



An Architectural Account of the Churches of Cholsey and South Moreton.

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WHEN we consider the antiquity and early importance of Wallingford and the many stirring events which were enacted there during the dark ages between the evacuation of Britain by the Romans and its re-settlement after the Norman invasion, and when we remember that just beyond, at Dorchester, Birinus commenced his great missionary work and established a religious centre for this portion of our Island, we need not be surprised to find Churches with remains of the early edifices which were founded in Saxon or pre-Norman times, still existing in this neighbourhood. No doubt, as we learn from the Domesday survey, most of the Berkshire parishes were thus early provided with Churches, but many of these were probably but flimsy, perhaps timber, structures, and no portions have survived to our day. We have, however, to the south of Wallingford a group of three Churches, viz., Cholsey, South Moreton and Aston Tirrold, all retaining traces of very early masonry, and though their history is much complicated by drastic restoration in the nineteenth century, it is thought that a description of their salient features may be of sufficient interest to warrant our singling out two of them, viz., Cholsey and South Moreton for our present lecture, reserving Aston Tirrold for a future occasion. There is much to attract the antiquary to this district. Grave controversy has taken place as to its claim to be the site of the important battle of Æscandune, when in the year 871 Ethelred and Alfred defeated and drove back the Danes. Indeed it is thought by some that it was in Aston Church that Ethelred was praying, when the action commenced. At Cholsey in 987 Ethelred founded a monastery to expiate the murder by Queen Elfrida at Corfe Castle of his brother Edward. This was probably destroyed by the Danes in the year 1003. Some early foundations have been discovered, which may denote the site of this Abbey. At the time of the Domesday

survey the Church of Cholsey, or Cealcey as it was then called, is stated to have belonged to the Abbey of Mont St. Michael in Normandy, but it was granted by Henry I with the Manor to the newly founded Abbey of Reading, which retained the Patronage till the dissolution of the Monasteries. The Abbot had a residence here, of which some traces remain to the south of the Church, and no doubt the celebrated tithe barn, 303 feet in length, 54 in width and 51 in height was erected by the Monks as a storehouse for the produce of their fertile lands at Cholsey. This barn also stood near the Church, but was unfortunately pulled down early in the last century. Much more might be written about the history and antiquities of this large and important parish, but we must not delay longer in commencing the architectural description of the Parish Church, the main subject of this paper.

The Church (Fig. 1) dedicated to St. Mary stands some short distance to the west of the present village. It is a large cruciform structure, and has suffered much from injudicious restoration. It consists of a central tower with nave, transepts and Chancel, the full length being 137 feet from east to west by 67 feet across the tower space from north to south. As far as we can see the walls are composed of flint and rubble, but those of the nave have got a coating of roughcast on the outside and of plaster on the interior face, so that it is not possible to assign a precise date to them, especially as many of the distinctive features have been obliterated by the recent insertions and alterations which have taken place. There can be no doubt, however, that portions of the pre-Norman Church still remain. The four tower arches are unusually massive, those opening to the transepts being quite plain.

At three of the angles of the middle stage of the tower (Fig. 2) (a later turret has been added on the south-west side), is some rude masonry arranged in the form of long and short work, which is usually associated with buildings of the Saxon times. Most probably the west portion of the Chancel, the walls of the transepts, and eastern part of the nave may be equally early, though there is no positive evidence to this effect.

About the middle of the 12th century some alterations were carried out, the south doorway of the nave, the north window of the west portion of the Chancel (Fig. 3) and the large arched recess on the east side of the north transept being of this period. The massive arches opening from the tower space to the nave and chancel seem to have been recessed into three orders, and respond shafts with

sculptured capitals added at this date. About a century later, circ. 1260-70, the Chancel (Fig. 4) was lengthened, and the beautiful series of windows erected at the east end, and in the early part of the 14th century the tower was raised and a new turret with entrance from the south transept added to the south-west side. The north window of the north transept is also an insertion of the decorated period of architecture. On the south side of the south transept a perpendicular window was inserted early in the 15th century, and another window (Fig. 5) of the end of that century has supplanted the original Norman light at the west end of the nave.

The post reformation improvements include the removal of the Rood Screen, which has fortunately been preserved in North Moreton Church, the renewal of all the roofs, that of the nave being lowered in pitch and slated, while those of the Chancel and transept are tiled. The interior roof of the nave is a very fair specimen of 18th century work. In the more recent restorations the Norman windows in the nave have been blocked up, and two windows of decorated character have been inserted on either side, and at the west end on the south side of the Chancel two lofty lancets of similar design to those on the north and south of the eastern bays have been introduced. The plain plastered interior walls give the Church a bare and cheerless appearance, which could well be relieved by the judicious application of coloured decoration.

Let us now make our survey of the Church, starting according to our usual custom at the east end of the interior of the Chancel (Fig. 6). The east window is of early decorated character, circ. 1270, and of somewhat unusual design. It has three trefoiled main compartments, and three circular panels, arranged two and one, in the head. It has a well moulded hoodmould, and containing arch with a fillet band resting on banded jamb shafts with foliated capitals. On either side of the main shaft, is a small subsidiary shaft with fillet band, but without capital or base. On the north and south sides of the eastern portion of the Chancel are three (Fig. 7) very beautiful and large lancet lights with a continuous hoodmould with a head at the east and west terminations, and well moulded arches supported on engaged jamb shafts, the two central ones ornamented with the fillet band, and all with large circular capitals. The arrangement of the piscina and sedilia within the cills of the windows on the south side is singular.

Within the cill of the east on south window is a plain shelf, and then on a lower level a slab with two piscina basins. Within

the next window are two plain stone seats, the eastern on a higher level than the western, and in the eastern portion of the west window another plain stone sedile. A stringcourse is carried along under the lancets on the north side, the east wall beneath the window, and as a moulding to the piscina and sedilia terminating westward on a head by the south chancel doorway. This is segmental headed with hoodmould on heads of a crowned figure and an ecclesiastic, and chamfered arch and jambs, on the interior side. To the west of this are two more lancets and the stringcourse in imitation of the original work already described. On the opposite north wall is a rather large Norman window with plain arch, chamfered abacus, and engaged jamb shaft on each side with flat cushion capital.

On the Chancel floor on the north side is a large blue stone (Fig. 8A) with the following inscription on a brass plate :—

“ Hic jacet dns Johes Gate vic' de chelseye qui
obiit vicesimo 1^o die julii anno dni MCCC
Nonogesimo qrto cui' aie propiciet' deus amen.”

On the south side of the chancel is another ledger stone with a small brass effigy of a Priest, about 14½ inches high (Fig. 8B). He is fully vested, and holds the chalice in both hands. Below on another brass plate is the following inscription :—

“ Orate p aia Johis mere qu^odam vicarii
istius ecclie qui obiit xiiii^o die Junii Anno
dni M^oCCCC^oLXXI^o cui' aie ppiciet' de' ame.”

On the north wall is a mural tablet with the following inscription :—

Near this
Place lie interr'd the Remains
of
George Bayly Esq^r
Who died Dec^r 19th 1741
æt : 56.
He married Mary y^e Eldest Daughter
of
Richard Jones Esqr of Ramsbury Manour
in the County of Wilts ;
Was an Affectionate Husband,
A Sincere Friend,
A Truly Honest Man.
To whose Memory
This Monument was erected
By a Wife Sensible of his Merit
and of her own Loss.

On the Chancel floor under the east tower arch are collected some old encaustic tiles with yellow quatrefoils on a red ground. On south of chancel is a portion of an old stall with panelled front and poppy heads. The four tower arches are low and exceedingly massive. They are semi-circular and without any ornamentation. Those opening to the nave and chancel are recessed in three orders, on both east and west faces, but it is suggested that originally they were quite solid and plain like those opening to the transepts, and are portions of the ancient Saxon Church, altered in the Norman period, after the Church had been presented to Reading Abbey. There is a chamfered hoodmould of the Norman date, and massive chamfered abacus, and the inner order rests on half round respond shafts with large capitals. The carving on those to the eastern arch is very crude and looks new. Above the east arch on the Chancel side are painted the arms of Reading Abbey, azure three scallop shells or, surmounted by a mitre, of no great antiquity.

(To be continued).

Feet of Fines for Berkshire.

(Continued from page 24, Vol. 14.)

Transcribed by L. J. Acton Pile.

EASTER 31 GEO. II. *(continued).*

(101.) Robert Watts and John Churchman *and* Thomas Field and Jane, w, and John Godfrey and Unity, w; houses, etc., and land in Wokingham and Easthampstead. £100.

(102.) Richard Belcher *and* William Stirling, gent, and Elizabeth, w, and Katharine Pococke, spinster; house, etc., and lands, etc., in Goosey and in the Liberty of Goosey. £100.

(103.) Philip Olive, gent, *and* Henry Olive, gent; house in New Windsor. £60.

(104.) Edmond Combe, gent, *and* John Ellis and Mary, w; house, etc., and land, etc., in Swallowfield, Co. Wilts, and house, etc., and land, etc., in Swallowfield, Co. Berks. £120.

HILARY 31 GEO. II.

(105.) John Pain and William Overton *and* Jacob Wells and Constant, w; house, etc., and land, in Great Farringdon. £60.

CHOLSEY CHURCH.

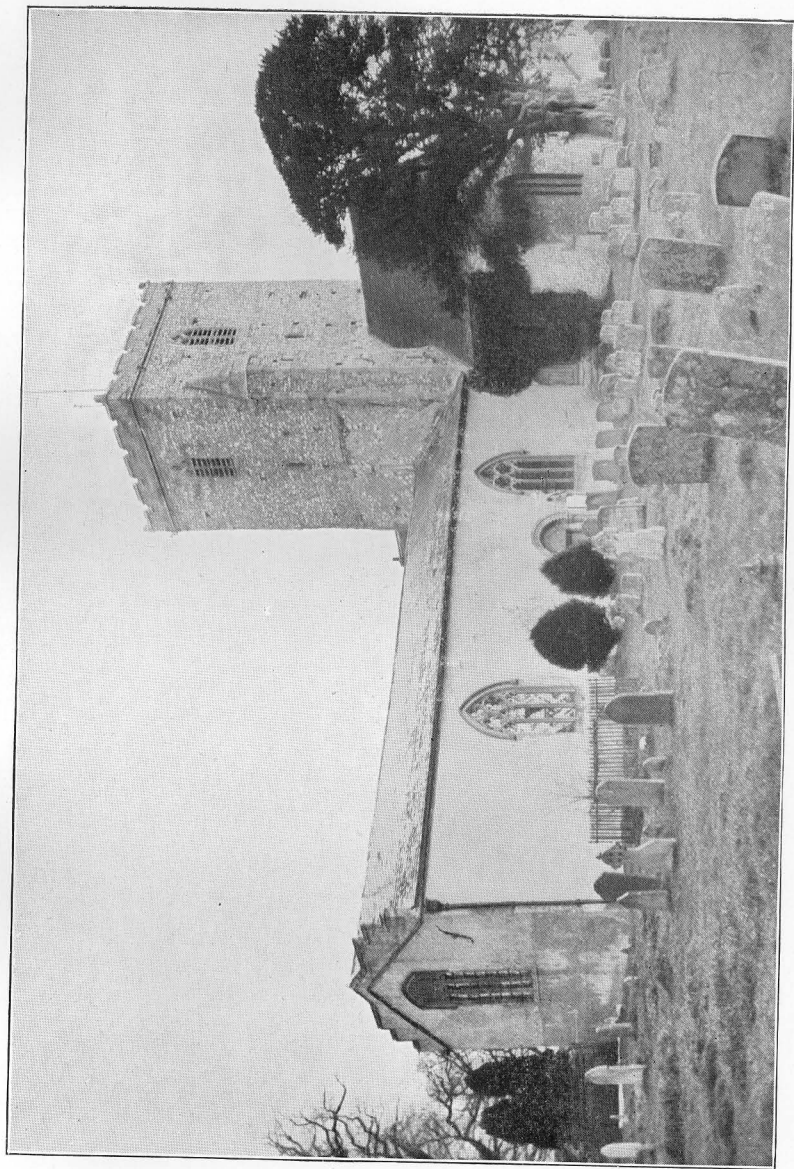


Fig. 1.

GENERAL VIEW, SOUTH WEST.

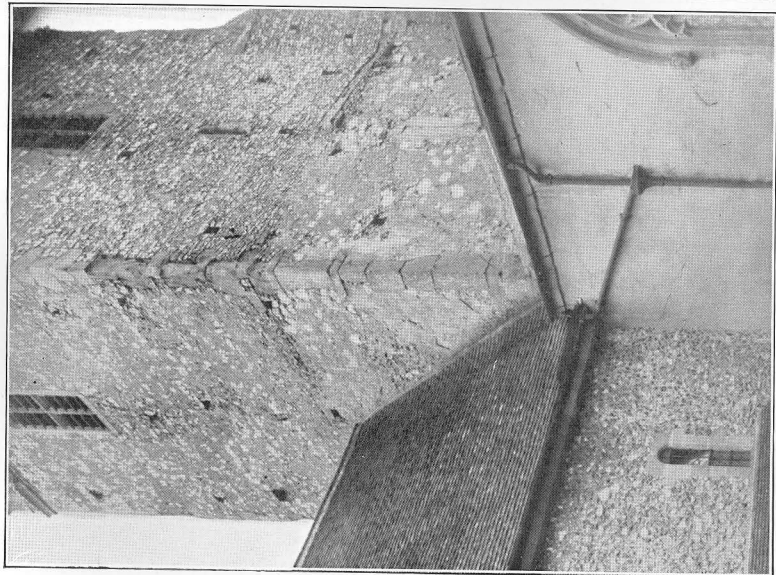
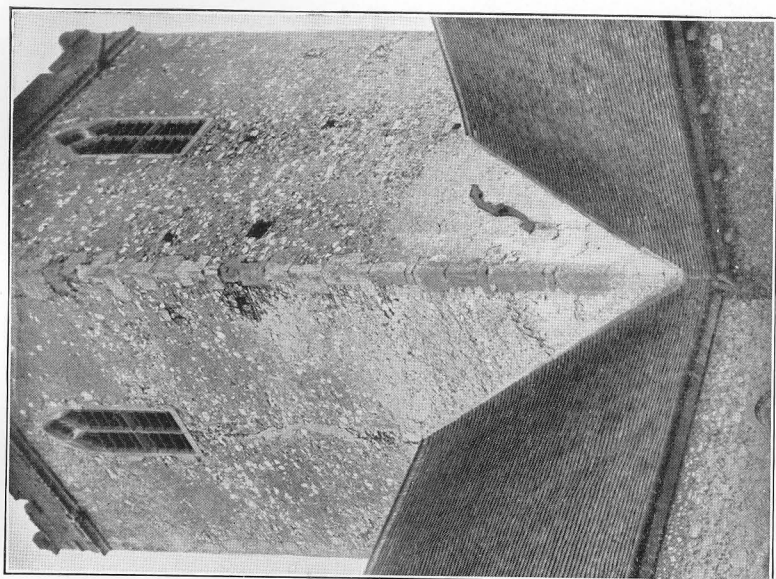


Fig. 2. NORTH WEST ANGLE OF TOWER.



NORTH EAST ANGLE OF TOWER

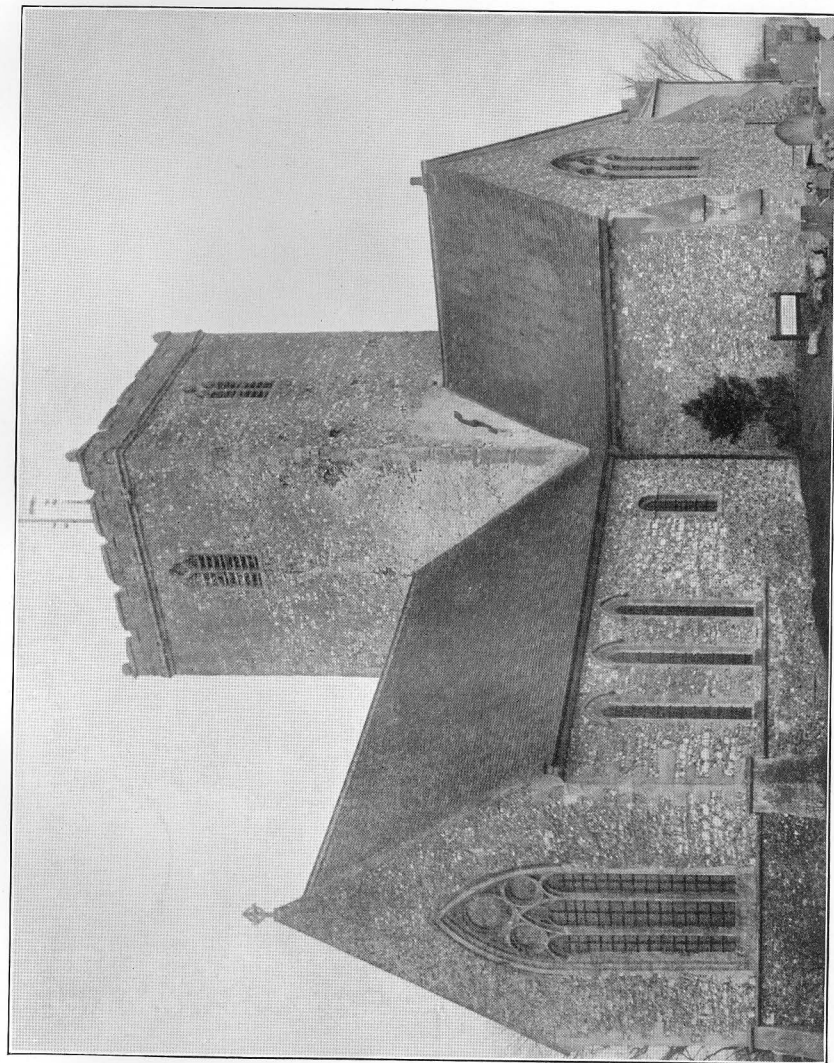


Fig. 3.

GENERAL VIEW, NORTH EAST.

CHOLSEY CHURCH.

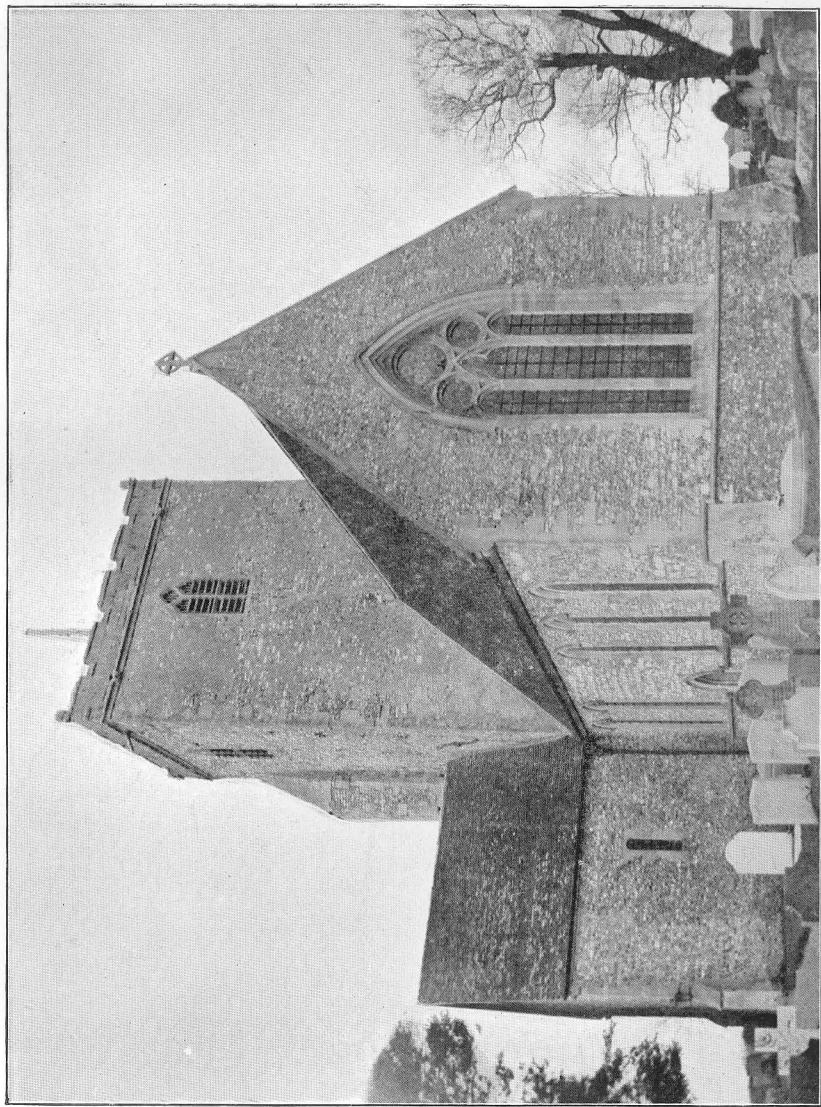


Fig. 4.

GENERAL VIEW, SOUTH WEST.

CHOLSEY CHURCH.

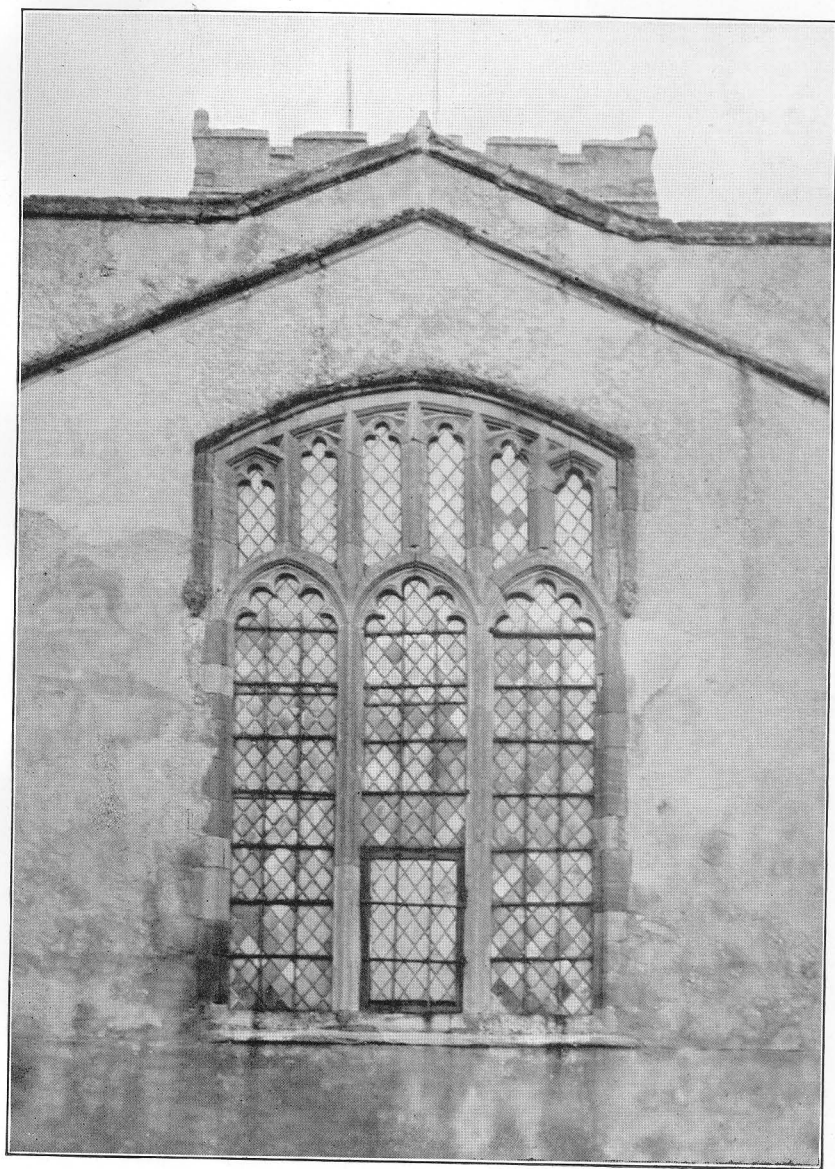


Fig. 5.

WEST WINDOW.

CHOLSEY CHURCH.



Fig. 6.

CHANCEL. LOOKING EAST.

CHOLSEY CHURCH.

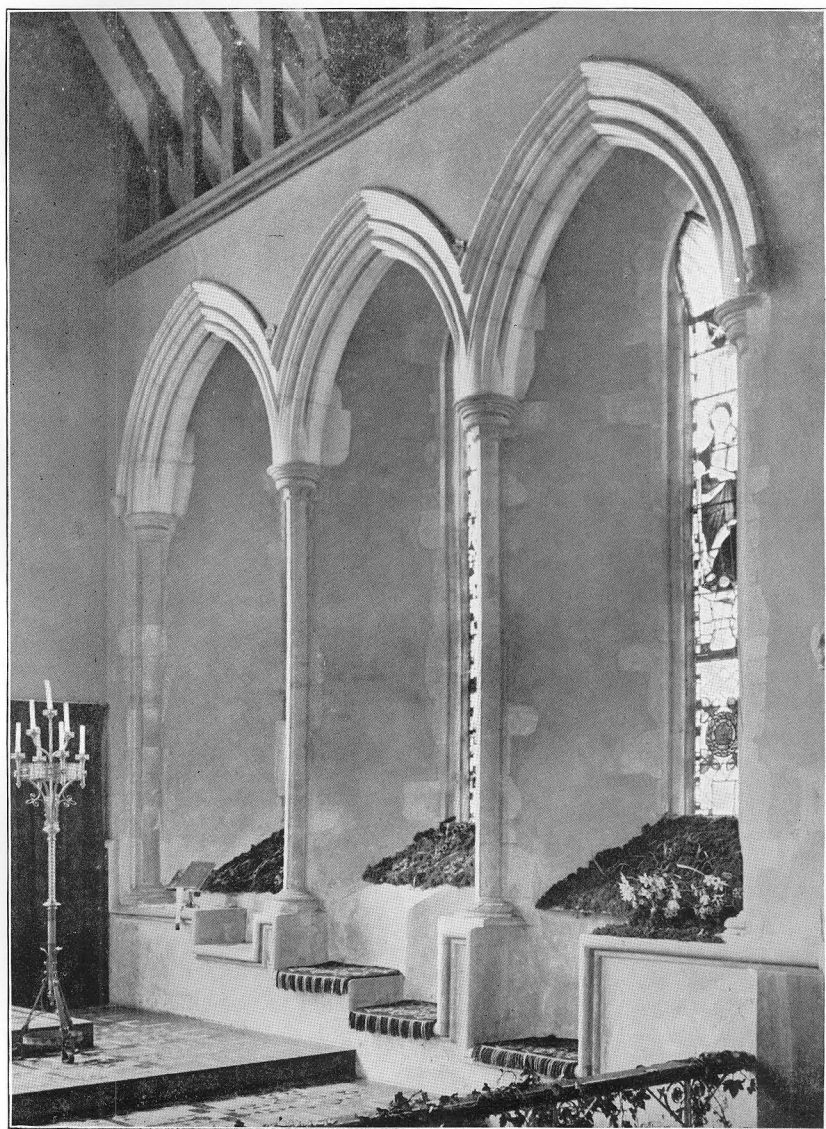


Fig. 7. ARCADE AND SEDILIA (SOUTH CHANCEL).

