

HARTY CHURCH, SHEPPEY.

BY AYMER VALLANCE.

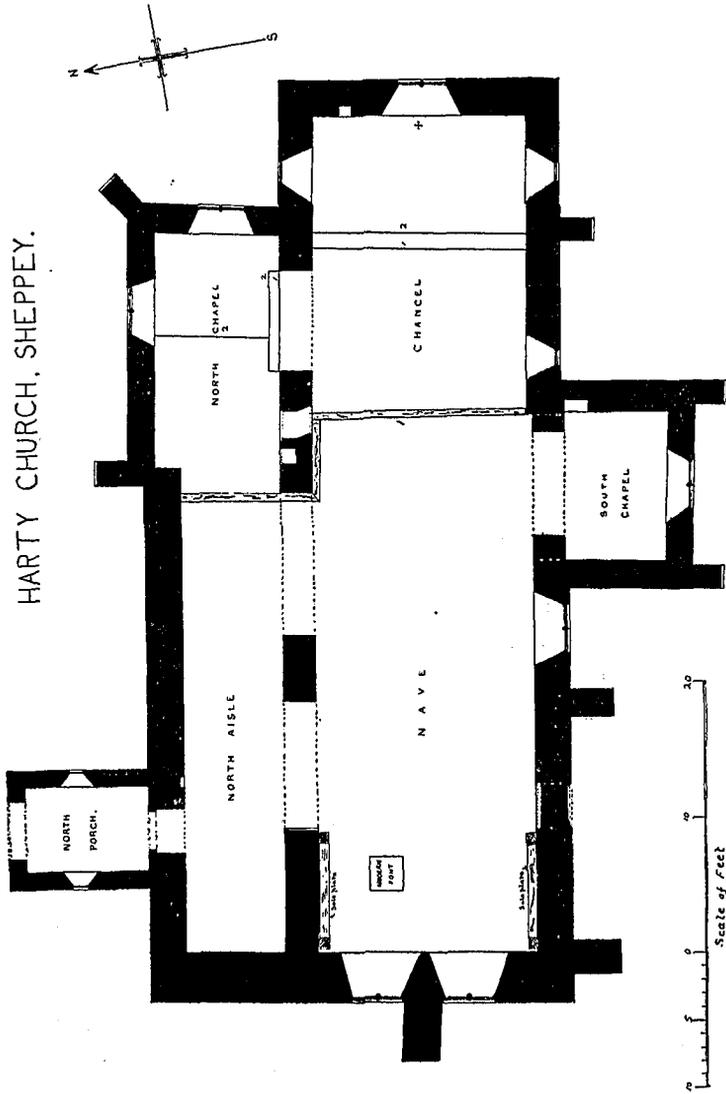
At first sight of the exterior there is no sign of anything earlier than a pair of thirteenth-century lancets, one on either hand of the chancel, near its east end. But closer examination proves the building to date from the twelfth, if not indeed the eleventh, century.

Calcareous tufa, or travertine, is to be seen in the west wall, and in the north-west quoin of the church, and in the south and east walls of the south transeptal chapel. There are also slight indications of the presence of travertine in other parts of the exterior. The only ashlar used in the exterior occurs in the quoins, doorways and windows. The wall surface generally is of undressed stone, purposely left rough to serve as a key for the plastering with which the building was coated. The walls are now stripped and defaced with pointing, erroneously drawing attention to the ruggedness, which was designed only as a means to an end and never ought to be exposed to view at all.

The plan comprises a chancel and north chapel, the latter extending about six feet further west than the chancel; a nave with north aisle and north porch, and a transeptal south chapel. Over the west end of the nave is a bell-cote, supported from within the nave from the floor upward by an oak frame, to which, seeing it is of simple carpentry, very rude and massive, without any architectural moulding or other determining feature, except its saltire-wise timbering, it would be rash to assign a date. It may possibly be of the fourteenth century.

The elevation of the west end is of fairly unusual design—an axial buttress between a couple of late-Gothic windows. The majority of the windows in the building is of much the same style. In the interior of the nave, high in the

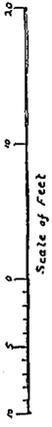
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north arcade wall, there remains part of a round-headed window, now blocked up, the arch of the splay turned with blocks of travertine with a slight admixture of clunch. This window, which is at least as old as the early part of the twelfth century and may even be a survival from a pre-conquest building, previous to the erection of the north aisle, does not belong to the category of clerestory windows. It owes its lofty position to a very natural desire, in the days when glazing was excessively rare, to minimise the inevitable discomfort of wind and rain.

The arches opening from the nave into the said aisle are of transitional character, perhaps between about 1190 and 1200. They are two-centred, with flat soffits, springing from imposts. Earlier than the north arcade is the arch which opens on the south side of the nave into what was perhaps originally a south transept, now transformed into a transeptal chapel or aisle. This arch can scarcely be later than about the middle of the twelfth century, or 1180 at latest. It is semi-circular headed, with a perfectly flat soffit, springing from imposts. The above-mentioned arches, as Dr. Francis Grayling (*County Churches series, Kent*, vol. ii., 1913) rightly points out, could not have formed part of the original scheme, but were later introductions effected by piercing the outer walls of the old nave.

An ingenious conjecture is made by Mr. C. H. Drake. He has found, in the course of measuring, that the thickness of the south wall of the nave does not tally with the thickness of the responds of the arch which opens to the south chapel and of the walling immediately adjoining thereto, but that there is a difference of several inches. The responds are 2 ft. 5 in. thick, whereas the south wall varies from 2 ft. 8 in. to nearly 2 ft. 9 in. thick. Had the arch been of one build with its contiguous walling, the latter and the arch responds must have been of equal thickness. Mr. Drake, therefore, suggests that the arch in question may actually have formed the chancel arch, and that, at the time when the south chapel (which he assigns to the fourteenth century) was erected, the original chancel arch was taken down and

utilized to make the new arch required to open into the south chapel. This explanation would at the same time account for the absence of a chancel arch in the building as it exists to-day.

A plain, two-centred arch, perhaps of the thirteenth century, without imposts and with stop-chamfered edge, opens from the chancel into the north chancel. The north aisle of the nave opens into the north chancel through a two-centred arch, which is chamfered and without imposts, but not of sufficiently pronounced type to be dated with more precision than approximately of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

The nave's south door, which appears to have been of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, is now walled up. Externally in the east side of the door-frame a scratch-dial is incised.

The north door, with a four-centred arched head, remains, together with the innermost truss of the timber roof of the old north porch. The present porch is merely a modern rebuilding.

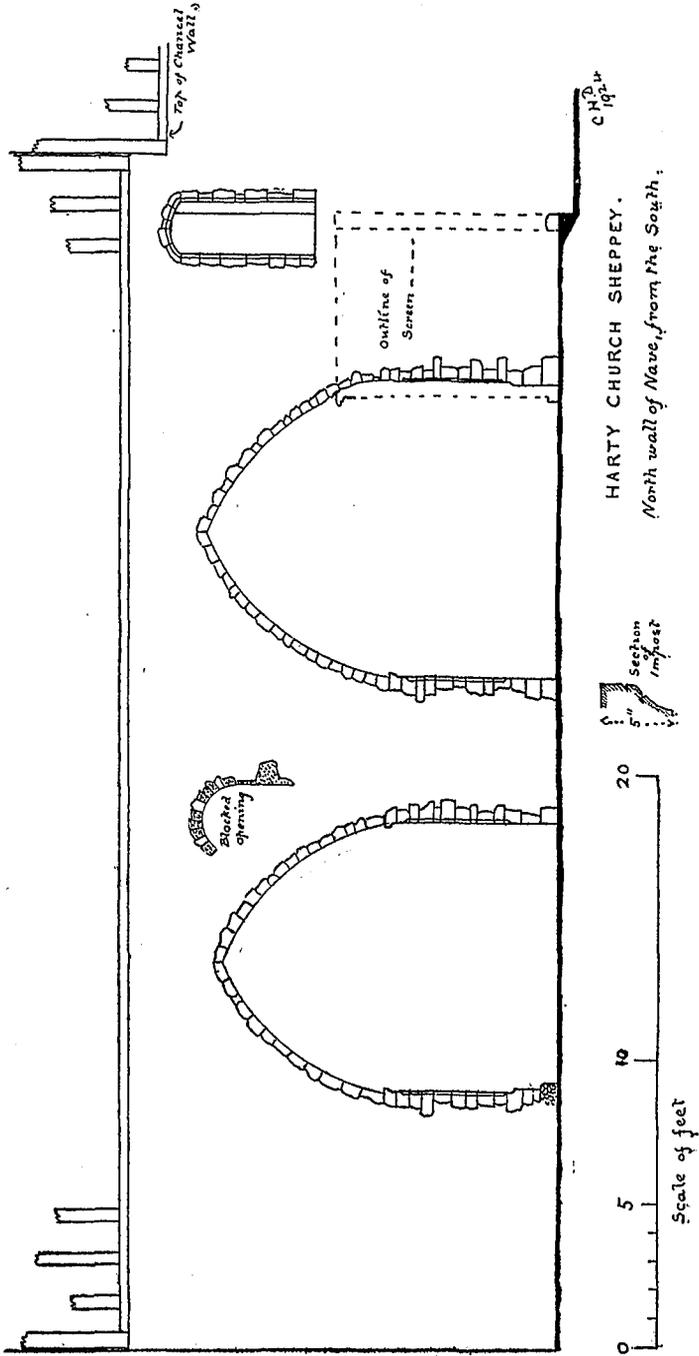
Within the north aisle, to east of the north door, is the mutilated basin of a holy-water stoup.

In the south wall of the chancel is a low-side-window, square-headed, with a pair of iron hooks in the jamb for the wooden shutter, which closed the aperture on the inside. This shutter has now vanished, and the window itself has been quite filled up with glass.

There is no chancel arch. The chancel itself is one step lower than the nave.

A short shaft of what appears to have been a "pillar-piscina" is to be seen half embedded low down in the wall of the chancel, to south of the altar.

In the east wall of the chancel, to north of the east window, is a richly sculptured niche with crocketed head. The work, though it appears to have undergone "restoration," dates from the fourteenth century, probably the reign of Edward III. The back of the niche is coloured with remarkably fine diaper ornament of late-fifteenth-century execution.



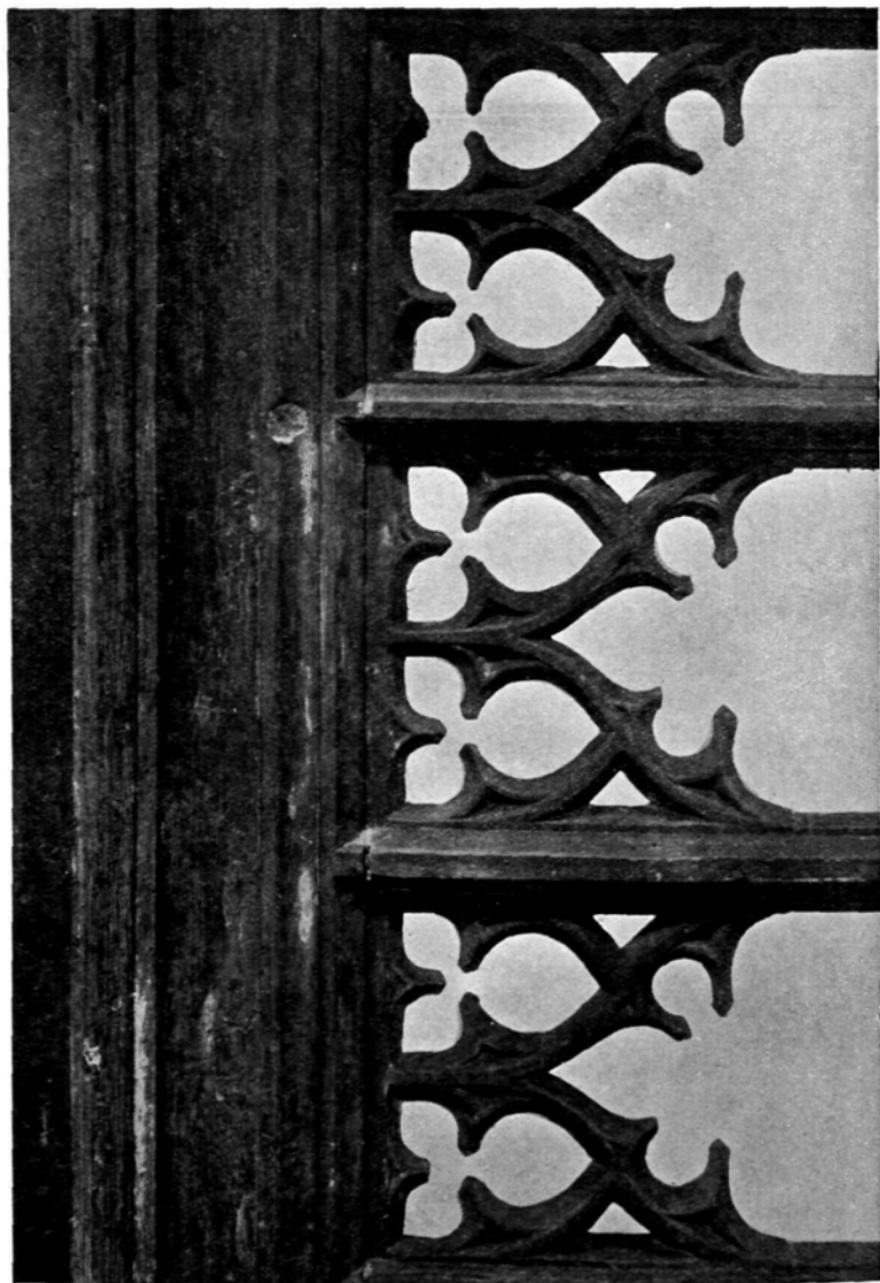
It would seem that formerly more colour decoration was in existence, for, in his *List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having Mural and other Painted Decorations*, 3rd edition, 1883, Mr. C. E. Keyser, F.S.A., notes "considerable remains of painting found built up in east wall on niches and tracery—of figures which cannot be made out." This statement hardly accords with local tradition. It is remembered in the neighbourhood that, during the process of repairing Harty Church in 1876, the workmen found some traces of wall-paintings. Not recognizing, however, that the remains were of any particular value, the plasterers covered them all over again, together with the surrounding wall. Thus were obliterated any vestiges that might have survived, except only the colour decoration of the niche above described.

Another niche, of fourteenth-century workmanship, foiled, but of much less elaborate design, is to be seen in the east wall of the transeptal chapel on the south side of the nave. At the springing on one side is a mask, which Dr. Grayling describes as "Norman." The opposite springing is not ornamented. There is a sculptured stone corbel, in the form of a head, south of the east window of the chancel; and another corbel, moulded only, in the south wall of the chancel, to east of the easternmost window of the south side. Another corbel, moulded likewise, is on the south side of the nave, adjoining the west splay of the south window.

Fragments of moulded stone, including what looks like the base of a mediæval font, lie at the west end of the nave.

The church is partitioned right across by oak screenwork of one design and make, at one height, viz., 7 ft. 9 in., though not in one direct straight line.

The north chapel screen is 10 ft. 3 in. long, and consists of nine rectangular compartments in the following order from north to south: five lights at the north end, next a door of two lights, and then, instead of lights, two blind or solid panels in front of the arcade pier. To enable this blind panelwork to stand upright, fitting close against the pier, the impost of the arch has been somewhat roughly



Photo

HARTY CHURCH, SHEPPEY
Detail of the Rood-Screen.

Aymar Vallance

hacked away, as well as part of the soffit above it. The woodwork then returns eastward against the south face of the nave's north wall for a length of some 6 ft. 4½ in. of solid panelling with feather-edge boarding, to join, at right angles, the north end of the rood-screen.

The rood-screen itself is 16 ft. 3 in. long, and consists of sixteen rectangular lights or compartments, viz., six on either hand of the central doorway, which has folding doors of two lights apiece. The lights centre from 11 in. to 11½ in. The doorway of the rood-screen has a clear opening of 3 ft. 9½ in. The wainscote of the screen is 3 ft. 7 in. high on the nave side, but within the chancel, which has a lower level than the nave, the wainscote measures 4 ft. ½ in. high. The fenestration is 3 ft. 7 in. high, with tracery to the depth of 11 in. in the head. Along the top of the lintel are indications of mortice holes for attaching the rood-loft, which was added afterwards, the screen not having originally been constructed to carry a loft.

There is no record as to the date of the screen, except the internal evidence of style. The plain wainscote of feather-edge boarding, and the design of the fenestration tracery, alike point to the fourteenth century, between about 1360 and 1380. Records exist it is true, in the shape of wills, but they belong to the following century. Thus in 1459 Thomas Mette devised 6s. 8d. "to the repair and making of the cross-beme"; and Thomas Banny, in 1467, left three shewes "to the new making of the rood-loft in the church," *i.e.*, the nave. It is so obvious that the existing screen is earlier than either of these bequests, that they must be understood as referring to additions made to it subsequently to its erection, and afterwards removed, while the screen itself was still preserved, to survive, happily, down to the present day.

It is specially worthy of note that both portions of the screen retain their doors complete. The whole screen has been subjected to repairs, but is, in the main, original.

The rood-stair, which, it may be presumed, was constructed about the time of Thomas Banny's bequest in 1467, is entered

from the north chancel. To make way for the stair an earlier aumbrey, close by in the south wall of the chapel, was truncated. The lowest part of the stair must have been of timber, since the cill of the doorway is 5 ft. 5 in. above the floor level. The opening is rebated, and one iron hook remains in the eastern jamb, for the door to swing outward. Thence a passage, 1 ft. 11 in. wide, is tunnelled through the solid wall; three stone steps, rising 2 ft. 6 in. from north to south, with a slight inclination to eastward, emerging into the nave at a height of 8 ft. 1 in. above the floor. The issue is a four-centred arch, with chamfered edge.

In the north aisle of the nave stands a sculptured oak coffer, which, there can scarcely be a doubt, is of foreign workmanship. It is, in fact, an instance of what inventories and other ancient documents refer to as a "Flanders kist." Its date is probably about 1375. A wood-engraving of the coffer, accompanied by four pages of description by the Rev. W. A. Scott-Robertson, in 1875, appeared in the 10th volume of *Archæologia Cantiana*.

Another coffer of somewhat later date, to wit, the last quarter of the fourteenth century, is preserved in York Minster, and has for central subject the combat between St. George and the Dragon.

A coffer of much the same style as, but again of slightly later date than, that at Harty, and having for subject the combat of St. George and the Dragon, its carving enriched with painting, was preserved, down to the time of the late war, in Ypres Cathedral.

In the case of the Harty coffer the subject is a joust between two mounted men. It is a mistake to imagine that the flanking figures under architectural canopies in the coffer at Harty, or in that at York Minster, have any connection with the main subject. They harmonize, of course, in costume and architectural style, but for the rest they must be regarded as quite conventional ornaments. It would impair the unity of the composition if the latter were carried out over the entire front, regardless of the several component parts and of the different directions of the grain. The main

subject, therefore, is confined to the principal slab with its horizontal grain, while the vertical stiles which frame the large panel at either end have their own independent treatment. The bottom of the stiles has perished through standing for centuries on the damp floor. Otherwise the body of the coffer should have been raised much higher from the ground than it now is. The whole has suffered much from decay and repair. The ogee-shaped apronpiece along the bottom is not original, and the lid is only a modern one of deal. The vertical dovetailing, by which the front slab and stiles of the coffer are joined together, is worthy of notice. Within, on the right-hand side, is the usual tray or till for valuables. The lid of the till is original, its edge being ornamented in a very similar manner to that of a large iron-bound coffer which had originally been used for safeguarding the town archives of Ypres, and, previously to the time of the late war, was kept in the Museum of that place.

Against the north wall of the north chapel stands a wooden table of modern manufacture, incorporating a number of carvings and traceries, apparently belonging to separate works of fifteenth-century date. Fixed to the table, below the slab, is a series of traceries, which look as though they had been taken from a screen-wainscote. There are also five sculptured bosses in the shape of demi-figures issuing from clouds, their hands crossed on the breast. These last, however, are suspiciously uniform in pose and expression. The table is traditionally reported to have come hither from Meopham Church. It happened that a former incumbent of Leysdown with Harty, the Rev. L. W. Lewis, was presented to the Vicarage of Meopham in 1875, and it is therefore not unreasonable to conclude, as Rev. R. E. Harding concludes, that, if the table were discarded about this time from Meopham, the then vicar of the latter parish might have secured it for his old parish in Sheppey. This seems to be the most satisfactory way of accounting for the acquisition of the table by Harty Church.

In a sort of lumber closet, curtained off at the west end of the north aisle, is a plain oak table with turned pillar

legs, framed or "jointed." This may well have been the communion table, provided in Elizabethan days in lieu of the demolished stone high-altar.

The roofs, font, pulpit, pews and lectern are all modern.

(Visited 15th June 1921.)

POSTSCRIPT TO HARTY CHURCH.

The church contains two engraved lattens or brasses, as noted by Messrs. Ralph Griffin, Secretary S.A., and Mill Stephenson, F.S.A., in *A List of Monumental Brasses remaining in the County of Kent in 1922*.

I. In the nave: Lower half of man, originally 12¼ in., now 6 in. by 4 in., in civil dress; foot inscription 13 in. by 12½ in., in English. Habram Fare, 1512. (Belcher's *Kentish Brasses*, vol. ii., p. 65, No. 194.)

II. In the north chapel: Inscription 19¾ in. by 4½ in., in English; achievement 8½ in. by 7½ in. Elizabeth, wife of Samuel Haward, gentleman, 1610. (The achievement illustrated in *Arch. Cant.*, Vol. VI., p. 299. Belcher's *Kentish Brasses*, vol. ii., p. 65, No. 193.) In 1901 the achievement was loose in the vestry, but is now (1923) preserved in the coffer, it being the intention of the vicar, the Rev. R. E. Harding, to have it refixed. Thanks are due to him for useful information, and also to Mr. Charles H. Drake for kindly going over from Faversham on several occasions to measure Harty Church, and for his generous labour in preparing the plan and diagram which accompany this notice.