

SOME LOW SIDE WINDOWS IN IRISH CHURCHES.¹

By PHILIP MAINWARING JOHNSTON, F.R.I.B.A.

In connection with a recent visit to Ireland, the fact has come under my notice that several examples of that sphinx of ecclesiology, the low side window, are to be found in the churches of that country; and, inasmuch as these examples were quite casually noted, it is highly probable that many others might be recorded if a systematic search were made.

GLENDALOUGH, COUNTY WICKLOW.²

The first of these to be observed is in some respects the most remarkable. It occurs in St. Saviour's priory church, one of the "Seven Churches" of Glendalough, the least known, and in point of beauty the best worth visiting in that interesting group. The church is a highly ornate instance of the later Irish Romanesque, dating from about 1160, and its exotic character, in spite of many touches in the carving that proclaim the native workman, is plainly manifest. It consists of a long nave and a short chancel, not much more than a square on plan, and originally barrel-vaulted, with a large *annexe* and a chapel on the north of the nave. Specially noteworthy are the fine wide chancel arch, with richly ornamented orders, carved capitals and bases, the east window, the curious niches in the chancel and the windows of the nave.

The low side window—never was that clumsy term more ill-suited to describe the opening—is in the usual place, the western end of the south wall of the chancel. At first sight it is manifestly a later insertion, no doubt of the thirteenth century, and its resemblance to one of the types of this class of opening, described

¹ Read before the Institute, December 4th, 1907.

² When this church of St. Saviour was visited by the members of the Institute at the meeting in Ireland in 1900, the low side window was pointed

out by the late Mr. Micklethwaite. In the Report of the Proceedings, *Archaeological Journal*, *vlii*, 342, it is wrongly described as "in the north wall," instead of in the south.

and illustrated by my friend, Mr. Ambrose P. Boyson, is very marked,¹ as in a lesser degree is its likeness to some English examples. The external opening (Plate I, No. 1) is of plain rectangular shape, measuring $9\frac{1}{2}$ by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, roughly formed in undressed stones, its sill rather over 2 feet from the ground; recessed within this is a circular aperture set back about a foot from the outer face of the wall. This rude hole, which is quite

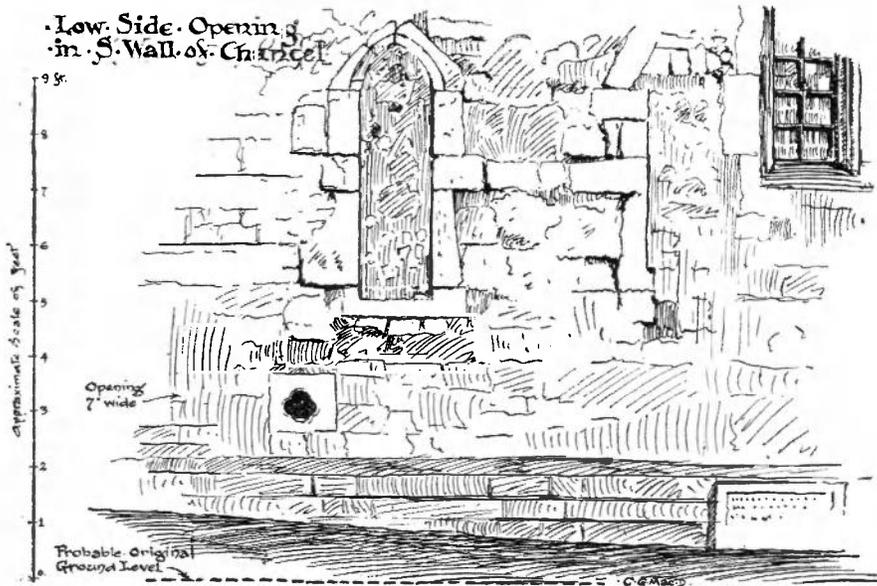


FIG. 1.—LOW SIDE OPENING. BLETCHINGLEY CHURCH.

without moulding or ornament, appears on the inside (Plate I, No. 2), where its diameter varies from $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches in width to $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height, and it is here seen to be pierced through a heavy slab, set on end in the middle of the thickness of the wall, which is 4 feet thick. The slab itself, which would seem to have once done duty as a mill-stone, is framed within a rectangular recess, 2 feet 4 inches wide and 3 feet 6 inches high, its sill being 2 feet 3 inches from the

¹ As, for instance, in the examples illustrated opposite pages 12, 14, and 19 in Mr. Boyson's paper, "On Low Set

Openings in Danish and other Scandinavian Churches," *Archaeological Journal*, lxi. 5-24.



ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH, GLENDALOUGH. LOW SIDE WINDOW.
NO. 1. — EXTERIOR.



NO. 2. — INTERIOR.

floor, and the total height of the wall to the springing of the vault being about 7 feet. The sill of the recess has evidently been intended for a seat; it is formed of a thin slab of stone with a slightly projecting edge. In Plate II, a man is seen seated within the recess. Plate I, No. 2, shows the circular rim of part of the mill-stone.

Perhaps the closest analogies to this remarkable example that we have in England are to be found in the lately-discovered opening at Bletchingley church, Surrey (Fig. 1), the low side window at Tatsfield, in the same county, and that at Coombes church, Sussex. The two former are of quatrefoil shape. The Bletchingley opening is about 7 inches in diameter and is set at a height of between 2 and 3 feet from the ground. It occurs a little to the west of two small thirteenth-century rebated lancets in the south wall of the chapel, which lies south of the chancel, the sills of the windows themselves being only about 2 feet higher in the wall. In its size and position relatively to the ground, and the floor inside, this peculiar opening agrees very noticeably with that at Glendalough. The Tatsfield example¹ is much larger and set higher in the wall, being 1 foot 7 inches in diameter, and over 3 feet from the chancel floor. That at Coombes is of plain circular shape, set immediately beneath a large two-light window of late fourteenth-century date, so that internally it appears within a niche or recess cut through the sill of the window to the tracery plane, thus uniting the two features in one composition. This opening, which is still blocked, is probably at its narrowest aperture about 1 foot in diameter, and its sill is about 3 feet from floor and ground.² It is noteworthy, that in the same wall of this small aisleless church, but separated internally from the foregoing by the chancel arch, is another low side window, a

¹ Illustrated by the writer in *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, xiv, 106; also in the Rev. H. Bedford Pim's paper, *Archaeological Journal*, lxii, 23. Mr. T. M. Grose-Lloyd informs me that there are quatrefoil openings of this class at Essendine, Rutland, and Stanningfield, Northants.

² Fully illustrated in papers on low side windows by the writer, in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xlii, 120-124, and in *The Transactions of the St. Paul's Ecclesiological Society*, iv, iv.

square-headed oblong opening, set even nearer to the ground. This appears to be earlier in date, probably early thirteenth century, and it is worked in Caen stone, the fourteenth century windows being in a local green sandstone.¹

There is one other English example that has come under my notice having a strong resemblance to the low side opening at Glendalough, and this has already been illustrated in the *Journal*.² This is in Sheldon church, Warwickshire, and was selected by Mr. Boyson as the nearest he could find in general character to the foreign examples he was describing. It will be seen by referring to the plate there given that this likeness is even greater to the opening at Glendalough. Instead, however, of a circular hole within a square one, both outer and inner apertures are of rectangular outline.

ARDFERT CATHEDRAL, COUNTY KERRY.

This very beautiful and interesting, though ruined, building consists of a long and narrow nave and a choir, without structural division, of the same width (the total dimensions are 137 feet 2 inches by 25 feet 1 inch), a short aisle, 10 feet wide to the south of the nave, and eastward of this a long transeptal building, 62 feet long and 23 feet wide, with a central projecting rectangular chapel. There are traces of a range of buildings abutting on the north side of the nave and choir, including what may have been a chapel, projecting beyond the eastern extremity of the latter. In style and date the church ranges between the Hiberno-Romanesque of its western front (*circa* 1160) to the graceful Early Pointed work of its lofty choir, with its magnificent range of nine tall trefoil-arched lancets on the south, and a triplet of enormous lancets in the east wall, occupying almost the entire height of the gable.³ The walls still retain their characteristic battlements of the stepped type so fre-

¹ There is a circular unglazed opening in the west wall of the south porch of Broadwater church, in the neighbourhood of Coombes, which in date and appearance is very close to it.

² In Mr. Boyson's paper, "On Low Set Openings in Danish and other

Scandinavian Churches," *Archaeological Journal*, lxi, 20.

³ Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors are often charged with a sort of megalomania in regard to the heights of their church walls and the long drawn-out archways and doors, together with the



ST. SAVIOUR'S PRIORY CHURCH, GLENDALOUGH. INTERIOR, LOOKING EAST.

Photo by Lawrence and Co., Dublin.

quently found in Ireland. The transeptal chapels (or chapter-house) and the northern buildings above referred to, appear to date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The low side window is at the extreme west of the south side of the choir, and from its absolutely plain character it is difficult to fix a date. There is no reason against its being co-eval with the elaborate work in the choir, and, if so, it may date from about 1230. The actual opening is a square-headed rebated loop, 3 feet 11 inches by 8 inches in the clear, its sill being 2 feet 6 inches from the floor, set within a splayed internal opening 3 feet 2 inches wide. It is not, however, in the centre of this, but the splay is much wider on the western side. The sill of the internal opening is flat, and only 2 feet 3 inches above the floor. As in the Glendalough example, this has evidently served as a seat, and for this purpose it is finished with a stone slab having a projecting hollowed edge. The inequality in the splay suggests that someone used to sit within, facing east. In general form and character this opening agrees with many examples of a common type found in England.¹ On either side of the internal head of this window are two corbels at a height of about 8 feet 3 inches above the floor, corresponding to two others in the north wall, and these evidently carried beams on which was laid the floor of a rood-loft. The latter would therefore stand immediately over the low side window. The extreme plainness of this example is noteworthy, especially contrasted with the elaborate range of windows hard by.

ST. DOULAGH'S CHURCH, COUNTY DUBLIN.²

Through the kindness of my assistant, Mr. C. G. MacDowell, who specially visited the building when

exaggerated size of the quoin and other stones they employed; but this craze for bigness is very noticeable also in many of these late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century Irish churches. The high east triplets in the cathedrals of Killaloe and Kilkenny, and the churches of Kilfenora, Cashel, Nenagh and Ennis, are other instances. The central lancet of the triplet at Ardferit is no less than 27 feet high and 3 feet wide. It is

interesting, by way of comparison, to note that the central lancet of a group of five in the east wall of the Grey Friars' Church, Chichester, is 26 feet high and 4 feet wide.

¹ Cf. the low side window at Rustington, Sussex, illustrated in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xii. 172.

² The spelling of the saint's name is very varied. Lord Lindsay gives no less than 88 different spellings from ancient

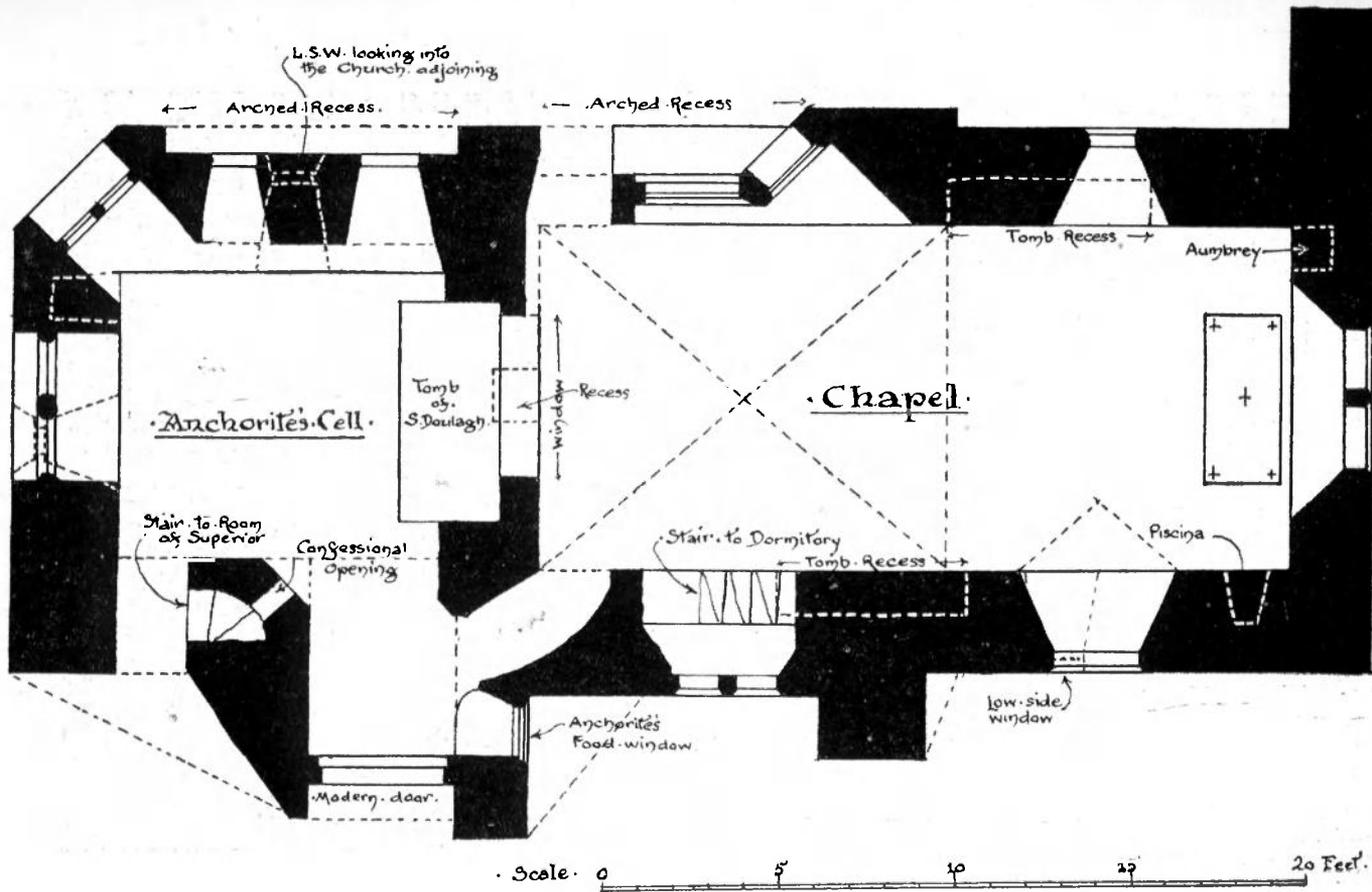


FIG. 2.—PLAN OF ST. DOULAGH'S CHURCH, CO. DUBLIN.

C. G. MacDOWELL, mens. et del.

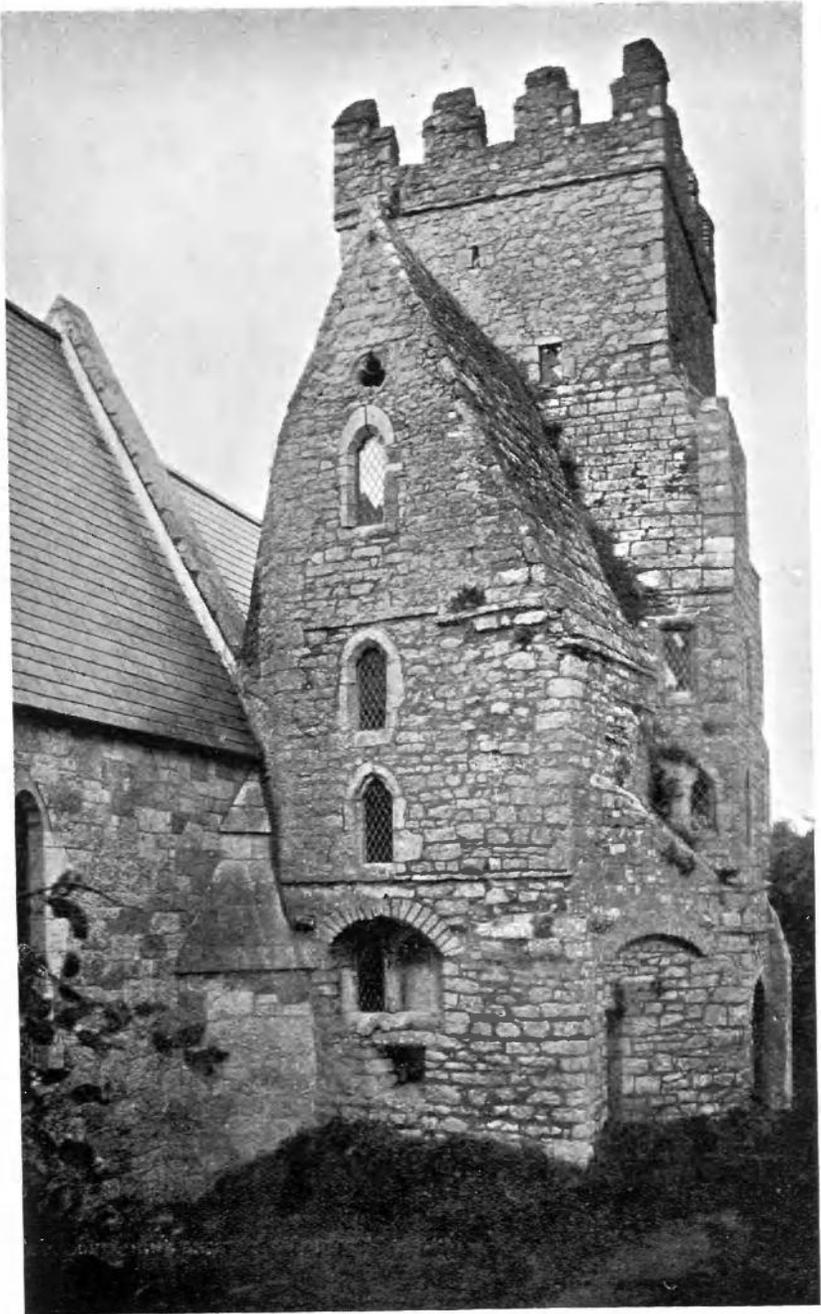


Photo by Lawrence and Co., Dublin.

ST. DOULAGH'S CHURCH FROM THE WEST, SHOWING ANCHORITE'S CELL AND CHAMBERS ABOVE.

recently in Ireland, I have been able to obtain fairly complete particulars of this remarkable church, which, considering its exceptionally curious features and its proximity to Dublin (it is within six miles), is far less known than it deserves to be. Its combination of sacred well, baptistery, monastic establishment, ankerhold, and church, the three last grouped into one building, is certainly without parallel, even in Ireland, that country of surprises. I do not propose to describe the two former features, although they merit the most careful investigation at the hands of archaeologists. The church and group of conventual buildings are evidently a growth, the main part dating from about A.D. 1200; but there may be the nucleus of an earlier building in the anchorite's cell at the west end, and there have certainly been many later alterations and insertions of windows and other features. (See Plan, Fig. 2.) St. Doulagh, the founder, was a noted anchorite, who flourished in the seventh century A.D., and there is practical certainty that his cell occupied part of the site of the present buildings, and if, as is not unlikely, it was of stone, the actual materials may have been re-used when the rebuilding took place.¹

documents, such as Dulech, Diulech, Diuligh, Diuleach and Dulagh. St. Dolachy appears in a document of the close of the fifteenth century, and in 1615, in the Regal Visitation, we have it as St. Dowlock's. Doulough is, perhaps, the generally received variety, but Doulagh has equal authority.

¹ Dr. Stokes, in his *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, writes: "St. Doulough's church . . . was not always a parish church as it is now. It was originally the cell of a recluse or anchorite like St. Simeon Stylites. Anchorites of this kind were imported from Syria to Gaul, and from Gaul to Ireland, where this institution flourished in greatest vigour. St. Doulough's church . . . comprises seven apartments and three stone staircases. The most curious portion is a small cell or chamber at the west end, where the original anchorites lived and in which they were buried. It was the rule, in fact, for the anchorite to be buried in his cell. One of the most celebrated Irish scholars and writers of the Middle Ages was Marianus Scotus

of Maintz. He was an enclosed anchorite, and tells us himself that he daily said mass standing on the grave of his predecessor, and with his own open grave beside him." Dr. Stokes quotes from the rule for anchorites: "An anchorite's cell should be built of stone, twelve feet long and twelve broad. It should have three windows, one facing the choir through which he may receive the Body of Christ, another on the opposite side through which he may receive his food, and a third for light. The window for food should be secured by a bolt, and have a glazed lattice, to be opened and shut, because no one should be able to look in, except as far as glass will allow, nor should the anchorite have a view out. He should be provided with three articles, a jar, a towel, and a cup. After tierce he is to lay the jar and cup outside the window and then close it. About noon he is to come over and see if his dinner be there. If it be, he is to sit at the window and eat and drink. When he has done, whatever remains is to be left outside for anyone

S. Doulagh's Ch.
View from S. E. Co. Dublin.



FIG. 3.

St. Doulagh was the first of a long succession of anchorites who occupied this cell, and from a very early date his sanctity attracted to the spot a small community of monks, for whose better accommodation the oratory or church was built and the cell itself probably rebuilt, upper chambers being constructed over it and in the tower that forms the central mass of this strange group. Perhaps there were detached cells or bothies (huts of timber or wattles), after the Irish manner, for the accommodation of the monks: but the abbot of the small community seems to have occupied one of the chambers over the cell, the anchorite being immured in the cell itself, which served him for both living room and sleeping apartment. It has been suggested that the small aperture from the stair that led up to the abbot's chamber was used by him in making confession to the anchorite, and the supposition is highly probable.¹ This opening is shown in figs. 5 and 6, in the latter of which the tomb of St. Doulagh, used as an altar, appears.

Besides these openings, two others of the low side window type occur in the cell and one in the chancel of the little chapel: all are rebated for shutters.

The window in the west wall of the cell may, I take it, be certainly classed as a confessional opening, for the reason that we know the anchorites to have been in priest's orders in many cases, and that they were much resorted to by the laity, as well as the religious, for making confessions.² The window

else who may choose to remove it, and he is to take no thought for the morrow. But if it should happen that he has nothing for his dinner, he is not to omit his accustomed thanks to God, though he is to remain without food till the following day. His garments are to be a gown and cap, which he is to wear waking and sleeping. In winter he may, if the weather be severe, wear a woolly cloak, because he is not allowed to have any fire, save what his candle produces."

¹ Anchorites were a good deal used by monastic communities as their confessors, both in England and Ireland. Richard Rolle, the celebrated recluse, was confessor to the nuns of Polesworth, Warwick; and there was a noted

anker at the abbey of Westminster. Several of the Irish cathedrals (perhaps the majority originally) had anchorite's cells attached to them. Cashel and the cathedral of St. Canice, Kilkenny, are instances. The well-known bee-hive cells on the islands off the west coast, and here and there on the mainland, were inhabited by these *includi*, under a specially rigorous rule, the cells being of such cramped dimensions that they could neither stand nor lie in comfort.

² In writing elsewhere upon this subject (*Surrey Archaeological Collections*, xiv, 132, and *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xlii, 178), I have quoted two historical examples; that of Richard II., who, according to Stow,



FIG. 4.—ST. DOULAGH'S CHURCH, CO. DUBLIN. INTERIOR, LOOKING EAST.

in the north wall of the cell pierces the back of an arched recess in the outer face, which recess would itself be within the chancel of the parish church, which from a very early date was built up against the north side of the cell and chapel. Through this opening the recluse was no doubt communicated with the sacred elements. This was one of the rules laid down for anchorites and anchoresses, as we have it in the *Bavaria Sancta* of Rader.¹ It was also, as my friend Mr. Boyson has demonstrated, not by quotation alone, but by photographs of the actual windows remaining in the Bridgetine Church at Vadstena, Sweden,² the method prescribed both for the shriving and communicating of the nuns of St. Bridget's foundation. The same rule and method obtained in their English house of Sion, Middlesex, to which the oft-quoted passage in Bedyll's letter to Cromwell, at the time of the suppression, refers.

The third of these peculiar openings, as will be seen in the plan, and from the view of the interior shown in Fig. 4, is in the south wall of the tiny chancel of the chapel, beneath a large window, and, therefore, quite low down in the wall.³ It seems, like the other openings before described, to have been, not glazed, but rebated for a shutter. While the others are exceptional in character, this is normal, in that it corresponds in situation, and we may assume in use, or uses, to the typical low side window in churches.

before going to meet Wat Tyler confessed himself to an anchorite; and the case of Henry V., who, after the death of his father, says Thomas of Elmham, went by night "to the Recluse of Westminster, a man of perfect life, and unfolding to him the secret of his whole life, being washed in the bath of true penitence, received against the poison of his sins the antidote of absolution." The cell of this famous anker was built adjoining the north side of St. Margaret's, Westminster, facing the abbey church. Such confessions as these, made to a man immured in a stone cell, could only have been made by means of one of these shuttered and grated openings, through which, as recorded in the case

of St. Wulfric at Haselbury Plucknet, Somersetshire, the anchorite spoke with his fellow men.

¹ This enjoins that the cell shall be constructed of stone, twelve feet square, with three windows, one towards the choir, through which the host may be received, another opposite to it in the external wall, for the admission of food, etc., and a third, high up, closed with glass or horn, for the purpose of giving light.

² *Archaeological Journal*, lxiii, 18.

³ The whole chapel only measures 21 feet 3 inches by 9 feet 10 inches. The square on which the cell is planned is only 9 feet 3 inches by 8 feet 3 inches.

S^r. Doulagh's Ch^h.
Co. Dublin.
S. E. Corner of Anchorites' Cell.

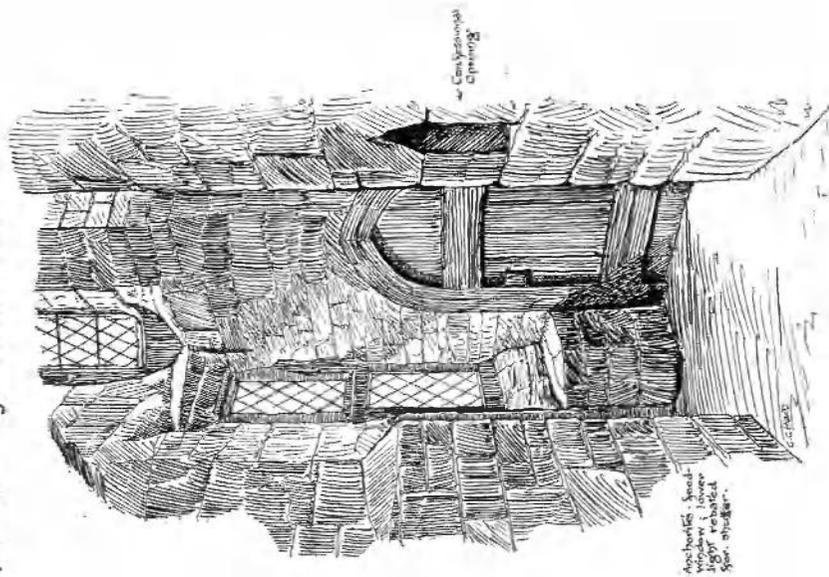


FIG. 5.

S^r. Doulagh's Ch^h.
Co. Dublin.
N. W. Corner of Anchorites' Cell.

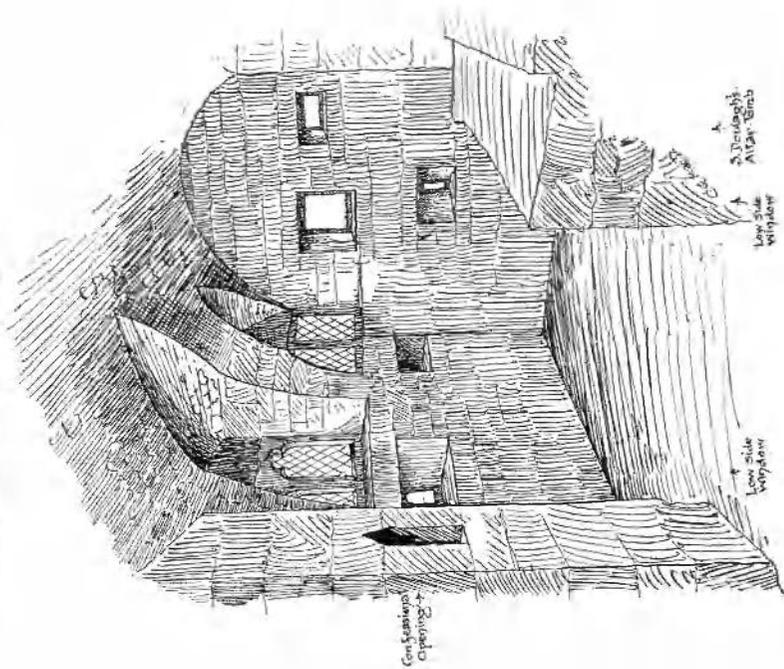


FIG. 6.

I have always argued, and I think that the evidence from St. Doulagh's and the other Irish examples strengthens the plea, that in endeavouring to ascertain the purpose or purposes served by low side windows, regard should be had to the evidence furnished by uses in conventual churches and in anchorites' cells. But while I maintain that any fair weighing of the evidence from all sources *must* admit the confessional use, as at least one of those to which these openings were put, I have expressly guarded myself against the statement, ridiculous upon the face of it, that *every* low side window was made and used for the purpose of auricular confession.

The object of this short paper will have been attained if I have shown that low side windows are to be found in Ireland, and also if the directing attention to these few instances should lead to the discovery of other examples in that country.¹

NOTE.

At the meeting of the Institute at which the preceding paper was read, a number of lantern illustrations of English low side windows were given, selected either as being typical or as possessing exceptional features.

It seems on the whole undesirable to include a full description of these within the limits of the present paper, but the interest aroused among ecclesiologists by this puzzling feature of ancient churches causes me to think that a list of the examples exhibited on this occasion will be of service in directing to them the attention of those interested in the subject.

¹ I should be deeply grateful for any information, sent through our Hon. Secretary, in regard to any other such examples. Research, examination and comparison, together with the light that

may be furnished by ancient documents such as building accounts, will surely some day give us the authoritative information for which archaeologists have so long been seeking.

SELECTED LIST OF LOW SIDE WINDOWS IN ENGLAND.

BERKS. LYDFORD.

NORTH HINKSEY.

BUCKS. ASTON CLINTON.

South side of chancel : a sub-transom opening of one light beneath a two-light window, date *c.* 1300.

WINGRAVE.

North wall of chancel : early fourteenth-century trefoiled lancet.

DRAYTON BEAUCHAMP.

North wall of chancel : a late fifteenth-century trefoil-headed opening.

BUCKLAND.

South wall of chancel : a thirteenth-century lancet.

SOULBURY.

Both sides of chancel : a two-light window, date *c.* 1400.

DORSET. STINSFORD.

Small lancet slit in a squint-passage between nave and chancel on south side.

SHEDLAND.

South side : square opening.

TARRANT RUSHTON.

South side of chancel : early fourteenth-century trefoiled lancet. West wall of north transept early thirteenth-century lancet.

HANTS. HEADBOURNE WORTHY.

South side of chancel : a two-light plate-tracery window with sub-transom openings, date *c.* 1280.

BURITON.

South side : a two-light window with rebated opening beneath the western light, date *c.* 1260.

BREAMORE.

South side of chancel : a two-light fifteenth-century window.

HUNTS. STOW LONGA.

South side of chancel : a rich early fifteenth-century two-light transomed opening.

KENT. HARTLEY.

South side of chancel: trefoil-headed with sub-transom opening, date c. 1260; valuable as retaining its original shutter and grille.

There are two other opening of this class in the church.

NORTHANTS. BYFIELD.

A fifteenth-century two-light opening squeezed in between a large early fourteenth-century window and the east wall of the nave.

MILTON.

WALGRAVE.

MORETON PINKNEY.

Two square-headed thirteenth-century openings, north and south.

SUDBOROUGH.

FAWSLEY.

A late fifteenth-century square-headed window with sub-transom opening.

GRAFTON UNDERWOOD.

A very small two-light opening, date c. 1340, by the side of a large window.

SUFFOLK. HEPWORTH.

South side of chancel: square-headed traceried opening, discovered in 1901.

YORKS. CALVERLEY.

South side of chancel: a two-light window with sub-transom openings, date c. 1340.

TANFIELD.

A square-headed double opening in a buttress projection, south side of nave.

I have not included the Surrey and Sussex examples in this list, as I have dealt with them at some length in the *Collections* of the archaeological societies of these counties. Essex is also omitted as it requires fuller treatment than can here be given. There are between twenty and thirty low side windows in Surrey and nearly one hundred in Sussex.