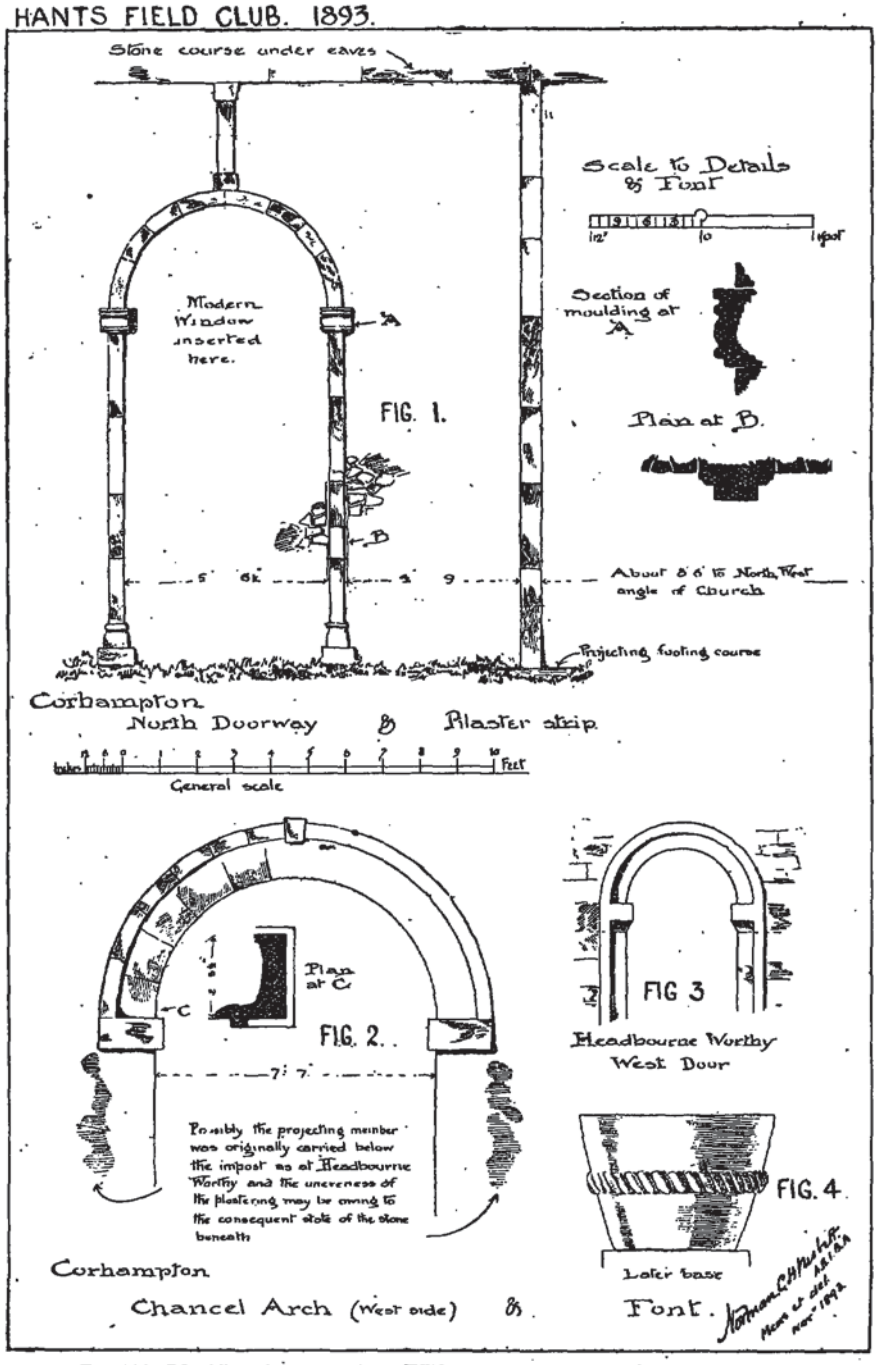
HANTS FIELD CLUB. 1893.



EXAMPLES OF SAXON ARCHITECTURE IN HAMPSHIRE.

NOTES ON SOME EXAMPLES OF SAXON ARCHITECTURE IN HAMPSHIRE.

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A few words as to Saxon architecture generally may not be out of place as an introduction to our subject. At one time it was not unusual for buildings, which we now recognise as early Norman in style, to be claimed as examples of Saxon art. The appearance of anything which could be suspected of indicating the use of Roman bricks or tiles, whether in complete features, like windows, or scattered fragments in the general masonry, was also considered a proof that the building in which such evidence was found belonged to Saxon times. Fifty years ago the North and South transepts of Winchester cathedral were believed to be the work of Bishop Æthelwold (963-984), since it was known that he re-built the church. After a time, however, a reaction set in, and instead of accepting almost anything, architectural antiquaries turned round and looked with suspicion on every building for which a Saxon origin had been claimed, some even denying that the Saxons had any but timber churches. It is quite possible that stone buildings were not common, but from the time of the Venerable Bede, who mentions the building of a stone church "after the Roman manner," we obtain documentary evidence from contemporary writers, as well as from the pictorial representations with which many of the Saxon manuscripts are adorned, which proves the Saxon artists to have been more advanced than is sometimes supposed. Possibly the troubled state of the country during the later Saxon period may have prevented any very important works being undertaken, to which should be added the very

prevalent belief, not confined to England, that the year 1000 A.D., would bring the end of the world.

No doubt the fact that this critical time had passed gave an impetus to the architectural work undertaken by the Norman bishops during the following century. Commencing, as it were, a new era in a new country, they appear, perhaps not unnaturally, to have considered that the erection of entirely new cathedrals was the most suitable course to pursue. Unfortunately this policy has deprived us of any examples of important Saxon churches.

It must, however, always be remembered that the Saxon style was not annihilated in the year 1066, and that the date of a building, having Saxon features, is not necessarily prior to the battle of Hastings.

Saxon workmen were probably employed to execute much of the building undertaken by the Normans, but sometimes, as at Lincoln, the Saxons were expelled from their old city on the hill, and were obliged to form a new settlement in the neighbourhood below. In such a case it is not likely that they received any assistance from the conquerors, and the churches built by them on the site reclaimed from the surrounding marshes must therefore be considered as Saxon buildings, although erected during the Norman period.

The history of architecture in England has now been well studied, yet features may be met with which cannot logically be attributed to any of the styles subsequent to the Conquest. If these appear naturally to fit into their proper place, when regarded as pre-Norman, something towards a satisfactory conclusion has been gained. If, moreover, the buildings in which these features occur be found in localities in which we should expect, on other evidence, to find monuments of Saxon origin, additional weight is given to this view.

Allusion has already been made to the assistance that may sometimes be obtained from the illustrations afforded by Saxon manuscripts. It must however be remembered that this kind of evidence requires careful handling, as the artist seldom professed to give a true representation of a particular building or other object. He sketched something that would suggest a church, but did not pretend it to be

like *the* church to which, perhaps, the passage he was illustrating referred. Often the limited space at his disposal necessitated giving undue importance to some points at the expense of others, for which allowance must be made. It is doubtful whether much reliance can be placed on the way in which matters of detail are represented, as it is possible for an illuminating artist to add to his buildings features which he invented as he went along, but in which a modern student may fancy he recognises details which were probably quite undreamt of by the original draughtsman.

Of the Hampshire churches which are most frequently referred to as possessing Saxon features Boarhunt is probably the best known, by name, at least, to architectural students. Corhampton is also illustrated in "Parker's Introduction to Gothic Architecture." The latter is certainly one of the most interesting, although it is curious that Headbourne Worthy, with its unique rood, is so little known, although it is more easy of access than either of the others.

Hambledon is another Church with evident Saxon features, and furnishes perhaps the most conclusive evidence of its pre-Norman date, since early Norman arches have been pierced through the walls of earlier date for the purpose of enlargement by the addition of aisles. It is interesting to find that these walls have remains, above the arches just mentioned, of a feature which is very generally met with in supposed Saxon buildings. This is the "pilaster strip" (fig. 1), as it is called, and consists of a narrow vertical stone rib reaching from the ground to the eaves, and formed of stones arranged vertically above one another and projecting slightly from the general face of the wall. As a rule this projection does not exceed 3 inches, and is sometimes less, while its width is about 7 inches (at Corhampton and Headbourne Worthy they are 6½ inches). This feature occurs on the external face of the walls, and although now seen on internal walls at Hambledon it is only owing to the fact that the aisles have been built outside the original church, and the hap-hazard manner in which the arches are placed with reference to these strips, shews at once that the two are not coeval.

The fact that no evidently Norman building affords examples of such features as integral parts of their design is strong evidence that they belong to an earlier period. It may be interesting to try and discover the origin of the feature. Saxon, like Norman, was a Romanesque style—that is, one founded on the generally debased specimens of their architecture, which the Romans had left in the various countries that had owned their dominion. The Saxons had no Roman buildings in their original home, and they are generally credited with having destroyed most of those in Britain, but as we know that there were remains of a Roman church at Canterbury when Augustine arrived, it is possible that Saxon builders may, in some cases, have tried to copy earlier buildings.

It seems, however, more likely that the Saxons obtained their ideas of architecture from Rome itself, which was visited, not only by ecclesiastics, but by more than one of the Saxon Kings, accompanied, no doubt, by members of the Court. The young Saxons, educated at the College, founded in Rome by Ina, King of Wessex, about 725 A.D., would also bring home recollections of the buildings with which they must have grown familiar.

It is interesting to remember that Wilfrid, to whom tradition ascribes the foundation of Corhampton church, had been to Rome as the companion of Benedict Biscop. On his return he took an active part in the Synod of Whitby, summoned in 664 to discuss the differences as to observance of Easter, &c., which existed between the Church of Augustine's founding and that which followed the guidance of Iona and Lindisfarne, Colman, who had succeeded Aidan, representing the northern Church. It is probable that an enthusiastic man like Wilfrid would notice other things besides matters of ecclesiastical observance, while in the Imperial city.

Another, whose influence was certainly great, was Theodore, of Tarsus, who was made Archbishop of Canterbury only four years after Wilfrid's triumph at Whitby. We are told that the scholars from his school went abroad in order to learn how to build stone churches instead of the timber ones then common.

Having now discovered by what channel the influence of Roman art reached the Saxon builders, we can return to the examination of the buildings.

There is very little doubt that all who went to Rome would visit the ancient Basilica of S. Peter, and probably many of the other churches of similar type, in all of which the ranges of columns separating the nave and aisles was a striking feature. These were generally of marble, and of course standing "free," a manner in which the Saxon architect could make but little use of them; but there was another monument which probably impressed English visitors of the seventh century as much as their successors. This was the Coliseum where the arcade is used as an external feature, and where the columns (the topmost storey having no arcade between) are "attached," being, in fact, pilasters.

From the earliest churches at Ravenna, and several Lombardic examples, to the latest of the Rhenish churches, it seems evident that the arcade with pilasters was a favourite feature with the Romanesque architects, as at Romain-Mortier. In some cases Saxon Churches shew this feature, as at Bradford-on-Avon, and possibly Little Horstead, Sussex. As a rule the simpler expedient of using pilasters only seems to have been employed, although the slenderness of their proportions reminds us how Cassiodorus referred to the tenuity of the columns used in his time, and likened them to spears.

At Corhampton we have a specimen of what was apparently a decorative feature over the smaller arch of the north door, the opening of which has been filled up recently (fig. 1). In the chancel arch of the same church a rude kind of hood moulding (fig. 2) is used, very similar to the west door at Headbourne Worthy (fig. 3).

There appear to be other points of similarity. The dimensions are very nearly the same, the Nave, at Corhampton, being about 37ft. by 17ft. 3in. The chancel arch 7ft. 7in. wide, and the width of the chancel about 14 feet. (The length can only be roughly ascertained as the original apse fell down and has been replaced with a square east end).

The dimensions given on Mr. Owen Carter's drawings of Headbourne Worthy, before the original Chancel arch had been removed, are as follows:—"Nave, 41ft. 9in. by 19ft. 9in; chancel arch, about 9ft. 6in.; and chancel, 14ft. 6in. wide. It is evident, however, that there was no western door at Corhampton, as the west front is bisected by a pilaster strip.

The stone used at both places for the pilasters, as well as for the quoins which are executed in the "long and short" method usual in Saxon work, is apparently Quarr Abbey stone, from the Isle of Wight—a shelly limestone—and although the cementitious matter has perished on the surface, the edges and faces are in remarkably good preservation, owing apparently to the extreme hardness of the fossil shells forming the mass of the stone. This is the more noticeable owing to the fact that the stones used for the pilasters, as well as the "short" stones on quoins, are placed in an upright position, and are therefore not laid on their natural bed. Similar stone was used at Winchester by Walklin, while it is also to be met with a few miles over the Sussex border, at Bosham, which is particularly interesting from the fact that Saxon and Roman work are here found side by side.

The font at Corhampton (fig. 4) is apparently of the same stone, but being protected from the effects of the weather, hardly appears so at first sight. As to the design there is no reason to doubt its being of Saxon date; but as it was placed on a base at a subsequent period it is probable that the tool marks upon it are not those of its original sculptor. These marks are apparently those of the mason's "drag" [1] and are remarkably fresh in appearance. The carving of the cable moulding encircling the basin compares favourably with the ornament, or lack of it, usually met with in the earliest Norman buildings.

A noticeable feature in the workmanship in Saxon buildings is the fineness of the mortar joints. In the Norman work at Winchester, and also at the Tower of London, the

[1] The *drag* is a thin plate of steel, usually a piece of an old saw, with an indented edge, used by masons for finishing stone work by scraping. Its effect in modern restorations is often most mischievous.

joints often exceed an inch, and it was only after the beginning of the twelfth century, as evidenced by the style of masonry used in rebuilding the tower at Winchester, that close jointed work came into use. Some of the joints measured at Corhampton are less than an eighth of an inch.

The church at Boarhunt, already mentioned, supplies an example of a Saxon window, of which a sketch has already been given in the proceedings of "The Hants Field Club" (Vol. II. p. 255). It has deep splays both internally and externally, that is to say, the narrowest part of the opening is about the centre of the wall. This is a common feature in many supposed Saxon windows, and since the small early Norman windows were almost invariably formed with the splay on the inside only, this arrangement appears to support the argument in favour of a pre-Norman origin.

The example at Boarhunt is ornamented with a species of "plait"-like decoration, or possibly a central stem with leaves on either side. It is noticeable, however, that the *direction* of this feature is continuous. Starting at the bottom of one jamb it rises, passes over the arch, and continues down to the same level on the other side. The leaves, if such they are, therefore point downwards on one side, which would probably have been avoided (if they were intended to represent leaves) by making a stem rise from each side, meeting above.

The knot has, from very early times, been a favourite religious symbol, and interlaced patterns are found in Irish manuscripts and on the monuments known as Runic.

Another peculiarity to which attention was directed by the writer, on the occasion of the Club visiting Boarhunt in May, 1891, is the manner in which the jambs slope inwards, towards the top, a feature of constant occurrence in the openings in the remarkable round towers of Ireland.[1]

Perhaps no great stress can be laid on these facts, but we may call to mind the fact that Wilfrid's opponents at the Council, Whitby, were the Celtic disciples of the Saint Columba, and that their influence was not small, the mere holding of the synod proves.

[1] This feature, although alluded to in the letterpress description, is not sufficiently observed in the sketch above referred to, so far as the outer jambs are concerned—the inner ones are correctly shewn.

As has been observed the locality in which a Church is found may greatly assist in deciding whether a Saxon building is likely to be found in a given neighbourhood. In all the instances referred to there need be very little doubt on this point. Headbourne Worthy lies on the outskirts of the capital city of Wessex. Corhampton is on the frontier between the Saxons and the Meonwara of Jutish origin, to whom Wilfrid was sent as a missionary by King Wulfere, while the parish of Hambledon, Mr. Shore tells us ("History of Hampshire," p. 62), is made up of no less than four Saxon village communities or tithings. In the foregoing brief notes it has been impossible to deal with many other undoubted examples of Saxon art remaining in Hampshire, but it is hoped that they may be the means of awakening an interest in the accurate study and observation of the pre-Norman style of our county.