

MARKS ON EASTBOURNE OLD CHURCH

By GEO. M. ATKINSON

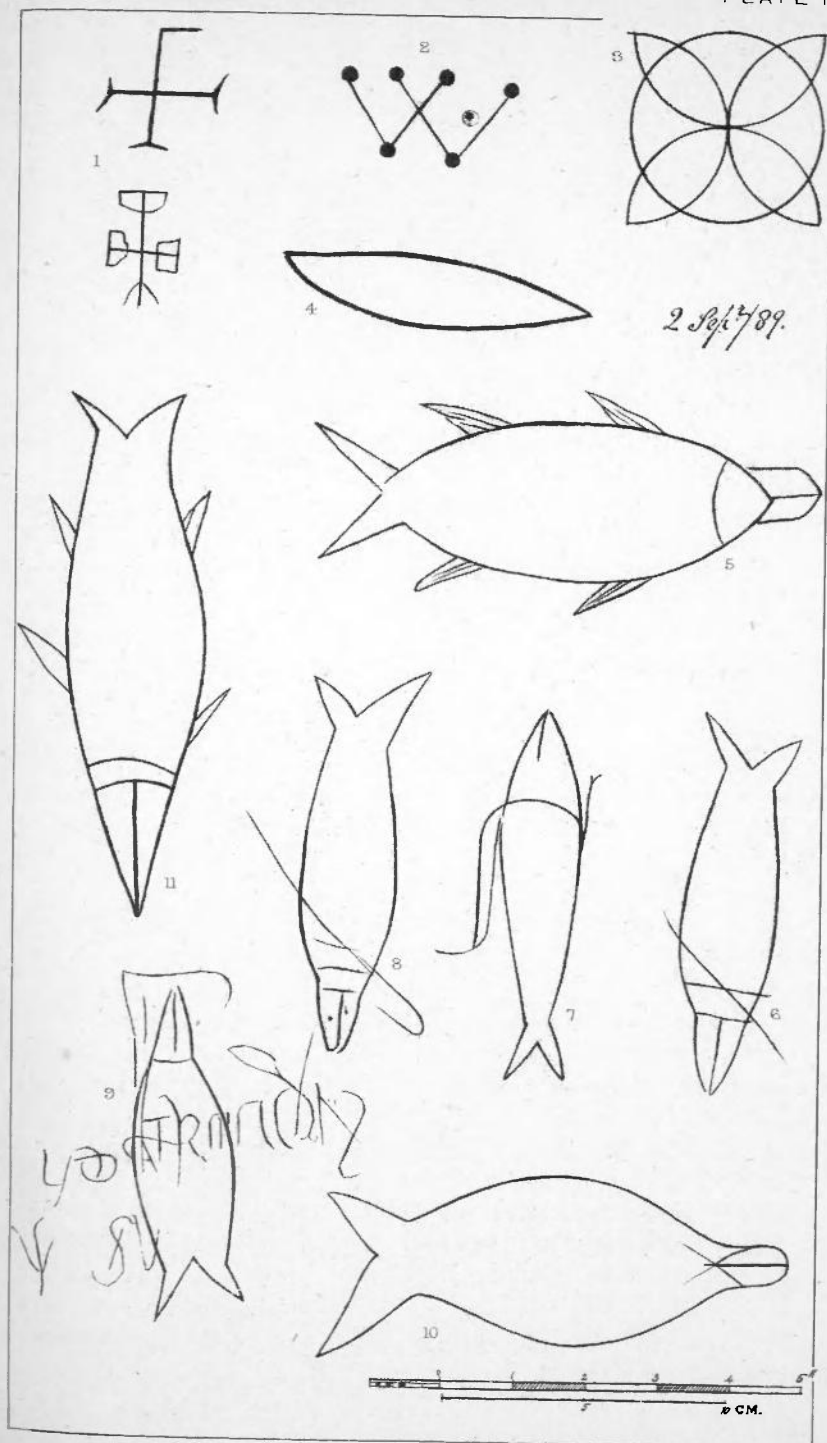
For some years past, when opportunity offered, I have collected the marks to be found on old churches and other buildings. These marks are supposed to be those of the Freemasons who assisted at the erection of the edifice. They may be divided into two classes. The mystical, such as have a hidden meaning; and the operative marks, indicating workmanship. The greater portion of these are constructed upon some geometrical figure, as a square, a circle, a triangle, or some portions of such figures, and in form resemble Phœnician letters. But on the Old Church at Eastbourne appear marks of rather an exceptional character. This church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. It belongs to the transitional period, 1145-90. (*Suss. Arch. Colls.* vol. xiv., p. 128), and is in plan, a central chancel with two side-chancels, a nave with two side-aisles, and a solid-looking tower at the west-end. The pillars in the nave are alternately circular and octagonal; the chancel-arch is circular (or elliptical), and ornamented with zigzags. The pointed arches in the chancel are also ornamented with zigzags. There is a vestry or sacristy built at the east-end, and a door communicating with it from the choir. The chancel is not in the same direction as the nave, it diverges a little, but the outside walls of the chancel and nave are straight. The fine old carved oak chancel-screen belongs to the decorated period, and there is evidence that it must, at one time, have formed an enclosure; it is now used to cut off a space for the choir. The stair that formerly communicated with the rood-loft is at the north side. There are south and north porches and doors, and a west-end entrance door in the

tower. A large hospice, a half-timbered barn, fish ponds, columbary, and conventical adjuncts afford an interesting study, though seldom observed by visitors to this charming seaside place.

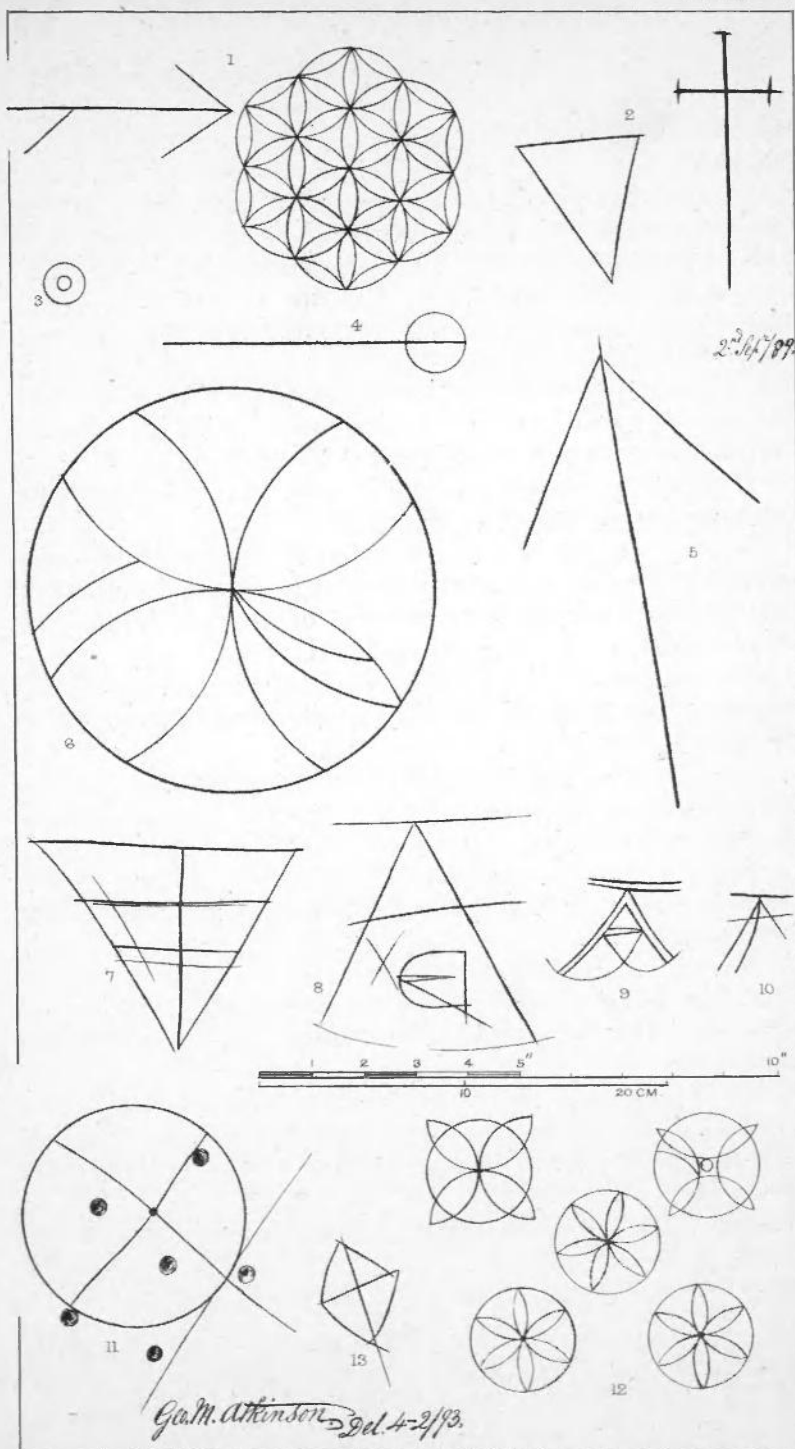
Thanks to the fact that the late Vicar, Canon Pitman, did not countenance the abominable craze for destruction, called restoration, several of the marks remained (Sept. 2nd, 1889), clear and distinct. The accompanying plates are reduced by photo-lithography from drawings taken from rubbings of the marks. I carefully indicate on the spot, with a red pencil, all white lines of the forms on the rubbings. From these it is easy to make tracings by marking a scale, thus preserving the relative size of each mark. Pl. I., Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, show fish form; in almost all cases representing a cetacean, something like a bottle-nosed whale, porpoise, or dolphin, in different positions, horizontal and vertical, and has a distinctly naturalistic treatment, with tail and fins, and in no way represents the vesica piscis or ichthus. This anagram was composed of Greek letters, but the emblem itself is only known on Latin monuments, a rather suggestive fact.

There is a portion of an inscription, in a kind of black letter character, crossing No. 9, Pl. I. This mark is on the southern side of the first pillar from the east on the south side of the chancel, near where the vestry-screen door now stands, and a portion of a rope is represented crossing several of the fish.

St. Peter is distinguished by a fish. A fish was an ancient symbol of baptism. We have the fish-god of the Assyrians, and the myth related of Jonah. The Church is dedicated to St. Mary, and the Star of the Sea is one of the attributes of the Virgin, who thence may have been credited with the dolphin of Venus. But these marks I think must be votive. If we consider the geological changes in the Weald of Sussex, the position of the Roman station Anderida founded on the coast at Pevensey, and the changes that have taken place in the Saxon harbour, which extended up as far as Polegate to Hydney, Lamport, and Mudhaven, now the centre of the town of Eastbourne, it is likely that a whale or shoal of porpoises may have been caught by the falling tide, and that these marks represent a tithe of fish.



West, Newman photo. lith.



West Newman photo.lith.

Pl. I., No. 1, represents a double cross mark, it was on the south side of the third pillar in the chancel; the ends of the lower mark (very fine scratches) are peculiar.

No. 2. An arrangement of pits and lines near the base of the chancel-arch pilaster, on the south side towards the nave. A schoolboy gave me an explanation of this mark it is a kind of contract mark, the tips of two fingers and the thumb of one boy being inserted in the pits, and the fingers and thumb of the other boy inserted into the other three pits. The contracting parties must have been kneeling on the original floor; a small niche or shrine, before which a lamp was suspended, is above this mark, and the slit behind it opened into a circular stair that perhaps communicated with the rood loft.

No. 3. On the second pillar, on the south side of the chancel, a circle with four interlacing arcs, or an aureole; above this mark evidence remains of a figure formed by seven circles similar to that on Pl. II., Fig. 1.

No. 4 is on the same pillar under the moulding of the capital; this mark is in a horizontal position, not a trace of $\epsilon\chi\theta\gamma\varsigma$ letters is to be found within it.

No. 5. On the eastern pillar on the south side of the chancel; 6 and 7, same place and several times repeated; 8, on the first pillar on the south side of the chancel.

No. 9. On the south side of the same pillar by the present vestry-screen door. This fish had an inscription written over it.

No. 10. On north-east pilaster. No. 11 Low down on the first pillar from the east on the north side of the chancel. The fish mark is only found in and about the chancel.¹

Pl. II., Fig. 1. On the third pillar from the east on the north side of the nave, a remarkable arrangement of seven interlaced circles, and an arrow, whatever the meaning may be. There are somewhat similar geometrical figures in Celtic Art, and children in the South of Ireland, on the 17th of March, decorate their caps with a piece of paper on which a figure formed like the central portion of this

¹ Dr. W. H. Curtis has kindly sent me a rubbing of a similar fish mark from Canterbury Cathedral; and Mr. H.

Michell-Whitley informs me that similar marks are found on other of the Sussex churches.

mark is drawn and rudely painted. It is called a St. Patrick's Cross.

The late Rev. Greville Chester, in our *Journal*, vol. xlvii., p. 140, 1890, draws attention to some sculptures of an Oriental design at Bredwardine and Moccas Churches, Herefordshire, resembling those found on stone sarcophagi discovered at Jerusalem by the Palestine Exploration Fund. The likeness between these is so close that I think there must be some significance in the form.

Nos. 3 and 4, are on the same pillar; also on the west face large arrows, nine inches long. (Fig. 5), pointing upwards (this is a frequently occurring mark, and found on Indian Temples). No. 13 is also found on buildings in nearly every country.

No. 2. A cross and triangle on the first octagonal pillar on the south side of the nave.

No. 6. This form is on the third pillar on the north side of the nave (the circle is nearly eight inches in diameter), it is possibly a consecration or dedicatory cross; near it are some scratches of shields, etc.

No. 7. This is on the second pillar from the east on the south side of the nave; near it is another inscription, similar in character to that over the fish, Pl. I., No. 9.

Nos. 8, 9, 10, are on the third pillar, on the south side of the nave.

No. 11 is on the west side of the fourth pillar on the south side of the nave. The tangent line is doubtful, as also is the pit near it.

12. Near the base of the fourth pillar from the east on the north side of the nave, is a group of five circles with intersecting arcs, some of which are nearly effaced. The small mark No. 13 is near this group.

There are several other marks about the church; their study would well repay anyone with time to devote to the subject.