

Church of St. John The Baptist, Clayton, West Sussex

About 6 miles north of Brighton and close to the foot of the north scarp of the South Downs, the church of St. John stands on sloping ground. It is very much as it would have looked 900 years ago, but with lengthened chancel (the original massive quoin-stones seem to have been reused). Side chapels were later added to the nave but these have disappeared, to be marked only by their blocked arches. The fabric is of whole flints, which show through the thin plaster on the north face, but are completely covered on the south. The quoins are of massive stones set side-alternate fashion; no original windows have survived. Points of interest inside the nave include the early medieval wall paintings dating to about 1080; Taylor mentions that they are attributed to a "Lewes School"; other good examples include Hardham, Sussex. Since their discovery in 1893 they have unfortunately faded somewhat (compared to the framed paintings made of them in the 1930's and which hang on the south wall inside the nave).

The feature of great interest is the pre-conquest chancel arch; and the allied fabric are the nave and the western part of the chancel, the nave having disproportionately high walls, a typical Anglo-Saxon trait. I can do no better than quote Taylor who described the unusual mouldings of the chancel arch thus: *These consist of three half-round shafts, one applied to each wall-face and one to the soffit, all three carried up parallel to the jambs and round the arched head, each shaft being separated from its neighbour by a protruding angle of the wall, which appears between the shafts as a moulding of square section. The arch is built of two orders of voussoirs, nine in the inner order and thirteen in the outer, all well-fitted, with radial joints. The jambs are, in the main, built of large stones cut to shape, so that each individual stone shows on its vertical face all three shafts and the two intervening square mouldings. The jambs rest on bases of plain cubical form, about 18 inches in height, projecting a little in front of the soffit-shafts, but flush with the wall-shaft on the west and flush with the wall itself on the east. The imposts are also rectangular in plan and about 6 in. in total thickness, of which about half is chamfered off below; they are returned along both faces of the wall for a few inches beyond the wall-shafts, and they project forward about 3 in. beyond the faces of all three shafts.*

All photos on these pages are described viewed clockwise from top left.

1. The church viewed from the north.



2. The NW quoin of the nave.

3. A general view of the interior of the nave looking eastward with the chancel arch centre.



4. The west face of the chancel arch, with the later wall paintings.



Church of St. John The Baptist, Clayton, West Sussex

The chancel arch.

5. Looking up at the west face of the arch.



6. The arch viewed from the chancel (from east).

7. The north impost.

8. North base and jamb.



Nikon





General dimensions.

Chancel arch.

H.Taylor gives the height (let us say H1) of the chancel arch (to the underside) as about 13.5 feet, and its width (W) 6 ft 2 in.

Using #laser measuring equipment I have arrived at the following dimensions.

H1 4.3 metres (14.08 ft).

H2 3.047 metres (9.98 feet).

W 2.087 metres (6.83 feet); measurement taken at 0.75 metres from floor.

Plinth of north jamb; width measured east west; 0.807 metres (31.75 in).

Nave.

H.Taylor gives the dimensions as about 38.5 ft by 17.5 ft. the walls being 2 ft 4 in thick (0.71 metres).

My corresponding measurements are:-

Length 12.08 metres (39.56 feet).

Mean width of nave 5.47 metres (17.914 feet).

Mean height to underside of tie beams 6.867 metres (22.49 feet).

I did not record the thickness of the walls, I am perfectly sure that Taylor was correct with his dimension.

Note: measurement H2 is the height to the underside of impost.

W is the width (of an arch) between the jambs.

All heights measured from nave floor as datum.

Equipment accurate to +/- 1.5mm at 10 metres.

All dimensions less than 1.5 metres taken with a steel rule.