

Derek Thackerray, one time resident of Boughton and Churchwarden of All Saints', produced an excellent booklet about the history of the church in 1996 and this has been used as the basis for the information on this part of the Group4 News website. Additional information has been added to his work and this is interspersed within the relevant sections.

Acknowledgement is made to the tremendous effort made by Derek.

## **All Saints' Boughton – A Guide & Short History**

### **The Village**

Boughton is not easily found on the map. The roads which enter the village from Oxborough, Beachamwell, Stoke Ferry, Barton Bendish, Wereham and Fincham are classified as public roads but none of them could be called a highway. Adverse reports of the impact of road traffic on community life elsewhere frequently appear in newspapers and on television, but there is no history of popular pressure for a Boughton by-pass! It is already so easy to by-pass. Travellers more easily find their way out than in, even though Boughton's most vital connections beyond the village boundaries have seldom been broken. So perhaps it is unsurprising that this small village rates very few lines, if any, in tourist literature.

Moreover, although a church has stood here for at least 700 years, and All Saints' is still regularly in use as a place of worship, only a few guides to the ancient buildings of England have mentioned it. For, like the village which it serves as Parish Church, All Saints' has to be sought out, too. Church Lane, in which it stands, passes only a few more houses before its tarmac surface gives way to a farm track and visitors must turn back; there is no throughway. But Boughton's place is secure among the hundreds of villages whose churches constitute Norfolk's unique endowment of the national heritage. They are all gems in their setting. In Boughton's case, as in few others, the setting would never be the envy of town or city. For, in Norfolk, the setting is not all just big skies or the local dialect; essential Norfolk includes a special ingredient distilled from its smallest villages that is drawn from the age-old casks of inaccessibility and remoteness. It is with this essence that Boughton casts her spell over all her visitors.



Thus the local historian Doris Coates, in *The Story of Boughton*, remarks (of the brevity of Boughton's entry in *White's Directory 1845*):

"....prosaic facts give little indication of the great charm of this tiny village which is West Norfolk's hidden beauty spot, unmentioned in travel guides, and only rarely visited by tourists. It is off the beaten track and unspoiled"

Mortlock, in 1985, also says:

"If there were star ratings for village ponds, Boughton's cottage-ringed example would get five *stars at least*. Just up a lane is the unassuming little church.....Lovingly looked after: a village church with an atmosphere of welcoming warmth which is palpable."

This guide is about the Church of All Saints' as the visible expression, both centuries-old and contemporary, of Christian belief within this village, where the living still regularly worship, surrounded by many generations of the dead who once did the same. This church also occupies a special place in the minds and memories of all those other families, however far dispersed they may be now, whose members once came here to mark the significant moments of their lives, for baptism and confirmation, for weddings and for funerals.

## The Church



People have a proper respect for the level of groundwater here, as they do in much of West Norfolk. The highest point in the village at ground level is only 105 feet (~32 metres) above the sea, and the contours on the local map are widely spread. Yet the land falls away in every direction from Boughton so the village catches the wind whenever it blows. Above the cottages clustered on this spur of higher land the head and shoulders of All Saints' Tower and Church have stood up even further into the wind over the centuries, and parapets and pinnacles all

exhibit some erosion beyond the normal decay of the years. The weather cock on the church tower looks down only 60 feet (~18m) to the church gate, but a more impressive 150ft (45.72m) to Boughton Fen, one mile away.

One gains a strong impression of even greater height above the surrounding countryside, so distant are the views on a good day. Members of the present generation of villagers recall a saying of their elders, that a person standing on the front step of the former Rectory at Boughton stands level with the spire of Swaffham church. Looking north east from the village, few observers would suggest that this is not so, but the O.S. map, surprisingly, does not support this view. The centre of Swaffham market-place is 230 ft. (70.1m) above sea-level; and a visiting gull on the spire of the parish church would look across the landscape from a perch 405 ft. (123.44m) up, that is to say, 300ft. (91.44m) above the doorstep of Boughton's former rectory.



A strong and plausible oral tradition deserves an explanation, nevertheless, and (given that verbal messages, oft repeated, sometimes suffer corruption in transmission) it does not seem to be a wild speculation that the old saying was first uttered looking towards the spire of Oxborough church – which sadly, fell in 1948. The spoken vowels of the place names are not dissimilar; and Oxborough's ground level is 70 ft. (21.34m) below Boughton's.

## Age

The building presents, in Early English and Decorated style (two of the divisions of English Gothic), an image that is typical of the small medieval church, although the tower wholly dates from the period. Bryant who (in 1902) referred to All Saints' as a "modern stone building, erected by subscription in 1874 (*sic*) at a cost of £1000" added that when the present church was erected, foundations of a second church were found close by. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding was clearly upon the foundations of the old, itself a 15<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding of a fire-damaged earlier church. Bryant's puzzling reference to a *second church close by* could support the view that there was a Saxon or Norman church here even before the former Early English one, and, of course, pre-dating the ancient tower too.

It can be said with more certainty that a church existed here at least since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, because records give the appointment of Philip de Brancaster as Rector of the parish in 1294 – and the list is continuous thereafter. Nevertheless, although this evidence helps, the tower



itself is the most dependable witness as to age. Blomefield (in 1807) says that the new tower was built in 1416, that being the date of a bequest of 3s 4d (about 17p) for its construction, in the will of John Ivered, Rector of Oxborough. But Pevsner (in 1962) thought it was older: “must be essentially of c.1300, see the bell-openings and the W.window”. And, although Cautley (writing in 1949 and maybe trusting to Blomefield) gave it “early 15<sup>th</sup> century”, Mortlock (1985) sees it as Pevsner does, “late c.13/early c.14, by the look of its W. and belfry windows”. Beyond doubt, the tower is the oldest surviving complete structure in the village, and is almost certainly 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The body of the church, too, rests upon 13<sup>th</sup> century foundations, and partly upon the ruined and fire-damaged walls of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which were not completely razed to make way for the 19<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction. This seems to be so even though Bryant, who ignores the fire that is mentioned by other authorities, states that the old church “was pulled down in 1871”. (He also says, somewhat baldly, “there is little of interest in the building”). Yet, there

was considerable incorporation of materials salvaged from the earlier church. There are also stretches of original masonry within the lower walls; and the pillars and capitals at the porch entrance are surely original Early English, and could very probably have been fashioned in Henry III's reign (1207-1272), or a little later, when records of Rector's of Boughton began. Moreover, looking at the north wall of the nave, Colin Shewring, local well known ecclesiastical architect, commented just before his death in early 1996, that it was almost all original except for the window dressings. So it seems that the Victorian roof is supported by walls which are, at least in parts, rather older; the ancient sustains the modern more substantially than is suggested by some accounts.

### Plan

The foregoing introduction does not mean, however, that the structural history is complicated, as it is in many larger parish churches, and a simple plan, as given below, is a sufficient guide for the visitor. Basic construction is of dressed stone quoins and random stone and flint.

All Saints' Church, built upon the foundations of its medieval predecessor, perfectly replicates the period's model for the small church: a western tower, a nave with a southern porch, and a narrower chancel. There are no internal pillars, aisles or transepts; the roof bridges both nave and chancel in a single span.

In dilapidated condition, and recently damaged by fire, the old church (of whose thatched roof the fire no doubt quickly took









Thanks are due to Peter Agate for the picture

*Kelly's Directory, 1888*, says that the rebuilt church had 150 sittings. This would be a tight squeeze today, but is not often put to the test.

It is somewhat puzzling that neither the fire and subsequent demolition, nor the rebuilding of Boughton's Parish Church, were newsworthy enough to be mentioned in the local Press, yet researching the event did disclose a report of the contemporary opening in Boughton, by Richard Harwin of the new Wesleyan Chapel. Built by Mr Bennett of Downham, at Harwin's expense, it had seats for 100 worshippers, and for over 100 years was an important centre of community life. It is now closed, like the village School, also Harwin's gift. The graves of Mr & Mrs Harwin are both in Boughton churchyard. Both the Methodist Chapel's place and the role of Harwin in the history of Boughton are worthy of much greater mention than this simple footnote. Doris E. Coates gives a full account in *The Story of Boughton* (ibid).

### Exterior

The square tower, of flint and boulder, though of modest height at just 50 feet (15.24m) up to its flat roof, was raised on walls of massive thickness – as the plan indicates. Above the plinth there are three stages, at each of which the thickness progressively reduces. There is some rather attractive flushwork in the panels topping the last stage, which is embattled. At each corner there are crocketed stone pinnacles, of which only the one at the south-east corner retains its finial. The tower was surmounted by a short wooden spire, covered,



at first, with lead, bringing the total height to 60 feet (18.29m). When the spire itself (by now slated and insecure) was removed in 1973, the weather cock was saved and repositioned, so the overall height was retained, too.



**Contemporary newspaper article reporting the removal of All Saints' wooden spire in 1973**

Bryant (ibid) reported that "the cross was removed in 1644". Maybe this was to make way for the spire (**Editor Note:** There was no spire shown in Ladbrooke's painting circa 1821-1832 so it might be assumed it was an addition in the 1872 partial rebuild), although Charles I was by then beginning to lose the Civil War and the cross might have been removed under duress; in which case, even the addition of a spire could have been "politically incorrect" in the Cromwellian regime. Of course, this church, like thousands of other English churches in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> centuries would have suffered damage, destruction and defacement at the Reformation as well as under Cromwell's Commonwealth. It is still possible, where the



original buildings have survived, complete with their scars and gaps, notches and grooves, and of course their written records, more fully to describe their richness and colour in those earlier times. From the historical and archaeological viewpoints, it is unfortunate that this opportunity is almost out of reach at Boughton because whole buildings were lost in the two recorded fires, both accidentally, so far as is known.

The tower is as beautifully proportioned as the main body of the adjoining church. Cautley (q.v.) states, first, that string courses should never give equal proportions to stages of a tower; and that, overall, the ideal is achieved where the height equals three and a half times the width at the base above the plinth. Boughton's tower conforms to these principles.

At ground level, the tower has a single westward-facing window, and, on the north, the lean-to boiler house. The belfry is at the third stage and has windows on each face (whereas most Norfolk towers have only one); and below the western window, a small quatrefoil "sound" hole, not unusual for Norfolk, which was really for ventilation for the bell-ringers. The windows, with their simple cusped "Y" traceries and the bell opening are typical of the transitional period between Early English and Decorated, and strongly support the view that the whole tower is either late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century.



If the tower is the most distinguishing feature of the church, the turret stair is the most distinguishing feature of the tower itself, although this is not unusual in other local churches. Rising to the third stage in the tower's south face, it has five small glazed quatrefoils to light the climber's way; then the turret is neatly capped and disappears into the belfry. There is evidence of periodic repair on the way up, including the use of brickwork, not otherwise seen in this building.

A foot or so above and parallel to the junction of the nave roof and the tower's east wall, can be seen the projecting stone string course in line with which the thatcher placed the reeds covering the old church. (In medieval times, according to Cautley (q.v) 95% of churches were thatched; some were leaded, but tiles and slates were very rare. Norfolk still had nearly 300 thatched churches in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Boughton.)

In nave, south porch (the only entrance), and chancel, the Victorian architect faithfully followed the gothic style, yet in a more

restrained way than some of his more famous contemporaries. The roofs are of slate, with gable crosses, partly damaged, on the eastern ends of the nave and chancel and over the porch entrance. The porch, it seems, incorporates some original materials – the pillars already mentioned above, for example, and the scratch dial, at head height, to the right of the church door on entering. This type of scratch dial, used by placing a stick at the centre and calibrating the dial by reference to the shadow cast by the sun, was properly called a mass dial because the calibrated radiating lines were not the hours of the day, but times for Mass. Beneath, is a little Holy Water stoup. On an historical note, the word Mass, an ancient Anglo-Saxon word for the Holy Communion, not exclusive to the Roman or Orthodox Churches as sometimes supposed, was used in the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) and was used in the register of Services of this church as recently as 1955. The stoup was no doubt in then, too.

The walls are generally about two feet (61cms) thick. The south wall has two windows; the north, three. The east window has three lancets of even height, whereas, in the Early English style to which it otherwise conforms, the central lancet would usually be higher. (At Wereham Church, nearby, there is a similar lack of conformity, except that the lancets there are indeed Early English; possibly, Withers copied them). The stone dating the restoration may be seen at the foot of the east wall.

### Interior & Furnishings

Through the porch and just beyond the church door the font, octagonal and plain, is on the left; and nearby but rather more interesting, the disused Jacobean Communion Table and a wooden chest, both bearing the date 1623.

A substantial arch, filled by a wooden partition, gives into the tower space, which is used as the vestry, and from which access is gained to the turret stairs and belfry. Opposite the entrance to the turret is a fireplace whose chimney rises within the tower's north wall, emerging on its copper-clad roof. On the staircase at about the fifth step, there is a curious face carved into one of the stones lining the wall, of which no previous note seems to have been made.

The ringing chamber is above the vestry, and the stairs end in the belfry where three bells hang with their rusting iron straps and supports in a massive oak frame. Although these bells have not been rung for many years, there is a chiming mechanism linked to them which was in use until recently. No's. 1 & 2 bells carry the inscription "John Draper made me 1627", and No.3 "Francis Woods Churchwarden AD 1807 Cast by Dobson".



Nave and chancel combined have an interior length of 67 feet (20.31m). The nave is 23ft. (7.11m) wide, the chancel, 18ft. (5.48m); and the whole may be seen, uninterrupted, looking eastward from the vestry door. Overhead, Withers' coupled rafter roof is of pine.

At the chancel step, beyond the pine pews, on the left, is the pulpit. On the right is the little organ, reputed to have been given by Richard Harwin, and, for many years located at the west end of the nave. It was restored in 1968 by Bishop & Son of Ipswich, and remains in regular use. John Budgen, organ builder, of Warminster, whose work on the restoration and maintenance of many organs in East Anglia included this little one, was invited to comment for the purposes of this guide. He wrote, as follows: "The organ is of an unusual design with a short compass keyboard, but its range of stops from 16<sup>th</sup> pitch to 2ft make it remarkably effective for accompanying the hymns. It seems likely to have been built by James Scott, a little-known builder from West Tofts, of whose work three or four other examples survive. The construction suggests that the organ may originally have been playable also by a barrel<sup>2</sup>. It contains the following stops:

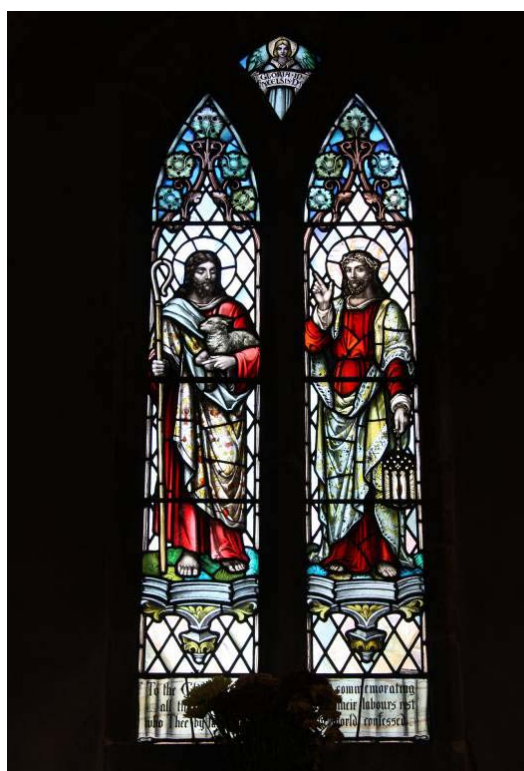
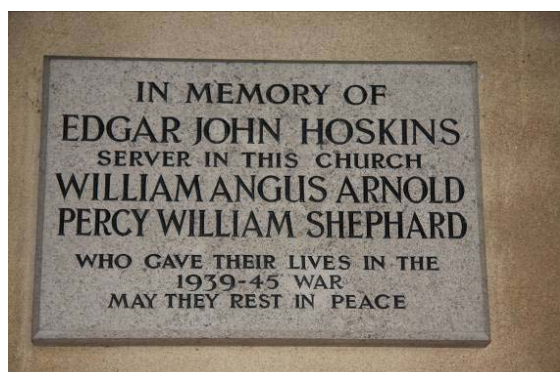




Bourdon, O<sup>p</sup> Diapason, S<sup>i</sup> Diapason, Principal, Twelfth, Fifteenth; and the keyboard runs up just three octaves from GG, covering only the essential range of notes. It slides in when out of use, as do many in older instruments.” There is a note about the organ, compiled from Mr Budgen’s further comments, attached to the organ case.

<sup>2</sup>Such an instrument would not have been out of place in a country church. By turning a handle or pedalling, the operator needed no other special skill to produce musical accompaniment for a repertoire of ten or a dozen hymns. The writer recalls one such instrument of childhood experience at Black Chapel in Essex, where a few hymn tunes became exceptionally well known, and others were never heard; but country church organists always were hardworked, as they are today, and the barrel organ was, for some congregations, a welcome alternative to singing unaccompanied. John Budgen suggested that this could possibly have been Boughton’s experience too, and that an examination by the organ tuner in due course might disclose whether the theory is sustainable by “signs of a second set of pallets”.

Four more upward steps lead to the altar, 4ft. 6ins. (137cms) above the nave floor. There are modern oak-topped communion rails of wrought-iron at the sanctuary step, made by Hodgson of Terrington, to the design of R.H.Payne, in replacement of some heavier Victorian rails; and the central swing members were added by Mrs F.H.Shephard. The altar reredos was the gift of R.Robinson. (Members of the Payne, Shephard and Robinson families have given service as churchwardens at All Saints’ Church spanning several recent decades). On the right of the sanctuary, just beyond the communion rail, may be noted a free-standing concrete slab, no bigger than a paving stone, in which, it seems, a 20<sup>th</sup> century pilgrim, back from his many journeys to ancient abbeys, has embedded and laid up his collection of samples of their stone fabric – Winnold, West Malling, Walsingham, Castle Acre, Tintern, Dale and Binham. Hereabouts, before the sedilia, there used to be a priest’s door, in the medieval chancel, according to Bryant (q.v.).



Of memorials, there are only two: on the north side of the chancel, to Smith Churchill, commemorating his rebuilding of the church in 1872; and the World War II tablet on the nave north wall. The latter, by Davis & Co. of Wisbech in 1948, honours the names of three men of Boughton, Edgar John Hoskins, William Angus Arnold and Percy William Shephard, who died on war service. Only one window is of stained glass, at the centre of the north side, depicting

the Good Shepherd and the Light of the World. This is the work of William Morris studios, and is reminiscent of Holman Hunt. It was installed in 1932, given by an anonymous donor, and commemorates All Saints, to whom this church has been dedicated throughout its history. The list of Rectors from 1294 to date hangs on the south nave wall.

An inventory of 1901 (in the Norwich Record Office) discloses “the silver plate was destroyed by fire many years ago”. There are, of course, a number of familiar items – candlesticks, communion vessels, crosses and crucifixes, and so on – in regular use, but little else in the way of pictures or ornaments. It may be presumed from a picture on the north wall, of “the Elevation”, a Burns & Oates figure of St. George (1917) and the statue of Mary, however, that former congregations were used to more elaborate ceremonial than is common today, and there could well have been more than these items. A small photograph by the door, of priest in cope and biretta (the Revd. J. Ashworth) with servers, in 1938; altar cards in a table drawer and a sanctuary bell, for example, and other signs all speak of a different liturgical scene, and the entries in the old Service Registers bring this to the imagination.

### Churchyard

The churchyard is partly surrounded by stone and brick walls. Close to the gate, and set within the wall is part of an old stone coffin which is most probably the one referred to by Goddard Johnson who, in a description of the church in 1842 said “a stone coffin was taken up from here in 1832”. This finding fits quite well with the date of the wall of which the coffin is now part, a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century construction. The area of the graveyard was estimated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century terriers at “3 Roods and 26 Perches”. It is an open churchyard, available to all parishoners, whether of the Established Church or not.

Not all the graves are marked by stones, nor are all the stones above the original site of interment; the older stones against the south and south-east boundaries were moved there from their original sites in order to clear and level the ground nearest to the church porch. Altogether, there are more than 200 numbered graves on the churchyard plan, all of the burials within the past three centuries. The oldest stone with a decipherable inscription is in the S.E. corner, the grave of Andrew Cott's wife and daughter who both died on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1706.



East of the chancel, there are nine stones in a row. The five small ones commemorate the deaths in infancy of children of the Revd. Smith Churchill, who rebuilt this church in 1872 and also built the “new” Rectory in 1857. The northernmost grave is that of Louisa Black (23), nursemaid to the family, next to Fleetwood (6) and Harriet (11) all three of whom died in a scarlet fever epidemic in January 1862. Smith Churchill's come next (died 1897), but there is no stone here to commemorate his first wife, who died in 1862 shortly after the tragic loss of the three younger lives.

<sup>3</sup>The three other small gravestones commemorate Eliza (1) in 1854, and Eleanor (1) and Susannah (“infant”) both of whom died in 1859. Smith Churchill's second wife, Mary Carter, bore him two sons and a daughter; and the largest stone in this group commemorates the deaths in 1916 both of the daughter – Mary St. Barbe Churchill and of her son Henry Churchill McNeil Smith, who died on active service in the Royal Navy.

The bodies of Richard and Sarah Harwin rest in a grave on the south.

3 The new rectory, now a private house, is reputed to have been built, following the scarlet fever epidemic, because of Churchill's reaction against the old Rectory where these tragic deaths had followed in such rapid succession. This cannot, on the face of it, be reconciled with the recorded date of the new building (1857) which preceded these deaths (1862), yet it rings true, and it would be interesting to rediscover all the facts about this very human story.

A stone on the north recalls a 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedy, to the memory of Frederick (13yrs) & Walter (8yrs) Howlett who, the stone records, "were accidentally (sic) drowned in Boughton Pit" in March 1929. Older villagers speak of the late and treacherous ice on the pond that Spring, as cause of this accident.



Beside the Tower stands the War Memorial to five named Boughton men, Walter Veal, James Rix, George Seymour, John Bray and Frederick Veal and all others whose lives were sacrificed in the Great War, 1914-1918,

The War Memorial was cleaned and refurbished in 2009 following a kind donation from Boughton resident Mr William (Bill) Miller.

Many of the departed have been laid to rest here over the centuries and, for some, though they now have no numbered or

marked place, the ancient burial registers still provide a brief memorial.

**Derek Thackerray, The Old School, Boughton, Norfolk, PE33 9AF  
Easter 1996**

**Transcribed for the group4news.co.uk website by Kevin Fisher  
October 2009**