ON THE REMAINS OF AN ANKERHOLD AT BENGEO CHURCH, HERTFORD[1].

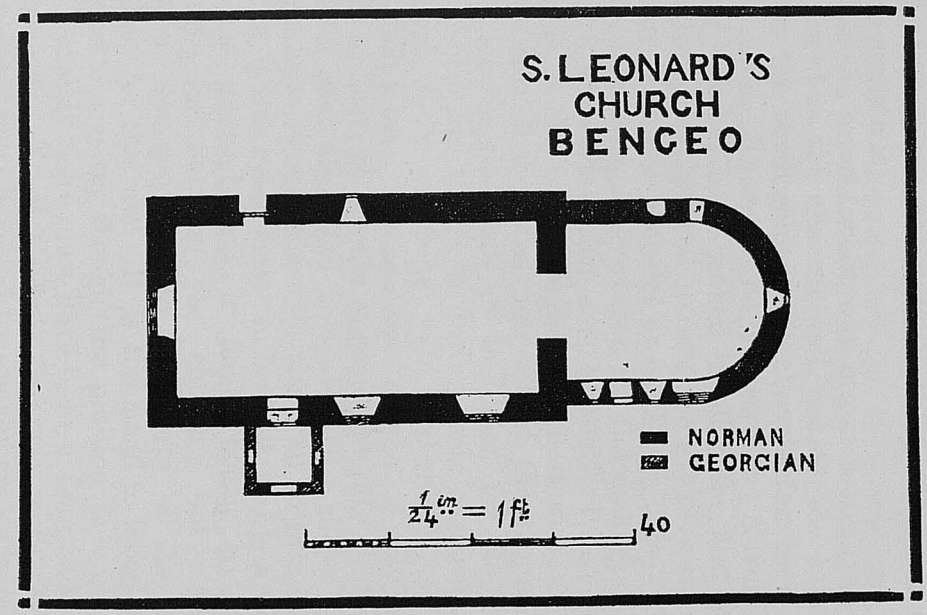
By J. T. MICKLETHWAITE, F.S.A.

Some years ago a new parish church was built at Bengeo, near Hertford, and the old one was abandoned, dismantled, and left to decay. It must soon have fallen into ruin altogether, but that in 1883 Mr. Gerard Gosselin, of Bengeo Hall, and a few of his friends prevented it by doing the most necessary repairs. Since then more has been done well, though slowly, and there is fair hope that the church may once again be made fit for the sacred uses for which it served more than seven hundred years.

The church is interesting and our thanks are due to them who are trying to save it. It is of the simplest type, with nave and chancel only, the former about 44 feet by 21 feet inside and the latter 24 feet by 19 feet including the apse. They are separated by a wall about 3 ft. 6 in. thick, in which is a chancel arch only 8 feet wide. The date is early in the twelfth century, and the plan is such as was most common in small parish churches at that time. It is rather larger than most examples of the type which have come down to us unaltered, but is just such as very many country churches must have grown from. Here the church still keeps its first simple form, and it has the round east end which does not often remain[2]. It

[1] Read at the monthly meeting of the Institute, December 2nd, 1886.

[2] Enough examples remain to shew that the characteristic square end, which the English Church inherited from her British parent, did not go out of use in the twelfth century. But I think that the Norman fashion for apses was more widely followed than the fewness of existing specimens might be thought to indicate. In small parish churches, which retain the side walls of their chancels, the western halves of those walls are often of the twelfth century, and the eastern of the thirteenth or later. And I believe that this nearly always means that an apse had been taken away and a square end put in its place. The English builders soon found out that unless it be vaulted an apse is a very bad ending to a church; so, as they did not often use vaulting in parish churches, they left off using apses, and altered those already built when they had the chance. An old English parish church with an apse later than the twelfth century is very uncommon.


S. LEONARD'S
CHURCH
BENGEO
NORMAN
GEORGIAN
1 in. = 1 ft.
40

has been altered in detail, and the alterations are themselves of interest as shewing how the later users of the church tried to counteract the narrowness of the chancel arch, which they had come to look on as a fault. But I will not discuss that matter now. My task to-day is to describe one very curious feature in the building, and, if possible, to explain it.

Soon after the present work was begun a strange hole was discovered in the chancel wall, just at the turn of the apse on the north side. It is about 4 feet high and 20 inches wide. There is no stonework. A roughly rectangular hole has been broken through the flint wall, and the sides of it plastered to something like a smooth face. There is no provision for or mark of a door. And it was difficult to assign any reason for the making of the hole. Yet it was certain that some reason for it had been. Rough as it, is there is enough care bestowed on its making to shew that it was not one of these openings sometimes left in the walls of buildings for the convenience of bringing things in during their construction, and blocked up when done with. Besides it is too small for such a use. It was suggested that it may have been made to bring in a coffin at some funeral. But it is too small for that also; and it needs to be shewn why men should have broken through the wall to bring in a coffin when it was much easier to bring it in by a door. Then it was guessed that it might belong to some extinct stove for warming the church; but neither the position, nor anything in the form of the hole seemed likely for that use. It is too small to have been the entrance to a vestry though the position is a proper one; and certainly there must have been a door had that been its purpose. Yet if the hole had ever more than a temporary use it must have led to some chamber outside, for the church could not have been used if it were open to the weather.

Some further light was thrown on the place a few months ago when a coating of modern cement was stripped off the outside of the wall. Then was found a second hole about the same size as the first, but cut only part way through the wall. It is plastered inside with clay, and was filled up with flints and clay. Rather above

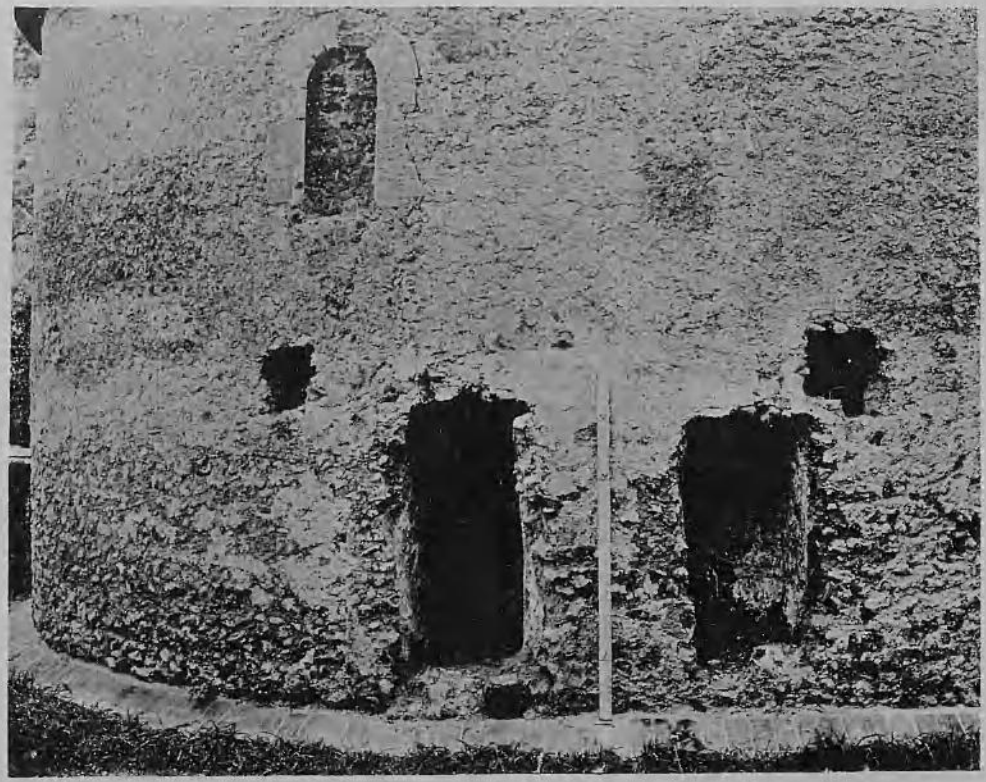
these holes, and east and west of them respectively, are two smaller ones, such as may have received the ends of timbers. These also were found stopped with clay. The annexed illustration explains the work better than any description.

It seems that a little wooden hut has been built at some time against the wall of the church. The smaller holes give its length from from east to west—about eight feet inside—and perhaps also its greatest height, about six feet. But this last and the width from north to south are uncertain, for there is nothing to shew what was the shape of the roof, and if there were ever any foundations they are not to be found now. The walls were probably of stud and clay dawbing, and the roof thatch.

The place can hardly have been other than an anker's den. And it must surely have been one of the least commodious. It is remarkable that so few such have been identified, for the number of ankers in England must at one time have been considerable. There is a good deal about them in the second volume of the new edition of Mr. Bloxam's *Gothic Architecture*, and Mr. Bloxam would assign to ankers most of the habitable chambers attached to churches, over vestries and porches and elsewhere. Very likely some such were used by ankers of the easier sort; but I think more were occupied by secular clerks and chaplains, and the anker's place was a hut built outside against the wall *under the eaves of the church*[1] as is said in the thirteenth century *Ancren Riwle* which tells us more about ankers than any other book I know of.

A cell was so placed that the anker need not leave it, either for worship or for any other reason. There was a window or opening through which he might join in the worship at the altar, and at times receive the Sacrament. And there was another window or hatch to the outside through which necessaries might be received and conversation held with visitors or servants. A window or squint is often found from a chamber over a vestry towards the high altar, and there is sometimes one from a porch chamber; but being on upper floors they could not well have the other window, so I take most of them not to have been ankerholds. Though as the degree of

[1] *Ancren Riwle*, published by the Camden Society, pp. 142-3.



REMAINS OF ANKERHOLD, BENGEO CHURCH.

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strictness varied much and seems for the most part to have been fixed only by the anker himself, it is possible that some may have been so used. The anker of the strictest sort was *inclusus*—permanently shut up in his cell which he entered with the licence and blessing of the bishop. Such a one could scarcely have inhabited an upper chamber.

Whether our Bengeo Anker was *inclusus* or not is uncertain. The entrance to his cell had no door, but it may have been blocked, and a squint or loop towards the altar formed in the blocking. If it were open a curtain must have been hung across it, perhaps a black cloth with a white cross like that ordered in the *Riwle*[1] to be put to the "parlour" window.

The recess in the church wall west of the doorway is the anker's seat and perhaps his sleeping place. And his bones may lie below; for it seems to have been a custom for ankers to prepare their own graves within their cells[2].

We find nothing to tell us his date. It may have been any time from the twelfth century to the sixteenth. But the rudeness of the work is I think a sign of early date. If it had been of the fourteenth or fifteenth century I should have expected the opening through the wall at least to have been formed with regular masonry.

[1] *Riwle*, p 50. [2] *Riwle*, p. 116.