ON KIRKSTEAD ABBEY, LINCOLNSHIRE, KIRKSTEAD CHAPEL, AND A REMARKABLE MONUMENTAL EFFIGY THERE PRESERVED.

By ALBERT HARTSHORNE, F.S.A.

The Cistercian Abbey of Kirkstead, a great religious house on the eastern bank of the Witham, was founded by Brito, son of Eudo, one of the companions of the Conqueror. Brito endowed it with extensive possessions as appears from the "Taxatio" of Bishop Nicholas (1291). Some of the charters, patents and grants are set forth in Dugdale's "Monasticon."

According to Stukeley's plan, taken early in the last century, the abbey buildings were very extensive, the entire area being enclosed by a broad and deep moat, with a wall of enceinte on the inner side.

But Stukeley's plan is somewhat vague, and the ancient and modern plans are so mixed up that the church is also marked "garden," and a summer house appears in the north transept. Foundations can be traced every where at the present day, and a fine and lofty ruin, apparently the north-east angle of the south transept, still remains. The architectural details are clearly Transition work, probably about 1160, and there is no sign of any buildings of Brito's foundation of 1139 which would, of course, have been late and florid Norman or Romanesque; the whole of of this transept end was standing in Stukeley's time.

It is well known that the Cistercians were a branch of the great order of St. Benedict, and that they were first constituted at Citeaux, in 1098, by a small band of monks who desired to conform more strictly to the rules of their great founder. How rapidly they spread over the whole of western Christendom, and what an important influence they had upon the religion and politics of the twelfth

century, is as remarkable as the general severity and piety of their mode of life at that early period. It is therefore not surprising, but quite in accordance with the feeling of the age, that one of the lords of the district should be brought under their influence at Kirkstead, and should add to their splendour by building and placing under their protection, in expiation of his own offences, a chapel where the monks should for ever pray for the repose of his soul after his death.

But the attractions of the outer world they affected to despise soon became too strong for the Cistercians, and, already in the latter part of the thirteenth century they gave signs of worldly laxity. It was so at Kirkstead when abbot Simon ruled the house.

In 1273 he was accused of divers encroachments and usurpations. He prevented the navigation of the Witham by any vessels save his own; he alone exercised the privilege of hunting, fowling, and fishing, and took waif and stray over Wildmore Fen, a tract of 45,000 acres, and he claimed similar rights over other districts. He set up a gallows at Thimbleby, and executed criminals thereon, —for which, in one sense, it might be thought he was to be commended,—but he did what was probably then thought much worse, he appropriated the assize of bread and beer there, and at Horncastle. He omitted to pay sheriff's aid for some of his large estates and refused to do suit and service for his lands within the royal courts, or in those of the Bishop of Carlisle at Horncastle. This lax Cistercian, Abbot Simon, was accused at Lincoln, in 1276, of smuggling wool and manufactured goods and defrauding the Crown of its tronage, and the citizens their tolls. Traffic of any kind being forbidden to the order, it is somewhat startling to find from this presentment that by unclerical and unlawful jobbery the citizens of Lincoln alone were thus robbed of tolls to the value of £2000 a year. When means of this kind and extent are added to their other vast possessions, some idea may be formed of the income of the Kirkstead Cistercians.

But fully fifty years before the unpleasant questions arose regarding the conduct of Abbot Simon, and during the abbacy of Abbot William, the very beautiful chapel of Kirkstead was set up, hard by the great abbey but quite

distinct from it, and without its encircling wall of enceinte.

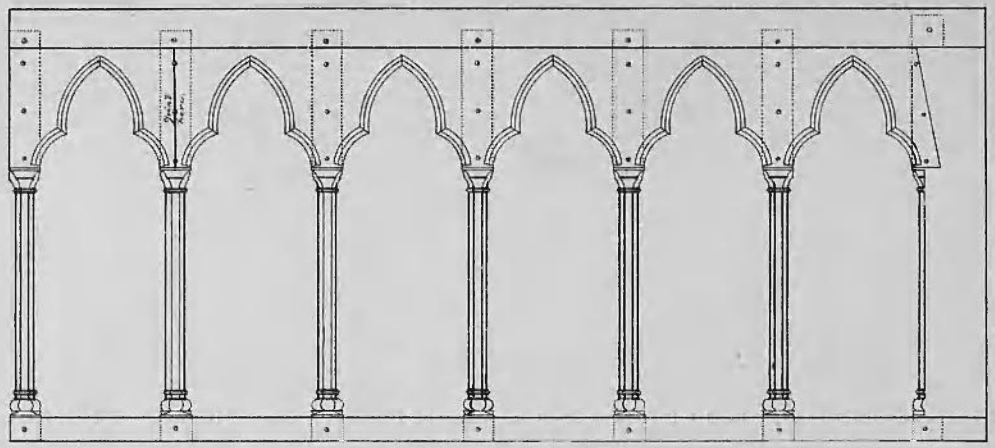
Built under the influence of the Cistercians to whom the rise and rapid development of pure Gothic owes so much, we naturally find here a work of the highest order. It consists of an unbroken oblong, divided into three bays by slight buttresses which sustain, inadequately indeed, the pressure of the heavy vaulted roof. The chapel is lighted at the sides by pairs of lancets, at the west end by an oval, and at the east end by a triplet. The exterior is singularly plain, with the exception of the west front, which presents a design of great beauty. The inside is very striking, whether we consider the perfection of the caps supporting the vaulting, or the exquisite beauty of the east window, where, as has been well said, the foliage seems ready to expand and yield to the breeze.

Reared up against the wall at the west end is a monumental effigy in Forest marble, larger than life, of a man in the military costume of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. He wears a cylindrical helm, a hauberk, apparently hooded, a short surcote and a broad cingulum. The left arm is covered by a ponderous shield, and he draws a sword from a scabbard. He wears breeches of mail, but the legs from the knees downwards are missing. The head rests upon a cushion supported by conventional foliage.

The occurrence of a cylindrical flat-topped helm in monumental sculpture is, of itself, sufficiently rare to merit notice. There are two examples at Furness, two at Chester-le-Street, one at Staindrop, and one at Walkern,—seven only in all, as far as appears to be known. They occur in the seals of Henry III, Edward I, Alexander II of Scotland, and Hugh de Vere. Actual examples of such head pieces are certainly of the utmost rarity. There is a very genuine one in the Tower, and another at Warwick Castle. Some sham ones were in the Helmet and Mail Exhibition held in the rooms of the Institute in 1880, and are suitably exposed in the Illustrated Catalogue of that interesting collection.

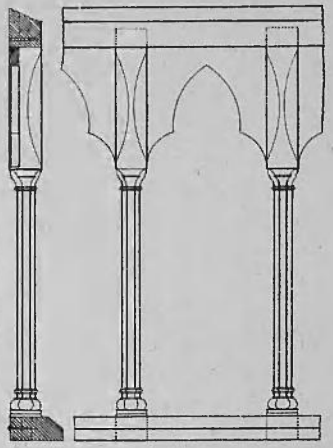
It is perhaps now well known that one of the archæological troubles of the past and present generations is "Banded Mail," and it will be within the recollection of the members of the Institute how much care the late Mr.

KIRKSTEAD CHAPEL, NEAR HORNCASTLE, LINCOLNSHIRE.

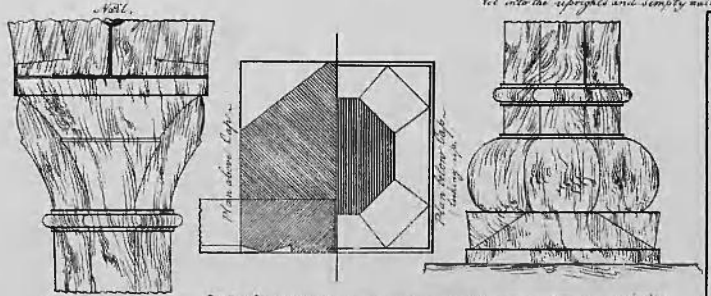


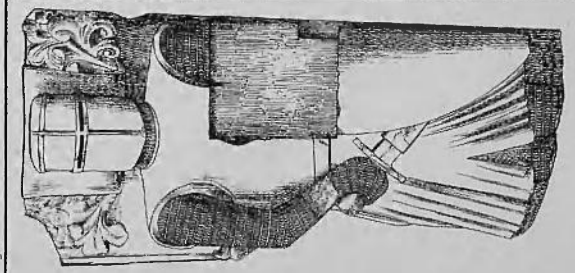
PART OF OAK SCREEN, **FRONT.**

There is another portion of six and a half bays in length. Both portions are now worked up into the modern deal seats. The framed shutters let into the upright and simply nailed on.



SECTION. **BACK.**





EFFIGY IN PURBECK MARBLE. CIRCA 1225.

Burges took to endeavour to unravel the mystery of its construction. At the time of the Helmet and Mail Exhibition he went to the trouble of having casts made from the only four then known sculptured representations of this defence, namely from effigies at Tewkesbury, Tollard-Royal, Dodford, and Newton Solney respectively, with the view of endeavouring to throw some certain and clear light upon its construction. On this occasion Mr. W. G. B. Lewis and Mr. C. E. M. Holmes contributed examples of defenses of leather and rings of various kinds, approaching as closely as possible to the forms and appearance of the four above mentioned varieties of this armour, and Mr. Burges subsequently brought his rare abilities to bear upon the question in the printed Catalogue of the Exhibition, and even he had to confess in the end that he could make nothing satisfactory of it.

Here, now, at Kirkstead is the fifth known sculptured example of Banded Mail in this kingdom. It is the first time that attention has been called to it, as such, although this effigy has been described more than once, and this is the earliest example of all. It will be seen from the illustration that the figure affords no indication whatever of the method of the construction of this kind of mail armour. On comparing it with the casts of the other four examples, now preserved in the Burges bequest in the British Museum, it appears that the Banded Mail at Kirkstead resembles most the Newton Solney type, but I can throw no light upon its construction, though I have long considered the subject, and I reluctantly leave the matter as I found it, twenty years ago,—a mystery.

If we are to suppose, as the Bishop Suffragan of Nottingham has suggested, that a local lord built Kirkstead Chapel, then I am disposed to think with him that that lord was Robert de Tattershall and Kirkstead, who died in 1212. The date of the chapel may certainly be of about the same period, namely, a little after the time of St. Hugh, and coeval with the Early English work of the second period in Lincoln Cathedral. The effigy may very well have been set up to the memory of Robert de Tattershall a few years after his death.

At the west end of the chapel are two separate portions of arcading in oak. These apparently formed part of a

screen, and are of the highest value and rarity as early examples of wood work. There are very few objects of the sort so early, and they are probably cotemporary with the chapel itself.[1]

To return to the abbey. The end came in 1537, when the monastic buildings were found to be in a wretched state of dilapidation. In answer to a series of questions, craftily drawn up by the commissioners, the last abbot, Harryson, confessed that the monks had, "under shadow of their rule vainly, detestably, and ungodlily devoured their yearly revenues in continual egurgitations of their carrion bodies and in support of their over voluptuous and carnal appetites, with other vain and unholy expenses, enormities and abuses; and that they had defiled their bodies with feigned devotions and devilish persuasions."

The monastic estate in Kirkstead was first granted to Charles Brandon. On his death it was given to Clinton, Earl of Lincoln. It passed by marriage to Daniel Disney, a zealous Presbyterian who, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, established dissenting worship in the chapel.[2] Kirkstead being a donative, dissenting service was permanently established by endowment in 1730, and so continued until 1812, when, after certain lawsuits, the state religion was established.

In the meantime, the effigy had been placed face downwards in the floor, and the chapel brought much to its present appearance.

In 1843, certain so-called improvements were effected;[3] and in 1846, the Lincolnshire Architectural Society published an illustrated monograph upon the chapel, to which I am indebted for some of the foregoing historical details.

[1] Mr. Micklethwaite is kind enough to tell me that the earliest example of wooden screen work in this country is at Compton in Surrey; this is of the Transition period.

The early screen work in Rochester Cathedral is of the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and of precisely the same character as that at Kirkstead. The screen at Thurcaston, Lancashire (engraved in Bloxam's "Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture," new edit., vol. ii, p. 36) belongs also to the same time.

[2] We are probably indebted to Mr Disney for the picturesque canopied pulpit, which still remains in the chapel.

[3] A part of these works consisted in removing "the unsightly beams by which the side walls were held together," with a view to the "preservation of the building from destruction." This singular proceeding has naturally had the result of causing the walls to lean still further outwards. Doubtless, the "unsightly beams" were introduced soon after the building was erected, and were themselves the sole cause that the chapel has been preserved to our own time.

At that time, namely in 1846, it was hoped that this publication would help forward the complete restoration of this choice building.

I am far from scoffing, as many do, at any idea of rules for setting out the proportions of mediæval churches.[1] If any body of men had them it was certainly the Cistercians; but it would be a nice question to say where science ends and rule of eye or thumb comes in; and it will not be convenient now to go into the ingenious manner in which, in 1846, the "mystic" figures—circle, oval, and triangle—were found to be combined in the form of the ground plan of Kirkstead Chapel, further than to notice that upon varieties of these mutable figures a "restoration" of the east and west gables was projected and accepted by the Lincolnshire Architectural Society of that day, who further recommended a bell gable at the west end, for which there was not a shred or shadow of original authority. Fortunately, the funds were not forthcoming for these vagaries, and the chapel passed unscathed through that most dangerous period of English architectural history. And so it has remained to the present day, as it was described 150 years since, "out of the sight and hearing of anything that is vicious;" and this is the more remarkable, because it must have been a singularly tempting thing for the typical restorer of forty years ago, and a sore trial to him to let it alone.

It must be added, that the time has certainly now come when something must be done to save this beautiful building from ruin. Six years ago its state was so dangerous that service therein was abandoned, and it has since been left to the owls and the bats. The heavy vaulted roof has pushed out the walls to such an extent that probably nothing short of partial rebuilding can be

[1] The subject has been ably treated by Mr. Kerrich in the "Archæologia," vol. xix, p. 353; by Professor Cockerell in the Winchester volume of the "Archæological Journal," "the Architectural Works of William of Wykeham"; and by Mr. Penrose in the Lincoln volume, "An Inquiry into the System of Proportions which prevail in the Nave of Lincoln Cathedral."

Persons who desire to follow further this intricate and difficult question should have their attention directed to "Facsimile of the Sketch-Book of Wilars de Honecort, an Architect of the Thirteenth Century," edited by Professor Willis, and doubtless the most important volume in the world upon Gothic architecture. Nor should the enquirer overlook "Rules for constructing a Pinnacle, as given by Mathias Roriczer in 1486," printed in the "Archæological Journal," vol. iv, p. 21, and which shows upon what strictly geometrical principles the architects of a later period went to work.

thought of. It has been reported on by an architect whose name is a guarantee of careful treatment; but now, as in 1846, the funds are not forthcoming. Another church has arisen on a more convenient site; and I believe that, practically, this little chapel can be dispensed with; but I think it would be a sort of scandal to the body antiquarian, or to societies like the Institute, if no attempt were made to save such a masterpiece. Having been spared at the Dissolution, and having escaped Civil War, Revolution and "Restoration," it would certainly be a melancholy ending if, for want of a little timely support which a few wooden props would give, it should, in our own day, be supinely suffered to perish. I know not whether even such slight aid as this will be forthcoming; but of two things, I am quite certain, if nothing is done, the chapel must collapse, and that very soon; and when it does so fall, it will become such an utter ruin that it would be quite impossible to put it up again.