

The Collegiate Church of S. Paul, Bedford. Read at the  
Excursion, 18th August, 1897,

BY REV. H. FOWLER, M.A.

In offering these notes to the members of our Archæological party I have to acknowledge my great indebtedness to some distinguished Bedfordshire Archæologists. I have verified the statements, as far as opportunity permitted, by referring to the original authorities. My remarks must be limited to the account of the early condition of things connected with the origin of this Church.

The Parish of S. Paul, which comprises the oldest portion of Bedford, is of unknown antiquity. It is probably older than the parishes of the south portion of the town, called "Potter-street Ward," which was not added to Bedford till 1019, in the reign of King Edward the Elder. It is a reasonable conjecture that the first Saxon Church in Bedford, whenever it was erected, was dedicated, either to the Apostle S. Paul, or S. Paul and S. Peter, jointly—of such primitive dedications there are many examples. The proximity of this site to the most ancient localities renders it likely, that the earliest Christian Sanctuary was situated here (on this site). I am referring to the ancient Ford and subsequent Bridge, the Saxon fortress, where would be the residence of a Thane or Alderman, and the Cheaping or Market-place, where the early Borough Moots would be held. But I must not pursue these speculations. What appears to be certain is, that the earliest associations of the church are monastic—Antiquarians agree that there was a primitive Monastery here in the 8th Century, and probably earlier, under the Mercian rulers. King Offa II had a partiality for it, and was perhaps a frequent visitor. There is reason for supposing that Abbot Almund, whose name is among the signatures to Offa's Charter given to St. Albans (assigned to the year 795) was Abbot of Bedford. However this may be, we have the authority of Matthew Paris for the burial of Offa with regal honours in a Chapel at Bedford in 796, and the story of the subsequent submersion of chapel and tomb by an inundation



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of the river "Usca," (the Ouse), also the complaints made against Abbot Willegode for not having secured Offa's relics for St. Albans. The traditional site is, I believe, a few hundred yards up the river, opposite to Batt's Wharf: we may see this from the Castle Mount. It seems useless to speculate whether this chapel belonged to the Monastery or to a Royal residence. The Monastery was probably destroyed in the devastations of the Danes, to whom King Alfred ceded this district north of the Watling-street, afterwards called the Danelaugh: if so, however, it had been restored before 971, in which year Thurkytel was the Abbot. His name shows him to have been of Danish extraction. The Early English Chronicle informs us (under the year 971) that Oskytel, Archbishop of York died at Thame on All Hallows Mass Night (November 1st), and Abbot Thurkytel, his kinsman, conveyed the body to Bedford; presumably on its way for burial at York. This was in the reign of King Edgar, who was a great favorer of the Monks. We hear nothing more of the Monastery; it was probably merged in the College of Secular Canons which appears to have been established here a considerable time before the Conquest; their Church was dedicated to S. Paul, and probably in succession to the Church of the Monastery. In the Domesday Survey the Canons of Bedford are named after the Canons of S. Paul's, London. (I am following the account given in Parry's Illustrations of Beds.) They were a powerful body well endowed with estates, and were lords of the Borough Manor. In their time a Norman Church must have been erected, and, I suppose, on this site. I may be treading on debateable ground, in describing it as situated just outside the western precinct of the Norman Castle erected here in the reign of William Rufus by Payne de Beauchamp, 3rd Baron of Bedford. The distinguished antiquary Mr. George Hurst supposes the moat to have joined the river close to the present bridge, where the Swan Hotel now is. The church was on the Canons' land and clearly outside the castle. This Secular College would have been governed by a Dean or Provost.

About the time, when the Diocese of Lincoln was constituted by Bishop Remigius, who began to erect

his Norman Cathedral in 1080, the Canons were unjustly deprived of some of their privileges by this unscrupulous prelate. Leland says, "the Prebendaries had their houses about the circuit of S. Paul's Church; and the names of two Prebends remain, although their stalls be at Lincoln." Remigius seems to have appropriated two of the Canonries with their "corpus prebendæ," or estates, to his cathedral. There are still at Lincoln two Prebendal stalls having attached to them the names respectively of "Bedford major" and "Bedford minor."

Lysons states that in his time (c. 1820), a mediæval house was standing in S. Paul's-square, held under a lease from the Chapter of Lincoln, and was supposed to have been a Prebendal residence. In the reign of Henry I. these Seculars were transformed into Canons Regular of S. Augustin by Lady Royse (the widow of Payne de Beauchamp), who was thus accounted their foundress. The cloister, and walled precinct, which must have been erected for them, would have been rather cramped for room in this situation. Whether these Canons had the patronage of other churches in the town I have no information, but I have to note that three churches here were, at a somewhat later period, in the gift of the Austin Canons of Dunstable, viz.: S. Mary's, to which they presented a vicar in 1216, the church of S. Peter, Dunstable, which stood opposite to S. Mary's; and that of S. Cuthbert to the north of the castle site. Presentations to these in the 13th century are noted in the Dunstable Chronicle. The influence of the Black Canons must have been powerful in Bedford. The Prior here, of course, had the tithes, and was bound to provide for the parochial ministrations by means of a secular priest or chaplain. If the Norman Church of S. Paul was on the same lines as the subsequent one, it was what may be called a "double church," for such was the arrangement of this structure before the modern additions (made in 1884). It had two naves and two chancels, of nearly equal length and width. If this is correct, the north member must have been the Church of the Canons, and the south limb the church of the burgesses; the south chancel was probably the Lady Chapel.

In 1164, the ninth of Henry II., the Canons were still here, for in that year an incident, which had important consequences, occurred. The account is given by the Chronicler Ralph de Diceto. One of the Canons, Philip de Broc, committed homicide; when put on his trial before the King's Justiciary, he behaved contumaciously. He appears to have claimed benefit of clergy, *i.e.*, to be tried by the Bishop's Court. The account of the matter is by no means clear. It is stated that, when brought before the Archbishop (Thomas à Becket), he could not deny his offence. The issue was, that he was degraded from his Canonry, and banished the realm for two years. Which court pronounced the sentence is not stated, but the Chronicler says de Broc's trial gave occasion to the serious conflict between the Bishops and the Civil authorities on the subject of the trial of criminal Clerks, which controversy the King thought to have brought to a settlement by the "Constitutions of Clarendon." We know the unhappy consequences which ensued in regard to Archbishop Thomas. Leland thinks that this occurrence was the cause of the removal of the Canons to a new abode. The site was in the adjoining parish of Goldington (afterwards called Newenham), about a mile down the river. The removal probably took place soon after 1164. It is certain that the benefactor who promoted this was Simon de Beauchamp. The Chroniclers call him the son of Royse de Beauchamp, but Mr. Elwes (in his valuable paper on the Castle), has shown that he was probably her grandson. He was heir to the Barony of Bedford, but for some years his estates and Castle were kept in the King's hands, because he took the side of the Ecclesiastics in the struggle between Archbishop Thomas and the King. In 1190 he recovered the Governorship of the Castle from Richard I., by the payment of a fine (of £100). What concerns us is, that he was a liberal patron of the Canons, and transferred them to more convenient quarters at Newenham. He probably built their church, for he was esteemed their Founder. He died in 1207, the ninth year of King John, and was buried in S. Paul's Church. This is an interesting point. His monument was in this church in the time of Leland, who says, "He lieth before the High Altar in S. Paul's Church,

with this epitaph, graven in brass—*De Bello Campo jacet hic sub marmore Simon, Fundator de Newenham.*”

This is probably identical with the slab (8ft. by 3ft. 4in.), now placed close to the east wall of the chancel, (its former position was in front of the altar); it has case-ments for an engrailed Latin cross, and for two small shields (of arms) above. There is a slightly hollow border, in which the inscription was probably inserted in separate brass letters. I am stating this on the authority of the late Rev. C. Boutell, who names this as “the earliest recorded example of a Brass in England.”

The assertion, however, is not undisputed.

To return to our subject. From this time (I suppose), the Church became solely parochial, although Tanner disputes this. Its history is not concerned with the Canons, except in the matter of the exercise of their patronage in presenting the Vicars, and upholding their Rectorial rights in the chancel. It is probable that the Beauchamps did more for the structure than the Priors of Newenham. I must hasten on. The deeds of the notorious Faulkes de Breauté belong to the history of the Castle. As soon as he was put in possession here by King John in 1215, (we are told), he laid sacrilegious hands on Newenham Priory and other religious houses for the purpose of obtaining materials for his extensive works of fortification; for the same reason, as Matthew Paris tells us, he pulled down the Church of S. Paul. This does not necessarily imply its total demolition, it is reasonable to suppose that at least its foundations remained. The Church continued a ruin until the capture of the Castle (after the famous siege), August 24th, 1224. When the fortress was doomed to be destroyed and levelled, King Henry III. issued his mandate to the Sheriff of Beds., about the disposal of the materials. One portion of the stones was assigned to the Prior of Newenham for the re-instatement of his Monastery; another portion to the Prior of Caldwell, (the House of the templars situated on the opposite side of the river) and another portion was set apart for the work of re-building the Church of S. Paul—“*perfectioni operis ecclesiæ Sancti Pauli Bedfordiensis.*” It is inferred that the Church was re-built within a few years of the date 1224. We are now arrived at the history of

the present structure, and the question, what features it retains of the re-constructed Church of the Early English period. I will leave this in the hands of the Bedfordshire gentlemen, who have so kindly offered to give us the benefit of their investigations and local experience in this extremely interesting subject.

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**General Meeting, held in the Vestry of Elstow Church, Beds,  
on 18th August, 1897.**

Present—Mr. S. Flint Clarkson, in the chair; Rev. Canon Davys, and Rev. H. Fowler, Hon. Secretaries. Messrs. G. Mowat, R. L. Howard, F. Trevor Davys, H. R. Wilton Hall, A. E. Gibbs, and H. L. Waddington.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

On the proposal of Rev. Canon Davys, seconded by Mr. S. Flint Clarkson, the Rev. G. A. Lewis Brown, Vicar of Redbourn, was elected a member.

The local Secretary referred to a letter received from a Member of the Committee directing attention to the rules of the Society, which required the Annual Meeting to be held at St. Albans, on 22nd June.

The Rev. Canon Davys pointed out that this rule had been in abeyance for some years, as it had been found convenient to hold the Meeting during the excursions, and no objection had been raised. He proposed, however, that the Annual business of the election of officers be deferred to a future day, at St. Albans.

Mr. Fowler stated that Rule 17 had been discussed by the Committee about ten years ago (June 26th, 1886); its inconvenience was generally admitted, and its consideration was deferred to a General Meeting, but no resolution was passed. After discussion, it was unanimously resolved to adjourn the Annual Meeting to St. Albans, the date to be arranged by the Senior Hon. Secretary.

Canon Davys alluded to the wish of some members to extend the Society's work, in the direction of additional meetings and excursions, he threw out the suggestion that a third Secretary might be appointed to assist in carrying out such extension.

The consideration of the subject was deferred.

WALTER J. LAWRENCE.

15th September, 1897.

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