

ST. LAWRENCE CHURCH, ISLE OF THANET,
KENT.*

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THE Church of St. Lawrence, Thanet, was originally founded, as were the churches of St. John and St. Peter, as Chapels of Ease to the mother Church of Minster in Thanet; and the earliest mention of this chapel of St. Lawrence is to be found in Thorne's Chronicle, where he states that "in 1124 the Church of Minster in Thanet, with the chapels of St. John, St. Peter, and St. Lawrence, were assigned by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Abbot and Convent of St. Augustine's Monastery, Canterbury, to the Sacristy of that Monastery," that is, for its service and repair.

About a hundred years afterwards the chapel became the parish church of this part of the Isle of Thanet, and the parish included the ancient Ville of Ramsgate, which from its very name seems to have been the key to the island, Ramsgate, up to the time of Edward I., being called Raunsgate, the Gate of Raun or Ruim, the ancient British name for Thanet being Ruim or Inis Ruochim, *i.e.*, Richborough Isle.

Notwithstanding the above quotation from Thorne, there is little doubt that some portions of this building are of much greater antiquity, tradition having assigned the year 1062 as the date of its foundation; but it is even likely that there was an earlier church still upon the site of the present chancel, as not only are the north, south, and east walls of the chancel of great antiquity, but in 1888, during the restoration of the tower, the foundation of an old wall was discovered running north and south at the west end of the chancel, and the foundations of old walls were also discovered under the chancel arcades on either side.

* Read at the Annual Meeting of the Kent Archæological Society at Ramsgate 24th July, 1900.

Be that as it may, the Early-Norman Church which existed about the year 1062 consisted of all that part of the central tower—which is built of rough hewn stone, and extends as high as just above the upper stage, lighted by round-headed windows—and of a nave and chancel, only without aisles, transepts, or side chapels.

An investigation of the walls above the arcades of the nave and chancel, and that part of the tower above described, sufficiently proves this masonry to belong to the Early-Norman period. Again, the quin of squared stones to be plainly seen at the north and south angles of the high chancel outside wall, from foundation to top of wall plate, clearly prove that the high chancel had a separate existence long before the side chapels were added.

The ridge piece of the roof of the nave is supported over the great west window by a curious Norman corbel, and underneath the window, upon the outside of the Church, will be found the remains of a fourteenth-century west door.

The tower will be seen to be supported now upon four piers of very massive construction, with pointed arches leading into chancel, nave, and transepts on either side, but in the Early-Norman Church the tower was no doubt pierced by a low round-headed arch leading from nave to chancel only, the north and south arches being of later date, that is, about 1225, when the rest of the work in Early-English was executed.

Upon carefully examining the northern face of the masonry, forming the north-eastern pier, will be seen marks of the rough weather this stonework has been subjected to, during the hundred and sixty years or more it formed part of the exterior wall of the tower.

The roof of the high chancel was formerly of a lower pitch than that now existing, as parts of the two circular loopholes in the first stage of the tower, to be described presently, are seen just inside the present gable on the east wall of the same, and above the remains of the lowest Norman string-course which encircled the tower.

The southernmost of these two loopholes was thirty years ago used as a means of ingress to the first stage of the tower, access being obtained by means of a wooden staircase

from the north chapel and on to a platform, the marks of which may still be traced just below this loophole, which was enlarged to make a doorway, now walled up. Upon careful examination beneath the plaster the marks of the principals of the old western end of the chancel roof may be traced. The old roof of the chancel was therefore of a pitch that would not interfere with the firing of arrows, stones, boiling lead, or other missiles by those who, using the tower as a point of vantage, sought to harass an enemy from its walls. There are six of these circular loopholes, which may best be seen from within the ringers' chamber, and now approached by the staircase in the churchyard.

Entering the tower by this staircase, immediately facing us is seen the south wall of the tower, presenting two of these loopholes side by side; they are circular, the inside diameter being 4 feet 7½ inches, diminishing at the outlet to 2 feet, and are composed of rough blocks of stone about 1 foot in length and about 2 to 3 inches thick, slightly wedge-shaped, with very wide joints; in fact all the walls of the tower up to the flintwork above the top windows are of this wide-jointed Early-Norman masonry.

Immediately above these two loopholes is a round-headed Early-Norman window. The north wall exhibits the same style of loopholes and round-headed window, except that the westernmost loophole has been enlarged to form the existing entrance to this chamber.

Immediately above this entrance is an ancient doorway opening, now walled up, on the same level as the windows. This was the original opening into the tower, and was gained by a newel stairway contained in a turret situated at and embracing the north-west corner of the tower, similar to that at St. Clement's, Sandwich. In the case of St. Clement's, when the aisles and chancels were added, the turret stairway formerly outside the church was allowed to remain inside. In the case of St. Lawrence, when the Church was enlarged at the latter end of the twelfth century, the turret staircase was demolished and the doorway walled up.

There are signs that the ringers' chamber was formerly subdivided into two stages inside, and it is likely that when

the Church was enlarged and the doorway above blocked up, this subdivision was removed, access to the tower being then gained through another and later entrance in the centre of the west wall of this chamber. This is now also walled up, but is of the Early-Pointed style, and opened upon the level of the present floor, and above is seen an Early-Norman round-headed window; it is possible this doorway opened into the gable of the old nave roof, and so by a wooden ladder on to the rood loft.

The interior of the east wall of the tower contains the two last of the loopholes, and above them a round-headed Early-Norman window.

These loopholes are now walled up. This was brought about in the following manner:—About 1350 the lean-to roofs of the chapels on either side of the chancel were converted into the pointed or gabled form of roof. The loopholes were therefore rendered useless, and were walled up. This also strengthened the tower sufficiently to sustain the extra weight of the added flintwork and battlements when the tower was raised to its present height, after it was struck by lightning in 1439.

It has been suggested that these loopholes were used for the purpose of giving light to beneath the lantern in the 1062 Church before the present floor of the ringers' chamber existed.

Above is the bell chamber, now containing eight bells; the number given by Hasted is five, and they were inscribed as follows:—

- I. Thomas Garrett, John Ticknore, Churchwardens. S. K. 1729.
- II. Sam. Knight, fecit 1724.
- III. Sam. Knight, fecit 1724, George Norten and John Hooper.
- IV. Mr. Edward Troward, Daniel Ranier, Churchwardens. R. P., fecit 1704.
- V. Mr. Edward Troward, Daniel Ranier, Churchwardens. Richard Phelps made these five bells 1704.

Of which Nos. II. and III. were recast by Samuel Knight in

1724, and No. I. by the same founder in 1729. The bells were recast again and one added to their number in 1808, making six bells. They bear the date upon them and the following inscription:—"Rev^d Richard Harvey, Vicar; George Stephens, Thomas Wootton, Churchwardens. Thomas Mears and Son, London, fecit."

During the years 1890-91 two new bells were added, and Nos. III. and IV. were recast and the whole rehung with new framework. This was carried out by Mr. Snelling of Sittingbourne.

This chamber is lighted on all four sides by pairs of Early-Norman round-headed windows, and just above these windows will be seen the new work of roughly faced field flints, intermixed with rubble. This raising of the tower took place early in the fifteenth century, the raising of the side chapel roofs giving the tower the appearance of being dwarfed, that it was necessary to raise the tower to its present height. It is recorded in Nicholas's *Acts of the Privy Council* that the tower was struck by lightning on 26th August, 1439, and some extensive repairs to the north-west column of the tower seem to have been executed in 1619 also. This column had been filled in to a great extent with pieces of very hard chalk, upon one of which a grotesque little face had been cut with a knife. On turning the block round to the light that date was found neatly inscribed at the back. This was discovered during the 1888 restoration.

Externally the tower is ornamented by an Early-Norman arcade on the east and south walls. These are placed upon the middle string-course, and consist on each of the two sides of five rounded arches, supported by round shafts with cushion-shaped and scalloped capitals, with a square abacus. The middle bay of each arcade is pierced to form a window, and its shafts are set in square recesses, which are also to be noticed at each extremity of the arcade.

The fifteenth-century flintwork above is surmounted by a string-course cornice, decorated by grotesque faces and gargoyles, and above are the battlements.

The first enlargement of this Church took place about the year 1175, when the walls of the nave were pierced with

Transition-Norman arches to form aisles ; there are three of these arches on each side—square in section—and they are supported by circular columns with the square abacus and scalloped capitals. The arcade on either side terminates at the east and west ends with a half column. These columns are not parallel ; the bay at the east end of the north side has a greater span than the others. The bays were originally all of much the same span, and to allow of access to the Norman rood loft, which passed across the west of the tower, the north wall of the nave was not pierced for the first bay so close to the tower as it was on the south side ; this blank space of wall having in the upper part of it, about the level of the top of the capital of the half column, a small doorway, forming a passage from the outside through the wall on to the rood loft. This arrangement can be seen in an oil painting hanging in the vestry. The passage gave entrance to a small gallery pew, which was removed in 1858 during the restoration, and the wall itself taken down and the bay extended right up to the tower.

The south-west porch was probably altered during the fourteenth century. It is built of flint, with a low doorway, late Decorated arch, with hollow moulded jambs, and presents a stone string-course all round the porch, the under part of it being very deeply hollowed, similar to the jambs of the entrance. There is a Pointed window on either side and a hood mould over the outer doorway. There was formerly a square-headed doorway opening into the north aisle.

The roof of the nave is about the fourteenth century. It has two tie-beams with octagonal king-posts, with moulded caps, bases, struts, and longitudinal struts. The roof was ceiled about 1773. About 1175 the eastern and western tower arches were altered into the Transition-Norman style, and have fine archivolt mouldings ; the piers are semi-circular, on either side of which are recessed shafts with capitals of almost Early-English ornamentation. The eastern arch bears upon its west face a moulding of the Norman chevron pattern. Both the eastern and western tower arches are supported with columns which have a square abacus, and are shafted on either side with a shaft, which is situated in a square

recess, except those of the western tower arch, which upon their eastern side have square pilasters. All the capitals of these columns are worthy of investigation. Amongst them are found the scalloped capital, simple foliage, cable pattern, and the rough spiral volute, with foliage and fruit. Two of the smaller shafts have demons' heads as capitals. The bases of the columns are square and ornamented with foot ornaments.

The high chancel is in a perfectly straight line with the rest of the Church, but on being viewed from the west end of the nave there is an appearance as if the chancel inclined to the north.

On investigation the chancel will be recognized as being of a different style to the rest of the Church. Except for the walls themselves the chancel is Early-English in character, and there is still the opening of a very fine and deeply-splayed lancet window, now walled up, in the north wall of the sacrum, and upon the south wall is seen the eastern jamb of a similar window opening. These windows, of course, lighted the chancel before the side chapels were added. It was about the year 1225 that the walls of this chancel were pierced north and south for the addition of side chapels. On the north there are two Early-English arches, separated by a square pier, common to both, with a recessed shaft at each corner, having flat and rounded bases and inverted bell-shaped capitals, with trefoil and cinquefoil foliations worked upon them.

On the south side are three of these Early-English arches, the easternmost of which being somewhat lower than the others, and the eastern side of the pier being very widely splayed, evidently for the purpose of forming a hagioscope. The two westernmost arches are similar to those on the north. The piscina in the high chancel is trefoil-headed and ornamented with simply square recessed jambs and sill; the bowl at the bottom is square, and is provided with a drain; to the west of the bowl is a flat surface for the lavabo dish, etc. The chancel has an open timbered wagon roof, the principals and purlines of which are moulded, and there are carved bosses at their points of intersection, and along the

wall plates carved groups of foliage. This roof appears to be of about the fourteenth century.

The side chapels were formerly separated from the high chancel by parclose screens, a portion of one of which is now remaining in the Manstone Chapel, and forms the vestry. This screen was of the Perpendicular period, and consists of tall panels with cinquefoiled heads, the spandrels being simply moulded. Upon three of the panels may be traced the figures of saints, at full length and of life size. These beautiful paintings were "restored away" and the oak varnished during the first restoration of the Church. The north transept is separated from the north aisle by a Decorated arch, and from the tower by a plain Pointed recessed arch.

In the vestry is a stone inscribed "R. T., J. R., 1715," for Robert Troward and John Rutter, the churchwardens of that year, who converted this chapel into the vestry, which contains the safe in which are the registers and Church books. The roof of this transept is probably of the fourteenth century, and covers the chapel of St. Catherine—commonly called the Manstone Chapel, which was the burial-place of the ancient family of Manstone of Manstone Court—and the chapel of the Holy Trinity.

The south transept also contained two chapels. It is separated from the south aisle by an Early-English arch. The south-east porch is modern; but to the east of this porch is a very beautiful Decorated piscina, with an ogee arch above a trefoiled head. The arch presents a fine example of what is known as the Roll moulding, and terminates on either side with the head of a bishop and the head of a king. The bowl is octagonal, and there was formerly a shelf across the middle of the piscina. It is probable that this chapel was dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury, and the one immediately to the west to St. James, both being covered by a fourteenth-century roof, supported by four tie-beams with square king-posts, struts and longitudinal struts passing down to the bases of the king-posts.

In this chapel are two chests, one of oak with a flat top and three locks, and containing poor-rate books from 1604—when the Poor Law was passed—to modern times. The other chest

is very much more ancient, and is made of oak and iron-bound; it is now locked with two padlocks, though the three hasps and two of the original locks are still attached to the chest. This coffer certainly dates back as far as the fifteenth century.

Dimensions of the Church.

Height of tower 108 feet. Extreme length of Church, from east wall of chancel to west wall of nave, 109 feet. Extreme width across the transepts, 54 feet 8 inches. Number of cubic feet of air contained in the Church, 152,361.

Brasses.

Many brasses formerly existing in this Church are lost; of those now remaining, that of Nicholas Manstone, who died 1444, is the most important. It is now situated upon an upright stone in the Manstone Chapel; the indents of his shields of arms still remain. He is here exhibited in full armour, belted and spurred, his dog at his feet, a collar of S.S. around his neck, sword and short dagger both sheathed, for his hands assume an attitude of prayer.

In the middle of the Manstone Chapel, upon the ground, is a ledger-stone with the brass torn out of its centre, but it has five remaining of the six shields of arms which surrounded it. This is the grave of Eleanor, wife of Nicholas Manstone, who died before 1444, as the lowest shield on the sinister side of her ledger-stone bears the arms of their daughter and heir with the Manstone quarter "labelled," shewing that the father of the bearer was still alive. The indent shews that the lady was dressed in a mantle and what was known as a mitre-shaped head-dress.

The top brass on the dexter side is lost; that on the sinister side is for Haute and bears: Or, a cross engrailed gules.

The dexter middle shield is the same, and bears a "rose" in the fess point as a cadence mark.

The sinister middle shield contains the arms of Manstone and Haute: Party per pale gules, a fess ermine between three mullets argent, for MANSTONE, impaling HAUTE.

The dexter bottom shield contains the arms of Manstone impaling Freeman, the latter being Gules, three lozenges or, two and one.

The sinister bottom shield bears the arms of Manstone and Haute quarterly, the Manstone quartering being labelled with "a file of three points" to denote the heir, the father still alive.

The next brass is a fragment, and is to be seen screwed upon the upper of the two northern panels of the screen. It is the figure of a lady in a butterfly head-dress, tight-fitting gown trimmed with fur, and fur ruffs, and a curious long belt ending in embroidery and tasselled. This represents the figure of Jehane, wife of Thomas St. Nicholas. She was the daughter of Roger Manstone and died in 1499.

In the same grave, as is recorded by Weever and Lewis, lie the bodies of her husband Thomas St. Nicholas and their son of the same name.

The next set of brasses are of the year 1610, and bear the arms of Sir Adam Sprakeling of Ellington—Sable, a saltire ermine, between four leopards' faces or. Upon a knight's helmet is the crest, an heraldic tiger's head erased sable, ducally gorged, maned, and armed or. This brass is curious, as it bears inscribed upon it the name Sprakeling nineteen times repeated. It records the death of Sir Adam Sprakeling, Knight, son to Robert Sprakeling, Gent., leaving seven sons and ten daughters.

The next two brasses relate to the second son of the above. They bear the Sprakeling arms, and record the death of Adam Sprakeling, who died 1615, leaving two sons and two daughters.

The last set of ancient brasses are now under the tower, and they bear three coats of arms: on the dexter side at the top the Sprakeling arms; on the sinister side at the top, Gules, within a bordure a mule passant argent, in sinister chief a mullet, for MOYLE; at the bottom, SPRAKELING, impaling MOYLE.

Hatchments.

The hatchments include those of Samuel Winter; Lady Catherine Stewart, Countess of Dunmore; James Townley;

Charles Joliffe; John Sicklemore; Captain John Pettit; Sir Thomas Wilde, first Lord Truro; Mark Sellers Garret, and Nathaniel Austen.

Monuments.

There are sixty-seven mural monuments in the Church, the most interesting of which is that to Robert Sprakeling, who died in 1590; that to Frances Coppin, daughter of Robert Brooke, who died in 1677, which bears a very curious inscription; and that to Henrietta Elizabeth, wife of James Antony Froude, who died 1874.

Sculptured Legend.

There are in this Church some very curious heads,* which are sculptured upon some of the capitals of the columns supporting the tower and those of the south arcade of the nave.

The first of these heads forms the capital of the shaft which is situated at the south-eastern corner of the north column supporting the eastern tower arch. This head exhibits the features of a demon with long pointed ears and a threatening countenance, who appears to be demanding, open-mouthed, something evidently withheld from him. The second head forms the capital of the shaft situated at the north-west angle of the south column which supports the eastern tower arch. Here the countenance expresses extreme anger and disappointment; he is gnashing his teeth with impotent rage. It will be noticed that both these heads are in an unusual position; they have actually passed the great screen and invaded the Holy Place itself.

The legend is continued in a couple of panels in the capitals of the pilasters of the same column, from which springs the south tower arch, the panel nearest the demon's head exhibiting the figure of a kind of serpent, evidently emblematical of some form of paganism. Upon the next panel immediately to the west is seen the outside of a

* For illustrations of these heads see *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XVI., p. 208.

building which might represent the monastery of St. Augustine, just outside the walls of Canterbury, and the half-length figure of a man with his face towards the demon, beckoning with his right fore-finger, and with the left fore-finger pointing towards the south-west porch. There are traces also in the left hand of what might have been an Archbishop's crosier.

The next of these grotesque heads is seen at the south-west corner of the south column which supports the western tower arch, and forms part of the corner of the capital of the half column with which the south nave arcade terminates. Here the demon is seen to be gagged; a bridle is in his mouth, and he is silenced though not yet gone.

The last of these heads is to be viewed at the south-west angle of the capital of the next column in this arcade, just opposite the south-west porch. Here the demon is seen grinning derisively, and has thrust his tongue in his cheek, giving an unearthly leer as he makes his exit through the south porch.

This legend may represent the casting of the demon Paganism out of the Church of England by Laurentius, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the time of King Eadbald, son of Ethelbert. The whole account may be read in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, book ii., chap. v.

Church Plate.

Consists of one flagon, two chalices, four patens, and one strainer-spoon, all of silver. The flagon is inscribed, "This Plate was bought for the church of St Lawrence in Thanet in the year 1742. R. Tyler, Vicar; H. Harnet, R. Easton, Churchwardens."

Of the chalices, No. I. is inscribed "St Lawrence, Thanet." The hall-marks shew a probable date of 1833.

No. II. is precisely similar.

Of the patens, No. I. is inscribed "The gift of Mr Thomas Thomson to the Parish Church of St Lawrence in the Isle of Thanett in Kent 1721." The four hall-marks shew the high standard of silver generally known as Queen Anne's.

No. II. paten is precisely similar to No. I. in every respect.

No. III. bears the following inscription: "The Parish of St Lawrence, Isle of Thanet, 1798." The five hall-marks shew the reign of George III., and it appears to be made of the higher standard of silver, *i.e.*, Queen Anne's.

No. IV. paten is inscribed as follows: "Parish of St Lawrence, Thanet, 1840." There are four hall-marks, and this paten appears to have been made in 1722, although not presented to the Church till 1840.

The strainer-spoon is not inscribed. The hall-mark bears the head of George III.

Fourteenth-Century Service Book.

The cover of an old parish book which was originally the first register book, dated 1582, and afterwards used as a churchwardens' account book from 1609 to 1623, is an illuminated vellum manuscript, and is evidently an excerpt from a fourteenth-century antiphonary. The first page exhibits the last three antiphons of Lauds, with a fragment of the second, then the hymn with its first verse syllabically arranged to music and the appropriate versicle and responsory. On the second page we have in full the antiphon of the "Benedictus" (the canticle peculiar to Lauds), immediately followed by the antiphon of the "Magnificat" at second vespers, and lastly an antiphon to commemorate St. Baldwin of Laon, a martyr saint. The saint who is referred to in this office is St. Elizabeth of Hungary, who died 15th November, 1231.

In the fourth antiphon in the office before us, her expulsion from home, her having to beg for shelter, her royal birth, her espousals in infancy, her charity and growth in holiness, form the theme of the hymn, and in the antiphon for the "Benedictus" her name appears with an allusion to her courageous protection of the poor from tyranny and oppression.

It is possible that this fragment came to St. Lawrence from the College of St. Elizabeth at Winchester, which was

founded by Bishop John of Pontoise for the instruction of the clergy, and where High Mass was celebrated every day in honour of this saint.

As far as the Church books are concerned, the oldest are four in number. Number I. is covered by the manuscript just described. It contains sixty-four sheets, and was originally intended for the register book. The dates extend from 1582 to 1620, and its contents relate chiefly to sesses made between those years.

Book No. II. is similar, and dates from 1613 to 1648.

Book No. III. has been noted as missing for many years, if indeed it was ever kept during those times.

Book No. IV., 1688—1709, contains Church rates and the churchwardens' disbursements thereof.

The Church rate books are carried down to the present century in several folio volumes. The poor rate and overseers' books commence in 1604, and the vestry books commence in 1739 and are complete to the present date. The registers commence in 1559 and are fairly perfect.