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Vol. XXXIV No. 1 September 2011



The Round Tower

Vol. XXXIV No 1

September 2011



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CHAIRMAN	Mr Stuart Bowell 2 Hall Road, Chilton Hall, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1TN Tel: 01449 614336 email: georgisab353@btinternet.com
SECRETARY	Mrs 'Lyn Stilgoe Crabbe Hall, Burnham Market, King's Lynn PE31 8EN Tel: 01328 738237 email: jastilgoe@aol.com
TREASURER	Mr Richard Barham 6 The Warren, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NW Tel: 01603 788721
GRANTS OFFICER	Mr Nick Wiggin Fir Tree Cottage, Winesham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 9EX Tel: 01473 785596 email: nickwiggin@hotmail.com
SALES & MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION	Mrs Pauline Spelman 105 Norwich Road, New Costessey, Norwich NR5 0LF Tel: 01603 743607
COMMITTEE MEMBERS	Ms Susan Williams (see page 3) Mrs Teresa Wiggin Fir Tree Cottage, Winesham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 9EX Tel: 01473 785596 Mr Paul Hodge The Cardinal's Hat, Back Street, Reepham, NR10 4SJ Tel: 01603 870452 email: pt.hodge@tiscali.co.uk Dr Anne Woollett The Cardinal's Hat, Back Street, Reepham, NR10 4SJ Tel: 01603 870452 email: anne.woollett@tiscali.co.uk Mr Michael Pollit 60 Chamberlain Road, Norwich, NR3 3LY Tel: 01603 486997 email: michael.pollitt@archant.co.uk
LECTURERS & Slide Shows	Mr Stuart Bowell, Mr Richard Barham (see above), Mr John Scales - Pastons, 30 Stoke Road, Poringland, Norwich NR14 7JL. Tel: 01508 493680

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The nearest round towered churches to High Wych are Broomfield (Essex) and Bardfield Saling (Essex), and nearer still, if Pritchett ever saw it before it vanished, at Birchanger, just North of Bishop's Stortford (Hertfordshire). In fact, amongst Essex churches, the outward appearance of the church at High Wych reminds one most of South Ockenden Church which was heavily restored in 1866, five years after the consecration of High Wych. Ugly or not, in our view the church at High Wych is not without some interest and in respect to round tower churches built by the Victorians, it should not be overlooked. High Wych church has not an East Anglian feel whatsoever. It does however echo something of the spirit of Booton Church (1875, completed 1891, St Michael and All Angels, Pevsner: "... a happy disregard for principles of Early English composition (*Lutyens* said of it: "... very naughty, but built in the right spirit"!)) in Norfolk. The latter church was once decried and written off as a horror of the Victorian age and was equally criticized by Pevsner as being "depressingly antiquated for the time when Morris and his disciples were busy in many places". Today, it is listed a building and singled out in tourist publications as a site worth seeing in the county. Perhaps the round towered church at High Wych will one day share something of its reputation.

Footnotes:

[1] Pritchett left other examples of his handiwork in Newport, Essex where he designed and built the existing "Cambridge style" square tower and the entire neo-Gothic church at Therfield in Northern Hertfordshire to replace the former mediaeval church (St. Mary's, Therfield 1878; St. Mary's Newport, 1858). His other works include the chapel at Perry Green (near the Henry Moore collection of famous sculptures), not far from High Wych.

[2] The Story of Sawbridgeworth: the church and its people (supplied by Ms Carol Fouters, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies: Local History Centre of Hertfordshire County Council).

[3] Willis organ details: Hertfordshire, High Wych, St. James the Great [N14180] Grid ref: TL4614; Survey date: 2000; (Organ playable).

H.T. Norris and T.S. Norris

The next issue is December 2011 and the deadline for insertion is Friday 28th October.

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

Susan Williams
Flinten Barn
Thornage Road
Letheringsett
Holt
Norfolk
NR25 7JD
Tel: 01263 712301
swilliams151@btinternet.com

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6 The Warren, Old Catton,
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THE ROUND TOWER

The quarterly magazine of the Round Tower Churches Society

Vol. XXXIV No 1 September 2011

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St James Church, High Wych

ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, WOLVERTON A RUINED ROUND TOWER

This church represents a number of enigmas. It is amongst the oldest in Norfolk yet its round tower was one of the last to be built in the late Middle Ages. Churches were originally placed near to cross-roads yet Wolterton is isolated from the network of country lanes surrounding it. The parish was always small and poor yet the church tower is still substantial and even ambitious in its design. All this takes some explaining.

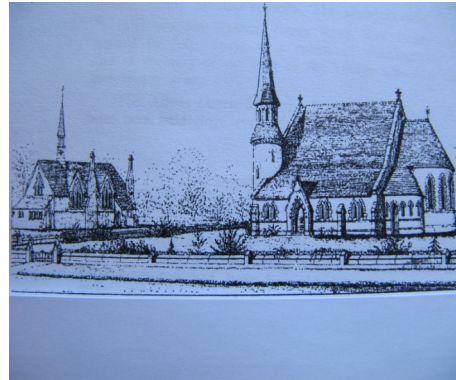
In the early 11th century St Benet's Abbey (near Ludham, in the Norfolk Broads) was endowed with the principle part of Wolterton. It was given half its advowson, the church glebe land and a plough-land – why? Normally it would be impossible to answer such a question but Wolterton seems to have failed as a settlement, early in its history. It was probably placed under the manorial jurisdiction of Mannington, a small parish to the west and the two places have been closely linked ever since. This meant that Wolterton needed to be resettled; ie 'planted' by the Abbot. Why else would the common field to the west of the village and a rectangular Village Green surrounded on three sides by tenements with the churchyard on the fourth, southern side, all have such a regular layout?

An ancient track-way diagonally crossed the Green, leading north-west to the coast at Weybourne and south-east to Blickling – *Grimes Way*. Another track-way led east and west, so the church was originally placed at an intersection of crossroads. A freeman called Thorold held a small estate here before 1066 – did he establish Wolterton's first church? In the *Domesday Survey* of 1086, the parish held 12 men and a population of about 40-50 people. This figure has remained fairly constant ever since (in 1603, 32 Anglican communicants were reported) so only a small church was ever needed here. Despite the Black Death of 1349, the church was fairly well endowed. In 1369, a survey was made of the church's contents and it recorded 11 liturgical books (as required by Canon Law) but no Bible; copes; vestments and a vestment chest; manual bells; a procession banner with staves; a coffin-bier with its carpet and coverlet; a Lenten Veil; various vessels – silver chalices, cruets, censor, pyx, oil container, etc. How could such a poor parish afford all these things? The answer could only come from patronage.

The manorial family of 'de Wolterton' is recorded in the parish from the 12th century onwards. They lived in a small manor-house 200 metres south

handling of gothic forms as anything in the Art Nouveau of 40 years later" (Pevsner (1977) pp. 195-196). The church is of the greatest architectural interest, unaltered and retaining its original scheme of painted decoration, counter-pointing the red and white brickwork of the interior".

As can be seen (below) from the architect's drawing [2] St James' church and the original building of the National School High Wych, if viewed together as a composition, offer a very impressive architectural edifice. In all fairness, the school with its uncoursed



knapped flint buildings and the church are inseparable the one from the other. This may explain why the round towerlet of the church is at an angle to the structure in order to accommodate the South doorway which was clearly built to have a direct access to the school.

According to the DOE's East Hertfordshire report, TL4614 (dated 22nd February 1967): "There is a lofty four-bay nave, South aisle, South porch, South-West round tower, a raised chancel, Eastern apse, and South-West vestry with rounded East-end. The round plan forms are echoed in the part-conical form of tower, apse and vestry, flanking the higher-gabled nave roof". The tower has a belfry and clock of later date. Moreover, the church has an original Willis organ [3]. The apsidal church is constructed of flint, red brick and stone dressings. A lower portion of the round tower at High Wych is of circular cross-section, whereas an upper portion thereof is of octagonal form with belfry windows and an attractive blue "Bennet" clock associated with an adjacent Star of David. To serve its purpose, it would seem to us to be wholly successful and added to it there are small attractive artistic features, not only the stained glass and organ but, for example, two coloured tiles on either side of the South door – Alpha and Omega – to add to its interest.

HIGH WYCH CHURCH, HERTFORDSHIRE:

A striking round towered church of an original Victorian design



Contemporary view from the south. Clock appears to be a later addition—see sketch p21.

Unlike Higham in Suffolk and the recently built Catholic Church round tower in Walsingham which specifically duplicate classical East Anglian round tower church architecture, the church of St. James at High Wych was founded on 25 July 1860. It was completed and consecrated on 17 June

1861. The church is a striking village church in George Edward Pritchett's (1824 – 1912)[1] personal interpretation of the early English style. Pritchett was slightly later than Pugin: Pugin built a house for the headmaster at St. Edmunds College, Old Hall Green in 1851 (for Pugin's organ, see South Pickenham/West Tofts (Battle Area)). High Wych is a village in rural East Hertfordshire located between Sawbridgeworth and Harlow, and close to the Essex border. Aside from a few old cottages, a pub and other houses of some antiquity, its central point of interest is the church of St. James which one could suggest offers the only church with a round tower of any age in the county of Hertfordshire.

This church has had a strong, indeed damning, assessment from Nikolaus Pevsner in his Hertfordshire volume of the Buildings of England 1953/1978. In describing the works of G.E. Pritchett, he states on page 34: "High Wych of 1861 deserves to be specially mentioned as an imminently typical example of high Victorian design at its most revolting!"

In DOE, Listed Building, East Hertfordshire, we read: "A striking church of original design of which contemporary critics said "... it shows considerable skill on the part of the architect (Ecclesiologist (1961) pp. 282) and which Pevsner regarded as "as original in its



of the church and 50 metres east of the present mansion. Sir John de Wolterton held the estate between 1362-1401. Blomefield (1705-52) wrote that Sir John and his wife 'rebuilt the church'. They added an arcade for the south aisle; a south porch and a north vestry. The porch faced in the direction of the manor-house rather than the village to the north. They were succeeded by their son, Walter de Wolterton who held the lordship and patronage up to 1437 when the estate was inherited by two daughters and then sold off. Walter was the last of a line which had extended over eight generations. Walter and his wife Christina were probably the benefactors of the new tower and the stained glass window memorials of the de Wolterton family.

A tiny drawing of the church was added to a Wolterton Estate Map in 1732 by the land-surveyor, James Corbridge. It shows the chancel roof lower than the roof of the nave. This contradicts what Blomefield wrote soon afterwards. He said they were the same height – did he mean the same width? On the north side of the chancel there was a window with stained glass showing the effigies of Sir John and his wife; their coat of arms below and a sun-burst emblem above (an amazing relic had it survived!). The east window displayed the twelve apostles with the Creed in scrolls emitting from their mouths - a device common in the late medieval period. William Le Neve from the College of Heralds, visited the Church in October 1630

and noted seven windows with armorial stained glass – besides those already mentioned were the west tower window showing the arms of over ten families; two windows on the south side of the chancel and another two on the north side of the nave. On the east wall was a recess with a statue of the BVM. 'Our Lady of Pity'. There was a guild to St Margaret perhaps marked by a hanging oil-lamp. In the 1640s, Wolterton had a very Puritan and controversial vicar, Paul Amgraut from the German Palatine who was sponsored by Sir John Potts of Mannington Hall. Many of the elaborate features inside the church probably disappeared soon after Le Neve's visit at the hands of the Puritans. Near the preacher's desk in the chancel there was a sepulchre brass to the Rev. Thomas and Margaret Langdon. He died in 1506. He is not in the priest list so was he a curate in Wolterton when the tower was completed? About the same time, John Dowsing left a bequest for re-seating the church with pews.

Edmund de Scammler was Bishop of Norwich (1584-90), during which time he turned back the tide of the counter-Reformation. His son Edward bought the Wolterton estate in 1595 from the executors of Robert Houghton. The Scamler/Scambler family were associated with Wolterton for five generations. On the east wall of the chancel there was an elaborate mural tablet showing James and Ann Scamler, as a pair of kneeling figures at prayer. On the sanctuary floor there were five black ledger slabs to the Scamler family displaying their coat of arms.

In 1722, Horatio, younger brother of the first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole began to buy land in the parish and started to plan a new mansion surrounded by an ornamental park. Neither church, village or Tudor manor-house had a part to play in this scheme. The manor-house burnt down in 1724 and its remains were demolished. In 1737, the last priest of Wolterton was presented – the Rev. George England. Wolterton was then consolidated with the adjacent parish of Wickmere. Between 1742-46, the cottages of the village were demolished (except the parsonage) and dispersed away from the church. Marriages in the church ended in 1740; burials in 1747 and baptisms in 1765. Blomefield writing in the mid-1700s recorded that the aisle, porch and vestry had already been demolished. In 1797, William Ward was paid to demolish the nave and chancel. The site of the church nave is now marked by a declivity in the ground with embankments on three sides. It is tempting to think that the rubble from the church as well as its foundations lie under these mounds. They remain archaeologically unexcavated but protected as an Ancient Monument.

If in the area of South Pickenham All Saints, where a portion of St Christopher remains, interested persons are well advised to visit the nearby church of Houghton on the Hill St Mary*. The paintings are perhaps the most remarkable found in modern times in England, dating from around 1080. The hamlet has now disappeared and the church was derelict until rescued and restored as a labour of love by a resident of North Pickenham. Although now having a square tower it is strongly felt it once had a round tower, and apse. Sporle St Mary, approximately 4 miles north is worth a de-tour (not RT).

Not all paintings at these churches have been covered but an * indicates buildings either with extensive remains or those considered to be of high artistic merit.

Valerie Grose

ROUND TOWER CHURCHES SOCIETY TOURS 2011

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and the lowly figure on the bottom is marked *sum sine regno* (I am without a kingdom). Some writing is discernable at Ilketshall.



West Somerton

A *Doom* is a painting of the *Last Judgment* and was used to remind medieval Christians of the after-life and Judgment Day, and to help keep them mindful of sinning by showing in graphic detail the dramatic difference between Heaven and hell. There are many variations but generally contain Jesus Christ at the top with Heaven and hell represented

on either side of him, St Michael weighing souls to see who is fit for Heaven (after Christ has judged them) and angels sounding their trumpets. A Doom was usually sited either on the rear (Western) wall, if that had a suitable space, or at the front (Chancel end) of a church, often on the Chancel arch itself, so that it would be constantly in view of worshipers as they looked towards the Priest during services. At West Somerton* fragments are on the south wall; an exceptionally fine angel sounding the last trump can be seen. If visiting the RT churches of Bramfield St Andrew or nearby Thorington St Peter (no paintings) it is well worth travelling a couple of miles to Wenham St Peter where a Doom with much detail, painted on boards was found, in the churchyard, the colours being revealed after a heavy shower. Bartlow St Mary has a depiction of the Weighing of Souls and a large dragon.

Mutford St Andrew has a feint painting with ghost-like appearance; Bramfield St Andrew: a white cross in a depressed arch; Gisleham Holy Trinity: an Angel with large wings; Haddiscoe: a few fragments of *The Three Living and the Three Dead*; Hales St Margaret: St James the Great with a pilgrim staff; Hardley St Margaret: St Catherine with her wheel; Fritton St Edmund: Ecclesia and Synagoga; Risby*: Massacre of the Innocents; Potter Heigham* and Risby*; Flight into Egypt; Risby: the passion of Christ: West Somerton*: Entry into Jerusalem, the Flagellation, and Christ crowned with thorns. Seething St Margaret and St Remegius* has sufficient wall paintings to make a visit worthwhile.

Some of the contents of Wolterton Church were probably moved to Wickmere – a huge 'Armada' Chest and a painted panel, now attached to its pulpit. The font seems to have gone to Mannington Church. Two bells were still in Wolterton's Tower in 1807 (says the Church Terrier). The Latin inscription on one bell suggests it was pre-Reformation in date ('*Robert Plummer made me in honour of St Margaret*'). The public lanes in the parish were moved out beyond its boundaries leaving the tower in splendid isolation. Wolterton Park and gardens were laid out in the grand manner around 1730, from plans made by the King's Gardener, Charles Bridgeman. Horatio Walpole became a Baron in 1756 and the grounds were extended to form a North Park, which is where the tower lies. Its ruin was retained as a romantic 'eye-catcher' in the landscape as was then fashionable. This may have preserved it from random demolition for its materials. The remains of the churchyard were cleared in the early 1800s and the tombstones were sold off in Norwich by the Lord Walpole, 2nd Earl of Orford (1752-1822) including the Scamler memorials. The coffins of later Earls were driven several times around the churchyard before being conveyed for burial in the family vault in Wickmere Church, to placate the disturbed spirits of the departed – so local folklore tells us.

An assessment of the Architecture of the Tower.

The lower part of the tower is circular and the upper third is octagonal. Internally the tower is circular for its full height including the eastern side. There is an inset at the string course where the circular and octagonal parts join. On the ground floor there was a large west window. Its stone tracery and jambs have gone but its pointed arch remains, with voussoirs of alternating flints and red bricks.

Above it at 1st floor level there is another pointed window which is smaller and with a shallower arch. Its hood-mould, cill and jambs have chamfered red bricks. Either side of the opening there are put-log holes. In the upper, belfry stage there are four tall openings (perhaps with two lights) in Perpendicular style. The corners of the octagonal part have limestone quoins. The battlements survive mainly on the east side of the parapet. These have squared flints in dressed stone panels. The flints over the whole tower were selected to have a consistent light-grey colour, shaped to make even courses and with galleted flint fragments in the mortar joints. The flints are not well bedded into the wall. A few patches of the facing flints have fallen off but some were recently replaced when the fabric of the tower was stabilised. The consistency of the external design of the tower suggests that both parts of it were erected as a single build.

On the south side there was a narrow, spiral staircase in a turret that rose up to the first floor. It was entered from the nave but only the upper door survives. The stair was built within the thickness of the walls of the tower and nave. The turret had an external finish that was similar to the tower suggesting that they were built at the same time, though the hood at the top does not quite fit that conclusion.

On the eastern side of the tower, the outline of the nave roof can be seen. The nave and chancel roofs were thatched (says Blomefield) which fits with the steep pitch of the surviving roof coping. The eastern side of the tower has rough walling, using flint rubble. From about a third of the way up the gable, the circular wall of the tower's drum over-sails the flat wall of the nave by about 600mm. This means that only the top three metres of the drum's exterior is fully circular. From the rough appearance of the tower wall it seems that it was built up against an earlier and existing gable wall. When the nave was demolished, the earlier wall was carefully removed up to the height of the over-hang. The jambs of the archway contain rough flints, ferricrete and a few medieval bricks. The arch is constructed entirely of bricks. These project forward of the wall face so the archway was bonded into the earlier (lost) wall. The surviving tower arch is tall and narrow. These proportions suggest an early date, say of the Norman period but there is no evidence to support such an idea. There is no sign of an upper doorway above this arch. The arch rises to the full height of the ground floor chamber as indicated by the large west window. Inside the small tower-space there is an oven used for baking Communion Wafers. Its flue rises up to half the height of the stair turret where there is a slit-opening with stone jambs capped by a brick. On the ground floor there is also a rougher arched recess, like a cupboard and without a flue. This is near the floor level and it lies awkwardly in part under the west window. The flange walls of the gable have also disappeared above ground, including the quoins. On the north side of the tower there is a vertical line of cut flints where the tower abutted the nave wall. This demonstrates that there was no fillet there.

SRH produced a plan that assumes the nave width was about 4.75metres which would have allowed only three pew places each side of a narrow aisle. That suggests a tiny church appropriate for a small congregation. Such proportions would be consistent with the early date suggested by the tower arch; ie Norman. Robert Ladbroke made a drawing of the tower from the south-west in the 1820s. By then the ruin was already shrouded in ivy, holly,

Risby St Giles* (also visited by E. Clive Rouse following advice sought from the rector around 1949) has a *Noli me Tangere* (Mary Magdalene meets Jesus in the garden) - **Noli me tangere**, meaning "don't touch me" / "touch me not", is the Latin version of words spoken, according to John 20:17, by Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognises him after his resurrection. This biblical scene has been painted by several artists from Fra Bartolommeo (1506), Hans Holbein the Younger, Correggio. Pablo Picasso's *Le Vie* (1903) was painted from Correggio's example. Titian's work of 1514, currently on display at the National Gallery in London shows Mary Magdalene, traditionally wearing a red frock and clutching her pot of oil.



Ilketshall St Andrew

The wheel of Fortune (discovered at Ilketshall St Andrew in 2001) is very rare in English Parish churches, there being only one other survival (in Rochester Cathedral), and of slightly earlier date. It is the emblem of the goddess who spins it at random, changing the positions of those on the wheel. Some suffer great misfortune, others gain windfalls and the

wheel symbolizes that luck, good or bad, never lasts. *The Wheel* has assisted the progress of civilisation and means of transportation and was widely used in Greek/medieval literature and art to aid religious instruction, to include a Boccaccio manuscript. Cicero's 'In Pisenom' also has a reference: '*The house of your colleague rang with song and cymbals while he himself danced naked at a feast, wherein even while he executed his whirling gyrations he felt no fear of the wheel of fortune*'. The great Rose windows in many medieval cathedrals, are based on the Wheel and characteristically, have four shelves, or stages of life, with four human figures, usually labelled on the left *regnabo* (I shall reign), on the top *regno* (I reign) and is usually crowned, descending on the right *regnavi* (I have reigned)



Clayton, St John the Baptist

Just 14 miles away, at Clayton, St John the Baptist, West Sussex extensive remains can be viewed. These fine and very early examples (of around 1100) that were discovered around 1895 when C E Kempe (1837 – 1907) was restoring the church, give an idea of how churches would have looked when the walls were adorned with many biblical stories

and characters, the most popular single subject being *St Christopher*. Examples of that saint can be viewed in the Round Tower churches of Bartlow St Mary, Belton All Saints, Edingthorpe All Saints, Fritton St Catherine, Fritton St Edmund, Haddiscoe St Mary, Hales St Margaret, Hardley St Margaret, Hardwick St Margaret, Moulton St Mary*, Potter Heigham St Nicholas*, Seething St Margaret & St Remigius*, South Pickenham All Saints, West Somerton St Mary. At Hemblington All Saints* (to be visited on the September RT tour) St Christopher there is only surpassed in quality by the example at Shorwell St Peter*, Isle of Wight. Also at Hemblington* are scenes from St Christopher's life. Burnham Overy St Clement, just a couple of miles from the RT churches of Burnham Norton St Margaret and Burnham Deepdale St Mary, also has an example.

At Fritton St Catherine (near Long Stratton) St George and a very impressive dragon can be seen. Some unfortunate damage appears to have been caused by removal/adjustment of a roof beam.

Although there are no wall paintings remaining at the two Berkshire round tower churches, just a short distance from Great Shefford St Mary, the tiny Norman church at East Shefford St Thomas (amalgamated with the parish of West Shefford in 1926, becoming the parish of Great Shefford) a redundant grade 1 listed building has 12th century paintings above the chancel arch, and on other walls are painted texts.

other small trees and undergrowth. Happily this has been cleared away. After restoration work was completed in the early 1990s, the tower was handed back into the care of the Wolterton Estate. Wolterton Park is open to public access but not the church tower. It is a grade 11* listed building. The site is still used for occasional outdoor church services.

Issues over the evidence.

1. WJG thought that there were several features in the tower that point to an early date. The narrow proportions of the tower arch with its rough jambs made of flint and ferricrete are examples. Perhaps the core of early tower walls were encased during the 15th century without the need for a complete rebuild. The small chapel-like size of the original nave increased the possibility of an early foundation. SNH and SRH both thought that the presence of late medieval bricks in much of the tower's fabric undermines these speculative ideas.

2. On the east side of the spiral stair there is a piece of vertical masonry next to the stair newel-shaft, so SRH thought that the stair-turret could have been added to the tower in a second phase of construction. The close matching of the exterior appearance of both features make this unlikely so SNH disagreed.

3. SRH thought that the Wolterton tower was very unusual but SNH cites two other round towers with contemporary stair-turrets and six where the turrets have been added to existing round towers (eg Wickmere).

4. SNH thought that the presence of galleting shows that the tower walls could not have been made using the traditional method – with shuttering. SRH disagreed saying the exposed section of the walls reveal that the flints were laid in special white mortar to match the flints' colour in contrast to the duller coloured mortar used in the core. This means that the facing material was erected first and the core material added later. That procedure would need formwork to support the facing flints. The sophisticated form of construction of the tower walls represented a huge technical advance on previous methods of construction. For example the flints were knapped rather than being merely cleft into rough forms. This represents the highest form of craftsmanship in the late Middle Ages say of the early 1400s. That would fit in with the pre-1437 date suggested above from documentary evidence.

Richard Harbord

References.

WJG – William J. Goode, founder of the Round Tower Churches Society
 SNH - Stephen Nelson Hart, Ecclesiastical architect
 SRH - Stephen R. Heywood, Norfolk County Conservation Officer
East Anglican Archaeology Report 51 (1991), Norfolk Archaeology Services
 Blomefield, Vol 6, 452; Cox, Vol 1, 162; Goode, 92

EDINGTHORPE SUMMER SUNDAY



I first saw All Saints Church Edingthorpe in August 2010 when my husband and I were making our own church tour of the many and wonderful churches close to the seaside town of Cromer.

Having made our way along sleepy lanes and the narrow track up to the church we found the building shrouded in

scaffolding and plastic sheeting and decidedly not open to visitors. Now some people might find this discouraging but it always pleases me to see that even seemingly remote churches are clearly loved enough to attract serious restoration; in this case renewal of the thatched roof. When we spotted the advert in the last edition of The Round Tower for the Edingthorpe Summer Sunday on 12 June this gave us the perfect excuse to return and see what had gone on since our first visit.

As a city girl I'm frequently amazed by the efforts people living in very small villages make to run local events. In Edingthorpe's case this even extended to having guides with walkie talkies to ensure that traffic flowed smoothly up and down the dirt track to the church. We arrived under slightly grey skies to see what looked like the entire village sitting on the grass or manning stalls, and, most important of all, the church looking resplendent under its new thatch. The scene indicated a lively community spirit and evident pleasure in the church building itself. Stepping inside it was great to see good quality craft stalls, well set out but with enough space to enable us to appreciate the finer points of the church interior. Although personally I'm a fan of the High Victorian, there was much to admire in the simplicity of this place, not least the fourteenth century painted screen and the remnants of wall painting. Someone was playing the organ - rather well, it had a sweet

WALL PAINTINGS IN ROUND TOWER (AND NEARBY) CHURCHES

Over the years, whilst attending summer tours and during lone peregrinations, various fittings within the churches have been discovered and enjoyed, ranging from the beautiful vaulted screen at



Southease

Bramfield St Andrew, the Norman font at Burnham Deepdale, pre-Reformation wooden pulpit at Burnham Norton and a much later addition – the Royal Arms of George IV at Norton Subcourse. During a recent visit to East Sussex, the three round towers were visited: Lewes, Piddinghoe and Southease, the latter being a small village on the South

Downs, with no shop, phone box or village inn and fewer than 20 houses. The church does however have over 1,000 years of recorded history and sections of ancient wall paintings. Whilst almost every medieval church has a font and pulpit (not necessarily original), only around 1,000 have varying degrees of remains of wall paintings. Most churches would have been painted with Biblical scenes to instruct illiterate parishioners, but the reformist Duke of Somerset, Reformer of all England began the process of ridding what were regarded as superstitious items. Walls were whitewashed or plastered sometimes many times over. At Southease in 1916 Professor E W Tristram (1882-1952), a medievalist art historian considered, on uncovering a small patch of colour, that further investigation would be warranted. Unfortunately, the general knowledge of chemistry of conservation was poor and Tristram was responsible for some damage at various locations. In 1934, (at Southease) the process of uncovering and preserving sections of hidden paintings was carried out by the late Dr E Clive Rouse (1901 – 1997).

The issue of building round towers for defence reasons has its advocates. This is clearly the reason for round towers at ecclesiastical sites in Ireland but in East Anglia this is unclear. On the Danish island of Bornholm, there is a clear preference for churches to be constructed in a round format for defensive purposes, for example at Østerlars.



Feltwell

The presence of solid carstone appears surprisingly far east at Roughton and Bessingham. At Feltwell the remains of the round tower show substantial use of carstone. At the west end of the south wall can be noticed flint, clunch, conglomerate and carstone. The presence of carstone is not a surprise as it occurs locally. All this suggests that the presence of solid rock did not deter the builders of round tower churches.

Notes on Carstone

University of Southampton, Stone in Archaeology Database

Local Name(s): Carstone – Silsoe, ‘Gingerbread’

Stone Group: Sedimentary

Stone Type: Sandstone

Geology: Era: Mesozoic
Period: Cretaceous
Epoch: Lower

Geological Sub-Divisions: Lower Greensand

General Colour Description: A deep yellowish brown colour

Hand Specimen: A medium to coarse grained, moderately well sorted

Description: Granular sandstone

General Comments: ‘Carstone’ is a term frequently applied to Greensand stones which were used for building further north in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and especially Norfolk

Stone identifiers: Granular, Ferruginous

Reacts dilute to HCl: No

K.T. Norris

tone. The rain held off - this was going to be a good afternoon. After tea provided by friendly ladies we walked round the outside of the church. The thatching really is admirable; it looks good for another hundred years. It was so pleasing to know that our Society had given a grant of £4,000 towards the re-thatching and roof repairs. As a former member of a PCC up in rainy Lancashire I know just how very important it is to ensure that church buildings are waterproof. Without that assurance any other restoration project is almost futile.

So well done to all concerned in the efforts to secure Edingthorpe as a viable place of worship for generations to come. To keep up to date with All Saints Church at Edingthorpe you can visit edingthorpechurch.blogspot.com or www.edingthorpepcc.co.uk.

I hope other churches will be encouraged to place adverts in The Round Tower to help publicise their events and that members of the Society will take the opportunity to support them.

Jane Moth

Hemblington, All Saints

3rd September: Round Tower Churches Society Tour 2.30pm

8th-11th September: Norwich Heritage Open Days

1st October: Harvest Supper

18th December: Candlelit Carol Service



Shimpling, St George

10th-11th September: Heritage Open Days

10th-11th September: Norfolk Churches Trust
Sponsored Cycle Ride

15th December 7.00pm: Festival of Nine Lessons
and Carols

Sheila Cooper 01379 740990/Maurice Philpot 07817 108239

SOLID GEOLOGY AND ROUND TOWER CHURCHES

In previous years, there has been much discussion about reasons for round church towers in East Anglia coming into being. Debate has been based on two competing ideas:

- 1) for reasons of defence; and
- 2) a lack of suitable building material

Proponents of the idea of a lack of suitable building material in East Anglia, and hence the unavailability of suitable local stone particularly for corner work on towers, argue the lack of suitable solid stone led to round towers being preferred over square towers as elsewhere. Much of Norfolk and Suffolk are not underlain directly by rock but by glacial drift. The glacial drift (despite being mainly clays and sands) contains large quantities of suitable building material such as flints, conglomerates and other lumps of solid rock, the latter often coming from hundreds of miles away, in some cases even Norway. This material, while satisfactory for construction, has to be bound together by mortar, but does not contain large blocks suitable for corner work. There are at least a couple of exceptions to this rule:-

To the west of East Anglia, there are significant outcrops of Cretaceous chalk. Locally, this was used for construction as clunch. At Isleham, the church contains this material. However, the material is too soft to be a reliable building material as it crumbles easily. The chalk is found in a band extending from northern Hertfordshire, through southern Cambridgeshire, with a break through the Breckland (though it can be found underground), re-emerging behind King's Lynn and through to the cliffs at Hunstanton. However, below the chalk lies a geological series called the Lower Greensand. This runs through Bedfordshire, forms low hills in Cambridgeshire, but is very pronounced in older buildings from Downham Market through to Snettisham and has been widely used. Though termed Greensand, this sandstone weathers from its olive green colour to a bright rust colour when exposed to the atmosphere, owing to its iron content.

When referred to by studies on buildings, this sandstone is called not Greensand but carstone or carrstone. This building material is found in

a narrow band in the west of East Anglia, running south-north. So it is not widely accessible except very locally in East Anglia. It is, however, possible to quarry carstone and it makes adequate blocks for building. In fact, it is the only suitable block building stone east of Northamptonshire. Currently it is quarried at Snettisham by Frimstone Ltd., north of King's Lynn.

It would be reasonable to conclude that with a suitable building material, carstone, that builders of churches would opt to construct square towers. This is what has happened at Downham Market St. Edmund, Dersingham and Heacham St. Mary. In fact, again, there are a couple of exceptions.



Bexhill



West Dereham



West Dereham

East of Downham Market lies Bexwell, where round tower and church are entirely built of carstone, as is the Victorian old rectory there. Two or three miles away is another round tower constructed in solid rock, namely West Dereham. Here, the rock used is not carstone but conglomerate. This conglomerate occurs locally in the ground; at West Dereham, there is the quarry from where this material was obtained. This conglomerate lies in the same geological series as the Greensand. On the church, it has been fashioned into solid blocks. The local church-builders, when presented with good building material not requiring mortar elected nevertheless to erect round towers. This counters the argument that lack of suitable building material led to the construction of round tower churches.