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## CHURCH OF ST MARY Chilton, Suffolk



# Church of ST MARY

*by Simon Cotton and others*

## History

The parish and church of Chilton are mentioned in Domesday Book but there are earlier indications of settlement here. The eastern boundary of the parish coincides with the Roman road which now links the B1115 at Great Waldingfield with the A134 between Sudbury and Newton. The Old English name Chilton means 'child's town', i.e. the town of a younger knight or prince.

The church stands somewhat to the west of the centre of the parish, now almost surrounded by a modern factory estate and far from any village. The reason for this is uncertain: the village may have been decimated by the Black Death of 1349, or the lord of the manor may have bodily removed it when he enclosed his new deer park, or the villagers' livelihood may have been taken away when new methods of agriculture were introduced. The church is now known as St Mary's, but medieval wills refer to it as being dedicated to St Lawrence.

From 1400 to 1643 Chilton Hall was the home of the Crane family. It had been in the ownership of the Carbonels until 1333 when it passed to the Botelers. With Marjorie Botelers' marriage to William Crane of Stonham the estate passed to the Cranes. When Sir Robert Crane V died in 1643 the house and manor went to the Bacons.

The house itself is a fragment of the original building, the eastern wing surviving of what was a mid-16th-century house of the type represented to this day by Kentwell Hall at nearby Long Melford. This house had in turn succeeded other buildings on approximately the same site and now stands in 18th-century gardens with a contemporary brick moat bridge.

In 1542 the Proceedings of the Star Chamber record a complaint from Robert Crane III concerning a curious incident within the church. It was alleged that, early one Sunday morning, a certain Antony Heveningham, accompanied by four or five armed servants, had broken the Park gate; thrown the same 'of the hynghells into the comen waye or strete'; entered the chancel and taken away the 14-year-old John Methwold for whose wardship and marriage his father had been paid £100 by Robert, to the fury of Heveningham, who claimed a right to him. Robert's statement, that, 'then saying his matens, he perceyved nothing' of the kidnap, is odd. Only an arcade separates the chapel, where presumably he was at prayer, from the chancel and, even if the arcade was not open as now, the commotion caused by the entry of a party of armed strangers must surely have been audible. By the time, according to

his story, that the misdemeanour had been signified to him and he had gone out on to 'the Grene', the raiders were on horseback with their trussed captive. An altercation ensued, during which they swore 'such abomynable othes as yowr subject detesteth to expresse' and Heveningham 'threw a foyn' (thrust) at Robert who 'cast it aside' with his cap 'dubled up' in his hand. After which, the intruders rode away as fast as their horses could go.

Because of its isolated position and the small size of the village it then served, it was decided to make St Mary's church redundant in 1979. It passed into the care of the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust, in 1983. Repairs have been carried out by Hoggs of Coney Weston under the supervision of Tony Redman of the Whitworth Co-Partnership of Bury St Edmunds.

## The Building of the Church

The church consists of a nave with west tower and chancel, with a chapel on the north side and a modern south porch.

Despite the antiquity of this site, the earliest work now visible is of the 15th century, Chilton, like many other churches in the neighbourhood, having been substantially rebuilt at that time. The wills of Robert and Anne Crane, whose monuments are in the church, are evidence that the fabric was complete by then but lacking furniture.

In his will proved in 1500, Robert Crane II left money for the rood loft and pews and for a chantry priest; in her will of 1508, but not proved until 1521, Dame Anne requested to be buried beside her husband in the chapel and bequeathed her best blue velvet gown to be made into vestments.

The window tracery reveals the same date. In particular, the two windows on the south side of the nave, relocated in the Victorian restoration, are virtually identical to those found in the south aisle of Long Melford church, rebuilt around 1481 at the instigation of John Clopton. The connection between the two churches is not surprising in that Robert was John's executor and he and his wife appear in the stained glass of Long Melford church. They may have employed the same architect.

## *Exterior*

St Mary's was restored in phases between 1860 and 1875 by the local architect George Grimwood of Sudbury, who also restored St Gregory's Sudbury, Great Cornard and Stanningfield. In 1861 the nave was re-roofed, the box pews were removed and replaced by benches, the south wall was rebuilt, the windows were moved and Minton tiles inserted in the floor. In 1875 the walls were given a decorative frieze, now largely removed, of texts, symbols, ornaments with diaper panels, borders and strips. The builders were Keogh of North Street, Sudbury. An organ was provided in the north chapel in 1868 when the canopies over the tomb chests in the Crane chapel were destroyed. The pulpit was set up in 1910 and the reredos in the chancel probably dates from the same time.

The west tower is the most conspicuous feature, a substantial brick structure with a flint parapet, similar to that of the south wall, which seems to have been added in the 19th-century restoration. It has big paired buttresses, belfry windows with flowing tracery, and unusual arched openings in the middle stage. The fact that the tower is of brick, like the north chapel, suggests that both were new constructions added to an existing flint nave and chancel, which themselves were given a thorough facelift. The bricks in the tower and the Crane chapel match exactly those in Chilton Hall: tradition has it that they were surplus when the house was built. The stair turret at the south-east corner of the tower leads to the belfry, which houses one bell, cast in the unpropitious time of 1658 by Miles Graye III of Colchester.

The north side of the nave has two square-headed windows: one, near the west end is of two tall lights, probably about 1500, with an unusual shape, suggesting that it was put in to illuminate a stairway or gallery; the second is in brick. Between the two is a north doorway, apparently long disused.

The Crane chapel is attached to the north side of the chancel and extends along part of the nave. It is of brick construction; the parapet atop its western and eastern walls

## *Interior*

bears a worn inscription that presumably commemorated its builders. The attractive corner buttresses have carved and decorated stone panels. The north wall shows signs of rebuilding and the doorway is of recent date. The west window has been bricked up to accommodate the Crane monument inside.

The flint walls of the chancel have a texture suggesting renewal in the Victorian restoration. The large east window has 15th-century tracery of slightly different style to the other windows.

Apart from the two large mullioned late-15th-century windows already discussed, the south wall of the nave has some nice stone gargoyles to remove rainwater, possibly a Victorian renewal; there is another in the north wall. The south porch was added c. 1930 by the Revd John Milner, who was rector here for 49 years.

The Crane chapel was built by the family to enable a chantry priest to celebrate Requiem Masses for members of the family. The two large tomb chests stood under canopies that were destroyed in 1868; on the western side of the pier between the chapel and the chancel, a stool of stone for a statue still remains. The chapel retains its fine late-15th-century roof, its design copied well by the Victorians in the chancel, and a floor of old pavement tiles. The west window was blocked in 1625 to take the Crane monument now there. The east window retains two lovely little figures in late-15th-century stained glass in its tracery lights. One shows St Appollonia bearing her emblem, the pincers. She was an elderly deaconess martyred at Alexandria in 249. As part of her torture her teeth were knocked out and she has therefore become the patron saint of dentists. St Michael is shown with raised sword, vanquishing a blue demon.

The oldest monument is the northernmost one to George Crane (d. 1491). He is shown as a recumbent alabaster figure with a gown and hat across his shoulder. His head is supported by cushions and his feet rest on a unicorn. Next to it, in an archway between the chapel and the chancel, is a similar monument to his parents Robert II and

Anne Crane (who died in 1500 and 1521, respectively). The Cranes are again shown as alabaster figures, Robert in armour, Anne in a robe which still retains a little red colour. The colours have been restored on the arms on the chancel side of this chest. Graffiti are no new thing: this monument bears dates of the 18th century and names.

The third monument in the chapel was made by the sculptor Gerald Christmas, who was paid £50 for it in 1626. Of black marble and alabaster, it shows Sir Robert Crane V, Member for Sudbury in the Long Parliament, who died in 1643, kneeling facing the viewer. He is flanked by his wives who kneel facing him. On the left is Dorothy (née Hobart) of Blickling who died in 1624; on the right is Susan Alington. Sir Robert married Susan when she was 19 years old, five months after his first wife had died. There were no children by his first marriage, but his second produced eight daughters, five of whom survived infancy, a stillborn son, and another who died aged 7, so that Sir Robert was the last of the Cranes of Chilton. Dame Susan died in 1681 and no inscription to her or to Sir Robert was ever added to the monument. Note the pencil inscription to the right of Sir Robert's head 'S Brown and A Park restored the chancel end of this church in the month of

September 1860 assisted by J Partridge'. There is a fragment of one of the canopies of the tomb chests upside down against the north wall.

The chancel was heavily restored in 1860 and 1875. The communion rails and the oak stalls with poppyhead carving and the piscina in the south wall are of 1860. The chancel floor has Minton tiles, the sanctuary marble. The Jacobean communion table dates from the late 17th century. The reredos of 1910 features mosaic decoration on alabaster.

The late-15th-century screen is presumably the one mentioned in Robert II's will and is complete to the top of the dado; it has a carving of a wyvern and a woman with a 15th-century headdress. The pulpit of 1910 matches the screen. The lectern of turned oak is of 1965. The pitch pine pews of 1861 were based on a design at Twinstead. A doorway communicates with the Crane chapel.

Like other parishes, Chilton sent men to the First World War (1914–18) who did not return; the War Memorial tablet on the north wall contains six names and also records the death of the rector's son, the Revd Dermod Ross Milner, who served as a naval chaplain from 1916 until his death in an accident at Archangel in 1919 when he was serving with the British forces supporting the White

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Russians. His father was the last priest to hold Chilton as a separate benefice, as rector from 1898 to 1948.

The octagonal font is a typical 15th-century design with four-petalled flowers on the base and quatrefoils on the bowl. Under the tower are more monuments, including a tablet to Sarah Freeland (d.1839) by Charles Harding of Ballingdon, who also made tablets at St Gregory's Sudbury, Glemsford and Long Melford. Her son, the Revd William Coyte Freeland (d.1852), rector for 14 years, is commemorated by a tablet by Keogh and Son of Sudbury.

There are two 19th-century Gothick Commandment Boards above the altar in the chancel. A further board with Commandments 1 to 3 is located in the tower.