

THE CHURCH OF ST LAURENCE

BRUNDALL



Fig 1

Statement of Significance

On behalf of the Rector and Parochial Church Council

GR: 632161 308453

NHER No. 10254

By Stephen Heywood
Heritage and Landscape
Dept of Planning and Transportation
Norfolk County Council
Norwich
NR1 2SG

Introduction

This report has been requested by the architect, Janet Jury, employed by the Parochial Church Council as a required preliminary to the formal submission of ambitious plans to enlarge the church. This is in order to accommodate the greatly increased congregation brought about by the growth of population in the village which is conveniently near to Norwich for commuters. There has been pressure for extra space since the late 19th century when an aisle was added to the north and in 1962/3 the church was extended to the west (fig. 2)

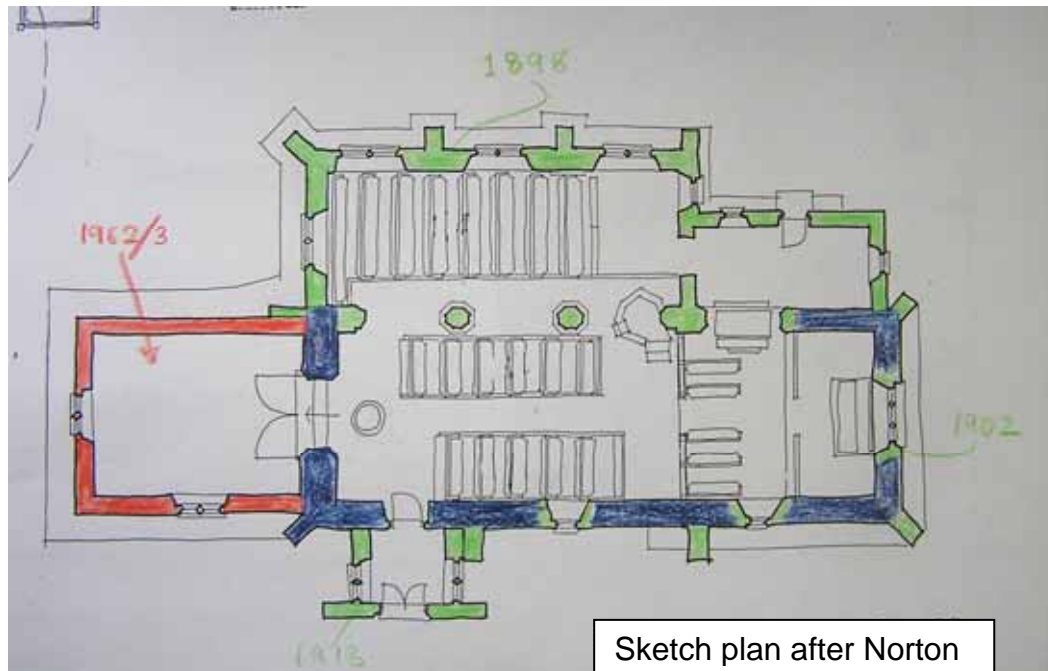


Fig 2

This plan shows how the building has been expanded and altered over the last 120 years. Ladbrooke's lithograph of 1824 shows what the Victorians were faced with on the eve of the religious revival.



Fig 3 J B Ladbrooke 1824

Ladbroke's lithographs of Norfolk Churches are remarkably accurate and an important reference for the history of churches and, in particular, the effect of 19th-century restorations (Fig. 3). From this picture alone it can be seen that there was no porch or north aisle, the windows were of two lights each, the buttresses were bulkier, the west window had a single vertical mullion, the roof was of tiles rather than slates and that the walls were rendered. Only the distinctive bellcote is immediately recognisable.

The surviving medieval fabric has most of its openings rebuilt. However the simple south doorway suggests a date in the 14th century. It has a two-centred arch with plain chamfered ashlar dressings with no further embellishment. Another medieval opening, rarely remarked upon, is in the west wall of the nave and now forms the entrance into the 1963 extension. The opening forms a tall arch with typical late medieval ashlar dressings. The drawings by Michael and Sheila Gooch for the new extension specify re-opening the existing entrance.¹ The blocking of the opening must have contained the west window which has been repositioned in the west wall of the extension. This window was already a Victorian replacement of a cruder opening with a single central mullion shown in Ladbroke (Fig. 3). The medieval dressings of the opening certainly rise to almost the full height of the elevation before forming an arch and are not the remains of a simple western entrance (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The western arch

The tall archway resembles a typical late medieval tower arch and suggests that the church had a western tower which has long since disappeared. When the excavations for the foundations of the new extension were made in 1963 no report was made of a discovery of the remains of a former tower. However, the lack of other evidence does

not rule out the strong possibility of there having been a tower in the position of the present western extension.

There are many reports of towers having collapsed and this often led to the erection of a simple bell cote on the west gable-end. The bell cote at Brundall may have been erected for similar reasons but it has become its most defining characteristic (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5

The bell cote has obviously undergone a number of repairs in the last hundred years or so but retains a pair of chamfered two-centred arches which would not look amiss dated in the late Middle Ages. However its simplicity renders it impossible to date on stylistic evidence alone. Very prominent on its eastern side is the dripstone relating to an earlier roof which was taller and also of a steeper pitch. Ladbroke (Fig. 3) shows a roof of a similar pitch with vacant drip stones indicating that the original roof had already been replaced by 1824. It was replaced a second time in the early 20th century. The bell cote has provision for two bells but there is only one.

The Norfolk Record Office has a number of drawings with various proposals for adding aisles to the church. The most accomplished set of drawings are by Alfred W Morant (fig. 6).

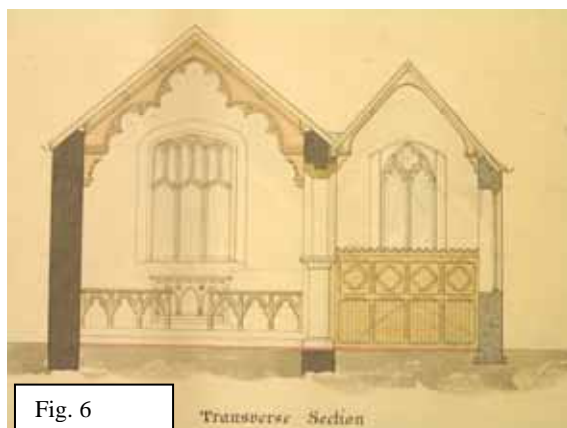


Fig. 6

The others are by J Lacey dated to 1898. Lacey's designs proposed lean-to roofs to new aisles while Morant proposed separate roofs altogether (Fig 6). The latter method was chosen and built onto the north side with a fine arcade in the 14th-century style with octagonal piers (Fig.7). The other elaborations proposed by Morant were

dropped.



Fig. 7

In 1962/3 the architects Michael and Sheila Gooch added the western extension opening up what has been thought to have been a former tower arch.. The cost was £2,234 8 shillings and 7d. The former west window was incorporated in the new west wall and the south wall was given a two-light mullion window. A new room was built in the church yard to a polygonal plan in 1970 to the designs of B Henderson Gray.

Interior

The earliest part of the building is a late Romanesque capital of mid to late 12th-century date (Fig.8). It is not in situ and is re-used as a corbel for the aisle roof at its eastern end. The capital has provision for a freestanding nook shaft and was probably part of a doorway, perhaps belonging to a Norman church on this site preceding the present building.

Also of considerable antiquity is the extraordinary font made of cast lead with repeated crucifixion representations in relief.

There are only 27 lead fonts surviving in the country most of the many others having



Fig. 8

been melted down² Each scene is enclosed in decorated borders. This decoration is not immediately recognisable as typically medieval and may date the piece to the 16th century with the introduction of the Renaissance (fig.9).



Fig. 9

Although the reliefs are unmistakable representations of the Crucifixion the crosses themselves are not shown. It is possible that these were painted on along with the rest of the font presenting a colourful focus for baptism. The base is of the early 20th century.

The construction of the aisle necessitated the rebuilding of the nave roof. In order to accommodate a regular arcade with sensible two centred arches the level of the wall plates needed to be raised and the incongruous few courses of brick work on the top of the south wall are probably a result of this (Fig.1). The roof itself is unremarkable: of trusses tied with collars and linked with butt purlins (Fig. 10). The 1898 aisle has a slightly more elaborate roof of arch braced trusses carried on wall posts with stone corbels



Fig. 10

Most of the furnishings and embellishments of the church took place in the early 20th century. The record office holds the following Consistory Court case papers:

- 1902 Chancel east window
- 1903 Memorial window
- 1911 Chancel screen
- 1913 Porch
- 1919 Two stained glass windows
- 1924 Reredos, altar, altar rails and panelling
- 1934 Memorial tablet
- 1951 War memorial
- 1955 Rewiring and installation of heating³

In addition to this must be added the renewal and re-design of all the windows, the pews and pulpit. It is not within the remit of this report to enumerate all the fine memorials and tablets. However, particularly worthy of note is the chancel panelled reredos with linenfold decoration and the bold Gothic Revival screen with the modern painted rood above.

As regards the glass the Flemish roundel of St Laurence holding his grill is a fine piece probably of 17th-century date in grisaille with yellow. Of the 19th and 20th-century glass the east window of 1902 by Clayton and Bell and the west window by Charles Kempe (fig. 11) are particularly worthy of note. Also of interest is the single quarry decoration of the two vestry windows consisting of each quarry having one of a variety of designs which would have been chosen from a catalogue (fig.12)



Fig.11



Fig.12

Conclusion

The church of St Laurence retains only a small amount of its original medieval fabric and has been very thoroughly restored and extended during the 19th and 20th centuries. Its most distinctive feature is the bell cote which has lost some of its pride of place through the 1963 extension. Internal features which require special care are the Romanesque capital serving as a corbel and the lead font both of which are valuable.

In the light of the present proposals which may include the removal of the north aisle there is no significant loss of historic fabric or features of particular artistic merit, provided that suitable places are found to keep the Romanesque capital and the St Laurence glass roundel.

It appears that much discussion revolves around the need for a bell tower. This would have the advantage of making the church easier to find as well as an opportunity for campanology. In relation to this it is worth remembering that the evidence suggests that it did originally have a tower. The bell cote was an economic alternative to rebuilding the tower.

Stephen Heywood FSA. Norfolk County Council. February 2008

¹ See Norfolk Record Office PD453/16. Drawing No. 19, 6/4/62

² See Lawrence Weaver, 'Some English Architectural Leadwork' *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 8, No. 34. January 1906.

³ Norfolk Record Office: DN/CON 163, 164, 172, 174, 183, 193, 205.