

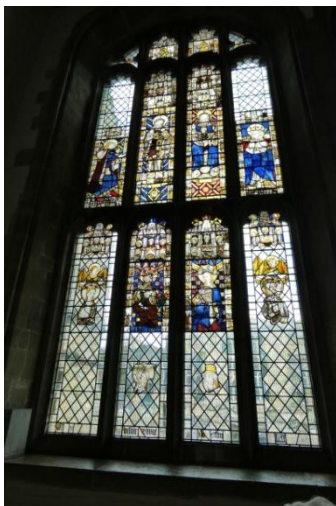
## Report on Looking at Churches Trip to Stamford, Suffolk & Ely (21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017).

*This report was written by Derek Lowe who should be commended for the quality of his descriptions and accompanying photographs. –Ed.*

This excellent three-day trip to visit six churches/cathedrals and one medieval almshouse, was organised by Joint Group Leader, Michael Crosby, although he was unfortunately unable to join us due to ill health. Ruth, Tony and Trish ensured everything ran smoothly and kept us all in order.

Like most religious buildings in the 1530/40s these had suffered badly due to Henry VIII's Reformation with defaced statues and loss of colour, but all are still very impressive. The magnificence of the buildings is due mainly to the area's wealth based on the wool industry. Each of the churches has been a work in progress as they have been renovated, repaired or modified several times.

**Browne's Hospital, Stamford:** This medieval almshouse was founded in 1485 by William Browne, a rich wool merchant. It was designed to accommodate ten poor men and two poor women. The guide suggested that the women were expected to look after the men (most of the ladies in our group seemed to think that this was very funny, for some reason!)



The men were accommodated in ten very small "cells" within one room and were expected to attend the adjacent chapel twice daily – anyone confined to their bed could still hear the services taking place in the chapel. The men were also expected to wear a special uniform with a top hat and long boots when they went out, which they must have enjoyed.

A long stone staircase leads up to the Audit Room. In 1870, the residents' conditions were improved when new cottages were built around the cloister.

The chapel still has impressive original stained glass windows.

There are still 12 residents, although the women probably outnumber the men now!

**St. Mary's Church, Stamford:** The West tower dates from 1220 in Early English Style. The spire was added in about 1300. The Great Road (Cross) was dedicated to WWI dead in 1921 and in 1948 a tower arch screen was added to remember WWII dead .



The 14C Corpus Christi Chapel has an unusual (for this area) Medieval Wagon Vault Ceiling having many bosses with different carvings, including "green men". A statue of Our Lady (about 1330) now on east wall, was discovered in 20C. The spire was strengthened 1471 & 20C.



Lady Margaret Beaufort lived nearby. Her steward was Keeper of King's Swans and local Royal Forest.

**St. Mary's Church, Bury St. Edmunds:** One of largest 15C parish churches in England, with second longest aisle and largest West Window. The nave is impressive with ten majestic bays and a very wide hammerbeam roof with eleven pairs of angels below and lesser angels on wallplates. A medieval menagerie of dragons, unicorns, birds & fish can be seen on a frieze below. In 1424, Joan Pyrie left large (in those days!) sum of **£10** for church fabric.



The tower collapsed in 1431. There are over 400 carvings on the nave ceiling. The grave of Mary Tudor, Queen of France is in this church. There are four chapels and tower now has eight bells.

St. Mary's has had a traditional choir of men & boys for 600 years. Now also Ladies' (2010) & Girls' (2015) Choirs.



**St. Edmundsbury Cathedral,**

**Bury St. Edmunds:** Formerly Cathedral Church of St. James. Until 1539, closely associated with Benedictine Monastery of St. Edmund. Started in 11C, rebuilt in 12C & 16C. Became a Cathedral in 1914. The Abbey Gate Tower (or Norman Tower) originally served as the church's belfry and still does, now with a total of 13 bells. Major works in latter half of 20C (Gothic Style) – officially completed 2005, work continued until 2009. Large font and cover by George Gilbert Scott, 1870, although largely masked by scaffolding at the time of our visit. Notable stained glass in Susanna Window and West Window. Millennium tower completed at last in 2005. Cathedral consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2009.



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**St. Peter's & St. Paul's Church, Lavenham:**

Finest Late Perpendicular Gothic Church in England and is Grade I Listed. First stone church here in 14C, reconstructed about 1500 & in 1860s; tower in 20 C.



Most visited church in East Anglia. 15C carved misericords (choir seats or mercy seats). Painted Rood Screen & octagonal font.



**Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford:** Grade I Listed Building. Started 1467 – 1497 – Late Perpendicular & Gothic Styles. John Clopton (the main benefactor) supported Lancastrians in Wars of Roses. He had Chantry Chapel here and the priest actually lived in the chapel. In 1710 tower was struck by lightning. Two tower changes since. Probably the longest parish church in England. Seventy-four tracery windows, many with original medieval glass – best in Suffolk, but most 15C glass lost in Reformation – some replaced after WWII. One probably inspired Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts. John Clopton was privileged in being able to rent large town house for annual rent of one red rose (good deal!). The Lady Chapel is a separate building. The church is finished mainly in knapped flint. The nave has a high, open timber roof – 21 roof trusses with wooden figures carved at base of each. Pulpit dated 1884.



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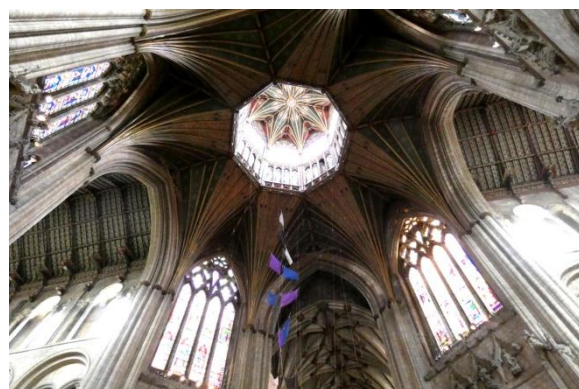
**Ely Cathedral:** In 672 St. Etheldreda founded the Abbey Church – her remains are still at Ely. Present building started 1083. Monumental Romanesque Style with some Decorated Gothic. Most famous for central octagonal tower with lantern above. Major tourist attraction. Cross-shaped plan with very long nave. Known as “the ship of the fens”.



Partial collapse at end of 15C. Very large free-standing Lady Chapel. 1322 Norman central tower collapsed. One of the monks designed the perfect answer – the octagonal tower. Out of disaster came triumph. Choristers can sing from high up in the lantern. More restoration in Victorian period – George Gilbert Scott – Gothic Revival. Further work – 1986 to 2000. Nave is one of most inspiring in England – part of Victorian restoration. Tells story of ancestry of Jesus from Adam

to Mary. There are four chapels. High Altar has (very expensive) pillars with gemstones set in them. 14C misericords in choir stalls.

One does not have to be religious to appreciate the beauty of buildings like these and the skill involved.



**The U3A “Looking at Churches” class starts again on Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October at St. Paul's Church Room, Belford Road, off Victoria Avenue.**

