

ST. MARY'S WOODBRIIDGE



10p

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

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TO THE VISITOR

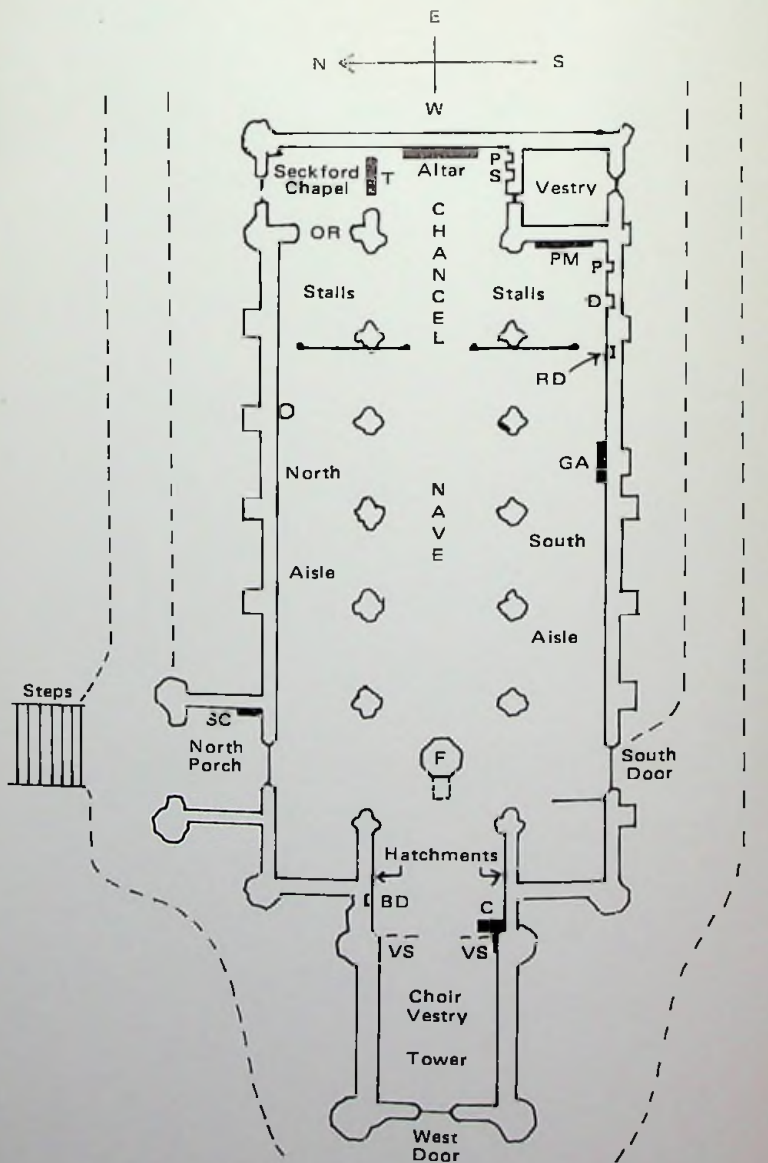
Whether you are a Christian, passing tourist, amateur antiquarian or whoever, we welcome you to the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Woodbridge. It is hoped that you will find this booklet both interesting and informative and, that when you leave you will have absorbed something of the atmosphere and spirit of a church which has been so much the centre-piece of Woodbridge for over five centuries and is much loved by its present parishioners.

Following the trend in East Anglian towns in the rising trade and prosperity of the fifteenth century local worthies replaced the old church by the present St. Mary's building in the graceful perpendicular style on the simple plan of nave and chancel with two aisles and square tower at the west end.

The nave and chancel form one continuous construction and there are six arcades supported by slender four-shafted pillars, the clerestory having twice as many windows as the bays below. The seventeenth century low pitch roof has hammer and tie beams alternating. The whole simple symmetry creates a pleasing impression of lofty spaciousness.

Externally the most impressive features are the fine tower and North porch which is the main entrance to the church. Both are lavish in their display of patterned skill in flushwork flint and stone.

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GROUND PLAN

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|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| T - Seckford Tomb | RD - Rood Loft Door |
| P - Piscina | GA - Georgian Coat of Arms |
| S - Sedilla | BD - Belfry Door |
| PM - Pitman Memorial | SC - Sawyer's Cupboard |
| D - Doorway (Steps down) | VS - Victorian Rood Screen |
| F - Font | |
| OR - Organ | C - Coffered Tracery |



Sunday morning.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

- 1086 Domesday Book records that among the possessions of Robert Malet in Wodebryge was 'A Church with 19 acres valued at 2 shillings.' The indications are that this was a Saxon church, built probably at the close of the tenth century.
- c.1193 The founding of a Priory in Woodbridge, of the order of St. Augustine of Hippo, by Eraldus Rufus (or Rous). It seems likely that the first Abbey buildings were constructed by his son, Hugh. The Priors and Canons developed the commercial life of the town, fighting for the establishment of a market in Woodbridge. This was achieved in 1224. They maintained and added to the church, and provided for the educational and spiritual needs of the townspeople. The Prior was, in fact, also the Rector and the old parish church served as the priory church. This must undoubtedly have caused some friction between the priory inmates and the lay worshippers. By the end of the fourteenth century, it was patently obvious that this old church, probably of solid but gloomy Saxon construction, was inadequate. This coincided with an era of prosperity in the area — an important twill-weaving centre.
- c.1400 Thus, at the beginning of the fifteenth century the foundations of the present church were laid — on land to the immediate north of the priory church. The townspeople were generous in their gifts for the construction of their new place of worship. All persons of substance during this period made some bequest towards the building. Even the poor parishioners subscribed the money to bring limestone round the coast from the Wash, and the black flints from the Thetford area.
- c.1450 The building of the great tower and the north porch at this time was the climax to a half-century of devoted effort by the whole community. For almost one hundred years the two churches stood side by side.
- 1537 Dissolution of the Priory, one of the many religious houses seized by Henry VIII during the years 1536-1540. Its buildings and lands were granted to Sir Anthony Wingfield. The church was stripped of its treasure and its plate sold for £26-7s.-6d.
- 1542 The old priory church was pulled down and its site incorporated into the parish churchyard.
- 1564 The ex-priory lands were purchased by Thomas Seckford for £764-8s.-4d. He made the last major contribution to the fabric of St. Mary's, constructing the chapel in the North Aisle, where the organ now stands.
- 1588 Here, in a vault he had prepared, this Tudor statesman and great local benefactor, was buried.
- 1627 Bishop Montague noted the lack of seating accommodation in St. Mary's and as a result the first of the wooden galleries was erected (1638).
- 1644 January 27th, the day after his destructive efforts at the Church of St. Mary, Ufford, came the notorious iconoclast, the Parliamentary Visitor, William Dowsing. He represented in East Anglia the contemporary Puritan hatred of church ornamentation and embellishment. He "took down two superstitious inscriptions in brass and gave order to take down thirty superstitious pictures." In addition the font and rood screen were defaced. The old oak benches with their carved poppy heads were destroyed — later to be replaced by solid box pews.
- 1813 Further large wooden galleries were erected during the years 1777-1813. Henceforth they dominated the church interior. A bitter con-



*The font, defaced by the Puritans in 1644. The canopy is modern.
(Photo: G. French).*

trovetry occurred during the construction work of 1813. A door was cut through the outer wall of the church to create easier access to the galleries by a staircase. The churchwardens arbitrarily declared a rate of 2/- in the Pound only to meet the expense, but this was reduced to 1/- only after an ecclesiastical court case. The churchwardens were compelled to pay the excess from their own pockets.

During the nineteenth century there was a nationwide move to restore churches to their original architectural simplicity. Belatedly parishioners undertook the removal of many of the post-Reformation interior accretions and a general cleaning-up of St. Mary's.

1863 Restoration of the badly-decayed North Porch. A contemporary account notes— "The accumulated soil of years, burying its base and the base of the North Aisle of the Church, to a depth of two feet and a half, has been all removed, and the earth levelled. The unsightly filthy urinal on the West Side, between the Porch and the Steeple, entirely taken away...."

1875 The great wooden galleries were finally taken down and the box-pews and three-tier pulpit removed, "and their wreck moved into the churchyard, displaying such a mass of real rubbish as was never before seen in a place of worship." The piscina and sedilia in the Sanctuary were discovered and also the piscina and two small doorways in the south chancel aisle.

The organ was transferred to the Seckford Chapel so opening up the western arch and west window.

It is interesting to note that Edward Fitzgerald, translator of 'The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,' participated in the discussions leading to the restoration work.

The violent upheavals which so often characterised the history of the church in the past are over. Since the mid-Victorian restoration, apart from minor interior alteration, the fabric of the church has remained unchanged.

RENOVATION FUND

No historic building — however well and truly built — can survive the ravages of time without constant care and attention. And St. Mary's is no exception.

With the passing years, the cost of upkeep has become increasingly heavy, and although every effort is made to maintain the building in a proper state of repair, a recent inspection by the Church architect shows that further work will be necessary to maintain the fabric in good order so that it is preserved for future generations. The cost will be about £40,000.

While we who worship regularly in St. Mary's accept this as one of our responsibilities, we also acknowledge our Christian duty to support the wider Church which is concerned with the needs of all mankind.

All those who are interested in the preservation of this historic Suffolk church are invited to help to provide the balance, either by way of a regular contribution to the Renovation Fund, or by a single donation.

Gifts and promises may be placed either in the box at the back of the Church, or in one of the envelopes provided. Please add your name and address, so that we may write and thank you.



Font panel (Holy Communion).

THE CHURCH INTERIOR

THE FONT

Entering the church by the north porch we see the octagonal bowl font. Fonts of this type are peculiar to Norfolk and Suffolk, only two of the 38 in existence being found outside these counties. St. Mary's has one of the three which have the Crucifixion as the eighth panel. The other panels depict the Seven Sacraments:—

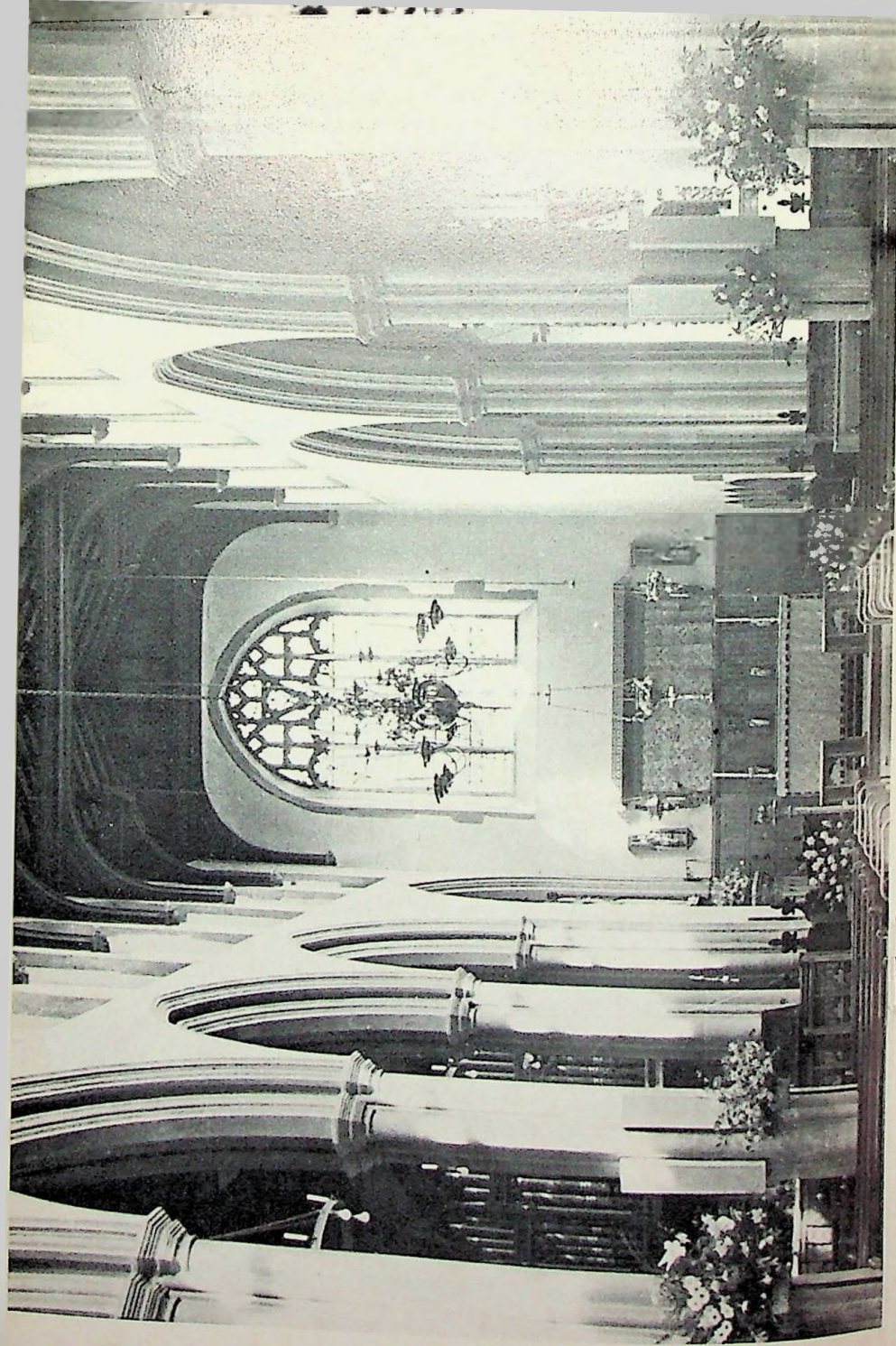
- Baptism — The priest receiving the infant from the godmother; one hand of the godfather touching the child.
- Confirmation — A man wearing a short tunic and cloak is being Confirmed by the Bishop who is in full vestments; an assistant holds the Bishop's book.
- Eucharist — Kneeling man and woman receiving consecrated bread from the priest; the communicants are holding a houseling cloth to catch any falling crumbs.
- Penance — The priest is shriving a woman and the demon is fleeing past a figure standing nearby.
- Holy Unction — The priest, accompanied by an acolyte, anoints with oil a sick person.
- Ordination — The bishop is laying his hands on the ordinand.
- Matrimony — The more severely damaged portion of the panel depicting the bride reflects the Puritan objection to the use of the ring in marriage.
- Crucifixion — similarly bears the marks of Puritan iconoclastic zeal.

The carvings were at one time brightly painted and traces of colours may still be seen. A framed drawing of the font stands nearby and may help to identify each panel.

Within each of the recesses of the pedestal is a lily — emblem of the Virgin Mary. The modern font cover is decorated with symbols of the Saints the fish for St. Andrew, the anchor for St. Nicholas, the feather for St. Barbara, the flower for St. Dorothea (an indirect tribute to Dorothy Seckford, local benefactrice.)

UNDER THE TOWER

Moving into the west end, beneath the tower, we see on the left an ancient leather covered coffer. There is some uncertainty about its indicated date. One theory is that this kind of container was known as a 'standard', a non-decorated coffer used for conveying 'stuffs' (good quality household materials, including bedding,) and that this one dates from the early sixteenth century. Generally, chests of varying kinds are to be found in churches for housing vestments, church valuables and parochial documents.



The Nave (Photo: S. French).

Near this spot the bones of an animal were discovered during restoration work a hundred years ago. When the tower was being built in the fifteenth century a dog or boar was buried, "so that its ghost might haunt the churchyard and drive off any who would profane it, i.e. witches and warlocks."

Behind the coffer are the wooden traceries of the dismantled Victorian rood screen.

On the north and south interior walls are a number of well-preserved hatchments — copies of the coats of arms of notable persons buried in the church. The arms of the Carthew family can be seen clearly in many of the hatchments and also on the classical style memorial tablets in the Nave, namely, 'or a chevron sable between 3 murre proper.' Murre are sea-birds probably razorbills or guillemots. One hatchment on the north wall showing the Carthew arms and a three-masted ship at anchor was placed there at the death of rear-admiral William Carthew in 1827.

To the right are the doors to the belfry ascent. There are eight bells, cast by Miles Gray and John Darbie between 1638 and 1679 and re-cast by Thomas Osborn of Downham Market in 1799. The 133 steps leading to the belfry were the scene of 'a wonderful feat of agility,' on March 15th 1753 when one Andrew Fosdike, 'went up and down the stairway seven times in twenty-seven minutes in the 67th year of his age!'

The west door, at one time probably a principal entrance to the church, has certainly not been so used for at least a hundred years. After its closure, as a contemporary notes, the area immediately inside was used as 'a sort of parish lumber room and store house for fire engines.' The church inventory of 1873, in fact, lists among the possessions of the church, 'two fire engines, four fire cranes, thirty-six good buckets, and about thirty in inferior order, together with harness, hose, and implements connected therewith.'

THE NAVE

As we move up the centre aisle towards the chancel we see a particularly interesting and rare type of candelabrum, presented by Robert Elfreth on July 15th, 1676, made in the Netherlands and similar to those found at Oosterhout and Kerkwijk. It is the fourth oldest of known date in Britain. It was fortunate to survive, when in 1841, the church was equipped with gas; in many other churches chandeliers were removed as obsolete and melted down.

THE SCREEN

At the chancel steps can be seen Victorian replicas of the original rood screen panels. That screen had been erected in the mid-fifteenth century, John Albrede, a twill-weaver, and Agnes, his wife, making a substantial contribution to the cost. There were probably as many as thirty-four panels, depicting various saints, but through the years many



North Porch.

have been destroyed. As late as 1839, for example, several were removed and made into a reading desk. Some of the original panels remain however, and the enthusiastic scratchings of the iconoclasts may still be seen on most of them. Above the screen was a 'candlebeam' with painted carvings of the Crucifixion between figures of Our Lady and St. John. Its height can be ascertained from the position of the doorway which led to it, high in the wall of the south aisle.

THE CHANCEL

Before passing into the chancel one should observe that the east window, restored in the early 1800's, does not occupy a central position in the east wall. There is no convincing explanation for this rather unusual feature. Notice also the elevation of that window. It was set at this height to accommodate a baldichino or canopy over the altar.

The glass is modern, provided by the will of Walter Bloxsome, a local retailer, and dedicated in 1946. It was designed by Martin Travers with the central theme of worship, showing the Adoration of the Magi at the feet of the Holy Child. The arms of Thomas Seckford, with those of St. George, the Province of Canterbury and the diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, complete the motif.

On the north wall is a rare small brass commemorating John Shorland, aged seven years, who died in 1601.

Adjacent, within the sanctuary, is the tomb of Thomas Seckford who built the Seckford Chapel, now the organ chamber.

Opposite the Seckford tomb, in the south wall of the Sanctuary, notice the fifteenth century piscina, the small stone basin, and sedilia, the recessed seats.

Another piscina may be found in the south wall of the chancel, indicating the original site of the side chapel, known as St. Anne's Chapel. Here you will see the fine black and white marble monument to Jeffrey Pitman, his two wives and two lawyer sons. Pitman was a tanner and haberdasher, and churchwarden of St. Mary's in 1596 and 1608. He was also High Sheriff of Suffolk in 1625 and by his will dated May 18th, 1627, gave the revenues of lands in Martlesham, an estate of nearly ten acres, 'for the reparation and maintenance of the parish church.' It is possible that the monument was made at Southwark by Gerard Janssen, whose father, a Dutch stone-mason, came to England in 1567. The Janssen family constructed the monument to William Shakespeare in Stratford upon Avon, and stylistic similarities are evident.

The low blocked doorway in the south chancel aisle may have led to the monastic church, which was adjacent on the south side of the parish church, or to the monastic buildings.



South Aisle and Pitman Memorial.

THE SOUTH AISLE

Return by the south aisle. Some amusingly grotesque corbel stones can be seen overhead: it may be that they depict the vices (a two-tongued liar, a gaping glutton), or they may be caricatures, or just done for fun. The last pair to the west are the heads of a man and woman — the latter wearing a caul, head-dress of the late fourteenth century.

The armorial bearings on the south wall are those of George III, 1760-1820.

The tour of the interior completed, the exterior certainly merits inspection. As you move through the porch you will observe a cupboard for bread to be given each Sunday to the poor, a bequest of 1635 made by Woodbridge yeoman, John Sayer. For a short time during the last war recipients even had to surrender their bread coupons! The ancient poppy-head bench beneath the cupboard may well be the sole survivor of Dowsing's visit in 1644 and of the installation of pews in the church.

THE CHURCH EXTERIOR THE NORTH PORCH

A bequest of Richard Gooding in 1455 and other contemporary gifts initiated the building of this porch. The base flushwork tracery panels and initials, arched panelling and battlements with quatrefoils and arches, topped by double-stepped crenellations and pinnacles created a most harmonious and attractive edifice. The flint-work panels, continued in the base of the tower include a chalice crowned, a lion and staff and numerous examples of the monogram 'Maria.'

When the porch was restored at considerable cost in 1864, the figures of Our Lady, St. Anne and St. Ethelreda were placed in the three niches above the entrance arch. In the same year a window was inserted in the east side below the ancient patterned panels, one of which symbolised the guild of St. Eloi — three crowns in pale with an 'e' between a fetlock and a rose — a fraternity which assisted the poor and needy.

A hundred years or so after its building, the porch seems to have been increasingly used as the centre of marketing and other business transactions. This market finally ended sometime in the seventeenth century.

THE TOWER

This noble erection, 108 feet high, embattled and pinnacled, of massive cut flint and stone dressing construction was built between 1444 and 1453 from townspeople's bequests and contributions, notable being those of merchant ship-owner John Kemp and of John Albrede and John Spicer.



South Aisle Corbel.

The dominance of the locality is best appreciated perhaps when viewed from the river Deben, from the elevated ground of Broom Heath or when approaching the town by rail. Understandably then, during the Napoleonic invasion threat between 1803-1805, a barrel of tar with combustibles was kept at the top of the tower ready to warn of a French attack.

On either side of the great west door of the tower may be seen the arms of Brotherton — 3 lions passant gardant in pale in chief a label of 3 points — for Margaret, daughter of Thomas Brotherton and granddaughter of King Edward I, and those of Segrave — a lion rampant crowned. The marriage between Margaret Brotherton and John Segrave, a distinguished warrior, took place 100 years before the tower was built, and these arms, perhaps, were transferred from the old priory church.

THE SOUTH WALL

The east end of the south wall is a rubble wall plastered over, suggesting that the monastic buildings — probably the priory church — were attached to it. One of the buttresses at the east end is hollow for it contains the old stair case leading to the rood loft.

THE CHURCHYARD

It is strange to think that the peaceful churchyard we see today was once an important centre of town life, a convenient meeting place, a business centre, and the tombstones often handy seats.

It has steadily increased in size over the years. The site of the priory church was a substantial addition in 1542. In 1794 a trustee of Woodbridge School leased a parcel of land for 999 years at the rent £1.1s. annually 'to augment the churchyard.'

On the north side, half way along the side of the church room, there is an interesting gravestone with the carving of a horse — the tomb of Abraham Easter, horse dealer.

There is a curious epitaph on the gravestone of Benjamin Brinkley, to be found against the Abbey School wall at the east end. It reads,

Here lieth the body of
Benjamin Brinkley
Who though Lustie and
Strong was one
That by misfortune shot
Himself with's Gun.
In the 23rd year of his age
He departed this life
To the grief of his parents
Spectators and Wife.
March the 27, 1723

At the west end is to be found the grave of John Clarkson, a friend of William Wilberforce and a prominent figure in the anti-slavery movement during the late 1700's and early 1800's. He organised and commanded a fleet which carried 1,200 ex-slaves from America and the West Indies to found the experimental colony of Sierra Leone, in West Africa, and was the first governor of that state.

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS – Used in this booklet.

Corbel-stones	Stone supports for roof beams, often carved.
Chancel	That part of the church, at the eastern end, where the altar stands.
Hatchments	A coat of arms in a lozenge-shaped frame. It was hung for some months in front of the house of a deceased person and then brought into the church. Payments were made for the right to hang them in churches.
Nave	The central part of the church.
Piscina	A shallow stone basin, formerly placed near an altar, which received the water in which the priest washed his hands and the sacred vessels.
Rood Screen	Rood (Anglo-Saxon 'Rode') signifies a cross. Before the Reformation a large cross or Crucifix occupied a conspicuous position at the entrance to the chancel sometimes placed on a <i>rood beam (candlebeam)</i> , but usually on a gallery – <i>the rood loft</i> . This gallery surmounted the screen dividing chancel and nave – <i>the rood screen</i> .
Sedilia	Recessed seats in the wall. Usually containing three separate seats, often graduated, and found on the south side of the chancel.

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THOMAS SECKFORD

The history of Woodbridge has been substantially influenced by the life of her greatest benefactor, Thomas Seckford.

Thomas was the second son of Thomas Seckford Esq., of Seckford Hall, Great Bealings. He was born c.1515 and spent his childhood at the hall, a splendid Tudor building which still conveys something of the style and importance of the Seckford family. Educated at Caius College, Cambridge, he entered Gray's Inn in 1540. Two years later he became a barrister and in 1555 Lent Reader at Gray's Inn.

He became Master of the Court of Requests in the first year of Elizabeth's reign. The Queen is said to have complained about the odour of Seckford's boots on one occasion, to be silenced by the gentleman's reference to the equally offensive odour of the unpaid royal debts!

His legal activities were extensive. He was involved in some of the most celebrated trials of the reign, including those of the Jesuit, Campion and the conspirator, Dr. William Parry.

In Suffolk, Seckford became increasingly powerful. In 1550, 1563 and 1572 he was elected to Parliament by the burgesses of Ipswich. The manor of Woodbridge Late Priory was granted to him in 1564, for the sum of £764 8s 4d., paid into the Treasury. The present 'Abbey' building dates from this year and bears the Seckford coat of arms. His stewardship of the Liberty of St. Ethelreda gave Seckford control of the courts of one third of Suffolk. In 1575 he moved the Sessions from Melton to Woodbridge, and built the Shire Hall to house them.

Most of his fortune was amassed by successful, though not always scrupulous mercantile enterprise. In 1575 a customer complained to Burghley about fraud committed by Thomas in a shipment of corn and malt, and about his smuggling hops. In 1583 the entire crew of one of his vessels was arrested for piracy on the high seas.

There was a thriving ship-building industry at Woodbridge in the Elizabethan era and the energy and enterprise of merchants like Seckford contributed much to the expansion and prosperity of the town.

By the 1580's Seckford had reached the height of his career. He was Surveyor of the Court of Wards and Liveries, responsible for the lands of orphans of the gentry throughout England.

In 1587, Thomas Seckford decided to donate a measure of his wealth to the town of Woodbridge, by founding and endowing, 'certain almshouses.' Letters patent were obtained on May 23rd, 1587, and the Seckford Almshouses were duly built to house thirteen poor men. Their founder drew up a comprehensive scheme for their administration, and in his will they were endowed with various properties in the parish of Clerkenwell.

By the nineteenth century the income of the charity had much increased. The almshouses were rebuilt and new buildings included a 'Hospital' Chapel, and in 1861, the Seckford Dispensary. The Seckford Charity and the Free Grammar School Charity, generously endowed among others by Dorothy Seckford in 1662, were amalgamated in 1891 and known thereafter as the Seckford Foundation. This substantial foundation continues to give benefit to present day Woodbridge.

Thomas Seckford died, without issue, in 1587. Just prior to his death he built a private chapel, 'adjoining to the parish church at Woodbridge.' St. Mary's parish register of Burials, 1545–1620, records the following:—

"Anno 1587, Mr. Thomas Seckford, Master of Requests, was buried ye fifteenth day of January."



Civic Service.



Woodbridge Excelsior Band.