

DENNINGTON CHURCH.

BY THOMAS EDWARD KEY.

We first hear of Dennington (originally called Donington or Dinginetuna) in the Norman times, for the lordship was held by Robert Malet, Great Chamberlain of England, under King Henry I., whose father, William Lord Malet, fought with the Conqueror at the battle of Hastings. It subsequently became the estate of Stephen, Earl of Bologne, afterwards King Stephen, by grant from his uncle Henry I. Seeing that the historical birth of Dennington took place in the Conqueror's time we might look in this building for Norman remains, so common in many of our neighbouring churches; but we must pass by that period, and also the early English, for it was not until the beginning of the third great epoch of architectural style that this church, dedicated to St. Mary, was built.

The church in the 14th century consisted of the present Decorated Chancel. The corbels of the chancel arch shafts are remarkable, for they belong to an earlier period than the chancel carvings, the dog tooth moulding and trefoil leaves being indicative of the Early English rather than the Decorated period. Some of the stones in the corbels have been restored, and one of the originals exists, having been recently discovered. The Nave is Decorated; the clerestory, porch, and tower are Perpendicular. Some members of the Wingfield family were probably benefactors to this building, for several of them are buried in this church, and their arms are found over the North Porch.* When a church had only one porch it was customary to place it on the south side, but when the main roads met, or the village was close to the church on the north-side, an exception was made, and the porch placed on the north, as here.

History tells us that Adam de Skaklethorp, rector of Cawston, in Norfolk, in 1348, was an eminent and wealthy person, and a great benefactor towards the building of the south aisle of this church, and to the repair of the chapel and altar of St. Mary, at the east end of the north aisle, and St. Margaret's Chapel and altar, at the east end of the south aisle. He was buried in the Cawston chancel before the principal image of St. Agnes. His will was proved in 1370.

The extreme length of this church (outside measurement) is 158 ft. † The Nave from the tower arch to the end of the chancel is 133 ft. 4 in. The width of the nave is 21 ft.; and the aisles about half that. The Chancel is 49 ft. 4 in. long. The height from the nave floor to the top soffit of the chancel arch is no less than 29 ft., to the lower collars 35 ft., to the upper collars 40 ft., to the ridge 45 ft.,

* See Vol. VII., 120. . . . † *Builder*, Feb. 11, 1888.

to the top of the tower parapet 75 ft., and to the summit of the beacon tower 82 ft. The Tower is of great strength, the walls being 5 ft. thick, and a local tradition says that we are indebted to the thickness of these walls for our fine tenor bell, which originally cast for Framlingham tower, was found too much for its stability, and so being moved here became the property of the parishioners. Those interested in massive ancient timber framing should visit the belfry. The staircase turret is carried up above the parapet, and finished as a beacon tower.

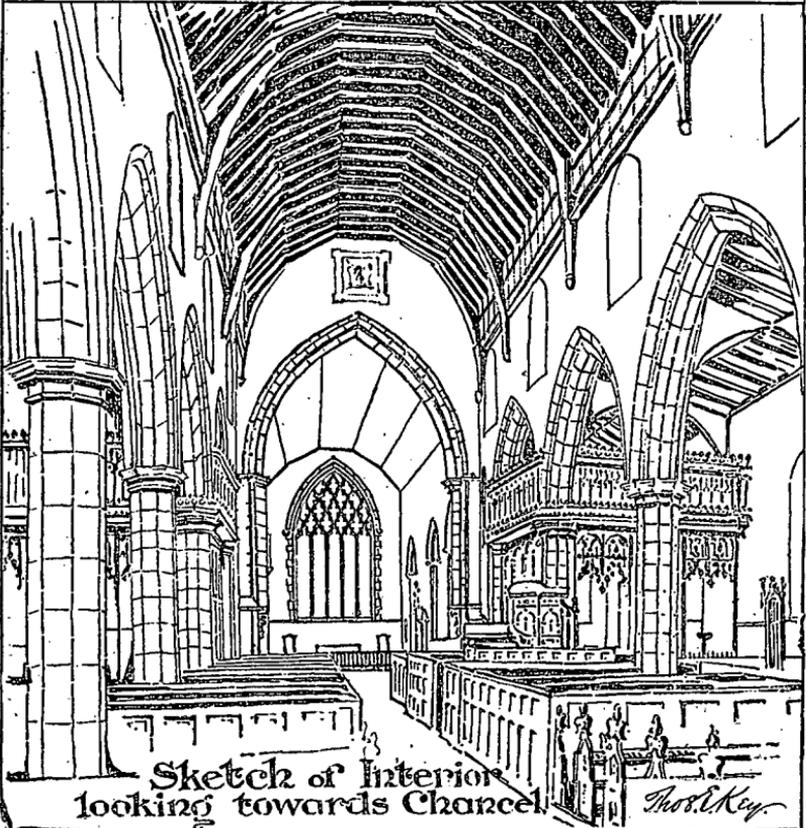
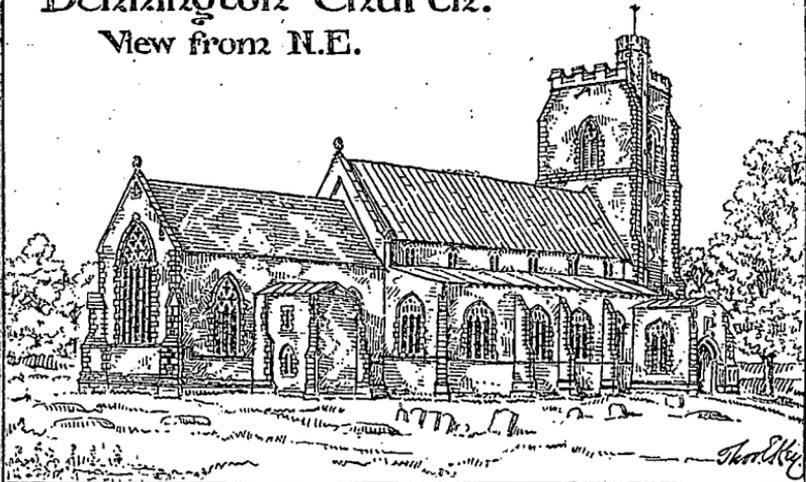
The chancel was repaired 40 years ago, and the original roof, probably in an advanced state of decay, taken off. Unfortunately the present roof was improperly constructed: the wall plates being two feet too high, which gives the wall above the windows a stilted appearance, and also brings a greater thrust on the buttresses. The weather moulding on the exterior shows that the original roof was of higher pitch than the present one. The windows are good examples of their kind. Their peculiarity at this period is, that the form of arch admits of an equilateral triangle being precisely inscribed between the crowning point of the arch and its points of springing at the imposts.

In noting the style of this church, it is interesting to observe its points of similarity with two neighbouring churches, namely Orford and Friston. The whole of Orford Church was, with the exception of the ruined Norman Chancel, built at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and the tracery of the alternate windows is identically the same as at Dennington; moreover, both are built of Caen stone. The church at Friston is celebrated for its Decorated tower, in the window at the west end there is such technical similarity between the label heads and other details that there is reason to believe that the work was executed not only at the same time, but also by the same workmen. In these remote times skilled workmen travelled in companies from one place to another, and when busy on one church their future services were secured for another. It is reasonable to suppose that after working at Orford they went to Friston, thence to Dennington, and afterwards joined the army of workmen at Ely Cathedral. Referring again to Friston Church, it is an interesting fact that the north gargoyle, below the tower parapet, is of the same design as the carving in the east capital of the south-west chancel window at Dennington.

The exterior heads have all been defaced with the exception of one which, built up in the wall during the addition to St. Margaret's Chapel, when Bardolph's Chantry was founded, was excavated a few years since. By this accident an exact record is afforded of the state of the outside work during the reign of Henry VI.

There is a remarkable carving over the priest's door on the south side, that of a head somewhat defaced, with a scaly body, and long tail twined around it, on the left side there is the reclining figure of a boy, whose entrails are being plucked out by a bird; the right side of the carving has the figure of a woman with a dagger and shield.

Dennington Church.
View from N.E.



Sketch of Interior
looking towards Chancel

The capitals of the Chancel windows are varied and beautiful examples of their kind. The first in the north-west window shows three ivy leaves with clusters of berries, the upper portion enlivened by four birds picking the leaves. The next is a woman, in the head dress of the period, holding in either hand a rose and bud, another rose and bud being worked in on either side. The third represents a stem curving the depth of the abacus, attached to which are three trefoil leaves and five bunches of nuts. The most graceful of all occupies the next position, a pleasing effect being obtained by four drooping elongated leaves, groups of berries relieving the spaces, the bareness below being relieved by the introduction of two stalks to each leaf. The one following this is the simplest of the series, and is nothing more than three oak leaves with acorns on either side. The sixth is noticeable as having small trefoil leaves growing from the cap itself. The next in the east window represents two boars fighting. The eighth also shows two conventional animals engaged in mortal combat. The tenth should be noticed for its horizontal foliage, which, if placed vertically, would have harmonized too much with the north finial of the sedilia. Then comes a human face. The twelfth shows two horned owls perched on the branches of a tree. Of the last two, the first is a grotesque head, and the second has oak leaves and acorns.

The crocketed canopy of the sedilia deserves attention; the finials are bold, and give a graceful finish to the whole design. The small heads at the springing of the canopy should be noticed. There is every reason to suppose that a similar canopy existed on the traceried piscina, as remains of a former buttress are plainly visible. The priest's window-seat adjoining the sedilia must be observed, as well as the figure terminating the string course by the priest's door.

Few village churches have so much ancient painted glass remaining as this. Dowsing visited this church on his errand of destruction in September 1644. He mentions in his journal that when he came to Dennington Church he took down the angels in Sir John Rouse's aisle, and two holy water fonts, and in the Bacon's aisle nine pictures of angels and crosses, and a holy water font, and ten superstitious pictures in the chancel, &c. (See Vol. vi., 265.) The following entry occurs in the Parish Book:—

1664. "Paid to William Curtys for setting up again the dyall at the church gate, 3d."

There are several entries about this dial; the villagers evidently took their time from it, there being no clock in the tower at that period.

The inhabitants of Dennington had to supply Fairfax with money for his wars, as appears by this entry in our town book:—

"Item for writing the two schedules of the money and jewels and plate given to the Lord Fairfax, 1/6"

The next entry deserving attention is :—

“Paid to Francis Verden when he came with Commission from the Earl of Manchester to search for scandalous pictures, 3/4.

“Paid out to the glazier for 10 new panes of glass, 13/8.”

We find the following memorandum in 1662 :—

“That upon the 2nd of June the churchwardens and other tradesmen did search the vestry for the brasses which had been formerly taken off the grave stones in the church and chancel, and did find there one and fifty pound and a half, and did lay it up there in a corner of the vestry by me John Paull, churchwarden 1662.”

In 1643 occurs the entry :—

“Item, laid out to one Smyth a glazier of Laxfield for 7 score 7 ft. of new glass, and 24 feet of old glass, and six score and 10 quarrells of glass about the repairing the church windows being much decayed & for colouring stuff & for doing out inscriptions, commanded by authority to be done £6 ls. 6d.

“Item : To Richard Parker for 18 days work in helping the glazier, and mortering up the panes, 9/-

“More to him for levelling up the chancel and other work about the church, 3/4.”

This last is a valuable entry to us, it marks the time when the chancel steps, leading to what was originally the high altar, were levelled.

The parcloses were erected about 1450. The painting on them is modern.

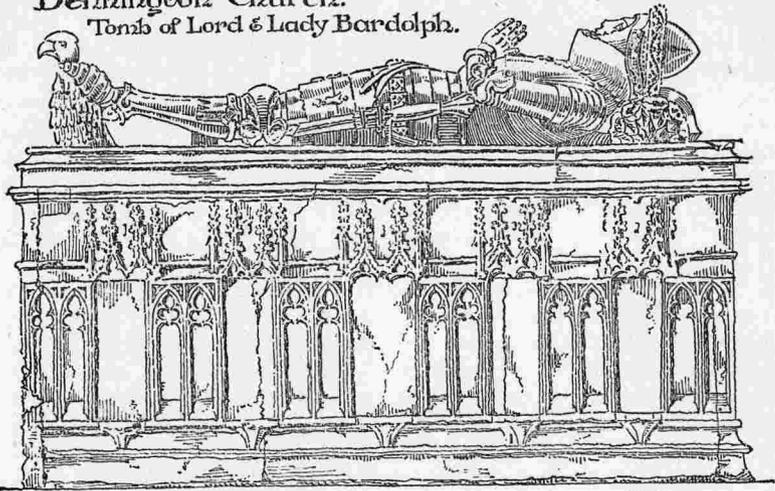
The screens are of oak throughout, and are decayed in places. The effect produced by the rood-loft, with its massive cross, or rood, towering up under the chancel arch, must have been very fine. It seems probable that the original rood screen, the lower part of which is in existence, was of slightly earlier date than the parcloses. The gallery in this screen was reached from St. Margaret's parclose loft by a semi-circular headed opening. What remains has been moved under the centre of the Chancel arch. It is obvious that this is not the original position, because there are traces of another compartment which formerly existed, but now cut away. The original colouring is in a fair state of preservation, also the carvings on the ten spandrels : the four on the north side are floral designs. The next represents two eagles facing each other : this is the only instance in the church where two opposite spandrels of this class of work are similar. The reason may have been that the eagle represents St. John, whose gospel was to be carried through the world, thus each bird flies in an opposite direction with the gospel scroll in its talons. The next, on the south side, represents a griffin, then comes a pelican with its nest of three young ones. There is another nest of the same on a bench end in the north aisle. A dragon, representing Satan, is shown on the next spandrel. The small borrowed lights in the wall staircases were plastered and white-washed over, but these have recently been opened.

St. Margaret's Chapel contains Lord Bardolph's tomb. It is a remarkable piece of work. The family of Phelip became seated in Dennington in the time of Richard II. A descendant of William Phelip, about 1408, married Joan, the daughter of Lord Bardolph. Sir William fought under Henry v., and while with the King in Normandy, was created a Knight of the Garter, at St. George's Feast, held by Humphry, Duke of Gloucester, the King's Lieutenant, and was installed by proxy at the death of that victorious King, holding the office of Treasurer of his Majesty's Household, he had the chief management of the royal funeral. He was retained to serve the King in his wars in France, with nineteen men-at-arms, and sixty archers for one year. In the 15th year of the same reign he founded a chantry in this church, and the next year was appointed Lord Chamberlain of the King's Household, with the title of Lord Bardolph. He appointed two chaplains to officiate daily in this chantry, and endowed it with £20 per annum. He also gave to this church, after the decease of his wife, a mass book called a gradual, a silver censer, and other things. He bequeathed his body to be buried with those of his ancestors before the above-mentioned altar, and directed a thousand masses to be said for his soul by the several orders of friars in Norfolk and Suffolk. By a codicil he ordered his body to be interred in the churchyard, and appointed upon the carriage of his corpse to Dennington, twenty torches to be borne about it on entering every town through which it should pass, and that 24 torches and 24 tapers, each of them weighing 4 lbs. of wax, should burn about it during the time of his exequies and mass: which 24 tapers should be carried by 24 of his own poor tenants clothed in black, and 24 tapers by 24 women also tenants, clothed in white, each to receive 8d. for their labours.

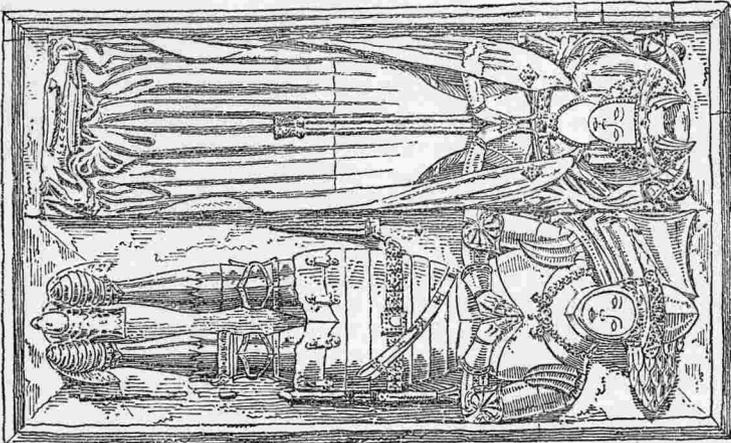
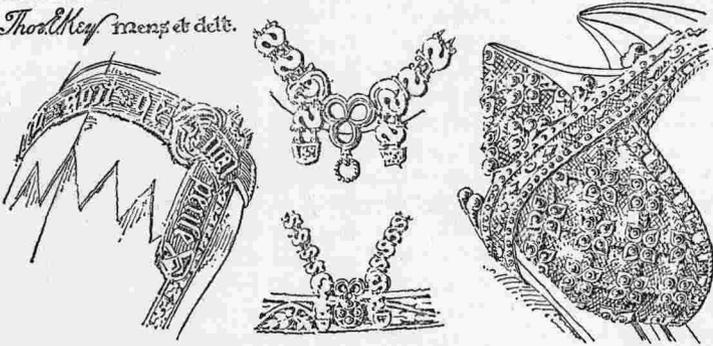
Lady Bardolph's will was proved in 1447 by which she bequeathed her body to be buried in the chapel of St. Margaret at Dennington. In 1887 the tomb was opened, nothing however was discovered, but at the depth of 5 ft., a slate was found, which stated that it had been opened in 1847.

The effigies are in a fine state of preservation. Lord Bardolph is shown with his head resting on his tilting helmet, which is surmounted by the orle and his crest, a plume of leaves; from under the orle hangs the contoise or tasseled scarf, represented streaming out in the breeze as it did when the Knight advanced in action. His head is enclosed in a basinet, encircled by a wreath, the band on his forehead having on it the letters "I.H.C." He wears a massive S.S. chain round his neck, a belt falls diagonally from the waist to the left side, to which is fastened a long sword, the hilt of which is decorated with the sacred monogram. The hips are encircled by a richly sculptured bawdrick, to which, on the right side, is attached by a double cord, a weapon about 19 inches long when perfect; the one here has the hilt missing. It is called a misericorde, the name indicating the cry for mercy that the victim raised when this instrument was used. His effigy is on the left, his lady taking the place of honour, as he was Lord Bardolph in her right.

Dennington Church.
Tomb of Lord & Lady Bardolph.



Thorold Key. mens et del.



She wears the usual mitred head-dress of the period, ornamented with pearls. Her head rests on a double cushion, the upper one supported by two angels. Round her neck is a small S.S. collar. Her feet are supported by a griffin. The details of the sides and ends of the tomb are very elaborate, being tabernacle work alternating with cusped arches. The figures were gilded and coloured in places, and each is cut out of a solid block of alabaster, resting on red brick piers, five courses to the foot. (Tomb engraved by Joshua Kirby in 1748, 35.)

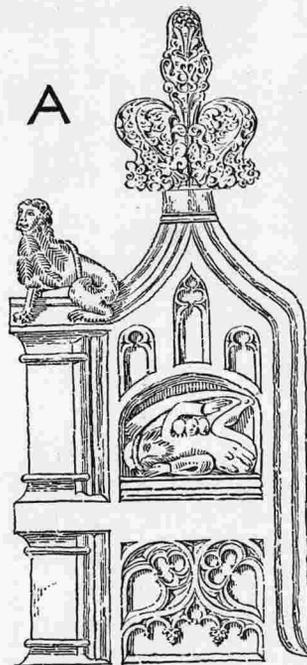
When the chantry to Bardolph was founded, the wall was taken down, and 2 ft. added to this chapel. At this period two priests' chambers were erected one above the other. At the present time the lower serves as a vestry, and that over it as a lumber loft. Attention should be drawn to the great strength of these rooms. The three windows were fastened by bars of iron, and guarded by massive shutters which could be securely fastened on the inside. The trap door over the primitive steps (constructed of triangular blocks) was locked from below. Everything tends to show that these chambers were the strong rooms of the parish. This was probably the repository of the plate which was sold to Fairfax. The eastern wall of this priest's house is built against a buttress.

The richness of S. Margaret's chapel was greatly enhanced by the fine altar tomb, which formerly had embroidered canopies and decorations. The slab is of Purbeck marble, and contains leaden plugs to which metal of some kind was fastened. The whole is ornamented with shields, crowns, and Tudor roses. There is reason to believe that this tomb was the Sepulchre of the Body of Christ mentioned in Lady Bardolph's will, and which was used more especially at the Festival of Corpus Christi.

The window in this Chapel is remarkable, inasmuch as the width of the opening between the imposts is less than that at the level of the slab. In the north-east of the Chapel is a niche, this, as well as the piscina, has been much mutilated.

Some tiles of vine leaf pattern of the period of Bardolph still remain upon the floor. In examining the wall of the vestry a small opening into the chancel was discovered, the oak lintel was decayed, and within the recess was found an ancient tile of similar design to those already mentioned. (See Details D.)

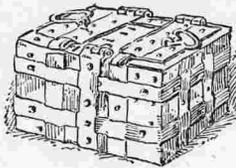
The open seats, bench ends, and poppy heads, will compare favourably with those of any other church in England. They are all of different treatment, with the exception of two. There is a certain relationship between them all, with the exception of one, which is higher than the others, has different detail, and instead of showing geometrical tracery, exhibits a most extraordinary figure with elongated feet, and is one of the curious people mentioned by the Greek writers, called the Skiapodes, or the shadow-footed, a fabulous race in the hottest part of Lybia, with immense feet, which they used as parasols. (Aristophanes *Av.* 1553 cf. Ctesias apud Harpocratio.)



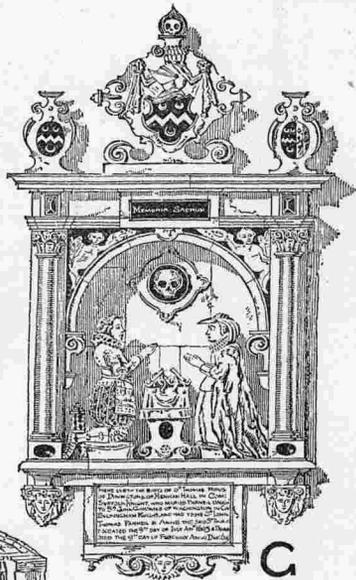
Dennington C^h
Details.



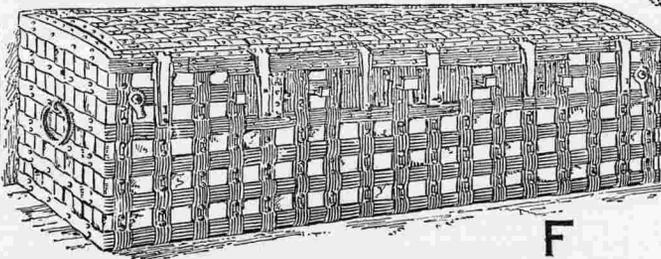
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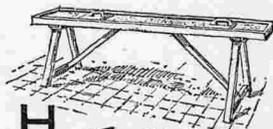
E



G



F



H

Thor & Key del.

- (I.) North east sketch and interior sketch of church.
 (II.) Bardolph's tomb. Elevation and plan showing details of the garter, Lady's head-dress, and the S.S. chains of both figures.

(III.) DETAILS.

- A. Shadow footed man, No. 31 on plan.
 B. Glass in outside divisions of chancel windows.
 C. Glass from middle do.
 D. Tile discovered in bricked up opening in the wall of Priests' Chamber above vestry. (Vide plan.) A similar tile is engraved in Gentleman's Mag. Jan. 1806, as having been found among the ruins of Sibton Abbey.
 E. The oldest church chest now in vestry, the whole of the outside is iron bound.
 F. The large chest in vestry, 7 ft. long, 3½ ft. of wrought iron banding of 2¼ in. wide, is employed.
 G. Monument to Sir Thomas Rous of Dennington Hall. Temp. James I.
 H. Sand table, formerly used in Chancel, by which some of the oldest inhabitants of Dennington were taught to write.

(IV.) PLAN.

Nos. 1 to 60 inclusive show the positions of the carved pew ends, the tracery varying in each. Nos. 61 to 82 show those with poppy heads and figures only without the side tracery.

Those worthy of special notice are:—

- No. 1 for its interlacing circles.
 No. 34 for its elaborate treatment.
 No. 5 for its large circle containing octagonal star, each point of which is filled with the Tudor rose.
 Nos. 11, 49, and 54, good examples of Perpendicular tracery.
 No. 52 has its carved side turned to the wall.
 53 contains the sacred monogram much defaced.
 20 and 40 have grotesque faces introduced in the tracery.
 No. 66 is of an earlier date than any of the others, and is of entirely different detail, with an excellent outside figure of an angel.
 45, the most remarkable outside figure, is that of a mermaid with the conventional fish's tail.

The stones marked A, C, D, G, H, J, N, S have had their brasses taken away. Brass inscriptions remain on B, F, L.

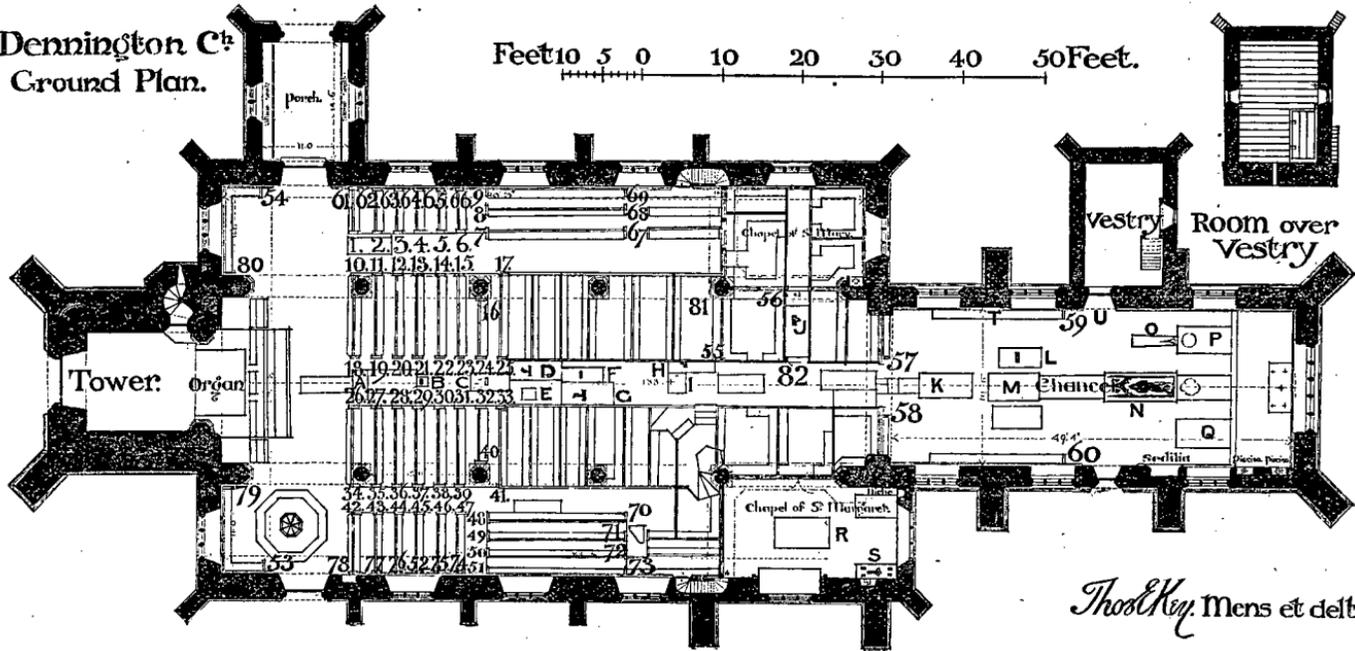
N once contained brass of Knight Templar, the Purbeck slab, with remains of cross at O is of same date.

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|--------------------|-----------------------|
| E. Robert Newton. | M. Rev. E. C. Alston. |
| I. Rev. W. Wynne. | P. Rev. T. Fynne. |
| K. Rev. R. Wright. | Q. Rev. F. Hotham. |

The mural tablet to Rev. W. Fulke is at point T, and that to Robert Wright's daughter at U.

Dennington Ch^h
Ground Plan.

Feet 10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 Feet.



Thos Key. Mens et del.