

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

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St Mary's Church, Cratfield 'Tea-point' in the tower

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HER Information

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<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit>

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Summary

Two visits were made to St Mary's Church, Cratfield to monitor the ground works associated with the installation of a 'tea-point' in the tower. The floor within the tower was made from thick and hand-hewn elm boards. The date of the planks is unknown but they look to be of some antiquity although their use as a floor in this context dates from no earlier than the middle of the 19th century and they had been raised with the addition of secondary joists more recently. Beneath the timber floor were the remains of the medieval tiled floor which once ran at a single, continuous level through to the nave. The *in situ* tiles were plain and unglazed but fragments of glazed orange tiles, probably Flemish and dating to the 14th-15th century, were also recovered.

1. Introduction

Two visits were made to St Mary's Church, Cratfield to monitor the ground works associated with the installation of a 'tea-point' in the tower. The work required cutting through a suspended wooden floor and the excavation of a trench for a linking drain. The floor within the tower was made from hand-cut elm boards and was undated. Only the excavations within the tower were observed, as the external works which consisted of a shallow drain and the excavation of a cess pit outside the churchyard wall were considered to have limited scope and did not require monitoring. The monitoring followed an outline brief by Bob Carr, the archaeologist on the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and the work commissioned by Nicholas Jacobs Architects on behalf of the PPC of St Mary's Church.

The site records have been archived in the small and main stores of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service at Bury St Edmunds and with the County's Historic Environment and Monuments Record under the parish code CRT 012. A copy of the report has also been lodged with the OASIS on-line database (ref: suffolk c1-92263).

2. Location and historical background

Cratfield is situated c.7.5km west of Halesworth, and St Mary's Church (Suffolk HER no CRT 017) stands at TM 3139 7483 on the south edge of the village (Fig.1). The settlement has a ribbon pattern that follows the road between Bell and Goostead Greens.

The tower dates to the 15th century and is entered through a west door. Prior to the start of work the tower had been divided from the nave by a lath and plaster wall which infilled the opening below the tower arch and a carved screen had been mounted on the nave side to embellish this infill wall. The screen was once part of a 15th century chancel screen which was re-worked to form a west gallery during the second quarter of the 19th century before being removed to its current location in 1879. The screen and infill had been removed prior to the monitoring visit as part of the current works. Inside the tower, projecting from the north wall is a timber-framed jettied structure, mounted on wall posts and supported by arch

braces which has been interpreted as a clock case (Fig. 5). The carpentry is consistent with medieval techniques and it is built into the fabric of the wall. Church accounts show that it was repaired as early as the 1530's, suggesting that it may be original to the tower (Mortlock 2009). The space beneath the overhang of the case has been enclosed with wide, pine boards to create a cupboard and an access door has been cut into the side of the case; the door hinges to the cupboard and access hatch suggest that these alterations and additions were made during the 18th century or later.



Figure 1. St Mary's Church, Cratfield, site location

3. Results

A plan of the floor boards was drawn by the architect in advance of the start of work, and photographed. The tower arch had been re-opened by removing the stud wall infill its adopted decorative screen. A 400mm length was cut from the

south end of the boards and removed to create a channel across the width of the floor. A test hole through the underlying soil was excavated by the monitoring archaeologist to establish the date of the floor setting and underlying deposits. A section of the test hole was drawn and shown in Figure 2 and the deposits described below.

The initial test excavation established that the timber floor had been re-laid and raised in the relatively recent past by the addition of a second set of joists (Fig. 2). The later joists were laid directly over the top of the originals to bring the floor level up by c.150mm and to the same height as the threshold of the west door. A record of the changing floor level was preserved as 'tide marks' in the extent of the successive decorative schemes and repairs to the plaster on the tower wall which respected previous floor levels (Fig.6 D). The soil between the joists was filled with a fine grey black silt (0002), an accumulation of dust and dirt that had fallen between the boards. Within this deposit was debris, too big to have passed between the cracks, which had been sealed in the void when the floor was laid. The latest material included glass jars for Bovril and fish paste from the middle of the 20th century and, from below the level of the top of earlier joists, lead comes and diamond-shaped panes of glass from a church window. The glass was cut with a glass cutter indicating it was no earlier than Victorian.

Below the accumulated silt/dust was a layer of compacted mortar and bedding sand, 0003. This was a substrate for a tiled floor, although in the area of the test hole the top of this layer had been truncated removing any evidence of tiles or their bedding mortar. 0003 included small fragments of brick and building flint within its make-up. Set into the wall, level with the top of this layer, was a row of batts (half bricks). The medieval flintwork had been chopped back to let the bricks into the wall and the wall surface was plastered down to the brick tops; below the bricks the flint was left exposed. The brick was well fired in an orange clay, and it measured $2\frac{3}{8}$ "", narrower than a standardised brick, suggesting a date of 17th or 18th century. Beneath 0003 was a layer of crushed, pale brown, chalky mortar, 0004, similar to that bonding the flints in the wall. The crushed mortar sealed a layer of 'dirty' dark brown clay, 0005, the clay had been re-worked and was flecked with charcoal and mortar. The tower wall continued below the level of the clay, and

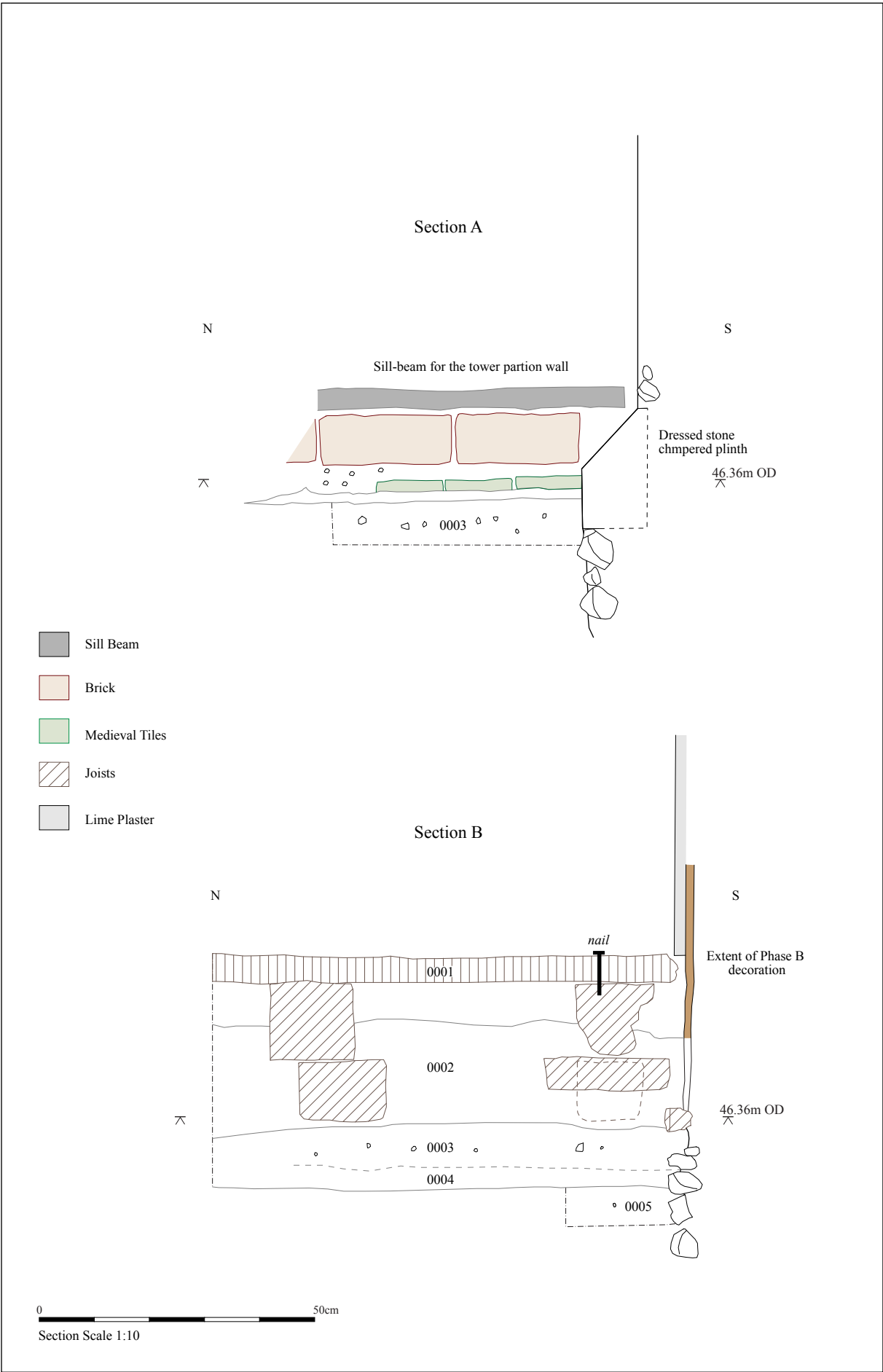


Figure 2. Sections through the tower floor

no cut for the wall foundation was seen in the clay suggesting that it was laid as a floor or a sub-floor within the church after the tower was built.

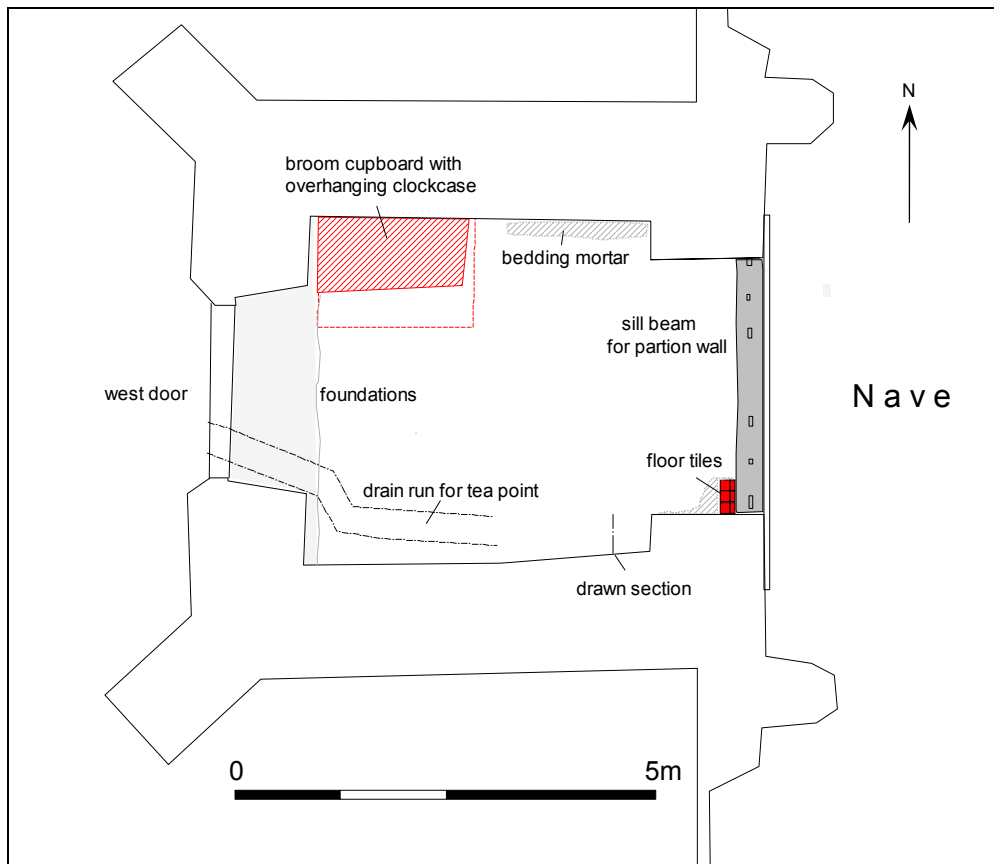


Figure 3. Tower floor plan after the removal of timber floor

A second visit was made after the complete floor had been removed and whilst the underlying ground floor level was being reduced to provide a suitable sub-base for the re-laying of the floor. The depth of the ground reduction removed only recent build-up and was above the archaeological level as established during the testhole excavations. The lifted floor boards were stored in sequence to ensure they were returned in the correct order.

Remaining *in situ* tiles of an earlier floor were recorded when the entire planked floor was lifted and the silt removed. An area of six tiles was found adjacent to the base of the tower arch on the south side and a layer of tile-impressed bedding mortar was recorded alongside the north wall between the tower arch and the clock case (Fig. 3). The tiles were plain, unglazed and measured 115mm². The tile floor level respected dressed limestone facing at the base of the tower which flared out in a chamfered foot (Fig. 4). The tiles were at the same level as those within the nave suggesting that the floor was once at a single level between the two. The west wall of the tower is built off a stepped footing of bonded flint, which

projects forward of the general wall face and is continuous below the west door. The height of the footing was just below the level of the tiles demonstrating that the tile floor reflects the original medieval floor level within tower even though the tiles themselves are undated. The threshold to the west door is however 310mm higher and shows that there was a step down into the church; examination of the moulding around the west door suggested that although the threshold had been re-set in the recent past, the level had not been altered significantly.



Figure 4. Tiled floor against dressed stone foot of the tower arch

The sill-beam of the improvised broom cupboard below the overhang of the clock case lies directly onto the bedding layer of the tiles (layer 0003) and was constructed after the tiles were lifted which suggests that the cupboard element was added when the first suspended floor was installed; the sill is at the same level as the original joists and the boards would have been cut around the cupboard rather than it sitting on the floor. The subsequent raising of the floor buried the base of the cupboard which was infilled with rubble to bring its internal floor level up to that of the raised floor outside the cupboard. The cupboard is difficult to date, the door furniture dates to 17th-18th century and the coat pegs to 19th century, but these all appear to second-hand materials. A fragment of a gravestone, dated by the style of the script to the 17th-18th century had been used underpin the cupboard frame and the graffiti on the cupboard walls date to the turn of the 20th century.

4. Finds List by Richenda Goffin

Only one context produced finds, these were collected from between the joist of the suspended floor - layer 0003

Five fragments of clay tobacco pipe @ 29g. 4 stems and one fragment of stem and bowl. The pipe has a complete spur and the lower part of a bowl decorated on the front with a leaf design, dating to the first half of the 19th century.

Small panes of clear, modern, window glass. Rectangular, diamond and pentagonal shaped panes from a leaded church window plus a fragment of lead window came. The panes are cut with a glass cutter and date to the 19th century or later.

Two other fragments of window glass appear older. One fragment of dark green glass is likely to be post-medieval, but the other fragment is medieval or late medieval in date. It is a dense green/brown colour and is undecorated with two grozed edges.

A fragment of glazed floor tile (761g) with a dense orange fabric with occasional voids and quartz. Upper surface is covered with a white slip and clear glaze making it an overall yellow colour. Knife-trimmed edge, with fine sanding on base, which shows the remains of mortar; probably Flemish and dating to the 14th-15th century. Height 45mm.

5. Discussion

The date of the planks which make up the floor are unknown. The timbers themselves are thick and hand-hewn and look to be of some antiquity but their use as a floor in the tower dates from no earlier than the middle of the 19th century and their setting at the current level is more recent still, raising the tower floor level above that within the nave. During the medieval period and up to the insertion of the wooden floor the tower was tiled and ran at a single, continuous level through to the nave. The *in situ* tiles were plain and unglazed but fragments of glazed orange tiles, probably Flemish and dating to the 14th-15th century, were also recovered. The threshold of the west door was higher than the original floor so the celebrant would have had to step down into the building as they processed through the church.

The putative clock-case has been identified as medieval and is believed to be an original feature of the tower, however the position of the clock case prevents the west door from opening fully, suggesting that it may not have been originally intended for this location. Processions through the church were part of the normal observance of the liturgical calendar throughout the medieval period. However after the reformation such practices are likely to have ceased, and the passage through the west door may have become less important, and it is perhaps after this date that the clock was installed in its current location

6. Archive deposition

Paper and photographic archive: SCCAS Bury St Edmunds. Archive store

Digital archive T:arc\archive fieldprojects\Cratfield\CRT012

The finds have been returned for the parish council to hold.

7. Bibliography

Mortlock, D. P. 2009, *The Guide to Suffolk Churches*. The Lutterworth Press



Figure 5. Clock-case against the north wall of the tower



Figure 6. Selected photographs

- A) Tower floor prior to lifting of the floor boards**
- B) Sill beam for the stud wall that infilled the tower arch**
- C) C18th brick at the base of the plasterwork and a layer of green clay laid as a sub-floor below the level of the floor tiles**
- D) Phases of decorative schemes showing changing floor levels**
- E) Bedding mortar for floor tiles against the north wall of the tower showing impressions of tiles**
- F) Bottom rail and planking of cupboard beneath the clock case extending beneath the timber floor**

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