

A guide to the Church of St Mary Virgin & Mother of the Benefice of Capel St Mary with Little Wenham and Great Wenham

By Mitzi Tyler



The present church stands on a site consecrated for worship for many hundreds of years; certainly since the time of the great Domesday Survey of 1086 when the existence of a “*fourth part of a church*”, with six acres of glebe, was recorded for the Manor of Boynton.

However, the present church stands on land used for burials from an even earlier period of history, as witnessed by the discovery in 1990 of Romano-British burial urns when the northern part of the churchyard was excavated for the building of the church extension.

Capel St Mary has been a settlement since Roman times. When, in 1930, building of council houses took place in the Windmill Hill area, the remains of a Roman villa were found on the site. These suggested an establishment of considerable quality. Other artefacts were also unearthed, not only in this vicinity, but in a larger area north of the church, as well as around Latinford Hill. These may be seen in the Ipswich museum.

The village itself has developed from a small linear agricultural village to today's much larger community, and in the same way the church has also grown to accommodate these changes.

This follows a theme of continuous rebuilding of parish churches that is in line with the changes caused by influences of wider world affairs. The dedication of the church is to St Mary the Virgin and Mother, and the name of the village must refer to the church, Capel being derived from Capeles (Norman French 1066-1087) or Capella (Latin) meaning chapel. However there is no record of the parish by this name until the 13th century as at the time of the Domesday Survey only the manors of Boynton and Churchford were mentioned. In a document dated 1291 the church was referred to as a secular rectory with two benefices, and a rectory it has remained ever since.

The Exterior

On walking around the outside of the church which consists of chancel, nave, porch and tower, the full beauty of the building, its windows and the various styles of architecture are revealed.

The tower is square and can be dated to the 15th century and prior to 1818 it supported a spire. Refaced with rough flint it shows evidence of re-used Roman bricks within its construction. It is in three stages with two drip courses and at its base can be found ashlar panels, some replaced with flint, decorated with blind arcades. On the south face, the clock commemorates the Diamond Jubilee in 1897 of Queen Victoria (Paid for by voluntary subscription at the cost of £120).



In the area at the base of the tower is a Garden of Remembrance for cremated remains, blessed in 1985, and overlooked by a privately-donated crucifix erected in 1987. In the older part of the churchyard there are many ancient gravestones, the readable inscriptions of which were recorded in 1997 by the Suffolk Family History Society.

The exterior to the north wall shows evidence of a doorway which probably led to the rood stairway, blocked at the time of the Reformation in the mid-16th century. This doorway, possible of Norman origin, is round headed and flashed near the base with Tudor brick in a herringbone pattern. The other north doorway in the nave, possible of Early English (1200-1300) or Early Decorated (1300-1350) periods now serves as the entrance to the 20th century extension.

At the east end, the chancel has buttresses also of Tudor brick indicating post-Reformation restoration, but on the most easterly head stop of the south chancel window is a pagan green man symbolic of a much earlier tradition of worship. There are other weatherworn grotesques to be found on the north wall chancel windows. A Norman-style priest's door in the chancel's south wall has more examples of ancient head stops and foliage decoration. A new door for this entrance was presented by the Friends of Capel Church in 1989. The south porch, built in the 15th century contains original oak arch braces and wall plates, but the inner door is contained within an archway of the Early English or Decorated periods.

Note the pilgrims' crosses carved in the stone (graffiti left by travellers *en route* to the shrine at Walsingham during the Middle Ages). Entry to the church is by way of a heavy oak door of overlapped boards with long hinges, which dates no later than the 14th century.

The Yew hedge that forms the southern boundary to the churchyard was planted in 1886.

The interior

The first impressions on entering the church give clues to its architectural evolution, following changes required of the forms of service. The whole building is a mere record of change. For the last 1,000 years it has evolved from its original single cell and had continued to accommodate the needs of the community and the styles of the liturgy of the time.

The periods of architecture begin with the north wall of the nave, which dates back to the 12th century indicating Norman origin because of its exceptional thickness (two foot 8.5 inches). They continue with the chancel, restored in the 14th century, and proceed to the nave with its 15th century roof.

It is probable that the side aisle was built with a new wall constructed several feet outside the original 12th century south wall, at the same time as the chancel was enlarged. At this particular period of history much rebuilding was taking place in churches all over East Anglia, as elsewhere, due to long-lasting changes dictated by Rome. Chancels were rebuilt for the new requirements of the Mass and forms of liturgy, and naves were extended for greater processional use.

The Nave

Note the plain four bay arcade to the south aisle, with octagonal piers and double chamfered arches which support the 15th century hammer-beam roof. This eight-bay roof corresponds to the pier centres as well as to the tall north wall windows. It has single hammer beams of short projection, with decorated arch braces but no wall posts. The arch braces contain carvings of foliage, leaves, buds, ball flowers and even one of a pomegranate, and may predate the main roof structure.

The afore-mentioned south wall was taken down during the first rebuilding programme (1250-1360) and the present arcade built, with the edition of the side aisle, although the tie beam roof here is of later 15th century construction. In pre-Reformation times this area could have been used as a side chapel possible for the parish gild. Records show the existence of a gild, noted in the 1524 Lay Subsidy returns to contain “£2 13s 4d in the Gild Stock” (used to maintain lights i.e. candles). The dedication is unknown as no gild records survive for Capel.

The Chancel

Probably the site of the original early church, it was rebuilt in, or widened, at the close of the 13th century in the style of Geometric-Decorated (1270). The roof, renewed in the 19th century, is a rare (for East Anglia) example of a “cradle” type.



The reredos above the altar is of the 19th century, an imitation of medieval work. It is reputed to have been given in 1907 by the children of Arthur and Caroline Barthorp, daughter and son-in-law of the Reverend Joseph Barthorp Tweed (Rector from 1867 to 1878), although other sources record it as a gift of the then Rector the Reverend A.C. Johnson (1878-1920).

Further conflicting sources accredit it to being of Belgian origin, or to the work of Wippel of Exeter. It was restored to its original colouring in 1960 by Mr Keevil of Wandsworth at a cost of £100. There were also two side panels donated at the same time, accredited to Thomas Stopher of Ipswich: but these were removed in the 1960s.

The angels, carved in lime wood, were placed on the ceiling in 1913. They are the work of the Lang family of Oberammergau and cost £3 15s each. It is recorded that one was donated by Mr Maurice Pickess the local carpenter and builder, others by the Reverend Johnson.



The chancel arch was also widened and heightened at the time of the enlargement of this area. Note that the arch is out of line with the east window, which is also out of line with the roof apex, more evidence of the rebuilding programme of the 13th – 14th centuries. A medieval piscine, discovered in 1915, was removed from the sanctuary wall when excavations were being made to install a storage cupboard.

Removed to the then vestry, this was described in 1926 by Claude Morley as a *“preserved half of a piscine of very curious shape and unusually large, being a shallow octofoil surrounding a ring of regularly sculptured leaves, probably Flamboyant in period and certainly unique in Suffolk.”*

The South Aisle

This was redesigned as a chapel by Howard Brown and dedicated to St Edmund in 1950 as a memorial to two former churchwardens, Mr B.B.Taylor and Mr F.C.Hempleman who died in 1946 and 1949 respectively. Mr Taylor had also been head teacher at Capel St Mary School from 1907. Today, due to yet another change in the mid-1980s resulting from the influence of the Parish Communion Movement, the altar table is now positioned beneath the chancel arch. The chapel has therefore reverted to being a side aisle.



The Book of Remembrance, recording the names of those who died in the two world wars, can be found on a shelf next to the east window. This was donated by Mrs B. Harris in 1952 in memory of her son who was killed in a flying accident.

In place of a war memorial, the parish contributed in 1920 to the East Suffolk Memorial Scheme for the enlargement of the Ipswich and East Suffolk Hospital at Anglesea Road, Ipswich.

The Rood Beam

From the west end of the nave, the Rood Cross and figures can be seen above the chancel arch.



These are not the originals but were placed in this position in 1912, also the 19th century work of the Lang family of Oberammergau, and were given by the Reverend Johnson. Of the original rood screen and beam there is now no trace.

The Windows

The east window in the chancel has four lights of the Perpendicular period (1350-1500). Its full beauty was revealed when the decorated Reredos was lowered in 1960.

The Victorian glass depicts the four archangels, Uriel (Oriel), Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, was given to the church by the Reverend Johnson to commemorate the peace of 1918. The windows in the north and south Chancel walls are decorated double lights of the period 1377-1485.

There are three large triple light windows in the north wall of the nave c1430, which were re-glazed in 1919 at a cost of £48. Similarly, the windows in the south aisle wall were re-glazed during the incumbency of the Reverend Johnson. He swept up after the final window was installed, and after the workmen had finished, remarking to Mr Green his churchwarden *"now I have done all I wanted to do in the church"* went home and died in the night.

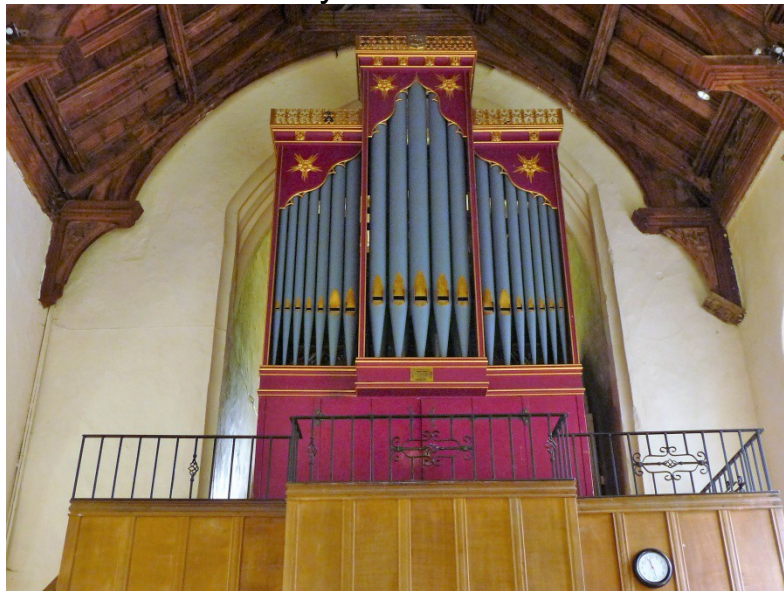
The window in the east wall of the side aisle is a fine and noted piece of work by Mr F.C. Eden. It was erected in 1925 in memory of Reverend Johnson, Rector of the parish 1878-1920, who was responsible for the continuation of the Victorian restoration which had been started in 1869. Churchwardens' account book records for 1869 *"Restoration of Chapel Church – received by public subscription £223 10s 3d paid £226 15s 9d."*

The modern stained window in the south aisle is the work of D Maule of Canterbury, and is dedicated as the 15th station of the cross. It shows Hope in the Resurrection and was donated by Mr Harley Young (one-time churchwarden) in memory of his wife and installed in 1984.

Note should be made of the visit of William Dowsing (Parliamentary visitor during the Civil War), who in 1643 "*broke down three superstitious pictures*" and ordered the removal of 31 more. Thus were destroyed all the medieval glass windows in the church.

The Organ

Built by Willis, this was positioned in the south aisle against the most easterly arcade pier in 1886, at a cost of £410. It was removed to its present position in 1950 as part of the Taylor/Hempleman memorial. It replaces a gallery noted in the churchwardens' accounts of 1855 "*church's bill for repairing the gallery £4.*" Also mentioned in these accounts are "*Ringers and Singers*", as well as the existence in 1803 of 46 members of a Benefit Society.



The former vestry, under the organ in the tower, was enclosed as a memorial to the Reverend Robertson, Rector from 1920 to 1952.

The Pulpit

The pulpit is painted in imitation inlay and is Georgian. The winding approach stairway was removed in 1915 and the pulpit set slightly further back. At this time the sounding board or tester above was replaced, inset with the original frieze.

The Stations of the Cross

These were purchased by private subscription and installed during the incumbency of the Reverend Canon Dennis Pearce in 1984, and replaced an earlier set of German engravings in the style of Durer.

The Bells

There are a total of five bells within the tower, only one of which is of pre-Reformation date, although it was recast by John Taylor, Bell Founder Loughborough in 1897. The inscription on this tenor bell reads "*of your charitie pray for the welfare of Gregorie Pascal.*" This gentleman, mentioned in the will of his father John, dated 1503, died in 1541.

The other bells are inscribed as follows: Treble bell: *T. Mears of London 1829 1. Tweed Rector.* Second bell: *T. Mears of London 1829 Cooper Brooke Churchwarden,* Third bell: *John Darbie Me Fecit 1683,* and Fourth bell: *Myles Greye Me Fecit 1624.* These four bells were returned and rehung at the same time as the recasting of the tenor bell.

A list of Rectors and their Patrons dating back to 1304 can be seen on the west wall by the organ steps.

Since the closure of the Friary in East Bergholt in 1974 then Roman Catholic community had shared the church, sadly with declining numbers of priests this sharing agreement was ended in 2004.

The building of the church extension in 1990 provided extra space for the congregation which had grown due to the development of the village since the mid-sixties. This the oldest building in the village continues as a place of worship and peace.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude those who shared their knowledge, and encouraged my enthusiasm for local history in general and church architecture in particular, without whom this millennium offering would never have been completed.

Mitzi Tyler
October 2000

We hope that this guide will inform visitors to St Mary's Church and help them to make it an enjoyable visit. We are extremely grateful to Mrs Mitzi Tyler for writing it and to her husband Lewis for producing it in its original paper-back form.

As you look around the church we invite you to give thanks for all those who have cherished it in the past; for those who maintain it now; and to spend a moment in prayer as have generations so done through the centuries.

In his excellent book Anglicans on High, Canon Roy Tricker reveals the effect the late 19th century Anglo-Catholic revival had some years later in Capel St Mary:

Objections to furnishings in Capel Church

"Of serious nature was the court case in 1926-7 over the furnishings in St Mary's Church, Capel when a faculty was sought by a local farmer to have 28 articles removed from the church. These included the second altar, High Altar candlesticks, Stations of the Cross, thurible, statue of Our Lady which had been placed upon the stand of a former lectern, a board with notices requesting prayers for the departed, sanctuary lamp, and various books – including the Anglican Missal, the Tabernacle, sacring, gong, crucifixes and confessional stool.

"These were finally condemned by the chancellor of the diocese (F. Keppel North) although the rood beam with its figures (which it was alleged had been put to superstitious use), the angels on the chancel roof, the professional crucifix, the reredos and the altar frontal, were allowed to remain.

"The case was heard in Capel village hall and the Anglo-Catholic practices at Capel were given a good airing. Fr Robertson and his two churchwardens gave evidence, explaining the purposes of the furnishings and Mr Packard, the petitioner, produced a document signed by 220 parishioners to back him up.

"Several witnesses tried to show that clouds of incense, non-communicating celebrations of the Eucharist, the abuse of images etc, were emptying the church. The facts seem to indicate, however, that the congregations had vastly improved since Fr Robertson's arrival. One witness testified that on visiting the church he heard a 'mumbling voice' and saw a lady making her confession in the chancel. The witness first stated that the priest's hand was on the lady's shoulder, but later withdrew that accusation.

"The Church Times found chancellor North's judgment particularly harsh and was pleased to back an appeal to the Court of Arches, which took place before Sir Lewis Dibdin in January 1928 with interesting results. The judge in fact reversed chancellor North's decision on two points – he declared that the notices requesting prayers for departed people were permissible, also the confessional stool and the crucifix above it, saying that this was greatly preferable to the hearing of confessions in the vestry or in a confessional box.

"The Church Times was therefore delighted to announce that this decision had, in fact, declared that kneeling-stools for penitents, with crucifixes nearby, and notices requesting prayers for the departed were now legal in Anglican churches, thanks to the Capel Appeal. The forbidden articles were reverently removed and taken to the rectory for a time."

We are extremely grateful to Canon Tricker for permission to reproduce the above excerpt from *Anglicans on High* published by Fitzwalter Press in 2014.

21st century heralds change



The newly re-ordered St Mary's Church

The 2015 church re-ordering

Malcolm Fenn, Treasurer, tells how the church re-ordering came about:

From 2010 onwards it was clear that the fabric of St Mary's was in a poor state. It was damp, heating inadequate, the old pews damaged clothes and church could not be used from November to March.

An architect was commissioned to resolve some of the issues in 2010/11 but due to lack of finance nothing was done. However in 2014 two large bequests were received from Rosemary Perry and Anne Lushey which prompted a fresh look.

The PCC appointed Phil Chatfield, a historic building consultant, to draw up a schedule to completely regenerate the building, with architects KLH to sign off.

The successful tenders were:

Building works, Rose Builders	£86,184
Heating SES mechanical services	£60,914
Electrics, lighting, sound Greg Garrad	£10,000
Furniture, Rosehill	£10,300
British gas	£8,500

But the total cost was £216,187 before tax refund

As Treasurer I project-led for the church and advised the PCC that by liquidating church assets, getting donations for new chairs and securing loans from the congregation, the project could be funded. Following formal approval (a faculty) was issued on 10/11/2014

Before any work could commence a survey by Suffolk archaeology had to be completed. This revealed a Ledger Stone for Robert and Rob MAUNDRELL dated 1830. This was lowered below new floor level. Some fragments of Roman pottery were found. Permission to proceed was subsequently given.

The Victorian soft pine pews, thought to be second hand, were removed and sold to local residents.

The pulpit and rood screen were removed after the Edwardian society deemed them to be cheap veneer and of no value.

A detailed 13 week programme was implemented:

- Install protection for organ, altar, font and take down figures from the rood screen;
- Remove all boarding on north and south walls;
- Dig external trench for new gas services, upgrade path with drainage;
- Cut out all floor joints;
- Adjust mat well inside main church door;
- Form perimeter service ducts and expansion loop ducts, (this was a concrete beam inside the inner walls of the church to allow walls to breath);
- Install heating pipework for heaters and underfloor heating;
- Provide 32 wall sockets, new LED lighting, sound system and TV's,
- Lay leca/lime over floor;
- Pump in quick drying cement;
- Decorate interior surfaces with 3 coats of lime wash;
- Lay mesh and screed pipework;

- First fix heating;
- Fix black grills around perimeter for ventilation;
- Lay tiles (it had been decided to take up an area at back of the church previously tiled in order to get one level) the tiles around the pillars had holes drilled in them to allow pillars to dry out. The church floor divided into sections of expansion joints is a work of art and was short listed for a prize!
- Final fix of heating and electrics.

It should be noted that the choir stall area was untouched

In addition to the main contract the following was done:

- The font was cleaned and re-jointed;
- The main altar was re-designed;
- Nave floor was sanded and recoated; and
- Donated chairs and benches were engraved.

The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Right Revd Martin Seeley, came to dedicate the work in October 2015 and a plaque detailing those involved was placed at the back of the church near the vestry.

In conclusion the building is now fully fit for purpose and the standard of workmanship ensures that it is good for generations to come.