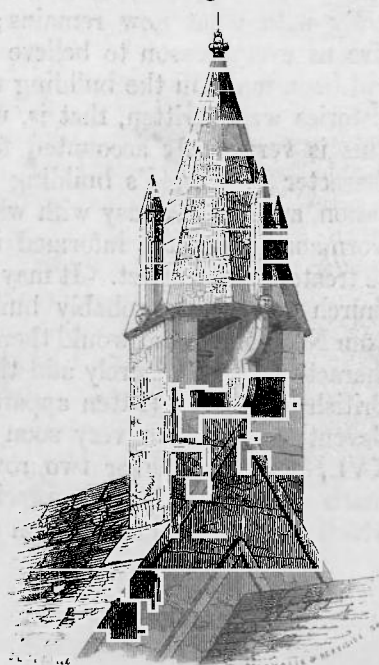


ON BELL-TURRETS.

No belfry is better adapted to a small village church than that which is supported by a single wall, as it saves much expense of material, and does not interfere with the simplicity of ground-plan desirable in an edifice of this description. Accordingly we find many instances of the plain flat bell-gable, sometimes standing over the chancel-arch, as at Skelton near York, and Binsey near Oxford, but more usually set upon the western wall, as at Northborough in Lincolnshire, and many other places. This kind of belfry has been much used in modern churches, though not often very successfully. As it is really no easy matter to design a good west front comprising a bell-gable, and the width required in our new churches much increases the difficulty, by placing the belfry over the chancel-arch, according to some of Mr. Pugin's designs, a more pleasing general outline may be obtained; but even in this case, when viewed from the north or south, the belfry will present to the spectator the mere end of a wall, and appear an unsightly excrescence to the building. I was therefore much pleased when my attention was called to some bell-turrets, which, standing like those above named upon a single wall, yet present the appearance, on a small scale, of steeples whose substructure affects the ground-plan of the building: and I was fortunate in seeing these specimens in their right order, not perhaps as regards date, but according to their development in point of design and ornament.

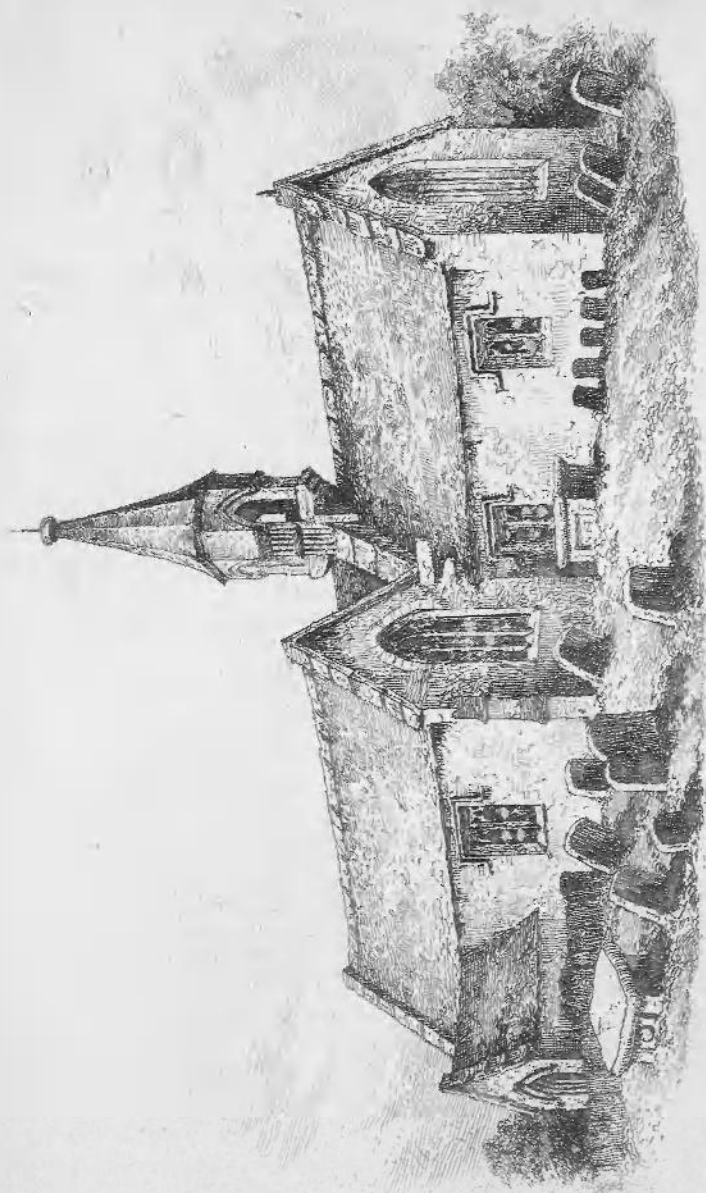
The first of these is Harescomb in Gloucestershire; a church mentioned by Rickman as having a singular belfry at the east end of the nave, but with little or no



Harescomb, Gloucestershire.



Acton Turvill



Leigh Delamere

further description. This belfry serves as a key to all the rest. The wall over the chancel-arch is crossed by a block of masonry projecting eastward and westward, and forming each way a sort of corbel or bracket. This gives support to the eastern and western faces of an octagonal spire, the other two cardinal sides resting on imposts raised upon the wall itself, two spaces or apertures being thus left for the bells. The diagonal faces of the spire are supported only by their connection with the others; but from the small size of the belfry it is plain the stone may easily have been cut in such a manner as to obviate any difficulty in the construction. The whole is strengthened as well as enriched by octagonal pinnacles at the cardinal sides, and at present it is banded with iron. The style of the church appears to be early Decorated; the windows consist of single lancet lights, but foliated; the west window is modern; the font has an Early English character. This church stands at a short distance to the west of the road between Gloucester and Stroud, about six miles distant from the former; it is not easily visible, as it lies in a deep hollow.

In the next specimen, the church of Acton Turvill, in Gloucestershire, the transverse block of masonry supports piers or imposts similar to those on the north and south sides; and the addition of shafts renders these sufficiently large to meet all the angles of an equilateral spire, its cardinal faces being supported by their corresponding imposts, and its diagonal ones resting between them, like the entablature of a colonnade. The cardinal sides have round pinnacles. This belfry, which stands over the chancel-arch, is of an Early English character. Some Perpendicular insertions have been made in the body of the church. The village of Acton Turvill is about ten miles westward of Malmsbury in Wiltshire.

At Leigh Delamere the design is improved upon by the introduction of a beautiful pointed



arch between the cardinal sides of the belfry, which are enriched by shafts. The lower part of the belfry forms, in its section, a cross, the upper part an octagon, of which the cardinal sides are smaller than the diagonals. The spire being equilateral, its angles evidently do not correspond with those of the turret, and there is also a small space left upon each of the cardinal sides, uncovered by the spire; this is filled up by what appears to be the base of a pinnacle, the upper part of which has been destroyed. This belfry is also of Early English character, though the chancel-arch, and indeed the whole of the church, leads me to believe that in point of date it belongs to the period in which the Decorated style prevailed. The reason why shafts are introduced, both in this and the last, is obvious, namely, to form a graceful finish to the diagonal openings, and to give the impost the character of a clustered pier instead of a bare wall. This belfry is also central, and the addition of a south aisle gives, in some aspects, a very picturesque outline to the church, which contains other portions worth notice, for instance a late stone pulpit, and some beautiful tabernacle-work at the east end, in the interior, the east window being blocked up. Leigh Delamere is about eight miles from Chippenham, to the north-west.

The belfry of Corston church stands upon the west gable, and in its construction is perhaps the most elegant of any. Here the transverse block springs from a corbel immediately above the west window, and is carried, as at Harescomb, up to the base of the spire as a wall, dividing, in two equal portions, the space between the northern and southern piers. Here the diagonals of the spire can neither be said to rest upon an arch, as at Leigh Delamere, nor to be supported like an entablature,



Corston Church.

as at Acton Turvill, nor yet by mere connection with the others, as at Harescomb. But the turret beneath the spire, which, like all the others, has a cruciform section below, becomes octagonal at the top, by means of a kind of bracket, which extends the cardinal faces sufficiently to make them correspond with the cardinal sides of the spire, and then, forming an obtuse angle in the horizontal plane, gives support to its diagonals. The form of the opening, as projected on a vertical plane, is trefoil-headed, the top being square. Round the base of the spire, which is ribbed, is a delicate moulding with a battlement, and on the top is a beautiful finial; there are no pinnacles. This belfry is difficult to describe, and not very easily drawn; but by examining it attentively, an artist would at once see its construction, and be able to form a model. Its style and date are clearly Perpendicular. Corston is about two miles from Malmsbury, on the Chippenham road.

These four turrets, it will be seen, are alike, in having a cruciform base and an octagonal spire, but they differ in the adaptation of the one to the other; and this variety gives them value in the eyes of the architect, as it will authorize him in forming combinations according to his skill, instead of scrupulously adhering to a given copy. They are also valuable as comprising all the pointed styles, and as admitting any degree of ornament. And it will be observed, that the belfry of Corston very gracefully occupies a position which could not have been properly occupied by a turret springing from the ground, viz. the middle of the west front.

If these specimens are worth imitation, *à fortiori* they are worth preserving. Now, though I am by no means in the habit of travelling through the country to spy out the nakedness of the land, I need feel no hesitation in saying, that one or two of the churches mentioned are in a state which must before long demand attention. In these days far less is to be feared from neglect than from injudicious restoration, or from the necessities of a parish forced to enlarge, repair, or rebuild, but unsupplied with funds sufficient for any thing beyond the least expensive mode of providing for the exigency. I am totally unacquainted with all the parishes which I have named, and know nothing of either their claims or resources, but I surely am not wrong in directing attention to the subject.

J. L. PETIT.