

THE DECORATION OF GUILDFORD CASTLE KEEP

BY

D. F. RENN

THE keep at Guildford has been described many times, the varied courses of the exterior being dismissed as "irregular" (G. T. Clark, *Mediæval Military Architecture*, II, pp. 53-71; *V.C.H., Surrey*, III, pp. 554-9). I hope to show that the coursing does in fact follow a definite pattern.

Ashlar masonry is employed for the angles of the pilaster buttresses, and in courses at the base of the plinth and just above the batter. Elsewhere, the courses are continued in bands of rubble; thin Bargate Stone slabs are used, sometimes laid herringbone-wise, together with scappled flints. The sequence is best seen on the east side of the keep, but parts of the pattern may be distinguished on the other sides. Reading from the ground upward, the sequence is:

ASFHFHFSFHFAFHFHFSFSFS . . . FSFS

(A = ashlar; S = slabs; F = flints; H = herringbone-work)

The pattern appears when the sequence is written diagrammatically, thus:

		H	H		H		H	H						
		F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
(A)	S				S		(A)		S	(S)	S	(S)	S	

Brackets indicate a change from the original design.

The keep of Colchester Castle in Essex exhibits a similar pattern in different materials; above the plinth the sequence is:

		S	S		S	S		
		T	T	T	T	T	..	
	L					L		

(L = limestone; T = Roman tiles; S = septaria)

Even if the Guildford sequence is original (the walls have been repaired more than once), this comparison must not be pushed too far. Colchester was begun *c.* 1080-5 as a great hall-keep; the smaller tower-keep at Guildford probably dates from the second quarter of the 12th century. The simplest type of herringbone work, two contra-inclined courses, was used as late as 1135-40 at Benington, Herts. (*Trans. East Herts. A.S.* forthcoming).

The complex pattern at Guildford and Colchester was most probably inspired by the decorative effect obtained by the simple

alternation of two different colours of building materials. The polychrome effect of bonding courses of tiles can be seen in many Roman buildings. Stone and tile alternate in the early 9th-century chapel arch at Britford church, Wilts., and the 11th-century hall under

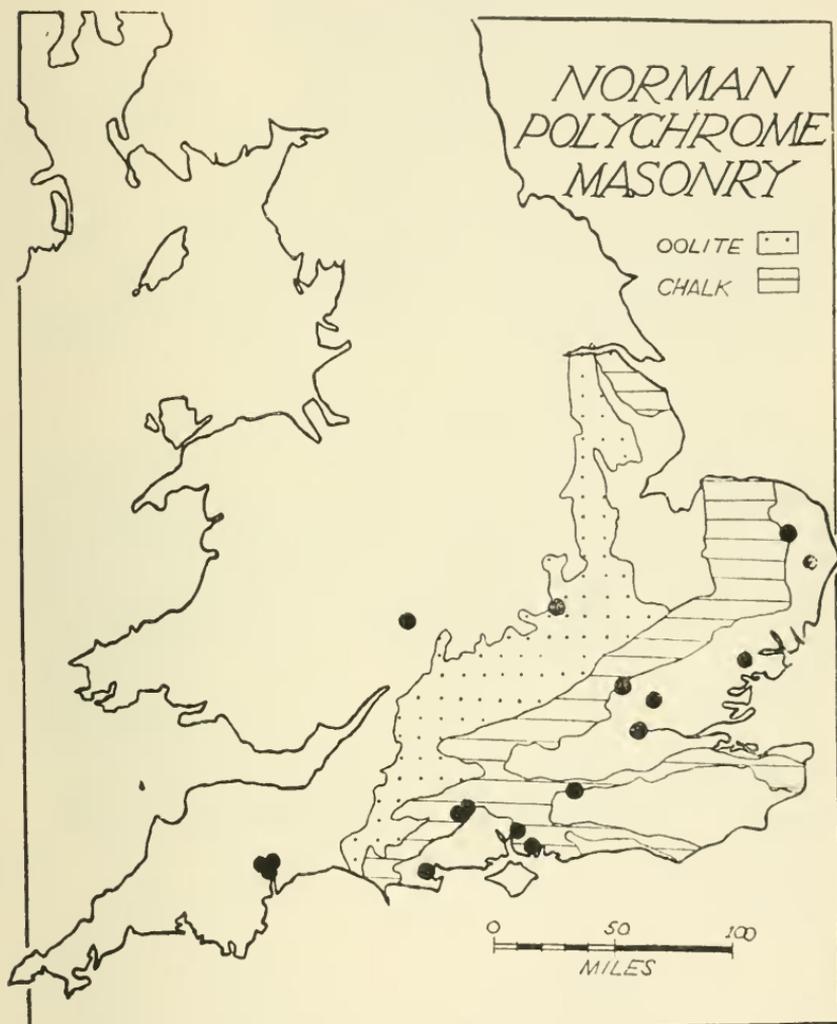


FIG. 1.—DISTRIBUTION-MAP OF NORMAN POLYCHROME MASONRY.

Chillham Castle, Kent, was spanned by an arch composed alternately of thin pieces of ragstone and equally thin pieces of red sandstone, having much the size and appearance of Roman bricks (*Ant. J.*, VIII, p. 351).

Early Norman examples of polychrome masonry include the following:

Exeter, Devon—(i) Cathedral—nave wall.

(ii) Rougemont—front and rear arches of gatehouse.

(iii) St. Nicholas Priory—crypt doorway and vault ribs.

Wareham, Dorset—keep wall, excavated 1950.

Old Sarum, Wilts.—(i) Great Tower quoins.

(ii) Cathedral—paving in Chilmark and Hurdcote stone (A. W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture after the Conquest*, p. 160).

Titchfield, Hants.—St. Peter's church, west doorway.

Portchester, Hants.—inner arch of castle watergate.

Westminster Abbey, London—School hall doorway.

Waltham Abbey, Essex—clerestory windows.

St. Alban's Abbey, Herts.—painted crossing arches.

Norwich, Norfolk—arches on west side of keep before refacing

(S. Woodward, *History of Norwich Castle*, p. 13).

Northampton—St. Peter's church, west tower.

Worcester Cathedral—chapterhouse and nave wall.

Colchester and Guildford are discussed above.

Where local materials were unsuitable Caen stone was employed and the distribution map suggests that the inspiration came from France by way of the major ports. Polychrome masonry occurs in Burgundy, striking examples being the narthex vault at Tournus (c. 1000) and the pillars and arches of La Madeleine, Vézelay (1096-1132). An interesting comparison may be made with the distribution of 11th-12th-century North French red-painted pottery (*Oxoniensia*, XVII-XVIII, p. 91).

The use of polychrome ornament was revived more than once. The alternate brown and white courses of the outer enceinte at Chateau Gaillard (1196-8) may owe something to Richard I's visit to Vézelay in 1190. The gatehouse to Denbigh Castle, and the arcaded parapets of St. David's Palace, Pembs., are examples of the early 14th century.