

# The church of St. Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex.

Besides the marshes at the north-eastern extremity of the tongue of Essex, St. Peter's chapel stands astride the west wall, in the ruins of the west gateway, of the Roman fort, which, under the name of Othona, was one of the nine forts of the Saxon shore. So wrote Taylor in his "Anglo-Saxon Architecture" volume one, pages 91 to 93. The Venerable Bede records that (AD 653) St Cedd was consecrated Bishop of the East Saxons and later built churches at *Ythancaestir* (Othona) and *Tilaburg* (Tilbury). E.Fernie, in his "The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons" states that its Kentish character and its parallels with the proportions of Minster-in-Sheppey, cast doubts on it being Cedd's church. Its odd position straddling the line of the wall of the fort through the opening of the west gate contrasts with Reculver and Burgh where the churches were sited fully within the walls. Fragments of rubble still visible in the 19th century in the south-east corner of the fort could be the remains of Cedd's church, leaving St. Peter's to be an addition made after 669 when Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, brought Essex over to obedience of the Roman rather than the Celtic church, and hence firmly back into the Kentish sphere of influence.

Today the nave remains and with foundations of an apse and flanking chapels. When the area was first systematically explored in 1867, the west wall of the fort, and those on the north and south, were still standing, 12 ft thick, to heights of 4 or 5 feet, but these walls have now almost vanished and part of the fort lies under the sea. Until 1920 the chapel was used as a barn, but it was then restored, and consecrated. Its walls are largely composed of re-used Roman stone, and the remaining building is distinctive in the height of its walls. The southern porticus was entered from the nave through a doorway which is now blocked, but whose eastern jamb, built in 'Escomb fashion' is clearly seen in the wall. Both north and south porticus overlapped the junctions of the nave and chancel (which were of the same width). Like Reculver, the apse was accessed via 3 archways. They are now blocked but the tall jambs have survived almost intact, of plain square plan, mainly built of Roman brick with occasional large blocks of dressed stone. The western quoins are of megalithic construction, mainly of pillar stones, many of which contain Roman lewis-holes. Each of the side walls of the nave originally had two large windows, of which two still exist in the south wall and one in the north (and one blocked in that wall). They are about three feet square externally with flat heads on wooden lintels and are splayed to 5 feet internally. Above the west door is round-headed window, its arch turned with Roman bricks. On either side of the west door are vestiges of a porch. In a plan of 1867 the walls remained to about two feet high.

All photos these pages are described viewed clockwise from top left.

1. The church seen from the west with the south wall of the nave to the right. The nave dimensions are 50 feet x 22 feet.
2. A closer view of the SW quoin, and one of the original windows of the nave which near to one of the buttresses (partly robbed away).





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3. The south wall of the nave with the two square-headed windows. The large 'scar' in the walling was for many years an access doorway for farm vehicles!
4. Seen from the south-east, the semi-circular outline on the ground is the apse and with that to the left the south porticus.
5. The simple but imposing interior of the nave looking eastwards. The remains of the end jambs of the triple arcade, which gave access to the apse, may be clearly seen upon the 'dividing' wall.





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6. The east wall of the nave with a closer view of the remaining jambs (seen in picture 5).

7. The interior again, but looking west with the doorway and round-headed window above.

8. The NW quoin showing the long-stone character of its build (partly clasped by the buttress).

9. The now blocked opening which gave access to the south porticus, the blue oval highlights the remaining jamb of the east side of that opening.

