



# An Architectural Account of the Churches of Sparsholt and Childrey,

In the County of Berks.

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## PART I.—SPARSHOLT.

**T**HE parishes of Sparsholt and Childrey are situated in the western portion of the County of Berks, about four and three miles respectively from the ancient town of Wantage, in the fertile and historic Vale of the White Horse, and about two-and-a-half and two miles distant from Challow station on the main line of the Great Western Railway.

It is not proposed to attempt to elucidate the history of the parishes and their several manors, or of the great families who were connected with them, though some notice of these will naturally be introduced in connection with the architectural details of the churches, in the construction and restoration of which they were mainly responsible.

It may safely be asserted that these comparatively small and remote villages possess two churches, which for their architectural details, and the number of ancient monuments which they contain, will compare favourably with any other churches in the County. As will be pointed out, especially in the case of Childrey, they seem to have escaped the destruction and vandalism, which in Cromwellian and later times have wrought such havoc amongst our Ecclesiastical edifices, and still possess many features, which from an artistic point of view, we must be thankful to find, surviving the intolerance and excess of zeal of the Puritans and their successors, and the indifference to art and early sentiment which characterised those who were responsible for the maintenance and repair of our churches in the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries.

Without further preface, we will now proceed to the description of the parish churches. And first as regards that at Sparsholt, we read that a church was in existence here before the year 963, and it is pardonable to assume that King Alfred may have worshipped within the sacred walls of the original edifice. It is of special interest to the writer of this article that early in the 12th century the manor of Sparsholt, as well as that of Aldermaston, and three others in the County was granted by King Henry I. to Sir Robert Achard, and consequently the history of these two parishes is mainly concentrated in the same families, at any rate up to the early part of the 17th century. The chief family residence seems at first to have been at Sparsholt, but in later times members of the Delamare family are distinguished as of Aldermaston, though they still retained their property and interest in the former manor. It will be difficult to identify the particular members of the family to whom we are indebted for the rebuilding of the more ancient church, and the various additions which were made to it, but there can be no doubt that to the generosity of the Achards we owe the chief portion of the church, which we will now endeavour to describe. The Parish Church of Sparsholt or Spersholt as it seems formerly to have been called, is dedicated to the Holy Rood, and now consists of a western tower and spire, nave, north porch, south transept and chancel. It was formerly cruciform, but the north transept was pulled down in the year 1787, and the old Rood screen and oak seats were cleared away and sold for 21/- ten years later. The Church was partially restored in 1870 and again in 1891. The advowson now belongs to Queen's College, Oxford, having been conveyed to it in the year 1342, as forming part of its endowment, when founded by Sir Robert de Eglesfield. The Church and Porch are covered externally with rough cast, which makes it difficult to state the period at which the different portions were erected. The lower part of the tower however is clearly of Norman date, and probably the walls of the nave were erected towards the end of the 12th century. The large plain circular font is also a relic of this earlier edifice. No doubt the Norman Church was a cruciform structure, and no alteration seems to have been made to it during the early English period, but in the first half of the 14th century, a grand scheme of enlargement was carried out, probably as a memorial to the Achard, whose cross-legged effigy remains in the south Chancel wall. On the very fine brass in the centre of the floor of the Chancel, the inscription as read by Ashmole more than 200 years ago, was

much more perfect than it is now. This (see the appendix) shows that it commemorates William de Herleston, Rector, who was presented in 1312 and died in 1353, and the introduction of the words "*hanc cancellam*" suggests that he was the rebuilder of the Chancel. Above his head is a shield showing a cross with the Achard arms, or a bend lozengy sable, in the first quarter, proving him to be a member of that family, and we may therefore venture to assume that he was the son of the Achard whose monument clearly forms part of the original scheme of rebuilding of the church, and a brother of the Sir Robert Achard, who is said to have built the south transept or chantry in the year 1330. It is hoped some evidence may be obtained to substantiate this contention. It was in the time of this William de Herleston that the advowson of Sparsholt was conveyed to Queen's College, Oxford, forming part of its original endowment. A date, 1327, has been given as the exact time at which this enlargement took place, and this will conform with the architectural details. At this time the upper part of the tower, the chancel and transepts were erected, and some windows were inserted on either side of the nave, and the details remaining furnish us with very beautiful examples of the decorated style of architecture. It is possible that the south transept with its monuments and early screen may have been erected, as is stated, in 1330 as a chantry chapel by Sir Robert Achard. During the Tudor period, probably in the reign of Henry VIII., windows of late perpendicular character were inserted at the east end of the Chancel, in the west tower wall, and high up on either side of the nave. These are of very plain design and vastly inferior to the earlier details. The spire is a later addition.

Let us now make our survey of the Church, commencing with the interior of the Chancel. This rises by three steps, placed at intervals towards the east, with one more to the altar itself. The present east window is modern, and is a large and fairly good example of the decorated style. The former east window was a poor specimen of the late perpendicular period, square headed of three lights, and has been preserved as a reredos in the east wall. On south of Chancel are three, and on north two, decorated windows, all of two lights, lofty and with a quatrefoil in the head. In those on the north are some small fragments of old glass. In the south wall is a beautiful combination of piscina, sedilia and founder's tomb, all coeval with the present Chancel. The piscina with large and deep basin, and the three sedilia, which are not

graduated, have flat ogee headed and crocketed canopies, terminating in a finial, and with a crocketed pinnacle between each arch. The sedilia rest on slender circular shafts with bell-shaped capitals. There is a delicate fringe to each of the canopies. Adjoining the sedilia on the west side is the founder's tomb, with beautiful ogee headed and feathered canopy, with finial and pilaster shafts on either side, and with very elegant cinquefoiled fringe and heads on the cusps. Below on a table tomb is the effigy of a knight, much weatherworn, with low helm, head on a pillow, supported by an angel on either side, surcoat, legs crossed right over left, dagger at his side, and feet resting on a lion. The side of the tomb is divided into three compartments, each having two shields within richly carved eight foils. The design is a very rich one, and no doubt the effigy commemorates the member of the Achard family at whose cost and in whose memory the Chancel was rebuilt. On the north side is a plain arched doorway, leading to the Sacresty, which is the ancient one, though the windows are modern, and immediately to the west of this a very beautiful arched recess, no doubt originally designed for the Easter sepulchre. It is exactly similar to the founder's tomb on the south, with rich ogee headed crocketed canopy and bold foliated finial, cinquefoiled fringe with heads on the centre cusps and foliage on the others, and pilaster shafts capped by pinnacles on either side. Traces of red colouring are visible in several places. An old chest has been placed within the recess. One or two old bench ends are now incorporated with the choir stalls. The Chancel roof is high pitched, and may be partly old. There is a doorway on the north side with segmental headed interior arch. On the floor are numerous interesting memorials. On a coffin shaped stone is carved a floriated cross, and there are numerous brasses, the most interesting of which is one to a priest on a large stone in the centre of the floor. He is represented with curly hair, and the tonsure, fully vested and with hands clasped on the breast. The figure has been enclosed within an eight foiled border supported on a stem, and with an inscription carried round the stone, only a small portion of which remains, viz: on the east side "die feb" and on the south "anime ur deus amen." (Since writing the above, an additional portion of the inscription has been recovered, viz., "Hic jacet Willelmus de Herleston" and "huius," and restored to its proper place on the stone.) There are two shields above the head of the priest, one of which has a cross and the Achard arms in the first quarter. This is of the decorated period

and of about the same date as the Chancel. There is a small brass effigy of a lady and two children of date about 1530. Ashmole mentions a brass of Peter and Mary Hunsdon, she died on May 31st, he afterwards. Also a figure of a priest with inscription to Thomas Mythson, Scholar of Queen's College, Oxford, and Vicar, no date of death. This has now disappeared. Also of two civilians, one of the Elizabethan period, all without inscriptions, and the following with inscriptions, which are set out in full as an appendix to this paper :—

(1) Partly under the stalls on the north side to John Fetyplace and Margaret Andrews, widow, daughter of Thomas Braybrooke, of Abingdon, his wife. He died February 8th, 1602.

(2) Nicolas Cooke, M.A., Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, and Pastor of this Church, died August 17th, 1603.

(3) Thomas Todhunter, Fellow of Queen's College, and Vicar, died April 1st, 1627.

(4) John Williamson, B.D., Vicar, died October 20th, 1633.

(5) Richard Edmondson, Vicar, died 1674.

The Chancel arch is of the decorated period with two plain orders continued without imposts to the ground. A long squint is carried through on either side from the present and former transept. On the north side of the nave at the east end is a two-light decorated window, probably originally in the north wall of the north transept, and a similar one further west, and two more on the south side, all similar to those in the Chancel. There is also on a higher level on the east side a three-light squareheaded Tudor window. Considerable remains of ancient glass are preserved in these windows, namely: in upper part of the east window on the north side is a small portion of a female saint with nimbed head and clasped hands. In the Tudor window adjoining it is a lady kneeling at a yellow faldstool, with blue dress and kerchief, and large rosary. Above her head is the inscription *Scā Kā*, indicating that there was a figure of St. Katherine in the panel above. In the central portion of the window is the head of another lady and some canopy work, and part of an inscription in capital letters in the eastern compartment, the word "*Michi*" is several times repeated. In the head of the east window on the south side is a figure of our Lord giving the Benediction. He has a red tunic and blue cloak, and His left hand

rests on the orb. The Achard coat of arms appears twice in this window, all the glass being of 14th century date.

There is a roll stringcourse along the north and south interior walls of the nave, carried as a hoodmoulding above the north doorway. This has an interior segmental headed arch, with the roll hoodmoulding and two chamfered orders. The interior arch of the south doorway is also segmental headed. The nave roof is low pitched, and much renewed, but is said to contain portions of that erected in the 14th century. At the west end is the font, one of the relics of the earlier Norman Church. It is of plain white stone, massive and tub shaped, set up on a more slender base, and with a pyramidal wooden cover of 18th century date. The tower arch is of the decorated period with hoodmould and two plain chamfered orders. The west window is a plain two-light insertion of the Tudor period, but on the north and south the original deeply splayed Norman window still remains. Above the tower arch is preserved a somewhat early and elaborate specimen of the Royal Arms. The tower now contains four bells, of these two are dated 1578, one 1603, while the other is of the pre-Reformation period and is dedicated to St. Catherine. On the north wall of the nave is a large tablet with inscription commemorating John Pleydell, who died April 17th, 1591 and Bridget his wife died February 14th, 1623. According to Ashmole this in his time was on the east wall of the south transept or Chapel.

The arch opening from the nave to the south transept or chapel is similar to the Chancel arch, having two plain orders continued without imposts to the ground. Beneath it is a very nice screen of decorated date, with a series of cinquefoiled arches on slender banded shafts. The roof is wagon shaped and said to date about 1350. The south window is of four lights with numerous quatrefoils in the head, and there is a two-light window of the same decorated date on the east and west sides. On a modern table tomb, but till recently on the floor, is the wooden effigy of a Knight with head on his tilting helm on which is a crest like a large mushroom. His hands are broken away, and the feet rest on a large lion. The legs are not crossed. The effigy has been much mutilated. Ashmole speaks of it as when he saw it thus: "In the middle of "this Chapel stands an ancient raised monument of wood, and "thereon the statue of a Knight in plate armour, with a short coat "over it, cut also in wood, his hands like the former are erect, and "his feet rest upon a lion. Under his head lies his helm, on which "out of a crown issues something like a mushroom."

It seems clear therefore that he has met with evil treatment since Ashmole's day.

Filling up nearly the whole space in the south wall below the window are two monumental recesses with very beautiful canopies above, almost exactly corresponding with those in the Chancel. They have the same elegant crocketing and cinquefoiled fringes with heads on the cusps, and are doubtless of the same period. Within these are placed the effigies of two ladies, which do not appear to be occupying their original situation. The figures are composed of wood and very elegantly carved. That within the western arch has rich flowing drapery, the head lying on cushions supported by two monks, and the feet resting on a dog. The side of this tomb is plain. The eastern effigy is also richly draped. Her head lies on two cushions supported by two angels, while her feet rest on two dogs. She has the wimple, indicating that she was a widow before her decease. On the side of the lower part of the tomb is a stone panel, query in its original position, with nine knights under crocketed ogee headed canopies, very closely corresponding with those above the piscina and sedilia in the Chancel. All have low bascinets, surcoats and shields and are varied in their attitudes, some with hands clasped and others drawing their swords. Although this monument is two hundred years earlier than that of Sir George and Lady Elizabeth Forster at Aldermaston, there are several peculiarities in both, which suggest that the artist employed to execute the tomb at Aldermaston, adopted some of his ideas from this beautiful example at Sparsholt. There can be no doubt that these effigies commemorate one of the last of the Achards and his two wives, probably as stated, Sir Robert and his wives Joanna and Agnes, that under the eastern arch being the second wife, who survived him, the date of the figures being about 1350-1370. Traces of colour have been noted on all of them. Leland who visited this church early in the 16th century in his itinerary, Vol. vi. p. 34, gives the following quaint account of them :

“ At Sparshold lyith one of the Achards honorably byried in a  
“ Chapel annexid hard to the side of the Paroche Chirche  
“ having a Chauntery : and on eche side of hym lyith a Wife  
“ of his. There is a commune Saying that the one of them  
“ was a Duches, and the other a Countes. But this Saying  
“ hath little Apparaunce of Truthe.”

This account strengthens the suggestion that the effigies of the two ladies were originally on a table tomb on either side of that of

the knight. On the east wall is a large tablet with shields and inscription to Sir George Hyde, K.B., who appears to have been knighted at the Coronation of King James I., and his wife, Katherine, daughter of Sir Humfry Ferrars, of Tamworth Castle. He died April 9th, 1625. On the floor in Ashmole's time was a stone in memory of Jane, wife of Thomas Walrone (still remaining), and on the nave floor the brass effigies of a man, his two sons and two daughters, and an inscription to Thomas Bothe, of pre-Reformation date. With the exception of the doorways to the nave, there is not much to note in the exterior of the Church. The two lower stages of the tower are of the Norman period, the outer openings of the two early windows on the north and south being oblong in shape. The upper stage was added at the time of the fourteenth century reconstruction, and has a two-light decorated belfry window in each face. The spire is plain, composed of wooden shingles, and erected at the end of the 18th century. The north doorway, within a debased porch, is now, and appears always to have been the principal entrance. It is a fine specimen of very late, or transitional, Norman work. It is semi-circular with an undercut hoodmould, terminating on dragons' heads. There is a plain chamfered outer order with stop terminations, and on the inner order a bold example of the elliptic arched ornament. In this instance we find a series of deeply-cut horseshoe shaped divisions separated by labels with trefoil terminations, and resting on a roll moulding on the angle of the arch. The abacus is of the late type, with a hollow, instead of the chamfer, on the lower portion. There is a jamb shaft to the outer, and engaged shaft to the inner order on each side, the former with bold, the latter with flat, foliage on the capitals. There are several votive crosses carved on the jambs. The door is old with massive oak panels. The iron-work may also be of early date. The south doorway is also of transitional Norman character, with undercut hoodmould terminating on heads, a small roll moulding, and two recessed orders each with a roll on the angle. The abacus is undercut, that to the inner order being rounded to the shape of the roll, which is continued down the jamb to the ground. There is a shaft to the outer order with foliage on the capitals.

There are nice decorated buttresses at intervals to the nave and along and at the eastern angles of the chancel. The chancel windows have hoodmoulds or labels terminating on heads, those to the nave and transepts are plain. The parapet on each side of the chancel has a very pretty wavy line pattern on the cornice of a similar design



to examples of the same date at Malmesbury Abbey, and St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Oxford. There are large gurgoyles on the north and south sides of the chancel. The north chancel doorway is plain of the decorated period.

There is the base of an old cross in the churchyard.

## Appendix.

### (A) Inscriptions on Brasses in the Chancel.

- (1) Ashmole in the History of the Antiquities of Berkshire gives the following inscription as existing in his time:—

"Hic jacet Willielmus de Herleston Rector . . . . .

"hanc cancellam, & obiit ultimo die Febr . . . . .

"Domini MCCC . . . . . Cujus anime propicietur Deus, Amen."

- (2) Brass Plate partly under the stalls:—

"Hic jacet . . . . .

"Duxit Mar . . . . .

"Thomæ Braybrooke de Abingdon Generosi et obiit

"8<sup>o</sup> Die Februarii Anno 1602.

"Hoc tumulo Fetyplace requiescunt ossa Johis,

"Et parvum corpus parvula terra tegit.

"Sed mens que melior pars est expersq sepulchri

"Infima despiciens sidera celsa colit."

(The inscription is in plain capital letters.)

Ashmole fills up the gaps of the first two lines as follows:—

"Hic jacet Johannis Fettiplace Generosus, qui uxorem

"Duxit Margaretam Andrews, Vid, unam filiarum."

and gives the following translation to the four hexameter and pentameter lines:—

"Here rest in peace John Fettiplace's bones,

"Whose little Corps this little spot entombs;

"His Soul superiour to the grave did rise,

"Left this low Sphere, and dwells above the Skies."

- (3) Hic sepultus jacet Nicolaus Cooke Artium Magister

Socius Collegii Reginæ Oxon et hujus Ecclesiæ

Pastor qui obiit August 17 1603.

I Thes 4 14 Deus eos qui obdormiverunt

in Jesu adducat cum eo.

- (4) Hic jacet corpus Thomæ Todhunter hujus

Ecclesiæ quondam vicarii et collegiæ Reginæ

olim socii qui sibi quinq habebat natos

viz. : duos filios et tres filias obiit 30 me

Martii et sepultus erat 1<sup>o</sup> die Aprilis

Anno D<sup>o</sup> 1627.

N.B.—The main inscription was probably designed in his lifetime, as the dates are in smaller letters, and have been filled in afterwards.

- (5) Here lyeth the body of John Williamson  
Bachelor of Divinity Vicar of this  
Church deceased Octob 20 1633.

- (6) On north wall of nave :—  
Here liet the bodie  
of John Pleydell gent  
who was buried April the 17  
Anno 1591 also the bodie of Bridge  
t his wife who deceased feb 14 anno  
1623 which Jhon and Bridget had 7  
sonnes and 6 daughters and 3 are  
buried in this ile Anthony  
Samuell and Catherin.

- (7) In south transept.  
Monument of Sir George Hyde, much of the inscription is obliterated.  
Ashmole, who did not literally transcribe the inscription, gives it  
thus :—

“Here was buried the ixth of Aprill, MDCXXV the body of  
“Sir George Hyde, Knight of the Honourable Order of the  
“Bath to our Sovereigne Lord King James, at his Coronation  
“of England; and had to Wife, Katherine the Daughter  
“of Sir Humfry Ferrars, of Tamworth Castle, in the  
“County of Warw, and had by her 3 Children.”

- (8) Ashmole mentions a brass in the Chancel, which has disappeared.  
“Of your charite pray for the soule . . . . .  
“sumetyme Vicar of this Church, who . . . . . 30,  
“On whose Soule and all Christian Soules . . . . .”

- (B) A great deal of interesting information about the Church, and the Priests,  
Queen's College and the Lords of the Manor, is to be found in a  
pamphlet containing the sermon entitled Sparsholt Feast, preached by  
the Revd. Oswald J. Reichel, B.C.L., M.A., on May 20th, 1883, with  
numerous notes, supplied from the records in the possession of Queen's  
College, Oxford.

[The illustrations of this article have kindly been presented to the  
Journal by the Author, to whom the Editor desires to express  
his thanks for the same.]



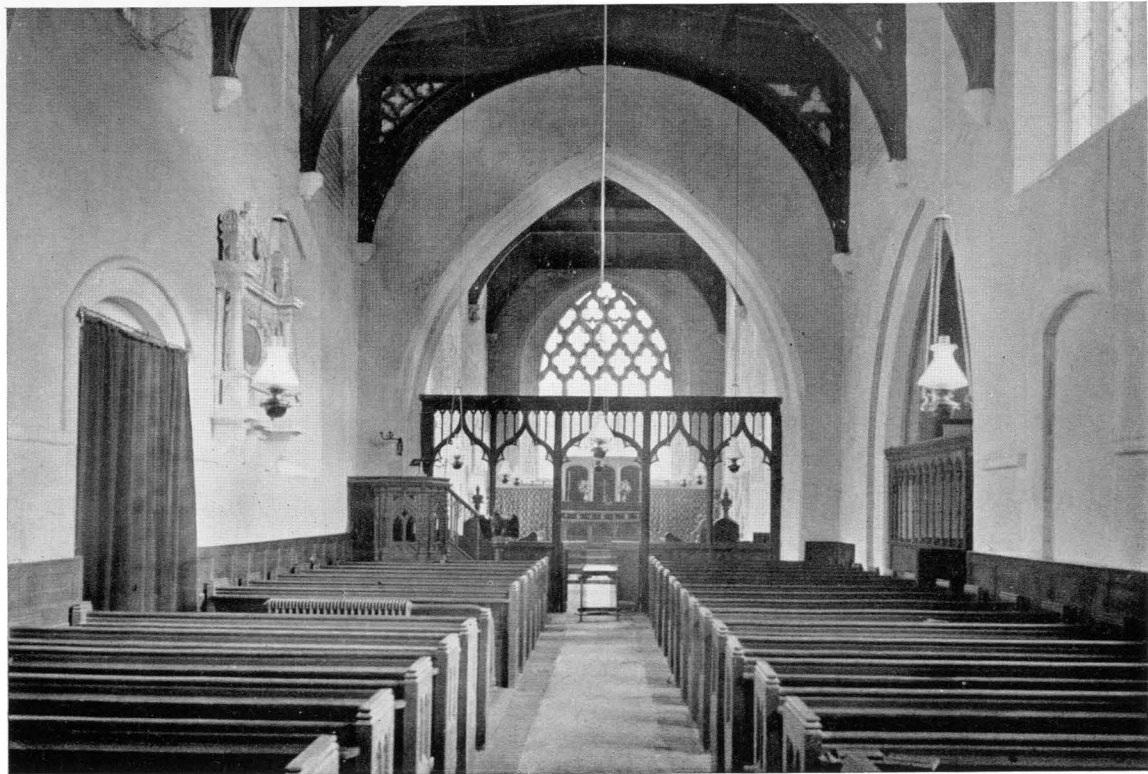
NAVE FROM THE NORTH EAST.



SOUTH SIDE OF CHANCEL.



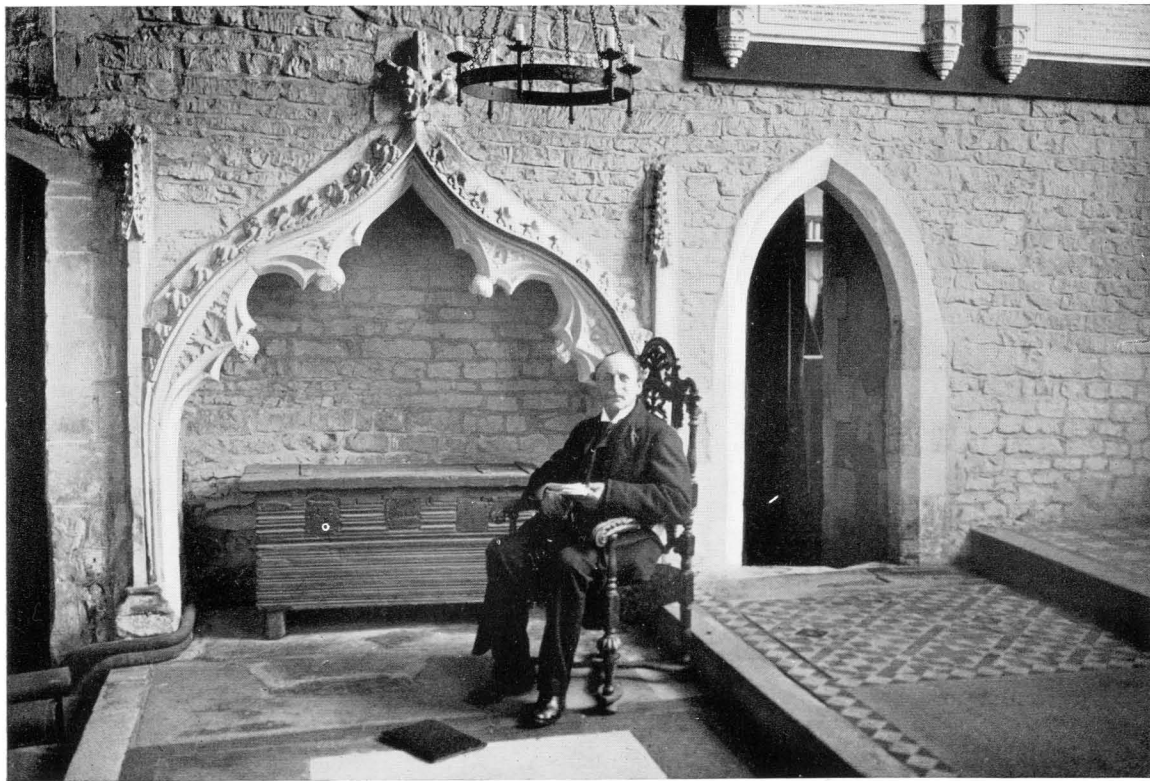
THE NORTH DOORWAY.



INTERIOR LOOKING EAST.



MONUMENT OF SIR ROBERT ACHARD. SEDILIA AND PISCINA, SOUTH SIDE OF CHANCEL.

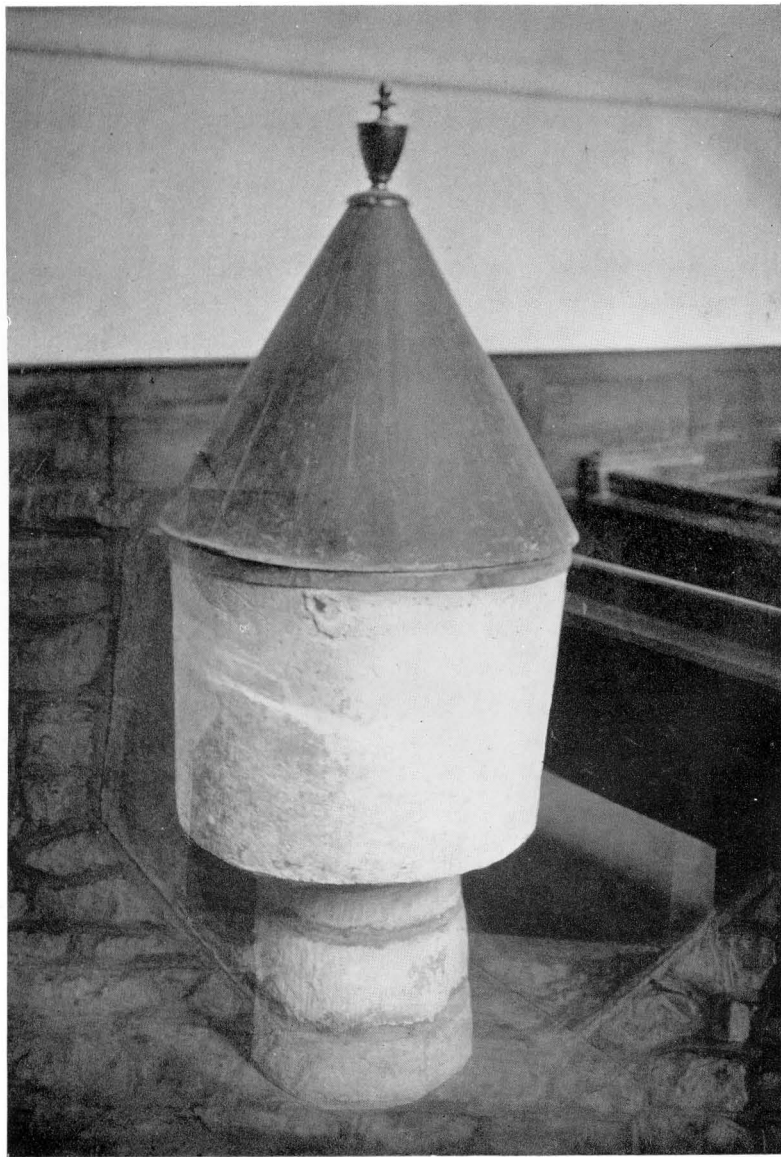


EASTER SEPULCHRE. NORTH SIDE OF CHANCEL.

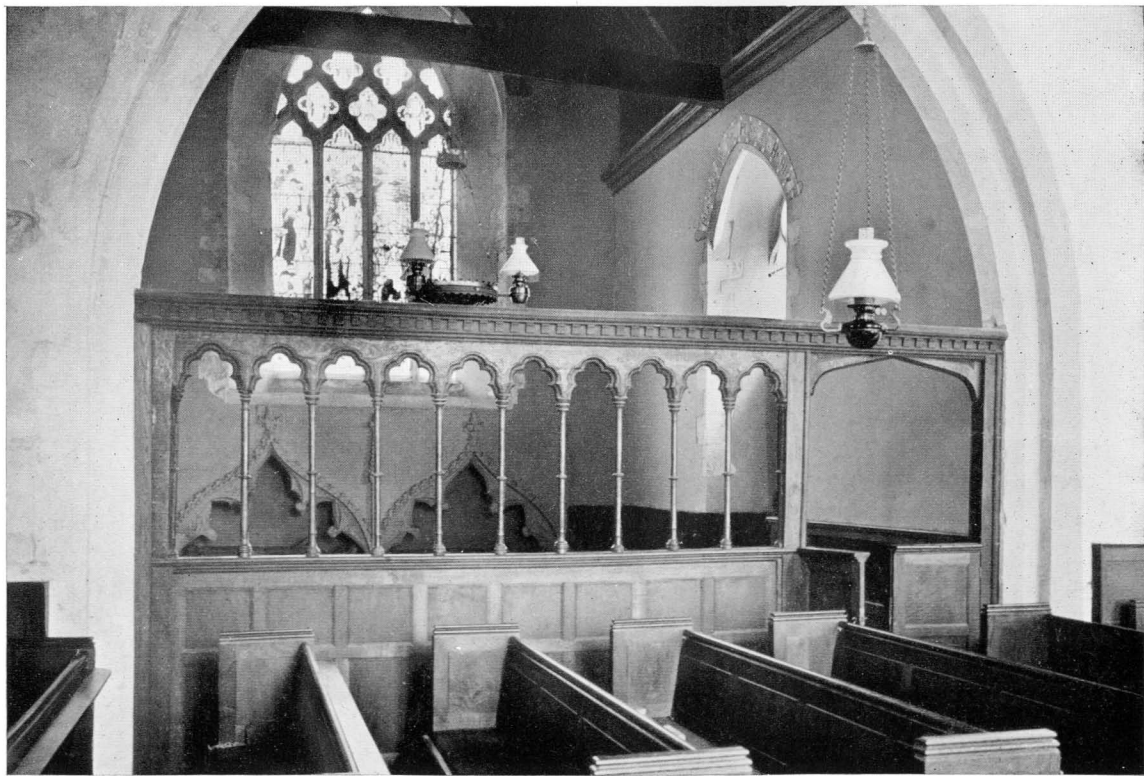




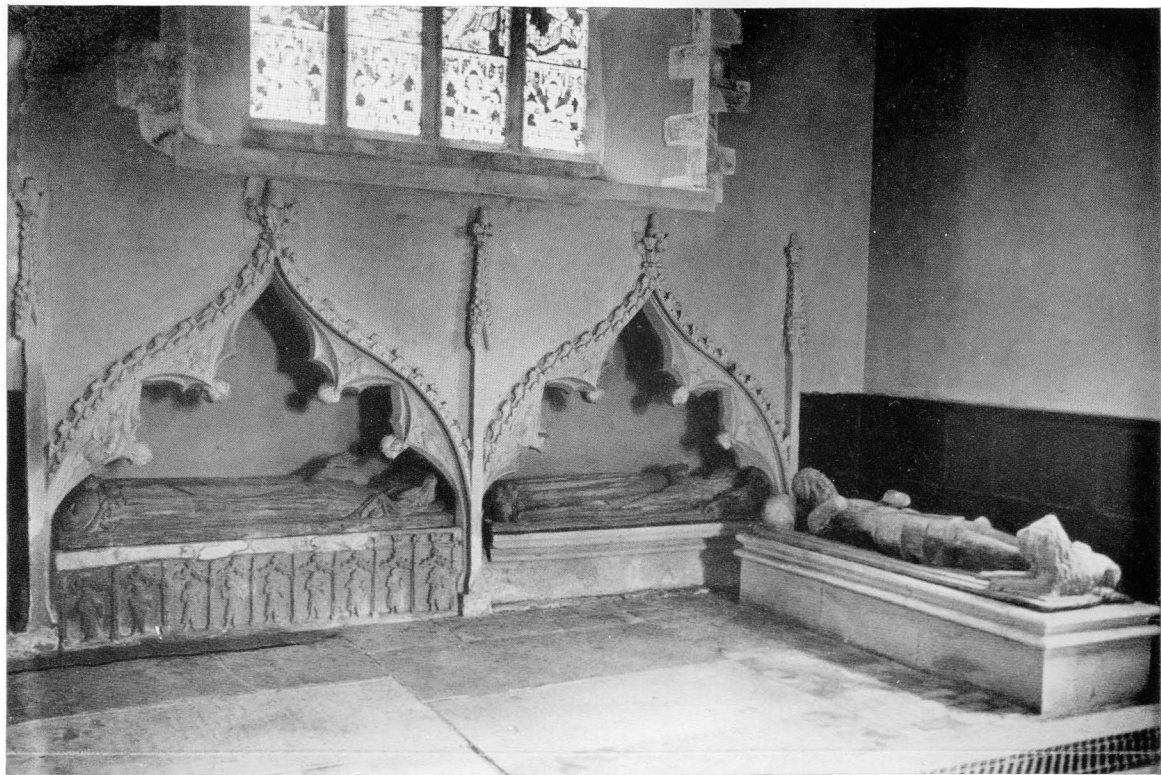
BRASS OF WILLIAM DE HERLESTON. CHANCEL FLOOR.



THE FONT.



SCREEN AND MONUMENTS. SOUTH TRANSEPT.



MONUMENTS OF THE ACHARDS. SOUTH TRANSEPT.