

All Saints Church, Lydd, Kent.

In the heart of Romney Marsh and on 'high ground' stands the impressive 199 feet long church known locally as the Cathedral of the Marsh. This large and imposing edifice has a Perpendicular tower over 130 ft high, and its spacious nave, aisles and chancel are mainly of Early English date. However, in the north-west angle of the north aisle a fragment remarkably survives of the main walls of an early Anglo-Saxon or Romano-British predecessor. It comprises a 30 foot run of north wall and 14 foot of adjoining west wall constructed in rough rubble with wide mortar joints. Its south wall and chancel have been swept away, as have its nave aisles. This early aisled church exhibits remains of a north arcade of three (blocked) round-headed arches; originally comprising aisled nave with clear-storey, chancel (possibly apsidal) and a western annexe. The lower part of the north wall is about 2 ft 6 in. width and the three arches are about 4 ft span and 10 feet high, turned in undressed flat stones and laid with typical Saxon disregard for radial setting. They are supported on piers some 8 ft high and 3 ft width cut square through the wall, and with impost. The wall above the arcade has a pronounced off-set where the roof of its north aisle sprung, and in the thinner upper wall, with its cill about 14 ft above the floor, a single clear-story window, now blocked, has survived. Taylor remarks that it is placed, like those at Brixworth, over one of the piers. This round-headed window is double splayed with the actual opening about 1 ft wide by 2 ft 6 in high and placed a little nearer the outer face of the wall than to the inner. In the west wall a much wider arch and of much the same general character as the arcade, about 6 ft 6 in wide and 11 ft 5 in high originally opened from the nave. There is more detail to be explained, but suffice to say here that this early nave was precisely 26 feet in length by 16ft in breadth internally. Detailed examination and measurement of the fabric by Mr. F.C.E. Erwood was published in 1921, and by Canon G.M. Livett in 1930. The basis of the above text is from H. Taylor's description of the remains, from his book "Anglo-Saxon Architecture" vol I pages 405 to 408. Although Taylor dates the pre-conquest fabric to the early 11th century (based on the style of the double-splayed window) the more likely date for this 'basilica' type building, and with regard to the style of the remaining arcade and the overall ground plan of the building, is in the 5th century.

All photos these pages are described viewed clockwise from top left.

1. This digitally enhanced photo shows the exterior of the north wall of the original nave (and with the N wall of the later Perpendicular tower running out to the right). The position of the base of the three archways is picked out by red horizontal lines to make it easier to visualise. The one remaining clear storey double-splayed window may be seen to the left hand. The red arrow indicates the position of the 'missing' window.



The two black vertical lines (bottom right) delineate the scar of the now vanished east wall of the north aisle where it would have sprung from the nave walling. The blocking stonework of the arches is probably made up of walling from the demolished pre-conquest aisle.



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2. The clear-story window noted on page 1.
3. The west archway viewed externally. The later buttress disguises the stump of the north wall of the vanished western annexe where it abutted the west wall of the pre-conquest nave (and indicated by the two black lines on the ground).



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4. The buttress seen in picture 3 on previous page, and showing more clearly where the north aisle abutted the nave (left).
5. The north and west walls of the pre-conquest nave viewed from the north-west.



6. Seen from the south internally, the three arches in the pre-conquest nave walling with the one remaining clear-storey window above, note the imposts (which will be seen in closer detail in pictures on following pages). Note the blocked middle archway where the blocking incorporates an Early English lancet window (blocked).



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7. A general view of the pre-conquest remains seen looking westwards and showing the west archway to the left with the arcade running out to the right in the north wall.
8. A closer view of the north impost belonging to the west archway. A design with plain chamfer.
9. This is the eastern impost of the centre archway, a simple stepped design indicative of a very early date.

