

THE PARISH CHURCH OF St. MARY the VIRGIN, BELCHAMP WALTER

CHANCEL:

The oldest work is thought to be from the 10th or 11th century and has survived in the narrow semi circular window in the north wall of the chancel. The current building dates from the XIIIth Century, although the eastern end, including the Altar and Altar steps were extended and raised a few feet during the restoration by the Patron the Reverend J.M. St Clere Raymond - about the year 1859.

The **East window** is Gothic, but all the glass is Victorian except the tiny topmost light which depicts the Virgin Mary, the window was restored in 1996.

The front of the **Altar** is adorned with two oil paintings by G.W. Brownlow who lived in the village at "Lodge Villa". They depict "Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac" and "The Supper at Emmaus" these were painted about 1870 and restored in 2011.

The **Raymond family monument**, designed and built by Robert Taylor for John Raymond in 1720 is on the North wall. Beneath the floor is the later of the two family vaults.

The eastern wall of the Sanctuary contains a fine tiled Victorian reredous and under the carpet can be found a decorative tiled floor.

The **Chancel Arch** is fine and beautifully proportioned. The carpets in the Chancel and Sanctuary were installed in 1964.

NAVE:

This is of unusual width for a single span and very lofty. It is of early XIVth Century origin.

At the North - east end are the remains of what must have been a very beautiful canopied **Chantry Chapel**, which evidently extended outside the North wall, and would have incorporated the tomb of the Botetourt family - Sir John de Botetourt having been buried in 1324. Prior to that date he occupied the Manor as underlord of the de Veres - Earls of Oxford, at Hedingham Castle, and Priory of Earls Colne, to whom the Church at that time belonged. This memorial was apparently defaced during the Civil War, at which time memorial brasses were also removed from tombs under the Centre Aisle.

Also on the North Wall can be seen **Mural Paintings** of unusual interest, particularly that of the Madonna to whom the Church is dedicated. Prior to 1962 this painting had been partially visible and in 1962, along with other paintings was restored by an expert who was a Mrs Baker; she was engaged through the auspices of The Pilgrim Trust.

Her initial comments regarding the Madonna are as follows " I discovered a text partially obscuring the painting, which is of 14th Century date. And I cleaned off the text to reveal an extremely lovely painting finely drawn and over life size in scale. It is probably an altar painting, bearing in mind the dedication of the church. I know of no better painting of this subject - it is the most entirely satisfactory treatment I have ever seen". The Virgin is crowned with her long hair flowing over her shoulders, and she is suckling her Child who is supported on her left knee, with tracings of censuring angels on either side and a bird can just be made out on top of the canopy - possible a falcon. The boldness of the drawing and the treatment of the eyes are typical of the period (XIVth Century).

The long hair is said to have been a sign of virginity but the crown is unusual, although it has been known as far back as the XIIth Century when a sceptre was

sometimes seen - as Queen of Heaven. The figure at the bottom right of the painting is thought to be the Patron worshipping the Virgin with his beads. The painting is reminiscent of that at Great Canfield in Essex, which is attributed to Matthew Paris, and could well be by the same hand.

The restoration then moved onto the remainder of the North wall where she uncovered two tiers of paintings. These are not by the same painter but nevertheless are interesting, in the top tier there are six subjects, and in the lower tier four subjects, but one of these is very hard to make out. The paintings are mostly in red ochre but also some are in yellow. They can be identified as follows;

Upper Tier - looking from left to right:

1. Christ entering the Gate of Jerusalem on a donkey which is in yellow ochre.
- 2 The Gate of Jerusalem. A small head is looking down from the battlements. Slight traces of a figure can be seen in the archway.
- 3 Christ kneeling and washing the feet of Peter.
- 4 The Last Supper. Judas is seen stealing the bag of money and a fish from the table.
- 5 The Betrayal, Judas, Christ and two Soldiers.
- 6 Christ before Pontius Pilate. Christ's hands are bound and He is blindfolded.

Lower Tier:

- 1 The martyrdom of Saint Edmund. He is bound to a tree and being shot by the Danes with bows and arrows.
- 2 This is indecipherable.
- 3 A large "Pelican in Piety" painted in red, pecking at her breasts and so drawing blood to feed her five chicks.
- 4 This subject is in some doubt, but appears to be a King, Queen and a Courtier bearing a Hawk. Perhaps the first part of "The Three Living and the Three Dead".

In 1964 Mrs Baker came back to look at the South Wall but the results were disappointing. The plaster on this wall being in poor condition, details had become obliterated, but portions of a roundel are seen depicting a figure with arrows and a woman. This is possibly Saint Sebastian, who was wounded with arrows shot at him, the archers leaving him for dead. His wounds were healed by Irene, widow of the martyr Saint Castulus.

Above the South door there appears to be three women with Christ - the Resurrection Scene? Especially as there seems to be a sleeping figure near His right foot.

To the right of the door is an inscription in Old English, this is of a much later date and quotes from the Acts of the Apostles (Chapter 20, verse 9): "And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen asleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sank down with sleep and, fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead", however the narrative goes on to say he recovered.

In 1996 the whole of the walls containing the paintings was stabilised and cleaned.

An oak cabinet encases "The Elegant Angel" this is a transfer print on glass of a mouth painting done by the Rev. Harry Morse just before his premature death due to Motor Neuron Disease and is dedicated to him, the cloud effect is sand blasted and is

similar to panels that can be found in the new Romam Catholic Church built next to the Slipper Chapel at Walsingham .

The upper part of the **Font** is Norman.

The **Organ** manufactured by Henry Jones (formally of Fulham), was installed in or about 1867 it is an excellent example of a small instrument, much in the tradition of the English Chamber Organs of the 18th Century.

An electric blower was fitted in 1957 from a bequest from former organist Mrs E.R. Bouffler, and a major restoration was carried out in 1967 when the swell shutters were removed and the range of pedals increased from 1 ½ to 2 ½ octaves.

The Stop list is: Open Diapason (from Tenor C)
Stopped Diapason
Principal
Twelfth
Fifteenth

Unfortunately there is no room in the case for any pedal stops; this deficiency being particularly supplied by the bottom octave of 16 foot pipes on the Manual. The tone is transparent and bright, eminently suitable for early organ music as well as for accompanying congregational singing.

A feature of the nave is its quadrangular **Pulpit**, which is adorned with paintings by Brownlow, of the four Evangelists, these were restored in 2011.

A family **Vault** is situated under the floor near the remains of the North door.

The **Heating** in the nave is primarily by electric fires, the old ‘Tortoise’ stove is still used but is not stoked up to the same extent as it used to be when it was the sole source of heating in the church. If looked at closely, scorch marks can be seen on the pews that are positioned on either side of it. The hooks that can still be seen on these pews used to hold in place metal sheets to protect them from the heat.

PORCH

The timbered **Porch**, and massive South door with its original lock, its key was stolen in 1997, is presumably of the same period as the nave.

TOWER

The flint work battlement tower is of the XVth Century, its tall (west) window glazing is from a much later period being installed about 120 years ago, this was restored in 1997.

In the tower is hung a fine peal of **eight bells**, which were rung for the last time in 1923 after which it was found that the timbered frame was unsafe. They were later adapted for chiming.

The **Clock, which is in good working order**, is dated by experts as being from 1730. It was converted to automatic electric winding in 1985

IMPROVEMENTS

The two **oil paintings** “The Crucifixion” and the “Ascension” which now hang either side of the Chancel window, did for a period hang in the Nave. The chancel

walls, along with the East wall of the Nave in Victorian times, were stencilled; these were covered with a colour wash more in keeping with the ancient murals.

The massive **cross beams** for a period during the 19th and 20th centuries were encased, now laid bare, they can be seen in their original splendour.

The **pews** in the Nave - originally arranged in three rows, are now set into two rows, with a central and two side Aisles.

CHURCHYARD

The churchyard, which overlooks the picturesque valley of the Belchamp Brook, has been closed for burials since 1920 and interments are now made in the Cemetery adjoining. In 1964 a Faculty was obtained to re-site some of the tombstones, after which, the ground was levelled and sown with grass. In spring a large area of the yard remains natural with beautiful displays of Daffodils and other Narcissi. These being planted by Peoples churchwarden, Ian Swift in memory of his sister.

On the exterior North wall of the nave is the following Epitaph to a former Sexton: -

Snug by this wall lies old Sam Cook
Who with his Spade his Bell and Book
Serv'd Sexton Three Score Years and Three
Until his Master grim Death cry'd
Enough - your Tools now lay aside
And let a brother bury Thee
Died 6 May 1800
Aged 89 Years

REGISTERS

In the year 1559 Queen Elizabeth I ordered registers to be kept in all Churches. In 1623 William Smythies was appointed Vicar. He not only kept the registers most beautifully, but also copied out entries of his predecessors from 1559 onwards in a vellum bound book. The current registers are preserved in the Church safe, but the older registers are kept in the Essex County Archives.

BELCHAMP WALTER CHURCH WARDENS

Vicar's		People's	
1873	Robert Firmin	1873-1881	Charles Adams
1874-1904	J.E. Brand	1882-1923	C.M. Stunt
1905-1914	J. Pannell	1924-1926	A. Skey
1915-1917	F.W. Wilson	1927-1929	Walter G. Deal
1918-1932	R.C. Mauldon	1930-1932	A.J. Daniell
1933-1939	A.J. Pearsons	1933-1950	H. Rowe
1940-1945	Walter G. Deal	1951-1955	J. Morton
1946-1965	S.P. St. Clere. Raymond	1956-1993	Ian R.K. Swift
1966-1998	Michael (Joe) B. Brown	1994-2012	Terry A. Raybould
1999-2010	David Cox		
2011-	Martin Runnacles	2013-	Rebecca Poynter

BELCHAMP WALTER VICAR'S

	Date	Patron
Joh. Clarke	-	

Ric. de Oakham	1370	Priory and Convent de Colne
Ric. Wright	-	“ “ “
Rob. Eede	1387	“ “ “
Joh. Crispe	1401	“ “ “
Joh. Man	1404	“ “ “
Nic. Baxter (or Barker)	-	“ “ “
Nic. Gyan	1465	
Joh. Forthington	1469	
Rob. Hochinson	-	
Hugo Fetherston	1526	“ “ “
Vincent Wharton	1528	“ “ “
Joh. Gilliot (or Gyllet)	1529-1560 (died)	
Edw. Riggs (or Rigges)	1580	Our Lady Queen Elizabeth I
Tho. Corbett	1583	St. Edmunds Hall Oxford
Joh. Collinson	1584	“ “ “
Will. Smythies	1623-1643 (resigned)	Raymond Family
Joh. Wright	1650	Our Lord the King (by lapse)
John Firmin	-	
Ric. Bate	1679	William Ayliff & William Raymond (Gentlemen)
Joh. Thomas	1680	
John Goodwin	-	
Geo. Rutherford	-	
Wm. Kent	1723	The King
T. Chapman	1731	
S. Raymond (senior)	1758-1767	Raymond Family
Robert Wright	1767-1784	“ “
S. Raymond (junior)	1784-1826	“ “
F.W. Pelly	1889-1893	“ “
T.L.V. Simkin	1893-1899	“ “
A.P. Pannell	1899-1942	“ “
E.W. Hamond	1942-1946	“ “
G.E. Adams	1947-1956	“ “
G.T. Beale	1956-1959	“ “
R.Trevor. Howard	1959-1993	“ “
Aidan Harker	1997-2000	“ “
Eoin Buchanan (Team Rector)	2004-2012	“ “
Sally Womersley (Team Vicar)	2014	“ “

Note;

The Parishes of Belchamp Walter and Bulmer were united on 27th September 1765.

The Parish of Belchamp Otten was added to the Benefice on 18th March 1958.

A new Benefice was formed on 1st July 1997 when the above three Parishes were joined with the Parishes of Belchamp St. Pauls and Ovington.

In 2003, the current benefice comprising Alphramstone, Gt. & Lt. Henny, Lamarsh, Middleton, Twinstead, Wickham St Pauls, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp Walter, Bulmer, Belchamp St Paul & Ovington Pentlow, Foxearth, Liston & Borley was formed and is known as The North Hinckford Team Ministry

GRANTS 1990 – Todate

English Heritage	£52,000	Roof, Windows, Murals, Butresses etc.
Friends of Essex Churches	£10,000	ditto
The Churches Conservation Trust	£ 1,000	ditto
Essex Heritage Trust	£ 400	Murals
Friends of Essex Churches	£10,000	Heating System, Lighting
Essex Environmental Trust	£ 5,129	Re-wiring
Essex Heritage Trust	£1,200	Restoration of GW Brownlow Paintings
Essex Gardens Trust	£ 100	ditto