

**Site name: St Stephen's Church**

Site ref: IAS 3203                      HER ref: IPS 277      CIMS Accession No: IPSMG:R.2009.53

NGR: TM16404449                      Extent: 140 sq m

**Circumstances of excavation**

The conversion of this redundant church to a tourist information centre involved minor improvements. This included the removal of the pews which sat on boarded wooden floors laid on joists which rested on bare earth below. The levels of this earth were to be reduced below the level of the surrounding tiled walkways in order to lay a new solid floor at the same level. The Suffolk Archaeological Unit were granted permission by the owners, Ipswich Borough Council, to excavate the ground levels which were to be removed, providing an opportunity to examine one of town's churches recorded in the Domesday Book.

Following removal of the pews in 1982, two small trial trenches were excavated either side of the central walkway in the nave. In the following year these were enlarged to include the whole area which had been occupied by wooden flooring in the nave (trenches 0028 and 0029), south aisle (trench 0050) and chancel (trenches 0065 and 0070).

**Site constraints**

Excavations were shallow ( c.15-30cm deep), being restricted to the proposed formation levels for the new floor, apart from the two trial trenches excavated in 1982 in the nave, which were 0.5m deep. Three hand-augered boreholes in the nave indicated 1.5-1.75m of deposits below current floor levels.

Dating evidence was sparse as there was little associated pottery.

**Funding bodies**

Suffolk County Council and the MSC Community Programme.

**Stratigraphic sequence (by period)**

***Late Medieval: c.1200-1450 (LMED)***

A robber trench (0036), with some remnants of a robbed flint, septaria and mortar wall (0021), ran east-west in trench 0029, just north of the arcade between the nave and south aisle and was covered by a tiled floor (0007). The robber trench was 1m wide and up to 30cm deep implying a poor foundation.

Where they were examined, in the two deeper (1982) trenches in the nave, the possible contemporary floor levels, beneath the tiled floor (0004, 0007, 0011, 0027) and cut by the robber trench (0036) were slightly different. In the south trench (0029), the upper layer (0010) was a mortar base for a floor, with four distinct, compacted, loam layers underneath (0012, 0013, 0016, 0017). In the north trench (0028), there two layers: a loam layer (0011), with human bones, and layer of loam with mortar underneath (0027). There was no pottery later than 12<sup>th</sup> century in these layers.

Wall 0021 is likely to be contemporary with the existing north wall of the nave (0023). Where the foundation for the north wall could be observed, it was found to be very shallow, and founded on a simple layer of flint cobbles (0024) laid directly on the loam layers (0011, 0025) found throughout the nave. Wall 0021, and the existing wall (0023), being of similar construction, are likely to be the south and north walls of the nave, prior to the later medieval rebuilding, which involved the demolition of the south wall but retention of the north wall.

***Late Medieval Transitional: c.1450-1600 (LMT)***

The poor foundations for the nave may well have caused structural instability of the church leading to its rebuilding.

Wall 0021 was demolished and the wall base (0020) on which the south aisle arcade rests was constructed. Whether this was built as a continuous foundation for the arcade or, as a south nave wall, which was later demolished and re-used as a foundation for the arcade is impossible to tell.

A wall base (0076), revealed in trench 0070, under the south arcade in the chancel, is exactly in line with the robbed wall (0036). However, it is more substantial than the wall implied by robber trench 0036 and similar to wall 0021 and therefore likely to be contemporary with 0021 and part of a comprehensive redevelopment of the south and east sides of the church.

Halfway along wall 0076, there is a wall stub turning south, which may mark the original east end of the south aisle, which was later extended eastward.

New tiled floors were laid on a mortar base in the nave (0007, 0031, 0037, 0038). Glazed floor tiles survived in patches (0034, 0035).

William Wimbill's will (1485) left money to rebuild the chancel (and bury him in it) and there was a further bequest from John Dekene to buy stone to finish the work on the church. Sir William Rush (died 1535) extended the south aisle to the east to form a family chapel (Haward 1993, 282). This confirms that the south aisle, its eastern chapel extension, the chancel and the replacement of all windows and doors in the church were carried out c.1485-1535.

***Post Medieval: c.1600-1900 (PMED)***

In the south aisle, there were many grave slabs and two brick-walled tombs (0055, 0064), all of which appear to have been 18<sup>th</sup> century or later. In the nave there was a brick-vaulted tomb (0033) and three unmarked graves (0002, 0008, 0014). The top of another brick-lined tomb (0071) was revealed in the north trench in the chancel (0065) and, in the south chancel trench (0070), there were the tops of a brick and septaria lined tomb (0066), a grave slab (0073) and an unmarked grave (0069).

In the south and north nave trenches, a number of features cut the LMT floors (0004 and 0007). In trench 0029, two east-west slots (0046 and 0047) indicate the position of timber beams to support a wooden floor. In trench 0028, there was a posthole (0005), probably for a scaffold post, and the foundation for the pulpit (0045).

Some underpinning with brick (0003) of the north nave wall was undertaken during this period.

**Finds**

There were 34 copper alloy finds of LMED to PMED date, including 7 jettons, 11 pins, 5 lace tags and 2 rings.

**References**

Haward, B.,1993 *Suffolk Medieval Church Arcades*

*Keith Wade 2013*