

## The Organ Chamber

The organ was placed in this ancient south chapel during the last century. The piscina can be seen on the south wall. A canopied niche, which once flanked the altar, still has traces of the inscription which originally said "Ora pro animibus Johannis Mors et Dionisia uxoris ejus et pro animibus (omnis) fidelum", (Pray for the souls of John Morse and his wife Denise and for the souls of all the faithful).

Mounted near the organ is a light box, which contains fragments of a mediæval and Tudor painted glass from windows believed to have been destroyed by the Puritans.

## The Churchyard

This extends to about five acres. The lych-gate is a memorial to Canon Pertwee, Vicar for 45 years. The flat tomb of the Dodds near the gate has an interesting inscription.

## Acknowledgements

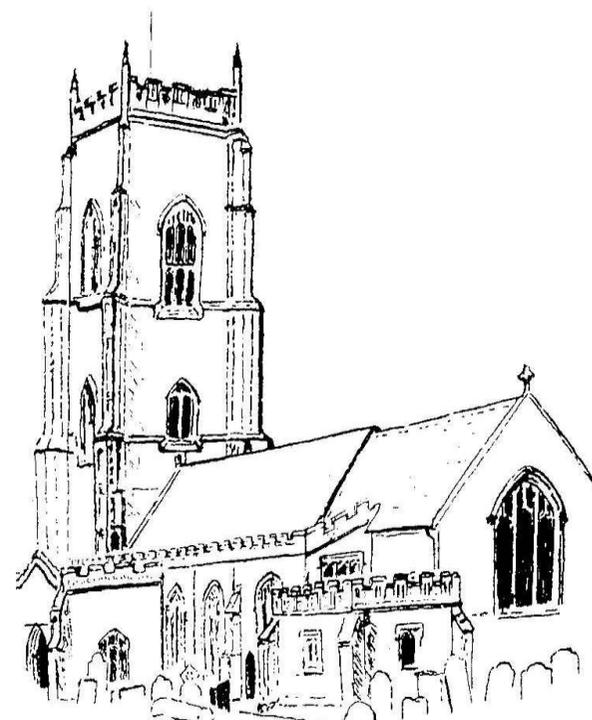
*For the information given in this brief guide, I am much indebted to the scholarly researches of Dr E P Dicken earlier this century and to an earlier guide book produced by the Rev Charles Heard, a former Vicar, as well as to many conversations with those who love "the old church".*

*April 1982 - Michael Swindlehurst, Vicar*

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## THE PARISH CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, BRIGHTLINGSEA



## History

The visitor reaches the church well before reaching the modern town. It stands at the high point of the parish where the ancient roads from Alresford and Thorrington meet and then continue to the town and modern waterfront. In all probability this is the ancient meeting place for the scattered agricultural community of the parish and the natural site for its church. Before the sea receded, Alresford Creek provided a sheltered haven for the town and the meadow below All Saints' is still called Church Dock.

The present church dates from about 1250 but had several predecessors, stretching back to the coming of Christianity to Essex in 653. You can see St Cedds Minster at Bradwell from the town and it would not have been long before the Gospel was preached in this parish and some kind of worship centre established. The start of the present building seems to be linked with the appointment of the first incumbent in 1237 and this was a time of general prosperity for England. The building consisted of the chancel and two-thirds of the present nave, with two small chapels. A good deal of material from earlier buildings, especially Roman brick, was used. Immediately to the left of the south door, as you come in, you can see a round-headed recess incorporating Roman brickwork. This is probably part of the earlier Norman church.

The fifteenth century saw a revival of England's wealth and here this was associated with the residence of the Beriffe family of wool merchants at Jacobes Hall.

The great tower, one of the finest in East Anglia, was built to the west of the church. When it had settled on its foundations, it was joined to the rest of the church by the building of two western bays of the nave, which are in perpendicular style. The south chapel and porch were added. The vestry was built in 1518 and the north chapel, where the Beriffes are buried, enlarged at the same time. Finally, the north aisle was reconstructed. A common feature of these additions is the use of knapped flints on the exterior walls.

During the reign of Edward VI, plate, vestments and two of the four original bells were taken into the king's hands. In the Civil War of 1642-6, Puritans destroyed the statues, removed paintwork and stained glass, hacked away at the beautiful niches, which are a feature of the church, and threw down the stone altar. One broken and headless figure, which may represent St Nicholas, was recovered and may be seen in the north chapel.

The large hatchment is that of Magens Dorrien Magens, the last of his family to own the estates. He died in 1848 and the hatchment is a particularly fine example of tempera painting on canvas. The smaller hatchment is of an inferior quality and relates to his wife, the granddaughter of the Earl of Talbot, who predeceased him in 1829. These were processed in the cortège ahead of the coffin.

The chapel has been completely refurbished for worship in recent years. The modern glass in the east window, by Caroline Swash, represents Mary's contribution as the Mother of Jesus, together with symbols which have become associated with her. The statue of the Celestial Mary by John Doubleday is carved in walnut.

### **The Chancel**

This is dominated by the monument to Nicholas Magens who is buried under a fine leger slab in front of the altar. A German merchant who made his home in London, Magens was a founding father of Lloyds Marine Insurance. He bought the estates here a year before his death. The monument in rococo style was executed in marble by Nicolas Read, a pupil of Roubiliac, and erected in 1766. The central globe shows California as an island on the west coast of America. The Angel of the Resurrection stands to the left holding a record of Magens' life. A huge cornucopia and a finely carved anchor to the right balance this.

The stained glass in the east window is Victorian but of good quality. The reredos, with its figures of St Nicolas and St Luke, is a modern memorial to a local doctor. To the right, the 16th century doorway and sturdy door give access to the vestry.

The holes, which can be seen in these doors, are thought to have been made by arrows in archery practice and musket balls that may date from the times of the Civil War.

The buttresses are at the diagonals and have a series of canopied niches, which do not ever seem to have been filled with statues. The crenellated parapet is late nineteenth century. In 1884, the Essex earthquake hurled one pinnacle through the roof of the nave and this now stands in the church.

Inside, the 15th century font has, since the last century, been under the tower. The octagonal bowl has a quatrefoil on each face enclosing a rose and traces of original colour and gilding can be seen. The single petalled roses were originally white for the House of York and red for the House of Lancaster; the double-petalled rose was white and red symbolising the union of the two royal Houses under Henry VII.

Above the font, is a gallery from which musicians would have accompanied the services in earlier times. The ceiling has some fine woodwork. Above is the ringing room, which used to be the place where the Freemen of the town met to elect the Cinque Port Deputy. This ceremony now takes place in the main body of the church on the first Monday in December. In the bell chamber, we still have the bell frame and one of the mediæval bells cast c.1400 and inscribed "Dulcis Sisto Melis Vocor Campana Michaelis", (I am sweet as honey and am called the bell Michael). There is also a small 17th century bell. A trigonometrical point on the roof of the tower is used for the Ordnance Survey.

### **The South Porch**

Built at the start of the 16th century, beyond the small doorway of 1250, the arch of the porch has alternating Tudor fleurons and diadems, with shields, mostly blank, though one has a symbol of the Trinity and another is defaced. Above is a fine canopied niche.

The spandrels have shields, one with the keys of St Peter, the other with the crossed swords of St Paul. There is flushwork in the base and also in the battlements.

### **The Nave**

The piers on the left as you enter are of particular interest because the two halves are separated by two hundred and fifty years, marking the beginning and end of the building of the present nave.

The painted glass in the window of the south aisle commemorates the centenary of the great storm of 6 March 1883.

Around the walls is a series of memorial tiles for those who lost their lives at sea. Originally intended for Brightlingsea men lost in the great storm, Arthur Pertwee instituted the custom and commissioned tiles dating from the start of his ministry in 1872. The tiles bear witness to the various losses suffered by this seafaring community. Similar memorials can be found on the continent but these tiles are a unique memorial in this country.

At the west end of the nave may be seen the Parish Book of Common Prayer dated 1789 and the "Dummy Boards" representing Aaron and Moses which date from c.1650. These originally stood at the east end of the church at the back of the communion table alongside the Ten Commandments.

William Beriffe and his wife Joan are buried in the centre aisle with handsome brasses of the period. Margaret Beriffe and Mary Beriffe are similarly commemorated in the north aisle, the latter with her four sons and one daughter holding her skirts.

The pews are provided with a colourful series of tapestry kneelers, representing the life and history of the town, a visible reminder that this is the community's church.

The painted glass in the north aisle showing St Paul, is Flemish glass of the 16th century. Originally, this panel formed part of a window which is to be seen at Ely Cathedral, where, apart from the book and part of the sword, their St Paul is a later restoration. The arms of the Cinque Ports in another window is a reminder that Brightlingsea is the only part of that ancient connection north of the Thames. Brightlingsea is a limb of Sand-wich and the Freemen meet annually in the church to admit new Freemen and to elect a Deputy who is responsible to the Mayor of Sandwich for the good conduct of the inhabitants and payment of the ancient ship money. This historical payment was in lieu of supplying an armed cutter and suitable crew in times of conflict and dates from the Middle Ages.

The church chest, with its typical three clasps stands at the east end of the nave. This replaced an earlier chest in 1740.

### **The Lady Chapel**

Enlarged by the Beriffe family c.1520, the chapel contains the brasses of William Beriffe of Jacobes, 1578, Deputy; John Beriffe, 1496, with Margaret, Amy and Margaret, his wives, showing also his merchants mark; John Beriffe, 1521, with Mary and Alice, his wives; Alice Beriffe, 1536, and her daughter Margaret. This latter is a palimpsest: a much older brass of two clergy has been reused by turning the figures (brass) over and inscribing the new images on the back. The arms of the Beriffes are displayed in glass, in a light box mounted on the north wall.

In the floor beneath the blocked 13th century arch is a stone slab, once used as an altar, with an incised foliated cross and five consecration crosses. The badly hacked niches in the east wall still carry traces of colour. To the right can be seen the blocked shape of a lancet windows which originally lit the chancel. In the first window on the north side can be seen fragments of 16th century glass. The two windows on this side were originally partially blocked and were opened up and reglazed by "The Friends of All Saints' Church" in 1990.

The biggest change came with the collapse of the nave roof, one Monday morning in 1814, bringing down all the clerestory windows, which stood above the arched and brought light into the centre of the church. The churchwardens were allowed to make a national appeal and sold one of the remaining bells but, in the end, could only afford the present wooden roof without restoring the clerestory.

During the Victorian period, the church was completely refurbished and the small chancel arch replaced with the present one to give a better view of the sanctuary.

In 1969, the condition of the fabric had deteriorated to the point where it seemed likely that the church would be made redundant and closed. However, a body of "Friends" was formed in the town to shoulder the responsibility of raising the funds needed to restore and maintain the fabric of the church.

The scheme proved successful and the collecting boxes in the church are for this continuing work of restoration. Major repairs to the roof were undertaken in 2001 and one of the "Friends" created the wonderful sculpture from some of the damaged roof beams immediately above where it stands.

### **The Tower**

This is 97 ft. high and there are 121 steps to the top where a fine view may be obtained. The tower can be seen for 17 miles out to sea and has been an important landmark. Indeed, Canon Pertwee, a former vicar, used to climb to the top in stormy weather to raise a riding light to the flagstaff to guide the fishing vessels home. The tower has four stages, the base being 10 ft. thick and ornamented with traceried panels and blank shields. The great doors are the originals of c.1500 and traces of decorative mouldings can be seen.

