

u3a Stowmarket History Group

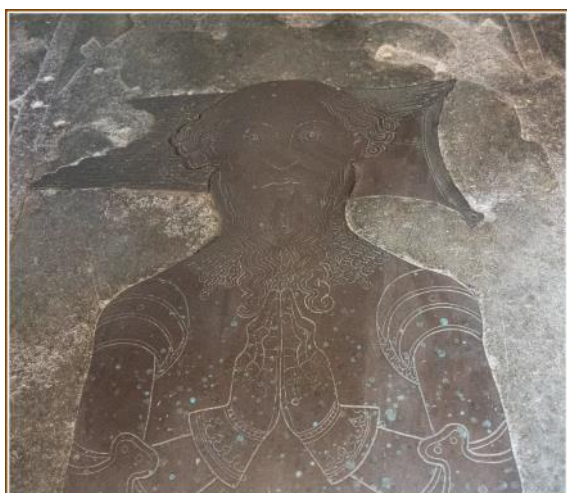
Church Tour – 10th August 2023

Following on from the well-received talk on Monumental Brasses by **Martin Stuchfield** in May 2023 a field trip was arranged for the group to visit a few Suffolk and Essex churches and examine the brasses in them. On the day we were treated to commentary at each of the churches by Martin who outlined the history and family links of those commemorated on the brasses viewed.



We initially gathered at the splendid, mainly 15th century church of **St Mary the Virgin at Stoke-by-Nayland** in Suffolk. We were greeted by **Richard Channon**, the church guide, who had laid on coffee and biscuits and gave us an interesting talk on some of the features of the church.

The impressive, four stage, red brick and stone tower was completed in about 1470 and can be seen from miles around. The south porch is of two stories with the upper floor being home to the parish library but its main attraction is that of the oak medieval doors. These are full of carved figures in relief, depicting what are thought to be angels and apostles. On stepping inside, you are struck by the tower arch which soars almost to roof level. There is an interesting perpendicular font that stands on a large Maltese cross pedestal and has evangelistic symbols and other figures in the panels. In the chancel there are two alabaster effigies on large tombs. One is to Ann, Lady Windsor, d.1615, the other is to Sir Francis Mannock, d.1634.



Martin then gave us an insight into the important series of monumental brasses in this church:

A large figure brass commemorates **Sir William Tendring, d.1408, in armour**. This is thought to be one of only a few attempts at portraiture on a monumental brass. He was the son of Sir William Tendring, and his wife Margaret, the daughter of Sir William Kerdiston of Claxton, Norfolk.

The Manor of Tendring Hall was not the only manor in Stoke-by-Nayland. The family acquired it during the later part of the 13th century, prior to which they resided in Essex, at Tendring. Sir William succeeded his father in the Lordship in 1375.

His wife, **Lady Catherine Tendring, d.1402**, lies nearby. She was the heiress daughter of William de Mylde of Clare. She married twice, the first time as the wife of Sir Thomas Clopton of Long Melford, to whom in 1382 he brought the manor of Lutons, now known as Kentwell Hall. By him she had a son William, whose family is later commemorated by several brasses in Long Melford church. Catherine, although not buried at Long Melford, is shown in heraldic costume in one of the stained glass, nave windows there.

Her second marriage was to Sir William Tendring, Lord of the Manor of Tendring Hall in Stoke-by-Nayland, by whom she had a daughter Alice. This daughter married Sir John Howard. Their grandson became the first of the family to become Dukes of Norfolk, a title still held by the family today.



Lady Catherine Howard, d.1465, was an ancestor of Ann Boleyn and Queen Elizabeth I and is depicted wearing a heraldic mantle. This important, heraldic brass was engraved in c.1535. She was the daughter of Sir William Hungerford, Lord Moleyns. She married Sir John Howard, Lord of the Manor of Tendring Hall, and by him had one son and four daughters. Her husband was the only son of Sir Robert Howard and Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Mowbray. After her death, her husband, Sir John was created a Baron in 1470, Duke of Norfolk in 1483 and two years later was killed fighting for King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. The effigy was stolen in 1971 but fortunately recovered and reinstated.

Dorothea Mannock, d.1632, wife of the earlier mentioned Sir Francis Mannock, is also depicted on a brass near to her husband's grand alabaster tomb. She was the daughter of William Saunders of Welford, Northamptonshire.



She married Sir Francis Mannock, Bart., Lord of the Manor of Gifford's Hall, and by him had three sons. Francis, John and William. She died on 7th July 1632 at the age of forty-two during the birth of a daughter Anna who survived her. Dorothy had been married 24 years. Her husband died two years later at 49 years of age.

It was late morning when we then crossed the County border into Essex to visit the interesting and unusual church of **St Peter and St Paul at Little Horkesley**. This church was rebuilt in 1958 to replace a medieval building that was almost completely destroyed by a German landmine in 1940. We were met by **Meriel Sparkes**, a former churchwarden, who told us some of the history of the church. The original building was a small Cluniac priory founded by Robert de Horkesley and his wife in around 1127. The priory was later dissolved by Cardinal Worsley in 1525 and converted into a parish church.



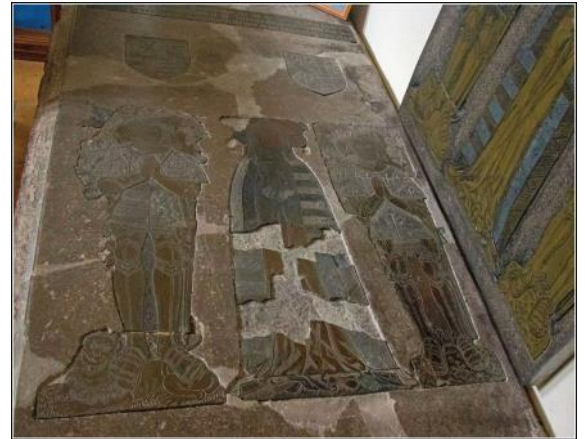
Although much of the interior was destroyed a number of important artefacts survived. Martin informed us that among these were three 13th century full-length, wooden effigies thought to commemorate **Robert Horkesley**, d.1295, his son William, d.1332, and William's wife Emma, d.1332. There are only seven other wooden effigies remaining in Essex. The monumental brasses were also recovered from the rubble and painstakingly conserved at Colchester Castle Museum over the ensuing seventeen years.



The largest and almost complete brass is to **Sir Robert Swynborne**, d.1391, and his son **Sir Thomas**, d.1412. The brass depicts two men in armour beneath an ornate double canopy with an inscription in Old French. The style of armour depicted on the two figures is quite different indicating the advances in protection that took place over a very short period of time.

There is another monumental brass reconstruction in the north side of the chancel. This brass commemorating **Dame Brygete Marney**, d.1549, was also recovered from

the bomb damage. She is shown flanked by her two husbands Thomas Fyndorne, d.1524, and John, Lord Marney, d.1525. When rescued from the rubble the male effigies of this brass were discovered to be engraved on both sides (palimpsest) with the reverse showing a part of a much larger shrouded figure of a lady dated to around 1470.



The group then adjourned to the 17th century **Cock Inn at Polstead**, Suffolk and enjoyed an excellent lunch. The village of Polstead is famous for its links to **'The Murder in the Red Barn.'** Here in 1827 William Corder met and shot dead his lover, Maria Marten, in the Red Barn, a local landmark. He buried her there in a grain storage bin. Afterwards he pretended to her family to have eloped with her to Ipswich. He sent Marias family letters saying that she was well and they were now living on the Isle of Wight but Marias stepmother had started talking of dreams she had had that Maria had been murdered. She persuaded her husband to dig in the Red Barn and he quickly discovered Maria's body in a sack. An inquest took place at the Cock Inn where evidence was uncovered to implicate Corder. He was tracked down in London, arrested and tried for murder. It has been estimated that more than 10,000 people witnessed his public execution at Bury St Edmunds where he was hanged and his body taken for dissection. Maria was buried in the Polstead churchyard but the location of her grave has since been lost. An inscription to Maria on a shed there is the only link to her resting place.

After lunch, there was just sufficient time for the group to travel the short distance to the Grade I listed church of **St Mary** which is set on a hillside commanding magnificent views of the Box valley and surrounding countryside. It is essentially an early 12th century building with some 14th and 15th century additions. Throughout there are traces of Roman bricks and tufa stone probably taken from the remains of a villa that once stood beside the present churchyard. It is reputed that the origins of the church date back to at least the 7th century when St Cedd preached nearby.



Martin showed us a brass depicting a priest in mass vestments dated to c.1430, that may represent **Nicholas Blundell**, who was rector of **Polstead** from 1417-28. Nearby, on the nave floor, in front of the pulpit is a figure brass to a civilian and wife with a group of five sons thought to date from the late 15th century.



The group then headed homewards after a most interesting day. Grateful thanks were extended by all to Martin for his valuable and insightful input throughout the tour.

Mike Taylor and Martin Stuchfield



A few more pictures taken by Glenda Taylor on the day



St Mary the Virgin at Stoke-by-Nayland



St Peter and St Paul at Little Horkesley



St Mary's at Polstead