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# The Church of St George Bradfield St. George



**By L.A. & D.W. Aves 1978**

**Revised and Updated 2014 by**

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## THE CHURCH

The Church. St. George is the most striking feature of the Village, particularly when viewed from the west, framed as it is by trees.

At various stages throughout its life, it has been enlarged and altered. The south wall of the nave is Norman. By standing close to the wall inside, it is easy to see how the wide base of the wall slopes back as it rises, possibly late 12th century. The north wall would have been built similarly, and the building as such would have been the simple basis of the original Church.



As the population grew, the Church was too small, and a north aisle was added. Possibly, at the same time, the roof of the nave was lowered - there is clear evidence of this on the east side of the tower - and the north and south walls were raised with clerestory windows installed. The two gargoyles on both the north and south walls may have been taken from their previous lower position and re-used act as a form of spout to carry away the rainwater. On the north side, they are more difficult to see because of the subsequent addition of the north aisle.

The question then arises, when was the tower added? An interesting Will, made in 1496, was located by Mr. A.R. Allanin in the West Suffolk Record Office. Extracts read as follows

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*In the name of God Amen.  
I William Cowper of Monks Bradfield in the County Suffolk  
husbandman....*

***Will that the parishioners of the town of Bradfield will go to the building of the new steeple within the space of 4 years. I will they have of my goods marks 10"***

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Since a steeple could also have been read as a tower, it might be thought there was no tower at this period. If it was erected within four years after 1496, with the old nave, it must have stood some time to allow an impression of the nave roof to remain as a permanent marking. In turn this would place the reconstructed nave nearer the 16th century.

Supporting the Church tower are two stepped buttresses. Both bear an inscription reading

**N.W.**  
**here begyn**  
**nyth John**  
**Baco(n) owthe**

**SW.**  
**of the fu(n)da**  
**cyon Thu p(re )**  
**serwe hyn**

There were Bacons in Monks Bradfield before the Norman Conquest, one William Bacon being a tenant in 1065-1093. A Henry Bacon is referred to in 1304 whilst a John Bacon of Bradfield appears in the Suffolk Feet of Fines 1321. Other John Bacons come to light in 1475 and 1500. On the assumption it was one of this family who built the tower, the question is when and how does William Cowper's will fit in?

During the first half of the 19th century, David Elisha Davey, accompanied by Henry Jermyn, visited most of Suffolk's Churches, making notes. Today, these manuscripts are in the British Museum, but a microfilm copy is held at the West Suffolk Record Office. From this, we learn Davey visited Bradfield St. George twice, once in April 1811, and again in October 1834.. His notes are most informative, and from them we see the

changes the Church has undergone during the past century and a half.

There was a double piscina in the chancel in the south side, the Communion Table being raised on two steps within the rails. He speaks of a niche and canopy, and here, too, was a staircase to the rood loft. Against the eastern wall of the north aisle were the Belief (Creed?) and Lord's Prayer. (In his plan he shows a window here).

Under the arch, between the chancel and the nave, were the Commandments and the Arms of George III (1760-1820 ) (Something similar existed at Yaxley). Texts of scriptures were painted on the walls, whilst the font stood against the last pillar north side. At the west end was a gallery.

On the occasion of his second visit, he noted the eastern clerestory window had a figure in glass of St. George in armour, and on foot with a spear in his hands, but the dragon was lost. In the large window below this, still remained the letter E (Tudor ) (?Edward VI 1547-1553 or Elizabeth I 1558-1603). In the south window of the nave, north (probably intended to read west) side was a niche walled up. The Commandments, etc., were on the sides of the east window of the chancel.

Comparing the foregoing with the present day, the double piscina has gone, probably disappearing during Victorian alterations to the Church. There are now three steps to the Communion table.

Most interesting is the fact that the north wall of the chancel is considerably thicker than the south wall. Undoubtedly at the time the vestry was added, such alterations took place.

Turning to the rood loft, the width of the supporting columns to the arch is sufficient to have taken the rood loft. More interesting is seeking the entrance to where the staircase was. The walls have been tapped, yielding a clue.

John Gage, writing in 1814, says ...(there) is a large square opening opposite the pulpit ... are the remains of the very narrow tower by which a winding staircase led to the rood loft, the door to which from the pew below appears a very small lancet stopped ... with loose stone and rubbish and is a very perfect example of the use of these openings in the wall between the Church and the chancel so often mistaken as their use. It is hardly possible to invent a staircase of smaller dimensions than this has been.

The reference to a gallery at the west end is interesting. The Church, as it is at present, can accommodate a congregation of 90 to 100, yet Visitation returns during the last century show figures in excess of that number.

Undoubtedly the population of Bradfield town had increased from the Middle Ages; we know in 1801 it had reached the figure of 354. Short of enlarging the Church again, a cheaper method was the installation of a gallery. How many it accommodated, where the staircase stood, and when it was removed, we cannot now say. It could also have served as a singing gallery.

Nearby, a stone truss in the upper corner where the north wall of the nave joins the tower, bears in the bottom right hand corner an incised shield. In the left hand corner are four parallel vertical lines. Higher up, appear two numerals 21.

### **Porch**

On entering by the south porch, note the sundial bearing the inscription "Come in Time", possible 18th century as it is noted by John Gage in his Illustration of the Church in 1810. There are also mason's marks to the right of the porch entrance with a date 176-.

Almost on the same level round the corner of the porch, further markings appear. Inside the porch there is a rough carving depicting a hand raised in blessing, possibly a symbol of God the Father. The entrance to the Church is beneath a moulded ogee

arch. Over the inside of the doorway (the present door was a gift by Mr D. Harvey in 1961, whilst Gage refers to an earlier door dating from Richard II (1377) or Henry IV (1399) there is a moulding with carved heads either side, replacing something earlier. Indeed, Gage refers to a very ancient fragment of a label (moulding) with two masks (reproduction of faces).

### **Interior**

Visitors will undoubtedly be impressed by the brightness, the flowers, and the polish, reflecting the care and devotion of the parishioners.

The north aisle is separated from the nave by three arches on four perpendicular columns. At the eastern end is a smaller narrower arch, probably inserted during the Victorian era. Near this opening is a niche with a Crusader figure. The latter was the idea of the Rev. J.R.M. Wright in 1946 as a war memorial. Initially it was decided to have a few simple words indicating a thanksgiving for the safety of the village amid all those who served during the war. After some controversy, the figure of St. George, designed by Mr. C.Blakeman, was completed in 1949.



Observe the four pews in the north aisle with carved and traceried backs and poppy heads, (The word poppy, is derived from the French "Poupee' meaning a doll or puppet). There are four choir stalls similar. A longer pew in the northwest corner has carved bench ends, but lacks the carved features on the back.

An engraved stone on the south wall near the door records the names of nineteen men who gave their lives in the First World War. The reredos also serves as a further reminder.

### **Roof**

Spanning the nave, note the arch-braced cambered tie beam roof with its seven heavily moulded arched braces and tracery. Examination of the carvings on these beams shows two dragons, acanthus leaves and similar. There are a number of escutcheons or shields bearing letters B, n, and outlines of tools. Each of the corbels bear different carvings.

A line of carved wooden bosses or plaques, 17 on either side, will be noticed above the clerestory windows, with tooth-like moulding above. One or two represent a Tudor rose, another possibly a pomegranate.



In 1972/3, it was found that the roof of the north aisle was leaking. When this was removed, other depredations came to light, in that the roof timbers were discovered to be badly infected. This small parish was then faced with repairs amounting to between £3,000 and £4,000. Through strenuous efforts of the Treasurer, Martin Corke supported by members of the Parochial Church Council, these expenses were eventually met. Shortly afterwards, the great gale at the beginning of January 1976 caused damage to the porch roof, west window and drainage pipes.

The east window is modern, being erected in 1913, bearing the inscription;

***To the Glory of God and in loving memory of***

***Geo. Francis Turner born 1816 died 1911***

***Laura Harriet Turner, born 1822 died 1911***

The Rev. G.F. Turner was rector of Bradfield St. George 1883 - 1900.

On the south side observe the small Norman window; the main windows are Perpendicular, with three clerestory windows on either side. Note how the clerestory window's cut into the larger windows.

The remnants of stained glass in the window on the south side of the chancel, representing St. George and the Dragon, have, according to Davey's notes, been removed from the clerestory south side.

However, T. Martin's notes circa 1741, some 70 years earlier than Davey, state there were two painted upper north windows. One was the headless figure of Wyllm Bradley kneeling beside possibly a prayer stool (believed to be William Bradley who died in 1498) and the other a man slaying a dragon at his feet, no mention of a horse, with a lance or spear.



Regrettably the glass has been broken and/or lost in the moves. Sir John Cullum in Volume I of his manuscript circa 1760, confirms Martin's observations adding there were some letters above St. George which he could not connect. He goes on to comment on the east window of the north (a)isle which had in old characters the word SABINI.

Davey, without any comments, confirms the existence of a window here in his plan. Although it has been filled in, probably when the vestry was built in the last century, the outline of the two lights can still be seen. Gage, however, refers to a three light window here as dating to the time of Henry VIII (1509 -47).

### Font

Probably our first introduction to the Church is by baptism. Generally the font will be found at the western end of the Church near the entrance. The font is an octagonal one, simple, of the 14th century.



### Pulpit



The pulpit is octagonal, Jacobean, carved on all sides. Close to the pulpit is the frame of an hour-glass by which the preacher gauged the length of his sermon with. no doubt, the congregation anxiously watching the fall of the sand.

### Registers

The Church registers commence in 1555, and are now in the custody of the West Suffolk Record Office, Bury St. Edmunds. A study of these reveals the number of young children who lived for a comparatively short time. About the middle of the 17th century three sets of twins were born, but one set was buried within the week. By contrast, Widow Bumpstead was buried in 1641 aged 105 years. Later in the century certificates appeared for burials in woollen.

An entry in Register No. 4 (1732 - 1783) reads;

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***The Church and chancell were white-washed and Beautified in July 1 733"***

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### The Tower

A circular staircase with 40 steps, well trodden, leads to the first chamber of the tower. A further 16 steps, even more worn, lead to the belfry, where hang five bells:

- |                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 1. H.P. made me                  | 1695 |
| 2. R.O.G.                        | 1668 |
| 3. Robard Gurney made me         | 1668 |
| 4. Lester & Pack of London fecit | 1764 |
| 5. Henry Pleasant made me        | 1695 |

Robard Gurney, son of Andrew Gurney, lived in Bury.

In 1694 Thomas Nunn paid £17. 0. 5d. in full discharge for ringing and hanging bells, whilst new bell ropes cost £2 in 1874. Seventeen years later, through the efforts of the Rev.G.F.Turner, the five bells were recast.

A set of wooden steps lends to a wooden platform alongside the bells. From the platform, a fixed loft ladder of 12 — 15 rungs reaches to an opening giving access to the top of the tower and its pinnacles, two of which were repaired by Hanchetts in 1925.

From the tower roof, where a Government surveyor was given permission in 1938 to put a triangulation point, good views are obtained. Without difficulty, fourteen churches can be located to the NW., N., and N.E. On the south side, due to the glare of the sun, it is difficult to locate churches. It is preferable to study the view in early spring, before the trees break.

Davey, in his notes writes "It commands so large a prospect that from it may be seen sixty churches in the circumference. The fire at Thrapston in Northamptonshire which happened a few years

ago (pre 1721) was seen from it. (Thrapston is 60 miles N.W. as the crow flies.)

Although the belfry windows have been covered with wire mesh to keep out birds, one of the window coverings gave way and pigeons and other birds used the belfry as a sanctuary, with the result that the platform and the bells were coated with muck. As an outcome" the bells would not ring properly. The Rector and Barry Scarfe cleaned all five bells in 1977.

Earlier, an adjunct to the tower was a flagstaff erected in 1932.

### **Church Treasures**

On show at the West Suffolk Exhibition of Church Treasures held at Ickworth in June 1967 was silver owned by the Church. The items were

*Silver Communion Cup, plain, straight sides, height 8" London 1661*

*Silver Paten, on foot diameter 7" London 1686*

*Silver flagon, tankard shaped, height 11 ", engraved-St. George and the Dragon. Maker 's mark T F London 1720*

*Silver Alms dish, diameter 9 1/2". Maker's mark T F London, 1720*

(The arms shown on this are those of Sir Robert Davers of Rougham, who succeeded his father as 2nd Baronet in 1685.)

### **Interior Dimensions**

As it is unlikely plans of the Church exist the following measurements of the interior may be of interest

From centre of West Arch to end of the Nave 39' 4"

From centre of West Arch to the altar steps 59' 0

From centre of West Arch to Top of steps 60' 1

From centre of West Arch to Inside west wall (tower) 12' 11"

From centre of West Arch to West door frame 16' 4"

Width of Church 31' 2" Width of Main aisle 19' 0"

Other measurements have been taken, but the above will give an idea of the size of the Church.

### **Incumbents**

A list of incumbents dating from February 1300 to 1811 may be found on microfilm in the Record Office at Bury St. Edmunds, taken from Tanner's manuscripts. There is however, a reference in Kalendar of Abbot Samson to Arnold the Clerk, parson of Bradfield c. 1200-1211.

#### Subsequent Incumbents

1802- 53 Robert Davers	1935 - 38 P.M. Aldous
1854- 83 C.J. Cartwright	1938- 45 *H C Eves
1883 - 1900 E.G. Turner	1946 - 53 J.R.M. Wright
1901 - 27 E.G.B. Inge	1955 - 63 Selwyn Evans
1928 - 35 H. Pettman	1964 - 77 iW. Bennett
1977 - 90 J. Hobbs	1991- 94 J.C.Ross
1995- 2001 J.Swain	2003 - 11 Simon Hill
2012 - Sharon Potter	

\* The Rev. H.C. Eves enrolled as a Chaplain to H.H. Forces, 23rd January 1940. He was able to get away from barracks from time to time to take services otherwise the Provost, Canon J. White assisted.

Pastoral reorganisation to decrease the number of clergy in the area has meant Bradfield St. George being grouped with different parishes at different times. From 1964 to 1977 the Rev.

J. Bennett had in his care Bradfield St. George. Bradfield St. Clare and Rushbrooke. The latter was originally combined with Bradfield St. George in 1922 (see London Gazette 28th April 1922). When the Rev. J. Hobbs came in 1977 Bradfield St. George was linked with Bradfield St. Clare and with Felsham and Gedding instead. Rushbrooke had now been linked with Rougham. In 1984 there was a further shift round. Felsham, Gedding and Bradfield St. Clare were linked to another group of parishes so that Bradfield St. George was now linked with Great and Little Whelnetham.

### *Exterior*

John Gago produced a coloured illustration of the Church as it was circa 1810. A study reveals a number of differences with today's building. It shows no Norman slit, very clear markings of the roof and pitch of the old nave on the east side of the tower, three small windows in the chancel, only one buttress to the nave to the east of the three light window, no buttresses to the chancel, which was narrower and lower than the nave. The cross on the roof of the nave carried a carving of a crown of thorns.

### *Churchyard Inscriptions*

Inscriptions copied from the Darby transcriptions and published by Charles Partridge in 1913 show:

*On the south side, exterior wall of nave:*  
*Rob Nunn 3 Apr 1663*

*On the ground John Adams 28 June 1715 Ag 44*

*Hannah his widow, daughter of Will Paine of*

*Bury 6 April 1738 ag 58*

*Anne their Da. and widow of Alex Falconer of Thetford,*

*Norfolk, surg. 14 June ag. 25*

*Alex Falconer, many years surgeon in Thetford Norfolk, 7 Aug 1771 ag 75*

Tomb: *John Adams 1738* (inscription illegible)

### **Headstones**

<b>Last</b>	<b>Chandler</b>	<b>Radnall</b>
Addison	Adams	Sturgeon
Green	Edwards	Pettit
Aves	Hunt	Goold
Chenery	Wright	Hearn
Biddell	Bennett	Ray
Fayers	Taylor	Chambers

There remain further sources to be researched. More evidence may come to light in the course of time.

## The Old Rectory

The old rectory near the church dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It is timber at the rear with large alterations in 1854, which at that time incorporated the old Parish Room.

In George Booth's printed record of Rushbrooke's Parish Register, he states that, according to Cannon Turner, the Rushbrooke Rectory was pulled down in 1784 and the materials carted off to Bradfield St. George Rectory. However the Church Registers (No 4, 1732-1783) show that the Parsonage House was in existence in 1733.

The rectory ceased to act as such and was sold in 1954, since when a number of modifications have been made to it.



Bradfield St. George. — O.

