

NOTES

LOUGHTON. The manor house and its interesting details are fully described in the Royal Commission's North Buckinghamshire volume;¹ but recently Mrs. Fuller has been engaged in uncovering more of the sixteenth-century wall painting mentioned in the Commission's Inventory. The original area has been for years concealed behind canvas and wallpaper, and there is some hope of this being exposed once more. The opposite wall has now been found to be completely painted with a repetition of the scheme, and the details are of great interest. Parts of the composition are in excellent condition. So far from being in plain black line on white plaster background, as the Commission states, there is evidence of considerable infilling with colour—red on the borders, blue, grey and brown in the figures and other parts. The frieze is not yet fully uncovered, so that one cannot see if the inscription "Feare God", is repeated, but it is almost certainly the case. The details of the cherubs, amorini, etc. are excellent. The roundels containing heads are supported by half-angels or seraphs, ending in acanthus foliage.

In the room below, the large stone fireplace mentioned by the Commission, which had been filled in and covered, has been exposed again and part of a date, not noted before, is disclosed on the left-hand spandrel: 15. . . The remaining two figures on the right-hand spandrel have unfortunately been cut away in making a fixing for some fireplace fitting, like a spit or jack.

BRADWELL ABBEY. The deplorable condition in recent years of the little chapel standing here on the site of a small Benedictine Priory, has been causing a good deal of anxiety. Accordingly I went recently to inspect the building with Mr. Christopher Gowing, with the kind permission of Mr. Field, now at the Abbey Farm.

There is a large, and increasing, area of tiles missing from the roof; and the resultant entry of water has brought down much of the seventeenth-century plaster coved ceiling, and severely damaged the interesting paintings of seraphim, in clouds, blowing trumpets. The Stuart Royal Arms has virtually disappeared. There are gaps in the stonework of the walling, particularly on the South side; and, there being no door, the building is open to entry and damage by all and sundry. These conditions really make a complete mockery of the fact that the building is a scheduled monument, and no funds are apparently available for its preservation, and no pressure can be brought to bear on the owner to keep it in order. The matter has been mentioned twice to the Ministry, but without result.

This dismal picture is somewhat offset by the interesting discoveries that have resulted from the present conditions, and a complete re-assessment of the building and its date and purpose is necessary.

The fall of the seventeenth-century plaster coved ceiling has revealed the timbers of the original roof above it, which are clearly of medieval braced rafter construction.

Further, a good deal of limewash on the walls has been removed by some person or persons unknown (most of it, it must be admitted, with considerable care), revealing evidence of a complete and extensive scheme of fourteenth-century wall painting.

¹ *R.C.H.M. Bucks., North* (1913), 183-4, and Pls. pp. 61 and 178.



PLATE 1. LOUGHTON. The Manor House. Portion of 16th-century wall painting partly uncovered, 1960

[Photo : C. N. GOWING



PLATE 2. BRADWELL ABBEY. Condition of the 14th-century chapel in November, 1960.

[Photo: C. N. GOWING



PLATE 3. BRADWELL ABBEY. 14th-century wall painting in splay of blocked North window of chapel. Figure of the Virgin, with dove and scroll, part of an Annunciation
[Photo: C. N. GOWING

The walls are powdered with the letter M in Lombardic script, alternating with small roses. There are traces of figure subjects on the East and South walls; and in the East and West splays of the North window is a charming Annunciation of c. 1330-40. The Archangel Gabriel is on the West, rather fragmentary, with a good deal of black in the wings. The Virgin, on the East, has a dove to the left of her head, and a scroll in front of her. This gives conclusive proof that the chapel was a Lady Chapel, and the whole building dedicated to the Virgin. The Priory was dedicated in honour of St. Mary. The work is of very good quality. But the lower edge of the plaster is broken by the faggots which are piled in the chapel, and it is loose from the wall.

In fact it is now perfectly clear, as I have always thought, that the whole building is of the date of the West door and window and numerous other details, namely c. 1330-40. It is inconceivable what prompted the Royal Commission in their account¹ to say that the chapel has details of the fourteenth century re-set, and that "it was re-built, except possibly the East wall, early in the seventeenth century". The only seventeenth-century work is the plaster ceiling already referred to: and the only re-set material appears to be two series of three quatrefoils in the South wall which, as the Commission says, are not grooved for glass. I conclude that they are probably the sides of an altar tomb.

I can see no reason for not identifying this building with the "little chapel without the church which may not well be spared" which appears in the Rental or Survey of the Priory made according to Lipscomb² in 1458 and printed in full; and in the Victoria County History³ as between 1524 and 1531. This the Royal Commission had evidently failed to see. Browne Willis quoted by Lipscomb above (p. 44) states that "the only ancient building standing there . . . was a small chapel built out of the materials of the Monastery soon after the Dissolution: the reason assigned for its erection being that the site was two miles distant from the parish church". This statement may have given rise to the re-building theory. The fact of the seventeenth-century improvements and adornment shows the building was in use as a place of worship at least up to that date—probably by the large farm house and cottages on the farm. The V.C.H. is in no doubt as to its medieval structure.

Without excavation, it is obviously impossible to relate this building to the monastic complex as a whole. It seems that it might have been the small chapel of the Prior's Lodging: or an external chapel built by the Monastery for the use of lay folk on or about the Priory farms and estates, being remote from Bradwell Parish Church, as stated above.

The work is elaborate and good, and evidently done at a time of prosperity just before the calamity of the Black Death, in which the Priory suffered severely, and from the effects of which it never recovered.⁴ The Prior, William of Loughton died in 1349, and the number of brethren was thereafter always very small. In the survey already referred to, half the buildings were ruinous, or in decay or need of repairs in various ways. It is, therefore, all the more important that this one small surviving relic should be preserved.

E.C.R.

LANGLEY MARISH. The Old Vicarage at Langley Marish was demolished in 1959; and some investigations on the site have been carried out by the Middle Thames Archæological and Historical Society. It was hoped, apart from searching for any objects of interest, to find evidence to show whether the house was on the site of an earlier

¹ *R.C.H.M. Bucks., North* (1913), pp. 69/70.

² Lipscomb, *Hist. of Bucks.*, vol. iv, pp. 41-4.

³ *V.C.H. Bucks.*, vol. iv, p. 284.

⁴ *V.C.H. Bucks.*, vol. i, p. 350.

dwelling, perhaps the medieval priest's house, or whether the building was entirely of the seventeenth century, incorporating older material.

Mr. Francis E. Adams sends the following preliminary notes :

The main object of the excavations was to find out, if possible, what was happening on the site between the raising of the stone church in the twelfth century and the construction of the Old Vicarage in the seventeenth. The building occupied a strategic position, close to the west door of the church and adjoining St. Mary's Road; the site having, of course, suffered little disturbance in over three hundred years.

The secondary objective was to try and confirm what was known from architectural and literary evidence of the age of the house.

Excavations commenced on the 30th January, 1960 and are still in progress.

Finds. These include animal bones and teeth, potsherds, pipe bowls and stem sections, pins, glazed tile fragments, glass, iron-work, and coins (so far identified) ranging from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. Much detailed work, including some cleaning, remains to be done on these objects.

Stone-work. Once faced, sandstone block was recovered from a depth of about five feet below floor level under the south room. This could have been accidentally dropped and/or, used as a stepping stone over low-lying ground. At lower foundation level and laid carefully on an approximately east/west line were five shaped blocks of Portland stone. West of these was a carved block of chalk and west of this, another section of stone had been built into the foot of the chimney stack that was in the centre of the north wall of the west wing. This last stone has not yet been fully excavated: neither has the area west of it.

Found on soil on the same level, roughly half-way along the row of excavated blocks was a farthing of King James I of 1621-3.

These blocks were in quite good condition, although the Portland stone was somewhat soft through damp. The inside of the Portland stone blocks still carried traces of decoration in the form of plain limewash.

These blocks do not resemble those left in the north arcade. They are part of a window surround, or surrounds, of a type similar to those in the north wall of the church. My opinion is that they formed part of the wall, removed when the south transept was built in 1623.

As to whether there was an earlier house on the site, of this we have no definite evidence to date. On the lower levels we have evidence of occupation prior to the building of the house, which seems concentrated on the western side of the site, but further work is required before any definite conclusions can be drawn as to what brought about this activity.

WING CHURCH. When, in 1880, the younger Scott cleared the crypt of Wing Church of the earth and bones with which it had long been filled, he says that he found in the western wall of the central cell the remains of a squint which opened upon the nave. As the wall in which it was said to be visible was unfortunately rebuilt between 1885 and 1890 all traces of this opening have disappeared and only the hollow floor at the entrance to the chancel suggested that there might be a cavity beneath. Recently the tiling here was removed and a squint about 4 ft. 6 in. wide and in fair condition was revealed but, as the earth with which it was partly filled was not excavated, it is uncertain if there are any traces of the nave window. It has long been noted that the present crypt is an insertion within walls which had been carried down to enclose what was, perhaps, planned as a hall-crypt surrounded by an external ambulatory, but that for some reason, possibly because its vaulting presented unforeseen difficulties or because the local stone pit was becoming exhausted, the original plan was aban-

done and the present arrangement substituted. It may be that a narrower arch, about 13 ft. 6 in. wide, the foundations of which remain in the masses of masonry around which the encircling passage closely winds, was intended and perhaps built. But such an arch would have left little room for the steps ascending to the chancel; even with the wider arch vaulting of the passages, broken down when the sill of the rood-screen was inserted, was found necessary to carry them. That the crypt is roughly contemporary with the rest of the building is evident from the lady Aelfifu's will (Add. MSS. 15350 fo. 94) by which she bequeathed her shrine and relics to Winchester. As she died before 975 it must have been built earlier for it is hardly credible that anything so complex would have been constructed after her death. The squint has now been filled with rubble and the tiles relaid and it is regrettable that nothing can now be seen that indicates the survival of this rare feature of early Romanesque architecture.

A.V.W.

MEDIEVAL POTTERY AT FENNY STRATFORD CEMETERY. *Mr. Edward Legg contributes the following Note:* During the latter part of 1960, the grave-diggers have come across numerous sherds of pottery whilst preparing graves at Fenny Stratford cemetery.

The first finds were small, and in the absence of any rims or bases, they were tentatively identified as Roman. Later however, a small rubbish pit was found, with several sherds, three different rims and a base. These were submitted to the Department of Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum and found to be (with one possible exception) of twelfth-century origin.

These finds, although not closely dateable, add significantly to the known age of the Fenny Stratford settlement, as the town is not mentioned in any written record until December 1252. Examination of the site itself has shown that the pottery was buried about one foot below the original ground level which has since 1922 been covered by four feet of made-up soil. The superintendent and his assistants are continuing to look out for further finds but as the cemetery will soon be full the possibility of dating the site more closely is rather remote.

Thanks are due to the superintendent, Mr. Willett and his staff for the interest and assistance they have given.