

Great Finborough Church

The church is notable for its situation on the edge of Buxhall Vale, with a lovely view from the West Door; its tower and spire at nearly 300ft, and its peal of six bells, given in 1910 by his family in memory of Squire Pettiward, which are frequently rung by the Suffolk Guild of Ringers and visiting bands. The church is in generally sound condition, but some remedial work is now required. The tower is a particular problem; it needs repointing over its considerable expanse at an estimated cost of over £30,000. Additional work is likely to bring the total repair bill to around £70,000 and the Parochial Church Council is preparing a scheme of renovation and internal refurbishment.

St. Andrew's tower and spire is perhaps the most dramatic feature of the church forming a distinctive landmark for much of the surrounding area. The base is a conventional square tower above which is an octagonal belfry. This is topped by the elegant octagonal spire of decorative bands of red and whitish sandstone, incorporating the stars that are found on the Pettiward coat of arms. Village folklore has it that the squire added the spire to the tower so that his wife could find her way home from hunting! In fact, Lady Frances Pettiward died in 1877 and the spire was added to the tower and dedicated to her memory.

People have worshipped on the site of Finborough church for over 1000 years. St. Andrew's stands in the centre of the village, in the former grounds of Finborough Hall and it is at least the third church to stand on this site. The Domesday Book in 1086 refers to a church benefice at Fineberg in Stow Hundred with thirty acres of free land and an acre of meadow situated on the estate of Roger de Oberville. The first recorded incumbent was John de Boteler who was priest in the parish from 1314 to 1344. The 14th century church was described as a small building "consisting of nave, chancel, south porch with bell turret and one bell."

From 1654 to 1936 the manor was owned by only two families, the Wollastons and the Pettiwards. These two families had a huge influence on the church and the village and many fine memorials can be seen in the church today. Not many Suffolk churches escaped unchanged in Victorian times. Some had minor modifications, but in St. Andrews case what started out as necessary repairs to the church gradually expanded to become a total rebuilding. Only the south porch was retained and even that did not escape unscathed. Today's church is largely the result of this enterprise. It is unlikely that such an expensive project could have been undertaken if it were not for Squire Robert John Pettiward. His family had lived in Finborough Hall since 1794 and owned most of the village and surrounding countryside. He had the wealth required for such a large undertaking, but he also had the power to order parishioners to contribute in money or labour according to their situation.



In 1874 R M Phipson was appointed architect; his work, in the Gothic Revival style, was greatly influenced by his mentor Augustus Pugin. Other local works by Phipson include St. Mary le Tower, Ipswich and the tower of Woolpit church. The foundation stone for the rebuilding is in the north wall in what was the corner of North Chapel. It simply states "the foundations of this church were laid anew in the year of our Lord 1875."