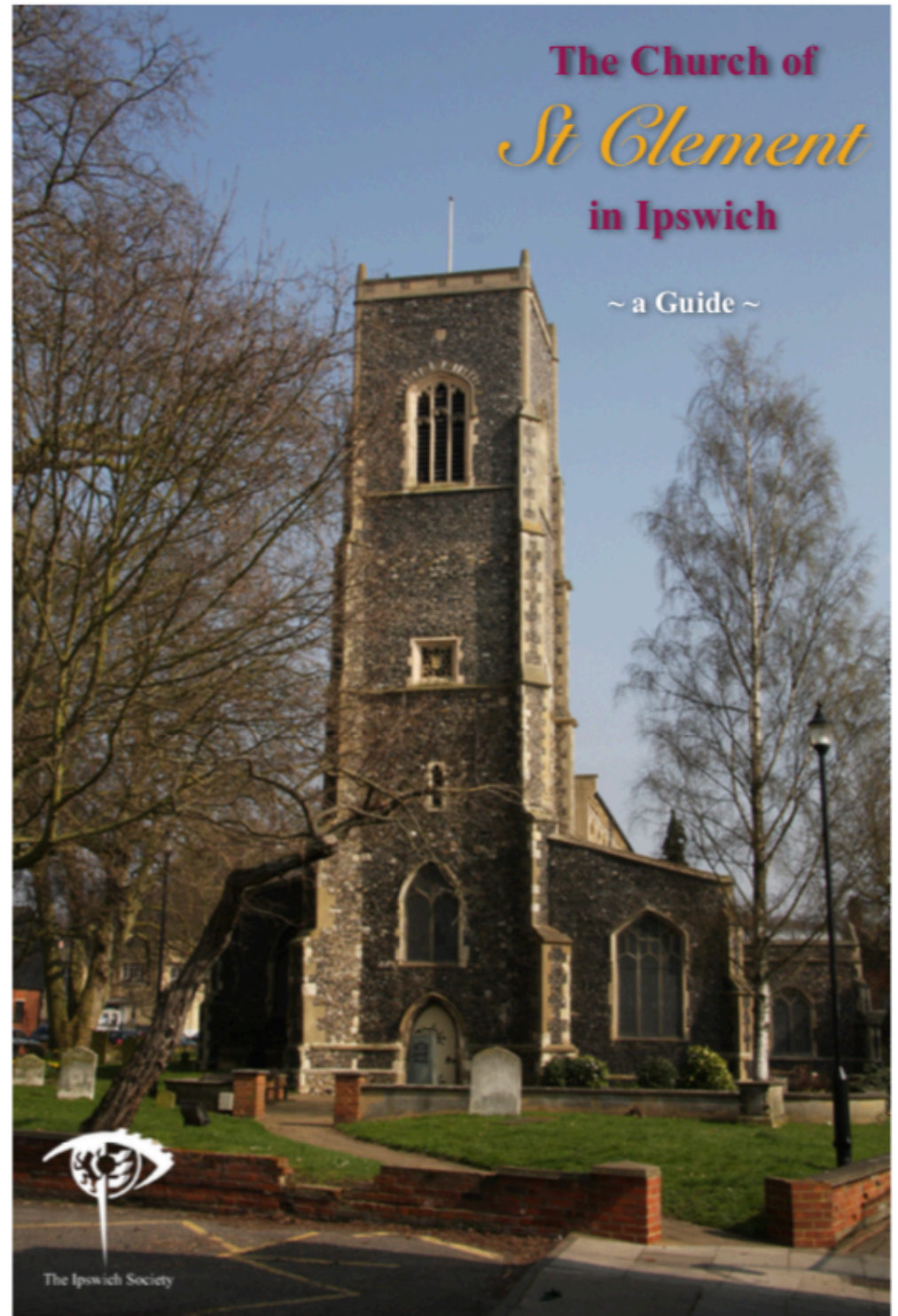


The Church of
St Clement
in Ipswich

~ a Guide ~



The Ipswich Society

The history of St Clement Church

The church is sited close to the Ipswich Waterfront, one of three dockland churches in Ipswich. St Peter to the west is now St Peter's on the Waterfront, a concert and meeting venue; St Mary-at-Quay in the centre has been extensively restored to become Quay Place, a heritage and well-being centre. St Clement is the Sailors' Church and distinguishes itself from the other two in being set in a green and leafy churchyard.

Ipswich (*Gipeswyc*) was the first Anglo-Saxon town, established at the first available fording-point from the sea of the River Orwell (by Stoke Bridge) around 600AD. In that period it belonged to Edith, the wife of Edward the Confessor. The Domesday survey (1086) lists four hundred churches in the county of Suffolk; nine were in Ipswich – but whether one of them was St Clement is uncertain.

The present building, which may have had a predecessor, was built in the 14th century. Much of the money needed for the building of the church was raised by prosperous merchants who wished to see their new dockside church as worthy of the great port that Ipswich then was – second only in importance to London.

The town was granted its first charter by King John at the nearby St Mary-le-Tower (1200), the start of a period of prosperity and growth for the town. The port reached its zenith in the 14th century as one of the main naval bases from which ships went forth to win the battle of Sluys and bring about the fall of Calais.

In the early Tudor period, the time of Thomas Wolsey, the tower was added to the church. Throughout the Tudor period Ipswich remained important as a port and centre of the wool trade. Around the Church of St Clement were maltings, warehouses and six shipyards which built many a warship and merchantman for the East India trade. In later years the port declined but the 19th century construction of deep quays and a Wet Dock revived its fortunes considerably. The population rose from 10,402 in 1801 to 17,186 in 1821, many living in the



St Clement on John Ogilby's map of Ipswich, 1674

rapidly developing parish of St Clement, which was convenient for the docks, the shipyards and the new engineering industries.

The church has served the merchants, sailors, dock-workers and their families for more than 500 years. The shipping and manufacturing industries grew close to the quaysides, the merchants building houses immediately north of the dock with their retail and commercial markets around the Cornhill: today's town centre. The area around the quays retains something of a cosmopolitan atmosphere, typical of an international port. Some of the interesting houses of those great commercial days remain in the streets around St Clement: The Captains' Houses in Grimwade Street, The Old Neptune, Isaac Lord and The Wheatsheaf, all in Fore Street.

The link between the town and Charles Dickens' character Mr Pickwick are well known. It was in the Church of St Clement, amidst its 'ancient precincts', that Sam Weller endeavoured to 'dissipate his melancholy' and it was at a 'retired spot' here that 'he was suddenly transfixed – by a sudden appearance'. It was in this corner of Ipswich, too, that Sam saw Job Trotter emerge from a green gate in a narrow lane, the gate that Mr Pickwick himself passed through when on his way to the Ipswich magistrates. The lane, now unrecognisable from Dickens' description, runs past the church.

A gazetteer of 1866, in referring to Ipswich (which then had 37,950 inhabitants), tells us that St Clement was one of the twelve parishes in the Borough. The parish had a population of 7,061 according to the 1861 census, one of the two most heavily populated parishes in the Borough. Such was the number of worshippers that a chapel of ease, a second church, was needed: Holy Trinity in Back Hamlet, built in 1835-6. By the 1860s the living of St Clement was amalgamated with that of St Helen and was a papal curacy in the diocese of Norwich. The patron of the

living and those of St Stephen and Holy Trinity was then the Church Patronage Society.



Restorations of St Clement in the 19th century saw the removal of the former, rather unsightly galleries; their timbers were used to make a beautiful screen for the church. This carved and partially-glazed screen is in the north aisle, near to the vestry door. The chancel, too, was rebuilt in 1860.

Since the 19th century the church had remained largely unchanged but, during the bombing raids of World War II, the church was extensively damaged. Restoration and repair followed including the reglazing of all the broken windows – and there were many. The year 1949 saw a visit to the church by the well-known Toc H chaplain, ‘Tubby’ Clayton, to dedicate the fine new east window.

The church closed in the early 1970s, opening once in 1977 for a wedding, later for occasional arts events, for The Ipswich Society’s regular Heritage Open Days and national historic churches cycle-ride open days. For a while, until the 1995 fire, the church was used as a store for props from the Wolsey Theatre.

In September 1995 St Clement was badly damaged by fire, but the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust was able to put it back in order. Almost two-thirds of the roof covering was lost, but the Victorian rafters only needed cleaning. The replacement interior roof we see today presents a rather ‘new’ appearance for a medieval church. The tower has also been restored by the Trust.



The exterior

The south porch survives from the earliest times of the church but the bulk of the building is a hundred years younger (15th century) with a chancel from the 1860s. St Clement is a handsome church of flint construction: a typical Suffolk church building material. With its clerestory (two rows of twelve double-light windows above the aisle roofs) and extensive window area, it is the most beautiful church of its period in Ipswich. The building consists of a western tower, nave, chancel, aisles and south porch. The style is generally Perpendicular with large windows typical of the period. The skilful use of slender buttresses enhances the general effect of the exterior; they are found between each aisle and chancel window, at the corners of the south porch and at each corner of the tower. These last buttresses continue to the tower top as octagonal turrets.

The tower

The tall tower dates from the early Tudor period and is Perpendicular in style (the diminishing buttresses make it appear narrower as it gets higher); the total height is nearly eighty feet. At ground level is a relatively small west door with a two-light window above. The next storey has a single lancet light on each face with, above, two different 19th century clock faces on north and south elevations. In the centre of the pierced opening on the west face is the Anchor of Hope on a



stone tablet: the symbol of St Clement, the patron saint of mariners. The anchor is repeated on a small stone tablet high above it.

In the bell-chamber are four tall and well-designed Perpendicular two-light windows with a rich hood moulding. At the very top, the tower terminates in closed masonry panelling very typical of East Anglian churches.



The bells

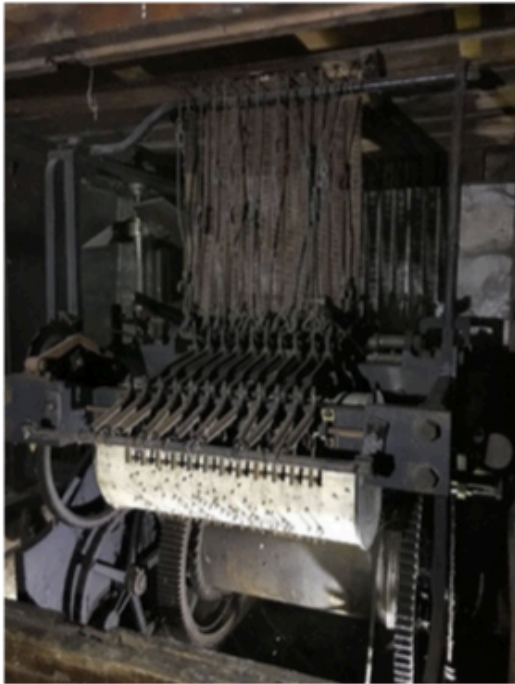
In the belfry of St Clement is a mellow and tuneful peal of bells; they are tuned to the key of F sharp (F#). The six bells were made by John Darbie of Ipswich, a bell founder who, from 1658 to 1691 cast over 158 bells for Suffolk churches. His bell foundry stood close to the docks. The Church of St Clement has the only remaining complete ring of six bells cast by John Darbie. Five of the bells bear the date of 1660 with the largest (F#) dated 1680.

In 1920, problems with the structure of the bell tower led to the bells being rehung by Alfred Bowell in a metal bell frame – made from bits of metal and girders bolted together – which was situated 10ft lower in the tower; he therefore moved all the chiming hammers. The Bowell Bell Foundry was in Wykes Bishop Street, and the Bowell family were bell-ringers at St Clement Church.

The carillon

In 1884 when Henry Bowell rehung the bells in their existing wooden frame, a clock and mechanical chiming mechanism (otherwise a ‘carillon’) were installed; both were built by Gillett & Co. Steam Clock Factory of Croydon. They were the gift of Felix Thornley Cobbold, presented in memory of John C. Cobbold, MP and High Steward.

Restored in 2018 by the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust and with a new electric-powered mechanism, the carillon gives – every three hours during the daytime – the notes of seven well-known hymns, one hymn for each day of the week.



The carillon mechanism

The new mechanism is more sympathetic to the bells; the old clock and chiming mechanisms used very large and cumbersome hammers. There are noticeable dents on the side of the 6th bell in particular where the old hammers used to strike. The original clock and mechanical chiming mechanisms have remained *in situ*.

The chancel

Although built of similar materials and style to the rest of the church, the chancel was entirely rebuilt in 1860 to the design of local architect Frederick Barnes. In the south wall of the chancel is a doorway, the priest's entrance. Unlike the nave, the chancel has no clerestory, its roof being generally lower. Both



nave and chancel roofs terminate at their east ends in simple crosses.

The churchyard

Numerous gravestones and memorials are of interest and many date from the 17th and 18th centuries. Mature trees including a number of large London planes surround the church. Adjacent to the east end of the churchyard is the parochial church hall, a plain red brick structure built in 1903, now commercial premises.

The interior

The church is entered through the oldest surviving portion, the south porch. This has a low gable roof, small two-light windows in each side wall and a graceful, though much-restored, outer arch. Inside the porch is a tablet bearing the names of parishioners who died in action in World War I. Entering the nave, one is struck by the loftiness, lightness and great length of the building.

The font

As is usual, the font is by the door since it relates to the 'entry into the church'. It is octagonal in shape, a combination of the circle of Divinity and the square of Earthly Values. Round the sides are emblems of the Saints: winged ox (St Luke),

winged lion (St Mark), eagle (St John) and a seated, winged angel with the face of a man (St Matthew). On the base, contrastingly, are the figures of wild men.

This is not as strange as it seems; for many years the early Christians had strong memories of their pagan past. Moreover, churches were often erected on important sacred places, so they were reluctant to risk offending any old gods who might still be around.

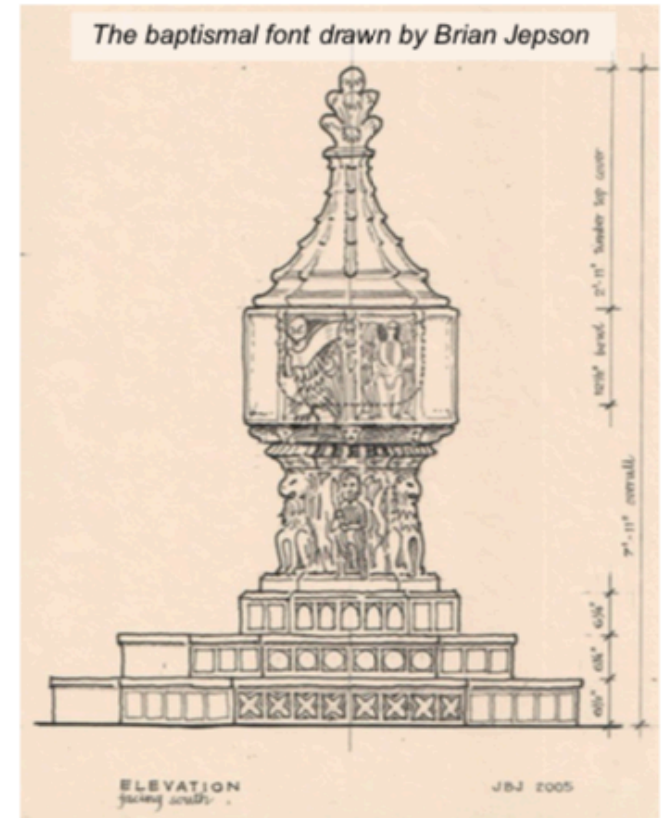
The iconoclasts of Cromwell's Commonwealth period visited many churches in Suffolk despoiling their interiors which they deemed idolatrous. The font was apparently removed before they arrived, to be reinstated in 1662. Traces of the medieval colouring on the carvings can still be seen.

The contemporary churchwardens had their initials ('FS': Fitz Sample, a local baker and 'JK': John Keeble, a mariner) scribed on the winged angel panel.

With the enlargement of the church in 1860s the font was probably relocated to the well-lit south-west corner it occupies today, but appears to be set on an early Victorian plinth/steps bearing typical 19th century decoration. The font is capped by a crocketed and pinnacled cover of late design.

The nave

This is the largest space of the church: wonderfully light and lofty. The fine clerestory already mentioned, the nave arcading of the early Perpendicular period (tall, graceful pointed arches, six on either side and with octagonal piers between) and the plain, dignified ranges are all 15th century. At the nave's east end are the pulpit and the site of the lectern.



The baptismal font drawn by Brian Jepson



The east window behind the reredos



A notable feature at the tower end of the nave is the carved and painted Royal coat of arms dating from 1661 following the Restoration of Charles II to the throne and showing the figures of Adam and Eve below. Victorian scrolled texts are painted on the plaster on either side ('Christ in you the hope of glory... which hope we have as an Anchor of the soul') and at the east end ('Glory to God in the highest').

The church organ was dismantled and removed and in 1983 it was installed in the church at Selworthy in Somerset.

The south aisle

This area is Perpendicular in style; there is a range of six spacious windows on the south wall and one at both east and west ends. The ones at the east end and on the south wall are of stained glass. Another window closer to the chancel was broken by the thieves who committed arson, previously mentioned, in 1995. The aisle extends a few feet beyond the chancel arch – insufficient space for a Lady Chapel – but does push west past the tower. The recess, so formed, is the Baptistry, the site of the font. This corner of the church is now dedicated to the Cobbold family.

The north aisle

Similar in manner to the south aisle, it has a stained glass window in the north wall. There is also a low door in the north wall, now seldom used. Reversing the pattern of the south aisle, this aisle does not extend past the tower, but does

continue to the full length of the chancel to the east to form a vestry. The extreme east end has another three-light window. The fine timber screen was made from the old, cumbersome galleries, erected in 1900 by W.H. Orvis, churchwarden, to the memory of his wife Eliza who died the year before.



The chancel floor

The chancel

Dating from 1860, the chancel is well-proportioned but less spacious than the rest of the church. The broad chancel arch is largely 19th century.

Behind the altar is an oak reredos (altar screen) which was placed there – like the tablet in the south porch – in memory of those who died in World War I. Behind the reredos is the great east window which reminds us of those who fell in World War II. The beautiful glass in this window was placed here in 1948-9 to replace that destroyed by the bombing of the war years. In 1949 the window was dedicated to the memory of Dr Ward who served and died in the war.

In the south wall of the chancel are two two-light windows in Gothic style, one of which is of stained glass. Also in the chancel is a wall piscina (a shallow basin used for washing the communion vessels) near the small priest's door, a recent replacement.



Memorials, the Cobbold connection

St Clement has a number of interesting memorials, tablets and brasses. Many are to past seamen and sea captains, a reminder that this is 'The Sailors' Church'.

Near to the font is the headstone of Thomas Cobbold, who brought his

brewery to Ipswich from Harwich in 1746 and used water from the fine springs in Holywells Park. He is described here as 'Common Brewer' (i.e. his brewery sold beer wholesale as well as selling through his own outlets); he died in 1767. This is one of at least ten memorials in the church to members of the Cobbold family. The Cobbolds had a long association with both the Church of St Clement and Ipswich.

A notable stone monument is dedicated to the memory of John Chevallier Cobbold (1797-1882), as is one of the church's impressive stained glass windows. At the end of the 18th century John Cobbold (1746-1835) took over from his father, Thomas, as a prominent brewer and businessman.

Both of John's wives were called Elizabeth and both are memorialised in the church. Between them they produced twenty-two children. The second Elizabeth Cobbold (1765-1824), was a well-respected early scientist, commemorated by the fossil bivalve, *Nucula cobboldiae*, which was named after her in 1817.

The mariner, Thomas Eldred (1561–1624), had a house (now demolished) at 97 Fore Street, immediately south of the south porch. Here he carried on a chandler's business after his sea voyages were over. Eldred sailed with Thomas Cavendish as his navigator and was one of only fifty men to survive this, the second circumnavigation by Englishmen (1586-8). The site of his burial is unknown. An



The monument to Sir Thomas Slade close to the west door.

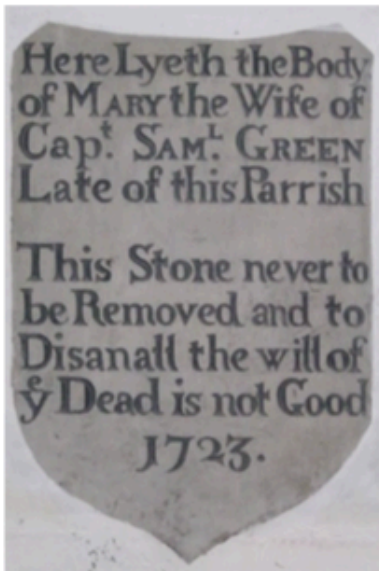


overmantel and painted plaster from Eldred's house can be seen in Christchurch Mansion.

During this golden age of exploration, Suffolk seafarers made a significant contribution to the discovery of distant parts of the world.

Sir Thomas Slade (1703/4-1771) is commemorated in the churchyard with an obelisk, the site of his grave being unknown. Slade was a qualified and experienced shipwright, a man of outstanding ability. He had trained at Woolwich, a major Navy Yard on the south bank of the Thames. He was later appointed as a Naval Surveyor by The First Lord of the Admiralty, one of only two in 1755. *HMS Victory*, on which Nelson fought the Battle of Trafalgar, was designed by Slade. *HMS Victory*, in dry dock at Portsmouth, is still the number one ship of the realm.

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An amusing warning on a stone is let into the wall of the south aisle: the memorial dated 1723 is dedicated to Captain Samuel Green and his wife Mary. The word 'Disanall' probably means *disannul* or 'declare to be invalid'.

Brasses in St Clement include one dated 1583 to John Tye, merchant and Portman of Ipswich. His will of the same date is in the National Archives at Kew. Tye Road in the new housing development off Duke Street is named after him.

There are brass plates with text and a male figure (the wife and children are missing) next to the octagonal lectern base. This memorial, dated 1607, is in memory of William Cooke, also a merchant of the parish.



In the chancel there are several fine mural monuments. One features a skull garlanded with olive leaves and books with a Hebrew text.

The most recent memorials

In 2017 The Ipswich Historic Churches Trust commemorated the work of its past Chairman, John Blatchly, with a brass plaque in the church near to the font.

At the same time a First World War memorial was unveiled, which had been relocated from the St Clement Congregational Church in Back Hamlet, paying tribute to the parishioners who were killed during the war. It is located at the west end of the north aisle.

Acknowledgements

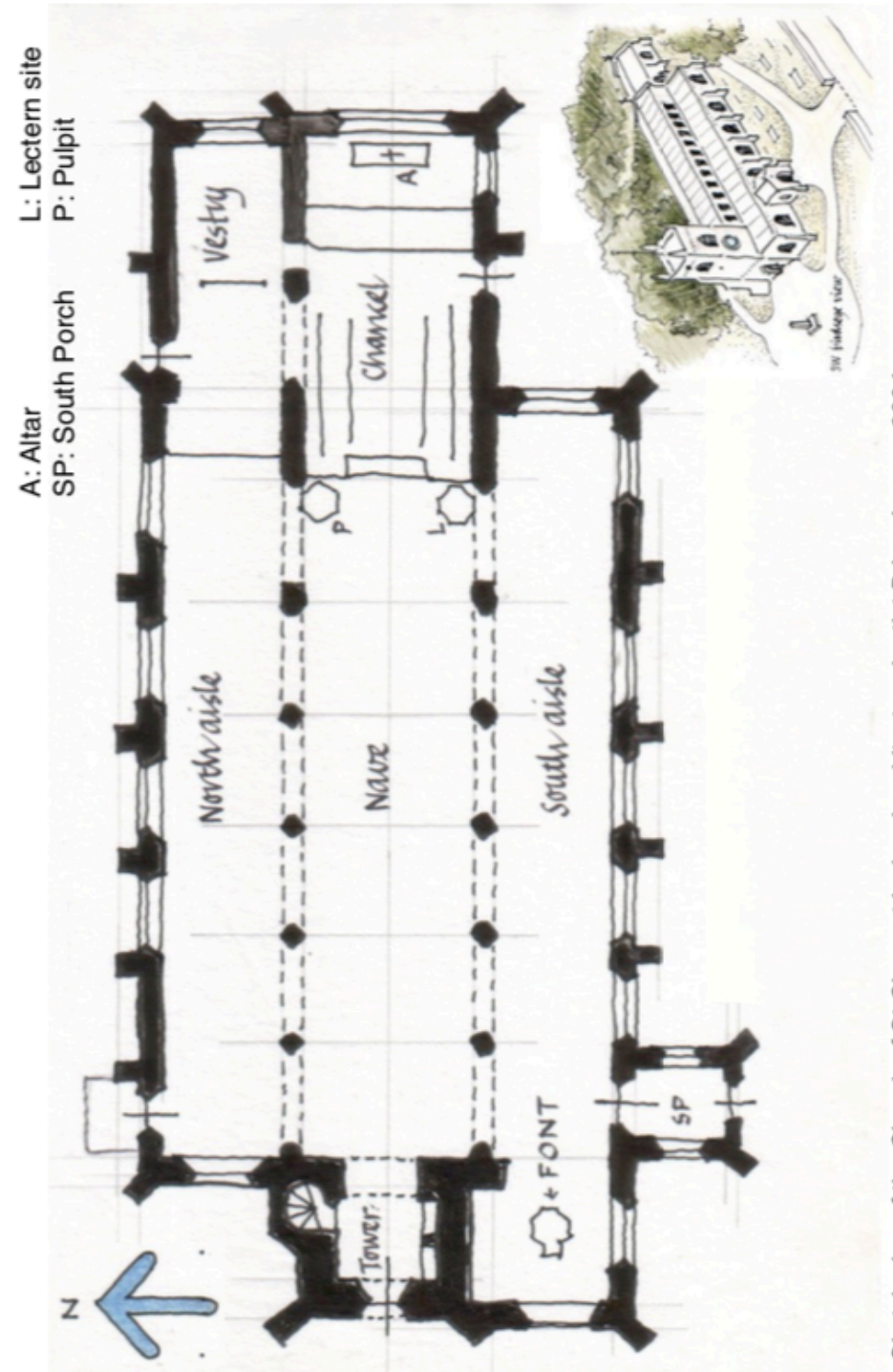
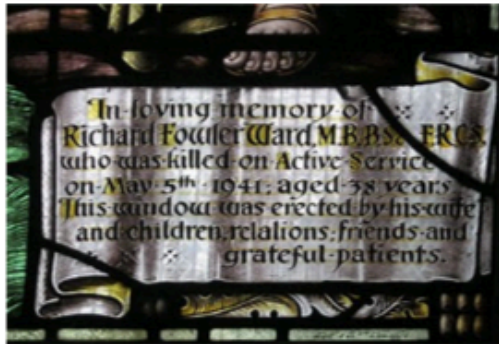
Anthony Cobbold
The work of the late Brian Jepson appears courtesy Mrs Jill Jepson
Katharine Salter
Ken Wilson
Rowell Bell
The Ipswich Institute



This booklet is dedicated to the memory of local historian Dr John Blatchly (1932-2015).

At right, from the top:

1. The John Blatchly memorial;
2. Dedication on the east window (signed on the lowest lozenge by Abbott & Co. of Lancaster);
3. Monument detail in the chancel;
4. Clockface on the south wall of the tower.



Sketch plan of the Church of St Clement by local architect and artist Brian Jepson, 2004

£2.00



St Clement Church in the snow, 2018

The Church of St Clement is one of the Borough's twelve surviving, town centre, medieval churches. Of those which have become redundant, five have found new uses. The last, St Clement, has been cared for by the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust since 1981 and has finally found a new role as the Ipswich Arts Centre. It is the only church in Suffolk dedicated to St Clement of Rome.

The main structure dates from the late 14th and early 15th centuries. It is one of our three dockland churches and was long known as 'The Sailors' Church'; many interesting monuments attest to this association. It is also the church of the notable brewing and banking family, the Cobbolds. There is a 15th century font and a Restoration-era carved and painted Royal coat of arms dating from 1661.



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