

Historical Sketch of St. Andrew's Church, Backwell.

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IT would have been impossible for me to venture to read a paper on this subject in the presence of so many who know so much more of archæology than myself, if I had not had the advantage which can only be enjoyed by one on the spot, of gathering together the opinions of many leaders of opinion—both architects and archæologists—upon the building in which we are assembled. To them I am indebted for any amount of interest which the following pages may possess.

Following the usual division of the styles of architecture into Norman, Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular, we may say that we have in this church fragments which tell of successive buildings or additions to an existing building on this site, in all the four periods in the history of architecture.

Remains of an ancient font under the tower, and of a roughly ornamented stone, built into the hagioscope in the north wall of the chancel, carry us back to the Norman period, and tell of the existence of a church here at least as early as the 12th century.

This must have fallen into decay and at some period, probably in the long reign of Henry III (1216–1272 A.D.), was replaced by a church in the Early English style, of which sufficient remains exist to enable us to form an idea of its dimensions. The most perfect of these remains are in the south wall of the chancel; of which the priest's door, the sedilia, and piscina are in good preservation. The Early English string-course may also be traced on the outside, being diverted to run over the later Perpendicular window. But

besides these more perfect remains, there are other parts which enable us to draw with some certainty the plan of the church as it stood in the 13th century, and lead to the conclusion that it was the same as at present, with the omission of the chancel chapels.

Starting from the priest's door on the south of the chancel, and going round the church towards the west, we find proofs that the south chancel chapel (the present organ chamber) is a later addition, partly from its being built into the door jamb, and partly because the moulding at the base differs from that which beginning at the buttress close to the window of this chapel, runs round the church. The buttress appears to have been cut down, and was no doubt at the end of the Early English aisle. The turret, containing the rood-loft staircase, was evidently not then in existence, but the lower mouldings of the buttress may after this be traced round to the porch, and then on to the west corner of the aisle, and they re-appear throughout the length of the north aisle on the opposite side. In addition to these mouldings the Early English windows may still be traced. The relieving arches over three of these appear on the outside of the south wall. The first, where the rood-loft staircase is (of this one stone may be seen on the east side of the turret); the second to the east of the porch between it and the present window (this window also clearly appears on the inside of the church); and the third over the doorway in the porch. A doubt would have been felt as to the length of the Early English aisles, if it had not been for the moulding before-mentioned, and for some evidence found in the labels over the west windows at the ends of both aisles. That on the south looks like an imitation of, and that on the north exactly corresponds with the label of, the apparently Early English (or possibly Decorated) window in the north aisle, which is now filled with stained glass, representing the Adoration of the Magi; leading to the conclusion that, if not at first, yet at some time during the 13th century (or possibly

the 14th) the length of the church was the same as now, and inviting us to conjecture an earlier tower, much on the same site as the present one.

The porch does not appear to have been built at the same time, but must have been added very shortly after upon not very secure foundations.

We come now to the Decorated period. The family of the Rodneys had long been in possession of one part of the parish, but by the beginning of Edward III's reign (1326 A.D.) they seem to have become owners of the two manors of Backwell, named from the ancient holders De Baiocis and Le Sore;¹ and at some time during the 14th century the Decorated canopy over the Rodney monument must have been erected, probably to the memory of Walter de Rodney who died 1342 (16 Edw. III), who may have been the first owner of the united manors; or to the memory of Sir John Rodeney, knight, who died 1400 (2 Hen. IV).

As we reach the Perpendicular period we find ourselves in that most fertile era of church restoration which reached its height when our country had entered upon its rest from the devastating wars of the Roses, with the accession of Henry VII in 1485. Great changes and additions were made in this church at various periods during the 15th century: possibly the earliest is that to which alone we can assign a known date,

(1). The earliest reference that I can find to the Rodney family as owners in Backwell is in *Inq. post mortem*, 16 Edward III (1342 A.D.):—"Walterus de Rodeneye pro Rado Bathon' et Wellens epo et pro priore et conventu de Worspyng—Backwell maner' (together with other manors) remanent eidem Waltero." But Collinson states that on the death of Bishop of Coutances, to whom William the Conqueror gave the place, it was divided into two portions, and one moiety, called Backwell Bayouse, was given to Walter de Rodney. A correspondent tells me that the Rodneys came into the parish in 4 Edw. I (1275 A.D.) by purchase from the ancient Norman family of Le Sore. Apparently this refers to obtaining possession of the second manor. In 1 Hen. V (1413 A.D.) is the first mention of the two portions of the property that I can find under Walter' Rodney, Chivaler, "Bacwell duæ partes manerii et advoc. ecclia," and the same expression occurs again 8 Hen. V (1420 A.D.), upon the death of John Rodeney, Chevaler; but it is not found repeated under later owners.

viz., the handsome tomb in the chancel, with recumbent figure of a knight, which, I am informed, may be identified by the coats of arms² as that of Sir Walter Rodney, who married Margaret, daughter of Walter Lord Hungerford, and died 1466 (6 Edw. IV).

By this time we must suppose that the Early English church of 200 years before had fallen into bad repair—who can say how?—perhaps by the fall of the spire from an earlier tower,³ and various works were accomplished by successive benefactors during the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries. These may be thus enumerated: First and chief in importance was the rebuilding of the nave (the ancient arches apparently being replaced on higher pillars),⁴ the re-roofing of the aisles, and the addition of the chapels on either side of the choir. About the same time we may suppose the buttresses were built to strengthen the old Early English walls of the chancel, and at a somewhat later date the corner ones at the west end of the south aisle and at the entrance arch of the porch. The altered mouldings of the capitals of the three westernmost pillars on the south side of the nave lead us to suppose that this restoration was not wholly completed at one time, and the windows were evidently inserted at different dates, replacing the older ones with Perpendicular tracery, being gifts, as we may suppose (somewhat similarly to the stained glass windows of our own day), of various members of the Rodney and other families who were connected with the parish during this cen-

(2). In centre, Rodney; to right, Peveril and Hungerford; to left, Hungerford of Heytesbury and Fitz James. On west face, Bayhouse, ancient owner of one of the manors.

(3). There is a local tradition that the tower was once struck by lightning; but this probably refers to the present one, and will explain the apparently later character of the upper story, which bears marks of being less delicately executed than the rest of it.

(4). It has been supposed by some that the arches and pillars of the nave belonged originally to the Decorated period. The objection to this view is that it necessitates the supposition that the nave was twice rebuilt, since there are clear evidences of an Early English building in the points already specified, and in the corbels on which the roof of the south aisle rests.

ture.⁵ Lastly, we may suppose the work was crowned by the building of the tower, which is one of the ornaments of this county, so rich in noble towers.⁶

The following inscription may be clearly discerned with the aid of a glass upon the tower, on its west face, on the north side of the window of the ringing loft.

Thē - spca Ic - bj

This is incorrectly given by Rutter in his *Delineations of Somerset*. It has been variously interpreted, but no satisfactory suggestion has yet come to my knowledge.

Some minor points of interest will be found in the following

(5). The following are known from *Inquis. post mortem* to have died possessed of property in the parish during this period:—Sir Walter Rodney, 1413; Sir John Rodney, 1420; Alicia, widow of Sir John Rodney who died 1400 (afterwards married to Sir Wm. Boneville), 1425; Isabella, Countess of Warrewyk, 1439; Henry de Bello Campo, Earl of Warrewyk, 1445; Sir Willelmus Zouch, 1468; Sir Thomas Rodney, 1469, and his widow Isabella (who afterwards married Wm. Pawlett), 1478.

(6). In the year 1502 (18 Henry VIII), on Monday in the week of Pentecost (Whit-Monday), a piece of land, containing one acre and a half arable and one styche pasture, was handed over to the parishioners of Backwell, their title dating back in a succession of deeds to 1349 (24 Edward III). In a lease of this land dated 1606, it is mentioned that it was held by the parishioners in trust "for the use of repairing and maintaining of the church of Backwell." And in another lease dated 1658, in which a cottage appears as added to the property, it is mentioned that "the premises" were given to the churchwardens for ever "by the will of Edmund Teynt, sometimes of Backwell deceased, for repairing and maintaining the said church." It has not been discovered who the donor of the land was, the names on the older deeds being those of which no record has been found. The property has continued to be handed on from one generation of the parishioners to the next to the present day. The following names appear on the deeds, 1349 A.D., Feoffment from John Badenam de Barwe to Robert de Lydeneye. Later in the same year, Robert de Lydeneye of Claverham grants it to Richard le Hayward of Backwell. 1400 A.D., Feoffment from Richard le Hayward of Bacwelle to John Whytyng, junr. 1498 A.D., Feoffment from Rowland, son of John Whytyng, deceased, to John Pастey and his heirs for ever. 1502 A.D., Feoffment from John Pастey de Flexbourton, husbandman, to Robert Feylond, John Voull, Wm. Crosse, and Wm. Edson, and their heirs for ever. After this date many names of each generation of parishioners occur.

adornments which may be assigned to about the same date :— the sanctus bell-cot; the rood-screen with its turret staircase, and the singularly beautiful, solitary, clerestory window to lighten it; and the two great niches, whose canopies were added to adorn the sanctuary on either side of a stone altar-piece, the remains of which (discovered at the time of the restoration) have been replaced by the present carving by Earp.

Two other points of much archæological interest remain: the vestry or cell on the north of the sanctuary, and the inscription over the chancel tomb.

1. Entering by a small Perpendicular doorway at the north end of the altar, we find ourselves in a small chamber, which has excited the curiosity of many. A small window, high up in the gable, leads to the conclusion that it formed a part of the Early English church. An examination of the outer wall shows that it was diminished in size by the insertion of the Rodney chapel between it and the chapel on the north of the choir: and it seems almost certain that the ancient piece of walling on which the hagioscope from the Rodney chapel is formed was once a portion of this chamber, the present opening being either the ancient loop-hole through which its inmate shared in the services, or made up from the stones which once served as a window. The most probable explanation of the use of this chamber is that it was originally a cell in which an anchorite lived, as Dunstan did in more ancient times at Glastonbury. It may have belonged to an earlier building than the Early English chancel; for this side of the chancel is known to have been ruinous, and rebuilt some forty years ago; and at some time late in the Perpendicular period it was probably turned into a vestry or priest's chamber, by the addition of the late window, doorway, and quatrefoil opening. Another suggestion is, that it may have served for a lodging for the poor brother who used to be sent to perform the services by the master of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Redcliff Pit; to whom, in 1306, the bishop granted the rectory, and upon

whose presentation he admitted, in 1343, a vicar to the said church.⁷ As the wall between this chamber and the Rodney chapel does not appear to be in its original position, the remains of what looks like a fireplace in it do not necessarily touch upon its original purpose.

2. We come lastly to the inscription to the memory of Lady Elizabeth Chaworth, formerly the wife of Sir Walter Rodney, who was High Sheriff of Somerset, 1511, and died some time before 1526.

First, I would call attention to the good work done by a Bristol archæologist of a century ago (Mr. Henry Burgum), who, in 1770, presented a brass plate containing an explanation of what he considered to be a Saxon inscription, and thus preserved for us the name of this lady's second husband, which is now gone from the inscription. The inscription runs thus: "Within this chapell lyeth Elizabeth, the first founderys of this chapell, and of the floke of shepe to the quarter tymes; late [wife of Sr John Chaworth], Knight, and before that wife to Sr Walter Rodney, Knyght, and systyr to Sr Wyllyam Compton, Knyght, whyre Elizabeth departed the [3rd day of June], in the yere of grace MCCCCXXXVII."

(7). Collinson, *History of Somerset*. But there seems to be some error in these dates, as we find, *Inquis. post mortem*, 33rd Edward I (A.D. 1304): "Will'm de Burne pro Hospit. Sancti Johis Baptist de Bristol died possessed of 10 acr. terr' (in Backwell) et medietas Advocacionis Ecclie ejusdem Villæ." This leads us to suppose that the hospital had some earlier connection with the church. From the Register of Bishop Drokensford, at Wells, it appears that, in 1311, dominus Will'm de Pykeleslegh was admitted "ad parochialem eccl. de Bacwell vacantem per mortem Guidonis de Shemiden" (*written over*, "nuper institutus in eadem"), on the presentation of Lady La Soor "veræ patronæ ejusdem." Unfortunately some words in this entry, which might more fully explain the circumstances, appear at present undecipherable. And under date 1329 of the same Register it is recorded that Milo de Monyton was admitted and instituted Vicar, with mention of the Master, Brethren, and Sisters of the Hospital (apparently) as Patrons. After this I can find no entry, until, in 1430, Matthew Will'm Frome was instituted on the presentation of Lord Walter Hungerford de Heytesbury, but whether as Rector or Vicar does not appear. The grant of the Rectory to an ecclesiastic accounts for there being both a Rector and a Vicar of this parish, as continued to the present day, in addition to a lay-rector of later origin.

Secondly, there is, I am told by more than one kind correspondent, no question as to the meaning of the words "flope of shepe" and "quarter tymes." They refer to an endowment for the curate of the church (or for the chantry priest), who had the wool or its value in money at the Ember seasons, for his salary, in return for certain services.⁸

Thirdly, it is an interesting fact that we possess the remains of the tomb-stone of this Lady Elizabeth, which may be seen under the tower.

Fourthly, the great question remains as to the chapel, of which Lady Elizabeth was the first "founderys." There are two difficulties in the way. One, because, as the date of her death is 1537, and the architecture of the monument belongs, in part, to at least 150 years before, it appears more than strange how she could be the first foundress of a chapel, which has been taken to belong to the same date as the monument. The other, because the inscription is already too long for the position in which it is found; and, when it contained the words now lost, it must have been about one foot three inches longer still; which leads to the supposition that it belonged really to some other place, and referred to some altogether different chapel.

Is any solution possible, which will both unravel the intricacies of the monument, and make good the traditional interpretation of this lady's claim, as being the foundress of this chapel, with its almost unique roof of stone beams?

An outside view shows, as already stated, that this chapel is later than the buildings on either side of it. And as the label to the window overlooking its roof agrees with that of other of the Perpendicular windows, there seems no reason to doubt but that the chapel to the north of the choir belongs to the

(8). Extract of will of Earl Rivers, Feb. 20, 1490: "To the Parish Church of Grafton all such cattle as I now have at Grafton, viz., 2 oxen, 5 kine, and 2 bullocks, to the intent that they shall yearly keep an obit for my soul, viz., Dirige and Mass of requiem by the Curate, 4 priests, and 4 clerks, also a herse and 4 tapers, every priest taking for his wages 5d., and every clerk 3d." (*Vet Testam*, 403.)

Perpendicular period. This brings us to fix a necessarily late date for the Rodney chapel. Moreover, the window and the doorway agree with the age of Lady Elizabeth. But then, the roof appears to belong to the Decorated canopy of the earlier memorial. How can this difficulty be evaded? Careful examination shows that parts of one rib only in the roof of the chapel are equally as elaborate in workmanship as the canopy outside of it; and after weighing a multitude of opinions, I am disposed to give this account of the whole matter. In the 14th century a recess was sunk in the chancel wall, and the canopy erected in memory of a Rodney—probably Walter de Rodney, who died 1342. In the 15th century a second memorial was erected to the memory of Sir Walter Rodney, who died 1466, grandfather (?) of the first husband of this Lady Elizabeth; and the tomb containing his effigy was partly recessed into the wall beneath the former monument. In the 16th century the Lady Elizabeth, in her grief at the early death of her husband, who died in his father's lifetime, founded and endowed the chapel, which was built (there is little doubt) in this way. The recess of the earliest monument was opened completely through the wall, and the wall of the ancient cell was removed further to the east, making room for the chapel as it is now; in which the style of the canopy was followed as far as possible in the ribs of the roof, though the masons failed exactly to copy the more elaborate earlier work. At the same time, the arched opening between the Rodney chapel and that to the west of it was either entirely made, or enlarged from a hagioscope which may possibly have existed before in connection with the canopied memorial, and a screen was placed in this opening. Upon the Lady Elizabeth's death the inscription, either by design or mistake, was made for this longer opening; and the panel, with the coats of arms—which, I am told, represent her marriages⁹—was probably intended to be placed,

(9). 1, Rodney. 2, Chaworth. 3, Rodney, Chaworth and Compton. 4, Compton. 5, Le Sor, the ancient owners of the manor.

together with the inscription (with which its moulding agrees), under this arch¹⁰—now utilised as a vestry cupboard. At some date the screen was replaced by the wall, which before the restoration of the church blocked up the whole opening. The screen was destroyed, or possibly removed to the back of the tomb, and fitted as at present into the older work. The Decorated canopy was cut to admit the panel, with its shields, and the inscription was introduced as best it might be. This may have been carried out by Mr. Rice Davis, who married a Rodney, and “re-edified this chapel”; he died in 1638, and was buried here, and a brass exists within the chapel to his memory. Repairs to the wall on the north side of the church some forty years ago may probably have occasioned the loss of the words from Lady Elizabeth’s inscription; and we can easily suppose that it was neatly put together again without them.

(10). This opening measures 9 feet 1 inch; the inscription, 8 feet 7½ inches, or, allowing for the words now lost, 9 feet 10 inches. The opening of the arch where the inscription is placed measures 7 feet 5 inches. So that, allowing for mouldings on either side over which the inscription might extend, there would probably be ample room for it at the longer arch. At the time of the restoration of the church by the late G. E. Street, R.A., in 1872, it was intended to open this arch down to the ground; but a weakness in the adjoining pier prevented this being done.
