

ART. XVII.—*Over Denton Church.* BY CHARLES J. FERGUSON.

Read at that place, June 21st, 1877.

THE church at Over Denton is built of stones taken evidently from the Roman wall, and is remarkable among the churches in Cumberland in retaining so much of its original form and character untouched,—presenting a curious example of what was the early type of church in this diocese. From a germ, such as this, were developed, by gradual additions and alterations, most of the churches of the diocese; the general process being, first, the lengthening, in Norman times, of short Norman chancels, as at Dacre and Torpenhow; then the widening of the nave by the addition of aisles, as at Ormside, Dacre, Torpenhow, and Gilcrux; the lengthening of the nave by the addition of a tower, of which many instances may be given; the increasing the size of the windows, as the use of glass became more general; the rebuilding, on a larger scale, of some part of the building; the addition of aisles, transepts, and, finally, of the modern sash window; Over Denton church, therefore, is peculiarly interesting in having little or no history, and in thus illustrating a first step in the church building of this diocese.

The church consists of a chancel, nave, and belfry,—the chancel being only 11 feet wide and 12 feet long. The original chancel arch remains. The window to the east end is a modern insertion, that to the south an insertion of the thirteenth century. The nave possesses two doorways, the principal one to the south is square-headed, the lintel being supported on two quaintly wrought corbels; that to the north is now built up, and was probably originally used for processional purposes. A little to the
east

east of it, one of the original Norman windows still remains, a rounded-headed slit, only a few inches wide, made before the general use of glass, and kept with good reason as small as possible. The two windows to the south are modern insertions, occupying no doubt the position of the originals. The west wall and belfry are also modern, erected on the old foundations. The roofs are in great decay, and, in fact, are only kept up by props.

A very large stone in the chancel covers, to judge from the sound, a vaulting, but no record or tradition exists about it.

The history of this church presents some curious points, not the least of which is the doubt once entertained as to whether this church and its parish were in the diocese of Durham or of Carlisle. Bishop Nicolson, in his account of the diocese of Carlisle (1703), under the head of Denton, writes, "There's another church at Upper or Over Denton, which is said to be in the diocese of Durham." The bishop caused enquiry to be made at Durham, and it turned out that in a Roll of Livings, belonging to the diocese of Durham, and made in 1498, was, "Ecclesia de Denton in Gillesland:" further, it appeared that in 1507 a synod was held by the Dean and Chapter of Durham, "Sede Vacante," and among the clerks that were cited were "Rector de Knaresdale et Rector de Denton in Gyllysland." Other instances were found by Mr. Rowel, who searched the Durham records under directions from Dr. Smith, prebendary there. Dr. Smith writes to Bishop Nicolson that Mr. Rowel "believes no notice has been taken of it, nor any exercise of jurisdiction claimed, for nigh a hundred years, and if your L.P. will take it, none will oppose you from hence."*

The extremely small value of the living was probably the reason of its being an ecclesiastical waif and stray.

* See Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlisle, by Bishop Nicolson, published 1877, pp. 3, 4.

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Since Bishop Nicolson's time it has, so far as I know, been always considered part of the Diocese of Carlisle. But if we turn to the chartulary of the Priory of Lanercost, we shall find rather more information on the matter than could be found by Bishop Nicolson's correspondents in the Durham records. We find that the Priory of Lanercost obtained from Hugh Pudsey, bishop of Durham from 1153 to 1194, the appropriation to themselves of the church of Old or Over Denton, which had been given to them by Robert de Vallibus, and Robert the son of Anketill. Bishop Pudsey confirmed the appropriation on condition that the canons of Lanercost were to appoint a vicar to serve the church, who was to receive his provisions from the canons and to pay them half a mark yearly. This charter is printed in both Hutchinson (vol. I. p. 144) and in Burns and Nicolson (vol. II., p. 209), and seems positive proof that in the twelfth century Over Denton was in the diocese of Durham. That this was not an intrusion by the Bishop of Durham into the diocese of Carlisle, in assertion of some old rights traced down from St. Cuthbert, is shown by the chartulary containing similar appropriations, (but made by the Bishop of Carlisle, to Lanercost or to Wetheral,) of all the neighbouring churches, including that of Nether Denton, which was appropriated by the Bishop of Carlisle jointly to Lanercost and Wetheral.

If we turn to John Denton's History of Cumberland we shall find the solution: he says, (writing circa 1600,) "Over Denton is in Northumberland and Nether Denton is in Cumberland, but both are in the barony of Gilsland." The fact is that this little angle between the Poltross brook and the river Irthing was, up to 1600, or later, part, or considered part, of the county of Northumberland and of the diocese of Durham; and the county boundary must formerly, instead of running down the Poltross to the river Irthing, have left the Poltross at the angle that that brook makes near Temon, and run thence direct to the Irthing by the

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line dividing the parish of Over Denton and Nether Denton. In fact Over Denton has been a debateable land between Cumberland and Northumberland; an expression which is perhaps hardly correct, for when we cross the Poltross we enter the district of Tindale, a franchise of its own, which only became part of Northumberland in 1495, under an Act of Parliament passed for the purpose of making it gildable and parcel of the county of Northumberland.

The confirmation by Bishop Pudsey states the church to have been given to the canons of Lanercost by Robert de Vallibus, and by Robert son of Anketell. Robert de Vallibus was the Baron of Gilsland, parcel of which Denton was. Robert, son of Anketill, was husband of Sigreda, or Sireth, co-heiress of the unbroken manor of Denton, and who got Over Denton for her share.*

In the long run this gift of De Vallibus and of Robert of Anketill, and the confirmation of Bishop Pudsey worked ill to the church of Over Denton. So long as the Priory of Lanercost lasted, the scanty stipend paid to an incumbent of Over Denton was sufficient for the wants of one who had in addition his "victus" from the foundation, and who could in old age retire there, or be pensioned out of the Priory revenues. But on the dissolution of the Priory the parishes of Lanercost, Farlam, and Over Denton came to fearful woe.

The late Mr. Mounsey, of Castletown, wrote of these parishes thus:—

"Every acre of land, every dwelling, and erection within them, belonging to the church, all tithes, and all pecuniary dues were seized by the Crown. Some portion of land near the Abbey yet remains so, having been granted to Sir Thomas Dacre and his heirs male, and having fallen in again to the crown on failure of such.† The remainder was granted in fee without

* The Chartulary of Lanercost, cited by G. G. Mounsey in his tract on Gilsland.

† This portion was a few years ago sold by the Crown to the trustees of the Earl of Carlisle, who thereon *voluntarily* expended a large sum in the reparation of the old Priory.

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stipulation, or expressed condition for the grantees to provide for the parochial cures. It was not to be expected that they would voluntarily do so, but surely it ought to have been specially enjoined."

Owing to this conduct of the part of the Crown, the whole yearly amount paid by the grantee of the church property in Over Denton was just twenty shillings. The state of things in Farlam and Lanercost was little better. From 1786 to 1845 these three livings were held together by the Rev. George Gillbanks, who held alternate services at Farlam and Lanercost, and left Over Denton church to be occasionally used for a funeral; baptisms there may or may not have been at Over Denton church, but the font is a watering trough in a neighbouring farmyard.

The very burial ground has been alienated by grantees of the church lands, and was but lately restored by the Howards, who purchased the church lands from the Tweddalls, who purchased from the Dacres.

Mr. Mounsey says:—

"To think of the once flourishing establishment at Lanercost holding, as it were, under its wings, the appropriate churches of the surrounding parishes, maintaining within its walls an educated body of clergy for the celebration of divine worship, and sending forth its priests to sabbath services, and the parochial cures of the neighbourhood with assiduity and regularity; and then to contrast with that mental picture of the former time the vast realities of the state of things which ensued upon the abolition of the monastery; it almost induces a question whether the boasted Reformation of the English Church was productive of good or evil to the people. Most assuredly in these parts, and down to a not distant period of time, the result was degradation of the status of the clergy with its certain consequence—a lapse into something like heathenism amongst their flocks."

In the churchyard are five remarkable monuments, four erect and one prostrate on the ground; one of these is to the memory of Margaret Carrick, otherwise Margaret Teasdale,

Teasdale, Meg of Mumps Ha,' Tib. Mumps the landlady
of Guy Mannering.

Here lieth the Body
of Margaret
Teasdale of Mumps
Hall who died May
the 5 1777 aged 98
years.

What I was once some may relate
What I am now is each one's fate
What I shall be none can explain
Till he that called call again

The other monuments commemorate sundry of Meg's relations. Mumps Ha', that is, Mumper's or Beggar's Hall, stood by the bridge over the Poltross, near the railway station, but has been pulled down.

Outside of the churchyard at Over Denton stands an old peel tower of small dimensions, said to have been the vicarage. It is now used as byre and barn. It can never have been a very choice place of residence, but probably only afforded an occasional shelter to some canon of Lanercost, who did the duty here.

On the conclusion of Mr. Ferguson's paper, Mr. William Nanson observed that, in the absence of any detail, it seemed impossible to fix with certainty the date of the church, but the peculiar form of the door and the rude character of the chancel arch had hitherto led him to look upon it as an example of that primitive English Romanesque generally called Saxon. He did not know of any Saxon work in Cumberland, but it would be in the recollection of some members that at Morland, in Westmorland, the open windows in the church tower were furnished with midwall shafts, one of the characteristics of the earliest English architecture so noticeable at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. Along the valley of the Tyne there was a remarkable series of churches, the towers of which probably dated from a time prior to the Conquest, or were built, at any rate, before the Norman Romanesque had reached these parts. It was after visiting the Tyne-side churches of Bywell and Corbridge that he had last seen Over Denton, and he had then been much struck by the similarity of the chancel arch here to the arch under the tower at Corbridge.

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The Rev. A. Wright, Vicar of Over Denton, then read the following notes :

*Historical investigation concerning Over Denton Ancient
Parish Church.*

THE Church and Parish of Over Denton are of a very early date. Immediately after the foundation of the Priory of Lanercost in A.D. 1169, by Robert de Vallibus, Baron of Gilsland and Lord Paramount, the rectory and right of presentation of the existing and endowed church of Over Denton, were given by Robert the son of Anketil, (with the consent of the Lord Paramount,) to the prior and canons of Lanercost.

The antiquity of the parish is implied in the terms of the deed of appropriation*, by Hugh Pudsey,† Bishop of Durham. The church is there designated "Ecclesiam de Veteri Denton." The intention of this designation might be to distinguish, in a well recognized form, between Over and Nether Denton.

Hutchinson speaks of the two Dentons as having formerly been one parish. In Vol I., p. 144, he says :—"The parish of Denton lies in the utmost north-east limits of Gilsland, and is now divided into Nether Denton and Over Denton. In strictness they are two parishes." This statement is inaccurate in two points; first, as regards the situation of Denton, and, secondly, that the two Dentons ever formed one parish. There does not appear to be any evidence that they ever formed one parish, and, on the contrary, it is a fact that, although so near, they are not even adjoining parishes. A

* Carta H. Die Gratia Dunelm Episcopi de Ecclesia de Veteri Denton super presentationibus Roberti de Vallibus et Roberti filii de Asketilli.

H. Dei Gratia Dauelmensis episcopus omnibus clemis totius episcopatus sui salutem. Sciatis nos dedisse et concessisse, et presenti Carta confirmasse priori et canonicis de Lance (Lanercost) ad presentationem Roberti de Vallibus et Roberti filii Asketilli Ecclesiam de Veteri Denton tenendam. Ita quod ipsi canonici presentabunt nobis et successoribus nostris, quotris ipsa Ecclesia vacaverit, perpetuam vicarium qui predicta Ecclesia deserviat, et nobis et successoribus nostris Episcopales consuetudines reddat qui etiam victum recipiat a predictis canonicis annuum pensionum dimidium tantum marice persolvat nisi eis nos vel successoribus nostri ex nostra auctoritate juxta ipsius Ecclesie augmentum et facultatem plus precipere concesserimus. Quos tamen in vita Guerri quem primum recipimus ullatenus fieri volumus. Quare volumus ut predicti canonici memoratum ecclesiam teneant libere et quiete sicut eam tenendam concessimus Salvis in omnibus episcopalibus consuetudinibus nostris. His testibus Willielmo Archidiacono Summo Camerario Magistro Ricardo de Coldingham Willielmo de Hovedona Willielmo filo Archiepiscopi et alsii.

† Hugh de Pudsey, Bishop of Durham, was called also Hugh de Puteaco. He was treasurer of York, and at the age of 25, on the 20th January, A.D. 1153, he was elected Bishop of Durham. He was a nephew of King Stephen, through whose favour he was chosen to be a Bishop. His election was in the last year of King Stephen.

detached

detached portion of Lanercost separates the two at Chapelburn, and from the time of Hugh (Pudsey), Bishop of Durham, that is, the latter part of the twelfth century, until so recent a date as A.D., 1774, Over Denton was never under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Carlisle. It was actually an ancient parish in a different diocese.

That the parish is a very ancient one, may be inferred also from local evidence.

Not far from the church, on the west side, and near the road leading to the Mains Farm, there is the reputed site of a Saxon village. As the see of Hexham was formed in A.D. 678, and the last Bishop of Hexham was expelled by the Danes in A.D. 821, it is probable that the pious labours of Christian teachers from Hexham caused a church to be erected at Over Denton for the benefit of the Saxon inhabitants. If so, the foundation of the church would probably date from the eighth century, and, if from that date, then the first church at Over Denton would be of wood, and probably of oak.

In the immediate vicinity of the church there are evidences of the great antiquity of the parish. The curious old Border Peel yet remains to tell of the state of society in past ages. This venerable relic of the past is locally and traditionally known as the "The Vicarage." Near it, and just outside the churchyard, there are traces of the foundations of many buildings. The existing building is certainly a Border Peel, and it may have been the vicarage, or part of the vicarage. It is now a byre and a barn.

The deed of appropriation of Hugh (Pudsey), Bishop of Durham, directed that the incumbent should be a perpetual vicar, and that out of the ancient endowment at the time of Robert the son of Asketil, the vicar was to have his maintenance, "qui etiam victum præcipiat," and that the vicar should pay an annual pension of half a mark* to the prior and canons of Lanercost.

In the taxation of Pope Nicolas in A.D. 1292, under the head of Durham diocese, Denton in Gilsland is valued at £5, and the pension therein of the prior and canons of Lanercost at ten shillings; and in the schedule of procurations payable in the deanery of Corbridge and

* In A.D. 1292, at the taxation of Pope Nicolas, Over Denton was valued at £5. This was a good endowment at that period. In A.D. 1226, a Justice of Common Pleas had £20, and in A.D. 1229, the Chief Justice of the King's Bench received £50 per annum. In A.D. 1298, the yearly pay of a curate in a poor parish was five marks. The English mark was in A.D. 1194 worth thirteen shillings and fourpence (13/4). The parson of Over Denton would, therefore, be "passing rich" on his £5 a-year. In A.D. 1287, Peter, Bishop of Exeter, in a synod of Exeter, decreed:—"That in every parochial church the perpetual vicarage should be endowed with at least five marks per annum, that he may in some measure keep hospitality, and, in case he grow old, sickly, or impotent, may be thereby sustained."

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diocese of Durham, the charge on Denton in Gilsland is two shillings and sixpence, and on the pension of the prior and canons of Lanercost therein threepence. These are in the same proportion as the values given in the taxation in A.D. 1292.

In a taxation in A.D. 1318, Over Denton was returned as of no value, being thoroughly destroyed and pulled down,—“*Vastata et penitus destructa.*” And in the same taxation there is a note on the pension of the Priory of Lanercost in the church of Over Denton, and some others,—“*Nullæ sunt hiis diebus propter destructionem.*” It is probable that from that period the church and parish were abandoned, and that episcopal jurisdiction then ceased.

In the valuation of Henry VIII, when “the eagles were gathered together,” and ecclesiastical property was so well looked after, Over Denton was not mentioned.

That Over Denton was not altogether overlooked by people in authority is proved by a grant made in A.D. 1562, by Queen Elizabeth, to Cecilia Pickerell, of the rectory of Over Denton, and right of patronage of the same, lately belonging to the monastery of Lanercost. Cecilia Pickerell did not appear to set much value on that “mark of royal favour,” for she immediately, by a deed of conveyance, transferred the rectory and patronage to Edmund Downing.

Over Denton next appears in the possession of the Dacres of Lanercost. By a lease dated 28 November 1566,* Christopher Dacre, of Lanercost, grants to Nicolas Twydell, of Denton, the advowson, rectory, and patronage of Over Denton . . . together with all those his glebe lands, tithes, oblations . . . *Proffitts*, and emoluments to the said rectory or advowson belonging or appertaining, to hold for twenty-one years at the rent of forty shillings.

In A.D. 1632, Thomas Tweddle, of Willowford, in Over Denton, conveyed the property to Lord William Howard, in whose family it now remains.

In 1702, Nicolson, Bishop of Carlisle, visited the churches of his diocese, and while at Nether Denton, Mr. Pearson, the rector, said “There’s another Church at Over or Upper Denton which is said to be in the diocese of Durham;” and Mr. Pearson gave the bishop the local gossip of the age concerning the deserted church of Over Denton. “The glebe lands there, as Mr. P. hinted to me, were lately consigned to Mr. Blenkinsopp, as a godsbairn gift.” Bishop Nicolson then communicated with the Bishop of Durham and was informed that “little or nothing was known of Over Denton; that there was

* The original lease is the property of the Rev. William Dacre, the representative of Christopher Dacre.

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mention of it in the old registers, but there had been no exercise of jurisdiction over it for 100 years past at least; and that if the Bishop of Carlisle would take it none would interfere."

In A.D. 1715, a provision of £1 per annum for four quarterly sermons, and two shillings for communion wine, was made.

In A.D. 1770, the first portion of the small modern endowment was provided, and in A.D. 1772 and 1774 further sums were obtained, making altogether £800. These were from Queen Anne's bounty and the Countess of Gower's benefaction. The augmented value of the benefice by the purchase and sale of land is now £50 per annum.

The first exercise of jurisdiction by the Bishop of Carlisle was in A.D. 1774, when William Townley was licensed curate.

In A.D. 1786, George Gillbanks was licensed perpetual curate.

In A.D. 1845, Isaac Dodgson was appointed to Over Denton and Lanercost.

In A.D. 1858, Over Denton was annexed to Gilsland, and in 1859 Charles Kipling became perpetual curate.

In A.D. 1865, Reginald Remington was appointed, and on his resignation in A.D. 1867, the present vicar succeeded him.