

# ROOD-LOFT PISCINA IN EASTBOURNE PARISH CHURCH.

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THE small list of rood-loft piscinæ known to exist in the County of Sussex has received a notable addition in the recent re-discovery of an interesting example in the twelfth century Parish Church of St. Mary, Eastbourne.

A correspondent in "Notes and Queries" in 1863 mentioned such a piscina as being in the church. During the restoration of the church, which took place shortly after this date, the walls were heavily plastered and the piscina was entirely lost sight of. Attention having been called to the supposed position of the piscina by the note above referred to, discoloration was noticed in the plaster at that spot, which seemed to take a definite shape. The plaster was therefore cut away and the piscina was found, filled in with portions of brick and extremely strong cement. Its form will be seen from the accompanying illustration and it is evidently of the same date as the aisles of the church, *i.e.*, the first half of the fourteenth century. The upper portion, with the shelf and trefoil head, and the basin itself, are of Eastbourne greensand stone, of which all the fourteenth century additions to the church consist; while the two side pieces are of Caen stone, the material used in the original twelfth century work. The working of the stone is as clean and sharp as if just completed, but the projecting portion of the basin has, at some time, been broken off and the edge squared up with plaster. In the pier, almost immediately below the piscina, is a cavity reaching to the floor level of the church. Many conjectures have been made as to its use, but though its features have been somewhat altered,

it would appear to have afforded a convenient channel for the drainings from the piscina.

The position of the piscina naturally suggests an enquiry as to the arrangements of the rood-loft, with its altar and other accessories. A turret outside the north wall of the church, entered by a door from the aisle, gives access by means of a staircase 2-ft. 6-in. wide to an enclosed passage over a massive stone arch spanning the aisle. There is no evidence of an original outside door to the turret; traces of doorways exist, but they were, almost certainly, made to provide access to galleries erected about 1820. The passage way over the arch was re-opened at the north end by the Vicar (Canon Goodwyn) in 1906, and the stone jamb and lintel of the doorway leading out to the rood-loft have since been uncovered.

On the south side of the chancel a staircase in the heavy stone masonry behind the chancel pier led to a doorway opening out into the church on the east side of the chancel arch, at the level of the rood-loft. The lintel of the doorway would be just under the clerestory string-course. This staircase is on a smaller scale than that on the north side, the steps being only 18 inches wide.

It is possible to form some idea of the general scheme of the rood-loft from the information afforded by various scars and patches in the stonework of the chancel piers and the first arch of the nave arcades. The position of the principal beam above the rood-screen is clearly indicated on both piers at a height of 8-ft. 6-in. from the nave floor level—the chancel floor is six inches lower. On the outer mouldings of the eastern limb of the first nave arch in both arcades, 16 inches above the capital, there is a patch of plaster indicating the position of a beam. This would give the approximate level of the loft floor, agreeing with the level of the doorways. There would be a rise from the top of the screen to the loft floor of some 18 inches, affording space for ornamental coving. Similar traces of repair to the stonework suggest that there were beams spanning the first bay of both north and south arcades. These beams, resting on the capitals of the nave piers at a height of 8-ft. 10-in.,



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at right angles to the loft, would have provided a suitable support for the loft to any width westward that might be necessary.

The fact that the capitals of the chancel piers have been cut away in the centre (now repaired with plaster) furnishes evidence that the space in the chancel arch above the rood-loft was filled in with a wooden tympanum, as was frequently the case. It is, therefore, unlikely that there would be any considerable width in the rood-loft on the chancel side, but a small platform may have been bracketed out to connect the gallery with the doorway from the south pier staircase, an opening being made through the tympanum on the side nearest the south pier.

The evidence in regard to the rood-beam, which stretched from capital to capital and carried the rood with its attendant figures, is worth noting. The north capital still shows a portion of the abacus square, where the beam rested, the remainder of the abacus having its edge rounded off. The Burrell MS., British Museum, Add. MS., 5,697, has a sketch of the chancel arch as it appeared in 1776. This shows a portion of the moulding broken away at each extremity where it joined the pier capitals. Evidently these portions were cut away when the rood-beam was placed in position and were not made good when the beam was removed at the Reformation.

The rood-screen is believed to have remained in position until 1844, when, being in a dilapidated condition, it was taken down; portions of the doors were placed on either side of the Easter sepulchre, where they now remain. The tracery is similar to portions of the work in the beautiful *parclose* screens, with which the church is so well furnished. These screens are considered by Mr. P. M. Johnston to be co-eval with the aisles, viz., of date 1310—1340, and there can be little doubt but that the rood-screen, as well as the rood-loft and its accessories, belongs to this period.

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