
Why is the south porch made from two different types of stone?

The reason is probably that the stone in the lower part was not available for the whole structure. The lower stone is dolomite, possibly from the north of England, and the upper is a limestone which may have been brought from Lincolnshire.



Does the church have connections with famous people?

Lord Nelson's parents were married in the church in 1749. Earlier, Nelson's father had been a curate here. Nelson's mother was from the local family of Suckling.

The poet George Crabbe (1754-1832) knew Beccles well, having married a young woman from the town. He was an ordained priest and is known to have preached here.

There is a monument in the church to the naturalist Joseph Arnold (1782-1818), son of a Beccles tanner, who brought to public notice the world's largest and possibly smelliest flower, *Rafflesia Arnoldii*, which he came across in Sumatra.

More information about St Michael's can be found in the church guidebook and on the information stands set out around the building.



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The Church of St Michael the Archangel, Beccles

Welcome

Here is some information about our church set out in the form of answers to questions frequently asked by visitors.



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Why is the bell tower separate from the main church building?

The ground slopes away from the west end of the building where a tower would usually have been sited. The ground here was probably considered unsuitable for a large tower.

The tower stands nearly a hundred feet high and is estimated to weigh 3,000 tons. The inside is made of brick with rubble filling the space between the brick and the stone exterior. The tower houses ten bells, considered to be one of the finest peals in East Anglia.



How old is the church?

A will of 1369 refers to the new church of Beccles. The porch dates from the mid-15th century and the tower was finished about 1540, having taken four decades to complete.

Why is the church so large?

Beccles was the third town of Suffolk in the Middle Ages, after Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds. Beccles has been a thriving market town since at least the 11th century, being one of the few places in England described as having a market in the Domesday Book (1086).

Until the 16th century when Henry VIII dissolved the great Abbey at Bury, the church belonged to the Abbey, which would have wanted a church in Beccles worthy of its ownership and reflecting the status of the town. Beccles was given by King Edwy (reigned 955-9) to the monks guarding the tomb of King Edmund at Bury.

What is the oldest object in the church?

The font is the oldest object and is a survivor from an earlier building on the site. The upper part of the font is made of Purbeck marble and is thought to date from the 13th century. There are no visible remains of the earlier church, but it is very likely that stone from it was re-used. *The font was relocated to its current position in 2020, with new steps added.*

What is the little window high above the door to the south porch on the church interior?

The window, known as a squint or squinch, looks out from a room above the porch. It would have allowed the priest to watch the high altar. The room has had many uses, including housing an ancient parish library, none of which now remains in the church. At one time the room stored the gunpowder of the local militia.



What is the structure above the priest's door on the exterior south side of the church?

This may have been an outside pulpit from which a preacher could have addressed people in the churchyard.

Why is the inside of the roof much simpler than that found in some other Suffolk churches?

The inside of the church was burned out in the great fire of Beccles in 1586, which also destroyed eighty houses. It has been suggested that the pink colour on some of the pillars is a relic of the burning. What do you think?