

Notes on Newton Solney Church.

BY F. J. ROBINSON.



THE Church is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. We do not know the date of its original foundation. Mr. J. C. Cox has been unable to find records earlier than 1271, but we read in the fragments which remain traces of a much earlier building. The church at present consists of nave, chancel, north and south aisles, north chapel, and tower. The floor has been raised considerably from its original level, as seen by the position of the blocked up north door, and of the north chapel, which is now used as an organ chamber, where the floor is much below the general level.

The church has been altered or rebuilt at various times. We find traces of Norman work in the piece of bold moulded arch stone built into the east wall of the chancel. The Early English lancet window at the west end of the north aisle is the next period, and would date about 1230. The stonework near it outside is seen to be built with small rubble stone. The lower part of the north wall of the tower, and the tower arch, may also be of this date. Little of this tower arch is seen at present, owing to the stonework blocking it up, but the pointed-shaped respond pier, working into a square-shaped capital, carrying an arch with plain square arrises, indicate this arch to be one of the oldest remaining portions of the church.

In the west window of the north aisle I would call attention to the rebate or sinking round the inside of the light;

this was evidently for the wooden shutter, or for a frame to carry canvas, which was used in early times instead of glass, or until the windows were glazed. We have specimens of glass in England of the 12th century, and it seems to have been used in ecclesiastical earlier than in domestic buildings, but it does not appear to have been in common use until a later period. From the building accounts of Westminster Abbey in the latter part of the reign of Henry the 3rd (1266—1271) the application of canvas or some material of that kind, is specifically mentioned.

The greater part of the present church was built in the 14th century. The nave, pillars, and arches, the jambs and label moulding of the east window, the buttresses generally, and the coping moulding of the south aisle parapet are specimens of the work of the early part of that century (about 1330). Some of the windows and the tower and spire, in my opinion, were erected toward the close of the century.

The north chapel may also have been erected about this time. The monuments now in the south-east angle of the chancel formerly stood under one of the two arches between the chapel and the chancel. The chancel arch and respond would be removed at this time to allow of the arches being built. At Muggington Church the chancel arch seems to have been removed to allow of the Pole chapel being erected on the south of the chancel.

The clerestory was added when the high roof over the nave was removed in the 15th century.

I have not yet mentioned the north doorway and window; the doorway is of Norman character of the 12th century, and the carving of the heads both inside and outside the two-light window have much the character of Norman work. I have, at various times, thoroughly examined the section of the outer moulding of the door, the nature of the stonework of the door, the window and the walling generally, the jointing of the stonework of the door head outside, and of the door arch and window arch inside, and have compared them with the jointing of the stonework in the north arches in the

chancel, and I cannot in my own mind put a date upon this work. I would ask you to consider if the stonework of this north door and window may not have been restorations of a later date than the 12th century, say about the date of the building of the north chapel in the end of the 14th century. I am aware that such a suggestion is contrary to all generally received theories of Gothic art, but there are points of difference in the present case which are worthy of consideration.

The stonework of the east window is not in character with the outer mouldings. The stone tracery was put up in 1862, and the style of the other stonework does not appear to have been properly considered.

A few fragments of old glass are to be seen in the windows, and possibly enough may be found to enable those interested in the restoration of the church to carry out the original design in the improvements shortly to be commenced.

It is proposed to lower the floor, open out the tower arch, provide new roof over the chancel, erect a new south porch, and so arrange the plan of seats as to allow of the monuments being properly placed in a recumbent position.