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ST PETER'S  
CHURCH

CLAYDON, SUFFOLK





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
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ST PETER'S CHURCH  
CLAYDON, SUFFOLK

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## ST PETER'S CHURCH

CLAYDON, SUFFOLK

by ROY TRICKER

St Peter's church, Claydon, stands proudly at the top of a ridge on the eastern side of the Gipping Valley, above and apart from the houses of the village.

Claydon was described in 1827 as 'a thoroughfare village, where the road divides' and, until the recent bypass was made, its village street was very busy with traffic. The tower of St Peter's, set in such a commanding position, is visible for a considerable distance.

Within a mile (1.6 km) of this church as the crow flies are two other mediaeval churches – St Mary's Barham, which is now the parish church of the benefice, and St Mary's Akenham, which, like St Peter's, is in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust.

### HISTORY

People have worshipped on this spot for 1000 years. The two western corners of the nave have large quoins (cornerstones) which are set in the fashion known as 'long and short work', and this dates the core of the nave to Saxon times. The inner arch of the south doorway may also be Saxon, but probably dates from the Norman period – possibly about 1100.

In the late 1300s or early 1400s, the nave received its present windows and doorways. Also the tower was built and, a little later in the 1400s, the porch was added on the north side. It was at this time that the nave roof was made and the font installed, along with much colour and carving, which was removed after the Reformation, especially by the Puritans in the 1640s. Their inspector of churches – William Dowsing – visited the church on 22 January 1644, and reported that 'We broke down 3 superstitious pictures and gave order to take down 3 crosses on the steeple and one on the church'.



*Exterior from the south in 1841 by Henry Davy*

When David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1827, he found a simple building, with just the tower, nave, chancel and porch. The outside looked much the same as Henry Davy's picture of 1841 shows. Inside, the nave and chancel had plaster ceilings and there was a musicians' gallery at the west end. On the walls were painted texts of scripture, one of which still remains. The royal arms hung on the south wall of the nave and opposite were the Ten Commandments. A plain oak pulpit stood in the north-east corner of the nave. The communion table was enclosed by three-sided rails and rising above it was a handsome 17th-century altarpiece, on which was painted a Glory (the IHS emblem, surrounded by rays). The altarpiece was surmounted by a pediment, which contained a carved or painted crown.

In May 1846, the Revd George Drury arrived as rector here. His family had been patrons of the living for some years and he in turn became patron also. He was to remain until his death 49 years later, during which

time not only was he to make Claydon church famous throughout East Anglia, but also to transform the simple little building and fill it with beautiful objects.

Father Drury became a staunch supporter of the Catholic Revival in the Church of England, which not only attempted to bring dignity and beauty to Anglican worship, but also to restore churches so that they could become fitting places in which this worship could take place. In line with the Oxford Movement, which spearheaded the Catholic Revival, and the Ecclesiologists, who promoted 'correct' church restorations on mediaeval lines, he set to work turning his church into a devotional venue for the elaborate worship which was to take place here. He was an amateur architect, stone- and woodcarver and maker of stained glass, and some of the work was actually done by him personally. In 1851–52 he partly rebuilt the chancel and equipped it for sacramental worship. About 20 feet (6 metres) of the nave was taken down and replaced by the transepts and the central crossing space – making the church cruciform. To the north of the chancel was added a vestry and a tiny side chapel, with a turret for the sanctus bell; to the south was a chamber which was later occupied by the organ. The chancel re-ordering was largely the work of Drury himself, but it is known that Richard M Phipson, the architect of the rebuilt St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich and Great Finborough churches, drew up the plans for the restoration of the nave and the addition of the crossing and transepts. The enterprising rector also carved the remarkable pulpit and the stone figures which formed the tower pinnacles and, possibly with the help of John King, the Ipswich stained glass manufacturer, he designed and made the glass for the east and west windows. The woodwork in the chancel and crossing roofs and in the benches and stalls was executed by Henry Ringham of Ipswich.

Since Drury's time three stained glass windows, by A L Moore, have been added and a statue in Hornton stone of the Virgin and Child, by Henry Moore, was presented by Sir Jasper Ridley as a War Memorial in 1949. This is now in Barham church.

In 1975 it was decided that St Mary's Barham should become the parish church of Claydon and Barham, and St Peter's should be closed. It was declared redundant in 1977, but it was not until July 1987 that

it was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust. During this long period it stood abandoned to the ravages of the weather, ivy and vandals. Since 1987, the exterior has been repaired by R Hogg & Son of Coney Weston under the supervision of Shawn Kholucy of Hoxne.

## EXTERIOR

The lane rises upwards from the village street almost 150 feet (46 metres) to the church, which is set back to the south, in a **churchyard** bordered by the extensive grounds of the former rectory.

There are several interesting graves, including the headstone (now against the vestry wall) of Nicholas Danford who died in 1711, and two Russian Orthodox crosses (one containing a beautiful Ikon painting) of the Count and Countess Benkendorf and the Count's sister. The tree-shaded stone, inscribed 'Miserere Domine' and enclosed by iron railings



*The south side of the church*

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to the south-east of the chancel, covers the vault of the Revd George Drury (d.1895, aged 76) and members of his family, including his mother Ann (d.1869, aged 81), his wife Anne Mary (d.1881, aged 54), his sister Ann Elizabeth Agnew (d.1902, aged 79), his daughters, Anne Mary (d.1882, aged 32) and Louise (d.1902, aged 49), and his sons Henry (d.1877, aged 13) and Drue (d.1924, aged 71).

The church itself, although altered in the 19th century, has great individuality – its small Saxon nave being somewhat dwarfed by the elegant tower on one side and the array of tall roof-gables which rise to the east of it.

In the two western corners of the **nave** are the Saxon long and short quoins and there is some original herringbone masonry beneath the north and south windows – again indicating an early date. The two-light windows are 15th-century Perpendicular – the northern one being constructed in a chalky clunch-like material, which weathers badly and is not often seen in East Suffolk churches. The removal of the plaster rendering has revealed much reconstruction in Tudor brick, especially round the windows and the 15th-century south doorway. The recent replacing of the render with limewash shows the variety of the building materials used.

The flint-rubble facing is exposed in the elegantly-proportioned 15th-century **tower**. Its western corners are strengthened by slender diagonal buttresses, which are decorated with traceried flush-work panelling in stone and knapped flints. Although not a remarkably lofty tower, 56 feet (17 metres) high to the top of the battlements, its height is accentuated by the comparatively low roof of the nave. Above the west doorway are a double Perpendicular window and a small single opening, which lights the chamber above. The simple belfry windows are set beneath depressed arches. The tower is crowned by a tall parapet of Tudor brick, faced with lime rendering, with stepped battlements.

The entrance to the pretty 15th-century north **porch** was bricked up when it ceased to be the main entrance. The porch is lit by double square-headed east and west windows and its north wall terminates in a crow-stepped gable.

The **transepts** of 1851–52 show impressive Gothic Revival work, reproducing the Decorated (early-14th century) style of architecture



*The 15th-century font*

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which was favoured by the Ecclesiological Movement. This is reflected in the tall roof-gables and the handsome triple-light windows, with their flowing tracery. The transept walls are faced with small whole flints. To the east of the north transept are a gable bell-cote for Father Drury's sanctus bell, and the vestry with its two-light window and impressively-moulded doorway. The south-east organ chamber has a sexfoil eastern window, a trefoil-headed south window and a most imposing doorway, with a trail of foliage and ballflowers and fascinating corbel-heads. The door itself is equally impressive.

The **chancel** walls are mostly mediaeval, although the windows (a trefoil-headed south window and a triple-light east window), the small niche in the wall and the course of leaves and ballflowers above it, are all of 1851. The design of the chancel features, both inside and outside, show the work of a much more amateur hand than the transepts, which is further evidence to support the belief that this was the work of George Drury.

## INTERIOR

Here again there is a contrast between the small and intimate mediaeval nave and the comparatively lofty and stately crossing, transepts and chancel.

Although the **south doorway** has a late-14th- or 15th-century arch, its internal arch is taller and has a semicircular head, indicating a former Norman (or even maybe Saxon) doorway here. In the wall beside it has been revealed a piece of reused stone, carved with a simple interlace motif, which may also be 11th-century.

The nave has a 15th-century arch-braced roof, with wide moulded cornices, finished off with brattishing at the tops of the walls.

The octagonal **font** is a beautiful piece of 15th-century stonecarving. It has a traceried stem and its bowl has angels bearing shields, alternating with crowns, all set beneath crocketed ogee arches. On the underside of the bowl are eight mediaeval human figures – all different and some wearing headgear of the period. The pretty 17th-century **font-cover** has an acorn at its centre.

On the north nave wall is an 18th-century **painted text** (from St Matthew 28, verse 19), in red and black lettering and with a border

of foliage. This is the sole survivor of several on the walls of the church. Texts like this were fashionable after the Reformation, being sound and godly substitutes for the mediaeval wall paintings.

The **north doorway** has its original 15th-century **door**, which retains the iron boss where its former sanctuary ring once fitted. It is still secured in true mediaeval fashion by a sturdy wooden draw-bar. The **porch roof** has 15th-century wooden cornices and tie-beams.

Another ancient **door** leads to the staircase in the south-east corner of the tower to the chamber above. The single **bell** was cast at the Ipswich bellfoundry of John Darbie in 1676.

The restoration and enlargement of 1851–52 turned St Peter's into a cruciform church – the symbolism of which would have been dear to Father Drury's heart. To the east of the nave is the crossing. From here eastwards is a very different world – the world of the Gothic Revival – where Drury the rector and Phipson the architect combined to create, on a small but ambitious scale, a dignified venue for worship in the Catholic tradition. The **central space** has four arches of which those to the transepts have short responds, which rest on huge carved corbels showing clusters of foliage, with acorns, hops, grapes and ivy. Smaller foliage corbels at the four corners support the handsome wooden vaulted ceiling, which has a central boss with a foliated cross, surrounded by leaves, set within a lozenge-shaped panel, bordered with tracery. This woodwork was executed by Henry Ringham of Ipswich, who was also responsible for the **benches** in the nave and transepts, with their flat-topped ends. His most beautiful work here has now been mostly destroyed. This could be seen in the front benches of the transepts, which had the four Evangelists and their symbols at the ends. Sadly, the vandals have only left the winged lion beneath the former statue of St Mark, on the south side. The transepts have **wagon roofs**, with carved bosses at the intersection of the ribs.

Two bookrests, with poppyhead ends, are much later; these were given as memorials and have small brass plaques with inscriptions.

The **pulpit** is a sumptuous piece of intricate stonework – the handiwork of Father Drury himself. It has three sides with a mass of elaborate tracery, using mouchette patterns. The two canopied niches at the corners contain statues of Our Lord and his Mother.



*The flamboyant 19th-century pulpit, believed to have been designed and made by the Revd George Drury*  
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*Interior looking north-west, through the 19th-century rood screen* (ENGLISH HERITAGE. NMR.)

Drury placed a simple wooden screen beneath the chancel arch, surmounted by a crucifix and six candles, but this was removed long before the church was closed. He also covered the chancel walls with painted patterns – likewise removed many years ago. Some paintwork does still remain on the arch-braced **chancel roof** of 1851, which rests on intriguing stone corbels, including a serpent curled around a branch, an owl, some foliage in a human hand and a Green Man, with foliage sprouting from his mouth. The **choir stalls**, with their large poppyhead ends, have been moved forward in order to reveal the ledger-slabs in the floors behind them.

The **sanctuary** is interesting because it was planned during the very early years of the Catholic Revival. The east window is pure Decorated Gothic and is flanked by traceried panelling in stone, with crockets,

pinnacles and the instruments of the Passion carved on tiny shields. In the angles of the east wall are two arched recesses, one of which contains a piscina.

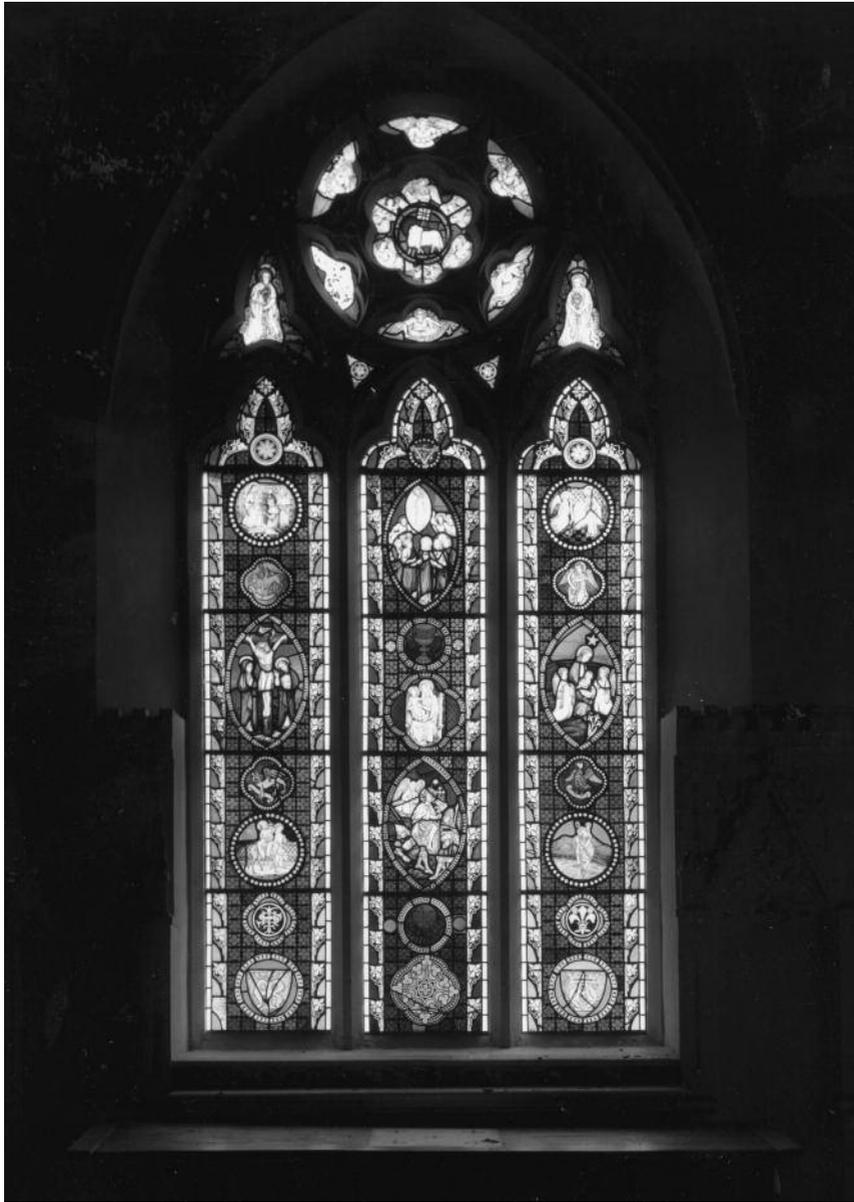
The present **altar**, with its mensa (top slab) of figured marble, was brought here in 1990 from the redundant church at Shipmeadow, near Beccles. This was another Anglo-Catholic stronghold and the altar, together with a beautiful triptych reredos, designed by F C Eden, was given as a memorial to Shipmeadow's late rector, the Revd Maurice Shelton Suckling, in 1897. The marble mensa was the personal gift of the Revd Robert Suckling, vicar of St Alban's Holborn and one of the great leaders of the Catholic Movement in the Church of England.

The **organ chamber** to the south has traces of stencilled patterns appearing through the whitewash on its walls. There is a fireplace recess in the south-east corner. The floor is paved with small encaustic tiles, with attractive patterns in relief. The **floors** of this church are an interesting mixture and they contribute greatly to the character of the building. They include white Suffolk bricks, square pammets, smaller 19th-century floor tiles and patterned Victorian encaustic tiles in the chancel and sanctuary.

To the north of the chancel are a **small chamber**, which was used by Drury as a side chapel, and a **vestry** to the east of it. At the top of the walls of both chambers are 15th-century wooden cornices, reused from the eastern section of the nave roof, which was taken down to accommodate the crossing and transepts in 1851–52.

## STAINED GLASS

**East window.** This is Drury's masterpiece although, like some of the other windows, it has been vandalised and pieces are missing. What remains has been carefully conserved. The main subjects are (from top to bottom) – Northern light: the visit of the Wise Men; the winged Ox of St Luke; Christ crucified with Our Lady and St John; the winged Lion of St Mark; the Flight into Egypt; the 'IHS' emblem (missing); the crowned 'MARIA' emblem (missing). Centre light: the Ascension; a Chalice; the Virgin and Child; the Resurrection; fragment of an inscription; foliated cross (missing). Southern light: The Annunciation; the Angel of St Matthew; the Nativity of Jesus, with angels; the Eagle of



The east window, with glass by the Revd George Drury

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St John; St Christopher; a fleur-de-lys (missing); the Alpha and Omega emblem (missing). In the tracery are the Archangels, Michael and Gabriel and a central emblem of the Lamb of God, surrounded by angels. In the small opening above is a six-pointed star.

**Tower, west window.** Not much remains of this window which was filled with grisaille patterns, with coloured borders. In foliage in the tracery each side can be seen 'AD 1849' and 'G.D. fecit', showing that Drury made the glass two years before the church was restored.

**South organ chamber, east window.** A cockerel, which is related to the story of St Peter's Denial. Almost certainly by Drury.



Drawing by Drury of the Resurrection panel in the east window

(REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES)

**Chancel, south.** St Peter. Replacing glass which was destroyed by a German bomb in the Second World War.

**South transept, south.** The Annunciation, the Nativity of Jesus and his Presentation in the Temple. This window, by A L Moore of Southampton Row, London, was dedicated on 4 March 1898. It was given in memory of Caroline De Lancy, mother of Annie, the wife of the Revd Ansell Jones. (Father Jones succeeded Drury here and was rector from 1896 until his death in 1927.)

**North transept, north.** The Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion and the Ascension, by A L Moore. This window (dedicated 29 April 1899) was given by Lt Col J De Lancy (brother of Annie Jones) in memory of his aunt Caroline (1894), his father and a lady called Hilda Mason (1893).

**North Transept, west.** The risen Christ, with Mary Magdalene, by Lavers, Barraud & Westlake. In memory of John Jackson (1896).

**Nave, south.** The Good Samaritan and the Good Shepherd, by A L Moore (dedicated December 1912). Given by Annie Jones and her brother in memory of Henry Lefevre and Anne Jones.

## MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS

Set into the vestry floor, but formerly on the south wall of the nave, is an oval marble plaque to Anketell Singleton, from County Monaghan, who died in 1894, having been Lieutenant Governor of Landguard Fort, Felixstowe.

The following people are commemorated by ledger slabs in the floors of the church:

- The Revd John Pistor (rector), who died in 1711.
- His wife, Jane Pistor, who died in 1729.

These are set beneath the arches to the vestry and organ chamber. The slabs have fine incised coats of arms.

- In the vestry is a slab to Harriet (1811–35) and Sophie (1821–38), daughters of the Revd Dr Richard Etough and his wife Anna. Harriet had thrown herself into the River Gipping near Claydon Bridge whilst the state of her mind was unbalanced. Her father was rector here from 1832–41 and it appears that he was obliged to leave Suffolk because of misconduct.

- In the floor of the organ chamber are four slabs from the Drury grave which stood outside the chancel before this chamber was built. The two near the south wall have lettering which is barely decipherable. They commemorate the Revd George Drury (d.1807), his wife Elizabeth, and Frances, wife of Richard Vere Drury (d.1787). The others record the Revd George Drury (Junior), d.1830, his wife Elizabeth (née Moore, of Kentwell Hall, Long Melford), d.1796, his son George, d.1832 and his daughter Elizabeth, d.1842.
- A marble slab in the north-east corner of the organ chamber (and originally in the chancel) has a brass inscription round its border, commemorating Samuel Aylmer (d.1635), who was the son of John Aylmer, Bishop of London from 1577–95. Bishop John purchased the manor of Claydon from Sir Robert Southwell in 1588 and Samuel duly inherited it.
- Elizabeth, daughter of William and Martha Nunn (d.1647) has a ledger-slab beneath the arch at the east end of the nave.

## THE REVEREND GEORGE DRURY, RECTOR OF CLAYDON AND AKENHAM FROM 1846–95

This eccentric, forthright, but also very talented priest became one of the most controversial clergymen in 19th-century Suffolk. He was born in 1819 (the son of Lieutenant George Drury, who was wounded at Waterloo) and he studied at Christ's College, Cambridge. The livings of Claydon and Akenham were owned by the Drury family and he in turn became rector and patron of this benefice, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. He became a crusading supporter of the Catholic Revival from its early years and he set about making his parish an Anglo-Catholic stronghold. Spurred on by his keenness to see the monastic life revived in the Church of England, he gave hospitality to Father Ignatius OSB, (Joseph Leicester Lyne) and his handful of Benedictine Monks, who made their home at the rectory and assisted in the parish from Shrove Tuesday 1863 until January 1864. Ignatius, who combined Hell-Fire preaching with the most extreme Catholic teaching and ceremonial, was one of the most dynamic and determined eccentrics ever produced by the Church of England. He found a willing ally in Father Drury, who was delighted that his church should be the venue for worship which

was at that time even more extreme than most of the great London centres of Anglo-Catholicism.

The 'goings on' in this quiet Suffolk village church in 1863–64 attracted much notoriety and were excellent fodder for newspaper reports. People flocked to the services – many because they enjoyed them, or were riveted by Ignatius' preaching; many others came to protest and to cause trouble. Those who came were treated to splendid out-door processions, with lights, banners and incense, also Solemn Masses, sung to settings by Mozart and Mendelssohn, in a church which was adorned at festivals with cloth of gold and silver and wreathed in flowers and flickering candles.

The presence of Ignatius stirred up a hornet's nest and many solid Suffolk Protestants pledged themselves to rid Claydon of the would-be monk and the Popish Priest who entertained him. The Bishop of Norwich stopped Ignatius from preaching in any church in his diocese and the services here became scenes of riots, protests and actual physical violence. Ignatius left for Norwich after less than a year but Drury did not give up his hopes for a monastic revival. In 1866 he set up a Convent of Benedictine Nuns in a house in the village street owned by a Miss Ware. This lasted until 1882 and was the scene of more trouble. The house became the rectory in 1930 and still stands, although now in private ownership.

Further persecutions came in 1878 over the Akenham Burial Case, when Drury – true to his beliefs and principles, but at some expense of charity and tolerance – refused to allow a Nonconformist Minister to conduct a burial service for an unbaptised two-year-old child by the gate of Akenham churchyard, where the little lad was to be interred. Not only did he interrupt the service, but also sued a newspaper for its report of the incident.

Despite what the sensationalists printed about him, it is clear that Drury was a prayerful and conscientious parish priest, who built up a committed congregation here. His creative talent may be seen in the church which he beautified, and also in the fascinating flint walls and gazebos in the rectory grounds to the south of the churchyard, which were built by him, using mediaeval masonry from the long-abandoned church at Thurleston and maybe also some unneeded stonework from

Claydon church when it was restored. He made his own bricks in a kiln in the rectory precincts. Doubtless some of these were used to build the high wall around his house to protect him and his family from constant persecution by groups of people hell-bent upon exterminating 'popery' at Claydon.

His grave, surrounded by iron rails, stands over the family vault to the south-east of the chancel. His long ministry here ended with his death on 2 December 1895. He had often been the object of rudeness and ridicule, his Bishop had censured him twice and the press constantly found him the ideal subject for adverse publicity. After his death however, one newspaper reporter was prepared to admit that 'only an undoubtedly sincere man would have stood the test from which he did not shrink'.

*Front cover: Exterior from the north-west (© CROWN COPYRIGHT. NMR.).*

*Back cover: View northwards from the south transept, showing the vaulted roof over the crossing (© CROWN COPYRIGHT. NMR.).*

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