

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The **CHURCHYARD** (said to be coffin shaped!) was laid out in 1825 when buildings which had for centuries crowded close to the church were cleared away. These included a Market Hall and school to the east and a group of tenements and a tavern to the west. The pretty gothic railings were reinstated in 1984.

Close to the churchyard gates, is the **MEMORIAL**, with its draped urn and relief portrait, to local worthy Joseph Dawson, who died in 1834.

A quaint **TOMB STONE** on the north side of the churchyard shows Death (or Father Time?) coming for a wan Victorian youth!

The 1887 **STATUE OF GLADSTONE**, sculpted by Albert Bruce-Joy, was donated by the directors of Bryant and May's match factory. The tradition of daubing the statue with red paint (for blood!) comes from a misapprehension that it was paid for in part by a forced levy from the match worker's wages.

From the churchyard gates there is a nice view of the church tower and it is a good place, too, to hear the **CHURCH BELLS**. Eight bells were donated to St Mary's from the 18th century onwards and were replaced after the bombing of the church. Sadly, we cannot claim that these were the 'Bow Bells' that defined a cockney. That honour belonged to St Mary Le Bow in Cheapside. (Though, modern Cockneys are much more likely to be born within the sound of our Bow bells!)

The old rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons', however, does seem to have an eastward thrust – through Aldgate, Shoreditch and Stepney, to– the '**GREAT BELL OF BOW**'.

For 700 years the church of St Mary, Stratford Bow, has stood in the middle not just of the 'King's Highway' but also of its community as Bow changed from rural hamlet to part of modern London's East End. Its history is told in its fabric and will continue to be as we prepare for its next century, witnessing to the love of God for our world and our city.

Thank you for your visit. Go in peace – and remember Bow Church and its people in your prayers.

*THE PARISH OF
ST MARY & HOLY TRINITY, BOW*

GUIDE

TO THE CHURCH OF ST MARY, BOW



WELCOME TO BOW CHURCH

A church here was licenced by the Bishop of London in 1311 and built a few years later. It was largely rebuilt in the 1490s and that is the building, restored over the centuries, which we see today.

THE TOWER, battered by time, weather and war, illustrates much of the story of Bow Church. The well-worn lower part dates mainly from the 15th century. The upper storey collapsed in a storm in 1829 and was restored in medieval style but was then destroyed in the last and worst raid of the Blitz in May 1941. The elegant restoration, in brick with its white turret, was completed in 1951 by H.S. Goodhart Rendel. He also added the new south 'Tuscan' porch at the same time.

Inside the building, the **FONT** dates from about 1410. It was discarded in 1624 in favour of a 'modern' version. It lay in the garden of the priest's house (later the workhouse) for 300 years and was rescued and replaced in Victorian times. It was then damaged in the 1941 bombing. No wonder it looks rather battered.

Beside it stands the **PASCHAL CANDLE**, originally lit on Easter Day to celebrate the Resurrection faith into which Christians are baptised.

To the left, the **ST STEPHEN'S WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL** contains mementoes of the Tower Hamlets' Rifles Regiment and the Rolls of Honour of St Mary's, St Stephen's, Old Ford, which was bombed in the War, and of Holy Trinity, Mile End, which merged with St Mary's in 2006.

In **THE NAVE**, with its low octagonal columns, notice the very narrow side aisles and lack of symmetry. The north wall may contain remnants of the original 14th-century building. The church has always been constricted by standing in the middle of the road and, as early as the 18th century, it was seen by some as an obstacle to traffic! The windows' double glazing was a much appreciated innovation of 1900. The noise of horses, carts and carriages on cobblestones must have been quite something.

The oak beams of the coupled-rafter **ROOF** were hidden for several centuries by a false flat plaster ceiling, which was finally taken down in the 19th century.

Two imposing 17th-century **MEMORIALS**, to members of the Coborn family, dominate the nave. To the right is that of Prisca Coborn, daughter of the minister and widow of a brewer, who became a local benefactress and is remembered in the names of local streets, pubs and schools. (It was Mrs Coborn who donated the plaster ceiling.) Opposite is that of her step-daughter Alice, who was buried on what should have been her wedding day – she was 15!

The **PARISH REGISTERS**, which survive almost completely from 1538 (and are kept at the London Metropolitan Archives where they can be consulted), tell us that Prisca was buried by the church door '*four foot deep, on her mother*'.

In the left aisle the **RUST MEMORIAL** of 1704 commemorates, among others, Edward Rust, a 'scarlet dyer'. Dyeing was one of the early industries that developed along the River Lea; trades which were to cause enormous levels of pollution in the 19th century. Edward Rust also served as Parish Clerk, though not it seems a very efficient one. The minister could never get him to hand over the registers!

Also in the left aisle, **THE HOLY TRINITY HANGING**, designed and made by Brian Coleman in 1994, commemorates the parish of Holy Trinity, Mile End.

The unassuming **PULPIT** was donated in 1887 as part of one of many Victorian restorations and 'improvements' to the building: work which avoided the frequently called for demolition and rebuilding of the decaying old church. The major restoration in 1899 was one of the first victories of the fledgling conservation movement.

Across the church, in the right aisle, the oldest **MEMORIAL** in the building, from 1551, is to Grace Amcotte, wife of a 'ffyshmongr'.

The **CHOIR STALLS** were designed, about 1900, by C.R. Ashbee, whose influential Guild of Handicraft was based in Mile End Road and who was prominent in saving and restoring the old church.

Though the **CHANCEL**, as we see it, is largely Victorian, the roof is medieval. The altar cross came from Holy Trinity, Mile End. The 1874 Bible and Book of Common Prayer are from the notable Rectorship of the Revd George Townshend Driffield, 1844-1880. It was he who introduced choral music to the church.

The copy of Dali's **PAINTING** of 'Christ of St John of The Cross' was recently donated to the church.

The unusual **EAST WINDOW** by H. Lewis Curtis, installed in the post war restoration, is a renaissance pastiche with no Christian symbols, but it is interesting and pleasing and fits in well. Look for the charming little mice, squirrel, owl, pigeons and cat featured in the design!

The flamboyant **MEMORIAL** to the Walker family, complete with busts and cherubs, dates from 1712 and, on the left wall that to Thomas Jordan is from 1671. Jordan, a merchant who had 14 children, is buried below his memorial, under the choir stalls! At least four Rectors of the church are buried in the chancel. The tomb stone of one of them, Thomas White, who died in 1709, was removed in the 19th century to the churchyard, to the north west of the church.