

**At our meeting at Quaker Hall on October 18th, we reviewed our first year of visits and looked ahead to 2019.**

**Mike Lloyd entertained us with a slide show covering all the churches we visited this year, from the first at Ringsfield to the last at Weston. Thanks Mike for all the hard work you put into this; it was widely appreciated.**

**There followed a very constructive and informative discussion on the way the group operated in our first year. There was widespread agreement that visiting one church per month was the best approach as it enabled us to explore a church in much greater depth. Cramming two in might lead to rushing around!**

**Peter said that we averaged 20 members per visit, which was considered to be ideal. A few members (9) had decided to resign: some from over-commitment (in too many groups!), others from the pressure of other engagements. This now meant that we had 25 members on the books and a few vacancies were available.**

**It was felt that the transport arrangements had worked well this year and we would continue to give lifts, where possible.**

**Penny Mills raised the possibility of us having a slide show/talk on church architectural features. Peter said he would investigate this further.**

Looking ahead to 2019 it was agreed that we extend the programme to include an extra church visit in October, giving seven visits in all. We discussed the possibility of arranging an "Away Day" to a church in Norfolk. Ranworth was mentioned as a likely choice. There would be an opportunity to see the glorious rood screen which contains some of the best paintings in England, the singer's desk and the splendid 15th century Antiphoner.

Arrangements had already been made to visit Burgh St Peter (Rosemary Kerridge as guide), Shadingfield and Sisland. Others churches raised were Wenhaston (to see the famous Doom), Norwich to visit St Peter Mancroft (make use of bus passes for that one!) and North Cove for the wall paintings.

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**For our final visit of our first season of Church Exploring, MIKE LLOYD guided us around St Peter's Church, Weston. The church contains many items of interest, including the high font that confronts you as you enter the building and the attractive Victorian east window. The brightness of the church, recently decorated, is another stand-out feature.**

Twenty-one of us enjoyed a splendid tour of the magnificent church at Redenhall in August. **Our guide, Brenda Le Grys, a long-standing member of the church, gave us an excellent account of the development of the church from early medieval times right up to the present century. The very rare double-headed eagle brass lectern caught our eye immediately we stood in the nave. In the Gawdy chapel we were all fascinated by the large Venetian chest with its paintings on the inside showing two ships, angels, a dragon and bird, and an IHS monogram. When the rain ceased we were able to explore the outside of the church, especially its magnificent tower with its beautiful flushwork. A bit**

of stair climbing, first to the raised organ, gave us another view of the nave and chancel, and further on we sat inside the bell tower whilst Brenda continued her talk.

A delicious tea rounded off a very successful visit to what is one of our landmark churches in the Waveney valley.

For our first church visit of the season, twenty-five members came to All Saints' Church, Ringsfield on a lovely, sunny afternoon on Thursday 19th April.

**JANE BEALES** has very kindly contributed this full report:

"The Church Explorers' Group assembled in the church car park to be given information on the social history of Ringsfield. Similar to some villages in the area, there were a few dwellings near the church, but most were a mile or so away at Ringsfield Corner, where the village had developed. As the church was built in a hollow, and prone to flooding, perhaps the architects decided not to build on a flood plain so built the village on higher ground.

Approaching the church, which was adorned by a thatched roof, in what is known today as Old Ringsfield, it seemed sunken in the graveyard on the northern side and raised up on the southern side. One suggestion was the importation of soil, to enable more burials to take place on the southern side. It seems that in the past people would rather be buried on the south side of the church.

On the north side of the church, between the nave and the transept, was an elaborate monument to Princess Caroline Murat, crest of a mermaid by King Henry VIII for saving the king's sister Mary from drowning.

The church itself was steeped in history and there had been mention of a previous church on the site in the Domesday Book of 1086. All the early church records had been destroyed, either by fire or flood depending on whose account you read. What we saw during our visit was of the 15th century church, which had been restored in 1883 by Sir William Butterfield. The oldest part of the church was the roof of the nave followed by the tower and font. There was a legacy given for the reparation of the new church tower in 1450. Another member of the group told the tale of damp occurring on the inside of the tower in more recent years. When the problem was investigated, it seems a golf ball had been blocking the water outlet at the top of the tower. When further enquiries were made, the golf ball had come from a nearby dwelling (The Old Rectory), where one of the young men had been practising his golf swing and had wondered where his ball had gone!

As we entered the church the evidence of Butterfield's restoration was seen in the roof beams. The day we visited there was a power cut, with no electricity at all. Using only the light of the sun through the windows made the visit all the more atmospheric. As a group we were asked to go around the church in pairs and with a question card, to get the true impact of the building which was full of history.

Another story which is of note was that in 1949 a robin built a nest in the old lectern. The robin was allowed to bring up a family there and has been remembered in a carving on the new lectern and on the porch gates.

**To end the visit we were served tea and cakes by Glenys, Peter's wife. Due to the power cut a neighbour with a gas stove was found and transported it to the church so tea and coffee could be served!**

**My thanks go to Peter Westmacott and Verity Montague who so ably explained the history of the church. Most importantly, thanks to Glenys who provided such delicious refreshments without electricity".**

**MANY THANKS, JANE, FOR THIS EXCELLENT REPORT.**

**Twenty-eight members attended the inaugural meeting on 26th February and eight other interested people sent their apologies. A fruitful discussion emerged and sufficient interest meant that the group would be viable. The following points were agreed:**

**Meetings would be held on the third Thursday of each month from 2-4 p.m. from April to September.**

**Members would be encouraged to act as church guides where possible OR be expected to arrange for a guide with the relevant church. A donation of £3 per head per visit would be made, plus £3 for tea when provided by the church.**

**A plenary meeting would be held each autumn to review the past season of visits, and a planning meeting would take place each February to arrange the new season's programme.**

2018 Programme#

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|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| April 19  | All Saints' Church Ringsfield | Peter Westmacott         |
| May 17    | St Michael's Church Beccles   | David Lindley            |
| June 21   | St Michael's Church Geldeston | Joan & Andrew<br>Holland |
| July 19   | St Andrew's Church Ilketshall | Church representative    |
| August 16 | St Mary's Church Redenhall    | Church representative    |
| Sept. 20  | St Peter's Church Weston      | Mike Lloyd               |

The group will be meeting monthly until September before taking a break for the winter months.