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Vol. XXXIV No. 2 December 2011



The Round Tower

Vol. XXXIV No 2

December 2011



Haddiscoe, St Mary

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Roughton: St Mary

The tower here is extremely fine. Partly built of ironstone, it shows herring-bone work, round Saxon windows and the typically Saxon double-pointed belfry.

North Norfolk. Sheet 133, TG 220 365 (Lat N52:52:47 Long E1:17:59)

Risby: St Giles

The late Saxon tower had a double ring of round-headed belfry windows, although some are now blocked. Inside the church there is much of interest with a fine screen and wall paintings.

West Suffolk. Sheet 155, TL 802 664 (Lat N52:15:57 Long E0:38:28)

Little Saxham: St Nicholas

This church and tower are of great beauty for their style and proportions. The top stage of the tower is Norman and it is on a Saxon base.

West Suffolk. Sheet 155, TL 799 637 (Lat N52:14:30 Long E0:38:07)

Burnham Norton: St Margaret

This is a late Saxon tower that has altered very little since it was built. The ring of circular windows below the parapet has been blocked up, but most of the other windows have remained as they were. The narrow church was widened by adding north and south aisles in the thirteenth century. Inside there is much of interest and beauty, from the Norman font to the Saxon tower arch and upper doorway, and especially the famous wine-glass pulpit of 1450 with its original paintings in fine condition.

North Norfolk. Sheet 132, TF 835 428

(Lat N52:56:44 Long E0:44:33)

Ramsholt: All Saints (right)

This very isolated church stands on a prominent site above the river Deben. It has a very elegant tower with three buttresses that enhance its shape and beauty. Inside there is much of interest.

South East Suffolk. Sheet 169, TM 307 421

(Lat N52:01:44 Long E1:21:48)



Sedgeford: St Mary

This church must be one of the largest of the round tower churches. It shows quite well how different generations added to their church. It now has north and south aisles, north and south porches and its chancel was extended in the thirteenth century.

North-West Norfolk. Sheet 132, TF 707 365 (Lat N52:53:55 Long E0:32:17)

The next issue is March 2012 and the deadline for insertion is 1st February 2012.

Please send items for publication either as email attachments or on disc as **separate** files – text, photos, drawings etc., or by post to:-

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THE ROUND TOWER

The quarterly magazine of the Round Tower Churches Society

Vol. XXXIV No 2 December 2011

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Haddiscoe, St Mary

Thank you to our retiring Editor

At a Committee meeting in March 2006 Lyn Stilgoe reported that Susan Williams had kindly volunteered to take on the editorship of the Round Tower Magazine for the Society. The Committee gratefully accepted her offer.

The first Magazine edited by Susan was the June 2006 edition. Since then, in over five years, she has successfully produced twenty-two editions. This represents a considerable achievement, the result of hard and conscientious work. An editor's role is never easy (especially when at least one fairly regular contributor is always just on, or even after, the deadline!). However, Susan has always delivered an interesting and balanced Magazine, with a good variety of content, ranging from carefully researched academic articles to those of a lighter or more quirky nature.

Susan now feels that it is time to stand down as editor. She has given the Committee time to consider options for successors and agreed to assist in the handover of responsibility to the new editors.

Thank you Susan, for all you have done.

Stuart Bowell
Chairman

I would also like to add my own thank you to all those contributors who have tirelessly provided articles, photographs and ideas. The Magazine's success lies in its content and relies on the supply of original material to maintain its appeal and interest. I do hope you will continue to support the publication and provide the new editors, Anne Woollett and Paul Hodge, with interesting ideas and features.

Keep up the good work...Susan



Hales: St Margaret and Heckingham: St Gregory (above)

Should be visited together as they are sister churches and are situated quite close together. Each has a Saxon apsidal chancel. They are both typical Norfolk thatched churches, both having magnificent Norman doorways and many other items of interest. They are also both among the seven round-tower churches which are well cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust.

South-East Norfolk. Sheet 134 Hales TM 383 961 (Lat N52:30:37 Long E1:30:44) Heckingham TM 385 988

Howe: St Mary

Not far from Norwich, this is a beautiful early church, and well kept. It has many signs of Saxon workmanship in both the church and tower.

South-East Norfolk. Sheet 134, TM 275 999

Tasburgh: St Mary the Virgin, Thorpe-Next Haddiscoe: St Matthias and Thorington: St Peter

These three churches all show Saxon arcading in flints in their towers, although Norman work has been added later.

Tasburgh and Thorpe-next-Haddiscoe: South-East Norfolk. Sheet 134, TM 201 959 (Lat N52:30:58 Long E1:14:39) and TM 436 981 (Lat N52:31:33 Long E1:35:30) Thorington: East Suffolk. Sheet 156, TM 423 742 (Lat N52:18:43 Long E1:33:18)

Little Snoring: St Andrew, Norfolk and Bramfield: St Andrew, Suffolk

These are the only two detached round towers, one in each county. While Little Snoring once had a Saxon church attached to it, the tower at Bramfield has always been detached. Bramfield has one of the finest screens in Suffolk.

North-West Norfolk and East Suffolk. Little Snoring, Sheet 132, TF 953 326 (Lat N52:51:18 Long E0:54:04). Bramfield, Sheet 156, TM 399 738 (Lat N52:18:34 Long E1:31:11)

Fornccett St Peter: St Peter

This church has a fine late-Saxon tower, and many old benches which are still preserved. A fine mediaeval staircase leads to the first floor of the tower.

South Norfolk. Sheet 144, TM 165 928 (Lat N52:29:23 Long E1:11:21)

TOP TWENTY ROUND TOWER CHURCHES WITH SPECIAL FEATURES

All of our churches are worth a visit in their different ways. Do visit any that you find. Many are kept locked because they are in isolated places, but there is normally a notice in the porch explaining how to find a person who holds a key.

Haddiscoe: St Mary

This is often called the champion of round towers. Of Saxo-Norman origin, c1100. It contains many of the traditional Saxon styles.

South-East Norfolk. Sheet 134, TM 439 969 (Lat N52:30:54 Long E1:35:42)

Herringfleet: St Mary

This church is three miles from Haddiscoe and the tower is of a similar date. It has a thatched nave and flint bands to the tower. The church is earlier than the tower.

North-East Suffolk. Sheet 134, TM 477 978 (Lat N52:31:17 Long E1:39:03)

Lound: St John the Baptist

This church is known locally as the Golden Church because of the large amount of gold leaf used in the decoration. This was all designed by Sir Ninian Comper in 1914. Note the modern wall painting and how it is already dated by the car and the aeroplane.

North-East Suffolk. Sheet 134, TM 506 990 (Lat N52:31:51 Long E1:41:38)

Blundeston: St Mary

This church is noted for its associations with Charles Dickens. It has a fine early tower. Note the blocked-up Saxon belfry windows. It has a good screen.

North-East Suffolk. Sheet 134, TM 514 972 (Lat N52:30:51 Long E1:42:18)

Fritton: St Edmund (right)

A thatched church with a quaint apsidal (round-ended) chancel that has hardly altered from early days. Early wall paintings and a rare three-decker pulpit make this church a **must**.

North-East Suffolk. Sheet 134, TG 473 02 (Lat N52:32:32 Long E1:38:51)



HADDISCOE, ST MARY

If proof were needed that features regarded as characteristic of Saxon architecture were used after the Norman Conquest, it is found at Haddiscoe church. Here, there are twin belfry openings with triangular heads, fillets between tower and nave, a tall tower arch and a narrow nave; although these are all recognised as Saxon features, the extensive use of Caen stone dates the tower, which can be shown to be contemporary with the nave, as not before the last decade of the eleventh century on the grounds that the first use in East Anglia of Caen stone imported from Normandy was probably at Norwich Cathedral which was not started until thirty years after the Conquest.

The church has a nave 16 feet wide, a two-bay chancel of the same width, a north aisle and arcade, a south porch and a round west tower.

The nave south wall is 2'10" thick, with a richly ornamented Norman south door that still shows Saxon influence in its stripwork outer moulding of square section. Above this door, a sculptured seated figure occupies a round-headed niche. The windows are Perpendicular with depressed two-centred heads with arch curves so flat as to appear almost straight; they have medieval brick relieving arches above.



The eastern bay of the five-bay arcade. Moulded imposts on the second bay (foreground), and chamfered imposts on the fourth

The north arcade has five pointed arches with substantial piers of the full wall thickness between. Above, a shallow clerestory has small quatrefoil windows. The centre and outer bays of the arcade have continuous plain chamfers on arches and jambs, two on the east bay and three on the other two. There are imposts on the reveals of only the two intermediate bays, chamfered on the fourth bay and moulded on the second. The aisle has Intersecting and Y-tracery windows which, though partially restored, seem to be the original patterns. A Norman door in the aisle north wall, now blocked, is probably the original north door reset. The flintwork of the aisle west wall is bonded to the nave, suggesting that original stone quoins were removed from the nave's north-west corner when the aisle was added. The original south-west corner has been replaced by a diagonal buttress.

In the west bays of the chancel's side walls there are four blocked circular openings, two in each wall, faced outside with a two-foot diameter ring of dressed stone. Internally they are blocked flush with the wall and the wall plaster conceals any evidence of them except for the western one in the south wall where about a third of the inner circumference of a dressed stone circle similar to the outside ones but about four feet diameter is still visible, apparently the internal dressings of a single-splayed opening.



The chancel south wall

At about three or four feet above the circles in the north wall there is a row of medieval brick putlog holes above which a variation in the fabric is noticeable. At the same level on the south side, a distinct change of fabric is also noticeable and four evenly-spaced square stones at this level might be

9. Churches as a sanctuary and a place of refuge. A round sanctuary-ring and iron plate are sometimes found attached to the main door of a church. Medieval law allowed fugitives from harsh justice to resort to the church. It reinforced the idea of the Church as an institution, independent of (though not detached from) the secular state and its temporal laws. That is probably as close as we can get to seeing the church and its tower having a defensive roll. Goode considered that if all the points he made were taken together then defence significantly influenced the roll of the church tower.

10. General use of bells. The church bells were not just used to call people to prayer and worship. They were also used to sound an alarm or announce an important event such as a victory in war. This was not just an incidental function of the bells – they were for general use for the community.

Goode's conclusion was that the essential purpose of a church tower is to provide the means of calling people to worship or announce an event of general concern. There were many incidental uses of which defence may have been one but they were entirely secondary.

Richard Harbord

LETTERS

Thank you!

“...will you please give my thanks to those members of the Society who helped me to raise nearly £80 for St Peter's church, Swainsthorpe in this year's Cycle Ride...” **Mr John Scales, Norwich**

Miss M Croft of Bristol writes *“...On page 17 of the Round Tower September 2011, the article states that there are only two survivals of the Wheel of Fortune. What about St Mary's Kempley, Gloucestershire? Simon Jenkins calls it a 'Wheel of Life' on page 215 in his 'England's Thousand Best Churches'. In Roger Rosewell's 'Medieval Wall Paintings' (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2008), he shows an illustration of it on page 208, as well as the 'Wheel of Fortune' in the Round Tower article, at Illketshall St Andrews, on page 224...”*

Mr A Gray of Norwich writes of a chance encounter...

“ On the way to visit a friend who lives at Great Snoring, I was glad to find St Andrews at Letheringsett open. A couple drove up to visit the church who lived in York. The lady told me that she was born in Norwich and it turned out that she lived in the same street, 2 doors away, from my parents before I was born. Small world! I also visited Little Snoring church...”

soffit fixed underneath them. The raised door would then have led to a cat-walk passing along the top of the tie beams to facilitate roof repairs. Such a feature would have been useful if the roof was thatched which was often the case in East Anglian churches. In support of this idea, the cill of these upper doorways usually coincides with the top of the original nave walls on which the tie beams could rest. The difficulty in confirming this theory is that no 11th century and very few 12th century roofs survive, partly because nave walls were often raised in the Middle Ages.

If we look inside the great minsters we also see these upper doorways as in Norwich Cathedral, under the crossing tower and very high up above the Presbytery. This may once have had a flat ceiling as in Peterborough which dates from 1230AD, and still survives. The door clearly gave access to the roof space and cat-walk via a spiral stair - certainly not by an external staircase. My own church in Gunton, Norfolk is Georgian and it has a flat ceiling like in the early Norman churches.

The Taylors found evidence of a balcony placed in one upper doorway which suggested a liturgical roll for it. This is more likely to have been a later feature added on. It would certainly be unusual to see a priest at the back of the church appearing at a high balcony during a service and it has no bearing on the possible defensive character of this feature.

7. Some towers had no access at ground level which suggests they were defensive features. They may have been added to an existing and earlier nave. That meant that the tower arch had to be cut through the gable wall of the nave – or not. Cautley thought this may be the case where the jambs of the arch have no stonework in them. If the tower had no door at all except say an upper eastern door, that suggests that the tower did have a defensive roll. An alternative idea is that there was no direct access to the tower from the nave because the tower has its own entrance door.

8. The tower would have offered a safe place for church valuables such as plate, vestments, rare books and furnishings? Secure chests were a feature of early churches though few survive. They were built in a robust manner. The massively heavy Armada Chest of the 16th century even stored weapons in the church in case of invasion. They have wide iron straps and double locks. Surely it was more convenient to retrieve items stored in a chest on the ground floor than climb up and down into an upper tower space for them? In any case towers are not very clean places with their crumbling, dusty fabric or where birds and bats manage to gain access.

evidence of a former eaves table course. In the east bay of the chancel north wall, two putlog holes framed and bridged with dressed stone can be seen, and between them a faint impression in the fabric of a possible blocked lancet window is discernible. Above a string course across the east wall, the present Victorian window with Geometric-style tracery appears to have replaced a larger one whose outline is indicated by the curvature of a relieving arch of medieval brick. Random dressed stones each side of the window seem to have been mistakenly taken for traces of blocked round-headed windows by Taylor & Taylor (*Anglo-Saxon Architecture. Vol.I. C.U.P.1980*).

The tower is built with well-coursed as-found flints, and the fillets in the re-entrant angles between tower and nave contain more stone than flint. The tower's four stages are separated by stone string courses, and rising from a stone table course, a later battlemented parapet is decorated with a chequer of knapped and rubble flints. The lower stage has a modern west window and the next two stages each have three small single-splayed windows with stone dressings inside and out, their external rounded heads cut from single stones. The fourth stage has four twin belfry openings at the cardinal points, with triangular-headed lights springing from a through-stone supported on a mid-wall shaft. The jambs have engaged shafts with capitals and the lights are outlined with billet mouldings. All are stone, and though to some extent restored, sufficient original detail remains to establish the tower as a creation of the Saxo-Norman overlap.



Tower and porch from the South- East

The tower has a pronounced taper and although its walls are about 4'3" thick at the west window and just under three feet at the tower arch apex, at the level where the tower rises above the original nave gable height (before the later clerestory), the external taper has reduced the wall thickness to the extent that it accommodates to the thinner nave wall at that level, with only a slight flattening of its external curvature above the nave on the east.

Interpretation

In order to support a Saxon attribution for the nave and chancel, it has been claimed on dubious grounds that the Saxo-Norman tower was added to an earlier nave. These grounds were: firstly, a contrived but unreliable formula that where a tower's wall thickness at the tower arch is less than at its west window, it has been added, secondly, an unsubstantiated preconception that a 16-foot wide nave with 2'10" thick walls must be Saxon, and thirdly, an assertion without supporting evidence that the Norman doorways and the circular dressed stone chancel windows are later enhancements.

This claim ignores the fact that if a tower with a curved east wall internally is a later addition to a church, the wall thickness at the tower arch apex would be at least four or five inches more than the nave west wall's original thickness which can be ascertained by measuring its thickness outside the tower, the extra representing the thickness of a curved layer of flints superimposed over the original flat face of the nave wall.

On the other hand, if the wall thickness of the curved wall at the tower arch apex is the same as or less than the thickness of the nave west wall measured outside the tower, then clearly the tower must have been built with that wall, because the thickness required for the curved flintwork of an added tower's east wall, occupying four or five inches, could not be accommodated at the face of the nave west wall without gouging out at least 6" of it – a pointless operation serving only to weaken the nave wall at that position.

At Haddiscoe, where internally the tower east wall is curved, its thickness at the tower arch apex is about three inches less than the notional thickness of the nave west wall outside the tower (see plan), proving that the tower and church must have been built together. The term 'notional' thickness is used because, owing to the narrowness of the nave, the visible short lengths of wall between the tower fillets and the original nave corners are not actual walls as such, but the ends of the nave side walls.

On the evidence of the Caen stone and Norman detail in its structure, the tower is proved to be post-Conquest, and since church and tower were built together, the church must also be post-Conquest. Other evidence in the church that supports this conclusion includes the dressed stone circular windows in the chancel walls, and the size of the stone sculpture above the south door suggests that it is more likely to have been built with the wall than inserted later.

The row of medieval putlog holes above the blocked circular windows in the chancel north wall and the conjectured stone table course at about the same level in the south wall may indicate a lower original eaves level of the

4. Many churches have a defensive character. This cannot be denied. Most battlements were added to churches in the late Middle Ages. In the case of towers, this meant having an expensive flat lead roof installed inside the parapet which again was something that happened mainly in the 14th - 15th centuries. The sculptural character of gargoyle roof drains are evidence from the same period. Previously round towers had a cone-shaped roof with over-hanging eaves as some still have. Parapets could be embattled or be just a plain wall and the choice in churches generally seems to be in equal measure either way. A few parish churches went over the top and embattled every part of the building – nave, chancel, aisles, porches etc. Battlementing became a fashionable form of decoration used along the edge of beams, on sepulchre monuments etc. These features were clearly a romantic status-symbol harking back to the Age of Chivalry and implied noble patronage.

The monumental western façades of the greater churches such as cathedrals declare their defensive character much more forcibly especially the bold Norman examples. This had a long history and went back to the monumental '*West-work*' of Anglo Saxon minsters influenced by German precedents. The front of Lincoln Cathedral has machicolations which is a defensive feature usually associated with castles. In these few cases, defence does seem to have been an integral part of the original design. Some churches have been subjected to a siege and were converted for that purpose, such as Crowland Abbey on the edge of the Fens, during the 17th century Civil War.

5. Some features are similar to those with a defensive purpose such as slit windows with splayed embrasures. They were designed that way to maximise the amount of daylight entering the church and also to minimise the amount of glass needed so they cannot be claimed to be 'defensive' in character. In any case they are usually too high up to act as arrow slits.

6. Upper doorways of towers facing towards inside of the nave is another example of a possible defensive feature. It has been suggested that these gave access to a 'safe room' where church valuables could be stored. A ladder to the upper room could then be pulled up or a stair provided. The space in front of the tower-arch is usually filled by the Font or circulation space even if there was no furniture such as pews in an early church. The presence of an additional staircase in the nave would have over-crowded that space especially in a small church. A more likely possibility is that nave roofs during the 11/12th centuries had tie beams with a flat ceiling

THE DEFENSIVE ROLL OF CHURCH ROUND TOWERS—A REASSESSMENT

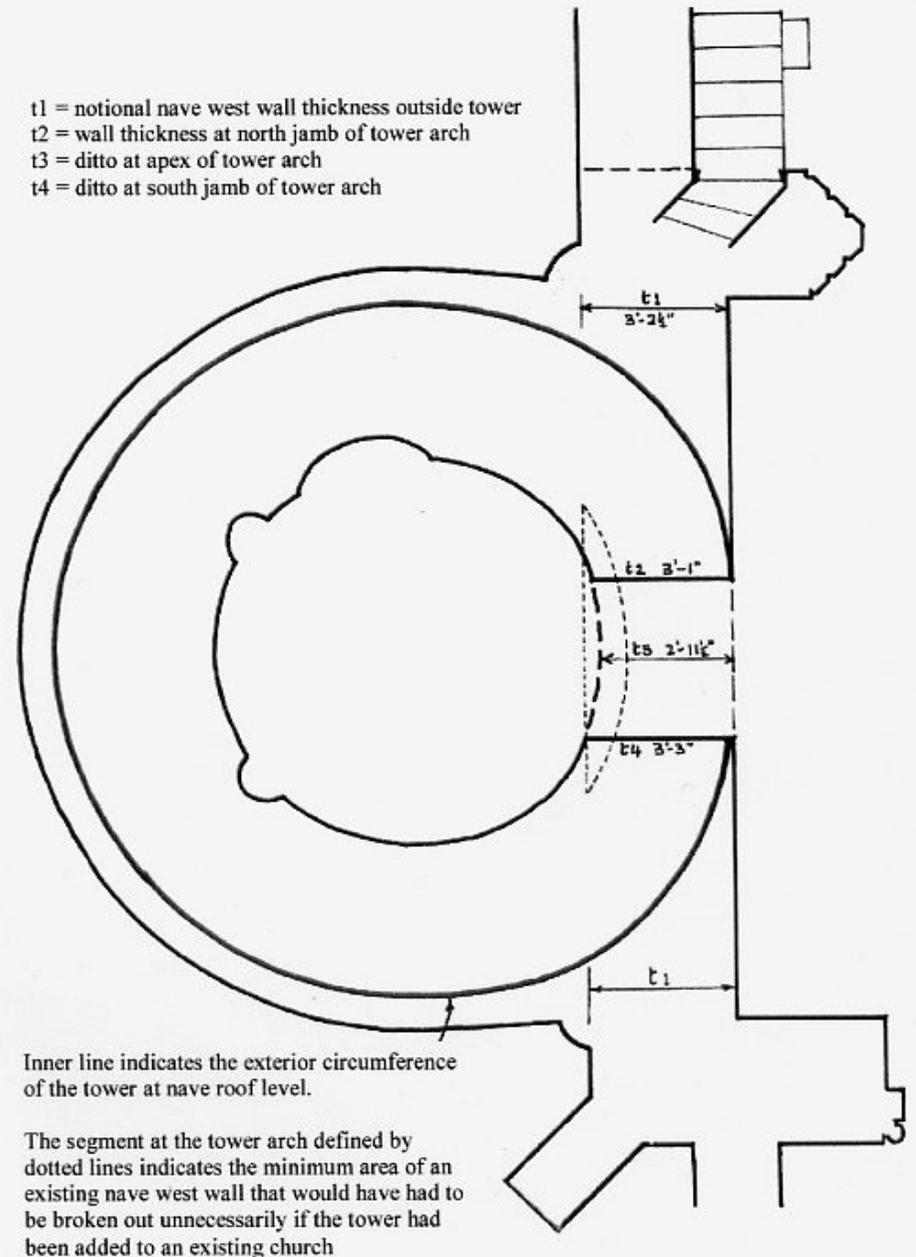
This subject was well aired by Bill Goode when he surveyed what earlier writers had said on the subject. That was nearly thirty years ago so the criteria he judged the subject against, deserves re-examination. It is clear that part of the allure and charm of church round-towers is their association with our unsettled history, especially in the Anglo-Saxon era. This can and does lead to a romantic view that generates extravagant claims for the antiquity of round towers. We know that the landscape and everything in it including churches, historically had to play their part in civil defence. This was especially the case near the north coast of East Anglia which was isolated from the rest of England and vulnerable to invasion.

Towers were erected essentially to house church bells so was the defensive roll of the tower incidental to that roll or integral to its purpose?

1. A strategic position in the landscape - burial mounds in the Saxon period and earlier were often placed on the sky-line. Some of these sites evolved into multiple Christian burial sites. It was natural to build parish churches in a visually prominent position such as high ground dominating the adjacent village so the same sites became the natural place to locate a parish church.

2. They were built as part of the defence against Viking raids where a threat persisted up to the end of the 11th century. Goode claims that archaeology supported the possibility of towers being erected at the beginning of the 11th century when the raids were still occurring. I have found no archaeological reports that gives evidence applicable to Norfolk Churches and which supports that assertion.

3. Early church towers were built for bells. In the 11th century most parish churches were very small and served as the semi-private chapels of their patrons. This suggests that church bells were still a rare thing. In any case their construction was still very simple, unlike the sophisticated form of bells used in the Middle Ages. Most parish bells of the 11th century and earlier were probably placed in free-standing frames erected in the churchyard or, on the roof of the nave, say in a ridge turret. This left them exposed to theft which is what happened to the turret bell on Bishop Solomon's Chapel next to Norwich Cathedral in the 17th century. Bells were easily the most expensive moveable possession of local churches. A bell tower gave the bells much more security which probably is what motivated their widespread construction in the Middle Ages.



HADDISCOE CHURCH. PLAN AT TOWER AND WEST END OF NAVE

chancel, the walls below this level and that below the east wall's string course being Norman. The nave was probably also correspondingly lower as implied by the assumed later clearstory addition (see below) and different fabric in the upper part of its south wall. Nave and chancel would have been too low for the present chancel arch, and as they are the same width, the original church probably had a single-cell plan with no chancel arch.

The simple chamfer on the imposts of the fourth bay of the arcade caused Pevsner to suggest that this arch may indicate a former Norman transept and that the moulded imposts of the second bay might imply the entry to an early c.14 chapel. However, a pointed arch to a Norman transept seems unlikely and the fact that these two arches conform to the spacing of the other bays tends to imply that, despite their detail differences, all were contemporary arches of an early c.14 arcade.

It seems therefore that in about 1300 there was a major reconstruction of the original lower church which the tower's Saxo-Norman features suggest was probably of the late eleventh or the early twelfth centuries. The nave and chancel walls were raised, with quatrefoil clearstory windows beneath medieval brick arches incorporated in the nave's heightened north wall. Arches were cut through the north wall to form the arcade and the aisle built incorporating the Norman door from the original north wall. Intersecting and Y-tracery windows in the aisle, though restored, corroborate the circa 1300 date.

The chancel arch, dated by Pevsner as circa 1300, was probably built in conjunction with the raising of the nave and chancel walls. Its south respond wall partly overlaps the internal circumference stonework of the western blocked circular window, thereby establishing that the four circular features predate these medieval alterations and negating Pevsner's suggestion that they might be Georgian. They were probably Norman single-splayed circular windows.

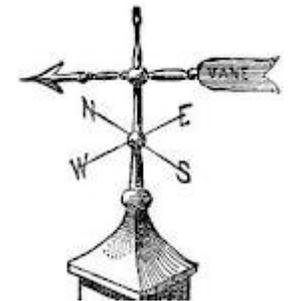
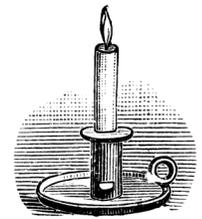


Inner surround of a circular window in the chancel south wall overlapped by the chancel arch's respond wall and a Perpendicular window reveal

The higher chancel would have necessitated a taller east wall and it

A LIGHT HEARTED QUIZ

1. Chase this on horseback
2. Type of type.
3. For showing blue films?
4. A volume of paper.
5. Wight or man?
6. Could be a breakdown lorry.
7. To cradle a princess's baby
8. For a medal or embrocation.
9. Might be hard to transplant
10. Robber of the Queen's kitchen
11. For the use of male voice choirs?
12. Change the fencing.
13. Must you crouch to use it?
14. Dull sermon? Shred or pulp it.
15. Are the sun and rain so proud?
16. Read it to the doctor.
17. No fruit machines in this one.
18. To light you to bed.
19. L centre.
20. Duke or bishop?
21. Wear what is left over.
22. Traditional bat roost.
23. No space for a top orchestra here.
24. A job that makes one blush.
25. Would new glasses cure it?
26. A rhyming pair: to kneel....
27. ...or wear.
28. Change of end for a French swimming pool.
29. Also a tube station.
30. Annoyed by all this?

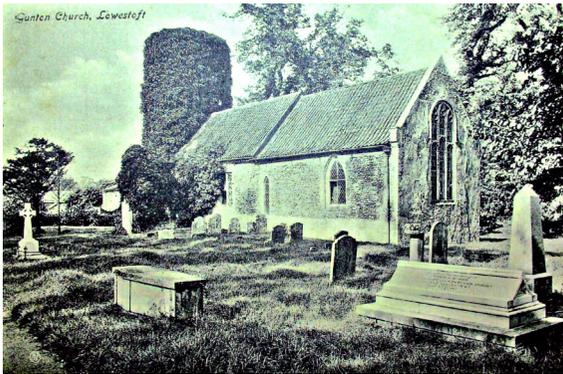


A £10 book token to the first correct answer to these disguised church items. Send entries to Anne Haward, 12 Church Green, Broomfield, CM1 7BD. Closing date 31st January 2012.

smaller doorway, in which a door is fitted, also with a semi-circular arch. If this was an original west door it seems rather meanly conceived compared with those at south and north. The building of a round tower on an existing west wall, if such was the case, may be supposed to have blocked a previous window opening, but the plain and whitewashed wall above this doorway was giving nothing away. This is quite different in feel to the gnarled flint wall with blocked porthole windows on which a medieval tower was added at nearby Kirby Bedon.

Joseph Biddulph

More about the Most Easterly Gem...



Whilst taking a short break at Warner's Gunton Hall I visited the church of Gunton St. Peter. One of the Church Wardens met with me and following an informative discussion gave me a copy of a photograph circa 1900. This shows the porch and the tower to be almost totally overgrown by ivy (or other climber). The picture shows

the church roof to be at two distinct levels, this to be altered during the most recent restoration. The Norman font currently within the porch and near to the south door can be seen to be in the churchyard just past the east wall and slightly to the south. The article in the *June 2011* magazine heading features of interest illustrates this font. An error probably occurred during a restoration.



Inside the porch and part of the door archway, at the base of the left hand side, is a Mass dial, (left) even without the porch, the dial would have not have been effective.

The church is now open most weekdays. Anyone staying at the Gunton Hall establishment can easily find the church by exiting the Hall rear entrance, walking across the complex so reaching a path

leading into the woods. Continue along this path for 1/4 mile approximately to reach the church in its picturesque setting.

Stan Barnes

appears that it was rebuilt at least from the level of the string course below the window cill, incorporating a larger window whose brick relieving arch can be seen enclosing its present Victorian replacement. This casts doubt on the Taylors' suggestion of circular window remnants in this wall.

Further alterations appear to have been made perhaps late in the fifteenth century when the porch was added and the nave's two-light Perpendicular south windows were inserted, with similar ones in the chancel. The internal reveal of the west Perpendicular window in the chancel south wall encroaches on the area of wall that would have contained part of the stone surround of the west circular window embrasure; this later medieval alteration, with the evidence of the chancel arch respond wall referred to above, confirms that the circular windows must be earlier.

Probably also late medieval, the narrow stair to the tower's first floor was formed by breaking into the west respond wall of the arcade in the aisle and cutting the stairway through the contiguous part of the tower wall.

The raisons-d'etre for a brick and stone quoin alongside one of the chancel south windows and a shallow medieval brick wall-arch below it pose an enigma.

Stephen Hart

St Nicholas, Topsham

On a recent trip to Devon I came across this Victorian round towered church in Topsham — a small town on the Exe estuary. Dedicated to St Nicholas (the patron saint of Seafarers) the church was built in 1867. It was funded by the Holman family— prominent Methodists and ship owners in the town. The exposed timbers of the wooden roof are meant to resemble the hull of a ship. Worth a visit if you are down that way...*Editor*



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, HELLINGTON



Aptly for a church dedicated to the prophet 'crying in the wilderness' (St Matthew 3.3) there was at the time of my visit a partly wild churchyard with large umbelliferae, tall bracken and nettles. The pale rendering left on parts of the exterior also added to an abandoned air, despite the building being vested in the Churches Conservation Trust and left open for visitors. The round tower is a cylinder with little or no tapering, predominantly in flints but with pieces of rectangular (i.e not Roman) brick even in the lower portions. It has

large gothic, louvered windows at the belfry stage, each consisting of a quatrefoil above paired cusped arches: these point north, west, south and east. The window surrounds show signs of having been restored, but the uniformity of the flint work suggests they are not later insertions: indeed, it seems that the tower was built in a single piece in the gothic period. After a thin horizontal band it is topped with a simple battlement. Most of its circle is achieved before it abuts the west wall of the nave, suggesting that it was added later to an existing nave wall.



The south door with its richly decorated concentric arches and multiple columns, has been well described in previous issues (*December 2004, page 36 and March 2005, page 60*). But there is another accomplished Norman doorway opposite to it in the north wall, of a single arch, with faces still vaguely visible on the carved heads projecting from the hoodmould terminations (see left). This contains the planks of an ancient door, a little worm-eaten at the base, but the interior has been blocked, producing a shallow recess. The only other opening in the north

wall of the nave is a single square-headed Perpendicular-style window with tracery. The north wall of the chancel is brick—with no openings at all.

Because of much rendering without and the paleness of the dressed stone of the windows, the body of the building seems almost white, and the interior is also whitewashed. Adding to this pale effect is the curious openwork porch at the south door, with a pantiled roof and niches with worn crocketing jutting out diagonally to left and right of the doorway's mid-gothic clustered columns. Each side wall of the porch is made up of cusped glassless window openings.

The south wall of the chancel has lovely pointed gothic windows, with different tracery in each. Above the gothic windows on the south side of the nave, immediately above the point of the arches, the wall is of thinnish handmade bricks. The increase in the height of the wall they produce makes the windows seem low in the walls - the same effect can be observed in the interior. These bricks, as much as can be observed through the remains of the rendering, appear to be mostly stretcher bond, i.e. laid flat with the long sides parallel to the wall. My initial response was to see this as a post-arch, rising well above the level where the bricks commence. This arch, puzzlingly, looks rather early English (Angevin) to me, but it may be an example of the survival of the Decorated-type tall pointed arches into the 15th century that is supposed to be a feature of Norfolk. According to Graham Hutton in *English Parish Churches* (Thames & Hudson 1952) this accounts for the rather old-fashioned look of the tower at Worstead. As for the bricks, I should have remembered, having once lived near the all-brick medieval church at Luton in Lincolnshire, that the material was in use in East Anglia as early as the 13th century. R.W. Brunskill, *Brick Building in Britain* (Victor Gollancz, London 1990) gives the example of Little Wenham Hall, Suffolk, circa 1275, adding that medieval bricks tend to be thin, erratic in shape (one in the wall here is like a reversed Z, squashed) and mainly red in colour, and 'generally one sees walls of many stretchers'. Taken all in all with the gothic features and the tower and the north wall of the chancel, the brick portion seems to represent a remodelling of the building in the later middle ages. The brick red would contrast sharply with the grey-brown of the flints, so plastering the outside and whitewashing the interior would seem to have been a reasonable aesthetic measure once the brick section was completed.

As if to confirm this heightening of the walls, there are quoins of side-alternate blocks of cut stone at the western corners of the nave, the one to the south even having a bevel as if to indicate the angle of the former roof. A bit too well-organised to be Anglo-Saxon work, they probably indicate the limit of the Norman flint wall that runs continuously around the Norman doorways—we assume that the ornate doorways belong to the 12th century. The doorways appear to be in the same pale stone as these corners. The quoins are topped by the brick, the brick corner on the south side managed rather clumsily. Two squarish panels in this brickwork may indicate that there were additional windows on the south side uncomfortably just below the roof level, later filled with bricks of a similar character.

There is a plain semi-circular arch over the doorway leading to the tower. There are deep reveals of a bit less than five foot, at the back of which is a