



St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

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



Revised 2026

THE DOUBLE HAMMERBEAM NAVE ROOF

In the fourteenth century a parish church was built on this site by the Augustinian monks of Holy Trinity Priory, which once stood where Christchurch Mansion is today.

The superb carved wooden roof rafters, spandrels above the “new” windows of the clerestory, and the carvings and corbels beneath each rafter 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 (woddysers – dyers and woad merchants), were the major benefactors. Henry and Isabel Tylmaker, (brickmakers, who died in 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 both inside and outside. This does not exclude other benefactors who have not been identified. The roof contains more than 120 carvings. On the south side the window spandrels show the symbols of the Passion of Christ, the ladder, spear, nails, crown of thorns and scourging pillar. Those on the north also show these symbols but include initials of the donors and other scenes. 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. What is clear, however, is that the whole project would have required the services of carpenters knowledgeable in the construction of such roofs.

We know that about 25% of all double hammer beam roofs in England are found in Suffolk. In an article in *The Mortice & Tenon* (Vol 57 Autumn 2014) Michael Rimmer suggests that this may be linked to the royal carpenter Hugh Herland (c1330-c1411). He was the master carpenter at Westminster Hall, which was both the first known angel roof and the first major double hammer beam roof. Commissioned in 1393 it was finished some eight years later in 1401.

In 1398 he was appointed to a new project, constructing a new harbour at Great Yarmouth, in Norfolk

It is likely that he would have taken some of his carpenters from Westminster to assist him on the Yarmouth project. The team, therefore, came into direct contact with East Anglian craftsmen, including carpenters and shipwrights

who would already have been expert in timber construction involving large beams.

These specialists may well have passed the skills on to the local carpenters involved in the construction of the roof at St Margaret's some 100 years later.

Equally, it is possible that carpenters from Ipswich were "invited" to work on the building of Westminster Hall and would have become acquainted with this method of construction.

The oak used is likely to have been imported from elsewhere as not enough would have been available locally. It is also probable that it would have been air dried (rather than green) to enable the fine carving which we see today.

The carvings and mouldings are coloured in red (red vermillion), green (synthetic malachite [copper carbonate]) and mid brown (ochre [iron oxide]). Interestingly small amounts of smalt, a blue pigment found in Europe from roughly the middle of the 15th century, were found.

It is though that the original colouring scheme may have been enhanced at a later date. Certainly, the colouring would have been striking to see.

It should be remembered that not only was the roof constructed but the top of the north and south walls together with the gables were also changed to accommodate the new clerestory windows and to take the weight of the wooden structure. Building using stone and lime mortar was limited to the summer months as it took some time for the mortar to dry, and any frost during this process would weaken the structure.

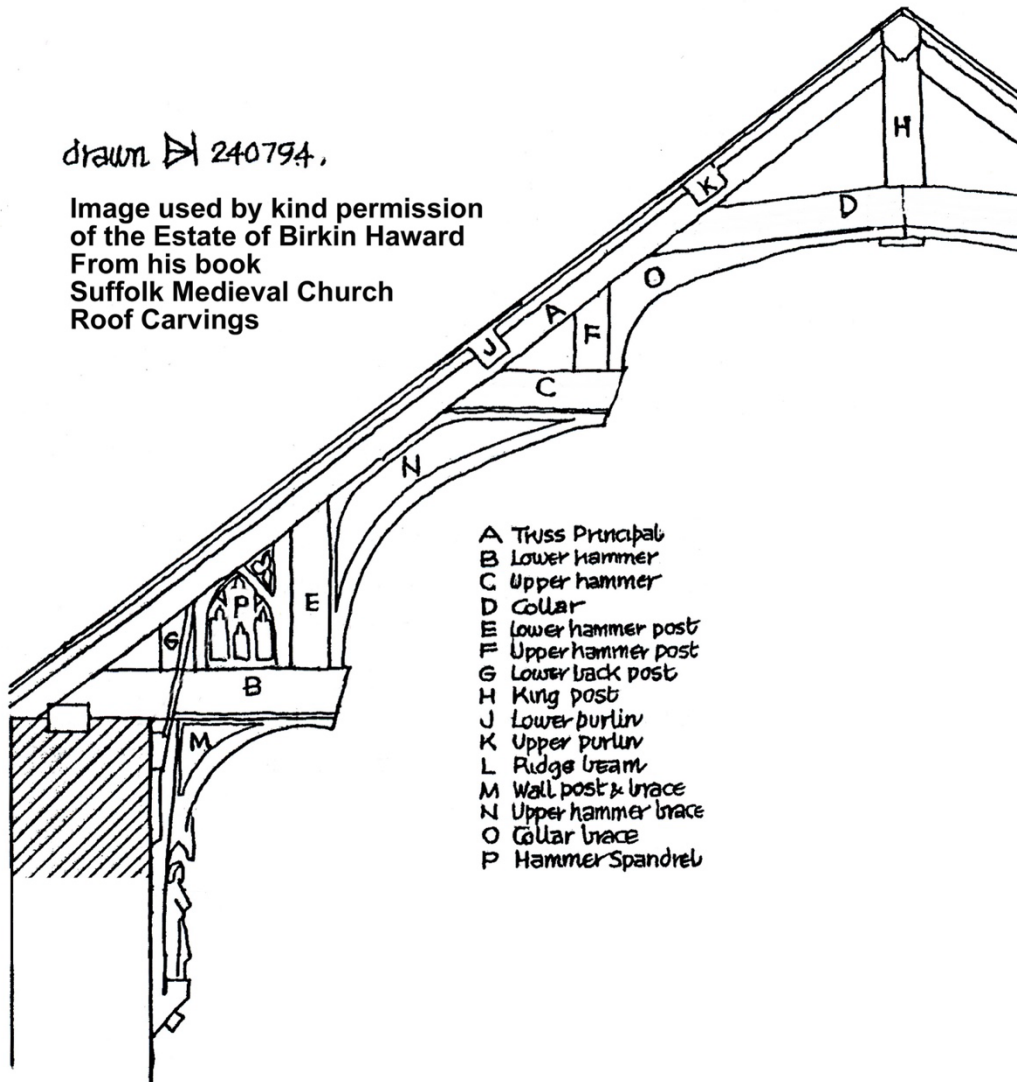
The rebuilding is likely to have taken place over several years. It is not clear how this was phased. Would they have dealt with, say, just over 2 meters of wall at a time leaving it to set before constructing two beams across the nave, or would they have completed all the stonework and then added the beams? Would the church have remained in use? It is known that scaffolding covered with canvas was used on other sites in England to protect workmen from the worst of the weather. It would be interesting to know just how the project was managed.

The span of the roof is 7m (23ft.) and the trusses are spaced at 2m (6ft. 6in.) centres. The total length of the nave is 22m (72ft.) and the maximum height from the nave floor is just over 12m (41ft.).

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

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. 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?

The following sections describe each set of carvings or paintings.

Full colour reproductions of the carvings for the spandrels and the beams can be found as separate booklets on the trolley.

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THE BAROQUE PAINTINGS OF THE NAVE ROOF

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. vs17.



The centre panels between them bear the Arms of England and Scotland (north side) and France and Ireland (south side).

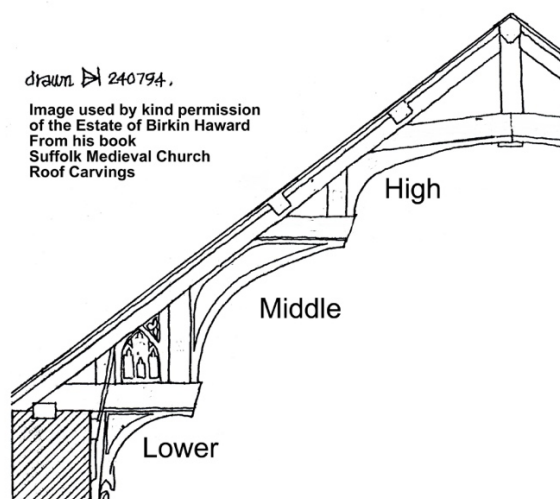
On the south, there is a WM monogram for the joint monarchs and the surrounding cherubs are festive. Opposite the mood changes, and the north panel has sad cherubs taking a crown off the altar, the orb is rolling on the ground and the olive branch drooping. We believe that this is a memorial tribute to a popular Queen who died as they were being painted.

The insertion of the “new” panels saw the whole roof 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 further damage or change during a Victorian reordering of the whole structure of the church, which included replacing box pews with 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.

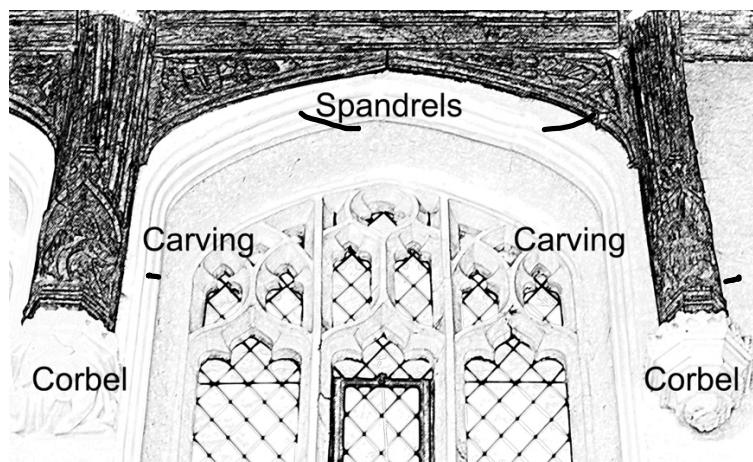
WHAT CAN BE SEEN IN THE ROOF CARVINGS?

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.

This diagram shows the position of the lower, middle and high carvings on the curved brace for the hammer beam rafters.



Whilst this diagram shows 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	Floral	East Side	Floral	Buds	Floral
			2			
Fruit	Floral	Rose	West Side	Pomegranate	Floral	Floral
Green Leaves	Floral	Rose	East Side	Buds	Oak	Leaves
			3			
Floral	Floral	Floral	West Side	Oak	Floral	Green Man
Hall's Merchant Mark	Floral	Cross on Shield	East Side	Pomegranate	Floral	Buds
			4			
Floral	Floral	Shield	West Side	Floral	Floral	Branch
Heart on Shield	Hall's Merchant Mark	Floral	East Side	Branch on Shield	Pomegranate	Oak
			5			
Floral	Saltire on Shield	Floral	West Side	Shield	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
Floral	Hall's Merchant Mark	Floral	East Side	Pomegranate	Cross on Shield	Green Man
			6			
Floral	Hall's Merchant Mark	Floral	West Side	Pomegranate	Floral	Shield
Floral	Floral	Floral	East Side	Floral	Shield	Three Buds
			7			
Floral	Five pointed Star on Shield	Floral	West Side	Branch on Shield	Shield	Shield
Hall's Merchant Mark	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	East Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
			8			
Hall's Merchant Mark	Fruit	Pomegranate	West Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
Fruit	Fruit	Fruit	East Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
			9			
Floral	Fruit	Floral	West Side	Pomegranate	Pomegranate	Pomegranate
Fruit	Pomegranate	Flower on Stalk	East Side	Branch	Floral	Twig
			10			
Fruit	Floral	Floral	West Side	Branch	Floral	Twig
Floral	Pomegranate	Floral	11	Floral	Pomegranate	Floral
Not known	Not known	Not known		Not known	Not known	Not known

Information about the carvings on the Spandrels above each Clerestory Window				
		East Wall		
North Wall				South Wall
		Window Number		
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 & Carved Bird	4	Scourge	Spear & Sponge
M for Hall Family	H for Hall family	5	Sacred Heart	Crown of Thorns
Chained Bear	Dragon	6	Cross	Sword & Keys
H for Henry Tilemaker	Tilemaker's Mark	7	Sponge & Spear	Scourging 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					South
Corbel	Wooden Carving		Rafter	Wooden Carving	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		

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SHIELDS ON THE ENDS OF THE ROOF HAMMERS.

In 1700, Beck and Edgar devised a new heraldic display to cover the stumps left when the iconoclasts of the 1640s sawed the angels off the ends of the roof hammers. The principal families of C17th Ipswich appear there, first the owners of Christchurch and the Red House. Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Seal to Elizabeth and his grandson Nathaniel Bacon, Town Clerk are both there. Thomas Bunning features partly as a reward for moving his pew so that the Red House Pew could be large enough, but he was also a generous benefactor to the parish. The arms of Devereux Edgar and Richard Phillips occupy adjacent hammer-ends in the centre of the south side; they were churchwardens in 1694. The schoolmaster-minister Cave Beck was not armigerous, but he put up arms of his own invention at the south west end all the same: first Bek 14th-century Bishop of Lincoln and Norwich) impaling Cave of London, then as an afterthought he had Bek painted over the whole shield, proof surely that these shields at least were painted locally. Even if his parents had been entitled to the two coats and his mother was a Cave, he should have quartered them.

The heraldic display can be dated precisely, as the shields were put up between August and October 1700, after the death indicated by shield N5 and before the marriage, which would have altered shield N-1.

One of the most interesting aspects of this assemblage of arms of the great and the good of the parish at the end of a turbulent century is the extent to which people of opposing political and religious views are commemorated side by side. Some are living, but most are dead. Perhaps it represents a conscious effort by Beck and Edgar to include such able Puritan politicians and ministers as the Bacons and Fairfax. Compared with the Whigs rapidly rising to prominence in town and county, these old adversaries may in retrospect have appeared men of stature, wisdom and integrity.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE SHIELDS

North side from the East:

- N1** Per pale Or and Gules, 3 lions passant guardant in pale within a bordure, all counterchanged WITHIPOLL impaling Quarterly Ermine and Gules STANHOPE for Sir William Withipoll (c.1596-1645), son and heir of Sir Edmund Withipoll, who in 1621 married Jane, daughter and coheir of Sir Michael Stanhope of Orford, owners of Christchurch 1619 to 1645.
- N2** Argent a fesse and in chief 3 roundels Gules DEVEREUX impaling WITHIPOLL, surmounted by a viscount's coronet for Leicester Devereux, 6th Viscount Hereford who in 1642 married Elizabeth, daughter and heir of Sir William Withipoll (N1). Elizabeth died in 1670 and her husband in 1676 leaving the children whose arms follow (N3 and N4) born to his second wife Priscilla Catchpole.

- N3** DEVEREUX impaling Quarterly 1 & 4 Ermine a fesse nebuly Gules on a canton Gules a ducal coronet Or NORBONNE 2 & 3 Gules on a chief Argent 2 mullets Sable BACON, surmounted by a viscount's coronet for Edward Devereux, 8th Viscount Hereford (1675-1700) who in 1690 married Elizabeth, daughter of Walter Norbonne of Calne, Wiltshire and Frances his wife, daughter of Sir Edmund Bacon, 4th Bt, owners of Christchurch from 1683 to 1700. Cave Beck was one of the guardians of the Hereford children, their tutor until they were 15, then their chaplain. Edward left Beck £10 in the will he made shortly before dying as a result of a duel.
- N4** DEVEREUX on a lozenge with a putto head above, for the Hon. Ann Devereux, who was born less than a month after her father the 6th Viscount died in 1676. On her marriage at St Margaret's on 29 October 1700 she brought Christchurch to her husband, a cousin, Leicester Martin. Martin, a close political confederate and fellow Justice of the Peace with Devereux Edgar, became Recorder of Ipswich in 1704.
- N5** NORBONNE quartering BACON on a lozenge with a putto head above, for Elizabeth (née Norbonne), Dowager Viscountess Hereford from her husband's death on 9 August 1700.
- N6** BACON impaling Gules a fesse between 3 crescents Argent a canton Ermine HOLLOWAY (putto head above) for Nathaniel Bacon, Esq., Recorder of Ipswich from 1642 and Town Clerk, 1651 and M.P. 1654, all to 1660 when he died, and his second wife Susan, daughter of John Holloway of Oxford and widow of Matthew Alefounder of Dedham. Bacon lived in the parish.
- N7** BACON quartering Barry of 6 Or and Azure a bend Gules QUAPLODE (putto head above) the arms granted in 1568 to Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Seal to Elizabeth I and grandfather of Nathaniel Bacon.
- N8** Quarterly Argent and Sable a cross between 4 escallops all counterchanged HOOKE impaling Vert a lion rampant Or VAUGHAN (but not the usual tinctures) (putto head above) for Theophilus Hooke, clerk, whose father Richard was a chaplain to Charles II. In 1679, Theophilus, then a widower, married Ann Vaughan, spinster of Ipswich. Hooke was incumbent of Hollesley and Sudbourne from 1666 to 1700 where the Devereuxs inherited the manor (with Chillesford and Orford) from the Stanhopes. Hooke was executor of the 6th Viscount Hereford, and, like Cave Beck, was chosen one of the guardians of the Hereford children by their mother Priscilla before her death in 1681. The Hookes were buried at Tuddenham St Martin, Theophilus in 1700 and Ann in 1714.²⁰
- N9** Argent 5 [should be 6] barrulets Gules over all a lion rampant Sable FAIRFAX impaling BACON on a lozenge (putto head above) for Elizabeth, daughter of Nathaniel Bacon (N6) and widow of Nathaniel Fairfax M.D., whom she married at St Margaret's in 1683. Ejected from his living of Willisham in 1662, Fairfax practiced medicine and heraldry and antiquities until his death in 1690. He commended Beck to the officers of the Royal Society as suitable correspondent on matters of scientific interest in the county.
- N10** The tenth shield is blank.

South side from the East:

- S1** Quarterly 1 & 4 Per chevron Or and Azure in chief 2 fleurs-de-lis Gules and in base 5 fusils conjoined in fesse Or each charged with an escallop Gules EDGAR 2 & 3 Gules a chevron Or between 3 leopards' faces Argent EDGAR ANCIENT impaling Azure a fesse engrailed Ermine between 3 lions passant guardant Or POWLE for Thomas Edgar (1602-1692) of Grimstone House, Recorder of Ipswich 1671-1691, who in 1635 married Mary, daughter and heir of Philip Powle of London. She lived from 1616 to 1695. Thomas built Red House for his son Thomas in 1658.
- S2** Sable semée of fleurs-de-lis and a lion rampant Or a canton Ermine PHILIPS impaling Argent on a bend Gules 3 roses Or DEPDEN for Nicholas Philips (1599-1673) merchant and linendraper, five times Bailiff of Ipswich, who married Mary Depden who died in 1642. She was first buried in St Nicholas church where Matthias Candler the antiquary, seeing her stone, wrote 'she was accounted the unparalleled beauty of her age'. Before his own death her husband willed that her body should be reinterred next to his in St Margaret's; their black marble slab lies in the centre nave aisle. The inscription mentions that 'in his fifth Bailywick [he] carried the mace before King Charles the second' on his visit to Christchurch in 1668.
- S3** EDGAR quarterly as before (S1) impaling Argent on an escutcheon between 3 crosses formy fitchy Sable each pointing to the centre of the shield a cross Or MILESON (putto) for Thomas Edgar (1649-1677) 3rd son and heir of Thomas the Recorder, who married Agatha, daughter of Borrodaile Milesen of Little Haugh, Norton, Suffolk. They lived at the Red House.
- S4** [Lost but restored in facsimile painted by Spencer Sands of IFACS Ltd and put up on 4 May 1995] PHILIPS impaling BURROUGH for Richard Philips, four times Bailiff of Ipswich and twice M.P, and Frances, eldest daughter of Charles Burrough (S6), his wife. Churchwarden when the roof panels were installed in 1694.
- S5** EDGAR impaling SPARROWE for Devereux Edgar Esq. (1651-1739) younger brother of the last Thomas, and Temperance, daughter of Robert Sparrowe, senior, gent. of Wickhambrook, his wife who lived from 1655 until 1754 or 1755. Edgar, joint designer of the display with Cave Beck, was Churchwarden with Richard Philips in 1694. Though Devereux lived and died at Grimstone House, he was also master of the Red House after his brother Thomas's death and in the minority of his nephew Milesen, heir to that estate.
- S6** BURROUGH impaling BETTESWORTH for Charles Burrough, gent., lawyer of Staple Inn, of Sproughton and Ipswich, died 1690 aged 78 and Amy his wife. She was the daughter of Thomas Bettesworth of Chidden, Hambledon, Hants and died in 1701 aged 77. Her arms included the crossed weapons on the canton, probably an augmentation of honour for service in the Royalist cause; on the ledger slab in the south aisle they appear as a plain saltire.
- S7** NORTH impaling CULLUM for Henry North Esq., B.D., counsellor-at-law, and Mary Cullum his wife.

- S8 BUNNING impaling LEA for Thomas Bunning, gent., and Elizabeth Lea, who agreed to move to another pew so that the Red House pew could be enlarged to please Devereux Edgar.
- S9 BEK painted over BEK impaling CAVE for Cave Beck, minister of St Margaret's from 1657 to his death in 1706. Joint designer, with Devereux Edgar, of the roof painting schemes.
- S10 The tenth shield is blank.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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