

Barnack, Northamptonshire

Βεσηρικ

Church of St John the Baptist

Grid refTF 079 050

Church fabric

Sculpture, decorative and figural slab

Sundial

Date

Tower, except belfry stage, very fine

Fisher

West tower of two stages, W angles of nave – period C1

Taylor

Tower with EARL'S BARTON and attributed both to Earl Walpeof, husband of Judith, William the Bastard's niece, at 1070-5

Irvine

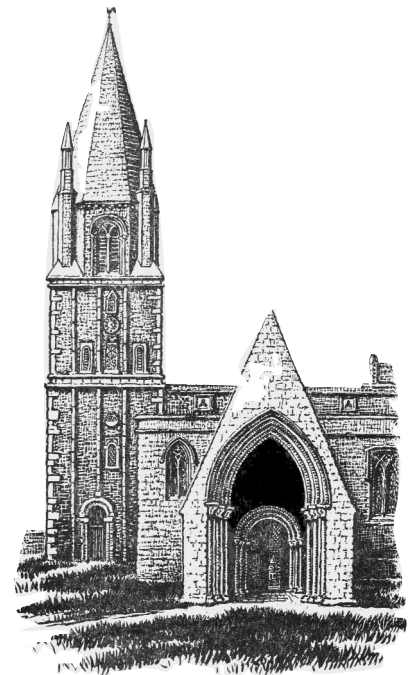
959-1000

BB

1000-50

Vict Co. Hist

Tower aesthetically most attractive of decorated Anglo-Saxon towers, details better finished and possibly better thought out than EARL'S BARTON – poss. due to peculiar, unusual, poss. unique and not now really understood use to which it was put. Built of uncoursed rubble of Barnack stone from local quarries (for history of Barnack quarries see *Vict Co. Hist Northants vol. i*). Walls 3'8" thick at ground level on N, W and S sides – 3'1" on E side – about 1' less at second stage.



Tower, exterior

26'6" wide N-S, 21' deep as far as nave wall, 65' high to top of upper string.

Two stages of diminishing height and slightly diminishing width. String courses wide enough (about 2') and of sufficiently complex design to be regarded as cornices, separate two stages and upper stage from Norman belfry. String course is an unusual finish to top stage of tower, indicating Norman belfry which probably replaced Anglo-Saxon finish of some kind; but H. M. Taylor considers tower did not extend above upper string course and gable-head windows just below with stone light slabs were original Anglo-Saxon belfry openings

Profile of string courses unusual: Three superimposed layers of stones, middle one the thickest (14"); lowest projects slightly from wall face below, top projects rather more from wall face above, being on level with wall face below and therefore behind lowest stone: reversal, possibly unintentional, of classical cornice design in which top stone protrudes most. Face of middle stone recessed behind faces of other two and lies between faces of upper and lower walls. Faces of top and bottom stones slightly bevelled upwards – e.g. of characteristic Anglo-Saxon step patten (c.f. REPTON, Derbys.) Between and below string courses are vertical pilaster-strips (c.f. EARL'S BARTON) but without semi-circular and triangular heads; three on each face dividing each face into four panels. Strips 10"-11" wide below, tapering to 5" above with projection of 6". Strips start from corbel stones with semi-circular ends

Strips on lower stage start from square corbel stones resting on the plinth. One rests on corbel stone just above keystone of arch-head of S doorway. Lowest rubble courses on tower W face from SW corner as far as first pilaster-strip (but no further) slope downwards towards S, indicating soil subsidence. At some time quoins repaired but apparently not damaged courses – fact that sloping stopped at first pilaster-strip suggests

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strips deep seated (i.e. prob. slabs with one dimension bonded deeply into walls) and strong enough to prevent wall damage from spreading – i.e. pilaster-strips not purely decorative but in some circumstances might have strengthening effect on thin Anglo-Saxon walls (see especially E. G. M. Fletcher and E. D. C. Jackson). Quoins in upper stage very regular upright-and-flat. Flats cut back to wall face. Quoins in lower stage of curiously irregular upright-and-flat of less projection than pilaster-strips.

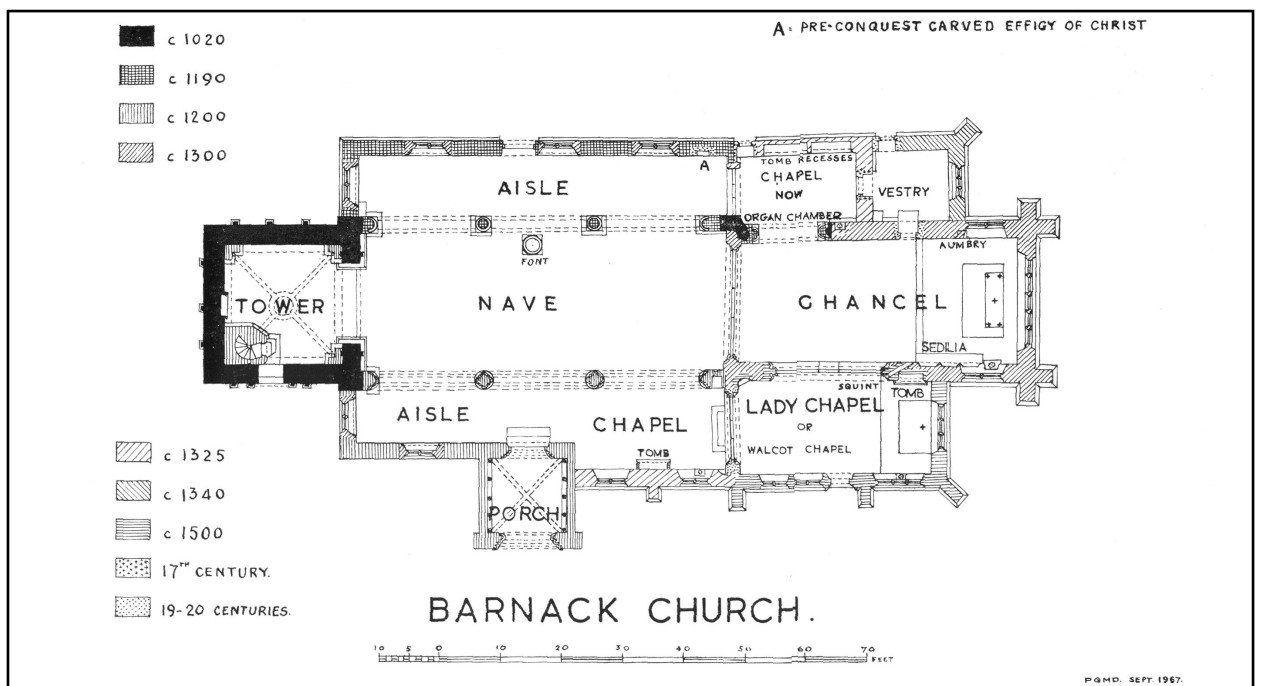
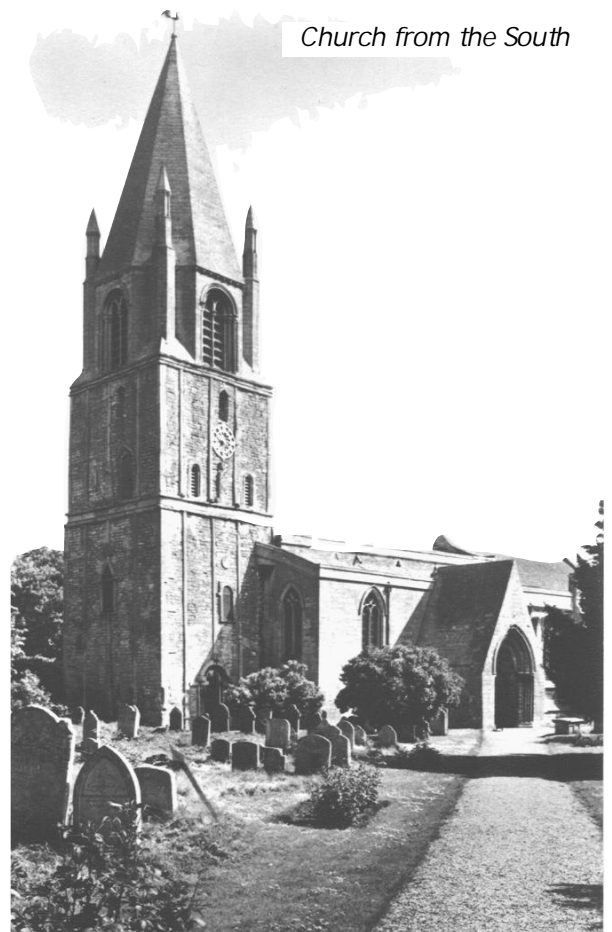
Foundations discovered of western adjunct and irregular lower quoins might be due to repairs after removal; but nothing known of date of foundations. Some of lower quoin stones cut back suggesting later building put up against tower. Foundations might belong to this.

Tower, N face

Lower stage. Roughly constructed round-head window; jambs of one stone each. Square, block imposts; very wide, single-stone, flat, sill. Head appears cut from single stone with decorative groove around front.

Upper stage has two ranges of wins.

Lower has two round-head windows. Single-stone jamb, two-stone heads; hollow chamfered all round. Heads, jambs and sills splayed; frames rebated to take wooden shutters.



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Upper range has one, gable-head window, high up, just below upper string-course, roughly built on outside. No jambs, only walling. Head of two slabs, stone light slab with flat interlace like continuous figures-of-eight with circles or flat rings cutting middle or intersecting parts of the eight.

Tower, S face

Lower stage doorway is original main entrance: unusual position for Anglo-Saxon main W entrance. Jambs of Escomb type not rebated in way usual with doorways of earlier period: door shut flat across inside as common in later period. Round-head of rather long voussoirs and plain slab impost, vertical strips on both sides of doorway resting, like all others, on square corbels near the ground. Strips also go round head but these rest on own independent square corbels projecting just above imposts.

Above S doorway and to E is flat-head window, square hood mould, ends resting on imposts: each spandrel has sculptured bird.

In SE corner just below string course is small Round-head, built up window.

Upper stage has two ranges of windows.

Lower range has two round-head wins (the eastern one a modern (1936) replacement) similar to corresponding windows on N face.

Upper range has one gable-head window corresponding to N face with identical stone light slab.

Tower, E face

Gable-head window just below top string-course corresponding to other faces: stone light slab with four rectangular openings

Pilaster-strips extend down to just below sill of gable-head window, resting on slab corbels.

Below corbels are marks on wall face of original gabled roof of Anglo-Saxon nave. Below gable roof marks is square-head doorway. S jamb, just below N jamb of gable-head window, of long-and-short work in jambs about 35' above present nave floor, above present nave flat roof, about 12' below marks of former, gabled, nave roof, possibly gave access to chamber between exterior and interior roof of early nave (cf. EARL'S BARTON; DEERHURST; BOSHAM etc.)

Tower, W face

Lower stage: No W Doorway. A little above level of S window with hood-mould is gable-head

window with one inner splay, rather crudely built pillar is of through stones, rectangular block imposts

Upper stage has two ranges of wins

Lower range has small round-head window, single-stone jambs, two-stone head, hollow chamfered all round. Head, jambs and sill splayed.

Large gable-head doorway in second panel from S Q; no jamb, cut as it were on the outside straight through walling. Gable-head of two large flat stones, one for each sloping side. This outer gable of very slight depth into wall and separate from inner soffit of large but not through stones, slight internal splay. Upper range has one gable-head window corresponding to N face but stone light slab has four rectangular openings

Tower, interior

About 19' × about 14'. Upper stage originally divided horizontally into two, or possibly three stages, floors later removed.

Upper storeys probably inhabited (as in many other Anglo-Saxon towers) possibly by church officials

Stone staircase, vaulting over ground storey, octagonal belfry stage, and strengthening of corners by angle piers all date 1220.

During 1834-5 restoration much débris found in tower from fire supposed to be burning of church by Danes under Sweyn 1013. Beneath débris was Anglo-Saxon hard plaster floor.

Suggested that tower not only used but designed for judicial purposes, central seat in tower wall being judge's seat (BB) and pointed out that parts of other churches often so used: but early churches used for many secular purposes, even fairs and dances in naves and it would not be necessary for them to be designed for such special purposes (EAF[chs]). Also suggested that aumbry-like recesses were really aumbries and that there was altar in front of central seat and tower was in effect western apse but square instead of round (TR).

Tower, internal N wall. Near tower arch, 4' above floor, recesses resembling aumbries

Tower, internal S wall. Near tower arch, 4' above floor: recesses resembling aumbries

Tower, internal W wall. In centre, below gable-head window is gable-head recess obviously intended as seat: 3'6" wide, 1'4" deep. Seat 1'8" above present floor; jambs of Escomb type with rectangular sectioned imposts, Head and jambs of

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Tower arch, looking W from nave

narrow stone slabs 4" thick. During restoration work, 1854-5, traces of wooden seats for 40 people discovered on either side of central stone seat. Seats had no canopies and consisted of rude stone risers with oak slabs for seats.

Tower arch

Magnificent tower arch opening to nave; 20' high, 15' to top of imposts, exceptional width 13', 3' deep. jambs not of Escomb type, but constructed of numerous long-and-short through stones. Arch-head constructed of genuine voussoirs, through stones. Flanking vertical pilaster-strips on each side of real long-and-short work, supported by plain rectangular corbels resting on tower plinth. Strips end, without capitals or enlargement, at under faces of imposts. Above strip work of square-sectioned stones similar in width to voussoirs continue round arch-head.

Imposts most unusual and probably most striking and complicated e.g. of characteristic Anglo-Saxon step pattern: each composed of three stones with profiles carved to produce effect of twelve flat stone slabs imitating Roman bricks arranged stepwise: pose. unique case of step pattern produced by carving: apparent slabs not square-sections or chamfered, but carved to comprise profile of complicated curves.

Nave

Tower bonded into nave W wall, which extends a little N and S beyond tower quoins. No signs of upright-and-flat work on lower part of E wall of tower, but they are visible a little to N and S of S quoin on W wall of nave: indicating that Barnack was never turiform church. Marks on tower E wall and upright-and-flat work on nave W wall indicate original Anglo-Saxon nave 32' high and 33' wide (about 6'6" wider than tower).

Norman arcade cut through N wall about 1180 when N aisle built and S arcade made about 1200. Wall above N arcade stated to be only 2'2" thick and possibly therefore original Anglo-Saxon wall or, improbably, later rebuilding to same thickness. Remains of possibly Anglo-Saxon arch plainly visible above N arcade from N aisle, roughly made of blocks of stone, not voussoirs. E springing is slab just tilted on edge and supported below by large block, about 2' long standing on end: suggesting walling original and Anglo-Saxon nave similar length to present one: 60'6".

Chancel

Nothing known of Anglo-Saxon chancel.



Christ in Majesty

Barnack

Sculpture

Round-head window in tower exterior S face above S doorway and to E has sculptured birds in spandrels between head and hood mould.

Just above gable-head window in tower W face is projecting, much worn, animal head resting on wide flat stone corbel: head acts as corbel to pilaster-strip above. Fairly common on late Anglo-Saxon monuments: probably of Viking origin, common on early Norwegian architecture and not in England before early C10, possible origin of Anglo-Norman beak-head ornament

Sundial

Above round-head window with hood-mould on S face ground stage of tower, about 25' from ground, is circular Anglo-Saxon sundial, only one in Northamptonshire. Lower half so worn that hour lines not visible but small central style hole to be seen. Upper third has foliage decoration, two side stems with three leaves attached to each and central vertical stiff stylised leaf. Background cut away leaving foliage and border in strong relief.

Carved slabs

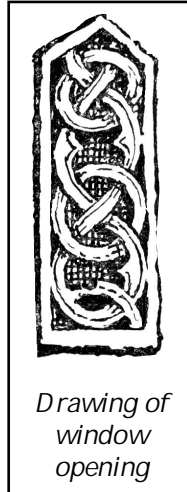
Three elaborately carved slabs in centres of N, W and S tower faces just above lower string courses; high relief with vine scrolls. Each has central stem

with foliage scrolls on each side containing bunches of grapes, with scrolls terminating in four-lobed leaves of Carolingian acanthus. Each has plain stone border which in two slabs seems complete at top and bottom. In two slabs side scrolls appear attached to border by stone hooks, i.e. they look like stone copies of metal grill. All three have birds above, two carved on separate stones. Bird on N slab bending down to peck at leaves. W one resembles eagle, has outstretched wings. Third, on S slab, resembles cock, appears to be part of slab itself and is closely similar to birds in spandrels of window below.

Slabs probably of same date as tower (BB) but possibly re-used fragments of cross-shafts of earlier date (TR).

Christ in Majesty

Figural slab in high relief at E end of N aisle N wall. Probably Anglo-Saxon.



Drawing of window opening

Quarry

Worked out by C15 – covered large area adjoining village on W and now known as Hills and Holes. Quarry was known to the Romans but was exploited in Middle Ages, when stone was exported all over E Anglia and Midlands to build castles, monasteries and churches.

(from church guide book)