St Mary, Swine, Yorkshire, East Riding

Feature Sets (3)

- Exterior Features
- Interior Features

Description

Swine is a hamlet and not on a major road; it is seven miles ESE of Beverley, five miles NE of the centre of Hull, and less than four miles SE of the site of Meaux abbey.

Much of Swine priory, a Cistercian nunnery, including the nave and crossing of the priory church is lost, mostly under farm buildings to the W of what is now the parish church of Swine. The 12thc church was cruciform, and only the nun's choir remains as the parish church, with many later medieval modifications such as expanded 14thc aisles and a giant Perpendicular E window. The central tower survived the Reformation but was replaced by another, at the present W end, c. 1787 when it became unstable.

The interior comprises a structurally-undivided nave of four bays and chancel of one bay, with N and S aisles off the arcades, and a N chapel (Hilton chapel) off the chancel. This chapel has an arch into the chancel that is in line with the N arcade but of later date. There is a modern vestry, etc, on the opposite side of the chancel. There is no chancel arch. Eight surviving stalls from the nuns' choir are in the first bay of the arcades (Pevsner and Neave 1995, 719).

The 12thc arcades are of four bays, and form the western part of the church. To confuse the unwary, the pulpit and lectern, marking the liturgical division between nave and chancel, are currently placed at Pier 1 N and S; this report disregards the current division and deals with each arcade in its entirety, and describes them as Nave Arcades.

There is Romanesque sculpture in the two arcades, and outside in aisle walls are three reset voussoirs and a window-head.

History

In 1066 and 1087 the archbishop of York had the manor of Swine. It was held with Winestead by Richard, and later Hugh, de Verli.

Domesday mentions a priest, but there is no record of a church till the mid 12thc. The nunnery was founded before 1153 by Robert de Verli, priest of Swine, who gave the parish church to the priory; the nunery was influenced by Cistercian ideals but, like other female communities, was not officially part of the Order until the 13thc (Burton 2001, 26-29).

There are no remains of claustral buildings reported in Burton’s Monasticon Eboracense (Morris, 1919, 307-8). A description of the site at the Reformation is quoted in Brown 1886 and Coppack 2008, see Comments.


Features

Exterior Features

Windows

Clerestory windows
There are ten of these; they are of approximately the same age as the arcades; they are centred above the piers as at Great Driffield. They are plain inside and out, and vary in the degree to which they have pointed rather than rounded heads.

### Exterior Decoration

**Corbel tables, corbels**

**Corbels on the N and S walls**

These are uniform, the plain block only modified by rounded corners on the face.

### Other

**Reset pieces**

### Dimensions

#### Piece 4
- Height of windowhead approx. 0.23 m
- Width of windowhead approx. 0.523 m

#### Piece 1
- Max. height 0.123 m
- Min. height 0.115 m
- Width (horizontal) 0.25 m

#### W end of S aisle. This fragment is below and to the right of the window. It is the face of a narrow voussoir with centripetal chevron and a cross chip-carved in the spandrel. The chevron roll is only weakly-rounded.
Piece 2
W wall of the S aisle, a fragment high up to the R of the window arch. It is part of a chevron voussoir with the roll on the angle.

Piece 3
W wall of the N aisle, to the L of the label stop on the window. This shows the soffit of a chevron voussoir, again, like piece 1, a narrow one.

Piece 4
S aisle wall, a monolithic window head reused as walling. The arch is slightly pointed, comparable perhaps to the clerestory windows.
The N and S nave arcades are of four bays and are very similar. The arcades lean outwards. The present division of the church into nave and chancel is at Pier 1 of the arcades, against which the pulpit and lectern are situated. The capitals at the E end of the S arcade, and elsewhere, have been repaired with a black substance but pieces have blown off, otherwise condition is good. Scraps of plaster and colour survive in a few places, for example, on the capital of Pier 2, N.

Bases are circular and similar in N and S arcades. They are moulded; some are made higher with an extra course of plain and chamfered plinth. The N arcade W respond base is circular; it has two tori with a scotia between; there is a smaller round moulding at the top. The S arcade W respond base is circular; it has two layers of plain and chamfered plinths; a plain upright, and two tori separated by a scotia. Round pillars.

Plain necking throughout, showing the rough chamfering which gives the impression of roundedness.

Capitals on both N and S arcades are approx. 1 m square and are made in two pieces. They have seven or eight scallops on each face. The corner scallop forms a large ‘drop’ of slightly varying shape, but with a keel on the diagonal at the corner. The cones themselves are very slightly keeled; this is so carefully managed that it hardly affects the semi-circular curve of the shields. There are occasional minor details: between the cones is a variety of ornament, mostly darts; on the E respond,
Pier 1 and the W respond of the N arcade, darts next to the angle contain beading. The beads are rounded, but retain just a little of the squareness of the first cross-cut, a laziness that created nailhead. One dart ornament has been developed into a sort of cable pattern, this is on Pier 1 of the N arcade, NW angle, W face. The S arcade has other details.

Imposts are plain and chamfered throughout with a sharp quirk at the angle.

Arches all pointed, of three plain and square orders and two plain orders to the aisles. The third order of bays 2 and 3 of the N arcade have chevron mouldings; the springer over pier 2 is plain.

N arcade, Bay 2, order 3

On the face, a row of centripetal chevron with a step outside and making a hollow diamond on the angle. In the soffit, a chevron row meeting the one on the face point-to-point, also with a step outside it. Spandrels plain. The voussoirs all finish flush with the wall surface.

N arcade Bay 3, order 3

On the face, a row of centripetal chevron. In the soffit, plain.
Architecturally, the S arcade matches the N; it is only in the two bays of chevron arches and in the more frequently elaborated detail between the cones of the scallop capitals on the N arcade, that any difference is noticeable. For description, see Feature, N arcade.

Capital of pier 1 to 3 have darts with one or two arrises.

W respond capital has batons as well as darts.

**Interior Decoration**

**String courses**

*String courses on E end of arcade walls*

To the E of the arcades, the walls continue straight to the E end of the church. There are several lengths of string-course on the chancel's N and S walls, one continuing from below the clerestory windows as in the nave, but others with no obvious purpose. They are chamfered above and below a plain vertical band. They have a common 12thc profile and provide evidence of the original Romanesque building.

**Miscellaneous**

*Remnant of window arch*

In the NE, or Hilton, chapel, on S wall above the wide arch into the chancel are several stones probably from a label. These have a hollow moulding and spaced large nailhead. The curved stones of the arch continue upwards beyond the remnants of sculpture. See Comments.

**Comments/Opinions**

*The view from Dade*

A view of 'the church from north-west' is in Poulson 1840-1, I, opposite p. 386. This was taken by Dade in about 1784 and shows the old tower; it is found in several versions but seems, from the areas of shadow, to have been flipped left to right in its first state, that is, it actually shows the building from the SW. A version of the Dade engraving used in Butler 2007, 398 shows fine detail in the old tower and remnants of transepts; the W face of the tower (that is, facing into the former nave) shows a large round-headed arch with three chevron orders, and there are minor round-headed arches too.

*The nuns' church*

Poulson 1840, II, 211, says 'the nave of the present church is the chancel of the old one, to which side aisles have been added at a later period'. Morris 1919, 308, says 'the chancel [was] reserved for the use of the nuns, whilst the nave served as the parish church'; Pevsner and Neave 1995, 719, also think this was the case: 'the choir is the former nuns' church.' That was the usual arrangement, but G. H. R. Kent says 'the eastern arm... was occupied by the parish church and the part west of the crossing tower by the priory church. That unusual disposition of priory and parish churches is also found,
however, at Nunkeeling. The nuns’ church was evidently demolished soon after the Dissolution…’ (VCHER vii, 116). At Nunkeeling, where nothing of Corpus period remains and the medieval church is a tidied ruin, the parish church stood east of, and adjoined, the priory church, which was removed after the Dissolution.

Regarding the priory of Swine at the Reformation, William Brown (1886, 329-30), published the survey made for Henry VIII in 1535 or 36. This said ‘the hole churche conteynyth in length lxxvj ffoote…wherof the quere conteynyth liij ffoote longe, wt xrvj goode stalles all alonge bothe the sydes of waynescot bourdes and tymber for the nonnes; and ane alter in the quere, and ij alters benethe in the body of the churche, wt xij wyndowes glasid…’. The surveyors were assessing the value of the priory’s buildings not the (then) parochial ones.

Glyn Coppack has reprinted the Dissolution survey, and from it has been able to reconstruct a plan of the buildings of the nunnery, with the cloister to the south of the nave of the cruciform church (2008, 281-88; pers. comm.). Coppack says, regarding the ‘xij’ windows, that the windows in the clerestorey, with the large windows at the east end of the south wall and on the east wall total thirteen, which is the number given for the presbytery in the survey. He says, further, that the measurements in the survey disregard the transepts and nave which were parochial and also ignore the presbytery aisles; the dimensions roughly equate to the internal length of the present church, the length of the arcades, and their distance from each other. It is therefore certain that the church now seen includes the nuns’ choir within the arcades.

The arcades have lost their original aisles; considering the quality of the arcades, the aisles may have been vaulted in stone, with bays approximately square. The removal of vaulted aisles would have augmented any subsoil movement, and caused the tilt now seen in the arcade walls. The area E of the E responds would have contained the sanctuary with the main altar, for the use of their visiting priests or master. The form and extent of the 12thc sanctuary are not known; the arcades have E responds, but the walls continue straight; see Feature, String-courses. Some part W of the nuns’ church, such as the nave, would in the early period have been used by the priests or master who were necessary for the community to function (Burton 2001, 28-9).

Considering the infrequent survival of the eastern ends of any 12thc monastic church, and the general poverty of nuns’ houses, the remains at Swine are of great interest.

**Length of moulded label on S wall of Hilton chapel**

These remains indicate that the arch is in situ; it would have been the external face of a large window lighting the sanctuary at the E end of the nun’s church. This feature is described as ‘a good moulded window with nailhead, late C12’ (Pevsner and Neave 1995, 719). With its mouldings and widely-spaced large nailhead, it does not look like the arcade; it is 13thc according to VCHER, VII, 117. The nailhead is pyramidal, not at all rounded, contrast the occasional beading on N arcade capitals.

**N arcade, the chevron labels: springing**

At Swine the pattern stops at the point the arches run together; the springing stone is plain. Contrast the round-arched arcades at Sherburn-in-Elmet (Yorkshire, West Riding), where two bands of pattern continue in a medley down to the impost, or the well-managed symmetrically-perfect junction of two orders of chevron on pointed arches at Patrick Brompton (Yorkshire, North Riding).

**Reset stones**

Voussoirs (i) and (iii) look to be from an earlier phase of building than anything in situ, while pieces (ii) and (iv) might be coeval with the arcades and clerestory.

**Corbels**

There are similarly repetitive mouldings on parts of Selby Abbey and at Farnham (Yorkshire, West Riding) on late 12thc work.
Bibliography


*A History of the County of York, Vol. 3 (Ecclesiastical History; Religious Houses; Political History; Social and Economic History)*, Victoria County History, London 1913.
The church from SE.
The church from NE.
The church from the SW.
The view in Poulson 1840, from Dade, flipped.

Location

Site Location

Swine
National Grid Reference
TA 134 358

Boundaries
pre-1974 traditional (England and Wales): Yorkshire, East Riding
now: East Riding of Yorkshire

Diocese
medieval: York
now: York

Dedication
medieval: St Mary
now: St Mary

Type of building/monument
Parish church, formerly Cistercian nunnery

Report authors
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Visit Date