

Along the River Stour



The name 'Bradley' derives from 'Broad Ley' the Anglo Saxon phrase for 'broad wood' or 'clearing'.
Great Bradley is the first village along the River Stour and among the highest in Suffolk. The presence of the Stour, meaning 'mighty river', is probably the reason for Great Bradley's existence.
Records go back at least to Saxon times when the Bradley lands were owned by Edwin, Earl of Mercia whose grandmother was none other than Lady Godiva. Edwin was assassinated in the Norman era and his lands distributed among the followers of William the Conqueror.
In the 13th century, the manor was owned by the Bigods, first Earls of Norfolk and owners of Framlingham Castle, who took part in the release of Richard the Lionheart and the signing of the Magna Carta.
Enter Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII, who owned the land between the East Green area of the village and the river.
The land around East Green later passed to St John's College Cambridge which Lady Margaret helped to establish, as well as the founding of Lady Margaret Hall, the first women's college in Oxford.

St Mary's Church Great Bradley

A building with a remarkable history and fascinating features



A link with Henry VIII



**St Mary's has a Tudor porch of mellow red brick with niches surrounding the entrance and tiny brick side windows.
It is considered to be the finest of such porches in Suffolk and it is believed the bricks were made by Henry VIII's own brickmaker.
For many years, until 1953, the porch was used as a vestry. It shelters an impressive Norman arch, beside which is a niche or stoup once used for Holy Water.**



Here in the Upper Stour Valley, the river flows through beautiful countryside. The many footpaths are popular with walkers who frequently visit St Mary's church which is always open.

The building is maintained and cared for entirely by volunteers so we are always grateful for donations.

***We hope you have enjoyed your visit to St Mary's and that you will consider becoming a Friend of the church.
Please take a form or email: friends@greatbradleychurch.com***

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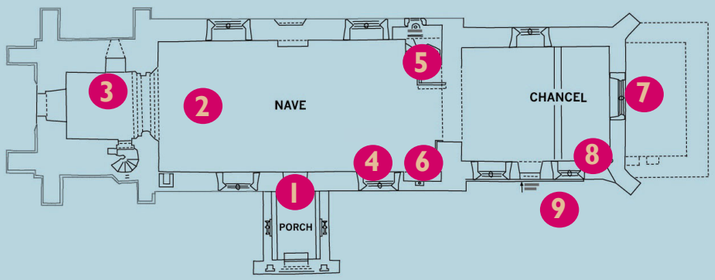
What to discover

St Mary's is a Grade II* church and one of the most interesting in West Suffolk and you are stepping into a building that dates back 700 years. There is plenty of evidence of Norman origins, most notably the grand and elaborately decorated arch inside the Tudor south porch. The chancel was originally Norman, rebuilt around 1320 and shortened sometime around 1730 although the 14th century priest's door remains. The nave was built around 1150 and the north door facing the road may well have been the entrance to the original Norman church.

Don't forget to look up to admire the 15th century wagon-type roof with its fine king posts as you wander through this ancient building.

Try to imagine how the church might have looked in the Middle Ages with its huge rood screen filling the 13th century chancel arch and its nave altars to meet the needs of the Catholic population. The rood is the cross or crucifix that would have been set high above the chancel to symbolize the death of Christ. Surviving alcoves outline where the stairs and rood beam were and indicate how deep and impressive the rood loft must have been.

As well as the removal of the rood screen to accommodate changes in the rituals of worship, the church has seen other alterations down the centuries as you will learn from this guide.



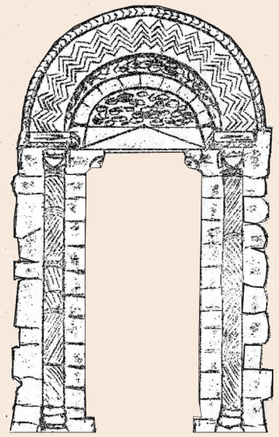
A tower with ancient bells



The handsome, embattled 14th century tower houses three ancient bells, the tenor being one of the earliest in Suffolk dating from about 1310. It bears the inscription 'Richard de Wymbis me fecit' meaning Richard de Wymbis made me. He appears in City records as a 'potter of Aldgate' and only four of his other bells now remain in the country.



The other two bells at St Mary's are also of great age, one dating from 1576 and the other quite possibly medieval.



1 Norman arch

Step inside the south porch to see one of Suffolk's most magnificent examples of Norman stonework. This tall arch leading into the nave, dates from the late Norman period and features two projecting heads, one a bishop wearing a mitre, the other a king in chain armour.



2 Font

The baptismal font stands near the entrance to the church, marking the start of the journey of faith. This 15th century, octagonal version is damaged but still retains its beautiful quatrefoil rose carvings.

If you look closely you may see some original colour in the stonework.

3 Fireplace

Look behind the organ to see something very unusual. The fireplace on the north wall of the tower is thought to have been used for baking the wafer bread for the Eucharist. A flue rising up 16 ft is covered at the top by a stone baffle plate.

4 Nave windows

Take time to look at the nave windows with their stone tracery from the Decorated Gothic period. On the south wall is stained glass dedicated to Frederick and Ida Webb by Powell & Son around 1952. Notice the tiny monk which is the maker's mark.



5 Pulpit

The pulpit was installed in the 18th century, probably as a three decker. It was later cut down but part of the clerk's desk remains in front as well as the sounding board.



6 Piscinae

Stone basins are visible on either side of the nave just before the chancel. One is behind the pulpit.

These piscinae indicate the presence of early nave altars as they were used in pre-Reformation churches for draining the water used in the Mass.

7 Memorial east window



The very moving east window above the altar is dedicated to Rex Wilder who was killed in the First World War. It is based on James Clark's 'The Great Sacrifice', 1914. Rex was the son of the Revd Burnard Wilder, rector from 1892-1932. In his memoirs, he records how he received the tragic news on Monday November 23rd 1914.

"A telegram from the War Office announcing the death of my 2nd son. 'Rex C.P. killed in action Nov. 19 1914'. Held a Memorial Service for the poor old fellow at 3pm on the afternoon of the 29th. Church more than full."

Mr Wilder performed the dedication ceremony himself on Whit Sunday 1919. He writes: *"During the week March 21-28, the stained glass East End window and stone work were inserted to the memory of Rex. Following this, on 28 March at Evensong there was a good congregation."*

Wall plaques on the north wall of the chancel commemorate Charles, John, Burnard and Percival Wilder who were, in turn, rectors of the parish and held the living for a total of 74 successive years.

8 Clergy seating



In the east wall of the chancel is part of a fine 14th century sedilia, the row of stone alcoves to seat the priest, deacon and subdeacon during a High Mass.

Only the subdeacon's sedile (the most westerly) remains, a clear sign the chancel would have been shortened, most likely in 1730.

9 17th Century tombs



There are 17th century graves on the south side of the church by the chancel. They feature skulls and skeletons and are known as *memento mori,* reminding us of the inevitability of death. The earliest legible stone is of 'Walter Derisley, Gent, who died on October AD 1681 aged 85'.

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