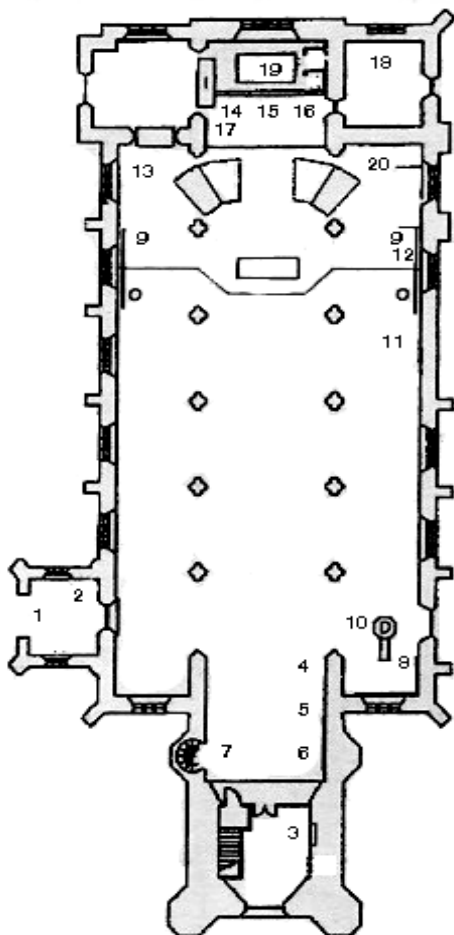




AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

ST MARY'S PARISH CHURCH

WOODBIDGE



AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE
TO THE CHURCH OF
ST MARY THE VIRGIN
WOODBIDGE

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WELCOME TO SAINT MARY'S – one of Suffolk's grandest churches and the jewel in the crown of this picturesque riverside market town, with its narrow streets and fascinating buildings. From many places we see its mighty tower rising above the houses and trees and gracing the Woodbridge skyline, yet St. Mary's is set not at the apex of the ridge, but a little beneath it, so whether we climb to it along Church Street and through the eastern churchyard entrance or descend to it via the alley and steps, which lead directly from the Market Hill to the north porch, the church's setting is delightful and unforgettable.

Welcome to a living, working building, which is no mere ancient monument, but still in daily use for the purpose for which it was built nearly 600 years ago. Many generations of Woodbridge folk, including our own, have altered and beautified it and have left their mark upon it. Like the Faith that it proclaims, St. Mary's continues to develop and evolve, yet it remains a Holy Place, made sacred by centuries of prayer and care.

Those whose spiritual home this is are glad that you have come to see it. We hope that you will enjoy exploring its exterior and interior and that this little guide may help to point you to some of its history and treasures. Above all, we hope that you will feel thoroughly at home here in our Father's house. May God bless and protect you.



WHAT TO SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH

The commodious north porch, by which we enter, had several important uses in mediaeval times, from transacting honest business, to the marriage service and the Churching of Mothers after the safe birth of a child. Nowadays, it shelters a seat, which incorporates the only two remaining 15th century **BENCH ENDS** in the church and, on the east wall, the **BREAD CUPBOARD**, with compartments to contain the loaves which the generous John Sayer bequeathed in 1635 to be given each Sunday to the poor. This charity still helps to relieve those in need, but not with loaves of bread. Reset into the wall beside the outer entrance is a weathered original **STONE PANEL** with the Mowbray lion and crown, removed here for preservation from elsewhere on the church. The **LANTERN**, given in memory of Rowland Francis Cobbold, Priest (1857-1945) and Lilian Hope, his wife (1872-1945) was refurbished during the renovation of the North Porch in 2017-18.

The downhill descent continues as we pass beneath the handsome 15th century entrance arch and through the traceried Barnardiston memorial **DOORS** (designed by W.A. Forsyth, 1947) into the bright and spacious interior. It is worth drinking in the interior as a whole, its superb design, its great height and noble proportions. Like so many of our greater churches, this is a place of grand vistas, from wherever we choose to look. Here also is craftsmanship from every century from the 15th to the 21st and many reminders that it is a vibrant working building – a lovely home for its own large Church Family and a place where its Visitors and Pilgrims may also feel welcome and at home.

Soaring six-bay **ARCADES** (c.1435-40) divide off the north and south aisles. The piers, with their beautifully-moulded capitals and bases, have many similarities to the arcade at Southwold and may be by the same architect. 19th century arches now divide the organ chamber from the sanctuary and the north aisle. Most glorious of all is the noble **TOWER ARCH**, which just about fills the west end of the nave; beyond it we see the elegant tracery of the great five-light **WEST WINDOW**. This is larger and more spectacular than the four-light **EAST WINDOW**, which is set high to accommodate the former 17th century altarpiece and, for some unknown reason, is slightly north of centre. Maybe this was originally a mid 15th century window, which was repositioned when the great altarpiece was installed during the 1600s. The large triple Perpendicular aisle windows were designed to admit the maximum amount of light and to give scope for artists in stained glass (and 15th century glass did let in plenty of light).





The **CLERESTORY** windows attempt to create walls of glass, illuminating the timbers of the **NAVE AND CHANCEL ROOF** – and you'll certainly be forgiven for lying flat on your back on a bench to enjoy it in comfort and without neck-strain! Stretching the entire length of the church, this is an amazing piece of timber construction, of sturdy straddling tiebeams, alternating with hammerbeams jutting out from the sides, all supported by arch-braces, rising from wall-posts, which rest upon stone corbels. Most of the corbels are original, with intriguing faces and patterns, although the roof itself has been restored and renewed in places over the years. Work took place on it in the 17th century and also in 1839. At the ends of the hammerbeams, fixed to later shields, and at the roof's apex, are some intricately carved 15th century bosses. Further fine carving may be seen in the **AISLE ROOFS** – again much renewed, but with marks on the timbers where their former plaster ceilings were fixed. The corbels of the south aisle roof are worth enjoying. They have fascinating human faces and creatures peering out at us. The carved bosses in the aisles are mostly 19th century, but a couple of mediaeval faces have survived in the south aisle.



The base of the tower received its new **WEST GALLERY** in 2002, which was shortly followed by the **NAVE ALTAR, PULPIT** and radiating **CHOIRSTALLS**, all part of an exciting re-ordering scheme to enable this 15th century church, adapted during each subsequent century, to best serve the needs of its 21st century Family for worship, work, witness and use. Do go into the tower base to see some of the beautiful **CHURCH SILVER**, which is displayed there.

On the walls near the nave's west end are six lozenge-shaped **HATCHMENTS**, which were displayed for a period of time outside the house of a deceased person and then brought for permanent display in the parish church. The upper hatchments each side commemorate Carthews. On the north side are Rear Admiral William Carthew (1827) and Ann (nee Denny), 3rd wife of the Rev'd Thomas Carthew (1785). His second wife Mary (nee Wall) (1771) and first wife Elizabeth (nee Morden) (1768) are on the south side, beneath which is the hatchment of Mary, wife of Thomas Knights (he died in 1707), facing one of their sons, either Robert or Thomas Knights, opposite.

On the south wall, near the tower arch is the colourful three-panelled **DEBEN MILLENNIUM FRIEZE**, showing the history of the town in beautiful embroidery created by local people in 2000, to the designs of Michael Coulter and Linda Wilde. This delightful and original account of the story of Woodbridge was made for the town and is displayed for all to see in its parish church.



The **FRONTAL CASE** nearby, with its fine linenfold work, was made in 1960.

Opposite is the **DOOR TO THE TOWER STAIRCASE**, where some 79 steps lead to the ringing chamber and bells, and a further 54 steps in the north-west corner give access to the tower roof. When David Elisha Davy of Ufford climbed the tower in 1811, he reckoned that he could see as far as Dovercourt church, Essex to the south and Dennington church to the north. Until well into the 19th century the tower had a clock with chimes (but no faces), which was installed in 1658 and parts of which still survive. The present ring of eight **BELLS** was cast by Thomas Osborn of Downham Market in 1799, while the 4th and 7th were recast by Gillett & Johnson in 1953. The tenor bell weighs just over 25 cwt and has a diameter of 4'5". St Mary's has a fine ringing history and the ringing chamber has some interesting peal-boards, with one board informing us that 'Andrew Fosdike went up and down this steeple 7 times in 27 minutes in the 67th year of his age March the 15th 1753'. A separate illustrated leaflet gives more information about the tower and bells.

Now lining the walls at the west end of the south aisle are the surviving mediaeval panels of the **ROOD SCREEN** for which John and Agnes Albrede gave money in the 1440s and 1450s, as was recorded in the inscription above the figures of the saints. 14 panels remain out of an original 34. They have been terribly mutilated by the Puritans and many are difficult to identify, but each is a precious 'Old Master', worthy of inspection.

The four panels on the south side show:-

1. Possibly the Blessed Virgin Mary with a book and sprig of flowers,
2. St. Ursula on a boat with the virgins who accompanied her scrubbed out
3. Possibly St. Thomas a Becket, with mitre and primatial cross,
4. St. Philip, with basket of loaves.

The western panels show:

1. St. Matthias, with an axe
2. St. James the Less with a fuller's club
3. St. Andrew, with an X-shaped cross
4. St. James the Great, with wallet and staff
5. A Bishop with mitre and crosier
6. St. Bartholomew, with a flaying knife
7. St. Simon, with an oar
8. St. Jude, with a boat
9. St. Thomas, with a spear
10. St. John the Evangelist, with his poisoned chalice

Above these panels are traces of the inscription, which states that John and Agnes Albrede gave the screen.



The dado (base) of the screen was still in place in the 1790s, when drawings were made of the paintings and placed in the British Museum. It was later taken down and the restorers in 1874-5 found parts of it, covered with baize, incorporated into a box-pew and built into the reading desk. From these the dado (base section) was reconstructed in its original form and position (incorporating the remaining 15th century panels) and in 1894 it received a new upper section (of open tracery) made by John Kent. In 1898, in memory of Mary Neale and her daughter, the surviving 14 mediaeval panels (described above) were removed and the dado then received faithful copies of the 24 originals, as recorded in the British Museum, reproduced 'in the minutest detail' (we are told) by Mr. J. T. Carter of London.

Thus, the principal part of the Albrede screen remains to this day and the **19th CENTURY SCREEN PANELS IN THEIR 15TH CENTURY FRAMEWORK** are now ranged along the north and south aisle walls, towards the east. They show 11 apostles and 13 other saints, including some English ones, and the full Albrede inscription in Latin.





At the west end of the south aisle is the octagonal **FONT**, at which Woodbridge babes have been baptised for five and a half centuries. This masterpiece of the mid 15th century stonecarver's art is one of only 38 in England (all but two of which are in Norfolk and Suffolk), which show the seven sacraments of the Church around the bowl. Some of the figures were mutilated by the Puritans in 1644, but the scenes still give a wonderful picture of mediaeval church life, costume, etc. and there are traces of pigment, showing that it was once beautifully coloured.

The north-west panel shows the **Crucifixion**, with Our Lady and St. John at the foot of the cross. Working clockwise from it, the sacraments are as follows:

Ordination – an ordinand kneels before the bishop and a server holds a chrismatory, containing Holy Oils;

Holy Matrimony – the left-hand figure is missing, but we can see the priest, the server with book and the bride or groom;

Baptism – a delightful little font, with priest behind it, the family to the left and server with Holy Oils to the right;

Confirmation – the Bishop confirms a man; to the right a figure in a long surplice and cowled hood holds the Holy Oils;

Penance – a lady penitent is being absolved in a carved confessional stall and the Devil beats a hasty retreat, top left!

Mass – A lady receives Holy Communion; the chalice is on the altar, above which is a beautiful reredos;

Holy Unction – the priest anoints the sick man on the chest with Holy Oils, whilst the server stands by with the chrismatory.

The scenes are set in a background of rays, similar to the fonts at Great Glemham and Denston. Beneath the bowl are defaced angels with outstretched wings, whilst the panels of the stem have buttresses, and lilies in pots – emblems of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The font is crowned by a fine openwork **COVER**, designed by W.A. Forsyth in 1937 and reproducing the fine woodcarving and noble proportions of our few remaining 15th century font covers. The little emblems (anchor, lamb and flag, lily, millstone, feather, flower, fish and hammer) represent saints mentioned in our mediaeval wills, although St Dorothy's flower is for Dorothy Seckford, who restored the great tithes to the church in 1672, enabling the parish priest to be the rector.



Towards the east end of the south aisle wall are the **ROYAL ARMS** of King George III, dated 1774. Royal Arms were made obligatory by King Charles II in 1660 to remind people of the position of the monarch as the temporal Head of the English Church.

In the south aisle wall at this point we see the upper and lower entrances to the **ROOD-LOFT STAIRCASE**. The **BLOCKED DOORWAY** nearby was a priest's doorway, giving access to the Chapel of St Anne and to the chancel; there was almost certainly a north doorway in a corresponding position in St Nicholas Chapel wall, opposite. Further east in this wall is a **PISCINA**, into which the water from the washing of the priest's hands and other disposable water used at the Mass was poured, reminding us that this was originally the Chapel of St. Anne.



The eastern section of the north aisle was the **CHAPEL OF ST. NICHOLAS**, eastwards of which is the **ORGAN CHAMBER**, formerly the site of Thomas Seckford's Elizabethan family chapel, which was approached from the aisle by an ascent of steps and through two folding doors. It had a square east window, framed by Doric pilasters, and in the centre of the chapel was Thomas Seckford's table tomb. The chapel is now at the east end of the south aisle.

The date 1672 appears in brass studs on the lid of the sturdy **PARISH CHEST** nearby, where parish documents and valuables were stored. We think that this was originally a travelling chest, dating from the 1500s and belonging to the Seckford family. It was placed in the church on Dorothy Seckford's death in 1672 and is located now at the east end of the north aisle. It is equipped with the three locks necessary for a church chest, for which the parish priest and two churchwardens each had a key, so that all three had to be present for it to be opened.



There was an **ORGAN** in the western gallery when David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1811, but in 1818 a new instrument by William Gray was provided at a cost of £608 and was restored and enlarged by William Stidolph, the Woodbridge organ-builder, in 1858. Mr Stidolph was also responsible for rebuilding the organ in the former Seckford Chapel, and further enlarging it in 1875. A new three-manual organ with 31 speaking stops (incorporating some of the earlier pipework) was built by Alfred Monk of London and was opened in January 1886. It was rebuilt in 1973-4 by Bishop & Son, with a two-manual detached console. This fine and versatile instrument now has 34 speaking stops.

The church's main act of worship takes place at the **CENTRAL ALTAR**, providing a focal point in the midst of the building. The new sanctuary area, with its rails and reading-desk, was created in 2004 to the designs of Nicholas Jacob. The **READING DESK** incorporates woodwork from W.A. Forsyth's pulpit of 1940, with a carving of a ship. Also in 2004 the radiating **CHOIR STALLS** were introduced behind the altar, R. M. Phipson's 1875

BENCHES still provide seating in the nave and aisles. Suspended above the altar is the elegant sixteen-branch **CHANDELIER**, which is a rare survival and is the fourth oldest of its type in Britain. It was made in the Netherlands and was given to the church by Robert Elfreth in 1676.



Further east is the original sanctuary and High Altar, above which is W.A. Forsyth's **REREDOS** of 1937, flanked by canopies with statues of St. Nicholas and St. Anne (the patron saints of the mediaeval side chapels). The statues of the four Evangelists with their emblems on the reredos were added in 1952. In the **AUMBRY** (or small cupboard) in the panelling to the north (before which a hanging lamp burns) is reserved some of the consecrated bread and wine from the Holy Communion, so that it can be taken to the sick and dying and to others who need it. The large **STANDARD CANDLESTICKS**, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, were given in 1927.

In the south sanctuary wall, beneath simple cinquefoil-headed (five-lobed) 15th century arches, is a set of three **SEDILIA**, which provided seats for the Celebrant, Deacon and Subdeacon during parts of the mediaeval High Mass, to the east of which, beneath a smaller arch, is the **PISCINA** drain for the High Altar.



Opposite, beneath a 19th century arch, is the **TOMB OF THOMAS SECKFORD**, second son of Thomas Seckford of Seckford Hall. He died in 1587 and was the town's most important 16th century citizen and benefactor, providing almshouses and the Shire Hall. In his judicial capacity, he secured to the Free School an endowment from the disputed Annott bequest of 1577. He purchased the Priory site in 1564 and it remained in his family until 1673. The Seckford vault was made beneath the north-east chapel which he built, and his table-tomb stood in the centre of the chapel. Both vault and chapel were used by the Carthews from 1711 and, when it became a porch and lobby in 1839, the tomb was demolished. Parts of it were set into the walls, or thrown into the part of the lobby, which became a broom-cupboard, for which the grey marble top-slab was used as part of the floor. After the 1875 restoration, the tomb was 'reconstituted' beneath the new arch to the sanctuary and much of what we see today, including the top-slab, is 19th century.

Beneath it is a mediaeval **BURIAL SLAB** with the indent of what must have been a superb bracket brass, with two figures on pedestals, which rise from a central stem, and two shields. D.E. Davy stated in the 1820s that this was the underside of the Purbeck marble slab on the Seckford tomb and he thought that it may have been for the brass of John Albrede's grandfather (died 1400).



The **FORMER VESTRY**, to the south of the sanctuary, is now a quiet place where people may sit, meditate and pray. Its simple vaulted ceiling dates from c.1800 and its walls are lined with late 17th or 18th century wainscoting, possibly from former box-pews. Its west end has a large 16th century cupboard, with fine Elizabethan linenfold panelling. Here until comparatively recently was a library of 200 books, given to the church in 1753 by the Rev'd Thomas Hewett, former Rector of Bucklesham. These books are now in safe keeping and are being restored and catalogued. The colourful **STATUE** of our Lord in the arms of his Mother, by Faith Craft, and given in 1957 in memory of John and Nellie Arnott, was originally at the west end of the church. It is interesting that the large three-light window hidden behind the east wall never seems to have been needed to give light.



In 2010 the Rector, Churchwardens and Parochial Church Council were delighted to receive, on permanent loan from the Friends of Friendless Churches, **THE EPIPHANY**, a large Edwardian oil on canvas, by Rupert Henry Corbould, 1866-1921. Corbould was a celebrated stained glass artist who devoted much of his career to the adornment of the Church generally, including his accomplished paintings. The Epiphany, painted on canvas and stuck to the wall of St. George's Church, Perry Hill, Catford, South London, was saved. The re-dedication of the painting and blessing of The Chapel of The Epiphany were conducted in 2012 by The Right Reverend Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The modern slate plaque showing the Lord's Prayer, was designed, made and donated by local craftsman, Spencer Wix in 2015.



STAINED GLASS

NORTH AISLE : west window – All that is left of the church's mediaeval glass survives in a small roundel here, made up of jumbled fragments of 15th century glass, surrounding the arms of the Seckford Family, which was originally in the east window of the old Seckford Chapel. The small faded coat-of-arms above is also of considerable age.

Three northern aisle windows have late 19th century glass, as follows (west-east):-

1. The gift of 'the loyal women of Woodbridge' in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. This glass, by Arthur Louis Moore of London, shows St. Patrick, St. George and St. Andrew, with the Queen herself at the base of the central light.
2. The Meller Memorial Window, made in 1903 at Powell & Co's Whitefriars Studio, in memory of the Rev'd Thomas Meller (rector 1844-71) and his wife Emma. Thomas was an Evangelical and a skilled linguist, who worked with the British and Foreign Bible Society, supervising the translation of the Bible into 20 languages. Here we see Moses, King David and St. Paul, beneath which are people from places where the BFBS had worked, including Chinese, Maori, Cree Indian, Red Indian and Fijian.
3. Scenes of the risen Christ, with Mary Magdalene, his apostles by the lake, and with Thomas and the other apostles, also the angel and the three Marys at the tomb. By A.L. Moore, in memory of Thomas Carthew, who died in 1897.

SOUTH AISLE: Stained glass in the windows shows (west-east); the last three of which were renovated in 2014 by Devlin Plummer Stained Glass Ltd. of Norwich.

1. The small window over the south door has lilies in the tracery lights, by Cox & Son of London, in memory of Loder Allen, who died in 1865.
2. Coloured patterns and inscription 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord', by Cox & Son, in memory of John Loder, who died in 1865.
3. SS. John the Baptist, Edward the Confessor, Stephen, George, King David, SS. Barnabas, Paul and Augustine, worship Christ in Majesty in this 'Te Deum' window, made in 1908 by A.L. Moore. It commemorates the Rev'd RCM Rous, Rector 1870-87 (died 1904), his father and grandfather.
4. The Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple, the Stilling of the Storm and the Good Samaritan, in memory of Thomas Temple Silver (died 1868), possibly by Messrs Ward & Hughes.

PRAYER CHAPEL WINDOW: Parts of the Trinity emblem may well be old glass.

EAST WINDOW: In 1842, Mr George Thomas filled this window with stained glass patterns containing the emblems of the Four Evangelists and other Christian symbols, by Thomas Willement of London. A legacy from the Woodbridge tailor and outfitter, Walter Bloxsome, who died in 1935, made it possible for a new window to be designed in memory of Joseph and Susannah Bloxsome and their family. The versatile Martin Travers, who created some fine 20th century churches, many stunning and glorious church furnishings, (often for 'extreme' Anglo-Catholic churches) and much vibrant and colourful stained glass, designed the window and made it in 1939, although, because of the War, it was not installed until 1946. The glass proclaims 'Unto us a Child is born'. At the very top the hand of God pours out golden rays through the tracery, with the Star central. At the tops of the four lights are the arms of St George (England), the diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, the Province of Canterbury and Thomas Seckford. Bonny little cherubs hover with prophetic scrolls over a scene of the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus, being held by his Mother. Near the bottom we see the lily of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also the crown and arrows of St Edmund, above which is the golden seal of Woodbridge Priory.

MEMORIALS

Many of the windows, furnishings and features in the church were given as memorials and have appropriate inscriptions. On the walls and in the floors are several memorials to people of the past, who have been part of this church and community.

The reconstructed **TABLE TOMB** of Thomas Seckford to the north of the high altar has been described above, as has the slab beneath it with indents of brasses, almost certainly for members of the Albrede family.

In the floors is a variety of memorial slabs, including mediaeval **BURIAL SLABS**, some with the **INDENTS** of former brass effigies and inscriptions. Three **BRASS INSCRIPTIONS** have been moved to the south wall at the west end of the north aisle. One warns us, 'As thou arte, So was I; And as I am, So shall thou be'. The others commemorate Thomas Bolton (1616) and John Sayre the younger (1622), whose epitaph states '.... Heaven takes the best, still leaves the worst behind'. On the north sanctuary wall is the brass figure, shield and inscription of seven-year-old John Shorland who died in 1601 and whose epitaph is worth pausing to read.



Details of a variety of Woodbridge worthies of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries may be read on the **LEDGER SLABS** in the floors, some of which have fine coats of arms. Others are commemorated by **WALL PLAQUES** of various vintages, some of which are very pleasing craftsmanship, particularly one in the north aisle to Nathaniel Randall (1800) and another to the Rev'd Thomas Carthew (1831) near the south doorway, which has a cartouche showing his coat of arms above it. The Carthews lived at the Abbey House nearby from 1711 and several of them are commemorated in the church. (the Hatchments at the west end previously mentioned)

Kneeling in prayer and looking out at us from his splendid **WALL MONUMENT** on the east wall of the south aisle, is the Woodbridge tanner, haberdasher and churchwarden, Jeffrey Pitman (died 1627), who was High Sheriff of Suffolk in 1625. Facing each other beneath him are his two wives, Alice (died 1613), who bore him seven children, and Anne who survived him. Kneeling beneath them are the two lawyer sons, who predeceased him, William (1615) and Jeffrey (1622). All apart from Anne have rhyming epitaphs beneath them and there is a central oval inscription at the base.

To the left of the Pitman memorial is an unusual **WOODEN MEMORIAL** to George Denman-Dean, who was killed in action in 1917, aged 21. A small oval door at the base will open to reveal the young soldier's photograph. His father, the Rev'd Richard Denman-Dean (rector 1900-1920) did much to foster the Catholic tradition of this church. He came here from Wickham Market, as did also his predecessor, the Rev'd Tom Housecroft (rector 1895-1900).



EXPLORING THE EXTERIOR

The hillside **SETTING** of St. Mary's is superb. Church Street, with its fine old houses, rises to the churchyard's eastern entrance, with the great bulk of the church set in its green churchyard. The northern approach via the alley and steps descends dramatically from the Market Hill to the sumptuous porch, giving a fine overview of the north side of the church's long body. If time allows, it is worth exploring the atmospheric **CHURCHYARD**, which provides a peaceful oasis in the heart of the town and has some interesting chest-tombs and headstones commemorating Woodbridge worthies. Shaded by trees a short climb westwards from the tower is the chest-tomb of John Clarkson, the anti-slavery campaigner and younger brother of the more famous Thomas Clarkson of Playford. He spent his later life in Woodbridge, where he died in 1828.

It is certainly worth climbing a little to the west part of the churchyard to enjoy the west face of the mighty **TOWER** – the church's crowning glory and one of the grandest flint towers in England, soaring to a height of 108 feet, which is just about equal to the length of the body of the church. A magnificent piece of design, craftsmanship and structural engineering, this amazing tower was built by hand between c.1448 and 1463 and is worth examining in detail.

The lover of church design will be fascinated by the buttresses, which strengthen its corners, and provide a rare textbook of buttress design, with great polygonal buttresses at the base, rising to square clasping buttresses, then elegant angle buttresses, then slender diagonal buttresses. The basecourse plinth is embellished with flint and stone flushwork motifs, including the special quatrefoil (four-lobed) motif with mouchettes (like curved daggers), the trademark of the Aldryche workshop at North Lopham, which produced beautiful flushwork for many East Anglian churches. There is also the crowned 'Maria' emblem, for Our Lady, where the distinctive 'M' motif incorporates an 'A', an 'R' and an 'I' and thus contains all the letters of 'Maria'.

The great west doorway has a fine and well-restored arch with the (renewed) arms of Margaret Brotherton (three Plantagenet lions with a three-pointed label at the top) and the crowned rampant lion for her husband, Lord John Segrave, in the spandrels framing the arch. This grand processional entrance is flanked by flushwork panelling, with a frieze of Aldryche panels and a central IHC, with an interwoven S (for our Lord),



forming a base for the magnificent five-light west window – the largest and grandest in the building. The bell-chamber windows are unusual and elegant. They are pairs of double openings set beneath a hoodmould (to deflect rainwater), but with simple flushwork between, similar to those at Elmswell – another Aldryche tower.



The parapet is an amazing showpiece of flushwork patterns and motifs. It is a double parapet, which is a feature of Suffolk towers, the lower section having a scrolly pattern and the upper embattled part enriched with tracery panels and stone shields set in borders of lozenges. Above, in the battlements, are tiny and exquisite panels, including 'M's, the Aldryche motif and other designs.

The string-course dividing the parapets has fine carved heads, some of which are gargoyles. The tower is crowned by four corner pinnacles and the emblems of the four Evangelists (replaced in the 1870s), and there are indications that the other battlements were also once crowned by pinnacles.

In the masonry on the north side, about 24 feet up and towards the east, is a piece of stone once inscribed 'Albrede', doubtless for John, who was one of the tower's chief benefactors, leaving 20 marks (£13.6s.8d) in 1448 'to the fabric and foundation of a tower to be newly made'. Also in this corner are the small windows lighting the spiral staircase, which ascends the lower section of the tower; to climb to the roof involves a second staircase in the north-west corner (its windows may be seen on the west side). Two staircases in a tower are rare, but not unique – it also occurs at St. Mary's, Bungay.

It is interesting that the parishioners had to build their tower on what was Priory land and so each year the churchwardens present to the Rector (now that there is no Prior) a red rose, in lieu of rents for this land, a renewal of an ancient practice.

Also originally from the Aldryche workshop is the magnificent flushwork adorning the **NORTH PORCH** (c.1455-63) – again one of the finest of its period in East Anglia, although much of the flushwork and the stonework of the entrance arch and the three-light windows was carefully renewed in 1863-4. Its walls and polygonal buttresses have basecourses with a variety of motifs (which may not be totally accurate reproductions of their weathered mediaeval predecessors), including wheel designs, chalices and Hosts for the Blessed Sacrament, monstres displaying the sacred Host and emblems including the 'M' for Maria and 'IS' for St. John.



The east wall is covered with flushwork panelling, above which are the three crowns and arrows for St. Edmund and his kingdom of East Anglia (also the Priory at Ely) and the lion and crown for Katharine Mowbray. The west wall is plain, with flushwork only on the basecourse and parapet. The north face is magnificent, with its array of flushwork panelling, its richly-moulded entrance arch (with St. Michael and the dragon in the spandrels) and three niches above. (Note their original little vaulted ceilings, and the angels beneath them). They were given their statues of Our Lady, her mother St. Anne and St Eltheldreda in 1866, when the parapet received back its seven pinnacles.



After a very generous donation, in 2017-8 Abbeygate Mason and F A Valiant of Bury St Edmunds renovated the North Porch, by repointing knapped flints, repairing coping stones, niches, leadwork, door, buttresses, the roof and the lime plaster.



The main **BODY OF THE CHURCH** seems rather an anti-climax after the tower and porch, but it is an interesting and imposing structure. Its original plan was similar to several of the great churches of Suffolk and Norfolk (including Southwold, Blythburgh, Lowestoft, Covehithe and several in the city of Norwich), with an unbroken nave and chancel, flanked by aisles which extend one bay into the chancel to form chapels. Here, however, the north aisle was extended in the 1500s to form the Seckford Chapel and the south aisle in the 1600s to create the vestry. What is unusual in the plan is that the west ends of the aisles stop a few feet short of the nave's west end, allowing the great buttresses of the tower to be free-standing.

The aisles are lit by large three-light windows. Their stonework is mostly renewed, while the north aisle's flushwork basecourse with its 'proud' stonework and also the flushwork between the northern clerestory

windows, is all 19th century. The clerestory, nevertheless, shows 15th century perpendicular architecture at its zenith and its fine array of fourteen triple windows really does provide a 'clear storey' to flood the upper part of the church with light. A horizontal string-course links the windows on the north side, which was clearly the 'show side', but not on the south, where the flintwork is less elaborate. The keen eye will notice that at the very top of the north and south clerestory walls are three courses of gault bricks, almost certainly put there in 1839 when the roof was restored. Also of 1839 is the eastern extension of the north aisle, when George Thomas replaced the Elizabethan Seckford Chapel with an entrance vestibule to the gallery stairs, with its rather large and incongruous doorway. The walls of the brick vestry on the corresponding side have been rendered over. The chancel's east wall has also been restored, but has a lofty grandeur, which is enhanced by its four-light east window.



SOME LANDMARKS IN THE CHURCH'S HISTORY

From 7th century, this area of south-east Suffolk had a special relationship with the monastery at Ely, founded by St. Etheldreda. Woodbridge was at the centre of a large area which formed the 'Wicklaw', or Liberty of St. Etheldreda, with several manors and churches under the control of Ely and functioning in many ways as a separate administrative area until 1889. A steward of the Liberty of Ely, called Ernald Rufus, founded a small priory of Augustinian canons to the south and south-east of the present church in 1193. These priests/monks shared the already existing parish church, which was standing when the Domesday Survey was compiled in **1086**, and the Prior was also rector of the parish.

We think that around **1432**, Katherine Neville, widow of John Mowbray, the great grandson of John Segrave and Margaret de Brotherton, may have been the main donor towards the present parish church and this may explain the flushwork motifs of the Catherine wheel and the Mowbray lion on the porch's east wall. John Mowbray was the great grandson of John Segrave and of Margaret de Brotherton – grand-daughter of King Edward 1. It was believed that the priory church stood to the south of the present church, although some now consider that it may have been to the east.

Unlike most mediaeval churches, St. Mary's was more or less built in one piece and the 58 or so extant wills between **1417** and **1545** show that local people were generous in contributing to its construction, adornments and maintenance, enabling us to date the building approximately. Whilst there were eight bequests to the new north porch between 1455 and 1463, fifteen wills left money for the new tower between 1444 and 1463. The Woodbridge twill-weaver, John Albrede, made generous bequests in 1448 to building and founding the tower i.e. the foundations and maybe the first stage and for painting the great rood; ten years later his widow, Agnes, made a further bequest for painting the rood loft. Further wills mention a chapel of St. Nicholas, altar of St. Anne and images of Our Lady, St. Andrew, St. Barbara, St. George, St. William and the Holy Trinity, also the 'doors' (perhaps a triptych) of SS. Crispin and Crispinian. There was also a chapel of St. Thomas à Becket, but this was in the adjacent Priory Church, for which there are also several bequests, both to the church and to the canons and novices who used it. During the late 1400s and early 1500s, bequests were made for vestments, plate, lead for the roof, service books and three bequests (in 1522, 1525 and 1533) towards the new High Altar of the parish church, showing that it was just about complete. .

The priory was dissolved in **1537**, its church was demolished in 1542 and its site and manor was purchased in 1564 by Thomas Seckford, the town's greatest benefactor. He extended St. Mary's north aisle eastwards to form a chapel and vault for his family, where his body was buried in 1588. By then so much of the church's internal décor had been altered to equip it for the needs of the Reformed Church, by Law Established, with its services and Scriptures in English and its hatred of the old 'visual aids'. Chantry chapels, rood-lofts, statues and images, stone altars, wall-paintings, etc. had been abolished by law.

The Puritans in **1644** went even further and William Dowsing, the Puritan Inspector for the destruction of 'superstitious images and inscriptions', recorded on his visit to St. Mary's on January 27th, 'We took up 2 superstitious inscriptions in brass; and gave order to take down 30 superstitious pictures' (probably the saints on the screen). It may well be that the parishioners had already attempted to make the church 'Dowsing friendly' – the defacing of the font must have taken place at this time and the Churchwardens' Accounts record the sum of 7s 8d spent on 'taking down the images'.

During the years that followed, the interior was further changed to enable the large congregation to hear the preaching of the Word. A musicians' gallery was built at the west-end in **1625**, probably by Edmund Burwell, (son-in-law of Jeffry Pitman) whose arms could be seen on it. A north-west gallery followed in **1638**. By 1811 the west gallery stretched the full width of the nave and aisles and contained an organ. Above it was a second gallery which could accommodate 100 schoolboys. Galleries stretched the entire length of the north and south aisles, their fronts level with the arcades. The north gallery was built in **1777** and the south gallery, built in **1793**, was extended eastwards in **1813** and was approached through a small porch and staircase, for which the churchwardens demanded two shillings in the £1 from members of the congregation. An ensuing court case halved this amount, with the churchwardens paying the rest! The nave and aisles were filled with uniform sets of box-pews and the three-decker pulpit stood in the centre aisle, near the west end and facing east in 1811, although in **1839** it was moved eastwards into the chancel, facing west. Wainscot panelling lined the lower ten feet of the sanctuary walls and, filling the east end beneath the high-set east window, was the magnificent 17th century oak altarpiece, with its Corinthian columns, gilt cherubim, central 'Glory' (the IHS monogram surrounded by rays of light), the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Commandments and the Dove of the Holy Spirit in a starry firmament beneath the great pediment, which crowned it.

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More improvements were made in **1839** by Mr George Thomas of The Thorofare, who offered to 'beautify' the church, on condition that the roof was repaired and its leadwork renewed, for which money was subscribed. Mr Thomas duly spent over £850 on his 'improvements'. Mr George Carthew 'liberally gave up' his family chapel (formerly the Seckford Chapel), which was altered to become a new entrance lobby, with stairs to the north gallery. Part of the mediaeval screen base was cut up and made into a reading desk which, with the pulpit and clerk's desk, was installed in the chancel and the east window was provided with stained glass by Thomas Willement of London.



A major restoration took place in **1874-5** when the church was closed for nine months and worship was transferred to St. John's Church. The vast congregation at the re-opening services on 2nd April 1875 found the interior of their church transformed. The galleries were removed, as were the three-decker pulpit and altarpiece; the box-pews were replaced by open benches and the base of the mediaeval screen was rebuilt in its original position. The organ was moved to the Seckford Chapel, which was opened out by a new arch to the chancel. Other new furnishings were provided and the effect was described as 'almost magical'. The architect was Richard Makilwaine Phipson, who restored many East Anglian churches and designed the splendid rebuilding of St. Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich and Great Finborough churches. The contractors were all Woodbridge tradesmen – bricklayers Benjamin Dove and John Fosdike, carpenters George Thurman and John Frost and the stonemason was William Stephenson, who also designed the new altar table and donated the sanctuary floor of Minton's tiles.

In **1887** the Rector and his four brothers decided to donate a new rood-screen, to be designed by J.P. Seddon and carved by Harry Hems of Exeter, in memory of their late father, Major Rolla Rous, who had been Patron and Lord of the Manor. Clearly nothing came of this because the mediaeval (Albrede) screen was retained and in **1894** a new upper part was made for it by John Kent of Sheffield in memory of Mr. Richard Jones, a local surgeon. This was dedicated by the Bishop of Norwich in March 1895. Its base still enclosed 14 mediaeval painted panels, but these were replaced in **1898** by 24 new panels (in memory of Mary Neale and her daughter), which were faithful copies of the originals (from Isaac Johnson's c.1790 drawings in the British Museum). They were painted by Mr J.T. Carter of Vassall Road, Kennington, who had worked for G. F. Bodley and C.E. Kempe. The tracery was painted and gilded by William Woodruffe of Woodbridge. The mediaeval panels were preserved and may now be seen near the font. The upper part became a tower screen in 1970 and was taken down in the 2003 reordering. The two halves of the mediaeval dado, with their 1898 panels, now face each other along the north and south aisle walls.

Much took place during the 20th century to conserve and beautify St. Mary's, particularly between **1935-1948**, under the supervision of the London architect William A. Forsyth. He designed the reredos, font cover and north doors (also south chapel furnishings and a pulpit, since removed) and supervised several structural repairs.

Alterations took place in **1952** and in **1970**, when the 1894 screen was moved to the west end. Visitors are very soon aware of the ambitious **21st century** re-ordering, which includes the spacious gallery and sacristy at the west end, designed by Philip Orchard of the Whitworth Co-Partnership, the central altar, choir stalls and treasury, designed by Nicholas Jacob and transformation of the former sacristy into a quiet chapel for prayer and meditation.



In recent years the people of St Mary's have again had cause to be very grateful for the advice and guidance of Mr Nicholas Jacob BA BArch RIBA AABC.

Please pray for the people who work and worship here today, and please accept their sincere gratitude for any contribution that you have kindly given to help them maintain this glorious church intact and beautiful for future generations to use and to enjoy.

It has been a great delight to research and compile this short History and Guide for visitors and pilgrims to glorious St. Mary's and I have had tremendous fun trying to solve a few (but by no means all) of its mysteries. I acknowledge with gratitude the work of authors of previous works about the church, not least John Dallinger's superb 'Record' of 1875. I am grateful to the Rector, Canon Kevan McCormack for much advice, encouragement and laughter, to Penny Bird, the late Cynthia Brown, Revd Paul Hambling, Dr James Harper, Veronica Howe, Janice Poulson, Rhona Sampson, Virginia Spray and TFS Photo Woodbridge, and particularly to Rita James who has co-ordinated this 2nd edition; also the late Birkin Haward and Peter Northeast, for sharing their specialist knowledge, and to the staffs of the Suffolk and Norfolk County Record Offices, Norwich Library and Lambeth Palace Library for the use of material in their care.

Roy Tricker 2011 (with updates 2019)

