



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

COWDEN CHURCH, KENT.

BY J. OLDRID SCOTT, F.S.A.

THIS is a small church, and though of great merit and considerable interest its architecture will not detain us very long.

It is probable that parts of the walls are as old as the thirteenth century, the earliest Decorated windows appearing to have been inserted in an older wall. It is possible that the inner arch of the west window is of this earlier date; it can hardly belong to the Perpendicular tracery, and has the character of an Early English arch.

Next to this the oldest features in the church are the two cusped lancets near the west end, within the enclosure of the tower, and the small circular window in the west gable; these may date from about the year 1300.

The chancel roof, with its beautifully moulded beams, follows closely on these windows. It is well worth careful study, as such finely moulded woodwork of this early period is very rare. There is little to distinguish the chancel roof from that in the nave; they are similar in design and construction, but the mouldings in the nave roof are rather less bold in their sections, and I am inclined to think it a few years later. The large double wall-plate or cornice is a striking and unusual feature, and it will be observed that the same arrangement is continued into the tower enclosure, though the mouldings here are omitted. As the form of the rafters is also just the same as in the nave roof, I have come to the conclusion that the western part of the roof, together with the fine timber framing which carries the tower, was constructed with the nave roof probably not later than 1330. This is, I believe, a much earlier date than

belongs to other timber towers of this kind, and on this account, as well as for its intrinsic merits, it deserves careful attention. The timbers are enormous, and for the most part in very perfect condition, while the form of the arches and other parts is very striking. The spire appears to be of the same age, and the timbers are in equally good preservation. The way in which oak shingling is used, not only to cover the spire and tower, but also for the roof of the west part of the church, is, I believe, unique.

Turning once more to the stone work, I would draw attention to the varieties of Decorated windows which occur in this small church, all nearly of one age, and yet evidently by different hands. The window in the north wall of the chancel shews what the opposite one was like before its mullion and tracery were removed to make room for some very indifferent stained glass! These windows must belong to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. The one west of the south porch follows them closely in design, but may be a trifle later, while the window east of the porch, though of about the same age, differs widely in its character from any other in the church. They are all of good design, and eminently suited to a country church.

The west doorway is another example of the same age, as well as the windows in the tower and west gable which I have already mentioned, and I think all will agree that few churches of its size can shew so many and such excellent examples of this beautiful style.

The succeeding century is also well represented at Cowden, though not so conspicuously. The porch, the south doorway, and the windows in the south wall of the chancel are all good examples of the Perpendicular style. The west window is of the same age, as well as an especially fine one now in the wall of the north aisle, which appears to have been inserted in the year 1487.

This is said to have been moved to its present position from the north wall of the nave when the aisle was added in 1837. Whether this is authentic or not I am not prepared to say; certainly the masonry of the aisle walls looks older than this, but that the church was considerably en-

larged at this time is vouched for by a notice-board in the tower.

The present east window is modern, as well as the vestry and organ arches. Till lately there were no arches between the nave and aisle, iron columns having been used previously to carry the roofs.

It is greatly to be regretted that the rood-screen, which till recently divided the nave from the chancel, was removed by a previous incumbent—no trace of it remains, but it is known to have stood some 2 or 3 feet within the chancel. The two piscinas in the north and south walls at the entrance to the chancel, which are very unusual, shew that there must have been altars standing against the rood-screen on each side of the central doorway.

Among the smaller details of the church I would draw attention to the beam which appears over the head of the fine window in the middle of the aisle wall; it has mouldings similar to those in the nave roof, and belongs to the same period.

The peculiar junction of the nave and chancel roofs suggests the thought that there was a chancel arch at the time of their erection, but I would not pledge myself to this opinion. The old fittings of the church have disappeared, except the pulpit with its sounding-board, which is Jacobæan in style; it has a good iron stand for an hour-glass. It should be noted that of the two small Perpendicular windows in the south wall of the chancel, that furthest to the east was moved from the north wall when the vestry was built.

FURTHER NOTES

BY GRANVILLE LEVESON-GOWER, F.S.A.

I have been asked to say a word about the images in the church, of which there were an unusually large number, and to give a few extracts from early wills relating to them and to the fabric.

JOHN SAXPES, 1505.—“To the image of the blessed Mary Magdalene 6/8.”

THOMAS WHITING, 1510.—“I give a cow to fynde a light before ouer ladie in the Church of Cowden and a cowe to the Church. I bequethe to the payntyng of our lady and repairyng of her xx^s. ”

RICHARD WIGGENDEN TH'ELDER, 1510.—“I bequethe 4 Kyne to be delivered to the Churchwardens of the Churche of Cowden, that is to say one of v^{lb} wax to bren before the Sepulture (this was the Easter Sepulchre) uppon Good fridaye and in the tyme of Easter, and that taper and 2 tapers more every of them of 2^{lb} $\frac{1}{2}$ to be set before *the image of our Lady*; a taper of 2^{lb} before *S^t John Baptist*, another before *S^t Mary Magdalen*, another before *S^t Kateren*, another before *S^t Margaret*, another before *S^t Peter and Paul*, another before *S^t Anthony*, another before *S^t Erasmus*, another before *S^t James and S^t Nicholas*. ”

It will be admitted, I think, that this is a remarkable number of images to find in one parish church.

JOHN WICKYNDEN, 1524.—“I bequeath to buy an image of S^t Uncumber to stand in Cowden Church of alabaster iiij^s. Item I bequeath 3 lights to burn in Cowden Church, one before the Trynyte, one before S^t Erasmus, one before S^t Uncumber; this to continue as long as they be abill. Item I bequeithe a trentall of masses to be said and song in Cowden Church. ”

St. Uncumber is an uncommon saint, and her worship was introduced a very short time before the Reformation. Sir Thomas More in his *Dialogue* makes mention of St. Uncumber, whose proper name was St. Wylgeforte. “St. Wylgeforte good soule is as they say served and contented with otys;” and again, “Women have changed her name, and in stede of St. Wylgeforte call her St. Uncumber, because they reken that for a pecke of otys she will not fail to uncumber theym of theyr housbondys.” She performed the same office for ladies as Sir Francis Jeune in the present day. Uncumber being a shortened form of disencumber—she that was ready to disencumber or free women from their husbands—her Latin name for the same reason is “*Liberata*. ” There was a famous image to her in St. Paul's. Michael Wodde, who wrote in 1554, says, “If a wife were weary of a

husband she offered oats at Poules at London to St. Uncomber" (*Notes and Queries*, 1 S., ii., 286). There is also a statue of her in Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster (figured in *Archæologia*, vol. xlvii.). She is represented as a young woman with long hair, a turban, and a beard (the latter she always has), and she reads from a book which she rests on the top of a T cross. In an inventory of vestments belonging to the Church of St. Peter at Norwich, "Two of maide Uncumber's best cotes and an orfrey of green damask. Item a cote of maid Uncumbers of redde silk." John Hyrnyng by will 1504 bequeaths to St. Uncumber's light in St. Giles's Church, Norwich, 12d.

St. Erasmus, also an uncommon saint to find in a country church, had a chapel in Westminster Abbey. He is represented in a variety of uncomfortable attitudes; his bowels wound round a windlass, hung up by the hands and torn by a hook with three teeth, melted lead poured over him, boiling cauldron behind him, etc.

ALICIA STYLL, 1487.—"To the light of the Blessed Mary and to the making of the new window a cow each." This is an interesting entry, because I believe it refers to the 3-light window in the centre of the north aisle, which was formerly in the north wall of the nave, and was happily preserved when the aisle was built in 1837. Its date will accord very well with the style of the window.

LAURENCE RYCARDS, 1465.—"To the light over the beam before the cross 3^s 4^d."

WILLIAM TURNOR, 1511.—"To the painting of the rode lofte 40^s."

RICHARD SAXPES, 1516.—"To the rood lofte of Cowden 6^s 8^d."

It is certain that up to the time of the last restoration in 1885 there was a rood-screen in the church. Sir Stephen Glynne in his *Notes on the Churches of Kent* is responsible for the statement that the rood-screen was modern Gothic. Canon Scott Robertson in his *Notices of the Screens in Kentish Churches** enumerates it as a modern

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, XIV., p. 371.

one. I confess that I am very sceptical on the point. A modern screen is a very unlikely thing to have found its way into a remote church like this, and to have been removed so soon. The three foregoing entries are positive as to the fact of there having been a rood-screen, and before the erection of the vestry the rood-loft door was to be seen in the north wall.* The absence of a chancel arch is another indication, and the two piscinas in the unusual position in the north and south walls at the entrance to the chancel point to two altars, probably to the Virgin and to St. John, in the two side compartments of the rood-screen.

The screen is said to have passed into the possession of a builder at Tunbridge, and I am not without hope that a portion of it may yet be found, and thereby the question of its date be ascertained.

It is to a curious accident that we owe the fact of the beautiful timber roof being ceiled over. It is recorded on a tablet in the belfry that "the Church was ceiled and repaired in the year 1742 with the money found in custody of John Wickenden, who was relieved and maintained in this Parish near 40 years." It is to be hoped that this roof, which is in good condition, will ere long be exposed to view.

The very interesting Parochial Account Book of Cowden, dating from 1598 to 1714, has been in part published by the Rev. Edward Turner in *Sussex Archæological Collections*, vol. xx., pp. 91—119.

* Hussey, *Churches of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey*, p. 53.