

Statement of Significance

Blofield

St Andrew & St Peter's Church

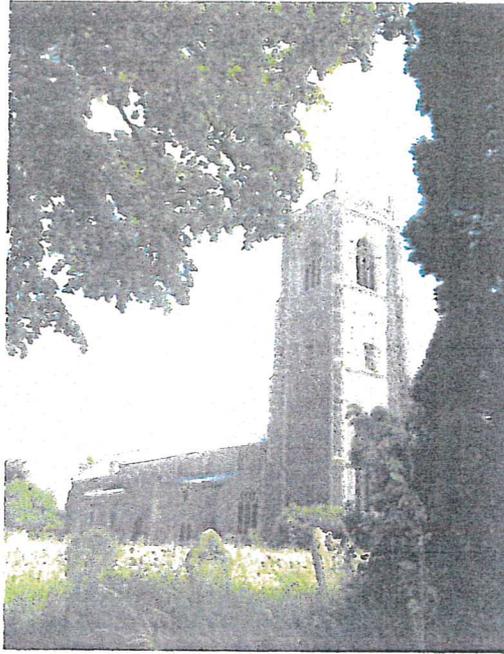


Photo courtesy of John Parfitt Photography

General information.

Benefice:	Blofield & Hemblington within the Deanery of Blofield
Diocese:	Norwich
Address:	St Andrew & St Peter Church, Church Road, Blofield Norfolk NR13 4NA
Grid ref:	OS Reference: TG 33530 09193
Local Planning Authority:	Broadland District Council
Listing:	Grade I

Introduction

The magnificent tower standing 110 feet high is a landmark attracting visitors from their first glimpse of it on the main road from city to sea and then into quiet Church Road. Framed by trees, it looks across a couple of valley fields to its open air neighbour at Braydeston.

From the tower top Happisburgh lighthouse can be seen on a clear day and Norwich Cathedral to the west.

The plinth and buttresses are panelled in flush-work, unusual tracery fills the sound holes on each face and four figures form the corner pinnacles. In 1605 'one of the Kinges blown down was set up again on the steple'.

1.1 Location and setting

Blofield church stands at the edge of the village which has a long history. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book as Blafelda – a site near a river. The stream at the church's southern boundary was once large enough for barges to carry Caen stone for building the church. Nearby was a moated Manor House belonging to the pre-reformation Bishop's of Norwich. The Manor of Blofield passed from the Bishop into lay hands and in the 16th and 17th centuries was held by Thomas and then Edward Paston. In 1704 the Masters and Fellows of Gonville and Caius college Cambridge acquired the patronage. The largest church in the Blofield Hundred it owes its size to the prosperity of the wool trade in Norfolk and to the presence of the Bishop as Lord of the Manor.

Adjacent buildings

Beech House, of ancient origin, held a village school between 1724 and 1878 funded by the Revd Charles Reve. On the other side of Church Alley, The Old Hall was The Rectory from about 1806 until 1950 replacing one to the east of the church. Thatched cottages stand further along Church Road and mellow brick barns are relics of Church Farm. Villagers from slightly further afield walked to services along Church Alley. Lamps hanging from brackets on the trees (one remains) lit the way to evening worship.

Boundaries

Flint walls, hedges and a dyke border the churchyard which has gradually extended over the years. It is entered through a lychgate designed by the Revd Claude Messent and given by Joseph Brewster in memory of his wife. Another carved wooden gate is in memory of a parishioner. At the bottom of the churchyard are the remains of a gate which once led into the grounds of the Rectory pre 1806.

White's directory tells of an oak tree planted in the churchyard by the Revd James Carlos (rector 1769 – 1804). Its wood was used for the new west doors in 1844.

1.2 The Churchyard

This contains many interesting memorials and affords fine views of the church. It occupies approximately 1.5 hectares. A public footpath divides the westerly "New Churchyard" (one third) from the eastern part occupied by the church. The "New Churchyard" is the main site of tended graves and is under the care of the parish council as it is closed for new graves.

A line of lime trees inside the wall bounding Church Road are the subject of tree preservation orders. They were planted in 1820 by William Codling, master of Reve's school.

There are a number of other mature/semi-mature trees in the churchyard. These are mainly beech, ash, oak, and yew.

The sward of the original churchyard has been managed for many years in accordance with the Norwich diocese churchyard conservation scheme. The last detailed survey was carried out in 2005 by Dr Bob Leaney. It is floristically rich with one of the best displays of oxeye daisies. The management work is carried out by Blofield and District Conservation Group with the help of church members.



1.3 Social History

The entry step to the church is worn down by the feet of worshippers over nearly 6 centuries. The interior step is the reversed gravestone of an unknown person of rank.

Above the porch was once a schoolroom where pupils were taught by the Revd Charles Reve. In his will in 1724 he left provision for a school room and master in Beech House across the road and monies to further the education of those beyond primary school years. The 'Reve Educational Fund' is still making grants totalling £400 pa.

In registers of 1660 the priest, Alexander Shipdham, referred to the difficulties of keeping the register seeing the 'abominable destruction of this kingdom' in the civil war and the 'murder of his Majesty Charles before his own gates at Whitehall'.

Significant personalities.



Edward Paston, 1550-1630, of the well known Norfolk family, was Lord of the Manor here and requested to be buried in the chancel at Blofield. A large wall memorial shows Edward, his wife and 9 of their children in prayer. This memorial was repaired and cleaned in the early months of 2014. Memorials to others of the Paston family are on floor slabs; young Margaret Paston who died in 1689 has an epitaph written by the poet laureate John Dryden. By the time this epitaph was published in a book of poetry the wording had been altered so that our wording is his first edition.

Sir Peter Eade (d. 1915) was surgeon, benefactor to the village and thrice Mayor of Norwich. He is buried in the churchyard and his life commemorated in the east window.

Margaret Harker (d. 1935) was a local benefactress. Her work with the Red Cross, St John ambulance brigade, infant welfare centre, Scots fisher girls and WWI war hospital is depicted in 2 windows in the south aisle. The Scots fisher girl scene was incorporated into the opening credits of 'An Island Parish' shown early 2011.



1.4 History of the building

At least one previous church stood here. Traces of Norman work are said to have been found to the north of the north aisle in the structure during repair works done at the end of the 19th century.

In a reference to a previous building a letter records that in 1299 Ralph de Ebor (York) occupied Blofield Church with force and arms. Our present church was built between 1380 and 1420s using flint with Caen stone dressings.

The church consists of a north porch, west tower, nave, north and south aisles and a chancel.

It was built from east to west between c. 1380 and c. 1440; the nave & aisles date from 1380–90; arcades, clerestory, chancel, east window and flooring, between 1400 and 1440; and the tower between 1426 and 1436.

A priest's vestry off the chancel was added in 1850 and a boiler room in 1912. With these exceptions the footprint of the church is much as it was at the time of its dedication in 1427.

1.5 Changes to the building

We know that the chancel's five windows once contained rich and beautiful specimens of heraldic glass and arms in the stalls represented the families of Paston, Suckling, Munday, Jannys, Bostock and Crofts. A chapel of the Blessed Virgin was endowed and well furnished. These have gone as has the upper part of rood screen. In 1812 a faculty was granted to block the north and south windows of the chancel and unblock the east window. We do not know when this was originally blocked. White's directories record that in about 1864 eight windows were blocked up. In 1878-80 unsightly, flat ceilings were removed and a new nave roof was made, pitched at its original level. In 1907-8 the chancel arch was rebuilt, a flying buttress erected and the rood stairway was blocked up. Mr Caroe was the architect for this work.

1.6 Within the church.



Photo courtesy of John Parfitt Photography

Memorials

Ledger slabs in the chancel commemorate priests from early days of this church and, in the nave and aisles, the warm, earth colours of bricks and pammets are divided by islands of blue-grey ledger slabs naming parishioners through the ages. Thomas Howes, sometime Rector here, was one of the executors of Sir John Falstaff's will, along with the Paston's. His father is buried in the chancel.

Bells

In 1552 Blofield was one of the few churches which had five bells, with the largest (a tenor) weighing in at 18 hundredweight. The present 7th bell dates from the mid fifteenth century. A treble bell was added in 1826 and two more in 1980. An additional chiming bell, cast at Whitechapel, was added in 2003. The bells are rung for every Sunday and festivals. They ring half-muffled during the Good Friday procession of witness and on Remembrance Day. Beneath the tower is a vestry from which an ancient door leads to the belfry stairway. A beautiful Gothic tower arch has intersections of two arcs in the style typical of the 1400s.

Font

The font is of exceptional interest and unusual as regards the carvings depicting scenes from the life of Christ. Areas still show pigment, a vestige of its early colourful days. Pevsner dated it to the 15th century. Originally placed at the west end of the nave behind a nave screen it was re-sited in 2012 to a bay in the north aisle where it can be seen by the congregation. Its removal from the west end opened up a self contained space (the 'welcome space') which is widely used by the church and community.

Wall painting

The consecration cross on the north wall is the only remaining one of twelve crosses made on the walls which would have been anointed with holy oil by the bishop at the church's consecration (about 1427) and later coloured.

Chancel

In the chancel are a good dropped window cill sedilia and a 15th century angle piscina with beautifully carved arches in both sides. A large wall memorial to Edward Paston in 1630 shows his entire family beneath a rainbow arc of letters which translate "Death by Death, You rise before me, Light to lead me, Path of Life". Amongst fine silver ware are a paten and flagon dated 1719 which were given by Charles Reve, rector and benefactor, who gave the village a school in 1727.

Chancel Screen

The remaining lower part of the screen is painted with 6 apostles on either side. Some repainting has been done in the 19th century but a considerable amount of medieval painting is visible on each panel. Carved figures of St Andrew with cross and St Peter with keys border the entrance to the chancel.

Pews

Some pews have carved poppy heads thought to date from the 15th century. Carved elbow pieces show a bishop seated in a chair, a man with a rosary kneeling at a faldstool, and a griffon (symbol of the Paston family).

Box pews were introduced in the early 18th century. These were placed in the aisles and four rows, rising, behind the 15th century pews in the nave. The 15th century pews were reserved for the poor men and women of the parish. The introduction of the box pews saw the construction of a Georgian screen at the back of the nave seating. In 1912 a faculty was granted for the removal of all the box pews and Georgian screen, however, only the aisle seats were taken out. In the 1930's pews from the now ruined church of St Peter, North Burlingham were purchased and placed in the south aisle. The north aisle was pewed in 1957 when the screen in the north aisle was erected.

Stained glass

Probably the most significant stained glass is that in memory of Margaret Harker depicting local scenes in her life and work. Pevsner regarded them as the finest example of Edwardian Baroque.

The earliest of the other stained glass windows, memorials to the lives of parishioners, date from 1878, with many installed in the early 20th century and a war memorial window in the 1950s. Designers were J. Hardman & Co., Kempe & Tower, Ward & Hughes, J & J King and artists Donald Taunton, Reginald Bell and Thomas J Scott. The remaining windows are glazed with yellow tinted Victorian glass.

Other additions

There have been a number of Victorian additions and alterations. The chancel roof was raised and re-roofed in 1879 and choir stalls installed. A Victorian Gothic stone reredos, in the style of Edwin Tench, was erected beneath the high east window. The pulpit was given by the Revd Turnbull in 1847. A succession of three organs installed during the Victorian era gave way in 1999 to a Hill organ from a redundant church in Upper Holloway.

In 1926-7 an oak screen with fine linen-fold carving was built across the tower arch creating a tower vestry.

In 2012 a new heating system was installed transforming the ambience of the place. From a chilly average temperature of 8.5 degrees C in winter months we now have a guaranteed 18 degrees C when the building is occupied.

The kitchen and toilet

Within the church is a kitchen (west end of the south aisle) and a toilet (west of the north aisle door lobby). These have proved invaluable since they were installed but need upgrading to comply with today's stringent environmental health regulations.

In conclusion

This is a medieval church of large dimensions which has had few alterations. Victorian restorations and additions have been of high quality craftsmanship.

1.7 Significance for Mission

Blofield Parish church is a well attended church seeking to move beyond services at 8.00 am and 11.00 am each Sunday. The usual average Sunday attendance in 2013 was the highest since 1992. The Christingle Service in December 2013 drew 425 people: by far the largest number we have seen. A communion service is held here on Wednesdays at 9.30am. A Monthly Messy Church began at Christmas 2013.

We have made many links with the members of the community who now use our building. Poppies café on Wednesday mornings attracts 35 people upwards and Poppies toddlers in the afternoon meets the needs of parents/carers and preschool children. A pantomime group rehearses here, PCC meetings are all held in the welcome space at the west end or in the chancel. A bereavement group is forming and has had initial training in the church.

The church is an open church and this has helped to break down barriers with the wider community. It is an increasingly popular venue for weddings with 10 booked in 2014.

1.8 Bibliography

Local historians

County record office.

Norwich heritage centre

Castle Museum

Kelly's, White's and other local directories.

N. Pevsner Buildings of Britain

Francis Blomefield An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk

Arthur Mee The King's England

Mortlock and Roberts The Popular Guide to Norfolk Churches.

Dr Bob Leaney churchyard expert

BADCOG flora and fauna records