

THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER AT PEMBURY.

BY W. TOWNSEND STORRS.

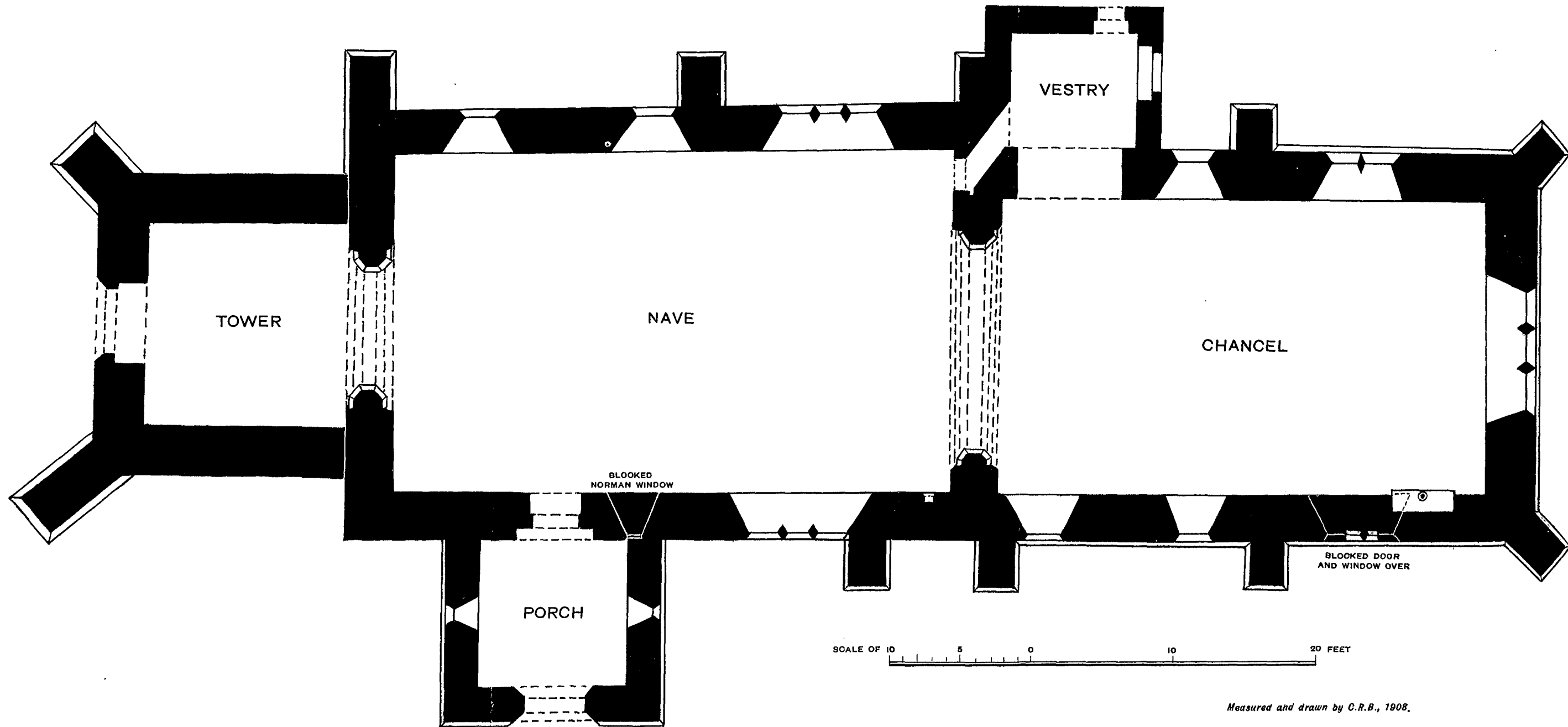
(WITH PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPH BY C. R. BOSANQUET.)

THE church of St. Peter at Pembury stands towards the extremity of a line of hills, about one mile north of Pembury village. Towards the east the ground falls rapidly to the plain of the Weald, and the church itself is built on a slight southern slope. There is no manor in Domesday Book which can be identified with Pembury,* but the church is mentioned in the *Textus Roffensis* under the name of Peppingeberia. The plan of the church, and the remains of Norman architecture existing in the fabric, would point to the probability of its having been first erected in the early years of the twelfth century or even possibly late in the eleventh century. From the fact that Tudeley and Hadlow are mentioned in Domesday, it may be assumed that the country hereabouts, till then densely wooded, was already being opened out, and it is not unlikely, in spite of lack of direct evidence, that Pembury was a settlement in pre-Conquest times.

The next mention of the church is in connection with the gift, by Simon de Wahull, of the Manor of Pepenbury Magna and Parva, with the appendant advowson of the church, to Bayham Abbey, the licence to hold which being granted by Gregory IX., in the year 1239. The advowson was held by the abbey until the time of the dissolution in the sixteenth century, when it passed into the hands of the lords of the manor of Pembury. The chief personal interest in connection with the church centres round the family of Colepeper of Bayhall.

In the reign of Edward II., Thomas Colepeper was castellan of Leeds Castle in the absence of Lord Badles-

* Furley, *Hist. of the Weald of Kent*, i., 221.



PEMBURY OLD CHURCH.

mere, a prominent supporter of the party opposed to the policy of that king. Hasted says that Edward, desiring the possession of Leeds Castle, sent his Queen Isabella there, with a large retinue, claiming a night's shelter on her pilgrimage to Canterbury. In Thomas Colepeper, however, she found a most vigilant guardian of the trust; and, on the plea that it would be first necessary for her to obtain permission from Lord Badlesmere, she was refused admission to the castle. The Queen attempted force, but failed and was obliged to camp without.

Edward, smarting under the insult, besieged and took the castle in the year 1321. Lord Badlesmere seems to have made a half-hearted attempt to relieve his faithful followers. There is some discrepancy in the account of what followed, but, apparently, Thomas Colepeper escaped. His sons, Richard and Walter, were, however, captured and executed; but John, another son, seems to have been received into royal favour by Edward III., and in the year 1355 paid twenty marks to that monarch for licence to found a perpetual chantry for a chaplain to celebrate daily for his soul and those of his ancestors, in the chapel of St. Mary, in the cemetery of the church at Pembury. He had married the co-heiress of the Hardreshull family, and was subsequently knighted. This chantry was entirely separate from the church.* It was 30 ft. in length, 18 ft. in breadth, and was covered by a leaden roof. At the dissolution it was pulled down and the materials were sold. The site that it occupied, in relation to the church, is open to conjecture.

In 1526, Cardinal Wolsey obtained letters patent licensing him to appropriate the rectory of Pembury, together with various other places, to the support of Cardinal College, Oxford. At his fall the advowson escheated to the Crown.

The church as it now stands consists of chancel, nave with porch on south side, and western tower with spire.

* Hasted, v., 271.

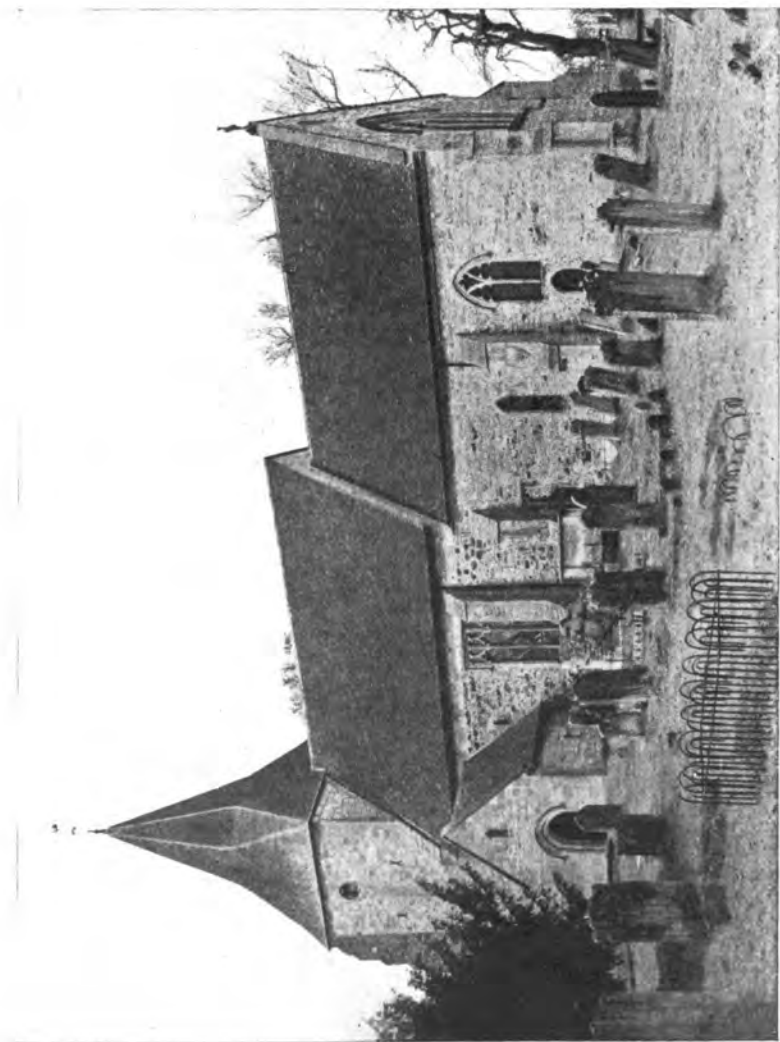


Photo.]

PEMBURY OLD CHURCH: SOUTH VIEW.

[C. R. B.]

There are no aisles. It is built of a local sandstone, shewing, here and there, considerable iron-staining.

Viewing the church from the south side, by which one approaches it from the village, it is at once apparent that the fabric is of several distinct styles and ages. The chancel is, on the whole, of better workmanship than the nave: it is good rubble work, and there is less of the iron-staining in its stone. The nave, on the other hand, is, with the exception of the three upper courses, of ruder rubble work, and there is much mortar between the individual stones. The stones are deeply stained with iron. The same divisional features are discernible on the north side, but cannot be quite so plainly traced.

Examining the south side more in detail, it will be seen that at the junction of the upper and middle thirds of the nave wall, there is a small round-headed window: its lower part is cut off by the roof-line of the porch. This window is of very small external dimensions, and has merely a plain chamfered edge: internally it is deeply splayed. It undoubtedly belongs to the original structure, and is the survivor of a course of like windows that at one time lighted the building. The arrangement, both as regards height from the ground, narrow external aperture, and deep internal splay, was a common one in Romanesque churches, and gave the greatest amount of light, with security—a very necessary consideration in those days. The south door is also round-headed, and is probably of the same date as the window, but it is so covered with plaster that no further details are visible. There is a square-headed window of three lights on the south side of the nave, and on the north side a corresponding window, and two single-light windows with cinquefoiled heads.

The upper three courses of the nave-wall are formed of squared stones, regularly laid, and with the minimum amount of separating mortar. The stone is not iron-stained, and stands out in marked contrast to the rough discoloured stone below. The porch, which bears its original roof, is of square-cut unstained stone.

The chancel fabric is of superior workmanship to that of the nave, but is still rough, and the stones appear to be partly of the same quality as that of the nave, and the rest of the finer kind previously referred to. A plain but well-cut cornice supports the roof. On the north side of the chancel there are two windows, and on the south three. The most easterly, in each case, is of two lights, and has tracery of the late geometrical type. West of these, on north and south, there is a single-light window with foliated head. That on the north has a square-headed weather molding of the scroll pattern. The corresponding window on the south has no weather molding. At a somewhat lower level and west of the last-named on the south side is a priest's window. The east window is a restoration, and previously to 1860 was square-headed and of three lights.

A noteworthy and curious feature of the chancel is the presence of armorial bearings cut in relief on the stones of the buttresses. Those on the south side are original—that is, were so placed when the buttresses were built, and the stones upon which they are cut form an integral part of the respective buttresses. The shields on the northern side were inserted at the time of the restoration to which I have previously referred. Of the latter, the most easterly bears the arms of the Woodgate family, and the western those of the Amherst. These two families were largely responsible for that restoration. For many generations they had served and worshipped in the church, and finally had found their rest within or around it. On the south side, the most easterly buttress, placed diagonally, bears a shield supporting a plain rectangular cross, like a cross of St. George. There is nothing to indicate the tinctures, and I have been quite unable to discover the significance of the device in this case. On the western buttress are the arms of the Colepeper family—a *bend engrailed*; and on the central those of the Hardreshull family, into which John Colepeper married—a *chevron between eight martlets*.

The tower, viewed externally, is plain and squat and has a short spire of the 'timber' type. There are heavy

diagonal buttresses on the western side: that on the south being the most massive owing to the gradual slope of the ground on that side. There is a western doorway, the arch of which is decorated with good fourteenth-century scroll-moulding. The jambs have been renewed and shew traces of ornamentation which seems to be of the late fifteenth century. Above the door is an ogee-headed window. In the upper part of the tower on the north, south and western aspects are circular sound-holes with quatrefoil featherings.

Internally the church is extremely plain, and is thickly coated with plaster. At the south-east end of the nave is a recess for a piscina, but so covered with plaster that no details are discernible.

The roof is a good specimen of tie-beam and king-post, and the spandrels formed by the braces of the wall-posts and tie-beams are ornamented by pierced foils.

The square-headed windows on the north and south of the nave were evidently inserted after the roof had been constructed, for in the process the wall-posts have been partly cut away and the supporting stone-corbels altered in position. The arch leading into the tower has typical fourteenth-century capitals, shewing the scroll moulding. There are straight-joints at the junction of the tower-walls with the western wall of the nave.

The position of the chancel in its relation to the nave is curious, inasmuch as its centre is about eighteen inches to the south of the centre line of the nave. The chancel-arch is poor and of late date. The moldings are very shallow, and on its west face the outer order is cut back near the apex and seems to support the most easterly tie-beam of the nave-roof. There are traces of red colouring on the pillars of this arch.

The chancel has been much restored, for until the restoration its floor was level with that of the nave. At the south-east corner was a flat stone bearing traces of an incised cross, and having round its border an inscription in Norman-French stating that beneath were placed the bones of Margaret, daughter of Thomas Colepeper. This stone,

with many other memorials of more recent date, was apparently covered in when the floor was raised.*

Though this church is small and architecturally unpretentious, there are several points connected with it that are, I think, worthy of consideration, and I should like to offer the following suggestions as to the history of the fabric. The original church consisted of a nave and short chancel. The fabric of the present nave is substantially of that building. The chancel was probably shorter than that now existing. The western portion of the north wall of the chancel may have belonged to the original building, but the south wall was rebuilt in a line with the south wall of the nave at a later date. The deeply-splayed window over the porch is the sole survivor of a like row that lighted the church, and the present south doorway is the original entrance. There was no tower. This substantial but small building seems to have served until about the middle of the reign of Edward III., when John Colepeper, having married the Hardreshull heiress, enlarged the church and founded the chantry in the churchyard, to which I have previously referred. There is no record as to the position of this chantry.† Apparently he pulled down the south wall of the chancel and rebuilt it in a line with the south wall of the nave, at the same time extending the whole chancel eastwards. He built the buttresses of the chancel and placed upon them the arms of his family and those of his wife. He pierced the western wall of the nave with the arch and built the tower, which he placed centrally with the chancel and not with the nave. It is, of course, difficult to trace the work of different hands: but from the fact that the stone is of finer quality and shews better workmanship I think that the raising of the nave-wall by three courses, and the imposition of the fine oak roof should be placed later than John—perhaps to the time of his son Sir Thomas,

* A detailed description of the stone is appended to this Paper.

† "John Polley thelder, wever," by his will in 1535, desired "to be buried in the churchyard betwixt the chaunsell and the chantry." (*Test. Cant.*, 59.) This would seem to fix the site of the chantry on the south side of the chancel.—ED.

sheriff in 1394 and 1395. Sir Thomas probably added, too, the nave-buttresses as an extra support to the wall against the outward thrust of the heavy roof. I think he built the porch, which in itself forms a very efficient buttress.

Late in the fifteenth century, the square-headed windows of the nave were inserted. This necessitated the cutting away of part of two of the wall-posts of the roof and an alteration in position of the corresponding corbels—a clumsy arrangement, to say the least of it. The chancel-arch may be of the same age, for the shallow moldings and the debased capital suggest a late date in the Perpendicular period. The relation that the chancel-arch bears to the eastern tie-beam of the nave-roof is curious: for, as I have above said, the outer order has the appearance of having been cut away to allow the tie-beam to strike across immediately in front of the crown of the arch. The following suggestion has been offered as to the cause of this condition. “The original Norman chancel-arch must have been comparatively low and narrow, while the wall in which it was set was of the same thickness as the responds of the existing arch. Above it, at the original height of the side-walls of the nave, there was an off-set, from which a thinner gable-wall rose, and on which rested the tie-beam of the original roof. The tie-beam of the existing fourteenth-century roof was placed at a higher level on the face of the gable-wall, and the old tie-beam was removed, leaving the off-set visible, as at the west end. In the following century it was determined to replace the original chancel-arch by the present one, wider and more lofty than its predecessor, to admit a screen and rood which have disappeared. The greatly increased span of the opening caused its pointed arch to rise above the old offset. It was necessary, therefore, to increase the thickness of the thin gable-wall, making its face flush with the face of the thicker wall below. Thus the old offset disappeared, and this added face and the outer order of the arch which was built up with it were stopped by an offset immediately under the tie-beam and its wall-post braces. The crown of the outer order of the arch

was not completed: to have completed it would have involved the removal of the tie-beam. Above the tie-beam the face of the gable-wall was left unaltered."

It is curious that there is no record of the repairs and reconstructions effected at the time of the restoration in 1860. We do, however, know that heavy galleries on the north and west were removed, as well as a small music gallery above, high up in the western gable. A dormer window which lighted this gallery was also taken away. Judging from a sketch made about the year 1840, in the possession of Mrs. Woodgate of Gimble Grove, there was also a window, high in the south wall, lighting the lower gallery. The vestry on the north side was constructed at this time.

There are no ancient memorials above ground except a seventeenth-century brass which has been fixed on the wall at the north-east angle of the nave. There is a curious pentagonal stone tomb in the churchyard, which there is every reason to believe formerly lay within the church. The upper surface bears the much-worn remains of what appears to have been a floriated cross in low relief. There is no inscription discoverable. This upper slab is raised about eighteen inches by a base of stone work, and the outer edge is decorated by a series of well-cut mouldings, of which the outer is an undoubted scroll. It had been suggested that this stone marked the position of the old chantry, and furthermore it was thought that foundations of some extent existed around it. However, to clear the matter up, the turf around to the extent of 5 ft. was removed and the subsoil excavated to the depth of 4 ft., but no sign could be found of anything in the nature of substructure.

When Hasted was compiling his work on Kent he communicated with the then vicar of Pembury, Mr. John Whitaker, for details concerning the church and its history. In his reply, Mr. Whitaker deals largely with that Colepeper memorial now covered in under the raised floor of the chancel, and as on some future occasion the stone may again

come to light, and as Mr. Whitaker's paper is much faded by time and very perishable, I think it would be well to give an extract from his note so far as it deals with the tomb.

NOTE BY THE REV. J. WHITAKER: *c.* 1710.

“There is a tomb stone in the pavement of the chancel of red variegated marble as it seems to be, the only monument of antiquity in the church, which evidently relates to the Colepeper family: but the more I examine it, the more sensible I am of my own incapacity to make anything of it. There appears at present to be no vestigia of there having ever been any date, and the inscription is in many places defaced. The stone is 5 ft. 6 ins. long, 1 ft. 9½ ins. broad over the west end, and 1 ft. 1½ ins. over the feet. 7½ ins. from the top is a groove 1 ft. 4 ins. long and about 1 in. in breadth, rectangularly intersected by another groove 1 ft. across. In the bottom of this cross are five drops of lead let into the stone, one in the centre of the two crossed furrows and one at each end, visibly intended for the purpose of fastening a plate, which, however, is now lost, and by its separation from the stone seems to have damaged that part of the inscription that was near it, which nothing but the violent hand of ignorance could have effected, the stone being so very hard that the letters in the other parts are as perfectly defined as ever they could be . . . I have often wished to see it subjected to the examination of some gentleman completely versed in antiquarian erudition, in which I am so entirely deficient as even not to know in what language it is written. The letters seem to be after the Saxon character, though many of them do not comport with any of the examples on type that I have impromptu to consult . . . An adept in the language wherein it is written might probably fill up the defects, and at least fancy into it some meaning, which I am, for my own part, incapable of doing—unless the old French at that time in use in

England might possibly justify the following acceptance.”
Vide infra.

Accompanying the note from which the foregoing is extracted was a rough diagram of the stone.

Prietz pur lame Margarete la file Sire Thomas
 Colpeper.

[P.S.—In reference to the scutcheon carved on the easternmost buttress of the chancel, the author writes to say that he has discovered in Hasted (v., 230) that Elizabeth, daughter of Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, and widow of John de Burgh, seems to have possessed Southfrith, which on her death passed to her son, William, Earl of Ulster, who bore for his arms, *Or, a cross gules.*

“As William’s daughter and heir, Elizabeth, married Lionel, Duke of Clarence and third son of Edward III., he was presumably alive at the time of the building of the chancel, and it is possible that he had something to do with that building. The Southfrith woods are but a stone’s throw from Pembury Church. The arms on the buttress would do very well for the Ulster arms borne by William, and the date (approximate) would correspond.”—ED.]