

## The north and south porches of St John, Maddermarket

The two porches at St John Maddermarket are among the earliest to survive in the city and important indicators of the development of the building type. At the time they were constructed St John's was aisleless so both directly abutted the west bay of the nave. It is clear from a number of characteristics that the north porch was also the bell tower. The



thickness of the walls indicates that it was to be built up to some height and take considerable weight, and a circular opening in the centre of the vault was provided so that the bells could be hoisted up through it, as at St Stephen's, built c.1300-10 (Lunnon 2015, 289). As the market after which the church takes its name was located to the north, this porch tower was both the main entrance and the show façade, again as at St Stephen's. The use of large carved heads of the vault bosses is consistent with other work from the early 14th century, such as the Ethelbert Gate into the cathedral precinct under construction in 1314-16 (Ibid.), though the style is rather harsher and probably a decade or two later.



Very similar bosses can be found on what remains of the vault in the south porch, and the two porches must be contemporary. Because it only rises to one upper storey the walls do not have to bear much weight and so they are thinner than those of the tower. That in part explains why the floor area of the south porch is 50% larger than the north (Ibid., 297) even though it is not the main entrance. There is however one thick wall, on the west side; it contained the stair (now blocked) to first floor level. At this stage in the development of porches in Norwich this solution was preferred to the construction of an adjoining stair turret which became popular in the 15th century; other examples survive at St Laurence, south porch, and St Gregory (Ibid., 289-90), respectively from the early

and late 14th century. The porch at Maddermarket perhaps dates between these extremes; the reused hinges on the south door into the church suggest a period of construction around 1330.



It is noteworthy and unusual that two porches were provided at the same period and with such different forms. While the purpose of the north porch as a bell tower explains its character, the south porch is not so straightforward. On one hand it indicates that the entrance from Pottergate was already of significance, but the function of the upper room remains unclear. The relatively wide, straight flight of steps suggests regular and convenient access, and in the period before sacristies were built adjoining the chancels of churches such spaces could have been where vestments, books and altar vessels were stored.

### ***Bibliography***

Lunnon, Helen E. 2015. 'Defining Porches in Norwich, c.1250-c.1510'. *Norwich: Medieval and Early Modern art, architecture and archaeology*, ed. T. A. Heslop and Helen E. Lunnon (Leeds: Maney Publishing), 283-306.