

A SAXON CHURCH AT BREAMORE, HANTS.

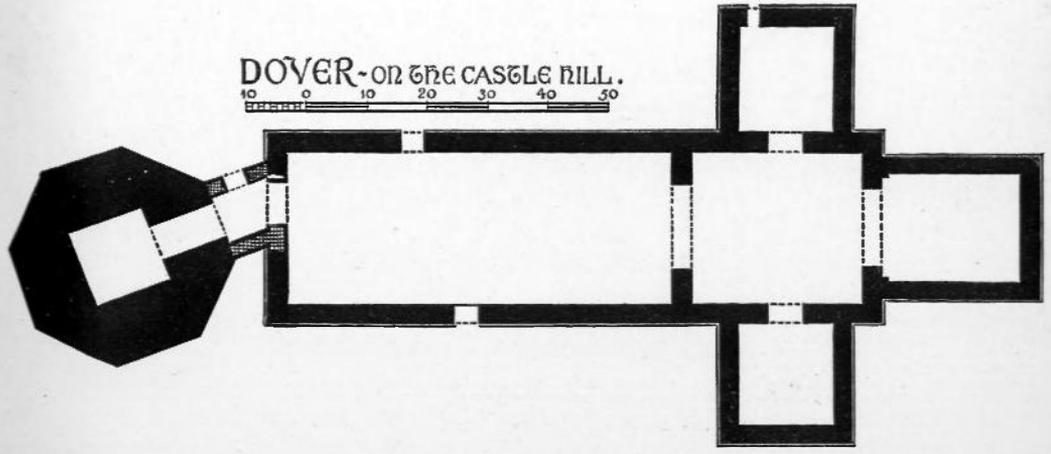
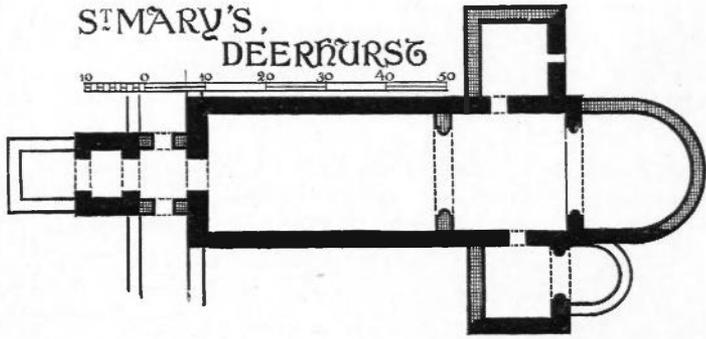
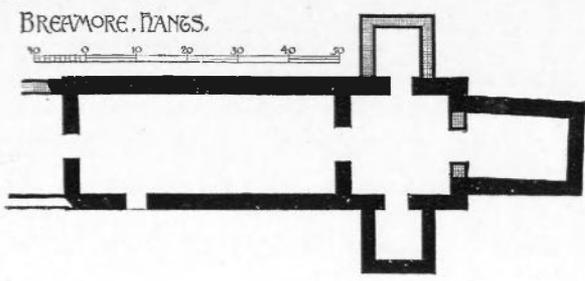
By the REV. A. DU BOULAY HILL, M.A.

The parish church of St. Mary, Breamore, about 9 miles south of Salisbury, may now be added to our list of Saxon buildings.¹ It is a cruciform church with a central tower rising to the ridge of the nave roof, the interior length being 96 feet 6 inches, and the width of the nave 20 feet 6 inches. In the accompanying plan what remains of the original Saxon ground-plan is shown black, and the parts conjecturally restored to it on more or less certain evidence are scored. Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite has kindly supplied for comparison his plans of the Dover Castle and Deerhurst churches, on a corresponding uniform scale of 32 feet to the inch, from his paper on "Saxon Church Building."² Thus it can be seen that we have here an example of the Dover type of the later period of Saxon church building, more complete than any yet known except that at Dover Castle itself. The roofs retain their original pitch, and except for the insertion of later windows the church presents much of its original appearance. The chancel has undergone some rebuilding, but the lower stones of its eastern quoins show that it represents the ground plan of the Saxon church.

The walls are of flint with hardly any attempt at herring-bone work, and with long-and-short work of green sandstone in the quoins and vertical pilaster strips. The walls were covered externally with yellowish plaster (now all removed) worked up to a straight rebate on the quoins and strips. The windows were simple round-headed openings in the rubble masonry, plastered, and splayed inside and outside. Two windows only remain in the north wall of the nave, and two in the

¹ The church has recently undergone restoration under the direction of Messrs. Christian and Purdav.

² *Archaeological Journal*, Vol. LIII, p. 293.



south wall are now blocked by the addition of the porch.

Below an original window in the east wall of the south transept an archway has been found blocked up, the external half of the stonework of the arch alone remaining. It is apparently an insertion of a later date, but still Saxon in character. It may have been an entrance, but more probably it was an opening into an apsidal altar space, not in the original plan, corresponding to that shown conjecturally on the plan of St. Mary's, Deerhurst. It seems to indicate that the transept floor was about 18 inches below the level of the floor of the tower.

Traces of a western extension of the north wall of the church give evidence of the existence of a west chamber of the same width as the nave, and the jambs of a doorway, 5 feet 6 inches wide, leading into it from the nave are visible below the ground line, though the whole of the wall above it has been rebuilt.

The north transept or chamber has disappeared, but the jambs of the tower arch, and the weathering on the northern face of the tower, clearly indicate its position. The east and west tower-arches have been replaced by wider four-centred corbelled arches of the fifteenth century, but portions of a low stone screen of this later date still rest upon the foundations of the original western tower-arch 6 feet 8 inches wide. The only one of the four tower-arches now remaining complete is that leading to the south transept. It is a tall narrow arch, 4 feet 11 inches wide, with bold cable moulding on its projecting imposts. On the tower face of the arch is the following inscription cut in the stone in capital letters 6 inches high, which when found were filled with plaster and coloured red, with a red line above and below:—

HER SPVTELAD SEO GECPYDRÆDNES ðE.

The three-letters *gec* in this inscription are cut upon a piece of white stone inserted as a patch in the green sandstone arch.

Another fragment of stone built into the adjoining wall bearing the letters DES gives evidence that the inscription was continued over the other arches. The language

is grammatical Old-English, and Dr. II. Sweet is of opinion that it is not much earlier than the middle of the eleventh century, and that the shapes of the letters do not contradict this date. *Swutelath* (*sweetelian*) has a rare intransitive meaning—"becomes manifest," "appears"; *gecwyrædnes* is no doubt a late unusual form of *gecwyræden*—"compact," "covenant"; and the inscription, which seems to be legal rather than scriptural language, perhaps refers to the fulfilment of some church-building vow, and may be thus translated—

"Here the covenant becomes manifest to thee."

It is possible, however, that the reference may be to the baptismal covenant, and the words may indicate the use of the south transept as a baptistery.

The discovery of this inscription is most valuable as affording an unexpected corroboration of the late date assigned by Mr. Micklethwaite to this type of building.¹

Another point of interest in this church is a large stone rood built into the external wall of the nave, over the south doorway. It has been so defaced as to show only the outline of the three life-sized figures which stood out in relief from the plastered wall. At the ends of the arms of the cross there are square panels which may have contained representations of the sun and moon, and above the top of the cross is a stone carved with wavy lines representing clouds from which proceeded a hand, as in the Romsey crucifix. I have little doubt that this rood, which occupies the space between two original windows, is coeval with the Saxon wall into which it is built; and that the doorway below it (now a twelfth century arch with its rebate cut away) represents the position of the original south entrance. In the twelfth century a low porch was built against the plastered wall of the church, the roof of which must have come just below the central figure of the rood. A small circular stone medallion with an *Agnus Dei* carved on a sunk panel, inserted over the south door, probably belongs to this date. In the

¹ The Rev. E. P. Dew, Rector of Breamore, suggests that the inscription may have been placed on the arch, when the priory was founded at Breamore in the twelfth century, as a record of the agreement between the owners of the

church and the founders of the priory. No doubt the Old English language still continued colloquially among the people, and as an academic study among monks.



SOUTH TRANSEPT ARCH, BREAMORE, HANTS.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY G. H. DUNMORE, DOWNTON.

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ROOD IN CHAMBER OVER SOUTH PORCH, BREAMORE, HANTS.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY G. H. DUNMORE, DOWNTON.

fifteenth century the walls of this porch were carried up so as to enclose the rood in an upper chamber or parvise, which was fitted up as a chapel and frescoed, exactly as in the case of the very similar rood on the west wall of the Saxon church of Headbourne Worthy, near Winchester.

As to the existence of dwelling chambers within the church there is but little evidence here. The four tower windows above the transept roofs were splayed downwards, as though originally open to the ground as at present. Some carved corbels remain at a higher level. There used, however, to be a belfry floor at a lower level, which may possibly have rested on ancient corbels now removed, but the entrance to this chamber seems to be merely a modern opening made in the south wall of the tower. Under the roof of the south transept, where it abuts against the tower, the wall is plastered, and still shows the marks of the original roof timbers—a king-post with two oblique struts; but the space here available must have been very small.

The western chamber is not exactly like any other known example, and it is unfortunate that interments and the rising ground have prevented any further investigations of the plan and purpose of this part. If, as I suppose, the south door was the original entrance, it would not have been merely a vestibule. It may have been the baptistery, and, at any rate in its upper storeys, may have been the priest's dwelling place.

In the twelfth century a small priory of Austin Canons¹ was founded at Breamore. They were no doubt provided with suitable buildings elsewhere than in the church, and the dwelling chambers would thus become disused. But they found the church on the whole sufficiently large and suited to their requirements; and except for the insertion of larger windows, the disuse of the appended chambers (the south transept was shut off by a wall with a small Tudor doorway in it), and the widening of the chancel arches, there have been few structural alterations in this ancient edifice.

¹ At the end of Henry I's reign. Tanner's *Notitia Monastica*, "Bromere."