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The Church of S. John Baptist, Inglesham, Wilts

by W. H. Knowles
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THE CHURCH OF S. JOHN BAPTIST,
INGLESHAM, WILTS

by W. H. KNOWLES, F.S.A.

THE landscape of the bordering counties of Gloucester, Oxford and Wilts, whether of undulating character, of broad plains, or bright meadows and noble trees, is attractive and beautiful to look upon. Equally in the aspect of the villages and ancient buildings there is a noticeable variety and distinctive charm. Of these local differences one is the prevalence, in Gloucestershire, of fine 14–15th century western church-towers, with an occasional sturdy example appropriately crowning some slight eminence, whilst amid the far-reaching flat spaces in the area, where the three counties meet about Lechlade, graceful spires of earlier date are frequent, and by the wanderer soon to be regarded as friendly sentinels in this sparsely populated and quiet countryside. Notwithstanding, tower and spire are absent at Inglesham, which is a mile only south of Lechlade but within the borders of Wiltshire and until 1883 formed part of and belonged to Berkshire.

The church at Inglesham is near where the Thames, 100 yards west of it, is joined by the Coln, on whose banks, but in Gloucestershire and within a short distance of each other, are the beautiful churches of Coln Denys and Coln Rogers, the interesting Bibury and famed Fairford.

By the charter of foundation, 25 Jan. 1204–5, King John endowed the newly formed abbey of Beaulieu (Hants) with, among many manors, 'the vill of Inglesham and the church of Inglesham'. (Dugdale's Monasticon, v, 683).
Owing to its remote position, Inglesham church was generally overlooked until William Morris, then living at Kelmscott nearby, drew attention to its loveliness. It has been untouched for almost three centuries, is of exceptional charm and much more attractive and fascinating than Kelmscott, which has undergone 'restoration'.

Externally the simple proportions of the church, whose walls are of a soft grey colour, its well designed double bell-gable, and deep sheltering porch, combine with the churchyard cross and a few tall trees to form a picturesque composition. Internally it is rich in unrestored furniture, including medieval screens, a Jacobean pulpit with canopy, and varied seating of unusual merit.

The plan (fig. 1) comprises a chancel, a nave of two bays with north and south aisles, to which was added a double bell-gable at the west end, a spacious south porch, and a small chapel in continuation of the south aisle.

On the interior the chancel measures 21 ft. 6 in. by 12 ft., and the nave 25 ft. 6 in. by 13 ft. 6 in. The walls of the nave are 26 in. thick and from floor to roof wall-plate 21 ft. in height. The apparent architectural details of the nave are of advancing character, and indicate that the work progressed without interruption over a period embracing approximately the last decade of the 12th century and the first of the 13th century, rather than in sections of distinct periods. The chancel was wholly built in the 13th century. The earliest features are to be observed in the south nave arcade of two bays (fig. 2). The eastern respond is semicircular on plan, with a moulded base having a hollow between two rounds over a square plinth, and a plain incurved scalloped capital, with an octagonal moulded abacus. The western respond is similar, save that the face of the scallops is sunk and has slight foliage between each scallop. The centre pier (fig. 3 and pl. v) is cylindrical over a moulded base and square plinth, and has a carved capital of stiff volute-like foliage and moulded octagonal abacus. The arches are
CHURCH OF S. JOHN BAPTIST, INGLESHAM, WILTS

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST
INGLESHAM WILTS.

Fig. 1
semicircular of two chamfered orders with a chamfered hood moulding to the north face. The responds of the north arcade (fig. 4 and pl. iv) are slightly chamfered on the edge, and the centre circular pier is of less diameter to that on the south arcade, and the foliage of its capital is more delicate in treatment (pl. iii). The arches of two chamfered orders (fig. 4) are pointed, and at the east and west ends die into square jambs; they have moulded hoods to both faces. The south door has an attached shaft to the jambs with a rude bell-capital and an impost having a plain face with a bead on its lower edge supporting a semicircular arch moulded with a roll only. The north door has a chamfered trefoil-head in two stones to the exterior, and a rear arch set higher of the same form. In the jambs are holes for a bar to secure the door.

The features of the nave just recited embrace details which if taken separately may be dated at least twenty years apart. Yet the late J. T. Micklethwaite considered
that the building of the church was a continuous operation, and accounted for its leisurely progress by suggesting the existence alongside of an earlier building.\footnote{See references to his report made in 1886 for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in Trans. B.G.A.S., xxii, 47, and xliv, 43–6.} Other writers have also suggested that 'the two aisles are not additions but part of the original plan'.

That so small a building should have occupied so long a period to erect is indeed highly improbable, and contrary to the evidence afforded by the building, the arcades
being clearly of different dates and insertions in earlier masonry. That a church of earlier date than the details just described did occupy the site, there is visible evidence in a sculptured stone (pl. 11) of a Madonna and Child fortunately preserved in the south aisle, and in the unmistakable and strikingly Saxon proportions of the nave. In the latter there are no apparent architectural details, but the dimensions of its plan, and the height and character of its masonry,² sufficiently demonstrate the fact that its walls belong to a building of the 11th century or possibly earlier.³

² The walls are only 26 in. in thickness—possibly thinner above the arcade—and uneven on the surface, either out of plumb or caused by the insertion of the arcade. Further, the west gable is of irregular rag-stones and the other walls approximately coursed.

³ On plan the nave is 25 ft. 6 in. by 13 ft. 6 in., and to the roof wall-plate 21 ft. in height. Usually pre-conquest naves equal two squares, that at Deerhurst church measures 37 ft. 6 in. by 21 ft., Deerhurst chapel 25 ft. by 16 ft. Trans. B.G.A.S., L, 59, 67. Worth church is 59 ft. by 26 ft. 8 in. and Dover 60 ft. by 27 ft.
The recognition of this fact enables us to realize that the common procedure in the development of the plan obtained at Inglesham: first by the addition of a south aisle (fig. 2), then of the north aisle and afterwards the rebuilding of the chancel. The accepted method of introducing an arcade was to cut tall narrow slits in the old walls, and in them to build each pier, followed by the arch in like fashion. At Inglesham apparently there was an unusual pause between the stage of breaking through the south nave-wall, firstly for the insertion of the east respond, followed by the similar operation for the west respond and again for the central pillar.

The confirmatory sculptured stone of the Madonna and Child (pl. II), possibly contemporary with the nave, may here be referred to. The stone is 24 by 42 inches in height. Our Lord is enthroned on the lap of His Mother. The figures are posed in profile and inclining towards one another. The Virgin is clothed in a hooded robe. The nimbed Christ is also draped in a long robe, His right hand is extended in the attitude of benediction, His left clasps a book, and above Him is the Dexter Dei. On the upper margin of the stone in capital letters is the name M A R I A. The work is a minor example of figure-sculpture rudely executed, which does not permit of precise classification other than that it must be assigned to a date preceding the structural details ascribed to the 12-13th century. At a later date the stone has been defaced by the incised meridian and other lines and the hole for the gnomen of a scratch-dial. Originally the stone may have occupied a position above the altar; previous to 1910 it was built into the south nave-wall near the porch.

To return to the fabric. In the second quarter of the 13th century the original chancel (possibly about 12 ft. square) was replaced by one of increased dimensions (fig. 1). On the exterior of both north and east walls is a chamfered base, and a string-course at the sill-level;
and on the interior in the east gable is a roll-moulded string-course which is a continuation of that on the north side. The features in the north wall are interesting. In it are two lancet windows (fig. 4) (the heads have been mutilated at a later period) which have wide splays to the jambs and arches and a chamfered hood-moulding which is carried along the wall at the springing-level.

Below the string and occupying the western half of the chancel north wall, is a wall-arcade of three semicircular arches (fig. 5 and pl. vi) having a filleted roll and a moulded hood. At the west end the mouldings die into the walls and at the east end are continued down the jambs. Between, the arches spring from carved capitals with moulded abaci, but the detached shafts and part of the bench table on which they stood have been destroyed. A similar arcade and bench probably existed in the south wall where is now the arch between the chancel and chapel, both intended for the use of singing clerks. Below the sill of the east window there are partially
destroyed shallow semicircular openings suggesting a reredos at the place.

The first variation to the general design was effected in the third quarter of the 13th century. Then the south chancel-wall was rebuilt in line with the south nave-arcade, thereby increasing by 12 inches the width of the chancel (fig. 1). The east gable was partially restored and the diagonal buttress at the southeast angle added. Incorporated in this slight extension are the east and south windows and the angle piscina between them. The east window is of three trefoiled lights within a containing arch, with a moulded hood to the exterior, and on the interior a cinquefoiled rear-arch. The south window (fig. 2) is of two trefoiled lights and a circle in the head between the trefoils, with a pointed rear-arch and hood-moulding, and a low projecting sill which forms a sedile. The piscina is placed anglewise in the southeast corner; it has a trefoiled head, a shelf and a circular basin. A further 13th century feature occurs over the west nave-wall where was erected a picturesque bell-gable (fig. 6) with two trefoil-headed openings for the bells, and above a pierced circle filling the apex of the gable. On the south face is an attached dial-stone. Possibly the deeply projecting buttresses below were added at the time.

During the 14th century the church was further adorned with new traceried windows; that at the east end of the north aisle is pointed of two ogee cinquefoil cusped-lights, with an ogee opening above with quatrefoil cusping. It has a hood moulding on the exterior, and on the interior brackets for images on either side of the window. A window, later in date, and which, with great probability, occupied the east end of the south aisle, was removed and rebuilt in the south wall of the chapel when that extension was made. In the same wall is a trefoil-headed piscina with a quatrefoil projecting basin. In the north wall of the north aisle is a low segmental arched recess four feet in width which has lost its cusping.
Near the east respond of the same aisle is a small piscina with a trefoil head and quatrefoil basin. The chancel arch (pl. iv) also was rebuilt in the 14th century (replacing the narrow one of the early church): it is pointed of two broad chamfered orders which die into the jambs and has a moulded label on the west side.

In the 15th century the external aspect of the church was much altered. Excellently designed windows were
INGLESHAM CHURCH, WILTSHIRE
Plates I–VI, ph. Sydney A. Pitcher
INGLESHAM CHURCH: NORTH PIER AND SCREEN
INGLESHAM CHURCH: WALL, ARCADE AND SEATING IN CHANCEL
introduced at the west end of the nave and aisles, and the aisle-walls were raised and finished with a parapet having well moulded cornice and coping stone. The nave window (fig. 6) is a pointed one of three lights of two chamfered orders; the mullions are continued to the arch soffit; the lights have cinquefoil and the lesser ones above them trefoil cusping; the hood-moulding is continued across the face of the nave wall to the buttresses which flank the window. The aisle windows (pl. 1) are of two square-headed lights with cinquefoil cusping and a hood returned at the ends. The small two-light window in the south aisle-wall has cinquefoil cusping but no hood-moulding. The gables have flat copings and the nave and chancel roofs are covered with stone slates.

The porch (pl. 1) was added in the 15–16th century but has been much restored. The outer opening has a lintel in one stone with flat four-centered soffit. In the gable is an ogee trefoiled niche with a moulded hood, and in the east wall a square-headed blocked recess. On either side are narrow stone benches. The steps within the porch descend to the church, adding to the quaint effect on entering, but occasioned by the increased height of the exterior churchyard due to repeated burials.

The extensions of the south aisle (fig. 1) provided a small chapel overlapping part of the chancel; it has a two-light pointed late 14th century window in the south wall which, as remarked above, was undoubtedly obtained from the demolished east end of the south aisle, and below it a priest’s door with a lintel in one stone resembling that to the porch, and in the east wall a square-headed three-light window without cusping. The arch between chapel and chancel is semicircular (fig. 2) of two chamfered orders, the inner springing from a corbel of the same section chamfered on the underside.

Few churches are completely enclosed by their original roofs. At Inglesham all are old and further they are agreeable examples of craftsmanship appropriate to the
simple character of the building. The chancel roof is formed of trussed rafters, collar and braces, without principals but held together by three tie-beams. The eastern half is boarded, constituting it a canopy over the sanctuary. This roof, which was a favourite form in the 13–14th centuries may well be of the end of the 13th century when the chancel was increased in width. Over the nave is a low pitched roof of 15th century type, with heavy tie-beam principals and curved struts; the purlins have curved wind braces. The south aisle-roof is also of 15th century type, it is divided into four bays by chamfered cambered beam-principals, with curved wall-pieces on either side resting on stone corbels. The compartments are arranged in eight panels, the wall plate and purlins are single, and the ridge-piece double chamfered. The north aisle is of like design but the members are unchamfered. The roof over the chapel is panelled to resemble the aisles in outline, but with added mouldings to the structural timbers.

Again it must be remarked, few churches are so well furnished with ancient fittings as Inglesham. On entering it (pls. iv and v) the visitor is instantly arrested by its old-world charm, incidental to the beauty and excellence of the unrestored woodwork which has escaped mutilation at the hand of the 'spoiler'. Parclose-screens enclose the side chapels occupying the eastern half of both aisles, but the chancel screen has been utterly destroyed unless we may regard a sunken oak timber at the floor-level as evidence of a cill piece. Three of the screens (pls. iii and v) are in tolerable condition—those between the east responds and the centre pillars of both arcades, and the return one between the south pillar and the south aisle wall. On the north side (pl. iii) the upper portion of the screen (between the pillar and the aisle-wall) has

4 See Hechington church porch roof, and Long Stanton nave roof in Brandon's *Open Timber Roofs of the Middle Ages*, plates i and ii.
been cut away leaving the wainscot and transom only. Both screens to the nave include a door opening at the west end (afterwards filled in), and a central door to those in both the north and south aisles (pl. v). The screens are square-framed with moulded mullions and traceried panels, a plain cill-piece, and deep-carved transoms and cornices. Above the transoms the open lights

![Fig. 7](image)

have delicate trefoiled feathered tracery within a pointed arch, and pierced spandrels. Below the transoms, on the solid wainscot, is flat trefoiled tracery to the narrow panels and cinquefoiled to the wider compartments within flat straight-sided arches and with leafed foliage in the spandrels. On both sides of the transom are a series of small square panels with carved roses cut in the solid (pl. v). The cornice is embellished with well undercut running scroll-foliage to the exterior and on the interior (the chapel side) is square-faced with sunk carved triangular panels arranged chevron fashion.

Inglesham is no doubt an instance of the removal of the chancel screen with its associated rood, because it
was considered it had served a superstitious purpose, and of the laity's intrusion into the chancel previously regarded as the province of the clergy and singing clerks. Here in both nave and chancel, amid the medieval screens just described, is a medley of 17th century pewing (pl. iv), albeit picturesque in effect. The imposing pulpit with panelled back and sounding-board is half hexagonal on plan and Jacobean in date. Below its floor-level, the boxed base is panelled, above are twin arches on each face and slight pilasters with caps and bases and at the angles large-leafed brackets. The cornice is moulded with dentils on the underside and a frieze of roundels enclosing carved patera. The canopy is similarly treated but with small turned drops at the angles. A reading-desk below the pulpit is formed in simple panels with a projecting book-shelf. On either side of the gangway (pls. iii–iv) are three seats of contemporary date with richly moulded and panelled doors and bench-ends, and turned knobs to the angle posts. Those on the south side have been largely mutilated. The two large box-pews in the chancel are Carolean (pl. vi), the deep top rail being carved with exquisite flat scroll-work. The seating at the west end of the nave is much later and of less merit. To be included as of the Carolean period is the altar-table, but the altar-rail with simple turned balusters is of the 18th century.

There are two old doors, one to the porch and the other, the north door, hung on beautiful iron hinges (fig. 7) of early character.

The stone font of the 15th century is octagonal on plan, with quatrefoil panels enclosing a roundel with carved rose in the centre. A small pyramidal oak cover surmounts the font, and by the side of the basin are iron staples for securing it.

There are fragments of painted glass in the chancel, the aisle and the west nave-windows, including small figures without heads and a head with cruciform nimbus,
and at several points indications of mural decorations. Over the chancel arch the ten commandments are coarsely inscribed.

On the chancel floor is a large black marble slab 10 ft. by 3 ft. 6 in. on which was once the brass of a 14th century knight with basinet and sword, four shields and a narrow border for the inscription, and on the floor of the chapel a small brass to Patience, wife of Robert Bates, d. 1783. Attached to the north nave-pillar (fig. 8) is a neat iron bracket for an hour-glass.

A small stone fragment pertaining to a reredos is preserved in the church. On it are traces of diminutive painted figures in two tiers of panels, in the upper the drapery of the lower portions of figures, and in the lower the heads of others, and on the broad face or style of the panel a kneeling figure on a larger scale.

In the bell-cots are two bells dated 1717.

Near to the south porch (fig. 1) stands a noble churchyard cross. It comprises three steps (the lowest projecting and chamfered on the underside), a tall base, and a tapering octagonal shaft 9 ft. in height with a battlemented finial, but unfortunately without the usual niched head.

The sections, figs. 2 and 4, are from drawings made by J. H. Bryan which were published in the Architectural Association sketch-book for 1871-2, vol. 5, plate 23, and here reproduced by the courtesy of the Association.

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Fig. 8