

Notes on the Restoration of Ashburne Church, Derbyshire. 1881-1882.

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ASHBURNE Church has been frequently noticed by travellers through Derbyshire—the well-known road,* which formed the chief medium of communication between Derby and the north of the county passes through Ashburne, and the Church, with its magnificent spire, would naturally command attention from the ecclesiologist. In this respect, Derby is a somewhat disappointing place, compared with many of our county towns. Ray, who travelled through Derbyshire in 1658, writes thus on August 18th : “ Derby is a large town, but meanly built ; there have been in it five churches, but some of them are decayed and ready to drop down ;” but on August 19th he writes : “ I got to Ashburne, where there is a very fair church, built cathedral-wise.”

Attention was invited to the beauty of its surroundings in the 18th century, by a correspondent of the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, and a sketch of the Church appeared in that venerable publication ; also in the *European Magazine* for 1792. During the present century, in addition to the ordinary guide books, we have the enterprising *History of Ashburne*, published more than forty years ago, by Dawson and Hobson, which describes the Church, and supplies us with two interesting engravings, one of the exterior,

* “ So, down thy hill, romantic Ashburne, glides
The Derby Dilly, carrying six insides.”

the other of the interior, in its unrestored state. Later still, we have the imposing work by the Rev. S. T. Mosse, then curate of Ashburne, illustrated with large folio lithographs of the Church as it appeared after the 1840 "restoration." When we have mentioned the paper commemorating the visit of the British Archæological Association to our town in 1851, and the volume which treats of the Church in Mr. J. C. Cox's well-known work, we have exhausted all the principal sources of information.

It would be ungracious to point out the errors, real or supposed, in these several descriptions, for the architectural history of Ashburne Church is by no means easy of explanation. We can, of course, point out certain portions as belonging undoubtedly to the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century periods of Architecture; but it is difficult to frame a theory which will account with perfect consistency for the present form of the fabric.

Of course, the well-known Consecration Plate tells us (Plate VIII.) that a Church was dedicated by Hugh de Pateshull, in A.D. 1241; and we can affirm, without fear of contradiction, that the chancel, north and south transepts, were erected previous to that date; but it is doubtful whether any portion of the present nave formed part of the building then consecrated. Fragments of an edifice belonging to the Norman and Early English Periods came to light during the restoration of the chancel in 1876-77, and also during the recent alterations; but the Norman fragments may have been brought from the old Chapel at Clifton, which was pulled down in the last century for the purpose of repairing the mother Church.

On certain points, indeed, we can write with tolerable distinctness—*e.g.*, the west wall of the north transept was evidently pierced subsequently to its erection, when the wall of the nave was brought out some feet further north into its present position; and again in the south transept, the eaves course of the western wall may be detected *inside* the present Church, although the external basement molds had been removed when the arch leading from the south aisle to the transept was erected. That

ANNO: AB: INCARNATIONE: DOMINI: M: CC: XLII:
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DEDICATION PRICES - ASPBURGH CHURCH.

the eastern chapels—viz., the Lady Chapel on the north, and the Saint Oswald Chantry on the south, with their arcades, were added at a later date than the other portions, is also made manifest by the string course which runs continuously from the external walls of the chancel along what is now the internal wall of the chapel; and a glance at the wall itself will teach us that it has been built *against* the chancel, and not bonded in with it. When the present central tower was erected, it was found advisable to add a strong buttress at the north-west corner, in order to counteract the thrust of the tower arch in that direction, whereas at the south-west corner, the nave arcade served for this purpose.

To begin with the special object of this paper, on Sunday, July 10th, 1881, I gave notice that on the following Monday I should commence operations. For years I had been planning the restoration of this noble building, and I felt a true conviction, that if my parishioners could once see in reality what I had already planned in my mind's eye, they would lay aside all prejudices and objections, and heartily support me in my work. The result has fully justified my expectations.

Like so many of our parish churches, Ashburne exhibits the gradual growth and glory of English architecture; and alas! bears upon its face the no less common and convincing signs of a debased and destructive period, extending from about the year 1640 to the present century inclusive. We fear, indeed, that the age of Vandalism has not yet passed away; its baleful shadow hangs yet over many a modern "restoration." Truth to tell, the archæologist and the architect should work hand in hand together, if the features of our ancient churches are to be retained, and at the same time the fabrics rendered secure.

I should mention *in limine*, that the chancel was "restored" under the advice of the late Sir G. G. Scott, in 1876-78, after undergoing sundry alterations, extending over the years 1839-70; and that the Lady, or Cokayne Chapel, was repaired under my own care during the years 1879-80, when the double gables were rebuilt precisely according to the pitch given by the weather-

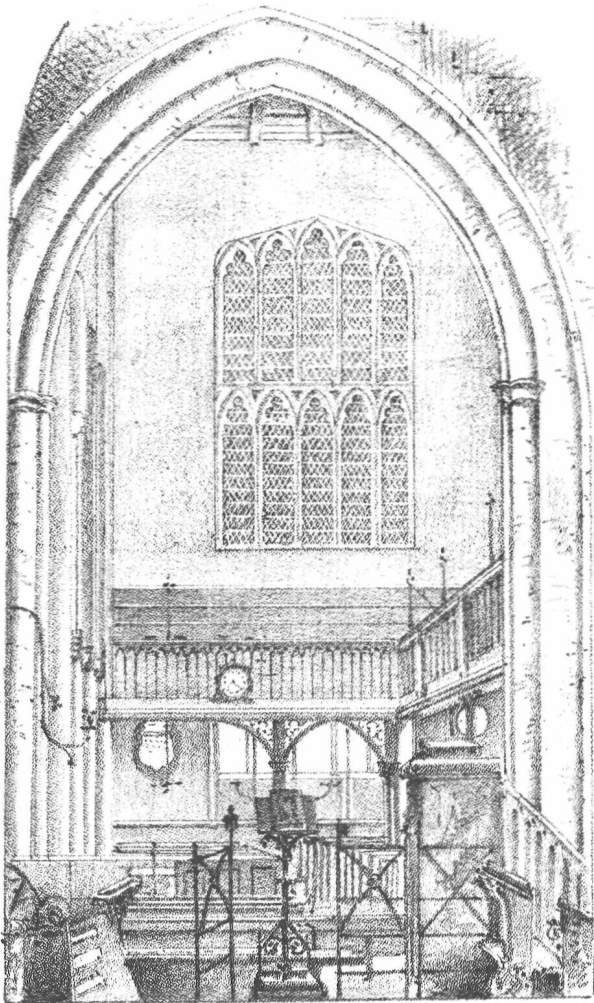
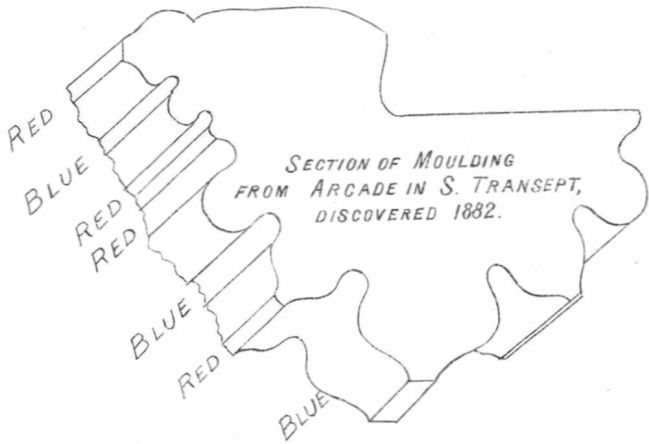
molding, and the roof raised externally, the old oak ceiling being at the same time retained.

It seems desirable, in the first place, to give a brief description of the Church as we found it.

The two passages of the nave and south aisle had been ingeniously arranged so as *not* to be on the site of the ancient alleys, and consequently on lines quite out of harmony with what should be the centre and guiding point of every church—I mean the altar. The stone flagging of the passages rested upon brick flues, raised about ten inches above the original level of the Church, and the pews were placed five inches above the flags, hence the congregation stood on the same level as the chancel, even after the latter had been considerably raised by the late Sir G. G. Scott. Then the hacked and battered bases of the arcade columns were altogether concealed from sight, and where any substantial portions remained, they had been utilised as convenient supports for the timber joists, and had been mutilated accordingly.

The font, after having been moved to three different positions in succession, stood in a singularly unsuitable place in the south-western transept. The western doorway—a grand specimen of Early Decorated work—had been ruthlessly destroyed in 1840, and a huge elongated window, 35 feet high, having taken its place, was silently but surely pushing the nave walls out of the perpendicular. The interesting semi-arch, which was designed to give access to the nave through the north transept, was utterly obscured and blocked up by a clumsy coke cellar and staircase; but the most serious damage to the building had been inflicted by the cumbrous galleries; huge iron girders had been inserted in the walls on either side, splitting the stone work in every direction, and in some cases shattering the jambs and shafting of the nave windows.

The capital of the westernmost pillar had been cut away, and the wood-work of the galleries fitted around it; fortunately a small portion of the carved foliage remained as a guide for restoration. String courses had been chopped down flush with



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HASEBURDE CHURCH INTERIOR LOOKING WEST.

PREVIOUS TO RESTORATION 1882

the walling, in order to procure a level surface, and every window in the nave and south aisle was either partially or entirely concealed by the wood-work of the gallery. (See Plate IX.)

Now that the floor has been reduced to its original level, we can admire the peculiar grace of the nave arcade; and special attention should be called to the elegant shafts which are developed from the springing, and perhaps formed in ancient days brackets for images.

The miserable western window has been removed, together with the gallery which necessitated its erection, and in its place we have designed a window of five lights, partaking of the same character as those in the north wall; the battlements have been renewed, and a cross placed on the centre of the gable. Much damage had been done to this part of the Church by the erection of a vestry, in 1720. The font was then first moved from its normal position, and a brick flue cut through the wall. I should mention that under the original western windows a string course had once run from north to south; this had been cut away in order to admit of the gallery planking, but fortunately I discovered a small whitewashed fragment *in situ*, and was thus enabled to reproduce the mold and ascertain its original position.

The doorway itself has been faithfully reproduced by the aid of the fragments found hidden in the wall, or built in by the 1840 "restorers." Some idea of its grandeur may be given by the statement that it is 14 feet high by seven feet wide; and the worshipper who enters by this doorway finds himself, in spite of the irregularity of the building, exactly opposite to the altar.

From the top to the bottom of the western wall of the south aisle gaped a crack three or four inches in width; the stone had split asunder, and the window arch had been thrust out by a rude entrance, evidently excavated for the purpose of interments. Moreover, I found that the internal wall-stone was quite black and rotten for several feet, and discovered, on inquiry, that this end of the Church had been used as a charnel-house prior to 1840. The skulls and bones from the adjacent yard had been

here piled up promiscuously, until the ammonia had actually eaten away the stone-work. Tiles, bricks and mortar had been freely used in order to make up the deficiencies, but the offensive smell still remained; and the workmen whom I employed were at times rendered quite sickly by the odour arising from the impregnated stone wall. I ought also to mention that skulls and bones were lying freely about underneath the flooring, and actually in the flues, and the entire surface of the Church was polluted by human remains.

Passing along the north side of the nave, I should wish to point out the windows closely similar in character to the upper windows of the presbytery in S. Alban's Abbey; they cannot be considered to belong to a much later date than the latter half of the thirteenth century, and thus mark the transition from Early English to Early Decorated work. These, having been cut in half by the gallery, never displayed their simple beauty in the unrestored state of our Church. One of this series (the eastern-most) has been altered in times past from a three-light to a two-light window, and an iron stanchion had superseded the mullion and tracery; the former has been removed and the stone-work replaced.

Now that the plaster and whitewash have been cleaned off, the broken courses can be discerned, and the exact space occupied by the three-light window can be pointed out. The interesting semi-arch, and the clever way in which the wall is managed, must be seen to be appreciated.

Another striking improvement appeared when the clerestory windows had been cleaned down; although elliptical in shape and belonging to a much later period, they possess a certain character of their own, and, of course, add considerably to the light and airiness of the building—a feature which did not escape the notice of Dr. Johnson when he worshipped within its walls, for we read in Boswell's well-known life the following entry in his diary:—"On Sunday, Sept. 12, we went to the Church of Ashburne, which is one of the largest and most *luminous* that I have seen in any town of the same size."

On this side we laid bare the remains of the ancient north doorway—the holes in which the massive draw-bar once moved—the hook and latch of the door itself still remained, and these have been carefully preserved, whilst the recess thus gained has been utilised for a coil of hot water pipes. A passage originally crossed over to the south porch, but these doorways having both perished, there seemed to be no adequate reason for restoring the alley.

The subject of seats and passages occupied our attention for some considerable time, but at last we planned what seemed to be the proper arrangement under the circumstances; and we were gratified to find, as the work went on, that the proposed central passage coincided exactly with the ancient plan. People can now pass freely round the Church, without being restricted to two alleys separated one from the other by impassable pews.

Perhaps my readers may appreciate in part the labour which has devolved upon us, when I state that 500 new stones have been inserted in the north wall of the nave alone; but so carefully has the stone been matched, that it is difficult to believe that so much labour has been expended.

Here, let me remark, that clearing the walls of cement and plaster has other advantages, besides that of displaying the beauty of the building, for we can now trace by the different courses and quality of the stone exactly where the plan of the Church has been altered and the walls raised during the Perpendicular period.

In the tower itself we disclosed two small windows, which had previously been filled up with bricks and plaster, and the lines of the high pitched roof which once existed can now be readily perceived. Here also, as in the nave transepts and south aisle, ominous cracks were laid bare, and ugly settlements which had been caused by those once fashionable underground pews, called vaults—these dangerous symptoms when detected were carefully filled in with grouting of the best quality, and the damaged stone cut out and replaced by new ashlar.

The south aisle had been clearly added at a later period than

the nave, the transept wall having been pierced in order to admit the arch. Here the foundations of the wall and portions of the external base moldings could be seen. The windows of this aisle are well worthy of notice; I do not recollect seeing elsewhere any windows approaching them in character; unfortunately, the carved caps of the shafting had suffered grievous ill-treatment, for they had been cut off level with the wall, and the wood-work fitted against them.

The remaining portion of the south porch was treated after the same manner already alluded to in the case of the north doorway, and thus the two ancient entrances to the parish Church can once more be seen.

The font has been placed on an additional base and step, and now stands as nearly as possible in the position which it occupied prior to 1840.

Adjoining to the south porch we found the entrance to a spiral staircase, which led to the now destroyed parvise, or priest's room, over the porch. In a church of this size and importance, it would be necessary to have an attendant always in the Church to guard the costly offerings and watch the burning tapers. By way of illustration, I may mention that a field called the Lamp-holme was in former days granted as an endowment for keeping a lamp perpetually burning in the Church of S. Oswald. In all probability this staircase terminated in a small turret corresponding to that in the tower; and, indeed, there are marks confirmatory of this on the outside wall. The window adjacent was lengthened and repaired forty years ago, at the time that the porch and staircase were destroyed.

Previous to the alterations then made, the aisles were floored with alabaster slabs, tiles, and common bricks. We have found several fine pieces of alabaster underground, which served for the foundation of flues, or covered the vaults which had been rifled by ruthless hands. Many of them showed marks of the wear they had suffered from passing feet, and we have utilised the best of them for the pulpit panels and sacristy.

The beautiful niche, where once probably stood the image of S.

Oswald, still remains in this aisle, although partially damaged by the introduction of an oval monument that had covered and injured it with iron cramps.

As the cills of the south aisle windows were all more or less defective, these have been renewed. From the condition in which we found them, it appeared as though the rain had beaten in and ruined the mortar. Could they have been thus exposed to the weather at the time of the Civil Wars? The marks of bullets and the dints of cannon balls give an instructive reminder of past history as we survey the west end of the Church; and the possession of two cannon balls actually taken out of the walls proves that damage more or less serious must have been committed. If these windows abounded in "superstitious images," no doubt a worthy companion to Will Dowsing would be found ready to destroy them.

I now proceed to describe—

The south transept, including S. Oswald's Chantry, or as it is sometimes called, "Bradburne's Quire."

The arcade which divides this transept always struck me as being incongruous, the arch-molds being poor and debased, whilst the columns were good and graceful. On stripping off the plaster we soon discovered the reason of this incongruity; the spandrels, or wall spaces between the arches, had been constructed of bricks, with here and there a stone; but observing that some of these stones had been tooled, I directed the workmen to cut some out for inspection, and I was rewarded by finding them to be the remains of a richly molded arch; in some cases the mediæval colours remained upon the stone. (See section on Plate IX.) It was plain enough that the transept had once been in ruins—the pressure of the tower, acting upon a building undermined by graves, had pushed the columns out of the perpendicular, and in consequence the arches had fallen down. From a list of briefs in my possession, I gathered that Ashburne Church was under repair about the years 1710-20, and the date stamped on the leaden piping (1719) confirmed this. An entry in the Register

for March 6th, 1716, runs thus :—"Buried Andrew Barnes, Carpenter, who made the new Roof over Bradburne's Quire"; and again on Feb. 9th, 1720, "The south end of the Cross-Ile and 7 yards of the steeple was rebuilt in yeir (*i.e.* the Churchwardens') time." The arcade, then, belongs to this period, and we are thankful that the work is as good as it is. Considerable damage had been done to the south wall by the erection of monuments, and the insertion of the large Decorated window in lieu of the lancets which originally lighted the transept, had not contributed to its solidity. By restoring the Early English shafts, we improve the appearance of the present window, and also exhibit the ancient lines of these lancets.

Here, too, the string courses and hood molding had been shamefully mangled, but we managed to obtain portions of the original, and all these have been made perfect.

During our excavations in the chapel, we came across the broken tombstone of one of Ashburne's worthies, Paul Taylor, and of Lydia Taylor, his daughter. These are now treasured up in the Cokayne Chapel. A small porcelain figure also turned up, which had probably been buried with some child. I could not but marvel at the fact which came to light shortly afterwards—*viz.*, that the old organ gallery had rested chiefly on a lead coffin which, by a perverse exercise of ingenuity, had been filled with bricks and used as the foundation for a pillar! In the eastern wall there once existed triple lancets, corresponding to those yet extant in the north transept; portions of the arches and fluted mullions were picked out of the wall, painted with black and white colouring in a zig-zag pattern. The east wall and late Decorated window have both been practically rebuilt.

The organ is now drawn further back, in order to leave the arch free which communicates with the chancel, and being raised on a strongly-built platform, gives ample space for a choir vestry and sacristy, with safes for registers and sacramental vessels underneath. The double piscina has been carefully restored, and a stone reredos and side altar, with alabaster slabs and panels, invest the sacristy with somewhat of its ancient

solemnity. The stalls were rescued from a farm-house in the neighbourhood, and form good specimens of bold wood carving, A.D. 1480; on one we have the linen fold pattern; on another the armorial bearings of Ralph Fitzherbert quartering Marshall of Leicestershire; whilst on a third, enriched with some striking foliage, a snail is seen devouring the leaves.

The north transept was in somewhat better condition, but the roof was in a sadly decayed state. On the second beam from the north wall was inscribed—

“ Churchwardens, 1697.

* “ Samuel Milnes. Richard Fletcher. R.M. T.C.”

Three of the soundest beams have been retained, but otherwise an entirely new roof has been constructed; externally the high pitch has been restored, whilst internally the old ceiling has been exactly copied, with this exception, that we have so raised the ridge-piece as to leave the head of the window quite free from obstruction. During our excavations here we found the Early English base of the central pillar, which had been superseded by the present Perpendicular column.

The tower needed very careful treatment, for it had shared in the serious injuries inflicted on the other portions of the Church. However, after all our expenditure of time and labour, the effect more than compensates us for the outlay. No one can observe those four piers, and mark the warm variegated tints of the stonework, with the graceful wave molding relieving their massive proportions, without being struck by their dignity; and the princely gift of tiles, presented by Mr. C. Minton Campbell, of Woodseat, lends additional beauty to the space beneath the tower.

With regard to relics, and objects of ecclesiastical art, it should be borne in mind that Ashburne Church has been swept with the besom of destruction—tiles, stained glass, carved wood-work, stone corbels, alabaster memorials and mural paintings—these have been damaged or utterly destroyed by “repairers or restorers” in past days; hence I have been able to secure but few specimens out of

* The Milnes family was connected with the Taylors and Websters, of Ashburne.

the wreck. Two interesting stone crosses were found by myself under the west end of the Church; they are figured on Plate X. Figure 1 is of very early date; Figure 2 closely approximates to the style of the Hope Cross, discovered last year.



I have selected a tile for illustration;* it forms one of a series of Alphabetic Tiles, and displays the letter M. Other tiles of the same series have been found at Dale Abbey and elsewhere in the county.

In addition to the alabaster flags, the inscriptions on which appear below,

I secured a very fine specimen, which had been buried underneath the tower. I could trace portions of a floriated cross, and the following letters running along the edge:—"—eus Amen. *Hic jacet Johanna uxor Henrici.*" The next word is provokingly indistinct, and is either "Dunh" or "Pun" (Dunham?).

Every scrap of mural painting has been carefully copied down, and may perhaps form the subject of a future paper.

Plate VII. exhibits the ground plan of the Church as at present arranged.

In conclusion, I should wish to place upon record the great obligations I am under to my friend Mr. Abbott, who has spared no pains to make the work worthy of his reputation. The local contractors, Messrs. Smedley and Walker, have shown unflagging interest in their work; and masons, joiners, and labourers have all partaken of the same spirit.

Much remains to be done ere the Church can be pronounced

* The woodcut is half the size of the original.

Fig. 1.

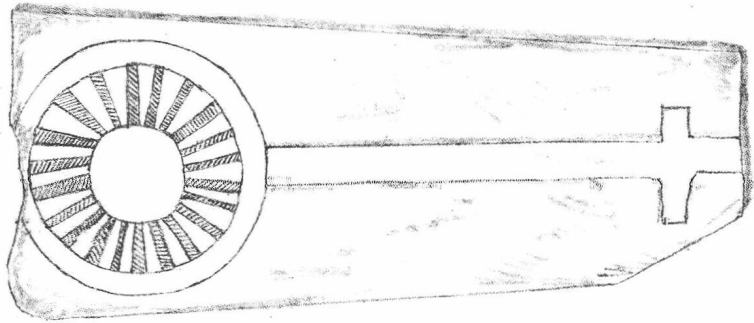
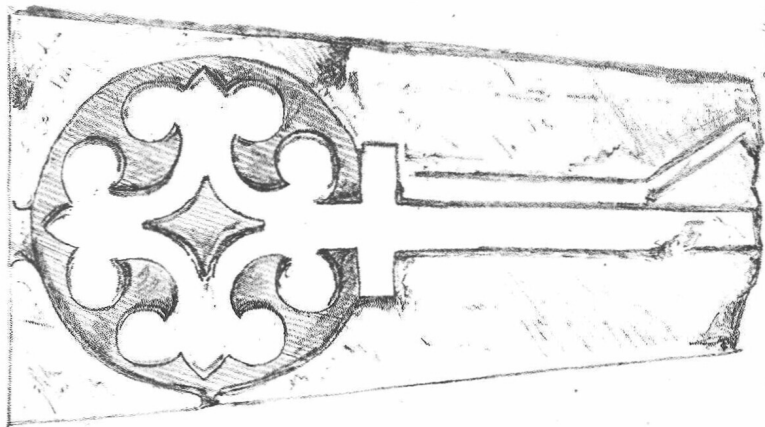


Fig. 2.



SCALE 1/4 INCH TO A FOOT

INCISED SLABS FOUND AT ASPBURNE 1882.

to be in a thoroughly satisfactory condition ; but I am thankful that I have been enabled to assist in preserving what is really the finest ecclesiastical building in Derbyshire.

I.

YET LIVING

QVIRE BY IOSEPH HEN
HENSON THE 13^H OF IV
DAVGHTER WAS MARIED
FRANCE : THE PARSON O
SHE WAS VERY PYOVS
& NEEDY & WAS THE
E 17TH OF

John Hanson, by Will dated January, 1610, charged his lands in Ashburne with the payment of £5 annually to the churchwardens, to be by them distributed, at Easter and Michaelmas, to such poor of the town as they should think in most need.

II.

THE MA.
OF THIS TOWNE
DREN PAVL TIM.
ROBERT HER LATE
THE 4TH & SHE THE 27TH OF M
TO THIS PLACE ELLEN THE DAUGHTER OF
M THO TAYLOR IS YET LIVING & THE
OTHER 2 SONS RICHARD & ROBERT &
DAUGHTERS DOROTHY MARY GRACE &
ELLONER ALL DIED YOYNG.

Blessed are they that dye in the Lord
Revel. 14. 13.

No memorial survived of this once well-known family of Taylor (of which Dr. Taylor, Johnson's friend, was a member, I believe), until I discovered these fragments.

III.

HERE LYETH THE BODIE OF LYDIA
 THE DAUGHTER OF M^R PAVL TAYLOR
 WHO WAS BVRIED HERE BY HER
 FATHER & OTHER RELATIONS THE
 22th of IVNE 1655 AGED 19 YEARS.

N.B.—Paul Taylor's Will is dated 24th December 1640.

IV.

HERE LYETH THE
 OF THIS TOWNE ME
 M T TA
 MARIED ELIZABETH
 OF
 BY HIM
 OF
 ANN T
 LYDIA THAT IS NOW LIVING HE WAS
 VERY LOVING TO HIS FRIENDS KIND
 THIS TOWNE

GAVE TO CH

per ann

MANY YEARS

THE 3 DA

Paul Taylor gave 20 nobles towards making a loft in the Church, for scholars and others to sit in.