

# NORMAN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE IN ENGLAND

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At present we know of some 50 extant examples of Norman domestic architecture, though most are fragmentary or mutilated. Stone is the chief building material to survive, so naturally most occur on the rich limestone belt which crosses England from N.E. to S.W. Not many have been found in the sandstone country west of it, but in the chalk and clay lands of the east flint took the place of building-stone in such houses as Charleston and Portslade. In fact it is the south-eastern half of England that preserves most Norman houses.

Norman domestic architecture has been neglected in the past. Indeed, there is still a general ignorance that 12th century buildings exist other than castles, churches and monasteries. The Normans are always pictured in these and, when a 12th century dwelling is recognised, it is given a Jewish owner.

This is the case with the best known of the Norman houses, Jew's House at Lincoln, and there may be some truth in the "Jewish theory." The Jews were accustomed to a higher standard of living than that of their simpler neighbours, many of whom, as in London, were probably content with timber, wattle and daub, and the danger of fire. The Jews were rich and had more to lose in a fire, also they were unpopular as moneylenders, and so liable to attack by the mob. A stone house was thus preferred for reasons of comfort and protection.

On the other hand, Lincoln, situated on the limestone belt, would be more likely to preserve stone houses than London, to which any building stone would have to be imported. (Yet even in London the Jews had houses of stone: Stow tells us how the barons of 1215 "repaired the walles and gates of the Citie with stones taken from the Jews' broken houses.")

But there were other persons of wealth in the 12th century besides Jew and baron: people who could afford to build a substantial house, especially in districts where stone was abundant. In the country stone houses might be feudal,

manor houses or granges, but in the towns the craft and merchant guilds were increasingly active and guild houses and even solid private houses could be afforded by the members. The question of defence concerned the merchant less than it did the Jew, but he also had valuable stores to protect from fire and theft, and money to build a stone basement for that purpose, with a pleasant hall above to live in.

To sum up then—the Jews probably had stone houses, but it is unwise to consider that every surviving Norman house necessarily had a Jewish owner.

The Jew's House at Lincoln was built about 1170–80 and indeed most examples date from the second half of the 12th century. Political unrest discouraged good civil building until the reign of Henry II, and before then stone was not in general use for building, even castles being mainly composed of timber. These latter would be the first to be translated into the less destructible material. Thus earlier dwelling-houses would be of wood or mud and so do not survive.

Even under Henry II the question of defence was important, and it was safer to have the living-rooms raised to first-floor level, a similar arrangement being found in the keeps of mid-12th century castles. In the 13th century conditions were still more secure and the hall tended to come downstairs. Yet first-floor halls were still built and this century, with the 14th, may be considered a period of transition. It was not until the 15th century that the ground-floor hall was usual.

In the Bayeux Tapestry the Aula of King Harold at Bosham is shown as a hall over a vaulted basement. Recent research inclines to the view that the tapestry was worked in England about 1077 but, even so, the hall depicted could be of the Norman type. Another possible Saxon first-floor hall is mentioned in the Chronicle for 978. But there is no real evidence that such halls occurred in pre-Conquest England, which is to be expected as it was essentially a stone type of building.

There are three main types of Anglo-Norman domestic architecture:—the first-floor hall, the aisled ground-floor hall, and the unaisled ground-floor hall. The first-floor hall is the most common.

Although we should expect a difference in type between town and manor houses, occasioned by considerations of space, it is noteworthy that the compact first-floor hall is common to both.

No doubt, however, the number of outbuildings, probably timber-built, would be more numerous in the country. In both the stone hall is raised on a basement or cellar (in the mediaeval ground-floor sense), either vaulted or with a wooden ceiling. This arrangement would provide storage accommodation below and raise the living rooms to a defensible height above the ground. Also the hall windows could be larger, loops sufficing for the storage basement.

This type is also found in castles, where a hall was often built apart from the keep and formed a separate house against the curtain. Christchurch Hall near Bournemouth is a good example of the simplest kind of first-floor hall, the single compartment plan. Architectural evidence suggests a date c. 1160. Thus it was probably built by Richard de Redvers, second Earl of Devon, who held the castle 1155-62, or by his son Baldwin, who died in 1180.

The first floor contained the hall, reached from the basement by a newel stair, and from the bailey by an outside stair, now gone, leading up to the narrow hall entrance. This is its usual position in a Norman house, though it was often nearer the end of a side wall.

Several features of Christchurch are found in Scolland's Hall at Richmond Castle, Yorkshire. The doorway is in the usual end position and the newel stair is near the entrance.

At the Manor House at Hemingford Grey in Huntingdonshire the hall entrance, now filled by a modern window, is in the end wall, an unusual position. The house dates from c. 1150.

The Jew's House at Lincoln, mentioned above, probably the best known of all the Norman houses, has an elaborate ground-floor entrance—an unusual arrangement found also at Aaron's House—possibly adopted for safety's sake. This might be taken as evidence that Jews, fearing persecution, actually built these two houses. The house dates from c. 1170-80; its strength and rich decoration supports the Jewish tradition, and we know the Jewess Belaset of Wallingford, owner in 1290, was condemned for clipping the king's coin.

The so-called "Aaron the Jew's House," also dating from c. 1170-80, has lately been proved by documentary evidence to have no connection with Aaron the Jew, who lived in Lincoln c. 1160-80, but not in this part of the city.

The hall and solar plan is less usual. It was probably a development from the single compartment plan in which the

upper end of the hall was no doubt divided off in some cases to serve as a bed-chamber for the lord and lady. The lower end may also have been partitioned, as it was later, by screens to form a passage sheltering the body of the hall from draught when the entrance door was opened. Curtains were probably often used for the purpose and perhaps the upper end was separated from the hall only when the lord and his family retired.

At Boothby Pagnell, Lincolnshire, the solar is added at the end of an ordinary single apartment of the same build. This late Norman house is an unoccupied building in the grounds of the modern manor house. It dates from c. 1200 and consists of hall and solar over vaulted basements. The first floor entrance is original and the staircase, though modern, is probably on the site of the original one. The hall and solar, with their basements, are divided by a stone wall, pierced by an original doorway. The hall cellar has a ribbed vault in two bays, while the solar cellar has a barrel vault. The hall fireplace is of the hooded type prevalent from c. 1200 until the 15th century. Earlier the arched fireplace was usual.

Moyses' Hall, Bury St. Edmunds, also belongs to the hall-and-solar type, but a third apartment may once have existed. The house was built of flint with ashlar dressings c. 1180, ten years before the Jews of St. Edmundsbury were expelled. The name Moyses may be Jewish and is certainly old, appearing for the first time in a document of 1328. But the house may have been considered Jewish on the analogy of the Lincoln examples and possibly belonged to the monastery. We know that Abbot Samson (1182-1212) bought and erected stone houses in the borough, but there is no proof that Moyses' Hall was one of them, though again fitting with regard to date. The hall basement now serves as the borough museum.

King John's House is a partial ruin in the grounds of the Tudor House, Southampton, and lies next to Blue Anchor Postern on the west town wall. The north and west walls are alone original and have been greatly disturbed at basement level. The west wall was common to both town and house enclosures, is thicker than the north wall, and was probably built first. In 1337 the French sacked Southampton and King John's House was probably ruined then and has changed but little ever since.

The house was built in c. 1150 and obviously not by King

John. It is also doubtful that he ever lived there. As the devil has been given charge of many Iron Age and Roman camps, so King John has seized popular imagination and the ownership of many early houses—when the Jews are not held responsible—is ascribed to him. Here the building was more probably the house of a merchant with business on the western quay, for the large western openings would facilitate the transport there of goods, possibly wine or wool, stored in the basement.

The walls thin some 9 inches at first-floor level to form a ledge for the joists. The north wall here is 2 ft. 2 in. thick. This is unusually slight. However, domestic architecture does not bear out the current view that Norman walls are always over 3 ft. in width. Even ground-floor widths of under 3 ft. occur where the cellar is unvaulted. With only two adjoining walls remaining, and no signs of a partition, it is difficult to decide whether these walls contained a hall and solar, or a hall alone. But possibly the fireplace and plain upper-floor north window belonged to the hall, the two upper-floor roll-moulded windows to the solar. King John's House is now well cared for as part of the Tudor House Museum.

The aisled hall seems to have been the chief 12th century type for a room of any width, as long timbers were not easily obtainable and arcades, dividing up the span into shorter sections, simplified the problem of roofing. This was solved in the 14th century by the introduction of the arch-braced and the hammer-beam roof, but even before this the aisled hall was passing out of fashion and under Richard II the greatest Norman hall of this kind, that at Westminster, was remodelled and a splendid hammer-beam replaced the old triple arrangement.

Many Norman castle halls seem to have been aisled where a large assembly had to be housed and were thus built at ground-level, where the solid earth could serve as a platform for the piers. They were usually built of wood and so more cheaply. Indeed, their construction was in origin one of timber, dating from pre-Conquest times. In view of their material most wooden halls have disappeared, but one remains, although disguised, the hall of the Bishops of Hereford.

There was also an aisled hall at Farnham Castle. Many aisled halls probably had a rubble base, as at Hereford, on which the timber-framed walls would rest, and the type of hall at Leicester and Farnham Castles, where a complete shell of stone

encloses the wooden arcading (now gone), may be a development from this. Complete translations into stone, such as the hall at Oakham, were exceptional.

This was rather a fortified manor house than a castle. Here the nave and aisle had a separate roof, but some aisled halls were roofed in a single span. Oakham Hall is a good example of the arrangement in an aisled hall. Built c. 1190, it is the Norman house with the most elaborate decoration. Dog-tooth ornament is everywhere to be seen and remarkable Corinthianesque capitals occur in the nave, probably owing to French influence. Each capital is slightly different.

Unaisled ground-floor halls do exist. They are four in number. But all are either doubtfully domestic or doubtfully Romanesque. Minster Court is doubtfully domestic, the hall appearing to form part of a semi-monastic plan comprising a church and dormitory. Horton Court in Gloucestershire and the house called "Norman Hall" at Sutton Courtenay have both been considered chapels because of their orientation and doorway arrangement, but their proximity to the church is an argument in favour of their being Norman houses, apart from other features into which I have no time to go.

Appleton Manor in Berkshire is doubtfully Romanesque. In fact I can plead only this round arch as an excuse for putting it in. It dates from the first quarter of the 13th century, but I am including it as a type of transition in style and plan. A traditional date in style is seen in the entrance, for it has the Norman arch together with the deep rolls, circular abaci, and stiff-leaf capitals of the Early English period.

We cannot then neglect the existence of 12th century unaisled halls on the ground floor, though the evidence suggests that they were uncommon in stone. Some might attribute them to monastic influence through the resemblance of Sutton Courtenay hall to a common type of frater. Another view might be that they form the translation of wooden houses into stone. This involves the question of the material used in the first-floor type of hall. All surviving examples of these are in stone, but it may be that, in some, stone was used only in the basement to protect valuable stores against fire: the less expensive hall above could be replaced more easily. No examples of this kind exist, but the castle hall at Devizes was possibly such a composite build.

A complete first-floor hall in wood is unlikely, for there could

be no advantage and only danger in an elevated position when the basement could easily be set alight. Not only would the latter lose its purpose as a safe place for storage, but the fact that the hall was raised above it would make egress difficult in case of fire. It is thus probable that the most common type of house in the 12th century, the house of timber, now destroyed, would have its living rooms on the ground floor, with possibly other sleeping accommodation in a loft in the roof above. An aisle would not be necessary, save in the larger buildings. Sometimes such an arrangement may have been translated into the more durable material, which would explain the stone examples left to us, but it is more probable that, where stone could be afforded, the builder would choose the compact defensible first-floor hall.

The most common form of window is the two-light, the one-shaft type probably being the earliest, as in the first-floor hall at Portslade, built c. 1150. The three-shaft window dates from c. 1150-60 and is found at Christchurch, where the decoration is rich, and at the little known first-floor hall (c. 1150) in the village of Saltford near Bath, in which the germ of the five-shaft type is to be found. The five-shaft window at Jew's House dates from 1170-80. Such a growth in the size of the window might be expected when settled times became more normal. At the end of the century windows became simpler again, as at Merton Hall, Cambridge.

Of Canute's Palace, Southampton, a first-floor type built c. 1180, a single window is practically the only portion remaining. It is good enough internally to deserve careful preservation but, if this is not done soon, it will be too late. The misleading name dates from 1807, when Englefield walked through Southampton and made the "fond conjecture" that from this hall Canute with his courtiers viewed the rising tide and from it descended to the beach "to repress by a striking and impressive lesson their impious flattery."

I can do no more than mention the Norman palaces. Mr. Charlton has excavated the royal palace at Clarendon and preservative works have been undertaken at Sherborne Castle, the house of Roger, Bishop of Sarum (1101-39).

Durham Castle has more of a military character, but I am including Pudsey's Hall, which is separate from the keep. The date is c. 1170.

Drastic restorations have taken place at Wolvesey Castle

or Palace, Winchester, the residence of Bishop Henry of Blois (1129-71), who also built Bishops Waltham Palace, Hampshire, an excellent subject for the Ministry of Works.

The mysterious building called St. Mary's Guild or John of Gaunt's Palace, at Lincoln, can be classed among the larger houses. Its date is c. 1180-90. From its scale and decoration it belonged to an owner or owners of importance, probably a great civic guild. This wing or acanthus capital supported two wide arches of a wall arcade in its entrance range. It was hidden behind a wall until recently, hence its excellent state of preservation. Now it is in danger of being damaged by planks and ladders which are stored nearby, for in spite of the tenants' interest in antiquities, the building business has to be carried on.

Nor is this the only house in peril. The Jew's House and Bishops Waltham, to mention only two, are also in decaying condition. It is of urgent necessity to make this state of affairs generally known and agitate for the preservation of these old and precious things. Otherwise there will soon be no Norman domestic architecture left in England.