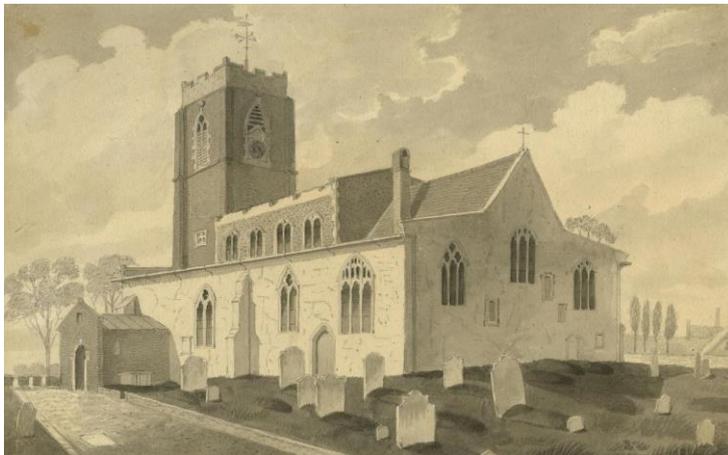


St Augustine's

The churchyard is founded on the east edge of an open space known as Gildencroft and occupies an acre. In general, the church relies on using flint rubble and brick for its fabric, cut stone is limited to only essentials such as traceried windows, some quoins, and offsets – though much of it has had to be renewed. This modest disposal of ashlar is consistent with its marginal location in the city and the relative poverty of the parish. The date of the foundation is uncertain, but probably 12th century if the dedication is to St Augustine of Hippo. The alternative would be St Augustine of Canterbury, which is more common, but the association of the advowson with the Augustinian priory of Llanthony by Gloucester (until 1259 – Blomefield 4, 476) suggests otherwise. Llanthony was founded by 1136.

Remains of what is probably the original building are to be found at the west and east ends, where traces of early quoins can be seen. The best preserved is the north-west corner of the nave, which contains an unusual mix of stone types. Both the SW quoin of the nave and the SE quoin of the chancel are marked with pieces of Niedermendig/Mayen lava quern stones (Roder, 1955) apparently in situ. From these the measurement of the first church can be established as just under 17m long (the nave 8.8m x 5m, the chancel 7.9m x 4.2m). The plan is a familiar Norwich type, with the interior of the nave walls aligning roughly with the exterior of the chancel. Whether there was an early west tower is unknown.



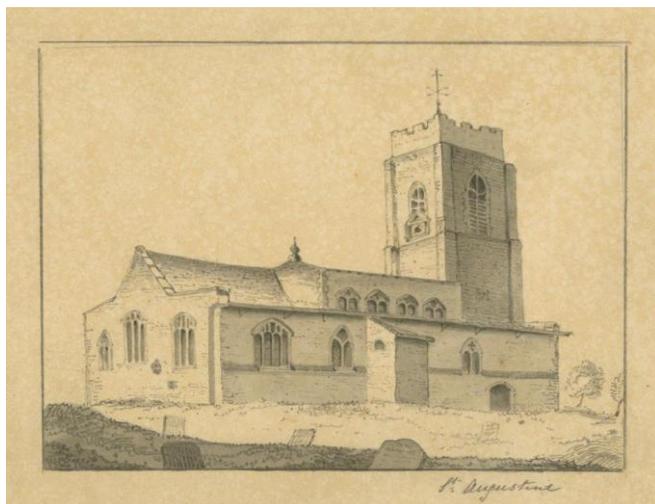
'St Augustine Colegate Church Norwich' by James Sillett (1764-1840), pencil and grey wash on paper, undated. © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/Norfolk Museums Service

The dates at which aisles and chancel chapels were added is hard to establish from the fabric because of the substantial restoration in the 1880s, and there is no known medieval documentation. What may be the earliest of the extant windows is sIV, the westernmost of the two in the south chancel chapel. The tracery pattern is close to a design found in the south aisle at North Elmham, probably of the 1320s. Such a date would also suit the now lost east window of the south chancel chapel as seen in depictions by Kirkpatrick (c.1720)

and Sillett (1820s). The former implies reticulated tracery enclosing quatrefoils, the latter also a quatrefoil design but simpler. At any rate, the current window (which is based on those at St George Colegate) cannot be used as evidence for dating in the late fifteenth century. The chapel preceded the present south aisle in date, as there are three remaining quoin stones in situ (above a renewed buttress) at what would have been the south west corner. It is possible that it served as the Lady chapel, though Blomefield's reference to one in the time of John Corpusty, rector from 1418-65, is not borne out by the extant text of his will (NCC Jekkys 19).

It seems likely that it was during Corpusty's time that a full south aisle and probably a north aisle too were built. The tracery pattern used in the aisles, in so far as it can be trusted, is close to that of the chancel of St Saviour, under construction in the mid-1420s. The north chancel chapel may well be that dedicated to St John and referred to in the will of Robert Heylesdon, parson, in 1523. It was possibly of quite recent construction, and preserves its roof, with moulded timbers and brattishing.

The most interesting documentation for the church relates to the roof of the nave. It was being planned in 1525 when William Myllys requested burial in the north aisle and gave 20s to the building of the new roof of the body of the church (PCC Palgrave 195). Implicitly the north aisle was complete (a safe place for burial) and works to the nave roof were soon to begin. However, as part of the money left by John Sketur, carpenter, was to be paid 'at the taking down of the old roof' (NCC Cooke 64), it was still in place in February 1531. The building of the new roof was dependent on the clearstorey, which must have been constructed shortly beforehand but it is unlikely to have been begun before the date of Sketur's will. The design and execution of the extant roof and figured corbels supporting it are consistent with work elsewhere the city in the early decades of the sixteenth century (e.g. the roof at St George Colegate, corbels at St Andrew's and St Stephen's). What is much less certain is whether the present nave arcades are part of this development or survive from an earlier phase. The former solution seems more likely as they are tall and broad and have four-centred arches. Furthermore, the aisle windows do not take advantage of the size and openness of the arcades, suggesting they went with an earlier and less expansive arcade design. Although the core fabric of the present arcades is not visible, the heavy and irregular surface plaster on them suggests they are of brick.



The large stair turret depicted in northern view drawn by Joseph Stannard implies that a rood loft ran across full width of the church. Kirkpatrick's drawing shows what is probably the medieval south porch, of two stories and with diagonal buttresses. The faintest hint of the roof line can be discerned on the exterior wall. Blomefield noted that the porch was rebuilt in 1726 and Sillett showed this new single-storied porch. Sadly, there is no good record of the form of the medieval west tower, which was rebuilt in brick in 1687.

'St. Augustine's Church' by Joseph Stannard (jun?) (1797-1830), pencil and wash on paper, undated; © Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/Norfolk Museums Service

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