

Norfolk Historic Buildings Group

Non members

£2.00

Number Fifty-three

Spring 2026

Newsletter



www.nhbg.org.uk

 [norfolkhistoricbuildingsgroup](https://www.facebook.com/norfolkhistoricbuildingsgroup)



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CHAIR

The NHBG starts its 27th year with healthy finances, a healthy (if ageing) membership and a widening following. Paul Hodge's stewardship of the Facebook Group has brought in over 4,000 followers and we maintain around 250 actual members. Allowing outsiders into the winter talks has resulted in considerably larger audiences than were available to in-person meetings and has attracted some additional joiners.

Our YouTube channel has 230 subscribers and allows members who have missed talks to see them later (lecturer permitting) and is another way that people are introduced to the group. One of the lectures has received almost 900 views (see page 15 for a list).

Owen's arrangements of the summer programme are shown on pages 4 and 5. These would be an ideal way of attracting new members, but unfortunately we have to limit the number of attendees at owners' requests, so most have to be members only.

The latest Journal analysing the lithographs of Norfolk churches by Robert and John Berney Ladbrooke is selling well. It was well reviewed by several national publications and I have been contacted by the 5-times great-grandson of Robert Ladbrooke who also bought a copy. Earlier Journals of the group's work in Walsingham, Tacolneston and on schools are still available and digital versions of the volumes on Hempnall and New Buckenham are available as the originals have sold out and it is too expensive to order a reprint.

Ian Hinton
Chair, Norfolk Historic Buildings Group
March 2026
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Administration

Annual Subscriptions

It is subscription time again. Subs are due on April 1st for everyone except very recent joiners. £15 for individuals and £25 for joint members - price held since 2011.

TO HELP THE ACCOUNTANTS - PLEASE DO NOT PAY UNTIL APRIL 1st

Most of you pay by Standing Order (The NHBG is not allowed to operate Direct Debit). If you are unsure whether you pay by Standing Order, email membershhip.nhbg@gmail.com.

For those that do not, please send a cheque to NHBG to the address for membeship, shown left, or pay by BACS

Nat West Bank Norwich Gentlemen's Walk (B) Branch
Account Name - Norfolk Historic Buildings Group
Sort Code - 54-21-06
Account Number - 93397364

**Please ensure that you use your
name as the reference**

Thankyou Maggy Chatterley (Treasurer & Membership)

New Members since the last newsletter in August 2025

F & R Barker - Rollesby	L Maldoom - Dickleburgh
T. Burton - Whissonset	R Steer - Starston
N & A Butler - Long Stratton	E. Syme - Norwich
H. Foster - Aslacton	M.&S Walsh -Swanton Novers
B. Hawkins - Croydon	S. Weiser - Sawston
A. Hubbard Thetford	N. West - Wicklewood
I. Kaye - Old Costessey	C. Wright - Hethersett

Cover photo:

The Old Manor House, Walcott by Ian Hinton

Photographed for the Broadland Book. It is probably 17th century but not listed. Myth suggests that it was used as accomodation for pilgrims to Bromholm Priory, approximately 1km away, to which it is rumoured to have a tunnel (as usual), despite the fact that the house post-dates the Dissolution by possibly 100 years. It was also possibly a retreat for Frederick Duleep Singh.

Norfolk Snippets (a new occasional feature)

please send any photos and/or notes to editor.nhbg@gmail.com

Thompson church bench end

Susan & Michael Brown have suggested that rather than the bench-end image being of the donor Robert Futter as I suggested in *Newsletter* 52, that it represents a scold.

Sue says that bench ends are often witty and this seems to be no exception. She thought it appears to depict a woman with flowing hair, in a dress, with arms akimbo - is she a scold with her pursed lips?

According to Cox, and others, scold-type imagery is often represented by impish figures, sometimes human-looking, sometimes animalistic, frequently sticking their tongue out¹.



Robert Futter was the new owner of College Farm in Thompson in the early seventeenth century and the donor for a considerable amount of work in the church, for which he seemed keen to take credit. This including the new chancel roof, recorded by a carved RF and a date (1648) on two of the corbels of the wallposts, the benches themselves, including his own box pew, but also his carved coat of arms above the fireplace in the principal room of College Farm.

Robert was born in Thompson in 1586, married in 1621 and died in 1662, 14 years after heavily investing in the church.

Whether this figure has the long flowing hair of a woman, or the pointed chin represents the beard of a man, we cannot know now, but as Sue says, their craftsmanship is always worth a second look.

¹ Cox, J.C., 1916, *Bench-Ends in English Churches*, OUP

Nothing new under the sun

Lynne Hodge has sent this picture of a mid nineteenth-century 'slab' cottage in Australia which is built by planing one end of the planks to fit into a groove in the adjacent plank to form a seal.

This method was used in plank and muntin screens in medieval buildings, but also in the Saxon earth-fast-post dwellings reconstructed at West Stow, but there using riven planks rather than sawn ones, and thatch rather than corrugated iron. The technique obviously works, for it to have been used for so long!



Cathedral Chambers, Tombland

Nick Stone sent in this picture of the front wall next to the Turkish restaurant in Tombland revealing what lies beneath the render. The nogging between the timber studs appears to be of randomly-shaped and variably-fired bricks, mostly laid on edge and larger than modern bricks, so presumably were never meant to be seen.



Cathedral Chambers is listed Grade II as "an 18C house, now office, with rusticated ground floor and rendered above".

Is this the original walling or was it, like so many earlier buildings in the Georgian and Victorian periods, where the unfashionable older structure was given a shiny modern front along with the sash windows?

Village-People on-line Magazine

The owner of a house we surveyed recently was involved with this magazine and wrote an article about the NHBG and the services we offer. So far we have gained new members and seen one new house as a result of the article!

<https://www.village-people.info/read-online/>



Opening doors to the past

Norfolk is full of charming old houses - from weathered timber framed cottages to grand brick built farmhouses - each with stories hidden in their walls. Peeling back the layers of history in these homes is exactly what the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group (NHBG) has been doing for the past 25 years.

The group began with a simple goal: to explore the county's remarkable stock of vernacular buildings - houses built in local styles using local materials. That's

why Norfolk's old homes look so different from those in, say, Devon or Yorkshire. Over time, each has been altered, adapted, and modernised, but behind every UPVC window or 1980s kitchen, there's a much older tale waiting to be told.

The NHBG offers a free service to owners of vernacular homes. Volunteers carry out a brief survey and produce a short report, helping owners understand more about the history of their home. These surveys also feed into a wider archive, building a

fascinating picture of Norfolk's architectural evolution.

With over 250 members - from curious homeowners and amateur historians to seasoned researchers - the group offers a welcoming community for anyone interested in the stories old buildings can tell. Members get access to exclusive summer house visits, winter talks (now conveniently held via Zoom), training sessions on how to interpret buildings, and a twice-yearly newsletter packed with insights.

Over the years, the group has also published eight volumes of research covering villages like Tacolneston, Hempsall and New Buckenham, shining a spotlight on Norfolk's rich architectural heritage.

Membership starts at just £15 a year and supports the group's entirely volunteer-led work. Whether you live in an ancient cottage or simply enjoy peering behind the scenes of Norfolk's past, it's a brilliant way to explore the county's built heritage and become part of the story.

Find out more at www.nhbg.org.uk. To have your house surveyed email: buildings.nhbg@gmail.com



These two houses, and the one above, once looked almost identical but have been considerably altered over the centuries. Two have had their walls replaced by brick, one has been shortened, one extended and one has lost its thatch.

Summer Visit Programme

If booking by post, please use the forms provided to book, with a separate cheque for each event.

IF YOU WANT TICKETS POSTED TO YOU, DON'T FORGET the SAE. The default will be to send them by email.

OR

You can reserve a place by email to summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com and pay by BACS, but **NOT UNTIL AFTER APRIL 1st AND ONLY WHEN ASKED TO DO SO, WHEN PLACES ARE CONFIRMED** - in case of overbooking.

The NHBG can now return payments via BACS, but we will need your bank account details to do so.

We have tried to avoid having limits on numbers attending, but at some venues we have no choice. Booking is on a first come, first served basis, but if there is considerable over-demand we will try and run a similar event in the future. *Owen Warnock*

Garlic Farm, Garlic Street Pulham St Mary IP21 4RL

Saturday 18th April 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00
Cost: £10
Limit: 30 (members only)
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

A chance to see this magnificent large farmhouse whilst it is undergoing a complete refurbishment. The house has some features which indicate an early date - a 6-bay grand queen-post roof and moulded joists - but its overall size suggests something later. For whom was it built?



Hidden Norwich Walk - Norwich over the water

Sunday 17th May 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00
Meet: **In front of the Norwich Arts Centre
in St Benedicts NR2 4PG**
Cost: £15
Limit: 20 (members only)
Walking: App 1.5 hours
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

John Humphrey's guided walk for the group last summer was considerably over booked, so by popular demand, John will rerun the walk uncovering hidden gems in the part of the city north of the Wensum.



Elmham Cathedral (a.k.a. The Ruin) and Elmham & Great Ryburgh Churches

Saturday 6th June 2026

Time: 11:00-3:00
Meet: **At gates of "the Ruin" NR20 5JU**
Cost: £10
Limit: 30 (members only)
Walking: churchyards
Lunch: byo picnic - tea provided
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

Peter Wade-Martins will explain the history and uses of the site that has been variously called The Bishops Palace and North Elmham Cathedral as part of the religious use of the site since the Saxon period. Then Peter and Susannah will guide us round North Elmham church with its 15C benchends, recently repaired screen and 17C pulpit.



We will also visit Great Ryburgh church, one of Norfolk's many early round-towered churches, accompanied by Peter Trent, the mason who has been working on the building.



Pykerell's House 7 Rosemary Lane Norwich NR3 3AF

Saturday 11th July 2026
& Sunday 12th July 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00
Meet: Pykerells House
Cost: £10
Limit: **15 each day** (members only)
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

Grade II* Pykerells House was saved from slum-clearance demolition by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust.

One of the few remaining thatched buildings in Norwich, it was previously known as Pilgrim's Hall and Old Rosemary Tavern. Since the NAT restoration it has been privately tenanted and only occasionally opens for organised groups. Numbers are limited to 15 on both Saturday and Sunday



Lime Tree Farm, Common Road Shelfanger IP22 2D

Saturday 8th August 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00
Cost: £10
Limit: 25 (members only)
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

A chance to see this late medieval common-edge farmhouse with evidence of a smoke bay, including the sooty bressumer. The house was enlarged in the 17C with a range built at rightangles. The medieval range was extended in the 18C, but was it originally a single-room detached kitchen or part of a larger house.



Thetford Town visit - Ancient House and St Cuthbert's church (Dads' Army and Charles Burrell museums are also open)

followed by the AGM

Saturday 5th September 2026

Time: Starts at 11:00
Meet: **Outside Charles Burrell Museum,
Minstergate IP24 1BN**
Cost: free
Limit: no limit
Walking: pavements, some stairs
Lunch: byo picnic - tea provided
Contact: Owen Warnock 01508 481822
summerevents.nhbg@gmail.com

Two tours of the Fifteenth-century Ancient House are available
- at 11:00 and 12:00 -
to be organised on the day



Ancient House, Whitehart St IP24 1AA

A map of Thetford with its large number of listed buildings for a self-guided walking tour will be circulated with the AGM papers

Both the Dads' Army and Charles Burrell Museums are free entry, but rely on visitor donations.

Followed by:-

Annual General Meeting

To be held in the upstairs room in Thetford
Library, Raymond Street IP24 2EA
at 1:30pm.

The room has tea-making facilities and will be
open from 12 noon

The AGM Papers, additional information and maps will be
circulated nearer the day

Appeal for Information

Village Pumps

We have received an appeal from members of the Pulham Market Society who are researching the village pump that once stood outside The Memorial Hall on The Green in the centre of Pulham Market. Despite hours in the Record Office, nothing could be found about it.

The immensely informative website
<http://www.villagepumps.org.uk/pumpsNorfolk.htm>

lists 141 pumps in Norfolk, but unfortunately none in villages beginning with a P.

If you are able to help or offer any additional information, please contact Stephen Hewitt direct - at
sandsj.hewitt@gmail.com

Exploring the French Borough (October 16th 2025)

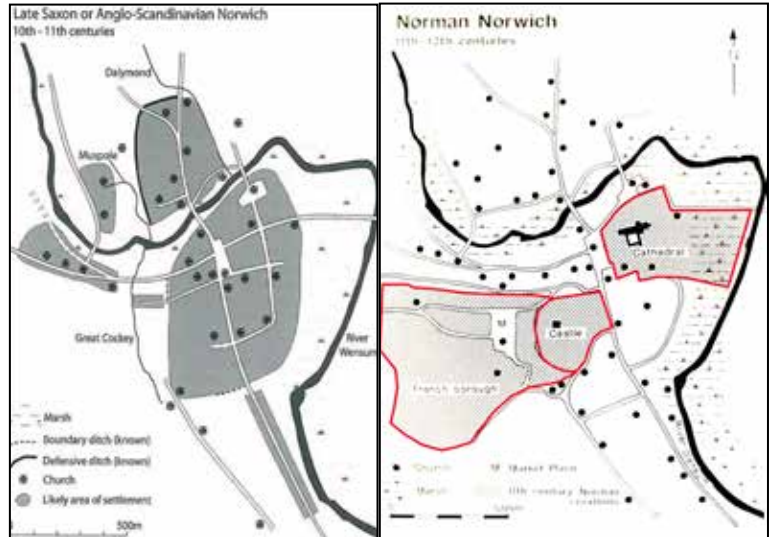
Jonathan Hooton

When the Normans arrived in Norwich soon after the Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon city only stretched as far west as the Great Cockey which ran down hill to the Wensum roughly parallel to present day Gentleman's Walk. The area to the west was open land. This was an ideal place for the market to go once large parts of Tombland (the Anglo-Saxon market place) started to disappear for the new Cathedral. The land stretching further west (from City Hall to Grapes Hill) became an ideal area for the Normans to settle in and they created three new parishes, St Stephens, St Peter Mancroft and St Giles. This area became known as the New Burgh or the French Borough.

This talk takes a look at the way this adjunct to Norwich has been used over the years and is largely covered by the buildings between Bethel Street and St Giles Street plus some excursions along the alleys that lead off these two streets.

The street pattern largely remained untouched until the 1930s when a large area was cleared to make way for City Hall, and again in the 1960s when more of it was cleared for the new library. Many fascinating buildings still remain and St Giles in the 19th century was Norwich's Harley Street - being occupied by many doctors and surgeons from the Hospital.

Bethel Street has the old fire station and weights and measures buildings, fine examples of Art Deco architecture and part of what Pevsner described as "one of the best examples of municipal town planning in England".



Anglo-Saxon and Norman layouts of Norwich

source: *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (with additional emphasis)

Beyond that is the old roller skating rink (which was an expensive [£10,000] failure), soon to be replaced as a Salvation Army Citadel where General Booth preached. It is worth looking inside at the impressive roof designed by Edward Boardman.

Images from
Jonathan's
Powerpoint



Bethel Street Fire Station, with some of its fine art-deco features



left: The Salvation Army Citadel, replacing the Old Skating Rink

below:

Four early 19C boundary markers on the Coach & Horses - the lead ones at the top defining the edge of St Giles and St Peter Mancroft, the 1710 stone marker beneath.

On the other side of the road there is what used to be the Bethel Hospital on the site of the Committee Rooms that were destroyed in the 'Great Blow' of 1648. The original building of 1713 is now obscured by the Victorian frontage which was re-modelled by Boardman in 1899. Parts of this complex, including the 18th century boardroom remain on the buildings at risk register.

A little further along the street is the Coach and Horses a largely 16th century building with adjacent stables of 1710, although parts of the interior are supposed to date back to the 13th century. There are also some interesting parish boundary markers including a very early stone marker of 1710.



The buildings either side of Watts court were destroyed by incendiary bombs June 27th 1942, (nos 55 & 57) although the 18th building where Mayor John Langley Watts lived and whom the court was named after, Number 61 is still standing a little further down the street.

A little further on is Ninham's Court, originally called Masters Court but renamed after Henry Ninham who liked to sketch the picturesque antiquities of Norwich, who was born in the house at the other end of the court facing on to Chapel Field. It is here that the grade 2* complex of 16th and 17th century buildings over a 14th century undercroft can be seen. Nugent Monck lived here from 1911-58 and performed plays in his drawing room until he managed to purchase and convert the old Catholic Chapel into the Maddermarket theatre. These buildings are also on the buildings at risk register and desperately in need of some attention.



6-9 Ninham Court - at risk

On the other side of Bethel Street is the entrance to St Giles Terrace a lovely terrace of early 19th Century houses of which Geoffrey Goreham wrote "Finding it, one can only stand and stare at an aspect that appears to have everything." Joseph Stannard, of the Norwich School of painters, used to live in the end house.



St Giles Terrace

There are only two grade 1 listed buildings in the parish of St Giles and at the start of Upper Saint Giles they are diagonally opposite each other. One is the parish church of St Giles and the other is Churchman House. Alderman Thomas Churchman had a house that faced Chapel Field; his son incorporated part of this house into his newly built house which he changed round to face Bethel Street. This was Sir Thomas Churchman and Churchman House was built in 1751. It narrowly escaped being bombed in 1942 when the two neighbouring house were bombed where Cleveland Road is now.

Upper St Giles, being near to the City gates, was full of pubs, there being five of them here in the 19th century. The Gates were

only put to the test three times and failed on each occasion; they were the Peasant's revolt in 1381 and twice during Kett's rebellion in 1549. It's most severe test was in 1480 when it was damaged by an earthquake. The only source to mention it was written a hundred years later by Neville in 1575. From his description it was very damaging and affected an area bigger than Norwich. Blomefield notes that in 1481 all the gates and towers of Norwich were repaired. Although he does not mention an earthquake it would be surprising if these two reports were unrelated.



St Giles Gate -John Ninham 1792
(Views of the Gates of Norwich by Robert Fitch)

St Giles church would deserve an article all to itself. This building was largely rebuilt in the 15th Century apart from the chancel that was in a bad state of repair and demolished in 1581. The present chancel was re-built in 1866 using the decorated style for the windows. At 113 feet it was the tallest of Norwich's churches and it is not a surprise that it was used as a beacon and the cresset, which held the fuel, now still stands inside the church. In the 19th Century it was used by soldiers for practising flag drill with those in barracks on Mousehold Heath. The fine brasses of Richard Purdance (Mayor in 1420 and 1433) and Richard Baxter (Mayor in 1424 and 1429) give the first pictorial evidence of those who lived in the French Borough.

Excursions down Cow Hill and back up Willow Lane are notable for the so called Holkham House, lived in by Matthew Brettingham and the home of George Borrow and Blomfield, where he compiled Volume 3 of his History of Norfolk, dealing with Norwich. Willow Lane also has the Jesuits Catholic Chapel, by J T Prentice and Pevsner notes that it was strange that he chose a style usually reserved for the non-conformists. It later became a Catholic School before being converted to offices by Michael Innes. Willow Lane then connects with St Giles Street formerly known as Lower (or Nether) Newport with its 26 listed buildings. The most striking of those being George Skipper's Norwich and London Accident Insurance Association built over the 15th century undercrofts of God's House, or Grant's Hospital founded in 1297, rebuilt in 1472 and dissolved in 1547. This is not far from the neo baroque Masonic House built in 1905 (architect Albert Havers) with a new Temple added at the back (architect S J Wearing) in 1928 and which has just been bought from the Masons. St Giles leads back to the 'new' French market where there are two other buildings of merit on opposite sides of the road, Gladstone House belonging to John Harvey, Mayor in 1784 and the Norfolk Daily Standard Office, another striking George Skipper Building from 1899-1900.



The two Grade I listed buildings in Upper St Giles - left St Giles church with its Victorian rebuilt chancel in second-pointed style and right - Churchman House, as it is today and the buildings to its right lost through bombing (St Giles by Peter Eade)

Jonathan is a qualified Norwich guide and has written about various aspects of the buildings and history of Norwich, as well as a history of the Glaven ports

Crenels and Merlons (November 20th 2025)

John Vigar

This precis has been taken from John's website, illustrated with images taken from John's powerpoint presentation

Battlements have been a feature of British architecture for over a thousand years. Many of our iconic buildings feature them as an integral part of their design. Where would our medieval castles be without them – or our church towers? Yet for such a common architectural feature it is amazing how little they have been studied or the vast spread of their influence mapped.

The medieval use of battlements, of course, was firmly grounded in defence. The crenels – the gaps – and the merlons – the uprights – were first employed to create safe places from which to fire on your attackers.



left:
*The Tower of London,
the earliest crenelations
in England*

Images from
John's Powerpoint
unless credited

Very soon, though, they became a status symbol and only those on good terms with the Crown were allowed to put them on their houses.



*Licence to crenelate, displayed on
the gatehouse tower at Coolings
Castle on the north Kent coast,
granted by Richard II in 1380*



photo: Ian Hinton

Local houses

*Mannington Hall
- licence to crenelate
1451 (Pevsner),
granted by Henry VI*



photo: Ian Hinton

*Oxburgh Hall
- completed 1482*

Medieval churches also embraced the fashion and the later in history the more decorative and less defensive they become. The pierced battlements of Gloucester Cathedral, for instance, could never be regarded as defensive.

Throughout that period of history we call the gothic survival – the late Tudor and Stuart period when tradition fought against the Renaissance – battlements were still being used as if to maintain a link with the past. It is no wonder then that when the Gothick style became fashionable the long established battlements came into their own and were used on thousands of new buildings both functional and decorative. Landscaped gardens, too, used them with abandon but they also found a place in the landscape of the industrial revolution – on a Glaswegian factory!

This lecture looks at the chronology of battlements and explores a selection of buildings both famous and obscure to tell the story of this traditional and quirky feature.

Churches

*Loddon - fully
embattled,
brick-built
and flint clad
in 1490s*



photo: Ian Hinton

*Erpingham:
tower top*



*Telford's 1822
suspension bridge
in Conway, built to
match the battlements
of the castle
- James Briggs
under creative-
commons licence
CC-BY-SA 4.0*

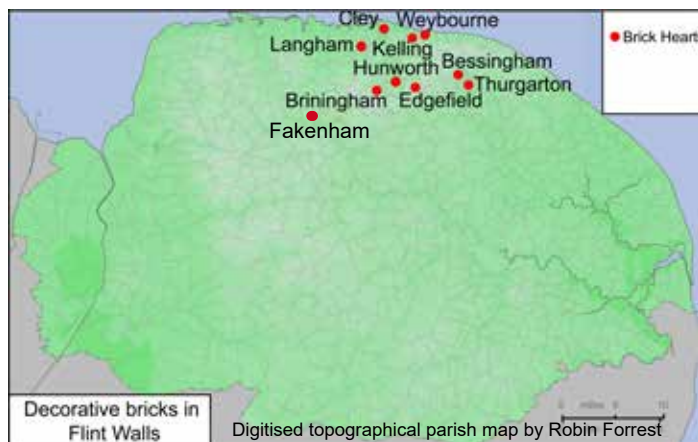


*Templeton's Carpet
factory in Glasgow,
designed by Leiper
in 1888*

John is an ecclesiastical historian who leads church tours of, and has written widely about, churches across the country. John is a member of the NHBG

Norfolk Hearts - the search continues..., with dated tumbling-in added to the search.

Lynne Hodge & Ian Hinton



Armed with his camera, Les went on to photograph a number of gable ends in Swaffham which had also been raised since their original construction. Each altered the building from one or one-and-a-half storeys to two storeys. In two cases the whole gable had been raised, whilst the third (bottom right) retained the original apex. All included copious tumbling-in, the two below with tumbling-in on both the original and final gable. All of these indicate sufficient prosperity to enable owners to substantially reconfigure their houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Church Cottage

As part of the search for decorative bricks in flint walls, we found an old photograph of the gable end of Church Cottage in Swaffham. The quality was not good enough for publication so asked NHBG committee member, and Swaffham resident, Les Scott to take some photos, which are shown below.

Church Cottage, Swaffham

It is not of the same hearts as were noticed in the north of the county, but consist of three large truncated diamonds made of red brick headers filled with knapped black flint and set in a wall of alternating burnt brick headers and broken flint showing the white cortex.



Photos:
Les Scott



*above and right:
four raised gables with various
elements of tumbling in*



Twyford Farm

Located between Bintree and Guist, Twyford Farm is an 18C Grade II-listed farmhouse with contemporary farm buildings. One of the barns displays a heart in burnt headers in a flemish-bond red-brick wall just above a series of ventilation holes. Obviously not contemporary with the 17C examples seen to the north of the county.



Angel Roofs of Norfolk Churches (December 9th 2025)

Sarah Cassell

Amongst the most distinctive features of some late-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth century Norfolk parish churches are their open timber roofs with angelic carvings. Carved angels form, or are attached to, the beam ends and/or principal timbers, either at prayer, or carrying musical instruments, symbols of Christ's Passion, implements of the Mass or (less frequently) heraldic devices. Without a full national survey, current research, including mine, confirms that the total number of surviving roofs well exceeds Michael Rimmer's 2015 estimate of 'over 170'. Angel roofs are easily missed, especially those simply peppered with a few small demi-angel relief carvings and/or located in aisles, so a definitive list is a challenge.

Angel roofs proliferated across East Anglia in the wake of the unveiling of Richard II's prestigious remodelled roof at Westminster Hall (c. 1393-9). Elite patrons, such as Michael de la Pole and Bishop Despenser of Norwich, appear to have introduced them locally. Angel roofs are not restricted to the popular hammer-beam roof. Many different roof types were used for angelic representations.

Arch-braced roofs

Arch-braced roofs, as at Salle SS Peter & Paul (mid 15c), and Harpley St Lawrence (early 15c) demonstrate that some patrons were content with integrated angels within an existing local carpentry tradition. These can mean diminutive angel relief carvings sprinkled across the intersections of principal rafters and purlins and/or along the ridge and cornices, as in the ridge bosses at Harpley. This generalised, rather understated and relatively economic approach remained the preferred option for some, as at Sparham St Mary and Great Witchingham St Mary (both late 15c). At Necton All Saints (15c), where evidence of medieval pigment is noteworthy, tried and tested arch-braces alternate with innovative arch-braced angelic hammer-beams.



*Necton All Saints
- Angel with pigment*

Images from
Sarah's powerpoint

Tie-beam & Queen-post roofs

At King's Lynn St Nicholas Chapel (c. 1410-1419), similarly proven tie-beam and queen-post construction was harnessed alongside embryonic angelic 'hammer-beams' in an influential and ambitious early open plan roof spanning nave and chancel. Most of these medieval angels were made of planks of timber with slots for the wings, attached to the underside of the beams, rather than carved from boxed hearts of oak.



St Nicholas, King's Lynn roof Angel made from planks

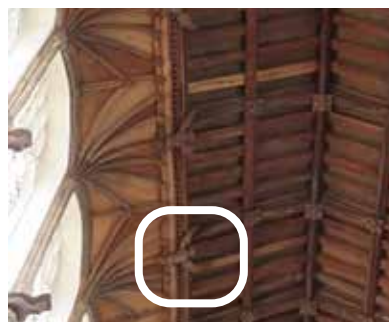


This pragmatic local design proved popular, especially in the west of the region. In some cases, such as the nave roof at Mildenhall St Mary (possibly c. 1425) in Suffolk, the carpentry and carving suggest the work of at least some of the same craftsmen.

Hammer-beam roofs

Elsewhere, single hammer-beam roofs took a variety of inventive forms. Connections derived from patronal networks between urban centres and their rural hinterlands can often be discerned. Two Norwich roofs, at St Peter Mancroft and at St Peter Hungate, provide good illustrations of the impact of innovative design upon other roof projects.

At Mancroft (c. 1440-1460), the roof appears to span the nave and chancel as a single entity, as at King's Lynn St Nicholas. In fact, fan-vaulted timber coving conceals two separate and distinct hammer-beam roof structures, created during a rather piecemeal rebuilding process. The lower tier of twenty carved demi-angels marks the ends of the hidden hammer-beams. Yet the influence of the Mancroft design was limited, possibly for financial reasons. The only surviving examples elsewhere in Norfolk are found at St John Maddermarket in Norwich (subject to nineteenth-century restoration) and at Ringland St Peter (15c), another angelic scheme with a deeper cornice.



*St Peter Mancroft-
Demi-angel on hammer-
beam end hidden by the fan
vaulting*

At Hungate (mid 15c), the braced hammer-beam roof spans the nave and transepts. The braces are set diagonally at the crossings, creating an elegantly vaulted appearance. This sophisticated cruciform design is extremely rare. It appears to have influenced roof crossing schemes at nearby St Mary Coslany (early- to mid-1460s) and at Stody St Mary (15c) in north Norfolk, much restored.



The form of the angelic beams at Hungate is also unusual. Relatively small demi-angels with folded wings are attached or carved into the underside of the ends of the beams. The closest parallels elsewhere are found in the north aisle roof at Wymondham Abbey (SS Mary and Thomas of Canterbury) (c. 1440) and in the later fifteenth-century nave roofs at Trunch St Botolph, Blakeney St Nicholas, Marsham All Saints and Banningham St Botolph, in north-east Norfolk, an area connected with the Pastons, who were certainly involved at Hungate.

*St Peter Hungate-
Angel beneath the hammer beam
holding the Book of 7 Seals*

The celebrated aristocratic roof at Cawston St Agnes (late 15c) comprises a unique design, with expensive pigment. Large carved angels and the Virgin Mary stand on the hammer-beams, facing each other rather than looking down at the congregation. Their feathered suits and two sets of wings identify them as cherubim. Roof angels were much more commonly attired as assistants at the Mass with one pair of wings, likely perceived as angels or archangels, the lowest angelic orders that were closer to humanity. These factors may explain why this beautiful scheme was not repeated.

Double hammer-beam roofs

Double hammer-beam roofs are most common in Suffolk churches and only four survive in Norfolk, spread across the county, from Tilney All Saints in the west to Knapton SS Peter & Paul in the north-east. They are characterised by overwhelming angelic display. The roof at Swaffham SS Peter & Paul surmounts the clerestory of the fifteenth-century collaborative lay church rebuilding project. In contrast, the forest of timber at Gissing St Mary (mid to late 15c) is overwhelming in a building of such modest size, probably funded by Kemp patronage. Their relative labels as 'false' and 'true' double hammer-beam structures is contentious and a matter for another lecture.

Imagery

The Westminster Hall angels bear shields charged with the royal arms. Few East Anglian angel roofs would follow this heraldic model, which was allied to elite patronage, with chivalric connotations. The nave roof at St Giles is a remarkable early exception, its hammer-beam angels bearing shields painted with the contemporary royal arms, in an unremittingly Lancastrian display. More commonly, parochial roof angels display alternative ecclesiastical imagery, holding items used at Mass, symbols of Christ's Passion (suffering and death) or play musical instruments as pioneered at King's Lynn. At Emneth St Edmund (15c), mirrored Mass symbols are held by feathered angels resembling those at Outwell south aisle. Carved saints inhabit wall-posts below, in a hierarchical display repeated elsewhere.

The north aisle roof at Mildenhall St Mary is characterised by a more generous structure and carving than the nave roof, indicating eminent craftsmanship and design beyond the local arena. It features the juxtaposition of sacred and profane imagery. Defaced beam angels in ecclesiastical dress alternate with arch-braced hammer-beams carved in the form of bestial and grotesque subjects, roll-moulding extending from their mouths. Large angels surmount saints on the wall-posts.

The Finchams appear to have sought to align themselves with prestige through appropriation and adaptation. At Fincham St Martin (15c), demonic braced beam carvings with folds of drapery and roll-moulding from the mouths are interspersed with angelic beams, local carvers referencing aspects of the Mildenhall scheme. As Dr Clare Dauntton has shown, the Mildenhall imagery was translated with unfortunate results at nearby Outwell, where the nave wall-posts feature oversized grotesques looming over diminutive saints. I discovered another reinterpretation of the elite Mildenhall roof carvings at Shouldham All Saints. The repaired hammer-beam figures feature drapery folds and roll-moulding from the mouths, like the bestial beam carvings at Fincham. Yet the Shouldham beams were surely intended as angels, probably with folded wings.



above:
Cawston St Agnes-Angels standing on the hammer beams facing each other

right:
Gissing St Mary.
Double hammerbeams with angels on the beam ends



below:
carved Saint on a wallpost at Emneth St Edmund



Two hammer-beam figures at Fincham St Martin

left: A demon with a roll from its mouth forming the roll moulding

right: An angel with realistic folds in its garments

Sarah is an independent researcher whose PhD study in 2018 was on the Structure and Image in Late Medieval East Anglian Angel Roofs

The First World War Pillboxes of Norfolk

(January 14th 2026)

Christopher Bird

Norfolk's First World War pillboxes are the only physical reminder in the landscape of an event that never happened: the long-forgotten invasion threat during the First World War.

Why was it that Norfolk, or indeed anywhere else in Britain, was seen to be at risk of a German invasion at all? There had been a widespread fear of invasion for several years before the First World War. William Le Queux's novel *The Invasion of England 1910* even features a large enemy force landing at Weybourne, taking advantage of the deep water close to the shore. The invasion threat is also found in other media such as the film *The Airship Destroyer* (1909), and the comic song *The Germans are Coming* (1915). In 1914 the east coast was attacked, with Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby being shelled by German shipping. The following year, Norfolk acquired the dubious distinction of being the first place in Britain bombed by airship.

There were fears that the stalemate of the Western Front might be broken with an enemy force landing on the east coast (given they lacked access to most of the French ports) and then marching on London. In January 1916 the Admiral and the War Office concluded that the Germans could conceivably land up to 160,000 men, and it would take at least 24 hours for the Royal Navy to intervene. It was decided that half a million men would be needed to defend England.

The Defences

The first lines of defence were the Royal Navy, backed up by gun batteries along the coast at Salthouse, Cromer, Eccles, Hemsby, Caister, Yarmouth, and Gorleston. These batteries were fairly lightweight, and no remains survive today. Some of these sites had been defended in the previous invasion threat during the Napoleonic era. In addition, trench systems in Norfolk along much of the east coast. And there was even an armoured train, based at North Walsham.

Pillboxes

Pillboxes appeared on the western front in 1917, being small defensible concrete positions, offering protection to a small number of soldiers armed with rifles or machine guns. In Britain, pillboxes were built from Yorkshire to Kent from 1917-18, to supplement the existing defences of the Navy, gun batteries and trench systems. They provided pre-prepared defensive positions which could have been manned at short notice, designed to slow up an invading enemy.

Period graffiti found on a pillbox at Sea Palling indicates that it was built by the Royal Engineers in July 1918, showing that these were built even in the final months of the war, when invasion was still seen as a possibility.

There are very few pillboxes surviving in Norfolk from WW1 - 24 as far as I know. So one tends to view these in isolation. But by using inter-war maps, postcards, and documentary evidence I've found the positions of a further 30, which are no longer extant. This allows us to plot them on a map and look at them not as isolated small buildings, but as part of a larger defensible network.

In Norfolk, there was a line of pillboxes along the coast from Stiffkey to Cromer, with further examples at Bacton and Sea Palling. There were also some a mile or so inland, just south of Sheringham, with a further set going past Bodham, Aylmerton, Hanworth, and then along the River Ant. The reason for the line of defences found along the Ant is that it formed a natural defensible position, roughly parallel to the coast. In the First World War the North Walsham-Dilham canal was wide and deep enough for wherries to pass, and would have been a significant hindrance to invading troops. But every crossing point received the protection of pillboxes. (I know of none at Ludham Bridge, but they may have been demolished in WW2, when it was heavily defended.)



Surviving pillbox positions along the coast and along the River Ant line

In addition there were pillboxes just inland from Yarmouth, either side of the A47. There was once a pair either side of Breydon Water, and finally a lone example at St Olaves, where there is an important crossing of the River Waveney.

Unlike the shell-proof designs used on the Western Front, Norfolk's types were more lightly built, as the invading troops would be unlikely to be bringing heavy artillery. So they are only built to bullet-proof standards, and would most likely have been defended with rifles, not machine-guns.

There are a few different designs found in Norfolk (with similar types also used in Suffolk). First, a small circular type at Stiffkey and Breydon Water.



The circular roof of an early small circular type at Breydon Water - photographed in 1992 - sadly no longer there

Second, a larger version, built of concrete blocks, with steel doors and shutters by which individual loopholes could be closed against enemy fire (this is the most common and distinctive type). The loophole shutters were important as none of the First World War types had internal walls. The shutters made it less likely that enemy bullets would enter, where they might ricochet around the interior, potentially killing all the occupants. The circular design would also have made it easier to deflect enemy bullets.



*A pair of block-built pillboxes at White Horse Common
A loophole shutter open for firing*

Thirdly, a hexagonal design similar in appearance to the Second World War 'Type 22', also with steel doors and loophole shutters. The hexagonal types are made of poured concrete instead of the individual concrete blocks. Examples of this type are found just west of Yarmouth and at St Olaves.



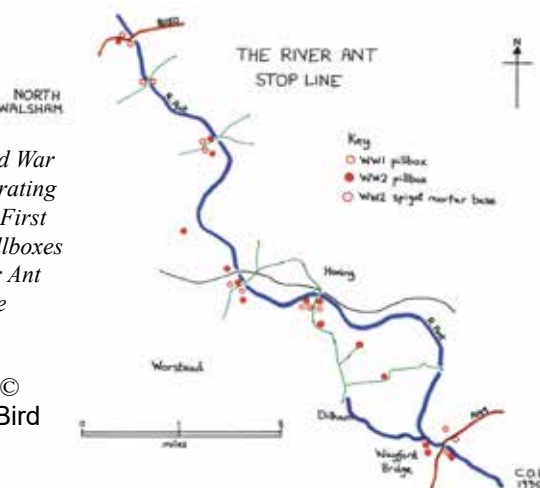
A hexagonal pillbox, cast-in-situ. A pair of these guard the A47 near Yarmouth

There were also square and rectangular types, no longer extant, at Salthouse. In addition, sometimes a standard design was modified to take advantage of the particular site, as at Spa Common, near North Walsham, where a standard circular type has been modified into a D-shape, to allow three loopholes to fire along a sharp bend in the road.

They were usually built in pairs, to give supporting fire. An unusual feature found on them is that the loopholes are frequently of differing heights, allowing some to be used while kneeling.

After the war ended, the First World War pillboxes of Norfolk lay abandoned and forgotten for over 20 years. Then in December 1939 some were surveyed to see if they might be of use in the next invasion threat. Often the very same sites were defended in the next war, with the River Ant line reused. Some of the WW1 pillboxes were reused in the 1940/41 defence schemes, some ignored, and others demolished to clear the sight lines for their WW2 replacements.

Second World War plan incorporating some of the First World War pillboxes in the River Ant stop line



All images © Christopher Bird

Eight of the 24 survivors were finally listed in 2025. But some of the survivors are at risk from damp, ivy, and structural issues. So much remains to be done to preserve and safeguard these unique reminders of a forgotten invasion threat.



*left:
One of eight pillboxes listed in 2025 (Bradfield)*

*below:
the same pillbox at Sea Palling taken in 1997 and 2025 showing how quickly they can disappear and deteriorate*



In the words of philosopher Roger Scruton, 'We do not merely study the past: we inherit it, and inheritance brings with it not only the rights of ownership, but the duties of trusteeship. Things fought for and died for should not be idly squandered. For they are the property of others, who are not yet born.'

Christopher Bird is an historian with a life-long interest in war defences. His book *Silent Sentinels: the story of Norfolk's defences* was published by Larks Press in 1999

The Great Fire of Norwich of 1508

(February 18th 2026)

Carole Rawcliffe

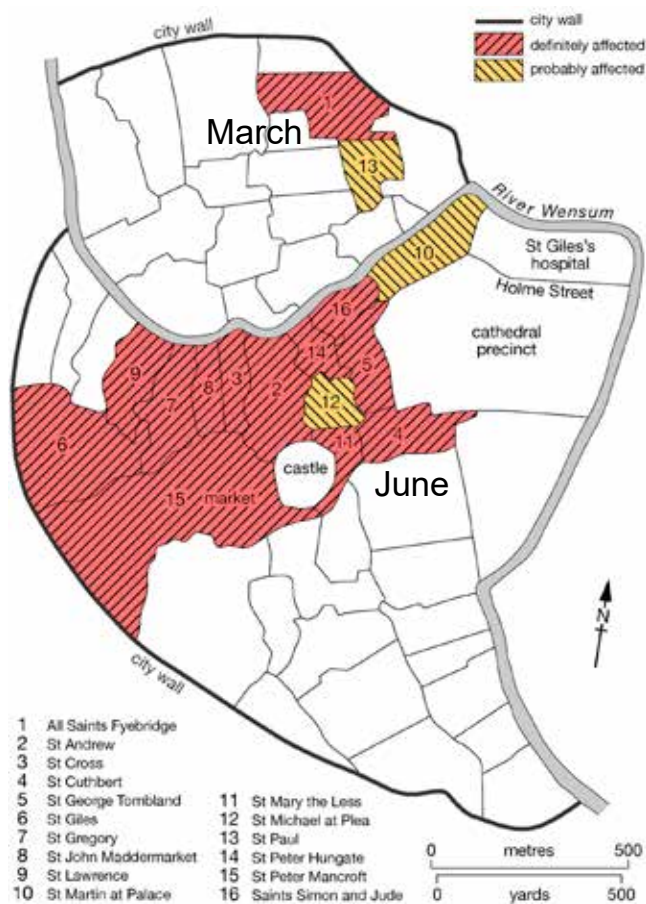


Pictures from Carole's Powerpoint

Fires were a regular and unpredictable feature of medieval and early modern urban life. Most were smaller in scale and considerably less serious than the major conflagrations recorded after the onset of industrialisation. Even so, in an age before insurance or state-sponsored relief, they could inflict lasting damage upon communities already vulnerable to disease, food shortages and economic recession. Along with the dislocation caused by the destruction of goods, housing stock and infrastructure, went the cost of providing short term assistance for the homeless and of funding long term regeneration, which, as my lecture reveals, might take decades to accomplish. And before rebuilding even began, the authorities had to remove accumulated debris and clear sites that disfigured the landscape, attracting fly-tippers and undermining communal health.

The outbreak of at least one apparently serious fire north of the Wensum in the spring of 1508, followed by a conflagration across Norwich's commercial heart in June, came as a blow from which some householders and landlords took decades to recover. Later claims that over 40 per cent of the city's housing stock went up in flames at this time may exaggerate the scale of devastation, but the consequences were still profound, not least because the most affluent and densely populated areas - encompassing some fourteen parishes and the marketplace - were destroyed.

Having examined the citizens' somewhat cavalier attitude to fire safety, my talk turns to responses at both a local and national level. It establishes a chronology based upon contemporary records, which challenges entrenched assumptions that the spring and summer fires occurred a year earlier in 1507. It then considers the extent of the damage, which, although catastrophic in central Norwich, appears to have been far less severe to the north of the river than hitherto supposed.



Map by Cathy Downton from the article in *Norfolk Archaeology* (with added colour and dates)

Recovery proceeded briskly in some quarters, as wealthy merchants rebuilt their homes and restarted their businesses, but the pace was far from uniform across the social spectrum. Several factors delayed the overall process of clearance and reconstruction, eventually prompting the authorities to seek parliamentary approval for the compulsory seizure of abandoned and derelict sites that had become a noxious eyesore. Repeated attempts to create a safer environment by prohibiting the use of thatch, which was identified as a particular local hazard, proved such a disincentive to investment that, after a long struggle, they were abandoned altogether. This battle, which dragged on until the 1570s, not only illustrates residents' attachment to traditional building materials, but also the financial challenge of creating fire resistant homes in stone, flint and brick with chimneys and tiled roofs. It wasn't always easy to translate precept into practice.

Carole is Professor Emerita of Medieval History at UEA. Her research focuses upon the theory and practice of medicine in medieval England, particularly hospitals. Her broader interest in Norwich saw her co-edit the two volumes of *Mediaeval Norwich* in 2004.

EHBG Conference

Essex Historic Buildings Group - Day School Saturday 27th June 2026 THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE OF EASTERN ENGLAND: an exploration of the similarities & differences

At Anglian Ruskin University, Bishops Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SQ

Ticket for the Day School and the optional Buffet can be purchased only from the EHBG website, <https://www.ehbg.co.uk>

Cost of the Day School:

without lunch £50 (£45 members) – with finger-buffet lunch £66 (£61 members)

NOTE bookings for food must be made by Thursday 4th June 2026; none can be made after this

Cheques are no longer accepted. Further information is available from John Walker, Marks Cottage, Stoke Road, Layham, Ipswich IP7 5RB, Tel: 01473 829774 Email: englishmedievalroof@hotmail.co.uk

Administration

NHBG videos on YouTube

Type the underlined part of the address directly into your browser, OR type VAG or Norfolk Historic Buildings Group into the Youtube search box (other non-relevant videos will also appear on this list)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DyU0M-Kfvk&t=121s>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz_l8mc1x5I&t=422s
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKgRbRmngb4&t=218s>
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VAG videos of East Anglian subjects

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Stpiw6wbce0&t=9s>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rlgEsIEEww>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCd07Hos8Tg&list=PLP-ojFvaknzVgiSGfBTsVocEpg1Lu_JRd&index=3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Por5-5UmEjo&list=PLP-ojFvaknzVgiSGfBTsVocEpg1Lu_JRd&index=4 Two Norfolk Churches
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-QMT0z5aMMlan>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_RBkWWRF4A

Gillian Gallacher - **River Crossings**
Ian Hinton - **Pulham North Green and its farmhouses**
Jane Chittenden - **Norwich Gas: its effect on local economy**
Peter Goodrum - **Jarrolds 250 years**
Ian Hinton - **The Development of church buildings in Norfolk**
David Bussey - **George Skipper**
Jan Bensley - **The Loddon parish study**
Richard Matthew - **A Tour of Norwich Guildhall**
Ian Hinton - **The Great rebuilding in Norfolk (VAG)**
Anna Kettle - **The craft trade of pargetting**
Tim Howson - **The Medieval houses of Maldon, Essex**
Anne Woollett - **Some houses of Norwich Cathedral Close**
Ian Hinton - **Krons Manor, Hempsall**
Chris King - **Houses in early medieval Norwich**
Mary Ash - **Burnt bricks: a different kind of building material**
Ian Hinton - **Poachers and Lime Tree Cottages, Hempsall**
Terry George - **The undercrofts of Norwich**
Ian Hinton - **Three surprising houses in Hempsall**
Stuart Burgess - **The Elizabethan House, Yarmouth**
Sarah Pearson - **Riddlesworth- the development of an estate**
Peter Wade Martins - **In search of Norfolk's early churches**
Amanda Bevan - **Lost Church of St Olaves**
Nick Hill - **An Almshouse in Stamford**

Edward Martin - **The Landscape Context for EA buildings**
Tom Williamson - **Norfolks geology and Vernacular Architecture**
Jess Johnson - **Some buildings of the S. Norfolk town of Diss**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Por5-5UmEjo&list=PLP-ojFvaknzVgiSGfBTsVocEpg1Lu_JRd&index=4 Two Norfolk Churches
Ian Hinton - **Two Norfolk Timber-framed houses**
John Walker - **The aisled halls of East Anglia**

AGM 2025

The AGM took place just after the last newsletter went to the printer. The draft minutes will be available at the AGM in September for ratification - here is a summary of the decisions:-

- The Chair thanked everyone, particularly members of the committee, for making another successful year for the group
- The Treasurer presented the accounts with healthy figures, despite spending over £3,000 on printing Journal 8. The independent examiners report declared that the accounts were managed well.
- Membership was 263 at the year end.
- Maggy Chatterley was re-elected as Membership Secretary
- The present committee was re-elected with no extra nominations, but there are still 2 vacancies for anyone who wants to get involved - just let the Chair know.
- Subscriptions to remain the same at £15/£25 for 2026/27.
- The in-person Members' Sunday will be continued this year on March 22nd at The Forum, after last year's success.

Members' Sunday (March 22nd 2026)

Norwich Cathedral in the 18th & 19th centuries - Owen Thompson

My research on Norwich Cathedral in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began thirty years ago when, as a mature student at UEA, I was asked by Roberta Gilchrist, the then cathedral archaeologist, to do some research in advance of restoration work on the west window. Very little has been written about the fabric of the cathedral in this period. The principal resources for this research are the Dean and Chapter archive in the NRO and pictures of the cathedral, such as Fitzpatrick's drawings, Cotman's paintings, illustrations from the Illustrated London News and photographs.

People often assume that not much has changed over the centuries since the middle ages: this is far from the truth with each successive generation adding, removing or restoring parts of the building. For instance, comparison of various illustrations, corroborated by written documents, reveals that between the late 17th century and the present day there have been six distinct arrangements of the turrets at the west end (five of which are shown right). One of these phases was necessitated by the entire west window becoming unstable in the 1870s. Part of the medieval tracery replaced at this time is now a garden ornament at Ketteringham Hall.

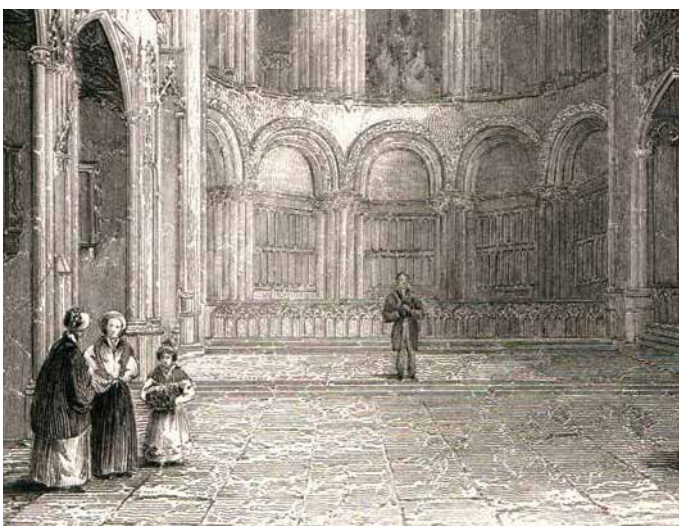
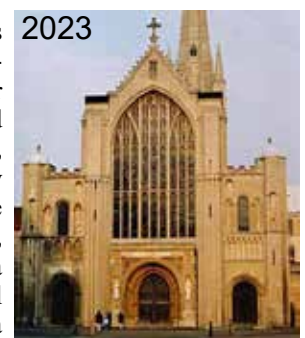
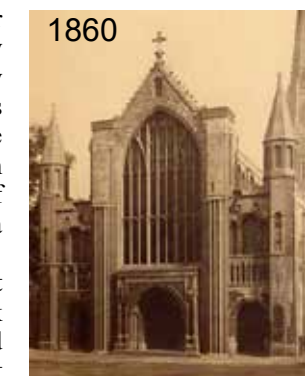
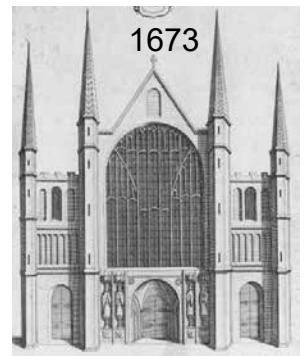
Archaeology may be able to record the changes in a building, but not always is it able to furnish the motivation for such changes. The arrangement of the steps near the altar was changed in 1832; Dean Pelew's diary for July 1st gives us the reason: "To approach this [the altar] there were six stone steps surmounted by the altar rail enclosing a large area within which the priesthood and congregation are accustomed to assemble promiscuously to celebrate the sacrament. The three uppermost of these steps were removed further eastward..."

What I find particularly interesting about this is that the start of the Cambridge Movement, which advocated a return to a more medieval form of service, is said to have had its origins as the result of the Oxford Assize sermon delivered by John Keble on July 14 1833, almost exactly one year after the changes to the steps in the Cathedral. Is this change to the steps, reserving the area east of the altar rails to the ordained clergy, an even earlier implementation of the ideas of this movement? Pelew was appointed Dean in 1828 and almost immediately started a programme of altering the physical layout of parts of the church, principally the south transept, with Salvin as the architect, making provision there for a vestry for the layclerks, and bringing more discipline to the way services were conducted. The change to the altar rails is of course part of this whole move, but seems to be the first alteration to the fabric that is part of the liturgical arrangements.

How should a cathedral look? Since the dissolution of the monasteries Norwich Cathedral had acquired a number of accretions in the form of houses built up against it at the west end, over the cloisters and around the south transept. The Norfolk Record Society volume on the Parliamentary Survey of 1649 and numerous illustrations help build a picture of just how many there were. By the early nineteenth century this was seen as spoiling the visual appreciation of the building and a slow process of clearing them away started. Salvin's 1830s restoration of the south transept was part of this, but those at the west end can still be clearly seen in an engraving of Professor Willis's lecture in 1847, of which

it was reported that "the principles of Gothic Architecture in his hands is a subject which even interests ladies"! The walls of one at the south east end of the cloisters, over the Dark Entry, survived to be incorporated into the recent building of the present library.

The builders' year-end accounts are a fascinating insight into the day-to-day work on the cathedral, whether the dangers involved, working six and a half days a week for thirteen weeks, the mistakes made, and how they spoke. "Pammments", a word I have been familiar with for forty years, suddenly revealed itself to me as a Norfolk contraction when I read a bill where a builder was charging for a quantity of 9" x 9" "pavements"!



The altar steps after the changes, taken from Winkles 'Cathedrals of England and Wales' Vol II London 1838

Members' Sunday (March 22nd 2026)

The Survival & Typology of Labourers' Cottages in Giltcross - Jess Johnston

Historians often make sweeping statements that the buildings of the lower classes don't survive, but as those members of NHBG who remember the talk by Tim Howson on Georgian Cottages in the Maldon District will know, that this is not the case. In vernacular studies these buildings have often been overlooked in favour of the study of those of yeomen and husbandmen.

Over the next year, I will be studying vernacular labourers' cottages of the Giltcross hundred of South Norfolk, which covers these parishes - Banham, Blo' Norton, Bridgham, East Harling, Garboldisham, Gasthorpe, Kenninghall, North Lopham, Quiddenham, Riddlesworth, Rushford & West Harling.



Map of The Domesday hundreds of Norfolk from HC Darby, The Domesday Geography of Eastern England published 1971

Some of these cottages are listed, but others are not and are vulnerable to change. I will be investigating the siting, the materials, the form, function and construction history of these labourers' cottages, and researching how the socioeconomic context of vernacular labourers' cottages has influenced their survival and use over time.

Initially the area was chosen as it was a convenient sub area of Norfolk, but as it spans two landscape character areas. Breckland to the west and the South Norfolk clay lands to the east. it will prove interesting to see if the soil type provides variations in cottage typology and survival rates. There are also distinct landownership patterns with the sandy soil area, which is predominantly under large estate ownership, such as the Shadwell estate, whereas in the East there is a larger number of smaller landowners.

The cottages that I have come across so far range from semi-detached workers cottages in villages, detached cottages in villages and detached cottages on Commons and wayside verges. There are variations in planform and building materials such as being one or two celled, number of storeys, the location of chimney stacks, roofing materials and walling construction.

Leigh Alston has surveyed a cottage in Kenninghall which he believes to have been built c.1600 as a pair of semi-detached tenements. To date I think this is the earliest building of this type in the area and it's likely that the date range for these cottages will be from 1600 to c1850. By 1850 polite materials and more substantial cottages were being built.

Abandonment particularly in earlier times, is likely to have been a common occurrence. Tenants move on, landlords don't wish to make necessary repairs to upgrade the property, and the buildings are left to decay and eventually be ploughed back into the soil. Today, a more common example of the fate of these buildings is demolition and rebuilding.

The Housing Act 1958 provided opportunities to access improvement grants for indoor bathroom facilities. But there are also cases from the 1930s onwards where the cottages were deemed unfit for human habitation and demolished.

There is a wealth of written material on the history of rural England, farming and the landscape by historians such as Tom Williamson and Susanna Wade Martins. I will be exploring rural history right up to the present day as this is likely to provide an understanding of survival.

There are also some interesting 18th century diarists such as Parson Woodforde and Mary Hardy. Who, although living in different parts of Norfolk, may mention visiting cottages in their parishes and provide descriptions of their form and material.



*Orchard Cottage,
North Lopham,
Google street view*

*Cottage in
Blo Norton,
Google street
view*



Richard Cobbold in the mid-19th century goes one step further and paints the homes of his parishioners in Wortham, Suffolk which is only a short distance from my study area. His paintings are important documents which show both interiors and exteriors of the labourers' cottages in his parish. Cobbold comments that "We see monuments remaining in many parishes- but they only tell of the Lords of the soil, the deeds of ancestry, the virtues of the wealthy..... Not a single monument remains to the poor- their costumes in our day, their habits or their lives." For me it is important to investigate and document these cottages as they provide a valuable insight into the lives of the rural labouring classes.

*Samuel Flatman 'a good old
Labourer' painted by Richard
Cobbold. An account of
Wortham, Suffolk 1860*



Please get in touch if you are aware of any vernacular labourers' cottages within my study area or in Norfolk more widely.

Email jj659@cam.ac.uk

The Old Vicarage, Methwold - Ian Hinton



The Old Vicarage is located immediately opposite the church of St George, with its enormous Perpendicular-period spire, elaborate stone capitals and angel roof, demonstrating how much religious investment there was in the parish in the 15/early 16C.



History

The origin of The Old Vicarage and its use are slightly less certain. It has not been used as a vicarage at least since the 1750s and possibly not since the later 17C. There are records of a vicar living here in 1649, but none after that. It had been impropriated (ie transferred into private hands) to the Duke of Norfolk in 1533 and by 1800 it was lived in by two families and was in a serious state. The living was amalgamated with neighbouring Cranwich around this time, but re-divided in the middle of the 19C and a new vicarage for Methwold built in Southery, several miles away across this enormous parish. The house was bought and lived in by Monica & Harry Dance, the founders of SPAB, to prevent its demolition who bequeathed it to The Landmark Trust - it is now managed by them as a holiday rental.

Exterior

The timber-framed element and jetty is of the late 15C - a similar date to many of the pilgrim hostels in Walsingham and the market-infill houses in New Buckenham (dendro 1471), but with additional decoration on the carved jetty brackets, forming capitals.

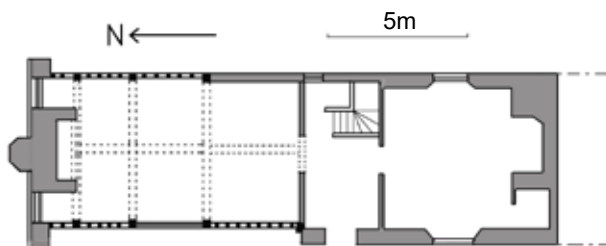
The elaborate stepped brick gable is probably 3 or 4 decades later, with identical terracotta elements in the half-octagonal element of the chimney to those of East Barsham Manor and Great Snoring Rectory - both dated to the early 1520s, so considerable investment was still being made here in the run-up to The Reformation and illustrating the status that the building possessed at that time. The external chimney is part of a three-flued stack, showing that the attic room was also heated (no access now). The four modern windows in the gable end sit beneath moulded-brick hood-moulds with two blocked two-light, gothic-arched windows to the attic floor.

The southern part was built of clunch in the 18C but appears to have been built on earlier footings, so may reflect the massing of the original building. The roof is now pantiled, although must have been thatched originally given the height of the gable.

Interior

The principal room has moulded cross principal joists, with soffits formed into a carved rod entwined with spiral ribbons (similar to, but of poorer quality than, that at The Priory in Magdalen). The common joists are also moulded. The fireplace bressummer has similar decoration as well as a complex drilled pattern and brattishing. The walls are close-studded in heavy-scantling timber throughout, with large wallposts.

The floorplan shows that the brick stack extends well into the room, reaching the decorated principal joist. The remaining timber studs in the east and west walls indicate that there was originally a narrow bay at the north end of the room, allowing for a smoke bay or timber-framed chimney to have heated the building before the brick stack was built, as the jetty shows that the building was always floored.



The Old Vicarage in Methwold has been managed by The Landmark Trust as a retro-style holiday rental since 2002 - no TV, no wi-fi, no central heating. Maggy and I stayed there earlier this month for my birthday.

Upstairs, the principal chamber has a similar elaborate ceiling though slightly less decorated, and both chambers have extensive painted schemes on the walls, including the wall studs.

Discussion

The complicated history of the parish – with links to the Duchy of Lancaster and possibly Castle Acre Priory - makes deciphering the origin of the building difficult. The impropriation to the Duke of Norfolk seems to post-date most of the major building work.

The probable date for the earliest phase of the building coincides with the building of Church Houses throughout the country. They were built after the bishops banned the holding of church ales in the naves of churches. These meetings raised money for the parish poor as well as for specific events and

for the maintenance of the church. Many parishes built new buildings often close to the church to enable the fund-raising to continue. In East Anglia many of them were converted to public houses after the Reformation.

Although the large Fenland-edge parishes were rich, the elaborate decorations could still be seen as too fancy for a priest's house, perhaps the Church House is a better explanation for its richness. Its internal features are very similar inside to one in Holcombe Rogus in Devon

Some church houses went out of use at The Reformation, others lasted a century or so until the mid 1600s. If this house was used as a Vicarage, it may only have been so post-Reformation for about a century or so, if the history is correct. It seems to have been a lay residence for most of its life.

Documentary history derived from NHER and Landmark Trust website

NHBG Research

A Digest of Buildings Visited Since April 2025

This is a digest of the Norfolk houses which the NHBG has been invited to look at and to prepare brief reports on. These are ALL private houses and NO contact may be made with the owners in any way except through the Committee.

These summaries of those reports are to inform members of the work undertaken on behalf of the Group.

Lynne Hodge

22-24 London Road Harleston

This house has a two-storey, timber-framed, but brick-fronted, range running along the street, which is now divided into 3 cottages, with a timber-framed range almost at right-angles at the rear. The brick front can be dated to after a 1907 photograph.

Two close-together principal joists provide evidence that a chimney stack in the centre of the front range was removed and replaced by two separate stacks towards the rear, heating the cottages. The details indicate a 17C build.

It is not clear whether the rear range once contained a small open hall. It consists of large timbers with several mullioned windows and there are strong indications that the common-refter roof was once supported by queen posts. This range appears to be of around 1500.

Lynne Hodge, Ian Hinton & Owen Warnock



Garlic Farm Pulham St Mary

A large two-storey house plus attic, currently being renovated, has had the timber frame up to the midrail replaced by brick. There are opposed doorways at the service end of the hall with stair access in the service bay. The timber sizes throughout the house are very large and generous, with flat-laid joists as wide as the spaces between. An oriel window on the face away from the camera appears to show that the house has been "turned round". The axial joist in the parlour is moulded, as are the common joists with a fancy chamfer termination.

Upstairs some windows have diamond-mullion mortices and shutter slides. The attic is partitioned but contains a full run of 6 queen-post trusses fully braced to purlins and collars, with large race-knife carpenter's marks, apparently in two series.

Many of the features suggest an early 16C date, but the size of the building indicates later. Dendro should help.

Lynne Hodge, Ian Hinton & Christine Shippam



63-64 Bailey Street Castle Acre

Built near the River Nar, outside the south town gate, 63-4 consists of four cells of different ages. The oldest appears to be a well-built brick and flint wrap-round gable with a moulded stone plinth. It contains a fireplace and appears to have been added to a timber-framed building which sits on a flint plinth at a slight angle, now rebuilt in brick. The cell to the north has a knapped-flint outer skin, reputedly of 1925. The brick and flint gable appears to have been built new, rather than recycled. The quantity of brick would suggest it is not earlier than the early 16C, which would fit with the adding of a prestige chimney to a house, or possibly a hostel/inn outside the town.

Ian Hinton, Owen Warnock & Les Scott



The Arch House, Castle Acre

Built just inside the northern town gate with a large amount of salvaged freestone, some decorated, in the exposed west wall, the remainder is built of rubble clunch and flint up to 1.5 storey height, the rest in brick with a flint gable. A second eaves raise is defined by tumbling-in. Much altered inside as it has been two very small cottages in the past with stable/workshop to the rear. Although the reused stone in the gable end indicates a post-Dissolution date, the other gable contains a stone window jamb and a blocked stone-jamb door downstairs suggests that the visible gable may have been added as a chimney to an existing building after the Dissolution.

Ian Hinton, Owen Warnock & Les Scott





Some human bench-end figures in Norfolk

Stokesby
(woman at prayer)

Corporal Acts of Mercy
Feltwell (bury the dead) Forncett (feed the hungry)

Walpole St Peter
(three lifelike faces)

Bedingham

Forncett St Peter
(seated man)

Forncett St Peter
Labours of the months
Sowing Reaping

Wiggenhall St Germain's / Thornham
(Seven deadly sins)
Lust Gluttony

photos: Ian Hinton

