

PLANS OF, AND BRIEF ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ON, KENT
CHURCHES

PART III. DARENTH, STAPLEHURST, BEARSTED, AND HORTON
KIRBY

By F. C. ELLISTON-ERWOOD, F.S.A.

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARGARET, DARENTH (Plan 11)

DARENTH church consists of a pre-conquest nave, a large and unusual early Norman chancel, traces of a transitional addition to this chancel and a thirteenth century aisle and tower, but the nave arcade has been several times modified.

Pre-Conquest work

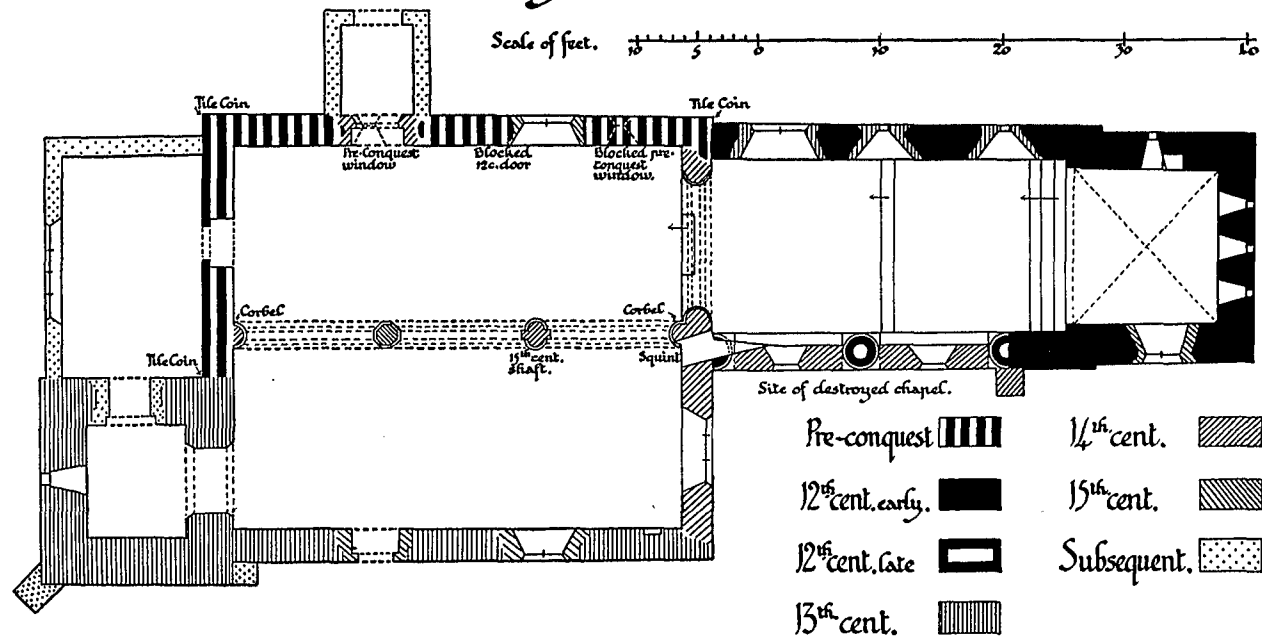
The nave of the church, originally 36 feet 9 inches by 19 feet is undoubtedly of this period and though only two of its walls and part of a third remain (and one of these, the west, unparadoxically mutilated by the building of a modern vestry that could easily have been placed elsewhere) it possesses some definite pre-conquest features. The three existing coins, the NE, NW, and SW, this last visible in the corner of the afore-mentioned vestry, display the tile technique in re-used Roman material¹ which, while in itself is no criterion of pre-conquest construction (similar work exists at St. Paulinus' Cray, which is certainly post-conquest) can certainly be regarded as indicative of early building. This dating is confirmed by the existence of a double splayed window, open inside the church, but partly concealed by the roof of the wooden porch. The head of this window is turned in tile, and the opening preserves the remains of the original perforated oak plank that served as the framework for a closing shutter. This window may be compared with those at Swanscombe² and West Peckham (to be described later in this series). About sixteen feet east of this window and on the same level, are the unmistakable traces of a second window, now completely blocked.

In the centre of the west wall was originally an opening of semi-circular headed form, but it was blocked till 1922, when it was opened out to form an entry to the new vestry. I was able to be

¹ This material is almost certainly derived from the Darenth "Villa" or "Dye Works" which was uncovered by the late George Payne, F.S.A., in 1894. The overgrown and indistinguishable ruins are in a field some half-a-mile south of the Church. See *Arch. Cant.*, XXII (1897), p. 49.

² *Arch. Cant.*, XLIII (1931), p. 242.

Darenth, Kent, S. Margaret.



Measured and drawn 1912. Revised and Redrawn 1948 by F.C. Elliston-Erwood, F.S.A.

present when this was done and to photograph the details as revealed. This was fortunate as nearly everything was destroyed in the process. The doorway, for such it proved to be, had been cut straight through the wall without any provision for a rebate for a door. This had undoubtedly been supplied in wood, and I thought I could detect the marks of it on the plaster that remained, but the evidence was slight and since then, all of this plastering, which was very thick and uneven, has gone, except a small almost invisible fragment incorporated in the modern rendering on the soffit of the arch.

As to the nature and plan of the eastern arm of the church at this period, there is no evidence. In my original account of the building¹ I suggested a small approximately square chancel, but Canon Livett in his article on the church at Eynsford,² suggested a much longer and apsidal one, but as there is no evidence either way, both of these suggestions must be regarded as purely hypothetical.

The Eleventh Century additions

The enlargement of the church in early Norman times, while it follows the usual course of making a larger chancel, is exceptional in this case because of the unusual length of the addition. This extension, consisting of a two-compartment chancel (making thus with the old nave an example of the three-celled Norman church) is longer than the pre-conquest nave to which it is attached, and there appears to be no alternative but to regard the whole extension as of one period, in spite of the fact that the middle section preserves no features assignable to the eleventh century. There can be no doubt about the easternmost portion, for while the ornament round the window heads is entirely unconvincing, and indeed it differs from that shown on an engraving in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1820, which also is not normal, the interior leaves not the slightest doubt of its antiquity. A low unornamented "arch of triumph," with small stone voussoirs, a groined vault, and the splays of the windows, these two last entirely covered with contemporary painting in imitation stonework, are clear indications of date. Thus, though the central section carries no precise dating features, an eleventh century sanctuary and a pre-conquest nave must have been connected by work which was contemporary with one or the other, and as there is a definite straight joint at the junction of the nave and this section of the eastern arm, the problem cannot be said to exist. Just east of the present north porch the vestiges of another round-headed opening can be seen, and this opening is shown inside the church by the removal of the plaster. One or two much-weathered voussoirs remain *in situ*, and judging from the ornament that survives, the door

¹ *Proc. Woolwich Antiq. Soc.*, XVII.

² *Arch. Cant.*, XLVI (1934), p. 162.

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must have been of some distinction and possibly a little later than the eastern end.

There are varied opinions as to the nature and purpose of the space above the sanctuary vault. It has been compared with the well known upper chapel at Compton, Surrey, but an investigation by the Dartford Antiquarian Society in 1932,¹ makes it clear that it had neither utilitarian nor ecclesiological purpose; that the walls above the vault had been raised some two feet at some early date; and that the partition separating the space from the chancel is of lath and plaster and like the woodwork of the roofing, of fifteenth century date. In brief, the space is nothing but the normal one between the upper surface of a vault and its covering roof, in this case subsequently enlarged by the raising of the walls. This makes the two other openings, the cross, and possibly the circular gable opening suspect, though they are given on the plate in the *Gentleman's Magazine* before mentioned.

A brief mention should be made of the tub-shaped font which belongs to the latter part of this period. It bears round its circumference a series of arcaded niches, each containing a sculptured subject, concerning the interpretation of which there has been considerable speculation. The sanest of these is that by our member the Rev. A. H. Collins, M.A. F.S.A.,² but one panel admits of no controversy; it is a contemporary representation of the rite of Baptism by immersion.

The Late Twelfth Century

In the south wall of the middle section of the church are the remains of a blocked arcade of two pointed arches springing from two responds and supported in the centre by a free pier. All these have square capitals with scalloped ornament and are clearly transitional work. Of the size of this aisle, or more likely chapel, there are now no indications, as the structure has disappeared and the arches are blocked. As the east window of the aisle and the two small lights in the arch filling are of fourteenth century work, it would seem that this chapel had disappeared by then.

The Thirteenth Century

Building operations during this period were devoted to the erection of the tower, the addition of an aisle with the making of a nave arcade, and a few window insertions. The tower is a plain substantial erection without any structural stairway, and unbuttressed. (The angle buttress shown on the plan on the SW angle is slight and late.) The North wall was pierced when the vestry was built. I am not happy

¹ *Trans. Dartford Ant. Soc.*, No. 2 (1932).

² *Arch. Cant.*, LVI (1943), p.6.

about the aisle. In the first place it is very wide for an early aisle and there are now no vestiges of the arcade that must have accompanied it. But the existing arcade appears to be a much rebuilt feature and in the course of several alterations, the thirteenth century work has disappeared, and there seems to be no evidence of a widening. The aisle then must be accepted as an original piece of work.

The Fourteenth Century

The transitional arcade was probably blocked in this century, the chancel arch inserted in place of an earlier one of unknown date, and the present entrance door to the church under the porch was put in. But the main problem is in the nave arcade. This at first sight is fifteenth century, but it springs from grotesque heads, which, whatever their date, rest on fourteenth century corbels similar to the capitals of the chancel arch. The piers are perpendicular, but the eastern of the pair rests on a base that was intended for two semi-circular or half shafts and it, too, is of the same style as the bases of the chancel arch responds. This can only be explained by presuming a Decorated arcade, followed in the next century by the present or third arcade.

The Fifteenth Century

The rebuilding of the nave arcade, as previously indicated, was the chief work of this period, together with one or two windows, and judging from the woodwork of the roofs there was much done in this direction, including the work over the sanctuary roof (see ante), and the large squint through the south respond of the chancel arch. The consecration cross on the north nave wall is probably associated with the alterations of the thirteenth century. The black marble pavement "Ex dono Edmund Davenport 1670" seems to have disappeared, as do scraps of painting and worked stone noted by Sir Stephen Glynne. The screen and stalls are new and the Laudian altar rails, after forming a railing round the font, have once more—in part at least—returned to their original position, while the rest of them form a screen to the tower arch. The large stone vessel behind the font is in all likelihood a domestic mortar.

THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, STAPLEHURST (Plan 12)

Staplehurst is a fine Wealden Church and its architectural history has been well written by the present Rector, the Rev. A. J. Walker, M.A., but as is so often the case there is no plan to elucidate the text. This plan may serve to fill the gap till a better is produced, and this brief note will allow me to put on record one or two points where I diverge from the published account.

The Twelfth Century church

The search for vestiges of the Norman church is mainly concentrated on the north wall of the present church, between the modern organ chamber and the great buttress supporting the chancel arch. This may, I think, be accepted as part of the north wall of the twelfth century nave. It is obviously older than the rest of the walling and has some herring-bone work, which may be corroborative. Anyhow I have taken this as the basis of my reconstruction. Behind the hymn board on the south chancel arch abutment, the plaster has been cut away and some rough masonry has been revealed. It is not by any means easily datable but as some early work might have been expected here, in spite of the bad logic, I accept it as another part of the early church. But where was the western termination? And where was the chancel? The south wall was on the line of the present arcade, and I think that the west wall must have stood from somewhere about the centre of the organ chamber arch to a point midway between the first two piers of the arcade. I choose this position because it makes a suitably proportioned nave, and there is no trace of the early walling west of the organ chamber. Of the chancel there is no evidence at all, and this part of my plan is purely speculative. The result as shown in tint on my drawing is however as a church of the period might be. The Vicar, supported by such a high authority as Mr. F. C. Eeles, would have a tower on the south side of the nave at its eastern end. This, while not unknown (see the plan of Kingsdown near Wrotham)¹ generally leaves some trace, even if destroyed, but here there is absolutely none. As will be seen later on, there is a problem here, but I do not think it can be solved in this manner.

The Thirteenth Century

An extraordinary and extensive enlargement took place in this century when additions were made west, south and east. The old Norman west wall was taken down, and the nave enlarged a bay and a half. The chancel was extended eastwards to its present extent and an aisle of five bays was put to the extended nave, and a chapel with three bays to the chancel. The Vicar says that the south tower was still in existence and separated these two sections, but again I fail to find the least evidence of this; the aisle wall appears to be homogeneous right up to the commencement of the south chapel.

The Fifteenth Century

There was very little work done in the fourteenth century except window insertions which are indicated on the plan, and we can now

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, XXXV (1921), p. 109.

Staplehurst, Kent. All Saints.

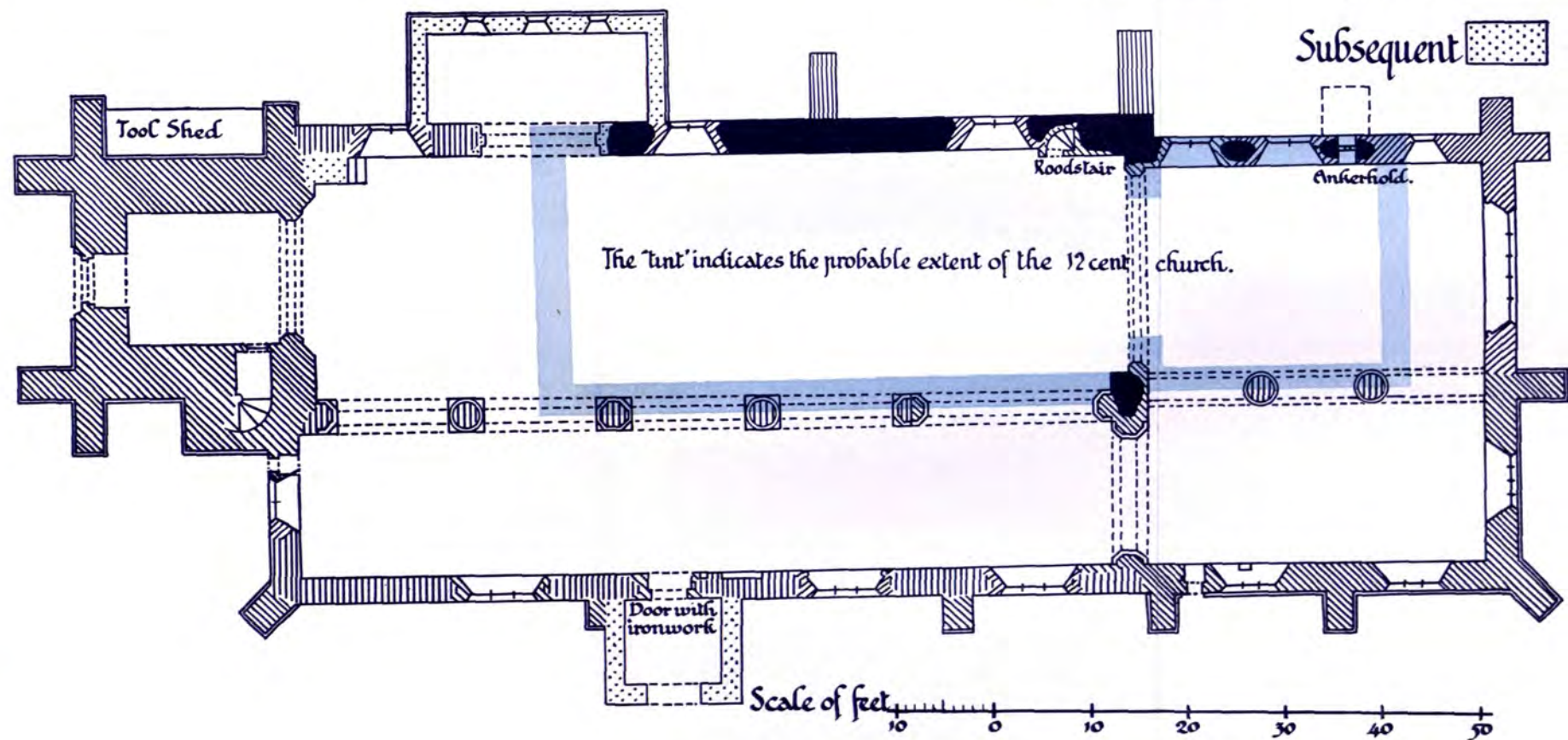
12th cent. ■

14th cent. ▨

13th cent. ▤

15th cent. ▧

Subsequent ▩



Measured by F.J. Martin & F.C.E.E 1941-2, Drawn by F.C. Ellison-Erwood, F.S.A. 1948.

come to the second great building period in the history of the church. This was first the erection at the west end, of the fine tower of typical Kentish type with its stairway in a separate turret. Secondly, the chapel was rebuilt as regards its east and south walls; this is clearly shown by the existing plinth, which encloses these walls only. There were more window insertions and finally, the great bone of contention the rebuilding of the easternmost arch of the nave arcade. I cannot help feeling that this was connected with the building of the rood-screen. It will be noted that this eastern arch is wider than the rest. If it had been originally (as I think it was) of the same width as the others, which would be normal, there would have remained, projecting from the chancel abutment a length of the original Norman wall of about 4 to 5 feet. This would be in the way of the extension of the screen in front of the south chapel, so the arch was widened and rebuilt. There would be no difficulty about this were it not for the fact that the cap of the added fifteenth century pier has two "ears" suggesting that it had been built into a wall as the cap of a respond. I cannot see where any such wall could have been and all I can think about the matter is that it is a case of re-used material. Further, there were rood-screen works going on in 1497 which might easily be an appropriate date for this late Perpendicular work, and the interpretation of the terms "High Beam" and "Low Rood" may be seen in the beams across the main chancel and the chapel arch respectively.¹

This account cannot close without a reference to Staplehurst's most prized possession, namely the iron work on the outside of the door in the south wall of the aisle. It seems clear that this was originally on a round-headed door; that the iron-work is probably twelfth century; that it has been remounted, perhaps more than once; and that it is damaged. The Vicar in his booklet has a plausible explanation of it all, but he admits that a Daniel has yet to arise who can read the riddle. I cannot attempt it, seeing only the whimsies of the local smith as he fashioned divers strips of hammered iron to strengthen and, maybe, to his notions, decorate the door.

Finally there is the Anker's cell, the opening of which into the church is open, and excavations outside the building revealed its floor. The smaller opening, with a very rough passage through the wall is our very old friend the "putlog hole." The ancient character of the masonry revealed may be an indication of the extent of the original Norman Chancel, which would have extended about as far east as the cell, and may serve to prove that the core of the wall is older than its facing, or it may be merely another case of reused stone. Here again I must disagree with the Vicar and Professor Grensted, as I must concerning his very elaborate explanation of the results of the obvious

¹ See *Testamenta Cantiana*, sub Staplehurst.

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tilting of the arcade wall and piers. The peculiarities of the roofing that he mentions are those produced by the reconstruction of the roofwork in the fifteenth century or later, called for by the gradual tilting of the arcade wall over some two centuries.

THE CHURCH OF HOLY CROSS, BEARSTED (Plan 13)

Bearsted Church does at first sight promise a great deal of interesting material, and at the desire of the Vicar I went down and produced the accompanying plan. The Norman church was not easy to locate because the whole of the exterior of the building has been carefully "restored," and in the process nearly all the datable material had disappeared. But I thought I could see some slight evidence of early construction in the south wall between the porch and the tower. There was, too, a change in the character of the masonry by the rood-stair turret, and another concealed behind the buttress east of the modern vestry. With this information we may suggest the growth of the church was probably something as follows :—

(1) A small Norman church extending from the tower arch to the screen, the eastern portion of this being a small and nearly square chancel. (It is shown on the plan as a pale tint.)






(2) This church was enlarged in the thirteenth century by the usual absorption of the old chancel in the new nave and the building of a new chancel further east.

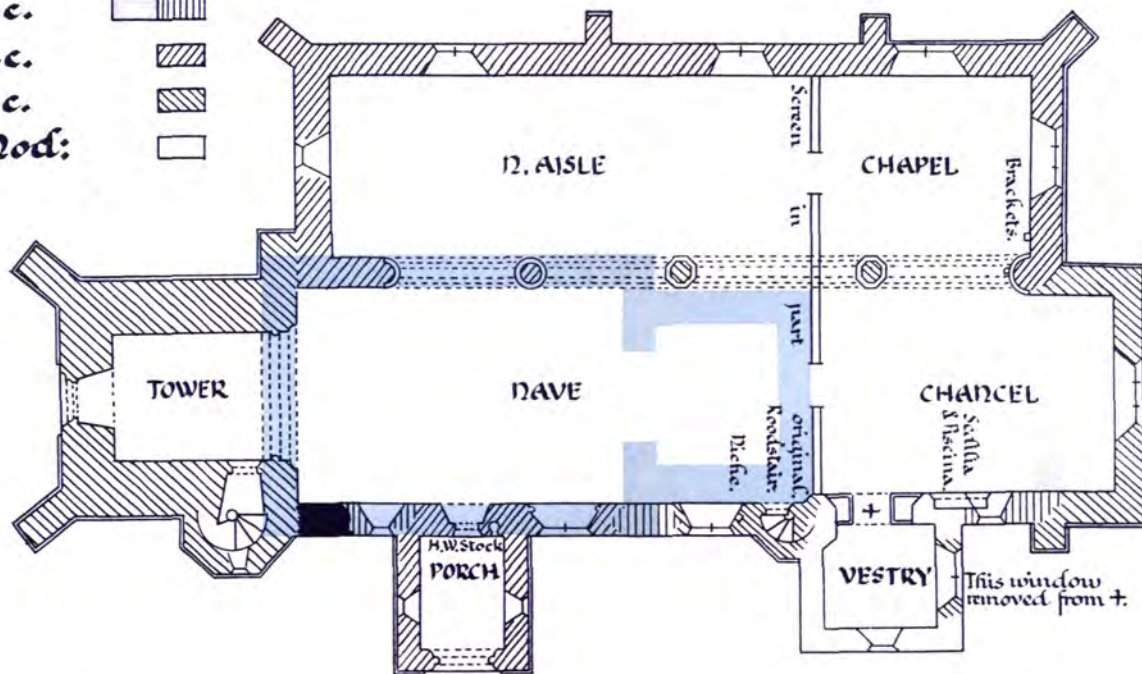
(3) The fourteenth century saw the addition of an aisle to the north with a chapel to the chancel. An arcade of three piers and two responds was put in and the south porch was built.

(4) In the fifteenth century the fine west tower was constructed and joined on to the Norman nave, and the chancel was further extended as indicated by the existing plinth. The eastern part of the chapel was likewise rebuilt. The insertion of the rood-screen necessitated the building of the stair and the rebuilding of part of the arcade at a wider span to accommodate the screen as it crossed the church from north to south. Part of this screen remains *in situ*.

Two matters of interest should receive some mention. The first must be the three strange beasts that decorate the angles of the tower in place of the usual pinnacles. Popular legend speaks of them as bears, and thus obviously associated with the name of the village, but they are certainly not those animals. They have been associated with the symbolic beasts of the apocalypse as representing the evangelists (though these are always four in number) and they have, in a moment of ecstatic patriotic fervour, been regarded as symbolic of the English, Scottish and Welsh elements of the British Empire, but an account in the local parish magazine for October, 1948, written by the Vicar (Rev. W. H. Yeandle, M.C., A.K.C.) dismisses all these theories,

BEARSTED. Holy Cross.

- 12c. 
- 13c. 
- 14c. 
- 15c. 
- Mod: 



The plinth round the east end is at a higher level than the remainder.

Scale of feet. 10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50

F.C. ELLISTON-ERWOOD, F.S.A.
1947

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including a more feasible one that the beasts are heraldic in origin, and derives from the lion, the panther and the griffin, some at least of those admirable virtues and precepts of life with which readers of the ancient bestiaries are quite familiar.

But by far the most interesting thing was a casual discovery made while photographing. The eastern respond of the nave arcade is much more substantial than the others and it might even be of earlier date. As a projecting bracket on its western side and above, quite clearly not seen from the far corner of the nave, are marks of something that has been removed. Closer examination made it seem probable a crucifix had stood here, and a tilted oval where the crucified would have rested seemed corroboration. The dedication of the church, "Holy Cross", is sufficiently unusual to call for some comment. The entry "to buy a candlestick of latton to stand before the altar of the Trinity in the pillar beside the high chancel there, 20 d." in the will of John Gemott, 1513¹ seems to make it clear that a representation of the Trinity, the Father enthroned and supporting a Cross with the crucified Son with the Dove hovering above, was formerly on this spot and was destroyed at the Reformation.

—Since the above was written, the Vicar informs me that fragments of ancient masonry, with part of an arch, were found under the floor of Commandments that used to be on the wall at the west end of the nave. This evidence has been again concealed, but it would indicate that this portion of the wall, is, as I have suggested, part of the Norman church.

He also gave me another date for the image of the Crucifixion in the church register VII, p. 377, where it is mentioned in a grant of land dated 1425.

OF ST. MARY, HORTON KIRBY (Plan 14)

St. Mary, Kirby, the next on the right bank of the Darent going south offers as many contrasts to that church as it is possible to find. It is (or rather was) a perfect cruciform church of the twelfth century, and in spite of the considerable damage it has suffered in different periods it is still of absorbing interest. Of any other Norman church that stood on this site (and both are now ruins) there are no traces save a few re-used Norman decorated stones, and it is not possible to say with certainty whether any other churches have left their mark on their successor. It is very likely, but the complete destruction of the thirteenth century nave makes any deductions out of the question.

The position of this nave that is the centre of the whole church is extraordinary, to me at least, that no previous writer has observed it.

has read aright the manifest signs that appear everywhere, to tell the story. Edward Cresy, an architect of no mean ability, lived in the village during the early part of the nineteenth century, and though he has left behind some very valuable information, he is silent, or rather in very great error, about the older nave. It is perfectly clear that the present nave is not the one put up in the thirteenth century, when the older structure was replaced by one which had a fine aisled nave, two transepts, a central tower and a chancel twice as long as that existing to-day (see note at end).

To deal with the present nave first. It is 31 feet wide, which is abnormal for a country parish church; it is out of alignment with the rest of the building; there are no arcades or aisles; there is much re-used stone in its fabric; and at its east end are two arches, one half blocked and the other communicating with the transept by a very unusual slanting passage. To anyone in the least familiar with church planning, it is plain that these arches were those at the ends of aisles leading into transepts. The mouldings of the capitals of the tower arches are extended on all sides till they reach a return wall, but on the west face of the tower, fronting the nave, these mouldings discontinue some three feet on each side of the arch, exactly where an arcade wall would (and did) join the tower west wall. Finally, by examining the exterior of the existing transepts, we see that the straight joint and line of coin stones on the west wall of the north transept is indisputable. The corresponding place on the south transept is not so perfect. It is masked by a buttress, but there is sufficient evidence remaining for us to be certain that conditions were the same. In short, the evidence is more than sufficient to enable the plan of the Early English church to be laid down with certainty, and this is indicated in tint on the plan. The transepts are to all intents and purposes intact, the ground plan of the tower remains, and the added length of the chancel is vouched for by many witnesses, including Cresy himself. The west door of the present building is of the following century, but it and the two adjacent buttresses are the only features that preserve the alignment of the axis and I have little hesitation in regarding that part of the west wall as of thirteenth century fabric. It might be as well here to give Cresy's notes on the church as printed in *Trans. Dartford Ant. Soc.*, No. 2 (1932) p. 15, ff.

"The chancel (at Horton Kirby) the interior dimensions of which were 38' by 18' and the walls 2' 9" in thickness. The N. and S. sides had each six lancet windows 8' high and 1' 9" wide set in deep splays with semicircular heads around which was a pointed arch. Slender Purbeck marble pillars 5" diameter with carved capitals supported the latter pointed arch.

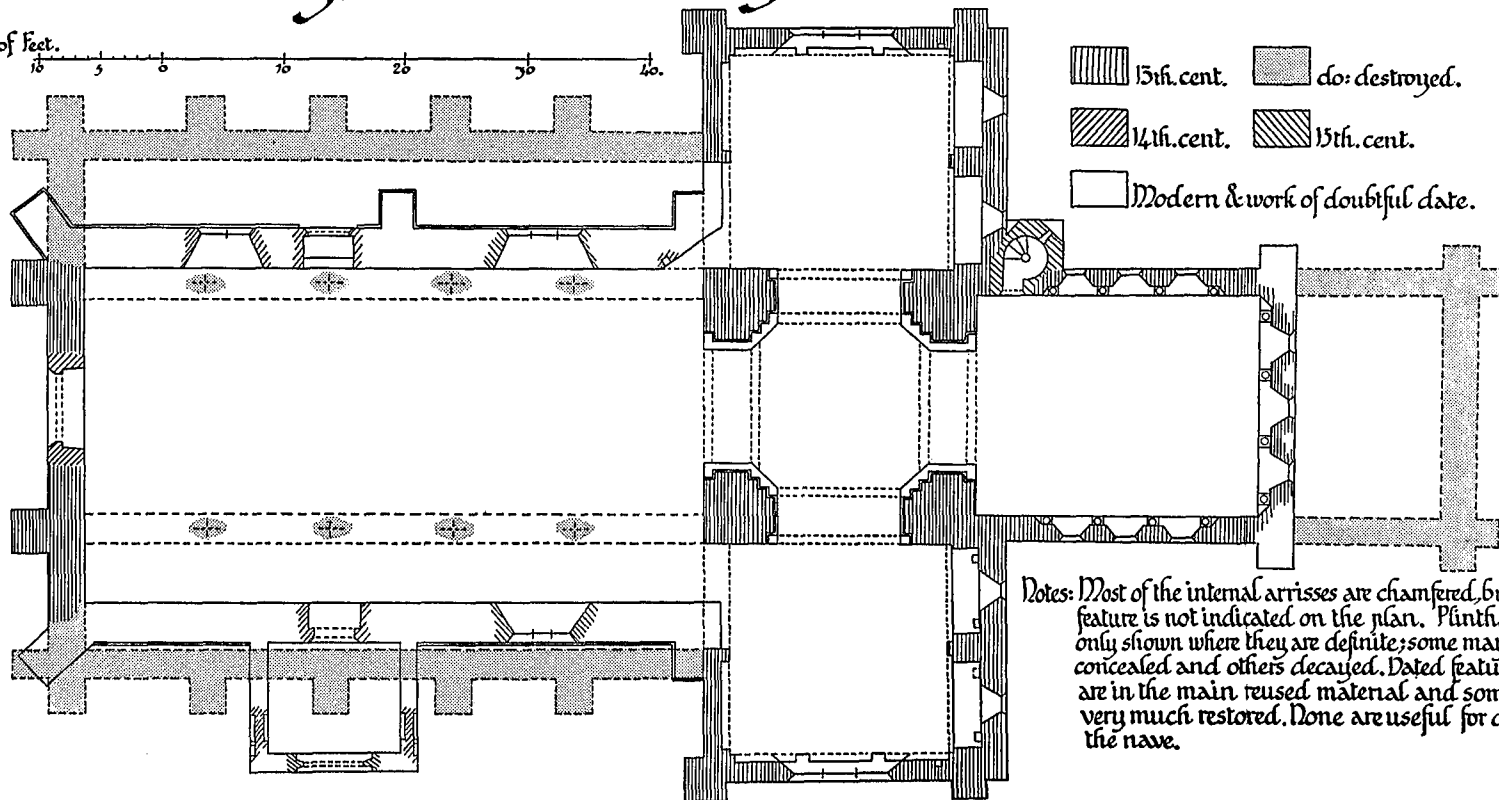
"There were never any side aisles.

"These details (concerning the chancel) are from drawings made in 1816: On returning from my continental journey I found the present

Horton Kirby, Kent. S. Mary.

Scale of Feet.

10 20 30 40



Notes: Most of the internal arrises are chamfered, but this feature is not indicated on the plan. Plinths are only shown where they are definite; some may be concealed and others decayed. Dotted features are in the main reused material and some are very much restored. None are useful for dating the nave.

Measured 1924, Drawn 1948 by F.C. Elliston-Erwood, F.S.A.

chancel rebuilt, abridged of half its length and the old materials made use of."

"The original interior (of Court Lodge or Horton Castle as it is sometimes termed) was more rudely handled by Mr. George Smith the Surveyor, who, when he *frightfully disfigured the church and removed the wooden spire*, metamorphosed the old castle . . . etc."

To return to the Church itself. The crossing, tower and transepts are fortunately, as far as the interior is concerned, in their original form and little altered. There are two deep recesses in the eastern wall to house transeptal altars and the lower part of the wall is arcaded; above it runs a continuous string-course. The architecture is of a severe kind, without any of the characteristic features of Early English work, and forms a marked contrast to the well-known church of Stone next Dartford, only four miles away to the north. The richness of the detail of Stone appears in all the textbooks, but the almost majestic simplicity of Horton is un-noted. Though so far as I know neither church was associated with the reformed Benedictine orders, Stone might easily represent the magnificence of Cluny and Horton the austerity of the Cistercians.

The chancel, as we know from the testimony of Cresy, has been shortened and much altered. The six windows remaining, three in a group on each side wall are to me singularly unconvincing. They may represent the original arrangement but they have obviously been rebuilt and mutilated. While the interiors are clearly made up of thirteenth century material, the exteriors are equally obviously a century later, and even then those on the north are different in detail from those on the south. The east group is certainly re-inserted, and in many parts entirely new. From the outside the extent of earlier damage is apparent from the extensive repairs in brick, especially to the tower and parts of the transept. This is a later alteration than that which produced the present remodelling of the nave, for Cresy speaks of the nave as if it were original. Thus we have two catastrophies that have overtaken the building and of which we have no record whatever. There was a great gale in November, 1703, which did much damage in London and the vicinity. It certainly destroyed Reynold's Place in Horton as Cresy tells us, but he does not add any details about damage to the church. In fact he implies that it was about a century later, for changes had taken place while he was abroad during the early part of the century, and the brickwork would tend to confirm this latter date. But what about the nave, when did that disappear? All one can say with some certainty is that it was after the fourteenth century and probably before the end of the sixteenth century, for scanty details in the present nave, such as the roof work, bear out some such period. Re-used work is everywhere. The outer jambs of the porch seem to be contrived from old window mullions; there are pieces of fourteenth century

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arcading or windows inserted in the sides of the same porch, and one of the coins contains a "mass dial" inserted upside down. A decorated piscina is inserted in the oblique wall by the north transept, where it is highly improbable an altar could ever have been sited. And so the church remains bereft of its shingled spire and with but a shadow of its former splendour, but still a monument that is worthy of more attention than it has received till now.

NOTE.—I have but recently discovered two early accounts of the Church, one in the *Transaction of S. Paul's Ecc. Soc.*, Vol. III, detailing a visit made by that Society in 1893, under the leadership of Mr. J. P. Seddon, F.R.I.B.A. and the other in *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, Vol. XI by Mr. J. Russell Larkby, 1905. Both of these accounts seem to imply an aisled church and some of the evidence is noted. Particularly in the latter account, our member Canon Livett points out the significance of the west door and the flanking buttress as being on the axis of the church. But the plans in each account make no attempt to indicate the probable development of the church, though I feel convinced that if Mr. Livett examined the church in any detail—the true solution cannot have escaped him and somewhere among his papers may be an account of this interesting building that should have been published long since.

FURTHER NOTE *re* BEARSTED.—The arch-fragment referred to in the earlier Note has been opened out again, and other details revealed may cause some slight alteration in the plan as given. Investigations are proceeding, and the results and the modified plan will be given in the next part of this paper.