

Chapel of the Blessed Trinity, Stonor

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SUMMARY

Recent renovation work provided the opportunity to carry out in-depth building recording at the Chapel of the Blessed Trinity at Stonor in the south Oxfordshire Chilterns. This article presents the findings of the structural analysis and of documentary research in the archive at Stonor House. A new tree-ring date confirms the building's fourteenth-century origins as a family chapel belonging to the locally prominent Stonor family. It is shown that the tower, probably started in the early fifteenth century, was the first major addition, perhaps associated with adjacent accommodation for the six chaplains employed by the Stonor family. The chapel continued in use after the Reformation, used clandestinely for Catholic worship by the recusant Stonors. The authors' detailed study of the roof structure shows that towards the end of the sixteenth century there was a major rebuilding of the chapel roof. The old roof was largely removed, and the four eastern bays were provided with a new crown-post roof which supported a lath-and-plaster ceiling. Finally, in the 1790s, when Catholic places of worship were given legal sanction, the tie-beams were truncated and the crown-posts removed to allow a plaster Gothick vault to be inserted. Large softwood baulks were introduced to support the roof and contain outward pressure on the walls. The central sections of the tie-beams were quartered and reused as purlins to help support the plaster vault.

Stonor Park, now within the modern civil parish of Pishill with Stonor, was part of the extensive ancient parish of Pyrton, in Lewknor hundred, south Oxfordshire.¹ The house, one of the county's most architecturally important buildings, has been the seat of the Stonor family since the Middle Ages.² The house and its wooded grounds lie some distance to the north of the hamlet of Upper Assendon (renamed Stonor in 1896). Pyrton parish formed a long narrow strip of land, running from the clay vale near Great Haseley to the Chiltern Hills. Stonor lies in the Chiltern part of the parish, close to Henley-on-Thames.

The chapel itself (Fig. 1) is situated at grid reference SU 74254 89230, almost seven miles from Pyrton parish church. It lies roughly on a west-east axis to the south-east of the main house (Fig. 2). The chapel site has a distinct slope downwards towards the south-west. During ground works in the 1960s it was found that to obtain a level site, presumably when the chapel was first built, the slope to the north was cut away, and that there is a narrow section of built-up ground to the south.³ Under the south-eastern corner of the chapel is a conglomerate boulder, one of a number of similar stones found at various places in the valley (discussed further below).

A ground floor plan of the house and chapel is shown in Fig. 3, below. This plan is from an analysis of Stonor Park in the 1960s by Dr W.A. Pantin for the Victoria County History.⁴ Pantin recognised that the architectural history of the house was complex, and admitted

¹ L.W. Hepple and A.M. Doggett, 'Stonor: A Chilterns Landscape', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The English Rural Landscape* (2000), p. 267.

² For the Stonor family: E. Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (2009).

³ Personal communication from The Hon. Georgina Stonor.

⁴ *VCH Oxon.* 8, pp. 144–7.



Fig. 1. The Chapel of the Blessed Trinity, Stonor. Photo by David Clark.

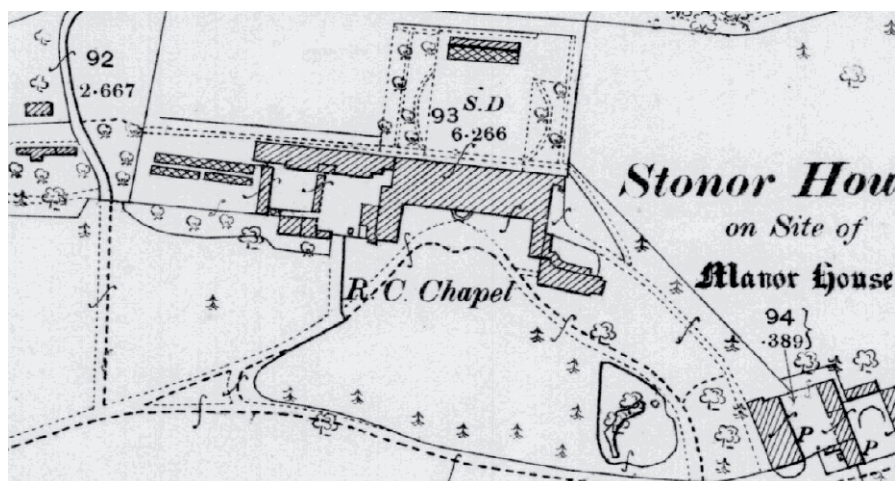


Fig. 2. Extract from 1898 OS map.

that some of his assessment was conjectural. While the results presented here clarify some aspects of the chronology of the chapel, they also raise additional questions, in particular about the tower. This sits against and within the north wall of the chapel near the west end, but is not aligned with it, taking its axis rather from that of the east wall of the house. The 1898 Ordnance Survey map shows a structure of some sort along the north side of the chapel. Before their demolition in the twentieth century there was a boiler house in this location and

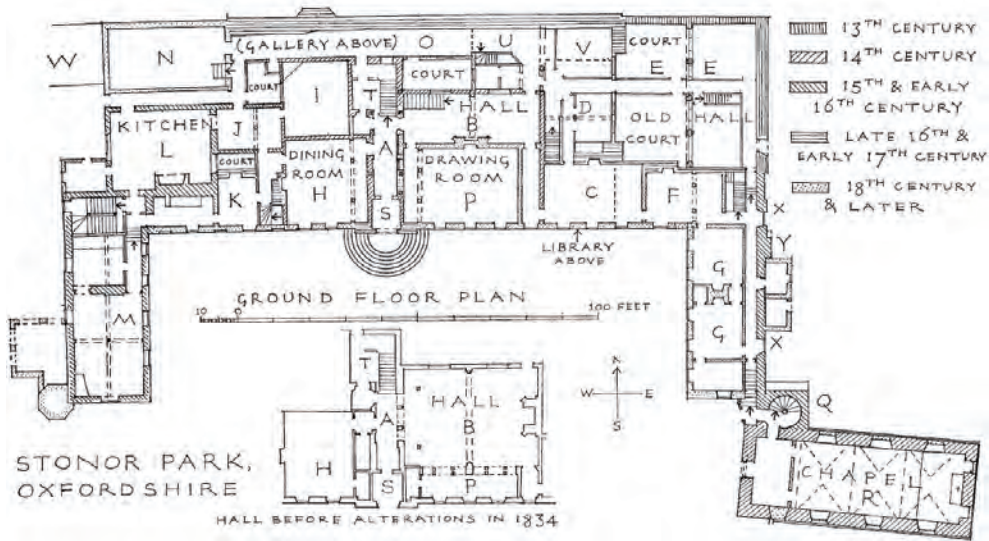


Fig. 3. Ground floor plan (taken from VCH Oxon. 8, p. 144).

a 'cloister' with some buildings known as the priests' houses.⁵ One objective of the recording was to see if any evidence for these survived.

The recording which forms the basis of the present study was confined to those aspects of the building that were visible – and accessible – from 27 November to 11 December 2014. The authors also observed the digging of various trenches for the new drainage system in May 2015.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The nine or ten thousand parish churches in medieval England were supplemented by thousands of free-standing chapels.⁶ These were ecclesiastical buildings that had not achieved the status of parish churches but which had their own separate identity. Some of them fulfilled parochial functions, while others were essentially private, serving for example lay aristocrats, their families and servants. The Stonor chapel seems to have fallen into the latter category. Duffy has noted that in the late Middle Ages among the aristocracy and higher gentry at least 'there were signs of a privatizing tendency, notably the growing number...who secured for themselves the convenience, and the status symbol, of a private chaplain and therefore a private Mass.'⁷ This provision of private chapels impacted on the vested interests of the parochial clergy. In particular the parish rights of burial and marriage were strongly protected from erosion by chapels.⁸ Bishops could give permission for masses to be held in private chapels, and more rarely for weddings and funerals to be celebrated.

Emery has remarked that 'the Thames valley region exhibits a greater number and broader range of domestic chapels than in any other part of the country.'⁹ The main

⁵ The term 'cloister' is that used by the Stonor family to describe the area to the north of the chapel.

⁶ N. Orme, 'Church and Chapel in Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), p. 82.

⁷ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992), p. 131.

⁸ A. Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy and their Organisation in the Later Middle Ages* (1947), p. 123.

⁹ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses in England III, Southern England* (2006), p. 21.



Fig. 4. Chisbury Chapel (Wilts.). Photo by John Steane.

surviving examples are at the Prebendal in Thame (c.1250), Hendred House, East Hendred (c.1255), Broughton Castle (before 1331), Minster Lovell (1430s), Rycote (c.1449), and Stanton Harcourt (before 1470). But perhaps the closest analogy structurally to Stonor chapel is the thirteenth-century chapel of St Martin (Fig. 4) at Chisbury (Wilts.). Also of flint, it is slightly shorter than Stonor (17.7 metres as against 19.6 metres) but exactly the same width (7.9 metres).¹⁰

THE CHAPEL AT STONOR – DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Although the Stonors had been resident in the area since the late twelfth century, a chapel at Stonor was first mentioned in 1331.¹¹ This chapel may have been built around 1300 by Sir Richard Stonor (1250–1314).¹² The present chapel, however, appears to be essentially the work of his son Sir John Stonor (1280–1354). Sir John was, with two intervals, chief justice of the common pleas for twenty-five years, and had the reputation of being a prudent, trustworthy and competent judge. He married a lady named Maud (or Matilda) and they had thirteen children.¹³ Sir John inherited the greater part of the family estates in 1314. In 1349 he enlarged

¹⁰ National Heritage List, no. 1013400.

¹¹ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 175 n. See also R.J. Stonor, *Stonor, A Catholic Sanctuary in the Chilterns from the Fifth Century till Today* (1951), p. 80.

¹² *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 145.

¹³ C.L. Kingsford (ed.), *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290–1483*, Camden 3rd Series, 29–30 (1919), vol. 1, p. xi states that his wife was Maud FitzLewis (b.1289 in Worcester), an attribution supported by P.J. Jefferies in his 'Stonor, Sir John (c.1281–1354)', *ODNB*. Kingsford's edition (and his 1924 *Supplementary Stonor Letters and Papers*) was re-issued as C. Carpenter (ed.), *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290–1483* (1996).

the chapel, using stone and lime, and obtained a licence from the Crown to establish a dwelling for six chaplains to celebrate there.¹⁴

Some doubt has been expressed as to whether Sir John Stonor's aims were fully carried out, particularly in view of the shortage of clergy following the Black Death.¹⁵ The documentary evidence is thin; in 1393 two of the chaplains were William Screyn and William Sherwood, and some eighty years later an account of chapel expenses includes candles, singing, bread and wine, with stipends being paid on Good Friday to Byrde, More, Joye, Fryth, Cooke and Thomas More, who may have been priests.¹⁶ Twenty-five priests are also named in an account of a funeral c.1480, and some of these may have been associated with the chapel at Stonor.¹⁷ One of the priests, Master Edmund, wrote to Sir William Stonor c.1477 and is mentioned in a letter of 1481 as playing a part in a transaction relating to the chapel.¹⁸ For two centuries the chaplains were supported by the income from 300 acres of woodland behind Stonor House. The woods were later seized by Protector Somerset and passed to the dean and canons of St George's Chapel, Windsor.¹⁹

Thomas Stonor, who came of age in 1415, employed 'lez Flemynnges' in 1416–17 for works at Stonor ('pro opere de Stonore') and purchased 200,000 bricks from nearby 'Crockkernende' (Crocker End, in Nettlebed) for £40, paying £15 for carriage to Stonor.²⁰ The Stonor accounts also mention leadwork for a tower – which must therefore have been built and roofed – carried out by Thomas Plomer of Oxford. Pantin felt that that the bricks were 'probably' for the chapel tower.²¹

Valuable information about the family and their house is gained from the collection of documents known as the 'Stonor Letters and Papers'. The documents give a flavour of what Christine Carpenter described as 'the worldliness of the religion endorsed by the consumers: lavish funerals, richly equipped private chapels, expensive tombs, ostentatious christenings.'²² Among the expenses recorded for December 1474 is the following entry: 'on Crystemas Eve y toke Mylis for ye makynge of tapurs for yowr Chapell, iij. d.'²³ There is also mention (in 1475) of service books, including a psalter:

a sawter now in þe keypyng of þe said Johane, perteignynge to þe Chapell of Stonore' and that 'the said Johane shall have thoccupacion of þe Sawter above rehersed during her liff and after deceasse shall leve the same Sawter to þe said William Stonore to thuse of þe Chapell in þe Manoir of Stonore forevermore.'²⁴

In the Middle Ages every chapel had to be licensed and dedicated by the authority of the diocesan bishop, or the pope. Pastoral services, baptisms, marriages, churchings, funerals and burials required further permission, and there are several documentary references showing that these were performed in Stonor chapel before the Reformation. In April 1427, for example, Thomas Stonor obtained from Pope Martin V an indult to have mass celebrated in the family chapel before daybreak.²⁵ At least one funeral, that of Thomas Stonor (d. 1474), was commemorated by a monument in the chapel. This included a recumbent effigy in armour

¹⁴ Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, p. xii; *Cal. Pat. 1348–50*, p. 290.

¹⁵ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 142 n.

¹⁶ Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, no. 146, pp. 151–2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* vol. 2, no. 257, p. 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* vol. 2, nos. 195, 284 (pp. 34, 118).

¹⁹ T. Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists. From Reformation to Emancipation 1534–1829* (2004), pp. 25, 182.

²⁰ TNA, SC 6/1122/15 (Christine Carpenter (ed.), *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290–1483* (1996) follows Kingsford in quoting an incorrect reference). The spellings are from Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, no. 41, p. 29.

²¹ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 145.

²² Carpenter, *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers*, p. 26.

²³ Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, no. 146, p. 152.

²⁴ *Ibid.* no. 157, p. 164.

²⁵ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 118.

with his first wife beside him, and his three sons and four daughters, all kneeling. It was decorated with heraldic shields quartering Stonor with de Ros, Winnard and Kirby, then Brecknock and four quarterings, Kinswall, Paynell, Gobion and Tilly. The tomb was probably defaced by the Roundheads, and Rawlinson (1690–1755) described the remains in 1718, but by the end of the eighteenth century they had been removed.²⁶ The chapel was also used during the funeral of Lady Anne Stonor in 1518, when forty-two priests and six chaplains offered masses there, although the main service and interment was at Pyrton parish church.²⁷

The documents refer occasionally to christenings. For example, there are directions for a christening in the writing of Sir William Stonor, which may relate to the christening of his son in 1482, as follows: 'To lede the chyld my brother Tomas, my brother Rokys. To bere the salt Thomas Lyne, to bere the basun Jon Doyly. To bere the gyftes Edmund Ramsey, Henry Makeney, Jelys Vellysborne.' The document ends with a list of torchbearers, including Morris Estcourt, Christopher Holland, and others.²⁸

Much is known about the rich furnishings of the chapel in the late fifteenth century. A 1474 account of furnishings is headed: 'Thys be the stuffe of þe chapelle of Stonor þe wyche must be left fro Eyur unto Eyur wythyn þe maner of Stonor'. There follows a long list of vestments, altar hangings, crucifixes, images including costly alabaster carvings:

Item j fygure of þe trynite of alabasture. Item j tabulle [table] of alabasture þe storyus of þe passyon of owr lord, þe wych Tabulle Mastres [mistress] Jane Stonor has yeft unto þe chapelle of Stonor wyth many oþyer þynges þerto belongyng.²⁹

These entries doubtless refer to images and retables widely produced by English alabaster carvers. The Trinity, where God the Father holds a cross with the crucified Christ on it, and the Passion, are among the subjects most frequently found.³⁰

Sir Walter Stonor moved to the house in 1534, and carried out building work in the west wing.³¹ But within a few years Henry VIII began his campaign of Dissolution and Reformation which must have been life-changing for the Stonors. The chapel and its fittings are not mentioned in the surviving Edwardian inventories of church goods – the chapel at Stonor may have escaped in the 1540s because the Chantries Acts excluded 'parochial chapels of ease, nor any chapel made or ordained for the ease of people dwelling far from the parish church or such like chapel whereunto no more lands or tenements than the churchyard or a little house and close do belong'.³²

There was a brief respite during the reign of the Catholic Mary (1553–58), when Sir Francis Stonor was knighted, but in 1577 his widow Cicely was assessed for £300 in land and £200 in goods, the largest sum for a Catholic landowner in the county at the time, and was required to pay large fines for recusancy (refusal to attend official church services).³³ However, she established a secret Catholic printing press at Stonor which in 1581 produced Edmund Campion's pamphlet *Decem Rationes*.³⁴ This had major consequences for the Stonors: over a four-week period the house was searched, raided and plundered, members of the family were taken to London, and all the 'massing stuffs' in the chapel were damaged or removed.³⁵

²⁶ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 170.

²⁸ Carpenter, *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers*, no. 358, p. 467.

²⁹ Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, no. 140, pp. 145–7.

³⁰ F. Cheetham, *English Medieval Alabasters* (1984), pp. 296–310 and 244–58 respectively.

³¹ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 216.

³² 37 Hen. VIII, c.4 and 1 Edw. VI, c.14.

³³ A. Davidson, 'Roman Catholicism in Oxfordshire from the late Elizabethan Period to the Civil War (1580–1640)', Bristol University Ph.D. thesis (1970), p. 102.

³⁴ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 174.

³⁵ Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists*, p. 38.

Although none of the family suffered Campion's fate, they were persecuted, imprisoned and fined.

The next time we hear of the chapel is during the Civil War when the Fanes of Wormsley, a few miles to the north, who were Cromwellians, stabled their horses in the chapel during a raid.³⁶ They also smashed the altar and destroyed Thomas Stonor's marble tomb. The hostility towards Catholicism gradually reduced in the eighteenth century and at Stonor a Catholic bishop (Dr Hornyold) was consecrated on 10 February 1752 in the chapel, the only such ceremony to take place in England under the penal laws.³⁷ Confirmations were held in Oxfordshire following the first Catholic Relief Act of 1778. At Stonor no fewer than fifty-two people were confirmed in 1786, compared with twenty-three at Mapledurham (another south Oxfordshire Catholic stronghold).³⁸ In 1794 Thomas Stonor negotiated (with parliamentary sanction) the return of the beech woods which had been given to the canons of Windsor 280 years earlier.³⁹ In the 1790s, a number of French Catholic priests fled the Revolution and Thomas Stonor employed one of them, Fr. Jean-Baptiste Mortuaire, as his chaplain. He served there until his death in 1830.⁴⁰

Works to the Chapel after 1750

Records relating to refurbishment of the chapel from the later eighteenth century survive in the family archive at Stonor. In 1767, William Slemaker of Henley, stonemason, cleaned the altarpiece.⁴¹ Four years later James Brooks deconstructed a stained glass window in the tribune and reset the pieces in the drawing room. Heating was introduced in 1775 when Abraham Buzaglo of London supplied a 'warming machine' for the chapel at a cost of £13 13s.⁴² Between 1796 and 1800, with greater emancipation, Thomas Stonor transformed the interior of the chapel, his uncle having begun the process in the 1750s.⁴³ Thomas sought advice about his renovation of the chapel from his father-in-law Henry Blundell of Ince (Lancs.), and Thomas Weld of Aston near Stone, Staffordshire.⁴⁴ In 1797 Stonor also approached James Thorp of Princes Street, Leicester Square, London about replastering the interior of the chapel.⁴⁵ Letters from Thorp proposing three different schemes with their respective prices are in the Stonor archive.⁴⁶ However, much of the work was carried out by local firms such as that of William Slemaker of Henley and Samuel Kerrod of Friar Street, Reading.⁴⁷ It is not clear who was responsible for supervising the works, as in a letter dated 6 February 1800, Thorp – who was paid £132 2s. 11d. for the plaster work – denied responsibility for a problem with it, writing that, 'the plaster sweating must be from the inhaling of damp air and not from any dampness in the plastering – as the whole of the chapel is on lath work except parts of the splayes of two windows as such must have been dry before the winter.'

William Slemaker also worked on the east window and doorcase. In a letter dated 11 March 1799 he mentions a 'man at east window of chapel 3s. 6d.' and 'chamfered and plaine worke to [the chapel] £1 2s. 2½d., two men two days each taken down mending and settin up the old window £3 12s.' Also: 'a mayson and laborers altray and mendin the chaple doorcase 5s. 6d.' Following this, much labour was expended on the provision of new glass windows: 'Mayson

³⁶ Ibid. p. 110.

³⁷ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 290; *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 175.

³⁸ Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists*, p. 176.

³⁹ 34 George III c.24 (1794); Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists*, p. 182.

⁴¹ Stonor Archive, 11/6, dated 1768.

⁴² Ibid. 153/1/2, dated 1775.

⁴³ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176; papers in Stonor Archive.

⁴⁴ Letter from Weld in Stonor Archive, 153/1/11, dated 1 May 1799.

⁴⁵ H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (2008), p. 1041.

⁴⁶ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176.

⁴⁷ Kerrod was also working on the plaster at nearby Mapledurham House in 1796: *VCH Oxon.* 20, forthcoming.

30 days a cutin the grooves for the sash frames let in bars to hold the stone up letting the irons in to hold the frames in splainin [?] the stones. £5 5s.' The pavement in the sanctuary, too, was renewed 'suppl [supplying] of marble in step and riser and pavement at 5s. 6d. per foot £51 11s. 8½ d.' 'Working the front of the step and polishing [the same] £2 5s.'⁴⁸

Another firm of craftsmen involved in refurbishing the chapel was Jackson and Moser. Their invoice dated 20 September 1799 refers to 'five pieces of Gothic arched railings... £32' and '180 brass cups and bases with an extra framed gate to do with brasses, £3 3s. 4d.'⁴⁹ Further brass cups and bases for the communion and tribune rails are also mentioned. The balustrade is a late eighteenth-century Gothic ironwork design by Gillow and is identical to that of the altar rail and so the tribune is also part of the late eighteenth-century work.⁵⁰

The most significant structural work done in the chapel during this campaign was the vaulting. Samuel Kerrod recalls particulars of work to be done in a letter of 3 September 1796:

The Ceiling of the Chapell to be floated and set fear [fair] with reed mouldings and the walls to be stucco and a impost round the enriched part not included. To the Sakecuresey [sanctuary or sacristy?] the ceiling to be floated and set fear the wall to be stuccod all the above to be don leabour only for the sum of Thourty nine pounds nine shillings and sevenpence.⁵¹

Other work was also being done on the structure of the chapel. A letter dated 26 February 1801 from William Slemaker refers to 'two men a sawin and workin the [illegible] on the end of the chapel 7s.' Further work billed in 1814 included 'to takin down ... for jointing clamping ... the altar steps, to work in floring, setting the steps at the chapel, to workin up the pavement, to jointing the same.'

Thomas Stonor had apparently thought of filling the windows with a patchwork of fragments of coloured glass – Bishop Milner had written to him in 1792 expressing his desire 'to see your venerable chapel filled up and adorned with the painted glass you are possessed of. But Stonor went his own way and had new windows made by Francis Eginton (1737–1805), the gift of Henry Blundell, who had recommended him. But things did not go smoothly with this contractor either – Eginton had measured the window openings before they were enlarged, so he had to alter the completed windows after manufacture so that they fitted. Eginton admitted the mistake was his and did not charge for the alteration. The largest glass is the *Salvator Mundi* in the east window, signed and dated 1799, after a painting by Carlo Dolci at Burghley House – Blundell, however, had suggested a Gloria.⁵²

Little was recorded about the building in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century, but it seems that no major changes were made at that time. In 1941 a German bomb landed near the rear of the chapel, damaging the east and side windows.⁵³ In 1948 a structure in the traditional location of the 'priests' houses' – or the 'cloister' – still stood, 'with six rooms over it' at the east end of the house.⁵⁴ It was in the 1950s, some 150 years since the previous restoration, that the next campaign of repairs and renovations took place. The work was entrusted to Messrs Chesterton and Sons of 34 Kensington Square, London, architects and chartered surveyors. Those mainly involved were John Hannay, S. Chesterton and a Mr Pilgrim. They used the services of a local contractor, A. Brown and Sons of Nettlebed. The work can be followed in a series of letters, specifications and invoices in the Stonor archive

⁴⁸ Invoice from Slemaker in Stonor Archive, 214/17, covering various dates to 1 Oct. 1799.

⁴⁹ Stonor Archive, Account no. 236. The company's factory was in Soho, London.

⁵⁰ Georgina Stonor, personal communication; *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176 attributes the altar rails to Eginton.

⁵¹ Stonor Archive, 152/5, dated 3 September 1796.

⁵² *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176. Slemaker's men worked on the windows and the altar from 1798 to 1799: Stonor Archive, 214/17) and information from Georgina Stonor.

⁵³ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176 and info. from Georgina Stonor.

⁵⁴ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 88.

dating from 1956. Brown sent an estimate for concreting and works 'to the roof and walls' to be done for about £2,000. Chesterton wrote to Major Sherman Stonor (later the 6th Baron Camoys) on 28 September 1956 saying he thought the estimate 'a little on the high side', although 'it does include for such things as a small amount of reinforcement in certain weak areas, trimming round the crypt entrance'.⁵⁵ This is the first mention of the existence of a crypt – now marked by a ledger stone near the east end of the chapel.

The next task in 1956 was the provision of a concrete foundation floor in preparation for, but not including, a bituminous damp-proof membrane, screed and marble and wood block finish. The earlier, now rotten, timber floor – resting on soft earth – was removed in this process. It was also found that the ground was chalk on the north side, with a thin earth layer on top, while to the south the earth seemed to have been built up to a greater depth. A number of tiles from the medieval floor were found in situ and can be seen in a showcase in the house.⁵⁶ The delivery of medieval paving tiles from Crocker End to All Souls College, Oxford in 1442 suggests a production centre local to Stonor.⁵⁷ Some of the Stonor tiles have design of a fleur-de-lys with a quatrefoil forming a roundel when four tiles are placed together – similar to those found at Barentin's Manor in Chalgrove.⁵⁸

In 1956 part of the 'priests' houses' against the north wall of the chapel were removed, leaving only a boiler house at the north elevation. The sacristy was removed from the east end and the doors closed with concrete blockwork and converted to cupboards. The lower parts of the walls were replastered.⁵⁹

The documentation contains a description of other works including the careful removal of all that remained of the original lath and plaster ceiling, attached to collars and rafter soffits and a danger in the roof space.⁶⁰ Since a substantial part of this ceiling (above the present vaulting) seems to remain, this work was evidently not carried out in full. New central heating and electric wiring were installed, the wall plaster was replaced, and the whole interior of the chapel was redecorated. Sherman Stonor's wife, Jeanne, advised by John Piper and Osbert Lancaster, supervised the redecoration, which was aimed at reproducing the colours of the eighteenth-century scheme. The stained glass was restored by George and Dennis King of Norwich. Repairs were carried out to the altar and the pews were repainted. The boiler house appears to have survived until 1976 at least – it is on a plan submitted in support of a planning application in that year.⁶¹

CARTOGRAPHIC AND ILLUSTRATIVE EVIDENCE FOR THE CHAPEL

The map evidence for the chapel at Stonor is largely unhelpful. A map of the Stonor estate made in 1725 which hangs in Stonor Park shows the house clearly, but the chapel and related buildings are not recognisable because of the angle of view. The early Ordnance Survey maps of the late nineteenth century (Fig. 2) show an amorphous structure to the north of the chapel, while later editions delineate individual buildings – the 'priests' house' and boiler house – also known from photographs (see below).

A more important piece of evidence for the chapel and tower is a painting of the house dating from 1687 (Fig. 5). The key elements for the present study are that the west end of the chapel seems similar to that visible today – with central doorway, Decorated window, string

⁵⁵ Letter in the Stonor Archive.

⁵⁶ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176.

⁵⁷ E. Eames, *Medieval Tiles: A Handbook* (1968), pp. 16–21; J. Wight, *Medieval Floor Tiles* (1975), pp. 124–8; S. Walker (ed.), *Building Accounts of All Souls College Oxford 1438–1443*, OHS, ns, 42 (2010), p. 258; M. Mellor, personal communication.

⁵⁸ A variant of no. LXXIX in L. Haberly, *Medieval English Pavingtiles* (1934).

⁵⁹ The date is from photographs in the Stonor Archive.

⁶⁰ Stonor Archive, 5.2.14.

⁶¹ SODC planning application P76/SO442/LB.

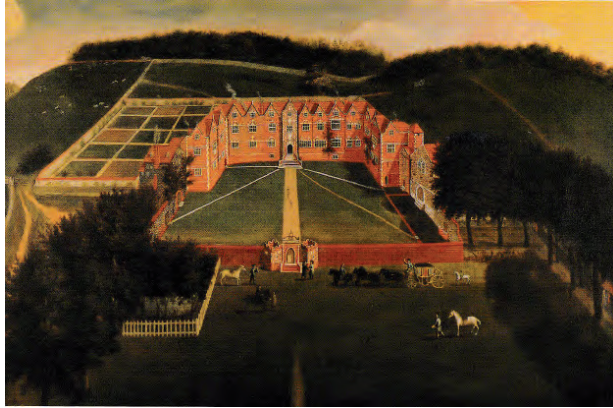


Fig. 5. *Painting of Stonor Park 1687 (copyright Stonor Enterprises).*



Fig. 6. *Stonor Park by J.P. Neale (1818).*

course and quoins. The tower has white quoins, a small south window to the upper floor, but no clock or other openings to south or west. The garden wall, however, is shown as being in line with the west end of the chapel. A painting in the Stonor archive by an unknown artist shows the chapel in 1762, before the 1790s work was carried out. The tower is shown as having a clock, and a bell-cote. J.P. Neale's watercolour painting of 1818 shows the tower with a pyramidal roof and a weathervane (Fig. 6).⁶²

⁶² J.P. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland*, vol. 3 (1820), p. 296.

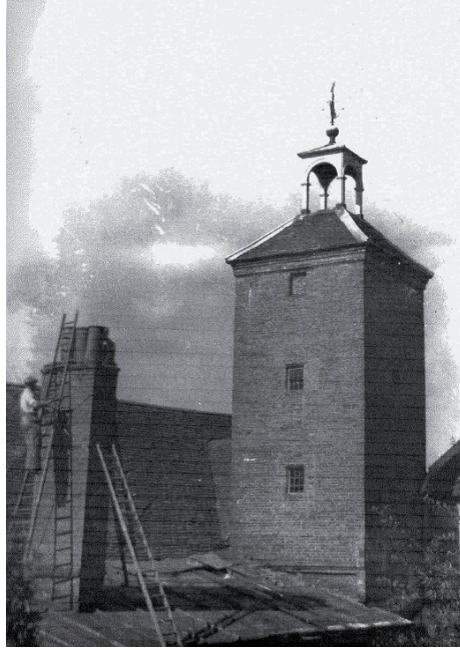


Fig. 7. Mr Sherfield on the stack at the 'priests' houses', 1956–57 (copyright Stonor Settlement Trust).



Fig. 8. View from the north-east following demolitions in 1959–60 (copyright Stonor Settlement Trust).

A number of photographs survive showing the buildings to the north of the chapel before their demolition in the 1950s. They clearly had a shallow pitched lean-to roof and a tall brick stack with at least three flues (Fig. 7) suggesting domestic use. By 1959/60 when Fig. 8 was taken, the demolition was complete, apart from a structure that was retained as a boiler house.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPEL

The plan of the chapel (Fig. 3) is broadly rectangular, 19.63 metres (63 feet 9½ inches) long and 7.93 metres (25 feet 9 inches) wide at the east end and slightly narrower (7.85 metres (25 feet 6 inches)) across the west. The walls are mainly of flint. The west elevation has generally well-shaped knapped flintwork with little visible mortar (Fig. 1). There are large shelly limestone quoins to the corners to north and south. Also in the gable, and only south of the doorway, is a row of ashlar limestone blocks. There is a limestone string-course across the length of the gable above the apex of the doorway. The doorway itself has a two-centred arch with label and moulded jambs in a variety of stones, some shelly limestone, some orangey limestone.

The knapping of the flint of the south elevation is coarser than at the west gable. The string course continues along the south and about half way between it and ground level is a further row of ashlar stonework, delineating the top of a plinth, which extends for all but the final 2.75 metres (9 feet) of the south elevation (Fig. 1). At the junction is a vertical area of broken stone and brick, and at the west end a row of ashlar limestone blocks at the lower level corresponding to those on the west gable.

The east elevation has a string course and ashlar limestone blocks near ground level. Some of the quoins to the north-east have been replaced by concrete. Replacement stones in the string-course now very tentatively indicate the positions of two doorways that gave access from the chapel to a sacristy built against the east wall and which was removed in 1956–7.

The north elevation has some red tiles inserted into the flintwork. Some of these are laid in courses – either repairs or as ‘spreaders’ to ensure the stability of the flint above – while some others have been arranged in a square feature possibly delineating a putlog hole.⁶³ The string course continues along the north elevation, but the westernmost section (some 6 feet in length) has been broken away.⁶⁴ At the base of the wall is a plinth – the eastern half of modern brick, the western mostly flint. Above this is a course of ashlar limestone blocks. Although internally (see below) there are three large splayed window-like reveals along the north wall, no evidence for these could be detected in the external flintwork.⁶⁵

Interior

Entry to the chapel is via the west doorway and internally from the house and tower by a further opening through the north wall and in which there is an iron gate.⁶⁶ These open to a vestibule with a gallery – the tribune – above. The floor of the vestibule is at the external ground level and has a covering of plain square polychrome tiles. A late eighteenth-century burial vault lies along the southern edge.⁶⁷ A partition wall 316 cm (10 feet 4½ inches) from the internal surface of the west gable separates the vestibule from the nave of the chapel and there are three steps up to each of two doorways into the nave. The doors and frames are in a Gothick style, dating from the remodelling of the chapel by Thomas Stonor in c.1796–1800.⁶⁸

Apart from a low step at the altar rail, there is no architectural differentiation in plan or

⁶³ Putlog holes indicate the positions of horizontal timbers used for supporting the scaffolding used during construction of the wall. As there is only one example of this feature here, it was probably for some other purpose – possibly the flue from Buzaglo’s stove.

⁶⁴ The ‘priests’ houses’ stood against this wall and extended to the east wall of the tower.

⁶⁵ They match in size and position the windows created in the south wall in 1797–99, and they are blind due to the presence of external structures. We have now no means of telling whether or not these structures were present in 1797–99, and hence whether they were in fact windows at one time.

⁶⁶ A former garden gate, inserted in 1978.

⁶⁷ Personal communication from Georgina Stonor.

⁶⁸ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176; J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England – Oxfordshire* (1974), p. 794; Colvin, *Dictionary*, p. 1041.



Fig. 9. Nave and sanctuary. Photo by John Steane.

decoration between nave and chancel/sanctuary (Fig. 9). The space is articulated by five bays of spindly plaster rib-vaulting, the ribs terminating in paired cherubs, apart from those in the western bay, which die away into the stonework of the west gable wall.

In each of the three eastern bays are tall splayed reveals; those to the north are blind, while those to the south are glazed. Before the 2015 restoration the floor was concrete, covered with modern laminate imitating marble tiles. At the east the sanctuary has black and white Belgian marble tiles laid in a chequerboard pattern. The altar stands on a further dais 19 cm (7½ inches) high, centrally against the east wall.

The altar has an *antique verde* marble frontal with a relief sculpture of the *Agnus Dei*, grey marble panels either side, and a top of white Sicilian marble – supplied by Bartlett and Purnell of London – supported by a group of four columns at each front corner. The altar was the gift of Henry Blundell of Ince, a collector of marble, in 1797 on the marriage of his daughter,

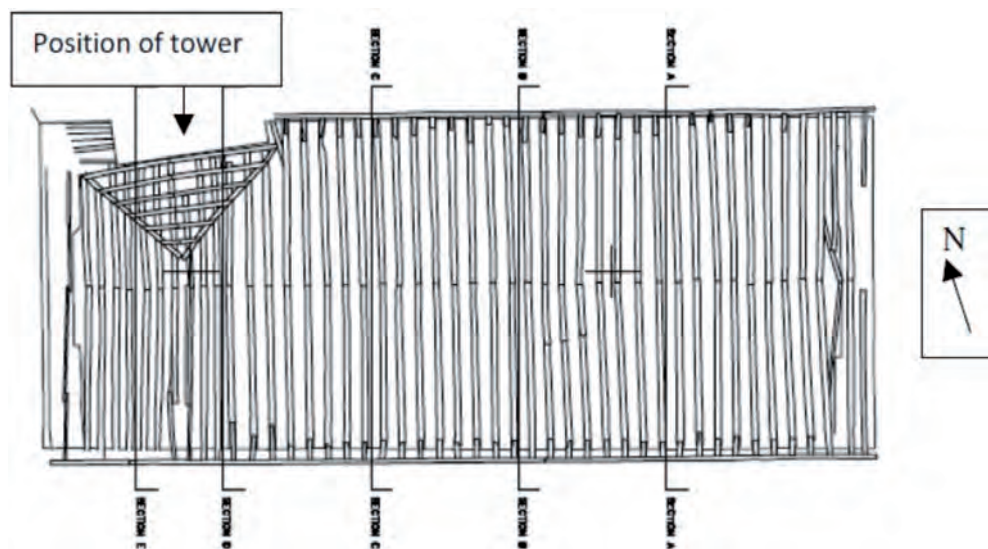


Fig. 10. Chapel roof plan (copyright Warner Land Surveys, 2014).

Catherine, to Thomas Stonor (1766–1831).⁶⁹ It is understood that portions of a medieval altar remain in situ within the present marble structure.⁷⁰

In the east wall, to either side of the altar are two identical Gothick doorways, similar in design to those at the entrance, but with the upper quatrefoil in wood rather than glass. Both now open to cupboards, but while the right-hand (south) one is featureless, inside the north cupboard are elements of a moulded timber doorframe, apparently in situ. The opening has been filled in by cement blocks which have been splayed to reveal the timber frame.⁷¹

The stained glass consists of an east window (*Salvator Mundi*) by Francis Eginton and others depicting the four Doctors of the Church (Augustine, Jerome, Bede and Gregory). The three surviving windows in the nave (also by Eginton) represent the first three of these, copied from pictures in Ince Blundell. The west window depicting St Gregory is Victorian.

The tribune is entered through a doorway at first floor level in the north wall from a corridor that also serves the east wing of the house.

Roof Structure

The plan of the roof timbers is shown in Figure 10. There are forty-five rafter pairs, the closely spaced eleven pairs at the west are scissor-braced, while the thirty-four pairs to the east are the surviving elements of a crown-post roof (Fig. 11).⁷²

Crown-Post Roof Figure 12 shows one of the principal-rafter trusses.⁷³ As with all the other trusses, the tie-beam has been truncated for the insertion of softwood structures to hold up

⁶⁹ *VCH Oxon.* 8, p. 176; Stonor Archive; *The antique verde marble* came from Egypt (chapel leaflet).

⁷⁰ Personal communication from Georgina Stonor.

⁷¹ Before the renovations of the 1950s the left hand door led to a sacristy at the east end of the chapel. The right-hand door was inserted in 1797 as a confessional aperture. A structure remained at the east until 1956 when a sacristy was created in the east wing of the house. Personal communication from Lord Camoys and Georgina Stonor.

⁷² Two additional rafter pairs sat on the western stone gable wall.

⁷³ It should be noted that this is a drawing produced by modern surveying equipment; the truncated collar that survived in this truss was in fact tenoned into the principal rafter.



Fig. 11. Crown-post roof from west. Photo by David Clark.

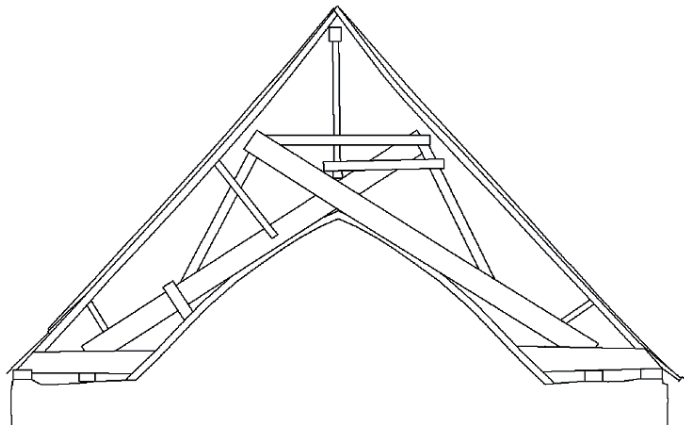


Fig. 12. Truss II (rafter pair 11) (copyright Warner Land Surveys, 2014).

the present plaster vault. The residual stubs show that the beams were some $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide by 11 inches deep and had 3 inch chamfers with lamb's-tongue stops along their lower edges. All their collars had also been removed – apart from half of that at truss II (rafter pair 11, numbered from the east). In the soffit of this collar is a mortice for a crown-post brace.

The principal rafters are 18 feet 6 inches long from tie-beam to apex and are of varying widths, from $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 6 inches, with depths from $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches. They were

converted using both axes and saws, the latter used in a pit as the sawmarks are broadly perpendicular to the face of the rafters. Each apex has a bridled joint pegged from the west.

The principal-rafter trusses I–V (rafter pairs 3, 11, 19, 27 and 35 respectively) delineate four equal bays, each with seven common rafters. Trusses I, III and IV are fair-faced to the east, but pegged from the west. They have chisel-stamped assembly marks, apart from the easternmost (I), which is un-numbered.

The crown plate survives (see the centre of Fig. 11), with empty mortices in the soffit and two peg-holes for the braces to the crown-posts. Parts of the braces survive within some of the mortices, indicating that they had been used. The plate itself consists of three lengths joined by face-lapped scarf joints with full-length tongue-and-groove, square vertical abutments and two edge pegs. These were noted between rafters 13 and 14 and at 26 where it was pegged through the collar. This joint has been found at Canterbury Cathedral (c.1455), the Long Gallery at Abingdon Abbey (1455), and the top plates of the great barn at Harmondsworth (1426).⁷⁴

The principal rafter truss V, however, includes a rafter pair (35) that had been part of a scissor-braced roof (see below) – the upper mortice for a scissor-brace survives. Part of the tie-beam for this truss also survives on the south. Each side of the roof has a pair of wall-plates, originally 17 inches to 19 inches apart, supported on the tops of the chapel walls and formed from lengths of timbers joined using a face-lapped scarf identical to that in the crown plate (see above).

There is a splayed scarf joint in the outer north wallplate some three feet to the east of its point of entry into the tower brickwork, through a crudely broken opening. It is truncated seven inches into the tower brickwork. Between the wall-plates are short ties (17–19 inches long) with chiselled assembly marks, tenoned into the plates. Movement in the roof has caused these to break apart, with gaps of between 1½ in to 4 inches. Timber ties have been nailed across the wall-plates to prevent this movement from spreading; iron ties are also used to supplement these in places (Fig. 13).

There are seven common rafters in each bay, set at 17–18 inch centres. They are of a variety of sizes (5 inches to 6 inches wide and 3 inches to 4 inches deep) with pit-sawing and axing both in evidence. Apexes are bridled and pegged from the west indicating that the roof was built starting from the east. The feet of the rafters are set into angled sockets in the outer wall-plates.

Most of the common rafters are numbered, with chisel-stamped assembly marks on the soffit of the timbers a short distance below the apex. Each rafter of a pair is numbered identically – though in ‘mirror-image’ (N4 has IIV while S4 has VII). The rafter pairs were erected in sequential groups but in the ‘wrong’ order in the first three bays. Thus from east to west in bay 1 they run from 7 (VII) to 1; in bay 2 from 21 to 15 and in bay 3 from 14 to 8.

All the common rafter pairs have surviving collars, but only some of these are numbered. Some are pegged from the east but most from the west. Some numbers are on the west face others on the east. The collars vary hugely in width: no. 5 was 5½ inches wide while no. 6 was only 3½ inches.

All the rafters had softwood furring pieces of varying thickness with stain marks from wrought iron nails on the upper surfaces; beneath the furring pieces were some fragments of earlier laths. Each rafter also had an oak sprocket nailed on at its lower end to provide additional overhang for the roof at the eaves. There were tile laths underneath some of these sprockets, indicating that they were secondary features of the roof.

All the rafter pairs have ashlar pieces to the inner wall-plate. These are tenoned into the plate (but have no pegs) and are nailed to the rafter. They support laths for a plaster ceiling

⁷⁴ C. Hewett, *English Historic Carpentry* (1980), pp. 197, 269, fig. 180; OBR report 105; *Vernacular Architecture*, 24 (1993), p. 52 and 44 (2013), p. 104; E. Impey, *The Great Barn of 1425–27 at Harmondsworth, Middlesex* (2017), p. 30.

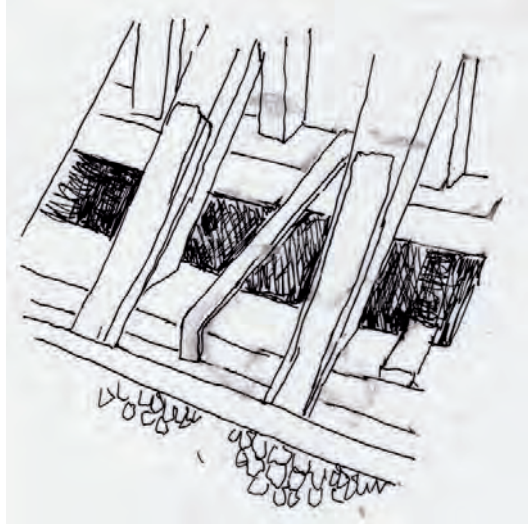


Fig. 13. Iron tie between rafters N16 and N17. Drawing by John Steane.

beneath the crown-post roof structure. They must, however, be primary otherwise the inner wall-plate has no purpose. One of the ashlar pieces on the north side of the roof (at N5) has a series of burn marks.⁷⁵ Such marks have been studied in detail and experiments have shown they are a deliberate application of fire to a timber. The reason for this is a matter of conjecture, but likely to relate to the superstitions prevalent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – as ‘sympathetic magic’, either for warding off evil spirits or, more likely here, to prevent damaging fires.⁷⁶

As noted above, although there was a truncated tie-beam at truss V, it was not set on the wall-plates of the crown-post roof, but in a notch in a slightly lower wall-plate to the west. The dendrochronology (see below) showed that this was a replacement of 1517. The principal rafter was placed centrally on the tie-beam – not to the eastern face – and there was no visible assembly mark. The rafters at truss V had been part of the scissor-braced roof at the west end of the chapel. Both had grooves down their east faces and an empty mortice (and peg) for the missing scissor-brace. The position of the northern rafter has also been altered, since its foot rests on an inserted softwood plank somewhat to the south of the tower, rather than on the wall-plate (or its continuation). As with the other principal rafter trusses, truss V (Fig. 14) has been largely replaced by a softwood insertion to support the 1790s vault.

Scissor-Braced Trusses We turn now to the scissor-braced trusses at the west end of the roof, of which nine complete trusses (37–45) and two incomplete ones (35 and 36) survive (Fig. 15). At 14½-inch centres, these trusses are more closely spaced than those in the crown-post roof. The scissor-braces are lapped and pegged – although not consistently in the same direction – and tenoned into the rafters.

None of the rafters associated with the scissor-braces on the north roof slope has assembly marks and all are smoothly finished with sharp arrises. Both saw and axe marks are visible. There were no assembly marks visible on the scissor-braces. The rafters on the south roof slope, however, have a very interesting set of marks. Some were very lightly done while

⁷⁵ These are tear-drop shaped taper marks, but here most overlap to create a long section of burnt wood.

⁷⁶ J. Dean and N. Hill, ‘Burn Marks on Buildings: Accidental or Deliberate?’, *Vernacular Architecture*, 45 (2014), pp. 1–15.



Fig. 14. Truss V – crown plate in foreground. Photo by David Clark.



Fig. 15. Scissor-braces from east. Photo by David Clark.



Fig. 16. Assembly mark on rafter S39. Photo by David Clark.

others were stronger, as can be seen in the example in Figure 16. In both cases a race knife was used.

There are insufficient survivals to determine the nature of the numbering system, or the significance of the scribed circles associated with some of the numbers. For example, Figure 16 shows rafter no. S39 with what appears to be 29 (XXVIII) plus a detached circle. Tags appear on some of the numbers, probably indicating the side of the roof at which the rafter was to be installed. The collection of marks suggests that many of the rafters of the scissor-braced section of the roof may not be in their original positions. On the other hand an in situ plank from a timber ceiling survives in the grooves of S44 and S45 (Fig. 17), which must therefore also be in situ. The highest number appeared to be 34 (S45) indicating that, whether reused or not, they came from a much longer roof than the surviving section at the west end of the chapel.

A detailed study was made of the grooves for ceiling planks along the faces of the scissor-braces and common rafters. The key result was that none of the rafters on the north roof slope (apart from N35, the principal rafter of truss V) had any grooves. This is consistent with the lack of assembly marks and shows that these were not part of the original scissor-braced roof. This was confirmed by the dendrochronology (see below).

Some of the rafters in this part of the roof have 'rafter holes', the same size as peg holes but generally only about 1 inch deep, and usually associated with the use of a jig or template on to which the rafters were fitted so that they could be cut identically. They were found near the feet of S40 and S41 to S45, and near the scissor-brace mortice on N38 and N41.

The ceiling plank (Fig. 17) was assessed by Dr D.W.H. Miles of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory as being Baltic oak, but was undateable. It appeared to have some sort of yellow ochre coating, but there was no evidence of a decorative scheme such as survives in the Lady



Fig. 17. Ceiling plank at west end of south slope. Photo by David Clark.



Fig. 18. Baltic timber marks at truss IV (rafter N27). Photo by David Clark.

Chapel at St Helen's church, Abingdon, where the painted panels of Baltic oak have been dated to c.1394.⁷⁷

Under the joints of the scissor-braces is a longitudinal timber, the east end of which is visible in Figure 14, cradled by the inserted softwood structure. It seems to have been truncated, having been sawn through at a peg hole. The other end is supported by a bracket pegged into a short post resting on a stone corbel in the west wall of the chapel. Half way along the length of this timber is a long mortice with two pegs with the west slope angled as for a brace towards the east. This timber would not be expected in a fourteenth-century scissor-braced roof, yet it has been shaped to fit neatly into the roof structure, and the corbel-and-bracket arrangement seems primary – and coloured yellow like the plank. Thus it was performing the same function as a crown plate – to prevent racking of the scissor-braced trusses – although it was not pegged into them. We return to this in the discussion section below.

The timbers at the northern roof frame had been altered and repaired. These are considered separately below following the section on the tower itself.

Softwood Trusses for the Vault As indicated above, the tie-beams of the crown-post roof were truncated in order to create a new plaster vault in the 1790s. Thereafter they acted as hammer-beams supporting scissor-braced softwood trusses from which the vault framework was suspended. Each of these new trusses comprises two large straight baulks of softwood half-lapped into notches in the tie-beams and held by four iron spikes.

A number of the baulks have distinctive Baltic timber marks (Fig. 18), one with the star-

⁷⁷ *Vernacular Architecture*, 23 (1992), p. 53.



Fig. 19. Purlin in Bay 2 south with struts supporting the ribs of the plaster vault below. Photo by David Clark.

shaped symbol of Danzig.⁷⁸ They were lapped at the crossing point and fixed together with long bolts. A further horizontal timber was then bolted across the upper parts of the scissor-braces to assist in reducing the possibility of spreading.⁷⁹ The purpose of these scissor-braces was partly to support the crown plate following removal of the crown posts, but also to support a tier of purlins on each side, from which the short vertical timbers supporting the Gothick vault were nailed (Fig. 19). The ribs of the vault are lapped and nailed at their apexes.

The purlins in bay 5 had come from completely different contexts, but the other eight seem to have been the product of quartering the sawn-out sections of the tie-beams from the crown-post roof. The chamfers were the same size and the half mortices (Fig. 19) seem to be the seatings for crown posts. The measurements also show that this is a possibility for at least four of the purlins. The gap between the truncated ends of the tie-beam at truss I is 4.93 metres and the lengths of the purlins were 3.36 metres to 3.39 metres.

Ceilings The pre-1790s ceiling survivals – one of timber and two of plaster – also hold some clues as to the dates and phases of the chapel roof. We have already noted above that the ashlar pieces and underside of the collars in the eastern (crown-post) roof supported a plaster ceiling. This ceiling left the crown plate (and presumably the crown posts) exposed but it seems likely

⁷⁸ T. Collins, 'Baltic Timber Marks: A Study of Use and Meaning in British Historic Buildings and Development of a Recording Methodology', dissertation for M.St. in Building History, University of Cambridge (2015).

⁷⁹ These may be a later addition when it was realised that the effect of the process to this point was to push the chapel walls outwards.

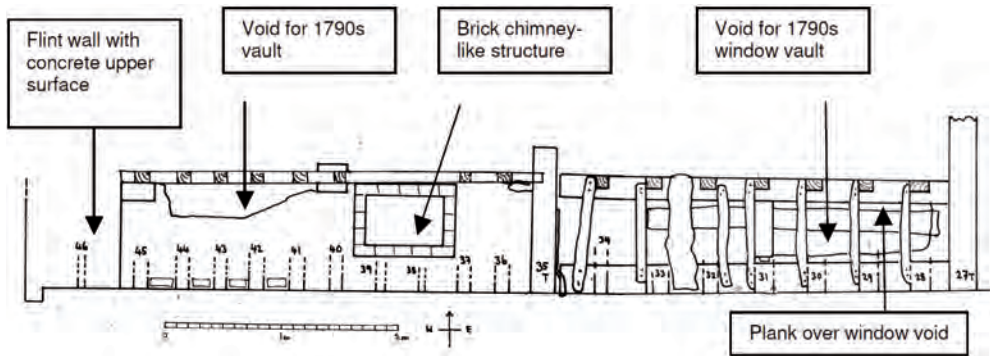


Fig. 20. Plan of west end of south wall measured at the wall-plates. David Clark.

that, given the relatively poor quality of the other timbers and the uneven carpentry, the roof was intended to be ceiled when first built. The plaster was of varying thickness, where visible mostly a grainy fawn coloured sand with reddish cow-hair and a finer white skim on the surface. It was supported on 1-inch wide riven oak laths.

There was also a lath-and-plaster ceiling beneath the scissor-braces at the west end of the chapel roof – the one that should have been removed in the 1950s (see above). The ceiling under the scissor-bracing is clearly later than the ceiling of oak planks but probably of a different date from that under the crown-post roof because the scissor-braces were set in an alignment consistent with the changed position of N35. At the tower, the plaster was applied directly to the brickwork.

South Wall, West End In order to understand the development of the west end of the chapel measurements were taken at the level of the wall-plate. Figure 20 shows the main features recorded.

The numbering of the rafters follows that used elsewhere in this report. The following features were noted:

Wall-plates: between rafters S45 and Truss V (S35) there was a waney timber wall-plate some 5½ inches to 6 inches deep supporting the rafters and some loose bricks. The truncated tie-beam at truss V sat in a notch on this wall-plate. The wall-plate supporting rafters S3 to S34 (and shown in Fig. 20) was at a higher level and terminated just before S35, to which it was attached by means of a twisted iron strap as shown. The tie-beam at Truss IV (S27) sat on top of this wall-plate.

The western part of the roof had an inner wall-plate as shown in Figure 20, also truncated at Truss V. The gap between inner and outer wall-plates was slightly greater at the west end than towards the east. This movement had caused the stub tie shown beneath rafter S31 to spring from its mortice in the outer wall-plate. The ashlar piece to rafter S36 had a groove down one side suggesting it was part of one of the scissor-braces described above.

Voids The south wall of the chapel appeared to have been opened up slightly at the west end to accommodate the 1790s plaster vault (Fig. 20). A brick structure had been inserted within the wall. There were some signs of blackening but in general the inner surfaces were clean. It appeared to be full of debris, mostly straw, but tile fragments were also visible. Between rafters S28 and S31 was a further void, spanned by a long plank, created to allow the plaster vaulting to extend over the south wall window below.

General

The position of the external wall scar and change in level of the ashlar blocks at the south elevation are 2.75 metres (9 feet) from the west end of the building, but Figure 20 above shows that there was no corresponding feature (near rafter S39) that might help in their interpretation. Indeed at eaves level the wall appeared to be uniform and without alteration at this end of the building.

The archaeology of the drainage channel – see below – confirmed that the garden wall was not aligned with the west end of the chapel, and so the obvious conclusion is that the change in level of the ashlar and the stub wall are primary features of the chapel south wall.

THE TOWER

The tower is built against and into the north wall of the chapel, a short distance from the west wall (see above, Figs. 3 and 10). It is aligned with the walls of the house, not those of the chapel. The tower has a square plan and five distinct levels, two within the base and three above. Inside is a newel staircase and at the top is a bell cupola above a tetrahedral roof. These are described in detail below. Firstly, however, it is necessary to examine the exterior.

The tower is shown from the north-east in Figures 21 and 22, the latter a simplified sketch with the various levels labelled. The upper three floors (T2–T4 in Fig. 22) are corbelled out to the east over the lower ones. To the north is a sloping buttress with a straight-joint to the main tower structure. The main building material is brick, but each elevation has its individual characteristics, described in turn.

East Elevation

The lower section of 85 brick courses (TG and T1) is broadly in English Bond (one row of stretchers and one of headers) with red and grey bricks laid with no particular pattern in the colours used. The bricks showed a considerable variation in size, from lengths of 7 inches to 9 inches, widths of 3 inches to 4½ inches and depths of 1¾ inches to 2¼ inches. In courses 9 and 10 below the corbelling there was a blocked putlog hole. The brickwork of the buttress is more regular, deeper and smoother than that in the main tower structure, and appeared to be eighteenth- or nineteenth-century in date.

Residual lime wash on the lower courses indicates the presence of the buildings formerly built against the tower (Figs. 7 and 8 above). Midway between ground level and the corbelling is disturbed brickwork suggesting a blocked lancet. The bricks in the blocking are relatively modern but the opening has no sill or proper arched head – three large bricks and some smaller fragments are crudely set in at the head to suggest an arch. Neither are there any ‘queen closers’ or other brickwork details consistent with a primary opening.

The brickwork in the section above the corbelling (T2) is similar to that below – both red and black bricks laid in English Bond. Queen closers are used at the corners, and the lower section is battered outwards. Above the twenty-first course above the corbelling are two straight-joints either side of a small square window that extends up to courses 39/40. These are the jambs of a formerly much larger opening – the queen closer bricks either side appear to be primary. This may have had an arched head, as the brickwork above is irregular and disturbed.

At course 46 above the corbelling (T3), the brickwork of the tower changes in character. Although similar sizes of bricks and mortar thicknesses are used, those above this course are laid without the regularity of the English Bond below. At this level there are straight-joints suggesting a blocked doorway (into which a later square window has been inserted) and a blocked square window to the right.

At level T4 is a further blocked window just under the eaves with a timber lintel in situ. The infill is recessed within the former opening, allowing the grooves for leaded glass to be seen at both sides. Above are further brick corbelling courses supporting the eaves.



Fig. 21. Tower, east and north elevations. David Clark.

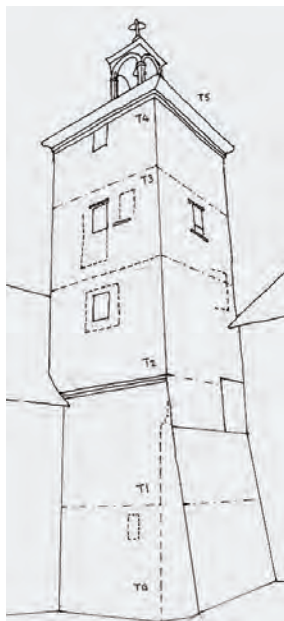


Fig. 22. Tower – diagram of levels (not to scale). David Clark.

North Elevation

The lower section forms the buttress discussed above, protected by a modern pentice roof. However, the brickwork of the buttress is here quite different from that facing east – the bricks are much smaller and the courses do not align with those of the eastern face. Above the pentice is a section of red and black bricks laid in random fashion, with some clunch blocks towards the east and extending above and below the corbelling. To the west is a rectangular section of render, apparently blocking a former doorway, with queen closers to the left jamb.

Above the clunch at levels T2 and T3 the bond becomes more regularly English, but with many misplaced bricks. To the west (above the eaves of the abutting range and close to the western edge of the tower) is a further blocked opening – again possibly a doorway. At level 3 is a blocked window with timber lintel and a further timber was set into the brickwork below the level of the sill.

West Elevation

The west elevation is largely concealed behind what appears to be a Victorian infill structure between the chapel and the east wing of the house – although earlier illustrations also show buildings in this area. The upper levels of the tower (T3 and T4) are shown in Figure 23.

Level T3 clearly has diaper-work, with black headers – produced by high-temperature firing, or by adding a glaze to the brick clay – forming the typical lozenge pattern, with the rest of the wall mainly in red stretcher brick. Into this pattern was cut a rectangular opening, the straight-joints of which remain. The lack of queen closers suggests that the larger opening was secondary – although there are some to the right of the Gothic arched window with brick voussoirs that was inserted into it.⁸⁰ At level T4 is a clock-face (set into a square opening); the brickwork around is broadly English Bond but with much disturbance and no evidence of diaper work.

Level T2 was partly visible beneath the roof linking the tower to the chapel. The brickwork below the level of the linking roof was somewhat crudely executed with some rubblestone for the lower part, and it was roughly shaped around the wall-plate of the main chapel roof.

South Elevation

The chapel obscures most of the tower's south elevation, but at level T4 is a small square window with shaped brick jambs and a groove for leaded glass. Below (T3) are two timbers set into the wall with disturbed brickwork between indicating the position of a blocked window. Again, there is no evidence that this was a primary feature.

At level T2 is an opening in the brickwork giving access to the chapel roof. This has been rather crudely broken through, suggesting that the builders of the tower did not have a need to enter the chapel roof – and thus there was probably a valley between the two rather than the present pitched linking roof. In the brickwork are two (blocked) openings, with brick lintels – probably putlog holes. The brickwork obscured by the chapel was not of the same quality as that above. The arrangements around this area are discussed separately below.

⁸⁰ In 1760: personal communication from Georgina Stonor.



Fig. 23. Tower, west elevation. David Clark.

Cupola

In 2015 this was a timber structure with legs clad in lead. Inside, two axial beams supported a bell and at its apex was a weathervane. These features had been removed for repair and renovation and were not examined in detail.

Tower Interior

Within the tower a brick newel staircase rises clockwise from the ground floor opposite the north door to the chapel. The first flight of seventeen steps terminates at a landing at level T1 from which a doorway leads to a corridor in the east wing of the main house and thence to the chapel tribune. The lower steps seem to have been rebuilt in smoother bricks than those found further up the tower. From the landing, a further seven brick and then five timber steps lead to the second floor space (T2). This is a square room with brick walls – obscured by render and lime wash to some elevations – and a plank board floor. The staircase at this level (and above) is in the north-east corner of the tower. On the east wall is a square window (set within a larger opening noted above from outside). In the south wall near floor level is the hatch door giving access to the chapel roof, referred to above. The wall thickness at this point is 34 cm (13½ inches) and the bricks were 9 inches long and 4½ inches wide, with depths varying between 2 inches and 2¼ inches.

The west elevation has a blocked window and the clock weights descend through holes sawn in the floor in front of it. To the right is a square recess similar in size to that noted above in the exterior of the south elevation. There is a straight-joint in the north elevation – apparently relating to the blocked doorway at this level noted above, the infill of which appeared to have some moulded stones and/or graffiti.

The ceiling of T2 (floor of T3) is supported by a heavy east–west beam, chamfered but not stopped, that has mortices for flat-laid joists, some of which may be in situ.

The staircase above T2 is all timber, and the newel post is trestle-sawn with a level mark.⁸¹ It crosses over a former window in the east elevation of the tower – the external evidence for which is a timber lintel which does not relate to the blocked brickwork above.

There is evidence of fenestration to each elevation at level T3. To the north is a splayed window opening 76 cm (30 inches) across and 57 cm (22½ inches) high in which the light is 48 cm (18¾ inches) wide. This corresponds to a blocked window visible externally. The east window was inserted into an earlier opening, apparently for a door, the lintel of which survives. This door would have been 89 cm (35 inches) wide and 188 cm (6 ft 2 inches) tall. There is also a blocked window to the north of this doorway, visible internally but partially obscured by the staircase to T4 above (see below). The (blocked) south window has a modern lintel internally and the west window (as noted externally) is a later Gothic insertion in a wider opening. It is 113 cm (44¾ inches) tall and 61 cm (2 feet) wide, with a two-centred arched head and diagonally-set leaded lights fixed to two saddle-bars set into a timber frame.

The roof of T3/floor of T4 is supported by a chamfered beam into which a series of flat-laid joists are tenoned, although the mortices are invariably wider than the joists, suggesting that the latter are replacements. There are nail and lath marks on the joists, the pattern of the nails suggesting at least two phases of ceiling – some lath and plaster survives over the staircase. The clock weights and their cables pass down the western side of the tower. Joist mortices can also be seen in the axial beam where it spans the staircase void at T4. Clearly, the staircase in these upper levels is not primary and hence the earlier access was probably by ladders.

Level T4 has a nineteenth-century replacement floor, and the walls internally are lined with clunch and whitewashed. It is lit to the south by a square window with leaded lights, and there was a further window with a timber lintel to the east, now blocked with modern bricks. To the

⁸¹ Level marks are lightly scored cross-like marks, which were used to obtain two parallel flat faces when hewing a log; D. Miles and H. Russell, 'Plumb and Level Marks', *Vernacular Architecture*, 26 (1995), pp. 33–8.

west, the clock mechanism stands on a wooden frame and bears a plaque showing its repair in 1828 by Grayson of Henley.⁸²

From T4 a stepladder gives access to the cupola containing the bell. The bell is rung hourly by the clock mechanism. The roof structure of the tower was also fully visible at this level, and was entirely modern in construction.

Relationship between the Chapel and the Tower

Since it was apparent that the presence of the tower had had an effect on the scissor-braced part of the roof, the relationship between the chapel and tower was examined in as much detail as was possible given the difficulties of access. It was clear that the east wall of the tower was butted against the north wall of the chapel and hence the tower is later than the chapel. When the access hole was cut in the south wall of the tower, the relevant rafter (N39) was truncated to allow access to the chapel roof space and at the same time roofs were provided over the areas of potential water ingress to the west and south of the tower where a pitched roof was built.

DENDROCHRONOLOGY

Dr Daniel Miles of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory carried out the tree-ring analysis of the timbers of the chapel roof and in the tower. This plays a crucial role in understanding the architectural development of the chapel. The dendrochronology identified a precise felling date of spring 1347 for one of the braces to the scissor-braced section, and a date of 1577/8 for the crown-post range to the east. The western end had also been subjected to some substantial repairs, with many of the northern rafters being replaced like for like in 1505, and a tie-beam (at truss V) being inserted in or shortly after 1517.

The tower was also sampled. There was no timber in the first three levels, but the ceiling frames of the third and fourth stages produced a felling date range of 1489–1521. A single replacement joist produced a felling date of c.1601. These dates seem to relate either to raising the height of the tower or repairs.⁸³

SUB-SURFACE ARCHAEOLOGY

In order to remove a source of damp within the chapel, the works in 2014/15 included improvements to the land drainage around the building. There were two main areas of investigation, a 2 metre-square pit dug to the south-west of the chapel to contain a soakaway and two trenches near the north wall of the chapel.

The south-west pit was dug to a depth of some 2 metres and the soil was entirely natural, with a 40 cm layer of topsoil above chalk-with-flints. No artefacts of any kind were found within the pit.

In May 2015 a short length of trench was dug to link this pit with a down-pipe from the chapel roof (Fig. 24). This followed the slope of the land south of the chapel, cutting through topsoil at the north then chalk below it at the south. The trench exposed a section of the path to the south of the chapel, showing that it had layers of rubble aggregate with brick, tile and stone beneath more recent tarmac and gravel.

The main interest of the trench for the archaeology of the chapel was the negative finding that although it cut across the position of the wall shown in the 1687 painting (Fig. 5) there

⁸² This is probably John Grayson, of Bell Street, who worked there from 1823 to c.1850. He maintained the church clock in Henley for an annual retainer of five guineas: C.F.C. Beeson, *Clockmaking in Oxfordshire 1400–1850* (1989), p. 106.

⁸³ Details in *Vernacular Architecture*, 46 (2015), pp. 111–12.



Fig. 24. Linking trench at south-west corner. Photo by David Clark.

was no evidence of foundations or that the soil had been disturbed. At the northern end of the trench some small flints were the only visible evidence of the chapel foundations.

A trench 46 cm wide for a French drain was dug near the north wall of the chapel, and returning northwards for a distance of some 180 cm, its eastern face about 90 cm from the tower wall. The main feature uncovered was a short length of brickwork 180 cm long and three courses high. The bricks comprised some deep red stretchers 9 inches by 4 inches by 3 inches with some large inclusions and some half bricks with salt-glazing. The 'wall' was only 10 cm (4 inches) wide and had no structural integrity, so unlikely to be a wall of one of the buildings demolished in 1956.

A further trench was dug at the north of the chapel to convey rainwater from the roof gutter to a soakaway to the east. The depth of the trench varied from 48 cm at the west to 1 metre at the east where it met a vertical cylindrical drainage tank. Under a thin layer of topsoil there was a layer of disturbed soil some 24 cm deep with flints and brick, tile and pipe fragments. Below this was natural chalk. In the central section of the trench was a section of modern hardcore – mostly brick and tile, with a concrete skim. The bricks varied in size, but were generally 9 inches long and 4¼ inches wide, although their depths varied from 3 inches to 2½ inches. One was 2½ inches deep with a uniform deep orange colour and had a 'frog'. Other bricks were unevenly fired and multicoloured, with some large inclusions. None of this provided evidence for the demolished buildings.

DISCUSSION

Chapel Roof

One definite conclusion from this study of the roof is that the two western rafters and their associated scissor-braces are in situ remnants of the earliest roof over the chapel, trees for

which were felled in 1347. This also implies that the west gable and south wall are also in situ and that the southern wall-plate is primary. This building had a plank ceiling of Baltic oak, probably painted. Parts of the earlier chapel referred to in the documents may survive in the walls of the present chapel, but the roof relates closely to Sir John Stonor's 1349 licence and its implication that the chapel had been renewed or enlarged.

Scissor-braced roofs were more common in the thirteenth century than the fourteenth, when they were superseded by the crownpost as a system of preventing racking – the propensity of a common-rafter roof to tip over.⁸⁴ However, one of the unusual features of this part of the roof is the presence of an axial timber shaped to fit neatly under the scissor-braces where they crossed. This was supported by means of a timber bracket on a stone corbel in the west gable end of the chapel. At first sight, the mortice in the soffit towards the east seemed too far away from truss 35 to have held a crown post brace. A crown plate as an original feature in a scissor-braced roof is very rare. In East Anglia, Stenning has reported that 'some of our earliest crown-posts were added to give longitudinal stability to a pre-existing roof' and illustrated this in a scissor-braced roof at Bradwell Hall (Essex).⁸⁵ There is, however, a possible example of a primary roof of this type at Maxstoke Castle (Warks.).⁸⁶ The roof of the hall at Maxstoke was erected in around 1345, and the upper part of a closed truss survives. This has a crown-post with four-way bracing supporting a single pair of curved scissor-braced common rafters. None of the other rafters survived, but the authors conjectured that all the other common rafters were scissor-braced pairs, contemporary with the crown-posts. Dr Miles has examined this part of the roof at Stonor in detail and is convinced that the scissor-braces and the crown-plate are contemporary. The existence of a fourteenth-century crown-post roof may also explain why this form was used for the sixteenth-century reconstruction. While we acknowledge the strengths of these arguments, it remains the case that this roof form is very rare and unnecessarily profligate in its use of timber.

We may also speculate about the length of this early chapel. Rafter S45 has the assembly mark XXXIIII (34) and the scissor-braced rafters are at 14½-inch centres, so if the roof was assembled with all the rafters in numerical order, this roof was some 41 ft long, compared with the present roof which is some 60 feet long. There is, however, no other physical evidence for a lengthening, and one possibility is that the early chapel had an architectural differentiation between 'nave' and 'chancel', the latter with a different roof form.

The Tower

We need at this stage to consider the tower, a distinctive, but enigmatic feature of the house and chapel at Stonor. The description above shows that the tower brickwork is not uniform, and so it has probably undergone a number of alterations since it was built. We attempt here to tease out these phases and the purpose of the building at each change. The basic form of the tower is of a base rising up two levels and containing only an unlit staircase, then three floors above, containing rooms.

The suggested date of 1416–17 for its construction is based on an account for bricks, in which a tower is mentioned. The long, thin bricks, laid in English Bond, with corbelling to the east are consistent with this date.⁸⁷ There are also beams supporting the upper floors

⁸⁴ This can be seen, for example, in the chancel roof of 1288 in St Giles' church, Oxford: *Oxoniensia*, 71 (2006), pp. 503–4.

⁸⁵ J. Walker (ed.), *The English Medieval Roof: Crownpost to Kingpost* (2011), p. 28. The church of St Matthew, Harwell (formerly Berks.) also has a braced axial timber under its scissor-braced roof in the south transept, but it is not clear whether this is primary or a later insertion.

⁸⁶ N.W. Alcock et al., 'Maxstoke Castle, Warwickshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 135 (1978) pp. 195–233. We are grateful to Dr Alcock for this reference.

⁸⁷ TNA, SC 6/1122/15 (Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers*, vol. 1, no. 41, p. 29). See also N. Moore, 'Brick', in J. Blair and N. Ramsay (eds.), *English Medieval Industries* (1991).

which have wide mortices for barefaced tenons – without the later refinement of diminished haunches – typical of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.⁸⁸

However, there are a number of problems with this interpretation. Firstly, although diaper work was used in European decorative brickwork, it did not become popular in England until the second half of the fifteenth century, following its use at Tattershall (1435), Herstmonceux (1441), and Eton College (1446).⁸⁹ Would the young Thomas Stonor have sponsored such innovation three decades before his royal superior? Secondly, the reference to the bricks does not specify the building they are for. Indeed the account for leadwork for the tower suggests that it was all but finished by that date, and so the 200,000 bricks brought to Stonor from Crocker End may have been for some other building. We have calculated the likely number of bricks in the tower is about 40,000, far short of 200,000. It is possible that some or all of the bricks were used in a building phase of 1416–17 in the main house, which may or may not survive. It is also possible also that ‘brykes’ refers to roofing tiles – the terms for brick and tile were used interchangeably in the Middle Ages. The number of tiles needed for the chapel roof would seem to be just over 14,000, but they could have been needed for any other part of the house.

Perhaps the explanation is that a tower was completed (with a lead roof) in 1416/17 but that later, perhaps around 1450, it was extended upwards to its present height. The brickwork also shows the evidence for later rebuildings and alterations. Unfortunately the tree-ring date range of 1491–1520 for a timber in an upper floor is unhelpful in defining one of these phases, as it could equally well have been introduced when the internal arrangements were altered – the stairs cut across former windows for example.

The tower may always have had a bell. One may have been needed before the Reformation to call the estate workers to services in the chapel. The reproduction of the 1687 painting is not clear enough to discern whether there was an external bell at that time, but it may be assumed that there was one, if staff needed to be called to the house or chapel. It is, however, unnecessary to have access to the upper floors in order to ring the bell – this can be done from ground level either internally or externally in a number of ways.

Of particular interest are the openings (and former openings) in the tower walls. The blocked lancet near the base of the east wall may have been an attempt to light the staircase, which would otherwise have been dark, but it was not an original feature. At level T2, however, above the corbelling, there seems to have been a large square (or perhaps arched with a flat four-centred arch) window, and to the north a primary opening in the form of a doorway or large window. What was it for? There is no evidence for heating in the tower spaces, but some form of domestic use cannot be ruled out – the room at this level could have been a vestry, for example.

If the northern opening at levels 1 and 2 was a doorway, there must have been some form of external walkway, platform or structure to allow entry. This raises the possibility that the tower stair was not primarily for people to *ascend* (for example to ring the bell) but to *descend*, perhaps from the house (or priests’ house) through level T2 and hence down to the chapel, avoiding the elements and without disturbing the family if prayers throughout the night were part of their duties.

Thus it seems that when built, the tower probably had only one main room – at level T2, which was entered from the adjacent building(s) through an external high-level walkway – and which probably served as a vestry.

There were a number of later phases of alteration to the tower. At some stage a door-like opening was created in the east elevation at level T3, but the height of this is above ground and the lack of any evidence of fixings for a walkway are difficult to explain. Could it have been a

⁸⁸ C. Hewett, *English Historic Carpentry* (1980), pp. 279–80.

⁸⁹ J. Bond et al., *Oxfordshire Brickmakers* (1980), pp. 3–4; A. Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building* (1987), p. 252 refers to the patterning in the earliest English examples as ‘tentative and unconvincing’.

temporary taking-in door for winching up equipment (for example, clock or bells) that could not be carried up the staircase?

The two windows under the eaves at level T4, and those below to the east within previously larger openings seem contemporary, and probably seventeenth-century in date. The present timber staircase to the upper floors was also inserted at this time. It seems medieval timbers were recycled – the trestle-saw marks on the newel-post strongly suggest a pre-1530 date.⁹⁰ The original purpose of the upper room at T4 is unclear – its use for housing the clock mechanism is later.

We return now to the relationship between the tower and the chapel, the awkward junction suggesting that they are of different dates. As the east wall of the tower was butted against the north chapel wall, it seems clear that the tower was built after the chapel. Since the tower is set within the line of the chapel north wall, some degree of rebuilding of the chapel roof would have had to be carried out at that time. There are two main possibilities: a) the documentary evidence that a tower had been built by 1416/17, or b) that the 1505 rebuilding of the chapel roof was associated with major alterations to the tower.

Turning to the way the tower was built, we have seen that the east wall of the tower was butted against the north chapel wall but at the west the brickwork seems to have cut through the chapel wall. The tower cut through the earlier wall-plate and so the scissor-braces had to be truncated and reset on a new wall-plate. *Prima facie*, the 1505 date for all the rafters in this position points to this as the date of major work on the tower. If, on the other hand, the tower was built before 1416–17, it is possible that by 1505, having made no provision for maintaining it, water ingress from the valley between the chapel roof and the tower brickwork was so serious that the whole of the northern roof frame had to be replaced. Both scenarios are plausible, and it is clear that the access opening from the tower to the chapel roof is secondary.

The most likely conclusion is that there was some sort of tower in 1417, but that it was rebuilt, heightened and improved over the following centuries. Its purpose was to show power and dominion, but the complexity of the structure, with its wide lower stair, and at least one room above that connected with another building, suggests it had an additional purpose – probably related to the life and work of the chapel and its associated chaplains.

Later Phases

The next major rebuilding phase in the chapel was around 1578 when the timbers for the crown post roof were felled. From this period are the eastern wall-plates (set at a higher level than the western one), tie-beams, rafters, collars, crown plate and ashlar pieces of a crown post roof that was ceiled from the start – thereby concealing the poor quality of the timber and its somewhat ragged construction. The northern wall-plate was set into the tower brickwork, but the old scissor-braced roof was retained at the west end. The building of the new roof began at the east end and worked back to the west, and incorporated some earlier timber at the junction.

As the western scissor-braces were retained, it is not clear how the awkward transition between the plaster ceilings over the gallery and the nave was managed, although it was probably justified by the different functions of the spaces below.

Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Work

The major rebuilding of the plaster vault in 1796 is clearly evident from the surviving structure: tie-beams sawn through, and a new superstructure inserted to support the plaster vaulting with apparently little regard for the mechanics of the alteration, although in the event it has remained intact (albeit after some pulling apart of the wall-plates). It also seems likely that the remains of the former tie-beams were quartered and reused as purlins in the vault structure.

⁹⁰ D. James, 'Saw Marks in Vernacular Buildings and their Wider Significance', *Vernacular Architecture*, 43 (2012), pp. 7–18.

A deep void was cut into the wall to allow the vault to extend over a nave window and there seems to have been a need at the west end (over the gallery) to cut into the wall there too. The brick chimney-like structure is puzzling, but a stove in the gallery to warm the family members sitting there would certainly have been a welcome addition at some stage.

The tower rooms were ceiled (probably in the eighteenth or nineteenth century) – again for some unknown purpose, although having introduced a clock (perhaps before the 1790s, as it appears in the 1762 painting) greater access would be needed to wind (and service) it on a regular basis. The present cupola and bell-ringing arrangements seem to date from the mid nineteenth century, as Neale's watercolour of 1818 shows only a pyramidal roof with a weathervane.

Chapel Exterior

Examination of the exterior showed some potentially significant features, in particular the scar of a wall near the west end of the south elevation. It has been suggested that this is evidence that the chapel was extended to the west,⁹¹ but we have shown that there is no evidence that the west end of the chapel has been extended – indeed it contains the earliest in situ fabric in the building. The trench dug for drainage at the west end of the chapel also showed no evidence of a wall. Thus we conclude that if there was a rebuilding or extending phase this was before 1347. Moreover the depiction of the wall in the 1687 painting is not accurate: it was not at this date at the west end of the chapel.

We noted above the large stone under the south-east corner of the chapel. The special nature of the stones in the close at Stonor was noted in the seventeenth century by Robert Plot who stated that they could be cut and polished like marble.⁹² The appropriation of pagan objects by early Christians and their incorporation into places of worship is a not uncommon phenomenon.⁹³ However, since the ground at the southern edge of the chapel has been built up in order to create a level platform for the building – perhaps in the fourteenth century, but possibly in 1578 if the eastern wall dates from a lengthening of the chapel at that date – there must be some doubt as to whether the stone pre-dated the building of the chapel. Whatever its origins, it is nevertheless clear that its location and use are intentional, if only to add credence to the longevity of the site as a place of worship.

Chapel Interior

The interior of the chapel was so comprehensively remodelled in the eighteenth century and thereafter that any attempt to reconstruct its earlier form must be conjectural. However, some general issues must be considered.

Firstly, are there common features of domestic chapels that might suggest what the early chapel at Stonor looked like? Take entrances. While parish churches typically have north and south doorways (as well as possibly a ceremonial entry from the west) it is difficult to generalise about the entry to private chapels. Some were accessible from the main house adjoining, but others resemble parish churches – Rycote has a west entry through the base of the tower, as well as north and south doorways; Hendred House chapel has opposing north and south doorways,⁹⁴ while the rebuilt fifteenth-century chapel at Stanton Harcourt Manor had opposing north and south doors, with a door in the surviving pre-1460 west wall.⁹⁵ College

⁹¹ Sherwood and Pevsner, *Oxfordshire*, p. 794.

⁹² R. Plot, *The Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677), p. 73.

⁹³ Pope Gregory I (590–604) encouraged Augustine to take over pagan temples rather than destroying them in order not to alienate the native population of the places he was converting. The most striking example is the incorporation of a menhir into the churchyard at Rudston (Yorks.). Local examples of 'foundation' stones such as that at Stonor can be seen at St Michael, Aston Tirrold, St Nicholas, Beedon (Berks.), and St Mary, Denham (Bucks.).

⁹⁴ C.R.J. Currie, 'Larger Medieval Houses in the Vale of White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, 57 (1992), pp. 115–16.

⁹⁵ *VCH Oxon.* 12, p. 278.

chapels may also provide relevant analogies. Merton College chapel (started in the 1290s as a replacement for the parish church of St John the Baptist) seems to have been entered only from the west – it was not until transepts (now the ante-chapel) were built that there was a street entrance to the north (for the parishioners) and a college entrance to the south. At Stonor the only ‘public’ entrance is from the west. The northern entry to the tribune was clearly for the family, but was the ground floor doorway used by the priests or did they use a door to the side of the altar? None of the local domestic chapels have priests’ doors in the south wall of the chancel as can be found in parish churches.

Spatial arrangements in medieval chapels differ from those in parish churches. Currently there is no structural or decorative differentiation at Stonor between nave and chancel/sanctuary, apart from the dais. This can also be seen at Rycote, where there is a screen, but apart from a more decorative paint scheme on the roof of the chancel, there is no other differentiation between the spaces – they are the same width, height, and the fenestration is the same. Hendred House, Stonor, and many pre-Reformation college chapels have the same characteristics. Size is one reason, but it may also be due to the perceived need to respect the foundation as a chantry and hence that those in the chapel are part of a community engaged in praying for the souls of the departed members of the family.

What sort of accommodation was provided for the priests? It is known that provision was made at Stonor for six of them in the 1340s, though perhaps it was some time before the full complement was reached. Where (as here) a number of priests were employed, they seem to have had equal status and shared income and duties.⁹⁶ But where was their lodging and what sort of residence would have been provided?

A number of houses have been identified as having been chantry priests’ houses – the White Hart at Fyfield (Oxon., formerly Berks.) and the Chantry House at Trent (Dorset), for example.⁹⁷ These seem to be rather grander than a typical yeoman house of the same period and place, as the priests had a special status in the manor. But these self-standing houses were provided for priests saying masses in the parish church and the arrangements for a private chapel may have been different. Some examples of locations to the north of the chapel (at Champs Chapel in East Hendred) and in towers (Rycote, Stanton Harcourt) have been recorded. The priests’ house at Farleigh Hungerford (Som.) was again a separate building, at the east end of the chapel (which had been the parish church until appropriated by Sir Walter de Hungerford in 1430) and almost out of sight from the castle.⁹⁸ At Broughton and Minster Lovell the priest(s) may have lodged in the main house, but as castles these may be special cases – and in general it appears that chantry priests were given separate accommodation.⁹⁹

It is clear that at Stonor the area to the north of the chapel was used for priests’ accommodation during the first half of the twentieth century. R.J. Stonor reported that in 1948 the cloister still stood at the east end of the manor, ‘with six rooms over it’.¹⁰⁰ The flues shown in Figure 7 suggest that the buildings they served were for domestic occupation, but since these were demolished without record we do not know when they were built. The ‘wall’ discovered during trenching in the return between the tower and the chapel had insufficient structural integrity to have supported the wall of a domestic building – it may have been the

⁹⁶ J. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: The Social Function of Aristocratic Benevolence* (1972), p. 47.

⁹⁷ W.A. Pantin, ‘Chantry Priest’s Houses and other Medieval Lodgings’, *MedArch*, 3 (1959), pp. 234–7; A. Gomme and A. Maguire, *A Design and Plan in the Country House: From Castle Donjons to Palladian Boxes* (2008), p. 85.

⁹⁸ T.J. Miles and A.D. Saunders, ‘The Chantry Priests’ House at Farleigh Hungerford Castle’, *MedArch*, 19 (1975), pp. 165–181.

⁹⁹ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 135 shows a ground plan of the medieval manor with the ‘quarters for six chaplains’ in the main house to the north of the east wing, but he gives no evidence to support this.

¹⁰⁰ Stonor, *Catholic Sanctuary*, p. 88.

remains of a garden wall of some sort. No evidence was found of any earlier buildings in this area.

The presence of eastern doorways to the chapel before the Gothick makeover suggests that the chantry priests' accommodation may have been situated beyond the east end of the chapel, as at Farleigh, but it is more likely that at Stonor it was to the north. This is supported by the obvious existence of early linked buildings, the blind north wall of the chapel, the high level tower openings, and the traditional reference to the area as the cloister. Documents in the Stonor archives refer to a storm in 1711 that destroyed a number of brick and timber buildings in the area.¹⁰¹ This location effectively hid the buildings from public view and it seems therefore that this was the location of the priests' accommodation from the fourteenth century onwards.

CONCLUSION

The works carried out at the Chapel of the Holy Trinity at Stonor during 2014 and 2015 have shed much light on its architectural history. We now know that any earlier building on the site was comprehensively rebuilt in 1347 when Sir John Stonor was setting up his chantry with six priests, licensed in 1349. His chapel seems to have had a rare form of roof – a crown-post structure supporting scissor-braces – and to have had a Baltic oak ceiling set into grooves in the braces, one panel of which survives. This building stood slightly detached from the Stonor residence, and the accommodation for the priests was probably somewhere to the north of the chapel.

The tower was built later, and probably linked the chapel to the house. The documentation suggests that a tower of some sort existed in 1416/17, but the diaper work on the west face is likely to be later. The chapel itself had to be altered to accept the tower, which is built into it. The walls were broken through and the roof was rebuilt. The dendrochronology of the timbers abutting the tower gives a date of 1505 for a major repair of the chapel roof, which may have been needed because of water ingress between the chapel and the tower. External connections to galleries suggest the tower related more to the activities of the priests than to the Stonor household, although it would certainly have been a distinctive landmark to visitors approaching the house.

A major rebuilding of the chapel roof – and possibly some of the east end of the building – was carried out by Cicely Stonor in 1578, when a flimsy crown-post roof was built, abutting the remains of the earlier scissor-braced roof at the east. This is very late for this roof type, which may indicate a local conservatism in building methods, or simply a desire to follow the style of part of the earlier roof. In any event, the structure was largely obscured by a lath-and-plaster ceiling which seems to have extended along the entire length, giving it a degree of unity and concealing the earlier oak panels above.

The present plaster vault was part of a major reconstruction of the chapel roof and windows in the 1790s. Parts of the crown-post roof were dismantled and reused along with huge baulks of Baltic softwood which were introduced to stabilize the remainder and support the new vault. A sacristy was built at the east end, accessed through doors, of which one at least was a priests' door to the sanctuary.

We have also shown that the garden wall illustrated in the 1687 painting of Stonor Park abutted the chapel not at the west end but at the point where a scar remains in the chapel wall some 9 feet to the east.

¹⁰¹ Information supplied by Georgina Stonor.

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