

## ST PETER'S CHURCH THORINGTON

St Peter's church stands to the south of the road that leads from Thorington to the A12. It is masked by trees and a thick hedge and stands slightly above the level of the road. It has a round west tower, a nave with north and south porches and a chancel.

It is an ancient structure and it is fortunate for us that much of the original fabric and many of the documents of this church have survived. In the early years of the nineteenth century it was visited by the antiquarians, David Elisha Davy and Henry Jermyn, who left a precious record of St Peter's early nineteenth-century appearance before it underwent major 'improvements' in the 1820s and 30s, as well as transcriptions of documents relating to landholdings within the parish copied from the Bence family papers. Davy entered their gleanings in his Suffolk volumes, now in the British Library. In 1884, the rector of Thorington, Thomas Hill, compiled *The Registers of the Parish of Thorington, Suffolk*, published by Mitchell and Hughes of London. It comprises a list of Thorington rectors from 1332 to 1876, and a complete transcript of the registers of the parish from 1561 to 1882, as well as a record of memorials in the churchyard. Finally, a bundle of loose churchwardens' accounts from the middle years of the fifteenth century, now in the Essex County Record Office, gives the surnames of contemporary parishioners as well as the agreement for the erection of the candlebeam in Thorington church. There may be more to be discovered, and yet at present Thorington church is relatively rich in fabric and documentation.

This guide begins with extracts from notes made by Davy and Jermyn in 1806, by Davy in 1830, followed by a description of how the church appears today.

### ST PETER'S CHURCH THORINGTON 1806

The chancel is 24 ft long, & 16 ft 6 in wide. The Communion Table is raised one step, & railed off. The floor is of red pammments. The Roof is ceiled arching.

Against the North Wall is painted the Decalogue, & on the wall also hang the following Hatchments,

1. For Alexander Bence, Esq. Bence, arg. on a cross between 4 frets, gu, a tower of the field.
2. Golding, Gu, a chevron or between 3 bezants  
In an escutcheon, Bence for Mrs Golding
3. For Mr Golding, Golding  
In an escutcheon, Bence

Crest, A dragon's head erased vert, guttee d'eau, collarded and lined or.

The Nave is 27 ft 8 in long, & 14 ft 10 in wide. It is seated, as is the chancel, with oak, and pewed with deal. The floor is of red pammments. It is lighted on the South side by one window below & 2 very small ones above, & on the North side by a large one, very much reduced from its original size & a small one above. The Pulpit is against the South Wall at the East end, of oak, hexagon. On the South wall are painted, the Lord's Prayer and Belief, & on the North Wall are the arms of Geo.2. & several texts of scripture on both nave and chancel. The Belfry is divided from the Nave by a round arch. The Font is near the West end: the bason octagon, of granite, supported by lions. The Roof is of oak, & with the chancel covered with tile.

The Steeple is a round Tower of flints, with an octagon double embattlement of brick. In it are 4 windows each consisting of 2 small arches, supported by 3 round Saxon pillars. It contains one bell with *Samuel Owen made me for Wansted 1596*.

The outside of the church is of flint rendered over. And on the North side is a small Porch covered with tile, the door from which into the church is a Saxon arch

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When Davy returned to make further notes in May, 1830, he commented that 'the church, which has for many months been under repair, is not yet completed but enough

has been done to shew what the improvements are intended to be'. Some of the monuments had been moved and one of black marble in particular, which had been placed on the floor, was 'never intended for the rough use it will now occasionally be put to, [and] cannot last a very long time'.

The pulpit had been moved to the west end of the nave 'into a sort of alcove, taken partly out of the Steeple'. The font was on the south wall, while the north porch had been converted into a family pew for the Bence family. The south door opposite the porch had been blocked and the only entrance into the church was the priest's door on the south side of the chancel. The red floor pammments had been replaced by white pammments. The rails to the Sanctuary had been made out of the old screen. Davy thought they were 'well adapted to the purpose'. The Bence hatchment was still present. The other two were relegated to the tower and the Commandments had gone.

## ST PETER'S CHURCH THORINGTON 2005

### THE TOWER

Thorington church is well-known because of its tower, which has variously been described as middle Saxon, late Saxon, Saxo-Norman and Norman, which gives it a building span of nearly three hundred years! David Elisha Davy, writing at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, may have been the writer who first planted the idea of an Anglo-Saxon tower in the general consciousness when he described Thorington's tower as having three round Saxon pillars. His observation is still regarded as correct by some people. Others disagree.

There are many round towered churches in East Anglia and perhaps the most obvious reason for their presence is the lack of local stone. The fabric of East Anglian churches is a mixture of flint and rubble, with costly stone imported from elsewhere to mould doorways, windows, quoins and parapets. Odd pieces of stone waste were cut into shapes which framed whole or knapped flints to produce the famous East Anglian flushwork. Where a Norfolk or Suffolk church presents a solid stone exterior, the building usually has a rubble filling.

The base of Thorington tower is 11<sup>th</sup> century, the lower courses of flint evenly and carefully laid with a hint of herringbone pattern. The lower window on the west tower face is a nineteenth-century insertion. The lower tower could have been constructed on either side of the Norman conquest in 1066, but it is the blind arcade of eleven arches encircling the middle stages of the tower which suggest an Anglo-Saxon date. Local masons, however, did not 'down tools' immediately after the Conquest and, within the locality, Anglo-Saxon building practice can still be recognized in Norman buildings as late as the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. The narrow round-headed windows inserted into the blind arcading are mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, as is the upper part of the tower where there are four windows in typical and authentic Norman style, their arches supported by Davy's '3 round Saxon pillars'. Although the pillars' capitals are worn, it is just possible to identify Norman waterleaf carving. The battlemented octagonal brick cresting at the top is late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The belfry houses the solitary 16<sup>th</sup> century bell inscribed *Samuel Owen made me for Wansted 1596*. It was presented in June 1598 by Edward Coke, Attorney General to Elizabeth I, and Bridget, his wife, on condition that it should never be sold away from the church.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century octagonal font stands in the tower on its 15<sup>th</sup> century stone stem, with roses and four lion supporters at the base, two males and two females. The font bowl is of Purbeck marble, with shallow double gothic arches recessed on each of its eight sides.

### THE PORCHES

The north porch is 15<sup>th</sup> century. Its roof reaches the eaves of the nave, and its external walls are partly plastered and partly flint. The entrance to the porch and the porch windows have hood-moulds with label-stops either absent or badly worn. The bases to the external entrance are very low and show that the ground level outside and the floor level within the porch have been greatly raised. The original entrance into the nave has been blocked-up, presumably when the porch became the Bence family chapel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The present north door is off-centre. There are two late-medieval oak pews in the porch.

The south porch is now the vestry. It does not appear on Davy's sketch map of 1829 and was erected at some time after this date. It was built cutting across and obliterating the only original Norman window left at that time. The chip-carving on the window's exterior upper frame is identical to masonry work from the Norwich school c.1140, still to be seen in the churches in the Lower Yare and Waveney Valleys. Two of the hatchments mentioned by Davy and the arms of George II are in the vestry.

### **THE NAVE**

The outside is plastered. In the north nave window, some 15<sup>th</sup> century tracery was replaced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'improvements'. On the south side, the remains of a date on the scratch dial high up on the wall suggest that it was first in use during the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Within, the interior reveals Davy's 19<sup>th</sup> 'improvements' of which the first to be noticed is the reconstructed tower arch with its bogus 'Norman' decoration. Above the arch, the rubble wall reveals stones bearing genuine Norman chip-carving and, higher still, the semi-circular arched opening, which may well be an Anglo-Saxon feature, was revealed in the 1980s when extensive repair work was carried out on the tower.

On the wall above the north door, a scar shows the size and position of the original doorway. On both sides of the nave, the walls have been cut away to accommodate the seating which replaced that formerly described by Davy in 1806, being 'seated with oak and pewed with deal'. Perhaps the new seating came from elsewhere and the restorers were reluctant to cut the pews to fit which necessitated inserting a moulded stone corbel-table some 7 ft from the ground to support the upper wall. Above the entrance to the south porch can be seen the scar of the blocked Norman window now partly hidden by the hatchment of the Bence family.

The roof is late 15<sup>th</sup> century. It may not have been constructed for this church originally (a wall-post on the south side narrowly misses a window arch), and yet it is not unusual to find a good roof being re-used – and this is a fine roof. Nevertheless, it sits uneasily and the carved spandrels are fitted below heavier beams which run the length of the nave on either side. Some angels have been defaced – some replaced.

### **THE CHANCEL**

The chancel is basically a 14<sup>th</sup> century building and has been much altered. It is plastered on the outside and the east window is a 19<sup>th</sup> century replacement in an early 14<sup>th</sup> century style. The cross on the gable-end may well be original.

Inside, the arch leading from the nave into the chancel dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration, and its reconstruction has removed all trace of the rood stairs, rood screen or candlebeam (see below). There are twin oak pulpits with stone bases on either side of the chancel step. The large opening behind the organ originally gave access to the priests' door which opened into the chancel. This is now blocked. The Ten Commandments are painted on the east wall on either side of the window and below, on the left, is the Lord's Prayer and on the right, the Creed. The piscina within the Sanctuary is 14<sup>th</sup> century. Its position is so low that the chancel floor must have been raised by as much as 2 feet over the centuries. The wooden reredos in the sanctuary is made of foreign oak and is dedicated to Henry Alexander Starkie Bence who died in 1881. It features the Crucifixion and the miraculous draught of fishes, with St Peter walking on the water. The altar is a good example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Stuart holy table and remnants of the screen tracery are set into the backs of the chancel pews.

The east window with its stained glass was dedicated to the memory of the rector, the Reverend Thomas Starkie Bence, who died in 1858. The north-east window is a replacement in a 14<sup>th</sup> century style, and is glazed in memory of his father, Henry Bence Bence, who died in 1861. The north-west window, although much damaged, is an original early 14<sup>th</sup> century design with one remaining label-stop bearing a king's head on the outside. The south-east window is in commemoration of Elizabeth Susannah Bence, mother of Thomas and widow of Henry.

\*Thornington's candlebeam is documented in the collection of documents held by the Essex Record Office (ERO D/DL E55). William Alcock, the carpenter from Blythburgh, appears in the Walberswick churchwardens' accounts as being responsible for making St John's tabernacle in the church there and for keeping the images in repair. An agreement was made c.1460 between Alcock and Henry Chestan of Thornington, the churchwarden, that Alcock would place a candlebeam in Thornington church for under £3. Perhaps Alcock was also the carver of the small pieces of tracery set into the 19<sup>th</sup> century pews in the chancel.

## MONUMENTS

As some of these have been moved since 1806, all that have been recorded are here whether they have survived or not.

### In the Chancel

An extract from an Extent Book in the possession of the Reverend Bence Bence taken by D.E.Davy in 1806. *For the proffe that the aforesayd Robert Wood was parson of Thoryngton, loke upon his gravestone lyene upon him in Thorington chauncell where upon is this superscription following written.*

— —  
**Xpe Ihu vere**  
**Roberti Woode**  
**miserere**

*Also it is written in the fower glass wynddowes in the chaunsell there this superscription viz: Dominus Robert Woode Rector isti ecclie fecit huic fenestrum fieri*

(Robert Wode died in 1461. By 1813, this memorial had disappeared)

On a flat stone within the Communion rails, is a brass plate, above which was a shield of arms or group of children on brass also, now gone, with the following Inscription,

*Here lyeth the Body of **Robert Gould** late minister of this Parish  
a faithful Teacher both by his life and doctrine,  
who departed this world the xi day of July 1620, aged lxii yeares  
and Jane his wife hath given the memory of him to posteritie.*

On the South side of the East window, is a plain black marble tablet, standing on a plain cornice: *Here resteth the Body of **Jane**, the daughter of Francis Monke, esquire,*

*first married to **Roger Day**, gentleman, and, after his decease,  
to **Richard Lovelace**, of Kingsdowne in the county of Kent, esquire, whom she also outlived  
but had not any child by eyther of them. She was a godly, sober and virtuous woman, and  
lived (by a blessing of God) until she was one hundred & eight years of age. In whose  
honoured memory Henry Coke, Esq. & Margaret his wife (sole daughter & heire of the said  
Richard Lovelace by Elizabeth his former wife) have erected this monument.*

*This Jane for the affectionate love she bare as well to her husband Richard Lovelace,  
as to the said Henry and Margaret & their children gave all hir estate of good value  
to those children, as by hir last will appeareth. She Christianly and peacibly passed out of  
this mortal life the 12 day of June 1630, in the favour of God and good men.*

*At the feet of the said Jane Lovelace lye buried the bodies of  
**Robert and Thomas Coke** sons of the abovesaid Henry, and Margaret.  
Robert dyed 20 Dec. 1630, Thomas dyed 18 Apr. 1631 – both infants.*

On the North side is a mural monument of white marble, being a plain square tablet surmounted by a triangular pediment, and over it a circular Urn and 2 antique lamps

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*Quiequid mortale fuit, et caducum Alex. Bence. Ar.  
(Filii unici Alex. Bence. Ar. et Christiannæ uxoris ejus)  
Nominis hand ita pridem merito laudati.  
Cui erga Parentes Pietas, erga Amicos Liberalitas,  
Erga Familiares Comitas, quando ullum invenient parem.  
In eo extitere quaecunq Genus  
Humanum ornant, et commandant Virtutes, adeo  
Ut jure dici posit, Virum fuisse Bonum et eximium.  
Sibi gratulenttur Ædes Carth. et Aul. S. Cathar  
Cantab. quod in his, quæ postea ad tantum  
Evexit fastigium, se Scientiæ Principiis imbuerat.  
Et pari Jure Hospitium Med. Tem. Londoninse.  
Ubi ex opera in Studiis Legum perquam fæliciter impensa, Vir tandem  
Ornatissimus enituit, et præstantissimus.  
Fato autem heu nimis properanti abreptus.  
Spemq omnem de se haud temere conceptam statim dissipanti.  
Terranas hasce Exuvias  
Hic deposuit, Annum circa trigeimum primum  
Ætatis suæ florentissimæ.  
Anno autem Salutis 1742.  
Sororibus, quas duas reliquit Mutuo desideratus, flebilis occidit  
Sed Neutri flebilior, quam Patri pientissimo,  
Cujus, hoc lugubre Marmor, ne tantæ Immemores forent Virtutis ingrâte.  
Posteris, extruendum curavit Amor paternus.*

*In Eodem Tumulo Quiescat **Maria Bence***

*Una Supradict: Sororum*

*Abiit Anno Ætatis 48*

*Salutis 1756*

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*Jacent Ibidem Exuviæ **Alexandri Bence** Armigeri,  
Ex Antiqua Stirpe Oriundi. Lector Si vis Scire Vir Qualis erat;  
Justitia, Fide, et Constantia, Eximius fuit.  
Fari quæ Sensit quæ Stauit aggredi  
Promptus et Intrepidus Gravis Idem et Cordatus.  
Leges, Instituta et Sacra Majorum Unice Dilexit;  
Patriæ Jura et Decus Asseruit, Commoda Propugnabit,  
Pessum Ruituris Reipublicæ Fortunis, Quoad Erat Privati,  
(Erat autem Suffragium, Erat Auctoritas) Diu Obnixus:  
Ad ævi Melioris orientia Signa, æquo Nimirum Aspirante Numine,  
Sanus Pervixit;  
Quo tandem Omine Spes Inter Maximas haud Evanescente,  
Latiior Migravit  
Anno Ætatis 88  
Salutis 1759*

In the north-east corner of the chancel:

*Sacred to the Memory of  
**Marianne Katherine Starkie Bence**  
Born 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1817 Died 21<sup>st</sup> May 1833*

Below this:

*To the loved memory of **Thomas Smythe Hill**, MA, BCL,  
for 30 years the rector of this parish  
Born 21 April 1823 Died 8 June 1906  
Requiescat in pace felicitatur*

Above the piscina:

*In loving memory of **Agnes**, widow of H.A.S. Bence  
Born 7 February, 1828 Died 19 June 1904  
Until the day break and the shadows flee away*

### **In the Nave**

On the north wall there is a First World War battle cross inscribed:

*In memory of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut A Bence Trower  
killed in action 29 May 1918  
1st battalion Scots Guards.*

On the south wall opposite the north door:

*In memory of **Edward R Starkie Bence** of Kentwell Hall, Suffolk,  
Late Captain 1<sup>st</sup> King's Dragoon Guards,  
2<sup>nd</sup> son of Colonel Bence of Thorington Hall in this parish  
Born 2 February 1823 Died 26 August 1889  
Buried in the family vault in this churchyard.*

Below:

*In loving memory of **Edward Starkie Bence**  
of Kentwell Hall, Long Melford, Suffolk  
Born 4 July 1862 Died 4 April 1937*

On the south wall:

*To the Men of this parish who gave their lives  
for their country during the Great War.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut Alfred Bence Trower 29 May 1918  
Major Edward Bence Trower M.C., 30 May, 1918  
Josiah Flatt Royal Artillery 6 November 1915  
Oscar Howe 8<sup>th</sup> Suffolks 31 July 1917  
William F Smith 4<sup>th</sup> Suffolks 18 August, 1916  
John Howe 11<sup>th</sup> Suffolks 10 April 1918*

On the north wall opposite:

*Sacred to the memory of **Ann Golding**  
sole surviving daughter and heiress of  
Alexander Bence, Esq., late of this place  
and wife of George Golding, Esq., of Poslingford in this county.  
She was buried October the 3, 1794 aged 80 years.  
In the various offices of life she was a dutiful daughter and exemplary wife,  
pious, charitable and affectionate she lived beloved and died lamented.  
This monument was erected by her kinsman, the Rev. Bence Bence,  
in memory of her virtues, and his esteem and gratitude.*

### THE RECTORS OF THORINGTON

The right of patronage (the advowson) for Thorington church was given to the Prior and Canons of Blythburgh by William, son of Walter de Sadenfield some time before 1199 and this was confirmed by Richard I who died that year. From that time until the dissolution of Blythburgh priory in 1536, the Prior and Canons of Blythburgh appointed the rectors of Thorington. At the dissolution, the advowson was granted to the Hopton family and subsequently to the Cokes and finally to the Bences. In 1950 it was transferred from the Bence-Trower family to the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

|      |                                 |      |                                   |
|------|---------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|
| 1332 | John Fowas of Dunwich           | 1334 | Philip de Berton                  |
| 1342 | Roger de Whatecroft of Yarmouth | 1349 | William of Snitterton             |
| 1354 | Warin Martel                    | 1361 | Thomas of Honyngham               |
| 1366 | Robert Cole                     | 1367 | John Bonore                       |
| 1376 | Robert Hierd of Colne Engayne   | 1387 | Walter Styrop of Thomston         |
| 1396 | John Edward                     | 1399 | Robert Ovy                        |
| 1411 | John Cory of Lyng               | 1414 | Thomas Frenge of Great Walsingham |
| 1418 | William Sandyacre               | 1419 | Thomas Smith                      |
|      | Thomas Dysse                    | 1436 | Robert Wode                       |
| 1460 | Walter Hunne                    | 1463 | Michael Gosse                     |
| 1464 | Thomas Medewe                   | 1466 | Richard Gorston                   |
|      | Ralph Croston                   | 1467 | William Thure                     |
| 1478 | Richard Marshall                | 1484 | Robert Smith                      |
| 1505 | Eliseus Aynesworth              | 1509 | Thomas Benewike                   |
| 1514 | Robert Dracots                  | 1521 | William Pankill                   |
| 1554 | John Hanson                     | 1558 | Anthony Wilkensonne               |
| 1571 | Thomas Moins                    | 1573 | John Denney                       |
| 1593 | Robert Gould                    | 1610 | Samuel Ledys                      |
| 1612 | Robert Gould                    | 1620 | Francis Kynnaston                 |
| 1640 | John Peirson                    | 1646 | John Chunne                       |
| 1661 | William Evans                   | 1676 | John Mayhew                       |
| 1694 | Thomas Shortrudge               | 1722 | Thomas Bence                      |
| 1753 | Charles Mabourn                 | 1758 | Barnabas Symonds                  |
| 1782 | George Golding Graves           | 1806 | Bence Bence                       |
| 1821 | Lancelot Robert Brown           | 1849 | Robert Starkie Bence              |
| 1858 | Addison Bramwell                | 1871 | William Belcher                   |
| 1876 | Thomas Smith Hill               |      |                                   |