

## BOLDRE CHURCH, HANTS.

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Few Churches, even in the Forest, are so picturesquely placed as the Parish Church of Boldre, and few so completely harmonize with their surroundings.

### BEAUTY OF SITUATION.

Shut away not only from the railway, but also from the high road—even from the village itself—peacefully secluded in the depth of the forest, approached only by winding narrow roads obviously very old and in their sharp turns and unexpected deviations well calculated to mislead the unwary, Boldre Church crowns a little knoll which falls rapidly towards the west and seems as if it had been specially designed to receive the sacred structure. Indeed, some think that the hill formed once a Pagan shrine like many other of the Forest Churchyards similarly placed on rising ground, such as Sopley, Minstead, and others.

And how well the Church, with its quiet length of roof and pleasant grouping, fits the site, even the unusual position of the tower on the south side enhancing the harmony of the whole. It would be difficult indeed to find another such combination of natural beauty in form, colour, silence and solemnity whatever be the season of the year and of man's work sympathetically carried on through successive generations in producing the old grey walls and weathered roofs, which constitute God's little House in this forest parish.

## EXTENT OF PARISH.

The Parish of Boldre is still an extensive one, although several ecclesiastical parishes have been carved out of it, and lies a little to the east of the high road which leads from Lymington to Brockenhurst, roughly speaking half-way between these two places.

## DERIVATION OF NAME.

The derivation of the name is somewhat obscure, but may possibly be traced to the Celtic *y Byldwr* (a full stream), and the appellation would not be unsuitable. In Domesday book we get *Bovre* and *Bovere*, while in the 11th century *Boore* seems to have been the name of the village, and in the 13th century *Bolre*. The suggested association with oxen does not appear to have any particular ground for acceptance unless it be through an old word *Bo'thar*, which originally meant a road for cattle (derived from *Bo*, a cow), as distinct from a main road.

## ANTIQUITY.

As regards the question of antiquity, such data as are available as regards both this and some of the adjacent Churches must be taken together. Four types of Church existed in England shortly after the Norman Conquest. They were the Cathedral, the Church, with jurisdiction over others, but inferior in rank to the Cathedral (in many instances, such as Christchurch Priory, the church of a religious community), the Parish Church, such as one ordinarily finds in a village, and the Field Church. The last-named of these would probably comprise most of the so-called Saxon Churches in this district, such being in the main associated in some way with the manor houses adjacent and without churchyards.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, a law of Canute gives these four divisions. A Field Church would in most instances consist of a nave and small chancel, with perhaps a porch, the whole being of mud and wattle, or if in stone of rude description. Between 1070 and 1081 the afforestation of the New Forest took place, and the

<sup>1</sup> "Parish Priests and their People in the Middle Ages," by E. L. Cutts.

Domesday Survey was completed in 1086. No mention is made of Churches either at Hordle or Boldre as existing before the afforestation, but such are referred to as existing shortly after. Milford and Brockenhurst Churches *are* referred to in the Domesday Survey as existing prior to the afforestation, but are therein described in a way which would lead to the conclusion that they were Field Churches. The cartularies of Christchurch refer to the existence between the years 1101 and 1107 of a Church at Hordle with a Chapel at Milford, a Church at Boldre with a Chapel at Brockenhurst, a Chapel at Holdenhurst, and a Chapel at Sopley. Again, between the years 1107 and 1155 these cartularies mention a Church at Boldre with her Chapels at Lymington and Brockenhurst, Churches at Hordle and Milford, a Church at Sopley, and a Chapel at Holdenhurst. All these were under the jurisdiction of Christchurch, but of this association more hereafter. The plain inference is that up to the time of the afforestation, and indeed up to the year 1081, none of these buildings existed except those at Brockenhurst and Milford, both of which would be Saxon Field Churches without churchyards. Then next in point of time we find Churches at Hordle and Boldre, the districts in which these stood being at the time in the hands of Norman Lords, while Milford was held by a powerful Saxon Theign named Aluric, an unusual although not altogether an unique occurrence. But in the period between 1101 and 1107 we have not only a Church at Boldre, almost certainly a new Norman one, of which portions still survive, but Chapels at Brockenhurst, Holdenhurst and Sopley, the former still in all probability the existing Field Church, and the latter two new Norman edifices. At this time also we have a Church at Hordle and a Chapel at Milford, which would indicate that while the new building at Hordle would be a Norman one, the Field Church at Milford, connected as it was with the property of a Saxon Theign, would still be the old Saxon edifice, enlarged it may be, and having its consecrated burial ground, for which evidence is not wanting. But in the period 1107-1155 a further change takes

place. Boldre has *in connection with it* Chapels at Brockenhurst and Lymington, the former possibly re-built and in part remaining to the present day; the latter obviously a new erection. Milford at this time (1155) has become a Church which in 1107 it was not in the strict sense above observed, and probably the oldest part of the present structure formed a part of this building. Sopley also has developed into a Church, but Holdenhurst remains a Chapel or Field Church. It does not seem clear as to whether Holdenhurst had now become attached to any other Church, but the conclusion is natural that it ceased to be a Chapel under Boldre.

About this time there is evidence that Hordle as well as Milford Church underwent considerable alteration, or even re-building, and while all these Churches and Chapels still remained under the control of Christchurch it would appear as if, except in the case of Boldre, with its Chapels at Brockenhurst and Lymington, they had become independent of each other, Holdenhurst, from its proximity to Christchurch and distance from the other Churches, coming directly under the control of the Priory.

#### ASSOCIATION WITH CHRISTCHURCH.

With regard to this control it should be noted that practically all the Churches in the south-west part of the Forest were dependencies of Christchurch Priory, and were served therefrom right down from Saxon times until about the middle of the 14th century. Moreover there are not wanting indications that during the earlier part of their history they had some connection with the British rather than the Roman Church, one of such indications being the existence of these Field Chapels. This, however, is a digression, and for further information on the point the reader is referred to the History of Milford Church, being No. 4, Vol. I., of the Occasional Magazine published by the Milford-on-Sea Record Society, wherein this subject is discussed at some length.

The association of these Churches with Christchurch is illus-

trated by the charter wherein Richard de Redvers (who died in 1107) confirmed to Christchurch the Church at Boldre with the Chapel of Brockenhurst, and this was repeated by his son, Baldwin, Earl of Devon, and by Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester. This Richard also refers to the Lymington association, while his son gives it in charge to the Twynham (Christchurch) Monastery. In 1219 a vicarage had been ordained, and Boldre with a Chapel was assessed at £21 6s. 8d., a pension by the Priory being charged on the vicarage as compensation for tithes in Boldre, Lymington and Brockenhurst, £2 13s. 4d. The patronage remained with the Priory until its dissolution.

It is not clear how far Churches such as Boldre were Mother Churches while they themselves were dependencies, but probably there was an arrangement of association for the purposes of masses, preaching, &c., by which a priest serving Boldre, for instance, would have under his particular care the Chapels connected with that Church. At any rate, the words "cum suis," used to describe the connection in this case, carry more than merely the word "cum" as found elsewhere.

#### FREE CHAPEL AT SOUTH BADDESLEY.

Perhaps here it might be mentioned that in 1329 a Free Chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in South Baddesley, as the Parish Church of Boldre was two miles off, and this was served by a priest from Boldre. In Queen Mary's reign, in the list of chantries, mention is made of the Free Chapel of Boldre.

#### THE PRESENT CHURCH.

A reference to the accompanying ground plan will shew that Boldre Church consists of several styles of English architecture—indeed it really contains examples of each style from Norman to Modern work. These are indicated by the various hatchings used in drawing the walls, and roughly give the dates when various parts were erected.

#### THE NORMAN CHURCH.

The oldest portion, and probably the only part now remaining of the Norman Church built just after the afforestation, is that consisting of the 3 easternmost arches of the nave south arcade, with their piers and the respond at their east end. These very likely had their counterpart on the north side, and thus helped to form a little Church with nave, two aisles and a chancel—the latter probably apsidal,—all typical of the period. The character of the remains of this original Church corroborates the dates above given as those of its foundation.

#### THE EARLY ENGLISH WORK.

Next in point of time we get some 13th century work, but this we must deal with under two periods—Early and Late. The Early work consists in the prolongation of the nave, possibly with north and certainly with south aisle and the present west wall with its doorway and shallow buttress. In this as well as in the later 13th century work there are marked indications that the design was by the same architect, who worked at Milford about the same time. This is particularly noticeable in the somewhat unusual octagonal piers to the arcade and the mouldings and shape of the capitals surmounting them. The porch on the south side belongs to the earlier 13th century period, at which time the then existing south aisle of the Norman Church was dealt with to some extent. The trefoiled opening in the south gable of the porch is interesting and somewhat unusual. It belongs to the same period as the rest of the porch, but suggests it may originally have been a niche furnished perhaps with a statue of S. John the Evangelist, to whom the Church is dedicated.

#### THE EARLY DECORATED WORK.

The later portion of the 13th century work is marked by the important addition of the north Chapel with its Purbeck shafts and east window corresponding in a singular degree with the work of the same period at Milford. There is a piece of weather moulding on the west face of the west wall of this Chapel

which would indicate an existing north aisle west of this Chapel at the time of its erection. This certainly may have been intended as a weathering to a future north aisle, but the former suggestion is by far the more probable one.

The tracery of the east window of this Chapel, if a copy of the original work, is interesting, since it marks a distinct period in the development of window tracery, but being modern it cannot be relied upon as indicative of what preceded it. The inner jambs and shafts of this window, however, are apparently parts of the original window and of the same date as the Chapel generally.

#### 14TH CENTURY WORK.

Early in the 14th century the chancel and the lower part of the tower were built, the former superseding the original Norman chancel. Restoration in this part of the Church, however, has been so drastic and modern replacement so profuse that it is difficult to say anything very definite as to the work of this period. The chancel arch is distinctly the original one of the early 14th century, and it is worthy of notice that the two orders of the arch die on to a plain splayed jamb instead of finishing on to capitals or continuing down the jambs without interruption as they probably would have done had they belonged to a later period. The slightly irregular shape of the chancel on the south side is curious, but does not appear to have any particular significance.

#### LATER WORK.

The north wall of the nave would seem to belong to the 15th century, together with the buttress at the north-west corner. The buttress at the south-west corner of the south aisle appears to belong to the 17th century, and the upper part of the tower was re-built in 1697.

#### THE MODERN RESTORATION.

"The whole Church was restored" in 1855, the vestry and lobby to same, the chancel windows, south aisle windows, and tracery of west window of nave being modern. These windows

have, however, in part some of the old stones of their predecessors built into them, while generally the windows which may be regarded as mediæval have been restored.

#### THE PISCINA.

In the tower is a charming little piscina (a niche with a stone basin and drain for washing eucharistic vessels, &c.) of early 14th century date, indicating the use of the lower part of the tower as a Chapel.

#### THE FONT.

The font consists of an octagonal plain bowl of the 15th century on a modern stem and base.

#### THE NAVE ROOF.

The chancel roof is modern, but the nave roof demands attention, since it consists of a barrel plaster vault with moulded ribs and ornamental bosses. From its similarity to the chancel and transept ceilings at Milford Church, which are dated 1640, it would seem that this roof, or at any rate this ceiling, should belong to the 17th century. The Victoria County History, however, suggests it is of the 15th century.

#### THE ALTAR TABLE.

The altar table is of the 17th century, carved, and with heavily moulded legs, and at the west end of the south aisle there stands another similar table.

#### THE REMAINS OF ROOD ENTRANCE.

The wooden entrance to the rood loft over the screen which obviously once ran across the chancel arch is of the 15th century, and will be seen at the extreme east end of the south aisle.

#### THE ORGAN.

The organ, although of no particular merit in itself, has an interesting association; and concerning it Mr. Abdy Williams, Mus. Bac., writes:—"In my 'Story of the Organ' the following

passage occurs (p. 177). In 1817 an immense organ was built by Flight & Robson in their rooms in St. Martin's Lane, at a cost of £10,000. The instrument which was called the Apollonican could be played on by six organists at once, and its six keyboards were so arranged as that the players faced the audience.

A. Felis who heard Samuel Wesley play it in 1829 describes it as the best organ he had heard in England, and says that the builders had used in it certain mechanical contrivances unknown before. Besides the keyboards it was provided with barrels which played overtures, quartets and symphonies, the barrels changing the stops when necessary. Failing, however, to attract the public, it was taken down in 1840 and its materials used for other organs. The organ at Boldre Church was erected in 1855. Its keyboard bears evidence of having been renewed but its pedals are of the kind then in use. Its mechanism seems to have lasted well unless it has been renewed. Its stop handles are of the large size of those days. It bears the inscription: 'Thomas J. Robson, Apollonican Rooms.' From the foregoing it would seem in all probability this organ was part of the enormous one built in 1817; it evidently came from the same manufactory.

#### MEMORIAL SLAB.

On the floor close to the west door is a portion of a slab with a 14th century flowered cross.

#### THE BELLS.

There are three bells all of 19th century date.

#### THE COMMUNION PLATE.

The Communion plate, as described in "The Church Plate of Hampshire" (1909) by Canon Braithwaite, of Winchester, consists of a silver chalice having the following inscription<sup>2</sup>: "Bernard Brougham, Vicar of Boldre. Moses Kittier, James Suffield,

<sup>2</sup> There is an illustration of this chalice in Canon Braithwaite's Church Plate of Hampshire.—EDITOR.

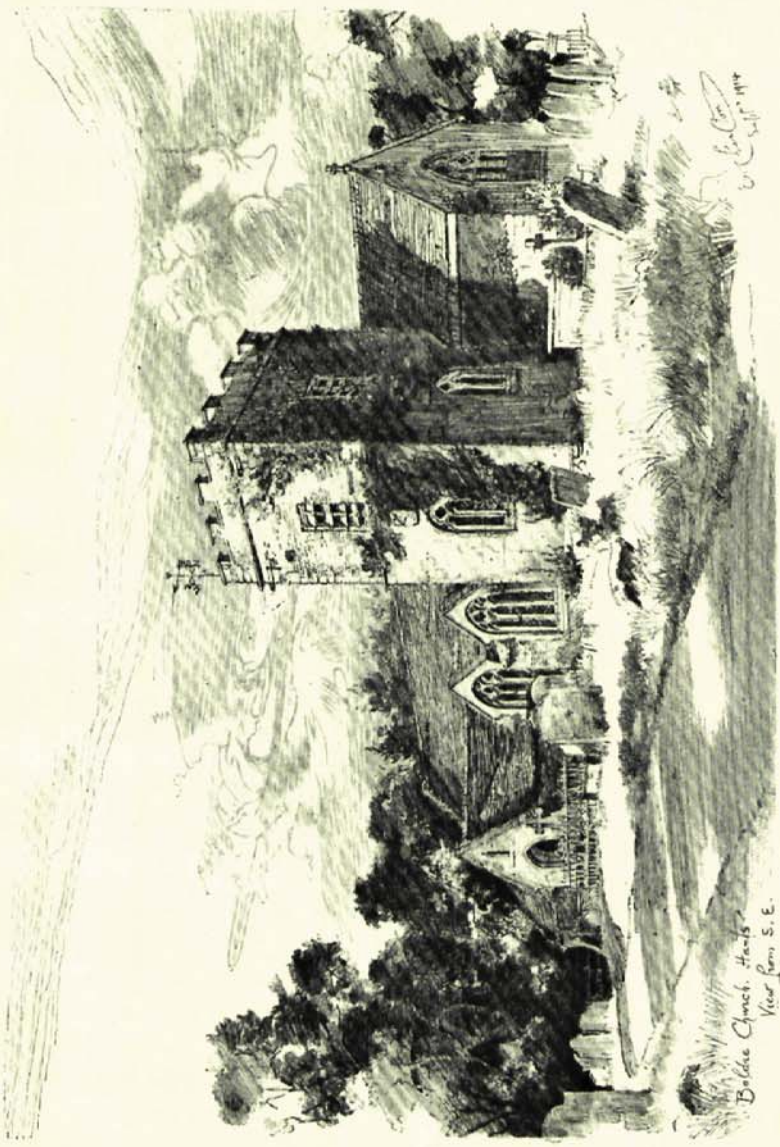
Churchwardens, 1700." This chalice is of very rude manufacture and was probably made locally. Note from first volume of Parish Register: "Laid out towards a communion cup 1677, in all 6s. 4d." A silver paten, 1669, inscribed "The gift of James Worsley to the Parish of Boldre." It bears a coat of arms and a crest, both surrounded by plumed work. Two other silver patens, date mark 1848. On the first is engraved the words, "Presented to the Parish Church of Boldre by the Rev. Charles Shrubbs, M.A., Vicar, 1849." On the other, "Presented to the Parish Church of Boldre by the Rev. Henry Shrubbs, B.D., 1849. A flagon, date mark 1830. Inscription, "Presented to the Parish Church of Boldre, in the County of Hants, by Elizabeth Purvis of Vicar's Hill House, May 1st, A.D. 1831." It bears a coat of arms. There is also a plated cup and cover.

#### THE REGISTERS.

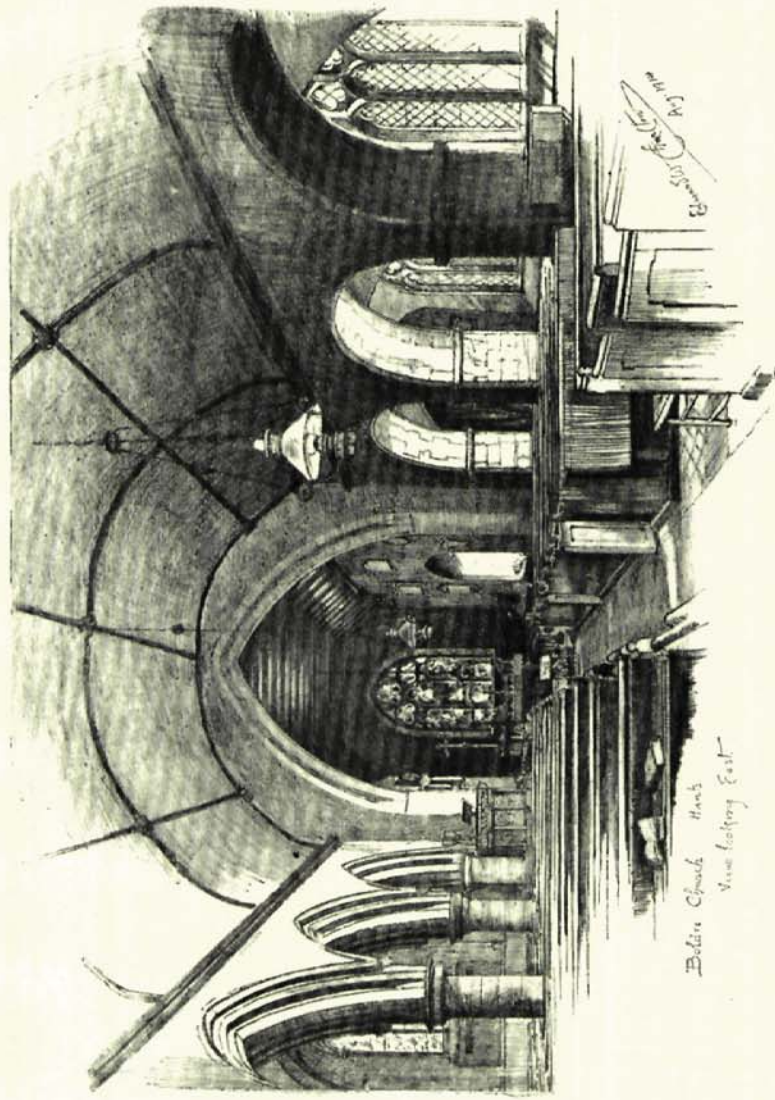
The registers of baptisms, marriages and burials all date from the year 1596, but there are a few blank intervals.

#### NOTABLE PERSONS.

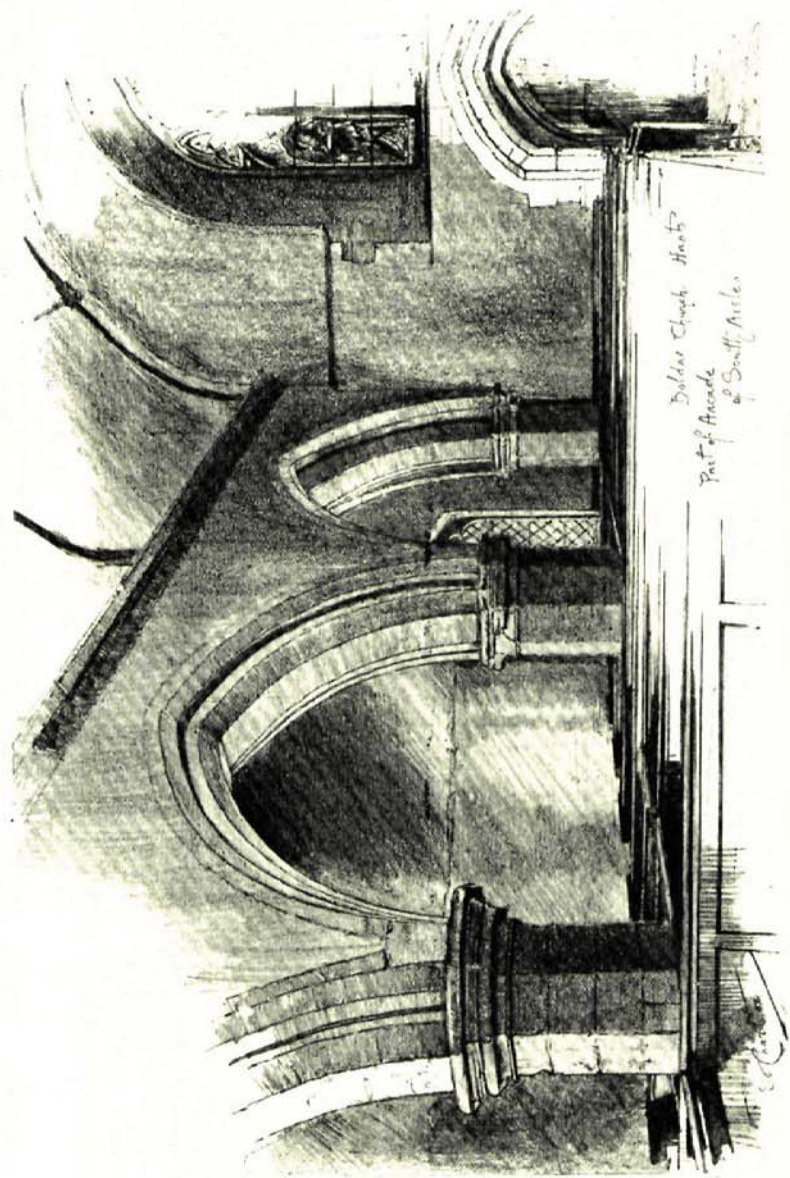
This account of Boldre Church would not be complete without some slight reference to one or two notable persons connected with it. On the north wall of the nave enclosed in a handsome renaissance architectural tablet, there is a bust of John Kempe, who sat for Lymington in the Long Parliament and who died in 1652. In the Parish registers is recorded in 1839 the marriage of the poet Southey with Catharine Bowles. But the most interesting association is that of the Rev. William Gilpin, the author of "Forest Scenery" (1791); "Observations on the Western Parts of England and the Isle of Wight" (1798); and of "Observations on the Coast of Hampshire, etc." (1804). He was Vicar here for 30 years and died at the age of 80 in 1804. He seems to have been a man of varied energies, not only as a good Parish priest and a lover of nature, but also as an educationalist, for, by a codicil to his will dated 1803, he founded a school at Boldre which still flourishes, albeit perhaps in somewhat



Baldie Church, Hants  
View from S. E.



Baldre Church, West  
View looking East



Dublin Church, Harb  
Part of Arcade  
of South Aisle



Interior View of  
East Window of North Chapel.  
Baldre Church - Hants



Part of Norman Arch  
and Doorway to Rood Loft.  
Baldre Church. Hants.



Boldre Church. Hants.  
Piscina in Tower

EWB

modernised form. There is a mural monument to his memory in the north chapel erected by his parishioners, and his tomb, which is also that of his wife, is in the north part of the churchyard. The inscription on this tomb, characteristic of the period, tells how Gilpin aged 80 at his death and his wife aged 82, lie together secure from the *dangerous* enjoyments of life, and how when they reach the state of joyful immortality they will find it "a new joy to meet *several* of their good neighbours who now lye scattered in these sacred precincts around them."

"Requim eternam dona eis Domine  
et Lux perpetua luceat eis."

The Ground Plan accompanying these notes I have prepared from my own measurements, but for all illustrations I am indebted to the well known painter-etcher Mr. E. W. Charlton, R.E., who has generously placed at my disposal the use of his drawings of Boldre Church for the purposes of this paper. Mr. Charlton's kindness I desire thus to acknowledge.—W. R.

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