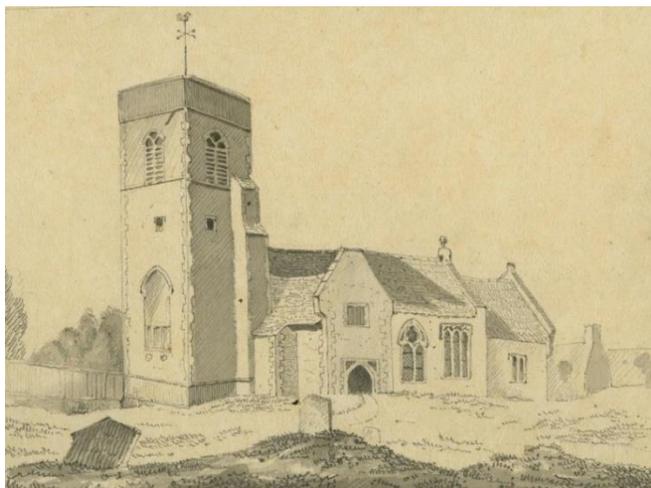


St Peter Southgate, Norwich

Located approximately 150m inside the city walls on the west side of King Street, St Peter's was the southernmost church in the city, close to Carrow and opposite the site of chapel of St Olaf Conesford. Blomefield commented that the parish was 'anciently known as St Peter Bither' (Blomefield 4, 65) but the source and meaning of this sobriquet is as yet unknown. In the 12th and 13th centuries the church was nominally associated with Conesford, becoming known as St Peter Southgate in the mid-13th century (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 52). The dedication to St Peter, apostle and fisherman, is pertinent to the church's location by the river and to the predominant occupation in the parish, which was largely made up of fishermen who met as guild members in their church. It has recently been noted that the church's dedication is also pertinent to its location close to an important city gate and this resonance is recorded early as 1175 x 1186 when the church was described as 'ecclesiam sancti Petri in Cuningesford prope portem ciuitatis Norwici' (the church of St Peter in Conesford next to the gate of the city of Norwich) (Shelley 2015, 96). The same charter is the earliest record of the church being in possession of the Benedictine Abbey of St Benet's at Holm, when Augustine of Hoxne, 'clerico', was confirmed as rector (Charters of St Benet's Holme. Norfolk Records Society vol. II (1932) no.105).

Having fallen into disrepair in the second half of the 19th century the church was finally demolished in 1887 (Sandred and Lindström 1989, 52). A small part of the tower remains standing. An unattributed amateur watercolour of the church is annotated in pencil: 'St. Peter Southgate King Street Norwich about to be pulled down 22 Novr 1882. In the wet' (NWHCM: 1922.135.854).

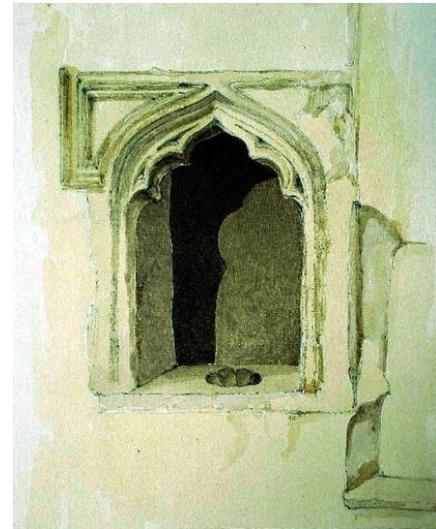


'St. Peter Southgate Church, Norwich' by Joseph Stannard (1797-1830), pencil and wash on paper
© Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery/ Norfolk Museums Service

The medieval church was never large or grand but sufficient evidence is available to construct something of its form. At the date of demolition the church comprised an unbuttressed square west tower with a three light west window and a stair turret in the south eastern corner; an aisleless unbuttressed nave with three windows in a variety of styles; a somewhat narrower and lower rectangular chancel; a two-storey south porch and a north chapel accessed from the easternmost bay of the nave. The drawing by Joseph Stannard (left) presents the clearest indication of the tracery forms: in the south elevation are a large two-light

Decorated window and a three-light square topped window. Stylistically datable to c.1330, this fenestration is coeval with the narrow unbuttressed west tower and the ogee-headed piscina in the chancel, beautifully recorded in watercolour by an unknown artist (below). Thus a sense of stylistic or architectural coherence implies that the church was largely rebuilt in the second quarter of the 14th century.

The church was little touched in the 15th century, but in the early 16th century some 'updating' did take place. Notable are the tower parapet and the north chancel chapel. The parapet bore an alternating diamond and circle pattern and was presumably the work paid for in part by John Isbelles' 1521 testamentary gift of 6s 8d 'to the making of the steeple' (NCC Robinson 19). Isbelles' grave stone cost 13s 4d, and he also instructed that his best gown and coat be sold and the proceeds used to buy a vestment which was to remain in the church. The foundation date of the Lady Chapel on the north side is assigned to Alderman Thomas Large, buried there in 1518, whose merchant mark Blomefield saw in a window of this chapel (Blomefield 4, 67). In 1526 fisherman William Basset the elder recorded his gift of 13s 4d for 'a new glass window within the choir [quier] on the north part', as well as 3s 4d to the 'making of the organs' (NCC Palgrave 306). His will makes clear that the chancel was the focus of devotion to St Peter, and implicitly this also served as the guild chapel. Unfortunately, no image of the north part of the chancel has yet been found to show the style or size of Bassett's window. It is worth noting, however, that these late medieval architectural changes at St Peter's, as elsewhere in medieval Norwich, were undertaken at a time when men of the parish held roles of civic responsibility.



'St. Peter Southgate Church',
watercolour on paper, unattributed,
undated; 14.9 cm x 12 cm
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Gallery/ Norfolk Museums Service

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