

A Saxon church on existing site at Stroud?

A SUPPOSITION that there was either a Saxon church or one of early Norman origin on the site of the existing Stroud Parish Church was aired by Mr. Lionel Walrond, curator of Stroud Museum, when he gave a lecture in the Church Institute last night.

The lecture, linked with a supporting exhibition of old plans and documents, some loaned by the County Archivist, was arranged to mark the laying of the foundation stone of the main part of the present building 100 years ago, and Mr. Walrond referred to an old photograph of the chancel which was demolished in 1866 and which showed what might have been a series of pilasters.

If that were so, he said, it was likely that that particular wall could have dated back to the Saxon period but more evidence was needed and he hoped that as a result of the lecture more old photographs might be unearthed which might help to substantiate the supposition.

New facts found

Mr. Walrond observed that little had been done since the researches by Paul Hawkins Fisher, the Stroud historian, to throw light on the history of the original church but some new facts had been discovered.

It was accepted, he said, that the mother church of Bisley dated back to Saxon times and that it became a church of considerable importance, being probably the only church at the time of Domesday to have two priests.

It was a historical fact that Stroud parish was carved out of Bisley, but a deed of composition dated 1304 stated clearly that the chancel of "the little chapel at Stroud" was in a derelict state.

Structural changes

"One wonders," said Mr. Walrond "what the date of the building of the chancel must have been for it to have become derelict at that time." He added that he thought Fisher was right in believing that the name of the town originated from the Saxon word Strogd—meaning a scattered place.

Observing that the deed of composition spoke of both a

chapel and chancel, Mr. Walrond said it would seem that the building in those days was not a single cell type.

Mr. Walrond described structural changes that appeared to have been made from time to time during the centuries and said the existing tower was erected in about 1400. It was about 1450 that Thomas Whittington, grandnephew of the famous Dick Whittington, constructed the south aisle and porch.

"Stroud must have become much more important at that time than we are sometimes led to believe," said Mr. Walrond when mentioning that Thomas Whittington, at his expressed wish, was buried under the south aisle he had created rather than at Bisley.

Among old documents relating to the church which had survived, said Mr. Walrond, was an account book which contained some very interesting entries. One dated 1628 referred to the purchase of a 12-branch candlestick which, it was believed, was sold as old brass when gas lighting was installed in the Church in 1839.

"If this had survived until today it would have been worth a considerable sum of money," he remarked.

Mr. Walrond displayed a number of exhibits, including a handbook of sketches by Joshua Wall—who was responsible for the carvings of the new church—of a number of churches in the district.