

ST MARY AT
THE ELMS
IPSWICH
A GUIDE



ST MARY AT THE ELMS CHURCH

ELM STREET IPSWICH

INTRODUCTION

St Mary at the Elms is a church with a history stretching back at least 900 years. Many people see it as a “jewel” in what was, in living memory, a highly populated area but which is now a predominantly business and commercial area of the town centre. Within the parish boundary are the neighbourhood police station, the Family and Magistrates court and several major office buildings and shops. Until their recent moves the Crown Court and Civic Centre were also within the parish. Although there are now fewer than 300 adults and children living in the parish, there are thousands of people who work and do business there during the week as well as an increasing number of visitors to the town.

People come into St Mary at the Elms seeking quietness and inner peace and also to pray. Some will be seeking answers to questions about the meaning of life and the purpose of their own lives. Some will be searching for God and have questions about what Christians believe because of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Some people come to worship God, our Heavenly Father, at the daily services, bearing witness to the love and power of God in their lives. They seek His help so that His loving will and purpose may be fulfilled in them and in the entire world.

Some people come simply to look around an ancient and historically important building and may only see it in that context. But visitors’ eyes and minds can still be opened to the wonders of creation and its purpose, and we hope that something of what visitors see and experience here will do just that and perhaps challenge them to find out more about why the church buildings exist and why they are still in use today.

St Mary at the Elms is a Church of England Parish Church, maintaining the Catholic faith and order that we believe is God's gift to His Church.

Many people find the quiet stillness of our church a real haven of tranquillity set in the midst of such a busy area. Our prayer board in the porch indicates that numerous visitors seek solace in the church at a time of distress. We hope that all who step through our doors will experience something of meaning. Visitors to our church will find a warm welcome if they choose to come here to worship God and to share in the life of His Church by following Jesus Christ in your daily life. The church is kept open every day.



Following the rebuilding of the church in the 14th century it was dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to distinguish it from the three other medieval churches in Ipswich dedicated to Our Lady, it became known as St Mary at the Elms. An 1841 sketch of the church by Henry Davy shows elm trees, and elms still grow near the church tower.

The church has become affectionately known as The Elms, and was originally a very small building. What is now the nave was originally the nave and chancel. The north aisle as we see it today did not exist except for a small transept. The internal timbers of the north aisle roof, along with the shape of the wall, reveal the existence of the original transept. A sketch of the church for a map of Ipswich produced in 1698 shows that there was a similar transept to the south side of the building.

The church is dominated by a 54 foot high tower which has always been described as Tudor but was built shortly after 1443, long before the Tudors battled their way to the English throne. Its brick shows the characteristic diaper pattern that employed darker colour bricks in the reigns of Henry VIII and his daughters. The diapering on the south face is very delicate and worth careful examination. The tower is strengthened by polygonal buttresses in receding stages at the corners, which is very advanced and well ahead of its proper architectural time. The tower and belfry windows reveal the skill of Ipswich brick makers and layers. This is all the more remarkable because the tower was erected during the most troubled years of twice deposed King Henry VI.

During the incumbency of Balthasar Gardemau, St Mary at the Elms served as Ipswich's place of worship for French Protestant refugees, the Huguenots. The Revd. Gardemau came to England in c1681, was ordained in 1682 and was Pastor of the French Protestants from 1682 to 1689.

There are five bells in the tower: one pre-Reformation which was cast in London by Joanna Hille in 1441. Four additional bells were added in the 17th century. It is currently unsafe to ring these bells because of the poor condition of the wooden bell frame. Visitors may on occasions hear a bell because one of the bells is struck by a clapper rather than rung.

The tower clock is thought to be the oldest in Ipswich. Design of the tower clock mechanism can be traced to 1340 and similar mechanisms continued to be made for some 200 years; but there is some evidence to suggest that the St Mary at the Elms clock is of a later date, perhaps around 1630.

At 8.30am on Saturday 25th July 2010 a fire broke out in what was then the Walsingham Chapel at the base of the tower. The contents of the chapel and the first floor of the tower were lost and the nave suffered smoke and heat damage.





RENOVATION WORK AFTER THE FIRE

This has included the rewiring and redecoration of the church, rebuilding the interior of the tower; and the refurbishment of the organ and the ancient tower clock. This work was completed in August 2012. The new screen installed at the base of the tower includes a re-designed etched glass memorial to the parishioners who died in the two world wars, incorporated into the doors. This replaces the wooden WWI memorial which was sadly lost in the fire, as was the hatchment depicting Charles II's Royal Arms.

The shape and size of the church as it now exists is the result of work done to meet the needs of the large and principally working class population of the parish in the second half of the 19th century. Until the mid-20th century the area comprised many small streets with rows of terraced houses, almost all of which were demolished to make way for commercial developments. The present chancel was added and the north transept was incorporated into the new north aisle. Finally, the vestries were added in the late 19th century.

The extent of the medieval building can be seen on the south side. The original nave still has its brick embattled parapet and the original chancel, now incorporated into the nave, still has its priest's door.

All the stone work for the windows in the body of the church is 19th century. All the stained glass in the windows is also 19th century, including the small panel depicting the Crucifixion in the middle north aisle window. The north east window of the aisle shows Christ with the Angel Gabriel on one side and the Blessed Virgin Mary on the other. On the south side of the nave the windows depict personifications of the virtues of Purity, Faith, Hope, Charity and Mercy.

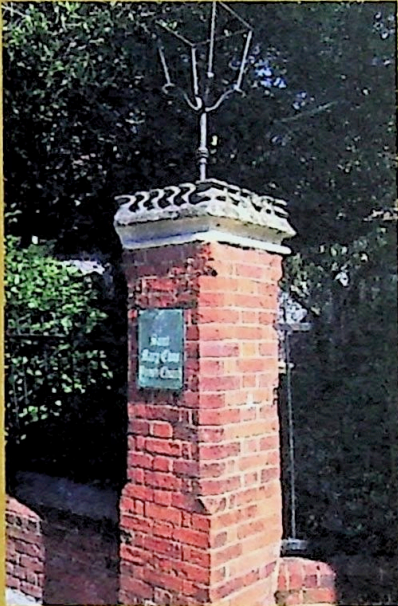


The 15th century font, as in many churches, is at the west end of the nave. It appears in an etching by John Smart of Ipswich in 1841. The font was re-cut in 1871, when a new cover was added. Around the base of the font are representations of the New Testament Gospel writers with their emblems at their feet. Matthew (man) is found on the south side, Mark (lion) on the east, John (eagle) on the north and Luke (ox) on the west. The panels around the bowl depict scenes from the Gospels, including the Baptism of Jesus. There is also a Lamb symbolising Jesus as the Lamb of God and the IHS monogram. This monogram was originally a representation in Greek lettering of the first three letters of the name "Jesus" and it is most likely that this is what was intended by the designer of the font. However, over the centuries other attempts to explain the three letters were made, usually using Latin, eg. "Jesus Hominum Salvator" (Jesus, Saviour of Men); "Jesum Habemus Socium" (We have Jesus as our Companion). In more recent times some people, regarding the letters as an English monogram, have assumed IHS means "In His Service".

The water stoup on the east side of the entrance has been restored and is in regular use.

There is a sculpted triptych of the Rood, 2006, by Charles Gurrey in the niches on the south porch. These were installed to replace the three images which it is likely were taken away and the niches defaced during the Reformation. The damaged stonework was left, possibly as a reminder of this desecration.

There is some good 19th and 20th century glass, including a north aisle window of 1907 by Sir Ninian Comper, and nave windows of 1879-80 signed 'Taylor late O'Connor'. There are notable wall monuments of the 17th to 19th centuries, including one erected by John Acton to his father, William Acton, a clothier who died 1616. This is a hanging monument showing him, his wife and their children, with his son John behind him and three daughters behind the mother. Death, a grisly figure holding a pointed dart, looms over them.



In 1977, the Guild of Our Lady of Ipswich (later renamed Meryemana) was founded

with two aims - to pray for Christian Unity and to plan and achieve the re-establishment of the shrine of Our Lady of Grace at Ipswich. The Shrine of Our Lady of Grace of Ipswich was re-established in 2002 in the Elms, being the nearest church to the position of the original Shrine of Our Lady in Lady Lane. The figure, carved by Robert Mellamphy, was placed in a niche created in the old priest's door and rededicated on 10 September 2002 by the Bishop of Richborough. It is an ecumenical shrine.

A more detailed history of the shrine can be found on our website which includes information about the Nettuno statue, on which the current carved statue was based.

www.stmaryattheelms.org.uk

REASONS FOR GRADE II DESIGNATION

The church of St Mary at the Elms, Ipswich, is designated at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * For its early fabric, in particular the Norman S doorway. * For its later medieval fabric, including the C16 tower. * For the interest of its fixtures, such as the Acton monument.

SOURCES Pevsner, N., Buildings of England: Suffolk (1974), 293 Mortlock, D P. The Guide to Suffolk Churches. 2nd ed. (2009) VCH Suffolk II (1907), 103-5 (Priory of Holy Trinity) Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture of Great Britain and Ireland (www.crsbi.ac.uk) qv St Mary Elms, Ipswich

Acknowledgements

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**“Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here”**