



Chickney, Essex

Licencez

Church of St Mary the Virgin

Church fabric

Grid ref TL 574 281

Date

Nave and W part of chancel – period C3

Taylor

Church-yard circular: if original, indicates very early site. Church very haphazardly laid out. External angles built up without quoins.

Nave

Two original double-splay windows high up in N and S walls, originally had wooden shutters.

Chancel

Doubled in length early in C13 and junction with Anglo-Saxon work clearly visible in exterior N wall.

Stone high altar slab is original: surface incised with five consecration crosses. It was found under the floor in 1858.

From the Church Guidebook

The Place-Name is Old English (or Saxon), probably meaning “Chicca’s Island”, and refers to the fact that the parish is surrounded by three streams which, when in spate, almost convert it into an island.

The Village, never very large, has completely disappeared. It stood in the valley north-west of the church, along Chickney Street and the old road, now a short lane a hundred yards or so west of the church, led down to it. The Hall, east of the church, an imposing brick building with a notable gable-end, was rebuilt in 1935. The cottage near its entrance is modern.

The Churchyard. An unusual feature is its circular shape, something of a rarity in this part of England. If this is an original feature, which there seems no reason to doubt, then the site must be very early and was probably a pagan temple or shrine before Christianity was introduced.

The Church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, is one of the oldest and most interesting in Essex, being

largely of Pre-Conquest date, built about AD 1000 or a little later. It consists of a chancel, nave, south porch and western tower, and is very irregularly laid out, the nave being wider at its east end and none of its angles right-angles. The chancel is deflected considerably to the south and the tower, built at right angles to the Saxon west wall, bears sharply to the north. ...

The Saxon church. The nave and western half of the chancel are Saxon. It will be noticed that the external angles of the nave walls are built up roughly without quoin (or cut) stones – stone of any kind being very difficult to get as there are no quarries in East Anglia. Two original window openings remain intact, one on either side of the nave, high up in the walls. They are deeply splayed both inside and out (a typical Saxon feature) and were not originally glazed but closed by wooden shutters which were removed when the church was used for a service.

The Chancel was doubled in length early in the C13 and the junction with the Saxon work is clearly seen on the outside north wall. On the interior the extension is marked by a bold string-course running round the eastern part of the chancel below the windows. ...The east window is modern but replaces a three-light C14 one of which it is a copy. ...The stone high-altar slab is original and its surface is incised with five consecration crosses, representing the five wounds of Our Lord. It was found beneath the floor in 1858 and replaced.

The Chancel Arch is an early C14 widening of the previous one, but it seems that the square-edged impost were re-used. Notice the curious panelled corbels which now support the inner order of the arch. ...

*From Philip G. M. Dickinson, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.:
Notes on the Church of St Mary the Virgin,
Chickney, Essex*