

The tower and south porch of St George, Colegate

In 1459, John Howys bequeathed £4 for a new bell for the church (Blomefield, 4: 472). This is the only documentation relating to the west tower and, indirect evidence though it is, is in line with the character of the building. In his work on the career of the 'Wiveton mason', Richard Fawcett identified a number of parallels with datable churches elsewhere in Norfolk (Fawcett 1975, 329-386). So, for example, he compared the mouldings of the west door of St George's with the west door at Great Cressingham and the south door at Wiveton, both being built in the late 1430s and 1440s (ibid., 351-3). The tracery of the east window at Great Cressingham is very like that of the west window at St George Colegate (ibid., 368-9). Other comparisons also indicate that at least the lower stages of the tower are likely to originate around 1440. By the time of Howys' bequest it is probable that the whole project was complete up to the belfry stage and perhaps had been for a while, since there is evidence that towers were allowed to settle for a few years before bells were hung in them (Salzman, 549). A further consideration is Fawcett's suggestion that the 'Wiveton mason' could be identified with James Woderofe (variously spelled), probably the leading mason in Norwich in the period from 1415 to 1450 (ibid., 339-41), although he subsequently distanced himself from this proposal (Fawcett 1982). It is however worth noting that St George Colegate was Woderofe's parish, as his wife's will of 1459 asks that she be buried in the church next to her husband (Blomefield IV, 472). It is now clear that James Woderofe had died in 1450, when executors were appointed (Trend 2015, 365). As two of them were also masons, John Jekkys and Nicholas Berkyng, they would have been well placed to complete any work that was still pending.



West tower, St George Colegate
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The tower is tall and elegantly proportioned with diagonal corner buttresses of four stages. At ground floor level it has arched openings on all four sides, those to the south and west with doors in them but those to the east and the north without. The implication is clear: the tower was enclosed on those sides by the nave by the west end of a north aisle. In common with most towers of the period, it has a staircase turret at the junction with the nave, in this case in the north-east corner. The curiosity is that it must always have been located within the north aisle rather than on the exterior. As there is no trace of it above the aisle roof it was either never completed, or subsequently lowered.



Porch spandrel, St George Colegate
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At the time of the tower's construction it seems the main entrance to the church was on the south side and a porch was built probably as part of the same campaign. The arch in the entrance façade of the porch has two elegantly carved spandrels showing the Annunciation (to the east) and angels bringing armour to St George (to the west). They are united by the theme of angelic visitation in preparation for momentous things to come. In St George's case, this unfolds on the west door of the tower where two more spandrels show him fighting the dragon (to the south) watched by the king, queen and princess (to the north). The arming of St George on the porch thus serves as a prelude to the scenes on the tower and was presumably always intended as the beginning of the short narrative sequence.

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