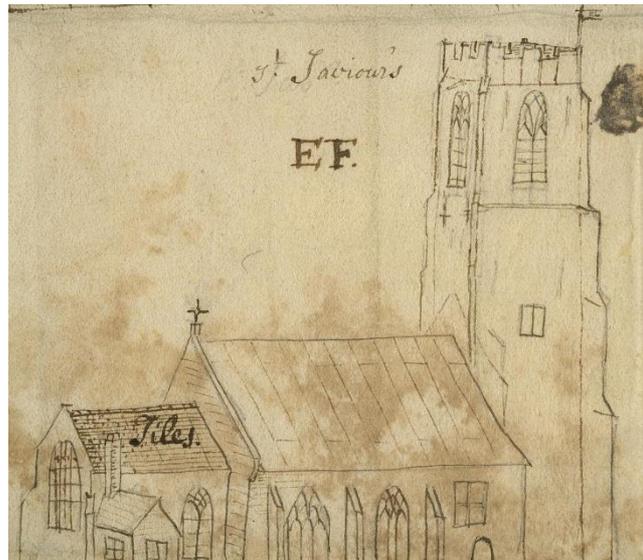


St Saviour

Building the chancel

The cathedral almoner's roll for 1424 gives a good idea of the range of people employed in rebuilding the chancel of St Saviour's as well as a quite detailed breakdown of costs.

John Spynk, mason ('cementarius') and his fellows were paid £12 for the making and materials of the walls of the chancel, while his colleague, another mason, John Wespnade, received £4 for the stone windows ('pro fenestris lapidis'). The identification of two masons is interesting for a number of reasons. It alerts us to the fact that the cut-stone details of such things as the plinths and buttress mouldings are not necessarily by the same person or team as the window tracery. In other words we should not be seeking to attribute the building as a whole to a single designer or operative; indeed it may imply that there were specialist window makers who were distinct from those who constructed foundations and flint rubble walling even if there were also some freestone mouldings involved in the elevation. The sum paid to Spynk and his team included 'a reward' and this was not uncommon in commissioned work – it was usually about 10%. There were five windows in the chancel. The east window was larger than the three-light Victorian one now in place, as can be seen from the relieving arch built over it, but its design is unknown (it had already been replaced when John Kirkpatrick drew the church in the early eighteenth century). The side walls probably contained two two-light windows, quite carefully copied in the Victorian restoration, and similar in design to one used (in alternation) in the clearstorey of St Gregory's a decade or two earlier.



'St. Saviours Church' by John Kirkpatrick (1686-1728),
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Also in 1424, Ralph Byltham and his fellows were paid 6/9d for services unnamed, but perhaps for work on the roof as the next items relate to roofing materials: the timber cost £1/-/3d; £1/14/1d was paid for reeds, 5/- for laths, 15/10d for nails and keys, 16/8d to the reeder, 4/- for broaches and bindings and 6/8d for clay and straw with the carriage (Cattermole 1985, 34). It is clear that the covering at this juncture was thatch and as the reeder is mentioned separately Byltham and his men were probably carpenters. The cost of the roof (£5/9/3d) is about a fifth of the total recorded outlay.

In 1425 the account for the glazing the windows is given, divided between the glass itself (£2/10/-) and the ironwork by which it was secured in position (keys and saddlebars, 9/6d). That is curious, because one might have expected the saddle bars to be needed when the window tracery was set in the walling. The following year, the parish chaplain gave 6/8d for unspecified work on the chancel which if added to the earlier figures bring the total for construction and weatherproofing to £28/15/5d. The final item recorded is furnishing: in 1429 the almoner gave 26/6d for the stalls, but whether this was the full cost or just a substantial contribution is not stated.

It seems that the building project at St Saviour's was carried through expeditiously in about three years and with the full support of the patron, the cathedral almoner. In other cases where we have comparable details the work was more protracted. At Hardley, about ten miles east of Norwich, a similar sized chancel took about six years to build (1457-63) and the mason, Robert Everard (Harvey 1987, 102-03), was responsible for both walls and windows (Woodman 1994, 204-06). But there too the roof also cost a little over £5 and the overall total was in excess of £20 but probably less than £30 (Ibid., 208). In the fifty years from 1420 and 1470, patrons no doubt knew that a respectable chancel could be built, roofed and glazed for about £25.

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