

HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND GRANT
REF: GP-14- 09058

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN
GISSING
NORFOLK



CONSERVATION REPORT

Hugh Richmond F.S.A. M.A. Dip. Arch. (Cantab.)

47 EARLHAM ROAD NORWICH NR2 3AD

Telephone 01603 633822

email: hugh_richmond@hotmail.com

**THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN
GISSING
NORFOLK**

CONSERVATION REPORT

1. SCOPE

The purpose of this paper is to report on the proposed repairs to the vestry/organ chamber (south chapel), the tower parapet and roof, the gables of the chancel and nave, the porch roof, the render on the north chapel, the rainwater disposal system and improvements to the heating and lighting of the church.

The report will provide a description of the development of the church and a full assessment of the areas to be repaired. The nature and extent of the repairs will be described together with comments on the adoption of appropriate methods and materials to preserve the character of the church.

The church was visited on 13/11/2015. Access was provided to all areas. The weather was a mixture of showers and sunshine.

A search for relevant material was made at the Norfolk Record Office on 03/11/2015.

2. INTRODUCTION

Gissing is a village situated some two and a half miles west of the A140, twenty miles S. of Norwich and five miles N. of Diss. The church is on the east side of Lower Street just to the north of Rectory Lane. The churchyard (TM14628529) is rectangular with an extension on the east side and the church lies more or less in the centre of the original churchyard.

The church is a Grade 1 Listed Building and comprises: Chancel with north and south chapels (the south chapel now serves as a vestry/organ chamber), Nave, West Tower and North Porch.

2.1 The development of the church

Phase 1. The earliest surviving fabric dates from the later 11th century and consists of the round tower and much of the sidewalls of the nave and chancel. These walls have a thickness in excess of 0.9 of a metre, which is characteristic of Norman work. The tower survives to the full height. The parapet was rebuilt in 1876-7 but stands on a string ornamented with billet work. The Norman walls of the nave also appear to survive up to eaves height, some 4.8 M. above ground level. This is marked by the top of the regular free stone quoins and a horizontal change in the flint facing that is on the same level as the springing point of the

later nave windows. The chapels obscure the exterior of the sidewalls of the chancel but the quoins at the eastern corners indicate that they were somewhat lower than the walls of the nave. There are indications in the flint facing of the west gable of the nave that the nave roof of this period had a pitch of about 45°. The stepped relationship between the nave and chancel is also typical of two-cell churches of this period.

The main surviving datable features of this phase are the belfry opening, the west window of the tower, the tower arch and the north and south doorways of the nave. The last four all have chevron ornament.

Phase 2. The N. chapel has a number of features that suggest it was added in the 13th century. The piscina has a pointed head and is worked with a continuous hollow chamfer. The doorway has a pointed head and a continuous plain chamfer and both the windows have "Y" tracery. All the openings have been restored but the drawing of that side of the church made before the restoration of 1876 shows that the present windows reflect the form of earlier elements.

The S. chapel was rebuilt in 1879¹ but the drawing of c.1820 by Ladbroke shows: the walls faced with ashlar, a doorway with a pointed head and a window with a pointed head and "Y" tracery. These last two suggest a 13th century date but the best indication that the chapel was originally built at that time is the arcade in the S. wall of the chancel. It has plain chamfered pointed arches, plain chamfered responds with pyramid stops and plain chamfered imposts. The specification by R. M. Phipson states that these features were carefully restored in 1876-7.

The responds and beginnings of the arcade arches of the original arcade of the N. chapel are preserved and show that it was similar to that on the S. It has subsequently been remodelled to form a single semi-circular archway. This was probably done following the dissolution of chantry foundations in 1547 when many of those who had endowed chapels adapted them to serve as family pews.

Phase 3. Changes in the fabric of the N. and S. walls of the nave indicate that they have been raised in height presumably to accommodate larger windows. The present windows, all in 14th century style, are of 1876-7 but it is clear from the drawing of the church made by Ladbroke in c.1820 that those on the S. side they are good copies the medieval windows.

Phase 4. There was a great deal of activity in the later 15th century. Money was left in 1478² for the building of the porch and for the repair of seating. The porch was heavily restored 1876 -7 and some 15th century pew ends have been incorporated when the present pews were installed in 1898.

The nave roof has also been dated to this time³. It consists of six bays defined by seven double-hammerbeam trusses. Each consists of a pair of principal rafters with a cambered collar that carries a Kingpost and below there are two tiers of hammer beams. The upper pairs support posts and full arched braces that run

¹ N. R. O. PD 50/20

² Cattermole & Cotton, Medieval Parish Church Building in Norfolk, Norfolk Archaeology Vol.38 pt.3

³ Report on nave and chancel roofs of the Church of St. Mary Gissing Norfolk, Wilson Compton Associates June 2006.

below the collars. The lower pairs carry posts and arched braces that support the upper hammer-beams and below are wall posts with arched braces. Lateral support is provided by ridge pieces, a single tier of side purlins and cornice pieces. This main frame carries plain common rafters and is embellished with brattishing and roll and hollow mouldings. All the hammer beams carry carved angels and the wall posts have niches containing small figures. The roof was thoroughly restored in 1876 -7 (see below).

RESTORATION

The Churchwarden's accounts indicate that the church roof was retiled in 1687 and in 1737 - 38 major repairs were carried out to the timbers.⁴

Francis Blomefield records that, "the nave is leaded and the chancel is tiled and hath a chapel on each side of it, both of which are leaded".⁵

The main beam of the tower roof is inscribed R AYTON 1821 and this may provide a date for the roof and explain why it was repaired in situ by Grimwood and not taken down for like the other earlier roofs (Ayton was the name of a local family⁶).

1876 - 1877

R. M. Phipson of Surrey Street Norwich, surveyor to the Diocese of Norwich from 1871-84, was engaged to restore the church.⁷ He produced drawings and two specifications for the work, one dated March 1876 and the other May 1876. The first was for "the restoration of Gissing Church Norfolk" and the second for "the rebuilding of the South Chapel and the restoration of the North Chapel of Gissing Church". The reason for the two specifications was that the Rector, the Rev. John Sharpe paid for the restoration of the church (chancel, nave, west tower and north porch) and Sir Kenneth Hagar Kemp (12th Baronet) for the work to the N. & S. chapels. The work was carried out by George Grimwood & sons of Sudbury.

The Church

The restoration of the church was extensive. The description of the work set out in the specification and examination of the fabric gives a good picture of what was done. The roofs of the nave, chancel and porch were removed and the tower roof repaired in situ. The roofs of the nave and porch were repaired and reinstated and a new roof was provided for the chancel. The nave roof was provided with fourteen new angels fixed to the lower hammer beams. The interior was stripped, the west gallery removed and the tower arch opened up and restored. A new heating system (by Gidney of Dereham) was installed and a concrete floor was laid and paved with Minton tiles. Sleeper walls were provided to support new pew platforms. The interior plaster was removed and replaced, the bottom four feet with Portland cement, all finished with Caen Stone dust. The chancel arcades and the chancel arch were restored. New furnishings were provided including: the pews (some late medieval bench ends were reused), the north and south doors, the door to the porch stair, the pulpit, the communion

⁴ Norfolk Record Office (N.R.O.), PD 50/37.

⁵ F. Blomefield, An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk.

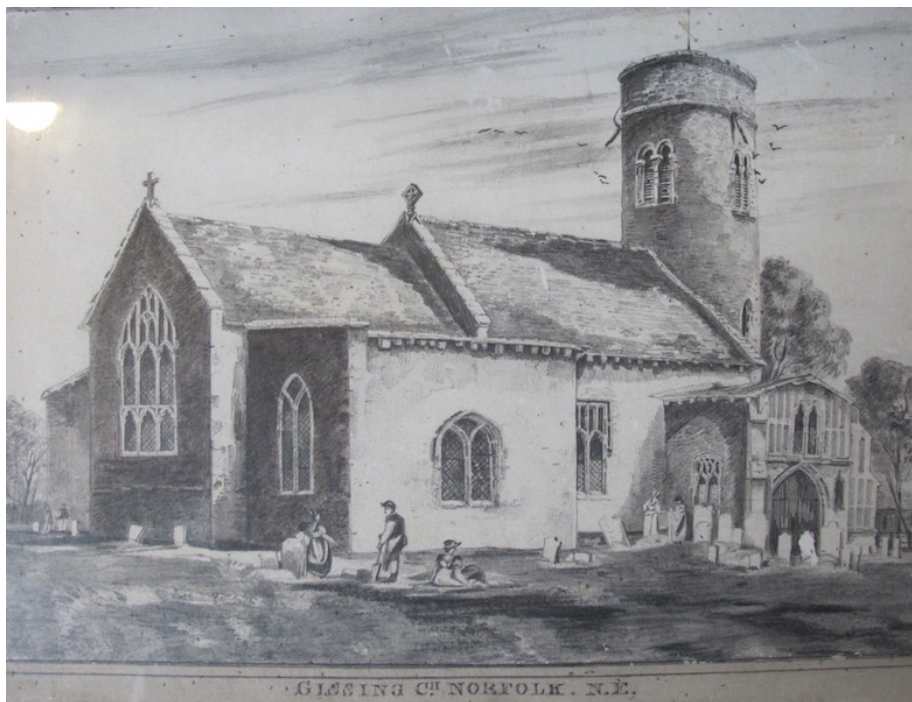
⁶ Rootsweb ancestry.com

⁷ N. R. O. PD 50/20.

rails, the tower floors, benches in the porch and porch gates. The specification describes the construction of a new stair turret in the corner between the west wall of the porch and the nave (intended to give access to the parvis) but only the



View from the S.E. by R. Ladbrooke c. 1820



View from the N.E. of c. 1800

doorway to the stair and the steps within the wall of the porch were rebuilt. The exterior was also thoroughly restored: all the external plaster was removed, the tops of the walls consolidated, the gables taken down and rebuilt, the top of the tower rebuilt in stone (the parapet), the modern clearstory openings and the gallery window were filled in (these are shown on the Ladbroke drawing), the exterior of the tower was restored, the west doorway removed and the opening blocked, the north and south doorways of the nave were restored, the porch extensively restored (the upper parts being rebuilt), the east window of the chancel and the nave windows of the were replaced and glazed with Hartley's rough plate cathedral glass and new cast iron rainwater goods provided. All this work can be verified by examination of the fabric.

The chapels

The north chapel was extensively restored and the south chapel rebuilt. The work set out in the specification and examination of the fabric gives a detailed picture of what was done. The work on the north chapel is described below and the south chapel will be described in section 3.

The north chapel

The roof was removed and rebuilt to the existing pattern reusing the sound timbers. English oak was used for replacement timbers and Memel fir for new rafters. The roof was then covered with pine boarding and 7lb. lead laid on roofing felt. A cast iron gutter and down pipes were fixed to the eaves on the north side.

The render and plaster was to be removed both inside and out and the flint facing of the exterior restored but in the event the render on the exterior was replaced. The interior plaster was replaced with Portland cement in the lower part and the piscina was restored. The west doorway was heightened by fifteen inches and a new door was provided. The windows were restored to the same pattern as that shown on the drawing of the north side of the church. It is clear from the specification that there were pews in the chapel, which have subsequently been removed. A 3" concrete slab was specified to go under floor slabs and paving.

20th century

George Denny, a local Black Smith, issued a bill for tie rods and plates in 1903.⁸ There are also the expected faculties for installing modern services etc.

⁸ N. R. O. PD 50/20



3. THE SOUTH CHAPEL - VESTRY/ORGAN CHAMBER

3.1 Description

The south chapel was rebuilt under the direction of R. M. Phipson in 1876-7. The form and detail of the arcade in the S. wall of the chancel suggests that there has been a chapel on this site since the 13th century. There is a vault under the present chapel and a board in the N. chapel records that members of the Kemp family were buried there from 1695 to 1874. When the chapel was rebuilt care was taken not to disturb the vault.

The work set out in the specification and examination of the fabric gives a detailed picture of what was done: the walls of the chapel were taken down to the foundations (suggesting that the vault had been constructed within an existing building), new concrete foundations were laid and new walls of rubble with a flint facing were built to match the S. wall of the nave. The walls were reinforced by: three bands of hard red tile brickwork 6" deep and 1'10 1/2" wide, the first under the windowsills, the second level with the springing of the windows and the third above the window heads, each band had two rows of hoop iron (No. 12 Birmingham wire gauge) securely fixed and built in, the doors and windows were built with brick relieving arches and sub-sills and the wall tops were capped with brick.

The walls of the compartment were united with the walls of the nave and chancel by cutting a straight chase 3" deep and grouting this with liquid cement. A damp course of Portland cement and slate was also constructed.

The roof was rebuilt to the existing pattern reusing any sound main timbers, English oak was to be used for replacement timbers and Memel fir for new rafters. The roof was then covered with pine boarding and 7lb. lead laid on roofing felt. The lead sheets run the full width of the roof. They are wide and fixed along the rolls. A cast iron gutter and down pipes were fixed to the eaves on the south side. The corners were rebuilt with small alternating freestone quoins and large moulded kneelers.

Inside the walls were plastered and the floor finished with tiles.

It has been established by inspection that red brick was used in the walls of the new compartment and in the S. face of the chancel wall but the detail of the construction of the walls described in the specification remain to be verified.

3.2 Significance

The S. arcade of the chancel and the burial vault of the Kemp family are important survivals. Also of interest is the opportunity to compare the specification of 1876 with the standing fabric.

3.3 Condition

The small quoins at the external corners of the compartment are breaking away from the surrounding walls particularly at the S.E. corner, which has been shored up and cased to prevent collapse. The corners are topped by over sized kneelers that are contributing to the problem with the quoins. The parapets of the end walls are not weather-tight and damp has penetrated the walls below to the detriment of the flint facing, parts of which are unstable and cracked. The damp may also have caused the iron hoop reinforcement to rust, further contributing to the problem. The roof is worn out, partly due to excessive thermal movement of the very large sheets of lead. There is a hole in the face of the S. wall of the chancel level with the head of the chapel roof and a substantial crack at high level in the S. W. corner of the first bay of the chancel.

3.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the proceeding paragraphs. The quoins of the corners of the chapel should be rebuilt and tied into the surrounding walling. The parapet walls should be rebuilt and the kneelers properly incorporated to insure stability. The flint facing should be carefully examined and all loose material taken out and securely rebuilt. If possible the condition of the iron reinforced should be ascertained and remedial action undertaken if necessary. The roof should be stripped, the structural timber carefully examined and any necessary remedial work undertaken. Also the S. face of the S. wall of the chancel should be inspected and any necessary remedial work carried out. The roof should then be recovered with lead detailed to modern standards. The crack in the N. face of the S. wall of the chancel should also be repaired taking care not to damage the adjacent memorial to Sir John Kemp d.1761, which was made by Charles Regnard of Hampstead Road London in 1815.⁹

⁹ Rupert Gunnis, Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660 to 1851

4. THE TOWER

4.1 Description

The tower dates from the mid 12th century is circular in plan and rises undivided to a stringcourse with billet decoration at the base of the parapet, which has a roll-moulded coping. On the W. side, at ground level, is a blocked doorway and above this is a window of two lights with semi-circular heads, the whole being framed with chevron ornament. Set midway up the tower on the N. S. & W. sides are deeply splayed circular openings. The belfry has openings on all four sides, each consisting of a pair of semi-circular headed openings separated by a shaft with a cushion capital and moulded base. The parapet was rebuilt in stone in 1876-7. The tower arch is tall and has rectangular jambs, plain chamfered imposts and a semi-circular arch decorated with chevron.

4.2 Significance

The tower dates from the mid 12th century and is an excellent example of a round tower of that period exhibiting a blend of Saxon and Norman features.

4.3 Condition

The tower appears to be in reasonable condition except that the render on the inside of the parapet is failing. Also there has been extensive leakage around the flagpole where it penetrates the tower roof and some of the support timbers are showing signs of decay.

Access to the roof is difficult and dangerous and should be improved to allow regular inspection and maintenance of the upper parts of the tower.

4.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the preceding paragraphs. The seating for the flagpole should be redesigned to prevent further leaks and the roof repaired as necessary. The render on the inside of the parapet should be repaired and or replaced if necessary.

The access arrangements should be improved by the addition of a landing on top of the bell frame and more handrails.

5. THE NAVE GABLE

5.1 Description

The gable was rebuilt in 1876-7. It has a pitch of 50° and is weathered by stone coping slabs supported by roll moulded kneelers and there is a terminal cross set on a gabled plinth at the apex. The wall above the chancel roof is faced with a mixture of flint and rubble. The junctions between the gable and the adjacent roofs are weather by lead cover flashings.

5.2 Significance

It is vital for the preservation of the fabric and the comfort of the congregation that this gable is weather proof.

5.3 Condition

The condition of the coping slabs has deteriorated and some of the joints have failed allowing water to penetrate the wall below. The pointing of the E. face of the gable wall is weathered.

5.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the proceeding paragraphs. The coping slabs should be removed and any defective units replaced in a matching stone. The condition of the E. face of the wall should be checked and any necessary repairs carried out. The lead flashings should be checked and any necessary alterations or repairs carried out. The coping slabs should then be reinstated taking care that the joints are sound and weather proof.

6. THE CHANCEL GABLE

6.1 Description

The gable was rebuilt in 1876-7 when the present E. window was introduced and this entailed rebuilding the wall from a level in line with the springing point of the window arch. The gable has a pitch of 40° and is weathered by stone coping slabs supported by large roll moulded kneelers and there is a terminal cross set on a gabled plinth similar to that on the gable of the nave. The face of the gable wall consists of a mixture of flint, rubble and some larger pieces of worked stone. The junction between the gable and chancel roof is weather by a lead cover flashings.

6.2 Significance

It is vital for the preservation of the fabric and the comfort of the congregation that this gable is weather proof.

6.3 Condition

Some of the joints between the coping slabs on the N. side are open allowing water to penetrate the wall below. The joints between the slabs on the S. slope have recently been re-pointed. The pointing of the E. face of the gable wall is weathered.

6.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the preceding paragraphs. The joints between the coping slabs on the N. slope of the gable should be re-pointed also the condition of the E. face of the wall should be checked and any necessary repairs carried out.

7. THE PORCH ROOF

7.1 Description

The porch was built in c.1478. The drawing of the N. side of the church of c.1800 shows it in disrepair and a roof with plain eaves. Thus it is clear that the parapets and the upper parts of the N. gable are part of the restoration in c.1876-7.

The roof sits behind a parapet and has a pitch of 15°. There are gutters inside the parapets on the E. and W. sides. The roof consists of two bays defined by three principal trusses, each consisting of a pair of principal rafters with wall posts and an arched brace. A ridge, a single tier of purlins and cornice pieces provide lateral bracing. The frame is decorated with roll and hollow mouldings and carries plain common rafters and lateral boarding covered with lead. The roof was removed and repaired in 1876-7.

7.2 Significance

The roof is firmly dated. Also it is vital for the preservation of the fabric and the comfort of the congregation that the roof is weather tight.

7.3 Condition

The lead has failed due to oxidisation caused by condensation on the underside. . The thickness of the lead has been reduced to the point where holes are beginning to appear.

The roof was heavily restored in 1876 but much of the original principal trusses appear to have survived.

7.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the preceding paragraphs. The existing lead should be removed. The condition of the roof should be checked and any necessary repairs carried out. A new deck should then be constructed on top of the existing structure detailed to allow increased ventilation. The increased height of the new roof will allow deeper parapet gutters with higher steps to be constructed (see section 9).

The roof and gutters should be finished with lead detailed to modern standards.

8. THE NORTH CHAPEL EXTERNAL RENDER

8.1 Description

The specification of May 1876 envisaged that the walls of the chapel would be stripped of render to reveal flint work, which was to be restored and remain visible. It appears that this scheme was abandoned and the render reinstated due perhaps to the poor condition of the underlying masonry. The render has been subjected to piecemeal repair.

8.2 Significance

The church is a building of considerable quality and the appearance of the N. chapel is detrimental to the whole.

8.3 Condition

Much of the render remains good but repairs have been carried out with unsuitable materials that are trapping moisture in the walls and are unsightly.

8.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the preceding paragraphs. All defective render and unsuitable repairs should be cut out and these areas made good with a lime based render matching the surrounding material.

9. RAINWATER DISPOSAL

9.1 Description

The existing rainwater goods are made of cast iron, the gutters on the nave have an ogee profile and the rest are "U" shaped. The down pipes are circular and are set close to the walls of the church. The N. chapel has no gutters and the rainwater falls from the eaves into a shallow channel and splashes back onto the N. wall. The N. porch has parapet gutters on the E. and W. sides connected to downpipes adjacent to the nave. The tower has a parapet gutter with short spouts on the N., S. and W. sides. Gullies with square brick surrounds are connected to underground pipe work. The tower spouts discharge on to the ground. The underground drainage system is ineffective.

9.2 Significance

It is vital for the preservation of the fabric and the comfort of the congregation that rainwater is conducted away from the building as efficiently as possible.

9.3 Condition

The layout of the gutters and downpipes is poorly designed: some of the gutters are undersized and badly set and a number of the downpipes are also poorly positioned. The parapet gutters of the porch are shallow and the outlets are poorly designed. The tower spouts are short. All the gullies are badly designed and difficult to maintain. The underground drainage system is inadequate.

9.4 The need for intervention and the recommended method of repair

The need for intervention follows from the preceding paragraphs. The channel at the base of the N. wall of the N. chapel should be removed. All replacement rainwater goods should be cast iron, properly sized to accommodate the maximum runoff from the roofs.

The gutters and downpipes on the S. side of the nave should be retained. On the N. side a new downpipe should be fitted at the western corner of the nave and the existing gutter reset to flow to outlets at each end. The gutters on the chancel and the chapels should be "U" shaped and deep flow. The downpipes at the eastern ends of the sidewalls of the chancel should be removed. The present gutter on the S. side of the chancel should be reset at a higher level and two new down pipes fitted to discharge on to the S. chapel (vestry) roof. On the N. side a new short gutter should be fitted at the E. end to discharge onto the chapel roof and along the rest of the length of the chancel rainwater should be allowed to cascade onto the chapel roof. Both chapels should be fitted with new gutters with a downpipe at each end. The porch roof will be raised making space for deeper, properly detailed parapet gutters and sumps. Each outlet should be fitted with a circular downpipe and an overflow chute.

Downpipes should have offset brackets to allow for easy maintenance. The foot of each pipe should be fitted with an angled shoe. Those going to ground should be set to discharge into an open channel leading to a gulley set well away from the walls of the church to allow for rodding. The gullies should be fitted with hinged gratings and removable catch-pots for easy maintenance. A catch pit should be constructed round the base of the tower and connected to a new underground drainage system serving the whole church.

10. LIGHTING

The present lighting arrangements are inadequate and need to be replaced. The new arrangements must provide good lighting for the expanded range of activities envisaged for the church and also provide sensitive illumination of the interior, particularly the nave roof.

11. HEATING

At present heating is provided by portable electric standards. It is planned to replace these with a fixed electrical installation. The PCC recognise that wall mounted heaters would not be appropriate in the nave given the form and quality of the roof and under-pew heating is envisaged.

The details of the lighting and heating installations have yet to be resolved but the principal objectives for both schemes have been established and briefs are being prepared.

Hugh Richmond
February 2016