



St Catherine's  
LITLINGTON CAMBS.

ST. CATHERINE'S CHURCH,  
Litlington

**The Ecclesiastical Parish of Litlington**, in the Diocese of Ely, is now part of the Shingay Group of parishes with Abington Pigotts (united since 1922), Guilden Morden, Steeple Morden, Tadlow, and Wendy with Shingay.

On 13 March 1336 Elizabeth de Burgh granted, as her first endowment, the Church and its land to the Master and Scholars of Clare College in Cambridge. The College is still our Lay Rector, but the Patronage to appoint the vicar was transferred to the Bishop in the 20<sup>th</sup> C.. Many past vicars have been Fellows of the College.



*14<sup>th</sup> C. veiled head  
on nave pillar*

In 1513 the church was recorded as dedicated to St. Catherine, Virgin and Martyr, who died for her faith in Alexandria in 307 AD under Emperor Maxentius.

**If you visit and walk around the building you can follow a plan on the central pages of a guide book so that you do not miss points of interest.**

**Our special items of interest are :-**

The **Graffiti** about Sir Frances Drake in the Lady Chapel (1595), and the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group **window** in the Chancel (1993) also the many heads in the nave and aisles.

The **Tower** now holds a ring of six bells. Five, originally cast in 1710, were recast, hung in a steel frame and the chiming mechanism added, in 1919 by Alfred Bowell of Ipswich at a cost of £202, and in the following year the sixth bell (the treble) was added for £50.

The **Vestry** was built in 1840, by the then vicar, Revd. W. Webb, who as Master of Clare College was able to acquire the fine 17<sup>th</sup> C. panelling and door screen from the College's Old Library, it is said without the knowledge of the other Fellows, when it was not needed for the present smaller Fellow's Library.

In the **Chancel**, the **south-east window** near the main altar was dedicated on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1993 to commemorate the men of the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group of the USA Air Force, who were stationed in the village during the 1939-1945 War. It was both made and given by John Dobbartin of Woodstock, Illinois and includes British and German glass. The stonework was repaired with funds from the Group and the Friends of St. Catherine's

The **Lady Chapel** in the south aisle was formed as a memorial to those who died in the 1914-18 War and to the then Vicar's mother Mrs Mary de Courcy-Ireland of Abington Pigotts. The previous Vicar had proposed a similar chapel in 1918, but this had evoked such a heated debate on the spread of ritualism within the church, that the idea was dropped.. The furnishings came from the Chapel of the House of Bethany, an orphanage in Bournemouth. The east window showing St. Catherine is from the Wm. Morris workshops in Westminster and is to the memory of Wm. Pateman, ringer and choirman.

**The church has two organs;** The main **Nave organ**, built in 1879, by J W Walker, was purchased in 1929, for £150, from Barcombe Church near Lewes in Sussex. At the time the pulpit was moved across the nave to its present site.

The **Chancel organ**, by Henry Jones, is two years older and was from the now redundant church in Saxon Street near Newmarket. It was installed here in 1992, by Canon Vivian Ryder, in memory of his wife Peggy, partly so that he could play for the hymns and also take the services in the Chancel, but sadly this was very shortly before his own sudden death.

## **Graffiti**

Over 400 hundred years ago a local resident vandalised the church with the Latin inscription, which has now become a recognised graffito, which many visitors come to see.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> C. the Sherman family were living at Huntingfields Manor, opposite the present Crown public house, and the Bolnest (or Bownest) family at Dovedales Manor, which is now Bury Farm, on the road to Abington Pigotts. Both families, which were related, bought up all saleable land in the village.

John Sherman , the Steward at the Manor, the son of a prosperous yeoman, was also a very successful farmer, but was said to be a grasping man and much feared by his neighbours for his obstinate behaviour and that, as Lord of the Manor, he manipulated the Court proceedings through the jurors. He rented the Rectory lands and took the tithes but enjoyed his own lands free, until he gave up the lease on favourable terms in 1592.

George Bolnest acquired land in 1595 at Huntingfields from his impecunious cousin Robert, but in 1597 John Sherman blocked the sale of further land by his then bankrupt son-in-law. He no doubt blamed his son-in-law's financial position on him spending too long at sea, or he could have given money to help finance Drake's voyages.

Robert Bownest (or Bolnest) may have been one of the crew of the 27 ships that sailed in August 1595. The intention was to harry the Spanish possessions in the Caribbean, but due the after interminable delays and wrangling as to whether Drake or Hawkins was in command, there was ample time for the news to reach Madrid, and the West Indies were made impregnable to the English. So not only did the expedition fail, but both Drake and Hawkins, died of dysentery in the following January, along with many of the members of their crews.

John Sherman died in 1599, having transferred his manor to his son, William, in 1597, so even if Robert was on that fateful voyage in late 1595, it is possible that his father-in-law was too old or ill to record his fate or his safe return by the time it was known in the village. There are also two interesting **Inscriptions or Graffiti**, both in Latin.

The earlier one, in the north aisle on a 13<sup>th</sup> C. pillar behind the nave organ.

**Tam Mari quam terra**                      “as on sea so on land”  
**Robert Bownest 1594**

The other more interesting inscription, measuring about 11 X 6 inches, is in the Lady Chapel on the left jamb of the widow to the east of the south door. Although it records the impending departure of Sir Francis Drake on what was to be his final voyage, no local connection can be established, although it may be connected with the other graffito.



By 1851 the census recorded 796 persons, but the population dropped again to only 395 in 1931. It has since risen again to about 850.

The village lock-up on the southern green dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> C. but with early 19<sup>th</sup> C. red brick and late 19<sup>th</sup> C. gault brick. It is reputed that the last person to be held there (about 1840) set fire to the bale of straw given to him as a bed.

Dovedales manor house (since 1675 called The Bury) was recorded in 1322, but it was known to be part of the manor held in 1086 by William the Chamberlain and Odo the Goldsmith. Huntingfields manor can be traced to 1235, with a moated manor house recorded in 1337 and part of the moats remain.

(See earlier in these notes concerning the Graffiti in the church.)