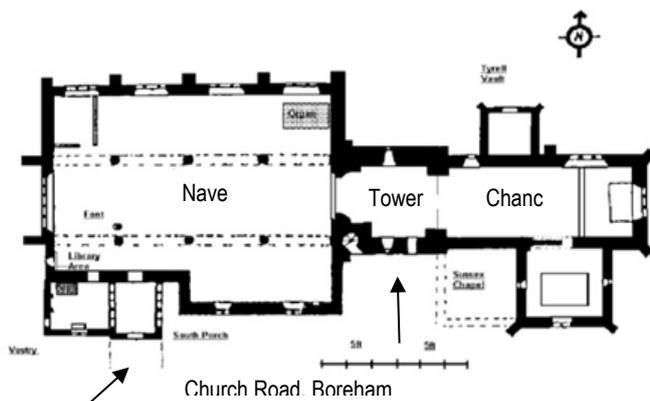




St Andrew's Church, Boreham

A detailed account of the historical features of the church

Described as “**More curious than beautiful**” by Nikolaus Pevsner (*Buildings of England, 1954*), the church is indeed full of interest and mystery. Encapsulated in this fine Grade 1 listed building is evidence from each of the best known periods in English history, together with some unusual features for a village church.



Ground plan of the church, showing the almost square nave, separated from the chancel by the tower, but with no transepts thus giving the building a linear footprint.

The two additions to the chancel are tombs.

Entrance is through the south porch and

through the door under the tower, both of which are wheelchair accessible.

Most of the principal services are held in the nave where there is a movable altar to the east adjacent to the organ, and a vestry kitchenette in the south-west corner from where light refreshments can be served. Meeting and greeting goes on just inside the entrance from the South Porch, the main doorway from the outside covered way (ambulatory). Near to the main doorway is the six sided 14th century font, beside which is the paschal candle mounted on a locally crafted modern oak stand (2013), and a niche in the wall, the stoup where holy water was kept. The chancel is used as a chapel, for smaller services and prayers, although with chairs and the old choir stalls can accommodate up thirty five people. In preparation for Easter, it has more recently been used as “the garden” and for compline services, being decorated accordingly as a special sacred space.

The church stands on an ancient site occupied since Roman times. The use of Roman bricks and tiles suggests there was a building hereabouts perhaps around the 4th century, located adjacent to the Roman road from London to Colchester. A natural spring line

nearby and an elevated location overlooking the broad valley of the river Chelmer, make this a good site for settlement. The Saxon name Boreham is pre 7th century and means "homestead on a hill." As the Christian faith took hold, perhaps brought by St. Cedd and other monks, Roman debris was used to build a church here around the 10th / 11th century, maybe earlier. The first mention of a priest dates from 1066, when Engelric the Priest was in charge of the manor of Boreham .

By thickening the walls of the Saxon building, in the 12th century the Normans constructed the massive square tower, which may have been dual purpose - worship as evidenced by the ambry and for defence. In the early 13th century a new large nave to the west of the tower was built with a long roof, sweeping down to low side walls. The small lancet window in the west wall and the remainder of the one opposite are remnants of that original structure, and offer an insight to how it would have looked. Around a similar time an apse would have been added to extend the simple Saxon chancel, thereby rendering the tower to a central position separating the nave and chancel with two great arches; this is a very rare feature in a small parish church. The enlarged semi-circular Norman arch constructed around 1170 turned in brick with a capstone, allows access to the chancel, which was further extended in Tudor times. However, there is considerable uncertainty about the date of the original nave arch. Passing under the tower arches into the chancel, there is a squint to allow those outside to receive communion, and also evidence of pre-Reformation wall paintings.

Parts of the two great arches are exposed, and as you enter the church and glance down towards the tower and chancel beyond, the view generates a real sense of awe and wonder and helps to make this is a really special place!

Later in the 13th century a lady-chapel was added on the south side of the nave; traces of its east window can be seen. There are two niches in the wall, each probably a piscina for priests to wash communion vessels. The north side of the church was considerably extended in the 15th century, affording more space and light.

The large east window was replaced with clear glass following bomb damage during World War II. There are two panels either side of this window inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

Attached to the chancel is the Sussex Chapel containing the splendid alabaster tombs of three Earls of Sussex. These may have been defaced during the Cromwellian period (Siege of Colchester 1648) or subsequent roof damage. An American flag (48 stars) commemorates the USAAF Airfield in Boreham opened in 1943 on land to the north of the main road and railway line. A wreath is laid at the War Memorial there every Remembrance Sunday.

At the back of the nave, the great 15th century west window, looks especially magnificent in the early evenings when the sun shines through. An 18th century Minstrel Gallery once

stood under the west window, made redundant in Victorian times by the installation of a hand pumped small Bevington organ located in the north-west corner of the nave. This site is now the Choir Vestry, as a new larger organ (Forster and Andrews 1889) was installed first in the chancel prior to the current location in the nave.

The decorative kneelers were made and donated in memory of loved ones, and to commemorate organisations connected to the parish. There is no proper floor to the church and the standard Victorian pews (reasonably comfortable) sit on wooden plinths, surrounded by a mixture of stone memorial tablets commemorating past vicars and prominent parishioners laid flat and 9" hand fired tiles. The chancel was refurbished with decorative Staffordshire floor tiling along with some exterior restoration work during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Victorian benefactors made generous contributions towards how the church looks today, responsible for the church clock (Gillett and Johnston 1883, smaller version of that in "Big Ben" - refurbished in 2017), the stained glass, pews, organs and the tiling around the high altar (reredos). The unusual covered archway (ambulatory) leading from Church Road to the south porch was erected around 1843 and later redesigned as a memorial to Canon H E Hulton who died in 1923. This is another unusual feature and much appreciated during inclement weather and for wedding photos.

The date of 1909 on part of the south wall indicates some refurbishment in Edwardian times, which included renewal of the nave roof. A further two bells were added in 1913 to the existing six bells dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, hence the Six Bells PH. located on Main Road, Boreham.

There are two wartime memorials and record books commemorating those men from Boreham lost in World War I and in World War II, and in the churchyard there are two war graves.

Reordering in the late 1960s brought the present organ, pulpit and choir to their current positions in the nave. The carved wooden ambry in the chancel was made locally and installed in 2011. Electric heaters are fitted in the chancel area. A new gas warm air heater for the nave was fitted in 2008 and new sound system installed in 2016.

Outside the church building the churchyard is open for burials and disposal of cremated remains. There is also an extended churchyard area opposite on the other side of Church Road, which is largely full but is still officially open. Both areas are kept in reasonable order and used regularly by people attending graves. There is a quiet memorial area to north of the church building with seating.

Across the driveway, which leads to the present Vicarage, the Parish Meeting Room, locally known as the "Pelly Room," was fashioned from the old vicarage stables, the money being provide by Miss Pelly. The building was reconstructed to modern

specifications including appropriate cloakroom facilities following a fire in 2005, and was consecrated by the Right Reverend Bishop Laurie Green for church use.

Realistically it accommodates up to fifty people, and is in regular use both for internal purposes and hire for children's parties and by other village groups e.g. Women's Guild, local Conservation Society and Twinning Association meetings.

So, what are the mysteries still to be uncovered?

- The early history of the church is very uncertain and the positioning of the different arches and walls is intriguing.
- Why is there only one tiny piece of Medieval glass in the building is not known, while those interested in history might ponder on what might have happened during the 17th century.
- The reason for the church tower becoming centrally placed is largely unexplained.
- As the parish church to Beaulieu Palace (New Hall) and the association with the Boleyn family in Tudor times, it is interesting to speculate if any of the famous names from the court of King Henry VIII may have walked this way. The burial place of Mary Boleyn is not known!

... and finally, what of the 21st century?

The present church community is very aware of the responsibility of sustaining and growing patterns of worship here. This church is alive and vibrant, with a wide range of services and activities. The building itself however, presents different challenges and relies heavily on legacies and gifts for the upkeep, yet also offers some exciting possibilities for further re-ordering to make better use of the space available.

The latest Quinquennial Inspection took place on 1st November 2017.

“...one of the most complex churches in Essex - its building history not easy to unravel.”

Ref. Essex Churches and Chapels