

LITTLE MARLOW CHURCH.

The following brief account of the Church of St. John the Baptist includes notes by Mr. T. F. Hannaford White, accompanying his excellent scale drawings. He gives the date of the earlier building as 1190, which is that given in Kelly's Directory. I do not know the authority for this date, but, as regards the chancel arch, it seems approximately borne out by the evidence of the work itself. The church now consists of chancel, of which the walls are probably of the 12th century, with two very beautiful two-light Early-English windows in the north wall (one of which has externally been renewed); a south chapel opening from the chancel and nave aisle; nave of three bays, no doubt wider than the 12th century, or earlier, nave, which was probably without aisles, as at Hitcham, with north and south aisles, which, although the arches differ slightly in detail on the north and south sides, were probably constructed about the same time, in the 15th century; north porch of timber; western tower, which probably formed part of the 12th century building. According to Kelly, the first modern "restoration" took place in 1866, when a gallery and the high pews were removed, and the ceiling of the chancel also destroyed. In 1902 further renovation was done under the direction of Mr. Harold Bailey, architect, at a cost of about £1,000. The plaster ceilings of the nave and south chapel, which seemed to date from the 17th century, were then removed, and the timbers and boarding of the roofs exposed, and the quaint 17th century dormer windows with their leaded panes were replaced by more gothic-formed windows with match-boarded flanks and heads. The writer regrets both alterations. There can be no doubt that a whitened plaster ceiling greatly improves the lighting of an interior, also that such a ceiling keeps it warmer in winter and cooler in summer; and, although the present dormers are larger than the old ones the nave

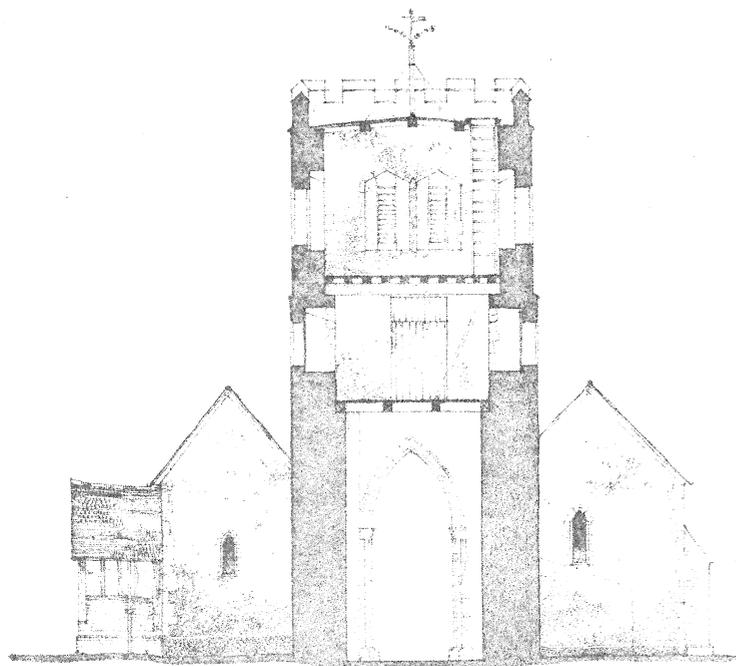
appears to be darker now than before the destruction of the old ceiling and the exposure and darkening of the woodwork.

Reference to the plan of the church will show that the reconstructed nave does not centre with the earlier chancel, that the space between the chancel arch and the nave arcades is greater on the north than the south. Near the centre of the greater space to the north is a beautiful trefoil-headed niche, at a height from the floor sufficient to clear the top of an altar. There are traces of wood plugs for hooks and a rebate for doors. Whether this was only an aumbry or contained an image or sculptured group or a tabernacle which, by opening the doors, was exposed to view during an office, may be debated. An argument against its use as a mere cupboard, commonly closed, may be found in the fact that the doors or shutters when closed would entirely hide the carved ornament which surrounds the opening. Above this niche and the altar which must have stood in front of it the rood-loft projected. This was gained by a stair from the east end of the north aisle, and considerable portions of the stone stairs and archway through the wall remain.

In the north wall of the chancel, close to its north-western angle, was an opening, now blocked, which some have pronounced to be a "low side window," so frequently met with in this county. At some period of its history this opening was used as a window, as proved by indications of iron bars in the arched head; but the height of the opening as compared with the width suggest rather that this was originally a priest's doorway, or a doorway from the sacristy to the chancel. The square plinths of the tower responds indicate an early date, and their bases and capitals may once have resembled those of the beautiful tower arch at Bisham, but they have been disfigured by non-descript mouldings ignorantly applied in cement.

A few fragments of old painted glass remain, one of them, in the south chapel, bearing the name "ledewych."

The most interesting memorial is the altar tomb to Nicholas Ledewich, who died 1430, and his wife, with

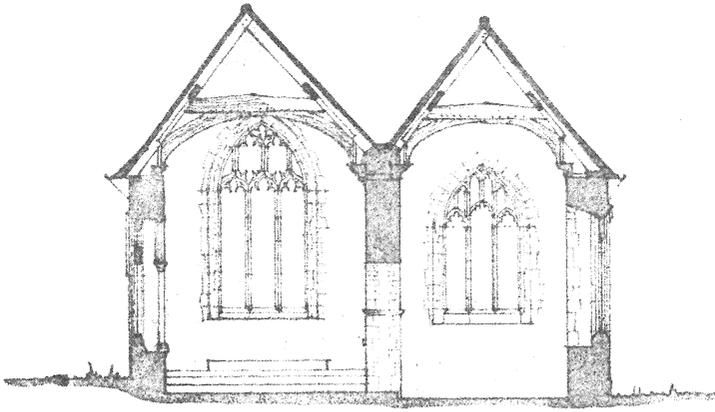


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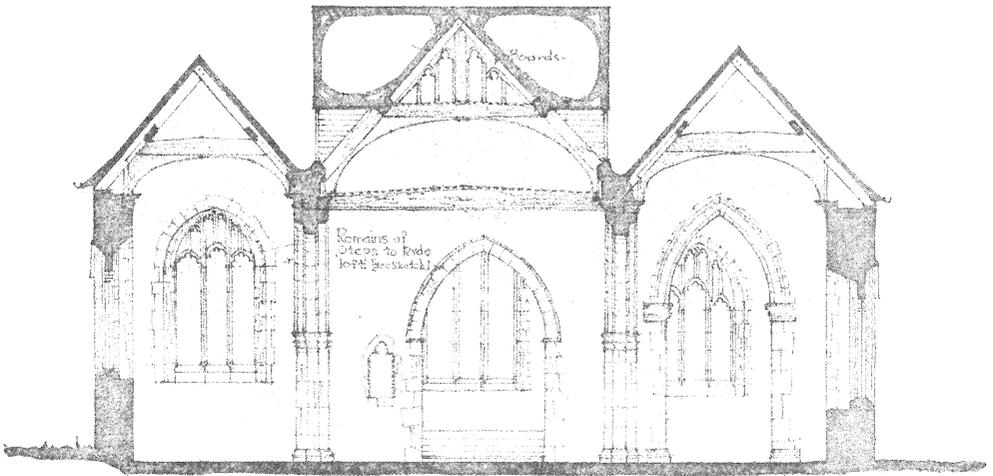


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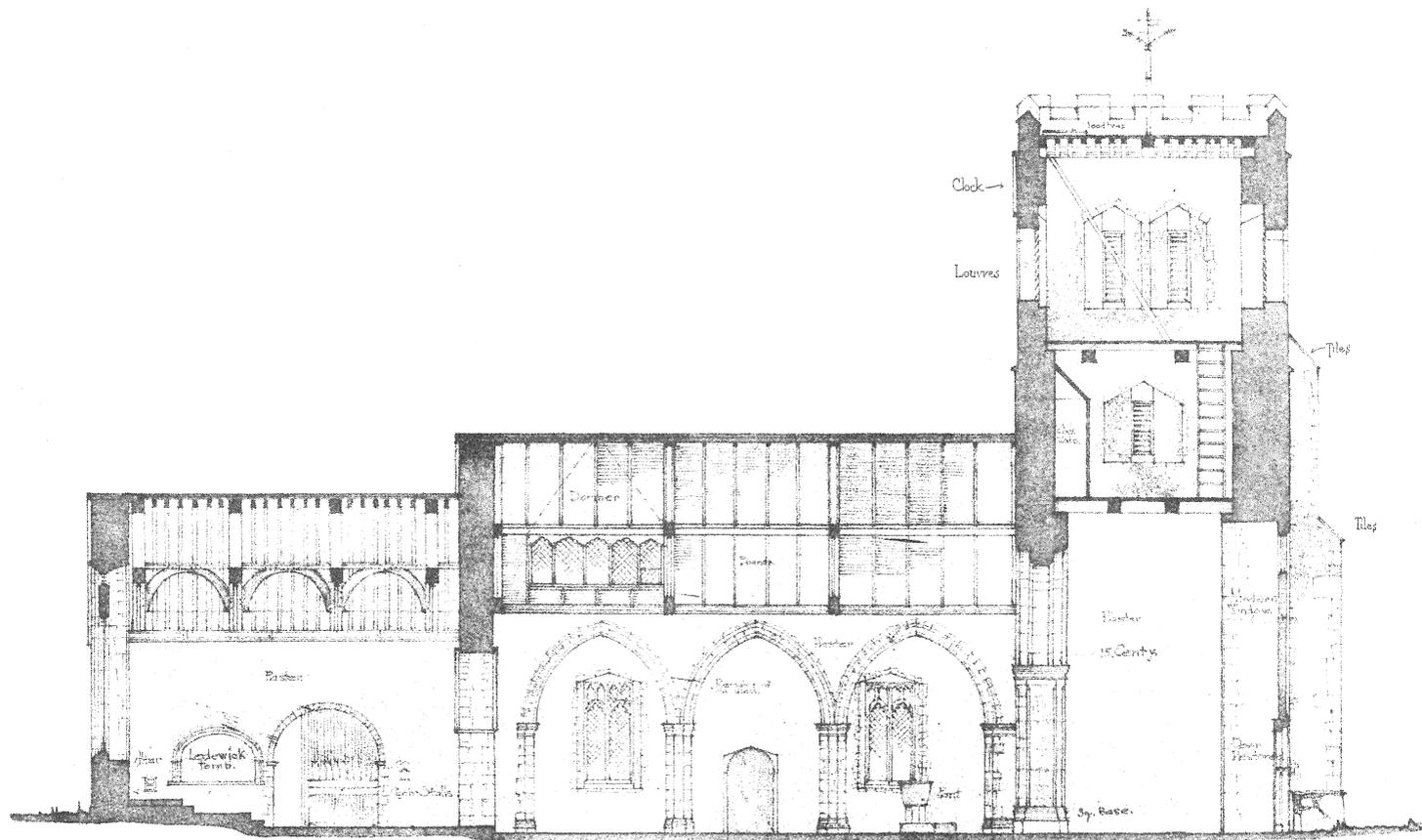
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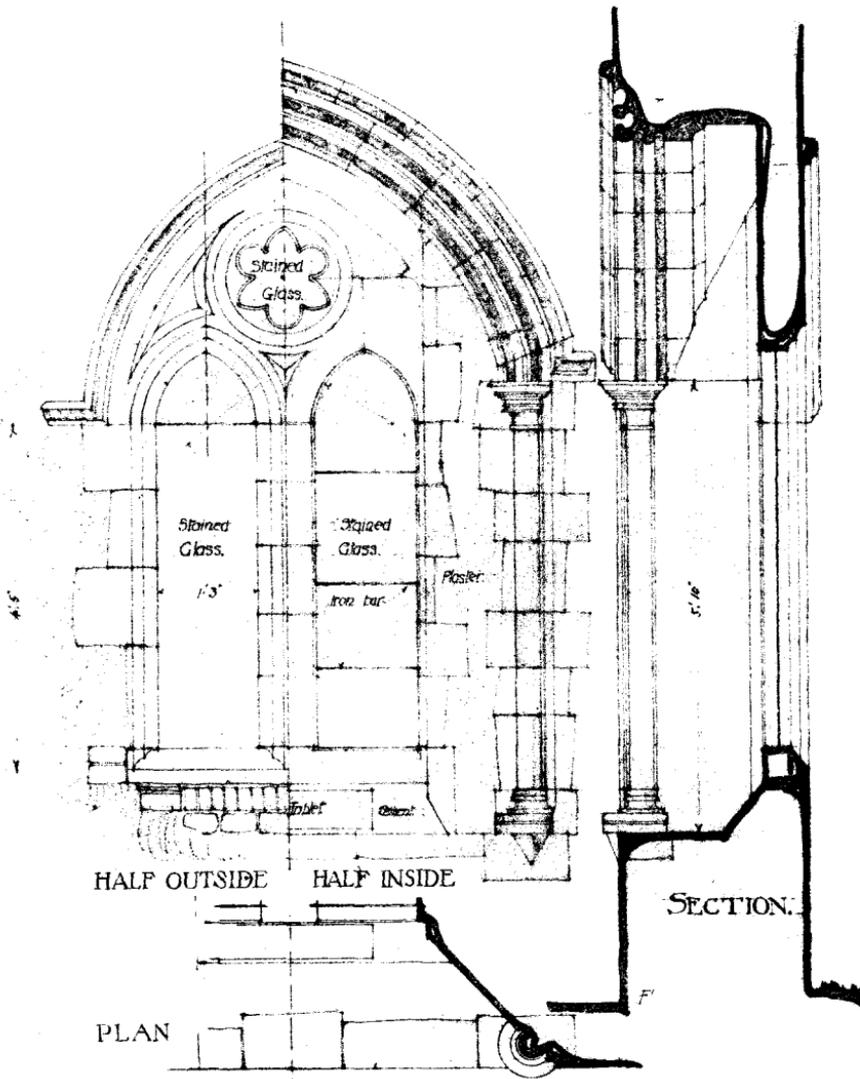
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NORTH ELEVATION

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NORTH WINDOWS IN CHANCEL .

their effigies engraved on brass plates upon a marble slab, but that of the husband has been stolen.

The fittings are modern. The altar table is of the 17th century, and there is an old gate-leg table of oak. An Elizabethan communion cup, 1569.

The register dates, marriages and burials, from 1559, baptisms 1562.

W. N.