

# Back Pages

## Snippets:

### Them stones, them dry stones

**A**t the eastern end of the Chancel in Cley Church there is a reminder of the many changes that have taken place in parish churches. Hidden from sight underneath the present Altar, there is a large stone slab that was eroded and cracked before being set in its present position. The slab, called a 'mensa', is the top of a medieval altar. Although many disappeared after the Reformation and the edict of 1564, they are not uncommon.

Distinctive features of these altars are the five crosses incised into the surface, for the five wounds of Christ, which were anointed when the altar was consecrated. One cross was central with another in each of the four corners. In the Cley altar four simple and rather crude crosses are still visible with the central one being illustrated in figure 1.

In the north aisle there are remnants of another medieval altar. Two stones set in the floor under the present Altar have in total four crosses or parts of crosses cut into their surface. The arrangement of these crosses suggests the two stones were part of a larger slab with the central section now missing. They may have been part of a subsidiary altar or even an altar in the earlier and much smaller church.

In Wiveton, the origins of two stone slabs of Purbeck Marble, on either side of the pulpit, are more problematical (figure 2: A and B).



Figure 1. Central cross of the Cley Altar

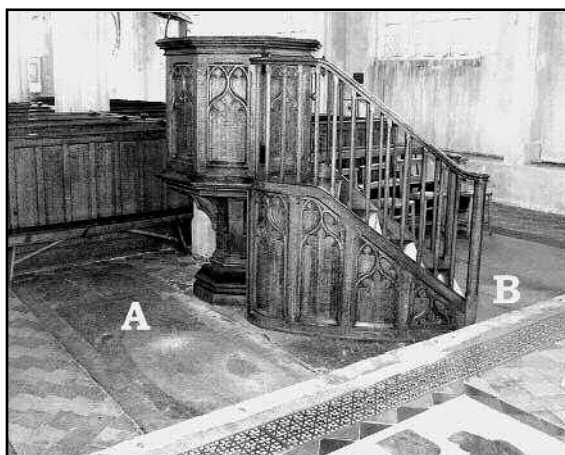


Figure 2. The two slabs of Purbeck Marble in Wiveton Church.

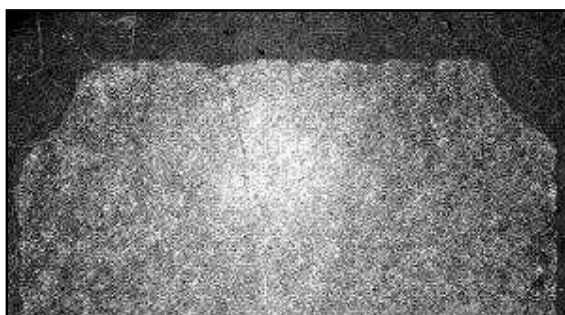


Figure 3. Close-up of one of the Wiveton slabs showing the quarter circle removed from the corners.

Both are now much eroded, with the smallest (A) having quarter-circles removed from each corner (figure 3). Were these also parts of altars? There are no crosses visible

on the surface of either stone, but in Medieval times some subsidiary altars did not have the distinctive crosses as at Cley. There is, however, another possibility - these slabs may have been part of an ornate tomb with pillars set in each corner to support a canopy or table-top. The original raised tomb of George and Anne Brigge is an obvious candidate (see page 33). We know the portrait brasses were once set in Purbeck Marble and in 1614 an order was made to dismantle this tomb.

*John Peake*

---

### **Feedback: Importation of Stone for memorials**

**I**n the course of a fascinating tour around the graveyard at Wells (reported in the BAHS Newsletter, June 2003) conducted by Nina Bilbey, the question arose of whence the material used for all the lovely headstones in this area's many churchyards came.

The obvious answer given was that, as North Norfolk is not well endowed with freestone, they came by ship, possibly in lieu of ballast. These stone slabs must have been a valuable commodity – and presumably dutiable – so it is surprising just how rarely they feature in the Cley and Blakeney Port Books.

A quick perusal of my Port Book transcripts for the years 1770 and 1780 reveals precisely one entry for 'gravestones', nine for 'flagstones' (measured in Dozens) and one 'slabstone', all shipped from Newcastle or Sunderland in company with a holdful of coal. The 'gravestone' entry is:

*5 Dec 1770 in the John & Rebecca (John Taylor master) from Newcastle carrying 26 chalder of coal and 2 British Gravestones.*

(PRO ref E190/576/2)

Presumably British stones attracted a lower rate of duty than foreign ones. I cannot believe that only two people, wealthy enough to afford a headstone, died in Blakeney, Cley and district in 1770. So how did the rest get their stones?

By the by, the Port Books also had four entries for grindstones, three of them in 1780. Curiously these grindstones were measured by the chalder rather than being individually counted as they had been in 1770 (there *were* only two to count). So, how many grindstones did one get in a chalder? Was there even a constant size? Was there a reason for the change in the style of entry in the Port Books, or was it merely a quirk of the person making the entries?

*Richard Kelham*

---

### **Snippet: From the Norfolk Chronicle 1770**

"Last Sunday evening [15 Jan] a fishing smack, riding in 6 fathoms water off Blakeney, was run down by a coasting sloop, and sunk directly. The people were with great difficulty saved by a boat."

"Monday 7 May, Rev Thomlinson, Rector of Cley, was married to Miss Winn of Holt, a very agreeable young lady, endowed with every qualification to render the married state happy, and possessed of a fortune of £15,000."

## **Feedback: The Windows of Wiveton Church – an additional note**

**F**ollowing the discussion in *Glaven Historian No.4* (2001) a reference has come to light which might provide yet another explanation for bullet holes in church windows.

K Thomas, in his important work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) discusses the irreverent behaviour of members of church congregations in the early 17th century, and the resulting referrals to the ecclesiastical courts. He quotes a case (page 191, taken from Ely Diocesan records B2/20 f79v) of a man who took a fowling piece to church intending to clean it during sermon. Having done so, he thought he might as well check that it was working, and so discharged it into the roof.

Leaving aside the glass at Wiveton, one wonders how many of the shotgun pellets discovered in church roofs, attributed to Cromwell's men having shot at the angel figures, may have a similar origin.

*Edwin J Rose  
Norfolk Landscape Archaeology*

---

## **Obituary: Basil Greenhill**

**T**he death has been announced of Basil Greenhill, the maritime historian and former Director of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. During his tenure at the NMM, Greenhill greatly expanded the scope of the museum and, inter alia, founded the

Archaeological Research Centre – known to some NMM staff as the “soggy wood department”.

He was the author of numerous articles and not a few books, the most famous of which is his two-volume study of *The Merchant Schooners*, essential reading for anyone interested in the coastal traders of Britain. He was 83.

---

## **Contributors**

**Jonathan Hooton** teaches geography and environmental science at Notre Dame School, Norwich. He is probably better known here as the author of *The Glaven Ports*.

**Eric Hotblack** is a farmer whose field walking experience has led to a wider interest in landscape archaeology.

**Richard Jefferson**, former cricketer and teacher, is an avid collector of things historical, especially those relating to the Glaven Valley.

**John Peake**, biologist, formerly worked in the Natural History Museum, London, and recently retired; has many early links with north Norfolk.

**Pamela Peake**, author, lecturer and recently retired adult education tutor; has a long-time fascination for social history.

**Monica White** is a botanist and formerly lectured at University College, London.

**John Wright** is a retired town planner who worked most recently for Norfolk County Council.