

## STOURMOUTH CHURCH.

BY THE REV. A. H. COLLINS, M.A.

THE Parish Church of All Saints', Stourmouth, has not, owing to its isolation, met with the attention it deserves. The road by which it is reached leads nowhere beyond, while other roads which pass over the Stour lie at some distance away. Thus Hasted's description of the village as a very obscure and unfrequented place seems still a fitting one. A reference, however, to Mr. Walker's article in *Arch. Cant.*, Vol. XXXIX, on "The Lost Wantsum Channel," will show how in the Saxon period the place was far less isolated by water, being in close touch with the ancient channel itself, which was then still easily navigable.

The present Church consists of a Nave 45 ft. 6 ins. by 17 ft. 3 ins. ; a South aisle of the same length and about 9 ft. 4 ins. in width (excluding the arcade in both instances) ; a somewhat shorter and narrower North aisle whose width decreases a good deal from East to West ; and an aisleless Chancel, 24 ft. 6 ins. long from the West of the Chancel arch to the East wall by 14 ft. 9 ins. broad.

A small Western steeple rests on an ancient timber framing that comes down to the floor. The writer has no hesitation in pronouncing the original aisleless Nave to be late Saxon, c. 1000 A.D., or earlier, while he believes that the Western part of the Early English Chancel is of the same period.

The evidence for the Nave is convincing :

(1) Thickness of walls, 2 ft. 1 in. or 2 ft. 2 in., which is much less than a Norman wall is likely to be.

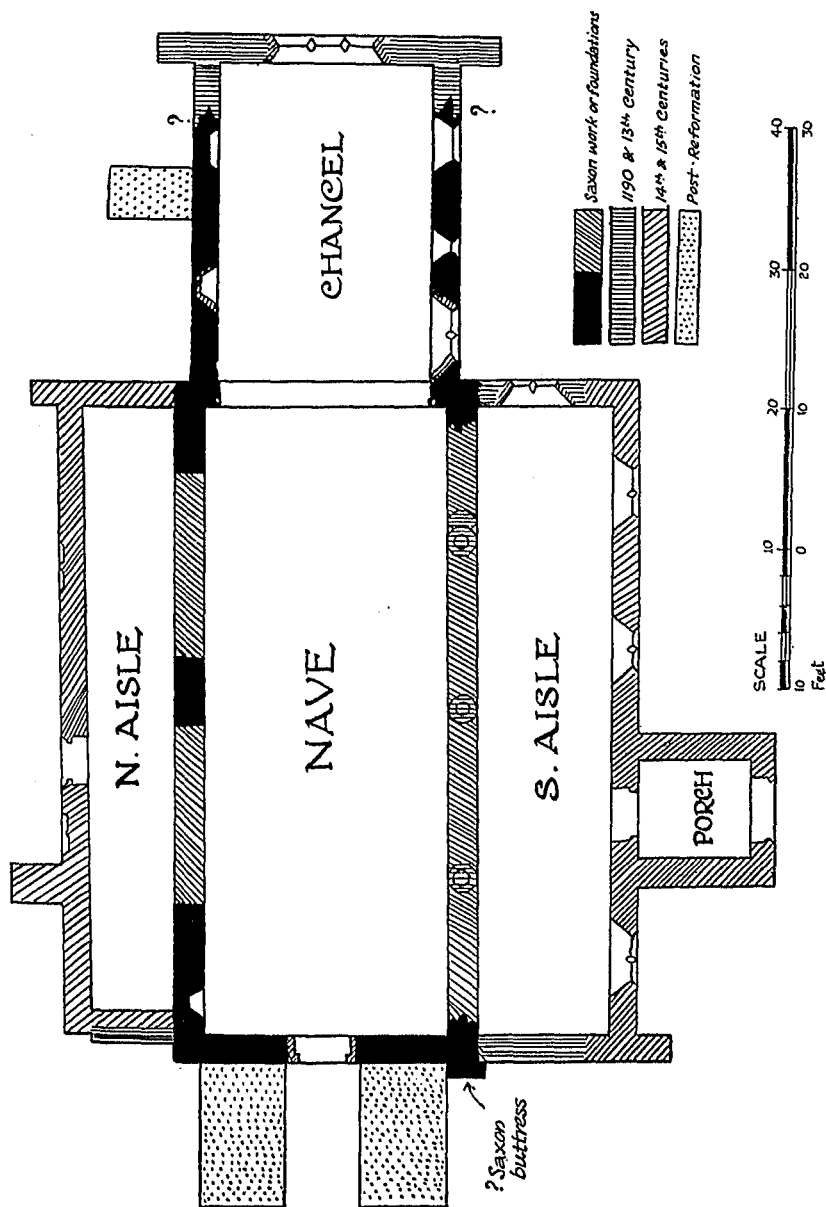
(2) The presence of the inner half of a double splay window—a little lopsided—in the Western part of the North wall. The outside of this window has been blocked by a facing of modern cement, but the shallowness of the inner

splay, occupying as it does little more than half the thickness of the wall, necessitates the existence of another splay outside.

(3) The North West quoin of the Nave, with its large pillar stone nearly 3 ft. high at its base. Above this are smaller ragstones and some Roman brick.

(4) The bull's eye window high up in the West gable. The circular opening is slightly chamfered, and seems to be about 13 or 14 ins. across. The outside is formed of four pick-dressed stones of unequal size, placed roughly and for convenience in the form of a cross. A most interesting feature is the presence of about six small sunk holes, four on the chamfer and two further out on the right hand stone. Two of the holes appear still filled. Can these borings have been for any other purpose than for the insertion of small sticks, on which oiled linen, or some other semi-transparent material, was stretched to act as a substitute for glass? Somewhat similar holes may be seen on a blocked Early English window in the North Chancel wall.

The S.W. quoin of the Nave is covered by a buttress, which was added for security. It consists of calcareous tufa and rag, and is butted rather than bonded in. Roman bricks may be noted here. Mr. Philip Johnston, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., who kindly visited the Church with me ascribed a Saxon date to this buttress, and it is therefore so indicated on the plan. With regard to the Chancel, the fact that the thickness of the walls there is the same as the thickness of the Nave walls suggests the same pre-Norman date. The present East wall is substantially later, though probably mediæval at its base. It is quite uncertain how far the original Chancel would extend, as there are no marks of former quoins to indicate the original ending. Certain marks of a juncture in the South wall about 8 feet from the point where the Chancel meets the aisle indicate that the wall here has been refaced. They cannot indicate a quoin, as the evidence of the North wall at the same point, where the masonry is homogeneous, is against such a view. It is likely that the



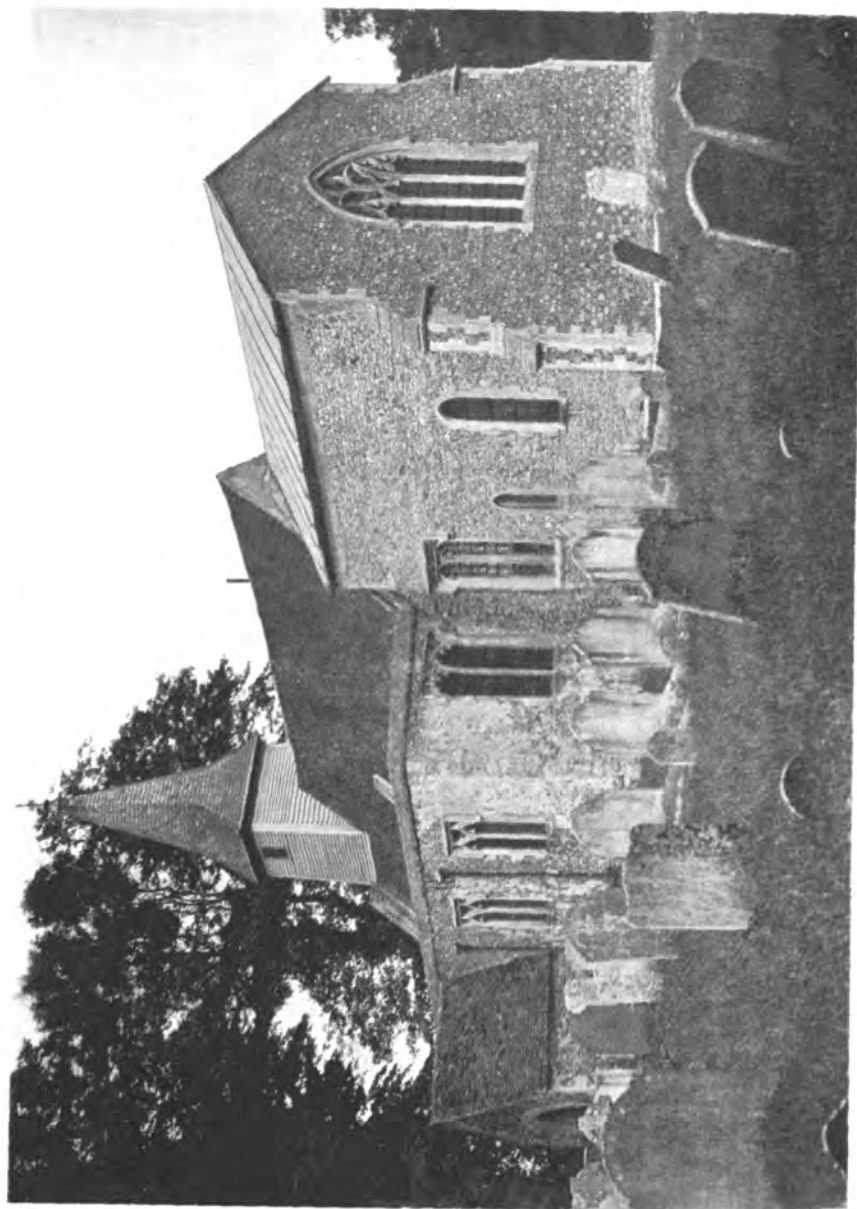
Chancel was slightly lengthened in the Early English period when, as the windows show, it was remodelled. The Early English Chancel arch with its nookshafts is exceptionally wide and lofty, and probably the Saxon Chancel was lofty too.

The further extensions of the Saxon building consisted in the throwing out of aisles, the South alone being anterior to the alterations of the Chancel. First, *c.* 1190, came the piercing of the South wall of the Nave, with four fine arches, resting on beautiful foliated capitals, with round abaci deeply undercut. Holding water bases are at the foot of the columns. The aisle then thrown out was of course narrower than the present one. Its first extent may be marked outside the West wall 6 ft. 6ins. from the inner buttress, and the line of the steeply sloping roof is clearly visible.

Signs of settlement, very common during the whole history of this Church, must have appeared about this time at the N.W. of the Nave, and a fine Early English buttress with steep set-offs, carefully undercut, was built to secure this end of the Nave. There was as yet no North aisle.

The fourteenth century saw the growth of the South aisle to its present size. The South porch was added at the same time, and all the windows in the aisle with the exception of the east window. It is likely that the existing windows are copies. The writer makes the suggestion that the North wall of the Nave was not pierced for an aisle until the fourteenth century, though he believes that most readers will ascribe an earlier date to the work. There are, however, on the masonry of the piers marks of the claw chisel, which was in general use in the fourteenth century, and the windows, of which the bases remain outside *in situ*, cannot possibly be earlier than then.

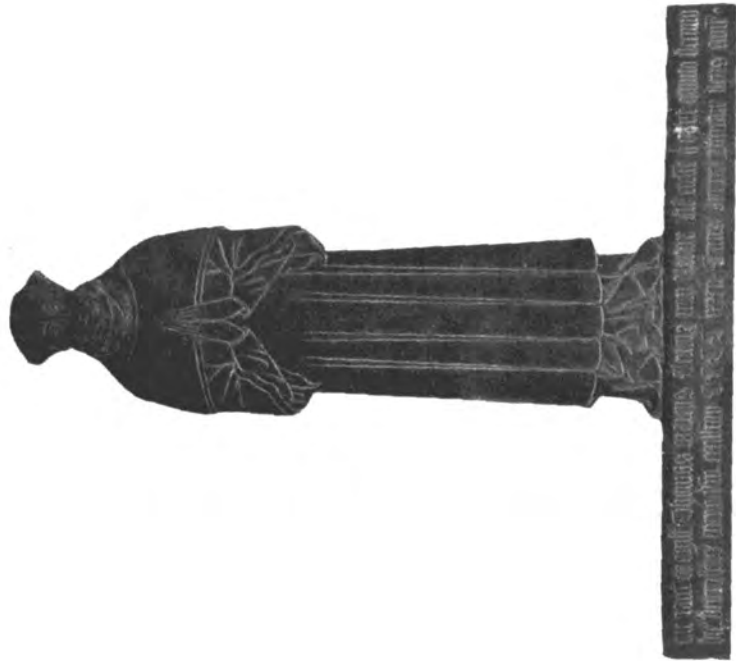
The writer has noted in East Kent a good many instances similar to Stourmouth, of chamfered impost on rough masonry piers which look very like Transitional Norman; but in his opinion the prevalence of claw tooling makes so early a date very unlikely.



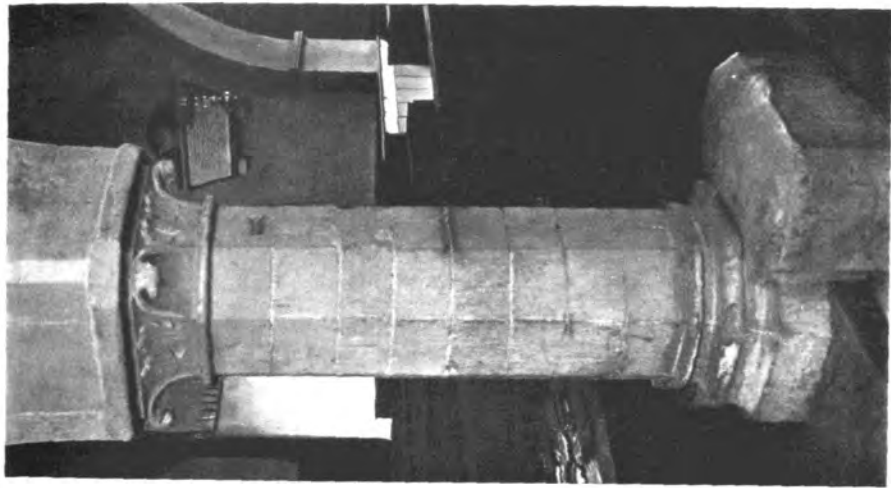
STOURMOUTH CHURCH FROM THE SOUTH-EAST. PLATE I.  
*Photo. Rev. A. H. Collins.*

STOURMOUTH CHURCH. PLATE II.

*Photos. Rev. A. H. Collins.*



Sepulchral Brass of Master Thomas Mareys.



Eastern Pier of South Aisle.

Readers may wonder why the already narrow North aisle gets 8 ins. narrower as it proceeds Westward. A suggestion may be made that the width Westward was not due to a measurement from the Nave wall, but was rather based on the projection of the Early English buttress, which was taken as the standard of inner measurement at this end. The wall at the West end of this aisle is exceptionally thick, being formed by the Early English buttress and the later addition.

Hasted records that the Church was given by Hamo, son of Vitalis, to Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester, and the monks of the priory, together with the whole tithe of his demesne. This must refer to the Saxon fabric, for there are no traces in the Church of early or indeed pure Norman work. He also notes the existence of small square tiles in the Chancel, and of an ancient font of stone supported by four pillars with plain bases and capitals. There is no trace left of these good things. Fortunately, however, the interesting brass of the Rector, Master Thomas Mareys, has escaped destruction. In response to a request for information, Mr. Ralph Griffin, F.S.A., very kindly sent me his work, *Kentish Items*, from which the following description is gathered.

The Rector is shown in academics, as six other Priests are shown among the brasses of Kent. The inscription below the figure runs thus: "Hic jacet Magist' Thomas Mareys nup Rector isti' ecclie q̄ obiit quarto decimo die decembris anno dñi millmo cccclxxii cujus anime ppicietur deus Amē." His cassock is seen coming down to the ground and falling over the feet, and its tight sleeves come to the wrist projecting from the openings in a shorter gown worn over it, which has loose sleeves reaching half way down the forearm; above this again is the cape or tippet, and round the neck the loose folds of the hood which would fall down behind, as seen at Lower Hardres.

The slab on the dexter side has an indent for a brass shield. This is gone, as it was in Hasted's time, but the slab still retains a shield at the top on the sinister side made

of lead, on which the spots of a charge of undée ermine are still visible, but all trace of the tincture of the rest of the charge has disappeared. According to his will in the Archdeaconry Archives, Thomas Mareys left to the Church 40s. to buy new bells, and 40s. to buy a chalice. His brother William has a brass at Preston near Faversham.

Amongst other objects of interest are a medley of ancient glass in the South of the Chancel, and some windows representing Apostles made at the Rectory by a Mr. Drake, who was Parish Priest between 1843 and 1883.