

Some Notes on North Wingfield Church.

By WILLIAM STEVENSON.

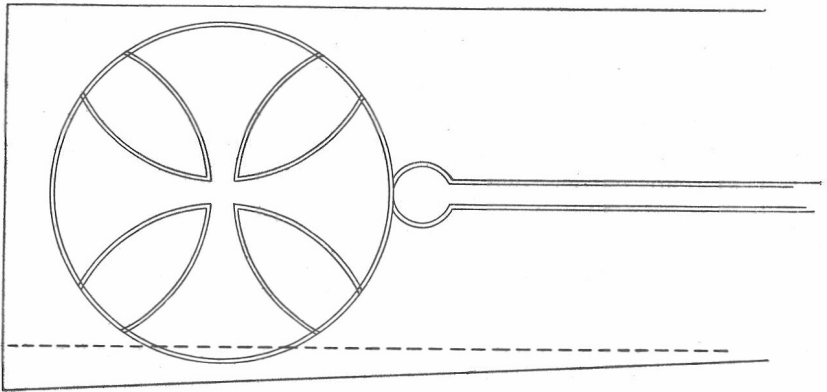
THIS church, standing alone, save with the Rectory-house and the old Chantry-house (the latter now an inn,) distant from the village, with its high tower on a commanding site, boasts of nothing in its fabric that reads earlier—with its “dog-tooth” mouldings, and “water-mould” bases—than the thirteenth century: anything beyond must be sought for in the oldest of the two fonts, and in the monumental remains in stone of incised grave-slabs, or coffin-lids.

This “dog-toothed” work, and the font, are both illustrated in *The Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. i, pp. 292 and 422. The former, wrought as a doorway, has not been used as such since the fourteenth-century Lady Chapel was built, which is open to the chancel, and on its north side. It is clumsily built high up in the wall and possibly narrowed in its opening, thus becoming a pointed arch where otherwise it might have been circular. It there forms an unglazed opening between the north aisle and the above chapel. The font (see No. 1 Illustration), wrought in one block, chalice-shaped, steeply chamfered on the base and rudely fluted in the stem, as if intended to represent a cluster of small shafts supporting the basin, may and possibly does date thirteenth century, the period of “sloping plinth courses.”

The monumental slabs placed aloft and on the floor of the south aisle, five in number, are noticed in *The Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. i, pp. 427-428; but not illustrated: three others have for centuries been utilized as

stone-seats in the south porch, where they have suffered from wear, except on the parts built in, or which happen to be close to the walls, where sufficient data exists for the restoration of two of them—on paper, as here given.

Jointly they form the south seat—with their heads to the north. No. 1 is a “wheel-cross,” which might re-

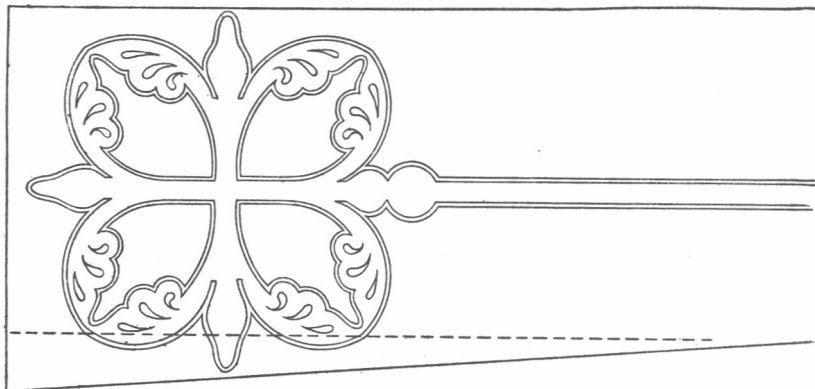


NORTH WINGFIELD CHURCH, No 1.

member some lord of Wingfield who played a part in the third Crusade to the Holy Land, 1188-1190, for we know the device later as the *cross patee* of the Heralds, and the “Maltese-cross,” or badge of the Knight Hospitallers of Jerusalem, or the Knights of Malta. A half-circle $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter can be partly traced where usually a calvary of steps is met with. The stone is now 5 feet 4 inches long, tapering in width 1 foot 6 inches to 1 foot $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches and is clearly Mansfield—which town must have been an important school for such objects for two centuries or more, and about whose church there remains an unusual number.

No. 2 is a characteristic “Early-English foliated cross,” and as is usually the case, is “conventionally treated,”

a middle date of that period would be c. 1230. The artist drew all the details with a heavy hand, result—a square appearance of the device, one that creates an optical illusion, for if enclosed in a circle, all the points or extents of the design would touch or agree therewith.



NORTH WINGFIELD CHURCH, No 2.

This stone is a major portion only of an original. It is 4 feet 4 inches long, by 1 foot 6 inches, tapering to 1 foot 1 inch. It might be viewed as the abiding monument of the lord of Wingfield who here built the first stone church, the nave of which in part survives. It followed a line of so called, but less pretentious "timber-churches," one of which, with its priest, is possibly recorded in the Domesday Survey of A.D. 1086; where we notice that the church was in "Winnefelt," a *soke* only in an otherwise churchless *manor*, of what now remains as Pilsley and Williamthorpe, with Tupton, another appendant *soke*.

Not long after the date of this latter slab, memorials began to take the form of life-sized effigies in stone, or

plates of polished brass.¹ Of the former North Wingfield still possesses two examples in the last stages of decay: but judging from the canopied recesses prepared for them in the chancel walls—one inside and the other outside—they bridge a span that runs close upon a hundred years. The one inside has been rebuilt, the other has a curvilinear canopy, and cannot be much earlier than 1310 or 1320, considering that we have evidence in the east window tracery, and the high pitch of the roof, that the chancel, with the exception of the Early-English round headed priest's door, was then rebuilt. Here, where we hitherto assumed, we have positive evidence, that the knightly lords of Wingfield were remembered not only in monumental form, but also as church-builders.

As a further early but allied note we have the fact that part of two sides of a square or oblong wet-moat exists in the rectory grounds adjoining, in which earlier buildings than the present one must have stood; whether it ever extended west to enclose the church cannot now be said; the gardener certifies, from the nature of the soil, that the northern ditch extended more westward or towards the church than the water does now. One of the two or more original corners—the north-east one—is still fairly perfect. A wet-moat on such an elevation would only be practical on a clay subsoil, and that is exactly what obtains in this coal-measure district.

North Wingfield Church also contains some most interesting sculptured stones. The altar-piece, reredos, retable, or tabula, was originally (as in an instance in Tuxford church, Notts.) in the east wall of the south aisle, but now, in a highly damaged state, is in the south wall, diminished, and destroyed in part to cramp it under the most eastward window of that wall. It bears evidence

¹The earliest known brass in existence in England is in Stoke D'Abernon Church in Surrey, date 1277.

in its geometric lines, its double order of mouldings, and its foliated crocketing, based on the vine, of the best workmanship of the best period of Gothic art, that which obtained immediately before, or was cut short by the Black Death of 1348. Although in the nave, it is no doubt contemporary with the chancel part of this church, and represents some great expenditure in the fabric by pious inhabitants, lay or clerical, in that north-east part of the country.

The subject is the martyrdom of St. Laurence (see No. 1 illustration), he, who, as tradition states, was roasted or burnt on a gridiron. The subject was wrought on two slabs of stone, the lower, below the springing line, the upper or canopy one above, the latter capped by an entablature that bore on its mouldings the large central finial, and the two small end ones of the pinnacles, now altogether lost; but its original or perfect state can be judged by inspecting the Tuxford example. The full height of the lower or figure-sculptured stone is here shown—that applied to the top or canopy stone will show what has been cut away from its original straight lower edge: the background of the picture above the figures has thus been destroyed, and the subject as we see it is compressed in height about one-fourth. It will be noticed that in the figure portion the buttress, arch shaft, cup and base is absent at each end; and that the pressing of the canopy portion down into the figure subject has been carried out at the cost of the principal cusps and the lower tracery. Passing the mutilations this work of art has been subjected to, the details of the figures may be reviewed. The grid is shown in a perpendicular position, the naked saint bound with cords to the bars: the lower half of the body is lying on its side, the upper with the shoulders down on the iron: the arms and hands have been hammered away—at Tuxford they are shown in the usual effigy-form in prayer—what is left of the

head covers the abdomen of the left standing figure or executioner, who shows his right leg and foot before the grid. The part he played in this tragic scene is not shown, a remark that applies also to the Tuxford example, where the end figures are transposed! The central figure (in both instances) is pictured blowing the bellows; a good part of which instrument still here remains. The right hand figure is engaged in probing the body; his knob-ended instrument is traceable from his left shoulder to the bowels of the martyr, his left leg and foot is shown before the grid. The object shown at the left hand bottom corner of the picture is part of the tall chalice-like, fluted stem, and chamfered base of the old but disused font, which has an Early-English, or thirteenth century appearance.

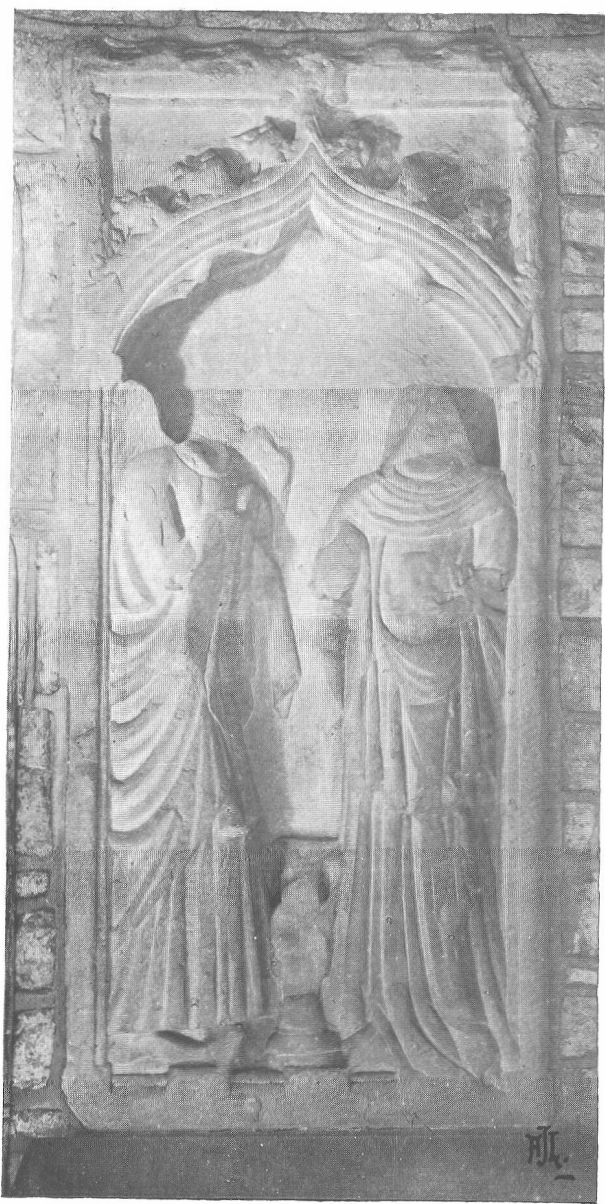
Illustration No. 2 is of the large four-subject reredos of sculptured stone in the east wall of the Lady chapel—now the vestry and organ chamber, inserted immediately left or north of the east window of that apartment. Judging from the poor rendering of the architectural details, it is late decorated in date. Its curvilinear character rules it out of the first quarter of the fourteenth century, and its art work suggests it is not earlier than the last quarter. The disturbed walling over the arches or canopies goes far to prove that it was a later insertion in the decorated wall—whose date appears to be the second quarter of that century. The stone altar of the period was no doubt placed below it, and not before the window immediately to the right or south. This old chapel is now so largely occupied by the organ that daylight pictures of this tabula and its companion in the adjoining north wall, cannot be taken—hence artificial light has had to be resorted to at the expense of clearness in some of the details.

The scriptural subject is well known and represented in ivory and alabaster carvings; but rare in stone on the



No. II.—THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

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No. III.—THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

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TO FACE P. 199.

important scale here given; it is the Coronation, or Glorification of the Virgin. An earlier example, dating 1290-1300, in painted ivory, is treasured in the Louvre, Paris, a fine photograph of which is given by A. M. Cust, in his learned work "The Ivory Workers of the Middle Ages" (Geo. Bell & Sons, London, 1902). Another, a panel in a fourteenth century triptych of Bishop Grandison of Exeter (p. 152) is now in the British Museum.

We have it again—with local association—in alabaster—in Preston church, near Hull, part of a broken altar-piece which must have emanated from the alabaster carvers, or old sculptors of Chellaston, or Nottingham.

In every case the two figures are seated and crowned, the Virgin on the left with her draped head gracefully leaning, and her hands on her breast in prayer. The Messiah on the right with his dexter hand and arm upraised, and his attribute "the orb"—in his sinister one.

In this North Wingfield sculpture the figures in the side niches in half kneeling positions are angels engaged in censuring the divine pair, their censers being depicted in each panel in the instant of being overhead. There are two instances of angel's heads and censers in conjunction on a broken tomb in Laxton church, Notts.

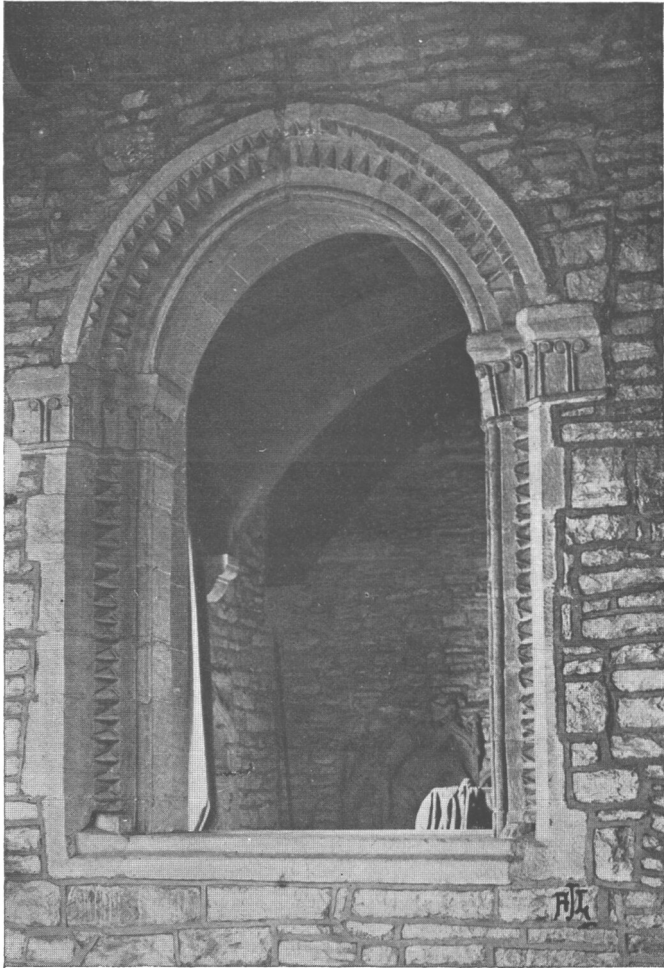
Illustration No. 3 is a large block of sculptured stone in its original position in the north wall of the lady-chapel, now the vestry and organ-chamber: it is a subject secondary to one with four figures which formed the reredos to an altar at the east wall of that chapel. It is wrought into a niche or tabernacle with a curvilinear canopy forming a cinquefoil-arch, the architectural parts of which are somewhat commonplace. The two standing figures it contains, with the earthenware vessel between them, represents a scene in the life of the Virgin Mary, one that marked the Feast of the Annunciation celebrated on the 25th of March, that on which the angel announced she would be the mother of the Messiah. Its date is

fourteenth century, the latter part of which to all appearance, owing to the intrusion of the great pestilence, was not so refined in art. The headless figure to the left is the fully draped angel defined by the shoulders of the wings. The head of this figure must have been wrought practically clear of the stone, implying it was not draped. A like scene, in ivory, in the Mayer collection in the Liverpool Museum, shows the natural hair.

The right figure of the pair, in which some indication of a head remains, is that of the Virgin ; it has been hooded or veiled, the part known as the wimple or handkerchief is still shown in lines about the breast and neck. This drapery in the middle ages seems to have marked the distinction of matron from maid, angels by compliment being awarded the latter or undraped form.

The dress on the left side of this figure has been caught up in a bunch by the right hand and tucked under the left arm ; the hands have been destroyed ; this conceit in the drapery of that period was peculiar to standing figures—notably those of Queen Eleanor of Castile, in her many funeral crosses, that remaining at Geddington, Northamptonshire, in particular. In this figure it was usual to represent the right forearm and hand in an elevated position expressing wonder at the news. The artist here lost or missed his opportunity of picturing a dove in the scene ; but he made a great feature of the vessel, the central object on the ground which in its turn gave offence to the sixteenth or seventeenth century iconoclasts, its upper face bears record of a hole in which some higher object in stone, metal, or carved wood must have stood to complete the symbol of the virgin—possibly the lily, and the lily-pot, which latter is given with an arched handle. Saving the socket or dowel-hole, noted above, there is no evidence of this lily plant portion of the scene.

☪ In the front of a contemporary alabaster tomb in the



NO. IV.—ELEVATED OPEN ARCH.

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TO FACE P. 201.

north transept of St. Mary's church, Nottingham, the badge is given more than complete—if that were possible—the stem of the lily is carried up with its leaves to the flowering point, where three blooms are expressed—in manner recalling the cross of Holy writ, and on them is wrought, in small scale, Christ crucified! the head by the central flower, the expanded arms by the other two. It there seems that the mysteries of symbolism could go no further.

Illustration No. IV shows the elevated open arch in the wall dividing the north aisle from the Lady-chapel—now the vestry and organ-chamber. The profuse manner in which this piece of work is enriched with "tooth," or "dog-tooth" ornament, fixes its date as "Early-English" (1189-1272), but the impostes retaining a flavour of the Transitional period it succeeded, stamps it as early, *circa* 1200. It has all the characteristics of the outer members of a doorway with a semi-circular head—necessary in an aisle wall where one roof covered all and the eaves came down too low to admit of a pointed arch. In its present position it is a rude re-setting of the arch-stones—the reveal is pronouncedly less at the crown than at the sides. This view is interesting as it shows part of the decorated arched timbers of the Lady-chapel roof, and a portion of the sculptured tabernacle work of that altar-piece of the "Crowning of the Virgin." A reasonable guess connected with this archway-masonry is that its purpose was a doorway in the north or south aisle, and that it remained there for a century or more until the Lady-chapel was added, and it there replaced to some extent a lancet window in the east wall of the north aisle.