

INCISED MARKINGS ON THE PILLARS OF SOME SUSSEX CHURCHES.

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SOME few months ago my attention was called by Mr. G. M. Atkinson to some incised markings on the pillars of St. Mary's Church, Eastbourne.

The main body of the church is of transitional Norman date, and on the original tooled surface of the pillars many marks are apparent.

In the nave interlaced circles are found; but in the chancel, and there only, fishes of various form take the place of the circles.

I therefore made a careful examination of the church, and took rubbings of the markings, and also extended my enquiries to the churches of Westham and Pevensey, in the same district.

A selection from the rubbings is shown in the plate, and their position is as follows:—

ST. MARY'S, EASTBOURNE.

1. Incised carving of a fish—Chancel.
2. Incised carving of a fish—North-east respond chancel.
3. Incised carving of a fish—On 1st pier from east end of chancel, south side.
4. Incised carving of vesica piscis form—On 2nd pier from east end in south aisle of choir.
- 5 and 6. Incised carving of vesica piscis form—On 2nd pier from east end in south aisle of choir.
7. Incised carving, with banner and inscription, now illegible—On 1st pier from east end, south aisle of choir.
8. Incised carving—On 1st pier from east end, south aisle of choir.
9. Crosses—South-west respond of chancel.
- 10, 11, 12. Interlaced circles—From piers of nave.

WESTHAM.

- 13 and 14. Interlaced circles—On pillar in nave, and on south pier of tower arch.

PEVENSEY.

15. Concentric circles—On pillar in nave.
16. Greek cross.
17. Cross of the Resurrection.
18. Latin cross.

These three crosses are on the arch of the north doorway of the church, and outside.

It will be at once noticed that the markings consist of fishes, circles, and crosses, the two latter being cut more deeply than the former.

The interlaced circles are an emblem of the Trinity, and the three crosses, each of a different type, on the north (or Devil's) door at Pevensey are curious.¹

Mason's marks are often met in old work, and some curious markings, for which no explanation has been yet given, have been found on some churches in Warwickshire. They consist of cup markings interspersed with grooves, and incised circles with rays diverging from the centre; but most of these are outside and on the south walls of the churches.

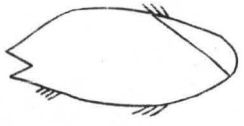
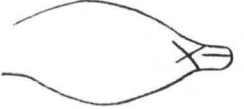




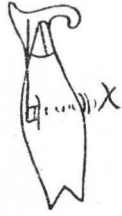


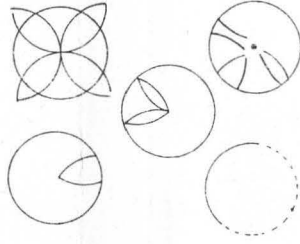
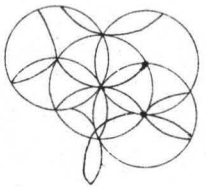

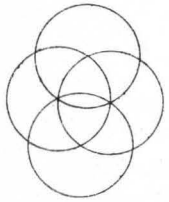
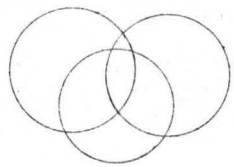
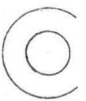
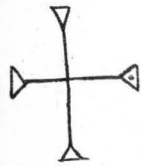


The most interesting of these markings are undoubtedly the fish carved in the chancel of St. Mary's, Eastbourne; they are restricted, as before mentioned, to that portion of the building, and evidently had some meaning, but what that was is a question of some little difficulty. I am not myself acquainted with any such markings elsewhere,² nor am I aware of their having been noticed before in Sussex churches, whilst several competent antiquaries to whom they have been submitted acknowledge they have never met with them before, and are unable to throw much light on the subject.

It has been suggested that they are mason's marks, but their position, carving, etc., will not bear out this theory, whilst their shape varies much from the recognized fish mason's mark, which is of this form,—



¹ At Arlington Church I have lately found interlaced and concentric circles, similar to those at Westham and Pevensey.

² I am indebted to Mr. Arthur Langdon for the information that there are two fish markings in the Crypt of Gloucester Cathedral.

1 	2 	3 E A S T B O U R N E 	4 	5 	6 
7 	8 	9 	10 	11 	12 
13 W E S T H A M 	14 	15 	16 P E V E N S E Y 	17 	18 

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The fish was, as is well known, one of the earliest symbols of Christ, the Greek name containing the initials of the names and titles of our Saviour; but it does not appear probable, from the variation in form which occurs, that these markings were intended for this symbol.

Another suggestion that has been made is that they are typical of the miraculous draught of fishes; those in the chancel were some of the hundred and fifty and three, which had been drawn up into the more sacred part of the church from the nave, and signified the clergy.

But a more probable meaning has been suggested to me by the Rev. W. A. St. John Dearsly, who is of opinion that they are marks indicating the payment of tithe on fish. Such tithe, it is well known, was formerly paid, and was collected up to a very recent date in the West of England, and Eastbourne was in the past, as now, a great fishing station.

I trust that this short notice of these extremely interesting marks may lead to a careful examination of other churches, in order to elucidate their meaning.

In conclusion, I must express my thanks to Mr. Arthur Langdon and the Rev. W. A. St. John Dearsly, for assistance cordially rendered.
