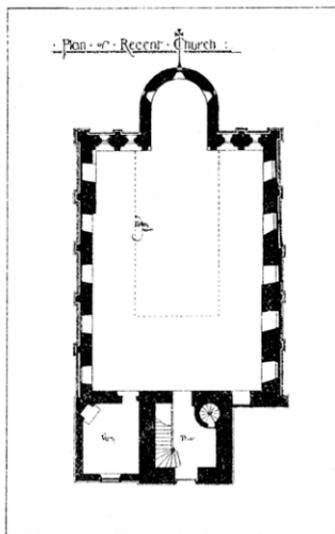


1.



View of Modern Church from SW
showing Norman Chancel - West of N

2.



3.



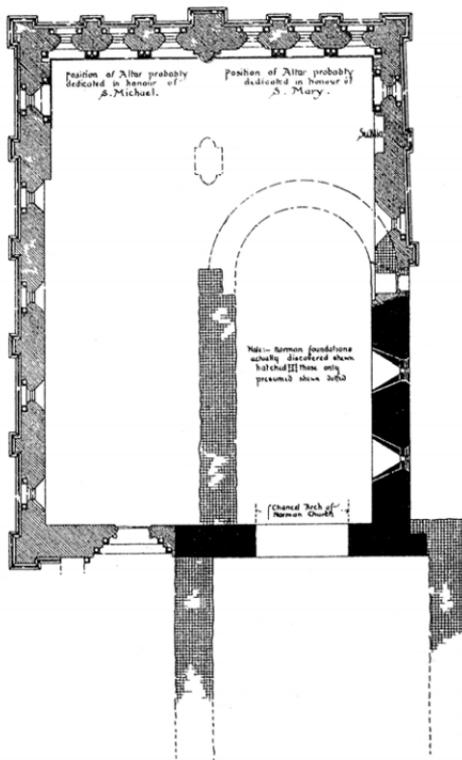
Sketch shewing Modern Church East end
Chancel built in 1752 : Windows in some of later date

Parish Church - Fgirmont - Cumberland :

Probable Plan of Early English Church :

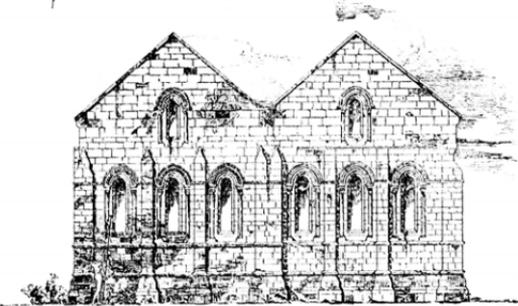
Early English work shown hatched
 Walls & Foundations of Norman Church shown in Black

2.



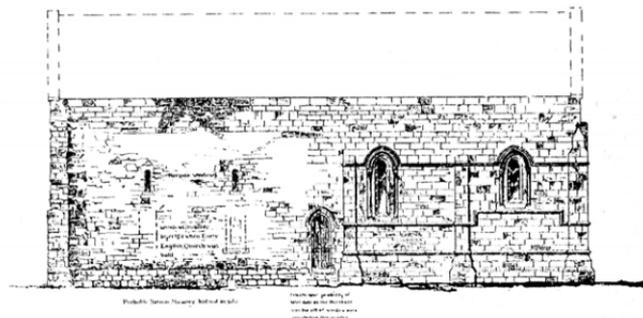
1.

Probable East End of Early English Church :



3.

Probable South Elevation of Early English Church :



1.



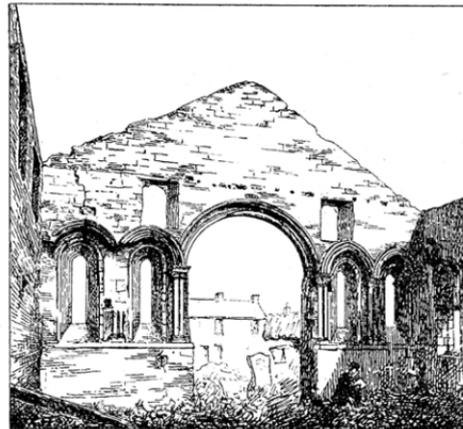
Sketch shewing West end (interior)
with line of the double roof distinctly marked & upper arch of West door

2.



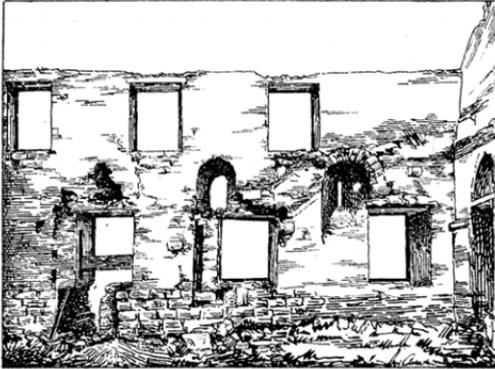
Sketch shewing Norman Scaillies
which had been built-up

3.



Sketch showing Early English East End Windows
& Chancel Arch built in 1292 out of the old Norse Arcade Scaillies

1.



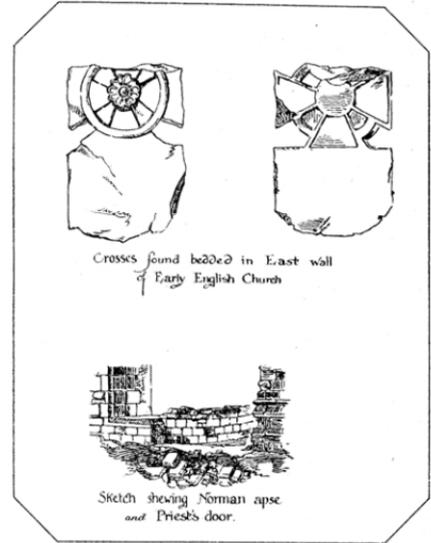
Sketch showing Norman windows
(interior view)

2.



West door with backing to Niche over for Eastern Choir

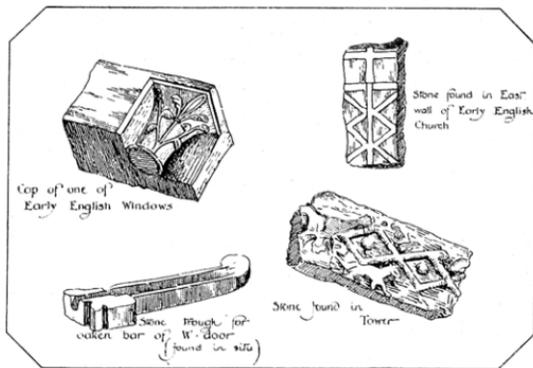
3.



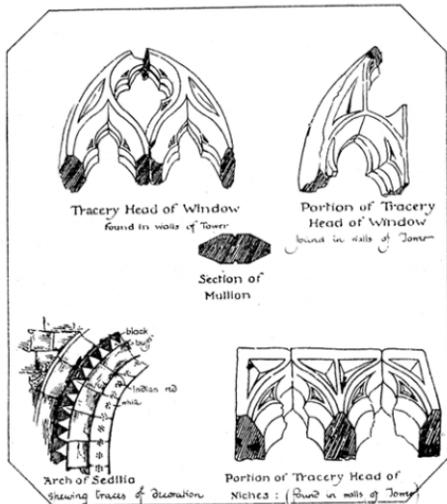
Crosses found bedded in East wall
of Early English Church

Sketch showing Norman apse
and Priest's door.

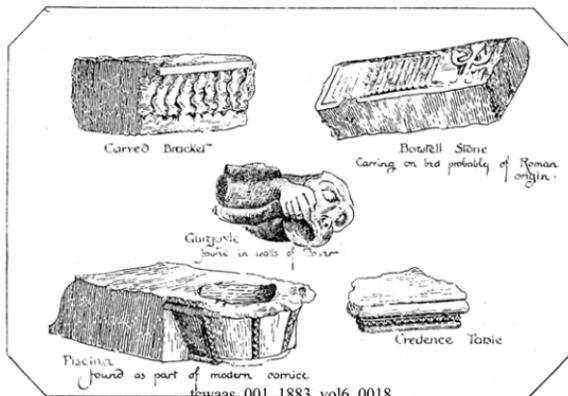
1.



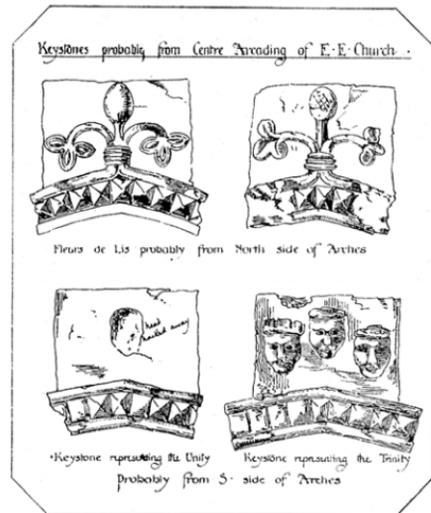
2.



3.



4.



ART. XVI.—*The Parish Church, Egremont.** By T. LEWIS BANKS, A.R.I.B.A., Finsbury Circus, London.

Read at Egremont, August 30th, 1881.

DURING the pulling down of this ancient Parish Church many things unknown, and unsuspected, were revealed, and although the building no longer exists, these new revelations may prove interesting to lovers of church architecture.

The story can be best told as it was first told. The building shall speak for itself in the order it spoke before, and each stone unravel its own mystery.

The church in our day was in appearance severely Puritan, square on plan, with an uninteresting tower in the middle of the west front, and a still more uninteresting chancel at the east end. The north, south, and west walls were pierced with square windows, devoid of proportion and regularity. The roof was tie-beamed and flat-pitched. Rough-cast had once covered the walls externally, but by the kindness of the rains of many seasons, such as this, had nearly disappeared. Internally, the walls were thickly coated with plaster. The ceiling drooped and bagged, and threatened to come down at any moment, giving one a favourable impression of the courage of the worthy rector and his parishioners, who dared to worship amid such imminent peril.

A gallery surrounded three sides of the church. It was approached by a dangerous stone staircase, and when reached had not a comfortable pew in it. The pulpit, a wooden structure, (said to have been designed and built by a tramp,—if so, it did him credit,) like everything else,

* Confer an account of this Church by Canon Knowles, vol. i. these Transactions, p. 300.

showed signs of giving way ; nothing but experience could convince it was safe to enter it. Every motion of the body made it rock like a cradle. The panels and mouldings were loose, and some had fallen out without any attempt being made to repair them. The floor was unevenly paved, and its area was covered with pews of all sizes and shapes. A cold, damp, fusty atmosphere had permanent residence there. The vestry at the west end was fittingly comfortable and unsightly. At the east end were four beautiful windows of early English architecture, evidently considered intruders, and sadly mutilated when the side galleries were erected. On the north side, externally, there remained buttresses, plinth, eaves-course, and a few walled up Gothic heads of windows, all of similar period. Though broken and time-worn, the beauty of these fragments was sadly out of keeping with the rest of the church. In addition to the building, we had two faculties and a contract to guide us.

The faculties are interesting documents, and give us some idea of Egremontian taste in the middle of the eighteenth century. The first is dated 1741, and has reference to the erection of a gallery. The persons applying for it were named Thomas Hinde, Robert Shepherd, John Wood, Richard Shepherd, William Muncaster, William Johnson, William Pearson, Thomas Airey, Thomas Benson, John Ponsonby, William Ponsonby, John Bragg, Henry Dixon, John Herring, Isaac Dickinson, and William Thompson. The reason they assigned for the application was

“That the seats and pews * * * will not conveniently contain the great number of people that usually frequent Divine Service there.”

The faculty then goes on to state that this

“Gallery with seats therein and staircase and passage thereto may without detriment to the Fabric of the said Church * * * be conveniently placed and erected in a *vacancy at the West end* of the said church,”

of the situation and dimensions hereinafter particularly mentioned, “To

“To wit the basis of the said intended gallery to be 2 yds. and 2 ft. from the floor or pavement of the said church, and the length of the said gallery from the west end wall of the said church eastward to be six yards, and the breadth thereof from the north wall to the *Main Pillar* southwards five yds. two feet and a half.”

The expression “vacancy at the west end” and the term “Main Pillar” are of importance, as will be seen hereafter.

The number and sizes of the pews are given with the dimensions of the staircase, and mention is made of breaking a hole or passage through the east wall of the steeple to the said intended gallery.

After due notice being given to all who might claim any right or title to the east wall of the said steeple or vacancy above described wherein the said gallery is to be erected, these gallery seats are “confirmed” to those applying for permission to erect the gallery, &c., for their

“Uses of sitting, standing, kneeling, and hearing Divine Service and sermons therein on Sundays, Holydays, and other opportune times without molestation of any other person or persons whatsoever.”

It then states the pew belonging to each person, and it appears from the contract dated June 6th, 1741, that in accordance with the amount subscribed by each was the position of his pew. He who gave the most had the front pew, and he who gave the least the back.

One William Herd was the contractor, who undertook to do the whole of the work for £32, out of which he had to pay £2 15s., the charge for the faculty. The highest sum subscribed was by William Pearson, £3 16s., and the lowest by John Herring and Isaac Dickinson, each 18s. 2½d.

In describing the gallery, this contract speaks of its being placed in the “*west end of the north side*,” and that its breadth be from the “north wall” to the “south wall” of the said church. Again, in giving the size of the front beam to support the gallery, it states it had to be

“12 ft. by 10 ft. square, and so long as to go across the said church and *one foot into the wall on each side*.”

In

In this contract no mention is made of the "main pillar southwards," but of a "wall." One other item mentioned in this contract, but not in the faculty, is of great importance—

"And also to make the window in the west end of the said gallery as large as the room will contain, and also to put in a window on the north side of the said Church opposite to the second seat to the front, two feet broad, and as high as can conveniently be."

Whereupon this William Herd ruthlessly cut away all the reveals and shafts of the west window, and substituted a lintel for the moulded arch, but carelessly left in position two capitals as silent witnesses to his wicked vandalism.*

That which is specially important to remember is the new window in the north wall.

The second faculty is dated 1752. It was obtained for

"Taking down the old roof (which is now in two) of the said church, and to cover the same with one new roof, *and to take away and remove the said old wall in the middle of the said church*, and also to take in about four square yards at the east end of the said church for a chancel, and to sell and dispose of such of the materials as will not be useful in such intended alterations."

Reference is also made to the intended erection of a new altar.

The faculty alleges that the double roof is in "a ruinous condition," that there is great need of room, of which "the said old wall takes up a great deal," and is at the same time of "great disadvantage to the minister," and that the applicants desire to "repair and *beautify* their only place of worship."

Their idea of beautifying is indeed remarkable. It consisted in removing two of the six east end windows, and building a hideous windowless chancel. They blocked up all the Gothic windows, with the exception of two on each side of the chancel arch, and substituted square ones where they could most easily put them. They hacked off wall

* See Plate IV., Drawing 2.

strings,

strings, externally and internally, and covered with plaster the beautiful ashlar, both outside the church and in. No mention is made of any enlargement of the gallery, but it is evident when the middle wall spoken of was removed the west gallery must have been carried across the full breadth of the church—most likely the side galleries were added at this time also. Tradition (no doubt based on these faculties), spoke of the church as a bi-aisled one, having an arcade down the centre.

The first work of demolition is to clear the inside of the church of galleries and pews. While doing so we have full confirmation of the west end gallery having been built in halves, and at separate times, as stated in the faculty of 1741. The northern half of the gallery is in every particular as described in that document. That the walls may speak, the plaster which hides them is hacked off, no easy work, but well worth the trouble. All that remains of the ancient windows in the north wall is soon brought to light. The two hacked-off string courses, one immediately under the cills, and the other at the level of spring of arch, and passing over the heads as a label mould, are distinctly visible. In the south wall there is a complication of windows, the reason for which was for long insoluble. The first discovery in this wall was a Norman, or very early transitional sedilia. It was, of course, walled up, but when these stones were taken away there still remained on the sides and on the soffit of the arch some traces of colour decoration.* It had no back, and the external ashlar in the rear of it had been renewed, probably in 1741 or 1752, when the square windows were introduced, because one of the ashlar stones at the back of it was the cill of one of the early English windows near it. The sedilia was seven feet away from the south-east angle. Between it and the corner were the remains of a window similar to those in the east end, excepting that it was shorter, the level of the cill

* See Plate III., Drawing 2, and Plate V., Drawing 2.

being

being raised to admit of the piscina and credence table in the wall beneath. The wall strings under the cills, both externally and internally, although hacked off, were clearly discernible, and were continued from the lower level to the higher, with a vertical rise of about two feet.

The treatment of the inner south-east and north-west angles shows the boldness of the architect. These east end windows had coupled shafts supporting the arch mouldings, but there was no room for the *outer* shafts of the most northern and southern windows if the side walls were continued the same thickness till they united with the east end wall. Therefore, to complete the windows, large chases were left in the side walls at the junction with the end, and the shafts placed in them. These recesses had long since been walled up and plastered over—probably when the church was “beautified”—and the shafts safely hidden from view. This, fortunately, preserved the caps and bases, so that they are the most perfect of all. The windows farthest east in both north and south walls had shafts and arch moulds inside and out, and were in every respect similar to the east end windows. The southern half of these windows—that is four in number, three in the east front and one in the south—were enriched with dog’s tooth ornament. The other four had not this enrichment. The window next to sedilia, on the west side, while the same in detail externally, differed from all the others internally. The reveals had a much wider splay, and the moulds on the angle were very uncommon, if not unique; only a part of one side remained. Many stones belonging to the other reveal were found in the masonry supporting gallery stairs, built in 1741, but no inner arch stones to give a clue as to its appearance internally. The remaining windows in the south wall will be referred to later on.

Turning to the west wall, still from the inside, the vestry door is set in an arched recess. The angle of the arch is a bold bead or roll carried down nearly to the ground on the
north

north side, but stopping at the spring of the arch on the south.* It was generally supposed that this was at one time an entrance to the church, but no one suspected there was here walled up, and plastered over, an exceedingly beautiful Early English—almost transitional Norman—doorway.† Over the lintel of the vestry door was observed a semi-circular crack in the plaster, which at first was thought to indicate a relieving arch only, but when the filling in was cleared from under it, it proved to be the sub-ring of a richly moulded arch. Thus encouraged, the work of bringing to light all that remained of the doorway was speedy and interesting. On one side a shaft with cap and base still remained, and sufficient marks to indicate where the others had been. Over the doorway were remains of a heavy projecting hood. Some of these stones were found in the tower, and one of them had enrichments on it of an earlier date. Above the centre of the door were stones which had formed the back of a niche, probably for the Patron Saint.

The character of this entrance seems unsuited to a porch, but a roof of some kind, and at some time or other, had evidently abutted on the building here, as evidenced by the raking joint of the ashlar and the string passing through the angle buttress, dipping to the level of the eaves of this roof. Later on, when pulling down this doorway, was found in position a long stone trough for oaken bar to bolt the door.‡ This clearly showed it to have been the *outer* door. In the north-west angle, on the level of the floor of the church, one stone attracted attention by its differing from the rest of the paving. Upon excavating, it proved to be the one solitary stone remaining of a stone seat that had extended about two-thirds of the length of the north wall, so far as the break. That it extended so far was clearly shown by pieces of slate wedges under the course

* See Plate III., Drawing 1. † See Plate IV., Drawing 2.

‡ See Plate V., Drawing 1.

of ashlar immediately above the seat. This shows the ashlar to have been underpinned when the seat was removed. A seat of exactly similar detail exists in Fountains Abbey. This stone supplied, what was otherwise unattainable—the level of the original floor, which was about fifteen inches below that of the recent floor. A portion, however, extending nearly fourteen feet from the east wall, westwards, appears to have been raised to about the level of the recent floor.

The semi-circular arch spanning the chancel is made of stones of irregular sizes and detail.* The chancel having been built in 1752, these arch stones must have been used for other arches previous to that date. The tradition that the church was once a double chantry or chapel, being divided by an arcade down the centre, seems to be so far corroborated. Further evidence of such an arcade is sought for by excavating down the middle of the building. Instead of finding the foundations for columns as anticipated, there are exposed to view the foundations of a wall, about four feet thick, extending from the west end about thirty feet. At this distance all traces of foundations cease. The rough foundation walling ends with one worked stone with square angle, set back about a foot from the north face of foundations. This sudden termination of the wall, and this stone evidently in position, were inexplicable. The inside of the building fails to supply any further clue to a probable arcade, and the meaning of this centre foundation.

Will the outside? On the south side of the tower the west front of church has different walling from that on the north side. This same character of walling—rubble—is continued round on the south elevation for about two-thirds of the length. From this point, all round the church, till it joins the tower again, the walling is ashlar. The south-west angle buttress, though very old, is evidently not the original corner of the church. The other buttresses, string courses and plinth on this rubble work, are miserable shams, stuck

* See Plate III., Drawing 3.

on within the memory of those living, to imitate the remainder of the building.

The remains of an arch in the southern portion of the west front, although walled up, are distinctly visible.* This arch, in size and detail, precludes the idea of its having been at any time an entrance to the church. It has every appearance of a Norman chancel arch. If so foundations may still exist of the ancient church. Commencing at the angle buttress the old foundations are soon reached, and the return wall or south wall of this church, which was followed for some distance. Much of the foundation has been removed in the process of interment. The corresponding wall on the north side was cut through when preparing the trenches for the new church. This, then, fully explains the foundation of a wall in the middle of the church.

This double early English chapel had for its basis a Norman chancel. All efforts to find traces of foundations of an apsidal termination proved fruitless, but when pulling down the south wall the last few courses of masonry showed the junction between the Norman and early English exactly, and supplied the missing link, giving us the radius of the apse, showing the apse to join the middle wall at the point where the hewn stone referred to was.†

In the south wall, amongst the rubble, was observed a stone with a semi-circular piece cut out of the bottom of it. This proved to be the head of a small window. It had been filled up at the date of the early English portion, and the mortar was so hard, that it almost defied tools to remove it. A second window, not quite so perfect, was also found. The shape of the windows, and the way in which they were constructed, point to very early Norman period.‡ There is a window cill low down, under the second Norman window. It is the same as the early English cills, and taken in connection with the reveals which could not be

* See Plate I., Drawing 1.

† See Plate IV., Drawing 3.

‡ See Plate II., Drawing 3, and Plate IV., Drawing 1.

understood

understood on the inside, seems to indicate that the early English architect did not consider the Norman windows gave sufficient light, so added other windows under them. The splayed reveal was perfectly plain inside, and there is nothing to show that it had anything more than a lintel for window head. A similar window seems to have been formed a few feet further east. But this window, at some subsequent period, was altered into a door. The cill was lowered to within eight inches of the floor level, and used as a threshold, as its worn appearance testifies. Probably this was the priest's entrance.*

Beneath the rubble walls of this Norman chancel were three courses of masonry, very like Roman masonry. They were not set in Roman mortar, and there is no reason to suppose they were anything more than stones brought from some neighbouring Roman building. Some think the Roman road passed between the church and castle, so there is nothing improbable in such a theory. What adds to the probability is the fact that these Norman builders do not appear to have troubled themselves to quarry stones. Excepting these three courses, all the stones in the chancel walls were boulders gathered out of the river or from the shore. The foundations under the Early English walls were formed of three courses of cobbles, each course distinctly divided by dry gravel and sand. The largest cobbles were in the lowest course.

The points left doubtful in connection with this Early English church, or rather chapel, are—first, the central arcade; second, the height of eaves and structure of roof; and third, the appearance of the west front. A fourth has been added. Was there a tower originally? The comparatively modern steeple contained a bell, probably made in the middle of the fifteenth century, and this leads me to infer there must have been a belfry. But beyond this bell the building supplies no reason for supposing there was a tower.

* See Plate II., Drawing 3.

With

With respect to the arcade, it seems more than doubtful whether it extended the length of the church. The contract speaks of a wall remaining, although it is true the faculty refers to a main pillar. But the fact that the circular end of the Norman chancel had its foundations grubbed up, while those of its side walls remained, seems to point to the conclusion that the wall also remained. One or more arches would then be thrown from the end of it to unite it with the east wall.* However, whether all or only part of this wall remained cannot easily be determined now. The base, and one stone of the respond pier, were found in the foundations of the modern chancel.† A number of smaller stones, of the same shape, were found, but where they were used it is impossible to say. Stones of exactly the same form are found in the respond column in St. Bees Abbey Church. It is also interesting to note that the windows, buttresses, plinths, and string courses, are almost identical with the best portions of St. Bees Abbey.

At first it seemed reasonable to suppose that what looked like an eaves course on the north wall was the original height of eaves, but this does not appear to have been the case. The bowtell course is unsuited to an eaves, and the small window to be made in the north wall opposite the second pew in the gallery is above this eaves. This window was formed eleven years before the double roof was taken off. Again, continuing the lines of the double roof which remained visible on the tower, they place the ridge in each case over the centre of the upper windows on the east and west elevations, and require the walls to be about the same height as the eaves of the single roof. Is it not very probable that the roofs had no eaves gutter, but parapet or battlement gutters? In that case the height of walling above windows would need some horizontal enrichment,

* It seems almost certain that there were only two arches, and that the centre column was octagon on plan, as some stones of that shape were found.

† They fit in exactly with arch stones of modern chancel arch.

and

and the architect designed this cornice. The eaves course of the single roof was last century work, and the workmen had no respect for the stones they used. One of them was nothing less than the old piscina.

Some crosses and sides of graves of early and late Norman work were found in the walls of the church. None that can certainly be pronounced Saxon. The tower had a number of stones which evidently never belonged to the church, and which most likely came from the castle, for the castle seems to have been the common quarry about the time the steeple was built. These were castellated battlement stones, tracery windows of fifteenth and sixteenth century, a gurgoyle, etc.

Respecting dates, the Norman chancel could not be much later than 1130. Except the string at chancel arch, everything speaks a much earlier date. The early English church was probably built between the years 1195 and 1214. The almost Norman sedilia, west door, and depressed window arches point to the earlier date, while the exceeding beauty of the detail incline to the later.

The Piscina being single and not double, which was usual up to the thirteenth century, points to the later date also.

It is most probable that William de Meschines, brother of Ranolph Meschines, was the founder of the Norman Church.

Dugdale's Monasticon, referring to Saint Bees, says:—"William de Mechine (or Meschines) was the founder of Saint Bees"—and a Latin Charter is extant in which he grants "to Saint Mary's, York, the church of Saint Bees, with 7 carucates of land in Coupland, the chapel of Egremont," &c. Hutchinson, Nicolson, and Jefferson, all quote this authority.

The great similarity in architecture between the Early English Church, and portions of the Abbey Church at Saint Bees, and of Calder Abbey, makes it very probable that Ada
de

de Lucy, who was lady of Egremont from 1203 to 1236, either as the wife of Richard de Lucy or of Thomas Moulton, had much to do with the building or completing of the three churches.

For many generations this church has been known as St. Mary's, but by what authority cannot be discovered. Bacon, in his "Liber Regis," calls it St. Michael's, so does J. Gorton in his Topographical Dictionary of Great Britain and Ireland.

In conclusion, it may be asked why so interesting a building was not restored instead of being destroyed? First, because the committee had no option, and second, because it was impossible. Restoration is only possible where there is something to restore, and then only advisable when there is some practical gain by restoration. Too little of the original church was left to permit of restoration. To rebuild on the old lines was impossible, as they are not yet properly understood. What is known was made known by pulling down the walls. It is hoped that a wiser course than attempted restoration has been adopted.

The parishioners will receive a larger and more comfortable church and they will see in the new building all that was of architectural worth in the old. The four east windows spared by the destroyers in 1752 are already in the chancel. The aisle walls of the new church are fac-similes of the side walls of the old. The arch stones which once divided the double chapel will appear in the transept arches, and the sedilia is built in the vestry wall. The west door would have been made the tower entrance but is so very small that even to teach by symbolism that "strait is the gate and narrow the way" was not sufficient excuse for utilizing it. Possibly it may be built against the boundary wall, for it would be a shame that these stones that have clung together for well nigh seven centuries should now be parted.