



ST MARY'S CHURCH

WASHBROOK
SUFFOLK



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.50



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST MARY'S CHURCH
WASHBROOK, SUFFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

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AKENHAM, ST MARY
3 miles N of Ipswich off A45

CLAYDON, ST PETER
4 miles NW of Ipswich off A45

IPSWICH, ST MARY AT QUAY
Key Street, near the docks

LITTLE WENHAM, ALL SAINTS
7 miles SW of Ipswich off A12

ST MARY'S CHURCH

WASHBROOK, SUFFOLK

by ROY TRICKER

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND PARISH

It seems hardly possible that this remote and rural church, hidden in the lush green Suffolk countryside, is only 3½ miles (5.6km) from the centre of Ipswich. In 1824 David Elisha Davy remarked that it stood 'in a very sequestered valley, not near any house and almost a mile (1.6km) from the principal part of the village'; very little has changed here since then. The valley has been formed by what is now the tiny Spring Brook, which flows eastwards to join the Belstead Brook, about half a mile (0.8km) from the church. This probably gave Washbrook its name – indicating a brook or stream where washing took place.

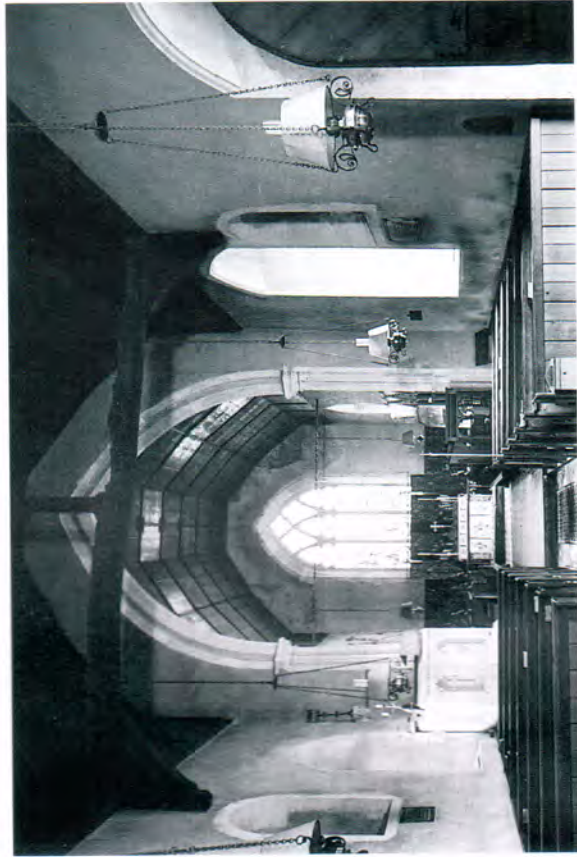
In Saxon times this area was called Great Belstead, while the present village of Belstead (about a mile (1.6km) south-east of St Mary's) lay in Little Belstead. Long ago there was within the boundaries of Washbrook parish a hamlet of Fellechurch (or Velechurch) with its own parish church, institutions which seem to have ceased after 1331. Remains of this church, some 273 yards (250m) south-west of the junction of Pigeon's Lane and Swan Hill on the B1113 (at grid reference TM1195 4290) were gradually buried and finally dynamited and removed in 1954 to permit deeper ploughing. John Kirby, writing in 1732–34 mentions the ruins of this church which, he states, 'if they are not now, were not long since visible'.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH

Like most churches, St Mary's is a mixture of craftsmanship of a variety of ages, as people of many periods and Christian traditions have built, altered and beautified it. From what can be seen in the building itself and from what little documentary evidence is available, the main landmarks in its long history are as follows:

c.1100 Tiny Norman windows in the north and south walls indicate that the core of the nave has been standing for about 900 years and the presence of a sarsen, or large glacial boulder, beneath the west wall of the tower suggests that this Norman church may even have had a tower. Some say that this boulder may have been used here to cancel its former pagan associations and claim it for Christianity. It certainly provides a very sure foundation and other boulders deposited in this part of Suffolk have been pressed into service by the builders of Bramford, Shelley and Sproughton churches.

The mid-14th century It was about time that the church received its present chancel, the craftsmanship of which is very ambitious for a small village church. The windows have curvilinear tracery beneath depressed (shallowly-pitched) arches – indicating the period when the Decorated style of architecture was beginning to evolve into Perpendicular style, maybe about 1355–70, when England was recovering from the Black Death of 1349. This was the year of the foundation of the Dominican Nunnery at Dartford, Kent. Shortly after this the manor of Amor Hall was transferred from the monastery at Aumerle (or Albemarle) in Normandy

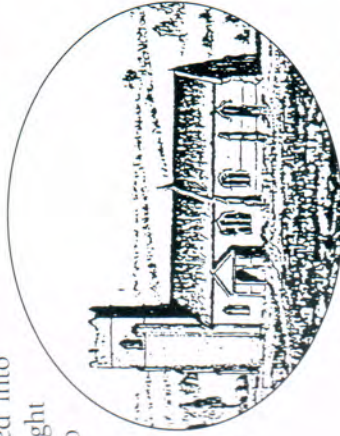


Interior looking east

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORIC MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

to the nuns at Dartford, and it could be that these new patrons built the chancel and equipped it with stone stalls for collegiate or monastic Offices. About this time two simple two-light windows were placed in the nave.

The 15th century During this century our churches were beautified with much colour and carving. Here the font has survived, but much else has disappeared. More light was allowed into the nave by the insertion of a three-light window in its south wall. It was also during the 15th century that the present western tower was added (although this may have been begun earlier). The tower now lacks its former belfry stage and parapet, which were still in place when Isaac Johnson made a sketch of the church (sometime between c.1793–1818), but had been removed by 1842 when Henry Davy made an etching of the building. The bell is by Richard Hille of London, who was working between 1428 and 1440.



St Mary's, with tower complete, by Isaac Johnson, just before 1818

The 16th and 17th centuries The Reformation in the mid-16th century brought about the removal of much ornate colour and carving inside the church (but not, thankfully, the canopied stalls and Easter Sepulchre). With services and scriptures in English, there was less need for many mediaeval visual aids. More damage was done in 1643–44 by the Puritans, in their zeal to rid our churches of 'superstitious images and inscriptions'. The Puritan inspector, William Dowsing, paid a visit here and records in his journal, 'I broke down 26 superstitious pictures (in glass or painted on the rood-screen) and gave order to take down a stoning cross and the chancel to be levelled'. The emphasis in Anglican worship was on the preaching of the Word and St Mary's was provided with a fine Stuart pulpit, the canopy (or sounding-board) of which was later converted into a table for use in the vestry. In 1670 John Daines, Vicar of Washbrook, became Rector of Copdock also, since when both communities have shared the same parish priest.

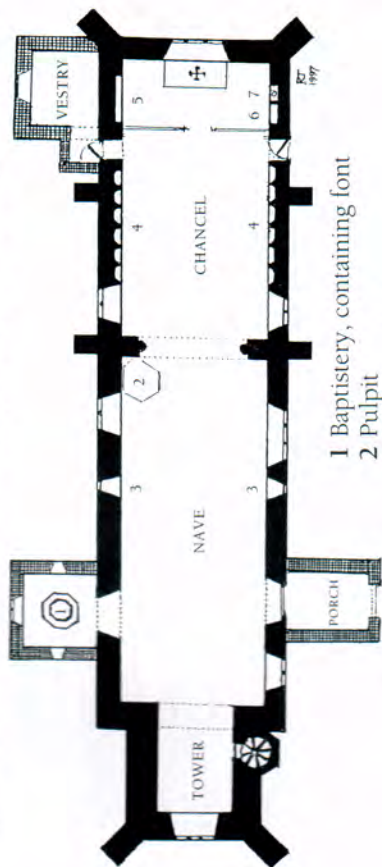
The 1820s About this time the manor passed into the ownership of the de Grey family of Merton, Norfolk. Sir William de Grey, who inherited it

in 1766 became the first Lord Walsingham and his descendants were to leave their mark upon St Mary's during the subsequent century.

When David Elisha Davy visited the church in 1824 the chancel was one step lower than the nave and the communion table was raised on one step at the east end, within its rails and with framed boards displaying the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Commandments on the wall above it. Davy admired the stone stalls, noting that the south-eastern pair, and also the piscina, were blocked up. Both nave and chancel had plaster ceilings, the pulpit was described as 'of deal, modern' and above the chancel arch hung the royal arms of King George III. The font stood opposite the entrance and had lost the figures round its pedestal. In the chancel floor was the ledger slab of the Revd Joseph Clarke, with its Latin inscription, to the east of which was the slab containing Edmund Knapp's brass inscription.

The external walls at that time were rendered and when Davy returned in 1828, he found that the walls (including the tower) had been covered with a thick coat of white-wash. Other alterations had taken place, including the reconstruction of what were formerly separate external roofs to the nave and chancel, noting that 'the roof is now all under one and covered with slate'. New wooden seats had been placed in the chancel and the blocked eastern stalls had been opened up.

This is borne out by a report in the *Ipswich Journal* of 10 January 1829



Plan of St Mary's church, Washbrook

■ Mediaeval work

▨ Additions of 1865-66

which states that during the previous year Lord Walsingham had spent several hundred pounds renewing the roof, repairing window frames and reglazing, restoring the stone seats and providing wooden benches to accommodate the poor. He also installed a new east window, replacing a much smaller aperture in the brickwork which had blocked the original opening for many years.

He placed there 'an elegant and costly window of stained glass, with the Arms and crest of the noble Donor'. Later that month, the *Ipswich Journal* reported that on the night of 26 January somebody had broken through a window, had forced open the parish chest and had stolen a silver chalice and cover, a small silver plate, a tablecloth, napkin and two surplices. The Churchwardens offered ten guineas reward for information leading to the offender's arrest.

1865-66 By this time the Lord of the Manor was the Revd James Tooke Hales-Tooke (who had been curate of Barton Mills, curate-in-charge of Bradwell, Essex and was Vicar of Scawby, Lincs from 1846-67). He had inherited property in Thompson (the next parish to Merton, Norfolk) in 1842, which he later exchanged with Lord Walsingham for the Manor of Copdock and Washbrook. Lord Walsingham remained Patron of the Living but Mr Hales-Tooke did a great deal for the church and the parishioners (who, it is stated, he 'ruled with a rod of iron'). He built the nearby Church Cottages, also a school in the village and it was he who was instrumental in the thorough restoration of the church. The building was closed from 26 November 1865 until the reopening on 22 April 1866.

A keen observer of the work done was Elizabeth Cotton of Amor Hall, who visited the church in December and noted that on removing the plaster ceiling the remains of an earlier boarded nave roof were discovered. Its timbers had been painted 'a bright vermilion, with black stars upon it'. Traces of a wall painting were discovered beneath the plaster just east of the entrance. Elizabeth sketched the south wall in March 1866, showing this painting and also the rood-loft staircase beside the three-light window. In September 1865 she was shown the plans for the restoration work, having been visited on 26 July by the Vicar, who brought with him a Mr Lamb, indicating that the architect for the work was almost certainly Edward Buckton Lamb. He had already been commissioned by the de Greys to design the porch at Merton Church in 1856 and a new rectory



*Washbrook Church Suffolk 7 March 1866.
Elizabeth Cotton's drawing of the south wall of the
nave during its restoration in March 1866 –
reproduced by kind permission of Mrs Sheila Hardy*

for Copdock (the house now known as 'Felcourt') in 1858.

Lamb was an architect of national repute whose unusual and eccentric designs were not always applauded by his purist contemporaries. Amongst the many churches he created are the amazing St Martin's, Gospel Oak, North London and St Mary Magdalene's, Addiscombe Surrey. In Suffolk he rebuilt the churches at Leiston and Braiseworth and designed the Town Hall at Eye.

Here the work included the addition of a baptistery chamber to receive the newly restored font, new wooden panelled ceilings for the roof (which was covered externally by tiles in two colours) and a new vestry to the north of the chancel, paid for by the parishioners. The interior was provided with new seating – the division of some of the benches into compartments, and also the two-toned roof tiles, being typical of Lamb's rather flamboyant style. Several of the windows were filled with stained glass at this time, including the east window given 'to the honour and glory of God and his Church' and adorned with the Hales-Tooke arms and initials.

At the reopening services, the Holy Communion was celebrated in the morning and the Revd James Hales-Tooke himself preached in the afternoon. The work cost in the region of £1,200.

The 20th century Until the 19th century, Washbrook consisted of the two hamlets along the Upper Street (now Pigeon's Lane from Cookshop Corner) and Lower Street, whilst Copdock, with its scattered farms and cottages, mainly comprised a line of houses along the London Road. As the population grew, the community centred upon Washbrook Lower Street and the old Copdock Street developed, the Brook Inn being built in 1864. With this gradual amalgamation of the two parishes, who had shared their priest since 1660 (and with, it is said, a tendency for the gentry to worship at the larger St Peter's and the workers at St Mary's) St Peter's, with closer and easier access for the most parishioners, became rather better endowed (including electric lighting and heating) and maintained.

On 6 May 1982 the Queen in Council confirmed the uniting of the two parishes to create a new parish to be called 'The Parish of Copdock with Washbrook'. The joint Parochial Church Council had discussed the future of St Mary's several times since 1971, when its dwindling congregation was faced with a £7,000 bill for repairs. In 1990 however, gale damage to the roof, an £82,000 estimate for this and for other major repairs, also the insurers' insistence that dangerous areas be roped off, brought matters to a head. Following much careful thought and deliberation a public meeting was held, after which the PCC recommended redundancy to the diocese. In 1993 St Mary's was vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust for preservation and conservation. During 1993–94 the nave and chancel were re-roofed and the upper section of the east wall of the chancel rebuilt, under the direction of Mr Henry Freeland of Cambridge.

In the care of the Trust and with the support of the Friends of St Mary's (who since 1992 have worked to raise money for and to promote interest in the church), this ancient and beautiful building continues its life and ministry – itself an offering of worship, a sermon in stone and craftsmanship and a silent witness to the Faith which it was built to proclaim.

THE EXTERIOR

This low-lying church in the lanes has an idyllic pastoral **setting** which is unforgettable. In the **churchyard**, yew trees form a natural arch above the path and a variety of headstones and chest-tombs commemorate people who were once part of this community. Beside the east wall are three Cullingham headstones. That to Thomas (who died in 1781 aged 31) warns,

'Young people, all that here pass by
As you are now, so once was I
And as I am so you must be
Therefore prepare to follow me'.

His father's nearby epitaph (1801) is rather worn, but reads,

'As time and hours pass away
So doth the life of man decay
Weep not for me, my glass is run
It is the Lord, His will be done'.

The variety of colours and textures seen in the **building materials** of which

below its lower set-off) is a worn scratch-dial. These were originally used to fix the time for the start of a service before the days of clocks. The original east window must have been splendid with its grand tracery in the style of the others. Its outline can be seen in the wall and pieces of its stonework, reused in the masonry of the upper part of this wall, were revealed when it was conserved in 1994. The present east window, made in 1828, is smaller, of three lights, and in the style of c.1300–10. It is worth looking at the tiny carvings at the bases of the eastern gables, with little carved faces peering out from beneath trefoils. The western gable ends also have carvings, but these are very worn.

The northern **baptistery** and **vestry** were added in 1865–66 and the **south porch** is also of the 19th century. Its lower part is of flint rubble, lined internally with large bricks, whilst its upper section is of timber with large foliage spandrels flanking its entrance arch. It shelters a 14th century south doorway, which has a renewed arch, flanked by male and female corbel heads.

THE INTERIOR

The interior of St Mary's has great character, although many of the features now to be seen date from the 1860's restoration or later.

In the base of the tower is a **bier** (possibly from the late 18th century) which was used to transport the coffin at funerals. The **Table of Fees** on the wall nearby, compiled about 1920, requires the payment of 10/6d to open a vault and a fee of 10 guineas, payable to the vicar, for making a family vault to contain two or more people. In the chamber above hangs a **single bell**, which has been sounding for five-and-a-half centuries, being one of a very few Suffolk bells made by Richard Hille of London between 1423 and 1440. Its diameter is 39½ inches (1 metre) and it is the sole survivor of three bells which existed here in 1553.

The 19th century wagon **roofs** have simple carvings at the intersection of the ribs in the nave, whilst the chancel roof is studded with bosses, showing flowers, foliage and the Star of David, also the Instruments of the Passion. Straddling the nave are two gnarled 14th century **tie-beams**, from which renewed vertical crown-posts rise to support the roof timbers above.

Near the entrance is a recess for a **holy water stoup**, where people dipped their fingers into the Holy Water and made the Sign of the Cross as an act of rededication upon entering the sacred building. Beside the

the church is constructed blend with the greens of the churchyard and the surrounding countryside, including flint-rubble walls using stones from the fields, bands of red and grey tiles in the roof and mellow bricks in the tower parapet.

The western **tower** is clearly truncated and tapers slightly. It measures 44 feet (13.4 metres) to the top of the battlements. At its base is a chequered base-course of stone and flints which have been split to expose their dark shiny cores. Diagonal buttresses strengthen the western corners and on the south side is the vice containing the newel staircase by which the tower is ascended. A 15th century date is indicated by the (renewed) three-light west window and the small upper windows which were designed to light the ringing chamber of a much taller tower. It can be imagined complete with its belfry stage and embattled flint parapet. The present parapet is of brick, maybe from the early 19th century. In the south wall are chunks of brown septaria – a local building material which crumbles badly and has caused the downfall or shortening of several East Suffolk towers. Underpinning the tower's base on its western side is a large glacial boulder (described by some authorities as a sarsen stone), which provided the mediaeval builders with a very solid foundation.

The nave and chancel are set beneath one continuous roof but, like most English churches, they differ greatly in character, because the maintenance of the chancel was the task of whoever received the Rectorial Tithes (in this case the Nunnery at Dartford), whilst the rest of the church was the responsibility of the parishioners.

The core of the **nave** is Norman (c.1100) and a careful look at the masonry of its north wall will show where the Norman work has been heightened. Two tiny Norman windows remain, although larger and later windows were added; two-light windows of the late 14th century and an elegant three-light window of about a century later.

The **chancel** has beautiful architecture of c.1355–70, including a plinth with chequer pattern at its base, elegant buttresses (also one renewed in brick in the 18th century), and horizontal string-courses punctuating its walls and running beneath its handsome two-light north and south windows, with their fine tracery. The south-east window has been shortened to accommodate the later priest's doorway, in the style of the 15th century, but renewed in 1866. In the buttress to the west of this (and just

offertory box is a **collecting shoe**, made in the late 19th or early 20th century for taking the collection.

Above the simple 14th century north doorway are the **royal arms** of Queen Victoria, fashioned in plaster. The baptistery contains a handsome 15th century **font**, which was considerably restored and recut in 1866, when the lions round its pedestal were replaced. There are many fonts of similar design and date in East Anglia. Angels with outstretched wings support the octagonal bowl, the panels of which are carved with angels bearing shields, alternating with pomegranate designs and a rose.

The nave is furnished with simple 19th century **benches** and in their ends are tiny carvings of Christian symbols, amongst which are the Instruments of the Passion (cross, hammer and pincers, spear, etc), emblems of the apostles (including the fuller's club of St James the Less, keys of St Peter, poisoned chalice of St John, knife of St Bartholomew, boat of St Jude and loaves of St Phillip) and the 'M' for the Blessed Virgin Mary. An unusual feature is the little book-rest in the south-east corner of the nave.

The **chancel seating** (with poppy-head ends) may well have been made for the children of the parish rather than a large choir. This is also 19th century, as is the commodious reading desk. The little organ, with its single manual of 3½ octaves, was made by the Positive Organ Company.

The stone **pulpit** (probably also of 1866) displays the cross and the 'IHS' monogram of Our Lord's name. On a 19th century foliage corbel behind it is a piece of wrought ironwork which may well have been an **hourglass stand**, (the hourglass timed the length of sermons) and is probably 200 years older than the present pulpit.

It is from the inside that the exquisite mid-14th century craftsmanship of Washbrook's **chancel** can be seen in its full glory. It is unusual that the chancel's length (30 feet, 9.1 m) almost equals that of the nave (35 feet, 10 m), the nave and chancel having an equal width of 15 feet (4.5 m). The wide **chancel arch**, with its moulded responds and capitals, is part of the mid-14th century reordering. The four side windows have lowered internal splays, the western ones for **seats** and the eastern ones to accommodate doorways. Six recesses in the walls each side form elegant canopied **stalls**. Their arches are shaped in the 'ogee' curve and are cinque-foiled (five-lobed), with carvings in the spandrels between the lobes. The arches are framed by stone hood-moulds, which rest upon a

variety of animal and human faces (some with interesting mediaeval hair-styles and headgear). The hood-moulds are embellished with leaves (forming crockets) and terminate in carved finials at the level of the horizontal string-courses, of which the southern one is also studded with carved foliage motifs. The stalls beneath are divided by shafts which have moulded capitals and bases. Their wooden lining and seats are a 19th century addition. The arcading continues into the splays of the two western windows and the jambs (sides) of the vestry doorway, where there are little lions' heads sprouting foliage. The scheme is continued into the sanctuary with two further arched recesses in the south wall; the shorter one contained a **piscina** drain (into which the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Mass was poured) and its neighbour provided a **Sedilium** (seat) for the priest during parts of the mediaeval Sung Mass.

On the north side of the sanctuary this masterpiece of the mediaeval stonemason's art reaches its climax in the **Easter Sepulchre**, which has now lost its shelf, or sill, but retains its beautiful elegant arch, flanked by tall crocketed pinnacles and with delicate carving in the spandrels – especially the two faces radiating foliage. Here in Pre-Reformation days a wafer consecrated at the Maundy Thursday Mass was reverently placed on Good Friday and removed on Easter Sunday morning, to symbolise Our Lord's burial in the tomb. Sometimes a wealthy benefactor to a church would ask to be buried in this spot so that his tomb could serve as the Easter Sepulchre.

The door nearby leads to the vestry, where the sounding board which formed a canopy to the lost 17th century pulpit, together with other pieces of woodcarving from this pulpit, have been made into a **table**.

STAINED GLASS

This formed a wonderful visual aid for teaching the Faith to mediaeval people who could not read. Although the mediaeval glass has long since disappeared, some of the windows contain scenes, symbols and texts in 19th century glass, which are as follows.

West Window The arms of the de Greys (the Barons Walsingham) and their crest, flanked by a vine and wheat (symbols of the Holy Communion). These probably date from 1828, when they were set in the east window,

and then removed here and set in grisaille glass in 1866 as a memorial to their donor, who died in 1839.

Nave – South West St Mary and her emblem of a lily in the tracery.

Nave – Norman windows Jumbled fragments of 19th century glass (perhaps from elsewhere), including a baby with a halo (perhaps from a Nativity scene), borders, etc.

Nave – South East In the tracery are two 'M' emblems, for Mary, the church's patron saint. One has a crown and the other a lily. Central is the brazen serpent set up by Moses.

Baptistry windows Jesus with the children (with the Baptism of Jesus above). Angels with scrolls in the two small windows.

Chancel – Western Windows These contain texts from scripture. Those in the south window are words of Jesus about the vine and in the north are texts about works.

Chancel – Eastern Windows The four Evangelists, with their emblems above them and Stars of David are at the top.

Chancel – East Window Presented by the Revd J T Hales-Tooke in 1866 with the Tooke and Hales arms at the base. This window shows the crucified Christ, with his Mother, St John, St Mary Magdalene and others, at the centre. To the left is Abel's sacrifice and to the right is Abraham's sacrifice of the ram instead of his son Isaac. In the tracery is the Dove of the Holy Spirit, the Lamb of God emblem of Jesus and the 'Glory' emblem of God the Father central. Mr Birkin Haward suggests that this window, and some of the others, may be the work of Messrs Ward & Hughes.

MEMORIALS

On the walls of the church are several memorial inscriptions (mostly small brass plaques) to people who have been associated with it. These are as follows:

Nave

- Oval marble plaque to William Heysing Meyer (1808) and his wife. A tile in the floor nearby marks the position of their vault.
- Brass plaques to those who died in the two Great Wars, whose names are recorded in the Garden of Remembrance in Copdock churchyard.

- The Revd Frederick de Grey. Vicar here 1837–81.
- The Hon. The Revd Arnald de Grey. Vicar here from 1883 until his death (aged 33) in 1889. (over pulpit)
- The Revd John Hocking. Vicar here 1881, then of Debenham 1883–90, then again here 1890–1903.
- Corporal Frank S Andrews. Killed at Pretoria, South Africa in 1900 aged 22.

Chancel

- The Revd James Tooke Hales-Tooke (died Christmas Day 1875).
- Edmund Knapp (1609). Original brass inscription.
- John Baseley Tooke (uncle of the Revd J T Hales-Tooke, d.1841).
- The Revd Joseph Clarke, Minister here for 31 years. He died in 1653, but this brass was made in 1855, when his ledger slab and the slab of Edmund Knapp were removed from the floor and broken up to make the altar step.

FURTHER READING

- S. PIPE: *Washbrook Church*, 1976. A brief history of the church, manor, clergy, etc.
- S. HARDY: *The Diary of a Suffolk Farmer's Wife 1854–69*, Macmillan, 1992. This book, about Elizabeth Cotton of Amor Hall, a deep-thinking 'Woman of Her Time', gives insights into Washbrook life and people.

Front cover: Exterior from the south-east (RCHME).

Back cover: 14th century stonework and 19th century woodwork in the chancel (RCHME).

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