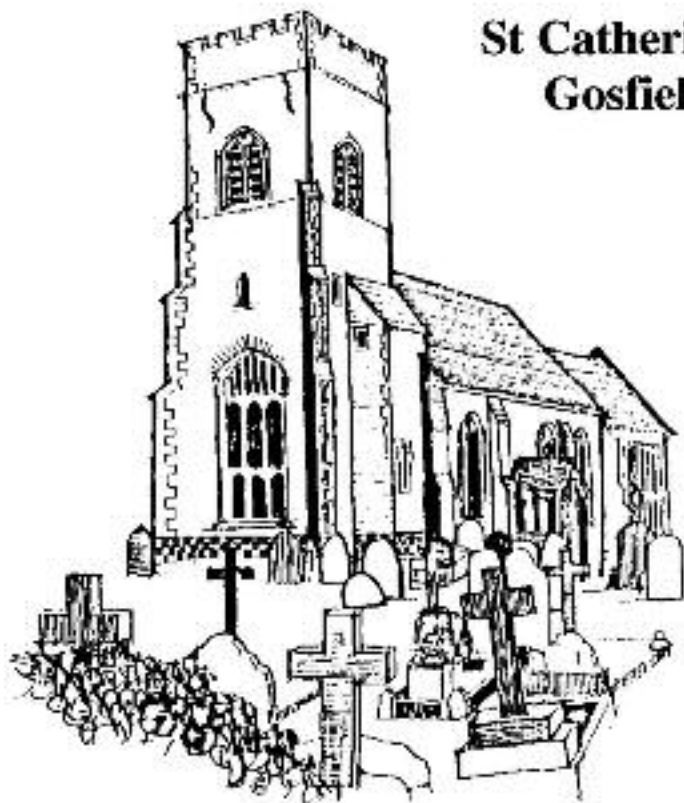




St Catherine's Gosfield



THE PARISH

The origin of the village name is not known for certain. It may be derived from Gorsfield (gorse grows in the sandy areas round the village), Goosefeld, or even Godsfield. It is unlikely that it comes from the prefix 'Cors' meaning 'fen' or bog' because of the situation of the village. Gosfield is not mentioned in the Domesday book, as the land belonged to the adjoining lordships of Castle Hedingham, Halstead, Hocking, Wethersfield and Gestingthorpe. It became a separate and distinct parish in the reign of Henry II with a charter from Alberic de Vere, 2nd Earl of Oxford, and the use of 'de Gosfield' in surnames in the district dates from that time. The village was divided into several manors Bellows, on which Gosfield Hall was built, Park Hall, Aylewards, Shardlowes, and Liston Hall. These names survive today.

The development of the church and the village has always been linked with the great estates of Gosfield Hall and of Gosfield Place (now demolished). The earliest Gosfield Hall was built by the Rolfs, founders of the present church, and the Hall was replaced by Wentworth's later building (again there is a link with the church in the Wentworth chapel). The location of the church also emphasises the connection with Gosfield Hall, but later development of the village has taken place away from the church, along the main road routes. The great estates were the major employers, and the generosity of the owners provided the village school and Park Cottages in the 19th century.

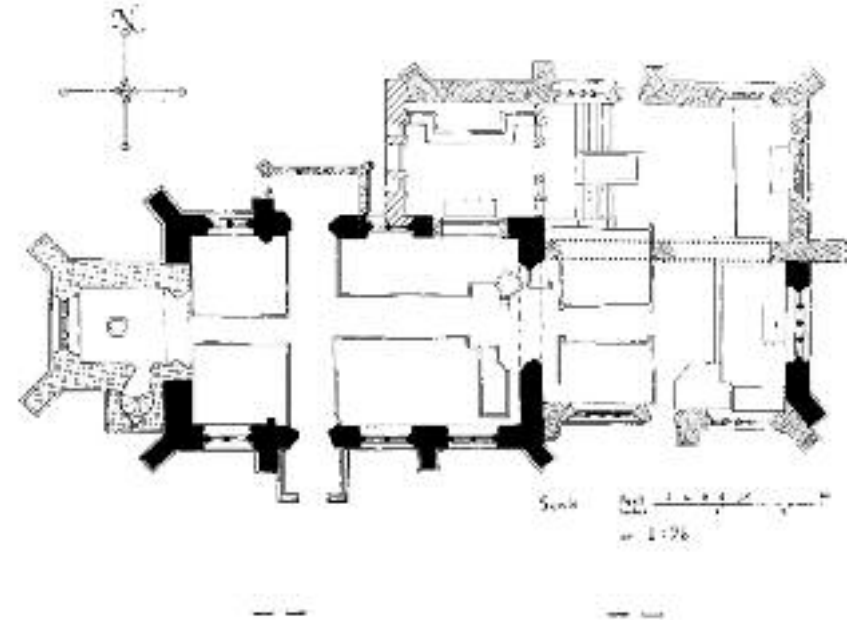
Today many residents commute to neighbouring towns and to London, but the village retains a separate identity from nearby Halstead and Braintree.






THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

The first church was built by Aubrey de Vere, third Earl of Oxford, the princely owner of much of north Essex, in 1190. His countess had recently built a convent at Hedingham, and the titles of the new church were given to the nunnery. When Henry VIII suppressed the convent in 1536 he presented the titles to the 15th Earl, known as the good Earl of Oxford'. His effigy in black marble lies in the chancel at Castle Hedingham Parish Church.

As one approaches Gosfield church through the lych gate a silver star can be seen, painted on the corner buttress. It is the de Vere star or mullet of the Earls of Oxford. When the buttress was rebuilt in 1560 the 16th Earl had just paid for a new roof to the chancel, and as a compliment to him his star was placed on the east, the corner of the church which looks towards Hedingham. So the connection between the de Veres. Hedingham and Gosfield is acknowledged.

But we have no idea what the first church looked like. There is no written description and no foundations have been found, so we have no indication of the size or appearance of the building. Evidently it was considerably smaller than the present church. By the 1400s the Commissioners declared that Gosfield was 'a great town having in it the number of 240 housing people (i.e. communicants). So Sir Thomas and Lady Rolf in 1435 built a new church. We know what it looked like, for today it is much as it was then. We even know what the founder looked like, because his brass is in the sanctuary of the church.



	Perpendicular 1435
	Late Perpendicular 1490
	Tudor 1560
	Georgian 1736
	Victorian Late 19th century

1190	First church built by Aubrey de Vere
1435	Second church built by Sir Thomas Rolf
1440	Memorial brass to Sir Thomas Rolf
1490	Tower built by Sir Thomas's daughter
1534	Tomb in chapel to Sir Hugh & Lady Rolf
1560	Chapel re-built by Sir John Wentworth
1567	Tomb under chancel arch to Sir John Wentworth
1736	Georgian family pew (with Ryebreck memorial)
1877	Organ built by Hill & Co.
1917	Electric light installed

15th CENTURY

The brass (1440) is on the south side of the high altar. It shows Rolf in his robes as a Serjeant-at-Law, a title which now survives in the Common Serjeant of the City of London. It is the only brass figure of a Serjeant in Essex, one of only five in England. The hatchment hanging in the chancel shows his coat of arms and that of his wife, Anne Hawkswood, heiress of the Gosfield Hall estates,

Of the 15th century church, the perpendicular east window and the nave remain, and the oak doors of the main entrance. The stained glass with which the Rolfs filled the windows has all gone, except for some fragments which were put together in the north window of the nave.

The Rolfs had only one child, Editta. The brass to her second husband John Green (1473) has gone, but the shape of it can clearly be seen in the nave. Editta may have been responsible for the building of the church tower in about 1490 as a climax to her father's building. Most of the village churches were first built without towers, with timber turrets occupying a western bay holding a single bell. The original bell at Gosfield survives. It was cast by Thomas Potter of Norwich and is one of the oldest bells in Essex. The second bell, dated 1637, by Miles Graye of Colchester, was the gift of Viscountess Dorchester, who had just bought Gosfield Hall. The treble, by Henry Pleasant of Sudbury, was added by Thomas Millington on his accession to the estates in 1704. Three bells, cast by Taylors of Loughborough, were added in 1962.

The church is dedicated to St Catherine of Alexandria, a patron of learning in the 15th century.

16th CENTURY

Rolf's great-great grandson, Sir John Wentworth, built the Tudor chapel in 1560. Wentworth had just completed the building of Gosfield Hall, in which he entertained Queen Elizabeth in 1561 (as did his daughter in 1579). He excavated a large vault beneath the chapel (since known as the Wentworth chapel) for the burial of himself and his family. To enable that to be done Sir John re-built the north wall of the chapel and the arches leading from the chancel.

These extensive alterations threw the east window out of centre. The widening of the chancel also accounts for the double buttress at the south-east corner of the chancel: the inner buttress is Rolfs and the outer one is Wentworth's. In front of the buttress is a tomb of Purbeck marble, which used to bear the names of Sir John and Lady Wentworth on the brass fillet. But there are signs of other and earlier brass shields on the tomb, and the style of carving is said to be some 50 years before the death of the Wentworths.

The other Purbeck tomb in the chapel is dated 1554 and carries an inscription commemorating 'Sur Hew Ryche (eldest son of Lord Chancellor Rich) 'who maryed Anne the Daughter and Ayre of Sur John Wentworth knyght'. But there are rivet holes of former brasses and again the tomb is said to be earlier than its inscription.

Wentworth provided seating for the congregation some proper benches so that the people need not stand for the whole service. In the choir stalls there are four bench ends with popey heads (from the French poupée, puppet). The Flemish linenfold panelling at the back of the choir stalls dates from about 1520,

18th CENTURY

An extraordinary part of the church is the Georgian family pew. It was built in 1736 to commemorate John Knight, MP, by his widow, later Countess Nugent. 'The memorial pew, with its opening looking into the nave, is now used as a choir vestry. It houses a handsome plaster ceiling and a remarkable memorial (looking somewhat out of place) by Rysbreck, the famous 18th century sculptor.

The daughter of Mr and Mrs John Knight married George Grenville, first Marquess of Buckingham, who introduced straw-plaiting as a village industry in 1790. Straw hats were made, and the Buckinghams publicised the hats by wearing them around the village. The Marquess, we are told, 'hung his straw hat ostentatiously over the front of the Hall pew'. The Marchioness is commemorated in the hatchment on the north wall of the Wentworth chapel. The three hatchments over the Tudor arches in the chancel are to the Sparrow family of Gosfield Place (a house now demolished).

In 1704 the Gosfield estates were inherited by Thomas Millington, and he presented to the church two chalices, a paten and a flagon, most of it family plate from the Hall. The plate, with hail marks of 1604 to 1611, is of tooled silver. It is kept in a Bank safe deposit and used only on the greater festivals.

The six Constables staves in the family pew are from the reign of William IV (1830 to 1837). The coat of arms over the south door is late George III (1760 to 1820). The Lord's Prayer and Creed wording on the nave walls was discovered when lime washing was done in the last century. It may well date from the late 17th century.

19th CENTURY

Like most churches, St Catherine's has a number of 19th century additions to record. Often Victorian restoration was heavy and deadening, but this church shows very few harsh outlines, even in the stained glass - which has often spoilt an ancient interior with its hard, unyielding, primary colours. The stained glass here in the east window is by Clayton & Bell, 1880, and it enriches the interior with its subtle colours. The glass in the Wentworth chapel dates from 1980. It was designed by Goddard & Gibbs, as was the most recent addition, the memorial to Commander Lowe, installed in the nave in 1987.

The timbered porch to the south door, protecting the beautiful main door of the church, is 19th century, as is the Priests Vestry on the north side of the nave. The handsome box pews are thought to date from 1830, and the choir stalls from 1850. The organ, a superbly toned one manual tracker action, was built for the church in 1877 by Hill & Co.

The church registers go back without a break to 1539. Like all ancient ecclesiastical records in the diocese, they are stored at the Records Office in Chelmsford. An extremely well documented index is kept in the Vicarage.

In the churchyard there are some fine 18th century and 19th century monuments. One — to the west of the tower — is to the Poor Clare nuns who fled to Gosfield with their priest during the religious persecution following the French Revolution. They lived in Church Road (in the old house at Highfields) and the nearby road called Nuns Meadow is named after them.

TODAY

A major restoration was carried out in 1988 and a great deal of ingenuity was needed to raise some £50,000, a great deal of money for such a small community.

Maintenance of church fabric is a constant concern especially in an ancient building. We are fortunate in having The Friends of St. Catherine's which hopes to be able to help with any major structural repairs which may arise. Currently we are also concerned that our lighting system is now nearly fifty years old. The 'Up-dated' heating system had to wait until after World War Two before it could be completed but it doesn't provide the standards of comfort expected today

Although the building is important, we have to remember why it was built. It exists for the worship of God and is a place where his people can come together for corporate prayer and fellowship.

THE FUTURE

The Church of God is a living organism and whilst we have inherited a medieval monument it has to meet the needs of today and be fit for the next generation.

We are investigating the possibility of some internal re-ordering so that the church can best serve the needs of the community. It must be remembered that the church is here to serve the community of Gosfield and whilst it strives to be the soul of the community it also needs to have concern for the bodily needs.

With reduced numbers of ordained clergy the ministry of the church must change. This could be very positive, as we are called to be a priesthood of all believers. It does mean that we may not have a priest resident in Gosfield in the future, but if a priest does live here he will most certainly be required to care for other communities. These may be hard lessons but scripture says that the gates of hell will not prevail against God's church. So we can look to the future in the certain knowledge that, if we remain God's, the church will continue.

Normal Service times:

Sundays

8.00 a.m. Holy Communion (BCP)

10:30 a.m. Parish Eucharist (1st, 2nd, 4th Sunday)

Family Service 3rd Sunday

5th Sunday Team Service various locations

6:00 p.m. Evensong and Sermon (3 p.m. Winter Months)

Tuesday

10:00 am Eucharist

There is currently a junior Church, Starbursts that meet on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Sundays during term time. They start off in the church at 10 am and return for a blessing towards the end the Eucharistic service.

