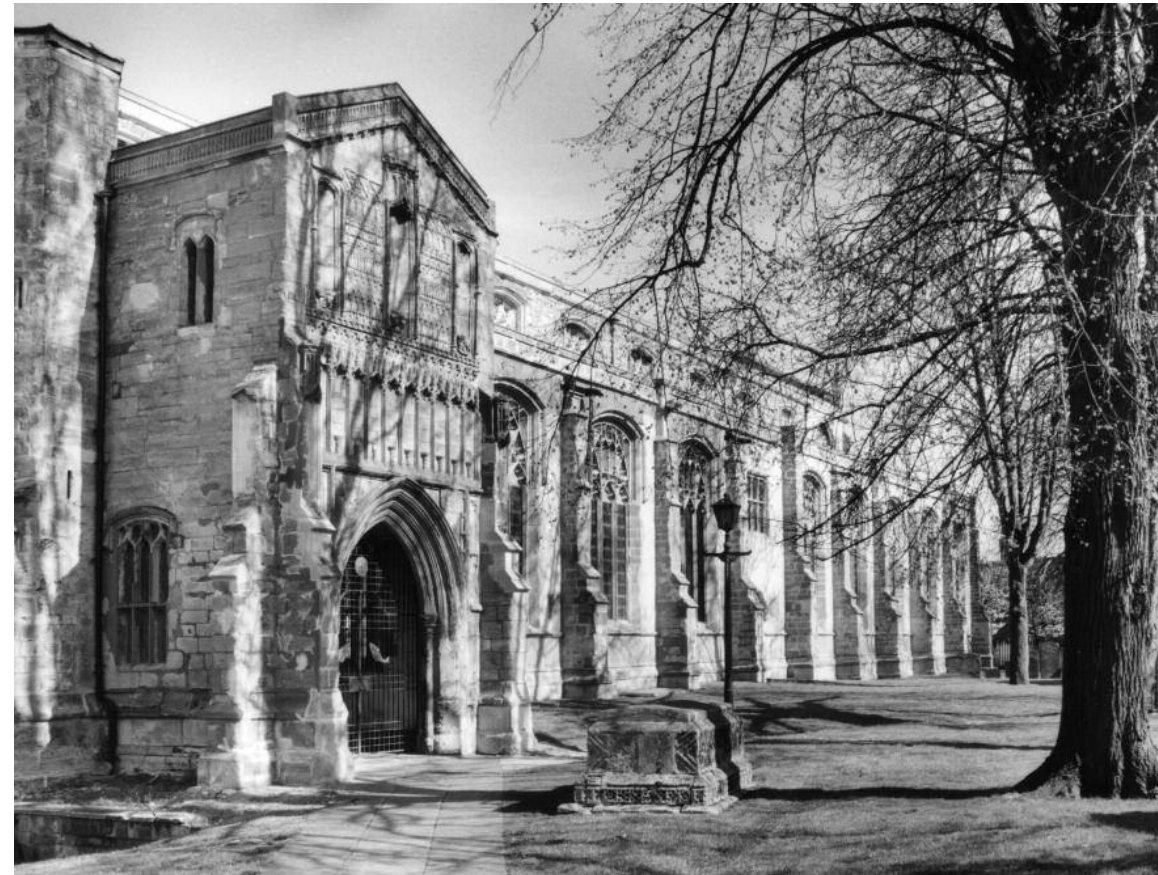




ST NICHOLAS' CHAPEL

THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

KING'S LYNN
NORFOLK



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ST NICHOLAS' CHAPEL

KING'S LYNN, NORFOLK

by ELIZABETH JAMES AND MICHAEL BEGLEY

St Nicholas' Chapel, King's Lynn, is the country's largest chapel-of-ease: a chapel dependent on a church and serving part of the parish for the convenience of parishioners nearby. It stands to the north of the town centre in a quiet churchyard entered through wrought iron gateway dated 1749. St Nicholas, a 4th century Bishop of Myra in Galicia, is the patron saint of children (as Santa Claus), of pawnbrokers and of sailors: a popular patron saint for churches associated with ports and the sea, as here, where the spire of his chapel was once an important sea-mark for approaching ships. 'Chapel' is to our ears a misnomer, for this is a huge building. It is lit by great windows at two levels and the superb roof leads the eye from west to east. Altogether this is one of the finest buildings of its date in England.

THE ORIGIN OF LYNN

'Herbert the Bishop to his sons around Lynn greetings. At your request I have begun to build a church at Lynn. . . '

With the opening words of a charter from Herbert de Losinga, first Bishop of Norwich, Bishop's (later King's) Lynn and St Margaret's church (now the Minster) enter history. They feature again in the foundation deed of Norwich Cathedral Priory dated September 1101: as the charter mentions 'the monk of Holy Trinity Norwich' who was to serve as priest at St Margaret's, the two documents are probably roughly contemporary.

The name Lynn is thought to derive from the Celtic *lin* (a lake, the Welsh *llyn*) referring to a salty lake which once opened into the Wash. The River Great Ouse at that time joined the Nene to flow to the Wash through Wisbech; it was not diverted through Lynn until the 13th century, partly through natural silting and partly by human effort. The result was to provide extensive trading opportunities upstream into a number of counties, as

well as seaward, which were to form the basis of Lynn's prosperity for centuries to come.

But in 1100 the site of the town was merely the waterside edge of the Bishop's manor of Gaywood, now an eastern suburb of Lynn. Herbert's 'sons' were part of a growing number of settlers literally 'around (the) Lynn' (circum Lynnham), where Domesday records many saltings, and where increasingly goods were arriving from overseas for return cargoes of wool, fish and salt. This embryo town centred on an area around St Margaret's, bounded by minor tributary streams or 'fleets'. These became known as Millfleet, which divided it from a village to the south which was to become South Lynn, and Purfleet, north of which a new development took place in the mid 12th century.

THE CHAPEL IN THE NEW LAND

'In our estate of Linn, in our new land which we provided recently for habitation... we have erected a chapel in the name of St Nicholas.'

Thus William Turbus, third Bishop of Norwich (1146–74), first introduces St Nicholas' chapel, granting it to the monks of Norwich occupying the priory by now attached to St Margaret's, which formed a cell to their parent house. William's 'new land' has generally been taken to mean that the land north of the Purfleet was originally too marshy for settlement and that he drained it, although the King's Lynn Archaeological Survey of 1963–70 found nothing to indicate that it was any different in character from the land to the south of it. The major east-west road (Damgate, now Norfolk Street) already ran through it to the river and probably to a ferry, ignoring the older town.

The 'new town' was given its own market place, originally open to the river bank. Even now the Tuesday Market Place, one of the largest in the country, is conspicuously roomier than the older Saturday Market by St Margaret's. The new chapel, however, was never allowed to develop into a separate parish, although to judge by the wording of a charter in which the fourth Bishop restored it to St Margaret's, it may have had or tried to wrest an initial measure of independence. It remained a chapel-of-ease to the older church, its modest nave apparently the width of the present south aisle. Its west gable wall with three lancets and a central doorway now



St Nicholas' from the south-west c.1845–50. Lithograph by CJ Greenwood
(TRUE'S YARD MUSEUM)

forms the east wall of the tower; it dates from c.1200 and perhaps replaced an initial temporary timber structure.

The lancets can only have admitted daylight for a few decades before they were blocked by the addition of the present impressive Early English tower. The Lynn historian E M Beloe, chapelwarden for over 40 years, pointed out that this old gable was not strong enough to carry the east wall of the tower, so an arch was thrown over its west face to double the thickness (visible only from inside the tower). The terrain was soft, hence the widely splayed tower foundations visible to south and west; however, the partial incorporation of the older wall, which had already had the chance to settle, led to uneven settlement in the new work and a list to the tower, corrected when the upper stage was added about 50 years later. Beloe compared the impressive scale and design of the earlier part to the detached

tower at WestWalton, and to the contemporary work at StMargaret's itself, which was almost completely rebuilt during the 13th century.

There is no doubt that during the next two centuries the 'New Land' was the place to live. Lynn's 14th century Red Register shows that merchants grew rich on properties there. The added tower may reflect this economic growth, as did once the now vanished brass inside of William de Bittering (d. 1369), which apparently rivalled the two famous Flemish brasses in St Margaret's. Set in 'a very fair Stone, 10 feet long and 6 feet broad', in 1738 it was 'still to be seen almost whole and entire' towards the east end of the south aisle. Bittering's personal mark appeared in the border and featured also in the window above. He was one of two successful merchant brothers, both of whom are known by their wills to have owned extensive properties in the New Land.

REBUILDING THE CHAPEL

'The beautiful chapel of St Nicholas was lately built from alms and goodwill and no one was constrained or harassed in any way for the work done.'

Thus burgesses unable to raise money for repairs to St Margaret's were admonished at a meeting in 1419 and two things are apparent: firstly that the desire to upgrade the chapel seems to have been spontaneous and secondly, to judge from the standing results, no effort was spared to create something which even now smacks somewhat of ostentation. It is hard to ignore the architectural statement which St Nicholas' makes to the world and not to ask at whom that statement was aimed at the time.

The scale of enlargement, leaving only the older tower and integral earlier gable wall, has created the largest chapel-of-ease in England. The internal length is 193ft (58.7m), width 73.5ft (22.3m), and height to the Nave ridge 93ft (28.3m). The style is lavish – largely on the new Perpendicular principles but enshrining distinctive ornamental details of an earlier style which led to Pevsner's cryptic comment that 'the details of St Nicholas' are notably wilful.' The date 1419 has been too easily seized on as a building date when it only indicates a point at which the chapel could still be described as recently built. The term 'de novo' is, incidentally, exactly that used nearly 300 years earlier by Bishop Turbus with reference to his creation of the New Land.

Benjamin Mackerell, the 18th century historian of Lynn, claimed to have seen in a window near the porch ancient glass, removed in his own time, bearing the date 1413: on the other hand this is more likely to record a benefactor's death than the date of building, although it coincides exactly with the date at which the Mayor of Lynn bought to repair the South Gate the materials of the former 'StMary's Chapel at St Nicholas'. The likelihood is that the rebuilding took place between the 1380s and 1413. The whole chapel is built to the same design, but whose is unknown. The west front includes the crest of Richard II, and must have been built before 1399. In the 1400s, the master mason was Hugh Rose.

In 1399 John Wace, parliamentary burgess for Lynn in 1390, directed that his body was to be buried in St Nicholas' 'in the entrance before the great door of the same church towards the west'.

It may be fair to say that practical building plans were in hand during the 1380s and perhaps earlier. Both the Lynn historian William Taylor's Antiquities of Lynn in 1844 and Blomefield's History of Norfolk cite a papal bull for rebuilding, although they disagree on the date, in 1371 or 1374. These dates are significantly close to the events described below, which took place in 1378 and may have fuelled enthusiasm for rebuilding on such a scale as a gesture of defiance to St Margaret's church.

ATTEMPTS TO GAIN A FONT:

1378–81 AND 1431–32

'Sir, said the creature [Margery Kempe to the priest of St Margaret's], dread ye not, for I understand in my soul that, though they should give a bushel of nobles, they should not have it.' (*The Book of Margery Kempe*).

The chapel, like the slightly earlier and now almost vanished St James' Chapel, which served an area to the east of St Margaret's, was staffed by a chaplain appointed by the Trinity Guild. In 1378 the then chaplain, John

Peye, at the request and expense of 'some of the townsmen of Lynn', presumably those living near the chapel, obtained from Pope Urban VI a bull granting the chapel the right to perform the sacraments of baptism, marriage and the churching of women, not permitted under its status as founded. The current Mayor, John de Brunham, was an influential man whose small daughter would grow up to become Lynn's much-discussed mystic, Margery Kempe. His reaction and that of many leading burgesses was one of concern. A meeting, held in the prior's chapel at St Margaret's, resulted in a declaration that the bull was fraudulently obtained. It was returned to John Peye but feelings ran so high that help to calm them down was sought from Adam de Eston, an influential Norwich monk, then living in Rome in high favour and sometimes called 'the Norwich Cardinal'. A letter patent was sent to Rome signed by the Mayor and 79 other signatories. Maybe the original application emphasised and exaggerated the distance between church and chapel, for pains were taken to point out that the distance was only three furlongs (less than half a mile or 0.8km) and presented no difficulty or danger to anyone.

The next stage, in 1381, was independent third-party arbitration by the Prior of Pentney Abbey, who examined the documentation, inspected the distance and decreed that the bull was deceitfully and fraudulently obtained. John Peye seems to have suffered no detriment to his position and appears still as chaplain in the record for 1411–12. It is likely that fund-raising for rebuilding began within a few years of this legal defeat and that Peye saw both its beginning and the near completion of the chapel. This background may be suggestive of just what statement is to be read into the lavish style which its defeated adherents financed to make it rival the other great East Anglian churches of its time. Another name associated with Peye's in the 1378–81 affair was Nicholas Swerdiston. His father John died in the Black Death year of 1349 and bequeathed to Nicholas, via his mother, a substantial property in what is now King Street, next to the future St George's Guildhall, indicating a man of some substance. Interestingly a Richard de Swerdiston is named as one of the town chaplains alongside John Peye in 1373–74.

Some 50 years later the supporters of the splendid new chapel made another attempt to gain the same sacraments. In 1426 a mandate to the Bishop of Ely appears in the Calendar of Papal Registers following a petition

from the townsmen of Bishop's Lynn. It set forth that the multitude and the devotion of the parishioners of Lynn had increased so much that on Easter Day there were 1600 communicants at St Margaret's and 1400 at St Nicholas' (with 900 at St James'). The Bishop was to ascertain the facts and if they were true, to grant the parishioners the right to receive the desired sacraments in the chapels. Nothing had come of this however by 1432, when the Mayor, Alderman and burgesses were asked to send a written request to the Prior of Norwich and the minute records that they agreed cheerfully ('hilariter'). Beloe notes that the letter, still extant, was 'without result' but Margery Kempe's reference to apparently the same affair gives more details. Despite the apparent unanimity in the Guildhall, it is clear that there was a worried opposing party at St Margaret's led by the Prior of Lynn who 'manfully withstood them through the help of some of his parishioners.' The parish priest consulted Margery herself, whose reassuring inner prompting is quoted above. The priest knew and pointed out that the Bishop had favoured the request for a font, under certain conditions which the priest himself was sure would be accepted. However, says Margery, they neither obeyed nor liked the conditions, and the matter fell through.

MEDIAEVAL WORSHIPPERS

Side chapels dedicated to St Edmund and St Peter are recorded in 1371. Beyond this there are a few other glimpses of the mediaeval chapel at work. Payments were made by the Trinity Guild to hermits there in 1373–74 (5s) and in 1407–08 (13s 4d.) A Guild of St George and the Blessed Virgin Mary was connected with the chapel but this was not the Great Guild of St George founded in 1406 whose hall stands in King Street and whose seal makes clear its association with St Margaret's. The Guild of the Annunciation was linked to the Chapel while that of St Antony appears at various times linked with both. In 1376 the Guild of St Thomas of Canterbury, which heard mass in the Chapel on his feast day, set up and maintained 'be-forn a certayne ymage of seynt Thomas' an eleven pound candle 'for to brenne in service tyme everiche festivale day in the yere.' In 1490 an indulgence from the Bishop of Ely makes it clear that the Guild of St Etheldreda also had an altar in the chapel.

The vast open hall formed by the present building would have been divided up with screens to form small chapels in the aisles to accommodate these guild altars, while the rood-screen would have marked off the nave from the chancel. The great rood above it is mentioned in the will of Richard Prestone, priest, who in 1523/4 asked to be buried 'afore the crucifix in the body of the church.' The screen still stood in 1738: Mackerell notes that some of the pews were 'finely embellished with carved Work, as is also the Screen.'

Taylor reproduced in his *Antiquities of Lynn* a surviving 1495 'memorandum of Parcells belonging to ye Charnell' – the charnel chapel at St Margaret's. It gives a vivid overview of the range of liturgical equipment in use in the late 15th century: books, plate, vestments and altar furnishings. The textiles are also a reminder that the bare architectural bones which we have now were overlaid with rich colours.

The chapel was rich in vestments, perhaps largely donated, like the 'red copeworth £20' left by Katherine Dalle in 1500; in a 1551 inventory St Nicholas' can muster 24 copes to 18 at St Margaret's, 12 of which remained in 1565 to be 'delivered in ye Hall and sold by ye assent of ye Parishioners.' Fabrics included white and blue damask, 'changeable sylke', and 'purple vellettwythbelles'.²⁹ pieces of plate were sold in 1545 in accordance with a directive that 'ye money there from arising to be bestowed and converted to ye Advancement of ye common wealth of this Towne.' Of the £73 raised, 40s was granted as an annuity for the Chapel's use.

AFTER THE REFORMATION

'There is in the towne ... (a chapel) called Sayncte Nycholas Chappell ... a Chappell of Ease and devyne service is used in the same daillie...but who was the founder thereof we knowe not.'

Thus wrote the Commissioners who enquired into chapels, colleges and chantries in 1561. In common with other churches it had lost many of its treasures as touched on above: the 1552 inventories of goods show that more plate worth £109 4s 7d was sold from St Margaret's, St Nicholas' and St James' collectively, and the money raised used to improve flood defences, whitewash the churches and provide clear window glass. But the

17th century records show that it was well cared for, as, by default, does its lack of recorded serious deficiencies in the Visitation records: the accounts suggest regular repairs and maintenance. New style furnishings were of good quality: 'Payd for a yarde of Satten for sylke byndynge lace for a pulpit cushion: 15/10d' in 1626, while in 1628 the communion table boasted a 'Greene Carpett of broad cloth fringed about with green silke and golde', although the plate comprised only '2 silver Greate Cupps double gilt with covers' and '2 greate pewter danske potts to fetch wine in'. The frequency of communion can be judged from the payment to Francis Dalton in 1605 for wine 'for ffyfteen communions this yere.'

Neither the transfer of the town from Bishop to King in 1537, nor the dissolution of St Margaret's Priory in 1539 brought the chapel any nearer independence. It remained subordinate to the parish church: Blomfield records an attempt at complete independence which was overruled by a Norwich Consistory Court hearing in 1609. Nevertheless a great step forward was achieved in 1627 when the right to administer the sacraments of marriage and baptism was finally obtained and £15 5s 51/2d was raised from the parishioners 'towards the setting up of the ffunt'. The final cost was £13 for the font (considered below under Furnishings) and slightly more than the same again for an elaborate cover. Sadly, in the light of 19th century ecclesiological principles, the Revd John Fleming, while curate, destroyed the cover 'because he considered the renaissance capitals pagan'. Beloe notes that he went on, as Vicar of Wiggshall St Mary the Virgin, to destroy its Renaissance chancel screen for the same reason.

Another important piece of furnishing from the 'prayer book period' was lost, for much the same reason as the font cover, at the restoration of the chapel in 1852: a fine altarpiece designed in 1704 by the Lynn architect Henry Bell. Fully described by Mackerell, it featured a pedimented centre panel which bore the monogram IHS 'in a radiated Circle, carved and gilt', flanked by panels showing Moses and Aaron 'in lively Colours'. The artist was the obscure R Schroder, a painting by whom featured in Bell's will: Croft-Murray notes that Bell may also have used Schroder for the paintings of Moses and Aaron on the original altarpiece (surviving but not in situ) of his rebuilding of All Saints' Northampton.

FRANCIS GOODWIN AND THE CHAPEL

For an illustration of the chapel during ‘the prayer book period’ we have to wait for the architect Francis Goodwin’s 1806 engraving of the interior looking east.

Francis Goodwin was baptised in St Nicholas’ in October 1784 and married there in March 1808. His father William progressed from carpenter to builder, a frequent background at this time for budding young architects. Francis may also have come under the influence of Lynn builder turned architect William Newham, who with his surveyor father, Samuel, had done well for himself through work arising from the Paving Commissioners’ ‘improvements’ to the town centre. It was in connection with one of these, widening the road at the east end of St Margaret’s, that young Goodwin was appointed to rebuild its Trinity Chapel on a smaller scale (1806). He was later to build churches and secular buildings all over the country, culminating in a much praised attempt at the competition for the Houses of Parliament, sometimes given as the cause of his death from apoplexy in 1835.

The chapel interior was the subject of the first picture which Goodwin exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1806, presumably the original for the engraving. The screen dividing chancel from nave, which in 1738 had ‘commodious Seats’ attached to it for visiting municipal dignitaries, had at some time in the late 18th century been replaced by a gallery which was open below, permitting a view of the east end, but this was now replaced by return banks of tiered seats, with a narrow gap between through which appears the only known glimpse of Bell’s altarpiece. On either side can be seen the galleries built in 1791, replacing (perhaps smaller) galleries there in 1628. Both were paid for by those holding seats there, a point which was to raise contention later, and the construction of that on the south was partly the handiwork of Francis Goodwin’s father William. Locally, Francis was, until recently, deemed a son of a prominent local lawyer named Harvey Goodwin, whose grandson, another Harvey Goodwin, destined to become Bishop of Carlisle 1869–91, was confirmed in St Nicholas’ in 1833. His biographer’s account preserves a vivid picture: *‘An immense crowd thronged the churchyard gates, and in the midst of it men were crying “Hot pies! gingerbreads!” The candidates...were hustled on like a flock of sheep from under the gallery into the aisle...The Bishop put a question*



Interior of St Nicholas' looking east in 1806 by Francis Goodwin
(KING'S LYNN MUSEUMS)

to a batch; they received the laying on of hands and, not knowing what to do or where to go, they were jostled on through another door at the north side of the chancel...(and) made their escape from the church, and so home.'

THE CHAPEL UNDER RESTORATION: 1852–1904

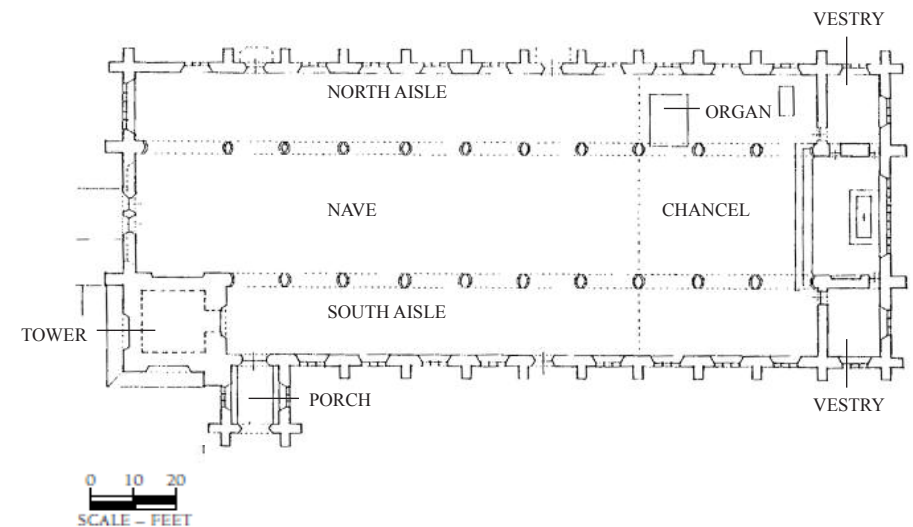
'Never shall I forget the delight which I experienced on my first view of the interior of Saint Nicholas' chapel; it was on the morning of a bright autumnal day, when the building was illuminated by a rich flood of radiant light...yes, veiled as its beauties are, and hid from view by the modern deformity of galleries, that cut the beautiful windows of the side aisles in half, a stage that hides the altar from view, a heavy misplaced pulpit, and clumsy pews, it is still a magnificent object: ...what then would be the effect of such an edifice, correctly restored?' – William Taylor, 1844.

PHASE 1: RESEATING IN 1852–53

In 1844, with Tractarian ideas gaining ground and the West Norfolk Ecclesiastical Architectural Society in existence since 1842, St Nicholas' was under severe criticism from one of its more prominent members, the local antiquary William Taylor, in his new book *The Antiquities of King's Lynn*. More than anything he hated the galleries.

Seats in those galleries and in most of the pews below were obtained for hard cash. Some went with properties in the town: even in 1605 the wardens' accounts recorded moving 'the pewe wch did belonge to the messuage wherein Mr Ewer dwelleth.' Some of these now belonged to persons living outside Lynn, who either left them unoccupied or augmented their income by letting them. A sale notice of 1813 advertises three seats in the chapel for auction: one in the south gallery and two in the curious 'cross gallery' of tiered seats visible on Goodwin's engraving. Scribbled on are the sums realised: £25–30 each. The Census of Places of Worship of 1851 records a total of 700 sittings at the chapel of which only 200 were free: similarly with St Margaret's. St John's was built in 1846, where seats were unappropriated, but many deserted to the non-conformist chapels. In 1851 William Newham, whose father had rebuilt the north gallery, admitted that they 'were not now required by reason of a new Church lately erected near and the increase and numbers of reli-

Plan of Kings Lynn St Nicholas' chapel – reproduced with kind permission from Birkin's Haward's Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades 1150–1550.



gious Dissenters'. In 1851 a new incumbent, Canon Wodehouse, drew attention in his inaugural sermon to this serious situation and set in motion plans to replace all the existing pews with the present seating, financed by donations and money raised on chapel property. The scheme was successful in removing the galleries, but not before a consistory court hearing had rejected the claim to ownership and deprivation of property made by five holders of gallery seats.

William Newham, who had been a parishioner all his life, considered himself to be the automatic choice as architect. Having drawn up his own plans, unasked, he produced them unexpectedly at a vestry meeting to an unreceptive audience. No one 'took it up, nor was a single observation made on Mr Newham's labours in the matter, beyond a short conversation as to the number of persons the ground floor would accommodate. Mr Pitcher begged to state that there were other architects in the town, who had promised to supply a plan when called upon.' The choice fell eventually, however, on John Brown of Norwich, who had been County Surveyor since 1836 and was also surveyor to the Dean and Chapter. His previous work in Norfolk included Swaffham Shire Hall (1839), the



Harvesting scene on a misericord from St Nicholas' chapel now in the Victoria and Albert Museum
(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

restoration of South Runcton Church (1839), two new Norwich churches (Christ Church Catton (1841–42) and St Mark's Lakenham (1843–44), with several restoration commissions in the late 1840s.

Paradoxically the 'restoration' was to strip out not only the galleries and Bell's classical altarpiece, but also nearly every remaining piece of mediaeval woodwork. Despite Taylor's reference to 'clumsy pews', Beloe maintains that the nave seating was 15th century, if cut about: 'the benches remained, with their carved backs, still fairly perfect', as Mackerell too had implied in 1738. All old material was awarded to the contractor and broken up or sold. The two surviving mediaeval stalls were saved by temporary duty as pulpit and reading desk, and narrowly escaped seizure thereafter by a warden to serve as seats in his front hall. Some of the misericords and two bench-ends did find their way to the Victoria and Albert Museum: six of the misericords can be seen on loan displayed in Lynn Museum.

The chapel re-opened on 23 February 1853. Work had included repairs to pillars damaged by the inserted galleries, and first aid to 'many a lost wing and broken nose' in the angel roof. A new reredos was provided

at the time it was left uncoloured and the present painted panels by Hardman were added in 1904. The new – and present – pews simply enlarged the overall number of seats and for the time being all pewholders would have a seat appropriated to them: it did not really address the problem of bringing in the poor, as Canon Wodehouse emphasised in his sermon at the reopening. Moreover, many local ecclesiologists, including Beloe, were left feeling that more was needed to restore the chapel's original grandeur, not least a new spire.

PHASE 2: THE RESTORATION OF THE SPIRE 1864–69

According to Mackerell, the pre-Reformation octagonal spire reached a height of 170 feet (51.8m). Half way up the clock bell hung externally, visible on Bell's 17th century print of Lynn from the west. Katherine Dalle left 20s 'to the making of the steeple' in 1500 which may mean a new tower was under consideration but never built: a spire (usually referred to in the records as 'the pinnacle') may have been an alternative.

A violent gale in 1741 brought down the spires of St Margaret's and St Nicholas' alike, whereupon 99-year leases on four chapel properties in 1742 and 1749 raised money to repair the damage to the chapel itself. The damage was less drastic however than at St Margaret's, where the entire nave had to be rebuilt. The chapel's replacement spire was described in 1854 as 'never a regular spire but a kind of wooden extinguisher stuck on to be seen at sea', during a heated discussion about its value and safety which led to its demolition. According to Beloe the tower was then badly boarded over, and within ten years the bells and interior were suffering water damage. An offer was then received from John Thorley of £1800 towards a new spire on condition that the bells were rehung.

The present spire, completed in 1869–70, was designed by George Gilbert Scott, who wrote, 'You will see that I have adopted as a means of compensating for the want of height in the tower an octagonal storey to the spire which will occupy in character as well as position a place immediately between the tower and the spire...'. It is constructed of lead-covered timber; the tower was restored for its reception and the bells were not only rehung but recast.

PHASE 3: NEW FURNISHINGS

In 1888 an estimate was obtained from John Oldrid Scott for refitting the chancel more in line with High Victorian ideals: this would have included new stalls, desks, paving and plinths, a chancel screen with gates and other side screens. It was not carried out, not least because of the costs involved, and improvement of the east end was made by rearrangement of the existing pieces. What was commissioned eventually from J O Scott was the case, erected in 1904, for a new Willis organ, and a reconstruction of the destroyed font cover and canopy from a surviving sketch. Sadly the latter was also ejected from the chapel in the 1960s and is now in a private collection. The restoration was completed in 1904 with a new pavement for the sanctuary and the paintings for the reredos.

‘THE FISHERMEN’S CHAPEL’

The chapel is widely spoken of in Lynn under this name and linked with Lynn’s closely-knit fishing community. North of the chapel lies a further ‘fleet’, now beyond the docks, which forms the anchorage for the small fishing boats. Many of the original ‘North End’ fishing cottages vanished in the 1960s under John Kennedy Road and the brick terraces forming today’s ‘North End’, still the home of many fishermen, were laid out around and for Frederick Savage’s ‘St Nicholas’ Works’ where his famous fairground carousels were developed and made until 1973.

In 1850 however, far from feeling that they belonged to St Nicholas’, the Northenders were among those excluded from seats by the pew system and the subjects of Canon Wodehouse’s concern even at the reopening of the re-seated chapel. His solution was a new service: ‘we want this whole chapel opened freely every Sunday evening, when old dresses and threadbare coats would come perhaps with less restraint’. This achievement led to what in 1868 was described as ‘the largest congregation in town, fishermen may be seen in their white and blue slops, and they confess...it is the happiest day of the week.’

Thereafter the evangelistic trend seems to have waned until a mission was held in 1897, led by Revd A E Campbell, the vicar of All Souls’ Leeds, formerly rector of Castle Rising. During the mission week, before each evening service, the clergy and choir ‘preceded by a plain wooden cross

(painted red) ... and lighted by a number of lanterns paraded various streets.’ The following January a number of adults prepared as a result of the mission were confirmed and it may be that the chapel’s popular image now as the ‘Fishermen’s Chapel’ has its origin in this period whose memories, passed down to grandchildren, fostered the deep affection with which even non-worshippers in the North End deplored its closure.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND THE SINGING FISHERMEN: 1905

The mission may have forged the link which brought the composer and folksong collector Ralph Vaughan Williams into the fishermen’s orbit. Staying in Lynn in January 1905, he met by chance ‘a clergyman’ who introduced him to a group of elderly fishermen: the result was his collection from their singing of over 70 folksongs. A photograph among the



The choir leading the congregation out of the chapel to the port for the blessing of boats on Sea Sunday July 1997
(DAVID MOORE)

composer's papers, of a clergyman with two fishermen, was eventually identified as his first two singers, James Carter and Joe Anderson, and the Revd Alfred Huddle, curate of St Nicholas'. In 1976 a daughter of Mr Carter revealed that late in life he and Joe began attending church after they had 'got in with a Revd Huddle ... and in the finish they were confirmed.' As no confirmations are recorded for some years at the chapel after 1898, it is likely that it was the mission which first brought them into the chapel. The composer used three Lynn tunes in his *Norfolk Rhapsody* (1906), including James Carter's haunting *The Captain's Apprentice* and included Joe Anderson's tune to Van Diemen's Land in *The English Hymnal as King's Lynn* (No. 170 in *Ancient and Modern New Standard*).

20TH CENTURY CHANGES

For the first half of the century the chapel continued to flourish, maintaining a huge choir to rival St Margaret's. Decreasing numbers however later united the two congregations at St Margaret's and during the 1970s St Nicholas' was almost unused for worship, except that on Christmas Eve it was borrowed by the Roman Catholic congregation, for which occasion, until the building of a second Catholic church at Gaywood, their own modest church was too small.

The closure of the small modern church of St Edmund on the North Lynn estate in the parish brought the morning parish eucharist to St Nicholas' once more for the next eight years or so, as a gesture to the northern part of the parish, with evensong only at St Margaret's. In 1981 the stalls were cleared from the chancel area, where the present broad shallow flagged dais was laid. This carries a new altar table, sedilia and benches in light oak, designed by Alan Frost of Donald Insall and Associates, in line with the liturgical movement's aim of bringing the communion closer to the congregation.

Eventually however the parish faced the fact that it could not continue to maintain two such enormous buildings, although it was by no means a foregone conclusion which one would continue in use. The decision in 1989 to retain St Margaret's and to allow the chapel to be declared redundant was not made lightly and many chapel supporters generously sacrificed their own personal preference to what was felt to be the best overall choice for the parish and town as a whole. The chapel is now in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust since 1992

ST NICHOLAS' TODAY

The chapel was the main concert venue for the King's Lynn Festival every July from the 1950s until 1996. The remodelling of the Corn Exchange ended the annual construction of staging and tiered seats here, but something special which made the Festival 'different' was lost - the chapel decorated with flowers and with audiences of 900 people; the interval in a sunny churchyard; even the memory of hard pews! A few parish services are continued, such as a Sea Sunday in early July, and for the Feast of St Nicholas' on or near 6th December, as well as funerals for North End local people. When the True's Yard Museum was founded in 1989 by Mrs Pat Midgley, a firm link was established between fisherfolk museum and chapel as the continuing focal points for the North End community. However, when the Festival stopped using the chapel after 2001, she and Mary Roche (daughter of Lady Fermoy) took steps to maintain music and public uses; the Friends of the Chapel started in 2002 and became a charity in 2003. Festival concerts are here again, and supplemented by the regular concerts of the King's Lynn Festival Chorus and other school and community events.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHAPEL

As rebuilt in the early 15th century, the chapel is a large rectangular aisled building with the earlier tower set within the south-west corner. The outline is broken only by the two-storeyed south porch immediately to the east.

The 13th century **tower** appears to be built, as mentioned earlier, in two stages. At the base big bold arches occupy three faces, including that now within the chapel, horizontally divided by a splayed sill, above which rise two subsidiary arches below a quatrefoil. Below the sill is a single lancet window on the south and the tower entrance on the west. The wide-splayed base plinth to counter the marshy ground has been referred to already. The tower is ashlar-faced but within the arches the blocks are roughly cut, giving an initial impression of later blocking, disproved by close examination of the stonework. This storey Beloe compared favourably with the south-west tower of St Margaret's and with West Walton. The upper storey he considered 'plain to the point of meanness', with its less deeply-moulded geometrical window on each face and plain parapet. The corrected incline suggests he was right in assigning a reasonable

gap between building stages but it must always have been the intention to build to this height, which does not by very much overtop the older gable in the east face. Above it the octagonal lead-covered drum, with matching windows, below Scott's spire of 1869–70, indeed compensates for the lack of height in the tower. This is also effectively diminished by the rise in the ground level between the building of the 13th century tower and the 15th century rebuilding of the chapel.

Immediately to the east the **south porch** has been called 'the finest and most remarkable feature of the exterior', two-storeyed with a stair turret in the angle with the tower. Its entire south face is covered with decoration: repeated empty statue niches with little pedestals and bands of decorative motifs which have been called 'a pattern book of samples'. At the angles former pinnacles took the form of a crowned animal and an eagle: these Mackerell interpreted as a lion and an eagle and the supporters of the arms of Edward III, but that would imply a building well advanced by 1377 and hardly 'recently built' in 1419. Inside is a lierne vault, the central boss of which represents God the Father, wearing a papal crown; the eight surrounding bosses bear angels and around them again are heads, leaves, demons and dragons. The door it shelters is also intricately carved, from the solid wood with no applied details.

Unlike the ashlar-faced tower and porch, the exterior walls of the chapel are built mainly of brick and rubble and rendered. The dressed stone on the tower is principally Barnack, with some Ketton, Ancaster and Clipsham. Internally the only interruptions to the rectangular shape, apart from the tower, are two vestries flanking the sanctuary. The east and west walls are almost completely occupied by single windows, the western boldly interrupted at its base by the stepped top of the west doorway. Between them stretches a magnificent **roof**, one of the treasures of the chapel, with angels with outspread wings playing instruments. The recorder on the south side is the earliest known illustration of this instrument in church carving. Unlike many such East Anglian roofs, however, they are not associated with the main trusses but placed on small hammer-beams directly above the clerestory windows, taking full advantage of the available light. The main roof members take the form of tie-beams carried on shallow traceried arch-braces with queen-posts and tracery above.

Below, the three-light **clerestory windows**, flanked by niches, are elab



A view through the tie-beams in the roof

(JULIAN LIMENTANI)

orately, almost fussily, cusped, over an arcade of slender pillars of quite severe plainness. Strangely, despite a semicircular rib running up from the pillars to the corbels supporting the wall-posts, the eye is not carried up, as you might expect, to the roof with its angels; it is 'stopped' twice, firstly by the heavy string-course below the clerestory windows, which is carried across the vertical wall ribs, and secondly by the heavily moulded heads of the clerestory windows themselves, with a lack of centre apex which seems to deter the eye from travelling upwards. This string-course divides off the clerestory firmly from the arcade below: there is no encouragement to see the bay from floor to ceiling as the unit in a repeated sequence that it actually is. Below the clerestory all attention is reflected onto the **aisle** windows. Like the clerestory these have segmental heads under substantial hood-moulds reaching well down the jambs, but within this outline, picked out in the tracery, are pointed arch-shapes echoing the arcades. It is in the windows especially that Pevsner points to 'notably wilful' details, with 'every so often unexpected diagonal lines'.

The clerestory finishes with the arcade at the easternmost bay, which forms the **sanctuary**, with its side vestries. This break in pattern is almost invisible outside; the vestry windows and parapet continue the pattern

established by the aisles. However, at the east wall, while the parapet slopes upwards like the aisle roofs, behind it the vestry roofs slope down to the chancel walls, thus allowing for two extra-deep windows, barely noticeable outside, to side-light the high altar.

Inside, in addition to its entrance-door, each vestry has a tiny doorway set close against the east wall, which seems to indicate that the original reredos stood clear of the wall with a passage behind. It is clear from the way in which these doors open that the usual approach was into the south vestry from the south aisle, through the eastern doors and behind the altar to the north vestry. The particularly elaborate north vestry doorway, under a five-sided arch, led into the sanctuary only, the present door into the north aisle being an insertion of 1903 copied from a doorway in Red Mount Chapel. The south vestry had no door to the sanctuary, but was entered from the south aisle and was perhaps open to any priest celebrating anywhere in the chapel. The north vestry, however, may have housed the real treasures and high altar ornaments, with more limited access through two 'security doors' in the supposed reredos passage. From here the priest could enter the sanctuary solemnly through its elaborate door, to the side of which is a recess with a steep sill, perhaps to hold a service book. Opposite are the remains of the sedilia, ornately carved but severely damaged.

The point of division between chancel and nave is marked by a bay where a break in the aisle windows has been relieved on the south (and formerly on the north also) with a rectangular window brought from the defunct St James' Chapel in 1628 to lighten that end of a new gallery. Here two exterior doorways face each other across the chapel. The northern one, like the north doorway further west opposite the main entrance from the south porch, is five-sided like the doorway of the north vestry, and is called 'very capricious' by Pevsner. Arches very like these occur in Bristol, in the Cathedral and St Mary Redcliffe, but are a century earlier. There are strong similarities between the arcades and aisle windows of St Nicholas' and those in the nave at All Saints' Litcham, where reconstruction was in progress in 1412. The tracery in the Litcham aisle windows is virtually identical to that at St Nicholas' as bounded by the 'pointed arch' feature (i.e. without the segmental head). Birkin Haward considers that St Mary's Mildenhall (Suffolk) also had the same master mason as St Nicholas'. An imaginary scenario in one of G G Coulton's books, linking the masons of

St Nicholas' with the rebuilding of All Saints' EastWinch, has unfortunately achieved legendary status and has sadly blurred the genuine fact that his study of masons' marks did reveal two common to both churches. Moreover, although the aisle arcades are very different, the vertical semicircular rib, not a common feature until later in the 15th century, does run up from the pillars to the wall-post corbels as it does also at Mildenhall, while the little heads, distinctively elongated, terminating the outer mouldings of the arcade are startlingly similar to those in the sanctuary at St Nicholas'. Some similarity can also be spotted in the tracery of the clerestory windows (straight-sided arches and a short horizontal embattled member just above the main lights).

FEATURES NOT TO MISS

1. The west doorway as seen from outside: the stepped top, intruding into the great west window, ties the two together and prevents the window from dwarfing the door. The heavy cusping of the doorway with its strong verticals is 'very St Nicholas', as are the strong hollows in the mouldings. The trumeau dividing the doorway into two is, like the five-sided door-heads, a feature more usual a century earlier.
2. The west doors are the original c.1400, and investigation showed they had been painted on the outside since 1460 or earlier.
3. The heads in the sanctuary bay: especially the angel choir above the sedilia, dramatically focused on the altar: where the heads face away the arrangement of their wings seems still to imply an eastern emphasis. Note the frequent long and oval faces, with high foreheads: the one at the end of the moulding beneath the north sanctuary window is very reminiscent of that at the west end of the south arcade moulding at EastWinch.
4. Similarly the label stops on the south doorway (in the porch); and the two north doorways (inside): busts rather than heads, and wearing hats in north German styles – reflecting Haneastic links?

MAJOR FURNISHINGS

The Font

The font of 1627 reflects the importance of the long-desired grant of baptism rights. Its making by Edward Coverstone of Tilney is fully

recorded in the chapelwardens' accounts. The bowl incorporates the inscription 'This Funt was graunted by Samuell Harsnett Bishop of Norwich 1627'. The design is interesting, not so much for the strapwork cartouches round the bowl but for the arched panels round the stem. Four are variations of mediaeval Gothic, two verge on the Renaissance and two are completely Jacobean in style. Even more curious is their apparently haphazard arrangement round the stem. The font dated 1632 at Terrington St John is certainly by the same hand and that dated 1607 at Weasenham St Peter also has a random mixture of Gothic variations round its stem. Coverstone was based at Tilney but the contemporary Tilney All Saints font and its near twin at Gaywood are completely different in style. In the north aisle, behind the organ, look for the touching little brass inscription to Anne Raylie: 'She was the first God gave unto her parents and the first baptised in the Funt of this Chapell. Aged 24 days'.

The Stoup

South-East of the font is an octagonal stone stoup, no longer in situ, so large that it has been mistaken in the past for an earlier font. Clearly, however, it is designed to be built into a wall and is therefore not a font.

The 'Consistory Court'

In the north-west corner is a most unusual survival. In 1617 £1 1s 1d was spent in 'makinge the newe seats called the Consistorye'. These included 'a spruce deale' and 'turninge two greate poastes and other pillars', presumably for the rail, and 'shortninge the old Communion table now standinge their'. This table bears the date 1577 on its frame and the seating seems to be made up of pre-Reformation benches. Note the artificial oak graining. In 1738 Mackerell says that here the Archdeacon 'keeps his Courts for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Twice every year, at Easter and Michaelmas'. He also adds that 'the Two Books of Martyrs' (i.e. Foxe's) formerly lay on the table and it was currently used for the Easter Vestry meeting.

The Lectern (north-east aisle)

One of about 45 brass lecterns listed in England and Wales as pre-Reformation, of which 11 are in Norfolk and most of the rest in the eastern counties. It has the familiar lions supporting the base and an eagle top,



An unusual survival – the Consistory Court in the north-west corner of the chapel made up in 1617 from older furnishings
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

with moneybox slots to take 'Peter's pence'. It belongs to a late-15th century design group which includes the lecterns at Billingford (Norfolk), Isleham (Cambridgeshire), Christ's College Cambridge, Peterborough Cathedral, Thorverton (Devon) and St Mark's, Venice.

Reredos

1851–53, designed by John Brown of Norwich and made by William Browne, stonemason of Lynn. The panels depicting Our Lord, flanked by the Virgin Mary and St John, and by St Nicholas and Bishop William Turbus, were designed by Hardman and added in 1904. One of John Brown's 1851 designs for it is among the parish records in the Norfolk Record Office.

Stalls

Two C15 stalls survive at the east end. (South) frontal with an antelope and a lion; the poppy heads show (E) a monkey riding backwards on a cow? / man with hat and beard in a whelk shell in the sea; (W) a bishop in heaven / Our Lord in glory. (North) frontal with a gryphon and a yale; the poppy heads show (E) a deer and a figure, before a tomb with 2 moneybags / a devil holding a boar over his shoulder, in the stocks, and the Chapel below; (W) a seated saint with a sheep and a book, his foot on a snake / Our Lady as Queen of Heaven. Similar stall fronts are in the south chancel aisle.

Sword-Rest

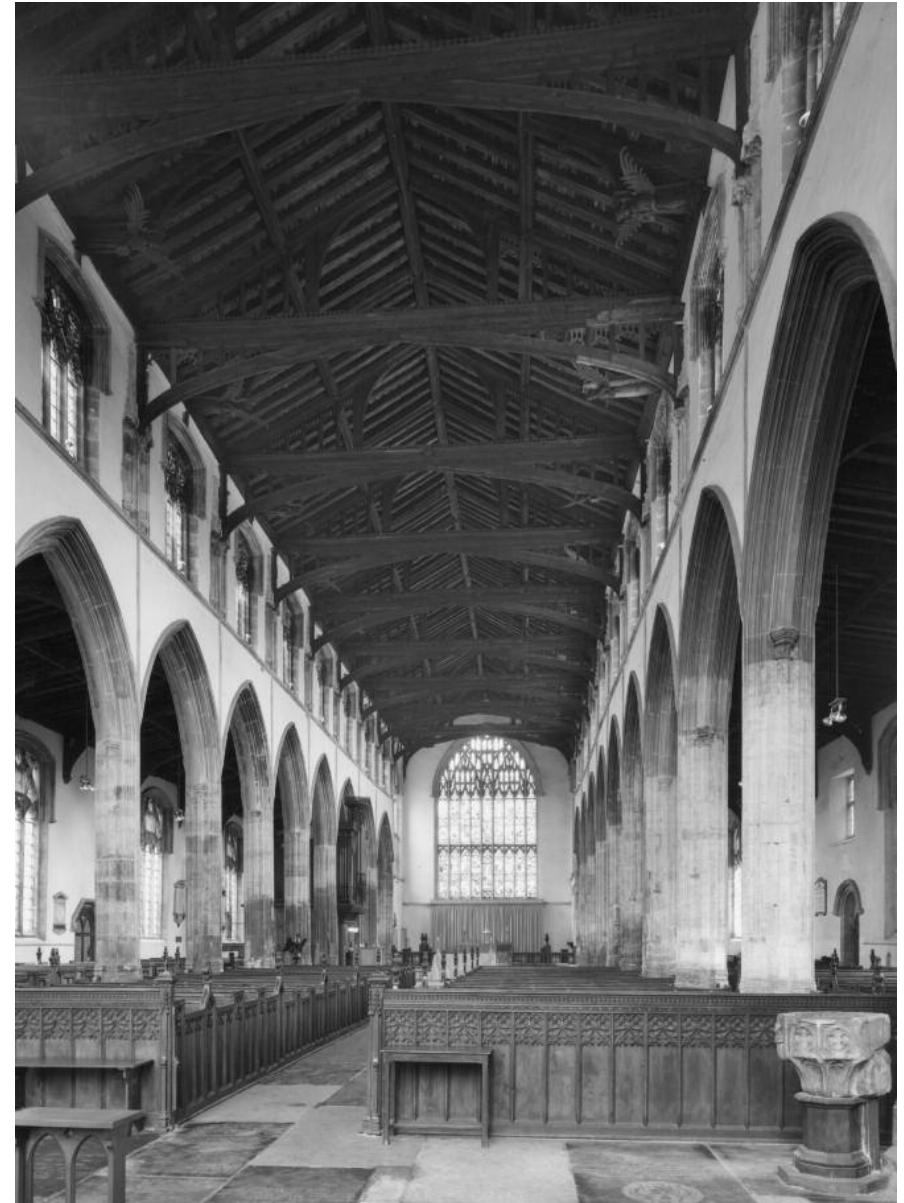
Dated 1743 and 1760: a projecting hand to hold the town's King John Sword, with the point caught under the crown at the top, when the Mayor visited the chapel in state. One very similar is still in use for civic services at St Margaret's and another in All Saints' South Lynn.

Benefactions Board (south-east aisle wall)

Elaborately framed with fluted pilasters and Corinthian capitals under a pediment, enclosing a round-arched panel for the inscriptions written in gold, which run up to 1900. In size and appearance so similar to the central portion of the lost Bell reredos as to raise the question whether they could be one and the same. A benefactions board lettered in gold was standing against the south wall in Mackerell's time. However, the Gothic lettering at the head suggests at least restoration in the mid 19th century and much of the lettering below, up to the 1758 entry, seems to have been executed at one time by a single hand, with the two latest additions a painstaking attempt to copy the same style.

Vestry Furnishings

(Not open to the public) Reused as the door to a cupboard is a pre-Reformation painted panel showing a priest kneeling at the feet of St Peter: a scroll from his mouth reveals his prayer: 'Aperi michi portas justicie et confitebor Dno' – 'Open to me the gates of righteousness... and I will praise the Lord' (Psalm 118 v 19). Behind is a low Georgian cupboard built across a corner which may have held a chamber-pot (cf. accounts for St Peter Mancroft Norwich in 1683: 'Pd for a white earthen Pott in the vestry 8d'). The cupboard on the west wall is also (late) Georgian,



*General view of the nave looking east. The font-like holy water stoup is in the foreground
(A F KERSTING)*

grained to look like oak and containing hat pegs.

Stained Glass

No mediaeval glass remains in the chapel: such little as survived the Reformation and Commonwealth was removed in 1805. A few fragments, including William de Bittering's mark, (see History) were later installed in the tiny windows on the top floor of Red Mount Chapel in the Walks at its own 19th century restoration.

1. *East window*: 32 scenes from the life of Our Lord, the Crucifixion and Ascension being afforded prominent places in the centre lights. The Apostles appear in the head lights. Subjects selected before his retirement by Canon Wodehouse; designed by H Hughes of Ward and Hughes, 1860. The contemporary press, in commenting on the need for very small sections of glass in the elaborate tracery, was curiously critical of the mediaeval creator of the window itself: 'Those divisions were constructed in a style not the very best – the designer, having apparently, in his zeal for over-elaboration, produced a general weakness of effect and, in some places, an actual bungle.'
2. *South sanctuary window*: The parable of the Talents in eight scenes by Warrington, 1854. In memory of Frederick Lane, Town Clerk and Chapel Warden, who lived in the present St Ann's House directly opposite the chapel, and died in a hotel fire at Travannes, Switzerland, in 1846.
3. *South aisle*: Christ with Mary Magdalene and Angels at the Sepulchre. Given by Mrs Marshall of North Farm in memory of her son Charles and dedicated on 31 October 1895, on the second anniversary of his death.
4. *North aisle behind organ*: Small panel of St Anne teaching the Virgin Mary to read. Based on glass in All Saints' North Street in York, drawn by a master at King Edward VII Grammar (now High) School, Lynn, in 1935 and made by G King and Sons, Norwich. At the time a chapel of St Anne was created in this area.

MONUMENTS

A complete list of the fine collection of monuments was published in 1937 (see Sources). Unfortunately the stone dais of 1981 obscures 27 ledger stones listed there in the chancel area. Only a few major monuments can be mentioned here but all repay a close look. One exterior monument should be mentioned first: a mediaeval tomb-chest, close to the porch; well decorated, with shields in quatrefoils within distinctive lozenges. Apparently 15th century but no association known.

Clockwise inside, beginning in the north aisle by the eastern outer door:

1. *Edward Milligan Beloe 1907*: 41 years chapelwarden and a local historian much quoted above: includes portrait in low relief. By T Brock RA.
2. (In the floor nearby) Note the surgeon *James (Jacobus) Greene* 'amputated from the body of the living' (A Corpore Viventium Amputatus)! The curious way of writing the date refers to the 'old style' of dating, the year beginning on 1 April, at a time when the 'new style' was gaining ground. He clearly died during the first three months of the year: 1692 (old style) or 1693 (new style).
3. (Behind the organ) *Mary Partridge 1748*: She was the daughter of Robert Say, whose ledger stone is at the foot of the memorial to Sir Benjamin Keene (6, below), and died in her 21st year, having just given birth to her third child.
4. (Going east) *John Turner (d.1711; monument erected 1715)*: MP for Lynn 1684 and the man for whom Bell built the Customs House and the Duke's Head. See also a ledger stone in the floor.
5. (East wall of north aisle) *Thomas Snelling, Alderman and Mayor 1623*: Lived at Clifton House and may have built its tower. His wife Margaret was the daughter of Matthew Clarck (see below) and his arms suggest he came from London.
6. (North-east aisle, freestanding) *Sir Benjamin Keene KB, Ambassador to Spain, d.1757 at Madrid*: Described by Horace Walpole as 'fat, easy and of universal knowledge'. The drawings by Robert Adam for this superb piece were found in the Sir John Soane Museum by Howard Colvin. A strong similarity has been noted between this and a wine cooler made by Chippendale to Adam's design for Harewood House (Yorkshire). Incorporates a fine quayside scene at Lisbon, opposite a portrait of Keene



Monument in the north-east aisle to Sir Benjamin Keene KB (d.1757), designed by Robert Adam
(A F KERSTING)

surrounded by the chain of his Order of the Bath, for diplomatic services. Originally in the north vestry which served as his mausoleum until the monument was ousted at the 1903 – 04 restoration; his grave itself is still in the vestry.

7. (Across the chancel, half covered by the stone dais) *The Revd Edward Edwards, Lecturer of Lynn 1849*: After the Reformation the Borough appointed a Lecturer to preach at the Chapel and at St Margaret's, one sermon in each every Sunday. Edward Edwards, the last appointee, was very much a founding father, in 1844, of the Lynn Museum, which holds a number of his watercolour sketches, including valuable records, drawn from memory, of buildings which disappeared in his time. The modern dais has hidden his name: those visible are his wife and son.
8. (East wall of south aisle) *Richard Clark, 'searcher and collector', 1602* and his wife *Joan*, erected c.1604 by his son *Matthew*, with his first wife *Sarah*. Matthew's children are also shown. The searcher inspected cargoes for the Crown. In the 1560s Lynn taxes were 'farmed out' to Lord Walsingham, whose agent was called a 'collector'. Richard arrived in Lynn, perhaps from London, in 1578 and was Mayor in 1584 as well as MP. Matthew's career was very similar.
9. (Going west) *Thomas and Susanna Greene 1675*: The design of this fine monument is sometimes attributed to Henry Bell, the Lynn architect. Thomas was a wealthy grocer who died during his mayoralty. Susanna Greene's gifts to the chapel the following year are included on the benefactions board.
10. *Samuel Browne 1784*: A fine monument of its period recording the last of a line of Samuel Brownes: the first originated from Boston and married Thomas Greene's daughter.

Much curious history lies in the simpler ledger stones in the floor, especially in the font area:

11. (West end of south aisle) *Sarah Dexter 1755*: This canny lady left £150 to the Corporation for beneficent purposes, but ensured it was not diverted elsewhere by arranging for her will to be read every year at the annual meeting of parishioners, and repeating her instructions on her tombstone. A copy of Sarah's will is still among the chapel papers in the Norfolk Record Office.

12. (Near the font) *Robinson Cruso 1773 aged 10*: Probably a son of the Elizabeth, ‘wife of Robinson Cruso, upholder’, whose slab is in the centre aisle (an upholder made upholstery and soft furnishings). Daniel Defoe published his famous ‘Treasure Island’ story in 1719, with the castaway Robinson Cruso. He visited Lynn in 1724 so these graves are not the name source, although its use over generations suggests a local family name, and there were Robinsons as Mayors in the 17th cent.
13. (East of the font) *JohnHorn 1706*: Sometime vicar of All Saints South Lynn, he was ejected from his parish in 1662 for not subscribing to the Act of Uniformity, which demanded full acceptance of everything laid down in the Book of Common Prayer. Horn then became a Presbyterian, leading a small congregation in a hired room in St Nicholas Street: he ‘preached thrice a day in his own house every Lord’s Day and on other days, besides lecture sermons, he expounded the scriptures in order, twice a day to all that would come and hear him’. Despite his enforced exit from his living, he nevertheless left £5 to the poor of South Lynn at his death.
14. (Immediately west of font) *Thomas Hollingworth 1779*: whose epitaph ‘An Eminent Bookseller A Man of the Strictest Integrity In His Dealings and much esteemed by Gentlemen of Taste for the neatness and Elegance of his Bindings’ has the ring of an advertisement.
15. (West of Hollingworth) *Simon Dupont 1723*: a bilingual epitaph to a French merchant from Ile de Ré.
16. (Above the Consistory Court): Wall tablets to *James Stapleton, Cork Cutter 1778 and Francis Boyce 1824* are both interesting for their charity details. Mr Boyce’s tombstone is in the floor immediately north-west of the font: like Mrs Dexter he had his legacies read out here, probably from this tablet, every year at the annual Easter meeting, which we know from Mackerell was then held in the Consistory Court below.

THE REGISTERS

Begin 1559; held with other parish documents on deposit at the Norfolk Record Office.

THE ORGAN

The Chapel organ is important as it came from a famous organ builder – ‘Father’ Henry Willis (1821-1901). In giving him this title, as a master of his craft and in appreciation of his great abilities, the Musical Times on 1st May 1898 declared him to be the greatest organ builder of the Victorian Era. The firm of Henry Willis & Sons Ltd still continues.

The St Nicholas’ organ is mentioned in the same breath as other fine and famous Willis organs in the Albert Hall, St George’s Hall Liverpool, Alexandra Palace and many cathedrals, but this is most likely because it was the last one he might have worked on. It is in fact a simple organ, an order book standard specification which could be ordered without much deliberation. But it is certainly a fine organ with some particularly beautiful voicing which is heard best about halfway down the nave.

It seems that the Chapel congregation first considered upgrading their existing organ in 1897, but subsequently ordered a new one. The British Organ Archive in Birmingham lists it as built in 1898-1900 – “1900 new no.16 organ £817” – and the National Pipe Organ Register date is 1900. The previous instrument was transferred in 1900 to the then-existing Athenaeum hall in the town, and so the new one was installed that year. The case was designed subsequently by John Oldrid Scott and built in 1903-04.

The specification of the organ is set out below.

Pedal: Open Diapason 16; Bourdon 16;

Great: Double Diapason 16; Open Diapason 8; Claribel Flute 8; Dulciana 8; Viola da Gamba 8; Principal 4; Flute Harmonique 4; Fifteenth 2; Trumpet 8; Corno di Bassetto 8;

Swell: Lieblich Bourdon 16; Open Diapason 8; Salcional 8; Vox Angelica 8 TC; Lieblich Gedact 8; Gemshorn 4; Flageolet 2; Cornopean 8; Hautboy 8; Swell to Great; Swell to Pedals; Great to Pedals; Mechanical action throughout.

THE BELLS

Three bells were sold from St Nicholas’ in 1550 to buy arms for the defence of the town: hence the 1552 inventory notes only one steeple bell weighing 16 cwt (813kg). By 1615 the number had been increased to four again

and then to five by replacing the tenor with two smaller bells by John Draper of Thetford. One bell needed recasting in James Edberry's foundry at Wiggenhall St Germans and when it proved still unsatisfactory, he was asked to cast it again in Lynn: this was done 'in comon stath yard' almost certainly in a bell pit excavated on the Corn Exchange site during redevelopment. It was then found to be untuneable and was recast in Thetford by John Draper.

Recastings of bells are also recorded in 1645 (the great bell) and 1684. The entire peal was recast as a ring of eight, with the tenor weighing 19 cwt (965kg), at the restoration of the tower and spire (1869–70) by Taylor of Loughborough. After much needed recent restoration work the bells were rung for the first time for many years for the Sea Sunday service in July 1999. The clock bell of 1613, by John Draper, which originally hung outside the pre-1741 spire, is also in the tower.

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Lynn Advertiser (microfilm at Lynn Library) especially 11 January 1851, 26 April 1851, 24 May 1851, 1 November 1851, 26 February 1853, 22 June 1853, 21 July 1860, 18 January 1868, 22 October 1897 and 23 December 1904

King's Lynn Borough Archives including

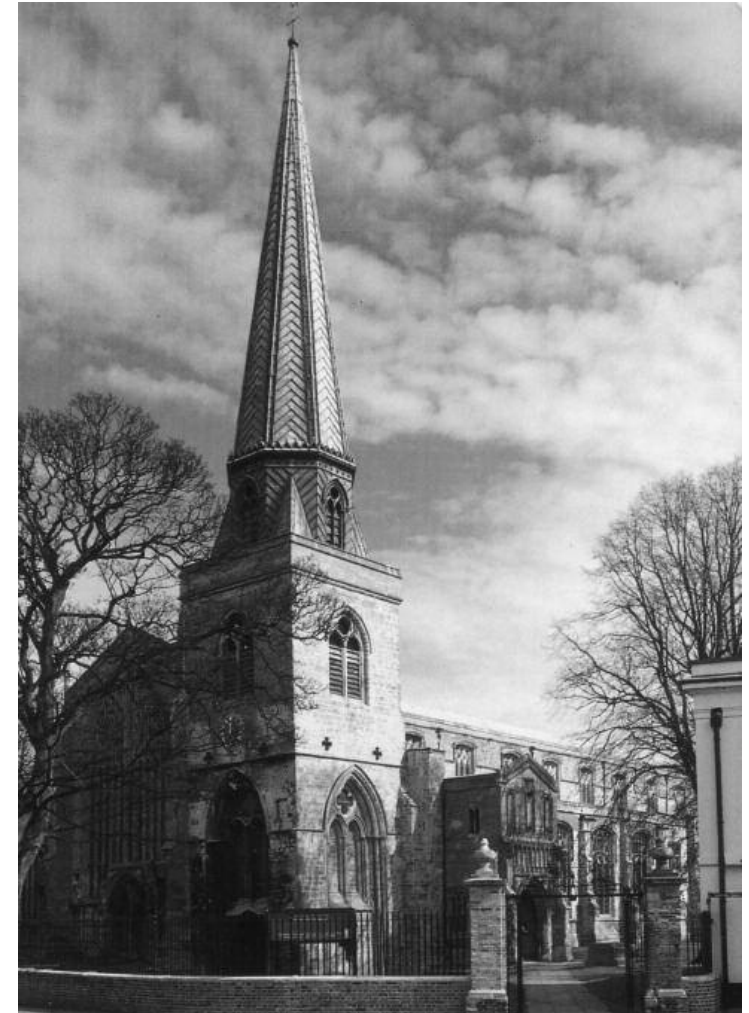
KL/C12/8 Copy of will of John Wace

KL/C38/7 Account Rolls of the Trinity Guild (payments to chaplains, hermits etc)

Norfolk Record Office:

PD 39: Records of St Margaret with St Nicholas King's Lynn

DN/CON/137: paper concerning the lawsuit over the removal of the galleries in 1852



Gilbert Scott's spire and the early tower of the chapel from the south-west
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Front cover: The fine two-storeyed porch and south aisle of St Nicholas' chapel
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: Monument to Thomas Greene (d.1675) and family
(JAMES AUSTIN, CAMBRIDGE).

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