

STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH: SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES.

BY

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I MAKE no apology for returning to this fascinating subject, as, although it might be supposed that it had been worn threadbare by the long paper in Vol. XX, and supplementary notes in Vols. XXI and XXII, yet since these were penned a number of interesting discoveries have been made which ought to be recorded, especially as, in some cases, they modify previous statements and conclusions.

In the summer of 1909 I had the opportunity, in superintending repairs to the Norbury Chapel on the North side of the chancel, of examining the original North wall of the chancel, which now forms the South side of the chapel. Cracks which had appeared in the plastering of 1866 were the immediate cause of this examination and on removing some of the plaster the flint and rubble walling was found to be loose in places. Some of this wall surface was removed, for the purpose of bonding across the cracks, when there was disclosed an older wall-face, not straight like the other but slightly, though regularly, curved. It was apparent also that this curved wall was constructed of flints and Roman bricks, set in a peculiarly hard mortar composed of chalk-lime and pounded Roman brick. After making the necessary repairs it was decided, by the kind permission of Mrs. Bowen Buscarlet—in whom are vested the manorial rights, carrying with them the upkeep of the chapel—to leave exposed a large section of this curved wall-face, which of course suggested the former existence of an apsidal termination to the chancel.

It at once occurred to me that if access could be obtained to the space between the chancel vaulting of c. 1210 and the roof over, further light might be thrown on this discovery. Accordingly, having obtained the consent of the Rector, the Rev. A. S. P. Blackburne, I entered this roof-space by a small door in the gable over the chancel arch, and by Mrs. Buscarlet's kindness Messrs. Higgs' workmen, who had been carrying out the repairs, were allowed to assist in my investigations. The pockets formed by the back of the vault were found to be filled with the dust and rubbish of ages, and in this were discovered a number of interesting things to be described further on. The immediate object of my search was revealed in the clearest fashion. The inner curved face of the North wall of an apsidal chancel, for a length of over 11 feet from its West wall, was unmistakably to be seen, rising above the haunches of the 13th-century vaulting. Beyond that measurement the wall pursued a straight line, at a considerable inclination to the northward from the axis of the nave,

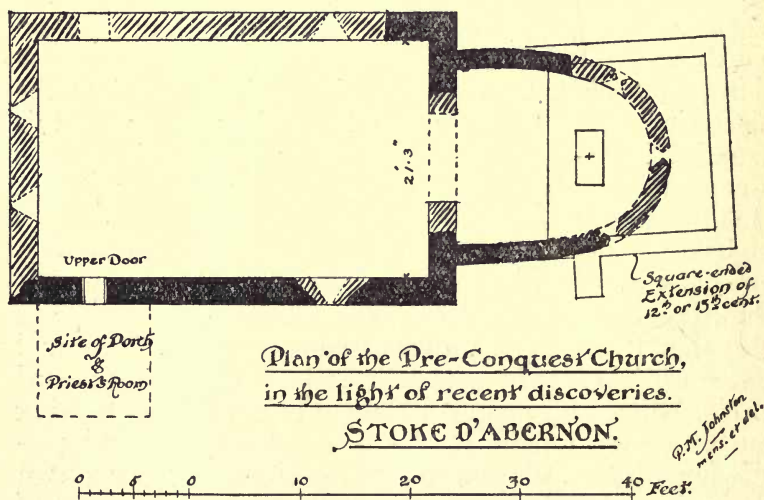


FIG. 1.

as shown on the accompanying plan (Fig. 1); and the gradual curve proved, when the measurements were

‘plotted’, to be from the same striking point as that found on the outer or chapel side.

Similarly on the South, although here not so obvious owing to the straightened-out wall of the later extension following much the same course (*see plans*), the slow curve of an ovoid apse remained; and apparently on both sides the ancient top of the wall had not been disturbed when the chancel was vaulted in c. 1210; only a foot or so of chalk rubble had been added to form a straight bed for the 13th-century roof-plate. Examination showed that the more ancient wall, on either side, was built with pinkish coloured mortar, made with pounded Roman bricks; and that on what had been the internal face to the chancel, above the later vaulting, it was still partly covered with a fine smooth-faced pink plaster, of curiously hard and even texture, made from the same materials: several loose pieces of this beautiful plaster were brought down from the roof-chamber and are preserved in the church.

Further; though very faint, unmistakable traces of extremely ancient painted decoration were discernible on these original plastered surfaces—more especially on the South side. I may be permitted to quote a brief description of this, included in my article on the Wall-paintings in Surrey Churches, contributed to *Memorials of Old Surrey*, illustrating it by the drawing of a fragment of the painting which I made for that article:¹—“The “thirteenth-century vaulting showed plainly where this “early plaster had been hacked off to receive the “springers of the vault, and the painting that remained “was not more than two feet in width at the deepest “point. Beneath the 13th-century wall-plate of the roof “was a broad band of a purplish-pink, then one of cream “colour, next a pair of chocolate lines three-quarter “inches wide enclosing an inscription border $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches “in width, beneath which were two lines, pink and “chocolate, and the beginning of a painted circular arch,

¹ By kind permission of the publishers, Messrs. Geo. Allen & Sons, Ltd.

“such as might have framed one of the original round-headed windows, or a canopy to a scene or saint’s figure. Some of these bands of colour, but nothing else, appeared also on the East face of the chancel arch wall, and on the North wall of the chancel. The lettering of the inscription band is in an early type of Lombardic or semi-Roman capitals, such as is found in the Saxon MSS. and in the few examples of pre-Conquest and late 11th-century paintings which have come down to us.¹ The accompanying reproduction of a drawing made at the time of the discovery of this



FIG. 2.

“valuable early fragment, gives as accurate an idea of the inscription as the writer was able to obtain under very difficult conditions. The cross and the **H** next to it are in red, the other letters in purple-pink and chocolate. Beyond the word **HIC** = here — suggesting reference to a picture below, as in the case of the Bayeux tapestry—no other word remains entire, unless it be the **CARIT** that precedes it before the **✠** stop. This latter word *may* be a contraction of **CARITAS**, charity, in its nominative or other form. The con-

¹ Cf. the destroyed painting on a Saxon window splay, St. Mary’s, Guildford, referred to above; also the Leonine hexameters at Hardham Church, Sussex, c. 1100 (vide *Memorials of Old Sussex*), and destroyed paintings of the same date at Plumpton and Westmeston, Sussex, recorded in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*; also the inscriptions accompanying the scenes on the Bayeux tapestries.

“traction mark through the stem of the **T** is fairly “clear.”

This remarkable fragment serves to show that prior to the 13th-century re-modelling the chancel was decorated with paintings—probably of scenes or single figures, with explanatory inscriptions in the frieze-band over them; and these paintings may have been executed prior to the year 1100. In the absence of evidence, it must remain uncertain whether the apse was destroyed and the chancel extended with the present rectangular East end in *c.* 1210, or at an earlier date: there is of course no question as to the vaulting having been introduced in the early years of the 13th century. That the apse took, approximately, the curve drawn on my plan—an egg-shaped curve, instead of a simple semicircle such as the Norman builders employed—is practically certain, and may be taken as evidence of a pre-Conquest date. Its exceptionally slender walls—1 ft. 10 in. thick—are in striking contrast with those of the nave, which average 2 ft. 6 in., and this peculiarity would suggest an earlier date for the apsidal chancel. Indeed, the nave being itself indisputably of pre-Conquest date, built perhaps in the 10th century, the ovoid apse may be a Saxon work of the 7th century; or even, if the pink plaster be taken as evidence in that direction, a fragment of the Roman-Christian period. Such a daring suggestion as this latter should not at least be excluded from the bounds of possibility: ovoid apses occur both in Romano-British and in Saxon buildings, of which the foundations have been unearthed in this country.¹

In the present summer (1913) I obtained permission to open one of the Saxon walls of the nave, in order to determine whether there were mortar or plaster of like character with those of the early apse. No original plaster was found beneath that of 1866, but mortar made

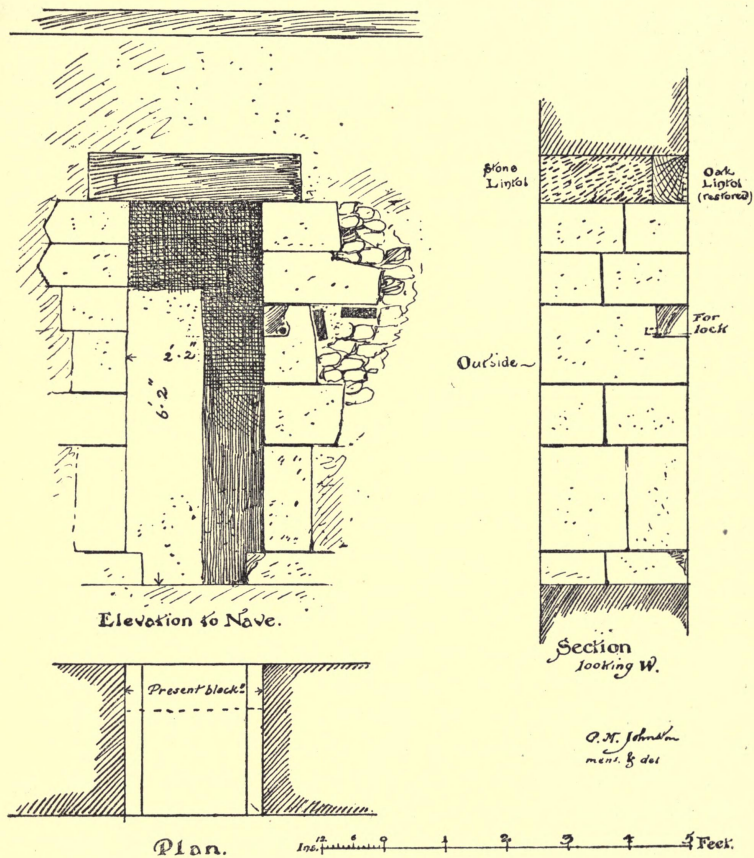
¹ Of the Saxon period a prominent instance is that of the supposed early-7th-century cathedral, Rochester, the foundations of which were exposed a few years ago by the Rev. G. M. Livett, F.S.A., and Mr. St. John Hope. The apse here had very thin walls, *c.* 2 ft. 3 in. thick.

of pounded Roman brick and chalk-lime was discovered, suggesting at least that the Saxons continued to use mortar made after the Roman manner. This mortar, however, was whiter and contained less brick, and the brick was more coarsely ground than in the apse walls.

All this, in my opinion, goes to show that the early apse at Stoke d'Abernon, if not actually Roman work, is of older Saxon date than the nave. It would be interesting if the pre-Conquest church of Fetcham, which I have shown (*S. A. C.*, Vol. XX, pp. 11 to 16) to correspond very closely with this in dimensions, could be proved also to have had an egg-shaped apse; as in that case we should have a similar reason for the sharply inclined square-ended chancel to that which I have found evidence for at Stoke d'Abernon.

The point selected for opening the nave wall was where the stone work of the Saxon priest's-chamber door was visible on the outside. The rubble blocking of this—itself probably of 13th-century date, from the character of the wrought stone fragments found in it—was removed from the inside under my supervision,¹ with the expectation of finding plastered joints, which might prove to be of the same pink plaster as had been found on the apse walls; but, to my surprise, the jambs proved to be of carefully wrought and coursed fine-jointed ashlar, in the greenish fire-stone found on the outer face, and carried entirely through the wall. The jambs slightly incline and the lower courses are in well-defined “long-and-short” work (Fig. 3), rising from a square plinth which projects only on the return faces. The outer head is formed by a wide stone laid flat (*see* section, Fig. 3), and the inner had evidently had an oak lintel, which has now been put back, replacing a relieving arch in modern brick. In the right, or western, jamb the stone had been cut away for a lock. There has never been a rebate to hold the door

¹ By a very skilful workman (Harry Milken) employed by Messrs. Higgs, of Cobham—the same man who did the work in 1909. His intelligence and enthusiasm deserve recording.



STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH:
Saxon Priest's-Chamber Door.

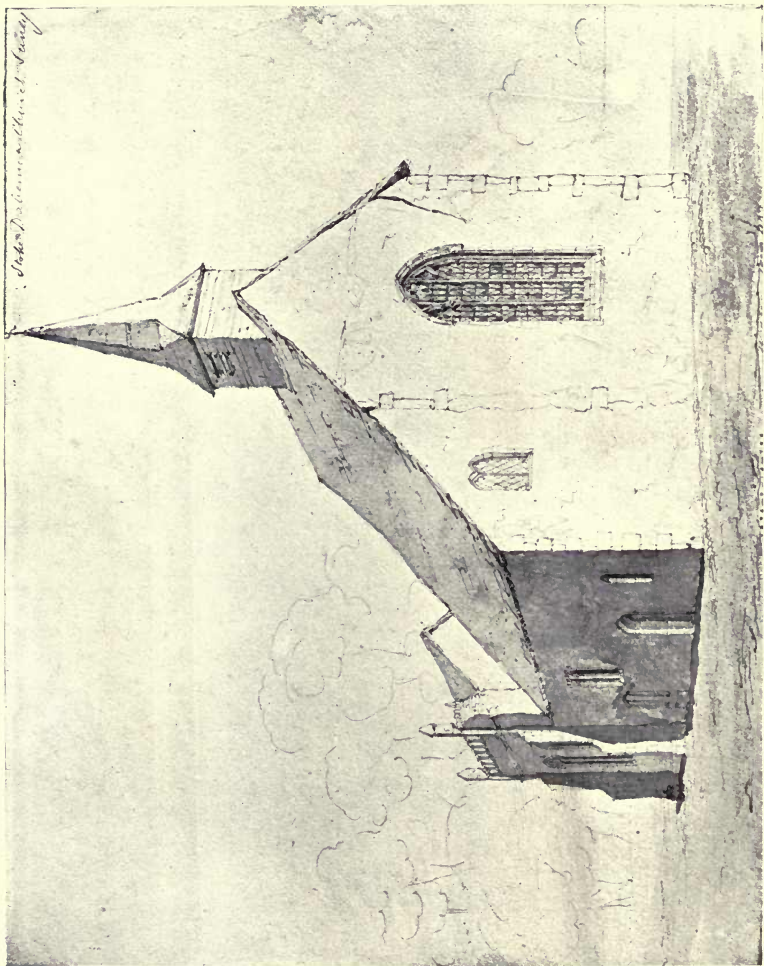
FIG. 3.

in this singular opening,¹ which, as I have endeavoured to show in my previous paper (*S. A. C.*, XX, 15, 16), must have served to communicate with the upper chamber of a two-storied *porticus*, probably used by the Saxon priest as a lodging. The doorway may be compared with upper-storey doorways of this early period at Bosham and Singleton, Sussex, but both these are between the tower and a nave roof-chamber: this one either communicated with the room over the vanished Saxon porch or, perhaps, with an upper chamber over the nave; but the latter, although the cill of the door is about 12 feet from the nave floor, does not, on the whole, seem probable. I feel sure that archæologists will be glad to know that, owing to my representations, the rector has consented to this rare doorway being left as opened, with only a slight blocking of flints on the outer face. A very interesting feature has thus been added to the interior of this remarkable church. The position of the door relatively to the *original* West wall of the nave² is shown on the plan (Fig. 1). The windows and hatched portions of this plan represent the probable lines of original features that have disappeared in centuries of alteration and enlargement. The windows, in particular, must only be taken as 'guesses'; those in the nave being founded upon the solitary Saxon window, formed of Roman bricks, remaining at Fetcham, those in the chancel on the double-splayed openings at St. Mary's, Guildford.

There is one striking difference between these two pre-Conquest churches, viz., that at Fetcham no stone dressings are visible, the nave West quoins and this window being entirely formed of Roman brick; but here, at Stoke, we have proof not only in the doorway, but

¹ There were no rebates on the door of a Saxon hall which I helped to discover at Nyetimber, Pagham, Sussex, nor in the pre-Conquest doorways at Lyminster and Selham in the same county. All are "through" openings with parallel jambs, like this. It may safely be assumed that these doors originally had wooden lintels and door-posts.

² The present *modern* West wall is of course considerably to the westward.



STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH: North-west View.

From a drawing by W. Twopenny, 1828.

also in evidence which has recently come under my notice in the shape of drawings by the late William Twopenny, preserved in the British Museum and here reproduced (Plates I and II), that the dressings in the nave were wholly of ashlar. In fact, until the 'restoration' of 1866, long and short quoins of the most pronounced Saxon character remained at the Western and South-east angles. Mr. Twopenny's accuracy is so well known to antiquaries that there can be no shadow of doubt that he drew what was actually there in 1828. We can only lament the destruction, in 1866, of such interesting, and, for Surrey, unique, evidence. In Plate I, the North-west view, the drawing clearly shows the exaggerated height of the nave walls—nearly always a marked feature in pre-Conquest as distinguished from later mediæval work, and specially a contrast with the work of the Norman builders. This note of height and 'bigness' comes out in the typical Saxon doorway, which, instead of the comfortable low and broad proportions of a Norman door, is tall and narrow; it appears also in the immense stones used in the long and short construction of these quoins (note especially those in the South-east view); but the excellent building of our Saxon forefathers is abundantly proved when we see that with these high walls there were no buttresses and that the walls, while on the 'thin' side, are not out of plumb—a testimony to good foundations and mortar.

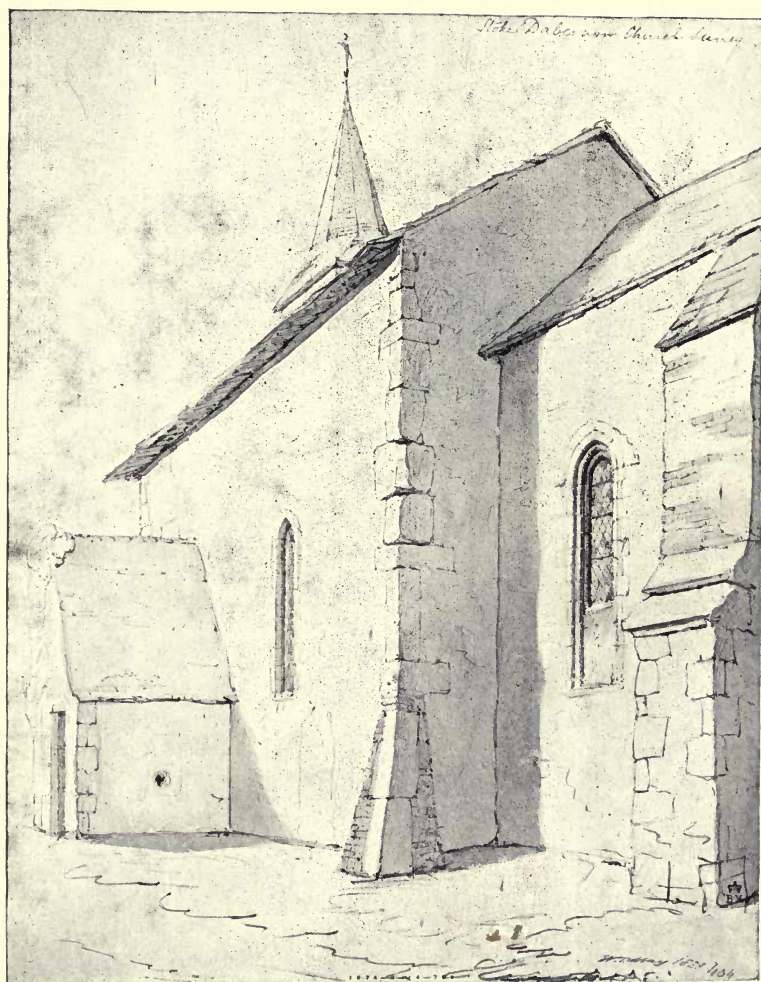
The North-west view shows also the comparatively low pitch of the Saxon roof, the aisle of c. 1190 (in the interior view note the stump of a lancet in its West wall), the early-15th-century West window of the nave, and a two-light 'churchwarden' window, high up in the West wall of the aisle. In its North wall, beside the little lancet of 1190, are two doors and a two-light window of 15th- or early-16th-century date—all now gone. Beyond is seen the Norbury Chantry, with its pinnacles and battlements, and the stump of a chimney for the still existing fire-place. This last—one of the few *mediæval* fire-places in a church in England—the

only one in Surrey—has lately been opened out, at my suggestion, and now looks quite an imposing feature (Fig. 4). When it was opened the hearth, which had been raised about three inches above the floor, was found to have been destroyed, and its place taken by a cavity.

In the South-east view (Plate II) is shown a mediæval porch—not the Saxon one, which stood to the westward, but one erected, perhaps, in the 14th century—with a steeply-pitched roof and a tiny quatrefoil-piercing in its East wall. Neither the upper-chamber door nor the pre-Conquest sun-dial appear, being, no doubt, hidden by the plaster which in 1828 still covered the walls. Eastward is the still-remaining chamfered lancet; and in the South wall of the chancel is another, richly moulded, with traces of a destroyed label. Both these were renewed, together with the priceless long-and-short quoin, in Bath stone, in 1866, as was also the heavy buttress (perhaps, as here drawn, of 15th-century date).

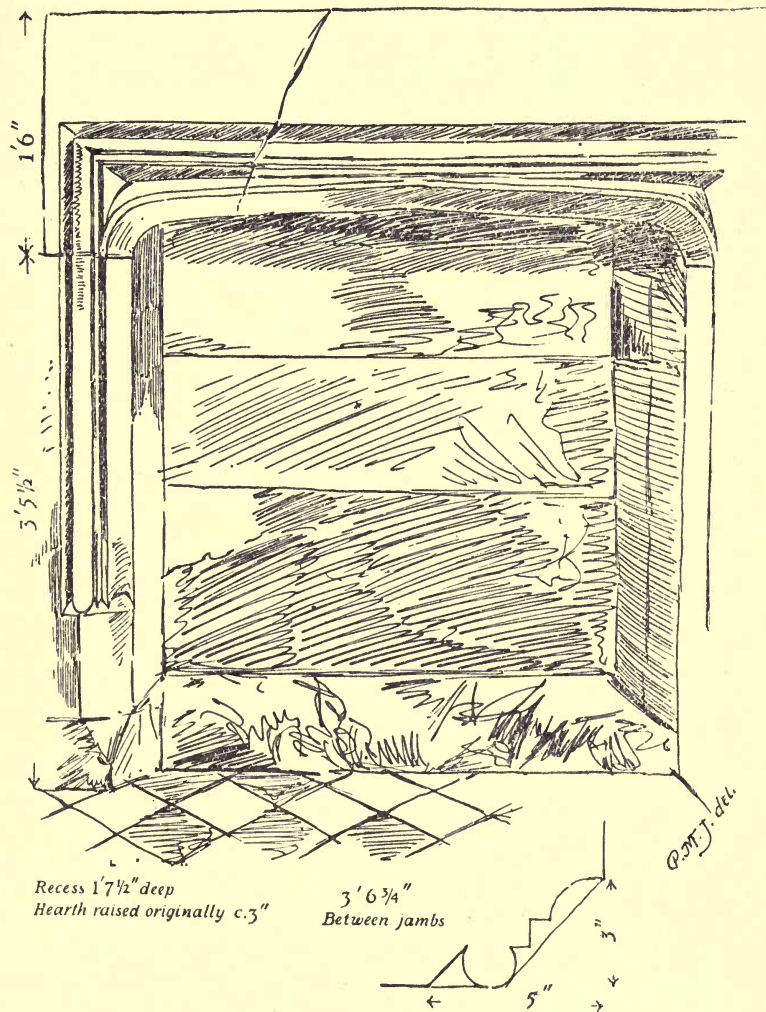
The interior view (Plate III) enables me to make a much-needed correction. It shows a *round* arch to the chancel instead of that of pointed form which figures in the pre-restoration view, reproduced opposite to page 10 in my paper in Vol. XX. The explanation of this puzzling discrepancy appears to be that the early round-arched opening survived, as here shown, until about 1850, when it was changed into that of pointed form and possibly widened at the same time.¹ This modernised arch was itself pulled down, together with the interesting altar-recesses and squints, by the restorers of 1866, and its place taken by the larger and very unsuitable arch that we now see. Mr. Twopenny's interesting drawing shows that the original arch, if not pre-Conquest—as it may quite possibly have been—was of very early date, its arch and jambs formed of through stones (as in the priest's-chamber door); and that it had moulded imposts of a curious section, not like Norman work. Traces of an arched recess are to be seen on its Eastern face, South side.

¹ An old inhabitant testifies to this as a fact.



STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH: South-east View.

From a drawing by W. Twopenny, 1828.



STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH:
Fireplace in Norbury Chapel.

FIG. 4.

Through the arch the view shows us the still-remaining arches to the North aisle, with what looks like a blocked Saxon window high up to the westward ; the font stands against the Western face of the arcade pillar ; there is a moulded wall-plate to the nave roof ; and the timber posts, carrying the bell-turret, with curved braces, also appear.

It remains to notice the "finds" referred to above, which resulted from the clearing out of rubbish in the pockets of the chancel vaulting. The most important is

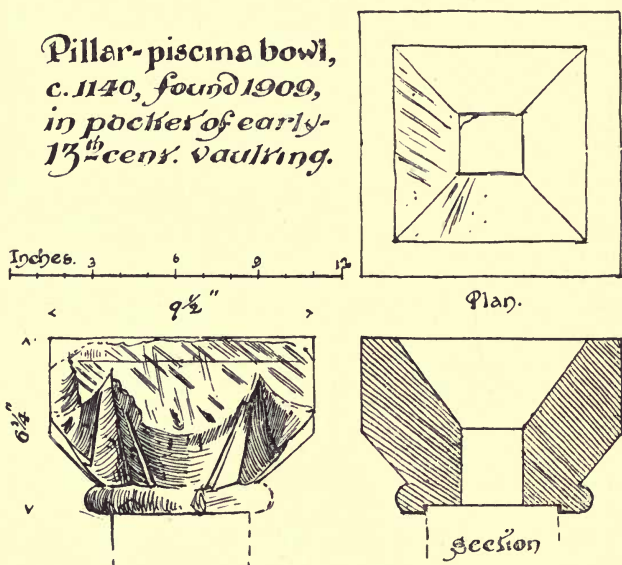
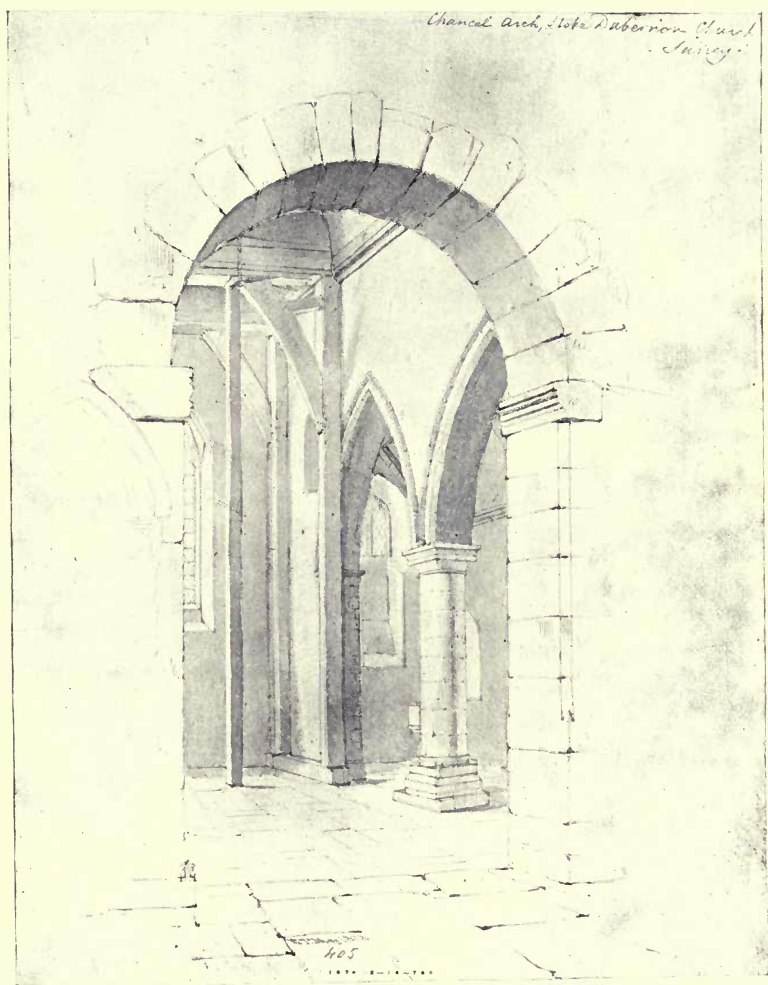


FIG. 5.

the mutilated bowl of a Norman pillar-piscina (Fig. 5). This may have come from the chancel or from the manorial chapel, which possibly preceded the Norbury Chantry.¹ The bowl, which, with the Rector's consent,

¹ This earlier chapel, I incline to think, was quite a small affair—perhaps nothing more than an apse, or a projection of square-ended form, one bay deep, at the East end of the aisle. Most of the wrought stones in the windows of the present chapel bear axe or vertical chisel-tooling of 12th-century character, and were no doubt used from an older building on the site when the Chantry was enlarged to the length of the chancel and the width of the aisle, in the last decade of the 15th century.



STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH: View of the Chancel.
From a drawing by W. Twopenny, 1828.

I have lately had set up on a bracket in the chancel above the modern piscina, is square, very deeply dished, and having a large square hole to take the rinsings. It is worked into the form of a scalloped capital, with a necking of circular section, round on plan, to suit the circular shaft which served as a drain. Other pillar-piscina bowls have come to light in Surrey at Compton, Thames Ditton, and Merstham (early 12th-century); and I have described one at West Clandon, of late 12th-century date, in my paper in Vol. XXI, p. 88.

Among the other objects of interest found, were several 12th- or 13th-century paving tiles with yellow and dark green glazes, $8\frac{1}{2}$ in., 6 in., and $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. square; a fragment of a Roman flanged tile; bits of Roman brick; and pieces of moulded stonework, which had formed part of Sir John Norbury's tomb, and of some late mullioned windows.

In conclusion I have to thank the Rector (the Rev. A. S. P. Blackburne), with Mrs. Bowen Buscarlet and her Steward, Major Nelson, for the very kind and sympathetic assistance they have given me during the investigations which have made it possible to write this supplementary paper. We owe it to Mrs. Buscarlet that the Twopenny drawings, here reproduced, have been photographed.