

St. Julian's Church, Wellow.

Statement of Significance for provision of kitchen and toilet facilities

St Julian's Church is a Grade 1 listed building and is a significant landmark in and around the village of Wellow, being visible from all four roads leading into the village, as well as standing above the surrounding buildings. It is within the Wellow Conservation Area.

Although it is possible to infer from historic references that there was an ecclesiastical building in Wellow from the 8th century, the existence of a church was first officially noted in 1117, when Henry I established an order of Augustinian Canons at Cirencester and gave to them the "ancient churches of Froome and Wellow".

In 1369, Sir Thomas Hungerford bought the villages of Farley and Wellow. (In 1337, Sir Thomas had become the leader of the House of Commons, the first to be called "The Speaker".) In 1372, on the feast of St. Philip and St. James, a building was consecrated by John Harewell, Bishop of Bath and Wells, with Thomas of Cirencester appointed vicar. However, it is not known what the structure of this church was.

What is known is that around 1430, Sir Thomas's son, Walter, Lord Hungerford, added a clerestory, a chapel at the east end of the north aisle, known as the Hungerford Chapel, and, from the style of architecture, possibly extended the south aisle and this, with the exception of the vestry, is what now forms the body of the church.

Of particular significance in the church is the magnificent "angel roof" with stone angel corbels supporting the tie beams and superb wooden carved angels at the tie beam bosses, some of which still carry traces of their original paintwork.

The 15th century pews have fine poppy heads and simple panelled tracery on their ends. One unusual feature is the reservation of seats for parishioners from the parishes in the Wellow Hundred, hand written on some of the pew backs, and dating from the 17th or 18th century. There are fine 18th century candelabra mounted on the pews.

The rood screen and the screen dividing the north aisle and the Hungerford Chapel are also 15th century, probably dating from William Hungerford's improvements, though the rood loft and rood itself were destroyed at some date, being replaced in the 1952 restoration.

The Hungerford Chapel, at the east end of the north aisle, contains 17th century monuments to the Hungerford family, as well as the imposing tomb of Dorothy Popham, who had connections to the Hungerford family. There are also remains of a 15th century fresco of Christ and the twelve apostles, believed to be the only 15th century church wall painting depicting this subject surviving in England. In the Hungerford Chapel there is part of a fine paneled, painted and gilded roof. The gilding has been renewed but the paint is original. There are brass memorials in the floor and on the walls to various members of the Hungerford family, dating from 1638 to 1657. On the north wall is a shallow recess, possibly an Easter Sepulchre, with a quatrefoiled front below and a four-centred arch above. Referring to the building of the chapel, it is inscribed "For the love of Jesu and Mary's sake Pray for them that this lete make".

From the style of the windows, it is possible that the north aisle and the easternmost

bay of the south aisle may not be the same date as the Hungerford alterations. One of the vernacular architects consulted has suggested the style might indicate that the north aisle is a later addition but there is no confirmation of this. The north elevation

of the church clearly shows the 3-light square headed windows with cusped heads, drip moulds and carved label stops, though some of these carvings are badly decayed. It is also clear from looking at this elevation, the north window to the Hungerford Chapel, though designed in a similar style is different in detail, suggesting that it is a different date from the other windows in this elevation.



North elevation

There are a number of tombstones set into the floor of the nave and both aisles, however, many of these have become illegible with the passing of time but there is one stone in the south aisle that is dedicated to John Hodson, Vicar of Wellow from 1674 to 1718.

The font is situated at the west end of the north aisle. Although it is possibly of 13th century origins, it has been heavily restored. The font cover is Jacobean and is dated 1623.

In 1845, the church underwent partial restoration including rebuilding the chancel, undertaken by Benjamin Ferrey, a well-known Gothic Revival architect. Another restoration was carried out in 1889-90 by Bodley & Garner, architects who also specialised in the Gothic Revival style. They again completely rebuilt the chancel and added a vestry. In 1936 it was discovered that the timber work in the church had been attacked by death watch beetle, and in 1952, W. Caroe & Partners carried out the necessary restoration, but retaining as much of the original woodwork as was possible.

It has not been possible to accurately date the tower. Peter Wright, in his book *The Parish Church Towers of Somerset*, states that Wellow tower does not fit any of the matrices that he developed for dating towers and the only basis that he could find to date it was the style of the west window, which he suggest gives a date ca. 1475. The architectural historians consulted offered the opinion that there may well have been a lower tower, which at some date was extended upwards. It is worth noting that the tower impinges on the window surrounds of both the west window of the south aisle and the west window of the north aisle, as shown in the photographs below:



North aisle, west window



South aisle, west window

It is also worth noting that the dressing, coursing, joints and finish of the stonework within the tower are different from the rest of the body of the church. Investigations have shown that the lower portion of the tower is built of a different stone to the upper portion (the change occurring approximately at the height of the proposed door lintel.) The wall consists, as would be expected, of dressed stone to the two faces, inside that church and outside, with a rubble core between. These investigations have proved that the core is very compact in both portions, upper and lower, and very stable with no material falling out during the investigations and minimal voids.

The proposal is for a single storey extension abutting with north wall of the tower and the west wall of the north aisle. This extension will contain two toilets, one of which will be fully accessible, and a kitchen area, with sink, oven or microwave and storage cupboards. It will not extend beyond the line of the north wall of the north aisle or line of the west wall of the tower. The levels of this area also mean that it will fit below the cill of the west window of the north aisle, so will not impinge on this feature.

Access will be through a new doorway in the north wall of the tower, which will reflect the doorway on the opposite side of the tower that leads to the ringing chamber and the bell chamber. However, in order to make it accessible, it will need to be wider than that doorway. It is proposed that the stone that will be removed is used to line the new access, so although it will no longer be in its present position, it will still form part of the tower structure.

Taking into account the amount of stone to be moved to a new location, this is a very small proportion of the construction of the tower and the scheme would have overwhelming benefit for the church, its congregation, the wider community and the church's long-term survival.

In addition, it would allow everyone who uses the church to experience the extraordinary achievement of the medieval builders by allowing them to see, by passing through it, the massive scale of the construction of the tower, an experience at present only available to the bell ringers when they enter through the door to the stairs to the ringing chamber.

Jane Rees.

Retired Historic Buildings Architect.

President of the Tools and Trades History Society.

September, 2018. Revised March 2020.