

Stoekfach Cross.



## Shocklach Churchyard Cross

BY GEORGE W. HASWELL.



SITUATED about five miles from Malpas, and thirteen from Chester, *via* Farndon, in the Hundred of Broxton, and Deanery of Malpas, and far removed from any habitation, is one of the most interesting Churches in our County. Although of small dimensions, it has many quaint features, and interesting to those of an antiquarian turn of mind.

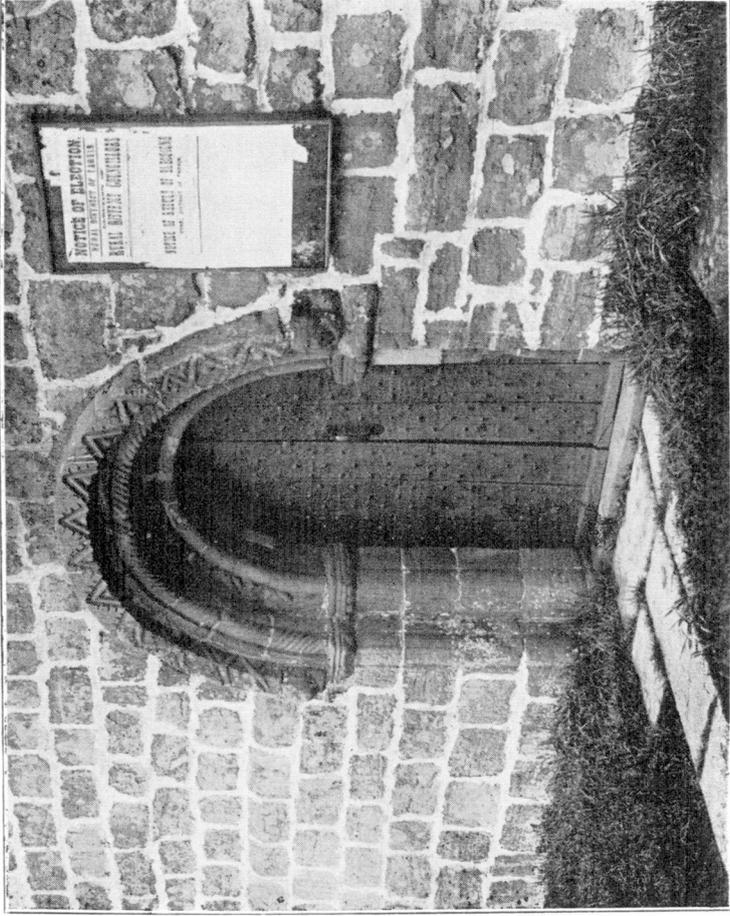
On the south side of the church, and opposite to the beautiful Norman doorway, is the Churchyard Cross, which consists of four steps, square on plan, the lower one being 7 feet square and 8 inches thick; the second,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet square, by 9 inches thick; the third, 4 feet square, by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick; and the fourth—a solid stone—3 feet  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches square, by 13 inches thick, and the north-west angle a sinking  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep—apparently a kneeling place. In this upper base was an octagonal shaft or part of the stem of the cross, sunk into a square socket hole. As the Cross was in a bad state of preservation, it was determined in April to carefully refix the stones, and reinstate the missing lower portion of the stem, by adding a small plinth base,  $14 \times 14$  inches square, and 11 inches in height, the upper portion being octagonal to meet the old shaft. All this has been carefully done, no old stones having been misplaced, refaced, or in anywise

injured, and undertaken as a memorial to the memory of the Vicar's wife. The whole has been fixed upon a concrete foundation, and each step filled up solid with the same material.

Shocklach Cross is of interest by the fact of its non-disturbance from its original position—the south side of a church, opposite to the chief entrance, being a common one—and has escaped the damage generally done to crosses at the end of the sixteenth century. The long limb of cross has at some time been thrown down and broken, one fracture being at the lowest end, as this—when fitted into the square socket on top base—left a space of one inch on each side; by lifting this 11 inches the taper was correctly fixed. An examination of the top of the stem reveals one of the most interesting facts in connection with this cross: four circular holes systematically placed opposite to each other, 2 to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, are to be seen. These are doubtless, by their form, dated about 1600, when about this period the plague was raging, and Shocklach doubtless felt its terrible fangs. As this cross would be used for marketing, great care would be exercised in receiving or passing money. For this object vinegar was placed in these holes, and the money placed in the hole next the purchaser, taken out by the vendor, and in turn placed in the hole nearest him. These holes must not be confounded with any dowel or cramp holes, with which to fix a sun-dial plate; they are too carefully worked and symmetrical.

One may presume the cross was thrown down about 1587, and again used in part thirteen years afterwards as a plague stone—it would be the handiest stone procurable, and would be lying about the churchyard. There do not seem to be any mason's marks upon any





Norman Doorway—Sioschliach Church.

portions; the stone is of the usual local red sandstone, and fairly well preserved.

Picture the vicissitudes an old churchyard cross has undergone, and what tales it could divulge; also what an object lesson for us to imagine the scenes it has witnessed! Proclamations, Church and Parish matters were from its steps given forth; Labourers hired by the neighbouring Yeomen; and, as an accompaniment to these gatherings, Pedlars and Itinerant Vendors would ply their callings; payments were made and accepted at these Crosses; and in some cases mortgages were arranged to be completed and paid off; all point out the extreme belief our forefathers had in the cross.

The Church itself has its interesting features; the Norman doorway mentioned is a fine piece of work. The corresponding doorway on the north side is blocked up; it is of later date, and above the apex of the arch is a corbel, probably to carry the ridge-piece of a wooden porchway. At the west end is an interesting feature in the Bell Turret (late perpendicular work): the space between the two large buttresses has been (in modern times) roofed in to provide a ringing chamber, which is approached from inside the church, a hole having been cut through the west wall. Tradition says the church bell was formerly rung in an adjoining tree when calling the parishioners to worship. On a lozenge in the chancel window is scratched a libellous attack on the neighbouring roads:—

“I, Robt. Aldersey, was here the 3rd day of Oct., 1756, along with John Massie and Mr. Derbyshire. N.B.—The roads were so bad we were in danger of our lives.”

The vestry is a very modern addition, but contains some valuable registers—dating from about 1538—and church documents, well worth reproduction.

In the surrounding neighbourhood there is nothing left of any great interest. Of the old Hall there are no remains, an old moated mansion, where in 1611 Sir Richard Brereton died, and was succeeded by Sir. R. Egerton, of Ridley, who had married his daughter and heir; a farmhouse now stands on the site. On the road to Farndon the road makes a sharp dip, and crosses a small stream by a bridge (locally known as Castletown Bridge), and on the right is seen a mound, covering the remains of Shocklach Castle. In the reign of Edward I. it was leased for life by John de Sutton to Oliver Ingham, who was afterwards Justice of Chester.

