



*Plan of Norman Church, at Plumblaud.
By J. A. Cory, Esq.*

ART. VI.—*An Account of Plumbland Old Church ; * its History, drawn from its remains, as they existed in 1868.*
By J. A. CORY, Esq.

Read at Plumbland, August 30th, 1876.

AS the body of St. Cuthbert rested here for a time, no doubt a degree of sanctity was attributed to the spot, and the remains of a hogbacked tombstone, reworked in the thirteenth century, point to a church on this site anterior to the Norman Conquest.

This church was almost certainly of wood, and having existed two or three hundred years, was replaced by an edifice of stone, about the year 1170. This consisted of a nave and chancel ; the plan given with this paper shews its size and proportions. Enough of this building remained in 1868 to allow a restoration to be drawn both of its general features and details by any architect acquainted with ecclesiastical architecture of the Norman period. It had as usual a south door, pulled down in the fourteenth century, the remains of which were found in the south wall of the church, and are now partly built up in the vestry and partly in the tower.

The north door forms the present entrance to the coal cellar. The chancel arch, heightened in the shafts, is reused in its old position. The east end gable had no doubt, three small windows, but of it no remains existed except the lower part of the east wall, which corresponded in thickness with the Norman walls, but not with those of later date. It was dark, as the unglazed windows were only nine-and-a-half inches wide. It had neither door nor window at the west end, but a small bell cote, probably terminating the west gable. So the building continued for about fifty years till the thirteenth century.

* Pulled down and rebuilt in 1870-71.

About 1220 the south, the east, and half the north wall of the chancel were rebuilt in the early English style, and the piscina, found broken in the later south wall, and now replaced in its original position, is of this date, as are also the windows of the present vestry. Why this rebuilding took place is not quite certain, but as no enlargement of the fabric was made, it was most likely necessary in consequence of the ill-built Norman walls becoming insecure. Thus again the church remained ill-lighted and cold with its character unaltered.

Sixty years more elapsed, and about 1280, another fashion had succeeded; glass now universally prevailed, even in the smallest country churches, and larger windows, and more light followed. The east end window was made in three lights combined in one large window, the remains of which are now built into the north transept. This must have caused the whole interior to be much better lighted than ever it had previously been, at the same time the whole east end and most of the south side appears to have been rebuilt. After this the chancel remained unaltered except perhaps by the addition of St. Cuthbert's chapel.

When this was added it is difficult to say, as no remains existed except the doorway from the church and the uneven surface of the chancel wall where the new wall had been tied into it, thus shewing the width of the building to have been only five feet five inches from east to west, it must however have been erected after the priest's door of the chancel, for the width of the chapel was curtailed by the existence of that door.

About seventy years again pass by. Population must have increased and the church become too small for the inhabitants, for about the year 1350 it was determined to increase its size. The south wall of the Norman church with its fine old doorway was then taken down, two pillars and three arches substituted, and a south aisle erected.

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The roof being continued in one slope from the eaves of the nave to the new south wall necessarily made that wall very low, and the greater width of the church rendered the insertion of a new window on the north side necessary. Hence the larger two-light square-headed window of the decorated period, built into the north wall, subsequently repaired and rebuilt into the new church in the same situation. At this time also the west wall of the old Norman building was refaced, and a small window built into the west end of the aisle, which, on being taken down, was rebuilt into the bell chamber of the tower. In 1614 the chancel roof was renewed and subsequently, like other churches, this one underwent the process of new pewing and was fashioned more in accordance with the prevailing taste of the day and habits of people.

It was again found too small, so that in 1834, the pillars and arches were thought inconvenient, and were taken away, involving necessarily a new roof, which was ceiled below. The south wall was nearly double in height, and a spacious gallery erected, and the main entrance made at the west end, so it came to the condition it was found just before the rebuilding. In pulling down the portion of the south wall built in 1836 the penstones of the nave arcade were found, and the head of one of the south side windows probably formed the south door of the aisle, built in or about 1380. It now forms the doorway leading from the vestry into the transept. In the rebuilding, I and my colleague Mr. C. J. Ferguson, of Carlisle, endeavoured to preserve as much as lay in our power every portion of old work which was not too far decayed for re-use, and thus have been saved those relics of the past which bind present history with bygone times, and must add considerable value to the building in the estimation of the cultivated mind.