

THE BASILICA OF LYMINGE; ROMAN, SAXON,  
AND MEDIÆVAL.

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“Basilica B. Marine Genetricis Dei quae sita est in loco qui dicitur Limingae.”  
—Carta Regis Wihtraedi, an. 697.

THE early history of the Queen Ethelburga, the foundress of the Church of Lyminge, and first Abbess of the nunnery she instituted in connection with it, has been so often told as to need no recapitulation in this brief summary of the discoveries which have been made on its site. In many forms the monkish historians who supplemented and amplified the narrative of Bede affirm that she passed the years of her widowhood at Lyminge, and died there in 647, the Saxon Charters of the eighth and ninth centuries corroborating their statements, and designating the church as the place of her burial. Goscellinus (about 1099), referring to more ancient chronicles, describes the site of this ancient resting place of the widowed Queen more fully, and fixes the place of her *eminentius et augustius monumentum in aquilonali porticu ad australem ecclesiae parietem arcu involutum*.\* To the south wall of the present parochial church my attention was accordingly first directed, and there I soon discovered the reason of the apparently contradictory

\* “Contra B. Mildrethae Usurpatores.” (Extat MS. in Bibl. Cotton).

words of Goscellinus. An apse of Roman work here developed itself, between which and the church was an arched tomb which had been broken up at a very early period, and realized fully the destruction of the monument when Lanfranc translated to the Monastery of St. Gregory, at Canterbury, the relics which had so long been enshrined at Lyminge. That I was now upon the site of the original *villa* which had been granted by Eadbald to his sister, I could not entertain the slightest doubt, though unable to determine what part of it might be assigned to the restoration or adaptation of the building to its later use. The form of the building, and its aspect towards the east, led me to believe that it had been a Roman church or chapel connected with the first foundation—nor could I hesitate to believe that it was the very place in which Ethelburga received the veil, in 633, from Archbishop Honorius.\* Unfortunately the position of the building in the midst of a densely filled churchyard precluded every design of extending our examination southward, in which direction, I cannot doubt, we should find the foundations of an outer wall corresponding with the south wall of the present church, which a careful investigation identified with the north or outer wall of Ethelburga's foundation. Our only chance of illustrating the discoveries we had already made was the exploration of the field adjoining the churchyard, into which, as we had already ascertained, the foundations extended. Here we were rewarded by the discovery of a vast foundation, forming the extension of the south wall of the church and

\* "Scimus enim Æthelburgam . . . post necem regis, reversam et Limingae conversatam, sacro velamine a beato Honorio consecratam defunctam et ibi sepultam." (Goscellinus ut sup.)

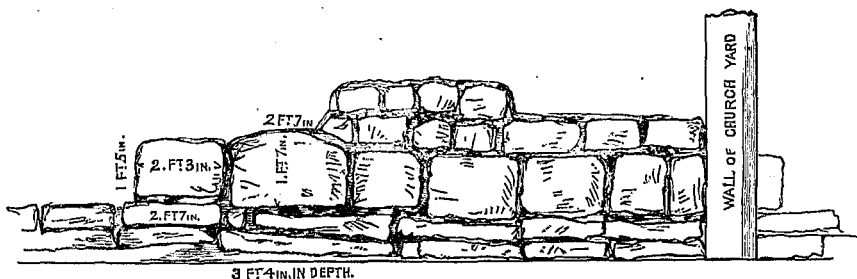
the supposed wall on the other side of the apse; and a portion at least of the plan of the ancient "Basilica of St. Mary the Mother of God, in Lyminge," as it is called in the charter of 697, became apparent. The interest of this site, in its connection with the early church history of England, could scarcely be surpassed. The palace of Ethelbert and Bertha—the scene of the early life and widowhood of Ethelburga—the place where her daughter Eanfled was brought up—the shrine which had been visited by Wilfrid on his journey into Kent to inspect the Saxon Monasteries—the residence of the Archbishops, from the time of Lanfranc to Winchelsey—the court at which the homage of the great Earl of Gloucester was rendered to Archbishop Peckham—few ecclesiastical sites could present features of more remarkable interest to the historical student than that of the Basilica of Lyminge, whose last relics were thus disclosed. That this building had a 'basilical' character in the civil sense, in the day of its transfer to Queen Ethelburga—that it was a place in which courts and markets were held, and a peculiar jurisdiction exercised, appears not only from its origin, but from its after history. Royal charters were given in it—it became, in the Norman period, a liberty in itself—the palace of the Archbishops here, from the time of Lanfranc, was called an *aula* and a *camera*;\* a title indicating not merely an ordinary manorial house, but a place of special jurisdiction—all reflecting back to its ancient basilical character. We might therefore expect to find here the structural characteristics of a Roman basilica, in lieu of the ordinary features of an ancient *villa* or residence of a private person. The foundations just

\* See the Register of Archbishop Peckham, an. 1279.

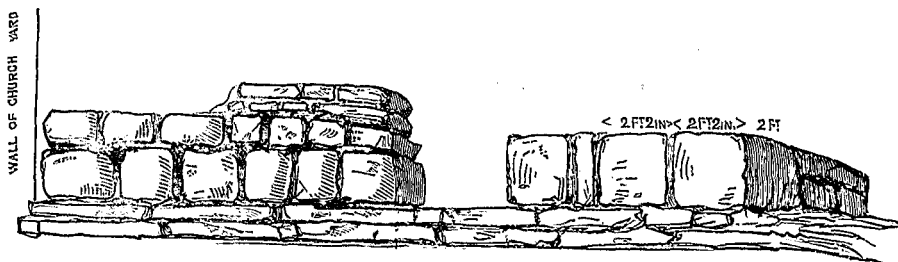
disinterred, at the depth of about eight feet from the surface, are accordingly of more than ordinary size—many of the stones being a yard, and even more, in length, and some of them two and three feet square, bound together by a solid concrete of lime and pebbles. Taken in conjunction with the Roman apse, adjoining the south wall of the church, whose limbs are continuous with them, and, (could the churchyard be excavated,) would undoubtedly be found to constitute a portion of the same building—the walls of the basilica would be 120 feet in length, the proper extension attributed by Vitruvius to such structures.\* The width between the two foundation walls already disclosed is not in proportion to this great length; but it would appear from the discovery of a vast and almost circular mass of building, on the south side of the wall, we first discovered that some open arcade may have existed on this side (such as De Caumont describes as usual in similar buildings),† which would make the width of the building correspond with its length. For to no other purpose than to the support of the pier of a very massive arch could I assign the fact, that this rude foundation (built of flat stones bound together with the hardest concrete) is actually imbedded to the depth of five feet in the rock chalk, which here is almost as hard as the Kentish rag itself. The vast apsidal fragment which adjoins it, and was discovered many years since, would thus constitute the central portion of the western end, and represent the site of the tribune, which always had this form

\* This is the length he adopted in building the Basilica of Fano.

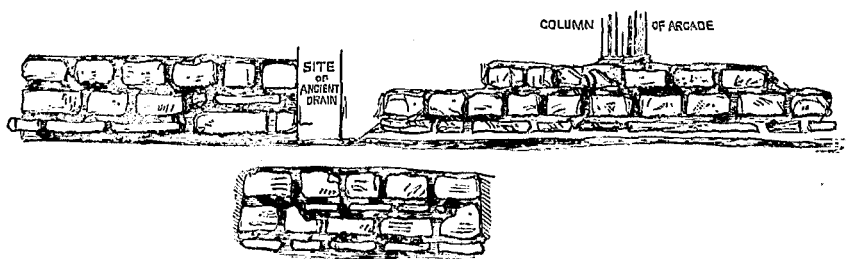
† “Il y a lieu de penser que quelques-unes étaient ouvertes au moins d'un côté pour la plus facile communication du peuple.” (Cours d'Antiq. Monumentales, tom. iii. page 286.)



NORTH AISLE OF THE BASILICA—FRAGMENT OF SOUTH WALL.  
(Eight feet below the present surface of the ground.)



NORTH AISLE OF THE BASILICA—FRAGMENT OF NORTH WALL.



FOUNDATIONS OF WALLS BENEATH THE EXISTING CHURCH.

and position. But what could have been the masonry of the visible portion of this massive building? Now here, besides particular and incidental evidences arising out of the remains of the Roman work to be found in the church, we have the undoubted fact that the entire Roman building has been broken up in order to build the present church, which is constructed in rude imitation of the work from which it was taken, and which formed the model to those who were destroying it for this purpose. Instead of cleaning these stones, and preparing them for their new position, as was customary in the Norman period (as in the case of St. Alban's), they built them in, covered with masses of Roman concrete, both red and white, and exactly corresponding with those of the foundation we have discovered; the stones forming the arches of the Roman windows are turned to the same use in the present church, and are sometimes even used as quoining stones externally. Nearly all the stones are built in an irregular herring-bone work, and are bonded at intervals, in the Roman fashion, with courses of flat stones and Roman bricks, while the bricks that are used in the arches of the windows are mostly taken from double string-courses of the Roman building, and still remain bound together two and two.\* Blocks of red concrete are used as single stones, and one enormous mass constitutes the foundation of the south-east corner of the chancel. Now, from the fact that we have found fragments of Roman arches of brick which exactly resemble those of the present building—fragments of herring-bone work built into

\* In one place (as is the case of the building, in the field, and in the apse adjoining the church) Roman roof-tiles are used in conjunction with ordinary ones.

the walls of the Roman Church, and quoining stones, with thin tiles, placed between them—features which could not have survived if the work of rebuilding had not immediately succeeded the work of destruction, I am led to conclude that the original building exactly corresponded with that which De Caumont describes as the regular type of an ordinary basilica. It appears to have been a long building, whose upper walls were pierced with small windows formed of Roman bricks internally, and externally, of wrought stone—a stone of a very remarkable character, and which must have come from a considerable distance. It was probably built in many of its courses of herring-bone work, like that of the Villa of Thesée, and bonded with double string-courses of brick or flat iron stones.

II.—We now pass to the Saxon period, and to the inquiry how far, and in what manner, Ethelburga might be supposed to build or to adapt the vast structure which had been conferred upon her by her brother? The monkish historians, who describe her as the builder and founder of the “temple of Lyminge” (as one of them terms it), forgot that she succeeded to a finished work, and entered upon the possession of it so immediately as to leave no time to do more than adapt it to its new destiny, if it needed even adaptation. “*Ædificavit,*” “*extulit,*” “*instituit,*” “*construxit,*” and such like terms, must be taken therefore in a very qualified sense. Up to what period the skill of imitating Roman masonry and reproducing Roman concretes survived in England we can hardly, with safety, conjecture. The problem is yet unsolved, and is probably insoluble. Some believe that the secret was entirely lost until Benedict Biscop’s first visit to Rome, 675–680. I cannot, therefore, pretend to say

what may remain of Ethelburga's re-building or restoration. Fragments of very early work have been found here from time to time, and a foundation of considerable size, built with a very rude concrete, unlike both the Roman and the later mixtures, was disinterred in the field adjoining the Church some years since. It was built in the form of a church, and of rude, unhewn stones; but the concrete was so perishable that the whole building, founded only on blocks of chalk and large fragments of the concrete facing of a Roman building (some of it painted red), fell to pieces by degrees, and has now entirely disappeared. It is possible that this might be a portion of the earliest Saxon work, and that the upper part of the building was destroyed by the Danes in their attack upon Lyminge in 804—after which the nuns under the Abbess Selethrytha took refuge in Canterbury, where a place was given them by King Cuthred. From 839, a change must have taken place, leading on to that suppression of the Monastery of Lyminge which was completed by Archbishop Dunstan in 965. For, in that year King Æthelwulf, instead of making a grant of the land adjoining the Church to the Monastery (or, as these charters generally term it, the "family") of Lyminge, grants it to the Archbishop; while, in 964, Æthelstan grants certain lands to the Church of Lyminge "with the consent of Archbishop Dunstan." At this point the words of the ancient writer, quoted by Goscellinus, (circa 1089) exactly fit themselves into our narrative. After describing the "destruction," as he terms it, of the "temple of Lyminge" (that is, its being reduced to the state of a ruin by fire and decay\*), "the place,"

\* The quantities of molten lead, charcoal, and charred wood—stones which had become reddened by fire, and other proofs of a ruinous con-



he adds, "remained destitute until it fell into the hands of the Archbishops of Canterbury, who restored it, and granted it to the clergy in order that they might serve God and his beloved virgins, Eádburg and Miltrude, with kindred devotion." He thus foreshadows the conclusion which a careful examination of the whole site for twenty years has forced in a manner upon myself, that the present church is the work of Archbishop Dunstan, at the period when it became parochial instead of monastic; that the grant of land of 964 was made with a view to this work of restoration; and that the walls of the Roman church still standing were then broken up, and built into the present fabric, whose south wall is based upon the north wall of the earlier building, thus reconciling the apparent contradiction of Goscellinus, who describes Ethelburga as buried "*in aquilonali porticu ad australem ecclesiae parietem*"—that is, the north aisle of her own nunnery church, against the south wall of the parochial church, which was built on the north wall of it. This "eminent and august monument," as Goscellinus calls it, was thus built into the new fabric as restored by the Archbishops, a restoration which was too well known at the period of Lanfranc to have been the work of any but the Saxon predecessors of the great Norman Primate. It was then that the new church was re-dedicated to St. Mary and St. Eádburg, its former title being changed, as was the case in other Saxon churches in Kent, Folkestone, Minster in Sheppey, etc.

Immediately after the grant of 964 (a fact which flagration which we found during our late excavations, objects which were also found on the discovery of the apse twelve years since, corroborated this statement and the conclusions I derive from it,

but for our theory would be quite inexplicable), the monastery was suppressed and attached "*cum omnibus terris et consuetudinibus ejus*" to the monastery of Christ Church, Canterbury, of which it had been previously an equal and almost rival, sharing with it the gift of the Duke Oswulf, and obtaining even the largest portion of it. The absorption of the more distant monasteries into the larger urban foundations was the distinctive policy of the great Saxon Archbishop, who is also described by all his biographers to have been a great builder of churches. Florence of Worcester writes "*destructas (or "desolatas") Dei ecclesias renovavit et ditavit,*" which was signally verified in the case of Lyminge, where he did both. King Edgar is described as addressing him—"Tu mihi Pater Dunstane, tu mihi de construendis monasteriis, de ecclesiis aedificandis salubre consilium dedisti." (Parker Annal. Eccl. Brit. Annal. Ep. Winton.) The supposition which has been sometimes advanced that the present church is the work of Lanfranc, is not only untenable on the ground of its masonry and materials, but on the ground of its ascertained history. Lanfranc, who removed the relics of Eádburg, could hardly have been the dedicator of the new church to her memory. In such a case he would have been rather bound to place her relics under the restored altar, than suffered to remove them altogether. Moreover, the church would not have been mentioned in Domesday, which refers to the reign of the Confessor, had it been the work of Lanfranc. For the Church of Lymne, which was built by him, has no mention in that record; and, indeed, every such work would have been too recent to find mention in the great survey. The laws of Edmund rendered it compulsory on

bishops to restore churches belonging to them, and hence the duty of Dunstan, immediately the estate was annexed to the Archbishop as Prior of Christ Church, would become inevitable. But while on every historic ground this conclusion must appear indisputable, the features of architecture, or rather masonry, which are exhibited by the earlier portions of the church (the chancel, the south wall, and the substructure of the north wall of the nave), render it absolutely impossible that it should be the work of so skilled an architect as the great Norman Archbishop. He who is said to have imported from Caen "*velivolis navibus*," "*quadros lapides ad aedificandum*,"\* could not possibly have sanctioned so rude a work for the church of one of his principal manors. Nor would he have built his church (as the present Church of Lyminge is built) upon a floor of concrete formed out of the fragments of the facing of the walls of the Roman basilica, broken up and consolidated into a confused mass—a kind of foundation which belongs to the period when much more faith was put in mortars and concretes than a Norman builder, importing from Caen "*quadros lapides ad aedificandum*," was likely to exhibit. Goscellinus, moreover, describes the monument of St. Eádburg as existing against the south wall of the *present* church before the time of Lanfranc's wanton removal of her relics. Nor is the size of the present building any argument against its Saxon character. Churches (as the laws of Knut shew) were of four kinds,—"*Capitalis ecclesia*," "*mediocris ecclesia*," "*minor ecclesia*," "*campestris ecclesia*;" and Lyminge, which was from the first designated a "*basilica*," a "*minster*"—the "*venerabile monasterium*"—the "*locus*

\* Vita Lanfranci (Autore Milone Crispino).

*beatiss. V. Mariae*," incontestably belonged to the first of these classes. The masonry of the lower part of Malling Abbey, which is the work of Gundulf, the contemporary of Lanfranc, has been sometimes compared with that of Lyminge. But, beyond the general rudeness of style, and the wide joints of the masonry, there is no other similitude. There is at Malling no appearance of direct imitation of Roman work—none of the irregular herring-bone work, and interrupted string-courses, which form the distinctive feature of the masonry at Lyminge. Nor have the mortars the least resemblance. The conclusion will be inevitable to every impartial observer that the present church is the work of Dunstan, after whose time, indeed, the Roman building would have been too far destroyed to admit of the close imitation we find in it to that earliest work. Undoubtedly, it was erected by those who were standing either in sight or in very near memory of the undestroyed walls of the Roman Basilica; of its small windows, turned with Roman bricks; of its herring-bone work, like that of the remarkable "Villa de Thesée," described by De Caumont;\* in a word, of every distinctive feature of that simple type, whose unskilful imitation degenerated in this instance into rudeness, and even barbarism.

III.—I now come to the third period of construction, or rather reparation, which is also distinctly and historically marked in our records. The present church of Lyminge being built on the north of the basilica of Ethelburga, the remains of the monastic and other buildings which had been appropriated from

\* This singularly resembles that under the foundations of Tamworth Castle, attributed by Mr. Bloxam to the year 914.

the ancient work, fell into the possession of the Archbishops, and were used as the foundation of the *aula* or *camera*, which was naturally rebuilt on a portion of the historic building.\* Accordingly, we find in the Roman foundation just revealed a portion of a mediæval work, which we are led to assign to the hand of Archbishop Peckham on the following grounds:—On his succeeding to the Archbishopric in 1279, he found that the late possessor of the See (Archbishop Boniface) had left the houses of his manors in a most deplorable state of injury and dilapidation. In vain he remonstrated with Petrus de Alby (the executor of Boniface, and then also Rector of Lyminge) on the immense expense he had been put to in this work of reparation, for which he had not yet received anything.† He charges the non-resident rector to put the buildings of the living into repair, and it cannot be doubted that, as Lyminge was the earliest of his manors visited, it was among the first to exercise his restoring skill. A fragment of this work of reparation is very conspicuously seen on the inner face of the Roman foundation just discovered. It is built of small flints, green sand-stone, and chalk, and was faced with a smooth coating composed, as is the mortar in the wall itself, almost wholly of sand, and hence extremely difficult to preserve from destruction. This fragment of wall is quoined with wrought Caen stones,

\* Lanfranc is said, by his contemporary, Milo Crispinus, to have got back twenty-five manors to his church. The same writer tells us that he built stone manor houses in many of them as residences. This, as one of the twenty-one greater manors of the Archbishops, is here evidently referred to.

† His letter of remonstrance to Petrus de Alby is to be found in his Register. He enjoins the rector in this “*ut congruè emendetur quod fuerit in ornamentis vel domibus defectum.*”

closely and well combined, and chamfered at the corners, as though to preserve them from injury. It would seem as though a cellar, or underground building of some kind, had here been dug out of the rock-chalk, within and beneath the Roman foundation, which is almost undermined. Three rude steps, formed of massive stones, lead down into this vault, and form the present limit of our explorations. Many pieces of squared and carved stone work (both Caen stone and the soft green stone found in the neighbourhood), numerous fragments of encaustic tiles, and an immense quantity of pieces of wall-facing, presenting a hard white surface on a base of almost pure sand, appeared among the earth that was here dug out. The work I have assigned to Peckham bears the closest resemblance to the restorations or alterations effected in the church at the same period. Even the mortars are here identical—the pure white lime of the Roman, and the bright yellow sand of the Saxon period, being replaced by a brown sand from a greater distance, probably brought from the neighbouring manor of Saltwood. The chancel arch, the buttress outside the church, the door of the chancel, and probably the narrow window of the north aisle (which formed part of the original tower), belong to this period. The chamfered corners of the piers of the chancel-arch are evidently coeval with the chamfered corner of the wall in the building in the field. The destruction of the ancient *camera* of the Archbishops was the next act of Vandalism which fills our local history with so many vain regrets. Archbishop Courtenay, having determined on building himself a Castle at Saltwood, gave directions for the sale of the stones on several of his other manors, and united the custody of

the park of Lyminge with that of the park of Saltwood. From this period, mediæval, Saxon, and Roman relics were mixed together in an indiscriminate confusion of destruction, and the field next the church is one of the most singular collections which can be found in England of the débris of almost every age of our ecclesiastical history.

IV.—During the fifteenth century our basilical remain was used as a quarry for the necessary works of the church—as it was in the early part of the present century as a quarry for all kinds of secular buildings, from a barn to a pig sty. The massive tower of the church, from which the remains of the old foundation are only a few yards distant, is apparently almost entirely built out of it, the stones becoming larger and larger as they ascend, and as the deeper stones of the foundation were being reached by the hand of the destroyer. A few squared and carved stones scattered here and there indicate the presence of the portion yet above ground, or perhaps of the detached stones which had been left in the débris, many of which we found in like manner, and on account of the looseness and softness of the earth, almost uninjured. But the greater part of the tower is built of large blocks of Kentish stone, faced, and sometimes almost covered with Roman concrete. I have often wondered how so vast a number of stones of such great size as was needed in this tower, whose walls are nearly six feet thick, and whose height is over sixty, could have been brought from so great a distance. But the nearness of the quarry had not then been revealed, nor was I able to appreciate fully the value of the bequest of five pounds which was left for the completion of the work by Henry Brockman of Shuttlesfield.

The work had certainly been suspended for some years for want of funds; and, but for the generous bequest of Thomas Duffyn, the Vicar (1480-1508), and the aid of the Rector, William Preene (whose inscription at Woolwich, now destroyed, depicts him as a munificent contributor to church building), it might have been still uncompleted. His epitaph speaks of him as having built the tower of Woolwich Church (long since removed), and doing many other works of the same kind. It is probable that the nave of the Church of Lyminge is one of these works,\* and that we are more indebted to him than to Cardinal Bourchier (whose arms appeared in it) for this important addition to the fabric; as we undoubtedly are to the good Thomas Duffyn for the erection of the tower, though the arms of Cardinal Morton and Archbishop Warham on either side of the doorway claim for them respectively the inauguration and completion of the work.

From a most unremitting and impartial study of the fabric of this church for twenty years—during which I have become familiarized with almost every stone, and have examined and compared every kind of masonry, of material, and of concrete and mortar—I have been led to fix these periods or data for every part of the building.

*The Roman Period, 400-500 ?*—To this belong the remains of the Basilica in the field and against the south wall of the church, including the substructure of the south wall itself, from the tower to the porch, after which a disturbance begins, which prevents our further identification.

\* It is not easy to determine whether the "*istam capellam*" of his epitaph refers to Woolwich or to Lyminge, both of which places are mentioned just before. (Weever, 'Funeral Monuments.')



*The Saxon Period, 965–1000.*—To this period I unhesitatingly ascribe the present church, with the exception of the north aisle and the tower. The servile yet ignorant and unskilful imitation of Roman peculiarities, indicated by interrupted bonding-courses, irregular herring-bone work, an absolute reliance on mortars, when the secret of making them in the Roman methods had been lost—all this points to the time when the Roman works were standing, but the skill to reproduce them existed no more; and indicates a period long prior to that of Lanfranc, who brought in from Normandy that higher method of Roman building with squared stones and close-jointed masonry, of which so few types were then existing in England.

*The Period of Archbishop Peckham, 1279.*—To this belong the reparations which are referred to in the letter of the Archbishop to Petrus de Alby, the Rector, and they include the chancel-arch, the flying buttress, a portion of the south wall, the south door of the chancel, and several minor details. In the foundation in the field they are discernible in the fragment of wall already described.

*The Period of Cardinal Bouchier.*—To this belongs the north aisle, in which a fragment of the ancient Norman tower (built with long flints, put in head-wise, and with very wide-jointed masonry) was included—a new tower being laid out at the western end. The foundations of this tower (which appears to have fallen down) were disclosed when the flooring of the church was removed. The masonry is clearly distinguished from the Saxon work, and there is an absence of any imitation of Roman peculiarities. It cannot, however, be later than 1100. The masonry of Cardinal Bouchier (or rather, perhaps, of the Rector,

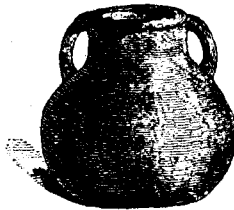
William Preene, (who worked under the shadow of the great Lord Cardinal), is in singular contrast to that of the venerable fragment he has continued. It is evidently built out of the fragments of the original north wall of the church, with the additions of some smaller stones, there having been no necessity in this instance to fall back upon the resources of the basilica.

We now come to the

*Work of Cardinal Morton* ; or, more properly, of Thomas Duffyn, the excellent Vicar, who bequeathed twenty pounds towards the tower, twelve pounds for a new bell, and four pounds for a building in the church-yard, where the parishioners might meet and regale themselves on the anniversaries. The first storey of the tower is of much earlier date than the second, and is built of different materials, and a different mortar. The strange platform on which it stands, and which quite needlessly (for it is built upon the rock chalk) extends to about two feet from the base, which is here nearly six feet thick, seems to belong to some earlier building, and to be merely adapted to its present use. After the bequest of Duffyn, recourse was had to the treasury in the field, out of which the whole of the tower from but a few feet of the foundation appears to have been built. The stones, increasing in bulk as they ascend, mark the approach of the builders to the vast blocks of the foundation ; while the concrete (sometimes finely faced and smoothed) which covers them tells the same destructive tale. In 1527, the last bequest—that of the collateral ancestor of the Brockman family (whose members, from 1477, had been such constant contributors to the church) was made. And I cannot but record with grateful and sad remembrance that among the last and most liberal of

the contributors to the fabric of the church, and to the general needs of the parish, was my venerated and lamented friend the Rev. Tatton Brockman, of Beachborough, whose forefathers were among its earliest benefactors, and whose successor and representative still carries on the same good tradition.

It will appear from this retrospective glance, that we have at least five periods of masonry at Lyminge: the Roman—the Saxon imitation of the Roman—the Norman—and the masonry of the thirteenth, the fifteenth, and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. These are as distinct to the eye as the periods of the history they illustrate are to the mind of the observer; and as they tend greatly to clear up the structural peculiarities of other churches, whose annals have not been so carefully preserved and recorded, they cannot fail to be of interest to the students of architectural antiquity everywhere.



Bronze vessel found, eight feet below the surface, at N.W. corner of the Basilica. (Height,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch; diameter of base, 1 inch, of lip,  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch; greatest circumference, 5 inches.)