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## THE CHURCHES OF SITTINGBOURNE AND MILTON.

BY F. GRAYLING.

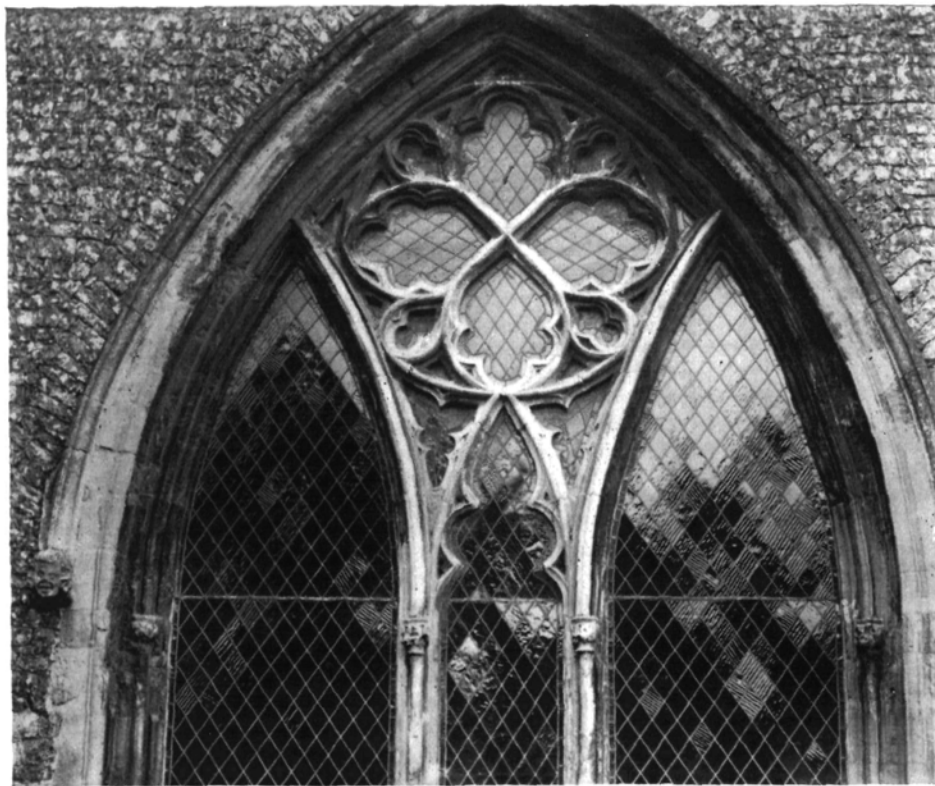
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### SITTINGBOURNE.

Few parish churches have survived, without curtailment—which was at one time imminent—or even total rebuilding in an unsympathetic style, the ordeals which, as will be noticed in the course of this Paper, this fine and thoroughly Kentish example has undergone. The existing building is to be traced from a smaller Romanesque beginning, the only portions of which now standing above ground are the eastern and western walls of the transept and parts of the pier-masses in its vicinity. Externally we cannot fail to observe the contrast between the admirable dressed flint-work of the early fourteenth-century period, referred to in the *Glossary of Architecture* under “Masonry,” and the rough field flint construction of the earlier builders. The original outer walls followed the lines of the present pillars and arches in the nave and archbishop’s chancel, and their foundations are occasionally exposed. The first enlargement of the earlier Church took place in the thirteenth century, when that portion of the central chancel which includes the recessed mural arcade and plain lancet windows was added. Some years afterwards the present nave and aisles, and the basement of the tower as high as the graceful western arch, were developed, and completed by the early part of the fourteenth century. The old outer nave walls were in this instance thrown down gradually as the works proceeded, and not pierced with arches as was usual in this county. The smaller Church did not extend further than the west end of the present nave. The arches in the body of the Church are set upon alternate round and octagon pillars, including the responds of the chancel arch. There is no hood mould-



THE TWO SIDE PANELS AND MULLIONS REMOVED BY PATTEN, 1765.



GEOMETRICAL WINDOW. SITTINGBOURNE.

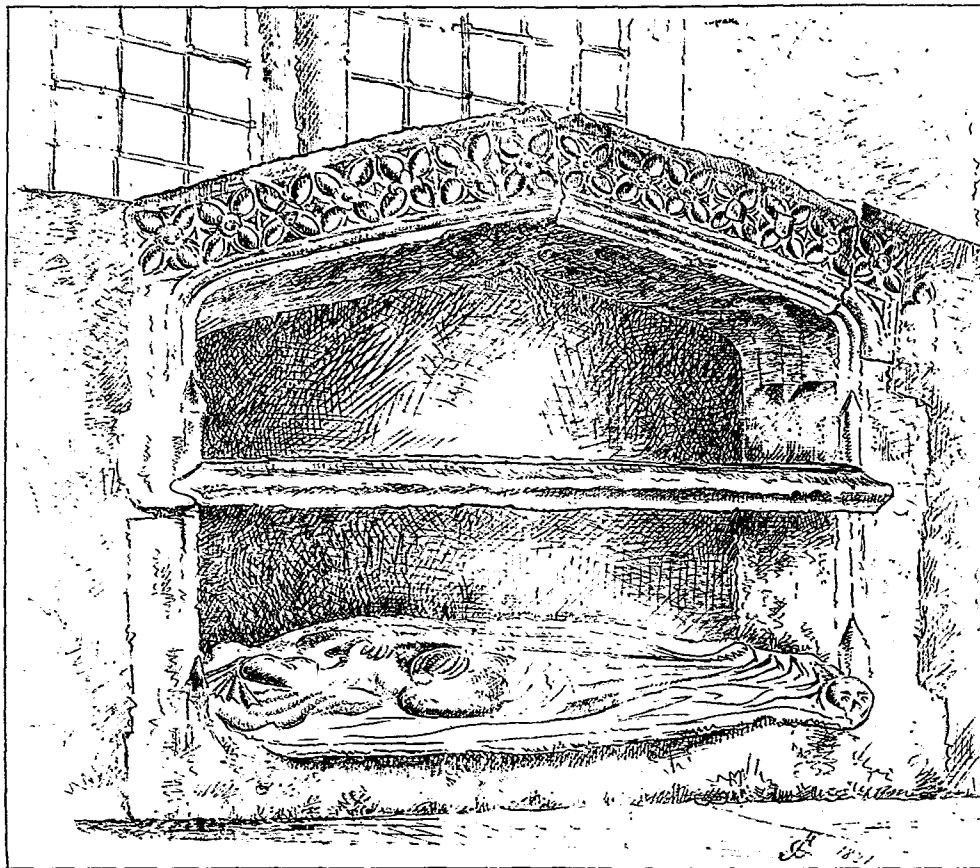
ing on the aisle side. Making allowance for a vandalism committed on the eastern responds in the fifteenth century, the whole building west of the chancel arch is a well-designed composition, the work of one mind. It is illustrated in Bland's *Arches, Piers, and Buttresses*, but without the deformity to be presently referred to. With regard to the aisles, we shall understand their appearance better by reference to the other sections of this Paper.

The Lady Chapel was erected by Simon of Chilton early in the fourteenth century. The whole of the space beneath what should be the dais reserved for the Lord's table includes a bold ribbed crypt, having a single quadripartite vault, two single-light transition windows, and a small pointed door leading up into the Church. In the south wall of the upper chapel we should carefully examine the elaborate geometrical window, once of five lights, now of three only, as will be explained. This design, evidently by the same hand, was only repeated at the west end of Brecon Priory Church in harder stone, and therefore with less ornament. In the interval between the well-directed works of the fourteenth and those of the next century the eastern wall of the central chancel was set a little further back, the triplet of lancets removed, and a smaller window than that still remaining in the Lady Chapel of similar design was inserted, which remained till 1859. Externally, beneath the modern central window, the masonry is mere rubble, and the north-east buttress was placed diagonally to resist thrust. The Sacristy Chapel was then no higher than the sills of the lance-windows, which were open (or intended to be) to admit light. During the fourteenth century also the tower was increased in height from a well-marked place, and the shaftings, etc., of the first east chancel window can be seen built in on the north and south walls. The external niche in the buttress of the Lady Chapel, formed of a beautiful shelly oolite, is referred to as "St. Marie of the Boterasse." Old inhabitants remember a portion of the statuette *in situ*.

Coming now to the fifteenth century, the most important work was lengthening the old Romanesque transept towards the street, and the introduction of the grand rectilinear

window. The font dates from this time, and bears a cross patonce, two *pateræ*, a lipped rose, and Archbishop Thomas Arundel's arms impaling those of the See. Later on Robert Wy Barn (Canon Scott Robertson finds) bequeathed a sum of money to improve the rood-loft. It is still easy to see what was then done, although the screen and loft are lost, and the stairs remain as re-opened in 1872 by Mr. Payne. The eastern respond of the nave arches was on each side removed, and the arches above were rendered rampant by larger fresh *voussoirs* cut to a different sweep. The blemish caused is apparent in some of the diagonal views, in one of which six arches whole or in part appear. At Eastchurch we can see the screen uninterrupted by the piers, as was effected here. In order to light up the "jubé" thus developed two larger windows in the style of the time were inserted in each nave aisle—the case of one still remains. Minor alterations, such as heightening the sacristy till its former lean-to roof was continuous with that on the North nave and Bayford aisles, also took place. At the end of the century the tower was finished off by a battlement and string-course; it had been designed to be higher. During the works one half of its northern wall was rebuilt in ragstone, and also a vertical half of the eastern wall. In each face so renewed the transition single-light openings in the ringing room, and the beautiful two-light fully-developed flowing traceried windows in the bell loft, were re-inserted; the north-east tower buttress was then altered from the Early English character of the rest. The great brick buttress probably dates from 1687, when Bartlet of Whitechapel cast six fine bells, which still remain, with modern additions. The inner door of the porch, the vaulting, and two little transition windows should be noticed. They are similar to the work in the closed-in crypt.

In July 1762 a great calamity happened. The whole of the roofing was destroyed in an hour by a plumber's fire, during a high wind, and this stately building, hitherto little injured by fanatical violence, "with all its ornaments and most part of its furniture destroyed," the exception being the "bells, clock, and chymes," stood in complete ruin



EASTER SEPULCHRE AT SITTINGBOURNE CHURCH.

for over two years, in consequence of delay respecting the four chancels. In the following December the parochial committee that had been immediately appointed after the fire, and empowered by the parishioners to "speedily rebuild and ornament the church," sent for George Dance, the celebrated architect of the day. After his visit on the 21st he reported at the George Hotel that, in his opinion, "the walls, pillars, and arches are strong and good, and with little repair fit to be built upon." The walls had been previously covered with straw—sixteen tons of lead saved—and after further delay the nave and aisles were re-roofed under the direction of one John Boykett of Milton at a cost of £488 2s. 3½d. A "brief" had passed the "great seal" and been read in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and London, with the following result:—10,090 papers, £1,246 10s. 3½d.; bad copper in the collection, 6s. 3d. After stamping, fiat, and salaries, there remained for the church £918 4s. 0½d. This brief was the subject of letters in the London press. The nave was provided with a semi-circular ceiling, and Italian cornices ran in all directions along the walls, and also into impossible places at the return ends. All the chancels, after narrow escapes from demolition, were ultimately roofed over by a pack of hedge carpenters. Archbishop Secker exercised a very helpful influence in all matters submitted to him. The large pointed window heads, including the great perpendicular one, were all cut off by the ceilings, and, with the exception of this and the geometrical example before referred to, all others within the building were deprived of their traceries, monyals of Portland stone (where necessary) being substituted. This mode of treating church windows did not even then give entire satisfaction, for in the vestry book I find the following question raised: "Whether the Gothick work should be removed from the east window?"

All the monuments were destroyed or removed, and it should be mentioned that a Sep Vans monument had been previously removed from here to Ash Church, where it may still be identified. The Easter Sepulchre remains in the Bayford aisle. Concerning the effigy and its pathology we may consult the *Journal of the Archæological Institute*, vol. iv.



It would appear, however, that the lady—one of the Lovelaces of Bayford Castle—died simply in child-birth, as there shewn. All the painted glass, remarkable for its heraldry, was thrown away. Five years after the fire the Church was reopened. “The old men must have wept.” Nothing much but further acts of vandalism were perpetrated in this patched-up temple till 1844, when, by the instruction of Mr. Vallance, Mr. Willement restored the south aisle west window. In 1859 another member of the same family presented the chancel window. Under the advice and direction of the late Mr. Slater the second east window was then removed. The present and third design is an acknowledged mistake. It would not be difficult to effect a good restoration, on thirteenth-century lines, also of the mural-arcade. In 1862 Mr. Slater restored the transept and the large window, then in the most ruinous condition. During 1868 the south-east window in the aisle was replaced by an exceedingly bad design. It is but fair to mention that Patten of Rochester was paid an extra sum above his contract, so dilapidated was this opening at that time (1765), and, when finally removed, whole pieces of the arch had fallen out. Still it ought to have been restored. In 1873, three years after our last visit, the late Mr. R. H. Carpenter entirely re-roofed the nave, and raised it to the old mark against the tower. But, in consequence of his never having been told that the Church had been burnt, he formulated his plan on Boykett’s work, and reproduced the semi-circular ceiling this time tricked out in fancy-dress Gothic versus block cornice at great expense. Shortly afterwards the whole Church began to spread. Without further interruption of Divine Service—for reopening had taken place with special services—extensive centerings and shorings were promptly erected, and Mr. Adcock gradually reconstructed all the great pier-masses. This period in the Church’s history will never be forgotten by those concerned at the time.

The restoration of the traceries has since been a gradual work. The exterior of the plain chancel blocked-lancets shews each to have two deep jambs, divided by slightly sunk chamfers. There may have existed shaftings, as in our

much Roman-cemented western door-case. Traces of half-figures in fresco are seen upon the round pillar in the north aisle; they were first noticed by Miss Bell, and are similar to the faces seen in old glass at the end of the fourteenth century. We may observe the ledgers in the transept-gangway, and the matrices for brasses, and the stone of the poet Theobald—a native of the town, who wrote a good edition of Shakespeare, and was, in spite of Pope, a master of his subject, and a highly religious man. We have seen that the great Architect of the last century called attention to the necessity of little repairs. The compound pillar between the central and south chancels differs from all the rest in being of ragstone—not fire-proof, like those opposite and throughout the nave, which are of Reigate fire-stone. It therefore not only lost one of its shaftings, but became scaled on its south side during the conflagration. The only repair at the time was effected with brick rubbish, and it was afterwards subjected to occasional patchings with Bath stone. Quite lately a gentleman from London, representing an important commission, has inserted a sham base on to a portion of wall, which was till 1878 part of the crypt, a small portion of which was then cut off in altering the steps. Further casing has also been effected. In the prosecution of these works the stability of the column has been rendered uncertain. The explanation given of so extraordinary a mode of repair was, I understand, that from viewing certain indications of the mode of piercing these two fine arches, it was evident to the restorer (?) that the pillar never existed below a certain point. Unfortunately for any such absurd speculation, fully three-quarters of the lower half of the pillar are still in existence. Some people may admire the sham joints emphasized with a lead pencil and the apple-dumpling annulet-bands! But all true archæologists and conservators of old buildings will agree with me that proper attention to this and some few architectural matters would be hailed with satisfaction when next the Society pay a visit to old Sittingbourne Church.

Since this Paper was written the whole building has undergone extensive repair. The battlements on both aisles have been renewed, and partially those upon the tower, which

latter are double-tabled. One of the buttresses has been renewed in ragstone. The hip roofs on both aisles should have been removed. The bells were all sent back to Whitechapel, and tuned together by modern machinery on the spot from whence they came in 1687. In the meantime the old fourteenth-century bell-frame, twice cobbled up, was removed.

This Paper would not be complete without some notice of the Whitechapel foundry which was established by Robert Mot, a native of East Kent, and carried on without interruption down to the present day. James Bartlet was the third and last of that family, who were the masters from 1619 to 1702, and his productions have not been surpassed, as the entire rings at Milton, Sittingbourne, and Hadlow testify, as well as the magnificent tenor at Lenham, which was pulled up by the writer during one of our meetings. The unusually fine tone brought out general approbation from members present. The Mearses, who held the foundry from 1782 to 1865, were a Kentish family, the first of that name having joined Chapman when he moulded the "Great Dunstan" of Canterbury Cathedral.

The two trebles of Sittingbourne Church were added in 1884, and being cast elsewhere were not entirely successful. When the bells arrived in London, 1897, the workmen searched the lofts to discover if possible the original moulding boards, as it was considered expedient to recast the sixth as well as the treble and second. The result has been entirely successful, the new bells all having the Whitechapel form of the seventeenth century, and are perfectly harmonious throughout.

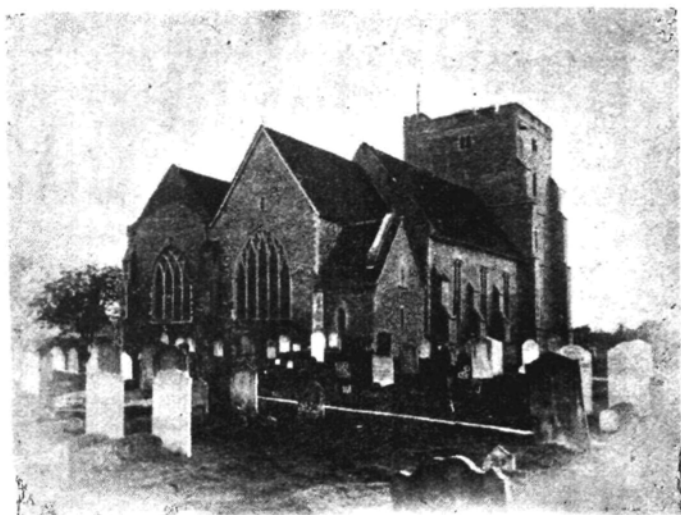
The ancient glass in the little old fourteenth-century opening over the north door was put together and fixed by the writer in 1887; a similar and larger collection can be seen in the modern Gothic church of the Holy Trinity at the western portion of the town.

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The illustration of the ground plan has been prepared specially for this Paper by an assistant of Mr. W. L. Grant, Architect, of Sittingbourne.

The Easter Sepulchre was drawn by Miss Grayling.

The mutilated geometrical window has been purposely photographed as close as possible by Mr. Ramell.



MILTON CHURCH, NEAR SITTINGBOURNE.



INTERIOR OF MILTON CHURCH.

## MILTON.

THIS magnificent edifice has been passed by and only noticed by a few members of the Kent Archæological Society on the railway journey to the Isle of Sheppey, both in 1870 and 1896. From whatever point viewed, whether on the summit of the chalk range or from the marshes in which it is situated, the grandeur of its mass is remarkable. Like all the early churches round Sittingbourne, there existed a single transept added very soon, and in most cases, with the exception of St. Michael's, this became eventually absorbed in an aisle, the end wall now alone remaining. It is evident at Milton that the lofty nave and part of the chancel belong to a class of church contemporary with Sheppey Minster and a few others.

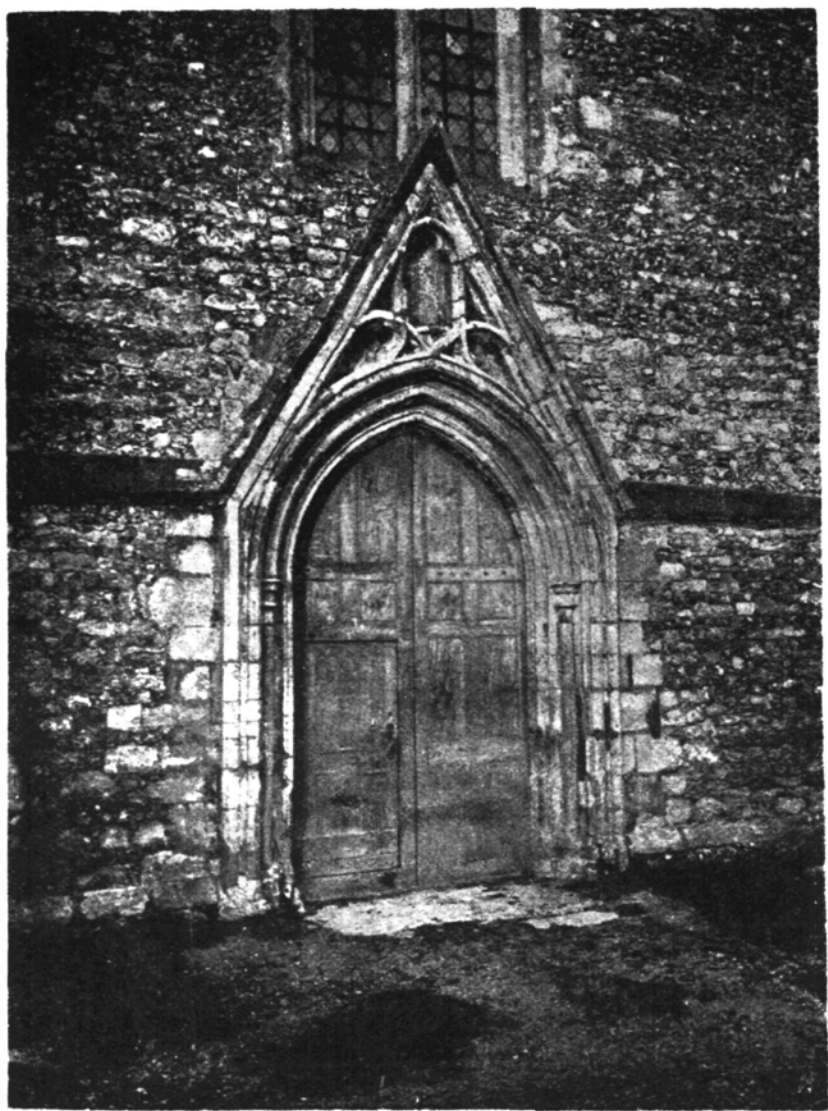
The following characteristics are noteworthy :—

There are lofty walls, containing regularly-laid Roman bricks from a large building known to have existed further north, for the excavation of which, however, permission was not granted when the churchyard was enlarged: also square-headed windows with wooden lintels and shutters, and a total absence of any distinct Romanesque-Norman features, although diligently searched for by trenching and other methods during 1889. The wooden lintels were all removed in the fifteenth century. The plan consists of nave and chancel, which may be the Saxon church, a south aisle and chancel divided from the older part by a range of pillars of middle-pointed design in the nave, and a pair of arches with an unusually lofty pillar of the same character between the chancels; a little sacristy, added on the north side evidently just before the fourteenth-century enlargement of the old church, is curious as still having preserved lintels and shutters to its pointed windows, and a singular window with a bracket in its gable, which was uncovered partially by the writer. But the glory of the whole is the western tower of the nave, begun with good footings (which are absent in the old early walls) in the time of

Edward III., and completed in about twenty years. The openings throughout are all thirteenth-century work re-used and fresh worked, as with the exception of the western portal and window the architect entirely depended upon his sets-off at the various stages and great size for distant and near effect. This is the largest parochial tower in the county, and now makes a fine galilee to the nave. The portal is well recessed and possesses a traceried canopy, a cast of which can be seen in the Crystal Palace, but tacked on to an arch of different character to its own, which is misleading.

The northern windows of the nave and chancel are all now four-light internally segmented headed fifteenth century, but it is quite evident that they are simple enlargements of square-headed openings with oak lintels. The windows of the south aisle are all fourteenth century; those in the Norwood chancel are all mis-restored, prior to 1889. The large window in the nave aisle is mongrel-Gothic; it replaced a sixteenth-century opening; but there can still be seen the rear arch of the fourteenth-century window in the centre of the old transept wall, which shews itself within and without by breaks in the line of the masonry, and having a lead flat over it instead of a plain tiled gable roof. The west window of the aisle is reticulated, and was very carefully mended *in situ* by Mr. Grant of Sittingbourne, who in 1889 acted as Architect, and redeemed the whole building from the decrepitude and filth of two centuries. Two low side windows were at the same time fully exposed by the writer; they lighted little chantry chapels enclosed by screens in connection with the great rood-screen; traces of painting exist, and a little piscina and the hinges for the usual shutter remain in the southern example.

The chancel roof is open, and of fourteenth-century date. The nave roof is also of about the same date, and has crossed struts over the collar-beams, which, when seen open from end to end, are very fine. Unfortunately, proper treatment was not allowed to be carried out in the roofs in 1889. The Norwood chapel roof is modern, and without interest. The gable has been heightened in brick. The history of the division between the chancel and nave is interesting, and bears



DOORWAY AT MILTON CHURCH.

upon the conditions that have altered or removed the chancel arches in other churches.

The form of the original arch is uncertain, but it would appear that in the first instance the wall was pierced with a small opening. On each side of this a pointed arch or hollow had been contrived. Then in the fifteenth century the whole of this was cut out for an enormous crucifix, and passages contrived from the aisle to pass over the grand rood-loft. In Henry VII.'s time the gable had been rebuilt in brick, and an ill-centred arch turned in the same material. The effect of this was even then to begin to overturn the north wall of nave and chancel. Consequently, up till 1889 there existed beneath the quasi-arch a hideous square framing and a number of iron ties.

The best treatment to be adopted was debated. The thrust-over northern pier shewed the soffit of the primary triple arrangement. No authority could be found for the details of the arches; eventually, at the suggestion of the writer, it was decided to remove the brick gable which was causing all the mischief, and it was found necessary to take down the whole north pier, foundations and all. This was carefully rebuilt stone for stone, and instead of a stone arch a large oak principal was constructed, taking the form of the attempted early sixteenth-century arch. In the pier, which had been up and down before, we found several voussoirs that had been part of a plain central arch during the fourteenth century, and had either dropped or been removed in the fifteenth century. Thus have existed here four distinct and different chancel arches. The building in this part is perfectly secure now. The corbels were carefully replaced for the rood-loft, and the passages reopened in the south pier.

The nave pillars are surrounded at their bases with stone benches. A miniature vaulting with ribs supports the wall over the door that leads up the staircase in the tower.

Very little remains of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century painted glass. Of the ancient furniture and screens nothing remains but a few linen panels in oak.

The sedile in the Norwood chancel is two-seated, and there are brasses to Sir John Norwood and Thomas Alys, as well as a good marble altar-tomb.



The tiling was similar to that in the Mayor's chapel at Bristol, evidently brought from Spain. One entire example from Milton is in Maidstone Museum, the rest was all broken up and the floor laid in brick many years ago.

There are five bells by the celebrated James Bartlet of Whitechapel, 1681. The space available would easily accommodate the largest possible ring of twelve bells.

The east window of the chancel is original, and similar to the Selling window, but is a little later and much improved.

The east window of the Norwood chancel has its own case, and slight ogee head and finial externally. The tracery was put in after a gale early in the century, and is incorrect. Brayley, in his *History of Kent*, fully describes the original. An old helmet is suspended in this part.

The Church is dedicated in honour of the Most Holy Trinity, and although remote from the populous town is now of great use for the services in connection with benefit societies, first set on foot by the late Vicar. The restoration in 1889 was carried out under the energetic superintendence of the Rev. Robert Payne Smith.

The tower needs some well-directed attention on its eastern face, although temporarily secured against further fissure, caused originally by lightning. In repairing the aisle roof one beam was found quite burnt through by the presence of an old disused stove-pipe.

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The illustrations represent the western door, and a general northern view, shewing the great tower, nave, chancel, and thirteenth-century sacristy. There is also an interior view, shewing the condition of the chancel arch before 1889 and the outline of the pointed hollow in the northern pier.