

ST. MARY'S CHURCH GREAT BRADLEY

From Information given by the Notes of RW Tricker (1975)

Great Bradley is a small parish in Suffolk situated near the Cambridgeshire border. It lies about 7 miles north of Haverhill and 8 miles south of Newmarket. The village is set in attractive and peaceful countryside, well away from the rush of industry, motorways and towns, and near the source of the River Stour.

The parish church of SAINT MARY is one of which any village could be proud. It is not a large building but it contains several treasures and much of beauty and interest to reward the visitor.

Parts of this church date back to the 12th century, the time of the Normans. Two doorways and the jambs of the chancel arch were built at this time, as was probably the core of the nave and chancel. Most of the windows in the body of the church were inserted during the Decorated period of the early 14th century. The fine western tower appears to date from the late 14th Century and was further beautified during the 15th century, in the Perpendicular style. The south porch was built during the reign of Henry VIII, probably about 1530. The chancel (which was several feet longer at one time) was repaired in 1864 and the church was further restored in 1896 and in 1911.

The building consists of square west tower, nave, chancel and south porch. Its approximate dimensions are: -

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Nave | Length - 44ft.9ins. | Breadth - 20ft. 6ins. |
| Chancel | Length - 26ft. 6ins. | Breadth - 17ft. 6ins. |
| Tower | N/S - 10ft. 4ins. | E/W - 11ft. 6ins. |
| Porch | N/S 10ft. 6ins. | E/W 8ft. 5ins. |

EXTERIOR

The church is beautifully situated in a pretty churchyard and its exterior is worth pausing to examine. The passing of time has mellowed its walls and a pleasing assortment of colours and textures can be seen in this ancient building.

The crowning glory of the exterior is certainly the handsome western tower, which merits detailed examination. Its walls are strengthened by set-back angle buttresses at the corners. The set-offs (or sloping ridges) of these buttresses have lions and shields carved on them. These can be seen on the southern and western sides of the tower. The staircase turret, near the south-east corner of the tower, extends a few feet above the parapet. This adds great dignity to the tower and it occurs in several churches in this south western corner of Suffolk (eg Withersfield and Hundon). Around the base of the tower and its buttresses is a simple frieze of chequered flushwork in flint and stone. The fine Perpendicular west doorway has a square hood mould, which rests upon corbel heads and has roses and foliage in the spandrels. Above it is the three-light west window, which is also in the Perpendicular style. The ringing chamber is lit by small rectangular apertures on the north, south and west sides. All four faces of the tower and the stair turret are crowned with embattled parapets, beneath which are fine gargoyles to drain the rainwater from the roof of the tower.

The windows of the nave and chancel are two-light windows in the Decorated style. Some of the stonework in them has been renewed during comparatively recent times.

On the north side of the nave are two double windows, of which the westernmost is of slightly later date and is similar to the belfry windows. To the east of these is a small rectangular window, which was probably inserted to give light to the rood

screen. The north doorway of the nave is Norman. Although it is a very large doorway, the workmanship is quite simple and the arch rests on plain shafts and capitals. In the north wall of the chancel is another simple two-light window, which has been largely renewed.

The east wall and its two-light window date from comparatively recent times and the chancel did at one time extend further eastwards. A string course runs around the exterior wall **of the** chancel.

In the south doorway of the chancel is a Decorated priest's doorway, with a hood mould and corbel heads, also a pair of simple, renewed two-light windows, which are similar to that of the north side.

In the churchyard, near the chancel are some good 17th-century gravestones, which have been carefully preserved because of their sheltered position.

In the south wall of the nave are two double windows, which are more elaborate than those in the chancel. The hood mould of the eastern window rests upon corbel heads.

The fine south porch is built of Tudor brick and tradition has it that the bricks were made by Henry VIII's own brickmaker. Its south face is somewhat ambitious, but is noteworthy, with its stepped gable and a total of eight niches. The three niches above the doorway have worn stone animal heads. The doorway itself has a square hood mould with quatrefoils in the spandrels. The two-light lateral windows are also set under the squared hood moulds. Inside, the porch has original timbers in the roof and the cinquefoil-headed niche of a Holy Water stoup in its eastern wall.

This porch has helped to shelter and preserve one of the greatest treasures of the church - the magnificent Norman south doorway. This dates from the latter part of the Norman period

(ie well into the 12th century) and is in a fine state of preservation. Its semi-circular arch, which is covered with several layers of zig-zag moulding, rests upon tall circular shafts, with spiral fluting and carved capitals. Beneath the arch is a restored tympanum, which was probably decorated with carvings at one time, and which is supported by two human heads.

INTERIOR

The interior of this church is bright, homely and beautifully cared-for. Its beauty has been greatly enhanced by the careful and judicious use of colour.

A Perpendicular arch divides the tower from the nave. In the north wall of the tower is a FIREPLACE, which may have been used for the baking of wafer bread for use at the Eucharist. The outlet for the smoke can be seen in the exterior wall, some 16 feet up and covered with a stone baffle.

Near the west end of the nave, in the south wall, is a deep RECESS, which may have been used as a cupboard in mediaeval times. On the west wall is a LIST OF RECTORS of the church from the year 1311.

The octagonal stone FONT dates from the late 14th century. In the panels of the bowl are quatrefoils, containing fleurons. More fleurons and some shields are carved beneath the bowl. Around the stem are trefoil-headed arches and around its base are more fleurons. A careful look at this font reveals traces of ORIGINAL COLOUR in the stonework.

The nave ROOF contains much of its original timber framework and is supported by four old tiebeams, with king posts. Two more old tiebeams (and one modern tiebeam) support the modern roof of the chancel.

The nave is fitted with simple but very tasteful modern benches and at the north east corner is the fine 18th-century PULPIT, which is complete with back and sounding board. This was until recently a two-decker pulpit, but its lower stall has now been removed.

The eastern end of the nave has been cut away on both sides, presumably to accommodate a very handsome Rood Screen.

This must have been a truly magnificent affair and its loft probably extended well into the nave, with side altars beneath it. Perhaps the stone CORBEL on the south wall supported part of it. Certainly there were side altars as their PISCINAE can be seen in recesses in the north and south walls. The rood loft stairs were probably situated on the south side, where the wall is **cut** away at a higher level.

The CHANCEL ARCH has a plain and pointed head, but its jambs are Norman and the later arch rests upon Norman impostes. The floor has been cut away to reveal the stonework at the base of the arch.

At the eastern end of the south wall of the sanctuary is a very fine 14th century SEDELE, which has a trefoil-headed ogee arch, resting upon semi-circular pillasters with moulded capitals and bases. Above it is a hood mould, which terminates in a foliated finial and rests upon one remaining corbel head. When the chancel reached to its full length there may have been more sedilla and piscinae in this wall. Parts of the STRING COURSE around the chancel wall are probably mediaeval.

The altar is a Stuart HOLY TABLE, which has been in use **for** about 300 years.

On the south wall of the chancel is a WALL MONUMENT, commemorating the Rev'd William Nash and his wife. He was

Rector here and died in 1783. Other wall plaques can be seen on the north wall of the chancel, commemorating four brothers - Charles, John, Bumard and Percival Wilder, who were all in turn Rectors of the parish, and held this living for a total of 74 successive years.

The church has a small, but beautifully toned ORGAN. This instrument is of considerable age for a village church organ and was built by Gray of London. It has five speaking stops.

In the tower hang three BELLS. The tenor is of great age and interest. It is inscribed 'RICHARD DE WYMBIS ME FECIT' (Wimbish is a small village near Saffron Walden). This bell almost certainly dates from the early years of the 14th century. The second bell, according to Raven, dates from 1576. The treble bell bears no inscription, so its origins are unknown, but authorities claim that this is almost certainly a pre-Reformation bell.

Amongst the church PLATE is a paten made in 1684 and two cups, dating from 1743 and 1809. *

The REGISTERS of the church go back to the year 1701.

Mr. Tricker's notes end as follows:

We welcome you to this ancient parish church, parts of which have stood for 800 years. This building is no museum, but is the Father's House. For this reason many generations of people have loved and cared for it down the centuries and have handed it down intact for us, in the 20th century (now the 21st century), to use and enjoy. Few visitors could fail to see the care which is lavished upon it by its present day custodians, who have the task of offering it and maintaining it for God's glory and for future generations.

The upkeep of an ancient building such as this is extremely

costly and the people of this small community would welcome your prayers and any contributions (however small) that you could spare, for this important task.

Mr. Tricker signs his notes!-

*A.M.D.G
(AD MEIOREM DEI GLORIA)
R.W.T. 1975*