

## DOWNTON CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

By the REV. A. D. HILL.

The size and dignity of this Church, and especially of the chancel, might lead one to suppose that it had been connected with some monastic establishment; but as a matter of fact the history of the parish shows a different and more exceptional explanation of its construction.

King Cynegils, before his death in 643, having become a Christian under the teaching of S. Birinus, the Apostle of Wessex, resolved to found a Church at Winchester; and his son Cynewalc, or Kenwalch, eventually carried out his father's wish, and endowed the new Church at Winchester with the gift of his own private Manor of Downton. The charter confirming this gift is transcribed in the *Cartularium Saxonicum*, and a copy of it may be seen in the Vestry. The Bishops of Winchester were, therefore, Lords of the Manor of Downton, and, no doubt, from time to time resided either at "Old Court" house, which stood on the west bank of the river, or at a house of the demesne of the Bishop in the Church Tithing, where the fifteenth century Parsonage Farm-house now stands. To their care and interest we are probably indebted for much of the building of this Church.

In 1382 the Church of Downton was appropriated to "the Bishop's table" for the maintenance of William of Wykeham's Scholars; and in 1385, William of Wykeham (with the license of the Crown and of Urban VI.) appropriated it to his new College of *Saint-Mary Winton* at Winchester, to which it continues to belong. The benefice was originally a Rectory, but at the date of this appropriation it became a Vicarage.

### *The Nave.*

The Church presents three distinct periods of building. The oldest is that of the western part of the nave, in which we have three bays with late Norman arcade and pointed arches. The capitals on the north side are original; those on the south are mainly modern imitations, in cement, of the old work. The half capital of the western respond is original, and is worthy of notice as having an uncommon bead ornament. There are no remains of the Norman aisles. In the thirteenth century the Church was lengthened eastwards—a very common procedure—destroying all evidence of the apse which possibly ended the Norman Church.

Two lofty bays of Transitional character form the east extension of the

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Members of the Institute at Downton, Aug. 4th, 1887.

nave. The plan now conceived was to make a large cruciform church with central tower, which was carried on during the thirteenth century, by building the Early English transepts and the eastern and western tower arches. The northern side of this addition to the nave appears to be earlier work than the south, but, from evidence in the masonry of the arches, I think the work was delayed in building, but all completed at the same time. The roof of the nave was made at this period (thirteenth century) continuous over nave and aisles. That over the south aisle has since been raised, but I can point out evidences of the original plan on the outer wall, where the nave joins the south transept.

The west window has, unfortunately, lost its tracery, but is of the fourteenth century, and had Geometrical Decorated work, of which enough traces remain to restore the design. The south door is of the same date.

The font is Early English, and had a cusped shallow arcade—which has been so repaired at the top as to give the appearance of Norman work.

#### *The Tower and Transepts.*

I place the Early English work here within the episcopate of the energetic Godfrey de Lucy, who built the Early English Presbytery in his Cathedral at Winchester, 1189-1204. The eastern tower arch is a fine specimen of Early English work, with clustered shafts and rich mouldings. The western arch is plain, with flat soffit and chamfered angles. The western piers of the tower have been renewed under the following circumstances. In 1791 Lord Radnor raised the tower 30 ft. above its present height, and the additional weight appears to have been too much for the piers to bear. The western piers were heavily buttressed, and an arch built below the original one, the opening being narrowed to 9 ft. At the restoration in 1860 the tower was lowered to its original height, and the north-west pier almost rebuilt piece by piece.

The north and south tower arches must have been either cut through walls containing smaller arches, or have been added to unfinished work at a later period; the hollow mouldings of the arch, and modern imitation of clustered shafts, clearly denoting the difference in date. The filling in behind and above these arches was found to be built with an inferior mortar, which more than anything else had occasioned the weakness of the base of the tower.

The transepts have at their ends plain triplets of lancet windows, the heads of which have lost their character by restoration; and single lancets on their western side. A more richly moulded lancet window remains in the east of the south transept; the other eastern windows are later insertions, being handsome square-headed two-light windows, with Perpendicular mouldings and cusping. In the window behind the organ should be noticed an unusual feature of foliage at the springing of the tracery. On the outside there are small heads in the corresponding position; and the dripstone is curiously fitted into the angle formed with the turret. In the north wall of the north transept there is a much mutilated early fourteenth century ogee canopy of a recessed tomb, or Easter sepulchre; and in the east wall an Early English piscina.

I will call especial attention to the beautiful capitals in the arch between the south aisle and transept, one with a fluted ornament and

detached leaves, the other with elegant stalked leaves, one of which flows out to form the stopping of the adjoining chamfer. These two capitals present in one view a charming epitome of the development of the characteristic Early English stiff-leaf foliage.

There is a hagioscope, or squint, in the south-east pier, and another existed in the north-east until it was blocked by an external turret stair. These were for the purpose of bringing a view of the high altar to the celebrant at the side altars in the transept. They, therefore, indicate the position of the high altar in an Early English chancel which must have been built, or, at least designed, of much smaller length than the present one. The position of low side window perhaps corroborates this.

The remains of singularly rich Early English mouldings, of no less than four distinct arches, show that there must have been a good deal more work of this period than now exists.

#### *The Chancel.*

This is the finest feature of the Church, and though it has suffered considerable mutilation, it affords an excellent specimen of a Decorated chancel.

Mr. C. W. Talbot has very reasonably conjectured that it is the work of Bishop Edington, and if this is the case, it must probably have been between 1346 and 1352 when the Church at Edington, in which the Perpendicular element first appears, was begun. For the first two years of this period a young and rising architect, William of Wykeham, was in the employ of the Bishop of Winchester, and it is possible that we may have here one of his earliest efforts in Church architecture.

The tracery of the central windows on each side is original, that of the others having been faithfully copied from these by the architect employed to restore the church in 1860, Mr. T. H. Wyatt. He unfortunately inserted key-stone corbels to support his additional shafts. There were formerly four great beams corresponding with the original corbels—but there is no evidence of a higher pitch than that of the present roof having ever existed, and an open parapet probably surmounted the walls externally, as at Bishopstone Church. The carved corbels and shafts are original, with the exception of the second from the east on the south side, which had been left uncarved. The modern character of its ornamental work is only too evident.

It is very probable that the large chancel was built to accommodate the Bishop during his visits to his Manor of Downton. In the time of Richard II, the demesne was probably in the Bishop's own hands; and though, subsequently, the Manor was held by lessees, there are records of the Bishop's Court being held here. Three authenticated visits of King John to Downton were, probably, royal claims on the episcopal hospitality. Under these circumstances the Church may have been divided and the Parochial Church separated with a distinct altar, of which an indication may be seen in the two corbels inserted on the caps of the eastern navepillars to bear a light rood beam. No other evidence of a screen remains, but until the restoration of the Church the chancel was shut off from the rest and only entered by a narrow door.

There is a four-canopied sedilia, the eastern one of which may have been occupied by a piscina; the projecting part of the canopy is, however, modern. An aumbrey remains in the wall beyond this. The arch

of the east window is original; the tracery, modern. Two corbelled shafts in the eastern angles seem to point to a change of design during the building of the chancel. A good specimen of a low-side window is to be seen, formed by lengthening the western light of the window next the tower. The original hooks for shutters on the inside and outside still remain. The easternmost of the two chancel doors led to a sacristy, or vestry, of which indications remain on the outside.

There are no early monuments remaining, but those in the chancel to the Fevershams are good specimens of the style of epitaph that prevailed in the last century. A slab with an incised cross has been used to roof the doorway into the belfry.

Externally, I will call attention to the careful flint work of the chancel, contrasting with the earlier flint work of the transepts. There is an interesting doorway on the south side of the nave, somewhat roughly constructed, of Perpendicular character, which may have been a priest's door to the parochial part of the Church. It is now blocked internally. The upper part of the tower is late Perpendicular; the pinnacles and parapet are those belonging to Lord Radnor's addition, which has been taken down. The shaft of an elegant thirteenth century cross stands *in situ* in the churchyard.