

Blomefield says in 1736

"The meanness of the fabrick hath preserved the inscriptions from being reaved, for it looks like a Barn at a distance".

Let the beholder judge as to the meaning of the meanness and its accuracy!

Local legend has it that this was the Church that Cromwell missed when his minions removed the ornaments from so many in East Anglia; they were supposed to have seen it full of straw and cattle and to have taken it for a farm building. Certainly the pew ends appear to have been gnawed by hungry animals!

Possibly the smallest Church in Norfolk, it must have had one of the smallest congregations. Hence redundancy procedure in 1976 followed by a Lease from the Diocese to the Norfolk Churches Trust in 1980; kindly cared for and watched over by the Alston Family at The Hall opposite; Lady Mann is Patron and C.E. John Gaze Lord of the Manor; there are occasional services from nearby Diss and Dickleburgh. Frenze is situate in the old Hundred of Diss in the Rural Deanery of Redenhall, Archdeaconry of Norfolk and Diocese of Norwich and its few Parishioners are now united with Dickleburgh Thelveton and Rushall.

Main work now in progress include the re-leading and replacement of all the windows excellently and swiftly completed by Dennis King in June 1983. Note the very ancient coloured glass and some interesting early engravings and symbols on panes in the south window. The roof timbers were replaced (copying the earlier pattern) by Sir Edward Mann in approx 1900 but the Nave and Porch roof need re-tiling. Providentially, or not the Church was struck by lightning early Friday morning June 24th, Midsummer day, possibly as a reminder that the Rent was due from the Trust to the Diocese - a Rose at Midsummer! The already weather-beaten weathercock was struck and there was considerable damage to the roof but the Builders were there the same morning to make wind and watertight. Iron hard oak was shattered (pieces are still in the Vestry) but there were no marks of burning. Wall repairs repointing and renewing of downpipes etc. is also required, the total cost is estimated to be over £23,000 but half will be met by Grant.

The beautiful setting is apparent and it is not hard to imagine the Deer which once roamed the adjoining woods and slaked their thirst at Diss Mere. One such is shown in the Crest on the newly returned Effigy of Sir Thomas Blennerhassett who died in 1531. This was said to have been re-discovered in Munich in 1820 and came into the possession of the Blennerhassett family one of whose descendants has kindly returned it. It has been beautifully re-set and is now on the south side of the chancel wall showing Sir Thomas in his military coat of mail with head bare, long hair, hands clasped, a sword and dagger at his side, spurs, gloves between his feet and wearing a surcoat of his arms and those of his Family. It was once enamelled and the inscription reads "here lies Sir T. Bl. Knight which deceased the 17th day of June in the year of our Lord 1531 and the 23rd year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Henry VIII whose soul God pardon"

*The crest is
a wolf
not a DEER*

Exterior Basically 14th Cent with early C16 South Porch of Tudor brick and some flint. Renewed Bell-cote, and said to be a ruined chancel pulled down in the early 1800's.

Interior The Brasses from London Norwich and Bury St. Edmunds are the main interest and the subject of a further note. Most relate to the Blennerhassett Family originating from Cumberland who acquired Frenze by marriage from the Lowdhams and the Arms of Sir Thomas (Gules, a Chevron Ermine between three Dolphins embowed Argent) also quarter Lowdham (Argent three escutcheons sable). These Brasses and this Family and its connections repay detailed study. There is also a late C13 Font, plain north door with Sanctuary ring dilapidated Royal Arms (James I and VI) splendid large Jacobean Pulpit with polygornal sounding board above (and monkey bench ends below!) and Family Box pew. The top part of the Communion Table is a pre-reformation Altar Stone with five crosses marked on it.

Thank you for coming, this hallowed place is preserved only with the greatest difficulty but hopefully its original purpose of worship will be renewed for future generations. We hope that you will return another day to become a true Friend of Frenze.

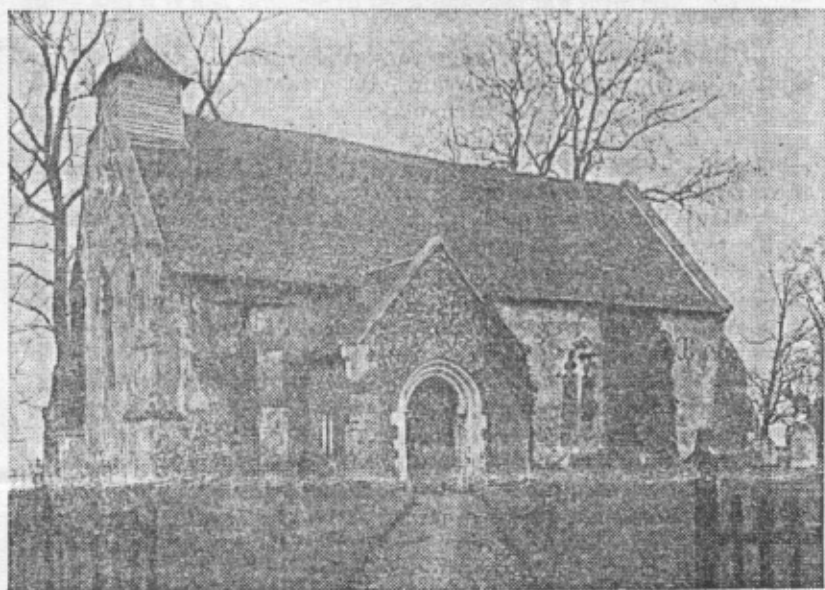
Further notes as follows :-

1. Description of Brasses by J.R. Greenwood and Other papers
2. Deeds and Documents relating to the Blennerhassett Family and to Frenze generally on deposit at the Norfolk Records Office. A list of these documents is available.
3. A note by C.H. Wilson relating to the Blennerhassett Family and their relations and American connections.

The Blennerhassetts (orig. Cumberland)

```

      Ralph Bl. d. 1475
      |
      John Bl. d. 1510  "Venerabilis Vir"
      |
      Sir Thomas Bl. d. 1531
      |-----|
      |         |
      George Bl. d. 1543         Anne m. Duke
      |
      John Bl  }
      George Bl } 1547 - 1600
      Samuel Bl }
```



Frenze Church

14th Century Church of St. Andrew the Apostle

THE 14th century Church of St. Andrew the Apostle, Frenze, probably one of the smallest churches in the country, stands on raised ground above the river Frenze, a tributary of the Waveney, in what was once the park of the Manor House, now part of Frenze Hall Farm.

Although the main London to Norwich railway line is not far away, carrying fast express trains, the country round is still as secluded as it must have been many years ago when "wild deer roamed in the Clint Hall and slaked their thirst in Diss Mere" (Bryant). These hills are not marked on the 1927 Survey map, but Clynt Plantation is shown.

Many visitors are attracted to St. Andrew's Church, in order either to study or make rubbings of the brasses, while others will be pleased to call a halt there to pay a casual visit when on their way through the farm to the lanes which lead on to Thelveton and Scole, where the only harsh sound is the call of the magpie, or the screaming of modern jet planes overhead.

The Church stands in the graveyard surrounded by iron railings, on the opposite side of the road is the low red brick building: Frenze Hall, once the Manor House.

Only 70 by 20 feet, this Church with the rough part flint walls and no steeple might almost pass as an old farm building. It is said that this plain exterior saved the brasses from Cromwell's pillaging armies, believing it to be a barn. (It was undamaged in World War II when bombs fell in Frenze).

A wooden bell cote which contains one bell weighing 75 lbs., inscribed "John Goldsmith made mee 1707," stands on the West end of the tiled roof. A small stone cross stands over the East end.

The porch is of flint, probably knapped as the smooth surfaces may be seen, and contrast with the rounded natural stones which form the buttresses and other parts of the walls, some of which are 700 years old.

Small pillars of brick stand on the outer doorway which has perpendicular mouldings on clustered shafts and decorated labels, one head now worn nearly smooth and the other is missing.

Over the South door are three recesses, all quite plain; swallows come to nest in the centre one, which probably once held images. On the floor of the porch is a stone coffin lid.

The interior of the Church, described by Mee as "a nave without a chancel" is very plain with thick slanting unfinished walls. The roof which was renewed in 1900 by the then patron is exactly like the original.

There are six windows in the Church, the glass is all plain, except for a few fragments of coloured glass in the East window.

It is said that in the hail storm of 1947 over 90 panes of glass were broken. The North door is quite plain and is blocked up. A very ancient iron Sanctuary ring hangs on it, worn almost to the thickness of wire where it has rubbed against the supporting ring.

ROYAL COAT OF ARMS

Over this door are the Royal Arms of James I, painted on boards three of which are supposed to be missing. The colours are dingy and it is just possible to see a unicorn, but little else.

The Jacobean oak pulpit, with a handsome sounding board, has carved panels to match those of the Jacobean horse box pew, which belongs to the Lord of the Manor. Age has softened the natural colour of the wood to blend in with the Church. Part of the rood screen has been made into a plain reading desk which stands beneath the pulpit. Two carved monkeys now worn nearly smooth form the arm rests.

The hinges of the manor pew are very like those which may be seen in today's New England homes (built by the Pilgrim Fathers) called Holy Lord hinges.

The arms of John Shelton, Lord of the Manor for some years, King's orator and versifier, were at one time on the wall above this pew. Bryant in "Bryant's Norfolk Churches," says: "Bloomfield mentions three brass shields in his possession which he thought belonged to the Church," and believed to be Shelton's.

In the West end of the Church are four backless benches very worn and smooth, with some of the carving now broken and these are like the rest of the old furniture in natural oak.

There is a door which rests against the West wall, and much conjecture is made as to where it should hang.

ALTAR ONCE A DOOR STEP

A pre-Reformation Altar stone was found used as a door step before it was restored to its proper place as top of the Communion table. It is marked with five small crosses, which represent the consecration crosses and are very primitive markings.

The Font is an octagon with coarse decorated traced panels and reeded shaft and stands in the West end of the Church.

Two piscina without canopy may be seen on the North and South side of the Chancel, one is a plain smooth hollow and the other more decorative, the small drain pipes in each case seem to be blocked.

When studying the brasses it is interesting to note the difference in the spelling of the name Blenerhassett (the family originally took its name from a village in Cumberland), who were lords of the manor and migrated to Ireland after 1595. A rubbing which had been taken of Thomas Blen'hayset before the brass was stolen since 1816 show a knight in the armour of Agincourt. It was

BEFORE 1814

1590

broken into three pieces for scrap metal and was later found in a curio shop.

Next to the Communion table is a brass figure of a woman which has been partly damaged.

The brass figure of Thomas Hobson on the North side is clear, showing a body tied in a shroud at the head and feet and open in the front.

On the steps before the Communion table is the brass effigy of a bare-headed knight, John Blenerhassett, he is in armour. Near the West end of the Church is Joanna in the dress of a religious votary. There is also one other brass figure of a woman near the Altar steps. But it is not easy to make out the inscription on the brasses.

RECORDS BACK TO 1651

The old records are in fair condition, the oldest, hand-bound in vellum, goes back to 1651 and records marriages, burials and christenings as baptisms were then called.

Bryant states: "The Communion plate consists of a small Elizabethan chalice, with circular band and a pewter flagon and alms dish. There is a modern paten."

It is interesting to record that a small pewter paten about 6 inches across marked with a crown over a heart, a tudor rose and London D.R.S. on the back and showing a scratch where the Communion bread was cut up, was found in 1955.

The former Lord of the Manor, Mr. Clement Gaze, is buried in the Churchyard.

The Church is in the Hundred of Diss Rural Deanery of Redenhall, Archdeaconry of Norfolk and Diocese of Norwich.

The tall pillar marking the vault of the Betts family bears the text taken from verse 9, chapter 53 of Isaiah: "He made his grave with the wicked." On the back of the memorial is the curious verse:

No more than doth the circle round
The sharp triangle satisfy
No more my heart all thats here found
Than ever Blessed Trinity.

The grave of Sheldrake Smith, one time owner of Frenze Hall Estates (1877) can also be seen.

H.M.S.



ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

FRENZE, NORFOLK





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST ANDREW'S CHURCH
FRENZE, NORFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

RICKINGHALL SUPERIOR, ST MARY
7 miles SW of Diss on B1113

WEST HARLING, ALL SAINTS
6 miles E of Thetford off A1066

SHIMPLING, ST GEORGE
17 miles S of Norwich W of A140

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

FRENZE, NORFOLK

by ANTHONY BARNES

Although Frenze is mentioned in Domesday Book, there is no reference to a church or a priest. The first record of a church is towards the end of the 13th century. The name suggests an earlier origin – the place of Frea's people, like Fring in north-west Norfolk, but given a Norman intonation.

The historian Francis Blomefield (1734) thought that the barn-like appearance of the church had saved some of its contents from thieves and a later visitor wrote: 'As for architecture there is little to be said'. Our increasing sympathy for unimproved vernacular buildings may make today's judgment kinder. There is a charming lack of pomposity about the flint and rubble walls, with patches of render, much of it old. The setting also has its charms. Although the Hall was pulled down at the end of the 19th century its farm remains, with a fordable stream beyond where it crosses the path in front of the church. The observant traveller on the London to Norwich railway line will glimpse the church, apparently in a farmyard, just after leaving Diss.

EXTERIOR

What survives is the nave of the original church, with 'battered' walls, i.e. much wider at the bottom than the top. Large external buttresses and tie-beams of different dates and materials indicate a continuing concern with stability. The wooden tie-beam near the west end is a fine piece of carpenter's common sense. A chancel projecting 14ft (4.3m) eastward was removed in 1827 because it was in bad repair and unnecessary in view of the numbers in the village. The old east window was incorporated in the new east wall. The main windows are Decorated in style, as is the font, with its low reliefs imitating contemporary window tracery. All of this looks early 14th century at the latest. The walls are constructed of rubble and



Font

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

flint, but the 16th century porch is of brick. On its floor are a damaged mediæval coffin lid and the remains of a second. The roof was repaired in 1900, when a new wooden bellcot was built a little further east from the old one, all on the instructions of the Patron, Edward (later Sir Edward) Mann.

INTERIOR

The great surprise is the interior, a complete contrast to the very modest external appearance of the church. It contains a remarkable series of brasses, with indents for more that have disappeared. There are also the remains of a James I royal arms in an

old frame, some well-preserved mediæval benches, and a notable set of pulpit, stall and squire's pew dating from the first half of the 17th century, all in oak now faded to a delicate grey. Some older work is incorporated, including two delightful monkeys that have lost nothing in subsequent repairs. On the altar is the mediæval mensa, removed from there after the Reformation and found during the 1900 repairs after having served as a doorstep for centuries. The bell is by John Goldsmith of Redgrave, 1707. There used to be a considerable quantity of heraldic stained glass, but almost all of it has now gone. On the blocked north door there is a mediæval sanctuary ring. In the sills of the main north and south windows are piscinas, presumably provided for side altars. A number of panes of glass record the names of glaziers carrying out repairs, one even mentioning the weather on the day he did the work.

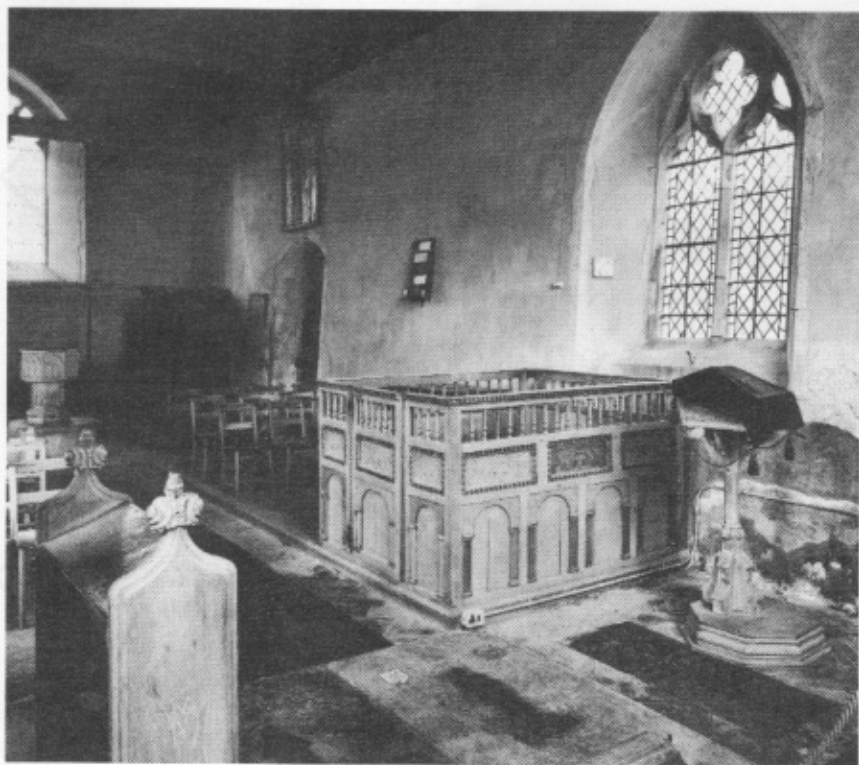
The first known lord of the manor was John de Lowdham in 1280 and it is tempting to ascribe the building of the church to his time. One of his descendants, Joan, married twice, her second husband being Ralph Blennerhasset, who died in 1475. She died in 1501, aged 97. The Blennerhassetts came originally from the Cumbrian village of that name, the senior branch of the family supplying Carlisle or Cumberland with mayors, MPs and other office-holders for three hundred years from 1388.

The Blennerhasset connections with Frenze ended in 1636. It is not known whether the pulpit and squire's pew were provided by them or by Richard Nixon, who bought the estate in that year. His ledger slab is in the floor of the church.

she
died
1501
aged
97 years
- B.J.

17th century squire's pew

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



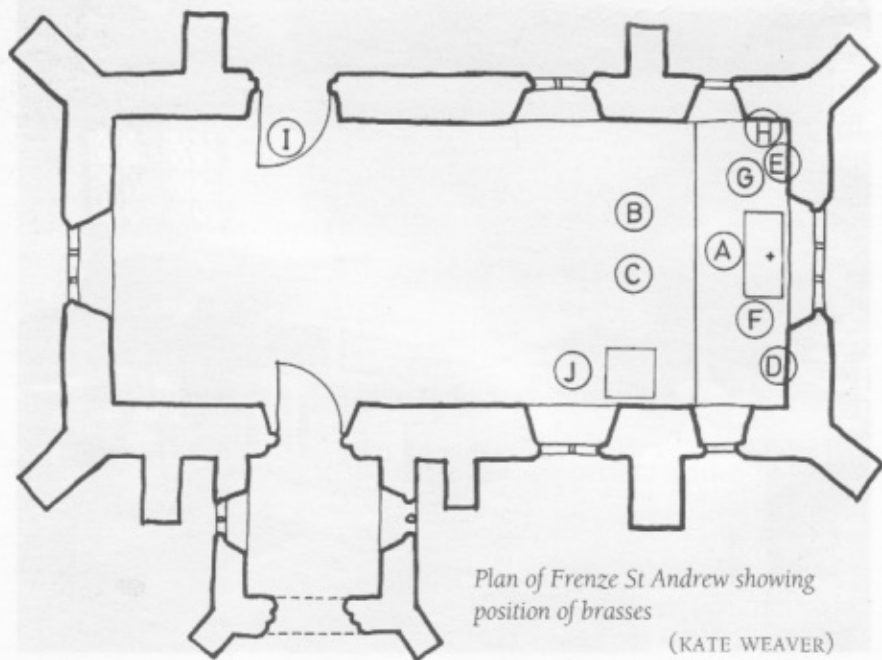
JOHN BLENNERHASSETT who died

1514 was not son of JOHN BH d.1510

(his son JOHN BH died 1532) - B.J.

BRASSES

The plan indicates which brass commemorates which member of the Blennerhasset family. The first represents the Ralph who died in 1475 (A). He and Joan had a son, John (d.1510 B) whose wife Jane died in 1521 (C). Their sons were Thomas (d.1531 D) and John (d.1514). Thomas and Margaret (E) were the parents of George Blennerhasset, whose daughter Mary (d.1587 F) first married Thomas Culpeper and then Francis Bacon; and of Anne (G) who married George Duke (d.1551; his brass has been stolen) and one of their children was Thomasin Platers (H). Johanna Braham (d.1519 I) was probably the mother of Margaret (E) and seems to have taken a religious vow in widowhood. Thomas Hobson (J) is dated c.1520. It is not known whether he was one of the family. At the west end and just inside the door are two slabs with indents for brasses. Blomefield reports an earlier historian's record of the inscriptions for Joan (d.1501) and her grandson John (d.1514). One may presume that these two slabs are their memorials.



The pieces composing the Mary Bacon brass have on the reverse a large part of an early 15th century effigy of an unknown academic. The Anne Duke brass is also a palimpsest with an unusual engraving on it, probably of St Edmund killing the Danish King Sweyn. It almost certainly came from the shrine of St Edmund at Bury after it was destroyed by fire in 1463. 1465-65.

Blomefield reported that in 1736 there were 60 inhabitants in six houses, figures that raise more questions than they answer. The population has never reached this level since. In 1981 St Andrew's was leased to the Norfolk Churches Trust on being made pastorally redundant. Substantial repairs to the glazing and roof were carried out under the supervision of Mr Neil Birdsall of Hingham. Further repairs were carried out on transfer to The Churches Conservation Trust in 1995.

The Trust is grateful to Canon David Weston of Carlisle, Mr Robert Manning of Diss, Mr Nick Hamond and the staff at the Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Studies Library for help in compiling this guide.



Ralph Blennerhasset d.1475 (A)

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Front cover: Exterior from the south east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Back cover: Pulpit and priest's stall (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

© The Churches Conservation Trust 1996

Series 4 no. 53

August 1996



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00