EVIDENCE FOR TOWER TRANSEPTS AT THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. JOHN-SUB-CASTRO, LEWES

By Richard Gilbert

All kinds of error, even in our own day, have obscured the history of the old Saxon church of St. John-sub-Castro, Lewes, which was pulled down in 1839 but is celebrated as the original home of the Magnus inscription, still to be seen on the exterior of the present church. Concerning the arches on north and south sides of the tower, however, there has been little to refute, for the good reason that no-one has attempted to account for them, and few writers have even mentioned them.

The earliest information (dated 1770) about them comes in a folio MS. book by John Elliot, now in Eastbourne Public Library. Elliot, born in St. John's parish in 1725 and educated in Lewes, took an early interest in antiquarian matters and became a valued correspondent of men better known. A pew-holder at St. John's,[1] he was an attorney, practising chiefly in London, and by a sad coincidence was brought back to Lewes for burial on the very day on which he had planned to return thither on retirement—Feb. 28th, 1782.[2]

No structural records of St. John's are available before Camden's statement, in the first edition of *Britannia* (1586), that it was in ruins. The following year, John Rowe (1560-1639) says,[3] the chancel was pulled down (never to be rebuilt), and, from the fact that the parish register begins in 1602,[4] it is assumed that this was done as part of a scheme to bring the building back to life again, cutting losses and repairing what was left.

No description of the church is available before Elliot's record, which tells of a nave (61ft. internal length) with floor several feet below outside ground level; a pit where the chancel formerly stood; a chancel arch filled with ruined masonry; a south nave wall containing a well-characterised Saxon doorway (now built into the back of the present church) with a Saxon pilaster-strip above; and small Saxon-type windows high up. The broach spire formed a pyramid with roughly equilateral sides.

A high, pointed arch led internally from the nave to the tower, which, be it noted, had similar arches in its other three walls and whose floor was three feet higher than that of the nave. Whether and how it was possible to pass from one to the other at floor level is uncertain; after 1779 the nave floor was raised. The south wall of the church stood some 25ft. to the north of the present building (which is sited with its ceremonial " east " to the north), and the tower was cut into the ancient earthwork which defended the western edge of the plateau[5] but which was demolished when St. John's Hill was constructed last century.

[1] 1807 list of pew-holders, copied by John Bartlett in 1816. Archives of the Sussex Archaeological Society.

[2] M. A. Lower, *Sussex Worthies* (1865), 329.

[3] Walter H. Godfrey (ed.), *The Book of John Rowe*, Sussex Record Society, vol. 34 (1928), 16.

[4] At East Sussex Record Office.

[5] T. W. Horsfield, *History of Lewes* (1824), I, 271.

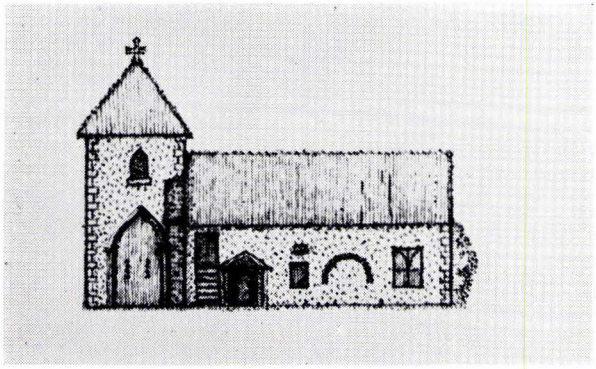


Plate IA. John Elliot's pen-and-ink sketch (actual size), 1770

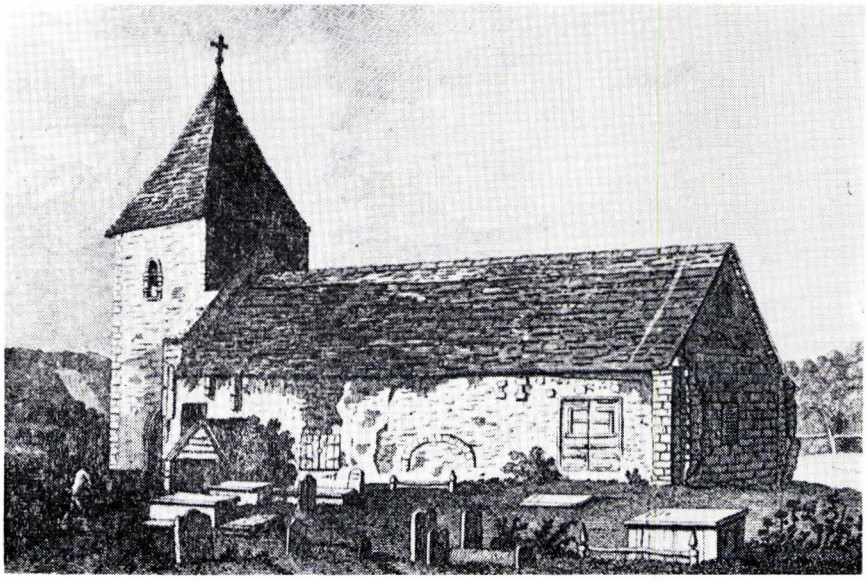


Plate IB. Samuel Hooper's picture in Grose's "Antiquities of England and Wales," 1776

There is in Elliot's book, in addition to the text, a small pen-and-ink drawing of the south side of the church (Plate 1a) giving an exterior view of one of the tower arches mentioned above. It is high and pointed, reaches down to the ground and is apparently filled in with vertical planks. Elliot does not mention this arch in the text, and no picture by any other artist gives a full view of it. This sketch has never been published before. To the east of the arch there appears what looks like a wall, higher, where it springs from the tower, than the western end of the nave but closely parallel to it or actually in contact with it.

Only one other drawing—that by Samuel Hooper in Francis Grose's *Antiquities of England and Wales*, first published in 1776—shows the south side of the tower at this period, for in 1779 a re-building plan[1] was adopted whereby the old porch was to be removed from the nave south door (to be closed up) and a new one built on the south side of the tower, re-opening the filled-in arch, which it entirely obscured save for the pointed top rising above the porch's flat roof. Hooper's viewpoint, however, is from the south-east, and therefore the corner of the nave hides the eastern side of the arch (Plate 1b), the whole of which would have been visible in his day; but enough is shown to corroborate Elliot's earlier sketch.

In the text, Grose notes something[2] which apparently concerns the north wall of the nave:—

> " Near the center of the north wall, towards the ground, there are the remains of what seems to have been a door-way, or old window, now filled up. The spring stones of the arch are apparent in the wall."

If we now read what Elliot wrote in 1770 about the tower, we are struck by a resemblance which goes beyond coincidence:—

> " The Steeple seems of a later Date and different workmanship from the body of the Church, and on the North Wall, in the centre, towards the Ground, seems to have been either the remains of a Doorway or old Window, now filled up, the Spring Stones of the Arch still remaining in the Wall."

It seems plain from this that Grose had read Elliot's notes and misconstrued them to refer to the nave instead of the tower. Indeed, the only corroboration we have of Elliot's word on this arch is the brief statement of George Alexander Cooke that the tower had " four tall, pointed arches closed up."[3]

We are now confronted by the need to explain two arches, south and north of the tower. That on the south, shown by Elliot and Hooper, cannot have been a window and is improbably high for a door, and that on the north could well have been like it, judging by the descriptions by Elliot and Cooke. A satisfactory explanation for both, however, would be the existence of tower transepts, to which these arches would have given access, and the possible wall parallel to the nave's western end (shown in Elliot's drawing and others) could be the ruins of the south transept's eastern wall.

If we can accept the existence of west-end transepts in so small a church, we may go further and consider the extent of these hypothetical features. As we have seen, the earthwork on the western edge of the plateau on which the church was built was cut into to accommodate the tower; but, had the cut extended no further than the width of the tower, a view from the south would have shown the foot of the tower obscured on the left side by the slope of the bank where it had not been cut away. This, however, is not so in either Elliot's or Hooper's pictures; but after 1779, when the porch was built on that side of the tower, pictures[4] show the bank sloping down across the left side of the entrance (Fig. 1). Indeed, a short flight of stone steps had then to be

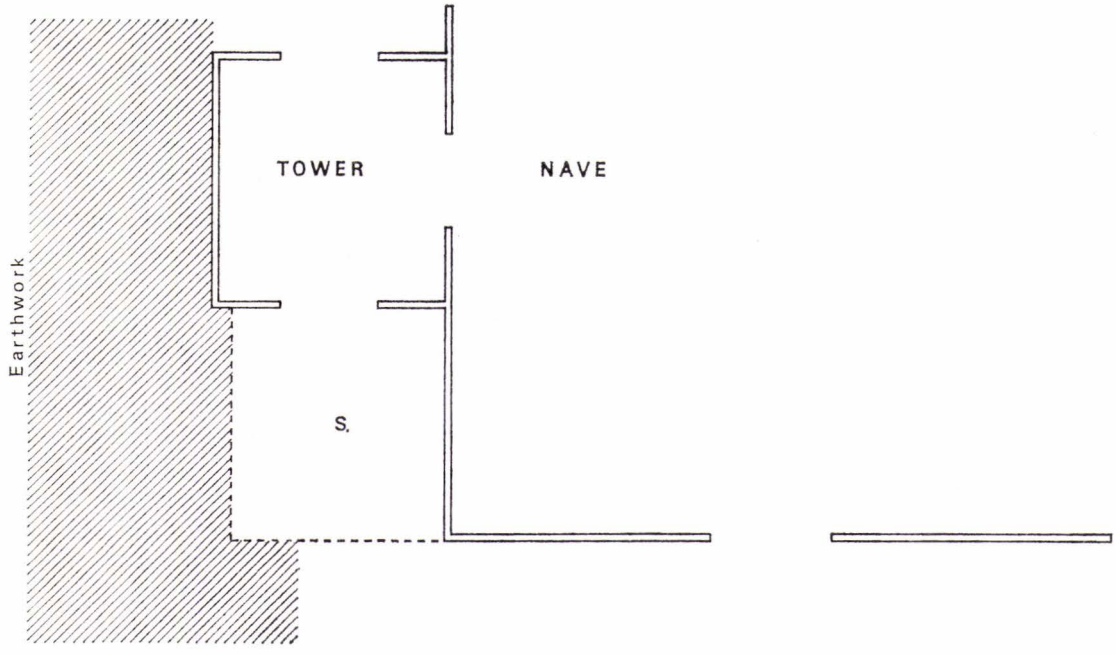
[1] St. John's parish register, E.S.R.O., PAR 412/1/1/5.

[2] Francis Grose, *Antiquities of England and Wales*, (1776), 159.

[3] *Topographical and Statistical Description of the County of Sussex* (1810), 117.

[4] By James Lambert in *Sussex Views*, Sussex Record Society (1951), pl. 95, and by James Rouse in *Beauties of Sussex* (1825), II, pl. 66.

constructed enabling one to climb the bank, apparently in order to reach the west side of the tower (which seems to have been the way to the gallery). An account of the making of these steps is given by Thomas Wakeham.[1]



S. Site of suggested south transept and, after 1779, of the new porch

FIG. I. Hypothetical ground plan of the South-West corner

There thus seems no good reason to suggest that any transept on the south side of the tower would have reached further than did the porch which eventually succeeded it, and this porch, judging by the pictures of the church and by Figg's ground plan in his Lewes map of 1824,[2] extended no further south than a line flush with the nave south wall. There is no word anywhere to tell us whether the earthwork bank on the north side had been cut away to make room for any hypothetical transept there.

If these transepts did, in fact, exist, there is no certain clue to the date of their disappearance, though it is reasonable to think that they were already in ruins when the chancel was pulled down, in 1587. Indeed, Wakeham says that part of a sculptured burial slab was found in 1779 under the little window on the south side of the tower. If by this he means during the re-opening of the transept arch (which was certainly under the little window), it might be another example (as with the chancel arch) of the building's ruined gaps being filled up with debris during repairs at the end of the 16th century.

[1] MS. book by Thomas Wakeham (1783), at E.S.R.O., ABE/1.

[2] Hanging framed at Anne of Cleves' House, Southover, Lewes.

At Sherborne, in Dorset, the Saxon abbey has recently been shown to have had a western tower with twin transepts, added about A.D. 1000. Western towers and transepts, says the current guide, were common in the Rhineland and northern France in the 9th and 10th centuries. Objection will fairly be raised that the arch shown by Elliot and Hooper is obviously not Saxon, any more than Cooke's description of all four tower arches as "tall and pointed," butn either was the filled-in chancel arch. Sir Stephen Glynne, writing in 1826,[1] describes the latter as pointed, and Lambert shows it as such, its internal span being approximately 16ft. on Figg's ground plan.[2]

If we now turn back to Elliot, we may recall his phrase—"The Steeple seems of a later Date and different workmanship from the body of the Church." He does not specify why he thought thus, but it might be agreed that, looking at all the pictures of the tower, only one feature appears possibly Saxon—the quoins of the walls, which might or might not have consisted of "longs and shorts." On the other hand, two positive points could be quoted to support Elliot's view. One is that the tower floor was 3ft. higher than that of the nave, the latter being well below ground level throughout its length, falling still more eastward. The second point is that the tower was cut into the earthwork, for, if the first builders had sited the church a few yards further east, this labour would have been obviated.

What, then, we have to envisage is a period of prosperity sufficient to justify the addition of a tower, with transepts, to the Saxon nave and probably the replacement of the chancel arch by one of contemporary style; and this, judging by the arches we have discussed, could have been in the 13th or 14th century.

This would harmonise with a scheme, approved by the Bishop of Chichester in 1337,[3] to merge the parishes of St. Mary-in-Foro and St. Peter the Less into that of St. John and to divide the parishes of Holy Trinity, St. Sepulchre and St. Nicholas between St. John's and All Saints'. This scheme, however, was not carried out.

Wakeham also has information which may bear on the period when the tower was built and the chancel arch modernised. He tells us that eight coffin slabs, entire or fragmentary, were discovered in various parts of the building in 1779 and he specifies where they were then placed. Two, he says, were found, already reversed, in the floor of the ruined chancel and were used in the steps up the earthwork bank and in the tower floor. It is impossible to think that they had been merely dug up, turned over and abandoned at the demolition of the chancel in 1587, and therefore we must seek a period of major reconstruction before that. Such a time might have been when the burials (which are presumed to be of priests) were remote enough to be decently forgotten and when there was a desire to pave the chancel, the original floor having been probably of earth. Taking all things into consideration, a 13th century date seems reasonable.

The wider implications of this are dealt with in the writer's typescript monograph on St. John's-sub-Castro deposited in the Society's library some years ago, when the notion of tower transepts seemed less acceptable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer is indebted to Lawrence Stevens for the photographic reproduction of the two pictures of the church, by John Elliot and Samuel Hooper, which illustrate this article, and to Elizabeth Dawlings for Fig. I.

[1] V. J. Torr, "Sir Stephen Glynne's Notes on Sussex Churches," *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. 16, 98.
[2] Figg No. 44 (1816), S.A.S. archives.
[3] Walter H. Godfrey, "The Parish churches of Lewes in the 14th century," *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 68 (1927), 175.

RALPH HOGGE'S IRONWORKS ACCOUNTS, 1576-81

by D. W. Crossley

I

The Origins of the Manuscript[1]

In the Library of Dulwich College is kept a note-book once belonging to Philip Henslowe (d. 1616)[2]. In it he recorded his financial involvement with companies of theatrical players in London in the early years of the seventeenth century: this part of the content has been fully published and requires no further attention here. Originally, however, between 1576 and 1581, the book had been used by Philip Henslowe's brother John, the clerk or manager of Ralph Hogge's ironworks on the southern fringes of Ashdown Forest. Philip and John were the sons of Edmund Henslowe, Master of the Game in the Forest.[3] John Henslowe's sister Margaret married Ralph Hogge.

The brothers started from opposite ends of the book; thus, towards the middle, ironworks and theatre accounts back on to each other. It does seem that early in its existence, before Philip used the book, certain pages were removed, perhaps accounting for, or at least accentuating the fragmentary nature of the ironworks material (see below). Most of the entries relate to the years 1577 and 1578, although there are 12 for 1576, and one each for 1580 and 1581.[4]

The responsibility, perhaps the actual writing, was Henslowe's, as shown by references to " my brother (Ralph) Hogge."

II

Ralph Hogge's Ironworks in 1577

Ironworking using the blast furnace was well-established by the time of these accounts. The great expansion in the Wealden industry had come in the previous two generations, fostered by the growth of the market for iron in London and the dockyards of South-East England. However, the very earliest furnaces had been in Ashdown, beginning with Newbridge in 1496,

[1] The writer is grateful to the Governors of Dulwich College for allowing this edition to be published, and to Professor R. A. Foakes and Dr. R. T. Rickert for loaning a transcript made during the preparation of their edition of Henslowe's Diary (Note 4, below). The present edition, however, is taken from the Dulwich original and this editor is alone responsible for the content and format of the text printed here. The Librarian of Dulwich College, Mr. A. C. L. Hall, has generously provided facilities for work on the original. Mrs. D. Meades, Mr. C. F. Tebbutt, and other members of the Wealden Iron Research Group have provided valuable topographical information.

[2] Dulwich College MS. VII. The book has a 19th-century leather and board binding, the spine lettering arranged for the Henslowe Diary to be read as *recto*, the ironworks entries as *verso*, from the back. In fact the written page numbering apparently dating from the 1570's runs from the start of the ironworks entries, which were on *recto* sides as seen by their compilers. Thus in this edition the 1577-81 pagination is adhered to, and the originally numbered faces of the pages regarded as *recto*. The page size is 11¼in. deep by 8in. wide. Philip Henslowe's stepdaughter married Edward Alleyn, founder of the College of God's Gift, Dulwich.

[3] E. Turner, " Ashdown Forest," *Sussex Arch. Colls.* vol. 14 (1862), 47.

[4] For economy of space it seems best to refer the reader to the careful account of layout made by R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge 1961), xii-xv.