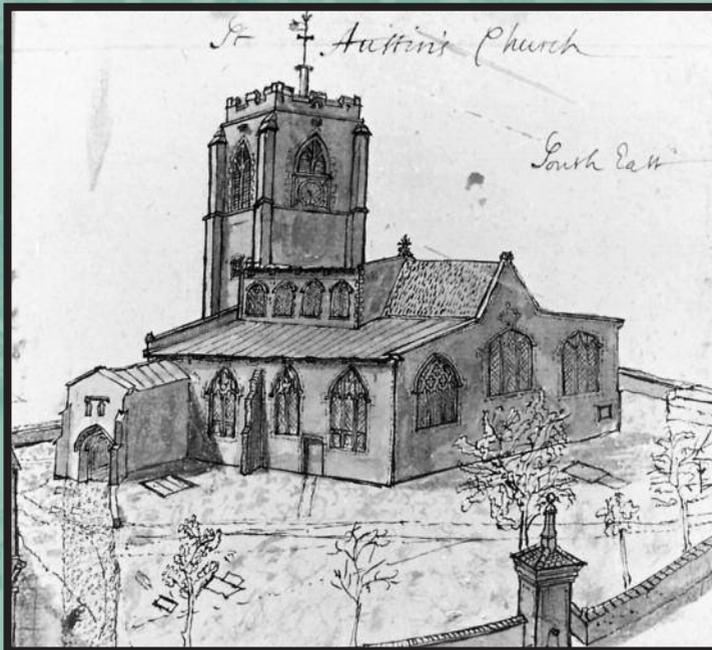


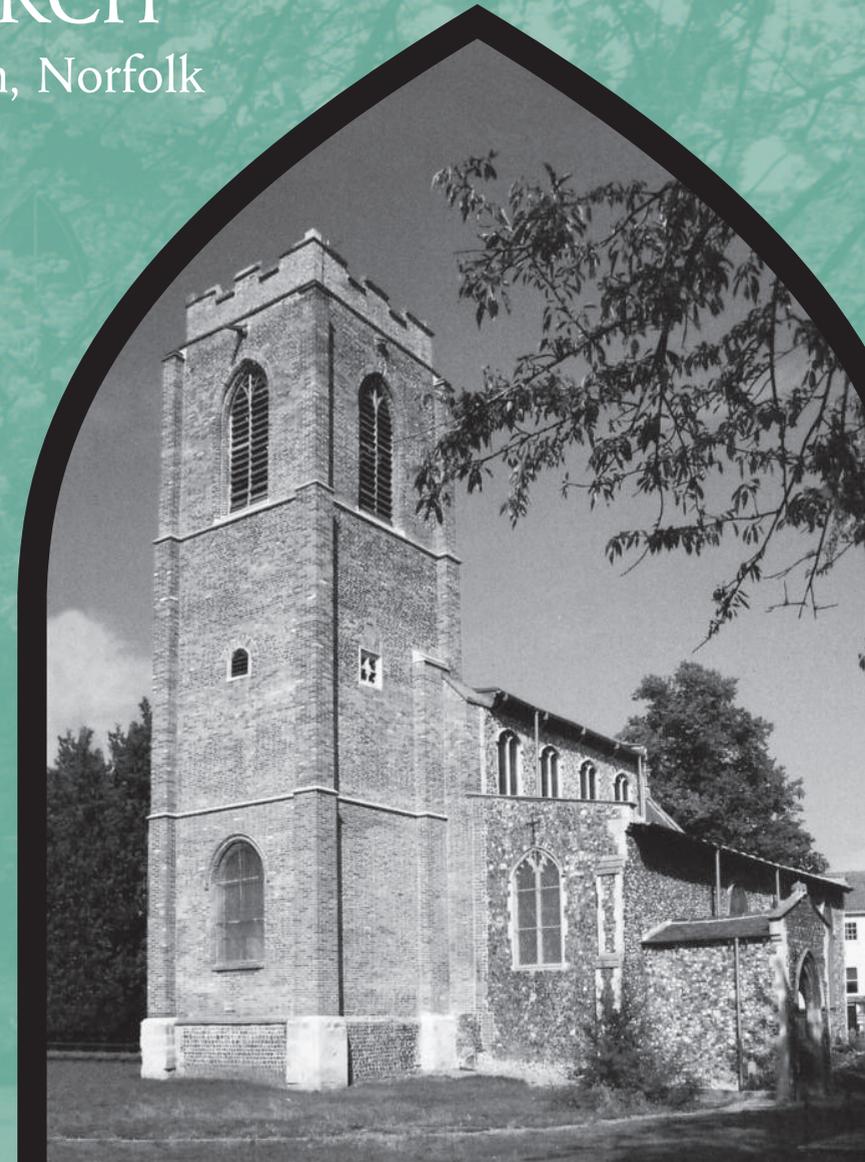


THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# ST AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH

Norwich, Norfolk



THE CHURCHES  
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Norwich, Norfolk

# ST AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH

by Stuart McLaren (former Head of Heritage Publishing, HMSO, now a freelance editor and local history researcher)



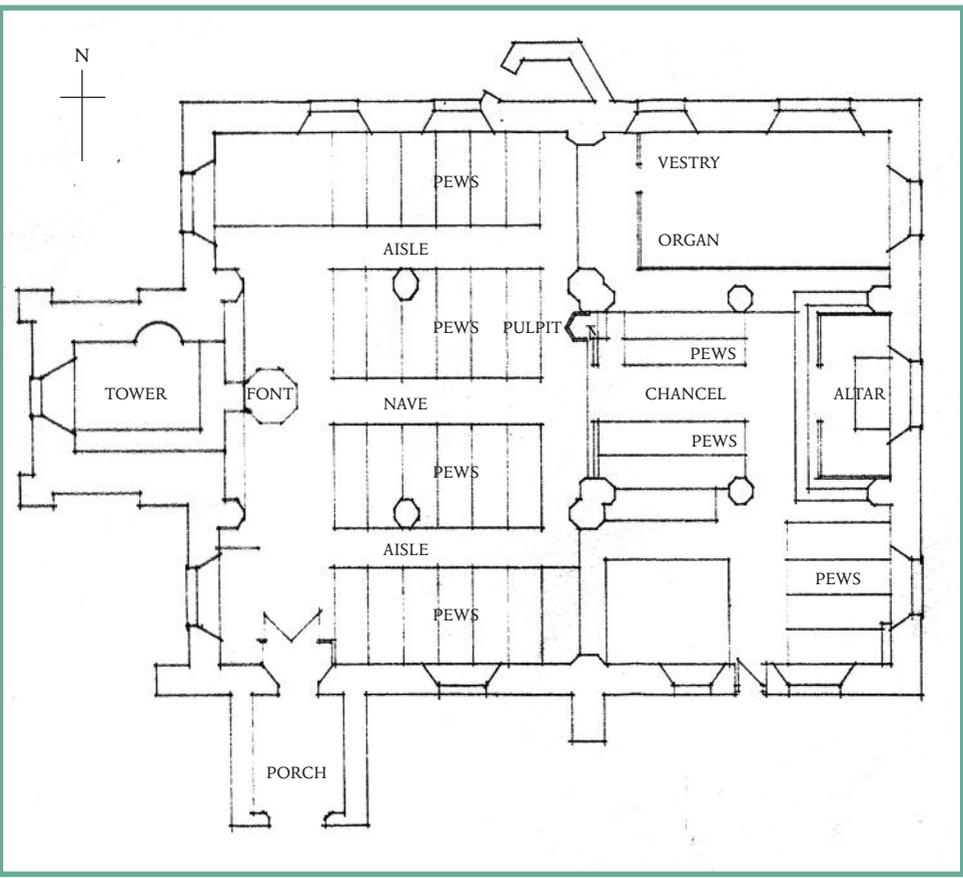
St Augustine's appears at first sight to possess relatively few claims to architectural or historical distinction. Certainly the Victorian gazetteers had little to say about it: 'An unpresuming edifice with a square tower' is a typical comment. Yet there is much of interest here.

The church lies outside the modern inner ring road, but within what remains of the city's walled boundary, the only surviving pre-Reformation church in Norwich so situated. This area has long been known as *ultra aquam* or Over-the-Water (i.e. north of the river Wensum) and set apart from the rest of the city. Until well into the 18th century the parish was still quite rural and included, to the west of the church, an area known as the Gildencroft where jousting and archery had anciently been practised. As Norwich expanded and grew richer, however, the rural aspect of St Augustine's disappeared, but a certain marginality persisted.

The parish, while industrious, has never been rich. In the Elizabethan period many immigrants, escaping from persecution in the Low Countries, settled here. Known collectively as the Strangers, they worked principally in the manufacture of textiles, a trade that enriched Norwich and made some of them their fortune. As so often, the wealthier citizens moved out. Without their patronage the church gradually fell into disrepair. During the 18th and 19th centuries congregations dwindled, partly through the rise in Nonconformity, particularly the Quakers. By the 1870s the situation was acute. The interior of the church was described as 'a wilderness of horsebox pews', while a breach in the churchyard wall left it 'exposed to the inroads of boys and donkeys'.

Front cover: The tower (S J McLaren)  
Left: Interior looking south-east  
(Christopher Dalton)

*Below: Exterior from the north-east  
(Christopher Dalton)*



At this date it was arranged as a 'preaching' or 'auditory' church, the pews turned toward a three-decker pulpit at the west end so that worshippers sat with their backs to the altar. (There is a fine example of this arrangement in The Churches Conservation Trust's church at Fylingdales in North Yorkshire.) Most of this was swept away with the appointment of the Revd W A Elder in 1877, who raised money for a thorough restoration in the new 'Ecclesiologist' style under the direction of the Diocesan Surveyor, Richard Malikwaine Phipson, whose work can be seen all over Norfolk and Suffolk, perhaps most notably at Ickburgh.

The impoverished, marginal nature of the area did not change, even in the 20th century, when slum clearances swept away many of the area's overcrowded, insanitary 'yards'. Factory closures brought widespread unemployment leading many to seek new lives elsewhere. The church itself was made redundant in 1997, the congregation being fearful of the cost of repairs. In April 2000 it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust and extensive repairs, particularly to the tower, were carried out under the supervision of Ruth Blackman of Birdsall, Swash and Blackman of Hingham.

This work was completed in 2002. Restoration of the churchyard, undertaken by City Works with the financial help of Norwich City Council and English Heritage, was completed in 2003.

## The CHURCH

While there is no clear indication about which St Augustine is remembered in the dedication, there had been links between this church and the Augustinian priory of Llanthony Secunda in Gloucester from as early as 1163. Their rule was based on the teachings of St Augustine of Hippo and so it is possible that it is the theologian and not the missionary, St Augustine of Canterbury, who was originally commemorated here.

One of the best views of the church is from Botolph Street to the south-east. From here the church is outlined against the sky, its chancel, nave and tower receding in perspective, clustered about with mature trees in a large churchyard a metre or so higher than the road level outside. To the south is a narrow lane with what is said to be the longest row of Tudor cottages in England. At its western end is a terrace of sheltered housing for the elderly built in the 1950s and a small recreation ground: all that remains of Norwich's ancient Gildencroft. At the end of this lane is Chatham Street. South of here is what remains of the Friends Meeting House (built 1699), badly damaged in the Second World War, and the Quaker burial ground.



Although the nave is said to have Saxon proportions, no physical evidence of the Saxo-Norman church known to have been in the possession of Llanthony Secunda Priory in the 12th century has survived. In plan the church is almost square, the only protrusions being the south porch, the west tower and the rood stair turret on the north. The exterior walls, with the exception of the tower and rood turret, are composed of knapped flint and mortar intermixed with a little brick, and with stone quoins at some of the angles. While the bulk of the church probably dates from the early 15th century, there have been so many periods of dilapidation and restoration that it is now quite difficult to establish what is original and what replacement. The windows are a case in point. Extensive work on the windows was undertaken in the late 19th century, so much of their fabric is probably not now mediaeval. Most are Perpendicular in style, although a few have Decorated tracery, almost certainly Victorian replacements in the then fashionable Gothic style.

**THE NAVE** The nave (minus its aisles) has, as has been noted, Saxon proportions, being short, narrow and quite tall. In the late 14th or early 15th century, broad aisles were added to the north and south, extending the whole width of the church. A four-light clerestory was presumably added at this period, the windows being Perpendicular in style with Y-tracery mullions. Inside it is clear that the north and south aisles' two-bay arcades were built at different dates, as they are oddly asymmetrical. The capitals of the south arcade differ in style and are a good 30cm lower than those of the north, where the arching is also more regular. The 16th-century roof is one of the finest of this period in Norwich, its date established by wills of 1525 and 1531. Its timbers, stained almost black and decorated with red star-shaped bosses, are arched with painted heraldic figures on the corbels. The font is 15th-century with an octagonal basin supported on a polypodal stem. The finely carved head of a young man on the font cover looks Carolean in style. It seems to have no obvious religious meaning and has perhaps come from a secular piece of furniture.

**THE CHANCEL** The chancel is only a few metres shorter and narrower than the nave. A priest's door provides access to the south-east end of the aisle, which according to the will of a local worsted weaver, John Dows (d. 1499), was once known as the Lady Chapel. There is a large, square piscina on the right. James Sillett's lithograph of 1828 clearly shows a chimney on the roof above here, probably indicating that a fireplace had been installed in what may then have been the vestry or perhaps in a private pew. No trace of this remains. When the Norwich antiquarian John Kirkpatrick visited the church in the early 18th century, he peered into a vault beneath the altar in which four coffins were placed, one above another. The sanctuary is raised up on a step and enclosed behind a simple Victorian communion rail. It has been suggested that the original Jacobean 'dumb-bell' rail was recycled for use in the gallery of the west tower. The north chapel, once known as the St John Chapel, is now the vestry. An Arts & Crafts-style copper plaque commemorates the restoration and enlargement of the vestry screen in 1915. The organ, originally in St Peter Hungate, Norwich, was installed here in 1906. The choir stalls and pulpit date from Phipson's restorations of the 1880s. The chancel roof is steeply pitched and scissor-beam in construction and also dates from this period. In contrast, the lean-to timber roofs of the north and south aisles are probably 15th-century. The north aisle roof is particularly fine, with fretwork tracery in the spandrels and carved cresting along the rafters. A blocked door, now only visible inside the vestry, formerly provided access to the churchyard here (the parsonage house once stood to the north-east). Outside, the broad, three-light eastern gable with its scattering of wall monuments is quite unlike any other in Norwich.

*Right: Interior looking west (Christopher Dalton)*





*St Augustine's in 1828 – lithograph by James Sillett. © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery*

**THE TOWER** St Augustine's tower is certainly its most distinguishing feature, earning its parishioners the name Red Steeplers. It is built of a reddish-orange brick in three diminishing stages separated by string-courses, with clasped brick buttresses on a flint base with stone pilasters, possibly the remains of the earlier tower. The first stage has a single, large, mullionless window on its west face. The second stage has decorative stone sound holes on the north, west and east faces, all possibly reused from the earlier tower, as were perhaps the gargoyle rain spouts round the top of the third stage, which has large, louvered windows on each face. A battlemented parapet and weather vane complete the tower.

The present tower replaced one that fell in 1677. The reason it collapsed is not known, though it had probably been in a poor state of repair for decades. The year is known from just one contemporary source: a chronicle compiled by a certain Mr Nobbs, schoolmaster and clerk of St Gregory's, Norwich who also recorded that in 1682 the tower had begun to be rebuilt. Evidently, the work took five years to complete. Kirkpatrick's sketch of c. 1713 shows the date

1687 on the east face of the brick parapet (see back cover). This disappeared from view for over 200 years until the 18th-century cement rendering was removed during recent conservation work. The faint, damaged figures of the date are best viewed with a pair of binoculars.

In the aftermath of the Great Fire of London in 1666, a move away from the use of stone towards mainly brick construction began to gain momentum. Brick was becoming fashionable and was also cheaper than building in stone. The increased demand for brick led to a freeing up of the trade to non-guild artisans who could move more easily beyond the major urban centres to find building contracts. The year of completion of St Augustine's tower was a watershed in the Norwich construction industry, the year when the percentage of bricklayers and tylers, known as 'red masons', compared with other building tradesmen began to rise steeply, and to be more frequently distinguished in contracts and official records from stone masons. Before 1750, there were few permanent brickyards in Norfolk, and it seems likely that for such jobs as the new tower at St Augustine's bricks were supplied

from temporary brickyards run by itinerant brick makers. In such situations, the bricks were usually fired locally in clamps rather than in permanent kilns; the 'green' (unfired) bricks piled up in great heaps and baked by burning wood, peat or coal beneath them. The newly fashionable red colouring of the brick came from using clay with high iron oxide content. The redness was sometimes improved by adding refuse from the leather making and brewing industries, which were much in evidence locally during this period. The uneven temperatures obtained during firing led to a variety of red-orange tones, as can be seen in the tower's pleasingly mottled terracotta appearance. During repairs done in 2001, Jeff Atthowe and Lee Jenkinson, the bricklayer, made every effort to match the existing brickwork.

A clock seems to have been attached to the eastern face of the tower at the time of its completion – a dial with the date 1687 can be seen in Kirkpatrick's sketch. This finally became derelict in 1877 and a new, electric-powered clock was installed in 1927. The tower originally housed three bells. These were removed in 1996, when the tower was considered to be in danger of collapse, and rehung in All Saints, Carleton Rode. Two were the work of the Norwich bell-making family, Brend, and the third was cast by Edward Tooke. All pre-date 1677 so were evidently salvaged from the fallen tower. There are bells stencilled on the curious stone tablet commemorating the sextons John Goose *père et fils*, placed high up inside the tower above the ringing floor. A board, once placed inside the tower, dated 1816, records the 'knockes for the dead' – the number of tolls of the bell due according to the rank of the deceased.

**THE PORCH** A south porch was presumably added soon after the addition of the south aisle in the late 14th or early 15th century. It has been reconstructed on a number of occasions. Kirkpatrick's sketch may show the original structure, with angled, stepped buttresses and a wide entrance arch in the Perpendicular style. It was also taller than the present porch – the apex of its pitched roof abutting the south aisle wall just below the line of its lean-to roof. The extra

height is probably accounted for by the existence of a parvise or small first-floor room above the porch. A double window above the entrance in Kirkpatrick's sketch seems to confirm this, while a small squinched section, which can still be seen across the south-west angle of the interior walls of the church, may have been part of a now lost porch stair. The porch was rebuilt in 1726, when the parvise and the angled buttresses were lost. James Sillett's lithograph of 1828 shows the porch much as it is today, although with a small niche above the entrance arch. The porch was again rebuilt in the 1880s, when the niche disappeared and the simple Norman-style arch over the entrance was replaced with a moulded arch in the Gothic style. Wooden gates were added across the entrance to the porch in memory of a long-serving churchwarden in 1947, possibly to discourage vagrants, a perennial problem: 300 years earlier a parishioner had been fined for allowing his wife to sleep in the porch. The interior contains one memorial on its east side: an austere but nonetheless attractive slate tablet to the infant son of Edmund and Elizabeth Reeve dated 1738. Further Reeve memorials are to be found within the church.

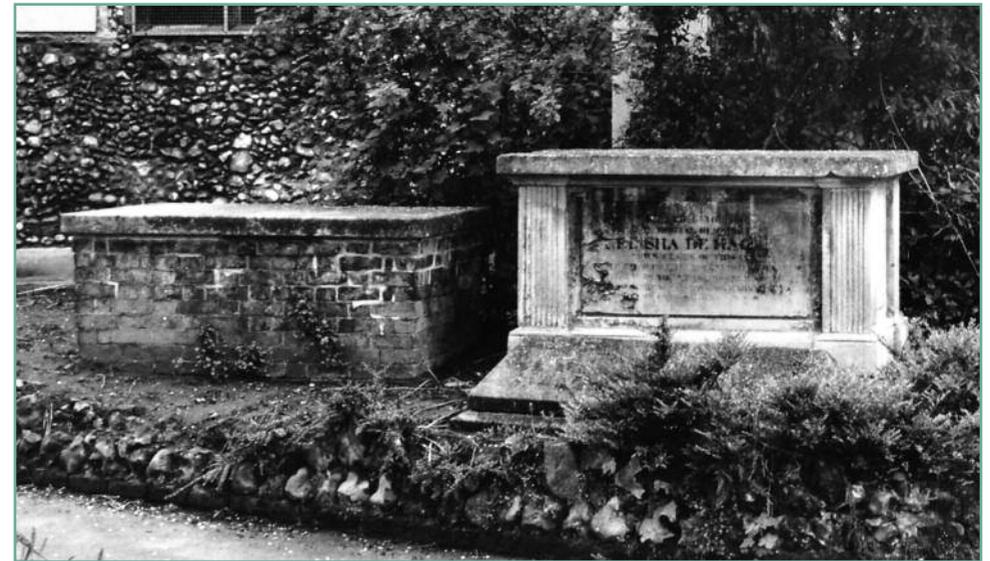
**THE ROOD STAIR TURRET** The turret on the exterior of the north side of the church is positioned at the junction of the nave and chancel aisles. It is three-sided and mainly constructed in brick, though of lesser quality than the tower. Two small lancet windows at the top face north-west and north-east. Originally, it was only accessible from within the church, but that entrance was closed up, probably in the restoration work undertaken in the 1880s. Steps once led to a small gallery housing a private pew that looked down into the church. No evidence of this or the interior entrance remains and the turret is now only accessible via an outside door, which provides access to the church's heating system. One fragment of the rood screen is preserved in the church. It depicts St Apollonia, holding a pair of tongs with a tooth, an emblem of her martyrdom. She was a popular votive saint in the Middle Ages, being invoked against toothache.

## TOMBS AND MONUMENTS

In 1894 the churchyard was made into a public garden, when most of the tombstones were moved to the northern and western margins. Sadly, most of these are now either broken or illegible. Amid fears that the space would be 'blasted by children's boisterous playing' (a perennial worry, it seems), the mayor at the opening ceremony spoke wistfully of: 'The grateful earnest of eternal peace'. For much of the 20th century the churchyard was noted for its display of flowers and shrubs, but in recent years the cost of this could not be maintained. Only a few of the larger table tombs remain *in situ*, mostly on the south side of the churchyard, although there is a curious Victorian pyramidal tomb in the north-east belonging to the Hinde family, local silk shawl manufacturers. (Note the entrance to Hinde's Yard across the street.) There are a number of monuments on the porch and on the south and east exterior walls, though most have succumbed to the weather and their inscriptions are now either erased or too faint to read. There is, however, a fine 18th-century monument on the east gable that is still legible, commemorating eight Jolly children – seven of whom died in infancy and one at the age of 69!

*The church contains many interesting tombs and monuments, dating from the 17th to the 20th century.*

Although Kirkpatrick noted several brasses when he visited the church in the early 18th century, none now remains. A number of the wall monuments and ledger slabs on the floor bear witness to the impact of immigrant 'Stranger' families on the parish; their names – Castell, Decele, De Hague, Delatate, Deneaw and Tavernier – are those of the well-to-do descendants of 16th-century religious refugees and economic migrants from France and the Low Countries, many of whom were skilled weavers. Elisha de Hague (1718?-92), a lawyer, was Town Clerk and Speaker of the Common Council of Norwich for 20 years. His family tomb is just to the south of the church. The parish's involvement in manufacturing in the 19th century is represented by two notable wall monuments. One in the nave, on the north side of the tower arch records the charitable bequest of Edward Manning to provide 12 poor children with apprenticeships in the manufacturing trades: 'Desirous of imparting such useful instruction to the poor when young as may enable them respectably to maintain themselves in their riper years'. The other, in the south aisle, is in memory of another local silk shawl manufacturer, Thomas Clabburn (1788?-1858). His monument, the work of sculptor J Stanley, has a remarkable inscription telling how it was erected by 'upwards of six hundred of the weavers of Norwich and assistants in his establishment as a mark of



*Monument to Elisha de Hague (Christopher Dalton)*

esteem for his many virtues as an employer and a kind, good man'. Note the loom shuttles from the coat of arms of the Weaver's Guild in a cartouche above his memorial. The Clabburn family tomb is in the south-west portion of the churchyard.

The most celebrated person commemorated in the church is undoubtedly the architect Matthew Brettingham (1699-1769). His family's white marble monument is on the east wall of the north aisle in what is now the vestry.

The second son of Lancelot Brettingham, a Norwich mason, he trained first under his father as a bricklayer and later under the noted architect William Kent, eventually becoming a master builder with commissions all over England, but especially in Norfolk. His work in Norfolk included commissions at Blickling, Gunton, Langley and, most notably, Holkham Hall, the seat of Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester. Work on Holkham had begun in the 1730s in the newly fashionable Palladian style.

In a Vault beneath the Altar  
is deposited the Body of  
MATTHEW BRETTINGHAM Sen<sup>r</sup>  
of this City Architect;  
who departed this earthly residence  
Aug<sup>st</sup>. 19, 1769. Aged 70 Years.

Also *MARTHA* his faithful and much lov'd Wife  
who surviv'd him 14 Years and finish'd a life of  
Piety and exemplary goodness April 16, 1783  
at the Age of 86.

As a Man his Integrity,  
liberal Spirit and benevolence of Mind;  
endear'd him to all that knew his Virtues;  
and his Talents as an Architect.

to the Patronage and esteem of the Nobility,  
the most distinguish'd  
for their love of *Palladian* Architecture.

In the same Vault  
is likewise deposited the remains of  
their Son ROBERT Manufacturer of this City  
Aged 40.

To the Virtues of his most worthy Parents  
their Son MATTHEW  
dedicates this Memorial  
of his gratitude and affection.

Who also lies there Interr'd

It was finally brought to completion under Brettingham's supervision in 1764, and was judged a magnificent success. Curiously, although Holkham Hall was based on the designs of his former master, William Kent, Brettingham's *Plans, Elevations, and Sections of Holkham in Norfolk*, published in 1761 after Kent's death, contained no acknowledgement of his contribution. Brettingham lived in St Augustine's parish for many years. One of his earliest works was a house, now lost, which he built, possibly for himself, in 1725 just outside St Augustine's Gate. From at least 1737 he rented part of a farm known as the Lathes adjacent to the churchyard. Here he had his orchard, reputedly setting mantraps after he was robbed of the stakes supporting his espaliers. He seems to have been a troublesome tenant – he was frequently sued for back rent, however, according to his son he made little money from his profession because he was too honest.

The church has a remarkable collection of memorials to the parish's sacrifice in the two world wars. In addition to a wall monument to the Benn brothers (north nave aisle) and a brass plaque to Arthur Cannell (west wall), there is a fine stained glass window (south aisle) by William Morris and Co. to Harry Pert, who was a teacher in civilian life. Two more teachers, Edward Halfacre and Edward Sizer, are commemorated on the east face of the oak

screen, erected in 1920, under the chancel arch. The west face of this contains the parish's Great War Roll of Honour. On it are inscribed the names of 79 local men who died in active service. One of them, Private John H Abigail, was shot for desertion in 1917, aged just 20, the only Norwich man to have been so killed in the war. It is very rare to find such a commemoration – possibly unique. A monument to the parish's losses in the Second World War is on the south-west wall of the nave, near the porch. In addition to the servicemen, it includes a poignant list of civilians killed during enemy bombing – four from the same family, killed during the Baedeker Blitz of 1942.

*Left: Monument to Matthew Brettingham, his wife and sons  
(Christopher Dalton)*

# THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national body that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are over 330 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk).

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

## NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St John Maddermarket, Norwich  
Off Pottergate

St Laurence, Norwich  
St Benedict Street

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of the Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library; the staff of the Norfolk Record Office; Norma Watt of Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery; and Kate Weaver and Anthony Barnes for their generous help and encouragement.

Right: Monument to Elisha de Hague, and his wife and children (Christopher Dalton)

Back cover: St Augustine's in the 1720s – sketch by John Kirkpatrick. © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

