

CHURCH CHANGES

Much that is mentioned can still be seen inside the church, so the illustrations concentrate on features which have either disappeared or are not currently visible.

The exterior appearance of our church has changed very little since it was built at the very end of the fifteenth century but the interior has seen a succession of alterations and restorations almost from the beginning. The earliest must have been the removal of the figures on the rood screen which divided the nave from the chancel in every church at that time. We have no visual record but a contemporary reference suggests that Dedham's screen was surmounted by the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and St John on either side flanked by archangels. They cannot have been there for long because in 1547 Henry VIII's Anglican Church decreed that all such figures should be removed. The screen itself may have survived much longer.

Luckily we have remarkable evidence of the church's appearance in the following century. By fortunate chance a very early glass negative has survived which shows the nave looking westwards in c.1850, when it was still furnished with box pews, a high pulpit and a reading desk complete with its Bible, an arrangement belonging to the heyday of Puritan worship in the parish. Sermons preaching the "pure" word of God were all-important then and Dedham had its own Lectureship set up in 1577.

A charismatic preacher John Rogers (c.1570-1636) was appointed Lecturer in 1605 and his powerful delivery earned him the name "Roaring Rogers". More space was needed to accommodate the growing congregation attending services at this time, so galleries were built across the two western bays of the nave and aisles in 1629. Although they almost collapsed under the overload of the huge numbers who attended Rogers' funeral seven years later they remained in use until they were taken down in 1862. All trace of them has long vanished though Dedham antique dealer Harry Griffiths is said to have had some of their woodwork still stored in his barn in the early twentieth century. The level of the galleries is clear because we can still see how the north door was cut across so that it could be opened underneath and deduce where the school boys sat because there are graffiti dating from 1701 onwards (like those on Shermans and the Grammar School) scratched high up on the second pillar from the west on the north side of the nave arcade.

The church has always needed constant repair and maintenance but in the words of Dedham's twentieth-century historian Canon Gerald H. Rendall "*in the Victorian years [it] experienced the blessings and the banes of the Restoration period.*" In 1862-3 the church underwent a major reordering and rearrangement. The earlier furnishings in the nave were swept away. The box pews were replaced by a complete set of up-to-date



A view looking westwards c.1850, showing the box pews, tall preaching pulpit, reading desk with Bible and organ up in the gallery.



The north door records the level of the vanished galleries at the west end of the church because it was cut across so that it could be opened underneath.



Graffiti scratched by the Grammar School boys on the second pillar of the nave arcade near the north door, showing the level of the former gallery seating.

pitch pine pews, which increased the seating by seventy places. A fashionable encaustic-tiled floor was laid, its reddish-brown and ochre patterning inspired by medieval tiles, like the comparable floor which still survives in our sister church, St Mary's, Ardleigh. During the excavations which were involved the buried fourteenth-century font from Dedham's earlier church on this site was dug up and reinstated. In the early nineteenth century attention had turned to the east end, where repair and reordering led to the installation of a redesigned east window. This was shortened c.1880 to accommodate a new reredos, which is still in place today.

A thoroughgoing restoration of the chancel followed in 1909, funded by William Wilkins Hewitt and his sister Sophia in memory of their brother James. All the furnishings including the choir stalls and altar rail were renewed and the tiled floor replaced by the present black-and-white marble paving. Four windows which had been blocked (perhaps to save the cost of necessary repairs) were opened up and filled with stained glass by W. Tower, nephew and successor of C.E. Kempe who had previously made the east window and those at either side. Comfort began to be a consideration and because extra windows in the chancel would have made it colder, a gas heater was installed there in 1909. In 1882 two cast-iron solid fuel stoves had been brought in to warm the nave. By the late nineteenth

century there was gas lighting. The church was lit by electricity for the first time on Palm Sunday 1934.

The organ in the west gallery had been made by William Hill and Son in 1843 and funded by subscription. It was enlarged in 1871 and brought down to ground level; in 1887 it was moved to the east end of the south aisle where it remained until 1975, when it was returned to its present position in the west gallery. It conceals the door to the ringing chamber, which was installed in 1963 as part of a major restoration and embellishment of the church which took place in the early 1960s.

To that time belong the carved angels' heads in the chancel by Aileen Kent and the heraldic shields on the nave roof. The font was moved from its central position near the choir vestry into the south-west corner of the south aisle. The nave was transformed once again. Stone and parquet flooring replaced the Victorian encaustic tiles and in the early 1970s the present oak seating with carved roundels and inscriptions replaced the pitch pine pews.

Innovations in the twenty-first century have been practical. In the early 2000s the stairs to the west gallery were rebuilt, replacing the worn-out steps with new ones carved with the names of donors or the loved ones they wished to commemorate. This made it possible for the public to access a new viewing platform constructed on top of the tower which was opened in 2007.

Toilets have been installed this year inside the former Vicar's Vestry in the south porch, out of sight from the nave behind its closed doors.

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The organ made by William Hill and Son in 1843 situated at the east end of the south aisle in the 1960s.



View looking eastwards showing the east window shortened to accommodate the reredos installed c.1880. Note the gas lighting, the central position of the font and the encaustic-tiled floor.

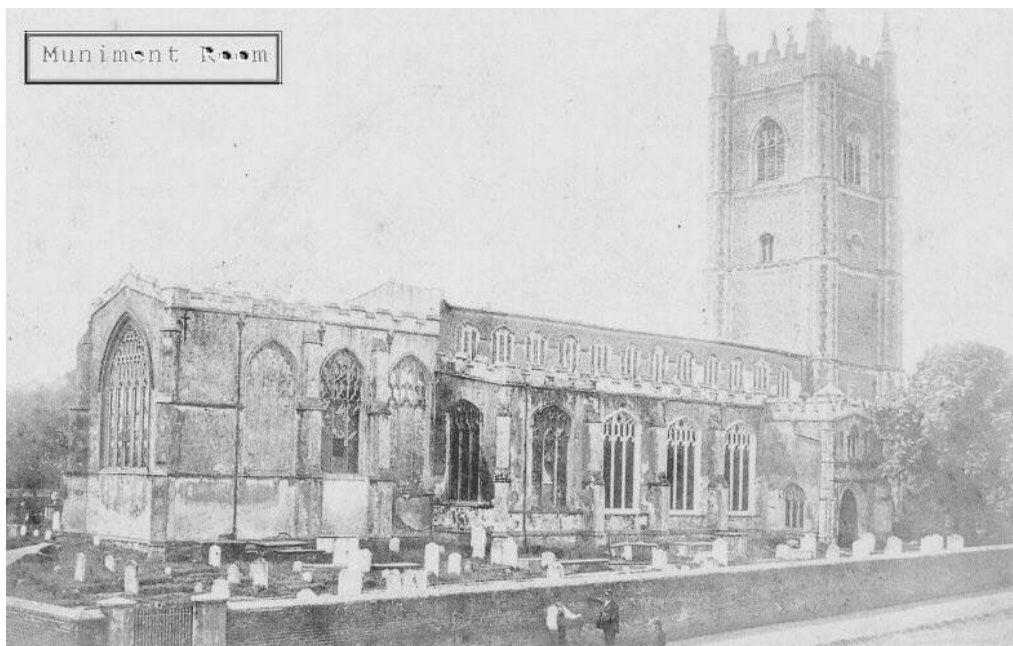


The door to the ringing chamber, designed by the church's architect Raymond Erith in 1963, which has been hidden by the organ since it was moved back to the West Gallery in 1975.



The staircase to the west gallery with steps carved with the names of donors or loved ones to be commemorated

The former Vicar's Vestry c.1970; this space is now occupied by new toilets installed in 2021 which are concealed behind its closed doors



The north side of the church c.1900 showing two blocked windows in the chancel. Note that the lime trees had not yet been planted but the chestnut was already well established.



The south side of the church c.1905 showing two of the blocked windows in the chancel which were opened up in 1909.



The chancel in the mid-nineteenth century showing the east window of c.1820, which was shortened in 1880 to accommodate the present reredos. The furnishings were all replaced in 1909 by those we know now.