

GUNTON ST PETER

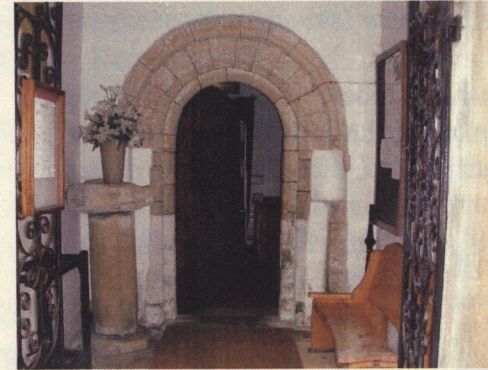
HISTORY

By the 7th Century, Christianity had come to East Anglia and the first church was built on this site. The local people were Saxons with their chieftain Gunni, hence the name Gunton: Gunni's Ton means Gunni's settlement. The area was probably wooded as far as the sea, cleared only for the track the Romans used from Corton to their camp at Roman Hill. The church was rectangular, without a tower, porch or vestry; built of local flint and surface stones, including conglomerate (puddingstone) pieces which can be seen in the walls. The Saxons added a short round tower to the church in about 900AD, in order to house a small bell (long disappeared), rung to call the people to services.

The tower can be seen by its flat east side to have been added to the church. It had a first floor room, probably a vestry or a study for the priest. As there were no clocks the priest relied on the mass dial, a small sundial, to indicate the time and thus when to ring the bell. Somehow St Peter's mass dial has found its way to the bottom left of the main doorway.

With the Norman Conquest in 1066 came changes to churches across the land. We can see the alterations made to St Peter's, especially the fine north and south doorways.

Today the finer one appears the north doorway: the south door was probably equally ornate, but it lost up to four columns when the porch was built in the 16th Century. The bowl of the original Norman font now stands in the porch.



During the Middle Ages it seems that the community around the church almost disappeared, and for centuries St Peter's stood isolated in the fields. Meanwhile the settlement of Lowestoft was growing fast, served by the newly-built and magnificent Parish Church of St Margaret. In 1602 the population of Gunton was recorded as 3, and for a period in the 17th century St Peter's church fell into disrepair.

At the end of that century a local man, Charles Boyce, took on the work of restoring the church. The south porch was built and it was probably at this time that the low tower was raised to its present height of 55 feet and the belfry windows were added. Charles was buried in the church, and memorials can be seen in the floor of the nave and over the south doorway.

In the 18th century Gunton Hall (the old hall, not the present holiday camp) was built next to the church. On its estate was found the clay for making the celebrated Lowestoft china. In 1802 the Hall came into the possession of the Fowler family, who had close links with the church as patrons and benefactors. The latest restoration of the church was in 1899-1901 when the family completely renovated the building as a memorial to their parents, Georgiana and Robert Cook Fowler. Photographic evidence of the mid 19th century shows the church with its tower and porch covered in ivy, a slate roof and the original windows.

The restoration was thorough: a new tiled roof, the east wall demolished to ground level and rebuilt, all windows blocked or restored. Interior walls were re-plastered, pews were put in, and an organ installed. To commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee a vestry was built on the north side of the chancel.

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard has been closed for burials since 1999, but in its north-west corner is a Garden of Remembrance for the interment of ashes. Adjacent to the woodland, it is a beautiful place of peace and birdsong.

On the south side is a bronze statue to a ten year old girl, road flowers into the bowl she holds. By the side of the remains were of the essential



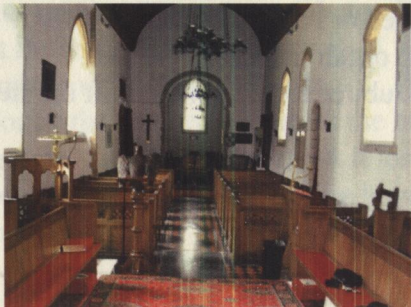
of the porch is a grave containing of unknown seafarers. These reburied following the building Annexe, which was built in 1990 meeting room, a kitchen and toilet facilities.

THE INTERIOR

To the left of the south door is a Book of Remembrance, and above this on the wall is a wooden cross sent back from the grave of Captain Reginald Charlesworth, who died in the battlefields of the First World War, aged 24 years.

The old Norman font stands in the porch: the present font was installed probably during the last restoration.

Halfway along the north wall there is a set of stairs, leading to nowhere! These stairs would have been built to access the top of the rood screen which divided nave from chancel in pre-Reformation times. (On top of the screen would have been a central statue of our Lord at his crucifixion, with his mother Mary and the apostle John.)



Near the stairs is one of the original, very narrow round-headed Norman windows, and also the list of Rectors, complete from 1305.

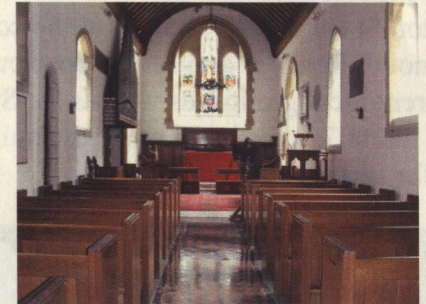
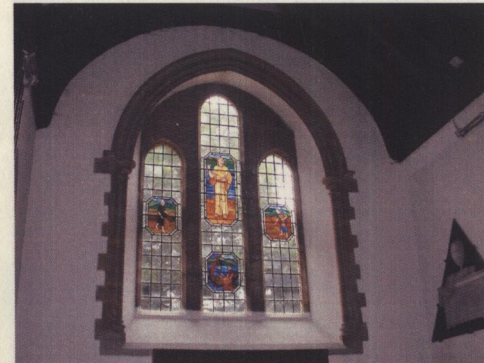
Only one piece of mediaeval woodwork has survived; it is incorporated into the Rector's stall.

The chalice and paten used each week for Holy Communion date from 1660 and 1670 respectively. They were made for Kessingland Parish Church which presented them to Gunton in 1750. The registers date back to 1739; all the old registers are now held in the Norfolk Records Office.

The organ (dated 1903) had to be pumped by hand until 1970, as the church had no electricity until the houses were built at this end of Gunton Church Lane.

We read the Bible as it rests on the wings of the wooden lectern in the form of an eagle, a symbol of the Word of God.

The keys on all the kneelers remind us of the apostle Peter, to whom the Lord Jesus entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19).



The restored east window over the Lord's Table contains the only stained glass in the church, a memorial to a parishioner placed in the 1960s. The window portrays the figure of Christ beckoning Peter and the other disciples to "follow me".

Still today the Lord Jesus Christ calls us all to turn from our selfish ways, to trust in his death for us on the cross, and to follow him day by day. **May your visit to this church help you to respond to him in repentance and faith.**

GUNTON ST BENEDICT

In 1942 the mediaeval church of St Benedict in the City of Norwich was almost destroyed by incendiary bombs. The damage was so great that the building had to be demolished except for the bell-tower.

The Diocese of Norwich gave the war damage reparation money to Gunton Parish for the building of a daughter church, to serve the new housing being built in the 1950s on the south-west side of the A12. The church was dedicated in 1956 to St Benedict, and its bell-tower houses the original bell from the Norwich church.

Gunton St Benedict's church (at the corner of Hollingsworth Road and Yarmouth Road) is a multi-purpose building, used throughout the week by different local groups, as well as for Sunday services. An extension was built in 2007, in order to make the building even more useful for mission and for serving the community.

