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Fig. 1. 13th-century carved stone head, below the east window of the north aisle, St John the Baptist, Findon.

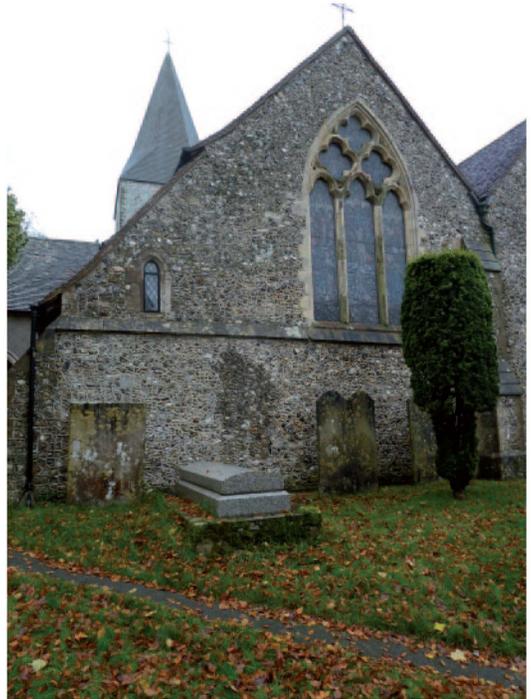


Fig. 2. Exterior of the east wall of the chancel, St John the Baptist, Findon. The stone head is located within the darker, damp area of wall.

A new discovery of a carved stone head at St John the Baptist Church, Findon, West Sussex

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During the summer of 2013, one of the authors (DAB) was revisiting Findon church to identify the historic building stones as part of a survey of West Sussex churches for a forthcoming paper. During inspection of the exterior walls, a small carved stone head was noted in the east wall of the chancel. There appears to be no previous record of this sculpture, which, stylistically, is of early medieval date.

A church at Findon is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Morris 1976). The present church is said to be Saxon in origin and enlarged in the late 12th and 13th centuries, although there is some conjecture over precisely which remaining elements are Saxon or later (Holmes 1989; Allen 2013). The current vestry contains a Norman arch, re-used over a later door, which may be the chancel arch re-used. Nairn and Pevsner (1965) propose that a lean-to north aisle was replaced in the 13th century by the current north aisle, which is as wide as the nave. Further work in the 15th century included a single new roof spanning the full width of the church. The exterior stonework of the chancel can be seen in a lithograph reproduced in Trower (1875) which depicts coursed ashlar in the lower area of the wall, where the head is now to be seen.

The church was repaired and restored by George Gilbert Scott in 1867, including the recladding of the outside of the church with dressed flints, obscuring much of the past history of the church (Wyatt 1926, 1938; Reeves 1968). The external pointing of much of the church is very heavy, and was apparently carried out at this time. Scott's restoration included the commissioning of the unique example of the painted tile reredoses by William Morris (Kelly 1999).

Published accounts include mention of a sculpted stone head, but this is a corbel located inside the church in the lower corner of the east window of the north aisle (Fig. 1) (Anon. n.d; Allen 2013). Stylistically, this stone head appears to be of 13th-century date. It measures 140mm high by 140mm wide and 140mm deep. The stone appears to be a hard chalk. The hair on both sides of the head retains traces of paint, and is pierced on front of the lowest wave, purpose unknown. These features have not been previously noted.

The newly discovered stone head is located in the exterior of the east wall of the chancel, 3.7m from the edge of the south-east corner buttress and 1.1m above ground level (Fig. 2). Godfrey's church plan (1934) suggests that this wall is of 13th-century date, whilst the plan has been redrawn by Holmes (1989) and described as 'later walls' based on Holmes' assumption that the chancel should have been more typically square and of standard internal width. An east window with



Fig. 3. Detail of carved stone head.

reticulated tracery was also inserted in the 14th century (Allen 2013). The restoration and recladding of the walls in the 1867 restoration give further uncertainty to the actual construction date of the current chancel wall.

The stone head measures 100mm wide by 120mm high (although its chin is missing), and is roughly the same size as the coursed flint nodules used in the wall construction (Fig. 3). The head is not particularly obvious, which probably explains why there is no previous record, although the workmen who placed it there undoubtedly recognised the head for what it was. The stone is a white calcareous material, which may be marble or hard chalk.

The sculpted features of this head are quite weathered, but it seems to be fairly crude in execution, with bulging eyes and a prominent nose. There is no surviving detailing of hair, and it is possible that the head was always bare of hair or head covering. The mouth and chin are missing – either hidden by the heavy pointing, or broken before the head was placed in its current position.

The authors have observed carved stone heads in the church of St Mary the Virgin in Eastbourne (Fig. 4) on the aisle side of the south arcade, which is dated to the 13th century (Nairn & Pevsner 1965) or 14th century (Clark 2011). A closer parallel is a medieval stone head that was found at Jordieland Farm, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway, and possibly another from Tongland Abbey, some 2km from Jordieland Farm (Future Museum 2012).

The placement of the stone head is likely to have occurred during repair work, as its positioning seems to be of no particular significance. It is probable that it was simply inserted as a piece of re-used stone during reconstruction or repair works. Medieval repairs and alterations do sometimes include the re-use of earlier fragments, and, on occasion, items that were too papist for post-Reformation ideas were hidden in the structure – for instance the Mass of St Gregory carving at Stoke Charity, Hampshire (Pevsner & Lloyd 1967). At Findon it is unclear when this head was incorporated into the east wall, but the restoration of Gilbert Scott is the most likely candidate.

As noted above, there is some conjecture over precisely which, if any, of the remaining elements of the church are Saxon. However, Allen (2013), proposes a more traditional development of the church. Whilst studying the church



Fig. 4. 13–14th-century carved stone head in the church of St Mary the Virgin, Eastbourne.

structure to understand the context of the newly discovered stone head, we are also inclined to accept a more traditional view of the church development than that proposed by Holmes (1989).

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