

Notes on Starston Church,

AND

A MURAL PAINTING LATELY DISCOVERED THERE.

COMMUNICATED BY

R. MAKILWAINE PHIPSON, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

STARSTON is very pleasantly situated on the banks of a rivulet running into the Waveney. On the rising ground on the north side of the stream stands the church, which until this year consisted of a nave and chancel, south porch, and west tower.

Its erection, as in the case with most churches, is of various dates. The walls of the nave, from certain indications of deeply-splayed narrow window openings with semi-circular heads, now filled up, appear to be of late Norman work, and to have had Decorated windows afterwards inserted in them. The roof of this part, figured in Brandon's *Open Timber Roofs*, is of the Perpendicular style, and is a very good specimen of the period. It is of a plain arch-braced construction, without hammer or collar beams. Traces of white stars painted on a portion of it still remain.

The chancel and chancel arch are of Perpendicular work, the east window being of three lights. On the north wall is an elaborate monument in marble of various colours, to the memory of Bartholomew Cotton, who held the manor of Bressingham, and died in 1613. He is represented kneeling and in the costume of the period.

Mural Painting,
Starston Church,
Norfolk.



C.W. Winter del.
from the original

COWELL, LITHO. SPENGLER

The west tower and south porch are also of Perpendicular date. The roof of the latter springs from four stone corbels, on which are carved the emblems of the four Evangelists. The tower has five bells, and a fine and lofty arch opening into the nave.

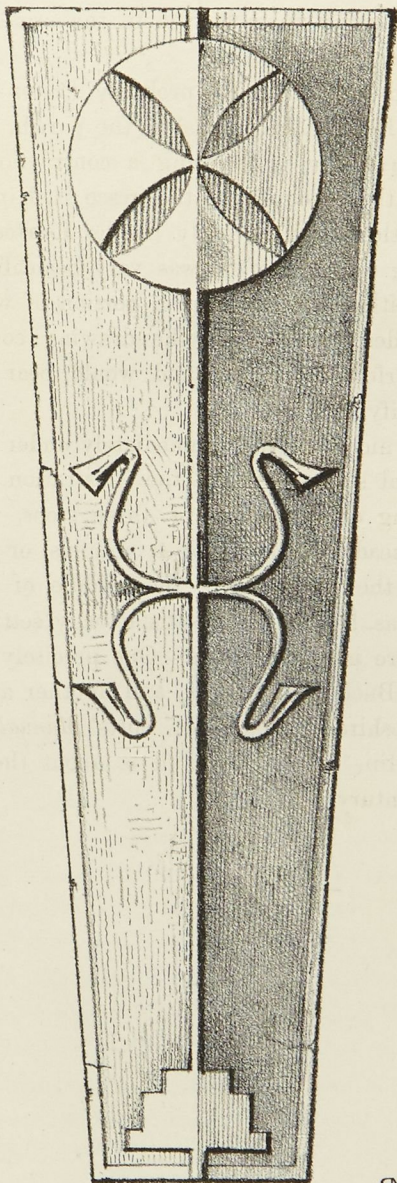
During the present year the church has been enlarged by the addition of a north aisle and organ chamber. In pulling down the north wall of the nave for this purpose, an arched recess was discovered about the middle of the wall and within two feet of the ground. It was about four feet wide and the same in height, measuring to the top of the arch, and had evidently been bricked up for some centuries, probably from the time of the Reformation. On the wall at the back of the niche, the depth of which was about a foot, was painted the subject figured in the accompanying illustration. When first opened the colours were exceedingly bright and perfect, but had become so pulverised by age that the slightest touch destroyed them, and I found it quite impossible to secure the smallest portion, as the removal of the plaster shook the colour off like dust. It was at first supposed to represent the death of some local celebrity, but I am inclined to believe with Dr. Husenbeth, to whom I have shewn the drawing, that it was never customary to represent on church walls any family subject, or anything unconnected with saints or sacred history. Dr. Husenbeth says it represents the death of the Blessed Virgin, and tells me he has an old wood-cut much in the same style.

In that case the figures at the head of the bed would be S. Peter wearing a cope, S. Paul holding a scroll, and S. John standing behind and represented as a younger man. An old legend mentions these three Apostles as present alone at first, while the other Apostles, who had all been summoned, stood without. The principal mourners are no doubt intended for holy women in attendance upon Mary, and the rest for various friends and acquaintances in Jerusalem.

The soul is carried up to heaven in the usual conventional winding sheet.

The legend on the scroll is probably *Precor Te Maria*, but Archdeacon Hopper, the rector of the parish, thinks it was *Pro Te Rnā Maria*, *Rnā* being a contraction of *Regina*. The date of the execution of the fresco is, I imagine, either late in the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century. The painting of parts of it was very beautiful—especially the shield with the crucifixion, a portion of which was unfortunately destroyed before the drawing could be taken. It was a perfect miniature, and would bear looking into with a magnifying glass.

Near this niche, but not immediately under it, was found the sepulchral slab shewn in the illustration. On it is a cross standing on a calvary of three steps, with a circle round the head, intended for a nimbus or glory. The meaning of the ornament in the middle of the cross, if meaning it has, has not been satisfactorily settled. Slabs of this design are not uncommon. One precisely similar is to be found at Buckenham Ferry, and another at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire, figured in Mr. Cutts' *Manual of Sepulchral Slabs*, plate liii. The date of it is about the end of the thirteenth century.



JMP. del.

SEPULCHRAL SLAB, STARSTON-CHURCH-NORFOLK-
SCALE ONE INCH TO THE FOOT.