

PLANS OF, AND BRIEF ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ON,  
KENT CHURCHES

SECOND SERIES. PART II

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THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, BEXLEY

THIS church is of ancient foundation, probably of pre-conquest date, but nothing remains to give any proof for such an assumption. Indeed, restoration has played such havoc with relics of an earlier epoch (and this is particularly the case in the 1883 works) that evidence that might have contributed to the formulation of a coherent architectural story has been almost entirely obliterated. It is next to impossible to give a date to the various buttresses, though one or two are shown on pre-1883 photographs and sketches, and windows have only been given a period on the none too certain grounds that they reproduce, more or less faithfully, those they have supplanted. Printed accounts of the church say that the screen and stalls are copied from fragments of original woodwork, but one looks in vain for these sources, and no one appears to know what has become of them. Similarly the rood staircase is claimed to be a reconstruction of that pre-existing, but there is very little architectural evidence in support of that statement.

Nevertheless, because the development of the building has been simple and straightforward, without any abnormalities, it is possible to say, with some assurance, that the Norman building consisted of a nave, coterminous with the existing one, and a chancel of the same width as that of to-day, but only half its length. Whether the tower, which is a large one without any constructional approach to the upper stages, is of the same date, is not so easy to determine. The two lights in the west wall and serving the vestry now placed here, were, in their original form, insertions, for the corbels that supported the floor of the second stage still remain and clearly show that this floor would have crossed these windows at half their height. As these windows are of thirteenth century type it follows that the tower must be earlier. I suggest, therefore, a transitional addition, without prejudice to the possibility that it may be somewhat earlier and contemporaneous with the remainder of the Norman building. In the thirteenth century normal extensions took place: the chancel was doubled in length and an aisle added with an arcade of four bays, inserted in the north wall.

The fourteenth century saw the addition of the north-east chapel,



(? St. Katherine, though a chapel of St. Nicholas is mentioned in the records) and the arch between this chapel and the main chancel was opened out.

This is in the main, the line of development. Subsequent additions were almost entirely confined to windows and roof work and, of course, restorations.

Evidence for this scheme is to be found in the following architectural details still surviving.

#### *Twelfth Century*

Head of a Norman doorway still *in situ* above the present entrance, with, inside the church, the original rere-arch, somewhat restored.

The south-east coin of the nave has several courses of tufa still in position, though at the base of this corner a worked piece of twelfth-century Caen stone has been inserted, seemingly a later repair.

The junction of the west wall of the twelfth-century church and the aisle extension shows very clearly a few feet north of the north face of the tower, and a similar break in the character of the walling is discernible on the south wall of the chancel, indicating the position of the early chancel east end. The south-west coins of the tower of Reigate stone are probably original though much weathered.

#### *Thirteenth Century*

The nave arcade is in part original, but there are many signs of repair and rebuilding. The eastern bay may have been rebuilt later to provide head room for the rood screen; it is somewhat wider than the rest. Windows were probably inserted during this period and the north and south doorways are likewise to be attributed to this century.

#### *Fourteenth Century*

The junction of the aisle and the added chapel is indicated by a break in the wall structure, and the arch of this period, continuing the line of the earlier arcade, does so in a broken line, a pronounced bend being clearly visible. It was in this period that the original chancel arch was taken down.

A matter not quite clear, and possibly now incapable of explanation, is to be found in the details of the north aisle. This is rather wide for the thirteenth century and one might look for some evidence of a later widening, though there are Early English details still remaining in the north wall. On the other hand, a continuous string course of fourteenth-century type runs along the north, east and west walls of

both aisle and chapel. Much of this is obviously recent, but the question must be asked, is this a part of the 1883 restoration which is known to have been "thorough", or was the aisle indeed widened when the chapel was added in the fourteenth century, earlier details being salvaged from the destroyed wall? It seems impossible to answer this query.

The base of the font (the bowl of classic type) is clearly of fifteenth-century date, but details of the triple sedilia and the piscina are obscured by recent repair and stencil mural decoration, and the existing rood staircase is likewise suspect, though, of course, it may represent a much repaired original feature.

The wooden shingled broach spire to the tower always excites comment, with its upper octagonal half placed oddly overlapping the square lower portion, but this feature, reminiscent of the better known Brookland campanile, is merely a device to ensure proper ventilation to the timber framing and thus tend to prevent dry rot. The so-called "mass dials" on the south-east coin of the nave, the Castelyn "Horn" brass, and the series of hatchments are other features of note in this interesting church.

#### THE CHURCH (R.C.) OF ST. MARY, DENTON NEAR GRAVESEND

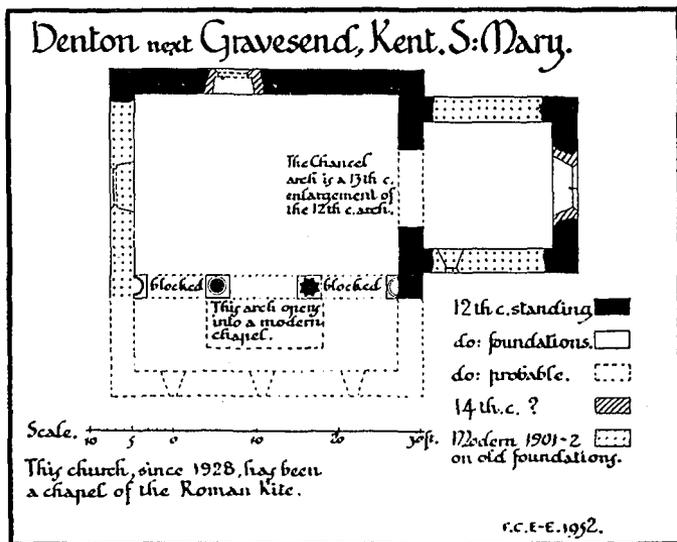
A commendable hobby of the late G. M. Arnold of Gravesend, in his time a valuable member and officer of the Kent Archæological Society, was the purchase and restoration of derelict churches of which there are many in Kent. Thus he obtained possession of the ancient church of Dode, remotely hidden among the woods of the North Downs, the ruined chapel of St. Katherine at Shorne and this, the subject of this note, the old parish church of Denton. St. Katherine, Shorne, a chantry chapel, is described in two papers by Mr. Arnold in *Arch. Cant.*, XX, pp. 195-202 and Vol. XXIII, pp. 78-85, but no plan is given of what appears to be a fourteenth-century building. Dode is the subject of a separate book, also by Mr. Arnold, but the most valuable account is that of the late Canon Livett in *Arch. Cant.*, XXI, pp. 260-72, with, as one would expect from Mr. Livett, a careful plan. St. Mary, Denton, is described in another publication by Mr. Arnold, and there is a small plan as a frontispiece, as well as a number of illustrations showing the church in its decay. But there is not a concise account of its architecture, and a recent visit to the building gave an opportunity to repair this omission.

Mr. Arnold acquired the ruins of the church about 1900 and restored them in the years following. In 1928 they were made over to the Roman Catholic community by Miss Irene Arnold, his daughter. The building was a parish church and not a chapel, and was seemingly in decay in the fifteenth century, though the living was held as a sinecure by various vicars. But no services appear to have been said and it

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would seem probable that the reformed rite has never been heard within these walls.

Architecturally the building is exceptional for Kent, and not very common elsewhere. As it stands at present it would appear just another little Norman church of nave and chancel such as that of Dode-



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already mentioned. But here at Denton are evidences of a south aisle separated from the nave by an arcade of three arches, carried by two free shafts and two corbels. The aisle was not rebuilt in Mr. Arnold's scheme of things, but the two columns remain, together with vestiges of the three arches, the centre one being opened out to form a shrine in the body of the present church. A little pent-house erection preserves this middle arch and openings are left to display other details.

The detail of the shafts is worthy of examination, and would appear to date the building to about the middle of the twelfth century. Owing to the great amount of reconstruction it is not easy to dogmatize, but there does not seem to be any reason to doubt that the whole church was of one period. The fabric is under the care of the clergy of the Roman Church of St. John the Evangelist, Gravesend who are to be commended for the faithfulness with which they discharge their trust.

### THE CHURCH OF SS. PETER AND PAUL, SHOREHAM

This church, which is best known for its unique rood screen and loft, and for its beautiful sylvan setting, has an architectural history by no

# Shoreham, Kent. SS: Peter & Paul.

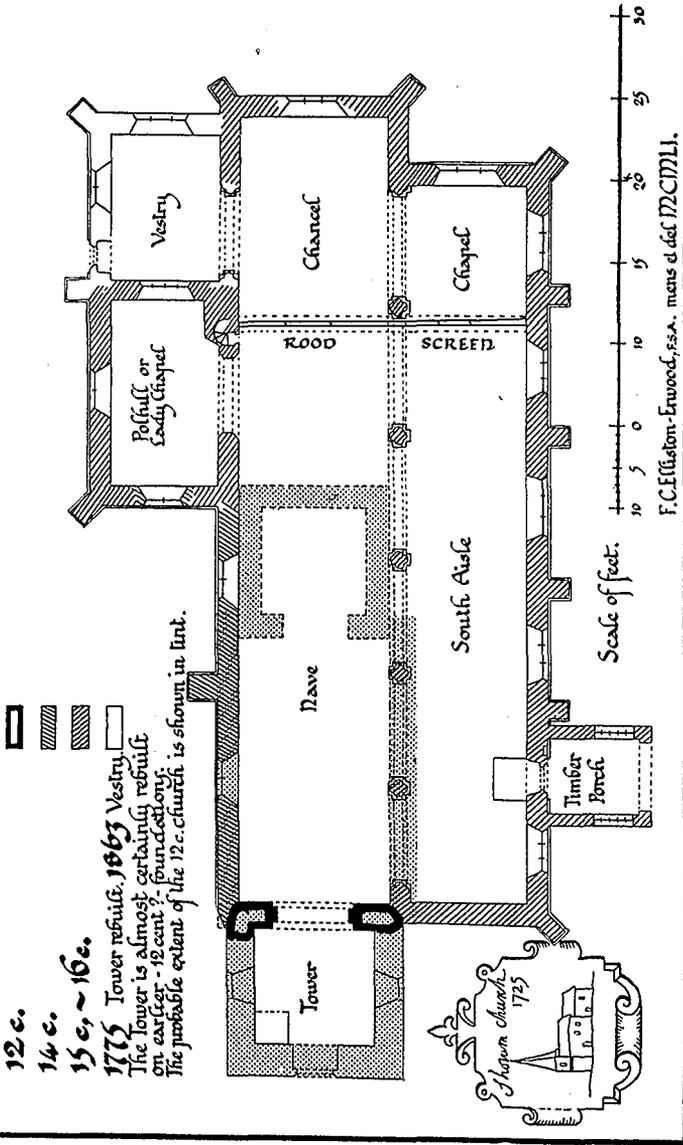
12 c.

14 c.

15 c., ~ 16 c.

1775 Tower rebuilt. 1863 Vestry

The tower is almost certainly rebuilt on earlier - 12 cent? - foundations. The probable extent of the 12 c. church is shown in lint.



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means easy to discover. Various disasters and subsequent rebuildings and restorations have destroyed nearly all the traces of earlier structures that might have been expected to survive, and while the building is both clean and tidy, it is in some ways a disappointment for the architectural student. The name of the parish is included in the list of churches in the *Textus Roffensis* and this is generally accepted as a proof of pre-conquest origin, but there are no architectural evidences of such an early church. It was more than likely of wood. There is likewise no definite indication of the church that followed it in the twelfth century.

At first view the building would appear to be fairly late in date. From the outside the red brick and flint tower, picturesque and colourful as it may be, speaks of a period when gothic had ceased to be the building idiom. Its date is given as *c.* 1775, when its predecessor was destroyed by fire. Inside the church the nave arcade, the most noteworthy architectural feature, is of late fifteenth or early sixteenth century work, well on to the close of the medieval period. The walling inside has been rendered and colour washed, while the exterior has been rebuilt, refaced and repointed. Nothing can be gathered from these sources, therefore, save here and there a re-used piece of Roman brick or diagonal-tooled stone speak of an earlier structure.

But the arch from the nave to the western tower seems to be of a late twelfth-century (transitional) date, and is probably, with the walls adjacent, the only survival of the first stone building, and as the walling is thicker here than elsewhere it maybe that here is the west wall of a twelfth-century church with a tower of the same dimensions as that now existing. Indeed it is more than probable that the present tower is erected on the earlier foundations. There is no evidence for this statement, but it is quite within reason to suppose that a small excavation would show the truth of this suggestion. It seems, therefore, possible to say that in the late Norman period there stood here a small church of nave, chancel and tower, the whole occupying the space up to the line of the present rood screen.

But the manner in which this church developed is still unknown. The normal way was to add aisles and extend the chancel, but there are no remains at all of thirteenth-century work to assist in proving this theory. The present aisle may be of this date: it is narrow, but there are no other evidences. All of this is speculation and as such not proven.

It does appear that there were considerable changes in the fourteenth century for many of the windows are in the style of that time, though they, too, have been greatly restored. It may be supposed that some of them at least are copies of earlier openings. There is also in the north wall inside the church a much restored wall-tomb canopy of the

decorated period, reputed to be to a member of the Buckland family. This family also built, at a later date, the north chapel of the fifteenth century, which has been known as the Buckland, Polhill or Lady Chapel. It is said to have once contained a stone effigy, but this no longer is in the church. This chapel contains a fourteenth-century window in its west wall, but this may have been removed from the north nave wall when the arch of the chapel was cut into it.

Records speak of building operations in 1485, 1567, 1575, 1581. In 1601 the chancel was in a ruinous state, as it was also in 1744 and repairs were carried out in 1775 (tower), 1863 (vestry), 1928, and but recently. None of these dates helps to fix the erection of the present nave arcade. It is a good piece of late perpendicular work and probably belongs to the first quarter of the sixteenth century to which period may be ascribed the noteworthy timber porch and some of the later windows.

The rood screen which has been described in many publications is of the same date and it is not without probability that its late erection led to its survival, its cross and figures being removed, if indeed they had been put into position.

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Since writing the above (which I propose to allow to stand unaltered) the Vicar (Rev. V. S. Edwards) has shown me a photostat page from the British Museum Add. ms. 5480. This manuscript, which I have since had out and examined for myself, is a bound folio book of pen and ink and a few wash sketches, mainly heraldic in character, but with a section devoted to Kent churches. These are described in a note in a contemporary hand "Taken by Mr. Warbuton the Herald in his survey of the County (of Kent) in 1725 and copied by Edward Hasted" but the last five words here (as elsewhere in the book) are additions in another hand and in different ink. Elsewhere in the volume (on original folio 213) is the note:

"I began copying this ms. about one at noon on the 30th of June 1764 and finished it about the same time next day.

EDWARD HASTED.

From this it seems likely that the book is Warbuton's original MS., the more so because while the architectural sketches are so poor as to be worthless, the heraldic drawings are much better, though even they leave much to be desired.

Among the church sketches is one of "Shoram church" showing a small unaisled nave, an equally small chancel and a western tower crowned with a tall, slender shingled spire. I have reproduced this drawing on my plan, in a cartouche in the bottom left hand corner, about one-third size. There is no indication of any aisle nor of the fine timber porch which is such a feature of the exterior, though

the tower may be that which report says was destroyed about 1770. In fact the drawing shows exactly what I conceive the church to have looked like in the fourteenth century.

Can this sketch be taken to represent the building as it was in 1725? I think not. It would imply that the existing aisle is later than 1725 and there is the problem of what has become of the porch which beyond cavit is fifteenth-sixteenth-century. Also what is to be said about the notable rood screen which stretches across nave and aisle and seemingly has always done so? I confess to a passing doubt about the date of the nave arcade. It is certainly late, and remembering several dated and authentic examples of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century "gothic" and having just read the late Sir Alfred Clapham's article on "The survival of Gothic in seventeenth century England" (*Arch. Journ.*, CVI, Supplement), I went down once more to the church and examined carefully the details of the arcade. It is as I have marked it, fifteenth-sixteenth-century, and therefore, must have been in existence when the sketch was made; and the building of this arcade was not the "considerable scheme of restoration" undertaken at Shoreham in 1744 (see the *History of the Parish Church of SS. Peter and Paul, Shoreham*, by the Rev. Augustus Payne, Vicar, 1930, p. 4) as I at one time feared. The matters of the timber porch and the rood screen, this last homogeneous throughout its length, though in part repaired in plaster of paris, do not therefore, affect the issue though they make it further improbable.

I have dwelt on this matter at some length as there is a tendency to accept any ancient drawing as incontrovertible evidence as to the state of an old building, regardless of the fact that features exist and did exist at the time the drawing was made which show the absurdity of the sketch, and to save time and trouble for future investigators I may say that having examined all these drawings carefully, and compared them with churches with which I am very familiar, they are on the whole worthless as architectural documents and negligible as works of art.

#### CONNINGBROOK CHAPEL, AT KENNINGTON

About thirty years ago, while walking in that somewhat remote area between Ashford and Wye, along the valley of the Great Stour, I came across a fairly recent excavation on the site of the ancient chapel at Conningbrook in Kennington (map reference, 1/25000, 61/04, 033437). I was unable at the time or since, to discover who was responsible for this investigation, nor have I seen any reference to it or plan of it. As, however, I measured the exposed walling myself, I think it is worth while placing the matter on record.

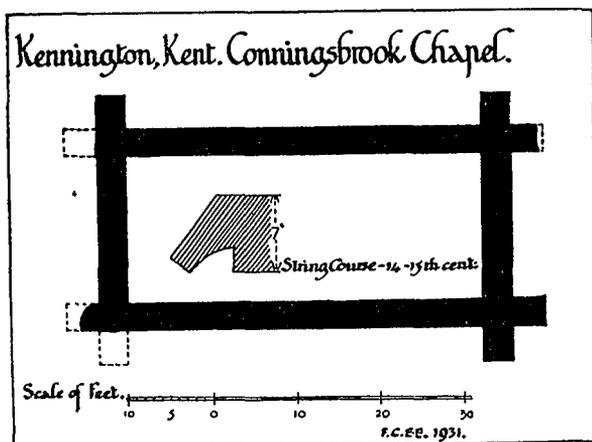
The site is mentioned in Furley's *Annals of Kennington*, a printed lecture, given originally by the famous Wealden historian in the village

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in 1877, wherein he claims (erroneously as a study of the parish church will show) that this building was used for parochial worship before the parish church was built.

As a matter of fact while there are twelfth-century remains in the parish church there was nothing to be seen in these excavations that suggested a date earlier than probably the fourteenth century.

The chapel was a plain rectangular structure, internally 42 ft. 6 in. by 17 ft. 9 in., having no structural chancel, and having pairs of corner buttresses 3 ft. 2 in. by 4 ft. at each angle, the foundations, 3 ft. 2 in.



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wide carrying a wall some 4 in. thinner. About 2 ft. of masonry survived at the east end, but there were only the slightest traces at the west. There were no indications of floor levels, nor of windows or doors.

In short the plan was exactly that of a typical "chapel" as opposed to a "church" and except that it is slightly smaller in length and width, it is exactly paralleled by the plan of Ruxley, given earlier in the first series of plans (*Arch. Cant.*, LX, p. 18).

Among the excavated material were fragments of glazed floor tiles, pieces of stained glass, some still in its leading, and a few pieces of ashlar, the only datable fragment being that illustrated on the plan. All of this could easily be ascribed to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century which is most probably the date of the chapel itself.

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