

## ST EDMUND'S CHURCH, SOUTH BURLINGHAM



St Edmund's is a simple structure of tower, porch, nave and chancel, but its simplicity holds treasures, some of which are described in the guide, with a plan of the church to help you find them. The patronal saint, Edmund, King of East Anglia and Martyr, is a shadowy figure. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the ninth century contains the only contemporary reference to him, mentioning his death in battle with Danish invaders in 869. A tenth century account of his life by Abbo of Fleury, both circumstantial and legendary, describes his death at the hands of the Danish archers and his beheading, his head being found by his men guarded by a wolf crying 'Here, here !'. He soon became associated with other miraculous events and was made a saint, his final resting-place being in the great Benedictine Abbey of Bury St Edmund's.

In the name of Jesus Christ  
We bid you welcome to this church  
Here in the quiet you may worship at his throne  
Here you may speak to the Father who loves you  
Here give Him thanks  
Here you may cast your cares upon him  
Seek forgiveness for the past, strength for the future  
Then go on your way rejoicing  
And may God bless you and grant you his peace

St. Edmund's Church represents about 900 years Christian worship in South Burlingham. This ancient building dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and retains many ancient treasures. Of course the living church community has changed over the centuries but regular Christian worship continues in this place.

We hope this guide will tell you a little of the history of this building, and pray that during your visit you might linger a while and worship the One it was built for.

You might like to use the prayer printed below before you begin your exploration of this building built to the glory of God..

Living God:

in this building, used to the sound of singing;  
this building which has seen baptisms and funerals;  
this building where people have come to be married,  
or to celebrate the birth of a child;  
this building where people have wept, and been filled with joy;  
this building where people have wrestled with the deep things of life,  
have prayed urgently, been stirred and changed;  
in this building where you have so often been with your people,  
be with us now.

*The Book of a Thousand Prayers © 2002 A. Ashwin*

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## The South Porch

The porch by which you come in shows the earliest architectural feature of the church, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman doorway, with its typical half-round arch, surmounted by a head, and zigzag, or chevron ornament. There are two columns rising to capitals with volutes, the spiral scrolls found in classical Ionic columns. The Norman north door opposite has no columns, but 'billet' moulding of raised rectangles, and is bricked up. Such doors were little used, and the north side of a church has always been the unfavoured side — in folklore the North Porch was sometimes known as the 'Devil's door'. Churches are always aligned East-West, a screen dividing the larger western portion, belonging to the congregation, from the smaller eastern, or altar end, reserved for priest and choir. Now walk through the church, past the screen and into the chancel.

## Wall Paintings: Thomas à Becket & St Christopher

On the south wall of the chancel is the now faint 14<sup>th</sup> century mural of the murder of Thomas, saint and martyr. Thomas, Chancellor, and friend of Henry II was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, but his refusal to place the church's authority under the king's brought about his downfall. Henry is said to have exclaimed "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?", at which four knights, Reginald FitzUrse, William de Tracey, Hugh de Morville and Richard le Breton took Henry at his word, rode to Canterbury, and struck Thomas down in his own cathedral on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, 1170. Thomas, hardly visible, is on the left, kneeling before his altar and accompanied by his chaplain. The four knights are portrayed drawing their weapons or in the act of murder. Henry performed a dramatic penance, whipped by Canterbury monks after a barefoot pilgrimage. At the Reformation 21 cartloads of treasure were removed from Thomas's shrine. The painting is an unusual survival, since Henry VIII gave

orders that images of Thomas's martyrdom, and all references to him should be destroyed. On the north wall of the nave is another fragmentary painting of Christopher, the 'Christ-bearer', traditionally shown as an enormous figure with a staff, carrying the Christ-child across a river. As the patron saint of travellers, his image frequently faces the south door, where he could be glimpsed and acknowledged by those with a journey before them.

### The Pulpit

The fifteenth-century pulpit is one of the finest in England, restored with the aid of the Pilgrim Trust in 1964. The base-board and parapet are carved from single pieces of wood; its eight tall panels are painted alternately with a green or red ground decorated with gold flower-patterns, or fleurons. The panels have tracery inserts, with crocketed pinnacles at the head, giving a sense of richness and elaboration. The panels are separated by buttresses decorated with fleurons, and also with some applied gesso, or plaster, which has been incised and gilded. The pulpit is girdled by a Latin inscription: 'Inter Natos Mulierum Non Surrexit Major Johanne Baptista' — 'Among those born of women, none has risen to be greater than John the Baptist'. There are a Jacobean — early 17<sup>th</sup> century — back-panel and sounding board, or tester, over the pulpit to give more depth and resonance to the priest's voice, and also a frame for an hour-glass of the same period. Surviving sermons from Elizabethan and Jacobean England are among the glories of English prose, and could well take up to an hour or more to deliver.

## The Rood Screen

The rood screen is painted in alternating red and green panels; the bare patches may have been where altars stood or where demolished box-pews were butted against it. The top has tracery with cusps, small projections to add variation, over ogee arches, an ogee being a fluid S shaped curve, much used in the later mediaeval period. The rood screen itself divides the nave from the chancel. 'Rood' is the Saxon word for cross or crucifix, sometimes used for the image of the crucified Christ, which, together with images of the Virgin and St John, would have been set on a great beam traversing the church over the screen. The order for their destruction came in 1547, but on the south side of the chancel entrance can be seen the remains of a stair to the rood-loft, or platform from which the images rose, and which was used for saying masses or keeping watches.

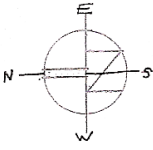
## Memorials

Behind the altar are two small brasses, one with a chalice, denoting the burial of a priest. A Jacobean brass to John Howlett (1615) on the north wall of the nave carries a stern message: 'Tantis malis haec vita est repleta ut mors potius remedium sit quam paena' — 'This life is so full of evil that death may be a cure rather than a punishment'. This seems an appropriate sentiment for a 'Cheife Constable' for the Hundred, a group of parishes. Drawn from the gentry, his job was to supervise parish constables in their attempts to enforce the law. If you carefully roll back the carpets in nave and chancel you will find several beautifully incised 'ledger' stones, some with crests and coats of arms marking seventeenth and eighteenth century burials. Please replace the carpets!

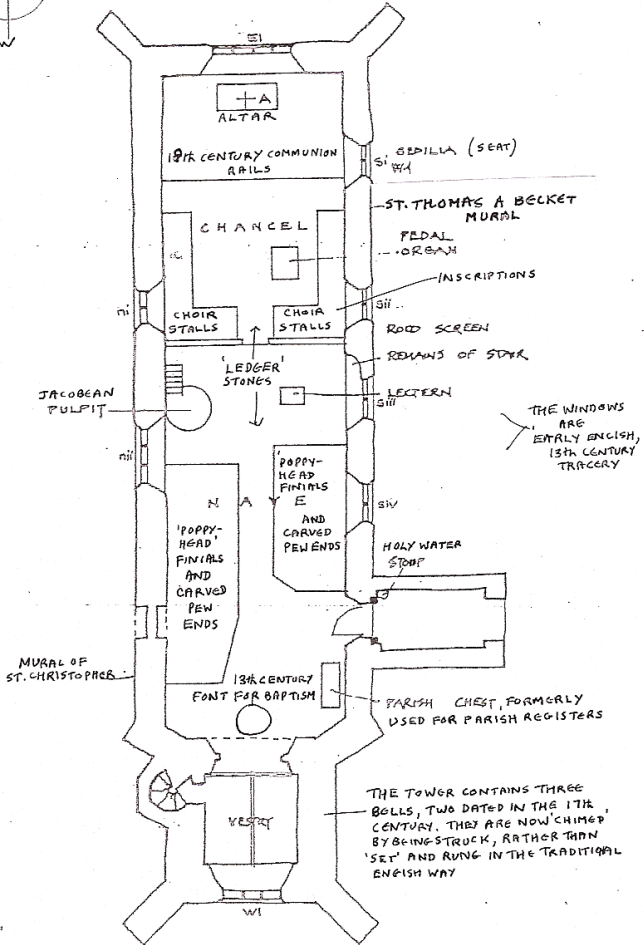
## Wood carvings and Inscriptions

East Anglia is one of the major areas where wood-carvings on oaken bench ends, or misericords, carvings under seats, are found. St Edmund's has some finer examples of bench-ends, and in both nave and chancel the benches end in finials, or poppy-heads, a form native to East Anglia, some of which are carved with elaborate faces. It is possible that Flemish weavers played apart in creating these decorative pieces, and 'poppy-head' may derive from the Latin 'puppis', a ships' figurehead, or French 'poupée', a doll. One in the chancel is carved with the images of a king and a bishop. The shoulders of these poppy-heads frequently have wood-sculptures of animal or human figures, and though some of St Edmund's are damaged, there are excellent seated figures, apparently in early Tudor costume, a dog, a snake, an elephant with its howdah, or castle, and a fox carrying away a goose. Classical fables, mediaeval bestiaries and church carvings were not created to provide an accurate analysis of the natural world, but to reveal moral lessons. Nature carried a symbolic Christian message for man, helping him to pick his way between good and evil, salvation and damnation. The fox, emblem of deceit and cunning, carries off a goose, the emblem of watchfulness and ordered flight; so should a Christian always be on his guard and live an ordered, watchful life.

As well as these formal carvings, there are numerous incised names and initials, particularly on the stalls (bench-seats) in the chancel. They date from the seventeenth century, and may have been created by inattentive village children, schooled at that time in the chancel. There are two interesting large graffiti of sailing ships on the back of a bench near the north door.

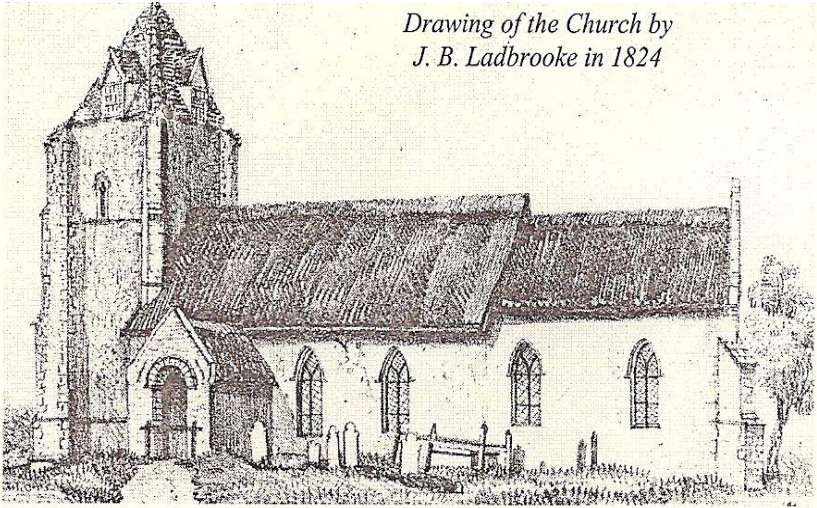


**SOUTH BUELINGHAM**  
ST. EDMUND



LAYOUT PLAN

*Drawing of the Church by  
J. B. Ladbroke in 1824*



A major restoration took place in 2013 with the help of a significant grant from English Heritage and other grant bodies. Work included a new tower roof, repairs to the exterior walls, the installation of drainage, and the stabilising of the wall paintings. The interior was also redecorated.

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