



ST ANDREW'S
CHURCH

FRENZE, NORFOLK



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST ANDREW'S CHURCH
FRENZE, NORFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

RICKINGHALL SUPERIOR, ST MARY
7 miles SW of Diss on B1113

WEST HARLING, ALL SAINTS
6 miles E of Thetford off A1066

SHIMPLING, ST GEORGE
17 miles S of Norwich W of A140

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

FRENZE, NORFOLK

by ANTHONY BARNES

Although Frenze is mentioned in Domesday Book, there is no reference to a church or a priest. The first record of a church is towards the end of the 13th century. The name suggests an earlier origin – the place of Frea's people, like Fring in north-west Norfolk, but given a Norman intonation.

The historian Francis Blomefield (1734) thought that the barn-like appearance of the church had saved some of its contents from thieves and a later visitor wrote: 'As for architecture there is little to be said'. Our increasing sympathy for unimproved vernacular buildings may make today's judgment kinder. There is a charming lack of pomposity about the flint and rubble walls, with patches of render, much of it old. The setting also has its charms. Although the Hall was pulled down at the end of the 19th century its farm remains, with a fordable stream beyond where it crosses the path in front of the church. The observant traveller on the London to Norwich railway line will glimpse the church, apparently in a farmyard, just after leaving Diss.

EXTERIOR

What survives is the nave of the original church, with 'battered' walls, i.e. much wider at the bottom than the top. Large external buttresses and tie-beams of different dates and materials indicate a continuing concern with stability. The wooden tie-beam near the west end is a fine piece of carpenter's common sense. A chancel projecting 14ft (4.3m) eastward was removed in 1827 because it was in bad repair and unnecessary in view of the numbers in the village. The old east window was incorporated in the new east wall. The main windows are Decorated in style, as is the font, with its low reliefs imitating contemporary window tracery. All of this looks early 14th century at the latest. The walls are constructed of rubble and



Font (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

flint, but the 16th century porch is of brick. On its floor are a damaged mediaeval coffin lid and the remains of a second. The roof was repaired in 1900, when a new wooden bellcot was built a little further east from the old one, all on the instructions of the Patron, Edward (later Sir Edward) Mann.

The great surprise is the interior, a complete contrast to the very modest external appearance of the church. It contains a remarkable series of brasses, with indents for more that have disappeared. There are also the remains of a James I royal arms in an old frame, some well-preserved mediaeval benches, and a notable set of pulpit, stall and squire's pew dating from the first half of the 17th century, all in oak now faded to a delicate grey. Some older work is incorporated, including two delightful monkeys that have lost nothing in subsequent repairs. On the altar is the mediaeval mensa, removed from there after the Reformation and found during the 1900 repairs after having served as a doorstep for centuries. The bell is by John Goldsmith of Redgrave, 1707. There used to be a considerable quantity of heraldic stained glass, but almost all of it has now gone. On the blocked north door there is a mediaeval sanctuary ring. In the sills of the main north and south windows are piscinas, presumably provided for side altars. A number of panes of glass record the names of glaziers carrying out repairs, one even mentioning the weather on the day he did the work.

INTERIOR

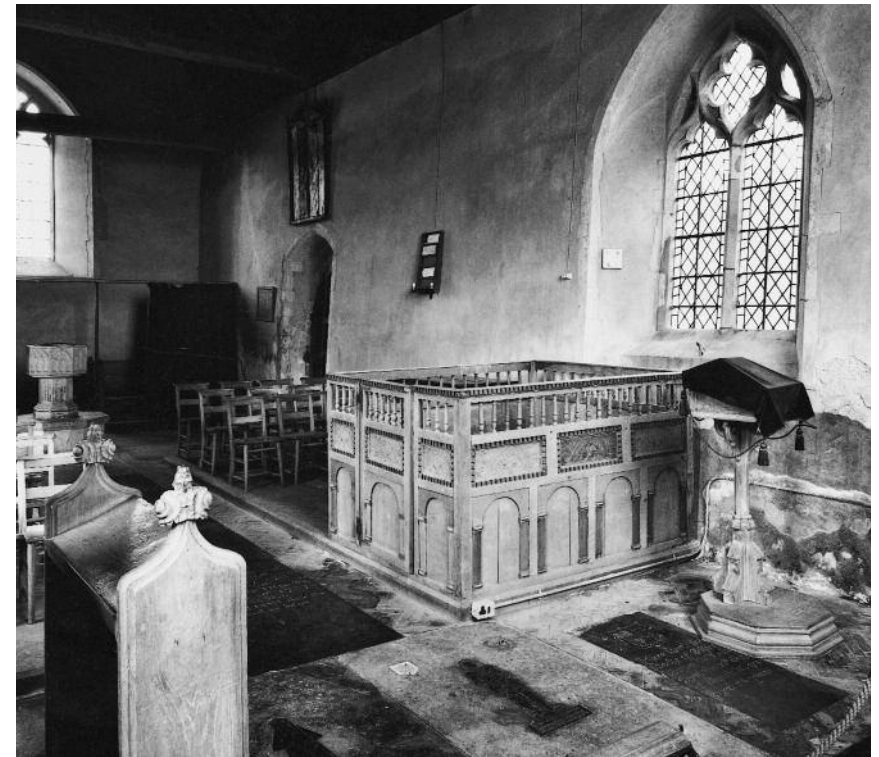
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The first known lord of the manor was John de Lowdham in 1280 and it is tempting to ascribe the building of the church to his time. One of his descendants, Joan, married twice, her second husband being Ralph Blennerhasset, who died in 1475. She died in 1501, aged 97. The Blennerhassetts came originally from the Cumbrian village of that name, the senior branch of the family supplying Carlisle or Cumberland with mayors, MPs and other office-holders for three hundred years from 1388.

The Blennerhasset connections with Frenze ended in 1636. It is not known whether the pulpit and squire's pew were provided by them or by Richard Nixon, who bought the estate in that year. His ledger slab is in the floor of the church.

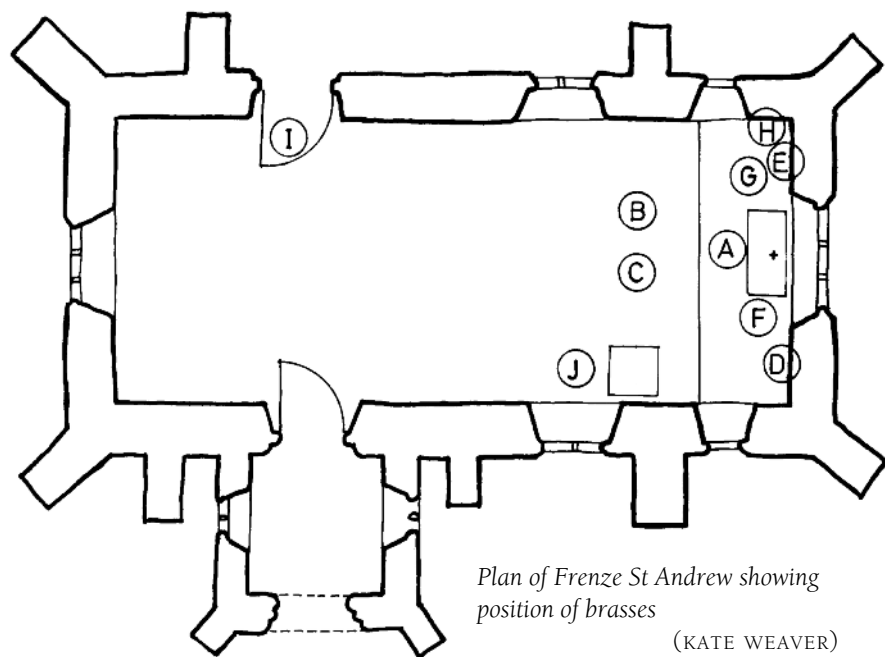
17th century squire's pew

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



BRASSES

The plan indicates which brass commemorates which member of the Blennerhasset family. The first represents the Ralph who died in 1475 (A). He and Joan had a son, John (d.1510 B) whose wife Jane died in 1521 (C). Their sons were Thomas (d.1531 D) and John (d.1514). Thomas and Margaret (E) were the parents of George Blennerhasset, whose daughter Mary (d.1587 F) first married Thomas Culpeper and then Francis Bacon; and of Anne (G) who married George Duke (d.1551; his brass has been stolen) and one of their children was Thomasin Platers (H). Johanna Braham (d.1519 I) was probably the mother of Margaret (E) and seems to have taken a religious vow in widowhood. Thomas Hobson (J) is dated c.1520. It is not known whether he was one of the family. At the west end and just inside the door are two slabs with indents for brasses. Blomefield reports an earlier historian's record of the inscriptions for Joan (d.1501) and her grandson John (d.1514). One may presume that these two slabs are their memorials.



The pieces composing the Mary Bacon brass have on the reverse a large part of an early 15th century effigy of an unknown academic. The Anne Duke brass is also a palimpsest with an unusual engraving on it, probably of St Edmund killing the Danish King Sweyn. It almost certainly came from the shrine of St Edmund at Bury after it was destroyed by fire in 1463.

Blomefield reported that in 1736 there were 60 inhabitants in six houses, figures that raise more questions than they answer. The population has never reached this level since. In 1981 St Andrew's was leased to the Norfolk Churches Trust on being made pastorally redundant. Substantial repairs to the glazing and roof were carried out under the supervision of Mr Neil Birdsall of Hingham. Further repairs were carried out on transfer to The Churches Conservation Trust in 1995.

The Trust is grateful to Canon David Weston of Carlisle, Mr Robert Manning of Diss, Mr Nick Hamond and the staff at the Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Studies Library for help in compiling this guide.

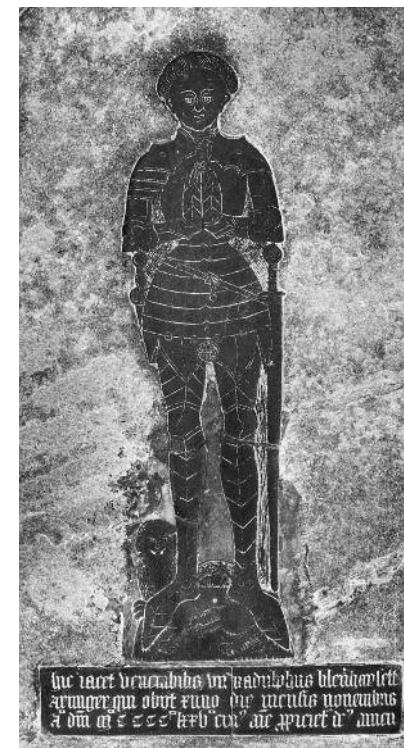
Front cover: Exterior from the south east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Back cover: Pulpit and priest's stall (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

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Series 4 no. 53

August 1996



Ralph Blennerhasset d.1475 (A)

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)