

THE CRYPT OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF SAINT NICHOLAS AT CHILTON CANDOVER.

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A GOOD description of this interesting building and of the circumstances of its discovery was contributed by the Rector, the Rev. E. P. Gough, to *The Winchester Diocesan Chronicle* of May, 1930. It may be worth while, however, to put on record the accompanying plan with a few words of comment and explanation.

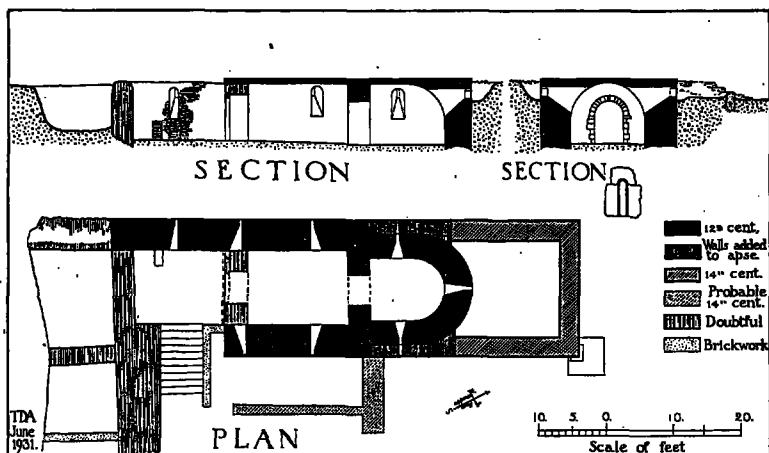
The subject aroused much public interest at the time of Mr. Gough's discovery, and articles appeared in some London newspapers which insisted on calling it an "underground Church." It may therefore be as well to state at the outset that it is a crypt differing in no respect from the numerous other crypts up and down the land, and was a church so far as and no further than any of them.

Without going into the large subject of crypts generally, it may be said that at the time of the Norman Conquest they were already a dying tradition. They had served various purposes of which the celebration of any of the sacred Offices was the least common.

The history of the Chilton Candover crypt is known or can at least be surmised with some approach to certainty. The manor was held in 1086 by Richard de Audeley, one of the Conqueror's captains, under the Bishop of Winchester. It was probably his son who built the church.

The Manor House stood until comparatively recent times. It was immediately to the west of the church, and it seems clear from the character of the surface and from the foundations adjoining the end of the church that the two buildings actually joined. It would appear therefore that de Audeley built a church which would serve at once the parish generally and his own household in particular, with a crypt below it as a mausoleum for his family.

The house was no doubt rebuilt several times before its final destruction, but always on the same site. The latest building faced roughly south-east, like the side of the church, down the gentle incline on which it stands. It thus commanded the fine vista of the wide avenue of yews which begins at the road along the bottom of the valley and ascends the opposite hill to strike the Preston Candover and Alresford Road about half-a-mile further on. Behind the house there is the wreck of a fine bowling green, perhaps originally archery butts.



The Crypt.

But to return to the crypt. The nave measured originally 32 feet by 11 feet. An archway 4ft. 3ins. wide leads into an apsidal chamber, 11ft. long by 9ft. wide ; the total length is 46 feet. The walls of the nave are from 4ft. 6ins. to 4ft. 9ins. thick, and those of the chancel, so to call it, 3ft. 6ins. The building is covered by a barrel vault, the crown of which is 8ft. 9ins. from the floor, and the apse has a half dome ; the vault appears to be about 9ins. thick at the crown. There are three small lancets in the north wall of the nave and two in the remaining part of the south wall. The middle window on each side is blocked by a later wall of uncertain age, 3ft. 6ins. thick, built across the nave ; the wall has a round-arched doorway ; to the west of this cross wall the vault and south wall of the nave have been destroyed. Three similar lancets light the chancel. The sills of these windows are only 2ft. 6ins. below the floor of the church ; they are approximately level with the ground on the south side ; on the north side, owing to the natural slope of the ground, the turf is about level with the church floor. The sills are steeply sloped so that their inner edges are only 4ft. from the floor. The window jambs are curiously irregular, some being splayed and others square.

The walls are faced with flint, the core being no doubt of chalk. The flint is very well laid in courses, the stones slanting to give a herring-bone effect, but this is not found in the later cross wall. I believe that herring-bone work is no indication of an early date, for it is found in the buildings of many periods. The vault was put in as concrete and still shows the marks of the boarded centering. Almost all the plaster has fallen.

The masonry is of very good stone, probably from the Isle of Wight. It is noticeable that the piers of the chancel arch have their angles smoothly rounded off to a height of from 2 to 3 feet, except the lowest stone which in every case keeps its sharp edge. I venture to offer an explanation of this. I suggest that the crypt was at times the lair of wild beasts which relieved the irritation of their skins by rubbing themselves against these pleasantly sharp and cool stone angles. There have been several periods when churches were not well cared for when this might happen.

This concludes the description of the crypt. It leaves some questions that are difficult to answer. Why was the nave halved in length by a substantial wall? The windows are in the vault and could only have been built along with it. Thus it would appear that the whole was vaulted originally. Perhaps the cross wall which looks like 12th century was really built in the 18th century with old material. It now shows on its west face a brick arch which projects $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The north wall to the west of the cross wall is faced with similar brick, and a small brick buttress has been built against it. On this hypothesis the western part of the vault fell or became dangerous in the 18th century and was replaced by a floor of wood joists. The irregularity of the window jambs is probably due to mere carelessness.

A few words may be added on the later history of the church in order to explain the plan.

To the east of the crypt there are the foundations of a square-ended chancel 28ft. long. Mr. Gough thought that this was probably of the 14th century. To carry it the side walls of the crypt had to be thickened, and it is to be noted that these do not block the Norman side lancets: it was thought worth while to continue these through the new work. Their external jambs are three courses high with broad flat chamfers, whereas the original windows are one stone high with a very delicate chamfer.

A tiny south aisle was also added. Its side wall has been partly destroyed, but when perfect the aisle must have been less than 7ft. wide. Of course this aisle blocked the south windows of the nave of the crypt; perhaps that is why the side windows of the chancel crypt were preserved. At the south-east corner there is the base of one of those big brick buttresses in sloping courses which they used to build in the 18th century.