

NOTICES OF THE  
**CHURCH OF MARTHAM, NORFOLK,**

*Previous to its Restoration in 1856.*

COMMUNICATED BY THE REV. E. S. TAYLOR.

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The Church of Martham is the most important, with regard to dimensions and architectural embellishments, in the Deanery of Flegg.<sup>1</sup> It differs from most village churches, in presenting an early and pure example of the Perpendicular style (1377-1546); whereas in most others we find a combination of several, either from later additions to the original structure, or from restorations of dilapidated portions; which restorations, if of ante-Reformation date, are invariably characteristic of the period in which they took place. In this way, it not unfrequently happens that the chancel arch is the sole trace of the original building.

In Martham Church, even the details of carving and glass are indicative of a period uniform with the building of the church, which I should assign to the reign of Richard II., or a few years anterior to 1400.

The building, which is dedicated to St Mary, consists of west square tower, nave, north and south aisles, south porch with parvise, and chancel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chancel, 84 ft. by 20 ft. 6 in.; Nave, 71 ft. 3 in. by 19 ft. 3 in.; width of Aisles, 10 ft. 9 in.

<sup>2</sup> Engravings of it have been given by Ladbroke and Brandon.

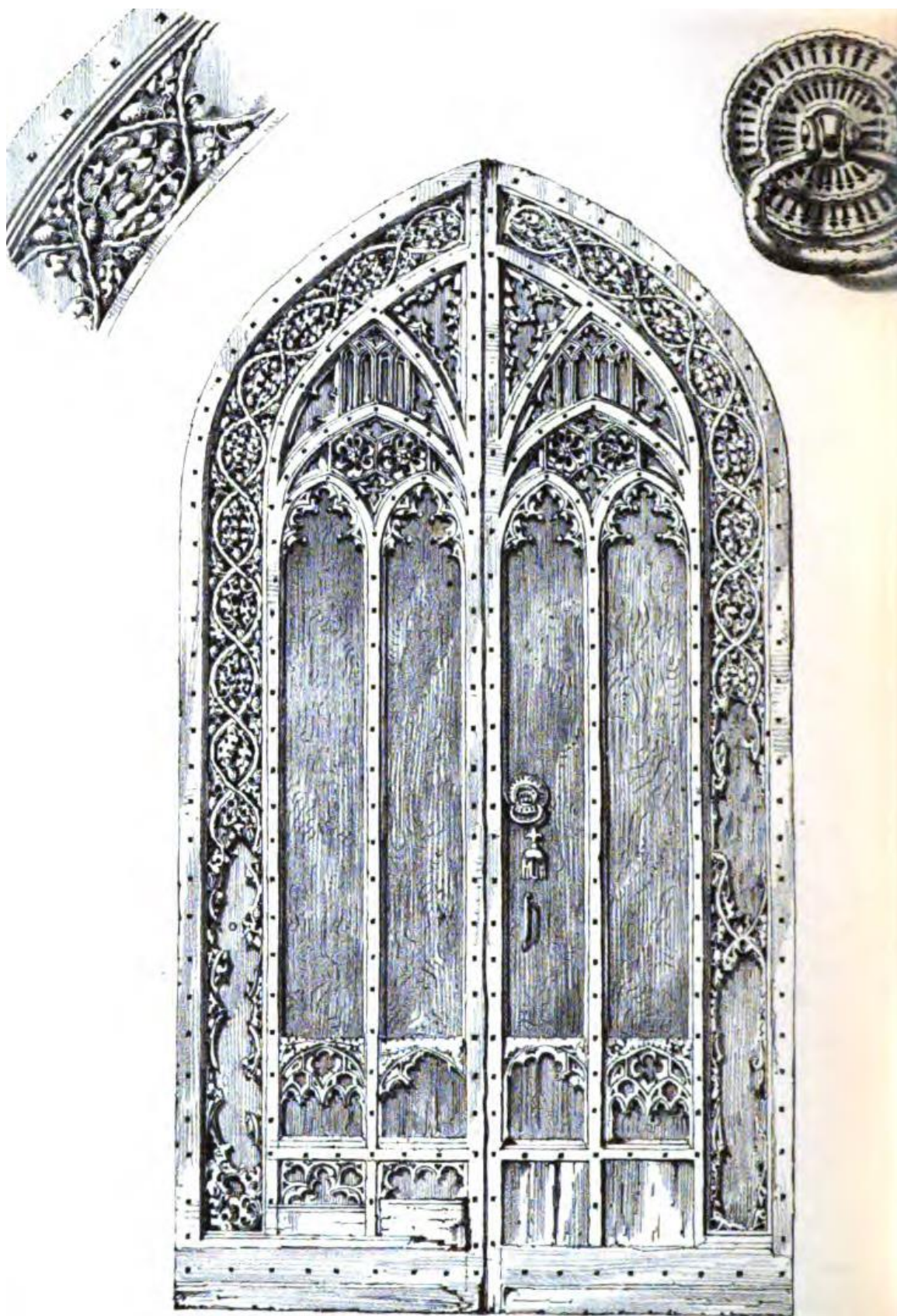


Illustration by C J W Winter

## ANCIENT DOORS

Martham Church, Norfolk

**The Tower is of exceedingly fine proportions, with embattled parapet, good base mouldings, and stone panels, filled in, as in many of our fine Norfolk churches, with squared flint. It is only excelled in this district by the still finer tower of Winterton, which is of six stages.**

**There is a fine and rich west window of three lights, with embattled transom; and a good west doorway.**

**The Tower Arch is lofty, and contains a series of shields in the mouldings, each suspended on a quatrefoil, and bearing charges of six varieties.<sup>3</sup> I am unable to assign the bearings with any degree of probability; and they may possibly be quasi-heraldic, or ornamental simply.**

**The Nave contains fine piers, in two ranges of four each, having laterally engaged shafts with caps, the arcade enriched with boutel mouldings. On each side are four fine windows, and in the clerestory five, with one of different pattern at the east end of each aisle, and some of these had portions of stained glass of more than ordinarily good character and interesting design.**

**The South Porch has good external and internal arches: its stone roof is plain groined with moulded ribs, and the Parvise is used for a parochial library, and retains partially its original tiled floor.**

**The South Door is a truly magnificent specimen of mediæval carving, in two leaves, panelled, with tracery heads of rich design and surrounded with a graceful band of vine-leaves and fruit. There is an excellent original closing ring and an enormous wooden lock. There is a north door, but no porch.**

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<sup>3</sup> 1. Chevron in base a quatrefoil  
2. Three quatrefoils, 2 and 1  
3. Cross engrailed  
4. On a cross a quatrefoil  
5. Saltire compony  
6. A chevron.

4 times repeated.  
Twice.  
Twice.  
Twice.  
Twice.

The Nave and Aisles are covered with elaborate oak roofs; that of the nave being of the hammer-beam kind, with carved angels, and open-work tracery in the spandrils. Several of these have disappeared, and been replaced with Elizabethan monstrosities in ruffs, &c., as had also the stone corbels, with the exception of two, representing a male and female, unmistakeably of the period of Richard II.: this is seen especially in the bifid beard of the former.

The Font is octagonal, of Perpendicular character, sculptured with the seven sacraments of the Romish faith. The eighth panel on the bowl represents the Last Judgement: the Saviour seated on His throne, an archangel on either side (their crowns surmounted by crosses) blowing trumpets; at His feet the dead are bursting from their tombs.

In *Confirmation*: the candidate is an infant in arms, the rite in the mediæval church being administered with chrism at the Bishop's hands, and immediately, or soon after, baptism.

In *Penance*: the evil spirit, with horns and dragon's wings stands near the door of the confessional, at the back of a kneeling female.

In *Matrimony*: the deacon holds the service-book open while the priest recites the office.

Each panel is finished with crockets and finials, and flowered spandrils.

The dresses in these subjects are temp. Edw. IV. (1450): the heart-shaped head-dress of the females is especially characteristic.

In the stem were eight panels with figures of saints; but as the font has been subject to iconoclastic mutilation, their characteristic symbols are undistinguishable. The whole was coloured with red, blue, green, &c.; but I think this is not original.

The nave is filled with benches having highly-enriched poppy-heads, one of which is especially curious, bearing the figure of a bell, on which is the monogram of Mary.



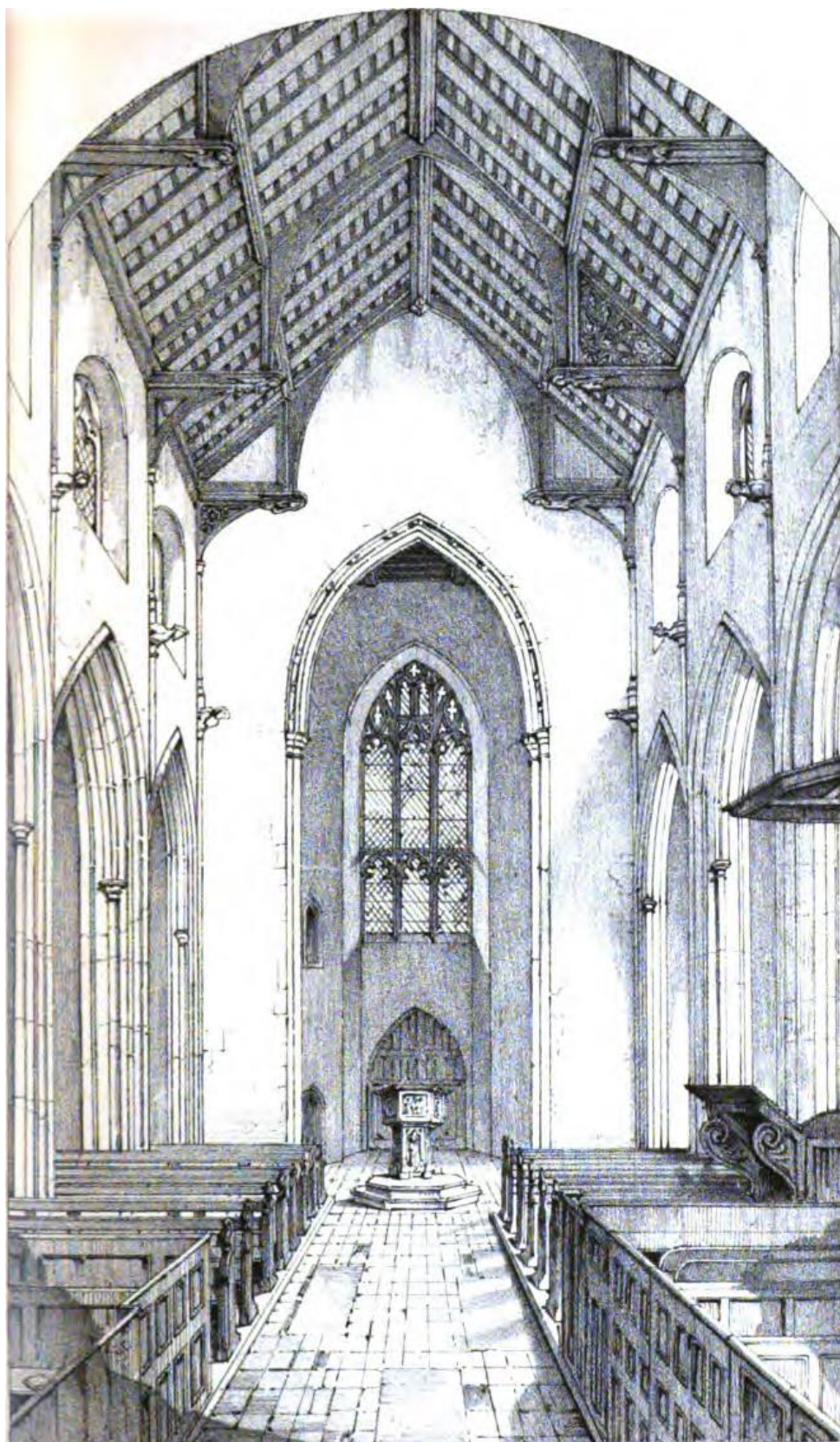


Illustration by C J W Winter

## INTERIOR VIEW

Martham Church, Norfolk

The Rood Door with its carved tracery, and the staircase, are perfect; of the original rood-screen nothing but the beam remained, and that in so decayed a state that it was only held in its place by a casing. When this was removed, traces of diapers and coloured mouldings were discoverable. The sancte bell was removed from this, some twenty years since.

There is, however, a very elaborate screen of Jacobean or Caroline date, which has the rare peculiarity of doors remaining; its panels are alternately red and brown, with a white diaper, evidently put on with a stencil plate: some smaller panels and mouldings are coloured green.

The Chancel Arch is lofty, but of less elaborate design than that of the tower. Over this were discovered traces of a mural painting in 1852: the ground a dull red, with gigantic angelic figures on each side, one of which was armed with a spear. The general subject was undistinguishable.

The Aisles are singularly deficient in interest; and though there is evidence that a chapel of St Blithe<sup>4</sup> existed, no traces of piscinæ or sedilia remain.

The Chancel has been much mutilated; the windows are of far poorer character than those of the nave: a few quarries with a yellow star-shaped pattern and borders remained, but still all in the Perpendicular style.

There are remains of good chancel desks and seats with carved elbows, the panels arched, with spandrils, quatrefoils, and pateræ.

The Decalogue is unusually early, black-lettered, and with rubricated capitals.

The Chest is ancient, the lid, as is common in this neighbourhood, hollowed out of a large tree.

Piscinæ and Sedilia are wanting, but there is a round-headed arch on the south side reaching to the floor of apparently modern date. A

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<sup>4</sup> In 1479 mention occurs of the chapel of St Blide at Martham; and in 1522 Richard Fuller, of Norwich, tanner, gives to the repair of the Church of Martham, *where St. Blithe lieth*, 10s.

pair of brackets, with angels' heads, are on the north wall, which, from their position and having holes on the top, may have supported a wooden canopy for an Easter sepulchre.

The chancel has its original oak roof, but white-washed and shortened; the east window is only represented by a square casement, which would have been more appropriate to a stable.

The Altar Cloth is an interesting relic of mediæval embroidery; it can scarcely be in its original state, as it is composed of pieces of velvet of different colours, figure with many varieties of cherubim, holding scrolls with inscriptions, and elaborate flowers. A four-winged example of the former, standing on a wheel, is very similar to one on the altar cloth at Forest Hill, Oxfordshire, and some patterns of the flowers exactly resemble the pattern on an antependium at Southgate House, Derbyshire, figured in Parker's *English Mediæval Embroidery*.<sup>5</sup> I think we have in it fragments of the differently coloured cloths used at the various Christian seasons by the Romish Church. The cloth itself was exhibited at the museum formed by the Archæological Institute at its Norwich Meeting. As its total dissolution is imminent from its present state, it would be very desirable that so interesting a relic should be preserved under glass.

I now proceed to a description of the painted glass, still existing in a dismembered condition. This, in its original state, must have been splendid in the extreme.

Want of care, and peculations, had destroyed the greater portion of it. One entire window had disappeared within the memory of man. Portions of others had been removed and are still existing in Mulbarton Church; these were copied and inserted in the drawings exhibited by Mr. Winter at the Yarmouth Meeting in 1856.

In the clerestory were sundry figures and patterns. With one exception – that of the splendid figure of St. Michael weighing souls, and the canopies of others – the painted subjects of the lower lights had all disappeared: in the two windows in each aisle nearest the west not a vestige of colour remains.

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<sup>5</sup> Engraved also in *Archæological Journal*, Vol. IV. P.298. The symbolism of the figure is very distinctly described in the first chapter of the Prophet Ezekiel.



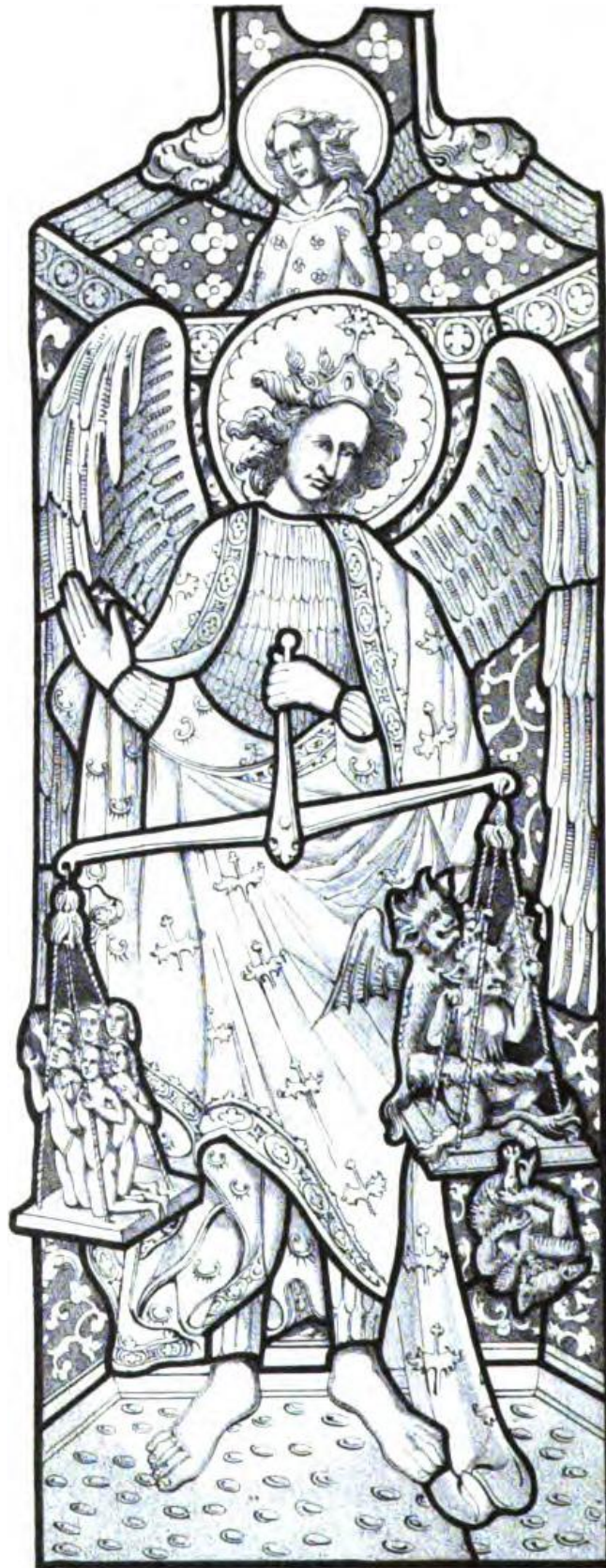


Illustration by C J W Winter

**ST MICHAEL WEIGHING THE SOULS**

**Martham Church, Norfolk**



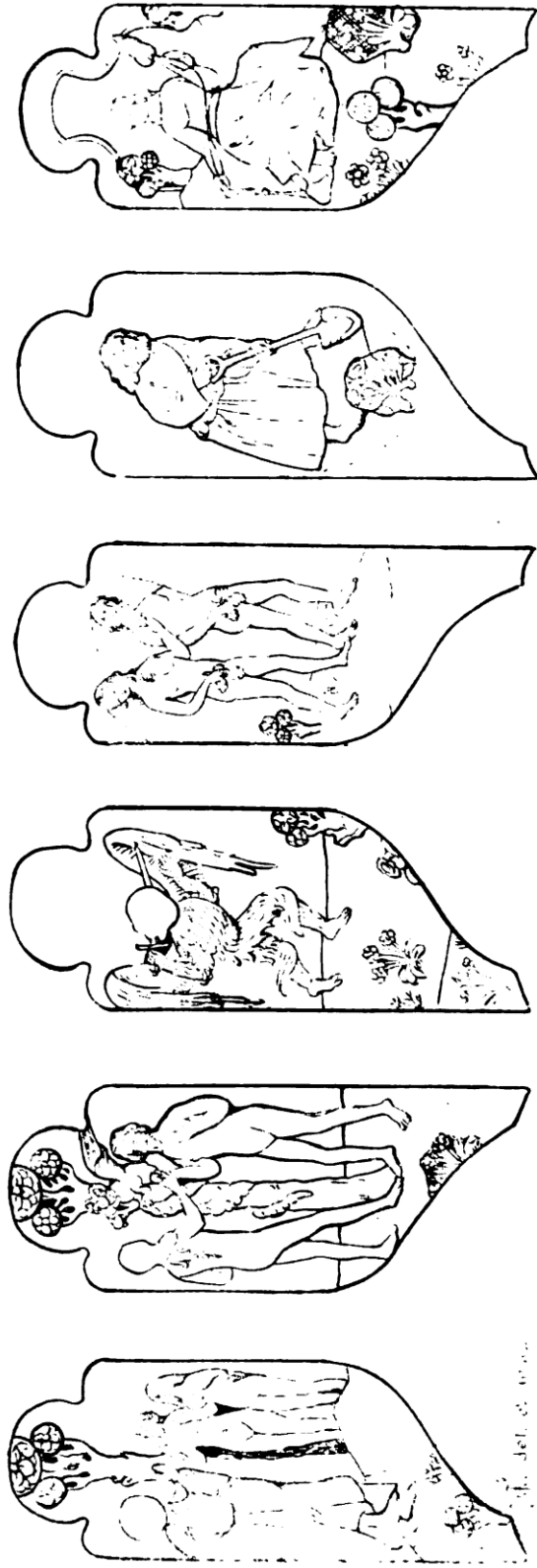


Illustration by C J W Winter

**The next window on the south side contained, in the upper compartments, the history of the Fall:-**

**1<sup>st</sup> The Almighty is directing the attention of our first parents to the tree of knowledge.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> The Temptation. The serpent, with a female human head,<sup>6</sup> is coiled round the tree and holding an apple, while Eve is offering another to Adam.**

**3<sup>rd</sup> The Angel of the Lord, with plumage of a red colour, holds an uplifted sword.**

**4<sup>th</sup> Adam and Eve fleeing from Paradise: they wear the fig-leaves, indicative of their fatal knowledge.**

**5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Represent their destined fate: Adam is digging the ground, and Eve spinning with a distaff.<sup>7</sup>**

**The easternmost light of this window contains the length figure of St. Michael weighing the souls of men against demons, of the best possible execution. The ground is a ruby diaper. The archangel has a white robe, flowered and bordered with gold, as is also his nimbus, crown, and wings. Above, is a half-length figure of an angel or saint. In one of the scales are six souls kneeling: in the other, which is rising, are two demons.<sup>8</sup> The donor of the window was commemorated by a black-letter legend below: *Orate p̄ aiab Rogeri*, in an inverted position; but which, according to Blomefield, concluded – *Clark et . . . . qui ista fenestram fieri fecerunt honori beate Marie*. A somewhat similar figure of St Michael occurs on the rood-screen at Filby.**

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<sup>6</sup> This has also the heart-shaped head-dress similar to those on the font, and characteristic of the date. The same figure occurs in the east window of the Lady Chapel, Wells Cathedral. On a scroll is written, "Si comederitis de ligno vitæ eritis sicut Dii scientis bonis et malis." (*If you eat from the tree of life you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*) Also on a Mosaic of encaustic tiles in Prior Crawden's Chapel, Ely. In the Heraldic MSS, in the College of Arms the same subject occurs, Arundel, 23; and the Genealogy of the Saxon Kings from Adam. The idea was current in Bede's time: "Nec erit omittendum, quod ait Beda, loquens de serpente qui Evam seduxit. Elegit enim Diabolus quoddam genus serpente foemineum vultum habentis quia similes similibus applaudunt, et movit as loquendum linguam ejus." – *Gervasius Otia*, Imp. I., 16. (*Nor should we omit what Bede says, speaking of the serpent who seduced Eve. For the Devil chose a certain kind of serpent with a female face, because like applauds like, and moved its tongue to speak.*)

<sup>7</sup> In an early production of Caxton (?) similar figures occur. "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?"

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps *conscience*, or good and evil deeds, which latter being forgiven, the soul rises. The idea is founded on the Egyptian mythology, in which Osiris holds the scales.

The next window contains in the tracery of the head the *nine* orders of the angelic choir, each represented by a single figure, generally bearing a scroll with its title:-

1. Angels: by a winged figure bearing a spear, much mutilated.
2. Archangels (probably), now missing.
3. Seraphim; represented with four wings.
4. Cherubim: a figure with its hands lifted in adoration. This and the last wear crowns surmounted by crosses.
5. Thrones: by an armed figure with wings and scales.
6. Dominations (missing).
7. Principalities: crowned, and apparently holding a sword or sceptre.
8. Powers: an armed figure holding the Great Dragon by a chain and scourging him.
9. The ninth is Virtues, not here depicted.<sup>9</sup>

The figures are all of a yellow colour; in the lights, only the canopies remain.

I regret that I have been unable to compare these figures with the same subject on the rood-screens of Barton Turf and Southwold, as, according to the valuable little work on “The Emblems of Saints,” by the Rev. F. C. Husenbeth, they are handled in a similar manner.

In the east window of this aisle nothing but unimportant fragments remain.

The east window of the south aisle had apparently, in the smaller compartments, under canopies, the events of our Saviour’s life:-

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Nativity.
3. Visitation of the Shepherds.
4. Adoration of the Magi; but all these are much mutilated and difficult to identify with any certainty.

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<sup>9</sup> The origins of these names is to be sought for in Colossians, 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, 16<sup>th</sup> verse:- For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”

**5. The Resurrection of our Lord.**

**6. The Ascension.**

**This last is particularly interesting; the last footstep of our Lord remaining impressed on the green hill. This probably is intended to represent the pretended footstep still preserved with such scrupulous care by the Eastern churches.**

**The head of the next window, proceeding westward, contained probably male saints.<sup>10</sup> St. Edmund King and martyr alone remains, with arrow and sceptre on a blue diapered field.<sup>11</sup>**

**The next and last of those which contained any painted glass, had figures of female saints on a diapered ruby ground, very graceful in their execution. Only the alternate effigies remain, viz., first, St. Margaret<sup>12</sup> piercing a dragon in the mouth with a long cross; in her other hand is *perhaps* a clasped book. In one of the legends of St. George it is stated that he delivered St. Margaret from a dragon: hence it has been supposed that the story of Perseus and Andromeda was applied to the Christian saint.<sup>13</sup> The next remaining figure is St Petronilla,<sup>14</sup> with clasped book and keys. Lastly, St Barbara<sup>15</sup> holding in one hand a palm branch; in the other, a model of a church or tower. In all probability the chapel of St. Blithe was in this aisle, and this window perhaps contained her effigy.**

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<sup>10</sup> This also occurs on the Barton Turf and Trimmingham rood-screens, and on the font at Taverham.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund, King and Martyr, King of the East Angles, who, not being able to hold out against the Danes, offered them his own person if they would spare his subjects. Having got him into their power, they endeavoured to make him renounce his religion, and on his refusing to do so they beat him with clubs and whips, and then binding him to a tree shot him through with arrows, A.D.870. This was traditionally related to have occurred at Hoxne in Suffolk, where was an oak called St. Edmund's Oak; and it is a curious instance of the occasional truth of these legends, that on its being taken down a few years ago, an arrow was found imbedded in its substance. The body of the king was buried in the town, in which Canute afterwards erected an abbey to his memory, and which from him was called St. Edmund's Bury: Fest. Nov. 20. Westhall rood-screen; cf. Filby ditto.

<sup>12</sup> Her commemoration is observed in our Calendar on July 20; Old English Calendar, August 15. She suffered in Antioch in Pisidia, A.D.278, but she was not venerated in Europe before the eleventh century. The same office was attributed to her as to Lucina among the heathens, viz., that of assisting women in labour.

<sup>13</sup> Hampson, *Medii Ævi Calend. I.*, 218. – Gibbon's *Misc. Works*, V. 490.

<sup>14</sup> Fest. S. Petronilla, V. Rom. Calend. May 31. North Elmham and Trimmingham rood-screens.

<sup>15</sup> Fest. S. Barb. Dec. 4, French Cal. North Walsham, Barton Turf, and Filby rood-screens.



There is very little of monumental interest in Martham Church, and only one brass: a heart, on which is the legend *post tenebras spero lucem* (*After darkness I hope for light.*) with an orate for Robt. Alen, Vicar, who died Anno Domini 1487.

In the south aisle are two slabs, of which one, nearly defaced, bears the following inscription:

Here Lyeth  
The Body of Christ<sup>o</sup>  
Burraway, who depar-  
Ted this life y<sup>e</sup> 18 day  
of October, Anno Domini  
1730.

Aged 59 years.  
And their Lyes   
Alice, who by hir Life  
was my Sister, my Mistres,  
My Mother, and my Wife.  
Dyed Feb. y<sup>e</sup> 12, 1729.  
Aged 76 years.

The following explanation is given of this enigmatical statement. Christopher Burraway was the fruit of an incestuous connection between a father and a daughter, and was as an infant placed in the Foundling Hospital; from whence, when he came of age, he was apprenticed to a farmer. Coming in after years to Martham, he was hired unwittingly by his own mother as farm steward, her father, or rather the father of both, being dead. His conduct proving satisfactory to her, she married him; thus becoming successively, mother, sister, mistress, and wife to this modern Œdipus. The episode remains to be told. Being discovered by his wife to be her son, by a peculiar mark on his shoulder, she was so horror-stricken that she soon died, he surviving her only a few months. Of the other slab, enough is decipherable to show that it covers her remains: but the parish register is deficient from 1729 to 1740, so that I cannot trace the family further.

I forwarded this singular account to the editor of *Notes and Queries* in 1951, by whom it was inserted in that periodical; and an

article appeared on it a short time after, from the pen of Mr. Singer, the commentator of Shakspeare.

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Mr. Singer gives several instances of similar stories. One especially, from a ruined sarcophagus at Rome;<sup>16</sup> and another in French, which is even more startling, as will be seen from the epitaph:-<sup>17</sup>

“Cy gist la fille, cy gist le père,  
Cy gist la sœur, cy gist le frère,  
Cy gist la femme et le mary,  
Et si n’y a que deux corps ici.”<sup>18</sup>

Few remains of antiquity have been discovered in the parish. A building of ornamental character was once standing where now the farmyard of Mr. Newman is situated. Two ornamental bricks, now inserted in the wall of the parochial school, are said to have come from it, bearing a crest, a griffin crowned and chained; two others were till lately in the garden of the workhouse at Rollesby; and I think others from the same mould are inserted in the gable of a house next the public road at Thorpe near Norwich. The upper stone of a quern was also found in a sand-pit in the higher part of the parish, and is now in my possession.

The Rev. Thomas Bowman, Vicar, presented in 1758, was the author of several religious works:-

“A Review of the Doctrines of the Reformation, in a Series of Letters to a Young Gentleman designed for the Ministry.” Printed 1768: Norwich.

“Thoughts on the Discipline of the Church of England, Baptism, Lord’s Supper, Confirmation, &c., in a Series of Letters to a Young Clergyman.”

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<sup>16</sup> Boxhornius Monumenta Illustrium virorum et Elogia. – Amst. 1638, fol. 112.

<sup>17</sup> La Sylva Curiosa de Julian de Madrano Cavallero Navarro, first printed in 1583, and reprinted at Paris in 1608. Heptameron of the Queen of Navarre, 3<sup>me</sup> Journée, Nouvello 30<sup>me</sup>. – Jeremy Tayloy; Ductor Dubitantium, B. 1, C. iii., Sect. 3, who cites Comitulus as his authority; here the scene is laid in Venice; by others the scene has been placed in Scotland; by others in London. Cf. Horae Walpole, Postscript to his Tragedy.

<sup>18</sup> “Here lies the daughter, here lies the father, Here lies the sister, here lies the brother, Here lies the wife and the husband, And yet there are but two bodies here.”

**“Seven Discourses on the Principles of the Church of England, as taught in Scripture; to which are prefixed Three Letters to a Clergyman.”**

**“Cawstoniana; or, Twelve Discourses addressed to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Cawston, Norf.”**

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**I may add to these notices, that ample funds for the restoration of the church have been provided by the liberality of a lady, of the family of the present vicar, as the old structure was fast verging to decay, the chancel especially requiring to be totally rebuilt. The architect is Mr Boyce, who proposes, I believe, to modify in some respects what has been described above. During the preparatory removal of the plaster and floors nothing has been discovered, except a tall stone niche, 8 feet 4 inches high and 3 feet 1 inch broad, about 10 feet from the floor and a few inches to the eastward of the north door. The arch was four-centred and very flat. This is now filled in again, but the workmen say it was about 20 inches in depth. Probably here stood the image of the Blessed Virgin, to whom the church is dedicated. A head of some saint or king, in stone and hollowed on the crown, and a few jettons or abbey pieces, of the usual types, complete the list of what may be said on this head.**

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