

St Peter & St Paul, Brockdish

Whilst on the whole I aim to be objective, I cannot deny that St Peter and St Paul's is way up there in my top favourite churches I have visited. The first enchanting element that caught my eye was the stunning memorial in the churchyard to the wife of Sir Edward Kay, Mary Valence French, who died in 1889. Its design, undoubtedly inspired by the Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's Albert memorial, features a large kneeling angel at its center surrounded by pink marble columns. Lady Kay was the daughter of William French, who was the Master of Jesus College, and when she died a scholarship was set up in her honour to support students who wished to pursue holy orders in the Church of England.



The oldest parts of the church date back as far as the late 11th century, but much of the current structure was constructed and expanded later in the 14th century, including the building of the south aisle. Further improvements and repairs were carried out in the 16th century, but by 1710 the west tower had collapsed as the church began to fall into disrepair. Three years later the tower was rebuilt simply, in brick and without much of the decoration of its predecessor.



In 1842, Reverend George France became the rector of Brockdish. He was responsible for and funded much of the intensive restoration and improvements that were carried out during the Victorian period. Included in these many additions was the installation of the wonderful tiled reredos which truly are the unexpected gem of this church. Their vibrant colour palette and kaleidoscope-esque pattern is something I have not as yet seen anywhere else, and they provide a stunning backdrop to the chancel.

In 1864, France enlisted the service of architect, Fredrick Marrable, to rebuild the west tower to its former glory. Marrable was the first Chief Architect of the Metropolitan Board of Works and had previously been engaged in designing the font at Brockdish in 1846.

The mark that France left on Brockdish is undeniable and his enthusiasm for the revival of gothic can clearly be seen throughout, from the plentiful stained glass to the expertly carved poppy head pews. St Peter and St Paul's is therefore a fine example of when the Victorians got it so very right.













