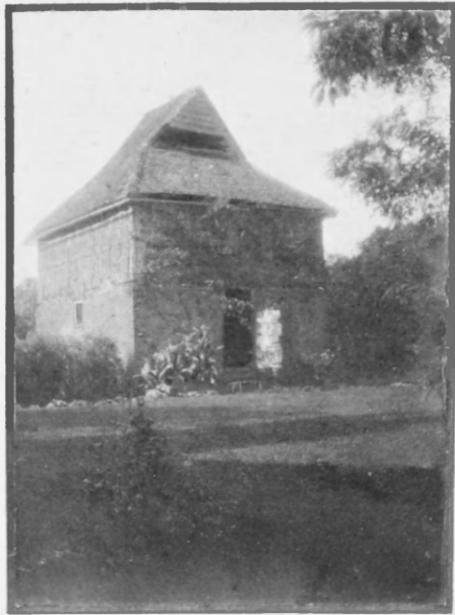


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Early Pigeon-Houses (Columbaria).

BY GEORGE MOWAT, M.D.

Although the subject of early Dovecotes or Pigeon-houses does not appear to have engaged the attention of the members of this Society, yet it is one possessing attractions not only for the antiquary and architect, but for the lover of the picturesque also. Such buildings are to be found in many districts throughout the country, but chiefly near Manor houses, Rectorys, Farm houses, Religious houses, and occasionally in Church towers. In Hertfordshire the best examples are in the eastern and north-eastern portions of the county.

Mr. Fowler's map of the monastic buildings at St. Albans marks the site of the Columbarium, in the garden of the present Deanery; but, no trace of it is now visible. In the Chronicles of the Abbots of the Monastery it is stated that during the abbacy of John Mootte (1396-1401) "a new Pigeon-house was built, the pigeons being divided among the brethren" (GESTA III. 444). The general plan is much the same in every instance, and consists of a massive detached building with walls often three or more feet in thickness when

the nesting-holes are in the wall-substance, but less when the structure is of brick, and the holes are either of brick, slate, stone, or wood, secured to the inner face of the wall.

The massive stone Pigeon-house was introduced into England by the Normans, and with it "the feudal right of Dovecote, which survived until the reign of Queen Elizabeth." Its form was that of the round Norman tower, domed, and somewhat resembling a kiln in appearance. The nest openings were 6 inches by 8 inches and 14 inches deep; the cavities being generally L-shaped, thus screening the sitting birds from disturbance. The holes were arranged in rows about twenty inches apart, each ten inches above the other. Separate ledges were usually placed under the holes, but were sometimes carried round the walls in a continuous line. Every pigeon-house was provided with a trap-door, or some other contrivance for preventing the escape of the birds, and possessed a strong door, with or without a grille. The more modern had barred, netted, or glazed apertures for admitting light. A very interesting point is the ladder (revolving or fixed) by which the nests were reached; and another is the lantern (often ornamental) through which the birds passed in and out. The pigeon-house was generally placed in a sunny, sheltered position, with the entrance easily seen from the adjoining dwelling-house.

The earliest examples in this country are of Norman design. That at Penrice Castle, in Gower, was probably built at the end of the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century. Professor Freeman thought "not later than Edwardian times." It stands close to the south-west angle of the outer wall of the castle, and is in perfect preservation. It is circular in form, with an inside diameter of 10 feet, walls 4 feet in thickness, domed, and having an opening at the top 2 feet in diameter. It measures 20 feet at its highest point. It is filled throughout with nest-holes having ledges of rough stone. The entire building is of local stone, and corresponds in every respect with the castle walls. It was probably built about the same time as the castle.

The Pigeon-house at Oxwich Castle, within two or three miles of Penrice, is also round, with thick walls

containing nest-holes; but, having fallen into ruin, less than half its original structure remains.

At Oystermouth Castle, only the foundations of the circular dovecote remain, some distance south-east of the castle.

The earliest account of English Pigeon-houses appears to be that by the Rev. John Webb, in vol. xxxi. of *Archæologia* (1845), and contains particulars of one connected with Lewes Priory, in Sussex, and another at the Church Farm, Garway, in Herefordshire. At the former, "the pigeon-house stood south-west of the present ruins, and was taken down about 1827." "It was cruciform, and equalled in magnitude many a parish church." "There were 3,228 pigeon-holes."

The first Cluniac priory established in England was at Lewes (1077-8). At Garway the evidence of date is very striking; for, although the building, which was of stone, circular, domed, and containing 666 nesting-holes, has now disappeared, yet the Knights Templar founded a preceptory on the site, with an inscription over a doorway to the effect that "In the year 1326 Brother Richard built this Columbarium." At Bury St. Edmunds, the foundations and part of the walls of the circular pigeon-house are still visible.

The nomenclation is interesting, for although *Culver* is Anglo-Saxon for a *pigeon*, and there are two, if not three, places thus named where the wild pigeon is known to breed (Culverhole in Gower, and Culverhole Point, near the mouth of the Axe, at Seaton, in Devonshire), yet there is no evidence that any *pigeon-house* was built in this country before the Norman occupation.

Columbarium and *Columbiere* speak for themselves.

The literature of this subject is very scanty. With the exception of Mr. Webb's notices in *Archæologia*, and the reprint of "Moore's Columbarium," first published in 1735, there is little to be found until we come to Mr. Alfred Watkins' excellent paper read before the Archæological Institute, in 1891; and an article by the same author, in the *English Illustrated Magazine* for 1892.

The antiquity of those buildings is traced in Fosbroke's *Encyclopædia* to the ancient Egyptians,

who, according to Diodorus (44 B.C.), had their dove-cotes, built of "reeds in a conical form, with holes for the convenience of the birds"; and "at the present time the ground floors of Egyptian houses seldom have windows, and the upper story is almost always devoted to pigeons, which are kept by thousands."

Under the head of "Economy of a Roman Villa." Fosbroke says, "Columbaria, or *dovecotes*, were towers, or places under tiles." In another place he remarks, "Bakehouses, dovecotes, cowhouses, and other places, were appendages to the churches of the monasteries."

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APPENDIX.—Pigeon-Houses in Hertfordshire.

Locality.	Shape.	Walls.	Inside diameter.	Nest holes.	Lantern.	Vane.	Roof.	Doors.	Windows.	Ladder.	Date.	Remarks.
Poles Farm, Ware.	Octagon.	Brick.	12 feet.	450, made with flat brick string course no ledges.	Lead octagonal trapped cupola, supported by eight wood pilasters.	N.S. E.W. surmounted by arrow.	Tile.	1, wood.	1, Circular wired not glazed.	Revolving.		E. S. Hanbury, Esq., Poles, Thundridge, proprietor. Mr. Trebell, tenant. String course outside about 4 feet from ground. Pigeon house still full of birds.
Rennesley, Wade's mill, Ware.	Square.	Brick.	16 feet.	640.	Lead square wooden supports trapped.	None.	Tile.	1, wood.	2 circular	None.		Still used for pigeons; peculiar fastening for door. Mr. Oliver, tenant. Mr. Fuller, Youngsbury, owner.
Amwell Bury, Ware.	Octagon.	Brick, 14 ins. cemented outside.	16 feet.	750, wood, 18 in., fixed to surface of wall.	Lead, octagonal latticed, having 24 openings, hinged latticed trap.	Arrow, N.S. E.W.	Tile, cemented angles.	1, strong wood, iron grille.	None.	Double revolving.	Dwelling house, said to be 14th century.	Building partly in ruin: no birds. Basil Richardson, Esq., tenant. E. S. Hanbury, Esq., owner, Poles, Thundridge, Ware.
Wymondley Bury, Stevanage.	Square.	Height 18 ft., upper half timbered, lower half brick.	24 feet.	234.	Double-gabled ends, N. & S., trap gone.	None.	Tile.	Probably chestnut—one piece.	1 iron-barred	None.		Out of use. W. H. Fox, Esq., tenant. Miss Wilshire, Welwyn, owner.
The Cottage, Wymondley Priory.	Square.	Brick.										Now used as a cottage chimney running through lantern.
†Graveley Hall	Oblong.	Brick.	22 feet.	Ledges.	Square, circular cupola, lead.	None.	Tile.	Wooden.	1 glazed.	Wooden frame work with one short ladder.	1840 over door.	Mr. Wright. Pigeon house infested by rats; no string course.
*Graveley Bury.	Square.	Brick.		386, ledges.	Square, 4 gables.	None.	Tile.	Wood.				J. D. Smith, Esq., Stevanage Bury.
Highdown, Pirton.	Square.	Timbered, faced with brick.	22 feet.	380, wood, no ledges.	Double gable E. and W., no trap.	None.	Tile.	1, wood.	2 glazed.	None.	House, 1504	J. Pollard, Esq. Double-gabled, similar to supposed dove cote at Nash's Farm, Sandridge, dove cote still in use.
Parsonage Farm, Pirton.	Square.				Double gable.							Mr. Davies. Not in use.
Hammond's Farm, Pirton.	Square.	Brick.		100 holes, built in thickness of walls, brick ledges.	Double gable, not trapped.	None.	Tile.	Wood, double lock.	None.	None.		Mr. J. Kingsley, tenant.
Walkern Place, Walkern.	Octagon.	Brick, 4 ft.	21 feet.	15 ins. deep, L shape, 420 ledges continuous throughout.	Lead, dental moulding, octagonal, surmounted by spike and round ball, not trapped.	None.	Tile.	1 door, reached by ladder from outside.	None.	None.	House, 17th century.	2 floors, lower used as granary, upper as dove cote; reached by ladder; still in use.
Home Farm, Little Gaddesden.	Octagon.	Brick.		About 400, occupying upper half of building only.	Lead, bell-shaped cupola, light wooden pilasters.	Support remaining, vane gone.	Tile.	Wood.	1 dormer window on each of the 8 sections of the roof.	Revolving, supporting on long step ladder.		Nest holes consist of stone slabs upon face of brick wall, with slate compartments.
Burge End Farm, Pirton.	Square.	Brick.		360 in wall.	Double gable, no trap.	None.	Tile.	Wood.	None.			Mr. Burton, tenant. Used as fowl-house. No pigeons.

* See Figure 18.

† See Figure 19.

‡ See Figure 20.