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NOTES ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF
 ALDINGTON CHURCH, KENT, AND THE
 CHAPEL AT COURT-AT-STREET, CALLED
 " BELLIRICA."

F. C. ELLISTON ERWOOD, F.S.A.

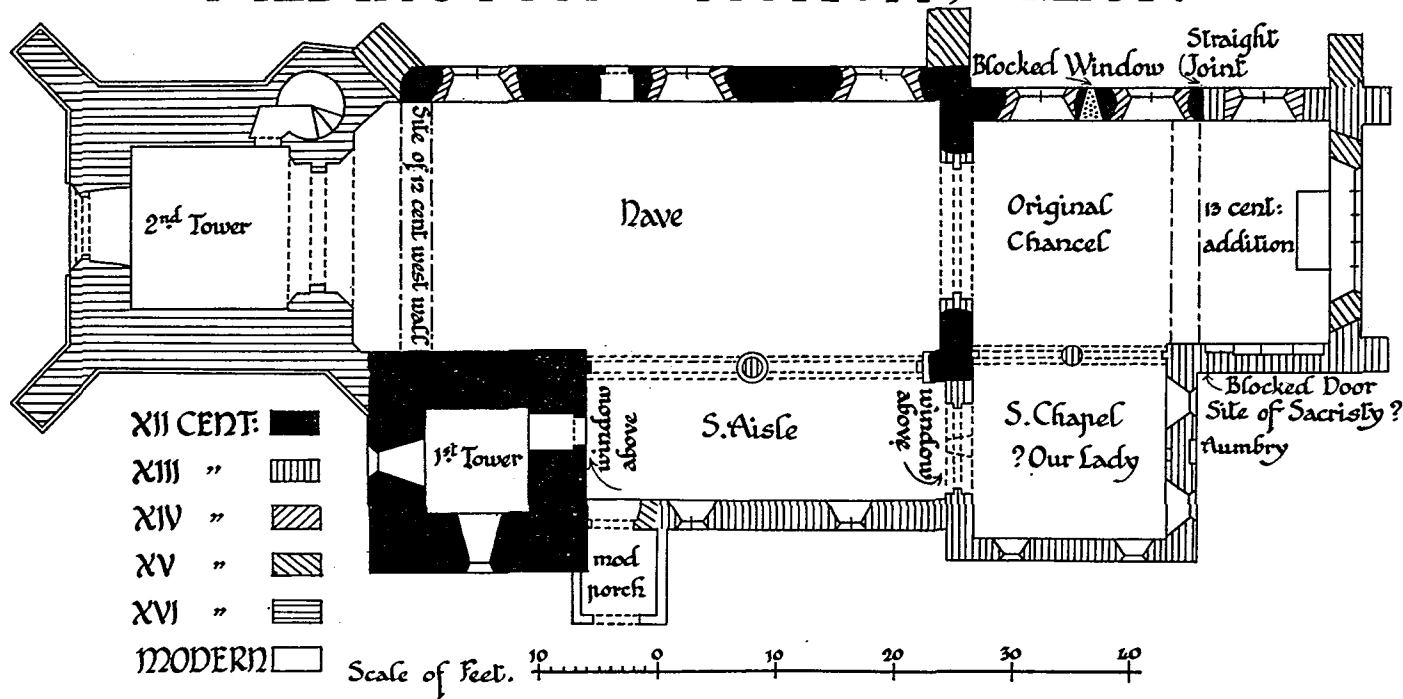
THESE two buildings, the one intimately connected with Erasmus (who was presented to the living of Aldington by Archbishop Warham), the other the scene of several incidents in the tragic life of the holy Maid of Kent, Elizabeth Barton, have, naturally, an interest beyond their architectural appeal, but from this latter point alone they are well worth a visit. The church is situated on the northern slope of the hill range on the borders of Romney Marsh, its fine recently-completed tower dominating the country around, and being a landmark from the sea. The building itself is simple in plan, consisting of a western tower, nave, south aisle, chancel, south chapel and the lower stages of an earlier tower, now used as a vestry. The earliest church of which there are any remains was Norman, of the twelfth century. It consisted of a plain aisleless nave, twenty-one feet by forty-three feet internally, with a small square chancel of about nineteen feet internal measurement. To the nave was attached at its south-west corner a massive tower, nearly nineteen feet square externally, with walls six feet thick, its west wall projecting some two feet beyond the west wall of the nave. The original length of the chancel is indicated by the old quoins still remaining in the exterior of the north wall, nineteen feet nine inches from the north-east angle of the nave. There are similar indications in the south wall, but these are only discernible from within the chancel. There is also, in the middle of the north chancel wall, a blocked, round-headed twelfth century window, showing that the first chancel was lit by a single light in each of the lateral walls. The original east wall has been entirely removed,

and the chancel arch replaced by a later one. Several of these features, especially those noted on the north wall, have been described as "Saxon," but their post-conquest date is unquestionable. The internal length of the old nave is indicated by a slight irregularity in the wall near its north-west end, a position confirmed by the situation of the fifteenth century diagonal buttress, built as a support to its north-west angle before the erection of the second tower (see plan). The north wall of the nave contains a blocked twelfth century doorway, and there are indications of round-headed windows to the east of it. The early tower is pierced on the ground stage by two deeply splayed narrow windows in the south and west walls respectively. There is a doorway on the east face, now opening into a thirteenth century aisle; but originally this was the entrance from the churchyard. There does not seem to be any direct communication between the church and this tower, unless there is a blocked-up door, of which there is no apparent evidence, concealed beneath the plaster of the north wall. There was, therefore, most likely another doorway to the nave on the south wall opposite to that on the north, pierced through a now destroyed wall, that stood on the line of the nave arcade. There was an upper story to this tower, but even with this addition it would scarcely attain to the full height of a normal Norman tower. Whether it was higher it is difficult to say, but in all probability it was. It has no structural stairway, a wooden ladder being the means of access to the upper floor. On the east wall of this tower, seen from the inside of the aisle, is a narrow window, with, apparently, a pointed head. Above it is the weather-mold of the earlier aisle roof. Quite clearly a thirteenth century window would not open into the roof of an aisle, and a careful examination of this window shows that it is not a thirteenth century window at all, but one of the narrow slits of the Norman tower, with a recently repaired head in cement. It is clear therefore that, as there are no signs of a roof-mold below this window, the original church was aisleless, and this window lit the upper floor of the tower.



ALDINGTON CHURCH.
From the South-East.

ALDINGTON CHURCH, KENT.



OF ALDINGTON CHURCH, KENT.

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F.C. Elliston-Erwood. F.S.A. 1926.

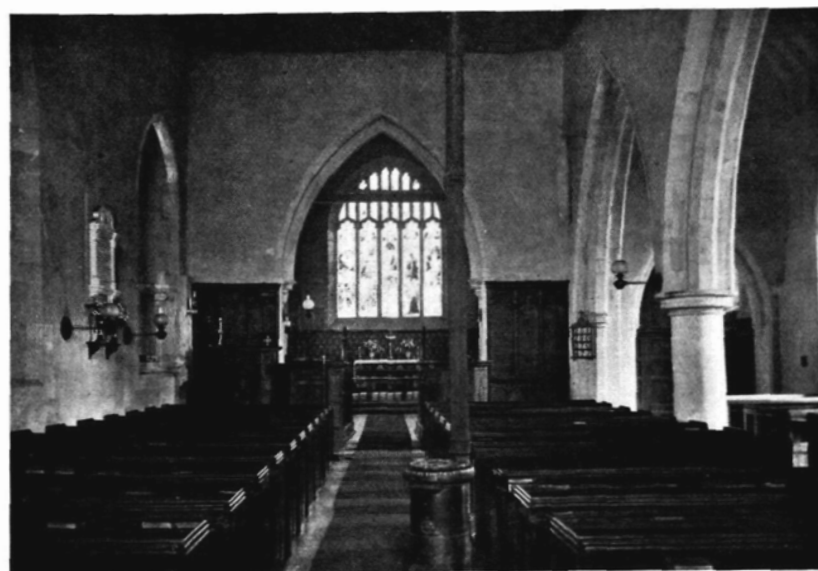
The following century saw the usual alterations and enlargements of a parish church. The chancel was lengthened some ten or eleven feet eastwards, a new chancel arch inserted and in the new east wall was placed a triplet of lancets, the extreme splays of which are yet visible. There are some slight remains of a priest's door on the south, with a window above, but most of the existing details of the chancel are of subsequent dates. The western portion of the south wall of the chancel (the original twelfth century wall) was pierced by two arches of thirteenth century date, each consisting of two chamfered orders, springing from a circular free pier, with molded cap and base. Only the inner orders are supported, east and west, by corbels. These arches have been rebuilt at some later date, but their thirteenth century origin is obvious. Beyond this arcade is a chapel, fourteen feet six inches by sixteen feet internally, lit at the east end by two lancets, which remain. There are also two lancets on the south side. This chapel is joined to an aisle of the same date by an arch, similar to those of the arcade, but springing from corbels. Above this arch is a window, its outer face towards the aisle, its splay towards the chapel, being now entirely within the church, and invisible from without. This opening is of undoubted thirteenth century date. Its sill is just above the line of the old roof, as indicated by the weather-mold on the tower face. Evidently the aisle roof was of low elevation, of pentise character, while that of the chapel was much higher, and gabled. The relative heights have been altered by the subsequent raising of the aisle wall, and the substitution of a gabled roof.

The nave arcade, replacing the twelfth century wall of the nave, is of two bays, with one free pier, circular in plan, with molded cap and base, carrying both orders of the arches. There are responds east and west, carrying the inner order only.

Between the two lancets of the chapel, and over the site of the altar, is a small niche, evidently for an image of Our Lady. A chapel to the Virgin is mentioned in early wills,



ALDINGTON CHURCH.
From the South.



ALDINGTON CHURCH.
Interior looking East.

as is an image, and this chapel is almost certainly the one mentioned. In the same relative position on the outside face of this wall is a rectangular blocked recess, with a rebate for a door. Above are two corbels. Here was evidently a little sacristy or vestry, the recess being the aumbry.

Access to this from the chancel was by a small doorway, vestiges of which can be seen in the angle between the chapel and the chancel. Of fourteenth century work there is very little, though such of the windows as are filled with tracery of this character may preserve the forms of windows inserted during the decorated period. There is an elaborate, but much



ALDINGTON CHURCH: BLOCKED WINDOW, (12TH CENTURY) IN EXTERIOR OF NORTH WALL OF CHANCEL.

damaged, double niche, with tabernacle work, on the east splay of the easternmost window on the north side of the nave. There is no clue to the images it contained, but there were images to St. Martin and St. Erasmus in the church (see *Test. Cant.*, sub. Aldington). The fifteenth century was much more prolific in building works and

additions. Buttresses, a new porch, windows, the rood loft entry and the rood screen all belong to this period. Of the last named the following details remain :

- a. The support of the rood beam on the north, above the decorated niche just described.
- b. The upper doorway in the aisle, with the beam corbel just below it.
- c. The communicating passage through the thickness of the nave arcade wall.
- d. The greater part of the screen itself now utilised as panelling on both faces of the chancel arch.

It is to be regretted that the screen is not replaced in its original position. Bequests mentioned in *Test. Cant.* show that this structure was being erected about 1490, to which period also belong the piscina and sedilia in the chancel.

But more important than these was the building of the magnificent tower at the west end of the church. The date, ascertained from wills and bequests, was between 1528 and 1547; and though generally ascribed to the munificence of Archbishop Warham, he can at most only be credited with commencing it. Until a few years ago it was unfinished, being without a parapet, and having a very unsatisfactory roof. Parishioners had left money by will towards the cost of its erection in its earlier stages, but the last bequest mentioned (in *Test. Cant.*) indicates that the work was still incomplete, and hints that local enthusiasm was waning. This tower was built some four or five feet west of the church. Thus the building could go on without disturbing the rest of the fabric, and when the tower had been carried up to a sufficient height, it was then joined to the church by pulling down the west wall of the nave and joining it up to the new work, as indicated on the plan. The tower arch is a fine specimen of late perpendicular work, of very pleasing proportions, which must have been rather spoilt when the open gallery, which was evidently part of the original design, was in being. The flooring corbels of this gallery still remain in the wall, and there is a stair leading to it, but the gallery



ALDINGTON CHURCH.

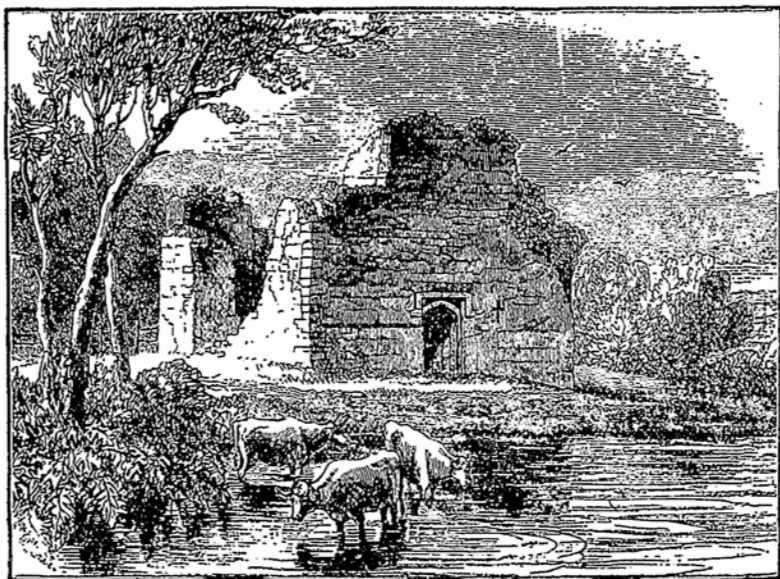
Stalls in chancel, and parceloses in the arcade between chancel and South Chapel.

itself has been removed. An octagonal turret in the north east corner contains a circular vice leading to the battlemented roof. The west front of the tower is likewise an excellent piece of architectural design, having large angle buttresses with double plinths, the lower one a plain chamfer, the upper a bold typical perpendicular section. There is a four-centred arched doorway, enclosed in a rectangular framing mold with traceried spandrils. On the south side of this entrance is a large Holy Water Stock, while above is a band of decorative details, consisting of a central ogee headed niche for an image (which is missing) with four square detached panels of tracery flanking it, two on either side. Above this is a good, deeply set three-light perpendicular window, with a large niche having a traceried plinth and tabernacled head north and south.

Several of the fittings of the church call for comment, especially the woodwork. The rood screen has already been mentioned, but in the chancel is a fine set of stalls, with returned west ends, carved with poppy heads and adorned with traceries and panelling, all good fifteenth century work. A screen separating the chancel from the chapel is also noteworthy, though it is evidently of two periods, while the south chapel itself is panelled in the classic style of the seventeenth century. The pulpit (sixteenth century work) has a fine carving of a pelican in her piety on its face, and the reading desk is also worthy of note. There are a few fragments of stained glass scattered among the windows, but the font is poor. The whole effect of a typical Kentish church is marred, however, by the absence of the screen, and the presence of the ugly (though no doubt necessary) stove and stovepipe which disfigure the nave.

Two miles east of this church, and, though in the adjoining parish of Lympne, intimately connected with it, is the ruined chapel of Bellirica, in the hamlet of Court-at-Street. Situated on the top of a steep slope behind the Manor Farm and quite invisible from the road, the roofless chapel,

the scene of several of Elizabeth Barton's visions, now keeps lonely watch over the wide expanse of Romney Marsh. From the remains it was evidently a plain rectangular building, twenty-three feet wide and forty-one feet long, having no structural chancel. The greater part of the north wall has disappeared, and of the remaining portions everything seems to indicate an early sixteenth century date for the whole structure. The west door is of four-



COURT-AT-STREET: RUINS OF CHAPEL FROM AN OLD DRAWING.

centred form, enclosed in a rectangular hood-mold with triangular spandrils. It is now blocked, but from within the rere-arch appears as segmental, while to the north is a very damaged Holy Water Stock. There are indications of a large east window of perpendicular character, and traces of two smaller, but contemporary, lights appear on the south.

This chapel does not appear to have been a detached building; there are fragments of walling continuing the line of the east wall in a southerly direction, and the stopping of the plinth course on the east and south walls indicates



ALDINGTON CHURCH.
Second, and existing, tower from South-West.



COURT-AT-STREET CHAPEL, OTHERWISE BELLIRICA.

[Photographs by F. C. Elliston Erwood.]

that other structures may have adjoined. Possibly some of these may have been the apartments of the Hermit of Court-at-Street mentioned in the official account of the doings of the Maid. It seems most probable, however, that this chapel was at one time the chapel of the Manor House, the foundations of which are quite apparent but a few inches below the soil and appear likewise to have some association with the chapel. There was here an image of more than usual sanctity to which resort was made, this matter being also mentioned in the proceedings against the Maid and her associates. In fact, the chapel may have been built especially for this relic, and the local enthusiasm engendered may have been an important ancillary factor to Elizabeth Barton's utterances. But these matters are beyond the scope of this paper. For the benefit of those who would care to follow this aspect of the subject, the following short bibliography may be of value.

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