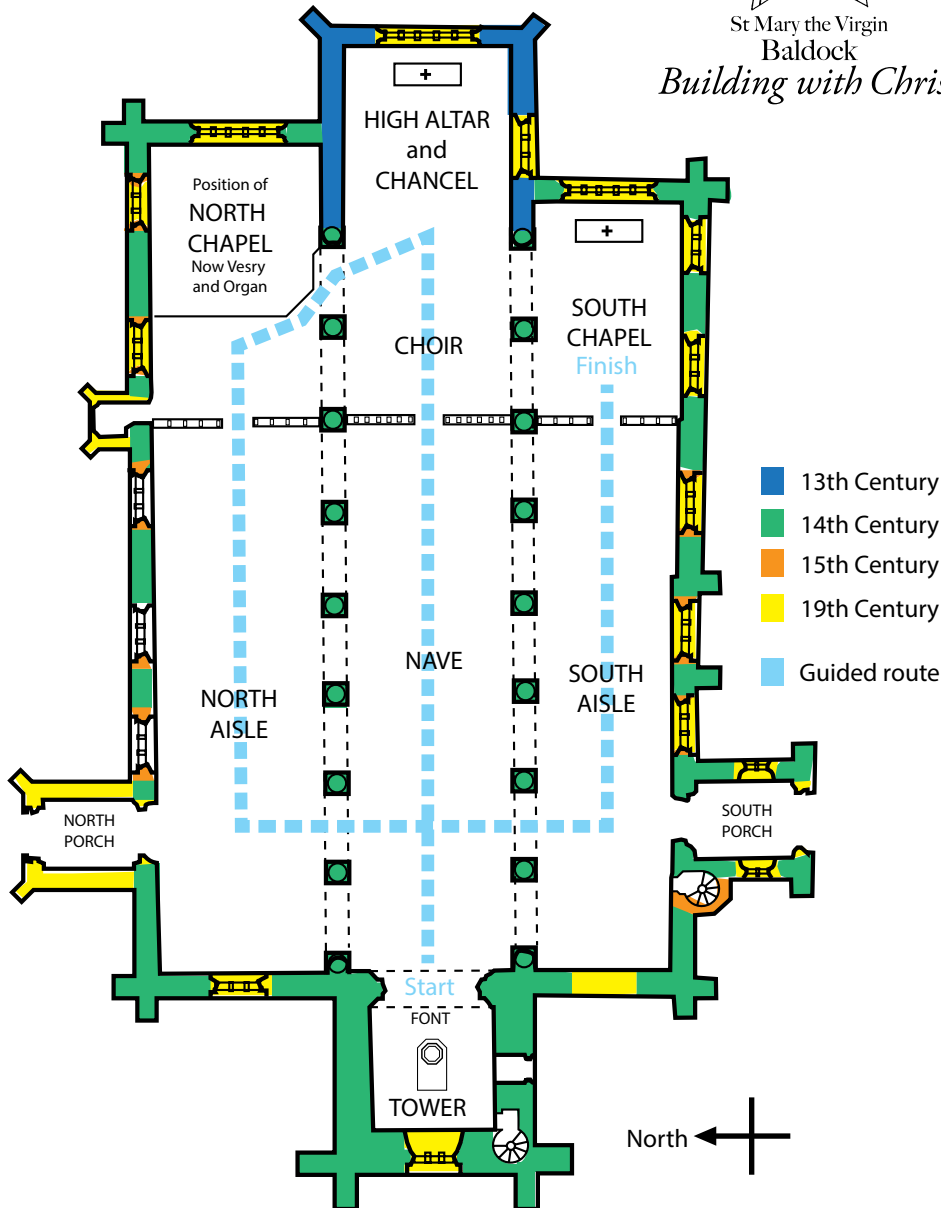


St Mary the Virgin, Baldock: *a Christian journey*

A suggested route around the church



St Mary the Virgin
Baldock
Building with Christ



At the heart of the town for 900 years, a view of Baldock from the Church tower.

The Outset

This area has been of spiritual importance since ancient times. There is evidence of a Bronze-Age settlement where the Icknield Way passed the Ivel Springs and there was an important Roman town around what is now Clothall Road. However the blueprint for the town we recognise as Baldock today began about the time of the Second Crusade in 1147 when the Earl of Pembroke gave “ten librates of land” from his Weston Manor and the rights to the income of markets and fairs to The Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon.

This was an Order of the Church to which Pope Innocent 2nd had issued special privileges because they protected Christians on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Members of this Order are usually called Knights Templar. By 1185 the “ten librates of land” was a thriving town and amongst its rent paying inhabitants were one Parson, five Chaplains, one Deacon, one Brother of the Templars and four masons. This suggests that Baldock had a substantial stone place of worship.

The privileges bestowed upon the Knights Templar enabled them to control vast assets but also to incur considerable resentment and in the 1309 the Order was disbanded and its possessions, in this country, were seized by King Edward 2nd. In 1312 when the King’s men came to take the market and fair tolls, the townspeople of Baldock including Thomas Cateyl assaulted, robbed and killed three of them. Later that year it was judged that former Templar assets should be appropriated to pious use and so most of the Templar property

was given to the Order of St John of Jerusalem or Knights Hospitaller as they are usually called. However it is evident that Edward did not bear any malice to the Cateyl family and appointed Thomas Cateyl's brother Robert, Archdeacon of Middlesex in 1315, Lord Privy Seal in 1320 and Lord Chancellor in 1323. The same cannot be said of Isabella, his Queen, who in 1326, on her return from France and with the intention of deposing her husband, rode to Baldock and ransacked the home of Thomas Cateyl presumably because his brother was supporting the King. The impact that incident had on this small town is difficult to imagine.

During the 16th century malting became the main industry and subsequently brewing brought prosperity to the town. Its geographical position established it as a staging post between London and the north and some of the old coaching inns still operate as hotels and bars today.

Throughout Baldock's history the church has been at its centre. St Mary's is constructed from flint, lime mortar and clunch, which is a soft limestone. The quoins or cornerstones of the tower are of Barnack stone and brought from one of the most important Medieval quarries in England. Barnack limestone was more difficult to carve and more expensive. The tower took ten years to build and originally had a wooden balustrade and ornate lead spike. Both of these were probably removed in 1816. In 1841 the tower was rendered with Roman cement and restored last in 2011-12. Standing about 39.6metres (130 feet), it has always been a landmark for travellers.

A view of the restored tower from the west end of the churchyard.



The Pathway

It is appropriate to begin our tour of the church at the font.

The font is used for baptism and is the start of the Christian journey through life. The word is derived from the Latin *'fons'* meaning 'a spring of water' and reminds us that St John the Baptist baptised Jesus in the River Jordan. Water is a sign of cleansing and beginning a new life in the church family.

This font is transitional Norman in design and has probably been in use here since the twelfth century. Many Medieval fonts were octagonal in shape. Often seven of the sides depicted one of the sacraments whilst the eighth side was often carved with an image of the Last Judgment, Mary and child, the Trinity, Christ's baptism, crucifixion or His resurrection. From 1236 all fonts had to have a securely locked cover.

We do not know if this font was ever decorated with sacramental images but the damage and marks on the surfaces of the stone sides could have been inflicted during the Reformation or Civil War when many Medieval effigies were destroyed. Unfortunately there is no record of what happened to this font's cover.

The black and white tiles on the floor of the baptistery and the steps leading up to the font date from 1901. The window in the tower, now clear, is to the memory of Vickris Pryor who died 1849. Described as "the worst window in the church: it once had images representing Abraham, David and Moses.



The Medieval chest, in the corner, was an 'Arca Domini' (chest of the Lord) and used to collect "St Peter's Pence", the tax of one penny per household payable to the Pope at 'Lammas'. This was an Anglo Saxon festival meaning "loaf mass" when a loaf would be baked using the wheat from the first harvest on the first day of August, a date which also commemorates the time St Peter broke out of prison. These boxes became known as Peter's Pence chests or Bread chests and, after the Reformation, were used to collect alms for the poor.



This font has been used to baptise the people of Baldock for centuries and is still used frequently.



A panorama of the Nave looking west toward the font and showing the Victorian box pews.

Now walk down the steps into the nave.

The Nave is the large centre part of the church and the word derived from Latin “navis” meaning ship. This is symbolic of the congregation being passengers in the voyage to God. It may be because the timber structure of the roof is constructed like a hull of a large boat.

In Medieval times the nave was probably brightly painted and traces of a crimson pigment can still be seen on some of the arcade columns. There might have been some benches around the walls of the church for the old and infirm and small altars in the nave.

The footprint of the building could have been the same for the last eight hundred years but there was considerable reconstruction during the fourteenth century. However this may have been “essential maintenance” because, when the Order of the Knights Templar was disbanded in 1309, an inquest into its possessions showed that much of the Order’s property was neglected and in disrepair.

The arcade walls, with their Doric pillars and Gothic arches, were raised when the clerestory and a new high roof were added in the fifteenth century. At the junction of the arches and the pillars the label stops have been sculpted into heads which may be representations of the inhabitants of Baldock and suggests that money was raised in the town by subscription. Notice that the one in the south west corner is a dog.

Set in the floor of the crossing is a brass figure of a woman with a kerchief covering her head and shoulders. Her feet have been deliberately cut away to fit on the slab. It dates from 1410 and originally formed one of a pair with a male figure but this is now lost. Also in this stone is a rectangular brass which commemorates the Reverend Edmund Pymm of Radwell who died in 1807.

Most of the memorials in the Nave are 18th and 19th century and erected for the prosperous maltsters and professional inhabitants of the town.



Perhaps this carving was in recognition of a loyal, working-dog.



The ornamental Purbeck stone in the floor at the front crossing is to the memory Reginald de Argeintein. The indentations in the stone round the margins show the remains of a rhyme in early French which translated as:

*Reginald de Argeintein lies here
Who caused this chapel to be
He was a Knight of St Mary
Let every good man pray for his soul*

It was thought this means that, like other family members, Reginald was a Knight Templar and that he sponsored the enlargement of the church. However he died in 1307 before that work commenced. The de Argeinteins were Normans who came over with William the Conqueror. An ancestor of Reginald was awarded the Lordship of Wymondley (situated 3 miles from Baldock) which held the tenure of the “Grand Sergeantry”. The duty of this old hereditary office was to serve the King with a silver cup at his coronation banquet. The family acquired wealth and additional manors in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire as a result of political alliances and marriages and it was connected to Baldock from 1214. However, although Reginald de Argeintein would have visited this church and possibly contributed to its upkeep, the reason his monument is here is unknown.

Moveable benches and platforms were first put in churches during the fourteenth century but it was the Reformation that made pews and pulpits standard items of church furniture because the sermon rose in importance as the central act of Christian worship and usually lasted several hours. In order to raise money, many churches installed box pews which were rented or sold. Wealthier members of the congregation often bought adjacent boxes which they heated and furnished according to their personal tastes. Not only did this raise ethical questions, it reduced the floor space and, at a time when the population was growing, meant that wooden galleries had to be erected to provide seating for all the parishioners and as a result, the practice ceased in the 1860’s.

At the vestry meeting of 1794, it was agreed “to erect a gallery at the west end of the middle aisle for the accommodation of the singers and the other inhabitants.” We know that the gallery was still there in 1842 because at his visitation in that year the Bishop noted that three fire engines were stored underneath it. The Bishop suggested that the fire engines were removed. Whether this prompted a discussion about reordering the church we do not know but the gallery may have been pulled down when the pews were installed in 1849 putting this church in the vanguard of “free pews for all”.



The ornately carved pulpit was installed in 1849 along with the box pews.

Below left. The bricked-up access to the Rood screen gallery on the north wall. Look above and you'll see where the staircase would have taken you.

Below right. The elaborate south aisle screen gives the best impression of what the whole gallery would have looked like and dates from the 15th Century.

The pulpit is hexagonal in shape, made from dark stained ornately carved oak. On each of four of the sides is a Gothic script inscription: Panel 2-“Faith cometh by hearing”, Panel 3-“Christ is all and in all”, Panel 4-“Holiness to the Lord”, Panel 5- “Looking into Jesus”, Panels 1 and 6 have no inscription.

The Rood screen was an important feature of a Medieval church because it was a physical barrier between the nave and the chancel and prevented the laity and animals from entering the sacred part of the church. Often, there was a platform and loft on the top along which clerics might process, read the gospel, preach or sing. Also fixed to the top of the screen would have been a large ‘rood’ (which is Anglo-Saxon for “cross”) with a statue of the Virgin Mary the mother of Jesus on one side and one of St John on the other. This portrayed the last moments of Christ’s human presence on earth when he entreated St John to take his mother into his home. We know the effigies were taken down and the lofts closed on this screen in 1548.

The screen is in three sections and made of oak. The central and north sections are fourteenth century whilst the more elaborate south section is fifteenth century. In the arcade walls above the central screen are openings which connected the galleries and the rood loft. The bricked-up arch, at ground level, in the north wall adjacent to the screen shows where a stairway originally provided access via a turret staircase.

In the lower part of the north section of the screen, between the pulpit and the door opening are two particularly noteworthy carvings. One is of a green-man and the other of a fish swallowing a mermaid. Both were originally pagan symbols which were adopted by the medieval Christian church. Whilst the mermaid might have been a moral warning to keep on the straight and narrow, the green-man was a sign of regeneration and resurrection.

[Walk through the centre gates of the Screen into the Chancel](#)

The word Chancel is derived from Latin through old French and means “lattice” presumably because it was an area obscured by a screen from the nave and parclose screens from the chapels.

Originally the clergy sang in a circle or “corona” around a raised stone slab reminiscent of the plinth on which animals were sacrificed in the Jewish tradition. The word “choir” is derived from “corona” and the word “altar” (meaning “high place”) was attributed to the stone slab which was the physical and metaphorical pinnacle of the Mass. In the east wall was a tabernacle which means “an enclosed place where God’s presence abides on Earth”. Reserved sacrament, that is consecrated bread and wine, was kept in the tabernacle so that it was ready to take to anyone who was dying. Thus the East wall signified the end of the Christian journey on earth.

The “Green Man” and Mermaid carvings in the lower panels of the north screen (can you find them?).





The Rood screen from the Choir. Note the doorways for the former gallery and the coats of arms.

Although the Mass was celebrated every day by the priest, deacon and curate, in Medieval times only the priest took the sacrament except on one occasion during the year when it was taken through the rood screen to the congregation. During the early part of the service the parishioners in the nave might have studied the stained glass windows and decorations, peered through the screens or prayed at one of the altars dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Trinity, St Nicholas or St James. When the bell, to signal the moment of transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements, was heard, they would all come together ready for the deacon to bring the Pax brede (Peace board) from the chancel and pass it round the congregation. After the Reformation stone altars were replaced by wooden communion tables to replicate the Last Supper where Jesus predicted His betrayal to His disciples. The substitution of a table for a sacrificial slab, signifies that because Christ gave His own life for all sin, no further sacrifice is required.

Today when we come together at the communion table we give thanks as we remember Christ is present with us in his death (sharing his broken body and life blood) and in his resurrection as we pray for his Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts of bread and wine.

On the chancel side of the rood screen you can see four shields which represent the Province of Canterbury, the Dioceses of Lincoln and Rochester and the cross of the Knights Templar. The choir stalls date from 1881 whilst the Clergy stalls were erected in 1936 in memory of Canon L. H. Boswall who was the Rector from 1930-34.

A flat headed double piscina is in the twelfth century south lower walls of the sanctuary (*Right*). One basin would have been used by the priest for washing his hands and the other basin for washing the sacred vessels after the Mass.



The window in the south wall and the memorial under it are in memory of the Rev'd John Smith and his wife who was the rector of this church from 1832 to 1870. As an undergraduate at Cambridge, he helped to decipher the code used by Samuel Pepys in his diaries. The window depicts the appearance of the risen Lord to Mary Magdalene on Easter Day. (Right)

The East window shows scenes from the passion and crucifixion of our Lord with mouchettes of the Virgin Mary and angels. In the main section is Christ victorious flanked by the four evangelists. It was erected in 1847 and has been attributed to William Wailes.

The level of the sanctuary floor was raised probably in 1756 when a stone altar-grave and brasses were moved to the North Chapel. The encaustic tiles were laid in 1881. The oak altar table was presented by the Rev'd William Fowler in memory of his wife in 1852 and the altar rail is probably from the same time.

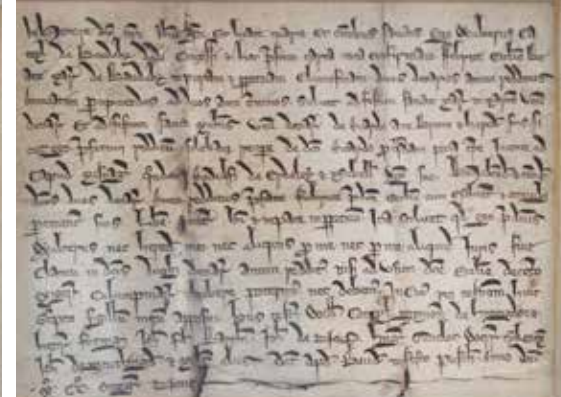
Mr H Williams made the credence table from wood removed from the tower when it was repaired in 1931. During the same year, whilst re-plastering the north wall of the sanctuary, the hidden doorway was discovered. The inscription on it suggests that it was bricked up in 1712 but its original purpose is unknown.

We have no account of the type or position of early musical instruments in the church. The first record shows that Forster and Andrews repaired an organ in 1876 and in 1901 at a cost of £115 renovated it. However in 1913 an hydraulically blown organ was built by Norman & Beard costing £1,162. 5s. A grant from the Carnegie Trust provided £375 and a £125 rebate for the Forster Andrews' organ reduced the sum to be raised by the parishioners. In 1934 an electric device replaced the hydraulic mechanism and during 2001 'Village Workshop' restored it to its original appearance by fitting dummy pipes and enclosing the 'swell' and the 'choir'. It is considered to be one of the finest organs in Hertfordshire.

[Walk past the organ towards the north wall of the vestry area](#)



A former doorway, probably bricked up in 1712.



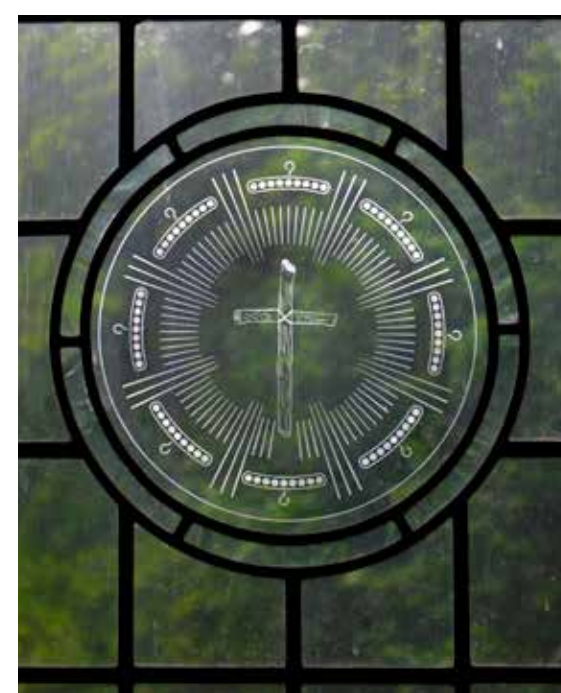
Documents from 1289 for the fabric of the church and a grant of salvation for the Cateyl family.

The area including the vestry and enclosed by the arcade, north wall and rood screen was originally the North Chapel. Extracts from Patent Rolls record that on 25 July 1459, King Henry 6th granted licence for “The Gild of Jhesu in the Church of the Blessed Mary in Baldock”. Church Guilds were formed in many old towns to promote piety and fellowship and members included men and women. The Guild in Baldock acquired considerable property and took charge of all the town charities. The members observed strict rules to assemble every year in the church on the vigil and morning of its foundation day and to maintain a chaplain to celebrate divine service every day at the altar of the Holy Trinity which was probably in this the North chapel of the church. The Guild was dissolved in 1550.

On the floor along the north wall is a coffin lid with a foliated cross in relief. (Above) It is carved from a Purbeck -type of fossiliferous limestone and dates from about 1270. The lid was found turned upside down and being used as a paving stone.

On the north wall is the brass of a man and his wife of about 1400. The lower part of his figure and the dog at his feet together with the inscription are missing but it is thought to be William Vynter and his wife Margaret. The memorial was originally sited in the Chancel.

The window shows miniature coat hangers surrounding a cross and replaced the panes destroyed by vandals in the late 1990's. It is dedicated to the memory of Dorothy Arbury who during the 1960's had made and sold coat-hangers to cover the cost of re-glazing the plain glass windows in the North aisle. It is now usually called the “Coat-hanger Window”.



The small door in the wall now leads outside through a porch which replaced the former rood loft staircase and dates from 1826.

[Walk through the doorway in the screen into the North Aisle](#)

The North Aisle and North Porch underwent considerable restoration in 1826 when a new double deal roof with a plastered interior was erected. Beetle infestation necessitated further restoration in 1931 and the plaster panels of the ceiling, which had been grained to look like oak, were painted white. The carved figure heads are original and made from oak. During the 1931 repairs, old oak rafters and cross bracers were found proving that a much older porch had been encased in 1826 and not pulled down.

The only stained glass in the north aisle shows the figures of Faith, Hope and Charity and was made by Charles Eamer Kempe. It was dedicated to the memory of Sophia Simpson by her son Joseph in 1881.

On the floor is the brass of a man and his wife of about 1470 on the north wall are two others. One shows the shrouded figures of a man and his wife of 1520 and the other an inscription to Margaret Benet dated 1587. Her son Robert was appointed Bishop of Hereford in 1603.

Behind the curtain are copies deeds one for the fabric of the church given by Walter Cateyl in 1289 and the other a grant for the salvation of the soul of William Cateyl and his wife Cecilia and of all his ancestors and descendants. The relationship between these two townsmen is unknown but they were most certainly kindred of Thomas, Robert and Ralph.

Brass figures from about 1520.





The statue of the Virgin and Child (*Left*) was given to the Rev'd Albert Victor Baillie on his retirement as Dean of Windsor in 1944 by the "Friends of St George's Chapel". He lived in Baldock until his death in 1955 and the statue was then given to the church by his son.

Now cross the Nave and South Aisle into the South Porch

South porches were an important feature in medieval churches and often where contracts were agreed and agricultural labourers were hired at Michelmas or Martinmas. It was also where the priest would meet the bride and groom to verify their intentions to marry before they entered the church. There was often an upper room in the porch called a parvis which might have provided sleeping accommodation or even a schoolroom.

Considerable alterations were made in this porch in 1869. Arms and armour from the seventeenth century Town Guard were discovered in the parvis which had been inaccessible for many years. The floor of this upper chamber was removed and the size of the windows altered to produce the open area we have today. The only visible evidence of the previous layout is the medieval doorway high up in the west wall which is connected by a spiral stairway to the small door just inside the church.

The windows are both late nineteenth century and dedicated to those buried in the porch. One shows Baptism and Laying on of Hands, whilst the other depicts St John the Baptist and Abraham.

Return to the south aisle and walk eastwards

The first window was fitted in 1880 in memory of Catherine Anna and Thomas Veasey. The main lights depict the Day of Judgement.

The second window was fitted in memory of Louisa Mary Pryor in 1861 and Morris Pryor in 1871. The main lights depict The Resurrection, The Ascension and Christ appearing to Thomas.

The third window (*Left*) was fitted in 1885 in memory of the Rev'd Thomas Rigby Kewley who was Rector for fourteen years. The main lights depicts Christ the Good Shepherd with texts from John 10:14 and Psalm 23.

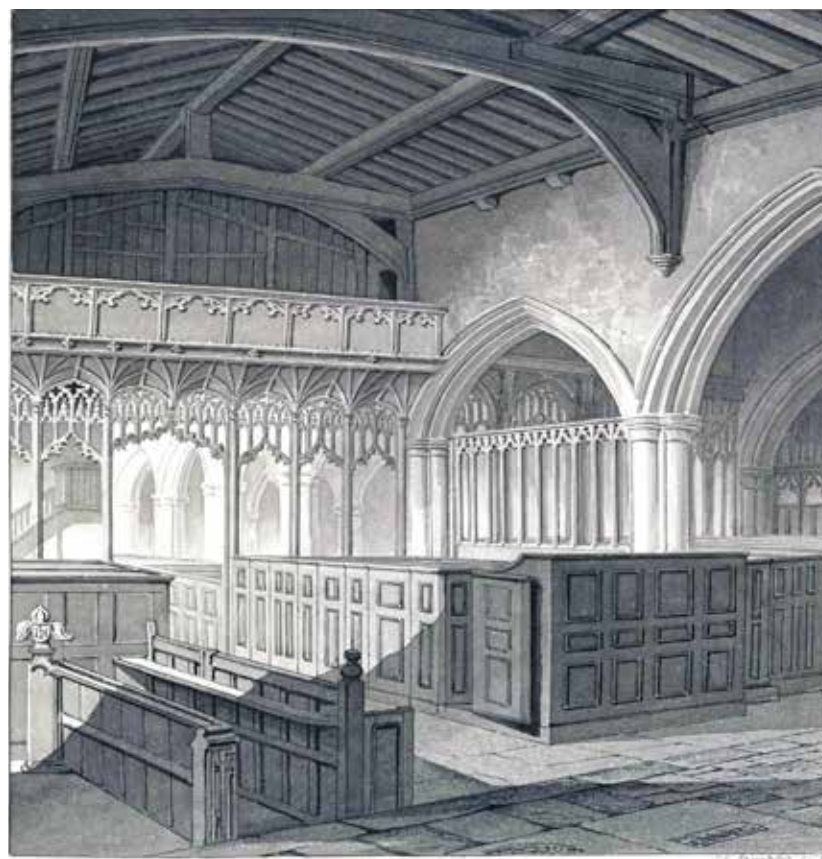
In the floor at the east end of the aisle is a large well worn stone which bears rivet holes that match some of the brasses in the North chapel vestry area suggesting that this is the original memorial stone.

Continue through the screen into the South Chapel

In Medieval times following the death of a person, Masses were sung by a curate in order to speed the soul of the deceased through purgatory to eternal rest in Heaven. These Masses were chanted at the altar of a side chapel which became known as a chantry chapel. We know that at one time there were five curates in this church and this was probably its chantry chapel. Today it is called the Trinity Chapel which is rather confusing when we recall that the daily offices of the Guild of Jhesu were said at the Trinity Altar.

In the South wall is a two basin piscina and a double sedilia which were seats for assistant clergy. The surrounding ogee arches are elaborately carved but badly damaged and probably fourteenth century.

The illustration shows the chapel as it was in 1840 when there was still a gallery across the top of the screen and the box pew of the Lord of the Manor faced directly into the chancel.



This etching of Trinity Chapel shows the space above the screens was boarded up and, at the back of the church, the stairs to the gallery built in 1794 under the tower can be clearly seen. It seems likely all these were removed along with the old box pews during the substantial reordering in 1849.

Etching used by kind permission of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS).

View from the South aisle of Baldock Church, Hertfordshire.



The chapel was restored in 1913 in memory of John Dear when the floor was raised and paved and edged with a step of Hopton-Wood stone which has been described as “very fine, almost like marble” and was used in the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and the Albert Memorial.

The base of the altar is 17th century but a longer top was added in 1913 as was the altar rail.

The alabaster and green marble War Memorial was erected in 1920 and children lay a wreath every Remembrance Sunday to respect all those who suffered or were sacrificed for the benefit of others.

The south wall window nearest the screen was made by Clayton and Bell and depicts the Nativity, Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus. It is dedicated to the memory of James Layton who died in 1875. *(Opposite page)*

The next window on the south wall is dedicated to the memory of Alfred Pryor who died in 1876. The main lights depict Nathaniel under the Fig Tree with text from John 1:48, Suffer the Little Children with text from Mark 10:14 and Christ with Mary and Martha with text from Luke 10:38.

The East window depicts people, scenes or texts from the Bible *(Back cover)*. Each subject is linked vertically with the Old Testament type in the lower section and the New Testament antitype in the upper section. The subjects are the Annunciation (Luke 1: 28) and the Angel with the wife of Manoah (Judges 13:3); the Transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and Moses and the Commandments (Exodus 32:15); the Crucifixion (John 12:32) and Moses and the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:9); the Resurrection (John 11:25) and Jonah and the Whale (Jonah 2:10); the Ascension (John 14:2) and Elijah and the Fiery Chariot (2Kings 2:11). It is dedicated to the memory of Edward Barber, Ebenezer and Sarah Shores, Anne Mary Kewley, Maria Bally, Cornelius and Anne Herbert.

Like many small market towns in this country, Baldock has endured periods of prosperity and expectancy as well as famine, civil war and despair. Within these walls individuals have revealed their feelings of happiness, sadness, humility, pride, innocence, guilt and sought answers to whatever is troubling them.



In the South wall a two basin piscina and a double sedilia, seats for assistant clergy. Adjacent to them, the War Memorial commemorating the fallen of World War I and in front our encased book of remembrance recording those who have died in this parish whose families wish to remember them here.



This church dedicated to St Mary the Virgin has been at the centre of this community for almost nine hundred years providing tranquillity, charity, love and hope. We invite you to spend a few moments of reflection here today.

The prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

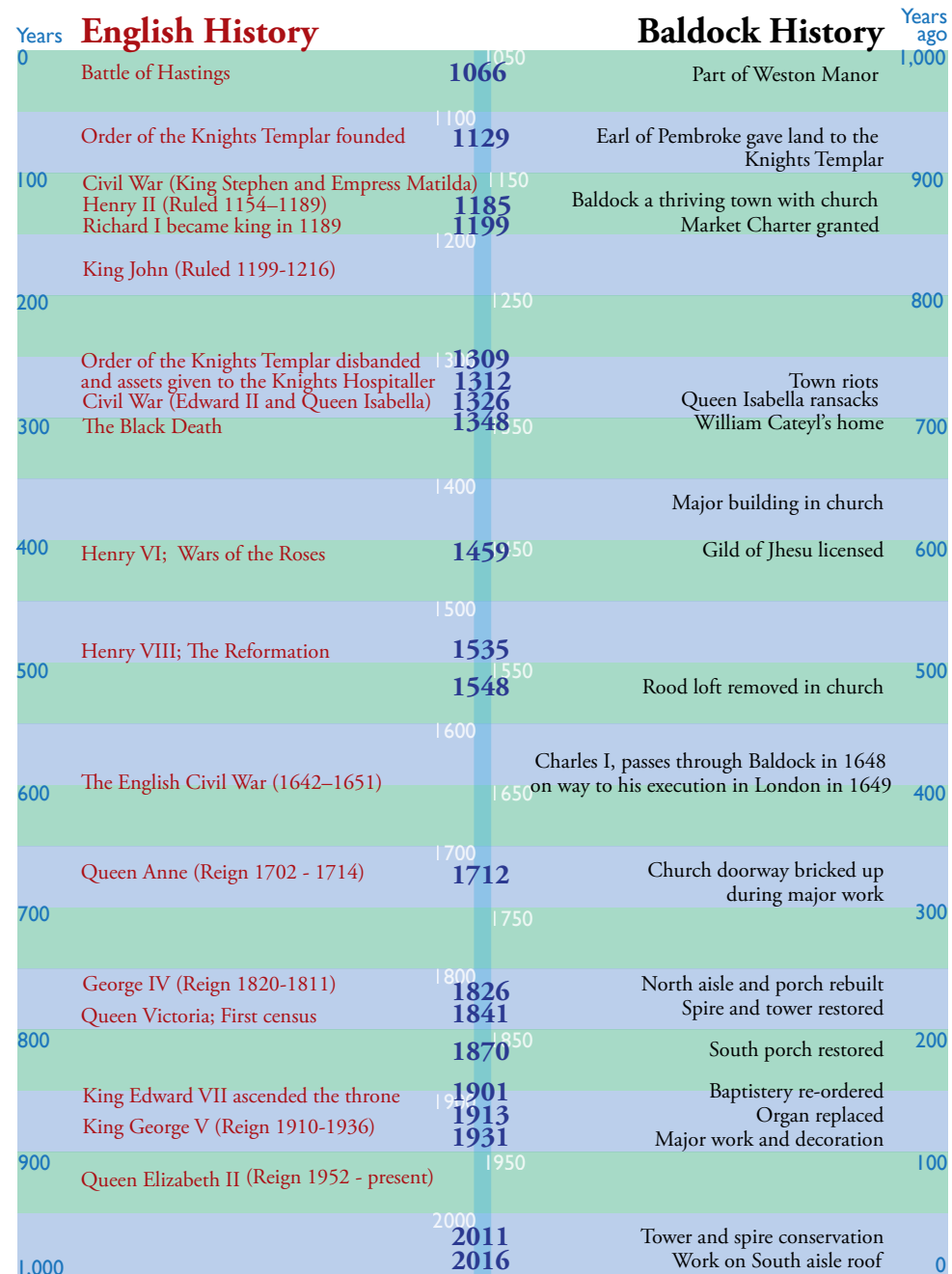
For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Glossary

Arcade:	a succession of arches, each counter-thrusting the next, supported by columns or piers.
Baptistry:	part of church in which the font is found and baptisms take place .
Chalice:	the cup used to contain the wine consecrated at the Eucharist (Holy Communion, Mass).
Chantry:	an endowment for the maintenance of priests to celebrate Mass for the soul and the chapel or altar where the Masses were celebrated.
Credence table:	a small table placed near the altar to hold the bread and wine to be used at the Eucharist
Crossing:	the junction of the four arms of a cruciform (cross-shaped) church.
Label Stop:	decorative feature as a termination of a label, sometimes called a head-stop.
Ogee arch:	decorative curved moulding on an arch.
Parclose screen:	a screen or set of railings to enclose a side chapel.
Pax Brede:	a small plate of ivory, metal or wood with a representation of a religious subject on the face and handle on the back formerly used for conveying the Kiss of Peace.
Piscina:	a small bowl with a drain usually in a niche in the wall south of the altar.
Sedilia:	seats for the celebrant and deacon on the south side of the chancel.
Transubstantiation:	the pre-reformation term to describe the supposed conversion of the bread and the wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood.



Acknowledgements: This guide was lovingly compiled by Rhian Dodds supplementing Gray's earlier guide and introducing new material from recent research. Photographs are by Laurence Browne and Revd James Sawyer.

