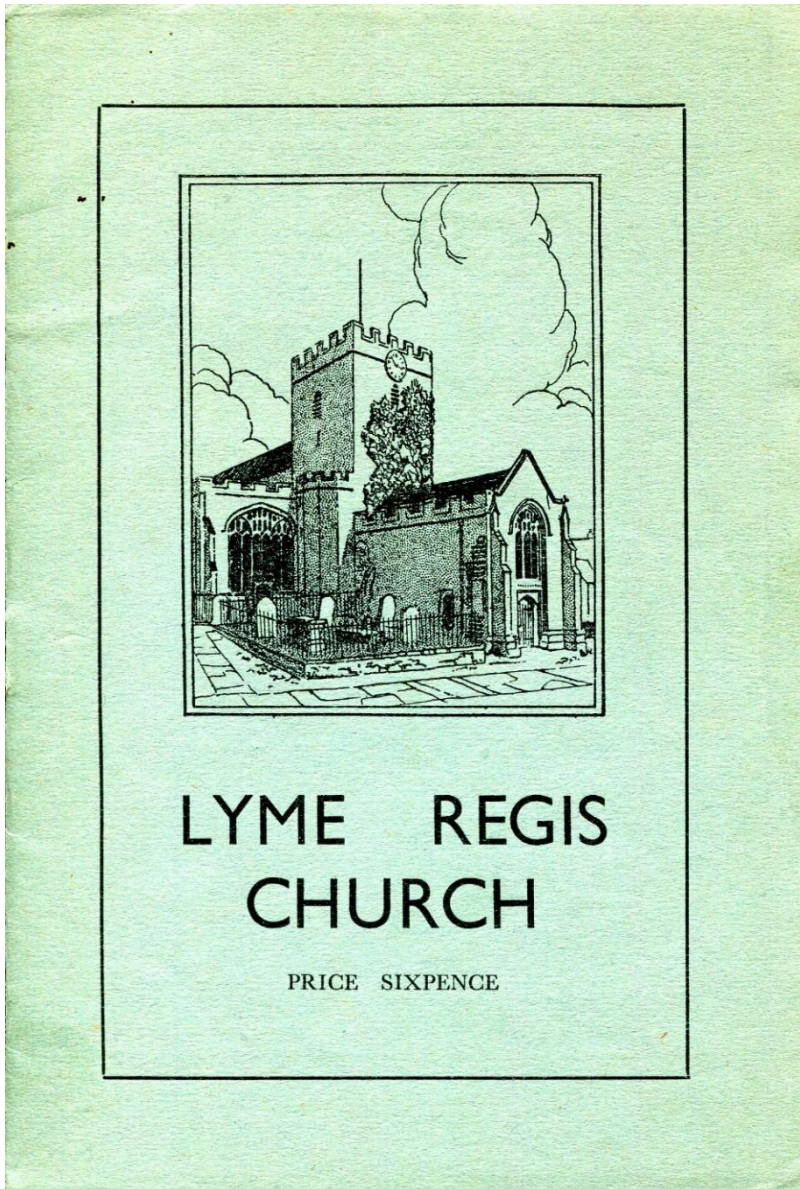


Lyme Regis Church – A Guide

Written by the Rev Charles Carew Cox, who was vicar at Lyme Regis, 1927-53.
Introduction by Graham Davies, September 2019.



The Rev Charles Carew Cox MA of University College, Durham and AKCL, was, as the new vicar of Lyme Regis, inducted to the living in January 1928.

He had previously been at the parish of West Moors in East Dorset since 1917, first as curate in charge, and then as vicar from 1922.

Rev Carew Cox was as an enthusiast for church bell ringing. In 1930 he was president of the West Dorset branch of the Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers.

I believe that the Rev Carew Cox first published his parish Church guide, *The History of The Church of St Michael the Archangel*, in 1930. This was to act as the blueprint for the next 50 years, with further editions and revisions published during that period.

The Museum has copies of the 1st, 4th, 6th and 7th editions of the guide, the last one published during the vicariate of the Rev Geoffrey Lewis Tiarks, and also revisions of the guide in 1971, 1977 and 1979.

The most recent guide would seem to have been written by ringing master Andrew Nicholson in 1991.

The front cover of the 6th edition of the guide, which has been transcribed below by Graham Davies.

Update from 1991 guide: It had always been suspected that a church existed on or near the present site in Saxon times though until recently no proof existed. During extensive repairs to the church tower in 1994-5 a late Saxon window, believed to date from around AD 980, was discovered in the south wall of the first-floor ringing chamber and it now seems likely that all but the top third of the tower is largely of Saxon origin. What seems originally to have been a Saxon tower was retained and "modernised" by the Normans around AD 1120 when they rebuilt the remainder of the church.

The History of The Church of St Michael the Archangel

By Rev C Carew Cox MA, Vicar

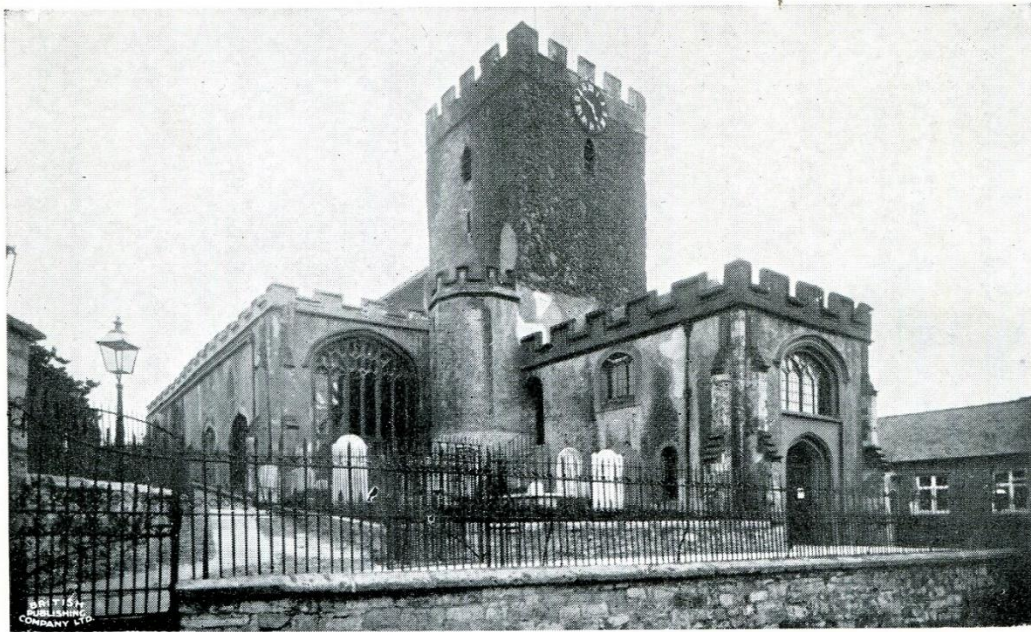


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*The Church of St. Michael the Archangel,
as it appeared from 1824—1934.*

THE general history of ancient Lyme has been written by many capable hands and is not our concern here. But the relation between ecclesiastical interests and the growth of the town is worth a note, for we find that in A.D. 774 King Cynewulf granted to the Abbey of Sherborne the land of one manse on the west bank of the Lim. With the coming of the monks what is now Sherborne Lane became probably the scene of their salt making, the industry through which Lyme had developed into a village ere the Domesday survey took place. In 1254 it is mentioned as a town under the government of bailiffs, and a reference then to shipping suggests the existence of some kind of harbour. Little can be discovered about the beginnings of the Cobb; a port " or " cobb ", however, at Lyme is spoken of in a document of 1230. Henry III, near the end of his reign, granted the town a fair and a market, and it received its Charter of Incorporation at the hands of Edward I in 1284.

The church stands at the bottom of the town in close proximity to the sea. In bygone days a considerable stretch of land intervened, but, owing to the wet lias subsoil, this has gradually slipped away. Only a small portion of the original churchyard remains. The protective measures taken in 1911 have since suffered considerable damage through the action of the sea, necessitating heavy repairs and a heightening of the wall under the cliff in 1948 at a cost of £550. This work, it is hoped, will secure the site of the church for many years to come.

A list of incumbents takes us back to the year 1329. The evidence of the fabric, however, proves the existence of a thirteenth-century church and suggests an even earlier building.

The present church is dedicated to St Michael Archangel, and consists of a nave of six bays—two of which form the chancel—built on a gradient rising from west to east. The absence of a chancel arch is to be noted. The total length from the east end to the tower is 92 feet and

the breadth 54 feet. The space under the tower forms the baptistery and west of that is the old Norman nave now used as a porch.

THE EXTERIOR.

If the stucco work over the western portion and the tower were removed you would see on the north side traces of transitional arches and, on the south, of an earlier arch. These formed the bays of the Norman nave and it is reasonable to suppose the existence of a north aisle, also probably a chantry to the south. This portion of the church extended about 10 feet beyond the present west wall until 1824, when, in order to widen the road, the westernmost section was pulled down.

East of the tower the church is a fine example of late fifteenth-century architecture, erected between 1490 and 1506. The two windows on the west side have noteworthy mullions. Some alterations of the east end were made at a restoration in 1885 at which date the present vestry was added at the point originally occupied by the south door.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are the lay Rectors and are responsible for repairs to the chancel. Some exterior renovation was carried out by them in 1929.

THE TOWER.

The lower portion is thirteenth century, the upper stages probably being added in the early sixteenth century. The whole is 58 feet high and has been considerably restored from time to time. In 1930 the battlements were completely renewed and the walls re-stuccoed. In the tower is a ring of eight bells with a tenor weighing about 11 cwt. The original ring of six bells was cast by Thomas Bilbie, of Cullompton, in 1770. Five of these remain, the fourth having been recast in 1843—this bell has the inscription " O sea spare me", and is still used for ringing the Curfew. On the fifth of the old ring is inscribed " This peal of bells was erected partly by rates and partly by subscription in the year 1770". In 1911 two trebles were added and the whole ring re-hung.

An outside staircase leads only as far as the ringing chamber. Access to the upper part of the tower is by a rough-hewn ladder.

THE PORCH.

Entering by the west door you will see around you the remains of the old Norman Church. On the north side are two columns dating from about 1130. These and the abutments of another arch on the south (probably about 1185) were brought to light in 1901.

In 1933 an extensive scheme of restoration was begun. The sixteenth-century roof being found on the point of collapse through the ravages of the death watch beetle and damp, an entirely new oak roof was constructed of the same design. A half-way floor forming a room above—for some time used as a school and afterwards known as the Old Vestry, which involved considerable damage to the Norman arches —was removed, the west wall rebuilt to a gable with a new Tudor doorway and stone mullioned window, the responds to the arches repaired and their outline revealed so far as was possible. The architects' scheme still provides for the construction of a narrow artificial aisle on the north and south in order to enable the ancient arches to be revealed and restored. The work so far completed has cost over £1,000 and about £500 will be required for the remainder.

The small window on the left-hand (erected in 1930) is interesting as being in memory of Captain Coram, who was born in Lyme Regis and through whose instigation the Foundling Hospital came into existence. Before passing into the Baptistery note what remains of the old rood beam above the Tudor arch.

THE BAPTISTERY.

Here you are under the tower. The west wall contains a thirteenth-century arch similar to that which gives access to the present nave. This arch has been filled in to strengthen the tower. North and south the entrances to the original transepts have been filled in. The small doorway on the north side leading to the tower stairway was discovered in the 1901 restoration. Note the well-preserved eastern arch. This was the chancel arch of the original cruciform church which was probably rounded off with an apse.

The font and cover are modern, erected as a memorial to Dr. Frank Parry Hodges, Vicar from 1833—1880.

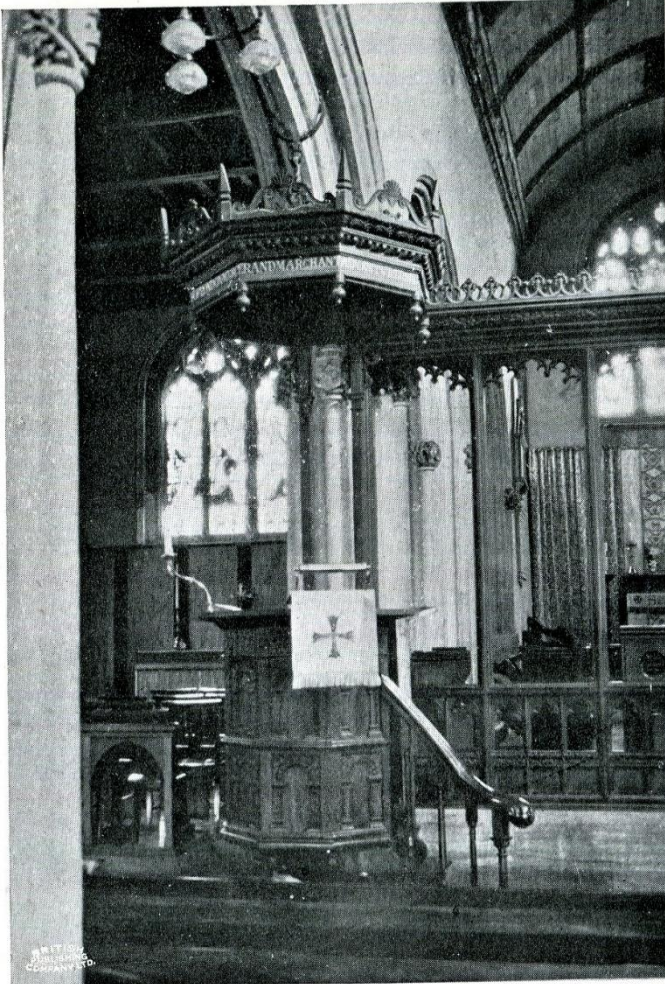
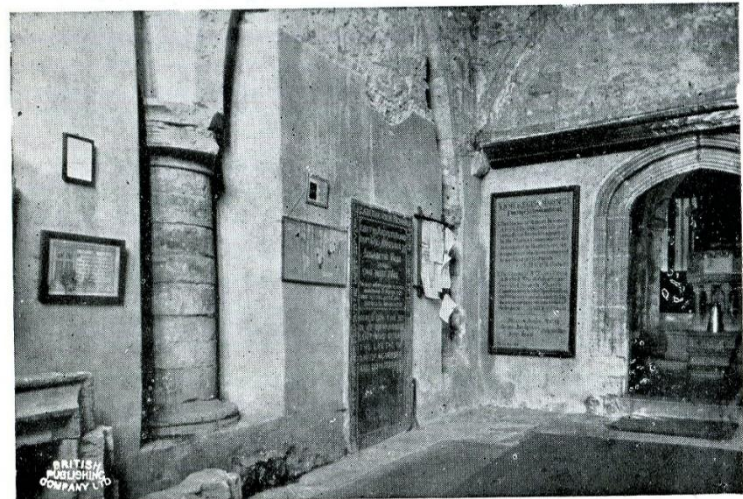


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The Pulpit.



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The 12th Century Nave ; 1934 restoration.



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Interior of the Nave.

THE NAVE.

This part of the building was probably completed about 1506. The graceful proportions of the arches are to be noted, also some very fine escutcheons carved around the pillars. The bases of the latter have curious variations in levels. Dr. Hodges carried out a renovation of the nave in 1834 and a complete restoration, which

involved some drastic alterations, was effected in 1885 during the vicariate of the Rev. G. H. P. Barlow. At that date a series of broad steps, which formed the centre gangway, were removed, and the present sloping pavement substituted, the church was entirely re-pewed, the side galleries demolished, the existing vestry built, a small door inserted below each west window, and the east window reduced to half its original length, some of the glass being replaced to form the two windows on either side of the sanctuary. The painting across the barrel of the chancel roof, showing the raising of the Cross, was added about 1850.

Some further restoration was undertaken in 1936— 1937. The roofs over the north and south aisles were re-leaded throughout and the clerestory windows re-mullioned, with other general repair to stonework. This cost £1,260.

A pillar on the south side bears the Borough Arms carved in stone with the initials of William Dare who was Mayor in 1491, 1500 and 1506. Upon another pillar is the Harrington Knot. William Bonville, Lord Harrington, was killed at the Battle of Wakefield in 1460, one year after his only daughter, Cicely Lady Harrington, was born.

The Children's Corner was arranged in its present position in 1929.

With the exception of the pews allotted to the Mayor and Corporation and Colway Manor all the seating in the Church is free.

The old lectern at the west end of the nave is to be noted. It acts now as a miniature museum and contains an old chained "Breeches" Bible, a copy of Erasmus' paraphrase of St. Luke's Gospel, 1559, a copy of the so-called "Bad" Bible of 1653, also some ancient coins and tokens recovered in 1885.

On the north wall hangs a large ancient tapestry presented to the church by the Rev. Edward Peek in 1886. Authorities differ as to whether the subject depicted is the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, 1486, or that of Prince Arthur and Catharine of Aragon, 1501.

THE WINDOWS.

In the south aisle is the window representing the Town's Memorial of those who laid down their lives in the first World War, 1914—18. It was placed there in 1921. Farther east is another four light window depicting David and Elijah on either side of Moses and Aaron. The Ten Commandments in Moses' hand are strangely enough, written not in Hebrew but in Latin.

The westernmost window in the north aisle is a memorial to Mary Anning—the "fossil woman" of Lyme—famous for her discovery of the ichthyosaurus fossil in 1811. She died in 1847 and the Royal Geological Society shared with the Vicar the cost of providing the window. The next window is of peculiar beauty. It represented Sir Galahad's vision of the Holy Grail. In rather blatant contrast is its neighbour depicting the four Evangelists.

THE CHANCEL.

On the left of the choir stalls is the LADY CHAPEL, formed in 1929 in memory of the wife of the Rev. R. L. Higham, Assistant Priest of the Parish.

The windows here are both memorials, on the north to Lieut. John Philpot, on the east to the Rev. G. H. P. Barlow.

The screen was erected in 1889 as the gift of the Rev. Edward Peek, a great benefactor to the church in Lyme Regis, to the memory of the Rev. G. H. P. Barlow.

In the south-east corner of the sanctuary is a small pointed niche. This may have formed part of an old Piscina or a stoup, but its original position cannot be determined.

Note an ancient brass, 1665, on the north wall of the Lady Chapel, recording the Ellesdon family who had the Living in their gift from the reign of Elizabeth to that of Charles II.

The old ORGAN occupied the centre gallery at the west end up to 1885 and was then transferred to the south-east of the chancel. It was dismantled and removed in 1939 after being in use for 111 years. The present organ, a good toned three manual instrument by Hele and

Co., was purchased from the Church of St. Mary Major, Exeter, in 1939 and erected in the west gallery by public subscription.

THE PULPIT.

This stood in the centre of the nave prior to 1834. It was then removed to the south side, and in 1897 transferred to its present northward position. It is a beautiful example of Jacobean work, the gift of Richard Harvey who was three times Mayor. The inscription round the canopy reads, "To God's glory, Richard Harvey of London, Mercer and Marchant Adventurer 1613. Faith is by hearing."

THE LECTERN.

This was presented to commemorate "the numerous gifts to this Church and Parish" of the Rev. Edward Peek, who died in 1898. The following four lines of English verse, composed by Zachary Edwards, are recorded on the brass tablet after the Latin inscription:

"Great good his fellow burgesses he did
Full oft, and pious gifts to Churches made.
His friends him loved, his life with God was hid,
His talents were not in a napkin laid."

THE GALLERY.

The central portion is an interesting relic of John Hassard who gave it. The inscription runs, "John Hassard built this to the glory of Almighty God in the eightieth year of his age Anno Domini 1611", but the additional words, "seven times mayor", have been lost. Beneath the inscription are the Borough Arms and the Seal of the See of Sarum, the Virgin and Child.



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The Nave looking East.



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The Children's Corner.

REGISTERS.

Baptisms, marriages and burials are recorded from the year 1538. The writing of the earliest entries is remarkably legible. There is an hiatus from 1572 to 1653, excepting one entry—the baptism of John, son of Ames Short, Vicar, in 1649.

The page relating to 1653 has a note " This year Cromwell was Protector" and a baptism is recorded under the signature of the mayor.

Following are some of the interesting memoranda dotted about on the pages: —

"The Church belonging to Sarum, 1284."

"Dedicated to St. Michael, 1405."

"A legacy given to rebuild part of this Church of Lyme, 1503."

" The new singing began in Lyme Church, A.D. 1729."

"A Ring of new bells erected in the Tower, 1770."

"1688. The Town of Lyme in Dorsetshire suffered by an earthquake."

"1759, 31st of May. The sea flowed 3 times in, in an hour at Lyme."

"1797, 18th Aug. The sea as above attended with lightning."

"1799, 26th of Jan. The sea flowed as above with the shock of an earthquake about 4 o'clock in the morning."

"May 11th, 1844. A large fire in Lyme burnt down a great number of houses amongst which was the Custom House, the Cupps Hotel and the old ancient Inn the George were the Duke of Monmouth quartered when landed at Lyme."

THE CHURCH PLATE.

There are two silver chalices and one paten of 1630 date, and another paten given to the church in 1909. Also, a very large silver chalice and paten, the latter dated 1664, the chalice being, no doubt, contemporary. The flagon is modern and there is a small beaten silver chalice and paten, presented in 1929 for use in the Lady Chapel.

LIST OF VICARS

1329	William Dare	1729	Hugh Key
1375	Roger Danyell	1731	David Symes
1397	William Baron	1744	Cornelius Norwood
1408	John Herte	1745	James Davies
C1423	Thomas Shapplegh	1780	John Jones
1425	Peter Greve	1783	Henry Seward
C1443	William Bynham	1787	Joseph Domett
Before 1514 – Daye (or Dare)		1798	William Evans
1534	Laurence Odam	1804	William jones
C1548	Robert Palfrey	1826	Charles Randolph
1564	John Toller	1833	Frederic(k) Hodges
1567	Thomas Washington	1880	John Smith
1573	George Elkin	1883	George Barlow
1574	Symon Norrington	1887	Charles Myers
1608	John Geare	1894	Rowland Hill
1650	Ames Short	1898	William Jacob
1662	Emmanuel Sharpe	1915	William Norman Wilson
1663	Timothy Hallet	1927	Charles Carew Cox

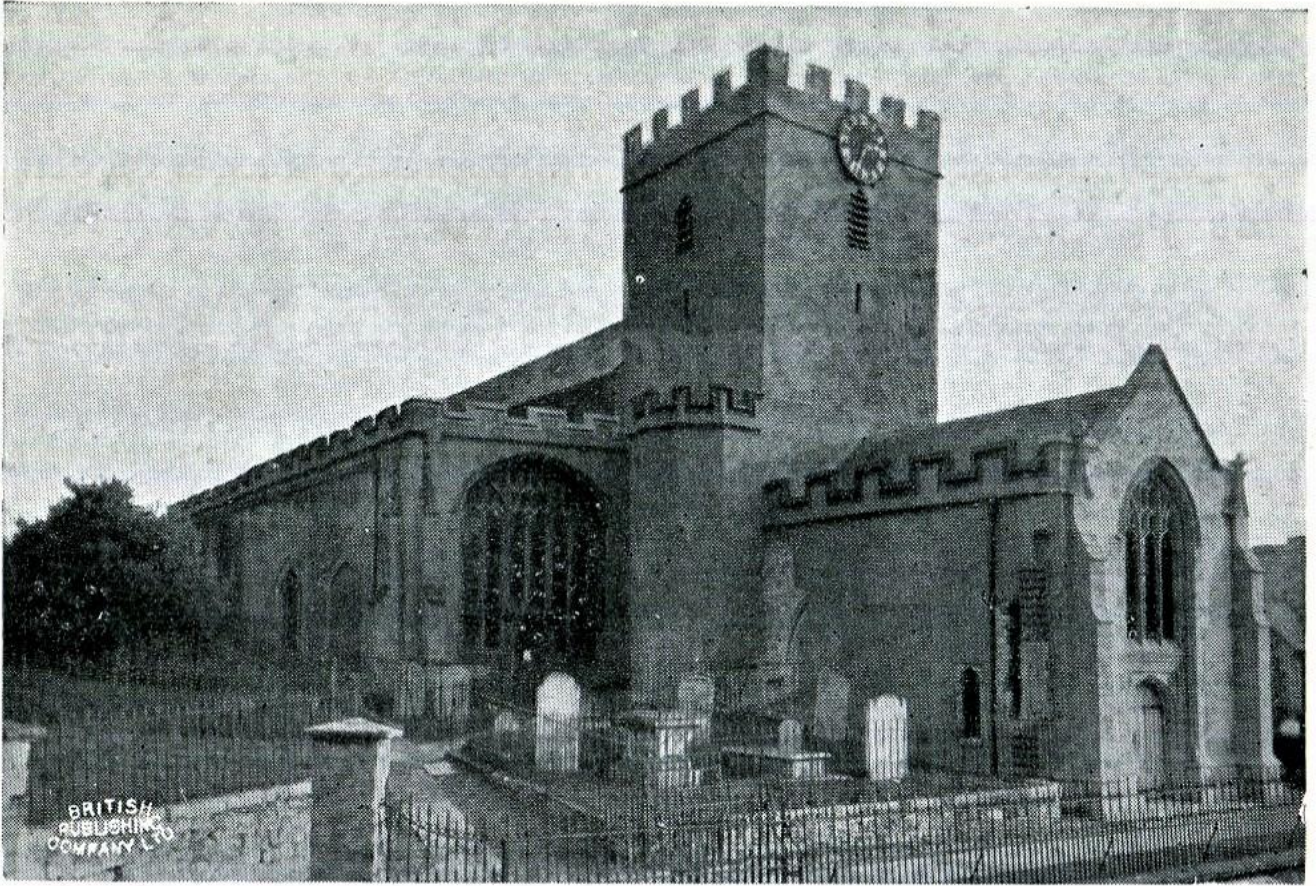


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*The Church after the partial restoration
of the West End in 1934.*