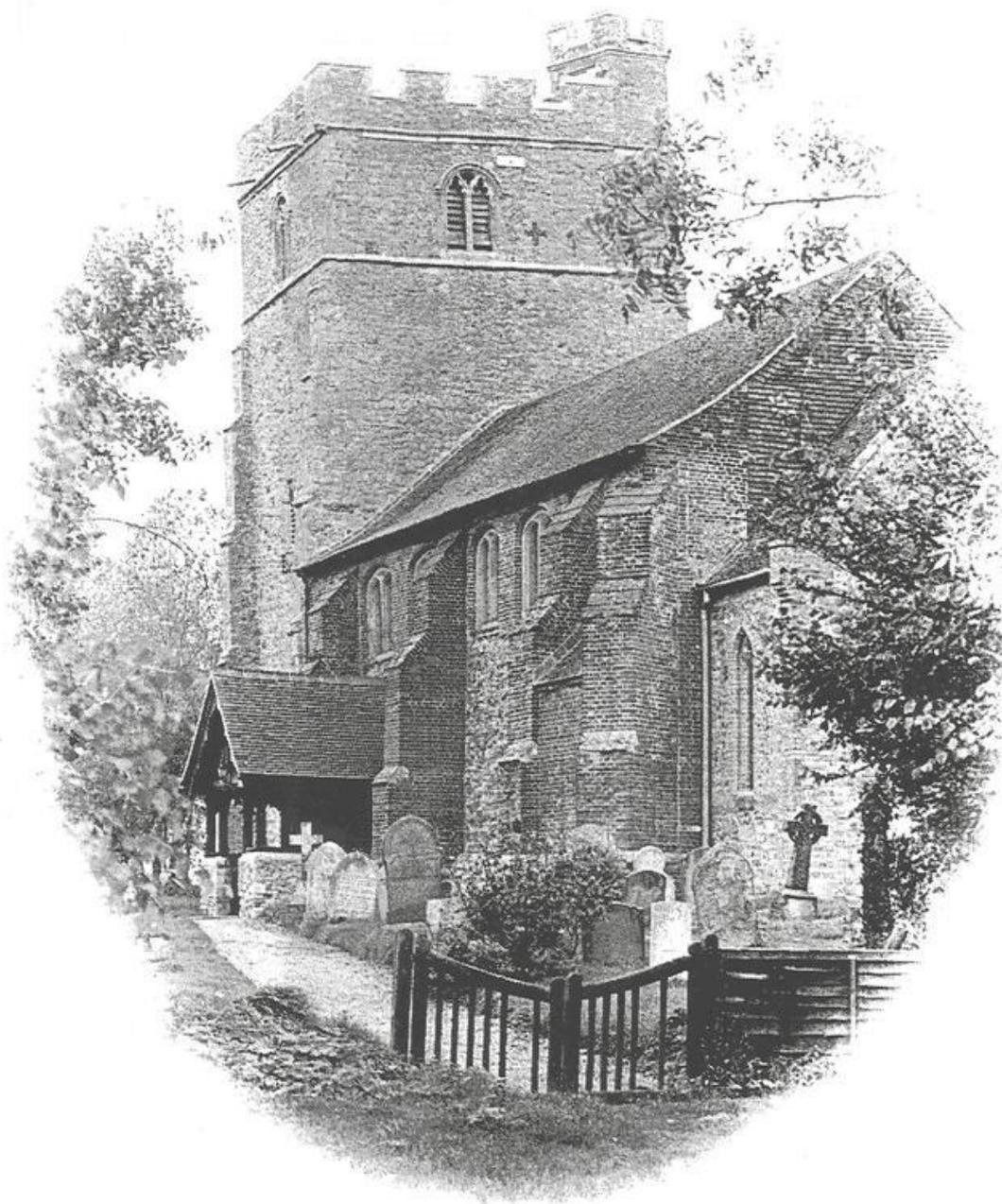


The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin Peldon



Preface

This account of Peldon Parish Church is reliant to an extent on three sources; Kay Gilmour's work, in Colchester Public Library, the guide to the church by the Reverend A.W. Gough, Dip Th, dated to 1970 and the description produced by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) in 1922.

Kay Gilmour writes of the entry on Peldon in the Domesday Survey, the history of the Manor and the church bells. For some of the architectural features the RCHM descriptions have been adopted.

The Reverend Gough's researches are detailed and thorough, notably on the earlier descriptions of the church; the 'devil door', the Elizabethan oak chest, the organ, the plate and registers, the rectories and school and, above all, on the biographical notes on the rectors. Wherever possible his wording has been preserved on these subjects.

Other references are acknowledged at the end.

This account then is an editing, development and updating of much that has gone before.

Alan Ellis

Front piece: St Mary the Virgin, Peldon

Introduction

Peldon Church is not well known, not glamorous, it will not appear in many lists of one hundred best churches nor will many people drive a distance especially to see it.

Judging from the Visitors Book, however, those who do seek it out and visit are delighted and greatly enjoy their experience.

It has a number of striking features, two of them unique among the parish churches of northeast Essex. It also has a number of mysteries.

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Maps of the area show Peldon St Mary's to be part of the outermost of three concentric rings of parish churches around Colchester, about eight miles out.

Normally approached from the east or from the south, the immediate impression given by the church building is one of strength. From an elevated position its turreted grey tower dominates the village and surrounding area. Contrasting splashes of brighter colour come from red tiles in the roofs of the nave and porch.

The form of the church is unusual in that it has a clerestory (1) but no side aisles; hence when the clerestory and hammer beam roof came to be added in Tudor times it was necessary to build also massive red brick buttresses onto the nave walls. This configuration is in fact unique among the parish churches of North East Essex.

Within the church the nave walls are plastered and painted throughout in a warm cream; the roof trusses above being a cool silvery grey. The interior is well lit and airy with largely clear glass to its windows; those of the clerestory and the short chancel allowing light to pour in from the fields and marshes extending to the estuary around and below.

The church is dedicated to St Mary the Virgin; one of one hundred and fifteen such dedications in Essex.

HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION

One of the earliest descriptions of the church is found in the Holman MSS, c.1720 (2)
"both church and chancell of one piece, tyled, a Tower of Stone, square, with one bell"

This description is applied to several parish churches locally and, in the case of Peldon, raises questions about the eighteenth century predecessor of the Victorian chancel. What does the writer mean by "of one piece"? Built from the same materials and in the same style, or with no chancel arch? This description though, however brief, is recognisably about the same church that is to be seen today.

The same cannot be said, however, for a fuller description given by the Reverend Christopher Harrison (Rector 1855 – 1867) *"In 1855 the Church was thus found. High, white painted, double or square pews through the whole church and Chancel. The Belfry (i.e. the Tower) boarded out from the Church, and with a large gallery in front of it, reaching to the Porch Door..... A whitewashed ceiling, much out of repair, on heavy tie beams, and hiding the timber of Roof. The Font (present Bowl and centre shaft) painted and resting on a brick base. The Altar, a painted deal Table, it's covering of corresponding meanness. The whole floor of the Church was on one level, one step only for kneeling at the Altar Rails."*

The double or square pews are gone and a whitewashed ceiling no longer hides the roof trusses. The tower is no longer boarded out, but above a partition is open to the nave. The font is no longer painted and there are now two steps up to the altar. Gone too is the large gallery, with no evidence of its presence surviving on the interior walls. Its supporting columns are, however, shown on a seating plan dating from before the Victorian restoration, and it is referred to in a churchwarden's account dated "August ye 1st 1739 for framing ye gallorey £1" (3)

We know from the Domesday record that there was a church in PELTENDUNA (as the village was then named) in 1085 A.D.; it had thirty acres of glebe attached, which would have been farmed by the parish priest;(4) a fact perpetuated today in the naming of the group of bungalows to the east of the Plough public house and the field behind the houses to the west. As yet no trace of this earlier church has been found.

The earliest parts of the present building are Norman, the nave dating back to the twelfth century. The tower was added in the early part of the fifteenth century and the clerestory, nave roof and buttresses in the early part of the sixteenth century. (5)

The church was fully restored in 1858/59, during the Rectorship of the Reverend Harrison at a cost of over £700; later to rise in 1867 to £908 when the vestry was added. A 6d rate was imposed on the parishioners to defray part of the cost. The present, noticeably short, chancel-cum-sanctuary was built and dedicated in 1953, in the time of the Reverend Roy Adnett. (6)

In March 2006 the Friends of St Mary's Peldon was formed following an initiative from Professor Bill Tamblyn. This secular organisation has raised a great deal of money in the intervening years. The money has been used to re-open the tower, with lighting and hand-hold and the steps repaired. Some 100 chairs have been provided in the nave, in lieu of the pews, together with maintenance improvements to the heating and lighting. An extension for kitchen and lavatory facilities is in progress beyond the north door.

The fabric of the church is a rich mixture of different materials and repairs carried out in whatever was in use at the time.

The north wall of the nave is cement rendered so that nothing can be seen of the original; in fact traces of earlier medieval rendering remain throughout the fabric. The south wall is composed of lumps of stone, large pebbles, flints, septaria (possibly from the area around the river Stour) and pieces of early medieval brick and tile. All of this is roughly laid to courses in a lime mortar with fine gravel inclusions and intermittent lines of bricks and tiles, possibly marking the periods of work. A concentration of stone marks the installation of the south east window.

Essex is a county virtually devoid of workable stone but which abounds in clay, hence from the earliest times and certainly from the late fifteenth century use has been made of brick in its churches and other buildings. Above the top of the nave walls the clerestory and all buttresses are of brick. Apart from that next to the south porch, which has been rebuilt and later repaired, these buttresses are in warm deep red early Tudor brick of an average size 9" x 4" x 2" (228mm x 102mm x 51mm). Moulded bricks mark the stages and inclined tops of the buttresses and the jambs to the clerestory windows on the north side.

Between the southeastern buttress and that set at an angle on the southeast corner of the nave, the brickwork enclosing the stair to the rood loft is decorated with a complex pattern of diamonds and triangles marked out in a dark brick, known as diaper work. Un-coursed limestone blocks, with the occasional brick or flint, are used in the walls and buttresses of the western tower.

The modern chancel is in a pale yellow/grey brick with un-coursed limestone panels, which include some larger stones on the north side.

The nave is entered by the south porch, which was rebuilt during the Victorian restoration; its west wall is formed from one of the brick buttresses.

Inside this west wall is a brick recess with four centred head below a triple trefoil brick corbel. The porch roof has a central king post truss and chamfered tie beam. At the right hand side of the south door is a

small stoup inset in the south wall with moulded jambs, a four-centred head and a square head over. There is leaf carving in the spandrels.

THE NAVE

In the north wall there is a fourteenth century window, partly restored, and of two trefoiled ogee lights with tracery in a two-centred arch and label. In the Holman MSS there is an interesting reference to this window in which there were many Coats of Arms relating to the Teye Family, who possessed the advowson of the church from 1450 to 1525. The arms have, since that visit in about 1720, been removed.

The north doorway, which can be dated from the early fifteenth century, has externally richly moulded and shafted jambs, a moulded two centred arch and label over with defaced angel stops. The splays inside are shafted with capitals and the rear arch is moulded.

It is thought by some to be one of the 'devil doors' found in some pre-reformation churches. During the medieval baptism service (most of which was conducted outside the church in the porch) exorcism used to take place, and perhaps the idea was that rather than have the excised 'evil spirit' driven into the church, the north door immediately opposite would be opened during the service to allow it to pass through!

The great west door was reserved for the old manorial occupants and the Palm Sunday processions. (The site of the old manor building is believed to be that of the present Peldon Hall close by, to the northwest of the church.)

The south wall has two modern windows but there is said to be evidence of earlier windows in this wall that has been obscured. The southwest window has an ogee head and contains re-used stones.

At the east end of this wall are the upper and lower doorways of the rood loft stairs that would have given access to the top of the rood screen, standing in front of the chancel arch. Both doorways have moulded, segmental heads, the stair being formed between the eastern most buttress on the south wall and that standing at an angle on the south-east corner of the nave.

The south doorway is of fourteenth century date with moulded jambs, a two centred head and moulded label with defaced stops externally and plain splays and chamfered head within.

Above is the early sixteenth century brick clerestory with four windows in the south wall and only three windows in the north, the penultimate bay from the east on the north wall being left as a blank.

The reason for this lies in the spacing of the buttresses and the roof trusses. The windows lie between the roof trusses and the even spacing of the buttresses on the north wall results in one buttress standing where a window would be. The uneven spacing of the buttresses on the south wall resulting from the presence of the south porch and the rood stair has the advantage of allowing for four windows. The four buttresses on the north wall, however, create a splendid spatial effect.

The north wall clerestory windows have two four centred lights with pierced spandrels in a four-centred head all in chamfer moulded Tudor brickwork. Those in the south wall are similar, following restoration in 1976.

The nave roof has already been noted as one of the most striking features of the interior, indeed of the church. It is also of sixteenth century date, partly restored. There are six bays and the trusses are of the type known as single hammer beam, the hammer beam being the short timber projecting horizontally at the level of the top of the wall. The trusses rest on wall posts in the form of shafts, with moulded capitals and bases, the main timbers are moulded and the curved braces form four centred arches. The oak roof was treated for death-watch beetle in 1966. At the present time the multi-toned silvery greys of these timbers in the nave roof are a joy to behold. Similar roofs elsewhere in East Anglia are carved and decorated, some with flying angels, but this roof retains an elegant simplicity and represents the latest in the technology of its day.

CHANCEL-CUM- SANCTUARY

At the east end of the nave is the combined chancel-cum-sanctuary (henceforth sanctuary), very short and with three modern lancet windows, all dating from 1953.

Nothing is known of the earliest chancel save that the structure preceding that built in the Victorian era, was pulled down about 1820 and that it was '*... of one piece*'. From photographs, the Victorian chancel built in the late 1850s was about three times the length of the present sanctuary and seemingly had two windows, one either side of the priests door, in its south wall and a vestry to the north, added in 1866. There were two narrow windows either side of the vestry and three lancet windows at the east end. This chancel was boarded off in 1939 and finally demolished as part of the reconstruction in the early 1950s.

A moulded wooden arch of Victorian date, carried on four stone corbels with angels bearing shields, stands at the entrance, apparently because it was feared that the poor ground would not support a more conventional stone structure. Happily this solution also resulted in a financial saving for the parish.

The south wall of the sanctuary incorporates a piscina (originally used in the rinsing of the vessels for Holy Communion, and draining off onto consecrated ground outside). It was discovered during the Victorian restoration imbedded in the wall as a corbel for the rood loft. (7) It has a sexfoil basin, protruding shelf and a carved chevron design in two layers below.

The three lancet windows incorporate a cross in red with a dove descending in the centre; the initials IHS (the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus) are in the right-hand window and the Hebrew word for Jehovah is on the left. Their proximity to the nave enables them to contribute to the light and airy feeling of the church. Either side are the Ten Commandments from Exodus XX, in black gothic script on grey grounds. In front is a panel of 56 octagonal tiles, worn and faded, providing a contrast with the tiles of more recent date elsewhere.

Dr Dudley Narborough, Bishop of Colchester, dedicated the new sanctuary on April 19th 1953. "*The architect was Marshall Sisson (1897-1978) of Godmanchester, and the work was by Clifford White of West Mersea*" (8) A drawing and specification from March 1952 is still extant and it would appear that the "*original glass*" from the Victorian chancel was re-used with "*new leads*". The two sets of three lancet windows would have been similar to enable this to be done. The tiles likewise are from the demolished chancel. (9)

THE WEST TOWER

To the west of the nave is the massive tower, built at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Within it is a spiral stone stair of 87 steps turning clockwise and giving access to the stages above the bell chambers and roof. The two centred tower arch is of two hollow chamfered orders; the responds have each two attached shafts with moulded capitals and bases.

During the Victorian restoration (1858/59) the then rector wrote:-

"Some stones of the belfry arch so out of place, as threatening at any moment to fall. A large, solid piece of masonry detached and pressing on the arch, owing to an old settlement crack in the tower .. the belfry arch entirely taken down to the ground, rebuilt upright and raised to its present height (4½ feet additional) and so brought into better proportions with the present height of nave"

An example of Victorian improvement on the medieval original; it should be borne in mind, however, that when the tower arch was built, the nave would not have had its clerestory.

Speculating then about the appearance of the church during the fifteenth century; if between the building of the tower and the addition of the clerestory the rubble walls of the nave came up only to the lowest course of the clerestory, there would have been a considerable imbalance between the tower and nave. However indications on the eastern face of the tower suggest the possibility that during this period the walls of the nave rose some 3' (915mm) above the top of the present clerestory to the level of the third stage of the tower buttresses; such walls would have been surmounted by a steeply pitched roof rising to the underside of the belfry window. This possibility is not referred to by RCHM and will require investigation when access is available, but would represent a noble and proportionate structure.

Further, a comparison of the dates shows the fact that the tower leans to the south and the west, is not attributable to the Peldon earthquake of 1884. This is also confirmed by a passage in the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould's novel "Mehalah" which mentions "*the leaning tower of Peldon*" in 1880. Poor ground conditions have clearly lead to subsidence over many years.

Through the tower arch the ground floor vestry contains, in the north wall, a doorway to the stair, with moulded jambs and two-centred arch. The partly restored west window is of three cinquefoiled lights with tracery in a two-centred head.

Externally there is a moulded plinth and turreted parapet with grotesques at the angles. The west doorway has moulded jambs and two-centred arch in a square head with traceried spandrels and a restored label with defaced head-stops. The second stage has in the south and west walls a window of one cinquefoiled light, that in the west wall having been rebuilt. The third stage has in the west wall a restored window of one trefoiled light. The bell-chamber has in each wall a partly restored window of two cinquefoiled lights in a square head with a moulded label. Five rectangular slits light the stairs. The tower walls are 5'6" (1.68m) thick at the base.

The tower holds the church's two bells, both recently restored to full working order with money provided by the Friends of St Mary's. The larger bell was cast in 1613 by Miles Graye of Colchester. It is engraved "Miles Graye made me in 1613", and weighs over 8cwt. (5) In 1976 the Miles Graye bell was found to be cracked and so could not be used. It was held by Colchester Museum Service until 2013 when it was returned to the church. The Friends of St Mary's arranged for it to be restored by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and subsequently rehung in its present position and brought back into use.

(10)

The smaller was cast by Thomas Mears in 1822, and weighs over 7½ cwt. This bell replaced a much larger one, which weighed over 9cwt, and the account from Thomas Mears has survived among the Church Warden's accounts:

LONDON Feby. 22, 1822

MR. COLEMAN FOR THE PARISH OF PELDON
DR TO THOMAS MEARS

TO 1 CHURCH BELL, 7cwt. 2qrs. 2lbs.	£52. 12. 6d
WHARFAGE AND CARTAGE	4. 6d
MAY 10 LANDING, WHARFAGE & CARTAGE ON OLD BELL	7. 0d
	£53. 4. 0d
CR	
BY OLD BELL: 9cwt. 0. 9lb	
DEDUCT IRON: <u>6lb</u>	
9cwt. 0. 3lb	£44. 18. 7d
	£8. 5. 5d

We see from this that the bell was delivered by sea.

'Thomas Mears' is now known as The Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

The west window to the ground floor contains stained glass with three figures illustrating Faith, Hope and Love. The window came to Peldon from the Ely Stained Glass Museum in 1989 and was dedicated shortly after the retirement of the Reverend Edward Charles Lendon. Originally the east window of the Rockley Chapel, Marlborough, Wiltshire, it was gifted to the museum in 1974 following the closure of the chapel in 1961. The window was made by Arthur Anselm Orr (1868-1949) about 1926 and was in memory of Hugh de Heinz Whatton, owner of the Rockley Manor Estate 1911-1926. The original tracery lights and inscription were not transferred and are still in Ely with other glass from Rockley. (11)

Also in the tower vestry is the 17th century Elizabethan oak chest. Originally it had three locks (as laid down by the injunction of Edward VI), and the two Churchwardens and the Rector used to have one key apiece, so that access to its contents had to be a combined operation. This chest, and its contents of irreplaceable old parish documents, was thankfully retrieved from the old vestry by Capt. N O R Serjeant, a churchwarden from 1935 -1944, who carefully sorted out these accounts and papers dating from the end of the seventeenth century. The chest itself was restored during 2014 by Archie Moore; the accounts and papers are now in the Essex record office.

CROSSES

The fabric of the church shows a number of crosses.

The tower has crosses on each of its four faces externally. On the south face at the third stage are four crosses set in a diamond pattern, picked out in black flint. To the north of the west door is a cross, picked out in black flint, the lower limbs restored and now indistinct. Faintly discernible on the north face is a simple cross. High on the east face is a small cross, picked out in black flint, with limbs of equal length. These seven crosses may well be consecration crosses.

Outside the church at the northeast corner is a stone with a carved geometrical design. This design may best be described as a long lobed quatrefoil set diagonally within a square with an inner circle joining the midpoints of the lobes. It has also been described as a 'nimbed saltire'. The RCHM describes the feature as 'inscribed geometrical pattern'. The feature is unique locally.

The Reverend Gough states in his history that a similar stone can be seen inside the north window of the belfry stage of the tower (at the present time, 2015, this window cannot be readily accessed). He also says that the same design has been found carved on the wall of the turret staircase and refers to the design being "*in the form of a cross (a Chrismon). Adedication stone of the church*"

Though a cruciform shape set diagonally may be discerned within the circle, the precise significance of this stone and its design is not clear. (12)

MISCELANEA

Returning to the nave, there are a number of interesting features to be noted. In the north west corner is the 12th century font. It is an octagonal bowl of Purbeck marble, with a central circular column and eight small shafts, on a double chamfered base. It has been much restored, and the places can be seen where the hinges and locks used to be when, prior to the Reformation in the 16th century, fonts were kept locked to prevent people stealing the 'holy water' for superstitious purposes.

Also in this corner is the organ. A Church Terrier (an inventory of all church possessions) shows the present organ to have been "introduced, Feb. 2nd, 1912", and the church register has an entry: "Mar. 3, 1912 : Organ used first time." It was purchased from St Michael's, Myland, Colchester, for £20. Originally the organ stood along the south wall of the previous chancel. When that chancel was boarded up in 1939, the organ was placed in the north east corner of the nave, which, unfortunately, obscured half the north window and both memorial tablets near the pulpit. The organ was taken down, and completely renovated in October 1967 by Cedric Arnold, Williamson & Hyatt Ltd, of Thaxted.

Central on the north wall is the 'Peldon Madonna', a collaborative painting created by Peldon Art Group under the direction of Steve Sharpe. It is based on a work by Giovanni Bellini (active 1459 – 1516) and is composed of 20 panels to form a colourful image 50" x 48".

An Act of Edward VI laid down that all churches should carry the Royal Coat of Arms and an old churchwarden's receipt shows an entry:-

*"August ye 15th (?) 1739 by Samuel bullock
For ye Crown in ye arch 12/8d"*

We do not know what form this took, but the Arms of George III (probably dating from the late eighteenth century and restored in 1967) hanging over the north door, followed it. This Coat of Arms was stolen on 2nd February 2002 and replaced by the Arms we see today. Designed by Denise Andrews and printed by Stuart Morris, it is a photograph of the arms of George III hanging over the north door of East Mersea Parish Church.

The pulpit, low screen and lectern were donated in 1860 by Mrs Aspinwall and Mrs Burgess of Peldon Lodge, as a memorial to their late brother, Mr C F Oldfield. The initials "A.B." are discreetly incorporated in the low screen to the left of the pulpit.

There are a number of memorials in the nave, commencing in the northeast corner behind the pulpit, these are listed below in anti-clockwise order.

A carved plaque to the Reverend Lindsey Johnson ME, 'the blind rector', who was rector for 16 years and died 22.7.1911.

A carved marble slab to Elizabeth Martha Godfrey, who died at the age of 25, the daughter of John Godfrey of the Royal Lancaster Regiment.

The northeast window contains a glass panel to Peter John Miller, who died on 2.4.1998. It was designed by Gay Hutchings, an artist living locally, and commemorates his many years of service to the village. The group of trees in the background and flowers to the right show his interest in the natural world and in gardens

An illuminated manuscript by P.P. London shows the roll of honour containing the names of 92 people from Peldon who served during World War I.

Similarly are shown the names of 38 people from Peldon who served during World War II.

A stone plaque gives the names of 8 people from the village who died during World War I.

On a reading desk against the north wall is the Parish of St Mary's, Peldon, Memorial Book, edited by Ted Sparrow. It records those from the village and nearby who lost their lives in the service of their country or through enemy action in the 19th and 20th centuries.

On the west wall are listed the names of 11 local people in whose memory the west window was restored.

Bert Wisdom is commemorated in a plaque recording that the light fittings were given in his name.

The grant of £60 by the Incorporated Society for Building and Churches towards the reseating of the church is recorded in a wooden plaque. The grant is conditional on a number of seats being reserved for the poorer inhabitants.

A stone plaque to Isabella Dora Sowman who died in 1933

An illuminated manuscript recording the names of 6 local people in whose memory the southern clerestory windows were restored.

The southeast window contains a small colourful glass panel dedicated to the memory of Canon E.J. Lendon MA, rector 1981-89 and his wife Mary. One of the diamond shaped panels of plain glass in this window is etched with a memorial to Laurence Andrew Sanderson and his daughter.

At the west end of the nave, near the south respond of the tower arch, is a monumental stone slab on the floor, with an 'indent' (or recess) where a brass inscription plate was once attached. At the time of the Royal Commission's visit in the 1920's it was intact. It probably marks the burial place of a priest (though not a rector of Peldon) and the inscription read:

HIC JACET THOMAS WEBBE QUI OBIT ULT. DIE OCT. 1463
(Here lies Thomas Webbe who died on the last day of October 1463)

The top step outside the porch was at one time also a monumental stone, though much defaced. The small lead rivets, which affixed a brass inscription plate are now much obscured.

There is a list of Rectors to the right of the south door.

PLATE & REGISTERS

A certificate of the churchwardens, dated 1552, shows that much of the church's valuable plate had been sold by 1548. (13) After the confiscation of monastic endowments, many parishes began to sell their church goods before the king could lay hands on them. The entry for Peldon reads:

“ William Hoy, Gregory Sake, parryshenours there presente that they have solde of the churche plate 2 chalyses, a shippe, a curette, a paxe and a senser conteynge in waighte vjxx iiij unces at iijs. The unce. Summa xv.li.iiis.iiijd. (£15. 3. 4d) whereof they have layed owte and bestowed in repayringe of highways and bridges xij.li iiijd (£12. 13. 4d). And the residue remayneth in thandis (ie the hands) of the saide parryshenours ”

In eastern Essex most of the money raised on the sale of church plate was used to repair bridges, (14) and we know from parish records that Peldon was at one time responsible for keeping Manwood Bridge (on the road to Colchester) in repair.

The present plate, all of early 19th century date, comprises a flagon, one chalice and three patens. The earliest register contains Baptisms, Marriages and Burials from the year 1725. However, by consulting the old Parish Overseers' book burials can be traced back to 1701, since the rectors then had to list all burials by affidavit, and to certify that 'there were none buried in linen'. This is a reference to the Acts of Parliament of 1660 and 1678, which decreed that all burials were to be made in wool, in order to reduce the importation of linen from abroad, and to encourage the home woollen industry. From 1st August, 1678,

“ no corpse of any person shall be buried in any shirt, shift or shroud or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver or any stuff or thing, other than is made of sheep's wool only or to be put in a coffin lined or faced with any sort of cloth or stuff or anything whatsoever that is made of any material but sheep's wool only ”

There was a £5 fine for contravening the Act, but it was repealed in 1814. (15)

The Church Services Registers begin in 1911, at the commencement of the incumbency of the Rev. Edgar Bowring, and the first church collections were begun at the same time.

PARISH AMALGAMATIONS

ADVOWSON & BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE RECTORS OF PELDON

Peldon was a Rectory and the Advowson, or right of patronage, the right of presenting a clergyman to a living, was held for many centuries with the manor. The estates of Peldon were granted by William the Conqueror to William the Deacon, nephew of William, the Bishop of London. Around the year 1200, William de Peltindone and later Richard de Peltindone presented.

From the late thirteenth century to the early fifteenth century the advowson and manor were in the hands of the de Neville family; magnates in their day with local connections. Towards the end of this period Alice de Neville (c1430-1503) and John de Neville held Peldon and at this time the west tower was built.

Both holdings then passed to the Teye family who held them from the early fifteenth century to the mid sixteenth century. Sir Henry Teye (1455-1520), sheriff of Essex in 1480 and 1500, and Sir Thomas Teye (1483-1540) held the manor during a period of seeming prosperity and building activity which

would have included the addition of the clerestory, buttresses and hammer beam roof to the existing nave. The king subsequently acquired the right and granted it to the D'Arcy family.

From the mid 17th century the advowson was held by various East Anglian families and personages whose presentations are recorded against the name of the rector concerned, sometimes a member of the same family. The parishes of Peldon, Great Wigborough and Little Wigborough were joined in July 1975; East Mersea and West Mersea having been joined in 1974.

Subsequent to the retirement of Reverend Lendon in 1989, the Rectorship of Peldon was suspended to enable parish re-organisation to take place.

In 1994, Reverend Robin Edward Elphick ALCD, the then vicar of West Mersea, became Priest in Charge of East and West Mersea, Peldon, Little and Great Wigborough, until his retirement in 2002.

The Reverend Sam Charles Norton MA became Rector of East and West Mersea and priest in charge of Peldon, Great and Little Wigborough in 2003 and in 2010 Rector of East and West Mersea, Peldon, Great and Little Wigborough. He left in 2018 and the post is currently vacant.

The Reverend Dr Amanda Elmes was for several years closely associated with Peldon until leaving the benefice team in 2014 to become Priest in Charge at Langham and associated parishes.

Since the amalgamations the Parish Administrator in West Mersea has dealt with all matters concerning the combined benefice and its incumbent, including liaising with the diocese and the five individual parishes.

Biographical notes (To be added)

THE PELDON RECTORIES AND SCHOOL

An old Church Terrier dated 1610 describes the earliest known Rectory:

"A House, a Barn, a Stable, an Orchard, a garden and about 22 acres of Glebe. Also the tythes of corn, hay and all other tythes."

A more detailed description of what is probably the same building, is found in the Terrier dated 1637:

"A parsonage house having a Hall, Parlour, a Kitchen, a Brew house, Dairy, buttery, Closet and 6 upper rooms, Study, also 2 barns and a stable and about 24 acres of Glebe" (16)

The Rector, writing in 1867 says:

"All trace of the Manor (of the Rectory) itself is lost, but it is commonly supposed that the waste land, adjoining the Glebe near the Pump, was part of it, and that the Plough Public House was built on it, and ought to be held under the manor".

The Reverend Gough wrote in 1970 that *"the old Tithe Barn is still remembered by some parishioners, and traces of the old Rectory, in the Glebe field to the north east of the Plough Inn, have been found."*

In 1822 the site of what was known as the Old Rectory was acquired, and a new parsonage was built there, roughly in the centre of what was the Old Rectory lawn. However, it was badly constructed, and a letter still exists, dated 31st March, 1852, from the Bishop of Rochester (to which diocese Peldon used to belong) licensing the Rector to be absent from his parish for nine months while the new building was erected.

The Old Rectory was sold in 1969 and a new Rectory established in 1968. Subsequently the Rectory was moved to what is now The Peldon Campus on Church Road.

In 1833 an 'Unknown Donor' conveyed land to the Churchwardens, which was subsequently leased to the Rector. A curate of the parish, the Reverend Robert Eden (17), was then instrumental in having a church school built using money raised by public subscription and a grant from the National Society.

The structure of the church of St Mary the Virgin remains in concept Norman rather than Gothic, relying as it does on weight and mass rather than arch and column. It has a number of striking features, notably its light airy interior, the elegant simplicity of its nave roof and the massive strength of its brick buttresses and tower, exemplifying the technology and craftsmanship of their day. It has its mysteries too; the location of the earlier church, the architecture of any earlier chancel, the height of the nave in the fifteenth century and the true significance of the carved stone set in its nave wall.

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REFERENCES

- (1) The clerestory is the brick portion with its line of windows above the rubble walls of the nave.
- (2) These accounts of visits to Essex churches are in the Essex Record Office.
- (3) The Reverend Anthony W Gough, Dip.Th. in his 'A Short History of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Peldon' 1970, quotes these two descriptions of the church in earlier times and the churchwarden's account for the 'framing' of the gallery.
- (4) 'Peldon', Kay Gilmore, 1955, unpublished copy in Colchester Public Library.
- (5) Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England, Essex, North Essex, Vol.3, 1922 (RCHM) p190.
- (6) Reverend Gough 1970.
- (7) Reverend Gough 1970
- (8) Kay Gilmore 1955.
- (9) Personal comment Canon Julian Limentani Bsc BArch RIBA FRSA AABC.
- (10) Personal comment Jane Anderson, Friends of St Mary's
- (11) Personal comment Dr Jasmine Allen, Curator, the Stained Glass Museum, Ely Cathedral 3.2.2015.
- (12) Personal comment Joyce Wallis, NADFAS 12.2.2015.
- (13) Essex Archaeological Society Transactions, Vol. XIII p165.
- (14) See The Reformation Essex, James Edward Oxley 1965, p168.
- (15) See The Essex Countryside Vol.14 No.144 July 1966 p656ff.
- (16) Newcourts Reportorium –'Peldon'.
- (17) Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XVI p360 for full account of Richard Eden's career.