

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
SOMERSETSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL AND
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
DURING THE YEAR
1905.

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

The Classification of the Somerset Church Towers.

*Second Paper, including (1) Additional Towers, and (2)
Corrigenda to the Paper in last year's Proceedings.*

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PART I. ADDITIONAL TOWERS.

A FEW of the double-window towers were omitted from consideration in my paper in the last year's *Proceedings*. Some of these were known to me, but not well enough to justify classification; while others had escaped my notice.

The undermentioned eight towers seem to complete the list of multiple-window ones, though I should be glad to hear of others overlooked. Six of these were already known to me: of the other two, Blagdon was notified to me by Mr. R. P. Brereton, and Kingsdon by Mr. Houghton Spencer; and I desire to express my thanks to these gentlemen for their kindness in supplying information, together with photographs of the respective towers.

No additional triple-window tower has come to my notice.

Three towers, namely Locking, Hutton and Blagdon, are to be added to Class II, sub-Class I, (Double-window, Single-tier,) on page 5 of my last year's paper. They should head the right-hand column, since they are related to the Banwell group; while the Quantock towers that follow are related to the Bruton group.

The remaining five, namely St. Benign at Glastonbury, Kingsdon, Wellington, Hemington and Bath Abbey, are "hybrid or *sui generis*," and are to be placed in the residual sub-class, right-hand column. (*See postscript to this paper.*)

LOCKING AND HUTTON.—These are double-window towers derived from the W. Mendip triple-window type. They are quite independent of the Quantock double-window towers, which are related to the triple-window towers of E. Mendip.

The window tracery and mouldings are of the usual Mendip type. The special W. Mendip characteristic is the treatment of the crown, the parapet being straight, and the pinnacles disjointed from the buttresses. (Contrast with Middlezoy, and its E. Mendip relatives Cranmore and Bruton.)

Both these towers are heavily overgrown with ivy, so much that the architectural features are only with difficulty discerned. It would be a neglect of duty if I did not call attention to the injudiciousness of allowing ivy to grow over beautiful or valuable buildings. Ivy not only conceals their features, but actually destroys them, by inserting its rooting tendrils into every chink, where they subsequently enlarge, disintegrating the mortar, and lifting the stones apart. Its proper use is for hiding ugly buildings and hastening their destruction. When concealment without destruction is desired, it is preferable to use the Virginian and other foreign creepers, which cling to the surface of walls without penetrating.

These two towers (Locking and Hutton) are much alike in composition, though different in detail. Both have the turret and spirelet at the S.E. corner. The turret is placed symmet-

rically, and does not interfere with the windows (Relation with Axbridge). The buttresses are diagonal as at Bleadon.

At LOCKING the window tracery and mouldings are more graceful, indicating an earlier date. There is a shallow extension of the window-recesses downwards as far as the hood of the single window below. The pilaster pinnacles between the windows are reduced to a minimum. The parapet is quatre-foiled and resembles that of Weare. Besides the corner pinnacles, intermediate ones are prepared for, but are absent. There is only one gargoyle (median) on each face, as at Wrington and Lymsham: this and the treatment of the window-recesses are peculiar features.

I am inclined to believe that this tower, if relieved of its pall, would prove to be one of the most perfectly artistic small towers in the County.

At HUTTON the window-recesses are not prolonged; the parapet is trefoiled, as at Banwell, and the pinnacles are more florid than those at Locking. The gargoyles are two on each face, as usual with Mendip towers.

BLAGDON.—This tower is known to me only through a photograph taken by the Rev. H. Bedford Pim, and kindly sent to me by Mr. Brereton. It is a double-window tower presenting an intimate combination of West Mendip with North Somerset features. At first sight it gives quite the impression of a West Mendip tower; for the window tracery and mouldings are of decided Mendip pattern, and the parapet is straight and perforated as in the W. Mendip group. But on further inspection we may notice that the top windows are tall and transomed, and slightly farther apart than usual, in these respects showing affinity to the top windows of the Temple tower at Bristol. Looking lower down the tower we find that, excepting the great W. window, the lower windows are blind, as usual in towers in the North of the County, *e.g.* the Temple, Portishead, Publow, etc. The weather-mouldings of the smaller windows terminate in a geometrical ornament, ac-

ording to the N. Somerset fashion. The window pilasters are akin to those at the Temple, the middle one arising from a figure at the string-course, the side ones from the buttresses. The most characteristic N. Somerset feature is the treatment of the buttresses, *i.e.* their being placed at a short distance from the corner of the tower, so that the corner shows from top to bottom, while all the string-courses are carried right round the buttresses. (Compare the buttresses at Portishead, which are almost exactly similar.)

The stair turret is at the N.E. corner. The photograph does not show whether it cuts out a window; but by comparison with the Temple tower I imagine it does not. The crown (restored) most resembles those of Locking and Weare; and there is but one gargoyle (*mediau*) on each face, as at Locking, Wrington, and Lympsham. (Contrast Hutton and the other Mendip towers.)

This is a very tall and stately tower, and fine both in detail and in composition. I should judge it to be nearly contemporary with Portishead and Locking, later than the lower part of the Temple tower, but distinctly earlier than its florid top stage. The combination of two kinds of local details is what might be expected from the situation of the tower, at the junction of the W. Mendip and N. Somerset districts; nevertheless it suggests interesting speculations as to the origin and distribution of the several local styles of our County.

GLASTONBURY, ST. BENIGN.—A tower having no general class-resemblance, but containing details the like of which may be found in certain towers by the Parret. The lower two stages seem to be of fairly early work, with good mouldings including the weather moulding. The upper stage shows a change of style, and may have been built after an interval: its tall transomed windows are poorly moulded and have no weather moulding; they are like elongated copies of those at Martock, except that they are farther apart and have window pilasters. The treatment of the lateral pilasters is as at Muchelney, of

the median one as at Blagdon. The parapet (restored) has plain battlements. The stair turret is prominent on the S. side, cutting out the eastern window of the pair: it is not carried above the parapet. The bases of the pinnacles are almost as at Muchelney; but the upper portions added by the restorer are after the fashion of Evercreech, looking rather florid by contrast with the plain body of the tower.

KINGSDON.—A very plain tower, presenting an unusual expanse of bare wall. (Compare Wellington.) The double windows of the top stage are small and far apart: their mouldings, tracery and transoms are as at Martock. The window pilasters are small and quite plain. They arise, not from a sill or string-course, but from corbels at the sill level, and simply run into the string-course of the parapet. (Compare Wellington.) There are no other windows except the usual large W. one and a tiny one half-way up the S. side. The stair is on the N. side, cutting out its eastern window. The buttresses have near their top an ornament which occurs in the same position at Langport. The parapet has plain battlements, and the gurgoyles are only at the corners. There are no pinnacles.

WELLINGTON.—This belongs to a class which we have not previously considered. It is a tower of W. Somerset character, in which the windows, usually single, are doubled through the influence of the Quantock tower-builders. The double windows of the top stage are small and far apart, with much bare wall below them. They have weather mouldings, Quantock tracery, and transoms. There are no side pilasters, only a median one arising from a corbel on a level with the spring of the window arches, (compare Kingsdon,) and running through the parapet to end in a pinnacle. On the string-course far below is another corbel head, which seems to be waiting for the pilaster to reach down to it.

The stair turret, instead of being placed at or near a corner as in the towers of more eastern parts of the County, is carried up the middle of the south side of the tower, passing between

the top windows and separating them widely. It rises above the parapet, and ends with a spirelet surrounded with pinnacles which spring from grotesque figures of animals. The buttresses are bold and effective, the pinnacles compound; and there are very numerous gurgoyles.

This tower is very deficient in window area, and might have been built at a time of window tax; but its outline is excellent, the crown being particularly successful. Its most prominent feature is the stair turret, the treatment of which is commendable, except that it might have been more appropriately placed on the N. side: the S. side should be kept as free as possible for windows. It will be found interesting to compare this tower with the small single-window tower in the adjoining village of West Buckland, which resembles it in the treatment of the turret, window pilasters, etc., and is evidently a contemporary work of the same masons.

HEMINGTON.—This is an abortive double-window tower. The builders seem to have projected a double-window double-tier tower, the village being within a few miles of Mells, Leigh and Chewton. They got so far as to finish the middle or blind double-window stage: but then a change of design occurred, or maybe a change of builders; for the top stage has only single windows, and these are of a design quite different from that of the blind windows below. The tower, though comparatively small and plain, might have been perfectly artistic if the original idea had been carried out, but in its present form it is most anomalous. One of the essentials of tower-design is that the interest shall increase towards the top: here the interest of the middle stage leads only to an anti-climax.

BATH ABBEY.—A mention of this tower may be expected because it happens to have double windows. It is however not one of the characteristic Somerset church towers: its style is derived mostly from other districts, especially the Midland Counties. For example, the polygonal buttresses and the parapet are after the fashion of Magdalen tower, Oxford, the

similarity being completed by the addition of spirelets early in the 19th century. The oblong plan of this tower, necessitated by the form of the church beneath, is not to be regarded as a defect, but rather as a device which has been unduly neglected, especially in Britain.

This is apparently the last tower of importance built in Somerset, as it was still unfinished at the dissolution of the Priory.

PART II. CORRIGENDA TO THE PAPER IN LAST
YEAR'S PROCEEDINGS.

CLASSIFIED TABLE OF TOWERS, *page 5*.—At the head of the right-hand column, Double-window, Single-tier, add—

Locking; Hutton; Blagdon.

In the right hand, Double-window, Hybrid or *Sui generis* list, between Muchelney and Backwell, add—

Glastonbury, St. Benign; Kingsdon;

Wellington; Hemington; Bath Abbey.

AXBRIDGE, *page 10*. Add the following:—

There is a niche with statue on the E. face as well as on the W.

This is the only triple-window tower in which the stair turret is placed quite symmetrically at a corner. The turret takes the place of buttresses and pinnacles at the N.E. corner; whereas in other towers it is usually situated on the N. or S. face, *near* a corner but not touching it, not displacing buttress or pinnacle.

The Axbridge arrangement does not interfere with the windows. The alternative arrangement requires that the windows shall be compressed or that one of them shall be eliminated. (See foot note, *page 7*.)

BLEADON, *page 10*.—The first six lines to be substituted by the following:—

This is, so far as I know, the only triple-window tower with diagonal buttresses. The stair turret is actually at a corner;

but unlike that of Axbridge it encroaches more upon the N. face, and cuts out a window.

BISHOPS LYDEARD, *page 16, 5th line from bottom*:—for S. side read S. and E. sides.

BRISTOL, TEMPLE CHURCH, *page 17*.—The nearest relative to this tower is that of Blagdon, the study of which has led me to the conclusion that the Temple tower originated from a combination of the Mendip and N. Somerset influences, and that the Midland influence was imported when the top stage was built, at a later period. The N. Somerset influence is seen particularly in the buttresses and string-courses, (compare Portishead, etc.,) the Mendip influence in the windows, (compare Shepton Mallet and Banwell.)

The crown at Blagdon gives a third possible form for that at the Temple, the forms previously suggested being those of N. Petherton and Chewton.

TAUNTON, ST. JAMES, *page 18*.—Mr. J. Houghton Spencer, the architect of the reconstruction of this tower, has sent me much valuable information, from which I extract the following:—

(1) In the 'sixties, at all events as late as 1866, the parapet and pinnacles were still in existence, even if imperfect.

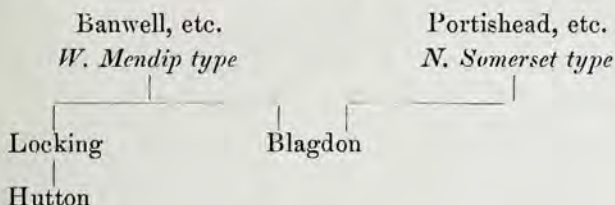
(2) The similarity to the Bishops Lydeard tower existed in the original building, the new tower being an exact reproduction of the design of the old tower as it existed in 1866-70, except as regards the parapet, pinnacles and turret roof.

(3) There was evidence that the parapet was not the original one. The design of the present parapet, pinnacles, and roof of turret, was influenced by a study of related towers, especially those of Staple Fitzpaine and Kingston.

At the Society's meeting at Taunton in 1898 Mr. Spencer exhibited his scale-drawings of this tower, and of St. Mary Magdalene, Bishops Lydeard, Kingston and Staple Fitzpaine. From these I obtained the measurements of these towers given in my last year's paper. I had forgotten the artist's name,

and enquiries at the Museum failed to discover it; but I now find that Mr. Spencer's exhibits were recorded in the *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIV, pt. i, p. 62. I am therefore glad to be in a position to gratefully acknowledge the source of the measurements.

PEDIGREE, page 31.—The following tentative pedigree should precede Pedigree II, of double-window towers:—



POSTSCRIPT.—Since the above paper was ready for press, I have heard from Mr. Brereton that the tower at Buckland Denham has the same anomalous arrangement of windows as its neighbour at Hemington. The name "Buckland Denham" should therefore accompany "Hemington" on pages 2, 6 and 7; and the number of additional double-window towers (page 1) is increased to nine.