

### **Christ Church, Fulmodeston**

The Black Death of 1348 halved the population and resulted in a gradual rebuilding of the houses on new sites, so the old church (St Mary's) was left separate from its village. The nineteenth century saw a rise again in population and it was the Revd. James Mould who finally closed the old church and built a new one on a new site in 1881. The neighbouring village of Croxton was already depopulated and the church of St John the Baptist was closed at the same time. A London architect, William Bassett-Smith designed the church we see, and the building contractor was Messrs Cornish & Gaymer of North Walsham. Fittings from both old churches were reused, but not the cut stone from their arches.

**The four windows** facing the road on the north side each have a different tracery design. In style they compare with the late Decorated Period of the 14th century. There is a conventional porch on the north side and a bell turret made to take the 1828 bell from St Mary's Church. It is a large bell which is swung by a wire passing through the apex of the nave roof.

**The west window** has two lancets and a quatrefoil within a circle above. A vestry occupies the east end of the south aisle and in it is a fireplace. The chimney goes up above the chancel arch to the apex of the east gable of the nave.

**The walls** are striking with white knapped flints and cut stone dressings on the corners. The chancel has a string course around it just below the window level. Before entering the porch you will notice the iron boot scraper thoughtfully provided for the muddy boots of those who walked across the field to church. The walls are lined on the inside with a quality red brick relieved by a course of Ancaster stone at four feet.

**The interior.** The piers are constructed with stone of two differing colours. The chancel arch is a typical Victorian design embellished with foliage. This is a development of the Early English Period design which had 'still leaf' decoration on the capitals.

**The font** has a bowl, made for this church, to stand on the four ancient stems which held the old font in Croxton church. The fifth and central stem contains the drain for the font. The old font had lasted from the 13th century, the Early English Period, and we may presume that it was cracked by the water freezing in it.

**The east window** has another lovely tracery design. Its glazing bears the date 1892. The central figure is Christ ascending into heaven with the two Marys and SS Peter, James and John gazing upwards. Note Christ's wound on his hands and feet and His attitude of giving blessing. The hand of God the Father also gives a blessing. To the left we see Jesus outside the tomb saying 'Touch me not' and the women bringing spices to the tomb. On the right we see the other disciples come to the open tomb, and Moses and Elijah.

**The altar table** and communion rail are nicely carved with various foliage and fruits included in the corners. They were first installed in St Mary's church and moved

here. It seems that improvements were still being made to the old church until the new one was built.

**The altar reredos** was the memorial for the Revd. James Mould, B.D., who was Rector from 1868 to 1886. He was the courageous man who closed two churches to build one new one, and we can only guess at the difficulties. The reredos has stone arches with marble columns between. The Crucifixion scene is central, flanked by the Nativity and Baptism of Jesus. To the left we see S. Matthew displaying the first page of his Gospel, and then S. Mark. To the right there are SS Luke and John, and below are their emblems. The emblems of the evangelists are derived from 'the living creatures' described in Ezekiel 1.10 and Revelation 4.7 who, like the cherubim, are concerned with the perpetual worship of God. The emblem of a divine man with angel's wings is assigned to St Matthew because his gospel teaches us about the human nature of Christ. The winged lion for St Mark refers to his teaching on the royal dignity of Christ. St Luke deals with the sacrificial aspect of Christ's life and death, hence the winged ox, and St John has a rising eagle because his gaze penetrates further in the mysteries of heaven than any other man. A prayer desk in the sanctuary was given as a memorial for Lieut. Gilbert Bartlett, aged 23, who died in the Battle for Caen on 8th July 1944. His family crest is a swan which will be found on the desk top.

**A charity board** near the door details the will of Ann Burcham in 1814 to benefit the poor of the parish, establishing a fund which still exists today. Another board in the vestry records a grant of £80 towards building this church. There was a condition that no pew rents be charged. Pew rents had been common in the early 19th century but the practice was dying out by the time this church was built. The church cost £2,500.

**The pulpit** came from St Mary's Church, Fulmodeston, and is stone with alabaster cornice, which is in keeping with this Victorian church.

**The pews** in the south aisle came from St John's Church, Croxton. They have 19th century poppy heads drilled to take pricket lights (candle holders). These items further demonstrate that people were still giving substantially to the old churches before they were closed.

Building new churches in Norfolk villages was an exceptionally rare event, but around that time there were some comparable ones. They were all because the village centre had moved. These further examples can be found at Edgefield 1883, East & West Beckham 1991, Little Huatbois 1864, Hindolveston 1914.

*Richard Butler-Stoney 1992*