



TYMPANUM, SOUTH DOOR, BRIDEKIRK.

ART. XXXVIII.—*Tympanum at Bridekirk Church.*

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THE south doorway of Bridekirk Church was, with other arches and doorways of the old Church, carefully removed and re-inserted in the new building to the west of the ancient site. In the circular head of this doorway is the sculpture, for the sketch of which we are indebted to our member—Mr. W. G. Collingwood. Mr. Collingwood says that “general critical feeling tells him that the bas-relief is like others of the eleventh century in France and Italy, but ruder. Comparison with well-known Saxon manuscripts of early eleventh century, shews that the peaked beard was then in fashion and went out when the Normans came in. But it came in again, for the image of Christ, in the thirteenth century, as alternative with the full beard. The soft red sandstone has perished, so that we can scarcely pass judgment on the original state of the work, but at first glance it appears to be too rude for thirteenth century. On the other hand what evidence have we of such Saxon art as this appears to represent in the early eleventh century in Cumberland?

The Byzantines put a glorified Christ over the door from the porch to the Church, but the Christ is throned with Gospels opened.* We should hesitate to name the Bridekirk Tympanum an ascension or a resurrection scene, being only certain that it shews the Christ in glory, with double beard and divided locks flowing over either shoulder, nimbed and fully draped, in the attitude

* Byz. Guide to Painting. Didron (Ed. Stokes) II. 390.

of

of blessing and within vesica. The stone is too much decayed to shew whether the Book of the Gospels was held in the left hand or to give us the exact display of the right hand, and the lower part has been cut away, so that it is impossible to say whether the figure is or is not "throned" seated on the rainbow.

It was not carved for its present purpose, the lower part having been cut away to suit a door with flattened circular head at some period before its removal from the old building. It measures 5 feet 9 inches across the bottom, is $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and is broken through the right shoulder vertically. The line of a more pointed arch seems to have been cut on the left side up to the right arm as though the mason had begun to make the whole stone into the heading of a pointed arch. The material is red sandstone whereas the other mason work of the old doorway is of light coloured sandstone. The foreman of the builders of the New Church says that it was taken out of the wall of the old church, about the centre of the building near to the chancel arch, out of the walling stones, not out of the foundations; that it was buried for some time in soil to remove the whitewash; that very little, if any, chiselling was done to it before refixing in present position, and that the work was done by the foreman himself, Mr. T. Robinson. The only chisel marks which appear are a few slight marks on the under side to the right hand.

In Vol. xxiii of *The Antiquary*, Feb. 1891, there is a short account of a Tympanum at Elstow, Bedfordshire, accompanied by a wood-cut, which by the kindness of the present Editor, Dr. Cox, we are able to produce. The writer, Mr. Geo. Bailey, records his impression and conviction that this old stone must owe its origin to the period embracing the latter part of the tenth and the early part of the eleventh centuries, and states that the draperies and general character of the work are almost identical

identical with those of the Benedictional of St. Æthelwold, written for him during the time he was Bishop of Winchester, between the years 963 and 984, by Godemann, afterwards Abbot of Thorney, 970, (I find) and finely copied in Vol. xxiv. of *Archæologia*. On consulting these drawings I find no less than eight illustrations in which the chief figures are included within the *vesica piscis*. In six out of the eight this figure is the Christ, the Son of Man in triumph, appearing to Stephen, His Baptism, appearing to the Apostles, the Ascension, and Christ in



TYMPANUM AT ELSTOW ABBEY.

glory with flowing locks; the other two being the descent of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Trinity. The semi-circular arch is another characteristic, even though the particular arch at Elstow or Bridekirk may not be of the same date as what it encloses.

By the friendly aid of Mr. Senhouse, of Netherhall, and the kindness of the brother of the compiler, Mr. Wigram, of Elstow, I have become the possessor of the *Chronicles of the Abbey of Elstow*, in which I find an illustrative plate and a description of the principal entrance to the Church

Church. It is situated in the wall of the north aisle, and “ consists of a semi-circular arch of five archivolts, resting on a curiously moulded *abacus* of attic type, which is ornamented with a deeply-cut chevron moulding, simple but effective in treatment, and in the angles of the piers, are columns with cubical capitals, carved with bossed flutings. Above the arch, resting on a simple square cornice (and within another semicircular arch), is a very quaint, but beautiful carving, representing our Lord in the attitude of blessing, seated on the rainbow, and surrounded by an aureola, or glory. The right hand is raised, the fingers being held as in the Latin form of benediction, and the left holds a book; the dress of the figure consists of the *peplum*, or outer robe, plaited with small plaits, as was usual in the 11th and 12th centuries, an inner robe with large sleeves; the head is environed with a cruciform *nimbus*. On the right of the central figure of the Saviour is that of St. Peter, holding the symbolic keys; on the left that of another Apostle, probably St. John. Each of these figures holds a book in the left hand, the right being raised, with the fingers extended in the attitude of admiration, and their heads are inclined towards their Lord as shewing reverence and deep attention. The whole of this carving is executed in low relief, and it is most probable that, like most other sculptured subjects of the period, it was richly coloured, and the background gilt. This remarkable portal, with its bas-relief, belongs evidently to the same original structure as do the early sem-circular arches of the nave; and it is most likely that, on the extension of the Church in the thirteenth century, it was, as is the case in many other instances, spared by the masons of the period, and re-inserted, on account alike of its interest and its antiquity. Immediately over the carved tympanum is one of the small windows of the earlier aisle, and several fragments belonging to the older portions of the church, are built into the walls.”

The

The central figure at Elstow and our Bridekirk sculpture agree; the nimbus, the flowing locks on either shoulder, the outer garment with its many folds, the inner garment seen at the neck and at the sleeves, at Bridekirk, and the *vesica*, as far as the waist, where the later mason has cut out his door head. Whether there were other figures on either side which have been hacked away to fit an arch for which it was not intended, or it was originally the centre of a gilded and coloured reredos, tomb, tympanum, or other structure, it is a remarkable relic to be found in this part of the country, and its likeness to a sculpture which can be pretty certainly dated as being at latest eleventh century, and situate at Elstow, adds greatly to its interest.

“The Benedictine Abbey”* convent, or monastery of Elstow, was founded about 1078 by Judith, niece of William the Conqueror. She was widow of Waltheof, Earl of Northampton and Huntingdon, and there is reason to conjecture that she was actuated by a desire to make such atonement as she could by the founding of the abbey for her share in causing her husband's death.

Waltheof, who was the son of Siward, Earl of Northumbria, in 1069, with his brother Cospatrick, joined the Danes in an attempt to subvert the recently established dynasty. This proved fruitless. In 1070 he submitted to the king, who, in the following year, confirmed him in his rights as Earl of Northampton and Huntingdon, and gave him his niece in marriage. Waltheof's brother Cospatrick, Earl of Northumberland, having on some new disgust from William, retired into Scotland, where he received the Earldom of Dunbar from the bounty of Malcolm, Waltheof had been appointed his successor in that important command, and seemed still to

* *Chronicles of the Abbey of Elstow*, by the Rev. S. R. Wigram, M.A.

possess

possess the confidence and friendship of his sovereign. In 1074 another conspiracy against the king was set on foot among the English nobles, and great pressure was brought to bear on Waltheof, in order to induce him to join it. This, however, he refused to do, though at the same time he pledged his word that he would not betray their design. The plot somehow reached the ears of Judith; she informed her uncle, and he had the unfortunate Waltheof imprisoned at Winchester, where, after the lapse of a year, he was beheaded, May 31st, 1075. Fifteen days later his body was, by the king's permission, obtained through the intercession of Judith, disinterred by Ulfketyl, Abbot of Crowland, and buried in the chapter house of that abbey. The Earldom of Northumberland at this time embraced Cumberland, which was a principal abode of the Danes, and it would seem that the earls had of necessity strong seats here between the mountains and the Solway. Uchtred,* Earl of Northumberland, not long before Canute's assumption of the English Crown, in alliance with the Danes, began to commit depredations in Cumberland, but was defeated after a sharp combat, near Burgh-upon-Sands, by Malcolm, King of Scotland. The site of a castle is still pointed out at Oughterside in the parish of Aspatria, known for several centuries as *Uchter-sat* (Uchtred's seat). Cocker-mouth Castle appears to be the chief stronghold in Allerdale-above-Derwent, but it was not until the parcelling out of lands after the Conquest that the Baron shifted his residence from Papcastle to Cocker-mouth Castle, which is said to have been built largely out of the ruins of Papcastle. On the high ground between Aspatria and Papcastle is one of the ancient beacons so necessary in early times on these borders, Moothay or

* Lyson, Fordun.

Moota. The wardens of these marches never rested long from the days of King Rederech Hœl to those of Edward I., and it is not likely that Judith's husband could succeed his brother and his father Siward in the Earldom without Judith herself becoming acquainted with so important a position. Bridekirk Church is the parish church of Papcastle, where Waltheof must have had a strongly guarded seat not far from the mountains, as nearer the sea he would also have the seat still bearing the name of a former earl, Uchtred.

When Waltheof had become sainted on account of the wonders done at Crowland Abbey immediately after his burial, as well as for the holy life he had led during his imprisonment at Winchester, and the honour in which he was held by all the English (of whom he was looked upon as the last champion), what wonder can there be if Judith his wife should make amends as far as possible for his loss, and lighten a little the burden of the Norman yoke, by re-building or beautifying the ancient church of Saint Bridget, which had suffered much in the many ravagings and plunderings from the effects of which none had escaped in those terrible days.
