

Threxton, All Saints by Stephen Hart.



The church comprises a nave and chancel of the same width, a north aisle, a circular west tower, a vestry north of the tower and a south porch. A steeply-pitched tiled roof covers the nave and extends down over the aisle to a lower eaves level on the north side. The chancel roof, also tiled, has a lower pitch although with the same eaves level as the nave on the south side.

The tower is fully circular to the top, and a stone string course at about three-quarters of its height forms the base of the belfry stage. The level parapet is modern brick. Much of the tower wall is covered with a deteriorating rendering some of what may be remnants of the medieval “harling,” but sufficient flintwork is exposed to show that its rubble flints are closely-packed and quite well-coursed. Limestone bridgings to its three putlog holes are visible. There are no fillets between tower and nave west wall.

The two-light pointed belfry openings are directly above the string course and there are only three, facing south-east, west and north-east. The two former have stone dressings and Y-tracery but the north-east one has been renewed in brick with a single brick mullion rising straight to the apex. The ground-floor west window also has Y-tracery.

Sufficient of the flintwork below the belfry string course is exposed to show that the walls at that level exhibit no evidence of former blocked belfry openings, but it was not possible to check internally.

A c.19 lean-to vestry, entered from the north aisle, has been built up against the tower’s north wall, faintly reminiscent of the clasping aisles at Sedgeford. Its roof is at the same pitch as the aisle roof but a little below it.

The tower’s internal diameter is 8ft 4ins. Measured at the west window the wall is 4ft 2ins thick, and 4ft 8ins above the tower arch, whereas the nave west wall measured outside the tower is about 1ft less. Above the tower arch the east wall is a flattened curve. The tower arch itself is pointed, about 12ft high to its springing level and has chamfered stone dressings facing the nave and within the tower and a chamfered stone sub-arch at the centre of the opening that fades into the reveals.

The gable and much of the chancel east wall had been rebuilt; Ladbrooke’s drawings of the 1820s shows a diagonal buttress at the south-east corner but there are now stone quoins at the corners. There is a curious three-light east window with each

light terminating as a separate lancet, the central one higher, but close inspection inside and outside shows that the stonework of the cill, jambstones and mullions is much older than that of the lancet arches, suggesting that they might be a cheap substitute for the original tracery adopted when the gable was rebuilt. Y-traceried windows in the chancel south wall suggest that the three-light east window may originally have had Intersecting tracery.

Excessive modern pointing has to an extent suppressed the original character of the flintwork of the south walls of the nave and chancel, but there does seem to be a difference where nave and chancel meet. The chancel's two south windows with Y-tracery are probably original; there is also a blocked low-side window in the usual position, low down at the west end of the chancel. The nave has three two-light windows, the eastern one with cusped Y-tracery and the other two with ogee lights and a multi-cusped quatrefoil in the apex. The two eastern windows retain original stone cills and some original jamb and mullion stones but their tracery is restored. The west window is probably entirely new. Ladbroke's drawing shows all three having the same tracery pattern, a Decorated style unlike either of the present patterns.

Except at the chancel's east end, on the porch, and on the north vestry, quoins elsewhere in the church are of Barnack stone.

The nave south door is now a simple, once-chamfered pointed opening, but the original doorway is said to have been moved from the nave wall to the porch entry when the porch was built as part of a restoration in 1865. Ladbroke drew Threpton church before the porch was built and his drawing shows the round-headed door in the south wall with its Gothic hoodmould with returned label-stops. The porch arch has these features, with jambs and some of its voussoirs of Barnack stone but others are a different yellower stone. A historical note in the church states: "On removing the south door from the church wall to form the entrance to the new porch, it was discovered that it was turned at some former time having originally Norman mouldings which were much mutilated."

The flintwork of the north aisle wall is close-packed rubble flint that has escaped the flush-pointing of the south walls; it contains two windows - a two-light east window with Y-tracery that occupies the full width of the aisle, and a small north window, probably a later insertion, with two ogee lights and a straight head. Evidence in the flintwork of a blocked north door is confirmed internally by a recess with a segmental head in a corresponding position.

The flintwork of the chancel north wall is similar to the aisle wall and has also escaped modern repointing. It contains an intriguing feature that defies rational explanation: in the re-entrant angle where the east wall of the aisle meets it, (at the point where nave and chancel meet), quoins of Barnack stone, bonding into its flintwork, terminate the chancel wall as would be expected had they been the north-west corner of a chancel that was wider than the nave, but there is nothing to suggest that it ever was. As far as can be judged, the flintwork in the aisle east wall appears to go behind these quoin stones rather than butting up to them. At the corresponding point internally, which is where the thinner arcade wall meets the

chancel wall, there is a 2.5inch set-back. At the equivalent position on the south side, the nave and chancel walls are continuous.

The nave south wall is about 2ft 10ins thick, but the arcade wall and the aisle north wall are about 6ins less, though the aisle's short east wall is 2ft 8ins thick. The width of the aisle is only 4ft 3ins.

The four-bay arcade between the nave and the aisle has double-chamfered pointed arches supported on one octagonal column and two circular ones. At the east respond, the inner order of the arch fades into the respond wall without a corbel or impost in the same way as the sub-arch of the tower arch fades into its reveal, and the outer chamfers of the arch die into the respond wall a little higher up; at the west respond the inner order of the arch springs from a small half-bell moulded corbel with a delightful twisted leaf carving at the bottom.,

Interpretation

Munro Cautley gives Threxton only one and a half lines in his *Norfolk Churches* (Adlard 1949) and calls the tower Norman and the arcade c.13. Pevsner (*North-West and South Norfolk*) Penguin 1962 also calls the tower Norman and the arcade C.13 but Bill Wilson, the revision editor of the 1999 edition says the tower is probably early c.13 rather than Norman. WJ Goods (*Round Tower Churches of South East England*, 1994) calls tower and church Saxon and quotes Charles Cox (*County Churches, Norfolk*, Allen, 1910) as reporting evidence of an 11-foot Saxon nave having been found during the restoration of 1865. Pevsner also refers to that discovery but mentions its width as 21ft. The present nave is 15ft 9ins wide and seems therefore unrelated to the earlier one, although Cox claims that the lower part of the south wall is Saxon.

There is no visible evidence in the tower to support a Saxon or Norman attribution for it, nor that it is a later build than the nave. The thickness of the wall above the tower arch is such that the tower could have been built with the nave or added later, and because of repairs and modern pointing to the nave west wall south of the tower, it is difficult to make a reliable comparison between its flintwork and that of the tower. Absence of evidence of blocked former belfry openings below the belfry string course suggests that the present belfry is an original part of the tower and its Y-tracery belfry openings indicate a post-Norman date, unless they were to be established as having replaced Norman ones. A post-Norman date is corroborated by the pointed, stone-dressed tower arch, which, unless altered later would be contemporary with the tower, and by the ground-floor west window, also stone-dressed internally, which shows no evidence of later insertion.

There are however several considerations that individually and collectively point strongly to the probability that the nave and chancel, the tower and aisle were all built at the same time.

1 The chancel, the tower and belfry and the north aisle all Y-traceried windows; they show no evidence of later insertion, and, indeed, the weathered condition of the stonework of those of the north aisle and chancel suggests that they are original.

2. The difference in thickness between the nave south wall and the arcade wall suggests that the thinner arcade wall was not the former external wall of an aisleless nave.

3. The thickness of the arcade wall is less than that of the chancel north wall. If it had originally been the nave's external north wall, it would be expected to have been the same.

4. Whatever may be the reason for the quoins at the west end of the chancel north wall, it is unlikely that they would have been incorporated if the arcade wall and chancel wall had been a continuous external wall.

5. The narrowness of the aisle suggests that it was more likely to have been part of the original church because it seems most unlikely that if an aisle had been added to an existing nave, it would have been made so narrow.

6. As mentioned above, the chamfered tower arch has a central chamfered sub-arch fading into the reveals – in effect a wide twice-chamfered arch. The similarity of this sub-arch detail to the way in which the inner order of the arcade's east arch fades into its respond wall suggests that they may be of the same time.

What can have been the purpose of the quoins at the west end of the chancel north wall? They seem to imply a termination of the chancel wall behind which the south east junction of the arcade wall with the east wall of the aisle was formed. But why this was done in preference to straightforward bonding of the flintwork remains obscure.

Although the arcade has almost unanimously been called c.13, circular columns and capitals, the basis of that dating, persisted into early c.14. 1280 has been suggested as the earliest date for Y-tracery, and so the combination of these two features in the arcade and north aisle, clearly part of the same build, must date them as either late c.13 or early c.14. By the reasoning outlined in the paragraphs numbered 1-6 above, the rest of the church would be likely to be contemporary with the arcade and aisle.

It could nevertheless, be argued that the round-headed entry arch of the porch, reset from the nave south wall, dates that wall to be a century earlier, but it is difficult to reconcile what is seen in the arch today with the reported "Norman mouldings" (whether "turned" or not). The surviving old (Barnack) stonework with a continuous profile on jambs and arch, appears to be post-Norman, because its double chamfer, the outer chamfer hollow, is a style more Gothic than Norman, and the semi-circular arch hoodmould above the arch with returned label-stops, also of Barnack stone, is decidedly un-Norman. It is now unknown for round-headed arches to have been used in post-Norman times for some time after the general adoption of the pointed shape. Examples in round-towered churches include the c.14 Galilee porch at Mutford and the north door in the rebuilt north wall of the nave at Blundeston, also c.14.