

## LITTLE WRATTING CHURCH

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Little Wrattling Church stands on an elevated site overlooking the Stour valley. Though the parish is fairly extensive, there is no village and the houses are scattered over its area. Blunt's Hall, of 19th century date, is the principal manor house and there is the fine moated site of another manor house at Great Wilsey, one mile to the south-west.

The churchyard in which the church stands is of two distinct levels separated by a sloping bank. An unusual feature is that this bank is curved and seems to have formed part of a larger circular enclosure of early date. It has been much damaged, and the west, north and north-east parts of the perimeter have been destroyed, but it is clearly marked on the south and south-west. It may be that here we have a rare example of a circular churchyard.

The church, which stands within this supposed enclosure, consists of a nave and chancel only. There is a wooden bell-turret over the western end of the nave and a modern south porch. The chancel was lengthened in the 14th century and was later enlarged by the addition of the Turnour chapel on the north side. Extensive restorations were carried out in 1895 when the roofs were renewed and much of the exterior stonework restored. The dedication is unknown.

It is very difficult to date the building and heretofore it has been thought to be of early Norman work. But the walls of the nave and the western part of the chancel are constructed with large pebbles and stones laid with wide mortar joints very unlike Norman work. Here and there are traces of primitive herring-bone work. A pre-Conquest date seems more likely, possibly *c.* 1040. Of this period there remain the north and south doorways, the north being blocked. Both have rectangular heads formed by stone lintels, the northern of which is plain except for a slight chamfer. The south doorway is of exceptional interest as the lintel consists of a large stone bearing an archaic inscription of pre-Conquest type, which has so far defied satisfactory translation. The lintel was once larger as the top part of some of the letters of the upper line of words has been partly cut off. From the few words which can be deciphered, it appears that this was a dedicatory inscription. The tall rere-arch of this doorway is semi-circular but the jambs are not splayed. In the eastern jamb is a closing-bar hole, no less than 5 ft. 6 ins. deep and a shallow hole in the western jamb was for the end of the bar. The wooden door retains ironwork which is thought to be of late 12th century date.



Little Wrattling Church.

During a recent restoration, some of the plaster which covers the chancel inside and out, was removed indicating that the western half of the chancel south wall is contemporary with the nave. No other early features have survived and there is no work of the 13th century.

The chancel was doubled in length in the 14th century, *c.* 1350, when a large three-light east window was inserted. The slightly moulded splays and rere-arch are of this time, but the tracery is modern. In the south wall is a very fine piscina having a crocketed ogée head terminating in a finial, and containing a quatrefoil drain. The very plain octagonal font appears to be of the same date, but only the bowl is original.

In the 15th century numerous alterations were made in the nave, chief of which being the erection of a rood screen which was standing in 1850, but subsequently destroyed. This screen had a wide loft, the western side of which was supported by corbels still remaining in the nave walls. The loft formed a canopy over the altars which stood on either side of the chancel arch. In the north wall is the doorway opening to an unusually large rectangular stair turret which gave access to the loft. It has recently been reopened, and the stairs, which are complete, lead up to a roughly formed chamber in the south side of which is the blocked access to the loft. In the east wall is a blocked doorway, but this is suspect as it is such an unusual feature, and may be the upper doorway of the rood stair rebuilt here by the 19th century restorers. In the wall at the foot of the stairs are two niches of different sizes, each once having a wooden lintel. One may possibly have been for a light.

When the rood screen was erected, the lighting of the nave was improved by the insertion of larger two-light windows in the side and west walls. Only the north window is unrestored and retains some fragments of contemporary stained glass in its traceried head, consisting chiefly of M's and R's with white Tudor Roses, all on a yellow background with a crimson border. The inner splays of the south window are also original work, but the tracery is new. The west window is entirely modern, and below it may be seen traces of a former west door. In the gable is a small blocked opening.

Early in the 16th century the Turnour Chapel was added on the north side of the chancel, to which it opened by two arches. It was approximately the same size as the chancel and probably contained a monument of which the kneeling woman, now placed on the sill of the south-east chancel window, formed part together with the shield of arms high up in the north wall opposite. This chapel was destroyed early in the 18th century when the arcade was removed except for the lower portion of the western respond which has the deep hollow mouldings of the period. This fragment has repeatedly been mistaken for the northern jamb of a later chancel

arch, but this is clearly impossible. When the arcade was removed a skew wall was built in its place, making the chancel 1 ft. narrower at the east end than at the west, and seriously complicating the construction of the new roof placed over the chancel in 1895, as the error was not discovered till the work was half-completed. The two-light window in this wall is of the 18th century, but the tracery has been renewed to a 'decorated' design. The remaining part of the west wall of this chapel abuts on the eastern side of the rood-loft turret and contains the blocked 'suspect' doorway above referred to. If this door is original, then it must have opened to an upper chamber over the chapel.

In the south wall of the chancel are two fine two-light early 16th century windows. They have deeply moulded jambs and segmental rere-arches, but the tracery and exterior stonework is entirely modern.

Over the west end of the nave is a wooden bell-turret, mostly modern, which contains an interesting 15th century bell, inscribed SANCTORUM MORE MODO PULSO LAUDIS HONORE. The timber framing which supports it is also of the 15th century, and the four massive uprights which rise from moulded horizontal wooden sleepers, have carved Tudor Roses up the sides. This is the only example of this type of bell-turret in Suffolk, but is fairly common in Essex only two miles away.

The north-east corner of the nave is occupied by the squire's pew, erected here after the destruction of the Turnour Chapel (from which it may have come). It is made up from late 16th century panelling and formerly had a continuous seat on all sides except at the entrance door. It partly covers the lower doorway of the rood-loft stair, and during the recent restoration the panelling and part of the seat were cut away to admit of access to the stair turret.

Westwards of the pew, several of the 15th century benches remain. They have rectangular ends with traceried panels having circles containing trefoils or quatrefoils in the heads. The seating on the south side is modern, but includes some old work, notably that forming the back of the westernmost seat.

The semi-circular chancel arch is entirely modern and was rebuilt and widened in 1895. In its northern jamb has been inserted a small rectangular sink having a drain on its inner side. The precise significance of this 'sink' and its date are unknown. There are two more, of much larger size, placed against the porch wall. All three were dug up in the churchyard about sixty years ago. They have each a wide shallow recess on the upper face, about 2 inches deep, and in one side is cut a V-shaped runaway. It is possible they may be of domestic origin.

The chancel screen is modern and is placed on the eastern side of the arch. The western end of the nave is taken up on three sides by benches, for use at baptisms, which partly surround the font. All the other fittings are modern. The registers date from 1780.

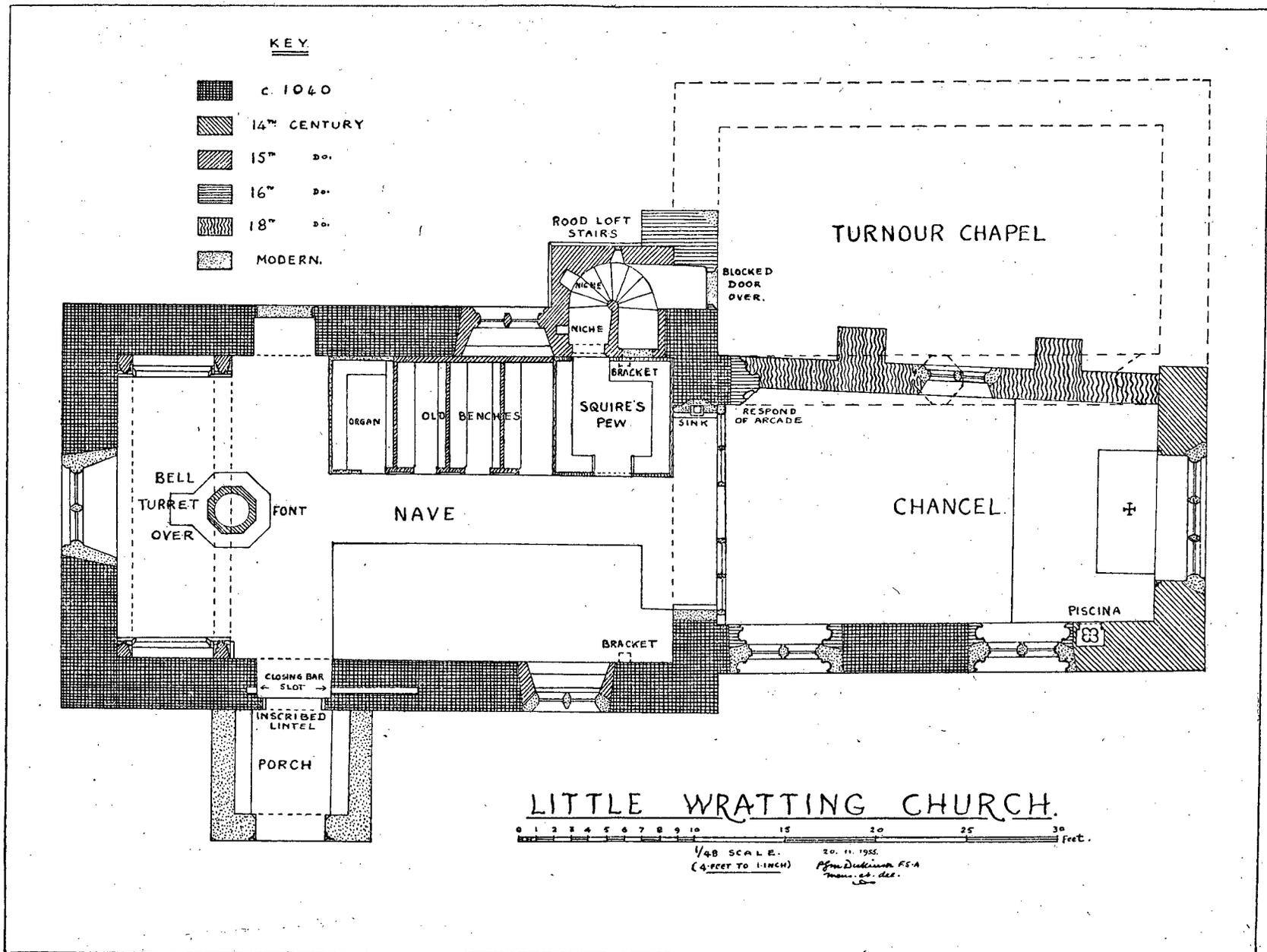


FIG. 3—Plan of Little Wrattling Church.