



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



ST MARY'S
CHURCH

EAST BRADENHAM
NORFOLK





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST MARY'S CHURCH
EAST BRADENHAM, NORFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

**BARTON BENDISH, ST MARY
THE VIRGIN**
6 miles E of Downham Market off A122

COSTON, ST MICHAEL
7 miles W of Norwich off B1108

KING'S LYNN, ST NICHOLAS
St Anne's Street

**WIGGENHALL, ST MARY
THE VIRGIN**
5 miles S of King's Lynn off A47

ST MARY'S CHURCH

EAST BRADENHAM, NORFOLK

by ANTHONY BARNES

People write of St Mary's, which was originally dedicated to the Assumption of St Mary, as a big church. This it scarcely is, in comparison with many not far away, but one looks up to it from the road and it looks big. The slight rise on which it is built is significant. The Bradenhams – the name means the broad place – are situated beside the river Wissey, which rises a mile or so to the east and eventually joins the Ouse, going into the sea near King's Lynn. A mile or so south is the Blackwater, which becomes the Yare, skirting Norwich and joining the sea at Yarmouth; and the same distance to the north is the source of a significant tributary of Norwich's main river, the Wensum. St Mary's is on the slope of one of Norfolk's unemphatic watersheds.

EXTERIOR

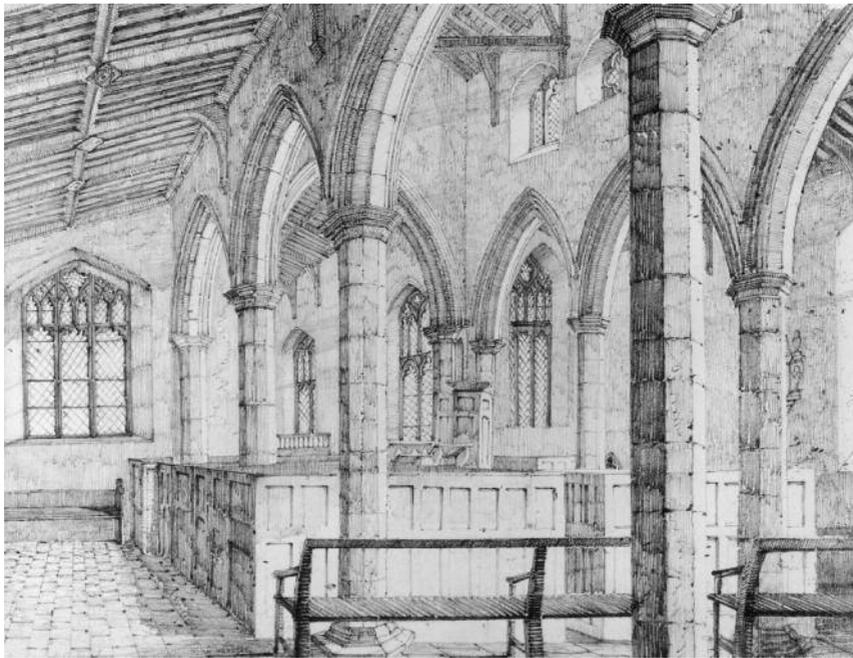
It is the 15th century tower that first catches the eye. It is massive, heavily buttressed – as is the rest of the church – and unusually, the aisles are wrapped round it. Except above the west door, the window openings are small, with flint and stone relieving arches above them. In Ladbroke's picture of about 1830 there was a pyramidal roof with a spike. This presumably dated from the 1791 repairs but did not survive a further programme of work a hundred years later, when £1,000 was spent. The east face shows the line of an earlier nave roof, probably thatched, and a recess for the sanctus bell. In the belfry is a mediaeval bell-frame. The only bell now is by John Draper of Thetford, 1620.

The porch is approached up an avenue of lime trees. It is of two storeys, but the floor of the upper room was removed in the 19th century and the stairway to it, which can still be seen, is blocked. Basically it is 15th century, but there have been alterations and additions, one phase of repair being signed P P, presumably the churchwarden at the time. There are buttresses at the corners along with pinnacles, now damaged, and the base of a cross on the gable.

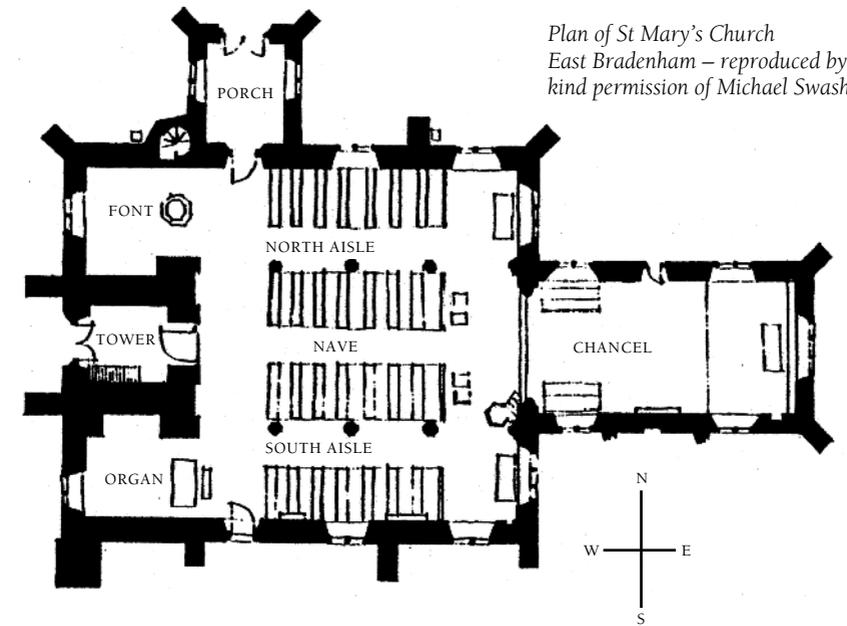
The walls of the church are of flint, rougher in texture on the south side,

away from the road. The quoins are of stone, and brick as well as stone has been used for repairs and renewals. The windows of the chancel and the aisles are 15th century, except for the east window, which is a Victorian copy of the earlier, Decorated, style set within what must previously have been another 15th century window. Also of this date are the two easternmost clerestory windows, probably put there to cast more light on the rood-screen inside. The other clerestory windows are early 14th century and of an unusual shape, circular containing quatrefoils, a variant of a characteristic Norfolk detail, to be seen at Cley and some ten other places.

The western window on each side of the chancel cuts into an older, Norman, window to judge from the disturbed stonework. The priest's door is 15th century, but on the opposite (south) side there are a blocked door and the stubs of walls. The digging of soakaways in 1996 revealed a continuation underground of one of these walls, jutting out from the building, more like a vestry than a chapel.



19th century drawing of the interior by the Revd H1 Vernon



Plan of St Mary's Church
East Bradenham – reproduced by
kind permission of Michael Swash

INTERIOR

The interior is wide and light, with the elegant 14th century arches of the chancel arch and the arcades – slightly different on each side – well lit by the clerestory and the big Perpendicular windows. These are of one design in the north and south walls of nave and chancel, the east walls of the aisles and the west wall of the north aisle. The main east and west windows are Victorian, but pick up the proportions of the arcades and chancel arch, so that there is a rare unity about the whole. An additional clerestory window above the chancel arch has been cut into when the angle of the roof was flattened.

The Y-tracery of the west window of the south aisle is not mediaeval and probably relates to the 1821 shoring up of the south side of the tower. This may have been made necessary by the creation of a vault in that area, fifty years before, for the Strudwicks, whose lead coffin plates are now displayed in the base of the tower. Two bells were sold to pay for this work, possibly those donated by Alice Smith in 1431 and Henry Hawe in 1514.

There were extensive repairs authorised in 1834, partly paid for by the



Interior looking east

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

rector, the Revd Joseph Smith, (£120) and partly by the patron, Thomas Adlington of Upper Tooting (£50). The pews shown in the drawing by the curate, the Revd HI Vernon, and installed in 1789 were replaced, and the nave and chancel roofs probably also date from then. The aisle roofs are still essentially mediaeval.

The font is probably 14th century with a cover in the Jacobean style. The door, close to them, is very old. In the tower arch is a rather vernacular blocking off of the singers' gallery described by Blomfield (1734). On the south walls are three monuments: to John Green and his wife (1684) who apparently gaze through the window to where their house once was; to Gibson Lucas (d.1758) by T Rawlins of Norwich and to Edmund Strudwick (d.1771). There are a number of ledger slabs in the floor, that to Sarah Townshend being the most touching – 'Whose Soule Enamel'd thus to Heaven fflyes'.

When the Gibson Lucas monument was removed for conservation, traces of five different schemes of painted text and ornamentation were

revealed on the wall behind, dated to the 17th and 18th centuries. These include text in Roman and Gothic lettering, and a decorative swag with unusual fruit and flowers. This material was treated to conserve the paint and plaster prior to reinstatement of the monument.

There is only one stained glass window, the east window of the chancel, by M & A O'Connor, c.1855. At the east end of the south aisle a 17th century communion table groans under the weight of a mediaeval mensa. The organ at the other end of the aisle is by Samuel Green, 1786, and came from Huntingfield Hall, probably in 1883.

St Mary's most celebrated Rector was Samuel Croxall, who, in 1713, published *The Fair Circassian*, described as 'a rather coarse production' based on the Song of Solomon. His later version of Aesop evaded controversy and ran to many editions and his career never looked back, for he ended as chancellor of Hereford diocese, more, we are told, for political than spiritual reasons.

The Bradenham's contain some 500 people, but it was thought that two mediaeval churches were more than they required. Despite its connections with Rider Haggard and LP Hartley's *Go Between*, West Bradenham is the less intrinsically interesting of the two and so it may be as well that St Mary's was steered towards The Churches Conservation Trust in 1996. A first stage of repairs was carried out in 1996–97 under the supervision of Mr Michael Swash of Birdsall & Swash, architects, of Hingham.

Front cover: Exterior from the north (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: Font and cover (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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