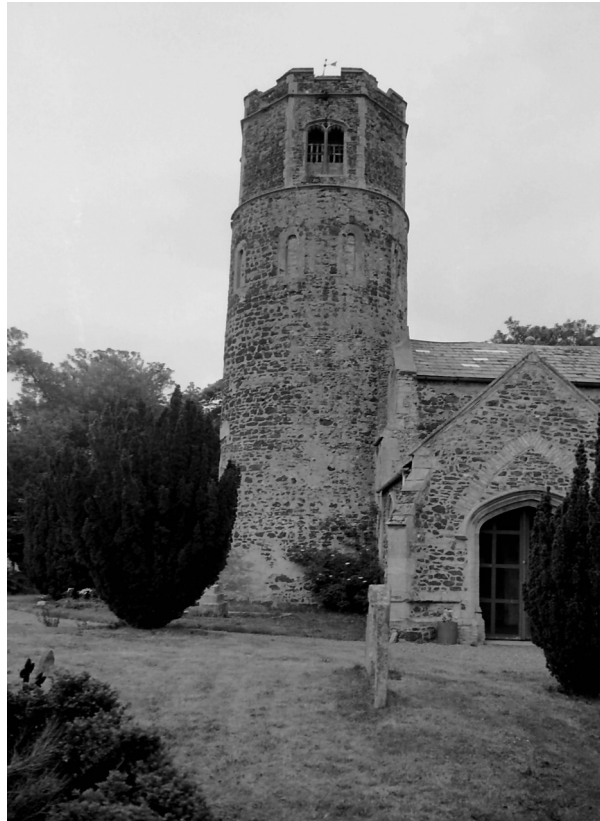




The Round Tower

Vol. XL No 3

March 2013



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Membership Subscription

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

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Those members who registered to receive the December magazine as a PDF will automatically receive this magazine as a PDF. If you have not yet registered but would like to receive the PDF in addition to your paper copy please send your email address to pt.hodge@tiscali.co.uk

Editorial.

Amendment: Bill Goode's photograph on the front of the December magazine was of All Saints, Mettingham and not Holy Trinity, Barsham. We visited both churches on 12th May last year.

Richard Harbord offers tantalising clues about the lost round tower church of St Peter, Ormesby on page 5.

Oddstruck on page 8 tells the story of the tower collapse at St Nicholas, Feltwell. St Nicholas is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

Our cover photograph of Bexwell this month was taken by the late Bill Goode on the 16th June 1976. Two different types of carstone were used in the construction of the tower. 'Lyn Stilgoe clears up confusion between carstone and conglomerate on page 13.

Stephen Harper-Scott gives us a glimpse of a long lost round tower church on page 15.

'Lyn Stilgoe reviews a new Shire publication on page 16 and Michael Pollitt pays tribute to the memory of Charles Roberts on the same page.

Details of our new gift membership scheme are on page 17. Part One of the 2012 Tours Report also starts on page 17. Part Two will feature in the June magazine.

2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Round Tower Churches Society. Our chairman reminds us of our history on page 20. Send us your anecdotes, stories and tall tales for the September and December magazines.

Important dates for your diary are on page 21. The AGM is on the 11th May.

Are you aware of wooden grave boards surviving in our churches or graveyards? If so Colin Bowlt explains on page 22 why he needs to hear from you.

For the latest news about round tower churches and to share your news and photographs visit us on Facebook. In addition to the Facebook page of the Round Tower Churches Society there is now a Facebook Round Tower Churches of Eastern England group. The page and the group are both administered by RTCS.



THE LOST CHURCH OF ST. PETER, ORMESBY.

Ormesby once had four medieval churches. In Norfolk no fewer than seventy eight rural parishes have more than one church but four is quite exceptional. At the end of the Middle Ages two of the Ormesby churches were lost - one of which was the round-tower church of St Peters. The story of Ormesby became more complicated in 1549 when Ormesby absorbed the parish of Scratby which had lost its medieval church. After a time Non-Conformist chapels replaced the lost churches but even some of these have now gone!

This parish is in the district of 'Fleggs' which was once an island surrounded by marshlands (later to become the Norfolk Broads) and the sea. It has many things that favour agriculture and settlement so it has always been densely populated — hence the need for so many churches. A prehistoric agricultural landscape has been detected and this was expanded with the arrival of the Romans. The Vikings also settled in the Fleggs so most of its place-names including Flegg and Ormesby have a Scandinavian origin. Many of the churches are likely to have been new foundations in the post-Viking era of the early 11th century. The mother-church of Great Ormesby is dedicated to St Margaret. Its south doorway is in a mature Romanesque style and dates from the end of the Norman period and the mid-late 12th century. This is the most easterly of the four medieval churches of Ormesby but paradoxically it is now in the middle of the extended modern parish. At the western end, in Little Ormesby, is the thatched church of St Michael. Between these two surviving churches were those of St Andrew and St Peter. The four were located on a track running east to west that has been relocated over time. In the 19th century it was moved north of St Peters in order to avoid the park of Ormesby Hall. The old track disappeared leaving the site of St Peters in an open field on the corner of an allotment garden. In recent times a village by-pass has been built south of St Peters to form the new A149 trunk road to Great Yarmouth.

The name Ormesby is listed under the 991 *Dane Gelt* (ie tax list) of parishes and in a Will of 1020. Usually a parish with several churches was sub-divided for manor purposes in the Middle Ages but that did not happen in Ormesby. The *Domesday Survey* of **1086** (1) considered the parish as a single manorial unit, owned mainly by the king who enfeuded the family of 'de Ormesby' from the early Middle Ages up to the 17th century, when the Clere family took over. Their pedigrees are well documented but there was no obvious manorial division of the parish made by them, say through inheritance. The 1086 Survey recorded 90 men. Using a standard computation this suggests a population of about 430. This confirms that the Fleggs had one of the highest population densities in England. Perhaps the two main churchyards were too small for this big parish so extra burial space was needed. It seems that the two churches of St Andrew and St Peter began as mortuary chapels to serve overflow burial-yards. In 2009, prior to road works being undertaken, part of the former churchyard was uncovered by archaeologists. No remains of a church were found

but 62 medieval burials tightly packed in, were uncovered (2). This supports the case for over-crowded burial yards in Ormesby.

The Great Survey of 1086 stated that a huge proportion of the population in Ormesby were Freeman. Perhaps they were of Danish origin. These men were semi-independent of the manorial system and able to sustain an independent chapel. They were sufficiently free in the 1500s to challenge the Lord of the Manor in court for breaches of their common rights of pasture. Between 1066 and 1086, the value of the king's manor had more than doubled. This was partly because several outlying estates had been added to Ormesby. Its wealth was also demonstrated by a very large flock of sheep that were able to pasture in the marshlands on the western side of the parish. All these factors favoured more church building.

Early in its history St Peters had a western round tower. By then it needed bells to call a congregation so it may have been promoted to the status of a parish church. Around **1100** the ecclesiastical income of Ormesby was appropriated by the King to endow the new hospital of St Paul in Norwich. From then onwards Ormesby became a united vicarage served by a single incumbent. Early ecclesiastical records such as the *Norwich Valuation* of **1254**, and later ones of 1297, 1298, 1299 lump all the Ormesby churches together though they do acknowledge there were four in the parish. The customary payments paid by St Peters and called 'Peters Pence' (6d, 10d, 6d) were the same as St Margaret's but more than St Andrews (2d, 2d, 2d). St Peter's nave was short and narrow – nearly the same width as the bell tower. The original chancel had a small apse. In the Middle Ages that was replaced with a wider and longer chancel with a square end. Some writers have compared this layout with the round towered church of Hales but that is much longer in plan. St Peters was given diagonal and side buttresses but there is no evidence of aisles or porches. Later the floor was surfaced in glazed Flemish-ware tiles. Part of it and the covered foundations could still be intact but deep ploughing may have disturbed them.

In **1349** the *Black Death* devastated many Norfolk communities. A new vicar was appointed in Ormesby soon afterwards and the 1349 tax assessment for the parish was significantly reduced to provide financial relief. Ormesby quickly recovered. The **1369** *Church Goodes Survey* showed that St Peters still had all the altar furnishing, liturgical books, vestments etc to function as a parish church (3). Like in St Andrews there was a stand for a coffin-bier so their graveyards were still functioning then. Decline set in during the Counter-Reformation when such impoverished churches could contribute little. In **1546** Ormesby and Scraby were consolidated so the parish then extended eastwards right up to the coast. The **1552** *Church Goodes Survey* makes no mention of the minor churches – only St Margarets and St Michaels, yet St Peters was probably still functioning up to the end of the 16th century. In the *visitation of the diocese* by Bishop Redmond in **1597** he found that the Vicar of Ormesby had to serve all the five parts of his extended parish. He was seen to be lax in his ministration so the two small churches of SS Andrew and Peter were

probably phased out in a planned redundancy at that time. Perhaps their churchyards were full. By **1603** the vicar had a large congregation of 220 Anglican communicants – few rejected the established Protestant Church. There things rested until **1726** when the Norfolk historian, Francis Blomfield visited Ormesby. He found that St Peters had been reduced to a thatched barn but the ruin of its round tower was still recognisable. It could be restored back to being a church 'with little (financial) charge', he mused. William Faden published his survey map of Norfolk in **1797**, which shows the site of St Peter's church as a ruin. It even features on the **1836** OS Map of Ormesby and the **1841** Tithe Map. Massive enclosures of land soon followed and the remains of the church above ground were cleared away then. Charles Cox's '*Norfolk Churches*' **1911** mentioned St Peters but this round-towered church might have been forgotten had not Charles Farrow spotted it amongst Blomfield's notes. The summer of **1976** was very dry so the site of the church showed up as crop-marks on aerial photographs. This image was published by Derek Edwards in **1987** (4) and it was listed by William Goode in his **1994** book (5) under 'Records of round towers no longer visible'. Neil Batlock (2) describes St Peters church in detail and this article is an over-view of that report.

Richard Harbord

References

1. '*Domesday Book Norfolk*', parts 1 & 2, Phillimore pubn 1984; Philippa Brown, editor.
2. '*Ruined and disused churches in Norfolk*', Neil Batlock, East Anglian Archaeology', report 51, 1991.
3. '1369 church goodes survey'; Norfolk Record Society, vol 19, parts I & II, p 46-47.
4. '*Norfolk from the Air*', Derek A. Edwards, Norfolk Museum Services pubn 1987; Peter Wade-Martins editor.
5. '*East Anglian Round Towers and their Churches*', W. J. Goode, RTCS pubn 1982; 2nd edition 1994.

<u>Churches</u>	<u>TG map location</u>
St Peters	49086 14695
St Margarets, Great Ormesby	49889 14551
St Andrews	4883 1481
St Michaels, Little Ormesby	48065 14888

You can see the Derek Edwards aerial photograph of the crop mark of this long gone round tower church at <http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/ormesbypeter/ormesbypeter.htm>

ST NICHOLAS, FELTWELL. THE TOWER COLLAPSE.

Just before 8:30am on 25th October, 1898 five year old Bert Willingham, left his uncle's house on his daily task of fetching the milk from Mr Lambert's farm near St Nicholas church Feltwell. At about the same time several workmen employed by Bardell Brothers of Kings Lynn to repair the tower having breakfasted at their lodgings and washed it down with a pint or two of beer at the nearby Chequers Inn strolled over to the church to start work for the day. The tower was covered in scaffolding as work to repair the ancient round tower had been in progress for some days. They had almost reached the church when the landlord's wife for some reason called them back. They stopped and started to return. Seconds later with a noise that it was later said, could be heard for miles the tower split in two along the lines of an old, previously repaired crack and most of the tower fell into the churchyard. Young Bert, having collected the milk was so frightened by the noise of what he thought was the church collapsing dropped the milk and ran home crying. On telling his story he was given a good hiding by his uncle for telling lies. The sound of the collapse had evidently not been heard at his home! Later, as the news spread it was realised that he had been telling the truth and his uncle apologised to him but the events of that morning made a lasting impression on the young lad. The workmen also never forgot their narrow escape.. The collapse of the tower was no surprise to Herbert J Green a Norwich architect and the Diocesan surveyor. In a report earlier in 1898 he had recommended the removal of four of the bells as "The weight of all five bells was too much for a tower which had never been constructed to bear the strain of such a peal". He further advised that the upper portion of the tower (the octagonal belfry) be entirely rebuilt at an estimated cost of approximately £250. Some parishioners questioned the necessity of this and called in another architect who recommended leaving the bells 'in situ' while the tower was repaired not rebuilt. This was the plan that was adopted with dire consequences. Upon the collapse of the tower Mr Green wrote to the press disclaiming all responsibility as his advice had been rejected. He could have been forgiven for saying "I told you so" to all and sundry.

Tower collapses are nothing new. From the Middle Ages onwards they have been frequent occurrences caused by primitive building methods, inadequate materials, insubstantial foundations or even all three as builders strove for bigger, grander churches. In most cases the tower was rebuilt and the builders usually learned by the mistakes of their forefathers and rebuilt stronger and

better than before. East Anglia has been particularly prone to tower collapses. The lack of suitable stone for building was a primary cause. Feltwell has (or rather, had) a round tower built of flint, reputedly of Saxon origin, surmounted by a 15th Century octagonal turret. Feltwell was and is still a mainly agricultural village on the edge of the fens, unusual (though not unique) in having two churches to serve a fairly small community. However by the early 19th Century the newer and larger St Mary's had become the main place of worship. The benefices were consolidated in 1805 and although St Nicholas's was 'thoroughly' repaired in 1834 use of the church declined and the last marriage had been conducted in 1855. In 1862 the chancel and vestry were removed and in 1864 it was closed for all services apart from funerals. In 1898, as we have already seen the tower collapsed and has never been rebuilt. The 20th Century saw little improvement for the church. It re-opened in the 1920s and was used for services in winter being smaller than St Mary's and easier and cheaper to heat but in 1973 the unequal struggle to maintain two churches ended when St Nicholas's was declared redundant. For a while its fate hung in the balance. Demolition was a real possibility but was averted due to a campaign by dedicated villagers and it is now in the hands of the Redundant Churches Trust. Two services are held each year; one on the Patronal Festival in June and the other a candlelit Carol Service in December. St Nicholas contained a ring of five bells but unfortunately they fared no better than the tower

(No. 1) "Michael Darbie made me 1661".

(No. 2) "John Draper made me 1621".

(No. 3) "Virginis Egregie Vocor Campona Marie".

(No. 4) "Etheldreda Bona Tibi Dantur Plurima Dona",

(No. 5) "John Draper made me 1614".

The three lightest bells were smashed when the tower fell. The shattered remains and the two surviving complete bells were stored for many years behind the organ until the fate of the tower could be decided. For a time there was a Tower Restoration Fund (evidently it was not covered by insurance) but eventually rebuilding was ruled out and the stump of the tower was sealed. It was as late as 1967 when the three broken bells were sold for scrap and the tenor bell sold to a new church near Cardiff. The proceeds of these sales were used to pay for repairs to the belfry at St Mary's. The medieval bell frame was also disposed of in 1967. The 4th bell, the 'Etheldreda Bell' was presented to Ely Cathedral and still stands in the cathedral nave (Saint Etheldreda founded the monastery at Ely).

Despite the lack of services at St Nicholas the church in 1898 still had a band of ringers who practised regularly and who were devastated at the collapse of their tower. We know their names. William Beamis was Tower Captain: he and his son Walter were thatchers. The other members of the band were James Shearing a wheelwright, James Arnold a blacksmith, Jack Nicholls who was 19 at the time of the collapse and the splendidly named Salisbury King Lambert a farmer whose job it was to fetch the beer from the Chequers to the tower on 'practice night'. We can only guess at how much 'practising' was actually done and the ringing abilities of the band. Given the lack of services at St Nicholas it is probable they rang (or chimed) the three bells at St Mary as well. The band had, however, paid for a set of 12 hand bells. A local tradition states that they used to practice on these during winter in the warmth of the pub rather than the cold church. They also used to tour the village at Christmas playing carols (these bells have now been restored and are in regular use).

William Beamis (1853-1933) had taken charge of the tower following the death of his uncle Daniel Spencer who had taught him to ring, three years previously. William's great-grandfather had been hung for his part in the Littleport Riots of 1816 and his grandfather jailed. On his release he moved to Feltwell and married a local girl. His grandson as well as being a master thatcher provided a Pony and Cart taxi service to nearby Mildenhall. On the day of the collapse father and son were re-thatching Pear Tree Farm House nearby. On hearing the crash they dashed up the ladders on to the roof from where they could see the devastation. They hurried to the scene where it is still told William stood on the village green and wept. Perhaps he realised that the chances of the bells ever being rung again were remote. William (and probably the other ringers too) continued to ring the bells of St Mary's ringing for the accessions of Edward VII and George V, the victories at Kimberley, Mafeking and Ladysmith and for the end of the Boer War and World War I. William retired after ringing in Feltwell for 32 years and died in 1933 aged 80. His son Walter, the last of the bellringers died in 1977 aged 93.

He was fond of repeating to all that would listen:

When the 8 bells of Swaffham rang they were supposed to say:

"We are the best bells in the town"

To which the five bells of St Nicholas Feltwell replied:

"Who can beat we five?"

The two bells of Weeting would boast:

"We two, we two."

To which the three bells of St Mary's Feltwell retorted:

"That's a lie, that's a lie."

Now, all that remains at St Nicholas is the sealed stump of the tower and the nave. In the church the old clappers are hung on the wall along with the following epitaph:

The Silent Tongues
Five of us used to speak to you
Two hundred years and more
We called you from your cottages
And from the old fen shire
With lofty tower one morn we fell
In Eighteen Ninety Eight
No more we'll call you to your prayers
For silence is our fate.

This article about the lost tower and bells of St Nicholas, Feltwell was written under the pseudonym Oddstruck and has appeared on various websites relating to bell ringing. The editors have tried to track down Oddstruck without success. If you have contact information for him/her please get in touch.



Holy Trinity, Barsham. Then and Now.



The late Bill Goode took the top photograph in 1979 shortly after the thatch fire. The RTCS visited Barsham in May 2012 and apart from scorch marks on some of the pews there is little or no evidence that the fire ever took place.

CARSTONE OR CONGLOMERATE?

Both these stones can be seen in round tower church buildings and there is often confusion as to which is which, both being in various shades of brown. Although in both cases the colouring is derived from iron oxide the two stones were actually formed in very different geological eras.

Carstone (also known as carrstone or gingerbread) dates from the Lower Cretaceous period and is a greensand layer from 100-112 million years old. It is a soft ferruginous sandstone containing glauconite. When quarried the stone is soft and green, easy to cut, but it hardens and the iron reacts with oxygen turning it to a brown or ginger colour. It tends to darken with age, particularly when not in full sunlight and often north facing walls are covered with a green stain caused by an algae (*plueroccus naegelii*).

The Norfolk area of carstone stretches south about 15 miles from the Hunstanton cliffs, appears near the surface around Heacham, is much deeper near Snettisham (requiring quarrying) and is also near the surface around Downham Market. The carstone near the surface is in small pieces as around Wolferton and is known as shell or shale carr. It can be seen in many buildings, for instance on the Sandringham Estate and is the popular so-called "ginger-bread stone". The deeper-down layers are often darker, have to be quarried and can be cut into reasonably shaped blocks. Some of the lowest layers do contain some small rounded pebbles.

There is also a silver carr, a grey version sometimes called Sandringham Sandstone derived from the same greensand deposit but without the iron staining. It was also used for building work and can be seen in parts of the same area from Sandringham through to Gayton. At Leziate there is a nearly white form of the greensand, nearly pure silica which is used for glass making.

Conglomerate is more correctly known as ferricrete but it also has the nickname of "puddingstone" from its appearance, somewhat like a plum pudding! It was formed 2-70 million years ago, possibly in river beds or where water collected at the bottom of a slope and can be found on or near the surface of the land. It is a naturally formed cement, again stained by iron oxide holding fragments of irregular angular-shaped

stone, notably gravel or flint. Flint did not appear on the geological scene till the Late Cretaceous period, over 70 million years ago but it is more recent than the carstone strata. Ferricrete is generally coarser grained than the carstone, not so easy to cut into blocks and contains many bits and pieces of other stones hence being called puddingstone. It can appear randomly in fields all over Norfolk but particularly in the Downham Market area. It is generally a mid-to-darker brown, not the bright ginger-bread colour.

In Saxon times the builders of the round towers were no doubt pleased to incorporate carstone or ferricrete into their churches. One large block saved collecting many flints and was good for holding the square corners of the naves. The Normans tended not to use anything but coursed flints with imported freestone for the quoins, windows and doorways so these stones are sometimes used to identify Saxon work although they were used again in the 13C.

Bexwell church tower (photo on front cover) shows two different kinds of carstone in its construction. The lower part is made of random rubble while the circular stage has more evenly sized pieces roughly coursed. West Dereham's church shows much ferricrete in its construction. The lower part of Gayton Thorpe's tower has quite a bit of the silver carr amongst its flints. Odd pieces of ferricrete can be found in churches all over Norfolk and indeed elsewhere in the country. The old cathedral at North Elmham close by the River Wensum, is largely constructed of flint and ferricrete. Parts of the carstone quarries at Snettisham dating back to medieval times, are still being worked.

‘Lyn Stilgoe

A plaque in memory of the archaeologist Basil Brown who discovered the Sutton Hoo ship burial was recently put up in Rickingham Inferior Church where Basil lived for most of his life. Before Christmas members of the Sutton Hoo Society came to the church and placed a holly wreath from the Sutton Hoo estate.

Rickingham Inferior Church Fabric Fundraisers are having an Antique Fair in Rickingham Village Hall on Bank Holiday Monday 6th May from 10 a.m. Admission £1.

ST ANDREWS, BURWELL

Our Facebook page proved its worth just before Christmas when Stephen Harper-Scott drew our attention to a long gone round tower church previously unknown and unrecorded by the Round Tower Church Society. Pretty much the only evidence for the church having had a round tower is a drawing by the Cambridgeshire clergyman and antiquary William Cole (1714-1782). Writing on the Cambridgeshire Churches website a contributor writing about St Mary, Burwell states 'Before you leave Burwell, stand in the churchyard and look the north-east. Until the mid-18th century, a second church (dedicated to St Andrew) stood across the road from the churchyard gate. We know that it probably had a round tower and was owned by Fordham Abbey but that's about it. The parishes were amalgamated in 1646, and by 1742 St Andrew was ruined so only a few drawings survive'. The Cambridgeshire Churches website is at <http://www.druidic.org/camchurch/churches/burwell.htm>

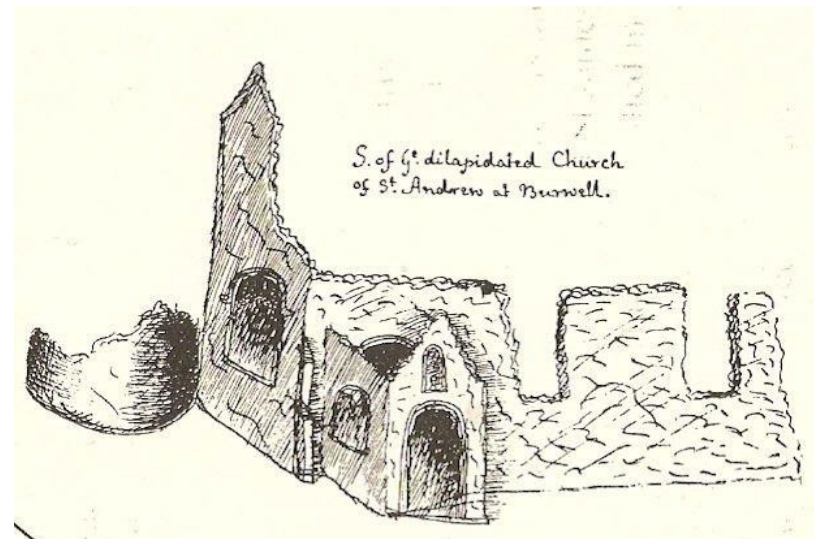


THE REV^d W^m COLE, A.M.

of Cambridge, & F.A.S. 1768.

Engraved from an original Drawing.

London, Published Aug^r 1805, by W^m Richardson, 173, Strand.



THE MEDIEVAL MONASTERY.

Roger Rosewell, published by Shire Books, £6.99, ISBN-13: 978 0 7481 146 6
Monasteries and monastic life were a very important and integral part of medieval life. This new book skilfully enhances our knowledge of the origins of monasticism, the different Orders and their disciplines, the daily way of life for the inhabitants of the Abbeys, Priories and Nunneries, and so much more right through to the changes brought about by the Dissolution. There are many relevant colour photos, and where no illustration was available (no cameras about five hundred or more years ago!) the text has been successfully augmented by lively sketches. There is also a Gazetteer of key religious sites worth a visit, county by county, some still in use as Parish Churches and Cathedrals, some still standing to a greater or lesser degree as historic ruins. Thanks to this very readable book they can now be seen with much more understanding.

‘Lyn Stilgoe

CHARLES ROBERTS (CVR) 1941—2012.

Award-winning reviewer and long-serving arts and literary editor of the Eastern Daily Press, Charles Roberts has died aged 70 after a long illness at his home in France. For almost 30 years, CVR as he was known wrote with authority on the theatre and arts and was also co-author of the definitive history of Norfolk’s medieval churches.

Born the youngest of three brothers in Staffordshire in 1941 he went to the local grammar school. He joined the EDP in July 8, 1968 at the EDP’s former Norwich headquarters in Redwell Street initially as a reporter covering Norfolk County Council. He fought for the arts throughout his whole career until he wrote his final column in April 2009. His efforts were recognised when in May 1990, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, the prestigious society formed in 1754 “for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce.” Three years later, he became an honorary Master of Arts at the University of East Anglia. His enthusiasm for churches led to a joint venture with Sam Mortlock to produce the first volume of the Popular Guide to Norfolk Churches, which was published in 1981. CVR, who wrote the 20,000 word glossary noted that his favourite churches were Edington followed by Barney. By 1985 when they had completed the three volumes the co-authors had driven more than 7,000 miles and had visited 659 Norfolk medieval churches. The one volume revised edition of Norfolk Churches was published in 2007.

In 1989 CVR wrote a comprehensive guide to the city of Norwich through its 1000 year history.

Having spent many holidays in France he decided with his partner Guy to settle in retirement in a remote region of the country. Following early retirement at the age of 56 in the summer of 1997 he kept in touch with Norfolk and the EDP with his regular column for another dozen years.

Michael Pollitt

<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Round Tower Churches Society</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">Gift Membership</h3>		
<p>Gift membership is a way of ensuring that the recipient has the enjoyment and pleasure of your gift throughout the year.</p> <p>A Gift membership package includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most recent of the Society's quarterly magazine The Booklet 'East Anglian Round Tower Churches' A Society Bookmark An individual card for your personal message <p>Cost £15.00 (overseas £20.00)</p> <p><i>A great idea for an unusual present</i></p>	<p>To enquire about Gift Membership Contact:</p> <p>Richard Barham 6 The Warren Old Catton Norwich NR6 7NW</p> <p>Tel: 01603 788721</p>	

Summer Tours 2012. Part One.

Our tour season opened in the Waveney Valley on a fine late spring day in May. Mettingham All Saints stands hidden by trees above the Bungay to Beccles road. Bluebells and Lords and Ladies were blooming in the churchyard. This tower, 51 feet high, was in a parlous state a few years back but has since been repaired and stabilised. Prior to this work a thorough survey was undertaken by Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service and their report SCCAS No 2008/193 makes very interesting reading.

In addition to the tower the church consists of nave, chancel, south aisle and south porch. Entrance is via a fine Romanesque doorway with engaged columns and orders of chevron and billet moulding in the arch which graces the north wall. Above the arch is a grotesque head with bulging eyes, a flat nose and a wide mouth. Inside the church we see a traditional East Anglian style font and placed inside the bowl a curious mini font. The chancel has two separate piscinae. A roundel of glass in one of the windows depicts the pelican in her piety feeding her young with drops of blood from her breast.

Beside Holy Trinity Barsham, is the charming Old Rectory, the birthplace of Catherine Suckling, mother of Admiral Lord Nelson, the Norfolk Hero and victor at Trafalgar in 1805. We enter the churchyard through a fine late 19th century, thatched lychgate. The tower is almost 55 feet in height and has well coursed flint work, while the

nave is thatched and the chancel is tiled. A unique feature of this church is the east end of the chancel with its fine diamond patterning where the window tracery is continued over the outside wall in stone and flint flushwork panelling. Holy Trinity's interior has much of interest. A poor man's box is inscribed and dated 'RHS 1691' and a pulpit is also 17th century. There is a plain chest with 'ND 1675' crudely carved thereon and some old bench ends. To the north of the sanctuary is the tomb of Sir Edward Echingham. In front of this is an early 15th century brass to a knight who wears the S.S. collar of the Lancastrians. Also in the sanctuary is an early Norman font. We were fortunate during our visit to have Reverend John Buchanan present, to give freely of his knowledge gained by extensive research of this church.



Mettingham

Barsham.



Venturing south leaving the valley for higher open country, we came to St Andrew Ilketshall. Here the tower is over 60 feet high with a lower circular stage of just over 35 feet while the octagonal stage makes it the second tallest of Suffolk's round towers. There is no string course between the two stages and Stephen Hart believes the whole tower to be a single build, probably constructed in the second quarter of the 14th century and added to an earlier church.

A Romanesque doorway with engaged columns and a chevron moulded arch gives entrance to the church. The nave roof is arch braced. There is a fine set of Charles II Royal Arms carved in wood and painted. Another interesting piece of woodwork is a 16th century bench with a richly carved back. The end is inscribed Richard Bonsey (suggests Munro Cautley) but might it be Bongey given the proximity of Bungay?



Ilketshall

Bill Goode wrote in his book 'a church where there is much more to be learned' and these words proved to be more prophetic than he could ever have known at the time. In 2001, wall paintings which have proved of great interest were discovered in the nave. On the north wall is a Romanesque fragment showing a church interior with altar and chalice. Those on the south wall are later, an early 14th century Wheel of Fortune, some bodies emerging from coffins and a beautiful female figure of the 15th century.

Photographs and text by Stuart Bowell

Forty Years of the Round Tower Churches Society.

The Round Tower Churches Society was founded in 1973, so this year we are celebrating our 40th Anniversary.

From 1965 to 1972, Bill Goode's interest in East Anglian churches with round towers was growing. He visited all of them and was very concerned to find that many were in a poor condition and that money for repairs was short. In an effort to assist these churches he tried to form a Society but with little initial success. A number of meetings were held throughout 1973 and on the first of September that year the Society was founded. There were 24 members who paid an annual subscription of £1.00.

The following year, by the AGM, the membership had grown to 70, charitable status was gained and the first grant of £20.00 was given to Cranwich, St Mary the Virgin. Other recipients of grants during the early years were Mutford, Bardfield Saling, Croxton, Frostenden and West Dereham, each receiving £25.00. In addition to helping churches financially, the Society's aims included promoting interest in and the study of these very special buildings. A magazine gave members a chance to share their views, articles were written and summer tours were a time for fieldwork and enjoyment in the company of like minded enthusiasts.

Bill was continuing his research, climbing towers, measuring everything in sight, recording his findings and formulating his theories regarding the dating of the towers. A book was the next step and The Round Tower Churches of South East England, illustrated by Diana Bowie, the Society's Publicity Officer, was launched at the Black Horse Book Shop, Norwich in May 1994. The book was a fully revised version of an earlier publication. The new edition was only made possible by generous donations, loans and advance orders from members. All profits went to the Society. Membership now stood at 330, membership subscription was £5.00.

By the 20th anniversary of the Society in 1993 approximately 150 grants had been given to over 100 churches, the total amount being £10,000.00. Membership continued to grow and it was noted with some pleasure that '20 of the first hundred are still with us'. Time, of course, takes its toll but 20 years further on 4 of those first 100 members are still with us. By the 25th Anniversary of the Society in 1998, membership stood at 472 and grants during the previous year totalled £3,575.00.

Our first study day was held in 2005 at Mendlesham in Suffolk and it was on this day we heard the news that H.R.H. the Prince of Wales had graciously agreed to become our Patron. Membership remained steady at 550 and grants paid during the previous year amounted to £4,500.00.

The Society has a website. We are in the process of updating it. Recently we have added a Round Towers Churches Society Facebook page. In addition a Facebook group called the Round Tower Churches Society of Eastern England was created, to which photographs and comments relating to the churches may be posted for members and non members alike to enjoy.

At the 2012 AGM our Treasurer reported that grants of £16,500.00 had been given to help 14 churches during the year, including our biggest grant so far (£5,000.00) to

help with the re thatching of Cranwich. We have been able to give larger grants in case of extreme need in recent years because of the generous bequest of the late Brian Harmer, who was one of the founding members. In addition promises of £13,700.00 have also been made. It would be entirely fitting if, as seems probable, we reach a total of £150,000.00 in our 40th Anniversary year.

The strength of our Society is in its membership. So many people have made contributions since its formation, giving freely of their own time and expertise, some individuals playing major roles for many years.

Our Founder Bill Goode died in January 2008, his vision, the Round Tower Churches Society lives on. Hopefully we will continue to build on what has been achieved since 1973 for many years to come.

Stuart Bowell

RTCS TOURS 2013

11th May 10am Herringfleet (NR32 5QS), Blundeston, Gunton before our AGM at 2.15. Gunton Church Hall.

Saturday Tours. First church at 2.30pm

1st June Sidestrand (NR27 0LT), Roughton, Aylmerton.

6th July Aldham (IP7 6NN), Hasketon, Ramsholt.

3rd Aug Beachamwell (PE37 8BD), Cockley Cley, Watton.

7th Sept Stockton (NR34 0HJ), Kirby Cane, Bungay Holy Trinity.

CHURCH TOURS 2013 on Sundays. First church at 2.30pm

21st April Hoe (NR20 4BB), Worthing RT, Billingford, Bawdeswell.

19th May Flitcham (PE31 6BU), Anmer, Dersingham, Fring.

16th June Frenze (IP21 4EZ), Thelveton, Dickleburgh, Rushall RT.

21st July Stow Bardolph (PE34 3HJ), Crimplesham, Bexwell RT, Fordham.

All are welcome on these tours. There are no charge though donations in the church offertory boxes are encouraged. Tea will be provided by one of the churches during the afternoon. The Sunday Tours end with a form of Evening Service, usually at 6.30pm (which is optional). Any enquiries to 'Lyn Stilgoe 01328 738237.

WOODEN GRAVE-BOARD SURVEY.

Wooden grave-boards were a once common feature in English churchyards, especially in those counties without sources of good monumental stone. Just how far back in time they were used is unknown and probably unknowable. However, in view of the vulnerability of exposed timber to decay, remaining examples, particularly from the C18 and C19, are now rare. By the late-1850s a wooden grave marker would probably have been the mark of either relative poverty or conservatism. The industrial revolution and the railways had made suitable stone for headstones available at affordable prices for far more people than had been the case previously. Consequently wooden markers were much less common as a stone headstone was usually preferred by those able to afford them. Some wooden grave-boards were well carved and clearly replicated stone headstones. More typical early wooden memorials were simple grave-boards consisting of a plank or rail stretching the length of the grave supported by posts at either end.

A research project is now underway in an attempt to determine the past distribution of wooden grave-boards in England from records of those still surviving in churchyards and burial-grounds or shown in old photographs or prints. If you are interested and can offer any help please send any records to Colin Bowlt at 7 Croft Gardens, Ruislip, Middlesex. HA4 8EY. It would be useful for Colin to have:

- 1, Name of church or burial ground.
- 2, Location (grid reference would be helpful).
- 3, Number if still present (any dates, inscriptions etc).
- 4, From photographs (details – book, postcard, dates etc).
5. From prints (details – book, dates etc).



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