



About St Gregory's

The charming little Norman church of St Gregory stands proud on a hillock above the River Chet. The location has considerably influenced the history of Heckingham village, causing both rises and falls in population.

Historically, sea levels were much higher and when this district was first inhabited, several thousand years ago, the low-lying areas were under water. By AD 700 sea and river levels had fallen, and local inhabitants moved away from the hill tops into the river valleys to take advantage of the light, rich soils left behind by the receding waters. The raised area was chosen for the church and construction began in the late 11th century.

Although the church is now very isolated, it was once part of a village recorded in Domesday Book of 1086, when it had as many inhabitants as the neighbouring villages of Lodon and Hales. The quality of workmanship in St Gregory's demonstrates the wealth of the village at this time.

About 300 years after the church was built sea levels began to rise again, driving the inhabitants out of the area. Over time, the population continued to decline, even after the lower levels became habitable again. The church eventually fell out of use and passed into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust in 1993 when repair works were undertaken, supervised by Roger Taigel. The south doorway was conserved with funds raised in Mr Taigel's memory.

St Gregory's is often compared to the nearby church of St Margaret's, Hales (also in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust). Heckingham church has seen many changes over the years, with medieval modifications and Victorian refurbishment. In contrast, Hales has remained largely Norman.

A thousand years of English history awaits you

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Access

Due to their age, historic church floors can be uneven and worn, and lighting can be low level. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors can be slippery.

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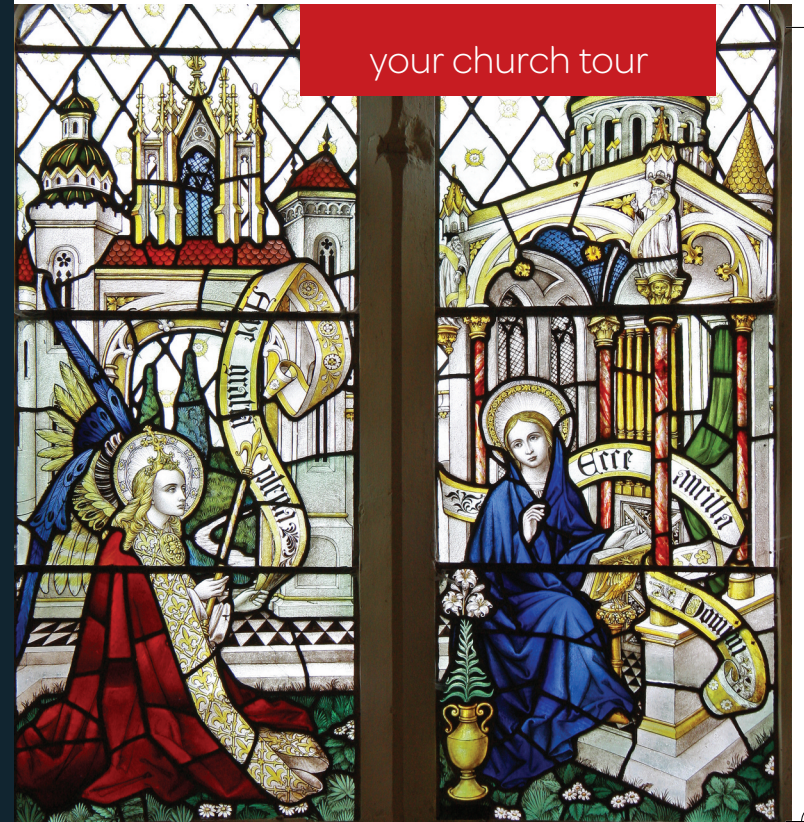
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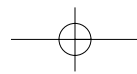


Church of
St Gregory

Heckingham, Norfolk



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



FOLD



1 The simple stone **font** is almost certainly Norman in date. It has a plain square bowl on an octagonal drum surrounded by four columns. Fonts were traditionally covered to help protect the holy water used at baptisms, and were lead-lined to stop water leaching into the stone. Unfortunately the

17th-century wooden cover has not survived, though an 18th-century engraving depicting the font and cover may be seen on the west end wall.

2 The 19th-century wooden-wheeled **bier** was used as part of funeral processions to carry a coffin. A small brass plaque inscribed 'Hales and Heckingham 1908', demonstrates another link between these neighbouring parishes and their architecturally similar churches.

3 In the 13th to 14th century, the church was extended by the addition of a **north aisle**. Crude arches were punched through the original north wall of the nave to provide access to the new aisle; hence the columns display a lack of dressed stone and decoration.

4 The north aisle floor contains a series of 17th-century **ledger stones** commemorating the Crowe family. The memorials include the family coat of arms, now largely obscured by wear. One memorial to a mother and daughter is inscribed:

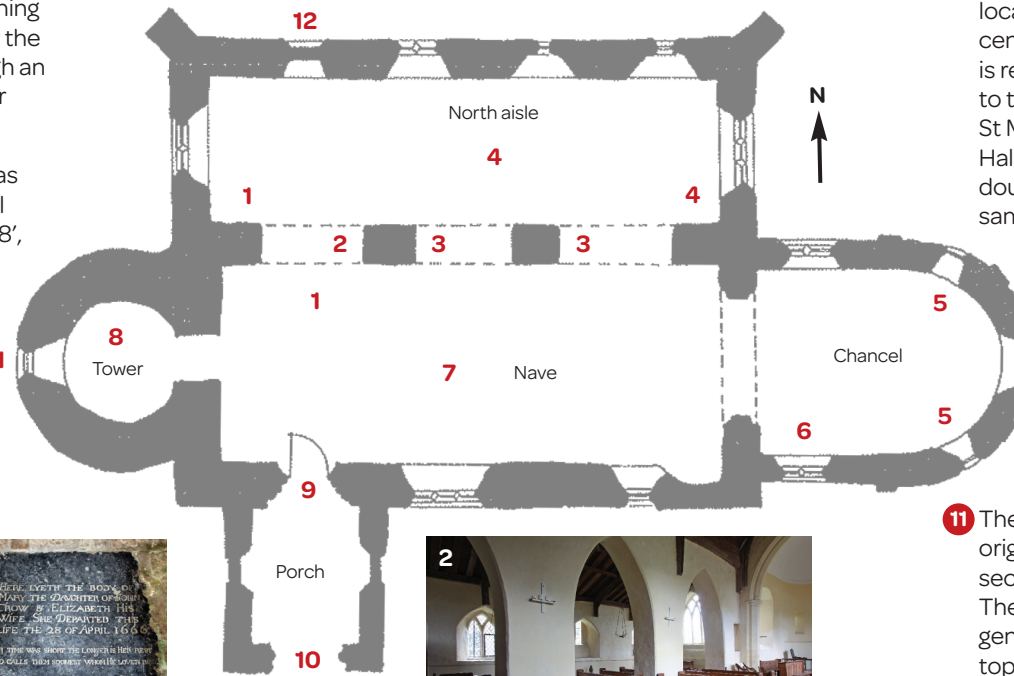
*Her time was short, the longer is her rest
God calls them soonest whom he loveth best*



5 The apsidal (round-ended) **chancel** formed part of the original Norman church, and has undergone some modifications. The two small windows to either side of the large eastern

window (cover) are Norman in origin, but contain **stained glass** of 1908 depicting St Gregory and St Margaret. The remaining windows probably date from around 1300, with more recent alterations. The roof is concealed by a plaster barrel vault.

6 The interior was largely refurbished in 1899, removing most of the medieval woodwork. However, the patron commissioning the changes left instructions for some wood to be reused. This can clearly be seen in the 20th-century **priests' stall**, formed from reused medieval pew ends with decorative carved 'poppyhead' motifs of leaves and flowers.



7 The nave has one **ledger stone**, dedicated to the Mingay family, and depicting the family coat of arms – three leopard heads within a shield. Further heraldic shields may be seen in the upper levels of **stained glass** in the south window.



8 The tower contains two **bells**, made by William Brend in 1631, and Thomas Newman in 1712. The bells were rehung in the early 20th century, and a further cracked bell was sold at this time.



12 The **north aisle door** (now blocked) was created to replace the Norman north door destroyed as part of the medieval expansion. The medieval door surround includes a large amount of reset Norman carved stone, which probably came from the original Norman doorway.

13 The **roof** is thatched, not an uncommon feature of many Norfolk and Suffolk churches. Such a roof will last approximately 70 years before it needs replacing. The roof was last re-thatched in 1978.

9 The magnificently detailed Norman **south doorway** is one of the finest in the area, and demonstrates the highly skilled craftsmanship and local wealth of the 11th century. The doorway is remarkably similar to that of nearby St Margaret's church, Hales, and was, no doubt, created by the same craftsmen.



10 The **south porch**, built of brick and flint with stone dressings, was added in the early 16th century. The statue niche (now filled in) on the front suggests that it was built before the Reformation in the mid-16th century, when deliberate destruction of religious icons occurred throughout the country.

11 The lower round section of the **tower** is part of the original Norman church; the middle and upper sections were apparently rebuilt in the 14th century. The tower was later repaired after its top fell, through generous bequests in wills of 1486 and 1501. Near the top of the circular stage some bricked in medieval putlog holes are visible, showing where scaffolding was erected to help with the construction.