

St. Stephen's Church.

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This Church is one of the three Churches founded about the year 950 by Ulsinus, the sixth Abbot of St. Albans, on the highways facing the principal entrances to the Monastery, in order to encourage people to live near. One Church he dedicated to St. Michael, the chief angel; one to St. Peter, the foremost apostle, and this Church to St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The Church was placed beside the old Roman road of Watling-street, and occupies the site of what was once an extra-mural cemetery for the inhabitants of Verulamium. The Vicarage belonged to the Abbot and Monastery of St. Albans, and on the Dissolution was granted to Sir Richard Lee, of Sopwell, together with the Leper Hospital of St. Julians a short distance away. Sir Richard appears to have rebuilt the house, and carried a brick wall round it. The brick wall still exists, but the house was pulled down and rebuilt, about 1660, by John Ellis, citizen and draper of London, which house still remains.

Of the Saxon Church built by Ulsinus nothing now remains. Being in a thickly wooded district, destitute of stone, it was probably built of wood, and it was not until the time of Ealdred, the eighth Abbot, that we find the old city of Verulam being used as a quarry for materials. The Church now consists of a chancel, with south chapel, nave with south aisle, south porch, and wooden western bell tower. The chancel of the Church points almost due south-east, the point on which the sun would rise on St. Stephen's Day, the 26th of December, but I cannot think that it was done intentionally, as St. Michael's, St. Peter's and the Abbey Church itself all point in an almost similar direction.

The Church seems to have been rebuilt in late Norman times, as it is recorded that it was dedicated by Ralph, Bishop of Durham* during the Abbacy of Robert de Gorham (1151-1166).† As that is the Transitional period, we should have expected to see something more elaborate than the present remains indicate. Portions of the Norman building still exist in the west wall, with its quoins of Roman bricks, and two small round headed windows. There is another window of the same size and probably of the same date now in the west wall of the heating chamber. This may have been removed from the old north aisle. Of this Norman north aisle only one built-up arch remains. The rectangular piers, with impost, and the plain arch, bear a strong resemblance to the north arcade at St. Michael's Church. The piers between the arches, too, must have been wide here as there, and the arcade probably consisted of three arches. If the work here were erected in the late period of Robert de Gorham, that at St. Michael's may belong to the same time, in which case it would be easy to account for the earlier arches above the north arcade at St. Michael's as having been erected in Norman times, instead of ascribing them to Saxon work.

The next works carried out consisted in rebuilding, or perhaps lengthening, the west end of the north aisle

* Matt. Paris "Lives of the Abbots.

† Gilbert, Bishop of Limerick, consecrated a Church here (1101-1111) Viet. Hist. II. 428. This earlier date agrees better with the character of the Norman work of the west end.

—the two built up arches can be seen on the outside ; building the south chancel chapel, which was dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, and adding the south nave aisle. Most of this work appears to belong to the 13th century, but some of it is certainly later as you will see in the eastern respond of the south nave arcade, and the next pier westward, where the caps and bases are quite different in section to the other work, though the arch sections are similar. The caps of the western respond and the three piers eastward are of unmistakeable 13th century section, but the upper stop to the splay on the respond is later in character and is similar to those on the eastern respond of which I shall speak presently. These western piers have no moulded bases, merely splayed plinths. The two western bays of the arcade are considerably narrower than the others, being only 7ft. between the piers, whereas the central bay is 9ft. 6in. wide, and the two eastern bays are each 10ft. 6in. This was evidently done to make the bays on the south side uniform with those on the north, the width of which was limited by the space available between the old Norman arch and the western wall of the nave. The large blocks of flint conglomerate, known as "pudding stones," under the western respond and under the wall outside, and, I believe, under the chapel walls, should be noticed. I have come across a good many examples in Hertfordshire, and they are nearly always under Norman or early English walling, and in positions evidently not intended to be hidden. These were probably used merely because their size and hardness made them suitable as foundations, or perhaps the builders may have had the text in their minds "Upon this Rock I will build My Church."

The south chapel also belongs to this period, which I should say, roughly, would be between 1250 and 1270. At that time probably the only opening between it and the chancel was the squint, about 8 inches wide, now partly built up, but still visible in the chancel. This points directly towards the high altar, and affords presumptive evidence that the former chancel was the same length as the present. The use of the squint was to enable the priest officiating in the chapel to witness the elevation of the Host at the high altar. The three

lancet windows and the double piscina, and perhaps the aumbry, belong to the 13th century building. The window between the lancets in the west end was inserted in 1861. A very peculiar feature may be noticed on the inside of the south wall of this chapel, the face of the wall having a regular slope, or batter, from floor to wallhead. This has been occasionally observed in Continental Churches, and has been attributed to the desire of the builders to give the suggestion of the side of a ship, the name nave being derived from "navis," a ship. I can see no structural use for it here.

The next work to the Church was done not long after the aisle and chapel. For some reason, perhaps failure of the 13th century work, the two eastern bays of the south nave arcade had to be rebuilt. They were probably widened at the same time, for, as I mentioned before, these two bays are each 12 inches wider than the central one. I think we can fix the date of this work to within a decade by comparing it with the bays erected by Abbot Hugh de Eversdone, between 1308 and 1326, on the south side of the nave in the Abbey Church, the sections of the caps and bases of the eastern respond and of the next pier westward here, being almost identical with those in the triforium in the Abbey Church, and the stops to the splays, too, are very similar. The coloured decoration on the nave arches has been done recently, and is a copy of the old painting, which had almost disappeared.

Judging from the splayed wooden jambs of the chancel arch, which are the only remains of the old chancel, I am inclined to think that the chancel must have been rebuilt about this time—say, about 1320.

Some time a little before the middle of the 15th century a considerable rebuilding seems to have taken place. The north aisle was removed and the wall rebuilt, leaving, however, one Norman arch and the two Early English arches embedded in the wall. A north doorway was inserted under the Norman arch, but since then it has been built up. The outer wall of the south aisle was rebuilt, the clearstory raised, and the chancel rebuilt. The western doorway and two windows in the south chapel also belong to this period, as may also some portions of the wooden belfry at the west

end. The belfry, however, has been very considerably altered, as you will see by comparing it with a print hanging at the west end of the aisle, and to which the date of 1841 has been assigned. The same print shows battlements on the south aisle, externally, which have disappeared. The Vicar has attached a very interesting note to the frame of this print, to the effect that, in June, 1840, the Vestry resolved to pull down this Church and re-use the materials in erecting a new one at Frogmore, a resolution very happily rescinded at the next Vestry. The arch between the chancel and south chapel is, I think, a late 15th century insertion. The built-up doorway on the north side of the chancel appears to belong to the 16th century, and from the plan of the doorway it is evident it was always intended to open into a vestry or other erection, and never opened directly into the open air.

The early 15th century font is a very interesting piece of work. It is made of soft "clunch" and has been a good deal mutilated. It consists of an octagonal shaft and basin, standing on a wide shallow-moulded base. In each side of the shaft is a cusped niche containing the carved figure of a saint, and above the shaft and supporting the basin are demi-figures representing the four Evangelists, winged, and with scrolls across their breasts, and between each is a shield. The whole font bears traces of colour, and probably the shields were emblazoned with arms, but nothing legible now remains. Some of the figures round the shaft are easily identified, but others are very doubtful. The following is a list of them, and I am indebted to the Vicar for helping me to identify them. On the east side, St. John the Baptist, clothed in skins and holding an Agnus Dei within a circle in his hand; on the S.E., a figure in armour, left hand resting on a sword, right holding a dagger, probably St. Alban; on the S., St. George, thrusting a spear into the mouth of the dragon, or this may be St. Michael; on the S.W., the woman who anointed Christ's head, holding a box of ointment; on the W., the Virgin crowned, holding the Infant Christ; on the N.W., St. Mary Magdalene, clothed in her own hair; on the N., a figure, crowned, holding a cross

within a circle in his left hand and a sword in his right, King Offa or King Edmund; on the N.E., St. Stephen, holding a book in his left hand and stones in his right.

Probably the most interesting object in the Church is the old brass eagle lectern. It was discovered about the year 1750, buried in the earth under the chancel. It consists of a beautifully-moulded shaft, mostly circular, but with one portion hexagonal, and which supports a well-modelled eagle with outstretched wings. On one of the bands is the inscription in old German characters, "Georgius Creichtoun. Episcopus Dunkeldensis"; on the front of the globe is a Bishop's mitre, with crozier, and on the back is a similar device between two shields, each charged with a lion rampant, the Arms of Bishop Crichton (Argent; a lion rampant azure). This George Crichton was Lord Privy Seal of Scotland in 1529, and Bishop of Dunkeld (1527-1543), but was previously Abbot of Holyrood (1515-1522), and seems to have presented this lectern to the Abbey. He was also the founder of St. Thomas's Hospital, in Edinburgh, and the Prelate, who is recorded to have "thanked God that he knew neither the Old nor the New Testament, and yet had prospered well enough all his days" The lectern is supposed to have been brought from Scotland by Sir Richard Lee, of Sopwell, who accompanied the Earl of Hertford on his Edinburgh raid in 1544. We know, from Camden, that Sir Richard brought a brazen font from Holyrood, which he presented to St. Albans Abbey, and which Fuller says was destroyed during the Civil War, and it seems probable that he also brought the lectern and gave it to his own Church of St. Stephen. It escaped destruction by being buried in the chancel.

On one of the nave piers is an interesting memorial of the Civil War. It consists of the words, "Adveniat R." ("May the King come") roughly cut in the stone. This was probably done by one of the three thousand Royalist prisoners whom Fairfax brought to his headquarters at St. Albans, and is recorded to have confined in Hertfordshire Churches, after the capture of Colchester in 1648.

There are no monuments of any architectural interest in the Church; they consist of a few mural tablets and a number of inscribed floor slabs.

There is one brass left, without an inscription, with the figures of a man and his wife and nine children, and is believed to be the one mentioned by Chauncy to William Robins, Clerk of the Signet to Edward IV., and who died in 1482. This brass lies on the floor of the south chapel, and is partly hidden under a cupboard, but a drawing of it is hung on the adjoining wall.

By the kindness of the Vicar, I shall give an extract from a book containing old parish records. The question arose in consequence of a difference of opinion between the then Vicar (the Rev. C. Lomax) and the Vestry as to who was responsible for the repair and insurance of the building to the south of the present chancel, it being argued by the parishioners that it formed part of the chancel. Counsel was consulted, and the following extract, being his opinion, was taken from the book:—"In consequence of a resolution of Vestry, held the 11th day of July, 1828, to take into consideration the repairs of the chancel end of the Church of the parish of St. Stephen's, a meeting took place at the above Church on Friday, the 12th day of June, 1829. Mr. Ralph Smith, and Mr. Edward Wyman, two of the churchwardens of the parish, attended on one side, and the Rev. Caleb Lomax, the Lay Impropiator, with his solicitor, Mr. Story, on the other. Such evidence was then produced, and such observation made as each party thought proper to bring before me, and I have also from research and otherwise bestowed upon the subject in dispute the best consideration in my power. Upon the whole, I am clearly of opinion that the building adjoining the south side of St. Stephen's Church is no part of the chancel of the Church. A chancel is defined to be 'the eastern part of a church in which the altar is placed,' and it is usually separated from the nave or body of the Church by an open screen or lattice-work called in Latin "cancelle," from which expression the word chancel is derived. Now it appears upon a careful inspection of this building that it is not situated in that part of the Church in which the altar is placed, and moreover it is separated from that part by a solid wall, which constitutes the south side of the Church. I am inclined to think that it is no part of the south aisle of the Church, as Sir Henry Chauncy seems to suppose in

his History of Hertfordshire, page 506, but it is a separate and distinct chapel. In neither case, however, whether chapel or aisle, the Lay Impropiator, whose obligations extend only to the chancel, would be liable to repair it. The structure itself shows that it was erected in very early times and was formerly used for purposes of devotion and sepulture. Niches may still be seen in which were placed the images of saints, and there is also another recess, which in Catholic times was probably used for holy water. It has every appearance of having originally been a place of worship in the nature of a chapel or chantry, founded perhaps by some religious person in the neighbourhood, in order that Masses might be performed for his soul. Similar buildings are not infrequent, and may be observed sometimes attached, as this is, to the parish Church, and sometimes situated even within it. It has one very striking and distinguishing feature for a separate chapel; namely, the floor at the eastern end is raised above the west so as to form a sort of chancel of its own. Clutterbuck, in his history of this county (vol I., page 231), distinctly treats this building in question as a chapel. He there says 'The present Church of St. Stephen's consists of a chancel with a chapel on its south side'; and Mr. Salmon, in his 'History of Herts' (page 92), describes it still more particularly. In speaking of the tombs within it, he says, 'in the south chapel, called "St. Mary's," is the following inscription. "Under this stone lieth the body of James Ellis, eldest son of John Ellis, Esq., of St. Julian's born March 15th, 1643, died June 29th, 1688"; another for Gyles Russell, citizen of London, 1669; another of William Kentish, of Burston, gentleman, who died May 26th, 1668.'" All these tombs and inscriptions may still be seen in this building, and no stronger proof can be given that it was originally no part of the Church but an independent chapel than the circumstance mentioned by Salmon of the Church being dedicated to St. Stephen and this chapel to the Virgin Mary. It follows, of course, that if it be no part of the Church it can be no part of the chancel of that Church. . . . Before any person should be made liable for so heavy a charge upon his private property, it is necessary to show, and to show clearly too, not a mere

solitary instance but repeated instances of repairs done and paid by the individual intended to be charged, or by some of his ancestors. In the absence of such proof, and with such strong historical and documentary evidence to the contrary, I am of opinion that the parishioners of St. Stephen's, who alone are interested in the building and have the sole control over it, are the proper parties upon whom the expense of repairing it should fall.—George Watlington, June 15th, 1829.”