



St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

An introduction to the double hammerbeam roof, the carvings and paintings



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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. Henry and Isabel Tylmaker (brickmakers) 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 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. Whilst we know who contributed to the building of the roof no marks identifying the craftsmen involved have been discovered.



The remarkable baroque paintings on the plaster and panels of the roof were devised as an elaborate tribute to King William and Queen Mary.



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 believe that this is a memorial tribute to a popular Queen who died as they were being painted.

The insertion of the “new” panels saw the whole structure painted which has over time destroyed much of the finer detail of the medieval carving. Indeed in the C19th commentators were very critical about the mix of gothic carving and baroque painting but thankfully their comments did not lead to a Victorian reordering of the whole structure when the box pews were replaced by those we see today. In the early C19th it became apparent that the walls were being forced apart and the metal tie-rods were added for stability.

The span of the roof is 7m (23ft.) and the trusses are spaced at 2m (6ft. 6in.) centres.

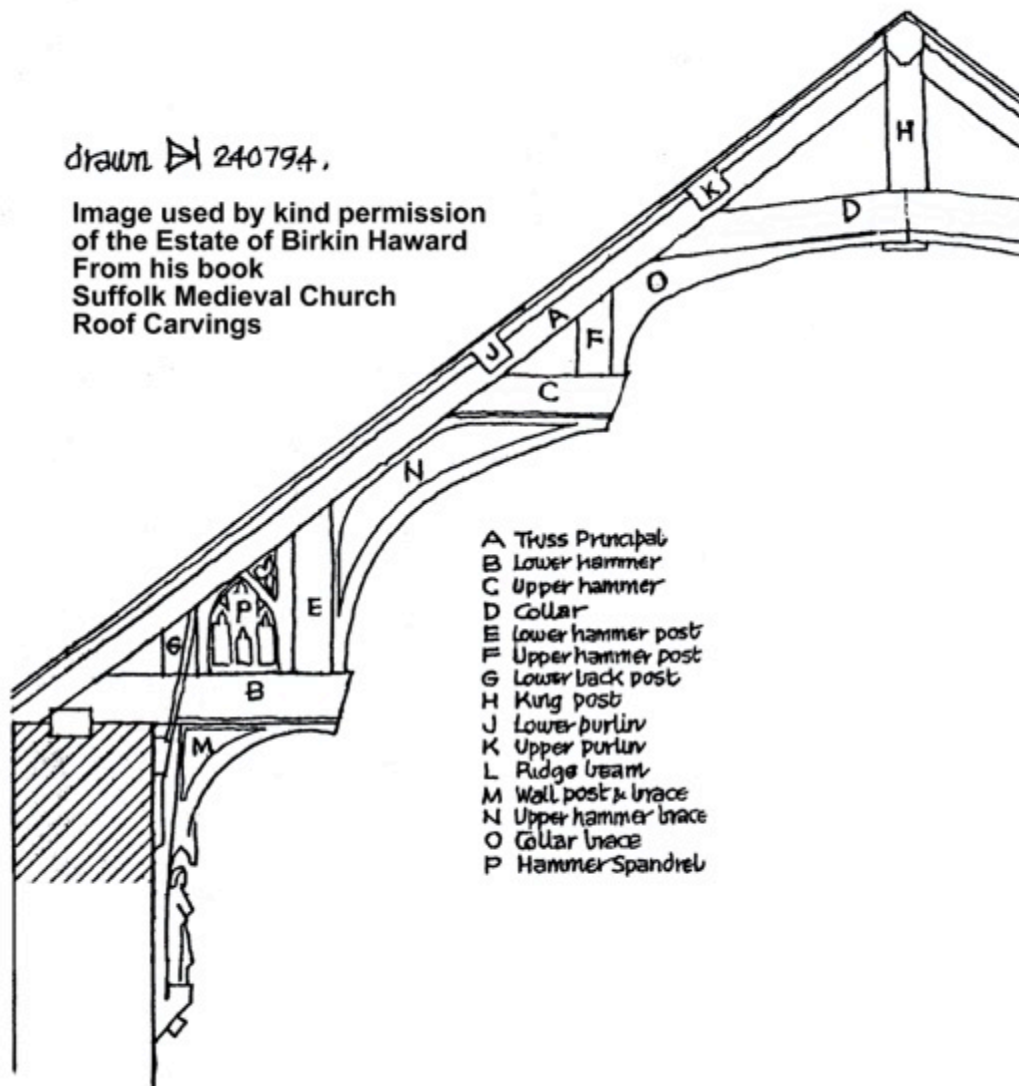
The whole structure was cleaned, conserved during 1994 and 1995.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Taken from Discoveries in the clerestory and roof structure of St Margaret's Church Ipswich by John Blatchly and Peter Northeast and published in: Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archeology and History VolumeXXXVIII Part 4 1996

How does the double hammerbeam roof work?

The double hammerbeam roof is one of the crowning glories of medieval carpentry in England.

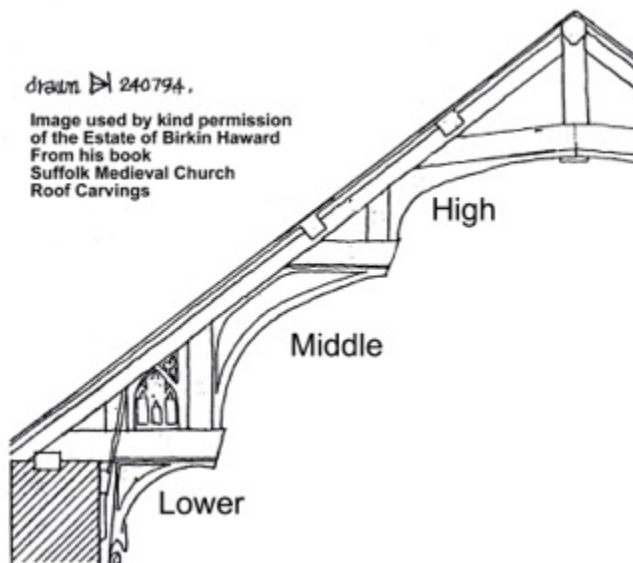


It opens up the roof space, and in building them medieval carpenters also showed off their carving and decorative skills. The national distribution of double hammerbeam roofs is concentrated in mid and east Suffolk and although local records show the names of Ipswich master carpenters we have no means of knowing who built this roof in the late C15th. Short beams, the hammers, are supported by curved braces from the walls and hammer posts rise from the end of the beam to support the rafter structure of the roof and the second layer of hammer beams. The weight of the roof is therefore directed down through the posts and beams to the wall plate and thus to the wall which is very thick.

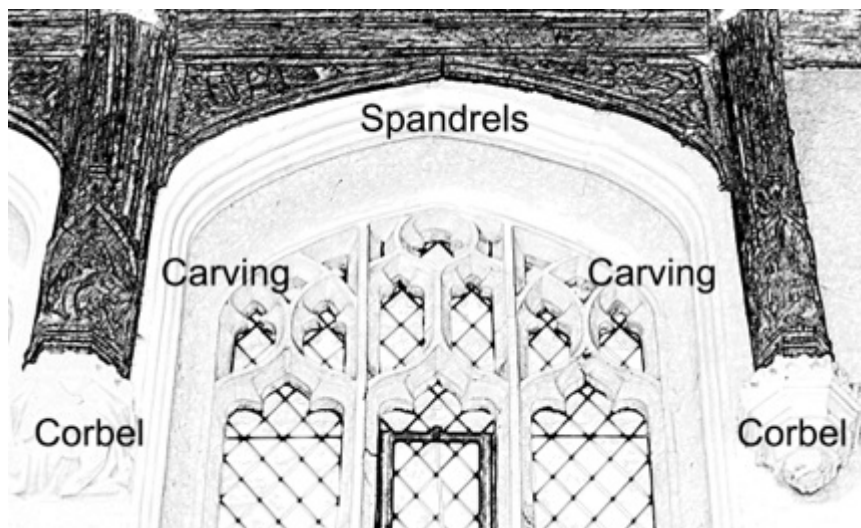
What can be seen in the roof carvings?

The following charts attempt to convey the wealth of carving by describing what can be seen. In all cases the numbering system has been kept the same with number "1" for the rafters or the clerestory windows always being the one nearest the east end (altar end) of the nave. The following diagrams may help in the interpretation of the following information sheets.

To show the position of the lower, middle and high carvings on the curved brace for the hammer beam rafters.



To show the position of the spandrels above each clerestory window, the wooden carvings and stone corbels.



Information about the carvings on the rafters of the nave						
			Altar			
			East			
North						South
			Rafter			
		High		High		
	Middle				Middle	
Lower						Lower
Plain	Plain	Plain	East Side	Plain	Shield	Plain
			1			
Floral	Floral	Floral	West Side	Floral	Keys	Floral
Dragon	Floral	Seeds	East Side	Floral	Buds	Floral
			2			
Fruit	Floral	Rose	West Side	Pomegranate	Floral	Floral
Green Pomegranate	Floral	Rose	East Side	Buds	Oak	Spiky Fruit
			3			
Pomegranate	Floral	Floral	West Side	Oak	Floral	Green Man
Merchant Mark	Floral	Cross on Shield	East Side	Pomegranate	Floral	Buds
			4			
Bud	Floral	Shield	West Side	Floral	Floral	Branch
Heart Shield	Merchant Mark	Floral	East Side	Staff on Shield	Pomegranate	Oak
			5			
Floral	Merchant Mark	Floral	West Side	Shield	Fruit	Floral
Floral	Merchant Mark	Floral	East Side	Cross	Shield	Green Man
			6			
Floral	Merchant Mark	Floral	West Side	Fruit	Floral	Shield
Floral	Floral	Floral	East Side	Floral	Shield	Three Buds
			7			
Floral	Five pointed Star on Shield	Floral	West Side	Staff on Shield	Pomegranate	Oak
Merchant Mark	Fruit	Pomegranate	East Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Big Bud
			8			
Merchant Mark	Fruit	Pomegranate	West Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
Fruit	Fruit	Fruit	East Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
			9			
Pomegranate	Fruit	Floral	West Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
Fruit	Pomegranate	Flower on Stalk	East Side	Branch	Floral	Twig
			10			
Fruit	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	West Side	Branch	Floral	Twig
Floral	Pomegranate	Floral	11	Floral	Pomegranate	Floral

Information about the carvings on the Spandrels above each Clerestory Window				
		East Wall		
North Wall		Window Number		South Wall
Left Hand	Right Hand		Left Hand	Right Hand
Cross	Three Nails	1	Rose	Bud
Branch	Fox & Goose	2	Rose	Foliage
Bend???	Branch	3	Ladder	Saltire
For John Bryd	Thatchers Mark	4	Scourge	Spear & Sponge
M for Hall Family	H for Hall family	5	Heart	Crown of Thorns
Chained Bear	Dragon	6	Cross	Sword & Keys
H for Henry Tilemaker	Tilemaker's Mark	7	Sponge & Spear	Pillar
Tilemaker's Mark	I for Isabel Tilemaker	8	Crown of Thorns	Hammer
M for Hall Family	H for Hall Family	9	Pince(r)s	Three Nails
I for Isabel Tilemaker	H for Hall family	10	Dice	Saltire

Information about the carvings on the Corbels and Wooden Niches					
			East Altar		
North Corbel	Wooden Carving		Rafter	Wooden Carving	South Corbel
	Unknown		1	Unknown	
Crown on a shield	Unknown		2	Unknown	Letter I
	Unknown		3	St James the Greater in a large pilgrims hat	
Floriated black letter H	St Luke in a doctor's hat		4	Unknown	Letter H
	Unknown		5	A female , possibly St Anne	
Two versions of W (one VV)	Unknown		6	St Philip with three loaves	Letter T/R
	St James the Less with a fuller's club		7	St Paul with a sword	
The Hall merchant mark with the top extended to form a Christian cross	Unknown		8	St Simon holding a fish	Letter H
	St Peter with his key		9	Unknown	
No emblem	Unknown		10	St Jude holding a ship	Letter W (VV)
			11		