

The Church

OF

SS Peter & Paul

KNAPTON



Fig. 1. Exterior from the south east.

Conservation-Based Research and Analysis Report

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Waxham Deanery
North Norfolk District Council

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Introduction

This report forms part of the investigative stage of grant-aided repairs and development.

The church was a rectory and the advowson was held by the manor until it was sold to St Peter's College, Cambridge in the mid-17th century. The church had several guilds in the Middle Ages which would have had their own altars.

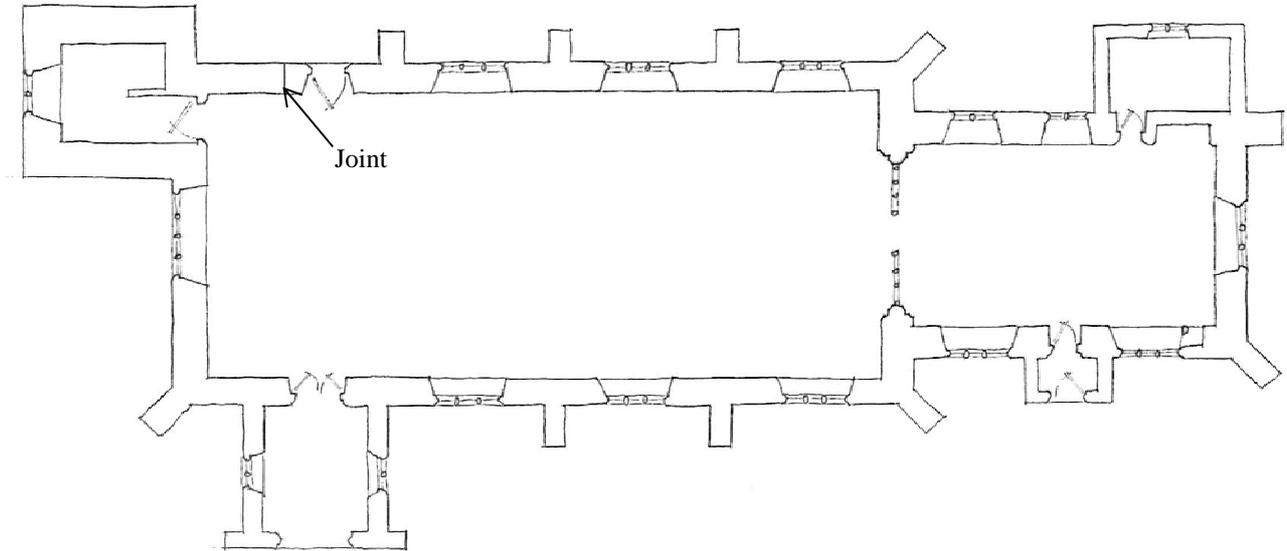


Fig.2. Plan by Ruth Blackman



Fig. 3. West end of nave north wall showing door, straight joint and heightening.

The church consists of a very wide nave with a narrower and lower chancel and a bell tower at the north west corner of the nave (Figs.1 & 2). There is a vestry of 1845 to the north side of the chancel which replaces an earlier vestry and there is a fine south porch and, unusually, a porch to the priest's door also to the south. The fabric is largely of whole flints with some areas of original render with occasional modern repair. The tower is of knapped flints. The chancel south wall has a modern render. The nave roof is of lead and the chancel of slate. There are limestone ashlar dressings.

The history of the fabric starts in the 14th century with the north and south doorways which have hollow chamfered mouldings and hoodmolds with human head label stops (Fig.2). The main fabric of the nave is contemporary with the doorways but the windows are later insertions (Fig.4). The tower has simple 'Y' tracery and may also belong to the 14th century. In the early 16th century the nave walls were heightened, the fenestration replaced and the nave roof replaced with the fabulous hammer beam roof.



Fig. 4. Nave north wall showing heightening and straight joint.

The 14th-century wall has a straight joint just to the west of the north door and it appears to be neatly finished with rubble quoins (Figs 2 - 4). Abutting this joint is the return of the short section of the east wall of the tower. It extends from the re-entrant angle to join the 14th – century wall. It seems unlikely that this was the north west corner of the original nave because all the other quoins have buttressed corners and ashlar dressings, there is no corresponding joint on the south side and because the north and south doorways do not leave enough room for the thickness of a west wall. The only explanation is that the north wall was deliberately finished short in order to facilitate the building of the tower. It was not unusual to build a west tower independent of the nave to which it was going to be attached in order to allow the heavier structure of the tower to settle without damaging the nave. At Knapton the existence of the straight joint a few feet away from the tower indicates that a tower in this awkward position was intended from the first. The heightened section of the nave has of course no straight joint and is butted against the tower with four blocks of ashlar (Fig.3). Regarding where the tower joins the west wall of the nave it appears that the masons did not key in the masonry at the point of junction for the selfsame reason (Fig. 5).

The tower itself is unbuttressed with only a doorway connecting with the nave. The fabric is of roughly knapped flint. It has 'Y'-traciated bell openings and a similar west window. There is an elegant crenellated parapet and a weathercock designed by John Sell Cotman – it is said. At the base of the tower, instead of a plinth as such, there is very deliberate miniature buttressing similar to a sort of glacis at the foot of a castle in order to discourage sapping. Such a method of building is very unorthodox and there is a possibility that it is the result of an attempt to underpin or reinforce the foundations of the tower. However, it is well-finished and has an effect on the presence and mass of the tower (fig 6).



Fig 5. Tower and west window from south west



Fig. 6. South west corner of tower.

As the tower is roughly contemporary with the nave it is remarkable that the habitual staged buttressing was not employed whilst it is on most of the corners of the adjoining building. First, of course, the question which needs to be posed is why was an asymmetrical, almost out of the way, position chosen for the tower. This was presumably in order to give the opportunity for the church to have a great west window which would be the glory of the west elevation as well as having the practical use of illuminating the nave. It may have been thought that the buttresses to the tower would draw attention away from the great west window. The four-light window of cusped 'Y' tracery is a typical early 14th –century window type particularly well executed at Knapton with elegant pierced cusping (Fig. 7). The window above is probably early 16th century and is contemporary with the nave heightening .

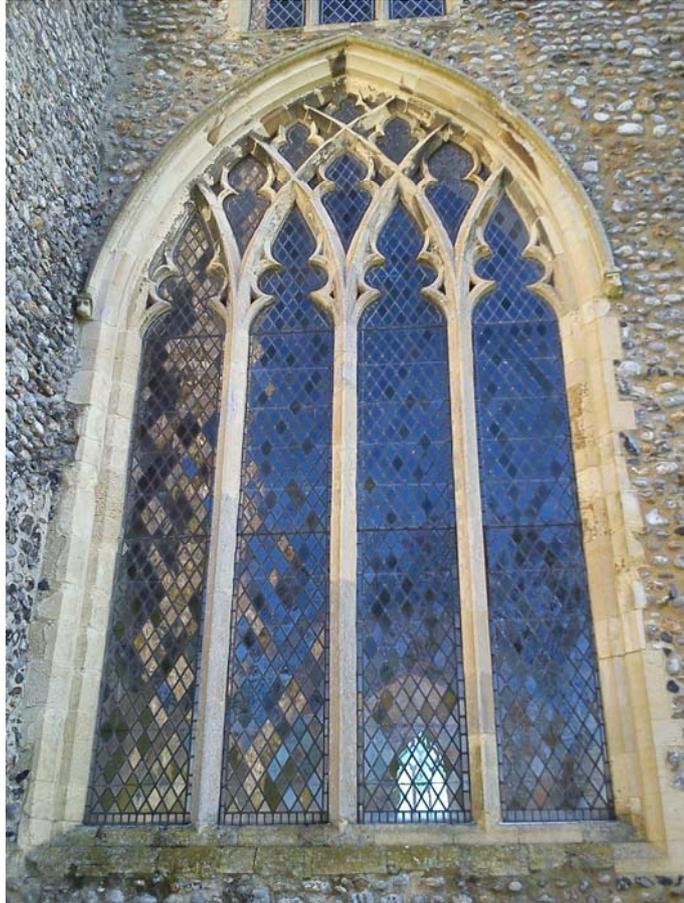


Fig. 7. West window.

The main body of the aisleless nave has diagonal buttresses to the three exposed corners and heavy buttresses between the window bays (Fig. 2). The 6 inserted windows have standard panel tracery, set, most unusually, within semi-circular arches (Figs 1, 4 & 8). This may be indicative of the gradual decline in the early 16th century of the Gothic in favour of Renaissance forms inspired from Antiquity. The windows on the south side have hood moulds with pretty pendant label stops. (Fig. 8) The chancel porch uses a similar semi-circular arch.



Fig 8. South west window head

The south porch is of 14th-century date and has only single side buttresses to its corners (Fig. 9). It has a plain two-centred archway with a remarkable triple niche above with cusped ogee arches.



Fig 9. Nave south porch

The Chancel was greatly embellished by the rector John Smith *..qui hoc opus fabricari fecit..* in 1504, which is recorded by Blomefield (Blomefield 8, 134) and Anthony Norris (Rye 3, vol. 4) in the 18th century. Norris gives a more full description of the painted inscription as follows: *Round the bottom of chancel roof is the inscription in very large letters, so as to extend the length of the chancel on each side.* The *opus* probably refers to the chancel roof alone. There is 14th century reticulated tracery to the east of three lights and two light windows to the north with cusped ogee main lights and un-cusped mouchettes (Figs.10 & 11). There is a vestry to the north east of 1845 replacing one on the same site (PD 265/19). A horizontal offset above the building indicates that the earlier vestry had a lean-to roof (Fig.11). This may well have been a 14th century porticus because there is a single buttress to the corner allowing for the vestry whilst the southern angle is supported by a diagonal buttress (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 East window.



Fig. 11. Chancel at north east showing off-set.

There is evidence on the gable-end of the roof having had a much steeper pitch and thus the side walls have been heightened as in the nave. The heightening was probably carried out for the new shallow ceiling likely to be of *circa* 1780 and before Ladbrooke of *circa* 1820. The south wall has a modern render with two large 15th-century windows each of three lights with shallow heads and panel tracery (Fig.12). In the centre of the wall is the priest's door which has had a porch added to it. The distinctive semi-circular head like the nave windows dates it also to the early 16th century.



Fig 12. South wall of chancel

The Interior is dominated by the magnificent double hammer beam roof with its myriad carved and painted angels (Fig. 13). The roof is widely attributed to the patronage of the rector John Smith but this is unlikely because a rector was responsible solely for his chancel as was recorded in the chancel roof. However, there is no reason not for it to date to about the same time as the now missing chancel roof. There is a will of 1511 leaving money towards the ‘pinyng’ (painting?) of the church roof (Cattermole & Cotton). Also Blomefield records a donation of 40 marks in 1506 towards ‘building of church’. In today’s money this is not far short of £20,000.



Fig.13. Nave roof looking east

All of the original figures are painted with pale faces and brightly coloured lips and hair with pupils and eyebrows in black. Clothes and wings are similarly coloured (Figs 14 & 15). There is speculation about the authenticity of the angels and especially considering that they would surely have been destroyed or disfigured by the iconoclasts. However, there is



Fig. 14. Angel on hammer beam



Fig. 15 Detail of angel

abundant evidence of iconoclasm at the lower levels. All the angels at the feet of the wall posts were destroyed, the cornices were damaged and the faces of the prophets on the wall posts are hacked. With the latter sufficient painted surfaces survive to match those on the higher angels (Fig. 16). Clearly the extent of destruction was determined by the length of the ladders.



Fig. 16. Bishop figure with hacked face and missing crozier on wall post.

On balance, therefore, one can be confident of authenticity with the admission that there may have been some touching up on one or two cases. Apart from the technical mastery the surviving paint is truly remarkable.

The most noticeable restorations of the roof are the re-introduced angels at the feet of the wall posts. A mid-19th-century engraving on display in the church clearly shows the tenons which held angels no doubt similar to the re-creations in place (Fig. 17). This new work was of George Gilbert Scott's restoration of 1882 and the names of the churchwardens and builders are displayed in the brattishing on the north side of the nave (Fig. 18) (PD265/20-21). Further major repairs were undertaken in 1930 and the drawn specification survives in the record office (PD 265/23). During this work a tie beam corresponding to the easternmost truss was removed and hammer beams substituted. The beam, which crossed the chancel arch, belonged to the original roof (photo in Lorraine 1970). The slightly truncated braces can be seen (Fig. 13).



Fig. 17. Engraving of roof before re-introduction of angels at feet of wall posts

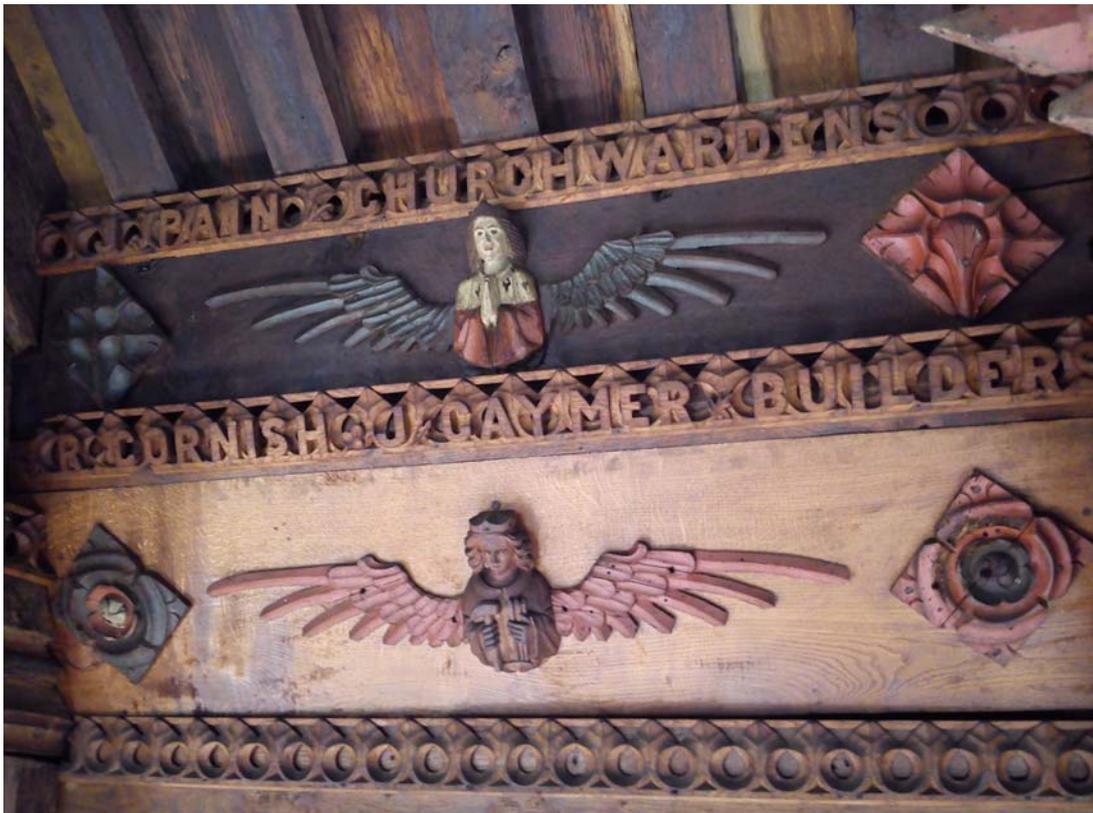


Fig.18. Carved names of churchwardens and builders

The screen survives almost complete with only its loft removed and the gates replaced with Jacobean versions (Fig. 19). It has been painted in wood grain and there is no visible original painted decoration. There is the typical intricate miniature tracery filling the heads of ogee

arches with a large multi-cusped central doorway. The rood stair survives and above the springing level of the chancel arch are pair of corbels which would have supported the rood.



Fig.19. Screen from the east.



Fig. 20. Chancel arch and chancel ceiling

The chancel arch itself appears to belong to the 14th-century phase (Fig.20). The original 1504 hammer beam roof to the chancel was replaced with the present roof and ceiling of

circa 1780. The pitch of the roof was reduced by heightening the side walls. The plaster ceiling forms a shallow segmental barrel vault (Fig. 20).

There is a fine angle piscina to the south (Fig.21). It consists of a pair of quatrefoils in the spandrels of a an ogee arch. The right hand section is a modern reinstatement.



Fig.21. Piscina

There is large part-blocked archway at the east end of the north wall (Fig. 21). There is no sign of it in the present vestry. The most likely purpose for this was for an Easter Sepulchre although the lack of a tomb in the recess leaves the question open.



Fig, 21. Easter sepulchre?

At the west end of the nave is a row of eight medieval stone tomb slabs. A ninth of the same sort is in a tomb recess on the south side of the nave (Figs 22 & 23).

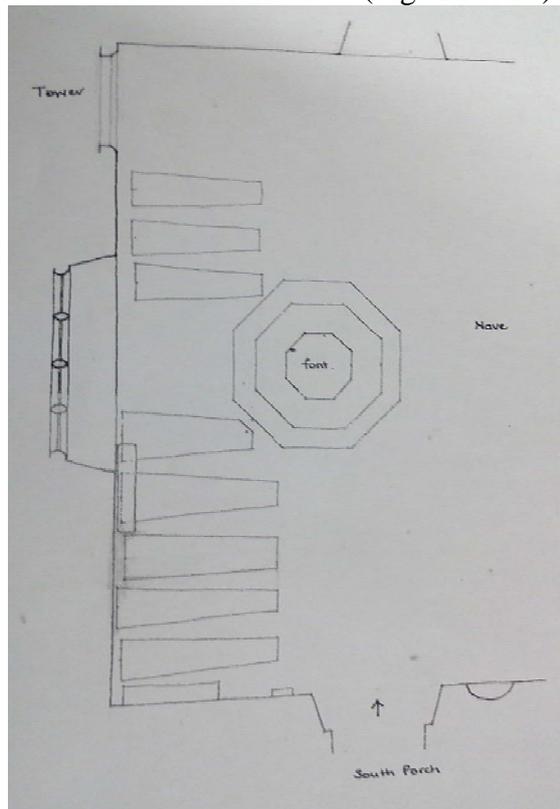


Fig 22. Plan of west end of nave (Ruth Blackman)



Fig 23. View of five tomb covers form north

These are decorated with either cusped cross, shaft and stepped base or alisées patée crosses also with shafts and in two examples with flanking arabesques (Fig.24). Some of the slabs are made of Purbeck stone or similar and some are very worn suggesting that formerly they may have been outside or in places of frequent foot fall. They are raised above ground level rendering the space unusable and the slabs themselves at risk of being damaged.



Fig. 24. Two covers with cusped crosses and one with alisées patée cross and flanking arabesque. The slabs are clearly not in their original positions and George Gilbert Scott's plan plots the lay out of the covers which were distributed randomly about the church but presumably over actual graves (Fig. 25). One of his proposals is to leave them in situ and replace the pews but,

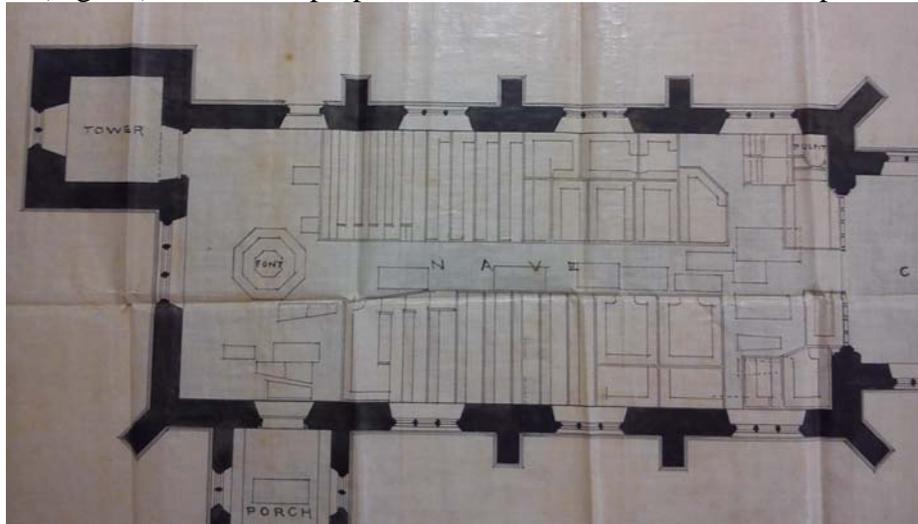


Fig. 25. Scott's plan of existing arrangements in 1881 (PD 265/21)

since he cemented and tiled the floor it seems likely that the slabs were moved then (Figs 26 & 27).

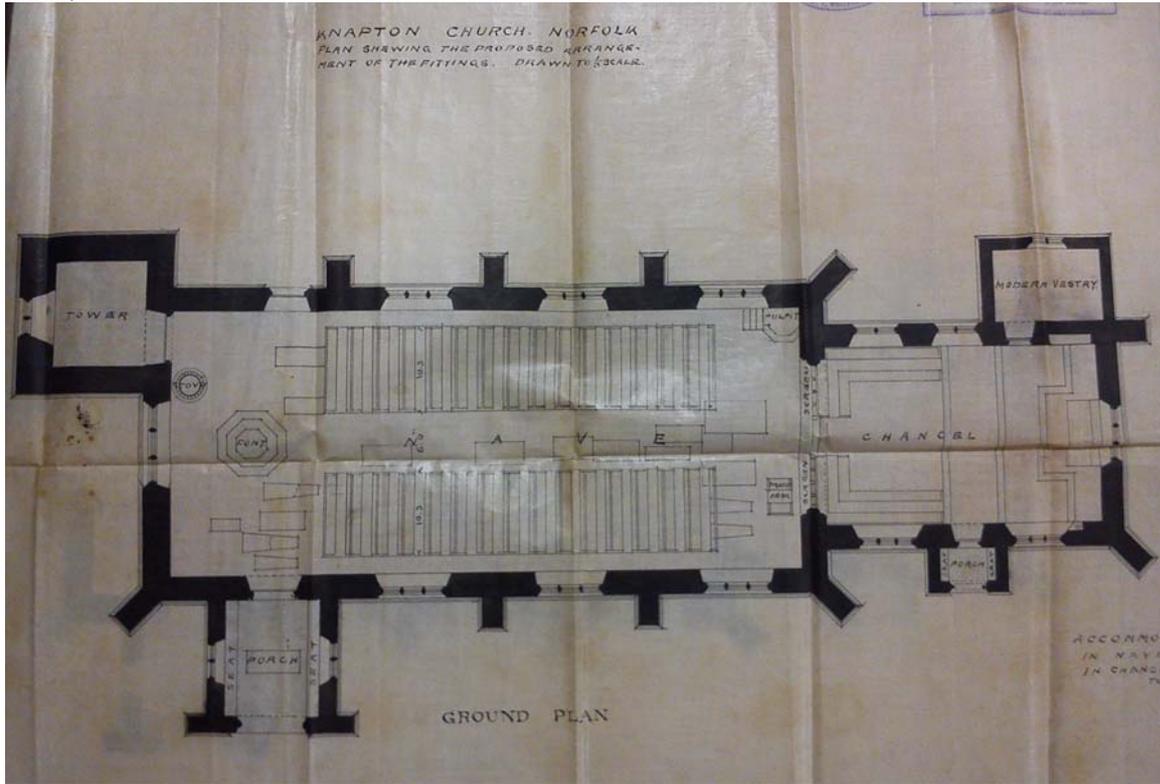


Fig 26. Proposed 1(PD 265/21)

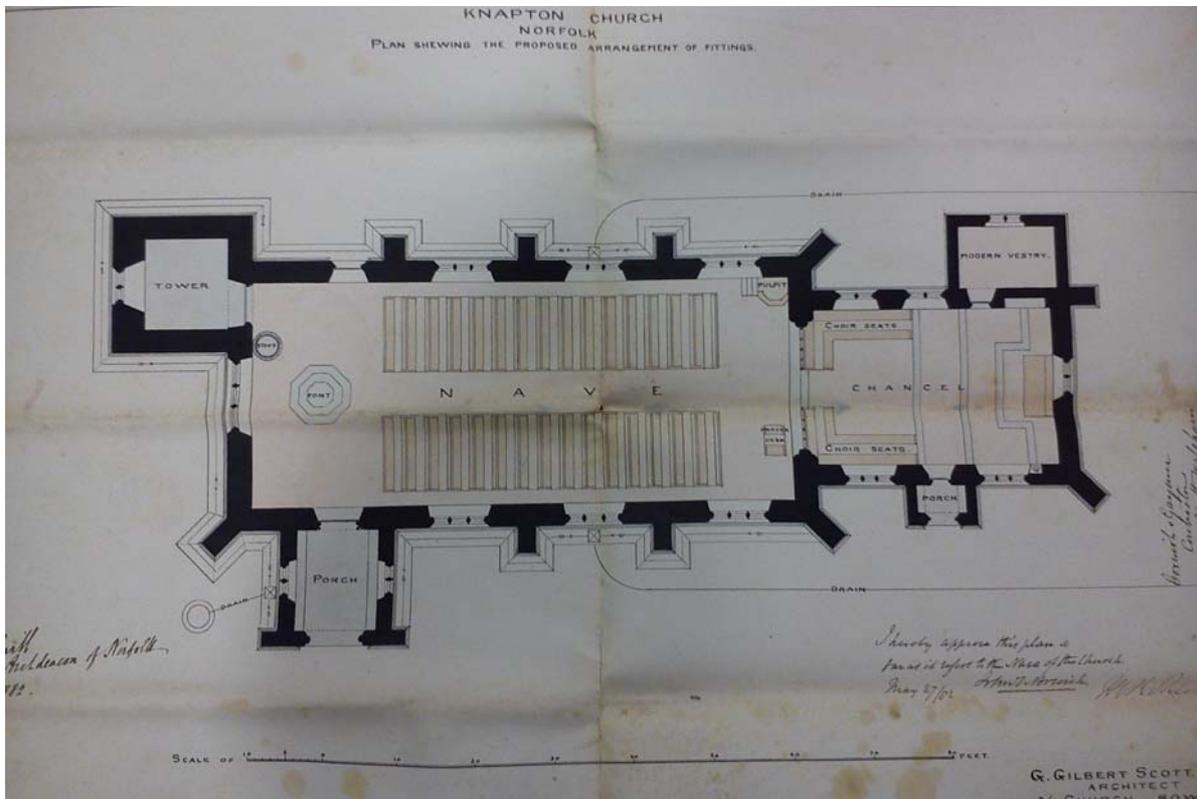


Fig 27. The final approved plan (PD 265/21)

The final approved plan shows no grave covers at all. In the event the Tournai marble slabs down the central aisle have been neatly re-arranged (Fig.28). Bryant records in 1900 (Bryant 1900) six coffin lids at the south west corner of the nave, 4 at south east corner of chancel and two with crosses under the south east nave window. According to this it was not until later that the present arrangement was arrived at. But Bryant's information was second hand and it is certain that the main changes were made under Scott. The seven narrow slabs at the west end along with one of the tapered slabs at the south east are now lined up against the west walls and the one remaining tapered slab was probably moved into the grave niche on the south wall. Of Bryant's 4 other slabs there is no sign.



Fig. 28. View of nave floor looking west.

The high number of pre-Reformation grave covers is a distinctive characteristic of Knapton. This could be owing to the fact that the living was not appropriated during the Middle Ages with the rector being elected by the manor rather than having a local prior or abbot as rector appointing a vicar. In this type of situation burials for the upper classes may have been at the priory rather than at the local parish church.

The font, with its steps and cover, is an important feature at the west end of the church at its traditional position opposite the doors (Fig. 29). The polygonal bowl is of Purbeck 'marble' with typical shallow arcading. The rather weak cover has a cupola with a Greek Inscription.



Fig. 29. General view of nave with font in foreground.

The Restoration

The major restoration took place during the 1880s under the direction of George Gilbert Scott (PD265/20 & 21). His specification for the neglected and damaged church survives and he undertook its repair which involved rebuilding the buttresses, repairing and re-leading the nave roof, cementing and tiling the floor, the replacement of the box pews and benches with 30 new oak pews (Fig. 29), new doors and other works (Figs 25-27). This restoration was responsible for the re-introduction of the angels at the wall posts' feet.

In 1849 the lean-to vestry was replaced and in 1930 the nave roof was suffering from a severe attack of death watch beetle (PD 265/23). This resulted in treatment and repairs truss by truss. The most significant being the removal of the tie beam at the east end of the nave.

The quinquennial inspections, begun in 1960, give details of the condition of the building and of some of the works which took place as a result. Apart from general repairs between 1974 and 1979 there are details of major repairs to the tower parapets, repointing to the upper part of the tower, replacement of string courses and whole sale repointing of west wall of nave. As these are the areas where repairs are to be undertaken again it may be relevant to mention that 'hydrolysed hydraulic mortar' was specified. It is thought that Hydraulic mortar was almost unobtainable in the 1970s and does hydrolysed mean that it was a putty? Imported hydraulic mortars had a very fast and hard set in Stephen's slight experience. As only the upper half of the tower was repointed because the lower half was apparently alright some discrepancy may be observed during repairs. The tower parapets were virtually renewed.

Summary

- Early 14th century. Nave and chancel built up to a lower level with a steeply pitched roof. Y-traceried west window, north and south doorways and chancel arch. Chancel windows to north and east.

- Mid-14th century. Tower at south west corner added but provided for by break in north wall of nave.
- 15th century. Screen
- 1504. Construction of chancel roof hammer beam roof
- First half of 16th century. Heightening of nave walls, provision of six windows and erection of nave roof
- Late 18th century. Replacement of chancel roof.
- 1849. New vestry
- 1882-89. Restoration by George Gilbert Scott.
- 1930. Roof repairs and removal of tie beam.
- 1961, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1979. Quinquennial inspections and repairs (DN/QQN 11/38, 19/24, 24/39, 29/27, 41/77 & 41/78).

Bibliography

Blomefield. Parkin. *Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, VII, 1808, pp 132-5 (based partly on Blomefield's notes of early 18th century).

Rye 3 is held in the Norfolk Record Office with a typed transcription also available (MS 370). Anthony Norris, *A History of the Hundreds of East and West Flegg, Happing, Tunstead and part of North Erpingham*, 4 volumes, circa 1782.

All references without names are catalogue numbers at the Norfolk Record Office.

Stephen Heywood, 22 December 2014