

The Bowdon Sheaf

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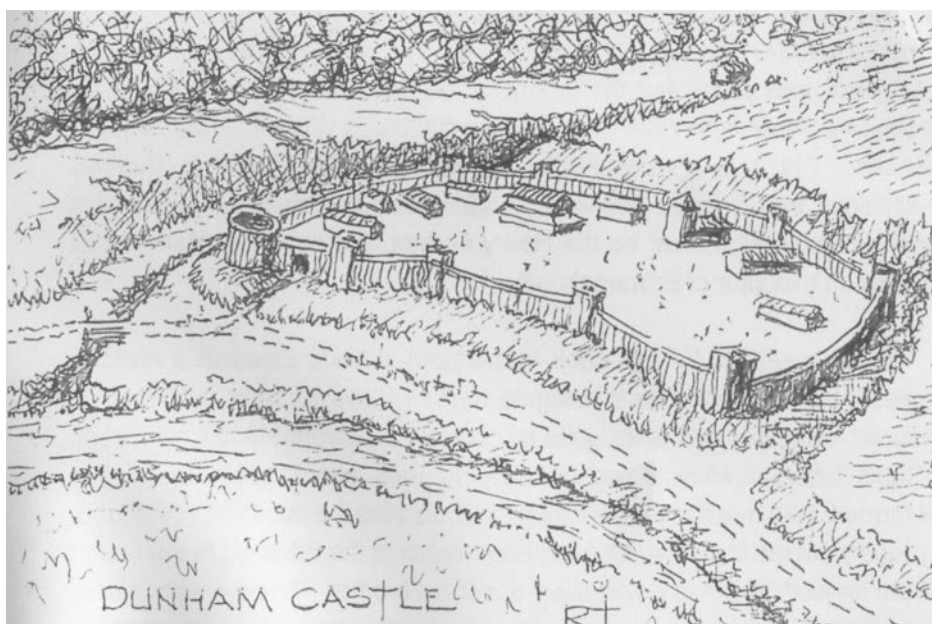
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**William Edwards of Bowdon Hall, and
St Margaret's Church, Dunham Massey
by Marjorie Cox**

This article arises out of a visit to St Margaret's Church by members of the Bowdon History Society last May, timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of its consecration in June 1855. The building of the church was commissioned by the new, young 7th Earl of Stamford and began in 1851, but was soon stopped. There then followed a competition for a new design between six architects, three of London and three of Manchester. It was won by William Hayley of Manchester, who, from the 1830s to 1860, built a large number of churches in Manchester and district, the nearest being St Anne's, Sale in 1854. Apart from serving the needs of the inhabitants of new and projected houses built on Stamford land, St Margaret's provided the Earl with a local living in his gift, unlike St Mary's, Bowdon, which belonged to the Bishop of Chester. Although in Dunham Massey township, the site was so close to Altrincham township that the boundary ran through the vicarage.

Members admired the church and its position (some even went to the top of the tower) and the lofty interior with its stonework and fine hammer beam roof, with carved angels. Dr. K. Lee's leaflet named not only the architect but also the builders: Bowden, Edwards and Forster. Readers of the Society's book, published in 1994, *Bowdon Hall and its People* by Peter Kemp, Ronald Trenbath and myself, may recall that the tenant of the hall from about 1848 and the subsequent owner from 1858 to his death in 1870 was William Edwards, joiner and builder. Originally the firm of builders, later contractors, based in Chorlton-on-Medlock, was Bowden (William) and Edwards, but later there was a third partner, Forster, who must be the Henry Forster, gentleman of Manchester, who was an executor of Edwards's will.

My research for the book had traced William Edwards's roots to Anglesey, but I did not then investigate further. However, after publication, I remained interested and later, quite by chance, discovered that a neighbour, Mr Ralph Tattersall, knew the actual farm, Pwllpillo, where the Edwards family had farmed. I am much indebted to him for contacting the occupant of the farm, who kindly put me in touch with two descendants of the Edwards family, not of William himself, who had no children, but of his brother, Thomas, who farmed there.

William, as appeared in the book, was greatly attached to his numerous nephews and nieces, some of whom lived or stayed at the hall. The Edwards descendants proved to be diligent family historians and greatly expanded my knowledge. Through one of them I learned of the existence of a book in Welsh, *Enwogion Mon 1830-1912* by R. Mon Williams, on famous men of Anglesey, in which William Edwards appears. I am most grateful to the Anglesey Record Office for providing a photocopy, with translation, of the entry on him, which was taken from an article in *Cymry Manceinion* (The Welsh of Manchester) and runs as follows:-

“A patriotic and successful gentleman who was born in Pwllpillo, Rhoscolyn in 1792. A carpenter by trade, at an early age he moved to Manchester. He was a capable craftsman and unequalled in the construction of staircases. He opened his own workshop in 1832 that soon became the most important in Manchester. He built some of the finest banks, warehouses and mansions in the town and neighbourhood. He was one of the most well known in Welsh circles, noted for his geniality and love for the land of his birth. He amassed great wealth and resided at Bowden (sic) Hall outside the city. He built ‘Ty Wridin’ in Rhoscolyn with the intention of residing there but death intervened. He died on June 16 1870 and was buried in Rhoscolyn.”

This, even allowing for some possible hyperbole, provides a welcome increase in our knowledge of Edwards's career, since it is extremely difficult to discover information about builders in Victorian Manchester, in contrast to architects. It is tantalising to be told that he built 'some of the finest banks, warehouses and mansions' and it would be interesting to know if Hayley used the firm elsewhere.

It has never emerged how Edwards came to rent Bowdon Hall; in the book I dismissed as coincidence the fact that his partner's name was 'William Bowden' (of Didsbury Cottage), the name of the owner who sold the hall to the Booths in the seventeenth century, but possibly there was more to it. Three years after St Margaret's was consecrated, Edwards bought Bowdon Hall from the Earl of Stamford, who by then lived mostly at Enville Hall, not at Dunham Massey, and was selling land on a large scale in the locality for building. True to his origins, Edwards farmed the Bowdon Hall estate and, in 1862, was asking if he could rent some neighbouring glebe land from the Earl, “as I am short for the succession of crops.”

William Edwards was succeeded at the hall in 1870 by his niece, Jane, daughter of his brother, Thomas, who had lived there with her uncle and had recently married Robert Warburton, of an old Bowdon family. Bowdon Hall continued to figure in the Edwards family history, as a niece of Jane. Margaret (her sister Alice Lloyd's daughter) lived with her intermittently for several years, since the Bowdon air was considered better for her than her native, strong sea air. A daughter of this niece was one of my excellent informants and sent me a photocopy of a picture postcard of 'Bowdon Old Hall', produced by Thornton Ltd Altrincham. It was dated February 13, 1904, was postmarked Altrincham and the writer, another niece of Jane, wrote "keep this as it's the only one I have been able to find." Presumably she wanted the family to have a memento of the hall, for with the death of the childless Jane Warburton on January 7, their close link with Bowdon was broken. Although a life interest in the Bowdon Hall estate remained with Jane's nephew, William Hugh Edwards, godson of William Edwards, he never lived at the hall. He lived in Anglesey, where he inherited property from his father, Hugh, J.P. and Deputy Lieutenant, until his death in 1929; for a decade or more he leased Bowdon Hall to tenants and then, in 1919, sold it.

My special gratitude is due to Miss M. Lloyd Jones and Mrs Eirlys Lloyd Jones. William Edwards's letter re renting glebe land is in The Stamford Papers, E.G.R. 14/78/5/104 in The John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

**Some Thoughts and Queries on the Castles,
Mills and Halls of the Barony of Dunham Massey
by Peter Kemp**

By the year 1070, following the ruthless Norman harrowing of Cheshire in the 1069 winter when the Conqueror's punishing force laid waste much of the area, the first Hamo de Mascy took possession of his new barony granted to him by Hugh Lupus d'Avranches, the new Earl of Chester, as one of the eight barons created for Cheshire's feudal government. The Domesday Book of 1086 tells us that he took over the ousted Saxon freeman Alweard's holdings in Dunham, Bowdon, Hale, Agden, Ashley, Baguley and Bollington (now Little Bollington), all devastated and depopulated and described as 'waste'. It has been estimated that only 11,000 people were left alive in the whole county.

It is well known that the Anglo-Saxons had spurned and mostly destroyed anything left by the Roman occupation, preferring to live in small loose knit groups rather than towns and villages, and that for security, they settled away from the major Roman roads; thus Bogedone (Bowdon), Doneham (Dunham), Aldhere/inga/ham (Altrincham), Sealh (Sale on its original Sale Moor site) and Asshetun (Ashton-on-Mersey) for example, were Anglo-Saxon 'townships' well away from the Roman Watling Street, the main road from Manchester to Chester. Although the 'Street' had decayed through neglect in the 600 years since the Romans departed, it was still the only major thoroughfare in the area and a well-worn route for traders and communication; any enemies or invaders would have come that way principally.

It is also well-known that the Normans' system of conquest and consolidation used wooden motte-and-bailey castles or forts quickly thrown up for protection and intimidation, and as bases from which their territory could be administered and defended. For absolute control, defence and counter-attack, the site chosen always had strategic importance and the de Mascy Dunham Castle at Castle/Watch Hill next to the Roman road ford across the River Bollin demonstrates this in all respects being raised on a bluff on a promontory flanked by the river at the front and a small ravine with a considerable stream and marshes at the back.

It must be remembered that the whole area was undrained and much wetter than it is now over 900 years later; the rainwater soaked into and then ran off Bowdon Downs lower down, hence Hale Moss (which required Hale causeway to cross over it from Bowdon), Heald Moss or The Marsh (where Altrincham Boys Grammar School stands), the moss of Moss Farm, Bowdon next to 'the great deep Bog' recorded by the 17C historian Sir Peter Leycester, and finally, the 'White Leaches' or wetlands displaying white bog cotton, all running one into the other and all draining into both the stream past Motley Bank and the stream to the rear of the Castle mound. The River Bollin, like the River Mersey, was untamed and untapped, so its flow was greater than now, and it wandered through wide reed-beds and water-meadows containing 'Eyes' or island-like areas which would be impassable every winter or cloudburst, and was a principal line of defence and protection. Hamo de Mascy would have lived in his hall within the bailey alongside the castle together with his armed men, horses, stores, etc., and cattle and tenants could be sheltered inside the bailey stockade in times of danger.

It is suggested that the Saxon Alweard's hall of residence may well have been at or near the present site of Dunham Massey Hall well away from the 'Street' in his hunting ground and close to his Saxon tribesmen in the scattered settlement of Dunham (settlement(ham) at or near the Hill (dun)) on the good agricultural land on the anticline of Bowdon Hill. There was a stream flowing through the settlement, since augmented and feeding the lake and moat area of Dunham Massey Hall, but, according to Domesday, no castle or mill recorded; the Saxons only had ditches and palisades for protection of their halls.

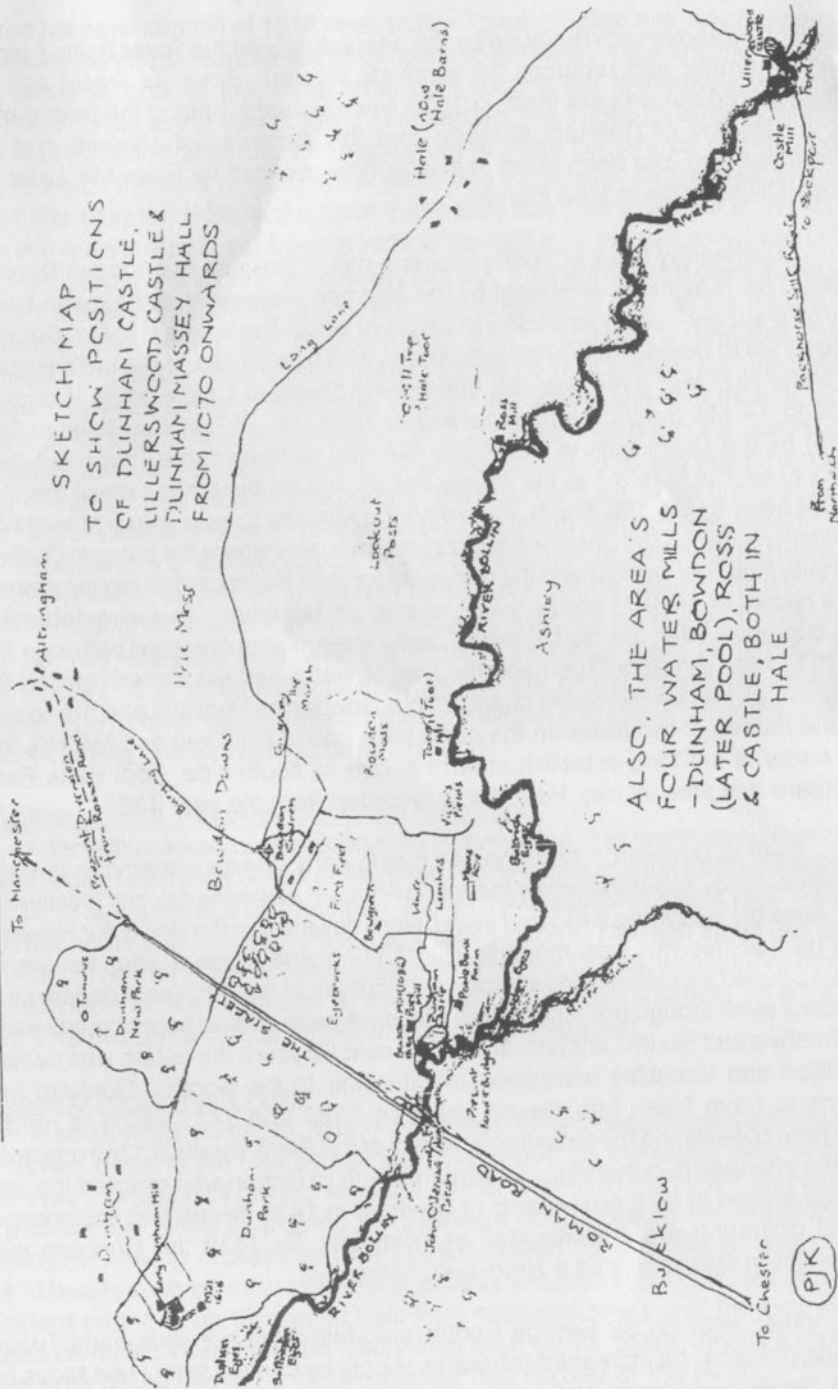
That first Saxon hall may have been destroyed in the Norman invasion, but later when Norman rule was consolidated and accepted mainly, rebuilt on the same site as the hall of the de Mascys when the castle was either decayed or 'slighted' and abandoned, or it may have been used as a hunting lodge for a short while. The adoption of Dunham as his baronial title and the name of his castle, strongly suggests that the first Hamo de Mascy made it plain to all and sundry that he was taking possession of the fiefdom of Alweard of Dunham, which included all the neighbouring 'townships' as the Saxons called them. Bowdon was the location of the Saxon chapel or church on the customary high point where St Mary's Church now stands, and little else since the township land was undrained and of poor quality, as its few inhabitants had been killed or had fled when faced with the Norman advance. Parishes began to emerge in Cheshire after 920 when the county became part of the diocese of Lichfield and resident clergy were appointed in place of the peripatetic priests. Bowdon parish was huge containing 10 townships and parts of two others until its gradual breakdown into separate units in recent centuries as populations grew.

Later Norman lords everywhere began to rebuild their churches in the Norman style, as happened at Bowdon though no trace has remained. The present parish boundary mostly along the line of Watling Street on that side which nowadays puts the Dunham Castle site in Bowdon did not then exist, the original ancient parish boundary coinciding with that of the barony. Hamo de Mascy also erected a castle further upstream by the River Bollin at Ullerswood on the Hale boundary on the bluff above and beyond the present Castle Mill (Chronicle of 1173), and between his two castles there was a lookout point at Tooth (Toot, Tout) Hill near the present house called The Priory which guarded the intervening space as an early warning post, probably with a horn, fires or flags to signal approaching danger. Little is known about Ullerswood Castle which, like Dunham, was adjacent to a stream draining Shadow Moss (now under housing and Manchester Airport). There is no evidence that either Dunham or Ullerswood were ever rebuilt in stone. It is suggested that at both sites watermills were owned by the de Mascys using the water flow of both streams adjacent to their castles for their income and convenience and as of right.

The sparse evidence available in this historical period in this area of Cheshire raises several questions for our Society members to consider, of which it is suggested the most intriguing are the following :-

PART OF THE BARONY & MANOR OF DUNHAM.

SKETCH MAP
TO SHOW POSITIONS
OF DUNHAM CASTLE,
LILLERSWOOD CASTLE &
DUNHAM MASSEY HALL
FROM 1070 ONWARDS



ALSO, THE AREA'S
FOUR WATER MILLS
- DUNHAM, BOWDON
(LATER POOL), ROSS
& CASTLE, BOTH IN
HALE

1. Where was Dunham Mill and Bowdon Mill ?

Mr Jim Howarth's article detailing his very useful research of 14th and 15th century documentary evidence of the watermills of the Dunham Massey estate (Bowdon Sheaf No.38, October 2001) makes it clear that there were four mills altogether - Bollington, Dunham, and the two Hale mills called Castle and Rasse (Ross). Certainly Castle Mill was on the Ullerswood Castle stream mentioned above until replaced by the one actually on the River Bollin (gone in living memory and replaced by a private house). Ross (or Rass) Mill has disappeared but was still there in 1630 when Edward Tipping the tenant miller of the Booths of Dunham Massey died; his father's will showed that new millstones had just been fitted. It is only now recalled by Ross Mill Lane and Ross Mill meadow in Hale Barns.

Domesday Book of 1086 records a mill at Bowdon but none in Dunham itself. This may be an oversight by the Norman assessors in their well-known hurry to survey the whole of Saxon England within the time set them. But what happened to Bowdon Mill? And where was it? The only site with a sufficient flow of water to power a mill was the one behind Dunham Castle on its Watch Hill mound. (A Mill meadow was recorded in 1838 (No.277 on the Bowdon Tithe Map) by the Bollin east of the Priory but this modern name (not used there before) seems to relate to the recent Ashley Mill on the other side of the river, swept away by the 19C flood). Following the Massey's move into a moated hall residence after 1326 in their hunting ground (probably where the present Dunham Massey Hall now stands) and the necessity for their Bollin castles having passed, as a record of 1410/11 shows a hall, chapel and outbuildings well-established, it is suggested that the old Dunham Castle stream was dammed with logs and earth to form a mill pool (perhaps the flow of water had slackened making this necessary). Hence the name change from Bowdon to Pool Mill and the reason for the names of two fields on the north bank called Mill Field and Mill Hill, and the name of the long-established farm above its south side, Pool Bank Farm still there this present day. Pool Mill is recorded from the year 1380.

Over at Dunham, it is suggested that in early times a stream ran through a shallow valley and pond below the manor-house, powering the lord's watermill and, possibly, supplying a moated area before flowing into the Bollin. Mr Howarth tells us that this mill was mentioned in 1347 some six years after the whole estate passed into other hands following the death of the 6th Baron de Mascy in Gascony even though branches of the Masseys were spread across many parts of Cheshire and South Lancashire. For the next 90 years the estate was owned by Fitton and Venables heiresses until it came to the Booths. Dunham mill seems to have fallen into disuse between 1380 and 1411 which is hardly surprising considering the catastrophic effect of the Black Death of 1349 onwards and the changes in ownership. Sir Robert Booth of Barton who married the last heiress arrived to take possession of Dunham in 1433 having had experience of mill operation at his Bollin Hall at Wilmslow. By 1439 the Dunham mill reappears in documents as a short-lived fulling mill.

When later on Sir George Booth remodelled the previous early Tudor hall and gardens, he increased the water supply by conduit from Hale Moss to fill his moats and canals and create the present ornamental lake which also powered his new cornmill of 1616 seen today. To accomplish this, any previous dam across the stream was raised by excavating the valley sides and the course of the mill leat, and, at the same time, constructing the fashionable viewing mount seen today at the lake corner of the garden. His Tudor-style remodelling of the Hall front and side had viewing towers at three corners for guests and ladies to watch the deer hunting in the park. The viewing mound (similar to the two at Little Moreton Hall) would have had a little banqueting house at the top where the guests would eat sweetmeats while taking in the raised-up view of the house, gardens and park, then newly laid out. This is still to be seen in Kip's 1697 bird's-eye view showing one or two new avenues of trees in the park but with house and mound out of scale with artistic licence to impress the commissioning owner, and the mill turned round by 90 degrees! Confusingly, the view has been taken that the site of Dunham Castle was this mound, an unstrategic location of no defensive strength at the edge of level ground, guarding no roads or approaches, and easily ignored and bypassed by any hostile force. If ever the water was a defensive feature, the lake dam would be breached in hours. No evidence whatever has been uncovered to support this assertion, either documentary or archaeological. The accepted authority of Cheshire history, George Ormerod, is quoted in support because when he viewed the mound c1816. He thought it looked like a castle mound (to please his host?), but as we know, he, like everyone else, was not infallible as things have turned out in other matters. It is inconceivable that the owners of this important estate, especially the Booths, would have omitted to mention 'the castle mound' in their proud recording of their Hall, gardens and park.

2. Is that really a Tumulus in Dunham New Park?

Although marked on the Ordnance Survey Map, it is understood that no archaeological evidence of burial has been found in this mound which possibly could be in fact a vestige of a Norman warren. Now called Dunham New Park, its former name was the High Park and it dates back to Norman times like the main park. The site in the dry sandy area high on the Downs would have been an ideal place for the Normans to introduce their coneys (rabbits) as a food asset. This possibility needs further investigation, I suggest.

3. John O'Jerusalem's Patch.

A small strip field called John O'Jerusalem's Patch was located alongside the 'Street' close to the ford across the River Bollin on the castle side of the road. Was this patch of ground where a former pilgrim to the Holy Land eked out a charitable living by praying for travellers about to face the hazardous crossing, or having crossed to give thanks to God for survival in return for alms? Usually such travellers prayed at a cross installed at such crossings like Crossford on the River Mersey at Sale from medieval times until the ford was bridged centuries later. Perhaps a holy man lived on his 'patch' beside a cross within sight of the castle? It seems certain that no one of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem owned it or gave it its name. The origin of this field's name may never be resolved.

Regarding Pool Mill, Dunham Castle and the Tumulus only further expert archaeology will reveal more of the whole picture. Also needing future investigation, I suggest, to complete the Norman defence sight line along the Bollin between Dunham Castle and Ullerswood Castle, another Toothill would be needed around about Hill Top (?Toot), Hale, if the elevations bare of trees would allow it. Perhaps this is too much to ask for now that area is all built up.

It is to be hoped that the authorities have plans to clear carefully the Castle Hill area of undergrowth and trees, allow a fresh archaeological survey to be undertaken, and to maintain the site as one of historic importance with information plaques as part of the Bollin Valley Park.

Sources :-

Bowdon Sheaf various articles

Dunham Massey National Trust

Monastic and Collegiate Houses in Cheshire Roland W. Morant

The Archaeology of Trafford Michael Nevell

**The Rebuilding of Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Bowdon, Cheshire
by Ronald Trenbath**

The influx of commuters following the opening of the railway to Bowdon in 1849 caused a population increase which rendered the parish church inadequate to cope with the extra parishioners. This factor, combined with the deteriorating state of the building, lead the church authorities to instruct Giles Gilbert Scott, a prominent architect, to undertake a feasibility study to deal with the problem.

Scott's report strongly recommended retaining and restoring the old building and enlarging it to an adequate size, rather than to demolish it and build a new structure.

After due consideration W.H. Brakespear, an architect from London, was commissioned in 1858 to undertake a survey and submit two schemes, one for restoration and enlargement, and one for an entirely new building.

The survey was very detailed, to include measured drawings and photographs and revealed an interesting building consisting of a collection of parts from previous periods ranging from 12th century Romanesque (often wrongly referred to as Norman) to late 18th Century Georgian, a tapestry of styles typical of most village churches in this country.

The building was reported to be in good condition, with sound foundations, except for the deterioration of some of the external features. The restoration and enlargement scheme submitted provided for the raising of the tower by 14ft 3ins, the roof of the south aisle by 2ft 5ins and the nave roof raised sufficiently to form a taller clerestory with a hammer beam roof. The former chancel and side chapels were to be demolished and replaced with a transept and new chancel, with a Stamford Chapel to the south side and a vestry and organ on the north side. Both aisles were to be extended westward to encase the base of the tower into the body of the church, the whole operation lengthening the building by 27ft 5ins. The external wall of the south aisle, which was out of alignment, was to be rebuilt on a straight line.

While this scheme would have retained much of the original building, the Romanesque and Early English features would have been replaced by ones in the Perpendicular style, so that very little of the original features would have been preserved. This action would have conformed with the Victorian belief, fostered by the Cambridge Camden Society, that no building should be left a collection of parts from different periods but should be rebuilt in one particular style to provide uniformity, even if this involved the destruction of sound features which displayed different architectural styles from the rest of the building. It was only after large public demonstrations that Westminster Abbey and Westminster Hall were saved from these acts of vandalism.

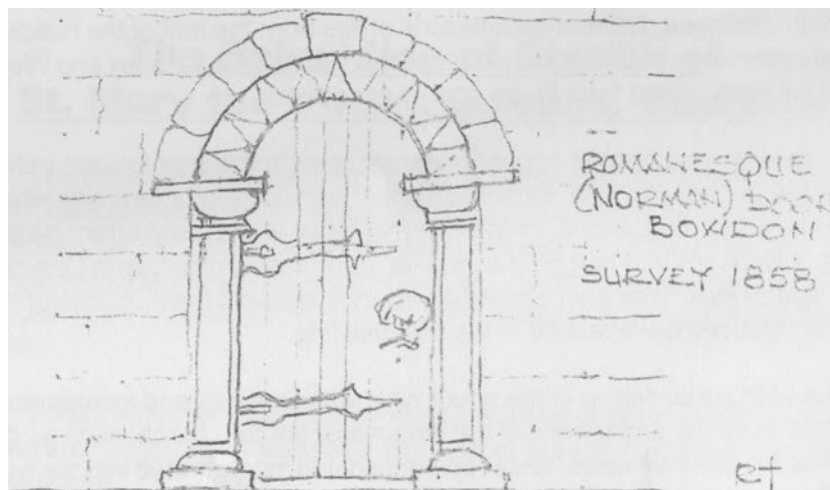
In spite of very heated opposition Breakspear's scheme for restoration was rejected in favour of total demolition and the building of a new one which was completed in 1860. Stone for the external fabric was brought from Hatton Quarries at Runcorn and that for the internal fabric came from Lymm Quarries with salvaged stone from the demolished church reused as infill. Some of the original foundations were reused in the new building.

The Mediaeval ceiling in the south aisle was restored and incorporated into the new building, and certain of the features of the old church, such as the square-headed aisle windows, were reproduced and incorporated into the new design which was basically Perpendicular with idiosyncratic additions. The presentation drawings, now housed in the Cheshire Record Office, are of a very high standard of craftsmanship and colouring and the architects perspective was bought at Sotheby's in 1992 from money left to the church and now hangs in the vestry.

The detailing and workmanship of the new building was very crude compared with that of a genuine Mediaeval church and has not weathered well during the last 144 years.

Ruskin wrote that the life-style and aspirations of mediaeval craftsmen created Gothic architecture and that this could not be recreated in the totally different conditions of the 19th century, each period he held, had its own style of architecture, valid for its own age and that to attempt in one age to recreate the style of another one was bogus and fraudulent.

The new building lost the intimacy of a village church but fitted in well with the ostentation of the developing dormitory town. Its enlarged size on the hill top made it a landmark for many miles to the south especially to travellers on Chester Road. The red sandstone gave the building a dominance over adjoining property, but as the surface of this stone darkened and hardened with age it acquired a dull appearance as though affected by atmospheric pollution. The cleaning of the stonework at the end of the last century might have destroyed the hardened surface to cause deterioration in the not too distant future, and one questions the wisdom of this action.



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