

The  
Church of S. Laurence,

ISLE OF THANET.

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BY

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**BLINKO'S BOOK SHOP,**

RAMSGATE.

## PREFACE.

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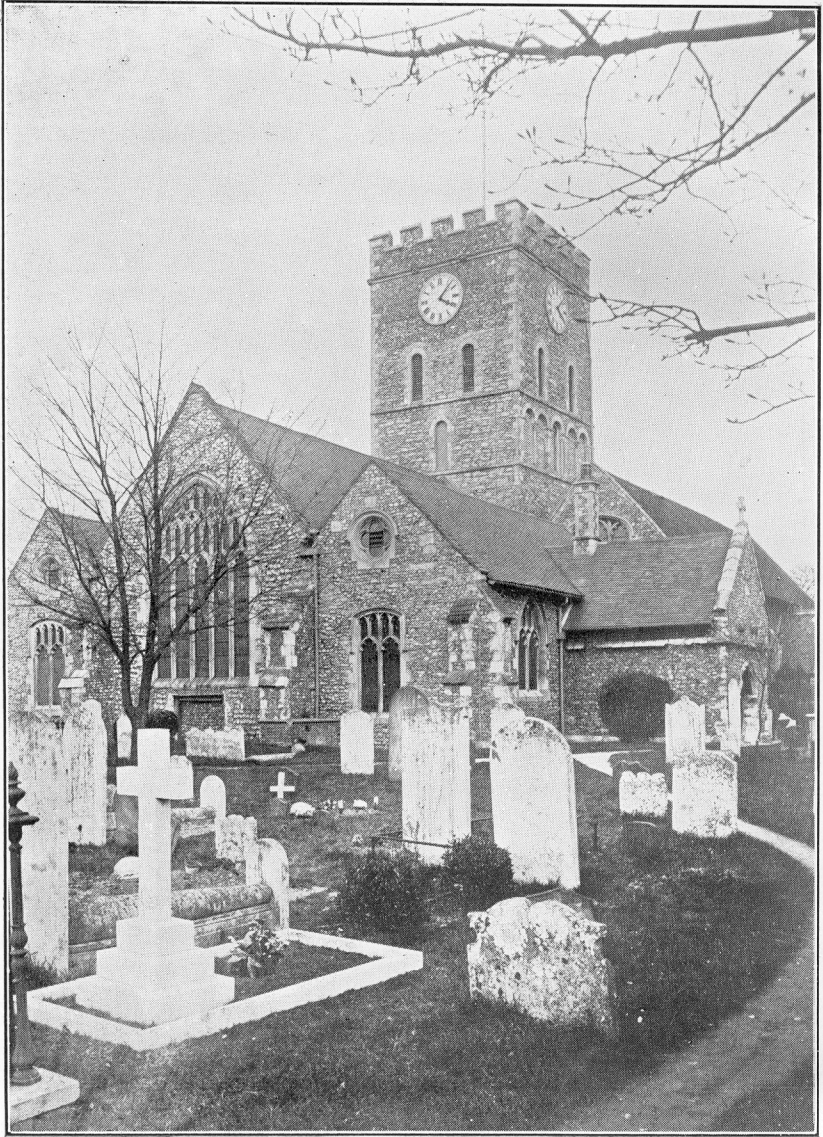
All lovers of S. Laurence Church owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Cotton for the admirable work which he has done in collecting material for its history,\* and the references in the following pages will shew the present author's indebtedness to him. Since the publication of Dr. Cotton's book however, the study of English Church architecture has made considerable progress, and it will therefore scarcely be deemed presumptuous, if an attempt be made to consider and interpret afresh those architectural features of S. Laurence Church from which, in the absence of documentary evidence, the history of the building must be deduced.

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\*See *The History and Antiquities of the Church and Parish of S. Laurence, Thanet, in the County of Kent, by Charles Cotton, F.R.C.P. Edin., M.R.C.S. Eng., Mem. Kent Archæological Soc. London 1895.*



A. H. SIMINSON, S. LAURENCE.

S. LAURENCE CHURCH FROM THE S.W.

# Church of S. Laurence.

Isle of Thanet.

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In the case of the greater number of our ancient parish churches the history of their original building and subsequent development may be read almost at a glance by anyone who possesses even a slight acquaintance with the ecclesiastical architecture of our own country. S. Laurence Church however is an exception to the rule, inasmuch as several of its features present perplexing problems and, at all events at first sight, seem to point to contradictory conclusions. In the following pages an independent attempt is made to trace the architectural history of the church by an examination of its existing features. It is stated in Mockett's Journal (p. 9)<sup>1</sup>—on what authority is unknown—that in the year 1062 a church was built at S. Laurence as a chapel to Minster. In the absence alike of documentary evidence and of conclusive architectural *criteria* it is impossible to confirm this statement or even to disprove it. At the west end of the nave, however, which is probably the oldest part of the church, there are visible externally, just above the later buttresses, what appear to be the original quoins, and these are *not* of "long and short work"; so that the evidence, so far as it goes, suggests a date for the earliest building some years later than the Norman conquest.

All that can be affirmed with certainty is that a church of some sort existed at S. Laurence before 1124; for according to William of Thorne (a monk of S. Augustine's

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<sup>1</sup> See Cotton. The History and Antiquities of the Church and Parish of S. Laurence, Thanet. p.19.



Monastery at Canterbury, and a native of Thorne in Minster parish just behind the parish boundary of S. Laurence), in this year the Church at Minster, with the chapels of S. John, S. Peter, and S. Laurence, was made over to the Sacrist of S. Augustine's.<sup>1</sup> We must therefore begin our examination of S. Laurence Church by enquiring whether any of the masonry which we now see can have formed part of the building as it existed in 1124.

Whatever may be the date of the original walls of the nave, it is evident that the *arcades* in the north and south walls as well as the aisles belong to a later period ; so also do the arcades of the chancel, while the eastern and western arches beneath the tower are not earlier than the last quarter of the twelfth century. It is probable, as will be shewn later that the nave arches are later piercings in earlier walls and a similar theory has been put forward in the case not only of the northern and southern but also of the eastern and western tower arches. In the case of the eastern and western tower arches, however, there is nothing to confirm such a theory. If the tower had been built in the earlier part of the Norman period, the Transitional arches, east and west, could only be explained on the supposition that they have replaced original semicircular arches ; but in view of the fact that such semicircular arches still remain in many churches (in S. Clement's at Sandwich for example), it is scarcely probable that such an alteration was made so soon after the original building of the tower ; and if it is difficult to reconcile the existing arches beneath the tower with the theory of an early Norman date, it is still more difficult to assign any portion of the tower to the pre-Norman period. There is no "long and short work" in the quoins, and the plain circular windows, one of which may be seen from the interior of the chancel in the east wall of the tower, in the storey above the

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<sup>1</sup> Cotton, *Ibid.* p.8.

great arches present no feature of Saxon architecture.<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch, however, as these circular windows have been regarded by some as proof of at least a very early date in the Norman period, it may be well to point out that similar windows occur in work which is known to belong to the latter part of the twelfth century. According to Mr. Francis Bond (*Gothic Architecture in England*.p.516) "a small circular window or *oculus* was a natural ornament to set in a gable, and occurs in early Christian basilicas, and in our Norman and Transitional work ; *e.g.* Darenth, Iffley, and S. Cross, Winchester. The smaller examples and even the large circle in Canterbury south transept are without tracery." In the case of S. Laurence Tower, if the circular openings really are loopholes rather than windows, as Dr. Cotton suggests, although this is not very probable, it would obviously be desirable to keep them as plain as possible. Further, the wide jointed masonry of which S. Laurence tower affords an illustration, and which Dr. Cotton considers evidence of a very early date, is found throughout the Norman period, and can be seen in the upper part of the Norman west tower at Ely, which dates from 1189.

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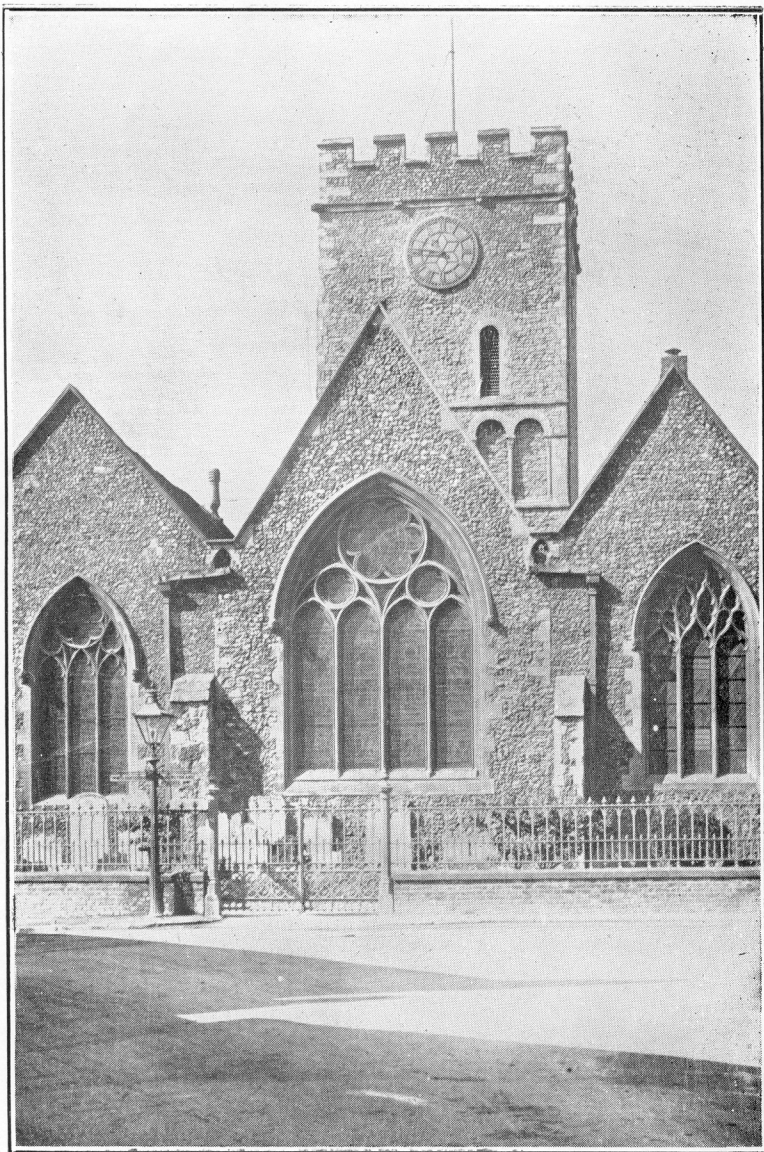
<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cotton, who maintains that the lower part of the tower formed part of the church supposed to have been erected in 1062, acknowledges that it exhibits none of the characteristics of the Saxon period, but he asserts that it bears a strong resemblance to the Norman work still remaining at Westminster, and that it may be assigned to the same period as Edward the Confessor's building. It would be strange indeed however, if the chapel of a little village, which was not even a parish, were built in the same style as the Royal Abbey for which the King had imported builders ; and it is unlikely that before the Norman Conquest, or even immediately after it, Caen stone would have been imported for such a church. In the latter part of the twelfth century, however, when vast quantities of Caen stone were brought to Canterbury presumably by Pegwell Bay, there would be nothing remarkable in its use in the parish churches of East Kent. Moreover William of Malmesbury, writing in the twelfth century, states definitely that the church which Edward the Confessor erected at Westminster was the first to be seen in England in that style of architecture, and although after the Conquest the new style rapidly spread, churches were still built in the old style, *e.g.* "S. Michael in the Cornmarket at Oxford, which though built probably after the Conquest is obviously the work of Saxon hands," (Jackson, *Byzantine and Romanesque Architecture*, vol. ii. p. 194). It cannot be supposed that S. Laurence Tower is older than S. John's Chapel in the Tower of London.

It will doubtless be asked however, if the Transitional pointed arches beneath the tower on its east and west sides are original, why do we find round arches in the mural arcades on the exterior? Leaving out of account the improbability mentioned above that a low semicircular arch in a tower shewing evidence of twelfth century construction should have been changed into a pointed one\* before the end of the Transitional period, there is no difficulty in supposing that the original builders of the tower, while employing pointed arches below for structural reasons, preferred semicircular arches for the merely decorative work above. For when the pointed arch was first introduced, it was welcomed rather for utilitarian than for æsthetic reasons. It was not only of great convenience in vaulting, but being stronger than the semicircular arch, it was particularly suitable for a tower where it was required to support a considerable superincumbent weight. Accordingly the two forms of arch were maintained side by side, sometimes in the same building, as in the Lady Chapel at Glastonbury and in that part of the choir at Canterbury built by William of Sens after the fire of 1174. An even better example of the mingling of the pointed and rounded arches is to be seen in the nave of Fountains where roundheaded clerestory windows are immediately above pointed arches. In the west tower of Ely Cathedral there are roundheaded doorways immediately above the pointed Transitional arch.

It may however be maintained that even if the tower is not earlier than the last quarter of the twelfth century, it may

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\*The chancel arch of S. Nicholas-at-Wade, which seems to have been pierced in a Norman wall about the beginning of the 13th century, might seem to disprove this statement, for the present arch must have been preceded by a narrower and lower arch of Norman construction. At S. Nicholas however the thirteenth century builders having to deal merely with an ordinary wall not surmounted by a tower, were able to obtain a really wide opening to the chancel, whereas at S. Laurence very little advantage would have been gained by merely changing a round arch into a pointed one.



A. H. SIMINSON, S. LAURENCE.

S. LAURENCE CHURCH FROM THE E.

nevertheless be coeval with the nave and chancel. But if the nave, tower, and chancel had all been built at the same time, it is probable that the church would have been of uniform width from west to east, and that the north and south walls would have lain in a straight line; whereas, as Dr. Cotton has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the northern corner of the tower projects  $5\frac{1}{2}$  ins. beyond the north wall of the chancel, and the north wall of the nave 1ft.  $8\frac{1}{4}$ ins. beyond the tower, while on the south side the tower projects 1ft. beyond the chancel, and the wall of the nave 1ft. 6ins. beyond the tower.<sup>2</sup> Further evidence that the chancel is not of the same date as the nave is afforded by the masonry of the east wall of the chancel which is different in character from that of the west wall of the nave.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the latter is composed almost exclusively of large undressed flints with sandstone quoins, the east wall of the chancel contains a quantity of sandstone with the flints, which are of much smaller size, and its quoins appear to be of Caen stone. Moreover the height of the chancel walls, which shew no signs of having been raised at

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid* p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Cotton maintains (p.20) that these particulars are clearly marked in a sketch of the church given in Lewis' "History of Tenet," (2nd edition, 1736) and in Battley's "Antiquitates Rutupinae" (editio secunda 1745). He says, "It will be noticed that the early Church consisted of a central tower, nave, chancel and south door to nave; that there were two lights in the nave, and the same number in the chancel, all placed high up in the walls, close under the eaves; and what is more remarkable, the Church tower is seen to project considerably to the south of the chancel wall. Again on plate 1, opposite page 2, (Lewis) which is a copy of a very ancient ecclesiastical map of the Isle of Thanet, will be seen this Church represented in the same manner; only it shews the east side of the Chancel lighted by one roundheaded window, and a small door to the south of it in the same wall."

Even on the assumption however that these views are based on some ancient sketch—which is not improbable—the evidence of such a sketch would be useless unless it were contemporary, *i.e.* not much later than 1200, and at this early date, as the Bayeux tapestry (probably a work of the second half of the twelfth century shews) artists drew in a conventional manner without troubling themselves about exact accuracy.

<sup>3</sup> This latter argument taken by itself cannot be pressed, since the masonry of both walls must have been effected by the insertion of the large windows. There appears however to be a difference.

a later date, is such that any early roof upon them must almost certainly have covered, wholly or in part, the circular openings in the east wall of the tower, and therefore, when the tower was first built, there must have been a lower structure, than the present chancel east of the eastern arch. <sup>1</sup>

Having thus cleared the ground for our enquiry by demonstrating the probability that nave, tower and chancel were not built at the same time we may go on to consider the main *data* for determining the history of the structure.

The chief features to be considered are as follows :—

1. The rough masonry of large undressed flints with a small amount of sandstone and with sandstone quoins forming the west wall of the nave.

2. The masonry of smaller flints with a larger proportion of sandstone and with ashlar quoins of Caen stone in the east wall of the chancel.

3. The masonry of the west walls of the nave aisles, from which it is evident that when the original aisles, which were much narrower than the present, were built, the slope of the nave roof was continued unbroken over them.

4. The moulded Transitional arches beneath the tower on the west and east sides.

5. The plain arches beneath the tower on the north and east sides, which appear to be later piercings made some time after the building of the tower, when the chancel aisles were added to the church.

6. The Transitional arcades in the north and south walls of the nave.

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<sup>1</sup> At S. Clement's at Sandwich also the original chancel or apse, as is evident from the masonry on the east side of the chancel arch, was much lower than the present chancel, its roof only just clearing the arch, and rising no higher than the string course below the circular windows.

7. The plain circular windows in the north, south and east walls of the tower, which, since those in the east wall are partially covered by the chancel roof, must be older than the present chancel.

8. The lancet windows, partly blocked up and destroyed in the north and south walls of the sacarium, which, together with the quoins in the east wall of the chancel, shew that the chancel aisles did not originally extend as far east as the chancel.

9. The early English arcades in the north and south walls of the chancel.

10. The string course above the arcade in the south aisle of the chancel extending eastward as far as the easternmost pier, from which it is evident that this aisle, originally much narrower, had a lean-to roof, and that its east end was in a line with the present vestry screen.<sup>1</sup>

11. The mural arcades on the exterior of the east and south walls of the tower in the storey above the one containing the circular windows.

12. The Norman windows in the storey above the arcades.

13. The masonry of knapped flints in the north and south walls of the nave and chancel aisles, in the east walls of the chancel chapels, and in the south-west porch.

14. The Decorated doorway of the south-west porch.

15. The Decorated arch between the sacarium and the south chapel, with its western pier splayed in order to give a better view of the high altar.

16. The Decorated piscina in the south chapel, which should be compared with the trefoiled piscina in the sacarium.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not impossible that there were originally clerestory windows above this string course, but if so, they must have been very small, and there is no evidence of their existence. Such small Early English clerestory windows do however occur, e.g. at Little Downham, Isle of Ely.

17. The irregular soffit of the arch at the eastern extremity of the south aisle of the nave.

18. The upper portion of the tower constructed of flint with Perpendicular battlements.

These features enable us to trace the architectural history of the church with tolerable certainty.

In 1062, or more probably a few years *after* the Norman conquest,<sup>1</sup> a small rectangular chapel<sup>2</sup> was built of large unworked flints. Of this chapel there remains the west wall of the existing nave and probably the walls above the north and south arcades of the nave.

During the last quarter of the twelfth century—probably about 1175 or a little later—this plain chapel was enlarged at its east end by the addition of the tower (exclusive of course of the upper portion, which was built in flint in the fifteenth century). The ground floor of this tower served as a chancel,<sup>3</sup> and access to it from the nave was by the lofty Transitional arch still remaining. As there is a similar arch in the east wall of the tower, which appears to have been constructed at the same time, there must have been some extension of the church east of the tower. But this extension cannot be identified with the present chancel, for any roof constructed on the existing chancel walls must have covered the round windows in the east wall of the tower.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest portion of S. Peter's Church, which was also a chapel to Minster, is said to have been built in 1070.

<sup>2</sup> "The simplest form in which the church occurs is seen in the early churches of Ireland. There is just an oblong shed; no chancel; no chancel arch; in England this form constitutes a chapel, not a church. It occurs for instance in S. Cuthbert's Chapel at Lindisfarne, and in the Chapel of S. Mary Magdalen at Ripon and at Skirlaugh." Francis Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> For this plan of church see Francis Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> "In general our English roofs, till about the end of the thirteenth century had a pitch from about 45° to 50°." *Ibid.* p. 391.



It is probable therefore that the eastern extension was merely a small sacrarium, very probably an apse, the roof of which would only just cover the eastern arch of the tower.<sup>1</sup> The north and south walls of the ground storey of the tower were not pierced by arches,<sup>2</sup> and probably contained small deeply splayed windows. The eastern portion of the church, viz., the chancel and sacrarium, at this date would therefore be like that of the church at Newhaven in Sussex. The tower was doubtless constructed for a double purpose—in the ground storey to provide a chancel, and in its upper part to be a campanile. The circular openings here, as at S. Clement's at Sandwich, may conceivably have been, as Dr. Cotton has suggested, loopholes through which arrows might be shot at invaders, though they would be unnecessarily large for such a purpose; and since the storey in which they are found had no direct approach in Norman times, and was probably open from the ground, they are more likely to have been merely windows. It is not unlikely that the tower at S. Laurence, like other early towers, served a double purpose and was used both as a campanile and as a place of refuge or at any rate as a

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<sup>1</sup> At S. Clement's at Sandwich the roof of the original chancel only just cleared the arch. Its apex reached the string course surrounding the tower, and its sides came down to the string course running north and south of the capitals from which the arch springs. If a similar plan was originally adopted at S. Laurence, as is probable, the wall plates must have been lower than the apex of the chancel arcades, and therefore the present arcades cannot be pierced in older walls.

<sup>2</sup> In this respect the tower of S. Laurence differs from that of S. Clement's at Sandwich which has many features in common with it. In S. Clement's the northern and southern arches beneath the tower are evidently of the same date as the eastern and western arches, and the church must therefore have been originally cruciform. The tower arches at S. Clement's are semicircular, but the style is well developed Norman, and probably not any earlier than the middle of the twelfth century. The Norman capitals at S. Clement's and at S. Nicholas with the grotesque heads are very similar to those of S. Laurence nave, and may have been carved by the same workman or by apprentices of the same master mason. It was suggested by the late Rev. C. A. Molony, Vicar of S. Laurence, that the grotesque heads of the nave capitals with the carvings of the tower capitals form a series representing an exorcism. (See *Archæologia Cantiana*, vol. xvi., p. 207). These carvings however are apparently not quite of the same date, and similar grotesques occur elsewhere where no such theory can be maintained.

strong room where valuables could be stored in times of danger. Both at Sandwich and S. Laurence it was doubtless necessary to have some place where valuables could be stored in case of an attack by pirates. It is probable that access to the upper part of the tower of S. Laurence, like that of S. Clement's at Sandwich, was originally by a round staircase in a turret at the north-west corner. In the interior of the tower, above the second string course (*i.e.* in the storey which has the mural arcades on the east and south sides), there is visible in the N.W. corner what appears to be a blocked up round headed doorway which was probably the original entrance into the tower from the turret. There is just enough room for such a turret between the N.W. corner of the tower and the more westerly of the two circular windows on the north side in the storey below. No trace of this doorway remains on the exterior of the tower, and no doubt it was blocked up when the turret was removed, probably in the fourteenth century, but possibly in the thirteenth. Those who blocked it up doubtless used the stones of the turret which had been constructed at the same time; so that, the materials being the same, there is now no means of distinguishing the blocking from the surrounding masonry. It is somewhat strange that this doorway should have led into the storey *above* the one which contains the circular windows, for the only way into this lower storey would have been to descend into it by a ladder from the floor above into which the door opened from the turret. It is however probable that the floor of this lower storey is a later insertion, and that the six circular windows on the north, east and south sides were originally intended to light the ground floor.

In the centre of the west wall of the tower, in the same storey as the circular windows, immediately below the ridge of the nave roof, there is an opening with a pointed arch, whether an interior window or a doorway it is not easy to

say. If it was a window, it is difficult to see for what purpose it was inserted, and if it was a doorway it is by no means easy to discover how it was approached from below.

Dr. Cotton<sup>1</sup> suggests that a ladder led to it from the rood loft; but if so the rood loft must have been of remarkable width, since it would be necessary to provide space not only for the ladder but also for the passage in front of it, and such a ladder must have been very inconvenient and unsightly.

It is however very doubtful whether S. Laurence possessed a rood loft till a date later than the construction of the opening in question.

According to the late Mr. Francis Bond<sup>2</sup> rood lofts "hardly appear in large parish churches before the fourteenth century and in small ones not for another century." The doorway (now demolished) in the east end of the north wall of the nave of S. Laurence, which presumably gave access to the (later) rood loft, and which was afterwards utilised as an entrance to a small gallery, appears to have belonged to the later Decorated, or to the Perpendicular, period. Moreover the head of the doorway was scarcely as high as the string course on a level with the tower arch capitals, and a ladder from this level would therefore not clear the tower arch. It is however evident that there was some turret built against the eastern end of the north wall of the nave, (for until the alterations made in 1858 the easternmost arch did not spring from a point opposite to that from which the corresponding arch on the south side springs, but some feet further west); and as the string course on the west wall of the tower shews that the turret cannot have been within the nave itself, it must have been built, at least in

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<sup>1</sup> p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Screens and Galleries*, p. 109.

part, against the north side of the nave wall. *If* the opening in the west side of the tower ever was a doorway, which is doubtful,<sup>1</sup> it would seem that the only way in which it could have been approached would have been by a newel staircase (in the turret mentioned above) leading to a doorway above the wall plates of the north wall of the nave, and constructed in a dormer of the nave roof, from which doorway a ladder led to the opening into the tower. Such an arrangement is however most improbable. We may conjecture that the rood-screen doorway which was destroyed in 1858 was a later piercing in the nave wall. When the changes were made in the fourteenth century, the original Norman turret containing the newel staircase appears to have been demolished.<sup>2</sup> At this period the tower had probably ceased to be used as a strong room, and had become simply a campanile. How access was provided to the ringers' loft, if it then existed, from this time is uncertain. The southernmost of the two circular windows in the east wall of the tower, the northernmost of which is still visible from the chancel, was at some time altered into a doorway, to which there led, until it was removed in 1858, "a wooden staircase from the north or Manston chapel, winding under the arch of the first bay from the tower and on to a platform the marks of which may still be traced" (*i.e.* in 1895) "just below this loophole."<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to believe that any builder of pre-reformation times was responsible for so ugly and awkward a contrivance, which was doubtless designed by some of those who

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<sup>1</sup> It is by no means improbable that this opening was made simply for the purpose of raising building materials, etc., to the tower, when, in consequence of the building of the aisles, the tower was surrounded by roofs on all sides. It is however possible that the nave once had a flat panelled ceiling and that the door led into the space within the roof. Similar doorways for a like purpose can be seen in the West tower of Ely Cathedral.

<sup>2</sup> The staircase by which the rood loft was reached in later times, occupying apparently the western portion of the ground on which the original turret had stood, was probably constructed at the same time as the rood loft, *i.e.*, the fifteenth, or at the earliest, the fourteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Cotton, p. 24.

introduced the galleries. It is not improbable that the bells were originally rung from the floor,<sup>1</sup> and that, on the rare occasions when it was necessary to ascend to the bells, access was provided by means of a ladder from the floor beneath the tower to a trapdoor in the floor of the storey above.<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that the floor of the ringers' loft until 1888, and indeed for some years afterwards, was considerably lower than at present and covered the moulding at the apex of the tower arches.

A curious feature of S. Laurence tower is that the arcading above the second string course (*i.e.* the storey above that which contains the circular windows) is continued only along the eastern and southern walls. A small engraving of the south-west view of the church in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of January, 1809, pt. ii. p. 17, represents this arcading as complete on the west side also; but engravings of this sort published at this date are seldom accurate—the artists frequently taking upon themselves to draw, not what they actually had before them, but what they thought ought to be there—and a larger etching of the church drawn from the same point of view by F. W. L. Stockdale, and dated December 30th, 1810, shews the tower with no arcade on the west side and plastered over, as it remained till the restoration of 1888, when, the plaster being removed, the window in the centre of the wall was laid bare. It is difficult to account for the removal of the arcading from the north and west walls of the tower if it ever existed; and the masonry which was exposed by the removal of the plaster does not shew the slightest trace of there ever having been a mural

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<sup>1</sup> This was the practice at Ely Cathedral, where the bells were hung in a chamber constructed above the central lantern in 1340. The floor of this bell chamber is 136 ft. from the ground.

<sup>2</sup> A similar method of reaching the upper part of the tower may still be seen at Newhaven.

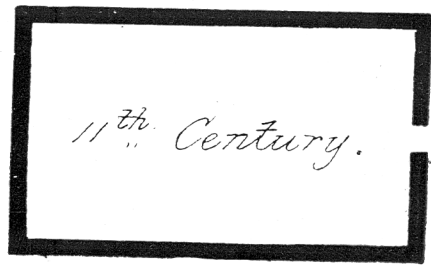
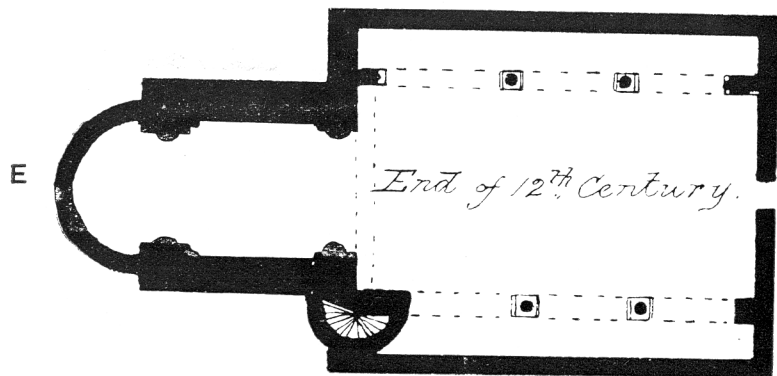
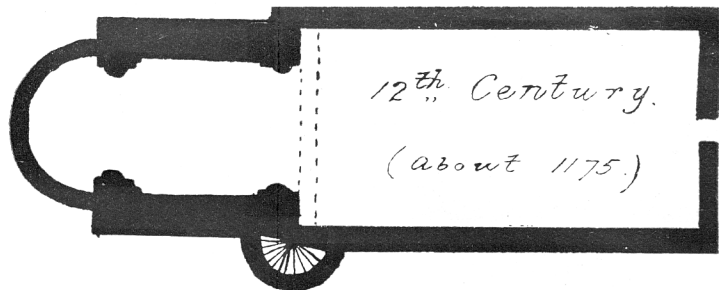
arcade. Why it was omitted it is impossible to say, but it is probable that the present village street was the only road near the church when the tower was built, and from this street only the east and south sides of the tower are visible. S. Laurence tower may therefore be an instance of what was far more uncommon in the middle ages than at the present time, viz., the skimping of adornment in places not seen by the general public. Above the third string course there are eight Norman windows, two on each side. These windows with the arcades in the storey below them are not inconsistent with a date late in the twelfth century. In the arcade on the south side, half way between the central window and the south-east corner there is a capital with volutes or foliations, the other capitals being scalloped like some in the south-west transept of Ely Cathedral which date from the last quarter of the twelfth century.

To return however to the history of the original building, it would seem that shortly after the completion of the tower, narrow aisles were added on both sides of the nave, the walls being pierced and the existing arcades constructed.<sup>1</sup> These arcades with their pointed arches appear to be slightly later than the very similar arcades in S. Peter's. The latter are said to have been constructed in 1184, though their appearance suggests a somewhat earlier date. That the nave arcades at S. Laurence are piercings in an older wall is clear from the portion of wall which remains at the west end on the south side. The roof of the nave seems to have been continued on each side to cover the aisles,

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<sup>1</sup> The Nave arches at S. Laurence were evidently all constructed at the same time, the greater span of the easternmost arch on the north side being the result of the alterations carried out in 1858 (see below p. 26). In S. John's, Margate, on the other hand, and in the south aisles at S. Peter's and at S. Nicholas-at-Wade, the arches were pierced in the Norman walls at slightly different dates, in order to provide chapels. It is evident that at S. John's, chapels were first added north and south of the eastern portion of the nave, then other chapels north and south of the western portion, the intervening space being subsequently filled up, when more arches were pierced in the nave walls. At S. Peter's the south aisle has a similar history.

These Plans which are based on a survey of S. Laurence Church made in 1887, are entirely conjectured, and are given merely as a rough illustration of the architectural history of the building. So far as that history can be reconstructed from the existing features of the Church as it is to-day.



Scale 16 feet to the inch.

as at Seaford in Sussex and at Toot Baldon, near Oxford.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen on an examination of the exterior of the west wall of the church, where the original gable of the nave appears to have been continued on each side beyond the original north and south walls.

A very few years after the alteration of the nave, probably not much later than 1200, it was decided to build a larger chancel.<sup>2</sup> This may have been due in part to the English dislike of an apsidal ending (if the sacrarium was originally apsidal). But it is difficult to account for the large size of the new chancel, a feature which is however common to a very large number of ancient parish churches. At first sight one is disposed to argue from the square piers that the chancel arches have been pierced in older walls, and Dr. Cotton<sup>3</sup> has adduced as some confirmation of this surmise the fact that in 1888 "remains of old walls were found under the arches of the chancel arcades." It is true that at S. Peter's a pointed arch in the south aisle of the nave, of what is apparently Transitional character (*i.e.* slightly earlier than S. Laurence chancel), bears a considerable resemblance to the chancel arches at S. Laurence, and that the former is undoubtedly pierced in an older wall. Moreover the plain capitals, or rather *abaci* of the chancel piers at S. Laurence resemble the *abaci* of the thirteenth century arches in S. Nicholas-at-Wade, which are likewise later piercings; but at S. Laurence, unlike S. Nicholas, the *abaci* are carried all round the four sides of the pier. Moreover at S. Laurence the chancel walls are of uniform thickness throughout—which

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<sup>1</sup> See Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> If the arches of the present chancel had been built at the same time as the tower, they would probably have been built of the same material; but whereas the rubble work of the tower is almost entirely sandstone, that of the chancel is mostly flint. There is indeed rather more flint in the tower below the lower string course than above it, but it is difficult to say how much of this is original.

<sup>3</sup> p. 44 cf. also p. 6.

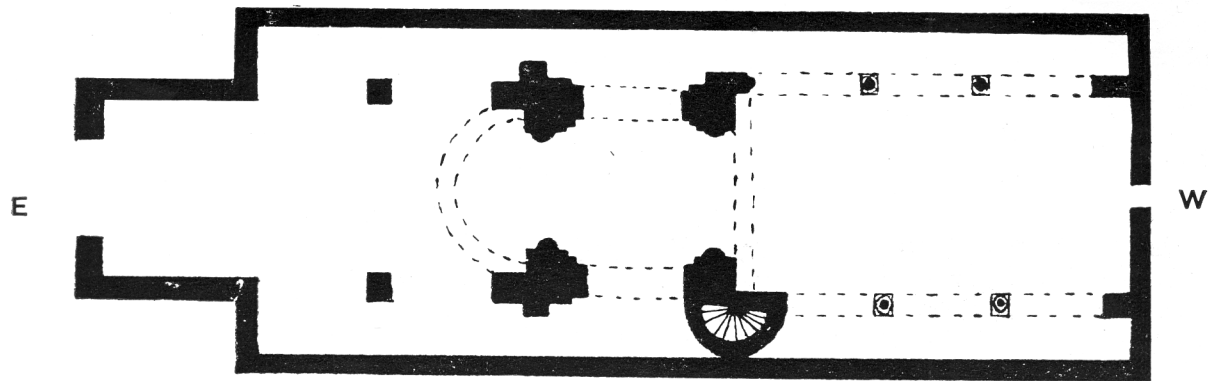


makes it improbable that the east end of the chancel is a later extension—and east of the arcades there are lofty lancet windows now blocked up. It is of course possible that the low walls of the original Norman sacrarium (if this was square-ended) were both raised and continued eastward, but it has already been pointed out (p. 19) that, as far as can be ascertained from what is now visible, the rubble masonry of the chancel differs from that of the Norman tower. Further, since the walls of any sacrarium designed by the builders of the tower could scarcely have been higher, and were almost certainly lower, than the tops of the present chancel arches, as much trouble would have been involved in utilising such low walls (if they existed) as in building *de novo*. These considerations make it probable that the present chancel with its arcades (except the low arch on the south side of the sacrarium) was altogether constructed in the early part of the thirteenth century. It is indeed not absolutely impossible that the chancel was originally unaisled, and that narrow aisles were subsequently added; but had this been the case, we might expect to find traces of the original lofty lancet windows above the present arcades, and of these no vestige has been found. Moreover the walls which were discovered in 1888 beneath the chancel arches by no means prove the existence of former solid walls above the floor; for it was the practice of the thirteenth century builders, when constructing an arcade, to make a continuous foundation wall on which to place the bases of the piers.<sup>1</sup> Such foundation walls beneath the bases of the piers were laid bare in the early English presbytery of Ely Cathedral in 1850. In Salisbury Cathedral similar walls are raised above the floor.

The original chancel of S. Laurence (*i.e.*, the space beneath the tower with the small extension to the east of it)

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<sup>1</sup> See Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 25.



S. LAURENCE CHURCH early in the thirteenth century.

*Scale 16 feet to the inch.*

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inclined slightly to the south. When the present chancel was built, this southern inclination was corrected, with the result that the eastern tower arch is not in the centre of the chancel.<sup>1</sup> It has already been pointed out that the chancel aisles originally terminated eastward at a point about on a level with the present vestry screen.

The flints in the piers and soffits of the chancel arches are curious. They seem to be too rough to have been intended for ornament like the later East Anglian flint panel work, or the flints in the tower buttresses at S. Nicholas-at-Wade, and they were perhaps intended to be covered with plaster. If however they were not intended to be seen, it is difficult to account for their being knapped. They may however have been unskilfully reset. The pier on the south side has been entirely rebuilt.

It is probable that when the chancel was built, the chancel aisles were continued westward on each side of the tower to meet the eastern ends of the nave aisles, and the north and south walls of the tower were pierced with the plain arches which we now see,<sup>2</sup> and which bear a strong resemblance to the chancel arch at S. Nicholas. The scalloped capitals of the piers of these arches are somewhat remarkable in thirteenth century work,<sup>3</sup> but are not in themselves evidence of earlier date, for the nave piers in S. Mary's at Ely (built by Bishop Eustace 1198—1215) have likewise scalloped capitals, and the thirteenth century masons at S. Laurence may have desired to make their work under the Norman tower correspond with the rest of the Norman work.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an additional reason for supposing the present chancel walls to be later than the tower.

<sup>2</sup> That these arches are a later piercing of the walls is evident from the unmoulded voussoirs.

<sup>3</sup> The tower capitals have been considerably "restored," but enough of the original stone remains to shew the design.

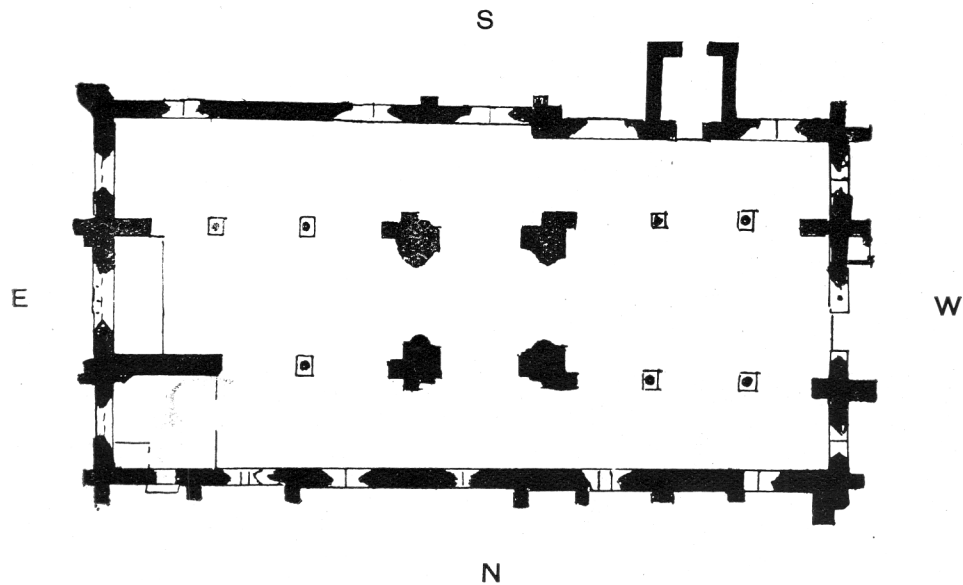
The existing arch between the south aisle of the nave and that of the chancel appears to have been widened towards the end of the thirteenth, or in the fourteenth century, the northern spring of it being of the same date as the chancel. That the arch as we now see it is the result of an alteration of an earlier arch is probable from the fact that the apex of the soffit is askew.

Early in the Decorated period the nave aisles were enlarged to their present width,<sup>1</sup> and covered with the gabled roofs which are so characteristic of Kent and Sussex. The similarity of the masonry in both aisles (of which the north and south walls are of knapped flint upon a low plinth) shews that this enlargement, together with the building of the south-west porch was taken in hand nearly simultaneously, probably not much later than 1275, in which year the church was made parochial. It must not be forgotten that the parochial church porch was not merely a vestibule, but was intended for certain ritual uses. "Almsgiving took place here, and the rite of exorcism; and part of the ceremonies of baptism, matrimony, and the churching of women.... Here too was placed the holy water stoup."<sup>2</sup> The small windows in the east and west walls of this porch are difficult to account for. The walls and the outer doorway clearly belong to the Decorated period, but the windows with their rude trefoil heads have the appearance of late twelfth or early thirteenth century work. They may have been inserted here

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence that the original nave aisles were narrower than at present may be found not merely in the fact mentioned above (pp. 18, 19) that before the gable roofs of the aisles were constructed, the gable roof of the nave was continued beyond the nave walls, but also in the fact that whereas the north and south walls are of knapped flint, the west wall of both aisles is of rough rubble. If the whole of each of the present aisles had been built at one time, we should have expected that the west walls of the nave aisles, like the east walls of the chancel chapels, would also have been of knapped flint. Since however the builders made use of the west walls of the narrower aisles, they naturally constructed the additions to them in the same style.

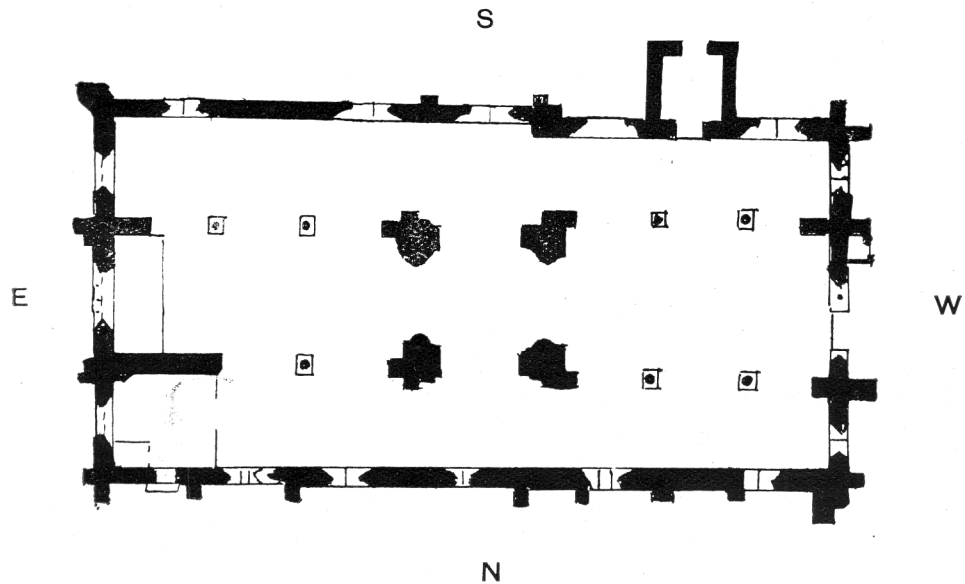
<sup>2</sup> Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 207.



*Scale 24 feet to the inch*

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S. LAURENCE CHURCH after enlargements made in the Decorated period.



*Scale 24 feet to the inch*

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S. LAURENCE CHURCH after enlargements made in the Decorated period.



A. H. SIMINSON, S. LAURENCE.

EAST END of the CHANCEL, shewing the Early English piscina, the low arch connecting it with the large south Chapel, and the Decorated piscina in this Chapel.

from some other building, but whether by the original builders of the porch, or at some later date cannot be determined.

Not many years after the widening of the aisles of the nave, the narrow south aisle of the chancel was replaced by the present large chapel,<sup>1</sup> the east wall of which was built flush with the east wall of the Early English chancel, and the south wall somewhat further south than that of the nave aisle. In order to give a view of the high altar from this chapel, a low arch was inserted in the wall east of the original arcade. The absence of any capital or abacus on the pier of this arch proves it to be later than the Early English period. At the same time the arch in the east wall of the south aisle of the nave was widened to the width of the new nave aisle, and the wall above it carried up to the height of the south chapel of the chancel. The exterior walls of the Decorated additions are faced with the beautiful knapped flint which is so striking a feature of S. Laurence church.

Not very long after the widening of the south aisle of the nave and the subsequent construction of the large south chapel of the chancel, the narrow north aisle of the chancel was pulled down, and the present large north, or Manston, chapel was built. The north wall of this chapel, although not built at the same time as that of the north aisle of the nave, forms a continuous straight line with it. The masonry of the north chapel, although very similar to that of the south, is not quite identical; for whereas the south wall is of knapped flint with white ashlar inserted at regular intervals, the north wall is entirely flint. Both these walls are remarkably thick for the period in which they were built.

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<sup>1</sup> From the fact that a foundation wall was discovered in 1888 running south from the central Early English pier, it would seem that this chapel was formerly divided into two, and corresponding foundation wall, similarly dividing, the north chancel chapel was laid bare at the same time. See Cotton, p. 47.



Moreover the arch between the north aisle of the nave and the Manston chapel, unlike the corresponding arch on the south side, is not the result of the widening of an earlier arch, but, with the wall above it, was evidently constructed *de novo* in the Decorated period. It was certainly built at the same time as the north wall of the chapel, and its general character suggests a date between 1320 and 1350. The original Norman turret staircase was, no doubt, pulled down at this time. About the same date a door was inserted in the west wall of the nave, probably in place of an original narrower doorway. Since the building of the north chancel chapel no alteration has been made in the ground plan of the church. Some minor changes were however made in the Perpendicular period. In 1439 the tower, having been struck by lightning, was carried up considerably higher, in flint rubble, and was finished with a castellated parapet. Probably in the same period a large window was inserted in the east wall of the chancel, taking the place of the original lancets, and a somewhat smaller window in the west wall of the nave above the doorway. Perpendicular windows, perhaps taking the place of single light Decorated windows, were also inserted, probably about the same time, in the west wall of the nave aisles below the circular windows in the gables, and perhaps in the north and south walls.

The east and west windows of the chancel and nave had already lost their tracery when the alterations were made in 1858. The present east window of late thirteenth century design dates from that time, and so does the great west window of the nave. The insertion of the latter necessitated the destruction of the upper part of the arch of the west doorway.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This doorway had been blocked up before 1810, a narrow doorway only being left in the southern half of it.

Further additions in the Perpendicular period were the windows in the western gables of the chancel aisles. To allow of the insertion of these windows, the eastern ends of the roofs over the nave aisles were hipped. The present nave roof, which blocks the opening in the west wall of the tower described above (pp. 14—16) was probably constructed at this time.

Perhaps the room over the south west porch was removed at the same time. That such a room once existed is evident from the sills of two windows which still remain above the outer door. The flint work above these two sills is so regular that the whole gable from the sills upward must have been reconstructed, and that by men who were accustomed to build with knapped flints. As the holy water stoup is on the east side of the inner doorway, access to the room above was perhaps provided by a newel staircase in the opposite corner. Between this and the stoup there would only have been room for a very narrow doorway, and it may be that one reason for removing it was in order to make a wider door into the south aisle. The present doorway with its four centred arch probably dates from the fifteenth century, and so does the blocked-up doorway in the north aisle. The south-east porch is a blunder of 1858.

As to the interior arrangements of the church before the introduction of the galleries (of which there were no fewer than seven) and of the square pews no evidence is forthcoming. On the panels of the vestry screen the outlines of figures of saints are visible, but it is difficult to determine where this screen was originally placed. The western bay of the south aisle of the nave was apparently screened off as a chapel or baptistry. The holes cut in the capitals of the piers of this bay to receive the upper beams of a parclose screen still remain. There are similar marks at the west of the north aisle.

In 1858 the easternmost arch on the north side of the nave was widened by the removal of the portion of wall containing the original doorway to the roodloft. This doorway had been utilised after the destruction of the roodloft to give access to the small gallery shewn in the picture preserved in the vestry.

At the restoration of the tower in 1888, in order to provide abutments north and south of the eastern piers, two arches were introduced, cutting off the western portion of the chancel chapels and producing the effect of transepts. A glance at the roof however, as well as at the masonry of these arches and the walls above them is sufficient to shew their true character. On the north side of the north-east pier the new arch is built on to what appears to have been an external buttress. This buttress however does not seem to be of Norman construction, and although its stones appear to be weathered, it is unsafe to conclude that it is earlier than the aisle in which it stands.—Buttresses in all aspects like those constructed against external walls are sometimes found in the interior of buildings. Such a buttress, with a dripstone at its top, occurs, for example, in the anteroom of the great hall of the Prior's House at Ely, where from the first it was under a roof.

Within living memory S. Laurence Church has received many tokens of the affection with which it is regarded by those who have worshipped there. It is much to be hoped that the parishioners, when they have first established a fund for the adequate maintenance of the clergy, may be induced to carry out some most desirable improvements within the building. The uncomfortable and ugly pews should give place to oak benches more worthy of the building, and if the floor beneath them were paved with wooden blocks, there would be no need to raise them on a platform as at present. The lowering of the height of the benches would add dignity to the nave



A. H. SIMINSON. S. LAURENCE.

S. LAURENCE CHURCH from the W. before the restoration of 1858 : from a painting preserved in the vestry. The top of the doorway which originally gave access to the roodloft can be seen in the little gallery immediately to the N. of the Tower arch.



A. H. SIMINSON, S. LAURENCE.  
S. LAURENCE CHURCH. Interior from the W.

piers. It would be desirable also to rearrange the gangways so as to shew the bases of the piers. The blocking up of the Manston chapel by the organ, entirely ruining the view from the north aisle of the nave, is most regrettable. Perhaps the organ might be constructed so that a portion of the pipes should be placed on a bracket above the organist's seat which would project into the chancel in front of the arch, the remainder of the pipes being placed against the north wall. It would be an enormous gain to the appearance of the interior of the church if the vestry screen could be removed (but carefully preserved), and a new vestry built.

For more than eight centuries S. Laurence Church has witnessed to the fact that man does not live by bread alone. May it supply for ages yet to come to an ever increasing number of devout worshippers the Gospel of the Bread of Life which came down from Heaven.

