

Blakeney Church.

COMMUNICATED BY

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THE very first thing which strikes a stranger, who visits Blakeney Church, is the fact that in addition to its having a fine tower at its west end, there is a much smaller one attached to the chancel. This peculiarity, which distinguishes it from all other Churches in the neighbourhood, arose without doubt from its position above Blakeney Harbour, which, in old days, was a much more important one than is now the case. The second tower was erected, first as a lighthouse, to guide ships into the harbour by night, and secondly, by marking out Blakeney Church from all others on the coast, to let sailors, coming from the North or elsewhere, know exactly where they were, thus forming an important sea mark, which I am told is still of much practical value.

The architectural history of the Church is very simple, for only two styles are represented; the beautiful groined chancel dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, and the very noble nave from the fifteenth. Why it became necessary to re-build the Early English nave only some 200 years after its erection, cannot now be determined, but it is most probable that it was burnt down, though of this there is no direct evidence. The

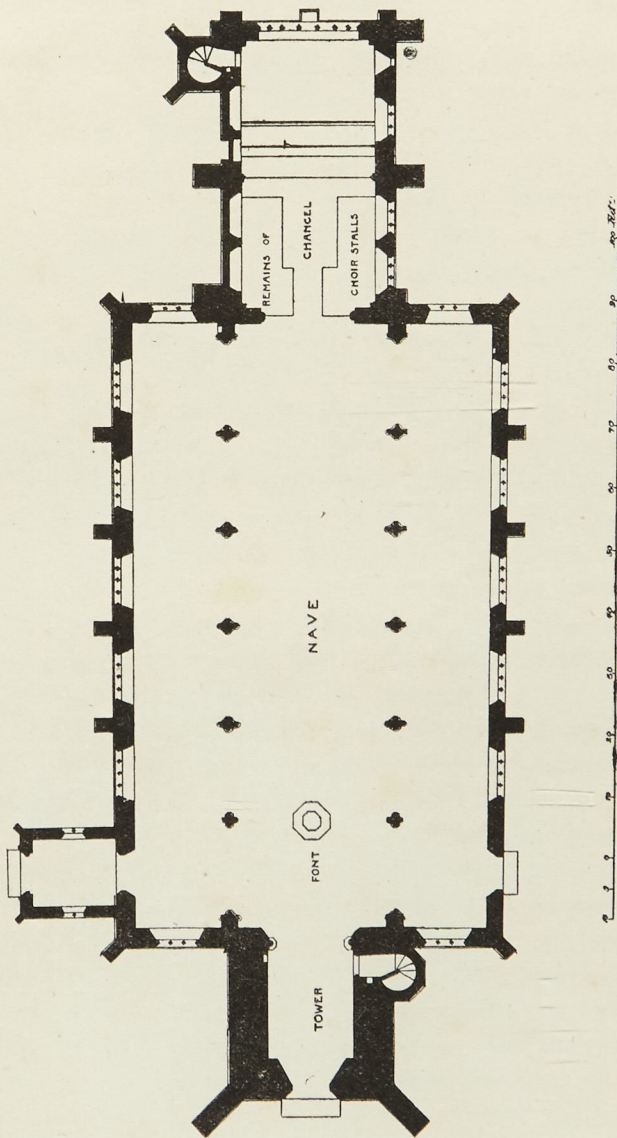
traces of the older nave are very slight. Two of the Early English columns were placed against the eastern jambs of the two eastern windows of the north aisle, no doubt to carry figures connected with chapels. There are the remains of an Early English corbel, inserted over the doorway which led to the rood-loft, and it seems to me very possible that the stones of the inner order of the beautiful nave arcade once formed a part of the corresponding early arcade. It will be observed that this inner order is formed of much smaller stones than the outer orders, and that the workmanship is somewhat different. A similar stone may be seen in the south wall of the chamber above the chancel, the walls of which were raised when the low pitch was given to its roof, and consist largely of early fragments.

Of the nave and tower little need be said. They are of most admirable design, while all the details are refined and appropriate to their several positions. The proportions of the interior are entirely satisfactory. The roofs, though not so rich as many in the Eastern Counties, are very pleasing, and one is glad to see how carefully they have been restored. The only old benches are the very simple ones in the south aisle. The font deserves especial attention, it is well carved, with representations of the Evangelists and their symbols, and the lower part is adorned with shields bearing emblems of the Passion.¹ One of these was a puzzle to me for some time, when I discovered it was the sword with which St. Peter cut off Malchus' ear. The ear is shown sticking to the blade.

There are two shields carved on the plinth of the tower buttresses, one of which bears the arms of the See of Norwich,—three mitres labelled, the lower

¹ A description of the various shields in this church will be found in Farrer's *Church Heraldry of Norfolk*, vol. ii., pp. 375-6-7.

ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH, BLAKENEY, NORFOLK.



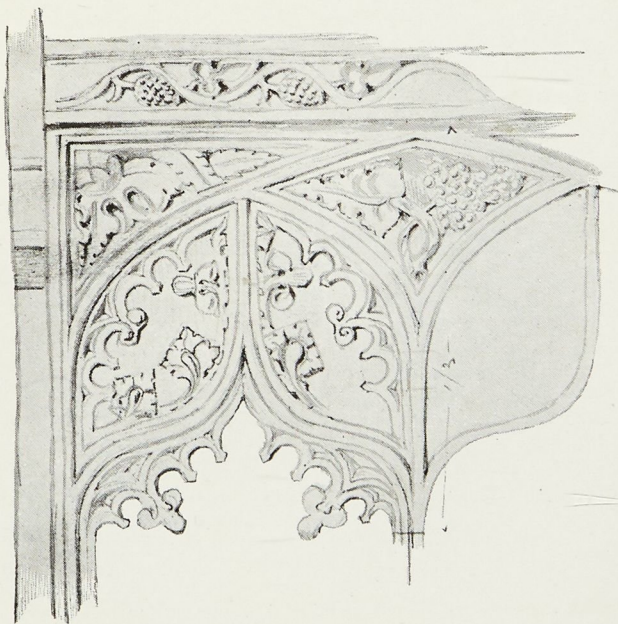
one transfixes with a crozier in pale. The other shield bears a dolphin embowed, with a cross above it, on an escutcheon, all within a bordure charged with escallops. This shield has probably to do with St. Nicholas, the patron of the church and of fishermen in general. Before leaving the nave, I have to draw attention to two slabs of Purbeck marble, which lie at the west end of the north aisle. They are of early English date, and apparently formed the abacus of a group of circular shafts. I have tried in vain to discover their origin. There is a small niche inside the tower on the north side; six holes are cut in its floor, they were probably made to hold the candles of those attending funerals. The north porch is a somewhat later addition. The few remains of stained glass collected in one of the aisle windows are of the same date as the nave. There is one, however, forming part of a quatrefoil, which does not fit to any of the present tracery openings, and, from its colouring, has an earlier character.

The chancel requires careful examination: it is groined in two square bays, and its east window consists of seven graduated lancets of beautiful design. The western bay has two windows on each side: these have had later tracery inserted for some reason which is not apparent. The old windows consisted of three lancets each, as may be seen outside on the south side, where the original sills were left when the later windows were inserted. The three lancets correspond in width with the two outer ones in the seven-light east window. The eastern bay differs in its arrangement of the windows from the western, on the south side there is one window similar to the ones I have described, but east of this is a single lancet. This lancet lighted a narrow sacristy which ran across the chancel, and was formed by a low wall placed some 6 ft. from the east end. It

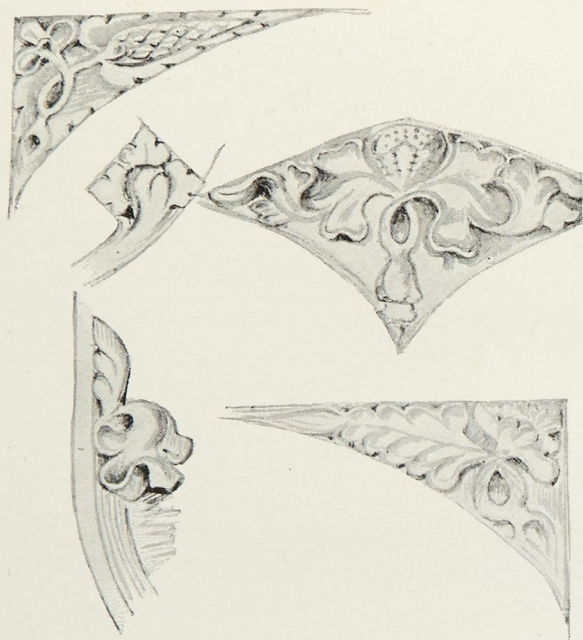
was against this wall that the high altar stood. The exact position of the wall is shown by gaps in the string-course to the north and south. No doubt there were small doors in the cross wall at each end of the altar, as in some other instances. The lower part of the east end is occupied by a wide recess in the centre, and by double aumbreys to the right and left. The large recess had shelves across it, as is shown by the grooves which remain, and was no doubt used for holding vestments, frontals, &c. The small doorway leading to the turret staircase, led out of this sacristy. The north side of the eastern bay of the chancel has one window of the same type as the others in the centre, with this turret doorway on one side, and a second, which must have been the priest's door, on the other side. Two iron staples on the north side mark the position of the Lenten Vail, while a small stone, inserted on the opposite side, shows where the other support formerly existed. The steps are ancient, but whether original or not I cannot say. A few old tiles remain.

Above the chancel groining there is a chamber approached by the turret, which is continued upwards, and forms the lighthouse tower. In the west wall of the chamber there is an Early English doorway, which must have opened into the church above the chancel arch. It may have been used for reading the Gospel from till the later rood-loft was erected. When this was done the door ceased to be of any further use, and it was blocked up by the rood, the beam for which still remains, and is now occupied by the rather handsome frames containing the commandments, &c.

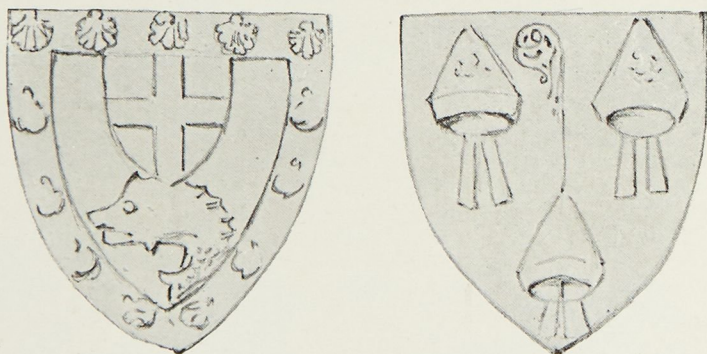
The turret as we now see it is all of the later date, but it is evident that there must have been one from the first giving access, through the chancel roof, to the doorway over the chancel arch, but there is nothing to



PART OF THE ROOD SCREEN.



CARVINGS IN THE STALLS.



SHIELDS IN THE TOWER PLINTH.

show whether it was also used as a lighthouse. The sedilia and Easter sepulchre or founder's tomb are somewhat later than the chancel. The fittings of the chancel are very interesting and of excellent design. The lower part of the rood screen is beautifully carved, but of its upper stage nothing remains beyond a few traces in the stonework of the chancel arch.

The stalls are of two designs, and some of them (four on the north side) stood, before the restoration of the church, in the nave, forming a part of what was known as the Priory pew. They are supposed to have been brought to the church from Blakeney Priory. There are some coats of arms cut in the misereres which might possibly throw light on this.

This completes all that need be said of the architecture of the church. It is one which no one who has had the good fortune to visit it will easily forget. Its noble western tower, and its unique lighthouse turret; its grand nave with a tower arch, hard to match in any other church; its lovely groined chancel, with the rare feature of an east window consisting of seven lancets, make up a whole which gives to Blakeney Church a distinction hardly to be met with anywhere else.