



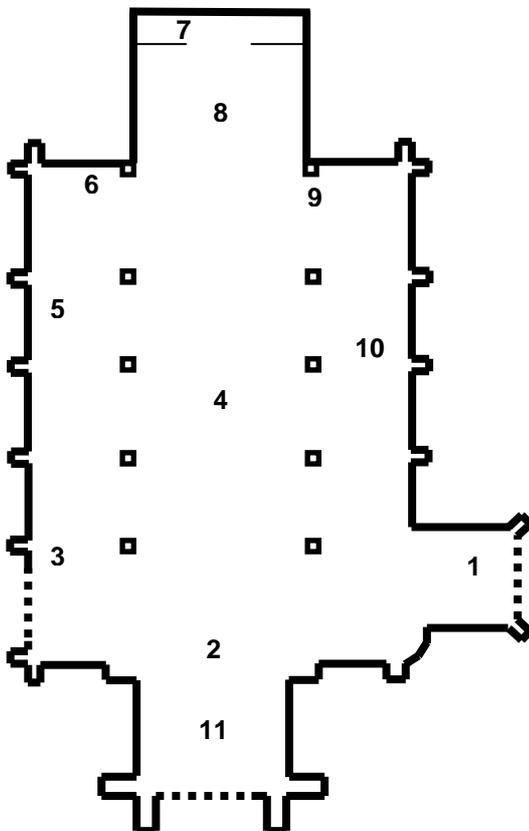
*A visitor's guide to*  
**St. Mary's Parish Church**  
*Hickling*

The village of Hickling is thought to have had its origins in the fifth century AD. We are not sure when the first church was built here. However there was certainly a church on this site at the Norman Conquest. It is recorded in the Domesday Book, 1086, and was probably of considerable age at that time. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Augustinian Canons of Hickling Priory, (which had been founded in 1185), began building the present church, of stone and knapped flint. It served what by then seems to have been a village of some importance since it supported a weekly market, granted by King John to the Priory in 1204. The Church was originally dedicated to All Saints.

At the Dissolution of the Priory, in 1536, the church took the dedication to St. Mary, which continues to this day. The extent and shape of the building is probably much as it was at the Dissolution, but at about that time the chancel was reduced in length - apparently due to the collapse of the east end - and the earlier dimensions are indicated by the height of the ground outside.

The church was heavily restored in 1875, and the immediate effect of the interior - plain, even austere - is as much the result of that as of the medieval builders. Before this restoration there was an oak screen, a gallery at the west end, box pews and a three-decker pulpit.

This simple guide is written in the hope that it might make your visit to the church as it is today more interesting.



(1) **THE PORCH**, as you enter, has two storeys and the sundial covers what was formerly a window. There is a holy water stoup to the right of the Church door. The porch is probably a little later than the main part of the Church, though the flushwork (stone panelling flush with the knapped flints) is no more elaborate than that of the tower or the buttresses to the aisles. There is a spiral staircase to the parvise, the room above the porch, from the choir vestry.

(2) **THE FONT**. Inside the Church visitors might like to begin their tour at the octagonal font which dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The decoration on the stem, traceried panels alternating with leaves, is echoed in the bowl.

(3) **PRIORS AND VICARS OF HICKLING**. Nearby, next to the north door, is a list of the Priors from 1185 to 1536, and of Vicars of the Church from 1340 (before which it was served from the Priory).

(4) **THE NAVE**. In the nave there are five bays, with the arches double-chamfered. The pitch-pine pews and the pulpit date from 1875; and the oak lectern was made and presented by Edward Myhill, a joiner who worked in the village, in 1910. At the NW end of the nave note the Parish Hearse, a hand-propelled carriage acquired in 1907/1908 and built by H.W. Howes, Norwich. The hearse has been in storage for some years and was returned to the Village early in 2004.

(5) **WAR MEMORIALS**. Memorials bearing the names of those who died in the 1914-1918 and 1939-45 Wars are on the wall of the north aisle. We do not know how many Hickling men may have fought and died in earlier wars; perhaps at Agincourt or one of the numerous land or sea conflicts in British history. In the Churchyard there are four Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstones.

**(6) TOMB.** The Church has some very interesting memorials. By the Pulpit: The large chest tomb is thought to be that of Sir William Wodehouse, who was granted the Priory by the Crown in 1542 after the Dissolution in 1536. Sir William was knighted for gallantry in 1544, was MP for Yarmouth (1545-47) and became a Deputy Admiral of the Fleet in 1547. His coat of arms, described in the County History of 1808, has disappeared, but the tomb is covered with much interesting old (and some more recent) graffiti, the earliest dated 1627. "Roundhead 1645" apparently dates from the Civil War period. There is also a frame carved for a game of Nine Men's Morris, a kind of board game for two players with nine counters; there are traces of similar frames in the porch at Rollesby and the cloisters of Norwich Cathedral. The Wodehouse family was very prominent in this area in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A tomb inscribed to Sir Thomas Wodehouse (brother of Sir William stands in Waxham Church. Research into the family is in progress (April 2004) and may shed further light upon the tombs.

**(7) STONE COFFIN LID.** Richly decorated; dates from 1250-1275, and was found at a depth of about eighteen inches below the nave during restoration of the Church in the nineteenth century. It bears a Latin inscription proclaiming:

*"Let Rosa by the Mercy of Christ Enjoy the Light of Heaven Whose Heart by the Law of Earth is Buried  
Beneath the Stone."*

Rosa is thought to have been the wife or daughter of Robert de Valoins, Lord of the Manor. As only her heart was buried it is likely that she died abroad. Theobald de Valoins had founded the Priory in 1185 and it is possible that the slab was brought here from the Priory Church at the Dissolution.

**(8) THE SANCTUARY / CHANCEL.** The communion table is Jacobean, (between 1603-1625) with a simple run of decoration along the front, and bulbous 'melon' legs. Directly underneath the east window is a memorial to the Rev. John Wells, Vicar of Hickling for 34 years, from 1769. He died in 1803, and left £250 in his will 'for the education of the poor Children of this Parish.' This formed part of the basis for schooling in Hickling until government grants began in 1875, and even now the interest from the bequest provides two prizes for the children who have made the most progress in Hickling School. On the north wall of the chancel is a memorial to John Calthrop (Calthorpe) who died in the smallpox epidemic of 1688, along with his butler and twenty other Hickling folk. His family had sold the patronage of the church in 1604. The memorial is attributed to William Stanton and is surmounted by an impressive coat of arms in marble. The epitaph is in heroic couplets. The small brass memorial on the opposite wall is to the Reverend Sotherton Nathaniel Micklethwait, Vicar for forty years (1849-1889), who paid for most of the restoration work in 1875, about £2,450. Note that the encaustic floor tiles, the only decorative touch the Victorians introduced, are slightly more elaborate here than in the nave. The silver chalice and cover, still regularly used for communion, is dated 1568 and the chalice is inscribed: 'This Cup is for the Toune of Hicklynge'.

**(9) THE ORGAN** was originally built by Brindley and Foster, of Sheffield, around 1860. It was bought from Honingham Church for £130 and rebuilt and erected here in 1897 by Norman Brother and Beard; of Norwich. In 1996 the organ was dismantled by Peter Jackaman, proprietor of F. Norden (Organ Builder and Tuner), of Ipswich, since the floor of the south aisle was suffering badly from dry rot and was collapsing under the weight of the organ. After much fund raising effort the south aisle floor was replaced in 1998/99. Mr Jackaman, (who was about to retire and had tuned and maintained the organ since he was a young apprentice), rebuilt the organ during 1999, and played the instrument at the organ rededication service in October 1999.

**(10) THE SOUTH AISLE.** On the south aisle is a memorial for Horatio Beckett, paid for by the choir, as he was church organist from 1889-1893, as well as Parish Clerk. In his short life he was a Stipendiary Monitor, then Pupil Teacher at the School. He then became a butcher because his elder brother and father had died.

**(11) THE BELLS AND THE TOWER.** The tower is perhaps the most impressive part of the Church, standing ninety feet tall. It is particularly interesting to see the relationship between the carving round the west door, the window (both with shields) and the traceried sound holes above it. There are five bells and they are one of the heaviest rings of five in the country. The earliest, the Tenor, cast by Richard Baxter in Norwich who died in 1457, weighs over 20 cwt; the Treble and Second are late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and were recast when the tower was restored in 1890; the Third was probably cast by Simon Severey, who died in 1454; the Fourth is dated 1614 on the casting, by William Brend of Norwich, (1563 to 1634). The five bells were overhauled by the Whitechapel Foundry, London, in 1938. It is understood that they were rung in 1945 to celebrate the end of World War II. Thereafter, on architect's advice, they remained unused until the tower was strengthened. Following extensive repairs to the top of the tower, the bell frame was overhauled and restored in 1989, and rededicated to the memory of the Rev. Ian Hoyle. In September 1989 the bells were rung again "after 50 years silence." On special occasions the tower is open for visitors to climb the 120 steps to the top, from where there are magnificent views on a clear day.

**THE CHURCHYARD.** In the churchyard, the oldest memorial still legible is that of Judith Harby who died in 1706, aged 31. The oldest person to be buried here was Sarah Theodorick who died in 1786 aged 103. The largest pedestal tomb, topped by the carved urn, is in memory of John Bygrave (d.1818) and Richard Stone (d.1796). In the extension (worth the walk for its view of the church) Roland Green the artist is buried, and also Lt. Col. Robert Sankey, warden of Hickling Broad Nature Reserve, who initiated the Hickling Water Trail in 1970.

### **THE CHURCH BEFORE THE VICTORIAN RESTORATION**

A rare glimpse of what the interior of the Church may have looked like in the mid nineteenth century is given in Oliver Ready's celebrated Broadland memoir: "Life and Sport on the Norfolk Broads in the Golden Days", 1910. Oliver Ready, born in 1864, attended Hickling Church in the 1870s and would have been some eleven years old at the time of the Victorian restoration in 1875. Oliver Ready's father, Henry, was Rector of Waxham-cum-Palling, and he and his family lived at The Old Rectory in Hickling. Oliver recalls:

"To get us out of the way, we thought, my brothers and I were often packed off to the church of a neighbouring clergyman, which was not more than a mile distant [Hickling Church]

"It was a grand old pile, built of flint stones from the sea-shore, with leaden roof and massive square tower wherein hung a peal of enormous bells, while the interior showed a beautiful carved screen, noble oaken roofing, and a high gallery at the west end, from where the choir of respectable, elderly men and a few hobbledehoys howled down doxologies, glory-bes, and old time hymns of unvarying tune, to the accompaniment of concertinas, fiddles and clarionettes.

"In the very centre of the church was a towering edifice commencing with the parish clerk's desk, above which was the clergyman's reading desk, above which, reached by way of a winding stair, was the pulpit, and above which again was an enormous sounding-board. The pews were of the loose-box type, having door and sides four and a half feet high, so that when sitting down one was perfectly screened from view. Each pew was privately owned, and so could be fitted up and made comfortable with cushions, carpets, and hassocks according to taste.

"There was a grandeur, a venerableness, an atmosphere of restfulness and peace about the ancient edifice which raised it above all ordinary buildings and proclaimed God's House. An era of church restoration, however, was abroad, and the parish elders declared that the beautiful old temple must be "restored". The magnificent lead roof was stripped off, sold, and replaced by slates; the screen was torn down and cast out; the old three-decker pulpit was expelled; the comfortable and secluded pews were supplanted by rows of varnished seats; the old stone pavement was replaced by bright and slippery tiles; the gallery was demolished; the frescoed walls scraped and plastered; in fact, the noble edifice, sanctified by centuries of worship, by generations of marriages, baptisms, and burials, was destroyed, giving place to a modern building with pretty windows, gaudy floor, and rows of brightly varnished seats: of a truth, it was "swept and garnished."

*With acknowledgements to the brief guide by  
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*for*

*Hickling Local History Group*

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