

THE OLD PARISH CHURCH  
AT HARMONDSWORTH, MIDDLESEX,

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BY

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THE Parish Church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is one of the most ancient in Middlesex, and, in some respects, one of the most interesting in the kingdom. The original design of the structure is obscure by reason of the alterations which have been made at different periods. Probably the earliest portion of the Church is the lower part of the existing square tower, the north wall of which ranges with what is now the south side of the nave, in which are specimens of the earliest first-pointed arches where the piers are circular with square caps and bases and arches rudely chamfered, their irregular span and other characters indicating that they have been inserted in this wall, which may date from the beginning of the eleventh century. Another token of the great antiquity of the Church, as well as its early alteration in plan, is afforded by the elaborate Romanesque doorway now in the outer wall of the south aisle; but as this wall abuts on the centre of the east wall of the tower it could not have formed part of the original structure, which, in all probability, was a nave, without aisles, of the same width as the tower, which stood

at its west end. From a cursory glance at the semi-circular head of the doorway, it will appear that in its original position it was of larger span, and since a very similar ornamentation of sculptured eagles' beaks occurs on the old western entrance of Iffley Church in Oxfordshire, we may safely conjecture that this doorway originally stood on the west side of the tower.

In the twelfth century, arches and circular piers were inserted in the north and south walls of the original building, and aisles were added, as was then the custom. At the end of this century a considerable change in arrangement was made, and, for some reason, the bulk of the Church was removed northwards, and a transitional Norman edifice, consisting of a nave and north and south aisles of three bays, and a chancel, was constructed; of this the south arcade and the western half of the north arcade, together with the nave, are the existing parts. The wall which had ranged with the south side of the tower was removed, and the arches and piers therein inserted were erected on the north side of the present nave. If the two columns and the half-column here be carefully measured and the depth of each course and the quality of the stone (hard chalk) be observed, it will appear that they are really the fellows of the old piers on the south side of the nave, but with their caps and bases altered to the then fashion and a course of stone omitted to secure the desired height.

The south aisle is narrower than its northern neighbour—this is always the case, unless, as sometimes occurs, the south aisle has been enlarged; this does not seem to have been done here, but the windows were altered in the Perpendicular period. In

the north aisle are some early English windows (lan-cets) much altered at a quite recent date, and other windows have been added.

The south wall of the present chancel formed part of the former chancel, and it must have had some good windows, perhaps with mullions, as is shown by the flat soffits of the upper part of the most western window.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century another change in the size and character of the Church occurred: the north wall of the chancel was taken down, octagonal piers and depressed four-centred arches replaced it, the roof was made to rest on the line of corbels above these arches, the present tracery was placed in the great east window and in the most western window on the south side of the chancel, and the splay was given to the sides of that window; the north aisle of the ritual choir was raised and extended eastwards to form at its eastern extremity a chantry (probably with the stone taken from the north wall of the chancel, and, perhaps, with the stone which formerly took the place of the red brick portion of the existing tower).

Apparently at this period it was intended to make the nave and chancel uniform in style; if this had been done the ritual choir would have been extended towards the west of the chancel (as was often the case in the larger churches), for a place is to be seen on one of the northern piers of the nave against which the screen would have rested, and that pier is thicker from east to west than the others, thus showing that it was intended to perform some special service.

It seems probable that the rood loft was intended

to have rested upon its capital. The altered part terminates in the middle of the arch of the first bay, so that the eastern side of that arch is higher and more modern than the western; a most singular effect is thus produced, apparently something stopped the progress of the contemplated change, and the arch was temporarily rendered secure.

In the south wall of the chancel there is a third pointed piscina and sedilia of the third age, triple and even. There is a much altered basin or stoup for holy water at the entrance of the church, and the remains of a piscina made for the use of the north-east chantry.

In the north-east chantry and aisle there is an excellent hammer-beam roof of acute pitch and considerable richness of detail. There is no chancel arch. The font, of Purbeck marble, is probably of the twelfth century, its basin is octagonal and is supported by a central column surrounded by small pillars of the same kind.

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