

SAXON SCULPTURE AT ST. ANDREW'S, BYWELL.

IN a recent visit to Bywell, I observed that the sculptured stone of which a sketch is given no longer occupied its original position in the Church of St. Andrew's. Previous to the late restoration, it formed one of the facing-stones of the southern splay of the west window, in the basement of the tower. I trust it may have been removed and carefully preserved, being a most interesting and singular specimen of Saxon work; but if it have not, the sketch, which I made some years ago, when resident at Ovingham, may be depended on for accuracy. The sculpture is in low relief, of curious and unusual knot-work design, and is apparently only a portion of a larger stone, the tracery being abruptly terminated by the fracture. At the other end the design has been completed, and the face of the stone beyond it is perfectly plain. This Church of St. Andrew's, with its sister Church of St. Peter's, possesses several points of interest to the antiquarian visitor, as indeed do all the churches on Tyneside, especially if viewed in the light of the theory which refers the church colonization of this district to the one master-mind of Wilfrid of Hexham.

The tower of St. Andrew's is of decided Saxon character, and closely allied to that of Ovingham in its form and details, as in the double round-headed windows divided by a plain baluster, and included under a simple semicircular arch. The chancel is of remarkable length, being longer than the nave by two feet, an unusual feature. It may be remarked, that both these churches are curiously one-sided, if I may so express it, as well as the neighbouring churches of Ovingham and Corbridge. St. Andrew's possesses a chancel, nave, and western tower, and, in addition, one, a southern, transept. St. Peter's has chancel, nave, and western tower, and one, a southern, aisle, extended a little eastward beyond the nave. Ovingham, besides the ordinary features of chancel, nave, and tower, presents us with north and south transepts, and one aisle to each, on the western side, and also a southern aisle to the nave. Corbridge again has one chancel aisle, on the northern side.

The sepulchral slabs bearing crosses at St. Andrew's are worthy of remark, no less than four being used as lintels to the doorway and windows in the church, and three standing against the north wall outside. In the porch remains the stoup for holy water, rarely spared by Puritan hands.

St. Peter's Church retains its Saxon northern wall of the nave, now pierced by an arch of communication with the chantry on the north side, but with the small round-headed windows still occupying their original position high up in the wall. The chancel of the Saxon church of Edmundbyers presents the same feature. Within the altar rails of St. Peter's lies an outline figure of a knight in armour, and also the ancient altar slab with its five crosses. At the east end of the south aisle lies also the slab of a chantry altar. I may remark, in passing, that the altar slabs exist in the neighbouring churches of Ovingham and Corbridge, though in the latter portions only; whilst Hexham Abbey Church displays in the pavement a noble high altar slab, at least seven feet in length, with five cross crosslets, and the almost unmatched example of an altar *in situ*, between the second and third piers on the northern side of the nave. The eastern triple lancet windows of St. Peter's are repeated in the churches of Ovingham and Stamfordham; in the last with a little elaboration.

Of the bells of St. Andrew's I have no note. St. Peter's possesses two bells, of which one bears an inscription, apparently a hexameter line rhyming in itself, but which is confused in the middle, either from an error in the casting or from the difficulty I found in transcribing that particular part. It runs in Lombardics thus:—

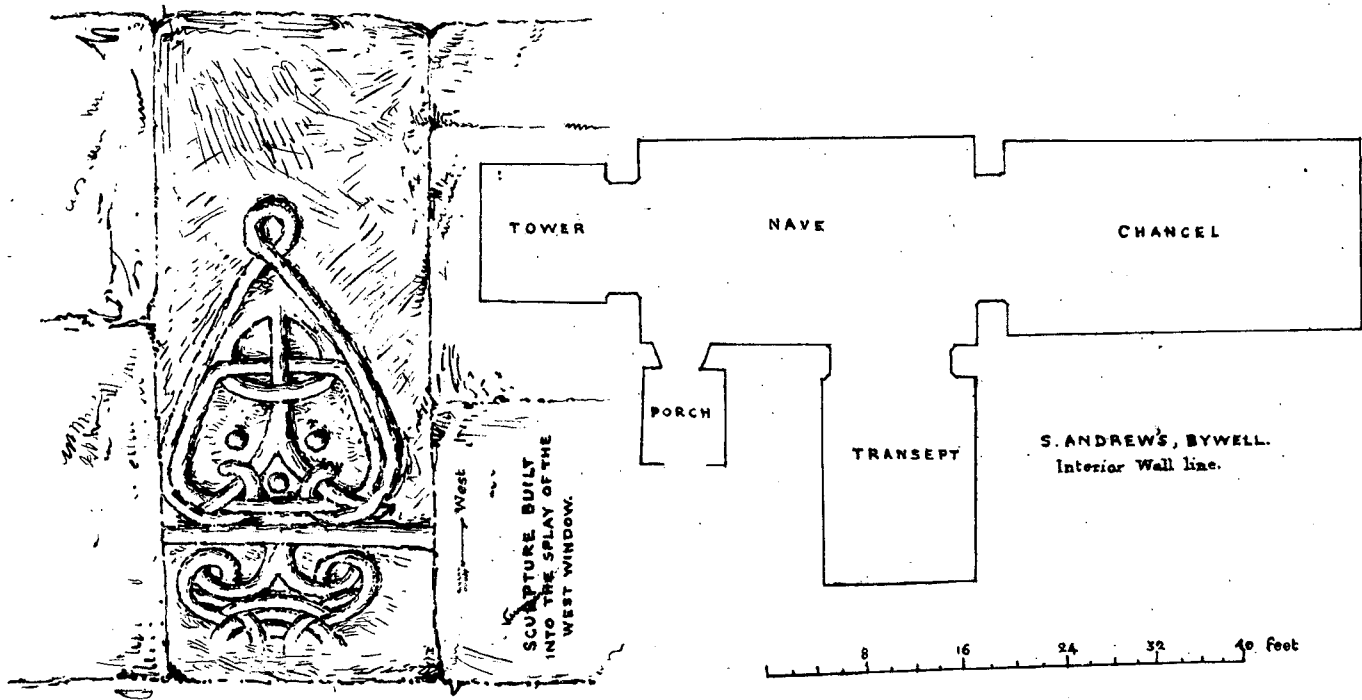
UTSURGANTGENTESVOCORHORIEITCITOLAÇÈTES +
 Ut surgant gentes voco . . . et cito jacentes.

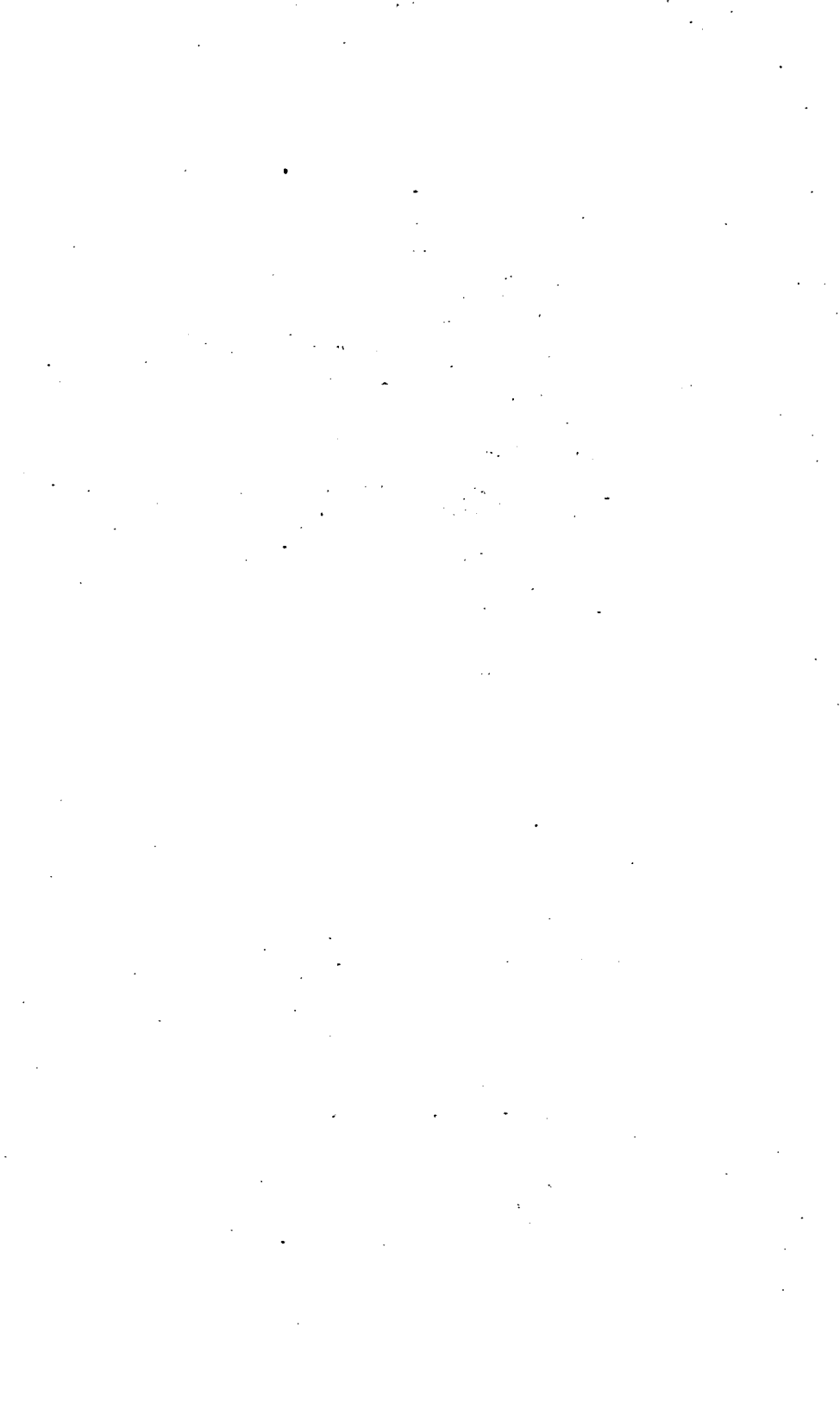
The other bell bears the unusual inscription of the whole alphabet, preceded by "Tu es Petrus," in character varying very slightly from the preceding.

TVESPETRVS: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ +

A curious, and I believe as yet unexplained, feature of St. Peter's Church lies in the apparently unfinished state of the external wall of the northern chantry. Between each window may be seen the springer of an arch, and the wall above each left rough and unfinished, as if for future insertions. It suggests the idea of an intended cloister, but there remains no memorial of such having ever existed.

These two churches bear, popularly, the names of the 'Black' and the 'White' Churches, a faint but lasting reminiscence, doubtless, of





the different Orders of Religious by whom they were served, and who, in rugged and turbulent times, maintained the light of Christian faith in this romantic and sequestered corner of the bishoprick. Recommending to the notice of the visitor at Bywell, as well as its churches, also its mediæval fortalice; and suggesting to the naturalist a glance at the ancient mulberry tree near the entrance of the park, and the noble oak trees standing in the grounds; I conclude these imperfect remarks with the hope that some more able pen may be induced to give the history of these sister churches, and throw some light on their connexion, and that of other churches in the district, with the great and noble mother church of Hexham.

W. FEATHERSTONHAUGH.

Edmundbyers, March, 1858.