

## PARISH CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, LITTLE BADDOW.

WELCOME ..... to this ancient and interesting church, which has a pleasant and peaceful situation at the northern end of the parish, near the River Chelmer and at the foot of the gentle rise of Danbury Hill, upon the slope of which is situated the main residential area of the parish.

People have worshipped here for at least 900 years and throughout its long history, generations of Baddow folk have altered, improved and beautified this ancient building. Today it is still in regular use for Christian worship; the purpose for which it was built.

We hope that you will enjoy exploring St Mary's and discover its features of interest and beauty. Above all, we hope that you will feel "at home" here in our Father's House. No visitor can fail to appreciate the love and care given to this church by its present-day custodians, who have recently spent thousands of pounds upon the building. Please pray for the priest and people whose Spiritual Home this is, and who welcome any contributions that their visitors could spare, to help them keep their ancient church intact and beautiful for future generations to use and enjoy.

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### EXTERIOR

The church stands attractively in a trim churchyard, from which the ground descends to the west, thus explaining the unusual arrangement of buttresses which strengthen the sturdy **tower**. The north-west buttress is diagonal, whereas the south-west corner has angle buttresses. This 52 ft high tower is mostly work of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and has a fine west doorway with Decorated (early 14<sup>th</sup> century) window above it. The door itself was inserted in 1953. To the north of the doorway is a niche, built to contain a statue. A staircase- turret in the north-east corner ascends to the level of the ringing-chamber. The windows of the

upper stages are Perpendicular (late 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries). The tower is crowned by an embattled parapet, beneath which, at the four corners, carved animal heads peer down.

The north wall of the **nave** shows clear evidence that this building dates from Norman times. Its masonry is late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century and incorporates many Roman tiles of much earlier date which have been re-used here. (The remains of a Roman hypocaust were discovered in the churchyard, showing that this is a very early site.) The large chunks of conglomerate stone are also Norman. The Norman doorway was discovered early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been reconstructed using Roman tiles, but it preserves its original stone capitals and the door itself is of very great age - some believe it may be the original. Early 14<sup>th</sup> century craftsmen inserted a two-light window (with good corbel-heads) into this wall to give more light to the church.

The south side of the nave was extended outwards in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It has been suggested that this was done to form a chantry chapel for the Filiols. It is most unusual in not having an arcade and gives this side of the building a somewhat lopsided appearance. Its east window is Decorated and has its original corbel-heads. The large four-light window was added in the 1850s when the church was restored to the designs of William White. The aperture high up in the east wall of the nave may have contained a Sanctus Bell. The single window west of the porch has been externally renewed with brick in the 18<sup>th</sup> century style, although internally it retains its earlier Gothic arch.

The **chancel** appears to be 14<sup>th</sup> century and its windows are Perpendicular in style. The north window has been blocked, also the priest's door on the south side. Incorporated into the masonry are some ancient re-used stones; one on the north side and another behind the south-east drainpipe are carved and may well be Norman.

The **south porch** incorporates much 18<sup>th</sup> century brick, but its solid timber framework (probably 15<sup>th</sup> century) remains. Inside can be seen the mediaeval roof timbers, also a lantern which may be 300 years old. The 14<sup>th</sup> century entrance arch to the nave is flanked by corbel-heads.

## WHAT TO SEE INSIDE THE CHURCH

The south door gives access to a bright and spacious interior, where colour has been tastefully used and light floods in through the clear glass windows. This is a church which feels “lived-in” and greatly cherished.

More evidence of the skill and artistry of the mediaeval masons can be seen in the small internal **corbel-heads** which flank some of the nave windows; also in the 15<sup>th</sup> century **tower arch** and the slightly earlier **chancel arch**.

The octagonal **font** is modern and was placed here in the 1950s. Until recently a large stone basin stood on a mill stone just inside the door. It had been found in a garden in Boreham and transported to the church around 1910. For a time it was used as a font, but it has no drain hole. It has been identified as a 14<sup>th</sup> century mortar that had been used in the ancient Danbury Tile Works. It now resides outside on the south side of the tower. Beside the entrance door is a pretty trefoil arch, beneath which was once a **Holy Water stoop**, into which people dipped their fingers to make the Sign of the Cross as an act of rededication upon entering the church.

Perhaps the finest and most beautiful features in the nave are the magnificent **arched recesses** in the south wall, which contain two **wooden effigies**. The arches are a masterpiece of early 14<sup>th</sup> century stone carving. They are cinquefoil and have rich canopies with clusters of leaf-croquets. The ends of the cusps are carved with motifs (one is missing), including tiny heads which look down into the recesses. Along the base are blank shields in quatrefoils. The two effigies are skilfully carved and beautifully preserved. They are of a lady and a gentleman whose clothing dates them from c. 1340-50. We think that they are members of the Filiol family (maybe Sir John Filiol and his lady), who may have been responsible for the 14<sup>th</sup> century reordering of the church. At their feet are fine dogs. Notice the beautiful folds in the lady's costume.

Eastwards of these is a smaller (but contemporary) recess, which contains a **piscina**, where water from the cleansing of the Sacred

Vessels and the priest's hands at the Eucharist was poured away. This also has a credence shelf and shows that an altar stood here in mediaeval times. Another **piscina** (for the High Altar) may be seen in the south wall of the sanctuary.

Above the south doorway is a framed set of **Royal Arms**, which dates from sometime between 1801-1831 and are probably the arms of King George III.

A gallery was erected beneath the tower in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it was removed in 1928. In 2008 the ringing floor was extended into the nave and a new access staircase was provided. The area under the tower was enclosed with a wood and glass screen to form a small meeting room, which also contains facilities for providing refreshments. The **door** to the tower staircase is the original and dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Along the walls of the nave is **panelling** from the old box pews which once filled the church. This dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the panelling on the north side is pleasantly carved. The **bench** to the west of the door is probably 15<sup>th</sup> century, but the rest of the nave seating was installed in the 1850s, when the interior was re-furnished to the designs of William White.

On the north wall is a large and magnificent **wall painting** of St Christopher which, although now faded in parts, is still rich in mediaeval colouring. It was painted about 1370 and shows the Saint carrying the Christ Child across the water. A close look will reveal traces of fish swimming in the water. About half way up on the left hand side is a figure of a hermit and a wayside chapel with its turret and bell. The painting was covered up during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was revealed again in June 1922. It reminds us that the walls of most mediaeval churches were painted with Christian scenes. These, together with the carvings in wood and stone, the painted screen and coloured glass, etc. acted as the common folk's manual of Religious Education in those far off days when few could read the services which were in Latin.

In 1991 there was great excitement when, during some re-decoration a small piece of plaster fell off the north wall revealing a trace of another wall painting. This was investigated in 1994 and revealed part of an ancient frieze depicting the **devil** (later beheaded). It consists of coloured plaster and has been dated to around 200 years before the St Christopher painting. The brick pattern on the wall passes over the devil but under St Christopher. It is thought to have been part of a scheme that would have gone right round the church since a small piece of the edge pattern was also found on the right of the chancel arch. The remainder would seem to have been lost during repairs and alterations and the removal of the original south wall of the nave.

The rood-screen, which stood ablaze with colour and carving beneath the chancel arch. has long gone. We can see in the arch where parts of it fitted. Above it was the rood-loft, along which it was possible to walk. The **rood-loft staircase** is still in place on the north side. This was discovered in the 1940s, having been covered over for many years. Above the loft was the great Rood (Our Lord on the cross, flanked by his Mother and St John) which was a constant reminder to the congregation of the central fact of the Faith - Christ crucified.

The **roof** of the nave is not ancient, although the great tiebeams which stretch from wall to wall are mediaeval. The nave and chancel once had plaster ceilings, which were removed during the 1940s. The chancel roof does however retain its original mediaeval framework.

The tracery of the east window contains some fragments of mediaeval **stained glass**. The figure on the left is probably St Michael and the right hand light is made up of fragments, more of which have been assembled in the east window of the nave. Three coats of arms in modern glass can be seen in other windows; in the north nave window are the arms of Arthur Lionel Woodhouse and the west window of the tower displays those of the Bishop of Chelmsford (the Patron of the living) and the Lords Rayleigh (the previous Patrons).

We can see by the floor near the Mildmay memorial and the height of the piscina opposite, that the level of the floor has been raised.

The small single window in the south wall of the chancel may have been a **low-side window**, equipped with shutters which enabled a person to operate an external Sanctus Bell which announced to people working in the fields the important parts of the Eucharist so that they could join in the prayer.

## MEMORIALS

The church possesses several memorials to people of the past who have been associated with it. The finest mediaeval monuments here are the **wooden effigies** of the Filiols, which have already been described.

Two **brass inscriptions** survive. One in the floor near the chancel arch commemorates William Toft (died 1470) and the other commemorating Mercymight Bristowe (died 1611), can be seen near the south door.

On the north side of the chancel is the large and handsome **Mildmay Monument**. It has been suggested that this is the work of John and Matthias Christmas, who designed many of the Lord Mayor's pageants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It commemorates Sir Henry Mildmay, of Graces, who died in 1639. He lies clad in his armour (he distinguished himself in battle in Ireland against the Spanish) and at his feet are his two wives in kneeling position - Alicia Harris on the left and Amy Gurdon (who survived him) on the right. Alicia Harris committed suicide on account of her husband's unkindness; hence the skull in her hand. To the north of the east window is a **wall-plaque**, commemorating Mary Mildmay.

## MODERN FITTINGS

As is the case with most mediaeval churches, we see here workmanship of many different periods, including fine craftsmanship of our own times, which rightly takes its place alongside the work of past ages. These items (some of which have been given as memorials to people who have loved and served this church) include:-

**Iron candelabra** - made by a local blacksmith.

**Lectern** - made by a former organist (whose brother discovered the hidden wall painting).

**Sanctuary lamp** - made by a Dorset craftsman.

**High Altar** - made in 1959, in memory of an artist.

**Choir stalls** - ones so recent are rarely found in our churches.

**Processional Cross, list of Rectors and Vicars** starting in 1293, and the beautiful **font cover** with a dove (the emblem of the Holy Spirit) worked in mother of pearl.

Notice on the north side of the nave the fine bronze **statue** of Our Lord. A large collection of **embroidered kneelers** has been made by the expert hands of a needlework group. They have also made sets of **vestments** and **altar frontals**.

## **BELLS**

The tower contains a ring of eight bells, which were hung in a new metal frame in 1986 by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Four of these bells have been refurbished, one bell was acquired from a redundant church at West Tilbury and three have been newly cast. The tenor bell (weighing 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  cwt) is late 14<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest in the county. Also in the tower is the old timber bell-frame, which contains two bells: one of which is still chimed, whilst the other – a pre Reformation bell by Henry Jordon – is cracked and unringable.

## **ORGAN**

This is a two manual and pedal instrument, which was built by Cedric Arnold in 1931. During 1986, it was completely overhauled and modified, and in 2009 it was thoroughly cleaned and re-bushed where necessary.

## **REGISTERS**

These date back to the year 1558.

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## **LITTLE BADDOW HISTORY CENTRE**

Little Baddow History Centre occupies a new building at the rear of the Chapel and behind the cart lodge. It contains many artefacts connected with the history of the village and at regular intervals puts on specialist exhibitions.

Details and opening times can be found in Little Baddow News.

## LITTLE BADDOW UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

This interesting building lies at the junction of Chapel Lane and Church Road, just under half a mile nearer to the village than the Parish Church. It is one of the oldest Dissenting Buildings in the country and has been investigated with interest by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments.

It was built of red brick in 1707, with an adjoining room built to celebrate the bi-centenary of the original building. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the porch was added.

The building has the simplicity of a Dissenting place of worship and seats 150 people. The plain windows have 18<sup>th</sup> century elegance. Four round windows are unusual in style, though the same may be seen in the URC at Epping, which was built shortly afterwards. The brass oil lamps have been retained, but have been converted to electricity. They add charm to the building. The small pipe organ was, like the one in St Mary's, built by Cedric Arnold and was presented to the chapel in 1934.

The original building had a gallery, which has since been removed. On the east wall there is a board recording the names of the Ministers of the church, with the dates when they served at Little Baddow, beginning with Thomas Gilson, who was 'ejected' from a neighbouring parish church when, in 1662, with 2,000 other priests in the country, he refused to accept the Act of Uniformity.

The history of Dissent in Little Baddow begins even earlier in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though the church quotes 1661 as the date of its formation. From 1626-29/30, Thomas Hooker was Lecturer in Chelmsford, but had to give up under pressure from Archbishop Laud. He then kept a school in Little Baddow, where he was assisted by John Eliot and enjoyed the protection of the Vicar of the parish - one John Newton. Hooker later left for America where he founded the State of Connecticut. Eliot, who followed him, became the 'Apostle to the



Indians’.

Until the present building was erected, the congregation met in various houses.

The missionary interest of the congregation was again stimulated during the following century by William Parry, who was one of those interested in the formation of the London Missionary Society - the first Protestant organ of International Mission. His own life was tragic. A stone on the outside wall of the chapel commemorates the death of three members of his family within three months.

Beside the main entrance are the graves of the Morell family, of whom Stephen was Minister from 1799-1852 and was followed by his son, Thomas (1852-77). Parry and Morell ran a dissenting academy in the adjoining Manse and Daniel, another of Morell’s sons, became the first Schools’ Inspector in Britain.

The building was erected at the expense of the Barrington family. Their son was at Rowe’s Academy where Isaac Watts, author of “When I survey the wondrous cross”, was a fellow pupil. Watts used to come and preach from time to time in Little Baddow, because of the family friendship.

An ancient cart lodge is still standing at the rear of the chapel.

Services continue to be held in the chapel on Sunday mornings at 10.30 am.

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## **LITTLE BADDOW CHRISTIAN COUNCIL AND THE ECUMENICAL COVENANT**

There are very good relations between the Parish Church and the Chapel; the two congregations try to do many things together, but at the same time they try to preserve the richness of their inherited traditions. Little Baddow Christian Council has been in existence for some 80 years, bringing together Christians of differing traditions.

In 2005 both Churches, in the presence of the Bishop of Bradwell and the Moderator of the Eastern Region of the United Reformed Church, signed an Ecumenical Covenant in which they pledged not to do anything separately that they could better do together. This was witnessed by village members from the Roman Catholic Church and the Quakers.

Services are shared on a regular basis and both congregations support a Missionary Link with the Karen people in the Umpium Refugee Camp on the Burma/Thailand border.

This booklet was originally compiled by Roy Tricker, a visitor to the church, in the hope that other visitors may find it helpful.

The Author is grateful to Revd John Geyer for writing the notes about the U.R.C. Chapel, and for the help and advice that he has received from the late Roy Warsop and Brian Gilders.

Revision and updating for this latest edition has been undertaken by Brian Gilders.

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# **LITTLE BADDOW**

**Essex**

**A Brief Guide to:-**

**The Parish Church  
of  
St Mary the Virgin**

**and**

**The Chapel  
of the United  
Reformed Church**