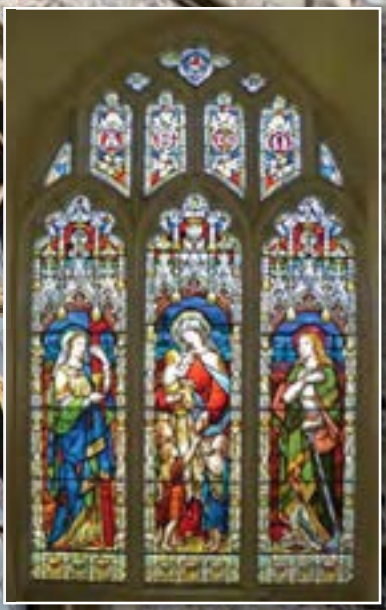
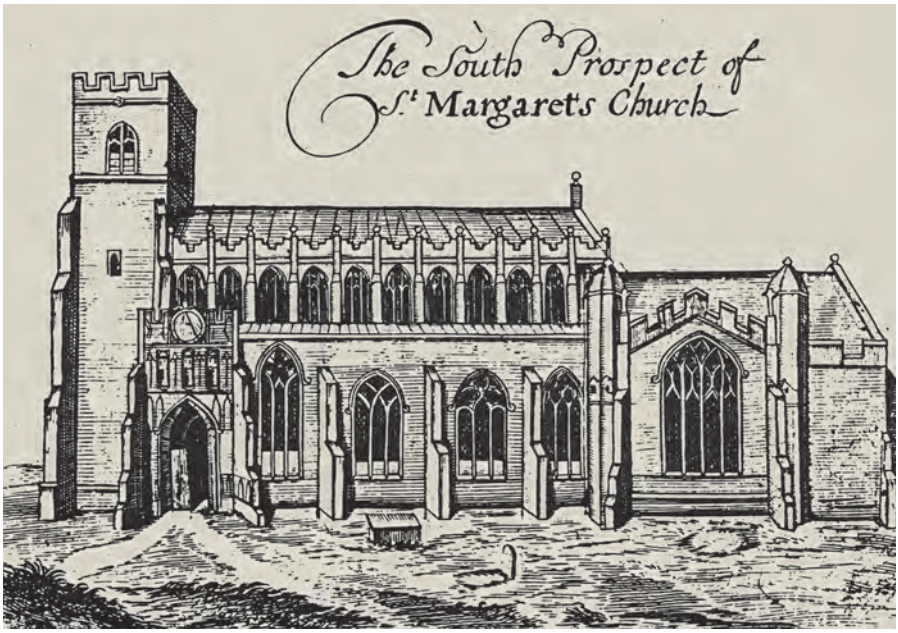
St. Margaret's Church

IPSWICH



Welcome...

to our magnificent medieval church. It is Grade 1 listed – one of only a few such buildings in Ipswich. As present-day custodians of the building our prayer is that as you visit this church you may experience something of the Spirit of God, as have all those who have worshipped here over the past 800 years.



From John Ogilby's map of Ipswich, drawn 1674, published 1698.

How old is the Church?

St Margaret's parish lies outside the ramparts of medieval Ipswich. About 1160, a Priory of Augustinian (also known as Black or Austin) canons was founded in the southern part of what is now Christchurch Park, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The Priory estate, known from the C14th as Christchurch, amounted to a considerable 643 acres. Many of the tenants, listed in a Rental Roll of circa 1291, represented a trade and a significant number of them were women. It was for this growing population that the canons began to build the present church in about 1300, dedicating it to Margaret, martyred in Antioch during the purge of Christians during the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. St Margaret was already a particularly significant saint in Ipswich as her feast day (July 20th) was one of the five rent days for the tenants of the Priory estate. There is no proof that Margaret ever lived, but the story tells of her being swallowed by Satan in the form

of a dragon; she burst forth from its belly, only to be beheaded for her Christian belief and refusal to marry a pagan. Two finely carved dragons high up in the roof substantiate the dedication to this Margaret rather than Margaret, Queen of Scotland. First the Priors, and then the owners of Christchurch Mansion which was built on the Priory site after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 – the Withipoll, Devereux and Fonnereau families – chose incumbents, chaplains or perpetual curates, for the church. The first mention of St Margaret's in documents was in 1307, and by 1381 St Margaret's was the largest parish in the town.

Ipswich was a major port from early times deriving its success in the Middle Ages from the wool trade with the continent. It was the prosperity of these townsfolk which enlarged and beautified the church in the C15th from its double hammer beamed roof and clerestory to its lost rood screen and gave it its great painted roof in the late C17th. St Margaret's is the visual testament to the wealth and piety of past Ipswich people.

The oldest features and earliest survivals

Three relics of Holy Trinity remain in the church: a C13th stone coffin lid with raised cross mounted on the south wall near the entrance, no doubt a Prior's memorial, a C13th door, hanging on the wall of the north aisle, and a C16th tomb slab set in the floor to the right of the door on the south side of the chancel. Details from the C14th are visible externally in the filled-in

window with Y-tracery at the west end of the south aisle and, internally, in the two nave doorways, the tracery of the north aisle windows and the five-bay arcades. The south aisle windows would seem to have been built about 50 years later, but all were restored in Victorian times. In about 1495, the roof was raised and the nave walls were cut away to put in larger clerestory windows. The three windows over the chancel arch look medieval but are C19th.

Further evidence of the C13th Priory can be seen at the west corner of Soane Street where the timber-framed Guest House of the Priory, much restored, still stands. On the corner post a shield shows a Tau cross raguly (T for the Trinity formed from rough branches rather than smooth wood) and a sun and two moons for the Three Persons of the Trinity.

The Royal Arms

Until 1846 the magnificent Jacobean frame containing the Royal Arms of Charles II hung over the chancel arch; it now hangs over the tower arch. Small heads, a male above and a female below, decorate the strapwork (the fretwork effect) of the frame. When this was taken down, another painting was found nailed to the back facing forwards and therefore hidden. This depicted the Prince of Wales feathers dated 1660 (but interestingly Charles II had no legitimate son at that time) and the initials of the churchwardens that year. It now hangs over the south door.

Above the Royal Arms there is a small window that enables a watcher in the tower to ring a bell at relevant points during the daily mass, or communion service.

The Font

The C15th Font was much mutilated during the visit of the iconoclast William Dowsing in 1644; only the figure on the west side is complete. It holds a scroll with the legend "Sal et Saliva', a reminder that, in the medieval Baptismal ceremonies, salt was placed in the child's mouth, and its ears and nostrils were touched with saliva, – practices which became obsolete about the time of Henry VIII. This panel survived because at that time the font probably stood against the last pillar at the west end of the north arcade and was not visible. The crudely carved cross in another panel is a tidying of the remains of a former angel.

The double hammerbeam nave roof

The superb carved wooden roof and clerestory were added at the end of the fifteenth century thanks to the generosity of several Ipswich merchants. John and Katherine Hall (who died in 1503 & 1506 respectively) and William their son (woddyers – dyers and woad merchants), were the major benefactors. John Hall, in his will, asked to be buried in front of the altar, the most prestigious place in the church. Henry and Isabel Tylmaker (brickmakers whose wills are dated 1445 & 1460 respectively) and John Bryd the Elder (thatcher) were also major contributors. Their initials and merchant marks can be seen in various places along the north side of the nave roof, those of the Halls occurring over 30 times in the church fabric. The roof has a clear span of 7m (23ft) and contains in excess of 120 carvings. On the south side are the symbols of the Passion of Christ, the ladder, spear, nails, crown of thorns and scourging pillar. The finely carved wooden figures of saints seated under canopies in the wall posts were "beheaded" on the orders of Dowsing in 1644. Only a few can now be identified. Numbering from the east on the north side these include 4 St Luke in a doctor's hat, 7 St James the Less with a fuller's club and 9 St Peter with his key. On the south side, numbering from the east: 3 St James the Great in a large pilgrim's hat, 5 a female saint, head covered, possibly St Anne, 6 St Philip with three loaves, 7 St Paul with a sword, 8 St Simon holding a fish and 10 St Jude holding a ship.

The remarkable baroque paintings on the plaster and panels of the roof were devised as an elaborate tribute to King William and Queen Mary, whose peaceful accession in 1688 brought greater religious tolerance. They were devised and commissioned by Cave Beck, vicar of St Margaret's and Devereux Edgar of the Red House, a member of a prominent local family. The painting is probably local work and consists of 50 panels, all but two of which are symmetrical. The ten centre "sky" panels are decorated with clouds and stars. The text 'Honour all Men. Love the Brotherhood. Feare God. Honour ye King.' on four panels is from 1 Peter 2.17. The centre panels between them bear the Arms of England and Scotland (north side) and France and Ireland (south side). On the south, there is a WM monogram for the joint monarchs and the surrounding cherubs are festive. Opposite the mood changes, and the north panel has sad cherubs taking a crown off the altar, the orb is rolling on the ground and the olive branch drooping. We know that the panels were put up during December 1694 and January 1695 and that Queen Mary died of smallpox on the 28th December 1694; hence this is a memorial tribute to a popular Queen. In 1700, Cave Beck and Devereux Edgar placed shields with

the arms of Christchurch, Red House and other notable families to cover the beam ends where formerly angels were fixed. The shields were all pierced with iron tie-rods added in 1803 to prevent the spreading of the nave walls under the weight of the roof. The panels were expertly cleaned and restored in 1994.

The Chancel

The chancel arch is decorated with crowns and fleurons (flowers), and on each side small arches lead to the aisles. The slate platform, rails and nave altar are C20th additions to the furnishings of the church. The chancel for centuries has failed to match the splendour of the nave. The upkeep of the chancel was the responsibility of the owners of Christchurch Mansion but the Withipolls neglected their duty and in 1554 the east window fell down. This seems surprising as Edmund Withipoll prepared his own high table tomb in the centre of the chancel in 1574 in readiness for his death, which occurred in 1582. In 1602 the Archdeacon reported that the chancel was again in ruins and had been for three years.

In 1635 Bishop Wren objected to the way the high table tomb prevented people from seeing the minister at the communion table and ordered it to be lowered and the altar raised. The tomb was removed in 1754; a stone in the floor marks the central site and the fine black marble slab with his monogram and the bold assertion in Latin: "Mortui sine hoste" – "They died without an enemy" – stands against the west wall of the north transept.

The Transepts

The south transept was built about 1500 as a chapel to Our Lady and All Saints. In 1512, William Ropkyn (tanner and interestingly an Executor of John Hall's Will) gave instructions in his will for his burial here and it is his altar tomb, with the indents of lost brasses on the slab, which stands against the south wall. He left ten marks a year (at least £3,500 in today's money) to his son William, a priest, if for three years he would sing Mass for the souls of his parents and their friends. Outside, the twin turrets frame the south transept window, the westernmost of which housed the rood-stair. Other signs of former rood fittings inside the church show that the arrangements were originally symmetrical from north to south. The screen, usually of wood, would have crossed the church at the chancel arch. It was normal for there to be a gallery or loft on top where a large crucifix, called a rood, was placed.

The north transept, a C16th extension, housed a growing parish population. Both transept windows are of the same period.

Church furniture

The only pieces of medieval furniture remaining in the church – a few fragments of screen and bench ends made into seats – are to be seen either side of the altar in the Sanctuary.

The present pews, which replaced C17th box pews, were installed in 1846 to provide seating for a parish population which had trebled since the beginning of the C19th. The carved poppyheads (from a poop or figurehead) at the end of each pew are mainly, but not exclusively, a distinctive feature of churches in the Eastern Counties.

The organ

In 1754 a musicians' gallery was set up at the west end in the tower. In 1844 a stone gallery for organ and choir replaced it; the grooves to take the supports can be seen in the tower arch bases. Only two years later the new gallery was removed *"it having been found a very objectionable structure in consequence of the irreverent conduct of the individuals who occupied it"*. The girls who used to sing there were dispensed with – *"it not being desirable that there should be paid singers in churches, especially females"*. Since then organs have been placed at various times in both transepts and in the present choir vestry in the northeast corner, which was built as an organ chamber.

The present organ, by Walker, replaces the Binns organ installed at the beginning of the C20th. It dates from 1859, was enlarged in 1891, and came from a redundant church in Bedford. A benefactor has added a pedal reed stop. It was refurbished in 2013.

The monuments

The earliest (1628) to Thomas Reddrich is behind the organ in the north transept, there is one of 1633 to John, father of Bishop Lany, at the west end of the north aisle, and a large urn commemorating Richard Phillips, 1756, near the south door. Nicholas Stanton, whose monument is in the south aisle, was minister here from 1641 to 1649 when he died.

The tablet to the Revd (Claude) William Fonnereau of Christchurch, who died in 1817, aged 85 in the chancel next to the organ should be read. The deaths of many who perished in military actions in the past are also recorded either in individual plaques or general memorials.

The church has a number of funeral hatchments:- shields made to notify the death of an important person. Those in the chancel are of the Fonnereau family, and those in the nave of the Edgars.

The glass

There is no medieval glass left in St Margaret's and, in 1940, a bomb damaged much of the Victorian glass of both aisles. In 1874 Ward & Hughes of London glazed the west window of the north aisle (showing six of the Acts of Mercy) and the tower window, best seen from the chancel step, depicts Faith, Hope and Charity. The east window with its Resurrection and Ascension scenes is by Jones and Willis of Birmingham (1913). The sun in splendour painted on the boss in the top light is a tiny remnant of a previous window and comes from the Fonnereau arms. A further fragment, the figure of St Matthew, survives and can be seen in Christchurch Mansion.

The external features

Approached from the south across St Margaret's Green the impression is of rich decorative detail including: the flushwork (a combination of stone and black knapped flint) of the porch and the dual layered parapets; the close set windows of the clerestory surrounded with carved stone panels bearing on shields the initials of the Hall family: JH on the north side and KH on the south and their merchant's mark (a dyer's posser and tongs); and the polygonal turrets framing the window of the south transept.

The west tower was first built in about 1400. Between 1737 and 1738 a classical frame was made on the tower to form a space for a clock face.

The current clock was built by Moore of Ipswich and is dated 1st January 1778. It is an unusual iron framed clock and is one of the oldest surviving public clocks in Ipswich. It was wound by hand until automated in 2017.

In 1871 the top of the tower was rebuilt in a grander style than before and raised by 3.4m (11ft) and it now stands 26.5m (87ft) high.

The bells

The first mention of bells at St Margaret's is in 1553 when four were noted. In 1630 Miles Graye of Colchester cast five bells and in 1655 Miles Graye III cast a further bell to complete a ring of six.

The Tenor bell was cast with the couplet:

"The living to the church, the dead into the grave.
That's my onely calling and propertie I have."

In 1899 a further two bells were cast by Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel and all eight bells were then rehung higher in the newly raised tower at the level of the louvres by Alfred Bowell, Founder, of Ipswich. In 1925 Bowell recast the Treble and the fourth bell of the peal. All were rehung in 1958. However they all swung in an East West direction, which placed great pressure on the structure of the tower causing it to sway.

In 2017, with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Treble, second and fourth bells were replaced by new bells cast to match the profile of the older bells and all eight bells, having been retuned, were hung in a new frame lower in the tower. Additionally a new ringing gallery was installed at the base of the west end window.

Text: Ann Woodings, David Hampson and David Evans
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St Margaret's PCC wish to acknowledge the seminal work of the late Dr John Blatchly who carried out much research and produced the preceding guide.

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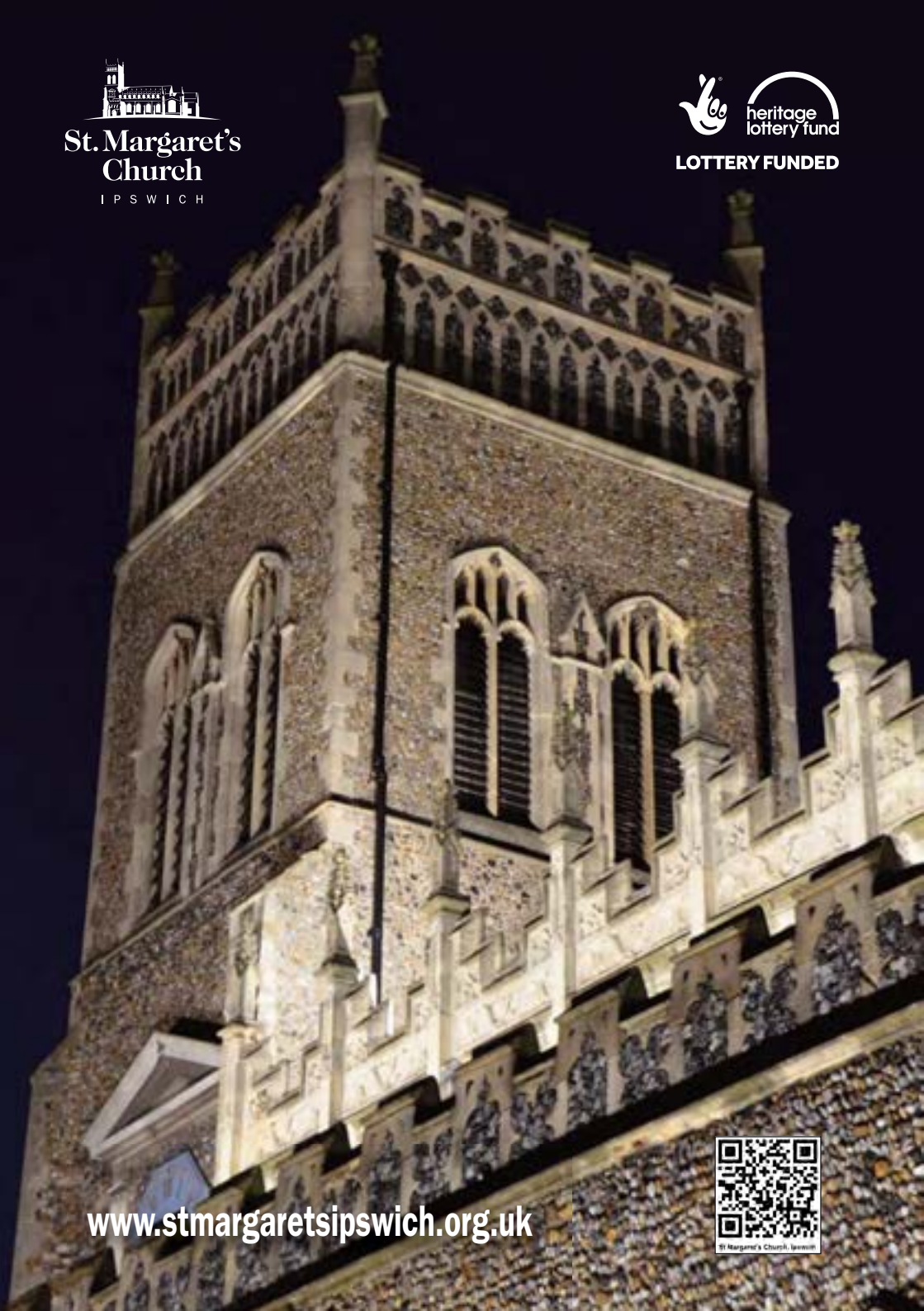

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