The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Brockdish.

SOME LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Our church is not a large church, nor particularly grand. It was renewed and restored in Victorian times and has sometimes been the object of sniffy architectural snobbery by 20th century writers who preferred older, medieval churches. Or it was ignored completely by authors singing the splendours of a county overflowing with glorious churches. Possibly this is because our church has always been off the beaten track, standing remote from the main village down a country lane. But it is the oldest building in the village, at least nine hundred years old and has a wealth of interesting details from across the centuries. The medieval church was restored and renovated in Gothic revival style in the mid-19th century by the remarkable Rector, Reverend George France, whose ambitious commitment to beautify the building leaves a legacy now much prized by experts in Victorian architecture and decoration.

The Parish Church of Saint Peter and St Paul, Brockdish, Norfolk

Adherence to the formal worship of Christianity has waxed and waned over the centuries and from the time of the Reformation in the mid-16th century, the people of Norfolk have been divided in their attachment to the established church. What we see today is a building that reflects the changes in religious observance and faith but is still a fundamental part of

our village identity, even when there aren't often many people in it! The parish church belongs to all of us, including those who stop by out of curiosity and we hope this little guide will illustrate how a small medieval church became a splendid Victorian one.

Early Beginnings

The church's development took place mainly in three periods: the foundation and earliest part of the church was built just before or after the Norman Conquest in the late 11th Century. Then followed a period of major expansion in the late medieval period at the end of the 14th century and five hundred years later, a renovation and restoration in the 19th century.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul was probably constructed because it lay at a mid-point between the two ancient manors of the village but safely above the river flood plain, in days when the Waveney was a far wider river than it is now. Brockdish has been here since before Roman times, a farming community created by the geology of the boulder clay terrain sloping down to the river. Brockdish is called BRODISE in the Norman survey reported in the Little Domesday survey in 1086, under the Hundred of Earsham. The Domesday excerpt refers both to the church and rector. The village probably takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon words 'brād' for broad and dic for ditch, softened by the Norman pronunciation of Middle English to 'diche'.

The church is located at some distance from the main village because a medieval church was a *parish* church, not a village church and while it happens that most churches are in the main settlement of the parish but many, including Brockdish, are outside the village of their parish name.

Late Saxon/ early Norman parts of the Church

The first church from which parts survive was probably a long narrow church of rubble faced with flint, which may or may not have had a square tower at the west end. It would have been thatched. Most of the churches in surrounding villages have round towers, built with rubble faced with flint, which had a better stability than square towers where there was no stone for square corners. The square base of the tower may however have been added later in Norman times.

The Norman church would have been very dark; the small windows

without glass, probably. Everyone would stand. The priest would speak the service in Latin, the villagers would not have understood the words and may well have carried on their own conversations. The priest would stand behind a screen separating the lay people's space or nave from the Chancel or Sanctuary that was reserved for the priest. It was usual for Norman churches to be vividly coloured with figures and patterns inside in wall paintings. None of these survive in Brockdish but fragments of wall colour were seen during the Victorian renovations.

14th and 15th centuries.

The basic shape of the church probably remained very little changed until the late 14th Century, when major rebuilding and expansion took place and the church shape emerged broadly as we know it today, created largely in the 'decorated' style of gothic architecture, (1275-1380) but also with some elements of the later perpendicular style (1380-1520). The date of the church expansion is difficult to pinpoint but must have been before the death of Sir Ralph Tendring of Brockdish Hall, who built the Tendring Chapel, who died about 1400.

It is generally accepted that the 13th and early 14th century were periods of rising population but increasing rural poverty from overpopulation, famine and 'the little ice age' of adverse weather. The local community had little left over to invest in beautifying their church but after the Black Death plague in the mid-14th century, that so rapidly killed between a third and a half of the entire population, population pressure on land reduced and the great late 14th century period of church building and expansion began. Brockdish is just one of numerous churches in Norfolk that were enlarged and developed at this time.

The south aisle was built during this period. The construction of the aisle necessitated the raising of the roof of the nave, which in turn required the construction of supporting buttresses of rubble, flint and stone along the north nave wall and the new south aisle wall. The decision to make the buttresses more or less match on both sides of the church meant several windows were covered up or cut in half. These buttresses remain but were decorated later in the 19th century with cruciform stone flushwork, entirely in keeping with the style. The clerestory windows, to bring much needed light into the nave, were inserted during the expansion.

Larger windows were inserted in the nave and aisle although smaller than the ones we see today. The chancel arch, the door surrounds to the north and south church doors were all modeled at the same period. The north door surround, now rarely used, is rather more ornamental than the south door, suggesting that this was used as the main entrance in late medieval times. Both doors had porches added in perpendicular style, it is thought in the early 15th century but the north one disappeared in the 18th century, most probably it fell down from neglect.

The nave roof, probably covered with lead when first constructed, is late 14th or early 15th century with tie beams and arched braces up to the ridge but the roof was later tiled and then recovered with slate in the 19th century.

The Reformation, the 16th and 17th Centuries

Church guides customarily hasten over the 16th and 17th centuries because wanton destruction and neglect seem to be the only matters to report of consequence; nothing got built. At Brockdish the north porch was allowed to decay and at some point the vestry tacked on to the north side of the chancel disappeared. The turbulent political, economic and religious events these centuries imposed fundamental changes to the culture and values of rural England and had a major impact on parish churches such as St Peter and St Paul. First the Reformation of the 1530s and 40s, then the Counter-Reformation from 1553-58, then on the accession of Elizabeth 1, the reimposition of the new Protestant faith that would become Anglicanism.

Brockdish parishioners were obliged, as elsewhere, to follow the official line and alter their church to suit the dictates of the crown. Initially, images and votary lights had to be removed from the church, walls whited to cover up paintings; only three candles were allowed. At a stroke, the multicoloured walls glitteringly lit for mass, were lost forever. New Bibles in English were to be placed in every church but but must only be read by priests.

A further tightening of the rules after 1547 brought the dissolution of chantry chapels, the end of the celebration of Wakes, Church Ales and Plough Monday, (popular ancient celebrations with much drinking, dancing and merry making), the prohibition of the use of holy water, beads, palms and ashes, the introduction of the English Prayer Book Act to allow the marriage of priests, the burning of Latin missals. On and on

the determination to impose an austere uniformity stamped out 'popish' vestments and rituals. All the while the Government was profiting from seizing goods of any value.

Brockdish church would have been proud of its colourful priests' vestments, made of precious cloth no ordinary villager could afford. An inventory of church goods compiled in 1552-3 listed the following treasures to be handed over to the Commissioners of the Crown.

Vestment white saten (satin)
Vestment of white damask
Vestment and cope of russet chamblet (chamblet or camlet was a light cloth of silk and camel-hair)
Vestment and cloake of black wurstede (worsted)
A cope of red satin
A cope of bawdkyn. (heavily embroidered cotton fabric)
Crosse clothes of single rarvis.
Crosse of cup gilt"

A sudden reversal of policy by Catholic Mary l in her short reign from 1553 to 1558 led to considerably more local expense and the widespread fear of the horrific penalties for non-compliance. After Mary's death, Elizabeth 1 reimposed Protestant worship again. Catholic symbols were banned once more and fines were imposed for non-attendance at church.

All these changes were taking place when Norfolk was in the vanguard of the Puritan movement. A goodly proportion of the population liked the simpler forms of worship, the cleansing of the Church, the closer relationship of man and his personal God. When we complain about the desecration and destruction of the Reformation and the 17th century puritan assault that followed in the next century, we must remember that the changes were probably approved of by most in Brockdish.

Some fabric improvements were made. In 1618 the whole church was 'newly paved and repaired' and 'the pulpit and desk new made, new books, pulpit-cloth, altar-cloth, &c. bought.' Church ceremonies had become simpler; sermons were longer and more thoughtful, invited 'lecturers' gave additional sermons on Sunday afternoons. Altar rails were removed and the altar table moved to a central position in the nave so the congregation could break bread and sup wine together during eucharist. Many churches bought new communion tables in the 1630s and it is likely that Brockdish church bought then the table that now sits at the back of the church, very typical of a communion table of the period.

During and after the Civil War of 1640-48 about a quarter of Norfolk clergy were thrown out of their livings by puritan zealots, most were the innocent victims of a systematic campaign against university educated churchmen. The fate of our Brockdish rector, Brian Witherel is undocumented but we know there was no official rector here between 1646 and 7. Witherel was succeeded at some point by unqualified preachers, who were ejected at the Restoration of the monarchy, as puritan preachers were and a conventionally Cambridge educated rector was finally installed to the Brockdish living in 1663. The episcopacy, abolished during Cromwellian times, was also restored. The Church of England was back and many were glad of it after the years of dull austerity.

The 18th century

The Church of England was in a sad state in the 18th century. Enthusiasm for religion was seen as dangerously divisive or socially inappropriate and having witnessed the horrors to which 'enthusiasms' could lead in the previous two centuries, who can blame them? But Norfolk churches, including Brockdish, were becoming dilapidated, simply falling down with neglect. In 1710 the western tower and steeple of Brockdish church collapsed. The tower, but not the steeple, was rebuilt rather economically in brick in 1713 but was a decent shape with a little decoration, a plain lower story with angle buttresses and a belfry with round headed openings, string courses of brick, pinnacles and battlements on top.

Brockdish Church in a lithograph drawn by Robert and John Berney Ladbrooke c 1820, showing the new church tower of 1713.

After the tower rebuilding and some repairs, no rector stayed here long enough to provide leadership for the church. A swift succession of rectors either did not stay very long or combined the Brockdish living with another at a distance. Patched up with bits of mortar, limewash and intermittent inadequate repairs in the early 19th century, the building was now the perfect setting for a restoration enthusiast to build his vision of how a church should be.

The 19th century: George France and the Church Reborn.

In 1842 on to the Brockdish stage steps Reverend George France MA (1816-1899), Rector of Brockdish until 1893, a crucial figure in our 19th century rural village. He was a busy magistrate. He established the first

National School and supervised its activities closely for 50 years. Spending his own money, he transformed the church into a first class example of 'high church' gothic revival architecture and built a romantic modern rectory for his family, which still stands, largely unchanged, east of the church. He seems to have been content to make this corner of rural Norfolk his own, not seeking preferment to higher office in the Church. It may well be that his various domestic and clerical projects and his family life were sufficiently time consuming and fulfilling to justify staying put almost to the end of his days.

George France age 21.

George France arrived in Brockdish with significant advantages, not least considerable personal wealth both from his own family's business in upper class funerals and high quality furniture but also from his wife Elizabeth Flood's wealth from her father's successful glove making business.

There is scarcely a church remaining in the UK which was not either restored, renovated or titivated in Victorian gothic style during the last three quarters of the 19th century. There were two main approaches to the national revival, first evangelicalism and second, High Churchmanship. George France was a committed high churchman who believed that the physical environment and decoration of the church must reflect the ritual and liturgy that were crucial in returning the church to the well ordered faith of pre-Reformation times. France clearly admired and followed the Oxford Movement that he must have absorbed at university at Exeter College, Oxford. His vision required a classically gothic interior.

First he took down the old western gallery and then over the next ten years installed a new font, cleaned up the fabric of the piscina, tombs, pillars and arches and scraped the walls of destructive whitewash. He had new windows made, unblocked and refashioned the clerestory windows, smartened up the south porch and recovered the roofs of the nave and aisle with slate tiles. The tower arch was rebuilt in 1851. The chancel roof and fabric were restored the following year, when new angel corbels were added to one remaining old one. The sedilia (priests seats) and probably the second piscina were added then.

France seems to have taken a considerable pause from 1853 to the next wave of activity a decade later, apart from the rebuilding of the churchyard wall in 1854, some work on the 'pillars' and the insertion of

stained glass in the clerestory wondows in 1857. The pause in his restoration fever may have been caused by his wife's ill health and his absence on leave.

Frederick Marrable and the Rebuilding of the Tower

By 1864 France was ready to invest in his long desired project, the rebuilding of the western tower. He was helped in this by a London based architect Frederick Marrable, who had designed the font 18 years earlier. The source of funds for the tower are reported to be from Mr France, Mrs France and 'the Rector's sister Miss E P France'. Marrable's first church design had been in 1852 in St Mary Magdalen, St Leonards on Sea, which church tower has close similarities to Brockdish. It is tempting to think Marrable brought an off-the-shelf 'one I made earlier' solution to Brockdish. In fact St Mary Magdalen's tower was not constructed until 1872, the plans having been shelved until they could afford to build, so Brockdish has the original.

The new tower of 1864.

The nave and aisle were tiled with plain back and red square tiles laid out in a common chequerboard design but the chancel, altar steps and tower base were paved with much more expensive encaustic tiles. While the tower was being constructed, France decided to restore the rood screen, which had its top half chopped on in 1561.

By the mid-1870s, George France was becoming more adventurous in his restoration. He created a modern tiled reredos that is one of the most striking features of the church. This was followed by a new altar, benches with intricately carved bench ends and new stained glass in some of the windows.

George France retired to Sevenoaks, Kent in 1893 and died in 1899. After his departure, in the early 20th century several more windows had stained glass inserted. The rood screen was modified in 1899, the gates and crucifix removed from the top and a beautifully carved tracery top half added with a simple superimposed cross.

A late change was the move of the font from the base of the tower to the back of the nave and the creation of a vestry by the addition of an oak screen across the tower in 2012.

The Bells

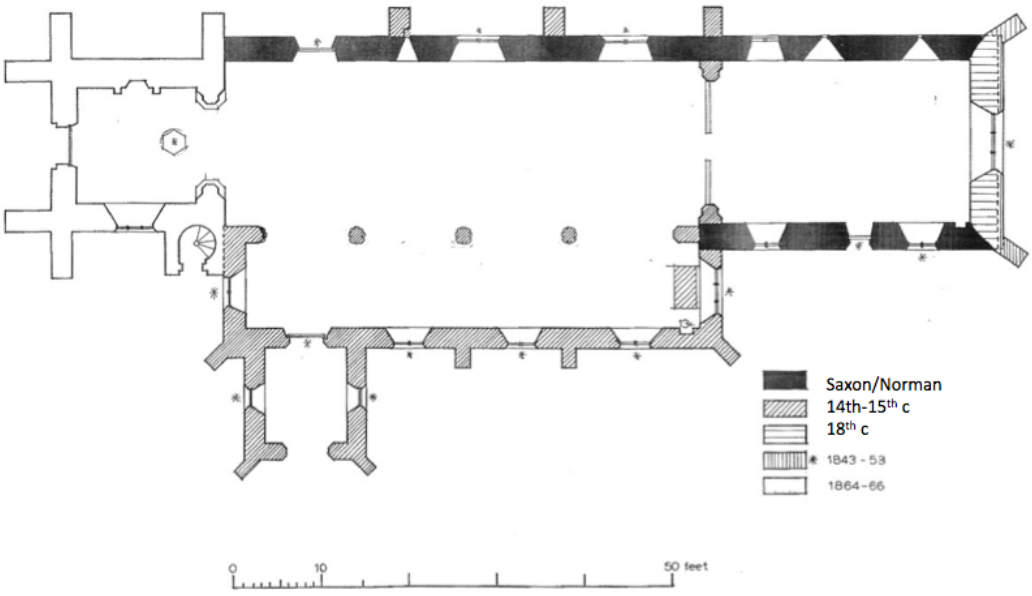
A joyous ring of six bells in the key of G lifts the spirits when they are rung out over the fields. The bells in place in 1710 were removed and kept safe when the old church tower collapsed until they could be rehung in the brick built church tower in 1713. But the whole assemblage was made good when the tower was rebuilt in 1866, with two of the bells being recast and the whole rehung in a more solid and well-made frame and machinery constructed by George Day of Eye.

The six bells comprise first, a treble by Edward Tooke, of Norwich, made between 1671 and 1679, a second and third both inscribed "Henry Pleasant Made me 1697", cast at Sudbury, recast in 1866 at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry; a fourth ancient 15th century bell was made by Reginald Churche at Bury St Edmunds, a fifth bell by Richard Brasyer of Norwich, also in the 15th century and finally a tenor bell made by Thomas Osborn in 1801. The bells were in a dilapidated and unsafe condition for much of the 20th century but were restored in the early 1990s by voluntary effort by skilled local craftsmen in an ambitious project. The rededication of the bells took place on Sunday, 24 November 1991. A fine ring of bells is our legacy from this determined effort.

The Advowson, the patronage of the church.

Since 1938, Exeter College, Oxford has owned the patronage of Brockdish Church, donated 'in memory of the Rev'd George France and [his son] George Flood France, both former members of the College'. The privilege of nominating the Rector to a parish church living was once a highly desirable and lucrative right, called the Advowson. In earlier centuries, the colleges of the two ancient universities, Oxford and Cambridge, whose main work was training students for the Anglican ministry, found the ownership of the patronage very useful for placing their own candidates in a job. By the time Exeter College received the donation of the Brockdish advowson, however, most of the privileges had disappeared but the connection remains. In medieval times, the Brockdish advowson was linked directly to the ownership of Brockdish Hall Manor and as the lordship of the manor passed from one family to another, so did the patronage. Nepotism was the order of the day until the 20th century. The advowson was detached from Brockdish Hall Manor only in 1824, when it was sold to a businessman, who acquired the living for his son-in-law, who in turn sold it to George France's father. A list of rectors, not wholly accurate, can be seen at the back of the

church.



Fabric Dating Plan

THINGS TO SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH.

The first impression is of a Victorian interior but the north wall of the nave and chancel are largely as they were created in the Saxon/Norman period, with the south wall and aisle being built in the late 14th century. The roof of the nave is also original, but was cleaned of whitewash and restained in the 19th century. Only the tower is wholly Victorian.

The Benches

Before taking a walk around the Church, pause to look at the Victorian oak benches, exquisitely carved with a variety of different poppyhead ends. They stand on deal platforms that add a little protection from the cold tiled floor in winter.

Poppyhead bench end in the nave

Turn from the back of the church and walk straight up the central aisle of the nave towards the Chancel and stop in front of the rood screen.

The Rood Screen.

The veneration of the rood, or crucifix, reached its peak in the 15th century; Brockdish screen still has its original 15th century wooden bottom half. It was first vandalised in the 1540s, probably whitewashed or pitched but in Catholic Mary I's reign, the rood was reconstructed and the rood loft repainted. The screen was attacked yet again in 1561 when Protestantism revived, the rood loft and the top half of the screen being removed. In 1864 Reverend George France did his best to preserve what survived of the mutilated 15th century screen by repainting in what he thought were the original colours with a touch of gilding and adding gates. The beautifully carved tracery top half, made by C E Hawes and Son, ecclesiastical carvers in Norwich, was added later in 1899, when the gates and crucifix were removed and a simple cross added. The restorations were paid for by sisters Eva and Marion Kay from Brockdish Place in memory of their father, Sir Edward Ebenezer Kay, a Court of Appeal judge. The final restoration catches something of the original splendour with the delicate tracery recreated in traditional Norfolk style.

The Chancel Arch and Screen from the Choir

The roodscreen seen from the nave

Directly to the right of the screen on the wall to the south side are brass plaques commemorating the Kays, including one to Sir Ebenezer and Lady Kay's great nephew, Major Edward Derek Kay Menzies, who served in the 7th Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and was killed in action in Normandy in July 1944.

The brass plaque to Sir Edward Ebenezer Kay and his wife Lady Mary Valence Kay

Plaque to Major Edward Derek Kay Menzies, killed in action 1944

To the left of the screen can be seen the blocked up opening to the medieval rood stairs on the east side of the east window in the north wall of the nave and the visible 'exit' behind the pulpit, also blocked up, where the stairs led on to the top of the rood loft, a wide beam or gallery running across the chancel arch. While you are looking left of the screen, note the pulpit.

The Pulpit.

The first pulpit was erected in 1619 but this was replaced by the current plain but pleasing oak one in the late 19th century.

19th century pulpit c 1880

The Lectern or Reading Desk

On the opposite side of the nave, the lectern was presented by members of the Brockdish Bible Guild in 1894.

The Chancel

Now go straight through the rood screen and look around the Chancel. Traditionally this was the priest's area, in his care and the most richly decorated. The chancel roof was refashioned in the 19th century but it sits on a series of carved bosses of charming, rather primitive carvings (corbels) of angels, one plucking a harp, another playing a pipe, one strumming a gittern, the forerunner of a guitar. One of these angels is thought to be medieval; the others were made to blend in. We do not know which is the original.

Angel corbels in chancel, supporting roof

The Sedilia or Priests' seats.

A stone bench, called a 'sedilia', was built into the south wall of the chancel' in 1852, "copied partly from one in Wingfield Church Suffolk". 'Sedilia' is the Victorian word for the seats on the right side of the altar provided in late medieval times for the officiating clergy celebrating the Mass. Sedilias were surprisingly contentious items of architectural adornment in the 19th century; what looks like an unassuming convenience to allow the parson to sit down during the service was the focus of much agonizing liturgical dispute quite incomprehensible to most of us today. Perhaps that is why Reverend France decided on a simpler, less ornate style than the one at Wingfield. At the same time as the sedilia was inserted it is likely that the pretty piscina was added to the right of the altar.

1852 Sedilia Brockdish

The piscina on the south wall of the chancel by the main altar.

Brockdish Church is very lucky to have two beautiful piscinas. A piscina is a stone basin used for washing the priests hands and holy vessels used during Mass or Communion services. Very few commentators mention this Victorian piscina in the chancel because of the importance of the other, important early one in the south aisle. But this second, beautifully carved piscina, which is in the decorated style of about 1380-1400, has delicate tracery and is well executed. The carving bears similarities to the carving of the three niches on the front of the church porch, which we know was constructed in the 19th century.

Piscina in south wall of Chancel

Reredos

By the mid-1870s, George France was becoming more adventurous in his restoration. He created a reredos, or altarscreeen that is one of the most striking features of the church. The design has gothic revival themes but is quite 'modern' for its day in its fashionable use of ceramic tiles. Now it is regarded as a beautiful example of mid-19th century tile work, one of our church treasures. The majolica tiles are by **Minton, Hollins and Co.** Many are based on designs by Augustus Pugin (1812-52), the great exponent of Gothic revival design

Altar and part of tiled reredos

The reredos stretches across the east chancel wall, with two big side panels in a moulded six leafed pattern linked by recessed trefoils, richly coloured in cream, gold, blue and turquoise. Across the top the tiles bear the inscription "Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you." On the panels on the north and south sides is a Latin verse. *"O Jesu, tuum vultum, Quem colimus occultum Sub panis specie",* which translates broadly as "O Jesus, whom we serve, your countenance is hidden 'neath the blessed bread".

A line of tiles with the four evangelists - St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John with the Holy Lamb at the centre runs along the central section just above the altar.

Tiles in Reredos

The reredos was installed at France's expense first as a memorial to his wife Elizabeth who died in 1874 but also as a testimonial to his and his wife's work in the church and a future memorial to himself. Three plain tiles, two with now faded inscriptions, lurk unseen behind the altar table bearing the initials and dates "EF 1874" for his wife Elizabeth and "1844 G and E F 1874" marking his and his wife's 30 years in Brockdish. Originally he left a whimsical "GF 18 - -", presumably to be filled in after with his future date of death. And someone obliged, as a new tile does now bear his date of death, 1899. You can see these tiles by peeking behind the altar.

The Altar or Communion Table.

The Altar is of polished walnut of the late 19th century. The central panel bears an inlaid 'IHS' inscription, surmounted with a crown rather than with the more usual cross. IHS is a common cipher for Christ, denoting the first three letters of the Greek name of Jesus, iota-eta-sigma or IHΣ. It crops up as a Christian symbol in many Victorian churches and on tombstones. The crown represents the State so the message on the altar reflects the role of the Christian Church of England as an institution of the State.

Altar, central panel

The Altar and Reredos, St Peter and St Paul, Brockdish

The Chancel Floor Tiles

The nave is tiled with a simple red and black tile design. The chancel and altar steps have a more elaborate design of encaustic tiles by Minton, Hollins and Co.

Minton, Hollins and Co encaustic tiles on the Altar steps and chancel floor c1865

The Organ

The original organ installed by George France was a 'Scudamore' dated about 1860, a small organ made to be used in the drawing rooms of the middle class sort of family as well as small village churches. It was enlarged and restored in 1905 by Norman and Beard, a local company. The 'new' organ is a 'Pipe rack' type with panelled sides with a sound outlet on the west side.

Memorial to Walter Worth.

Directly to the right of the organ on the north wall of the nave is the memorial to Walter Worth, rector of Brockdish parish for only two years from 1753-55 and unfortunately omitted from the list of rectors that hangs in the church. His rather grand marble tablet also recalls his wife Susanna, the daughter of John Aldous, gentleman, of Syleham. The couple's arms, a double headed eagle for Worth on the left and the Aldous family arms on the right are inset at the top of the memorial.

Memorial to Reverend Walter Worth and his wife Susanna

The Old Elm Coffer.

In the northeast corner of the Chancel, underneath Walter Worth's memorial, sits a battered utilitarian plain elm box on feet, in no great shape, with a modern metal lock attached where an iron plate should be. The iron corner binding suggests an 18th century origin. No-one seems to know when this box appeared.

East Window, Chancel.

The church windows are unusual but not unique in Norfolk in having stained glass in almost all of the lights. When the sun streams through the east window, south clerestory and aisle on a sunny day the light patterns are delightful. The windows and glass straddle the 19th and 20th century in origin. The quality of the stained glass is good; the best manufacturers, using their star designers and artists, were commissioned to enrich the windows over the course of 70 years, from the 1850s to the 1920s.

The main east window in the chancel was originally in an earlier style, probably Early English gothic pointed but by the early 19th century half the window had been blocked up with brick. France copied the east window in 1852 from the St Mary Magdalene Church at Castle Ashby Northamptonshire; it cost £36. The glass is thought to be by Michael O'Connor, a founder of M and A O'Connor, one of the more prominent stained glass companies of the mid-century. The window shows the crucifixion in the central panel with the Virgin Mary of Clopas with St Peter in the northern light and Mary, mother of James and John in the southern light. There are characteristic flower designs in canopies, tracery lights and lower panels. The window was rededicated in 1869 to recently deceased Lady Kay (Mary Valence Kay *nee* French) the wife Sir Edward Ebenezer Kay.

The main east window in Chancel

Before leaving the chancel, note the small blocked-up priest's door in the north side of the chancel from the early Norman period. You can see the new larger 13th century priest's door put in the south side of the chancel instead. Turning back into the nave from the chancel, look to the right to the north wall and inspect the windows.

The Nave

The North Windows in the Nave.

An early window in the north wall thought to be late Saxon.

The earliest window in the church is in the north wall of the nave, discovered by Reverend France in 1851. It is thought to be late Saxon but was enthusiastically restored, so looks newer than it is. The two large windows in the north nave are now perpendicular gothic in the style of the early 15th century, totally reconstructed to various degrees in 1851. When the 15th century builders put in these new windows originally, the

masons did not reflect the rhythm of the south wall windows but stuck them rather incongruously round the new north wall buttresses. The glass in these two large north nave windows was replaced in 1900 with new stained glass to commemorate the Reverend George France and his wife Elizabeth. The windows are thought to be by James Powell and Sons, the company also known as Whitefriars Glass. The four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are wonderfully drawn and their silk robes exquisitely rendered.

Francis Blomefield, 18th century antiquarian and rector here for a short while, had noted that, "in a north window are the arms of De la Pole quartering Wingfield." If one looks carefully to the top of the westernmost north nave window, one can just spot the arms recreated in the new 19th century windows, a nice touch.

Arms of Michael de la Pole, quartered with his wife, Katherine Wingfield

North nave, the Four Evangelists, commemorative windows
to George and Elizabeth France,1900.

There are several other older smaller round-headed lancet windows in the north wall. One of them has a classic roundel of 'grisaille' (grey sketch work), very typical of James Powell and Sons.

Grisaille roundel

Memorial to John Monck, 1759

Was John Monck buried under this pew in the corner of the nave by the pulpit because it was his favourite place to sit? John's father William Monck was a wealthy draper in the City of London, his mother the daughter of a controversial Mayor of Colchester. We do not know why John Monck was buried in Brockdish.

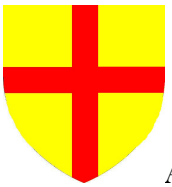
Standing on the north side of the nave by the Monck memorial, now look up across the nave to the clerestory above the south aisle.

The Clerestory Windows

The whole point of a clerestory is to shine light into the church, putting in coloured glass rather defeats the purpose. The glittering, rather jolly blocks of colour add traditional heraldic motifs to an otherwise biblical set of windows. In 1850, the windows were cleaned out and two blocked up windows were reinstated but it is not clear whether the coloured glass was inserted at the same time or later. It was certainly all in place in 1885 when a study of church heraldry of Norfolk was published.

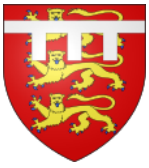
Clerestory windows: left, symbols of Saints Peter and Paul; right the Arms of Howard and John Bacon.

The four windows east to west represent first, the crossed keys and crossed swords of Saints Peter and Paul, then there follow three windows with the arms of the manorial families who held the patronage of the church. The second window has the arms of Bigod and Tendring, the third the arms of Mowbray and Brotherton and the fourth window has the arms of Howard paired with the arms of John Bacon, who gave a substantial gift to the church in his will in 1433. The Bacon charity still exists. It has to be said that that there is no clear record of this particular John Bacon bearing arms but it is good to have his generosity recorded in a memorial window.



Arms of Hugh Bigod, 1st Earl of Norfolk 1095-1177

Arms of Sir Ralph Tendring, Brockdish Hall c1360-1400.



Arms of Thomas of Brotherton, 1st Earl of Norfolk. 1300-1338

Arms of Thomas Mowbray 1st Duke of Norfolk. Born 1367-1399

Arms of John Howard, 1st Duke of Norfolk. 1425-1485

Now cross the nave to the south side, to the east end of the aisle. You are now in the Tendring Chapel.

The Tendring Chapel and Sir Ralph Tendring's Tomb

Puzzled visitors will look around the east end of the south aisle for a 'chapel' enclosure without success. The Tendring Chapel was originally created by the separation of the end of the aisle from the nave by the marble chest tomb of Sir John Tendring (c 1380 -1436) of Brockdish Hall but this tomb was dismantled and plundered for its stone to make a makeshift font in the 18th century. Sir John paid for the creation of a fitting Purbeck marble perpendicular altar tomb for his father Sir Ralph Tendring, which sits right at the end of the aisle, serving as an altar. Ralph's wife Alice is also buried there. Ralph was a younger son of Sir John Tendring of Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk who settled the Brockdish Hall Manor on Ralph from his several properties.

The tomb may have been reset at the east end of the aisle at some later date. The table shaped canopy, thought to be originally from the lost Sir John's tomb, sits rather oddly on top, in part obscuring the view of the lovely east window in the aisle. The tomb chest bears shields in cusped lozenges, its brass decorations long gone. There is a niche to the north of the altar, clearly meant to have the figure of a saint on it but now has a randomly sited gorbel, an ugly head, taken from some other part of the church.

Sir Ralph Tendring's altar tomb c 1400

The Piscina at east end of the south aisle c 1230-50

The Norman Piscina at east end of the south aisle c 1230-50

The late Norman piscina, which is considered both unusual and finely worked, with arches and dog tooth decoration, is from the mid-13th century. It is built into the side of the south aisle near the Tendring altar tomb, which was not constructed until the late 14th century. It has been in this position for many centuries and seems likely to have been inserted here when the aisle was built.

The East Window in the South Aisle

France's first project on the windows was to create a fine east window in the aisle in 1848, "a plain copy from the window in Over Church in Cambridge". The general form and tracery of France's new window is a copy of the rather grander perpendicular gothic window at St Mary's, Over but the glass, inserted in late 1851 renders the appearance now totally different. It was made by John Winter, a glass artist working in Bungay and is most interesting for its inset roundels of 17th century Flemish painted glass. Nineteenth century Britain was awash with panels and roundels of exquisitely painted glass from the Low Countries, originally from monasteries and religious houses, which sold in huge quantities in the markets of Paris and London. They are common all over the country, inset into new Victorian windows to give a suitably ancient element to a gothic revival.

East window, south aisle, by John Winter 1848

17th century Flemish Roundel, Adoration of the Magi

17th Century Flemish Roundel, possibly Pharoah's daughter finding Moses

17th Century Flemish Roundel, The Deposition from the Cross, from a print by Jan Van Straet (Stradanus, 1523-1605).

There are three smaller roundels in the window that may have been inserted later.

One of two smaller roundels in east aisle window of unknown provenance

The South and West windows in the Aisle.

The three south windows and the west window of the aisle were added in 1849. The West window in the Aisle is a typical piece of cheaper quarry glass by Whitefriars but the south aisle south-east window is a stained glass window of 1907, with Christ as Good Shepherd and Christ blessing a child inserted, a two light window dedicated to Revd Joseph Henry White, rector from 1895-1905. It is attributed to James Powell and Sons.

Detail, the Good Shepherd, south-east aisle window

South-east aisle window

South Aisle Centre Window.

This was the last of the windows to be renewed in the 20th century, inserted after 1923. Dedicated to the Kay sisters, Eva Mary Valence Kay (1850–1923) and Marion Annie Catherine Kay (1852-1921), who lived at Brockdish Place and were major benefactors to the church. It was designed by George Jonathan Hunt (1878-1945) whose signature can be clearly seen.

Aisle, south centre window 1923.

Detail of south central aisle window

Memorial to Samuel Atmeare in the south aisle, 1769.

A simple slate memorial to Samuel Atmeare, who was married to Elizabeth. At present we know little about him. They had a son, also Samuel, in 1733, baptised in Norwich, who later served on the parish trustees of the poor.

Memorial to Samuel Atmeare, 1769

Having looked down the south aisle, make your way down to the back, west end of the nave. There you will see the font.

The Font

A fine hexagonal baptismal font was constructed of stone in 1846, in high gothic revival style to a design by Frederick Marrable, the architect who later designed the new tower, at a cost of £48. Some stone from the old makeshift font was incorporated. Originally the font stood at the base of the tower but was moved to its current position at the back of the nave in the early 21st century. **The font cover** is a splendid piece of Victorian carved oak in with a hexagonal crown with struts covered in beautifully carved leaf 'crockets'. It was clearly made for the font and is in quintessentially English style.

Brockdish Church font 1846

Also at the west end of the nave are the bier and a 17th century table.

The Bier.

At the west end of the nave stands this once common piece of equipment for moving coffins during a funeral but is now quite a rarity. The bier dates from the end of the 19th century and was given to the church by John and Alice Pollard, who owned a building firm near the Old Kings Head Public House. John had been born in the village and trained originally as a carpenter. It seems likely that he made the bier himself. The bier originally had solid wooden wheels but these were so noisy that Mrs Pollard insisted that rubber tyres be fitted. The bier used to be pulled by a small white pony unless the deceased lived very close to the Church when it was pulled by hand. It was used for funerals at Syleham and Thorpe Abbotts as well as Brockdish. The bier was rediscovered in the Rectory Barn in late 1981 and Mrs J. Christine Longe (1948-2016), from the Grove, who was a Churchwarden at Brockdish for many years, was responsible for restoring it.

17th Century Oak table

An early 17th century oak table stands at the back of the church and serves to hold leaflets and the visitors' book. It was probably bought as a communion table at a time when new ones were being bought to satisfy new church regulations in 1630. The top frieze of the table is original but the table has been altered by the addition of a later frieze in the gothic style and two side drawers.

Early 17th Century Oak Table.

Now face the tower and go through the new oak doors to the tower vestry.

The Oak Doors to the Tower Vestry.

Before the beginning of the 21st century, it was difficult to find a corner in the church that could serve as a vestry. The ground floor of the tower seemed the only appropriate space and so permission was sought to move the font into the nave and erect a screen of doors to partition the tower from the nave. In 2012 the new screen was constructed of high quality English oak with simple pointed arch mouldings and rose carvings, providing a vestry area behind.

Oak vestry screen at foot of tower, 2012

The Tower

The newly rebuilt tower was finished in 1866 when the bells were rehung. A curious baronial fireplace was added to the south wall of tower interior, which appears to have no function. The floor of the tower has an exquisite encaustic tiled floor by Maw and Co, based in Shropshire. The design can be found in Maw's catalogue of 1865.

Tiled Floor of Tower, by Maw and Co.

The Tower Windows

There are two interesting and exceptionally beautiful windows in the tower. One can be seen by standing back in the nave and facing west, since the window projects above the new oak screen. The other remains hidden behind the screen until one enters the vestry. They were inserted when the Tower was rebuilt. The west window is a three light design showing Christ in Majesty flanked by Saints Peter and Paul. It is of strikingly beautiful coloured glass of high quality, thought to be the work of the O'Connors but there is no signature or identifier on it.

Detail of the west window in the tower

The West Window in the Tower

The other hidden window, in the south wall of the Tower, is a pure stylised foliage design of jewel coloured glass, also thought likely to be by O'Connor. Be sure not to miss this one since it is one of the prettiest in the church.

Window in south wall of tower 1864.

Memorial to Robert Laurence AB

There are two memorials in the vestry below the church tower. One is a round tablet commemorating Robert Laurence, the young rector who died age 25 in 1739, who lived at Brockdish Hall. His grandfather built the present Brockdish Hall in 1634.

Memorial to Reverend George France MA

This simple tablet, inserted by his daughter Harriet, records France's restoration of the church.

Painting of the church by Augustus Cook

Hanging on the wall of the vestry is a simple, 'primitive style' painting of the church by a local farmer, Augustus Cook, (1890-1960), who lived at the Grove, farming 360 acres with his son Vernon in the first half of the 20th century. Gus Cook was a devoted churchwarden for many years. He was probably a better farmer than painter but it is a memorial to his love of the church.

Lost Treasures.

Like most other churches, Brockdish has suffered at times from theft and fabric deterioration. Brasses have disappeared over the centuries, carvings on stone and slate have been worn away by feet but most of the losses have come from damp in the church interior walls. Precious things have simply rotted away. For example, a barely visible stone slab in the floor by the lectern covers the grave of John Moulton and his wives, which until the 18th century showed the Moulton family arms. In 1704 John married Elizabeth Spalding of Brockdish. Elizabeth died 31 October, 1716, aged 32. Within a month or two John married again, but his second wife Mary died six months after Elizabeth, age 27. Within a year John Moulton himself died 12 June, 1718, aged 38. They are all buried together in the church.

On the south side wall of the Chancel there is a faded, and now illegible memorial to Thomas Cotton, who died in 1788. He and his family owned at least two properties in Brockdish. The Cottons were a landowning family in Starston. The armorial heading can just be seen standing proud from the plastered wall. There is a smaller version of these arms in the top of one of the north nave windows.

Left, the arms of Thomas Cotton on his memorial. Right, how the arms used to look

Thirty years ago the tablet was still in tact but legible. The inscription read 'if the Virtues which ADORN life could PRESERVE it, there would be no need to record the passing of the tenderest Father, the faithfullest Friend, the best Husband.' The memorial is now far past restoring.

Finally, a beautifully carved oak wainscot chair of c1630 used to stand in the northeast corner of the chancel and is mentioned by many early 20th century guides to the church. It was given in 1897 by Mr and Mrs Adolphus Edward Holmes, who owned the drabbet manufactory at Syleham Mill, one of the largest village employers. The chair was stolen from the church in April 1988.

THINGS TO SEE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The best view of the church is from the churchyard to the south, when the fine Victorian tower with its octagonal stair turret, triple lancet windows and beautifully knapped flint walls can be appreciated. The tower looks in keeping with the simpler flint walls of the nave and chancel, a well designed whole. The west wall of the tower has a rather grand but never used door, flanked by angels supporting an arch. Windows in the nave walls and the chancel are perpendicular in style but 19th century. The ugly waterspouts, perhaps a little over-specified on length, were added in the twentieth century to Victorian gargoyles. Flushwork has also been added sensitively to the late 14th century buttresses on the south and north walls.

Cruciform flushwork on a buttress.

The south porch

The south porch is original but has been redecorated with flint with flushwork limestone panels in Victorian times and with three niches, Christ above, St Peter to the left and St Paul to the right. A top moulding frieze was restored and a cross superimposed.

Walking round to the north side off the church one can just detect where the old flints give way to newer lines of flints in the raising of the walls in the late 14th century. Also visible in the north wall is the small round-headed window of late Saxon or early Norman rediscovered and renovated in 1851. There is another early 'bifora', or two light window in the north wall of the chancel, possibly 13th century, transitional in style between Norman and Early English gothic, that also emerged during the Victorian restorations, probably also covered up when the north wall buttresses were put in in the late 14th century.

Simple 'bifora' window in north wall of the chancel

There is a small blocked-up priest's door in the north side of the chancel from this period. A new larger 13th century priest's door was put in the south side of the chancel instead.

The Churchyard

The churchyard was extended last in 1909. Until then there was about one acre. The flint wall was added in 1854. There are many mature lime,

fir and pine trees and wonderful views over the Waveney valley. Most of the surviving gravestones and memorials are from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

The War Memorial dated 1919 is sited near the south porch of the church and is in the form of a simple gothic, Portland stone cross on a square plinth. Three sides have the names of the dead in alphabetical order, for World War 1; there is a small additional stone footplate on the fourth side to the two dead of World War 2.

The War Memorial

Local families are naturally well represented in the churchyard. The Kay family who lived at Brockdish Place have the elaborate Victorian memorial to the north of the church, right of the main gate, one side each of the cubed base dedicated to Sir Ebenezer and Lady Kay and their daughters Eva and Marion.

The Kay Family memorial

Just nearby are the red marble tombs and family vault of some of the Walne family of the Grove. Three successful Walne brothers from the late 19th century:- a surgeon Daniel Henry Walne FRCS, his lawyer brother George Walne and another brother Alfred Septimus Walne, who became British Consul at Cairo, are all buried here. Near them is the tomb of the watercolour artist James William Walker, who lived in his later years at The Grange. A large collection of his work is held in Norwich Castle Museum study centre.

The 1892 conjoined double gravestone of married centenarians, Benjamin and Elizabeth Atkins, weavers at the drabbet (rough linen) factory at Syleham stands on the right of the path leading down to the church.

Round the south side of the Church is a large stone slab to Thomas Walne of the Grove who died in 1827 and a large chest tomb for Christopher and Anne Churchill, who were tenants at the Grove some years after Thomas Walne. Just near the path leading to the Rectory lie the tombs of Elizabeth France and her daughter Phoebe. And there are over 300 gravestones of members of families who still live in the village or locality, the most numerous being the Barkways, Chilvers, Finches and Hines. The graveyard is still in use and there is space for a few generations yet in this lovely spot.

Elaine Murphy © 2016

Thanks

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