



*The Church Interior, Boxford.*

FRITH.  
SEP 31



# Guide to the Church

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## Some Notes on the History and Development of Boxford

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PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY.

## PREFACE

These random Notes make no pretentions.

Information has been collected from many sources and I am most grateful for all the help I have received.

My aim has been to paint a picture, however incomplete, of some aspects of life in the village in which we live, and I crave the indulgence of readers for any errors and omissions.

Ralph Tugman.

*Boxford.*  
*June 1972.*

# Boxford

## SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE

Boxford, under its original name of Koddenham, appears in the Domesday Book. The name is perpetuated in Coddennam Hall, a farmhouse built near the site of a much earlier Tudor mansion bearing the same name on the outskirts of the village. The lordship of Boxford, amongst many other properties in East Anglia, was granted to a Norman Knight, William de Malet, a half brother to William the Conqueror. It is said that this was a reward for giving King Harold a decent burial after the Battle of Hastings. The Peyton family who owned and occupied Peyton Hall until the middle of the last century, is directly descended from the Knight and still takes a great interest in the village.

### The Church

Boxford's Church of St. Mary dates from the early fifteenth century, but there was certainly a church on the site in 1190, and parts of that church may have been incorporated in the present handsome, dignified and most impressive building. The tower which is 74 feet high, is surmounted by a little leaden spire or lantern which originally contained the 'clockbelle', now placed with the other bells. It was partly covered with cedar wood in the early nineteenth century. Some sixty years ago the weather vane at its apex was blown over and was hanging in a perilous condition. Mr. W. Bloss Kingsbury, for many years a churchwarden, who still does much for the church, scaled the spire and removed the vane.

Both porches are of particular interest. The North Porch was probably constructed in the fourteenth century and may have been moved to its present position from a monastery once situated below the site of the present Peyton Hall. An echo of this monastery can be heard in the names of the fields adjoining —Upper and Lower Trinity. It is said that monks serviced the Church before the Reformation and were lodged in rotation at Brick House in Ellis Street. They used a causeway over the river to get to the Church (the new building estate between Brick House and the river has been given the name of The Causeway) and the small, very ancient 'Priest's Door' on the south side of the Church was said to have been built for their convenience. The porch itself is a fine example of decorated wood work and may well be the oldest of its kind in Suffolk, if not in the Country. The South Porch is very elegant. It was built in the middle of the fifteenth century of soft sandstone which was floated over from Caen on rafts. It was carved with great care by masons who, it is said, camped for very many months in what is now the closed churchyard. The sandstone was obviously so valuable and fascinating to work that the craftsmen were loth to leave a square inch undecorated. Unfortunately, although efforts have been made to preserve it, it has suffered severely from the ravages of the weather.

The interior of the Church contains much of interest. The font with its panelled pedestal of the fifteenth century, has a Jacobean octagonal cover, and the traces of mural inscriptions and paintings should be noted. Mention must be made of the mural tablet—

In memory of  
Elizabeth Hyam of this Parish  
for the fourth time widow  
who by a fall that  
brought on a mortification  
was at last  
hastened to her end  
on the 4th May 1748  
in her 113th year

There is also a charming brass — a memorial to David Bird, the Rector's infant son, who died in 1606, and is shown asleep in his cot with his pattens neatly disposed underneath.

Alas, the Church was badly mauled by misguided iconoclasts in the seventeenth century. In 1643 the Earl of Manchester, 'General of East Anglia' appointed William Dowsing 'Parliamentary Visitor of Suffolk Churches' with instructions that 'all Crucifixes, Crosses, images of any one of the Trinity or of the Virgin Mary, and all other pictures of saints and superstitious inscriptions should be taken away and defaced'. William Dowsing, who was born and died at Laxfield, kept a Journal in which he recorded 'visiting' 110 churches and the manner in which he carried out these instructions. Sudbury, Assington and Stoke-by-Nayland are mentioned, but not Boxford, and it is probable that one of his Deputies of whom he had several, was detached to attend to Boxford Church. By this time, the Church, through donations and legacies, had accumulated a considerable number of silver ornaments, gilded and painted carvings, statues and sculptures, and richly embroidered copes and other vestments in addition to the items included in Dowsing's instructions. All were destroyed or looted. But though these men were able in their perverted zeal to destroy so much of beauty, they were unable to detract from the imposing grandeur of the edifice itself.

### The Village

Not a lot is known of the early history of the village itself. It was certainly an important centre of the woollen industry which flourished in this part of East Anglia between 1400 and 1800, and had a far greater population then than it has now, reaching its peak in the 17th century. Records show that in 1522 there were four Craft Guilds established in what was then a small town, indicating a prosperous manufacturing centre; in fact, from an industrial point of view, it was just as important as its better known rival, Lavenham. It seems quite likely that Boxford Grammar School, to which John Winthrop refers in his diary, was built and endowed by the Guilds sometime before 1560. It was granted Articles of Incorporation by Queen Elizabeth in 1596. The school continued as such until the late eighteen eighties, since when it has become a private residence. It is situated at the top of School Hill on the road to Sudbury. Scholars from Boxford, Groton, Edwardstone, and Assington still benefit from the funds accumulated from the sale of the building and its endowment.

From the benefactions to the Church alone, it is obvious that Boxford was a very wealthy town in which employment was found for hundreds of people. It is particularly interesting to discover that at least six merchants or tradesmen in Boxford, during the period 1648 to 1672, minted their own small currency, or 'brass farthings' until they were pronounced illegal. The reason for them doing so was that the value of the official halfpennies and farthings was not recognised by





*Boxford Parish Church from Butcher's Lane.*

the ordinary people. Coins bearing the names of Thomas Goodale of The Falcon; Susana King of The Swan; Daniel Bowtell, a Mercer; Ambrose Ponder, a Mercer; John Riddelsdale, a Distiller; and James Warwell, a Draper are still in existence. The last named was a Royalist, son of James Warwell, the Rector of Boxford from 1638 to 1663. He defied the Cromwellian regime by displaying on the reverse of his coins a Crown and a Fleur-de-Lys — a pledge to The King over the Water.

Many years ago when the Rector of Boxford lived at Parsonage Farm — a lovely little cottage beside the stream off Stone Street Road — there was a circular Tudor dovecote near the barn, the remains of which can still be seen. The cottage itself has been modernised and a wing added, making it into one of the most delightful residences in the parish.

With the decline of the woollen trade, other industries were established, notably parchment making and brewing, and there were at one time no fewer than 22 maltings in what was still a flourishing town. A number of glove makers from the Continent settled in Boxford at the time of the persecution of the Huguenots which culminated in the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve. The houses in which they worked survive in Stone Street and Swan Street.

There were many mills in Boxford. There is record of a windmill being blown down in 1605, and there were others at Calais Street, Sand Hill, and Whitestreet Green, but no trace of these seems to exist. In more recent times a Boxford mill was destroyed in a blizzard in 1881. This was rebuilt and, though no longer in existence, was working in living memory. Mill Cottage at the entrance to the village on the Sudbury Road marks its site. There was a water mill on the river where the present surgery now stands and the river was navigable up to this point. When it was built is not known. It was burnt down in 1934 and the flood-gates collapsed after the floods the following year. This reduced the river to its present size and there are still many in the village who look back with nostalgia to the days when bathing and boating were still enjoyed on a lovely stretch of water above the mill. There were other water mills at The Wash and in Peyton Hall meadows.

The town was well served by its Inns. In addition to those existing today — The Fleece, The White Hart, The Swan, and The Compasses, there were The Chequers in Church Street, The Falcon, The White Horse, and The Saracens Head in Swan Street, The Kings Head in Broad Street, The Bakers Arms at Whitestreet Green, and The Half-Way House on the Polstead boundary. Each no doubt had its history but little is recorded. There is the story, claimed to be authentic, of the last minute escape in the early 17th century of a gypsy rascal when about to be burnt as a witch, the sentence having been passed and the pyre built in the stable yard of the Fleece. And it is often recalled that much later, in 1828, the examination by the magistrates took place of Thomas Corder in the public bar of The Fleece, which is lined with panelling originally in the Parish Church. Corder was afterwards found guilty and hanged for the murder of Maria Marten in The Red Barn at Polstead. It is also recorded that he was imprisoned for the night in the Boxford Village lock-up, which was later the Fire Station, and is now a bus shelter. It still retains the initials 'B.G' — Boxford Gaol — above its doorways. Yet another story is told that before one of the bells was raised into position in the Church tower, it was filled with beer in the Fleece yard and all were invited to drink from it.

The White Hart also has its tales. There are many who remember a character named 'Tornado Smith' whose mother was the landlady of the Inn. He was the





15th Century Houses in Boxford.

first in this country to build a 'Wall of Death' which he erected in the backyard. He also owned a lioness which he had brought up from a cub and which he exercised daily in the streets of Boxford until some of the more timorous of the villagers complained. The lioness is believed to have been buried in the forecourt.

Crossing the river in the village, it seems, has always been somewhat of a hazard. Originally there was only a ford from which the village got its name, but in the early 17th century there were apparently two bridges; one stone, one wooden. The following two extracts from John Winthrop's Diary refer to the crossing —

'On the 17th February 1607 Jane Dryfield and her childe departed from her mother's in Groton to goe to London; the night before she was in danger to have been burned in the bedde, and as she rode through Boxford her childe fell into the river at Boxford bridge'. He adds the comment — 'Haec sunt malorum omnia', which might be loosely translated Some people have all the bad luck!

A further entry dated 12th January 1620 suggests that the bridge might have ceased to exist by then — 'Ridinge throughe Boxford with Mr. Gurdon in his coache, my son Henrye being with me and one of Mr. Gurdon's men, entering into the towne the coachmen were throwne off and the horses ranne throughe the towne over logges and high stumpes until they came upon the causeye right against the Church and there were snarled in the logges etc and the coache being broken in pieces, top, bottom, and sides, yet by God's most merciful providence we were all safe — Blessed be His holy Name!'

With the large increase in heavy traffic, even the modern bridge still remains a major danger, though the risk to pedestrians has recently been reduced by the provision of a footbridge.

A study of the Parish Registers which go back to 1557 show that a number of surnames in these early records are still current in the village today. Probably the best known are those of Kingsbury, Whymark and Kemball, though there were also Rices and Kings. It is recorded that a Kingsbury, a carpenter, was one of the large party of Puritan emigrants which accompanied John Winthrop of Groton Hall who became founder and first Governor of the State of Massachusetts. It is also reported that this same Kingsbury built the first Church in Boston, Mass. The Kingsbury family has been engaged in the building trade in Boxford since the 17th century, and the present firm bearing that name is well known throughout East Anglia. The family of Whymark is still prominent in the village and there was a 'Wymark' listed in the Domesday Book.

The Court House and Police Station, now disused as such, was built early in the last century and Courts were held there regularly until 1962. In the early days of its existence there was much unrest amongst agricultural workers and their sympathisers and feelings ran so high against the farmers that cases of arson were of frequent occurrence. It is surprising to recall that in one case heard at a Boxford Court, a draper's apprentice from Polstead was sentenced to deportation to Australia for writing a letter to Sir Charles Rowley threatening to set fire to his property.

Little is to be found in the records of the leisure activities of the village people in mediaeval times. It is known that Boxford staged two important fairs each year; one on Easter Monday and the second on 21st December — The Feast of St. Thomas. No doubt games of all kinds were played. We know they played football in Boxford because John Winthrop entered in his Diary that on 4th March 1617 'Brand brak his leg at footebal'. Brand or Brond was a well known

name in the district and this particular Brand was probably the son of the owner of Coddendam Hall, a rich clothier.

### **Boxford Today**

The village, which reached its nadir in the last century, has sprung to life in recent years, and the population is still rising. Many new houses have been built — an excellent Council estate by Cosford Rural District Council, and three more estates by private enterprise. There is no doubt that the infusion of new blood has revitalised the village and the newcomers are rapidly being integrated.

The amenities have also been improved. The Village Hall, managed by an independent committee, has been modernised. A Community Council has been formed which has, through its efforts, provided the village with an adequate recreation ground and sports pavilion. This has, inter alia, enabled a Football Club to be resurrected — Boxford had a splendid team some 50 years ago — and the newly formed Club has got off to a good start. The children have not been neglected and a playground with swings and slides has been provided. Boxford Bowls Club which has been in existence for very many years has recently excelled itself. Four of its 17 lady members played for England in one year and several of the male members represent their County regularly. With the great improvement which has been made to the bowling green itself, it is expected that the Club will increase its membership considerably.

More and more interest is being taken in Local History and in the Arts. The Boxford Flower Show which had fallen on lean times in recent years after a long history of achievement, is beginning to recover its past glory.

The Boxford Congregational Church has been long established and the present Church building bears the date 1823. The Church itself has been a splendid influence and has always been held in high respect in the village. The Sisterhood particularly has through the years been renowned for its charitable work.

Boxford Primary School, with its keen and energetic Parent/Teacher Association, plays an important part in village life. It has gained a considerable reputation for its proficiency in music, and amongst its many successes, its carol service at Christmas deserves special mention. The Friends of the School were responsible for providing it with a covered swimming bath, built to a large extent by voluntary labour and paid for by funds raised in the village.

Several attempts have been made in the past to establish a Youth Club and considerable success has been achieved. Recently the West Suffolk County Council has appointed an experienced organiser and the number of members of both sexes has increased steadily. Mention must also be made of the facilities for recreation provided by Mr. V. F. Leeder for young people, and these are much appreciated.

Situated as it is on the border of the beautiful Dedham Vale, immortalised by Constable and many other artists, the only threat to the future of the village is over population and bad planning. Those who are privileged to live in Boxford today are determined that it shall, as far as is possible, retain its rural character and charm.



## A GUIDE TO THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY, BOXFORD

### ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR VISITORS

#### The Church

A short description of the Church and some of its features is given in the early pages of this booklet. The following additional material - derived from several sources - is provided to assist visitors to identify features of particular interest, and to get some idea of what the Church contained in by-gone days. These notes have been prepared since the publication of the booklet and some repetition is inevitable.

As one approaches the Church from the north, one cannot fail to appreciate the general appearance of the structure, dominating as it does the village itself. The fine proportions of the massive 74 feet tower surmounted by its attractive spirelet are most impressive. The tower has a clock on the north side and a sundial on the south. The top of the tower has an embattled cornice and had, until recently, figures at each corner representing the four evangelists - the Eagle, the Lion, the Calf, and the Man. Unfortunately the ravages of the weather rendered them unrecognisable and unsafe - each weighed some 30 cwt - so they had to be removed.

The visitor, in his approach, will have noticed the west doorway which has not been in general use for many years, although it has recently been opened up during summer months to give an impressive view of the nave and east window. It has double doors with a border of vine trails. The doorway is set in a finely moulded arch emphasized by a radiating pattern in brick, flint, and stone.

He will probably enter the building by the south porch. It was built in the 15th century, partly of Caen stone and partly of a softer sandstone. When completed in about 1465, it must have been a building of outstanding beauty. Unfortunately, it has suffered severely from exposure, and so far, attempts to preserve it have not been very successful. However, it is hoped to make another effort to retard further deterioration. Inside the porch there is a large Purbeck gravestone under which the body of John Cowper, and possibly some of his descendents, lie buried. He was a clothier and was a large employer of labour. He left the sum of £13.3.4. towards the cost of building the porch, and both he and his family who lived in Stone Street, were generous benefactors.

#### The South Door

The south door is characteristic of all the doors in the Church; in fact it is claimed that few churches have so many doors of so early a date in such fine condition. It dates from the 14th century and is finely carved and panelled.

#### The Font

The font, which immediately comes into view, stands on a panelled pedestal of the 15th century. The cover is late 16th or early 17th century. It is of the cupboard type with ogee cap and opens in two halves. The inside is painted with texts. Note the staple on the cover which gives rise to the possibility that this enabled the cover to be padlocked. Until the early 17th century this would have been obligatory as it was customary to keep fonts permanently charged with hallowed water which had been used to wash away original sin.

#### The West End

The west end of the Church underwent a complete reconstruction in the 19th century. Formerly, there was an organ loft which protruded, supported by pillars, some 25 feet into the body of the Church and the choir stalls were in tiers under the floor of the loft. At ground level, doors led into the base of the tower and to the double doors at the west end, the exterior of which have already been described. On the left as one enters the tower base, a winding stone staircase leads to the bell-ringers' chamber, the small gallery overlooking the aisle, and the clock room. Above are situated the belfry and doors leading to the roofs over the nave and aisles and ladders which lead to the summit.



### The Belfry

There are five major and three minor bells which cannot be pealed until they have been re-hung and re-tuned, although they were restored and re-hung as recently as in 1894. To bring them into use again would be vastly expensive as a new steel frame would have to be provided and many structural repairs to the fabric would be essential. The belfry is not accessible to visitors but it may be of interest to list the bells and their dates:-

Treble Bell by Thomas Gardiner of Sudbury. 1714

2nd Bell by Henry Jordon of London. circa 1450

3rd Bell by Thomas Gardiner of Sudbury. 1754

4th Bell by Charles Newman. 1688

5th Bell by T. Osborn. 1799

6th Bell by Thomas Potter of Norwich. 1404-1416

7th Bell by John Keybill of London. circa 1480

8th Bell (tenor) by John Thornton of Sudbury. 1718

The 2nd, 6th and 7th Bells are amongst the oldest bells in the County.

### The North-West Corner

In the north-west corner is the Children's Corner and near-by the north door leading to the north porch. This was, it is said, called in past ages 'Death's Door', because, though seldom used, it was customary for the dead to be brought into the Church by the south door and to be taken out for burial by the north door.

### The North Porch

The north porch is a fine specimen of 14th century decorated woodwork. Cautley, in his classic work - 'Suffolk Churches and their Treasures' - describes it as 'The most wonderful wooden porch in the Country', but an eminent architect who inspected it recently, considers it 'more of a liability than an asset'. It is certainly a great pity that it has such a neglected and dilapidated appearance. The Church records show that in 1820 the Rector and churchwardens recommended that it should be 'taken down' as it was then, in their opinion, in very bad repair. How fortunate that it survived. It is intended to carry out a number of carpentry repairs and, if funds permit, to embark on a discreet restoration. The origin of the porch is somewhat obscure as in the eye of the expert there are indications that the porch was transferred to its present position from elsewhere.

### The North Aisle

On the wall of the north aisle, revealed when the plaster was removed in the 1887 restoration, can be seen texts which draw attention to the necessity for righteous judgments. It has been suggested by one incumbent that the seats immediately beneath were reserved for the Justices of the Peace.

### The Pulpit

The pulpit is of considerable interest. Until the 1887 restoration there was a very ornate 3-decker pulpit and sounding board, but what happened to it is unknown. The present pulpit may have been constructed partly from the original pulpit and partly from the 18th century reredos which was removed from behind the high altar at the same time. The pilasters at the base of the present pulpit are worthy of note.

### The Rood Screen and Loft

Cautley states that from the earliest times the place of the Sacramental Presence was partitioned off from the main body of the Church by means of a screen, and it is obvious that Boxford Church was no exception, although no trace of the actual screen can be seen. The evidence that there was a screen and also a rood loft or gallery is provided by a narrow winding stone staircase contained in the massive compound pier or pillar on the north side of the chancel behind the pulpit. Bequests for the adornment of the rood loft are recorded. On this loft was erected the rood or crucifix which, until the Reformation, was a feature of most churches and compared, if it did not actually compete, with the high altar as an object of devotional reverence. The staircase gave access to the loft as in all probability the rood was illuminated by candles which

would have had to be renewed. It is also likely that the loft was used as a musicians' gallery. In Boxford Church the screen probably extended the whole width of the building thus allowing secular activities to take place in the body of the Church without intruding on the more hallowed area of the chancel. Two doors, high up on the pillar can be seen, each of which can be reached by means of the staircase. It is known that the rood loft and probably the screens were taken down in 1558 at the time of the Reformation.

### The St. John the Baptist or Guild Chapel

This chapel, which was probably maintained by the four Boxford Merchant Guilds, occupied the space at the east end of the north aisle and was transformed during the 1887 restoration. A new organ had already been purchased and installed in 1874. Part of the chapel was converted for use as a choir vestry. In this vestry, under the floor covering, can be seen the altar tomb of William Doggett, a Merchant Adventurer of the East India Company. Beside his own coat of arms are those of the Mercers' Company, the Merchant Adventurers, and the East India Company. He may have been an ancestor of the founder of the Doggett's Coat & Badge race for Thames watermen. The visitor should examine an artist's impression of the interior of the Church, dated 1857. It is hung on the side of the organ casing facing west and shows the 3-decker pulpit, the organ loft, and the box pews. The piscina, or wash basin for holy vessels, in the south east corner of the chapel is interesting. The present main vestry is a modern addition.

### The Chancel

In mediaeval times, it is likely that the chancel was just an empty space, devoid of all furniture. It has been suggested that this, in accordance with custom, was deliberately designed to enhance the sanctity of the high altar by placing it at some distance from the congregation. In 1887, however, a great transformation took place. The new organ had already been installed; and the removal of the reredos, the replacement of the 3-decker pulpit, and many other sweeping changes were made. In recent years, in the chancel itself, new choir stalls were constructed - a gift to the Church by the Kingsbury family in memory of their parents. Mr. Kingsbury and Mr. Kemball, who undertook the restoration work nearly ninety years ago were members of families which were prominent in Boxford ever since records have been kept, and continue to be so today.

Two simple poppy headed bench ends are now part of the prayer desk.

### The East Window

The east window is of special interest for two reasons. First, it is a beautiful example of modern art. It was designed by the late Rosemary Rutherford as a memorial to Captain and Mrs. Ralph Vernon of Edwardstone who regularly attended the Church for many years. It was completed in 1972. Second, there is no evidence whatsoever that stained glass has previously been used as part of the decoration of the Church. The subject is the Transfiguration. In the great cross in the white seeded glass, it shows Christ as St. Mark recorded - 'His raiment became shining exceeding white'. Moses is on Christ's right (the left as you look at the window) and above him the flames of the burning bush. Elijah is on Christ's left (the right hand figure as you look at the window) and above him the wheels of the 'chariot of fire'. Below, are Peter, James, and John; there is no way of knowing which is which; on the extreme left and right is an impression of kneeling figures representing Everyman with symbolism above of the Tree of Life and the water, or River of Life. Above, in the highest tracery, is the dark blue grey - the Cloud the symbol of the Divine Presence overshadowing the whole scene.

### The Lady Chapel

At the east end of the south aisle is the Lady Chapel. Here again, in pre-Reformation days, a screen probably separated it from the main body of the Church. Behind the altar is some beautiful linenfold panelling. On the south wall, in the corner, is another piscina. On one wall is a painting of St. Edmund,



King and Martyr, complete with arrow, and evidence from the painted but empty niches indicate that the chapel lacked nothing in the way of decoration. Mention has already been made of the small brass plate set in the floor, to the memory of David Byrde, and the mural tablet to that of Elizabeth Hyam who lived to the remarkable age of 113 years. Both of these memorials can be seen in the Lady Chapel. On the south wall is the small Priest's door, and just outside it, can be seen a 'scratch dial' on a nearby buttress, although this is barely recognisable. Might this have been placed there to enable the priest to check his own punctuality? In the chapel is also kept a 14th century chest in fine condition.

#### Architecture

No attempt has been made in these notes to describe the magnificent architecture of the structure itself. H. Munro Cautley, FSA, ARIBA, Professor Nikolaus Pevsner, and others have described in detail so much of the construction and style that anything the writer of these notes could add would be superfluous if not impertinent. Suffice it to say that the ceilings, the arches, the pillars, together with the perfection of the proportions, combine to make this a church to admire and remember.

Finally, in compiling these notes, I have made use of the work of many architectural and historical experts. I must especially acknowledge the help I have received from Mrs. Sylvia Jenkins, who has recently completed what appears to me to be a most valuable treatise on Boxford Church, its architecture and its history, which adds greatly to the knowledge of the subject already available.

R.E.T.