



The Church of
St Mary The Virgin,
Wix, Essex

Introduction

Welcome!

As the Rector of Wix, I welcome you to this place of living worship, following a tradition of a thousand years of worship to Almighty God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

In this very informative leaflet lovingly put together by an old friend of the parish, Don Budds, you can trace much of that thousand years from shortly after The Battle of Hastings, via The Priory of Our Lady at Wix, the “suppression of the lesser Houses” in the sixteenth century, the almost dereliction of the seventeenth, the rebuilding of the eighteenth and restoration of the nineteenth into the building that you visit today at the start of the Third Millennium.

You will, I am sure, walk round and imagine all those who have worshipped here down the centuries, possibly in your imagination hear the chanting of those Benedictine Nuns as they gathered to pray seven times a day. You will also see newer points - the Processional Cross and The Votive Candle stand, added to the church in recent years to enable our worship to continue and develop.

At the end of your visit, sit a while; pray in thanksgiving for the past and hope for the future, not only for yourself but also for the on-going life of this Parish Church, and, maybe, light a candle in praise to God before you leave.

May God bless and keep you on your journey of life with Him.

Fr. Eric R Littler (Rector & Parish Priest)

*Front Cover by Don Wellman. Research by Don Budds
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CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, WIX.

The original church, dedicated to St Mary, was built in the late 11th or early 12th century by Walter the Deacon, the Domesday owner of The Manor of Wix, Park Hall. It had a central tower between chancel and nave. The foundations of the original chancel were discovered in 1961.

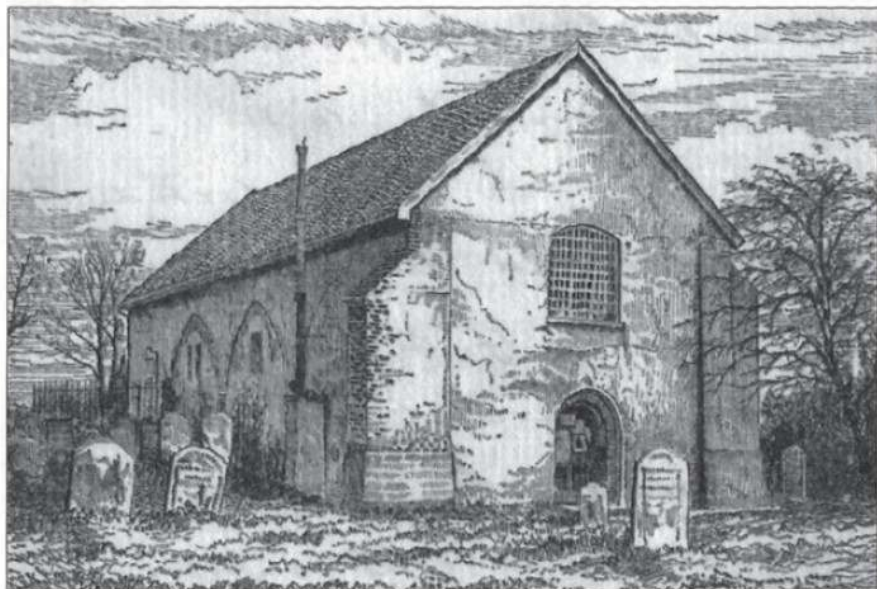
Around the year 1123 the church, together with its tithes, was given as part of the foundation gift for a priory of Benedictine Nuns which was built to the south of the church by Walter Mascherell, his brother Alexander de Waham, and their sister Edith. These three were the children of Walter the Deacon. The chancel, used by the nuns, was dedicated to St Mary and the nave, rededicated to St Michael was for the use of the parishioners.

In 1525 Cardinal Wolsey obtained a Papal Bull for the suppression of several "poor and destitute" monasteries which included Wix Priory; the buildings were demolished, together with the chancel of the church leaving the nave of the parish church, with a tower at the east end containing three bells, for the use of the parish.

The present church was built in 1744 out of the ruins of the earlier building. and extensively refurbished in 1888. The oldest part of the building is the north wall which is the blocked arcade of a 13th century north aisle. This arcade may be seen from the churchyard as three bays with two centred arches of chamfered orders; the octagonal columns have moulded capitals with chamfered bases and the responds have attached half columns.

In the east wall of the nave behind the pulpit may be seen a blocked 14th century doorway with moulded jambs and a two-centred arch, which would originally have given access to the tower or rood loft.

A triangular headed memorial to the Hickinggill family, who once lived at Pond Hall, Wix, may be seen on the east wall of the nave. Three members of this family were incumbents of the church during the 17th and 18th centuries. After two centuries of neglect the old church was in ruins and in 1744 a new church was built, mostly of material from the old building, with subscriptions coming from the clergy and local gentry. It was a plain rectangular building, built on the site of the nave of the original church and using the original north arcade for the north wall. There was no steeple or porch and the chancel was at one with the nave, being divided by a rood beam. There was a gallery at the west end. When completed it was dedicated to St Michael.



The rebuilt church of 1744 as shown in a 19th century engraving.

An entry in the parish register for 18th September 1744 records a marriage service conducted by the parson of Gt Oakley “at the new church in the parish of Weeks.....they were the first couple that ever were married here since the re-edifying of the church.”

Early in 1884 the vicar, the Rev. P. Benwell, asked the local population for a subscription to build an entirely new church on a more central site, a surveyor's report having found that the walls and foundations were not substantial enough to justify any more money being spent on maintaining the existing structure. An estimated cost of about £2,000 was suggested; in the event only £999-17s-0d was raised and consequently the new church was not built and it was decided to refurbish the existing building instead.

In 1888 the vicar presented a statement of accounts to the subscribers for the “Restoration of Wix Church”. The work consisted of a thorough restoration and re-seating of the nave, the addition of a chancel, and a bell turret at the west end, the removal of the gallery and the building of a circular west end window. The work was “most satisfactorily carried out” by Mr. Alfred Brown, building contractor of Braintree, who was awarded the contract for £855 including £65 for late alterations to the roof of the nave. John Paskell, a local carpenter, carried out the internal woodwork installing new pews and using wood from the old high pews as a dado round the walls. He charged

£1-4s-0d for his labour. The vicar and churchwardens acknowledged the following gifts which had been presented to the restored church:-

Font	Mrs. Norman
Communicants' Kneeling Mat	Mrs. Benwell
Altar Book Desk	Rev. H. W. Jukes
Book Markers	Mrs. Jukes
Alms Bags	Miss Norman
Paten	Rev. P. Benwell
Lectern	The Rector and Churchwardens of Mistley.

The Altar Cloth was kindly worked by the Misses Hempson of Bradfield Lodge, the materials being provided by means of additional subscriptions collected by the Misses Eagle, Spring Farm.

It was also proposed to fill the seven small east windows of the chancel with stained glass as shown in the framed design now hanging in the vestry. The centre window had been promised by the Rev. C. F. Norman of Mistley Place on condition that sufficient money was raised for the one either side. These three windows now have stained glass but there was not enough money for the other four.



The church interior shown soon after the 1888 refurbishment

The restored church, re-dedicated to St Mary The Virgin, in the Diocese of St Albans, was reopened at 11am on Thursday, 12th April 1888, by the Bishop of Colchester in the absence of the Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of St Albans who was unwell at the time.

In 1937 Mr. & Mrs. G. K. Mitchell of Pond Hall erected the west end porch “..... in thankfulness to God for all his goodness”

THE CHURCHYARD

In 1869 the churchyard was enlarged by 40 perches of land which belonged to the Wix Abbey estate, using part of a field called Cherry Garden and part of Orchard Pightle between the church and Wix Abbey. In 1905 the churchyard was again extended by about 2 rods and 14 perches of land given by W. J. Grant Esq. of Cullompton, Devon, and it was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Colchester on Saturday 2nd December of that year. A note in the church safe records that although the weather was unfavourable there was a good congregation, including many of the local clergy. The bishop and clergy were met at the churchyard gate by the choir who sang the hymn “The Church’s One Foundation”. At evensong the music was undertaken by Mrs. A. Hempson of Ramsey Hall and a collection amounting to £3-14-8d was made for the Churchyard Enlargement Fund which had reached £56-9s-4d by subscription among the parishioners.

There are two vaults in the churchyard one of which contains members of the Constable family who were land owners in the village during the 18th and 19th centuries. The second, the Hickeringill vault, may be found adjacent to the east end of the north wall of the church. A memorial tablet on the exterior north wall of the church just above the vault recites, “This iron railing encloses the burial place of the ancient family of Hickeringill which settled at Pond Hall in the parish about the middle of the 16th century where they constantly resided, and from that time were patrons of the perpetual curacy of Wicks. The vault was closed in November 1805 at the interment of Elizabeth Deborah Hickeringill, a maiden lady, the last survivor of the family bearing that name. To preserve their remains sacred and undisturbed this railing and memorial were placed Anno Domini 1812”. The reference to the 16th century is an error on the tablet and should have read 17th century. The railings referred to have gone, having been taken during the second world war, along with many other iron railings in Wix, to help the war effort. The vault has had to be modified in recent years due to its close proximity to the church wall giving a problem with clamp. Close by the Hickeringill vault is another multiple grave containing ten members of the Simson family who also resided at Pond Hall during the 19th century.

THE BELL HOUSE

Contained within the old part of the graveyard is a bell house containing a large cracked bell. The original bell house timbers became rotten and when, in the 1970's, an attempt was made to steal the bell, it was thought necessary to remove it for safe keeping. Fortunately the late Mr. Roger Paskell, whose family timber business had been in Wix for many years, came to the rescue and rebuilt the bell house as a copy of the original. There is an ancient local story that in earlier days a bell tower, in which to hang the bells, was built three times, and three times the Devil pulled it down during the night; so it was decided to build a bell house at ground level in the churchyard. The Devil must have taken a dislike to bell towers in this area because Wrabness churchyard also contains a similar bell house!

It is not known exactly when the bell house was built, but a church inventory of the 13th century mentions the existence of two bells. In a later inventory in 1552 these two bells together with the present bell are recorded as being hung in the steeple. By 1633 officials of the Archdeacon of Colchester, after a visit to Wix, complained that "the rooffe of the bell house wants repair", suggesting the present bell must have been moved to the churchyard bell house in the late 16th or early 17th century. The bell is attributed to a London bell founder, John Danyell who was working c1460. The use of an ornate cross, the royal arms and a medallion bearing the words "Thy Mercy Ladi Help" all of which appear on the bell, are characteristic of his work. The inscription "Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum" was typical of bells cast in the 14th and 15th centuries.



The church after the 1888 refurbishment showing the 13th century arches in the north wall. The 17th century bell house may be seen on the left.

Church of St. Mary The Virgin, Wix

Incumbents (date of first record)

1152 - 1162	Algarus	Persona ecclesie de Wikes
c. 1215	Osbert	Chaplain to Prioress Christina
1298	Sir William de Arkesdene	Parsonse de Wikes
1309	John de Kingewyk	Rector
1327	Thomas	Rector
1362-1374 Whelnetham	William Russell	Chaplain to Prioress Maude de
1383 - 1413	Godfrey	Chaplain of Parish Church
1440	John Andrew	Rector
1440	Abraham Veele	Rector
1195	Dom: Richardus	Rector
1558-1561	William Bamford	Curate
1565	Edward Walker	Minister
1581-1584	William Wingfield	Curate
1586-1588	William Wingfield	Curate
1592	William Steeds	Curate
1594-1610	William Wingfield	Rector
1596	Mr. Burstall	Curate
1600	William Hilles	Curate
1610-1620	Henry Foote	Minister
1622	Rabosfry Dove	Minister
1628	Mr. W. Veasey	Minister
1631	Anthony Fenton	Curate
1643	Edmund Carter	Rector
1653-1654	<i>No Incumbent</i>	
1655	Philip Lambart	Rector
1656	Mr. Carter	Rector
1660 - 1662	John Clyett	Rector
1662	George Lewes	Curate
1662 - 1664	John Clyett	Curate
1664	John Lowes	Clerk
c.1675	Edmund Hickeringill	Rector and Patron
1686	Isaac Read	Clerk
1704	Joseph Union	Curate

Incumbents continued

1719	John Benison	Curate
1738-1774	Charles Umfreville	Curate
1770	Thomas Hickeringill	Curate
1771-1779	Edmund Hickeringill	Curate and Patron
1774	Francis Evans	Curate
1776	C. Wade	Minister
1783	John Jones	Curate
1784	William Pinnock	Curate
1786	R Houghton	Curate
1787-1795	W. Willan	Curate
1796-1800	John Harrison	Curate
1800	Thomas Scott	Curate
1821	Thomas Harrison	Curate
1823	John Scott	Curate and Patron
1825	Thomas Scott	Curate and Patron
1831	George Burmaster	Curate
1832	Henry Thomas Liveing	Curate
1836	Fredrick J. Foxton	Curate
1837-1876	St. George Wilkins	Curate and Patron (Vicar and Patron from 1865)
1877-1882	Thomas Oldham	Vicar
1883	Proctor Donnell	Vicar
1908	J. Henry Stamp	Vicar
1910 J	Joseph Wood	Vicar
1914-1932	Alfred G.E. Christie	Vicar
1933-1934	Bethel Grundy	Vicar
1935	H. Hamilton Brown	Vicar
1936	G.E. Hackforth	Vicar
1949	Arthur Bowen Lewis	Vicar
1954	Philip N.H. Palmer	Curate (Vicar from 1955)
1969	W.H. Wade	Vicar
1975	Eric Hayman	Priest in Charge
1983	Leslie De Groose	Priest in Charge
1990	Philip E.H. Palmer	Curate
1992	Peter H. Williams	Priest in Charge (Vicar from 1995)
1998	Eric R. Littler	Rector
2003-2008	Eric Fisher	Rector