



THE MEDIEVAL CHURCHES OF NORWICH: CITY, COMMUNITY AND ARCHITECTURE

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The Porch at St Mary Coslany



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THE now much mutilated and restored two-storey porch at St Mary Coslany was once a rather handsome and detailed building. A large quantity of cut stone is used on the façade, including an elaborate niche which probably once housed a statue of the Virgin. The carved spandrels either side of the entrance arch show the Annunciation with the Virgin in the dexter spandrel and the angel Gabriel in the sinister. Similar arrangements survive on the porches at East Dereham, Great Witchingham and East Tuddenham.

The main porch was a significant part of any church, as sacramental ceremonies including baptism and marriage began there. That may help explain why the Annunciation was such a popular subject.

As the church currently stands, the porch is the least well integrated element. It sits against the south wall of the nave, centred between (but not filling) the two westernmost buttresses. The design fits with others in the region within a 20 mile radius of Norwich (Colby c.1435, South Walsham c.1454, East Tuddenham c.1458 and Acle c.1497). Based on these similar

examples it could have been built as early as the 1430s, but a date in the 1450s is more probable. The mouldings of the exterior jambs and arches are near-identical to those of porches at Walpole St Peter (c.1435), Wiveton, Great Cressingham (c.1439) and Hilborough (Fawcett 1982, 35-6). In the city, St Mary's limestone façade is reminiscent of the fan-vaulted porch at St Giles (built c.1455) and the basic form complements the porch at St Margaret Westwick, where dark flint contrasts St Mary's pale ashlar.

PORCHES were also used as burial places, and that at St Mary's is likely to be the porch in which John Harrowe, alias Wyghton, glazier and Fyebridge alderman in 1453, requested burial in 1457 (NCC BROSARD 84). It is possible (given the stone vaulted ceiling) that it was even built as a tomb canopy. Wyghton's will includes neither a bequest nor any instruction for the building of porch, but does record the large gift of ten pounds to the fabric of the church. Seemingly building works were in progress. Nine years later, Johanna Halle also requested burial in the porch at St Mary's (NCC JEKYS 31).



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IN similar manner to the panels of crowned 'M's and erect swords on the porch at Hilborough, the plinth bears flushwork panels with the 'Maria' cipher in carved pale ashlar set within knapped dark flints, which have since fallen out. The freestone has not lasted well either, and much of the plinth frieze has been lost and the buttresses largely remade.



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