The combination of the Tudor rose and the pomegranate of Aragon point to the marriage of Henry VIII with Catherine of Aragon. The font was probably made just after Henry’s marriage to Catherine and his accession in the same year of 1509.

- The fine 16th century stained glass set in the window above the Altar of the Jesus Chapel. Although there has been considerable debate about who designed the glass, many experts now agree that the work is most probably by Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg. The glass panels were originally in the church of St Ouen at Rouen, probably part of a much larger window. They were brought to England towards the end of the 18th century by a member of the Neave family. The glass remained in their possession for seventy years until it was placed in this window in the early 1880s in memory of Sir Arundell Neave.
- The fifteenth century tower constructed of Kentish ragstone and the soft stone known as 'hassock'. It has four stories marked by weathering courses and is supported at each corner by diagonal buttresses.
- The distinctive checkered flint and stone battlements above the Nave, Aisle and Tower, dating from the late 15th to early 16th centuries.

Produced jointly by Southend Borough Council & St Mary’s Church. July 2003

5. The Chancel roof, decorated in 1965.
6. The Chancel and choir stalls.
7. 16th century font probably made just after the marriage of Henry VIII with Catherine of Aragon.
8. Sixteenth century stained glass window believed to be the work of Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg.
For more than a thousand years there has been a church on the site of St Mary’s, Prittlewell. When the Saxons settled here, soon after the Roman Legions left Britain, they found a fine dry site overlooking the river Thames with a fresh water stream - the Prittle brook - and good grazing land nearby.

The present building still contains the remains of a Saxon arched doorway, but the majority of the building is built of Kentish Ragstone and dates from the 12th to 15th centuries. It is now recognised as a building of national importance and is protected as a Grade I Listed Building.

**Church Name: St Mary the Virgin**

The church is one of many English churches dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, mother of Jesus.

**Historic Development of the Church**

Prittlewell is one of the oldest villages in Essex and was one of two principal settlements in the Borough until the rise of South End in the 18th century (the other being Leigh). Much of the former Prittlewell’s past is still evident in the buildings and ancient street pattern that remain. And St Mary’s Church still dominates the horizon as it has done for many centuries.

There is archaeological evidence that a small chapel was erected on the site of the present church in the 7th century. A portion of the Saxon doorway of that tiny chapel remains today as part of the north wall of the Chancel. It incorporates some re-used Roman bricks. For four hundred years or so the small Saxon Chapel served the developing village of Prittlewell. In the 11th century the Norman nave was built which greatly enlarged the building and the old Saxon Chapel formed the Chancel of the new church. The church at Prittlewell is mentioned in the Doomsday Survey of 1086.

Towards the end of the 12th century a Processional Aisle was added to the south side of the Nave. The South Aisle was enlarged and completed in the late 15th to early 16th century, almost doubling the size of the Church. During that period also, the magnificent tower was built together with a porch and an eastern wall that now forms part of the Jesus Chapel. Since then the structure of the church remains undisturbed save for the addition of the vestries in modern times. When the town of Southend-on-Sea was established at the ‘South End’ of Prittlewell village, the church of St. Mary the Virgin became the mother church of Southend.

Over the centuries the Church at Prittlewell has seen joyous times and has fallen on hard times. Shortly after Henry VIII’s reign, at the time of the Reformation, so much of the church’s income and assets were seized that the churchwardens sold the church plate to pay for maintenance of the church. In the Second World War St Mary’s suffered blast damage from bombs falling nearby, but daily services continued at the normal times throughout those difficult years. It is said that the Vicar at that time, Canon Ellis Gowing, had the valuable 16th century stained glass removed from the Jesus Chapel and buried in the vicarage basement for safe-keeping!

A comprehensive restoration scheme for the Church was undertaken in 1870 which involved the replacement of the roof over the Chancel, South Chapel, Nave and Aisle with the magnificent oak roof seen today. The Chancel roof was decorated in 1965. The most striking feature of its design are the angels. Four small angels form the finals of the hammer beams, all with their hands clasped in the attitude of prayer and facing the altar. Between them are three larger angels each bearing a shield on which is carved the implements associated with the Cross and the Passion of Christ. Monograms of the name Mary can also be seen between the beams.

**Significant Features**

St Mary’s has many interesting features including:

- The remains of the early seventh century Saxon doorway, built with Roman bricks, can be seen behind the choir stalls on the north wall of the Chancel. The arch and part of the surrounding wall can also be seen in the external north wall of the church.
- A fine example of finely carved 16th century Tudor door. Originally the external door of the south porch, now, the internal door from the porch into the church. The porch itself dates from 15th century.
- The 16th century octagonal Font with concave sides with sculptured ornaments including a crucifix, a Tudor rose, a half-rose, a chevron with three fleurs-de-lis, a heart with two crossed spears and a halved rose and pomegranate.

1. St Mary’s Church is built of Kentish ragstone
2. Church Tower, built in the 15th century
3. Remains of a 7th century Saxon arch built with Roman bricks on the north side of the church
4. St Mary’s Historic Graveyard