

## CIRCULAR TOWERS.

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BY CLAUDE MORLEY, F.E.S., F.Z.S.

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The interesting round towers are one of the peculiarities of Eastengle churches to the present day ; and, after somewhat close examination, I am certainly of the opinion that not only the original principle but the majority of those we still possess are of pre-Norman origin. Besides the first ones of 1861 (E. Angl. N. and Q., i, pp. 108, 139, 165), two lists of the Suffolk Towers have been published : by Raven (History of Suffolk) in 1895, at p. 59, and by Bryant (County Churches) in 1912 at p. 20 ; but neither is complete. The former list enumerates forty-five churches, erroneously including those of Nowton, Rushmere near Ipswich, Thornham Parva and Westleton, and excluding Spexhall ; the latter equally erroneously omits both Burgh Castle and Spexhall, possibly also others that I have not noted. So that the true total of those in Suffolk nowadays is forty-two.

A Norfolk coast one, Eccles Tower of which two large blocks were still lying upon the beach in 1922, was blown down during 1895 " and in its fall revealed its wheatstalk-like construction. From its appearance it was evidently built in sections of about ten or twelve feet. Each portion is perfectly smooth where broken off in its fall, as if the builder allowed one portion to firmly settle before another was added. This is

observable throughout the circular portion.\* The walls of this part are exactly five feet in thickness. The massive tower-arches, always on the east side, testify to the ecclesiastical nature of the structures, evidently intended to open into a church; and the frequent contiguity of church and landlord's homestead rendered the tower and bell useful for many mixed purposes. Among the laws passed by King Æthelstan in the year 937 was one which necessitated the building of a bell-tower on the estate of a Thegn. This wise regulation I regard as having given rise to many of those round towers, which are hardly to be found out of East Anglia," says Raven *loc. cit.*; and the acknowledged complement of such towers in Danish days (Streatfeild's *Danes*, 1884, p. 51) certainly makes for a pre-Conquestal origin, though this very restriction seems to me the strongest argument against their connection with so universal a law. Badham (*All Saints, Sudbury*) in 1852, p. 70, considers that an any-shaped "bell-tower is the badge of a church with parochial rights, and seems to have been so since the days of Æthelstan, when the patronage of such a structure was one of the qualifications for the title of Thegn. Chapels were content with a turret."

Raven found "that these structures thicken as we approach the coast, where in all probability the

\* This method of construction is quite certainly survived from the Romans. "In the Wall of Hadrian, whin-stones were "puddled in" amongst the mortar to fill up the interior of the wall. This done, more courses of facing stones were built up, and then the interior filled in the same manner. In the walls of Richborough, and at other places, we trace a number of small holes on the face of the walls, which are probably made to support scaffolding ["putlog-holes," invariably conspicuous in Suffolk circular towers In]. some cases, where the walls, as at Wroxeter seu Uriconium, were not more than three feet thick, these holes go right through" (Wright's *Roman and Saxon*, p 161). This sectional method of erection, unfortunately, is not shown in the illuminated MS. (Harl. no. 603) in the Brit. Mus., "which appears to belong to the latter end of the Anglo-Saxon period, and in which we find several pictures of walled towns"; though it does figure circular towers, with strong hewn-stone courses at each angle of the walls, and thus proves such to have then been in vogue.

Scandinavian population most abounded," and if we restrict the latter to Svein's Danish (to the exclusion of Ivar's Norse) followers he is right ; though what such a population has to do with Saxon thegns is not explained by him. He was, doubtless, thinking of the time when all such towers were thought Danish. "The Norfolk and Suffolk round steeples were long popularly ascribed to the Danes ; and Mr. Britton, in his essay on the Architecture of the Anglo-Saxon period, countenances this opinion. He says 'the round towers attached to churches in Norfolk and Suffolk have been attributed to the Danes. As examples of architecture, they are certainly devoid of science or beauty in design ; and the masonry is of the very rudest and most unskilful kind. They may fairly be referred to an age of barbarism ; and no period of the English annals is more entitled to this appellation than that of the Danish, under the reigns of Canute, Harold and Hardicanute' (Arch. Antiquities, p. 74)," says Suckling at p. xxxi.

But John Gage, who has some Observations on the Ecclesiastical Round Towers of Norfolk and Suffolk, with eight plates in Vol. xxiii., p. 12, of *Archæologia*, remarks in his Thingoe Hundred that "if this were so, we might expect to find them in Northumbria, where the Danish dynasty held full sway, or we might expect to find them in the mother country ; but we do not. They are nearly entirely confined to the limits of East Anglia ; there being 125 round towers in Norfolk, forty in Suffolk\* ; and in the rest of England only two

\* For Suffolk ones, cf. N. & Q., 4th ser. ix., pp. 136, 186, 249, 327, 391, 455 ; and Add. MSS. in Brit. Mus. no. 6754. For those of Eastengle, cf. Brit. Arch. Assoc. xxi., pp. 162-80 ; and other papers in vol. xxxviii., xliv., xlv. and xlvi. The remains of a former round tower at Harleston, on the Waveney, were discovered about 1860 ("Notes on the Parish of Redenhall with Harleston," by Charles Chandler, 1897). That of St. George's in Ipswich, named in Domesday, was also circular, at least till the end of the 16th century, if it be that shown in the 1st ed. of Fox's Martyrs, illustrating an execution, said to be Bilney's.

in Berkshire, two in Sussex, one in Surrey, two in Cambs, one in Northants and seven in Essex." Nor will Suckling in 1846, p. xxxiii., allow that they are pre-Conquestal: "By far the greater number of these structures are unquestionably Norman; and very few are dubious in their character and construction. Their masonry may be described as consisting of rough and whole flints laid in very tenacious mortar. In a few cases the flints are broken, and the squared faces laid outwards with considerable attention to regularity [hardly the most usual style of Norman work!]. They rise on an average to the height of fifty or sixty feet [usually less, and I do not believe a single original top remains in Suffolk], upon a diameter of fifteen or sixteen; the thickness of the walls, in most cases, occupying the greater half," which is to say that they are over three and three-quarter feet thick.

It may be of use to here collate my personal measurements and observations upon the Suffolk round towers, though I will say at once that so large a proportion of them has been repaired, refaced, restored and re-topped that I hesitate to draw any very definite conclusions. The figures refer to (1st column) the total circumference in feet externally at about five feet from the ground; (2nd column) the thickness of the tower-wall in inches, usually at its west door or window; and (3rd column) whether the tower tapers towards its summit, if not it is apparently cylindrical throughout.

## GROUP A.

Bradwell	..	..	56½	40	No
Burgh Castle	..	..	58	32½	No
Belton	..	..	56	(rebuilt)	Yes
Ashby	..	..	53	53	—
Lound	..	..	54	54	No.
Fritton	..	..	54	37	No
Herringfleet	..	..	55	50	No

## GROUP A.

Blundeston .. ..	50	38	No
Gunton .. ..	46	59	—
Mutford .. ..	64	56	No
Gisleham .. ..	48	60	No
Rushmere, N. ...	48	40	No

## GROUP B.

Frostenden .. ..	57 $\frac{1}{4}$	52 $\frac{1}{2}$	No
Spexhall .. ..	..	(totally rebuilt)	..
Wissett .. ..	54	—	Yes
Holton .. ..	44	40	—
Thorington .. ..	56 $\frac{1}{4}$	42 $\frac{1}{2}$	No
Bramfield .. ..	63 $\frac{1}{2}$	60	No
Theberton .. ..	56	42	Yes
[Buxlow .. ..	c. 50	ruins alone left]	..

## GROUP C.

[Beccles, Endgate : ? Castle-farm)]			
Barsham .. ..	57 $\frac{1}{2}$	50	Yes
Mettingham .. ..	50	53	No
Bungay .. ..	62	40	No
Ilketshall St. A. ..	68	52	No
Ilketshall St. M. ..	59	—	Yes
Elmham .. ..	40	30	No
Weybread .. ..	65	—	No.
Syleham .. ..	—	60	Yes
Brome .. ..	64	—	No
Stuston .. ..	50	45	No.
Wortham .. ..	90	50	—
Rickinghall .. ..	c. 57	54	No.

## GROUP D.

Beyton .. ..	56 $\frac{1}{2}$	35	Yes
Hengrave .. ..	54	33	Yes
Risby .. ..	53 $\frac{1}{4}$	42	No.
Saxham .. ..	60	—	No.

## UNGROUPED : E.

Ramsholt	.. .. c.	52	—	Bulges
Hasketon	.. ..	60	64	No.
Bruisyard	.. ..	59	48	Yes
Thorp (Ashfield)	.. ..	49½	40	—
Onehouse	.. ..	46	—	No
Aldham	.. ..	50	36	Yes
Bradley Parva	.. ..	58	45	Yes

*TOTAL, FORTY-TWO TOWERS.*

“The round tower is a feature, which has given rise to much controversy,” say the Parkers in 1855; “for a length of time it was boldly asserted that the whole of these were the work of a very early period, but more attentive examination has led, in many instances, to a different conclusion; for while it may be conceded that some have all the character of early work about them, it is equally clear that in others there is every mark of work as late as the fourteenth century,” which in no way disproves a pre-Conquestal origin. There was no more a law against rebuilding the upper part of Saxham Parva in its original circular form during 1120 than the tower of Spexall upon its acknowledged Saxon foundation in its original circular form on 11th August, 1911. Hence it is not surprising that “these towers are of different ages. Some have distinct features of early and some of late Norman architecture, and some have characteristics of early English style. Mr. Parker’s theory is that, constructed of flint as they are without exception, they are built round to suit the material, and to save the expense of the stone quoins which are necessary for square corners and which were difficult to procure in districts where the building stone had all to be imported,” as is said at Suff. Inst., 1888, p. xlv.; accepted as the “simplest explanation of the form” by Baldwin Brown in 1903, p. 183; and upheld by Bryant in 1912, p. 9.

Here, then, are three theoretical reasons\* for the circular shape : (1) the Saxon lord's bell-tower ; (2) Danish national influence ; (3) the exigencies of local geological strata. Superficially the first appears the most probable ; but it cannot be maintained because the law was general and our towers, along with all past records of such, peculiarly local. With the second Gage has obviously confused the earlier incursions of the ninth century Norsemen, who were Pagans and utterly distinct, with the Danes of the early eleventh. And when we come to examine the restricted distribution of these towers south of the Waveney, the third theory at once becomes as impracticable as the first.

The usual speculations and some valuable suggestions are expressed by H.M. Doughty : " May it not be that these churches and towers were built by the same hands at the same time together ; the earliest, rudest churches not of timber ; and were both copied from, debased Roman models ? In composition, a church built at Rome by Constantine [who died at York in 337], St. John without the Walls, is like a building of the style called Norman, and Norman-looking zig-zag moulding adorned the palace of Diocletian at Spalatro. As Saxon or Norman church-builders did no doubt copy Roman work for churches, why should they not have copied the Roman round towers, too ? When Romans built Burgh Castle, they built round towers in rubble ; with, as at Fritton, a course here and there of brick. They found here flints in plenty but no stone ; and, without stone for corners, would find it easiest to build a tower round. And so, when Saxons or Normans built a church, would they not

\*A very different one was given for the round tower at Pentlow by a native, who *ought* to know ; he " explained to us that, before the flood, it had been used as a well ; and, when the inhabitants of the new generation who resided on that spot were looking for a place to build a church, they selected this site because the old well would do for a steeple ; and therefore they built the church to it " (E. Anglian N. & Q. 1868, p. 310). A capital example of the varying periods at which distinct parts of a single church may be erected !

also, as a Roman would have done with the same materials, be likely to have built round towers? If they had been watch-towers, would the added church have nearly always joined them? [This seems a matter of Ordinance.] It would have been easier in building [though an extra west wall were necessary] not to make the junction, and separate towers would have served as well for belfries. Yet only one separate round tower can the writer remember: at Bramfield, where the church and tower stand some thirty feet apart; but Bramfield church is modern, so to speak: decorated work. An earlier church [of which there exists no trace on the tower] may have adjoined the tower" (Summer in Broadland 1897, p. 99).

Twelve of the twenty-two churches in the Lothingland deanery still possess circular towers; and we may well believe those now carried away by the sea before being rebuilt further inland, like Lowestoft, Covehithe and Southwold, were of similar construction. From this main centre in the extreme north-east of the County they spread, exactly as do the Danish place-names of the eleventh century, along both the coast and the River Waveney. The former group (B) consists of Frostenden, Spexhall, Wissett, Holton, Bramfield, Thorington and Theberton.\* The latter (C) is more extensive and comprises Barsham, Ilkeshall Saint Andrew and Saint Margaret, Elmham All Saints, Bungay Trinity, Mettingham, Weybread, Syleham, Brome, Stuston, Rickinghall Inferior and, westernmost, Wortham. Around Saint Eadmund's shrine is a little cluster (D) of four: Beyton, Hengrave,

\*To this group must be added "slight remains of the round tower of Buxlow Church may be found in the garden of a cottage near Knoddishall Red House" (Doughty's Theberton 1910, p. 34); it is close to the windmill at Knoddishall Green, which place constituted the defunct and forgotten parish of Buxlow; for "Notices" of this church, cf. the Tanner MS., cccv., 129. Doubtless many of our lost towers were circular, e.g., the "base of a round tower" was found at the west end of the ruins of Hazlewood by Dr. Hele (Aldeburgh, 1870, p. 33).



Risby and Saxham Parva ; these may be contemporary with Knút's new monastic church there, dedicated on 18th October, 1032. For the rest we have no more than extremely isolated examples at Ramsholt which I find no reason to consider Roman, Hasketon a peculiarly Scandinavian name, Bruisyard doubtless, as its very name implies, an outpost of Framlingham Castle, Thorp a Danish test place-name, Onehouse, Aldham close to King Guthorm's tomb, and Bradley Parva in the extreme south-west, an unexpected position which I would suggest that we owe to the individual lordship of the Danish thegn Ulf Manigesson of Bramfield, above.

The main point that strikes one about those villages, still possessing circular towers, is their common insignificance : Frostenden the seaport, and Bungay the market-town, are the only two with any claim to importance. It is useless to quote their present population in support of the fact, since we must regard it throughout nearly a millennium. Prosperity was not, at first, commercial, but dependent upon the manorial Lord ; and here there is some evidence that he had more connection with the subject than has been hitherto recognised : Thegn Manig Swart, who was pretty surely a pure Dane or his son Ulf owned Bramfield, Syleham, Theberton, Bruisyard and Bradley Parva ; and Healdene, lord of Thorington, was almost certainly the latter's brother. Hence we find the large proportion of six round towers held by a single family about 1050.

That the Hundred's influence is negligible may be inferred from these towers, unequal distribution through that of the Earl : thus—the six Hundreds of Ely's Liberty contain but four ; and the seven (nominally  $8\frac{1}{2}$ ) Hundreds of Bury's Liberty have but seven ; while in the Geldable ones they are thus distributed : Bos-

mere-Claydon and Samford 0, Stow 1, Hoxne 2, Hartismere 3, Wangford 6, Blything 7, and Lothingland 12. Individual wealth would erect the Decorated towers of the twelfth and following century, and the communal prosperity of the wool-staplers contributed the Perpendicular ones of the next hundred and fifty years, as more in keeping with their enlarged churches than were these comparatively insignificant turrets of circular form and no garniture. At first Norman, Early English, and even Decorated windows were misleadingly inserted; the upper storey was frequently elaborated; but by 1375 nothing less than total reconstruction sufficed in, or at the least elevation of the superstructure in a curious octagonal shape of, the Perpendicular style. Among Kirby's "Clothing Woodlands" throughout which weaving thrived, and in his "Sandlings," etc., whence came the wool to weave, no or but isolated examples of such circular towers were suffered to survive; though I do not know if we are justified in considering thus the north-east, as Suffolk's most indigent corner. Lothingland, Stow and Plomesgate Hundreds were of equal wealth in 1327.

When this distribution is compared with that of the place-names (not of townships alone) of Danish origin or influence, it coincides to so remarkable an extent\* that I am led, though there were not a similar tower in all† Denmark, to place faith in the well-nigh "exploded" theory that we owe the inception of our round church towers to the Danish incursions of the early eleventh century; and in no way to Eastengle's dearth of hewn stone. This dearth would affect the north-east of Suffolk to no greater a degree than the

\* I do not know if we may add the restriction of "Lockers for the Processional Cross" also, as further evidence.—Cf. E. Angl. N. & Q., 1886, p. 244 et 1905, p. 176.

† Were the Danes that the pagan Svein Tjúguskeggi left at home in 1004 christianised coevally with those who followed him to England?

remainder of the county ; nay, it would affect it less because to all these places, both in Lothingland and on the Waveney's bank, ships from the quarries of Northants are far more accessible than was transport to the central areas where freestone is everywhere found to have been employed. And when, on the other hand, we compare the method of their structure with such really Norman towers as Eyke, Oulton, Ousden, Orford and Bury, the incongruity of craftsmanship is abundantly apparent.

That such towers have occasionally been rebuilt in their original form is no more than in the nature of things, nor does it tell us upon how many round-tower sites now stand Perpendicular ones. That such towers were actually erected before the Conquest, the typical Saxon triangular-capped windows in the *top*, the latest part, at Herringfleet (with later Norman enrichment) positively prove ; and the rest vary from such avowedly pre-Conquestal work as Syleham and Barsham, through the majority which are usually termed Norman and occasionally transition-Norman—Saxham Parva is composed of level rows of somewhat small stones to the height of the aisle-roof ; the later (Norman) work above this height is utterly distinct, of much larger and quite irregularly disposed stones—to a mediæval structure like Wortham really a class apart, and up to the proved Saxon foundation of Spexhall whereon a circular tower was reared but yesterday. The style seems to have often been too hastily judged by that of the windows, which in almost every case are later insertions, often of the Decorated period as in the ruin at Thorp by Ashfield. Little or nothing reliable is to be deduced from association with the remainder of the church, for one or other is always independently rebuilt : e.g. the tower at Belton (in 1849, says Bryant), the church at Hengrave. We cannot doubt that whatever period the present round tower represents, it at

least commemorates one of the late Saxon time ; and I most certainly regard such parts of the original structure as remain to be the work of the first half of the eleventh century. Our data is, of course, at present quite inadequate to arrive at a definite conclusion ; but, till more be forthcoming, it all focuses upon the forty years preceding the Norman Conquest.