



# The Round Tower

Vol. XL No 2

December 2012



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**The next issue is March 2013 and the deadline for contributions is 1st February 2013.**

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*Minimum £10 (overseas £15) a year of which 40% goes towards the printing and posting of The Round Tower magazine and administration. 60% goes to the Repair Fund of the RTCS.*

*Magazines are published in March, June, September and December. The membership renewal date is the first day of the month following the application for membership.*

*To join the Society or to make any enquiry about your membership please contact :-*

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## **THE ROUND TOWER**

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

**Vol. XL No 2 December 2012**

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Keep up to date with news on the Round Tower Churches Society Facebook page. You can download photographs, text and comment on anything relating to round tower churches.



The Round Tower Churches Society website is at [www.roundtowers.org.uk](http://www.roundtowers.org.uk)

## **Editorial .**

The excellent black and white photograph of All Saints, Mettingham on the cover was taken by our founder the late Bill Goode. The society visited Mettingham on the 12th May this year.

Richard Harbord reminds us of the splendours of the redundant church of St Mary Coslany on page 5. This church is sometimes open to the public on Norwich Heritage Open Days.

Some exciting news for one of our round tower churches on page 9.

Joseph Biddulph writes to remind us of Round Tower Churches in the West of England on page 10.

'The Archaeology of Churches' by Warwick Rodwell is a new book not a new edition of Rodwell's old book 'Church Archaeology'. Carly Hilts makes it clear in her review on page 12 that this is an excellent book and would make a much appreciated Christmas or birthday present for anyone with a more than passing interest in our churches.

The wettest summer on record? The sun (almost) always shines on RTCS visits. 'Lyn and Dick give us their behind the scenes look at the Essex Day on page 14.

T.S. and H.T. Norris encourage us to visit and enjoy the lost round tower church of St Mary Birchanger on page 18. The monument to Jack Watney is of particular interest.

Finally we report on the Study Day at Bawburgh on page 20. We enjoyed convivial company, three excellent speakers and a guided tour of the church by 'Lyn Stilgoe and Dick Barham.

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Do you want to view or print out this magazine in colour? See page 16 for details of how you will be able to do this.

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Correction to the Rosemary Rutherford article published in the September magazine, The 'Harvest' window is in St Faith's Gaywood not St Faith's Gayton. Apologies but these things happen.

## ST MARY COSLANY, NORWICH.

This round tower is allegedly the oldest in Norwich. Writers from W.J Goode to the Taylors have taken the Anglo-Saxon character of the belfry openings at its face value and have dated the tower accordingly. Close examination of the fabric, however, raises questions about their conclusion.

In 1908 there was still a circular (not 'octagonal', as some suggest) upper stage that no longer exists. This had twin openings with Decorated style arches and Y-tracery that might have been cusped. Bells were recorded in the tower in 1368 and 1552. In 1640 a tenor bell was replaced by two smaller trebles of 3cwts each. By 1700 there were six bells which is an unusually large number for a round tower. Near to the mid height of the tower there was a string course where the walls were inset externally and internally so the upper walls were thinner than those below. To accommodate the swing of the bells during change-ringing, then newly in vogue, the internal sides of the upper walls were 'scooped out'. The additional thinning of the upper walls meant that by 1908, the tower's belfry stage was close to collapse. There were still two medieval bells in the tower of 4½ and 5½ cwts. The *Sanctus* bell had already been sold off in 1865 for just £3. The others were taken down in 1907/08 and were never re-hung. In 1937 they were moved to the new church of St Catherine's, Mile Cross where they are still.

The upper stage of the tower was removed in 1908. Its plain parapet and two gargoyles were relocated below the former belfry openings at string-course level. The lower part of the tower was also in disrepair. During an inspection of some very wide cracks, early belfry openings within the thickness of the walls were discovered. Parts of a central shaft dividing the twin openings were found insitu. Photographs taken at the time (see, '*Norfolk Archaeology*', vol 17 (1910) pages 31-41, by J. T. Hotblack) show that similar twin openings were found on the other three sides of the tower. In each there was a central shaft made up of an assemblage (from bottom to top) of a square block placed on the centre-line of the walls; a moulded circular base; a circular shaft with a mid-height ring; a cushion capital; and a head-block extending to the outside face of the wall. Triangular arches were formed over the openings using wooden boards to support the flint rubble above – not the usual stone slabs. The jambs are made of rubble which is untreated. Impost stones at the head of the jambs have 'quirked' chamfers. Many of these elements were either missing or damaged in 1908. The shafts were made of Caen stone which comes from Normandy (an indication of their early date) but were mainly broken. The through-stones were too weak for their purpose and also had to be replaced.

Little of the original materials has therefore been left in-situ. The outside face of the tower is made of cut and uncut flints coursed in the upper part of the tower but not in the lower part. It is difficult to identify where repair work has been carried out on the walls and it is uncertain whether these stone shafts were original to the tower or early materials imported from elsewhere and inserted into later walls

The artist James Sillet (1764-1840) made a careful drawing of the church from the south-east in the 1820s. This drawing shows a slit window on the eastern side of the tower which is no longer visible. Inside the tower in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, a blocked rectangular opening can still be seen at the same level. On the western side of the 1<sup>st</sup> stage (ie. ground floor) there is another slit window with a round arched head. It appears to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century insert. This is confirmed by a blocked window, which is visible inside the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage. It is 1.2 metres wide and has a pointed head – perhaps 14<sup>th</sup> century in date like the former belfry openings.

The tall tower arch is Perpendicular in style. There is no sign of an upper door into the roof space above it. Inside the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages there are blocked door openings on the north side of the tower. These led to a former spiral stair that had 'recently' been demolished in 1910. This left a scar on the outside of the west gable where two areas with different flint patterns can be seen. In the same corner there is a flint fillet approximately square in plan between tower and gable. This may have survived when the external turret stair, added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, was later removed. There is a timber beam inside the tower space on the eastern side above a straight rere-arch. This disguises the inner curve of the tower space and it gives a false impression that that side of the tower is straight faced, which is not the case. The church's general history has implications for the tower so this is also worth examining.

The church was not mentioned in the **1086** *Great Domesday Survey* but St Marys may well have existed by then. During the 1908 repair programme, a trench was dug across the centre of the nave to look for the foundations of a smaller church, earlier than the present one. Nothing of interest was apparently found. The present nave is over 20 metres long so an earlier nave with a length of say 9 metres would not have been revealed by that trench and it is possible that the remains of an early church may still lie hidden below the floor.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the neighbourhood was very sparsely inhabited. A survey was made in **1254** of ecclesiastical incomes in Norwich and St Mary's was valued at £1, paying only 20 *sols* in tax. In **1291**, another survey showed a dramatic rise in income for most Norwich churches including St Mary's - £3.13s.4d, paying 5½ marks in tax. Between these dates 1254-91 the building of St Mary's went through a massive expansion, giving it an length of nearly 40 metres. Just north of the tower arch there was an unusual western altar to the Holy Trinity. Above it was an inscribed plaque dedicated to the donor Thomas Lingcole and dated **1298**.

A Decorated-period frame for the chancel's eastern window has been detected. One other 14<sup>th</sup> century window survives – on the north side of the chancel. Of the same period, an iron-bound chest used to be kept in the vestry and later, in the chamber over the porch. In **1368**, a '*Church Goodes Survey*' was made across Norfolk. For St Mary's a long list of contents was recorded – 14 liturgical books; numerous vestments and copes, chasuble albs, stoles, amices; the usual altar vessels; hand-bells, a banner, an altar frontal; a Lenten veil etc. The list went well beyond the minimum required by ecclesiastic statute so it was well endowed.

The church is in the flood plain of the River Wensum which lies to the west. In 1762 there was a serious flood and many of the church's ancient books were lost. Since then, the floor has been raised. The parish retained its suburban character with glebe that was cultivated arable land and there was a large churchyard where live-stock were kept over-night on their way to the cattle markets in the centre of the city. In the Middle Ages the yard contained an anchorite's cell and on the northern side there was a rectory with a big garden. In modern times, when Southergate Street was re-aligned further north, nearer to the church, it replaced an earlier foot-path, and the burial yard was much reduced in size. The character of the round tower of St Mary's accords with its setting on the medieval city's fringes. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the parish was an attractive area to live in so it had many prosperous residents. They made bequests to the church and it was given an elaborate 'make-over' as part of the Counter-Reformation movement in Norwich. The dates of the donors' Wills and memorials in the church suggest construction dates between **1465-66** for the addition of the transepts and their fine roofs. Most of the church's window tracery date from the same period. The north transept became the Chapel of St Thomas where his statue stood. The south transept was perhaps dedicated to St Anne. A north Vestry had a lead roof – Charles Cox says all this work was completed by **1477**. In **1483** a bequest was made for the tower, new bells and a priest's door to be inserted on the south side of the chancel. There may also have been a chancel screen as a turret stair survives which could have served it. The 15<sup>th</sup> century south Porch is especially fine with *lierne* vaulting on the ground floor; a turret stair to a *Parvis* Chamber and over the entrance, a central niche for a statue that has long gone. A large candle stood before the Easter Sepulchre of Jesus on the northern side of the chancel and a little to the east was a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. An octagonal Font (of only standard quality), a pulpit, *misere* stalls and other church furniture were also installed. Despite all this display, much of the window tracery was made of wood, which was only slowly replaced with *Clunch* (hard chalk). This was a cheap stone local to Norfolk with poor weathering qualities. Even the surrounding jambs and buttresses were made of this unsuitable material. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was it replaced with stone which is stronger but also alien to Norfolk. This 'make-do' approach may also explain why the tower was not rebuilt to match the Perpendicular character of the rest of the church. The round-tower looks incongruous next to one with pretensions to be a grand city church. Before the upper belfry was removed in 1908, photographs show that the tower had a much greater physical presence than it does today.

In **1552** the '*Church Goodes Survey*' records that St Marys, like so many other Norwich churches sold off their valuables thus pre-empting their removal by the state commissioners. St Marys sold off more silver plate than any other church in the city. The money was used to adapt the church for Protestant worship - whitening the internal walls; removing images etc, as well as repairing the tower. Ancient stained glass was replaced in fifteen windows with 'white' (ie transparent) glass. Colourful wall paintings were replaced with texts written on scrolls.

Only the font and pulpit escaped this 'cleansing' programme. It is almost a miracle that the church survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the clever move made by the warden in 1552 certainly helped. The church survived minor damage from a fire bomb in World War Two but repairs were carried out then as they still are today. When the church was made redundant in 1974 it passed into the care of the '*Norwich Historic Churches Trust*'. In 1979 plans were drawn up to convert the church into a theatre but because of a lack of support this idea was not taken up. In the early 1980's the Friends of Norwich Churches rented it as their headquarters but had to give it up on financial grounds. Eventually in 1985 the building was converted into artist studios and in more recent years into a second-hand book depository.

Richard Harbord



**Photograph of St Mary Coslany by Simon Knott**

## **The English Heritage Angel Awards 2012.**

At a glittering ceremony at the Palace Theatre in London on 22 October 2012 St Mary's Church in West Somerton won the award in the category for the Best Rescue or Repair of a Historic Place of Worship.

Here is an extract from their submission:

Our medieval building and its 14th century wall paintings give untold pleasure to the thousands of people who visit and the local community who worship in this church. However, dampness from the roof and walls meant that the paintings would be lost forever if something was not done. And so began a daunting race against time.

In 1989 the stripping of old rendering revealed blocked in doors and windows, the doorway arch being made of re-used Roman bricks. In 2000 we restored the round tower and its 13th century bell, which is probably the oldest in Norfolk. In 2005 the chancel and east window were restored and in 2009 the nave and porch re-thatched, stonework and timber beams repaired and a new drainage system installed.

The completed project cost about £180k. We were most fortunate to secure a grant of £123k from English Heritage, the rest from local fundraising, the Norfolk Churches Trust, the National Churches Trust, Garfield Weston Trust and The Round Tower Churches Society. Throughout the work we decided that it was important to source the materials and expertise as locally as possible. The reeds for the thatching were growing near the church, the thatcher is from a local family firm and our architects are based in Norwich. With the new roof and repaired walls the paintings within can now be preserved. The church is now in use two Sundays a month and is visited by about 3000 people.

The award winners were chosen by a panel of judges chaired by Andrew Lloyd-Webber. The judges were Melvyn Bragg, Bettany Hughes, Charles Moore of the Daily Telegraph, the Bishop of London the Right Revd Richard Chartres, and Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage.

## ROUND TOWER CHURCHES IN THE WEST.

Joseph Biddulph writes to remind us of Round Tower Churches in the West of England. There are two churches with round towers in the Lambourn Valley in Berkshire: St Mary's Great Shefford and St Gregory, Welford.

St Mary's Great Shefford is approached along a fine avenue of lime trees. The church consists of nave, chancel, south porch and west tower. The tower is in two sections. The round lower section is probably Norman or C13 with a string course and two round headed windows. It is rather chunky in flint and brown stone rubble set on a plinth of paler stone. The top section of the tower is an octagonal belfry stage with lancet windows and is crenelated, probably built in 15<sup>th</sup> century. The church and the lower stage of the tower are built of the same materials and the tower is curved internally, suggesting that the tower was built at the same time as the church. The tower has windows at all three stages and in this respect reminds us of many East Anglian round tower churches.



Photograph of St Mary's from [www.GreatShefford.org.uk](http://www.GreatShefford.org.uk)

St Gregory, Welford is the second round tower church in the Lambourn valley. A church on this site was listed in the Domesday Survey (1086). Until the Dissolution, the church belonged to the monks of Abingdon Abbey who had a grange next door. The church was very substantially restored in 1850s. The Norman round tower and 13th century spire were taken down stone by stone and carefully re-erected. Several of the old features of the church were retained including the font and sedilia and a monument to Anne, Lady Parry (1585) of Welford Park, a Lady of the Privy Chamber to Queen Elizabeth I. She is shown kneeling in prayer with her many children

incised in a stone below. Otherwise the church is a Victorian rebuild with some beautiful carvings including depictions of three Berkshire Saints, one of which is St Edmund of Abingdon. More information about St Gregory's can be found on David Nash Ford's Berkshire Royal History website: [www.berkshirehistory.com](http://www.berkshirehistory.com) .



Photograph of St Gregory's by Churchcrawler from [www.geograph.org.uk](http://www.geograph.org.uk) Photo 69958

Bill Goode notes two other round tower churches even further west: St Tysilio, Llandysillia, Powys Montgomeryshire and Bettwys Pentpont Breconshire. The tower at St Tysilio Llandysillio is a narrow bell tower or turret, built in 1833 when the old belfry was removed. The church at Pentpont Breconshire which has no known dedication was built in C18 and rebuilt in 1864 to a design by George Gilbert Scott.



Photograph of St Tysilio to the left by John Firth.

Photograph of Penpont to the right from [www.jlb2011.co.uk](http://www.jlb2011.co.uk)



**The Archaeology of Churches. Warwick Rodwell.  
Amberley, £ 25.00. ISBN 978-1848689435**

From tiny field chapel to soaring cathedral, Britain's churches represent a varied and vital part of the archaeological record. Often the oldest surviving building in their settlement, these ever-present structures are easy to take for granted but for centuries they have played a central role in the lives of local communities. Local histories can also be read in the fabric of the churches themselves; some are built over earlier Roman structures, others still show patches of burnt stone testifying to Viking raids.

Yet they are also a resource under threat; the Great Fire of London alone wiped out 89 historic churches, while today arsonists damage an estimated 60 every year. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Dissolution of the monasteries saw many religious buildings being dismantled and their materials reused, while the pitiless iconoclasm of the Reformation also took its toll on the ecclesiastical landscape. Today neglect is another factor making their position precarious, leaving redundant churches vulnerable to vandals and decay.

This is not to paint too bleak a picture for Britain's historic churches, however. The burgeoning heritage/tourism industry has helped, while organisations such as English Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Churches Conservation Trust are doing inspiring work to preserve them.

In the last 50 years archaeological interest in the study of historic churches has flourished, and in this authoritative and absorbing new volume Professor Warwick Rodwell guides us expertly through the development of the subdiscipline. An architectural historian and consultant archaeologist for Westminster Abbey and the cathedrals of Bristol, Lichfield, and Wells, Rodwell has been excavating churches since the 1970s and his deep knowledge of - and love for - the subject shines through in every chapter.

The book begins with a summary of how church archaeology evolved as a field of study, considering 12th-century quasi-archaeological investigations by monks, searching in churchyards to recover the remains of saints, bishops and legendary kings - an impulse still potent in the 19th century, when antiquarians twice disinterred St Cuthbert in Durham. We are introduced to Leland, Henry VIII's 'king's antiquary', who Rodwell claims as 'the first rescue archaeologist'. Discussion of pioneers like Camden and Stukeley leads us into the surge of 19<sup>th</sup>-century antiquarian enthusiasm for architectural recording, and an exploration of how the devastation of the Second World War created new archaeological opportunities.

Against this backdrop, Rodwell paints a vivid picture of Britain's ecclesiastical heritage. His comprehensive chapter on the different components of a church is a valuable resource for anyone planning to visit a historic religious building - the text reads like the commentary of an enthusiastic and immensely knowledgeable guide. As well as illuminating the function of key features, this chapter also showcases the astonishing range of forms that churches can take. Lovely eccentricities include the late 15th-century Red Mount Chapel in King' Lynn - an octagonal, redbrick structure three storeys high and built for pilgrims en route to Walsingham - and the Norman chapel at La Houge Bie, Jersey - built on a Neolithic chambered tomb and modified in the 16th century to resemble the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Subsequent chapters offer thought-provoking insights into how huge structures were built without the help of modern technology, and the processes of excavation and survey peculiar to studying historic churches. Particularly enjoyable is the section on Medieval graffiti found in churches, some of it pious, some probably etched by bored parishioners, from gameboards to a detailed drawing of St Paul's Cathedral as it looked before 1666 in a Hampshire church.

This is a beautifully-illustrated book, nowhere more so than in the chapter on excavation, which has some wonderful photographs. Here Rodwell also discusses some of the more surprising objects recovered during these investigations, from swan bones to a jar of coins, and demonstrates how much we can learn from excavating such as Spitalfields in London. From how to tell whether a skeleton was buried in a coffin or a shroud (the elbows are a clue) and how to identify the grave of a bishop, to the waxing and waning popularity of grave goods, this chapter is crammed with interesting facts.

A hugely enjoyable book, and one that is sure to be a key authority on this subject for years to come.

Review by Carly Hilts

**The Round Tower Churches Society acknowledge with thanks Carly Hilts and Current Archaeology magazine for allowing us to reproduce this review. The review was originally published in Current Archaeology 270. September 2012.**

### **ESSEX TOUR 2012. 'Lyn's Thoughts.**

In November the suggestion was made by the Committee that it would be good to have a Tour to visit five of the six Essex Churches with medieval round towers (not Pentlow having been visited in 2007, but the four others not seen since 2001 and South Ockendon last seen in 1994). Letters were duly sent to the various Incumbents asking for permission to visit their churches, starting lengthy negotiations, not helped by the chosen date, 2nd June, coinciding with the Jubilee Celebrations! Eventually a time table was agreed upon, and the advertising posters could be designed. The posters were not for the usual three churches, but with five to be fitted in, so definitely only views of the towers! Further reminder letters went out during April, enclosing the posters to encourage local people to join us.

The next undertaking was for 'Lyn and Dick to make a preview visit nine days before, to take notes and photos of the different buildings, to check out the car parking facilities and to work out the easiest route between churches. There were also the RTCS publicity leaflets, which needed folding, and the regular posters to be taken and left at each church to attract new members.

'Lyn's car having developed a nasty knocking (shock absorber) the night before, her husband had to be prevailed upon to deliver her to Old Catton by 7.15am. In fact, sharing a car was a blessing in disguise as she could attempt to read the map (a pre M25 one for Essex!), give directions and write down the road numbers and the junctions, with Dick's comments, "turn left at the King's Head", "drive x miles to a roundabout and take 3rd left", "follow route signs to Coggleshall, but don't go into it", etc! Somehow we made it to each church on time, spent an hour or so there thanks to various keyholders, who had been organised in advance. South Ockendon to Broomfield was 22 miles through Brentwood and Chelmsford, luckily there were then shorter distances adding up to 17 miles, and finally Bardfield Saling to Lamarsh was 24 miles!

A very welcome interlude was to have lunch with an early member of the Society Anne Haward, having had a very knowledgeable tour with her round Broomfield Church. Further kind refreshments were offered at Bardfield Saling! Then home, after a long day, to finalise our notes, and to have the route instructions worked out by Dick!

The great day came! South Ockendon, not far from the M25, has a church refaced with black flints and enlarged in Victorian times, but it still has its 12C Norman north doorway. Inside the north chapel is an elaborate memorial for Sir Richard Saltonstall, +1601, a former Lord Mayor of London, his wife Suzanna and 16 children, and there are also some figure brasses.

Broomfield's fabric contains some Roman tiles from a nearby villa, and the chancel glass by the Vicar's daughter, Rosemary Rutherford (1912-72), is of national interest, as is her fresco painting within the tower, of Jesus stilling the waves. Here we were able to partake of our packed lunches in the most useful annexe, St Leonard's Hall, as well as being offered copious cups of coffee and tea, which were much appreciated!

Great Leighs is remembered for its Norman doorway, in the west of the tower, possibly re-set from the south nave. Within the chancel north wall is a deeply carved 14C

arch, presumably made to adorn the founder's tomb, and further interest was provided by the fine barrel organ of 1830.

A new experience met us at Bardfield Saling, where we were greeted with glasses of wine (at 3.30 in the afternoon)! Some of us were able to climb right out on to the top of the tower, to admire the landscape around. Inside the church were examples of a local 19C industry plaiting straw to form decorations, and 16/17C graffiti and a medieval consecration cross.

Finally Lamarsh welcomed us, a picturesque lime-washed church with its Essex spire atop its tower, (also seen at Broomfield and Great Leighs). Part of the tower fell in 1797, but was resourcefully repaired in 1865 with lath and plaster, not noticeable under the present rendering. Here the interesting east window glass was designed by Mary Lowndes (1857-1929). The afternoon ended with a short recital on the c1750 organ made by George Pike England, played by the Warden between Jubilee Fête duties!

All day we had been made so welcome by the Priests (at four of the five churches) and congregations. All the people at the churches seemed delighted to be visited by the Society. Some of our members living in London joined us for the first part of the day, others joined us for later churches, and the faithful few, perhaps a dozen, completed all five churches (some taking rather longer for the journeys than others, but no-body was completely lost without trace!). A happy day, with 258 miles driven by 'Lyn!

Not quite the end of the venture as within a day or two the thank-you letters had to be written to everyone who had helped us at the churches, and all the paper-work and notes had to be filed away for another day!

‘Lyn Stilgoe

### **ESSEX TOUR 2012. Dick's Thoughts.**

The day that 'Lyn and I did the preview of the Essex churches involved me in a twelve hour outing and 237 miles of driving. The first thing I did when I got home was to sit down in a chair that was not on the move and enjoy a bottle of ale which I had placed in the refrigerator earlier in the day. No more thoughts of churches that day!

In the eight days before the tour itself I had to prepare the route instructions for the day as well as my own notes for the interiors of the five churches we would be visiting. Route instructions were typed up first, whilst they were still fresh in my mind. Then I began work on the church notes. I typed up the notes I had written while visiting each church, usually working through the interior of the church from west to east. Then I turned to any guides or books which I could find relating to the church I was considering. These were read through and I noted any corrections or additions to the notes I had typed earlier. Having reassured myself that I have covered all aspects of the church which I needed to mention, I put those notes to bed and moved on to the next church. I usually deal with just one church each day otherwise my thoughts start to get muddled!

The day before the tour I printed out my notes and had yet another read through to make sure that they made sense!

Then to the day of the tour itself. I left home with fingers crossed that I had remembered to pack everything I needed for another long day out. No need to have worried, everything seemed to pass smoothly, due in a large extent to the effort which 'Lyn had put in to the original planning. My main memory of the day is the lovely welcome which we received at each church and the pleasure of meeting members who had turned out to support the tour.

Eventually arrived home at about 7 30pm. I was more than grateful that I had not forgotten to leave another bottle in the fridge. No more thoughts of churches that day!

Richard Barham

### **The Round Tower PDF**

Colour images do not print well in black and white without expensive tweaking and high quality paper. The cost of colour magazines is well beyond the magazine budget for the RTCS.

We are therefore pleased to announce that with this December magazine we are offering a free additional service to those with access to the internet and an email address.

Send your email address to [pt.hodge@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:pt.hodge@tiscali.co.uk) and we will send you a PDF attachment of the December magazine and all subsequent magazines. You can either print out the magazine in colour (the PDF comes printer ready) or just view the colour images on your screen. You will still receive a black and white magazine in the post.

In order to view PDF files it is essential to have a PDF Reader installed on your computer. If you do not have one you can download a free PDF Reader program from either Foxit or Adobe.

John Scales visited sixteen churches and chapels in South Norfolk (including seven round tower churches) on the annual Churches Gala Cycle Ride. He wishes to give his sincere thanks to those members who generously allowed him to raise £122. Half will go towards the new chancel roof at St Margaret's, Herringfleet ( see page 17).

## ST MARGARETS, HERRINGFLEET.

The chancel roof at Herringfleet has been undergoing repairs. We regret to report that shortly after the roof tiles were removed at the end of August the chancel roof collapsed in to the church. Fortunately the church was empty at the time and no one was hurt. The rafters were discovered to be riddled with woodworm and were totally rotten. The architect has been to survey the damage and estimates that the extra work in replacing the rotten roof timbers and erecting a temporary tin roof will cost an additional £7,000. Everything in the church was covered with tarpaulins so it will not be possible to assess the extent of the damage to the interior of the church until the work is complete.

RTCS had already agreed to provide support for the original roof work (along with agencies such as English Heritage and other charities such as Suffolk Historic Churches Trust and The Wolfson Foundation). At our committee meeting on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 we received a request from the church wardens for an additional grant towards the extra work now required. By a very fortunate co-incidence we had just received a donation in memory of a late RTCS member Mr Leonard Beckett which we were able to offer as a contribution towards the new costs.

As we report on page 3 of each edition of 'The Round Tower' 60% of a standard £10 membership subscription goes towards the Repair Fund of RTCS - more when members give more than the minimum subscription as many of you already do. This has enabled us to give £16,500 towards church repairs in the last financial year. While we can make only a small contribution towards the costs of repairs we help church wardens demonstrate to big funders such as English Heritage that there is support for the churches in the community. In the last two years we have also been able to supplement RTCS contributions with money from a very generous legacy bequeathed by another former member of RTCS.



RTCS visit to Herringfleet.

The morning after the collapse.

## THE LOST ROUND TOWER OF ST MARY, BIRCHANGER (ESSEX).



St Mary's Birchanger once had a round tower [1] [2] although available records do not tell us as when the tower was demolished. The unnamed author of an out of print guide tells us that the round tower was taken down in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century although there is no source for this statement. However, the round tower must have been removed before the erection of a bell-cot at the west end of the church in 1898.

Birchanger was subject to restoration by the Victorians when the North aisle was added to provide more seating. This programme of restoration included the bell-cot which was erected by Sir Arthur Blomfield. Parts of Birchanger church almost certainly date from late Saxon or early Norman times. The village was recorded in the Domesday Book under the name Bilchanga. In the 12th Century the village name was recorded as "Bircehangra" which means "Wooded slope growing with Birch trees".

The Norman doorways are of considerable interest owing to Abaci decorated work with chip-carved Sal-tire crosses [3]. The 12th century South doorway was discovered in about 1930, this door is now blocked. Its internal arch has been raised in order to create room for the staircase to the organ gallery. Though similar in decoration to the west doorway, it has in addition foliage scrolls along the arch. This door also has a unique feature for Essex, a small carving high up in the tympanum depicting The Lamb of God, with a cross and flag of victory. The West doorway appears to have been moved from the north side of the church when the present north aisle was erected to increase seating capacity within the church. It is uncertain whether or not the door was once located at the entrance to the round tower. The West doorway has many similarities to that of the round tower at Hammerlöv at Skaane in Sweden.



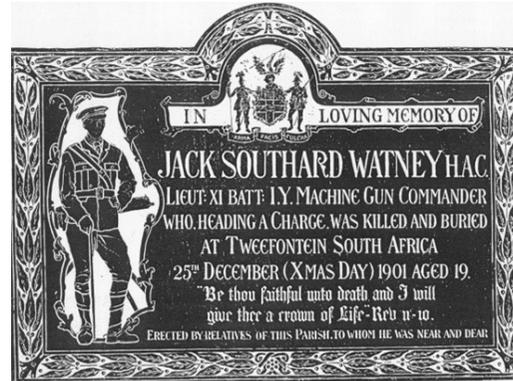
South door.



West door.

Inside the church there is a 15<sup>th</sup> Century piscina, a late 15<sup>th</sup> Century font and some plain 18<sup>th</sup> Century benches. A brass on the South wall is interesting as being apparently the first brass in Great Britain to depict a soldier in modern khaki uniform. It is to Jack Watney, a lad of 19 who fell in South Africa in 1901.

There is also a superb organ built by the French organ building master, August Gern (1885 to 1915), who was a works manager for the famous French organ builder Cavaille Coll



(1825 to 1899) and whilst superintending many of the firm's organs in England he undertook a number of commissions for private patrons. The organ at Birchanger is possibly unique in that its mechanism and parts have not been replaced since it was installed in 1898.. This organ (Historic Organ Certificate awarded in year 2006 with Grade 1 assessment) alone justifies a visit to Birchanger church.

#### Bibliography and notes:

- (1) The Buildings of England: Essex, Nikolaus Pevsner, pp. 26, 87, ISBN 0 300 09601 1
  - (2) Round Tower Churches of South East England, W.J. Goode, pp. 197, "... Near Bishop's Stortford, Pevsner records the North aisle is from year 1899, and there are two Norman doorways, one at least has been reset. The round tower seems to have been destroyed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Pevsner records the nave as Norman, and the chancel as Early English. "
  - (3) An "Abacus" in architecture is a flat slab forming a top of a capital; a "Saltire" a cross with diagonal limbs.
  - (4) See NPOR ("National Pipe Organ Register") database under "Birchanger" via Internet to obtain a full stop disposition of the organ together with additional historical information.
- Birchanger Church is usually locked. The rector is Paul Wilkin (tel 01279 812203, [stansted.rector@googlemail.com](mailto:stansted.rector@googlemail.com)); the church office in Stansted Mountfitchet is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 09:00 to 12:00.

T.S. and H.T. Norris

## **Round Tower Churches Society Study Day at Bawburgh.**

Nick Groves from Norwich Historic Churches Trust started the day with a fascinating examination of the popularity and power of round spaces in the ritual landscape over the course of history and across cultures. Some of the examples he discussed were: Hagar Qim temples on Malta, with apsidal ends and circular chambers, dated at c 3500 BC and hence the oldest standing buildings in Europe; the solid circular mounds at New Grange in Ireland which covered passages along which the sun shone at the winter solstice; Stonehenge with a series of circular shapes and Avebury, the largest stone circle in Europe. The Greeks and Romans also sometimes employed circular spaces (eg the Pantheon in Rome) alongside the more frequent rectangular forms of temples. In a Christian context, Nick discussed some early round forms of churches: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (AD 326) built around the supposed site of Christ's tomb and crucifixion; Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (AD 532) with a circular dome within a square framework; San Vitale in Ravenna (AD 527) with a circle in the centre of an octagon; and Charlemagne's Palatine chapel in Aachen (AD 790-805). There is no evidence of why these circular spaces were built and how they were used.

Matthew Champion presented some findings from the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey in Norfolk churches. NMGS is a volunteer-lead community archaeology project started in 2010. It has recorded hundreds of graffiti in churches and is currently working at St Benet's Abbey. The frequency and quantity of church graffiti suggest that rather than being considered as unwelcome and destructive, graffiti were tolerated and probably encouraged. Most graffiti are difficult to discern but powerful lights set at a sharp angle bring them into clear relief, as Matthew's slides revealed. The same set of symbols is frequently drawn, especially daisy wheels, five pointed stars, crosses and M shapes. Daisy wheels are compass drawn circles often divided into sections, some simple and some more complex, representing perhaps eternity, the earth or the universe. There are also examples of daisy wheels on wooden parish chests (as on the splendid chest at Hindringham). The current view is that these daisy wheels represent ritualistic protection marks, as is often argued for their presence in houses. Compasses were not an obvious part of the tool kit of ordinary medieval people raising speculation about how they were obtained.

Graffiti crosses are usually found in porches and around doorways suggesting perhaps they were made by people as they conducted business in the porch, adding a spiritual element and helping to commemorate agreements. Figurative graffiti are less common. At Blakeney ship graffiti are found mostly on piers on the south side of the church, each respecting the space and layout of the others, suggesting that they were visible over a considerable time period and were not removed. This suggests at least a tolerance if not support from the clergy. Some graffiti seem to be mason's marks and design work, as on one of the piers at Weston Longville, but Matthew argued, graffiti may give a voice to ordinary churchgoers and provide information about how they used and felt about their churches, in contrast to the elite who raised memorials to themselves and often left a written record.

Canon Jeremy Haselock from Norwich Cathedral completed the day's talks with an account of Norfolk's painted screens and pulpits. Norfolk has more medieval painted panelling than anywhere in the UK. The rood screen which separated the nave from the chancel was the most important piece of church furnishing in the late medieval period, involving the skills of joiners, carpenters, carvers, painters, gesso workers (gesso is raised plaster of Paris which is usually gilded over) and gilders. There was at least one workshop in Norwich which produced screens for the surrounding area. Jeremy discussed a wide range of screens, including that at Barton Turf, which is high quality work in international gothic style of 1400-1425. It has the nine orders of angels (including seraphim with feathered tights and body stockings) and three domestic female saints, St Apollonia, St Barbara and St Dorothy. He described the three phases of work at Cawston: side panels in competent international gothic style with some raised gesso work; Latin doctors on the doors in a more Flemish style probably painted a decade later; finally paint on parchment attached to the screen. Screens were often created and painted as money became available, sometimes in the form of bequests. In the C15 preaching became more popular and pulpits began to appear, including fine examples of wine glass pulpits painted with the four Latin doctors at Burnham Norton and Castle Acre.

'Lyn Stilgoe and Dick Barham led us round Bawburgh church, dedicated to Saints Mary and Walstan. Saint Walstan was a local saint from a rich family who worked as a farm labourer, gave his wages to the poor, and gained a reputation for healing sick animals. A church was built where he is supposed to have been buried and the well below the church attracted visitors wishing to be healed. Of particular interest in the church are several fragments of C14 and C15 glass, C16 brasses in the floor of the chancel, a poor box and C17 altar rails.

Many thanks to our Chairman Stuart Bowell for organising the day and introducing our excellent speakers. Thanks also to Bawburgh Village Hall for their hospitality.

Anne Woollett



The Society continues to be grateful to Simon Knott for giving us permission to use his excellent photographs in the RTCS magazine.  
[www.norfolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk)  
[www.suffolkchurches.co.uk](http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk)

**SHIMPLING ST GEORGE . Some dates for 2013.**

Open Days [11am to 4pm] March 31<sup>st</sup>; April 1<sup>st</sup>; May 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>; August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>.

PATRONAL FESTIVAL Evening Prayer Tuesday April 23rd 4:00pm. Wine and nibbles from 3:15pm.

By Invitation .... Saturday June 15th 7:00 to 9:00pm St George's Church - AT HOME. An opportunity to meet and chat with those involved with the Church over a glass or two of wine.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS [10am to 5pm] September 14<sup>th\*</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> (also the Norfolk Churches Trust Sponsored Cycle Ride [9am to 5pm]).

At 7:00pm on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September with wine and nibbles from 6:15pm . ROUND TOWERED CHURCHES a Norfolk and Suffolk Speciality. Stuart Bowell - Chairman of the RTCS.

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December at 7:00pm. Service of Nine Lessons and Carols by candlelight .

**The UK Web Archive and the Round Tower Church Society.**

The RTCS has responded positively to a request to archive the website of the Round Tower Churches Society in the UK Web Archive. The UK Web Archive was established in 2004 to capture and archive websites from the UK domain responding to the challenge of a 'digital black hole' in the nations memory. The UK Web Archive contains specially selected websites that have long term research value and that represents different aspects of online life in the UK. Apparently once our website has been captured for posterity then the UK Web Archive will automatically record changes to the website as and when changes are made. The British Library archive can be searched by visiting [www.webarchive.org.uk](http://www.webarchive.org.uk).

# ROUND TOWER CHURCHES SOCIETY

[www.roundtower.org.uk](http://www.roundtower.org.uk)

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