

Church Fenton

Historic Environment Appraisal



Church Fenton Heritage Significance - Initial Report

Background

Church Fenton is recorded along with Little Fenton in the Domesday as 'Fentun' within the Wapentake of Barkston Ash. Its name is still recognisable as 'village', or 'town', in the 'fenland', the Church or Kirk prefix being added later in (circa 1338) following the erection of the Grade I Listed Church of St Mary around 1230 that would have likely been the primary church serving the plethora of smaller settlements nearby. Indeed it is possible that the Church was pre-dated by an earlier church and the extant remnants of the Church cross on the small green of Church street may support this.

The first reference to the village is, according to the village website, in 963AD when the following description was given:

“East of the high ground at Sherburn the land was wooded with huge oaks and tiny British settlements. Houses were made of poles covered by skins or leaves. The land was low lying, often below sea level. Tracks that existed were limited to ridges of high ground.”

Such a description would fit with certain features of the village that still exist today, including the numerous drainage channels of moated sites in the area, the sinuous path of Main Street and Nanny Lane and the likely early clearances or Intakes around 'Northfield' where circular field boundaries (and the name Northfield) are suggestive of early woodland clearance.

Early references to the occupants of the village are to be found in archive collections from the 14th century including a Debtors record from 26th January 1339 (archive ref C131/6/3) which refers to 6 acres of meadow and a water mill at Church Fenton. Several Parliamentary surveys were also undertaken and enclosure awards appear to date from around the 1770's.

The physical fabric of the village is generally a mix of brick and local limestone although there are likely several remains of timber frame buildings encased within later buildings. Earlier structures therefore may contain elements of the famous Huddleston stone and potentially have higher status origins. Later brick manufacture gradually became more common and this mix of materials (which may have been perceived as being unfashionable or unsightly) may explain the amount of render on many buildings.

The village appears to be a collection of clusters of development around distinct focal points, junctions or early farm/manorial sites. Such dispersed foci of settlement are still perceivable around the junction of Church Street and Main Street/Station Road, around Hall Lane and at Church End Farm where the village core and its outlying hamlets still retain the appearance of distinct areas.

The Grade I Listed St Mary's Church itself would appear to have a relationship to Church Fields immediately to the south of Main Street and this would explain the plethora of footpaths and desire lines that are found on the 1850 Ordnance Survey plan that lead over this space. What the role of these fields were, whether common land or simply as wetland for much of the year (prior to the construction of Carr Dike drainage channel), is still unclear but there was a direct path from the old Vicarage (15th century cruck framed house) on Main Street and from Hall Farm at the east end of the dispersed settlement towards the church.

The reference near Hall Farm of the old Tythe Barn that may still partially survive, would also potentially support this link.

The later history around Church Fenton Airfield is also significant and the airfield already contains several scheduled monuments related to the airfield's air defence.

Assessment of remaining fabric

As mentioned above Church Fenton still retains a significant amount of historic fabric however there has been some serious erosion of the aesthetic quality of several historic buildings and structures. This has manifested itself in inappropriate change to several buildings often through demolition, heavy modification, through the application of render, and the insertion of UPVC windows, often of poor quality.

Despite this however the historic character of the village can still be deemed to be desirable to maintain or enhance and should the further loss of several historic buildings ever be allowed it would be a serious loss to the area.

Further to this inevitable development pressure focussed around the village and its railway station also presents a risk to the character and appearance of the village. Although opportunities undoubtedly exist for development, there is a real danger that poor quality development could cause serious harm to both the heritage assets and the character of the village as a whole and this is reflected within the Church Fenton Village Design Statement and the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Notable Buildings within Church Fenton

Church Fenton has many types of buildings that reflect the societal changes throughout its history. Ranging from the Medieval church to timber framed farmsteads to Methodist chapels and the railway station. NB: This list is not exhaustive and does not seek to provide a comprehensive list of the notable buildings of the village.

Church End Farm, Church Street: Good survival of barns and farmhouse facing north along Church Street. Front of farmhouse would appear to be 18th/19th century but older, possibly medieval building extant to the rear. There is some suggestion that the building may be later encasement of an historic house.

Orchard Cottage, Church Street: Alleged to date from 16th century but modified in later 20th century with UPVC and white render. Notable structures within the curtilage include barn and stable block, both of stone with later modifications. Also notable is stone structure, with later brick upper storey with possible reused timber lintel over later opening to ground floor. The site contains a water well and two large fishponds. (It was initially thought that these may represent a moated enclosure of some form as the site is square shape with two ponds shown on early plans that could respect the property boundary.)

Church of St Mary, Church Street: Grade I Listed cruciform church dating from 1230. An exceptionally important building. (for more info see Listed Building Description).

Former Church Fenton Primary School, Church Street: 19th century school building and school masters house (documents relating to its commission in National Archives.)
Village Church Cross, Church Street. Grade II Listed Medieval cross with base and lower level upon small village green. Recorded by Speight in 19th century.

The Croft, Church Street. Grade II Listed 16th century or earlier timber framed house with outbuildings and later 18th century additions adjacent to church.

1-6 Church Street 'Chicory Row'. Early 19th century cottages with alleged connections to Irish settlers and Chicory agriculture in the local area, labelled as 'Roman Terrace' on the 1847 OS map but it is unclear why. Modified with UPVC windows.

Manor Farm, Main Street. Manor farm would appear to have formed part of the moated manorial site of Church Fenton. The Manor Farm farmhouse is a fine Victorian double fronted property that stands within a pleasant lawned area to the front.

The White Horse Public House, Main Street. White Horse Inn. Shown on the 1847 Ordnance Survey plan and recorded in Civil War accounts from 17th century. White rendered building (presumably to cover up later additions) with shallow reveal sash windows to main range. It would appear that there are three phases to this building and the earliest phase could be quite early and possibly timber framed (due to off centre chimneys). Appears to have been extended in Georgian period with later, Victorian, extensions to the rear. A potentially early



a/b) Church End Farm. An interesting historic cluster of buildings forming the distinct end of the village from the South. c) St Mary's Church. d/e) Former Church Fenton School and schoolmasters house. (now residential). f) The Croft timber frame building of substantial status. g) 'Chicory Row', Church Street. h) Remnants of Church cross, Church Street. i) Manor Farm house, Main Street. j/k) The White Horse pub. NB the off set chimney, a potential indicator of an earlier timber frame building, later encased.

building of local, community significance.

The Old Vicarage, Main Street. Grade II Listed built c. 1663 of a cruck frame construction but heavily modified in later years.

Cottages, Main Street. Row of cottages, formerly one unit was a bank. Possibly late 18th/early 19th century date and forming a distinctive form of cottages within the heart of the village.

Former Methodist Chapel, Main Street. Late 19th Century former Methodist chapel provides an interesting focal point within the street scene and reflects the religious and cultural changes brought to the village around this time.

Hall Lane/Nanny Lane

There would appear to be an interesting story here and the lines of roads, open spaces and extant buildings all contribute to the significance of the village as a whole. All structures are non designated and with fairly significant change having occurred. Nevertheless this part of the village still retains its rural 'feel'. Older buildings such as barns and potential remnants of the Hall and Tythe Barn with potential historic links to the west over fields all contribute to this significance. Several buildings appear to have stone elements which may relate to their older origins.

Church Fenton Airfield

The good preservation of hangers and 'domestic' buildings retain the character and forms of a typical 1930's Royal Air Force Station.

The remains of the former World War II airfield defences at RAF Church Fenton survive well. Church Fenton was one of few fighter stations in the north of England and is one of the few nationally where significant remains of the defences of a Battle of Britain station still survives. Three quarters of the fighter pens still survive in a near complete state along with remains of support buildings and sections of the perimeter runways. Fighter pens are now rare survivals in England, and with their associated structures they illustrate well some of the measures taken to protect fighter planes during World War II by means of dispersed and well-defended pens. In addition one of the battle headquarters and some of the defensive posts are still intact. Taken as whole the monument provides tangible information about a significant period of history when England was under severe threat and demonstrates some of the counter measures employed



a) Cottages on Main Street. b) Georgian House (Grade II Listed) on Main Street - a classic example of 18th century farmhouse. c) Church Fenton Methodist Church (now residential) d) Properties of some antiquity to the east end of Main Street. e) Second World War shelter along Nanny Lane. f) Possible early barn containing interesting feature that may date from 17th century if not earlier. g) Hall Lane.

Potential Boundaries

An exercise has been undertaken that attempted to locate 'positive' buildings and features that could help contribute to the appreciation and understanding of the village as an historic place. The mapping of such elements can be used in an attempt to distinguish areas of greater/lesser importance and as such help to determine where potential boundaries could include/exclude.





*For Discussion purposes only. Draft Appraisal of Extant Historic Features within the
Village of Church Fenton.
Contact: Andy Graham agraham@selby.gov.uk*

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