

St Mary and St Lawrence
formerly
The Priory of St Leonard
Great Bricett

Church Guide



GREAT BRICET CHURCH

Watercolour of the Church by Henry Davy c1850

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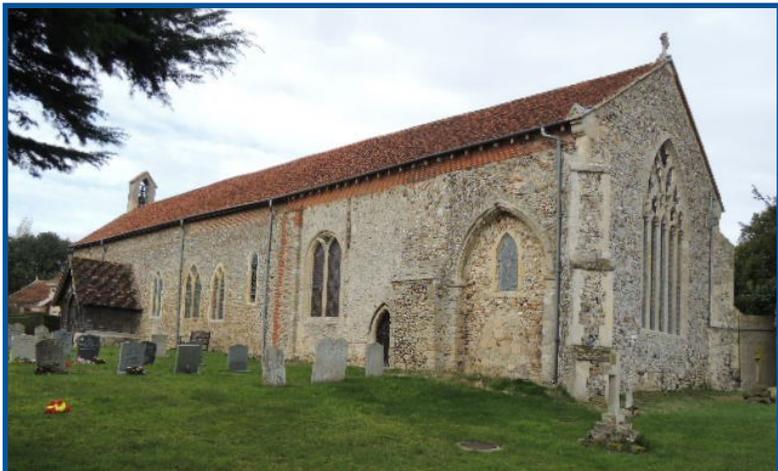
The PCC are very grateful for the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund in producing this guide. It was produced as part of a major refurbishment project including retiling and other repairs to the roof and gutters plus the new path and the Information Board by the gate. The Heritage Lottery Fund made a grant of £82,200 towards this work which was carried out during 2019.

Welcome

The immense heritage interest in the church of St Mary and St Lawrence is due to this outwardly modest building being the remains of the former Augustinian Priory on this site, founded c. 1110 by Ralph fitz Brien and his wife Emma. It was the only English house ever to be affiliated to the Church of St Leonard at Noblat in France (which is itself now part of a World Heritage Site). The choice of Saint Leonard is a highly unusual one and suggests that Ralph and Emma had a particular connection with the place. The most likely explanation is that they felt they owed some personal debt to St Leonard. Noblat held the relics of St Leonard, who had gained widespread fame for aiding those suffering captivity or imprisonment to gain their freedom. Ralph fitz Brien may have believed that he had emerged from a period of captivity as a result of his prayers to the saint and may even have visited the shrine to personally hang up his chains of captivity in thanksgiving. Dedicating his foundation at Bricett to this saint would therefore be understandable.

Being 'Alien' (a non English Mother House) it was dissolved by Henry VI in 1444 and its possessions granted to King's College, Cambridge. The college still has an extensive archive of original documents on Bricet Priory back to its foundation and these have been subject to cataloguing projects.

The building today consists of the nave and chancel of the former monastery church under a simple tie beam roof. The former monastery quadrangle to the north side is now the private garden of Great Bricett Hall which was also part of the monastery and is in fact structurally joined to the church.



Church Interior

The nave in 2020



The nave c. 1900

The Victorian glass in the lower part of the east window was destroyed during WWII.



Some interesting features of this church

The Porch

The porch was added during the Victorian restoration in 1850; it has a distinctive patterned pebble floor.



The South Doorway

The only impressive Norman piece is the south doorway. It is not *in situ*, but originally stood a little further east. A carved inscription includes the words LEONARDUS.

The Screen

The screen at the west end of the church is a very unusual feature. Although obviously old, it is quite difficult to date.



The blocked up arch behind the screen in the west wall shows that a tower was either built or intended.

Stone Sundial

This is over an old blocked up doorway on the south wall – to the east of the porch. It is reputed to be the oldest in the county dating from the eleventh century. It could predate the church being Saxon and coming from some earlier building. The marks on the dial indicate the times of the services.



The Bells

The small bell has the text "GEORGIUS.WILLIAMS. COLL.REGAL.SOC.PO SUIT ANNO MDCCCXXXIX".



Rev George Williams was curate of Bricett from 1838 to 1840 (The date on the bell is 1839).



The large bell has the text "IN HONORE SANC TAE. TRINITATIS ANNO MDCCCXXXIX"

This translates as "in honour of the Holy Trinity, 1839".

Stained Glass

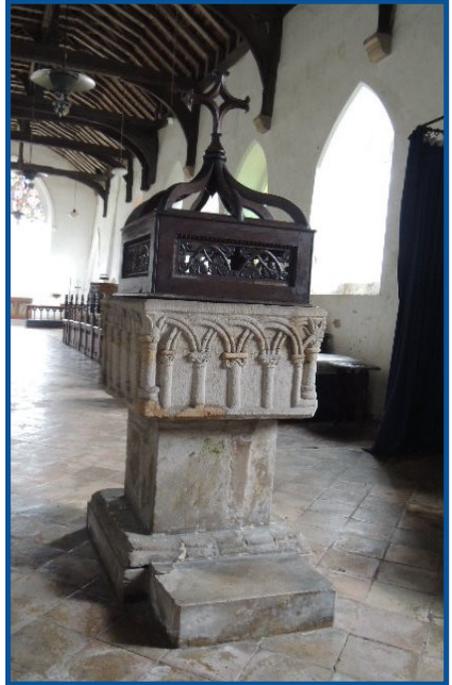
In the window on the south side of the nave are four panels which depict the Evangelists with outspread wings. These date from 1320. These panels were originally in the east window together with representations of the martyrdom of Thomas of Canterbury and the figure of Edward the Confessor. The panels are one of the few examples of early glass which survived the Cromwellian period.



Moving towards the altar, the small window features our patron saints Mary and Lawrence. A modern piece, this was commissioned in memory of Church Warden John Dracopoli in 1975. Lawrence is depicted with a grid iron on which legend has it that he was martyred over coals. After the martyr had suffered pain for a long time, the legend concludes, he cheerfully declared: "I'm well done on this side. Turn me over"! Mary is depicted more simply with her signature lilies.

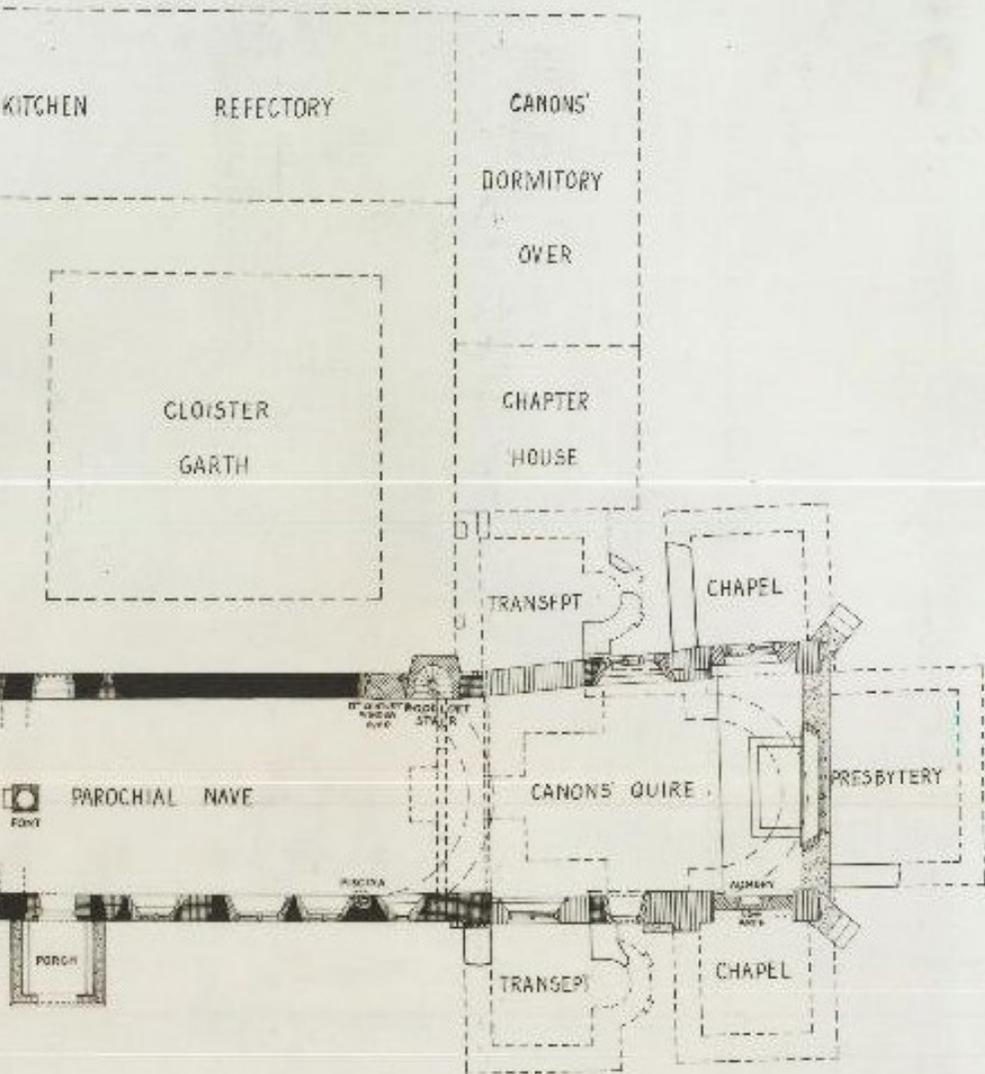
The Font

This is one of the finest in Suffolk. It is Norman dating from the late 12th century. It has a square arcaded bowl with the detail on each face being slightly different.



The Pulpit

Although not as old as much of the church, It has superb carvings and each side is different.



The Organ

The present organ was formally inaugurated here on 5th September 2010. It was built by Bath organ builder John Clark (1827-1873) and was originally installed in the church of St John the Evangelist, Lower Weston, Bath in 1851. Twenty years later it was relocated to the chapel of St Martin's Hospital in Bath from where it was rescued by the English Organ School only days before the building's demolition in 2006. It is one of the few John Clark organs still known to exist and we are proud to have it here in Suffolk thanks to the enthusiasm of the English Organ School.

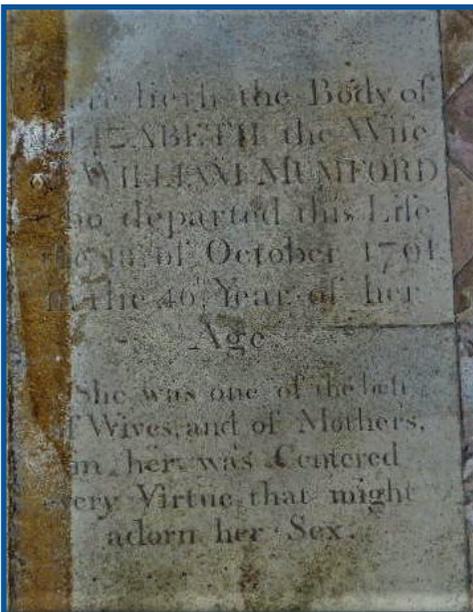
The original, unattractive pine casing was painted by village resident and artist Felix Wilding to give the impressive oak look we see today.



The Memorial

This is a memorial to John Bright of Tollemach Hall, formerly in Little Bricett, now part of Offton.

There is a translation of the Latin inscription under the memorial. There are also some interesting ledger stones in the floor at the east end of the church.



The Mumford family were tenants of King's College, Cambridge and lived at Gt. Bricett Hall before emigrating to Canada.

The Staircase

The Northern staircase leading to the original rood loft above the rood screen (long since removed) which would have separated the chancel from the nave, is of great interest



The Furniture



To the left of the altar: A Jacobean chest being a very fine example of the workmanship of the period.

To the right of the altar:

A Stuart table which was almost certainly an earlier Communion table for the church.



Floor Tile



This tile in the British Museum is thought to have come from the priory of Great Bricett and bears the pre 1340 version of the royal arms of England.

Additional information is available on the village website
Please see greatbricett.suffolk.cloud

Church Registers

A copy of the Census from 1901 and a copy of the Burial Register from 1813 to 1994 is available for inspection at the back of the church. Older registers are held by The County Record Office in Ipswich.

Appendix 1

The Priory of Bricett

Extract "A History of Suffolk" V.C.H. Suffolk Vol II 1907

Ralph Fitzbrian and Emma his wife, about the year 1110, founded a priory for Austin canons at Bricett, which was dedicated to the honour of St Leonard. The foundation charter endowed the priory with the tithes of Bricett and of "Losa" with its chapel, a moiety of the church of 'Stepla', and the church of Stangate, Essex, in addition to various plots of land in the vicinity. The founder also gave to the canons a large garden on the south of the monastery and a smaller one on the east, and he ordained that whenever he was in Suffolk the canons were to act as his chaplains and to receive a tithe of his bread and beer.

These gifts, with slight additions, were confirmed to the canons both by the son and grandson of the founder and by Sir Almaric Peche, who married the great granddaughter and heiress.

In 1250, Walter, Bishop of Norwich, with the assent of the prior and convent, licensed a chantry in the chapel of Sir Almaric and his lady, within the court of their house, on condition that the chantry chaplain, at his first coming, should swear, in the presence of the prior, to restore to the mother church of Bricett every kind of offering made in the chapel, without any deduction, on the day or the day after the offering was made; and also that no parishioner should be admitted to the sacrament of penance or any other sacrament by the chaplain, save in peril of death. It was also stipulated that Almaric and his wife and household and their heirs should attend the mother church at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption and St. Leonard's Day and make the accustomed offerings at high mass.

Although the founder had enjoined that the canons of this house were to be under the special protection of the Bishop of Norwich, and that the prior was to have the power of appointing and removing canons, the priory of Bricett was claimed early in the 13 century as pertaining to the monastery of Nobiliac, in the diocese of Limoges and the Duchy of Berry. This claim was resisted, but in 1295 an agreement was arrived at favourable to the foreign house, whereby Bricett became an alien priory; this composition was renewed and confirmed by the Bishop of Norwich in the chapter-house of Bricett on 16 July 1310.

The taxation roll of 1291 gives the annual value of the temporalities of Bricett Priory in various Suffolk parishes and in Pentlow, Essex, as £13.18s.1/2d. Under spiritualities there was the church of Wattisham with an income of £5.6s.8d and portions from Castle Acre of £1.13s.4d and from Wenham of 6s.

In a long list of royal protections to religious houses in 1295, in return for bestowing on the king a tithe of their income, the Priory of Bricett is described as a cell to the priory of 'Noblac in Lymoches'.

In 1325 Thomas Durant and Margaret his wife obtained license to enfeoff John de Bohun of a fourth part of the manor of Great Bricett together with the advowson of the priory of St Leonard of the same town.

License was granted in 1331 for the alienation by Thomas le Archer, rector of Elmsett, and Richard his brother, to the prior and canons of Bricett of three parts of the manor of Great Bricett of the yearly value of £7. The fourth part of the manor of Great Bricett of the annual income of 36s.8d was assigned to the priory in 1346 by Richard Hacoun and Anne his wife. In the same year John Bardowl and Isable his wife released to the prior and canons of St Leonard's all their right and claim in the manor of Great Bricett.

On the general suppression of the alien priories, Bricett came into the hands of the crown. In 1444 Henry VI granted the whole of the possessions to the college of SS. Mary and Nicholas (afterwards King's), Cambridge. This grant was confirmed by the same king in 1452 and it was again renewed by Edward IV in the first year of his reign, namely 24 February 1462.

In a book of surveys of the University of Cambridge, 1545-6, the annual value of the priory or manor of Bricett is set down under the possessions of Kings College at £33.11s.8d.

Appendix II: The Priors of Great Bricett

c. 1178-1206	Peter.
c. 1218	H[...].
1218-c.1252	Bernard.
1259	John de Brisete.
c. 1268-9	Geoffrey.
c. 1272-1276	Bartholomew.
c. 1283	Stephen.
c. 1292-1300	Augustine.
c. 1305-1311	Robert (Rotbert).
1312	William Randulf.
1337	John of Essex (<i>de Essexia</i>).
1350 or 1352	John of Lodden (<i>de Lodene, Lodne</i>).
1365	Adam of Darsham (<i>de Dersham</i>).
1371 or 1372	Alan of Coddendam (<i>de Codenham</i>).
c. 1390s	Alan Borel.
1400	Nicholas Barowe or Barwe.
1407	John Grovec.
1427	Robert Stanton

Ref: Great Bricett Manor and Priory by Edward Martin

Appendix III Daily Life in an Augustinian Priory

The priory appears always to have been small and only had six canons in 1381. The brethren were exhorted to live at peace with each other, forgetting what their social position had been in the world; to keep the appointed hours of prayer scrupulously. No brother was to go outside the bounds of the house alone, but must have a companion, and was to be careful to have nothing to do with women, though he was not forbidden to look at them. No one was to receive letters or gifts. All clothes were to be kept in one place, and if any one received clothes belonging to another he was not to complain, as everything was to be held in common. Clothes were only to be washed as the superior decided, and baths were to be allowed in case of need.

There were seven services, distributed over the twenty-four hours of a day and night. At midnight the convent rose and went to the church for Mattins and Lauds, after which they returned to their dormitory, or dorter as it was called, and slept till sunrise, when they returned to church for Prime, followed by the morning Mass. All then went to the Chapterhouse, where the private affairs of the house were discussed. When Chapter was over, work of various descriptions followed, till it was time for the next service, Terce. After Terce came High Mass, followed immediately by Sext. While dinner was preparing, the brethren read in the cloister, and at midday came dinner. After dinner all went to take the midday rest in the dorter, till the bell rang for None. After None the brethren went to the frater (refectory or eating place) for a drink, returning to work until Evensong. Then followed supper, the brethren reading in the cloister afterwards, while the servants had their meal, until the bell rang for Collation, which was held in the Chapterhouse. The last service of the day, Compline, followed, and then the brethren went in order to the dorter to sleep till they were roused at midnight for Mattins.

The prior and all the brethren slept in the dorter, except the infirm and the guardians of the church. No one was to appear with his head uncovered, a brother going to the reredorter (toilet) ought to hide his face in his hood. The dress of an Augustinian Canon consisted of a black cassock, which was a long fur-lined gown reaching to the feet, and over this a white rochet, a linen garment not quite so long as the cassock, and having tight sleeves; it was bound at the waist with a girdle. Over this was the cape of black cloth with a hood, also known as the habit, fur-lined for winter use, and of coarse woollen cloth for summer. Canons were also allowed to wear for the sake of warmth an *amess* or short cape of grey fur, which was thrown over the shoulders and had two long pendants hanging down in front. When travelling, they were also allowed gloves or mittens.

Ref: Great Bricett Manor and Priory by Edward Martin

