XIV.—WHITTONSTALL CHURCH.

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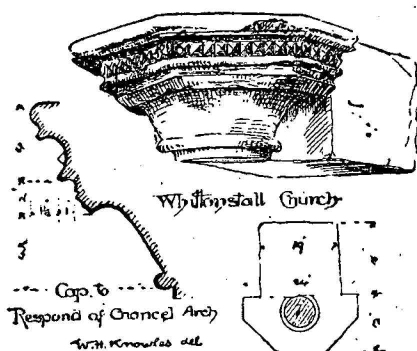
[Read on the 26th August, 1885.]

THIS church was rebuilt in the year 1830, and the architecture is neither better nor worse than was to be expected at that period. It consists of a nave, about fifty feet long by twenty-six feet wide. Eleven feet are partitioned off at the west end for a vestry and vestibule, both of very good dimensions. A somewhat slender tower at the west end contains a bell. There is an outshot at the east end, ten feet deep by fourteen feet wide, for the Holy Table. The walls, though of no great thickness, have been most faithfully built; for although the situation is very exposed, particularly to the west, there is no sign of damp in the west wall—a very unusual thing in a church in such a position. The ceiling, fourteen feet high, is flat, with a cornice all round, and an ornament in the centre from which hangs a corona with six lamps. It is seated with rather high pews, which, however, are of very good materials and workmanship, with doors. All the seats are alike, without any distinction between rich and poor. The whole displays very good intentions on the part of the builders, leaving it to be regretted that their ideas—which, however, were only those of the time—were not of a more ecclesiastical tone.

At this distance of time, it is difficult to get any trustworthy information as to the character of the building which the present one replaced. An application made some years ago to an aged priest, who happened then to be the oldest in the diocese of Durham, and had been ordained as curate of Shotley and Whittonstall in the year 1818, only elicited the response that in his day Whittonstall Church was "a perfect hovel." At the time of his acquaintance with Whittonstall, very few had the knowledge necessary to judge, from existing remains, what such a building may once have been. Of course, this remark applies with still greater force to surviving parishioners. All that has

been got from them is: that the building was very small and very dilapidated; that there was something like an arch in the wall at the west end, and further westward, ruins; no belfry, and consequently no bell; and that there were three small windows in the east end.



One stone alone of the old building, as far as is known, remains, but it is an important one. It is clearly one of the corbels of what must have been a very good Early English chancel arch, bearing a very strong resemblance to those at Medomsley, on the opposite hill in the county of Durham.

It must be owned that these are very slender materials for forming an opinion, but an attempt may be made to guess what they suggest.

1. The one stone remaining is the corbel of a chancel arch, therefore the church consisted of a nave and chancel.

2. The chancel had opened into the nave with an arch of Early English character of considerable beauty.

3. The east end of the chancel was lighted by three lancets.

4. In 1830 the chancel only was in use, the nave being in ruins, the chancel arch remaining, but built up, the chancel itself being in a very dilapidated state.

In fact, the church seems to have borne some resemblance to Medomsley and the two churches at Bywell, particularly to St. Peter's, which was the mother church, though not, perhaps, so lofty as that is. All things considered, it seems likely that Whittonstall Chapel was originally built early in the thirteenth century, while the manor was still in the possession of the Baliols. It may possibly have been a copy, on a smaller scale, of the mother church of St. Peter's, just as we see that Durham Cathedral, a few score years earlier, was reproduced in miniature in the island of Lindisfarne.

The chapelry is conterminous with the estate of Whittonstall, comprising the two townships of Whittonstall and Newlands. It originally belonged to the Baliols. This distinguished and very

powerful family, as is well known, was ruined in consequence of their pretensions to the crown of Scotland, towards the end of the thirteenth century. But before this, the manor of Whittonstall and its appurtenances had been granted to the Darrayns, in whose possession it appears to have remained nearly a century, and then to have passed to the Menevylls. There are several deeds extant referring to transactions between the Darrayns and the Menevylls; but the final deed seems to be one dated at Midsummer, 1366, by which Isabella, widow of William de Kellaw, daughter and heiress of Robert Darrayn, Knight, releases all right to Whittonstall and Newlands in favour of William de Menevyll and Dionisia his wife. These two seem to have had no family; but, by a second wife, William de Menevyll had a daughter, Isabella, who became the wife of Sir William Claxton, lord of Claxton, in the Bishoprick of Durham. Their son, Sir William Claxton, became heir to Emma Tyndale, the lady of Dilston, by which means Dilston and Whittonstall came to be vested in the same owners. Sir William's son, Sir Robert, had four daughters, the second of whom, Joanna, was married to John Cartington of Cartington Tower, near Rothbury, and seems to have had Dilston and Whittonstall as her portion. Anne, the daughter and heiress of John and Joanna Cartington, married Sir Edward Radclyffe of Derwentwater, in the county of Cumberland, who was still living in the second year of Henry VIII. Their descendant, Sir Francis Radclyffe, was created by James II. Baron Tyndale, Viscount Radclyffe and Langley, and Earl of Derwentwater. The melancholy fate of his grandson, James, third and last Earl of Derwentwater, is well known. He was a most amiable and accomplished nobleman, but, being engaged in the rising in favour of the Stewarts at the beginning of the reign of George I., he was beheaded, and all his estates were forfeited to the Crown. These estates were assigned by the Government for the support of the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich, and continued in the possession of the Commissioners for more than a century and a half. The estate of Whittonstall was sold in 1872 by the Lords of the Admiralty to Joseph Laycock, Esq., Alderman of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

It was, of course, while Whittonstall was the property of the Commissioners for Greenwich Hospital that the Chapel of Whittonstall was rebuilt, and no doubt the Commissioners contributed liberally to the work.

The Manor House, or Whittonstall Hall, occupied a site on the very summit of the hill which separates the valley of the Tyne from that of the Derwent, and must have commanded a very magnificent view of both valleys. It stood hard by the Roman Way, commonly called Watling Street, which leads from Corbridge to Lanchester. No ruins remain, only some ridges and mounds; but there are some old hedgerows, which seem to mark the avenues by which the house was approached. That the manor was one of considerable importance seems to be indicated by the fact that the privilege of a chapel was conceded to the lord and his tenants.

The church stands between 300 and 400 yards northwards from the site of the Hall, just under the summit of the hill. It is nearly five miles from the Parish Church of Bywell St. Peter's. There is no record of any ancient endowment, but the chapel seems, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, to have had its own minister. After the insurrection of 1569, it was objected against Thomas Swalwell, curate of Medomsley, "That thou, in the tyme of the laite Rebellion, diddest procure, suffer, and maintayne one Sir John Cowper, curat of Whittonstall, to churche three women, and marye certain persones in latton [Latin], in such rite and form as was prescribed by the Pope, at Medomsley." In the Visitation Roll of Bishop Barnes's Chancellor in 1578, the names occur of George Cowper as curate of Whittonstall; William Strother, a Scotsman, curate of Shotley; William Assheton, vicar of Biwell Andrew; and Thomas Wilkinson, vicar of Biwell Peter; so that these four churches at that time had each its own minister. Shotley is designated as a parish church, Whittonstall as a chapel. At a later period it was different. A history of Northumberland, published in 1811, says that Whittonstall "has a small chapel, which belongs to the Vicarage of Bywell St. Peter, wherein divine service is performed once a month." This seems to indicate that the service was performed by the Vicar of Bywell, but the statement probably refers to a date previous to 1811; for in the list of clergy at the end of the book, Michael Maughan is given as the curate (incumbent) of Whittonstall, as well as of the adjoining parish of Shotley. In 1774 a grant was obtained from Queen Anne's Bounty and Whittonstall became a perpetual curacy. A farm of 74 acres, bearing the ominous name of Wetbottoms, was purchased in the moorlands of the Parish of Brancepeth, the rent of which could not be great; and pre-

vious to 1836 the living was usually held in conjunction with that of Shotley. The two Bywells were also held together, sometimes with a third or fourth living. Such was the order of things half-a-century ago. Not only were two or three of the best livings heaped upon some fortunate ecclesiastic, but two or three very small ones were accumulated on some poor priest, to eke out what must have been at the best a very scanty maintenance. The incumbents of Whittonstall and Shotley seem commonly to have had duties elsewhere, and their place was supplied by a sub-curate, who officiated in the two churches alternately, living, sometimes in great poverty, in the parsonage of Shotley at Unthank (which, by the way, is mentioned as their residence in the time of Queen Elizabeth), for there was no glebe house at Whittonstall. The Act restraining pluralities put an end to this system. Both livings were augmented ; Shotley by the trustees of Lord Crewe, and Whittonstall by the Dean and Chapter of Durham, the appropriators of the great tithes of the Parish of Bywell St. Peter's. Separate incumbents were appointed, and, in course of time, a glebe house was built at Whittonstall. Meantime, a huge town, named Crook, had grown up close to Wetbottoms, which began to be called by the more agreeable name of Wheatbottom, and coal was discovered under the glebe, which has tended much to the improvement of the benefice.

For a long series of years Mr. Simpson Brown was sub-curate of Shotley and Whittonstall, living in straitened circumstances in the parsonage at Unthank. He is understood to have been the son or grandson of a Mr. John Brown, an early convert of Mr. Wesley's, who mentions him repeatedly in his *Journals*. Mr. Wesley took care of the young man's education, and, in course of time, he was ordained. During his lifetime Mr. Brown erected a gravestone in Whittonstall churchyard, in memory of some members of his family, who were buried there. This gravestone is remarkable as being one of the earliest works of the sculptor Lough, who began life as a stonemason under a builder in the parish of Shotley. Mr. Brown retired from his curacy in 1818, and sixteen years after was himself buried in Whittonstall churchyard, at the age of 93. He is the ancestor of several highly respectable clergymen in the dioceses of Durham and Newcastle. Mr. Brown's immediate successor as sub-curate of Whittonstall and Shotley, was Mr. James Green, who eventually became vicar of St. John's in Weardale. He lived to be the oldest priest in

the diocese of Durham, and died a few years ago, when he was consigned to his last resting place by the vicar of Whittonstall, the place where, upwards of sixty years before, he had begun his ministry.

In this present day of church restoration and adornment, one can hardly look upon such a church as Whittonstall Church now is, without regret, but we must take into account the days in which it was built. The ancient churches were then full of the traces of Puritan ascendency. Little account was made of a middle aisle. Very commonly the pulpit, which was the one centre of attraction, was placed against the south wall; or, if the church had aisles, against a pillar half-way down the nave, and all the seats were made to face it, so that many were turned away from the holy table. There were many four-sided pews where two sets of worshippers faced each other. Churches like All Saints, Newcastle, had not lost their prestige, which after all, on *some* accounts, they well deserved. According to the prevailing ideas of the worship of the sanctuary, the ancient churches with their long chancels and the obstruction of pillars and arcades, were very inconvenient. Whittonstall Church was built according to the ideas of the time; and no doubt, when it was finished, the worthy men who had the care of it looked upon their work as a triumph of common sense, and their new church as admirably adapted, much more so than the ancient churches, to the requirements of the reformed ritual. Moreover, all the ancient churches in the neighbourhood were at that time in a most miserable state of decay and squalor, and continued to be so for many years more. In these circumstances, for a long time after it was built, Whittonstall Church must have been regarded as one of the most convenient and handsome churches for some distance round, with its spacious vestibule and vestry, its middle aisle, its substantial and well-constructed seats, all alike for rich and poor—at a time when some of the neighbouring churches were disfigured by hideous four-posters for the more important parishioners—and none of the seats turned away from the holy table. Beyond doubt it was far in advance of most of the churches of the same rank in the county, and, in point of arrangement, superior to many city churches of great pretensions and repute. Let us honour good intentions where we see such evident tokens of them, and forbear to try the work of our recent predecessors by principles of which neither they nor anyone else at that time had any idea.