

**Trips out with a religious connection:**

**Witley; Edvin Loach; Edvin Ralph; Brockhampton**



**The Ascension depicted on the glorious ceiling of Witley Church by Antonio Bellucci.**



**Outside the Church of St Michael and All Angels at Witley. The church is in the Diocese of Worcester.**

David Melhuish at All Saints' had been recommending us to visit Witley church for a long time – finally we managed to get there! One word of warning – don't follow the sign to the church, it's a long, very rough uneven road. Follow the signs instead to Witley Court and park in their car park – the church adjoins the English Heritage attraction but can be reached without having to pay to get into the main building.



**To appreciate the splendour of the ceiling frescos, there is a mirror that allows you to see them without straining your neck!**



Great Witley Parish Church has the most stunning interior of any Baroque church in England. The ceiling is covered in paintings by Antonio Bellucci; the windows are painted enamel and stained glass by Joshua Price. The walls are covered in intricate gilded mouldings and there is a very fine organ. In addition there is the large marble Foley monument by Rysbrack, beautifully carved pulpit, pews and font by the Forsyth brothers, and a fabulous gold mosaic reredos.



**There are some spectacular items of church furniture, such as this elevated pulpit.**



The reredos and altar are also ornate and spectacular. Rachel, Countess of Dudley, the 2nd Earl of Dudley's wife, designed the gold mosaic panels for the reredos.



The chessboard patterned aisle at Witley Church, with the spectacular font in the distance.



In 1747 the church was transformed. The 2nd Baron Foley acquired by private sale from the Duke of Chandos' Canons Palace, Edgware, near London numerous fixtures and fittings. The ten stained glass windows and the oil on canvas paintings were placed insitu on a new curved ceiling, purpose built to hold the central painting 'The Ascension'. This painting is stretched onto a wooden curved frame. The organ and pipes were also included in the private sale. The moulds for the wall and ceiling decorations were taken from the original designs of the plasterwork at Canons and recreated from papier mache. Papier mache had just been perfected by Henry Clay of Birmingham.



**The memorial to members of the Foley family, who transformed the church, is currently (June 2017) undergoing restoration.**

Completed in 1737, the Foley memorial comprises a huge grey marble sarcophagus on a plinth, above which rises a large pedestal against the backdrop of an enormous grey marble obelisk and larger than life figures depict the first Lord Foley, Thomas, his wife Mary, and five of their seven children. It was designed and carved by Michael Rysbrack (b. Antwerp, 1694) who also carved the monuments to the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace and Isaac Newton in Westminster Abbey. It was commissioned by Lady Foley who paid for the church to be built in 1735. Standing at over 8m (26ft) high it is regarded as the tallest funerary monument in the country.



**The Foley monument at Witley Church.**





The frontage of Witley Court, an English Heritage property.





**The astonishing herringbone pattern of the stonework at Edvin Loach Old Church. The herringbone-pattern stonework on the north and south walls is a feature of early Norman churches in this part of England.**



Our next port of call was, as we found out, across the Diocesan boundary in the Diocese of Hereford. Edvin Loach has two churches: the older defunct ruin, and a newer Victorian church. The curious name of this place originates in the late 11th century, when the district of Yedeven was divided between the Loges and Ralph families, hence the present names of the parishes of Edvin Loach and Edvin Ralph. The ruined church, once dedicated to St Giles but later known as St Mary's, probably dates back to this time.



**The ruined Old Church at Edvin Loach was replaced by the New Church in 1860.**



The name of the village derives from the Norman 'de Loges' family, added to the Saxon *Gedeven* (Edefen), meaning "Gedda's marshy land".

The old Church was built in the mid 11th century or later and was dedicated to St Giles. It is built within the earthworks of a Norman motte and bailey castle. Later it was re-dedicated to St Mary. The old church gradually became dilapidated, though its roof was still intact as late as the 1890s. It is in the guardianship of English Heritage.



Close to the ruins of the Old Church is the church of St Mary, Edvin Loach, built in 1860.

The new St Mary's Church, designed by Victorian architect Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1860, stands next to the ruins of the old church. This is a fine example of 19th-century church architecture designed in the Early English style.



The newer St Mary's Church, Edwin Loach, built in 1860, was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott.



**The beautifully constructed ceiling at St Mary's Edvin Loach – the structure is reminiscent of an upturned boat.**





The altar at St Mary's, Edvin Loach.

Curious to see the neighbouring village of Edvin Ralph, we pressed on to the church of St Michael and All Angels. Today the village is now spelt on maps as 'Edwyn Ralph' - although you still see it referred to as Edvin Ralph eg on the church noticeboard!



The beautiful wooden church notices cabinet at St Michael's Edvin Ralph.





The approach to the church at Edvin Ralph is delightful – with an old fashioned lamppost, like in Narnia!





The tower and porch at St Michael and All Angels, Edvin Ralph.



**The church porch at St Michael and All Angels Edvin Ralph is absolutely beautiful – there is an arch of roses around it.**





The beautiful altar and reredos at St Michael, Edvin Ralph.





In the Tower base can be seen a remarkable group of medieval effigies together with a flat slab bearing the figure of a lady identified as Maud de Edefen, all of which commemorate the Edefen family.



**An ornate, beautifully crafted example of an organ at St Michael, Edvin Ralph.**



Our last visit of the day was to a National Trust property at Brockhampton. The property has a defunct Norman Chapel in the grounds. We had visited Brockhampton before, but now much more of the house may be viewed.



**The unique timber framed Gatehouse and medieval Manor House at Brockhampton Estate.**





**The leaded windows of the Manor House.**

The main attraction of the Brockhampton Estate is Lower Brockhampton, a timber framed manor house that dates back to the late 14th century. The manor house is surrounded by a moat and is entered by a newly restored gatehouse at the front of the house. The house is surrounded by farmland, some of it parkland with woodland.



**Across the moat at Lower Brockhampton are the ruins of a Norman Chapel.**





**Inside the Norman Chapel at Brockhampton.**





**There are acres of parkland to explore at Brockhampton.**



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