

NORTON CHURCH, CO. DURHAM.

from the South West.

ARCHAEOLOGIA AELIANA.

I.—NORTON.

BY W. H. D. LONGSTAFFE, VICE-PRESIDENT.

[Read in Norton church on the 23rd September, 1889.]

THE lower portion of the tower of this church, along with its transepts, constitutes a very important piece of evidence in the history of northern architecture. As far as I am aware they are almost, if not quite, unique as far as the diocese of Durham is concerned. It is touching to consider how these venerable works of the later Saxon period survived all surrounding changes down to our own century, making a picturesque and interesting break in the church between the varying chancel and nave.

It is satisfactory when documentary light can be thrown on stones and mortar, however clearly their style may date them. The first mention of Norton is in the fine manuscript known as the *Durham Book of Life*, which lay on the high altar of the Cathedral for the reception of the names of benefactors: 'Here giveth Northman Earl unto Saint Cuthbert Ediscum [Escombe, where there is a Saxon chapel] and all that thereunto serveth and one-fourth of an acre at Foregenne. And I, Ulfcytel, Osulf's son, give *Northtun* by metes, and with men, unto Saint Cuthbert, and all that thereunto serveth, with sac and with soken, and any one who this perverts, may be ashired from God's deed and from all sanctuary.'

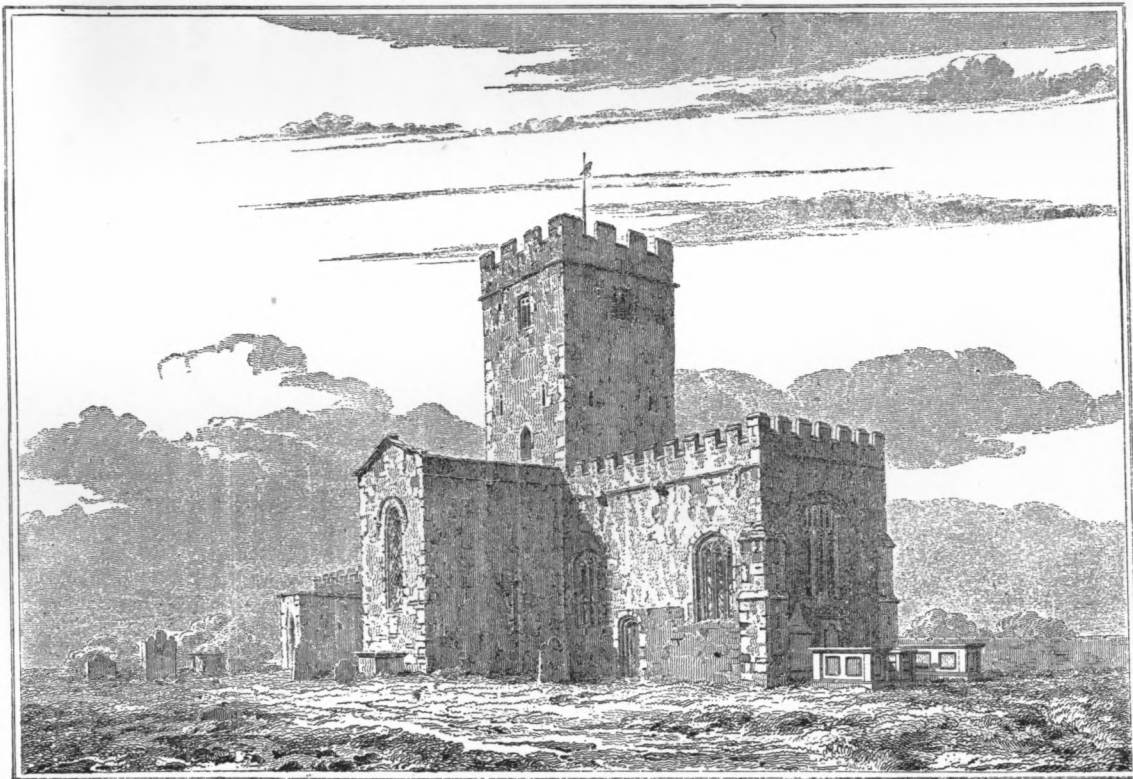
Now, Escombe had previously belonged to the church of Durham, and had with other townships been lent or leased by bishop Aldhun and the whole congregation of Saint Cuthbert to three earls, of whom Northman the restorer of it was one. Bishop Aldhun died in 1018, and if we allow about ten years for Northman's possession we shall approximate the time when he restored Escombe, and Ulfcytel, by his gift of Norton, sundered it from Hartness, of which Billingham was a member.

A shire, in the north of England, perhaps all over England, was any assemblage of places ashired, or cut off, or bounded out from the adjacent county. Every county was a shire, though every shire was not a county. In after times we find the mills of Nortonshire in one record to correspond with those of Norton, Stockton, and Hartburn in another. We may therefore conclude that Ulfcytel's metes, sac, and soken, comprehended the whole of the ancient parish of Norton, except, perhaps, Blakeston. Stockton parish is of modern Parliamentary origin, and Norton church is the mother church.

The Saxon buildings in the north of England are, as a rule, of the quaint but artistic and well-wrought style of Saints Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop, such as we have in churches at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth, or of the succeeding type known to us by towers at Ovingham, Monkwearmouth, Corbridge, and Billingham. A later and coarser style is principally known by southern examples, one of the most important of them being the tower of Deerhurst church, to which, on the evidence of an inscribed stone, we may safely give the date of 1056.

In the Deerhurst tower we find triangular-headed windows, more ornamented than is usual. At Norton we find such windows, without ornament, above the arches opening from the tower into the transept and chancel. I infer that a church was built soon after Ulfcytel's grant, or, in other words, soon after 1030, some 859 years ago. How the north transept of so early a date (the Blakeston porch) became attached to the manor of Blakeston, and when the south transept (Pity porch) received an effigy of Our Lady, I never expect to know. But, in the language of the inscription over the remains of Shakspeare, 'Blest be the man that spares these stones.'

We do not at present see the south transept quite as Edward Blore saw it. We must thank him for drawing Norton church, and for personally engraving Surtees's pretty plate of 1823, of which a reproduction is given in the opposite plate. We gather from it and from Hogg's lithograph, the hiding of the quoins by buttresses and tampering with the window, Pity porch greatly resembled Blakeston porch which has been more fortunate than itself. The walls in proportion are high, like those of Saxon and early Norman buildings generally. The roofs are low, and according to Hutchinson's more



NORTON CHURCH (about 1823) FROM THE S.E.
(Reduced from the Engraving by E. Blore in Surtees's *Durham*.)



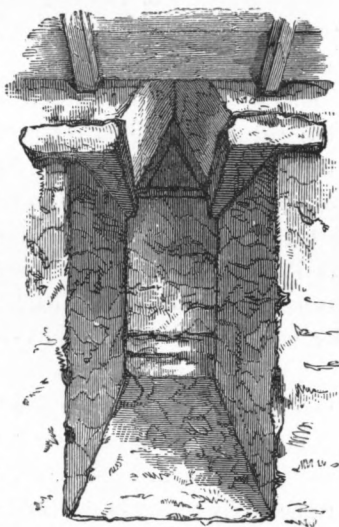
homely engraving, had been covered by some sort of tiling, which had disappeared between 1785 and 1823. The corner quoins-stones are massive and singular, the other masonry being of small stones. The extent of the Saxon tower is shown in Blore's plate, his drawing having been made before the rough-casting took place. The weird quoins distinguished it, and above it, as at present, rose the Perpendicular and thinner superstructure which gives dignity to the whole. Neither the window of Pity porch as engraved nor the late window of Blakeston porch seem to represent the original lights which were perhaps much smaller. That of Pity porch appears to have been surmounted by some strip work, probably Saxon.

Only the arches of the transepts remain in their original rude state. A triangular-headed window exists above each of them, and also above the remodelled opening into the chancel. The next story of the tower is lighted by mere slits, some of them being very near to the angles of the building. Then the ancient tower ends, the change of masonry being detected, even when the rough-cast existed, by a slight hitch in the outline.

A portion of a Saxon cross was worked into the west end of the nave and is now in the porch, and another sculptured stone, of which the date is in dispute, was built into the modern part of the south transept, and is, I believe, still to be seen. It resembles the central portion of a stone found at Wearmouth, and the drawings of schoolboys with compasses on their slates.

As to the reasons for a cruciform Saxon church at Norton we have no information, but the plan is found elsewhere at an early period, and I decline to express any opinion that it originally betokened any cathedral, monastic, or collegiate status.

In 1073 or 1074 some Mercian monks arrived in the north who placed a new roof on Wearmouth church, and had a large gift of land



from the bishop to enable them to restore the monastic buildings and rebuild the church at Jarrow. Very interesting remains of their early Norman work remain there. In 1083 they were removed to Durham, and in 1093 the foundation stone of Durham cathedral was laid. The style is Norman, rather more advanced than one would expect.

To make room for them at Durham, the old congregation of St. Cuthbert was ejected from church and home. It consisted of secular priests, married, and transmitting their benefices to their heirs. This constitution was by no means peculiar to Durham, and against its violent destruction the old secular clergy struggled as bravely as copyholders and leaseholders have struggled against ecclesiastical usurpation in recent years. For 150 years at least, they kept their ground elsewhere against the innovations directed against them. But in Durham they were removed to the churches of Darlington, Auckland, and Norton, under what conditions we know not; and they and their children were ignored at Darlington before the time when bishop Pudsey built the beautiful church there, with the intention of restoring in it the old order of secular canons of Durham. It is a curious subject of enquiry whether bishop Pudsey the father of Henry de Pudsey by Lady Adelidis de Percy meant married or single canons. As contradictory matters of fact Henry Pudsey inherited Percy in Normandy, and the subsequent prebendaries of Darlington were bachelors.

Although the old gifts to St. Cuthbert were enjoyed by the bishop and congregation, bishop William de St. Carileph, sole Ecclesiastical Commissioner of his day for his own diocese, affected, during the post-Conquest period, to set apart estates which were asserted to belong respectively to the bishop and the cathedral body. His acts were the prelude to a long struggle between his successors and the corporation aggregate. An early dispute arose as to Blakeston. Bishop Flambard professed to restore it to the convent on a deathbed repentance, but as a matter of fact it remained beneficially with his relations and their grantees at a quit rent.

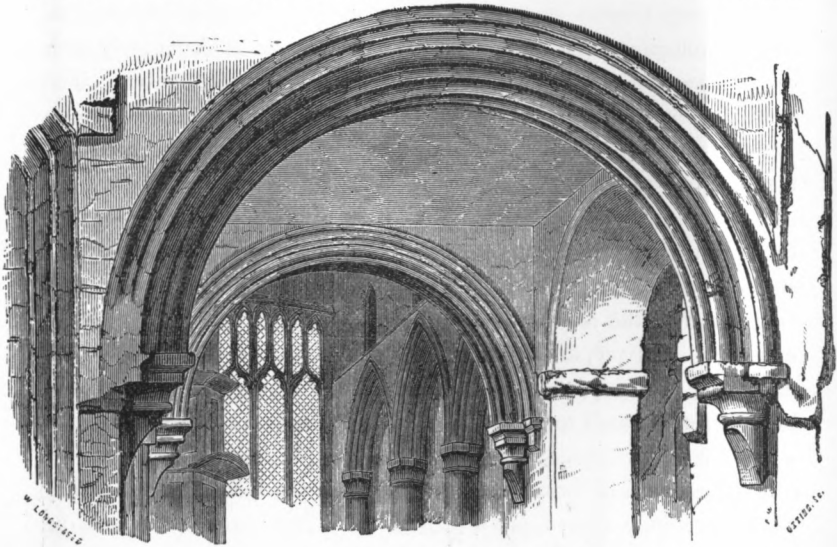
Flambard was connected with Norton in another and a curious way. He obtained from Henry I. the grant of a market there on Sunday, and the pond was, and perhaps may be still, called Cross Dyke. Plainly he had no faith in any palatine rights in Norton as to markets.

We have no further mention of the place until the great episcopal

survey of bishop Pudsey in Henry II.'s time, called Boldon Buke. We there find Norton or Northton (the name is spelled both ways), and the other townships in Nortonshire forming part of the Boldon system of tenure which is only found along the east coast of Durham. The old service of cornage, a money payment in respect of cattle, was however excepted, for want of pasture. This does not mean that the tenants had no cattle, for they rendered certain cows for the bishop's support, but, apparently, that they did not possess rights in common pastures belonging to him. The bishop's hall at Stockton is mentioned, and this is interesting in connection with Norton church, because the fragments lately existing of Stockton manor-house, conserved in the last remaining portion of that house—castle as it has latterly been called—were of the same date as the nave of Norton church. The work, which included the nutmeg ornament looked like that common in the north from about 1170 to 1195, good bold Transitional Norman, fast floating into the Pointed style. I am happy to say that, in spite of the Stocktonians, some other fragments of their 'castle' exist, and, further, that from certain remains in my possession I am enabled to state that the Norton aisles also exhibited the Transitional volute in common with the nave. On one of the piers this volute is presented, as you will observe, in a striking and attractive form. The old Saxon nave had, probably, no aisles. The new arrangement occasioned the breaking of a small archway from the south aisle into Pity porch and a window in the east side of that transept. As the rude Saxon arches of the tower would form a curious vista from the handsome nave, they were thoroughly altered, and furnished with mouldings corresponding with those of the pointed arches in the nave, but were left in their circular form. A new font, strongly resembling those of Billingham and Stainton, was provided. The remains of it are now in the churchyard on the south side of the church.

The rebuilding of the chancel came next. As the tooth and nail-head ornaments found in it occur in north country architecture from the first to the last of the Early English style, it is not very easy to assign an exact date during the thirteenth century to it. One is pleased to find that the builders, intentionally or negligently, left indications of the Saxon chancel which was narrower than the present one.

The church was now collegiate, for in 1228 archbishop Gray appointed master H. Devon to a prebend in it which belonged to William Cantans, on the presentation of king Henry III., the see of Durham being vacant. Judging from the unpleasant effect of the restored east end of Easington church (which also has a robust Transitional nave) in such an approximation to the style of Henry III.'s time as *temp.* Victoria can make, I do not think that we need regret the subsequent disappearance of the lancet lights which at this time were made the termination of the chancel. The single sedile¹ is an unusual feature, *so* unusual that at one time I had a



misgiving that it was a doorway transferred from the outside during the subsequent reparations of the Perpendicular period. Its freedom from weathering was opposed to that theory, and all doubt on the subject has been removed by the existence of a similar object in the Early English style at the Saxon chapel on Dover castle hill.

Both the nave and the chancel had high pitched roofs, and these with some sort of pyramid or spire of wood and lead, which doubtless surmounted the old low Saxon tower, must, with the intersection of the higher walls and low pitched roofs of the venerable

¹ There is a single sedile on the south side of the chancel of Hedon church, Holderness. See *Proc.* iv.—ED.

Saxon transepts, have presented a picturesque effect, hardly equal, however, to that of the edifice in its later state. A judgment, of course, must not be formed from the high-pitched unbattlemented roofs of deal and horizontal rows of Welsh slate, which now disfigure the country. A really good roof of high, but not too high, pitch, when covered with lead having bold vertical ribs, and furnished with a pierced parapet or battlement is not an unpleasing object, though it is only adapted to towers built in accordance. Speaking generally, I must say that Perpendicular towers were admirably designed or adapted whether the adjoining roofs were high or low. The architects of the Early English period could not, in the infancy of the Pointed style, reach perfection. Still, their achievements at Norton were, in all likelihood, very good; and let us bless them and their successors of the fifteenth century for leaving us the transept walls with their original heights and roofs, however different those heights and roofs may have been from the notions of the thirteenth century.

The arrangement by which the Saxon triangular-headed windows opened into the interior of the church would probably be utilized in some way for purposes of ritual. The tradition used to be that the rood-loft had been, where the old organ gallery lately was, above the tower arch. This certainly was the case at Jarrow, where the early Norman arches are very low; and it is curious to find even the lofty church at Darlington provided with a second tier of arches in the central tower opening to the interior of the church.

There are no works at Norton of the Decorated style prevalent in the fourteenth century, except a noble effigy, removed from Blakeston porch. Mr. Raymond, the curate in whose time it was removed to the east end of the church, had heard that it had not always lain under the arch leading into Blakeston porch, close to the base of a parclose screen where we remember it being, but had been brought from some other part of the church. I am inclined to think that this notion had arisen from some removal of it in the porch itself, possibly when the gallery stairs were erected. Both Hutchinson (1794) and Surtees speak of it as somewhere in the porch, and in accordance with its position there is the clumsy insertion on the shield of the quartered coat which vested in the Blakeston family during the sixteenth century. That the effigy, whether originally within the porch or not, was believed

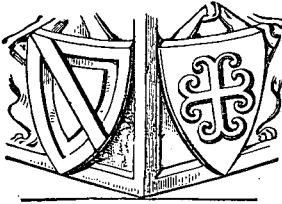
by the uncritical Blakeston, who inherited the quarterings from his mother Bowes, and sold the estate in 1615, or by the Davisons, later owners, to have been one of the Blakestons of Blakeston, must, I suppose,



be accepted. It is very similar to the effigy in Bedale church, of the great Brian fitz-Alan who died in 1301, and it is particularly interesting from the circumstance that it presents the artist's mark, an I and three links or annulets interlaced. On the base of a contemporary image found at Hartlepool, probably by the same John Chain or John Lock, are four links interlaced.



There are two original coats of arms behind the canopy, one apparently that of John Lythegrenes, a great man in bishop Bek's time, and a trustee for him in his purchase of Evenwood, or of Ralph de Langton, of Wynyard; the other that of the barons Bek, who were lords of Redmarshall, or of the Fulthorps, lords of Grindon, or of the Carrows, lords of what is now Seaton Carew. The de Parks did not finally part



with the manor of Blakeston until 1349. They were a thriftless lot, and might go to the expense of such a fine monument, in which case these small shields only refer to allied families; but I am more inclined to suppose that the effigy is that of some greater person, one very intimately connected with the family of Bek.

From whatever cause, whether rot in the ends of timbers, or shortcomings in acoustics or comfort, high-pitched roofs became unfashionable, and mostly disappeared all over. The Early English fabric itself of the chancel of Norton also fell into decay. The eight prebendaries who had the great tithes, and whose sacramental attire and tasselled tippet may be studied at Billingham, and unsacramental vestments at West Tanfield, on the respective brasses at these places, scandalously neglected to uphold this chancel. In 1410 cardinal Langley ordered them to repair it, but in vain, or to no permanent purpose, for eighty-six years afterwards, in 1496, bishop Fox had to sequester their incomes for the purpose of rebuilding it, assigning as a reason that 'the canons, prebendaries of the same church, had permitted the chancel of the

said collegiate church, which had been decently and richly constructed for the praise and worship of God, to fall into ruin and desolation, as well in the roof, main walls, and windows, as in divers other respects.'

The extensive Perpendicular alterations in the chancel are evidently of that period. Nature, 'slowly true, has lain her colours on' them. The work is of a quiet and not undignified character, and it harmonizes admirably with the reverend remains alongside. The nave also received a flat roof during the Perpendicular period, and the tower was heightened by a superstructure of thinner masonry than the walls beneath, the surplus thickness of the latter serving as a support for the great beams of the bell frames. These alterations most likely preceded those of the chancel. The octagonal churchyard cross rising from a square base also looked like a Perpendicular shaft. It lay on the wall of the churchyard until the recent enlargement of the burial ground.

These old countrified churches, in their present state, are useful studies, and it is difficult to over-estimate their value in creating and keeping on foot local veneration and sentiment, such important handmaids to religion. Little remains to be said of later changes in the church, and the tale is not the most cheering.

The sweeping away at the Reformation of the prebends which were held by pluralists, which must, one would think from the treatment of the chancel, have been mere sinecures, did not mend matters. In 1579, soon after the lay rectory commenced, the chancel was again in decay, though, judging from present appearances, there can hardly have been any decay of main walls or timbers.

We have, I believe, no pre-Reformation evidences on the Tees, such as we have on the Tyne, of the ancient modes of appropriation of seats according to good morals. But, after the Reformation, in 1635, the archdeacon allotted the seats in the church of Norton, and the parishioners were to be placed 'in decent manner according to their ranks degrees and qualities.' The vicar and churchwardens place Mr. Davison of Blakiston 'in the seat next unto the chancel on the north side where he useth to sit, and for his servants and tenants to sit in the north-porch, which is called by the name of Blaixton-porch. As for men servants which cannot read, we appoint them for to sit in the south porch, called by the name of Pettie-porch. And as for women servants, for to be placed to kneel down in the middle ally, near the font.'

When Hutchinson's third volume was published in 1794, all the windows in the nave had become 'flat-topped.' An early lithograph 'drawn by John Hogg, printed by Hullmandel,' shows them in that ugly plight. Its real interest for us is in exhibiting the west side of Pity porch with the same archaic characteristics as the other parts of the transepts. How we dwell upon the most miserable evidences of destroyed portions of the holy and beautiful temples of our fathers which we, after the destruction, cannot recall! For their age made them beautiful, and their beauty made them holy. They were works of men 'cunning' (as our authorised version has it) according to their lights, and Nature had been 'slowly true' to them, as she is to everything.

In spite of any compromise in 1635, made during archbishop Laud's sway (when the law and the practice of the Church of England never as yet resuscitated by Low Church, or High Church, or Broad Church, were fading away, and the black gown, insisted upon by Laud, was irretrievably accepted in such benefices as would afford one, until, in our own time, by a curious poetical retribution, it became the shibboleth of his enemies), in spite of any intermediate attempts at 'redistribution of seats' (as politicians say), the inevitable crisis came. Landowners were no longer little sovereigns, delighting in the happiness of their sub-feudatories. They now affected to treat their native land as mere material for speculation. The doctrine that a landowner in increasing his income must provide church accommodation for the contributors to it, had become an obsolete one. Norton church had been built for, and, in the ordinary course of events, by a certain number of persons, whose dwellings, each surrounded by the residue of its toft, and its pretty croft behind, can only be realized by a visit to certain villages in the counties bounding that called Durham. Statutes had been enacted, but, in spite of Acts of Parliament, both tofts and crofts were sacrificed to the crowding of increased population. Some of them, most of them, were built upon. The owners, whether of the tofts and crofts, or of the adjacent lands which ought to have been parcelled out into more of them, had no right to complain if a seat calculated to hold some five people would not hold fifty. Their predecessors in title could only have subscribed for an edifice adapted for the five.

The crisis at Norton occurred, or was hindered, in 1823, when the following changes in the fabric took place. The aisles were extended to a line flush with the ends of the transepts. A medieval architect would, under the circumstances, very likely, have taken a similar course, or he might have converted one of the aisles into a second nave, or given double aisles as in the glorious church of Kendal, or have lengthened the nave. But his workmen would have carved the mullions and the foliation of the windows by their eye, and not by rule and compass. And the result would have been irregularities, such as we find in the leaves of a tree, and in anything produced by God or photographed, and not drawn by man. It is, of course, as impossible to reproduce medieval work as to produce a MS. which could pass for a genuine holograph of Shakespeare, or as it is for us to reproduce the handwriting of our ancestors, even of those nearest to ourselves. None of us can reproduce that of a father, grandfather, or great grandfather. And, in 1823, such reproductions were quite as hopeless as they are now. Moreover, the stone used seems to have been very ill-adapted to receive Nature's slow colouring.

In addition to this enlargement, galleries were resorted to, and, one way and another, extra accommodation (much more than sufficient ten years afterwards, as I most certainly remember) was obtained. Some 350 sittings were to be free and unappropriated for ever, meaning, I suppose, whether the parish contained 3, 300, 3,000, or 3,000,000 inhabitants. The rights of the persons for whom the church was erected were respected in a way, but they must have been badly advised when they accepted the substitution for their ancient usages. Pews seem to have been set out with regard to properties, but *in form*, I believe, they were set out to persons. The individual might sell his house and retain the pew, according to the arrangement. He might leave the parish and lock up his pew. And what was the unlucky purchaser to do if he wished to go to a church on Sunday? Well, he might go into the free seats intended for the 3, 300, 3,000, or 3,000,000 people as of right; but if he were of the nervous tribe to which the same chair in the same place, the same bed in the same room, the same room or the same house was of consequence, he would be in evil plight.

At the alteration of 1823 the old font was turned out, and a new basin placed in the sedile.

Into more recent changes it is hardly worth while entering at large. The objectionable substitution for one of bishop Fox's windows in the chancel was, I believe, made in 1853. A font (modern) has again been placed at the west end of the church.

As to other ritualistic arrangements, I have been in most of the churches of the county, and I think I may safely say that in none of them have I observed either rubric or canon observed by High, or Low, or Broad Church during any hour, day, or year of my existence. I therefore pass over such subjects, having already said elsewhere as much upon them as I care to say on such unimportant matters.

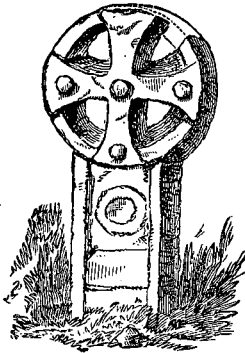
No critical works on Durham churches have been produced, but it is singular that illustrations of Norton should be absent from such works on Durham as we have, Hutchinson's and Surtees's excepted.

In conclusion, I would venture to express my utter abhorrence of doctrines which would compel us either to investigate and conserve titles derived from the Ancient Britons, or to resort to modern communism as we now see it ecclesiastically exemplified in its worst phase. Surely there must be some honest man in this England, if we would but make up our mind to revert to it. 'The glory of children are their fathers,' but, 'Boast not the virtues of your ancestors; they are *their* possessions, none of *yours*.' Ancient rights, institutions, and memorials must be conserved until they have lost all their use. It will be very long indeed before a gray church has lost its use.

The above paper must have been written some years ago, but I need only add a postscript. As to the supposed piscina found, I can offer no opinion, not having seen it, or a photograph of it. There is one interesting circumstance which must not be overlooked. Built into the east side of the south porch you will observe the remnant of a female effigy, wanting the head, in very low relief, discovered during the alteration of the church in 1875-6. It is remarkable that like as the male effigy is almost identical with that of Brian Fitz-Alan, so this female effigy at Norton is almost identical with that of Lady Fitz-Alan at Bedale, as if the widows had some favourite sculptor as their spouses had had.

It will have been observed that even in Saxon times Norton was understood to be the town north of some other *tun*. The importance of Stockton as a tidal outlet must have been perceived at an early period, and yet I am by no means certain that it was the South-town or SUTTON alluded to. Its chapel of St. Thomas has a late dedication, and there is a remarkable hitch in the centre of Norton, as if two vills had met and, in their respective progresses, one southward, the other northward, had intentionally or clumsily preserved a sort of bound. At the sign of the 'Highland Lad' (whoever he might be) the western side of the village retreats and the eastern one comes forward.

The woodcuts used in illustrating this paper have been kindly lent by the Royal Archaeological Institute. They appeared originally in the *Arch. Journal*. There was a beautiful little Perpendicular boss of wood in the Tower, but it has disappeared during the divers troubles of this church.



CROSS, COLPITTS'S FARM, NORTON.