

CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, IBSTONE, BUCKS.

The present article concludes a series embracing descriptions of three Churches lying close to one another in a remote corner of the Desborough Hundred ; in the two recent issues of the "Records" the Churches at Turville and Fingest were described, and it is only now proposed to limit this paper to an archæological account of the Church at Ibstone, and not to cover ground belonging to the historian.

Very little has been written upon this particular parish (sometimes spelt Ipstone), whilst upon the subject of the Church, practically no documents exist. Formerly, the village and church stood in Oxfordshire, at which time the Bucks boundary is said to have passed through the parlour of the Manor House, but since 1894 it has been wholly in Bucks, and in the Deanery of Wycombe. The living is held with Fingest, but up to 1841 was joined with Cuxham, near Watlington.

The majority of the churches in the neighbourhood are situated in valleys, and are surrounded by dwellings, but the fabric about to be described stands upon a hill overlooking the Hambleton valley, and is, curiously enough, placed at some considerable distance from its village. This isolation is the first point which strikes one on approaching the site, for the Church is almost encircled by trees which impede most of the views from any distance. Another early impression is the fact that the structure has a history in many respects identical with both of those to which reference has been made.

The churchyard is spacious, and falls somewhat quickly from north to south ; the level has risen on the north owing to the displaced earth from interments and comparatively little on the south ; the situation is pleasantly wooded, while the picturesqueness of the whole is enhanced by a fine large yew at the west end.

This Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, is quite small, having, with choir and gallery, a seating accommodation of from 110 to 115 adults and children, and consists of a chancel, a nave, gallery, bell turret, south porch, and heating chamber, of which the two latter are modern

works. The greater part of the walls is of twelfth century erection, and has kept its verticality extremely well, particularly so in the chancel arch.






Entering by the Norman south door, one observes the restrained character of the general effects, and also the satisfactory proportions; it is, however, forcibly brought to one's notice that the whole interior is quite spoiled by the large gallery at the west end. As in other local instances, the hand of the restorer has made its mark at Ibstone, where are to be seen the usual raising of the chancel level, the extravagant design in tile floorings, angle buttresses to the east wall, pitch pine seats and chancel roof, and other inharmonious details so extensively introduced at the time of the restoration in 1870. In spite of these discordant introductions, there is much interest of a broad and simple nature.

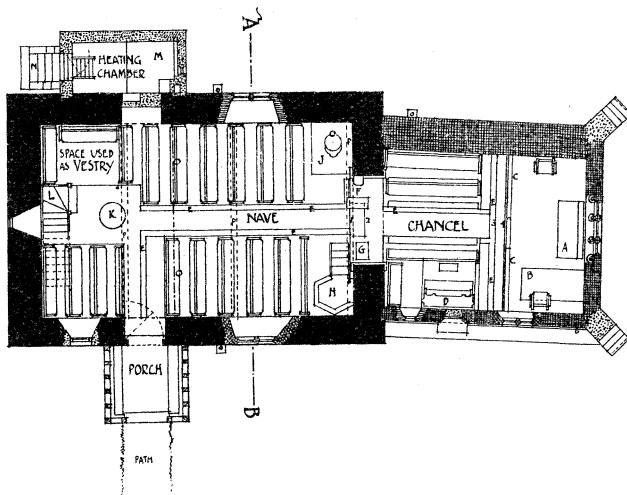
The walls of the nave, varying in thickness from 2 ft. 8 in. to 2 ft. 11 in., are built of flint, and faced roughly in mortar, of which most of the original work appears to be remaining on the west front. The flat east and west gables, which have hipped copings covered with roofing tiles, are particularly interesting, as, although following the lines of the lead roof, they are very unusual, and in pleasing contrast with the ordinary steep pitches. The internal dimensions are 29 ft. 8 in. by 18 ft. 5½ in., whilst the diagonal measurements are both 34 ft. 11 in., showing that the Norman nave was truly built. This characteristic appealed to the writer at Fingest, where great accuracy was employed in the twelfth century work, but where, as at Ibstone, the building of subsequent centuries proves to have been loosely undertaken. The orientation is that most frequently found in small churches; the axis of the chancel deviates to the south from that of the nave.

The stone chancel arch is tall in proportion, being 8 ft. 6¾ in. wide, rising to a height of 16 ft. 9 in. from the general floor line (see Section A.B.). The semi-circular form springs from an impost moulding, which is enriched with a sunk diaper design. There is a chamfered plinth, and in the soffit of the arch a carved head of a figure, undoubtedly of ancient date, has been built in. The arch, with jambs, is standing well, as, indeed, is the whole of the Norman work, but there is

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HISTORICAL REFERENCE.

	NORMAN	12 TH CENTURY.
	EARLY ENGLISH	13 TH CENTURY.
	DECORATED	14 TH CENTURY.
	PERPENDICULAR	15 TH CENTURY.
	1870 RESTORATION	19 TH CENTURY.

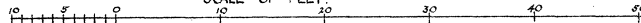


GENERAL REFERENCE.

- A ALTAR
- B MEMORIAL SLAB
- C ALTAR RAIL
- D ORGAN
- E GRATINGS OF HEATING APPARATUS
- F PRAYER DESK
- G LECTERN
- H 15TH CENTURY PULPIT
- J STOVE
- K FONT (PROBABLY) NORMAN.
- L STAIRS TO GALLERY
- M FURNACE
- N STEPS
- O LINE OF GALLERY FRONT
- P TRUSSES IN ROOF

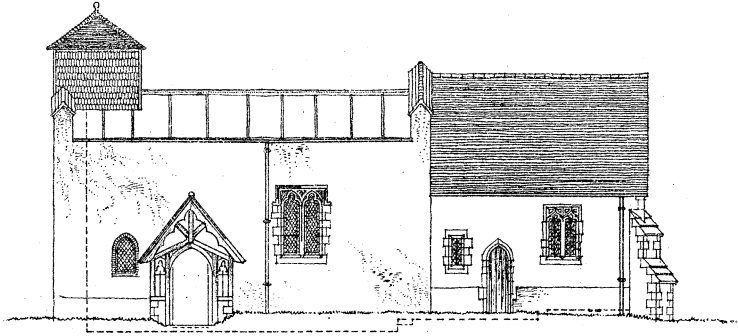
GROUND PLAN.

SCALE OF FEET.

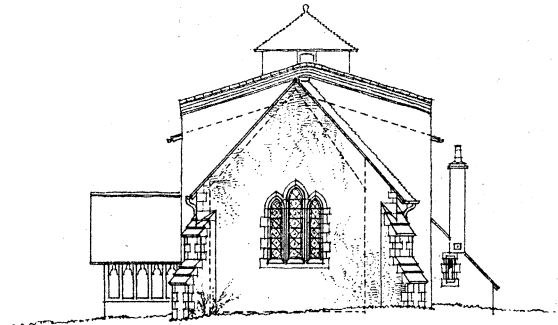


MEASURED AND DRAWN OCT 1923
By W. A. FROSTH A.R.B.A.

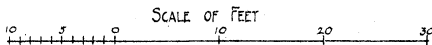
CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS, IBSTONE, BUCKS.



SOUTH ELEVATION.



EAST ELEVATION.



MEASURED AND DRAWN OCTE 1893
BY W.A. FOESYTH A.R.C.I.B.A.

just an appearance of newness which may be due to re-scraping of the stonework when the interior was replastered. The south door has a stone lintol, with a "billet" ornament carved over the face of it, and above the lintol is a semi-circular-shaped tympanum or head, with some modern incisions in lozenge form, enclosed by a sunk label moulding; there are also two caps or imposts with a similar diaper pattern as to the chancel arch. This enrichment does not, however, appear to the writer to be twelfth century work; it is very small in scale, and comparatively uninjured, and resembles Early English diapering, but in the present instance the work is modern in appearance.

The opening of the north doorway has been built up, and, although the inner arch is seen in the nave, the original external head of the doorway is still remaining, and can be seen inside the modern heating chamber addition.

This doorhead is interesting in that it possesses a straight stone lintol, a segmental arch, and a tympanum with small inlaid stones of a lozenge shape, the whole being bedded in a kind of reddy-brown mortar. One stone impost moulding remains, and the door opening has been built up with a rough flint wall. The detail of this door is in no way like the south door, although the form is identical.

The three windows of the nave are later insertions; the large two-light south window is late Decorated, of coarse detail, but with an unusually minute pierced middle spandril light, and there is a carved head of a stone figure built into the wall immediately above the label; the inside jambs have splays of different angles, and a flat stone arch covers the whole opening on the nave side. The south window externally is a non-descript feature finished in brick; the splayed reveals of the interior point to the existence of mediæval work, and to the fact that here is an alteration consequent upon the introduction of the gallery. The north window is a two-light 15th century insertion, the sill of which is unusually high above the floor line, a fact suggesting the former existence of a Norman window; the stonework outside is rendered with cement mortar, and the inside head is flat, plastered with the walls.

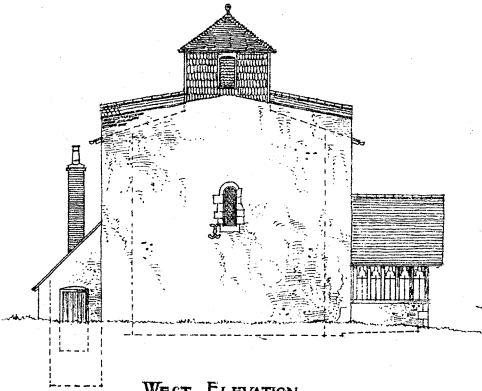
The roof is framed in oak with three king post trusses, of which the scantlings are as follow:—Tie-beams, 10 in. by 9 in.; king post, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.; principal rafters, $4\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $4\frac{1}{4}$ in.; struts, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $4\frac{1}{4}$ in.; purlins, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.; and rafters, $4\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $2\frac{1}{4}$ in., laid flatwise. This is undoubtedly eighteenth century work, in which iron straps and bands have been used; the pitch is unusually flat for this method of framing, but it probably takes the lines of an older roof, the slopes of which are indicated by the east and west low gables. There is a date 1774 on the tie beam over the chancel arch, and the whole of the timbers are roughly chamfered. The lead covering appears to be very old material, of which the sheets are of considerable width; it was re-laid during the nineteenth century upon stained deal beaded boarding, at which time the oak timbers were varnished.

The bell turret contains two bells with almost equal tones, hung in an oak carriage; there are no inscriptions or other evidences of dates, but the roof and the turret appear to be of one date. The turret roof is hipped four ways, covered with tiles, and finished at the apex with a stone finial. The vertical sides are finished with oak shingles, and there are two louvred openings on the east and west faces. These shingles were fixed during the last century, replacing an ordinary weather-boarded covering.

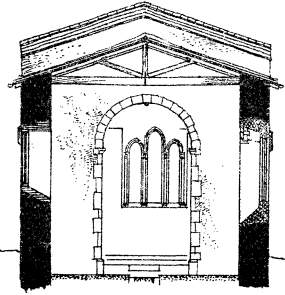
The porch to the south doorway is framed in fir, with open sides set upon low walls, and replaces an older addition built with flint walls, covered with mortar; this is shown in a sketch taken before the restoration was begun.

The gallery at the west end of the nave, which, as before said, mars the effect of the whole interior, was erected in 1837; it is a somewhat large feature, capable of seating at least forty children, and is thus very much out of scale with the interior. The front is filled in with painted turned balusters, which are clearly 18th century workmanship, and from a sketch made from a photograph kindly lent to the writer they would appear to have been adapted from an old communion rail and balustrade of the desk fronts in the chancel. The sill and handrail are of pine.

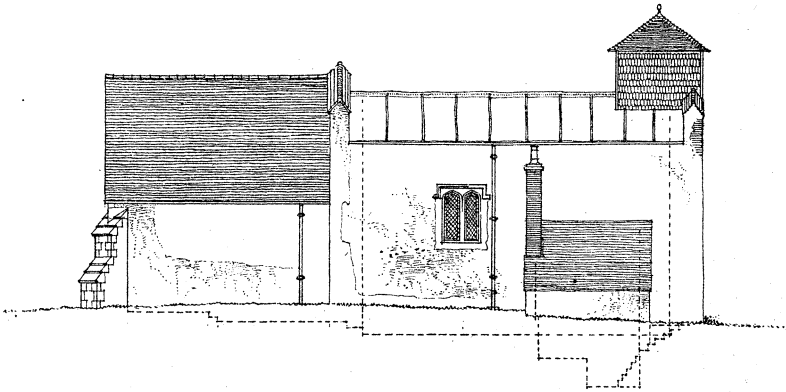
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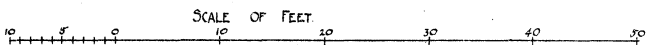
WEST ELEVATION.



SECTION A-B.



NORTH ELEVATION.



MESSEGEUR AND DEANEN OCT 1903
BY W. A. FORSYTH ARCHT.

Perhaps the feature of the interior possessing greatest interest is the late 14th century oak pulpit. These are now, alas! very seldom met with. In this instance the cornice, base, and the stairs have been renewed, and the fine traceried panels, with carved crockets, finials, and pinnacles, well preserved. A small iron ring remains, which may at one time have held an hour glass support.

The font consists of a large stone bowl lined with lead, having sides diminishing towards the foot. There are rough tool markings over the whole of the stonework, and, although there is no detail to assist in determining the date, the period of workmanship appears to be Norman.

On the north side is a modern heating chamber with furnace, from which the heat is conducted through iron floor gratings (E on plan); the apparatus has, however, been discontinued in recent years, and heat is now obtained from an independent stove standing in a very prominent position in the north-east corner of the nave. The passages are paved with 6 in. red and black tiles laid in a checquered pattern.

The nave seating is of pitch pine placed upon deal platforms; this was introduced at the time of the restoration, when the old high-backed seating was entirely removed.

The internal dimensions of the chancel are 19 ft. 5 in. on the north side by 14 ft. 8 in. on the east, whilst the two diagonal measurements have a difference of 8 in., showing the irregular nature of the building. The plan shows the walls to be 13th century, but it should be here mentioned that the east window and south door is the only evidence in support of that contention. A Norman chancel must have existed, but all traces have disappeared. Perhaps the most remarkable point is the extreme thinness of the east wall, which measures 1 ft. 8 in., and the south wall only 1 ft. 4 in., whilst the north wall is of substantial thickness. The raising of the floor levels was introduced prior to the 1870 restoration.

The east window is a good example of 13th century moulded work; it consists of three lancets, the centre of which is stilted considerably higher than the outer

lights. Externally the detail has ordinary splays, but the heads inside have moulded arches springing from moulded caps carried by engaged columns with turned bases; the upper part of the east wall has an off-set, which makes the gable very thin. The larger of the south windows is a two-light late Decorated insertion; the traceried heads are ogee in form, and the whole is very similar to the south windows in the chancel at Fingest--no doubt the work of the same hand. The other south window is a very small single square-headed light, probably 15th century work. The priest's door has been filled up on the inner side. This has the appearance of being 13th century work, and of having been "scraped" in recent years.

The altar table is a good specimen of English 17th century work; it is constructed in oak, but has been painted and grained to imitate the same material.

The roof is a modern pitch pine construction covered with tiles, replacing an old oak queen post roof. It is curious to notice the effort made to keep the wall plates level on the inside and also to maintain the ridge central with the east window and the gable externally, owing to the difficulty caused by the irregular thickness of the north and south walls. Reference to the east elevation will explain this point.

The existing altar rail, steps, and tile pavings were fixed about 1870. With the exception of the floor slab marked B on the plan, which has reference to the founder of the Goring Heath Charity, there is an entire absence of memorials inside the church. All the glass is modern.

This account cannot be concluded without acknowledgment of the kind and valuable assistance rendered by the Rector, the Rev. Henry Joscelyne, Miss Joscelyne, Miss Tiddeman (who kindly lent the sketches to which reference has been made), and to Mr. A. H. Cocks.

WILLIAM A. FORSYTH.