

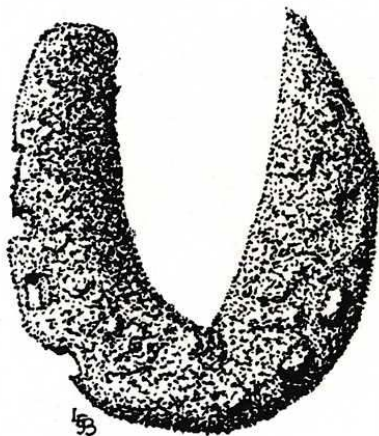
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FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE ANGLO-SAXON WORK AT EAST COKER

Since the brief note was compiled for the last edition of Chronicle (Vol.5, p.58), additional aspects of the Anglo-Saxon work at East Coker have been recognised and are described below.

- 1 Quoins Show Deliberate Curvature** If the west end quoins are viewed directly from the west, it can be seen that they do not stand vertically but curve inwards towards one another. This curvature does not appear to be restricted to the quoins but also applies to the walls to which they relate, i.e. the whole structure shows the effect. This appears to be a deliberate feature of the building and not the result of subsequent distortion by, for instance, movement of the walls or foundations. This curvature matches the profile of the stub wall adjoining the south arcade. The effect seems similar to the 'batter' described by Leask (Leask H.G, 'Irish churches and Monastic Buildings' Vol. 1, 1955). The quoins are very closely jointed, and it seems possible that the curvature was achieved by allowing the upper edge of each stone to protrude and then cutting back the stones in situ to achieve a smooth profile. This rather peculiar type of masoncraft recalls some of the strange details at St. Lawrence's Bradford on Avon. It also appears that the top-most stones of both quoins may have been re-built at some time, because although the stones are of similar texture they appear to be more vertical and are smaller and have lost the building pattern of the lower stones of the quoins. Rather more rebuilding seems to have occurred on the north than the south.

Some Irish churches do indeed show a degree of curvature and there could therefore be a possibility that the walls and quoins at East Coker exhibit Celtic influence upon the Anglo-Saxon builders. This would make some sense in terms of the location of East Coker, on the fringes of Anglo-Saxon dominance, close to surviving Celtic traditions on the South-West peninsula and South Wales. However, having looked more closely at standing Anglo-Saxon churches with this in mind, it seems that the feature may be more common than has previously been acknowledged. It has, for instance, been recognised at Escomb by Fernie (1983, p.55).

- 2 Stub Wall Pre-dating the South Arcade** There is evidence for this visible in the south aisle. The masonry of the most westerly arch of the south arcade stands proud of the wall surface by perhaps 2 inches, as the wall curves towards the top and the masonry of the arch is vertical. In this relatively small area, no attempt has been made to hide this discrepancy by adding layers of plaster. The conclusion must be that the arcade is a later addition to the wall.
- 3 South Wall of the Nave May Also Show Early Work** There is a possibility that the south nave wall at East Coker is an example of an earlier wall being pierced for a later arcade, rather than rebuilt. The upper stages of the wall above the arcade become progressively thinner as they reach the wall plate. The effect continues for most of the length of the arcade, although it is no longer apparent before the crossing is reached. If this wall and the arcade are contemporary, what would be the purpose of this thinning? The most likely explanation seems to be that the early wall survives in the higher levels of the wall (thoroughly hidden by paint). The same effect does not appear to be evident above the 15th century north arcade and so perhaps this wall was rebuilt at the time the arcade was constructed. The nave walls are well covered with plaster and paint, so that it is not possible to see any of the masonry.

- 4 **Construction and Material of the Quoins** The quoins are not regular and show some unusual features. Most noticeably, they have some additional in-filling pieces of stone which tones down the visual effect of the stones which are set in the side-alternate orientation. The resulting vertical joint lines are very narrow and give the superficial impression of being false joints, incised on more massive blocks of stone. However, close inspection indicates that these joints are real. The material of which the individual quoin stones is made is difficult to identify, due to the presence of dirt and lichen. However some stones may well be a variety of Ham stone but others, some form of oolite. Since Jope has shown that many of the stones in this area which bear Anglo-Saxon sculpture probably came from the Great Oolite, at Bath, it would indeed be interesting to discover if any of the material of the East Coker quoins came from the same source. Any deviation from the local Ham stone would be significant, as this material is so dominant in the region.
- 5 **The Reason For the Anglo-Saxon Work Not Being Previously Recognised** Until 1975, access to the west end of the church was through the grounds of Coker Court, which has always been a private house. Before that time the visitor would not have had an opportunity to see the west end of the nave from the outside. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, John Batten published a photograph in 1894 showing Coker Court as it then was. It is possible to see that the west front of the church is covered in ivy. We do not yet know when the ivy was removed but whilst it was present, the quoins would certainly have been hidden from view and only the 15th century doorway and window visible. This would have coloured one's impression of that part of the church. Without the strong visual evidence of the quoins, the internal evidence is much harder to appreciate.

BRIAN & MOIRA GITTOS

ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY - AN ACTIVITY SYMPOSIUM

Saturday 12th October 1991, Downside School, Stratton-on-the-Fosse. More and more archaeological societies and schools are organising ancient technology workshops. This symposium is designed especially for anyone planning a workshop for their school or society, but will also be of interest to anyone wanting to experiment with ancient technology. All the activities will be ones that can be set up within a day. The symposium is open to both members and non-members of CBA Group 13. For the flint-knapping workshop you are advised to bring both strong gloves and safety glasses. The fee for the day will be £2, to include afternoon tea. There is no need to book - just turn up.

Programme

- 10.30 CBA Group 13 A.G.M. (members only)
- 11.30 Welcome and Introduction - Overview of Activities
- 13.00 Lunch (Packed lunch or village facilities)
- 14.00 Divide into groups for workshop sessions
These will include flint-knapping, mediaeval crafts and fire-making.
- 15.30 Tea
- 16.00 "Organising Ancient Technology Workshops", lecture by Jake Keen.
- 17.00 Close

Parking will be in the School Quadrangle and the venue will be signposted from there. For further information, please ring Moira Gittos, Yeovil 20112.