

The Nave of St John Maddermarket

The interior of St John Maddermarket offers an uninterrupted view from west to east. There is no chancel arch or other division separating the nave from the presbytery perhaps because, on such a restricted site, the spaces that would have resulted would have been very limited. As things stand, the continuity of the nave arcades and clearstorey creates the impression of a single, coherent volume.



St John Maddermarket interior looking west.
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Despite the impression of coherence, there are some anomalies. The arches of the easternmost bay containing the chancel are shorter than those of the nave bays (an average of 3.45 m as against 3.77 m), and even more strikingly the elevations of the north and south arcade differ in many details. The piers have different bases and mouldings and the arches to the south have hood moulds while those on the north do not. The wall shafts rising into the spandrels of the arches end at different heights: on the south side they reach to the level of the apex of the arches, on the north they terminate at half way up the arches. The design of the north arcade implies the use of wooden wall posts above the capitals, whereas the south might have taken arch braces. At some time between the construction of the two sides there must have been a change of mind about what sort of roof was envisaged. Even so, the dates of the two sides cannot be

separated by more than a few years. The south arcade has been linked to the work of the 'Wiveton' Master who was most active in the late 1430s and 1440s (Fawcett 1982). That fits well with the career of the probable patron of the south aisle, Ralph Segrym. He was mayor of Norwich in 1451 and died in 1456. His tomb was in the

Lady chapel at the east end of the aisle. In 1452, a bequest of £40/- made by Robert Blickling, 'arminger', to cover the roof with lead suggests that work was nearing completion (NCC Aley 130). The burial in the equivalent position on the north, in All Saints chapel, was of Richard and Elena Hoste (Blomefield IV, 292). Hoste was a mercer who became a sheriff in 1462 and MP in 1467, in which year he died. However he did not become a freeman of the city until 29 Hen. VI (1450-1, LeStrange 1888, 76) so it seems likely that his contribution to the church came after that of Segrym, which implies that the south aisle is the earlier of the two.

Even so, the design of both the north and south arcades clearly precedes the decision to build the clearstorey, with two windows per arcade bay, which in turn resulted in a new roof being built at a height well above the wall shafts on both sides of the nave. A complication for this phase of the work will have been that the existence of the north porch tower. As originally built, it would have obstructed any clearstorey windows in the north-western bay. It was therefore a prerequisite of a full clearstorey that a new tower to house the bells be built elsewhere. In the event one was provided over the lane running past the west end of the church and until it was substantially complete it seems unlikely that the porch tower would have been truncated. Confirmation of such a building sequence is provided by the new tower's buttresses facing into the church. Weatherings can still be seen on the offsets below the present roof, so when the west tower was first constructed the roof was still at a lower level than it is today. Was this the roof that Robert Blickling left money for in 1452?

The present roof is clearly based on the model of St Peter Mancroft, with a fictive wooden rib vault acting as a coving on either side to mask the hammerbeam structure. After it was built the main east window (dating back to c.1330) was raised by about 1.5 metres. Its original sill position can still be made out on the exterior at the same level as that of the Lady chapel window just to the south. Like the addition of the clearstorey, the lifting of the east window serves to draw the eyes upwards to emphasise the height of the church. Unfortunately, however, the central section of the roof now sits very close to the apex of the window (the result of a reconstruction of the timberwork in 1876 following a gas explosion) so the overall effect is not quite as envisaged in the mid-15th century.

Bibliography

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