

## NOTES ON SOME MURAL PAINTINGS

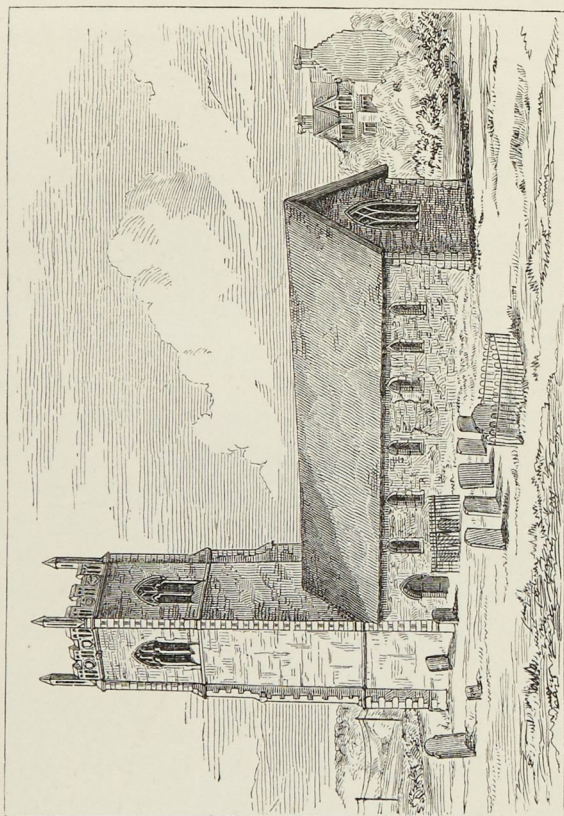
Lately discovered in Eaton Church.

COMMUNICATED BY

SIR JOHN P. BOILEAU, BART., F.R.S., V.P.S.A., *President.*

SOME interesting mural paintings having been recently discovered in the little Church of Eaton, in the county of the city of Norwich, about two miles west of St. Stephen's gate, I think it may be agreeable to the Archæological Society (though some able articles upon them have already appeared in our provincial paper, the *Mercury*,) to have a short notice of them, and it may be useful hereafter as a record of the discovery.

Eaton, Blomefield tells us, though now with Earlham and Heigham in the city of Norwich, was anciently in Humbleyard; and I presume, therefore, that the lands mentioned in *Domesday*, 1086, as then belonging to the burgesses of Norwich in Humbleyard, were in these parishes. He also tells us that the meaning of the word Eaton is Town on the Water [Eau Town]; but as it is written Etune and Aituna in *Domesday*, it may mean Town on the Island, from Eye and Town. Before the Conquest this parish was owned by Edric, but the custody of it was given by the Conqueror to Godric.



THE SOUTH SIDE OF EATON CHURCH.

OF FINNEY & CO.

T. J. COLE.

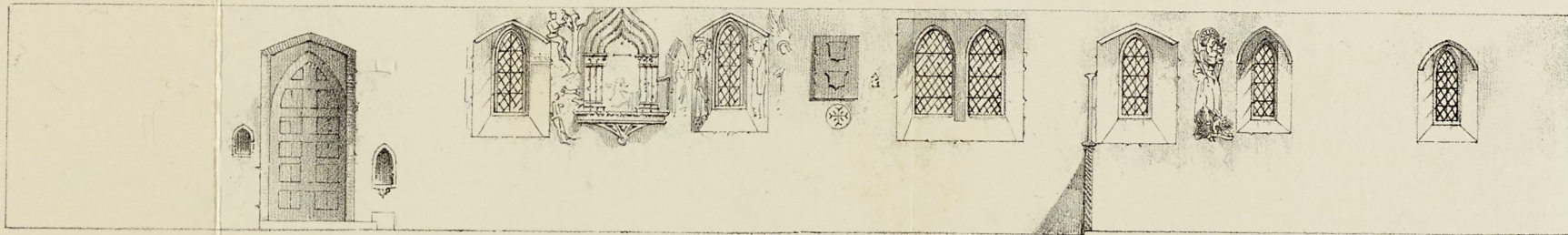
It was then one mile long and one broad, but the manor appears to have extended into the neighbouring parishes and to have been of the value of £7. It was subsequently given by the Conqueror to Flahald, the ancestor of the Fitzallan family, Earls of Arundel, who gave it, temp. Henry I., to the Cathedral Church of Norwich, where it remained till the Dissolution, when it was valued at £13. 8s. 0*d.*, and passed then to the Dean and Chapter. It would be rather a curious genealogical inquiry, whether Count Flahault, the ambassador from France to England, is a descendant of the above-named Flahald, whose son took the name of Alan.

The Church of Eaton at the Conquest possessed fourteen acres of glebe, valued at 14*d.* per annum; which seems to have been the average value of land at that period. It is dedicated to St. Andrew, and had a guild to his honour. Having passed with the manor to the church of Norwich, the rectorial tithes were appropriated to the uses of the cathedral, circà 1204, by the Bishop, John de Grey, but the patronage of the *Vicarage* was given to the Prior and Convent, and so has passed to the Dean and Chapter.

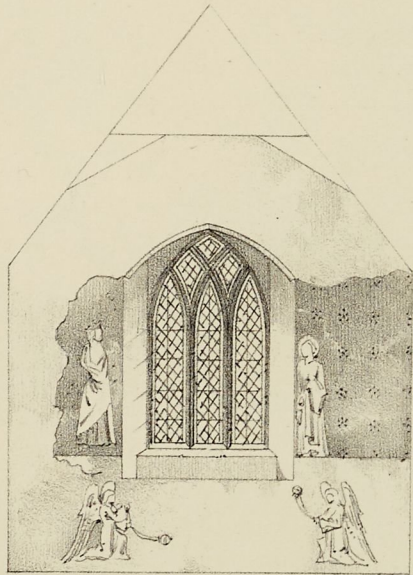
In the month of November in the past year, the church being in want of complete repair, Mr. T. Jeckell, architect, of Norwich, who is also one of our intelligent archæologists, was directed to inspect and report upon it. From his investigation, he tells me that he has every reason to believe, principally from Norman fragments worked up in the walls, that the original church was of the Norman period, and that the present structure, showing much of the pointed style, is either an entirely subsequent one, or so much altered that it retains no detail of the Norman date. The early pointed building, again, was considerably altered in still later times, as he considers the chancel-seats and tower are of the style which prevailed from about 1440 to 1490, or even later.

Mr. Jeckell found some fragments of a screen and rood-

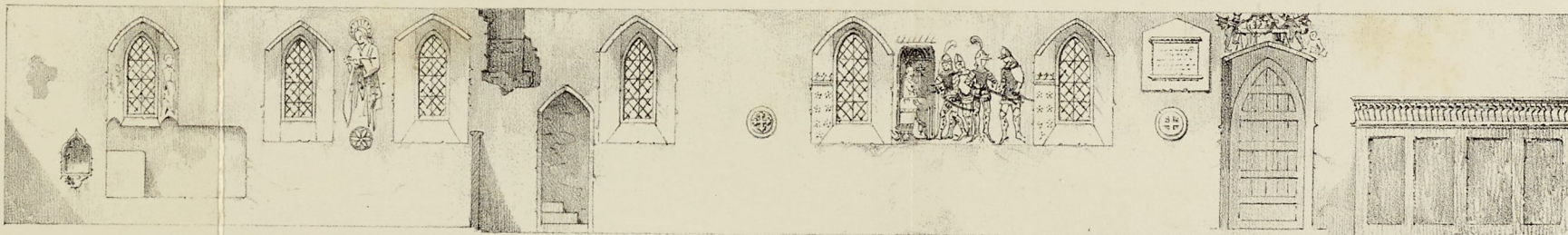
INTERIOR OF ELTON  
 CHURCH NORFOLK  
 A D 1861



NORTH SIDE ✓



EAST END ✓



SOUTH SIDE ✓

Kell, Bro<sup>s</sup> Lath<sup>s</sup> Castle St-Halbarn

loft and some painting on the chancel roof, as also the arch through which was the passage by a staircase to the rood-loft,



and has made a clever drawing from these details, showing how these parts once existed and how elegant they were.

Their style corroborates his former opinion of 1440 to 1490 being the date when important repairs and improvements were made in the church.

It was during Mr. Jeckell's examination that the mural paintings to which I have first drawn your attention were discovered, and we must all be indebted to him for the care he has bestowed to preserve them as much as possible from injury. All the walls appear to have been so decorated, but several of the subjects have not yet been sufficiently uncovered, or are too much injured, to ascertain these, while some have been destroyed by insertion of modern mural monuments. There are two paintings of considerable beauty of design opposite each other on the north and south sides of the chancel, representing, the former, St. John the Evangelist, the latter, St. John the Baptist. They are recognizable by their emblems (as may be seen by reference to "Emblems of Saints," 2nd edition, p. 90.) The Evangelist has the eagle and the cup, the palm branch, serpent, and scroll. The Baptist has the book and cross.

On the north wall of the nave, a little west of the pulpit, in the splays of one of the windows, are two well-executed paintings, (represented in page 163) at present much defaced and not easily to be made out; but Dr. Husenbeth explains them to me thus—

"On the right hand as you stand before the window is a female, crowned, and bearing a crossed staff and a clasped book. This is St. Helen. There is part of the inscription remaining, something in this way, **S \* \*lena**, intended no doubt for St. Elena. The other figure on the left is also a female. She holds up a crown in her left hand, as if resigning or making an offering of it. It is St. Jane of Valois, Queen of France. This inscription has the word *Johanna* tolerably legible. I found a figure of the same saint on the rood-screen at Barnham Broom."



14. 11. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

DEHEN OF THOMAS H BECKER.

On the south wall opposite is the highly interesting representation of the martyrdom of Thomas à Becket. It is very nearly identical with the representation of the same subject on the south wall of Burlingham St. Andrew's church, in this county, discovered in the month of July, 1856, which is engraved and so well described by Mr. Morant in the fifth volume of the Journal of our Society: but the Eaton painting has been more injured, especially the figure of the archbishop, his cross-bearer, and the shrine. The four warriors are well preserved, and though the right hands and most of the arms of the two foremost are lost, the action of the one making a stroke, and the other a less violent motion, is manifest. The third figure is sheathing his sword from which blood is falling at his feet, whilst the fourth figure has his sword sheathed and appears in the attitude of expostulation. By a comparison of several other representations of this event with history, it would seem that they, as well as this painting, are more conventional than strictly historical; which may partly be accounted for by the many variations in the numerous (29) histories written of it shortly after its occurrence; besides the violence, confusion, and darkness when the murder occurred, which must have made complete exactness as to particular facts very difficult. It is however, I think, most probable that De Moreville is intended to be represented by the last figure on the right of the spectator, who stands somewhat apart and tranquil, as he is said by Dr. Stanley, from the writings of Grim and others, not to have struck any blow. And the third may be meant for Tracey, who is called the "Primus Percussor" by Baronius and Robert of Gloucester, and who, as Stanley tells us, (page 80, *History of Canterbury*.) was supposed to be unable to accomplish his penitential vow of going to the Holy Land on account of his great crime. The avenging winds of heaven always drove him back, and he died at Cosenza in Italy of a



dreadful disorder, exclaiming in his last moments, "Mercy on me, St. Thomas!" He indicates by his action that he has already done his work. The two nearest figures to Becket, and who are in the act of striking him, must then represent Fitzurse and Brito (or De Brett.)\* There is nothing here, apparently to me, to distinguish them apart; whereas in the South Burlingham painting Fitzurse is at once recognizable by his shield with his arms, a bear, upon it, and also by having in his hand the carpenter's axe, which almost all the historians mention his having seized to break a way through the closed passages to seize the archbishop. De Moreville has a shield. The bearing on it is not clear, but it may be an eagle; and we learn from Burke, that the arms of Moreville, temp. Hen. II., were, *azure, an eagle displayed Barry gules and argent, another argent and gules.*

One of the two figures in the act of striking may perhaps have also had a shield, as is the case in the South Burlingham painting, but it is not there now. The armour worn by the knights is decided by our best authorities, to whom I have submitted the drawings, to be before the middle of the 15th century, which nearly corresponds with the period suggested for the architectural embellishment of the church. This painting is therefore probably a little later than the one in South Burlingham.

Besides these two mural paintings of Becket's murder here brought forward, I am authentically informed that at

\* On further observation, it has been suggested, and with probable correctness, that the drops of blood at the feet of the third figure are fallen not from his sword but from the sword or scabbard of the first figure, which is painted red, and probably therefore this first figure is Tracey, the "primus percussor;" and the third is not sheathing but drawing his sword, to take his part in the action, and may rather represent Fitzurse, as this is his place in the Burlingham painting, as is evident there from his armorial bearing on his shield.

Hingham another lately existed, but has been covered over, making three in this county!—whilst so far as I can learn only four throughout all other parts of England have as yet been brought to light, viz.—

|                  |                             |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Preston, Sussex, | St. John's, Winchester,     |
| Whaddon, Bucks,  | Trinity, Stratford-on-Avon. |

It is probable I may not yet have heard of all which exist; still it seems from the large proportion of these reminiscences in Norfolk, that the "Cultus" of Becket was very prevalent here. I would suggest to the Society that this may have originated in the union which existed (especially in his last days) between Becket and the two most powerful personages in Norfolk at that time, viz., Hugh Bigod, the Earl, and William Turberville, the Bishop of the Diocese. There are to be seen in Dr. Giles' *Life and Letters of Thomas à Becket*, two letters, one from him to the Earl, the other to the Bishop, clearly showing this alliance, and are remarkable as the last letters he is known to have written, being sent on the 27th of December, 1170, and his death occurring on the 29th, two days after. It is not forced, therefore, I think, to suppose that they would have supported his canonization, and caused it to be observed and honoured in Norfolk during their lives; and when once established, the superstition or piety of the age would probably have sustained it, and occasioned, even two or three centuries afterwards, the commemoration of his murder, and his sacrifice for the church, by such mural paintings as that now under consideration. And it is also probable, from the date of this painting corresponding with the spread of Lollardism in Norfolk, that paintings and other decorations would then be done to the churches, to please the people and keep them from embracing the new doctrines; and no subject for this purpose could have been more fitting than that of Thomas à Becket, at once a popular

saint and one whose devotion to the church had obtained for him the glory of canonization. I am not, therefore, without hope that, as attention is now awakened, more such paintings may be found in our churches, especially if investigation is carefully made when considerable repairs are required to their walls. That more formerly existed is, I think, most probable; and we now know, by what has been found at Burlingham and Eaton, that when Henry VIII. issued his famous proclamation, 16th Nov. 1538, for the destruction of all memorials existing of Becket as a saint, these mural paintings were not destroyed, but only partially injured and covered over with a coat of paint. Others, therefore, may still exist, and be only hidden from us by as slight and simple a covering! It is also not improbable that in this county, so rich in beautifully-painted and decorated screens, some instances may be found, if carefully sought for, where this martyrdom of Becket is represented.

In the Eaton church painting there is this peculiarity, that the faces of the four knights were only partially injured, and their figures covered over with common lime whitewash, which was easily removed, and the painting brought out well preserved; whereas the figure of Becket was almost entirely broken away and its place covered with a red strong cement, which could not be removed without difficulty, and brought away much of the adjoining painting. This is an interesting proof of the actual carrying out of Henry the Eighth's edict for the destruction of all memorials of Becket, and one of those confirmations of history which archæology so often produces. In all the representations I have seen of about the date of the Eaton church painting, a shrine is introduced, at which Becket is falling or kneeling; but this is an anachronism of the artists, and intended to give a superior idea of the sanctity of the martyr, as no shrine existed on the spot in Canterbury Cathedral where he fell, till one was

erected nearly a century after in his own honour. In the earliest memorials of the event—such as the Limoges coffer, preserved in the Museum of the Royal Society of Antiquaries; the mural painting at Preston, and the sculpture over the south transept door at Bayeux, in Normandy—no shrine is shown.

In looking at several of these memorials of different dates and different centuries, it creates some surprise to see the armorial bearings represented on the shields of the knights by no means the same; but this may arise from several causes, and yet the same persons be intended. First, the artists may, in these country places especially, have been imperfect in their knowledge of heraldry and made mistakes. Secondly, they may have adopted the armorial bearings of the patrons, who caused the paintings to be made in the spirit of adulation which existed in these days; or, lastly, the arms borne by the descendants of the original knights may have very probably varied, for there is nothing more common in early times than the son or grandson to have changed the arms which his ancestors bore.

It has not been my object in these Notes to enter into critical details of the armour represented in the painting, or any discussion on the character of Becket, his influence upon the monarchy and church of England, nor to point out and try to reconcile the different statements of his biographers. Dr. Stanley has most ably done the latter. Becket's character will, I believe, always be estimated according to the sentiments of those who endeavour to judge it, and I repose on the high authorities I have consulted for the date and peculiarity of the armour. I have wished to preserve a note for the Society of this interesting discovery, and draw attention to one or two facts connected with it of local county interest. I shall therefore conclude with remarking, that such was the fervour of the worship

of St. Thomas of Canterbury (as Becket after canonization was called) that the riches of his shrine exceeded even those of Walsingham Abbey, which excited the cupidity of Henry VIII. and contributed to bring on the Reformation. Erasmus tells us of them, that "The least valuable part was gold; every part glistened, shone, and sparkled with rare and very large jewels, some of them exceeding the size of a goose egg."