

**St Dunstan's Church, Mayfield, East Sussex  
Report on the Blocking of the wall between the Bell Tower and Rear Nave**

**Commissioned by**

**John D Clarke Architects  
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**Project No. 2583**

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## **Introduction**

- 1.1 The Church of St Dunstan's is located in the village of Mayfield, East Sussex (NGR TQ 586 270). It is a Grade I listed building and the structure dates primarily from the 15<sup>th</sup> century with some earlier 13<sup>th</sup> century material surviving in the tower. Archaeology South East were commissioned by John D Clarke Architects in May 2007 to undertake a study the stone wall between the nave and the Tower and to identify, from the materials and tooling, the date that this wall was built and any reasons for the substantial blockage.
- 1.2 The work was undertaken by the author who has a degree in archaeology from the Institute of Archaeology and a PhD from University College London in Medieval Archaeology. He has worked in archaeology for many years specialising the recording and analysis of buildings, with particular expertise in architectural fragments and buildings stone.
- 1.3 The analysis of the building material was undertaken following the investigation of documentary records pertaining to the infilling of the arch. Limited records exist of this wall's construction or purpose and thus an archaeological inspection was required to provide some idea of its date. These are based on clues such as tooling marks, mortar and other building technologies common throughout south-east England. A more exact local knowledge could modify these provisional conclusions, but not affect the substance of this note.
- 1.4 The accepted sequence of construction is that the tower is of 12th-Century date (Barnes 2003, 3). No date is given for the later (blocked) arch in the guidebook, but it is implicitly contemporary with the reconstruction of the nave in 1410-1430 (ibid). It seems more probable the tower was built in the 13th century (see below) while the nave arcade and blocked arch are contemporary with the insertion of the clerestory between 1503-1532 (ibid, 6). The false four-centred arches in the arcade make a Tudor date probable.

## **Investigation**

- 2.1 The visit took place on May 1st and both sides of the wall were inspected after Jo Woodliffe kindly provided access at short notice; making it possible to inspect the arch directly from the bellringers' chamber.

- 2.1 A two-centred arch can be seen. A small area of the blocking was removed in the past to expose one of the capitals and round responds on which the chamfered arch rests. The east bell tower face consists of very rough sandstone rubble. There is a relieving arch on the west (ringing chamber) side, but the east side shows only a peculiar 'inverted V' over the arch, perhaps a contemporary repair required to stabilise collapsing masonry when the opening was made.
- 2.2 The arch was blocked with ashlar masonry. The ashlars enclose a rubble core mixed with white lime mortar. The individual ashlars of Wealden sandstone (a Cretaceous limestone) show signs of re-use; clues being the presence of blocking pieces in awkward gaps and, where necessary, repairs to the corners of damaged ashlars.
- 2.3 A narrow blade was used to dress the ashlars which left an irregular pattern of strokes on the faces; such as would be produced by a hafted Jadd Pick or Racer; these marks are distinct from the 13th-century tooling marks visible on the ashlar interior of the Bell Tower stair. The medieval mason used a wide chisel (boaster) and mallet: This tool seems to have remained locally in use in the 15th century (to judge from the arcade piers).
- 2.4 The use of a hafted jadd-pick or racer to shape the ashlars is rarely seen in a medieval context, except for hard stones such as Purbeck marble or Kentish ragstone. The probability is that the ashlars were cut after c. 1540. The lime mortar employed is an early, or at least pre-dates the Industrial Revolution.  
  
The mortar is soft, pale and powdery with a high lime content.
- 2.5 When the arch was built, its stone mouldings were rendered flush with the surrounding rubble wall face; many coats of whitewash being subsequently applied. The blocking wall was built against this render which stayed in place. It was therefore sandwiched between the arch and blocking wall, after the general removal of internal finishes in the 1970s. The friable margin was coated with cement when that stripping occurred.
- 2.6 The present doorway through the wall is of late-19th or early-20th century date, being no older than the door itself. The cut to insert this door remains clearly visible.

## **Conclusions**

- 3.1 It has been established when the wall was not built; and, if only by default, a date in the intervening period (1540-1840) is implicit. The 're-

use' of the ashlar must then be allowed for (that being their previous service in an earlier building). This allowance of time would 'push' the date into the latter half of the suggested 300-year datespan and an 18th or (at latest) early 19th-century date is therefore suggested.

- 3.2 The likely sequence of events is:
- a) The construction of the tower in the ?13th century with a small door leading to the nave.
  - b) The enlargement of the door into a two-centred opening with responds and a moulded arch in the ?early 16th century when the nave was built.
  - c) The blocking of the arch sometime between 1700 and 1840
  - d) The insertion of a new connecting door between the nave and tower in the ?late 19th century
  - d) Removal of all internal historic finishes in the ?1970s, (resulting in the cement margin)

### **Other considerations**

- 4.1 The removal of the arch would reveal medieval finishes of the church interior and the services of a conservator may be necessary.
- 4.2 The wall was probably built to counter structural fears about the Bell tower. These may now be a thing of the past (Barnes 2003, 7) but evidence of recent settlement should be checked before its removal.

Mark Samuel Ph.D MIFA

### **Sources**

Barnes, J., (2003), A guide to the Church of St Dunstan, Mayfield, Mayfield

Clifton-Taylor & Ireson, A.S., (1983), English stone building, Gollancz

**Archaeology South East**  
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