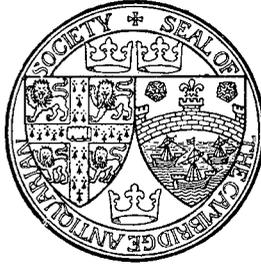


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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1935—OCTOBER 1936



VOLUME XXXVII



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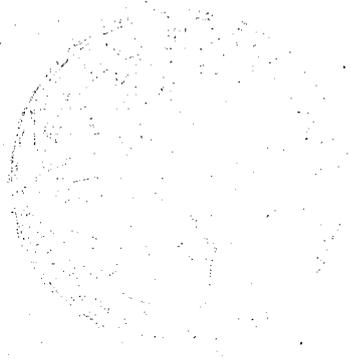
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Besides a number of figures in the text.



ORNAMENT IN HADSTOCK CHURCH, ESSEX,
compared with that on a piece of carved stone built into
the wall of Great Canfield Church, where there is also a
recognized piece of Danish carving

By LOUIS COBBETT, M.D., F.R.C.S.

In 1016 Canute fought the battle of Assandun, or Assingdon, and defeated Edmund Ironsides, thereby becoming King of England. In commemoration of this victory he caused a minster to be built on the battlefield, and dedicated it in 1020.

It is not certainly known where the battle was fought, but it is stated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle¹ that it was somewhere in Essex. Some scholars have thought that it was at Ashdon, three miles south-east of Linton, while the majority² have concluded that it must have been at Ashingdon, in the southern part of the county, near the estuary of the Thames.

I do not propose to discuss the question whether Ashdon or Ashingdon is the more probable place for the battle to have been fought, for that has been done by others; but to bring forward a piece of architectural evidence which seems to me to support the claims of Ashdon.

At Hadstock, two and a half miles from Ashdon, and on part of the ground claimed to have been the field of battle, is a pre-Conquest church with peculiar ornament. This was claimed by Miller Christy to be Canute's minster.³ The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments lends some support to this claim,⁴ and the late Professor Baldwin Brown told me, shortly before his death, that, although he had formerly been in favour of Ashingdon as the place of the battle, he was then in some doubt, being impressed by the unique character of the ornament at Hadstock.

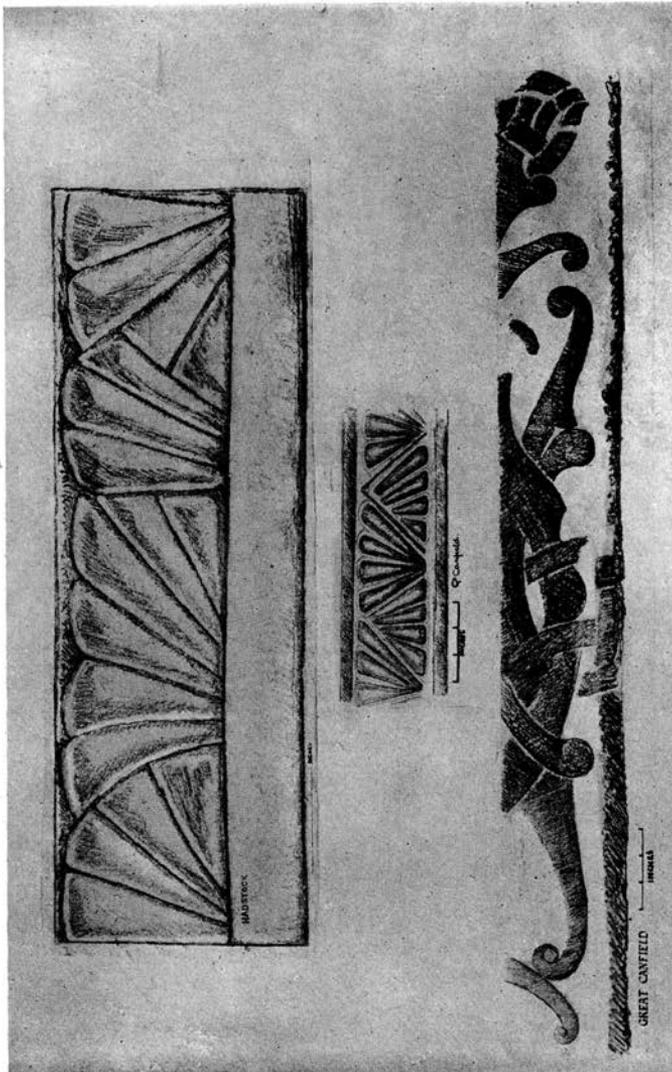
¹ Earle and Plummer, *Two Saxon Chronicles*, p. 152.

² Holinshed, Miller Christy, and Professor H. B. Swete, once Rector of the Parish, supported the claims of Ashdon, but Camden, Gough, Freeman, Green, and Oman have all been in favour of Ashingdon.

³ Miller Christy, *Jour. Brit. Archaeol. Ass.* xxxi, 2, 1925, p. 168.

⁴ R.C.H.M., *Essex*, i, 143.

PLATE I



Ornaments at Hadstock and at Great Canfield.

Now of what kind is this ornament? The most characteristic example is a broad band of carving on the upper halves of the abaci of the responds of the archways inside the church, and of the doorway. This band, about six inches deep, may be divided up into roughly triangular areas, in each of which there is a radiating arrangement of tapering elements, which might be called fan-like, were it not that they tend in many cases to curve to one side at their outer extremities. For that reason this kind of ornament has been likened to honeysuckle. The accompanying figure (Pl. I, upper part) is drawn from a rubbing from one of the abaci of the doorway. These figures will explain the kind of ornament better than any description.

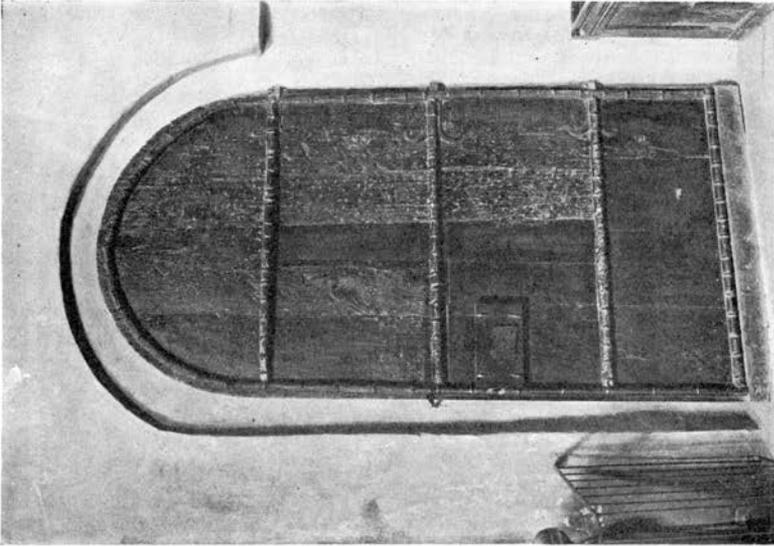
The church has always been cruciform. Whether there was a central tower is uncertain; there is no sign now of a western tower arch. But the archways of the chancel and the two transepts remain, and parts of them are original. The great arches have all fallen, and have been replaced by pointed ones. The archway of the north transept was rebuilt in the thirteenth century, and that of the chancel in the latter part of the nineteenth; it is a copy of original work in the archway of the south transept. All three archways have retained their high-stepped bases, and the responds of the south transeptal arch, though restored in part, contain a good deal of the original work.

The fine doorway on the north side of the nave is entirely original, and is highly decorated like the transeptal arch, but, unlike it, the original round arch itself has survived, and over it is a hood moulding, square in section, ornamented with the honeysuckle pattern.

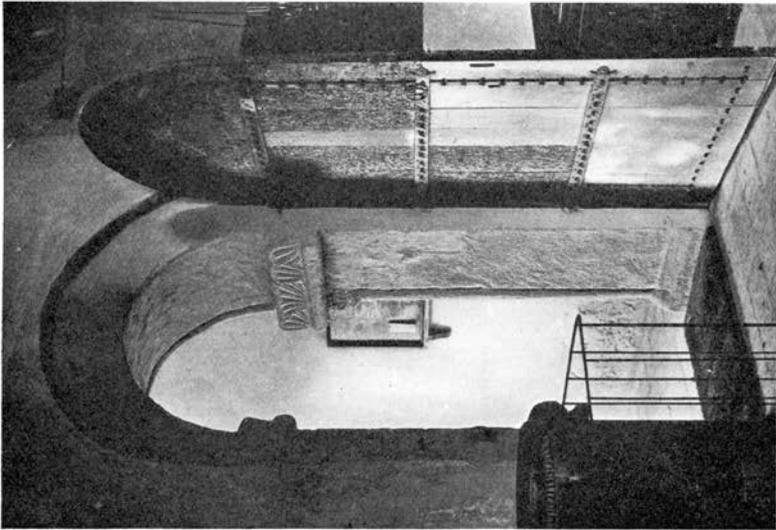
In the responds of all these archways were angle shafts with cushion caps—a striking anticipation of Norman forms. But they were ornamented with a pattern never copied by the Normans, and which is similar to the pattern on the abaci already described.

The distribution and style of this peculiar ornament is illustrated in the accompanying figures.

Pl. I shows, in its upper part, a drawing made from a rubbing of the pattern on the abacus of the doorway, also shown in Pl. II*a*, as seen from within the church.

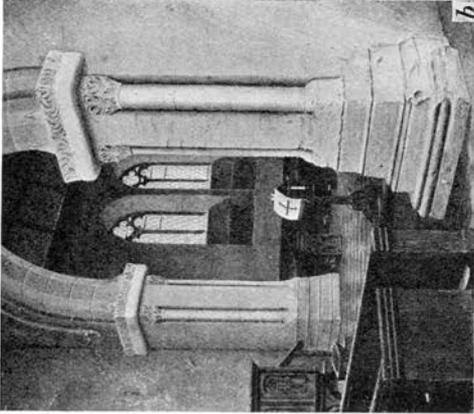


b. North door, Hadstock.

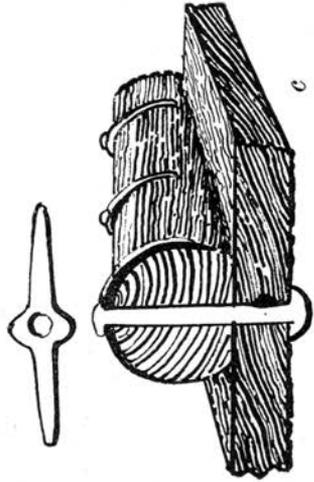


a. North doorway, Hadstock.

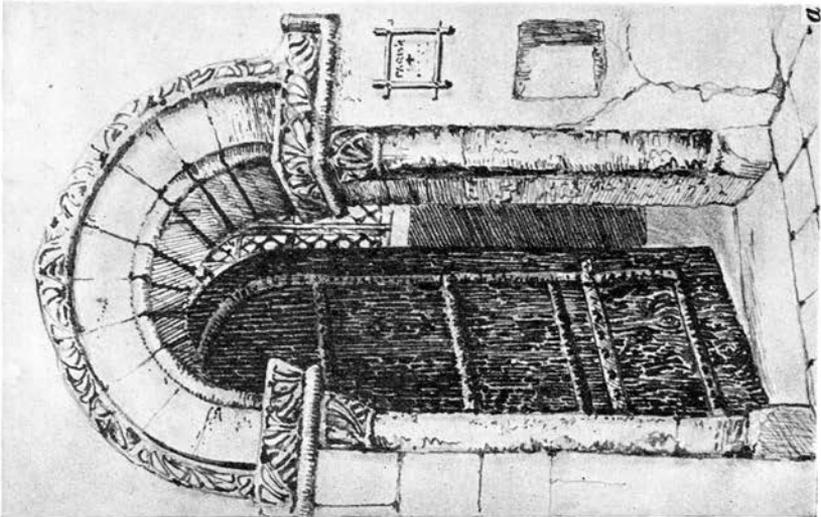
PLATE III



b. Interior of church, looking north-east from south transept.



c. Details of north door.



a. North doorway, Hadstock.

Pl. III *a* is a drawing of the doorway from without.

Pl. III *b* shows the inside of the church looking north-east from the south transept. It is from a drawing by Mr A. C. Himus of Cambridge. The respond in the foreground belongs to the transeptal arch, and is largely original. The other is one of the responds of the recently built chancel arch.

So much then for the peculiar ornament of Hadstock. It is fan-like, or honeysuckle-like, whichever you please. But it must be pointed out that not all of what I have called the fan-like elements (or the petals of the honeysuckle) are curved, and the curvature has I think been exaggerated in the parts that have been restored.

I now come to the particular piece of new evidence which I believe has a bearing on the problem of the date of Hadstock Church.

At Great Canfield, in Essex, not far from Dunmow and fifteen miles from Hadstock, is a church which has a piece of undoubted Danish carving rebuilt into its Norman chancel arch. To see it one must get up a ladder and examine the upper surface of the abacus on the south side. The design is largely covered up by the voussoirs of the arch, but enough is exposed to show that it is Danish, and resembles the lower part of the famous Ringerike stone in the Guildhall Museum in London, the date of which is generally agreed to be about the time of Canute (see Pl. I, lower part). Now I do not claim that this undoubted Danish ornament is anything like that at Hadstock. But associated with it in Great Canfield Church is a piece of carved stone preserved in the wall of the porch, which seems to me to resemble the Hadstock ornament very closely.

The pattern on this stone is about half the width of those at Hadstock, namely three inches. Like them it is divided into triangular fan-like areas. But the set-out of the pattern is stiffer, and its elements show none of that tendency to curve which has caused the Hadstock pattern to be compared with honeysuckle. Pl. I shows drawings made from rubbings from the Hadstock and the Canfield patterns side by side for comparison.

The reader can judge for himself the closeness of the

resemblance. If he thinks that it is enough to warrant the conclusion that both carvings belong to the same period and the same school, then the association of the Canfield stone with Ringerike ornament will doubtless incline him to the conclusion that Hadstock Church was built in Canute's reign, and that, consequently, it is very probably Canute's minster.

The church door. As a piece of evidence bearing on the problem of the origin of the church, though only of minor importance, the oak door may be held to be worthy of consideration. It is obviously ancient, having undergone only some repairs at the bottom, and may possibly be the original door of the church (Pl. II*b*).

A piece of human skin, nailed to the door beneath the ironwork, is known to have remained there until the middle of the nineteenth century. It was recorded by Stukeley and other writers in the eighteenth century; cf. Miller Christy, *op. cit.* p. 188.

The reason that the door is thought worthy of consideration in connection with the problem of the Danish origin of the church is the peculiar method of its construction. Instead of consisting of a heavy morticed structure to which the boards are fixed, as medieval doors usually do, this door is composed of thick planks laid side by side, held together, partly by the long iron hinges, and partly by a rather light rounded frame of wood, with three transverse pieces, fixed to the planks with peculiar rivets. The accompanying photograph and drawing (Pls. II*b* and III*c*) will explain this method of construction, which I have sometimes thought is more like that of the boat-builder than the carpenter.

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