

The Parish Church of St. Leonard's, Sandridge.

No apology can be needed to the Society for printing in the present "Transactions" Papers by the late Rev. Dr. Griffith, and the Rev. J. A. Cruikshank, on the interesting little church of which each was vicar—the former from 1872 to 1890, and the latter from 1891 to 1899.

It is over twenty years now since Dr. Griffith read his Paper before this Society, viz., in January, 1885. The restoration of the church was then in hand, and every detail connected therewith was followed with the keenest interest, most patient thought, and warmest enthusiasm by Dr. Griffith. The Paper was not included

in the Transactions of the Society, owing to the fact that the author considered that there were many points connected with the history of the building which needed further investigation and elucidation. In fact, he was collecting material from every available source for this purpose; but, owing to ill-health, he was unable to carry out his intention of writing a Paper on the Church and Parish as full, complete and trustworthy as patient research and ripe judgment could produce. The Paper was reported at the time in the *Herts Advertiser*, to which happy circumstance we owe its preservation from oblivion, and the ready courtesy of the proprietors of that journal has allowed the Society to reproduce this very valuable and interesting contribution for the benefit of its members. There are no doubt points in it which its learned author would have modified later; for there were many interesting facts revealed by the restoration works of which he was cognisant, but of which no notes are, unhappily, to be found amongst his papers.

THE FOLLOWING IS THE PAPER,

ENTITLED

“The Parish Church of St. Leonard's, Sandridge.”

It is exactly eleven centuries this year [A. D. 1885] that, with the sanction of Pope Adrian I., the Province of Canterbury was dismembered, and King Offa secured the elevation of the Bishop of Lichfield as a third archbishop in England over his kingdoms of Mercia and East Anglia, thus depriving Lambert, Archbishop of Canterbury, of seven dioceses. The arrangement lasted for only fourteen years; but, the circumstance is sufficiently interesting to justify its quotation from the fact that the earliest recorded mention of Sandridge, as far as I can ascertain, is, that it was given to St. Alban's Abbey by King Egfrid, who was for nine years associated in the great kingdom of Mercia with his father, Offa, known as the founder, or refounder of St. Alban's Abbey; and, who reigned alone after his father's death.

We know nothing of the ecclesiastical history of the village until much later. It would be interesting to enquire what was the condition of parishes at this period, so far as they were then formed; what was the

arrangement made in regard to building the church; and, still more, what were the burial grounds in those very ancient days. Recently, in the parish of Wheathampstead, there has been discovered a considerable cemetery of Saxon times, from which one or two remnants have been taken. The site of the discovery is the top of the hill, just beyond Lord Kilcoursie's residence in a pit worked by Mr. Jonathan Cox.

Whatever may have been the burying-ground used by the inhabitants of Sandridge before its gift to the Abbey by King Egfrid, it is quite certain that in the middle of the Norman period there was a church here. It was, however, called a chapel, as many churches were in those days. It was consecrated by Herbert Losinga, the first Bishop of Norwich, the founder of Norwich Cathedral and of the churches of St. Nicholas at King's Lynn and Yarmouth. His life and writings have been published in two volumes by the present Dean of Norwich.* There is a beautiful manuscript of his in the Cambridge University Library. He died in 1119. Sandridge Church was consecrated not much later, if any, than St. Alban's Abbey Church, which took place on Holy Innocents' Day, 1116.

We can form a good idea of this early church from portions yet existing, viz., the wall which separates the chancel from the nave, and the north and south terminations of the nave walls. To realize the early state of the church we must remove the beautiful arcading of the Norman arches and pillars, the north and south aisles, and the stone-work which now ornaments the screen, and replace them by rough walls; the dividing wall pierced by a depressed semi-circular arch of Roman bricks, rudely put together with great thicknesses of mortar between brick and brick, carefully plastered on its underside, and standing on two upright pillars made of the same materials. The nave walls were pierced by narrow Norman lights, splayed out from the exterior to the interior; and the western wall was pierced with a half-circular arch, opening into the low Norman tower. It is impossible at present to determine whether there was an apse or chancel at the east end.

* The late Dean Goulburn. [Ed.]

Probably when we come to restore the chancel we shall be able to determine whether it was an apse or a chancel. There are marks which lead us to suspect that we shall find that it was an apse; but we cannot be quite certain.

The first change in this simple church was made during the Transition Norman times, between the years 1150 and 1175. The side walls of the nave were taken down for almost their whole length, and the two arcades of octagonal pillars, with their bold, beautiful capitals, and the semi-circular arches of Tottenhoe stone erected in their stead. When the late Sir Gilbert Scott, a fortnight before his death, visited this church—with the late secretary of this Society, Mr. Ridgway Lloyd—he was so struck with the freedom and beauty of this work, that he exclaimed, “The man who worked those capitals might have wrought with Phidias on the Parthenon!”

A clerestory was raised over this arcading; aisles, north and south, were added in flint work, with windows—not as now, but of that time [Transition period]. A portion of one of these may now be seen, with a new stone-head added to it. This great change having taken place not later than the year 1180 seems to argue in favour of an earlier origin to the church than the date of its consecration—which was at its latest in the year 1119—as suggested by Mr. Gordon M. Hills. One noticeable feature in the addition of the aisles is the junction of Roman brick-work of the old east wall of the nave with the then new flint-work of the aisles. Similar straight joints may be noticed in work of Roman bricks in St. Stephen's church. At this period was introduced the Norman font of Tottenhoe stone, which still stands against the pillar near the north porch door, with its intersecting half-circular arches, and the arrangement for covering it, and the stone steps, worn by knees of clergy and parents, who have there for seven centuries dedicated to God and His Church the children of thirty generations. Its leaden lining is marked by the initials of less reverent men of the time of the Commonwealth.

The next change was made during the Early English period, by removing the west wall, with its low, half-circular headed arch, and replacing it by a new wall with an Early English arch, and two columns of Early

English work, vying in beauty of form and work with their earlier neighbours. In each there seems to be a recollection of the work of the old Greek or Roman artists. Mr. Keyser has suggested that probably, at times when the Abbey Church at St. Alban's did not require the services of its best workmen, the latter may have been sent out into parishes around, and allowed to do work there, so that the Abbey might not lose them altogether. The beautiful capitals of the old Norman arches, and, as far as we can as yet see them, those of the Early English arch, show that it was no ordinary hand that did the work.

During the latter part of the fourteenth century some early Perpendicular work was introduced into not a few of our churches; and, by this time, the rough chancel walls of this church were not creditable to the Abbey to which it belonged. What was to be done? It seems that the builders began their work of improvement by taking out for some feet in height the whole length of wall dividing the nave from the chancel, shoring up the upper portion, cutting away the upper part of the two brick pillars that supported the chancel arch, and inserting the beautiful stone-work which still exists, in spite of the old arch and the mass of the wall above pressing on the weakest portion of the delicate open work, with its four-leaved flowers, its strange carvings of heads, its arms of the Abbey and of some unknown person,* and the quaint unaccountable-figured stone seat ends†—one narrower and deeper than the other. Long may it stand, in spite of restoration proclivities, to mark a fourth period in the history of the church. Soon afterwards, during the abbacy of John de la Moote, the chancel was rebuilt by him from its foundations, with its priest's door on the north side, and its early

* Mr. Ridgway Lloyd was of opinion that these were the arms of John de la Moote, who was Abbot from the year 1396 to the year 1401.

† "At Sandridge, Herts, there is a solid wall, pierced with windows between the nave and chancel, and with a central doorway, by the sides of which are stone stall ends, on one is carved a listening priest, on the other a woman, beads in hand, which is curious enough in itself, but, I think, also shows that confessions were heard near the chancel arch" See "The Low-side Windows of Surrey Churches," by P. M. Johnson. Surrey Archæological Collections, Vol. xiv., pp. 127-8. [Ed.]



FIG. 22.—INTERIOR OF THE CHANCEL, ST. LEONARD'S CHURCH, SANDRIDGE, ABOUT 1886.
From a Coloured Drawing in Rev. Dr. Griffith's Collection.

Perpendicular windows; its now almost obliterated wall paintings, and its remarkable timbering resting on buckle corbels, still as fresh as when they came from the chisel of the workman, who either worked earlier than John de la Moote, or imitated earlier work.

About the same time the south aisle door, and the windows of both aisles were replaced by Perpendicular work; and, apparently, then was opened the splayed low window, which afforded a view of the nave from outside. This was probably intended to enable people from without to look upon an accessory altar in the south-east of the nave.

How was the heavy bare wall, facing the nave, where in other churches so much beauty was presented to the people in the nave, brought into harmony with the rest of the church? The remains of colour on the west face of the lower stone work, and upon the uppermost part of the rough wall, and the omission of it between, suggest that some other ornament was provided for the intermediate portion. Two evidently corresponding cuts in the stone capitals of the two eastern pillars seem to be just adapted for the support of a beam across the length of the wall; and, the interval between the two lower apertures and the one upper, was on the right level for another corresponding beam. Here, then, stood the ornamental rood loft of wood, covering to the eye "the foul deformity" which had been so puzzling.*

There is much yet to be said of the encaustic tiles; the painting of St. Michael, and of his adversary; the fall of the tower of the church; the lowering of the roof—and the funeral sermon of the churchwarden who arranged it; the building of the existing tower; the history of the bells; the communion rails and the pulpit; the rush of people out of church when the roof gave way—following the lead of the tower; the fire-place in the squire's pew; the furniture of the church when Sir Hugh was the vicar; the curious history of the stage-player and poet, Stephen Gosson, afterwards a Puritan divine, and many other bits of lore which ought some day to be committed to writing and print.

* There is a Paper on Sandridge Church, dealing more particularly with this screen by Mr. Somers Clarke [A.D. 1885] in the *Archæological Journal*, Vol. xlii. p. 247. [Ed.]

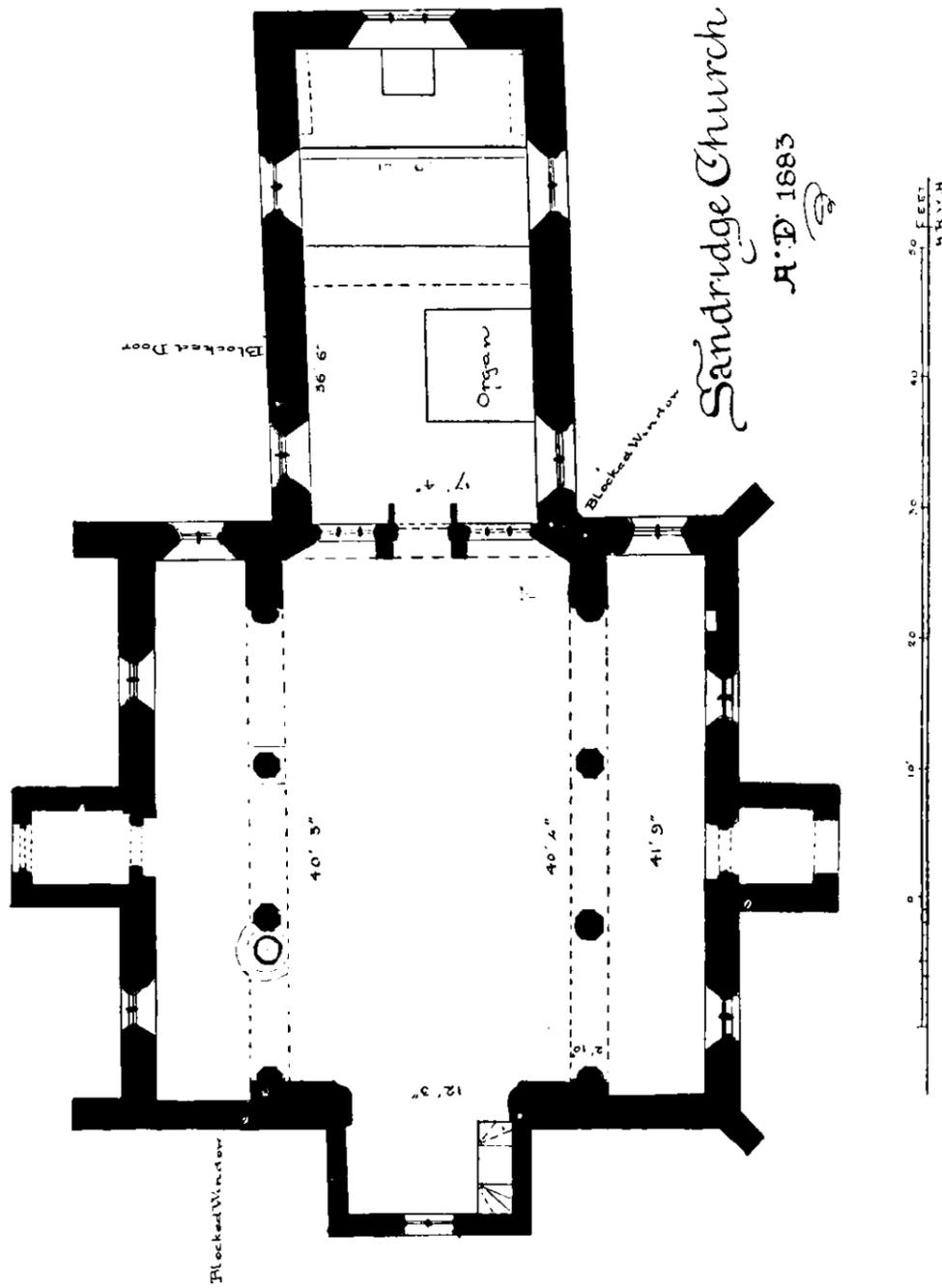


FIG. 23.—PLAN OF CHURCH.