

WORTH CHURCH, FROM THE SOUTH-EAST, AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY DR. DIAMOND.

ON THE CHURCH AT WORTH.

BY W. S. WALFORD, ESQ., F.S.A.

THE village of Worth is in the hundred of Buttinghill. The parish is extensive in proportion to the population. church stands about a mile eastward of the Three Bridges station on the London and Brighton Railway. It has long been regarded as an object of curiosity, and supposed by some to be very old; by others to occupy an ancient site, and to be, in part at least, of rare antiquity. When Sir W. Burrell visited it in 1775, his attention was arrested by the chancel arch, which he thought much older than the rest of the building. In more recent times, an antiquity, which I apprehend it would be very difficult to prove, has sometimes been claimed, if not for the building itself, yet for the site, as that of a very early Anglo-Saxon church. The history of churches in this country, even when they are in all probability of earlier date than the Conquest, can rarely be carried back beyond the compilation of Domesday. Unfortunately for my present subject, no mention of Worth-neither of the church, nor even of the place—can be discovered in that record. We have therefore no evidence from it as to whether a church did or did not exist there at that time. The non-mention in Domesday of a church at any particular place is not conclusive that there was not one. It was no part of the design of that survey to comprise the churches. In some parts of it they are entered; in others they seem uniformly omitted, unless they had land belonging to them which fell within the inquiry of the Conqueror's commissioners. However in this case, though other Sussex churches are given, yet, since none of the lands in the parish can be identified, that no notice of the church can be discovered need not excite any doubt as to the

existence of one, if it can be made probable by other means. The earliest mention of a church at Worth, that I have met with, is in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas (c. 1291), but doubtless it had then been built many years.¹ The name of the place is Anglo-Saxon, and probably Saxon-English also. It signified a collection of houses, a street, a village, and sometimes a principal residence with inferior houses about it for dependents, as was most likely the meaning in this instance. To such a residence a considerable quantity of land would be attached. Though the word occurs elsewhere alone as the name of a parish, it has almost universally some distinctive prefix to make it specific. With many such names of places all are familiar. It would be too much to infer an Anglo-Saxon origin for the parish from this designation. It was a portion of a considerable forest which extended into other parishes. The district is still a forest country, pleasantly diversified with hill and valley; and it is not improbable that some of the wooded spots within it are parts of the primeval bush, which, though often invaded by the axe, have never been broken by the ploughshare, or clothed with herbage. Such a country was well adapted for the pleasures of the chase, and some Saxon *eorl* may very probably have fixed his abode at Worth. That its lords in somewhat later times took such pastime there we are not left to conjecture. Its immediate possessor after the Conquest is not certainly known, but it most likely soon became part of the honour or barony of Lewes. I have not found any mention of it even in the twelfth century. But when John de Warenne Earl of Surrey was summoned before the Justices in Eyre at Chichester in the 7 Edw. I (1278) to show by what authority he exercised rights of free warren and free chase in Worth, Ditchling, Claydon, Cuckfield, and a great many other places in Sussex, he pleaded that his father, William de Warenne Earl of Surrey, had held the barony and honour of Lewes, to which these rights were annexed, and had died seized of them, and that he, Earl John, was his heir, but, being under age at his father's death, they had come into the hands of the king during his minority; yet they were given up to him after he came of age, and he had done homage for them to the king. This plea was

¹ See note 3, next page.

allowed.² It is needless to add that the honour and barony of Lewes were in the De Warennes long before Earl William's time. He succeeded his father, the former earl, in 1202, and died in 1240, leaving his son Earl John a minor of the age of five years.3 In the course of those proceedings the earl stated that he had parks at Worth, Cuckfield, and Ditchling, and inquired whether the king claimed anything in them; but his right to them was admitted by the counsel for the crown. He appears to have kept his parks and warrens so well stocked with game, that complaints were made by the neighbours of the devastation of their corn.⁴ Other acts are recorded which exhibit him as a very jealous guardian of his own forest rights, though by no means duly mindful of those of others. It is remarkable that in the proceedings against him, as they are enrolled among the Placita de Quo Warranto, Worth stands first, as if the most important of the numerous places in which he exercised the rights of free warren and chase, and also of those in which he had parks. The earl, whose title was so called in question, died in 1304, and was succeeded by his grandson John, the last earl of the name of Warenne; who died without legitimate issue in 1347, seized of the manor of Worth, leaving his sister Alice, wife of Edmund Fitz-Alan Earl of Arundel, his heir; to which family of Fitz-Alan this manor and many others held by him in Sussex eventually passed, notwithstanding an arrangement that led to the surrender of them to the crown in 9 Edward II. The whole of the parish did not belong to this earl, since we find Sir Ralph Cobham, in 19 Edward II, died seized of a messuage and forty acres of land in it. In the Returns of the Lords of Townships, &c., for the purpose of effecting the military levies in 9 Edward II, Worth and Crawley (an adjoining parish) are associated, and the Earl of Surrey (De Warenne), Margaret wife of Michael Poining, and Giles de Plaiz, are named as the

pended about the church at Worth. He has kindly searched several times for the document, but all his endeavours, as well as my own, to discover it have been unsuccessful. The minority was in all probability that of this Earl John, which extended from 1240 to 1256.

² Placita de Quo Warranto, p. 750-1.
³ William Durrant Cooper, Esq., has informed me that there is in some volume of the Burrell Collections a copy of an inquisition taken during the minority of one of the De Warennes, Earls of Surrey, in the return to which is comprised an account of his forests, and mention is made in it of timber having been ex-

⁴ Rot. Hundred, ii, p. 210.

lords and lady; but it does not appear that either of the last

two had anything in Worth.

To revert to the church; since both historical and documentary testimony fails us for establishing its date, let us see what kind of a building it is, and what evidence is furnished by itself of the time of its erection. Having carefully inspected it, and had the assistance of some architectural drawings which have been made for the Society by Mr. F. T. Dollman, and of some photographs by Dr. Diamond, an honorary member, who is well known for his obliging readiness to give to the cause of archæology the aid of his surpassing skill in this new art, I will endeavour to present a more complete description of this church than has, I believe, yet appeared. It may be premised that it stands in a spacious churchyard, which is entered from the north-west by a lichgate of some antiquity. Owing perhaps to the extent of the yard, and to the paucity of inhabitants in past times, there has been no remarkable accumulation of earth about the church, as is sometimes found to be the case where a church is of great age, or occupies a very old site.

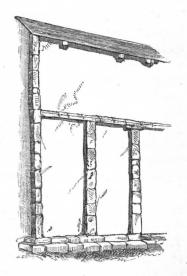
The church is cruciform; consisting of a nave, with north and south transepts, and a chancel, semi-circular at the east end, and longer than is commonly found in Norman churches in proportion to the nave. (See plan, opposite p. 241.) There is no aisle or tower, nor any indication of there ever having been any. Over the north transept has been erected a wooden bell-chamber, rising into a dwarf shingled spire, which rests on four wooden uprights or supports within, and gives it the appearance of a low tower. The walls of the nave and transepts are covered with plaster, both within and without; and the chancel is also plastered within, but without it is covered with thick whitewash, and appears to be built of roughly squared stones or rubble; and the walls of the whole church are most likely of the same material. Externally the nave and transepts have stone quoins, except at the north-west corner of the former, where a buttress has been erected.⁵ These are of what may

be called long-and-short work; but the difference between the stones in size is not so great, nor the alternations of long

⁵ Though indicated in the plan, no part of the north-west quoin, if it exist, is now visible.

and short so regular, as are commonly found in work to which that name is applied. More remarkable than these are a stringcourse and some pilasters. The stringcourse is now defective, but was once carried, with little interruption, round the whole building, at rather more than half the height of the walls; below this, and supporting it, while they rest on a projecting double course of stone now imperfect, but once probably running also round the building, and forming a base near the ground, are the pilasters, each about 14 inches wide by 3 deep, of long-and-short work as irregular as the quoins; and there are some fragments of others, as if the like had formerly existed all round at intervals of from five to six

feet. The base in two stages, the upper receding, merits a passing remark; for, rude as it is, it reminds us of the graduated plinths in classical architecture, from which it may have been derived through debased examples that once existed in this country, whether executed during the Roman occupation, or by the followers of Augustine. The situations of the pilasters of which there are any remains and the stone base are shown on the plan, and a cut of the two pilasters near the south-west corner is here given. No certain trace of any pilaster appears

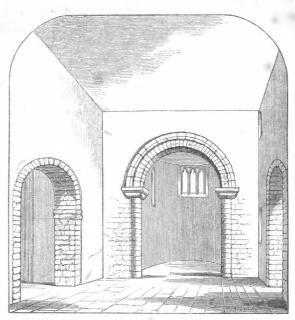


above the stringcourse. The walls of the chancel are lower than those of the nave; but the roof is higher, being of sharper pitch. The stringcourse of the chancel is also proportionately lower (about sixteen inches) than that of the nave: on the latter it is chamfered, while on the former it appears to have been flat. Small portions only of it now remain on the chancel: these are on the south and the northeast sides. The stringcourse on each transept is about its own width lower than that on the nave, and flat like that on the chancel; and from it the roofs of the transepts spring, so

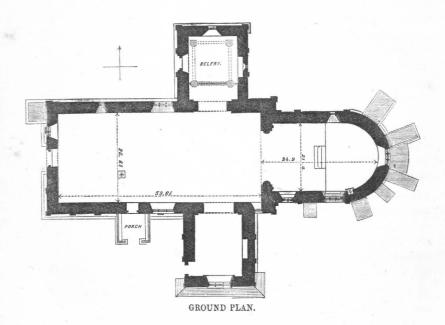
that, exclusively of the bell-chamber and spire, they are both much lower than the nave. The present roofs of the whole building are comparatively modern, and slated with common slates, except of course the spire. Beside the buttress erected at the west end, flush with the north-west corner of the nave, in consequence probably of some settlement, there are no less than six modern buttresses about the east end, three of stone and three of brick, disfiguring the chancel; as if on two occasions apprehensions had prevailed as to its safety: and the wall under the east window, for a considerable height. has the additional support of a mass of masonry, battering or sloping outwards nearly six feet at the base. This probably is of the same date as the stone buttresses, between two of which it is placed. At the south end of the south transept is a somewhat similar, though smaller, mass of masonry of earlier date than that just mentioned. Some have supposed it to be part of the original foundation. But the quoins there are of later date than the rest, and afford a strong inference that the south end of that transept has been rebuilt. It is therefore more probable that this masonry was an addition when that repair was executed. To such rough work it is difficult, if not impossible, to assign a date within any moderate limits. The buttresses and masses of masonry are indicated on the plan in linear shading.

There are two ancient doorways: one at the west end, and another, much smaller, on the south side of the nave. These are in the same style, and both are manifestly insertions. Their forms and mouldings are alike, and seem referable to the early part of the fourteenth century. No unquestionable trace of any other doorway remains visible, but the plaster within and without may fully account for this. Mr. Hussey has mentioned some traces of a small round-headed doorway, now filled up, as existing on the exterior between the south door and the west end.⁶ There is, from some cause, a faint semicircular mark on the plaster, such as the head of a gravestone placed against it might have left; but I question whether any would be found in the masonry. Two stone brackets, one on each side of the west door, indicate that it

⁶ Notes on Churches in Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, p. 308.



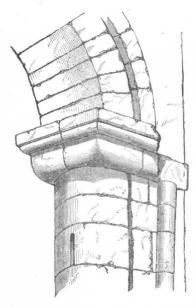
INTERIOR, LOOKING EAST, PEWING, &c. REMOVED.



once had a porch: the south door has still one of wood, but

of no great antiquity.

Within the walls, the nave is $59\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $26\frac{1}{2}$, and the chancel, including the archway connecting it with the nave. is 34 feet 9 inches by 21 feet. The chancel arch is very effective. both from its size and its proportions. It is 14 feet 1 inch in span, semicircular, and of a single order, measuring at its highest point from the floor 22 feet 5\frac{3}{4} inches. (See print opposite.) It springs, at the height of about 15½ feet. from massive semicircular jambs or piers, with remarkable imposts



or capitals, each consisting of a flat cushion and a square abacus, with an intervening quarter-round moulding. (See the above cut.)⁷ On the western face of it was a double square hood-moulding, the under member being in lower relief than the upper; of this member (the upper) only a small portion next the north capital remains. The eastern face has a single square hood-moulding, equal in width to the double one on the other. On the same face (i.e., the eastern) is a bold half-

this capital to Alexander Nesbitt, Esq., whose pencil furnished the drawing of

⁷ We are indebted for the drawing of the remains of the ancient manor-house at Crowhurst engraved in Vol. VII.

round moulding, descending from each capital to the floor. The piers and arch are about three feet thick, exclusive of mouldings, and the stones of which they are constructed extend through the whole thickness. The work is deficient in the neatness and regularity which are characteristic of Norman masonry. There is a want of parallelism and similarity in parts which should have been respectively parallel and alike. The two capitals, though at first sight alike, will be found dissimilar in their proportions and sectional lines, as if worked by different hands, without the ordinary care to secure likeness where the design did not contemplate diversity. The intended horizontal lines of the north abacus slightly converge, and the half-round descending from the capital deviates considerably from the perpendicular. These irregularities are apparent in the cut. On removing part of the pewing next one of the piers, no trace of any base was discovered. The floor of the eastern half of the chancel is raised four steps, and this probably was so, if not originally, yet at least in the fifteenth century; for the east window, which is an insertion of that period, is at an unusual height; and the piscina, which is perpendicular, and a plain stone bench for sedilia under a flat Tudor arch, correspond with the present elevation of the floor.

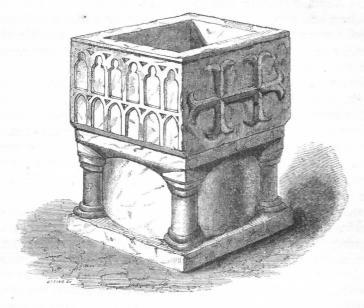
The transepts, which, though much alike, do not exactly correspond in proportions or position, are respectively about 19 by 14 feet within the walls, exclusive of the space under the arches opening into them from the nave. Those arches, one of which (the south) is now much mutilated, were about 8 feet 8 inches in span, semicircular, and sprang from square jambs. They rise to 14 feet 7 inches above the floor, and are quite plain. The imposts should seem to have consisted of two members on each jamb, the upper projecting beyond the lower. They were in all probability both square and perfectly plain, as if left in block; and a plain square moulding descended from them to the floor on the inner side in a corresponding situation to the half-round on the east face of the chancel arch. All these have been removed, with the exception of small portions on the jambs of both transepts. The masonry is remarkable in places for its rudeness, small irregular stones being let in among large ones. The jambs and

imposts of the arch of the south transept have been to a great extent cut away, to accommodate the occupiers of some pews within it, so as to give this arch a strange appearance; but its original form may be made out by comparing it with that on the north side. There is a semicircular arch of very good masonry in the east wall of this transept, partly built up. Probably an altar may have stood there. These transept arches are about 9 feet west of the junction of the nave and chancel; and the transepts are, as has been mentioned, much lower than the nave. The entrances into them from the churchyard are modern.

The windows are of various dates, and are all evidently insertions, unless a very small semicircular-headed window in the east side of the north transept be original. There is no external splay to it, and it has little to indicate its date beside its form and size. Such a window however might, I conceive, be of any period, and therefore this may be original. On the north side of the church are two small lancet windows above the stringcourse—one in the nave, nearly opposite the south door; and the other, somewhat larger, in the chancel. I call them both lancets: the former is clearly so; and, though the latter appears now with a semicircular head, the splay, which is internal only, is pointed, and the stone forming the head is modern, having been inserted when the window was reopened and glazed with modern painted glass about ten years ago. None of the other windows are much, if at all, earlier than the fourteenth century: several are of the fifteenth. Among the latter is the east window, which is a small one of three lights, and, as has been observed, at an unusual height. Among the former is a small window in the space between the south transept and the chancel, on the jambs of which and on the wall near it are some remains of a diaper pattern in colour. This window, and that in the north end of the north transept, may be of the thirteenth century. The most remarkable window of the fourteenth century is that over the west doorway, with which it appears to be contemporaneous. Both the doorways are in the decorated style, with the overlapping roll for a hood-moulding, and are probably referable to about 1330. The hood-moulding of the window is different, and what might be thought some years later: the tracery however is decorated, and in it is an escutcheon with the arms of De Warenne in glass of that time. These are most likely the coat of John de Warenne Earl of Surrey, who succeeded to the earldom and to the lordship of Worth in 1304, and died without legitimate issue in 1347. The window in the south transept is a modern imitation of that just described.

The roof is flat and modern. It is ceiled and whitewashed in the nave and panelled in the chancel, and has the appearance of having undergone some comparatively recent repair.

The Font, which stands near the south door, is curious: it consists in reality of two fonts placed one upon the other. This is not suggested by its appearance, for the lower, which is 1 foot 6 inches high, is not very unlike many supports of fonts of the twelfth or thirteenth century, being apparently a



square resting on a short cylinder between four columns, on a square base common to all. The upper font is 1 foot $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches high, and nearly square, viz., 2 feet 2 inches by 2 feet, having three of the sides enriched with ornamental carving, and the fourth plain, as if designed to stand against a wall. The carvings, as it now stands, are, on the south side six pointed

quatrefoils, 3 and 3; on the east a double arcade of pointed arches, the lower plain, the upper trifoliated; and on the north a double cross moline. There is nothing that indicates any great difference of date between the two fonts: a few years before and after the commencement of the thirteenth century might probably suffice for both. Opinions may even differ as to which is the earlier; but I think the lower one was first executed, and that the other may be as late as the early part of the reign of Henry III. It is not easy to account for such an arrangement. From the manner in which they fit one on the other, without very obvious marks of mutilation to bring them to this state, the later might seem to have been designed for that purpose, the east and west sides of the upper (which are those farthest apart) being slightly chamfered at their bases to bring them even with the top of the lower font. But, on examination, I think it will be found that the base of the arcade on the east side has been slightly cut away by the chamfer; and this may justify us in concluding that the upper

font was not designed for its present situation.

Having described the church with some minuteness of detail, I proceed to consider what may be the date of it. Mr. Bloxam, Mr. Sharpe, and others who have seen it, have come to the conclusion that it is substantially an Anglo-Saxon building; and, what is rare, that there has been no deviation from the original ground-plan, though without doubt there have been great repairs at various times, and windows and doorways inserted, and the roof throughout replaced by a modern one. In this opinion, after a careful examination of what I believe to be the grounds of it, I am brought to acquiesce. Little is known of the early ecclesiastical architecture of the Anglo-Saxons. As the companions and followers of Augustine erected churches of stone, no doubt it was in the Roman style as then practised in Italy, but with little, if any, ready-wrought materials at command. Bede, writing about 730, contrasts the practice of the Christians of Scotland, who built them entirely of wood (robore secto), with that of the English, who built of stone. A portion of the church at Jarrow, in which he officiated, is believed to remain. The style, gradually debased, became what is now called Anglo-

⁸ Lib. iii, c. 25.

Saxon. The domestic edifices of the Anglo-Saxons were chiefly of wood; and smaller churches, where stone was scarce and timber plentiful, were probably of that material. A taste for carpentry forms for decoration, even in stone, appears to have grown up in this country before the Conquest. The peculiarities of the Anglo-Saxon style have been noticed by several writers, and they are perhaps nowhere better stated than in the later editions of Mr. Bloxam's *Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture*.

In no part of this church have I found any kind of construction or decoration peculiarly Norman, except perhaps the arch in the east wall of the south transept, which seems later masonry than the transept arches. The most remarkable indications of its being of Anglo-Saxon workmanship are the quoins and pilasters, especially the latter. Narrow ribs of stone, giving the masonry the appearance of carpentry, occur on divers churches believed to be Anglo-Saxon; and pilasters, having considerable resemblance to these, exist on the churches of Corhampton, Hants, and Stanton Lacy, Shropshire, which are generally held to belong to that period; and also, according to Mr. Sharpe, at Wolbeding, in this county, which he considers to be Anglo-Saxon.9 Some of the pilasters at Corhampton, if not at Stanton Lacy, still rise to the roof, and it is not clear whether they were ever cut or tied midway by a stringcourse. At the present time there is no indisputable evidence of there having ever been any pilasters at Worth above the stringcourse. Over each pilaster of the nave is a crack in the plaster, but that may be due to other causes than the existence of the remains of a pilaster there: and on the north side of the chancel, over that near the lancet window, is a disturbed appearance in the masonry, dimly seen through the whitewash, possibly occasioned by the removal of an upper pilaster. If indeed any traces exist in the masonry, they are covered by the plaster and whitewash. The chancel arch and the arches leading to the transepts are also in favour of an ante-norman date. Beside their general character and the absence of Norman ornament, the large stones of which the chancel arch is constructed, its irregular masonry, the pecu-

⁹ See Proceedings of the meeting of the Archæological Institute at Chichester, Collections.

liar capitals, the square and double square hood-mouldings, the descending half-round, the plain jambs of the transept arches, their double square imposts, the descending square moulding, and the peculiar masonry of those jambs, all accord with Anglo-Saxon architecture better than with Norman. The great length of the chancel in proportion to the nave is remarkable, and not usual in Norman churches; but I place no reliance upon it, for the like is found at Sompting; where the position of the communication between the Anglo-Saxon tower and the later nave is adverse to a supposition that the present nave and chancel occupy the site of the earlier church. ¹⁰

It may appear strange, that, if this church be Anglo-Saxon, there should be no unquestionable trace of any original doorway or window. But, as the original church must have had a doorway and windows, this objection would be equally applicable to the assignment of any date to it prior to the thirteenth century; yet the church is certainly older than that period. A comparison of the intervals of the pilasters on the south side makes it probable that an original doorway occupied the site of the present south door. The absence of all such traces may be accounted for, not only by the plaster and whitewash, but by both the doorways occupying the places of the former doorways, and some of the windows being enlarge-

ments of those which preceded them.

It has been noticed that the roofs of the transepts spring from the stringcourses. Seeing that the earliest windows in the nave and chancel are lancets, and are above the stringcourse, and no pilaster appears there, I have been led to consider whether it is likely that the original roofs of the nave and chancel also sprang from the stringcourses, and whether the walls may not have been raised above the stringcourse in the thirteenth century, and those lancet windows made in the new work. The walls of Stanton Lacy Church do not appear to have ever been lower than these now are, and those of Corhampton but little so; and, if the roofs of this nave and chancel ever sprang from the stringcourses, they must have been low, especially the chancel, as the stringcourse on it is not so high as that on the nave. Still it is remarkable, that the string-

¹⁰ See a plan of Sompting Church, Archæol. Journal, vol. xi, p. 141.

course of the nave and the capitals of the piers of the chancel arch are nearly on a level, as if designed with reference to each other; and, if the roof had a pitch not greater than mightbe expected on an Anglo-Saxon church, there would have been ample room for that arch, which we have seen is 22 feet $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the opening above the floor, the radius being about 7 feet, and the piers about $15\frac{1}{2}$ feet: add to which, that the walls of Dunham Church, Suffolk, which are reputed to be Anglo-Saxon, are, if I mistake not, no higher than these would be if they did not rise above the stringcourse. these been raised, the upper part of the quoins would be later than the lower; and at the south-west corner of the nave a few stones near the top, but no more, look later than the rest: on the other hand, however, the quoin at the south-east corner has all the appearance of being original to the present roof, and if this be so, the wall cannot have been raised as supposed. On the whole, I am induced to think the walls are of their original height; but, should indubitable traces of similar pilasters above the stringcourse be hereafter discovered, the question would be settled beyond all reasonable doubt.

A supposed difference in the stringcourse on the north side of the nave, and the absence of pilasters below it, led Mr. Hussey to conclude the north wall had been rebuilt, though on the old foundation. If so, it must in all probability have taken place when or before the lancet window was formed. But that stringcourse is in fact chamfered like the one on the south side, and in other respects bears a great resemblance to it, and is as near as may be of the same height. Pilasters have been removed, we know, either wholly or in part, from other portions of the building, and therefore there is nothing improbable in supposing that those on the north side of the nave may have been taken away when some great reparation was effected; which may have been when the buttress was erected at the north-west corner. Whatever traces of them

remained would now be concealed by the plaster.

In conclusion, I would observe, that though I concur in the opinion that this church is substantially Anglo-Saxon, I see no good reason for believing it to be of earlier date than the first half of the eleventh century. I incline to think the nave and chancel were not built at once; for the difference in the height

of the stringcourses upon them, not to mention the variation in form, suggests that the chancel was first erected. Being a forest country, there may have been a temporary wooden nave which was shortly afterwards replaced by the present, for the interval cannot have been long. The stringcourses on the transepts resemble that on the chancel; but then they were never free and independent strings, but were, I conceive, originally introduced merely to carry the roofs, or at least to mark to the eve the roof-bearing lines. Etheldred II married in 1002 a Norman princess, who afterwards became the queen of his successor Canute. She was the mother of Edward the Confessor by Etheldred. A Norman influence in architecture began to be experienced, it is believed, in this island several years before the Conquest, and it is said to have been encouraged by the Confessor, who had spent some years in Normandy. Still, if the inscribed stone found on the site of Deerhurst Church, Gloucestershire, recorded the erection of that church, 11 as seems most probable, the Anglo-Saxon peculiarities had not, it is manifest, become extinct at that period of the Confessor's reign. Opinion will always outrun assignable evidence and logical inference; and, if I were required to state more definitely when I think this church was built, I should say that it was commenced and the chancel completed, I conceive, in the latter part of the troubled reign of Etheldred II, or in the somewhat more quiet one of Canute, and the nave was added in the reign of Edward the Confessor, not long after his accession.

¹¹ Companion to the Glossary of Architecture, p. 26.