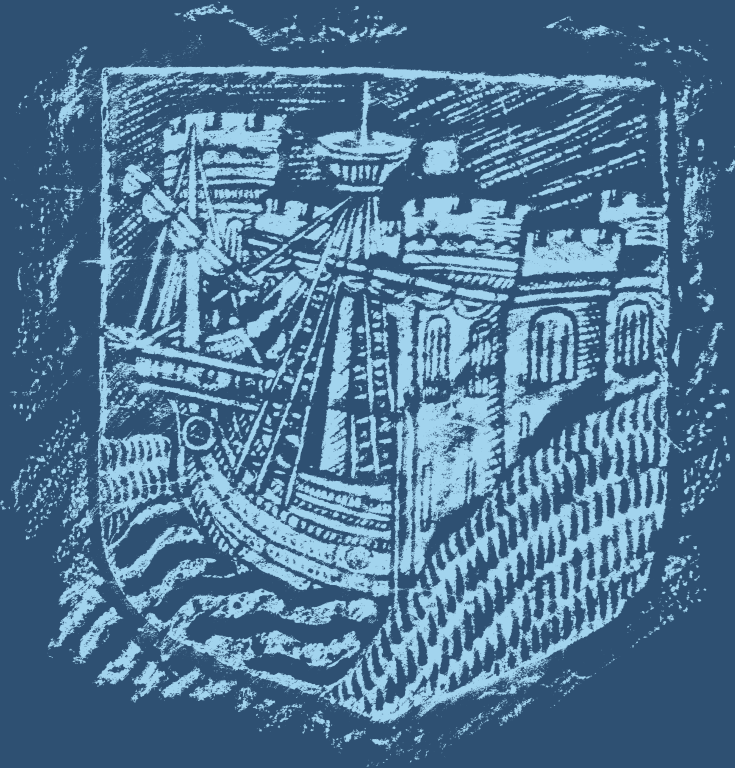


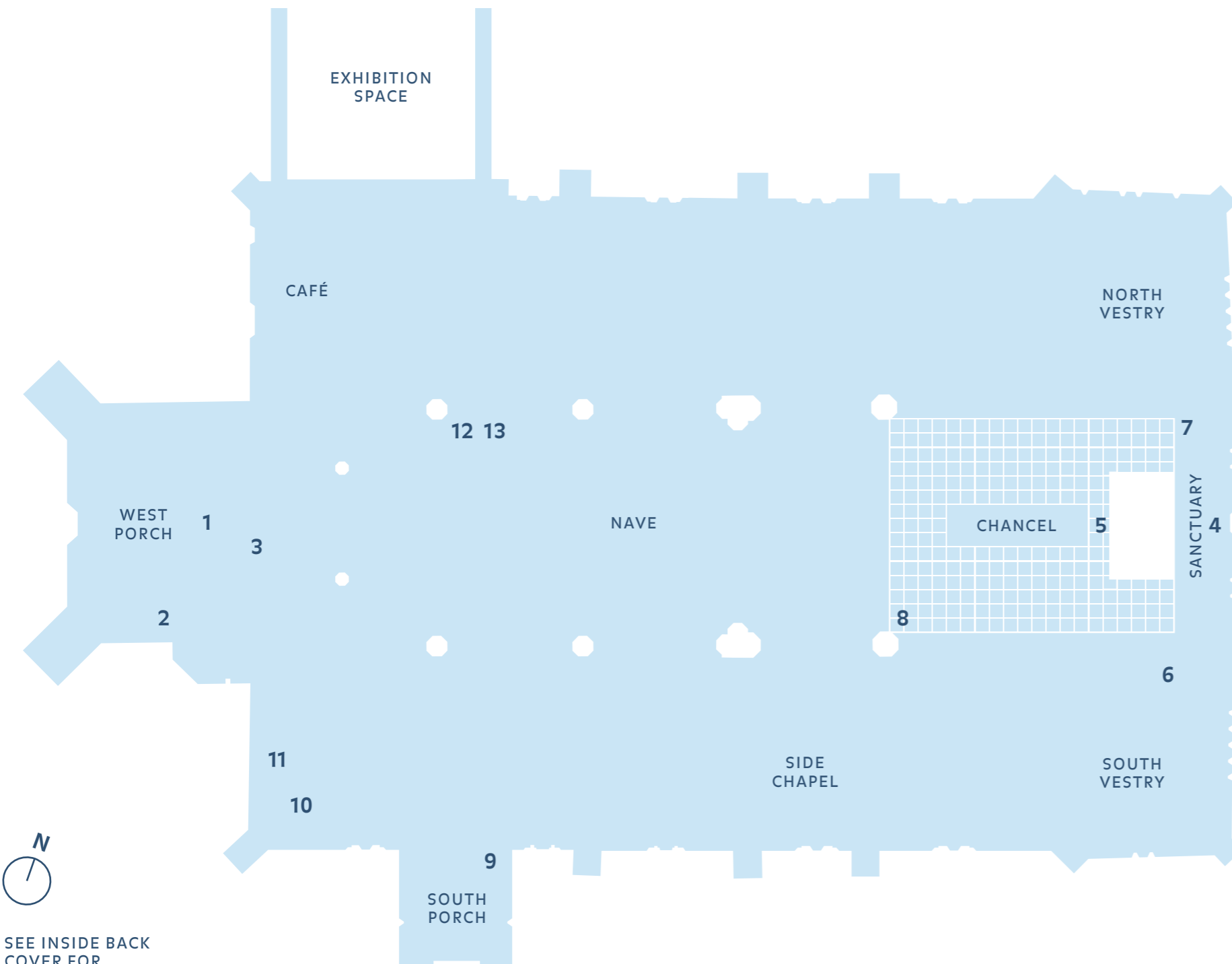


CREATIVE
CHURCH



ST MARY'S
WALTHAMSTOW

MAP



SEE INSIDE BACK
COVER FOR
CHURCHYARD MAP

St Mary's has a long tradition of arts, music and creative expression, connecting with the wider history of innovation and creativity in Walthamstow. This leaflet guides you on a tour of the church and churchyard, introducing important architectural and design features, as well as stories and symbols from across 900 years of history. Originally a Norman church commissioned in the early 1100s by Ralph de Toni, St Mary's has been shaped by numerous creative people across the centuries.

We invite you to start your tour at the entrance to the church. The maps on the front and back covers of this leaflet will help guide your journey. The numbers on the map correspond to the numbers next to the names of key church features.

1 THE WEST PORCH

Looking up in the West Porch, you will see the original 16th century oak beams which support the weight of the tower. If you look to either side of the porch, just beyond the end of the oak beams, you can see the two stages of the building of the tower. The lower whitish stone is the Kentish rag-stone of the original tower (probably dating from the early 15th century) and the bricks at head height and above are Tudor bricks from the rebuilding in 1535. Tudor bricks are smaller than modern day bricks, so can be easily told apart.



2 THE BELL TOWER

Looking to the right as you face the nave, you will see a small, locked wooden door. This leads to steps which climb the church bell tower. The tower is 19 metres high, with 67 internal stairs, and offers fantastic panoramic views of the surrounding area from the top. The records show an earlier bell tower existed in 1431, when repairs to the 'steeple' were requested. George Monoux completed the rebuilding of the tower in 1535. The tower can occasionally be visited on specific guided tours, so please do keep an eye on our website.

3 THE ORGAN

As you walk into the nave of the church, look back and upwards to see the organ which is positioned above the West Porch. This was first installed in 1848 and later restored after suffering damage during World War Two bombing. A significant organist from St Mary's history was George Bird (1811–94), who held the post for 65 years. As a blind person, Bird made a highly successful career from music at a time when people with disabilities faced huge societal barriers to work. As well as performing as an organist, Bird was also a teacher and arranger of music.



4 EAST WINDOW

Walk now through the nave towards the largest stained-glass window in the church, the beautiful East Window above the Chancel and Sanctuary. This window replaced the original rose window after Miriam Harris – later the first female churchwarden of St Mary's – generously offered to place it in memory of her husband. It was dedicated on All Saints' Day in 1937, temporarily removed during World War Two, and then replaced after the war ended.

The window represents the *Te Deum*, an ancient Christian hymn, and features angels, saints, and church leaders. If you look very closely, you might see the tiny 'White Friar' symbol in the border at the bottom right corner. This is the 'signature' of James Powell & Sons Ltd, also known as Whitefriars, the company who made the window.



5,6 SANCTUARY

The Sanctuary, or the space surrounding the communion table, is at the far east of the church beneath the East Window. All of the furniture here is made of carved oak, including the Lord's Table, dating to 1905. The wonderful carving behind the Lord's Table is based on Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (5) and shows Jesus with his disciples the night before he was arrested.

To the right of the Sanctuary as you face the East Window, you will see the pulpit (6). This dates from 1903 and bears a representation of the Apostle Paul, who is seen holding a book and sword. The book reminds us of his contribution to the Bible through his letters in the New Testament, whilst the sword represents his martyrdom by Roman soldiers in 67 AD.



7 MERRY MONUMENT

On the north wall of the Sanctuary is the Merry Monument, a memorial to Sir Thomas (died 1654) and Dame Mary Merry (died 1632). The sculptor was Nicholas Stone, Master Mason to Charles I. The skull that Dame Mary holds symbolises that she had died when this monument was placed, whereas Sir Thomas was still alive, represented by the book in his hand. Sir Thomas Merry held an important position in the Royal Household and was an ardent Royalist. During the Civil War, he was fined for his allegiance to the crown by the Parliamentarians and suffered the loss of his goods. This is probably why there is no name inscribed on his side of the monument – there was no money to pay for it!



8 LECTERN

Moving towards the south side of the church you will find the lectern from which the Bible is read. It dates from 1903. The brass eagle is seen by many as representative of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. In this interpretation, the eagle is strong and powerful, with the wings spreading forth to carry the word of God.



9 HOLY WATER STOUP

Continue along the south side of the church to find the South Porch entrance, built in 1535. The south door would have been the main route of entry at this time. On the inside wall to the left as you enter the porch is a Holy Water Stoup. This was used for passers-by to bless themselves with holy water in the days when the church followed Roman Catholic teaching, before Henry VIII broke with Rome. No doubt the practice of using holy water continued for some time before the Protestant way of worship took hold, and this stoup provided blessings to people even when the church was closed.



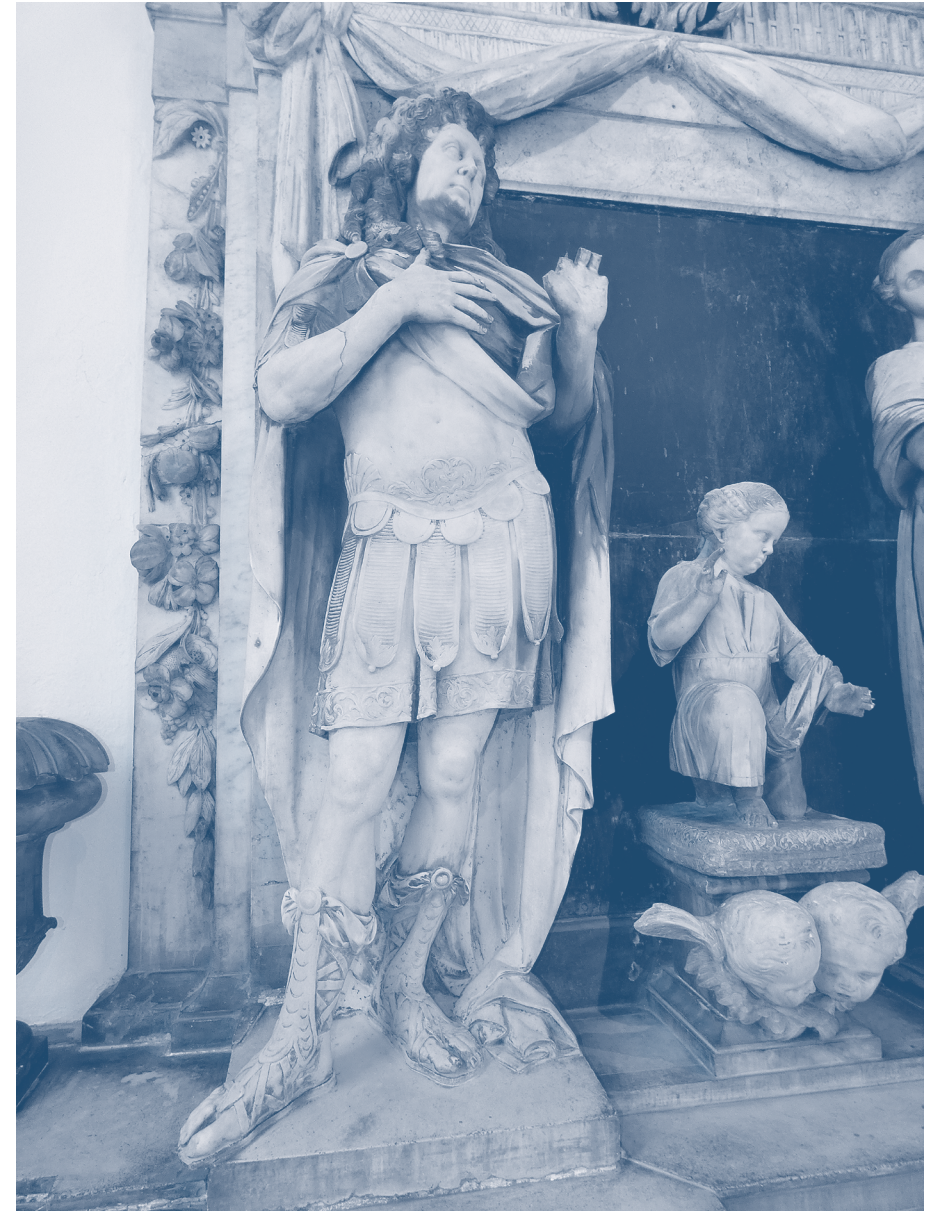
10 FONT

Continue on from the South Porch and find this fine example of a white veined marble font with a fluted bowl, raised and resting on an octagonal base. It was presented to the church in 1714 by Francis Eyles, a London alderman, at a cost of £15 (around £2,000 today). The famous designer and activist William Morris, who appears in the St Mary's baptism register of 1834, would have been baptised in this font. This page of the register shows Morris's father's occupation as 'Gentleman'. The occupations of other fathers shown on the same page include a gardener, a lawyer, a soap boiler, a servant, a husbandman, a bricklayer, and a waiter. As it is today, Walthamstow was home to people of many different backgrounds during the 1800s. They came together under this roof to worship and bless the arrival of their children.



11 SIGISMUND TRAFFORD

On the west wall of the south side of the church you'll find the Trafford Monument, the largest in the church. It was installed by Sigismund Trafford (1643–1723) after the death of his wife in 1689. The Traffords were a wealthy family with a long history. Sigismund Trafford's immediate forebears were London merchants, whilst he became an MP. In this elaborate monument, the family is in Roman dress. This style was popular at the time for gentlemen of 'rank', and it signifies an admiration for the customs and practices of government in ancient Rome. The monument is in the style of Grinling Gibbons and, though we do not have the records to confirm this, may well have come from his workshop. Gibbons' work in wood and stone very often included a carving of a peapod. Legend has it that an open peapod indicated that he had received payment for his work, whilst if left shut he had not been paid. You can check the peapod in this monument to see if the Traffords had paid their dues!





12 NAVE AND COLUMNS

Now return to the Nave where you can imagine the original site of the 12th century church. It was a plain, rectangular building with no aisles, galleries or tower. The Nave measured 14m x 7m, which is the area enclosed by the first four pairs of columns starting with those on the west (back) wall up to the large, clustered columns. The Chancel at the east end, beyond the clustered columns, was 9m x 7m. The base of these columns are the oldest visible parts of the church and date from the 13th Century when the side aisles were added.

In 1843 when the church was reordered, the upper parts of the pillars were cut octagonal but the lower portions of some of the columns were left untouched, as they were hidden by the high box pews. You can see the stonemasons' chisel marks on the lower sections.

13 ANGELS

If you look up, you will see the carved angels which support the roof. Angels are messengers in the Christian faith, and these ones have been in place since 1876 when the interior was renovated.

The next five features are viewable from outside the church (you will find a map at the back of this booklet to help you). Leave the church through the West Porch, turn right, and walk around the main buttress on the north-west wall. Please be aware that the ground may be uneven and slippery in wet weather in the churchyard, so do tread carefully.



IN THE CHURCHYARD

14 AGNUS DEI

Look up above head height and see the small (about the size of a dinner plate) carving of the *Agnus Dei* (Latin for 'Lamb of God'), which is an ancient Christian symbol showing a sheep carrying a cross. It is probably early 16th century and is said to be a consecration cross, declaring the church as sacred. It was originally above the West Porch door and was relocated when the tower was rebuilt in 1535.



15 SOLLY VAULT

With your back to the church, go through the churchyard gate, which you will find opposite and slightly to the left of the West Porch door. Through the gate, you will find an outstanding, grade II listed tomb belonging to Isaac Solly, a merchant who died in 1802 at the age of 77. During the Napoleonic Wars, his company Isaac Solly and Sons were principal contractors supplying hemp and timber to government dockyards. The vault displays a lion's head and feet, representing the power of God guarding against evil. The monument is made of Coade stone, an innovative artificial stone developed in the late 1700s and sold by the pioneering businesswoman Eleanor Coade.



16 LEFEVRE VAULT

Continue along the path towards the big Georgian building opposite, which is the church hall, known as the Welcome Centre. You will come across this tomb to the left of the path, which is the burial place of Peter Lefevre (died 1751). Lefevre's parents were Huguenot refugees who fled France in the mid 1680s. Lefevre bought Three Mills in Bow in 1727 and, with others, set up a successful gin distilling business. He rented the Water House, which is now the William Morris Gallery. Note the carving of the skull and bones on his tomb, a *memento mori*, or reminder of earthly mortality.



17
ELIZABETH CASS

With your back to the church, turn right from Lefevre's tomb and walk along a narrow path leading north. You will soon see the only vault in the churchyard with railings. A pre-Christian belief was that evil spirits could not cross iron. Iron railings around a grave thus symbolise that the dead are protected from evil. The tomb of Elizabeth Cass is the only tomb in the churchyard which retained its railings when others were taken for the war effort in 1942, as it had recently been refurbished by Walthamstow Antiquarian Society. As you walk through the churchyard, look out for the traces of railings around other tombs.



18
DOBRÉE FAMILY VAULT

A little further along the path is the Dobrée family vault. This is decorated with a coat of arms, as well as several interesting symbols. The acanthus leaf motif was first used by the Ancient Greeks, who noticed that this plant often grew in cemeteries, leading it to be associated with the 'heavenly garden'. The upturned bird under the leaf represents a life ended. The snake coiled into a circle is another symbol from Ancient Greece and Egypt. This is known as an *ouroboros* and represents the eternal cycle of life and death. The cup, book and plate of bread at the east end of the vault depict the meal of the Holy Communion.





Thank you for visiting St Mary's. You can find out more about the church's history through the alternative tour leaflet, **WALTHAMSTOW LIVES**, or by joining one of our tours or events. More details are available at: stmaryswalthamstow.org