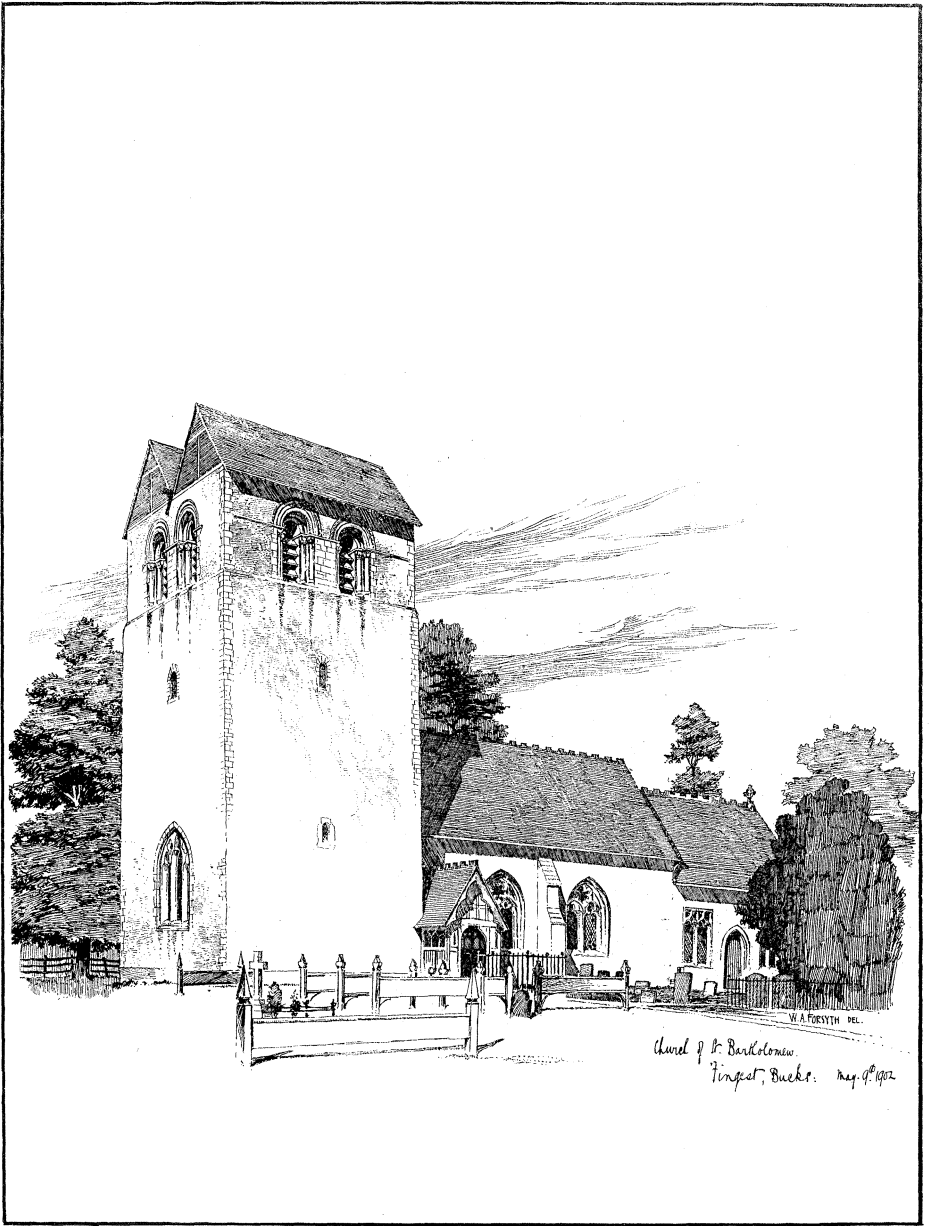


CHURCH OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW, FINGEST, BUCKS.

BY W. A. FORSYTH, A.R.I.B.A.

Of the Churches of the Desborough Hundred, that at Fingest, although comparatively little known, is perhaps the most remarkable in the matter of proportions. Situated in a beautifully wooded district at the head of the Hambleden valley, and standing well back from the lane leading to Great Marlow 6 miles distant, this fabric, dedicated to St. Bartholomew, possesses a dignity and grandeur seldom seen in churches of the village type. The feature which produces this particular character and so compels attention is the Norman Tower; not only by reason of its unusually large scale in relation to the Nave, but also by its actual design in which latter respect it is perhaps unique; the other parts of the church are very small in extent, and consist of a 12th century nave, to which the chancel was added a century later.

As illustrating the progress of knowledge of and reverence for these monuments of mediæval building, Langley, in his history of the Hundred published in 1797, says "It is dedicated to St. Bartholomew, and "has nothing worthy of observation." Again, in the county history of Lipscomb, vol. III., is stated "the "gable roofs erected over the nave and covered with "tiles, prove that in its modern alterations neither taste "nor expense have been lavished upon the building." The roof here referred to is a fine 13th or 14th century example of oak construction. A general restoration took place in 1866-7, and bearing in mind the state of opinion on such matters, Fingest may be said to have escaped much wanton destruction, although leaving much to be desired in the work then carried out. At this time an 18th century carved altar piece, the altar rails, the screen between nave and chancel, and a south porch appear to have been removed and were replaced by similar fittings of a "Gothic revival" character; tile pavings were laid throughout, and angle buttresses added to the east end of the chancel. The latter was a favourite means of strengthening the east walls of



Church of St. Bartholomew
Timpot, Bucks. May 9, 1892





the churches in the district at this period; in some instances it is quite useless, and in every case completely destroys the original simple character of the square ends of the churches. Another and very general work was to raise the chancel, sanctuary, and altar by a succession of steps for the intended benefit of the service at the expense of the internal proportions of the fabric; from the fact of the chancel windows being considerably lower than those of the nave, the effect of these rising levels is much felt at Fingest. Few churches remain where such a state of things does not exist; the nearest example is Radnage, which, with Fingest, Turville, Ibstone, and Stokenchurch, was visited by the Bucks Archæological Society on July 17th, 1902, and it will doubtless be remembered how noticeable was the charm of the uniform level and the internal proportion of the east end; Radnage has also escaped the 19th century angle-buttresses. In other respects much good work resulted from the restoration at Fingest.

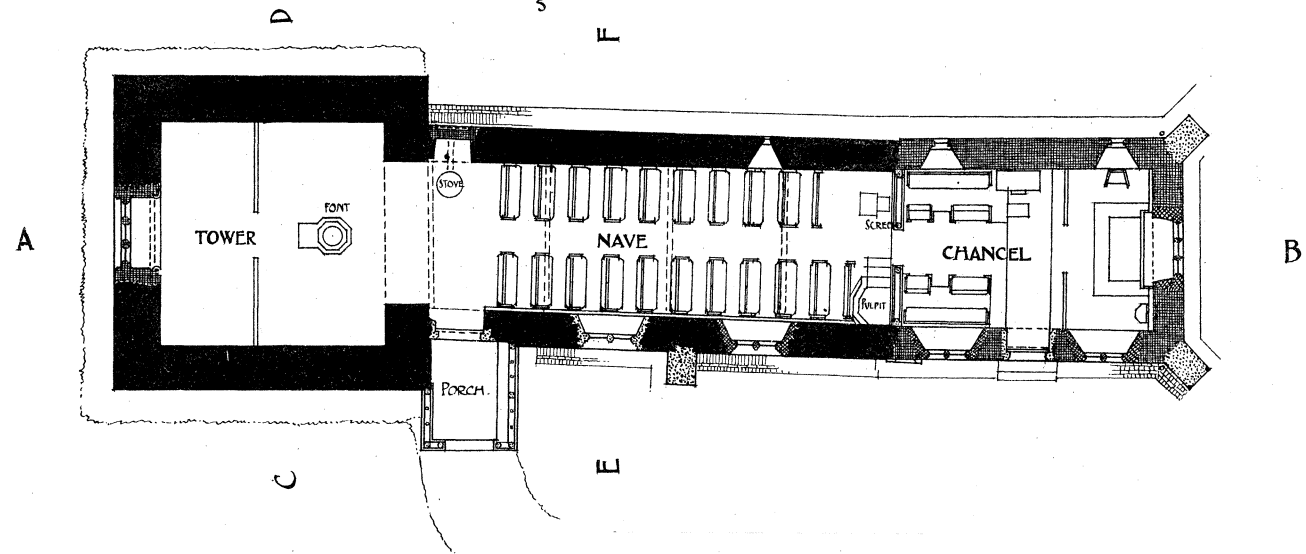
With regard to the orientation, as will be seen from the ground plan, the axis is irregular, inclining considerably to the south in the nave, but taking a general line of south-east by east.

The tower standing at the west end is a massive erection, rising 60 feet above the general floor line, and measures 8 feet wider and 30 feet higher than the nave; internally it is 19 feet 5 inches square, with walls almost 4 feet thick, and it is interesting to note that the work was very truly built, for the inside diagonal dimensions both read approximately 27 feet 4½ inches; moreover, it proves to have been soundly built, as little or no settlement has taken place, and the walls, which are mainly of flint rendered with mortar on the face and having stone quoins, stand as true and vertical as when first erected early in the 12th century. These quoins are very numerous, and of small size, thereby assisting the general scale, and are set flush with the mortar face of the walls. The tower is arranged in three storeys, the lowest rising 22ft. 8½in., the intermediate 15ft. 11in. high, and the topmost rising to the roof. There is no external access, but the various stages are approached inside by an iron ladder. Both externally and internally the top stage

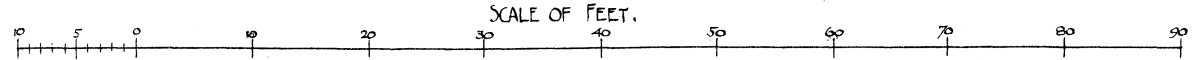
CHURCH OF ST̄ BARTHOLOMEW, FINGEST, BVCKS.

HISTORICAL REFERENCE.

-  NORMAN 12TH CENTURY.
-  EARLY ENGLISH 13TH CENTURY.
-  DECORATED 14TH CENTURY.
-  1866-7 RESTORATION 19TH CENTURY.

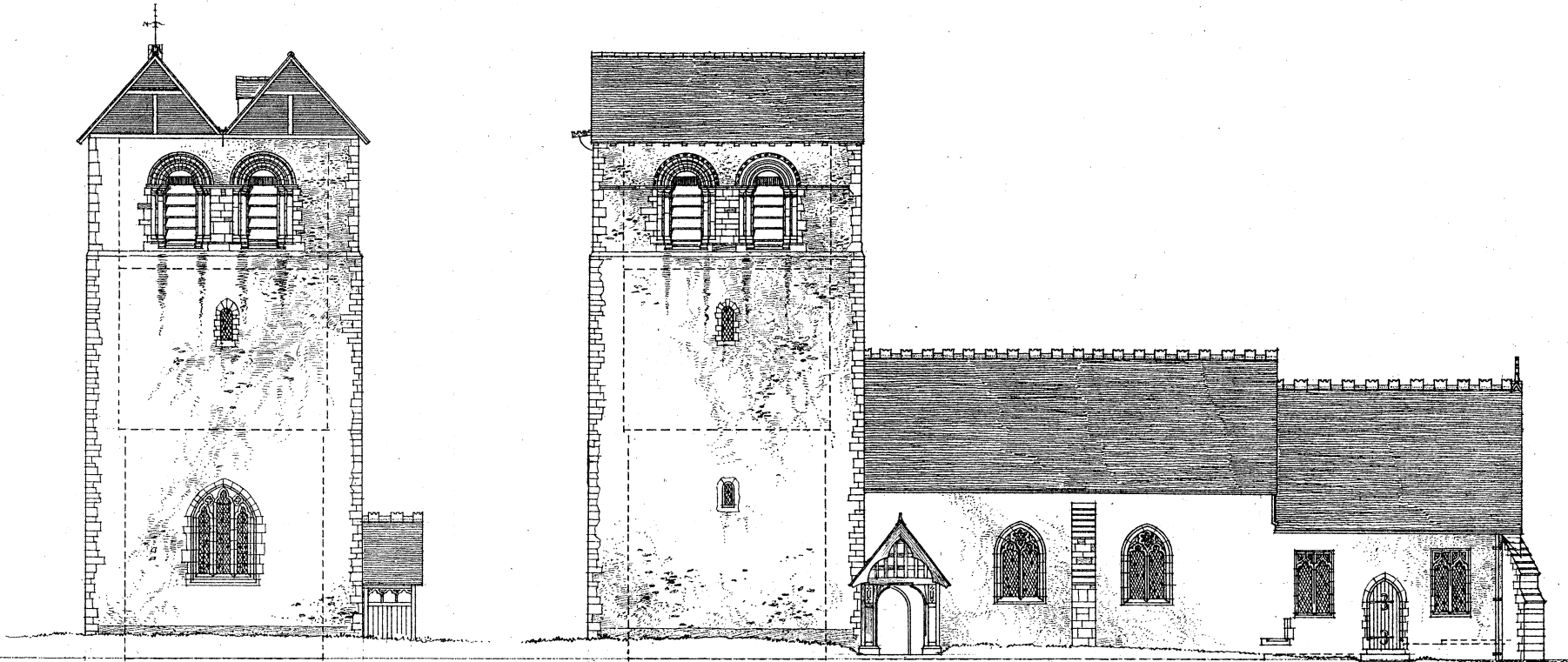


GROVND PLAN



MEASURED MAY 1902
 DRAWN JUNE-OCTOBER 1902
 BY W.A. FORSYTH A.R.I.B.A.

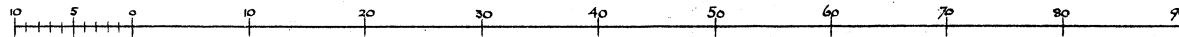
CHURCH OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW, FINGEST, BVCKS.



WEST ELEVATION

SOUTH ELEVATION

SCALE OF FEET



MEASURED MAY 1902
DRAWN JUNE-OCTOBER 1902
By W. A. FORSYTH A.R.I.B.A.

or bell chamber is the centre of interest; each of the four sides has two semi-circular headed openings placed about 5ft. apart and enriched on the outside with moulded arches, cushion caps, columns and bases, the detail of which is typical of the best work of the period. At first sight the detail appears to be repeated in all the openings, but closer inspection shows that it is not so; the arches are in two rings, the inner one being recessed, and in some cases both are moulded, and in others the outer ring only is enriched; the mouldings are of that sunk character which is so subtle in Norman work, for in conveying the effect of elaboration does not destroy the strong stone-built feeling of the work of this period. A label forms the outer member of the arches, and effect of projection is obtained by a simple process of sinking. On the south side it is worked in the form of a "billet" enrichment. The shafts are engaged, and are mostly circular, but in one case on the east side it is polygonal. The openings are now filled with oak louvre boards, which are much too large in scale. The whole of this upper storey is set back from the lower faces of the tower with a splayed offset.

The twin gables seen in the roof form a most satisfactory finish to the whole; the oak construction is of an interesting kind, dating probably from the early part of the 14th century, now in a very good state of preservation, and, from the method of framing and scantlings of the timber, resembles the spirit of similar work in the neighbourhood. Briefly, it consists of a large transverse tie-beam 8in. by 5in., with a 20ft. 7in. span strutted from the north and south walls by 9in. by 5in. shaped timbers, and securing two outer wall plates about 10 by 6in., and two inner pitching-plates 9 by 5in.: these plates receive the lower ends of the rafters 5in. by 3in., each pair of which has a 4in. by 3in. collar. A central purlin, about 5 by 3in., catches up and stiffens these collars, and is itself held up by a post 6½in. by 6½in., from which spring two shaped struts. The gable ends reveal the internal construction, the timbers being filled in with red brick. Tradition says that plaster was stripped from these ends when the roofs were re-tiled at the restoration. One bell only now remains, dated 1830, hung in an old oak carriage.

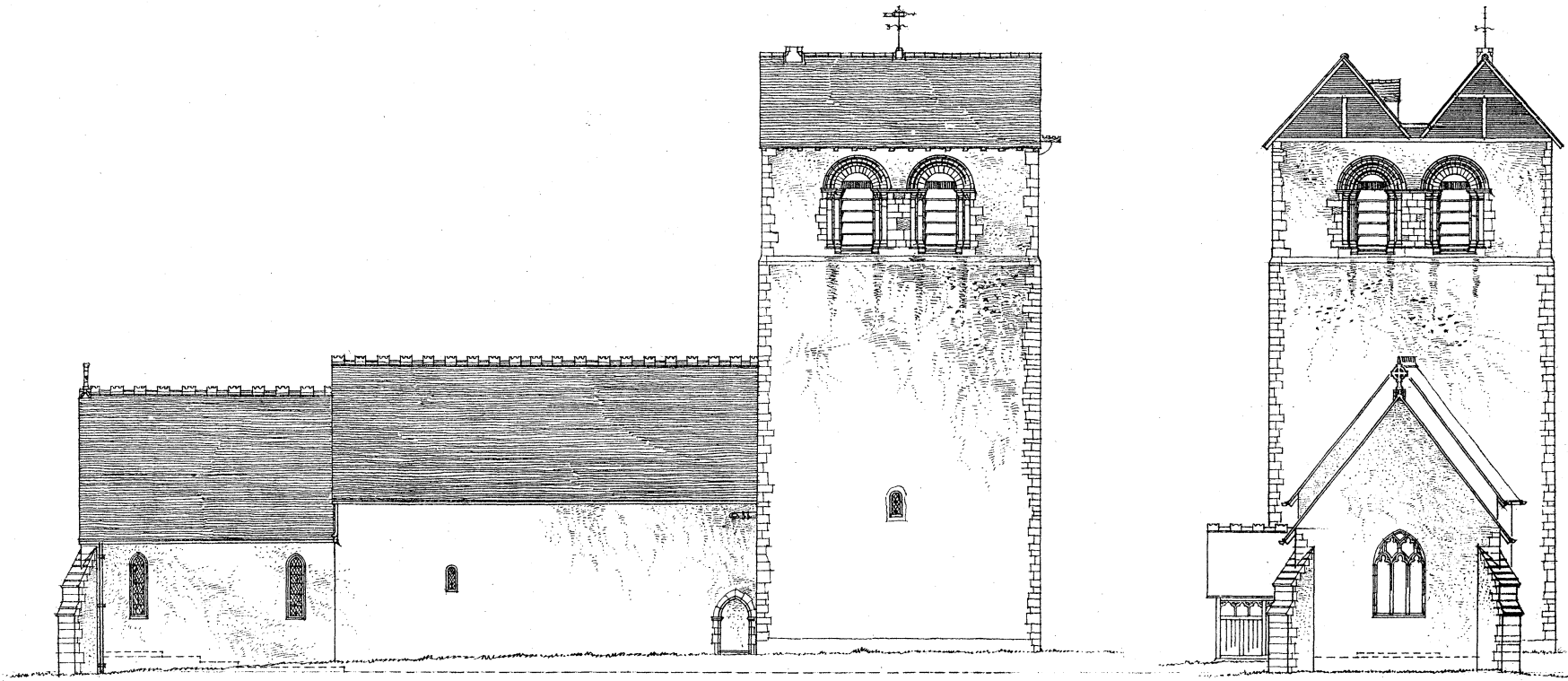
Mr. A. H. Cocks, in his "Church Bells of Buckinghamshire," noticed marks in the walls made by a larger frame, which evidently carried a peal.

Between the bell chamber and the intermediate stage there is practically no offset in the walls, thus accounting to a great extent for the construction of the top floor, which is strongly supported by oak uprights from the floor below. The framing of the latter is difficult to determine, as a pitch-pine panelled soffit has been applied to it.

The ground storey has two important features—the west window and the arch opening into the nave. If the Norman detail as seen in this church is perfect of its kind, this "Early English" window is equally good, of the best 13th century building. It has three lights, each with a simple cusped head, which externally are enclosed by a slightly recessed arch. On the inside of the wall the opening is in the form of a single pointed arch, beautifully moulded, having a label with carved terminals, delicately carved caps, and moulded shafts and bases. The whole of this window is built of clunch, and has stood remarkably well. The foliage of the caps is skilfully pierced, and worthy of the hand of a Lincoln or a Wells mediæval craftsman. The nave arch is a large semi-circular opening 12ft. 4½in. wide, 15ft. 5in. high, springing from a splayed impost, and it is interesting to note that it corresponds with the original width of the nave. (See section E-F.) The voussoirs are exposed on both sides, and show the small scale of the stones used at this period. The remaining windows of the tower are semi-circular headed with deep splayed jambs. The font is octagonal in form, of early "Perpendicular" date. The upper part only is original, having a moulded cornice and cusped heads to the sunk panels.

Of the Norman features of the nave there remain the inner arches of the north and south doorways, and the small north window. The outer arch of the north door is pointed work of the succeeding century—quite a common example of a mediæval alteration, and often seen in the churches in this Hundred. The outer arch of the south entrance is modern. The north window is similar to those of the tower; but the easternmost of the two south windows is a late "Decorated" inser-

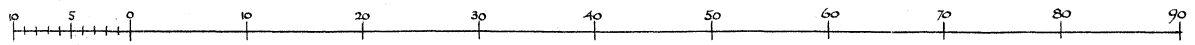
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NORTH ELEVATION

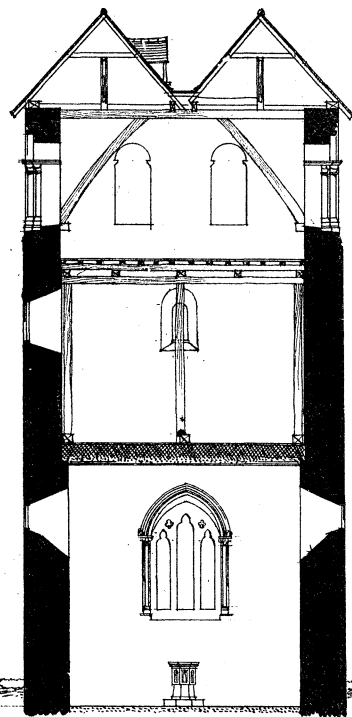
EAST ELEVATION

SCALE OF FEET :

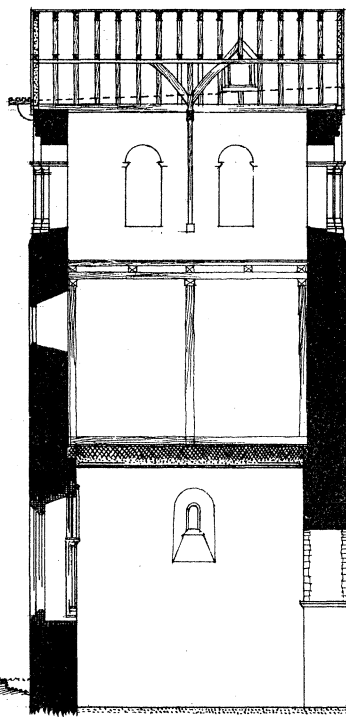


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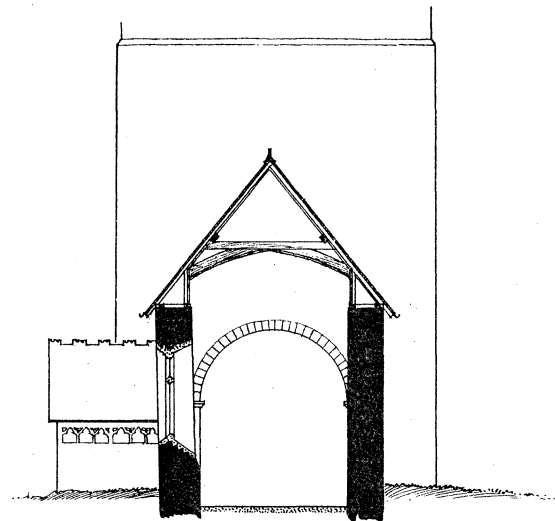
CHURCH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW, FINGEST, BUCKS.



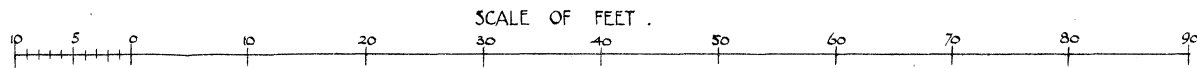
SECTION C-D



SECTION A-B



SECTION E-F



MEASURED MAY 1902
 DRAWN JUNE-OCTOBER 1902
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tion, whilst the other is a very poor 19th century copy of it. There are also remains of a low side window. (See plan and south elevation.) The buttress between these windows was erected about 1866, but, owing to settlement, has ceased to perform all the work expected of it and the south wall still inclines very considerably. The nave, being extremely narrow, admits of a central passage of only 2ft. 8½in. between the oak benches which, on either side, accommodate but two persons abreast. Although of no unusual height, a lofty proportion is produced by this narrowness which is enhanced by the design of the roof. This roof is the feature of the nave with all its interesting construction exposed to view. It takes the form of a steep pitch with long rafters secured to outer wall-plates and supported vertically from inner plates. There are five sets of principal rafters having tie-beams stiffened by curved struts to carry the purlins, which are also assisted by shaped struts from the principals, as will be seen in Section A-B. The spaces between the rafters are plastered. Evidence is seen of the former existence of plastering applied to the inside of the roof covering most of the timbers; this was stripped at the restoration—a very good work—but the external appearance was spoiled by the substitution of an ornamental ridge tile for a simple one of “half-round” section, such as the tower possesses.

An unusual point concerning the interior of this church is the absence of a chancel arch. In its place is to be seen a large coarse pitch-pine screen carrying the thin gable end of the nave roof, erected about 1867. Lipscomb, in 1847, says: “Between the nave and chancel “is an open screen with three arches.” There is no tradition that a stone arch was ever removed; indeed, the evidence is opposed to any such existence, for it will be seen on referring to Section A-B that the end timbers of the nave roof, which, as stated, are very early work, adapt themselves to a thin gable, and it is unlikely that any of them were buried in the thickness of a large flint wall. Had additional rafters existed, extending the length of the nave and leaving the present exposed timbers as now seen, the position of any wall would have encroached upon the north and south windows of the chancel. Again, the greater width of

the chancel produces a break in the north wall of the church (see ground plan), which coincides with the rough-cast face of the gable wall. The only probable solution is one suggested by Mr. W. H. St. John Hope in discussion of the point, viz., that the east end of the church was originally apsidal, in which case the early main roof may have been continued in circular form covering the apse, the whole of which was pulled down when the 13th century chancel was added.

The two north windows, lancet in form, is the only remaining evidence that the chancel is "Early English" work. These, until last century, were filled up, but were re-opened as a memorial. A brass inscription on one of the sills records the work. Truly this was an ideal form of perpetuating a memory compared with the raising of an ornate tomb or slab of a foreign material, which not only frequently destroys some internal effect, but is liable to damage or removal.

The two south windows are late 14th century or probably transition insertions—broad and simple in feeling. The main O-gee of the tracery is not of a flowing line, but has a slight break or distortion, giving it an individual character. The east window of three lights is of the same period, but of smaller scale detail, and has a typical splayed drop arch on the inside dying into the jambs of the opening. The priests' south door is modern, but probably replaces a smaller 13th century opening.

With one small exception, there is an entire absence of monumental slabs, tablets, and brasses from the interior of the church, which was re-plastered throughout when last restored. The glass is all modern. Langley refers to certain of the chancel windows containing representations of the Virgin, but there are now no signs of these.

Generally speaking, this church stands in good condition, which may be the outcome of certain judicious works in disposing of surface water, the excluding of birds, and the prevention of ivy and other vegetable growths from gaining any considerable hold upon the external walls.

In conclusion, it can be said that a visit to this corner of the county, and to Fingest in particular, will amply repay any trouble and provide much matter for the close attention and interest of the archæologist.