

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



North Aisle, view looking East.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.

# The Archaeological Journal.

---

JUNE, 1868.

---

## HOWDEN CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

By the late REV. JOHN LOUIS PETIT, M.A., F.S.A.

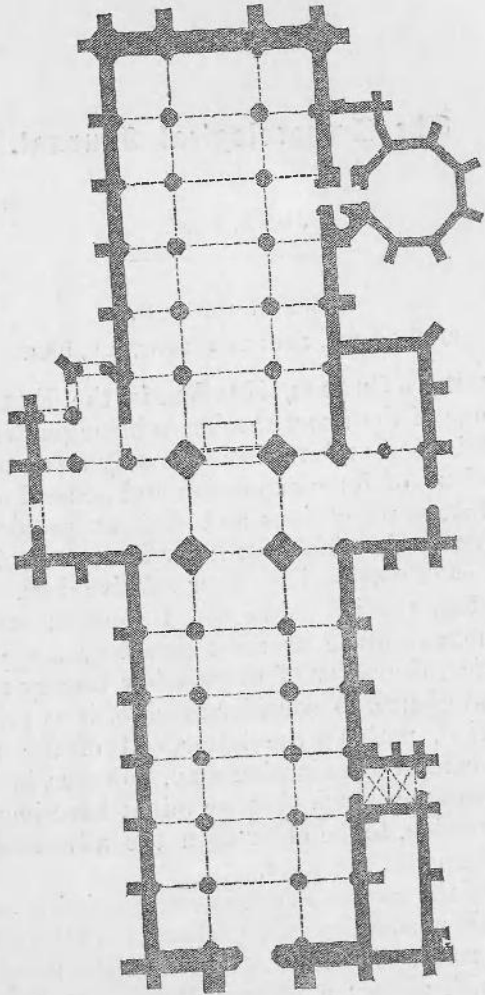
ST. CUTHBERT'S CHURCH, Howden, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, one of the finest specimens belonging to a district rich in ecclesiastical architecture, not only attracts attention by the grandeur of its composition and general outline, but offers, I think, some curious and difficult problems to the student desirous of making out its architectural history, and assigning to each portion its proper relative date.

The greatest portion is in the Decorated style (I use Rickman's nomenclature as most generally accepted), and the Geometrical character of the window tracery might lead us, at the first glance, to consider much of it as belonging to an early period, perhaps the latter end of the thirteenth century. A careful examination may, however, incline us to fix a later date upon much that we might have imagined, on our first impression, to be older than the advanced, or even the late specimens of the style.

The plan of the church is cruciform, consisting of a nave and aisles with a south porch, north and south transepts, a choir, now in ruins, of the same length as the nave, and like it provided with aisles; a lofty central tower chiefly of the Perpendicular style; a beautiful chapter house of the same style, but earlier in date, and a few chapels and chantries. The dimensions, according to measurements which I took somewhat roughly, are as follows:—

<sup>1</sup> Communicated to the Architectural Section at the Meeting of the Archaeological Institute, Kingston-upon-Hull, July, 1867.

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



Ground-plan.

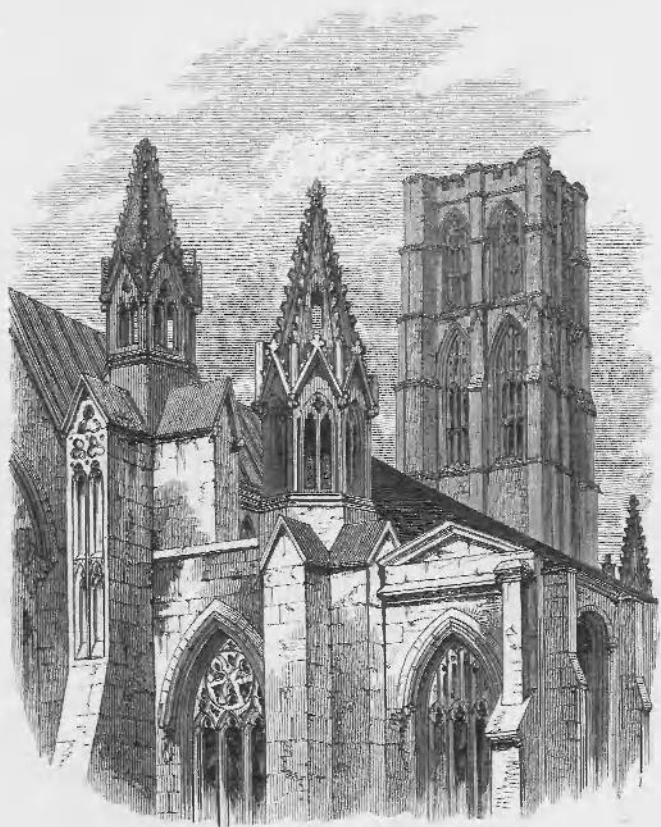
HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



West end.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



Pinnacles on the West front.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.

	feet.	in.
Length of nave internally from the west wall to the western piers of the central tower . . . . .	107	9
Width of the whole nave . . . . .	58	4
Width between opposite piers . . . . .	24	8
Width of inter-columniations . . . . .	15	1
Width of area of intersection including tower piers . . . . .	39	7
Width of tower arches . . . . .	15	5
Total length of transept internally from N. to S. . . . .	112	6
Length of choir internally . . . . .	109	5
Total width ditto . . . . .	58	10
Width between opposite piers . . . . .	24	7
Width between adjacent piers . . . . .	17	2
Chapter house, between opposite sides . . . . .	25	0
Diameter of nave piers . . . . .	3	1

That of the choir piers is rather less.

I did not measure the height of any part, but I hope that my sketches are sufficiently correct to give some idea of the general proportions.

The west end is an extremely beautiful composition ; I should say nearly unique. The central gable, the coping of which is crocketed and crowned with a cross, is flanked by two hexagonal turrets, two sides of which face to the west and east, and the angles formed by the oblique sides face to the north and south. The upper part of these turrets has in each face an open arch, subdivided by a mullion ; and they are finished with spires, the faces of which are pierced, and the angles delicately crocketed. These turrets rest upon broad and deep buttresses of which the upper stage is finished with a gable. The ends of the aisles are finished with a horizontal line instead of either a slope or a gable ; the effect of this arrangement is remarkably good. These are also flanked by fine hexagonal turrets and pinnacles, similar to the others both in design and dimensions, but having their sides facing to the north and south, and their angles to the east and west. This change of position from that of the central turrets gives a fine play of light and shade. The large central window is a Decorated one of a geometrical character with four lights, with different orders of tracery, the central mullion being thicker and deeper than the others. The head consists of a quadrangular figure with sides curving outwardly ; two of them coinciding with the arch of the soffit, and the other two forming an inverted arch beneath. In this figure is a large quatrefoil having a subor-

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



South Elevation.

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.

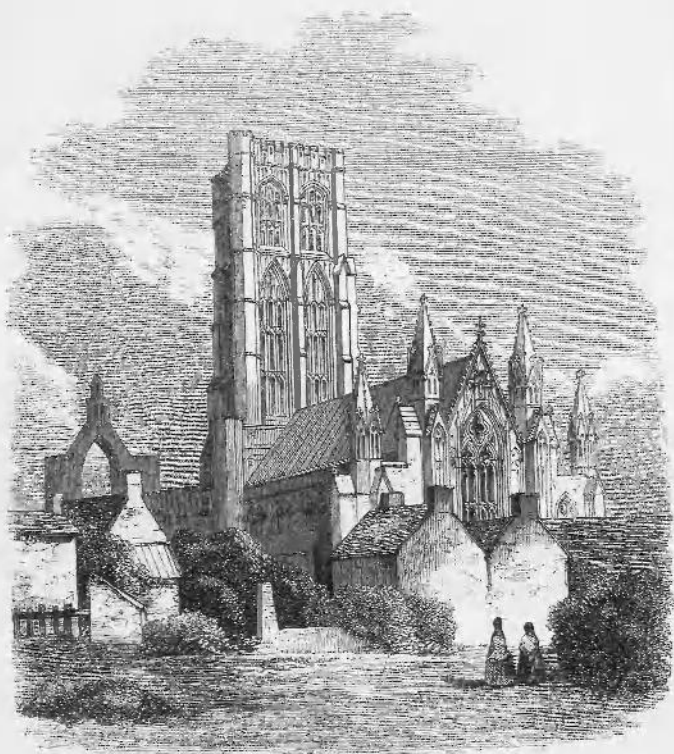


One of the Pinnacles on the South side of the Choir.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.



HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



View from the North-West.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.

dinate foliation. The pair of lights on each side of the central mullion is finished with two trefoils and a large quatrefoil above them, comprised within arches of the same order with the central mullion and the figure above. The window has a transom, which, from its want of harmony in scale with the design above, I think must have been a later insertion, probably introduced during some repair of the mullions. The spaces between this window and the buttresses have delicate panelling of a Geometrical character. Below is a door of several orders of mouldings. The lateness of character we shall have to consider presently, as well as some peculiarities in the west windows of the aisles, which are of three lights and have a circle in the head. The buttresses flanking the central compartment have good figures in niches. The spires of the turrets were probably all crowned with statues; one, a winged figure, still remains. It is remarkably light and elegant.

Attached to the south side is a very late Perpendicular building now used as a school, and I believe originally designed as one. Though this addition is no improvement, I should not say it much injures the general effect of the front. I most sincerely hope that this beautiful composition may not be restored, in the usual sense of the term. Some repair is doubtless necessary; but it should be no more than what is requisite to ensure safety, and prevent as much as possible the further decay of delicate work. I should much deprecate any attempt to replace what has already been effaced by the action of time.

The late Gothic school-house, which I have noticed, extends on the south side from the west end to the porch, which is now used as the vestry, but ought to be opened and restored to its original condition. This is a very perfect specimen of the Decorated style, and a head, supposed to be that of Edward II., over the door, suggests a date corresponding to some part of his reign, or early in the fourteenth century. The porch, which has a parvise or chamber over it, is beautifully vaulted, and externally enriched with plain and massive pinnacles. The aisle windows, between this porch and the transept, have a Geometrical character, as well as the clerestory, which consists of a pair of two-light windows in each bay. The transepts are the earliest parts of the church, showing decided Early English work; their front

windows are pure Geometrical ones of four lights, but with transoms, probably inserted. The other windows of the transepts have each two lights with a circle in the head. They are of very beautiful proportions, and would take place among the earliest specimens of bar tracery. The pier-arches and clerestory of the choir have wholly disappeared, the outer walls of the aisles and the east front alone remaining. The aisle windows, however, are in part preserved and are of a purely Decorated character, though not without traces of the Geometrical. The elevation of the east end is also perfect, with the exception of the window tracery. Mr. E. Sharpe, in his *Architectural Parallels*, has given the east window restored, apparently with great correctness. It had a large circle in the head, with radiating lights, and much flowing tracery. This front differs from the west front in having the hexagonal turrets which flank each of its compartments set one way, namely, with faces to the east and west, and angles to the north and south. The buttresses have niches of delicate work, from most of which the figures have disappeared; some of them having been removed to the rood screen. Some of the aisle buttresses still retain their extremely beautiful pinnacles. No doubt there were flying buttresses to support the roof of the central aisle. I do not suppose that the nave ever was vaulted.

The chapter-house is Perpendicular, so early as to have something of a Decorated character: in style it is not unlike Nantwich church in Cheshire. It is an octagon, with deep buttresses much enriched and terminating in pinnacles. The windows are of three lights, with somewhat intricate Perpendicular tracery, and ogee crocketed canopies. The interior is panelled with arches which are filled with quatrefoils. No part of the vaulted roof remains. It probably fell in 1750, as that is the date given for the fall of the spire which covered it. The vaulting of the choir is said to have fallen in 1696.

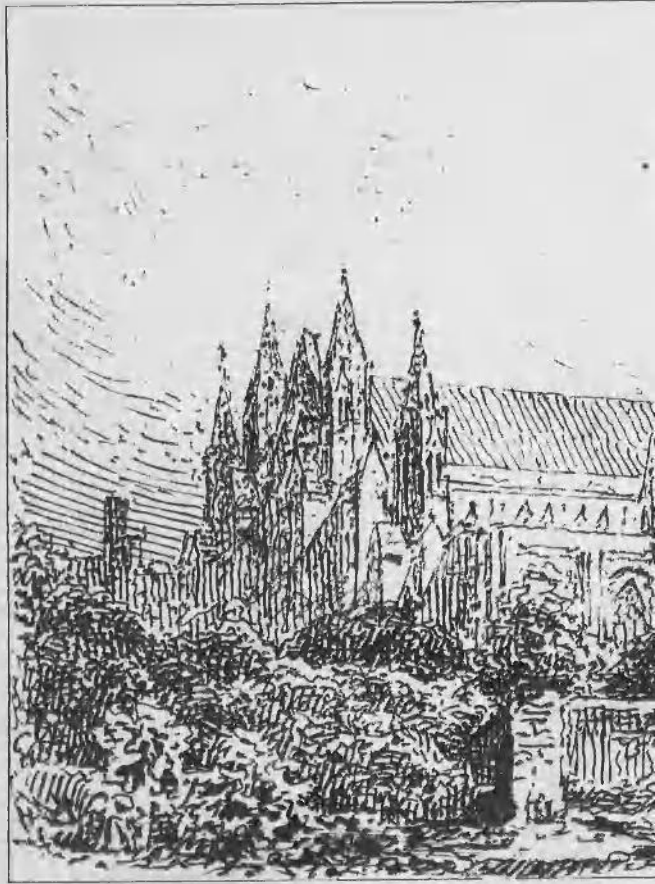
The tower, up to a string just below the ridge of the nave roof, and somewhat higher than that of the transept, is apparently of the same date with the piers and arches below, namely that which corresponds with the Decorated style. It presents no architectural features, except a small shaft at each angle externally. The interior is quite plain, and it probably never was intended to form an open lantern, which,

HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.

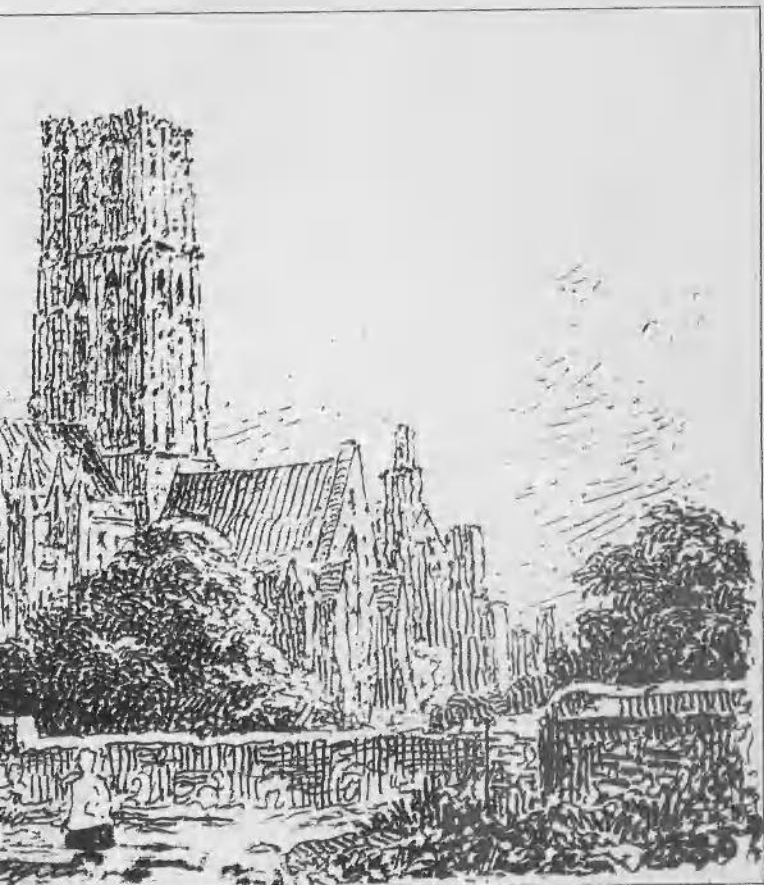


Entrance from the Choir to the Chapter-house.

From a drawing by Miss Petit.



HOWDEN.



GENERAL VIEW.

together with a great part of its superstructure it has lately been made to do, at much sacrifice of convenience, and with very inadequate results as regards beauty and effect. The next stage or compartment is a very fine specimen of Perpendicular ; fully developed in its character, but probably early. It is said to have been erected by Bishop Skirlaw, about 1390 A.D., in the place of one washed down by floods. This is not a very likely story ; but it may have been erected as a more conspicuous landmark, in consequence of the floods, which were occasionally of such extent as to render structures of this description necessary. Each face has two lofty windows of three lights, divided in height by two transoms, and having good Perpendicular tracery in the heads, which are comprised in somewhat acutely-pointed arches. There are buttresses, facing cardinally, both at the angles of the tower and between the windows ; and there is a stair-turret at the north-west angle. Above this stage is another of decidedly later character, belonging evidently to the very end of the style. Its windows correspond in width and position with those below, and like them are of three lights, but are divided in height by only one transom, and have very depressed arches. The parapet is embattled and has no pinnacles. Possibly none were ever intended ; certainly they would be no improvement. With regard to the general effect of this fine tower, I would remark, that though it has no architectural enrichment properly so called, that is, nothing beyond what is purely constructional, yet its appearance, even at a short distance, is rich and almost florid ; and again, that its outline is a perfectly unmistakable one, and therefore peculiarly adapted for a landmark. There is no tower in the district at all like it, and I think that few towers in England will be found that nearly resemble it in character. Though very lofty, it has an air of massiveness that is hardly attained by many towers of lower and wider proportions ; perhaps this may be attributed to the flatness of the summit ; be it as it may, this peculiarity can hardly fail to strike the spectator.

I am not acquainted with any records that would assist us much in determining the architectural history of the church. In Hutchinson's History of Durham we are told that in the time of Hugh de Derlyngton, elected prior of the convent of Durham in 1258, " a bull was obtained from the Pope for

the appropriation of Hoveden [Howden] church for an addition of 16 monks, but at a considerable expense he procured the appointment to be converted into prebends, apprehending they would prove as honourable and advantageous promotions, and as acceptable to the clergy whom he wished to serve, as if the original institutions were maintained."

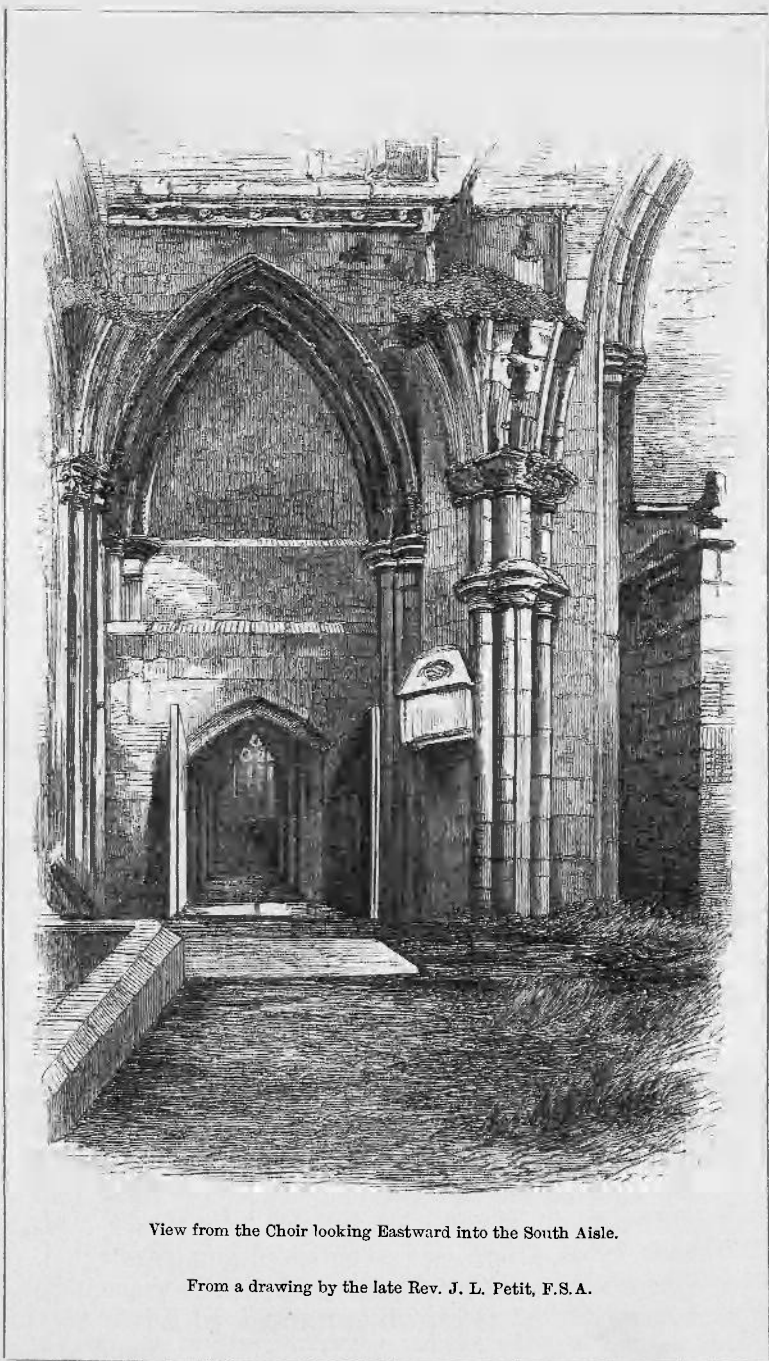
"The prior and convent of Durham had a large jurisdiction in Howden and Howdenshire, and over the church of Howden and other churches and chapels within that liberty."

"The church at first was a rectory parochial, of the patronage of the prior and convent of Durham, and in March, 11 Henry III., Walter, Archbishop of York, by the assent of Fulk Basset, parson of the church of Howden, and of the priory and convent of Durham, granted to Walter Kirkham, clerk, all the tithes of corn pertaining to the chapel of Estrington, by name of a single benefice, without cure of souls or episcopal burdens, rendering thence yearly to the parson of Hoveden and his successors (3 bezants) as a pension on Martinmas-day."

"6th March, 1267. Forasmuch as the parish church of Hoveden was very wide and large, and the profits and rents so much abounding as to be sufficient for the maintenance of many spiritual men, therefore Walter, Archbishop of York (at the instance and petition of his chapter of York), that there might be prebends ordained out of the revenues of the church, and by their concurrent authority and consent, and likewise of the submission of the prior and convent of Durham, to him, of whose patronage it was, made this ordination, viz., that there should be in this church of Hoveden, five prebends for ever, and each of them to maintain at his own proper costs a priest and clerk in holy orders to administer in the same, in a canonical habit, according to the custom of the church at York, and to observe the like way of singing as those of York church, (excepting in matins which they shall say in the morning for the parish,) and one of them who is most fit shall be rector of the quire and ordain things belonging to divine service, and each of them as an ebdomodary shall orderly keep his turn, and serve the cure of the parish by his respective priest in the portion assigned to him."



HOWDEN CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.



View from the Choir looking Eastward into the South Aisle.

From a drawing by the late Rev. J. L. Petit, F.S.A.

“The area or churchyard should be proportionably divided to the prebendaries for their habitations, and the value of the buildings then erected should be converted to the fabric of the quire.” Hist. Durham, vol. III. pp. 450, 451.

These extracts from Hutchinson's History of Durham show that the church was a large and important structure in the middle of the thirteenth century, and also point out changes in the ecclesiastical constitution very likely to lead to considerable alterations in the fabric itself. The supposition that these were made soon after the year 1267, when the church was made collegiate, is not contradicted by its architectural style and character. There do not appear to be any Norman remains of the church *in situ*; a few fragments are used in the masonry of some of the adjacent buildings, but I do not remember noticing any in the work of the church itself. The south transept door is clearly of the Early English style, and not of a very advanced stage, nor is the workmanship at all elaborate. The north door has less decidedly marked features, but is probably much of the same date. In the walls of both transepts is some rough masonry; this I conceive to have belonged to the church prior to its being made collegiate.

We have some indications of the form of the church previous to the erection of the magnificent choir now in ruins. The eastern face of the tower pier, as shown in the cut, exhibits, below the capital from which sprang the westernmost choir arch, another capital, lower than those of the arch opening from the transept into the choir aisle. Now there can be little doubt that this low capital belonged to an arch opening from a choir or chancel, which was itself without aisles, into an aisle or chapel attached to the eastern side of the transept, and covered with a roof sloping down from the wall of the same transept: an arrangement by no means uncommon, and which may have been adopted in a structure even earlier than the Early English parts of the edifice.

It is most likely that the original church had, or was intended to have, a central tower, but it may be questioned whether any part of the original piers remain *in situ*. The section of the present piers exhibits in places a certain flowing line, or curve with contrary flexure, which, though it

may be occasionally found in early work, is more characteristic of an advanced Decorated or curvilinear style. And the mouldings of the tower-arches are wholly different from all the other arch-mouldings in the church; consisting of simple concave chamfers, without the combination of torus and hollow which is elsewhere used with so much variety and profusion.

But perhaps the strongest evidence may be found in certain constructional accidents. The tower piers and arches are themselves perfectly firm, true, and solid, with no crack or indication of settlement, though they are made to bear a much greater weight than was originally intended, and though the bed in which the foundation is laid, if I am rightly informed, is by no means of a firm and solid character. But every one of the arches which abut against their piers has been forced from its proper shape, and has a decided break near the crown, evidently in consequence of weight or pressure from the piers and arches of the intersection. Whether they have suffered from the pressure of an earlier tower of the same date with themselves, or from the present structure before its completion and consolidation, it would not be easy to determine without further data, and I am not aware how such can be obtained. So far, the order of date appears to be, first, the transepts with their eastern arcades and western arches opening into the nave aisles; next, the arcades of the nave; next, the tower piers and arches, and the lower stage of the tower itself. I ought to have remarked that all the bases are Decorated; I do not recollect noticing an instance of the Early English water-moulding in any part of the interior, though at Hull it occurs in work of a much later character. Above the western arch of the tower is the mark of a weather-moulding, which corresponds with what would be the roof of a nave having no clerestory above the arcade; and the roof might have been continued over the aisles with the same slope, or at a small inclination. The walls of the aisles may have been in the same position as the present, but somewhat lower. We have thus arrived at the general plan and composition of a fine and large parish church, such as may have existed at the latter part of the thirteenth century, and it may have comprised some work subsequent to the endowment of the collegiate establishment, though prior to those portions of the building

which more decidedly mark its collegiate character. At this stage the church consists of a nave with aisles, but no clerestory, a low, plain, central tower, transepts with eastern aisles or chapels, and a chancel without aisles.

But after the church became collegiate, it was probably thought that an edifice of greater dignity and size would be more appropriate, and the first important step would naturally be the erection of a new and larger and more magnificent choir.

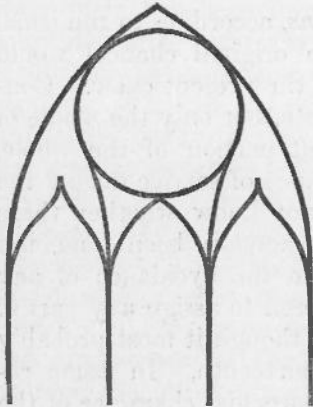
I would first notice that the design of this choir is such, that a very large portion of the fabric might be built and completed without touching or interfering with the services of the then existing chancel. Indeed, all that now remains of this fine structure, with the exception of the bases of piers and the like, might have been formed round the old chancel without touching its walls, as, according to the usual proportions of such buildings, the original chancel would hardly exceed in length one half of the present choir. Consequently it was possible to complete, not only the whole of the outer wall, but also a sufficient portion of the whole, near the east end, for the continuance of service during the demolition of the chancel. I do not know whether there are any indications of this having actually been done, but it clearly might have been done, to the avoidance of any interruption. I should not be disposed to assign any part of the choir to the thirteenth century, though it most probably belongs to the beginning of the fourteenth. In some respects it has quite as much of the parochial character of the nave, namely, in the slightness of the piers and the width of the arches.

The magnificence of the new choir when complete would suggest certain additions to the nave, which might contribute to the unity and harmony of the whole structure. The principal of these is a new clerestory, by which the roof of the nave is made to correspond in height with that of the choir. The design of this is remarkably elegant. Although it must of necessity be late in the style, that is, if it was built after the choir, it still preserves so much of the Geometrical character as to keep it in perfect harmony with the oldest part of the church. In construction it is very light, being never intended or calculated to bear a vault. As the beautiful west front, which has already been described as to

its general features, is adapted to a nave with a clerestory, it necessarily bears a corresponding date, and is therefore, if our suppositions have hitherto been correct, later than the east front, though a hasty glance might induce us to think otherwise. But the jambs of the western door, in their shafts, bases, and mouldings in general, bear decided indications of a very advanced style, having, in fact, more in common with Perpendicular than Early English work.

We have noticed the south porch as having been assigned to Edward II.'s reign. Its pinnacles bear much resemblance to some at Selby of the Decorated period.

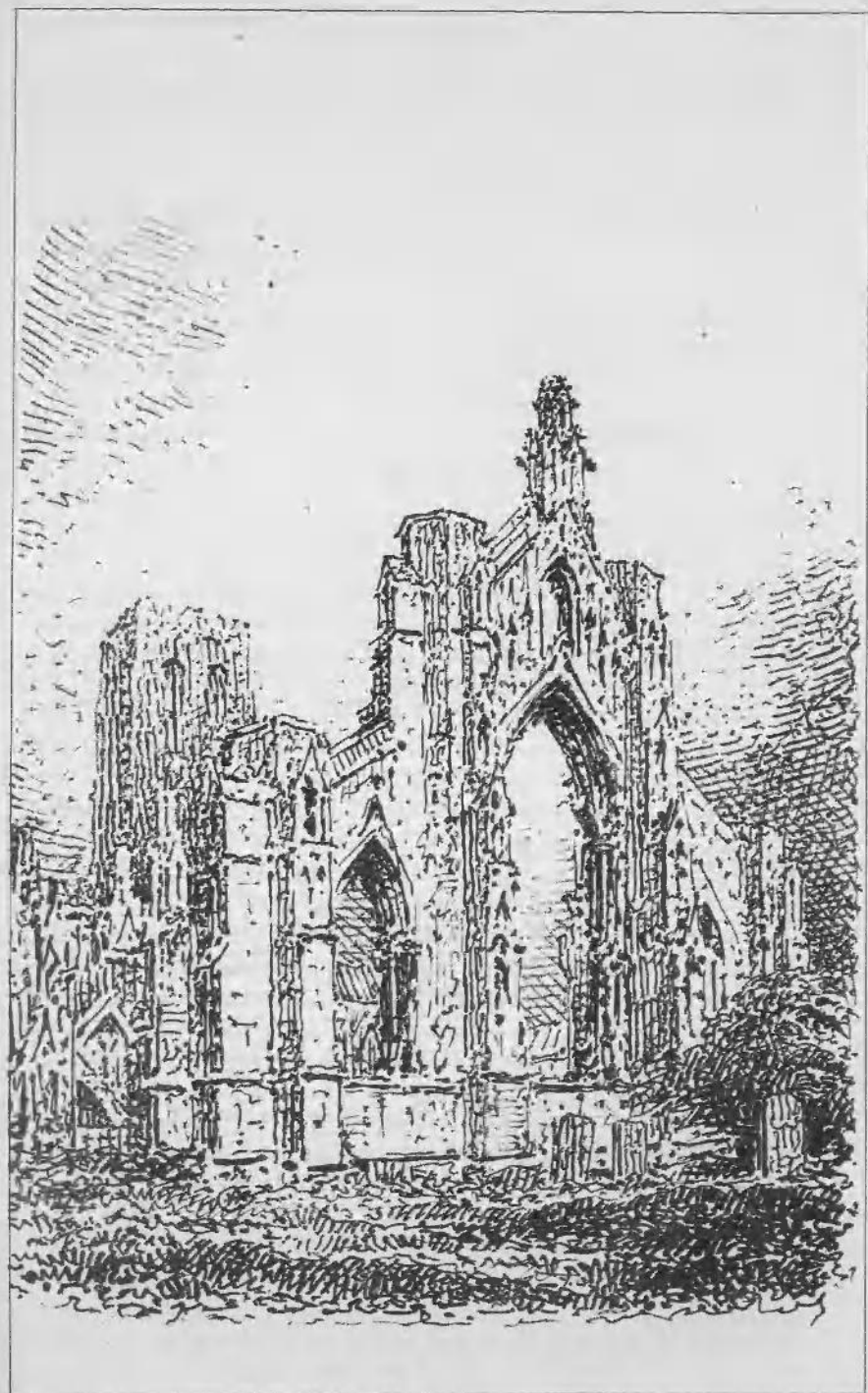
If the nave aisles have been increased in height, the windows must be of the date of the later work of which we have spoken, but they still preserve the same geometrical character which pervades the whole fabric. We must not omit to notice the west windows of the aisles, which though they exhibit the circle in the head, have in connection with it a flowing line, which is quite inconsistent with the purity of geometrical tracery, and is no improvement to the composition. It is, however, a feature of too small importance to catch the eye, and consequently cannot be said to detract from the beauty of the front. This window is copied in the modern east win-



Tracery of the West windows of the aisles.

dow inserted in the blocked up arch of the tower.

Bishop Skirlaw's works at Howden are mentioned in Hutchinson's History of Durham. He was translated to that see, April 3, 1388, having been successively Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, and Bishop of Bath and Wells. "He made," it is said, "a strong tower to the church of Howden for the safety of the inhabitants on any inundation, and expended great sums of money in the repairs of that church, whereto he added the chapter-house, which is spoken of at the time as a beautiful edifice; he erected the hall of the manor-house of Hoveden, and was at much cost in other edifices there. He was at the expense of building



HOWDEN, EAST END,  
PLATE 2.

a great part of the tower of York Minster, vulgarly called the lanthorn, where his arms are now to be seen." "He departed this life on the 24th of March, 1405; and was interred in a magnificent tomb, opposite to that of Bishop Hatfield, before the altar of St. Blase, which afterwards obtained the name of Skirlaw's Altar."

The style of the beautiful chapter-house quite corresponds with the period of the early part of Bishop Skirlaw's episcopate, that is, about 1390; while the greatest part of the tower might be well assigned to the beginning of the following century, near the time of the Bishop's death, who probably did not live to witness the completion of that stage. The upper stage, as we have remarked, is altogether of a different date.

The figures removed from the east end to the rood screen, now the reredos, are fine and well executed. There is also a good monumental effigy in a chapel annexed to the south transept; in the same transept is a kind of pedestal or stand which may have supported a figure, or it may have been a table on which offerings were placed. The rood screen has a compartment roofed with a depressed barrel vault of stone, evidently of a late date.

I must again express my earnest wish that this beautiful church be not made to undergo the process of so-called restoration. Perhaps a careful survey might be expedient; and here and there it might be found necessary to replace a stone or two; but any substitution of new work, however well executed, for the old, would go far towards destroying all the value and interest of one of the finest illustrations of the most beautiful phase of mediæval architecture which exists in England.

I have to offer my thanks to the Rev. William Hutchinson, Vicar of Howden, for the assistance and facilities he has given me in the examination of the church; to Mr. William Small, bookseller, who has directed my attention to several interesting details, and of whose dates, apparently given with correctness, I have availed myself; and to Thomas Clarke, Esq., from whose notice of the church I have also derived assistance.

---

The illustrations of the foregoing memoir, prepared from the beautiful drawings by the lamented author, have been presented, in accordance with his most liberal intentions, by the kindness of his Sisters and Executors.