

ST MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH,

BRENT ELEIGH

Our illustrated *Church Guide* is being rewritten; please accept this meanwhile. The information is drawn from a number of printed resources. If you would like to receive a copy (price £3 + P & P) when printed, please send an email. **Please see note at the end!**

Please be aware that bats, 3 species, inhabit this church, and we are unable to housetrain them! A disinfectant gel dispenser is located in the permanent portable toilet by the car parking bays.

History In the 11th century, the village was known as *Ilelege*, made up from '*Illa*', a Saxon who owned the land; and '*lege*' meaning meadow or land. It is known that there was a 'parson' here in 1235, named John, but definite mention of a church was not until 1254 in the 'Norwich Taxation', with the Abbott of St Osyth taking tithes. Later the village was known as '*Illeye Combusta*', and also as 'Burnt Eleigh', both following a fire of devastation. The present Church building probably dates from the 13th century, though there may have been one previously.

The items below assume the reader is progressing in a clock wise order on entering the Church

Main points of interest

1. South Porch; with its scratch dial, is probably of same date as the South Door, early 14th c. with its traceried head.
2. Font: is 13th c., with a Purbeck marble bowl, with 12 sided plain panels; Stuart cover.
3. Bells in Tower; there are three; sadly due to condition of the frame, we are advised to use them only very infrequently, and only with great care! Cast in 1612 – James Redbury; 1622, and 1632, by Thomas Cheese, both based in Bury St Edmunds.
4. Royal Arms above vestry door; are Queen Anne, superimposed by 'G.R.'.
5. Vestry; this was added pre 1826, and build from brick; the door however was the original North Door from the nave
6. Wall paintings to right of vestry door; some text probably written in Elizabethan times.
7. Vertical beams; this indicates that the nave was heightened at some stage, but insufficiently to insert a 'clerestory' (ie with windows). It has a wattle and daub infill.
8. Box pews; the original Jacobean pews were added to reputedly using the Stuart panelling from the Library when it was demolished in the 17thc. Good Stuart panelling on the front pews, and a fine example of 13th c carving in the back of the pew by the Font
9. Pulpit; a good example of a Jacobean pulpit on a single post, note carved brackets below.
10. Rood Stairs (to removed screen); this was uncovered when the pulpit was moved, 1960.
11. Colman Memorial; a fine memorial carved from Italian marble by Thomas Dunn, a renowned craftsman, who travelled the country; this is said to be one of his finest executions; Edmund Coleman founded the Colman's Almshouses (1731) located in the village; these were for rental by retiring farmworkers who lost their tied cottages and 'had to move on'. Dr Henry Colman built a fine parochial Library of some 1000 books.
12. Chancel; the wall panels are early 18th c. The ceiling panels are possibly Austrian oak.
13. Altar Railings; these 3 sided railings are late Stuart, unusual as they date from before an edict of 1634, after which, the altar rail was taken straight across from the north to south wall; this example is rated as the best of the few remaining in East Anglia.

14. **Paintings on East Wall.** This set of paintings was discovered in the early 1960's during redecoration works; expert examination determined that they date from around 1300, meaning that they are probably the earliest known altar wall paintings in the UK.

Left hand side – kneeling Angels sensing the presence of a figure in the centre. **Central painting** – the Crucifixion, with the figures of St John on the right, and the Virgin Mary on the left. It is said to date from AD 1300, and most beautifully and delicately drawn and painted. The remaining text is from St John (John 6.55).

Right hand side – a painting of the Harrowing of Hell; a kneeling monk is seen low down on the right hand side, possibly the donor.

Full information is to be found by the niche in the south wall under the window.

An 'extra interesting point' is that the black background on the left hand side has been allegedly caused by lamp smoke; the 'stars' seen were originally small pieces of copper, which by removal now make the star shapes stand out as we see them.

(The paintings suffered perhaps 'intentional vandalism' 3 years ago, when deep gouges were made through the 3 main figures; due to the fragile nature and unique quality of the paintings, painstaking work was undertaken by one of the UK's leading specialist restorers, this taking 9 months to complete in difficult conditions; we are thrilled to see the paintings again, (but please see note at the end.....))

15. **East Window;** this is relatively recent, as it was only inserted after the old Library built against the East wall, had been removed; in doing so, the top of the centre wall painting was lost.

16. **Lady Chapel;** the parclose screen is mainly 14th c. Curious painted medallions to be seen. See also the 2 x 14th c tiles, forming a cross, together with 2 x 15th tiles, green/flowers.

17. **Tombstones** outside: note the particularly grand tomb outside the south chancel wall, with grim reminders of our mortality, skulls, and the rest!

Summary Brent Eleigh has just 176 residents (including 33 at Laxfield House Nursing Home); this beautiful medieval Church occupies a special place in our hearts; through determination it is in relatively good order, and likewise we want to ensure that we can hand on to the next generations to treasure and respect, whatever religion may or may not, be followed.

Thank you for coming today; and for taking an interest in our church. We have a variety of events in the forthcoming period, and would be delighted if you could join us; information should be in the Church, or you can look on our village website at ***One Suffolk Brent Eleigh'***.

Do take this page home with you; **all donations are very welcome**, please place this in the slot in the wall on the left hand side of the door as you exit – and **please** sign our visitors book! Apart from the 'Parish Share' of some £7500, **it costs £75 a week** for insurance, heating, the churchyard, minor maintenance etc, so if you are able to **'pop in a pound'**, it all helps! Thank you!

In order to improve the level of Church lighting, bring it to modern day standards, and do justice to the skills of the painter(s) of our unique set of wall paintings, we are launching a fund raising campaign to cover the costs involved; if you are able to assist, directly, (or indirectly through a Charity for example), we would greatly appreciate it; costs are being evaluated but estimated to be £25,000; the current rather basic lighting appears to date from the 1970's.

All cheques please to 'P.C.C. of Brent Eleigh' Charity no. EW25408

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