

LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH.

BY THE REV. E. R. OLIVE, VICAR.

THIS ancient building, situated one and a half mile north of Newington-next-Sittingbourne, stands almost at the edge of the Halstow estuary, and near the site of the ancient Roman potteries. It is not surprising, then, that its exterior masonry, like that of St. Martin's Church at Canterbury, should comprise a quantity of Roman material.

Dr. Harris, in his *History of Kent*, states that the church of Halstow (Halegestow, or the Holy Place), dedicated to St. Margaret, was given by Archbishop Hubert to the convent of Christ Church in Canterbury. An ancient record tells that Agnes, sister of Archbishop Thomas Becket, married Thomas, son of Theobald Helles, and that John of London, son of the marriage, was instituted in 1184 by Archbishop Baldwin to the vicarage of Halstow, on the presentation of Prior Alanus and the convent of Christ Church.

The following account has been compiled from the report of Mr. W. D. Caröe, M.A., F.S.A., the architect to whose direction the repair and restoration of the building (exclusive of the chancel) were entrusted :—

It is evident that a Romanesque structure existed upon the site, and that it was largely constructed of Roman bricks. The earliest existing portions of the building are to be found in the south wall of the chancel where a semi-circular-headed brick window (walled up) and some brick herring-bone work still remain *in situ*. This work belongs either to the early part of the ninth, or else to the latter part of the eleventh century. It is not improbable that the



LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH. From the South-east.



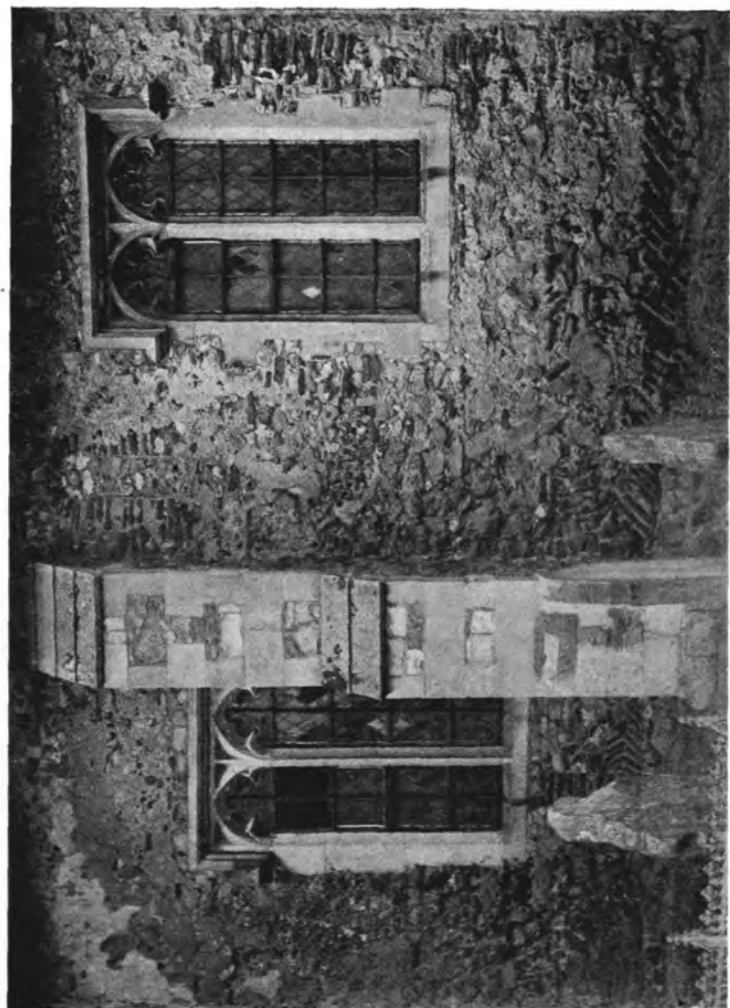
LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH.
View from the North-west of the Nave, toward the East.

church may originally have consisted of a small rectangular cell, complete in itself, with or without a chancel, standing to east of the existing east wall.

The main structure of the present nave appears to be of early Norman foundation, and it is fairly evident that at the time when it was erected, the east wall of the chancel was also brought into being. The ancient cell presumably was made into a chancel, with a new east wall, a new nave being added about the same time. There are quite clear evidences that the new nave was originally a plain parallelogram on plan, and lighted high up with round-headed windows. One of these may still be observed in the north wall of the tower. There appears to have been some prolongation of the south wall of the nave at its west end, but precisely what change may have been effected is a matter of speculation.

The next stage in the development of the building was the insertion of arcades and the erection of the aisles, about 1150—60. This appears to have been a somewhat clumsy process, for the wall-bases, which were cut through for the opening out of the arches, were never properly removed.

[Although both arcades are assigned by Mr. Carøe to the latter part of the twelfth century, it is obvious, from their lack of uniformity, that they cannot have been coeval with one another, but that a considerable interval must have elapsed between the respective dates of these two additions to the original nave. The south arcade has much narrower arches than the north arcade, which, moreover (unlike the south arcade, with its square-edged soffits), has chamfered edges all round its arched openings from floor to apex. It looks as though the spacing of the south arcade had been controlled by the position of the tower, but this can scarcely have been the case, if the tower itself was not built until the thirteenth century, the date attributed to it by Mr. Carøe (*vide infra*). It is probable that, in the process of opening out the arcades, the builders of deliberate purpose refrained from completely smoothing off the wall-bases, at any rate in the case of the south arcade, of which the east abutment,



LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH.
Detail of South Wall of the Chancel.

Photo, T. M. G. Lloyd.

as also three sides of the middle pier, still retain wide footings, to form bench tables. These in fact represent the most primitive kind of seating accommodation.—ED.]

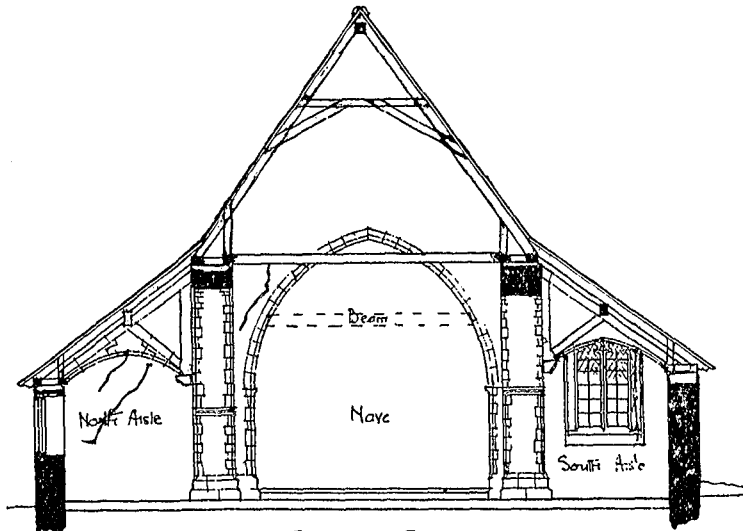
Early in the thirteenth century great changes were made and the fabric assumed very much its present shape. The tower was erected, the north door [still secured within, as of old, by a draw-bar—ED.] inserted, and the chancel arcaded internally. [The cylindrical shafts of this wall-arcading in the chancel have suffered much from patching and repairing. But it would seem that all of them were originally of Purbeck marble (about 3 ft. 6 inches high each) with Purbeck abaci to their stone capitals.—ED.] To the same period belonged the external buttressing of the chancel.

In the thirteenth century also the chancel was probably reroofed and rewindowed. One of the lancet windows then inserted still exists near the east end of the north wall of the chancel. Further, a sacristy (now demolished) with a two-centred doorway (now walled up) in the north wall of the chancel was erected in the internal angle between the chancel and the nave's north aisle. Many of the ancient floor tiles, which still survive, are of the thirteenth century. [They have been collected and laid at the east end of the nave. They are all plain, without pattern.—ED.] The rectangular font is a remnant of thirteenth-century work, and still retains its four subsidiary columns of Purbeck, but the present bowl is largely a patchwork, with modern plaster.

The subsequent changes are not of great moment. In 1340—50 a new west window was added, and toward the end of the fourteenth century a new east window, as well as side windows to the chancel, and a new window at the east end of the south aisle. [The fact of the existence of the sacristy accounts for the absence of a window at the east end of the north aisle.—ED.] In the sixteenth century a two-light window was introduced in the north aisle to replace a small slit, part of which, close by, still remains.

The pulpit, with sounding-board, is Jacobean, the western gallery early eighteenth-century work. [This gallery was

abolished at the recent restoration, and its remains, turned balusters, made into a screen enclosing a vestry at the west end of the south aisle, beneath the tower.—Ed.] The pews



Transverse Section

·SCALE OF FEET·

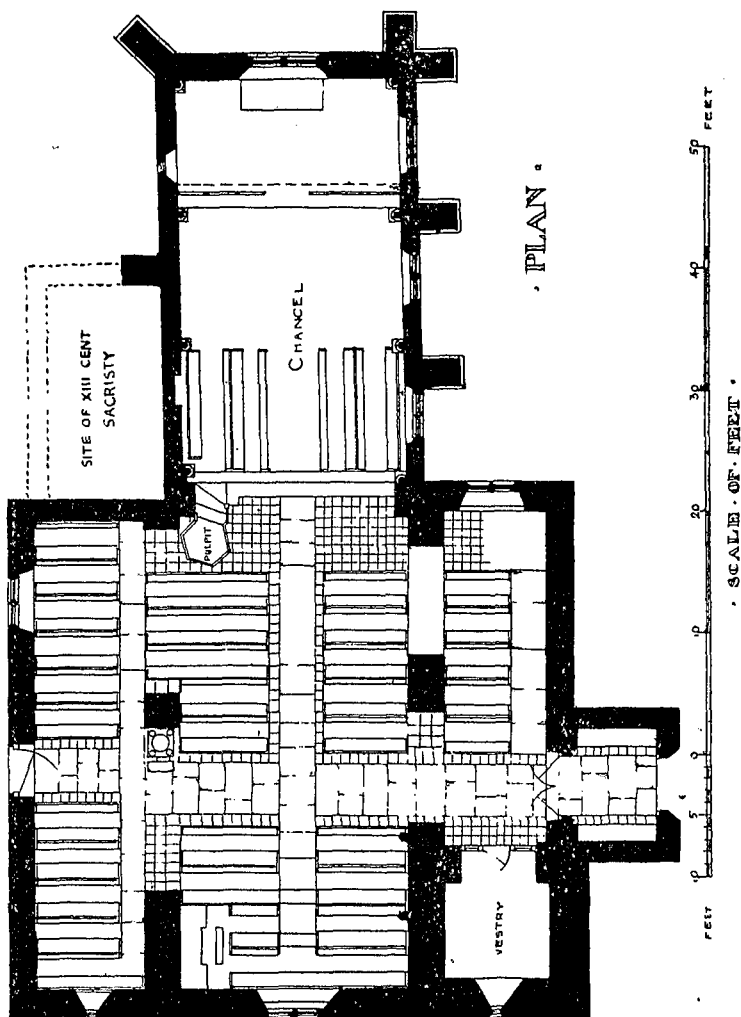


belong to about 1750, at which date there appear to have been carried out considerable repairs and alterations. Among these may be enumerated the enlargement of the south window of the belfry, the straightening out of the roof-pitches of nave and aisles, and sundry repairs in brick. The two wall-posts which abut against the north wall of the tower are probably only makeshifts. The gutter between the nave-roof and the tower has no doubt been faulty, and the ends of the beams becoming rotten in consequence, the posts above mentioned had to be introduced to make good the defect.

The old roofs, probably coeval with the erection of the aisles, exhibit a marked Kentish peculiarity, viz., the expo-

sure of the truss upon the outer wall-surface of the gables. [Internally nave and chancel alike are roofed with tie-beam and truss-rafter roofs of seven cants. The tie-beams of the

LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH



chancel are hollow chamfered and, furthermore, carry octagonal king-posts, with moulded capitals and bases to corre-
VOL. XXXIII. M

spond. In the wall, beneath the east window of the chancel, is a small square recess, or aumbry.—ED.]

One of the corbels of the altar-beam of the chapel in the south aisle should be noted.

A point of special interest is the fact that the building retains a form which was very usual in the thirteenth century, viz., nave and aisles under one continuous roof. This form was probably almost universal at one time, but few examples of it have come down to the present day as perfect as that of Lower Halstow Church.

NOTE BY THE REV. E. R. OLIVE.

It should be mentioned that the chancel was "restored" in 1878-9 at the cost of the then Rectors, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The work carried out by Mr. Carøe, architect, in 1907, comprised the reparation of the tower, bells and bell-frames. A new south porch and an inner doorway of stone were erected under the same auspices in 1913, in place of a dilapidated porch of brick, built about 1810, when the original thirteenth-century porch was ruthlessly destroyed and the inner doorway reconstructed in brick. The seventeenth-century quoins of brick were replaced by new quoins of Kentish rag, and the slated spire by one of shingles.

In the course of digging a hole for the lightning conductor, the foundations of the thirteenth-century sacristy between the chancel and the north aisle were uncovered. Two small remnants of this ancient sacristy survive above ground. One of these protrudes from the east end of the nave's north aisle and the other from the base of a brick buttress on the north side of the chancel. None of the tomb-stones on the newly-discovered site of the sacristy being anterior in date to the year 1700, the inference is that the sacristy itself must have been demolished toward the end of the seventeenth century, at about which time, no doubt, the comparatively modern buttress of brick was erected.

The site of the vanished sacristy has been carefully marked out with stones by the present Vicar.

ADDITIONAL NOTES BY THE EDITOR.

From the testimony of wills it is known that an altar of St. Catherine was in existence in 1493 and one of St. Thomas in 1528. There would also be the customary high altar in the chancel and a Lady altar elsewhere within the church. It follows then, that, as there were no chancel aisles to contain them, one of these four altars must have been situated at the east end of either aisle of the nave (thus accounting for three altars, including the high altar), while the fourth must have stood in the nave itself, in front of the rood-screen, to right or left of the doorway which opened through the screen into the chancel. And at the opposite side to this nave-altar, viz., either in the north-east, or in the south-east corner of the nave, would be situated the wooden stairs, which, in the absence of a stone staircase, must have been provided for access to the rood-loft. No vestige of screen-work survives, but it is evident that the upper part of the chancel arch, from a level of about 4 ft. 6 inches above the imposts up to the apex, was filled by a solid partition, or tympanum. Of the latter, though no trace of vertical timbers remains, the pair of chases for the horizontal supporting beam, which was situated some 12 ft. 6 inches above the nave floor, is still to be seen. These two chases, each about 12 inches high by 1½ inch wide, are sunk in the soffit of either sweep of the chancel arch, at a distance of about three inches back from the westward face of the east wall of the nave.

When the modern coating of whitewash was removed in the course of the repairs in 1907, a number of mural paintings, six or seven of them fairly distinct, was brought to light, as follow:—

1. On the eastern soffit of the eastern arch of the north arcade. A subject too worn and faint for identification.

2. In the north aisle, on the north face of the middle pier of the north arcade. A figure of an abbot or prelate in alb and crossed stole, cope with large vesica-shaped morse, wearing a mitre on his head and holding in his left hand a staff of which the upper part had been obliterated. This figure, which was conjectured to represent St. Thomas of Canterbury, has now crumbled away, with the exception of the head.

3. In the nave, on the spandrel of the middle pier of the north arcade. Here should have been a gigantic figure of St. Christopher. Nothing, however, remains even to suggest such an identification of the subject, unless it be a marked diagonal line, which might possibly be the staff borne in the hands of the saint. There are, among many undecipherable traces of colour, some rosettes, which seem to be the remains of a masonry pattern.

4. On the eastern soffit of the western arch of the north arcade. The remains of three figures. One of them, a small figure on the right, may well be of earlier date than the others. It looks as though one subject had been painted on the top of another. Mr. Carøe has described this painting as "St. Cecilia attended by an angel," an identification which can hardly be maintained, seeing that not one of the three figures has wings, nor the emblem of St. Cecilia.

5. On the western soffit of the western arch of the north arcade. A priest, abbot or prelate in Eucharistic vestments (the chasuble dark purplish-red) with his left hand raised to hold a staff, which is now obliterated.

6. In the nave, on the north wall of the latter, to west of the arcade. An undecipherable subject, the mediæval work having been obliterated by having black-letter texts painted over it at some post-Reformation date.

7. In the nave, on the west wall, to north of the west window. Two figures seated on a long throne or bench, and bending towards one another in the attitude which seems to suggest the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A less likely alternative suggestion is that these two figures depict our Lord conversing with the Woman of Samaria.



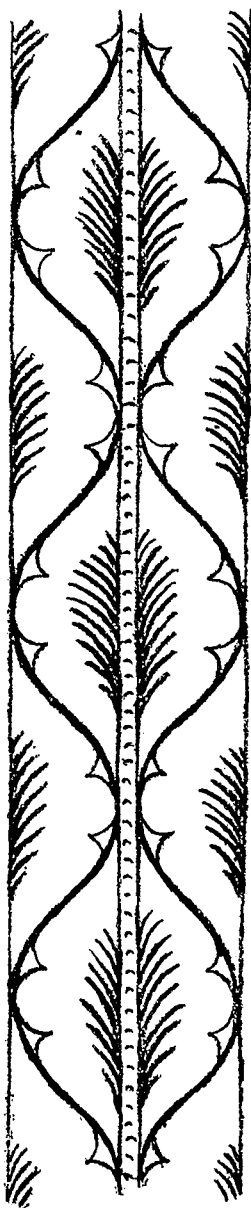
(No. 2 in text.)

LOWER HALSTOW CHURCH.



(No. 8 in text.)

Mural Paintings.



No. 12.

RECONSTRUCTION OF PAINTED
ORNAMENT ON SOFFIT OF
CHANCEL ARCH.

8. On the eastern soffit of the western arch of the south arcade. A crowned female figure, seated and having her left hand raised to hold a staff or sceptre, no longer visible. Underneath are the remains of two consecration crosses, partly overlapping one another, and therefore painted at different dates.

9. In the nave, on the spandrel of the middle pier of the south arcade. Undecipherable remains, among which appear to be traces of masonry pattern with rosettes and conventionally treated floral scroll-work.

10. In the south aisle, on the south face of the middle pier of the south arcade. A figure seated on a throne beneath a trefoiled arch or canopy. This subject, though sadly obliterated, appears, from what remains of it, to have surpassed any of the others in grandeur and dignity.

11. On the eastern soffit of the eastern arch of the south arcade. A figure stretched upon a saltire cross, presumably the martyrdom of St. Andrew. Beneath, in a sailing-boat with striped sail, two seated figures, perhaps the brothers, Andrew and Peter.

All the above paintings date from the latter part of the thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century, and, with the

exception of No. 10, are rude in execution, giving the impression of having been the work of an artist or artists of only mediocre attainment.

12. On the soffit of the chancel arch. A double wave, or trail, of conventional leafage, with cusps, executed in red and brown, probably soon after the middle of the fourteenth century or perhaps even as late as the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Four small moulded circular caps and bases of thirteenth-century stone-work, brought to light in the course of restoration, are now to be seen fixed to the wall in the south aisle, to west of the doorway. Above, at wall-plate level, is fixed a moulded voussoir, also of thirteenth-century work, which was believed by Dr. Francis Grayling, who found it in a neighbouring builder's yard, to have formed part of the south doorway.

In the outer doorway of the new south porch are incorporated a few moulded jamb-stones and voussoirs, and in the east quoin of the porch is an old stone, with the remains of two small dials incised in the surface.

From the roof of the easternmost bay of the nave hangs a brass "spider" chandelier, having two tiers of branches, six branches above and twelve below. It bears no date, but seems to be of eighteenth-century workmanship. It is suspended by handsome wrought iron links, presumably coeval, with three four-ways ornaments, partly gilt and partly painted in scarlet and black, or blue.

In the south aisle stands an ancient box or chest, with semi-cylindrical top. Its date may be about 1700, or possibly somewhat earlier.

April 8th, 1918.

AYMER VALLANCE.

NOTE.—Special acknowledgment is due to Mr. W. D. Carøe, F.S.A., who kindly supplied a tracing of his ground plan of the building.

Thanks are also due to Rev. Waterman Gardner-Waterman for having supplied the photographs of the interior and of the mural paintings.—ED.