

Bradbourne Church.*

BY ALBERT HARTSHORNE, F.S.A.

BY the kindness of the Council of the Derbyshire Archæological Society, I am allowed to offer a few remarks upon Bradbourne Church, and in doing this I will be as brief as I can; and in order also to be clear, I have made a plan which sets forth the different periods of the church's history, as shown by the architectural character of the various parts of the building.

The intelligent study of ecclesiastical architecture was first taught us by the late Professor Willis; he it was who first opened the book of architectural history. He applied historical documents to the actual buildings, and one by one he unfolded the story of many of our cathedrals in a most lucid and admirable manner. What Willis did for cathedrals some others did for castles, and what they did for castles we are sometimes able to do for churches.

In the case of cathedrals we have the Fabric Rolls of the ancient foundations; for castles in the hands of the Crown we have the sheriffs' returns year by year on the Great Roll of the Pipe, the Close Rolls, the Liberate Rolls, and other corroborative and collateral evidence, known as the Public Records, all now happily available for use; they were not so much so many years ago, and antiquaries (who are not infallible) made great blunders in consequence.

* Read at Bradbourne, July 21st, 1888.

As regards churches we are not so fortunate as with cathedrals and castles, and we have usually to rely upon the evidence of architecture alone. Still we occasionally do have documents which we can apply to parish churches, and it fortunately happens that at least the early history of Bradbourne Church can be elucidated by means of documentary evidence. I will be as cautious as I can in my use of these documents, in reading the writing upon the wall, because, where the written record is so slight, there is always the danger of being tempted to get more out of the documents than they really give us.

In deducing the history of an old church, there are two ways of looking at it; and it must be borne in mind that very few churches in England are of one period, but have grown from small beginnings, like most other human institutions and things. Mr. Freeman, whose opinion we all receive with the utmost respect, insists that we should look at the outside of a church before going in; other authorities persist in going inside the church first. In the one case it may generally be said that we see what the church has grown to, and in the other what it has grown from. Strictly speaking, no rule can be laid down; and, certainly, the growth of Bradbourne Church is best seen from the outside, therefore I have asked you to stand here.

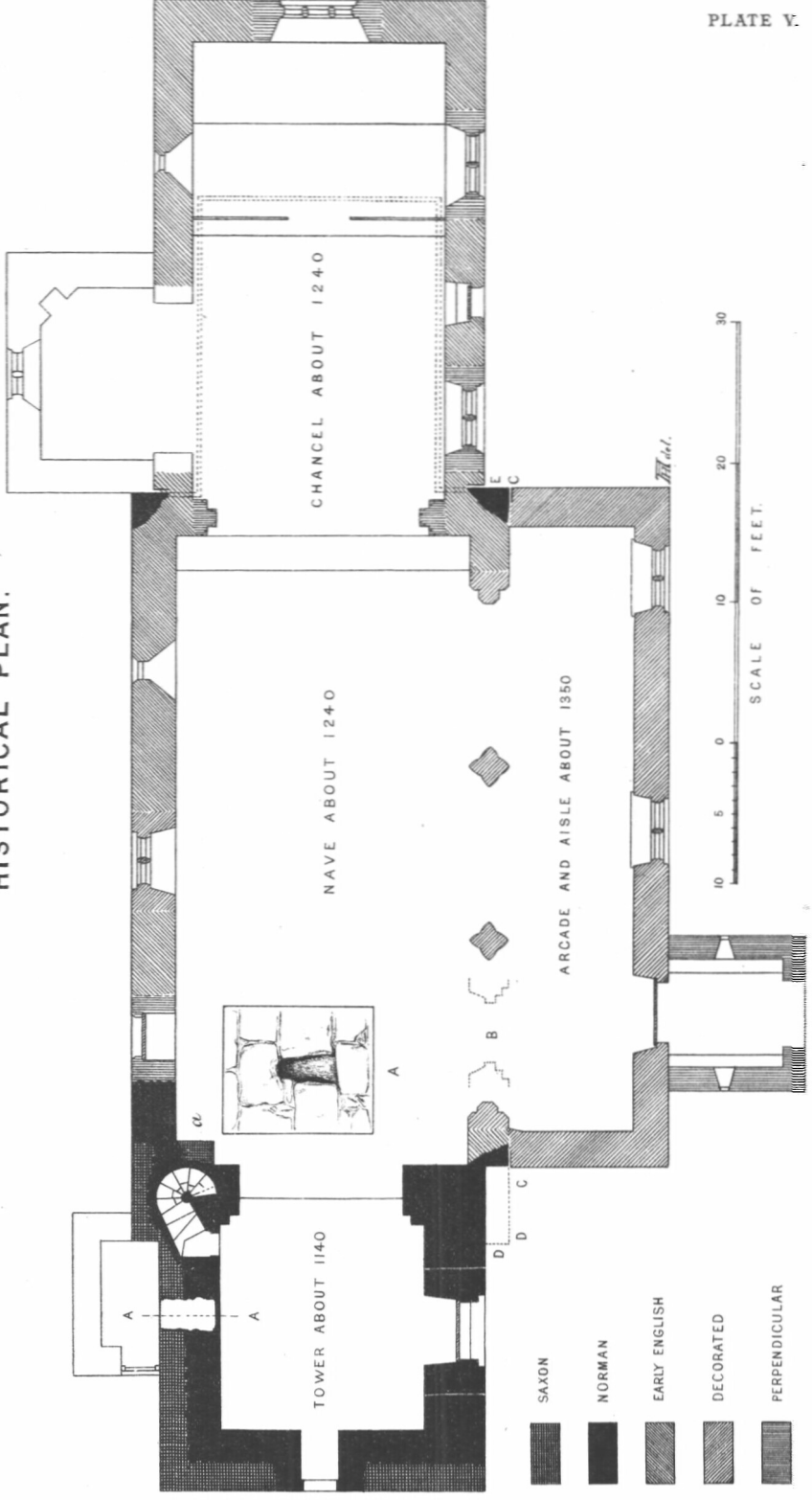
Now, as to documentary evidence. When the Great Record was drawn up, in 1087, the Commissioners returned that here was a priest and a church — “*ibi presbyter et ecclesia.*” This is the usual entry. It was no special duty of these agents to make a church survey. The primary object of Domesday was to form a basis for taxation, and, secondly, to ascertain the area of the country; but the church and the mill are constantly, not necessarily, mentioned, as important objects in every community, and probably as giving a general idea of the social condition of the people.

The question now arises, Does any part of that Saxon church, which the agents of the Norman conqueror saw, still exist? I hope nobody will be startled, but I think a part does exist. I say this with some diffidence before the Derbyshire Archæologica

Society, because no one has ever ventured to proclaim the fact before. I have marked on the plan the portion to which I give a pre-Norman date.

Now, as to the material evidence. We will examine it close, too, presently. And first, as to what there is not in the way of distinct and usually recognised Saxon details. There is no "long and short" work, there is no window splayed equally inside and out, no turned stone balusters, no mid-wall shafts, no triangularly-headed openings, no strip-work, and no arches with continuous imposts. I will give the anti-Saxon as much as I can. We are, therefore, driven back upon the character of the masonry, and I may at once observe that the absence of the whole of the above-mentioned details does not immediately put Saxon out of the question—far from it. The variety or richness of ornamentation in architecture is always influenced or ruled by the nature of the local material, and in poor communities the builders must make use of the materials nearest to their hand. It is the natural result of circumstances. In the case of Bradbourne Church, what I call the earliest work—that at the west end and north side of the tower—is formed of just such stone as was to be found on the surface; it is not even hammer-dressed, but roughly shaped for bedding and laid in courses with wide joints, after the usual pre-Domesday manner, and specially marked and deeply pitted with the impress of age, and distinctly differing from the Norman work which has been imposed upon it. There are no buttresses to the tower, or, indeed, to any part of the church, so I make no point of this; but it may be borne in mind that the absence of buttresses is a distinct pre-Norman condition, and the absence of "long and short work" and other well-known Saxon features may be properly accounted for by the nature of the material convenient for use. On the north side of the tower, 7ft. 9in. from the ground, in the early walling, there is a rude opening, with sloping sides (A. A. on Plan), and 6ft. 6in. above it, in the Norman walling, a proper Norman window, now built up. The rude opening passes into the wall to the depth of 4ft., and is filled up on the inside. It is not Norman; its use as an opening

HISTORICAL PLAN.



for light was blotted out by the Norman when he raised the tower; and if it is not Norman, what is it? and why is it there at all? We shall see later on.

The subject of Saxon masonry has of late years attracted considerable attention among antiquaries, and they have somewhat tardily recognised that there are many more churches that contain remains of this early character than have been usually supposed to exist, but they are very difficult to be certain about. The eye of a lynx, a good memory for other examples, and an experience in such matters far larger than I can lay claim to, are necessary to enable one to speak positively upon this point. So much at present for the Saxon.

Shortly after the time of the Domesday survey, the manor of Bradbourne was held under the Ferrers by the family of Cauceis, and before the middle of the twelfth century the church appears to have been entirely rebuilt. Whether the new late Norman church followed the ancient lines throughout there is now no evidence to show. I think, as in many other cases, the Norman builders only made use of so much of the earlier tower as suited their purpose. Saxon towers were large in regard to the rest of the church, and were convenient for adaptation; and, taking two well-known towers for comparison, we find that Barnack tower is three feet, and Clapham tower, near Bedford, one foot six inches larger each way than Bradbourne. Moreover, the proportions of a Norman church are usually four squares—one for the tower, two for the nave, and one for the chancel. Such are the proportions of the church of Stewkley, which also belongs to the middle of the twelfth century, and as we fortunately know the extent of the Norman nave of Bradbourne, I have indicated the external dimensions of the chancel also, conjecturally, of course. (See double-dotted lines.) The Saxon church was probably much smaller, with rudimentary transepts.

The amount of use which the Normans made of the earlier walls of the tower is clear on the outside. They also utilized as much of the beginning of the Saxon nave north wall as served their purpose for the insertion of a newell stair. Inside

the church we find a block of masonry (*a* on Plan) which was brought into service for the same purpose. Now, the centre line of the opening before alluded to (A. A. on Plan) comes exactly half way between the west face of the tower and the east face of this block of masonry. This can hardly be an accident, and it therefore appears to show three things:—(1) that the rude opening is original work; (2) that the block *a* is also part of the early foundations; and (3) that the Saxon tower was wider from east to west than the existing Norman one. Into this angle, then, the Norman thrust his stair, and the evidence in the lower part of its being an insertion, you will have an opportunity of seeing. You will also observe that it is a Norman, and not a later stair, from the method of its construction in concrete, upon a wooden frame which has left the impression of the boarding or “lagging” in the mortar on the under side. You will further see that each step radiates or works off from the centre of the newell like the lines in a spider’s web, and is jointed near the newell, and has no continuous bearing across the gangway, the steps being supported upon the concrete arch. This actual stair is entered by a narrow Romanesque doorway in the tower, and begins to rise under two circular arches, and, mounting up to the level of the bell chamber, is continued in later work.

Concerning the tower generally, it speaks for itself, and is a striking thing in a country not remarkable for great Norman buildings. The masonry is not of the best quality, with fine jointing, such as may usually be found in buildings of the eleventh century; this is to be accounted for by the nature of the local material.

In every part of England we meet with elaborate late Norman doorways. They are wonderfully varied, and seem to have always been respected by subsequent builders; they are often the only Norman remains in very many churches, and are therefore very seldom in their original positions. At Bradbourne the Normans made the entrance to their tower on the west side, the usual place. That doorway you will see, now used as a window. Whether any part of it is earlier than the Norman, or indeed

what date the head and jambs of the window really are, I leave an open question. And you will also see that the great south doorway of the tower is an insertion. It has obviously been removed, and was no doubt originally the principal entrance to the Norman nave (B. on Plan). The masonry in its immediate vicinity has a tendency upwards in its courses, that no Norman waller, regularly working, would have made; and the change, which is a very interesting chapter in the history of the church, would be more apparent were it not for the rampant vampire ivy which in some extraordinary way has secured the affections of the people.

There is nothing to tell us what the Norman windows of the nave were like, but we fortunately know exactly the width and length of the nave from the straight joint at each end of the south aisle, and the Norman masonry which turns the corners (C. on Plan.) These happy accidents happen sometimes. It is not easy to understand why the Norman builders, in reconstructing the tower and nave, mainly, as I take it, from old foundations, made so feeble a junction of the tower with the nave at the south-east corner. It may be that, not wanting the beginning of the Saxon nave wall here (see dotted lines D. D.) for a stair or other purpose, they carried the new tower wall through, and, in fact, they blundered then as men often do now, and perhaps they thought no one would find out what a measured plan has revealed to us. No doubt we are indebted to the Cauceis family for all this Norman work, and with further regard to it we may also have no doubt that the tower was carried up to the characteristic Norman corbel table by them, and no further. A genuine Norman battlement on a church is, I believe, unknown, but they did finish their keeps of this period in this manner, but very plainly, as Rochester shows, and the like rude character of work survives in Irish towers of this and a later time. The Bradbourne Norman probably finished his tower with a low pyramidal roof, after the fashion of his own country, and covered the nave with a pitched roof, masked inside, if he could afford it, by a flat boarded ceiling like that at Peterborough. I have spoken of the

rudeness or coarseness of the Norman masonry here. It is what a superficial enquirer might easily mistake either for antiquity or the signs of rebuilding, but persons more versed in such matters are aware that rudeness alone is no reliable sign of antiquity.

We now come to the second documentary evidence which we may apply to Bradbourne church, the Chronicle of Dunstable, begun by Richard de Morins, in 1202, carried on year by year till 1297, and containing further contemporary entries up to 1495. It is impossible to estimate the historical value of this record too highly. Besides throwing great light upon the everyday life of the time, and the internal and external affairs of the Priory, it gives information upon the general history of the country in such a manner that many important historical facts are known solely from this document.

In the time of John the manor of Bradbourne was conveyed to Godard de Bradbourne by Geoffrey de Cauceis, who also, most fortunately for us, gave the church of Bradbourne to the Black Canons of Dunstable, in 1205. There are many entries in the Chronicle concerning Bradbourne and its neighbouring parishes between 1205 and 1290, and from some of them we are enabled not only to date a large part of the work which belongs to the golden age of Gothic, but also to understand some of the changes which, without them, must always have remained a mystery. It appears that the gift of the church to the priory was not confirmed before 1222. The canons took their first crop from "Balidena" and "Ticentuna" in 1223, and after some slight litigation in 1238, the prior was put into possession of the church of Bradbourne with its belongings, and three canons were here established, of whom one was to be responsible to the bishop, Hugh of Coventry, for the spiritualities, the prior accounting for the temporalities.

The advent of the canons to Bradbourne seems to have had much the same effect as we have, unhappily, been accustomed to see in our own day when a new vicar is appointed to an old church—the church must be restored; and this appears to have been done at once, and in the following manner:—

The Norman nave and chancel were taken down and an early English one newly built or recast with the old materials. This must have been very soon after 1238, the character of the two Early English windows remaining tell us this, and unfortunately for the credit of the Dunstable canons, we can also recognize some of their work, not by its goodness, but by its badness. Unlike the Cistercians and the Benedictines, the Dunstable Augustines seem to have been but sorry constructors. Their own Chronicle is full of their building troubles. Walls and towers were constantly tumbling down, and the accounts of restorations carried on at Dunstable and elsewhere are quite alarming. They probably enjoyed it then as too many people do now.

Here they made use of the Norman walls as far as they suited their purpose, just as I have endeavoured to show that the Normans did of the Saxon walls, and they swept away the old chancel and put up a wider one. This we know from one little feature; namely, another straight joint, at the point E on the plan. Straight joints are as godsend in architectural history. There yet remain two of the Early English windows, one in the chancel and one in the nave, and the priest's door. I can say nothing about the Early English work in the south side of the nave, because it has been supplanted, but the north wall carries the south, so to speak. On the east face of the tower is the mark or chase of the high-pitched Early English roof which impinged upon it, and had its apex cut into and level with the sill of the belfry window. I think the font belongs to this period, but it is difficult to say positively, owing to circumstances which I will touch upon later.

For the architectural story of the church we have no more documentary guides, but there is an interesting little entry in the Chronicle, under the year 1282, informing us that Ralph de Harewood, canon, died at Bradbourne on the fourth of the calends of September. I do not undertake to find a tenant for every stone coffin that is dug up, but they cannot have been frequent here, and it does happen that a stone coffin was found some years ago in the churchyard which is certainly of the time of Harewood's death.

It is now used for a water-trough ; a font has been put to a worse purpose at Bradbourne, as I will show you later on.

To carry forward the history of the church, the stones have now to speak for themselves, and we accordingly gather from their details that nothing more was done to the fabric until the middle of the fourteenth century (1350).

A considerable work was now taken in hand. The south wall of the nave was pulled down, an arcade set up in its place, and the south aisle built. At the same time a window was inserted in the north wall, exactly facing the centre of the middle arch of the arcade, no doubt taking the place of an Early English single light window, and of precisely the same design as the two Decorated windows in the south aisle. The Norman doorway, as we have seen before, was removed to the tower, and one of the Decorated period now forms the present entrance to the church. The pitch of the nave roof was lowered, as we find by the second chase on the west face of the tower, unless, indeed, this chase may be taken to indicate the pitch of the Norman roof.

As regards the style of the Decorated work, the arcade is plain and solid, and by no means devoid of dignity. The windows are large in detail, and have the peculiar feature of their hood mouldings being worked close up to, and forming part of, the string course. The hoods of both windows are terminated by heads of men and women, and these alone would fix the date. Those of the easternmost window represent Edward III. and Philippa. The king is shown with a beard which we know with absolute certainty, from his Great Seals, he first began to wear between 1338 and 1340. It shows the interest of the study of all the branches of mediæval art when we can date a window in the Peak, at least in one direction, by the beard of a king.

It must be remembered that the division of Gothic into styles is entirely arbitrary, and for the convenience of students. Unlike Classic, which has its rules, fixed and immovable, the history of Gothic architecture is one of continual progress and change, and there must therefore be a Transition, more or less emphasized either way, between each style. For instance, we say roughly

that these windows and arcade are Decorated, because they have more of the Decorated character about them than of the style that succeeded it. It would be more strictly proper to describe them as of the period of the Transition between Decorated and Perpendicular, which succeeded it.

We now come to some features in the building which at first sight are rather puzzling. First, the very uncommon window in the south-west corner of the chancel. It was evidently put in as a special memorial, but it is difficult to date it from its stone details; the forms are as coarse as they can be, but the mouldings could scarcely be finer, and it might be of any date between 1350 and 1450, in an out-of-the-way part like the Peak. The restorers have left us, fortunately, some original glass in the head, and this again is anomalous, the shield being of such a form that it might be as old as 1320, but the details of the diaper, and specially a rose of two sets of five leaves, with a small seeded centre, shows that the window must be a lingering example of an earlier style, a late instance of flowing Decorated, perhaps 1360. The arms in the window are Arg. a chevron between three horse shoes Sa. for Edensor, who, I believe, married a late fourteenth century Bradbourne; it looks at first sight like a Ferrers coat, but that family bore no chevron. To about the same time we must assign the chancel arch, and the east window, which is a good example of reticulated tracery for any one who admires such rather common-place work, which ran a long course.

We are now on the confines of Perpendicular, and to this period belongs the next window in the chancel; it may be 1380, but, as I intimated before, in a part of the world where a knowledge of the progress of architecture must have been fitful and uncertain, we cannot apply fixed rules for dating different parts of a church; the character of the masonry, and details like straight joints, and not forms of windows, but mouldings, are really the only reliable guides.

The mouldings of the parapet of the tower indisputably prove that it cannot possibly be Norman, though it may appear from below old enough to be so ancient. As a matter of fact it must

have been set up about 1450, at which time, with scant chivalry, they took out of the church the effigy of a lady of the time of Edward II., and turning it upside down, scooped out the back and degraded it to a water spout. Then also was carried up the stair turret to the roof.

The next thing that happened was also a considerable work. The roof of 1350 was taken down, the internal string course cut off, the clerestory set up, a north doorway put in, and some rebuilding done at that point from the ground upwards. The chancel walls were raised from the line of the top of the windows, the nave and chancel re-roofed with tie-beams, and parapets added to those portions of the church. At the same time a porch was planted against the south wall to bolster up this side. All these works are clearly evident from their style and the nature of their building, and the church remains at the present day, as far as the outside is concerned, in precisely the same condition as it was left when the mediæval builders departed about the year 1490.

As far as we antiquaries are concerned we have now done with the church. It is no strict part of our business to blame or commend what has been done since. You may depend upon it that the church's history did not stop in 1490; indeed, we know that later men, and particularly the Buckstons, left their mark upon the church inside. I hear of carved seats and a handsome oak gallery, an incised alabaster slab of a man and his wife in the chancel, and church plate Hall-marked with Britannia, and in excellent condition. We only know that these things have gone as much beyond recall as last week. We can only regret that a better spirit did not prevail when this ancient church was swept and garnished at the bidding of a committee of local wiseacres; for, remember, we might have had the building in seemly order, and with a "proper sense of the fellowship of humanity," have retained those items, good in themselves, which came naturally to the church, and have a far more human interest than rubble-pointed walls stripped of their original plaster, distracting tile pavements, or tawdry altar decorations. I hope I am not a crochety fanatic, but I am afraid if I ventured to say

all I thought about church restoration in Derbyshire, and before a Derbyshire audience, I might be glad to take refuge in the church tower! But it is some kind of satisfaction to know that the wholesale "restoration" which took place here, and obliterated as much as was possible of the church's later history, would be almost impossible at the present day. The world has learnt much during the last forty years, and at a great cost, and we do not now all of us think it wise to wipe out parts and fittings of churches, if they are seemly, simply because they do not come within the charmed "Gothic" circle. We recognize that a Jacobean pulpit, and even a Queen Anne gallery, is just as much a part of the history of the church, and consequently of the place, as Marston Moor, or the coming of the Highlanders to Ashbourne in '45, are of the country.

I have, I fear, been very long, but we have dealt with a long period, and perhaps I have propounded certain things which you will not accept. I remember, some years ago, after my father had shown with unerring certainty, from public records, that Edward II. was not born in Caernarvon Castle, but that he built a great deal of it, and roofed it ten years after he came to the throne, it was the custom of the custodian to continue to point out to the visitors the miserable passage room as the place of Edward II.'s birth, and to add: "A man called Hartshorne says Edward II. built this tower; but, Lord bless ye, *he* knows nothing about it!" I have, in the same way, endeavoured to read the history of Bradbourne church from the records and the stones themselves, but I am far from prophesying that no one will come here in future and say the same of me.

After the paper had been read, the members inspected the Saxon work of the tower, the ancient cross shaft, and the Norman doorway. Inside, Mr. Hartshorne called attention to the distressing harshness and nakedness, and the mischief that had been done to the church by the senseless process of stripping the walls of the plaster and pointing the rubble masonry. He deplored the manner in which the whole of the interior except the tower had

been stricken by the curse of restoration, its history so needlessly wiped out, and the mouldings of the arcade, and the font, re-tooled to such an extent that the original forms could barely be distinguished. In the chancel the white alabaster steps were spoken of as having been obtained by cutting up the incised slab to which allusion had been made. If this sort of work, added the speaker, was "restoration," it would be interesting to know what meaning was attached to destruction when the church was "restored."

Mr. Hartshorne subsequently showed the members a late Norman font, which, until three years ago, had been in constant use in Bradbourne, as a pig-trough. It was probably the font which the canons abolished when they first came to Bradbourne.