

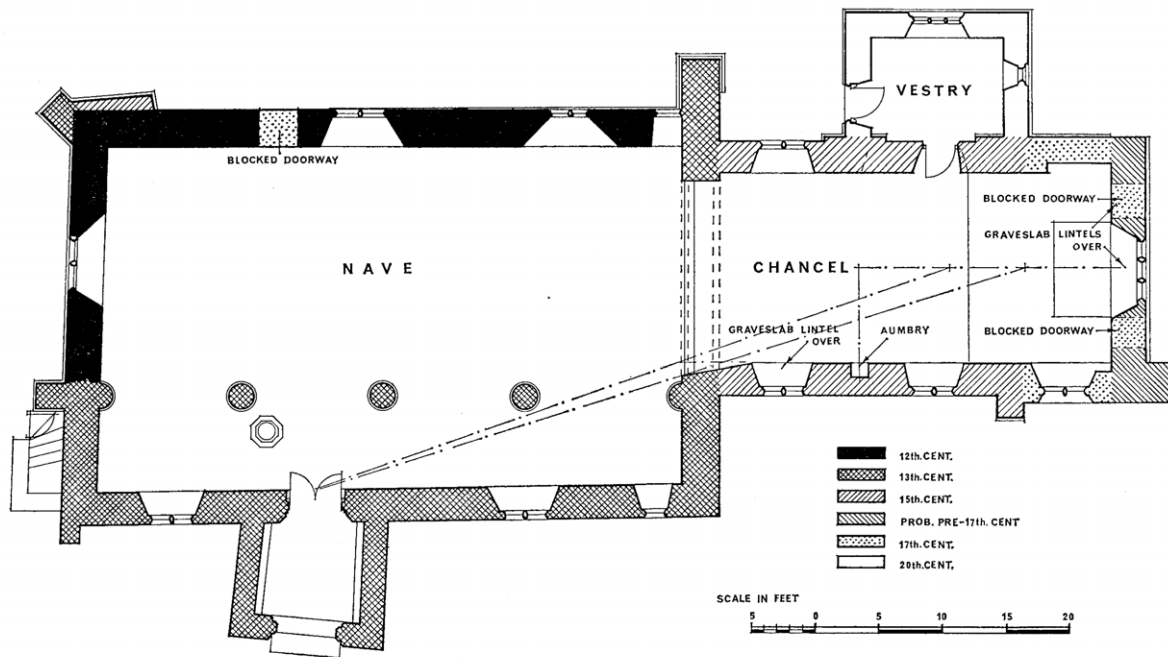
ART. V.—*Recent discoveries at St Oswald's Church,
Dean.* By J. HUGHES.

Read at Penrith, April 6th, 1968.

AT the beginning of September 1967 the Rector of Dean, the Rev. E. O. Bennett, M.C., drew my attention to several interesting features which had been revealed during the re-plastering of the chancel of Dean Church. When the old plaster was removed there was an opportunity for close examination of the masonry walls, and the following discoveries were made:

1. **Aumbry.** On the south wall of the Choir a well-preserved aumbry, measuring 1 ft. 4 in. x 1 ft. 3 in. and 1 ft. 3 in. deep, came to light. The walling above is carried on a shouldered arch typical of the 13th-14th century. The position of the aumbry is a considerable distance from the Sanctuary, being sited approximately mid-way along the Choir wall.
2. **Doorways.** Within the Sanctuary two blocked doorways on each side of the east window were revealed. The outline of the more northerly could be seen from the outside as well as from the interior. Both doorways appeared to be devoid of stone jambs and were filled with loose rubble.
3. **Graveslab Covers.** A sandstone lintel measuring approximately 3 ft. 6 in. x 1 ft. 5 in. over the 15th-century window adjacent to the Chancel arch on the south side of the Choir proved to be a graveslab cover of earlier date. An incised cross shaft and chalice motif are plainly visible, the style of the latter suggesting that the slab was originally a memorial to a 13th-century priest.¹

¹ Jacobus de Wigton and Robert . . . are listed as Rectors of Dean in the 13th century.



ST. OSWALD'S CHURCH, DEAN

FIG. I.

J.H.

Another graveslab has been similarly used on the east window. Here the slab has been cut lengthways and only one half used as a lintel. The portion now visible measures approximately 6 ft. 1 in. x 1 ft. 3 in., indicating that the original stone was of a large proportion. Previous building operations have considerably defaced what may then have been a well-worn stone, but certain features indicate it to be a 14th-century type. The shaft and one arm of the cross head show it to have been of a simple *fleur-de-lys* pattern. The "black letter" inscription running along the edge of the stone is unfortunately too worn to be decipherable. Below the cross is the faint outline of a shield. The charges are not easily visible and it was decided to make a charcoal rubbing in an attempt to read the arms. This revealed that the coat had been fretty with possibly a canton.

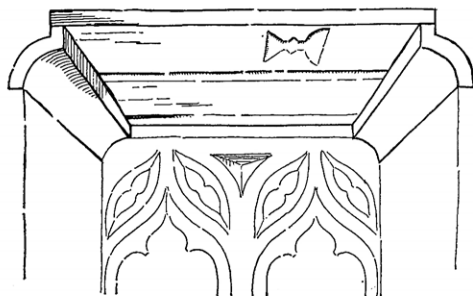
The arms of the de Branthwaite family of Branthwaite Hall in the 14th century are said to have been *Argent fretty and a canton Gules*.² The manor was granted by William de Meschines in the early part of the 12th century to Waldieve, whose son gave it to a kinswoman whose husband took the name of de Branthwaite.³ Robert de Branthwaite held the manor in 1230 and his son Robert was in possession in 1276. In 1278 the latter was engaged in a dispute with Gilbert de Workington concerning the boundaries of his manor.⁴ The Lay Subsidy of 6 Edward III (1333) assessed Thomas de Branthwaite of Dean at 12s. 0d. in goods. Later in the 14th century the manor passed with a Branthwaite heiress to the Skelton family.

The Rev. Wm. Sherwin, in a manuscript dated 1876, stated that a custom prevailed at Dean which allowed the funeral bell to be tolled, free of charge, for the occupiers of Branthwaite Hall, Branthwaite

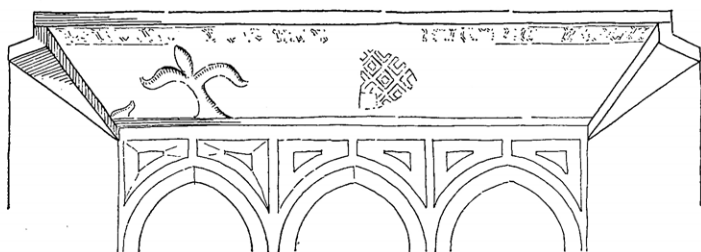
² F. J. Field, *An Armorial for Cumberland* 95.

³ NB ii 58.

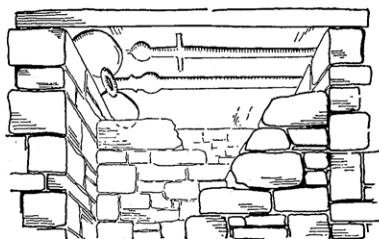
⁴ Rev. F. W. Ragg (CW2 xiv 395).



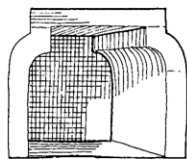
LINTEL OVER CHOIR WINDOW (SOUTH)



LINTEL OVER EAST WINDOW



LINTEL OVER BLOCKED DOOR



AUMBRY

ST OSWALD'S CHURCH, DEAN

J.H.

FIG. 2.

Edge, Wright Green and the Rectory. Local tradition asserts that some of these families also had the right of seating in the Choir. It is tempting to surmise that in medieval times these families also had the right of burial in the Chancel.

A third graveslab, re-used as a lintel, was found over the northern blocked doorway on the east wall. The removal of some of the rubble-filling showed that this was approximately 3 ft. 6 in. x 1 ft. 4 in. and had an incised cross shaft and a head of a slightly more ornate type. The upper portion of a sword was also clearly visible on the stone. The slab gave every indication of being early 14th century in design.

Comment.

The finds present the following problems. Why was the aumbry so far away from the existing Sanctuary, and why were two doorways inserted in the east wall? A careful plan of the Church was drawn and it was noted that the wall under the springing of the chancel arch on the south side was splayed. Clearly this splay had been formed at a later date than the original building, and it became evident by the insertion of sight lines on the plan that at some time or other the Chancel had been lengthened to its present size, the splay being necessary to enable the officiating priest to be seen from the south aisle of the Nave. A sight line from the south door through the original springing point of the Chancel arch showed that the original altar would have been much nearer the nave and that the newly discovered aumbry would have been within the original Sanctuary.

The windows of the earlier shortened Chancel are of the 15th-century ogee type and it is known that a re-dedication of the Church took place in 1447, necessitated no doubt by considerable rebuilding of the fabric. The graveslab lintels give every indication that they were inserted at that date.

The lengthening of the Choir probably took place during the 17th century, as is evidenced by the style of the most easterly window on the south wall. It is suggested that at that time another building lay to the east of the Church, lying some nine to ten feet away and entered by doors on its west side. It is further suggested that this building was then for the most part demolished, leaving the lower part of its west wall to form the base of the new east wall on the Church, the doorways at the same time having been blocked up. Supporting this theory is the evidence that with the plaster removed from the interior it was seen that the east wall was not bonded to any extent with the north and south walls of the Chancel. Furthermore, the lower 6 ft. or so of the east wall is thicker and different in character to that of the upper portion. The east window viewed from the interior has dressed quoins only on the upper portion. These are not extended to the older and lower parts of the wall. Moreover, externally the plinth on the north and south sides of the Chancel is not extended round the east wall.

The old Grammar School of Dean was traditionally said to have been close to the east end of the Church. John Fox of the Goldsmiths Company endowed the school with £150 in 1596, yet only 19 years later his son John rebuilt and re-endowed the school, which would seem to indicate that the first school was not in new premises but an adaptation of an old building near the church. A portion of this ancient building may well have been finally incorporated into the east wall of the Church in the 17th century.

It is possible that for a time one of the blocked doors gave access to a vestry, the location of which, although uncommon, is not entirely unknown. Examples can still be seen in some of the York churches and at Burgh-by-Sands.

Conclusion.

The discoveries materially assist in tracing the development of the Church at Dean. The north and west walls of the Nave are thicker than any other remaining walls, and the masonry gives a 12th-century appearance. There is some evidence of a projecting base course on the north wall. The Transitional character of the nave arcading suggests a date of early 13th century (*c.* 1225). The south porch may be assigned to a slightly later date. A major re-bulding of at least the Choir took place in the 15th century, with further extensions taking place in the 17th century. At this time the Church had probably fallen into serious decay. A considerable portion of the north wall of the Nave shows evidence of being then rebuilt. The blocking up of the "Devils" door probably took place at the same time.

Acknowledgement.

I wish to thank Mr C. Roy Hudleston for kindly correcting the several errors which appeared on the original typescript of this paper.