

Excerpt from AB24 on the GA Church

Wedlake and the Glastonbury Plan.

The Glastonbury plan is part of the damnosa hereditas of Bligh Bond. He correctly recorded on plan the fact that the south range is not set out at a right angle to the east and west ranges and later proceeded to argue and act on the 'revelation' that the whole of the abbey buildings were laid out on a rectangular grid. Wedlake was not the only victim. The generally accented plan of 1930 accents the idea and I long believed it.

As far as my records go Wedlake did not work at Glastonbury in 1926 and 1927. When the excavations were under the direction of Theodore Fyfe, Wedlake was appointed as Foreman in 1928 when the Committee of three Directors - Feers, Clapham and Horne - was set up. Clapham told me that he had arranged this with Wheeler. C. E. Clayton remained the local man in charge and his services are acknowledged by the Directors in their reports (e.g. Proc. LXXX (1934), 35). Wedlake is not named in these reports.

The pre-Conquest church as generally accepted was uncovered in 1926 and 1927. Fyfe, who was at Glastonbury for most of each season, was a qualified architect with experience of excavation in the Near East; I suspect that the plan published in 1928 (Proc. LXXIV (1928), pl. 1) was based on his survey, or at any rate his records. The Directors assumed that the tower located on the east side of Fyfe's trenches was the central tower of a cruciform church. They therefore extended the clearance for 30 ft. eastward along the nave (ibid., pl. 2). No walls were found and no record of this clearance appears in the Director's published reports. It was assumed that the excavation of the pre-Conquest church, including Dunstan's additions had been 'completed' (Ant. Journ., (1930) 2, 27). It was concluded that the tower discovered by Fyfe stood centrally on the east side of the church. I remember discussing at length with Clapham the anomalies of this solution.

At this stage one of the Commission's Investigators was sent down by Clapham - Feers as Chief Inspector had no surveys under his control - to check both the pre-Conquest plan and the general plan of the abbey. There was no general re-survey of the abbey buildings; Bond's plan was accepted with slight modifications. This was in preparation for the meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute in 1930, which was addressed by Feers, in the absence of Clapham through illness (Arch. Journ., LXXVIII (1930), 437-32). I think that the excavations in the nave had already been filled in, but cannot be sure, as I visited nearly every year and my dated notes did not survive the war. The only record that we have of the eastern extension of the excavations in the nave and later work in the church is that of Wedlake. When I was excavating he visited on several occasions and at times made comparisons with what he had seen. It was not till I was preparing my report to the Wells Cathedral Conference that I discussed the excavations in the church in any detail with Wedlake (Brit. Arch. Assn. Wells and Glastonbury (1981)). Wedlake never produced any plan, but gave me facts and measurements. He subsequently saw in draft and approved both the schematic plan which I published and the more detailed plan which I have prepared. He once said rather testily that the 1930 plans were based on the measurements of a local surveyor, who never consulted his (Wedlake's) notes. This can only be a mistaken reference to the Commission's Investigator, who supplied the data on which Vera Dallas worked out the published plans of 1930.

The next area explored while Wedlake was at Glastonbury was the south end of the east range and the latrine. The published plan (Proc. LXXX (1934), pl. 11) was again the work of one of Clapham's staff and drawn in his office. I never discussed this area with Wedlake. Everything was post 1904 and no problems arise.

The following years to 1939 were devoted to the area west

of the cloister. Work was closed down hurriedly in 1939, at the e  
of August. The site was left open and fenced off in preparation  
for making the plan. Clapham intended to send down and investigate  
as on previous occasions. He was unable to do so. I did not visit  
in 1939, being otherwise occupied. The site remained fenced off  
with the trenches open, but crumbling and silted till I began work  
in 1951. I was pressed by the Trustees first to deal with this  
area so that it could be filled in levelled. I was given the plan  
(Medlake's) which was clearly not the work of a professional  
surveyor, but which appeared to be accurate when I took spot checks  
rather than spend two seasons clearing again the whole of the area.  
I tested the sequence of the buildings and identified the east  
end of the abbot's house and other features, including parts of  
Dunstan's cloister. The site was then filled in, levelled and  
returned. It was then that I attempted to set out the abbot's  
house combining the parts in the now levelled area and the standi  
remains to the west. It became clear that the plan was inaccurate  
The measurements had been taken by triangulation from a base line  
formed by the west side of the cloister, lined out on the site on  
the basis of Bond's plan and the west end of the frater of which  
a few stones were visible. It had been assumed that these formed  
a straight line. A quick test with ranging poles exposed the fall  
A careful survey of the cloister showed that the south range was  
set about 4 degrees off the right angle to the east and west rang  
which were parallel and at right angles to the church. A search  
through Bond's original reports showed that Bond had accurately  
recorded this (Proc. LVII (1911), pl. 2). I did not then know  
that the 1939 plan was Medlake's. I spoke of it rather slightly  
to him pointing out the error. He replied but Bond showed that th  
Abbey buildings were laid out on a rectangular grid citing the  
plan of 1913 (Proc. LXX (1912), pl. 1). There the matter remains.

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1913 Plan LXX (1913)

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C. A. Raleigh Radford

remains