



Tong



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TONG CHURCH, SALOP.

THOUGH church architecture is generally allowed to have reached its highest perfection during the prevalence of the Decorated style, it cannot be said to shew any symptoms of decline at the first appearance of the Perpendicular; a style, which dispensed indeed with some of the peculiar beauties of its predecessor, yet by the introduction of a new element was rendered capable of a degree of grandeur and magnificence hitherto scarcely attained. Of this the choir of York furnishes a striking instance; nor less so, the well known works of William of Wykeham, and other eminent architects of the age. But it is not only in churches of the first order as regards size and enrichment, that we are to look for architectural character. The edifice which I propose to notice, though comparatively plain and of moderate dimensions, yet presents sufficient indications both of the beauty of the prevailing style, and the genius of the architect, to justify a careful examination.

The parochial church of St. Bartholomew at Tong^a, it appears, was rebuilt by Isabel, widow of Sir Fulke Penbrugge, knight, between the years 1401 and 1411, in which latter year it was made collegiate, and endowed for the maintenance of a warden, four chaplains, two clerks, and thirteen infirm old men. To this date, I think there can be no doubt, may be assigned the whole of the present structure, with the exception of a chapel annexed to the south aisle early in the sixteenth century; nor can I discover any remains of the earlier building, unless a discrepancy between the north and south

^a The village of Tong is about ten miles from Wolverhampton, and three from Shifnall, at a short distance from the Shrews-

bury road. The church stands in a corner of the park attached to Tong Castle.

range of pier-arches in the nave, which will presently be noticed, should lead us to suppose that the architect of the new edifice took advantage of as much of the old work as suited his purpose.

The ground on which the building stands is not perfectly level ; and it is terraced up by a wall to the north and west ; that this was done at the time of its erection, or previously, appears from the ruins of a part of the college, which stand below the terrace to the westward, and very close to it ; the highest part of these, which are the full height of the ground story, would scarcely reach the level of the church floor.

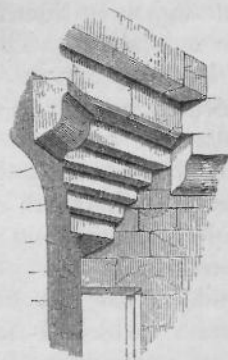
The church consists of a fine chancel, a central tower, and a nave ; with aisles extending from the western front of the building to the eastward face of the tower ; a south porch, and a vestry attached to the north side of the chancel. The nave and chancel are of about the same height, that is, their roofs are nearly on the same level ; but the base-moulding, which runs round the whole, is varied in its level by several breaks, being considerably lower in the west than in the east front. This, as well as the string-course under the windows, is uniform throughout, except in the additional chapel. Both ends are finished with an embattled parapet, instead of a gable, the central battlement being raised in two stages, so as to suit the pitch of the roof, which accordingly is very low. In fact the only gable in the church is that of the vestry, which has almost as low a pitch as it is possible to give. The parapet of both chancel and nave is embattled, and has pinnacles of a square section, with delicately embattled horizontal strings, (instead of gables or canopies,) their faces being set cardinally. They are not crocketed but have a well-executed finial. This kind of pinnacle is in excellent character, and well suited to the building. The nave has no clerestory, the roof of the aisles rising up to the string-course under the parapet. The aisles themselves have no parapets, and their coping at the end is finished in the usual manner, viz., by a plain slope corresponding with the roof ; but there has been a large pinnacle at each of the western angles. The



South-east Pinnacles of the Chancel.

central battlements also on the east and west fronts apparently have had crosses, as there are sockets on them. The south porch is embattled, and has small pinnacles. The vestry is without a parapet.

The base of the tower, above the roof, is rectangular; over this is an octagon, embattled, with a pinnacle at each angle, and surmounted by a low spire. The junction between the octagon and its base is by triangular slopes under the diagonal sides, to which the pendentives internally correspond, instead of forming arches. On each of these slopes is a small pinnacle; the lower part of the belfry, which contains a great bell presented in 1518 by Sir Henry Vernon, but recast in 1720 on account of its injuries during the civil war^b, has a window of two lights on the north and south sides. The others have plain square-headed doors, opening upon the leads. There is no weather-moulding to indicate that the roof of the church was ever of a higher pitch. The octagon, which contains a peal of smaller bells, has windows of two lights on the cardinal sides. The spire itself, at about half its height, is encircled by spire-lights ending each in a crocketed finial or pinnacle; those only on the cardinal sides being pierced. A ball, probably of modern date, finishes the steeple.



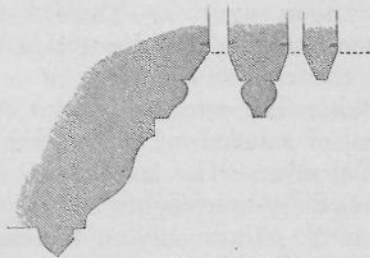
Pendentive of one of the Diagonal sides of the Octagon.

The chancel is divided on the south side by bold buttresses into three compartments, each of which has a beautiful three-light window, the base of the central one being slightly raised, to admit a door beneath. On the north side the arrangement is different, and proves the vestry to be part of the original design. For this side is nearly equally divided in two by the western wall of the vestry, to which a buttress corresponds; and between this and the tower are two windows, similar in size and composition to the southern ones, but not separated by any buttress. The vestry windows are of two lights, which are foliated; there are neither labels nor tracery in the heads

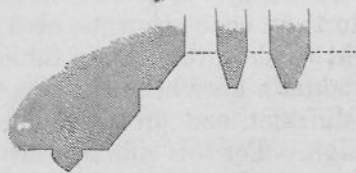
^b On the upper part of the bell is a band inscribed—"Henricus Vernon istam Campanam fieri fecit 1518, ad laudem Dei omnipotentis beatæ Mariæ et Bartholomæi S^{ti}." And on the lower part—"Quam

perduellionum rabie fractam sumtibus Parochiæ refudit Ab. Rudhall, Gloucester, Anno 1720." The weight is estimated at 48 cwts.; it measures six yards in circumference.

of these windows, but their forms are marked by small sunk triangles. This arrangement appears also in the sedilia, and in one of the monuments of the church. The east window of the chancel is a fine one of five lights, with good Perpendicular tracery and a transom. The principal mullions in all the chancel windows are of the first order, and the secondary mullions in the head are of the second order, but throughout the rest of the church all the tracery is of only one order. The arches of the windows are mostly two-centred, and differing but slightly in their form (though somewhat less pointed) from the equilateral. The buttresses of the chancel are finished with the pinnacle which we have noticed, and have well-executed gurgoyles. Each of the eastern angles has two buttresses running cardinally, instead of a single diagonal one; consequently the pinnacles are doubled. The two buttresses of the north corner have each an elaborate niche in the stage corresponding with the lower part of the window. The moulding of the jambs and architraves of all the chancel windows has a bold convex section, which I have not often noticed in Perpendicular work, except of a very late period, but it frequently occurs in Decorated windows. In fact the chancel windows of Shiffnal, which are of a somewhat early Decorated, have a moulding of much the same character. Its effect, as regards light and shade, is excellent, and it is probably more durable than a moulding comprising the large hollow so common in the Perpendicular style. This kind of moulding appears in the tower-arches, the pier-arches on the northern side, all the doors, and some of the windows of the north aisle; in short, I may say wherever there is a variation from the plain splay or chamfer. I may notice that the transom of the east window is not very dissimilar from one in a Decorated window in the neighbouring church of Albrighton. It will be observed, that in this window a



Mouldings of Side Window of Chancel



Mouldings of West Window of Nave.

secondary mullion (over the central light) runs up to the very point of the arch, instead of branching off below it, so as to leave a space to be filled up by a quatrefoil; indeed, in the other windows, where the central mullion does so branch off, the four-sided opening left is not foliated, nor does the quatrefoil occur any where in this position, except in the porch and belfry.

The chancel and vestry doors, which are similar, have the four-centred arch. It is clear that these are not later insertions, and no doubt the Tudor arch, as it is called, which is no more than a modification of the segmental arch used in the earlier styles, was adopted for convenience long before it became a decided architectural feature. These doors have spandrels, but the porch, the western and the northern doors, are without that feature, which, as the style advances, becomes in buildings of a high degree of finish, nearly universal.

The west window has four lights, upon which rests a transom, not reaching across from jamb to jamb, but stopping at the points of the extreme lights; from these points also spring the mullions of the tracery lights, which are of the same width with the principal ones, and alternate with them. Consequently there are three of these lights in the head of the window which are cinque-foiled. This arrangement was probably adopted for the sake of painted glass; and in one of these tracery lights there are some remains, apparently in their original position, the subject being a congregation of saints worshipping, with a scroll fitted into the foliation, "*In eternum Patrem omnis Terre.*" The east windows of the aisles, which are of three lights, have a somewhat similar arrangement, only that in this case the large tracery light stands directly over the central principal one. The other windows of the aisles have two lights each.

The interior of the church, in its architectural features, is much plainer than the outside. The piers of the nave are octagonal; the arches are of two orders, those on the south side being merely chamfered, those on the north side, which, as well as the piers, are of greater height, have the convex moulding we have noticed. The west side of the chancel-arch has a label, which the eastern side has not. I have frequently remarked that the western sides of central arches have been the most enriched, evidently as meeting the eye of the spectator in looking eastward. This is peculiarly the case

in Norman churches. The jambs of the windows in general are quite plain, and have very little splay; those of the east window (and I think no other) have a little moulding at the edges.

But this plainness of the building itself sets off the rich and beautiful wood-work with which it is furnished. Of this, though in a mutilated and decayed condition, enough remains to render a very satisfactory restoration quite practicable.

The top of the rood-screen has been an exquisite piece of carving, and ought to be carefully copied or modelled in the very few places where it retains its ornaments unbroken. The stall-seats in the chancel have devices which are on the whole distinguished, which is not frequently the case, by elegance rather than grotesque design. Some of the poppy-heads are elaborate and well executed; one in particular, which represents our Saviour surrounded by the Apostles; at the back of the prin-

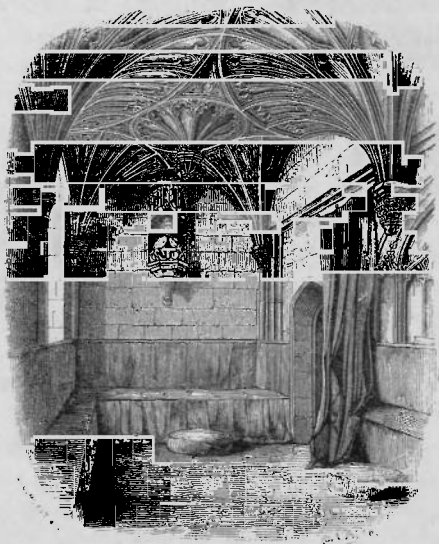


South Aisle

incipal figure, which is raised above the rest, is the vine. The ends of the pews in the nave are square-headed, with good mouldings and excellent panelling; and fine screens run across both the aisles. The vestry door, too, has some foliated panelling. The roof of the nave is low pitched, of dark wood, the spaces between the rafters being boarded; the principal brackets are ornamented with carved foliage; some of the secondary ones have angels bearing shields, and many of the intersections of beams, &c., are marked by rich bosses. The chancel-roof is plainer. Some of the beams in the aisles are carved with foliage. Most of the wood-work seems to be of a

date not much later than the church, and was perhaps executed when it was made a collegiate establishment^c. Of the painted glass enough only remains to shew what must have been its value, and to make us regret its destruction. It appears to have had a great proportion of white glass, with some fine pencilling and staining; from which I conclude that all the windows were filled with it. A good deal of rich colour is however introduced. Besides the specimen I have noticed in the west window, there are some quarries in the chancel window of a pattern not unfrequent in Perpendicular work; and in the head of the east window are a few figures which I think have kept their place. With these exceptions, the little glass that remains is disposed in fragments.

We must now notice the beautiful chantry or chapel added to the south aisle in the sixteenth century. Its eastern and western walls range with those of the tower, so that it forms a kind of transept. It is open to the church by a rich ogee door with a crocketed canopy, and also by a wide elliptical or Burgundian arch, under which is a fine monument, with effigies of Sir Henry Vernon and Anne his wife, in the latest Perpendicular style. He died in 1515. On



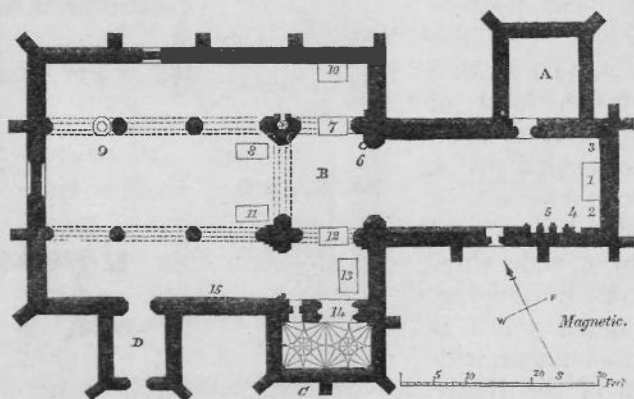
Golden Chapel.

the west side, in the interior, is a half-length upright figure, supported by a panelled bracket with a detached pendant, and having a rich canopy over his head. He is represented with a book in his right hand, which he is turning over, and the fingers of the other hand are raised upright, as if to give emphasis to his reading or discourse. The features and ex-

^c The rood-screen is ornamented with a very rich Tudor flower. I do not know whether this be an indisputable mark of

date, but the style of carving, and general character of the work, much incline me to assign this part to the Lancastrian period.

pression are remarkably good. This is the effigy of Arthur Vernon, priest, son of Sir Henry Vernon; and the very perceptible resemblance between the countenance of this figure and that on the adjacent tomb, makes it highly probable that both are faithful portraits. On the east wall is an inscription to this effect:—"Pray for the soul of Sir Henry Vernon, Knight, and dame Anne, his wife, which lie here * * *^a of our Lord 1515, made and founded this chapel and chantry, and the said * * * departed the 13th day of April in the year above said: and of your charity for the soul of * * * Arthur Vernon, priest, son of the said Sir Henry, on whose souls IHS have mercy. Amen." Arthur Vernon was rector of Whitchurch, Salop, and died 1517. There are also some remains of paintings on this wall. The south side has two square-headed windows of two lights, plain and without foliation.



Plan

The roof of this chapel is an admirable specimen of fan-vaulting. Its plan, and principal ribs, are marked in the annexed cut of the ground-plan of the church. The spaces between the fans have circles, to which are attached pendants, by ribs of the same moulding with those of the second order in the fans themselves. The central fan on the north side, instead of being supported by a shaft, (which would have interfered with the Vernon tomb,) springs also from a pendant, which is enriched with mouldings and foliage. This

^a Parts of the inscription are effaced. old characters and spelling.
I need not say that the whole is in the

addition to the original building is usually called the Golden Chapel. Much painting and gilding remains in the roof, and still more in the canopy over the figure of Arthur Vernon, where it is scarcely faded or worn away at all.

The following measurements will give a fair idea of the general dimensions and proportions of the church, though they might be corrected in many points by a practical architect.

| | Ft. | In. |
|---|-----|------------------|
| Total length of the interior | 103 | 10 |
| Of which the chancel, from the east wall to the rood-screen is about | 41 | 0 |
| Total width of nave and aisles, internally | 45 | 11 |
| Of which that of the nave from centre to centre of opposite piers, is about | 20 | 3 |
| Width of chancel internally | 17 | 8 |
| Interior of vestry from north to south | 15 | 3 |
| Ditto from east to west | 12 | 6 |
| Interior of porch from north to south | 12 | 1 |
| Ditto from east to west | 11 | 11 |
| Interior of Golden Chapel from north to south | 9 | 4 |
| Ditto from east to west | 17 | 0 |
| Width of each face of the octagonal piers of the nave | 0 | 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| * Span of east window including the jambs | 11 | 0 |
| Ditto within the jambs | 9 | 8 |
| One of the lights of ditto | 1 | 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Thickness of the wall at the chancel door | 2 | 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ |

None of the walls of the church, excepting those of the belfry, appear thicker than this, but some are thinner by a few inches.

| | | |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Width of the chancel buttresses | 1 | 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
|---|---|-----------------|

None of the buttresses of the church differ from these in width by more than half an inch, except those of the Golden Chapel, which are 1 foot 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

| | | |
|---|----|-----------------|
| Depth of chancel buttresses above the base-moulding | 2 | 4 |
| Ditto of diagonal buttresses at the west end | 2 | 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ |
| Ditto of western buttresses between nave and aisles | 3 | 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ |
| Span of western door | 4 | 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Of outer door of south porch | 5 | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ |
| Lower part of the belfry internally from north to south | 16 | 10 |
| Ditto from east to west | 15 | 0 |
| Thickness of wall in this part of the tower | 3 | 0 |
| Height of the coping of the chancel battlements (on the south side) from the level of the under part of the base-moulding | 25 | 9 |

* The two central mullions of this window, though of the same order with the others, and having similar mouldings, are somewhat thicker.

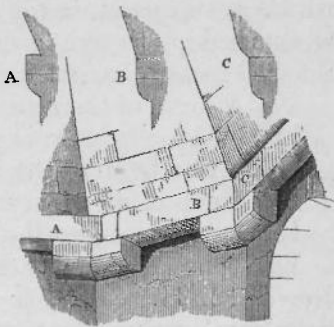
The height of the coping of the battlement on the octagon from the level of that on the chancel, I should judge to be upwards of twenty-six feet ; and the total height of the steeple may be from seventy-five to eighty feet, but I had no means of ascertaining these with any great accuracy.

I have given these measurements, because I consider the building before us to afford a striking instance how completely the medieval architect felt the importance of scale as well as proportion. In a larger structure, the simplicity of detail requisite for fully carrying out the design of this church, would have given an unpleasing degree of plainness ; in a smaller edifice, much that now is excellent would have been meagre and minute. The flattened roof is here a decided beauty, as it not only gives effect to the embattled parapet and pinnacles, which, when their finials were complete, must have been very beautiful, but to the central steeple itself ; and had this steeple been of a more tapering form, the range of spire-lights, which are perhaps nearly unique, would have been out of place. If we compare this central octagon and spire with any in Germany, where the feature is a common one, though it is exceedingly rare in England, we shall have no reason to pronounce that our own specimen suffers by the comparison.

This building is in its mechanical construction essentially a cross church, yet it neither develops the form of a cross in its ground plan, nor indicates it, as it might have done, by transepts distinguished from the aisles. Such examples are far from uncommon, and I cannot but look upon them as affording one proof (among many others) that an attention to symbolical meanings had little or no material influence in forming the principles of Gothic architecture. It is true that the mere decorative part abounds with symbols, and it is likely that meanings were affixed to several forms and arrangements, their architectural propriety being duly approved. But I hold that symbolism was made altogether a secondary consideration, and never suffered to interfere (unless in a few insulated cases) with the far more important points of mechanical propriety, convenience, beauty, and solemnity.

The most elaborate among our Gothic churches will occasionally present a want of perfect agreement in size or detail between corresponding portions. This was doubtless often the result of mere accident ; still such accidents would have been guarded against, had there not been a feeling that ex-

treme nicety might take away from character, just as wood-work cut by a machine is, owing to its very finish, far inferior in effect to that which is cut by the hand, and shews the mark of the knife or chisel. We have already remarked the difference between the north and south range of arches in the nave. The mouldings at the base of the piers differ, though the capitals are nearly alike. The external divisions do not correspond with the internal ones; for the parapet along the nave is divided by the pinnacle into two equal parts, whereas the interior has three arches between the western wall and the western pier of the tower. The width of the two aisles differs by a few inches, and the east window does not stand in the exact centre of the front. These discrepancies, slight as they are, are still remarkable in a building which exhibits so much uniformity in design, and carefulness in execution.



Interior of the Octagon at the Junction of the Spire.

We have seen, by the measurements, that the base of the tower is not an exact square; neither is the octagon above it equilateral. But the spire is more nearly, if not altogether so, which renders necessary a peculiar construction at its junction with the octagon; this is shewn in the accompanying cut.

The following references to the figures in the ground-plan, will shew what are the principal objects of interest in the church.

1. The Communion Table.—This is of alabaster, being taken principally from a very rich tomb in another part of the church. Its front and sides are elaborately worked with open arches, pinnacles, and crocketed canopies, with several figures. The round and elliptical arch are freely used, and there are other marks which shew it to be of the latest period.

2 and 3. Small monumental tablets of the latter part of the sixteenth century.

4 and 5. Piscina and Sedilia. The latter are of rather a bold than elaborate style of workmanship; they consist of three depressed pointed arches, divided at the heads by small sunk triangles, as in the vestry windows: they are trefoiled. The mouldings of the piscina are somewhat richer, and

there is a shaft with a shelf or bracket in each of the inner angles.

6. A small octagonal pedestal, attached to the pier. It is supposed originally to have supported an image of St. Bartholomew, in whose honour the church is dedicated.

7 and 8. Fine Gothic tombs.

9. The Font.—Octagonal, on a shaft. Each of the faces which are exposed, has a trefoiled arch with a shield. The workmanship, though good, is not very elaborate. Width, 2 feet 8 inches; height from the step, 3 feet.

10. A tomb of the sixteenth century, comparatively plain.

11 and 12. Rich Gothic tombs.

13. A fine tomb in the Italian style.

14. Tomb of Sir Henry Vernon already noticed.

15. A brass let into the wall.

The four monuments in the centre of the church, viz. No. 7. 12. 11. and 8. (I place them in the order of their dates) are invaluable, as presenting a series of Perpendicular work, each specimen being characteristic of the period to which it belongs. The first, though executed with great care, (in fact the minutest details of costume are elaborately worked,) is comparatively severe and simple in its design, having more a massive than an ornate character. The second is decidedly florid, yet all its enrichments are of a strictly architectural description. The third, though it has also open-work canopies, yet depends much for its richness upon spaces filled with minute and intricate panelling. The fourth, equally rich with any of the others, has the Burgundian arch, and shews other decided symptoms of the decline of the style. This debasement also appears on the outside of the Golden Chapel, where the crockets, instead of adding lightness and elegance to the pinnacles, as is the case in the tower and porch, give them a very cumbrous appearance.

It is hardly to be supposed that so beautiful a church will long escape the process of restoration. Nor indeed is it to be altogether wished, though I should earnestly deprecate one on a very comprehensive scale. Externally, some of the pinnacles are broken or displaced, and others have lost their finials; if these were renewed after the model of such as are sufficiently perfect to preserve their general effect, the latter being suffered to remain untouched, and other mutilations of the stone-work, as in the tracery of the west window, care-

fully repaired, no doubt the general aspect would be improved. The same applies to the wood-work of the interior. Some of the poppy-heads that have slightly suffered from decay, might be preserved in their present state, others might be restored, and the barbarous work with which a few of them have been repaired, I suppose during the last or preceding century, might be replaced with work of a better character. The repair of the rood-screen would require a careful and able artist, but in this it would be desirable to remove none of the present work that can possibly be kept in its place. In the nave several unsightly pews rise above the level of the original seats, and might be removed with great advantage to the appearance of the building. The original disposition of the seats does not seem to have been much disturbed except in one or two instances, and could easily be retained, as a very economical disposition of the space seems by no means required for the wants of the parish. The monuments admit of some repair, there being several fractures, especially in the most beautiful one, No. 12. An account of this will be given in a future number. Some stoves, too, that are now in the body of the church, by no means conduce to its beauty; and I would further suggest, that if the Golden Chapel must be used as a pew, some tapestry of the date or character of the sixteenth century, if any could be procured of an appropriate description, might advantageously replace the present linings and curtains of cloth, and some good cinque cento painted glass be substituted for the modern coloured panes in its windows.

I fear I shall be thought by some to have intruded too much of mere opinion and criticism on matters of taste, into a journal devoted to antiquarian research, but I would plead in my defence, that it is within the province of archæology not merely to establish dates or certify historical facts, but also to encourage a true appreciation of the relics bequeathed to us, as indications of the spirit, character, and genius, of a former age.

J. L. PETIT.