

ART. XVII.—*The Church of St. Oswald, Grasmere.* By  
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*Read at Grasmere, September 12th, 1913.*

TO the late Miss M. L. Armit's admirable book on the History of the Church of Grasmere all antiquaries must turn for information. In her chapter on the dedication she claims that the name suggests an early foundation, and points out that a well at the foot of Kelbarrow, whose waters continued to be carried to the church for baptisms until quite recently, shares the same dedication.

This was a chapelry under Kendal and there are three or four early references to it. The first dates from the year 1254, when the Pope granted a dispensation to Henry de Galdington, rector of Grossemere in the diocese of York, to hold an additional benefice with the cure of souls (Cal. Papal Reg., ii., 294). Thirty years later, i.e. in 1283, at the inquisition held after the death of William de Lindsey,\* we find the jurors saying that he died possessed of a "certain chapel at Gresmer, taxed yearly at 66s. 8d." (Lancas. Inquis.) The third item is in consequence of the Statute of Mortmain,† when in December 1301, Edward I. issued a writ to the sheriff

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\* Grasmere was held by the Barons of Kendal. With the death of William de Lancaster III., the patronage passed to his youngest sister Alice, who married Sir William de Lindsey.

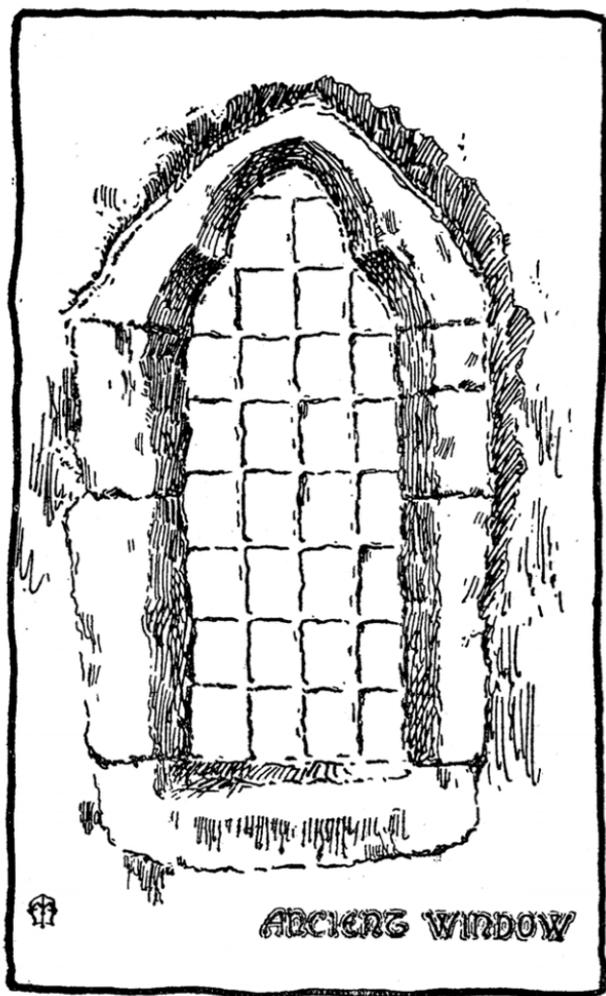
† During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the revival of monastic life, it became the fashion to grant away the income of the churches to some neighbouring monastery, on condition that perpetual prayer should be said for the souls of the grantor and his family. The logical result was that the inroads which these benefactions made upon the estates held in chief of the King became a menace to royal power. Edward I., therefore, in 1279, put a restraint upon the custom by his Statute of Mortmain, which enacted that in future a royal licence should be sought before any lands or churches were alienated to a religious corporation. If it was found by an inquisition that the property could be so alienated without injury to the King, then a licence was granted.

of Westmorland bidding him enquire of true and lawful men whether it would be to the prejudice of the crown, or others, if the Abbey of St. Mary at York were allowed to appropriate the Church of Kirkby Kendal, *with its chapels* and appurtenances. The jury found that the appropriation would damage no one, but that the chapels of "Gresmer" and "Winandermere" were in the patronage of Lord Ingram de Coucy, the husband of Christiana de Lindesey. Accordingly a licence was issued, under date 23 February 1302, for the Abbot and Convent of St. Mary's, "towards the relief of their impoverished condition," to appropriate the Church of Kirkby-in-Kendal, on condition that they appropriate none of its chapels (Cal. Pat. Rolls, 30 Edw. I.). The Abbey, however, very soon succeeded in gaining jurisdiction over both Grasmere and Windermere, as we find in a confirmation of the Abbey's possessions, made by the Pope in 1396, that these two chapels were included (Cal. Papal Reg., v., pp. 1-4.)

In these early days the chapel was, no doubt, a plain rectangular building of timber, without either chancel or tower. Miss Armitt reasons that it was not even situated upon this site, pointing out that the ancient road to the north which has been supposed to be Roman passed along the firm slope of the fells, some 300 to 400 feet above the valley, thus making an easy gradient from White Moss, where it is known to have entered the valley, to Dunmail Raise. Close beside this way, there is a field known as Kirk How.

If the one trefoil-headed window, situated between the tower and the porch, is anything to go by, we must place the date of the erection of the subsequent stone building somewhere about the commencement of the fourteenth century. Mr. George Middleton, in a little book that will be referred to later, says that from a drawing made in 1821 it will be seen that other two windows of similar

size and design existed in the south wall. Should this surmise be correct, then we can say that the present



tower, the remnants of the north wall and the lower portions of the south wall with the priest's door,\* belong

\* Mr. Middleton is wrong in supposing that the inverted arrow-head on the lower quoin of the western jamb of this door is a mason's mark.

to the first stone structure. In the north wall are still existing the corbels that carried the first roof, whilst certain horizontal bulgings below seem to indicate the former existence of a rough string course that once accentuated the window heads. It does not appear that any structural division separated the altar from the nave.

After a time the building was re-roofed, when the principal rafters were brought much nearer together. They are of light weight and it would be interesting to know if this was occasioned by the substitution of slate for thatch or shingle.

For some two hundred years this chapel seems to have accommodated the dalesmen, but when the woollen trade spread, say about the year 1540, need came for enlargement. It was then too late to gain the advantage of the architectural knowledge of the monks. Religious life had gone out of the monasteries and their political power was broken. The men of Grasmere, therefore, had to fall back upon their own resources when they tackled the difficulty of how to keep their chapel intact during building operations.

Here we find them erecting on the northern side, where no graves existed to impede their task, another building of nearly the same size and parallel with the old one.\* Of course this meant two separate roofs: the principal beams can still be seen, one spanning the south section and one the north section, with the inner spars of each resting upon the middle wall. They were therefore obliged to leave this wall standing, but they pierced it through, as far as they dared, in order to join the two buildings together.

Hence the massiveness of the square piers, the absence of any sort of capital or base to them, and the necessary plaster finish to smooth up the rough walling. It will be

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\* The north aisle measures 21 feet 10 inches wide, or the same width as the chancel. The nave is 3 feet wider.

noticed that this is not quite the same method as we found yesterday adopted at Hawkshead, but it is known to have been the method followed when building the north arcade at Billingham in Durham and at Tytherington in Gloucestershire.

Doubtless the double roof soon gave trouble. The long valley gutter, between, must have lodged snow and the lead work would ill withstand the great volume of water that would flow from such a large gathering ground. Thus we find in the will of Mr. John Benson of Baisbrowne, dated 1562, a bequest "towards the Reparacions of the church of gresmyre xxs., so that the Roofe be taken down and maide oop againe."

Then it was that local ingenuity conceived the plan of raising the middle wall by means of a second tier of arches, and whilst keeping the principal rafters in their old positions, of continuing the spars, on either side, up to a central ridge-piece, forming, as it were, a Queen Post construction, with the collar resting upon the heightened wall. To their great disappointment they found that the principal rafters of the northern half were not opposite to those of the southern half of the church, and yet, nothing daunted, in a clever way they raised their upper roof from a King-post head in the southern half across to a purlin in the northern half.

There was another difficulty:—the roof over the northern half, by being of a narrower span and yet kept to the same height of ridge and gutter, was of a steeper pitch than the roof over the southern half, so that in erecting their upper roof the ridge piece came over to the southern face of the middle wall, and with the difference of pitch caused an awkward break in the slating of the northern slope.

Also notice their great sense in only continuing the upper tier of arches just sufficiently to catch and support the first to the last of the collar beams, leaving the two

ends open for light from the two gable windows. Their ingenuity throughout is only equalled by their pluck, for the upper tier of arches is not even superimposed upon those beneath. I venture to think that few architects, knowing the roughness of the walling, would dream of throwing the considerable weight of the upper tier, with its burden of roof and wind pressure, upon the crowns of the arcade beneath.

Mr. George Middleton of Ambleside has written a peculiarly interesting little book on Grasmere, and I cannot but help quoting a passage from it, in reference to the western door of the aisle:—

Every stone has a story to unfold, and the defaced bottom quoins of the jambs tell us that in wintry weather, for centuries, the dalesmen kicked them to free their boots of compressed snow before entering the church.

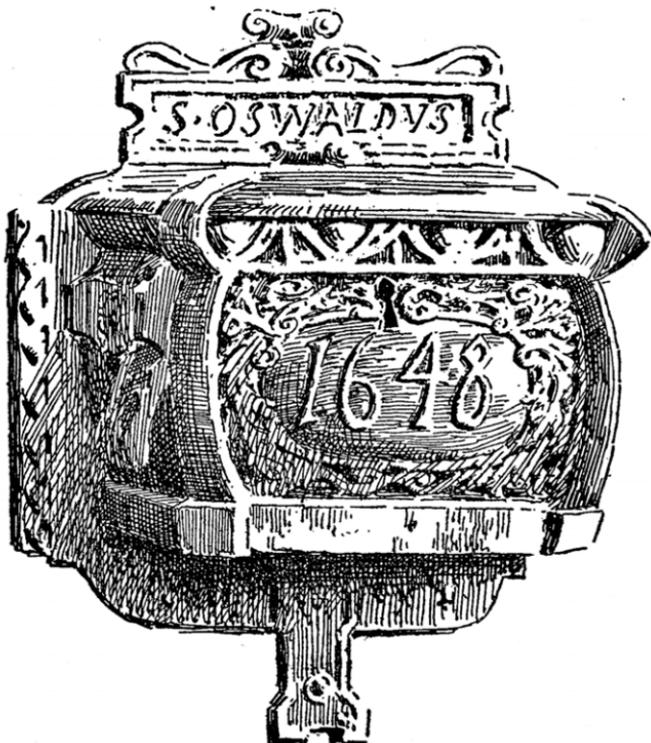
It would appear as if the gable end above has been rebuilt with a much thinner wall at some time, and the small Elizabethan window has clearly been brought from some other building to do duty here.

One hundred years later, we come to the two earliest inscribed dates about the building. One is on a bench-end, roughly cut with the date 1635, and the other is on the box, situated just inside the Priest's door, which bears date 1648 on the front, "Poor Box" on the top lid and "S. OSWALDVS" on the back-plate.

It is perhaps too much to say that the bench-end remains to us as a pattern of what all the other forms were like, but there it is, with the foot long enough for firm fixing into the earthen ground, and Mr. Fuller informs me that he can remember at least thirty of them being sold by public auction when he was a lad.

No document that concerns the fabric, prior to the Restoration of the House of Stuart, exists; but since that period the records are sufficient to trace the quiet, almost

uneventful, history. The Reformers, of course, had stripped the church of all ornament and decoration, so that the first proceeding, after the Restoration, was to cover up the nakedness of the building. Nothing was permitted at first, except the painting of texts upon the



**S. OSWALDUS ALMS BOX**

walls, with flourishes to adorn them, and so we find a sum of money paid out, in 1662, for "making y<sup>e</sup> sentences w'in y<sup>e</sup> church." So important was this form of decoration considered, all over the Kingdom, that the Archbishop of Canterbury gave a commission to his "well beloved in Christ," a craftsman who belonged to the "art and

mysterie of Paynter-stayners of London, to carry it out in all those churches of his Province where it was found wanting" (*English Ch. Furniture*).

In the following year Daniel Fleming set to work to furnish his seat in the chancel with a great pew. His account book for 13 July 1663, gives the following:—

Paid unto Christ. Robinson of Kendall (Joyner) for 10 y<sup>ards</sup> and foot  $\frac{2}{3}$  of double wainscott at 4<sup>s</sup>. P<sup>r</sup> yard, and yards 4 foot  $\frac{2}{3}$  of single wainscott at 3<sup>s</sup>. P<sup>r</sup> yard, for a Board, Ledging and Knobs in all (being for ye seats at Gresmere) ye sum of £03. 06. 06.

I take this to read, for 10 yds. 2 ft. of double, and for 4 yds. 2 ft. of single wainscott: at present this pew measures 8 feet long, but it will be noticed that it has been cut short in order, perhaps, to make room for the modern pulpit. If we take the 4 yds. of single wainscott to refer to the back portion against the wall, then the pew extended westward exactly to the angle where the chancel ends. The two or three decker pulpit adjoined the pew; the sides and sounding board were panelled with the same form of panelling and apparently it was of the same date.

Twenty years later, the vicar and wardens of the Mother Church of Kendal entered into a contract with James Addison, of Hornby in Lancashire, to re-beautify their church. This he did in every conceivable place with texts of scripture, cherubim and seraphim, green hissing serpents and flying dragons, and the whole was garnished and embroidered with sundry quaint devices and flourishes, in green, yellow and black. The exterior walls, likewise, were decorated with yellow and black bands, some 5 inches wide, on the roughcast, extending round all the windows and door openings, up the angles of the walls and buttresses, and completely round the tower. It was so "beautified" indeed that Squire Fleming must oft have felt disappointed with the somewhat amateurish work at his own church. For no sooner had his son,

Henry, become Rector, we find them engaging this same James Addison to come over and "freshly beautify and adorn" their church here. The contract was entered into on 29th March, 1687, as follows:—

The said James Addison shall and will on this side the first day of August next after the date hereof, sufficiently plaster-wash with lime and whiten, all ye Church of Grasmere aforesaid, and well and decently to paint ye Tenne Commandm'ts, Lord's prayer and *thirty* Sentences at such places as are already agreed on, together with the King's Arms in proper colours, and also to colour the pulpit a good green colour, and also to flourish the Pillars, and over all the Arches and doors, well and sufficiently, the said Parson and Parishioners finding lime and hair onely. In consideration whereof the s<sup>d</sup> Parson and Parishioners doe promise to pay him nine pounds ten shillings when or so soon as the work shall be done.

Wordsworth, in *The Excursion*, Book v., writes that:—

Admonitory texts inscribed the walls,  
Each in its ornamented scroll enclosed;  
Each also crowned with winged heads—a pair  
Of rudely-painted Cherubim.

They were obliterated by whitewash in 1741, but doubtless Wordsworth recalled what he had heard concerning them.

Let me say a word as to the maintenance of the fabric at this time. It devolved upon the three townships of Grasmere, Langdale and Loughrigg with Rydal, each of which elected a body of six representatives, who together were known as "The Eighteen." Each township had a separate portion of the church allotted to it, and a document, dated 1661, recording the several portions, is quoted in Miss Armitt's book. Roughly speaking the care of the chancel with its four windows and door fell to the rector: Grasmere township were seated in the nave and undertook the repair of the south wall from the priest's door to the tower, and half the aisle; Langdale's accommodation was wholly on the north side, and it

undertook to repair the north wall; Loughrigg and Rydal were seated apparently in the centre—on either side of the arched wall—and attended to the upkeep of the Porch and three windows in the south wall. The three townships jointly attended to the maintenance of the tower, the bells, the roof and the pulpit.

And so we pass forward for another hundred years to a period when the state of the floor of the church had to be attended to. It must be remembered that all statesmen had the right of being buried within the church, that the earthen floor was therefore constantly dug into for fresh graves, and that it was continually sinking into hollows as the older graves became solidified. No wonder that the plague broke out again and again, and I think we can realise with Miss Armitt that "the fragrant rush was needed for another purpose than mere warmth and cleanliness." But in the year 1772 slate flags were bought and extensive work was done upon the floor, at a total cost of £9 8s. 1¼d.; the flagging of the "low end" not being completed until the following year (Wardens' Accounts). The "low end" must refer to the space from the crossing between the north and south doors to the tower. Mr. W. Fuller informs me that the area remained unoccupied until about 1861, when pews were placed upon it owing to the necessity for increased accommodation. And yet this flagging could only have been laid down the aisles, for fifty years later (1828) we find a visitor writing that he "found the very seat floors all unpaved, unboarded, and the bare ground only strewed with rushes" (Morrison Scatcherd, quoted in the Rush-bearing pamphlet compiled by Miss E. G. Fletcher). It would seem that it was not till the year 1840-1, that the floor was filled in to a level with the ground outside, and paved all over, when the necessity for the annual rush-bearing came to an end. The old forms, with their long legs to fix into the earth, were now removed and stained

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deal pews were set up in their places. At this restoration the western door and the arch into the nave were blocked up in order to use the floor of the tower as a vestry, and new windows were inserted in the north aisle.

During the year 1851 the east wall was rebuilt, when a carved stone head was found built into the old wall, and when the ancient Piscina, now unfortunately re-dressed, was likewise discovered hidden behind the plaster. There is one thing quite certain, and that is that the south wall of the chancel has also been rebuilt. There is no record that this was done at the same time as the east wall, but, until we are told otherwise, the obvious inference is that it was. Seemingly the east end was taken thoroughly in hand, when, in order to give it more the appearance of a chancel, this portion of the south wall was brought inwards three feet three inches. Firstly it will be remembered that the chapel was originally a plain rectangle without any line of demarcation dividing the altar from the nave. Secondly, the window openings here are only two feet four inches through from outside to inside, as compared with three feet in the nave. Thirdly, it will be noticed that in the nave the feet of the principal rafters where they tenon into the beams, stand free from the wall, whilst here in the chancel, they are buried within the wall. Fourthly, notice that the new east window is not central with the King-posts of the roof, and lastly compare the mid-Victorian design of the window with those in the south wall.

#### CHRONOLOGICAL NOTES.

At the dissolution of the monasteries the patronage of Grasmere was granted to the Bellinghams of Levens.

1574. Alan Bellingham sold the patronage to William Fleming of Rydal for £100.

1741. Addison's work was obliterated when the inside of the church was whitewashed. In its place new texts

were painted on wooden framed panels and hung up on the walls.

1755. New Communion rails and table were provided. The table continued in use until 1884, when it was put to one side and used as a Credence Table.

1810. A vestry was partitioned off at the west end of the north aisle.

1814. Mr. George Middleton points out (*Grasmere*, p.16) that the churchwarden's books give items for the re-slating of the roof as follows :—

Paid Lady Fleming for wood for church roof, £11 ; Jno. Barrow for laths, £8. 18. 0 ; Mr. Braithwaite for slates, £37. 1. 11 ; James Heavside for slating, £24. 1. 4 ; with other items amounting in all to £107. 18. 9.

1823. Burials within the church were discontinued.

1829. A new pitch-pipe was bought for 7s. 6d.

1876. The building was re-roughcasted outside, when the tabling of a higher pitched roof was discovered on the east face of tower.

1879-80. The tower arch was again opened out, and a new Vestry partitioned off in the north-east corner, or Langdale choir. Oak seats took the place of the stained deal pews. Mr. George Middleton says that at the same time " the east end of the church was decorated . . . the Font removed . . . to its present place under the tower."

1884. A new pulpit, font cover, Communion table and Litany desk were provided.

1891. Mr. George Middleton says that with a view to preventing the entrance of damp into the tower walls, the lime roughcast was stripped off and the joints pointed with cement. It does not seem to have been a success as very soon afterwards the tower was again covered with roughcast, but this time in cement.

1905. The two Alms dishes, some eight inches in

diameter, and with handles about eleven inches long, were discovered in the old Tithe Barn attached to the Rectory. They have since been hung up on the south wall near the Porch door.