

Holy Rood Fair

14th- 16th September

Did you know.....over eight hundred years ago a bustling fair would have been taking place outside St Margaret's Church?

The right to hold a fair had been granted to the Canons of Holy Trinity Priory by Henry II and was confirmed by King John in 1204. It was to be held on Holy Rood Day (14th September) to continue for 3 days. There is some suggestion that this was later moved to 25th September when the country changed from the Gregorian to the Julian calendar in 1752 and 11 days were lost in September that year! (Hence the date on the commemorative plaque on St Margaret's Green.)

Their priory now lies under Christchurch Mansion, and they built this church for their parishioners.



An illustrative view of a medieval fair.

In medieval England only the King could grant the right to hold a fair or have a market. This they did quite sparingly, usually for a considerable sum of money, but it made the recipients very prosperous as it was a highly prized money spinner.

After the Dissolution of the monasteries the right to hold the fair moved to the Withipoll family and then to Ipswich Corporation as part of the Town Charter granted by Charles II in 1665.

The fair was held originally on a large green which stretched from the south of the churchyard, down to the ditches outside the ramparts of Ipswich. This is where St Margaret's Green now stands. After the Danes controlled Ipswich in the early C10th the area was used by Ipswich freemen as a safe place to hold meetings known as "Things". Indeed, Bolton Lane was called Thingstead Way until at least the C17th.

The Holy Rood fair was mainly for agricultural products and the last one took place on Corn Hill in the middle of the C19th. It was noted mainly for the sale of cheese and butter and latterly sausages and sweetmeats.