

## THE CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL, STEWKLEY.

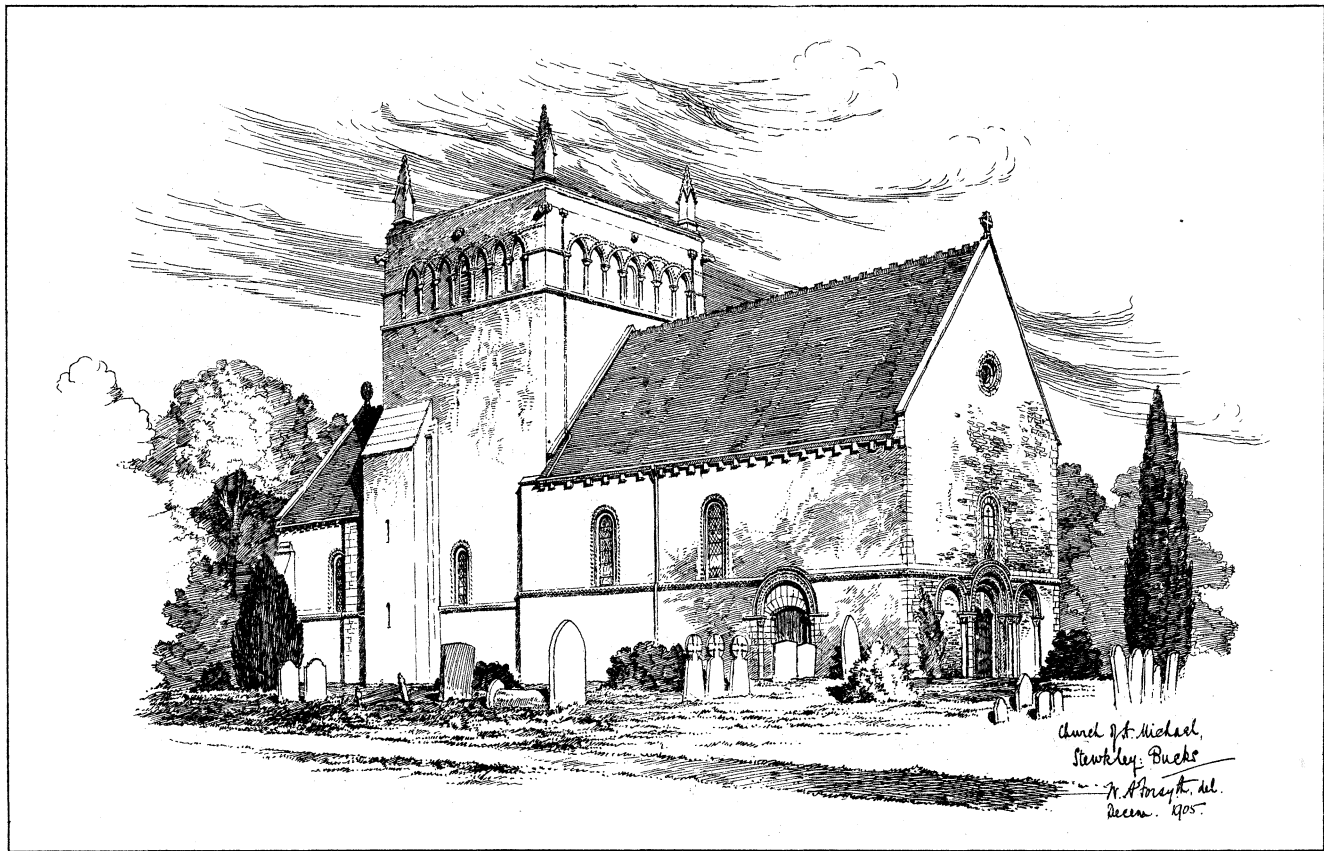
[By W. A. FORSYTH, A.R.I.B.A.]

The famous Norman Church at Stewkley requires no introduction to members of the Bucks Archæological Society, or indeed to students of English ecclesiastical architecture, for the subject has frequently been dealt with descriptively, in its entirety and in part. Sketches of features have appeared in the pages of these RECORDS, but no general treatment, either in plans or views, has been given. Well-known works upon the subject have illustrations of a pictorial nature, and it is hoped that the accompanying measured drawings and sketches will prove a useful addition to what has already been contributed.

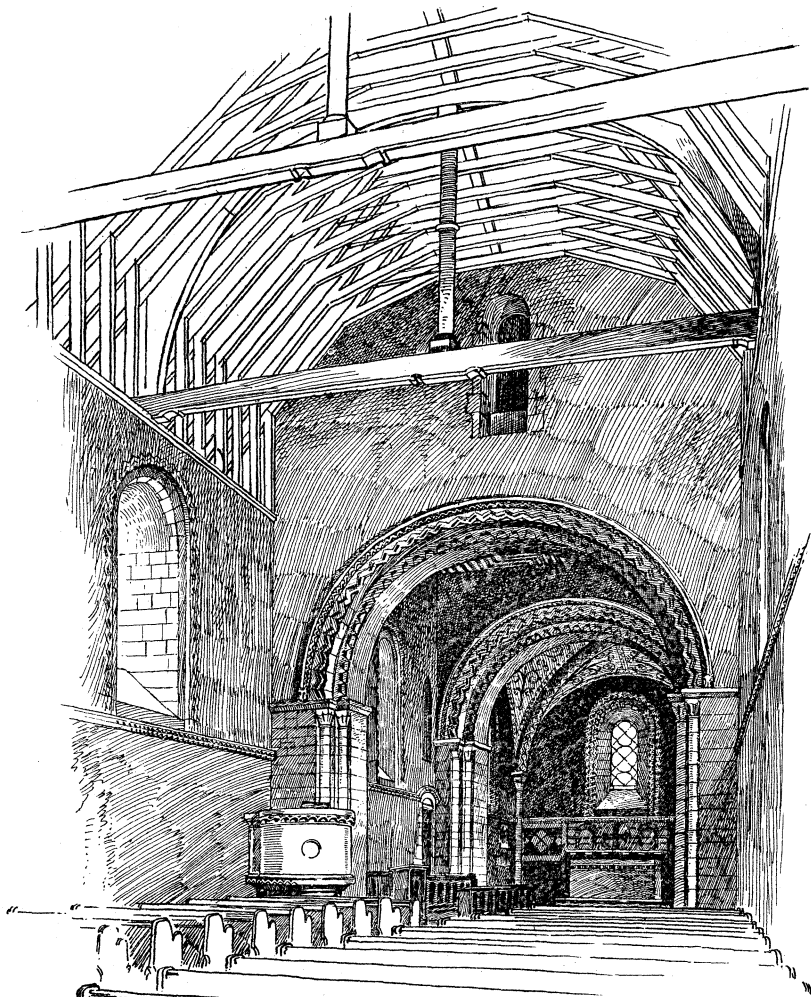
The following notes are intended to serve as an accompaniment to the drawings, and to present certain aspects of this beautiful work gathered from a close inspection, and, in effect, to supplement the excellent description of the Church given to our Society on April 19th, 1862, by the Vicar, the Rev. C. H. Travers, and published in the RECORDS, Vol. III., p. 77.

The Church is peculiarly isolated. A building of such dimensions and fine character is not unusually associated with remains of a large ecclesiastical establishment, but there is nothing to suggest any such association, and moreover the site is considerably distant from any Diocesan centre. The first impression is not without disappointment, owing to the somewhat uniform and ordinary effect given to the exterior by the thin coating of mortar, with imitation jointing, which was applied to the north and south fronts early in the last century. However, a critical examination soon reveals work of a very high order.

As the writer has remarked in previous contributions to the RECORDS, the work of the Norman builders has been very accurately and thoroughly performed. No better testimony can be given than the sound and vertical nature of the external walls and the general state of preservation of detail. The chancel was



Church of St. Michael,  
Stewkley, Bucks.  
N. P. Grayth. del.  
Decem. 1905.



Interior of Church of St. Michael  
Stewkley, Bucks.  
W. A. Forsyth del.  
Decem. 1905.

strengthened at various periods in the 19th century, and bears little evidence of structural defect. The tower, where the walls are uniform in thickness with those of the nave, 4 feet  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches, does not appear to have moved at the base in the least, although some slightly bulged faces are to be found in the upper levels. The diagonal measurements of the tower in all the stages show that it is not quite rectangular. In the nave, however, an example of accuracy is found in the two diagonal dimensions reading 52 ft. 5 ins. It should be here noted that the measurements given in the description of the Church previously referred to do not accord with the actual sizes. The two easternmost compartments are not square, there being in each instance a length greater, by a foot, than the width. An interesting point of the nave is that the length, in proportion to the width, lends itself to two vaulted compartments, the westernmost of which would have had the north and south doors central with the groining and shafts. It is clear, however, that this was not intended, as the windows now in the middle of the length of the nave occupy the positions which would otherwise be those of piers, and the other windows would not be central with the vault spanning them.

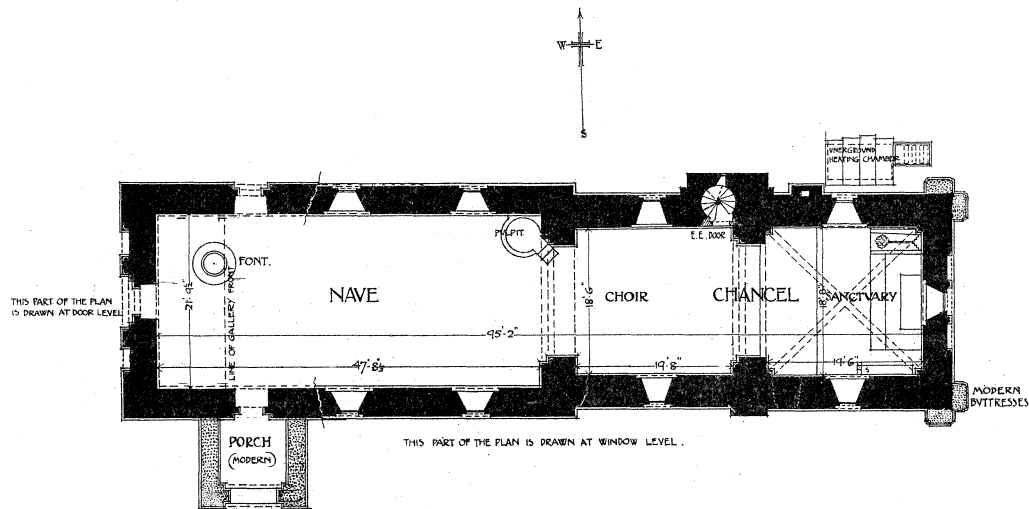
The proportions of the interior are very dignified. The sense of stability and of the religious purpose which clings to the fabric is impressive. The original roof was, no doubt, of the proportions now obtaining, but there is evidence here, supported in kindred examples, that the nave had a flat ceiling at the wall plate level. That the space in the roof existed and was made use of is clear from the presence of two door openings, Norman in type, leading from the ringing chamber of the tower into the roof spaces of the nave and chancel respectively. The latter access is still to be obtained, but the former is lost, owing to the open nature of the 13th century roof. In the opinion of the writer the increased height thus given to the proportion of the nave is, happily, a gain to the interior. A further improvement could still be made by removing the west gallery. The original flat ceiling, if any, must have depressed the internal effect very materially, and come much too close to the crown of the tower

arches. Moreover, the pleasing contrast in the respective parts of the ground storey would not have been so marked.

Stewkley is constantly likened to and compared with Iffley. A few comparisons may therefore be of interest. The original plans of both churches were very similar; but the chancel at Iffley was extended 20 feet in the 13th century, giving a total interior length, according to Britton, of 103 feet, while Stewkley now measures 95 feet 2 inches. The nave at the former is given by the same authority as 19 feet 6 inches, while the latter is 21 feet 10 inches, so that the Norman building which we are now considering is longer and wider than the original extent of its Oxford neighbour. The patronage of the two churches is very similar. The fabrics resemble one another in form and feature; but, whereas Iffley shows much alteration and extension, Stewkley is most fortunate in possessing very little which did not exist in the 12th century. Of this subsequent work, the 13th century alteration consists of the insertion of a piscina in the south wall of the chancel and a doorway in the north wall of the tower, shown in the longitudinal section, giving access from the circular staircase to a former rood-loft. The roofs, although constructed in 1862 and displacing flat lead-covered features, restore the original high-pitched coverings. Two other modern additions are seen in the south porch and the external pier, on the north wall of the chancel, containing a flue from an underground furnace; these, curiously enough, have developed the only serious settlements in the Church. The four buttresses at the east end, dating from 1862, would have been more in keeping with and less challenging the interest of, the Norman work if greater simplicity had been given to their design.

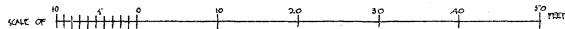
The east and west gables have been restored and rebuilt in the upper parts, while the old rubble walling of both fronts has been exposed. There is very little doubt that the whole of the exterior and interior of the Church was originally plastered, for the dressed stones of the angles and features stand in advance of the plane of the general wall surface. Moreover, the rough nature of the walling material is such as to suggest

CHVRCH OF ST MICHAEL  
STEWKLEY BVCKS



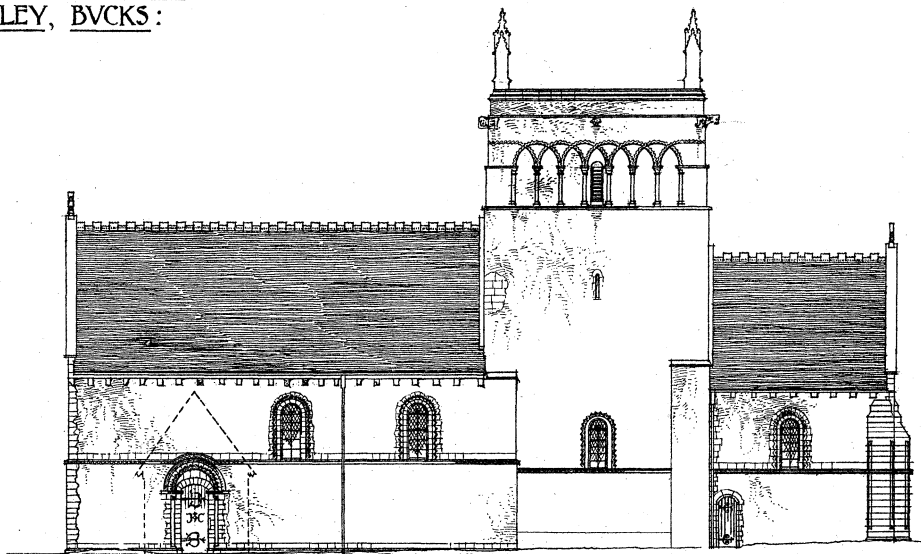
GROVND PLAN

SCALE OF 8 FEET TO 1 INCH



MEASURED AND DRAWN  
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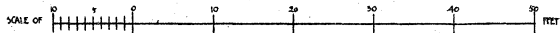
CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL,  
STEWKLEY, BVCKS :



DOTTED LINES SHOW THE MODERN WORK

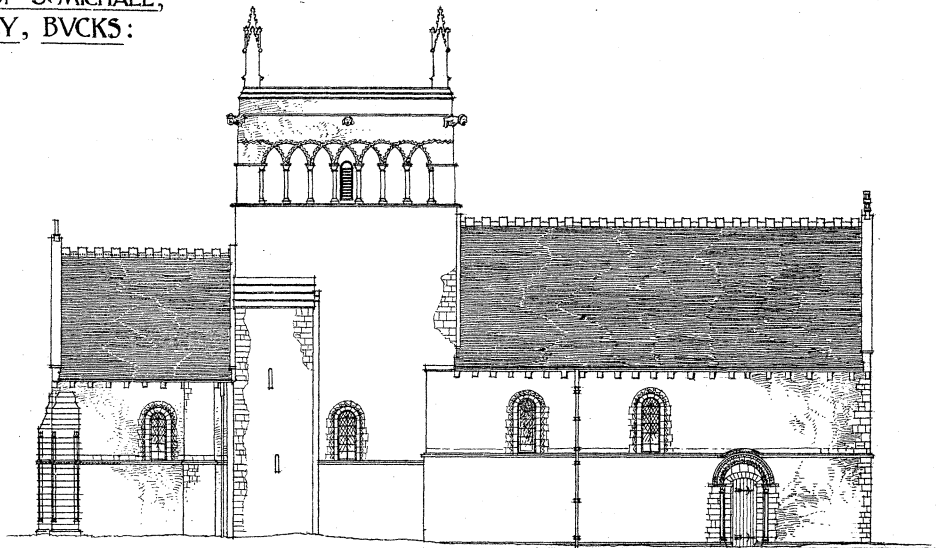
SOUTH ELEVATION

SCALE OF 8 FEET TO 1 INCH



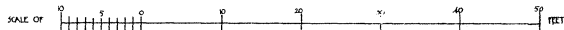
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CHVRCH OF ST MICHAEL,  
STEWKLEY, BVCKS:



NORTH ELEVATION.

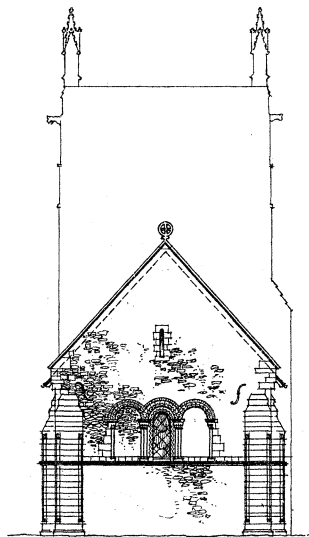
SCALE OF 3 FEET TO 1 INCH



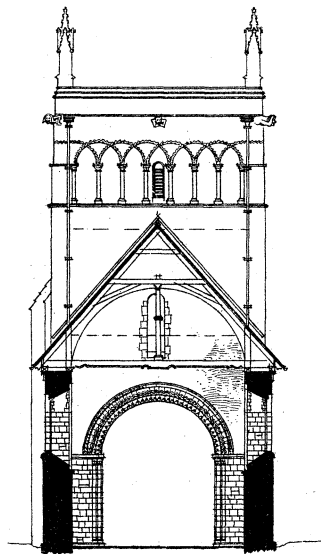
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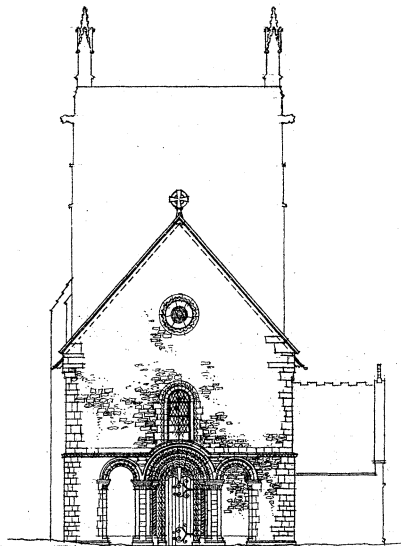
CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL  
STEWKLEY BVCKS



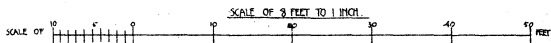
EAST ELEVATION



SECTION THROUGH NAVE

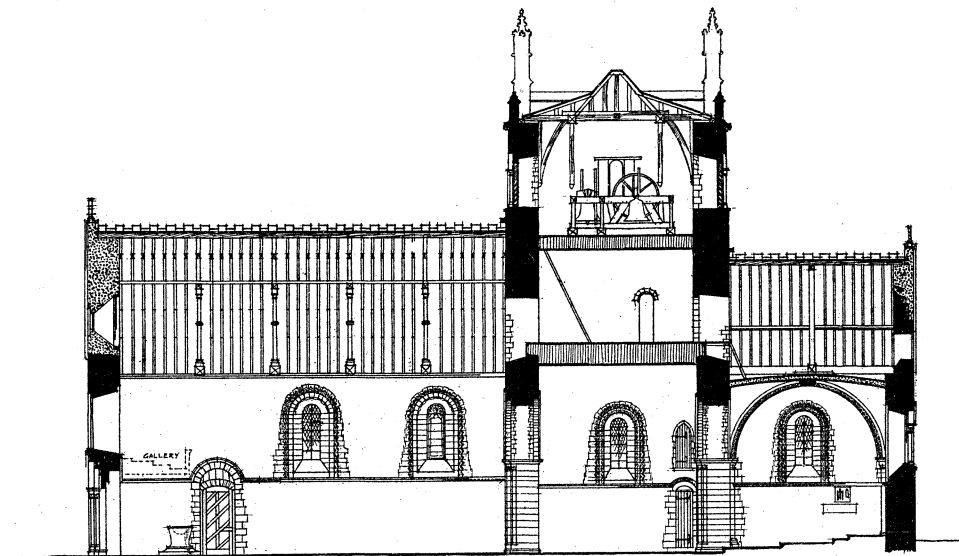


WEST ELEVATION



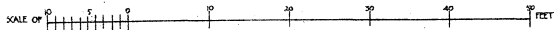
MEASURED AND DRAWN  
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1905  
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CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL.  
STEWKLEY, BVCKS:



LONGITVDINAL SECTION

SCALE OF 8 FEET TO 1 INCH



MEASURED AND DRAWN  
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1905  
by W. A. FORSYTHARIDA.

that the rubble was never intended to be seen. The stripping of the plaster on the two end fronts would appear, therefore, to be a mistake. A point worthy of notice is the series of offsets in the wall faces of the exterior, varying, according to position, from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches each.

One of the chief characteristics of Stewkley Church is the consistency of its scale and detail. The carvings are so employed as to express the relative importance of the parts. The doorways, for instance, are specially emphasised on the exterior, while the distribution of the enrichments of the interior leading up to the vaulted sanctuary, is a matter for interesting observation. The better stone of the building material, the dressed work, was without doubt quarried at a considerable distance, so that economy had to be exercised. All the exposed stones in the quoins, arches, piers, etc., vary in size throughout. The sculptured enrichments and zig-zag ornament are also varied in dimension to conform with the stone jointing, showing that these were all carved in position after the masons had fixed and faced up their work. It is further borne out by the "sunk" nature of the designs. This careful use of material is perhaps the great factor in producing the infinite variety and interest of mediæval work. The masons' marks are principally of a + form.

The views published in 1807, in Britton's *Architectural Antiquities*, are somewhat misleading in the matter of proportion of parts and in scale of detail; the Church also is made to look a very small building. A short spire is shown rising from the tower, and the four existing pinnacles are also indicated. The writer found the latter to be built in brick, rendered in mortar, and the crockets, finials, etc., cast in a cement-like material. The rendering of the whole of the exterior was probably done about the same time. The removal of these pinnacles is desirable.

Much more might be said upon this engrossing subject, but the reader is referred to the article in a previous issue to which allusion has been made. These notes cannot be concluded without placing on record the assistance rendered by the Vicar, the Rev. R. Bruce Dickson, in facilitating the fascinating task of measuring his beautiful Church.