

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
OF
THE TOWER OF ST MARYS CHURCH,
HAREFIELD**

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THE TOWER OF ST MARYS CHURCH, HAREFIELD**

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CONTENTS	Page no.
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 ASSESSMENT OF THE TOWER BLOCKING	2
3 CONCLUSIONS	3
4 BIBLIOGRAPHY	3

List of Figures

Figure 1 Plan of church with dates built (showing areas where brickwork was examined)

List of Plates

Plate 1 South arch of the tower showing blocking (looking north)

Plate 2 East arch of the tower showing blocking and inserted staircase (looking west)

Plate 3 East arch of the tower showing blocking (looking east)

Plate 4 Brickwork revealed within the cupboard inserted into the east arch of the tower (looking south)

Plate 5 Brickwork revealed within south arch of the tower (looking south)

Plate 6 20th century safe within the east arch of the tower (looking east)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological assessment of the later blocking and structures of the east and south tower arches of St Mary's Church, Harefield was commissioned by Lloyd Sheppard Architects on behalf of the church in order to establish the date of these additions.
- 1.2 A desk-based assessment of the church was previously carried out by AOC Archaeology (October 2002) and the history of the church can be summarised from this document as follows:

- The first record of a church in Harefield is through a reference in the Domesday Book in 1086 to a priest associated with Harefield Manor. Although it cannot be excluded, it does not consequently follow that the Saxon church stood on the same site as the present St Mary's, which dates from the late 12th century. The church was originally a simple Chapel and Nave and remains of this structure are preserved in the western wall of the present Nave.
- St. Mary's remained apparently unaltered until the 13th century, when the Chancel was rebuilt, and a North Chapel or Aisle was added. The arch between the present Chapel and Nave is all that remains of them now. A new Chancel was also built around this time. In the early 14th century, the Nave was rebuilt and a South Chapel added.
- The early 16th century saw the addition of the present North Aisle and Breakspear Chapel. Later in the same century, the tower was built to house six bells, the earliest of those remaining is dated to 1629.
- St. Mary's church underwent a number of restorations during the post-medieval period, with general repairs to the roof and ceiling in 1705-6, and more extensive alterations occurring 1768-9 under the guidance of the architect Henry Keen. He was responsible for the Gothic plasterwork on the Chancel ceiling, and he renewed the Chancel arch and designed the altar. Further repairs and restoration work were carried out in 1802 on the Chapel, and in 1841, when the South Aisle was extended to the west by 2 bays, bringing it into line with the western wall of the Nave.
- Between 1958 and 1959, the tower and nave roof were restored. Additions to the interior include the reredos (carved screen behind the altar) and communion rails in the late 17th century; and a 3-decker pulpit along with several box pews in the 18th century. There are also numerous monuments and memorials, particularly to members of the Newdigate family, throughout the church.

- 1.3 A site visit to examine the tower blocking was carried out by AOC Archaeology on 15th December 2004.

2 ASSESSMENT OF THE TOWER BLOCKING

- 2.1 The tower has a Tudor arch on each of its east and south internal sides. These are part of the original construction of the tower and are dated to the 16th century. The south arch was blocked with brick with a covering of plaster, as was the east arch, although here there was also an inserted stair and cupboards (Plates 1-3), which was linked to the internal re-ordering of the tower including the changing of floor levels, although the two pieces of work may not have been contemporary.
- 2.1 The plaster was removed with a hammer and chisel from the blocking and additions in three locations to examine the brickwork (see Fig. 1). These were:
1. The internal face of the cupboard under the stairs of the east arch
 2. The staircase within the east arch.
 3. The internal face of the south arch blocking
- 2.3 The cupboard under the stairs within the east arch appeared to be built as part of one structure with the stairs and main blocking of the arch. The cupboards walls and floor were constructed of the same brick type and one of these was temporarily removed and examined. The bricks measured 211mm x 99mm x 62mm and were light red and hand made with no frog (Plate 4). The bricks in the wall were bonded with white lime mortar and the bricks of the floor were unbonded, held in place by dust and dirt between the bricks.
- 2.4 The bricks of the staircase build within the east arch were visible in several places where the plaster had fallen away. These were the same as the bricks revealed in the cupboard below the stairs.
- 2.5 The bricks within the south arch blocking were of the same type as those within the east arch blocking and insertions. A slightly larger area of brickwork was exposed here, which revealed that the bricks were laid in English bond, alternating rows of headers and stretchers (Plate 5). These bricks were bonded with white lime mortar and the structure was covered with a thin skim of light yellow brown plaster with frequent small grit animal hair inclusions. This was in turn covered by a thin skim of harder, white plaster with no hair inclusions that had been finished with lines inscribed in the surface to give the appearance of ashlar block masonry and painted.
- 2.6 A safe had been inserted into the blocking structure at the north end of the vestry. This was built of fletton bricks and was unrendered (Plate 6).

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The blocking of both of the arches and the construction of the staircase and cupboards appears to have been contemporary as all of the bricks used in the construction were of the same type and as far as could be seen, so were the construction methods.
- 3.2 The height of the bricks (62mm) and the method of manufacture indicates that they are of 19th century date. It seems probable that the blocking of the arches and the insertion of the staircase and cupboards within the tower dates to the 19th century and was perhaps carried out at the same time as the restoration work on the Chapel in 1841, when the South Aisle was extended to the west by 2 bays. The tower arch blocking had also been previously dated by Pevsner as 19th century (see AOC Archaeology Oct 2002)
- 3.3 Further additions to the tower were made in the 20th century when a safe was added for the church valuables.

4 BIBLIOGRAPHY

AOC Archaeology (Oct 2002) *A Cultural Heritage Desk-Based Assessment for St. Mary's Church, Harefield, Hillingdon*

APPENDIX 1: PLATES



Plate 1: South arch of the tower showing blocking (looking north)



Plate 2: East arch of the tower showing blocking and inserted staircase (looking west)



Plate 3: East arch of the tower showing blocking (looking east)



Plate 4: Brickwork revealed within the cupboard inserted into the east arch of the tower (looking south)



Plate 5: Brickwork revealed within south arch of the tower (looking south)



Plate 6: 20th century safe within the east arch of the tower (looking east)