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A Brief Account of Turkdean Church, Northleach

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(Vicar of Turkdean, 1881-1902)

and Charles Lloyd Richard Tudor, architect MSA

Among the many parish churches in Gloucestershire, Turkdean Church, dedicated to God in memory of All Saints, is a very interesting example of the progress of church building during different periods of the history of our country; and like many another village church it speaks to us in silent but eloquent language, as a witness of the simple piety and faith of those who have gone before and who, in their day and generation, gave of the best of their time and skill, to the greater glory of God and thus forms an invaluable link between the days of old and the present time.

Owing to its remote situation on the Cotswold hills this church has not hitherto received the recognition it deserves, but an opportunity of placing its history on record occurred during the course of its restoration in A.D. 1897. Before any attempt at restoration was undertaken, a very careful set of measured drawings of the church as it then existed, was made, so as to preserve an exact account of its past history.

The work was thoroughly conservative in character and was carried out under the personal supervision of the architect and no attempt whatever was made either to introduce new features, or to interfere in any way with the ancient work, the only repairs undertaken being rendered absolutely necessary by the condition of the building at that time, so as to maintain it in good order for future generations.

The Norman Church

The original church appears to have been a typical example of late Norman, consisting of an oblong Nave only, without aisles, with a Square West End terminating with an Apse at the Eastern end of building.

The walls may possibly have been continued beyond the chancel arch, so as to form one or more Bays, with a narrow Apse beyond, opening East, a type of Plan frequently met with at this period. No direct evidence, however, can be adduced as to the exact plan of this part of the church, unless the foundations can be discovered under the present chancel floor.

The actual remains of the Norman work now consist of the West End of the Nave, which extends under the present Tower, a part of the North and South walls at this end of the church and the chancel arch, together with the external portion of a small doorway now built into the South wall of the chancel.

The length from the West wall of the present Tower, which then formed the end of the Nave, to the chancel arch is about 48' 6" and the width 16' 6".

The Tower, added in the fifteenth century, is built over a portion of the original Nave, the Norman work being continued on the North side of the church to a point a little beyond the external face of the eastern Tower wall and, on the South side, to the West end of the present South aisle; the face line of these walls being about eight inches beyond those of the present Nave.

The two outside walls of the Norman Nave project about 4' or so in front of the Tower walls on the North and South Sides, against which the roofs of these projecting portions of the building abut.

The West End of the original church now forms the lower stage of the Tower wall and projects about 10' in front of the wall face of the South aisle, on the outside, at the West End.

Pilaster buttresses, so frequently met with in work of this period, are built at the angles of the Tower and are continued up to the eaves of the projection previously mentioned.

There is also a buttress of the same date, in the centre of what is now the West wall of the Tower, extending in height to a little below a point where the copings of the original work abut against the Tower walls.

Part of a doorway, now blocked, is built in the wall of the original Nave on the North side of the Tower.

The arch is semi-circular and of one order, with the chevron ornament on its face and rests upon a plain chamfered and quirked abacus and cushion stone and the upper portion of a small shaft. The alternate Billet moulding is worked upon the hood over this archway, there are also the remains of an archway on the opposite side.

The Norman Gable at this end of the church is covered with a roofing formed with stone slabs, finished with wide copings, which extend to the upper stage of the Tower walls.

The copings rest upon a moulded cornice, with moulded corbels underneath, characteristic of the period.

Just above the cornice a plain chamfered string course forming a weathering to the Pilaster at the angle is continued round the West end of the Tower, forming a small cornice to the eaves course on the South side.

A small semi-circular doorway, now built into the South wall of the chancel, contains a tympanum filled in with some good diaper work, the arch has two orders and the hood over is enriched with the nail head ornament. The capitals have the usual flat upper face with quirked and chamfered abaci and the two small shafts terminated with cushion stones and small neckings.

This doorway probably formed the ancient priest's door and has no doubt been removed from its original position.

Fine fragments of stonework are reinserted in the West end of the Norman Nave and are worked with various designs.

The remaining portion of the original church is a plain semicircular chancel arch, with square jambs and plain abacus only, similar to those previously described.

The face of this arch is flat and has no ornament of any kind.

The outside walls of the church are faced with good ashlar work, which is now in an excellent state of preservation.

The pitch of the Norman roof is clearly indicated, by the lines on the East wall of the Tower and these would, if produced, continue the line of the coping over the projecting portions of the North and South walls of the original Nave.

When making excavations at the West End of the South Aisle for underpinning the wall a good many capitals and portions of columns, etc., were found buried under the floor, of Norman date and, amongst these, the altar stone mentioned in the account of the restoration of 1897.

The alteration to the church about the time of the fifteenth century

As so often happened in those days considerable alterations were made to the church about the time of the fifteenth century; and these included the taking down of the East End beyond the chancel arch, with the Apse (if one existed) together with the removal of the North and South walls of the Nave, with the exception of the remaining Norman work, to which attention has already been called, as well as the taking down of the high pitched roof over the building.

A large chancel with a square wall at the East End and a South Aisle, separated from the Nave by an arcade of three pointed arches, with a spacious porch, on the North side, were then added and a Western tower was also built over the Gable of the West end of the original building, of less width than the old Nave underneath.

The Tower was then divided from the Nave by a wall, continued the full width of the church and this also formed the West end of the Aisle, the West End of the Norman Nave, now under the Tower, projecting about 10' in front of the Western wall of the aisle, the building of this division wall, between the Tower and Nave shortened the latter by about 9' 4".

The Tower is not quite square on plan and is carried on three pointed arches, of the same date as the rest of the work at this period, one dividing it from the Nave and the two others supporting the Tower walls over them.

These two arches are built within the outer walls forming the Norman Nave, on account of the reduced width of the Tower and present a curious appearance when seen from the inside of the Tower.

The upper stage of the Tower is finished with a moulded cornice and battlemented parapet and contains four square headed two light windows, with traceried heads over the lights and is set back from the lower stage by a weathering. The Tower walls batter considerably, as seen from the outside. The Tower contains three bells and a sanctus, one of the former being, from its inscription, a pre-Reformation bell, the rest having been cast, or re-cast, in the seventeenth century (see Gloucestershire Notes and Queries vol. I, p. 285).

Large buttresses were added at this time, to support the East wall of the Nave and the chancel arch on each side of the church and there can be little doubt that these replaced pilasters originally built in the same position which were either taken down, or cased in, a smaller buttress was also built a little beyond the middle of the wall below the Tower on the North side.

A flat pitched roof with probably a moulded parapet and cornice, corresponding to that now over the porch and Tower and covered with lead, was also placed over the Nave and, as there was not any clerestory, was no doubt continued so as to form the aisle roof which was probably finished with a battlemented parapet, although there are no traces to be seen of one now.

The pitch of this roof is clearly defined upon the Tower wall inside the church.

There seems reason to suppose the Nave walls may perhaps have been heightened a little, as it was found at the time of the restoration in 1897 that if the new roof then erected had been constructed with the same pitch as indicated by the lines on the Tower it would have finished below the large moulding at the eaves over the Nave and now forming a cornice, on the North side.

This moulding undoubtedly formed the lowest member of the parapet over the Nave roof and corresponded in all probability to that now over the Porch, which has a good moulded parapet and cornice, in character with the Perpendicular work.

As was usually the case, some of the timbers of the original roof were most likely used again, after having been shortened and adapted.

There is nothing to indicate the kind of roof over the chancel at this time, but no doubt it was constructed in the same way, with a flat pitch and parapet, like those over the Nave and Porch.

Generally speaking the Perpendicular work is coarse and heavy in detail, as is often the case and it does not seem to call for more than a few remarks.

The arch mouldings to the Nave arcade consist of two orders, the outer having hollow chamfers, separated by the usual three quarter hollow.

The upper part of the capitals are square edged with a scroll moulding and the neckings to the shafts are plain rounds.

The capitals, shafts and bases are octagonal on Plan and this is somewhat unusual, as the shaft in Perpendicular work is generally round, with an octagonal capital, the upper members of the base being circular and the lower portion octagonal.

The bases to the shafts have annular rolls, sloped off to form elongated hollow chamfers, with a lower member, which was discovered during the restoration work and this has also a hollow chamfer at the top. The three Tower arches are simply chamfered on the edges and these are continued down the jambs and have no capitals or bases.

The mouldings to the entrance arch to the porch are similar to those of the Nave arcade and are continued down to stops, this arch is pointed and has a good hood moulding.

The arch next the church is four centred and is more elaborate in detail and has a square head and moulded hood the spandrel between the head and the arch, being filled with tracery, the moulding in this case are carried down to a stop and consist of an ogee and wide shallow hollow, finished with a double ogee in front, the splay inside the church terminating with a slight hollow on the edge.

The blocked doorway in the South wall of the chancel is pointed and is in character with the rest of the work and has a moulded hood over it, this arch has suffered a good deal of mutilation, at some time or other.

The two three light windows in the South aisle on each side of this doorway are pointed with moulded hoods over these windows, have traceried heads over each light and tracery in the upper divisions and have chamfered mullions and jambs, finished with deep splays inside.

The two light windows on each side of the Porch are square headed, with moulded hoods, the mullions and jambs have the typical ogee mouldings and hollow chamfers on the outside edges, the splays inside finishing with the double ogees. The lights have traceried heads and the subdivisions over are filled with tracery as before.

The two lancet windows in the South chancel wall do not present any characteristic features calling for notice and there seems reason to suppose that the wall in which they are set is more or less of modern date.

The three light East window is modern, copied from the Perpendicular work. The ancient stone Pulpit is octagonal on Plan and the lower portion is divided by small circular mouldings and rests upon a hollow chamfered plinth, the cornice is formed with two rolls and fillet mouldings, divided by a small hollow. The upper stage has some good open panel work, divided by moulded mullions and transoms, with traceried heads, finished square at the top. There are some good moulded and octagonal shaped corbels in the South wall of the aisle and also in the arcade opposite for the support of the roof timbers.

No remains of A Sedilia or Piscina have been discovered so far.

The Present Church

The present church now consists of a Nave, chancel and South aisle, with a Tower built over the Western Gable and a large Porch on the North side.

With the exception of the dressings to the arches and windows, the walls of the church are plastered inside, the external faces of the walls of the Nave, Aisle and Porch are ashlar work, those of the chancel being built in coursed rubble.

The building is very irregular on Plan and no two walls are built at right angles to each other and this is especially noticeable with regard to the chancel, the axis of which inclines about one foot eight inches towards the North; how far this deflection, so often met with in the case of a chancel, may be due to carelessness in setting out the foundations, or for symbolical reasons, is a point which has not yet been satisfactorily determined by the various authorities on such matter.

The average dimensions of the church, taken between the inner walls in the centre of the building are approximately as follows, Nave 39' 2" long by 16' 5" wide, chancel 31' 8" long by 17' 10" wide, aisle 38' long by 6' 10" at the East End and 7' 7" wide at the West End. The width of the Tower, between the two arches on the North and South sides is 8' 2" and the length from West to East 6' 6", the extreme width between the inside faces of the outer walls, from North to South is 16' 6", the full width of the Nave.

The Porch is 9' long by 7' 10" wide. The Chancel floor is raised four steps above the Nave floor level, probably in accordance with the natural slope of the ground.

The East window is filled in with stained glass, representing the crucifixion and that in the North wall of the chancel represents St Peter and St Paul, in memory of the Revd Frederick Biscoe, Vicar from 1837 to 1880.

The Restoration by the Revd Frederick Biscoe in 1839

This work included partial rebuilding of the South wall of the Aisle and the renewing of many parts of the shafts to the Nave arcade, which has been cut away for fixing the pews.

A new East window was inserted in place of a round or square headed one and a modern window over the Pulpit was entirely removed. The top of the old window, at the West End of the Nave, had the tracery renewed, to match the other window, having previously been obliterated when the gallery was put up.

The Western gallery was then taken down and the font was put back in its proper place where it had previously stood near the door, but unfortunately the bowl of the ancient font was accidentally broken and the present one is said to be a copy of it.

The old stone Pulpit had been stowed away in the Tower and was now placed, in its original position, upon the North side of the Nave.

A new floor was laid throughout the church and all the old high square pews were replaced by low open seats and a few years later the flat ceilings were removed.

In 1859 new altar rails were put up and a new altar table was given by the Hon. John Dutton, a Glastonbury chair by Dr. Middleton, a brother of Mrs. Biscoe and a cross was placed over the gable of the chancel by Miss Biscoe, sister of the Vicar.

The Restoration in 1897

The Restoration was begun on Whitsun Monday 1897.

The contract for £720 included all necessary repairs to the stonework, the underpinning of the Tower at the West End and also the West End of the Aisle and at several other points, the rebuilding of the lower stage of the large buttress at the East End of the Nave, the North wall of the Chancel above the plinth level and repairs to the buttress against the North wall of the Tower, including a portion of the wall next to it, which was then in a vary unsafe condition, as well as the upper part of the gable at the East End of the Nave and the rebuilding of the wall of the Aisle at the West End, as well as general repairs to the buttresses and walls where necessary.

Considerable settlements had occurred in all cases where underpinning had to be undertaken.

New copings and crosses were added to the gables of the Nave and Chancel and considerable repairs had to be made on one side of the parapet and to the angle buttresses of the Porch.

The roofs were taken down and substantial new king post roofs were constructed, as far as possible, to the original pitch all the timbers visible being in oak, excepting the boarding and the traceried work over the wall plates. The roofs were covered with stone slabs.

The King and Queen post roofs to the Nave and Chancel, which were removed, were of exceedingly rough design and workmanship and of modern date, every vestige of the ancient roofs having been previously removed, although possibly some of the timbers, may have been re-used here and there in the construction of the modern roofs.

By the exercise of great care, a saving of £32.10.6 was effected on this contract and this sum was included in the additional expenditure upon the subsequent work, bringing the total outlay expended upon the restoration up to £964.11.10.

This additional work comprised new drainage outside the church, levelling the ground in places and re-arrangement of the seating, as well as the removal of all the gravestones embedded in the floors, to a new position in the South Aisle and the lowering of the Nave floor to its original level.

It may be mentioned the Nave floor is considerably below the level of the ground outside, with the exception of that at the West End of the church.

The fifteenth century moulded corbels in the South wall of the Aisle and between the Nave arches, carry the pendent pieces of the new roof and add very much to its appearance.

New wood block floors were laid in the Nave and Chancel and that to the Porch was substantially repaired, the floor to the Aisle being formed with the gravestones being referred to and made up with other paving stones where necessary.

The Sacrarium was faced with encaustic tiles in accordance with the architect's designs and new steps were put under the Chancel arch and Font and the Pulpit was removed to the South side of the Nave.

During the course of the alterations the ancient altar stone was found buried under the Western wall of the Aisle and it was then relaid in the floor of the Sacrarium, so that the altar now stands over it.

The stone measures 9' by 2' 1" and is 9" thick, the upper face has five crosses inscribed upon it, very rudely executed.

Great care was taken to employ only good materials and workmanship and the whole of the works have been very well carried out by the Builder, Mr. W. Mills of Foss Bridge, Northleach, under the supervision and in accordance with the plans and specification of the architect, Mr. Charles Lloyd Tudor M.S.A. of 32 Cambridge Gardens, Notting Hill, London.