

## Cranwich Church Tower.

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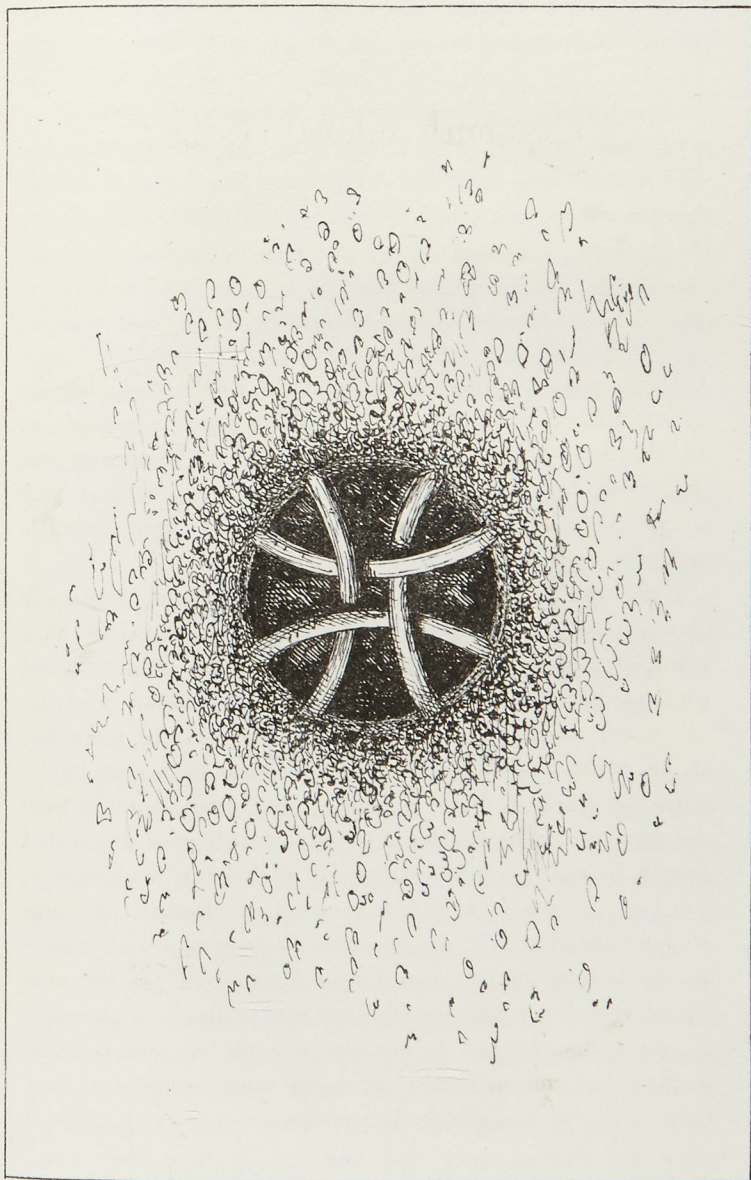
THE REV. A. SUTTON, M.A.

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HAVING been requested to say a few words on the curious and ancient tower of this church,<sup>1</sup> I do so with a feeling that I am quite unfit to address so learned an assembly, and may trust to your kind consideration in anything I may advance as regards my opinion of its great and venerable antiquity.

I am well aware there are many archæologists who smile at the notion of any existing churches, or portions of them, being of a period much before the Norman Conquest, and consequently would regard Blomefield as mistaken in giving this tower a date so far back as Harold, from the mere fact of his being possessed of property in the parish, and consequently likely to build a church; but when, arguing from the same premises, I attribute it to a much earlier period, I fear their smile would be converted into downright laughter; but for my own part, as we have several Roman buildings still in existence in England, some in a very perfect state—as the Roman gate at Lincoln,—coupled with the fact that Christianity was introduced into East Anglia long before Harold's time, viz., in the early part of the seventh century, as Bede informs us, when churches must necessarily have been built for the celebration of divine service, I think it

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Excursion Meeting of July, 1868.



WINDOW,  
ROUND TOWER, CRANWICH, NORFOLK.



therefore unreasonable to argue that no parts of them can be existing at present, when we consider the solidity of such towers as this, and the imperishable materials of which it is formed.

Round towers appear to have been built at all periods of architecture, but generally are of an early character, and no doubt their origin arose from the ease with which they could be constructed without the expense of freestone for angles; and under the impression that the tower of this church is among the earliest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture we have existing in England, I will draw your attention to a few points connected with it in succession, and, with a view of making them plainer, will place before you a rough diagram of the building.

The main features to be observed are—

1st.—The rudeness of construction, and gradual tapering of the walls to the top, without any indication of stages.

2nd.—The almost total absence of freestone throughout its construction.

3rd.—Its completeness as an original building of very remote date, the only addition to it being that of the battlement, which is probably of the Perpendicular period of Gothic architecture.

As regards the rudeness of its construction, it is impossible for any one, in a casual manner, to look at it externally without seeing that the skilled workman of the early *Norman* period had no hand in it, and by close inspection I think there is evidence to show that it was raised in courses of about eighteen inches in thickness, not by hand, but by pouring rubble material into a frame in a liquid state, and allowing it to stand till sufficiently consolidated before another layer was placed upon it; the arches being formed on rough centres of wood upon which the rubble was poured, which is evident from the impressions of the pieces of wood being most distinct at the present day, these centres not being

(as was the custom in the Norman period) of the same size as the opening, but about four inches larger, so as, when removed, to leave the arches set in on each side two inches from the jambs.

The tapering of the walls should also be noticed, two-thirds of which is external, the following being the thickness of the walls:—at the base 4 ft. 4 in., and at the top 2 ft. 4 in., giving a diminution of two feet in the whole height, which is 47 feet exclusive of the battlement, of this 1 foot 4 inches is external, and 8 inches internal. Thus the diameter at the base is 15 ft. 4 in., and at the top 12 ft. 8 in., the height being (a trifle under) three diameters of the base.

2nd.—The next point is the almost total absence of freestone; and this is very noticeable, even the jambs of the arches being constructed of flints and rubble, without any attempt at angles, the arches, as I observed, being formed of the same material, the only pieces of freestone being the small round window in the lower stage, and the three very remarkable ones in the form of a Runic cross in the middle stage, all of which are cut out of single flat stones, the walls being externally slightly splayed to form a kind of frame for them.

3rd.—As to its completeness as an original building, it is well worthy of observation. In a general way, we find the upper story of round towers of early date has been removed and an octangular top substituted at various periods of architecture,—some very elaborate and elegant, as that at the neighbouring church of Stanford; here, however, nothing has been done but to add a simple battlement, which is no doubt a great improvement to the general effect, though perhaps if it had terminated in a conical form like the Irish round towers, which it very much resembles in general outline, we should have a better idea of what the ancient landlords and builders considered perfection of a village church steeple.