



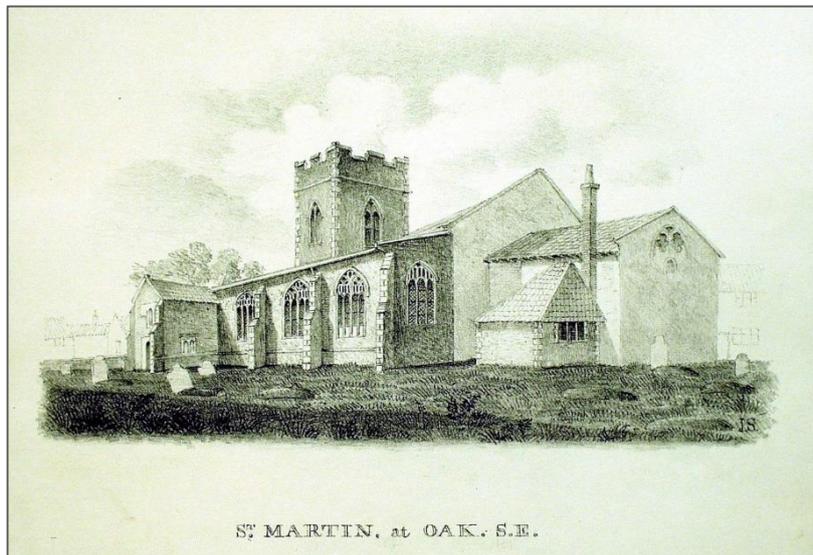
THE MEDIEVAL CHURCHES OF NORWICH:  
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## Thomas Wilkyns' chapel and the south aisle

THE SOUTH AISLE is said by Blomefield on the basis of an inscription 'on a brass plate lying at the entrance to the chancel' to have been rebuilt by Thomas Wilkyns, alderman (died 1492).

*Orate pro anima Thome Wilkyns nuper civis et aldermanni Norwici qui istam elam sumptibus suis propriis de novo in omnibus fieri fabricavit, et idem Thomas obiit xxviii die ianuarii anno domini Mccccclxxxvi cuius anime propicietur deus.* (Blomefield 1745, 833)

[Pray for the soul of Thomas Wilkyns, once a citizen and alderman of Norwich, who at his own expense, in all things, caused this new aisle to be constructed. And the same Thomas died on the 28th January in the year of our Lord 1491, whose soul may God propitiate.]



St Martin at Oak from the south east, James Sillett, 1828  
© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/Norfolk Museums Service

THE DATING STYLE of the period placed the days up to 25th March (the feast of the Incarnation/Annunciation) in the preceding year, hence what is recorded as January 1491 would by our reckoning be January 1492. In his will Thomas requested burial in the churchyard by the window between the buttresses on the south side of the church. He also instructed that

his executors 'do build a chapel on my grave honourably in the worship of God' (PROB11/9/82). The resulting chapel, in which the memorial brass was laid subsequently, may just be the easternmost bay of the south aisle as it differs in detail from the two bays further west. However, all the work is contemporary and covered by the same roof; it thus seems that Wilkyns' instruction prompted the construction of the whole of the south aisle. In 1503 John Reynolds, mason, requested burial in the churchyard and left 40s to the leading 'when they go to the ledying of the said church' (NCC POPY 396). The implication seems to be that the church was still undergoing works but that the end of the no-doubt disruptive construction work was in sight. Surviving wills of subsequent date offer no indication of when internal burial was reintroduced.

SUBSEQUENT GENERATIONS of the Wilkyns family did not, however, have a sense of this chapel being their ancestral mortuary. Thomas's eldest son Rauf (d.1535) requested burial in the church, the location left to the discretion of his executors. The second son, Thomas (d.1523), left 10s to the 'reparation' of the church but elected to be buried in St Michael Coslany, as did his wife Agnes (d.1534), specifically next to the tomb of her husband. William Wilkyns (d.1504), plausibly the son of Rauf and Anne, also requested burial in the churchyard.

THE PROJECT clearly included the south arcade as well as the new aisle wall and its four-light windows. The piers are of lozenge plan and the mouldings are close to those of the nave piers at George Colegate and Michael Coslany, both of the late 1490s; though St Martin's differs in details such as the moulding of the arches. Given Thomas Wilkyns' date of death, it is probable that the south arcade and aisle at St Martin's were the first to be designed in this style. The easternmost window on the south side (s.V – counting as s.IV the now lost east window in the aisle) has lilled transoms (brattishing) perhaps registering the importance of the location, which was the Lady Chapel built by Wilkyns' executors. At St Michael Coslany, brattishing occurs on all the windows, a fact suggesting that it was emulating the most elaborate characteristics of St Martin, but on a much larger scale. This evidence seems to show that the details of a relatively modest but innovative project could influence the brief for a much better-funded one in a neighbouring parish.



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THE PORCH at St Martin's was probably conceived and built as part of the same campaign (on the east side alternating ashlar quoins link it to the aisle wall).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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