

MINSTER CHURCH.

THE architectural merits of St. Mary's Church, at Minster in Thanet, fully accord with the dignity which it formerly possessed, as the mother church of one half* of the Isle of Thanet. The handsome churches of St. Lawrence, St. Peter, and St. John the Baptist, all mainly built in the twelfth century, were chapelries, appendant to St. Mary of Minster. Sir Stephen Glynne, who was an admirable judge, pronounced St. Mary's to be "unquestionably one of the very finest churches in the county." Its total length, inside, is 160½ feet, from the west wall of the tower to the east wall of the chancel. The length of the transepts, from north to south, is 85 feet 1 inch. The total width of the nave and aisles, together, is 49½ feet; and the width of the chancel is 21 feet 10 inches.

The dedication of this church, to St. Mary, forms the only remaining trace of a Conventual establishment which was founded in Minster, about A.D. 670,† by a royal widow named Ermenburga, *alias* Ebba, *alias* Dompneva.‡ Canon Jenkins has admirably elucidated the history of this lady, and of her foundation here.§ She and her daughter, St. Mildred, successive Abbesses of the Nunnery, were both interred within the monastery of St. Mary, and an unknown saint named Florentius was buried in the cemetery of St.

* Reculver was the mother church of St. Nicholas at Wade, and of All Saints. Monkton was the mother church of Birchington, and of Woodchurch *alias* Acolte.

† *Historia Monasterii Sæ. Augustini Cantuariensis* (Edit. C. Hardwick), p. 6.

‡ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, XII, 182 *et seq.*

Mary in Thanet.* Nevertheless, within sixty or seventy years from its foundation, this Nunnery of St. Mary, being too small, was supplemented by the erection, upon a different site, of a larger establishment. That new building was the work of Edburga, the third Abbess, who caused it to be dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul.

To the new church, of that new Nunnery, Edburga is said to have translated the body of St. Mildred from its tomb at St. Mary's; and in that new church of Saints Peter and Paul, Edburga herself was buried in A.D. 751.†

The second Nunnery was destroyed, by the Danes, *circa* A.D. 830 or 840;‡ and, after that period, there was no convent of any kind in Minster.§

Thomas of Elmham is our authority for saying that there may be a connection between the site of the existing Church of St. Mary, and the site of St. Mary's Nunnery which was founded in A.D. 670, but was supplanted before A.D. 751 by the newer foundation dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. Writing about A.D. 1414, Thomas of Elmham says that Dompneva founded her Nunnery "in the southern part of Thanet, near the water, in that place where now stands the parish Church of the Virgin Mary (*Dei Genitricis et Virginis*)."^{||} This statement he repeats upon a later page:— "*De templo Sanctæ Mariæ in Thaneto, quod tunc fuit ubi nunc parochialis ecclesia remanet.*"[¶]

Although the church is cruciform, its Norman tower stands at the west end of the nave. Arcades, each consisting of five round arches, separate the nave from its north and south aisles. The vaulted chancel is of the Early English period; the north and south transepts of the same period were not vaulted until recently. At the point where the transepts cross the body of the church, it is probable that the Early English architect intended to have erected a tower; he vaulted the roof of this central portion.

* *Hist. Mon. Soci. Augustini*, p. 223, § 34 and § 35.

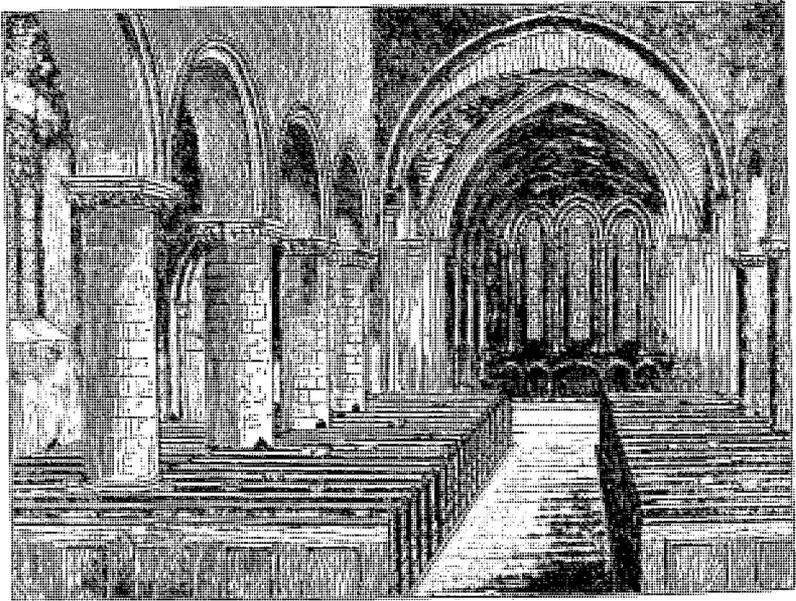
† *Ibidem*, pp. 220, 223.

‡ *Ibidem*, p. 222.

§ Lewis, *Hist. of Tenot*, has by inadvertence inserted, near the bottom of p. 57, a paragraph which makes the last Abbess Siledritha succeed in 797, and live until 1011.

^{||} *Hist. Mon. Soci. Aug.*, p. 215.

[¶] *Ibidem*, p. 218.



INTERIOR OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, MINSTER, THANET.

Upon entering the church, the most casual observer can see that the nave arcades, each containing five round-headed arches, are of two or three periods. The three easternmost arches, on each side, are much more ornate than their two plain western neighbours. Nor is this the only sign of difference. The walls supported by the two western arches are 14 inches thicker than those above the three eastern bays of the arcades. These thicker walls extend from the tower into the nave about 26 feet. At the line of junction with the thinner walls, on each side, there is consequently a curious and unsightly set-off. The piers of the three eastern arches are but 7 feet 5 inches in circumference, while the pier between the two westernmost arches is 9 feet 5 inches in girth. On the south side, the huge pier which stands at the line of junction between the thicker (3 feet 6½ inches) and thinner (2 feet 4½ inches) walls, is particularly clumsy, and indicates very clearly the later addition of three bays to the nave.

There are considerable differences between the north and south arcades, and between the north and south aisles. The mouldings of the western portion of the arch adjacent to the tower, in the south arcade, shew an additional thickness of wall there, which is not seen on the north. On comparing the two arcades we find that while the walls, and the detached piers, are of similar thickness in both, the spans of four arches on the north side vary from 10 feet to 10½ feet in width, while those upon the south side are all of them less than 10 feet wide.* The north aisle is 26 inches wider than the south aisle; the dimensions being, from arcade-pier to wall, 12 feet 5 inches on the north, and 10 feet 3 inches on the south. The wider bays of the north arcade, and the greater width of the north aisle, may indicate that it was added later than the south aisle. This idea is much supported by the fact, that an early dogtooth moulding appears upon the three easternmost arches of the north arcade, as their sole ornament, and their pier-caps are of transitional character; while the corresponding arches on the

* Mr. Bubb's measurements shew the northern spans to be (commencing at the west end) 9 feet 6 inches; 10 feet 4 inches; 10 feet 6 inches; 10 feet 5 inches; and 10 feet. The corresponding spans on the south side are 9 feet 10 inches; 9 feet 10 inches; 9 feet 6 inches; 9 feet 10½ inches; 9 feet 10½ inches.

south have only chevron and billet ornaments, and their pier-caps are of earlier character. The nave seems to have attained its present form about A.D. 1160 or 1170.

Upon close examination of the older and thicker walls, at the west end of the nave, we find traces of a remote period, when those walls were unpierced; that is, when there were no aisles. From the centre of the nave we see, in the south arcade, above the second pier from the west, the upper portion of the interior arch of a Norman window. Turning into the north aisle, we see, in a similar position over the north arcade, the upper portion of the exterior arch of another Norman window. Both these windows, in the earlier and thicker walls, were originally exterior windows; but they were necessarily destroyed when these earlier walls were pierced for the addition of aisles.

Mr. Bubb informs me that, during the work of restoration in 1863, foundations of a cross wall, running from north to south, were discovered beneath the floor of the nave, at the line of junction where the thicker and thinner arcade-walls unite. This cross wall, about five feet thick, was seen by Mr. Bubb, by Mr. May the clerk, and by others.

We seem thus to learn that, during the first period of the existence of the nave's thicker arcade walls, they did not extend more than twenty-six or thirty feet eastward from the site of the existing tower. They were then exterior walls, having round-headed windows, of fair size, and moderately splayed. Were they then the walls of a chancel? They may have formed the chancel of the church, in the eleventh century; but whether they were erected early in that century (before the Norman Conquest) or late in that century, there is no evidence to determine.

We then find that these thicker walls were pierced and their windows blocked up. It is quite possible, and not improbable, that the south wall was pierced, and a south aisle added, while the north wall was still unchanged. If so, the addition of the wider north aisle, and the arcade of wider bays, would occur at a later period, in the history of these walls.

Whether either of these periods synchronized with the



MINSTER CHURCH, THANET, FROM THE SOUTH WEST.



MINSTER CHURCH, THANET, FROM THE NORTH EAST.

addition of the thinner arcade-walls, of the eastern portion of the nave, it is difficult to decide. It may be possible either that they were added when the south aisle was formed, or that they were added, first, as external walls, before aisles were made. It is said that in the eastern portions of the arcades there were Norman windows above the arches. I am told that the interior openings of these windows were seen in 1854, when the walls were bare, during the incumbency of the Rev. R. T. Wheeler. The nave has a lofty king-post roof, probably of the fifteenth century.

The Norman tower of four stages, three of them pierced with round-headed windows, is, on the outside, 22 feet 2 inches square at its base, but on the interior it is $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet square. Its height, to the top of the battlements, is $61\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and at its top it measures 19 feet 6 inches from north to south, and 18 feet from east to west, within the battlements. For these and all other measurements, I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Robert Bubb, who has afforded me much information. His figures give a fair approximation to the actual dimensions. The tower walls, which at base seem to be nearly four feet thick, become less solid above. In the belfry loft, about half way up the tower, its west wall is 3 feet $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and the east wall 3 feet $3\frac{1}{4}$. The tower has shallow buttresses, of three stages, with Norman strings continued across them. On the north and south sides, the buttresses stand within three or four inches of the angles; but on the west side, they are further from the angles of the tower. Above the tower is a spire which, at its base, is 41 feet in circumference. One ancient and four "Caroline" bells hang in the Tower.*

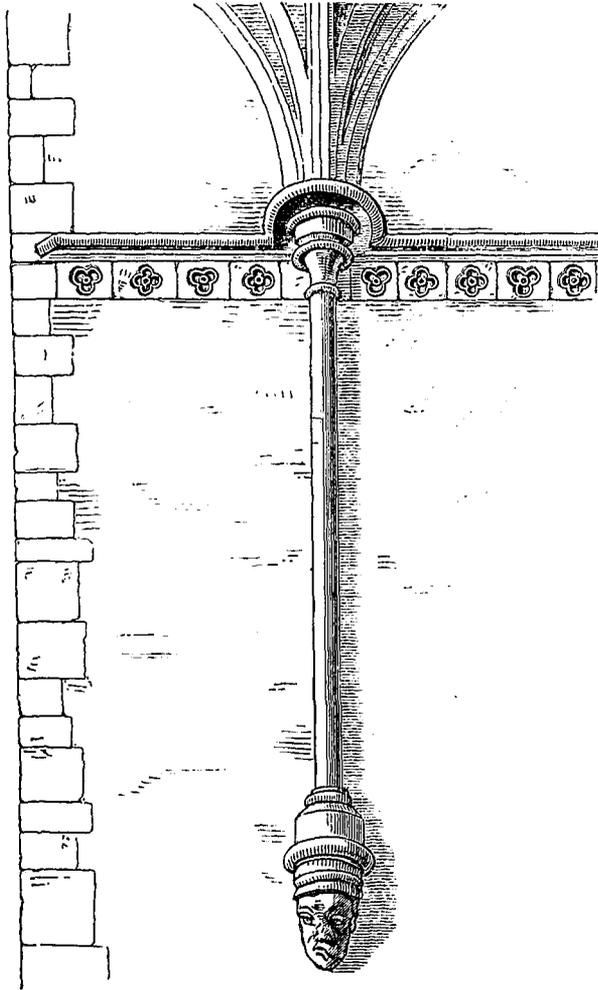
The Norman arch by which the tower opens into the nave is 22 feet 2 inches high, from floor to soffit. This is the exact length of each side of the tower's base. Considerably above this tower-arch, there is a large Norman window, looking into the nave from the belfry loft.

At the south east angle of the tower, but overlapping it eastward, there is a large turret, 7 feet 7 inches square.

* Mr. Bubb tells me that the treble is dated 1636; No. 2, 1626; No. 3, 1660; No. 4 is ancient and is inscribed *Sancta Maria ora pro nobis*; No. 5 is dated 1636.

It is built of unwrought stone ; it has no string-course, nor ornament of any kind ; it rises nearly as high as the tower, and ends in a four-sided conical capping of (apparently) stone tiles. Its south-west angle has quoins of wrought stone, simply recessed, for about one-half of its height. The windows are small rectangular slits, and its doorways, two in the east wall, and two in the north, are all roughly formed. The only entrance to this turret is from the south aisle, and the quoins of its north-east angle are visible in the nave, above the western engaged pier of the south arcade. The connection at present existing between this turret and the belfry loft, is a passage of the rudest kind, cut first northward, then westward, and lastly northward again, through the north wall of the turret and the south wall of the tower. The upper doorway into the bell chamber is of ordinary construction, but there are several useless stairs in the turret above the level of that door's base. Mr. Bubb, and others who have studied the peculiarities of this church, suggest that the turret is of earlier date than the tower. A doorway, in the east wall of the turret, is some feet above the existing roof of the south aisle. Evidently the roof to which it originally gave access was on a higher level, but the higher roof has long ago disappeared. I am inclined to think that this turret was built with the south aisle.

The transepts are of unequal dimensions, and although their designer intended to vault them both, yet his intention was not carried out until recently. The North Transept opens to the north aisle by a pointed arch, eight feet wide in the clear. This transept is $19\frac{1}{2}$ feet long from north to south, and 22 feet 9 inches deep from east to west. In its north wall are two lancet windows, and above them is a small Norman window, in the apex of the gable ; there was a door in the western corner. Externally this doorway is surmounted by the Early English string-course which, running beneath the windows, is continued as a square hood-mould over the door. Internally, beneath the windows in the north wall there is a string-course, and under it an altar tomb, beneath an arched canopy without cusplings. The tomb slab is incised with a cross flory, and around the edge were Lom-



VAULTING SHAFT AND STRING-COURSE OF SUNK PANELS IN THE
CHANCEL OF MINSTER CHURCH, THANET.

bardic letters forming, says Weever, this inscription: "Icigist Edile de Thorne que fust dame del espine."* The front of the altar tomb was adorned with carved arched niches. This transept is called the Thorne Chapel or Chancel, and many believe that its founder was commemorated by the tomb in its north wall. There are two lancet windows in the east, and one in the west wall.

The South Transept is entered from the south aisle by a pointed arch, 7 feet 10 inches wide in the clear. This transept is 18 feet 5 inches long from north to south, and 23 feet deep from east to west. The lancet windows formerly existing in its south wall have been replaced by a Perpendicular window of four lights, over it there is a little Norman window in the apex of the gable; the original lancets remain in the east and west walls.

The space lying between the transepts, and between the nave and chancel, has pointed arches on each of its four sides, and is vaulted like the chancel, in chalk, with plain round ribs lacking bosses. Rood-beams seem to have been placed across both the eastern and western arches of this central space. The holes into which the beam-ends were inserted are still to be seen, in the piers of these arches, just above the spring of each.

The Early English Chancel, 52 feet 9 inches long, is very handsome, although by no means ornate. The vaulting, in four bays, springs from round vaulting shafts, the moulded bases of which rest on corbels about 4 feet from the floor. These corbels vary in pattern, one is a human head, others, like simply curled stalks, die into the wall. The caps of the vaulting shafts are of the usual Early English bell shape, well moulded. Beneath these caps runs a flat string-course of sunken panels, and above that a projecting string of the usual hollow moulding. The panels of the flat string-course are ornamented, in the two western bays, with sunk quatrefoils and trefoils, alternately (or nearly so); and, in the centre of each, a small circle of stone is left uncut, to project button-like. In the two eastern bays, the sunken ornament is

* Thorn is the name of a house and small estate in Minster, from which the Chronicler Thorn is supposed to have derived his name.

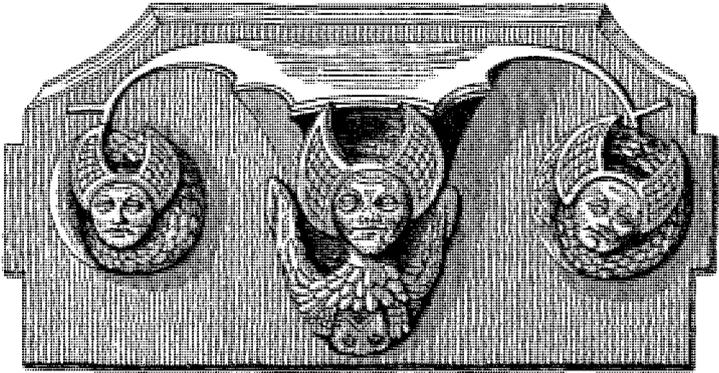
uniformly circular, not cusped. This string-course of sunken panels is very much like two others in Kent, of somewhat similar construction and design. One of them runs around the *sacrarium* of Hythe parish church; the other adorns the north wall of the cloisters of Canterbury Cathedral, where it surmounts the Early English arcading which ornamented the exterior of the ancient Refectory's south wall.

The chancel has, on each side, four lancet windows without shafts, but in the east wall are three lancets deeply moulded, having clustered shafts, with good bell capitals, and well-moulded bases. In the north wall is a tall narrow aumbry of peculiar shape; it is arched and pointed; and, being nearly five feet high, looks very much like a doorway; internally it is rectangular and capacious. Just east of it, the base of a vaulting shaft has been roughly inscribed with a rhyming distich in Latin. "Discat qui nescit quod Trot . . . hic requiescit." The inscription is simply scratched upon the stone in a running hand, of the fifteenth century probably; the three last letters of the man's name are not legible, but its first syllable "Trot" . . . is very plain.

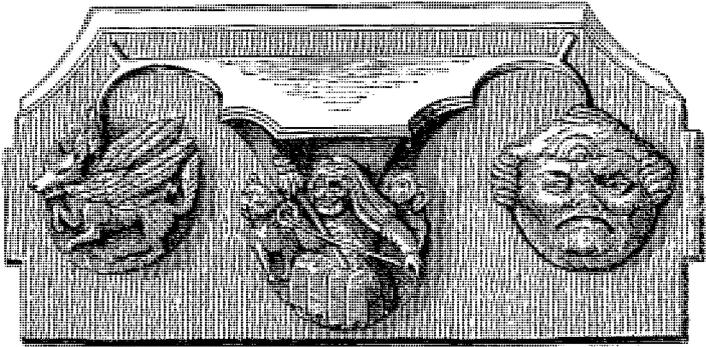
There are in the chancel eighteen handsome stalls of wood, ten on the north side, eight on the south, the seats of which are carved with various quaint designs. Upon each elbow is carved a winged angel wearing a coronal or circlet, which rises in front into the shape of a cross. These stalls are especially interesting because we can date them with some degree of accuracy. One upon the south side, close beside, and west of, the vestry (or priest's) door, bears the name of John Curteys, who was rector of Minster from A.D. 1401 to A.D. 1419. By old tradition, this stall has been continuously used as the seat of the clergyman officiating at daily prayer. The designs carved upon the seats (*misereres*) are as follows:—

NORTH SIDE.

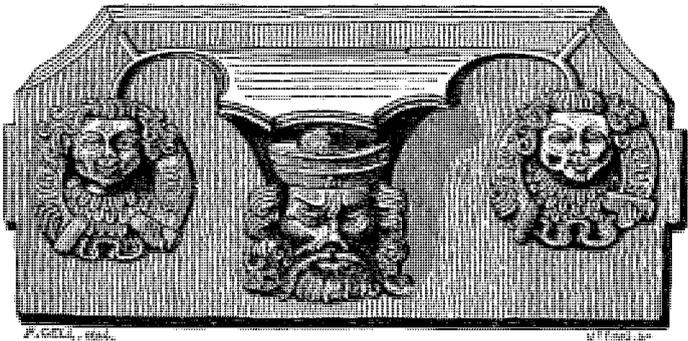
No. 1. (Western stall). A female head with horned head-dress, surmounting a winged body which has the clawed feet of a monster. On each side of this lies a small snake, curled into a circle, but having the head of a female with horned head-dress.



Miserere, No. 1.



Miserere, No. 10.



Miserere, No. 15.

CARVINGS ON SEATS IN THE CHANCEL OF MINSTER CHURCH, THANET.

- No. 2. A shield charged with a fess between three mullets; the arms of Manston of Manston Court. On each side of this there is a leaf.
- No. 3. An antelope, wearing a collar and chain. This was a Lancastrian badge. On each side there is foliage.
- No. 4. Three shields; the central one bears the Manston arms, with a crescent for difference.
- No. 5. A shield bearing the S^t Nicholas arms, *ermine* a chief quarterly. On each side is an angel holding a blank shield.
- No. 6. The devil seated between the horns of a huge head-dress worn by a woman. On each side is a lion's face with projecting tongue.
- No. 7. Two birds back to back. On each side is a fish.
- No. 8. An angel bearing a blank shield. On each side is a double rose.
- No. 9. A simple bracket. On each side is a four-leaved flower.
- No. 10. (Eastern stall). A woman seated, holding a distaff, and having on her right hand a cat, on her left a dog. On the west side of this carving is a fox running off with a goose on his back. On the east side of it is the clown-like head of a man.

SOUTH SIDE.

- No. 11 (Eastern stall). Three heads. That in the centre may possibly represent the Saviour, those on either side are sensual monks.
- No. 12. An angel clad in feathers, bearing on his breast the monogram *t. h. c.* On each side, a monster.
- No. 13. The female head of a furious "scold," with a gag in her mouth. On each side an eagle on its nest, with a scroll in its beak.
- No. 14. A man seated, stirring the contents of a pot, and shouting with his hand beside his mouth; behind him is a basting ladle, and an implement used for putting bread into an oven. On each side is a fowl or goose, on her nest.
- No. 15. A turban'd head of a man. On each side a grotesque head behind which appears a scroll. On one scroll is "*Johannes*," on the other "*Curteys*."
- No. 16. The bust of a man who is laughing immoderately. On each side is a lion's head, likewise grinning.
- No. 17. The head of a man with curling hair. On each side is a dragon.

No. 18. (Western stall). An angel playing upon a guitar. On each side is a human face.

For drawings of some of these carvings, and of the vaulting shaft, we are indebted to the generosity and skill of the Rev. F. Gell, of Minster Vicarage. Mr. Bubb kindly furnished photographs from which the other woodcuts have been taken.

In the south aisle of the nave, beside the second pier from the west end, stands the Bible-desk, to which the covers of an ancient Bible are still chained. The font, near the same place, is new. Traces remain of a primitive sundial, scratched upon the west buttress of the chancel's south wall, at its eastern angle.

In connection with the heraldic shields which appear upon stalls No. 2, 4, and 5, it may be stated that the benefactor commemorated by the St. Nicholas shield was, probably, John St. Nicholas of Thorne, whose wife's Christian name was Bennett.* Their son and heir Thomas St. Nicholas married Julian Manston, daughter and heiress of Nicholas Manston (who died in 1444) by his wife Eleanor heiress of Edmund Haute. Thomas St. Nicholas, of Thorne, by his will made in 1474, desired to be buried, before the image of St. Nicholas, in the Chancel of Thorne at Menstre† (that is the north transept of Minster Church). His wife Julian survived, until 1493, when she was buried in the Manston Chancel of St. Lawrence Church. Their sons were named Roger, Thomas, Richard, and John.‡ Roger's only child, Elizabeth St. Nicholas, heiress of Thorne, Manston Court, and Powcies, married John Dynley.

The site of Minster churchyard was used for burials, at a very early period. Some years ago, there was found in it a skeleton, on the skull of which was a glass vessel, bell-shaped, ornamented with threads of glass, like the glass vessels found in Saxon graves, and placed with its mouth downwards.§

* Planché, *A Corner of Kent*, p. 365.

† Lewis, *Hist. of Tenet*, p. 81.

‡ Planché, p. 366.

§ *Archæological Journal*, iv., p. 159.