

ST MARY'S CHURCH, ROUGHTON, NORFOLK.

In AD 937, King Athelstan made an edict saying that *thanes* (squires) should own a chapel with a bell tower. The king died soon after and the country was beset with unrest for nearly a century. It is not surprising that no surviving church round towers dating from before AD 1000 can be clearly identified today. In fact round towers were built over a four hundred year period and less than half of them date from the Saxon and Norman periods. Dating is made even more difficult where later features have been added to the original structure.

Many precedents have been cited for round church towers. For example churches built during the Roman period had an apse at the west, not the eastern end of the nave. King Canute wanted to make up for the destruction of churches by his Viking grandfather so he encouraged a new era of ecclesiastical projects. This included in 1020 a new Abbey at Bury St Edmunds, which included the 'Rotunda'. This was the sepulchre chapel of the martyred king of East Anglia. It was cylindrical in shape and based on an important model – the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Although there is a substantial difference between the Rotunda and bell-towers, the chapel at Bury might still have been an important model for round towers. It was to Bury that the pilgrims from East Anglia travelled, rather than to other buildings scattered around Europe cited as models for the church round tower. No wonder that there are about 176 round towers surviving in East Anglia (including ruined ones). About forty of those towers seem to be of Saxon or Saxo-Norman origin, which is a very high number when compared with other English regions.

According to Domesday Survey, the capital-manor of Roughton was owned by Wulfnoth Godwinson in 1066. He was educated in Normandy and returned to England when he came of age in 1052. He was a non-resident manorial lord but perhaps Roughton Church was rebuilt in stone at about that same date. Wulfnoth was brother of the King Harold who was killed at Hastings in 1066. He survived long after 1066 and may not have been immediately deprived of the manor of Roughton. Construction of the church may have continued into the 1070s.

Saxon Period.

The bell tower at the western end of the church has an unusual number of original features from this period that still survive:

1. Herringbone coursing at the lower level in the 1.12m thick flint walls.
2. *Puddingstone* (sandstone with gritty gravel) in various places such as quoins.
3. Two 'Bulls Eye' windows with internal and external splays at the lower stage. The flint *voussoirs* around the window arches may be a Saxon feature but could also be later.
4. A tall tower arch facing the Nave (widened in the 19th century)

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5. Three narrow 'slit windows' in the middle stage.
6. Four twin bell-openings each have triangular heads and are separated by ferricrete spine walls with rounded outer faces. These spine walls go through the full depth of the tower walls although from the outside, they look like 'drum piers' (pace, Pevsner. *Buildings of England, North East Norfolk*. Penguin 1962)
7. A door at high level above the tower arch (still open but hidden behind the modern organ loft).

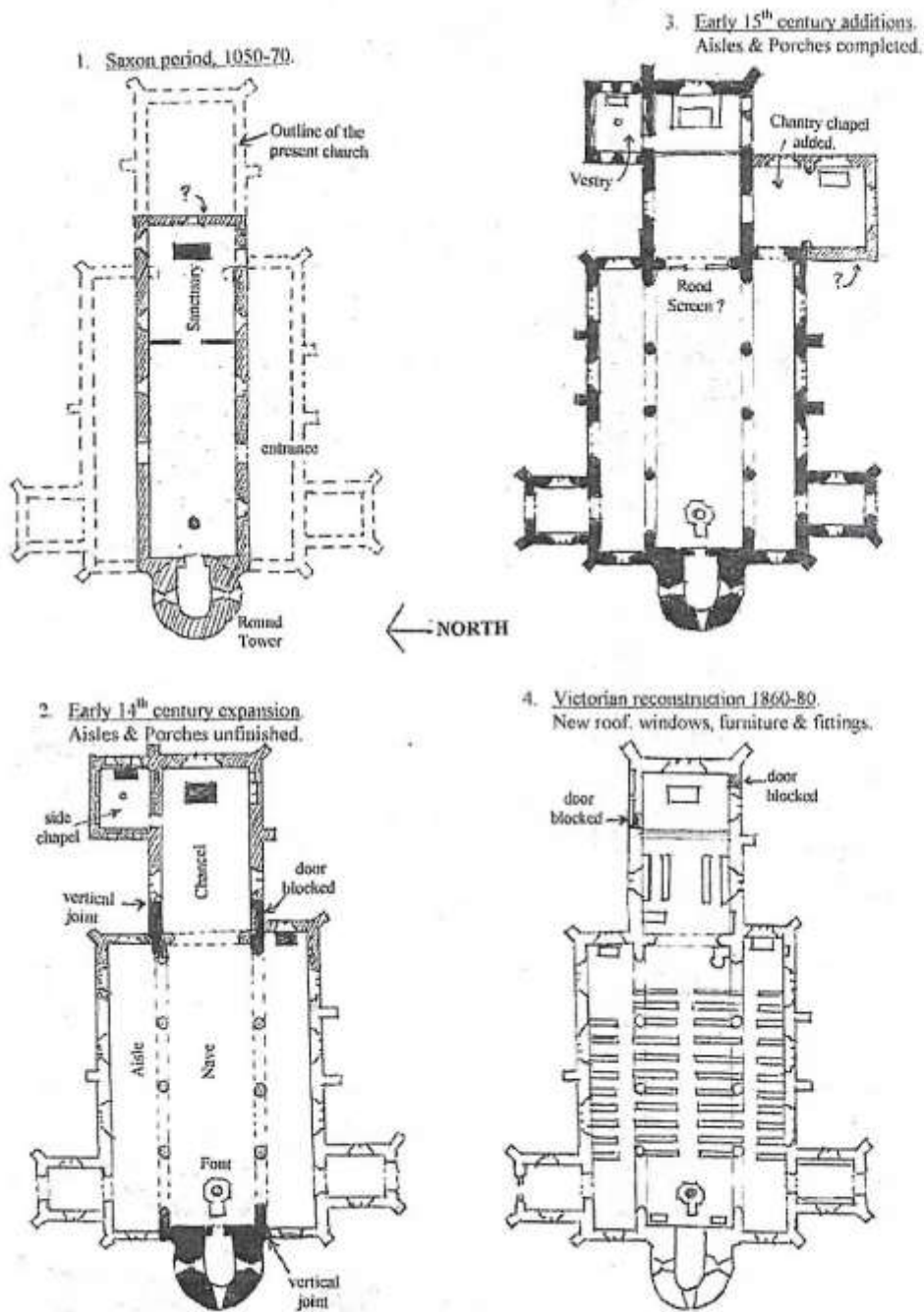
W. J. Goode (*East Anglian Round Towers and their Churches* 1982, rev. 1994) states that towers over 11.0m high, with thick walls and pre-Norman features associated with naves over 6.0m wide are more likely to be late, than early Saxon. These generalisations need to be treated with caution but Roughton Church does come within that description except that its nave is less than 6.0m. wide.

Between the western end of the nave and the later south aisle there is a vertical wall joint with brown-stone quoins on the nave side. The tower is joined to the nave wall with a quadrant fillet. There is no through coursing of stonework to link the tower and the nave walls. The presence of the fillet does not automatically mean that the tower and nave wall were built at the same time. The width of the present nave is the same as the original Saxon church. It is narrow in comparison with its length (4.88 by 16.15m). (see fig.1 of Plans, pg.53) The *Domesday Survey* suggests that the total population of Roughton in 1086 was about seventy people. These could be accommodated in a shorter nave than the present one. The Saxon nave and chancel were probably housed under one continuous roof and separated only by a timber screen. A vertical joint on the north side of the chancel may mark the end of the Saxon chancel. At the western end of the south side of the chancel, there was a Priest's (?) door 2.18m high with brown stone jambs. This is now blocked up but it may also have been part of the original Saxon church. The flat arched head of the door opening however is 15th-century in character.

Decorated Period.

Much of the present church fabric is in the Gothic 'Decorated' style perhaps dating from the incumbency of the earliest recorded Vicar of Roughton, the Reverend Adam Wombe (1310-1329). Since the Norman period, the population of Roughton had more than doubled, so much more accommodation was needed in the church. The chancel was probably extended with a chancel arch built east of the earlier nave-chancel divide. The nave was provided with porches, arcades and *clerestories* on the north and south sides, The windows are of a later period so these works were probably not finished until after the Black Death of 1349-1355. Dr. Pevsner thought that the nave arcade was later, rather than early 14th century.

The south aisle had an altar and a *Piscina* (which survives). To provide these, the aisle had to be extended further east of the chancel arch and that meant blocking up the Saxon Priest's door. The north aisle has no *Piscina* and did not



Roughton, St Mary's Church. Evolution of the Building. R.Harbord 2002

need to extend beyond the chancel arch. It implies that for some reason, this aisle was not provided with an altar. The north aisle is shorter in length than the south aisle. On the south side of the main altar there is no *Piscina* either. If one did originally exist in that position, then it might have been removed when a later Priest's door was inserted. The adjacent window has a dropped cill with carved side panels and this cill may have served as a *Sedilia*.

Roughton had two manors (not three, as some have some authorities claim) and also two resident priests who shared the one church. In 1183 the newly founded Nunnery of the Holy Cross at Bungay was endowed with the advowson of Roughton which then became (in part) a Vicarage. The Rev Michael Frere was the Vicar of Roughton in 1695 when the Rector (?), the Rev Robert Brown, MD of Roughton died leaving a bequest to endow the present Church School. This historical arrangement shows why a Chantry Chapel was needed in Roughton.

On the north side of the Sanctuary there is a door only 1.45m high (now blocked up) which probably led to the attached chapel. The door has chamfered jambs, only 1.45m high and a pointed head. Perhaps the earlier Sanctuary had no steps leading to the main altar and a lower floor. The chapel has a square headed *Piscina*, which suggests that it also had an altar. Two pointed wall-arches remain on the external north wall of the chancel. These arches may have been part of a vaulted roof of the north chapel. The font near the tower arch is octagonal with a plain stem; eight attached shafts and double ogee headed panels on each side. The outer entrances to the two porches, have very elaborate mouldings in the same style. Similar elaboration was provided to the clerestorey windows, which have pretty shafts supported on corbels with carved 'grotesque' faces. Roughton church has an unusually large collection of these carvings inside and outside the church.

A new Chantry or Guild Chapel was built on the south side of the chancel which was apparently much larger than the earlier one on the north side of the church. A proposal to provide three altars to St Mary, the Holy Trinity and All Saints was recorded in 1371 with elaborate ceremonies that were intended to attend the Guild dedications. The interior of the church was then described as plain and unornamented. The extension blocked up the south window to the chancel. A new Priest's door was inserted at the eastern end of the Sanctuary (now blocked up). A vestige of its stone head-moulding can be seen inside. It was 1.65m high (slightly more than the door on the north side). It can be seen in the sketch drawn by the Rev John Ladbrooke in 1823. (Norwich Castle Art Gallery archives). This is a general external view of the church looking north-east. Flint stones used to block up the opening can still be detected outside.

The previous altar at the eastern end of the south aisle was probably moved to the new Chantry Chapel. Perhaps an open archway linked the aisle and chapel. Many of the churches around Roughton had ecclesiastical stained glass, a rood

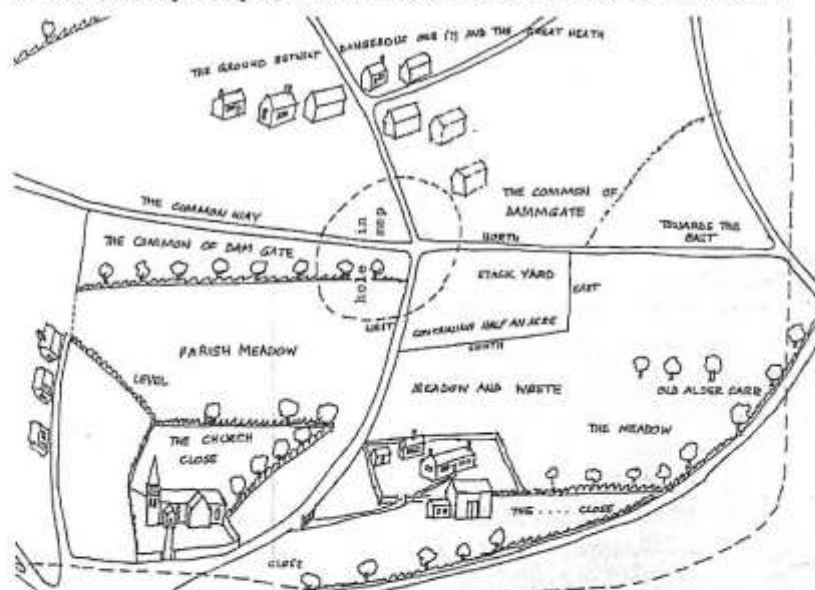
screen and stair turret; bells etc, but no evidence remains in Roughton for any of these items except the latter.

Perpendicular Period

The bar tracery of the windows in the aisles and porches on the north and south sides of the church were completed in this period (in the early 15th century). The present windows may date from the period of Victorian reconstruction. In 1813 a visitor to Roughton, the Rev. M. Kerridge sketched the Tower, the reticulated tracery of the east window of the chancel and others in the south aisle. These sketches show some of the architectural features of the church before the Victorian changes were made (BL, Ad Mss 4759 f.33, 6" x 4"). The present windows seem to match what Kerridge drew.

Tudor Period

Perhaps the larger side-chapel was used as a school but chantries were abolished by Act of Parliament in the 1530s. The two chapels of Roughton probably fell into disrepair. In about 1530 there was a legal dispute in Roughton and the surviving documents at the PRO include a very rare birds-eye view of the parish including the church looking north-east. It shows a pointed spire on the tower and the Chantry Chapel, still extant, on the south side of the church.



Part of a map of Roughton Parish, transcribed by the author from the original at the Public Record Office, Kew. (MPc, 600 by 711mm)

Whatever late medieval embellishments existed in Roughton church, they were removed during the puritanical purges of the mid-16th century. It then fell

into a chronic state of disrepair. The thatch of the chancel was open to the sky. In the early 17th century reconstruction of the church, brick battlements and a flat lead roof were added to the top of the tower and three new bells were hung.

Victorian Period.

The Reverend Sayers (grandfather of the novelist Dorothy L.Sayers) was Vicar between 1862 and 1881. He was also the Rector of Roughton after 1866 when the benefices were united. He had considerable financial resources at his command and was able to rebuild and refurnish the church, rectory and village school. He dismantled much of the church fabric (but not the tower) and then rebuilt it reusing much of the old dressed stone. New seating was installed for 216 people, which gives an idea of the existing size of medieval church. Whatever remained at that date of the extensions either side of the chancel, they were probably then removed. The east wall of the south chapel overlaps a Mr. Legge's slab of 1717, which may indicate that that wall and its window are entirely Victorian.

Perhaps a lot of the ancient fabric was lost in this period but enough evidence of the early structure was left for us to be able to work out the main building sequences in Roughton Church's history.

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