

THE CHURCH OF S. MARY AND S. EADBURG, LYMINGE

By EDWARD GILBERT

LYMINGE, near Folkestone, was royal property belonging to King Ethelbert of Kent and was given by him to his daughter S. Ethelburga, (Eadburg) when she retired to Kent after the death of her husband, King Edwin of Northumbria in A.D. 633. Here she founded a double monastery. Her church, dedicated to S. Mary is last heard of about A.D. 840. Then in A.D. 960 a certain Athelstan gave money to 'the church of Lyminge' which may well have been for rebuilding. At about the same time the site came into the hands of the Archbishops of Canterbury, namely Dunstan at that date.¹ The present church is built over the original S. Mary, which must have been badly ruined. It is unlikely that such ruin dates after Dunstan's time; there is no period when the site is likely to have lain desolate for long enough to achieve it. Hence there is a natural probability that Dunstan found a ruined site, and there is a clear implication in Goscelin's account² that Dunstan rebuilt it.

So much is this so that the great Italian scholar Rivoira regarded Lyminge church as a dated church of c. A.D. 965,³ as did Sir Giles Gilbert Scott⁴ and Canon Jenkins,⁵ who knew it better than anyone. Baldwin Brown⁶ thought it was rebuilt by the Conqueror's archbishop Lanfranc, about 1085. But there is no written evidence for this, although of course he had the site, and in fact built an archiepiscopal palace here of which no trace remains.

The old nave was a simple rectangle (Fig. 1) about 60 ft. long and 27 ft. wide, though the western termination is uncertain owing to the loss of the original quoins. The chancel was nearly square measuring about 24 ft. by 20 ft. internally. It is however, the fabric which is so interesting and made Baldwin Brown think it must be Norman. It consists of a rubble of small stones and flint mostly uncut, with some Roman tile. What is remarkable is the effort to treat this decoratively, use being made of beds of canted stones, often miscalled herring bone, cordons of thin stones and Roman tile, invariably single, plainly imitated from Roman work but not Roman work, and beds of larger stones

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, ix.

² *loc. cit.*

³ *Lombardic Architecture*, 2, 290.

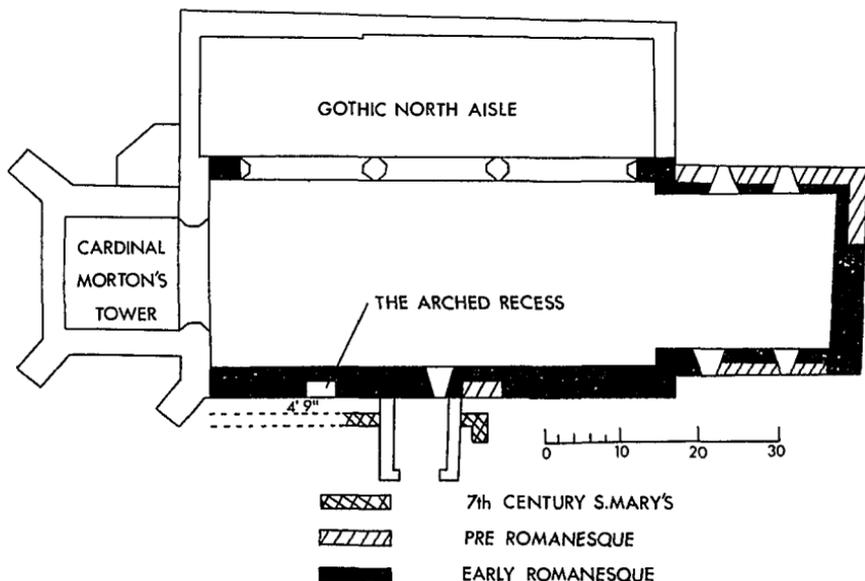
⁴ *History of Church Architecture*.

⁵ *Arch. Cant.*, ix.

⁶ *Arts in Early England*, 2, 469.

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(Fig. 1). None of this work is very consistently carried out, but its intention is quite plain. Although this is the main fabric it is not universal, and it is clear that the building has undergone many vicissitudes. Some of the intrusions appear (Fig. 1) to be older, e.g. a band of much larger stones, some 20 ins. long, and about five beds high underlying the north wall of the chancel, and about half the east wall. This



ROMANESQUE CORE LYMINGE KENT

FIG. 1. Plan.

has its own quoin in the N.E. angle, of three megalithic and very degraded stones. This work therefore cannot be Roman, for the Roman used no special quoining. This piece is not perfectly aligned with the main walling above. In the middle of the north wall of the chancel, and reaching full height is a band of larger stones, irregularly set, which have led some, including Baldwin Brown, to think it is a fragment of older walling. But it does not go through the wall, and should rather be regarded as external patching. The east end of the south wall of the nave is mostly renewed but just east of the porch is a patch of the older work, here about 10 ft. high.

The main quoins are in a side-alternate of small stones, the biggest about 10 in. deep, and closely resembling the quoining at Wouldham,

undoubtedly a Saxon church. The quoins are unbuttressed. Over the old western part of the south wall of the nave is a beautiful string course near the top about 8 in. deep, and with a graceful hollow-moulded chamfer. This also appears, but cut away, on the interior walls, and on the outside of the old north wall, now pierced by three Tudor arches, where it can be seen that it was deeply keyed into the wall. Another cut-away string course appears lower down on each side of the inserted chancel arch, where it might represent the Saxon imposts carried back to the side walls, or a corbel for a Rood. The walls are thicker than those of most Saxon Churches, being about 44 in. in the nave and 40 in. in the chancel.

OPENINGS

The original door is lost. It might have been at the west, where is now Cardinal Morton's tower, or more likely where the present entrance is, about mid-wall on the south. Traces of five windows however remain, four of them more or less complete. Externally they have stone voussoirs and jambs of four stones. This work as it stands may be mainly restoration, but there is no doubt that these windows had some stonework in the dressings originally. Internally they have rear arches of Roman tile, and the single splay has vaults largely of the same material. The jambs are largely in rubble, though some cut stonework is incorporated which may or may not be original. Originally they were larger than today being about $9\frac{1}{2}$ ft. high internally and 6 ft. high externally. The splay is from 17 in. externally to about 36 in. internally.

The chancel arch is a very strange opening. It is Gothic, and spans the full width of the chancel, the walls of which are cut back to make a base for it. The inference is that the older arch, if any, was also full width, and probably died into the wall; even possibly a triple arcade could have existed. The east wall of the nave, and no other, has internally some Roman tile, and this should mean that there was an earlier arch and that it contained tile.

Beside the chancel arch on the south is a blocked opening with a triangular head, apparently to a Rood Loft.

The other opening of interest is external, in the south wall of the nave towards the west end and low down, and is an arched recess rendered largely in Roman tile, which Dr. Cox thought contained the relics of S. Eadburg. An opening in the end communicates inward, and now has a ventilator in it.

DATING

I do not find that any of the details here point specifically to the period of the Conquest, and some point right away. The rubble fabric

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is of no special date. The decorative treatment seems to point away from the Conquest. Baldwin Brown seems to have overlooked the fact that by the time of the Conquest these decorative treatments had, in England, dwindled away to a rather crude herring-bone. His examples from Rochester show this clearly; both the enceinte, and still more Gundulf's tower have little or nothing except rough herring-bone. There is very little herring-bone at Lyminge, and the general effect to

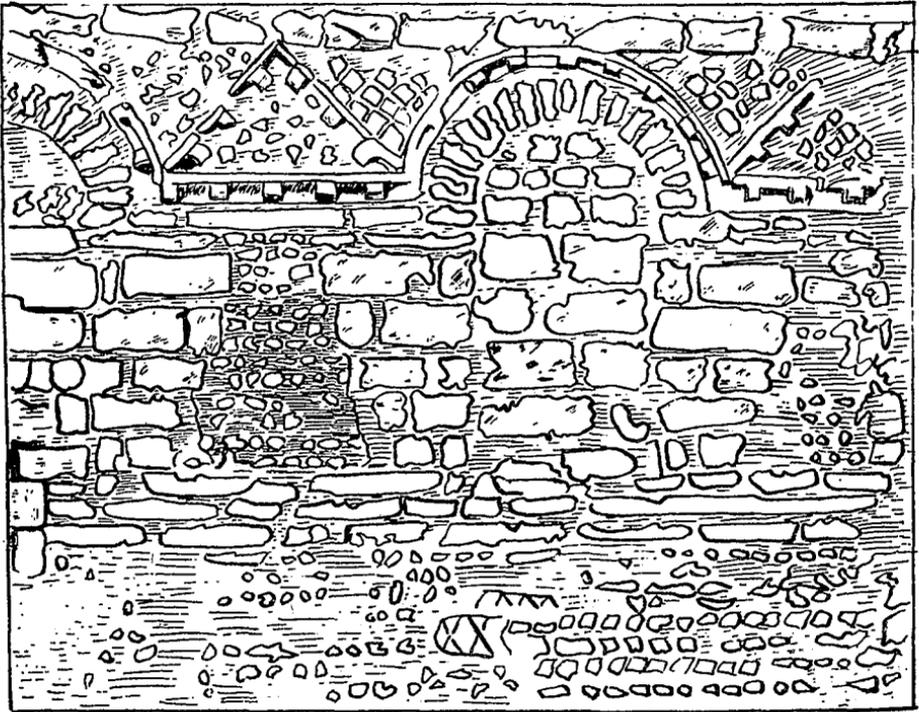


FIG. 2. Walling and Windows. Cravant. Indre et Loire. 10th Century.
(From Enlart. *Architecture Religieuse*.)

my mind resembles much more closely tenth century work at S. Mesme Chinon, or Azay le Rideau. Fig. 2 shows Cravant of the same date, and here will be seen a basic fabric of rough rubble, bands of larger stones, a general effort to create decorative patterns, the curious and typical indifferent use of stone and tile for the edges of arches, and the particular combination of stone in the jambs, tiles in the arch, as in the rear arch at Lyminge windows.

Cravant is much more sophisticated than Lyminge, which is its country cousin, but the affinity seems to me quite remarkable.

The hollow-moulded string course is unusual for Norman work but is more probably Gothic than Saxon. A full width chancel arch is more Saxon than Norman. Above all the rear arches of the windows are non-Norman. Tile is not a usual technique for the arch in Norman times in Kent. The size of the windows is also unusual for the Conquest, or for any other period. We are here in a little-known, not a well-known period.

By far the best comparison in England, in my opinion, is to the Church of S. Michael's at S. Albans. This was built by Ulsinus c. A.D. 950⁷ and it seems to me that the core of the existing church is Ulsinus's work. This is also the opinion of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments,⁸ of Rivoira,⁹ and is being argued again very carefully by the Taylors in their monumental book,¹⁰ still forthcoming as I write. It is also a church with rather long rectangular nave and fairly square chancel. It had thick walls, as at Lyminge, and a fabric basically of rough rubble, of which very little is there visible; decorative treatment can neither be proved nor disproved. There is the large window with much use of Roman tile; the wide chancel arch, there within 7 in. of full width. If S. Michael's is accepted as tenth century, then far from the architecture at Lyminge needing the abandonment of the traditional ascription to S. Dunstan, it supports it.

Before leaving this interesting church further mention must be made of that mysterious recess in the south wall of the nave (Fig. 1). It is only 4' 9" long and therefore too small for a full sized tomb, and does look as if it contained a reliquary. The site of S. Ethelburga's remains would be in the north porticus of S. Mary's Church, on the analogy of S. Austin's Canterbury. This fact is substantiated by a quotation unearthed by Canon Jenkins saying that the relics were:

'In aqilonali porticu, ad australem ecclesiae parietem arcui involutum'.¹¹ If this is translated 'on the site of the north porticus (of S. Mary) and in the south wall of the church (of S. Mary and S. Eadburg) and enclosed in an arch', it exactly fits the existing recess under certain circumstances. These are briefly that the north porticus was a central one as at S. Pancras, and not one flanking nave and sanctuary, as shown tentatively in Clapham's plan.¹² This is of course eminently possible. If this were the case it would explain a number of most puzzling facts.¹³

⁷ *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii, S. Albani.* Rolls Series I.

⁸ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. Herts, III.

⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ *Alphabetical List of the Anglo-Saxon and Saxon-Norman Churches of England*, by H. M. Taylor and Joan Taylor.

¹¹ *Arch. Cant.*, ix.

¹² *Romanesque Architecture Before the Conquest*, 22.

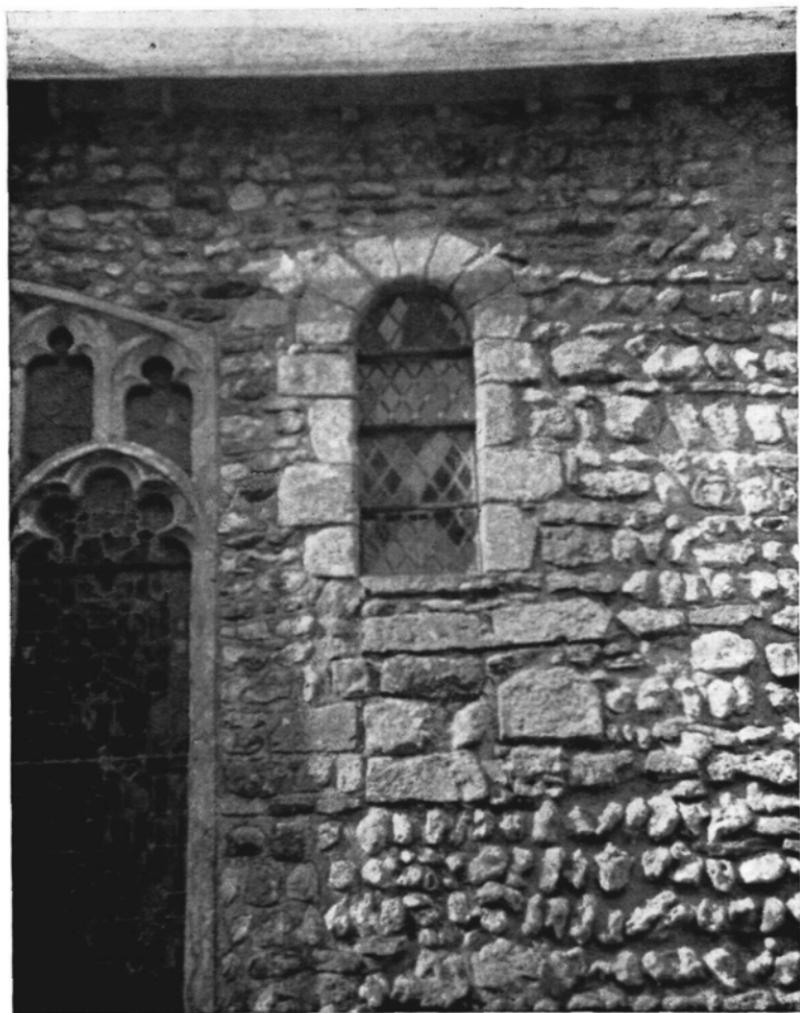
¹³ The arch is of Roman tile mainly. The use of Roman tile, or of stones cut to the shape of tiles, both of which are here included in the term 'tile', belongs here to the early Romanesque period, and is unlikely to be a later insertion.

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1. The text concerned.
2. Why a reliquary was put in this most extraordinary position instead of as usual under the high altar, or in the chancel.
3. Why the reliquary is external at all, i.e. it was pre-existing in that position.
4. Why the later church is built so close to S. Mary's and half-overlapping it, namely to include the sacred relics.
5. The fact that the recess is empty. The relics have certainly been translated somewhere.
6. Why there is an opening in the recess, something which all reliquaries had.

If this is the site of the relics, then it is not merely improbable but impossible that Lanfranc rebuilt this church, because it was he who translated the relics to Canterbury, whereas this church would have been built by someone who enclosed the relics in his church.

I have to thank the Rector, the Rev. Gerald Luckett, for much assistance. It was he who called my attention to the originally greater length of the windows, clearly visible in Plate I; to the blocked triangular headed window or doorway in the south wall of the nave and to the ventilation passages communicating inwards from the arched recess, I am grateful also to Miss Elizabeth Arnold for help with the figures.



South window and walling, Lyminge.