



## An Architectural Account of the Churches of North Moreton, Brightwell, Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham.

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LAST year I contributed a short paper on the architectural features of the interesting Churches of Cholsey and South Moreton, and as our Society has since visited Cholsey, North Moreton, Brightwell, and Little and Long Wittenham, I think it will be a fitting corollary to the former paper, if I bring under the notice of the members the many points of interest in the four last mentioned Churches, especially as the excursion was poorly attended, and only a small party took advantage of the opportunity to pay a personal visit to this district. No doubt much information can be collected as to the early history of these villages, lying as they do under the shadow of Sinodun Hill, and close to the ancient settlements at Wallingford and Dorchester, but our special object will be to deal with the architectural details of the Churches, and these will furnish us with ample materials for our paper to-day.

The village of North Moreton is about a mile from South Moreton,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Cholsey, and about the same distance from Didcot junction and Wallingford. The Manor seems to have come into the possession of the Stapleton family in the 13th century, and though it is doubtful as to whether they had a residence in the parish, or a place of sepulture in the Church, it is certain that the erection of this beautiful structure is in great measure due to their generosity, and if they did not utilise it as a repository for their bodies, they attempted to do so for the repose of their souls. A very interesting account of this great family appears in the last

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.

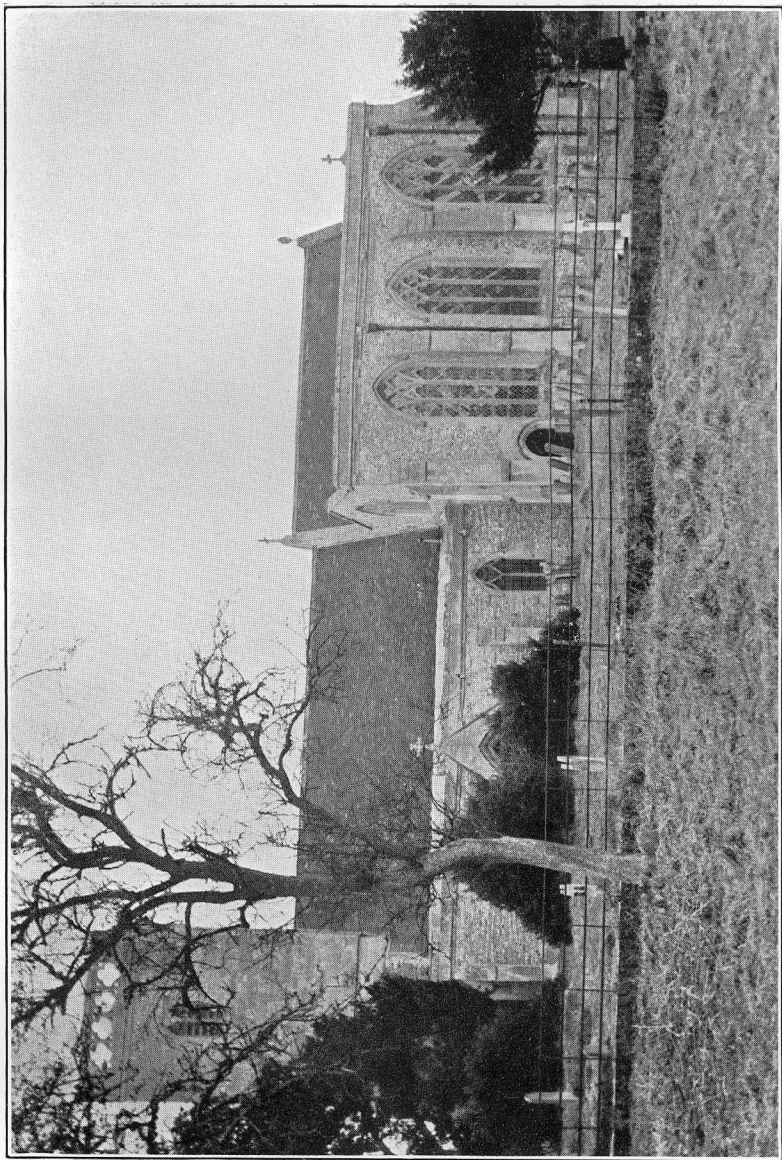


Fig. 1.

VIEW FROM THE SOUTH.

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.



Fig. 2.

NORTH SIDE OF NAVE.

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.

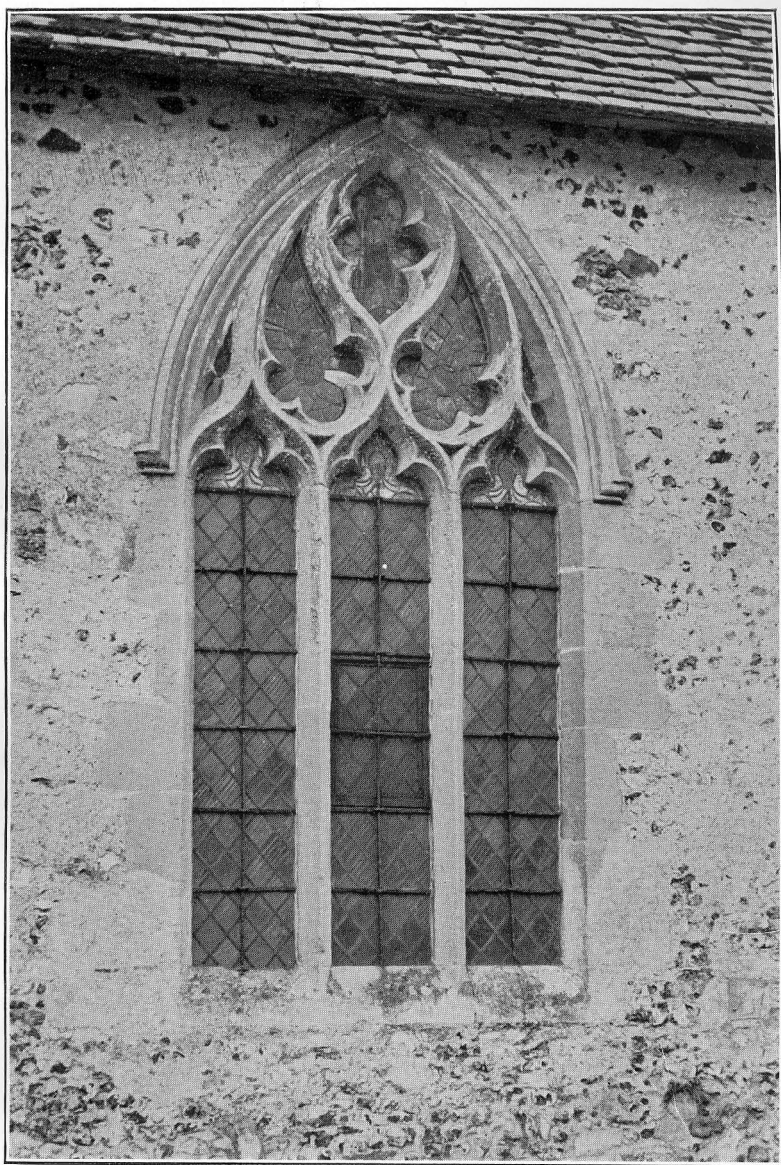


Fig. 3.

WINDOW NORTH SIDE OF NAVE.

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.

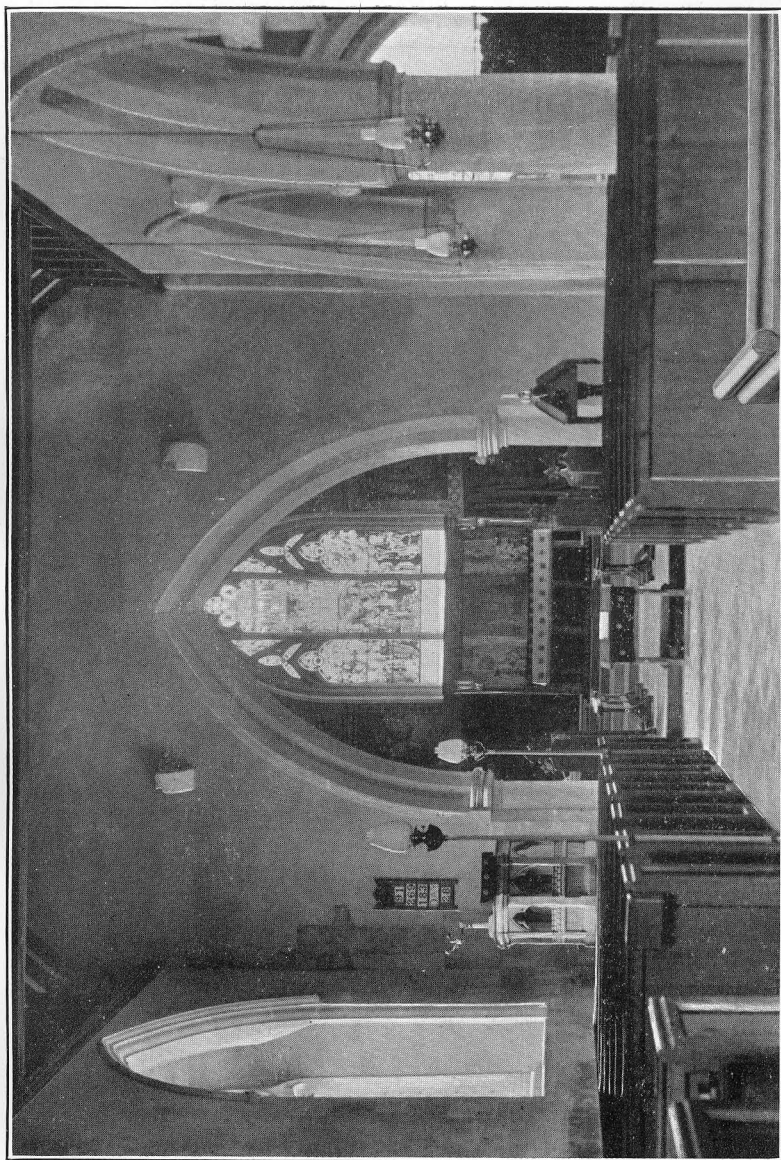


Fig. 4.

INTERIOR LOOKING EAST.



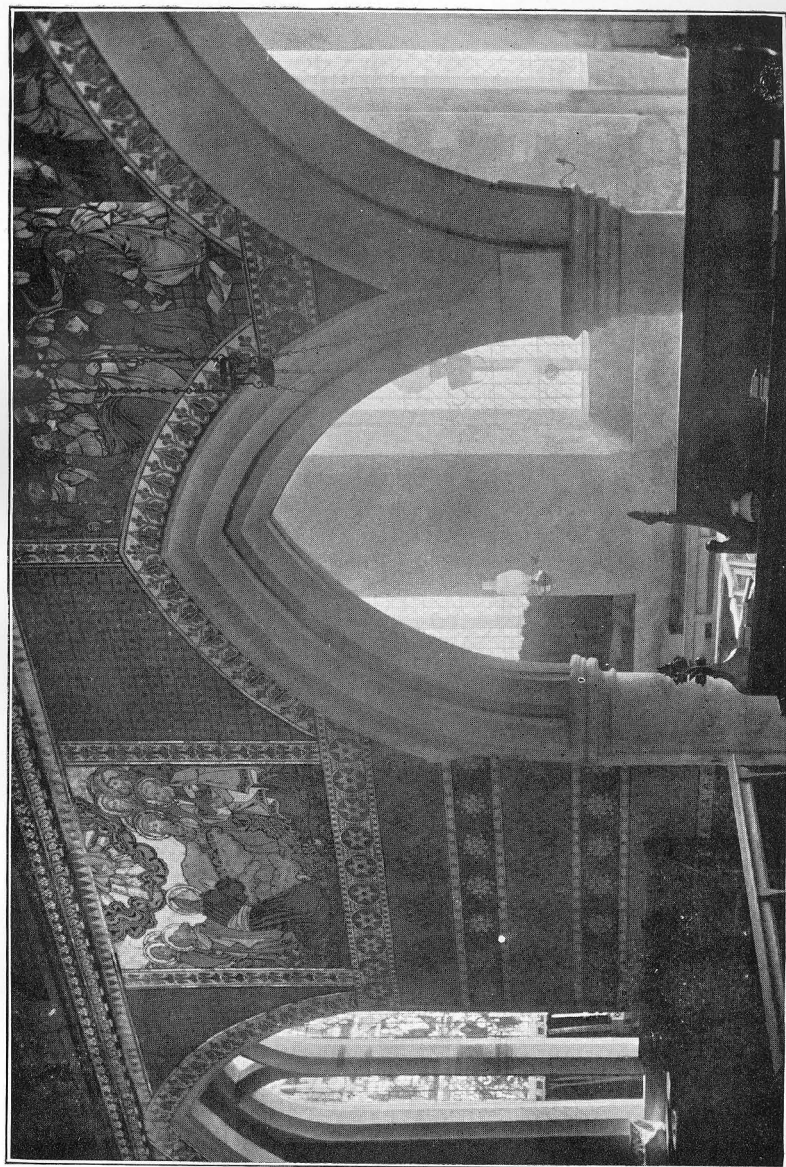


FIG. 5. ARCHES OPENING FROM CHANCEL TO CHANTY CHAPEL.

number of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal, contributed by that able antiquary, the Rev. J. E. Field, Vicar of Benson, Oxfordshire.

The Church of North Moreton, (Fig. 1) dedicated to All Saints, consists of a west tower, nave, south aisle, chancel and south chapel. It is entirely built of stone and a fine structure for so small and out of the way a parish, and its architectural history is not very clear. No doubt there was a Church here in the Norman period, and an elaborately carved corbel now in the Chapel, and the plain tub font in the nave have been preserved, but nothing else has been retained, as far as one can see of this ancient edifice, and a drastic rebuilding appears to have taken place in the second half of the 13th century or transition from the Early English to the Decorated period. Of the Church then erected, the nave arcade and the arches from the aisle and Chancel to the Chapel remain, and circa. 1270, the Chancel was completed as we now see it. About 25 years after this the beautiful Chantry Chapel of St. Nicholas was founded by Sir Miles Stapleton, the former chapel being enlarged and continued eastward, so as to bring the east wall into line with the east wall of the Chancel. After a lapse of another fifty years several very elegant flamboyant windows (Fig. 2 and 3) were inserted in the walls of the nave and aisle, and the north and south doorways appear to be of the same date. The tower was added in the fifteenth century, and the timber roofs are mainly of this period.

Let us now according to our usual custom make our perambulation of the Church (Fig. 4), starting in the interior of the Chancel. The east window is a very fine example of the Transitional period between the Early English and Decorated styles, but its symmetry is spoiled by the lower portion being hidden by the present reredos, and it is only on the exterior that its admirable proportions can be properly appreciated. It is composed of three trefoil headed lancets, the centre light being carried right through to the head of the containing arch, while the side lights terminate lower down and have a trefoiled compartment above them filling up the space on either side of the central light, and all within the single containing arch. On the north side are two windows, each with two lancets within a containing arch. The mouldings are fluted. On the south side near the east end is a similar window, (Fig. 5) now opening into the Stapleton Chantry. On this same side two low arches open into the Chantry Chapel. They have two fluted orders and rest on a central circular column, and semi-circular responds

with well moulded capitals. The Chancel walls have been decorated with paintings in recent times, but the colouring is too dark, and the effect in conjunction with the sombre glass in the east and north windows, is by no means happy.

The Chapel of St. Nicholas, or Stapleton Chantry, is the most interesting portion of the Church, and a fine example of the Decorated style of architecture. It was founded and endowed by Sir Miles de Stapleton, a descendant of an important Yorkshire family, who are first recorded in a document of date, February 17th, 1216, when Nicholas de Stapleton was appointed constable of Middleham Castle. His son Nicholas, who was a Judge of the Kings Bench, married a daughter of Milo de Basset, and through her became possessed of property in North Moreton and the neighbourhood. His son, Milo de Stapleton, of Richmondshire, soldier, statesman, and churchman, as he has been called, succeeded his father as his eldest surviving son in 1290. He was twice summoned to Parliament as a Baron, and was killed at the battle of Falkirk in 1298. Besides other Church restorations in Yorkshire, Sir Miles founded this Chantry at North Moreton, and appears to have been engaged on the work in 1296. In March 1299 an enquiry was held before the Jurors of Berkshire, to ascertain whether any loss would result to the King or to anyone else, if Stapleton was allowed to give and assign "one messuage, one virgate of land and two acres of meadow at North Moreton for the endowment of two chaplains and their successors to celebrate mass daily in the Chapel of St. Nicholas there." The Jurors found there would be no damage to the King, but only to the Lady Joan de Valence, widow of William de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, the late King's, Henry III., half brother, and as she made no objection, the arrangement was duly carried out. A meadow of 17 acres at the back of the Church Farm, enclosed on two sides by an ancient moat, is still tithe free, and known as the Chantry Field. It has been stated that at this same time the above named Countess of Pembroke was rebuilding the Church, probably the Chancel, but the style points to a period at least twenty years earlier. It is interesting through the medium of the record just given to obtain an approximate date for the beautiful Chantry Chapel. It has one large window on the east, three on the south, and as it is much loftier than the south aisle, one more on the west side, above the arch. The east window (Fig. 6) is very fine Decorated of five lights with three tiers of trefoils in the head having four, three and two in the several rows.



NORTH MORETON CHURCH.

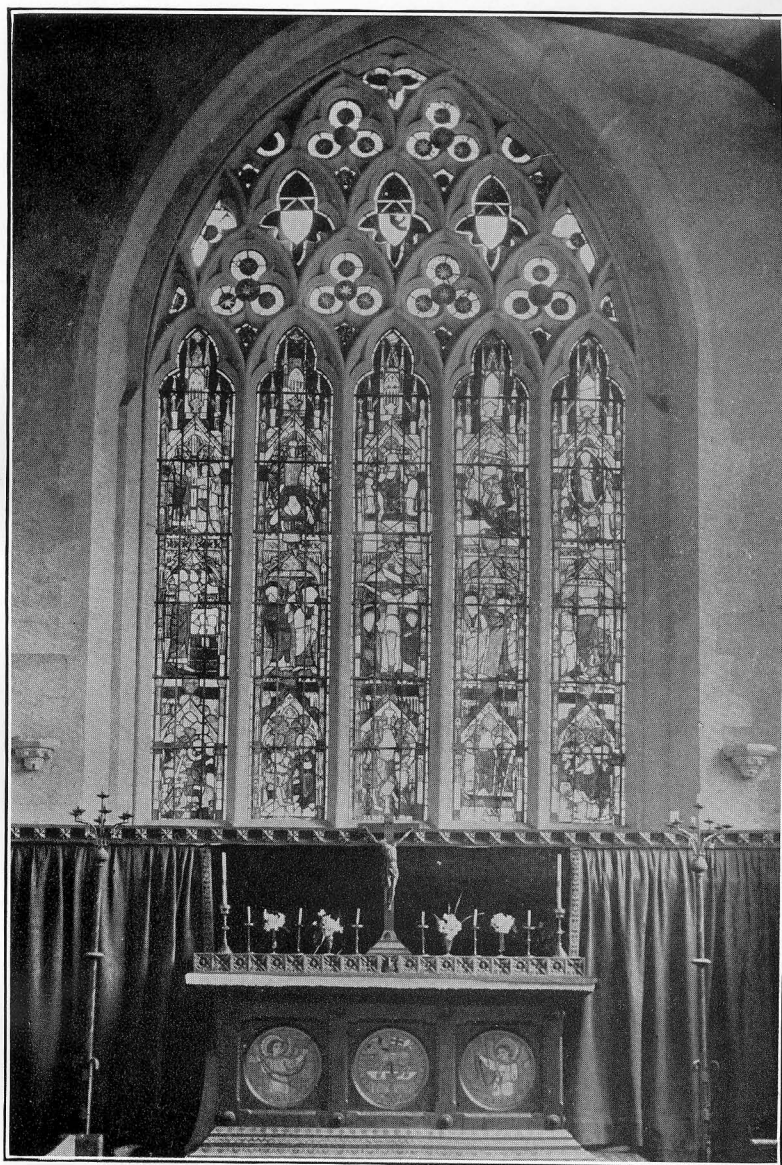


Fig. 6. EAST WINDOW OF CHANTRY CHAPEL.

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.



Fig. 7.

PISCINA IN CHANTRY CHAPEL.

NORTH MORETON CHURCH.



Fig. 8. NORMAN CORBEL IN CHANTRY CHAPEL,

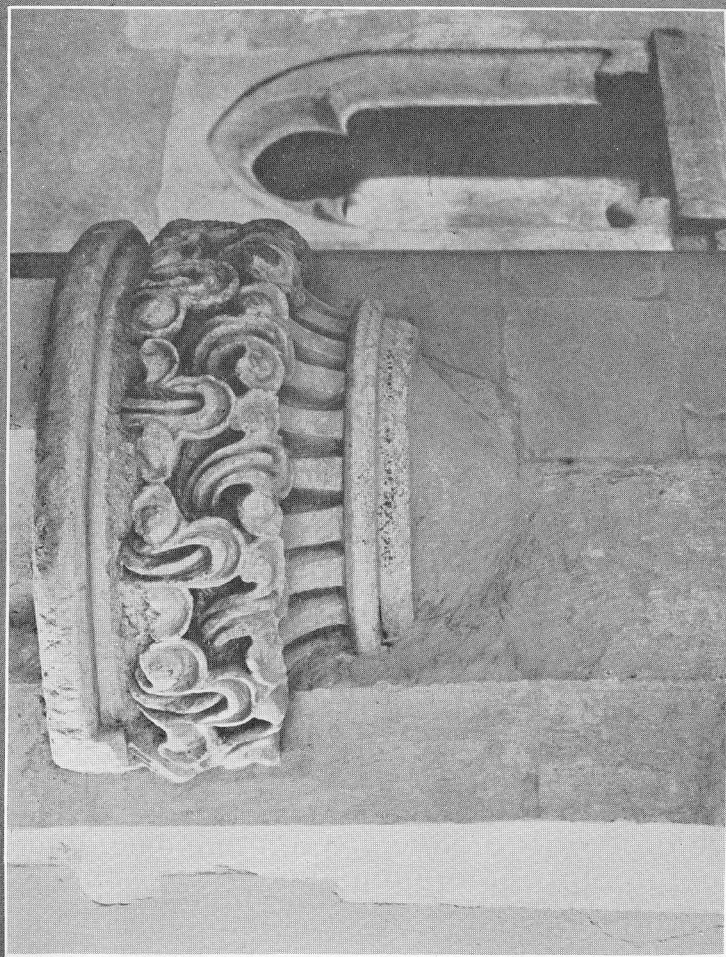


Fig. 9. SOUTH CAPITAL OF ARCH FROM AISLE TO CHANTRY CHAPEL.



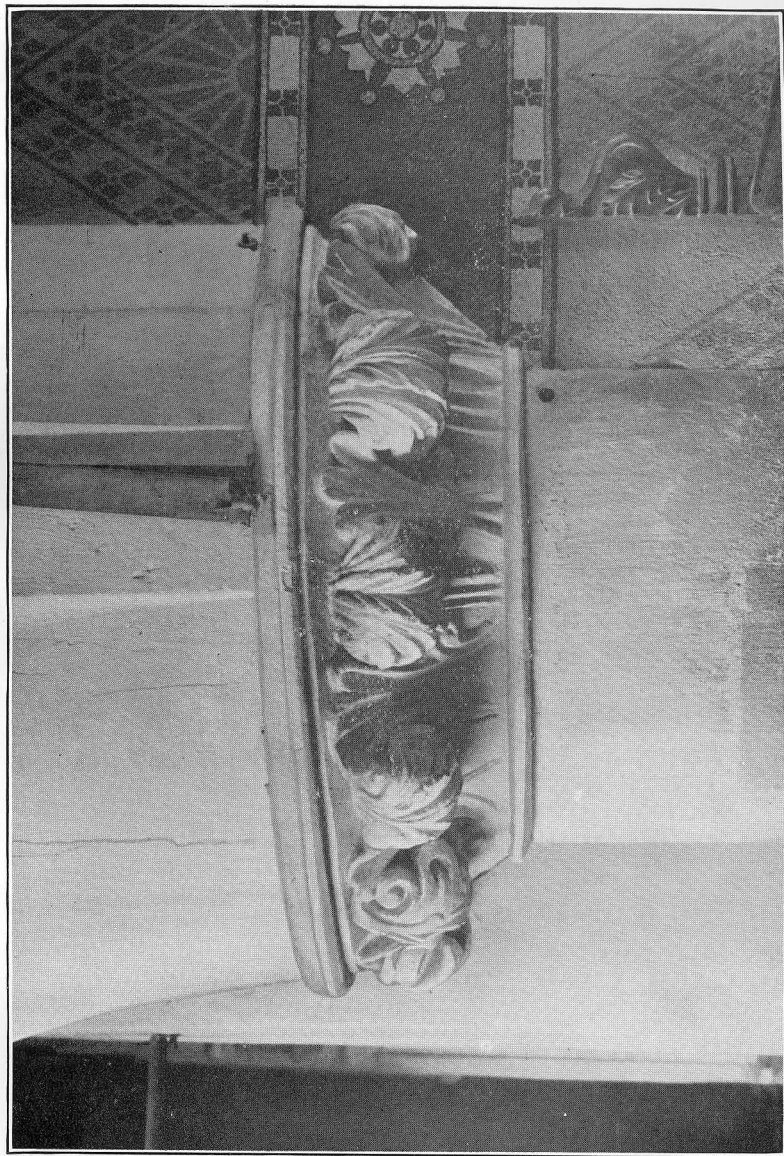


Fig. 10. NORTH CAPITAL OF ARCH FROM AISLE TO CHANTRY CHAPEL.



The windows on the south side are of the same height of three lights, the east and west with intersecting mullions, the middle one more closely following the design of the east window. The west window is also of three lights of similar design. All the mouldings in the heads of the several lights retain their cusping. A stringcourse with half-round moulding is carried along the east wall. On either side of the east window is a small bracket for image, enriched with the ball-flower ornament. In the south-east corner is a very beautiful angle piscina (Fig. 7), which is engraved in Rickman's Gothic Architecture. It has a richly carved canopy with hoodmould resting on head terminations, and with a course of the ball-flower ornament carried round in a hollow. A central and side shafts support two ogee-headed arches, and a large vesica-shaped opening in the head of the canopy. There is one nicely moulded basin. Let into the north wall is a large block of white stone, the purpose of which is not very clear. On it is placed a large stone corbel (Fig. 8) of the Norman period, with a mutilated head on the lower part and beading above, a relic of the earlier church. The arch opening to the aisle belongs to the 1270 period. It has a hoodmould and two fluted orders resting on large capitals ornamented with very bold conventional foliage (Fig. 9 and 10). The roof of the Chapel is flat, and probably a restoration of late 15th century date. On the floor is a well carved cross coffin lid, and two more mutilated stones which may possibly have covered the remains of some members of the Stapleton family or of the early Chantry priests.

The glass in the east window (Fig. 6) is very fine, and without doubt the most remarkable example remaining in the County. It was brought under the notice of the Royal Archæological Institute on April 4th, 1856, by the late Mr. Winston, who described the window as being in a most damaged condition, and urgently in need of immediate preservation. He mentioned it as being on the south side of the Chapel, which must have been an error, and gave a list of the subjects in the main panels, which were then in their proper position. He stated the probable cost of restoration would be about £50, and that the Society of Antiquaries had already promised £10 towards that sum (see Archæological Journal, XIII. 274). On March 1st, 1861, Mr. Winston again brought the matter before the Royal Archæological Institute, and reported that the glass had been duly restored. It appears that it had been taken up to London to be repaired, and that the whole window had been re-leaded, and

plain white opaque glass inserted where fragments were missing. The whole cost was £31 16s. od., so that the work had been carried out as a labour of love (see *Archæological Journal*, XVIII. 152). He fixed the date of it as being between 1300 and 1310, and no doubt it formed part of the original scheme of the founder of the Chantry. The ruby and blue colouring is very rich and the whole scheme is replete with interest.

A great deal of renovation has been necessary in the upper lights, but the original design seems to have been adhered to. Within the top compartment is a plain yellow medallion on a red ground with a beaded border. Within the two trefoiled divisions in the next row is the blazing star on a black ground in the centre, and within the three cusped recesses round it the blazing star on the black ground within a circular medallion, having a black scroll pattern on a white ground on the border. Within each of the three trefoiled compartments in the next row has been a shield on a red ground. The Stapleton lion reversed remains on the middle shield, the two others being now plain. All the shields have been suspended from a bar above. Within the four trefoiled compartments of the next row, the arrangement and design is the same as in the second row, with the blazing star on the black ground, and within circular borders in the three divisions.

The main panels are each divided into three compartments, and have very rich canopies in the head. These are coloured yellow on a very rich ruby red ground. In the upper part of each has been depicted a window, but only the three on the north remain, with four lights and varied tracery in the head. The several compartments are separated by a band, red between the lower and middle, and blue between the middle and upper series with a line of battlements above. The groundwork of the various subjects is a deep blue.

Commencing with the lower panel on the north side, we see in the upper left-hand corner what seems to be a defaced head, while below is a soldier in full armour and holding a sword, falling off his horse; another soldier also on horseback, and with hands clasped in prayer, being portrayed behind him. This represents the Conversion of St. Paul. It is out of its proper place, having been transposed with the lower panel in the fourth row. In the next compartment above is a bishop giving the benediction over three figures in a yellow tub, while on a beam above are hanging what appear to be three hams. This no doubt records the well-known miracle of St.

Nicholas in bringing to life the three students who had been murdered and their bodies salted down to be sold as pickled pork. In the upper compartment is, in the middle, an upright column, meant, I think, for a wall. On the north side is a Bishop with pastoral staff, giving with his left hand through an opening some object into the hands of a female figure on the other side, another person standing behind her. This is said to represent St. Nicholas dispensing charity to the poor, or more probably the legend of his providing dowries for the daughters of the poor nobleman.

In the lower panel of the second series is, on the right, a figure in light brown robe and red cloak giving the benediction with the right hand, and with book in the left. On the left is a tonsured figure with blue tunic holding a net in his hands, there is a boat in the background and some large quaint fishes below. This represents the miraculous draught of fishes, and is the first of the series relating to St. Peter. In the next compartment is, on the left, a figure in red with cruciform nimbus, holding a book and large key towards a second figure with red tunic and white cloak, but with the head destroyed. This represents Our Lord presenting the keys to St. Peter. In the upper panel is a figure fastened to a green cross head downwards, and an executioner on either side tying up his feet. This portrays the Crucifixion of St. Peter.

In the next middle series is in the lower picture Our Lord in red with cruciform nimbus, the face is destroyed, fastened to a pillar, and a man with a scourge on either side, thus depicting the Scourging. In the next is the Crucifixion; Our Lord with white loin cloth extended on a green cross, and with defaced scroll above His head. A figure in red on north, and in white with green cloak on south, no doubt representing St. John and the Blessed Virgin Mary, their heads have been destroyed. In the upper panel is the Resurrection. Our Lord in red holding a Cross and Banner in the left, and giving the Benediction with the right hand, is stepping out of the tomb, while a small kneeling figure is introduced on either side.

In the next series, is in the lower panel, a figure, head destroyed, of a bishop with his deacon behind him giving the benediction, with another figure also with a pastoral staff kneeling before him. This is called St. Nicholas preaching, but probably represents the Consecration of the saint as bishop of Myra. It is out of its place, and has, as has been stated, been transposed with the lower panel of the first series. In the next compartment, the glass has been much

injured, but there is a seated figure with sword and another in green and yellow standing before him. This is interpreted as St. Paul before Felix. In the upper division is a kneeling figure in a yellow cloak and an executioner with uplifted sword about to behead him. This is described as the martyrdom of St. Paul.

In the last series on the south side, in the lowest compartment we see a figure of Our Lord with cruciform nimbus in a pale blue dress and red cloak, another figure with book and pale brown dress behind Him and two figures in front of Him, one with yellow dress and two keys, the other with green dress and book. All these have the nimbus round the head. Our Lord is leaning over a female in white recumbent on a couch, and with folded hands. She has not the nimbus. One might naturally assume this to be the raising of Jairus' daughter, Our Lord being accompanied by his three favourite apostles, as recorded in the Gospel, but it is claimed to represent the death of the Blessed Virgin, and the tradition of the appearance of her Divine Son on that occasion. In the next picture is a bier in the centre with yellow coverlet, and a figure with cross, one in white the other in green, on either side. Below the bier is a small figure trying to overturn it. This is considered to be the Burial of the Virgin. In the upper panel is a figure in white, the face gone, within a vesica supported by four angels, and a figure with hands upraised below. This is said to represent the Assumption of the Virgin, and completes this most interesting series.

*(To be continued.)*

MR. W. P. COURTNEY sends to the *Westminster Gazette* an early instance of the use of a well-known phrase. It is to be found in no less familiar a volume than Hearne's Collections (Oxford Historical Society's publications, VIII, p. 50).

1722-3. Feb. 27 (Ash Wed.) This Afternoon at one Clock, Magd. Coll. great Bell went for Dr. Thomas Stafford, Fellow of the College, who died this Morning in the College, after a few days' Illness. He took his Master of Arts Degree, Febr. 5, 1666, and that of Bach. & Dr. of Civil Law, June 13, 1678. He was a Man that lov'd to get Money, but was, however, very kind to his poor Relations. There is this Story going of him that some of the College talking once of doing something by way of Benevolence or Generosity, upon some publick Account, and he asking for what reason it was answered, *to do good to Posterity*. *Posterity*, says the Dr., *What good will Posterity do for us?*

Strangely enough, Mr. Courtney remarks, the last act of the Doctor was to benefit those that came after him—future demies of Magdalen.