

Boveney Church is dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, according to the gospels a disciple of Jesus Christ and the first witness to His resurrection. Mary Magdalene was a popular saint in the medieval west. The present church at Boveney dates from the 12th century, though there may have been an earlier one on the site. Never a parish church, it was originally a simple building, a chapel-of-ease to St Peter's, Burnham. It was erected close to a now vanished quay, at which barges were loaded with timber from the Windsor Forest for shipment downriver – hence its popular designation as “the bargees’ church”. As a chapel-of-ease it did not possess rights of marriage or burial, which were reserved to the parish church. An attempt to raise it to parochial status in 1737 failed through lack of funds. It was transferred to Eton parish in 1911, declared redundant in 1975 and threatened with demolition. It passed into the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches in 1983.

Architectural history

The body of the church, a nave and chancel under one roof, is constructed of flint and chalk rubble, with ashlar dressings. One notable feature is the use of galletting in the mortar courses (the insertion of slivers of flint into the mortar, for both structural and decorative purposes). In the late 15th or early 16th century, the western two-storey weather-boarded and timber-framed belfry tower was added, constructed on five timber ‘legs’. It houses three bells of 1536, 1631 and 1636. The church was restored in 1897, when the present windows, other than the lancet in the west wall, were inserted.

Inside, the church evokes a very uncomplicated informal piety. The massive tub-font is contemporary with the foundation in the 12th century. Several 15th-century pews remain and, if you look closely, you will



find the carpenter’s marks on them. These marks were a way of numbering the timber elements, so that the pews could be assembled in the church.



Carpenter's mark

All other furniture and fittings, including the plaster barrel vault ceiling, are of the 18th and 19th centuries.

During recent repairs, we uncovered a small patch of wall painting on the north wall, offering a glimpse of what this church looked like hundreds of years ago. Experts believe it is a 15th-century painting of St Christopher, rendered large, with a bushy red beard and rosebud lips, looking out from the south door on to the river.



12th century font



18th and 19th century furniture



15th century wall painting

Other Friends' churches near St Mary Magdalene, Boveney

Waddesdon Hill Strict and Particular Baptist Chapel Chapel of 1792 evocative of simple rustic nonconformist piety. Features include a total immersion baptistry and hand-painted monuments. (contact office for keyholder).



St Mary, Hardmead Medieval church with a group of memorials to the Catesby family and fragments of medieval stained glass. (contact office for keyholder).



St Mary Magdalene, Caldecote Dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, this church retains its medieval pews and a fine medieval font. A Georgian pulpit survives from the time of the 18th century repairs (church open).



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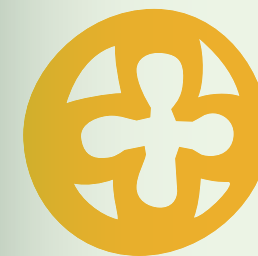
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Church of St Mary Magdalene Boveney

a guide to its history

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