

This isolated area of Essex is best known for the Battle of Maldon fought on the saltmarshes in AD 991 between Ethelred the Unready and Viking invaders. Beyond that this has always been a sleepy, out of the way place, the church of St Mary reflecting this in its unpretentious architecture. Hall and Church once stood within a moated enclosure, of which only a small portion survives. Such moats are common in East Anglia and were used to contain livestock and a more complete example survives elsewhere in the parish. The church closed in 1970 and has been owned by a charity, The Friends of Friendless Churches since 1975.

The earliest part of the church is the nave which dates from the fourteenth century. It is built of stone rubble, in the most part rendered to give protection against the relentless winds that sweep across the marshes. Next in date is the unusual Tudor west tower whilst the north porch was added in about 1600. The chancel was rebuilt in brick in the eighteenth century, no doubt due to subsidence to which the church is still prone. The true beauty of the church is that it has hardly been touched since the early nineteenth century.

The tower dates from the Tudor period and is built entirely of timber in the Essex tradition. What makes it remarkable is the 'skirt' which hides the wooden posts that support the weight above. Today it is the main entrance to the church. Once inside you can see how the areas around the wall were not meant to be used as they are cut off by the beams supporting the structure. The wooden shutters on the windows were replaced by the Friends.

The Tudor north porch was added to protect what was formerly the main entrance to the church and is delicately carved leaves. Inside the porch and now reused as a threshold is the matrix of a brass to an unknown man and his two wives. Do look at the fossils in the stone. The north doorway into the church is fourteenth century and is carved with delightful rosettes.



Supporting timbers



Nave

Box-pews dating from the early nineteenth century fill the nave. There is an eighteenth-century pulpit. Although the roof is ceiled you can see that it is of crownpost construction. The windows in the nave are of varied date. The earliest is in the north wall, with fourteenth-century 'Y' tracery. Opposite is a large Tudor window whilst above the pulpit is a small nineteenth-century window. The large opening in the west wall was once a window before the tower was built. The font is Victorian.

On the north wall of the nave, to the left of the window, can be seen fragments of medieval wall paintings – red lines of masonry decoration which would have filled interior. Faintly overlying these it is possible to see a crowned head. This is an image of the East Anglian king Edmund the Martyr (AD 841–869) dating from slightly later in the fourteenth century. It was uncovered during conservation work in 2009. Over north and south doors are oval painted texts taken from the Book of Isaiah. The blocked brick arch by the pulpit would once have opened into a south chapel.



King Edmund the Martyr

Chancel

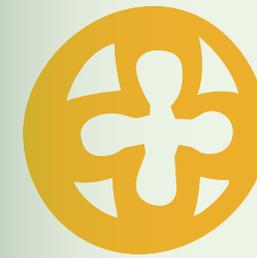
In place of a chancel arch is a nineteenth-century timber tympanum inscribed 'Behold the Lamb of God'.

Inside the lighter chancel the east wall is painted in trompe l'oeil to create the effect of drawing back tasselled curtains from the holy table with the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments painted on the walls beneath. The text behind the altar 'This Do in Remembrance of Me' is painted on a sheet of tin, whilst traces of nineteenth-century stencilling run around the walls. The church contains just two memorials, a wall plaque to an early twentieth-century priest and a ledgerstone almost hidden by choir stalls, to the Solly family who lived at Mundon Hall.



Trompe l'oeil tasselled curtains





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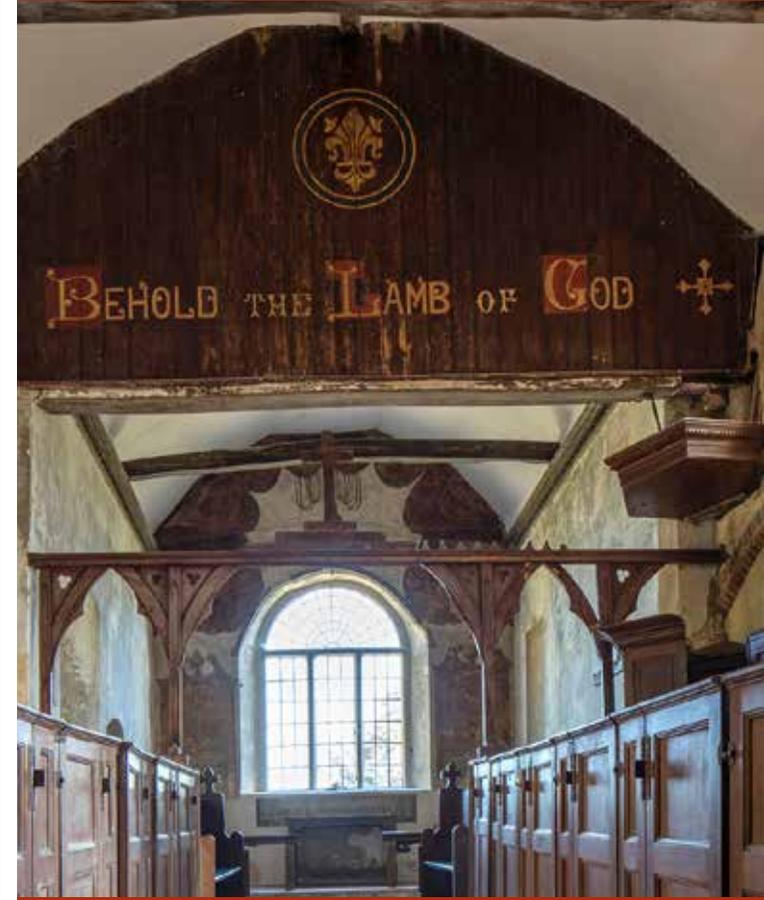
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Not far from Mundon

St Peter, Wickham Bishops

This church dates mostly from the 12th century and consists of just nave and chancel, the former having a 15th century south porch. Inside are fragments of sumptuous and ancient wall-paintings. Now used as a stained-glass artist’s studio. Contact the office to arrange a visit.



 **FRIENDS OF FRIENDLESS CHURCHES** 

Church of St Mary Mundon

a guide to its history