

ART. XI.—*The parish and church of St Michael, Arthuret.* By C. G. BULMAN.

*Read at Kendal, April 2nd, 1966.*

ARTHURET parish is of considerable extent, being bounded by the rivers Esk and Lyne, the Carwinly burn and the Raeburn. Originally there appear to have been five places of worship in the area; a principal church at Arthuret, and four chapels — at Nichol Forest, Kirkandrews-on-Esk, Chapel-Flosh and Easton. The earliest mention of a church at Arthuret is *c.* 1150, when Turgis Brandos of Liddel gave the presentation to Jedburgh,<sup>1</sup> but there may well have been a church on this site before this date.

The derivation of the name Arthuret is uncertain, and there have been several suggestions as to its origin. Some authorities have stated that it is a corruption of "Arthur's Head", the name which was originally appropriated to the ascent whereon the church and parsonage house are placed.<sup>2</sup> The name is found, however, as early as the 6th century and is referred to in Welsh traditions and ballads, which tell of the Battle of Ardderyd about the year A.D. 573, when Rhydderch the Christian, king of the Cumbri, defeated Gwenddolen, the pagan king of Scotland and became king of Strathclyde.<sup>3</sup> It would seem certain that the name Arthuret, or in its ancient spelling, Ardderyd, comes from very early times.

Arthuret church was unfortunately sited in the midst of a very troubled area and seems to have suffered accordingly through several troubled centuries before the building of the present building in 1609. In the 16th century

<sup>1</sup> CW2 xxix 52.

<sup>2</sup> N. & B. ii 471.

<sup>3</sup> CW2 viii 236-245.

the Debatable Land of the Border was continually swept by battles and raids, and during this period former buildings on the site perished. The need for a new church at Arthuret was emphasized by Bishop Barnes of Carlisle, when, in 1571, he referred to the inhabitants of Arthuret, Kirkclinton, Bewcastle and Stapleton as "people among whom is neither faith, virtue, knowledge of God, nor regard for any religion".<sup>4</sup> In 1597 a jury of the West Marches found that the church at Arthuret had been decayed for sixty years or more and they did not know who was the patron or who ought to rebuild it.<sup>5</sup> In 1606, James I, on information he had received about the Border Country, wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, pointing out that the parish of Arthuret, being of very large extent, had in ancient times one principal church and four chapels belonging to it, all of which were so decayed that there was not any part of them left standing. The country was very poor and he had been petitioned to grant a licence for a general collection throughout the realm for rebuilding the church at Arthuret, and directing that such collection should be made in all churches upon one Sunday in every quarter for the space of one year.<sup>6</sup> It was in this way, through a national collection that the present church was built, and planned on its very generous scale, in 1609.

There are no surviving documents giving any details of the building of the church or of the costs involved, but an account at the end of the 17th century states, "it is commonly reported by some that can remember the building of the church, that bells were cast and ready at Kendal, and that the persons employed to fetch them went off with the money that should have paid for them and built up the steeple".<sup>7</sup> Whatever truth there is in the story, it is certain that the tower did remain unfinished

<sup>4</sup> *VCH Cumberland* ii 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote.

<sup>6</sup> Extract from Arthuret parish registers.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop Nicolson's *Miscellany*, CW Extra Series i 134-135.

until the time of the Rev. Hugh Todd, rector of the parish at the close of the 17th century. He made an appeal for funds to complete the tower, stating that "the tower steeple of the church remains unfinished and without bells, whereby the worship of God and the benefit of the people is not so well provided for as was first intended and as in the Christian government ought to be". Dr Todd himself contributed £50.<sup>8</sup>

In 1704, Bishop Nicolson made his Visitation of Arthuret, and among his notes states that "The whole is well leaded and indifferently well seated; the Quire especially, which has been improved (in many cathedral modes) by Dr. Hugh Todd, D.D., Prebendary of Carlisle, the present Rector." "We should very much like to know what the "cathedral-modes" represented in, presumably, the way of fittings.

There was a restoration of the fabric in 1868 when the east end and the great east window appear to have been completely renewed and new stained-glass inserted to the memory of Sir James Graham, Bart., of Netherby, who died in 1861.

### **Architectural Description.**

The church stands on an eminence half a mile from Longtown, for which place it forms the parish church. The building is a very ambitious one for its post-Reformation date and is substantially built of red sandstone, some of the ashlar blocks being of considerable size. The window dressings and mullions are of white stone and they afford a very pleasant contrast to the main walling. The plan is a very spacious one, consisting of an aisled nave of five bays with a clerestory above; a chancel of two bays with north and south aisles, and a projecting sanctuary at the east end. To the west there is a massive tower of moderate height beneath which is the main entrance. (Plate I.)

<sup>8</sup> Parish Records.

The architectural style is late Gothic, a rather severe version of the Tudor or late-Perpendicular style, and, owing to the circumstances of its erection, it is in one style throughout. One looks in vain at Arthuret for the usual evidences of different building periods; all is balanced, formal and symmetrical, with the exception of a few details purposely introduced by the builders. There is here no Norman, Early English, or Decorated work; no later aisle or chancel grafted on to an earlier nave, and so there is none of the variety which gives interest and charm to so many of our ancient churches. The real interest at Arthuret is the fact that the whole church should have been rebuilt at one time, in 1609, and that the style should be late Gothic, or, one might say, belated or "survival" Gothic.

It is for this fact that Arthuret church is remarkable, for by the middle of the preceding century, with the coming of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the old medieval style had been largely abandoned and the new imported, revived Classical style adopted. However, the old native Gothic style lingered late in the north, The Reformation had put an end to church-building almost completely and many great churches had been destroyed, so that it is rare indeed to find a church built at this immediate post-Reformation period.

As well as the style, the plan also shows how conservative the Cumberland builders then were, for the layout is purely medieval and more suited for the services of the medieval church with its accent on ritual and procession, than for the services of the Reformed Church, in which the sermon played a principal part. When church-building began again on any scale towards the end of the 17th century, churches were usually planned as preaching halls, often with galleries, and the medieval ideal was abandoned. At Arthuret, the aisles to the chancel, developed in medieval days for the accommodation of side chapels and chantries, must have been almost

useless for the Reformed worship, but display the strength of traditional forms. (Plate II.)

The nave internally has five bays of two-centred arches, simply chamfered and carried on octagonal columns. The three western bays have also the feature of a pilaster on the north and south side of each column, based on a tall plinth. The result is rather clumsy and the composit column thus formed tends to obscure the view from the aisle towards the chancel. Perhaps it was for this reason that this feature was abandoned in the two western bays where the columns are simple octagons. The change in design almost suggests that there had been two building periods, but there are no structural indications to support such a supposition. The capitals of all columns are very simply moulded to an identical profile and all the bases are simply chamfered. The clerestory above consists of simple three-light windows of moderate height. (Plate III—Interior.)

The chancel is separated from the nave by a chancel arch, pointed and chamfered. It is similar in character to the arches of the nave, but is considerably larger in scale; and is separated from its aisles by pointed arches springing from octagonal columns, the details of which are the same as those of the nave.

The aisle windows are square-headed with mullions and with a transom at half-height, but with no tracery in the heads. There is an interesting difference between the fenestration of the north and south aisles, and this was probably done in a praiseworthy attempt to give some variety and interest to the building. On the south side there is a window of four lights to each bay, separated by a buttress externally. On the north side there are two windows to each bay of only three lights each, and spread out more broadly, with a buttress externally between each pair. As already stated, there is no tracery in the heads of the aisle windows, or any cusping, and anything elaborate of this kind was probably beyond

the skill of the builders. What technique the builders had was reserved for the great east window, where a six-light window, with some ambitious tracery was attempted. This window is perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole church, for although the traditional late-Gothic character of the church would suggest that the east window would be designed with the usual Perpendicular tracery of its period, this is not the case. Instead, for some reason, the builders of the church decided to attempt something different and more difficult, and the tracery is designed in the fashion of an earlier style of Gothic, known as "Geometrical". This properly belongs to the period *c.* 1300. (Plate 4—Chancel.)

The window is of six lights, divided into two parts by a massive central mullion, each half having intersecting tracery in the head and with a large circle at the apex of the arch. However, the window is not wholly successful as a composition, for the designer has constructed transoms across the lights, and as these are completely out of character with the style of tracery, the window must be regarded as a hybrid and not architecturally pure. The tracery and the heads of the lights are uncusped, another feature which betrays the late date and also the lack of technical skill on the part of the builders. This window and tracery, as we now see it, is a reconstruction dating from the restoration of 1868. The original window and east wall were removed to Whooff House, near Aglionby, Carlisle, and re-erected in the garden where they can still be seen, still apparently in very sound condition. The existing window is almost an exact replica of the original one, although the central figure at the head of the original window appears to have been a large oval and not a circle — a feature which would make the window more remarkable still. (Plate V.)

Externally the church has a late-Gothic appearance (Plate VI) with battlements to the aisle and clerestory walls. There are small pinnacles to the angles of the walls

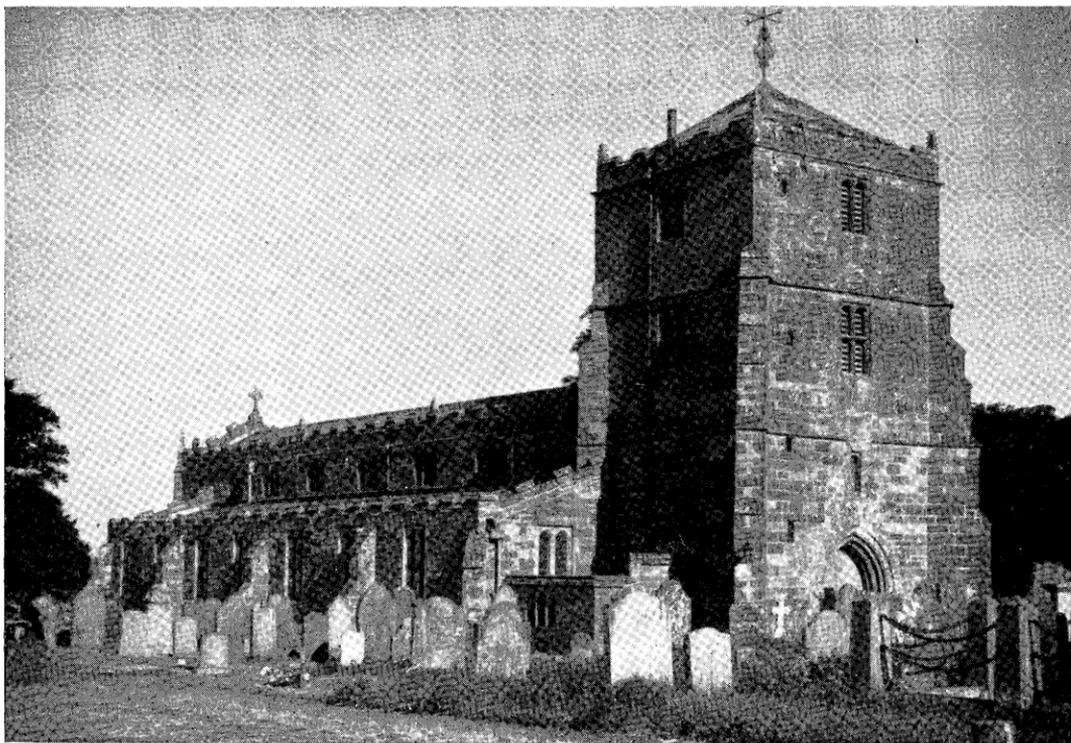


PLATE I.—Exterior from North-west.

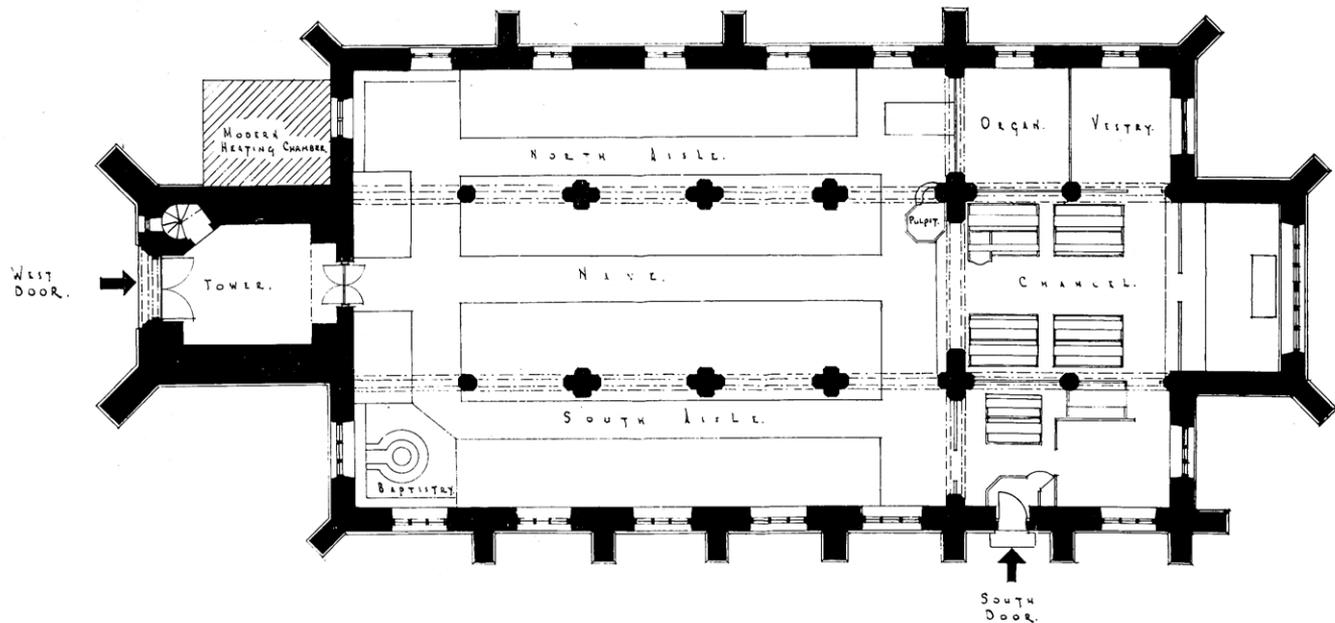


PLATE II.—Plan.



PLATE III.—Interior, looking East.

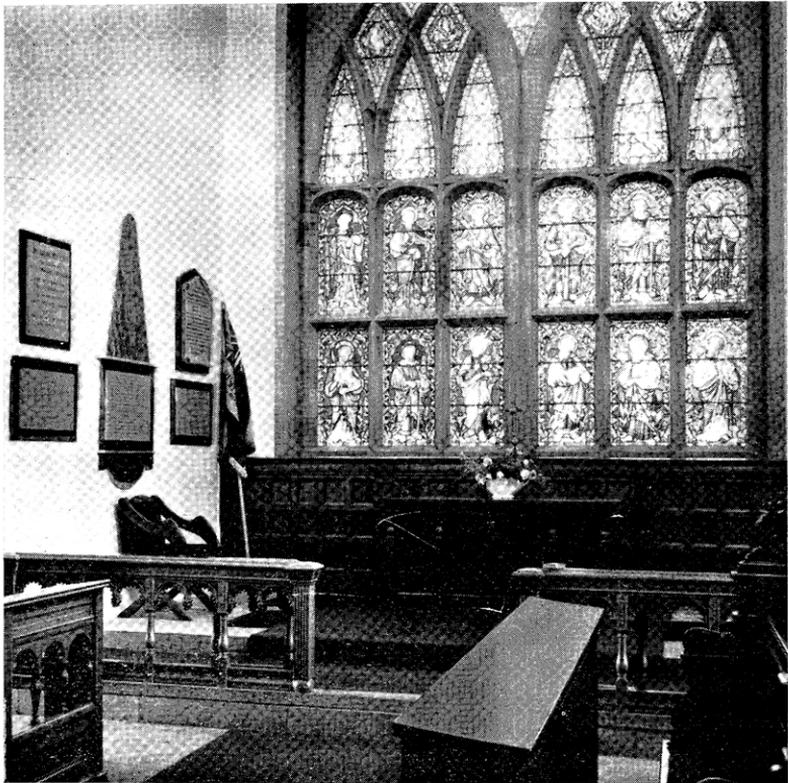


PLATE IV.—Chancel and East window.

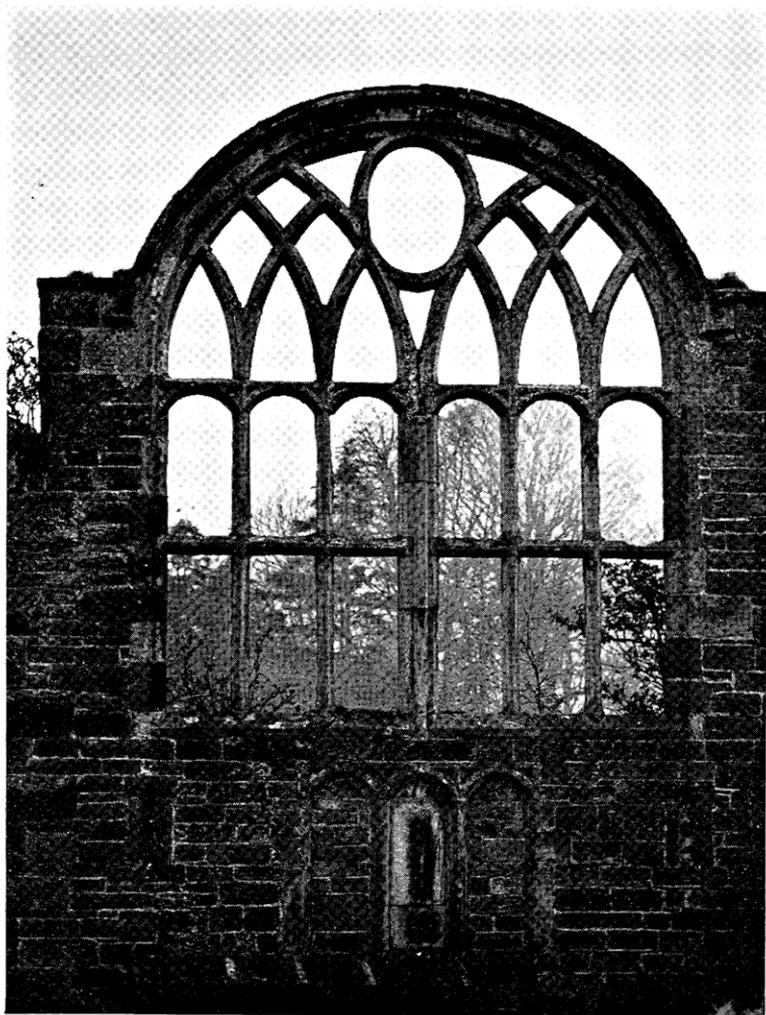


PLATE V.—Former East end of Arthuret Church, now at  
Whooff House, Aglionby.

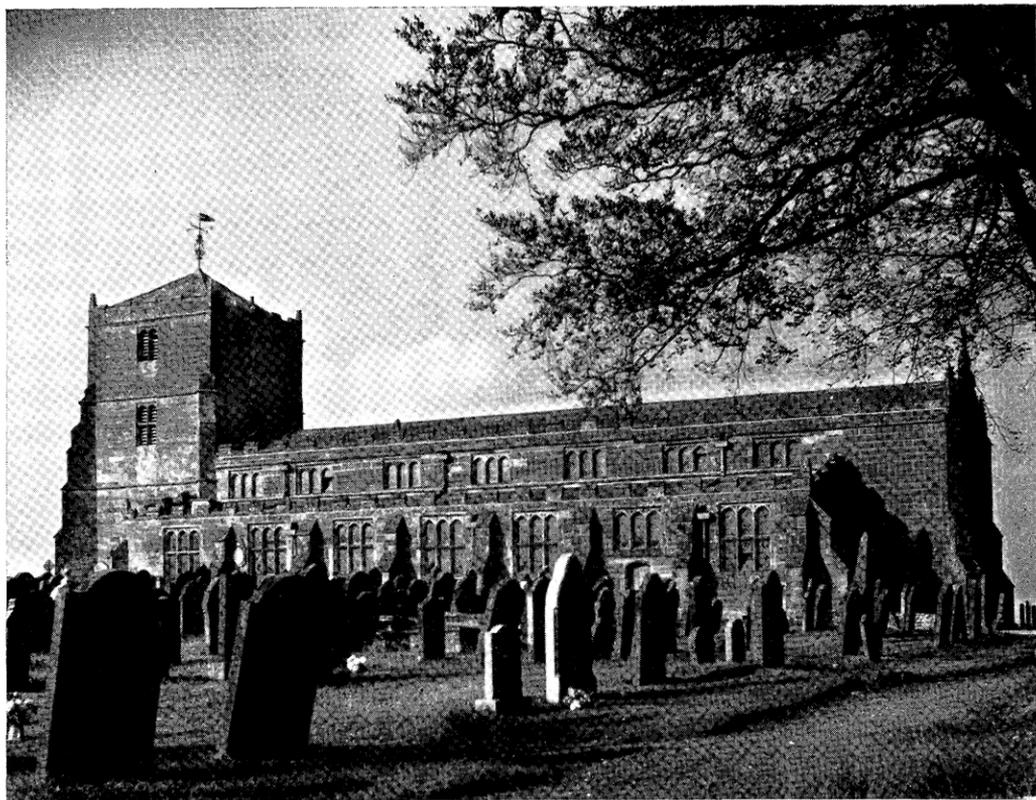


PLATE VI. East elevation.



PLATE VII.—The "Heart" Brass.



PLATE VIII.—St Michael's Well.  
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and one or two intermediate ones on the parapet. The roofs are of very low pitch and are not visible above the parapets. There are no hood-moulds to the tops of the windows, the lack of which gives a rather flat appearance, and the windows generally approximate more to the domestic type of late-Gothic as seen in the manor-houses of the period, rather than typical ecclesiastical work.

The tower at the west end is contemporary with the church in its lower stages and was left unfinished at the time, presumably from lack of funds. It was not completed until the time of Hugh Todd, *c.* 1700. From the massive size of the angle-buttresses it would appear that the original builders had intended to raise the tower to a much greater height than the modest stage added by Dr Todd, and there is no doubt that the increased height would have added greatly to the proportions of the church.

#### **Fittings.**

As might be expected from the late date of its erection, no fittings, with one exception, have survived from medieval times. The single exception is, however, of the highest interest and takes the form of a "heart" brass. Brasses depicting priests, knights and clerics generally are not rare in our ancient churches and a number have survived in the diocese of Carlisle. "Heart" brasses are on the whole uncommon however, and the one at Arthuret has several unusual features. It is fixed on the north side of the sanctuary wall and shows two hands holding a heart which rests on a cross fleury. The heart itself was not an unusual device in the Middle Ages and is generally considered to refer to the soul. Such memorials probably have different meanings but they seem frequently to have been placed over a tomb in which only the heart was buried. This particular brass may perhaps be of 15th-century date; the workmanship is

somewhat crude. It was discovered at the restoration of the church in 1868 above the Netherby vault in the north aisle of the chancel where the organ now stands. It may have been torn off some ancient tomb at the time of the Reformation, or when the old church on the site was demolished. (Plate VII.)

#### **Hatchments.**

The church contains three good examples of the minor art of heraldic hatchments, that is, heraldic devices painted on framed timber or canvas and hung in churches. The art seems to have flourished, particularly between about 1760 and 1820, and the artists seem to have been local men. The hatchments are now hung on the west wall of the church and show the arms of the Rev. Robert Graham, D.D., 1711-1782, who built the existing mansion of Netherby and did much to improve the life and conditions of the people in the district; those of Sir James Graham, first baronet of Netherby, who died in 1836, impaling the arms of his wife, Lady Catherine, daughter of the seventh earl of Galloway, and those of Charles Graham, the eldest son of Dr Robert Graham, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Richard Gorges of Eye in 1781, whose arms are shown impaled with those of her husband. He died in 1782, the same year as his father.

#### **Font.**

The font is made of red sandstone and consists of a very unusual nine-sided bowl, standing on a heavy cylindrical base, with two steps below. It is similar in character and workmanship to the church, and probably dates from the same period.

#### **Memorials.**

The close association of the church with the Graham family of Netherby, for many generations, has inevitably resulted in a large number of memorials to the family

being placed in the church. The oldest one is situated on the wall of the north aisle and is a black-and-white marble tablet of classic design. It commemorates Sir George Graham of Netherby who died in 1657. The memorial to Mrs Thomasina Storey, situated on the wall of the south aisle, states that the lady was the "daughter of Mr George Constable, the laste Rector" and who "dyed 1st February, 1674". This memorial is obviously of local workmanship and is interesting because of its quaint spelling and lettering.

### **St Michael's Well.**

Near to the church is a spring of excellent water called St Michael's Well. It is not uncommon for a parish church to be associated with an ancient spring or well, and there are a number of instances in our own diocese of Carlisle. Dedications to St Kentigern are usually accompanied by a well, as at Aspatria and Caldbeck, and perhaps the best known example in this area is the famous spring at Kirkoswald, just outside the west wall of the church. Probably the early Christian missionaries found some kind of well-worship in being, and with the spread of Christianity the wells and springs were hallowed and dedicated to a saint and used for the purpose of Christian baptism.

The spring at Arthuret is rather surprisingly situated half-way down the steep escarpment to the west of the church, and although almost completely forgotten in recent years, was recently cleared and excavated. The spring issues from the hill-side and, when first excavated, was found to have been enclosed in a monumental kind of way at some past period, probably at the time when the church was built in 1609, judging from the character of the masonry. There is a stone basin to receive the water, enclosed in a pointed arch, and the space immediately below it had been laid out with flagging as a kind of terrace, approached from above by a flight of

six steps. There were stone benches on two sides of the terrace and a channel contrived in the flagging to take away the overflow from the basin. The steps were much worn, indicating that the spring had been much visited over a long period, and it is tempting to assume that the presence of the spring was the reason for the erection of the church on this site originally, remote from the village, the position being regarded as a hallowed one, sanctified by the "holy" spring. Unfortunately, the stonework around the spring has been much injured since it was excavated, but Plate VIII shows it as it was when originally uncovered.

In conclusion, it must again be stressed that Arthuret church is in many ways a most remarkable one. We have seen that it was built in 1609 as the result of a "national appeal", and at a time when church-building had to all intents and purposes ceased throughout England owing to the Reformation. We have seen also that the plan, although intended for the services of the Reformed Church, is purely medieval in layout. The style is also traditional in what we may term "survival" Gothic, of the late Perpendicular or Tudor variety.

There are important questions to be asked in connection with this church, questions which it may now be impossible to answer. We should like to know who were the actual builders of the church and who was responsible for the plan and who directed the building operations. The only place locally where there would still be a masonic craft existing would be Carlisle. It would, no doubt, be here that masons could be recruited who had the skill required to build a large church, and this would account for the traditional forms used, including the traditional sections for the mullions. Nevertheless, despite this and the variations purposely introduced, the church has, on the whole, a very mechanical feeling and there is a distinct sense of effort about it. The same moulds are repeated over and over again and the windows repeat

in exact form. There is not a scrap of ornamental carving about the whole building and the mouldings used are rather coarsely executed and sometimes not used in proportion to their position. For instance, the mouldings used for the columns supporting the chancel arch are exactly the same as those used for the capitals for the columns of the main arcade although the chancel arch is much larger and loftier. The windows generally are of very domestic-looking, late-Tudor type, mullioned only and devoid of tracery. An effort to achieve something different is made in the east window, but, as I have pointed out, although interesting, the tracery is stylistically a failure and is indeed something of a curiosity. One cannot feel that any master-mason or "architect" designed Arthuret; it is distinctly a stone-mason's church. Nevertheless, it remains a remarkable monument of its period. Our parish churches do indeed display an infinite variety and we would not have this one different. There is probably not another church of its early post-Reformation date in England.