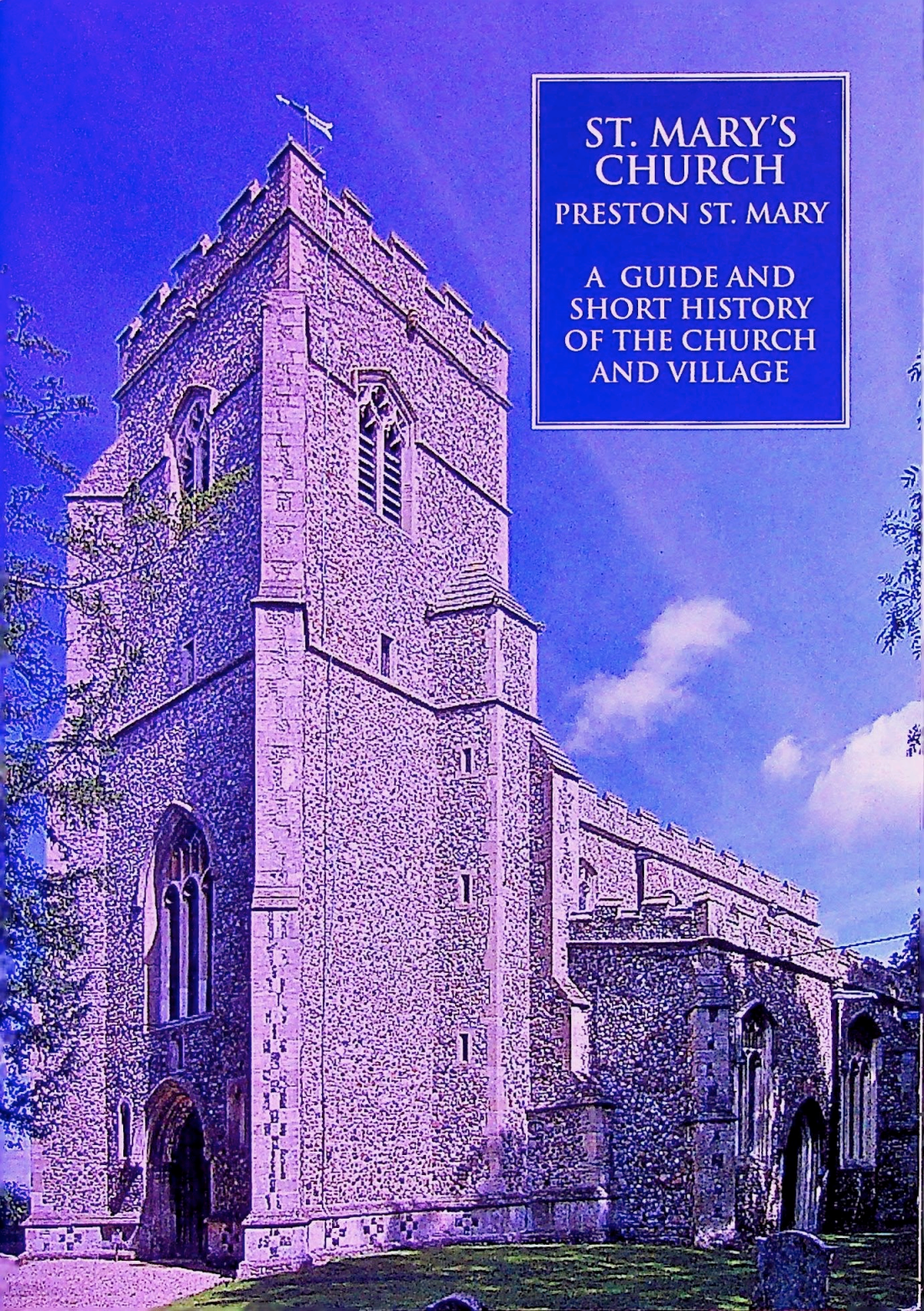




ST. MARY'S
CHURCH
PRESTON ST. MARY

A GUIDE AND
SHORT HISTORY
OF THE CHURCH
AND VILLAGE



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A HISTORY OF PRESTON ST. MARY VILLAGE

PRESTON St. Mary lies two miles east of Lavenham, on the western slope of the vale of the river Brett, and 9 miles from Hadleigh and Sudbury. There is evidence of Roman occupation in the village, notably in the field known as 'Old Ley' on Priory Farm, and it seems that a village or farm flourished here prior to 43AD. The evidence for this is mainly by way of coins and remnants of artefacts found in the ground and disturbances in the terrain indicating foundations of earlier buildings. This site was in fact the subject of a TV Channel 4 *Time Team* programme in 1995.

For written evidence we have to go forward nearly a thousand years to the time of the Norman Conquest and two entries in the Domesday Book, which in present day English start as follows:

In PRESTON St Edmund's held 1 free man before 1066: he could grant and sell land. Arnulf. He has 3 carucates of land in lordship

Wulford, a free man under Stigand, held PRESTON before 1066 as a manor; 2 carucates of land with the jurisdiction.

(A *carucate* was: 'as much land as could be tilled with one plough (and 8 oxen) in a year').

In the first entry there is reference to 'a church with 7 acres'. This is the earliest known reference to a church in the village. Little is known about earlier churches on this site but we can be certain there was at least one, as the list of past Rectors goes back to 1246. It is thought that the present church, may have incorporated in it parts of the earlier foundations and structure.

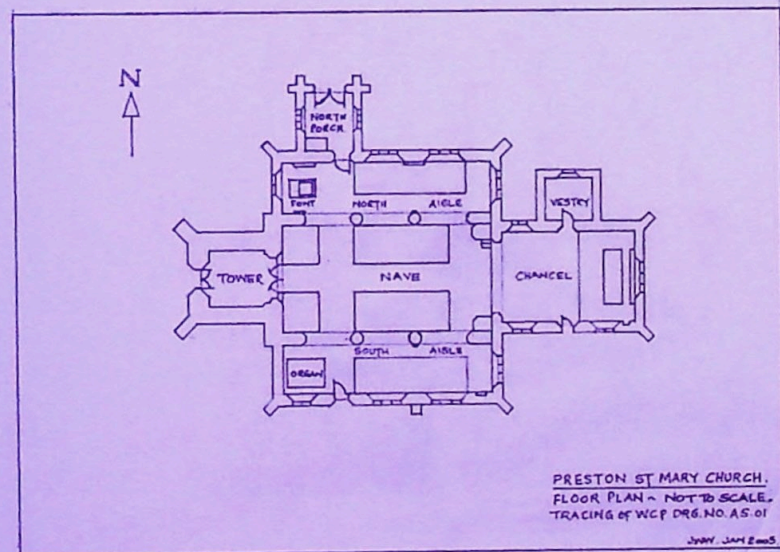
From the Norman Conquest up to the Reformation most of the records of Preston relate to the Manors of the village. The principal and early Manor was Preston Hall or Church Hall Manor and was vested in Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford in 1155. This was subsequently divided into lesser Manors, namely Swift's Manor at one time held by Cecily, Duchess of York, mother of Edward IV, Maister's (now Preston Manor), which once belonged to the Masters of the Commandery of Knights of St. John of Jerusalem in neighbouring Battisford, Mortimers Manor, was vested in Sir William de Mortimer of Attleburgh, and Priory Manor which was vested in the Priory of Holy Trinity, Ipswich; names still surviving today.

The history of these Manors is set out in W.A.Coppinger's: *A History of the Manors of Suffolk* (1905-11) but this does not help us over the form of either the earlier or the present church as it makes no reference to either, perhaps because no relevant records were found.

A GUIDE AROUND THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

On entering the churchyard at the west gate past the War Memorial to the men of Preston St Mary who were killed in the two World wars, one passes beneath a large yew tree reputed to be well over 800 years old and therefore pre-dating the existing church building. There is also, to the south of the building, a Commonwealth War Grave that is now officially a Listed Monument, dedicated to the memory of Daniel Fosker, who died from his war wounds in 1920 and thus within the time limit for a war grave. (His biography, along with details of all our war casualties, is on a board at the back of the church.) The churchyard is managed in coordination with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to encourage the local flora and fauna.

The present church building was built in the 14th and 15th centuries and is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. Although we celebrate her festival, no physical trace of this dedication remains. The church is listed grade 1 and comprises nave with clerestory, north aisle, south aisle, tower to the west, north porch, chancel to the east, and a small vestry attached to the chancel on the north side.



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The chancel and tower have 14th century origins and the nave and aisles were built in the 15th century, about the same time as Lavenham church. John de Vere, the thirteenth Earl of Oxford, who fought

at Bosworth, effectively promoted the prosperity of Lavenham and its cloth trade, as his family had done since the 13th century, and encouraged the building of Lavenham church. He may well have taken an interest in the building of this one, since Preston must have housed many of the spinners and weavers who contributed to the creation of Lavenham's wealth. Therefore it is not duly fanciful to suppose that it is his head and that of his countess, which we see so sensitively sculpted outside the west door.

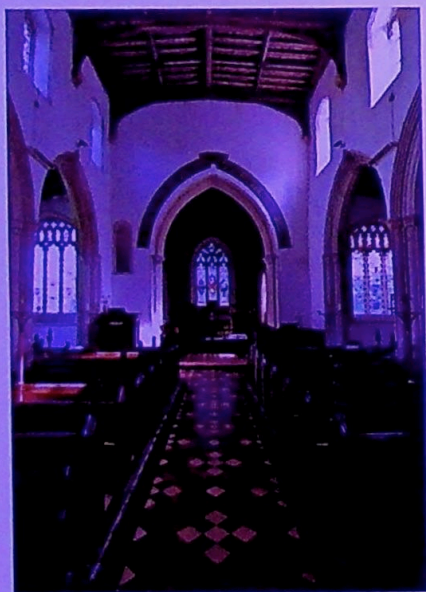
One enters the church through the 15th century north porch, which is panelled overall in flushwork. It is said to be one of the finest in Suffolk and a classic example of flint

flushwork. The doorway has emblems of the Passion and Trinity in spandrels and fleurons stud the arch. There are three matching niches, two in the buttresses and one over the doorway, which has an angel holding a shield below the stool. Inside the north porch is an altar tomb (sarcophagus) with a Purbeck marble top, initially thought to be that of either a medieval founder of the church or that of the church builder and built outside the church before the building of the porch. It has now been established due to the fortuitous discovery of the will of Thomas Waryn in Bury St Edmunds Records Office, that it is he a Husbandman of Preston who is buried there. His will dated 1524 (pre- Reformation) sets out in detail the instructions he gave for Masses to be said, where and how



much to be paid, for the repose of his soul. This document gives a fascinating insight into the mind-set of a fairly wealthy Tudor farmer from this village.

THE NAVE



THE ARCADES in the nave are unusual in that the builders used two different kinds of stone. The freestanding piers on both sides are made of a hard stone, most likely from Lincolnshire, where there were various quarries in the Stamford area quarrying stone of this type. This would have been chosen for its ability to withstand heavy loading because, as can be seen, they are unsupported. The attached columns at the east and west ends of the arcades are however made of a much finer-grained stone known as clunch, which was also used for the arches of the south arcade and for the columns of the tower arch.

CLUNCH is a hard form of chalk that was quarried in various places in east Cambridgeshire, and northwest Suffolk; it was sometimes referred to as 'Burwell stone', after the quarry at that place. The fine-grained texture and softness made it very suitable for intricate carving, and would have cost much less than the Lincolnshire stone, as the quarrying and transport costs to Preston would have been considerably less and one suspects that its use here was to save costs. The higher use of clunch in the south aisle than the north aisle indicates perhaps that money was getting tight in the later stages of the rebuilding of the church.

In 1758 the original 14th century tower was struck by lightning, causing serious damage preventing anyone ascending it and was noted in the Parish Book at that time as follows:

May it be remembered that in the evening of 20th August 1758 about 9 of the clock a terrible strike of Thunder and Lightning was seen and heard to the Great Surprise of many people and at the same time in the Storm was beat of the Southmost corner of the Stople adjoining the Church of Preston St Mary in the County of Suffolk a large quantity of the coping stones with a large quantity of the small stone, several large holes beat through the side of Stople and the Stair Case of Stople cracked at the sametime almost from top to bottom. The windows of the South Isle much broke both glass and pilars of the windows. In the North Isle much battered and several strong marks of Violence made in the walls of the Church. One end of a seat in the north Isle torn in pieces and several marks of fire left but praise be the fire took no such effect of burn and.... either Church or Stople.....

Mr John Ranson and...

Churchwardens.

Repairs were effected at that time, and the cracks strapped with iron which lasted for over a hundred years, when on 23rd April 1863 at about four o'clock in the afternoon a great portion of the tower fell upon the nave roof carrying it with it, demolishing the western gallery, crushing the organ and burying the Norman Font (*right*), which still bears the crack that it sustained on that occasion. It was reported that the collapse had been caused by further restoration work being carried out to the previous damage to the tower, when part of the turret staircase in the tower had been removed. This angular support being taken away, the lateral pressure drove out the walls, and the tower was split from top to bottom, causing much devastation.



IT is interesting to note that in the Minutes of a Vestry Meeting held on 8th December 1864 the following was recorded:

At a Vestry meeting held this day notice was given of the distribution of Miss Green's charity in bread by the Rector and one of the Churchwardens on Nov. 8th.

Also the following communication from the Rector was read:

I promise to contribute two hundred (£200) towards the restoration of Preston Church on the following conditions:

1st That the Rate-payers themselves contribute four hundred pounds (£400) towards the same object by Rate, Loan, Subscription or otherwise.

2nd That such sum be actual contribution of the Rate-payers themselves, and that it be all in hand, untouched, available towards the restoration of the church.

3rd That the restoration be complete – Church and Tower, not necessarily done at the same time, but that, when any one part is undertaken, the entire restoration be completed at some future time.

4th That such some of £400 be collected before the end of the year eighteen hundred & sixty-six (1866).

5th That I shall still (be) Rector of Preston at the time.

(signed) Henry G. Williams

Preston Rectory Nov 26. 1864.

In July 1867 the work of rebuilding and restoration commenced under the direction of the architect Sir Arthur Blomfield, (1829–1899) of Cavendish Square, London, by Mr Toomey, builder of Bury St Edmunds for the sum of £2000. This included not only the tower and nave, but also substantially rebuilding the chancel; the vestry also appears to date from this period.

The work continued almost uninterrupted until October 1868 when the re-opening for Divine Service was held on Thursday 15 October, 1868 with two services, the first being Holy Communion at 11.00am attended by the Bishop of Ely, The Right Revd. E. Harold Browne who conducted the Communion and preached the sermon, and 3.00pm Evensong attended by the Archdeacon of Sudbury, the Ven. Lord Arthur Hervey who preached the sermon. More than thirty Clergymen were observed at these services, from all the surrounding parishes, meeting at the Hall adjoining the church and processing in their surplices, hoods, and stoles to the church. The choir of Lavenham took part under the direction of their organist Mr G.F. Harwood, who played a large harmonium; the organ having been destroyed when the tower collapsed. This had been purchased by subscription and installed only 33 years earlier in 1834.

THE bells that had been rehung in the tower by Mr Flanders Green of Tuddenham rang merrily, the ringers being members of the Lavenham and Preston peals. The village took on a festive look, the day being generally observed as a holiday, with flags displayed at the entrance to the churchyard and on the tower, as well as at the hall where marquees were erected for the visitors' luncheon. Mr Nunn of Sudbury served lunch in a large marquee to about 90 ladies and gentlemen and Mr Debenham of Lavenham served the choir in a small one. There was an extensive report of the events in the Norwich and Suffolk Post dated 20 October 1868 stating:

'The restorations have been successfully carried out, the new work being joined to the old in so perfect manner, and with such good materials, that not the least flaw or settlements is discernable, and the old tower being heightened, stands forth firmly again in more than pristine dignity'.

'The Churchwardens Messrs. T. King and J. Wright have also exerted themselves outside the edifice, giving good example of modern churchwarden's work much to their credit, the churchyard is put into good condition, the paths gravelled, the parish stocks – a barbarous relic of a bygone age – removed from the entrance to the churchyard, and all things look as if the good people of Preston were determined not only to mend their ways, but to teach others to go do likewise. Such was the pleasant state of things at the opening service. These services must be considered in every respect as most gratifying'.

More recently, at the west end of the nave, the pews have been removed to the west of the cross to make it easier for the congregation to gather around the font during baptisms. It also allows more room for fellowship before or after services and provides a space that is very useful for the provision of refreshments at concerts, talks and other community events.

NORTH AISLE

JUST inside the north door is a 12th century Norman Font almost certainly from the previous church, and is most probably cut from Barnack stone quarried near Stamford in Lincolnshire. It has a square bowl with revets, styles incepted arches, and a tree of life, mounted on additional 19th century stonework.

To the right of this door there is a list of all the Rectors of the parish since 1246. The arched recess on the inside of the north wall, probably a low tomb recess, also suggests that at least this part of the wall was of the previous building.

ROYAL ARMS & COMMANDMENT BOARDS



MOUNTED high on the north wall either side of the door are the Royal Coat of Arms of Queen Elizabeth 1st and Commandment Boards, painted on oak and triptych in form by the orders of Robert Ryece III of Preston Hall (1555-1638) – patron, an antiquarian of note and a great student of heraldry.

The triptych on which the Arms are painted appears to have been cut down from a previous board, probably rectangular, which had borne the Arms of Edward VI, and the Elizabethan Arms were over painted on it. The triptych bearing the Ten Commandments was probably made in Edward VI's reign and Ryece had the arms board cut down to match. It is thought that the boards were painted by Ryece himself or by William Milles of Lavenham, as in Ryece's last will and testament dated 7 February 1637, it states:

To William Milles of Lavenham, Suffolk, painter and glazier – 40s 'With all my boxes of painting coolers, with desire that soe long as hee shall live and bee able to worke, that hee doe from tyme to tyme renewe and amend as need shall require the deciaies of the coolers, wordes, letters, copartimentes and formes of those tables, writeinges and inscriptions which hee hath at any tyme made for mee as they are fixed in the parish church or chancel of Preston aforesaid'.

In past years the Royal Arms and Commandment Boards have been loaned to various institutions for exhibitions, illustrating the national and international importance of these treasures of Preston St. Mary church.

While on loan to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London in 2003 for their Queen Elizabeth 1st Exhibition marking the 400th Anniversary of her death, it was reported that the triptych of the Royal Arms of Elizabeth 1st was one of only three remaining in the country, being by far the most elaborate and splendid of them.

THE ARMS BOARD has also been to Norwich Castle Museum in 2010 for an exhibition entitled 'The Art of Faith. 2000 Years of Art & Belief in Norfolk'; and in 2013 to Tate Britain for an exhibition entitled 'Art under Attack - Histories of British Iconoclasm'.

In 2015 the Royal Arms Board went on loan to La Reunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais, Paris, for inclusion in a joint exhibition with the National Portrait Gallery, London, entitled 'Les Vrais Tudors' presenting the art of the Tudor dynasty (the English Renaissance) to a continental audience.

In 2021–2022 it was prominently displayed in the British Library's major exhibition "Elizabeth and Mary: Royal Cousins, Rival Queens".

In H.M.Cautley's book 'Royal Arms and Commandment in our Churches' (1934) he mentions a third inscribed board in Preston church which unfortunately, has long ceased to exist, but Ryece in his Breviary of Suffolk records the inscription in Latin. The translation in English of that time is:

Glory for ever bee unto the Lord.Sacred to God who hath twice avenged us,and in memory ofThe Fleet of Spain,Overwhelmed & Overthrown, A.D. 1588

We saw (& trembled to behold) the seas swarming with the Fleet of Spain. One hundred twenty & four ships, well tried, made up that "Invincible" Host: their mighty frames amazed all seamen by their strangeness. Neptune had seen them & marvelled at his new wealth; now he laughs to think that to him have come all glories of the Earth.

But we were all filled with dread by the roll of a thousand drums & the trumpet's frequent blare, by the blades unsheathed on every hand & threats of servitude; for all these weapons the Spanish savage had devised for the ruin of our British race, while we entrusted our hopes to the vessels battered & ill equipped. That mighty host, laden with fireballs (but without their master) set sail & issued forth with savage prayers that she herself might perish, if need be, in the flames of her own kindling, could she but overwhelm her foe in common ruin.

Driven by the winds she trusted, the Spaniard perished indeed & destroyed thus our foe. The very sea that once was bright with Spanish sails we saw now, with exultation, dyed with Spanish blood & gore.

Their fleet is hurled violently from her course; some vessels are at the bottom of the sea, others are aflame in mid-ocean, while some, drifting blindly on the flood, scarce make at length an unknown shore.

A Rock indeed our God was named & twice our land's Defender. For once had He vanquished our foes & once had He mocked their plots. Once with open ruin, and once with treacherous guile they were assailing us; but the ruin they planned was betrayed & their treachery was brought to nought.

(This refers to the defeat of the Spanish Armada and to the Gunpowder Plot).

COATS OF ARMS

THE NAME Ryece – variously spelt – Rice, Rise, Ryse, Ryce, or Ryece, is found in several places in this region in the fifteenth century. In Colchester, Belchamp Otten, Kedington, Worlingham, and as early as 1327 in Brettenham where Ryece Hall still stands today. The origins of these Ryece names are obscure, but there may well have been some who came from Wales in the time of Henry VII, or before.

A Thomas Ryece owned Preston Hall in 1480, and died there in 1520. His son Robert married first Agnes Munnings of Nedging, and secondly Margery Waldegrave of Sudbury, through whom he inherited property in Bildeston. He acquired a good deal of property in Preston and there is evidence for believing that he built and inhabited for a time another house not far from the church on the west side. By the time of his death in 1544 he was recognised locally as a man of some substance. His son was also called Robert, born before 1487.

The third Robert Ryece in direct line married Mary Appleton of Little Waldingfield, and became a reputable antiquarian and student of heraldry. He received part of his education in Geneva, and justly became famous for his book published in 1618, *The Breviary of Suffolk*, which describes the county in general and all the heraldry in particular. It was he who set up the coats of arms in the glass windows of the church, mostly of Suffolk and locally related families. He states in his *Breviary* that there were one hundred and sixty, giving descriptions of each one, so they must have occupied not only the clerestory, but most of the other windows as well.

We can assume that many were lost when the lightning struck the tower in 1758. Fifty-two coats of arms are all that remain today, forty-six in the windows of the clerestory and east ends of the aisles and six above the lateral arches of the nave – running clockwise from the west end of the north aisle the shields are:

1. Gules, three crowns or = Bishop of Ely. (Preston was in the bishopric of Ely from 1837 to 1914).
2. Argent, three spearheads and a chief azure = Ryece of Preston Hall
3. Royal Arms, England, Scotland and Ireland, quarterly.
4. Trinity symbol. See of Canterbury.
5. Sable, three lions passant in bend between two double cotises argent + Browne [? For Edward Harold Browne, Bishop of Ely 1864-73].
6. Argent, a lion rampant sable [holding an object]. = Emmanuel.

See the back cover for a record of all the Heraldic Shields.

IN THE Quinquennial Inspection on the church fabric in 2010, the diocesan architect reported that the west-facing window in the north porch was subject to much rainwater penetration, showing that the glazing cement was generally failing, and that in time this could lead to major damage to the internal walling and the oak bench beneath. His report concluded that re-leading of the window would cure the problem, which would involve the complete removal of the window glazing, re-leading and renovation of the stone mullions and re-installation of the new window.

The Parochial Church Council decided that the window renovation would be an excellent opportunity for this parish to celebrate and commemorate the St Edmundsbury & Ipswich Diocese Centenary Year in 2014 and if possible the inclusion of the Diocesan shield as a centre piece would be most appropriate. The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) were approached concerning this and whether we could also include other heraldic shields as a continuation of the historic tradition started by Robert Ryece of Preston Hall in this church in the latter part of the 16th century.

With the approval of the DAC a faculty application was made to the Chancellor of the Diocese and we received a faculty approving the inclusion of three Coats of Arms, namely The Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, Emmanuel College Cambridge, Patrons of this Parish, and Mr Brian Winston OBE a resident and benefactor to this church and parish over many years.

The new window was dedicated at the Patronal Service on Sunday 7th September 2014 by the acting bishop of the Diocese, The Right Revd. David Thomson, assisted by The Revd. Stephen Earl – Rector, The Revd. Mark Woodrow – Curate, with representatives of the donors to the cost of the window namely, The Dean of Emmanuel College The Revd. Jeremy Caddick, Mr Brian B Winston OBE, his son Peter and grandson James, Mr Roger Huggett – Treasurer of the Friends of Preston St Mary Church, and Mr James Wilkins past Churchwarden representing the Parochial Church Council.



Diocesan Shield



Emmanuel College Shield



Winston Shield

AFTER the service a presentation was made by Mr Wilkins to Mr Winston of a painting of Preston St Mary church to mark his family's involvement in this renewal and dedication of the window. This was followed by a special buffet lunch arranged in a marquee in the churchyard to celebrate the occasion attended by all 80 members of the congregation and specially invited guests.

Mr Winston became a resident in this parish in 1984 and has always held the belief that no village can prosper without an active church and village hall; he has actively and generously supported both for 30 years. He was awarded an OBE for his charitable services in Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee Honours list in 2002, and received the Grant of Arms from the College of Arms in November that year, as shown below.

It is interesting to note the design details used in creating this Coat of Arms. The White Chapel at the top of the arms represents the area of Whitechapel where Mr Winston was born and educated. The bell refers to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry where the Bow Bells were cast, within which sound he was born.

The Griffin rampant is borrowed from the Coat of Arms of the Leyton Orient Football Club and is included due to his close association with the club. He was a Director from 1972 and became Chairman and owner in 1973 until 1984. In 1976 he was invited to join the management committee of the Football League and also became a member of the Football Association Counsel.

The key in the claw of the Griffin signifies Key Street which was the street at Mile End Gate where his father was born.

The Latin motto around the base translates into a phrase he adopted in his teens,

'Out of Step – Up the Front'.



DURING the substantial rebuilding in 1867 the nave roof was renewed, with moulded oak timbers, carved bosses and cornices. From the outside there is evidence, namely a small angel below a stub buttress at the east end apex of the nave roof, that there was once a Sanctus bell turret there.

The nave floor was paved with Minton and Hollins' patent tiles, and open, beautifully carved 'Poppy Head' oak pews were fitted.



At the east end of the nave stands the pulpit, which was a gift by The Revd. Leonard E Shelford (Vicar of St Matthew's, Upper Clapton), and his brothers, sons of The Revd. William Shelford, Rector of Preston from 1829 to 1854. The cost at that time was said to be about £50. At the back of the pulpit the entrance formerly leading to the rood-loft can still be seen, with the staircase crumbled and worn by time and use. The matching priest-reading stool was a gift of the Curate of Preston, The Revd. C. Parker.

The fine and intricate Victorian brass lectern was given to the church in 1874 by Mr James Hewitt, brother of The Revd. Thomas Hewitt, Rector here from 1870 for 23 years.

THE CHANCEL

THE refurbishment included the raising of the roof which is wagon shaped in 14th century style, panelled in oak, with its ribs and the bosses at angles nicely carved. The new stained glass windows, although unsigned appear to be by H. Hughes of London. The east window c.1868 depicts the 'Sower', the 'Good Shepherd' and the 'Reaper'. The floor was laid with tiles from the Architectural Pottery Company of Devon.

The small door in the north wall leads into the vestry where the registers are kept. The gift of Robert Ryece to the church of a silver paten or salver, is of special note, bearing the date 1624 and the Latin word 'Reticebo' meaning 'I shall keep silence', which uses letters taken from his name: an ingenious and modest way of recording a gift. Piety, modesty, and generosity seem to have been outstanding in his character, and it is noteworthy that in his fascinating book '*The Breviary of Suffolk*', there is hardly a mention of himself and little about his manifold activities in benefit of the Church. : He was in fact the Patron of the Living, an office that he transferred by a deed dated 11th October 1620 to the Master, Fellows and scholars of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, who have continued to exercise that office to the present day.

ROBERT Ryece is buried on the north side of the altar, and his wife Mary née Appleton of Little Waldingfield, on the south side. They are commemorated by brasses in the sanctuary floor here, which should not be overlooked: on the south side for Mary Ryece (1629) with four shields, and a Latin epitaph elegantly comparing our fleeting human life to that of the butterfly and water spider, and on the north side for Robert Ryece a lavish display of heraldry, Ryece's shield with mantling, crest and motto and eight other shields, but characteristically, without an epitaph.

The tiling on the east wall of the sanctuary includes pictures of the passion, the seamless garment, the crown of thorns, the nails, hammer, spear and hyssop, and the ladder and dice.

The marble reredos behind the altar was erected in commemoration of The Revd. D G Williams the Rector, and The Revd. C Parker his Curate, by James Powell & Sons of Whitefriars who were best known for their stained glass. However, they undertook other work and this reredos is by them and was given by the Rector's family together with the Altar Table and coverings. The mosaic panels of the Evangelistic symbols and a centre inscription informs us that it was the Rector and his Curate 'by whose exertions, the rebuilding work was carried out'.

The large mosaic panels set into the wall on either side in 1890 commemorate The Revd. William Shelford, Rector from 1829 to 1854, and his widow Emily who survived him by 35 years. The centre panels show the Agnus Dei, and the Pelican in her piety. (The graves of The Revd. W Shelford, his wife and family are located in the far southwest corner of the churchyard, to the right of the front gates). The Revd. Shelford erected a new and handsome Rectory House in 1835, now known as Shelford House, which still stands at the north end of the village.



THE 14th century piscina in the right hand corner has a cusped ogee arch and an arch inside the window jamb overlooking the dropped window cill sedilia, or stone seat.

To the above right of the south chancel door can be seen an inscription concerning Nicholas Coleman, Rector of Preston 1640, and a loyal supporter of the monarchy.

In Cromwell's time the House of Commons established a Committee of the Whole House 'for Religion', which was usually referred to as 'the Committee for Scandalous Ministers'. In the Case Book of Suffolk Committees for Scandalous Ministers, it is recorded that Nicholas Coleman was accused by certain Covenantors of being "popishly inclined and an observer of sundry innovations and ceremonies". When asked to take the Covenant, as set forth by the parliament, "he said that if he should take it he should damne his soul, ...moreover he pulled out the King's Declaration and read it in church. He seldom or never gave his parishioners notice of the fast days before they came... He was a frequent company keeper, and very much given to drinkinge ...and on Ash Wednesday did either brake his legg or put it out of joint and in that humour desired the bone setter to set his legg in such a manner that he might go on it againe the next morning, although it was six weeks after at least before he could show himself at his church after that miscarriage".

A warrant was issued for his ejection on the 23rd July 1644, but under the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 he was brought back. The inscription in Latin was written by a successor The Revd. John Hill, Rector 1719, who put up this stone in 1729, praising Coleman and saying that so excellent a man should not go without an epitaph.

SOUTH AISLE

AT THE eastern end of the south aisle there is another piscina, indicating that this was once a Lady Chapel with an altar in the days before the rebuilding and re-benching of the nave.

The Nativity or Mary window in the south wall is by Ward & Hughes and dated 1884. This was erected by the children of the late Joseph Parker of Brettenham Park, in memory of The Revd. Charles Parker, Curate in charge of this parish 1865 – 1871, who donated the Priest Stall mentioned earlier, and also included in the inscription on the reredos as being responsible together with the Rector, Revd. H.G. Williams, for the rebuilding and refurbishment of the church.

In the centre of the south wall is a plaque in memory of John Ely Wright of Preston Manor who was Churchwarden of the parish for 49 years, and was erected by parishioners and friends. It is interesting to note that his name is one of those listed in the minutes of the Vestry Meeting held on 8th December 1864 concerning the rebuilding of the church.



The doorway next to the organ has boltholes each side of the door recess where a wooden bar would have been inserted to secure the door. On the outside of this door, either side of the window behind the organ, two heads carved in stone can be seen, and may well be taken for those of Robert Ryece and his wife Mary, looking out across the moat towards the house in which they lived together.

The organ was installed in 1874 mainly at the charge of the then Rector, The Revd. Thomas Hewitt and his brother Mr James Hewitt.

THE TOWER

AT THE entrance to the tower the restored remains of the Ancient Rood Screen now stand. During the restoration of the church 1867-8, the lower part of the very ancient and massive Rood Screen, which till then had remained undisturbed in the Church, half hidden by pews, (the upper portion having been cut down at a much earlier unknown date) was by some strange oversight carted away with the old pews and thrown away. Fortunately they were seen in a builders yard in Bury St Edmunds by an antiquary, who wrote to the newspapers, and they were eventually brought back, and preserved in the vestry. From these pieces the Revd. Ernest Geldart, a well-known ecclesiological expert, reproduced as nearly as possible, the whole design of the Rood Screen as it originally stood in its entirety, the surviving portions being worked into the design.

In 1904 the Rector L.O. Asplen sent out a letter appealing for contributions for the cost to restore the lower portion of the Screen, estimated by Messrs. Taylor & Clifton, of London at £65, and the restoration of the whole Screen at £200. On account of the great cost of the whole restoration it was proposed to restore first the lower portion only and that the work could be done locally with equal efficiency for a smaller sum. The work was put in hand in early 1907 when funds had reached over £36, against the local cost of £40, and completed during that summer.

The beautiful design of The Revd. Geldhart of the whole screen was framed and now hangs on the north wall of the tower.

The door on the south side of the Tower leads via the spiral stairs up to the bell-ringing chamber. It is recorded that there were four bells in the church tower in 1553 and in 1743 there were five and as previously described, in 1758 the Tower was struck by lightning and the staircase cracked from top to bottom. In 1868 after the tower was rebuilt the bells were re-hung and again in 1932 after the bell frame had been strengthened. The six that are hanging there now are three trebles in the notes of C, D and E cast by Thomas Gardiner in 1744, the fourth in B, by Miles Graye of Colchester in 1640, the fifth in A, 1702 and the sixth in G (the tenor bell) 1704, both by Henry Pleasant.

In the west wall of the tower are large double oak doors which, as can be seen by the badly worn sill where many hundreds of feet have trodden, was for many years in the past used as the main entrance to the church and is still used today for weddings and funerals.

On the north wall of the tower is a painted metal plaque detailing the 'Benefactions to the Parish of Preston'. *The Robert Ryece Charity* was founded by him to apprentice two sons of the poor of the parish and still exists today, administered by the Trustees of the charity, namely the Rector, two Churchwardens, and a representative from the Parish Council.

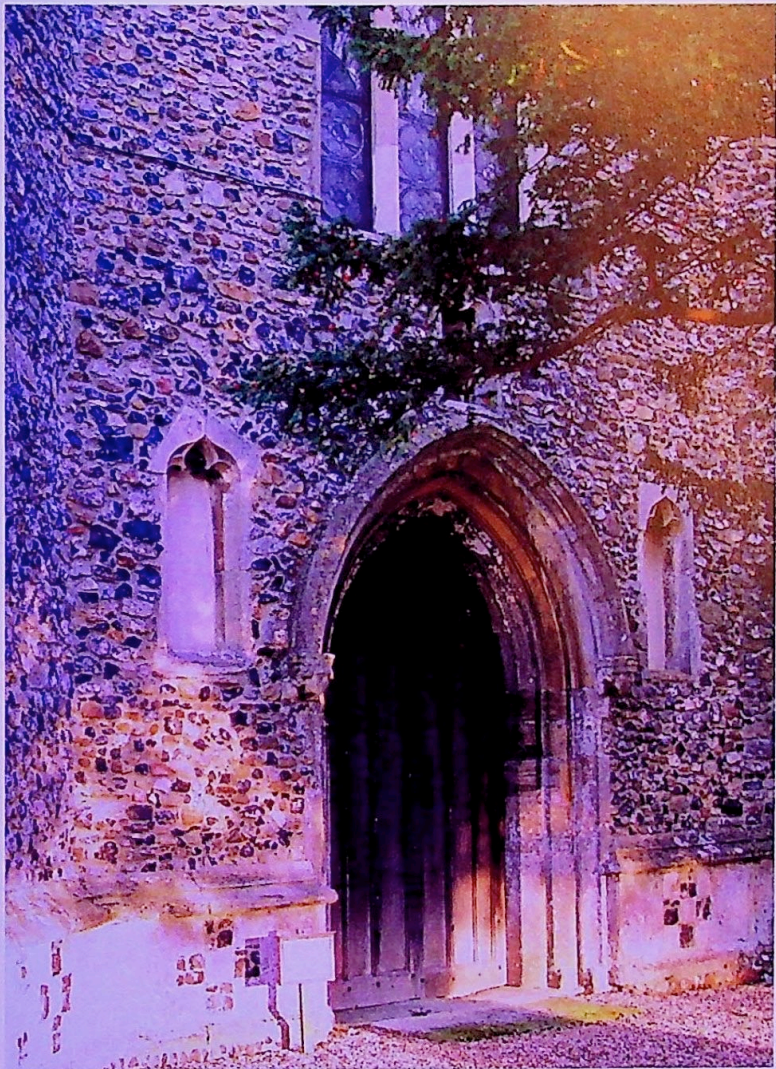
EACH year school leavers or students are invited to apply to the Charity for a grant to assist them to purchase books, tools or clothing necessary for them to pursue their apprenticeship or studies in their chosen career.

The Mary Green Charity also mentioned has been administered by the the Rector and Churchwardens. Mrs Mary Green of Bury St Edmunds (a native of Preston), who died in 1816, left in her will £200 to be invested in Government Securities, the dividends to be used to buy bread or fuel for distribution half yearly to the poor of the Parish. The records show that this continued until 1942 when it was decided that as coal could not be delivered, a payment of five shillings per claimant should be paid instead. The tiny remnants of this charity have been overtaken by inflation and become so insignificant that the Trustees made the decision to close it in 2023, subsuming the remainder within the Robert Ryece Charity pending proper use of it when circumstances arise.

In conclusion it is interesting to note that from the enterprise of people from this village who emigrated to North America, the town of Preston, Connecticut was established. Born in Preston St Mary Thomas Park at the age of five sailed with his father Robert Park, his elder brother, John Winthrop of Groton and many others, in 1630 in the 'Arabella' for New England. Land titles were deeded to the immigrants, for the sum of £50 by the Chief Mohegan, Owaneco in 1686. Some thirty families led by Thomas Park, the Tracys and Nat Leffingwell, petitioned for the Preston boundaries to be granted incorporation as a town. This the Connecticut Legislature granted in March 1687. From then on Preston developed as an agricultural community, depending on the skills of the pioneers. Eleven years later, Thomas Park became the first deacon of the first 'Church of Christ of Preston' to be built of brick and stone, some five centuries later than this church in Preston St Mary. Until that time, services were held in homesteads or a nearby barn.

Other emigrants from Preston St Mary, namely Judith Everard who married Mary Ryece's brother Samuel Appleton in this church on 24th January 1616, also sailed to America with the Pilgrim Fathers, and they were founders of the famous New England family of that name. Mrs Patricia Pennington (née Appleton) a direct descendant of this family visited Suffolk in 2003 with her husband David, and renewed their Marriage Vows in a Service in this church in celebration of their fifty years of marriage, coincidentally on the 24th January 1953, exactly 337 years to the day of Patricia's ancestor's marriage here in 1616.

A group from Preston, Connecticut came here for the celebrations of the Millennium. Residents of Preston St. Mary have also visited Preston, Connecticut on two occasions. The second time was in May 2013 when they were welcomed by the Mayor of Preston and the Governor of Connecticut.

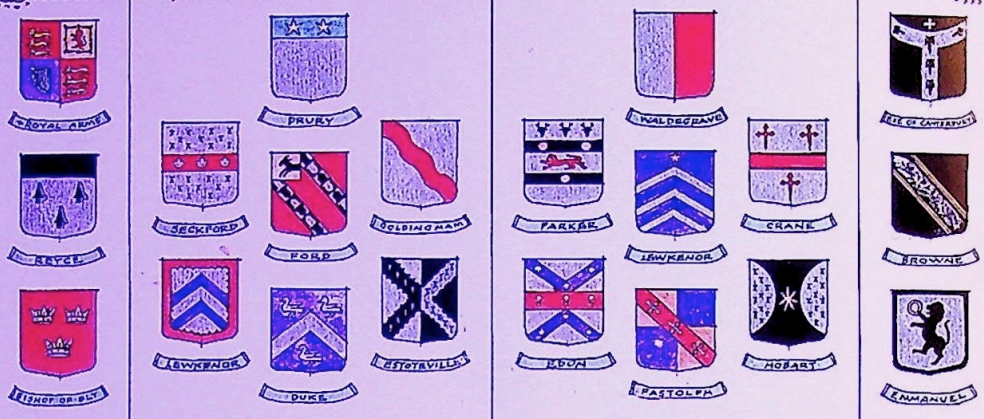


The west door.
Sculptures would have once stood in the niches on either side.

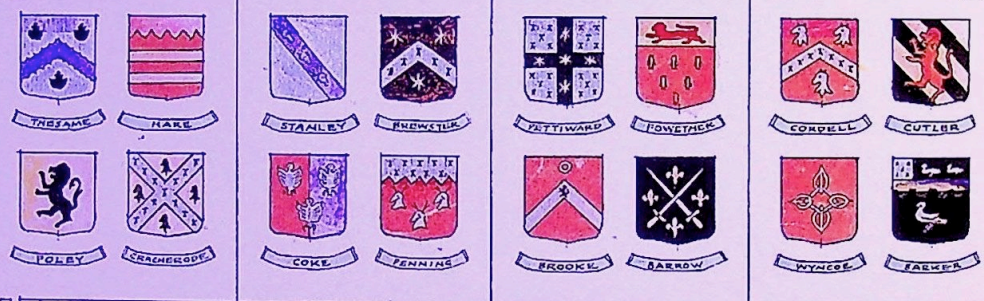


Can you locate these sculptures and who they are thought to be?

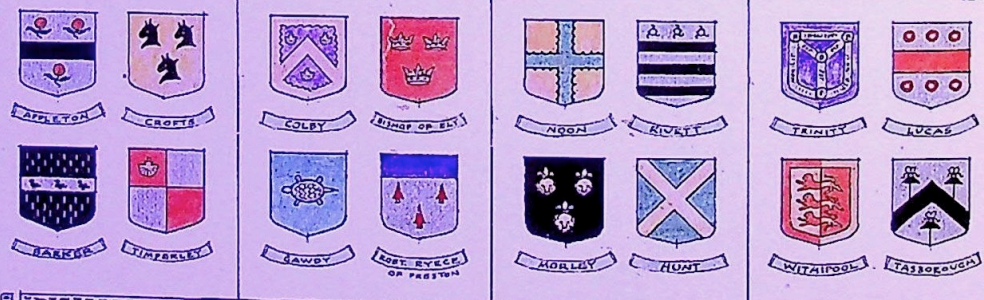
ST. MARY'S CHURCH PRESTON
 RECORD OF HERALDIC SHIELDS



NORTH KEYSTONES NORTH AISLE WINDOW SOUTH AISLE WINDOW SOUTH KEYSTONES



NORTH CLERESTORY WINDOWS



SOUTH CLERESTORY WINDOWS

A record from the 1960s of the Heraldic Shields in the Church at that time