

FINGRINGHOE CHURCH

Historic Buildings and Conservation
Essex County Council



Essex County Council

Report commissioned by the Parochial Church Council and prepared by
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Contents

Introduction	1
History of church	2
Summary of repairs and restoration	2
The nave, chancel, south aisle and chapel	5
The tower	7
The south porch	9
The north vestry	10
Significance	11
Bibliography	11
Appendix 1: List description	12
Appendix 2: Timeline	12

Introduction

Fingringhoe is a scattered village located on the west side of the River Colne to the south of Colchester. The parish church of St Andrew is positioned on a ridge running west from the river, with views over the valley of the River Roman, a tributary of the Colne, to the north.

The church is Grade I listed, and is described by Pevsner as 'visually quite exceptionally successful'. It has a 12th century nave, 14th century west tower, chancel, south aisle and south chapel. The walls are of flint, Kentish Rag rubble and septaria, with occasional use of Roman brick. Small thin bricks (45-50mm) in the tower are an interesting example of locally made brick. Similar bricks also occur at Stanway Old Church and Thorrington church porch. The facings of some walls consist of squared coursed flint. Dressings are of Roman brick, limestone and flint. The roof is tiled. The tower is distinctive with bands of flint and stone rubble. The largely 15th century south porch is particularly fine, with knapped flint and stone chequerwork and a crenellated parapet.

The interior is also of note, and includes medieval wall paintings, an early 15th century nave roof described by Cecil Hewett as 'one of the most important roofs in the county (1982, 24), and a 14th century statue of St Margaret of Antioch.

Some repairs and restoration works have been carried out at intervals to the church throughout its history, but it remains largely unaltered. These repairs, often executed roughly with brick and tile, contribute to the timeworn character of the building. More recent repairs carried out since the 1870s to both the interior and the exterior have not significantly altered the overall appearance of the building. The condition of the tower was a particular cause of concern following the earthquake of 1884. Between 1915 and 1920 the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) were involved in repair proposals, resulting in the buttressing of the tower in 1920.

Grant-aided repairs are to be carried out to the tower masonry, porch roof and masonry and the vestry roof. Further non-granted aided repairs are also underway. This document was commissioned to establish the historical sequence of construction and repairs to the building, and assess the significance of features. This will enable informed decisions to be made about their conservation.

This is a desk-based study, drawing on available printed and archival material. A particularly useful document in the preparation of this report is G.M. Benton's *The Church of St Ouen (alias St Andrew) Fingringhoe, Essex*, published in 1938. The Essex Record Office (ERO) also holds a collection of correspondence between architect Wykeham Chancellor and Rev. J.H. Valpey relating to repairs to the tower covering the period 1915-1921 (D/P 369/6/6). There are also additional details contained within the surveyor's notes of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England that were not in the published version (1922). The SPAB archives have a file relating to

their involvement in discussions about repairs covering the period 1905 to 1965. This includes two reports produced by SPAB members, one dated March 1906, by C. Carter, and one March 1915 by A. Powys.

History of the church

It is not known if a church existed at Fingringhoe prior to the Norman Conquest, and the church is not mentioned in the Domesday survey. The present building dates from circa 1100 AD. The church was originally dedicated to St Ouen or Audoen, patron saint of Rouen. Montagu Benton suggests that the church became mistakenly referred to as St Andrews through a misreading of this name in the 18th century.

The Norman church occupied the area of the present nave, and the existing north wall of the nave is largely original. The 12th century church probably comprised a short square or apsidal chancel as well as the nave. In the early years of the 14th century the chancel arch was rebuilt and the south aisle was added, achieved by crudely piercing the south wall of the Norman nave. A doorway was inserted through the north wall of the nave at this time. The west tower was also built in the 14th century. Alterations at the end of the 14th century included rebuilding of the chancel to a larger plan, the extension of the south aisle to form the south chapel, and the building of the south porch. The nave was heightened in the 15th century. The porch was partially rebuilt some time at the end of the 16th century or in the early 17th century. The north vestry was constructed around 1840, but sits on earlier foundations.

The plan below (*Fig. 1*) extracted from the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments publication, provides a phased plan of the church.

Summary of Repairs and Restoration

Although the church has never been comprehensively restored, its condition has been the subject of concern throughout its history. Records refer to the continual need for repairs; in 1633 the 'chauncell walles want pargettinge on the out sides', and in 1684 the chancel was again in need of repair.

Rough repairs and patching in brick and tile seem to have been carried out in the 18th century, including repairs to the south porch wall and south aisle parapet.

Towards the end of the 19th century it was recognised that the fabric and furniture of the church required attention. The tracery of all the windows was either repaired or renewed in the early 1870s. Churchwardens' returns of 1876-7 noted that the tower was 'out of repair' and 'seriously cracked', and they proposed placing an iron girder around the tower under the string course.

FINGRINGHOE

The PARISH CHURCH of ST ANDREW

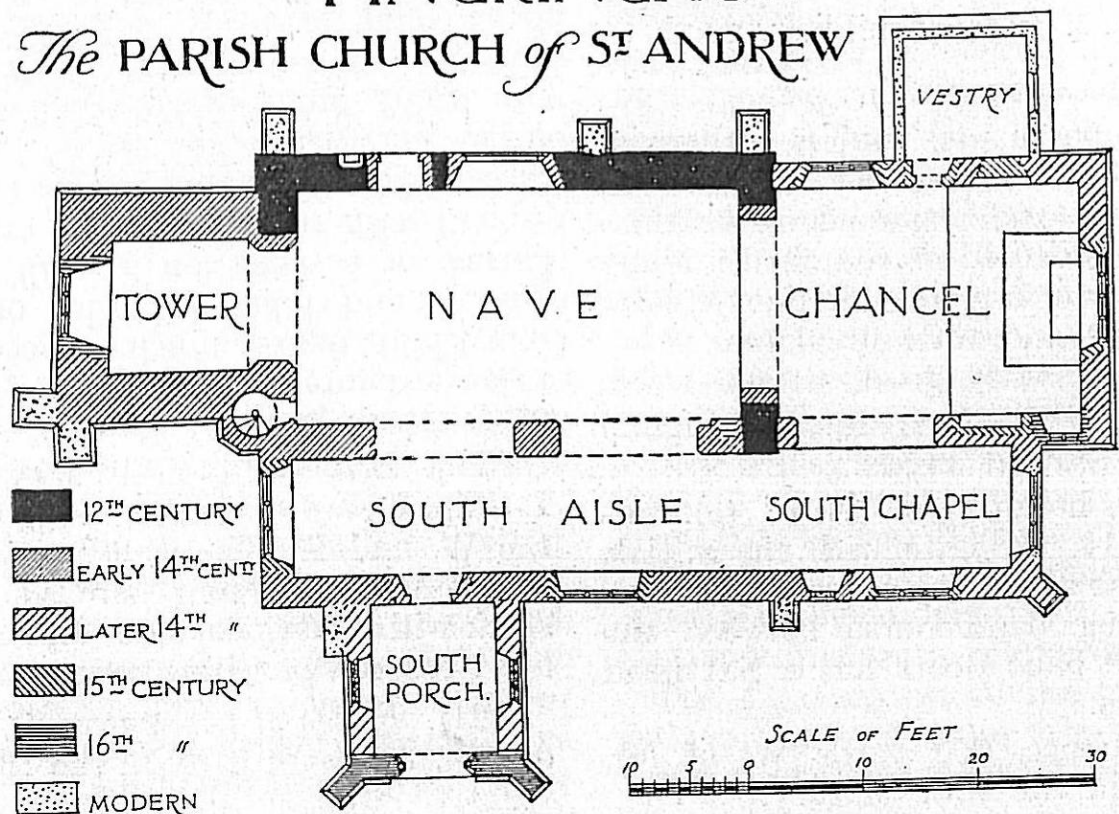


Fig. 1 Phased plan of Fingringhoe church. Reproduced from The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England).

In 1884 an earthquake struck the area. A report on the event the following year recorded that in the village a large percentage of buildings were damaged. The roof of the nave of the church was affected, and the building was 'considerably shaken and cracked inside'. However the church was much less damaged than other churches in the area, such as Great Wigborough, Peldon and Langenhoe.

In 1885 a printed appeal was launched for funds to improve the interior of the church, and in the course of removing old plaster loosened by the earthquake some remarkable medieval wall paintings were uncovered (see *Fig. 3*). During the incumbency of Rev. C.L. Walker (1889-1901) extensive repairs were carried out, mainly to the interior. These included removing the old box pews and the west gallery. In 1891 the timbers of the chancel and nave roofs were scraped and cleaned. The ceilings and walls were whitewashed, and other improvements were made to the interior furnishings. Montagu Benton records that the tower staircase turret was rebuilt around 1890. Between 1893 and 1896 the altar rails were fixed to a new step of Portland stone, and the old step was removed to the entrance to the chancel. The brick floor of the chancel was replaced with encaustic Maw's tiles, which were not regarded by the SPAB in their 1915 report as appropriate. Deal block paving was laid in the nave, with oak blocks in the gangway. Whitewash was removed from the south aisle roof. Also at this time the ground stage of the tower was cleared

out and the walls rendered with cement, and the floor was paved with wooden blocks.

Other repairs were carried out in the early years of the 20th century, including the repair of the roof of the south aisle.

The SPAB were first involved in Fingringhoe church in 1905 when a local resident wrote to them expressing concern over plans to redecorate the interior. This resulted in the report produced by SPAB member Christopher Carter in 1906. He described the church as 'an interesting little building and practically unrestored'. He considered the church to be generally in good repair, although cracks were noted in the tower and the lead sheeting of the south aisle was in a poor state. The walls, he noted, retained their covering of original plaster both on the outside and on the inside. The external plaster needed repair, and Carter recommended improvements should be made to rainwater drainage from the nave and chancel roofs. Overgrown ivy required cutting back, and abutting soil to be cleared from the south-east corner.

There seems to have been no immediate response to this report and its recommendations. However in 1915 the SPAB were again contacted about the deteriorating condition of the church, particularly the tower. Later that year SPAB secretary Mr A. Powys produced a second report on the church in which the tower was marked out as being in immediate need of repair with serious cracks in the south-west corner. Powys recommended a variety of repairs in accordance with SPAB principles of minimum intervention. This included retaining earlier repairs such as the patching of the south porch, so as to 'not shock the senses with the vulgarity of the over-zeal'. Under the incumbency of Rev. J.H. Valpey funds were sought to cover the expense of repairing the church tower and the architect Wykeham Chancellor was commissioned to take on the work. Chancellor evidently responded to the SPAB report with his own programme of repairs, details of which have not survived in the archives. Powys believed that Chancellor's proposals did not conform to SPAB principles, in particular his proposal to reconstruct the formerly embattled parapet. It is not clear from the records the extent of the repairs that were actually carried out across the whole building, but the tower was shored and in



Fig. 2 The two buttresses built under the supervision on Wykeham Chancellor in 1920. They have since been repaired with modern tiles.

1920 brick buttresses faced in flint and tile were built at the south-west corner (*Fig. 2*).

Following a fire which affected the roof on the north side of the nave in February 1925 a defective flue was replaced by a chimney of red brick.

Other repairs carried out over the next 20 years are noted by Montagu Benton and included the following:

- 1925, making concrete channels around the church and releading the tracery lights of the west window of the tower.
- 1927, repairing the bell frame and repointing the walls of the south aisle.
- 1928, repointing the north wall of the nave.
- 1930, relaying the brick floor of the chapel on concrete and providing a stone step, repairing the nave roof.
- 1938, repairing the roof of the south porch.

In 1968-9 renovations to the church included relaying the flooring and replastering and whitewashing the walls. During these renovations the 14th century statue of St Margaret of Antioch was uncovered, plastered into its niche.

Repairs were carried out to the roof following damage caused by the 1987 gale.

The nave, chancel, south aisle and chapel

The nave was originally constructed circa 1100, and the north wall is largely original, partly built of flint and Ragstone rubble but largely composed of septaria laid in regular courses. The quoins of the north-east and north-west angles are formed partly of Roman brick. Two blocked 12th century windows were uncovered on the external wall in 1928. Montagu Benton notes that when decayed plaster was removed from this wall original mortar was found that was a warm buff colour due to the inclusion of a large proportion of orange-brown sand. He describes this as a well mixed composition containing pebbles and pounded cockle and oyster shells.

The nave and chancel were largely reconstructed in the 14th century, including the rebuilding of the chancel arch and enlarging of the chancel, and the piercing of the south wall of the nave to create the south aisle. A doorway was rebuilt or inserted in the north wall of the nave. There is a blocked window opening in that wall, probably of the same date, that was blocked when the nave walls were heightened in the 15th century. The mortar of this window is noted by Benton as being whiter than that of the 12th century windows. This reflects the change from the brownish mortars commonly used in the 12th and 13th centuries to the whiter mortars of the 14th and 15th centuries. Two 15th century windows were later inserted in this wall.

The chancel has an east window with elements dating from the 15th century including part of the external label, but with modern tracery. The wall externally has a moulded string course below the window cill. At the time of the Royal Commission survey the lower wall had some plaster remaining probably of the 16th century. The gable has been refaced in modern brick. The 14th century chancel arch has responds which were restored in 1895 and which Montagu Benton suggests were cut back when pews were introduced into the chancel. The chancel also has a late 15th century window in the north wall, along with a doorway possibly of the same date with a modern lintel, and a blocked window probably of the 14th century. In the south wall is a 16th century window, and externally the wall has a moulded string course which the Royal Commission noted as retaining some 16th century plaster.

The roof of the nave is particularly remarkable, and is described in more detail by Cecil Hewett (1982). It is round arched to the collars, which are double and clasp the collar purlin. The inner ends of the diagonal spurs are carved with portrait studies (*Fig. 3*). The roof dates from the early 15th century. The roof of the chancel is similar but without the carvings, and is a little later in date according to Hewett.



Fig. 3 The chancel arch with wall paintings uncovered following the 1884 earthquake and the unusual timber roof with carved portrait heads on the spur ends.

The south aisle, created by piercing the south wall of the nave in the 14th century with an arcade of two arches, has two 15th century windows which have been heavily restored, and there is a late 14th century doorway. The battlements of the roof were believed by Mr Powys in his 1915 report to have been repaired in brickwork in the late 18th century or early 19th century, and he recommended these later repairs should be retained.

The south chapel, created by extending the south aisle in the late 14th century, has an essentially modern east window but with splays and rear arch which may be 14th century in date. There is a blocked 14th century doorway, and in the south wall a window opening probably of 14th century date but with a 15th century window inserted in the earlier opening. The chapel wall has some 18th century repair in brick.

The tower

The tower is built in three stages, with a staircase turret in the south-east angle, and was originally unbuttressed. The turret is entered by a door from the nave. There is a moulded plinth with flint chequerwork. The external walls have bands of flintwork alternating with bands of plastered Ragstone rubble. The turret is more elaborately decorated than the tower with banding and patches of narrow medieval bricks. Whilst banding is not a common feature of Essex church towers, other examples are known which are of 14th or 15th century date. The parish church of All Saints at Purleigh has a 14th century west tower built in four stages, where the first two stages are of alternate courses of dressed flint and squared Ragstone. West Thurrock is another, more striking example where the tower has alternate bands of Reigate stone and knapped flint. Stanway All Saints, now a ruin, is also banded with brick and flint, and has a moulded chequerwork plinth.

In the west wall of the first stage is a three-light traceried window of the first half of the 16th century. The roof of the first stage is a quadripartite vault with ribs with small chamfers, described by the RCHME as of brick covered with plaster and dated to the 16th century. Below the spring of the arch the ribs have been cut back to the wall, which the RCHME suggests was probably carried out when the gallery was inserted. In the east wall of the second stage is an opening with Roman brick quoins and head. The RCHME report is doubtful of the purpose of the opening, although Montagu Benton suggests that it facilitated the raising and lowering of the bells through the roof.

The double scissor braced oak bell frame was recorded by the Essex Bellframe Survey as very old, possibly 16th century or earlier. There are three bells, although the frame is constructed to accommodate four. The treble is by Miles Gray I and is dated to 1625, the 2nd is by Roger Reve and is 15th century in date, and the tenor is probably 14th century. Only the treble is still hung. The other two bells sit on the vault. Ringing cracks in the bellfry were noted in the 1906 SPAB report, but repairs were subsequently carried out and the 1915 report did not note any problems here.

The top of the tower was at one time embattled, and is recorded as such in 1707 when the battlements of the 'steeple' were to be repaired (noted by Montagu Benton), and is still described as embattled in Kelly's Directory of 1914, although this may be due to text being carried over from previous editions. A description of the church dating from 1854 states that the parapets of the tower were rebuilt in old materials, and the roof is described as ancient, slightly pitched and covered with lead. It is not known exactly when the embattled parapet was rebuilt plain. A fund raising flier of 1894 shows the tower with plain parapet, which contradicts the text of Kelly's Directory, whilst the SPAB report of 1905 refers to the tower's battlements. The tower was used by the military authorities as an aircraft observation post, the War Department having acquired significant property in the village from 1905, and it may be that the battlements were rebuilt for safety reasons at this time. The 1915 SPAB report describes some unmoulded stonework in the parapet which probably represents 18th century repair.

The RCHME report of 1922 states that the staircase turret was recently refaced, and the walls and newel repaired, the extent of the repairs increasing towards the top of the staircase (Fig. 4). As has already mentioned, Montagu Benton suggests works to the turret were carried out around 1890, and may have been a response to earthquake damage. The turret was in the view of Mr Powys 'rebuilt very well and in a most conservative spirit', with 'no deception', as the modern bricks were left exposed to view on the inside. The stair is remarkable for its exceptional narrowness.

Fig. 5 Detail of the staircase tower, rebuilt after the 1884 earthquake. Although modern brick has been left exposed in the interior, the exterior uses tile and narrow brick as seen elsewhere on the tower.



Mr Carter's report of 1906 recorded a system of cracks on the west and south faces of the tower, but did not believe that these had moved over the last 10 years. However the poor condition of the tower prompted the SPAB's second report in 1915. This noted that there had been movement in the west corner where the outer facing had bulged away from the walling behind, and cracks had appeared that were visible inside and out. This was put down in part to the clay soils of the area, and to drainage works and excavations carried out in the neighbouring schoolyard, as well as the effects of the earthquake. No movement was noted at the top of the tower, which Powys attributed to the repair of the rear arches of the belfry openings which had been repointed, as well as the replacement of a portion of the south-west quoin which had fallen away about 15 years previously. There is no evidence in the archives that any of the SPAB's other recommendations were carried out at the time.

The correspondence in the ERO from Wykeham Chancellor to Rev. Valpey provides further information on the discussion about how best to repair the tower. This was a difficult time to be considering such repairs given the shortage of labour and materials brought on by the war. Buckling and cracking in the south and west faces, particularly between the lower string course of the first stage and the top of the plinth were of particular concern. Chancellor favoured rebuilding and bonding, and advocated the use of Thompson's Grouting Machine (to force the grout in under pressure). This had been used to good effect at Purleigh church, and the SPAB's report also suggested using a grouting machine to fill the voids. The SPAB had also proposed inserting bonding courses of tile or slatey stone built in with cement mortar through the thickness of the walls. In the event the costs were prohibitive, and the construction of two massive buttresses was eventually decided upon as the most cost effective solution.

Of the tower windows, the Royal Commission survey recorded that the single lancet windows of the second stage had splayed external jambs of plastered Roman brick, with two centred rear arches and splays of plastered rubble and Roman brick, and that the windows had been restored in places. The estimated date of these was 13th century in the survey notes, but 14th century in the published report. This indecision is excusable given the rather crude construction of these windows, which were concealed by plaster. The brickwork in fact seems mostly to be locally made 14th century brick (*Fig. 4*).

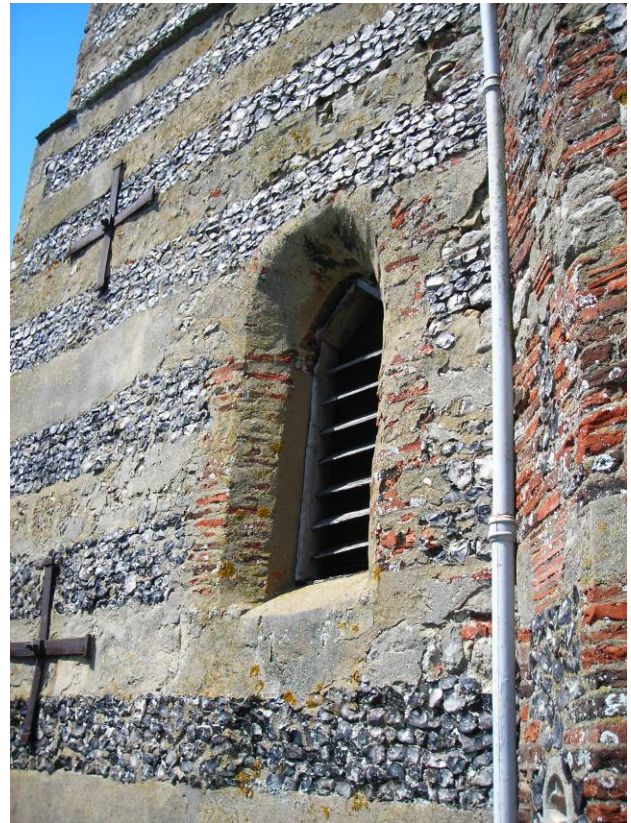


Fig. 5 Second stage window formed of 14th century brick.

In the third stage, the upper part of the window in the east wall was then blocked, and the rear arch noted as a modern rebuilding. Externally the mullion was said to be restored in brick, and a relieving arch inserted probably in the 16th century. The window in the north wall had gone, except for the external jambs, the splays and the restored rear arch. The window of the west wall was in a similar state to the east although the mullion remained, and in the south wall again the window was largely as in the east but plastered over externally. Some restoration work has been carried out since the Commission's visit.

The south porch

The RCHME suggests two phases of building for the south porch, the first around 1400 with later remodelling including refacing externally, with an embattled parapet of flint chequerwork and a moulded plinth with trefoil-headed panels of flint inlay. Two blocked windows in the east and west side walls were understood to relate to the earlier phase, and remains of the earlier plinth said to survive beneath the blocked window of the west wall. The window on the east side has been altered with 17th century brickwork. Further investigation of the fabric of the porch is required to establish the validity of this proposed phased development.

The porch is described by George Buckler in 1854, with buttresses of stone dressings and flint, and ornamented niches supported by buttresses and crowned with crockets, the details 'much defaced by time'.

In the SPAB report of 1915 the flint panels on the lower level of the porch were described as mutilated and patched with tile and brick representing repairs generally pre-19th century in date. This flint chequerwork was noted as being fragmentary when Benton was writing in 1938.

The porch was designed to have an almost flat or camber beam roof, but this was replaced by one of steep pitch without tie beams, plastered below and covered with tiles. (Visual inspection of the roof timbers indicates that it is a clasped purlin roof with windbraces of substantial timbers, and datable to the late 16th or 17th centuries. It is not 18th century as suggested by the RCHME). The side walls have been patched with red brick and tile from time to time and a brick buttress added in the north-west angle (*Fig. 6*).

In his report of 1915, Mr Powys advocated a minimum intervention approach to repairs to the porch, in accordance with SPAB principles. He placed emphasis on dealing with structural defects rather than renewal and reinstatement of features such as the lost pinnacles. He proposed retaining the pitched roof, rather than attempting to reinstate the original flat roof. He also recommended the retention of the brick and tile patching, rather than renewing the flint panels which would, in his view, 'produce just that neatness which we want to avoid'.

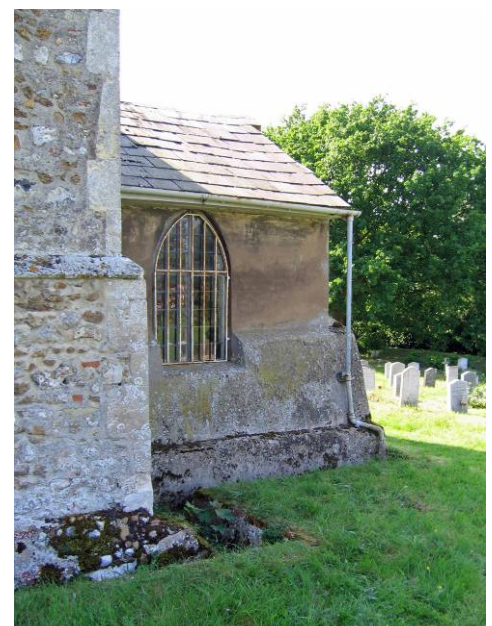
Fig. 6 The south porch, exhibiting evidence of periodic repairs.



The north vestry

The brick north vestry was constructed around 1840, according to Montagu Benton, but was built on old foundations which rise a few feet above ground level (*Fig. 7*). Benton suggests that the original building was 15th century in date (on the basis of the doorway), and served as a sacristy. Alternatively it may have been used as a priest's lodging. At the time of the 1915 SPAB report the walls of the vestry were described as covered with Roman cement.

Fig. 7 The north vestry, an early 19th century structure built on older foundation walls.



Significance

The church at Fingringhoe is an important local landmark, and is an impressive and attractive building given prominence by its hilltop location.

The church has escaped any large scale restoration despite many interventions throughout its history. Writing in 1906 SPAB member Christopher Carter wrote that 'the whole building in its shaping, colour and textures is exceptionally interesting and charming'. The historic repairs and alterations carried out to the church contribute to its attractive appearance and historical character. Discussions between the SPAB, Wykeham Chancellor and Fingringhoe's vicars provide interesting insights into approaches to the conservation of historic buildings in the first decades of the 20th century.

The tower is unusual on a number of counts. The vault is very unusual, particularly as it is constructed of brick. The flint and stone banding of the tower is also of note, although other examples are known in Essex, including Stanway and Purleigh. The flint chequerwork of the plinth is a notable feature, as is the use of 14th century brick. The exceptional narrowness of the staircase turret is distinctive.

The bellframe is of great age, probably one of the oldest in the county. The 14th century bell may be original to the tower. Both these features represent important survivals.

In addition to the tower, other features of note are the south porch with its flint chequerwork. Some of the brickwork in the window heads of the porch may be medieval. The extent of the medieval wall paintings that have survived in the interior is exceptional. The nave roof is important and rare with its unusual structural form and spurs skilfully carved with portrait heads.

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Appendix 1

List Description

FINGRINGHOE ABBERTON ROAD

1.

5214

Church of St Andrew

TM 02 SW 13/31

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2.

Parish Church, C12 nave, with one complete window and one fragmentary, all with roman brick. C14 chancel, south aisle south chapel, and west tower. Extensive re-used roman brick. Tower has bands of flint rubble and limestone and chequerwork at the base. C15 south porch also in chequered flintwork. Carved spandrels to outer doorway, good C14 inner door. Interesting remains of wall paintings depicting the Virgin, St Christopher, St Michael, a seated woman and Christ as man of sorrows. Circa 1600 brass to John Alleyne. Monument 1655, George Frewe. Red plain tiled roof. Nave roof is of unusual form, round arched to double collars, clasping the collar purlin. Diagonal spurs with fine portrait heads. Late C14 south door. RCHM 1.

Listing NGR: TM0296720388

Appendix 2

Timeline of construction and repairs (not exhaustive)

c.1100

Construction of nave and chancel

Early 14th century

Chancel arch rebuilt

Doorway inserted in north wall of nave

South aisle added

1st phase of south porch

West tower built

Late 14th century	Chancel rebuilt South aisle extended to form chapel South porch added
Late 15th/early 16th century	South porch remodelled Nave roof raised, ?walls heightened
16th/17th century	Tower arch rebuilt
17th century	Brick repairs to east window of south porch
17th/18th century	South porch re-roofed Brick and tile repairs to south chapel and south aisle parapet
c.1840	North vestry added on earlier foundations
Early 1870s	All window tracery repaired or renewed
1884	Earthquake causes damage to nave roof and interior plaster
1885	Appeal launched for repairs to interior. Removal of old plaster reveals wall paintings
1889-1901	Various repairs/renovations, mostly internal except stair turret rebuilt and refaced, timbers of chancel roof scraped and cleaned, new step of Portland stone for altar rails, chancel paved with Maw's tiles, nave paved with deal block paving with oak blocks in the gangway, whitewash removed from south aisle roof. Ground stage of the tower cleared out, walls rendered with cement, floor paved with wooden blocks. Removal of west gallery and box pews etc.
1894	Embattled tower possibly rebuilt plain by this time
c.1900	North doorway of nave re-opened
1902-3	Repairs to roof of south aisle
1920	Buttresses added to tower
1925	Concrete channels made around church Re-leading of tracery lights of west window of tower

1927	Bell frame repaired Walls of south aisle repointed
1928	North wall of nave repointed
1930	Brick floor of the chapel relaid on concrete Repair of nave roof
1938	Repairs to roof of south porch
1968-9	Renovations including replastering and whitewashing of walls, 14 th century statue of St Margaret of Antioch discovered
1987	Repairs to roof following gale