

All Saints', Great Holland



As you approach the church, your first glimpse of it will be of the fine pre-Tudor red brick **tower**. This was built over a period of seven years between 1413 and 1420 and is one of the oldest brick towers in the county of Essex. It houses a ring of eight bells given by the Barron Bell Trust in 1930. The founder of the Trust, Miss Emma Barron, lived at Vesey Farm in Little Clacton Road, Great Holland.

The original church also dated from 1413 but fell into such a state of disrepair that it was demolished, except for the tower, in 1865. As the demolition work began the Chancel roof caved in and it was commented that 'work had begun not a moment too soon'. The foundation stone for the new church was laid on 25th May 1866, and the church was completed that same year to the designs of Sir Arthur Bloomfield.

It is interesting to note that Thomas Hardy, the famous novelist, was employed by Sir Arthur as an Assistant Architect from 1861-1867 and so could well have been involved in the drawings for the new building. Much of the cost of the work is believed to have been paid for by the Rector, the Reverend Richard Joynes.

The churchyard is entered by a **lych gate** built in the early 1930s. The timber is solid oak from Redgrave Park in Suffolk. The tiles, all 1100 of them, came from a house in Colchester, now demolished, and the 500 bricks used in its construction were hand made at Marks Tey, near Colchester, so that they would match those in the tower.

The **South Porch** entrance corresponded with the architecture of the church and was a gift of Mr Charles Hicks who lived at Great Holland Hall next to the church.



Once inside the church one of the first things you notice is the great **Tower Arch**. When the church was rebuilt in 1866 this arch was created, opening up part of the tower to the interior of the church.

The lower space was originally used for children attending Sunday School and it was not until 1908 when a robed choir of 12 boys and 8 men was formed that it became the Choir Vestry we see today. It was also at this time that Mr F W Messent gave 'choir desks' to match the church pews in memory of his wife.

The lower oak screen with its diamond-paned glass and double doors was given by Mr Edgar Hodgkins, who lived at Woodcote now Wood Hall, Church Lane, around 1908-1909, in gratitude for a 'merciful recovery from a very serious operation'.

The upper screen, also of oak, was added by public subscription in May 1966 to commemorate the centenary of the rebuilding of the church.

The Nave

Near to the Tower Arch is the octagonal stone **font**, the cover of which was given in memory of Mr Harry Linefan Hodgkins by his wife after his death in 1917.

In 1979, when the north aisle roof needed renewing, two rows of pews were removed from the tower end to make its use more flexible.

The **windows** in the north aisle still contain their original stained glass; the windows in the south wall of the nave also originally had stained glass in them (very similar in pattern to the Chancel windows). In 1955, when one of them needed repairing, it was decided that the stained glass in all three should be removed and replaced with plain glass to allow more light in and now only the top three panels still contain the original stained glass.

The Chancel

When the church was rebuilt in 1865-66 the new **East window** in the Chancel was the personal gift of the Rector, the Reverend Richard Joynes, and so he reserved the right to choose the artist. He chose the firm of Ward and Hughes, but insisted on making many alterations to their original designs. One thing to note is that in every scene Our Lord has his hands raised.

To either side of the East window are painted the words of The Creed and the Ten Commandments. The furniture and the organ in the Chancel are all in oak (the organ having an oak case). A 'generous donor' gave the furniture in 1915 but the organ was given in 1909 by Mr John Lyon Corser.

On the North wall of the Chancel is a large **monument** in memory of Henry George Rice, Rector of Great Holland. It was made by the sculptor Hinchcliff and was removed from the old church before its demolition. The floor of the Chancel is paved with Maw's encaustic tiles, whilst the floors of the nave, aisle and tower have red and blue Staffordshire tiles.

The Vestry

A tablet on the inside wall of the **vestry** records that it was added to the church in the summer of 1917

*'In complete confidence
That victory will be given us
An act of Faith and Thanksgiving'*

The donor was Mr Edgar E Hodgkins who also donated the lower oak screen on the Tower Arch. The original vestry appears to have been a small room at the rear of the organ.



The tablet on the wall just outside the Vestry lists the known Rectors of All Saints'. In 1984 on the death of Canon Kenneth Walter the parish of Great Holland became a united benefice with St Michael's of Kirby-le-Soken.

The Churchyard



As you leave the church going down the path on the left-hand side are two graves with skull and crossbones on each, both dating from the 1750s. They are often referred to as the 'Witches' Graves' or 'Pirates' Graves'. The adult grave is of Elizabeth Ainger and a child lies at her feet, but it is not known if it is her own.

Old church records reveal that Elizabeth was married to John Ainger and they lived in the village, but there is no record of the Baptism of a child. When the inscription on Elizabeth's stone was still legible it read:

*'Here lieth the body of Elizabeth Ainger
Laid with all her magic
Of this parish who departed
This life the 15th day of October 1751
In the - year of her life.'*

Little else is known about her. There is a record of Robert Ainger dying on 9th December 1756, possibly the child at her feet and maybe their son? John Ainger remarried on 23rd January 1756 to a Mary Bogges, also a widow.

The Parish Room

Following the death of the Rector in 1984, the diocesan authorities decided that Great Holland could no longer remain a single parish. A joint benefice with St Michael's, Kirby-le-Soken, was created and the All Saints' Rectory in Church Lane was sold by the diocese.

However, Mr. K. D. Crook, our persuasive Church Warden at the time, cajoled the diocese into contributing £10,000 from the proceeds of the sale towards a new building which would offer a meeting place, kitchen, toilet and storage facilities. It was proposed to locate it on the western boundary of the churchyard and it became known as the Parish Room.



The village was informed of the proposal in June 1986 and invited to support a number of events organised by a fundraising committee. Such was the success of the venture that, together with appeals to charitable organisations, the required sum of £28,000 was raised in 14 months. The building was opened in June 1987 by the Archdeacon of Colchester.

The Tower Restoration Project



The tower is a notable land and seamount, dominating the skyline of Great Holland for many miles around, and in the past it would have given comfort to sailors transporting their cargoes up and down the coast.

In the early part of the 21st century the tower began to show evidence of major problems: the roof was leaking badly and the wonderful old brickwork was in urgent need of **restoration**. A small and enthusiastic committee was formed in 2008 to try and raise approximately £75,000 for a new roof and for necessary repairs to the masonry. The scheme was managed by The Morton Partnership, a well-known firm of structural engineers specialising in ancient buildings.

Fundraising began in earnest in 2009 and thanks to some very generous donations from individuals and charities, including the Friends

of Essex Churches Trust, as well as splendid support from the local community for the many and varied fundraising activities, the required amount was raised within a year.

Work was originally scheduled to start in April 2010 but an inspector from natural England discovered a maternity brood of Natterers bats in the belfry so everything had to be put on hold for several months. The contractors, Bakers of Danbury, eventually began work in August 2010, and the restoration was completed by December that year. In addition to the original specification, Bakers also repaired the mullion stonework and some wood louvers. All the work was carried out with great care and craftsmanship and the tower should now last several hundred more years.

A Thanksgiving Service for the restoration, taken by the retired incumbent, Peter Coley, was held on 8 May 2011.