

ART. I.—*Bolton Church, Cumberland.* By CHARLES J. FERGUSON.

Read at Bolton, August 30th, 1876.

“NOW on the north-west side of this River of Elne you have fair green downes and fair flockes of sheep, and fine sweet mutton, and over against Ireby, stands Bolton, a fair Church and Psonage of £100 per annum.” So writes Sandford, in his quaint manuscript; the Church still stands in pleasant pastures, and is one of the most remarkable, if not actually the most remarkable, of our Country Churches, differing essentially in its character from any of its neighbours, and shewing, most clearly, foreign influence in its design.—The chief peculiarity is its stone roof, which differs entirely from the early barrel vaulting, of which an instance may be seen in the Chapel of the Tower of London, and from the vaulting or groining of pure Gothic; both of these were intended to have an outer roof of timber, to be in fact a ceiling only, but the vault under which we stand is, or rather was, intended to have been a true roof; the extrados, or outside of the vault, has originally either actually formed the outer skin, or the covering slabs have been laid over it, or attached, to it without the intervention of wood; it has little in common with the Gothic of England, but seems rather to resemble the pointed barrel-arch over the choir at Roslyn, and that which formerly existed at Holyrood. The Scotch never willingly borrowed from England, but all their predilections were for continental nations and especially for

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France : Mr. Ferguson, in his Handbook of Architecture, says that the whole character of Scotch Architecture is continental, wrought out in a bolder and generally in a simpler and ruder fashion than the corresponding examples in other countries. In the southern part of France, in Provence, in the neighbourhood of Marseilles, these vaults are common ; one of the best examples being that of the Church at Fontifroide, where the nave is covered with a continuous pointed barrel, and the aisles are roofed with half vaults, exactly as the transepts are here, thus forming abutments to the central arches. The advantage of this form of construction is that the tiles or paving stones of the roof rest directly on the vaults without the intervention of carpentry, a copy in fact of the Romans in their treatment of the Dome.

It seems at first sight curious to find in the very extremity of the kingdom such an excellent example as we find here of this Romance or Romanesque style of building. And when we examine the church itself we find that it has no doubt succeeded an earlier one of Norman times, for in four of the corbels in the west wall may be noted the remains of four Norman capitals. The long narrow chancel is so similar in proportion to those of late Norman times, to that of Torpenhow, which has just been visited, and to that of Dacre on the other side of the county, as to show that it has been rebuilt on its own foundations. The chancel has a much plainer base course than the nave, namely, two simple splays, which stop on the east side of the nave : the base course to the nave is much more elaborate, and that to the vestry, of which a portion is, I think, original, is more simple, being a single splay only. I take it that the Old Norman Church having fallen or been battered to pieces, the architect first rebuilt the chancel, and then carried out the nave and transept, on a more extensive scale than before, and some years later added the sacristy : the building thus
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erected seems to have come down to us with few alterations, except those of modern times, a piece of luck arising partly from its substantial build and partly, as Bishop Nicholson relates, from there being so many dissenters in the parish, that no necessity arose for enlargement.

The question is by whom it was rebuilt and when? As to the when, we know that in 1322, Robert Brus burnt Rose Castle and laid waste all the western side of Cumberland to Duddon Sands, that in 1387, a similar visitation seems to have been paid which had Cockermouth for its centre, and that during this period throughout Cumberland little architectural progress was made; and we need not be surprised that Bolton Church required to be rebuilt about the end of this period. Tradition says the church was built in one night by imps at the command of Michael Scott, the wizard, a tradition which seems to linger still in a modified form, for I heard from a lad in the village that it was the work of his well known namesake, Sir Walter who utilised Michael Scott in the Lay of the last Minstrel: the wizard flourished during the thirteenth century, and is reported to have died a monk either of Holm Cultram or Melrose, both of which claim his body, and his books. Tradition thus points to Holm Cultram and to Melrose Abbey, both communities of Cistercians, and doubtless in constant communication: we find on further examination that Holm Cultram had a actual holding in the parish, and owned land at Bolton, which the monks of such an order as the Cistercians, we may be sure, did not neglect to visit and look after, and I think that the tradition which points to these Abbeys in connexion with the rebuilding of Bolton, is probably correct, and that thence were obtained the drawings and designs and the men to carry them out, if the monks were not the actual originators of the plan. This, Mr. Cory suggests to me was Ralph Nevile, first Earl of Westmorland and 8th Baron Nevile of Raby, who

who in the time of Richard II., (the very time when Bolton Church required to be rebuilt), was, in conjunction with the Earl of Northumberland and others, in government of the city of Carlisle and custody of the West Marches ; he, or his family were also patrons of Bolton ; he was actively engaged in France, in fact, I believe, at one time was actually Governor of Provence ; he rebuilt Raby Castle, and added a porch to Gainford Church, roofed in this manner, so that it seems, most probably, that Ralph Nevile, struck with the stability of the buildings seen on his travels, was instrumental in introducing a similar style here, and that he was able to do so through the Scotch connection of Holm Cultram and Melrose, and the foreign workmen to be got through thence.

Be the designer who he may, having completed the chancel on the lines of the previous one, he next commenced with the nave ; this was laid out on a most scientific plan ; towards the east were two transepts, and towards the west two porches, which thus form admirable abutments to the stone roof, with which the nave is spanned : that the stone roof was intended to form the actual outer covering, there can be little doubt, for on careful examination it will be observed, that the water tabling or projecting course of stone work at the west gable, under whose projection slating is usually housed, is worked out of the walling stones themselves, and does not admit of any timber or woodwork being housed under it ; at Lanercost Priory a small example remains of similar treatment in the roof of the south aisle of the choir, which, as far as the thickness of the wall, is formed of the actual walling stones, carefully wrought and weathered as is usual in buttress slopes. After the troublous times which immediately preceded its erection, we cannot wonder that the church was built for defence and shelter, as well as for a house of prayer ; a stone staircase, capped with an hexagonal stone top, leads to the roof, round which is an ample walk protected

tected by a parapet wall ; in order to make the circuit complete, the west gable is set back on corbels, which are cleverly managed in the interior.

In the inside of the stone roof, just above the springing not only of the nave roof, but also of the transepts, are a series of massive corbels, intended, I think, in the first place, to rest the centering on, on which the arch was formed. They are not unusually so left in bridges and other works requiring heavy centering, and I am informed by my friend Mr. Micklethwaite, F.S.A., that some, of the 14th century, still exist in Tadcaster bridge, although the arches have been since rebuilt; they may also have been utilized in case of need for forming a temporary loft, which would form a place of refuge.

In examining the interior of the church, while we are grateful for the handsome way in which it has been repaired, we may feel some regret that the plaster has been laid on with so lavish a hand that sundry objects of interest are quite buried. Above the doorway to the turret stairs may just be discerned traces of the doorway which lead to the rood screen; and from the sacristy to the chancel there still exists a squint, formed to command a view of the high altar, now, I am sorry to say, entirely plastered over on the church side. The interior is still to be traced, though at present filled with a cupboard.

The transepts, I need hardly say, have been used as chapels, in both the piscinas and aumbreys remain, as they do also in the chancel. The chancel contains, on the south side, to the west of the Priests' door, a very interesting low side window; if you examine it you will find that it is on a lower level than the other windows, and is checked or rebated on the joints and mullion, to receive a door or shutter, and that on the mullion itself special provision has been made for the reception of the bolt; traces of the hinges on which the shutters worked are also visible. No exact record has been discovered as to
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what the purpose of this peculiar kind of window was, of which several examples exist, but I think the most reasonable one is that they were intended for doling alms from, and you usually find that where such a window exists, there is a charity in the parish, as is the case at Bolton. The window tracery is peculiar, and is quite un-English in character; at Linlithgo, a doorway exists the tympanum of which is filled with tracery of precisely similar character to that in the East Window, another proof of the Scotch feeling to be found throughout the work. I think on the exterior you should not fail to note the excellence of the masonry and its massive character, some of the courses being no less than 21 inches in height.

The church, I should add, is rectorial, and is dedicated to All Saints. In conclusion, I propose to read a transcript of Bishop Nicholson's visitation to Bolton Church, which took place very nearly at this time, one hundred and seventy-three years ago, and it is, I believe, chiefly through the liberality of Mr. George Moore, and Mr. Foster, of Kilhow, that the dilapidations the Bishop refers to refer to, no longer exist.

"Bolton August 26th, 1703. The chancel here is a very great length, and its high walls are good and firm. There are five Windows in it, whereof half of each is wall'd up. The want of Rails is what is common with this, and a great many of its Neighbours. But the Irregularity of the Floor (which lies in hollow pits) and a great rough Heap of Stones, at the very entrance of the Door, are somewhat Extraordinary. The roof needs looking after.

"The body of the Church and the two Side Isles, (belonging to the Parishioners in common) are covered with a Tapering Arch of large hewn Stone, over which there is an outer Covering of Slate. So that a small matter will repair and beautify it in such a manner as to give it a very glorious appearance. The mischief is, there are so many Dissenters, (chiefly Anabaptists and Quakers in the parish),
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that t'will be difficult to set forward anything of that kind; till God and the Government blesses us with a more effectual method of Raising our Church Assessments. A set of new Books has been procured, since Mr. Thompson came to the Living. But the old Curate (poor Mr. Heddy) looks as tattered as ever, but will hereafter, I hope, have his Salary rais'd.

“On a Brass plate upon a Tomb Stone in the Church-yard is this inscription:

Depositum Danielis Hechstetterij quondam hujus Ecclesiae Rectoris, qui post defatigatos Viginti Annorum Labores Tandem requievit in Domino, Creatoris sui brachiis Confisus. Sepultus 7o die Apr. A.D. 1686.

“All this (except the Date of his Burial) is said to be the composing of the deceased Rector himself, who was M.A., of Queen's College, Oxford, and sometime Master of the Grammar School at Carlisle.*

“The Parsonage House (having first dropped piecemeal) was much contracted by the last incumbent, Mr. Robinson; who paid yearly (as was reasonably suspected) so high a quit rent, out of this Rectory, and that of Plumbland, to his patron, Mr. Thompson, that he was never well able to keep himself and his Family (any more than that of his Curate) out of a starving Condition. The Register Books begin at 1574, but like the other matters have been much neglected and spoiled.”

On the conclusion of the paper, a discussion arose, in the course of which Dr. Simpson, referring to the low side window, said the received theory was that lamps were placed in these windows after a funeral to scare away evil spirits. Mr. Ferguson said another theory was that lepers, being unable to come into church, made confession at these windows. Mr. Cory said these side windows had their earliest date in the 13th century, and they always had hinges and bolts for shutters, but not glass. They would, therefore, appear to
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* For Daniel Hechstetter, see vol. 2 Transactions, pp. 226, 231.

be for some such purpose as giving out alms or receiving confession. In corroboration of his inference that Ralph de Neville built Bolton Church, Mr. Cory added that a similar roof existed in Staindrop Church, which was of the same period and was connected with the same family. Mr. Whitwell said Mr. Cory's theory was extremely probable. He remarked upon the paucity of decoration inside the church while not a little was observable outside. Mr. Ferguson said the inside was once covered with plaster, which was no doubt painted with figures. Dr. Simpson: I should like to see us come to that again. We want more colour in our churches. Mr. Moore said the plaster was not coloured when he was a boy. He added that in his youth he implicitly believed the tradition about Michael Scott.
