

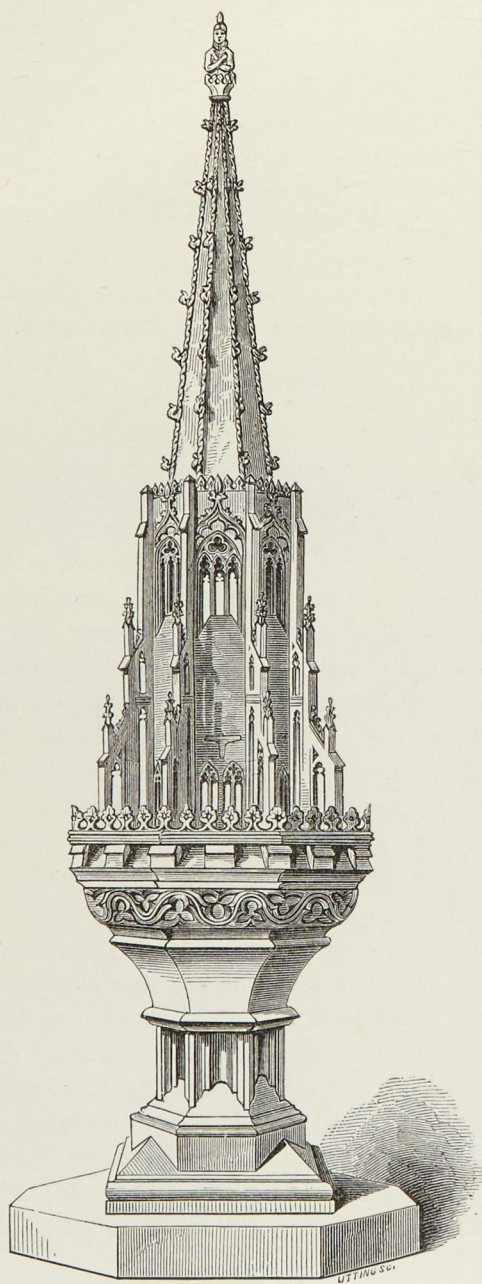
Elsing Church.

COMMUNICATED BY

THE REV. C. R. MANNING, M.A.,

Honorary Secretary.

THIS Church is an excellent specimen of what is now so rarely to be met with,—an ancient building with little or no additions to the original design. It is throughout a pure Decorated church, of the early part of the reign of Edw. III., and for this reason it was selected by Messrs. Brandon as one of the subjects for illustration in their “Parish Churches.” It is fortunate also that, in this case, we are able to fix the date from other evidence than that of the architecture. It is a step gained whenever we are able to produce a *dated example* of a mediæval building: although allowance must be made in many cases for differences arising from the locality. From the inscriptions formerly remaining on the fine monumental brass in the centre of the chancel, as well as the position of that monument in the church, and from similar inscriptions in the painted glass, there is sufficient to prove that, as Blomefield asserts, this church was built by Sir Hugh Hastings; and as we find that the Foliot family, from whom Sir Hugh Hastings derived the manor, through his wife, presented to the living in 1330, and that Sir Hugh died in 1347, we may fix the date of 1340 as that, as nearly as possible, at which the church was erected. There is some peculiarity in the design of the windows: the flow of



FONT IN ELSING CHURCH.

the tracery is not so easy and graceful as in the best specimens of Decorated work, and leads one to suspect the influence of foreign taste. It may however be only due to local causes, as there are instances somewhat similar in neighbouring churches, as at Beetley. There is a large east window of five lights, and side windows of two lights, but the heads of the latter are unfortunately blocked up. In the former are some very fine remains of contemporary painted glass, with the figures of Sir Hugh Hastings and his wife, as founders of the church. On the north side is a chapel or sacristy of the same date. In the south wall are plain sedilia and piscina. The nave of the church is very broad for its length, and has three fine Decorated windows on each side, of three lights each. There are north and south porches with foliated ogee-arched doorways to each. The tower is at the west end, and is of the same period as the rest of the building. In the easternmost windows of the nave, on each side, is some more painted glass, the southern one containing remains of three figures. The font is also original, and its wooden cover is well worthy of attention. It is of Decorated work, and is believed to be the oldest font cover remaining, all others being of Perpendicular work. It is of a simple and elegant design, its pinnacles much mutilated. The accompanying illustration will afford a better idea of it than any longer description.¹ It deserves to be carefully preserved from further injury.

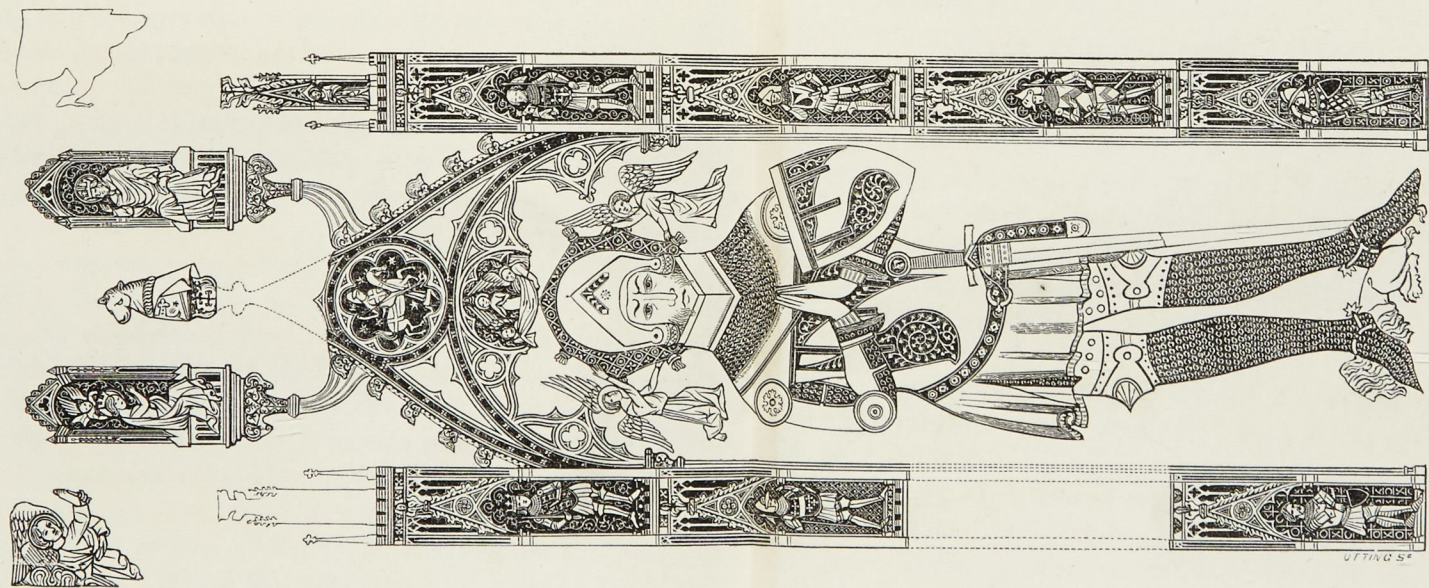
Some paintings were discovered on the walls of this church a few years ago, apparently representing events in the life of St. John Baptist.

The brass which lies on the pavement of the chancel of this church, though now but a wreck, was originally one of the grandest in the kingdom. It was executed at a date

¹ It is also engraved in the *Archæologia*, vol. xvi., as it was in 1809: which plate has been followed in the present illustration, by permission of the Society of Antiquaries, in order to show some of the smaller details, since lost.

when Gothic art was at its highest perfection; and the person here commemorated being a member of a very distinguished family, the brass was large, elaborate, and costly, as well as beautiful in design. It happens also that there are but very few other brasses remaining of this particular date, so that both the costume of the effigy and the style of the surrounding ornament are very valuable examples to the archæologist.

It may be worth while to remark that when a brass or altar-tomb is observed to be placed in *the centre* of a chancel or chapel, it generally denotes the *founder* of the church or chapel. In many cases the founder's monument was erected in the side wall, frequently on the north side; but a central position, evidently *designed* to be central, is also generally indicative of a similar intention. Such was the case here. Sir Hugh Hastings, son of Sir John de Hastings, Lord Abergavenny, by Isabel, his second wife, daughter of Hugh le Despencer, Earl of Winchester, married Margery, sister and co-heiress of Sir Richard de Foliot. The manor of Elsing having been in the hands of the Foliot family, Sir John de Camois and his wife (the other co-heiress of the Foliots) released their interest in this manor to Sir Hugh Hastings and his wife; and he, as Blomefield tells us, built this church, and was here buried in the year 1347, and his wife in 1349. The portion of inscription, now destroyed, which Blomefield gives, relates the same fact, "in gwowe [whose] worchipe, yis churche hath been wrowt by Howe de Hastyng and Margaret hys wyf." If this inscription were contemporary, it was a very early example of the use of English in epitaphs; but there is reason to doubt whether it were not a much later addition. The figure of the knight and those of the weepers at the side are very interesting in point of costume, as they show the stage of transition from the simple hauberk and surcoat of previous times, to the partly plate armour and closer-fitting jupon of the latter half of the 14th century.



BRASS OF SIR HUGH HASTINGS, KNT., 1347. ELSING CHURCH, NORFOLK.
 (The portions now lost are supplied from Cotman's engraving.)

Until a few years ago there were supposed to be no other brasses in existence which gave this same style of military costume. I had myself the pleasure of discovering one in all respects similar and of the same date to a year, though on a much smaller scale, in Wimbish church, Essex, which was immediately engraved by Messrs. Waller, in their large work on "Monumental Brasses." Another has since been restored to Bowers' Gifford church, Essex, from which it had been taken away, and is engraved in the "Manual of Brasses," and by the Essex Archæological Society.

The engravings of the complete brass being confined to scarce and costly works, viz., Carter's *Ancient Sculpture and Painting*, and Cotman's *Norfolk Brasses*; and only details having appeared in other publications, as Waller's *Brasses*, and Boutell's *Series*; it is thought desirable that a new engraving, both of the lost and remaining parts of this splendid relic of monumental art, should accompany this paper, and be accessible to all our subscribers in the pages of our own volumes.

The effigy is clad in a mixed armour of mail and plate, with a jupon, not closely confined at the hips, as was the custom shortly after, but with the sword-belt hanging loosely, and allowing the full skirt of the jupon to fall beneath. The legs are now lost, but Cotman's engraving and the rubbing preserved in the British Museum, show that there were no jambs of plate over the chaussés of mail. This and the shield on the left arm connect the costume with older fashion, while the gorget, or collar of plate, over the camail, and the bascinet with its perforated moveable vizor, connect it with the later style. The sleeves of the hauberk are slipped off the hands, showing the quilted haqueton beneath the mail; and the ancient heraldic bearing of Hastings, the maunch or sleeve, with a label for difference, is richly diapered, both upon the shield and the jupon itself. The genouillères, or knee-caps, are spiked; and there are round plates at the

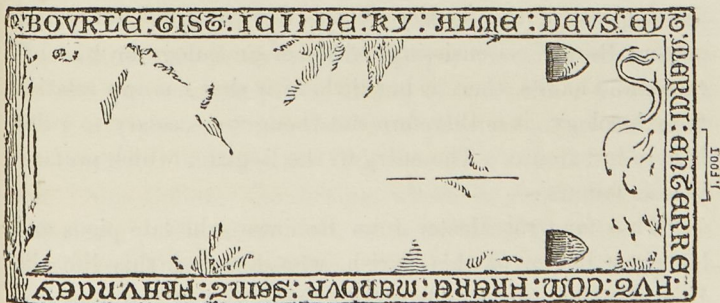
elbow and shoulder joints. The head rests on a diapered double cushion, supported by angels.

The canopy in which the effigy is placed is also well-deserving of study, and very beautiful. The sides are each composed of a series of four canopied niches, containing armed figures or "weepers," being, as in other cases, relatives of the deceased. In all of them a double outline will be observed, designed, it would seem, to distinguish the figures with better effect from the diapered field on which they are placed. I cannot do better than here quote the description given of them by Mr. Boutell, in his "Brasses and Slabs," p. 46.

"On the dexter side, the first figure represents King Edw. III., crowned, displaying on his embroidered jupon the arms of France and England quarterly, which bearing was assumed by King Edward in 1341, but six years anterior to the date of this brass. The second figure is Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, armed at all points, and holding a lance with a pennon; the third, now lost, represented one of the Despencer family; the fourth (lost) is Roger Grey, Lord Grey of Ruthin. On the sinister side are the figures of Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster; the second is lost: it was taken away, Cotman says, by the ill-advised zeal of an antiquary, but he has engraved it, and it represented Laurence Hastings, Earl of Pembroke, who died in 1348, and his shield, bearing Hastings quartering Valence, has been considered the oldest example of a subject quartering arms; to this succeeds the effigy of Ralph, Lord Stafford, a good example of that which Sir Hugh's own figure is without, the jambs of plate over chaussés of mail; and the lowermost is that of Almeric, Lord St. Amand, whose head-piece is very singular." This is the "chapelle de fer," or kettle-hat, so called from its resembling an inverted cauldron; it had a ridge over the top of the head, and a wide brim. It might be drawn forward in actual combat, so that the brim projecting over the brow would afford some

additional protection. "This is the only specimen of this head-piece which has been noticed engraven in a brass; and the only other example in a monumental effigy occurs in one of the equestrian figures of Aymer de Valence in his tomb in Westminster Abbey."—(See Cotman's account.) The upper part of the canopy has a figure of St. George and the dragon in the foliated centre, and two figures or brackets, representing the coronation of the Virgin Mary. The finial is formed by the crest on a tilting helmet. At the upper corners were angels, one only remaining, with censers, attending the soul of the deceased conveyed upwards in a sheet, which appears in the central cusp of the arch. A similar conceit occurs at Balsham, Cambridgeshire; Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire; and Checkendon, Oxfordshire. It is not improbable that this brass is of foreign execution, although the English practice of letting the stone slab appear between the effigy and the sides of the canopy is here adopted. It is to be hoped that no further loss will be sustained from this magnificent brass, but that the inhabitants of Elsing will be proud to retain in the best preservation the beautiful monument which adds so much to the interest of their parish church.

There is another large slab placed beneath the altar with a marginal inscription in early characters, and the indents of two shields in brass. There appears to have been originally



an incised figure on the stone, as traces of a lion or other animal are visible at the foot. The lower end of the slab, as well as the sinister side, are chamfered underneath, but there is no substructure in its present position. It would therefore appear to have been formerly on an altar-tomb, and to have stood against the south wall, possibly in some other church or in an earlier one on the same site. The upper end is much worn, and the letters are there entirely destroyed; the rest reads,—

..... E : BOVRLE : GIST : ICH : DE : KY : ALME : DEVS :
EYT : MERCI : ENTERRE : FVT : COM : FRERE : MENOVR : SEINT :
FRAVNCEY

The Friars Minors, Franciscan or Grey Friars, came into England in 1224. The date of the stone would therefore be between that time and 1340. Blomefield supposes it to be in memory of a rector who belonged to that order. Its length is 7 ft. 3 in.

The Register of the parish of Elsing, preserved in the church chest, contains a very long Latin memoir of the life of John Robinson, Rector from 1616 to 1667. It was examined by the Members on the occasion of their visit to the church, and a translation of it has kindly been placed at the disposal of the Society by the Rev. J. J. C. Valpy, the present Rector. Consisting chiefly of an eulogy on his character and habits, there is but little in it that has any relation to archæology, it is therefore not thought necessary to print it here in extenso. The entry in the Register which prefaces it is as follows :—

“Thus far wrot Master John Robinson, the late pious and laborious Rector of this Parish, who departed this life the $\frac{17}{18}$ of October, and was buried the twentieth of the same.

"Of whome somewhat is further declared in the following pages; partly that in Elsing there might remaine some memorial of him who had so much and longe endeavoured its good and happiness, and chiefly because it is to be hoped there will succeed him such as will no less disdaine to imitate that example he set them, than to enjoy those conveniences he so freely provided for them. If it seem strange that such a matter should be heere attempted, yet surely 'tis no way unbecomeing for that Booke to exhibit somewhat of his life, which registreth both his birth and death. But if any mislike thus much English before the coming Latine, or wonders why both appeare not in the same dresse, let it suffice y^e writer fancied some peculiar reason for this diversitie. Concerning whom let only thus much be knowne, that as he had the fairest opportunities to knowe, and greatest obligations to reverence him whose briefer character he hath heere drawne, so hath he done it with as much sinceritie as brevitie."

The Latin memoir which follows relates that Mr. John Robinson was born at Elsing, 8th January, 1592;—his mother was of the "noble and ancient house of the Langdons," and his godmother was "the most pious Lady Anne Browne." He was educated first under Mr. Smith, then Rector of Elsing, "a noted schoolmaster, formerly an Etonian," who was also his godfather; and afterwards at Monks Soham, Suffolk, under the same person. The "meanness and barbarity," however, of this "great Pædagogue," on his noticing the abilities and progress of his pupil, "condemned him for an entire year to the lowest labors of agriculture along with his hired servants," to the great displeasure of his noble godmother. In about his 17th year he was sent to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he continued five or six years, partly at the cost of Lady Anne Browne. Here he received "much kindness and encouragement, a thing not common, from Dr. Branthwaite, the then master." Leaving

the University he was appointed domestic chaplain to Thomas Browne, Esq., son of the Lady Anne, at Weasenham. In 1616 his patroness persuaded her husband, Sir Anthony Browne, who, "as a military man and a Roman Catholic, allowed many things, especially of that kind, to be done by his most prudent wife," to present him to the Rectory of Elsing. About seven years afterwards he married Miss Sarah Sayer, "who came of a most honourable family of that name at Pulham Mary in this county." The rectory-house being "very ruinous and falling to pieces hour by hour, in the place, therefore, of this vast and disorderly and heavy mass of building, our Priest (born for his country) at his own expense built that neat, convenient, and compact house which is now called the Rectory; together with the barn and other necessary adjacent outhouses." A high eulogy is paid to his learning, and piety, and eloquence: "for twenty years past he put to paper nothing of what he was going to say;" he disliked controversy, though he successfully refuted both Romanists and schismatics, "always walking in the ancient road, the beaten path, and that way which Antiquity and the Church have marked out in every age," and zealously fulfilling every duty to his flock and parish. "Good God, with what anxiety and care he was oppressed when, in 1663, the roof of Elsing church, by the decay and fall of the western part of it, received a dreadful fracture. For though all round about despaired of its being re-built, considering the poverty of the place; yet by this man's labour and advice, and exhortation, all were so animated, that in a very short time the sacred fabric recovered its original beauty and strength." Such was his good management of his affairs, that though the value of his living was only £80, and he was without private means, and yet always "hospitable, liberal, and refined;" and had laid out £1200 in building, and in educating and endowing children; he had nevertheless acquired "an income not less

than the rectory itself." He had three sons and six daughters, two of whom died young; two of his daughters were happily married, two others died before him. "One of his sons, the youngest, he made a clothier. The eldest he dedicated to the muses: and he still lives a practitioner of medicine, and fellow of Caius College." The misfortunes of his life were the unhappy marriage of his eldest daughter, and the death of his wife, which somewhat accelerated his old age. His last days were harassed with disease, but his death-bed is described as full of peace and resignation: his consolation to his sorrowing friends was,—“I have not so lived that I am afraid to die.” The memoir concludes,—“In short, after our excellent pastor had softly cherished, wisely led, wholesomely fed, and industriously taught, his flock for half a century and more; when he had faithfully served his country and his church alike, at length grown old, and failing rather in body than in mind, on the 17th of October, in the year of grace 1667, with great tranquillity, and with a bright example to posterity, at the command of his Heavenly Father he departed to his home.”

By the kindness of Mr. J. L'Estrange I am enabled to add some names of Rectors of Elsing omitted in Blomefield's History. They are taken from the Institution Books of the Diocese.

Lib. vii. *fo.* 5.—1407, 12 March. Robert Syred, presented by Sir Thomas de Morley, Knt., patron for this turn.

Lib. viii. *fo.* 23.—1416, 20 August. John Rydowt de Groundesburgh, on the death of Robert Syred, by Anne, Lady de Morley.

- Lib. xi. fo. 35.*—1455, 12 August. John Sampson, on the resignation of Syr John Rydeowt, by John Wyndham, Esq., and Margery his wife, “dñe de Hastynges.”
- Lib. xi. fo. 154.*—1466, 31 March. Laurence Blythe, on the death of John Sampson, by John Hastyngg, Esq.
- Lib. xii. fo. 2.*—1473, 6 Nov. Thomas Palmer, on the death of Laurence Blythe, by John Hastyngs, Esq.
- Lib. xii. fo. 182.* 1494, 20 January. John Bakster, on the death of Thomas Palmer, by Sir John Hastyngs, Knt.
- Lib. xv. fo. 19.*—1512, 5 February. James de Bossewell, chaplain, by lapse.
- Lib. xvi. fo. 60.*—1521, 24 April. Roger Caldicot, on the resignation of James Boswell, chaplain; by Dame Anne Knyvett, patron for this turn.
- Lib. xviii. fo. 26.*—1551, 17 March. Philip Adampson, by Catharine Hastings, widow of Sir Hugh Hastings, Knt.
- Lib. xviii. fo. 36.*—1553, 26 April. John Gybson, on the resignation of Philip Adamson, by the same.
- Lib. xviii. fo. 93.*—1554, 9 November. Thomas Whittbye, by Thomas Gawdye, Esq., serjeant-at-law, and Dame Katharine Hastings, his wife.
- Lib. xx. fo. 104.*—1584, 31 March. Bartholomew Raven, on the death of John Whitbye, by Thomas Raven and Thomas Skippon, for Anthony Browne, Esq.
- Lib. xx. fo. 188.*—1590, 21 July. William Smyth, on the death of Bartholomew Raven, by Anthony Browne, Esq.
- Lib. xxi. fo. 16.*—1604, 17 December. Thomas Buxton, on cession of last incumbent, by Thomas Playtyrs, Esq., for Sir Anthony Browne, Knt.
- Lib. xxii. fo. 56.*—1616, 27 April. John Robinson, A.B., on death of last incumbent, by Sir Anthony Browne, Knt.

Lib. xxv. fo. 4.—1667, 28 February. John Harris, A.M., on death of John Robinson, by Thomas Browne.

Lib. xxvi. fo. 87.—1682, 24 March. Henry Gooch, on the death of John Harris, by Thomas Browne.

The following extracts from Wills relating to Elsing are also furnished by Mr. L'Estrange, in addition to those already given by Mr. Harrod in our Proceedings.* They are from the Registry of the Archdeaconry of Norfolk.

1480. William Ball, of Elsing, bequeaths his body to be buried in the churchyard of our lady, St. Mary, of Elsing; mentions guilds of St. John Baptist, St. Margaret, Blessed Virgin Mary.

William Fox, of Elsing, leaves to our lady's light 4^d.

1504. Cecily Hawn, of Elsyng, leaves to the reparation of torches in Elsyng, 6^d.—lights of our lady; St. Nicholas.

Reg. Fuller, 1469, 1503, fo. 71 (Latin). Alice Reyner, of Elsing, relict of John Reyner, bequeaths her body to be buried in the churchyard of B. Mary of Elsyng, to the high altar 8^d. to gild of St. Margaret 6^d. gild of St. Thomas 6^d. to bylhaw church 4 bushels of wheat, to Elsing 4 bushels of malt.

Reg. Gloys, fo. 316. W^m. Chekett, of Elsing, 26 March, 1518. "My body to be buried in the chirche yerd of our lady in Elsyng; to the high altar 2^s."

"Item, I bequeath to the Chirche of Elsyng a peyer of Chales w^t a patent and iiij Rochetts for the clerkes in y^e qwer."

"Itm. I bequeth to the seid chirche of Elsing ij milche nete to be laten for iijs. iiij^d. by yer for evmore in this man^e ffollowynge, that is to sey ij^s. of the iijs. iiij^d. to y^e repacon

* Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society's Papers, vol. i., pp. 118, 122.

of the seid chirche of Elsynge. And to the pson ther and to his clerkes to syng dirige and masse of Requiem viij^d. And to Ryngers and lights abought the hers oder viij^d. And if the wardens of the chirche of Elsynge make defawte herof, that than it shall be leful to myn execut's to take the seid nete and to sell and dyspose them after ther discrecion."

Witnesses, Sir James Bosewell, clerk, &c. Proved at Bawdeswell, 19th September, 1519.