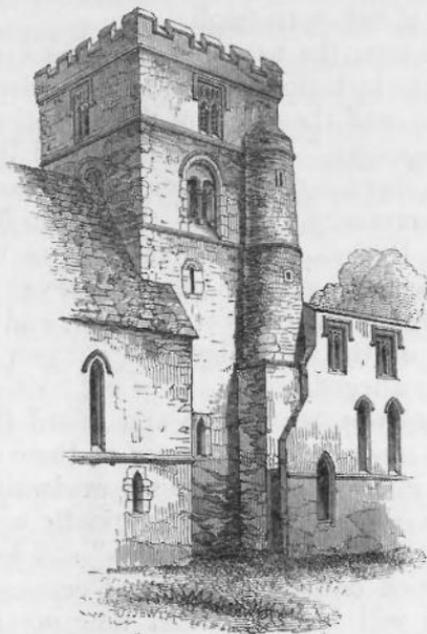


LOW SIDE WINDOWS.



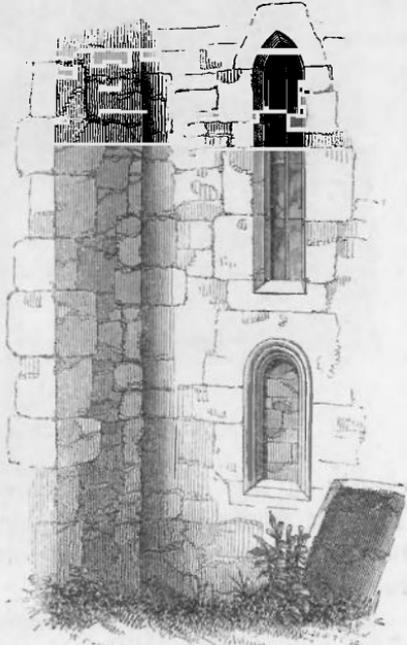
BUCKNELL, OXFORDSHIRE. a a. Low side windows.

No part of our ancient churches has so completely baffled the enquiries of antiquaries, architectural students, and ecclesiologists, as the low side windows which so frequently occur near the west end of the chancel, usually on the south side, but sometimes on the north, and sometimes on both sides; occasionally also near the east end of the nave, and in other situations. It is difficult to give any definition of them that will apply to them all, excepting that they are always below the range of the other windows, and generally very near the ground. They are frequently walled up, and this appears to have been done at some remote period; many of them, however, still remain open, and are now glazed, but in such cases the glazing is always modern, and they do not appear to have been originally glazed; in several instances wooden shutters remain, which appear to be original, and in many more the hinges or fastenings remain.

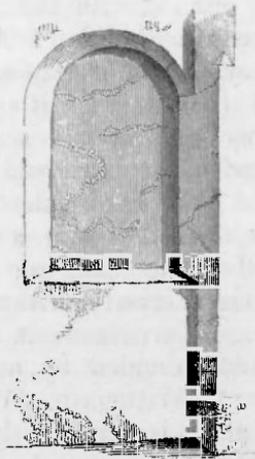
Examples may be found of all periods; but prior to the thirteenth century they are rare: after that period they become comparatively common, and traces of them belonging to this

and the two following centuries are numerous in most parts of the country. Probably the earliest example remaining is that at Caistor, Northamptonshire, published in this Journal^a, from a drawing by Mr. Hartshorne, which appears to belong to the Anglo-Saxon period, as shewn by the long and short work in the jambs, though the upper part of the window has been rebuilt in the fourteenth century.

Of the twelfth century few examples have been noticed: there is one which appears to belong to that period on the south side of the chancel at St. Margaret's at Cliff, Kent; but this is rather a doubtful example. Another, at North Hinksey, Berkshire, there seems no reason to doubt; the round head and the Norman mouldings are decisive. It is situated on the south side of the chancel, immediately to the east of the chancel-arch, which was of early Norman character, until it was recently altered. The south doorway is also Norman, and the lower part of the walls belong to the same age, though all the windows are subsequent insertions. Another, also on the south side of the chancel of St. Giles's, Northampton, may still be traced on the exterior, and is distinct in the interior.



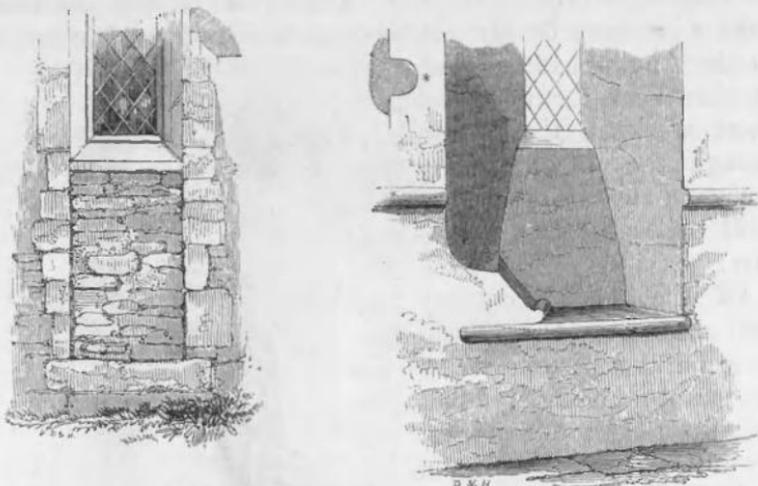
North Hinksey, Berkshire.



St. Giles's, Northampton, interior.

^a Vol. iii. p. 288.

Of the thirteenth century there are examples at Raydon, Suffolk; Elsfield, and Cowley, Oxfordshire. All these are



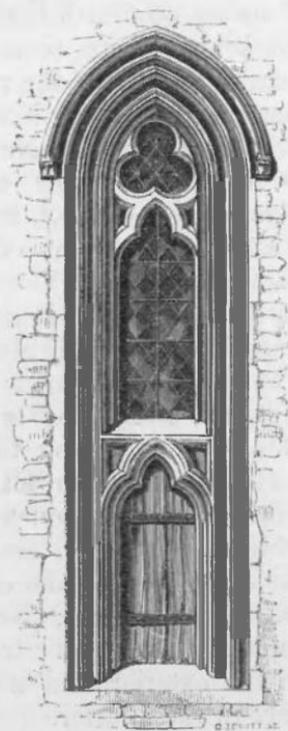
Exterior and Interior of the low side Window, Elsfield, Oxon.

clearly of the Early English style. That at Elsfield is remarkable for having a stone seat and desk formed in the sill in the interior.

Another at Akeley, Buckinghamshire, also on the south side, has a trefoiled head, and is late in the style.

The one at Raydon, Suffolk, (engraved in Brandon's Analysis,) is a very elegant example, forming part of the design with a single light window having a trefoiled head, and a trefoil pierced through the solid head above, the low side window itself has also a trefoiled head below the transom: this still retains the original shutter.

The same arrangement of a lancet window divided by a transom occurs at Wittenash, Warwickshire, and is frequently used. At Oakington, Cambridgeshire, (engraved in Paley's Manual,)

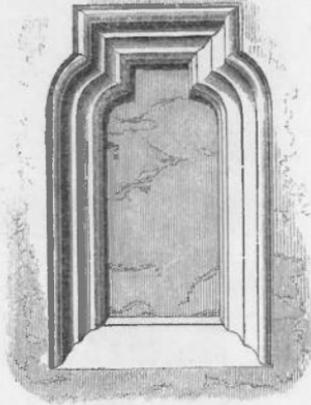


Raydon, Suffolk.

there are two square openings below the sill of the window: these are now glazed.

At Bucknell, Oxfordshire, there are three, one on the north side of the chancel, lancet-shaped on the outside, with a square-headed opening within, and one on each side of the nave, near the east end, of a wide lancet form, with a round-headed recess over each on the inside: there were probably chantry altars at each of the two latter places, (see illustration at the head of this Article.)

Of the fourteenth century, at Over, Cambridgeshire, are two, early in the Decorated style, and perhaps belonging to the end of the previous century. They are opposite to each other, on the north and south sides of the chancel, of the form called the Carnarvon window, or the square-headed trefoil, and are not later than Edward I. At Binstead, Isle of Wight, is one of precisely the same form, (engraved in Weale's Quarterly Papers.)



South side Chancel, Over,
Camb.

At Offchurch, Warwickshire, is one of a similar form on the south side of the chancel, which is Early English, and it is not clear whether the low side window is original or an insertion.

At Lillington and Dunchurch, Warwickshire, they are small square-headed openings, quite plain, about two feet high and one wide. At Barton, Warwickshire, a Decorated low side window is inserted in the north wall of an Early English chancel.

At Cubington, Warwickshire, the chancel of which is Decorated, the low side window on the south side is of the same style, a single light, with a cinquefoil head, about 3 ft. 6 in. high by 1 ft. 6 in. wide. On the north side is another of late poor Perpendicular work, evidently an insertion.

At Long Compton, Warwickshire, on the south side of the chancel, is a recess in the wall with a trefoil head, and in the

back of it are two small square openings side by side, with a sort of solid mullion between.

At Morton Bagot, also in Warwickshire, is an elegant example early in this style, with a trefoil pierced through a solid head, the lower part divided by a transom as in other instances.

At Somerton, Oxfordshire, on the north side of the chancel, is a singular example: the window is a single light, long and



Exterior.

Somerton, Oxfordshire

(Interior)

narrow, with Decorated tracery in the head, divided by a thick transom, below which the opening does not appear to have been glazed. In the interior is a recess with a sort of shoulder, as if there had been a seat by the side of the opening, agreeing in this respect with Elsfield and some others.

At Whitwell, Rutlandshire, the low side window is of two lights trefoiled, with a quatrefoil in the head, and is set in a recess close to the south-west angle of the chancel, with a bold hood-mould over it, terminated by the corbel-heads usual in this style. For this remarkable example we are indebted to the note-book of the late Rev. H. D. G. Baker, of Stamford, whose loss will long be felt by his friends, and by all archæologists who had an opportunity of knowing the value of his accurate and careful observation.



Whitwell, Rutlandshire

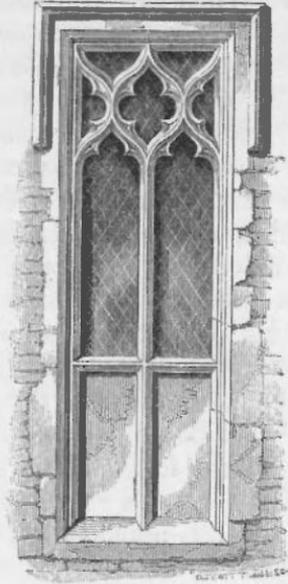
At Garsington, Oxfordshire, a plain window of two lights, situated on the south side of the chancel, nearest the west end, has the lights continued down below the level of the other windows, with a transom in place of the sill, and the two square openings thus formed have evidently been used as low side windows. The iron-work in them appears to have been original, but they do not appear to have been originally glazed. The window opposite to this on the north side has also low side openings under it of the same character, and also had original iron bars.



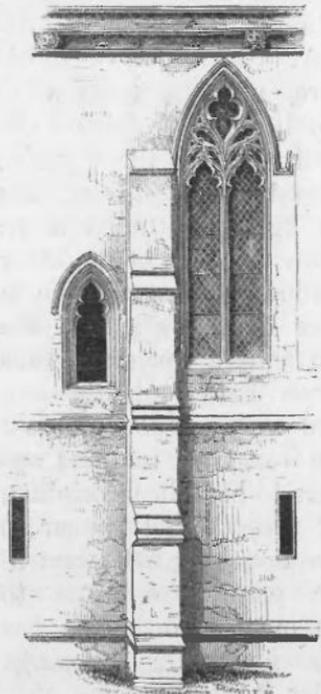
Garsington Oxfordshire

At Ardley, Oxfordshire, a square-headed window of two lights with Decorated tracery of a flowing character, the lights divided by a transom, below which were the low side openings.

The most remarkable example hitherto noticed is perhaps that at Prior Crawden's chapel at Ely, which is on the first floor, having a room under it. The low side window is in the usual situation on the south side, at some distance from the altar, and as there is no nave, not far from the west end of the chapel. This example is not easily reconciled with any of the existing theories respecting the use of these openings; being about ten feet from the ground it could not well be used for confession, and would seem to shew that they were used for some internal purpose rather than external. There is a similar example at "La Sainte Chapelle" in Paris, at a still greater height from the ground. This example is the more singular from the fact of there being a second chapel below, and no low side window in this lower chapel. The remarkable openings at the back of the sedilia at Dorchester, Oxfordshire, have been described as belonging to this class; but those were originally glazed, some of the painted glass being of the



Ardley, Oxfordshire.



Prior Crawden's Chapel, Ely.

same age, and made to fit the openings, which seems to mark them as distinct from this class, though their use is equally obscure.

Of the fifteenth century examples are numerous, and frequently insertions in earlier walls.

At Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, a window of two lights, square-headed, with straight-sided sub-arches to the lights, is inserted under a very good Decorated window on the south side.

At Eccleshall, Staffordshire, a square-headed window of three lights is inserted under a lancet window, cutting off the lower part of it, and having a wooden lintel. This is in a fine Early English chancel.

At Blisworth, Northamptonshire, the low side window on the north side of the chancel has a trefoil head and a square dripstone over it. There is another on the south side, but that is quite plain.

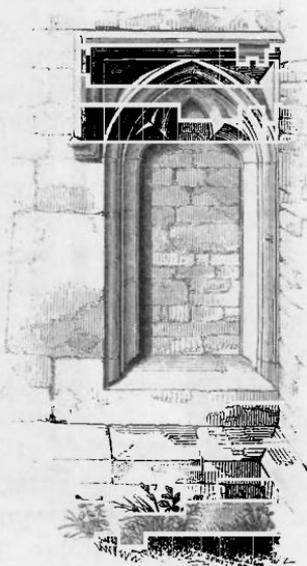
At Swavesey, Cambridgeshire, is one in a remarkable situation, near the east end of the south aisle of the nave, which is separated from the chancel aisle only by a low wall, on which has been a screen; against the screen was a chantry altar, and between the altar and the piscina belonging to it was this opening, so that the priest officiating at the altar must have been quite close to the low side window.

At Hellesdon, Norfolk, is a very good example, with the original wooden shutter and iron-work perfect.

At Wetherall, Cumberland, there is a late example on the south side of the chancel; it is of two lights, round-headed, with a square dripstone over them. Between the head of the window and the dripstone is cut in good old English letters,

“*Orate pro animo Will. Thornton, abbas.*”

There was a Benedictine priory here. On the splay of the



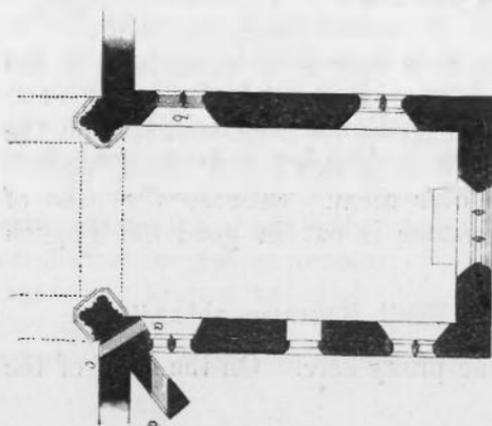
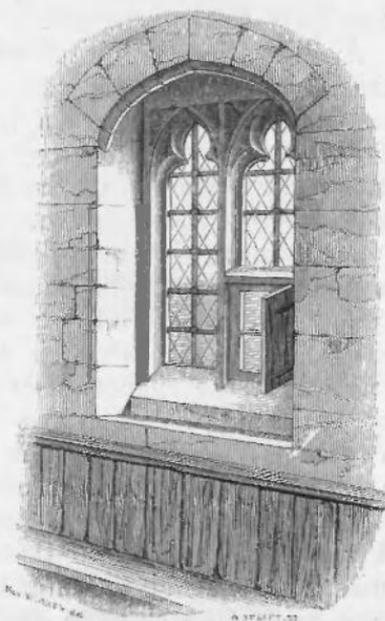
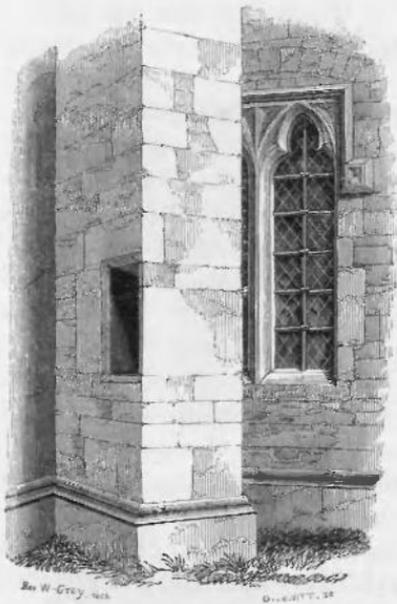
Blisworth, Northamptonshire.

semicircular arch of a doorway in the same church, and of the same date as this window, is another inscription,

“*Orate pro animo Rich^{di} Wetheral.*”

For this notice and a few others we are indebted to the manuscript notes of the late Mr. Rickman, now in the possession of the Oxford Architectural Society. We are also indebted to that Society for the use of the woodcuts of Bucknell, Elsfeld, and Garsington, which were engraved for their “*Guide to the Neighbourhood of Oxford.*”

The most remarkable specimen of these openings is that at Othery, near Bridgewater, Somersetshire. It is not a separate



- a. Low side window on the south side, its sill being 1 ft. 6 in. above the base moulding.
- b. Low side window on the north side, now stopped.
- c. Squint from south transept.
- d. Opening through the buttress.

window, but merely a square opening in the lower part of one light of a late two-light Perpendicular window, having the wooden shutter and the iron-work remaining. It is in the usual situation on the south side of the chancel (*a*); but the opening would be entirely concealed from almost every point of view by a buttress supporting the central tower, which projects immediately in front of it, and so close to it as to prevent any person from standing or kneeling on the outside of it, but a hole is cut through the buttress (*d*) in a direct line with this opening, either for the purpose of enabling some person to see out, or to make a light in the window visible to passers by. The distance from the outside of the buttress to the opening appears too great for the purpose of confession. From the jamb of this window is a squint into the south transept.

A very singular example occurs in Winchester College chapel, on the south side, near the screen; one of the lights of a three-light window is divided by a transom with an arched head under it; the hinges of the shutter remain: it is now blocked up by one of the buttresses of the tower, which was built about fifty years after the chapel, but as the foundations are known to have given way, this buttress is probably of later date. The low side opening is about ten feet from the ground, both inside and outside, which does not seem to agree with any one of the theories for its use.

The theories and conjectures that have been started to account for these openings are almost endless.

1. They were called lychscopes by the Cambridge Camden Society, on the assumption that they were for the purpose of watching the paschal light, a theory which the Society has since acknowledged to be untenable.

2. The theory which is at present most prevalent is that they were confessionals. This is said to be the oldest, and to be supported by tradition. It has lately received additional support from Mr. E. J. Carlos, who called attention, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October, 1846, to the following passage in a letter from Bedyll to Cromwell at the time of the suppression of monasteries: "We think it best that the place where these friars have been wont to hear outward confession of all comers at certain times of the year, be walled up, and that use to be foredone for ever." This passage applies only to the monks of a particular order; but Mr. Carlos ob-

serves, that "if an irregular practice of this kind existed in parochial churches, and there were places requiring to be walled up, it would be in the province of the ordinary to direct it to be done."

But the injunctions issued by the bishops and other ordinaries of that period are extant, well known, and have been closely scrutinised, and no such ordinance has been brought to light. Other objections to this theory have been noticed as they obviously occurred in describing particular examples. Those of Prior Crawden's chapel and "La Sainte Chapelle" are not easy to surmount.

3. For lepers to assist at mass; this conjecture is attributed to Dr. Rock, whose character and studies give great weight to his opinion, and entitle it to respect and consideration; but the facts that some are so close to the ground that it would be necessary for the lepers to lie down to see through them, that others would be some feet above their heads, and that very few command a view of the altar platform, seem decisive against this theory.

4. For excommunicated persons doing penance preparatory to their being re-admitted into the church. The same objections which apply to No. 3 apply to this also.

5. To place a light in, to scare away evil spirits from the churchyard. The situation of these windows is generally not convenient for such a purpose; and the existence of such a practice in this country requires confirmation, although we are aware that in France numerous examples are found of stone pillars in churchyards, with an opening for a lantern at the top, said to have been used for this purpose.

6. That they were offertory windows; this theory is supported by Mr. Paley, who adds, "It appears that they originated from an order of recluses, or *solitarii*, who had their oratories *contiguous to*, or adjoining churches, and who, not being allowed to communicate with any assembly of men, had these little windows constructed "ut per fenestram posunt ad missas per manus sacerdotum oblationes offerre." See Martene de Antiquis Ecclesiæ Ritibus, lib. i. cap. iv. art. vi. sect. 7^b.

^b Mr. Paley's reference to Martene is erroneous, which gave us some trouble in finding this passage. To save our readers a repetition of this trouble we here give it entire: it will be seen

that the words omitted by Mr. Paley give the passage a directly opposite meaning to that he attributes to it; the windows mentioned are those of the oratory, not of the church: the entire passage

The objections to this theory are, first, that the dwellings of the recluses were so *contiguous* to the churches, that the only access to them often was through the church, being sometimes in the room over the vestry, by the side of the chancel, in other cases in the tower, more frequently in the room over the porch, erroneously called the parvise, and the openings for their use from these rooms into the church frequently exist. Secondly, the inconvenient situation of the low side windows for such a purpose, as before stated in the objections to No. 3.

7. For the acolytes to pass the thurible through, for the purpose of having the charcoal blown up to a red heat in the open air before the incense was put on, thereby avoiding the unpleasant fumes which arise from charcoal when first lighted.

The objections to this theory are that there are no records or traditions of such a custom, or directions for it in the rubrics of the Missal, and the same observations which were applied to No. 3 apply in part to this also, though the situation of these openings is generally more convenient for such an object, than for most of the others which have been mentioned.

8. To enable a man or boy to look out for the approach of the priest, and ring the little bell to announce it to the people; the other windows being too high from the ground for that purpose; these openings being always so placed that the rope from the sanctus bell over the chancel arch, would naturally hang very near them, or could be easily made to do so, whether on the east or the west side of the screen. This is the only theory that has been mentioned which applies to those which are in the upper story.

The objections to it are the want of authority for the antiquity of the custom of ringing the little bell on the approach of the priest, though its very general use in all parts of the country seems to shew that it is not a modern practice; and the inconvenient situation of many of these windows for the purpose, being so close to the ground, and so placed as to command a very short distance only.

9. For the distribution of alms either in money or in bread: many of them are conveniently situated for this purpose, and

confirms the view taken in the text. "Hic prætermittere non debeo id quod præscribit Grimlaicus in Regula Solitariorum cap. 16. ut nimirum Recluso [oratorum ita sit domui ecclesiæ contiguum, qua-

tenus idem Solitarius per fenestram ejusdem oratorii possit ad missas per manus sacerdotum oblationes offerre."—Martene de Antiquis Ecclesiæ Ritibus, lib. i. cap. iv. art. vi. sect. 7.

a special benefaction might account for the opening of a special window at any period. The inscription over the window at Wetherall seems to support this theory; the windows by the side of chantry altars would also agree with it.

The objections to it are that many of the windows are not convenient for the purpose, and some it would be almost impossible to apply to such a use, as the one at Othery, and the two that are on the first floor.

10. To give light to the reader of the Lessons, all the other windows being filled with painted glass, which scarcely allows light enough for reading to pass through it. This theory has the support of M. Viollet-Leduc, the eminent architect of Paris, who is employed in the restoration of "La Sainte Chapelle," and who says that the low side window in that building was glazed with white glass, covered by an internal shutter which was closed when the window was not in use, in order not to interfere with the general effect of the "dim religious light" from the large painted windows.

The objection to this theory is the constant habit of using candles at all hours in the Roman Catholic Services.

11. For the purpose of ventilation only.

The objections to this theory are its evident improbability, and that there seems no reason for always choosing the particular situation occupied by these windows for such a purpose.

12. The symbolical theory, that it was intended to symbolize the wound in the side of our Saviour on the Cross, the church itself being considered as representing the body of Christ.

The objections to this theory, besides those which apply to this kind of symbolism in general, are the entire want of authority for it, and that it is not consistent with the general theory that the chancel represents the head, and the nave the body on the Cross, and the transepts the arms extended, or when there are no transepts the aisles the arms by the side. The cases in which there are two windows opposite to each other are also fatal to this theory.

We believe that many other theories have been started to account for these low side windows, but none occur to our memory at present.