



Sompting, Sussex

Σομπτίντζερ

Church of St Mary

Church fabric

Sculpture

Grid ref TQ 161 056

Tower and part of nave. Unique helm roof.

Fisher

West tower and possibly parts of nave walls - period C.

Taylor

Original dedication unknown.

Tower

Built of uncoursed flints with some Roman bricks in N and W tower walls. Formerly plastered but much plaster has peeled off. Two stages, separated by decorated string-course. String-course square-cut with series of curved, semi-elliptical hollows cut around lower edge. SE quoin is genuine long-and-short work, though rather irregular above string-course. SW quoin below string-course is big stone work arranged mainly on end in rough long-and-short arrangement. Above string-course is rather irregular long-and-short work; below string-course, flush with wall face (unusually) and originally plastered.

NE quoin above string-course of small square or short slabs on end.

NW quoin similar to NE quoin above string-course. Below string-course flush with wall face (unusual) and originally plastered like walls

On S and W walls, on both sides of SW quoin, extending to string-course, are real long-and-short thin buttresses. Evidence for similar buttresses at NW quoin, replaced by later larger buttresses.

Apparent SE quoin below string-course not real quoin, as nave of same width and nave N and S walls continuous with tower N and S walls. This is really projecting long-and-short pilaster buttress at junction of walls. It projects from wall, *c.f.* NW and SW quoins

In centre of N, S and W walls are genuine long-and-short pilaster-strips, square-cut below string-course and half-round above. Half-round strips extend up into apices of helm roof and end below projecting square corbels. (According to Rickman's drawing corbels hollow chamfered round lower half.)

Below belfry openings pilaster-strips interrupted by decorative capitals.

Tower roof

Rhenish helm. Fine though later examples at Abbey Church, Laach; Andernach and Coblenz cathedrals; Apostles' church at Cologne.

Four-sided gabled roof with apices of gables placed centrally in tower walls and lower corners of gables above tower quoins. Roof faces trapezoidal. Only Anglo-Saxon tower known to have retained original roof form.

Tower, E wall

Pair single gable-head belfry openings. Gable sides have half-round edges, stone jambs

Tower, S wall

One small gable-head window to E of central pilaster above string-course, suggesting internal second stage. Gable of two, thin slabs. Each jamb has tall, massive, centre slab with smaller slab above and below. Sill is one slab between jambs. Neither window nor doorway in ground stage. Square-cut lower portion of central pilaster strip intact, standing on a projecting base. Half-round section above string-course also complete. Floriated capital below belfry openings

Two pairs tall, double belfry openings, one on each side of central pilaster. Round heads not cut from single stones. Heads and jambs half-round on outer edges. Sills square-cut, sloping. Central, mid-wall shafts, plain, straight (not balusters). Upper ends corbelled out to N and S to support double heads (no mid-wall projecting impost): *cf.* JARROW and BOLAM, also late C11: *c.f.* also Trier cathedral in the Rhineland.

Tower, W wall

No openings above ground stage and below belfry which is not separated from stages below. Only some parts of lower section square-cut central pilaster-strip below string-course remain: half-round above string-course intact

Capital below belfry openings too badly worn to be recognised, but according to Rickman's drawing was decorated with human face. Tall, narrow,

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blocked round-head opening to N of central pilaster with slab jambs and no imposts; thin sill and half-round head cut from single stone. Rebated all round, including sill, possible for fixing of lighting slabs: too far above ground for doorway.

Other openings, one window and one door, are later than Anglo-Saxon.

Pair of single, gable-head belfry openings, gable sides with half-round edges, jambs of Roman bricks

Tower, N wall

Two ranges of window openings between string-course and belfry, indicating four internal stages including ground stage and belfry. Lower pair are small, gable-head openings, one of pair each side of central pilaster. Central common jamb is a single, massive, circular pillar stone. Outer jambs single stones with half-round outer faces. Sill too badly worn to be recognisable – according to Rickman's drawing was massive with queer carvings on face; possible a re-used cross-shaft fragment

Above are two separate, single windows, close together, one on each side of central pilaster; larger than those below, round-headed. Both heads and jambs have half-round outer faces. Both heads below and enclosed by larger round heads in wall in Roman bricks. Both have massive sills, probably decorated like pair below.

Two pairs of tall, double belfry openings, one on each side of central pilaster, similar to those on S side.

Tower arch

Fine, with round-head of vousoirs, jambs of slabs, face-alternate, approximating to upright-an-flat in

that some stones thinner and run further into walls. Stands on thin, square-cut plinths. Soffit rolls – late Anglo-Saxon feature – around head and down jambs, standing on chamfered half-round base. Thin, square-cut abaci below arch-head cut to appropriate shapes, and below abaci, voluted capitals of original design; corner volutes boldly carved (cf. GLENTWORTH) trumpet spirals with clusters of grapes at centres. Capitals on soffit rolls foliated and similar to capitals on external half-round pilasters: three layers of rather crudely stylised leaves with turned-back tops (cf. SCARTH). Clapham thought they derived from palmette, which was easier to copy than acanthus and found occasionally in Anglo-Saxon work, but acanthus found elsewhere in church.

Chancel

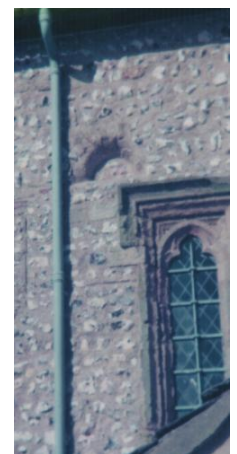
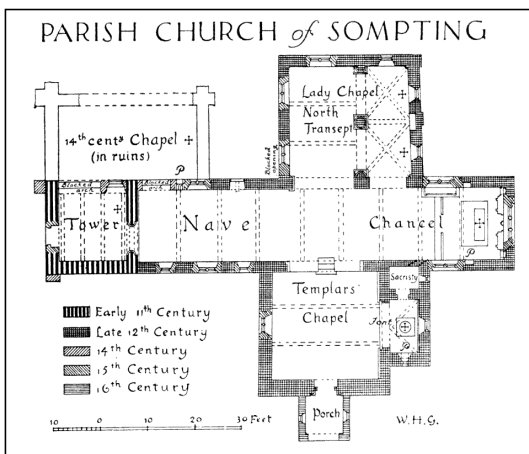
S of altar is a gable-headed piscina with rather primitive but highly-finished interlacing acanthus ornament

N of altar flat lintel of rectangular recess has same acanthus carving.

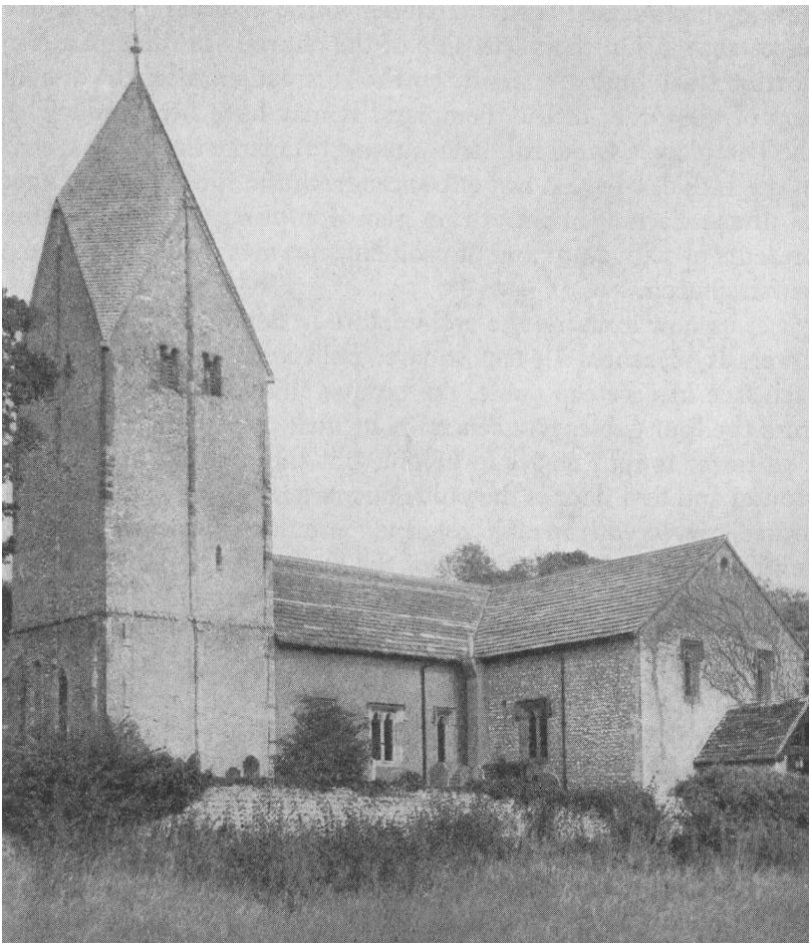
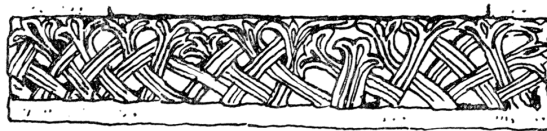
Behind altar, three strips of frieze incorporated in later reredos. All probably fragments of complete frieze.

Carved slab

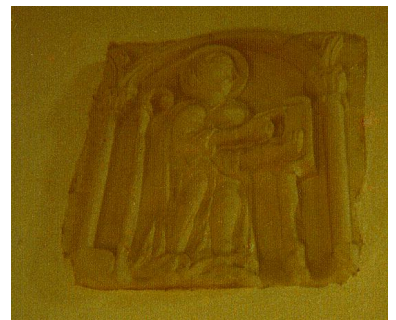
S chapel E wall has carved slab. Arch with shafts and capitals with simple palmette ornament similar to that on tower arch soffit-roll capital and stiff leaf ornament (c.f. Jew's harp ornament at STOW and elsewhere). Inside arch nimbed figure, primitive in execution, with body in frontal attitude, head in profile, with a single large eye in top side of forehead. Hands large, holding book on rest and blessing. Pastoral staff, apparently unsupported on point



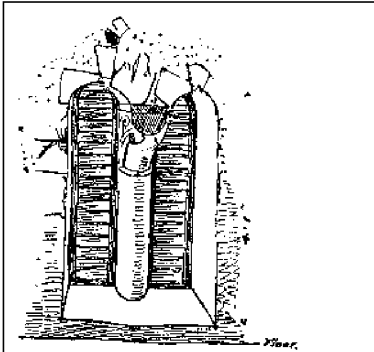
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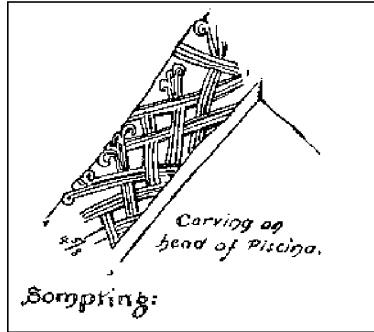
Above:
Tower arch capital
Top left:
Church from North-East
Centre left:
Carved acanthus frieze
Bottom left:
Church from South-West
Below:
Figural sculpture:
Photograph by Elaine Cloake
and Drawing by Malcolm
Eadmund Dunstall



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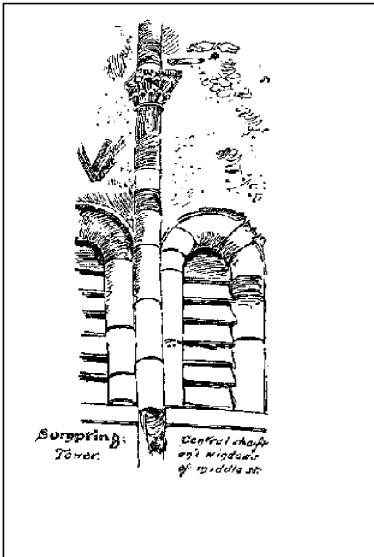


Sompting: Window in top stage of tower, with mid-wall shaft, N. side

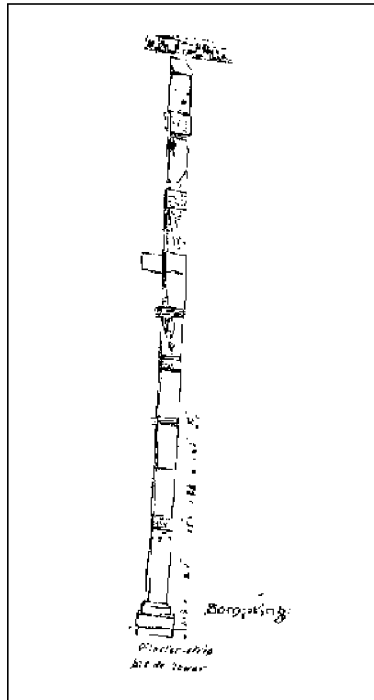


Sompting:

Drawings of various architectural details of Sompting church



Sompting: Tower. Central shaft on inside of middle st.



Sompting: Middle shaft bit of tower

