

**B**oveney 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, and 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 12th century foundation. There survive some medieval pews, but much of the furniture and fittings, including the plaster barrel vault, are of the 18th and 19th centuries.



12th century font



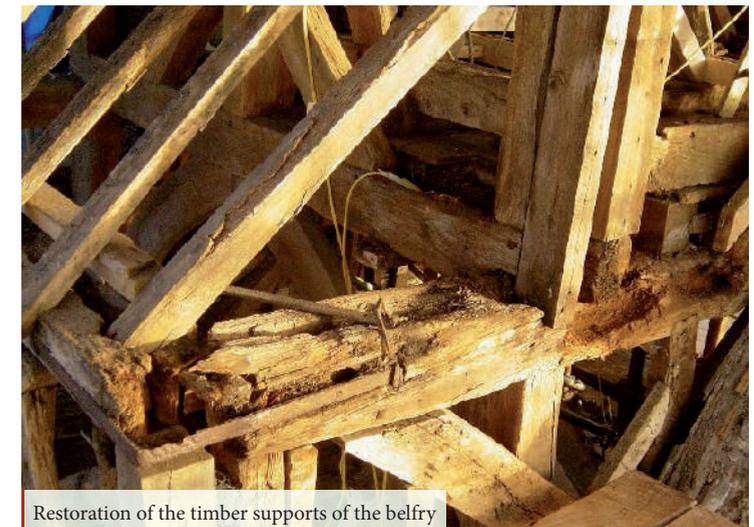
18th and 19th century furniture



The church before and after restoration

## The church today

Since passing into the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches, St Mary Magdalene's has undergone substantial and expensive repair and restoration. The massive timber supports of the belfry had rotted, and it was in danger of collapse. Restoration cost some £200,000, borne by generous donors and a generous 70% grant from English Heritage. The work, directed by Nicola Westbury and undertaken by F J Williams of Henley, won the RIBA South Conservation Award for Architects in 2005. Since that date, further work has been undertaken including the retiling of the roof, and on the interior, leaving the church in the excellent and secure condition that we see today.



Restoration of the timber supports of the belfry

Text: John Morgan-Guy.

## 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.



**St Mary, Hardmead** Medieval church with a group of memorials to the Catesby family and fragments of medieval stained glass.



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



(For access please ring the office)



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Church of St Mary Magdalene  
**Boveney**

a guide to its history