

ROUND-NAVED CHURCHES IN ENGLAND
AND THEIR CONNEXION WITH THE
ORDERS OF THE TEMPLE AND OF
THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF
JERUSALEM.

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The subject of the round-naved churches of England and their connection with the Orders of the Temple and of the Hospital is by no means a new one, but down to the present I do not think any attempt has been made to bring together for comparison the plans of all the examples of such churches we have in this country. Excavation and research are, of course, constantly adding to our knowledge, which cannot therefore be considered in any way finite.

The ground plans which I have drawn to illustrate this paper represent every round-naved building in England which it is possible to plan. All are drawn to the same scale, all are shewn with the north to the top, and all are tinted to a uniform scheme of colours to indicate dates. Thus the black denotes early twelfth century work, the brown mid-twelfth century work, and the purple building of the latter part of the twelfth century; thirteenth century additions are coloured blue, and fourteenth century yellow.

The earliest record I have met with of a round church in England is of one at Abingdon Abbey, begun by St. Athelwold about 960: "cancellus rotundus erat, ecclesia et rotunda, duplicem habens longitudinem quam cancellus; turris quoque rotunda." I shall have to refer to this again.

The earliest surviving circular building in England has quite lately been discovered under the eleventh century abbey church of St. Austin at Canterbury, but is now represented only by its plan, a full account of which has just been published in Vol. XXXII. of *Archæologia Cantiana*.

It was 54 ft. in diameter, with an inner ring of eight massive piers and an encircling aisle, round within, but octagonal outside. It was built by Abbot Wulfric before 1059 to connect the great church built by King Ethelbert with the lady chapel of Eadbald, his son and successor. Wulfric apparently did not live to complete his building, and it was taken down and reduced to its present condition by Abbot Scotland, who, before his death in 1090, had rebuilt the greater part of the abbey church, including the crypt and the presbytery over it, the tower, transepts, and enough of the nave to form the monks' quire.

The earliest round building that we have standing is the roofless nave of the curious chapel of St. Mary Magdalene in the inner bailey of Ludlow Castle, of a date not later than 1120. Its chancel was enlarged in the reign of Elizabeth, but I have recovered by excavation the very unusual plan of the old one, and the accompanying plan shews what the chapel was like originally. (FIG. 1)

The plan of another early twelfth century round-naved building, in this case a parish church, has lately been brought to light, also by excavation, by Mr. A. W. Clapham under the present church of West Thurrock in Essex. It had a square-ended chancel and a round nave of 25 ft. diameter. (FIG. 2.)

Two other parish churches with round naves are fortunately still in being. They were built in the first quarter of the twelfth century, the one at Cambridge, the other at Northampton, both in honour of the Holy Sepulchre. Each has an inner ring of pillars with upper works, and an encircling aisle, like Wulfric's building at Canterbury. The Cambridge nave is 41 ft. in diameter, but the original chancel has gone. (FIG. 3.) The Northampton church has a nave of 59 ft. span and parts of the side walls of its chancel, but has lost its apse. (FIG. 4.)

Interest in the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem was much in men's minds in the twelfth century; it would not be surprising therefore to find visitors to the Holy Land building on their return round-naved churches after the model of the

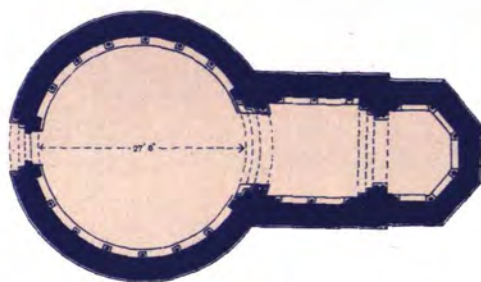


Fig. 1. Restored plan of the round-naved chapel in Ludlow Castle, Salop.

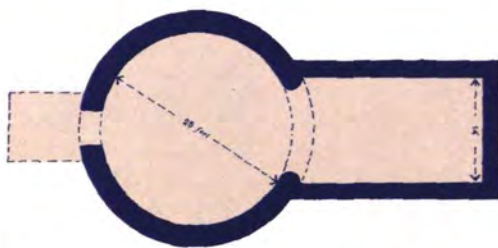


Fig. 2. Plan of a round-naved parish church at West Thurrock, Essex.

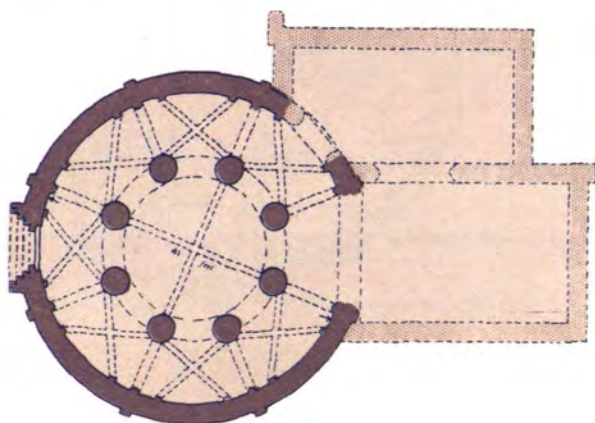


Fig. 3. Parish church of the Holy Sepulchre at Cambridge, with round nave.

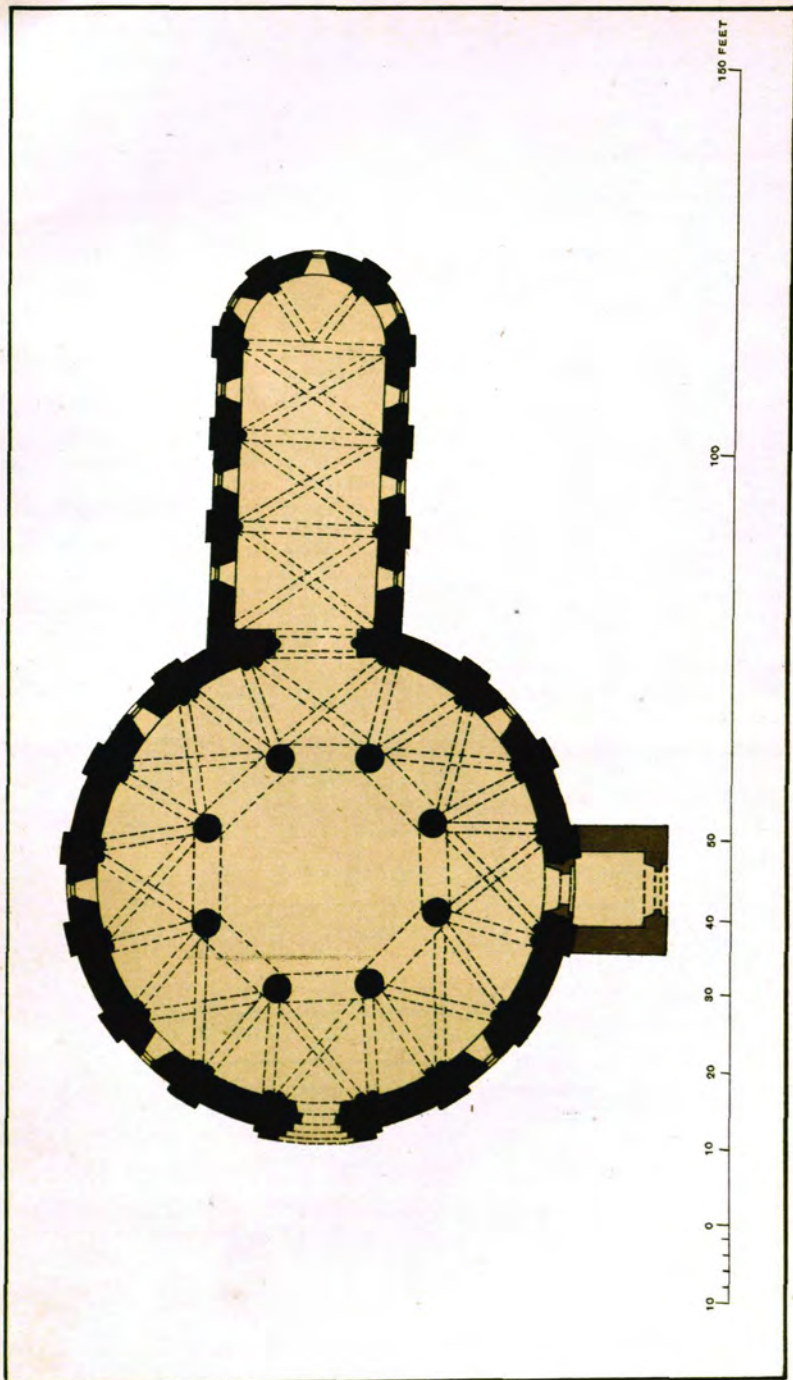


Fig. 4. Parish church of the Holy Sepulchre at Northampton, showing the round nave and former apsidal chancel.

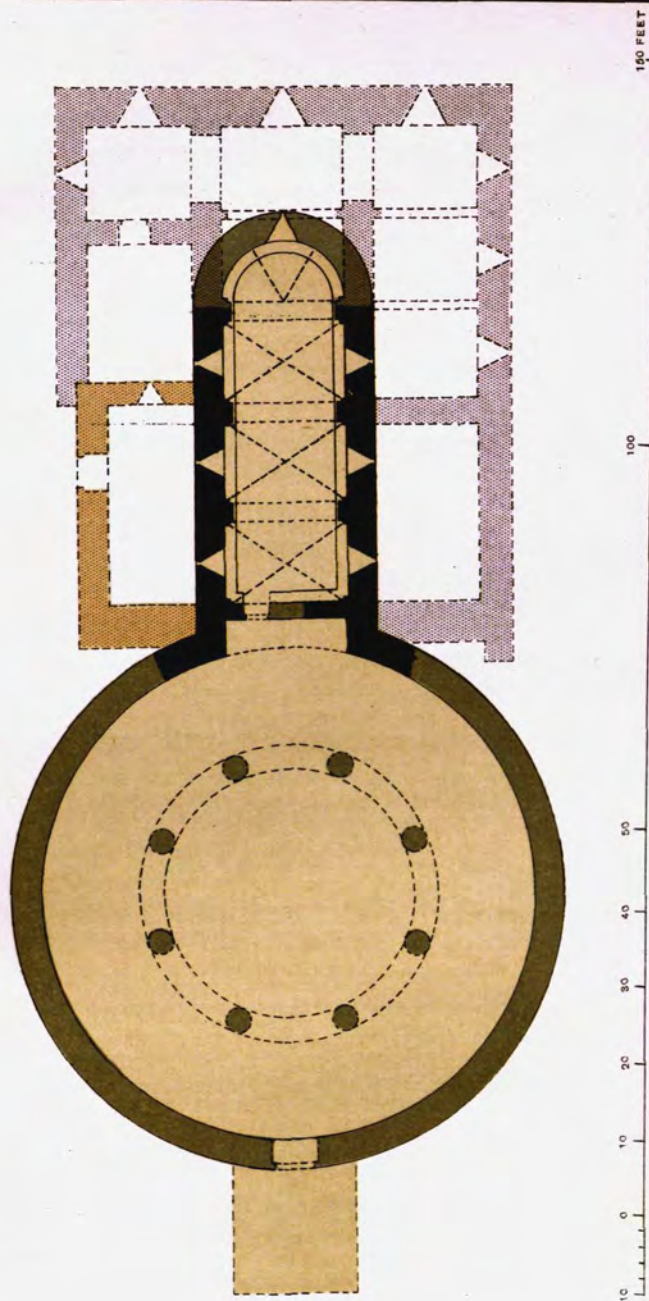


Fig. 5. Priory church of St. John, Clerkenwell. Crypt plan showing apsidal quire and round nave.
The later extensions of the presbytery and quire are shown in dotted outline.

anastasis or circular building that enclosed the Holy Sepulchre itself, attached to the *martirium* or apsidal quire raised above the reputed site of Calvary. This notable church, which had originally been built early in the fourth century by the Emperor Constantine, had been ruined and rebuilt at least twice, but in 1047 it was again rebuilt, and as before on old lines.

The Order of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist was founded in 1099, but its first English house, that of St. John at Clerkenwell, was not founded until about 1140. The apsidal quire of its church, with its underlying crypt, was thereupon begun, and followed gradually by the building of a large circular nave, no doubt with an inner ring of pillars. The remains of this nave were discovered by Mr. H. W. Fincham in 1900. But late in the twelfth century the eastern limb was greatly enlarged on a different plan, and in 1185 the whole church was ready for its hallowing by the patriarch Heraclius. (FIG. 5.) As the brethren of the Order were unlettered they did not keep the quire offices like monks or canons who could read, but were dependent on chaplains for the performance of divine service and administration of the sacraments. The original presbytery, therefore, with probably a small temporary nave while the permanent one was in building, would have been quite large enough for the first requirements of the house.

The Order of the Temple was not founded until 1118, and its first English preceptory was established in Holborn about 1135. From the remains of it that were uncovered in 1875 the church is known to have had a round nave, but the inner ring with the pillar bases, which was all that was found, evidently belonged to a smaller building than the Hospitallers' church. (FIG. 6.) Later on the Templars removed their house to a new site south of the Strand, and there built a larger church with a long aisleless quire, and a round nave which is still standing. This church was also hallowed by Heraclius on the 10th February 1185-6. Like the Clerkenwell church, and perhaps in rivalry of it, it soon after received a new and enlarged quire which was consecrated in 1240.

The church of the New Temple as at first built closely resembled in plan that of the Hospitallers, but it had not any crypt, and the nave was of $59\frac{1}{2}$ ft. span as against the 65 ft. of the church of St. John. Like the Old Temple, it has an inner ring of six pillars only. (FIG. 7.)

There is, of course, no need here to dwell upon the likeness of these two churches to that of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, nor upon the reasons that led to such likeness, and it will be more convenient to pass on to the suppression of the Order of the Temple in 1312 and the grant of the larger part of its possessions to the Order of the Hospital. Between thirty and forty British preceptories were then transferred, but very little seems to be known about their buildings or even of those of the early commanderies of the Order of St. John. Some of them certainly had churches with round naves, and of these we know most about that of the Templars' manor *de la Bruere* or the Heath, more commonly known as Temple Bruer, in S. Lincolnshire. The remains of its church and a curious tower attached to it formed the subject of an engraving by the brothers Buck, published in 1726. A hundred years later only the tower was left, but in 1832-3 the site was excavated by the Rev. G. Oliver, rector of Scopwick. The printed account of his discoveries describes the finding of dreadful vaults, mysterious arched passages, burnt skeletons, and other weird finds, all connected, of course, with the awful and diabolical rites which the poor Templars are supposed to have practised. The plan of Dr. Oliver's discoveries had for years attracted me, and in 1908 I was able to ease my sceptical mind by testing its accuracy.* Excavations shewed that vaults, passages, and burnt skeletons were all non-existent, but I had the satisfaction of re-establishing the plan of the round nave and of exploring a hitherto unknown twelfth century apsidal crypt that had underlain the first quire, with descending flights of steps into it from the nave. (FIG. 8.) I also

* A full description of the discoveries made in 1908 will be found in a paper by the writer on "The Round Church of the Knights Templar at Temple Bruer, Lincolnshire," in *Archæologia*, LXI., 177—198

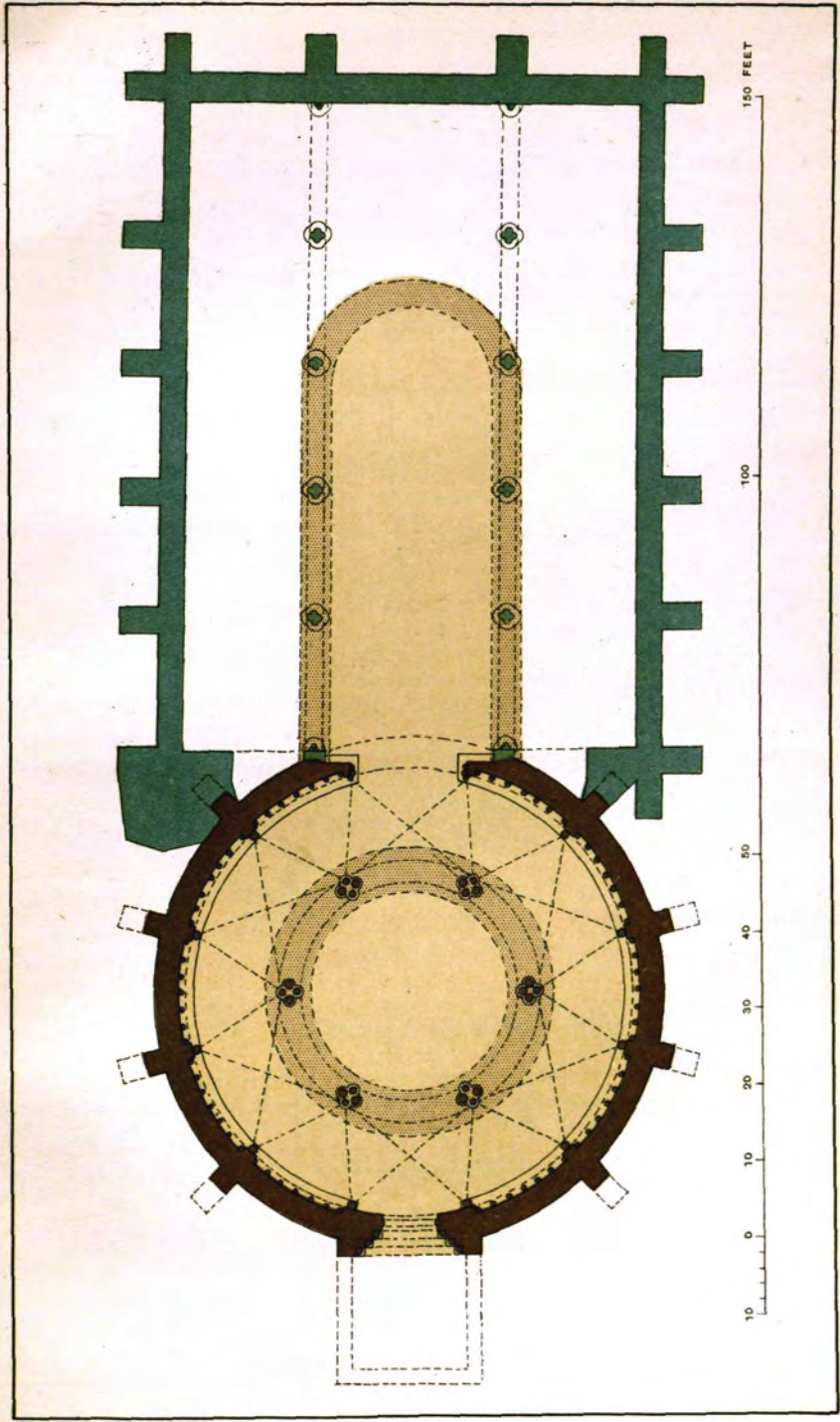


Fig. 7. Plan of the round-naved church of the New Temple in London.

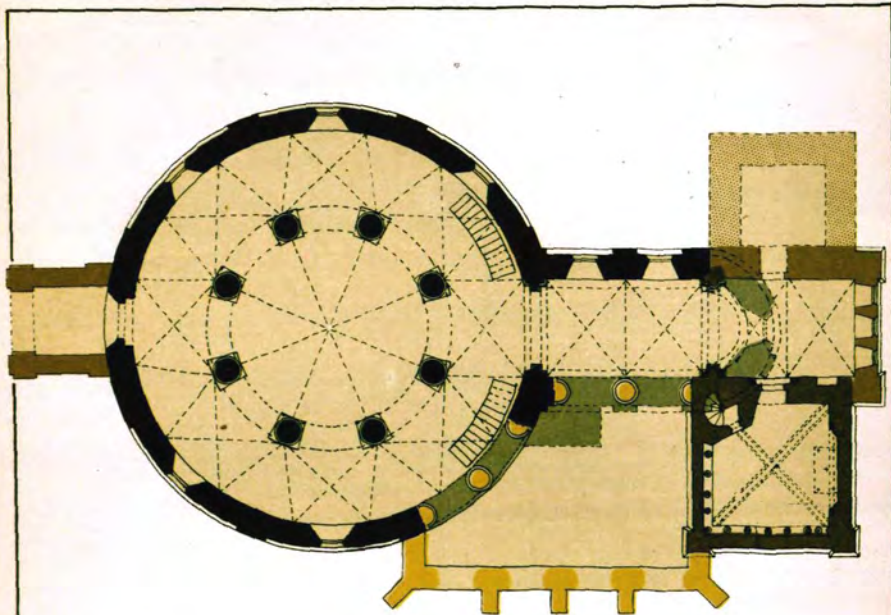


Fig. 9. Restored plan of the church at Temple Bruer, Lincolnshire.

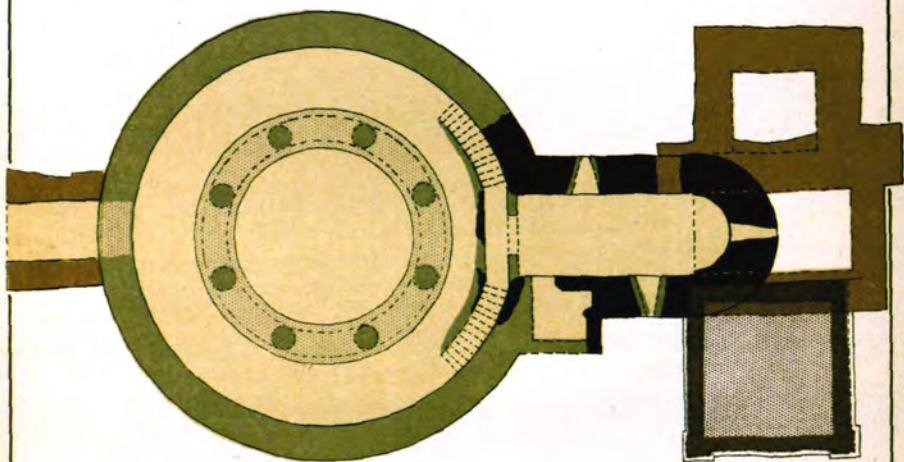
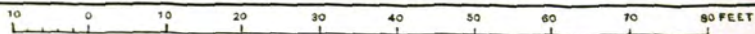


Fig. 8. Plan as excavated of the crypt, etc., at Temple Bruer, Lincs.

found that the church had been lengthened eastwards with a square end and a tower built on the north-east of the new quire. This was afterwards balanced, towards the close of the twelfth century, by the tower to the south-east which is left to us. Both the earlier and later quires were vaulted. The nave had a diameter of 50 ft. with an inner ring of apparently eight arches, and an encircling aisle which was certainly vaulted. At the south-west corner of the quire was a vice or staircase leading down to the crypt and probably upwards to the roofs. There was also a western porch, and early in the fourteenth century a large chapel was added to the south of the quire. (FIG. 9.)

The parallel between the Temple Bruer church and that at Clerkenwell is therefore both close and interesting, and the restored plan of the lesser building illustrates the other very completely.

The next example, the church of Little Maplestead in Essex, is of special interest from having been built, like the mother house at Clerkenwell, by the Hospitallers themselves, when the parish and its church were given to the Order in 1185. The existing church is usually regarded as a building of the fourteenth century, but its plan is strongly suggestive of a twelfth century origin. It seems to have consisted at first of an aisleless apsidal quire, with a round nave $29\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in diameter. Within this, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, was built an hexagonal ring of arches, with cross arches from the pillars to the outer wall, and upon the hexagon was raised a wooden belfry. New and larger windows and doorways were also inserted, but the small eastern loop was left, probably because the apse was screened off to make a vestry behind the high altar. The church suffered a most drastic "restoration" in 1852, when all the old features were either renewed or destroyed, and my plan shews the arrangements that existed previously. (FIG. 10.)

The belfry over the hexagonal arcade at Little Maplestead suggests the question whether the inner arcades of the other round churches were not also carried up as belfries, at any rate of wood. That at Cambridge supported a real

belfry of masonry until the destructive "restoration" of 1841, and the Northampton church seems to have had one until its present tower was built in the fifteenth century. It is true, of course, that at Temple Bruer first a north and then a south tower were added on either side of the quire, but the south tower, which is still in good order, was certainly never used to contain bells, as its peculiar arrangements prove. Of the north tower we know nothing beyond its plan. The Clerkenwell church not improbably had also a belfry above the round arcade, and may not have possessed a bell tower until the circular nave gave place to a rectangular one after 1381.

In connection with this question of round towers and belfries I would like to recall the description of Athelwold's church of Abingdon, with its *cancellus rotundus* or round-ended quire, its *ecclesia rotunda* or circular nave, of a span twice the length of the chancel, and its *turris quoque rotunda* or round tower, which might well have surmounted the nave. The original plan of the Temple Bruer church illustrates very closely such a church as the Abingdon one may have been.

Of other round-naved churches there remains to us at present the plan of but one more, that of the twelfth century Templars' church on the western heights at Dover. It had a square-ended and not an apsidal quire, and a round nave, only 27 ft. across, and, therefore, probably without any inner ring. (Fig. 11.) Its plan is exactly that of the building found under West Thurrock church, but the latter had never any connection with either Templars or Hospitallers.

In Gough's (1789) edition of Camden's *Britannia* is this note about the preceptory of Aslackby in Lincolnshire :

Here was a round church, now rebuilt as a farmhouse, and still called the *Temple*. The embattled square tower remains at the south end, of two stories, the upper open to the roof, till lately enclosed . . . the lower a cellar vaulted with groined arches, on whose centre were eight shields.

While I was investigating Temple Bruer my friend

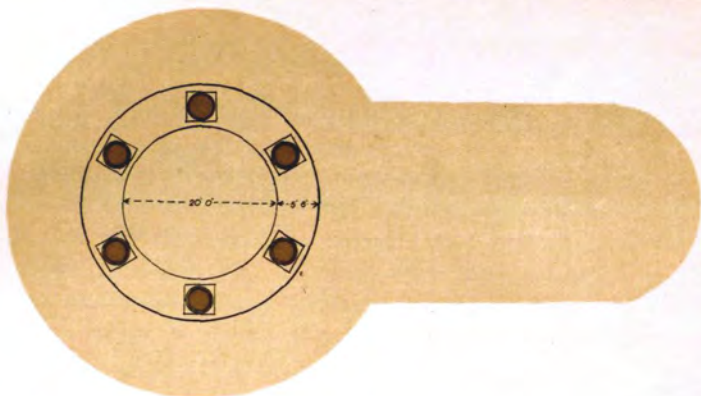


Fig. 6. Remains of the church of the Old Temple in London, uncovered in 1875.

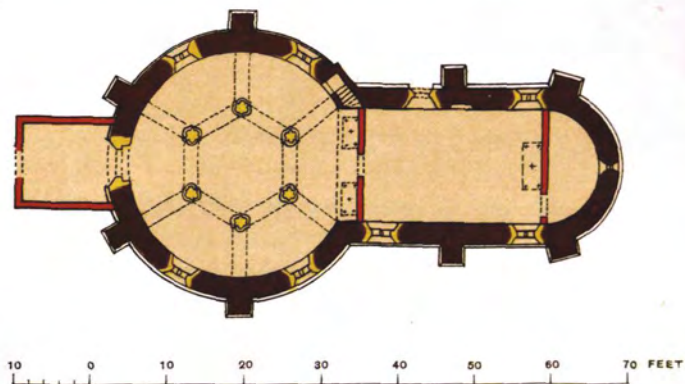


Fig. 10. Plan before "restoration" of the Hospitallers' church at Little Maplestead, Essex.

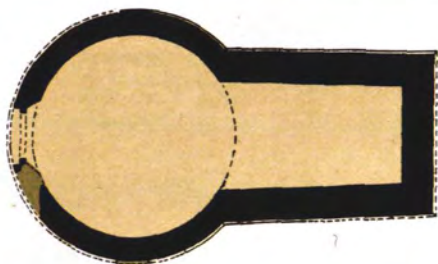


Fig. 11. Plan of the Templars' church on the western heights at Dover.

Mr. W. D. Fane motored me over to Aslackby in a snow-storm, but all that we could then see was the large keystone with the shields of arms, the tower having fallen so lately as 1891. Much moulded stonework remains, but whether the plan of the church could be recovered by excavation is at present uncertain.

Yet one other round building is known to us from records, though it did not belong to either the Hospital or the Temple. On the Liberate Roll of Henry III. (1232-3) the keeper of the King's houses there is ordered to cause to be painted "in the King's round chapel at Woodstock" Our Lord in majesty with the Four Evangelists and St. Edmund and St. Edward, and to cause two new glass casements to be made there. The King's manor of Woodstock has now disappeared from the face of the ground, but haply it may be possible some day to search beneath it for the foundations of the round chapel, which was perhaps a twelfth century building like that in Ludlow Castle.

Of course neither the Hospitallers nor the Templars always built churches with round naves, and the Commanderies at Swinfield, Sutton-at-Hone, Yeavely, and Harefield can still shew us oblong chapels of thirteenth century date. The fourteenth century church at Temple Balsall also is a square-ended oblong. This form may indicate a change of fashion, but it must be borne in mind that commanderies were by no means all of equal importance, and some at any rate would have had no use for a large church or chapel.

I am hoping, in fact I have practically been promised, that when the present stress is ended a small Committee of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem will be appointed to visit or enquire into the site and remains of every English and Welsh Commandery formerly held by the Order. This would include a large proportion of the sites of Templars, preceptories, and the results of the enquiry ought to be of interest. In some cases, as at Sutton-at-Hone, Harefield, and Rothley Temple, the buildings, though converted to other

uses, all remain, and could easily be planned. In other cases, as at Swinfield and Temple Bruer, the chapels or other parts are still standing. Elsewhere there is only a site, which may or may not have later buildings upon it, and can perhaps be excavated.

Sutton-at-Hone, Swinfield, Dover, and, I think, a fourth site at West Peckham, are all in Kent, so when our enquiries begin it is not improbable that the Kent Archæological Society may be asked to help, as I am sure it readily will.

This paper was originally prepared for the General Assembly of the Grand Priory of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England on the day of St. John Baptist 1916, but on the invitation of the Council of the Kent Archæological Society was again read at the annual meeting of the Society in London on 27th June 1917. It is here reprinted, in the main, by kind permission of the Order of St. John, with the original illustrations from the Report of the Chapter-General for 1916.