



St. Mary the Virgin

A Visitors' Guide



St. Mary the Virgin

The church of St. Mary the Virgin, Kempford, is one of the Cotswolds' best kept secrets. This majestic building, with its gaunt ashlar front, rises from the water meadows of the Thames in stark beauty. There are no frills here, simply a testament to the power and the glory of God. The visitor enters the churchyard through a pitch-roofed and dormered lych-gate, surmounted by a delicate iron-work cross and built in 1865 by J. & J. Bowley as part of the extensive restoration works of that period. There is a cluster of C18 carved chest tombs on the left and a low trefoil arch in the outer North wall of the Chancel holds a memorial to members of RAF Squadrons 190 & 620.

St. Mary's was begun in the mid- C12 and most of the Norman nave of that date survives, including four of the original deeply splayed windows (though not with glass of that date). The North and South doorways too remain, with the chevron mouldings typical of the period. Other features from that time include the flat pilaster buttresses at the West end and the string-course with zigzag mouldings running over the buttresses. There is much for the visitor to absorb. This booklet takes the form of a walk through the church, its information given not chronologically, but related to each feature as it is encountered.

The North Porch (built circa 1520) is the point of entry. Its doorway has a chevroned arch, shafts with zigzag mouldings and scalloped capitals, but its tympanum, where a sculpture or relief might be expected, is empty. Its outer four-centred arch is adorned with three angels bearing shields. Under the porch to the left, is a crocketed and pinnacled ogee, possibly once a niche for the Rood, or an Easter Sepulchre moved down from the Chancel