

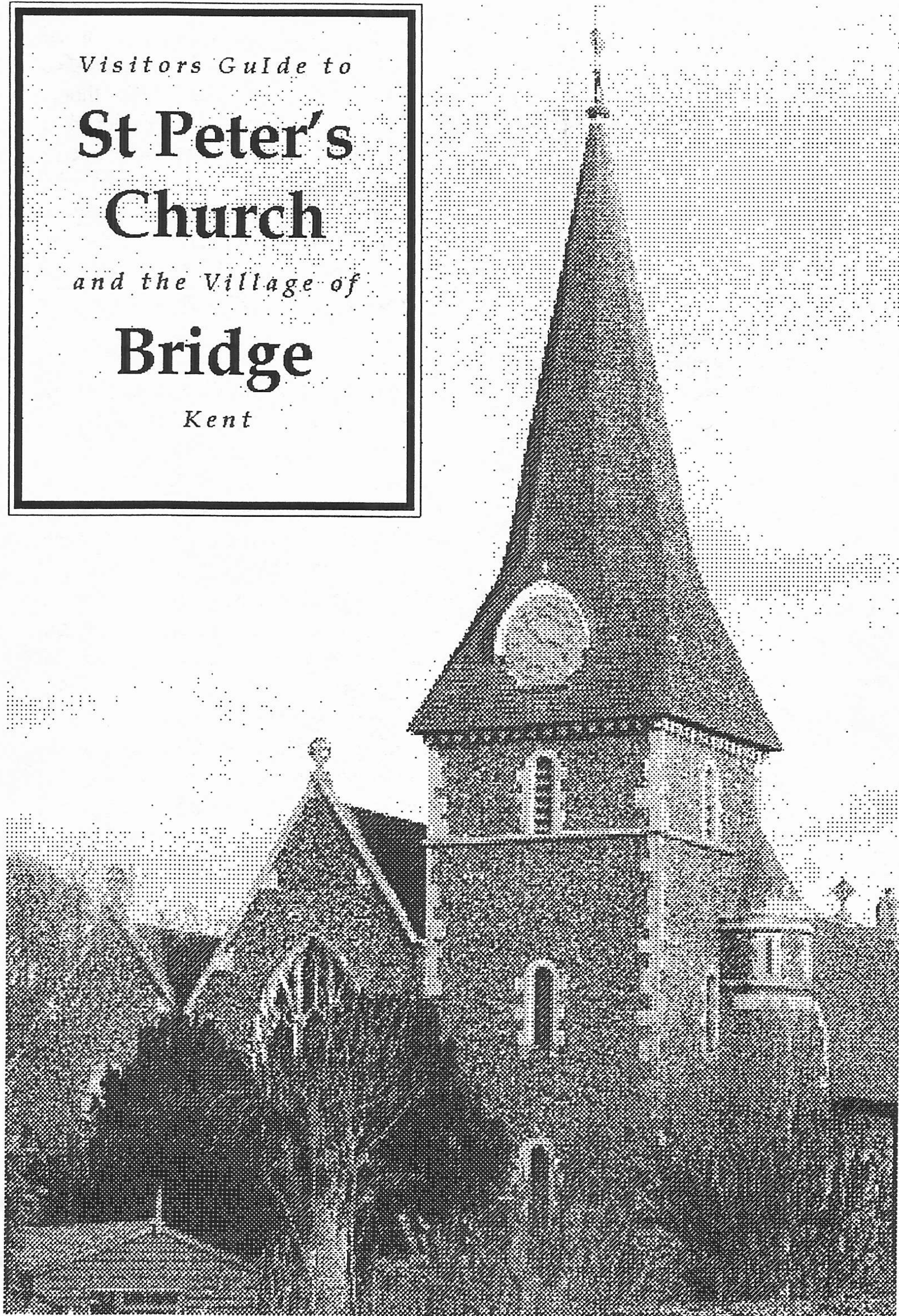
*Visitors Guide to*

# **St Peter's Church**

*and the Village of*

# **Bridge**

*Kent*







**T**here is no mention of a village of Bridge in the Domesday Book of 1086, though there is a reference to a 'Hundred of Brige' which is thought to have been a meeting point on the Roman road from London to Dover for villagers along the Nailbourne living in and around the nearby parishes of Bishopsbourne, Patrixbourne and Bekesbourne, each of which has its own medieval parish church.

Bridge has always been part of the parish of Patrixbourne, and its church is still technically a chapel-of-ease (chapel annexe) to St Mary's, Patrixbourne, which lies three quarters of a mile to the east. There has been a chapel on this site in Bridge since 1189, and it was enlarged through the 12th and 13th centuries to become a church, and because of its position alongside the main London to Dover road it is likely to have been principally used by passing travellers to pray for their protection and safe journeys.

Historically, the land comprising the 'Hundred of Brige' was contained within the manor of Blackmondsbury which was part of the possessions of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, while in 1258 Bridge's chapel was appropriated by Archbishop Boniface to the Prior and Convent of Merton, Surrey, a situation that continued until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1538.

In the mid-19th century, at a time of large Victorian congregations, St Peter's was massively restored and enlarged principally through the generosity of Mrs Mary Gregory of Bridge Hill, who was the daughter of Nathaniel Pattison of Congleton in Cheshire, whose family had founded the first silk mill there in 1752.

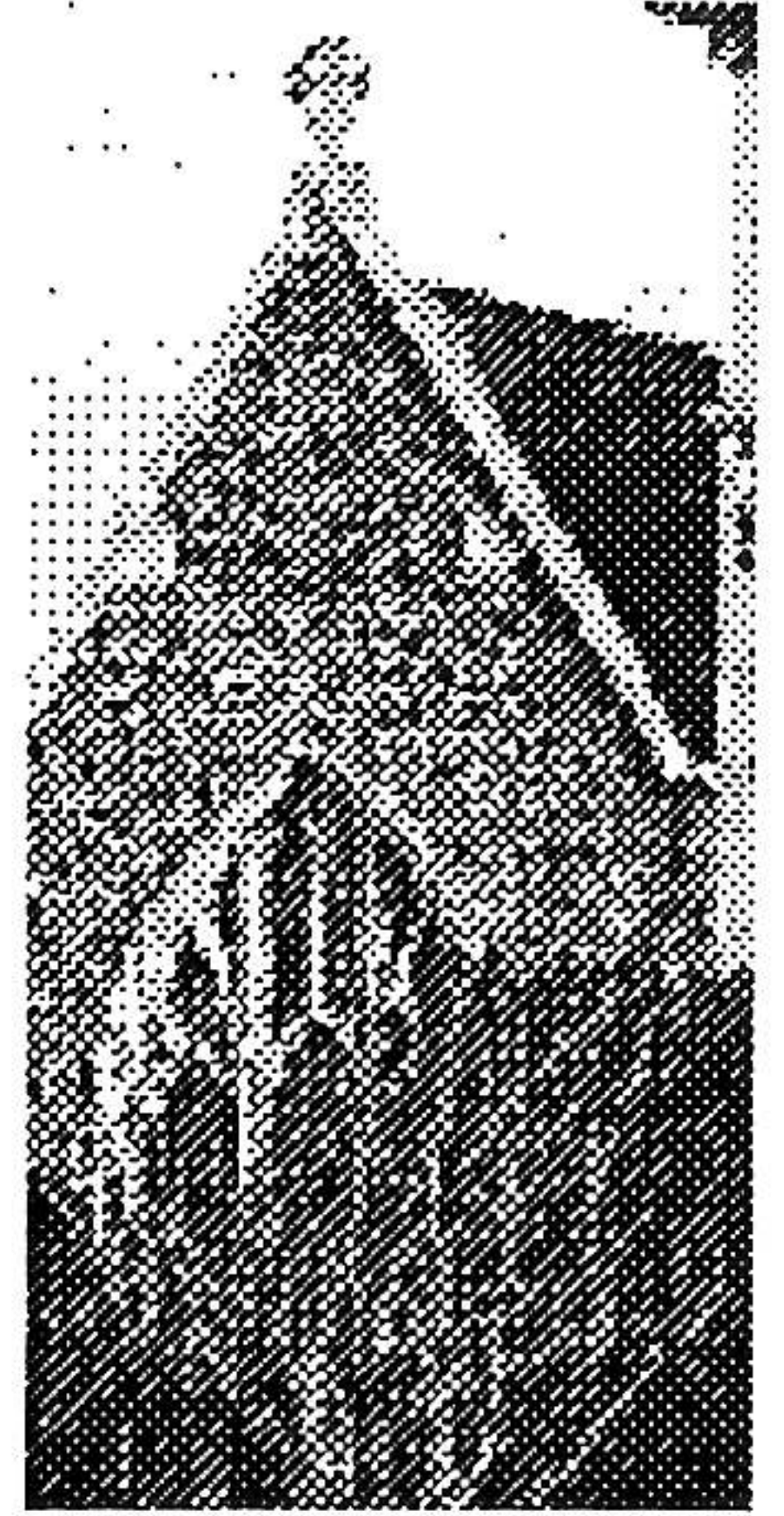


# *St Peter's Church Exterior & Churchyard*

**A**s seen today the church is the result of the extensive restoration work undertaken in 1859-60 by the architect Giles Gilbert Scott, when the outside of the walls were completely refaced with dark knapped flint- a fine example of the Kentish craft, and Bathstone facings. Canterbury Archaeological Trust surveyed the church in 1994 and said that behind this flint facing the core of all the main walls must be medieval, with the exception of the vestry on the north-east side and most of the tower and its stair-turret on the south-east side. Also during the restoration the north aisle was enlarged by extending it westwards, and the wall of the south aisle was raised to its present height..

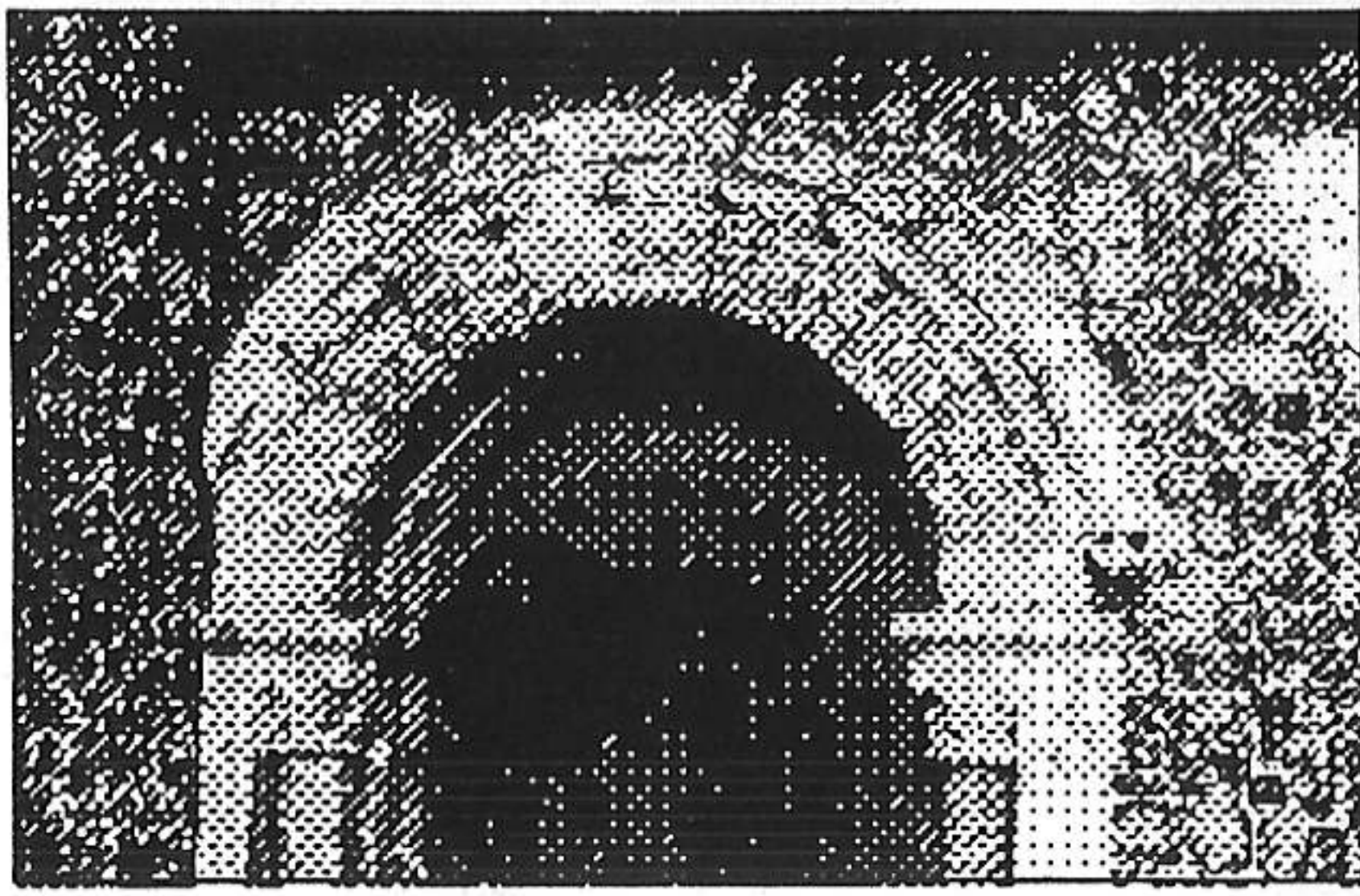
There are two original doorways, a small one leading to the vestry in the north east corner by the side of the chancel showing deep chevron mouldings, and the west doorway through which you enter the church.

The west doorway is mid-to-late 12<sup>th</sup> century, and unlike virtually everything else on the exterior, was not totally renewed in 1860, its fine moulding standing out in bold relief, with carved capitals on the shafts and three weathered heads. The 3-light west window above it is in the early perpendicular style and the only late-medieval survival dating from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and



*West window, top.  
West doorway, above.*



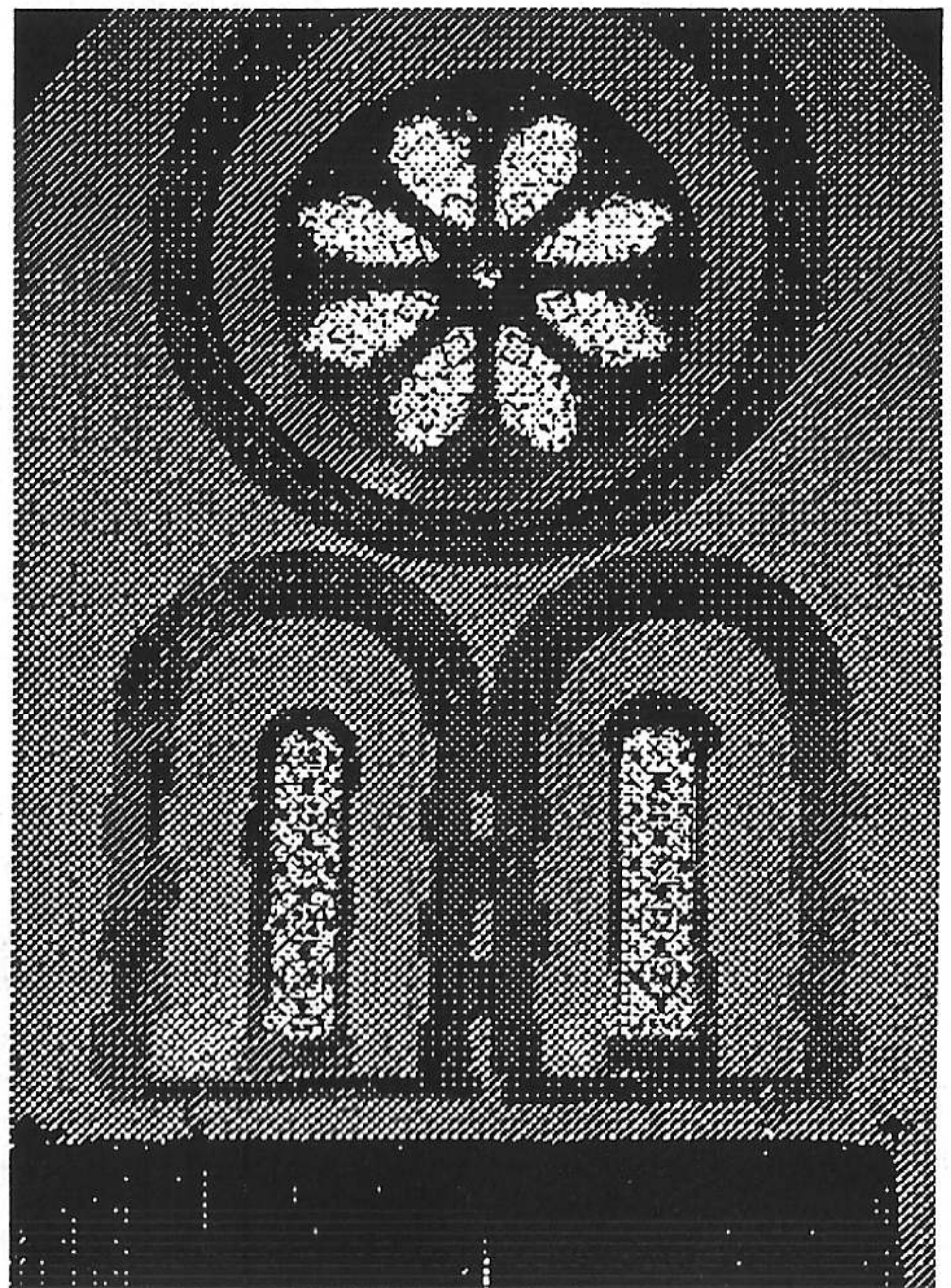


*Vestry doorway*

appears to contain much original stonework.

The original late 12th century tower had deteriorated to such an extent by the 17th or 18th centuries that it had proved necessary to support it with brick buttresses to the south-east and south-west. But in the 1859-60 restoration it was completely rebuilt above its medieval base, with a shingled spire and the addition of the south-east stair turret. The tower is hung with a ring of three bells, of which only the tenor bell, thought to have been cast in the 14th century by William le Belyetre of Canterbury, bears an inscription, reading: ANE: MARIA: GRACIA: PLENA; DUS: TECU.

The churchyard contains many interesting headstones dating from the early 17th century, and was extended to the west at the beginning of the 20th century, and although technically full since the 1980's, burials still occasionally take place in family plots. Kent County Council took over the responsibility for basic maintenance in the 1990's.



*Wheel window and Norman windows in the south aisle*



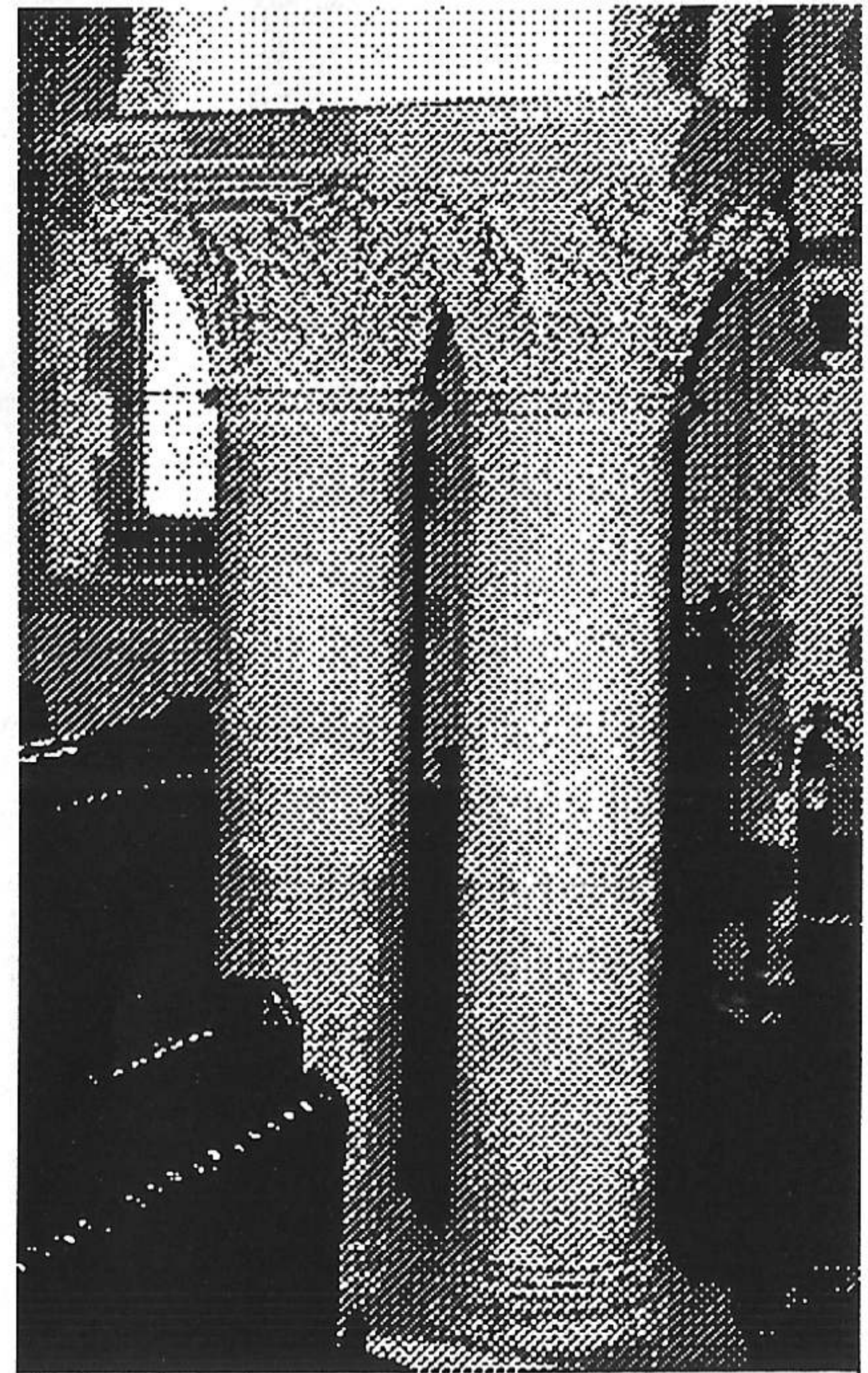
# *St Peter's Church Interior*

**S**t Peter's follows the traditional layout of three aisles and a chancel with a wooden barrel roof over the nave and plain wooden roofs over the side aisles. From the surviving remains Canterbury Archaeological Trust report says that there is no doubt that the nave, chancel, south aisle and tower base all date from the 12th century, and though it is possible that the nave may date from a century earlier there is no visible evidence for this. The south aisle and tower were added in the later 12th century, and the north aisle and north-east transept chapel date from the early 13th century.

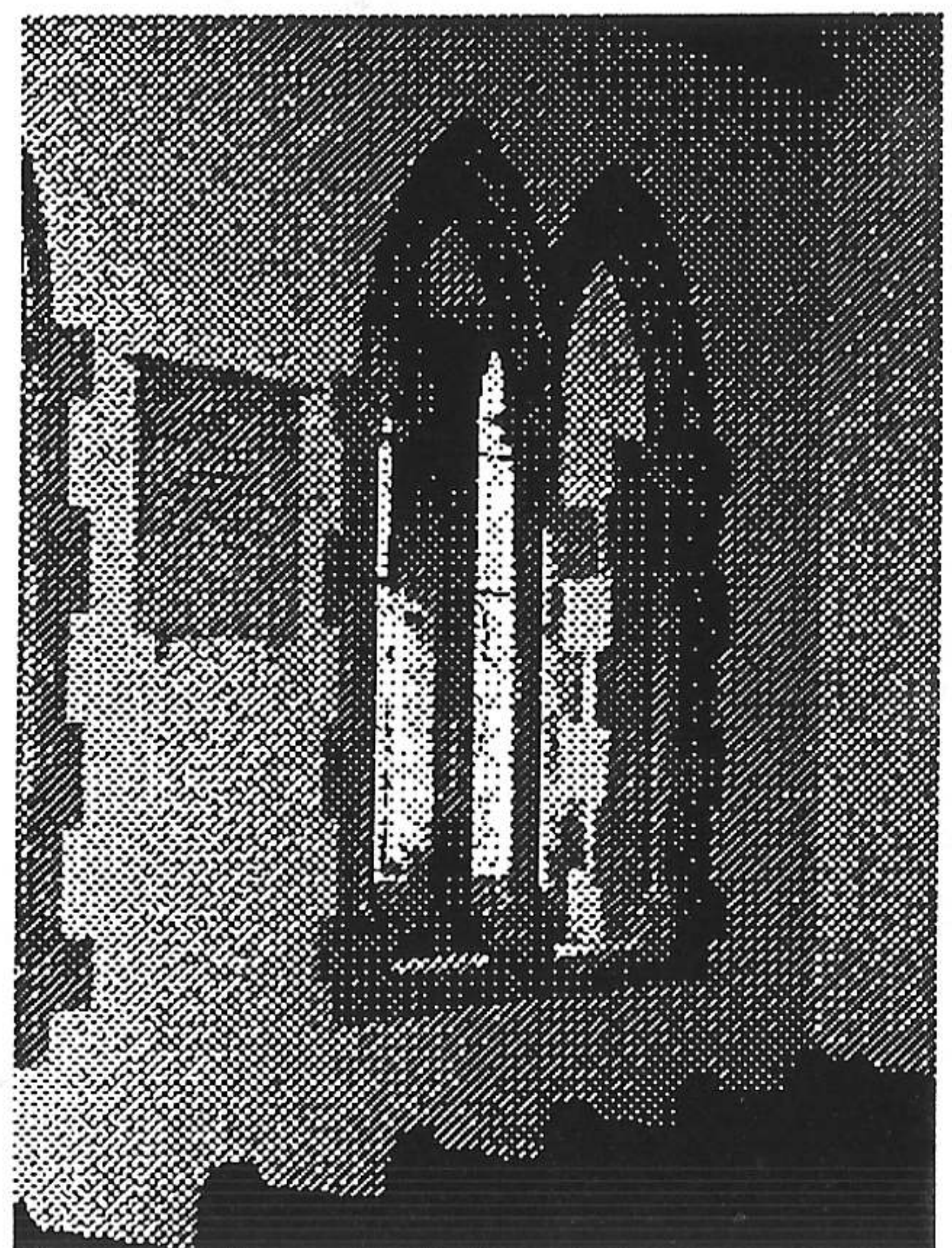
Though a small amount of Norman stonework is visible, almost all of what is seen today is Victorian work dating from the 1859-60 restoration when the south aisle wall was raised to its present height, and the north aisle extended west. At one time the eastern end of the north aisle was partitioned off for use as a schoolroom.

The columns in the church are generally considered disproportionately large for the size of building. On the north side the arcade is of four bays with the four arches supported by unusual coupled circular piers- formed from what may once have been square shafts, and crowned with floral capitals of Early English design. Pevsner writes that they are in about the same scale as the top two thirds of William de Sen's piers at Canterbury Cathedral, but paired E-W, not N-S.

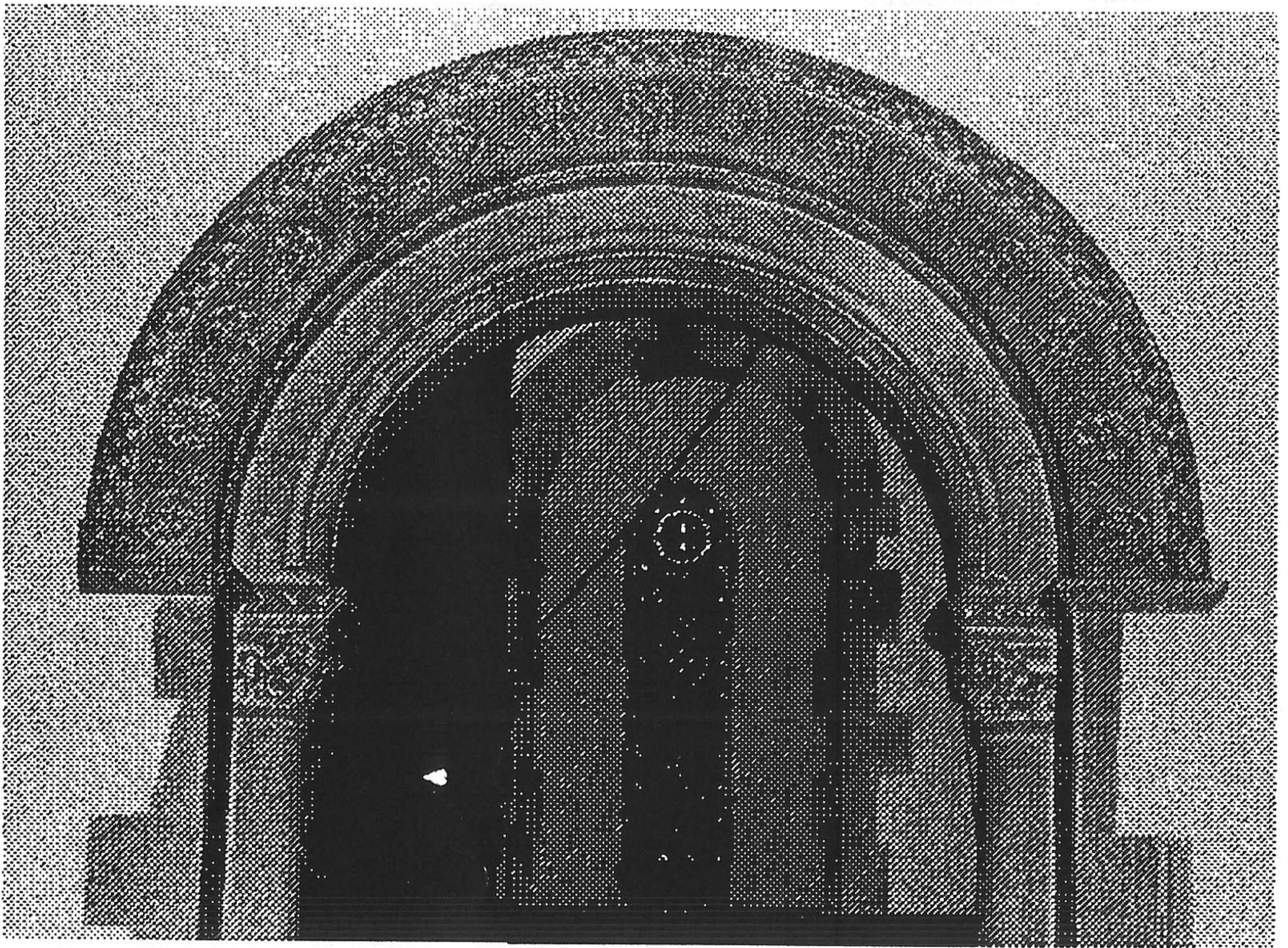
The arcade on the south side is of three bays and the three arches are considered fine specimens of Early English work. The east end of the south aisle contains a huge wheel window set above two Norman windows which are deeply splayed and filled with stained glass. The south aisle windows are unusual as the centre shafts



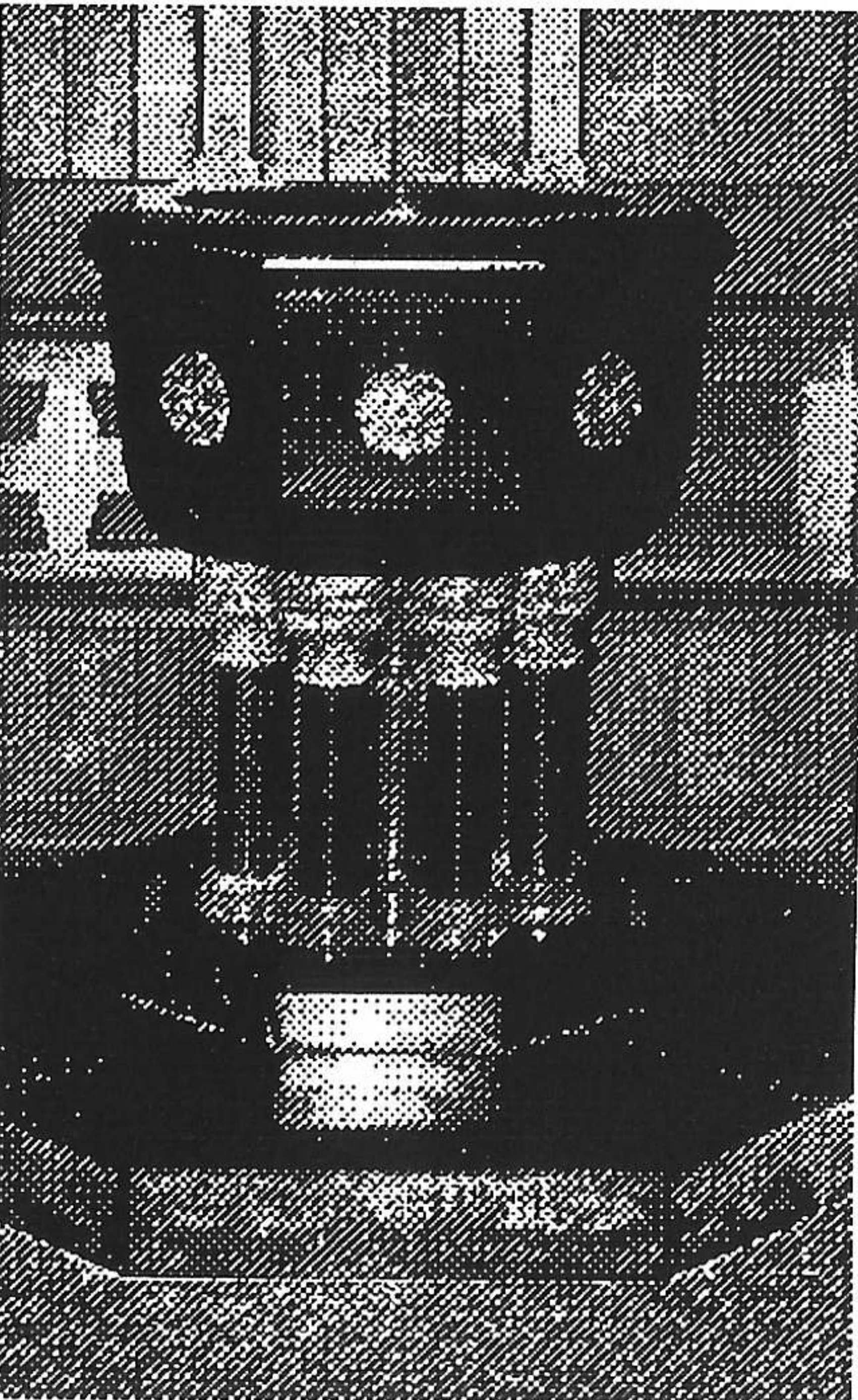
*Double columns in the north aisle, above.  
South aisle window, below.*







*Richly decorated tower arch, above.  
Cornish red serpentine font, below.*



stand out by themselves in front of the glass. One of them contains a stained glass memorial to the memory of May, wife of Major Farwell of the 44<sup>th</sup> Regiment and daughter of Mr & Mrs Winter of Bridge Hill, who died in Madras in 1882

On the north side of the tower there is a fine stone arch with rich billet moulding supported by grotesque heads. A board above the belfry states that the church and steeple were repaired by Samuel Hills, churchwarden in 1787.

Standing on the floor of the tower the octagonal font is carved out of rare, and now unobtainable, Cornish red serpentine marble, and is considered to be of outstanding workmanship. Unusually, the bowl is supported by a central pillar itself surrounded by eight shafts, all in the same material. The glass in the west window was installed to the memory of Dr Amelius Sicard who died in 1880.



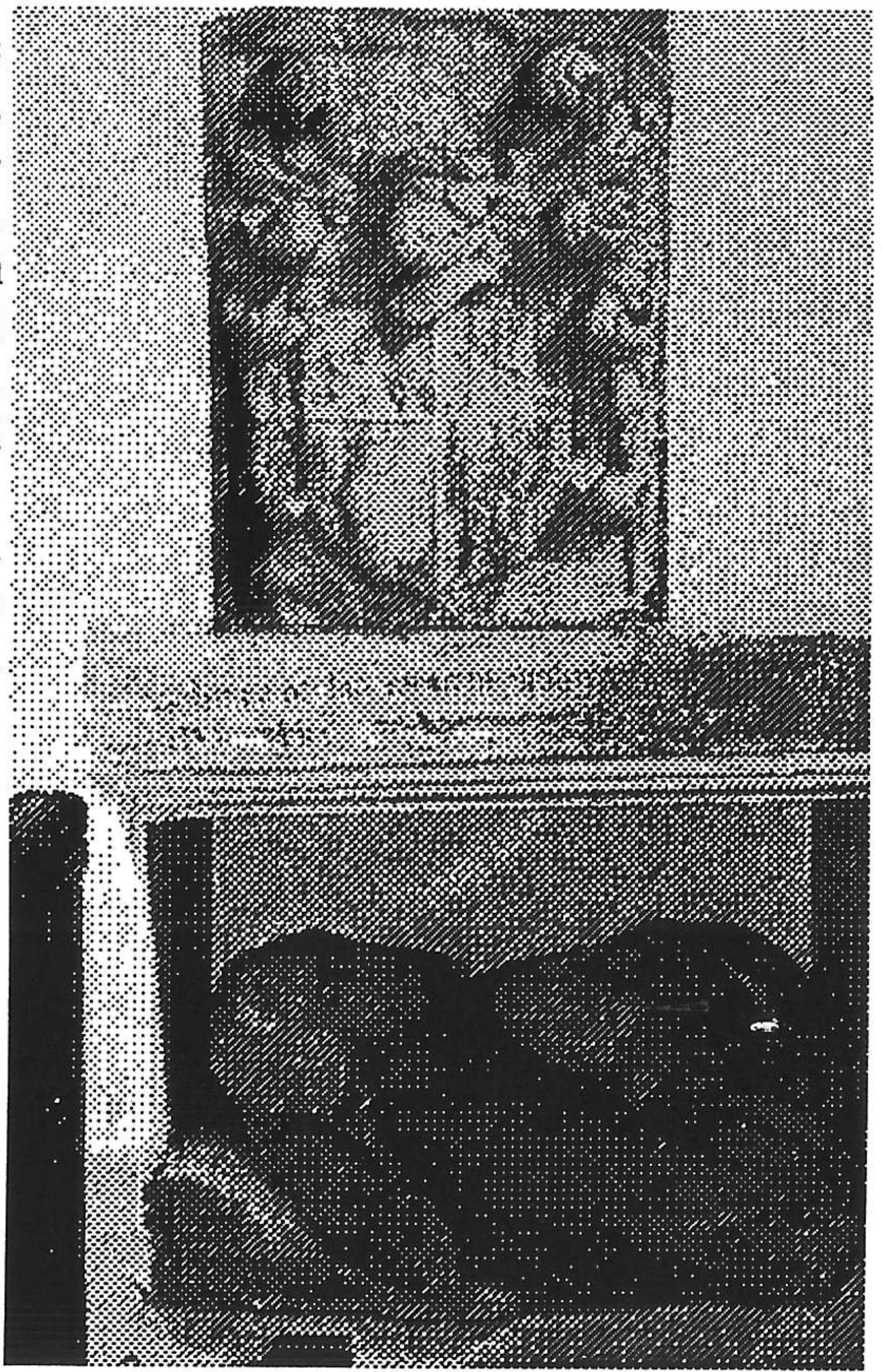
In the chancel on the north wall there is a fine semi-circular Norman carving, all that survives of a lost doorway, depicting scenes from the Book of Genesis. One sequence shows Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden listening to the Devil and then being driven out by an Angel, and another shows the story of Caine and Abel.

Below this carving is the figure of a robed priest, believed to be Marcobus Kaseley a vicar until 1512, apparently cut in two and reclining in two small recesses. The two carved scrolls on the opposite side of the chancel may have been part of his tomb.

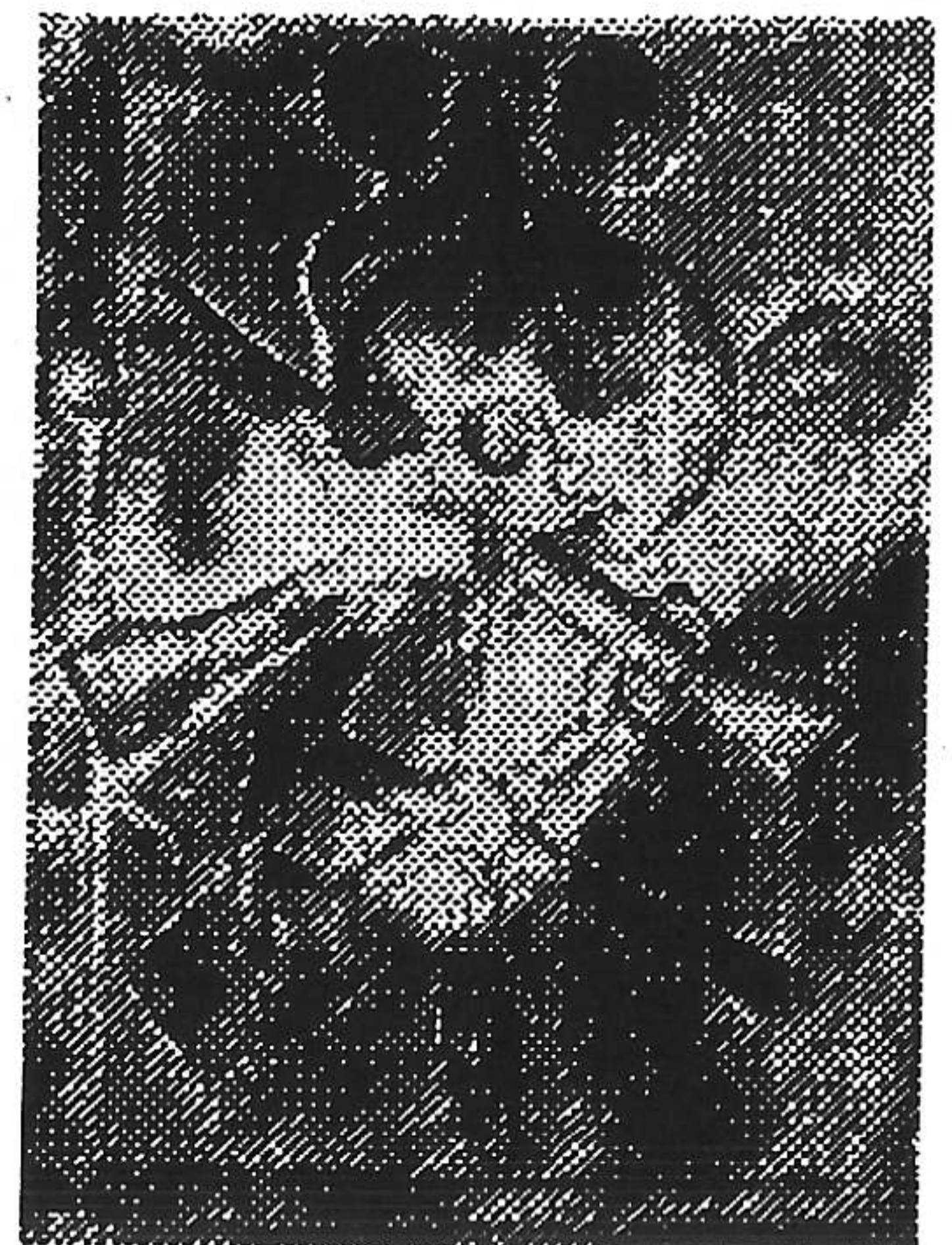
There are several interesting tablets within the church two of which are particularly interesting. In the middle of the chancel floor lies buried the second daughter of Sir Dudley Bigges of Chilham Castle who was Master of the Rolls in 1643, and in the left side aisle there is a tablet to Mr Sicard who is one of the many people who lived in the village of Huguenot stock.

High on the east wall is a portrait attributed to Cornelius Jansen, a noted painter at the time of Charles I, who is known to have stayed with Sir Arnold Braems at nearby Bridge Place. Sir Arnold had settled in England from his native Low Countries and made his fortune first as a builder and then as harbourmaster of Dover docks, and there is a plaque to his first wife Joan on the south chancel wall. Her memorial is flanked by two marble carvings, on one side by a skull through which a serpent entwines, and on the other side by a coat of arms; these may be all that remain of a once much larger tomb.

The Victorian organ dates from 1860 and is typical of its period; it was renovated in 1975. The church interior was repainted in 1998 by a volunteer team drawn from the congregation.



*Memorial to Marcobus Kaseley, above.  
Skull and crossbones carving, below.*





# *The Village of Bridge*

**B**ridge is unique in being the only village in the country with only that one word as its name. The village straddles the old Roman road known as Watling Street in a valley where the seasonal Nailbourne stream flows north out of the head of the Elham valley to turn right angles east on its way out to the sea. Watling Street was constructed by the Romans to serve as their overland route from Dover to London via Rochester, and for almost 2000 years was used by pilgrims, private and commercial travellers, and not least by the military on their way to and from battles on the Continent.

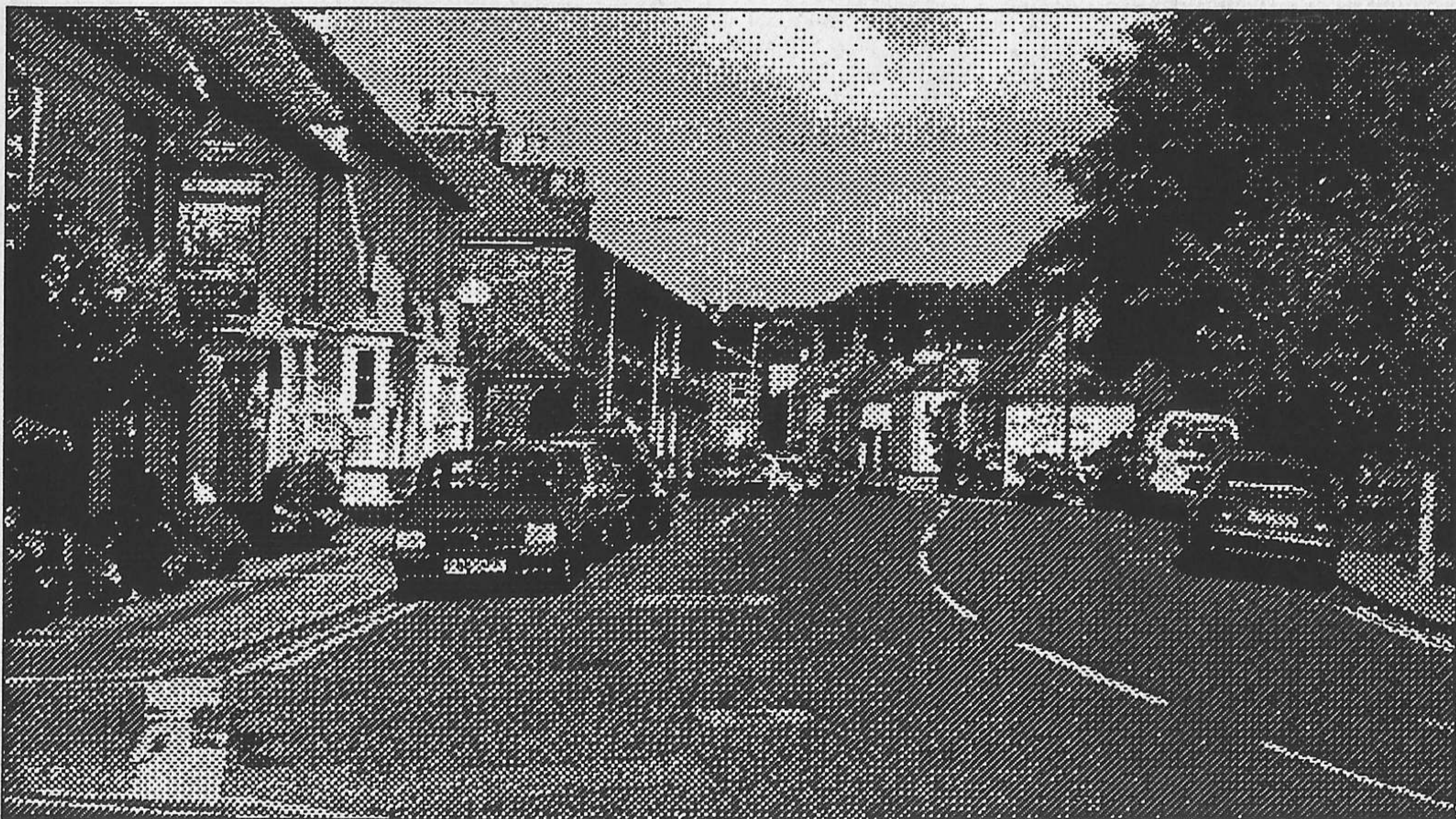
So from the earliest times Bridge became established through its role in tending to the needs of all this human traffic and their horses, due to the availability of fresh water, the first they would encounter before or after travelling over the long high ridge of the downs to and from Dover. It was finally by-passed in 1976 to relieve what had by then become intolerably and dangerously high levels of heavy articulated goods vehicles to and from the continent, but only after protesting villagers had created their own chaos by blocking the High Street in a series of sit-in protests until the Government was forced to act.

Along with vast tracts of East Kent, the Garden of England, hop growing in Bridge was a major feature of agriculture in the surrounding countryside and covered an extensive acreage. Until mechanisation was introduced in the 1950's, at harvest time for a fortnight every September large numbers of hop pickers and their families travelled down from south and east London, and lived in specially built huts on the farms. Hops were a very valuable commodity and for centuries were subject to double tithes of



20 per cent which had to be paid annually to the established Church until the 1920's, when the system was abolished by Parliament.

Although just under three miles from Canterbury, Bridge boasts a wider variety of amenities than most villages in the area, including three public houses, the White Horse- traditionally the travellers hostelry, the Red Lion- traditionally frequented by the military, and the Plough and Harrow- still very much the villagers' pub. There is also a surgery, veterinary practice, baker, newsagent, hairdresser, photographers studio, small supermarket, combined chemist and post office/bank, restaurant, and night club. All this combines to make Bridge an



*Bridge High Street looking north from Brewery Lane.*

attractive and much sought after village in which to live, which is reflected in its premium property values.

The 1960's saw three housing developments within the village: to the east in Riverside, parallel to the High Street, to the west in Western Avenue, and to the south in Bridge Down. Since then apart from infills



there has been little housing built, although the local landowner Lord Conygham is keen to develop the land between Riverside and the bypass for affordable housing. In 2000 planning permission was granted for a new surgery to be built along the Patrixbourne Road to replace one in the centre which had outgrown the practice.



*Bridge High Street looking north from  
Bifrons Walk*

## *Country Houses Around Bridge*

**B**ridge is fortunate to have a number of notable houses close to it. A little way along the Bourne Park road, south-west of the churchyard, lies Bridge Place which was built in the 17th century by Sir Arnold Brems to a large C shape plan using hand made Dutch bricks he had imported through Sandwich. At the time it was the largest house in East Kent



after Chilham Castle and boasted a deer park and an aviary, but its vast size made it uneconomic to run, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a new owner had all but one wing pulled down. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to Edward Taylor of nearby Bifrons, a friend of George IV, and also of novelist Jane Austen; since the 1960's it has been home to Bridge Country Club.

Further along the same road about half a mile from the village Bourne House can be glimpsed set at the end of a long drive. An outstanding red brick and stone Queen Anne mansion of fine proportions and listed Grade I, it is in private ownership and not open to the public.

Higham Park, which lies off the top of Bridge Hill to the south of the village, was extended in the early 20th century by wrapping a new stone classical style structure around three sides of a much earlier building. It was inherited by Count Louis Zborovski who built outrageously powerful racing cars fitted with First World War aero engines made famous by author Ian Fleming in his childrens story Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang. Also on the estate to entertain his house party guests Count Zborowski built a miniature scale steam railway, and was active in the promotion of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. The house was commandeered by the Army in the Second World War, and for some years afterwards became a hospital annexe.

There was once a fourth house, Bifrons, which stood halfway between Bridge and Patixbourne; it had been built in the mid-17th century and remodelled by the Victorians 200 years later. It was demolished after the Second World War during which time, like Higham Park, it had been commandeered by the army to augment Canterbury's extensive garrison.

In both World Wars Bridge was home to numerous temporary training and transit camps for large numbers of troops before they continued their journey along the old Roman road to Dover to fight on the Continent.





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