

= Blakeney Chapel =

Blakeney Chapel is a ruined building on the Norfolk coast of England . Despite its name , it is in the parish of Cley next the Sea , not the adjoining village of Blakeney , and was probably not a chapel . The building stood on a raised mound or " eye " on the seaward end of the coastal marshes , less than 200 m (220 yd) from the sea and just to the north of the current channel of the River Glaven where it turns to run parallel to the shoreline . It consisted of two rectangular rooms of unequal size , and appears to be intact in a 1586 map , but is shown as ruins in later charts . Only the foundations and part of a wall still remain . Three archaeological investigations between 1998 and 2005 provided more detail of the construction , and showed two distinct periods of active use . Although it is described as a chapel on several maps , there is no documentary or archaeological evidence to suggest that it had any religious function . A small hearth , probably used for smelting iron , is the only evidence of a specific activity on the site .

Much of the structural material was long ago carried off for reuse in buildings in Cley and Blakeney . The surviving ruins are protected as a scheduled monument and Grade II listed building because of their historical importance , but there is no active management . The ever @-@ present threat from the encroaching sea is likely to accelerate following a realignment of the Glaven 's course through the marshes , and lead to the loss of the ruins .

= = Description = =

The Blakeney Chapel ruins consist of an east @-@ west rectangular structure (S1) 18 m × 7 m (59 ft × 23 ft) in size with a smaller rectangular building (S2) , 13 m × 5 m (43 ft × 16 ft) built onto the southern side of the main room . Most of the structure is buried , only a 6 m (20 ft) length of a flint and mortar wall being exposed to a height of 0 @.@ 3 m (1 ft) prior to the excavation of 2004 ? 05 . The ruins stand on the highest point of Blakeney Eye at about 2 m (7 ft) above sea level . The Eye is a sandy mound in the marshes that is located inside the sea wall at the point where the River Glaven turns westward towards the sheltered inlet of Blakeney Haven . Cley Eye is a similar raised area on the east bank of the river . Despite the name , Blakeney Eye , like most of the northern part of the marshes in this area , is actually part of the parish of Cley next the Sea .

The land on which the building stands was in the possession of the Calthorpe family until its purchase by banker Charles Rothschild in 1912 . Rothschild gave the property to the National Trust , which has managed it since . There is no public access to the site .

The ruins are protected as a scheduled monument and Grade II listed building because of their historical importance . These listings do not cover the land around them , but the whole of the marsh forms part of the 7 @,@ 700 @-@ hectare (19 @,@ 000 @-@ acre) North Norfolk Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its internationally important wildlife value . The SSSI is now additionally protected through Natura 2000 , Special Protection Area (SPA) and RAMSAR listings , and is part of the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) .

= = Documented history = =

The building was first shown on a 1586 map of the Blakeney and Cley area , apparently drawn to be used in evidence in a legal case regarding the rights to " wreck and salvage " , the outcome of which is unknown . The original map disappeared in the 19th century , but a number of copies still exist . In this map , the building on the Eye is shown as intact and roofed , but it has no name . A map by the Cranefields from 1769 has the building as " Eye House " , but by 1797 cartographer William Faden 's map of Norfolk shows the " chapel ruins " , a description that was then consistently used from the 19th century onwards . Some maps , including Faden 's , show a second ruined chapel across the Glaven on Cley Eye , but no other documentation exists for that building .

The medieval churches of St Nicholas , Blakeney and St Margaret 's , Cley , and the now ruined Blakeney friary , were not the first religious buildings in the area . An early church was recorded in the 1086 Domesday Book at Esnuterle (" Snitterley " was a former name for Blakeney , the current

name first appearing in 1340) , but the 11th @-@ century church 's location is unknown , and there is no reason to think that it is on the site of the ' chapel ' .

An anonymous booklet on Blakeney published in 1929 states that there was a " chapel of ease " on the marshes , served by a friar from the Convent , but the document on which this seems to be based , a Calendar of Patent Rolls dated 20 April 1343 , simply notes that a local hermit was given permission to seek alms in " divers parts of the realms " . There is no evidence of a dedication of any religious building on the marshes , and no mention of a chapel in any surviving medieval documents .

= = Investigations = =

The first investigation of the chapel ruins , supported by the National Trust , was conducted by the local history group in the winter of 1998 ? 99 . This survey was conducted under a licence from English Heritage that allowed access but did not permit excavation , so it relied on height measurements , geophysics (resistivity , and magnetometry) and molehill sampling . The area surveyed was 100 m long and 40 m wide (109 yd by 44 yd) . The magnetometry failed to detect the subterranean features of the chapel , but did show an unexpected linear anomaly , related to buried ironwork from wartime defences . The resistivity survey clearly showed the larger room , but barely detected the smaller , suggesting that it had less substantial foundations , was probably less well @-@ constructed , and possibly later in date .

Plans for a realignment of the Glaven channel meant that the Eye would be left unprotected to the north of the river , and would eventually be destroyed by coastal change . It was decided that the only practical course of action was to investigate the site while it still existed , and a preliminary evaluation was carried out in 2003 as preparation for a full survey in 2004 ? 05 . The surveyed area covered 10 ha (25 acre) , significantly more than the 0 @.@ 4 ha (1 acre) of the 1998 investigations . 50 trenches were excavated in a herringbone pattern outside the buildings , each 50 m long and 1 @.@ 80 m wide (194 by 5 @.@ 9 ft) , and six trenches of varying dimensions were created inside the chapel . The latter equated in total area to two of the standard trenches . The geology was investigated with eight boreholes , and geophysics (magnetometry and metal detection) were used to locate subsurface anomalies .

The major excavation of the site in the winter of 2004 ? 05 concentrated on the building and a 10 m (33 ft) zone surrounding it . The results indicated that there were a number of phases of occupation . The remains of the building were reburied after excavation , so nothing is now visible at the surface .

= = Archaeology = =

= = = Early occupation = = =

The earliest evidence of permanent occupation is a series of ditches of 11th or 12th century date which are believed to have formed an enclosure , the south east corner of which lies below the " chapel " . Evidence for any buildings within the enclosure has either been lost to the Glaven or is buried outside the survey area . Few finds were associated with the ditches , although some fragments of Roman or earlier pottery and three Henry III pennies were found nearby . As elsewhere on the site , there is little evidence to link the old pottery to its location when found . By the time of the construction of the main building , some time in the 14th century , the ditches had filled with sand . A small hearth was built at ground level , shortly before or during the erection of S1 . It appears to have had fairly light use , but the presence of slag suggests that it was intended for smelting iron , perhaps by a smith . There was evidence for a number of small fires elsewhere in S1 at a similar date to the hearth , but whether they were related to the smelting is unknown . At this time , hearths could not melt metallic iron , but produced a ' bloom ' (a mixture of iron and slag) which could be converted to wrought iron by repeated heating and hammering . Another , even

earlier , smelting hearth is known from West Runton , 17 km (10 mi) further east on the Norfolk coast . The main ore in this area is the iron @-@ rich local carrstone .

= = = Medieval = = =

The larger north building was built without deep foundation trenches , but was nevertheless a solid , well @-@ built flint and mortar construction . The building had " substantial time and money spent on it " in the opinion of the principal archaeologist . The flints were selected to decrease in size as the walls rose , and the internal corners were decorated with limestone blocks set as quoins . Seashells were recovered , with a distribution suggesting that they were once part of the fabric of the building as galleting (strengthening for the mortar) . There were entrances in the west and northeast walls , and some evidence that there were once windows in the northwest and south walls . The floor was compacted soil , and the original roof material is unknown , but the presence of a few glazed floor tiles and Flemish pantiles of a somewhat later date is consistent with a higher @-@ status appearance . There was no internal wall at this date , but there may have been an external wooden extension to the southwest corner .

The medieval building was eventually abandoned , and much of the structural material was taken for reuse in Blakeney and Cley villages . A stone archway in Cley is traditionally believed to have come from the chapel , and would fit the western entrance , although it could have been brought from elsewhere such as the ruined Blakeney friary . The ' chapel ' building was deserted around 1600 , but whether the collapse of its east end was the cause or a consequence of its disuse is unknown . The main building seems to have suffered a major fire at some stage , and no wooden structures have been found . The site was flooded at least three times , subsequent to the building 's collapse . At some stage , part of the western wall was lost , the steep slope where it stood suggesting that it may have been taken by the sea .

Most of the pottery found within the larger room was 14th to 16th century , nearly a third of which was imported from the continent , reflecting the Glaven ports ' importance in international trade at this time . The pottery appeared to be mainly domestic in nature , including jugs and cooking vessels .

= = = Post @-@ medieval = = =

The 17th @-@ century room , S2 , used the south wall of the existing structure as its own north wall , and was largely built using materials salvaged from S1 , although the standard of the work was poorer . The new room had a double fireplace , but there was no evidence of a dividing wall between the two hearths . Limestone blocks , identical to the quoins in S1 , were used as structural and decorative features in the fireplace . In addition to the pantiles taken from S1 , there were Cornish slate roof tiles . Whether they formed part of the roof of S2 or were associated with the possible wooden extension is unclear .

At the same time that S2 was built , a dividing wall , again of inferior quality , was built across S1 to create a western room . There were no molehills within the smaller building , which had suggested that , unlike its neighbour , it has a buried solid floor , and this was confirmed by excavation . This had a floor originally made of mortar , relaid at least once , but then covered with a layer of flint cobbles , suggesting that it was a working area . The old hearth was not covered , so it may have still been used . A new fireplace was also added , apparently of a domestic design , although the context makes that function improbable . A well @-@ marked track led southwest down the slope from S1 , and a large midden was close to the path . It has been suggested that a " clean " pit north of S1 was a well , with fresh water floating above the saltwater below , a phenomenon known from Blakeney Point and elsewhere on the Norfolk coast .

There is only limited evidence for use after the 17th @-@ century desertion , including a 19th @-@ century tobacco pipe and some Victorian glassware . A wartime barbed wire fence ran through the ruins , and was detected by excavation and magnetometry . Other modern finds included a gin trap , bullets and other small metal objects .

= = Purpose = =

Blakeney Eye has a long history of occupation , with many finds from the Neolithic , but few from Roman or Anglo Saxon dates , although a gold bracteate was a rare and significant 6th century find . Animal and plant finds showed that both domesticated species , such as goats , and locally available prey such as curlews were eaten ; rabbit and canid remains may reflect the use of fur from these mammals . Evidence of cereal processing and storage is difficult to date , but may be medieval .

The buildings were abandoned during the 17th century , and their uses , which may have been varied over the long period of occupation , remain unknown . The east ? west orientation and superior workmanship of S1 would not preclude religious use , but there is no other evidence , archaeological or documentary , to support that possibility . The limited number of finds , even of material which could not have been reused , have suggested that any medieval habitation must have been very limited in numbers of people and time . Other plausible uses have been suggested , such as a custom house or a warrener 's house , but again there is nothing to support these speculations .

= = Threats = =

Realignment of the River Glaven means the ruins are now to the north of the river embankment , and essentially unprotected from coastal erosion , since the advancing shingle will no longer be swept away by the stream . The chapel will be buried by a ridge of shingle as the spit continues to move south , and then lost to the sea , perhaps within 20 ? 30 years .

The ridge of shingle runs west from Weybourne along the Norfolk coast , before becoming a spit extending into the sea at Blakeney . Saltmarshes can develop behind the ridge , but the sea attacks the spit through tidal and storm action . The amount of shingle moved by a single storm can be " spectacular " ; the spit has sometimes been breached , becoming an island for a time , and this may happen again . The northernmost part of Snitterley village was lost to the sea in the early Middle Ages , probably due to a storm .

In the last two hundred years , the maps have been accurate enough for the distance from the ruins to the sea to be measured . The 400 m (440 yd) in 1817 had become 320 m (350 yd) by 1835 , 275 m (300 yd) in 1907 , and 195 m (215 yd) by the end of the 20th century . The spit is moving towards the mainland at about 1 m (1 yd) per year ; and several raised islands or " eyes " have already been lost to the sea as the beach has rolled over the saltmarsh . Landward movement of the shingle meant that the channel of the Glaven , itself excavated in 1922 because an earlier , more northerly course was overwhelmed between Blakeney and Cley , was becoming blocked increasingly often . This led to flooding of Cley village and the environmentally important freshwater marshes . The Environment Agency considered a number of remedial options . Attempting to hold back the shingle or breaching the spit to create a new outlet for the Glaven would be expensive and probably ineffective , and doing nothing would be environmentally damaging . The Agency decided to create a new route for the river to the south of its original line , and work to realign a 550 m (600 yd) stretch of river 200 m (220 yd) further south was completed in 2007 at a cost of about £ 1 @. @ 5 million .

Managed retreat is likely to be the long term solution to rising sea levels along much of the North Norfolk coast . It has already been implemented at other important sites like Titchwell Marsh .