

SWAFIELD



SWAFIELD ST NICHOLAS

Swafield's church is somewhat remote from its village, but set in a commanding position on a hill with lengthy views over the surrounding countryside. The nave has a thatched roof and the chancel is now covered with slates, although its high east gable wall indicates that it once also had a thatched roof. The slender tower is built of cut flints, with short western buttresses supporting just the ground floor stage. There is a three light 15C west window and belfry openings on all four faces with flatter arches and two lights. At the first stage there are some former "sound holes", for ventilation, now partially filled in and blocked with brick. At the top are four gargoyles at the corners and above is a battlemented parapet, decorated with some flushwork flint set in the stone.

The large **15C nave windows**, three each side, have decorative brick and stone relieving arches above them and a variety of grotesque headstops (Fig. 1) to the hoodmoulds. At the north-east corner of the nave the window has been shortened to allow for the insertion of a stairway to the rood loft. **The buttresses** have neatly cut flints inserted in their faces and two of the ones on the south side have Mass Dials, an early form of sundial indicating when the services would take place. These were in use



Fig. 1

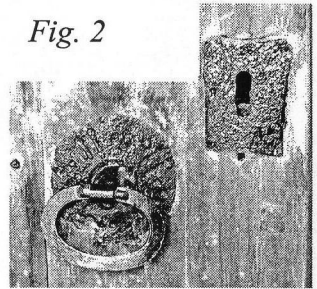
from Norman times until about 1400, when clocks as we know them became more easily available.

The chancel has plainer windows, although still large, and a small priest's door. Its east window has an unusual pattern with a horizontal transom dividing the tracery into two layers.

The **south porch** entrance has a former grave slab as its threshold, recognisable because of its tapered shape. In the north-east corner of the porch is a large Benetura, or Holy Water Stoup, where the

congregation could dip their fingers and cross themselves as a sign of atonement before entering the church. The doorway has much graffiti cut into its stone, many of them crosses, and a further small Mass Dial on the west jamb just below the end of the hood moulding. **The door** itself is ancient, of medieval woodwork, with 15C ironwork (Fig. 2), consisting of a rectangular scutcheon plate, a ring plate and an oval ring. The ring plate has punched designs of lancets and circles.

Fig. 2



The Victorian font is placed in front of the tower arch, with crisply carved quatrefoils on each side of the bowl containing foliage, except for the side facing east which has IHS, the monogram of the first three letters of the Greek "Jesus", on a shield. There are bulky fleurons on the corona below the bowl and trefoil headed panels to the stem. The **tower arch** has mouldings in its head, but these die into the vertical wall with no mouldings or responds. Above is an inverted V marking a former roof line, of perhaps an earlier narrower church. The **blocked north doorway** accommodates the War Memorial, with, unusually, more souls lost in the second World War than the first.

There is a fine panelled **medieval wood roof** to the nave, with nine bosses along the ridge. There is a chart nearby to help identify the various carvings, including five heads (Fig. 3) and four, perhaps Tudor? Roses (Fig. 4). Evidently these bosses in former times were surrounded by elaborately carved tracery, but now not much more than the central figure survives.

Near the south door is a modest **stone memorial** for Captain James Olifent, who died in 1808 with:-

“Tho Boreas blasts and Neptunes waves
Have tost me to and fro,
By God’s decree you plainly see,
I harbour here below.

Where I do now at Anchor lie,
With many of our Fleet;
Yet once again, I must set sail
Our Admiral CHRIST to meet.”

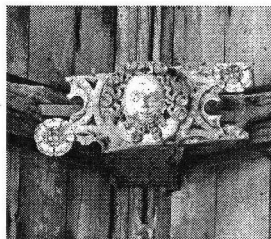
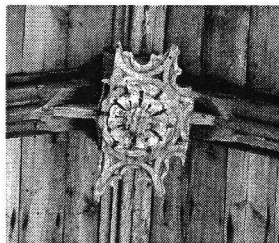


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

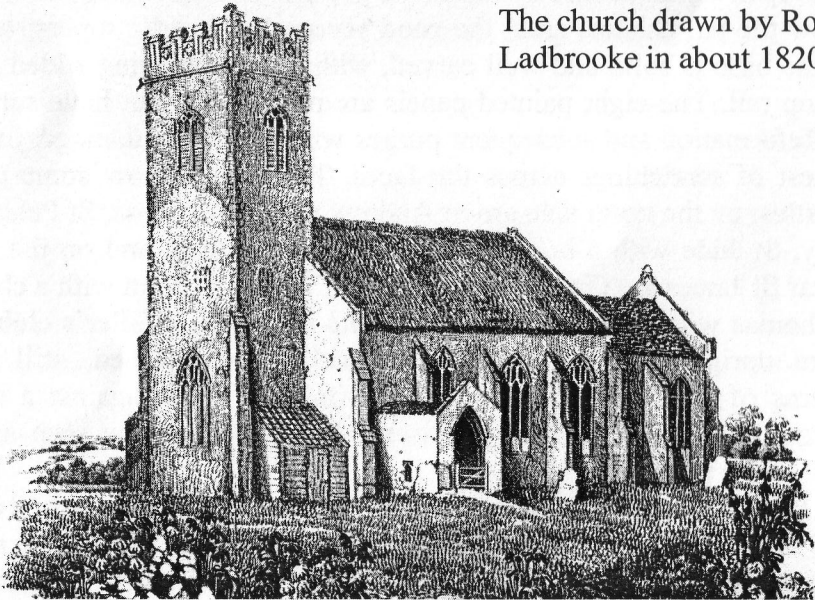


On the north wall is mounted a **Crucifix** with an amazing history. The body was found thickly covered with clay on Walcott beach in 1937, and its arms were subsequently picked up, one a mile away along the beach. It had maybe come from a church overwhelmed by the sea? These pieces were repaired, mounted on a cross and presented to the church in 1939. Below the tall chancel arch, the **rood screen** has lost its superstructure, but the base is solid and well carved, with later brattishing added along the top rail. The eight painted panels are rather dark, but have survived the Reformation and subsequent purges with very little damage, just the lightest of scratchings across the faces. The panels show some of the Apostles: on the north side are St Andrew with his X cross, St Peter with a key, St Jude with a boat and St Simon with a fish, and on the south appear St James the Great with his pilgrim’s staff, St John with a chalice, St Thomas with a spear and St James the Less with a fuller’s club. The centre uprights, which would have had doors attached, still show patterns of delicately coloured roses with long stems against a cream background, and stencilled flowers on dark green can be seen around some of the panels.

The lectern for the Holy Bible is held by a solid wooden angel, given in 1900 in memory of John and Martha Neave. Nearby in the floor is a very large black ledger stone, originally for William Harmer who died in 1710, but also used to remember his wife Elizabeth and several of their children, some of whom died as infants.

The **east window** contains Victorian patterned glass, c1880, with texts entwined in different plants, "Fight the good fight"(a lily), "I am the living bread"(a passion flower), "I am the true vine"(a vine), and "Lay hold on eternal life"(a rose). The other stained glass is in the second window of the chancel on the south side, which shows St Cecilia with a portable organ, the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb, and St Nicholas with his symbol of three gold balls, (later used by pawnbrokers!). This glass, made by Jones & Willis in 1904, is in memory of Henry Dolphin, who lost his life at Laings Nek in the first Boer War in 1881, and his brother Edgar Dolphin, who was drowned in 1889.

Behind the altar the east wall is entirely covered with panelled wood incorporating the **reredos**, in memory of Frederick Simpson Thew, Rector of this parish 1886 - 1921. The **choir stalls** incorporate some pieces of older tracery and the **priest's desk** has the triangular Trinity symbol on its front rail. In the south-east sanctuary the **piscina** has pierced panel tracery at the top, above the square bowl with two drain holes. Similar tracery patterns of trefoil and cinquefoil arches are used in the Victorian reredos and altar.



The church drawn by Robert Ladbrooke in about 1820.

This leaflet was compiled for Church Tours in 2007 by 'Lyn Stilgoe.