
Tracing the History of a Parish Church

INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is meant as an introduction to the printed and manuscript material available in the Suffolk Record Office for studying the architecture and history of a parish church in Suffolk. Many classes of record are held at all three Record Offices. If a source exists at only one or two of the offices the fact is indicated.

Much time can be saved by consulting printed material before moving on to manuscripts: the first section therefore contains a short list of books on the aspects of history of Suffolk churches, all of which are available in the searchroom libraries.

It should be noted that not every source mentioned below will necessarily provide information on a particular church.

SOME PRINTED SOURCES

Suffolk Churches and their Treasures by H. Munro Cautley (5th ed., 1982)
The Buildings of England. Suffolk by N. Pevsner (2nd ed., 1974)
Suffolk. A Shell Guide by N. Scarfe (3rd ed., 1976)
Hatchments in Britain, 2: Norfolk and Suffolk by P. Summers (1976)
A Dictionary of Suffolk Arms by Joan Corder (1975)
The Heraldry of Suffolk Churches, Suffolk Heraldry Society (1978-1989)
Round Tower Churches of South East England by W.J. Goode (1994)
Suffolk Churches; a pocket guide edited by Jean Corke and others (2nd ed., 1977)
Medieval Tiles in Suffolk Churches by D. Sherlock (1980)
Bells and Belling in Suffolk by R.W.M. Clouston and G.J.W. Pipe (1980)
Saints in Suffolk Churches by J. Salmon (1981)
Benches and Stalls in Suffolk Churches by J. Agate (1980)
David Elisha Davy's 'A Journal of Excursions through the County of Suffolk 1823-1844' edited by J.M. Blatchly (Suffolk Record Society 1982)
Nineteenth Century Suffolk Stained Glass by B. Haward (1989)
Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades by B. Haward (1993)
Writing a Church Guide by D.P. Dymond (1977) is a general guide with local examples, and a good bibliography.

References to articles on Suffolk churches in periodicals can be found in *A Suffolk Bibliography*, edited by A.V. Steward (1979), especially the sections on 'Religion' and 'Localities'.

The searchroom libraries contain many printed church guides together with notes, newspaper cuttings, parish and deanery magazines and a series of 'Pocket Histories of Suffolk Parishes', all of which describe the parish church.

PARISH RECORDS

Parish records are located as follows: those for West Suffolk parishes are at Bury St Edmunds; those for East Suffolk are at Ipswich, except for parishes in the Waveney District, which are at Lowestoft. The records of parishes in Lothingland Deanery are held at the Norfolk Record Office.

- **Churchwarden's accounts and papers**

The churchwardens were the parish officers responsible for the maintenance of the church fabric and furniture. Main series accounts give details of regular maintenance; there are often special accounts for major restorations. Papers may include plans and photographs. 16th-20th cent.

- **Vestry minutes**

The vestry took decisions about church repair and the church-wardens were answerable to it. 18th-19th cent.

- **Minutes**

In the 20th century the Parochial Church Council exercises many of the functions belonging earlier to the vestry.

- **Faculties**

Any significant alteration of or addition to the fabric or furnishings of the church required permission by faculty. Copies have often survived among the parish records. 19th-20th cent. (See also Diocesan Records)

- **Terriers**

Periodic descriptions of the parsonage house, glebe lands, tithe customs and church furniture and plate. 17th-20th cent. (See also Diocesan Records)

- **Parish registers**

Will often contain memoranda about restorations, accidents to the fabric or gifts of fittings. 16th-20th cent.

- **Parish magazines**

Record events connected with the church, including changes in the fabric. 19th-20th cent.

DIOCESAN RECORDS BEFORE 1914; ARCHDEACONRY RECORDS

The ecclesiastical parish was supervised by two authorities: the Archdeacon and, above him, the Bishop. The whole of Suffolk was part of the Diocese of Norwich until 1837. In 1837 the Archdeaconry of Sudbury (West Suffolk plus the parishes around Eye and Stowmarket) was transferred to the Diocese of Ely. The Archdeaconry of Suffolk (the rest of East Suffolk) remained in the Diocese of Norwich. In 1914 the two Archdeaconries were reunited to form the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (see next section). However parishes in the Deanery of Lothingland stayed in the Diocese of Norwich after 1914.

The Diocese and the Archdeaconries created similar types of record, in series which often overlapped. Four classes of record created by them are particularly helpful in tracing the history of a church. (Any records in this section relating to Waveney area churches will be held at Ipswich.)

- **Visitation books**

These record the condition of the church and furnishings, with a note of repairs and improvements required to be carried out before the Archdeacon's next visit. Bury 1742-1807; Ipswich c1670-1757

- **Faculties** (See also Parish Records)

Registers of faculties granted, many of which have not survived among the parish records. Bury 1634-1698 and 1837-1914; Ipswich 1633-1914 [whole county] and 1838-1883

- **Terriers** (See also Parish Records)

The archdeaconry and diocesan series of terriers will contain more examples than have survived among the parish records. Bury 1613-1912; Ipswich 1613-1914

- **Parsonage house papers**

These contain plans, specifications and related papers for buildings, repairing or altering parsonage houses, and include a few relating to the repair and alteration of chancels. Bury 1838-1914; Ipswich 1783-1913

DIOCESAN RECORDS FROM 1914

The records of the whole of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich are held at Bury St Edmunds. Two series of records are particularly useful:

- **Faculty books**

These record the date of issue of the faculty and the subject matter. 1922-1972

- **Faculty files**

These can include petitions, plans, estimates and correspondence. 1919, 1949 to date

ANTIQUARIANS' NOTES

Many antiquarian scholars visited churches from the 17th century onwards, leaving notes and drawings which can be invaluable for modern students. For more information on individuals see J. Blatchly, *The Topographers of Suffolk* (4th ed., 1981).

Blois, William (1600-1673). Church and Heraldic notes (Ipswich GC 17:775)

Candler, Matthias (1604-1663) and Philip (d.1689). Notes on the parishes and churches, arranged by parishes within hundreds. (Ipswich JC 1/1/5; Bury J 556)

Borret, John (d.1698). Church notes (descriptions of arms and copies of monumental inscriptions) for 26 parishes in Suffolk, Essex and Norfolk. (Ipswich HD 1538/79)

Martin, Thomas (1697-1771). Church and monumental notes. (Bury E 2/41/8-9). See also Ord below.

Blomefield, Francis (1705-1752). Church notes, chiefly descriptions of monuments with transcripts of inscriptions, compiled 1723-1726. (Ipswich HD 1538/79)

Cullum, Sir John (1733-1785). (a) Church and monumental notes. (Bury E2/33/17.3) and (b) Church notes, Ampton and Hengrave only (Ipswich HD 1538/75)

Edgar, Robert (active c.1730-1750). Notes on Suffolk and Essex churches and religious houses, with details of inscriptions, bells, etc. (Ipswich HA 247/8/13)

Johnson, Isaac (1754-1835). Drawings of Suffolk churches made in 1813 and arranged by hundreds. (Ipswich HD 484/1-2)

Ord, Craven (1756-1832)

(a) Collections for a history of Suffolk; notes and original documents arranged by parishes within hundreds (24 vols including 5 index vols). (Ipswich HD 1538/1-24)

(b) Church notes arranged by parishes within hundreds; copies of monumental inscriptions, illustrations of churches, arms, monuments. (Ipswich HD 1538/69-74); index HD 1538/22)

(c) Register of Suffolk livings; lists of incumbents with dates of institution (2 vols) (Ipswich HD 1538/80-81)

(d) (with Thomas Martin) Church notes, mostly for parishes in Risbridge and Hartismere hundreds. (Ipswich HD 1538/67).

Pridden, John (1758-1825). Drawings and notes on churches made in 1786. (Ipswich qs 9)

Davy, David (1758-1851). Transcriptions of notes made by Candler, Blois and Martin. Also his own observations, drawings and plans made in the 1820s and 1830s. Notes arranged by parishes within hundreds. (Ipswich J 400/1-15; Bury J 534/1-6)

Darby, John (1791-1846). Notes on Suffolk churches; mainly monuments and heraldry, but with some observations on fabric and furnishings made in the 1820s and 1830s. (Ipswich qs 929.5)

Fitch, William (1792-1859).

(a) Suffolk illustrations, arranged by parishes within hundreds. (Ipswich HD 480:1-31)

(b) Hundred collection; church notes, documents and general parish histories arranged by parishes within hundreds (30 vols) (Ipswich qs 9)

(c) Suffolk monasteries; includes notes on churches of parishes having religious foundations, compiled in 1840s and 1850s. (Ipswich qs 271)

Davy, Henry (1793-1865). Etchings of Suffolk churches, 1820s to 1840s. (Ipswich Illustrations Collection; Bury Acc. 1527)

Wooderspoon, John (1806-1862). Notes, newscuttings and drawings on Suffolk churches. (Ipswich qs 726.5; Bury Acc. 1525)

Glynne, Sir Stephen (1807-1874). Notes on Suffolk churches. (Ipswich P 470; Bury P 709)

Watling, Hamlet (1818-1908). Collection of drawings of churches and church furnishings, especially stained glass and rood screens, made c.1865-1875. (Ipswich HD 475; Bury Acc. 1527)

Ford, J.C. (d.1900). Notes, illustrations, documents and newscuttings arranged alphabetically by parish. (Bury Acc. 1511)

Farrer, Edmund (1848-1935).

(a) Notes, illustrations, documents and newscuttings arranged alphabetically by parish. (Ipswich HD 78:2671; Bury HD 526)

(b) Church heraldry of Suffolk arranged by parishes within hundreds, compiled in 1912. (Ipswich S 929.8)

Morley, Claude (1873-1951). Notes on churches, buildings, manorial history and antiquities made in 1920s and 1930s. Arranged alphabetically by parish. (Ipswich HD 603/2/1-14)

Antiquarians' notes covering a number of single parishes are listed in *Archive News*, 3, pp 6-8.

OTHER SOURCES

- **Wills**

Bequests in pre-Reformation wills throw light on the rebuilding, enlargement, furnishing and decorating of parish churches. Translations or summaries of many wills are available. Wills for the Waveney area were proved in the Court of the Archdeacon of Suffolk and are held at Ipswich.

- **Newspapers**

If the date of a major 19th century restoration is known, local newspapers can be consulted for accounts of the progress of the work and often lengthy accounts of the re-opening.

- **Photographs**

These can be valuable in illustrating features that have been removed or 'restored'. (There is a separate leaflet on the major photographic collections in the Record Office)

- **Estate and family archives**

These can help in several ways. In cases where members of the landowning families have held parochial offices (e.g. church-warden), official records may have found their way into the family archive. Where such a family held the patronage of a living, the archive may contain deeds or papers relating to the advowson of the church. Finally such families, as influential parishioners, may well have been consulted on such matters as church restoration, or may have financed restoration work; in which case the family archive may contain relevant correspondence and papers.

- **Round Tower Churches Society Collection** (at Lowestoft)

Includes interior and exterior photographs and files of notes on the history, architecture, restoration, alteration, furnishings etc of round tower churches within Suffolk and elsewhere.

Bury Record Office, 77 Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2AR

Telephone: 01284 741212

Email: bury.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Ipswich Record Office, Gatacre Road, Ipswich, IP1 2LQ

Telephone: 01473 584541

Fax: 01473 584533

Email: ipswich.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Lowestoft Record Office, Clapham Road, Lowestoft, NR32 1DR

Telephone: 01502 405357

Fax: 01502 405350

Email: lowestoft.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Record Office web site: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro>

Suffolk Heritage Direct website: <http://www.suffolkheritagedirect.org.uk>