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With the writers Complete

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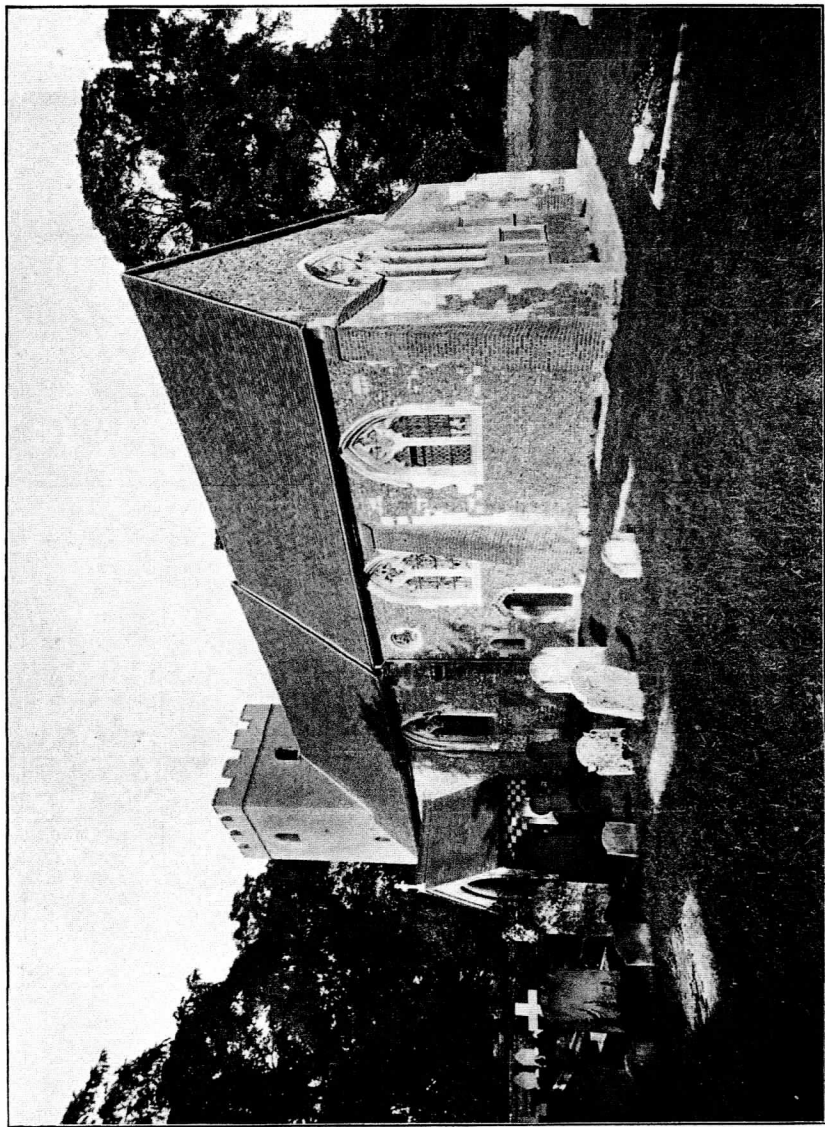
HITCHAM CHURCH.

[Reprinted from the RECORDS OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE,
Vol. 9, pp. 297-301, 1907.]

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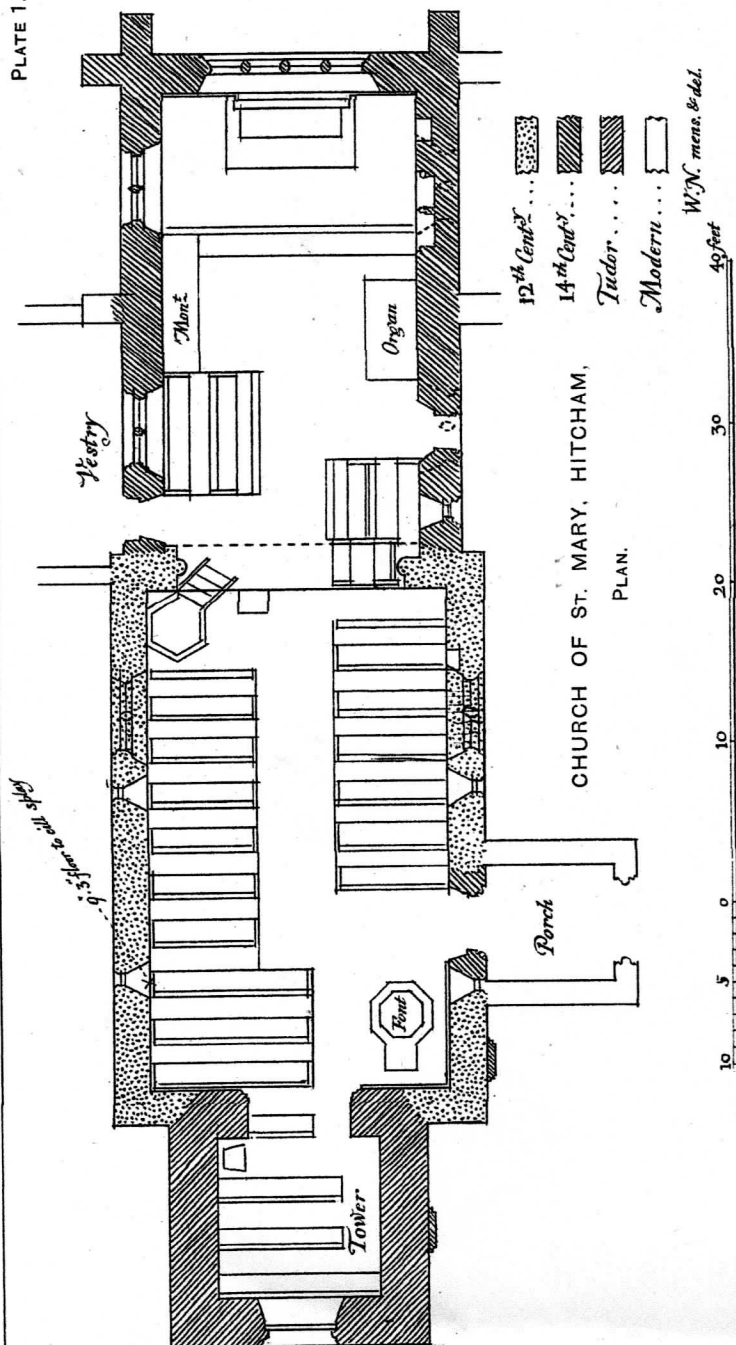
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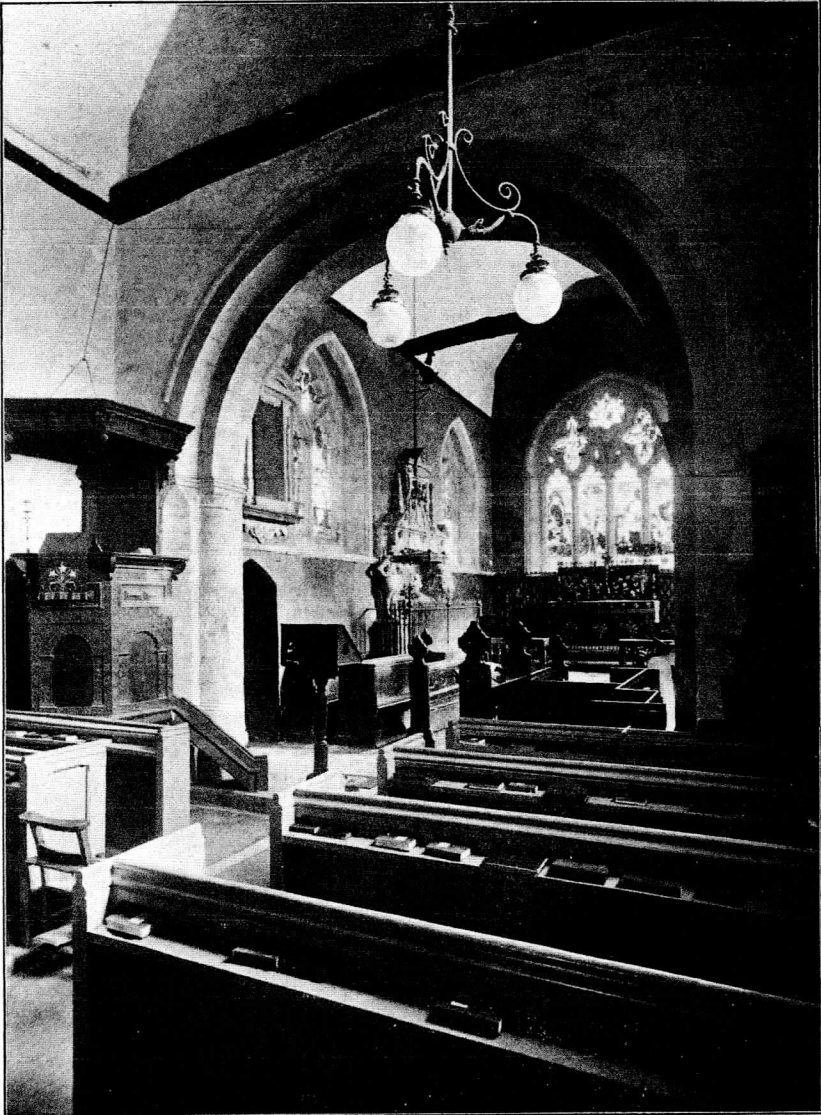
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NYREN PLUMBE, PHOTO.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, HITCHAM.





NYREN PLUMBE, PHOTO.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, HITCHAM.

HITCHAM CHURCH.

Small in dimensions, the Church of St. Mary, Hitcham, is quite large in interest. It may claim antiquity, for its little nave has welcomed the worshipper since the 12th century. No more beautiful work, of a simple kind, is to be found than its 14th century chancel. It ranks, I believe, second in this county to Chetwode only for the extent of what it retains in the way of old painted glass. Few churches of its size have preserved so many encaustic flooring tiles of the 14th century. The memorials of the dead which are identified, though not going back beyond the beginning of the 16th century, are an interesting series. The church consists of nave and chancel, both without aisles, a western tower added late in the Tudor time, containing three bells, and a modern porch and vestry. The materials used in the nave are flint with freestone dressings, and amongst the quoins externally may be noticed a hard conglomerate, which I am told is still dug in the neighbourhood. Clunch was used for the beautiful Decorated work of the chancel, including quoins of buttresses and even sill-stones, which have, of course, suffered from the weather. The roofs are rather high-pitched and covered with tile, the rafters of oak about 6 inches square, with plaster ceilings which have not been "opened up." There would seem to have been no tower till the present late Tudor one was built—of red brick, thinly faced with stucco or rough-cast. The nave must have been very insufficiently lighted by the four very small round-headed windows, two on either side (two now blocked by memorials), although there may have been a larger window in the west wall. So that when the new chancel was built in the 14th century two two-light windows were inserted in the nave, one on either side, one of which, having presumably decayed, has been renewed after a fashion in cement. The chancel arch has two plain orders, the inner one carried by an attached shaft, of which the roundness is broken by a central fillet, the capital carved in transitional style. To make more room for the priest's stall on the south

side a portion of the chancel arch pier was cut away in the 13th or 14th century, and, without inserting new stone to form a corbel at the head of this cutting, the bust of a man was carved in the existing clunch of the pier. By way of a balance to this on the north side, another head or bust was carved to stop the chancel string against the north pier. At about eighteen inches above the apex of the chancel arch on the chancel side, in the centre, a shaft of transitional character rises to a considerable height, the upper face of the more modern plaster ceiling resting upon its abacus. This shaft was presumably in connection with the roof of the earlier chancel.

The 14th century chancel is very complete, well-proportioned, and very pleasing. Not much destruction would seem to have taken place in it. Probably the large monument in alabaster and marble to Sir Wm. Clarke, Knight, 1624, so typical of the renaissance vanity, which occupies a large part of the north side, obliterated an Easter sepulchre or founder's tomb, and the brass to Nicholas Clarke, Esq., now on the floor, was formerly on an altar tomb of Sussex marble.* In better style than the large monument on the north side—which is enclosed by a good contemporary iron grille—is the earlier mural memorial to Roger Alford and wife, 1580. This seems to have been moved slightly westward, and the sedilia which it had encroached upon restored. Lipscomb noted that "in the pavement are several ancient sepulchral stones, some of them coffin-shaped; and on one of that form in the nave is a pastoral staff in relief." He does not say if any of these coffin slabs were in the chancel, but he seems to imply it. At the restoration in 1866 these slabs were turned out, and are now set up on end against the south walls of nave and tower. They number now five, all tapering and of English marble; one has a hollow moulding round it with no cross now traceable, another a double hollow with indications of a cross, another slightly reduced at each end had a 13th century floriated cross. These marbles have evidently suffered by exposure to the weather in their new position. In addition to the

* Hist. and Antiq. of Bucks, G. Lipscomb, 4 vols. 4to., 1847.

brass above-mentioned, there is another to Thomas Ramsey, 1510, and Margaret his wife.†

Detailed scale drawings of the chancel were printed in the Spring Gardens Sketch Book from measurements taken in 1878 by Mr. G. R. Webster.‡

There are instances here both of the low and the high side windows—as will be seen in the photo plate of the exterior—the former much restored. Controversy has raged about the use of “low side windows,” chiefly in chancels, and not far from an altar, ever since Mr. J. H. Parker started the subject in 1844. They are found in nearly all parts of England, and also in Denmark,§ but, it is said, not in other parts of the continent. They have been called lepers’ windows, but lepers were not admitted even to the church-yards. They have been said to have been used for confessions. The priest of Husaby, Verster-götland, said that such an opening in his church was for persons who, on account of grave offences, could not enter the church, to make their confession outside this window, and through it afterwards receive the sacrament—apparently shutting his eyes to the objection that anyone who could be admitted to the sacrament could not be excluded from the church. They were said by others to have been for depositing gifts from those cured at an adjacent holy well. But they are found where there was no holy well. They were look-out holes, to observe from the chancel what was taking place outside—such as the approach of a funeral procession. They were holes for archers, churches serving as places of refuge in troublous times. They have also been said to have been intended to look through, from without, upon a painting of St. Christopher, which would preserve the beholder from death for at least that day. They were for the purpose of throwing a light towards the church-yard to drive away the devil. Another theory, and better than some

†The writer has taken rubbings of these two brasses, and proposes to place them in the county museum if they are not already included in the collection. It may be noted here that the memorials of the dead in this church would alone supply material for a very interesting paper.

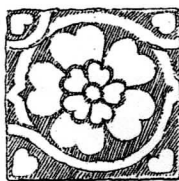
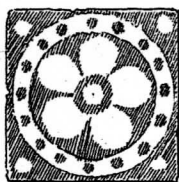
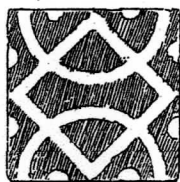
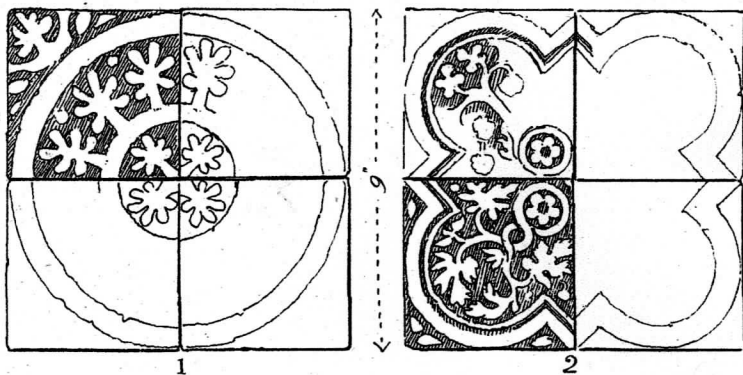
‡This book, in eight folio volumes, was printed privately for members of the Club, and is, I believe, not available even in our public libraries.

§ Arch. Journal, Vol. XLIII., No. 249.

of them, was that by opening a casement or shutter in the window from inside the sacring bell should be rung at it. Or they were for a passer-by to see, without entering the church, if the lights before the altar or the figure of a saint were burning. A few, amongst whom I will include myself, hold the commonplace view that they were for the most part made for the purpose of giving more light to those or someone within the church. In the present instance the low window would throw some extra light on the priest's stall, the position of which is indicated by the cutting away of a part of the south pier of the chancel arch, while the high-up window would throw light on to the rood loft.

In the course of the repairs which have (1906-07) been carried out under my direction the walls were carefully washed in search of old wall paintings, but nothing was found in the chancel; while in the nave slight traces of decoration, dating apparently only from the 17th century, were found, and have not been obliterated.

On the appointment of the present rector in 1906 the usual survey of the chancel was made. Rather more than the surveyor required was done to the roof, which was entirely stripped, and the tiles re-laid upon new lathes. In repairing the 14th century masonry not a stone was replaced, except where required for stability or to exclude the weather. It being found impracticable to match the old clunch, Beer stone was used to renew sill-stones and mullions which had perished, and which were mainly substitutes themselves. Repairs followed in the nave, the roof being treated in the same way as that of the chancel. In the "restoration" which took place in 1866 the little church suffered a good deal as to its fittings. The old oak pewing was removed, and low-backed deal benches substituted. Owing to the absence of ventilation the joists on which these were laid had rotted, and have had to be renewed. Our late member, Mr. Rutland, who was the contractor in 1866, had the good taste to appreciate this old wainscot work better than his employers, and preserved it, and we were able to purchase from him a small portion which he still



CHURCH OF ST. MARY, HITCHAM.

ENCAUSTIC TILES IN THE CHANCEL.

W. N., MENB. & DEL.

retained, and this was used to line the wall where the font stands. The late 17th century altar-rail not being in the Gothic style, had its well-formed balusters removed, and their place taken by some pseudo-Gothic filling. These balusters also were recovered from Mr. Rutland and replaced. The Jacobean pulpit and sound-board add to the picturesqueness of the interior. The original pedestal having disappeared, a new one has been substituted, and a new lectern has been provided in harmony with the pulpit. It is hoped to provide a more worthy prayer-desk and choir seats than the present deal benches.

Many old encaustic tiles remain in the chancel floor, a few of them, perhaps, in their original positions. I have drawn some of the best preserved specimens, which vary considerably in the different examples, and these are illustrated (Pl. VI.). Nos. 6 and 9 occur also at the neighbouring Little Marlow Nunnery; * and No. 9, also at Binfield, within Windsor Forest. On the subject of the three small shields on this tile more will be said when the painted glass is described. Nos. 1, 8, 10, 11, and 13 are, or were,† at Yateley, Hants.

Of the three bells, No. 2 is inscribed *sancte petre*, and is probably, Mr. Cocks tells us, by John Saunders. The other two are by Thomas Swain, signed and dated 1755.‡

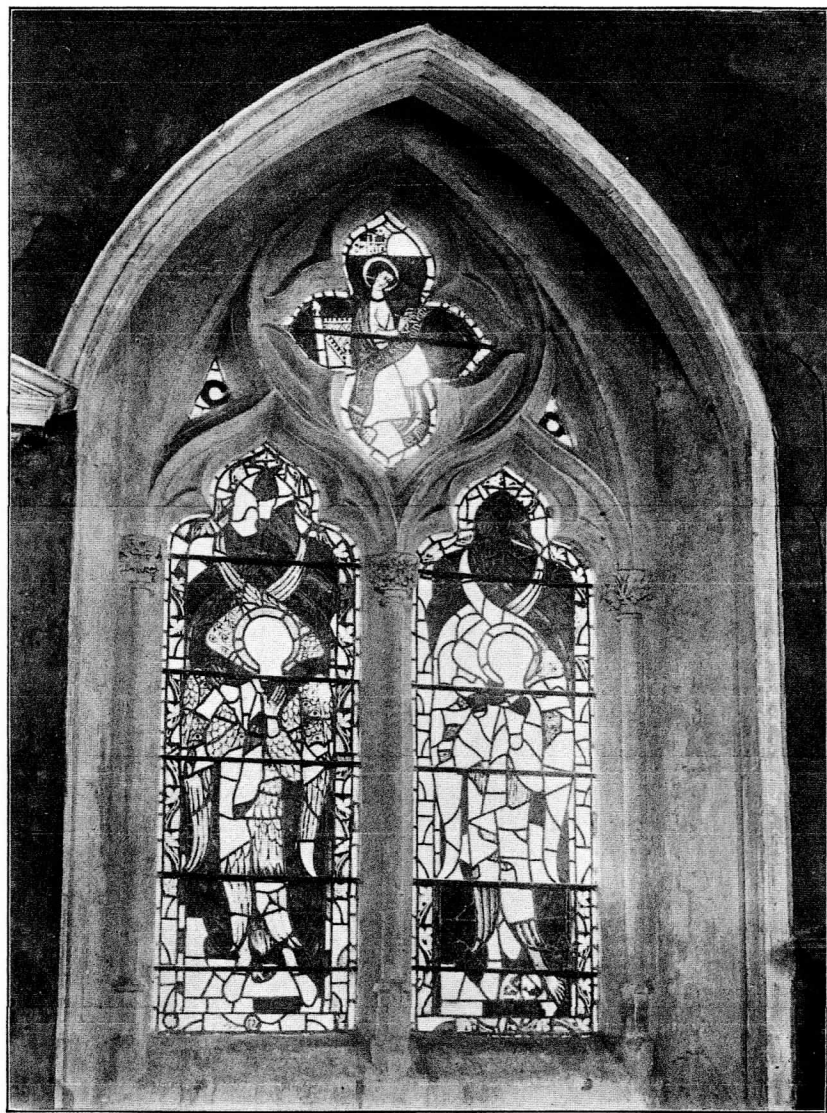
I must leave the chief glory of Hitcham, the painted glass windows of the chancel, to be described by an expert in our next issue, when probably Mr. Powell will also lay before us interesting evidence indicating the probable donor. Messrs. Powell have recently re-leaded the old glass, restoring to their right places fragments which in the course of many re-leadings had become misplaced. No modern coloured glass has been added. The cost of this work was the last gift to the church made by the late Mrs. George Hanbury, who unhappily only survived its completion a very short time.

W. NIVEN.

* RECORDS, Vol. VIII., 1902.

† Vol. of Tracings of Enc. Tiles, Soc. Antiq.

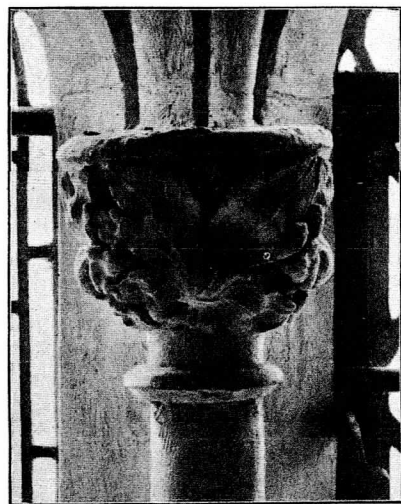
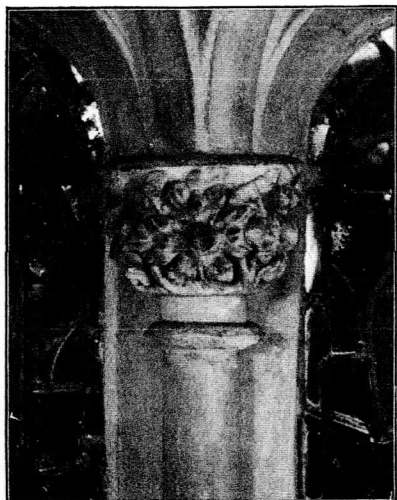
‡ Church Bells of Bucks, by A. H. Cocks, M.A., 1897.



NYREN PLUMBE, PHOTO.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, HITCHAM.

TWO-LIGHT WINDOW, NORTH SIDE OF CHANCEL,
SHOWING 14TH CENTURY GLASS, AS RE-LEADED.



NYREN PLUMBE, PHOTO.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, HITCHAM.
CARVED CAPITALS TO TWO-LIGHT WINDOWS,
NORTH SIDE OF CHANCEL.