



Lewes, Sussex

πῖθ Læpe

Church of St John the Baptist sub Castro

Church fabric

Grid ref TQ 414 104

Date

Doorway rebuilt on C19 church, period C.

Taylor

Victorian church has v weathered Anglo-Saxon arch built into exterior E wall of chancel on N side of apse.

Jambs have three, half-round strips up to impost. Imposts originally carried back along walls, about 15" remaining on each side, and have two shallow grooves cut into face. Arch-head consists of segmental stones: three strips continuing parallel around arch-head but seem to have been square cut above impost.

On upper side of impost, just outside the outer member of strip work is fragment of half-round section carved from projection of impost stone, that looks as if it has been a corbel supporting a pilaster or other strip work.

MD

The first church of St John was built a little to the N of the present church. The site of the chancel indicated by the Croft tomb (flat slabs on a raised platform to the right of the main path through the churchyard. This church was the centre of a fortified Anglo-Saxon settlement guarding the valley of the River Ouse. Some are of the opinion that the fort and church may have been built by King Alfred, but there is no direct evidence of this although it is known that he was often in this area. Anyone who stands in the churchyard, so peaceful now, will understand the strategic importance which must once have attached to this position. It would have commanded the waters of the estuary and it looked across to Mount Caburn and Malling Down where trackways provided the land lines of communication.

The Saxon church survived, in part at least, until 1839, but it fell into disrepair and was described by the antiquary Camden in 1610, as being "all desolate and beset with briars and brambles". Soon after this it was restored and from time to time alterations were carried out.

On the church exterior at N end of E wall (just before path opens out into churchyard) can be seen a half circle of stones let into wall, bearing an

inscription in Latin (*see photograph below*). This is a monument to Magnus, said to be of the Royal House of Denmark, who forsook soldiering and became an anchorite. Little is known of Magnus although various conjectures have been made, including the suggestion that he was the third son of King Harold II (of England and Denmark). We do not know what led him to the decision to be walled into the side of the Saxon church. It is known, however, that this engraved arch was a part of the old church and was later incorporated in the present church. The memorial includes 15 inscribed stones, 11 original with Lombardic lettering, others of C17 origin. A C13 sepulchral slab is placed beneath the stones.

*Notes from church guide book,
ed. Mary Hocking.*

Saxon Earthworks

Alfred built a burh at Lewes. It is thought that "Brackmount" (one of the two mounds on which Lewes castle is situated) was part of the burh. In 1974 (V. Peter Drewett ed. *Rescue Archaeology in Sussex 1974*: Institute of Archaeology) an exploratory excavation by "the Fosse" failed to find any evidence of Saxon defences (as they had expected) in either Brook Street or Lancaster Street, and it is now thought that the church of St John-sub-Castro was outside the defences and not within them.





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Barbican Museum

Grid ref unknown

Jewellery

Pottery

Domestic Items and weaving

The Saxon room

Jewellery

in case:

Ivory arm ring.

Small bronze rings and buckles

Iron girdle hanger, with marks of textile.

Buckles of bronze and iron, one still having a piece of glass inlay.

Three necklaces, with beads of amber, quartz, glass and ceramic.

Two large, gilt bronze, square-headed brooches

Small saucer brooches

Two gilt, bronze, saucer brooches

Bronze annular brooches.

Ornate, gilt bronze, cloak pin.

A small plaque of silver, about 1" x 2", with criss-cross pattern surrounded by interlaced vines and birds.

Two maps on wall: Sussex c. AD 470, and Sussex c. AD 840.

Sculpture (photograph) from JEVINGTON, of Christ Harrowing Hell.

"During the erection of Saxonbury House, Lewes, in 1891, thirty-two inhumation burials laid in shallow graves were found over a period of several months. Fourteen had no goods, but the others contained knives, swords and a small number of brooches."

Domestic Items and Weaving.

Small bronze-bound bucket

Piece of daub.

Part of a bone comb.

Small bone knife handle.

Part of a bone weaving comb.

Iron knife with loop for suspension.

Three fired clay loom weights.

A lead cist found at Willingham in 1847, probably C10.

Saxon Pottery

"It is difficult to obtain a clear picture of pagan Saxon pottery as the majority of examples come from the burial sites not the dwelling places.

Two main groups are found: large urns containing bones, and smaller ones accompanying either inhumations or cremations which, when buried, probably held food or drink. The small amount of pottery recovered from the domestic sites, however, suggests that this is just one side of the industry. Strainers, handled pots and very large storage jars turn up in houses but rarely in the cemeteries. On the other hand, decoration, in the form of stamps, bosses and incised lines, is very common on cremation urns but appears much less frequently on domestic wares. This seems to suggest that though much of the pottery was made by the women for their own immediate needs, there was also some degree of local specialisation in the production of funerary wares."

Three glass vessels, "probably imitating drinking horns". These may have been made within the confines of the Roman Empire and exported to the Germanic tribes.

Small, ribbed glass bowl.

The Saxon warrior

Spearhead, (with modern copy).

Small seax.

Head of throwing axe (with modern copy).

Iron shield boss

Head of axe hammer (with modern copy).

Two iron swords

Model of a Saxon warrior (based on traditional Sutton Hoo reconstructions).

Plan of Alfriston cemetery

Discovered in 1912 at Winton Street. A rich site with 120 graves and a large quantity of brooches, beads, rings, spearheads and shield bosses. The cemetery was first used in C5 AD and use continued into C6.

Lewes, Sussex

Two models, one of male inhumation and one of female inhumation.

Next to them examples of goods found.

Male

Iron spearhead

Gilt bronze brooch for fastening the cloak.

Shield boss with silvered rivets

Buckle.

Iron knife.

Female

Two saucer brooches

Necklace of blue beads (glass).

Group of beads strung together on silver wire.

Bronze bowl.

Pictures of an Anglo-Saxon hall found at Bishopstone and an Anglo-Saxon grubenhaus, mentioning that some had earth floors and others planked. Suggest that cavity floors delayed the rotting of the timbers.