

MR. JOHN HUNT, of Thurnby, having exhibited a tray full of relics of various periods from the Roman to the present, found beneath the level of Thurnby Church, in the foundations, and about the fabric, read a Paper upon the subject, as follows :

THE ANCIENT CHURCH OF THURNBY, LEICESTERSHIRE.

WITHOUT attempting to trace back the history of Thurnby to a remote antiquity, or to place upon paper various surmises as to its origin, I may allow it to speak for itself, by giving its name :— It is one of the many villages in Leicestershire ending in “*by*,” which termination is allowed by all antiquaries to be a certain proof that the name at least was given by Danish or Norse settlers, at a time when the Northmen overran this country, and established themselves on its pasture lands. The word “*by*” in the old Norse language signified, originally, a single farm ; afterwards, the idea conveyed was expanded to signify a collection of houses, or a village or town. To this word was frequently prefixed some local peculiarity, and so the name of very many of our villages originated. Thus, Thurnby was Thornby, or the village of Thorns ; Bushby (close by), the village of Bushes ; Brooksby, the village by the brook, and so on. Such being the case, we may claim for Thurnby an existence at the time when the Danes mustered and spread in Leicestershire. There is some evidence to show that the Romans left their mark in the village ; we will let that pass now. As my object to-day is to place before you a few notes upon the ancient Church of Thurnby, lately taken down to be replaced by a new structure, I may here remind you that Christianity is known to have existed in this county in early Saxon times. Indeed, Leicester was a city with its Bishop, in the seventh century, and the chief relics preserved of the ancient Church of Thurnby are certain incised stones (which will be more particularized presently), which go to prove that at that early period, or shortly afterwards, there was a church existing in that village. The ancient church of Thurnby was dedicated to S. Luke. Burton (who published his *Description of Leicestershire* in 1622) describes the church, as his custom was, with a list of the arms depicted therein, which then were eleven in number. The church appears to have fallen so much into decay in the eighteenth century, that the inhabitants, in order to avoid the expense incumbent upon them in providing for its repair, actually pulled down the chancel, under a faculty obtained in 1779, and the south aisle was used ever afterwards (until the later entire demolition of the church) as a substitute for it. Indeed, at that time, Thurnby seems to have been in a depressed condition. Throsby tells us that, not only was the church in a wretched state, and thoroughly unfit for its use as a place set apart for the service of the Almighty, but ruined cottages

were scattered about the place, and the principal house noticed by him was kept by a professional gentleman of Leicester, for insane people. Throsby said all this was to him "wonderful, and it must be so to every one who examines the registers" (that is, to see the many respectable and old families connected with the place), and views its situation, which (as we all know) is extremely beautiful and picturesque. It is well known that since Throsby's time, not only has the house for insane people happily been appropriated to other purposes, but Thurnby has been behind no village in the material prosperity of its inhabitants, and in the neatness and good order of their dwellings. Unhappily, however, when a church is allowed to become in such an almost hopeless state of decay, neglect, and all but ruin, as had overtaken the unfortunate fabric at Thurnby, men are apt to dread the commencement of the good work of restoring the House of God, and to hope that as it has lasted, and to some extent answered its purpose, in their fathers' time, so, at least, it will last their time; and the work is delayed for the next generation. So Thurnby Church had become so dilapidated that it was pronounced past repair, and the only mode of meeting the difficulty was to take down the old fabric and rebuild a new church upon the old foundation, preserving as much as possible of the ancient material and the principal features, and inserting them in the new structure. Harry Leycester Powys-Keck, Esq., the Lord of the Manor, with praiseworthy liberality, undertook the entire cost. The old building was taken down last year, and the new church is being roofed in, and will soon be ready for use. Having said thus much by way of introduction to my notes, I now proceed to lay them before you.

THURNBY CHURCH, dedicated to S. Luke, consisted of a nave, a large south aisle, and a small low north aisle, each separated from the nave by three lofty arches, over each of which was a clerestory window. The tower was at the east end of the nave, and contained four bells. The ancient chancel was taken down (as before stated) in 1779. The work of demolition was commenced by first taking down the pinnacles and parapet of the tower, below which was a moulded cornice, with figure heads and four gargoyles; the roof of the tower being of lead, some of which was very thick. The four windows of the upper stage of the tower, which served as a bell-chamber, were of the Decorated Style, in tolerable preservation, and the head of each was cut out of one solid stone. This upper stage of the tower was found to be partly built of the stone of an old spire; for on taking it down the foreman discovered the ancient stone to be cut through and reused as ashlar. Upon placing some of these stones together, he succeeded in making seven feet of the spire perfect, and upon calculation from the quantity found it was presumed there was sufficient to build a spire 40 or 50 feet high. The stone was Weldon rag. Four springers for four squinches for

the bottom of the spire were discovered; the other four were no doubt destroyed by inserting the beams of the floor of the upper stage of the tower when the spire was taken down and the tower raised. On the upper part of this stage (which was supposed to be the top of the original tower, and composed of Attleborough stone) were found the apex of a pinnacle, six carved stone heads, two crockets, small caps and bases, portions of stone broken up and used as ashlar, various pieces of tracery to windows, stone with zig-zag pattern, portion of old springer to gable end, two or three gargoyles, and other fragments. In this stage there were three Gothic windows blocked up; on the west face was a door leading on to the nave roof, which, from its peculiar character, is thought to have been the door by which access was gained from the top of the belfry staircase, through the lower portion of the spire, on to the parapeted roof of the tower, and removed from that position and placed in its present one when the spire was taken down. The tower was carried internally by four arches resting upon four massive Norman pillars, the circumference of each of which was fifteen feet three inches; height, nine feet six inches from floor to abacus of caps. The N.E. and S.E. columns were cracked and much decayed, which was probably caused by the removal of the north transept and chancel, the church having been originally cruciform, as was shown by the remaining water-tables or drips on the outside of the tower, marking the high-pitched roof which formerly existed. On the east end of the tower remained a portion of the chancel wall, forming a buttress to support the tower, with part of a small lancet window blocked up. The opposite buttress was not a portion of chancel wall. At the east end of the south aisle (used as a chancel) were discovered under the plaster, two sedilia, and a piscina (quadrilateral), and in the east wall, on each side of the altar, an aumbry; the one on the north side fourteen inches higher from the ground than the other, and smaller. The lintel of this small one was found to be a portion of an ancient incised stone described hereafter. Under the east window of this aisle was found a recess three feet six inches from the floor, eight feet long by three feet eight inches high, decorated with a margin of scroll-work in black and red, containing four lines in Old English characters, coloured. This was probably the position of the altar-piece or "table" in mediæval times. The respond of arcade at the west end of the north aisle had a cap, ornamented with a nail-head moulding. The pillars of the arcade were octagonal, with caps and bases all varying in mouldings. On the under side of the chancel arch was found some scroll-work in red; also some lettering (undecipherable) upon the face of the wall, over the tower arch, looking west. The interior of the belfry wall was covered in part with the ringers' figures (changes), both in red and black, of two periods. On the west front of the north-west column, carrying the tower, was found some writing in Old English, and under the

cap a semicircular pattern in primrose colour. The roof of the nave was of recent date. Portions of wood, of beautifully moulded oak, used in supporting the roof of the south aisle, are traditionally said to have formed part of one of the roofs of Leicester Abbey.

It need scarcely be remarked that in taking down an ancient church like that of Thurnby, many curious relics, of almost every century of mediæval times, were brought to light. What, however, I wish specially to draw your attention to, and which, indeed, originated these notes, was the discovery (as already hinted) of several singularly-incised stones, which, from their peculiarity, at once demanded attention. The first of these stones (*See Illustrations, No. I.*), when found, was forming what we may call the lintel of the aumbry, or locker, at the east end of the south aisle; the others were found built in the south-west pillar—which was fifteen feet three inches in circumference, and nine feet six inches from floor to abacus of cap. (*See Illustrations.*) These stones I exhibited in the temporary museum formed by the Royal Archæological Institute in Leicester, during the Congress of that learned body in this town, in the autumn of 1869, and they were then subjected to much examination and criticism by several eminent archæologists. The general, if not the unanimous opinion, then given, referred these very curious stones to the Saxon period. From their shape and other peculiarities, they were supposed to be headstones of graves. I exhibit correct drawings of them. It will be seen they are incised on both sides, in what may be termed geometrical lines, without any attempt at lettering, and apparently without any tinge of symbolism; excepting that the cross in various forms is traceable in nearly every case. There appears a certain amount of design in the arrangement of the lines; indeed, in what may be called the reverse of No. 1, the pattern may not unfairly be described as consisting of eight double cross crosslets radiating from a common centre. The great rarity of stones of this description renders an attempt even at explanation difficult, and a guess at their true origin uncertain. It is, however, fortunate for our present object, that others of a somewhat similar character have been exhumed in Yorkshire. The little Church of Adel, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, is described as being almost, if not altogether, a pure Norman church of the middle of the twelfth century. The stones there found were discovered in the foundation or groundwork of the church, and so pointing to an earlier origin than the building. It is, however, difficult to assign a date to the Adel stones, of which I exhibit drawings,* inasmuch as the parish produces British remains, pit dwellings, a monolith, a Roman intrenchment; and there is an entire absence of any decided type—Roman, Anglo-Saxon, or

* See *Archæological Journal* for 1870, for engravings of these stones. Drawings of them may also be seen in our own Associated Societies' Volume for 1868, pp. 204 and 207.

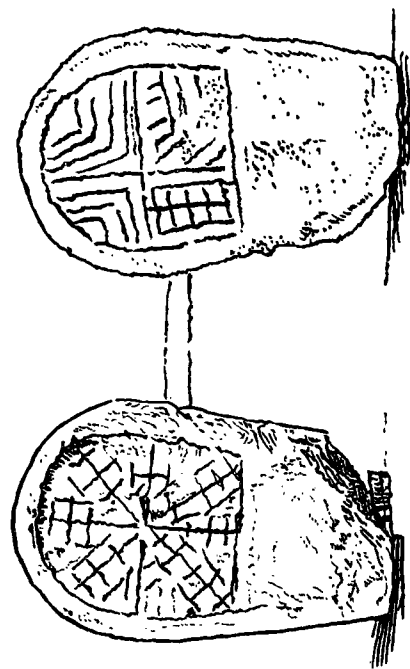


Fig. 1...2ft. 1ft. 3in.

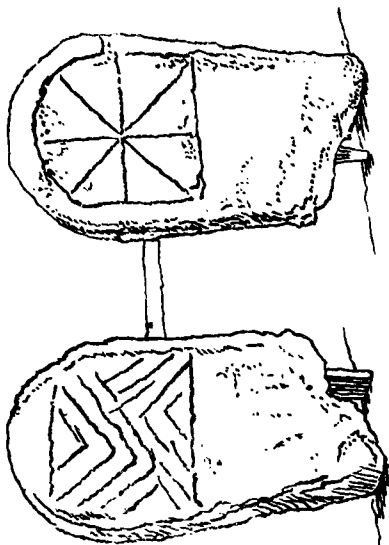


Fig. 2...2ft. 1ft. 1 1/2 in.

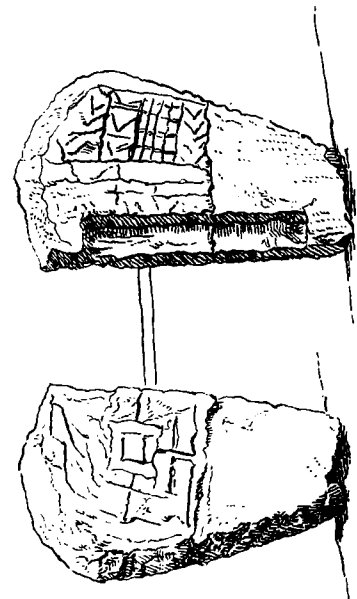


Fig. 3...2ft. 1ft.

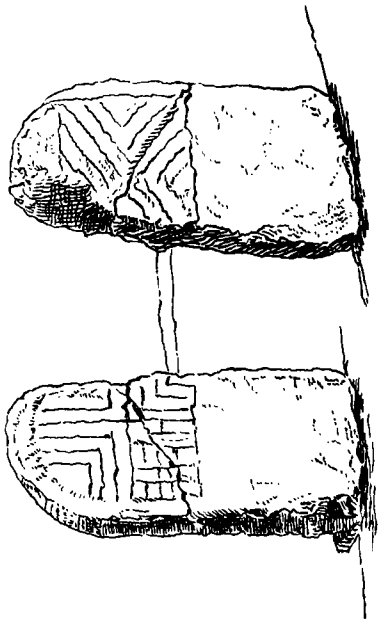


Fig. 4...2ft. 1 1/2 in.

Norman—in their design. I would refer you to the remarks of the Rev. H. T. Simpson, and others, as given in the *Archæological Journal* for 1870, page 77. It appears from these remarks, and from a correspondence which has taken place between the Vicar of Thurnby and the Rev. T. H. Simpson, the Rector of Adel, that several eminent archæologists have been consulted respecting the Adel stones. A few of these opinions I give as bearing upon our present enquiry. Professor Westwood (who has paid special attention to these early relics) assigns them to some time ranging from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, and says they are undoubted headstones. The late Sir James Simpson thought them tombstones of about the ninth century. Canon Greenwell considers them very early Norman. It will thus be seen that the learned men whose opinions I have quoted upon the Adel stones, do not agree as to their date. Mr. Simpson, himself remarks, with some force, that it seems difficult to suppose they are early Norman, when they were broken up as rubbish for the foundation of the Norman Church of Adel in about the year 1135; and he further remarks, “I think they bear notable marks of Pagan origin.” I may here remark that whilst remembering that, so far as I know, it has yet to be proved that headstones for graves were used at all in Saxon times, these stones, being incised on both sides of the upper part, were evidently intended to stand detached. However this may be with regard to the Adel stones, the origin and date of which I am inclined to think has yet to be determined, we shall do well to compare the two sets together—the Yorkshire find and the Leicestershire one. The result of that comparison will, I think, be, that while both sets were made for a common purpose, the Adel stones are the more ancient of the two. The designs incised upon the Leicestershire stones are, I think, better defined and more regular in arrangement than those upon the Adel stones; and while I am compelled to agree with the Vicar of that place that the Adel stones have strong pagan marks in their lineaments, our Leicestershire stones have, I think, at any rate, a faint outline of Christianity on their surface; but whether Saxon or Norman, I cannot say. I hope the questions raised by these discoveries may induce others more competent than myself to follow up the inquiry. To return to the church itself, it was originally a Norman structure, as proved by the four circular massive pillars supporting the tower, the dripstones on the same, and its cruciform arrangement. The Anglo-Norman conventional churches were mostly cruciform in plan, with a low tower rising at the intersection of the choir and nave with the transepts. Yet, I should imagine, from the incised stones, about which I have just been speaking, and the quantity of burnt stones found built up in the walls, that a church anterior to the Norman period existed; and it is well known that during the ninth and tenth centuries the Northmen or Danes were continually plundering and

burning our sacred edifices. That the church was taken down and rebuilt some time towards the latter end of the twelfth, or early in the beginning of the thirteenth century, is almost incontestibly proved by the pointed arches of the tower (having as a base the pillars), which were first introduced about this period. The church was pulled down a second time, and rebuilt about the middle or latter end of the thirteenth century, as shown by the Early English fragments of windows, caps, and arch-stone; also an apex found in the course of pulling down lately. The mural paintings found on these various fragments point unquestionably to the Early English date; these fragments being refaced, reworked, and reused in the structure. A third time the church has been pulled down, as indicated by the bases of the nave arcade columns; these being of the Early Perpendicular period, sometime in the fifteenth century. In conclusion I may say, that although the registers belonging to Thurnby Church do not possess any special interest, being almost devoid of those curious notes upon local and national events so often found recorded in similar documents, still it should be noted that the parish was not slow in obeying the injunctions of Henry VIII., issued in 1538, which enjoined that such records of baptisms, marriages and burials should be kept in every parish. The most ancient book belonging to Thurnby Church, which I have seen—and which down to about the year 1603 is apparently a transcript of earlier books—is headed “Thurnbie. A Register booke made by the commdment of Kinge Henrie the eight in the xxix. yeare of his Raigne the xxx. daye of Noveember Ao 1538.” This book contains entries of baptisms and burials only, until 13th August, 1564, when we find “Ao 1564 Willm Jaram and Barbara Burrett were joynd together in matrimonie the xiii. daye of August.” From the commencement of the book to the year 1624 each paper is signed “By me Roger Crosley.” The first marriage by licence appears under this date, “1628 Thomas Broughton and Agnes Pennie—were married wth a licence—Aug. 16—Malachia Crosley—Curat. Ibid.” During the latter years of the Commonwealth, and occasionally afterwards, the date of birth and not of baptism is given: indeed, so late as 17th August, 1702, I find the following curious entry:—“Joseph Veasy of Bushby (a ffanaticke dissenter) did then inform me y^t his child which *he calls* Elizabeth was born y^e first day of June last.” Joseph Veasey had other children of whose birth he informed the Vicar, but he does not appear to have brought them to the font for holy baptism.

MR. VINCENT WING of Melton Mowbray contributed the following Paper on

GRIMSTON CHURCH, LEICESTERSHIRE.

GRIMSTON Church, which is named St. John's, is in the soke, or jurisdiction peculiar, of Rothley. The Knights Templars, from