



St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

The Hall Family and St Margaret's Church.



The final decade of the 15th century was a period of economic recovery in Ipswich and a number of its churches consequently benefited from the largesse of their pious parishioners. St Margaret's was fortunate to be the parish church of the Hall family of whom John was the most prominent Ipswich dyer of his time.

Dyeing was a very skilled trade and its practitioners were highly regarded. The superb clerestory and roof in our church, built with money mainly from the Hall family, is therefore proudly decorated not only with their initials and their



merchants' mark derived from the tools of their trade. The mark, shown here, is a posser (now more commonly called a dolly) which is a stick with several legs radiating from a wooden disc, rather like a stool, fixed to a long pole with a handle at the top for maximum leverage which is used to beat or 'poss' clothes in a dye pit, and the tongs used to lift cloth out of the dye pit.

In his will of 1503 John stipulates a life-time gift for its building. He obviously felt that it was sufficiently generous to ask to be buried “in front of the crucifix”, almost certainly the one on the rood screen which stood at the chancel arch, and although no longer in place, the door arches in the walls indicate where it used to be.

John Hall first appears in the records of Ipswich in 1466/7 when he constructed a dye-pit called “Adam” in the town ditch in the north ward of the town. It was there he was fined for a health offence in 1484. He called himself “a woddyer” or dyer in woad (a natural blue dye) which was a major trade. He rose up the town hierarchy becoming a freeman in 1477, a councillor in 1480 and a Portman in 1488. In 1481 he was the tax collector in St Margaret’s parish. His wealth was such that he donated a suit of body armour to the King (Henry VIII) in 1491. His bequest of five marks (about £1,725 today) to Bildeston church, a thriving wool town famous for its Blue Suffolk Broadcloth, is interesting and may reflect his woad connection.

His executors were William Ropkyn and Thomas Baldry whose memorials still exist. William Ropkyn is buried in the Lady Chapel in St Margaret’s in a tomb altar on the south wall. The small matrices of brasses to him and his wife can just about be made out. Baldry, who also donated a suit of armour to the King in 1491, has two brasses in St Mary le Tower, Ipswich.

Katherine Hall is known through her will of 1506 in which she asks to be buried with her husband in St Margaret’s church. She requests that Father John Page, who served at St Margaret’s from 1505-9, sing masses for “my husband and me and my friends” for 8 years and gifted the church a linen towel of 8 yards. She also made a bequest of 5 marks to the church at Caldwell for the painting of the tabernacle of St John. Caldwell was a manor outside the town walls in open country. It stood near where Caldwell Hall Road runs in the east of the expanded modern town. However, in the early 15th century John de Cauldwelle lived there and then from 1460 to 1473 Bishop James Goldwell, who became Bishop of Norwich. The manor was later owned by Edmund Withypoll of Christchurch Mansion. Katherine also gifted St Clement’s church in Ipswich 6s 8d (about £370 today). Her son, William, was given her house and the tenement “by the church” for his lifetime. On his death the house was to pass to his heirs and the tenement to his daughter Joan. William acted as his mother’s executor with William Ropkyn.

William is listed as a clothmaker in his will of 1526.