

WIVELSFIELD CHURCH.

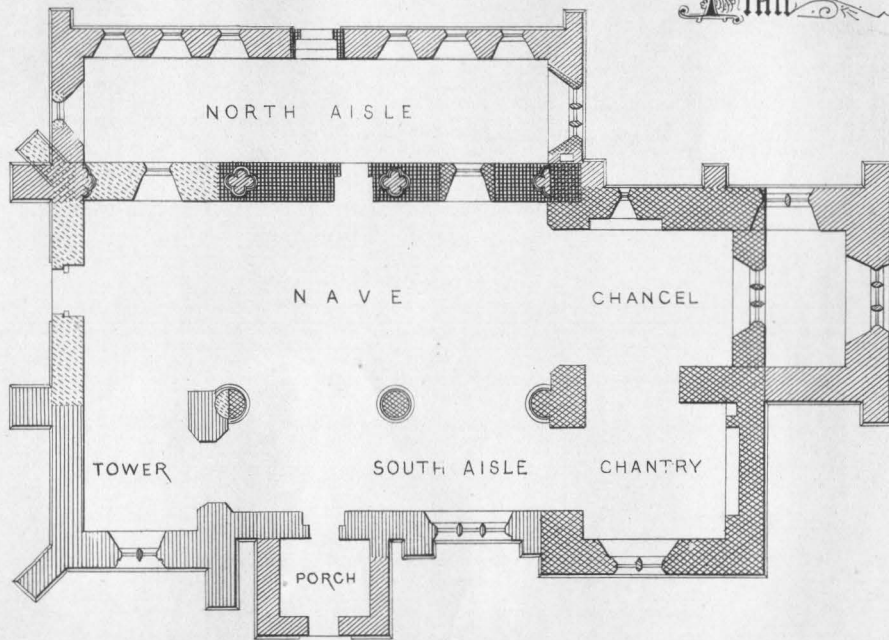
BY THE REV. HENRY JOHN RUSH, M.A.,
INCUMBENT OF RUSTINGTON.

THIS Church, which is dedicated to St. John Baptist, and must be classed among the smaller churches of the county, stands about half a mile to the north of Ditchling Common, having the parish of Ditchling as its boundary to the south, and that of Lindfield to the north. At the time it was first erected, and for some centuries after, it must have been very inaccessible; but the road through Ditchling and Lindfield to London has of late years completely altered its position in this respect; and it is now more accessible than many other churches in that part of Sussex. It may be here observed that, according to Hussey, this Church is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey.

Of the earlier history of this Church but little is known, beyond the simple fact that it was originally a Chapel-of-Ease to Ditchling; and that it continued to be so annexed until the episcopacy of Bishop Praty (1438 to 1445), when it was disunited, and Wivelsfield became an independent church. At an early period it passed with Ditchling to the Prior and Monks of St. Pancras Priory, Lewes; having been given to that celebrated religious house by William, the second Earl of Warren, "*pro Rainaldo fratre suo,*" as the deed of gift states, "*ad opus Anniversarii Rainaldi.*" And this gift was confirmed to them by Seffrid II., who was Bishop of Chichester from 1180 to 1204. And a dispute having






WIVELSFIELD CHURCH.

Plan



W. SLATER.
R. H. CARPENTER. } ARCHTS.
LONDON.

EXPLANATION.

- Norman Work. 
- Early Pointed 
- Decorated. 
- Perpendicular. 
- Modern (1869) 

0 5 10 20 30 40 50 FEET

arisen in 1392 as to the patronage of the Church of Ditchling, with that of Wivelsfield annexed, and of two other churches in the neighbourhood, it was decided by Bishop Mitford, upon the question being referred to him for settlement, that such patronage was vested in this religious establishment.

The Church of Wivelsfield is very prettily situated, standing as it does upon a grassy sloping bank, commanding an extensive view of the south downs, from which it is distant about five miles, on the one hand, and of the woody tract of the Sussex Weald on the other, and having much fine timber about it. The parish is of considerable extent, comprehending about 4000 acres, and its population, before not small, has been very considerably increased of late years by the County Lunatic Asylum having been built in it.

It is not, however, so much with the general history of Wivelsfield and its picturesquely situated church that we have now to do, as with the peculiarities of structure of this building. To determine its style of architecture has long been attended with much difficulty. Hussey, in his account of this Church, says of it that from the peculiarity of its position—he does not tell us in what that peculiarity consists—it has been sadly patched and neglected; but that, notwithstanding this, it still has some interesting points about it. Previous to the restoration which it has just undergone, and the addition which has been made to it of a new north aisle, it had in its construction, as the ground plan of it will shew, almost every style of ecclesiastical architecture, from the early Norman to the late perpendicular. The architects employed were Messrs. Slater and Carpenter, whose excellent taste and correct judgment in all matters connected with their profession, was sure to lead to the most satisfactory results. Their alterations were sure to be conservative and not destructive.

At the time, then, that these well-known architects took the restoration of this Church in hand it consisted of a chancel, nave, south aisle, with a chantry at the east end of it, a dwarfed massive tower standing at the south-western angle of the building, and which was finished off like many other of our Sussex churches with a spiral shingled cap. This tower is furnished with a melodious peal of five bells,

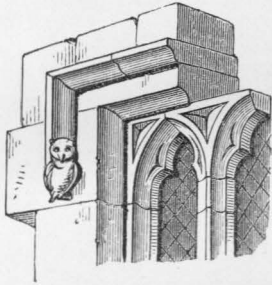
one or two of them of medieval date. Of these and their inscriptions I need say nothing more, as Mr. Amherst Daniel-Tyssen has given us an account of them in volume xvi., p. 230 of our S.A.C.

In the churchyard are some ancient monuments, the inscriptions on the older of which are for the most part nearly obliterated. Of the monuments within the church there is beneath the tower a handsome marble tablet, erected to the memory of some members of a family named Richbell, formerly resident in Wivelsfield, but which has been extinct there for two centuries or more. The interments which it commemorates commence in 1639. There are also monuments to the memory of two members of the family of Thomas More, Armiger, of More House; a moated residence standing at no great distance from the church, and taking its name from this family. They died—one in 1681 and the other in 1691. One of these two is a Palimpsest. Of another mansion in this parish, called Otehall, an account will be found in volume xix., p. 61.

From this brief sketch of the history of the Church previous to its restoration, I shall now proceed to give an account of the same Church restored; which, I will here add, has been undertaken and completed, and a parsonage built, mainly through the liberality of the Tanner family, the present owners of More House and Otehall, and one of them the patron of the benefice.

And here I am happy in being able to give an account of this Church, and of the different peculiarities which the work of restoration brought to light, from a statement with which Mr. Carpenter himself has kindly furnished me, and to which he has added a ground plan, shewing by means of different tints the several styles which this Church was found to display. I need, therefore, add nothing more myself, except that, through the courtesy of the present editor, I am enabled to give specimens of the different styles which this Church displays from drawings made for him by Mr. John Wood, of Hickstead Place, Twineham, and which he has placed at my disposal.

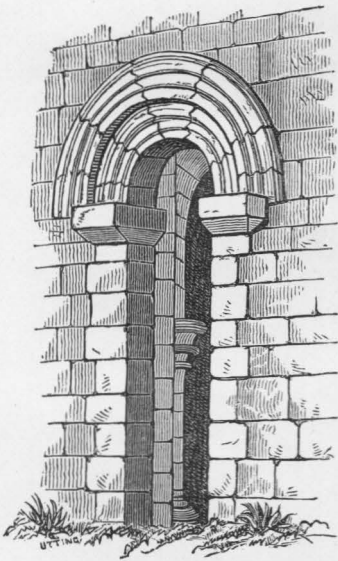
Mr. Carpenter's descriptive observations on this church, then, are as follows:—



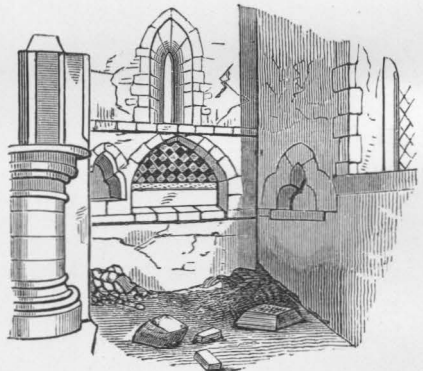
NO. 1.



NO. 3.



NO. 2.



NO. 4.

EXAMPLES OF STYLES IN WIVELSFIELD CHURCH,

“Like the generality of Sussex churches, Wivelsfield Church is exceedingly simple and unpretentious, and of a severe and almost rude character of detail. Nor is this to be wondered at when it is considered, that in its early days it was buried in a thick Sussex forest, and was situated at a distance from any large town or monastic establishment. It could not, therefore, enjoy the advantages which the churches of Shoreham, Steyning, Boxgrove, Battle, and Arundel possessed, in the erection of which the most skilled workmen that could be obtained were employed, and the highest art-knowledge of the day was called into action, and where the materials principally made use of were stone from France and often polished marbles. It was the fate of Wivelsfield to have only its local workmen to depend upon, who copied and did their best to follow the fashion of the century in which they worked, making the most of the few materials which they had near at hand; and it is but justice to say, that very pleasing and characteristic was the effect they were enabled to produce by these simple means.

“The original church was evidently very small, on which account it required enlarging three several times in medieval days, and now again for the fourth time in modern days, each enlargement being clearly manifested by the several changes in style. First, there was the little Norman Church, with but nave and chancel.

“The former of these was only 27 feet in length; it was built of rough rubble stone, and covered with plaster outside as well as inside. Of its architectural features only the north doorway remains (see illustration No. 2), now rebuilt in the new north aisle. It has perfectly plain jambs, with a rude arch moulding and label and simple impost. In the thirteenth century the Church underwent great alteration, due probably in a great measure to the liberality of some landowner in the parish, who built for himself a chantry on the south side of the new chancel, about the same time as the parish were building an arcade and south aisle. This arcade was of two arches only, with a low massive pillar in the centre, with bold capital and base, supporting arch mouldings of very rude and careless workmanship; while the chancel arch and the arches of the chantry are, on the contrary, although simple, very

well executed, and the former is of remarkably pleasing proportions. On the north side of the chancel is an arched recess, with a small "low side" window. The east window is a composition of three lancets under one internal arch, and with but small mullions dividing them; which is not a very satisfactory treatment. On the south side is a small piscina. The chantry is about the same size as the early chancel. Its east wall is treated in a remarkable manner; a small lancet is placed high up in the gable, and under it is an arched recess, or reredos, having once at the springing line of the arch a wooden or marble shelf across it. It is, in fact, the super-altar. The back of the recess is painted with an effective lozenge and diaper pattern in colour (see illustration No. 4). In the east wall is also a pretty little trefoil headed aumbry, and in the south wall a piscina, also of good detail. The chantry is lighted by a trefoil-headed two-light window, splaying widely inside, and also by a lancet in the west gable over the ancient aisle roof. Of this early aisle no trace now remains. The walls were of rough rubble work, plastered outside and inside; and decorated in all probability with paintings. A most remarkable example of these decorations existed till lately at the neighbouring Church of Westmeston, and in most Sussex churches paintings more or less perfect still remain.¹

"There are now no remains of the early tower, which, it may be presumed, stood westward of the nave; for in the fourteenth century the church required again enlarging, and considering the shortness of the nave it was not thought advisable to extend northward. The builders of that day chose rather the alternative of a west extension; they cleared away the west end of the nave and tower, and lengthened the nave and aisle 14 feet, adding a third arch to the south arcade. Here a curious junction was effected. The half pillar, or respond, of the early arcade was left standing, and a new half pillar was built on to it, with a cap and base of the same height, but differently moulded, stopping abruptly against the older ones. The masonry of the arch is well executed, and

¹ A very curious and interesting specimen of these church paintings, discovered in Wisboro' Green Church, will be given later in the volume.

forms a decided contrast to the two older arches.² The west end has a small two-light window over a small west doorway. The new length of the north wall had only a small single-light window, harmonising with the more ancient one.

“The chancel remained unaltered, except by the insertion of a three-light window over the arched recess in the north side, but its dimensions were now very disproportionate to the lengthened nave. In the succeeding century changes again took place, the whole of the nave, aisles, and chantry being re-roofed, in the usual Sussex style, with trussed rafters and heavy tie beams and king posts, covered with heavy Horsham stone. The ancient south aisle wall was rebuilt on the original line, but of greater height, the early one being probably low, like that of Henfield Church. A large three-light window was placed in the south wall, as the church was likely to be dark. The doorway is flat headed, and has a holy water stoup on its east side; a somewhat similar example of an external stoup remains at Mappowder Church, Dorset.³

“At the west end of the aisle and southward of the nave a new tower was built, using the original south wall of the nave to carry the north side of the tower, and to support the east wall, an arch was turned across the aisle to the pillar before mentioned; this, however, was too weak to carry the additional weight, so without disturbing it a block of masonry was built up against it on which to rest the new arch. This pier, therefore, is now made up of masonry of three different dates. The effect of this block of masonry is by no means good, as it partially builds up the western arch of the arcade. The tower has a two-light window on the lower stage (see illustration No. 1). Above this is the ringing stage, lighted by small single-light windows, or rather openings, for they have never been glazed. The bell stage tapers towards the top, and there has been on each side a plain two-light window. The tower is covered with a low shingled pyramidal roof, terminated in a post and finial. It is buttressed at the angles; and, with the chantry, forms a most picturesque group. The masonry of this date is of rubble sandstone, roughly squared in the tower walls.

² See ground plan.

³ There is a very similar example at

the original nave entrance of Maresfield Church.

“Of the old monuments, seats, and fittings, there are no remains; but on the whole the Church did not suffer so much by churchwarden-improvements as others have done; the walls were of course whitewashed, and the roof ceiled, and a dormer was inserted to light the gallery, and the west window was taken out.

“The restoration of the ancient part has, therefore, been confined to putting it into repair; but as additional room was required, a north aisle was added, harmonising generally with the early work; reinserting the ancient features where any existed.

“The chancel has been extended to the east, to the proportion which it ought to have had in the fourteenth century. A large window has taken the place of the early triplet, which is more suitably placed at the east end of the new north aisle. During the repairs of the roofs it was discovered that the south aisle, in the fifteenth century, had a nearly flat roof, covered with lead; the decayed ends of the principal beams being found embedded in the wall. In later times, when repaired, it was raised for the sake of economy, and covered, like the nave roof, with Horsham stone; the sale of the old lead probably covering the cost of the repairs. We have thus traced the history of the Church from the Norman period to the present day. On some points, however, we cannot speak with certainty—we cannot, for instance, possibly say whether the original chancel was apsidal, as old Keymer Church, or square ended; nor, again, can we determine as to the shape and position of the more ancient tower.”

It should be mentioned, in conclusion, that during the progress of the work of restoration, on the removal of the gallery, Hebrew texts in distemper were discovered upon the south and western walls of the nave, over which Latin Early-English texts had been introduced.

“*Laus Deo.*”—“*Floreat Ecclesia.*”
