

## LIMPSFIELD CHURCH.

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THE Annual Excursion of this Society in 1865 included a visit to Limpsfield Church. It was found to be a building which had previously suffered so much that doubt was felt by the Committee as to the desirability of halting there; but it happened to fall in with the route which was fixed for other reasons, and an account of the church and its registers was subsequently published.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of the past year (1871) considerable works upon the building have been effected, and it has been, what in domestic phrase would be spoken of, as "turned inside out." The result has afforded some additional information respecting the structure which it may be well to place before the Society by way of a brief supplement to the account of the church already published; and it will not be without interest to note how far the account given proves to be correct when the building is seen stripped of the whole of the plaster with which the walls had been covered.

The chancel was certainly somewhat later than the tower, nave, and aisle, which present the appearance of dating from the latter end of the twelfth century, while the chancel is distinctly of the Early English style. The difference of date was very manifest upon an examination of the masonry of the north-east angle of the tower, which runs up independently, while the wall of the chancel is built up against, and not completely

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of this Society*, vol. iv. p. 238.

bonded into it. There is always very great difficulty in determining the age of a wall, in consequence of the fact that windows and doors and the ornamental work to which we are enabled to attach a date were often inserted in earlier walls; and sometimes, on the other hand, an early feature may be retained and rebuilt in a later wall, though this is very unusual in the case of anything but a Norman doorway, which seems to have been generally treated with exceptional favour. It is only when we see a bare wall which has been stripped of its plaster that we can, by an examination of the masonry, feel any absolute certainty of the comparative age of different parts of a building.

In the north wall of the tower was a plain flat soffited arch, built up at the time when visited by the Society, but now reopened to the chancel. The form of the arch, and the fact of its being cut straight through the wall, without even the edges chamfered, indicate a date of the earliest pointed architecture. In my previous account of the church there is mention of a doorway in the tower near the east end of the north wall, conjectured to have led, through the thickness of the wall, over the arch and to the Rood-loft. Its head is segmental-pointed, higher on one side than the other; a form not unlikely to occur in a staircase doorway in a confined situation, or else in a hagioscope. When denuded of plaster, this, which had previously been supposed to be a doorway, appeared from the masonry to have been merely a recess. That it was not the entrance to stairs leading up to the Rood-loft is further indicated by the fact that the stripped wall showed no sign of any upper outlet. The height of this recess from the ground and its small dimensions, as well as the nature of the walling which the passage (had there been one) must have traversed, were circumstances adverse to the original conjecture. The hypothesis that it was a hagioscope is also untenable; the appearance of the masonry, and the fact that in passing through the wall it would have cut through the chancel string-course—which, however, is uninjured—are together fatal.

But what it really was is by no means easy to con-  
jecture.

ture. It is improbable in the extreme that such a form of head would have been chosen for a niche, unless on account of some special circumstances, of which there is here no indication.

Within the walls of the tower were marks of a parclose or screen once crossing the western arch between the tower and aisle. The section of moulding, which by some oversight is labelled as being the section of cap of west respond, is the impost of this arch; it runs straight through the wall, although the arch is recessed and widely chamfered. The section of base is correctly described as that of the west respond.

The doorway in the east wall of the tower, which, I am informed, was cut about the year 1827 as an entrance to the vestry then built, is now plastered over, and the bench-table continued across it. I am also informed that the window previously in the east wall of the tower was removed and inserted in the vestry.

The piscina in the south wall of the tower is extremely rude; its head is an irregular flattened semi-ellipse; it is spoken of in my former notes as being very late. Some persons suppose it to be of the original work of the tower, but it is impossible to say with certainty.

In this side of the tower a window of two lights in the style of transition from Early English to Geometric has been substituted for the poor one with a brick mullion which had at some previous time been there inserted.

The vestry which adjoined the chancel and tower was of no particular interest, and has been removed.

In the south side of the chancel, the two lancets, placed (as will be seen on a reference to the anastatic sketch accompanying the original description of the church) at an unusually high level for a chancel of these dimensions, have been reopened. This became practicable in consequence of the removal of the vestry. The splay of their jambs was discovered to be painted, perhaps coevally. It is simply a division by red lines like stonework, and in the centre of each little compartment a dark green cinquefoil flower: it is well preserved.

A very remarkable little window has been discovered



east of the piscina. It measures only 1 ft. 10 in. high by barely 4 in. wide in the clear, splayed equally on either side to a total width of 2 ft. 7 in., and ending on the east side within 2 in. of the face of the east wall. Its lancet head is cut in a single stone. The cill slopes downwards moderately to within 18 in. of the present floor, which, judging by the sedilium, is about 10 in. lower than the original level. The window-cill must, therefore, have been only about 8 in. from the floor. On the other hand, it must be noted that the base of the north doorway would appear to indicate no alteration of level, but the date of the doorway cannot positively be fixed. Any person on the exterior of the church must kneel or stoop very low in order to look through the window, and would then command a view of the end of the altar. The window was glazed, and I could perceive no indication whatever of a shutter. From this it seems to me conclusively that it was not one of the class of windows termed lychnoscope.

Over the piscina, but not exactly over its head, is a rectangular recess  $15\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide  $\times$  12 high  $\times$  14 deep, but the back was probably filled in 4 in. with plaster. Its head is formed by the string-course.

It was thought that the doorway west of the sedilium (as shown in the sketch), was not originally a doorway, and it has been filled up.

A most remarkable similarity to this side of the chancel occurs at Stowe Bardolph, Norfolk. There is first (from the west) a doorway<sup>1</sup> much like that at Limpsfield, but the head segmental-pointed. Next are three graduated sedilia, and then a very wide piscina, with segmental-pointed head. In continuation of the range is a widely-splayed lancet, apparently almost as small as that at Limpsfield; it is however on a rather higher level, both at head and cill, than the piscina; it is not so close to the face of the east wall, from which there may be a space of about 18 inches to the splay of the window. Over the piscina and part of the highest sedilium, is a

<sup>1</sup> Engraved in *The Builder* for 15th Dec., 1849.

large, broad lancet window. The date of the Stowe Bardolph chancel is not much later than that at Limpsfield, and the general resemblance is striking: the level of the flooring has evidently been somewhat altered.

The window in the east end of the chancel, as will be seen on referring back to our view of the church, was of the latest Perpendicular date. Upon the removal of the plaster of that wall, features of considerable interest were discovered. Over the altar there had been a reredos, the precise design of which was not very clearly distinguishable; there remained a stone framing about 7-ft. wide by 3 ft. 5 in. high, roughly filled in with brickwork, and in the chamfer of each jamb was a trefoiled panel. On each side of the window beyond the splay, was a good-sized niche for a statue, below which, merely separated by a thin shelf of stone, it was carried down in the form of an aumbry. Below the level of the east window there are two recesses; the one in the centre of the east wall, behind the altar itself, is segmental-headed and wider than high, measuring 1 ft. 7 in. high by 2 ft. 1 in. wide, and 1 ft. 5 in. deep, and has a rabbet for a door: it was probably a reliquary, though reliquaries are extremely rare in English churches; but examples may be found, such as the remarkable instance at Sompting, Sussex. The other recess is situated close to the south end of the east wall; it is of the same form, 1 ft. 5 in. high by 1 ft. 11 in. wide, and 1 ft. 5 in. deep. It may possibly have served as a credence.

When the plaster was stripped off the east wall, it was found that there remained on the outside the cills of three lancet windows, the outer jambs of the side ones, and part of their heads; and on the inside, the inner jambs of the side ones.

It therefore appeared clearly that there had originally been a triplet of lancets, subsequently removed to give place to the window and reredos to which we have adverted: the latter have been removed and a triplet of lancets substituted. The inner jambs mentioned were found to have been painted at three successive dates: the original Early English, the same as that now pre-

served on south windows of chancel; over that a scroll painting about a century later; and over that again a painting of pomegranates of Perpendicular date. The painting was not in good preservation, and when exposed to the weather by the removal of the covering of the roof and upper part of the east wall, the attempt to preserve it proved fruitless.

Taken together, the whole east end formed, with the window, a reredos of very late Perpendicular date. Such examples in English parish churches are extremely uncommon; but a very fine one, also of Perpendicular date, though earlier, exists at Reigate, whereof such part of the tabernacle-work as projected had been cut away, the hollows filled up, and the whole covered with a level surface of plaster, perfectly concealing the work until nearly thirty years ago, when it was discovered and reopened, and the original stonework cleaned, so that it now presents an excellent and interesting feature in that fine church.

On the north side of the chancel it was discovered that what in the north chantry had the appearance of a blocked piscina, was a small doorway through the wall to the chancel very near the east end. The doorway in this very unusual position, is splayed outwards from the chancel, and the door itself was close to the chancel face of the wall, and it opened outwards towards the chapel.

Discoveries were also made in the chantry. In the east wall two jambs, similar to those found in the chancel, were discovered; in consequence of which the subsequent late window, seen in our view, has been superseded by a triplet corresponding with that now in the chancel; an unusual feature. Near the south end of the east wall is a rectangular aumbry with rabbet. Not far from the east end of the north wall, was discovered a doorway jamb. The two-light square-headed window near it, mentioned in our former notes, is early in the Perpendicular style. There was sufficient evidence to show that there had been originally three single lancets in the north wall. The buttress which was put to strengthen the wall blocked one, and the two-light window was



probably substituted for the other, to give more light. The doorway in the north wall was very likely blocked at the same date.

In the south aisle of the church, the discovery was made, beneath the two-light window, of a double lychnoscope, each wider than usual and nearly square; the hinges remained. The class of window called lychnoscope almost invariably occurs in the chancel, or else, less commonly, near the east end of an aisle; so that this is a very peculiar example.

On the north side of the chancel arch was discovered a doorway with a four-centred head, probably early Tudor work.

I am informed that when the north aisle was built (in 1852) steps were found in the thickness of the wall, which then formed the west wall of the chantry, but I am unable to ascertain anything further respecting them. As a conjecture I should suggest that the staircase leading up to the Rood-loft may have run up here, in which case, the upper Rood doorway (on the south) may have been intended merely as a means of access, by way of the loft, to the upper part of the tower. There was no upper doorway on the north perceptible, but this part of the building seems to have had alterations made in it, as appears by the Perpendicular doorway north of the chancel arch.

The facts thus ascertained, in consequence of the works of "restoration" effected in the past year, confirm what was previously stated respecting the earlier history of the building. The present nave, south aisle and tower at its end, are the oldest parts, being of the date of transition from the round-arched to the pointed style; the chancel and north chantry were Early English. An early Perpendicular window was inserted in the north wall of the chantry, and in the chancel the reredos and east window inserted at a later date. In 1852 the north arcade and aisle were built, the old chancel arch replaced by that which now exists; and when visited by the Society, the church generally had a modernized appearance.

The gallery, which we mentioned as stretching across the west end of the nave and north aisle and spoiling the effect of the large window, has now happily been removed. The font is moved to the north side of the west pillar, on the south side of the nave.

The facts mentioned as having been ascertained by an examination of the masonry were noted in the autumn of 1871. They are not all now observable in consequence of the interior walls having been re-plastered.

Beneath the flooring in the chancel there was discovered a censer, which I have not been fortunate enough to see, but I am informed that it is of bronze, and dates from the twelfth century. It is, however, at present in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London, who intend to publish an engraving of it in their "Proceedings."

The timber roofs have all been brought to light during the restoration. The nave roof is a fine example of the cradle-form. The triplet in the chantry is filled with glass by Clayton and Bell: open seats of oak have been substituted for the former high pews, and the floor has been laid with ornamental tiles. The works had been carried out with much care under the direction of Mr. J. L. Pearson, the architect.

The upper windows in the tower have been restored with stone and lengthened to their original proportions, which had brick jambs.