

ARCHITECTURAL NOTES ON PATRICKSBOURNE CHURCH.

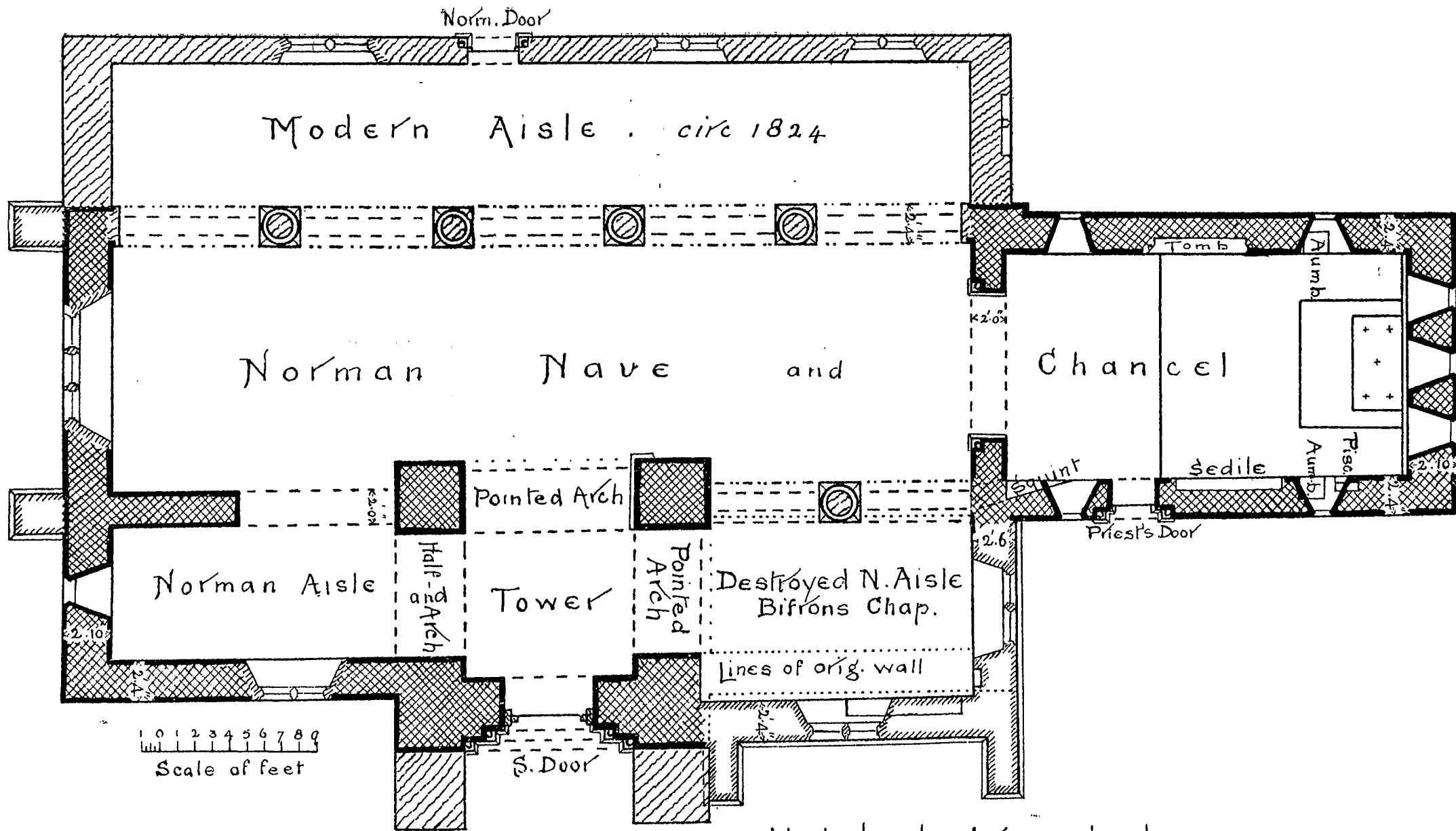
BY THE REV. G. M. LIVETT, F.S.A.

THE story of the church of Our Lady at "Patrick'sbourne," its vicars, registers and briefs, was told by Canon Scott Robertson in Vol. XIV. of *Arch. Cant.* The following Paper deals only with architectural matters.

There was a church at Bourne at the time of the Domesday Survey. Parts of the existing building are clothed with ivy, but as far as one can see there are no remains of masonry of so early a date as the eleventh century, and all the evidence points to the erection of a completely new church towards the end of the twelfth century, so that it is probable that the earlier building was of wood.

The accompanying plan shews that the church now comprises a chancel, measuring (in round numbers) 23 ft. by 13 ft.; a nave, 49½ by 14, with a north aisle of the same length as the nave and 8 ft. wide; a tower at the middle of the south side of the nave, its two northern piers standing across the line of the south wall and projecting in a singular manner into the body of the nave; a narrow aisle, 7½ ft. wide, to the west of the tower, its west wall ranging with the west wall of the nave; and to the east of the tower a chapel, the Bifrons chapel, 10 ft. wide, and having its east wall in line with the east gable of the nave. The southern piers of the tower (strengthened by ugly battering brick buttresses) project themselves three feet beyond the wall of the aisle to the west, and between them is an uncommonly beautiful Norman doorway which forms the main entrance to the church through the tower.

Apart from this fine entrance and the unusual position of the tower in which it is placed, the chief interest of this church, from an architectural point of view, lies in an attempt to recover its original plan and design. Its post-Norman parts must be eliminated, and the destroyed Norman



St. Mary's Church,
PATRICXBOURNE.

Hatched ground-plan
illustrating the growth
of the Church.

parts must be restored in imagination. It must then be determined whether the Norman plan thus revealed is that of the original stone building, or whether it is the result of late-Norman additions to an earlier-Norman original.

The task is not a difficult one. In the first place it is clear that the north aisle is a modern addition. The arcade which separates it from the nave is modern, and the side-wall, 1 ft. 7 in. thick, is much thinner than old walls were usually made. That wall contains a Norman doorway which was made for a thicker wall: it has been removed from elsewhere and rebuilt into its present position, and the stones have been misplaced in the process: the little crosses and scratchings low down on the west jamb were made when the stones which bear them occupied a higher position in the structure. The wall also contains a two-light window, apparently of Decorated date, to the west of the doorway. Moreover, Canon Scott Robertson has preserved the tradition that this aisle was erected in the incumbency of Hughes Hallett, *circa* 1824. So we must sweep away this north aisle, and imagine the original north wall of the nave standing on the lines of the aisle-arcade and containing the Norman door and Decorated window.

In the next place we have to deal with the Bifrons chapel, erected in the fifteenth century, as proved by the features of the windows and of the founder's tomb in the south wall. A study of the plan leaves little doubt in the mind that this is an enlargement of a narrow aisle on the same site, an aisle corresponding in every particular with that running west from the tower. Furthermore, the two arches separating it from the nave, manifestly of the same date as the north aisle-arcade, must be replaced in imagination by a wall of the same dimensions as that which separates the aforesaid aisle from the nave. In the wall there must have been an arch of communication with the nave: probably one like the plain round Norman arch in the corresponding wall immediately west of the tower.

This conjectural restoration yields a plan of uncommon form but of perfect symmetry, consisting of a rather long chancel and a long nave, with a single aisle and a tower-

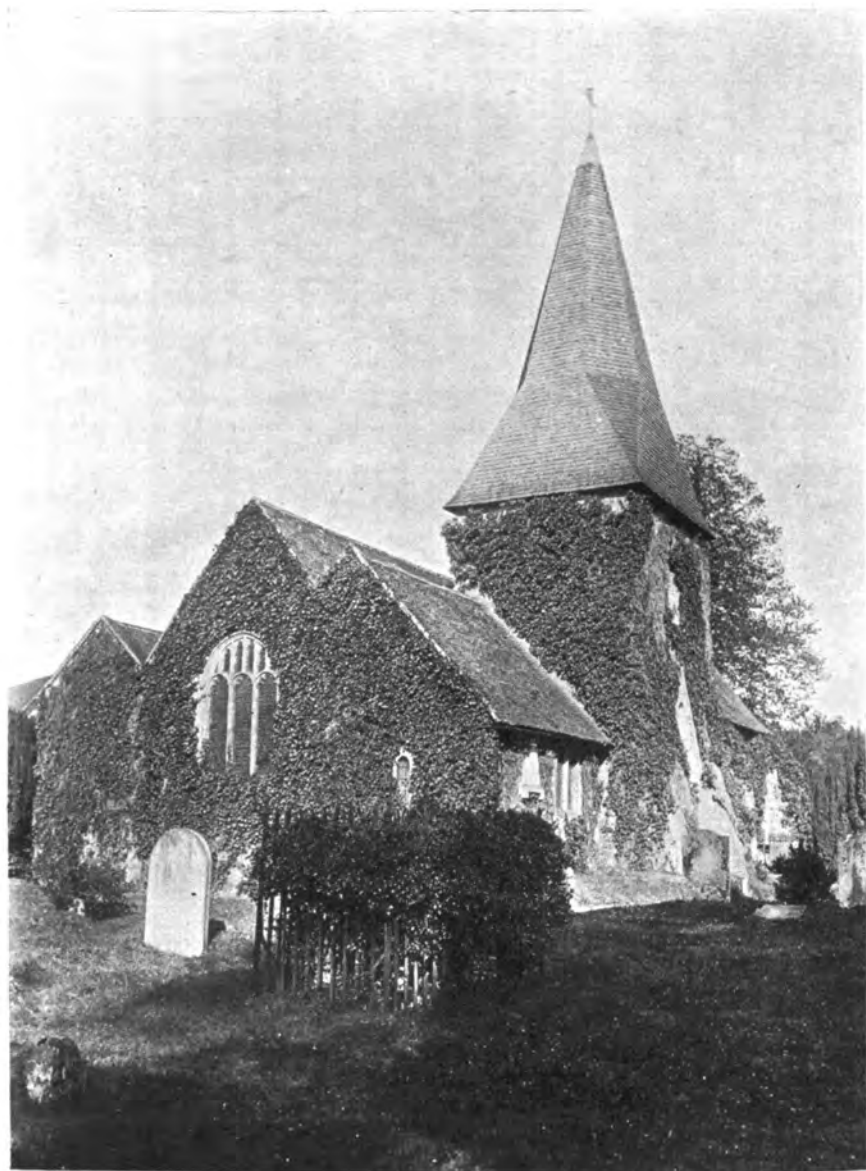


Photo.]

PATRIXBOURNE CHURCH: W.S.W. VIEW.

[*Fisk-Moore.*

covered main entrance on the south side. It is a plan which could hardly have been evolved before the latter part of the twelfth century. The reasons for regarding it as a creation of that period and not as the result of additions made to an earlier building are several and conclusive. It is impossible to reduce it, by the subtraction of the tower and its flanking aisles, to a simple early form of known type; in itself it supplies a perfectly satisfactory though uncommon form for a date when church-architects were making all kinds of experiments in planning; it explains certain marked peculiarities of construction; and (*pace* Canon Scott Robertson and Sir Gilbert Scott) all the existing Norman features point to the erection of the church in all its parts at the time which we have indicated. Evidence supporting this view will appear in the sequel.

Let us now try to recover in imagination the southern or south-western aspect of the late twelfth-century building. In order to do this we must cut down the aisle-wall to a line about two feet above the sill of the square-headed two-light window. The wall here is thickly covered with ivy, but a close examination reveals, below that line, original surface plaster of a kind that is not found above the line. This indicates the original height of the aisle-wall. We must, therefore, remove the present ridge-roof of the aisle; we must imagine a single sloping roof covering both the nave and its aisle, and running down just above the Norman window in the west wall of the aisle. There may or there may not have been a small Norman window in this side wall. The aisle running to the east of the tower was of the same character. The brick buttresses of the tower must also be removed. The tower will then appear rising out of this great sloping roof, its face (containing the main entrance) projecting outwards beyond the line of the low aisle-walls, and its top capped with a low pyramidal spire in place of the existing tall spire. The tower and entrance would thus stand out much more strikingly than at present, and the resulting aspect would be most picturesque.

That this design was original, and was not achieved by the addition of aisle and tower to an earlier aisle-less nave,

may be gathered from a study of the plan and the thickness of its walls. There is a symmetrical variety in the thickness of the different walls which corresponds with structural requirements. The end-walls of the Norman church, namely the west wall of the nave and aisle, the east wall of the chancel, and probably also the east wall of the aisle, were all 2 ft. 10 in. in thickness; the side-walls, namely the north wall of the nave on the lines of the existing arcade, the outer wall of the aisle running east and west of the tower, and the north and south walls of the chancel, were all 2 ft. 4 in. in thickness; while all interior walls, namely the chancel-arch wall supporting the east gable of the nave, and the wall separating the aisle west of the tower from the nave, and probably the corresponding wall east of the tower, were all 2 ft. in thickness. These facts point to the inclusion of the tower and south aisles in the original plan. Moreover, it is remarkable that the inner face of the walls which separate those aisles from the nave lines with that of the south wall of the chancel. Now, if the original nave had possessed no south aisle (or aisles and tower), not only would the nave have been abnormally long for its breadth, but also those separating walls, being in such case remains of the outside wall of the nave, would be as thick as the other external side-walls (namely, 2 ft. 4 in. instead of only 2 ft.), and, moreover, they would not range as they now do in a continuous line with the chancel-wall, but would stand some inches further to the south, leaving an external quoin (like that on the north side) at the junction with the west end of the chancel-wall.

We are now in a position to understand the peculiarities of the three arches which support the tower inside the building. The eastern and northern arches, looking from the tower into the Bifrons chapel and the nave respectively, are tall and acutely-pointed, while that looking into the aisle running west of the tower is a low half-arch. The reason for the form of this half-arch is evident when it is remembered that the original covering of the aisle was a sloping roof running low down to a level only two feet above the sill of the late two-light aisle-window. It has



Photo.]

PATIXBOURNE CHURCH: SOUTH DOORWAY.

[*Fisk-Moore.*

undergone some repairs, but many of its voussoirs shew the characteristic facing of Norman masonry. This is absent from the pointed arches, which are plastered all over. It is clear that, when the original aisle to the east of the tower remained with its sloping roof, the pointed arch could not have existed: it must have replaced a half-arch, similar to the one just described, when the Bifrons chapel was built on the site of the aisle. A glance at the plan shews that the pointed arch is somewhat thinner than the original half-arch must have been. No doubt the pointed arch looking from tower to nave was inserted at the same time, replacing a plain round arch of Norman date.

It only remains to examine the details of the Norman work, and to realize that they may all belong to one and the same date. I agree absolutely with the date to which Scott Robertson assigned the great south doorway, with its delicately carved capitals and tympanum, and its tall pointed canopy containing a niche carved with the *Agnus Dei*: "this design cannot well be of a date earlier than 1170; and it may be ten years later." I venture to disagree with the same authority when he says that "the chancel arch, which is of simple and massive design . . . , is probably of earlier date The priest's door, south of the chancel, may also be of like earlier date." Any slight difference that may be seen in the character of the work is accounted for by the fact that the plainer work was done by the banker-man while the carved work was done by a sculptor. Towards the end of the twelfth century it is possible that the bankermason was also the sculptor, but in any case the object aimed at was different, and the tools used were different. It is a case of difference not in the date but in the manner of working the stones. Moreover, Scott Robertson overlooked the fact that there is work in the south doorway that was done on the bench, and that it is of the same character as that of the chancel-arch and priest's door. This is apparent in the bases. Indeed the bases of the chancel-arch and the priest's door are, if anything, more advanced in character than those of the south door. Again, it is impossible to differentiate the dates of various parts of

the chancel, and the "marigold window of eight lights radiating from a central circle" which appears in the east gable above the triplet of Norman windows is distinctly a late design. The zigzag molding in the priest's door is late in form, and the label of the rebuilt north door shews nail-heads which, being carved on the outer face, also indicate a late date. Then, again, the Norman windows of the chancel are of the same plain character as that in the west wall of the aisle. The plain work of the mason and the more elaborate work of the carver in stone are contemporaneous.

The conclusion of our study is that in Patribourne Church we have an original late-Norman plan of unusual design. It is said that at Eythorne Church, which I have not seen, the "tower is over the north porch." On the south side of the early-Norman church of Trottescliffe there is a post-Norman tower through which the only entrance runs. The same arrangement exists in the little Early English church of Westcliffe near Dover, where a tower of later date stands in front of the south doorway. These churches have no aisle. All Saints, Maidstone, supplies an instance, of early Perpendicular date, in which the old chief entrance is through a tower projecting from the south aisle. A modern example may be seen in St. Mary's, Chatham.

In a footnote to his Paper (p. 171) Scott Robertson tells us that Sir Gilbert Scott "considered that when the tower was built the porch here (*i.e.*, at Patribourne) was allowed to remain, as it had done before; being too beautiful to be touched." But it is quite certain that the tower with its little circular belfry-soundholes (compare those in the Norman tower of St. Mary's, Dover) is of the same date as the "porch" or doorway. The doorway is formed in great piers of masonry which can have had no other object than the support of a tower. It is difficult to believe that Sir G. Scott is correctly reported.

Two brief notes may be added. The blocked squint shewn in the plan must be of post-Norman date. On the south side of the window in the east wall of the Bifrons chapel there is a niche which seems to be Norman work: it must have been rebuilt into its present position.