

St Mary's, Huntingfield

Our next visit, in complete contrast to Walpole Old Chapel, was to the church of St Mary in the beautiful verdant churchyard in the equally beautiful and verdant village of Huntingfield. Patronage of the church by the holders of the manor of Huntingfield, and later by the owners of nearby Heveningham Hall, has meant the history of the church involves some of the great East Anglian families, the de Uffords and the de la Poles (the arms of both families appear on the 14th-century font), the Paxtons and Cokes of Norfolk and, in the 18th to the early 20th

centuries, the Vannecks, Dutch merchants who had settled in London in the 17th century.

The towering wooden gothic font cover in St Mary's is a 19th-century copy of three we had already seen: one at Ufford church on the previous day and one at Wingfield earlier today, and one several years ago at Ewelme in Oxfordshire, another parish under the patronage of the de la Poles from Wingfield. This copy at Huntingfield was commissioned by the Reverend William Holland, vicar at Huntingfield from 1848 to 1892, in memory of his wife Mildred. The order, furnishing and painted decoration of St Mary's as we see it now, is due to William and Mildred Holland and to the Vanneck family. By the middle of the 19th century the fabric of the church required serious attention; this was carried out between 1859–66 with the architect J. P. St Aubyn supplying the ground plan, a Norwich builder, Mr Spaul, and stone mason, Mr Lloyd, doing much of the work, plus carpenter and bricklayer from nearby Walpole and the blacksmith from neighbouring Heveningham. The majority of the work was funded by Reverend Holland. However, it was his wife Mildred who was responsible for the amazing decoration of the roof of both nave and chancel. It has been suggested that the couple travelled widely in the Eastern Mediterranean and that this may have influenced the boldness and strong colour scheme. What is known from her husband's journal is that she did receive some advice from the architect and antiquarian E. L. Blackburne, FSA, whose researches on medieval decoration had been published in 1847 as *Sketches Graphic and Descriptive for a History of the Decorative Painting applied to English Architecture During the Middle Ages*. The page for St Mary's, Huntingfield on www.suffolkchurches.co.uk includes many illustrations of the decorations.

This was the wonderful background for looking at a private collection of Suffolk chairs with Jan and Tony Howe and Robert Williams.