

NOTES ON THE  
CHURCH OF ST. MARGARET-AT-CLIFFE.

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THE Church of St. Margaret-at-Cliffe is an unusually well-preserved and beautiful example of a parish church of the twelfth century.

It consists of a long, square-ended chancel, with four windows on each side, a nave with clerestory and aisles of four bays, and a western tower. The measurements of the ground-plan are as follows :—

Total length, exterior .....	126 feet.
Total breadth, ,, .....	58½ feet.
Chancel, interior .....	40 feet by 18½ feet.
Nave, ,, .....	53½ feet by 20½ feet.
,, with aisles .....	53½ feet by 45½ feet.
Width of aisles .....	10 feet and 9 feet.
Tower, interior .....	19 feet by 18 feet.
Width of walls of chancel and nave aisles and arcades .....	2½ feet.
Width of walls of tower and chancel- arch.....	4½ feet.

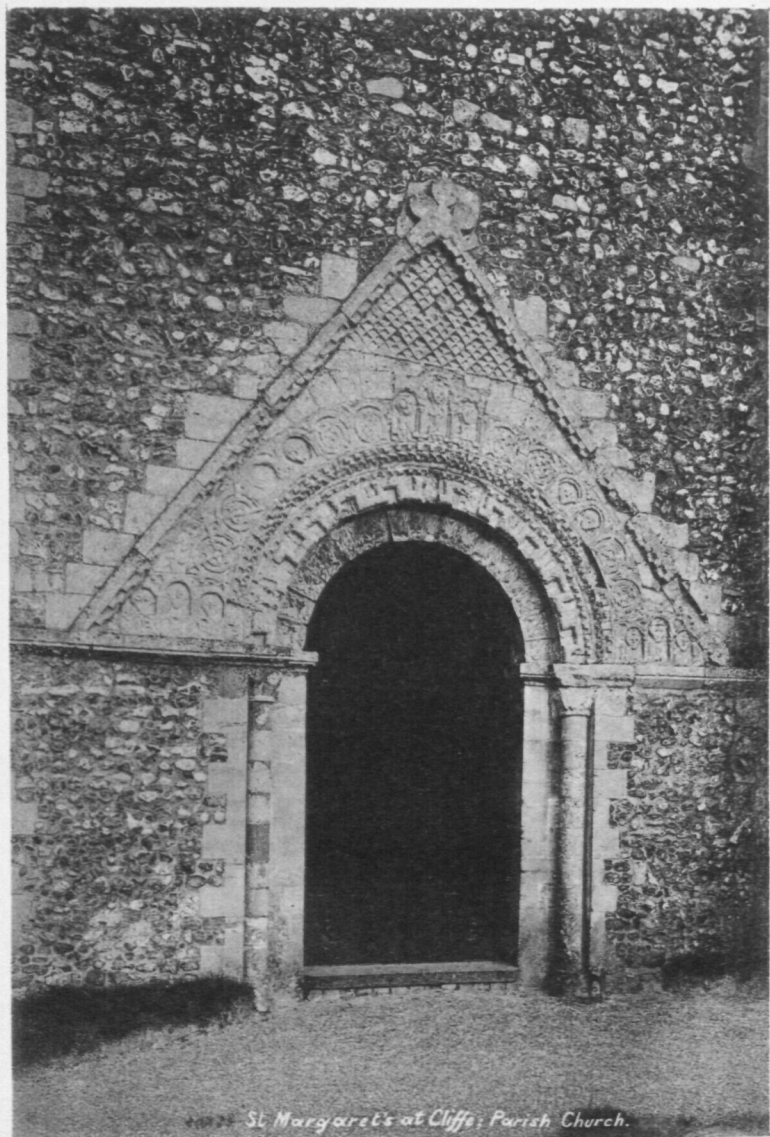
The church has suffered very little from alterations and additions. The north porch is not Norman ; the north aisle has been lengthened westwards to form a vestry on the north side of the tower ; the window which originally lighted the north aisle from the west end has been placed in the side-wall hard by, and the corresponding window in the west end of the south

aisle has been blocked up; the three-light window at the east end of the north aisle has replaced a Norman window which corresponded with its fellow seen at the east end of the south aisle.

The recent insertion of round-headed mock-Norman windows in the side-walls of the aisles, where originally there were none, has served more than any other alteration to destroy the original appearance of the building. Imagine the aisles without lights except at the ends, and the nave without seats or level flooring, and imagine altars at the ends of the aisles, and a rood-beam across the chancel-arch carrying its rood, and the mind sees the church of the twelfth century.

Later on, no doubt, the rood-beam was replaced by a rood-screen and loft. There are no signs of the usual stone staircase to such a rood-loft, but on the two easternmost piers of the nave arcades there are marks which indicate the erection and subsequent removal of steps, either of wood or stone, which must have led up on either side to the rood-loft.

Various considerations suggest a late-Norman date for the church—the third quarter of the twelfth century. Early-Norman parish churches were planned without aisles. Late in the Norman period in many cases aisles were added. In St. Margaret's we have an instance—perhaps an early instance—of a church planned at the first with aisles. The size of the chancel-arch is another sign of late date. Early-Norman churches had small chancel-arches, like that remaining in West Farleigh Church. Later-Norman churches, and even churches of the early-Pointed period, were often built with a central tower. The architect of St. Margaret's, with admirable foresight



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of the incoming fashion of erecting a rood at the entrance to the chancel, designed a wide-spanned and tall chancel-arch, leaving the tower to be built at the west end of the nave.

Many small details also point to a late date: the elaborate carving of the caps of the nave arcades, the use of the edge-roll in the arches, the dog-tooth and cable mouldings of the arch of north doorway, the necking of the bases of that doorway, and other similar features. But the date of the church, except in respect of the tower, cannot be pushed later than the third quarter of the twelfth century. The workmanship is decisive against a later date. All the carving of the capitals and arch-mouldings, in the arcades and north doorway alike, seems to have been executed by banker-men on the bench, and the axe seems to have been the principal tool used by them. All the ashlar bears signs of having been faced with the axe.

The tower at the west end is manifestly later than the rest of the church. The tall and severe pointed tower-arch, with the circular bases and caps of its responds, stands out in strong contrast with the round arches of the nave and chancel. It implies the introduction of fresh influence, if not of fresh workmen and a fresh designer, among the builders. It marks a new departure both in style and in workmanship. The bases have the hollow moulding of the early-Pointed period, and the caps are carved into a ring of the trumpet-like scollops that are characteristic of many buildings which, like St. David's Cathedral, belong to the last quarter of the century. The ashlar has the face-marks of the broad chisel, a tool the use of which, according to Gervase, as the reader will

remember, was introduced into England by William of Sens in the year 1174. The design of the remarkable west doorway, with its shallow carving, its curious triplets of figures set in miniature arches, and its triangular label, has nothing in common with the bolder north doorway, except that most of the carving was probably executed on the bench, and possibly with the axe. One of the small caps has the trumpet-shaped scollops seen in the tower-arch, but the bases are after the old Norman pattern seen in the nave arcades.

While the tower has many features which distinguish it in style from the rest of the church, and prove it to be later in date, yet there is no sign of a break in the continuity of the building. On the contrary, the ground-plan suggests that, though the church may have been built from east to west, it was plotted throughout at one time; and the continuity in building is apparently illustrated by the beautiful clerestory wall-arcading, which runs also along the north side of the tower, and originally did the same on the south side, and was continued (? at a slightly different level) along the west face of the tower.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the chancel and nave were built before 1175, and the tower shortly after that date. The church is a fine one, interesting in respect of its ground-plan and general design, well worth the careful attention of the student of architecture, and demanding unstinted admiration from an æsthetic point of view. The northern aspect, seen from the road and approach, suffers somewhat from the addition of a parapet upon the old corbel-table that runs above the nave clerestory, and from the poverty of the entrance to the porch and of its

gable. Then, perhaps, something might be done to make the entrance more worthy of the church. The tower, too, has suffered much at the hands of the repairers, whose initials and date appear on the south side; but further restoration would certainly detract from its interest, and probably fail to add to its beauty.\*

A newel staircase that ran up the north-west corner of the tower has been destroyed. The entrance to it remains. The lintel of the doorway consists of one large stone, which from its rude character some have pronounced to be Saxon workmanship; it appears to the writer to be merely a bit of unfinished carving of the same age as the rest of the tower.

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PS.—Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite, in a recent report on the church, extracts from which have been forwarded to me by the Rev. F. Case, says: "The church keeps still the form given to it in the first half of the twelfth century; and it is very uncommon to find a parish church so fully developed as this one is at so early a date."

This plan, though it is a simple one, is not only very uncommon, it is almost unique. It is necessary to distinguish between churches of which aisles formed part of the original plan and churches which were originally built without aisles, and to which aisles were afterwards added. From before the middle of the twelfth century onwards to the fifteenth, people found the addition of an aisle to be the easiest way of enlarging a previously existing church of the common aisleless nave and chancel type. Under the influence of this

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\* Is it too much to hope that the heavy and unsuitable modern stone pulpit may ere long be replaced by a wooden structure, and that the organ may be rebuilt and placed (? bracketed) where it shall not obstruct the view of the fine chancel?

custom, probably, the architect of St. Margaret-at-Cliffe planned his church with a pair of aisles to the nave.

The arrangement, however, evidently did not commend itself generally to architects of the twelfth century. The development of parish church ground-plans followed other lines. A central tower was the first common feature of development, and that was quickly followed by transeptal chapels. Thus the complete cruciform type (without aisles) was evolved, examples of which, belonging to the end of the twelfth and early part of the thirteenth century, are numerous. Then, lastly, fully half a century after our church was built—and I find myself unable to modify the reasoning which has led me to assign it to the third rather than to the second quarter of the twelfth century—came the incorporation of aisles into the plan of parish churches, either with or without a central tower, but seldom, if ever, without either transeptal or side chapels to the chancel. The width of the aisles added to parish churches before the middle of the twelfth century, judged from the few examples that remain, seldom exceeded 6 or 7 feet; a century later they were seldom more than 10 or 12 feet; in the following centuries they became very much wider. So much for the architectural history of aisles in parish churches. The last stage in the development of the general ground-plan was marked by the enlargement of chancels and side-chapels, and the relegation, except in some very large churches, of the tower to its old position at the west end of the nave.

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