



REDUNDANT
CHURCHES
FUND

ST NICHOLAS
BUCKENHAM
NORFOLK

40 pence



The tiny village, which is home to about fifty people, is set near the River Yare, about nine miles from the city of Norwich. A ferry which once crossed the river here gave the village the name of 'Buckenham Ferry'. The sails of boats can be seen passing up and down the river, and the railway passes through the parish on its way between Norwich and Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

Buckenham Hall was demolished over 25 years ago and its ancient church ceased to be regularly used at about the same time. It was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund in 1979, since when it has been carefully rescued from its former sad and derelict condition.

The building consists of nave, chancel, north porch (now a vestry) and an octagonal western tower. The walls are constructed mainly of flint-rubble, with several chunks of dark brown ironstone conglomerate. The striking feature of the building is the western tower, which is octagonal from foot to summit and is one of the finest of Norfolk's five octagonal church towers. It dates from the 13th century (although its battlements are restored with later brick). The belfry stage has a stone lancet arch on each of the eight faces; the four on the cardinal faces are opened up as belfry windows. Each arch has a roll-moulding and rounded moulding can also be seen on

the eight corners of this stage of the tower, extending vertically from the lower cornice to the top of the parapet. In the stage below, on the west face only, is a similar 13th century lancet window without roll-moulding. The west doorway of the tower is Norman and is a beautiful piece of work, with scalloped capitals and zig-zag moulding in the arch. This doorway was in position in 1813 so is not a 19th century imitation and it was clearly a 12th century doorway (either from an earlier tower or from the west wall of the nave) which the 13th century builders incorporated into their new tower. The stairway built into the angle between the tower and the nave on the south side is a later addition. Inside the upper part of the tower is an 18th century dovecote, a great rarity.

The south wall of the nave has been restored with Tudor brick at its base and round the windows. It contains a pair of windows, heavily restored together with the buttresses during the 19th century. The pair of two light windows on the north side however have fine Decorated tracery of c 1320-30. On this side is the 15th century porch converted into a vestry. Notice the blocks of early ironstone to the west of this; they may well indicate what was the north-west corner of the original Norman nave. The south doorway is Norman; it has a very simple arch, the semicircular head of which is covered with zig-zag moulding. Carved into the stonework, quite low down on its western side, is a mediaeval scratch-dial, which indicated the times of services before the days of clocks.

The chancel shows work of c 1300, as is seen in its two southern windows, which have 'Y' tracery, and in the splendid early Decorated east window, of five lights and beautifully designed. Above it a small stone head peers out. Three-light Perpendicular western chancel windows were inserted each side in the 15th century (note the corbel heads which flank the northern one).

The internal wall of the tower is circular and a Gothic stone screen, erected during the 19th century, divides the tower from the nave. Above the tower arch once hung the Royal Arms of Queen Victoria; beside the place where they were fixed is their date - 1841. The church underwent considerable restoration during the time that the Revd T W Beauchamp was Rector here (1814-63) and mostly during the 1820s and 1840s. Various dates on the walls of the church remind us of this. On the east wall we see '1823', '1820' (above the east window) and '1824'. The sanctuary steps also bear the date 1824, as do the sills of some of the windows. Above the west doorway is the date '1823' which may refer to the door, or to the inner tower wall. Thomas Beauchamp was related to the Patron of the Living, Sir Thomas Proctor Beauchamp and, being a man of means, probably footed the bill out of his own pocket. His work is of interest because much of it was done before the Gothic Revival began its widespread Victorian restoration of churches.

The panelled plaster ceilings of the church are also 19th century. Their cornices are studded with carved bosses and their panels are beautifully and effectively painted with stencilled motifs.

The vestry (the former porch) contains the fine north doorway - a splendid example of Early English (13th century) architecture. Rounded shafts and capitals support the arch, which has keeled roll-moulding and characteristic dog-tooth ornament.

The octagonal font is a magnificent piece of 15th century stone-carving, which may well have been carefully restored and re-cut in places during the 19th century. Around the bowl are eight figures, seated beneath delicate ogee arches; beneath the bowl are angels, with outstretched wings. Against the stem are four figures holding books, alternating with four standing figures beneath trefoil-headed arches. The figures represent Saints and Apostles and, although

many are difficult to identify, we can make out the key of St Peter, the flaying-knife of St Bartholomew, the fuller's club of St James the Less and the fish of St Simon, in the figures on the bowl.

The nave benches and chancel stalls are 19th century work, but the present pulpit is mostly woodwork of the 17th century, brought here from Foscoate in Bucks. The wooden font cover, which is crowned with a dove, was taken to Strumpshaw Church.

The stonework of the chancel arch shows signs of careful 19th century restoration. Also of the 19th century are the 'shafts' of plaster which may be seen against the chancel walls, supporting the arch-braces of the roof, also the smaller 'shafts' in the splays of the chancel windows, each terminating in a small capital. These are unusual additions which the 19th century restorers designed to beautify the interior and the corbel heads which may be seen in the chancel were also added at this time.

The five-light east window is a very worthy feature of the church. Its upper section contains what remains of the richly-coloured glass by Samuel Yarrington, placed there in 1823 and restored at the expense of people in the community in 1982. In the south wall of the chancel is a fine early 14th century piscina. Its arch rests upon carved heads and terminates in a carved finial. The windowsill beside it has been lowered to form two sedilia. The stone communion rail is 19th century.

Four 13th century coffin lids were discovered during the 19th century in the churchyard and two are now set in the chancel floor at the foot of the sanctuary steps. One clearly shows its foliated cross, whilst the other is now very much the worse for wear.

On the north wall of the chancel is a handsome wall plaque to Ann Newbury, who died in 1707. Although made in the early 18th century, this monument is really in the style of the preceding

century. It bears a Latin inscription and has an urn with a flame at the summit. In the sanctuary floor are four ledger slabs, carved with skulls and other emblems of mortality, and commemorating John Awcocke, who died in 1660, also three sisters - Kathryn, Ann and another Kathryn Denny. The first two died in 1660 and the last in 1658. A ledger slab in the nave floor commemorates John Vincent, who died in 1732 aged 29 years. A further slab in the floor near the entrance has the indent for a former brass inscription. On the north wall of the nave is a brass plaque, commemorating the Revd G Elwyn, who was Rector here from 1871-1915.

In 1840, an interesting discovery was made under the chancel of this church. About two inches beneath the floor had been buried, years before, carefully wrapped up in sedge reeds, two treasures of very great antiquity. The first was part of an alabaster tablet, depicting the martyrdom of St Erasmus. It shows five figures engaged in killing the unfortunate saint, who was put to death during the Roman persecution of the Christians in the 3rd century. The other treasure was a Greek cross with a 'Christus Rex' figure. The cross has two horizontal bars and Christ is crowned and triumphant - reigning from the tree. These works of art were presented to the Norwich Museum and may now be seen in St Peter Hungate Museum of Church Art, in Norwich.

The bell, which hung in the tower, was of great interest because, although it bore no inscription, it was known to have been a pre-Reformation bell but it was unfortunately stolen from the tower and is now lost.

The Communion Plate, which was made in Newcastle in 1744, may now be viewed in the Treasury at Norwich Cathedral.

The Registers of the church date back to the year 1780.

THE REVEREND
WILLIAM
HASLAM, M A

No notes about this church would be complete without a mention of William Haslam, who was its Rector from 1863-1871. His short ministry here was sandwiched between two long incumbencies - of Thomas Beauchamp (1814-63) and George Elwyn (1871-1915). During his time at Buckenham however, hundreds of people were drawn to this tiny place.

He was a man of the Evangelical tradition and his straight Gospel preaching had already produced tremendous results in Bath and in Cornwall. He soon attracted crowds to Buckenham and before long the church was packed to overflowing and he was forced to use in addition a barn and a meadow opposite the Rectory. He also preached in public halls in Norwich, Yarmouth and Lowestoft, in addition to several other churches, with great success. Many converts were made at his services and hundreds of people of all descriptions changed their lives as a result of his preaching.

Many of the clergy disapproved of his methods and the Bishop regarded him with suspicion, but clearly the Holy Spirit poured out through this sincere and hardworking priest whose tireless energy and love of souls was unfailing. His book, 'Yet Not I', relates many detailed incidents and encounters during his time at Buckenham. He left here in 1871, having been appointed to the Curzon Chapel in London.

It is difficult to imagine the field in front of the Rectory, then a meadow, thronged with people, with the Rector preaching from the semi-circular pulpit in the wall of the Rectory garden. This was so, however, just over a century ago and is a great contrast to the quietness here today. Haslam's pulpit in the wall may still be seen beside the road.

This guide is an abbreviated version of a predecessor written by Roy Tricker.

Front cover 'Buckenham' church by John Sell Cotman reproduced by permission of the Director of the Norfolk Museums Service.

Inside front cover photograph by Saba Bannatyne of The Advisory Board for Redundant Churches.

Inside back cover east window c 1924 photographer not known.

Back cover Christopher Dalton. 1979, before repairs. The churchyard is now beautifully cared for.

REDUNDANT CHURCHES FUND

This church is now in the care of the Fund. This body was set up in 1969 to preserve churches of the Church of England no longer needed for regular worship but which are of historic, architectural or archaeological interest. The Fund's main income is provided by Church and State but the constantly increasing number of churches entrusted to it (250 in March 1989) means that its resources are severely stretched. Contributions from members of the public are therefore gratefully received. If there is no money box in the church or the keyholder is not available, please send any contributions you would like to make to the Fund at the address shown.

The Fund is a registered charity, no 258612.

Published by the Redundant Churches Fund
St Andrew - by - the - Wardrobe
Queen Victoria Street
LONDON EC4V 5DE

March 1989

Printed by Direct Design (Bournemouth) Ltd., Printers
Poole, Dorset

