

The Church of St. Mary, Marston Magna, Somerset.

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THE Church consists of chancel ; nave with north porch ; a chapel on the north of the nave, and a western tower. It possesses features of very unusual interest, and of many periods which it is easy to follow ; for, although the Church underwent a "restoration" in 1828, the work was confined to the erection of galleries and pews and the addition of colour-wash to the walls, so that the fabric happily remains as it was before, and it has suffered less from the 17th century fanaticism than most churches.

That a Church existed on this site before the Norman Conquest is proved by the existence of two small pre-Norman stone window heads, which were rebuilt into the 14th century east wall of the nave over the chancel ceiling.

As in the majority of cases, the earliest complete feature in the Church is the font, which is a fine Norman one of the earliest half of the 12th century. It has a circular basin, 2ft. 8in. diameter, with scallop moulding round its sides, and it stands on its original stem and base. There is no part remaining of the structure of the Church in which this originally stood—(it is quite possible that the font was set up in the previously existing Saxon church), but fragments of coeval work are built into the tower turret and the north wall of the chancel, and the part of the east wall below the window sill

date from about 1170 ; in the north wall of the sanctuary is a small coeval window—square outside, but with wide splay inside, carried round as a slightly pointed arch. Part of this wall has herring-bone masonry, and it is somewhat curious that this is an isolated piece, with ordinary random work below and around it. This is not of itself an indication of very early work, as it is found as late as the middle of the 13th century. This wall possesses one unfortunate characteristic of Norman work—a defective foundation, and it is doubtless due to this weakness in other parts of the Church that there is not more of it left. The wall leans outward very considerably, and, although there is evidence that this was the case in the 15th century, there is also ample evidence that the movement is still in progress.

The east window of the chancel is a triple lancet, which was apparently inserted in the Norman wall, but the upper part of this wall having been rebuilt during the present century the window was then reset.

The Norman Church probably consisted of nave and chancel only, and the walling was of random masonry, besides the north wall there is a small piece of the work of this period remaining under the S.W. window of the chancel, where the sill of an earlier window than the present one still exists ; but with these exceptions the Church was entirely rebuilt at about 1360 (the chancel slightly before the nave), in the style known as “Decorated,” which then prevailed ; the masonry is of *coursed* rubble, and the distinction is easily seen in the south wall of the chancel. This 14th century work remains intact, excepting where disturbed for later insertions. There is a three-light square-headed window in the south wall of the sanctuary, and a priest’s door westward of it. The nave (unlike the chancel) has a plinth course on the south, and three buttresses—each with two set-offs, the plinth continued round them, also two three-light pointed windows, with inside curtain arches ; a similar window exists in the north wall. In posi-

tions unusually near the west end are the north and south doorways of the nave, these, like the windows, have the wave-mould and cavetti, but it is noteworthy that nowhere in the Church, excepting at the west window of the tower, is there a label mould to any arch. The chancel arch dates from this period of rebuilding, and consists of two orders—the outer a small chamfer, and the inner a wave-mould, on both arch and jambs, stopped on high plinth-base on the latter. The corbel trussed-rafter roof remains over the chancel, but in a most dilapidated condition.

The south porch was erected soon after the nave, but of meaner construction, local stone having been used for all, excepting the arch of the outer doorway, which latter is enriched by two orders of “wave-mould;” a modern window has been inserted in the east wall.

The tower is a fine one of three stages, with moulded base and splayed plinth; the stair-turret is carried up at the S.E. angle, entered from the inside by a pointed doorway, retaining *its original 14th century door*, and there are diagonal buttresses at the other angles. The lower stage has a western doorway, with mouldings dying out above the base, and a three-light pointed window over it, possessing the only label mould in the Church; this has good terminals carved with the eight-petal rose, and a further one over its apse. The archway opening into the nave is of very lofty proportions, and nearly the full internal width of the tower, two orders of sunk-chamfer on arch and jambs with moulded impost. The middle stage has a square opening, on the south side only. The upper stage has a two-light window in each face of somewhat peculiar type of tracery, the central eye being solid and carved with a boss. This is surmounted by a cornice and embattled parapet with gargoyles at the angles—the parapet is built of rubble work and has a rose carved on the central battlement of each face.

The great works of the 15th century in this Church were the erection of the north chapel, with the archway between it

and the nave; the erection of the rood screen and loft (now missing), with stair-turret to approach the latter, and the insertion of the two western windows in the chancel. The chapel is, I believe, in some respects *unique*, it embraces a chapel, a porch giving access to it, and to the nave, and having a kind of loft over it, forming a western-gallery, approached by a stone stair-turret from the porch; it once had an oak parapet, which has been made up into pews for the chapel. Beneath the front of the gallery is an open screen of oak, forming the division between the chapel and the porch; this has a small central doorway, and it supports the original floor-beams of the gallery. The doorway in the screen has been widened, and the whole screen much altered, but its design is easily followed. The steps of the turret are considerably worn, showing that this feature has been much used, although the turret is now closed, and access to the modern gallery is otherwise obtained. The entire structure consists of three bays, divided by buttresses with two set-offs, and having diagonal ones at the angles, two bays are occupied by the chapel, and the third by the porch and gallery; each bay of the chapel has a pointed three-light window, and there is a similar one in the east end flanked on the north side internally by a very rich and well preserved niche, with corbel side pinnacles, good groined canopy with crockets and finials and carved cornice. In the west wall is a two-light window placed out of the centre to admit of the turret, and carried up to light both the porch and gallery, the floor beam running across it. The porch has a north doorway—a four-centred one in order to bring it beneath the gallery floor, the 14th century inner doorway was not disturbed in making the addition. A stone bench is carried along inside the north wall, but it has been cut away for the modern stairs. The arch between the chapel and nave has two orders of the wave-mould; attached shafts on the jambs, with carved caps, but without bases, the shafts stop on a deep plain plinth. A base mould with

splayed plinth is carried round the outside of the chapel ; and it is surmounted by a good plain parapet with gargoyles at the angles. The roof is modern and poor and unworthy. Altogether this annexe is a charming feature, and gives a special character to the Church.

The rood screen was evidently erected when the chapel was built, for the wall between the latter and the rood loft stair-turret, which projects on the north side of the nave, has the same base mould continued through—in this case the 14th century window here must have been reset. The doorways of the turret have been built up.

The two-light square headed window near the west end of the north wall of the chancel was inserted at about the same time, and the parts of walling around it rebuilt to the vertical. A pointed window was, at the same time, inserted in the south wall opposite.

There are fragments of old glass in the east window of the chancel—two angels and an inscription. In the north window of the nave are later pieces : a King, with nimbus, wearing an ermine robe and carrying a sword ; and the chalice and wafer. In the window opposite are coeval pieces : two lilies, probably indicating the dedication of the altar, which doubtless stood on the south side of the chancel arch. This is indicated by there being a step across the nave some eight feet from the end, and by a small square-headed window which was erected in the south wall to give light to this altar after it had been darkened by the erection of the rood loft over.

It is worthy of note that the floor of nave and chancel slope upwards towards the east, following the natural lie of the site.

The nave roof was evidently reconstructed about a century ago, and old timbers reused for it, the lead bears the inscription

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1792.

The pulpit is a good one of early Georgian type, with sounding board, but mounted on a very unsuitable base. Parts of the nave seating, near the east end, are Jacobean, and the remainder of the Georgian period; all the ends are of oak, and should be reused in any rearrangement of the Church. The seats are at present uncomfortable to sit in, and *impossible* for kneeling.

In 1828 a gallery was erected across the west end of the nave, entirely blocking up the tower arch, and thus depriving the Church of the effect of one of its finest features; access to this was gained by cutting a doorway through the north wall of the nave to connect it with the ancient chapel gallery, and a new wooden staircase put to approach the latter. A window was at the same time formed in the south wall to light the gallery. Another gallery was erected across the chapel arch, running east to west, and projecting into the chapel, where a separate staircase was put to give access to it—the chapel is thus ruined by these two mean staircases and the gallery, while its pews are most incongruous and inconvenient, one select one being five feet high. The pews in the chancel were probably set up at about the same time, and are equally unfit and unseemly.

The south wall of the nave is damp owing to the ground outside being above the floor, and the deal dado with which it has been covered is getting rotten. The whole of the interior of the Church is covered with colour wash, which extends over plastered surfaces and wrought stonework alike, quite concealing the beauty of the mouldings. The ceilings are of modern lath and plaster. The floors of the nave are, on the whole, good, but the pavings of the chancel and under the tower are rough and poor, and the wooden step in the former is unsuitable.