



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN

Redgrave, Suffolk



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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Redgrave, Suffolk

CHURCH ST MARY THE VIRGIN

by Jean Sheehan (Redgrave local history recorder)

HISTORY

The church of St Mary the Virgin, Redgrave, was built in the mid-14th century, probably on the site of the Saxon church mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086. It was built by the Abbots of the Benedictine Abbey of St Edmundsbury, to whom the manor had been given by Ulfketel, Earl of East Anglia, c.1005.(1) The name Redgrave is derived from the Anglo-Saxon meaning 'Reed Ditch', and Saxon pottery has been found in a field near the church. This may have been the site of the Saxon hall, and could be the reason for the location of the church outside the present village. It stands in an elevated position between the site of the hunting lodge built by Abbot Samson in 1211(2) and Fen Street, whose inhabitants were mentioned in a rental of 1433.(3)

*Front cover: Monument to Sir John Holt,
Lord Chief Justice of England*

*Left: The chancel and nave from
the west end*





Left: Exterior from the south-east

Below: Exterior from the south

EXTERIOR

weatherproof were carried out by the Trust in 2006, including restoration of the glass in the east window and repairs to the pinnacles of the tower. Steel grilles have replaced the broken wooden louvres in the tower to exclude the pigeons. The current architect is Philip Orchard from The Whitworth Co-Partnership. The interior was restored in 2007 by The Churches Conservation Trust, and Redgrave Church Heritage Trust has installed toilets in the tower, a mini kitchen and heating.

The church is mainly in the 14th-century Decorated style with a Perpendicular clerestory and a few windows updated to the Perpendicular style. Between the windows of the clerestory are flint flushworked monograms, probably made by the Aldryche family firm of master masons from North Lopham, in the latter half of the 15th century.(7) The Decorated east window has seven lights with deep mouldings round it showing that it was built with no expense spared by the patron. Above the east

The Abbots of Bury were lords of the manor of Redgrave until the Reformation. Thomas Wolsey was rector in 1506, but there is no record that he ever came to Redgrave.(4) Nicholas Bacon purchased the manor and started to build Redgrave Hall in 1545.(5) He was made Lord Keeper of the Seal by Elizabeth I in 1558 and knighted at about the same time. His son, another Nicholas, was knighted by James I in 1611 as premier baronet of England. Sir John Holt, Lord Chief Justice, became lord of the manor in 1703 and it passed into the Wilson family through the marriage of Lucinda Holt. Mr Peter Holt-Wilson is the present lord of the manor and patron.

The abbots' market was situated in the hamlet of Botesdale which was part of the ecclesiastical parish of Redgrave. A chapel of ease was built close to the market place before 1338,(6) later used as a chantry chapel and as a result confiscated in 1547 by Edward VI. Sir Nicholas Bacon founded a grammar school in the building,

and after closure in 1878 it became a chapel of ease again in 1883 and is still in use. A mission room was built at Redgrave in 1897 by the Revd Thomas Holt Wilson to hold evening services in the winter. This building was renovated and consecrated as All Saints' church in 2008.

The ecclesiastical parishes of Redgrave and Botesdale were united with Rickingham in 1975 to become the benefice of Redgrave-cum-Botesdale with the Rickinghalls. St Mary's Rickingham Superior was made redundant in 1977 and vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust, although Rickingham Inferior church is still in use.

St Mary's, Redgrave, was declared pastorally redundant on 1 April 2005, because the chapel of ease and the mission room were also used for services. The mother church was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust on 1 October 2005 because of its great historical value and interest. Repairs to make the building





Left: The vestry on the north side of the chancel

Below: The 17th-century brass to Anne Butts in the sanctuary

Right: The chancel, north aisle and nave from the south-west entrance

INTERIOR

window can be seen the earlier roof line which was much shallower. The chancel has niches on all sides which would have contained religious statues before the Reformation, and a Decorated priests' doorway still exists on the south side of the chancel.

On the north-east of the church is a red brick vestry, with a 16th-century ceiling and a large oval window. The original blocked north doorway into the church is directly opposite the south door.

A red brick tower replaced an earlier tower which collapsed. Rowland Holt rebuilt the decaying red brick 16th-century tower in local Woolpit brick to match Redgrave Hall which had recently been remodelled with the parkland by Capability Brown.

'Todd built me in 1784'

is inscribed at the top of the tower. An archway into the church can be seen inside which was later blocked and a narrow stone newel staircase leads up to the ringing chamber.

The south porch has a sundial over the entrance, and the 14th-century inner doorway is finely decorated with fleurons and king and queen head stops, with a niche above, beneath which is a carved angel.

Inside, the church is very light and spacious. The arcades are 14th century with piers of quatrefoil section with narrow shafts to match the chancel arch.(8) The nave roof dates from the 15th century with alternating hammer beams and arch braces, above which are braced queen posts.

On the south wall of the sanctuary is a Perpendicular triple sedilia, with a canopy over each seat, where the priests sat. Next to it is a



piscina to rinse the silver chalice used in the communion service with the water running into a drain through the wall. The roof of the chancel is supported on corbels depicting faces, one of which is an abbot.

On the floor of the sanctuary is a very fine brass, commemorating Anne Butts, mother of Sir Nicholas Bacon's wife, who died in 1609. She is shown wearing a hooded cloak of the period and an embroidered petticoat. Beneath the figure is a poem as an epitaph stating that she was married for seven years and a widow for 61 years. The brass was originally on a table-top tomb,(9) probably removed when the floor of the sanctuary was lowered to accommodate the monument to Lord Chief Justice Sir John Holt (cover) in 1709/10. This is an extremely fine monument, carved in marble by Thomas Green of Camberwell, depicting Sir John in his judicial robes with figures of Justice and Mercy on either side and is said to have cost £1500.(10)

The vestry on the north side of the chancel, with an outer skin of brick, is on the site of the Bacon vault where Sir Edmund Bacon built an aisle for the tomb of his wife. In his will, Bacon requested that the vault be bricked over following his burial, which took place in 1649.(11) The bones were later removed to the new Bacon Chapel at the west end of the north aisle when the monument to Sir John Holt was erected. A tomb had already been built at the east end of the north aisle by Sir Nicholas Bacon, son of The Lord Keeper, for his wife in 1616. The tomb was made by Bernard Janssen, the king's engineer. After Sir Nicholas' death in 1624, his son Sir Edmund Bacon commissioned Nicholas Stone, later to become royal stonemason, to carve the effigies of both his parents in white marble to be placed on the tomb, at a cost of £200.

Nicholas Stone also designed the Bacon Chapel at the west end of the north aisle. It contains black-and-white marble niches, and a slab of white marble on the floor decorated with a



Left: Effigies of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Premier Baronet of James I, and his wife Anne.

Below left: The 18th-century reredos depicting Moses and Aaron and the Ten Commandments

Right: The 14th-century Decorated octagonal font



north aisle which may be contemporary with the church. The painting depicts a man's torso and leg and has now been conserved. Traces of a wall painting have also been discovered to the east of the south door.

The pulpit on the south side of the nave was given by George Holt Wilson, a former patron, in 1875. There is a 14th-century piscina situated in the south-east corner of the south aisle, showing that there was an altar here before the Reformation and next to it is a dropped-sill sedilia. This was the Lady Chapel until 1923 when a faculty was obtained to restore the chapel as a war memorial. The carved oak altar which is there now is dedicated to the men who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

Edmund Tabour of Botesdale requested in his will of 1447 to be buried in the chapel of St Edmund in the church of All Saints of Redgrave. The chapel and the dedication of All Saints were removed at the Reformation. He also left 40d to the high altar and money for a chaplain to pray for his soul and his departed friends in the church and the chapel of Botesdale for one year.(14)

black marble cross fleury with the word **ELEVATVR** carved on one side. Two of the windows in the north aisle were partly blocked, probably to accommodate the memorials. Bones of other members of the Bacon family were also placed in the vault after being removed from All Saints', Garboldisham, when it became dilapidated in 1734.(12) On the walls are finely carved tablets, one by Nicholas Stone and one probably by his son John, with other

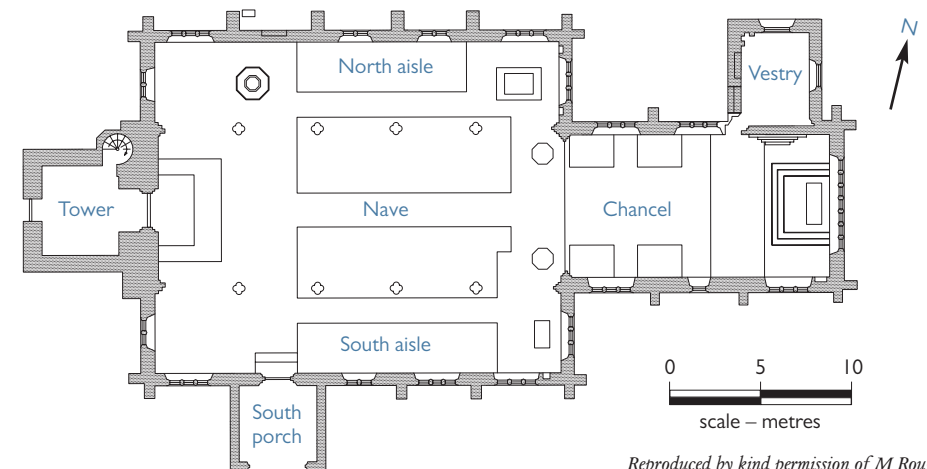
memorial tablets on the walls of the chancel in memory of members of the Bacon family.

The 14th-century Decorated octagonal font is also in the north-west corner, close to the blocked north door. Eight heads are carved on it, although in the middle of the 19th century this was not in use and a common slop-basin was substituted.(13)

Hanging on the wall nearby is a large painted 18th-century wooden reredos, depicting Moses and Aaron with the Ten Commandments written in the centre. This was replaced above the altar by a painting of the holy family, which was in position by 1810 when David Elisha Davey visited the church. In turn this was replaced by blue velvet dossal curtains in 1952.

The north aisle has niches in the east wall to hold statues, now containing imitation gauntlets, helmet and sword carried as emblems at the funeral of Sir Nicholas Bacon in 1624.

During restoration part of a medieval wall painting was discovered on the north wall of the



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Left: The Decorated east window, with glass donated by E P Blake in 1853

Below: The Stuart royal arms, probably of Charles II



GLASS

The stained glass in the east window was given by E P Blake in 1853, and was made by Farrer of Diss.

A small amount of medieval glass found outside the church was fitted into a clear-glazed window in the south aisle when the windows were restored in 1967. This window has the name of J Walker 1800 scratched into the glass, and also J Walker 1870 stating that it was a very cold day. The glass in the east window in the south aisle is dedicated to two former rectors who were incumbents from 1844 to 1904, Thomas Daniel Holt Wilson, and his wife Barbara, and Thomas their son, members of the family of the lords of the manor. John Wood Wilson, brother of Thomas Daniel, is also commemorated in a stained glass window in the south aisle. The glass in the east window of the north aisle is in memory of Hon. Lyon Playfair, Capt. RFA who was killed in action in 1915. He was the son of Lord Playfair who was residing at Redgrave Hall at the time.

FIXTURES *and* FITTINGS

Above the south door hangs a carved and painted Stuart royal arms probably of Charles II. This may have been made to hang above the chancel arch at the Restoration.

The organ, in memory of Lucy Wilson, was made by Casson and Company in 1890. This replaced an earlier organ, made by Joseph Hart of Redgrave in 1842, which stood on a gallery, now removed, at the west end of the church.

An early-15th-century iron-bound chest, with its two original padlocks, stands at the west end. The keys were held by two churchwardens, so that the chest could not be opened by one person. It was used for storing important documents and, after the reign of Queen Mary,





Hatchment showing the arms of Holt impaling Ballow for Prisca widow of Rowland Holt

the parish registers, which had been ordered to be kept in churches. The baptismal register dates back to 1538, and the marriage and burial registers to 1561.(15)

Also at the west end is a wooden hand-hearse bought for the use of the parishioners by Miss Wilson, and first used in 1886.

Many hatchments hang upon the walls; those in the north aisle are connected to the Bacon family, those in the nave to the Holts, and in the chancel to the Wilsons. Hatchments were hung on the outside of a house after the death of an important resident and subsequently placed in the church.

The oak desk at the back of the Bacon Chapel was originally from the chapel of ease and used in the grammar school founded by Sir Nicholas Bacon for which he was granted letters patent by Queen Elizabeth in 1561. After the Reformation the abbey schools were closed and the gentry founded new schools for the education of the poor.

Three bells were in existence at the time of the Edwardian inventory of 1553, and a further two had been added by 1691, when they were all recast by Charles Newman. He inscribed

*'CHARLES NEWMAN MADE MEE.
1691.. GOLDSMITH CHURCH.W.D.'*

on the tenor bell.(16) They were recast again in 1736 by his son Thomas, who inscribed the

churchwardens as John Munns and John Goldsmith. The latter may have been a descendant of John Goldsmith the bell-founder of Redgrave. He cast bells for at least 15 Suffolk churches, between 1702 and 1713, including Rickinghall Superior in 1712 and was buried in Redgrave churchyard in 1714. Thomas Osborne made a treble bell in 1785 bringing the total to six bells.(17)

Prince Charles visited the church on 2 July 1993 to attend a concert performed for *Music in Country Churches* of which he was patron.

St Mary's is a magnificent church for the small parish of Redgrave-cum-Botesdale. This is certainly due to the fact that the patrons were the Abbots of St Edmundsbury, and built the church in the design of a miniature cathedral, probably because their hunting lodge and deer park were situated nearby.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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Historic churches, due to their age and previous use, often have uneven and worn floors. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors and steps can also be slippery.

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NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St Mary, Rickinghall Superior
7 miles SW of Diss on B1113

St Andrew, Sapiston
7 miles SE of Thetford off A1088

St John the Baptist, Stanton
9 miles NE of Bury St Edmunds off A143

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*Right: The nave looking west
Back cover: Hatchment showing the arms of Bacon impaling Crane for Sir Edmund Bacon 4th Baronet d.1685*

Photographs by Steven Cole 2008

