



ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH

BRANDISTON, NORFOLK



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH
BRANDISTON, NORFOLK

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

BOOTON, ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL
12 miles NW of Norwich and 2 miles E of Reepham

LITTLE WITCHINGHAM, ST FAITH
10 miles NW of Norwich off A1067

ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH

BRANDISTON, NORFOLK

by SIMON COTTON

Although only about ten miles from Norwich, Brandiston church has a remote rural setting, sharing a drive with Church Farm, a building largely 19th century in outward appearance. Brandiston Hall, to the north of the church, was originally a hospital for Mountjoy Priory in the next village of Haveringland. In part dating to 1647, it was for long periods in the hands of the Paston and Atthill families. A modern farmhouse stands on the site of Guton Hall which was the manor house of this parish. Guton was a separate parish of a settlement mentioned as such in Domesday Book (1086) but has long been consolidated with Brandiston. Its church dedicated to St Swithin is supposed to have stood in the same churchyard here at Brandiston, but no trace is now visible. It is said to have possessed a tower with four bells. The Brandiston church may well owe its mediaeval rebuilding to the Gyney family who held this manor from the 13th century into the 1430s. The place name Brandiston is thought to mean 'homestead' or village belonging to a person named Brant.

EXTERIOR

St Nicholas is built mostly of flint, with a pantiled roof. It has an unusual plan – the tower stands at the west end of the north aisle. The aisle was originally the nave, its chancel having been demolished by the 18th century.

The porch was presumably built at around the same time as the present nave but has subsequently been repaired, particularly the gable which is largely constructed of brick and flint. The gable has a niche containing a small statue of the patron saint carved in 1938. The size of the porch, as so often, is due to the considerable liturgical use to which this part of the building was put. The buttresses have flushwork decoration (patterns in stone and knapped flint) characteristic of the period. By the porch are open putlog holes in the nave wall which received the horizontal part of the scaffolding used when the church was being constructed.

Closing the entrance is a delicate wrought iron gate with scrolls and depicted in Ladbrooke's drawing of 1820. On the floor adjacent to the outer entrance is a broad rectangular slab with slits cut into it near the corners.

The dimensions suggest that it was the stone slab (mensa) of a mediaeval altar. In Edward VI's reign, there was a movement to have these removed and replaced by wooden tables, and many were reused by inverting and setting them in as flooring.

The rebuilding of the nave was carried out about 1400. The window tracery on the south side is particularly interesting; the central three-light window has a Decorated motif based on the four-petalled flower, whilst the flanking ones have Perpendicular tracery with eyelets heading the supermullions just below the arch. The mouldings of the three windows are the same. The west window of the nave is similar to the central window on the south side. The phenomenon of Decorated and Perpendicular tracery motifs occurring side by side is found in a number of churches in north-east Norfolk. The nearest parallels to the Perpendicular tracery are found at Trunch, in the porch at North Walsham (c.1380) and in Walcot nave (c.1427). The four-petalled flower motif enjoyed a wide vogue in the 14th century, dateable examples being Acle (c.1362) and Attleborough (c.1379).

There is no reason to suppose that these windows are not part of the same construction c.1400. The fashion for building a larger nave in the late Middle Ages, the earlier nave being adapted or rebuilt to serve as an aisle, was also followed some five miles away at Guestwick, whilst another East Anglian example is Westhall (Suffolk).

The present east wall of the church, probably 18th century, is of brick and flint, with two large brick buttresses to support it. The tracery of the east window is relatively modern, but in keeping with other windows in the church. The nave buttresses have been partly rebuilt too.

The north wall of the present chancel has corbels high in the outside wall which helped to support the aisle roof when the aisle extended further east. There are remains of an arch inside which once opened into the aisle. The aisle itself has tracery generally similar in period to that in the nave with, however, a fine mid-14th century east window with reticulated tracery.

The tower at the north-west corner of the church was almost completely rebuilt in 1890 after being damaged in a gale. The lower part of the tower is round, the octagonal top being a later modification. There was nothing in the tower to indicate an original date earlier than the 12th century until repairs in 1996 revealed that a crack was in fact the south-west corner of the original Norman nave. The windows with their mouchette (dagger) motifs in the 14th century style are part of the Victorian rebuilding; they are not shown in the Ladbrooke drawing c.1820. One feature possibly dating from the early building can be seen below the north-west nave

buttress: there are signs of what may be Roman brick and conglomerate quoining, perhaps 11th or 12th century. There is one bell, recast by Barwell of Birmingham in 1904.

INTERIOR

The church has a light and attractive interior owing to the lack of an appreciable amount of stained glass, much of the plain glass being pre-1800, to judge by its unevenness. The roof, which is plastered over in the nave, is probably 18th century at the earliest, 19th century at its east end. The other furnishings are likewise relatively modern, but are generally well designed and finely made.

There are fragments of mediaeval glass in the south windows, but it is difficult to assess the designs owing to the darkness of the glass. The central window has a narrow coloured border with flowing scrollwork round the heads of the main lights; the westernmost window has some canopy-work. This glazing is likely to date from c.1400 like the windows themselves. There is some grey and black grisaille glass in the north window of the chancel, and a two-light window in the north aisle depicts Saints John and Nicholas. This window commemorates John Riley Mee, an early 20th century rector who lived at Brandiston Hall; the window is signed near the bottom of the right-hand light by the artist, Percy Bacon. A faculty was given for this window in 1925. Blomefield described now vanished glass of St Nicholas with a kneeling woman dressed in a scarlet gown wearing a gold girdle; another window had the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the north aisle, at the foot of the carved oak Victorian organ screen, is an early ledger slab at the head of which there is a sole name * THOMAS * incised in Lombardic lettering, half of which is covered by the screen. This form of lettering was frequently used until the mid-14th century, and related to Thomas Andrew, rector here from 1338 to 1349. (A printed list of rectors hangs in the Vestry.)

There are a number of memorials in the church. These include several black marble ledger slabs in the floor, mainly to members of the Atthill family, dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries. One stone slab has an early example of the influence of the Gothic Revival in brass inscriptions to Richard Fitzthomas (1845) and Alice Jane Thomas (1852). The most interesting of a number of wall tablets is that to the Reverend William Atthill (1847).

The font bears a brass tablet recording that it was given in memory of the Reverend Thomas Medlicott Brown, who was rector 1884–92. It has an



The organ in the north aisle

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

octagonal bowl bearing quatrefoil and other motifs, the bowl standing on five short colonettes. The font has a contemporary oak cover, topped with a wrought iron finial. This font supplanted an earlier one, possibly 12th or 13th century.

The organ, brought here from Haveringland Hall, is a small chamber instrument with four stops: it has a painted deal case in late 17th century style but is probably of early 19th century date. A barrel, apparently from a different organ, is kept in the vestry.

The chest at the front of the nave is Jacobean (17th century). The lectern, pulpit, communion rail and altar table all date from the Victorian restoration and are generally of oak. The pews have poppyheaded ends in imitation of the mediaeval style, whilst the altar has a Gothic Revival tracery design on it.

The oak reredos in the chancel was given as a thank-offering by the Mee family in 1919; the panelling done in a simple Arts and Crafts style (Gothic styles were unfashionable by then) bears the text 'Benedictus Qui Venit in Nomine Domine'. The brass altar cross is inscribed 'Given in memory of John Grey Porter, who died in 1889'. It was made in 1894.

The stone statue of St Nicholas (1932) in the north-east corner of the nave depicts the three children he is said to have restored to life. There is a niche for a statue in the east end of the north aisle; this would have accommodated a statue of the patron saint of a nearby guild altar.

In July 1979 the parish of Brandiston was united with the neighbouring parish of Booton and as a result St Nicholas was declared redundant and came into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust on 18 March 1981. There was another union of parishes in October 1987 and this has led to the Victorian church of St Michael and All Angels, Booton, also being vested in the Trust.

Repairs have been carried out under the supervision of Mr Michael Swash, RIBA, of Hingham.

Front cover: Brandiston church from the south-west (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: Nave and north aisle (the original nave) (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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