

Before the Victorians got to work

Most of the notes for this article are taken from visits to various local churches by David Elisha Davy (1769-1851). Born in Romburgh, he met his life-long friend, Mark Farley Wade of Orford, at school in Bungay. Davy began researching the history of Suffolk in 1805, travelling many miles on foot or by horseback. Towards the end of his life he lived at Ufford and relied on Wade to take him around.

Butley

When Davy visited Butley church in 1810 he was interested in describing what he found and not the dilapidations identified in various archdeacons' visitations. It was very small, the nave only 43 feet in length and 18 feet wide, built mostly with crag stones and rendered over, thatched except the porch and the chancel tiled. This is as it stands today and inside the font is the same, probably standing in the same place, as is the screen.

However the oak seats, desk and pulpit 'all very ancient, having little decoration' have all gone. So too, not surprisingly, has the Decalogue¹ 'with the effigy of Moses behind' and the Lord's Prayer and Creed 'all printed on a sheet of paper'. Above the

screen were the Arms of Charles II, 'in their proper colours, painted but decayed'.

These must have been hung before the archdeacon's visitation in 1676, when the only work required was the whitening of the church interior and repairs to the churchyard paling. There would have been no evidence either of the incongruous arrangement of the church furniture during the puritan period. Whereas the focus had been and was to be on the altar, it was then on the pulpit placed on the south side of the nave with any seating directed there. Preaching was the most important aspect of services.

Davy found little of artistic merit in the church and the painted ceiling to the chancel, representing a starry firmament was 'very indifferently performed'. There were no monuments or inscriptions. He didn't comment on the quality of the Forth family escutcheons in the east window, but they showed 'Forth impaled with Gilbert' and 'Forth impaled with Powell'. Elizabeth Powell, from Wales, married William, the purchaser of the Priory estates after the Dissolution, and Dorothy Gilbert, daughter of Sir John Gilbert of Great Finborough, married Sir



'Puritan' communion table (Butley). Photograph: Diana Gaskin.

07 03 2018