

Letter to SPAB Committee by Powys (4 pages)

November 30th 1928.

To
The Committee,
The Society for the Protection of Ancient
Buildings.

Gentlemen,

WINTERBORNE TOMPSON CHURCH

In accordance with your instructions I visited Winterbourne Tompson Church on November 26th in order to draw up a report on its condition and to make an estimate of the cost of repair.

I was kindly met by the Vicar of Bere Regis who also holds the living of this Parish. He desires me to thank you for your interest in the building and to let you know that he would welcome the help of the Society in the repair of this church only stipulating that the consent of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the Chancellor of the Diocese should be obtained. I explained to him that the Society would certainly not act without their good-will and that it was most un-likely that their consent would be with-held for the two bodies work in close co-operation.

This church is situated on the main road leading from Bere Regis to Sutrminster Newton standing beside a farmhouse and within half a mile of Winterborne Anderson where there is a really splendid house of the sixteenth century.

The Church is completely neglected; no services have been held there since 1896. ^{with housing} The farmhouse is a building of the early sixteenth century and is famous for its beautiful mediaeval plaster ceiling which runs for the length of the house on the first floor and for two very fine chimney stacks which rise at the back of the house and for the beautifully constructed stone spiral staircase which is built against one of these chimnies in the form of a gabled wing^s

The church consists of a single chamber about ⁴¹~~33~~ ft long ^{including the apse} and ^{apsidal} 15 ft 6 ins wide with an ~~apse~~ side east end extending beyond the

parallelogram. The west wall of the church is three feet ^{thick} and the side walls two feet six inches thick. They are built of local rubble stone walling with fair ashlar quoins. There are three 2-light windows in the south side with arched heads to the lights in a single square headed window which ~~is blocked~~ ^{have painted hood moulds.}

The west door is square headed with simple splayed jambs and contains a good plain door with nice iron-work.

~~In the south side~~ there are three flat and narrow buttresses at the east end, one north and ^{also} south where the apse springs from the straight walls and one in the middle of the apse facing east. There is no east window.

There ~~is~~ ^{are} the remains of a blocked window in the south wall of the church towards the west end. This window was a single light one and had a circular or lancet head. It is a little difficult to distinguish it at the present time. There ~~is~~ ^{are} also traces of what appears to ~~be~~ ^{have been} a 2-light sixteenth ^{century} window ^{now} blocked up at the east end of the north wall.

Towards the west end of the north wall there is a square headed narrow doorway which is now completely filled by a stone buttress of considerable bulk which finishes at the level of the door ^{head}. This buttress is difficult to date but it might well have been built before the reformation even as early as the fourteenth century. There are two other buttresses against the north wall, both of brick, both apparently built in the beginning of the eighteenth century when the south window and the west doorway were made. ^{One of them is bad order.}

On the north side of the church and immediately adjoining the wall there is at present the farmyard. The south west and east walls of the church rise from the churchyard. There is one monumental tomb formed as an altar with brick sides and a very decorated top. The churchyard is surrounded by a red brick wall which dates from the end of the eighteenth century.

The roof of the church is formed of collared couple rafter trusses

with ^{oak} purlins or principals. Framed with these trusses are curved ribs which now take the plaster wagon ceiling. The wagon ceiling is divided into bays by chamfered ribs with carved bosses at the interception. The roof appears to belong to the first half of the fifteenth century. The rafters are of oak measuring *five inches square* they have suffered badly from attacks of the Death Watch Beetle. The roof is covered with plain tiles and at the eaves with three or four courses of stone slates from Furbeck Isle. There are about ten mediæval ridge tiles remaining on the ridge with fin back decoration. Rising from the roof at the west end is a little weatherboard bell turret with a pyramid roof. This is of later construction probably early eighteenth century. This contains a single bell.

The church is completely fitted with eighteenth century ^{oak} pews, screen and altar rails. This oak panelling is in good order with a few defects. The floors in the pews are ^{in places} rotten owing to the leaks in the roof, and for the same reason patches of plaster have fallen. The gangway is paved with fine flag ~~of~~ stone from Furbeck Isle.

The north and south walls lean outwards considerably and at some ^{probably early} time in the last century a tie beam was inserted and two tie-rods. The walls have ^{with} leant further over about $1\frac{1}{2}$ " since ~~that time~~. ^{The screen was unsoundly made.} The south wall ^{shows signs of heaving} ~~has~~ ~~been~~ ~~taken~~ away from the walling and there are one or two other cracks in the wall, particularly near the apse and at its junction with the north and south walls.

The following works are necessary to preserve the building:-

(1) The roof must be stripped. The coupled rafter trusses need repair and judging from the few rafters I was able to inspect I should estimate that about one in four of these must be renewed and the remainder repaired by scarfing on new pieces taken from the coupled rafter trusses which may have to be discarded.

The plaster which is on oak rent lath must be removed during the

repair of the roof, not only in order that the timbers may be made accessible for repair, but also because it is in bad condition owing to the rusting of the nails. The roof tiles are hung with pegs from rent deal laths. When the roof timbers have been repaired together with the wall plates, I advise that the tiles be re-hung on rent oak tile laths with oak pegs. Again care should be taken to preserve the mediseval ridge tiles which should be replaced in their original position. The turret needs some repair and probably new weatherboarding. While the roof is being repaired, I advise that a re-inforced concrete horizontal beam be laid on the wall tops between the inner and outer wall plates or immediately below them.

When the roof is complete the plaster ceiling should be renewed
When the roof has been repaired I do not think it will be necessary to add any more ties than those which exist, but these should be strengthened and made to securely hold the wall tops and the suggested concrete beam.

The brick buttresses ^{against} ~~at~~ the north ^{wall} ~~and south~~ end need some repair and the defective cracks in the walling should be properly repaired by building bonds across them through their thickness of the wall at appropriate levels. ^{These bonds should be grouted up solid.}

With regard to the furniture; it is desirable that the decayed flooring should be removed and replaced with sound oak boards on oak joists. ^{The defective panels of the pews should be renewed and the broken steps leading up to the pulpit.}

I estimate that this work could be carried out for the sum of about £250 and I suggest ^{that} the work be put in hand as soon as possible the money being advanced from the surplus of ^{this} years working ^{to be paid back in time from the interest to be derived from the fund obtained by the sale of Hardy's Manuscript which ~~was~~ recently held by the Society.}

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours sincerely,

Secretary.

SPAB Annual Report 1929

WINTERBORNE TOMSON CHURCH, DORSET

In last year's Report members were informed that the Society hoped to sell manuscripts by Mr. Thomas Hardy. It has been singularly fortunate (it can with pleasure report) in selling them for the sum of £1,000. It is intended to spend the interest of that money on the repair of Dorset buildings.

The Committee has decided to begin with the repair of the little Church of Winterborne Tomson, and photographs of this building taken from without and within are reproduced here to show its charm and interest. The church is entirely forsaken. Standing in a tiny churchyard, it has so long been disused that but few traces of grave-mounds remain to suggest that burials took place there. There is one lonely tomb built like an altar with brick sides and a crumbling stone slab-top. It is a sombre reminder of the final doom of both man and his works. It tells the short term of a generation, but leads the living to consider how in his day he may prolong the life of the Norman church which in succeeding centuries his predecessors have used, altered and loved.

The building and its setting (for on its north side it rises direct from the barten of a farm) is exactly such as stimulated the mind of Thomas Hardy in his descriptions of Dorset scenery. The deserted hamlet of Winterborne Tomson lies on the north of that heath country to which he gave the name of Egdon. It rests quietly amid the water meadows of the brook which in the winter months swells almost to the size of a river. Those who know the low green country through which the River Frome runs at the foot of Dorchester High Street, will be able to see in their mind's eye the vale which spreads to the north of this church.

It is estimated that the repair will cost about £250. The walls of the building, though becoming loose here and there, and though they lean outward, are on the whole still fairly sound. It is the interesting fifteenth-century roof, with its plaster wagon-ceiling, ribbed and bossed, which is fast falling into decay. Already tiles have fallen from patches of the north slope, and already on a rainy day the melancholy of a wet-chilled visitor is further saddened by a monotonous drip from the decaying ceiling.

The Society, with the permission of the Vicar of the parish which is now held with Bere Regis, has obtained a faculty from the Bishop's Chancellor to carry out repairs, and the suggested works have been approved by the Salisbury Diocesan Advisory Council.

From the description of the building given above, it is clear that no delay can be allowed if it is to be saved. Therefore, although the purchaser of the manuscripts does not complete the payment for them until the year 1930 has come and gone, the Society has determined to borrow the money required until the purchase is complete. It would be most grateful to any of its members who would be willing to lend it the required sum without asking for interest during the three years in which the purchase money accumulates. It is believed that when the next Report is issued it will be possible to print photographs of the repaired church.

Those who desire to increase the capital sum which will form this memorial to Thomas Hardy are asked to send their contribution to the Secretary, remembering that the interest alone is to be spent on the repair of Dorset buildings which Hardy knew and loved.

Annual Report

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