

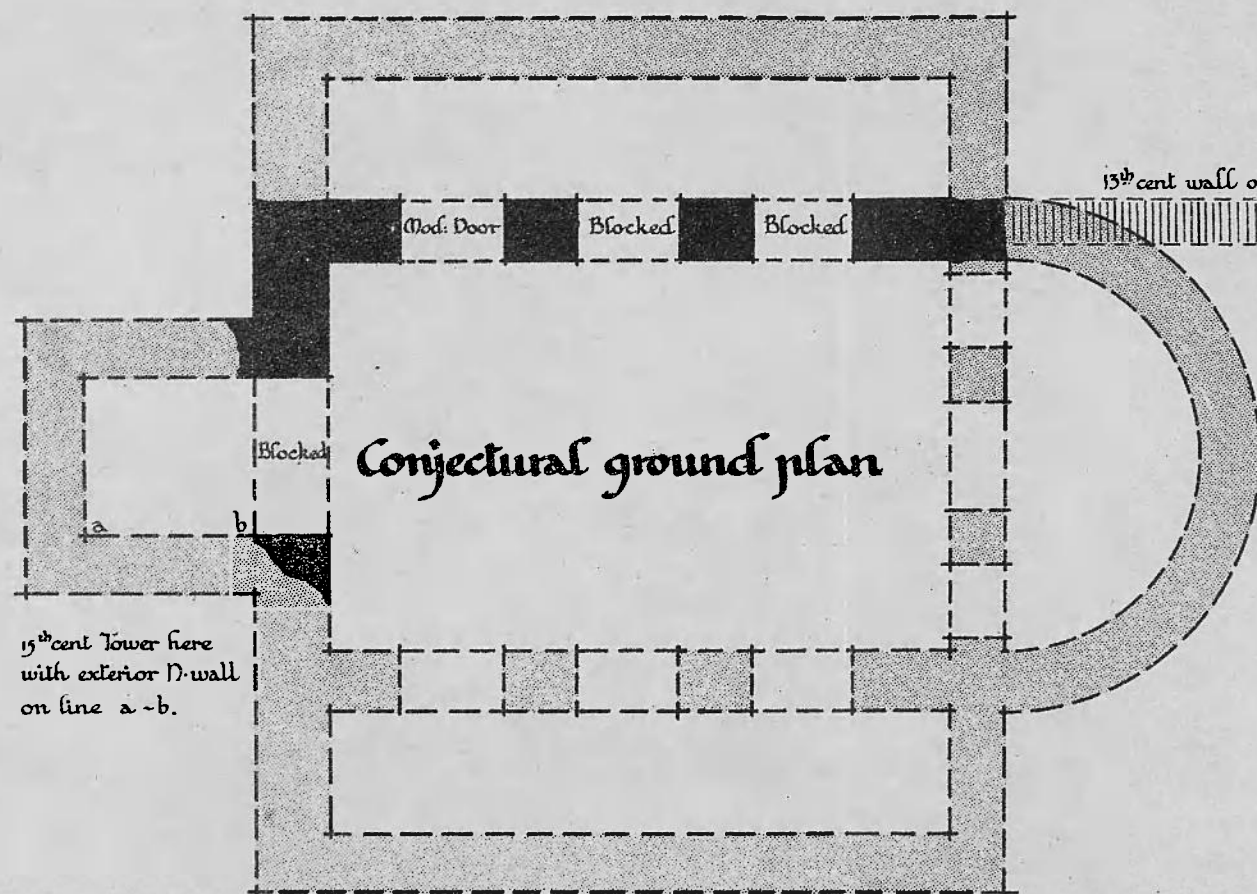
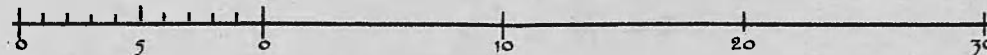
THE PRE-CONQUEST CHURCH AT LYDD, KENT.

By F. C. ELLISTON ERWOOD.

The remarkable fragment of a pre-Conquest church at Lydd on Romney Marsh, Kent, has seemingly never had adequate treatment. The character of the remains was evidently unrecognised by Canon Scott Robertson when he wrote his account of Lydd church in *Arch. Cant.* xiii, pp. 427-450, for he describes the architectural features hereafter dealt with as a mural arcade of late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century work. As the whole of the interior details were then obscured by thick plaster, perhaps this is excusable. The discovery of these vestiges of an early church, and their recognition as such, was due to the late Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite. In the latter of his two papers on Saxon church building (*Arch. Journ.* lv, pp. 343-344) he gives a fairly detailed account of the remains, accompanied by a plan on a small scale, but he admittedly makes no attempt to reconstruct or suggest the original form of the church, or to give a date for the building. Professor Baldwin Brown, in the second volume of *Arts in Early England*, pp. 245-246, deals briefly with this building, as one of the four extant pre-Conquest aisled churches in this country—Brixworth, Northants; Reculver, Kent; and Wing, Bucks, being the others. He gives a plan of the walls in question together with elevations and sections, though again on a small scale. He does not describe in detail the fabric, nor does he suggest any original plan for the church. He does, however, fit the building into his chronological scheme, assigning it to the ninth or tenth century. It is the purpose of this paper to give a comprehensive account of the remains as they exist at present, and to make an endeavour to place this interesting building, whose value as an early Christian monument is incontestable, in its proper architectural relationship with other buildings of like character, and to give it a place in the line of development of pre-Conquest architecture. This is all the more necessary as since the

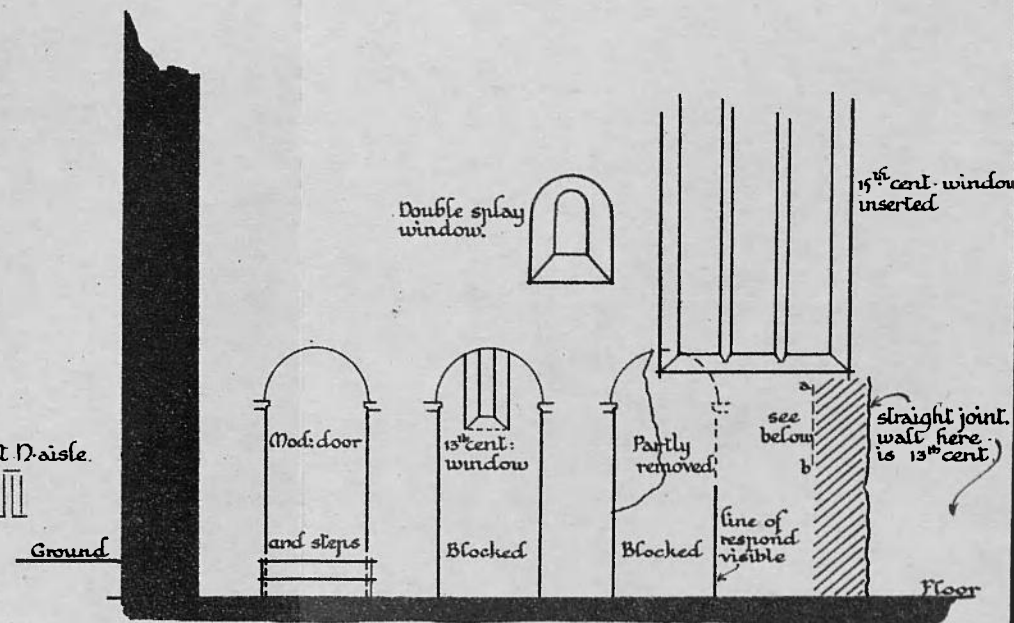
Lydd, Kent. Preconquest Church.

Scale of feet.



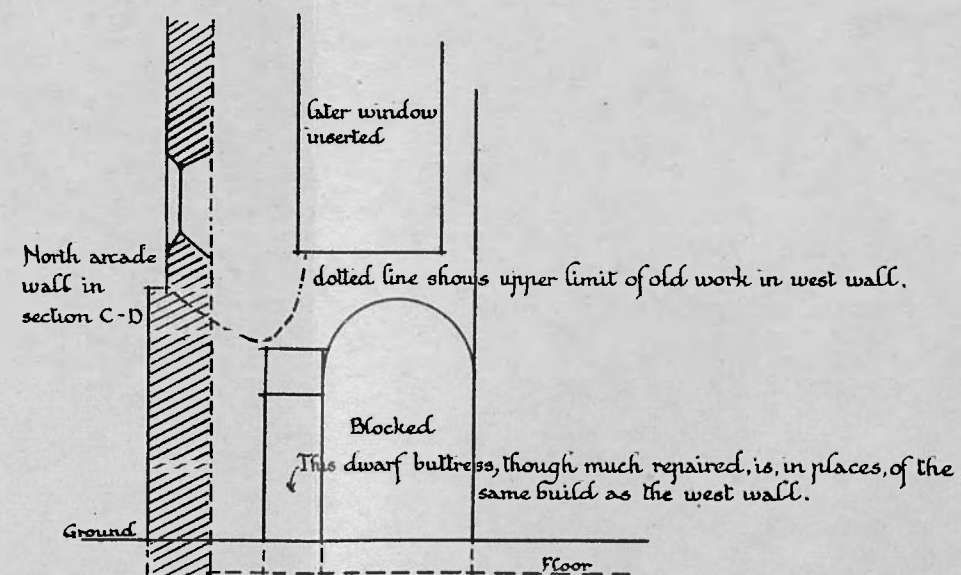
Conjectural ground plan

Preconquest work.
Do, conjectural.



Interior Elevation, north arcade.

At a-b (above) are distinct signs of an internal angle and a return wall.



Exterior Elevation, west wall.

church was seen by Messrs. Micklethwaite and Brown, the greater part of the plaster has been stripped from the walls and the fabric exposed to view. This was done in 1907. No attempt is made to pronounce a final judgment, which would only be possible after complete excavation both within and without the present church. As this excavation seems unlikely to occur in the near future, the present paper may be justified.

Lydd church of to-day is a large, imposing structure of considerable interest, ranking perhaps only second in interest and importance, among the ecclesiastical buildings of Romney Marsh, to that of New Romney. Its general architectural history has been described (without a plan) by Canon Scott Robertson in the paper in *Arch. Cant.* already mentioned, but there is still plenty of work to be done before the history of the fabric is quite clear. It is not proposed, however, to deal with any of the medieval features of the church, but to confine this enquiry to what is, in all probability, a fragment of the first church erected on this site.

The western portion of the north wall of the north aisle is marked off from the rest, by a setback of about 9 inches, 28 feet from the west end. The whole of this stretch of walling has been stripped of the thick plaster that covered it, and it is evident that at some early period it was pierced by three arches. Two of these are now blocked—the westernmost has been opened out, fitted with a modern wooden door-frame, and serves as an entrance. The blocking of the eastern arch seems to have been of two periods. It is evident from the middle arch that at first the arches were only filled in to within 6 inches of the south face of the adjacent piers. In this filling was inserted a thirteenth-century (?) window, which was subsequently blocked. As it is now, the middle arch preserves the thirteenth-century aspect, while the eastern arch, which was made flush with the rest of the wall when the fifteenth-century window above was inserted, has only the upper western portion of the later filling removed, the rest of the blocking being still in place. The head of this arch and the upper part of its eastern respond have been broken away in inserting the window just referred to, but near the floor, the straight joint, giving the line of the

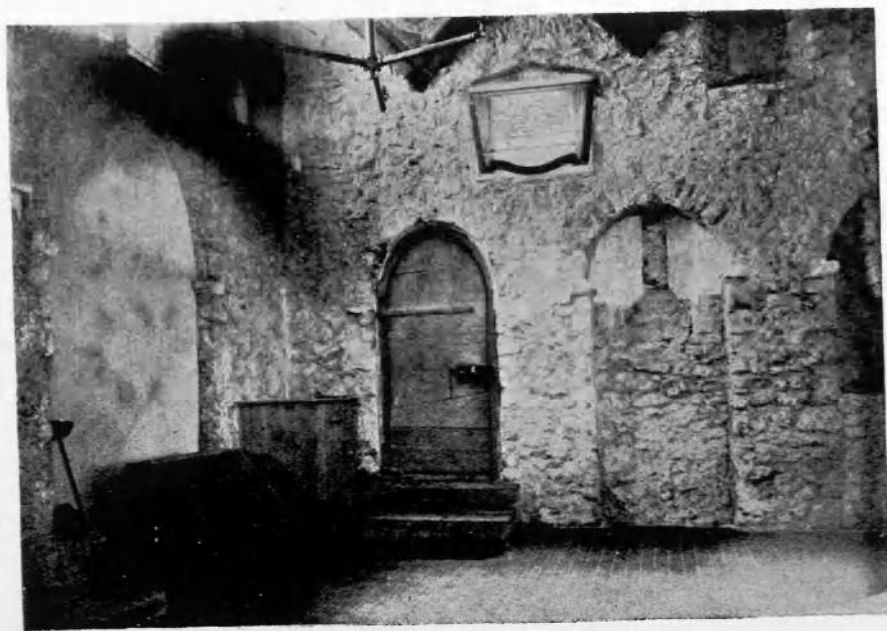
respond, is quite evident. These arches are 4 ft. 4 in. wide and 10 ft. 3 in. high, with semicircular heads, which are slightly wider than the distance between the responds. The piers are 3 ft. wide, and the arches spring from imposts cut from slabs of stone 4 inches thick. These imposts have roughly hollowed mouldings, though in the case of the eastern impost of the central arch this mould is distinctly roughed out with two straight cuts, meeting at an obtuse angle. Together with two or three stones immediately below them, the impost-blocks are the only stones which give any indication of having been worked. The remainder of the walling consists for the most part of irregular masses of ragstone, with, here and there, fragments of tile, with no attempt at coursing. The arches have been turned in flat, irregular pieces of rag, used voussoir-wise, in what may be described as 'tile technique.' The rough texture of the wall was covered with thick plaster, now nearly all removed, save portions on the soffits of the arches.

Beyond the east respond of the easternmost arch extends a stretch of wall about 6 ft. 3 in. long. Four feet of this is the original wall face—original, that is, without the plaster; the remaining part is evidently the toothing of a return wall, which would thus have been 2 ft. 3 in. thick. Just below the easternmost light of the inserted fifteenth-century window are obvious signs (see a-b interior elevation, north arcade, fig. 1) where three squared stones have been torn out. These were the interior quoins of this return wall. Beyond this, the old wall ends abruptly, the continuation being thinner and of later date.

From this it is evident that the wall represents a blocked arcade of three arches with two free piers, the whole length of the arcade being preserved. Above the eastern pier is the interior splay of a double-splay, circular-headed window, 4 ft. 6 in. high and 3 ft. 6 in. wide, with the lower edge of the splay 13 ft. above the floor. The window opening is 2 ft. 8 in. by 1 ft. 5 in. with inclined jambs, but these details are not necessarily ancient, as the window has been obviously plastered and patched. This light is the sole survivor of a range of three similar windows, the eastern of which was totally destroyed when the fifteenth-century



NO. 1. LYDD CHURCH, KENT: EXTERIOR OF SAXON CHURCH, NORTH-WEST CORNER OF NORTH AISLE.



NO. 2. INTERIOR OF SAXON CHURCH, SHOWING NAVE ARCADE AND WESTERN ARCH.

window was inserted. The western light is probably still concealed beneath the memorial tablets and hatchments, though Mr. Finn took these down and carefully examined the wall for evidence of this window, but without success. As a matter of fact, there is a somewhat close similarity between the texture of the old work and of the filling that renders a differentiation difficult. If anything, the mortar of the early work is more pebbly.

From the outside, many of these features are observable : the western arch, serving as an entrance, is obscured under an atrocious cement rendering : the position of the middle arch is marked by the few stones removed from the blocking to show the head of the arch, while part of the third arch is discernible, especially at the foot of the wall, if the rank grass be removed.

Above the arcade the wall is set back about 9 inches and continues thinner. The exterior opening of the double-splay window is partly opened out and preserves in more or less degree the original proportions, though the lower splay has been altered, probably at the time when the setback was filled in with cement to render the wall weather-proof (see plate 1, no. 1, and fig. 1).

Just a little eastward of this early window, the whole of the character of the wall is changed owing to the insertion of the later window, and it is almost impossible to detect the termination of the early walling on the exterior face. The west quoin of this wall is not original ; it is quite evident that something has been removed, and the angle made good with other stones.

Returning to the interior of the church, the west wall of the present aisle demands attention. Here the main feature is a large arch, of similar architectural character to those that form the arcade—but of different proportions. It is 6 ft. 6 in. wide and 11 ft. 5 in. high. The imposts are of the same stepped character, and though the arch is now blocked, it evidently went right through the wall, as the head is apparent on the exterior. Presuming, as did Mr. Micklethwaite, that this arch is in the centre of the old nave, it gives this an internal width of about 16 feet. The south jamb and part of the wall beyond are original, but the erection of a tower *circa* 1450 has slightly obscured the issue, as it has resulted

in the removal of all traces of the return wall and arcade on the south.

On the exterior, features of greater interest appear. In the first place, the upper part of the wall has been rebuilt. The dotted line on the exterior elevation (see fig. 1) shows the limit of the old work. But the most important feature is the cement-rendered buttress. This is so small and so obviously useless as a support, that some reason must be found for its existence. Micklethwaite neither shows nor mentions it; Baldwin Brown shows it as entirely modern and overlapping the jamb of the western arch. Now I think that careful measurement and observation will show that the south face of this buttress and the north jamb of the arch are in one and the same straight line. Moreover, the part of this projection that is obviously old is of the same build as the rest of the west wall (see plate 1, no. 1). In short, we have here the fragment of a return wall extended westwards to form the north wall of an annexe of some kind, which was afterwards destroyed and the ragged end of the wall smoothed up to form a perfectly useless buttress. Professor Brown also shows the present tower as overlapping the south respond of the western arch. This may be, but I think that the north wall of the tower is built on the line of the older wall, if not actually on the footings themselves.

Mr. Arthur Finn, F.S.A., to whom I am greatly indebted for much assistance and hospitality, and who is responsible for revealing all that has been revealed, made some slight excavations at the west end, but reports (I did not see the results personally) that the area at the west end was chiefly sand and shingle with little loose stone, a few bones and no foundations, the dwarf buttress being likewise without footings. This is, of course, what is quite likely to appear. At the building of the tower, the surrounding area would be thoroughly cleared; in fact, all that was left was the slight ragged toothing, and when, as was probable, a slight crack showed in the filling of the arch, this was taken as evidence of a previously existing buttress, which was therefore 'restored.'

This completes the detailed description of the extant remains, save that in various parts of the interior walling are curious holes about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter and of varying

depth, some of which had been plugged with wood. They are situated :

1. Impost block, north side of west arch, in the hollow.
2. West side of first arch (present doorway) on south face of first stone below impost. This stone is covered with rough diagonal tooling and the hole contained a wooden plug.
3. East side of the same arch, but about 10 inches below the corresponding hole opposite.
4. East side of middle arch, 4 ft. 8 in. from the floor.

These holes are at least of the same age as the wall, as nos. 2 and 3 were covered with the remains of the contemporary plaster, which I removed to clear the holes. From the lack of uniformity of level it is difficult to imagine they held curtain supports. It may be that the stones are re-used material from elsewhere, possibly of Roman origin.

It is evident, therefore, from the preceding account, that we have the complete north arcade wall and the greater part of the west wall of an aisled basilican church. So much Mr. Micklethwaite recognised, and in his plan indicated it.

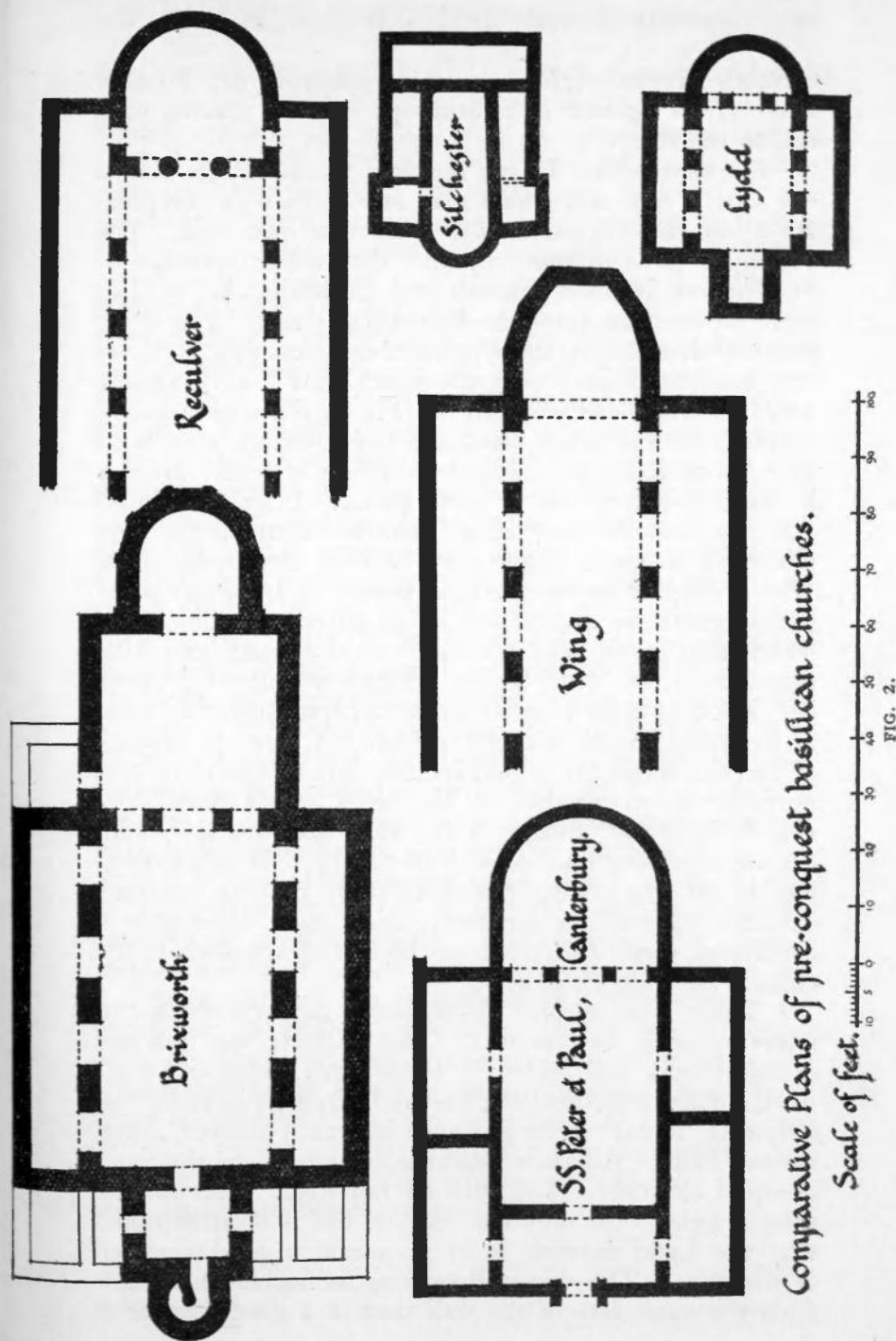
The plan (fig. 1) accompanying this paper shows the existing parts in solid black—the conjectural portions being in tint. It remains, therefore, to justify the reconstruction. The aisles are obviously indicated. The arcade must have given on to an aisle, and the setback remaining on the exterior of the wall shows clearly where the aisle-roof rested. Above the roof a range of three (?) double-splay windows formed a clerestory which lit the somewhat small and dark nave. The width of the aisle is unknown; it might be recovered by excavation.

Professor Baldwin Brown gives only four aisled pre-Conquest churches as possessing architectural evidence of their early form, though there are others whose basilican plan can be presumed from documentary sources. Reculver, though certainly aisled at one period (and that period certainly pre-Conquest) was not so planned at the first. Its early form was rather like St. Pancras, Canterbury, with *porticus* north and south. Therefore the only undoubted aisled churches are those of Brixworth, Wing and Lydd.

Comparative plans of these and others are given (fig. 2) from which several interesting points may be noted. First, the diminutive size of Lydd is such that it could almost be stowed away inside the magnificent and unique nave of Brixworth. On the other hand it is only a trifle larger than Silchester. None of the architectural details at Lydd possess the craftsmanship displayed at Brixworth, though it is quite likely that if the plaster were stripped from the piers and arches at Wing, a parallel technique might be found. Four arches form the arcade at both Brixworth and Wing, but only three are found at Lydd, with the result that the proportions differ greatly from the other examples in that the width of the nave and aisles over all is greater than the length of the nave. The addition of another arch at Lydd would bring it to more normal proportions, and though at first I thought it might be possible to interpret the evidence as indicating the existence of another arch, I fear it is out of the question. The length of the nave is therefore absolutely fixed. The chancel I have shown apsidal for the following reasons :

1. It seems to be the characteristic eastern termination of churches of this and allied character, especially in the south. For the same reason I have indicated a triple arcade in front of the chancel, though, from the existence of a wide arch at the west end, there is no reason why a similar arch should not have formed the chancel arch.
2. The only reason for the wall terminating as it does now, with a broken end, must be found in the probability that the wall curved from here eastwards and was thus unusable. As long as the wall remained straight, it could be, and was, used as part of the new aisle. As soon as it curved it was removed, and the continuation carried out as it remains to-day.

Mr. Micklethwaite mentions that the sexton told him of a vault and some walls below the floor, somewhere near the east end of the early work. It is only right to add that Mr. Finn discredits the existence of these alleged foundations. He was continually in the church during the time the re-paving was being carried out, and would



Comparative Plans of pre-conquest basilican churches.

Scale of feet.

FIG. 2.

certainly have known of any such being discovered. Possibly some vaults opened in another part of the church gave rise to the story.

The feature that I have ventured to add to the plan is one that is new and which may not be entirely accepted. It is the rectangular addition at the west end. The analogy I have in mind is with the western porches at St. Pancras, Monkwearmouth and Corbridge, rather than with the western tower at Brixworth, though it is quite possible that, as in the two northern examples, a tower may have been built over the porch. As I have already noted, excavations have been made here, but with negative results. On the other hand, the large western arch must have given access to a western building of some sort: it is much too large for a mere portal. I feel convinced that the dwarf buttress above described contains the only remaining fragment of the north wall of this forebuilding. Where original mortar can be found, it is of the same pebbly character as that in the admittedly genuine wall. There may have been an apse at this west end (the fragment is too short to say whether it curved or not). Mr. Micklethwaite suggests either a baptistery or an altar at the west, on the analogy of Silchester. In the absence of further details, it is perhaps hopeless to speculate, but north or south porches to the aisles would have been very insignificant, owing to the fact that the aisle walls cannot have been much over 8 feet high. Though a doorway is not impossible, it is more likely that an imposing entrance was built at the west, which, from topographical conditions, seems to have been the line of approach to the church, as it is even now.

There remains only to suggest a date to which this structure may be assigned. The characteristic features of late work are absent. These are: long-and-short work, double windows with mid-wall shafts, pilaster strips, stripwork round openings, and internally-splayed, long, narrow loops. All these features are absent in the early group of churches. The walls are not lofty. The double-splayed light is the only late feature, but it must be noted that the Lydd example is by no means a good specimen of the type. The mid-wall opening is not much further from the outer face of the wall than in a good number of

twelfth-century churches. It is certainly double-splayed, but the outer splay is comparatively slight and, moreover, almost certainly the window does not preserve its original form. A western porch or tower is not of necessity a late sign, and the fact that the arches are wider than the clearance between the responds, though perhaps of Roman origin, may indicate any date. It is found at Wing. Lydd walls are thicker than the average late Saxon walls. From documentary evidence, Lydd comes into notice towards the end of the eighth century. It was in existence earlier, but was probably not much more than a few marshmen's dwellings on the slight eminence (then probably an island) on which the present town is built. The first notice is found in Eadbriht's charter of A.D. 741 wherein 'pasture for 150 beasts near the marsh which is called Bisceopeswic' [in Lydd] is mentioned.¹ In A.D. 774 Offa of Mercia granted to Jaenberht, archbishop of Canterbury, '3 ploughlands or sulings of Merscware land called Hludum,'² and then in A.D. 790 appears a strange entry in the A.S. Chronicle (though not in all MSS.) recording that Aethelheard succeeded to the primacy on the death of Jaenberht. He is described as abbot of the monastery of 'Hlud.'³ This has been variously located at Louth, Lincoln, and Luddesdown and Lydd in Kent. Unfortunately, philological grounds make it unlikely that Lydd is the spot, otherwise something more definite might have been deduced. In A.D. 893 the Danes sailed up the Rother to Appledore, passing Lydd, which no doubt they sacked. Thus it may be assumed that two dates for the church are possible. Either the building was erected in the latter part of the eighth century, when Lydd was a definite part of the possessions of Christ Church (in which case the church survived the Danish raid) or a later date, say the beginning of the tenth century, after the Danish invasion. Professor Brown accepts these limits when he classifies the edifice as either 'B' (A.D. 800-950) or 'C.I' (tenth century). Brixworth in its earliest form dates from about A.D. 680. Wing, on the other hand, is most likely late tenth century.

¹ Kemble, *Codex Dipl.* nos. 86, 122 and 1003; Burrows, *Cinque Ports*, p. 14; Birch, *Cart. Sax.* p. 349.

² Burrows, *op. cit.* p. 14; McClure, *English Place Names*, pp. 215-216.

³ McClure, *op. cit.* p. 235 and note i.

There seems to be no work in the rest of Lydd church earlier than the thirteenth century other than the pre-Conquest building, and it is quite within reason to suppose this tiny structure survived practically complete till the enlargement of the church *circ.* 1238, which date may also mark the commencement of the commercial importance and prosperity of the town. Some tradition of the sanctity of the earlier building, or of its associations, probably lingered, so that the whole of the little church was not destroyed, but part of the fabric incorporated to preserve the site.

It is of importance also to note that the charter of 741 mentioned above also refers to the existence of an oratory dedicated to St. Martin, in what is now New Romney.

It seems quite likely that the church at Lydd may have been erected at a somewhat later date to serve those in Denge Marsh who were separated from St. Martin's by the old course of the River Rother. Denge Marsh was inned during the latter part of the eighth century, as was the district known as Westbrook, and these dates may be taken as indicating the period at which the need for the cure of souls became a matter of urgency.

Reviewing the evidence as we have it to-day, from the general absence of late Saxon features, and from the probabilities indicated by the documentary evidence, the early church at Lydd may be reasonably assigned to the latter part of the eighth or the earlier part of the ninth century, say between A.D. 775 and 825.