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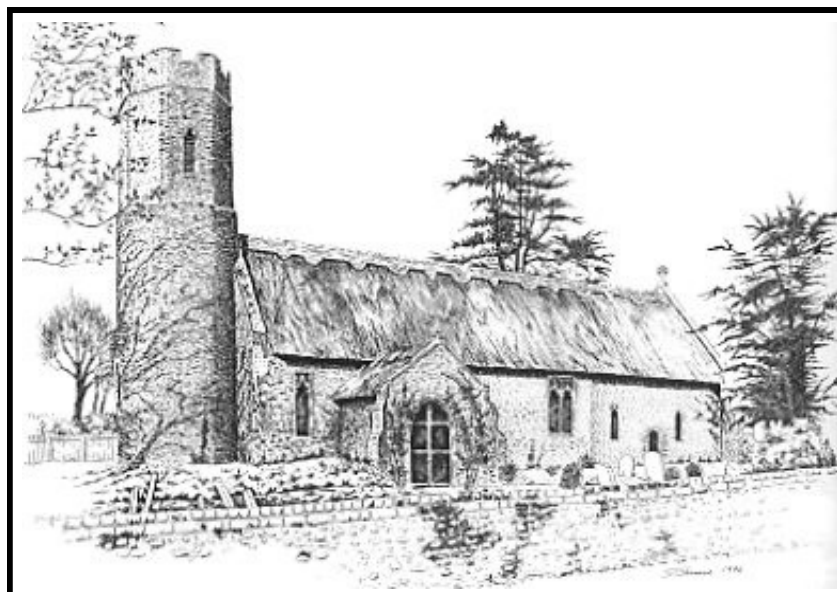
Vol. XXXV No. 3 March 2008



The Round Tower

Vol XXXV NO. 3

March 2008



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ROUND TOWER CHURCHES SOCIETY 2008 TOURS

Tour and AGM 10th May

10.30am	Wacton (TM 179 917), Shimpling, Gissing
2.15pm	Annual General Meeting Gissing Village Hall

Saturday Tours – first church 2.30pm

7 th June	Norton Subcourse (TM 407 986), Thorpe next Haddiscoe, Haddiscoe
5 th July	Worthing (TF 995 196), Bylaugh, Morton on the Hill
2 nd August	Brome (TM 145 765), Syleham, Weybread, (Suffolk)
6 th September	Intwood (TG196 042), Keswick, Swainsthorpe

NB all in Norfolk except for 2nd August.

Church Tours – Sundays, first church 2.30pm

20 th April	Upper Sheringham, Beeston Regis, West Runton, Overstrand
18 th May	Sprowston, Rackheath, Salhouse, Woodbastwick
15 th June	Docking, Burnham Westgate, Burnham Sutton cum Ulph, Burnham Thorpe
20 th July	Saham Toney, Ovington, Carbrooke, Scoulton

Church Tours, visiting Norfolk Churches, were organised by Richard Butler-Stoney from 1970 till 2003. Tea will be provided and these Sunday Tours end with a Service, usually Evensong at 6 or 6.30pm.

Everyone is welcome to attend either Tours, which are free.
Any queries about either Tours phone 'Lyn Stilgoe - 01328 738237.

W.J.Goode—Founder Round Tower Churches Society

As we go to press we have received the very sad news that our founder, Bill Goode, has passed away. There will be a full appreciation of his work and contribution to the society in the June magazine. This follows the recent death of his old friend and long term member of the society Mr Brian Harmer.

EDITORIAL

With talk of a small fork, a broken spade and strawberries, you would be forgiven for thinking that you had received a copy of Allotment Monthly. However, all will be revealed as we peak inside an unusual church building in Essex and then take a look at the work of Sir Ninian Comper. Further reading takes us via a simple, rural church at Horsey, to the Rotunda in Prague and the round towers of Bliesgau. The agenda for the AGM is published on page 69 and the new Tours Programme is featured on page 70.

The next issue is June 2008 and the deadline for insertion is Friday 25th April 2008.

Please send all items to:-

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THE ROUND TOWER

**The quarterly magazine of the
Round Tower Churches Society**

Vol. XXXV No. 3 March 2008

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*Cover drawing: Dot Shreeve
Interiors of Horsey: courtesy of
www.norfolkchurches.co.uk*

HORSEY, ALL SAINTS

Sheet 134. Map ref. T.G. 458 231

The church consists of a round tower with an octagonal belfry stage, a continuous nave and chancel about 16 feet wide without a chancel arch, under a thatched roof, and a south porch also with a thatched roof.



View of the tower from the north-east

The nave and chancel are built of uncoursed flint rubble and, the north side in particular, still bears remnants of a harling finish. A simple, pointed, once-chamfered stone door in the nave west wall and a trefoiled lancet window in the chancel south wall, which show no indications of having been inserted later, establish the nave and chancel to be of the Early English period. Their other windows are from the 19th century or later restorations. The side walls are quite low and just under 2'6" thick. External and internal measurements taken at the west ends of the north and south walls show that the nave west wall is about 2'8" thick south of the tower but about a foot thicker on the north side. This extra thickness is visible at the top of the NW corner where there are

renewed dressed stone quoins, and as the flintwork of this wall is different from that of the nave north wall, it seems that a later facing has been added.

The basis for a Saxon attribution for the nave has been a few flints in its SW corner which have been thought of as original Saxon flint quoins. This corner has been much repaired and now comprises mainly bricks interspersed with a few small flints and some very weather-worn quoin stones at the top. The amount of brick in this corner relative to the small number of flints in it suggests that those flints are not original flint quoins but are simply part of the reconstruction of this corner. They are all small walling material, not quoin-size flints and some are knapped. It is inconceivable that a builder repairing the corner with the amount of brick that has been used would have made the repair around and between occasional retained small flints! It is more likely that the corner may have

ROUND TOWER NEWS

We have had a number of enquiries concerning the content of the AGM in May—please find below the proposed agenda...

THE 35th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING THE VILLAGE HALL, RECTORY ROAD, GISSING SATURDAY, 10th MAY, 2008, AT 2.15pm

A G E N D A

- * Welcome and Opening Prayers.
- * Apologies for absence.
- * Minutes of the last AGM held on 12.5.2007.
- * Chairman's Review of the Year.
- * Treasurer's Report.
- * Grants Report.
- * Election of Committee Members and appointment of Officers.
- * Election of Auditor.
- * Any Other Business.

Please note the above may be subject to change.

XXXV No 2 December 2007 magazine - the Houghton on the Hill drawing was incorrectly attributed, it should have read Robert Ladbrooke and not John Ladbrooke....

Annual Membership Subscription:

Minimum £10 (overseas £15) of which 40% is for the printing and posting of *The Round Tower* and administration, with the balance going to the Repair Fund.

Magazines are published on the 1st of March, June, September and December. Membership renewal date is the first of these dates following the application for membership.

To join the Society, please contact the Treasurer whose address and telephone number is on the inside back cover.

dilapidated and too small for the number of parishioners, was demolished and rebuilt in 1790-91. Due lack of space, it was built in the south-north alignment it still has today. Remarkable is the furnishing of the nave and chancel: made by the locally famous sculptor Jean Madersteck from Lorraine/France for the nearby monastery of Gräfinthal, the people of Reinheim purchased the items by auction when the monastery became redundant during the French revolution for very low sum.



A personal favourite is the pulpit which is supported by the figure of Samson, and highly decorated. But also the chancel with the altar or the reredos are well worth a visit of this pretty church.

Bernd Jatzwauk

This article is based on the brochure "Rundturmkirchen im Bliegau" by Heidi Kügler, published by Rheinischer Verlag für Denkmalpflege und Landschaftsschutz, Heft 394, 1993; ISBN: 3-88094-755-4

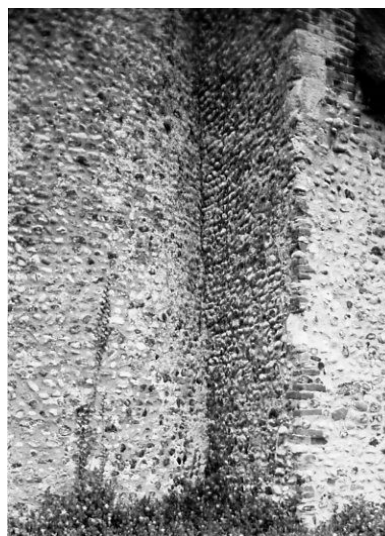
French Round Tower Churches Tour

Details of the planned tour will be available at the end of March. All those who have registered interest will receive details by the beginning of April.

If you have not already registered - please contact 'Lyn Stilgoe on 01328 738237 or email jastilgoe@aol.com by 31st March 2008.

originally been built with a poorly-weathering stone such as is seen in the remaining top quoins (perhaps the original ones, still in situ), and was rebuilt as cheaply as possible with such material as was available. On the north side, the original NW corner is lost behind the thickened nave west wall and the later large buttress there.

The tower is fully circular internally with a diameter of 8'3". Its walls are 3'5" thick, and at the tower arch apex the thickness is the same, i.e. 9" thicker than the nave west wall. By comparison with the original un-repointed flintwork of the nave north wall, the tower's circular stage flintwork is quite different; it is similar to the refaced nave west wall and may be contemporary with it. Not only is it coursed but it contains an



The SW nave quoin, rebuilt in brick

appreciable amount of knapped flint of a quality not found before the end of c.13, and more significantly, putlog hole bridgings externally and internally are of medieval brick. This evidence suggests that the tower was built later than the nave whose original walling contains no brick, and the 9" extra thickness at the tower arch apex is consistent with the tower east wall's curved inner face at that level having been built against the nave west wall. The tall pointed tower arch is formed without stone dressings except in its recessed arch head, and this might suggest that it was cut through the nave west wall rather than being built with it.

A stone weathercourse built into the east wall of the tower, which is an indication of post-Conquest construction, shows that the present nave ridge level is as it was originally, and as this coincides with the top of the tower's circular stage and there is no evidence in its walls externally or internally of blocked former belfry openings, it is unlikely that the circular stage ever stood as a complete tower. It follows therefore that unless the octagonal belfry replaced an earlier post-Norman one, which its own early post-Norman style suggests is unlikely, it would have been contemporary with the circular stage or possibly a later completion of an unfinished tower whose construction may have been interrupted by the Black Death. It has

medieval brick corners and joins the circular stage without a string course which, like a few other round towers of comparable date, Wramplingham, Edingtonthorpe and Ilketshall St Andrew for example, suggests that its two stages were contemporary; their flintwork is not dissimilar and the lancet-style belfry openings, compatible in date with the pointed tower arch, also suggest that the round and octagonal stages represent a single building phase.



Small holes, about a foot square, inside the walls of the upper part of the circular stage of the tower

Although there are no blocked former openings in the tower walls, there are at the top of the circular stage walls internally, four small recesses about a foot square formed with brick, flint and stone that have been left open following removal of old floor timbers; they have been called blocked Saxon belfry windows!

The tower's battlemented parapet is faced with knapped flints and is probably a fifteenth-century addition.

The original Pevsner (1962) says little about the church but the 1997 version calls the round tower "probably c.13 rather than c.12 with... the belfry added in c.15" and "the rest is c.13 too". Cautley calls the tower Norman, and Goode attributes church and tower as Early Saxon. However, the evidence described above suggests an alternative possible constructional history. Originally, a single - cell towerless church was built during the thirteenth century. The

Reinheim, catholic church of St. Markus

The village of Reinheim lies in the valley of the river Blies, right on the Franco-German frontier. The favourable location in this fertile basin might have been crucial for an early settlement. From Celtic times derives the burial chamber of the so-called "Celtic princess of Reinheim". There is also evidence for a Roman settlement. Numerous excavations have taken place between Reinheim and Bliesbruck in Lorraine/France during the last couple of years, forming the major part of the "Europäischer Kulturpark Bliesbruck Reinheim" (Archaeological Park of Bliesbruck Reinheim) today. The ending "-heim" is probably an indication for a Franconian settlement.

The first mention of the catholic church of St. Markus can be traced back to the year 1314, that of the village to 1267. The church is built in a north-south direction with the round tower situated on the eastern wall of the nave. The round tower has a height of 15,05 m to the edge of the roof, and, like all the neighbouring round towered churches, crowned by a tapered helm roof. The outer diameter of the tower is 7,80 m at ground level and 6,80 m at the first and second floor, while the inner diameter widens from 4,80 m at ground and first floor to 5,00 m at the upper floor. The ground floor lies about 0,70 m below the ground level of the nave, and is reached via a couple of steps. The ground floor has been used as a chapel since 1488, when it received its gothic décor: lancet windows in the northern and southern wall of the tower and a Y-tracery window in the eastern wall, and a gothic cross-shaped vault. The chapel is used today for baptisms, the font is also located here now. A recess in the eastern nave wall, above the entrance to the ground floor chapel in the tower, probably shows a former entry to the first floor of the tower. It hosts a statue of St Sebastian today. In 1574, the church was rebuilt; either a nave was added to the round tower for the first time, or – what is thought to be more likely – a formerly smaller, west-east aligned nave was extended. In the late 18th century, building activity evolved in the region under the auspices of Countess von der Leyen, residing in nearby Blieskastel. The church, which had become



BLIESGAU

After the general look at the round towers of the Bliesgau and the description of the church of Bebelsheim in the first part of this series, we continue with the remaining two German churches in the Bliesgau. The final part will then concentrate on the church of Zetting in France, just across the border, and probably the most interesting and spectacular of the round tower churches in this area.

Erfweiler-Ehlingen, catholic church of St. Mauritius

The climatically favourable situation of the village of Erfweiler on the south-western slope of a basin probably was the determining factor for an early settlement here. In the 19th century, the parish priest Arnold Rütter discovered the remains of a Roman bath. In the late 1970s, a “Villa Rustica” was excavated, the largest to be found anywhere in the region.

While the first mentioning of the village goes back to 1223, a written document of the parish dates back to 1347. The current building integrates some older parts, the oldest being the rectangular choir from the 14th century and the round tower from the 12th or 13th century that is affixed to the eastern side of the joint of nave and choir. The round tower, built of quarry stone, has a height of 11,80m to the edge of the roof, and like St. Margaretha of Bebelsheim, it is crowned by an octagonal, tapered helm roof, dating back to the year 1614. Unlike the tower in Bebelsheim, it narrows nearly a meter from base (5,80m) to the edge of the roof (4,85m), while the inner diameter widens from 2,80m at the base to 3,35m at the top. This means of course that

the thickness of the walls diminishes from base to top. Two doors are located in the ground floor, one opening to the churchyard in a north-eastern direction, one into the choir in a western direction. The door opening which links the tower with the choir seems to be the original one, while the one leading to the outside was added at a later time. Loopholes in the middle floor seem to underline the original purpose of the tower, namely defence. Major works on the church took place in 1614 and 1824, when the original building became too small for an increasing number of inhabitants of the village, while the church got its final form, as it is today, in the neo-gothic style in 1904.



extent and quality of knapped flints in the external wall of the tower's circular stage, and its pointed tower arch internally imply a date no earlier than the late thirteenth century, but its putlog hole bridgings of medieval brick suggest the fourteenth. The trefoiled lancet form of the belfry openings in the octagon suggest an early rather than a late c.14 date, but if completion of the tower was delayed by the Black Death, the originally envisaged design may have been adhered to.

If we believe those histories that tell of the death of half of the population of Norfolk during the plague known as the Black Death in the middle of the fourteenth century, we must recognise that it would have had an enormous effect on churches under construction at the time. The second quarter of the century was a busy building period, during the later years of the Decorated style; many churches or towers of that period are therefore likely to have been affected or subjected to completion delays.

Stephen Hart

From the archive... 'More Latin' - appeared Vol. XX111 No 3 March 1996

Whereas some Latin tags like Ora Pro Nobis turn up in church after church, there are one or two Round Tower churches that have less common, longer inscriptions. In Acle the font has a panel with Our lady of Pity and the inscription 'Orate Pro Animabus Qui Istum Fontem In Honore Dei Fieri Fecerunt Anno Dni Millimo CCCC Decimo' - Pray for the souls of those who had this font made in honour of God, 1410'. This is particularly unusual as it does not name the benefactors as do similar font inscriptions in East Anglia, e.g. around the bases of the fonts at Burgate, Darsham or Orford.

Another part of the church where Latin inscriptions often still survive is on painted screens. These are usually Biblical quotations as at Ringsfield or Burlingham, but at Blundeston there are angels of the Passion bearing scrolls marked 'Passio Christi Salvatoris'—The Passion of Christ our Saviour.

Perhaps it is no surprise that it is at Lound that one meets the longest inscription of all where the final verses of Psalm 150 appear on the magnificent Comper organ case. 'Laudate Dominium in Tubae, Laudete Eum in Chordis et Organo, Laudate Eum Cymbalis Sonantib. Omnis Spiritus Laudet Dominium, Allelui.

Anne Haward

INTERIOR - HORSEY, ALL SAINTS



The understated interior of this church is a delight and reflects the simple rural landscape in which it stands. Victorian tiles lead via plain benches (some still with 15th century poppy-head pew ends) to a modest holy table in the chancel. Overhead, ring candelabra hang from the simple timber roof frame whilst light floods in from the East window.

In the north chancel wall there are three small cupboards (aumbries) whilst in the south wall there is a round arched piscina with a deep circular basin under a square surround, now without most of its tracery. To the right is a sunken sedilia under a stained glass window dedicated to Elizabeth Rising who died in 1882. Other windows contain memorials, with that of Catherine Ursula Rising being of particular interest. Dressed in red and standing in front of a window at Horsey Hall, she is calmly poised in front of her painting easel. Other window memorials include depictions of St Peter and St Paul and Christ with a new born lamb.

In the north wall of the nave can be found the old stairwell, complete with both the upper and lower doorways, providing access to the former rood loft. The wooden screen has six unpainted panels at the base, three either side of the ogeed central opening, with ogee arches and panel tracery above them. On the south side, just before the screen, is a carved wooden pulpit.

To the rear of the church is the font. Both basin and stem are octagonal and each facet features a recessed trefoiled arch. Beyond is the tower arch complete with carved wooden tower screen.



death was superstitiously attributed to this act. A contemporary account by a (monk?) Gocelin says that he died in 1059 leaving the Octagon nearly, but not quite, finished. His successor, Abbot Egelsig, seems to have done nothing more with the building works, so the tombs of the saints and kings remained in St Mary's church. The Octagon never became the royal mausoleum of great prestige, which it was intended to be. Instead it fell into decay. This may explain why it had so little architectural impact on the region.

From the time of Wulfric, the foundations of a square bell tower have been identified at the western end. It is of some curiosity what type of bells might have been hung there. The earliest church bell I have found is displayed in Hereford Museum – dated as late Saxon and measuring 9 inches by 6 inches, by 15 inches high. It is made of metal sheets riveted together, narrower at the top than the bottom but with none of the heavy striking lip which characterise medieval and later bells. It was hung from a channelled metal handle. There was no sign of an internal clapper. If it was struck on the outside there were no marks of wear on its sides. Such bells were rung like a carillon to mark the times of monastic offices, feasts etc. Very little seems to have been written about the relationship between early bells and their towers so I would be interested if any society members have further information on this subject.

Soon after the Normans invaded in 1066, the Saxon cathedral in Canterbury was burnt down and then demolished. They concentrated most of their building efforts on that great church. Scolland became Abbot of St Augustine's Abbey. He started to demolish the archaic, very long and narrow Saxon church. This began at the eastern end. By the time of his death in 1087, the new presbytery and transepts were nearly complete. The basement of Wulfric's rotunda still survives, but the new, monumental, Norman church destroyed all other evidence of it above ground. In the Middle Ages, St Augustine's Abbey became the 15th richest in the country. Of the estimated 83 late Anglo-Saxon churches of England, including the cathedral minsters, the secular and monastic minsters, very little is known about all but a handful of them and that makes St Augustine's Abbey doubly interesting. It is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument open to the public and well worth a visit.

Richard Harbord

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY, CANTERBURY, KENT

In the June 2004 edition of the Round Tower Church Society magazine I claimed that the Rotunda of Bury St Edmund could have been the inspiration for the many church Round Towers built in the same region of East Anglia. A fitting retort might have been that a similar rotunda was built in St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury but it had no influence at all on the building of churches or their towers in the south-east of England. This article examines the circumstances behind it.

The rotunda in Kent was called 'Wulfric's Octagon' and started in 1050 which was about 20 years after the Bury Rotunda was completed. The Octagon was so-named as its outer form followed that shape with a diameter of about 60 feet. The inner part formed a cylindrical tower. It rose in three main stages – the cellar opened into a crypt on the east side; above it was the main storey as high as the adjacent nave; with a tower above that. Wulfric became Abbot in 1047. He found five churches in and around the Abbey following the same or similar east-west axis. From the west there was a chapel of unknown dedication with a western circular turret; the main church of St Peter and St Paul; a gap of 49 feet and then St Mary's church; a gap of 240 feet to St Pancras Church; then a further substantial gap, rising up a hill to St Martins. The latter was a Roman church and the only one still in use by Christians perhaps in all of England (led by Bertha, the Queen of Kent) when St Augustine arrived in 597. The chancel may form part of the original Roman building making it the earliest parish church in Britain still in use today. St Pancras is now a ruin but in 597 it was used by King Ethelbert for pagan worship until the time when Augustine converted him. This church also has the look of a Roman building. The site and surroundings of the Abbey have therefore a feeling of immense antiquity.

From Canterbury, St Dunstan reformed Britain's monastic system and the way that monasteries were laid out. The formal layout of the monastery (on the north side of the church) at St Augustine's may be the earliest in the country. By 978 he also started to rebuild the west front on a grander scale. Saints and the royal family were buried in St Mary's crypt and the abbots, including St Augustine, were buried in St Peter and St Paul's church. Wulfric made no attempt to rebuild these long narrow churches. Instead, he demolished the chancel of the latter church to provide sufficient space for his new Octagon. This was after he became Abbot in 1048 where his plan was to use the Octagon to link the three existing churches of the Abbey. His early

THE ROTUNDA OF THE HOLY CROSS



This church in Prague is called Konviktská Karoliny Svetlé, "the Rotunda of the Holy Cross". This is one of the very last gems that remain of 12th century Prague and may have a claim to be one of the very few round tower churches in that country. The rotunda is a small chapel where the round roof is in effect a small round tower for containing the bells. This design is characteristic of the style of the Premyslids, kings who reigned between the 11th and 14th centuries. Wall paintings dated from the 14th century are to be seen within the church itself.

In the past, Prague certainly had more round churches. From the beginning of the 10th century, numerous churches, circular in form and complete with a domed roof and sometimes multiple apses, were built. These took the place of earlier churches built in a different design. Does this fashion offer a parallel to the way round-towered churches came to be built profusely in Norfolk and Suffolk? This church building was typical of the earliest period of the Premyslid Dynasty. Not only did this church style spread throughout the Premyslid state in Bohemia and Moravia, but it was also adopted in Austria, in Poland and elsewhere.

Dispute as to the origin of this round church style has been prolonged. A Carolingian origin has been the favoured view, such churches being copied from the Rotunda of St Guy built in this style by St Wenceslas in Prague at the beginning of the 10th Century. Others suspect a Byzantine influence entering the country via Italy. This Bohemian style may be detected in St. Donatus Church in Zadar, and also in other churches much further to the East as far as Montenegro, for example in the church of St. Luke and St. Mary in Kotor (See Francis Dvornik, *"The Slavs: their Early History and Civilization"*, Boston, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1956, pp. 150/153).

A round tower attached to the west of a nave is an attractive solution to a problem which seems to have defied the builders of the round churches in Bornholm and elsewhere in Denmark (see article in next issue). A remarkable achievement of the round-towered churches of East Anglia of the period is that they achieved this same end by the innovation of marrying a west tower with a nave. The Rotunda in Prague is an alternative solution to this technical problem.
H.T. & T.S. Norris

A CHURCHYARD BUILDING AT PENTLOW

In the churchyard at Pentlow, Essex, stands a wooden building under a tiled roof. It is situated at its closest point less than 7 feet from the buttress of the north chapel. Rather too substantial to be termed a shed, a small outbuilding would seem a better description. The timber walls are of vertical planks above a brick plinth 9 inches wide and the height to the eaves from the brick base is 7 feet. The roof is of red “pin” tiles and is pyramidal in shape. There are two doors, one larger than the other, on the west side and a single door at the north end of the east side. There is a single cast iron down pipe on the north side. This building is just over 13 foot square and dates perhaps from the late 19th century.



What was its purpose? Might it have been a sexton's shed, somewhere to store digging and general maintenance equipment? The smaller door on the west side leads to an area, which clearly shows the building is partitioned. This area is 6 feet 5 inches long by 3 feet 9 inches wide.

The larger door on this side leads to an area 9 feet 3 inches wide and 12 feet 9 inches long. What can only

be described as sundry old truck and lumber make up the contents of this area; a pair of shears, a small fork, (both very rusty) bits of old pipe, a broken spade, an enamel jug, short pieces of a ladder, timber trestles, old cans and a dusty Hayterette rotary mower.

However, on opening the door on the east side of the building a surprise awaits. It gives entry to a privy. The “room” is 6 feet 1 inch by 3 feet 9 inches, open to the rafters, with greyish pammets 1 foot square on the floor. The wooden “thunderbox” is 1 foot 7 inches high by 3 foot 9 inches wide by 1 foot 5½ inches and the hole in the top is 9 inches north to south 10 inches east to west, slightly oval in shape.



breath-taking example of a reredos/screen a visit is recommended to Wymondham Abbey (3*) as it has the largest and most beautiful one erected in the c.20.

Many of his restorations have been spoilt or destroyed: St Alban's, High Holborn badly bombed in 1941 with the loss of his font cover (based on that at Ufford); the crypt at St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, sadly through neglect and damp problems – the church being alongside the Regent's canal - although it is hoped to start a programme of restoration in the near future; the fine oak top placed over the altar table at Wingfield was removed in 1960. Even Comper's house, The Priory at Upper Norwood, south London was demolished, there being now no property, once lived in by Comper, where a commemorative blue plaque could be placed.

Comper's glass practice continued for several years after his death with a bee being added to the strawberry. I have yet to find one but as my interest in the work of Sir John Ninian Comper continues I have no doubt that the prospect of that fresh discovery will continue to provide much pleasure.



Ciborium and reja at Wellingborough & underside of ciborium at London Colney

The ciboria/baldacchinos (freestanding canopy over an altar, supported by columns) I have seen, have all shown diverse and beautiful ornamentation. Comper used the term *ciborium* (technically correct), others prefer *baldacchino*. Should we bow to the opinion of this eminent architect or hold our own view, as with so many other aspects of church architecture?

I would like to thank the incumbents, church wardens/other staff at the places I have visited for their help and warm welcome.

Valerie Grose

Bibliography

'Sir Ninian Comper' Anthony Symondson and Stephen Bucknall (who sadly died on 14th January 2008 as we were putting this piece together—Editor)
The Buildings of England—Norfolk, north-west and south' Nickolaus Pevsner & Bill Wilson

mother from Barsham (RT church) rectory where he was staying with the rector, a Mr Williams who knew Comper's father, and referred to the East window painted by his master (C E Kempe) who also trained F C Eden (1864-1944), Comper's only professional rival. Comper worked widely in East Anglia and after he had visited the gloriously beautiful churches (from which he drew inspiration from their rood screens) was saddened to find them either in a state of decay or with bad and vulgar restorations.



Hanging pyx (V&A)

The rood screen was the visual centrepiece of medieval churches, with the altar, its heart. Comper's designs often included a hanging pyx, above the high altar, for reserving the Blessed Sacrament. One exquisite example, now in the Victoria & Albert museum, was originally at Egmonton (3*) - said to be one of Comper's most beautiful restorations. One of his last works was the altar and reredos in Romilly Bernard Craze's (1892 - 1974) Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham (1959). After nearly four hundred years, the 20th century saw the restoration of pilgrimage to Walsingham as a regular feature of Christian life in the British Isles, and beyond. There is also some stained glass at Walsingham where the strawberry motif will be found, but interested visitors may find it advantageous to equip themselves with a magnifying glass and kneeler when seeking out the fruit.



Detail of reredos (Stockcross)

Pevsner caused lasting damage to Comper's reputation. His work though was recognised both by a knighthood, at the age of 84, from King George VI and by his ashes being interred in the north aisle of the nave of Westminster Abbey under a series of his windows. This despite it having been his wish to be buried alongside his wife at Wellingborough. Also in Westminster Abbey, Comper was

responsible for the Warrior's chapel where, in a corner, it is surrounded by a reja. Instead of the usual screen Comper also installed a reja at Stockcross, Berkshire through which one sees a richly carved alabaster reredos. For a

One is left to speculate - was this 'necessary house' for the sole use of the sexton, or also for parishioners visiting the churchyard to tend graves, or perhaps for the use of the congregation.

Increasingly today, lavatory facilities are being installed in our ancient parish churches for the comfort of the worshippers and visitors, but some would say to the detriment of the fabric of the building. Sometimes there are difficulties with the water supply for such works. Recently a church in north Suffolk has solved the potential problems of lack of a water supply and the need to place the convenience in the church, by installing an 'eco-loo' in a small wooden building in the churchyard. That which is deposited therein, eventually becomes compost.

It seems that the parish of Pentlow had the answer over a hundred years ago, pointing the way to good practice today. Perhaps more parishes should consider installing 'the privy without' rather than the 'lavatory within'.

Stuart Bowell

RUINED AND DESERTED CHURCHES

The following paragraph appears in a book entitled 'Ruined and Deserted Churches' written by Lucy Elizabeth Beedham and published in 1908.

'...While on the subject of these much-discussed towers it may be interesting to mention, on the authority of Murray's Guide to Norfolk, that they number in all one hundred and eighty, distributed as follows: Norfolk, one hundred and twenty-five; Suffolk, forty; Essex, seven; Cambridgeshire, Berkshire and Sussex, two each; Northamptonshire and Surrey, one each; and that, with a single exception, are all of identical proportions, being 60 feet high and 16 feet in diameter including the thickness of the walls...'

Any thoughts on the 'identical proportions'?

SIR NINIAN COMPER *An appreciation of his restorations/work in churches*

The funeral services for my late grandparents were held at Eye Church (a 2* Comper restoration – 1919-32) some 30 years ago. At the time, I did not appreciate the enormous contribution Sir John Ninian Comper (1864 – 1960) had made to British church *furnishing* in the first half of the c.20, (some work being completed in the late c.19: St Margaret of Scotland, Aberdeen (1889), and St Peter Mancroft (1897), to name but two. He had no formal qualifications, being listed in *Who's Who* as “architect unregistered”, and saw himself more as a church furnisher.

In May 2006 an article in a national newspaper, to commemorate the birth of the late Sir John Betjeman 100 years earlier, featured six of the former poet laureate's favourite churches that were in need of funds. Two of these, Blisland, Cornwall (full of devotion and colour) and St Cyprian's Clarence Gate (3*) in London have Comper associations. Blisland, windows only (by Comper); St Cyprian's, one of 15 complete churches is light and spacious. After early reservations, as Betjeman saw more of Comper's work and better understood it, he became his principal supporter, having earlier ridiculed him by referring, on television, to his “wark in the charch” at Lound (3*) as marvellous and it remains a church that many consider to be their favourite work. Comper though was not entirely satisfied with the screen but considered the organ case to be the most successful he had designed. His font cover there is an elaborate creation based on that at Salle and the south altar has detail taken from the screen at Ranworth.

Following the Round Tower's visit to Lound in May 2007 I became interested in looking further at Comper's varied restorations. He completed some 500 commissions, both in this country and abroad, and although each is unique, one can step inside a church and recognise the “Comper” work. From a baldacchino/ciborium (some examples (all 3*) at London Colney, Herts, Pusey House, Oxford, St Phillip's, Cosham); a rood screen, reredos, font cover, hanging pyx, riddel posts, reja (iron screen), the Pantokrator/Majestas (depicted in stained glass or as a carved figure atop the rood screen), organ case/loft (astonishing example at Carshalton, Surrey), commemorative brasses (exquisite detail of Richard Temple West, who founded St Mary Magdalene, Paddington) to gravestones with Comper's special signature rich burnished gilding, added in the 1920s. His work can also be experienced in the embroidered vestments, altar frontals and linen; rose red hangings (erroneously described to his annoyance as Comper *pink*); blue (as seen by Comper at St John Lateran in Rome) was also used (in the crypt at St Mary

Magdalene, Paddington (3*) and at Mundford (2*), near Brandon). In the chancel at Gt Ryburgh (1*:RT) is a ceiling/roof of plaster floral wreaths, in panels, with a frieze of angels with outstretched wings, all uncoloured and pure white. Strawberry(ies), wild fruit (coloured yellow), were introduced in the bottom right hand corner of Comper's stained glass windows (inserted after 1903), in memory of his late father who was feeding them to poor children when he died. At Mundford the strawberry is actually coloured red. However,



Pevsner referred to the glass in the East window “that seems to be by Comper” as “terrible”. He did though find the screen ‘quite extraordinary’. Unlike at Lound (richly coloured) Mundford's was left in dark oak. Comper was commissioned, on a very limited budget, to build a church at Rothiemurchas (3*) in the highlands to replace the original (of corrugated iron and known as the Tin Tabernacle). He chose a design of all white, as he had seen on his Spanish travels, and was his ‘little gem.’ Funds did not allow for stained glass. It is markedly different from his greatest work - at Wellingborough (3*) - which even Pevsner, who rarely missed an opportunity to dismiss or overlook Comper's work - had to admit “it glistens and reveals and conceals to one's heart's delight”.

Comper's ultimate aim was to bring man to worship God through beauty and he wanted light for showing the *beauty of colour* on carved woodwork, painted and gilded screens and altars, textiles and embroidery. He admired English late medieval glass and the tonal effect of glass of a lighter type seen in English parish churches – for instance at Fairford and Great Malvern, and fragmentary examples in East Anglia. Throughout his life he had numerous contacts and introductions that, in turn, led to one commission after another. In 1882, he was invited to work, voluntarily, with Charles Eamer Kempe (1837-1907), a glass painter/church craftsman. Many years later, feeling he owed little to his year with Kempe, he nevertheless admitted it was at that stage he developed technical ability and gained the confidence to “train workmen in many disciplines and imbue them with his standards and aesthetic ideals”. In 1883 he wrote to his