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ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ON ST. PAUL'S CRAY CHURCH

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This ancient church, having ceased to be used as a place of worship, has lately been converted to serve as a day centre for the charitable organisation Age Concern. While this work was in progress, I was requested by the Diocesan authority to record any features of archaeological interest which might come to light. These circumstances have provided an opportunity for making a close scrutiny of the building, and it seems appropriate to publish the results of these latest observations, especially in view of the fact that the description appearing in *Arch. Cant.*, xviii (1889), failed to take into account certain evidence indicating that the origins of the church are earlier than commonly supposed.¹ (Fig. 1).

The Buildings of England (1969) calls attention to the presence of re-used Roman tiles – or bricks – in the north-east quoin of the north chapel and their occurrence also in a blocked early window in the north wall of the nave. The present writer is there credited with the suggestion that these are surviving features of a Saxon nave with a contemporary porticus. It might have been preferable to have used the term 'Saxo-Norman', as it is now recognized that up to the end of the eleventh century Anglo-Saxon techniques persisted in use. Re-used Roman material continued to be employed after the Conquest, as at Eynsford Castle, wherever it was obtainable from the ruins of a Roman villa or other building in the close vicinity. Roman remains occur at many points along the valley of the River Cray near whose banks the church under consideration is situated and would have supplied useful material in an area lacking in natural sources of freestone.

¹ This evidence had, however, been noted in an article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1841, pt. i, 361–5.

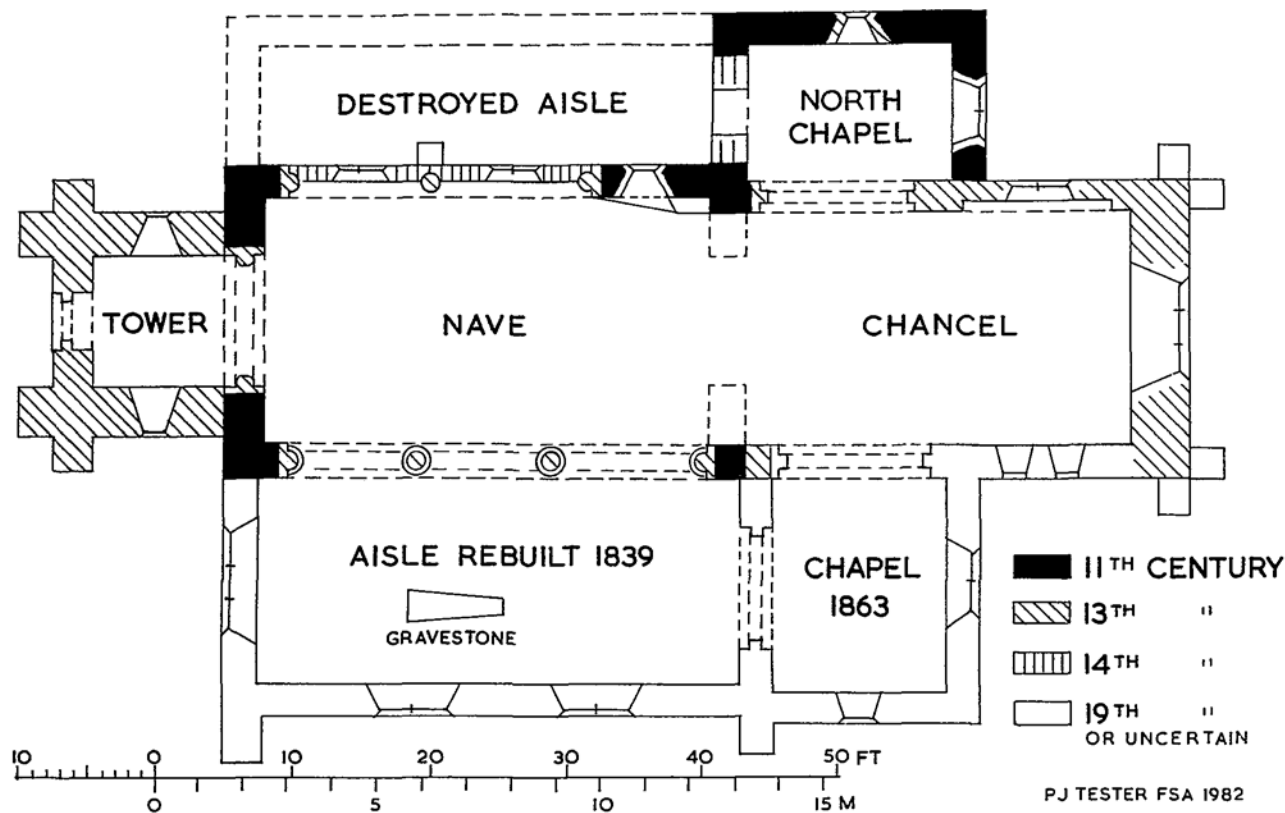


Fig. 1. Plan of the Church of St. Paulinus, St. Paul's Cray.

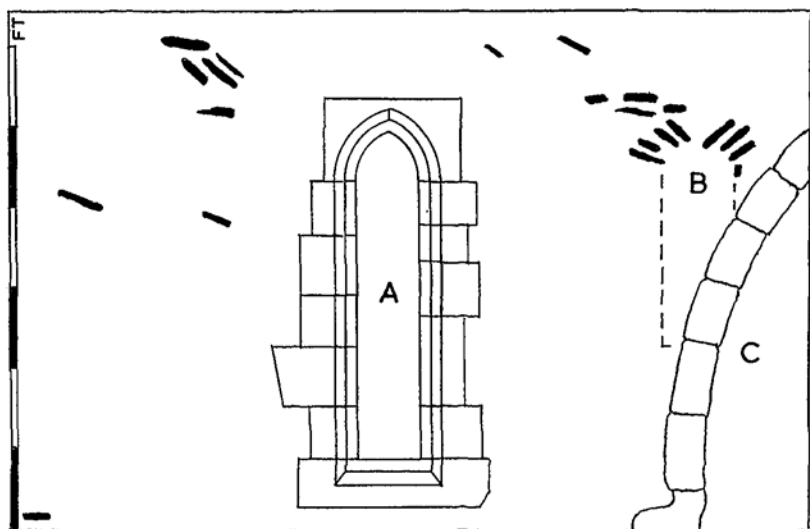


Fig. 2. External face of the upper part of the north wall of the nave immediately west of its junction with the north chapel. A. Victorian lancet window. B. Head of blocked Saxo-Norman window, formed of non-radially set re-used Roman tiles. C. Thirteenth-century arch cut through earlier wall to communicate with north aisle now destroyed.

Note: Roman tiles are shown in solid black.

A view of the church from the north-west (Plate I) shows two blocked pointed arches once opening into a north aisle long since destroyed. Above the line of the eastern arch there appear seven Roman tiles set non-radially in typical Anglo-Saxon manner to form the arched head of a narrow single-splayed window the lower part of which has been cut away by the later arch opening into the added aisle (Fig. 2). Internally, the semi-circular rere-arch of this window, 13 ft. above floor level with an internal diameter of 2 ft. 6 in., is clearly discernible, turned in Roman tiles and strongly reminiscent of the well known Anglo-Saxon window at Darenth.² There, however, the opening is splayed externally in contrast to St. Paul's Cray, and one is led to compare the latter with a little window at West Kingsdown where the outer arch is roughly formed of several thin pieces of stone – resembling tiles.³ The Kingsdown window is accepted by the Taylors in their standard work as 'either Anglo-Saxon or very early Norman', and there can be no doubt that the same may be said

² H.M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (1965), 190-2 and Pl. 442.

³ *Ibid.*, 351-2 and Pl. 502.

of the surviving parts of the thin (about 2 ft. 4 in.) north wall of the nave of St. Paul's Cray.

We can reasonably assume that the south wall of the early nave coincided with the line of the existing thirteenth-century arcade and also that the west end survives in its present position. Unfortunately, the north-west quoin has been renewed in modern brickwork but the flint rubble walls near this point include numerous re-used Roman bricks and pieces of *opus signinum*. The south-west quoin of the nave is recorded to have been constructed of Roman tiles until destroyed in the nineteenth-century alterations.⁴ No trace of the chancel arch remains although its position can be inferred from the fact that the west wall of the north chapel almost certainly aligned with the north-east angle of the nave. Moreover, a late-medieval rood loft opening survives on the south side at the upper level on the conjectural line of the chancel arch. Removal of the arch to make room for a rood screen and loft was very common practice in the late medieval period.

Previous mention has been made of the fact that the north-east quoin of the north chapel is constructed of re-used Roman tiles and the north-west angle is recorded to have been also built of this material before modern 'restoration'.⁵ Near the base of the north-east quoin there are also two blocks of tufa and another of brownish sandstone. The work is roughly executed with wide mortar joints between the tiles which extend twelve feet above the present ground level (Plate II). Resemblance to the tile quoins at Darenth – generally accepted as Anglo-Saxon – is very pronounced. One brick has attached to it a thick layer of mortar containing pounded tile, or *opus signinum*, obviously remaining from its original setting in a Roman construction at least six centuries before its re-use in the church.

There is strong presumptive evidence that the north chapel is contemporary with the nave as both possessed the same unsophisticated technique in the use of Roman tiles, and they may well have been conceived *ab initio* as components of a unitary structure. Such a plan would, however, be difficult to parallel in late pre-Conquest work, but might bear comparison with the early-twelfth-century chapel of St. Bartholomew's Hospital at Chatham,⁶ and there is a Norman chapel attached to the chancel at Great Mongeham. The St. Paul's Cray chapel walls are 2 ft. 8 in. thick at the east and west and 2 ft. 5 in. on the north, these being below the usual thickness of

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Arch. Cant.*, lx (1947), 16–7.

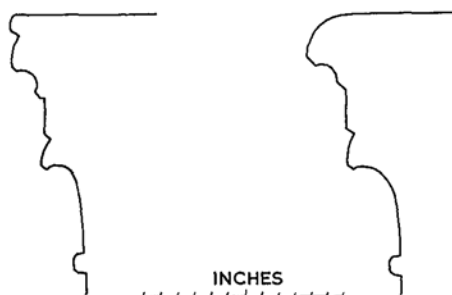


Fig. 3. Profiles of Nave Capitals. *Left*: central pillar of north arcade. *Right*: west respond of south arcade.

Norman work which is seldom much less than 3 ft. A lancet window in the north wall of the chapel is a thirteenth-century insertion.

The early chancel occupied the area between the north and south chapels, its north side probably coinciding with the alignment of the later arch into the chapel. How far it extended eastward is uncertain, but it may not have reached beyond the east end of the north chapel.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century a north aisle was formed by piercing the nave wall with two pointed arches resting on a central cylindrical pillar with a moulded capital (Fig. 3) and responds to match at each end. At the same time a wide round-headed arch was made in the west wall of the north chapel to communicate with the aisle. There is a chamfer on its inner edge and despite its 'Norman' form there is no reason to suppose it to be earlier than the aisle. A factor possibly influencing its form is that the aisle roof may have been simply a downward extension of that covering the nave so that the arch leading into the chapel had to be kept below the roof line. At Horton Kirby similar round-headed arches led from the aisles into the transepts in the original arrangement considered to date from c. 1200.

The south aisle was also added about this time, as suggested by the similarity of the mouldings of the capitals in both north and south arcades (Fig. 3). The east respond on the south side and the pillar next to it have carved capitals of an elaborate and unusual form, as depicted in *Arch. Cant.*, xviii (1889) (facing p. 281), and Mr. John Newman has observed that the acanthus foliage may have been inspired by the work in Canterbury quire undertaken in the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁷

⁷ *Buildings of England* (1969), 484.

As part of this enlargement the chancel was lengthened and widened on the south side. On the north, however, the builders were prevented from setting back the wall by the presence of the chapel, so in order to effect a slight increase of floor width they constructed a wide arched recess for almost the full length of the eastward extension.

A thirteenth-century tower was added at the west end of the nave. Its buttresses have been extensively patched with modern brickwork but they are basically most likely part of the original structure.

In the fourteenth century the north aisle was demolished and the arches leading into it blocked, the date of the alteration being suggested by the form of the two rectangular-framed windows with trefoil-headed lights inserted in the blocking.

Originally, the south aisle was narrower than at present and it was rebuilt on its present lines in 1839. Similarly the south chapel was rebuilt in 1863, presumably on older foundations although there is no certainty of this. Openings into the chapel on the north and west have capitals to the responds of obvious Victorian origin carved in imitation of the medieval examples adjoining.

Several of the medieval windows have had the outer stonework and tracery renewed and the east window of the chancel is entirely nineteenth-century. Traces of the group of lancets once in this position can be seen internally. A possible triplet in the east wall of the north chapel was indicated by traces now unfortunately obscured by recent alterations.⁸

During the 1980 conversion, a medieval gravestone was uncovered in the south aisle in the position shown on the plan (Fig. 1). It was 7 ft. long and 2 ft. 5 in. wide at the head, the sides tapering towards the foot which was 1 ft. 6 in. wide. There was no inscription or indent for a brass on its eroded surface.

⁸ *Ibid.*

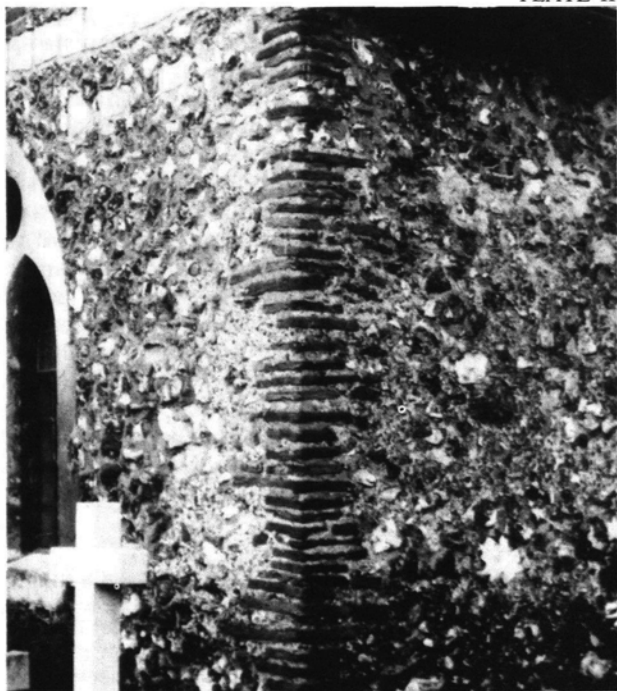
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PLATE I



View of the Nave from the North-west.

PLATE II



North-east Corner of the north Chapel, showing Quoin built of re-used Roman Tiles.

