The church of Stoke D'Abernon lies in close proximity to the manor. Even today the churchyard is largely enclosed by the grounds of the manor house, appearing as a part of the property, rather than as a separate entity. It thus illustrates, visually as well as legally, the early medieval concept of the Eigenkirche (ecclesia propria), the church built for his tenants by the lord or possessor, over which he retained extensive rights. The pre-Conquest origins of the church of Stoke D'Abernon and the details of the building sequence were recognized and set out by Philip M. Johnstone in two articles published over 50 years ago. Unfortunately vital information concerning the earliest stage only came to light after the preparation and publication in the earlier of these articles of the period plan illustrating the growth of the building. It has therefore seemed desirable, when reformulating the interpretation of these earliest remains in the light of modern advances in scholarship, to recapitulate the later architectural history, so that the whole story of the medieval church is summarized in a single publication. I am most grateful to the Rev. J. H. L. Waterson, Rector of Stoke D'Abernon, who first invited my attention to this interesting building and with whose permission and help the present study is published, and to Mr. A. R. Dufty, who visited the church with me and who has read and commented on this article. I am also indebted to Mr. David Black for preparing the excellent plan of the church (Fig. 2).

The Architectural History of the Church

Stage 1: pre-Conquest

The earliest building of which remains survive at Stoke D'Abernon consisted of a nave and chancel. These have long been accepted as pre-Conquest. Baldwin Brown, though with some doubts, ascribed this church to his period B, 1, 2 which should indicate a pre-Danish origin in the later 8th or 9th century. When the whole building was drastically restored and extended westward in 1866 much of the old work was destroyed, but a number of earlier drawings allow us to reconstruct the evidence as it existed before that date. The nave measured internally 35 ft. by 21 ft. 3 ins. and stood 21 ft. 6 ins. high to the eaves. The western angles shewn in a drawing of 1828 by W. Twopenny (Pl. IXA) have megalithic quoins. At the base of the south-west angle these stones appear to be set alternately as flat slabs and upright pillars, giving the appearance of 'long and short' work. But as only one face is shewn in the drawing it is possible that the pillars are really long slabs set on edge and that the quoin, even at the base, is not in real 'long and short' work. In any case this construction is not typical of the quoins. The south-east quoin,

which survives in a much restored form, is better studied in another drawing of 1828 (Pl. X A) also by Twopenny. Its character is similar and there is no consistent use of ‘long and short’ work. The south wall of the nave, 2 ft. 6 ins. thick, remains very little altered. The masonry is rubble, chiefly of large field flints, with a number of re-used fragments of Roman tile, set in a hard mortar, which derives its pinkish colour from the use of pounded Roman tile. The original dressings, including the south-east quoin, are of greenish firestone.

The most interesting feature in this wall is the small upper door (Pl. X B) near the original west end. This door, which is contemporary with the wall, has well-dressed jambs, the stones extending without rebate through the whole thickness of the wall. The head is flat with a stone lintel and the lowest stones of the jambs project slightly, narrowing the width of the opening. The doorway measures 6 ft. 2 ins. by 2 ft. 2 ins. with its sill about 12 ft. above the level of the nave floor. Two similar blocks of dressed firestone, further east and above the later south door, suggest the jamb of a blocked window. Another original window might be expected in the position now occupied by a lancet of c. 1200 (p. 169). The east wall of the nave, which was rebuilt in 1866, was similar to the south wall. A drawing by Hassell of 1829 (Pl. XIIa) shows the original chancel arch of semicircular form. The large dressed voussoirs, set as through stones and springing from heavy moulded abaci about 1 ft. deep, are clearly visible in a drawing by Twopenny of 1828. The voussoirs are irregular in shape. The abaci have flat ends around which the mouldings do not return;

1. SAC., XX, 101.
2. SAC., XX, 15, fig. 3 and Pl. III; XXVI, 126-8, fig. 3.
3. SAC., XXVI, 132, Pl. III.
they are clearly classical stones re-used and must have come from a substantial Roman building. The southern abacus is cut into by the head of the arch above the niche of c.1200 (p. 169). The jambs of the chancel arch had been altered when these niches were inserted, but the stones still appear to run through the thickness of the wall and the alterations do not seem to have involved more than a redressing and cutting back of the original pre-Conquest masonry.

The apse discovered in 1909 by Johnstone survives only in the south wall of the west bay of the present chancel and in the space above the vault. The south wall of the chancel still shews, immediately west of the central buttress, a setting of Roman tile which probably marks the site of an original window. In 1947 the removal of Victorian arcading from the inner face of this wall disclosed the stone sill of the same window. The position suggests four windows flanking the apse, rather than three as indicated in Johnstone's restoration, here reproduced (Fig. 1). The original apsidal chancel measured 15 ft. wide with a stilted plan. It was extended and vaulted in c.1250 (p. 169), but the top of the older walls was then left standing above the extrados of the vault. The masonry resembles that of the nave and is set in a similar pinkish mortar. The wall is very thin, only 1 ft. 10 ins. At the west end of the south wall, where the external face of the masonry is still visible, there is an extensive patch of re-used Roman tiles set herringbone-wise. No detail survives, but the facts set out point unequivocally to the pre-Danish age and to the beginning rather than the end of that age. Later pre-Conquest walling normally varies from 2 ft. 6 ins. to 3 ft. thick. The nave at Stoke D'Abernon is slight by this standard. To find a parallel to the much thinner apse one must go back to the early Kentish group of the 7th century, where 1 ft. 10 ins. is recorded at St. Pancras, 2 ft. at St. Peter and St. Paul and 2 ft. 2 ins. at St. Martin, all in Canterbury. The apse is rare in later pre-Conquest architecture but normal in the early group. In particular the stilted form found at Stoke D'Abernon can be paralleled in churches such as Rochester and Lyminge. The slight wall of the apse can hardly have carried a vaulted semi-dome and calls for a wooden roof; this feature survives in certain Italian churches and is there dated to the 7th or 8th century. The re-use of large Roman moulded stones for the abaci of the chancel arch may be compared with Escomb and is again an early feature. For all these reasons it is desirable to place the original church at Stoke D'Abernon early in the pre-Conquest series; a date in the 7th or at latest at the beginning of the 8th century must be accepted. That it lacks other early features such as the porticus and the triple arcade between nave and presbytery, as at Reculver is to be explained by a difference in function (p. 172).

1 SAC., XXVI, 121-3, fig. I. The original plan is here reproduced unaltered. The principal corrections needed are the deletion of the supposed porch and the alteration of the windows in the apse. The gallery would extend about 10 ft. from the W. wall.
2 SAC., XX, 13, fig. 3; cf. PI. III.
3 A. W. Clapham, English Romanesque Architecture before the Conquest (cited as Clapham), 107.
4 Clapham, 18-24.
5 Clapham, 95. Of the four examples quoted Wing certainly (J.B.A.A., 3 ser. XV) and North Elmham probably (Arch. J., CXVI, 119-20) go back beyond the Danish wars.
6 Clapham, 21-2.
7 Italian examples are Santa Maria di Castelseprio attributed to the 7th century and San Salvatore, Brescia, attributed to 8th century (G. Chierici, Santa Maria di Castelseprio, 526).
8 Arch. J., CXI, 214.
Stage 2: 12th century

The first alteration that can be traced is the refurnishing and redecoration of the chancel. This was carried out in the 12th century. The surviving fragments of wall painting preserved in situ above the inserted 13th-century vault show that the old apsidal chancel was still preserved. The only remaining piece of furniture is the top of a pillar piscina treated as a reeded capital and dating from c. 1140-60. This was found in 1909 among the rubbish above the extrados of the vault.\(^1\) The painting on the upper part of the old apse consists of a formal design with a band of writing forming a frieze. The letters are capitals with a few early Lombardic forms.\(^2\) The main register probably consisted of a series of figures or small scenes, explained by the inscriptions. The painting is certainly of the 12th century, but cannot be more closely dated; there is no reason why it should not be contemporary with the pillar piscina.

\(^1\) SAC., XXVI, 132-3, fig. 5.
\(^2\) SAC., XXVI, 123-5, fig. 2; E. W. Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Twelfth Century* (1944), 147-8.
A. Church from N.W. in 1828 (W. Twopenny)
(Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

B. Stoke D’Abernon church from S.W.
A. South-east corner of nave in 1828. (W. Twopenny)
(Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
B. South wall of nave, E. of porch

(Reproduced by permission of Reynolds Photos)
Stage 3: late 12th or early 13th century

About 1200 the nave was enlarged by the erection of a north aisle, and altars were added on each side of the chancel arch. The nave is separated from the aisle by an arcade of two bays. The pointed arches are of square section with slight chamfers on the angles; there is a plain hood towards the nave. The responds are square. The central column is circular, on a square base with spurs; it has a moulded capital, also spurred, rising to a square moulded abacus. A plain lancet window without external hood, inserted in the south wall of the nave, is contemporary.

The alterations at the east end of the nave consisted of the insertion of two shallow niches for altars; these were cut into the masonry flanking the chancel arch. The northern niche with a pointed arch and simple hood shews in a mid 19th-century painting. It there flanks the pointed chancel arch, which replaced the original opening about 1850. The niche had been subsequently cut through to provide a hagioscope with a rectangular opening. This altar was dedicated in honour of St. Thomas of Canterbury. There was formerly at the back of the niche a large painting of the saint vested as an archbishop and set against a background some of stars and crescents. The inscription was in developed Lombardic lettering. At the foot was the kneeling figure of a donor in mail with a close fitting bascinet. The description suggests that the donor was Sir John D'Abernon the elder (ob. c. 1277).

On the south side of the arch the painting already referred to shews a rectangular opening, larger than but corresponding to the hagioscope on the north side of the main arch. A second niche with an altar may be inferred.

Stage 4: 13th century

The chancel was rebuilt with a square end in the 13th century. The new work has heavy diagonal buttresses in two weathered stages at the eastern angles and a similar buttress in the centre of the south wall. The south windows are simple lancets with external hoods set in widely splayed embrasures; openings and embrasures have moulded angles. The new work was vaulted in two bays. The vaulting shafts are single at the angles and triple in the centres of the side walls, with moulded bases and capitals. The vaulting is quadripartite with moulded ribs; the cross arch separating the bays is enriched with a band of star ornament.

The new chancel was fully decorated with contemporary wall paintings. The remains of an elaborate composition have been recovered from the east wall. In the uppermost register are angels, one blowing trumpets. Next are a group of half length figures facing inward towards the central subject, which was destroyed when the existing window was cut through the wall. At the base is a crowned king playing a harp. The fragment has been interpreted as the...
adoration of the Lamb, which would imply that there was no window in the 13th-century east wall. This was evidently thought to cause inadequate lighting in the chancel and a large east window was inserted in the early 14th century (Pl. XIIA). On the side walls there are the remains of painted ashlar lines with floral sprays, also of the 13th century.

The added chancel is exceptionally fine work for a small village church. It has been dated as early as c. 1210, but it is difficult to reconcile some of the detail with a period so near the beginning of the century. A date about 1250 would better accord with the form of the mouldings and the design of the paintings. Historically it is likely that the chancel was built by Sir John D’Abernon the elder (ob. c. 1277) and intended to contain his tomb, the brass for which was probably ordered during his lifetime.

Stage 5: 15th and early 16th century

The only substantial medieval addition of later date was the Norbury chapel, forming a north aisle to the chancel. This typical late Perpendicular work was erected by Sir John Norbury, who founded a chantry in the church of Stoke D’Abernon. He died at an advanced age in 1521 and the chantry is mentioned in his will. The chapel must be dated to c. 1500. Other windows and detail in the church are of about the same date.

The details of this work and of subsequent alterations, including the 19th-century restorations, need not be recapitulated in the present context. The most important of these alterations was the extension westward in 1866 of both nave and aisle, involving the destruction of much early work, which has been described by reference to earlier illustrations. Work renewed in the 19th century normally reproduces the original detail.

The Social Setting of the Pre-Conquest Church

The pre-Conquest church of Stoke D’Abernon has emerged as a small building with an aisleless nave, apsidal chancel, and a western gallery entered through a door in the south wall, which must always have been reached by an external wooden stair. It has been argued that this church antedates the Danish invasions of the 9th century and that it was erected in the 7th century, or at latest soon after A.D. 700. Before considering the significance of the building the early history of Stoke D’Abernon must be related. ‘D’Abernon’ is a post-Conquest manorial suffix and need not be considered. The original name was Stoke, which the English Place Name Society interpreted as stoc, a palisaded enclosure. But there is now reason to believe that many of these names go back to an original stocc, meaning a dependent settlement, more particularly one with the specialized function of a dairy farm.

The earliest record is that in Domesday Book (1086) which may be translated: ‘Richard himself holds Stoche. Bricsi (cild suprascript) held it in the time of King Edward. It was then assessed for 15 hides; now for 2 hides and 5 acres.

1 S.A.C., XX, 30-1.
2 English Place Name Society, XI, 95.
3 English Place Name Society, XXVI, 153-6.
4 Victoria County History (cited as VCH), Surrey, I, 318; cf. III, 457-8.
Plate XI

Chancel and N. arcade, Stoke D’Abernon Church
A. East end of chancel in 1829. (E. Hassell)

B. Nave and chancel-arch from E. in 1829. (E. Hassell)
The land is for six ploughs. In demesne there are two ploughs and [there are] 10 villeins and 9 cottars with 2 ploughs. There is a church and 7 serfs, a mill worth 7 shillings and 4 acres of meadow. There is a wood for 40 hogs. In the time of King Edward it was worth £4 and is now worth £4; when [Richard] received it £3. Richard who held Stoke in 1086 was the son of Count Gilbert and ancestor of the great house of Clare.

Bricsi Cild, the pre-Conquest holder of Stoke, was a great Saxon landholder. The title cild indicates his position as a person of importance. In the Kentish lest of Sutton he is named in a list of 15 landholders possessing the private jurisdiction described as soc and sac. He also held rich manors in that county. While it is possible that some of the holdings attributed to Bricsi belonged to another man of the same name, the title cild identifies the possessor of Stoke with the holder of Plumstead, Seal and Lullingstone; in other cases the title may have been omitted as it was in the original draft of Stoke. It would be unwise to enlarge the area of search and seek to identify Bricsi Cild as the holder of much other property in many counties recorded as belonging to Bricsi. But it has generally been thought that he is to be identified with the holder of Foulsham, Essex, of which Domesday Book records: ‘Bricsi held [it] assessed at one hide less ten acres and as a manor. He held this land freely and when the King (i.e. William I) came to this country he was outlawed and the King took the land’.

Bricsi was clearly a man of wealth and standing. Stoke with its assessment of 15 hides and its church was one of his more important holdings, if not his principal seat. It recalls the 11th-century definition of thegn right, contained in the Laws of Cnut (III, 60, I). This states that if a ceorl prosper so that he has five hides of his own land (Latin version: de suo proprio alodio), a church (ecclesiam propriam) and cookhouse, a fortified gatehouse and seat and duty in the king’s hall, he is worthy of thegn right. Unfortunately the earlier history of Stoke is unknown and it is not possible to say how long it had been an important holding.

Recent work on later Saxon churches has focused attention on a type of small church with a large and well-built western tower. The type has seldom survived intact and the picture must be built up from scattered evidence. The most important example is Barton on Humber, Lincolnshire, where the richly decorated western tower of the 11th century was originally associated with a small eastern building or chancel, measuring 14 ft. by 12 ft. Barton was a large and important holding possessed before the Conquest by Ulf the Constable, and granted by William I to Gilbert of Ghent. The similar tower at Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, has produced no evidence of the form of the contemporary building to the east. The church lay within the defences of the Norman bailey. Earls Barton was again an important holding possessed before the Conquest by Bondi. It passed to Judith, the Conqueror’s niece and

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1 VCH., Kent, III, 204b, 221a, 222b, and 223a.
4 Clapham, 103; R. Brown, Notes on the Earlier History of Barton on Humber, 66-9.
became a centre of the Earldom of Huntingdon, which in the later 12th century constituted the principal English possession of the Kings of Scotland. The early church under the nave of Dunfermline Abbey, Fife, consisted of a tower and small eastern chancel; the building sequence shews that this preceded the added quire. It is a reasonable assumption that the older building is the Palace chapel, in which King Malcolm married Queen Margaret, and that the added quire was the church built by the queen after her marriage, for the accommodation of the monks sent by Archbishop Lanfranc. A recent examination of the Priory Church of Restenneth, Angus, has brought to light the earliest stage of construction consisting of a tower and small eastern building, similar to the church at Dunfermline. The tower, which still stands to its full height, is of a type that would pass as pre-Conquest in England; it should date from the 11th century. Here again tradition suggests that the site was in origin princely, not ecclesiastical.

Many late pre-Conquest towers are still standing in England. They often survive as the sole relics of churches of the late 10th or 11th century. Many probably fell into the same class as those that we have been discussing. A number can be associated with wealthy Saxon landholders of high standing. Singleton in West Sussex is a good example. In 1066 this was the centre of a large estate assessed at 97½ hides and held by Earl Morcar. The tower is massive with an upper door set high in the east wall. Clapham in Bedfordshire has a tower that falls into the same class. This was an important Domesday manor, claimed by the monks of Ramsey, to whom it had been given by Athelstan Mannesunnu, subject to the right of dower by his widow. Athelstan Mannesunnu (ob. 986) was a wealthy landowner who made a number of gifts to the church. The date of the tower suggests that it was built during his lifetime as the church of his manor, probably his principal residence.

This type of church, in which the most prominent feature is the great western tower, seems to have evolved during the ecclesiastical reorganization of the 10th century. It is a specialized form of the Eigenkirche (ecclesia propria) and can hardly be dissociated from the definition of thegn right already quoted. While there is, inevitably, little evidence that the great tower was associated with a western gallery, either under the arch or projecting into the church, such a feature is likely. In the hierarchical state of society then arising it is probable that the lord and his family would desire a special seat and that they would not wish to mingle with their tenants and servants in the restricted space on the floor of the building.

The west gallery itself is a well known feature in early churches. The classic account of its purpose occurs in the history of the monastery of Seligen-
CHURCH OF ST. MARY, STOKE D’ABERNON

stadt,¹ to which attention was drawn by Baldwin Brown. Seligenstadt was founded about A.D. 800 by Einhard, the Carolingian statesman and biographer of Charlemagne, to house relics brought from Rome. At the west end he had an upper chamber (cenaculum), from which he was able to follow the service. There are also references to the keeping of relics in these chambers. The archetype of the arrangement is to be found at Aachen itself in the church built by Charlemagne as a palace chapel and Imperial mausoleum.² This is a centrally planned building, with the ambulatory in two stories. The western bay of the upper storey, facing the altar, formed a private oratory for the Emperor, with an external loggia, on which he could shew himself to the people.

Attention has recently been drawn to these western galleries in pre-Conquest England by H. M. Taylor.³ He notes instances at Tredington, Wing, Jarrow, Deerhurst and Brixworth; others could be cited. The position of these galleries in the building sequences of the churches has not always been elucidated. At Brixworth, as I have argued elsewhere,⁴ the gallery is strictly an upper room over the porch, which was reached by an added stair. It is associated with the insertion of a large triple window cut through the east wall of the porch to give a view on to the altar. All this is work of the 10th century; it marks the abandonment of the old monastic western porticus in two stages, which I have associated with the teaching of the catechumens in the period of the conversion. At Wing the gallery was in use in the 10th century, when the church was in the hands of Aelfgifu, a wealthy lady of the royal house.⁵ It does not certainly go back to the earliest period, when the church was probably monastic. Tredington⁶ was an important manor of the Bishops of Worcester, assessed in Domesday Book at 23 hides. In all these cases it is probable that the gallery is associated with the stage when the church was seigniorial rather than any other.

The great western tower and the western gallery are different aspects of the same tendency in later pre-Conquest England, the desire of the important lord to have a special seat within the church which he possessed (ecclesia propria). Possession of churches was not confined to laymen. Many bishops possessed churches both within and outside their own dioceses. Lanfranc himself, though seeking to reform the church in England, was tenacious of his rights over the churches in other dioceses possessed by Canterbury.⁷ To what extent the architectural features under discussion were found in these churches cannot be known. But it is perhaps significant that the finest surviving example of the great western gallery is to be found at Melbourne, Derbyshire,⁸ a church built by Adelulf the first Bishop of Carlisle (1133-57). The manor belonged to the See and was long a favourite residence of the rulers of that troubled northern diocese.

³ Peter Clemoes (ed.), The Anglo-Saxons: Studies of some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins, 138-42.
⁴ Arch. J., CX, 202-5.
⁵ D. Whitelock, Anglo-Saxon Wills, 20-3 and 118-25.
⁶ VCH., Worcestershire, III, 543.
⁷ See p. 165, n. 1.
⁸ Arch. J., LXXI, 393-4; and p. 243 below.
At Stoke D’Abernon there is reason to suggest that the western gallery or lord’s seat goes back to the beginnings of the church in the 7th or early 8th century. If this be so it is the earliest English example of a long tradition. The gallery lost its importance in the parish churches as a result of the 12th-century reforms and the general enlargement of these buildings. Characteristically it survived as a normal feature of the private chapels found in palaces and in many great houses. Here it has remained in use even to our own day. These later examples lie beyond the scope of the present article, which may well end with the citation of one outstanding example, the Chapel Royal in Hampton Court Palace.¹