

A NOTE ON MINSTER COURT AND TRIPARTITE CHURCHES.

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IN a paper published in Vol. XL. (p. 142) on the Saxon tripartite or three-chambered church of Whitfield, *alias* Beuesfeld, mention was made of some Norman examples of the same type, and comparative plans were given of East Ham (Essex) and Sutton-near-Dover. These churches have an aisleless nave with the usual chancel-arch in its E wall ; a square choir, less in breadth and lower in height than the nave, with an arch looking on to the altar ; and the sanctuary beyond, apsidal in form and narrower and lower than the choir.

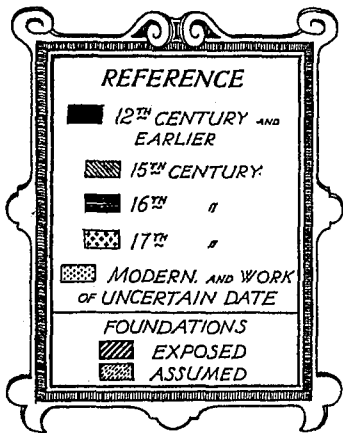
Another Kentish example of the type has recently been unearthed in the grounds of the manor-house known as Minster Abbey, now in the possession of Mr. C. H. Senior, at Minster-in-Thonet. Its existence was revealed by the effect of drought upon the lawn, and by Mr. Senior's kindness the foundations of an apse were in part excavated for the inspection of the members of the Royal Archæological Institute on the occasion of its summer meeting in 1929. By further excavation Mr. Percy K. Kipps was enabled to discover the tripartite form of the chapel and the lines of the W tower. To illustrate this brief notice the Council of the Royal Archæological Institute has kindly granted the loan of the block of Mr. Kipps' plan of Minster Court, which was published, together with excellent illustrations and an exhaustive description, in the latest volume (lxxxvi) of the *Archæological Journal*.

It is supposed that the ancient nunnery of St. Mildred, founded in the seventh century by Domneva Ermenburga¹,

¹ Variouslly called *Æbba*, *Ermenburga* and *Domneva*. Scott Robertson (*Arch. Cant.* XII, 182) suggests that *Domneva* may be regarded as a compound of *Domina* and *Abba*, simply meaning the "Lady Abbess, denoting the popular title given her in the neighbourhood of her great foundation."

MINSTER COURT, THANET.

PLAN SHOWING EXISTING BUILDINGS
AND SITE OF FORMER CHURCH E^S



NORTH RANGE

WEST RANGE

ORIGINAL HALL



PASSAGE

SITE OF CHURCH

TOWER

N A V E

C H A N C E L

APSE



stood on the site now occupied by the parish church. In the following century a larger monastery was built on a site which tradition has identified with that of Minster Court. Burnt by the Danes towards the end of the tenth century, it was deserted by the nuns and what remained of it was inhabited only by a few clerks.¹

The site was included in a grant by Cnut of the important manor of "Thanet" to the abbey of St. Augustine in the year 1027.² It may be presumed that the monks without any great delay built their manor-house on the same site, absorbing whatever remained of the ruined abbey buildings. Originally a small building, running N and S, it was enlarged early in the twelfth century by the addition of N and S wings enclosing a quadrangle of which the E side was left open: on the S side the chapel, with its massive tower rising up in the SW angle of the quad; on the N the great hall, flanked at its W end by a narrow building in the NW angle; and between them there remained the earlier building. In the remodelling the early house and the new compartment at the W end of the hall were arranged to form a single long two-storied building, which doubtless contained the kitchens, the parlour and the dormer. A slight divergence of the lines of these two parts and a difference in the thickness of the walls, visible in Mr. Kipps' accurate plan, suggest a difference of date. This is confirmed by a difference in the technique of the masonry as seen from the quad. In the wall along the W side there is a fair amount of herringbone facing, of which there is no sign in the twelfth-century walls. There is also a little blocked window which has a flat lintel of stone, like the lintels of wood seen in Lanfranc's hospital of St. John outside Northgate, Canterbury. All this suggests a date

¹ See Mr. R. C. Fowler's account in *Vict. Co. Hist. of Kent*, vol. ii, p. 151.

² The entry in *Domesday* indicates the importance of the manor: "In Tanet Hundred, St. Mildred's. The same Abbot (of St. Augustine) holds Tanet Manor, which answers for 48 sulings. There is arable land of 62 teams. In demesne there are two. And 150 villans, with 50 bordars, have 63 teams. A Church there. And one presbyter, who gives 20 shillings a year. One saltwork there. And 2 fisheries of 3 pence. And one mill. In the time of King Edward it was worth £80. When the Abbot received it, £40. Now, £100."—*Larking's Translation*.

about the middle of the eleventh century, or maybe a little later, for the original manor-house.

Through the ground-stage of that earlier building, at its S end, the twelfth-century architect drove a vaulted passage of three bays to give access to the quad from without. S of the passage and structurally connected with it rises the N wall of the tower, containing the remains of a newel-staircase. It is remarkable that the all-over width of the massive tower exceeded that of the nave by about 7 ft. (This may possibly throw some light on the puzzle of the original form of the W end of Minster parish church.)

The tripartite plan of the chapel needs no comment, unless it be to note the semi-circular form of the apse: this is a Norman feature, distinct from the stilted form usually found in Saxon apses. The foundations indicate that the walls of the nave were thicker and that of the apse was thinner than those of the choir.

In other counties there are a few examples of the tripartite species of parish church under review. In these days motor-travel members may like to visit them, and they may be able to add to the list, which does not pretend to be complete. Dalmeny near Edinburgh—choir and stilted apse each vaulted (see plan in E. S. Prior's *Gothic Art*, p. 52); Kilpeck, Herefordshire—vaulted apse (F. Bond's *Eng. Ch. Arch.*, p. 187); Moccas, Herefordshire (ditto, p. 236); Steetly, Derbyshire; Checkendon, Oxon. Other tripartite churches which have features distinguishing them from the species under consideration are not included, but mention may be made of Newenden, Sussex, which has an apsidal sanctuary and a tower over the choir; Studland, Dorset, also has a tower over the choir, but the sanctuary is square and both compartments are vaulted. Dunham Magna, Leckhampton and other churches might be noted, but these remarks must be brought to a close.