

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



St Edmund

Suffolk Historic Churches Trust

Registered Charity No. 267047

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As I write it is Holy Week but the world is in lockdown, the churches are closed and few people are abroad. For my own part I am blessed by living in the beautiful Stour Valley countryside with all our children and grandchildren hunkered down with us, but I pray each day for others less fortunate, whether they are cooped up in a small urban flat, or on their own or in fear for those they love.

Of course our oldest churches have seen many a plague over the centuries - none worse than the waves of the Great Pestilence between 1348 and 1380 that went on recurring through the 15th century and beyond. In the first wave the population of England was nearly halved – maybe back to the two million or so of the Domesday Book in 1086. We know work stalled at St Mary's Kersey during the worst of the plague but Suffolk churches continued to be built, rebuilt and embellished in the second half of the 14th century - the wonderful St George's, Stowlangtoft and St Mary's, Parham date from then - and of course the following hundred years was to see the great flowering of church building in Suffolk with our famous perpendicular wool churches – or cloth churches as they should more rightly be called - being triumphant rebuilds of what had gone before. What flowering will follow our current travails?

During the lockdown the Trustees and officers of SHCT, and Helen Read, our Assistant Secretary, whom I know many of you have been in contact with over the years, are using phone and video links to enable us to keep the Trust ticking over. We are still giving out grants and we are preparing for our key fundraiser, the annual Ride and Stride on 12 September, in the expectation if not certainty it will all go ahead. But I fear our annual service of thanksgiving, planned for 12 July at St Peter & St Paul, Aldeburgh, is unlikely to go ahead.

In November 2019 the Trustees had an 'Away Day' to reflect upon our purpose and means of achieving it, from which we came out convinced that our purpose was as critical as ever and with renewed energy for the task of supporting Suffolk's wealth of great buildings and those who care for them. We look forward to safer times and are already planning ahead for our 50th Anniversary Year.

Much of what follows in this Newsletter refers to days of us gathering together that now feel somewhat like a distant memory, but they will return. Meanwhile stay safe, stay well.

Geoffrey Probert Chairman

**As always, this Newsletter is also available on the SHCT website –
shct.org.uk – under the "Latest Newsletters" tab**

SUFFOLK CHURCHES RIDE AND STRIDE 2020

Subject to any disruption arising from the coronavirus outbreak, our Ride this year will take place on Saturday, 12 September - it is always the second Saturday in September when the children are back at school. Please note the date in your diaries. If you cannot ride yourselves, encourage your young to do so, and be sure to sponsor those who do. Please support your local organiser by volunteering to staff the churches and keep them open for visitors. Suffolk's churches and chapels are the finest in the country, and our county raises more than any other in the land. This is due only to our loyal supporters.

In 2019 we achieved a total of £128,405. It is again down on the previous year, but still a fine sum at a time when fund-raising is becoming increasingly challenging and every Saturday between Easter and Michaelmas you will see cyclists on our roads and lanes competing for some cause or other.

The Pedal and Drive event on the same day with classic motors was a triumph and raised a further £10,797 for the Trust, so overall we are keeping our income up. Gift Aid recovery gives us about £18,000, so the work of the Trust in grant giving continues undiminished. However, the commitment and support of our organisers, riders and sponsors remain vital. My thanks to all.

Patrick Grieve Chairman, Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride



St Michael, Beccles – south porch

WINTER STUDY DAY – 1 FEBRUARY 2020

Over 80 of us gathered at the Barn, Haughley Park on 1 February with the promise of learning more about the rather shadowy figure of St Edmund, the very significant monastery founded 1,000 years ago at Bury St Edmunds and the extraordinary adventures of the Bury Cross.

Clive Paine, the well known and much loved local historian and a Vice President of the Trust, told us about Abbo, a Fleury who visited the monastery at Ramsay and wrote about the life and death of Edmund in 869-870. His source was Edmund's armour bearer, who was present at Edmund's death, and told Archbishop Dunstan who told Abbo 115 years after the event. Apparently, Edmund was crowned on Christmas Day 855 at Buruman (possibly Sudbury). Edmund is captured by invading Danes who say he can reign as their "puppet". He declines. He is dragged before the Danish king and contemporary illustrations suggest he was "tried" as had been Christ. He is tied to a tree and killed with arrows. The illustrations suggest the sanctity of Edmund with the presence of God in an extended hand or, in one instance, the head of Christ and the inclusion of the almond-shaped "halo" or mandora which is usually associated only with Jesus or Mary. Edmund is beheaded, the Danes steal the head (they believed only a complete body would go to heaven). A helpful wolf leads Edmund's followers to his head and it is reunited with the body and buried.

According to Abbo, Edmund was moved to Bury in about 889 and declared a Saint as well as a King and Martyr. Between 890 and 910, 2,000 coins were discovered with St Edmund Rex on them, so he did exist.

It was Canute, son of Sweyn (a Dane) who brought monks and established the Bury community. The shrine of St Edmund became central to the building of the Abbey which was, at the time, one of the largest buildings in Western Europe.

However, the resting place of Edmund's body remains unknown but he is commemorated in many churches including Troston, Wells Cathedral, on the retable and walls at Thornham, on the screen at Eye and in the flushwork at Fornham All Saints, Charsfield and Ixworth. He is also the patron saint of monarchy.

Dr Richard Hoggett, a freelance heritage consultant who produced the Heritage Assessment commissioned by the Abbey of St Edmund Partnership in 2016, then led us in looking at illustrations of the physical remains of the Abbey and the different ways it has been studied over the last 500 years.

The Abbey was a Benedictine foundation which, post-Dissolution, had fallen into decay. The site can be traced back to 869. But the stone used in the building was a very valuable asset, so much of it was recycled into other structures. All that can be seen today of a building which is thought to have resembled Norwich

Cathedral are the flint rubble cores of the walls and only the Shrine of St Edmund was recorded contemporaneously, that is about 1434-1439. In 1890, Hardy attempted a reconstruction of the Abbey but it was all conjecture – a very large monastic complex with a vast church plus those of St James and St Mary.

In 1952, a Norwich architect, Mr Wittingham, produced a plan showing what he thought was the full extent of the monastery at the time of the Dissolution but really very little is known about the site. The area within the walls is a repository for archaeological remains; it is protected and needs excavation and interpretation. However, Richard's researches have produced some interesting suggestions.

In 1478, William Worcester visited the site and, as was his practice, produced notes which give the paced dimensions of the and cloisters. Edmund Prideaux's sketches of 1735 show images of a church, the Bishop's palace and with ruined walls visible. The Buck brothers produced an engraving in 1741 showing monastic fishponds, while Godfrey in 1779 showed that much masonry survived to the late 18th century. In 1793 a watercolour by Thomas Girtin showed a building attached to the Abbey gate. And in 1848 a cache of bones was found near the Norman Tower, and Richard Owen (who later established the Natural History Museum) assessed them as belonging to either dogs or wolves. It was claimed in the local paper that as the bones were discovered, Edmund's oak tree at Horne blew down!

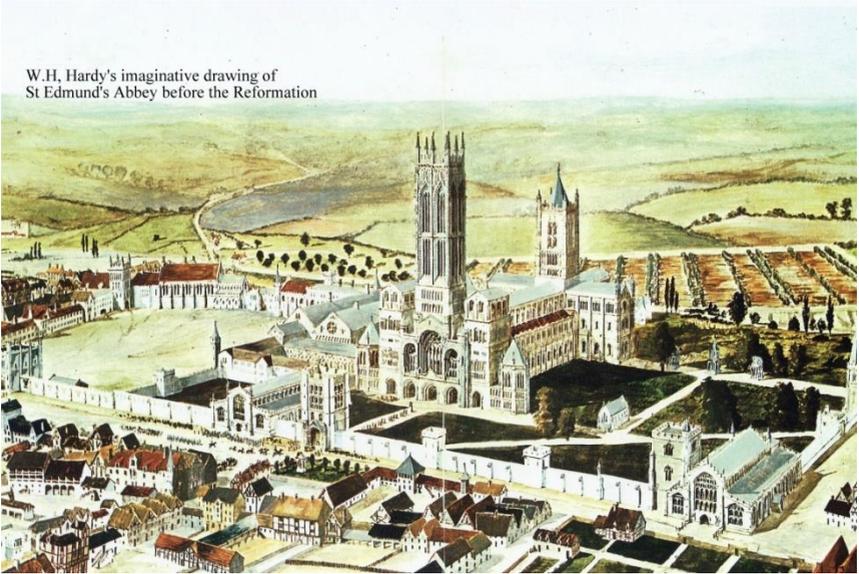
A recognised local historian, M. R. James, who also wrote ghost stories, collected descriptions of the church and its environs and presented it as a guided tour of the 15th century site. Richard described it as a first class piece of scholarship, but conjectural. It showed the Shrine of Edmund at the East end. He thought Edmund was in the crypt.

In 1902, excavation started at the Chapter House. A line of stone coffins was discovered, containing 12th/13th century abbots, who were reinterred. In 1957, foundations of the west front were found and between then and 1964 the footings of the rotunda were discovered.

The excavations undertaken to date serve to whet the appetite of anyone interested in this site. Much remains to be done if some of the mysteries are to be resolved. The site continues to evolve and remains very significant in the modern life of Bury, with the development of the gardens to include memorials such as that to the Holocaust.

After an excellent and warming lunch we settled to hear Howard Stephens talk about the "Bury Cross " sold in New York in 1961 for £600,000 (about £5m today). But was it in fact the Bury Cross? That is what Howard set out to discover.

W.H. Hardy's imaginative drawing of
St Edmund's Abbey before the Reformation



W K Hardy's conjectural reconstruction of St Edmund's Abbey (top)
and the Bury Cross (see Winter Study Day report – pages 5 - 9)

The Cross in question is ivory, 23" tall and 14" wide, dating from 11th/12th century and carved most beautifully on the front and back of every surface. The depictions are from the Bible and include Adam and Eve, Christ taken from the Cross, Pilate and Caiaphas and the prophets. It was bought by the Cloisters Museum, New York, but there is a superb replica at Bury Cathedral on display in the Treasury.

We know that at Bury between about 1140 and 1150 Master Hugo carved a Cross and put it in the choir, but on the list of contents lost, produced after the fire on 11 June 1193, there is no cross mentioned. It did not appear again until 1955 when it was offered for sale on the world market, apparently owned by a man called Mimara. Where had it been for 750 years?

After sale, the cross was examined and found to be of Walrus Ivory, carbon-dated 600/650AD, in four pieces with a base and staining which indicated it had been buried. The Latin inscriptions indicated they had been written in England in about 1140/1160. Thomas Hoving in his book King of Confessors (1981) related this Cross to King Edmund.

A Hungarian man called Kiegler said he had seen the Cross at Zirc in north-west Hungary but he referred to it as the Maledictus Cross and did not say it was in four pieces, but there are records of two English crusaders in Zirc churchyard. Historians agree the Cross was not part of the ransom of King Richard. But how did the Cross get to Zirc?

Howard visited the church at Zirc. Conversation with Brother Adam had to be conducted in Latin but it transpired the library had books dating back to 1130. It is recorded that in 1192 the sacristan from Zirc was in the Bakony Mountains and found two exhausted Englishmen. He cared for them at Zirc Abbey. They were called William and Thomas and both died. The monks at Zirc were Cistercians and were not allowed possessions except books, so the Cross that William had with him was buried with him. In the 19th century the Abbey was enlarged and there were some reburials, when the Cross was found and kept. The Germans requisitioned the Abbey during the War, expelled the monks and, it is said, when the Germans left they took more than they had brought with them!

In 1889 Thomas Archer wrote about Richard I's crusade 1189-1192 and said Richard stayed at Bury Abbey to pray for his crusade and was given the Cross. He had an adventurous time fighting, marrying, being shipwrecked and eventually being captured near Vienna before getting home.

So, how did Mimara get the Cross? Howard suggested that it was on one of the trains that tried to take looted gold and artefacts to Germany during the War but they were intercepted by the Americans in Central Europe and the loot taken to

Munich for repatriation. Mimara was there posing as a Yugoslavian official. He managed to reach Zagreb where there is a museum full of copies and stolen goods. It is believed that the Cross at Cloisters did go on the crusade with Richard but whether it was the one carved by Master Hugo in Bury in 1140 you will have to decide. There is one further enigma: down the sides of the Cross there are two phrases not from the Bible, which it is thought were added perhaps in about 1181 by Abbot Samson at Zirc Abbey. Perhaps proof that the Cross was indeed carved at Bury St Edmunds.

We had a fascinating day and were left with rather more mysteries than usual to ponder. First, St Edmund who certainly existed but whose final resting place is unknown, then what was the Abbey at Bury really like and finally, the adventures of the Bury/Cloisters Cross. We were very grateful to our excellent speakers and to Robert Williams and his family for once again allowing us to use his lovely Barn.

Diana Hunt

MEMBERS' EVENTS 2020

Due to current restrictions on gatherings, our Spring Field Day, which was due to be held on Tuesday, 12 May 2020, has been cancelled.

The remaining events listed below are all subject to confirmation as the Covid-19 situation unfolds over the coming months. We will keep you posted on developments on the SHCT website – shct.org.uk

Sunday, 12 July	Annual Service at St Peter and St Paul, Aldeburgh (10.30am)
Saturday, 12 September	Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride 2020
Monday, 12 October	Annual Meeting and Supper for Friends of the Trust

SPONSORING RIDE AND STRIDE RECORDERS

At SHCT we often hear that some churches struggle to find people willing to cycle or walk on their behalf, although they are happy to be open and welcoming participants. Here is an idea for September 2020: Your recorders will be sitting in the church taking names down, often for several hours, so why not sponsor them? Many Suffolk churches already do this, and we heard of one that raised £320 in this way! As always, half of sponsorship money goes to the church and half to the Trust to distribute in grants.

Thank you, as always, to our wonderful volunteers for making Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride such a success each year.

Rachel Sloane



Signing in at St John the Evangelist church, Bury St Edmunds, 2019

GRANTS COMMITTEE NEWS

SHCT Grants

The meeting dates for 2020 (subject to any alterations arising from the coronavirus outbreak) and criteria for SHCT grants can be found on the SHCT website www.shct.org.uk/grants/ where application forms and guidance notes can be downloaded. Alternatively, this information and our advice on funding for church repairs in general can be accessed by contacting the Trust office by telephone or email.

The Taylor Report Pilot Funding

Some of the recommendations of the Taylor Review into the sustainability of English Churches have been tested by Historic England with a pilot scheme in Manchester and Suffolk. During the first year, 27 Suffolk churches of all faiths and denominations have benefited from this government funding for maintenance and urgent repair works. The Pilot is approaching the end of its second and final year and is now closed for applications. In addition, many of those volunteers who are responsible for caring for our church buildings have been able to take part in the Pilot workshops on topics of maintenance, repair and community engagement. The Pilot is undergoing an independent evaluation; an interim report has recently been published and the final report is due later this year.

Changes to the Wolfson Fabric Repairs programme for Parish Churches

The administration of the Wolfson Foundation funds for fabric repairs to Grade I and II* Anglican churches is moving from the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division of the Church of England to the National Churches Trust. More information can be found on their websites:

www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/our-conservation-grants/

www.nationalchurchestrust.org/

Grants Committee

We are sorry that Mary Wolton has decided that the time has come for her to retire from the Grants Committee. We shall very much miss her advice and the wide knowledge of Suffolk's churches and chapels she contributed to our meetings. We welcome John Devaux, already a Trustee, who has agreed to join the Committee.

Celia Stephens **Chairman, Grants Committee**

MY DAY WITH THE SAINTS

A late Summer ride for the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, September 2019

At the first church, to a pedal cycling purist like me, to see an electric bike outside was a terrible shock. Somehow an electric bike was even worse than a car, even though both are permitted on the modern Ride and Stride. The climb up on to the plateau of the Saints was (I felt) made steeper by that electric bike. The feeling of being cheated was eased somewhat by the welcome of the sitter-in and the offering of Fox's Glacier mints. Sat in hot sun, sucking.

To the next, and along one of those roads-beside-a-ditch we came to a sharp corner where there was a pile of things for sale – someone having a clear-out. And half hidden in the pile was the sinuous curve that could only be an English Scythe. A rapid stop, the seller engaged in conversation about scythes, the different blades, different poles or snaiths. A promise was made, and the seller agreed to hold it until we returned with cash in hand. And so to a second climb up to the plateau of the Saints.

After the usual exchange of compliments with the sitters-in, with biscuits and tea, here it is imperative to see again the medieval wall painting "The Wheel of Fortune". It takes me time to take it in, to ignore the pieces missing or over-painted, to see only the drawing. That and the artist's idea of visualising the progress from birth, through adulthood and old age to death, is sobering but exhilarating. It looks like a freehand drawing.

A group comes in: we know them, and we hear the reason for the electric bike. He lives on the other side of the valley, and the return ascent is too much for his knees, recently operated on or replaced. So he has crossed both river and major road, to join us in the next county. We sit in the sun on the well-placed seat, stonework radiating warmth. Happy aeroplanes play around against summer clouds. But it is only just Summer, it is that second week in September, the day of the Harvest Moon, almost Autumn, but often fine and warm, like now. We feel deservedly rewarded by the fine weather.

At the next church, as the bike is parked we hear the conversation of the sitters-in. The subject is 'vicars'. Vicars have good points and not-so-good points, but they have a lot to put up with, and they are trying. The biscuits here are superb, even a tin of all colours, and there is a sack full of crisp packets. We meet again a group who will share the danger of a main road on the way to the next church; we agree to form a peleton on the road - it works, fast traffic slows to pass. After a short while, we separate from them and plunge into the countryside of The Saints. The only colour is brown, or browns. Dark brown fields, brown

water-starved verge, brown fallen leaves. A deep ditch gives some colour relief with Meadowsweet, Corn Sowthistle, even dear old Ragwort, all on their second flowering. The same people come in while I sit with biscuits, and they discuss orchids as they pass through the 're-wilded' (un-mown) churchyard. Here they have a way of keeping down the 'weeds'. In the far half of this churchyard are a good number of full grown oak trees, trunks two hand-spans across and perhaps five to 15 yards apart, that form a thick canopy over the churchyard. No side branches till 25 feet. Very little growth surrounding the headstones here. In the warmth and light of Spring all the usual bulbs and early wild flowers come out, but later growth is stifled by the thick canopy. Under the trees it is so dark I feel that I can manage a quick call of nature. But there is laughter as they tell me I forgot I was wearing my Hi Vis jacket.



Mettingham, All Saints

The next is different: Not the usual pair of faithful lady parishioners to welcome and chat the weather. The voice is of Command, "Name, please?" And here no sack of crisps or tins of biscuits, here is a real Lunch, wedges of cheese, small tomatoes, water biscuits and a dip, and more. She goes into the church to discuss internal features. He approaches to talk of the churchyard. "Bit of a mess don't you think? We ought to get those gravestones straightened. And those lichens, they discolour the stones and cover over the names. I do like Order you know".

Next is the redundant church in the middle of fields. Getting to it really is difficult. A metalled road gives way to a gravelled track, then a path, and lastly a four-inch earth track between a deep ditch and ploughed field. I dismount, later chance it and ride. But then walk it – it is too dangerous. Suddenly the church appears. Talk about re-wilding, this churchyard is WILD. But the church is well cared-for and the welcome heartfelt. I ask about the thick book she was reading – "It is an annotated lectionary Bible, I'm training to be a Lay Preacher. I managed two hours work on the lap-top before the rush began". We look up Genesis 1, to see how much has been lost of the poetry. Some has been kept at least.

We turn east, towards our home, and there is a long, very long downhill freewheel, we are coming off the plateau of the Saints. The last but one church is on a steep south-facing slope. A notice warns visitors of the danger of rabbit holes, there is a gate to pass through the paling fence. The churchyard is short grass, kept short not by ride-on mower, but by the rabbits. The path to the open south door is on grass, grass within grass. No-one is there, we are late, but we sign in. There is a well placed seat again where we plan our next route. In the south-facing warmth we are surrounded by grass-hoppers. I even see one munching on a blade of grass.

At the last church, no-one sitting in, no welcome, no tea or biscuits, we are late indeed. But another solid Norman arch, the fourth, we are passing through the 11th and 12th centuries. And a surprise – a set of Stocks, for pinning wrong-doers by the ankles whilst pelting them with bad tomatoes, or worse. I count their visitors – 14. Some from 20 miles away. It has been a lovely day. We have been out for eight hours in another world, visiting 10 ancient churches, and everyone we meet feels blessed. Tomorrow I can work out the mileage. And hope to begin healing the leg muscles.

**Philip Evans, Old Raleigh bike, Mettingham All Saints church,
September 2019**



Carving of a mastiff at St Michael's, Framlingham (see article next page)



Depiction of a talbot in Dennington

DOGS IN CHURCH

Dogs get a bad press in the Scriptures as unclean animals, licking beggars' sores, returning to their vomit and gathering crumbs under the table. Although despised in the East, we in Britain have always loved dogs, and they follow us everywhere, sometimes even to church. Some churches had a pair of dog tongs to enable the Sexton to remove misbehaving dogs during services. There is a famous pair to be seen at Bangor Cathedral, although I think none in Suffolk.

In Dennington there is a pack of delightful hounds, namely talbots, carved as pew ends, along with other beasts and mythical creatures. Talbots were hunting dogs used in the chase, and much valued by noble families. I have heard that they may represent the Dominicans, who sometimes were called *Domini Canes*, the Hounds of the Lord. There was a Dominican house at Dunwich.

In St Michael's Framlingham on the tomb of Mary Fitzalan, there is a fine carving of a snarling mastiff upon which the grand lady rests her head. There may well be other examples of heraldic hounds, but they usually preferred lions or wyverns upon which to rest their heads and feet.

The best known unwelcome dog to visit a Suffolk church was the black dog Shuck, who in 1577 burst into St Mary's Bungay during a storm, causing death and destruction. On the same day on the way to Bungay, it is claimed Shuck attacked Blythburgh church, sending the bells crashing down on the font, and killing a man and a boy. Shuck escaped out of the north door, upon which his blackened claw marks can be seen to this day. Can Shuck have done this twice on one day, or are the two parishes competing for this tale? Church Grims, black dogs that haunt churchyards, are seen in the north, but not in Suffolk.

To encourage the young, some churches today hold special pet services when people bring cats, dogs, donkeys, gerbils and the like. These occasions I understand can be testing as the love the animals arouse in their owners is not always shared. Dogs don't love cats, and cats may love gerbils, but not vice versa. Donkeys tolerate their owners but care for nobody.

When I was a boy in the 1950s, an old black labrador called Badger regularly followed his master to church on Sunday morning, and sat outside waiting for him until the service was over. One hot summer Sunday the church door was left open, and Badger came in and flopped down at the back. All was well until the last verse of the hymn "Ye watchers and ye holy ones" - you may recall every verse ends with no less than five Alleluias. At the end of the penultimate verse, during the Alleluias, a fine baritone was heard, mellow but out of time. In the last verse, the voice became loud and persistent. In fact, when the hymn ended the final "luuuua" carried on, before dying away. It was Badger.

Patrick Grieve