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F. Chancellor

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ST. PETERS ON THE WALL, BRADWELL JUXTA MARE.

BY F. CHANCELLOR.

After the exhaustive and interesting Paper communicated by Mr. Lewin to the Society of Antiquaries in 1868, upon the Castra of the Littus Saxonicum, it would be presumption in me to attempt to add anything to his description of the Castrum of Othona, and I intend therefore, to confine my remarks to the chapel on the walls; not with the view of setting myself up as an authority upon the subject, but for the purpose of obtaining the opinion of those better able than myself, to give one as to its date.

The building is 49 feet 7 inches long by 21 feet 7 inches wide in the clear of the walls, and 24 feet 9 inches high from the present ground level to the wall plate. The walls are 2 feet 4 inches thick, and it is built, as its name denotes, upon the old Roman wall. We may dismiss the roof from our discussion, because that is undoubtedly of modern construction.

When the foundations were laid bare a good opportunity was afforded of ascertaining where the old Roman wall left off and the walls of the building commenced, and after a critical examination I arrived at the conclusion that there was a marked difference between the construction of the chapel walls and those of the castrum, which satisfied me that the wall of the castrum had been demolished to somewhere about the level of the ground before the chapel was erected.

Mr. Lewin, in his Paper, suggests that the principal entrance to the castrum was on the western side, and where the chapel now is. This appears to be a very reasonable suggestion, because the foundations of the gateway would probably extend somewhat beyond the face of the wall on either side, and thus a larger area of foundation would be found there than at any other spot.

It has been argued that this building was erected—
1. By the Romans,
2. By the Saxons.
3. During the Norman Period, or even somewhat later.
I propose shortly to discuss the evidence upon which these theories rest.

As regards the Roman theory. I wish I could subscribe to this idea, and that the evidence of the building pointed to its being an undoubted Roman basilica.

That the walls are erected of Roman materials there can be no question, for undoubtedly the old Roman walls formed the quarry from which they were raised, and upon comparison, the materials, Roman tiles, septaria, and rubble stone are identical in each case, but the mode of putting them together is very different. In the Roman wall, as can be seen by the sketch of the fragment left, the first course consisted of a layer of tiles, then about eighteen inches of septaria and rubble, then three courses of tiles, then eighteen inches of septaria and rubble, again three courses of tiles, and again the septaria and rubble; and wherever the walls were of sufficient height to show any construction this arrangement of materials was carried out; and I would remark that the construction of the walls of the Roman villa, which was discovered in Chelmsford in 1849, were exactly of the same character as the walls of this castrum.¹

With regard to the construction of the chapel walls the tiles are, as a rule, reserved for jambs of openings, or for quoins, the main part of the wall being built of the septaria and rubble without the intervening bands of tiles.

It must be remembered that the walls of the castrum were 12 feet thick, and the builders meant that it should be a stronghold in every sense of the word. We know how the Romans excelled in military engineering. Can it be believed that they would commit such a wretched engineering mistake as:

1. To build out upon their wall of defence any building not forming absolutely a building of defence, such as a tower to watch from, or to enable them to sweep the face of the wall with some of the engines of defence; and
2. To make a break of 21 feet in a wall of 12 feet in

¹ A precisely similar mode of construction occurs at Burgh Castle. See article on Porchester Castle in the Winchester volume.—Ed.
thickness, and for that 21 feet to trust solely to a wall 2 ft. 4 in. thick.

I submit therefore that upon the evidence of the construction of the walls not coinciding with the construction adopted by the Romans in works of a similar character, and the interpolation of such a building with walls not much thicker than would be put up by a speculative builder of the present day in the centre of a wall of huge strength meant for defensive purposes, the Roman theory must fall to the ground.

As regards the Saxon claim there can be no doubt that after the exodus of the Roman legions the whole country was in a disturbed state, and we are informed that the sea kings of the North amused themselves from time to time by swooping down upon the Eastern coast of England, and carrying off such loot as they could secure. Any building, therefore, of a military or defensive character would no doubt be preserved—and in such an exposed position as this Castrum occupied, the shelter it would afford would be peculiarly valuable. The military argument against the erection of the building by the Romans would therefore have equal force as regards the Saxons, but in addition there is an absence in the building itself of the chief characteristic of Saxon work, namely, the long and short quoins—and there is a peculiarity about the quoins which I shall point out presently in dealing with a later period which I apprehend will take it clearly out of the Saxon period. I may also mention that the presence of buttresses is an additional piece of evidence against the Saxon claim.

We now come to the Norman period. In a building which is absolutely devoid of mouldings, and about which there is not a fragment of carved or moulded work, it is somewhat difficult to fix upon any feature by which to determine its precise date, but there is one feature about this building which I think will afford strong evidence that its erection could not have been before a certain period, although we may not be able satisfactorily to fix any subsequent date. I allude to the buttresses.

Of these there are altogether seven. It has fallen to my lot to have to do with a great many of the old parish
churches of Essex, and in very many of them I have found remains of Norman work. Indeed it is not all an unusual thing to find the shell of the building of the Norman or transition from Norman to the Early English period with windows and doors of later insertion. I might instance Great Waltham, Broomfield, and Great Canfield as examples, but I have invariably noted an entire absence of buttresses of the Norman period in these buildings.

I do not mean to say that there are no Norman buildings with buttresses, because I believe even in this county there are one or two examples, but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. The quoins are square, and in very many instances formed of Roman tiles or bricks, and I would here remark that from the large number of Roman bricks and septaria which I have found worked up in some old churches throughout the county, the buildings left by the Romans must have been far more numerous than we have any idea of; because, in addition to their serving as quarries for any new building, they were too irresistible to be neglected by the road maker. And not only in Essex do we find a general absence of buttresses in buildings of this class but in other counties as well, and where buttresses in buildings of a larger class are used, the projection is so slight that the wall space between has more the appearance of being recessed than the buttresses of being projected. And again when buttresses were used they generally covered the angle.

Now in this building we find the buttresses of considerable projection, and although from time and rough usage they have been much defaced, there is still sufficient evidence to prove that originally they projected at least 2 ft., thus indicating a period of erection coinciding with what we understand as the Early English period, or at any rate Transitional Norman; but there is still another feature which was certainly not in use prior to the Early English period, and that is the position of the angle buttresses. They are not exactly at the angle, but the quoin of the building is shewn for some few inches before the buttress breaks out. I should not like to make the sweeping assertion that in no building previous to the Early English period does such a feature exist. All I can
say is, I have never met with an example, and I think I am justified in saying, that it is a feature admittedly of a later date than the Early Norman period.

I may be met with the suggestion, that these buttresses have been added, but upon a very close examination I could not find any evidence in support of this theory. The work is of the same character and materials as the bulk of the walls, and is, I think, unquestionably bonded in. I have met with many instances where buttresses have been added to buildings of an earlier date, but there has always been a marked difference between the work of the original wall and that of the buttress; I think a tolerably conclusive piece of evidence as to the buttresses forming part of the old work is the fact of their crumbling away to within a very few inches of the face of the wall, if they had been added they would in many cases have left the old work bodily from the rough usage they have undoubtedly received.

It is most unfortunate that we have no documentary evidence upon the subject of this building. It is true that Camden cites Bede, and Ralph Virgil, monk of Coggeshall, to show that Cedd built a chapel in the city of Manchester; but in addition to the arguments I have before named upon this point, I apprehend that the chapel was built in the city and not in the fortress, and therefore the chapel thus alluded to was destroyed with the city.

The only other mention we have of this building is by Morant, who informs us that in 1442, a jury found that this building, which was then undoubtedly used as a chapel, had a chancel, nave, and small tower with two bells, that it was burnt, and the chancel was repaired by the Rector and the nave by the parishioners, but when it was founded and by whom they know not. The nave only now exists, but when the excavations to which I have before alluded took place, we found a confirmation of this return by the jury of 1442, and I have marked upon the general plans the foundations of an apse at the east end, no doubt the chancel alluded to, and at the west end the foundations, no doubt of the tower, which were then exposed, and are now again all covered up; in further confirmation of the former existence of the apse, I would refer to the broken walls at the east
BRADWELL CHAPEL.
FROM A DRAWING BY THE REV. H. MILLIGAN.
LAND TRENCHED FOR THE DISCOVERY OF WALLS.
end, clearly proving that the building was in some form or another continued in that direction.

This semi-circular apse is strongly relied upon by some as proving its undoubted Norman character, but I think we must not place too much reliance upon this point, for it must be remembered that in old time the abbey of St. Valery, in Picardy, held one half of this parish. We also know that the round apse was very commonly adopted in France, even at a later period than that corresponding with our Norman work; and it is possible that the architect may have been of foreign extraction, and taking into consideration the very remote position of Bradwell, far away from the great thoroughfares of the county, access by sea was probably as convenient as that by land, and thus the introduction of the apse may be accounted for. There is one other point in connection with this apse which may be worth a passing thought.

It is clear that the old Roman wall was strengthened with at least one circular tower, and these towers may possibly have had narrow openings either for look-out or purposes. May not the materials thus worked to a defensive circular face have suggested their re-production in a circular form in the new building to be erected?

The absence of windows has been commented upon. If there is one feature of our Norman and Early English Churches in this district more decided than another, it is the extreme smallness of the windows, generally not more than six inches wide outside, but splaying off, of course, to a much greater width inside. These windows would, when the building was converted into a barn, be useless, and therefore I can readily imagine that they would be widened to the width of the inner splay or whereabouts, and converted into loops to enable the labourers to load the bays of the barn with corn. I apprehend that two of these narrow windows on either side, together with those in the apse, would be considered quite sufficient for lighting purposes.

A very curious feature is the starting of an arch at the east end. One would naturally expect to find the remains of an arch which would cover the whole width of the nave, but if this arch is completed in a semi-circular form it would scarcely cover half the width; it would seem, there-
fore, that if there was only one arch it must have been very flat at the top or four-centred. The other alternative seems to be a double arch with a pier in the centre—a feature which, if I remember rightly, is to be seen in the so called chapel at Beeleigh Abbey.

Taking a survey of the whole building, both as regards the visible, and what is now the invisible parts of it, and relying mainly upon the buttresses which I might almost say are the only architectural features left, I would submit that the date of this building may be fixed at the latter end of the twelfth century, and that it was built for ecclesiastical purposes.