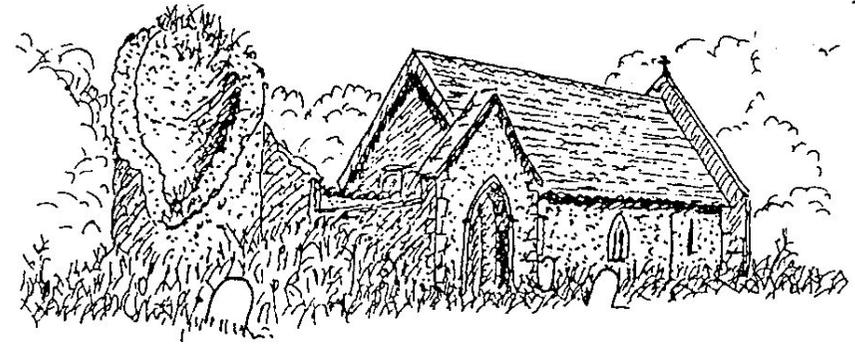


St Margaret's Church



Morton-on-the-Hill, Norwich, Norfolk

The key is kept at Morton Hall

Regular worship was conducted here up to and including Easter Sunday in 1959. That night the tower collapsed. It was a still night and the sound was like a load of gravel being tipped out of a lorry. The flints and mortar tumbled into great heaps both inside and outside. This badly damaged the nave and porch roofs, and so it was left unrepaired for twenty years. Then, with close co-operation between Lady Prince-Smith and the Norfolk Churches Trust, assisted by voluntary helpers, it was possible to restore the church, and it is now used for special services.

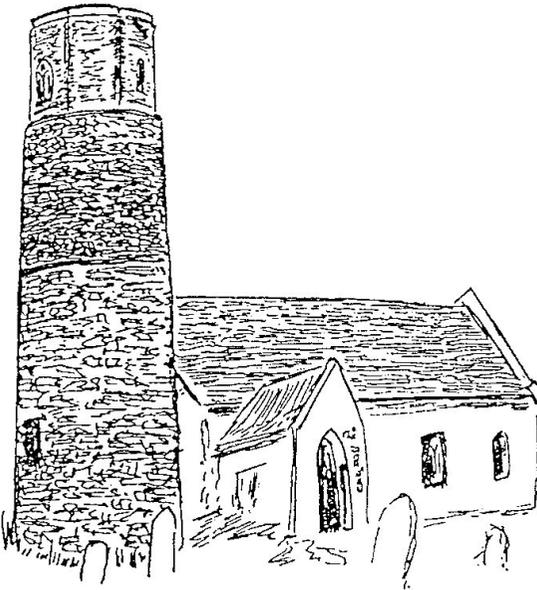
The round Saxon tower, tapering slightly, with a later octagonal belfry stage, is illustrated on the back page. The nave walls near the tower contain conglomerate stone, and are undoubtedly part Saxon. Notice the north-west corner in particular, which is constructed of these stones. The tower has a double splayed window in its east face, indicating that it was added to an already existing church, and the tower arch is constructed without any dressed stone.

The Domesday Survey mentions Morton only as a part of Helmingham. The Helmingham church has now disappeared completely, but was situated at the foot of Morton Hall's front drive. There were three bells in Morton's tower which are now in use in Attlebridge church, and may be heard across the Wensum valley.

The fine figure brass in the centre of the church depicts Katherine Audley, sister of Thomas Southwell. She died in 1611, aged 80. Again there is good quality lettering on her slab, describing how "*she lived 45 years a widow. She kept good hospitality. She was charitable to the Poore.*" She wears a hoop dress and ruff. This brass was removed during the period when the roof was leaking, and subsequently returned and restored in place.

The north chapel is very early. The arcading is 14th century or possibly even earlier, with octagonal piers and double chamfered arches. A piscina (stone basin) is believed to be hidden behind the plaster of the wall. A stone coffin lid could be the tomb of the original donor of this chapel. Following the Victorian restoration the chapel contained a family pew which was entered by the special chapel door.

There were originally five old benches with poppy heads in the nave, but they went to Reedham Church, and were lost in the disastrous fire in that church in 1890.



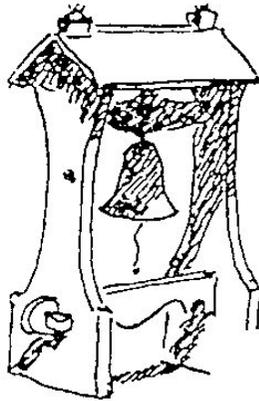
Rare trees may be seen near the church. The surrounding grounds were laid out by Sir Joseph Hooker of Kew, and an archway at the Hall bears his initials and the date of his work here in 1890.

People have found blessing and peace in this church which is kept available for prayer and meditation. The Rector of Weston Longville holds special services here.

St Margaret's Church before 1959

Original leaflet compiled by Richard Butler-Stoney from research by E F J Freezer & Lady Prince-Smith, with drawings by H D Holbeach; revised 2006 by Cassie Tillet

The **present bell** was found in the coach house of Morton Hall, and set up in the ruined part of the nave. Its previous history is unknown, but its date is 1793.

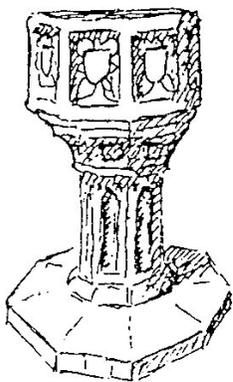


The nave and porch walls have now been capped with Norfolk pantiles. The south porch has a 15th century Perpendicular entrance with knapped flints. The inner door is of fine old oak with decorative carving possibly as old as the porch itself.

There was no external difference between the nave and chancel walls and roof, but the nave has a square headed window and the chancel a lancet window. A tombstone set in the nave wall is in memory of a baby who died in 1729; the skull and cross-bones and the hourglass are symbols of our mortality.

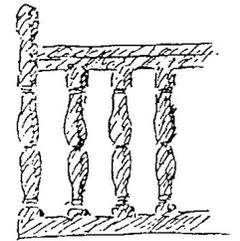
The window in the east wall is very high up, and has intersected tracery of circa 1300. The elaborate buttresses with gabled tops and panelling and the basecourse are all Victorian restoration work of 1865. The chapel's east window is further Victorian work in the Decorated style. The stained glass from this window was moved to Costessey a long time ago.

The nave's north doorway has been restored, but the actual opening is early, and could be pre-Conquest like the north-west corner with its squared lumps of conglomerate. There are no windows on the north side, but a small north door into the chapel is used, and was part of the 1865 restoration.

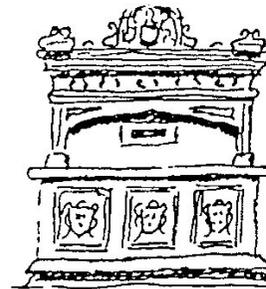


There is now a new timber framed and glass west wall, and the **font** has been moved into the interior. The octagonal font is 15th century and has shields on panels around the bowl. There are fleurons underneath, and it was carved from Caen stone from Normandy.

There are fine 17th century sturdy baluster type **communion rails**. Commandment boards with the Creed and the Lord's Prayer fill the east wall. On either side are the base panels of a former roodscreen, now set against the walls. They have been thoroughly cleaned, but traces of medieval paint have been detected in the crevices.



A brass plaque on the chancel wall is the parish war memorial erected after the Great War of 1914-1918. Opposite is another brass plaque bearing the Berney family arms with their crest of five ostrich feathers.



The principal monument here is the **Southwell tomb** in the north chapel. It is a tomb chest with a slab which has fine lettering on the top and an arched wall tablet on pilasters above. Thomas Southwell built an Elizabethan manor house near the church circa 1600. He died unmarried in 1609, and was buried here with two other members of the Southwell family. A Georgian wing was added to the house in 1820 by Thomas Berney, and the Elizabethan part subsequently demolished in the 1950s.

The brass inscription plaque on the tomb is missing, but the shield at the lower left contains a crescent to signify that this was the second son of Sir Richard Southwell of Woodrising, and the crest at the top is a talbot. A nephew of this Thomas Southwell was the famous poet, Robert Southwell (1561-1595) who became a Jesuit martyr. He was caught at Harrow saying an illegal mass and was imprisoned for two years; he was then hanged, drawn and quartered in London on 21st February 1595. The stone mason must have enjoyed carving **fanciful dragons** in the corners of this monument, and it gave equal joy to discover them when the tomb was cleaned up after years of dereliction.

