

### CHAPTER III

We need now to look at the individual church sites themselves. I propose to deal with them in two groups: the first considered in some detail, as there substantial remains of the second church, contains Reepham, South Walsham, Antingham, and Great Melton; the second contains the other eight, where the second church has long since vanished, or is reduced to negligible remains. Gillingham is dealt with at the end.

- I -

#### **Reepham St Mary/Whitwell St Michael and All Angels/Hackford All Saints**

This is perhaps the best-known group, and is unusual for two reasons: first, there were originally three churches in the enclosure here, and second, the three settlements all bear different names. Indeed, there was a fourth settlement, Kerdiston, which has, however, been a part of Reepham since the fourteenth century: whether it ever had a place of worship is uncertain. The 'site of St Mary's chapel' marked on the OS maps is most likely to have been the manorial chapel of the de Kerdestones (thus Blomefield and others), although seven acres of land were set apart for the support of a priest at the time of Domesday. Two of the churches, Reepham and Whitwell, survive complete, while Hackford was burnt down in 1543. The group is notable also for being the last of the twelve to retain separate incumbents, there being a Rector of Reepham-cum-Kerdiston and a Vicar of Whitwell-cum-Hackford until 1935.

**Reepham church**, the most easterly of the three, is dedicated in honour of the Nativity of Our Lady, and is historically a rectory. It was held in two medieties: Reepham St Mary or Thomas's, and Reepham-alias-Kerdeston or Hugh's. These were held separately until 1558, when one priest held both. This lasted until 1674, when they were split, and finally reunited in 1700.

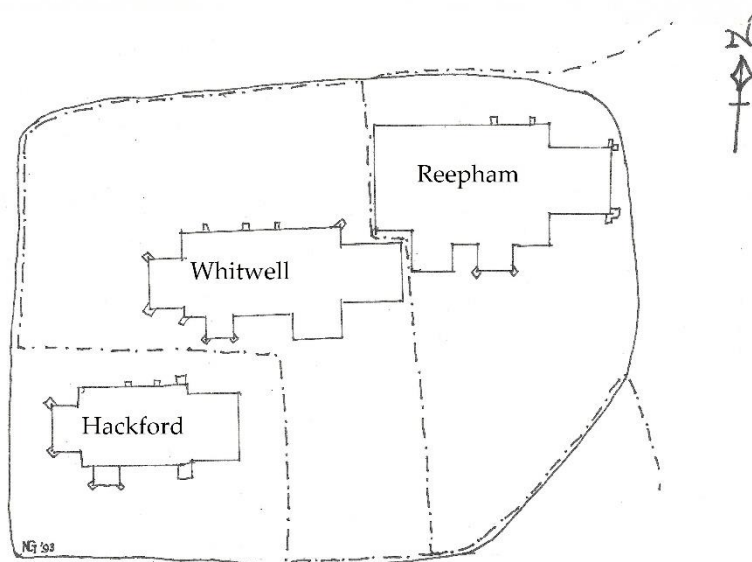
As it stands now, the church consists of a nave with aisles under one roof (the clerestory was removed in the eighteenth century),<sup>1</sup> chancel, south porch, and a square tower attached to the aisle about midway along its length. The position of this tower is unusual, although not without parallel (*e.g.*, St Stephen, Norwich, though there it forms a porch). Hurst suggests that the tower is a survival from an earlier church, on the ground that the internal (north) face has a door 'where one would expect an arch', over which is a string course, 'suggesting it was exposed to the elements'.<sup>2</sup> This would put the building on the same axis as Whitwell church; whether this would have been a wester or an axial tower is unclear: there is room for both.<sup>3</sup> A more likely reason is that the two

<sup>1</sup> MJ Sayer, *Reepham's Three Churches*, p 17.

<sup>2</sup> Hurst, *Reepham and its three churches*, p 2.

<sup>3</sup> A parallel is at nearby Guestwick, where the former axial tower is now at the east end of the north aisle.

churches are so close, and the parish boundary so involved, passing along the outside face of Reepham's nave west wall and the along Whitwell's chancel east wall, that the parishioners were constrained to build their tower in their parish, and this was the only suitable position.<sup>4</sup> To support this theory, there are angle buttresses on the two southern (external) corners, but not on the northern (internal) ones.



*Fig 3.1: Thomas Martin's plan of the three churches in their yard, with parish boundaries as in 1906 (redrawn NWG)*

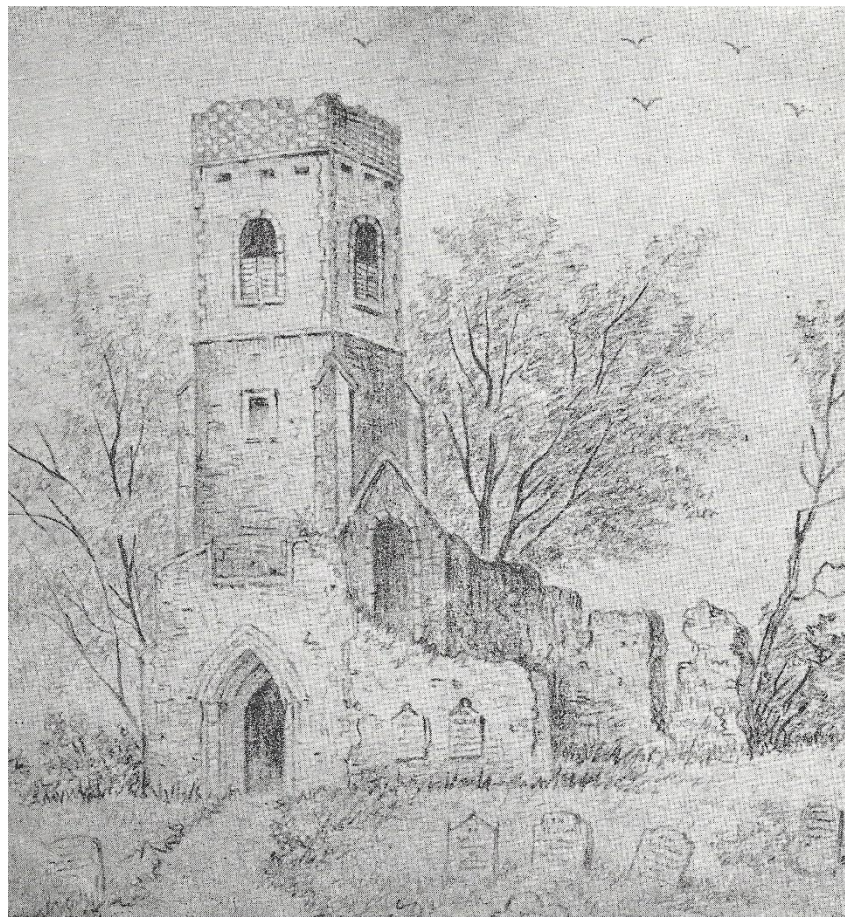
**Whitwell church**, which stands immediately to the south-west of Reepham, is dedicated in honour of St Michael and All Angels, and is historically a vicarage. It consists now of nave, chancel, west tower, south porch, and south transept. This transept is datable to the sixteenth century, and is the descendant of Hackford church, being built by the parishioners of Hackford, probably of materials from that church when it was united with Whitwell.<sup>5</sup> The church is so closely placed to Reepham church that they actually touch, the north-east corner of Whitwell lying against the south-east corner of Reepham for about two feet: see Fig 3.1. (The connecting door was not constructed until the union in 1935.) This would suggest that the two churches were originally much smaller structures than they are now, being placed some distance apart, as is the case with the other examples. During the mediæval period, they were expanded as far as their somewhat cramped siting allowed, this coming into physical contact. The most curious thing about this church is that

<sup>4</sup> St Martin in Exeter has its tower in the neighbouring parish.

<sup>5</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, p 149.

it is situated in a detached portion of its parish, which consists of the churchyard to its north, west, and south. This is, so far as can be ascertained, unique in the group of thirteen.

**Hackford church**, which stood to the south-west of Whitwell, was dedicated in honour of All Saints, and was historically a rectory. It was burnt in 1543 and not rebuilt, the living being united with Whitwell. It consisted of chancel, nave, south porch, and west tower. A drawing by the schoolmistress, Miss EF Boon, made in 1784, shows the tower, which stood until it was demolished in 1796, part of the nave walls, and the porch. All that remains today is the west wall of the porch (Messent's conjecture that it is 'the east wall of one of the aisles' is untenable, as the church never had aisles.) The church was much further from the other two, and separated by the churchyard path, which also forms its parish boundary.



South East view of ruins of All Saints' Church, Hackford  
7th June 1790. (A portion of the flint wall still stands).

*Fig 3.2: Miss Boon's sketch of Hackford.*

The sketch-plan of the three churches given at Fig 3.1 is based on a plan drawn by Thomas Martin in about 1750, and includes the parish boundaries taken from the OS six-inch map of 1906.<sup>6</sup> It shows Hackford church on the same east-west alignment as the other two, and the position of the remaining wall lends credence to this. Christopher Barringer raises the question as to whether there were parish churches in Whitwell, Kerdiston, and even Hackford.<sup>7</sup> He mentions the existence of a chapel in Kerdiston,<sup>8</sup> and also ‘reference to a chapel of St Nicholas in Whitwell’, but does not give the source of the reference, nor the chapel’s supposed site. We may assume that this was a chapel-of-ease to St Michael, as the actual settlement of Whitwell is over a mile away from the church. He refers also to the ‘field’ of Kerdiston, Whitwell, etc. The earliest map of Whitwell is probably an early eighteenth-century original, but the copy is dated 1772; it shows the furlongs in the fields, as does a similar map of Kerdiston of c1600 (held in NRO): this implies that the internal boundaries are a late addition to the scene.

One is inclined to think that perhaps Reepham and Hackford had formed a ‘conurbation’ (*cf* Saxthorpe/Corpusty., Horstead/Coltishall), and found it convenient to have the churches in the same place. This may be supported by the distribution of the ‘halls’ and ‘manors’: Whitwell Hall is in the middle of its parish; Hackford Hall is about a mile and a half west of the market; Kerdiston has its Old Hall site, Manor and Old Hall Farms about a mile away from the market; Reepham has a Manor Farm to the north-east of the market.

The place-name evidence is also telling: the name Hackford is stated by Ekwall to mean ‘the ford at the bend of the river’.<sup>9</sup> There is a stream which crosses the road at Hackford Vale, which indeed bends from a north-west/south-east alignment to a north/south one just before this. Hackford Vales is about three-quarters of a mile west of the present main settlement. This could indicate that the settlement has gradually moved eastward, where it coalesced with Reepham/Kerdiston. These two names mean, respectively, ‘a manor held or run by a reeve’ and ‘Cenred’s *tūn*’. It is just possible that Kerdiston is the original settlement, with Reepham, being run by the reeve. (A defensible division between the two would be along the road leading into Salle.) Is Reepham, therefore, more ‘successful’ as it has formed a dual settlement with Hackford? Whitwell means ‘the white spring or stream’ – with ‘white’ to be interpreted as in ‘white water racing’. The OS map shows several wells and springs in Whitwell, all in the area of Whitwell Common. This again suggests that the focus of the settlement has gradually moved north to Hackford market.

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<sup>6</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, Plate XIX, p 22, and text on p 189. The original of the sketch is NRO RYE 17/3.

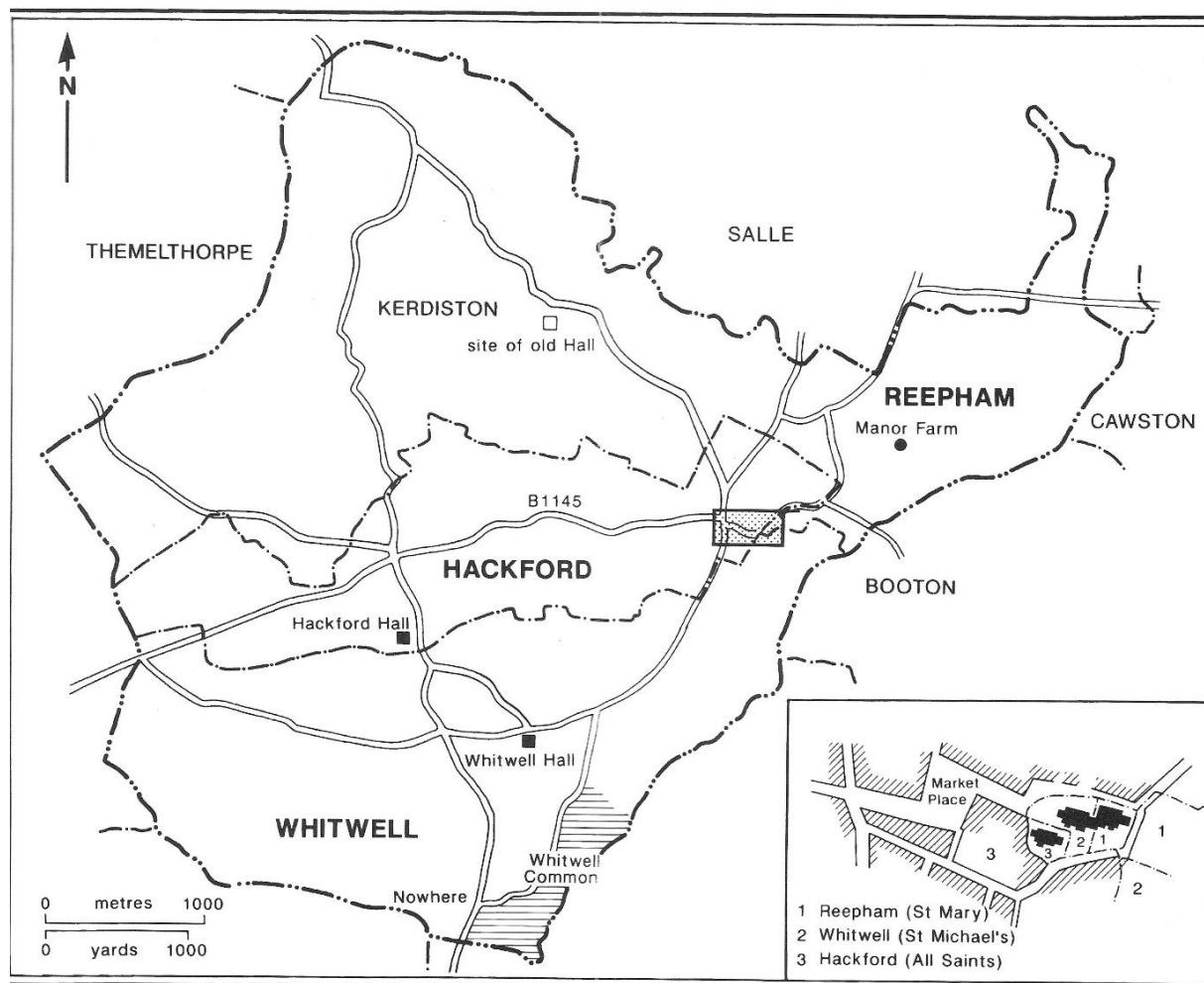
<sup>7</sup> JC Barringer, *Reepham, a market-town*.

<sup>8</sup> This is most likely the manorial chapel – see p 11 *supra*.

<sup>9</sup> E Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, s.v. Hackford.

The place 'Nowhere' near Whitwell Common is intriguing. This name usually indicates a non-parochial area within a village (*cf* Nowhere near Acle), often because of the decay of a church.<sup>10</sup> Was Whitwell itself a divided settlement, with one church in the south of the parish, and the other in the north? If so, the southern one went to decay very early indeed.

With regard to the market, John de Vaux, lord of Hackford, granted a charter for a market in 1277, which was sometimes referred to as Hackford Market as late as the eighteenth century. Barringer wonders whether the market was placed near the already present churches, or if they were built anew near the market. It should be borne in mind that Hackford actually contains, even now, the vast majority of the built-up area of the three villages, although it is the smallest of the three parishes: Hackford has 837.6 acres, Reepham 2497.2, and Whitwell, which has 1534.8, has almost an appearance of being inserted between the other two (see Fig 3.2).



*Fig 3.3: the internal parish boundaries*

<sup>10</sup> P Rutledge, *Norfolk Atlas*, §40, p 90.

It would seem fairly certain that what we are dealing with here is a coalescence of settlements (compare Norwich, which is made up of *Norðwic*, Westwick, Coslany, Conesford, Nedeham. etc), rather than the splitting apart which has happened in the other settlements under examination.

### South Walsham, St Mary and St Lawrence

These two churches form the second-best preserved group, St Lawrence lasting until 1827, when it was burnt out. The livings were united in 1890.

**St Lawrence**, historically a rectory, is usually considered to be the older foundation. The church consisted of chancel, nave, south porch, and west tower. All that is left now is the chancel, with a wester extension made in 1832. The tower, which had flushwork battlements, was split vertically, the western side standing until 1971, when it fell after a combination of lightning, high winds, and a sonic boom.

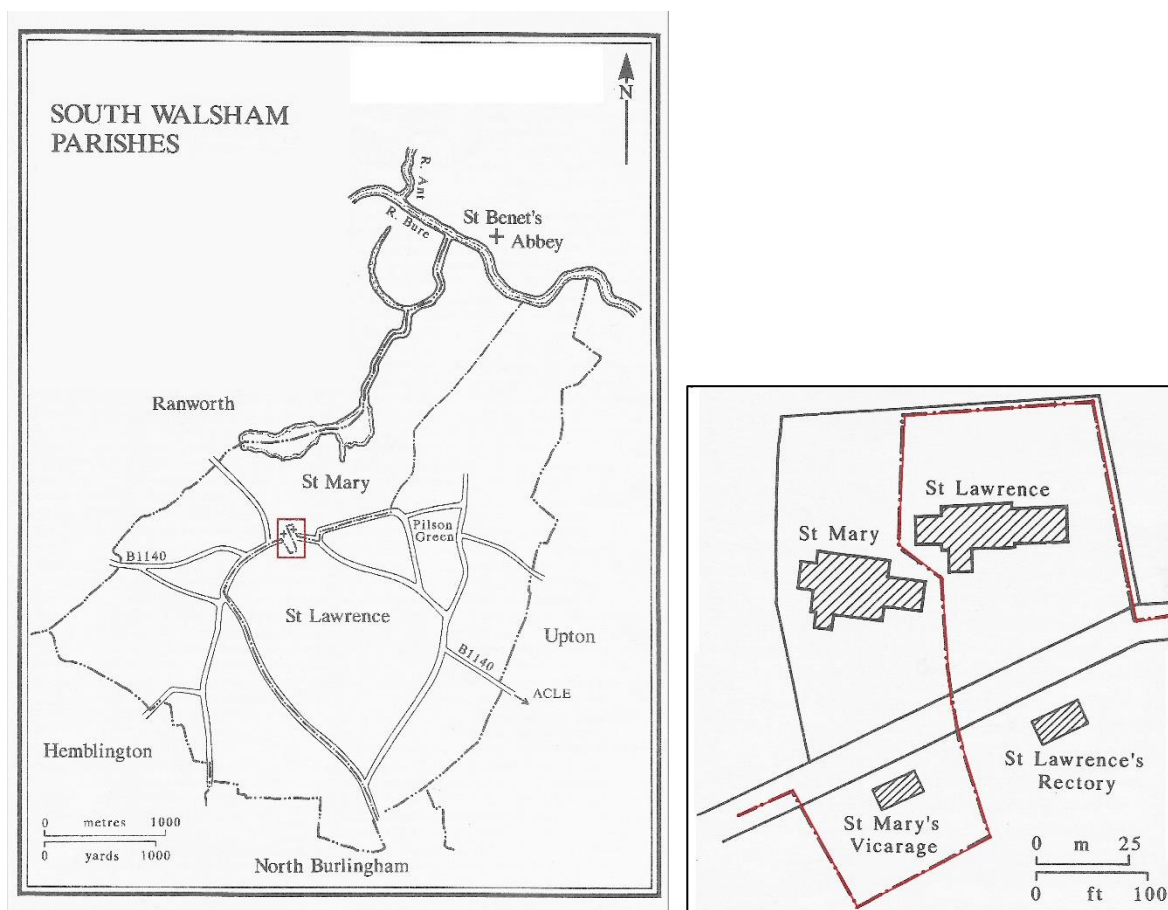


Fig 3.4: the South Walsham boundaries, with detail around the churches.

**St Mary**, a vicarage, is considered to be the daughter foundation, although this is based on the evidence of the internal parish boundaries. It consists of chancel, nave, north and south aisles, south porch, and west tower. It stands to the south-east of St Lawrence, the tower of which was parallel to the chancel of St Mary. The east-west alignment of the two buildings converges towards the west.

The internal parish boundary (see Fig 3.4), which is the only one recoverable apart from the Reepham group, runs along a road through the middle of the ‘greater’ parish, making deviations round the churches and their respective parsonage houses. This leads Warner to think that the parish of St Mary was carved out of St Lawrence, although he qualifies this by saying that ‘it is possible that the boundary ... was a rationalisation of an earlier, more complex, state of land division’.<sup>11</sup> This is pointed by a transcript from an unnamed ‘Norfolk Directory of 1853’ in the muniment room at St Mary, which states that ‘to settle previous disputes, it was determined at the enclosure that the road which runs through the village should be the parish boundary’.<sup>12</sup>

St Lawrence is thus most likely the older parish, and it is the one which holds the portions on the marshes to the east: St Mary has none.

### **Antingham, St Mary and St Margaret.**

It is a moot point whether this group is better preserved than Great Melton, but as one of those is a nineteenth-century rebuild, I choose to place Antingham third. Here the two churches stand one to the south of the other, the southerly one (St Margaret) being if anything a little further east than its northerly neighbour (St Mary). The east-west alignment is also not identical, St Mary being orientated a little more to the north than St Margaret. They are sufficiently far apart not for the one not to have pulled the alignment of the other into parallel, as may possibly be the case at Reepham and South Walsham, where the buildings are much closer together.

**St Mary** is the church which remains, dating in its present form from about 1330, and appearing to be of one build. It consists simply of nave and chancel under separate roofs, but of identical width, south porch, and west tower. It contains a Purbeck marble font of c1225, but it is thought that it may have belonged to St Margaret, although there is no evidence to support this.

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<sup>11</sup> Warner, *op cit*, p 47.

<sup>12</sup> The enclosure here was in 1801. [2017: *White's Directory of 1854* says the same, so this is the probable source. The ‘muniment room’ no longer exists.]

**St Margaret** has been ruinous since the late seventeenth century, and the ruins now consist of the west tower, and the walls of the nave and chancel, which stand to varying heights. There was also a south porch. The whole structure is now extremely overgrown and very dangerous, and close inspection was, therefore, not possible. [2017: *It is rather more accessible now.*] However, it is possible to say that there are probable signs of twelfth-century work here: the nave, to which the chancel and tower were later added, has quoins of carrstone. In 1703 a Faculty was granted ‘to take down the old walls of the ruined church of Antingham St Margaret, provided that the stones and other materials be employed to no other use’ than repairing St Mary.<sup>13</sup>

Since 1748 the living, which is a rectory, has been consolidated not with St Mary, but with North Walsham, which is the next-door parish. [2017: *The parishes were split in 2002, St Margaret being united with St Mary.*] However, despite this clear separation of the two livings, Antingham was treated a one parish, with St Mary as the parish church. North Walsham’s involvement was limited to the upkeep of the ruins. Thus, disappointingly, the internal parish boundary is not be found – if it was ever more than notional, anyway. Batcock, however, thinks that the churches may have been in distinct yards originally, and refers to the eastern church yard wall, which is of masonry in the part which would logically belong to St Margaret, but is a hedgerow in St Mary’s part.<sup>14</sup>

The question which immediately arises is why this union should take place. Antingham has two manors, one church being attached to each. St Mary goes with the manor of Antingham Witchingham; St Margaret goes with the Manor of St Bennet (attached to the chamberlain of St Benet’s Abbey). North Walsham’s patron is the Bishop, in right of his legal title to the Abbacy of St Benet’s, and one can but suggest that this may be the reason.

### **Great Melton, St Mary and All Saints**

This is the last of the twelve groups to retain substantial remains of the second church. The reason here, as noted above under Antingham, is that in 1723 the two parishes were united (although they been held in plurality for considerable periods), and All Saints was allowed to dilapidate. However, in 1883, St Mary was in such bad repair, that it was found more convenient to rebuild All Saints and allow St Mary to go to ruin, and this is the state of affairs which obtains today.

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<sup>13</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 6/C3.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*



**All Saints** as rebuilt consists of nave, chancel, west tower, south porch, and north transept, of which only the tower is original.<sup>15</sup> It contains an early English lancet in the north chancel wall, said to come from St Mary.<sup>16</sup>

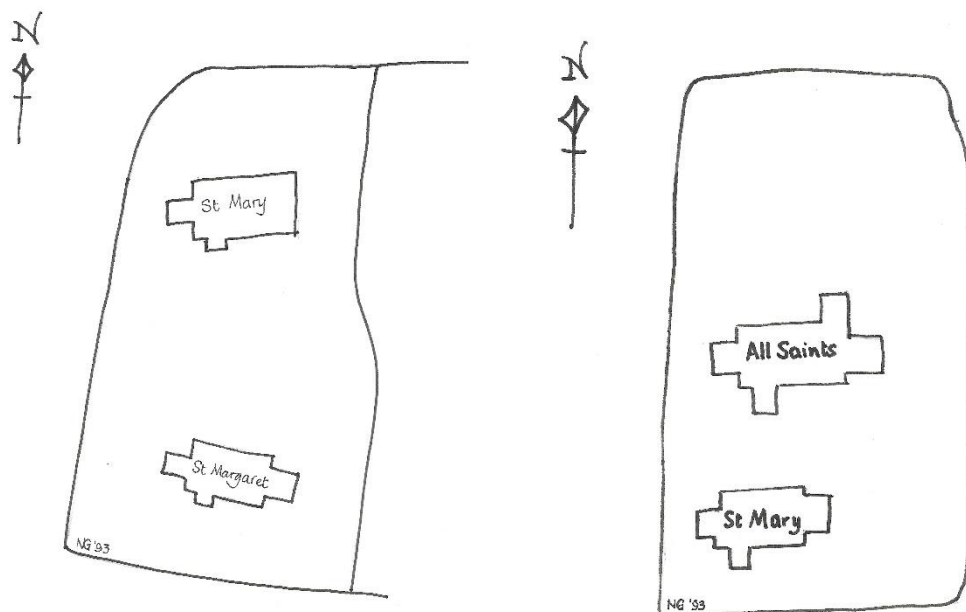


Fig 3.5: sketch plans of Great Melton (left) and Antingham (right) to show the relative positions of the churches

**St Mary** now consists only of the shell of the tower. Formerly the building comprised nave, chancel, south porch, and west tower. The tower is unbuttressed; the west corners have limestone quoins, while the eastern ones have the broken-off remains of the nave wall. The tower arch is turned in brick, and two rooflines are visible above it. The west window is four-centred, although the tracery has vanished, and the belfry windows are four-centred also. This would appear (subject to the usual cautions about later refenestration) to place the tower in the fifteenth-century (Blomefield says it is 1440).<sup>17</sup> The nave would appear to have been earlier: an engraving by Ladbroke, taken from the north in 1823, shows lancet windows in the chancel, pointing to a date in the thirteenth century, while the nave windows are fourteenth or fifteenth century in style.<sup>18</sup>

St Mary stands twenty metres to the south of All Saints, and slightly further to the west, by a few feet only. The east-west alignment is not identical, as it converges towards the east. All Saints occupies the middle of the churchyard, while St Mary appears to be fitted in between it and the

<sup>15</sup> DP Mortlock and CV Roberts, *Norfolk Churches*, vol 2, p 52.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Blomefield, V, p 12.

<sup>18</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 7/E13. The Ladbroke engraving is at Plate CDLXVI.

boundary (see Fig 3.4, and see Plate XVIII in Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, p 21). This may be significant fact in determining which is the later of the two, as we would expect the earlier church to occupy the centre of the enclosure. A church is mentioned in Domesday, and it may well be All Saints.

There are two manors here, to each of which one of the churches belonged: All Saints to Peverell's, and St Mary to Hacon's.<sup>19</sup> In addition to this, Peverell's held also the chapelry of Algarsthorpe, which is now hamlet within Great Melton. There is also the adjacent parish of Little Melton, which is about half the size of its neighbour, and which we may assume is a former dependent settlement: its church is dedicated in honour of St Mary and All Saints, a fairly unusual dedication, which is particularly telling in this instance, as the two churches of Great Melton are St Mary and All Saints. Was it formed, therefore, by an equal migration from the two parishes of the mother-settlement?<sup>20</sup>

## - II -

The other eight groups have either no or very scanty remains left of the second church, and thus cannot be described in such detail as the first four. However, the approximate sites within the churchyards are known in all cases, although, as is the case with Hackford and South Walsham St Lawrence, later burials are to be found within the sites, and these do not make interpretation or identification easy.

### **Barnham Broom, Sts Peter & Paul and St Michael**

The two churches here lasted until the sixteenth century, according to Batcock, but a pamphlet by Simon Cotton and Roy Tricker notes that the livings were united in 1347, and they think that St Michael was pulled down then 'providing the impetus for the rebuilding of the other church'.

**Sts Peter & Paul** consists of nave, chancel, west tower, and south porch. The whole church appears to be of one build, and the date would be in the later fourteenth to early fifteenth century, which fits with the earlier date of demolition given in the previous paragraph.

**St Michael** now consists of a very low fragment of walling, which Batcock interprets as part of the north wall, as it runs east-west.<sup>21</sup> This is screened in a very heavy growth of yew-trees to the

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<sup>19</sup> Blomefield, V, p 12.

<sup>20</sup> 'St Mary and All Saints' is a fairly common double dedication, there being twenty-seven pre-Reformation examples. It is the second most common double dedication, after Sts Peter and Paul. F Arnold-Foster, *Church Dedications*, vol III, p 7.

<sup>21</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 8/A8.

north of Sts Peter & Paul, and, as Batcock says, requires ‘diligent searching’.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the size of the church, its south wall cannot have been more than a few feet away from the north wall of Sts Peter & Paul.

The churches would appear to have been on a similar east-west alignment, and both are very close to the eastern edge of the churchyard.

Blomefield says that both churches were taxed together at twenty marks, and the carvage of St Michael went with that of Sts Peter & Paul., which is stated to have the carvage of the chapel of Ryskes with it;<sup>23</sup> he thinks that St Michael may, therefore, have been the parochial chapel of the decayed village of Ryskes: this may now be represented by Rush Green.<sup>24</sup> The village itself was at one time called Barnham Rysks, Chambers saying ‘that hamlet, and church thereto belonging, being united to it’.<sup>25</sup> It had been called Barnham Broom only ‘for the last 55 years’ – *i.e.*, since c1774. If this is so, one wonders why a chapel-of-ease was built in the same place as its mother church.

### **East Carleton, St Mary and St Peter**

This group is unique in that Domesday mentions both churches as being present.

**St Mary**, the surviving church, is a small structure consisting of nave and chancel in one piece, with a north aisle of equal length, and almost as wide, south porch, and west tower.

**St Peter**, which seems to have been dilapidated around 1550, consists now solely of a piece of walling, about three feet high, which runs north-south. This is probably the west wall of the nave.<sup>26</sup> According to Blomefield, the church had no tower, and was the smaller of the two buildings. If this interpretation is correct, it would place St Peter to the south, and fairly, by not completely, to the east of St Mary.

Both churches were appropriated, and both invalidly. St Mary was appropriated to the Cistercian nunnery of Marham on its foundation in c1249. It was then conveyed by 1324 to the Priory of Alnesbourne, a very small house of Austin Canons. The canons appointed a stipendiary chaplain, and eventually conveyed the church to the Master and Brethren of St Giles’ Hospital, Norwich.

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Blomefield, II, p 377.

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to my former Anglo-Saxon tutor *the late* John Levitt of Keele University for confirming my hypothesis, based on philological change.

<sup>25</sup> Chambers, p 326

<sup>26</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards, 8/B5.

However, in 1498, the Bishop obliged them to appoint a Rector, as the appropriation was invalid. It remained in the gift of the Hospital until the Dissolution, and then passed to the Corporation of Norwich as Guardians of the re-founded Great Hospital.

St Peter was appropriated to Shouldham Priory, and no vicarage was endowed. This appropriation was disallowed, and the church became a rectory in Shouldham's gift. In 1441, it was united with St Mary, and the church turned into a parsonage house.<sup>27</sup> However, in 1640, the King presented Edward Rogers to St Peter's alone; the living was returned in 1677 as a sinecure.

The parish itself is very small, and does not seem to admit of any immediately obvious division. The churches stand fairly well in the middle of the parish, although several yards back from the road. There is, however, a part of the parish in its north-east corner called Lower East Carleton, which is a possible centre for a second parish. Domesday also mentions the lost hamlet of Walsingham, which lies within East Carleton; the two-and-a-half inch OS map marks the remains of a third church on Scott's Hill, about half a mile south of the other two.

There are two manors, Carleton Curzons and Carleton Peverells. Chambers implies that each manor went with one of the churches, but it is not clear whether this was so, and if it was, which church went with which manor.<sup>28</sup>

### **West Dereham, St Andrew and St Peter.**

There are absolutely no remains at all of the second church at Wes Dereham, though in Blomefield's day there were some. This group is of interest as being the only group situated to the west of the Stiffkey-Blo'Norton line.

**St Andrew** is the surviving church, and consists of a round west tower (which has the extraordinary internal diameter of 17' 6"), nave, chancel, and south porch.<sup>29</sup> The tower arch is Norman in origin, and the south door to the nave is c1200; the windows in the rest of the building are Perpendicular, but these may well be replacements by the Abbey (see below).<sup>30</sup>

**St Peter** stood to the west of St Andrew: the site is covered now with nineteenth-century burials, and has also been allowed to grow wild as a conservation area. The church appears to have been

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<sup>27</sup> Blomefield, V, p 98.

<sup>28</sup> Chambers, *General History*, p 795.

<sup>29</sup> Pevsner, *BE: Norfolk 2: North-west and South*, p 374. [2017: p 763 in the 1999 edition.]

<sup>30</sup> These details from Pevsner: the church was locked when visited.

last in use in the first half of the sixteenth century, and was abandoned as one church was more than sufficient for the village.<sup>31</sup>

West Dereham also contained an abbey of Premonstratensian canons, founded by Hubert Walter, Dean of York, in 1188.<sup>32</sup> It had an interest in both churches: St Peter was given by the founder, and appropriated to it; St Andrew was given by Sir William Timworth in 1218, and also appropriated. No list of incumbents survives, presumably because both churches were served from the Abbey.<sup>33</sup> There were two manors, Curple or Pentney Priory, and Timworth. They were united,<sup>34</sup> and belonged to the Abbot until the Dissolution, when they passed to the Crown, and then to Sir Thomas Lovel in 1554.

It is probable that one church went with each manor, St Andrew with Timworth and St Peter with Curple. The late survival of the second church in such a small village is almost certainly due to the Abbey's control: it was an important house of its Order (it had possessions in thirty-three Norfolk parishes); it would have no stipend to find for vicars or parish chaplains; and it would appear to have confined rebuilding to refenestration.

### **Bedingham, St Andrew and St Mary**

Again, nothing survives of the second church here.

**St Andrew** is the surviving church: originally a rectory, it became a vicarage in 1302. Anciently, it was held in two medietyes. As it stands now, it consists of nave with aisles and eastern transepts; chancel; and round west tower with the common octagonal top. The tower is thirteenth-century, the rest probably fourteenth- or fifteenth-century.

**St Mary** was probably last in use in the sixteenth century, and presumably suffered the same fate as others at this time: one church was sufficient for the village. Nothing is left, and its precise location is unknown, although Messent says foundations remain.<sup>35</sup>

There was a manor of Walsingham Priory: was this connected with St Mary's?

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<sup>31</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards, 8/F13.

<sup>32</sup> R Midmer, *English Medieval Monasteries*, p 324.

<sup>33</sup> Blomefield, VII, p 321.

<sup>34</sup> Chambers, *General History*, p 45; but no date is given for the union.

<sup>35</sup> Messent, *Ruined Churches of Norfolk*, p 13.

### **Blo’Norton, St Andrew and St Margaret**

Again, nothing survives of the second church.

**St Andrew** consists simply of nave and chancel which are undifferentiated, north aisle, north porch, and west tower. The chancel windows appear to be thirteenth-century, but may be re-used or renewed; the rest of the church appears to be fourteenth-century. The wooden north porch is sixteenth-century.

**St Margaret** was pulled down in 1394: a licence was granted on 13 May in that year, ‘after Robert de Brome proved to the Bishop that St Margaret’s was so decayed, and St Andrew’s able to hold all the parishioners, that this was worthwhile’.<sup>36</sup> Chambers adds that the revenues of the church were so small that ‘nobody would accept of it’.<sup>37</sup>

### **Rockland, St Mary and St Margaret**

The current name for the village is Rockland St Mary. In Blomefield’s day it was known as Rockland Abbots, as the Abbot of Langley had held the Manor.<sup>38</sup> The two parishes were also known as Rockland Major and Rockland Minor, this being the only example of separate village names surviving (except at Reepham).

**St Mary** is the surviving church, and was in Rockland Minor. It was held in two moieties, the *par major* being a rectory belonging to Bigod’s part of the town.<sup>39</sup> The advowson was sold, together with that of South Walsham St Lawrence, by the Duke of Norfolk to Queens’ College, Cambridge. The *pars minor* was given to Langley Abbey and appropriated. In 1360, the two moieties were united. It consists of nave with south porch, chancel, and an exceptionally thin west tower. The date is probably mid-fourteenth century, but the church has been heavily and extensively restored.

**St Margaret** was the church of Rockland Major. It was given to the Benedictine nuns of St Margaret in Bromehall in Berkshire, and appropriated. The advowson belonged to the manor of Little-breeche.

Little is left of St Margaret: about four metres to the east of St Mary’s chancel is a length of walling running north-south, about seven metres long, and two high. Batcock interprets this as the west

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<sup>36</sup> Undated pamphlet by Roy Tricker and Simon Cotton in Colman & Rye Library [2017: *now Norfolk Heritage Centre*]

<sup>37</sup> Chambers, *General History*, p 701.

<sup>38</sup> Blomefield, V, p 483.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

wall of the nave.<sup>40</sup> The site is covered with nineteenth-century graves. A pamphlet guide says that it was about the same size as St Mary,<sup>41</sup> and Chambers adds that it never had a tower.<sup>42</sup> The exact date of its abandonment is unknown, but it was most probably pre-Reformation.

There were two manors here; Abbots and Little-breeche, and it appears that Rockland Minor (St Mary) went with Abbots, and Rockland Major (St Margaret) with Little-breeche.

### **Stiffkey, St Mary and St John Baptist**

The second church here was last in use about 1559, as there were separate Rectors until that date.<sup>43</sup> Despite this, there is some confusion over which church was actually pulled down, and which is still standing. Messent is of the opinion that St John survives, as are Mortlock and Roberts, Chambers, and also Pevsner; but Batcock refers to Jones, who is of the opinion that St Mary survives, as there are no references to St John in wills after 1552. The Diocesan Directory gives the dedication as 'SS John and Mary', and *Crocksford's Clerical Directory* as 'St John w St Mary'. For the purposes of this study, we shall follow majority opinion, and assume that St John is the survivor.

**St Mary** stood due east of St John, and the west wall was only a few feet from the east wall of St John. Ruins were visible until about 1883, when they were cleared away. All that is left now is a rectangular earthwork filled with nineteenth-century graves. It would appear from this that the church was a single-celled building, or at least one with no separate chancel, and no tower.

### **Wicklewood, All Saints and St Andrew**

There are no remains here of the second church, but there are excellent documentary references for its abandonment.

**All Saints**, the surviving church, was appropriated to the Almoner of the Cathedral Priory, one moiety in 1226, and the other in 1235. The manor of Ampner's (*sc* Almoner's) would appear to go with this church.

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<sup>40</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards, 8/C12.

<sup>41</sup> Anon, *Eleven Churches a guide to the Bramerton Group, Norfolk*, Bramerton, c1978.

<sup>42</sup> Chambers, *General History*, p 758.

<sup>43</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 9/D2.

**St Andrew** was under the patronage of the Abbey of Bromeholm, but in 1341, Edmund Ufford, the brother of the Earl of Suffolk, obtained a licence to settle it on the Prioress of Campsey. As the licence was not confirmed, it was appropriated instead to the Almoner of Norwich in the same year. In 1367 (23 June, according to Blomefield, 23 January according to Chambers) the Bishop consolidated both churches and united them to the Almonry. No vicar was assigned to St Andrew, as both were in one yard, and St Andrew being decayed, it was to be demolished, on condition that the Vicar of All Saints should find a chaplain to celebrate in All Saints for the parishioners of St Andrew. In 1424, the Bishop united the whole into one vicarage.<sup>44</sup> St Andrew stood on the north side of All Saints, and nothing now shows above ground level.

### - III -

#### **Gillingham St Mary and All Saints**

The churches here appear to be in adjacent yards, separated by a driveway to the Hall; thus they do not appear in Batcock's list. However, it would appear that the drive is a late feature of the landscape, being constructed over the churchyard when the Hall was built in the Jacobean period, and that the churches were originally in the one yard.<sup>45</sup>

**St Mary** is standing. A Norman foundation with central tower, it was unsensitively rebuilt and enlarged around 1859. Enough of the original work remains to support the Norman date.

**All Saints** has only its tower surviving. The rest of the church was dismantled in 1748, after the parishes had been consolidated. As with Antingham St Margaret, the ruin is considerably overgrown and dangerous. However, it is possible to say that the tower is later than St Mary's, having four-centred belfry windows (the tracery is gone) and a four-centred west window with Perpendicular tracery. It is datable further by wills to 1461-72,<sup>46</sup> the latter date being a bequest of 40s to the battlement of the steeple.<sup>47</sup> There are two rooflines visible on its west face. The higher, marked with stone, is the nave roof, and the lower, marked with render, may be that of a mortuary chapel built against the tower after the rest of the church had been dismantled. The tower arch itself is turned in brick, and there are diagonal buttresses which end below the top stage: these are all but invisible owing to the ivy.<sup>48</sup> The church appears to have been a simple structure of nave,

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<sup>44</sup> Blomefield, II, p 460.

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous undated leaflet on the churches in Colman & Rye (ref 726.5).

<sup>46</sup> Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 7/D9.

<sup>47</sup> But this does not prevent the foundation of All Saints being synchronous with that of St Mary: it may easily have been rebuilt when Windle and Winston were united with All Saints in 1440.

<sup>48</sup> See Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, Plate CDLVII, on fiche cards.



chancel, and tower, as Martin, who witnessed the demolition of the church, gives its dimensions as

Nave: 5 paces x 14 paces;

Chancel: 5 paces x 20 feet.<sup>49</sup>

The churches had separate incumbents until 1746, when they were united. The graveyard of All Saints was used until the early years of the twentieth century, but is now very heavily overgrown. The disposition of the churches is similar to that at Antingham, St Mary being to the north, and slightly to the east, of All Saints (allowing for the nineteenth-century truncation of the original nave at St Mary). The east-west alignment converges towards the east. They stand, however, much further apart than any other pair: at least two hundred feet separates them.

The Hall drive is quite probably an incursion over the churchyard, judging from inspection. Chambers, writing in 1829, says ‘the walls and heavy iron gates, with which the court was formerly environed, have been removed within these few years; at which time the turnpike road was turned and the grounds laid out in modern taste’. He goes on to stress that the new entrance to the Hall was between the two churches. Faden’s map (surveyed 1790-94) shows the drive passing between them.

The situation is somewhat complicated by the tenorial pattern: there is only one manor in the parish, and Gillingham now (and has since c1440) contains two other decayed parishes, Winston and Windle, which were united to All Saints. In the 1316 list of lords, Gillingham, Winston, and Windle are listed, together with Geldeston, Kirby Cane, and Ellingham, as being held by Roger Bigod. Chambers says that the manor was part of the Bacon property, and Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper, was ‘the first who had the grant of the manor’.<sup>50</sup>

The question that immediately arises, whether or not Gillingham is a genuine shared churchyard, is why there are two parishes here, as there is only one manor – and that is shared with six other parishes. It may well be the case that the reason here is not manorial, but to do with freemen. Tom Williamson’s map shows a very high concentration of freemen in this area of the county in late Saxon times: approximately thirty to forty per square kilometre.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, the population density at the same time was very low: between none and six recorded individuals per square kilometre.

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<sup>49</sup> Martin, *Notes and Sketches*, information from Batcock, *Ruined Churches*, fiche cards 7/D9.

<sup>50</sup> Chambers, *General History*, p 85.

<sup>51</sup> K Skipper and T Williamson, *Norfolk Atlas*, §15, p 40.