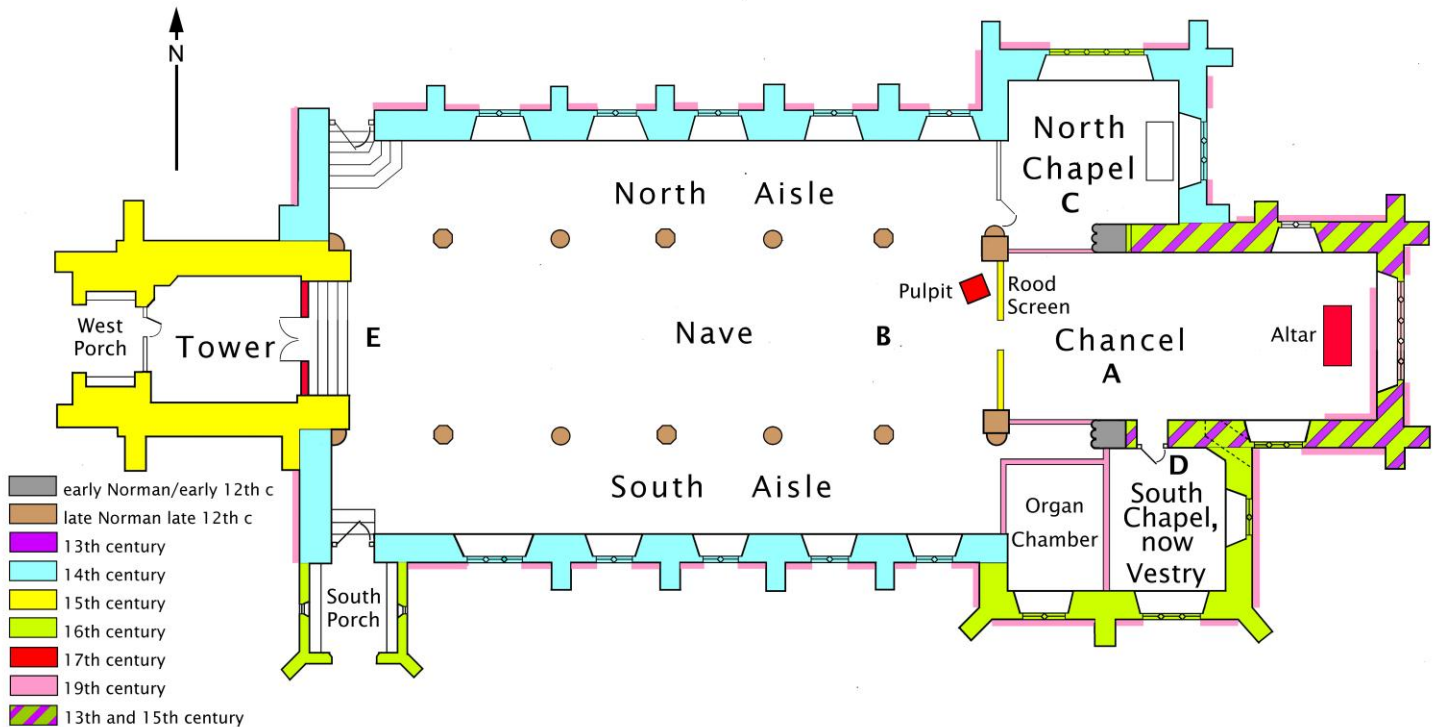


WELCOME TO THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, NORTH ELMHAM: A SHORT GUIDE

*We hope this short guide will point out some of the things of interest in this beautiful building.
For more detailed information please see the guide book on sale in the Church; price £2.*



Plan of the church showing the different phases of building.

The story of North Elmham church covers 900 years of change. It was begun by Herbert de Losinga, Bishop of East Anglia and founder of Norwich cathedral, as a replacement for the wooden cathedral church at Elmham which had been used as a parish church since its abandonment in 1071. Losinga died in 1191 and by this time he had replaced the wooden building with an impressive private chapel to serve his manor house on his Elmham estates. (The chapel site is to the north of the present church and under the guardianship of English Heritage. A separate guide book is for sale in the church)



You entered the church through the south Porch, built about 1500; notice the carved heads supporting the roof braces.

The face to the east (right) of the south door within the porch. Does it depict someone suffering from tooth ache?

Bishop Losinga's church and its successors

Stand at A on the plan. You are in the **Chancel** where Losinga started building. His chancel would probably have been rounded (or apsidal) in shape. Look up high on the south (right-hand facing the altar) wall and there is a small Norman window. There are traces of another one opposite to the north. This shows that the original church was a tall and substantial structure.

Before you come down the steps from the chancel to the main part of the church (the **nave**) you will see the other survivals of Losinga's church. The **two easternmost arcade pillars have** scalloped capitals on shafted pillars, very typical of the early 12th century. It is clear that these pillars were designed to support aisle arcading. Aisled parish churches of this date are very unusual. Bishop Losinga intended his North Elmham church to be a very impressive structure. The only other Norman aisled parish church in Norfolk is at Walsoken, near Wisbech, dating from the 1140s.



Norman capital on aisle post in chancel

Now come down to the nave and look at the arcade pillars. (**B** on the plan). The pillars are **alternately round and octagonal**, different easternmost ones, but similar to those at Walsoken.

However, unlike at Walsoken, here the arches have been replaced by pointed arches typical of the 13th century when the **aisle pillars** were raised using stone blocks of a different size and

the new arches added. This roof-line existed until the roof was raised and the **clerestorey** (or upper row of windows) added in the 15th century. The line of the old roof can still be seen in the inner face of the tower. The outer walls of the **aisles** were rebuilt in the 14th century.

The north and south chapels, C and D, dedicated to St John and St James, were created in the 15th century when the cult of the veneration of saints was at its height.

The pew ends

As you walk down the aisle look at the carved fine **pew ends** dating from the 15th century, and showing birds, animals and human faces.



Performing bear on one of the pew ends

The rood screen

Dividing the nave from the chancel is the fine **rood screen** of about the same date, showing saints of the early church carrying the symbols by which they could be recognised. It is one of the best of its kind in Norfolk and survived destruction by the puritans by being turned face downwards as the standing for pews, to be rediscovered by the Victorian restorers. (For a list of the saints and their symbols, look in the church guide book.

The windows

The **window openings and tracery** date from the 13th century (north chancel), 14th century (aisle windows), 15th century (clerestorey), 16th

century (westernmost window in south aisle and north chapel north window) and 19th century (east window). Small pieces of **medieval glass** survive in some of the north aisle windows and that above the chancel arch.

The pulpit, altar and tower screen

All these date from the 17th century and are the work of local craftsmen, Francis Floyd.



Date and inscription (Christ, the true vine) on the altar carved in 1622.



The pulpit is dated 1626. It celebrates the uniting of the crowns of England and Scotland

with roses, thistles, the Prince of Wales' feathers and Irish harps.

19th century changes

Both the inside and outside of the church were transformed by the Victorians. The outside was faced with knapped flints and inside, the box pews were removed revealing the medieval carved pew ends, and the rood screen discovered and re-erected. The chancel was re-roofed in 1838 and in 1852 the stone **redos** (or panelling) behind the altar was inserted. The fine stained glass window behind the altar is dated 1874 and the choir stalls and parsons' pews were added in the 1880s. The tiled floor with its iron grills covering the heating pipes was also a Victorian addition.

Before you leave the church

pause just in front of the steps up to the tower (**E on the plan**) and **look back down its length to the chancel**. Look up to the **clerestorey** which gives the church interior such a feeling of space. Notice the 15th century windows with their tracery which ensure that the church is always filled with light.

Tower and exterior

Outside notice the group of 18th century gravestones, many decorated with cherub heads, to the south of the church.



One of the earliest gravestones is that to Elizabeth Hastings, dated 1720. The hourglass and skull are typical of this date, while cherubs were more usual later in the 18th century.

The exterior of the building was refaced with flint in 1864. The fine **tower**, built about 1400 is visible for many miles around. Walk round to the tower into the unusually placed west porch under the tower. Look at the carvings on the frieze, at the corners, supporting the vaulted ceiling and the decorations around the west door.



Carvings of salamanders decorate the west entrance under the porch, built about 1400.



North Elmham church tower, with its west porch built within it.

Efforts to keep the church in good order continue as we endeavour to make sure it remains a focus of community and Christian activity in the village.

Donations towards this work are always welcome.