



The Drake Chapel, entered through a doorway in the chancel, was originally the vestry until 1728 when it became a private monument room for the Drakes with their family vault beneath. A fine collection of memorials spans 300 years of the family. The room was converted into a chapel in 1967 and handed back to the parish.

Monumental brasses set into the floor of the church have recently been moved into the Drake chapel. They include:

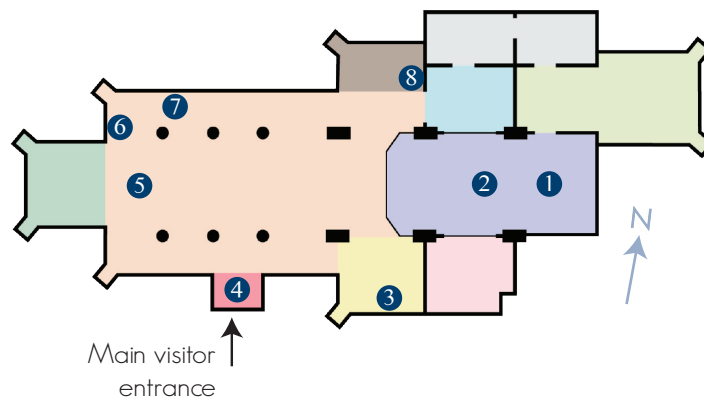
- **Henry Brudenell**, Lord of the Manor of Raans, and his wife **Eleanor** (1430).
- **Thomas Carbonell** (1439) and his wife **Elizabeth** (1438).
- **John de la Penne** (1537) and his wife **Elizabeth**.
- **John Drake** who died aged 3 in 1623. His brass is set into the floor to the left of the altar (pictured above).













Visiting the Drake Chapel

The Drake Chapel can be viewed on Sundays 11.30-12.00 throughout the year. Open at other times by appointment, contact the Parish Administrator.

Our Church



	Chancel		South Transept
	Drake Chapel		South Porch
	Nave		St. Catherine's Chapel
	North Transept (St. Andrew's Chapel)		Tower
	Organ Chamber		Vestry

The numbers on the floor plan indicate the location of the points of interest listed in the 'look out for' feature inside.

Contact Us

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St Mary's Church

Old Amersham



At the heart of the community

A free guide to the origins and history of the 12th century parish church of St Mary's

St Mary's Old Amersham dates from around 1140AD and was built on a holy site where a Roman road crosses the River Misbourne. It was at such locations that missionary monks of St Augustine, St Birinus and other evangelist bishops would have baptised their converts.

The nave occupies the original footprint of the Norman church; the only intact evidence of the 12th century church is a lancet window in the east wall of St Andrew's Chapel. The wider pillars in the east of the nave suggest that a central tower rose above the chancel step. The church was extended at numerous times during the middle ages as the town expanded: the north transept enlarged in the 13th century and the south transept enlarged in the 14th century when the north and south aisles were also added. The current tower, south porch and St Catherine's chapel were added in the 15th century.



In the 15th century the floor level of the church was raised to protect it against regular flooding of the River Misbourne. You can still see the original lower doors to the west of the south porch and in the west wall of the nave.

The Drake Chapel and South Chapel (now home to the organ) were added in the 17th century and the upper vestry in the 18th. The lower vestry and most of the stained glass windows are Victorian - the latter serving as dedications to the Drake family - with the only exception being the east window in the chancel, which is exquisite Flemish glass from 1610, donated by William Drake in 1760.



Between 1602 and 1662 the Drake family inherited and bought various estates around the town, as well as the advowson of Amersham, which meant they become patrons of the church - remaining so to this day. In 1870, Rector Edward Drake began restoring the church to its medieval interior layout and had the exterior clad in flint.

St Catherine's Chapel started as a chantry where a priest would chant prayers for souls of the departed. A statue of the saint decked out in expensive cloth was forcibly removed by Reformers in 1552. It became a private chapel for the family of Raans Manor, some of whom were interred beneath the floor. In 1781 it was converted into a mausoleum until 1908 when it became a chapel once more. The carving from Oberammergau was gilded in 1971.

The fine stained glass window in St Catherine's chapel is from Kempe Studios (1908). The signature of their work - a wheat sheaf and a tower - can be seen in the left hand corner of the glass.

In the churchyard you may notice some curiously shaped and exceptionally rare tombstones called 'body stones'. St Mary's is home to about forty of these stones and little record has been found of them in other churches except for Westerham, Kent. The body stones date from about 1770-1860 and are believed to have been a fashion inspired by the Burial in Wool Acts of 1667 and 1673.



St Mary's Church has an ancient tradition of bell-ringing and is one of the few churches worldwide to have more than eight bells. The sound of the bells can conjure up the joy of weddings and the solemnity of remembrance and provide a characteristic backdrop to English Sunday mornings in Old Amersham.

The Bell Tower is home to thirteen bells hung for full circle, tuned as a major twelve with a sharp second bell. The peal is widely regarded as being



the best ring of twelve for their weight, and consequently St Mary's regularly hosts teams of ringers from all over the country. Similarly, the church is noted for its magnificent acoustics and the "great power and remarkable versatility" of its organ. The church is often used for choral and orchestral recitals of the highest standard.

Look out for...

1. The Chancel's starry ceiling, decorated in 1965 but with corbels dating back to the 13th century.
2. The ornate Drake family memorials in the chancel.
3. A tomb from c1350 in the south transept decorated with a floriated cross and two shields and believed to be that of Richard de Rockingham, Rector from 1333.
4. The Tudor rose, dog and pig heads carved into the 15th century roof of the South Porch.
5. The medieval font, from 1310.
6. The list of rectors and patrons to the right of the tower.
7. Original floor tiles mounted on the nave's north wall.
8. A 13th century lancet window between St Catherine's and St Andrew's Chapels. It was blocked in the 15th century but re-opened in 1908 and glazed in 1995.

