ST DROSTAN'S CHURCH, MARKINCH, FIFE

A Survey of Masons' Marks within the Tower

July 2015

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(Mason's Mark Project)



A Survey of Masons' Marks in the Tower of St Drostan's Parish Church, Markinch, Fife

Recording undertaken by the Mason's Mark Project

With assistance from Local Volunteers

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A Survey of Masons' Marks within the Tower of St Drostan's, Markinch

Summary

A recording survey of the masons' marks within the old tower of St Drostan's Parish Church, Markinch, Fife, was undertaken over 5 days in June and July 2015. This recorded 830 marks of 31 different masons.

Background

The Church of St Dostan's, Markinch, Fife stands on top of a glacial mound within the small town of Markinch at NGR NO2974 0196. The exact date of the building of the tower is unknown but thought to be 12th century. There is believed to have been a religious building of some type from possibly as early as the 6th century, although this early structure was probably wooden. A full description of the church can be found in Manson's *Markinch Parish Church, an Archaeological and Historical Assessment.*

It is known that the site was given to the religious group known as the Culdees of Loch Leven somewhere in the middle of the 11th century, although it is unknown what type of building stood on the site at this date. By the early 13th century the church was given to the Priory of St Andrews, Fife, so it is likely that a stone structure stood here by that date. There have been number of previous publications on the church and tower which attempt to date the building of the tower, but none gives a conclusive date, although most point to a probable 12th century date. This is based on the structural building techniques as well as some documentary references. However, as far as this author is aware, there is no definite document referring to its actual building. Suggestions have been made that there is a possible link between St Drostan's with both Dunfermline Abbey and Durham Cathedral, with possibly some of the same masons being used, who had worked on these two great buildings. It was hoped by looking at the masons' marks and doing a comparison that some links might be made. However, using masons' marks alone can rarely be used to date a structure. There needs to be a tie in with documentary records as well as building techniques being taken into account.

The Survey

The recording of marks was undertaken over three days in June, the 18th, 19th and 20th, and two days in July 2015, the 13th and 14th, with the help of volunteers from the Markinch Heritage Group and with permission from the Church Authorities. This was arranged through Bruce Manson of the Heritage Group.

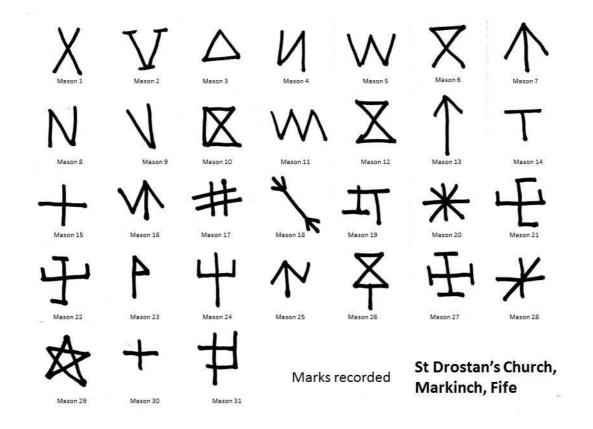
The Method Used for recording

All walls of the five floors and the spiral stair within the tower were checked for marks and all visible ones were recorded by photography, with an L- scale beside each mark where suitable, and sketches and notes taken of the marks and their locations. Each mark was given its own individual number to identify its location on plans and schematic drawings done at a later date.



The Results

A total of 830 marks were recorded. From these 31 different masons could be identified, although it is just possible a very few of the similar marks may have been done by the same mason. It is also probable that more marks may survive but are not visible due to inserted beams, particularly in the clock chamber. There is also very visible damage to stones from stone spauling and flaking. This was particularly noted higher up in some of the walls where damage by water ingression was noted and especially within the top floor of the tower.



Masons with their marks

NB The list of masons below with their marks is not set out numerically but grouped reflecting similarity of marks.

A number of marks (16) were recorded but due to the damage and erosion to the stone it was not possible to identify the mark and allocate it to a specific mason. This was the case for numbers 67, 261, 383, 425, 494, 526,619,657,661,677,700,725,727,750,808,827.

Three masons used a cross as their mark but each in a different way: Mason 1, Mason 15 and Mason 30.

Mason 1

A simple saltire cross identified this Mason 1, who worked on all but the 4th floor. A total of 79 instances where his mark was identified are recorded. The mark was usually a fairly precise cut, although a number showed poor survival due to stone decay.



Mason 1 - Mark No 6

Mason 1- Mark No 788

This mason used a straight forward right-angled cross, although occasionally one leg could be slightly longer as shown in mark 534 below. This mason's mark was found on the ground floor, 1st, 2nd and 4th floor with a total of 18 instances being recorded.



Mason 15 - Mark 651

Mason 15 - Mark 534

This was a very precise small cross quite distinct from mason 15. He appeared only to work on the 2nd floor, as his mark was not noted anywhere else. Only 5 of his marks were recorded.



Mason 30 - Mark 567

Mason 30 – Mark 225

A Roman 5 was used by this mason, who worked in all areas apart from the spiral stair. 64 of his marks were recorded. Occasionally some of the slashes on the legs or point could be longer than others.



Mason 2 – Mark 175

A back to front Z or N marked this mason who only worked in the ground and 1st floor areas. A total of 13 of his marks were recorded.



Mason 4 – Mark 150

Very similar to Mason 4 is the mark of Mason 8, whose mark is in reverse of 4. He worked on the ground, 1st floor and 2nd floor. 16 of his marks were recorded.



Mason 8- Mark 91

This mason used a simple letter W for his mark which can vary slightly in size. He worked on the ground floor, 1st floor, 2nd floor and spiral stair. 35 marks were recorded.



Mason 5 – Mark 35



Mason 5 – Mark 147

Examples of damage by stone erosion or spauling of surface are shown on the two photos below.



Mason 5 – Mark 310



Mason 5 – Mark 802

A mark similar to Mason 5 was used by this mason but with an added leg. His mark was only recorded twice, once on the ground floor and the other on the spiral stair.



Mason 11 – Mark 45

Mason 11 – Mark 787.

Both show severe spauling of the stone surface.

A triangle with two extended legs, or a tepee-shaped mark, which could show variations occasionally, was this mason's mark. Mason 6 worked in all areas apart from the 4th floor. 69 of his marks were recorded.

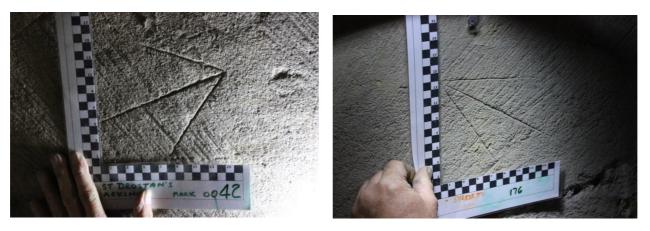


Mason 6 – Mark 507



Mason 6 – Mark 245

The most prolific of all the masons, he used an arrow as his mark and again there are a number of variations which could indicate that he had others, such as an apprentice, mark his stone for him. He worked in all areas of the tower. 196 of his marks were recorded.



Mason 7 – Mark 42

Mason 7 – Mark 176



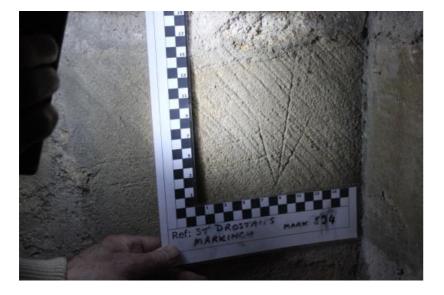
Mason 7 – Mark 116

Mason 7 – Mark 690



Mason 7? – Mark 502 This arrow was of a much larger scale than the others but only one example so probably is Mason 7.

A mark very similar to Mason 7 was made possibly by another mason. This mark, although also an arrow, is usually smaller and narrower in dimensions than Mason 7's mark. The tail is also usually longer so it is just possible this is a different mason. He worked on the ground floor, 1st, 2nd, 3rd floors and on the stairs. 17 marks were recorded.

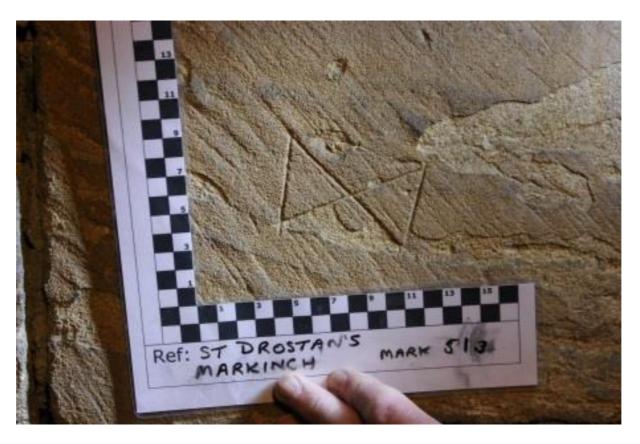


Mason 13 – Mark 534



Mason 13 – Mark 362

A St Andrews cross filled in on three sides, or an hour glass with one side filled. This mason worked on the ground floor, 2nd floor and 3rd floor. Only five of his marks were recorded. This mason could be related to Mason 12 below.



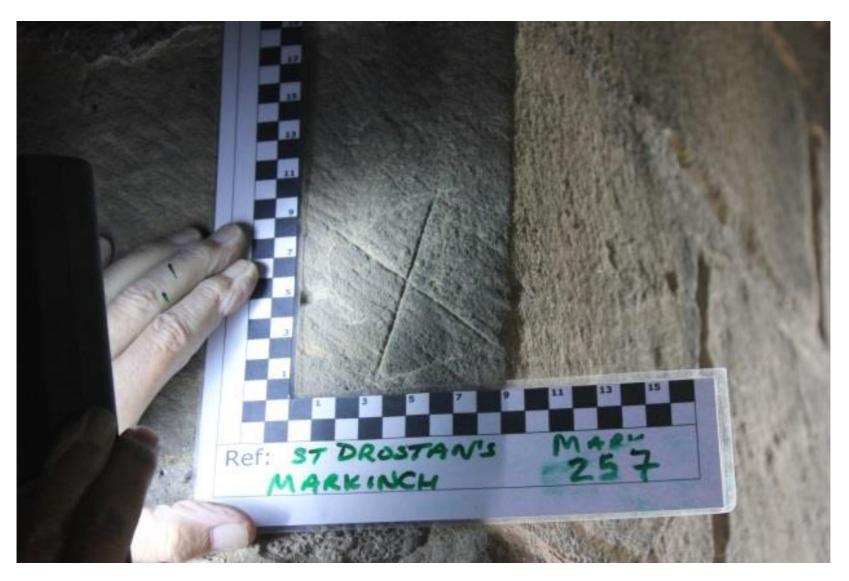
Mason 10 – Mark 513 although similar to Mason 12 there is a definite line joining the top two corners.



Another prolific mason, whose mark was recorded 106 times, is Mason 10. His mark is an 'egg timer' or double triangle. He worked in all areas apart from the 3rd floor, where his mark was not noted, although it could have been hidden by later beams. It is possible that he was the master mason, as there are two stones with his mark and other marks also on them. He cut his mark in a very precise way using his chisel marks as the basis for his first line. Note this on the two photos below.



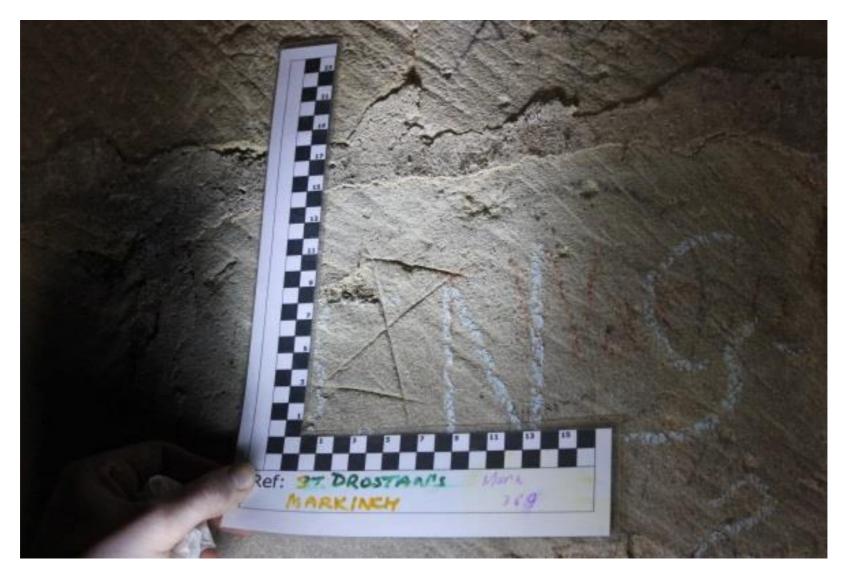
Mason 12- Mark 119



These two marks below are not cut on the working chisel lines as usual so may have been marked by his apprentices.



Mason 12 – Mark 423



The examples below show a mis-cut of one of the lines and an overcut.





This stone below not only shows his mark but gives building instructions as to how the stones were to be laid.



He also appears to approve Mason 3's cutting of his block as both marks are on the same stone.



Mason 3 Mark 427 and Mason 12 – Mark 428

A triangle was the mark chosen by this mason, although it varied greatly from a small neat triangle to a more uneven sided one. He worked on most floors apart from the 4th floor and the outer face of the tower within the loft. 37 of his marks were noted. It is just possible that Mason 3 had been an apprentice of Mason 12 and when gaining his mark at the end of his training he took the triangle as his mark, which is a half of the mark of his former master. This may explain why both marks are on the one stone.



Mason 3 – Mark 256

Mason 3 – Mark 24

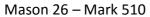
It is possible that this may be a misinterpretation of Mason 3 but it appears to be a V so may be a different mason, but due to the height it was not possible to look at it more clearly. Only one instance on the 2nd floor was recorded of this mark.



Mason 9 – Mark 635 or Mason 3?

Very similar to Mason 12's mark but with an added line extension to one end formed this mason's mark. Only one example was found inside the loft on the outer wall of the tower. It may either be accidental and is Mason 12 or perhaps a son working with his father?





Only one example of this mark was noted and may not be a separate mason, but it doesn't appear to fit in with any other grouping particularly, apart from possibly Mason 1. This mark was only found on the 2nd floor.

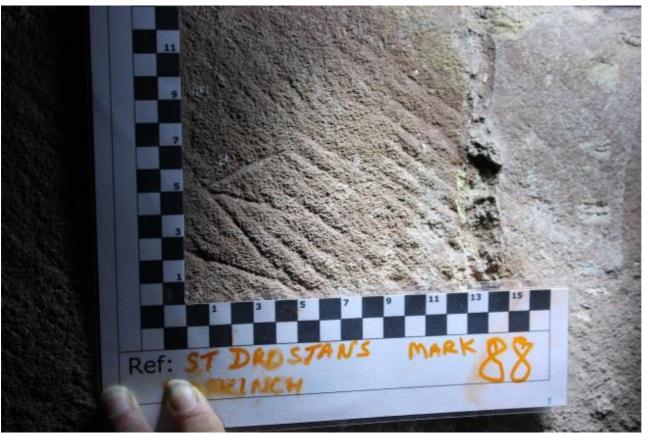


Mason 14- Mark 665

Mason 16 & Mason 25

These two masons used a similar mark to each other but in reverse. This may mean they were related, such as father and son, or brothers. Only one record of each mark was noted.

Mason 16 worked on the ground floor only while Mason 25 worked in the 1st floor only.





Mason 25 – Mark 228

Only one mark from Mason 17 was recorded on the 1st floor only. A hashtag mark with nothing noted similar elsewhere.



Mason 17 – Mark 244

A very distinct mark found only on the 1st, 2nd and 4th floors. Very long and narrow based on two arrowheads pointing towards each other. 9 examples of this mark were noted.



Mason 18 – Mark 374

Only a single mark recorded of possible inverted initials T T. Only found on the 1st floor.



Mason 19 – Mark 254

This mason used an asterisk for his mark. Some are quite small while others much larger, which again could indicate that others cut the mark for him. This mason worked on 1st floor, 2nd floor, 3rd floor, 4th floor and on the stairs. 48 of his marks were recorded.



Mason 20 – Mark 564

Mason 20 – Mark 397

The two examples below show the same mark but on a larger scale.





Mason 20 – Mark 578

Mason 20 – Mark 633

This mason uses a very similar mark to the above Mason 20 but with one less line. He worked on the 3rd and 4th floors, with only 4 examples of his work recorded.



Mason 28 - Mark 772

Mason 28 – Mark 777

Mason 21 & 22 and Mason 27

The marks of these two masons 21 & 22 are again similar but each in reverse, which could again signify a family working together. Both marks are only found on the spiral stair. Mason 27 is also very similar in design, who is perhaps of the same family or yard.

4 examples were found of Mason 21 and 3 examples of Mason 22. Only one was found of Mason 27.



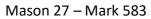
Mason 21 – Mark 814



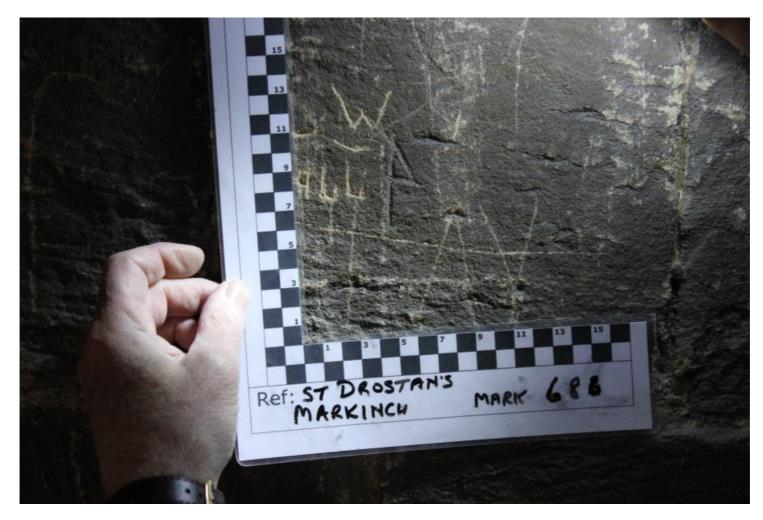
Mason 22 – Mark 296

Also similar is Mason 27, whose mark was only found on the second floor.





Only one example of Mason 23 was recorded on the 3rd floor. It is a small sharply cut distinct mark.



Mason 23 – Mark 686

This mason's mark is like a trident but unfortunately the examples are poor and faint. He worked on the 1st floor only with only 2 examples visible.

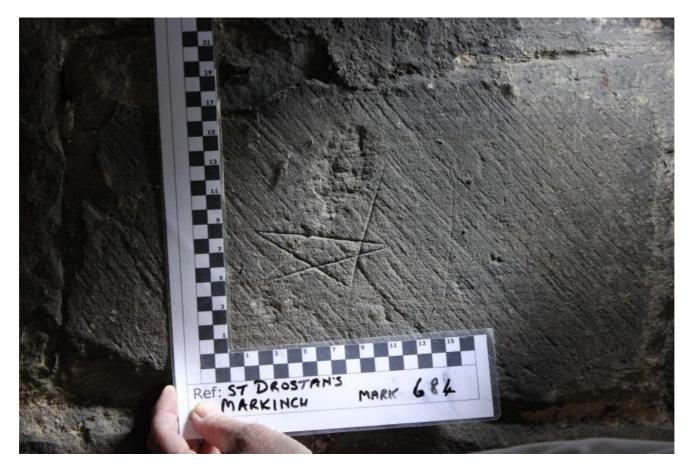


Mason 24 – Mark 358



Mason 24 – Mark 474

Again amongst the higher producers of work Mason 29 had a 5-pointed start as his mark. They vary in size as well as design so again could indicate others cutting his mark. He worked on 2nd floor, 3rd floor, 4th floor and the stairs. 58 examples of his mark were recorded. Many of the voussiors of the arches were cut by him.



Mason 29 – Mark 685



Mason 29 – Mark 722



Mason 29 - Mark 744



Mason 29 – Marks 715, 716 on the voussoirs of a window.

Mason 31 was only found on the 3rd floor where 2 examples of his mark were recorded.



Mason 31 – Mark 703

Discussion

The topic of masons' marks can be controversial. There are a number of opinions on their use. It is generally believed that when an apprentice mason finished his long apprenticeship he became a full mason and was then allowed to choose his mark which he would use to identify his work. This personal identification mark would be cut into blocks he had dressed for purposes of quality control, as well as calculation of payments (Hislop, M 2000, *Medieval Masons*, 50).

Over the years masons' marks have raised some interest in a variety of fields but can often be dismissed as of little use or interest, mainly due to the wide spread of both area and dates where similar marks can be found over. Yes, this can be true but they can at least help to establish a building sequence where a structure has been added to over centuries. Naming a mason is a different problem.

Attempting to date a building by masons' marks alone is fraught with problems, as the same design of a mark can appear over a wide time span and over a wide area. For example the mark of Mason 12 is similar to a mark found at Arbroath Abbey, Angus, where it was noted on a window of the ground floor of the East gatehouse which is dated between 13th and 14th century. A similar mark is also found at Kildrummy Castle Watergate, Aberdeenshire, with a possible date of the 13th century. However, it is also found on later buildings such as Glamis Castle, Angus, where it was recorded on part of the castle dating to the 16th century, and also at Inverquharity Castle, Angus, which again is dated to the 16th century.

At Elgin Cathedral, Moray, marks similar to Masons 5, 27, 29 and 30 can be found on the building, which dates between the 13th to 15th century.

The mark of Mason 7 can similarly be placed at Arbroath Abbey with an early 14th century date and at Drum Castle where it is found on areas dating from the 13th century to the 14th century. It is also found again at Inverquharity Castle, which is dated to the 16th century. Indeed the marks of Masons 1,15, 20, 29 and 30 can also be found at Arbroath Abbey, all in parts dating from the 13th-14th century.

The five-pointed start of Mason 29 is found across a wide variation in dates from the 12th century up to the 17th century, being recorded in Leslie House in Fife, which is of late 17th century in date.

The one mark which is more unique and likely to be of more use for dating is the elongated double arrow of Mason 18, which to date the writer has not come across in over 70 buildings where marks have been recorded.

What is of interest is that Masons 21 & 22 appears to have been brought in to work only on the spiral stair. This may be because they were more skilled in cutting blocks on a curve than some of the other masons, who generally only cut ashlar blocks.

Where we find only one mark recorded by a single mason this could possibly indicate an itinerant travelling mason simply filling in time before starting another job. This is in reference to Masons 9, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23 & 26.

Two masons appear to be more prolific in their production of dressed ashlar blocks than any other, in particular Mason 7, who worked in all areas of the tower. He appeared to be able to work both ashlar blocks and the curved blocks of the spiral stair.

Mason 12 is notable for the deliberate way he cut his mark into a finished block. It was very precise and made use of the lines of dressing across the face of the block for cutting of the diagonal line of his mark. There is also, I think, clear evidence that not all the marks allocated to him, were actually cut by him. In some cases the mark does not align with the way the stone was dressed, in particular marks 369 and 423. There are also some slight extensions to the cutting which over-run the general shape, as well as some obvious mis-cuts and then recut (mark 618).

However, given that Mason 12 also cut his mark on a block, which also contained building instructions as to how blocks were to be joined (Mark record 69), this could indicate he had some importance on site and was perhaps the master mason, or at least one of the more prominent masons to be working here.

There is also another indication regarding his importance, which comes in the form of his mark on a block which also had another mason's mark on it. This refers to the block containing mark records 427 & 428. Here Mason 3 also appears along with Mason 12. As suggested above, this could well mean that Mason 12 was approving the work of Mason 3, who had perhaps been his former apprentice but who had recently finished his apprenticeship and was now a full mason with his own mark. Perhaps there were regulations which required checks to be made on those who had recently joined the ranks of full masons. There is certainly a slight link in that Mason 3 chose half of the mark belonging to Mason 12 as his own mark, a single triangle which is half of the double adjoining triangles of Mason 12.

Conclusion

Work will continue no doubt into the future in attempting to prove that the same master mason, or possibly group of masons, who worked on Durham Cathedral and Dunfermline Abbey, also worked on building St Drostan's. As noted above at other locations some of the marks found at St Drostan's can indeed be found in Durham Cathedral. This is in reference to the marks of Mason 1, 3, 6, 11, 12, 15 in particular but one would have to know the date of the part of the building where each mark was found first of all to see if the dates was the same.

While unfortunately the survey itself cannot identify a specific mason or help date the building of the structure itself it has added to the general information being gathered on the tower.

Marks can be, and have been related to a specific mason on occasion, but this is usually aided by documentary evidence. It is therefore important to try to undertake as much research as possible on both the documentary side as well as the analysis of the building structure itself. The problem of documents surviving from early church records in Scotland is well known, due to the large amount of damage and destruction caused by the Reformation. However some have survived, although thin on the ground. It is always the possibility that others might yet await to be discovered by a diligent researcher.

Moira Greig

Mason's Mark Project

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Bruce Manson for approaching me in the first place to record the marks and for making arrangements for access. His knowledge of the tower itself proved to be extremely useful.

Thanks are also due to the Minister and Church Session of Markinch Parish Church for allowing us access to the tower and for the use of the Session House.

Special thanks must go to Maureen Brand for making the greatly appreciated cups of tea and coffee every day, also for arranging teams of volunteers to assist.

Finally I would like to thank the volunteers themselves, who gave their time to help record the marks: Dael Wilson, Juli Gleason, Alan Crombie, Barrie Brown, Colin Thomson, Michael Gleason, Ian Sankey, Christine Manson and Gretchen Schuttger.

References

Hislop, M 2000 Medieval Masons Shire Archaeology

Manson, B 2014 Markinch Parish Church, An Archaeological and Historical Assessment

Appendices

Appendix I Sheet giving the identified masons

with number allocated to them.

Appendix II Chart showing locations where each mason worked

along with number of instances his mark was recorded.

Appendix III Floor plans of the Tower of St Drostan's Church, Markinch

Showing the general locations of all recorded marks

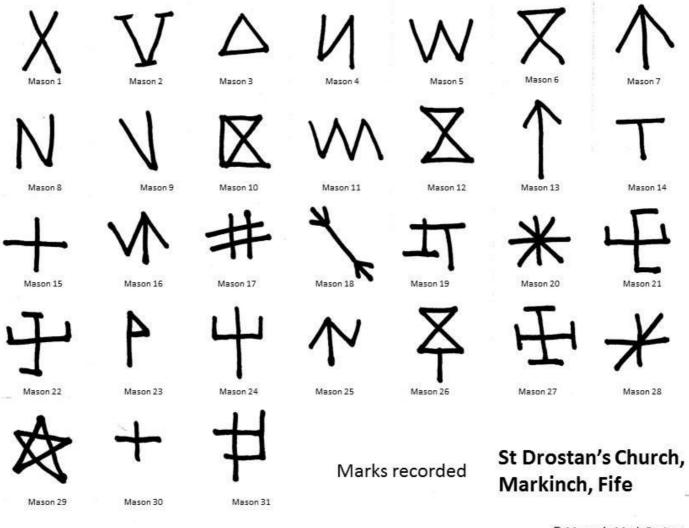
Appendix IV Schematic Drawings of Elevations

Showing the location of each numbered mark record.

Appendix I

Sheet giving the identified masons' marks

with number allocated to them.



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Appendix II

Chart showing locations where each mason worked

along with number of instances his mark was recorded.

St Drostan's Church, Markinch , Fife

Areas where each mason worked

Mason	Mark	Ground floor	1 st floor	2 nd floor	inside loft	3 rd floor	4 th floor	spiral stair	No
1	X	*	*	*	*	*		*	79
2	V	*	*	*	*	*	*		64
3		*	*	*		*		*	37
4	И	*	*						13
5	W	*	*	*				*	35
6	X	*	*	*	*	*		*	69
7	\wedge	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	196
8	N	*	*	*					16
9	V			*					1
10	X	*		*	*				5
11	M	*						*	2
12	X	*	*	*	*		*	*	106

1

1. 11

Mason	Mark	Ground floor	1 st floor	2 nd floor	inside loft	3 rd floor	4 th floor	spiral stair	6
13	\uparrow	*	*	*		*		*	17 >>
14	T			*					1
15	+	*	*	*			*		18
16	M	*							1
17	*		*						1
18	×		*	*			*		9
19	工		*						1
20	*		*	*		*	*	*	48
21	七米 七							*	4
22	中							*	3
23	P					*			1
24	4		*						2
25	N		*						1

A11

Mason	Mark	Ground floor	1 st floor	2 nd floor	inside loft	3 rd floor	4 th floor	spiral stair	
26	举				*				1
27	H			*					2
28	×					*	*		4
29	X			*		*	*	*	58
30	+			*					5
31	#					*			2

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3

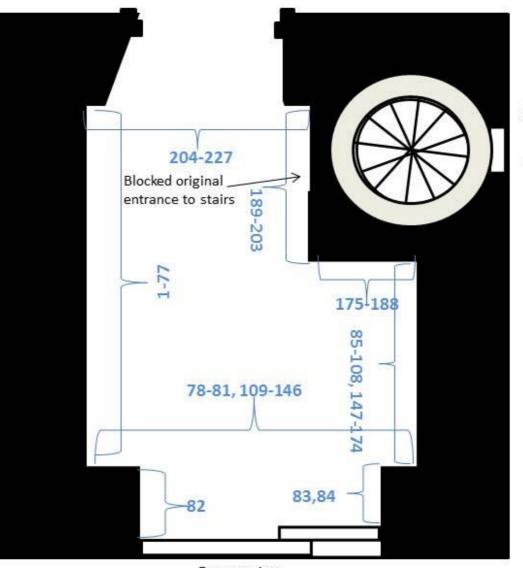
Appendix III

Floor plans of the Tower of St Drostan's Church, Markinch

Showing the general locations of all recorded marks.

St Drostan's Church Markinch, Fife

Later entrance into tower beneath window



Spiral stair to upper floors. Entrance now external

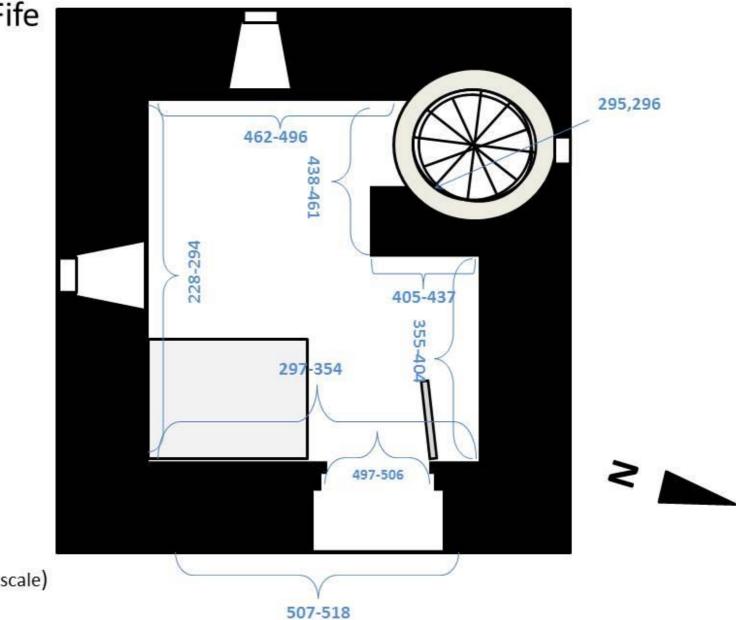


64 Ground floor plan

(schematic – not to scale)

Doorway into original church through blocked archway

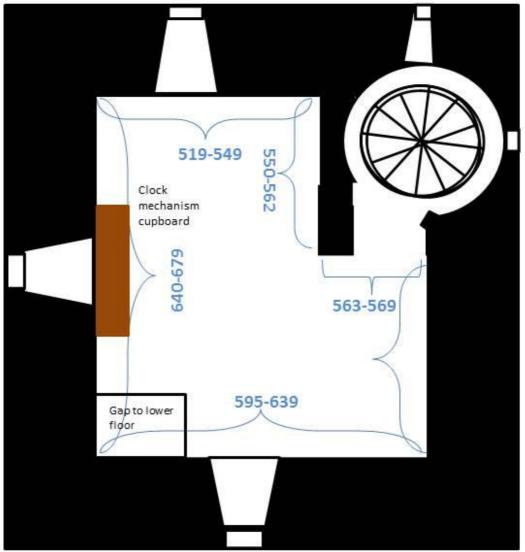
St Drostan's Church Markinch, Fife



65 **1st floor plan** (schematic – not to scale)

St Drostan's Church

Markinch, Fife



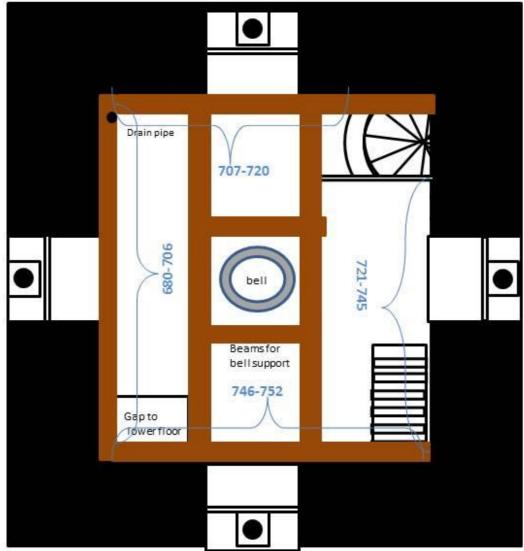


2nd floor plan (schematic – not to scale)

66

St Drostan's Church

Markinch, Fife

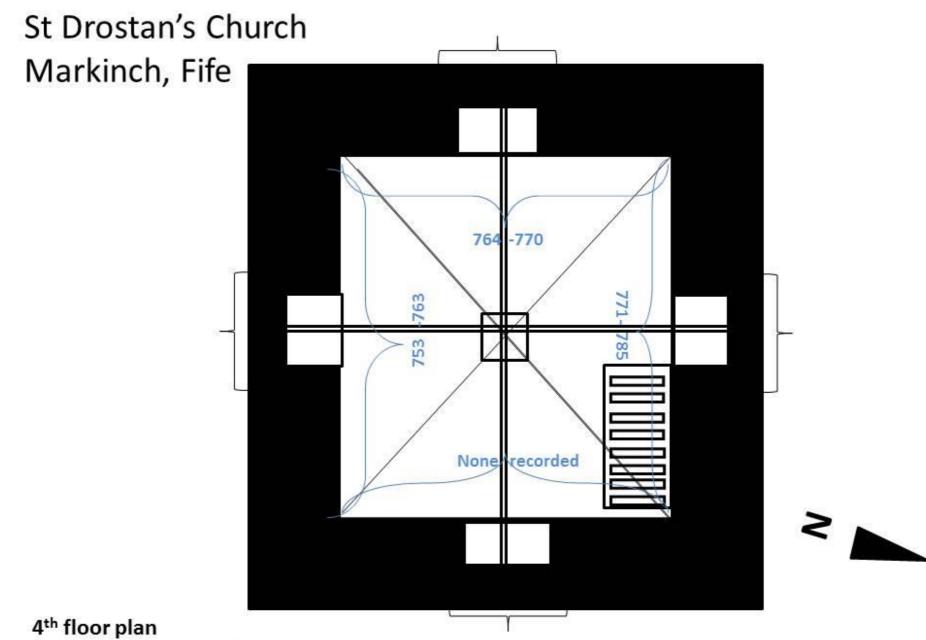


2

3rd floor plan

67

(schematic – not to scale)

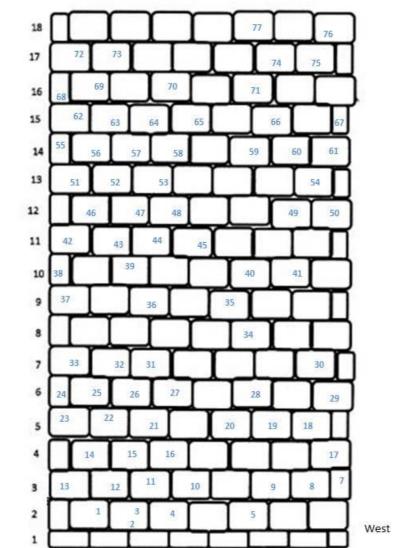


(schematic – not to scale)

Appendix IV

Schematic Drawings of Elevations

Showing the location of each numbered mark record.

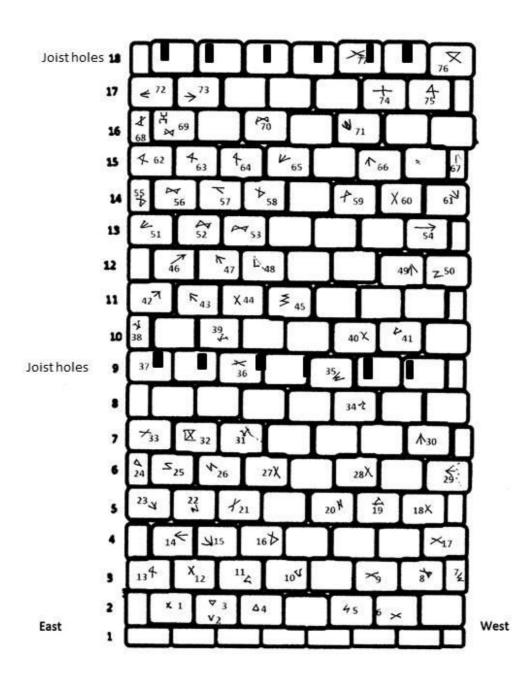


St Drostan's Church, Markinch, Fife



Tower Ground floor South wall

East



St Drostan's Church, Markinch, Fife

4

Tower Ground floor-South wall



4 ..

Schematic

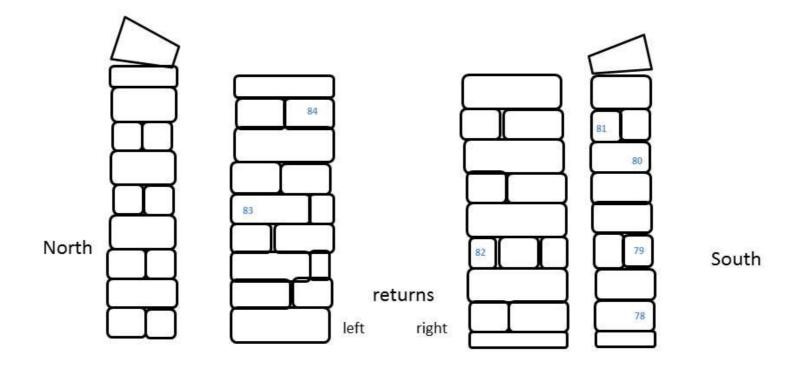
Not to scale

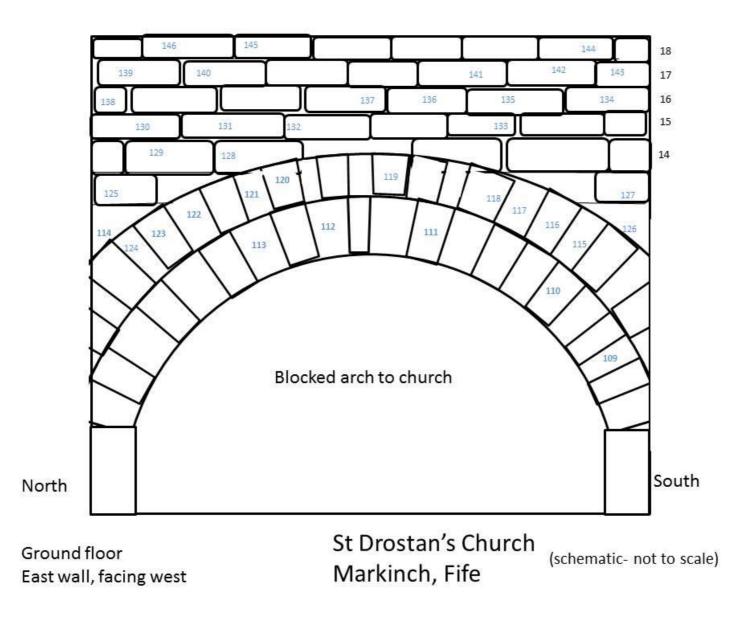
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(schematic- not to scale)

St Drostan's Church Markinch, Fife

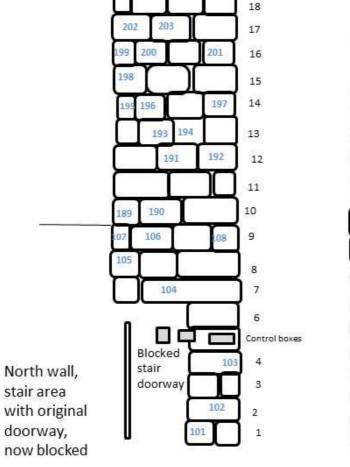
East wall, facing west Left side of arch East wall, facing west right side of arch

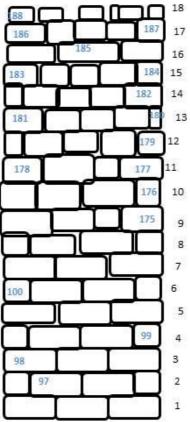


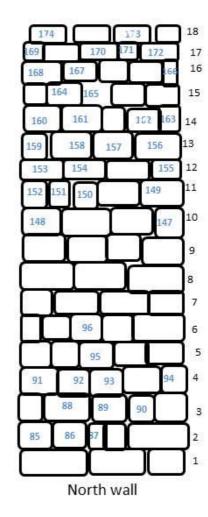


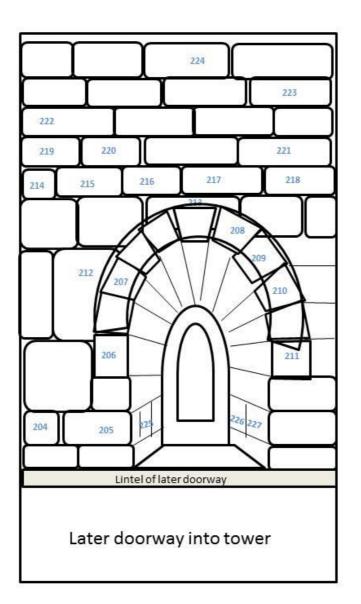
Ground floor (schematic – not to scale)

North wall return, facing east









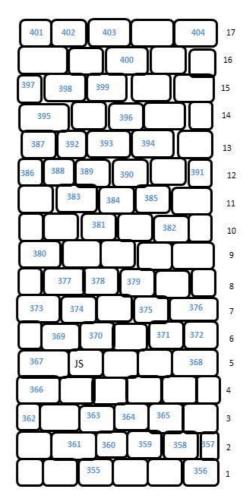


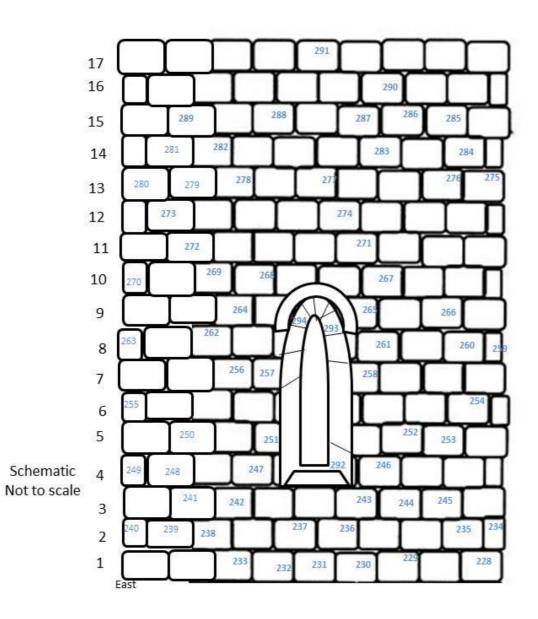
Upper West wall, facing East

Stair access wall		
46	51	
459 460		
457 4	58 456	
455	ЦIJ	
45	3 454	
451	452	
449 447	448	
444 44		
441 442	443	
	440	
Δ. Ι		
to stairs		
496		
Цļ	439	
	438	

	Return, faci	ng east
<u>ן</u>		437
6	435	436 434
j	432 431	\square
ן	429	430
4	426 423 424	428
1	421	422
J		420
ן		419
	416	418
\prec	413 419	
<u> </u>	411	412
	409 410	\square
4	407	408 406

First floor



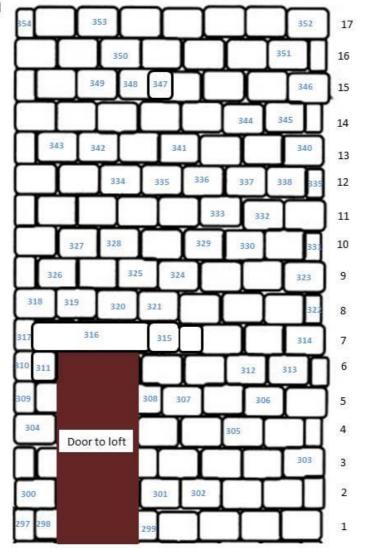


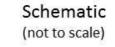


First floor-South wall

First Floor, East wall

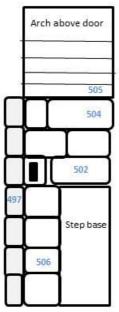
North

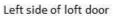


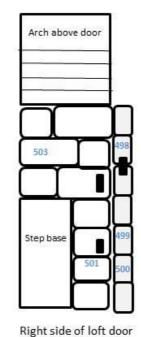


South

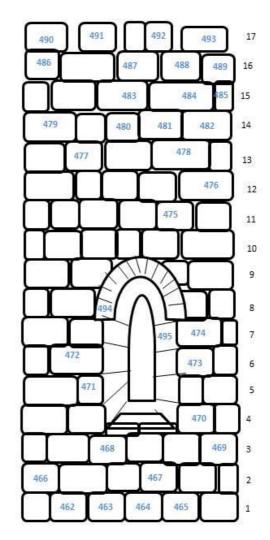
First floor schematic- not to scale

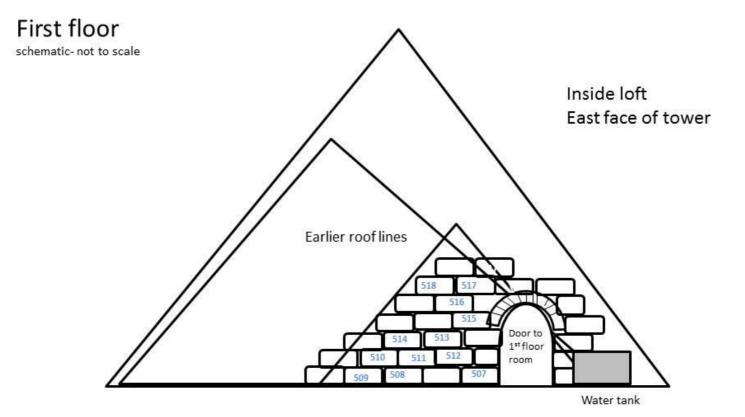






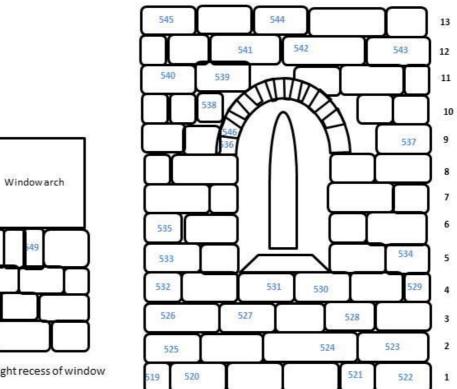
West wall





Second floor West wall

Schematic (not to scale)



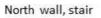
Windowarch 547

Left recess of window

Right recess of window

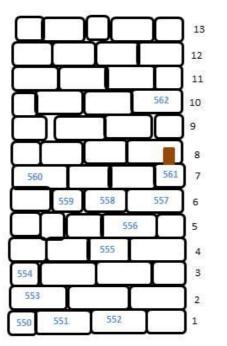
Second floor North wall

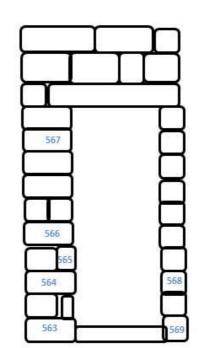
Schematic (not to scale)

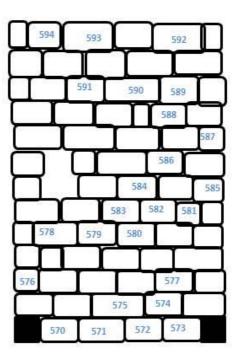


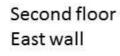
North wall return

North wall, facing south

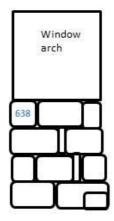








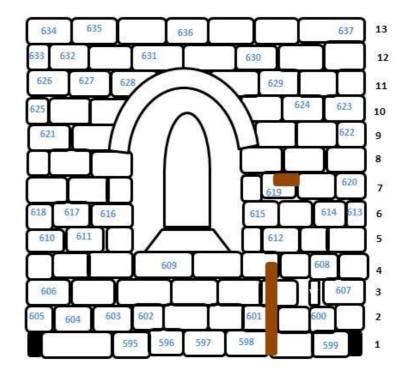
Schematic (not to scale)



Left side of window in East wall

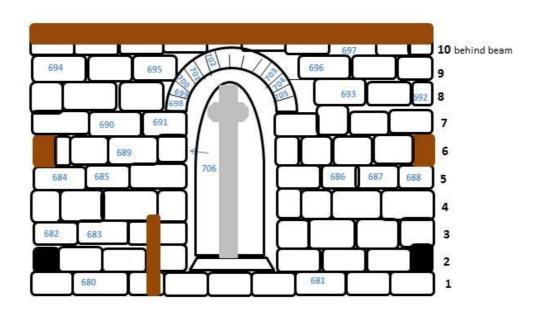
Window arch 639

Right side of window in East wall



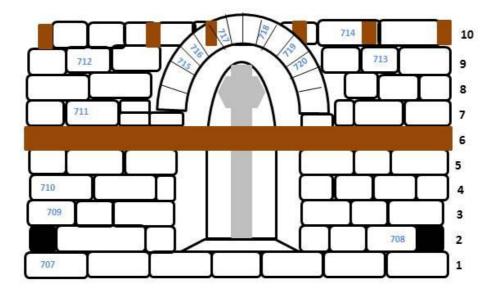
Schematic (not to scale)

Third floor South wall



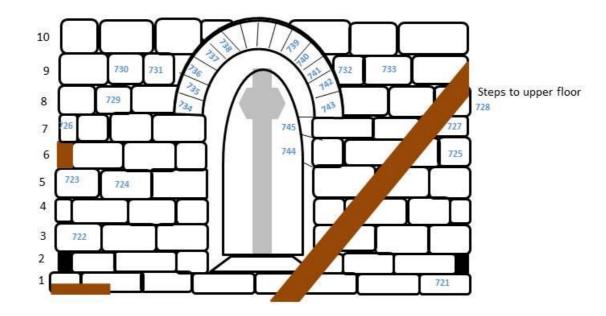
Schematic (not to scale)

Third floor West wall

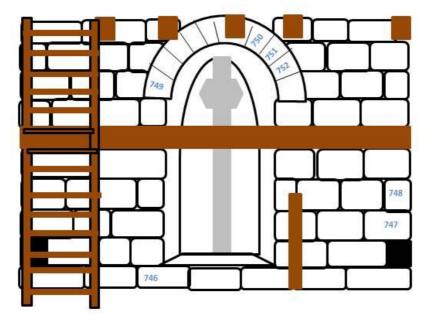


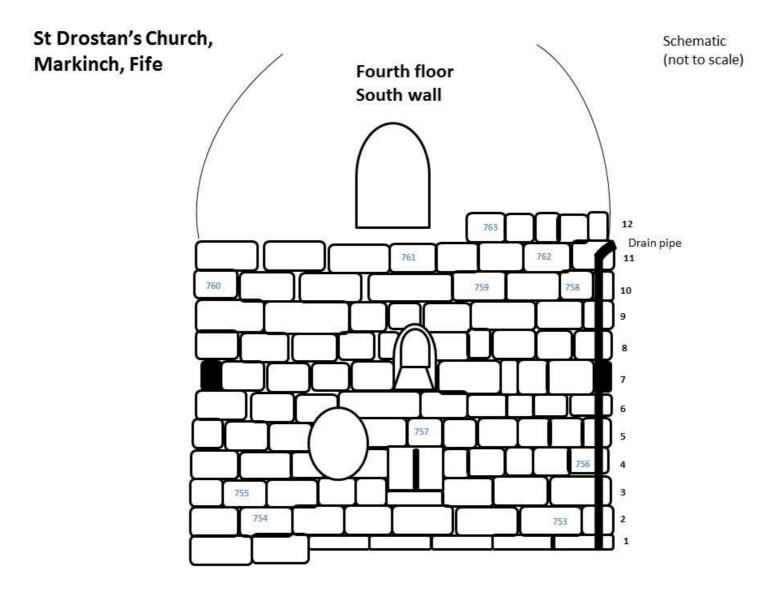
Schematic (not to scale)

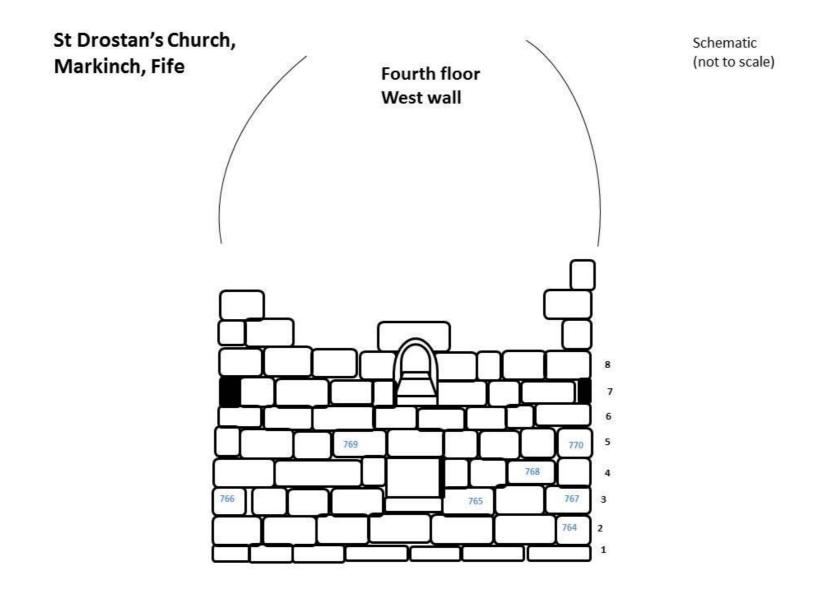
Third floor North wall



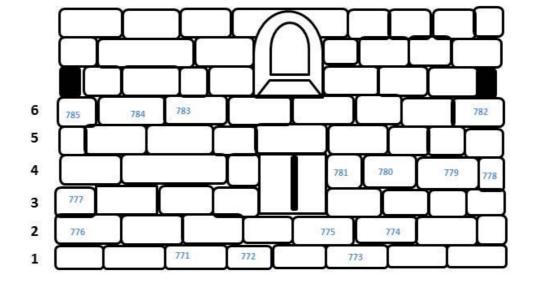
3rd floor East wall Schematic (not to scale)





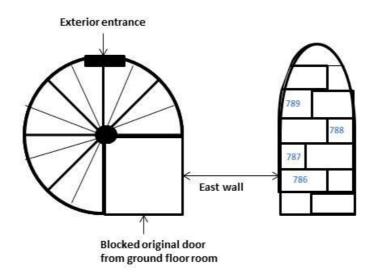


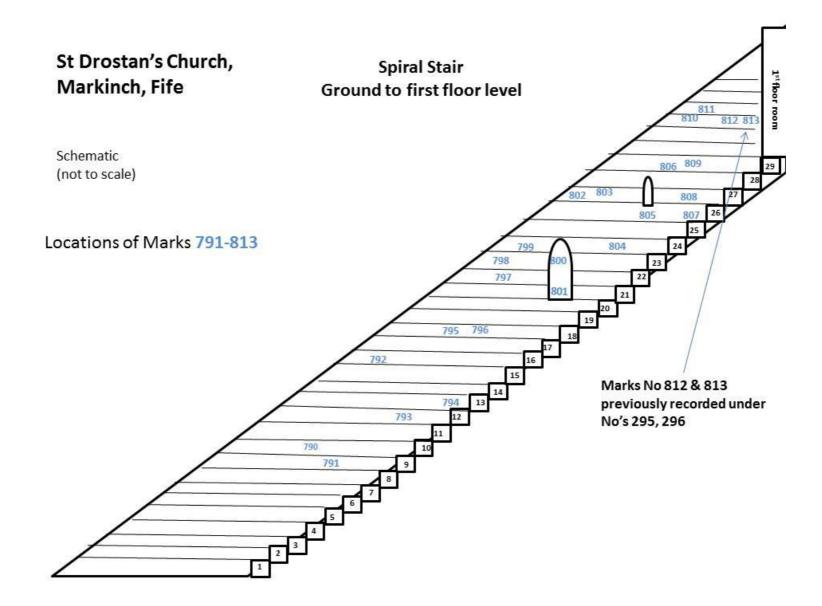
Fourth floor North wall Schematic (not to scale)

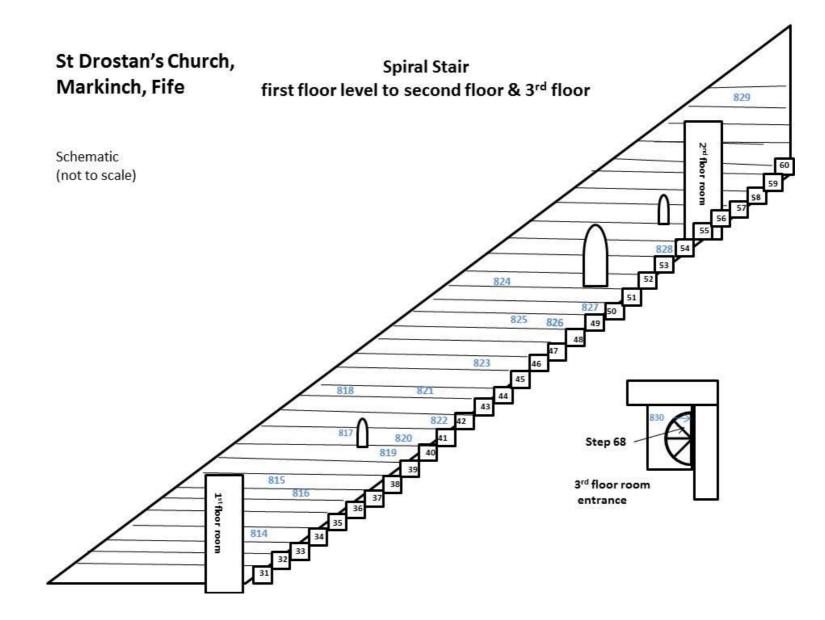


Schematic (not to scale)

Spiral Stair base







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