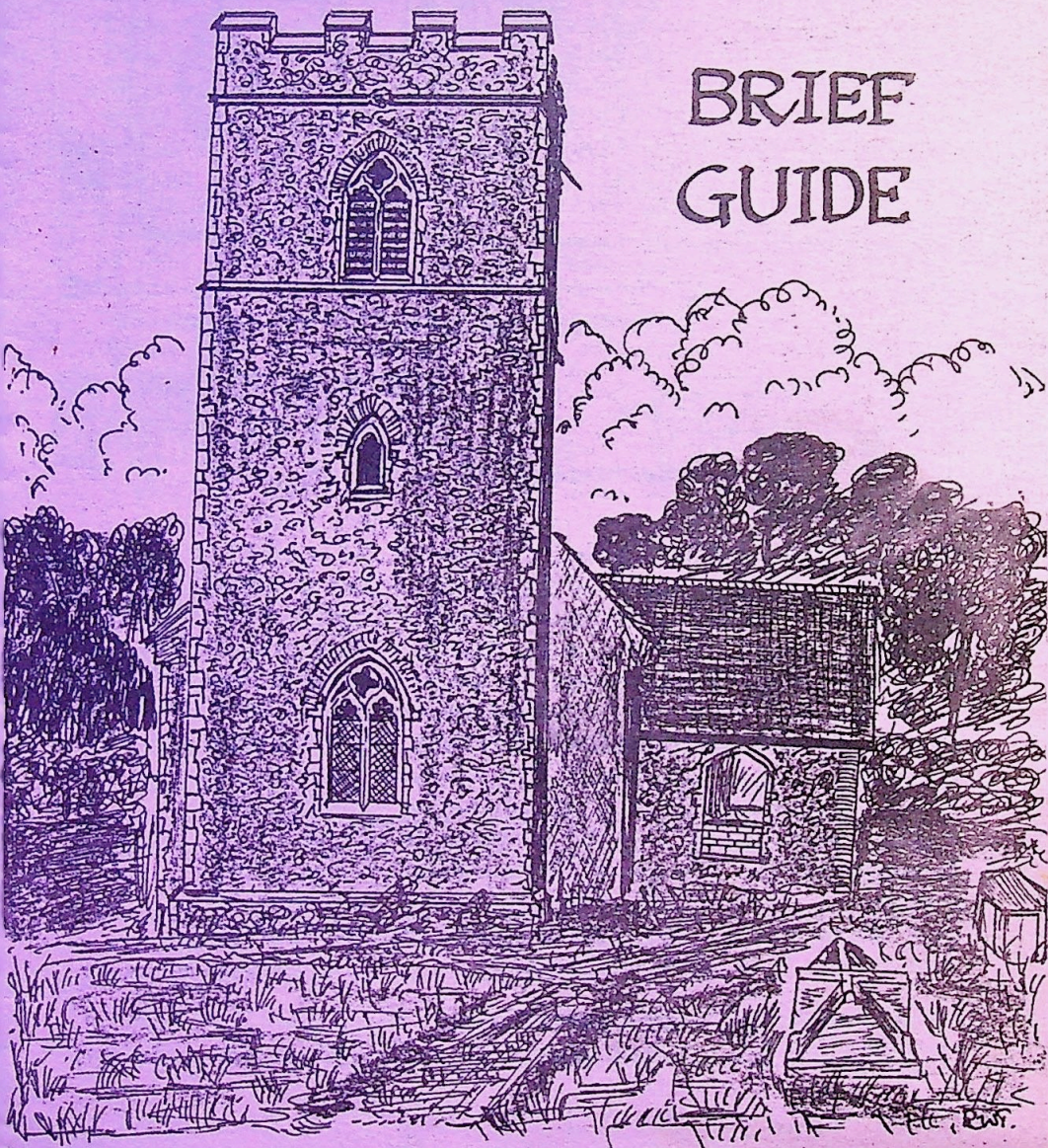


Saint Mary's Church Little Blakenham Suffolk

BRIEF GUIDE





To our Visitors

We are glad that you have discovered this little Shrine, where people have worshipped for at least 700 years. Please feel at home here in our Father's House, the walls of which are saturated with the prayers and devotion of many generations of Blakenham folk. We hope that you will enjoy the peace and beauty here, that you may have time to say a prayer for those who are its present-day custodians, and maybe also to spare a small contribution which will help them to maintain it. Remember that this is a place where people of all faiths or of none may find peace and inspiration and where Christians - whoever or whatever they are - may look upon as "Home"!

May God bless and
keep you.

WELCOME to Saint Mary's, Little Blakenham!

A journey along the delightful by-road leading from Bramford to Somersham and Offton will convince anybody once and for all of what a fallacy it is to say that the county of Suffolk is flat! Here we have miles of beautiful undulating rural scenery and, some four miles north-west of Ipswich, set high and nestling on its gentle hillside, is the tiny village of Little Blakenham - quiet and in the heart of the country, and seemingly a far cry from the bustle of the modern world. The tower of its little church, because of its elevated position, is visible for some distance, rising out of the trees. The parish which it serves is long and narrow, stretching some three miles from its south-western limit, not far from Flowton Church, to its north-eastern extremity, beside the River Gipping near Claydon.

This wayside church is set upon a grassy chalky bank beside a narrow lane, a little above the houses of its village and beside the former Rectory - an attractive house with Dutch gables, which stands at a considerably lower level than the church.

WHAT TO SEE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.

What an idyllic SETTING for this trim country church - a feature well worth taking time to stand back and savour. Do enjoy the views southwards from the churchyard, across the Suffolk countryside and, if you have time, climb up to the west end of this distinctly sloping churchyard and enjoy the view back to the church tower, set against its background of trees. This is not possible from the other end of the churchyard because the east wall of the church is right beside the boundary with the Old Rectory grounds.

The church itself is small, but is elegant and endearing; comprising nave, chancel, tower and porch. The nave and chancel walls are rendered, but are built of flint-rubble, which is exposed in the walls of the tower and porch. Unusually, there are no mediaeval buttresses to strengthen the walls, and only one later buttress, which lends much needed strength at the north-east corner.

The building is lit by windows of varying shapes and dates, the earliest of which may be seen in the CHANCEL.

The east window here is a rare example in Suffolk of a stepped triple-lancet window of the late Early English period (c.1250-80), which is beautified by trefoils (three-lobed shapes) in the stonework each side of the centre light (not unlike the east window of Kesgrave Church). A single Early English lancet window may be seen on the north side, also an attractive two-light Perpendicular window of 15th century date, whose arch is framed by a hood-mould, resting upon carved lions heads. In the south wall of the chancel is a two-light 14th century window with interesting corbel heads, also a taller two-light Perpendicular window, which is 15th century, as is the tiny priest's doorway nearby. Note the little Mass Dial in the stonework of the chancel's south-east corner, just visible about 5 - 6 feet from the ground. This was used to indicate the times of services before the days of clocks.

The south window of the NAVE is late 14th century and the set of three north nave windows, which were copied from it, were inserted by Mr. Stephen Jackson, c.1849-52.

The unbuttressed and embattled TOWER is 14th century. Its northern and eastern belfry windows are single ones, with cinquefoil (five-lobed) heads to their arches, whilst the others are double windows, with pretty 14th century tracery, as is also the west window, lower down. The ringing chamber has a small single western window and beneath the parapet on this side is a fine gargoyle head, made to throw the rainwater clear of the tower walls.

The 15th century PORCH is a pleasing mixture of knapped flints, stones and, in the quoins (corners), slender Tudor bricks. Later bricks block the bases of the east and west windows, which were once two-light windows but have now lost their stonework. There is a good continuously-moulded entrance arch, above which a simple mediaeval niche now frames a more recent statue of the Virgin and Child. Note how the south wall leans distinctly outwards. Inside we see that this porch, which is large and tall for the size of the church, was restored in memory of the Rev'd William French, Rector of Little Blakenham and Nettlestead from 1895-1934. We enter the church by means of an elegant 14th century south doorway.

WHAT TO SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH.

The interior is homely and feels lived-in. The white-washed walls lean outwards, betraying their great age.

The nave and chancel are of equal width and the entire church, from east to west, is only about 62 feet long. Here we see work of several periods and the interior has altered much during the past 150 years.

When David Elisha Davy visited it in 1829, the roof was hidden by a low plaster ceiling and the nave was equipped with "neat and uniform" box-pews, which were rented by the families who could afford them. At this time the people of the poorer classes sat upon low benches against the chancel walls. The Communion Table was railed around on three sides and, flanking the east window, were boards displaying the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Ten Commandments. A visitor to a service in 1858 (when the congregation of 60 included 20 schoolchildren) described the church then as combining "the plainness of a barn with the strength of a fortress"!

All this was transformed when the building was closed for two months in 1868 to undergo a thorough RESTORATION. The work was carried out by George Hewitt, the Ipswich builder and the designs were prepared by Mr. F. Josselyn - possibly a relation of George Josselyn, the Churchwarden and one of the driving forces behind the raising of the £300 necessary for the work done. The church was re-opened on Sunday 23rd August 1868, with a service conducted by the Rector, the Rev'd John Jackson, who also preached. The collection amounted to £7.14s.11½d.

Much of what we see here today dates from 1868. When the plaster ceilings were removed, making the interior much more lofty, the mediaeval ROOF rafters were repaired and lined up and repaired so that they could be covered with stained and varnished boarding. Note the 15th century moulded CORNICES along the tops of the walls. The old pews were taken out and the present dark-stained and square-ended BENCHES, with their individual doors, were made, also the CHOIRSTALLS in the chancel. The large PULPIT, with its traceried panels, was installed, also the ALTAR TABLE and the carved COMMUNION RAILS. The furnishings are all of oak, as are the two doors, which were added at this time, when also the south-west angle of the nave was repaired and the roofs were re-tiled.

Although there is much Victorian work here, several features remain from earlier times. The simple TOWER ARCH is 14th century, and possibly also the octagonal FONT, which is difficult to date because the only carving on it is the moulding at the foot of the stem. On the north nave wall,

opposite the entrance, hang the ROYAL ARMS of King James II, dated 1685.

Of 15th century date is the attractive PISCINA recess in the south wall of the sanctuary. Each side of its cinquefoil-headed, ogee-shaped arch are simple leaf designs. Into the piscina drain was poured the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist.

Much of this interior is reasonably unassuming, with few airs and graces, but its EAST WALL has considerable elegance and dignity and is a rare and beautiful example of Early English craftsmanship of c. 1250-80. The triple lancet window, beneath its all-embracing arch, is flanked by trefoil-headed ARCHED RECESSES, which are punctuated by circular engaged shafts, with moulded capitals and bases. These had been bricked up until their discovery about 1850, when it was revealed that they contained faint traces of wall paintings, which were touched up and added to during the 1868 restoration. On the north side was St. John the Baptist, with the inscription "Ecce Agnus Dei" (Behold the Lamb of God). It was thought that the very faded southern painting showed the Assumption of Our Lady, but this was replaced in 1868 with a painting of Jesus carrying his cross - a copy of one which formed the altarpiece in Magdalen College Chapel, Oxford. These paintings have since been painted over.

Also in about 1850 the northern lancet window nearby was unblocked, revealing more WALL PAINTINGS, again originally 13th century, but almost entirely repainted by the Victorians. Here we see in the eastern splay a robed and bearded figure against a red patterned background, which could possibly be Our Lord. In the eastern splay is a lady, holding a bird, against a black patterned background, believed to represent the Church as the Bride of Christ.

The east window contains STAINED GLASS, showing Jesus as the Light of the World and flanked by small figures of St. John and St. Peter. It is a memorial to John Ranson Cuthbert, who died in 1876. The south-east nave window has a small 19th century star in its tracery and the central of the three windows on the north side of the nave displays a coat of arms and the date 1849 - possibly indicating the year when these windows were renewed by Mr. Stephen Jackson.

Three MEMORIAL PLAQUES may be seen on the nave wall. One near the lectern commemorates Wallace, Percy and Agnes, the young children of John and Sarah Cuthbert, who died in 1858, 1854 and 1841, respectively. A brass plaque commemorates Eustace Charles Mason, who died in 1937, and a stone plaque records the names of four people from this parish who gave their lives in the two World Wars.

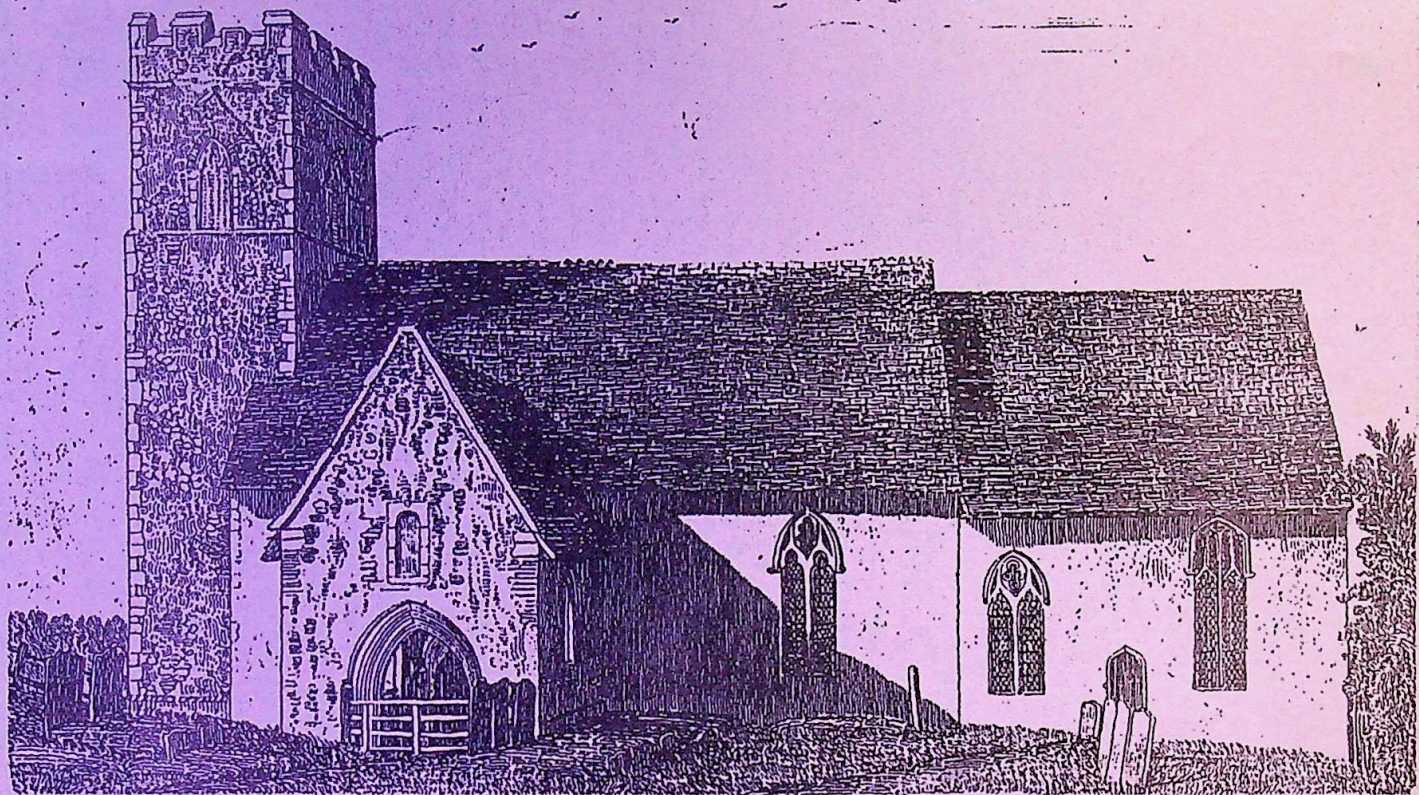
The gallery beneath the tower houses the small single manual ORGAN, by the Positiv Organ Company of London.

In the tower above hang Little Blakenham's two BELLS. There were three here in 1553 and parts of the present bell-frame date from c.1600. The bells themselves were cast in the Ipswich foundry of John Darbie in 1660. The treble bell has a diameter of 28" and weighs 4½cwt, whilst the tenor's diameter is 32" and its weight is 6cwt.

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This booklet was written by Roy Tricker, a visitor to the church, who is grateful to the Rev'd Felix Prewer for his encouragement, to Cynthia Brown, George Pipe and Randal Clouston for their help, to the Staff of the County Record Office for the use of their facilities and to the Pupils of Copleston High School, Ipswich, for assembling the booklets.

November 1988.



The Church c. 1857~ etched by Henry Davy