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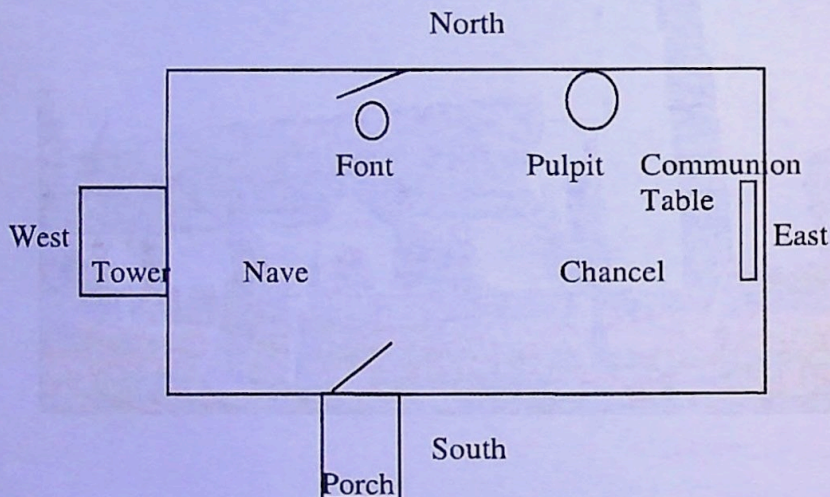


St Mary's Church, Henstead with  
Hulver Street

**Church Guide**

# St Mary's Church, Henstead with Hulver Street

St Mary's church is on the side of the Hundred River Valley. When you approach Henstead from Beccles and Hulver the tower seems to rise out of the valley to reveal a small church blending in quietly with its surroundings. Like many East Anglian churches, the village has shifted over the centuries to leave the church standing on its own.



## History

A church has probably stood on this site for at least 900 years. (Unfortunately the church "writings" were destroyed in a fire.) The north wall may have been built soon after 1066. The lower stonework in the north wall is of uncut flint in a "herringbone" pattern (i.e. One layer with stones leaning to the right, the next layer leaning to the left). This would suggest it was early Norman

work. The stones in this early work are from Caen in France.

The two doorways, north and south, are late Norman (12th Century) judging by the style. The stone work suggests that the north doorway was inserted into a wall already standing.

The windows are in the architectural style of Edward III's reign (1327-1377) known as the Decorated Period.

During the middle ages the church was associated with the guilds of Our Lady (Mary, the mother of Jesus) and St. John the Baptist; at the south west corner of the nave there is a tall niche which was used to hold the guild banners and a processional cross. The porch and tower were built in 1470.

In 1641 a fire spread from a farmhouse and premises near the east end of the church (approximately opposite the present Henstead Hall ). The fire is thought to have burnt the old carved benches, much of the interior woodwork and much of the chancel. It also destroyed the chest which contained the parish "writings". The chancel was rebuilt, much shorter and a little door high up on the north side of the chancel shows where the chancel arch once stood. (The houses burnt in the fire were not rebuilt.)

It seems that during Oliver Cromwell's time the church was Puritan and followed Congregationalism, but returned to the orthodox Church of England style of worship in 1662 after the King, Charles II, was restored in 1660.

In 1842-1843 and again in 1906, the church was restored. The 3-decker pulpit and box pews were removed during the 1906 restoration. During the Second World War a bomb which landed nearby blew out the leaded panes in the south window and they were replaced by clear glass.

The porch was renovated in 2010.

### Points to Note

The inside of the building has a simple, unified plan. The chancel is not divided in any way from the nave; there is no step or screen or

arch to mark it off. However, there are niches where the original screen between the nave and chancel would have been fastened.

The plain oak pulpit and pews and the fine, carved communion rails were installed in 1906 and are in keeping with the church's simple plan.

The only stained glass window is in the south east of the chancel. It shows, on the right, Jesus welcoming the children and, on the left, Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It was put in in memory of a young son of one of the lords of the manor of Henstead and Hulver.

The exceptionally fine, Norman arch in the main (south) doorway, with pillars and various types of carving, is practically unchanged since it was constructed. Note the four concentric circles of the arch: plain, roundels (or shields), chevron (or dogtooth, or zigzag) pattern and a triple row of billets (short lengths of cylindrical mouldings like bundles of wood).

There are the remains of a late medieval holy water stoop in the south east corner of the porch.

The Tower has battlements, gargoyles and carved stone heads on the top, and curious little slits which seem to give it dignity.

### Purpose

The church was built as a place for prayer. It is interesting to think that the people of Henstead and Hulver have worshipped God here for at least nine hundred years. In that time much has changed, but, amid all the changes, God still offers hope to those who search for Him and trust Him.