NORTON CHURCH, IN THE COUNTY OF DURHAM.

"HERE giveth Northman Earl unto Saint Cuthbert Ediscum, and all that thereunto serveth (hyreth), and one-fourth of an acre at Foregenne.

"And I Ulfcytel, Osulf's son, give Northtun by metes, and with men, unto Saint Cuthbert, and all that thereunto serveth, with sac and with soken, and any one who this perverts, may he be ashired from God's deed and from all sanctuary."[1]

An Osulf was Earl of Northumberland about 952. Escombe is in Durham, and in all probability the Norton here mentioned is Norton, near Stockton, rather than Norton, near Wath, in Yorkshire, which, with the neighbouring vills of Hutton, Holme, and Holgrave, were granted by Bishop Flambard to the family of Conyers.

At all events, Nortonshire[2] (as the records of Bishop Bek call the parish) was a very early possession of the church of Durham, cutting through the wapentake of Sadberge to the Tees, and severing that district into two great portions. From the eastern or coast portion, termed Hartness, Norton was ashired by a strong natural boundary, a large morass, through which the numerous branches of Blakiston Beck percolated. The adjoining parish was that of Billingham, which had been granted to the church before the annexation of Norton, but which was soon sundered by the violence of the times, and formed the southernmost limit of a Pagan usurpation of the territory of Hartness. That the morass was of considerable importance cannot be doubted, and we can well understand how it came to pass that the fields of Norton, which slope towards it, are full of human remains. We can also readily believe that the peculiar circumstances of the place required the erection of a church at a very early period.

[1] Liber Vitæ Dun., 43 b.

[2] A shire, in the north, was any assemblage of places *ashired* or cut off, or boundered out from the adjacent country.

Billinghamshire was not restored to the church till the reign of the Conqueror, and then it was given to the convent, and not to the see. Consequently, it continued to be under a jurisdiction different to that of Norton. The latter place emerges from obscurity in 1082, when Blaichestun (Blakiston), one of its chief estates, was granted to the newly-placed monks of Durham, and Bishop de Karilepho, who made the grant, disposed of the ejected secular priests of the cathedral by distributing them to the churches of Auckland, Darlington, and Norton, at all which places, therefore, ecclesiastical edifices must have been existing.

It does not appear whether the expelled seculars were followed by a regular succession of prebendaries or not; but in 1227 we find that Norton Church was collegiate, and so it continued, consisting of eight portionists or prebendaries, of one of whom, Robert Brerely, there is an effigy of brass in the church of Billingham, where he was vicar. The prebendaries had the great tithes, and had to uphold the choir of the church, a duty which they scandalously neglected. In 1410, on Vicar Bromley's complaint, Cardinal Langley ordered them to repair the chancel. In 1496, Bishop Fox sequestered their incomes for the purpose of rebuilding it, assigning as a reason that "the canons, prebendaries of the same church, had permitted the chancel of the said collegiate church, which had been decently and richly constructed for the praise and worship of God, to fall into ruin and desolation, as well in the roof, main walls, and windows, as in divers other respects." In 1579 the chancel was again "in decay."

Bishop Skirlaw, in 1406, gave to the Church of Norton a set of vestments of white satin, embroidered with little golden leopards, edged with green stuff termed card (*cardâ*); containing a chasuble with narrow golden orfreys, two tunics, and a cope with orfreys of red velvet, embroidered with squared quarterings (*cum garteriis quadratis*), three albs and three amices, two stoles, and three maniples.

The College of Norton shared the fate of its peers. In 1553, pensions of 5*l.* each were paid to Lancelot Thwaites, *minister*, and six other persons. Probably one of the eight portionists had died. Thwaites does not occur in the list of *vicars*, Gilpin, the Apostle of the North, having succeeded, in 1554, on the deprivation of John Rudd, who had been vicar from 1539. The vicar has a small copyhold

manor. The remainder of the township of Norton is principally copyhold or leasehold under the bishop. The manor of Blakiston forms the chief exception. The remainder of the old parish of Norton has, since Queen Anne's days, composed the parliamentary parish of Stockton-upon-Tees. At this place a chapel had been founded in 1237. It was dedicated to St. Thomas the Martyr. The parishioners of Stockton, Preston, and Hartburne, were advantaged by it, but had to visit their mother-church on the Feast of the Assumption, and pay the vicar 50*s*. They offered one penny with the consecrated bread every Lord's day, except when they attended Norton Church. "The chapell of Stoketon standeth a myle [nearly two modern miles] from the parishe churche, not only for the easement of the inhabitants of the towne of Stoketon, but also for the easement of divers parishioners of sundrie other parishes in the winter tyme, when for rayny fludes they can come none wher els to here devyne service." The rainy floods were caused by a stream and morass between Norton and Stockton, very similar to that between Norton and Billingham, and they have not ceased. Yet, however necessary the chapel was, it did not escape the harpies of Edward VI.'s time, and before the establishment of the new parish, the inhabitants of Stockton paid 3*l*. per annum, commonly called the *Priest's own*, to the vicar of Norton, who maintained a curate at his own cost to save the chapelry, the possessions of which were in lay hands. The old chapel stood a little south of the present large brick church, which was opened in 1712.

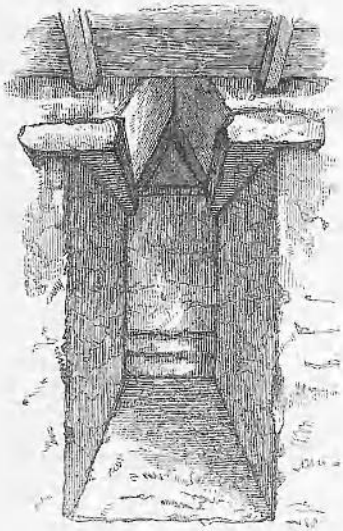
The village of Norton occupies an elevated promontory, surrounded on three sides by the marshes already noticed. It has been likened to a frying-pan. The pan terminating the long town street (its handle), is composed of two squares of green common, divided by a slight eminence, on which, according to a not uncommon arrangement, stand the village forge and bakehouse.[3] The western square has been thrown out of shape by an enclosure before the church, which stands at its north-west corner; and here, according to tradition, (which names a pond in the square "Cross Dyke,") was held the market of Norton, which was granted to Bishop Flambard by Henry I., to be held on Sunday, a day not disagreeable to the people in early times. A Friday market at

[3] The bakehouse belongs to the grammar-school.

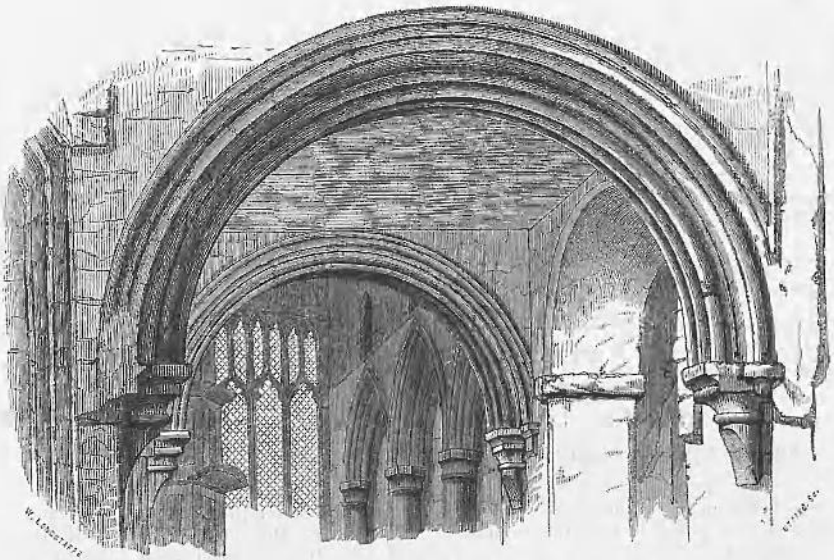
Sedgefield was, in the XIVth century, quite neglected, and the chapmen exposed their merchandise and transacted their business in the church porch on Sundays.

The collegiate church consists of a central tower, and the usual four limbs of a cross, of which the nave only is furnished with aisles, and these in modern times have been widened so as to be flush with the transepts. The names of the transepts or porches (porch being a common expression in the north for private chapels or chantries in churches, of various descriptions) are gathered from an allotment of seats in 1635. The parishioners were to be placed in decent manner according to their ranks, degrees, and qualities. "Mr. Davison, of Blaixton, shall sitt in the seate next unto the chancell one the north side, where he usith to sitt, and for his servants and tenants to sitt in the north porch, which is called by the name of 'Blaixton Porch.' As for men servants which cannot read, we appoynt them for to sitt in the south porch, called by the name of 'Pettie Porch;' and as for women servants, for to be placed to kneele down in the midle ally, nere the font." The south porch is usually called "Pity Porch," and Mr. Hutchinson (in his History of Durham) and the parishioners consider that an altar or image of our Lady of Pity stood there. The base of a wooden screen separates Blakiston Porch from the remainder of the church, and that porch is full of memorials of the later lords of Blakiston.

The consequences of Bishop Fox's sequestration are very visible in the chancel; the east window, two south windows, (the westernmost one being, as usual, lower than the other,) and the priest's door, being all of his period. The masonry near the latter object is much disturbed, and some suppose that a fine early English recess in the interior, a little to the east of it, was the original doorway. It seems to me to be far too rich for the interior of a doorway, and much too perfect to be the exterior of it turned round, and it has all the appearance of being a single *sedile*. The old font having been removed to the vicar's gardens, a porcelain basin was inserted in this arch, and was used for baptisms until it was lately supplanted by a handsome stone font in the appropriate place in the nave. Brewster calls the recess "a niche or ancient piscina," and a piscina *might* have been inserted in it during Fox's alterations, but the wall sounds hollow elsewhere, and Brewster lived before these matters were treated with much precision.



Small Window in the Tower, interior view.



Chancel arch, looking West.

The east end (save its window) and north side of the choir are essentially Early English. The nave is Transitional Norman, having pointed arches on plain cylindrical piers of Bishop Pudsey's time, and I strongly suspect that this prelate placed the college on the foundation we find it, in the same manner as he founded the College of Darlington. A doorway from the south aisle into Pity Porch, and the east window of the latter are also transitional.

Attention must now be called to the tower and transepts, which have considerable interest. It will be observed, from the appearance of the tower arches, that the vestigia of an earlier chancel are visible. (See woodcut.) This chancel was of the same width as the transepts and nave, and if Transitional Norman, could not need replacing by an Early English successor. It will further be seen that while the transepts open by two very rude, narrow arches, without mouldings, unless their projecting edge can be so called, the nave and choir open by two arches of their utmost width, with transitional mouldings.[4] The obvious conclusion is that, on the building of the nave, the constructors wishing to obtain a complete transitional vista to the east, remodelled two arches of the tower, and this conclusion seems to be rendered certain by the appearance of the next story of the steeple, where the rude angular-headed windows, one of which is here represented, are found above both classes of arch. The width of the base of the triangle is not so great as that of the lower portion of these windows, and hence they have a shouldered appearance. The next story is lighted by mere slits, rather singularly disposed by two on each side, some of them being very near to the angles of the building. Here the ancient tower ended. The superstructure is Perpendicular, and of much thinner masonry than the walls beneath, the surplus thickness of the latter serving as a support for the great beams of the bell-frames.[5] The change of masonry is also detected on the exterior by a slight hitch in the outline.

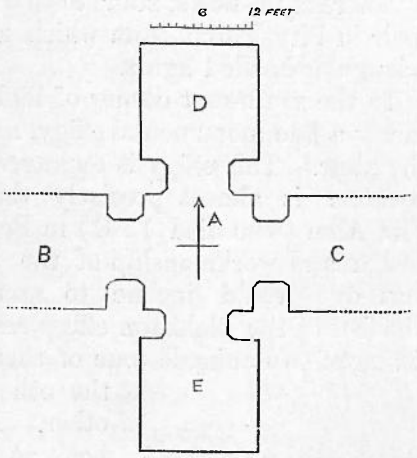
The north transept or Blakiston Porch is composed of very small square stones, with angles of long and short work,

[4] The piers of these arches are cut away for pews, leaving the capitals as corbels.

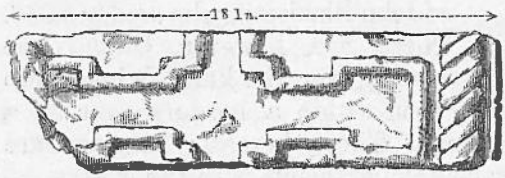
[5] The bells having been recast, I give the inscriptions on the old bells from my rubbings.—1. "A. D. 1607. R. V."—2. "Anno. Domini. 1613. J. C."—3. "Venite. Exvltemvs. Domino. S. S. 1664—R. D. J. C." Between each word a shield of arms, a chevron between three bells impaling three. . . . .

which also appeared in the south transept before it was refaced. The tower is roughcast.

A Norman church would scarcely want rebuilding in Pudsey's time, and I have no doubt that in the tower and transepts of Norton we see the remains of the Saxon church which received the expelled seculars of Durham in 1085. The choir, it may be noticed, is more than two-thirds the length of the nave, which only comprises three arches. Perhaps all the arms of the Saxon church were rather short and equal. In consequence of the arches on the north and south being narrower than the transepts themselves, the church, when in its original simple cruciform shape, would assume the common form, which appears in St. Cuthbert's Cross, the Hartlepool tombstones inscribed with Runes, on a fragment from Jarrow, on the edge of a Roman slab, now in the Castle of Newcastle, and other instances. A base of a cross noticed in Brand's account of Jarrow probably belonged to the design engraved, which, as the slab has been laid flat in a wall, must have run up the wall.



Original outline of the interior of Norton Church. A. Tower. B. Original Nave. C. Original Choir. D. Blakiston Porch. E. Pettie Porch.



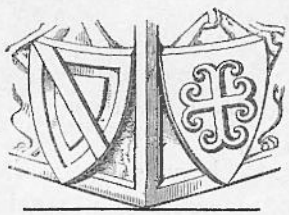
Cross on the edge of a Roman slab from Jarrow.

After very careful examination, suggested by the position of the triangular-headed windows, I cannot detect any change of masonry in the gable of Blakiston Porch, and I am led from this fact, and reference to Saxon MSS., to believe that, like the Romans, the Saxons used roofs of very moderate pitch. I am not unmindful that, in the later towers of Jarrow

and Darlington, there are a second set of tower arches opening to the roofs, and forming a sort of rood-loft, and I am not sure that the room above the ground story of Monk Wearmouth Tower did not always open to the nave. But the windows at Norton are not adapted to this purpose.

There is no newel stair to this tower. It is reached by a stair in Pity Porch, from which a doorway opens under the triangular-headed lights.

In the south-east corner of Blakiston Porch there lay formerly a fine monumental effigy, now removed to the south of the altar. This effigy is engraved in Surtees' Durham. The costume is almost precisely that of the effigy of Brian Fitz Alan (who died 1301) in Bedale Church, and the very design and workmanship of the two effigies are so similar that one would incline to ascribe them to one hand. The feet of the Blakiston effigy rest on a spirited group, consisting of two animals (one of them certainly a lion, perhaps the other so also) tearing one another. A single figure sits with a book at the knight's side. There are two very remarkable circumstances about this effigy. First, the shield borne on the arm is clearly a "palimpsest," for its bearings could only be borne by the descendants of John Blakiston, who died in 1586. There are, however, behind the canopy over the knight's head, two shields :—1. An inescutcheon within a bordure, over all a bend. 2. A cross moline. These heraldic bearings are fashioned in a manner contemporaneous with the effigy.



Shields at the back of the head of the Norton Effigy.

Of these coats, the cross moline seems certainly to belong to Fulthorpe, a family seated at Fulthorpe, in the neighbouring parish of Grindon. The other suggests the feudal influence of Baliol, and it is perhaps worth noticing that the dictionaries of arms give another coat to Fulthorpe, Argent, an inescutcheon sable. It is remarkable that these tinctures are not only those of the more usual coat of the cross,[6] but also

[6] One of the crests of the Tunstall stock was an eagle displayed *argent*, charged on the breast with a cross moline *sable*. I call attention to the coincidences in the text in consequence of having repeatedly remarked a tendency in families to marry with others of similar bearings or tinctures.

of all the six quarterings given in the visitation, for Fulthorpe of Fulthorpe and Tunstall, (Bland, Burgh of Burgh, near Catterick, and Booth, are amongst them,) and even of another class of coats ascribed to the name of Fulthorpe, in which a lion and *annulets* semé or in orle are variously disposed.[7] And here, rather in coincidence than in connection, comes in the second observable feature of the Norton effigy, which was hidden from Mr. Surtees' draughtsman. It is a mark on the bevel of the monument near the base of the shield, an I and three links or annulets interlaced. Is this an early example of a badge, or of a sculptor's mark? I am at present disposed to think that it is the artist's device, because, on the base of a small image[8] found at St. Helen's Chapel, Hartlepool, we have the remains, as it would seem, of the same mark, the links not quite of the annulet form. One might suppose the sculptor to have been called John Cheyne, or by some synonymous appellation;[9] perhaps Locke, since the same device, with three oak trees, formed the punning coat of the Lockwoods of Newcastle, quartered by Anderson of Haswell Grange. Can it be the local name, found (in the genitive?) in *Lucasland* mentioned in Hatfield's Survey? (see the note *infra.*) All the modern families of Lucas bear six annulets, and that name may be merely Luke, Latinised, or in the genitive case, as Jones, for John or *Johannes.*

Fragment found at St. Helen's Chapel, Hartlepool.

Did the Norton effigy really represent a member of the family called Blakiston? I apprehend that it did not.

The manor of Blakiston was granted by Bishop Karilepho to the monks. Bishop Flambard reft it away and granted it

[7] "Norton. Rogerus Fulthorp miles tenet duo messuagia et una carucata terræ vocata Lucasland." *Hatfield's Survey.* "Lucas (Durham); or, a fess between 6 *annulets* sable." Gen. Armory.

[8] The upper tunic of the larger figure, and the dress of the smaller one, are painted with vermilion; the larger figure may have represented a patron saint; the workmanship is similar to that of the Norton and Bedale effigies.

[9] Tremayle has also been suggested, a name occurring in the western counties. Any indication of the name or device of the artist is rarely found in sepulchral memorials. Mr. Waller has noticed a remarkable example at Westley Waterless, Cambridgeshire, in his "Sepulchral Brasses." In Hefner's "Costume du moyen age Chretien," a representation is given of the effigy of George von Seckendorf, who died in 1444. On one of the lappets of the skirt which falls under his taces, the sculptor has introduced an escutcheon and monogram, doubtless his personal device or mark.

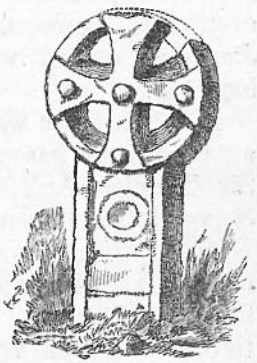
to his nephew; but in his dying hour the sting of conscience smote him, and, borne to the altar of his cathedral, he offered his golden ring upon it in testimony of restitution. The nephew's rights passed away with his uncle's repentance, and the strong powers the king gave "that he might no more be afflicted with the clamour of the monks." His descendants had Blakiston a little longer by acknowledging the superiority of the convent; but, in the XIIIth century we find in the manor a line of knightly owners, who sprung from Old Park, on the Wear, and bore the name of their birth-place. Geoffrey de Park, of Blakiston, was at the battle of Lewes in 1264, and Richard Park was lord in 1323. A new family was, however, nursing in the manor, whose members contrived to tear field after field, and finally the manor itself, from their lords. In 1320, John de Blaykeston was chaplain of the chantry, which the Parks founded in their chapel at Blakiston. Before 1341, Roger, *the cook* of Blakiston, had obtained a lease of property, which in that year Richard-Fitz-Richard Park sold him in fee. Hugh de Blakeston occurs at the same time, and in 1349 his son acquired the manor.

We have already seen that the effigy corresponds with that of Brian Fitz Alan, who died in 1301. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that it was erected in readiness some years before the death of the person represented, or that when he died an old man he still wore old-fashioned armour, we may stretch twenty years forward, and still be a quarter of a century from the earliest Blakistons of any repute or ownership. In all probability a Park intervened between Geoffrey of 1264 and Richard of 1323, and might well own the monument. If this was not the case, it may be assigned to Richard; but, as the features are not aged, it must, in that event, have been prepared in his lifetime. The two shields behind the head are both, perhaps, arms of alliance, and if there was originally a coat on the large shield (and surely there must have been), the substitution of the arms of Blakiston was an act of great meanness.

The Blakistons were not ungrateful to the memory of Rogerus *Cocus*. They wore red cocks in their shields, and mounted a cock for their crest. The heralds call these birds dunghill-cocks. One would have thought that black-cocks would have been a better allusion. Robert Blakiston,

a priest, of Stainton in Cleveland, in 1522, had a brother Robert. The latter made heraldry and ancestral remembrances tell for convenience, and called himself Robert Cok.

I do not know the boundaries of Blakiston Manor, but I have sometimes thought that an early stone cross (with the usual imitations of gems (?) in the form of small round protuberances), discovered, and still standing near a farm-house[1] in the neighbourhood, had some reference to them. What remains of the churchyard cross of Norton, a plain square shaft, chamfered at the angles, lies on the wall next to a stile at the south-west corner of the churchyard.



Cross at Colpitt's Farm, near Norton.

The vicarage house is modern. Its predecessor, said to have been built by Vicar Sisson (1746-1773), is figured in Hutchinson's Durham. In 1415, Vicar Robert Bromley leaves the residue of his estate to his executors to spend, according to the bishop's directions, in payment of his debts, at the amount of which he greatly grieves, and the repair of his mansion at Norton, "ad quam teneo ultra quam sufficere potero." The executors renounced probate, but the bishop imposed administration on one of them, a brother of the testator.

There was at Norton a "free chapel of Norton Hermitage," part of the possessions of which seem to have been appropriated to Stockton Chapel. These fell into lay hands; the remainder,[2] with probably a portion of other chantry lands, appear to have endowed the Grammar School of Norton, which stands in "the Hermitage Garth," and by leases of the bishop (going back to 1600) owns two common ovens or bakehouses, (one of them now waste, and situate at the foot of the village, the other between the two greens as before mentioned,) a toft or kilnstead where the Lady Kiln formerly stood, the close called Kiln Close, or Lady Close, and an acre with the same kiln formerly occupied. Besides

[1] Thorney Close, if I view the maps aright. I know the place better as the Out Farm, or Colpitt's or Swalwell's Farm, from the names of its recent occupiers.

[2] The subject is obscure, and perhaps the evidences in Brewster's Stockton are not very accurately given. It may however be gathered that the establishment had been broken up before the general dissolution of such foundations.

these old leaseholds, the school holds 20 poles of allotted land behind the building (set out in 1673), and some escheats granted by the bishop in 1720. The school is due east of the church, and probably occupies the site of the chapel or hermitage, but its only ancient feature is part of the west gable, containing a square mullioned window, and even this, perhaps, is cotemporaneous with a piece of Jacobean carved woodwork discovered in the house not long ago.

In 1501, there was in Norton parish a vicar, non-resident, a "capellanus parochiæ" (the chaplain of Stockton ?) and Sir Thomas Aplbie, chantry priest. The Ecclesiastical Survey of 2 Edward VI. returns "the parishe church of Norton havinge howseling people, 700." Besides Stockton chapel it names the existence of a priest in the church for term of years. He had "stocke of money for iij. yeres to come, at iij.*l.* by the yere, geven by William Blaxston, xij.*l.*," and was evidently to officiate in Blakiston Porch for a few years for the soul of the last departed lord, William (who died before 1533). The nature of the college seems to have been remarkable. Under "the porcion of tythe within the seyd parishe of Norton," we find eight incumbents, "having the seyd tythes (yearly value, 48*l.*) porcioned emonge them to studye at the universitie;" Lancelot Thwayte, and the six who received pensions (as before stated) being among them. This statement agrees with a demise to Will. Crofton the same year of the tithe grain of Norton parish into eight portions, divided by ancient custom for the exhibition of lay scholars and otherwise, at the pleasure of the Bishop of Durham. So Bishop Barne's "Clavis Ecclesiastica" mentions the "eighte laye porcionarii seu prebendæ, everione 8*l.* and were of the Busshope of Durham's giefte but are now dissolved and in the Quene's handes."

In 1580, the Bible in Norton Church was "not sufficient, beinge *old* and torne, lackinge fower or five leaves together in sundrye places of St. Paule's epistles."

Gateshead. W. HYLTON DYER LONGSTAFFE, F.S.A.