

## XI.—JOHN BELL'S PLAN OF ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE.

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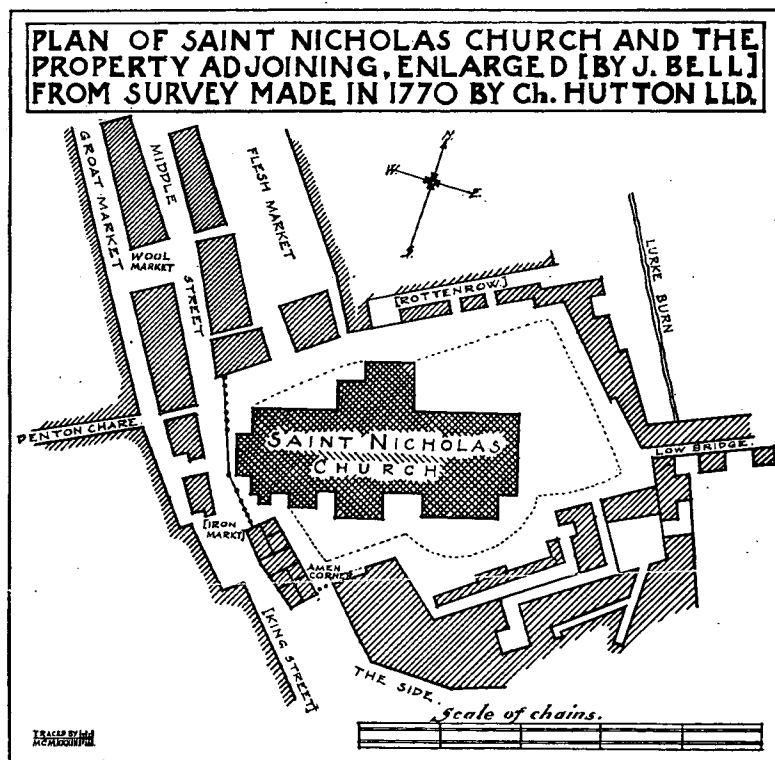
[Read on 29th March, 1933.]

When writing my history of the cathedral church of Newcastle upon Tyne for last year's volume of *Archæologia Aeliana* I had frequently to lament the lack of a good plan of the building before its nineteenth century restorations. Lacking this, it was necessary to do a good deal of guessing which would not otherwise have been required. I have now been privileged to see and make tracings from two plans<sup>1</sup> made by John Bell, surveyor, Gateshead, in 1831-32, apparently by request of the churchwardens whose names are listed on the drawing, and it may be worth while to place on record the lessons learnt therefrom. Moreover the plans are worth reproducing for their own sakes, as documents of considerable historical and ecclesiological importance.

The smaller of the two plans, both of which are drawn on the same sheet of paper, is to a scale of an inch to the chain or 1:792. It is described as "enlarged from a survey made in 1770 by Charles Hutton, LL.D.," and, despite its obvious inaccuracies of detail, it gives a good idea of St. Nicholas churchyard and its environs. It shows the real Amen Corner, a good way west of its modern successor, and the rows of houses which had been built actually upon the churchyard and using it as their roadway. Its most interesting feature is the way in which it emphasizes the fact that the churchyard must have been, in origin, not one of the late Hadrian Alcroft's round "cyrics" but a rhomboid, of about two acres contents, not unlike the Roman temporary camps of which so many can be traced near the Wall. It would appear to be possible that the church was built within such a camp enclosure, and this may be the origin of the persistent local tradition that it stands on the site of Pons Aelii. The

<sup>1</sup> Now preserved in the Town Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne.

chancel arch appears to stand nearly half-way between the north-east and the south-west ends of the enclosure, and it will be noticed that the old axis of the church (see *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., IX, plate xxib) was more nearly parallel with the sides of the enclosure than the present axis is.



The larger plan (plate xii) is to the useful scale of 1 : 96, and is stated to be from a survey made by Bell in 1831-32, but as he is known to have possessed one of the three copies of Hutton's detailed plan of the church it is possible that he used the latter as a basis for his work. It shows the church as repewed in the eighteenth century, and the only nineteenth century work shown by it is the rebuilding of the north end of the north transept and the

internal alterations there done in 1824 by John Dobson. The plan of the pews and sanctuary will be of value to those of our members who wish to see where their great-grandfathers sat, and also to ecclesiologists, as exhibiting a typical late eighteenth century arrangement of an English parish church. The same plan was introduced into the Church of Scotland a few years later, but with the Table on the congregation's side of the pulpit, and continued popular there long after it had been abandoned by the Church of England.

Commencing at the north-west corner and proceeding clockwise, the following are points to note; the references, unless otherwise stated, are to pages in *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., vol. IX.

The west end of the north aisle, three feet thick, is no doubt the work done in 1736 (p. 132), while the north door and its massive buttresses dated from 1771 (p. 134). East of the door, a thinner wall, part of which still exists, dates from the westward extension of the aisle after the tower arches were opened in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

The north aisle wall was apparently four feet thick before the Greens refaced it in 1834 (p. 143), and if so its thickness was reduced at that date. Bell's plan confirms my suspicion that the Greens also altered the setting out of the buttresses. Coming to the Queen's Porch, little chantry, or west aisle of the north transept, the plan shows that I was wrong in supposing that it was as an addition to the plan (p. 118), evidently an aisle eight feet wide formed part of the early fourteenth century transept and all that was done later was a widening of the aisle by moving its west wall three feet farther out, leaving the old north window and buttress untouched. The present aisle, built in 1834, agrees in width with neither of its predecessors. The internal plan of this aisle and of the transept is as reconstructed by Dobson in 1824 to form a baptistery with vestry alongside. I am more and more inclined to think that before the reformation the north part of the transept, and its east aisle, was all floored, whether in wood or stone,

on the level of the floor over the charnel chapel, and formed a single roomy chapel known as "The Kings or St. George's porch." The south part of the transept, floored at a lower level, forming "St. John's porch." However, that is just a hypothesis.

The reconstructed "school gallery" (p. 136) is indicated on the plan, also the stone pillars supporting the organ gallery of 1785, and the pews and pulpit as planned in 1785 and altered in 1798. The east end shows the alterations of 1818 and the gable before it was rebuilt by Dobson in 1859.

The plan of the vestry is not exactly as built in 1736; there had evidently been a second doorway on the south side and this had been already built up to form a cupboard. The thin buttress between the vestry and the south transept was already thin; it may have been cut down when the windows beside it were restored in 1785, or it may always have been smaller than the other choir aisle buttresses.

In the south transept we see the old choir stalls refitted as seats for a morning chapel with a prayer desk at its south end and an entrance porch on its west side. The south-east pier of the crossing differs from its plan as existing, and appears more suited to support the Maddison monument which undoubtedly stood against its south face. Was the pier rebuilt and altered in plan by sir G. G. Scott in 1873? Another problem is raised by Bell's plan of the south gable, which he shows only two feet nine inches thick and with the southmost buttress on the east side of the transept two feet six inches north of the angle. If this is correct, and Richardson's view does not agree with it, the transept must at one time have been either about ten feet longer or two feet six inches shorter than at present, must have been shortened or lengthened either about 1370 (p. 114) or about 1635 (p. 127), and its gable rebuilt thicker not in the fourteenth century as I supposed (p. 114) but in 1873. This is the sort of thing that makes one curse all restorers who do not cut dates on their work! But Bell's plan may here be inaccurate.

The nave south aisle wall is shown six inches thicker than at present, and the Bewick porch is represented as it existed before its destruction to make way for the present chapel shortly after Bell surveyed it. West of it the old "church poorch" still stood. The usual site for a south entrance porch is farther east, e.g. where the Bewick porch stands, but St. Andrew's church, Newcastle, and Ponteland church both have porches in the same position as at St. Nicholas, and both the two last mentioned were lopsided with their doorways off their centre lines.

The plan of the tower shows that I was wrong (p. 144) in assuming that the lower part of the north-west turret stair dated from the nineteenth century and that the north and south arches were widened to any extent by Dobson or the Greens. It also shows with more emphasis than Mr. Wood's plan that the west face of the tower is not at right angles to the present axis of the church and is, in fact, almost at right angles to the old axis line. Evidently some part of the twelfth century west end was still in existence when the foundations of the present tower were laid. The fact that part of a twelfth century window, resembling a belfry window, was among the debris taken from the tower in 1832 (p. 103, fig. 2) already pointed to that conclusion.

During the recent alterations a twelfth century pillar was found in the south-west pier of the crossing in a similar position to that in the north-west pier, and other evidence was found indicating that the late twelfth century nave (p. 101) had some resemblance to the nave of St. Hilda's church, Hartlepool. Although the western tower of Hartlepool is later than its nave it may have been planned at the same time, and with its arches and vault it has affinities with the west tower of St. Nicholas, though its details are entirely different in style and period.

Interesting though Bell's plan is, it cannot compare as an archaeological record with Hutton's, made before 1783 and showing monuments and burial vaults as well as pews. If any member of our society ever comes across either of

the three copies of it which existed a hundred years ago, I should be very grateful for information as to its whereabouts.

## APPENDIX.

A list of the monuments referred to by the letters on plan.

|                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>South Aisle.</i>        | A. Frances Burton.               |
|                            | B. Mary Furge.                   |
|                            | C. N. Ridley.                    |
|                            | D. W. Wrightson.                 |
|                            | E. J. Stephenson.                |
|                            | F. W. Hall.                      |
|                            | G. Rev. J. Smith, vicar.         |
|                            | H. M. Ridley.                    |
|                            | I. H. Askew.                     |
|                            | J. S. Blackett.                  |
|                            | K. E. Collingwood.               |
|                            | L. M. Duane.                     |
|                            | M.                               |
|                            | N. L. Maddison.                  |
|                            | O. P. Crow.                      |
| <i>Middle Aisle.</i>       | P. Rev. T. Dockray.              |
|                            | Q. J. Atkinson.                  |
|                            | R. E. Greenwell.                 |
|                            | S. E. Mann.                      |
| <i>North Aisle.</i>        | T. R. Buggon.                    |
|                            | U. B. Dawson.                    |
| <i>St. George's Porch.</i> | V. Major-General J. B. Skerrett. |
|                            | W.                               |
|                            | X. R. Shafto.                    |
|                            | Y. S. Peareth.                   |
|                            | Z. W. Peareth.                   |
|                            | a. W. J. Peareth.                |
|                            | b. B. Smoult.                    |
|                            | c. W. Peareth.                   |
|                            | d. J. Cuthbert.                  |
|                            | e. J. Bainbridge.                |
| <i>St. Mary's Porch.</i>   | f. R. Davison.                   |
|                            | g. T. Hamilton.                  |
|                            | h. J. Huddleston.                |
|                            | i. J. Hodgson.                   |
|                            | j. E. Mosley.                    |
|                            | k. W. Ingham.                    |
|                            | l. Rev. H. Moises.               |
| <i>Nave.</i>               | m. Lord Collingwood.             |
|                            | n. Sir M. W. Ridley.             |
|                            | o. B. K. Wilcox.                 |
|                            | p. Rear-Admiral W. Charlton.     |
|                            | q. M. Wilson.                    |
|                            | r. J. Bell.                      |

*Nave.*

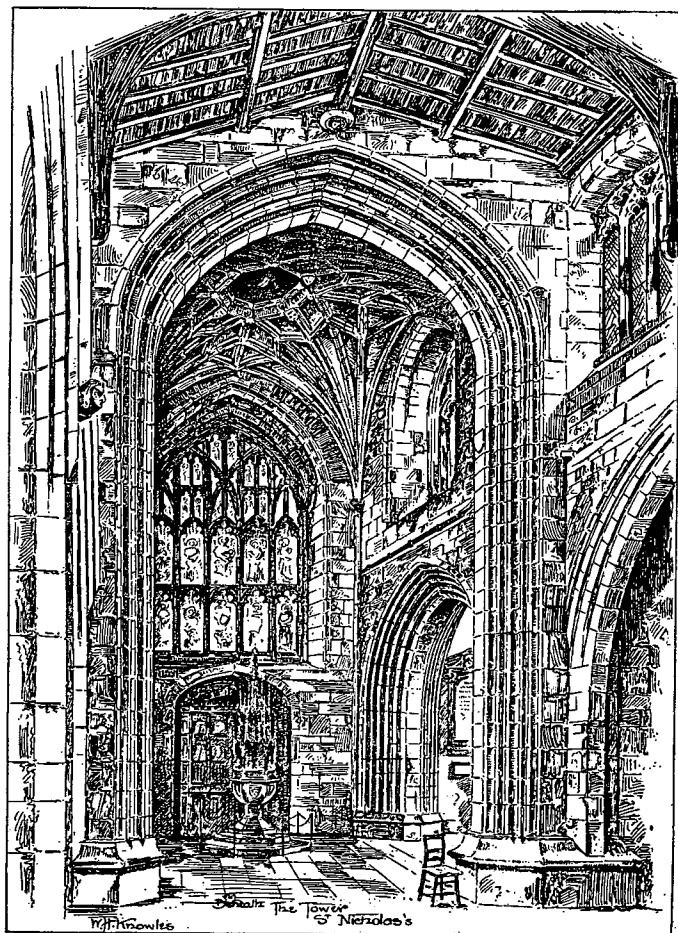
- s. W. Lloyd.
- t. W. H. Thornton.
- u. Rev. J. S. Lushington, vicar.
- v. M. Weldon.
- w. J. Ellison.
- x. A. Ingham.
- y. Rev. N. Ellison.
- z. — Clavering.

*Bewick Porch.*

- A. Major J. Werge.
- B. Calverley Bewick.
- C. Robt. Bewick.

*South Entrance.*

D.



PLAN of ST NICHOLAS CHURCH.  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE :  
SURVEYED IN 1831 - 1832, BY  
JOHN BELL OF GATESHEAD:

