

## UNUSUAL DOORWAYS IN OLD BUILDINGS.<sup>1</sup>

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In bringing before the Archæological Institute the following observations I should at once say that I have been induced to do so rather by the hope of obtaining information upon some of the difficulties to which I shall allude, than with the idea of imparting much information. I will describe some of the puzzles which I have met with, but I do not intend to explain these features, indeed, I cannot do so; but, on the contrary, I hope the members of the Institute will be able to throw light on some of my difficulties.

I will first describe one of the last churches which I have seen, viz., that of Orton Longueville. It is situated two miles west of Peterborough and is dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

It possesses three unusual features but I will describe roughly the whole building. Its ground plan consists of a western tower, nave with north and south aisle, and south porch, and a chancel with a north aisle. So far it is a most ordinary building but it is unusual in that it is built in one style throughout, viz., the Decorated style, excepting a few windows of a later date. Although no earlier features are now to be found it was not to be supposed that no earlier church existed, and I found when it was restored in 1836, at the expense of the Duke of Northumberland and the Marquis of Huntley, that remains of Norman foundations were discovered. What has become of the font I cannot say. In 1721 this parish was merged with Botolph Bridge and the church in that village was abandoned.

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute January 7th, 1889.

On the outside of the chancel, on the south side, there are two wide and deeply recessed niches at the level of the windows, but otherwise there is nothing to attract special attention.

Inside the chancel, on the north side, close to where the altar rail stands, there is a sharply-pointed recess about six inches wide and perhaps three feet to the apex of the arch. I cannot even make a guess as to its origin. This is my first puzzle. In the west wall of the chancel, on either side the chancel arch, there is a recessed stone seat. These probably were the return stalls.

In the eastern respond, of both the north and south arcade of the nave, there is an opening something like a doorway, although there is no sign of a door having hung in either opening. The openings go right through the wall and stop about two feet from the present floor level. This is my second puzzle.

In justice to myself it is only fair that I should say that my time for studying the archæological features of buildings, which I visit on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, is always limited, my duties being, first, to consider the *structural* condition of the building; secondly, its capacity for meeting present requirements; and lastly, the most pleasurable one, of trying to find out its history; and in tracing the history of a building is it not the case that one always wants to make a second visit, and often a third and a fourth? After one has left the building, and quietly thought it over, fresh possibilities occur to one, or it may be that one talks it over with a friend, who throws fresh light upon the subject, and one can neither confirm or confute his suggestion without again seeing the building. I am sorry I cannot say for certain whether these openings are of the same dates as the arcades or not, but my belief, after having studied the jointing, is that they were built at the same time as the arcades. They could not have been intended merely to give light, for, had that been the need, obviously, the simple course would have been to have let the first arch of each arcade spring from the west wall, so as to have no respond, or only a slight one. So far I have only been able to think of one possible explanation.

It has seemed to me possible that these openings were

entrances to the rood loft staircase, or more probably ladder. There are signs of a screen having existed across the chancel arch. My suggestion is that another screen was placed west of the openings in question and that a way up to the loft was formed between the two screens somewhat after the manner of the Canterbury Cathedral choir screen although, of course, the two cases are not parallel. I should perhaps say that there are no signs of a rood loft stair in any of the usual places.

Doubtless had one seen the church before it was restored in 1836 the whole of the question would have been more intelligible, and I may add that the restoration which is just going to take place will make the matter still more puzzling to future antiquaries as a screen will be placed in the chancel arch and thus hide the marks which prove the existence of a former screen. But I am glad to be able to say that the architect promises to deal much more leniently with the church than is usual.

My next puzzle is to be found in the western tower, but on our way there I should like to call attention to a large shallow cupboard on the north aisle wall. Upon opening the doors there is displayed to view a painting of St. Christopher bearing Christ. It is in a far more perfect condition than any I have ever seen, although there certainly is a very good one at All Saints' Church, Warlingham, Surrey. The Warlingham one has been made as large as the wall space would allow, but the Orton Longueville one might have been much bigger.

Attached to the pillar of the south arcade, opposite the south door, there is a money box which is used solely by women who have been churched.

Now the last unusual feature, which I spoke of as being in the tower, is this: on the south side there is the usual stair turret, leading up to the ringing chamber and the belfry, but on the north side there is another turret, which leads up as far as the ringing chamber only.

I suppose there can be no doubt that the turret had stairs in it originally, but at present there is a doorway on the ground level, and another opening on to the ringing-chamber floor, and *no steps*, a rough vault having been thrown over eight or nine feet above the ground level. What could have been the reason for building this turret?

It is of the same date as the tower, but it could not have been built with a view of making the two sides of the tower match, for, first of all, it does not do so, and secondly, such a motive is quite a foreign one to mediæval builders. There seems to me to be but one possible reason for building two staircases, viz., that there was a large traffic up to the ringing chamber or first floor of the tower, and therefore one staircase was provided for ascent and the other for descent. And the only explanation to be given for so many wishing to go up into this room is, I suppose, that a relic was kept there, and that pilgrims came to see it, but the whole of this suggestion is, to say the least, very problematical, and I hope some better suggestion will be made.

Let me now ask you to turn your thoughts from this church to the most interesting and well-known church of Langford, in Oxfordshire, which stands near the railway line beyond Witney, and about two miles short of Lechlade. The building has a most unusual plan. There is a large Norman tower, with a very long and large chancel of greater width than the tower to the east of it and a long nave on the west sides with aisles, the nave being the same width as the tower and the aisles running on beyond the east end of the nave for half the width of the tower, thus forming two good chapels.

The church will probably be recalled to the mind of anyone who has seen it by the two very large flying buttresses on the north side of the nave supporting the nave aisle wall. This wall has to receive the thrust of two other flying arches which support the nave wall. The whole is an ingenious contrivance to meet the difficulty of the nave arcade having gone outwards at this point. However, the special feature I wish to draw attention to is an early English doorway on the south side of the chancel quite close to the east end. When I visited the church the incumbent told me that it was the opinion of the local Archæological Society that this doorway must have been moved to its present position and recommended that it should be moved further west for it was alleged that its present position must be wrong as it opened into the church *within* the altar rail.

Although this was one way of getting over a difficulty it did not appear to me to be a satisfactory one.

The doorway showed no signs of having been moved and on entering the church I found a large recessed locker, with many compartments, on the north wall just opposite the doorway. It then occurred to me that the east end of the chancel which is, as I have already said, of unusual length, must have originally been used as a vestry, a screen having been placed across the chancel just west of the doorway in question, the altar standing against it in the middle on the west side, and probably a doorway through the screen being provided on either side the altar after the usual manner when a vestry was built at the east end. I am sorry to have to confess that what I have said about this church is from memory only and that I have no measured plan of the building, and I will, therefore, let my next example be one which I know really well and which I have partially measured. In fact to make sure of some points I visited it again last Monday.

The building I refer to is St. Catherine's Chapel which stands upon a little hill about a mile out of Guildford between the river and Portsmouth Road. Before describing the building, which is now a ruin, I had better say that the questions I am going to ask are—Why should such a small building have such a large west doorway? Why should it also have a north and south doorway? and, still more strange, why should the two windows over these doorways have been blocked up and filled in with two more doorways? The building is a simple parallelogram measuring inside 20 ft. 8½ in. wide and 46 ft. 1½ in. long. The walls are from 2 ft. 9 in. to 2 ft. 10 in. thick and have two buttresses at each angle, excepting the north west angle where there is a fine vaulted turret staircase, the steps having all gone.

There are two buttresses in the length of the building on each side and three windows, a doorway being under each central window. There is a large eastern window 8 ft. wide, and this window, and the windows due north and south of the altar, are all about 5 ft. lower than the four other side windows. At the west end there is a doorway 6 ft. wide with a window about the same width above it. There are no corbels or niches for images, no piscina, credence, sedilia, or aumbrey, and no signs of any galleries having ever existed.

The History of Guildford by the two brothers Russell, printers, of that town, says that the chapel is spoken of in the Pipe Rolls of the fourteenth year of Henry III. and again in the following reign of Edward I. This makes a building to have been in existence here in 1229, and I suppose it to be this building. If so the Decorated style of mediæval architecture came into use earlier than is usually believed to have been the case for it was undoubtedly built early in the time when the Decorated style first came in. The windows originally had tracery and the south doorway has a singly cusped head embraced with a label struck from two centres the section of which is undoubtedly of that period.

A bell used to hang in the turret having on it the inscription "Santa Catharina ora pro nobis," but John Weston, the bailiff, of Guildford, in 1735 says that this bell was melted in the eight bells in the lower parish of Guildford.

The materials used for the walls is the local sandstone which is full of iron, and with age turns to a bright purple brown, and clunch for the dressings. In passing it is worth noting that they bonded the *internal* angles of the building with finely dressed ashlar and that the walls were plastered all over on the inside, the plaster being taken over the ashlar. In none of the different building trades are we so much behind our predecessors as in the plasterer's trade. It is one of the few evils which followed upon the good preaching of Mr. Ruskin that paint and plaster are looked upon as shams and this has resulted in quantities of beautiful mediæval plaster being destroyed and with it paintings upon the plaster which have been hidden by whitewash.

Undoubtedly also this disrespect which has been shewn towards plaster-work has resulted in its neglect so that we cannot now get a plain wall properly plastered, much less any decorative work in plaster properly done.

I am, however, allowing myself to be led away from my subject, viz., that of the five doorways (not counting the turret doorway) in this little ruined chapel.

The western doorway is, as I have already said, unusually wide, viz., 6 ft., but it is unusual in another respect for there is no check in the stone jambs for the



doors to stop against, the jambs being taken square straight through the wall. The same is the case with the north doorway although in both cases there is the usual sinking in the arches to receive the doors. The south doorway has its jambs and arches arranged in the usual way.

Before saying anything about the upper doorways which have been added to the building let us first consider those belonging to the original building. It is always safe I think to conclude that the builders in the middle ages were as reasonable as the builders of to day. Indeed, when one sees attempts made at building in the style of the Normans in our days and of rough rubble unplastered walls being put inside buildings or the brick front of a house fifty or sixty feet high being carried on an iron girder one is even tempted to give the mediæval builder credit for being more reasonable than the builder of to day. I shall, therefore, conclude that there was a good reason for building all these doorways as they are. But they certainly would not have built them so had the chapel simply been a chapel of ease for an ordinary small congregation.

Now, the lane which runs in continuation of the track across Puttenham Common and which is now called Sandy Lane is marked on the Ordnance map as "Pilgrim's Way." This lane runs down close by St. Catherine's chapel to the ferry over the river Wey. Tradition says that the pilgrims used to visit St. Martha's church, a Norman cruciform building which stands on St. Martha's Hill. This hill is a little over two miles east of Guildford. The more direct route for them to have taken would have been along the old Roman road which runs along the Hog's back, and a more beautiful road, with its extensive view both to the right and left, could hardly be found in all England. It seems to me more probable that they would go this way both on account of safety and also because they then would be able to make Guildford a resting place and they could make a special visit to St. Catherine's as it would be less than a mile out of their way. At any rate tradition says that the pilgrims going from Winchester to Canterbury used to visit St. Catherine's chapel. It is even now a beautiful spot and it must have

been even more beautiful in those days with the silvery river Wey flowing in the valley below, through the water meadows unlocked and unpolluted by the town of Godalming, and its obnoxious paper mills.

Now, if we study the chapel and bear in mind that it must have contained some holy relic and that it was visited by the Canterbury pilgrims it becomes more intelligible. The large six feet wide doorway at the west end would be a great convenience. It may be that they had an open grill across it so that the chapel might be locked up and people still be able to worship by placing themselves at the west door where a considerable number would be able to see in, or on special occasions it may be that they opened both the north and the south door, so that the pilgrims coming in large numbers could pass in at one door and out of the other. I am in fact now explaining the existence of these two doors in the same way as I tried to explain the existence of the two turrets in the tower of Orton Longueville church. Of course, I do not suppose that every church which had a north and south door was visited by pilgrims, and I think that these doors, which are to be found in nearly every parish church, were in all probability placed there solely for the use of funeral and other processions. There is one difficulty to be got over and that is why they provided no stop for the door in the jambs of the north and west doorway, and yet gave the south doorway and the turret doorway the usual stop.

My suggestion is that at times when the pilgrims were not coming to the chapel, the south doorway, being provided with a hung door, was the only one used, and that the north and west doorways did not have hung doors in them, but only what might be called movable shutters. Such shutters would stop against the rebate in the stonework of the arch and the doorstep, or they might drop into a groove on the floor and be secured against the rebate in the arch by a bolt. Shutters so secured would be far more safe than any hung on hinges and secured by a lock, and they would not require the usual stop in the jamb as a door would, although, of course, such a stop would break the joint between the wood and the stonework and keep the weather out better.



On the other hand, there can be no doubt that an opening without either a door or stops on the jambs is far the best form for a crowd of people to pass through.

I am sorry to say that I have not as yet taken the obvious course of examining the jambs of all the doorways with a view of ascertaining what ironwork has been let into them, and this may probably throw some light on the subject.

The first features about the ruin which originally attracted my attention, and caused me to puzzle over it, were the doorways which have been inserted in the central window on each side, and I will not trespass upon your time further than to describe them to you, and, perhaps, offer a humble suggestion. The south window has had a doorway with a two-centred arch placed in its middle, flush with the outside wall. Both arch and jamb have a plain chamfer on them, and the jamb is of the usual door-jamb section, *i.e.*, it widens out after passing about six inches into the wall, and it is then taken straight through to the inner face of the wall, where a segmental arch struck from one centre is thrown over the opening. This arch is very flat and has a chamfer upon it.

Clearly then the door on this side of the chapel must have been hung in the usual way like the one below it and have opened into the building.

Now the window on the north side of the chapel has been filled, in exactly the reverse way to the window on the south side. On the *inside* it has a doorway with a two-centred arch, similar to the one described as being on the *outside* of the south wall, and an arch struck from one centre, but not so flat as the one in the south wall, has been placed on the *outside* of the north wall.

Therefore the doorway on the south side lead into the building and the doorway on the north side lead out of the building.

Are we not justified in supposing that a gallery must have existed between the two doorways and that its object was to allow people to pass through the chapel? I venture to think that it could have had no other use and that it justifies my suggested origin of the two doors on the ground floor.

There are no signs whatever of any stage having existed

outside these doors on either side and it is almost impossible to assign a date to the doorways, but I am inclined to believe that they were added very soon after the chapel was built.

As, however, I have been bold enough to start a theory, I had better make myself clear by stating how I believe this chapel was used, even at the risk of repetition.

I believe the present chapel was built originally for the accommodation of the pilgrims, and that at times of the year when there were but few coming, the great west doorway was left open, so that it could be used at unusual times when pilgrims and others were not expected, but that when the crowds of pilgrims came they passed in the south door and out at the north. After a time this was found to give insufficient accommodation and it was then that a gallery over head was resorted to and temporary ladders or wooden steps were put up against the building to give a way in and out of the gallery.