surprised, perhaps discomfited, yet inspired by the word of God.

Trinity Methodist church, which dates from 1888, was ideal both for the service and the excellent refreshments which followed. We are very grateful to those who took so much trouble to make us feel so welcome and produce such an uplifting experience.

Ian Angus Colneys Area Organiser, Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride

WINTER STUDY DAY 2019

In the rather dull period after Christmas and the New Year we have arranged a Study Day to raise your spirits. Once again by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Robert Williams, we invite you to join us at The Barn, Haughley Park, on Saturday, 9 February 2019. We are offering excellent speakers, a hot and comforting lunch (including some of Tina's delicious puddings) and pleasant company, all for the usual price of £12.00.

Programme: Registration and coffee 10.30 - 11.00am. Then, Clive Paine and Howard Stephens will talk about "Rood Screens and Lofts, their history and purpose". Chloe Cockerill will then intrigue us with "Helms, Hatchments and Hedgehogs" concerning heraldry in Suffolk churches. She has pointed out that from a boss high up in the roof to a ledger slab beneath one's feet, coats of arms can provide vital clues to the history of a church and the local families. Heraldry appears in nearly every church in Suffolk, often on memorials and stained glass, as well as Hatchments and the Royal Arms. The day will finish at about 3.00pm.

Diana Hunt

GRANTS COMMITTEE REPORT 2017-18

It has been a year of major changes and initiatives across the grant funding landscape.

During the financial year 2017-18 SHCT grants totalling £88,508 were awarded to twenty-seven Suffolk churches. In addition, four churches were recommended for National Churches Trust Partnership grants totalling £20,000. The final Partnership grants will be awarded by the end of 2018 when the scheme will come to a close as NCT are restructuring their Grants Programmes. The Grants Committee has been able to recommend more than thirty projects for this additional funding stream and the extra grant aid made available to Suffolk churches during the lifetime of the Partnership Scheme has been much appreciated.

The Committee awarded grants to several churches carrying out projects with major support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. HLF continues to grant-aid urgent structural repairs for churches but during 2017 announced the closure of the ring-fenced Grants for Places of Worship Scheme. In place of this, churches are now included in the general 'Heritage' Grant programme for projects costing over £100,000 and 'Our Heritage' for smaller projects. Further changes to HLF funding are in the pipeline and a new Strategic Funding Framework will start in January 2019.

The Suffolk Historic Churches Trust was founded in 1973 at a time when the future of our wealth of beautiful churches was uncertain and some were threatened with redundancy. Much has been achieved since then but funding the necessary repairs and maintenance is a challenge. In April the Government published the Taylor Review which, whilst acknowledging the value of these buildings in their communities for a wide variety of reasons, also accepted that attention needed to be focused on the long-term sustainability of these special buildings. In order that informed decisions can be made, pilot schemes have been established in two areas: Manchester and Suffolk. Thus, it is hoped that a proper assessment may be made of the issues concerning both urban and rural areas. The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is managing the scheme in Suffolk and it is expected that more details will emerge over the next few months.

My thanks, as always, to the members of the Grants Committee for the detailed consideration they give to all applications. We are sorry that John Carrington has felt it necessary to stand down as Grants Secretary owing to the pressure of other commitments. We are very grateful to him for the fresh approach he brought to the role and the time he put into managing the grant application process so efficiently.

Robert Hogg and Joy Rowe, both long-serving members of the Grants Committee, have also decided it is time for them to retire. Robert, with his background in heritage restoration, brought invaluable expertise on the particular needs of church buildings. Joy has been involved with the Trust from its earliest days, serving in many different capacities including chairman of the Grants Committee. Her enormous interest in and vast knowledge of Suffolk churches of all denominations has enriched our discussions. We will miss them both and thank them for all they have contributed to our deliberations.

Celia Stephens Chairman, Grants Committee

GRANTS AWARDED 2017-18

Bacton, St Mary	£8,000
Baylham, St Peter	£2,000
Beccles, St Michael	£3,000
Blyford, All Saints	£1,500
Clare, URC	£3,000
Cransford, St Peter	£2,000
Elmswell, St John	£4,000
Felixstowe, Methodist church	£2,000
Great Livermore, St Peter	£5,000
Harkstead, St Mary	£2,000
Helmingham, St Mary	£3,500
Hitcham, All Saints	£1,000
Ipswich, St John URC	£3,000
Ipswich, St Matthew	£1,500
Little Cornard, All Saints	£4,000
Nayland, St James	£5,000
Needham Market, St John the Baptist	£10,000
Newbourne, St Mary	£2,000
Old Felixstowe, St Andrew	£2,000
Pakefield, All Saints & St Margaret	£3,000
Raydon, St Mary	£508
Saxmundham, St John	£2,500
South Elmham, St James	£5,000
Southwold, St Edmund	£3,000
Tattingstone, St Mary	£2,500
Wantisden, St John the Baptist	£6,000
Whitton, St Mary & St Botolph	£1,500

Total: **£88,508**

FORTHCOMING MEMBERS' EVENTS

- Friday, 12 October (5.30 for 6pm) Annual Meeting and Supper for Friends of the Trust
(at Haughley Park Barn – see page 15 for details)
- Saturday, 9 February 2019 Winter Study Day
(at Haughley Park Barn – see page 11 for details)



(Image credit: Jane Acton; janeactonpr.co.uk)

THE UNDELIVERED MARDLE

The Suffolk-based writer John Rogers published his book “The Undelivered Mardle” in 2013. The book recounts how one day when Mr Rogers had arranged to give a talk (or mardle) at St Mary, Letheringham, he suffered a heart attack. The “undelivered” talk became the basis of the book.

Earlier this year, a number of copies of the book were placed in churches around Suffolk. Mr Rogers invited visitors to borrow a copy of the book to read in return for a small donation to the church in which it was found. Once finished, he asked that the book be left in another church, so that others may read it too.

Sadly, Mr Rogers died recently, but the initiative continues. The photograph shows the book against the backdrop of St Peter, Cretingham. The cover illustration is by Mr Rogers’ daughter, the artist and illustrator Lucinda Rogers.



One of the fourteen sacrament fonts in Suffolk, at St John the Baptist, Badingham
(see Patrick Grieve's article on the back page)
(Image credit: Simon Knott; suffolkchurches.co.uk)

ANNUAL MEETING OF FRIENDS – FRIDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2018

This year's Annual Meeting of Friends will be held on **Friday, 12 October at 6.00pm (preliminary drinks from 5.30pm)**. Please take note of the different day and earlier time than previously. As usual, the venue is The Barn at Haughley Park, Stowmarket by kind permission of Robert Williams.

After the business part of the meeting, we are very pleased to have as our speaker the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and MP for West Suffolk. Mr Hancock, who prior to his current appointment was Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, will speak on the topic of "Valuing our historic past long into the future".

A buffet supper will then follow. There is no charge for the evening, but donations to help keep costs down are gratefully accepted.

We do need to know how many to expect, so please either complete the reply slip enclosed with the Newsletter and return it to the Trust Office, or email us on shct@btconnect.com. An invitation to the Meeting is also enclosed with the Newsletter as a reminder.

SUFFOLK FONTS

On entering the west end of a church, the first thing you see is the font. At the start of life a child is purified in baptism and then in maturity progresses up the nave towards the presence of God at the altar. There are a few Norman fonts, notably the black Tournai marble one at St Peter's, Ipswich. Most were crude and were swept away and replaced with increasingly ornate and splendid ones in the great age of church building between 1300 and 1500. The sacrament of Baptism increased in importance, and fonts were elevated on steps. In 1236 it was ordered that fonts be provided with covers to protect the sacred water from dust and dirt, and from theft for medicinal or magical purposes. These covers became elaborate and of great beauty, the finest survival being found at Ufford. The font was filled at Easter and the same consecrated water remained in the bowl for use throughout the year. Infant baptism involved immersion, which must have been a shock, although a rubric in the Prayer Book states "If they shall certify that the child may well endure it, he shall dip it in the water discreetly and warily." Baptism by affusion was recognised as equally efficacious, as is shown depicted on the font panel at Badingham. Fonts became ever more ornate, with foliage and mouldings, and on the shaft often four lions sejant representing the Gospels, alternating with wildmen, depicting primal man in his unredeemed state.

Fonts reached their highest development in the 15th century, with the 36 seven-sacrament fonts for which Norfolk and Suffolk became famous. (There is one in Kent and one in Sussex). The 13 in Suffolk can be found at Badingham, Blythburgh, Cratfield, Denston, Great Glemham, Laxfield, Melton, Monk Soham, Southwold, Wenhaston, Westhall, Weston and Woodbridge (St Mary). These fonts are octagonal and panels show the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, mass, penance, extreme unction, ordination and matrimony. The eighth panel varied, sometimes showing the Crucifixion, the baptism of Christ or the patronal saint. The panels are remarkable for their interest and detail. In the penance panel the devil is shown departing, at Westhall with his tail between his legs, and at Woodbridge forcibly ejected. In extreme unction the departed is always shown in bed, at Badingham with his shoes under the bed and his weeping wife at the foot.

Most of these fonts show traces of pigment, red, blue and green, particularly at Westhall, which has gold gesso work still to be seen. Combined with the wall paintings and stained glass, medieval churches would have been a feast of bright colours and vigorous images.

With the Reformation and a turning away from Roman cults, the prominence of sacraments declined and with them the importance of fonts. Many were damaged, and in 1566 Elizabeth ordered that fonts were not to be removed. With the puritans came wholesale defacing and destruction of all catholic imagery and most of the seven-sacrament fonts were badly damaged with the figures losing their heads, or at Blythburgh and Southwold being wholly obliterated. This rejection of Roman rites continued as late as 1810 when the fonts at Wenhaston and Wherstead were defaced. It is a miracle that so much has survived at all. Fonts are one of the many glories of Suffolk churches, and repay a close look, not forgetting that they are still in regular use for their original sacred purpose, bringing a child to God.

For those interested, a full history, description and inventory of fonts in Suffolk can be found in H Munro Cautley's seminal work "Suffolk Churches and their Treasures" (The Boydell Press), upon which I relied for much of this article.

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