

St Andrew's Church, Mutford by Stephen Hart.



St Andrew's, Mutford, has one of the tallest of all round towers; it is circular for about three-quarters of its total height and there are fillets in the re-entrant angles between the tower and nave on both sides. The octagonal belfry, which joins the circular stage without a string course, has stone corners and although the belfry windows in the cardinal faces, originally two-light, have lost their mullions and tracery, flushwork dummy windows in the diagonals with cinquefoil ogee lights and a reticulation unit in the apex are judged to be a 14th century pattern. The belfry is crowned with a fine flushwork parapet.

Below the octagon, the tower's circular stage has windows at three levels. To light the ground stage, there seem originally to have been three narrow flint-framed loops (slit widows). Two, facing north and south, have been blocked and no evidence of them is visible internally because the ground-stage walls are plastered. Although a remnant of the flint arch of the western one is just discernible, it has been replaced by a taller, wider stone-framed lancet.

At first-floor level, there were three more windows facing south, west and north. Those facing north and south now show externally as blocked flint-framed loops, apparently similar to the ones below but the one facing west has had a modern narrow wooden lancet inserted. Internally they present a rather confusing picture: the two facing north and south, though blocked flush with the wall, still show round flint arches of about four feet span, but the west embrasure, not blocked, gives a better indication of the probable original form of the openings. It has a round arch with flint voussoirs, a plastered soffit and rubble flint reveals that run straight for about two feet and then splay inwards towards the actual aperture. The arch soffit is not splayed and shows board-marks of shuttering in the soffit mortar, which appears to be continuous with that on the splayed parts of the reveals. The overall size of the opening measured at the internal wall face is four feet wide by about eight feet high. From the evidence of their arches and faint indications of parts of their jambs, the north and south windows appear to have been the same size as the west one.

In the east wall of the chamber in which these windows occur, is situated the supper door. It is about 2ft 3ins wide and has a triangular flint head, the apex of which is about four feet below the level of the crowns of the window arches, and as it is little more than three feet above the floor, shows that the floor level must have been raised a few feet at some stage. The upper door is visible from the nave in the apex

of the floor, showing that the nave would have been its present height when the tower was built. Within the first floor and above the tower arch on the ground floor, the internal tower plan shape is circular.

The external fabric of the tower is well-coursed flintwork up to a level of about 2ft 6ins above the heads of the first-floor windows, i.e. roughly the level of the nave roof ridge. Above this, the flints look smaller, their coursing discipline is less marked and occasional medieval bricks are to be seen in the fabric. These are quite distinct from the obvious brick repairs at the top. A change in the flintwork is discernable at a corresponding level internally. At the top of this stage a small stone cusped lancet faces south-west.

The tower arch is pointed: it is tall, about 11ft to springing level, and it spans 10ft 6ins. Facing the nave the jambs of the opening have 45-degree splays, 2ft 2ins wide, but as the opening is the same width as the tower's north-south diameter, the reveals of the opening within the tower are continuous with the tower walls, being tangential to the inside curvature. The arch itself is four times chamfered on both sides: on the nave side, the chamfers die into the jamb splays and on the tower side into the flat reveals. Measured at the apex, the arch is just under four feet thick – slightly less than the nave west wall measured outside the tower, although it should be recognised that, because of the limited internal width of the nave, the short lengths of the nave west wall visible externally are actually the “ends” of the nave side walls.

Mutford round tower is the only one to which a galilee porch has been added. Its walls of uncoursed flint, quite different from the tower walls, are simply butted up against the tower; the side walls each have a single-light trefoil window and west quoins of dressed stone. The west wall contains a dressed stone entrance arch spanning 8ft 4ins, which, despite the semi-circular form of the arch, is clearly Gothic rather than Norman: the arch itself is twice chamfered (one plain, one hollow) and dies into the jamb stonework rather than springing from impostes in the Norman manner and it has a hood-mould of cyma section – definitely post-Norman. These Gothic details and the pointed entrance doorway into the tower with its segmental rere-arch within indicate a 14th-century date. A comparable example of a 14th century semi-circular arch in a contemporary wall is the doorway in the nave north wall at Blundeston, rebuilt from low level.

On the north side of the tower, coursed flintwork in the west and north walls of the nave is similar to that in the tower's lower stage, and Caen stone quoins of typical Norman proportions at the north-west corner show no evidence of later insertion – in fact the mortar in the weathered jointing between the stones can be seen to be continuous with that in the adjacent walling flintwork.

The nave north wall is about three feet thick and has two two-light Perpendicular windows, the westernmost one apparently in a blocked former north doorway opening. Below the eastern one, internally, a Norman arch with chevron decoration spans a recess – probably a wall tomb. The arch voussoirs were no doubt salvaged from elsewhere in the church and reset in this position, and measurement shows that the original arch span would have been about 7ft 9ins.

The chancel seems to have been rebuilt in the 14th century, with the present chancel arch. Its north wall has a stone plinth and contains a huge blocked window, shafted inside, and comparable in size to the beautiful, though probably restored three-light east window in which a five-petalled-flower form motif forms the tracery above the centre light. An exquisite dado of flushwork panelling extends across the full width of other east end and around the diagonal corner buttresses.

A large archway in the chancel south wall, brutally blocked in red brick, suggests that a transept or chapel once stood to the south of the chancel and a thick buttress to the east of the blocked opening is probably a remnant of its east wall.

The south arcade and aisle are probably also 14th century. The arcade has double-chamfered arches on octagonal piers and the two-light side windows have Y-tracery – a style used for many years after 1300. Sadly, the interesting-looking west window has lost the tracery from the large oval in the apex above its two ogee lights.

Dating the tower

Measurement has shown that, had the church originally stood without a tower, its west wall would have been about four foot thick, but since the wall thickness at the tower arch apex is not greater than this by at least the thickness of a layer of flints (it is in fact slightly less than four feet) and the tower east wall internally is circular, the tower and nave west wall must have been built together at the same date. This is borne out by the similarity of the flintwork of the nave north and west walls to the lower walls of the tower. By virtue of its coursed flintwork and its north-west quoins of Caen stone, the nave would appear to be Norman, and hence the tower also.

However, flint-framed windows in the tower, a triangular-headed upper door and fillets between tower and nave are features that have been identified by the Taylors in their *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* as being characteristic of Saxon workmanship and so could suggest a pre-Conquest date for the tower. All these features, though, have also been found in post-Conquest buildings and are not therefore proof of Saxon date. A triangular-headed upper door is visible in the Norman tower at Flitcham for example, and several Norman and post-Norman round towers have fillets (e.g. Haddiscoe and Frostenden). As regards the first-floor flint windows, if they were original larger round-headed openings subsequently reduced, this proves that their exterior flint frames must have been post-Conquest.

These first-floor windows present a particular problem: their design internally is so unusual that it is difficult to be certain how much, or if any alteration has been made. Their size and straight jambs suggest that they could have been belfry windows, but on the other hand the facts that they are lower than the nave ridge and that the upper door gives access to the chamber in which they are situated, argues against them having been belfry windows. Is it conceivable that a “tower” no higher than the nave would have been built to house a bell? It would have been simpler and more effective just to mount a bell externally on the gable!

It is suggested that the tower, built at the same time as the nave early in the 12th century, originally had a contemporary belfry stage perhaps of about the same height as the present circular stage. During the 14th century, this belfry came down, to be

replaced by the upper present upper circular stage and eventually the octagonal belfry. The different workmanship of the upper circular stage and the belfry suggests that there may have been a constructional pause between them, perhaps as a result of the Black Death.

The purpose of the first floor windows may simply have been to light the first-floor chamber and their unusual internal form just a variation from the normal fully-splayed pattern. Externally, although the flintwork around the openings does show slight evidence of alteration, it does not suggest blocked openings of a size equivalent to the interior west recess.

If, as the evidence suggests, the tower's original stage is not later than Norman, the tower arch has obviously been altered: its four-times chamfered arch suggests a 14th date, perhaps contemporary with the upper circular stage. It would have displaced an original Norman arch that could have been the source for the Norman voussoirs of the arch over the wall tomb in the nave north wall. Its span (7ft 9ins) is not incompatible with the width of a Norman tower arch, as for example the one at Wissett. If, as suggested, the wall arch had been the original tower arch, enlargement of its opening to the present width would have been achieved by widening it about 16ins each side. Pevsner suggested that the wall-tomb arch may well have come from the galilee porch or from a former chancel arch, but the galilee is surely later, and the tomb arch too small for a chancel arch.

Because of the apparent conflict between the nave's Norman evidence and tower features that might suggest a pre-Conquest date; it is difficult to be certain about the tower's age; the relative credibility of this conflicting evidence therefore has to be weighed. On balance, a Norman date for the tower seems most likely in view of the nave's Norman evidence and the likelihood that it and the tower are contemporary; supported by the possibility that the wall-arch voussoirs could be from a Norman tower arch. The case for a pre-Conquest attribution relies on a belief that features recognised as characteristic of Saxon workmanship were not used after the Conquest.

The church apparently underwent a major reconstruction during the 14th century. The chancel, south aisle, tower alterations and galilee porch all seem to date from that time.

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