

As a result of the Reformation in the mid 16th century and the establishment of the Church of England, religious and political change imposed responsibilities on church authorities. Over the centuries, under the guidance of the Vestry, churchwardens had many different tasks, such as dealing with directions given by iconoclast William Dowsing in 1644 to destroy all remaining images of idolatry. They also organised the church courts held at Hadleigh for maintenance of spiritual discipline, as well as the recovery of unpaid tithes, and church rates. The 18th century saw a new clock mechanism placed in the tower, very pleasing to the Vestry. During the mid 19th century, the church underwent major works including removal of all old cracked plaster on exterior walls and demolition of the smaller southern porch. Again the Vestry, through the churchwardens, raised funds for such work and their correspondence with architects and builders is in the Suffolk Archives.

An exploration of the life and times of the Vestry can be found in

Tales from the Vestry.

*How the town of Hadleigh in
Suffolk was governed
from this building.*

by

Sue Andrews and Roger Kennell

56 pages and 40 illustrations.

£10.00

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Governing the town from the Vestry

*A place of safety and
decision making
1600 - 1869*



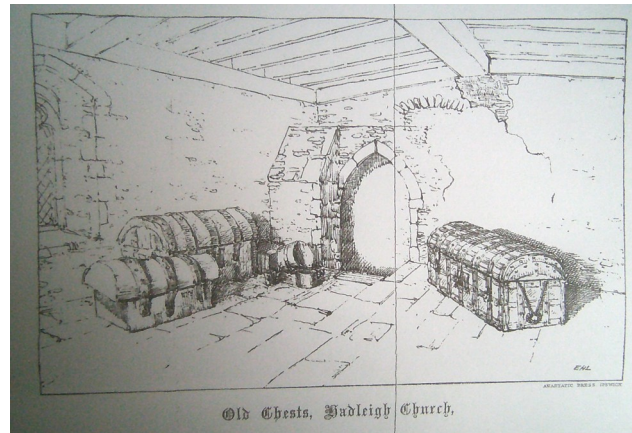
The story of the building and the Vestry who met there can be told in four parts: its architectural heritage, its use for church administration, its use for civil administration and the restoration and creation of the new vestry.

The vestry of St Mary's church is impressive for its size, being two storeys. The quality of limestone used for external decoration and quality of its execution, all indicate a building of high status.

Since the vestry was built towards the end of the 15th century, as well as being the place used for church administration, the building gave its name to the group of unelected men who met there to govern the town from 1600 until 1869. The Vestry would hold public meetings annually to settle both church and civil business for the year ahead.

As forerunner of Hadleigh Town Council, the Vestry was responsible for many aspects of town life:

supporting poor relief and managing the workhouse in the Guildhall. They also established a fire brigade and a police force, provided street lighting and created Hadleigh Town Cemetery, to name but a few.



***From the History of Hadleigh(1860)
by Rev. Hugh Pigot***

Over the centuries parish churches were required to have a chest with three locks, where monetary gifts given for the poor and valuable plate were held. It was also where all important documents were stored for safety and records of baptisms, marriages and burials.



The sacristy above the vestry

In 2023, the vestry of St Mary's Church in Hadleigh was renovated both inside and out.



***View of the vestry looking back
to the doorway into the church***

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