

For nearly 900 years Christians have gathered in this lovely old building to celebrate, to express joy, to give thanks, to seek help, to weep, and to express sadness and grief.

Above all they have met to offer praise and worship to almighty God, through his Son Jesus Christ.

Beautiful and historic though our church is, it is so much more than a beautiful and historic building.

One of the most visited churches in the country, St Mary's is a testimony to the faith of generations of Christians whose lives have been enriched through their relationship with the Living God.

Our prayer is that our visitors will come to know the Living God to whose glory these stones have been laid and lovingly maintained.



HISTORY OF ST MARY'S CHURCH



ST MARY'S CHURCH OLD KNEBWORTH

St Mary's Church

The Parish Church of

St Mary the Virgin and St Thomas of Canterbury

The ancient Parish Church of Knebworth, dedicated to The Virgin Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury (Thomas á Becket) is known generally as St Mary's. Both St Mary and St Thomas are commemorated in the West window. Originally St Mary's stood at the heart of the mediaeval village of Knebworth, the earliest record of which is in the Domesday Book, where it is among the lands of Eudo the King's Steward, son of Hubert de Ryes, sublet to Humphrey de Anneville. When Knebworth Park was created, most probably in the late 13th century, the former settlement was relocated about ½ kilometre to the south, leaving only the church and some earthworks as evidence for the mediaeval village. Although the present church dates from the 12th century, there is evidence for an earlier building on the site

The nave and chancel are the oldest parts of the church, dating from 1120 (the reign of Henry I, son of William the Conqueror), but the chancel was rebuilt during the last century. The porch, on the South side of the church, dates from the early 19th century (reign of Queen Anne) but the doorway is much older: 1380 (Richard II, son of the Black Prince). The pulpit is of 18th century oak, but it has on it four Flemish carved panels depicting the Annunciation, the Circumcision, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Nativity. These date from about 1567 (the reign of Elizabeth I). The pews are 15th century and of oak.

The tower was built by Sir John Hotoft, owner of Knebworth in 1420. Sir John was Treasurer to the Household of Henry VI. Part of his tomb can be seen in the entrance to the Lytton Chapel. Dating from 1480 (Edward IV and the Wars of the Roses) in the base of the tower stands the octagonal limestone font. Here, through the centuries, literally thousands of people have been baptised into the Christian faith.

The belfry contains a peal of eight bells, of various dates from 1627 to 1897.

Also in the tower are two panels giving the names of the Rectors and Patrons from 1294 (the time of Edward I) to the present day. The first recorded Rector is Richard de Andeville who died in 1294, at which time the Patron was Sir Robert de Hoo.

The list also includes Simon Bache who was priest at Knebworth from 1405 to 1414. A fine brass mounted on the Chancel wall commemorates him and the inscription translates as follows:

" Here lies Lord Simon Bache, priest, formerly Treasurer of the household of the most illustrious Prince Henry V, King of England, and Canon of the Cathedral Church of St Paul's in London, who died on the 19th of May in the year of our Lord 1414."



In the Chancel, the altar is of 18th century oak inlaid with mahogany. Above it is a 17th century Italian painting of The Last Supper. On the North side of the Chancel is the Lytton Family Chapel, first built about 1520 (reign of Henry VIII) and rebuilt some 200 years later. The sculpturing in the Lytton Chapel is amongst some of the finest in the country.