



Norfolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan

MIN 25 – land at Manor Farm, Haddiscoe Heritage Impact Assessment - Addendum (2024): Assessment of potential group of nine round tower churches including Haddiscoe St. Mary, and Thorpe next Haddiscoe St. Matthias

Background

During the hearing sessions of the Examination in Public for the draft Norfolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan; a representor stated that Haddiscoe, St Mary and Thorpe next Haddiscoe, St Matthias were part of a group of nine round tower churches. However, it was not defined which churches made up this group.

In Historic England’s Hearing statement, the only mention of a group of churches is in relation to Haddiscoe, St Mary and Thorpe Next Haddiscoe, St Matthias as having group value in relation to marking historic settlement in the lowland next to the Broads:

“2.28 Historic England continue to have serious concerns about the introduction of an extraction site at Haddiscoe due to the level of harm it would cause to the historic environment, primarily due to its impact on the significance of St Mary’s Church, Haddiscoe and other heritage assets including the historic and group value of the Thorpe and Haddiscoe round tower churches.”

Introduction

For the purposes of this assessment, it is assumed that a potential group would be the nine round tower churches in closest proximity to the settlement of Haddiscoe.

Settlement	Name of Church	NHER, SHER & NHLE* details	Construction period for tower
Haddiscoe	St Mary	NHER 10702 , NHLE 1169126	11/12 th century
Thorpe next Haddiscoe	St Matthias	NHER 10703 , NHLE 1306674	11/12 th century
Norton Subcourse	St Mary	NHER 5282 , NHLE 1306333	13 th century
Heckingham	St Gregory	NHER 10511 , NHLE 1169302	11/12 th century
Raveningham	St Andrew	NHER 10540 , NHLE 1050483	12 th century
Hales	St Margaret	NHER 10523 , NHLE 1169239	11/12 th century
Fritton and St Olaves	St Edmund	NHER 10504 , NHLE 1372918	14 th century
Herringfleet	St Margaret	SHER HRF 005 NHLE 1031950	12 th century
Ashby	St Mary	SHER ASY 001 , NHLE 1352636	13/14 th century

*NHER is the Norfolk Historic Environment Record, SHER is the Suffolk Historic Environment Record (<https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/map>), NHLE is the [National Heritage List for England](#)

Most church towers in England are of a square design, with only a small number of round towers. The Round Tower Churches Society suggests that there are around 180 round towers, with the majority of these being in East Anglia, with Norfolk having the most with 126. The greatest concentration of round towered churches is in southeast Norfolk and northeast Suffolk in the Yare and Waveney valleys. Many suggestions have been made over the years that the round tower churches were earlier than those of square design. However, Stephen Hart writing at the Round Tower Church Society suggests that this may not be so clear cut. There is dating evidence for round towers being constructed into the post-medieval period, and that some square towers were constructed in the Saxon Period, although not generally in East Anglia.

Discussion

The prevalence of round towers in East Anglia has been the subject of much debate over the years. The majority of 19th and early 20th Century writers attributed most round tower churches to the post conquest Norman and early Medieval period with only a handful of Saxon period churches. In the 1980's and 1990's a contrary argument was made by W. J. Goode (Goode, 1994), who proposed that the vast majority of round tower churches dated from the Saxon period, based on the earliest date for the use of elements of the towers, and that any later architectural or technological features were later additions. While Stephen Heywood suggested that the majority of round towers were post Conquest, he proposed that their form was culturally influenced by round towers in Germany, Denmark and Sweden as a result of the Baltic trade between East Anglia and those states rather than a result of any functional reason to do with scarcity of suitable freestone (An Historical Atlas of Norfolk (2005), page 60). Stephen Hart (2003) proposed an alternative to the theories of Heywood and Goode, that in fact the construction methods of the Saxon builders continued in the post conquest period, or Saxo-Norman Overlap, and that in common with preceding theories most round tower churches were built during the Saxo-Norman Overlap. Stephen Hart and other authors have suggested that the scarcity of building stone in Norfolk combined with the relative abundance of flint cobble led to towers being built in round section as this was comparatively easy to build with these local materials, rather because of cultural influences from the Baltic. Hart notes (Stephen Hart, Round tower churches of England, 2003; page 13) that East Anglia has a far greater number of round tower churches than in those Baltic States, and that the construction of round towers from flint dates back to at least the Roman period (Stephen Hart, Round tower churches of England, 2003; page 12). Square section towers would generally require corner stones (quoins) to construct, for which suitable stone occurs sparsely in the East of England. There are also suggestions that the use of local artisan builders rather than masons may have led to the number of round towers as this was a design with which they were familiar. However, there are examples of round towers built with the inclusion of Caen stone such as at Haddiscoe St Mary and Thorpe Next Haddiscoe St Matthias amongst others. Caen stone is not thought to have been imported into East Anglia until the start of the building of Norwich Cathedral, so its inclusion especially in the string courses around a tower would indicate likely post-Conquest construction.

Given that the current predominate theory is that the majority of round towers were built in the 11th/12th Centuries, this would undermine the 'defence tower' theory put forward by H. M. Cautley (1937), that the round towers were built as defence towers in the Anglo-Saxon period as a result of Danish raids. His theory then goes on to suggest that the naves of the churches were later additions grafted onto these towers as the threat of raids receded. However, this theory has been discredited as virtually all the round towers were built at the same time as the naves of their church, which has been shown by Stephen Hart's analysis of the comparative thicknesses of the western wall of the naves and the round towers which show contemporaneous construction of these elements. Stephen Hart states that the balance of evidence points to the round towers being built

towers as part of the overall church construction. Evidence includes the small internal space of the towers, with many being below 10 feet in diameter, which would significantly limit their usefulness as a refuge (Stephen Hart, 2003, Page 9).

As can be seen, while the majority of the churches were built in the 11th/12th Century there are some which are significantly later. Given this, there seems to be little evidence that the churches listed overleaf were originally constructed with the intention to be observed as a group of nine. That is not to say that it would not be possible to view at least some of these churches from another but that there is no evidence to suggest that this was part of the reasoning for the location or their construction as round towers.

The churches at Haddiscoe and Thorpe Next Haddiscoe while intervisible from the top of the towers, and of round construction differ in some construction methods and architectural features despite both being 11th/12th Century and incorporating the use of Caen stone. The constructional techniques of the belfry openings follow a Saxon technique for St. Mary's, and a later Norman technique for St. Matthias, potentially indicative of a chronology for the buildings as Norman techniques became more widely known as construction of Norwich Cathedral progressed, although both are within the Saxo-Norman Overlap and both make use of Caen stone.

In terms of dating evidence beyond interpretations of construction techniques, style of windows and so forth there is almost no hard archaeological evidence as to the date of round tower churches. Obtaining any such evidence would be almost impossible and probably would never be precise enough to date any structure pre or post-AD1066. Most Norfolk churches have undergone a complex evolution of repairs, changes and rebuilding. Churches which had round towers had them replaced with square towers during partial or complete rebuilds. Complex and random historical circumstances have led to the survival or not of any given round church tower or perceived group of round towered churches.

As has previously been discussed, the towers were constructed as bell towers and there is no evidence that the top of the towers were designed to be widely accessible. Stephen Hart suggests that the first floor of the tower may well have formed a priest's room; perhaps equivalent to the later vestries. The bell may well have been rung from this room by a deacon or priest's assistant for liturgical purposes (calling to services). Change ringing of bells only developed in 16th and 17th centuries. That being the case and given that the 'defence tower' theory has been discredited (Stephen Hart, Round tower churches of England, 2003; page 9) then the likelihood of general access to the top of the towers historically seems unlikely. Often the access to the first floor of the tower was often from a doorway in the top of nave, either via a ladder or later a set of steps to a walkway within the nave.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the historic landscape surrounding Haddiscoe is strongly influenced by the two round tower churches of St Mary's and St. Matthias, these churches were constructed to serve their own communities and there is no clear evidence that part of the original construction was an intention that they should form an intervisible group with each other or with any other church in close proximity. No evidence has been found from the research on Round Tower Churches that has been examined for this update, for a defined group of nine Round Tower Churches that includes St. Mary's and St. Matthias'.

The Heritage Impact Assessment for MIN 25-Land at Manor Farm, Haddiscoe (Examination document B19) contains an assessment of the potential effects of the allocation on the

significance and setting of the Church of St. Mary and the Church of St. Matthais, and it is not considered that any additional effects would result to a wider group of nine round tower churches as suggested by respondents.

References

Goode. W. J., *Round tower churches of southeast England*, Round Tower Churches Society, 1994

Hart, Stephen, *The Round Church Towers of England*, Pub. Lucas Books, 2003

H. M. Cautley, *Suffolk Churches and their Treasures*, London, 1937

Heywood, Stephen, Chapter 29. Round Towered Churches, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, Ed. T Ashwin & A Davison, Pub. Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 2005

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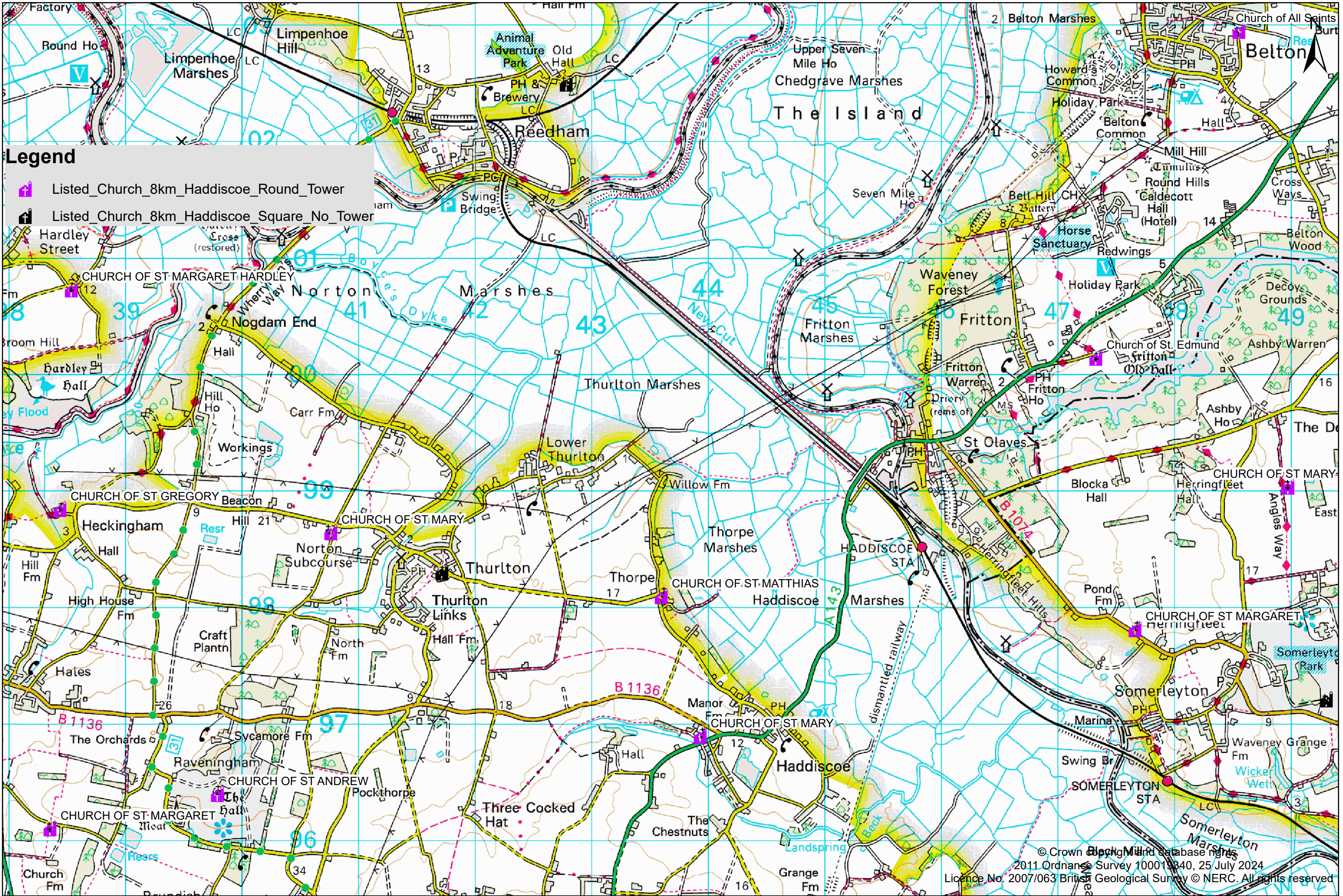
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On the following page is a map showing the locations of listed churches in proximity to Haddiscoe

Legend

-  Listed_Church_8km_Haddiscoe_Round_Tower
-  Listed_Church_8km_Haddiscoe_Square_No_Tower



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