



About St Mary's Old Church

Bergholt means the 'wood on the hill', and originally West Bergholt was known as 'Bergholt Sackville' after the family who were Lords of the Manor until 1559. The old church stands in a picturesque setting next to the Hall, some distance from the village which is a much more recent development. In 1904 St Mary's New Church was opened in a more convenient location, and gradually services at the Old Church declined until it was declared redundant and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1976.

Like most medieval churches, St Mary's displays work of many different periods. The north wall of the nave survives from a Saxon church, which in turn would have replaced a timber church, remains of which have been found during archaeological excavations. In the late 13th and early 14th centuries the Saxon north doorway was blocked in, a south aisle added with new main doorway and the chancel extended. The remodelling was completed by the erection of the belfry in the late 15th century.

Much of the character of St Mary's derives from the fact that very little restoration took place in the 19th century. The church was reseated in 1877, but plans to enlarge it were never followed through – the decision being taken to build a new church in the village centre. The only subsequent major work was the installation of the present east window in 1928.

The church is built of a pleasing variety of materials including flint, septaria, bricks, brown conglomerates and reused Roman tiles. Inside, the red brick and pamment floor and limewashed walls and ceilings create a domestic, rather than religious, feel to the building.

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Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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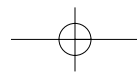


St Mary's Old Church

West Bergholt, Essex



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1 The 'tub' **font** is a very simple 13th-century design with a diminutive cover dating from the 18th century.



2 This massive **oak chest** dates from about 1400 and is both metal-bound and iron-studded. It would have contained the parish valuables and originally had three locks: for the priest and both churchwardens.



3 A section of **wall** from elsewhere in the church has been preserved to show the lath and plaster construction usually found in timber-framed buildings.

4 Stairs lead to the 18th-century **gallery**, which is supported by cast iron pillars encased in wood. The seating in the gallery comprises wooden benches of two designs; those with backs and those without. No doubt the open ones were there for the poor who could not afford to rent seats downstairs. As elsewhere in the church, hat pegs abound! The dormer windows were added at this time to bring more light into the church – the light from the south aisle windows not penetrating far beyond the arches of the arcade.

5 On the front of the gallery are the cast iron **Royal Arms** dating from 1816. These are one of a series of 23 to be found in local churches that were cast by Joseph Wallis Junior, whose foundry was at the west end of Colchester High Street. They show the new design for Royal Arms of that date when the electoral bonnet of Hanover was replaced by a crown. One can imagine Mr Wallis selling these to local churches as a way of keeping up to date – and making a fortune as a result!

6 High over the chancel arch, and discovered in 1986 hidden below layers of limewash, are the earlier **Royal Arms** of King James I (reigned 1603–25). A careful inspection will show that the painting has been encroached upon at its top by the plaster of the later nave ceiling. The motto below comes from Psalm 68 and translated reads 'Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered'.



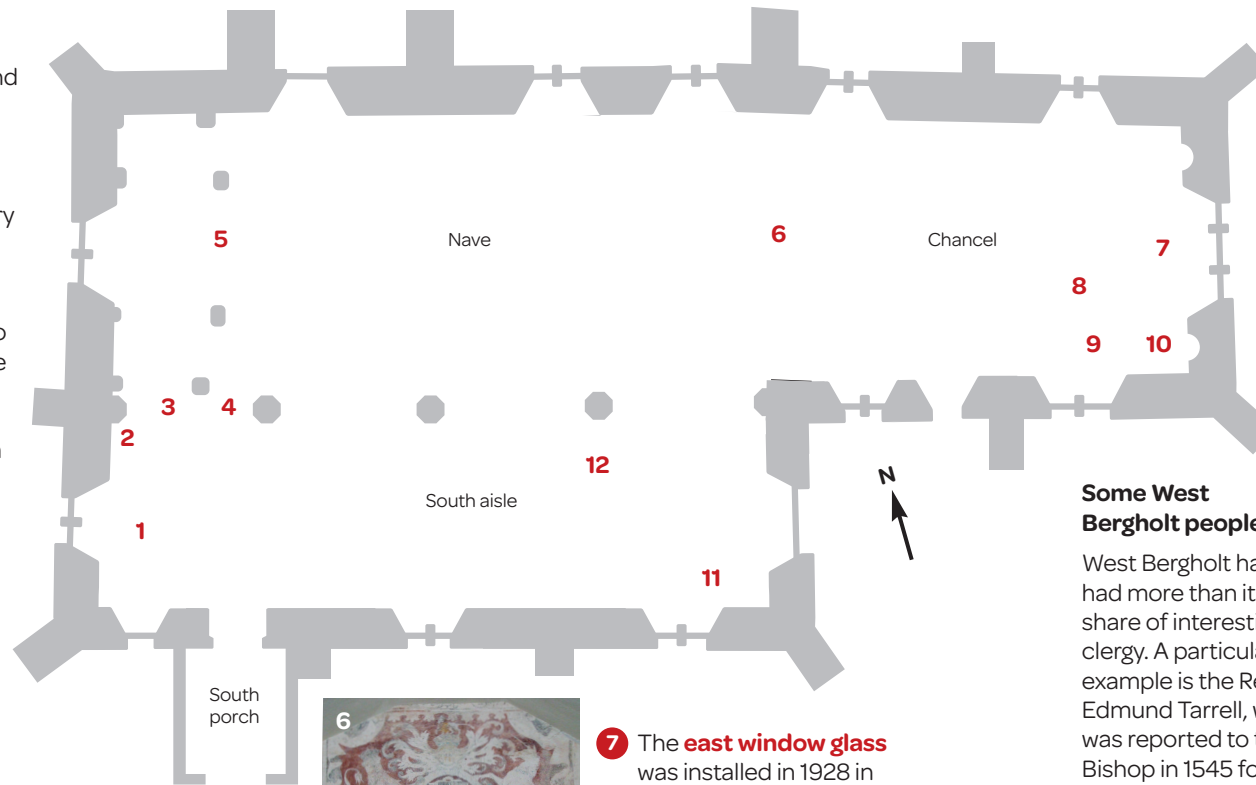
8 The delicately turned **altar rails** date from the late 17th century and enclose the altar on three sides, although they have been brought forward a few feet from their original position touching the east wall.

9 The **piscina**, where medieval priests washed their fingers before Mass, dates from the 14th century as does the seat or sedilia to its right.

10 Two **image niches** flank the east window. They would have contained statues or wall paintings of saints in pride of place over the altar.

11 Another **piscina** here shows that there would also have been an altar at the east end of the south aisle before the Reformation, although the reseating pays this interesting feature no respect.

12 In the centre of the gangway is a **coffin-shaped stone**. As it has two holes drilled through it this was probably the base of a stone coffin that would once have contained the body of a 13th-century priest or dignitary.



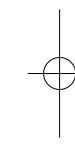
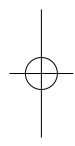
Some West Bergholt people

West Bergholt has had more than its fair share of interesting clergy. A particular example is the Revd Edmund Tarrell, who was reported to the Bishop in 1545 for being drunk, fighting and neglecting his duties! When, on one occasion, he could not be found to administer the Last Rites to a dying parishioner it was discovered that he was in a public house in Colchester. A hundred years later a successor, Gregory Holland, was charged with similar crimes – but this time it was probably a political move as Holland was a Royalist supporter during the Commonwealth period.

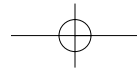


7 The **east window glass** was installed in 1928 in memory of Thomas Daniell, whose family owned the large brewery which for over a hundred years was the industrial centre of West Bergholt. The glass was designed by Frederick Charles Eden and depicts the Risen Christ (cover). Eden not only designed but also made the glass in his London studio and, like much of his work, the beauty is in the skilfully drawn framework and expressive faces.

Photographs by Dr John Salmon



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