

## **Atworth Church Tower**

### **History and description of the Tower**

The existing tower of the church of St Michael and All Angels, Atworth, is an embattled and saddle-back tower constructed with rubble stonework and ashlar buttresses, and is the sole remaining part of the complete rebuild of the medieval chapel undertaken by Thomas Beaushin in 1451. There had been chapels on the site since 1001, when King Aethelred II granted permission to the Abbess of Shaftesbury to build a chapel. This was completed by 1070 and was mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086. At some date in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the chapel was partially destroyed by fire and had to be rebuilt.

The existing Tower is described as follows on the English Heritage Listed Buildings website:

Detached north tower linked to nave by short passage; 4 stages with diagonal buttresses, string courses, pointed moulded west doorway with square hoodmould, 2-light window with cusped arched lights, square hoodmould to second stage, arrow loop to third stage, bellstage has 2-light square-headed louvred windows with cusped lights, cornice with water spouts to battlemented parapet, gabled tiled roof. Stair turret on north side has ogee-headed doorway with planked door, arrow loops, gabled roof. East side of tower retains blocked tower arch to former nave and former roofline.

Within the Tower are three bells, one of which is the oldest item in the whole building – the treble bell, cast in Bristol in 1350, and inscribed ‘Ave Maria’, but now cracked and without a clapper. This claims to be the oldest bell in Wiltshire. The tenor bell is dated 1606, and was made by Roger Purdue of Bristol, and is inscribed ‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’. The third bell was cast in 1786 by William Bilbie of Chewstoke to the memory of Guillian Webb, church warden.

### **The Condition of the Tower**

The most recent assessment of the condition of the 15<sup>th</sup> century tower is to be found in the Quinquennial Report undertaken on behalf of the Diocese of Salisbury by Raymond Winrow of Slade Smith and Winrow of Bradford on Avon on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The information here comes from his report.

### **The exterior of the Tower**

The East elevation – appears to be in ‘good order’.

The South elevation – is in ‘reasonable condition’ though the gutter needs painting.

The North elevation – the door which leads to the turret staircase needs to be treated with a preservative stain because it is splitting in places, and there is a need to repoint at the junction between the door and the stonework. Also, the steps which lead up to the door have a gap underneath which may take water. At parapet level, a lot of the rendering has come off.

The West elevation – has some stones which are exposed where the rendering has come off. The window on this elevation has lost part of its stone label.

The Roof – appears to be in ‘reasonable condition’, but there is a plant growing in the gutter on the east side and this should be removed and the pointing restored.

### **The interior of the Tower**

The chamber above the Vestry - has a timber boarded floor which is ‘very dirty’, and the plaster on the walls is crazed and in ‘poor condition’. The west-facing window has bars which could do with painting. The roof timbers of this chamber show signs of beetle infestation which, hopefully, has been dealt with.

The Belfry – the wooden ladder which gives access to the bells is loose, and there is no safe access to the roof. The bell frame shows signs of beetle attack and ‘this should be continually monitored in May/June of each year’.

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July 2011