

The Date of the Parish Church of Melbourne, Derbyshire.

By W. DASHWOOD FANE.



THE Parish Church of Melbourne, in Derbyshire, is the grandest of its class in a wide district around it, and is remarkable for the extent of original Romanesque structure which it retains, and for the singularity of its plan.

It can scarcely be doubted that the existing Church was *originally* designed and constructed with—

nave and side aisles,

central tower of one outer stage,

upper and under chancels,

two equal transepts,

three eastward apses,

western recessed doorway,

two western towers,

continuous galleries, extending along the western end of the

Church, the two sides of the nave, round the four sides

of the central tower, with a doorway into the upper chancel,

stairs in each of the western towers up to the gallery,

groined rubble vaulting under the western gallery and the

upper chancel, and over the nave galleries—all of early

Romanesque character—

and that the whole of such structure was completed within a short space of time, probably continuously.

Externally, the remains of the original flat buttresses of the chancel and the nave aisles, and the early character of the transepts and their northward and southward windows, of the shafted outer stage of the central tower, of the northern clerestory, of the angles of the western towers, of the chancel north and south windows, of the arcading at the west end of the (destroyed) over chancel, and the traces of high roofs of equal pitch against all four sides of the central tower, are evidences of simultaneous design and continuous construction.

That roofs rising to the height of the traces now visible on the four external faces of the central tower belonged to the original structure may be inferred from the following considerations, viz. :—

(1) Steep roofs of equal height over all four limbs of an early Romanesque church are characteristic of the style. (See "*Ecclesiastical Art in Germany during the Middle Ages*," by Lubke, pages 22 and 24.)*

(2) The western side walls and the end walls of the two transepts remain unaltered, and are of considerable thickness, well adapted for carrying roofs of the steep pitch indicated on the Romanesque stage of the central tower.

(3) Over the nave of Melbourne Church an outer roof would be necessary to preserve the masonry vaulting, of the employment of which there are indications. That outer roof would reach the lines now seen on the western outer face of the central tower.

(4) The absence of windows and of external embellishment on the four sides of the Romanesque stage of the central tower points to the design that high roofs should abut against that stage of the central tower.

(5) The second or upper arcading—now seen on the outer eastern face of the central tower—must have always been an *internal* (not an external) embellishment of the Church, and

* The Cathedral of St. Magnus (Romanesque) in Kirkwall has, or lately had, four steeply pitched roofs of equal height, abutting against the central tower.—Lewis's "Topographical Dictionary of Scotland: Kirkwall."

must have been inclosed under a high roof, which, however, did not admit of the addition of the third or uppermost tier of arcading, which is seen on the four inner sides of the central tower.

That the nave was originally vaulted with masonry appears to be indicated—

- (a) by the nave walls having a thickness of four feet at the height at which such a vault would spring :
- (b) by the shafts over each pier, which now terminate at the level of the triforium floor, but which must reasonably be supposed to have risen higher, and to have supported the springing of ribs, carried north and south across the nave—(see *Lubke*, page 44), the absence of the upper portions of these shafts seems to be due to the substitution, as at present, of timber uprights on corbels, carrying a low timber roof :
- (c) by there still being under the western gallery, and over the northern triforium, and over the four galleries of the central tower, and by there having formerly been over the lower chancel grouted rubble vaulting.

That there was originally a Romanesque chancel, consisting of an upper and a lower storey, separated by a vaulting of stone seems to be proved—

- (1) by the bosses of a corbel table remaining at the two points where the eastern walls of the transepts meet the central tower, indicating that a corbel table ran round the chancel at that height :
- (2) by the single blind arch remaining on each side of the chancel, and adjoining the central tower, showing that a blind arcade ran round the chancel at that height, so as to be an external ornament between the upper and lower chancels, of a well-known Romanesque character—(see *Lubke*, pages 25 and 40) :
- (3) by the marks of a groined stone vault still to be seen on the inside of the chancel walls, which would carry a floor at the same level as the floors of the galleries of the western

end of the nave, and of the central tower. The gallery of the western end of the Church is still carried by a groined vaulting of grouted rubble of early construction :

- (4) by the middle arch of the lowest tier of arcading in the eastern side of the central tower (now a glazed door) being open down to the floor, so as to give passage into an upper chancel :
- (5) by there being in the eastern outer face of the central tower a second or upper tier of arcading, such as would be an embellishment of the interior of an upper chancel.*

If the upper chancel in Melbourne Church was a chantry chapel, it is not surprising that it was destroyed, as were the apses of the two transepts (also chantry chapels), after the abolition of chantries.

The windows in the north and south aisles, and the eastward windows in the chancel and in the two transepts—inserted when the apses were removed—are obviously of later construction ; but with the exception of transition from triple round arches in the northern triforium to double pointed arches in the southern triforium, there is uniformity of style in the Romanesque architecture prevailing throughout what remains, and these portions may reasonably be regarded as part of the original structure.

That the southern triforium, as we now see it, is not original but a substitution for an earlier one, must, I think, be accepted, on a comparison of the two sides of the nave.

The main columns and the arches between them on both sides of the nave, and the walls above as far as the string course, and also the slender shafts that now stop at that string course, are all of one early period. Those slender shafts seem to have been designed to carry the ribs of a Romanesque stone vault. The southern triforium commences at its east end in uniformity with the whole of the northern triforium. The central tower, the south transept, and the south western tower, were carried up to their full

* See an account of St. Martin's Church at Dover, having two tiers of chapels in the choir, and two eastward apses in the transepts. "The Antiquary" (published by Elliot Stock), February, 1892, p. 69.

height in the Romanesque style. Can it be supposed that the building of the southern side of the nave, necessary to the roofing of the nave, proceeded so slowly as to invite the introduction of a different style (the pointed) in that very limited portion of the original structure?

A comparison of the internal roofing of the galleries in the two sides of the nave proves that the modes, and therefore probably the periods, of construction, are very different. On the north side the roofing is of grouted rubble, resembling that which exists in the galleries round the central tower and in the approaches from the east to both the triforia; but in the southern triforium between the pointed openings in couplets in the inner and the outer walls, the roofing is of largish stones laid archwise. Having regard to these several points, is it not to be inferred that the southern triforium was originally constructed in conformity with the northern, and that afterwards, by some accident, by fire or otherwise (discoloration by fire is considered by some to be still visible in the south aisle) it became necessary to rebuild the south wall of the nave above the string course, and at the same time to make a new roof to the nave? for the old roof must have failed when it lost the support of the south wall of the nave. If that new roof was to be of wood, it would not require that the shafts, which had run upwards to support the stone roof, should be renewed in the new south wall above the string course: and on the north side, the upper parts of the original shafts would have to be removed for uniformity, and to admit of the new timber uprights being placed against the walls.

If then it may be assumed that Melbourne Church was originally constructed with two triforia of triplets of round-headed arches and round clerestory windows, as well as with all the other Romanesque features which have been above enumerated, what is the probable date of that structure?

It may here be remarked that there are two particulars in which there is a close resemblance between the central tower of Melbourne Church and that of Norwich Cathedral, the latter said to have been commenced about A.D. 1090. Each is decorated

internally on all four sides with tier above tier of round headed arcading—Melbourne having three tiers, Norwich four—and in each the galleries are continued through the lowest tier of arcading, so as to afford passage to the upper parts of the Church eastward.

The Domesday Record states that there was then (A.D. 1084 to 1086) "in Meleburn a Priest and a Church." May not the present Church be, *in the main*, that so mentioned? Buildings resembling Melbourne Church were being erected in Western Europe as early as A.D. 1000. (*See Lubke's "Ecclesiastical Art," pp. 17 et seq.*)

The plan of Melbourne Church is precisely that of the simplest type of "Romanesque Basilica" figured by Lubke, p. 15. Its longitudinal section is also mainly of the same type as in Lubke's work, having the two storeyed western portico, but differing in having a two storeyed chancel* (instead of a single high chancel), and in having triforium galleries, combined with a clerestory, instead of a simple clerestory. With these exceptions, Melbourne Church appears to belong to the most severe and most primitive type of "Romanesque Basilica."

It is true that Dr. Whewell, in his "Architectural Notes on German Churches" (3rd edition, 1842, p. 106), observes that "in the finest early Romanesque buildings in Germany the space over the pier arches and under the clerestory windows is left a blank, and in England in Norman buildings that space is filled by a row of openings or panellings of various kinds, which is mostly a merely ornamental member, and not applied to any customary use"; and that "the churches which have an open gallery forming a second storey to the side aisle (the Männer chor) belong to the Early German class, *i.e.*, the latter part of the twelfth century.

With respect to the triforium in Melbourne Church, it is to be remarked that it is combined with the clerestory, and serves to transmit and spread the light of the windows in the latter. It must be regretted that Dr. Whewell, if he ever visited Melbourne

* An admirable example of a two storeyed Norman chancel may be seen at Compton, near Guildford, Surrey.—ED.

Church, did not record his views with respect to its date or class : and indeed it is matter of surprise that, though Melbourne Church formed the subject of a careful paper by Professor Wilkins in "*Archæologia*," vol. 13 (1809), illustrated by large scale engravings of its plan and longitudinal internal elevation, there does not appear to have been any subsequent publication of results of a close study of the building in all its early details above specified—such as its very remarkable character may be said to require and invite—with the view of approximately ascertaining the date of its design and construction. The present writer, for many years past a resident in Melbourne, feeling that his own training has not qualified him for this study, has been solicitous to obtain the assistance of the most competent scientists, but not with the success that he earnestly desired.

Failing a positive conclusion as to the date of the fabric from a study of its architectural details, are there any known facts in the history of the spiritual pastorate of Melbourne, or of its temporal signiory, which will serve for that purpose ?

It has been conjectured that the grandeur of the church, and the singularity (amongst English parish churches) of its plan, may have been due to the Rectory of the parish having been for ages annexed to the Bishopric of Carlisle. But the early history of that Bishopric is not favourable to such a supposition. Early chroniclers agree ("*Historia Major Wintoniensis*" seems to be the leading authority) that the Bishopric of Carlisle was founded by King Henry the First in A.D. 1132 ; and the death of the first Bishop (Aldulf ?) is assigned to A.D. 1155. The war between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda seems to have had the effect of causing the sovereignty of Cumberland to lapse for a time to the King of Scotland ; and the spiritual oversight of that district seems to have been resumed by the Bishop of Whithern in Galloway. In the Pipe Rolls of 5 and 6 Henry II. (1159-60) under "*Carliolinæ*," payments are accounted for "*Episcopo de Candida Casa*," *i.e.*, to the Bishop of Whithern.

When and how the Rectory of Melbourne was first annexed to the Bishopric of Carlisle perhaps cannot now be ascertained.

Suggestions of its having been given to the Bishopric at a very early period of that See are found in the Public Records.

"Testa de Nevil," or "Liber Feodorum," compiled about A.D. 1327, is a collection of notes of Inquisitions taken at various periods. At folio 17 of the publication by the Record Commission we find (under Notts. and Derby) :

"Magister Simo de Waltham tenet ecclesiam de Meleburn de dono Regis Johannis, qui illam alias dederat. Et dominus Rex pater Regis Johannis similiter dedit eam. Juratores nesciverunt utrum illam dederunt ratione custodie quam habuerunt in Episcopatu Karlioli, vel alio modo."

Whether "*ecclesiam de Meleburn*" here means the Rectory (according to the stricter usage) or the Vicarage, is perhaps doubtful; but from this passage we learn that King Henry II. and King John had from time to time made grants of the "Church" of Melbourne; and that they had retained the custody of the Bishopric of Carlisle, no duly constituted Bishop being appointed. Subsequently the Rectory of Melbourne was claimed as having belonged immemorially to the Bishopric.

On 29 June, 4 Edward III. (A.D. 1330), there was tried at Derby before de Herse and other Justices in Eyre, a proceeding on a writ of *quo warranto* against John de Rosse Bishop of Carlisle. His claim to view of frank pledge of all his tenants at Melleburn the Bishop maintained by stating that he was parson of the Church of Melleburn, and that he and all his predecessors Bishops of Carlisle, parsons of the said Church, had view of frank pledge of all their tenants in Melleburn "*de tempore quo non extat memoria*" without interruption. The Bishop also claimed that he and his men should be quit of toll, passage, pontage, &c., which claim he rested on a Charter of King Henry III., under the seal he then used, granting all those liberties to God, and the Church of the Blessed Mary of Carlisle, and to Walter (Mauclere) then Bishop of Carlisle (A.D. 1223-1246) and his successors, and to the Prior and Canons of Carlisle serving God in the same Church and their successors; and he also rested it on a subsequent Charter of the same King, under his new seal, dated 10th January

in the 55th year of his reign (A.D. 127 $\frac{0}{1}$), granted at the instance of Robert (de Chause) Bishop of Carlisle (A.D. 1258-1278). The jury (A.D. 1330) found that the then Bishop of Carlisle (John de Rosse) and all his predecessors, parsons of the Church of Melleburn, "a tempore quo non extat memoria," without interruption, had view of frank pledge of all their tenants in Melleburn; they also found other matters in favour of the Bishop in respect of the Manor of Barrow, and in respect of the liberties claimed by him, but not of pillory or tumbil.

Evidence of that inquisition, by an Inspeximus dated 25 March, 1606, under the Chancery seal of King James I., is now in the Muniment Room at Melbourne Hall.

That finding of the jury in the year 1330 in favour of the Bishop's claim by prescription might seem to imply that the Bishops of Carlisle had had uninterrupted enjoyment of the Rectory of Melbourne during "legal memory," *i.e.*, as far back as the reign of King Richard I., A.D. 1189; but the public records seem to establish that there was no duly constituted Bishop of Carlisle after the death of Aldulf the first Bishop about 1155, through the reigns of Henry II., Richard I., and John, down to 2 Henry III. (A.D. 1218), when Hugh Abbott of Beaulieu became Bishop by the concurrent action of the Pope, the Prior and Canons of Carlisle, and the King's Council.

It appears by an extract from Rotuli Litt. Clausarum (vol. i., p. 369) that in consequence of the letter of Pope Innocent the Third to King John, which is recited in that King's Letters Patent of 10 January, 120 $\frac{3}{4}$, addressed to the King's brother, Geoffry, Archbishop of York (Rotuli Litt. Patentium, folio 37), the King granted to Bernard, Archbishop of Ragusa, the Custody of the Bishopric of Carlisle, and with it the Rectory of Melbourne; still that event would be too late to admit of our ascribing to that Prelate the building of Melbourne Church, the architecture of which must be of earlier date.

There remains, however, the possibility that Aldulph, the first Bishop of Carlisle, may have directed the construction of this Church between the years 1132 and 1155, the duration of his

Episcopate. It is uncertain whether the Rectory of Melbourne was held by Bishop Aldulph; though early mention in the "Records of a Vicarage" implies an early appropriation of the Rectory; and if it was so held, it is more reasonable to presume that it was selected for annexation to the Bishopric because the Church was then a singularly grand one, than that its condition was such as to cause Bishop Aldulph to erect a new Church.

It has been thought that the galleries existing in Melbourne Church may have been constructed for the passage of a religious community using the upper Chancel, or perhaps of a guild. But the passages in the triforia and the central tower are so narrow as to allow with difficulty the passing of two persons in opposite directions; though that difficulty might be obviated by the careful observance of the rule that those entering the Church should use one of the two western stairs and the gallery on the same side, and that those leaving the Church should use the other gallery and stairs. In fact, however, there is not any trace in the Public Records of the foundation, existence, or suppression, of any religious community or guild established in Melbourne; and monks or nuns or guild members cannot be supposed to have originated those galleries and to have left no other trace of their existence. A sisterhood of Saint Bride had its house about a mile and a half westward from Melbourne Church, just without the limit of the Parish, and mention is made in an old deed of the "Priests' way to Saint Bride's"; but that sisterhood had its own chapel, still traceable on the spot, and it can scarcely be supposed that their rule would admit of their attending services so remote from their abode, or that this Church should at its building have been specially adapted to their use.

And here it may be mentioned (if the departure from grave discussion may be forgiven) that a belief exists in the minds of some living inhabitants of Melbourne that the very old buildings now standing near the western end of the Church, and a large house that formerly stood where the house (now known as "Church House") was built about sixty or seventy years ago, belonged to a Nunnery; a belief that seems to rest on the finding

in that old house, when pulled down, articles supposed to have been "nun's caps," and also on the supposed existence of an underground passage from those buildings to the Castle, distant about two hundred yards to the north-eastward. As regards the passage, a few years ago a deep trench for a new sewer was dug across its supposed course without any trace of the passage being found; and as regards the "Nunnery," it is shown by existing deeds that the ground on which it is supposed to have stood belonged to one of the Chantries in Melbourne Church, and became in the reign of Elizabeth the property of the Beaulie family, who built upon it the old house in which the articles called "nuns' caps" were found.

Resuming seriousness, it remains to consider the relations between the Church of Melbourne and the temporal seigniorship of the district during the building of the Church.

The Domesday Record states that (in A.D. 1054-6) the Manor of Melbourne was in the demesne of King William, and that it had belonged to King Edward (the Confessor); at the earlier period it was worth £10 (per annum), but then only £6, though it rendered £10. And that the Manor had annexed to it a "berewick," consisting of the neighbouring places, "Barrow-on-Trent, Chellaston, Normanton and Osmaston. For a long period suits arising in those places were prosecuted in the Manor Court of Melbourne, as appears by existing Court Rolls.

Whether there was at Melbourne in the eleventh or twelfth centuries a mansion fitted to be a royal abode is uncertain. There is no mention in the Public Records of a Castle of Melbourne until A.D. 1327, when the "Castrum" is specified as part of the possessions of Thomas Earl of Lancaster and Leicester, in "Inquisitiones Post Mortem" (Vol. 2, page 8). We find in Calendar Rot. Pat. (folio 72, 4), that in the year 1311 Robert de Holland had a license from King Edward II. "Kernellare mansum suum apud Melburn." This was doubtless the origin of Melbourne Castle. A nobleman's mansion, perhaps previously a royal residence, or place of "gisting," was converted into a place of strength, and was ever afterwards called Melbourne Castle—"castrum de

Melburn." The itinerary of King John, compiled by Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy from the dates of the Charters that King granted, shows that he "lay" at Melbourne on five different occasions in his reign of seventeen years. It appears in the Close Rolls that twice he ordered casks of wine to be sent from Nottingham to Melbourne, but the house at the latter place is not designated, as are his castles at Nottingham, the Peak, and Hareston, in the same orders. It is possible, however, that, as King John kept the Bishopric of Carlisle vacant, and its temporalities in the hands of his own officers, he may have used the Episcopal Rectory House for his own place of abode while at Melbourne.

The lordship of so important a Manor—the ownership of a considerable estate—the patronage of the Rectory—may have rendered Melbourne a place so considerable amongst the Royal possessions as to cause a Church to be built there of the grandeur we now see, with Royal funds.

But in what reign was the Church built?

Venturing to the extreme limit of conjecture, let it be remarked that King Canute during his reign of twenty years (A.D. 1016-1036) built churches in England, and founded the Monastery of Bury St. Edmunds. He made a journey to Rome (in the interests of pilgrims from England), in which he might have become familiar with the Rhineland Romanesque churches, and he had for wife Emma, sister of the Duke of Normandy.

As difficulty may be felt in attributing the building of this Church to so early a king as Canute, it has next to be observed that King Edward (the Confessor) was the son of Emma of Normandy, and resided in that Duchy for many years before his accession in A.D. 1042. The favour shown by him to Normans who resorted to his court was the cause of the insurrection of Earl Godwin and his sons.

If either Canute or Edward caused a church to be built on his demesne at Melbourne, it would very probably be of this early Romanesque type.

The peaceful periods in those two reigns are followed by times less settled during the reigns of the two Williams, "the Conqueror"

and "Rufus." The Domesday Record shows that the King's revenue derived from Melbourne had become less assured in A.D. 1084 than in 1066. Great "Norman" Abbey and Priory Churches were being built in England during the reigns of two Williams, and there are still remains of the chapels in the castles they erected ; but as to any Parish Church having been erected by their immediate direction, there seems to be little probability.

Failing a definite pronouncement by a competent authority, after an adequate study of the Church, and of what can be learned of its history, I do not venture to do more than ask the question, May not Melbourne Church be, in the main, the Church mentioned in the Domesday Record?

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