

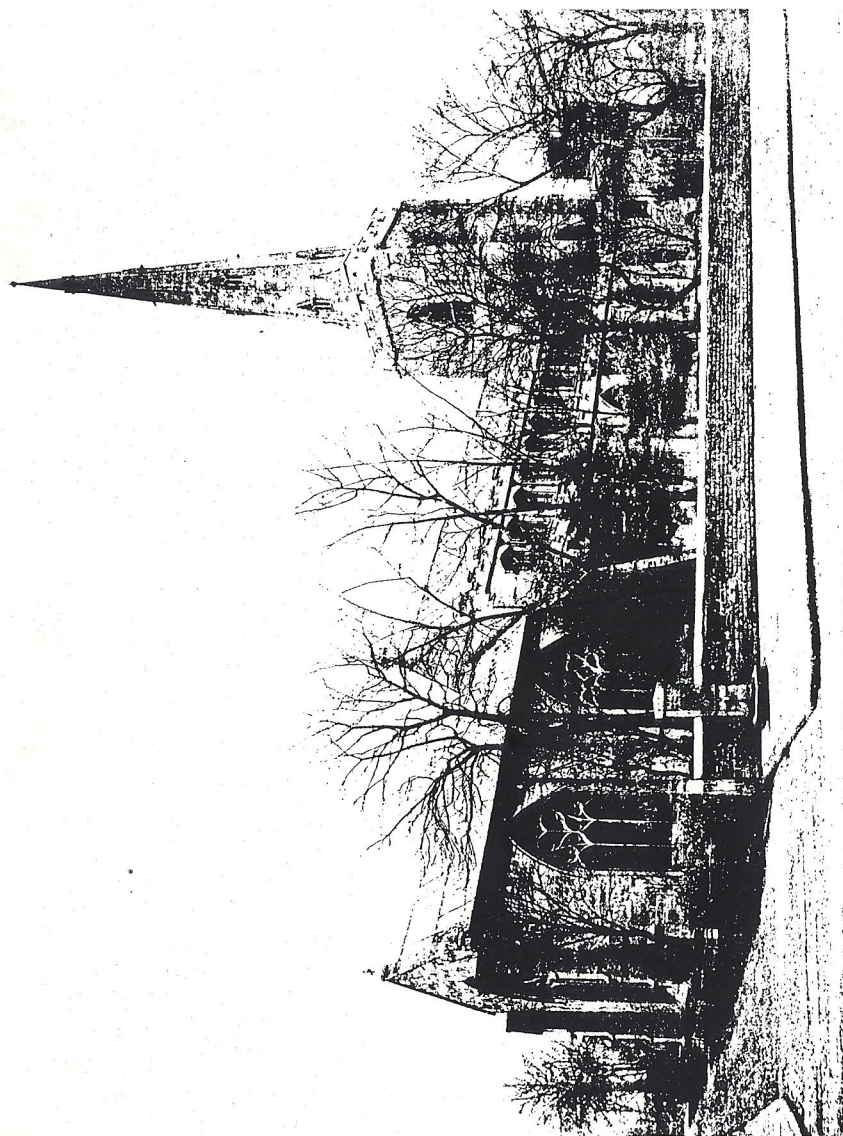
NOTES ON

HOLBEACH CHURCH

HENRY PEET

HOLBEACH 1890





*Architectural and Ecclesiological*

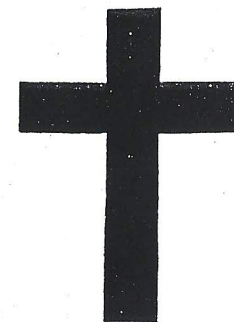
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**HOLBEACH CHURCH.**

BY

Henry Peet

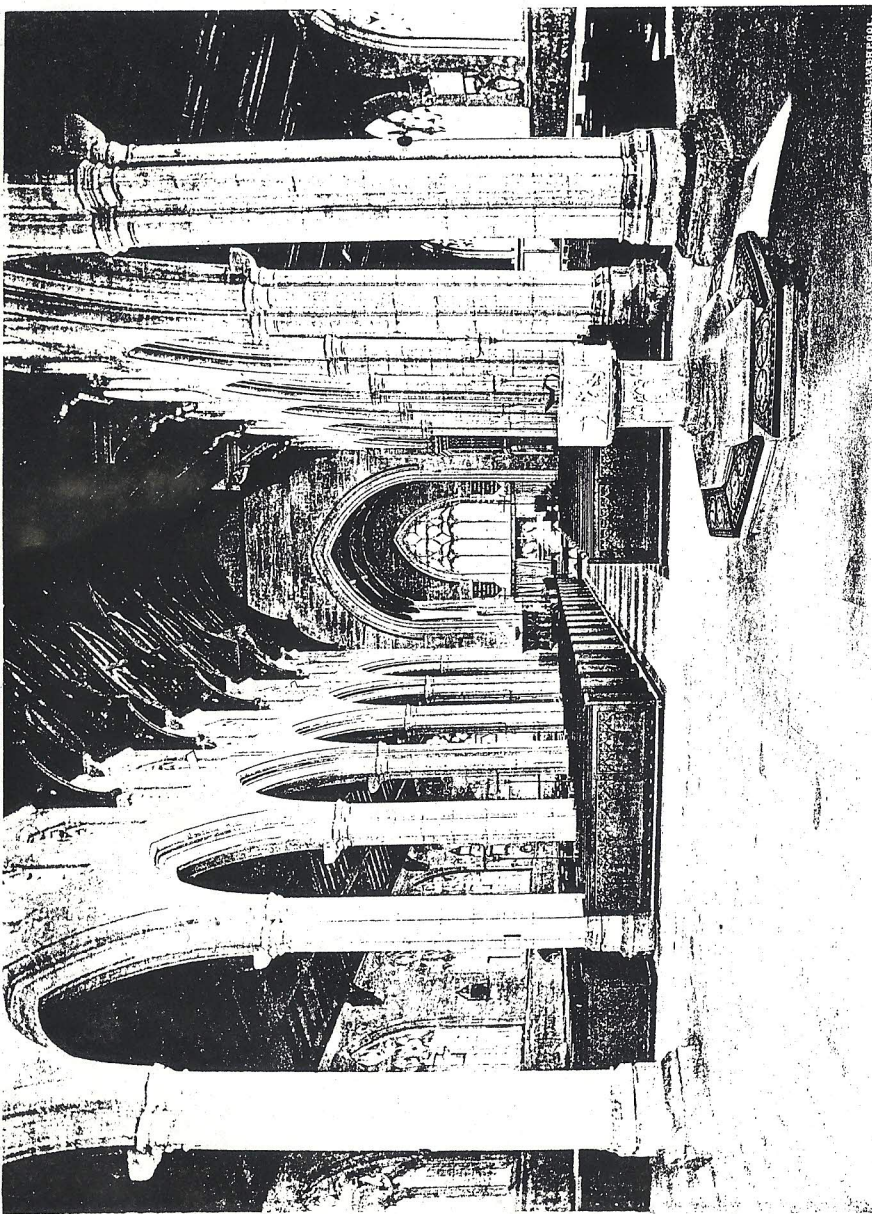
*(Member of the Historic Society—Lancashire and Cheshire).*

A Paper read before the Members of the Holbeach Literary  
Society, Tuesday Evening, November 18th, 1890.



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*Published by* H. A. MERRY, HIGH STREET, HOLBEACH.  
1890.



## PREFACE.

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THE autotype illustrations of the interior of the church have been prepared from views specially photographed; and the view of the exterior has been reduced from a large photograph, somewhat faded and indistinct, which came into my possession many years ago. Several inquiries were made to find the photographer of this particular view, for the purpose of obtaining a print direct from the "negative," but without success. I, however, ascertained that the "negative" was accidentally broken, after only two or three impressions had been taken. Believing this to be pre-eminently the finest view of the church, and knowing the difficulty, amounting almost to an impossibility, of obtaining a similar picture from the same standpoint, I determined to submit my print to a firm of high-class photographic artists, with the result that they have most fortunately been able to reproduce the permanent and beautiful autotype which forms the frontispiece of this pamphlet.

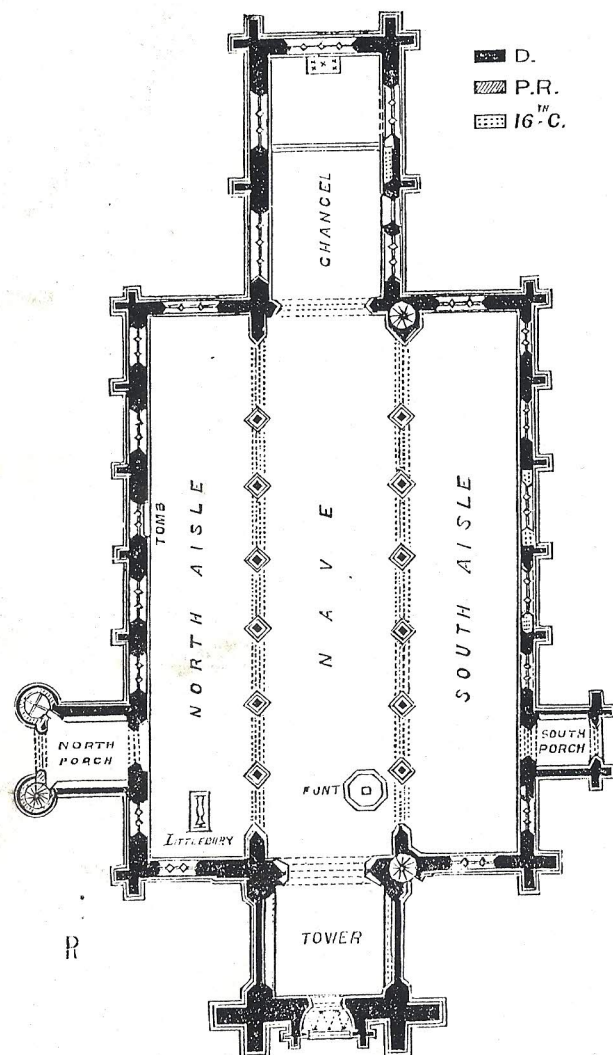
I must express my thanks to Mr. J. Kennerell, of Wisbeach, for the careful manner in which he followed my instructions in taking the "negatives" of the interior; and to Mr. Bell, of the firm of Brown, Barnes, & Bell, Liverpool, for the unremitting care and skill he has expended in producing the autotypes from these "negatives." These autotypes will bear very close and minute inspection,—every detail being most faithfully reproduced. I am persuaded these views are incomparably the most complete and artistic, which have yet been made of this venerable edifice.

In the letterpress many literary errors, I fear, have crept in, but as these pages will for the most part come before indulgent readers, I will anticipate only friendly criticism.

HENRY PEET.

MOUNT PLEASANT,  
LIVERPOOL.





## Architectural and Ecclesiological Notes on Holbeach Church.



N eminent and trustworthy writer ranks the stately church of Holbeach amongst the four finest Curvilinear Parish Churches in the United Kingdom, and whilst it is an excellent specimen of the architecture of the period in which it was built (circa 1340 to 1390) it fortunately presents few difficulties to the student, being one of those architectural books in which he who runs may read. We are told there are sermons in stones, and, I may add, very interesting ones, too, if we only know how to read them. Some of the neighbouring churches are, perhaps, more interesting to the archæologist from the variety of the styles, or orders, which may be found in them; whereas in this building we have an uniform church built from its foundations in one style of architecture, and, with the exception of a slight break of about twenty years, the building work was continuous. The structure was enlarged and altered very soon after the first portion of the work was completed, but the original design seems to have been persevered in to the end. When the work was fully completed (before the close of the 14th century) there were no subsequent additions (except portions of the north porch), and the exterior has not been materially altered since its erection, more than five hundred years ago.

Its mutilations are also comparatively small. I venture to say that few churches have been handed down to us so little damaged by time, by iconoclasts, or by so-called restorations, as this.

My object in describing this fabric is not only to point out its various beauties, and its architectural history and details, but to show you the use for which its various parts in the history of the church were built and adapted, so that a new interest may be given to you in exploring your parish church.

We are very apt to speak of this building as a *fine old church*. The first epithet is quite correct. It is a *fine* church, but it is by no means an *old* one—that is, of course, by comparison. As a matter of fact, it is



is one of the latest of the old parish churches in this neighbourhood. Compared with Weston, Moulton, and Whaplode on the west, and with Fleet, Gedney, and Long Sutton towards the east, it is, at least in its foundation, a hundred years later than any of them. Mr. Foster has shown in his interesting account of Whaplode Church how a sort of rivalry existed between the Abbots of Croyland and the Priors of Spalding, resulting in each of these religious houses vying with the other in the erection of the series of beautiful churches which adorn the road from Spalding to Long Sutton. This church was no doubt beneficially affected by this rivalry, but it probably owes more to the then resident family of Littlebury, and to the Bishop of Lincoln—the latter had, in 1332 acquired by purchase the advowson, and in 1340 a vicarage was ordained, which entailed upon him the obligation of finding books and vestments, and *building the chancel*.

It is singular that no account has been preserved of these formidable undertakings. When we consider the condition of the Fen roads in those days, the distance the stone would have to be brought, the difficulty of quarrying without blasting powder, and the magnitude of their works, we are filled with admiration at the pluck and perseverance of the old builders, who knew not the meaning of fatigue, and whose resolution and steadfastness of purpose must have been indomitable. In these days of railroads, and steam lifts and hoists and cranes, and every mechanical appliance which the ingenuity of modern science can devise, we fail to build the mighty temples which our forefathers, unaided by any of these adventitious auxiliaries, raised for the worship of God, and which still remain—the admiration and wonder of the world.

I think, however, our old river played an important part in this building work. We know that in the time of Stukeley's father it was navigable, and that barges came up as far as the bridge. Since the 14th century much marshland has been reclaimed from the sea, and I have little doubt when the Church was building, the river would join The Wash somewhere near the old Roman Bank, and thus form a very convenient tidal waterway for the conveyance of stone from the Northamptonshire quarries.

I am glad to think that at some period of its history this wretched sewer, which we still dignify by the name of the *old river*, may have had its unsavoury banks washed by the salt sea waves, and has, perhaps, borne upon its bosom the very stones now reared into that grey tower which stands "sternly watching" through the centuries, and no doubt looks down with pitying eyes upon its quondam friend and benefactor, now, alas, a plague spot and a by-word!

The finest view of the Church is that which is obtained from the N.E., by standing on the pavement in the High Street. Here the entire length of the edifice is seen at once, and a magnificent pile it is—a perfect mountain of stone. The lofty and spacious chancel, the long and effective range of clerestory windows, the domestic-looking turrets of the north porch, the gable of the nave with its sanctus bell-cot, the long line of embattled parapets on nave and aisle,

and

and rising above all in grand perspective the massive tower, crowned by the highest and largest spire in Holland, form a view of great architectural beauty.

Unfortunately, it is only at certain seasons of the year that this very satisfactory view can be obtained—the churchyard adjoining being crowded with trees, the foliage of which completely shuts out the view during the summer months. A very picturesque view can be obtained from the first milestone on the Spalding Road. From this point the spire soars in tapering gracefulness above the surrounding trees, and on a clear day is seen beautifully reflected in the adjacent pool. As thus seen mirrored in the water, the optical illusion is most perfect—by stretching out your hand it appears as though you could touch it. The whole masonry of this noble structure is uniformly good and worthy of the design, scarcely any crack or settlement being perceptible.

I wish I could convey to your mind some idea of the splendour and magnificence of the internal decorations of this grand church in the olden time, with its six altars, its rich tabernacle-work, and its high altar—placed far from irreverent gaze—its sculpture, its painted glass, its curiously worked screens, its sepulchral monuments in marble and alabaster and metal, its fretted woodwork, its elaborate altar frontals of various hues, its jewelled cross—emblem of the Christian's brightest hopes—its precious books with their costly bindings, its rich embroidery, its exquisite vessels in silver and gold, its gorgeous vestments apparelled in finest needlework, and all its dainty and variegated ornaments, which appealed so strongly to the evidence of the senses, and formed the accessories to the sacrifice of the Mass. Such were amongst its artistic appointments, until the Dissolution came and swept them all away. Then followed the reaction from the ornate ritual to the bald and naked service of the last century. Although the fittings and the decorations have been destroyed or transformed by this reaction against the old ceremonial and the requirements of congregational worship, the fabric still remains, unchanged, when all around has changed so much.

Let me then point out its main architectural features. It may be described in general terms as a late Decorated church, gradually merging into Perpendicular, consisting of a chancel, a nave of seven bays with clerestory, north and south aisles, uniform in length with the nave—the former being 20ft. and the latter 21ft. wide—north and south porches, and a canopied western entrance, above which rises a spire-capped tower. It exhibits that character common to nearly all parish churches of this period in being plainer inside than out. The orientation—that is the precise position of the building with respect to the East—is in this instance quite in accordance with the practice of the Church from the earliest period. The chancel faces due east, and this is the only position in which a church should be placed, so that the worshippers face the east whilst at prayer. There are very few examples of any deviation from this rule, although occasionally we find the orientation varying from N.E. to nearly S.E., and



and it has been supposed that in these cases the church pointed to that part of the eastern horizon where the sun rose on the day of the Patron Saint.

I will not refer more particularly to the question of "turning to the East," which has so frequently in these later times been the subject of bitter controversy, further than to say, that to me it is inexplicable why any opposition should ever be offered to a custom, which if no other reason could be urged in its favour, is a beautiful figure of the unity of the Church. This church is dedicated to God in honour of All Saints. I might here point out to you a very common error of speaking of churches as being dedicated to a particular saint. This is a mistake which cannot be too frequently corrected, as many superstitious notions and very erroneous opinions are expressed by those whose information upon this point is limited. All churches are *dedicated to God*, but in *honour* of certain saints, by whose name they are distinguished.

The present church occupies the site of an earlier building, which we know was in existence in 1177, being mentioned in a deed addressed by Alexander, Pope of Rome, to the Priory of Spalding. The restoration of old churches in this country seldom fails to be accompanied by a disclosure of some stones of a date far anterior to the building renovated, and this church has proved no exception to what may be almost termed the rule. Some remains of this Norman building were brought to light in 1867 during the reseating of the nave, but beyond the fact that it was built in the Norman style, that it occupied the same site, and that it was the scene of one or more riotous meetings, our information is of the most fragmentary character. We are also left very much in the dark respecting the building of the existing church. When the ecclesiastical authorities decided to replace the small Norman church with a more elaborate structure, we can well imagine they would be very solicitous that the faithful in Holbeach should not be left entirely without a house of prayer during the many years which must elapse before the new church could be completed. They would therefore allow some portion of the old church to remain, probably the chancel with perhaps one or more bays of the nave. The work of building the present nave and aisles would then proceed (*circa* 1340) without in any way disturbing the Norman chancel, where service would daily be offered. I think it very probable the old materials from the dismantled building would be utilised for foundations. We know the three westernmost piers of the north arcade stand on the plinths of the piers of the earlier church, and if excavations were made beneath the nave floor we should probably find further remains. The masonry of the south wall of the south aisle is throughout its whole length less in thickness than the masonry of the corresponding wall of the north aisle. The reason for this departure is not at once apparent. Possibly in constructing the north wall the lines of the earlier church were followed as far as practicable, and the Norman core encased, which would account for its greater strength and thickness. The walls of the aisles were carried up to their present height, and the nave was finished and roofed,

but

but without a clerestory. The proof of this is to be found on the western side of the east nave wall, above the chancel arch, where faint traces of the ridge of the former high-pitched roof still remain. When this portion of the work was finished the daily service would be conducted in the new nave, and the work of building the chancel would commence. It is quite clear the Norman chancel was in existence in 1340, as we find in the document by which the vicarage was ordained, and which has recently been published by the Rev. Grant W. Macdonald, the significant words, "The Bishop to rebuild the chancel *de novo*," and the date of that document is 1340. This clearly implies an existing chancel which was to be pulled down and rebuilt. The architectural details quite agree with such documentary evidence as has been brought to light. The easy flowing character of the window tracery, almost approaching flamboyant, is distinctly later than that of the aisle windows, and a careful examination of the base moulds shows them to be of later date, although they have been very cleverly adapted to the base moulds of the aisles. I think we may with tolerable accuracy fix 1360 as the date when this work was completed and ready for consecration. When the nave, aisles, and chancel were completed there was an interruption in the progress of the work for nearly twenty years, all building operations being abandoned, either from want of support or some other cause. The insatiable desire for enlarging, improving, and decorating churches was, however, too great to permit of any prolonged delay, and after this slight interval the construction of a tower and spire and the addition of a clerestory to the nave was proceeded with (*circa* 1380). It was found necessary to heighten by a few feet the east wall of the nave. The idea of adding a clerestory was evidently in the constructor's mind when this wall was built, for you will find it was not finished with a gable-end agreeing with the pitch of the roof behind it, but was carried upwards, screen-like, above the slope of the roof, and finished with a horizontal course, which still remains, and is distinctly visible, a few feet above the apex of the chancel arch. The masonry of the upper portion—that is, the new walling, built when the clerestory was added—is also somewhat less substantial.

Contemporaneously the building of the tower and spire was proceeding, and we may, I think, state without much fear of contradiction, that the whole structure—nave, aisles, chancel, south porch, tower, and spire—was fully completed before the close of the century.

These views are, I think, in great measure confirmed by the internal evidence of the building itself, and are in no sense antagonistic to such contemporaneous historical records as have been brought to light.

The tower, which is the most prominent feature, is very large and well-built, exhibiting a style of architecture somewhat later than the aisles and chancel, but of nearly the same date as the clerestory. It is of exceedingly good proportions, 86 feet high, with an embattled parapet decorated with sunk panels, quatrefoiled, and has an ornamented cornice, which carries a large shallow hollow, filled at intervals with a row of enriched bosses, and eight curiously-carved gurgoyles of



of considerable projection. Originally there were angle pinnacles (crocketed and surmounted by a cross); traces of these, or at least their bases, may be seen within the battlements by anyone who will take the trouble to ascend the 107 steps in the newel staircase at the S.E. angle, which gives access to the summit of the tower and its intermediate floors. The *tout ensemble* would be somewhat enhanced if these pinnacles were restored, but their absence is in no way an eyesore, and perhaps adds to the massive appearance of the whole structure. You will notice the horizontal moulding on the battlements is continued round the embrasures, which is a characteristic feature of the Perpendicular style, whereas the moulding on the decorated nave and aisle battlements is cut off at each opening, and not continued vertically down the sides. This feature and the transom in the belfry windows indicate that when these portions were built the change to the Perpendicular had fairly commenced.

The belfry windows, boldly finished and deeply recessed, one in each face of the tower, are of two lights each, trefoiled, with a quatrefoil in the head. The dripstones are terminated by corbels, on which the carvers—knowing the position was too elevated for general observation—took the opportunity of producing grotesque and even indelicate subjects. Below these windows is a plain string course which encircles the tower, being carried round the buttresses. In the west front is a well-recessed doorway, flanked on either side with a double-buttressed projecting jamb, which carries a stone groined roof, forming a shallow porch. A careful examination of this roof will probably reveal that these ribs are simply carved in imitation of groining. The door is modern and without interest.

This porch cuts into a five-light window, which is similar to the windows in the north and south faces of the tower. These latter were walled up half their height until the restoration in 1867. Their tracery is very peculiar and difficult to describe, and their proportions and general design are such as to mark their late character. The length of the mullions is excessive, being carried from the sill almost to the window-arch. Considering the beauty of the aisle and chancel windows, I am inclined to believe that at some time or other the design has been mutilated.

At the beginning of this century there was a modern doorway in the south face of the tower—made for the purpose of giving entrance to the floor space under the old vestry, which formerly occupied a position beneath the ringers' chamber—which has very properly been filled in with masonry.

The buttresses are in pairs, one standing on each side of the angle, and of bold projection, divided into five stages, with a set-off between each and finished with a gable. The angles of the buttresses are, however, perfectly plain, with neither chamfer nor moulding.

The spire is octangular and rises from within the battlements to the height of nearly 100 feet. It contains sixteen very beautiful spire-lights or louvre windows, two in each face, all of which are gabled and have hoods which terminate below on corbel heads, being surmounted by enriched

enriched finials, but these latter have mostly perished. The hoods are richly crocketed, both on their upper and lower faces; the windows are of two lights, cinquefoiled, with a quatrefoil in the head, above which is a cusped triangular opening. The whole range is worthy of special notice. At the angles of the spire is a plain bold roll, and at the four corners it is supported by broaches, which are crowned by a stone crozier, forming a beautiful finial. The apex is terminated by an octangular stone table surmounted by a weather-cock. The whole work is very masterly, and the spire very properly takes rank as one of the most graceful, as it is the highest, in the Fen-land.

Next to the tower and spire the most noticeable feature in the elevation is the long range of clerestory windows. When the building work was recommenced (*circa* 1380) this was undoubtedly the first addition, and although elsewhere the Perpendicular style was being rapidly adopted, the only approach here noticeable is in the depressed arches of the fourteen windows. The tracery is still good, though late, Decorated, and the embattled parapet above these windows still retains the principal feature of the style, in the coping being cut off, and not carried up the sides of the merlons, so as to form a continuous line round them. The mouldings on this coping are more shallow and less in number than the corresponding mouldings on the aisle battlements, and the same may be said of the cornice, although not so clearly marked.

The exterior view is very effective and consists of fourteen windows, divided into pairs, by buttresses of three stages each. These small buttresses so late as 1722 rose above the embattled parapet, and each carried a pinnacle, panelled and crocketed. Each window is of two lights, trefoiled, enclosing a quatrefoil, the dripstones terminating with a series of corbel heads of very coarse workmanship. The whole front is effectively designed and produces a very pleasing contrast of light and shade, unequalled by any church in the neighbourhood.

On the east gable of the nave is a bald-looking arch bearing date 1629. Always a plain structure without any architectural feature of interest, it has been rendered doubly so since it was denuded of the stone cross which originally crowned it. The sanctus-bell was presented to the church A.D. 1453, by W. Enot, of Lynn, and Henry Nele, of Holbeach, and would hang in the ancient bell-cot, which stood in the place now occupied by this uninteresting arch. The bell-cot was probably destroyed at the Dissolution, and the bell disposed of, as we find amongst the curious lot of articles sold by the churchwardens in 1547, according to the "injunctions of the Kynges Magyste," an entry for £18 2s., the price received for one bell.

Perhaps I should explain to you that the sanctus-bell was almost invariably suspended on the outside of the church in a small turret over the archway leading from the nave to the chancel, and was rung at the elevation of the Host, and at the more solemn parts of the service of the Mass, to call the attention of those people who might be in the vicinity of the church, but who were unable or unwilling to attend.

By



By the Injunctions of 1547 the sanctus-bell was diverted from its original purpose, and, when not disposed of, was made to give notice of the sermon—when there was one.

The walls of the chancel were formerly parapetted and embattled, at least that on the north side, which added considerably to the completeness of the whole building. It is worthy of note that the north or town side of the church is throughout more enriched than the southern aspect. In an old engraving, now in my possession, these battlements are depicted, but the period when they were wantonly destroyed I am unable to fix.

The buttresses are of four stages, with a successive reduction in their projection at each stage. They terminate at the top with a triangular head, which has a trefoiled ridge-mould, and contain within their gables very elegant engaged tracery, which should be minutely examined.

The base course is singularly bold and spreading, and is continued round the buttresses, giving them in their lower members a breadth, and dignity, and importance, which is one of the most characteristic features of the late Decorated, or Curvilinear period.

The east gable of the chancel is appropriately crowned by a floriated stone cross. I may explain that the cross itself was always looked upon as an emblem of glory, and wherever we find it in ecclesiastical work it is always more or less floriated, with enriched terminations branching out. Many well-meaning people object to crosses and to other ornaments of the Church, not because they can find any fault with them *per se*, but solely on the ground that they are used by Papists, and they consider this a sufficient reason for excluding them from the Church of England. If we are to act on this principle—of excluding everything which is held in common by the Church of Rome and ourselves—we ought to renounce the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Deity and Atonement of Christ, and even the Bible itself. All that the Church of Rome has which is catholic, scriptural, and pure, we have, and we only protest, and shall protest for ever, against her multiplied corruptions.\*

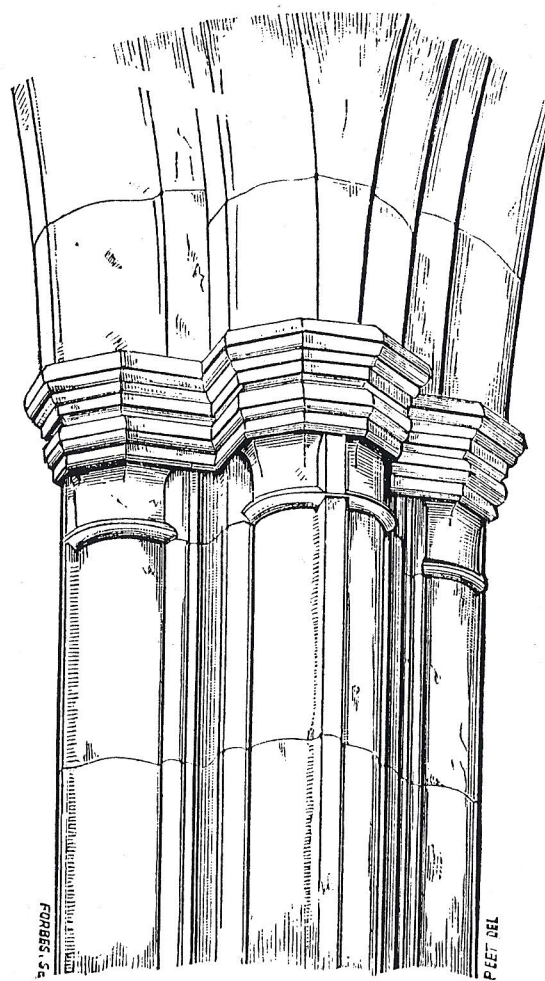
**Introit.** On entering the church by either the south or west door the first object which arrests attention is the Font. Nor is its position so near the entrance without a sufficient reason. It was not placed near the principal door, and at the west end of the building, by mere chance, but to symbolize the great truth that Holy Baptism, of which the font is the instrument, is the sacrament of admission into the

\* [Formerly a cross stood on the Market hill, which was pulled down in 1683. It was pentagonal in form, without any central column, the angle buttresses acting instead. There were five angle pinnacles to support the lateral thrust, and the structure was groined inside.

The simple churchyard cross would probably stand on the southern side of the church to the left of the pathway leading to the door.

Let me express a hope that both these beautiful and striking symbols of our common faith may again be allowed to hallow and decorate the churchyard and market place of this my native town.]

Church.





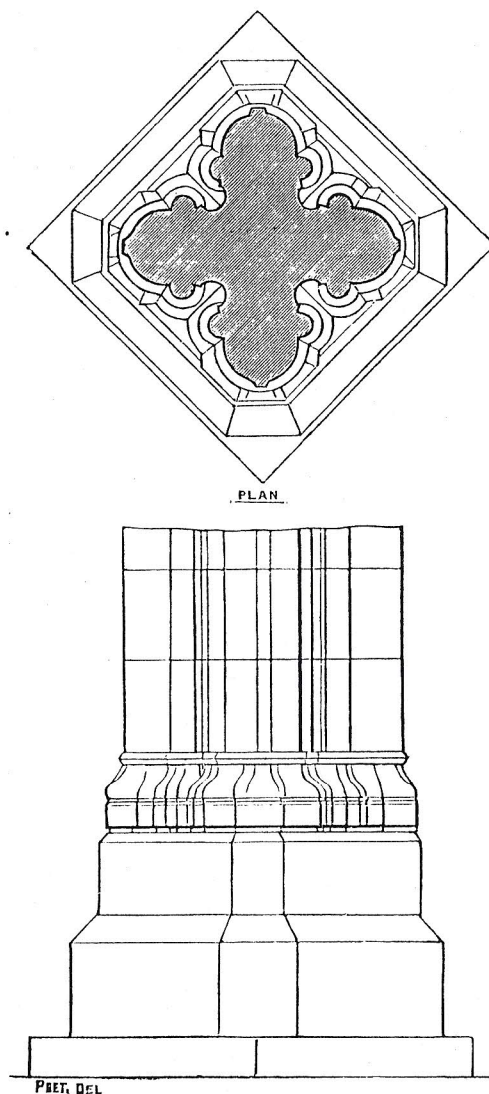
Church. Thus, you see, it is far removed from the chancel—the part of the church which is set apart for the highest services to which the child can be admitted, when, by Confirmation, he is come to the full privilege of a Christian. You will also notice that this font is not a small basin, but sufficiently large to baptize children by immersion.

Its shape is octagonal—I may state that the majority of fonts are octangular, an octagon being a very ancient symbol of regeneration—and it is supported on a panelled octagonal shaft (rising from an enriched base), each face of which is decorated with an ogee arch in sculpture with crockets and finials. The eight sides of the font have recessed panels with designs in relief, some of which are wholly illegible. The design is good, though late, and the carving shallow and of rather coarse execution.

**The Pave.** This is the part of the sacred edifice in which the parishioners sit during the time of divine worship. In former times no seats were appropriated. The men were all placed on the epistle side, that is the south side, and the women on the gospel side. The appropriation of particular seats is a comparatively late innovation. It was not until after the Reformation that the fashion of each family wishing to be seated by itself in church began to obtain. The ancient custom had the authority of an Act of the Synod of the Diocese of Exeter in 1284, which decreed that no one should claim any seat, but whoever first entered a church for the purpose of devotion might choose at his pleasure a place for praying, the only exception being in favour of the lord of the manor and the patron, who were usually permitted to sit within the chancel. At the present time the duty of seeing that the parishioners are provided with seats devolves upon the churchwardens, who have a right to exercise a reasonable discretion in dictating where the worshippers shall sit. Those who are most conversant with parochial matters must be painfully aware that sittings are a never-ending subject of animosity and ill-will, and they will tell you there is nothing which people defend with so much pertinacity as a pew. Fortunately a better understanding on this subject is now apparent, and devout churchmen are beginning to acknowledge that "private rights have no place in the freehold of God," but that when the rich and the poor meet together for prayer, they should meet as in the sight of Him, who is the Maker of them all, oblivious of all worldly distinction. I remember seeing in this church one Sunday morning, many years ago, a most unseemly wrangle, which nearly resulted in a free fight, between two parishioners—one a farmer, the other a solicitor—for the possession of a particular pew. Both gentlemen are now dead.

Architecturally the nave consists of seven bays, with a range of clerestory windows on either side. The seven arcades are supported by slender and elegant shafts of four clustered piers, filletted, with a deep hollow mould in the returning angle. The pier capitals are simply moulded without any floriation, and the mouldings are thin and without interest. The abacus, which has an ogee profile, is not a separate member, but forms part of the capital itself. The arches are pointed

PIER AND BASE





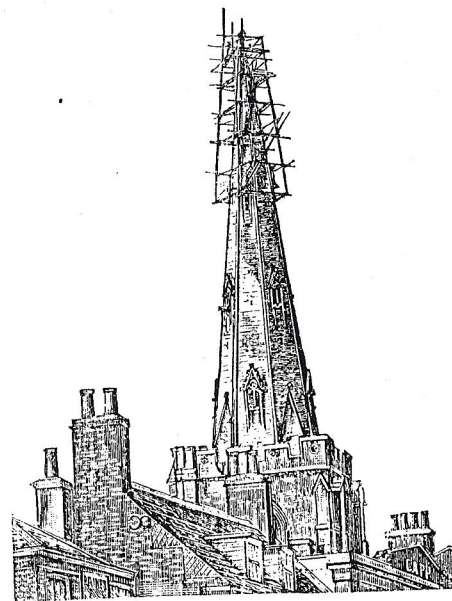
pointed, flatly moulded, and consist of two members, the two easternmost of the north arcade and the easternmost of the south arcade having the deep hollow mould in the returning angle of the piers continued between the members of the arch. The bases are octagonal, as are the pier caps—a clear indication of the lateness of the period at which they were built. Close to the respond in the N.E. corner stands the pulpit, a fine specimen of costly modern wood carving. The nave opens into the tower by a high, massive, and very beautiful archway, the jambs and arch of which are boldly moulded. This arch may be considered the finest feature of the interior of the church. A very disfiguring and obstructive singing loft, in which stood the organ, entirely concealed this tower arch until the recent restoration, when it was cleared away. Passing beneath it we find ourselves under a groined roof, above which are the clock chamber and the chimes. From this point the view of the interior is very fine. The long range of new oak roofs, the completion of which has but recently been accomplished, are here seen to great advantage.

At the south-east angle of the nave, and just below the springing of the chancel arch is a square-headed doorway. This gave access to the rood-loft, which, with the screen, divided the chancel from the nave. The stairs are constructed in the respond, and the doorway which gives entrance to them is in the south aisle. These stairs formed no part of the original structure, but were very ingeniously built in at a subsequent period.

From the earliest ages there has always been a separation between the clergy and the people, and the part eastward of the screen has been set apart expressly and exclusively for the highest and most solemn services of the Church. In parish churches these screens were generally built of wood, and consisted of open tracery panels, whereas in cathedral churches they were more frequently of stone. Partly resting on the screen, and running across the whole width of the nave was the gallery or loft, in the centre of which stood the rood or cross, and this was one of the most impressive features of the church. The rood-loft of this church was retained until the early part of this century from the circumstance of its being transformed into a singing gallery.

It was no doubt necessary at the Reformation to remove from the rood-lofts, and from the altars, the crucifixes, images, and relics which, with whatever pious intentions they had been originally placed there, had become objects of gross superstitious adoration; but when the frenzied innovators with wild and indiscriminating zeal, not only removed the images, but also broke down the screens by which the chancels were separated from the body of the church, and threw them open and admitted the mass of the people to occupy the sacred places, the religious reverence with which they had hitherto been regarded was exchanged for an irreverent contempt, far more injurious to the cause of religion than the Reformers ever contemplated or desired.

It is very curious how the Protestant notion has arisen that rood-screens are Popish, whereas the Roman Use does not require them. At St. Peter's,



THE REBUILDING OF THE UPPER PORTION OF THE SPIRE.

(From a Photograph taken by Mr. T. W. Curtis, Junr., August 30th, 1866, 4-30 p.m.)



St. Peter's, at Rome, there is not the slightest trace of one—the high altar being under a baldacchino under the dome—and St. Peter's is a typical modern Romish Church. The survival of screens in the British Church and afterwards under the Sarum Use in England generally, was probably a survival of Eastern influence in English Christianity. The tendency of the Romish Church, especially in the city of Rome itself, has been against screens, and their existence in this country shows the real independence of the old Church of England—even during the middle ages—in repudiating the Papal claim to interfere with its ancient ritual arrangements.

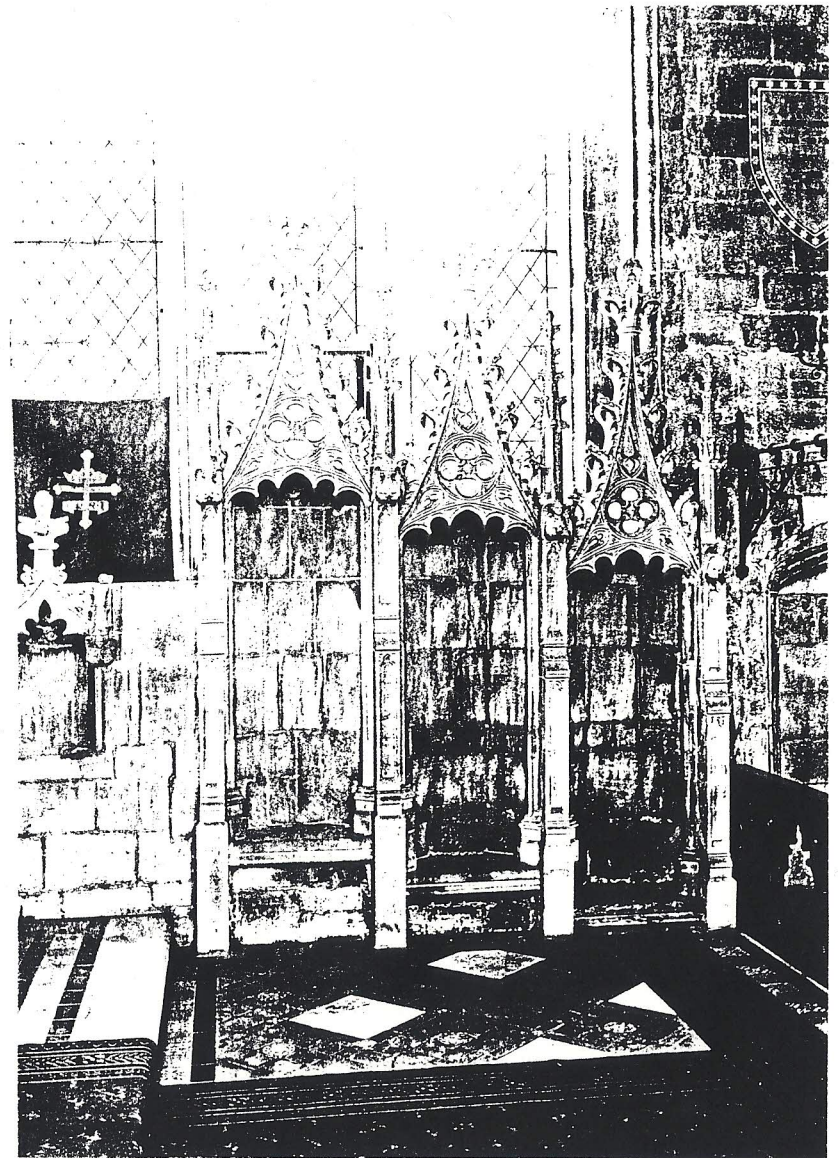
The first and most important use of the rood-loft was to serve as an elevated place from whence to read the Gospel and Epistle to the assembled worshippers. Here lessons were read and holy days announced, and on great feasts lights were set up, and at Christmas and Whitsuntide it was decorated with boughs and evergreens. Previous to the introduction of pulpits, which are not older than the 13th century, the sermon was preached from the rood-loft.

The chancel arch is an important feature of the interior, being very lofty, and spans nearly the full width of the nave. The mouldings of the jambs are continued in the arch without any capital or impost between them—another indication of late Decorated work,—and the hood moulding is cut off at each termination without any enrichment.

The large chancel, which accords well with the spacious nave, is elevated by one step, the ascent to the altar being by three steps. On the south side is a priest's door, eastward of which formerly stood a small sacristy, which we know was in existence in 1530, but how long anterior to that date it is difficult to say. It was taken down in 1567. The low doorway—now filled in with masonry—through which it was entered still remains in the south wall, and on the exterior of this wall, between the buttresses, there are unmistakeable indications of its having had a lean-to roof. It must have added to the picturesque appearance of the edifice, and it certainly was a very convenient and useful addition. Possibly those who were responsible for its demolition considered it an awkward excrescence, preferring a rigid uniformity in the design, with both sides exactly alike, rather than that varied and broken outline to which we owe so much of the beauty and effect of our old Gothic churches.

A few feet from the east end in the south wall is the ancient piscina. This is a small niche built in the thickness of the wall, in the bottom of which a basin is hollowed out of the stone, with a pipe leading into the ground. The most ancient sacrariums had two basins. In one the priest washed his hands, and down the other the ablutions of the chalice were poured. When the rubric for receiving the ablutions of the chalice became generally observed, the second basin was disused, and the late sacrariums have one basin only.

The head of this piscina is cinquefoiled, above which rises a richly decorated finial, and its roof is elaborately carved in imitation of groining, with enriched bosses. The basin has drain-holes pierced round a central rose. Adjoining the piscina to the westward are three arched



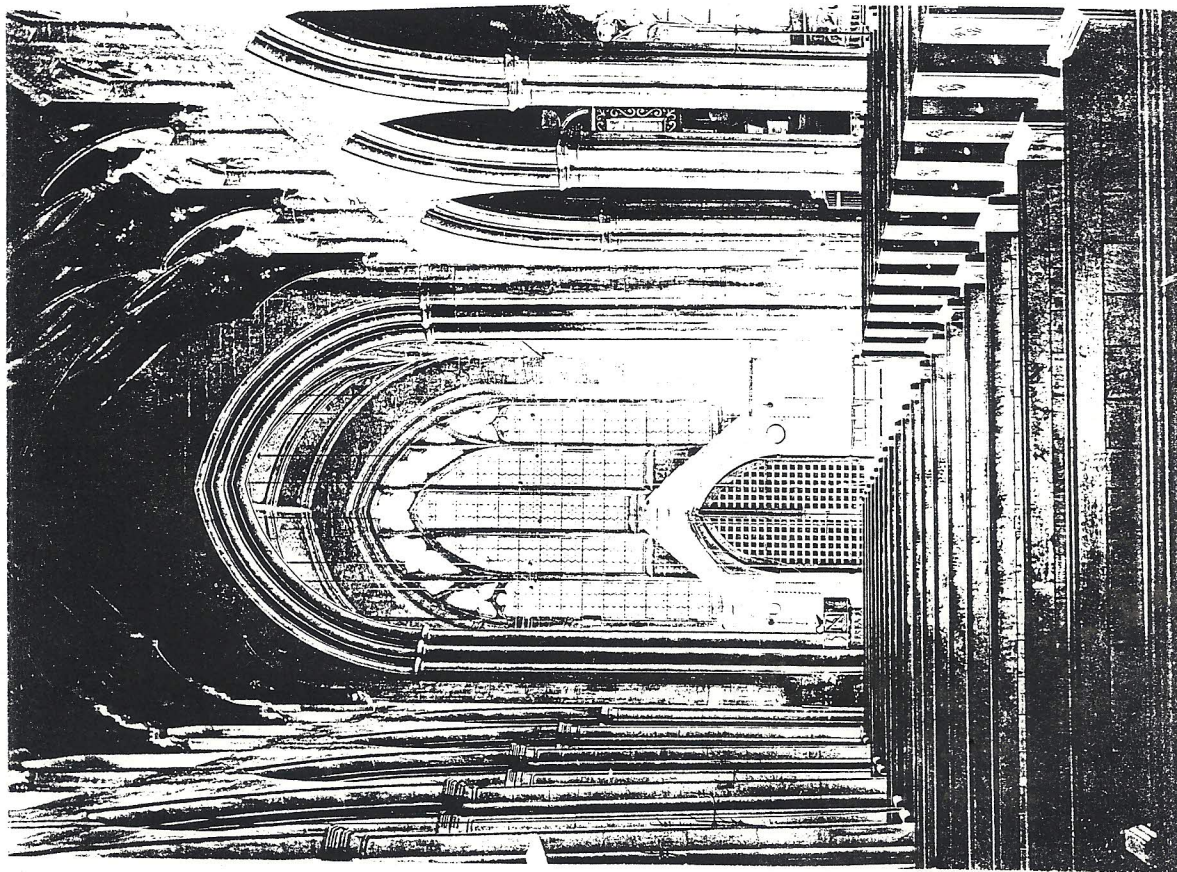


arched recesses with pedimental heads richly ornamented with crockets and finials. Panelled buttresses occur between each recess, carrying angels, and terminating in elaborately-carved pinnacles, which rise diagonally. These are known as the sedilia, and were the seats occupied by the officiating priest, deacon, and sub-deacon. Under the Reformed Rite, when the Holy Communion is to be administered, they should be occupied by the celebrant, gospeller, and epistler, of the present Liturgy. These sedilia and the piscina were in a most ruinous condition previous to 1867, when they were handsomely restored.

Altogether the chancel is a fine specimen of late Decorated work. Its spacious and lofty dimensions, and the unusually large size of its five windows produce an effect of lightness and transparency which is very pleasing. A tendency towards Flamboyancy is apparent in all the windows, but it is especially noticeable in the east window and in the westernmost one in the north wall. These two windows are excellent examples of complete flowing tracery, and are worthy of special notice. They are of four lights each, cinquefoiled, and of great size and elaborate design, with an amount of wavy foliation in the heads quite characteristic of the period in which they were built. The two windows in the south wall, and the easternmost one in the north wall are of three lights each, trefoiled, and of excellent design. All these windows have hood mouldings.

Happily the roof added by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 185- has been removed, and the present one of oak, which harmonizes well with the nave roof, substituted in its place. The altar rails and the oak choir stalls are good, substantial, modern work, and the sanctuary has been tastefully inlaid with encaustic tiles. Immediately under the east window in its ancient position is the altar, or communion table—and it is immaterial by which name it should be designated, as we find in the Primitive Church both names were used indifferently. It is an altar in respect of what is there offered up to God, and a *table* in respect of what is there eaten and participated of by man. We find in the Rubric of the First Liturgy of Edward VI. it is sometimes styled *the altar*, and at other times *God's board*; but by whatever name we call it, men of devout minds will meditate with reverence on the greatness of their blessing in being permitted to approach it, and will look above and beyond the outward ceremonial and name to the great spiritual truths which its presence symbolizes.

The windows of this church are its most prominent and attractive feature. In each aisle wall is a grand range, all (with one exception) having the fine flowing character of tracery in vogue during the latter half of the 14th century. They are beautiful examples of that period, and although indications of a Flamboyant taste in the design are apparent, they are probably unrivalled amongst Fen-land churches. Formerly they were rich in painted glass, but not a vestige now remains. Each aisle wall is pierced by six windows of three lights each, trefoiled, the jambs and arch having the double-ogee moulding; the dripstones terminate on enriched corbel heads, and the whole work is bold and varied, though somewhat rough in execution. Between each





and on the architectural details, for its history. Until, however, more decisive evidence is produced than has yet appeared, its character, ornaments, and mouldings must have their due consideration in assigning the probable date, and these give little countenance to the theory that the construction was an after-thought. Some portions were undoubtedly built subsequently, but a careful examination will, I think, disclose that the main walls are contemporaneous with the rest of the building; that the design has been altered or modified; that old work has been destroyed and replaced in the course of erection, and even that alterations have been made of a much later date, which render it almost impossible to pronounce with absolute certainty what portion belongs to the original design. Judging, however, from the interior and exterior aspects of the structure, it is evident the two circular towers were grafted upon the original porch at a later period, and it is possible that this may be the building work on the north side of the Church of Holbeach, alluded to in the will of Thomas Calowe, 1526, to the furtherance of which he gives and bequeaths three score pounds.

Between the face of each tower and the east and west walls of the porch there is a straight vertical joint, which would indicate that these towers were built up against the walls—not built into them—and consequently not bonded together in one solid wall of masonry. At the same time the old high-pitched roof was removed (the weathering is still clearly visible on the south face of the north wall) and the parvise constructed by dividing the porch into two storeys. Possibly the east and west walls were also carried up, and the embattled parapet added. There is some irregularity in this parapet which it is difficult to explain. That on the east side joins the aisle battlement at the same level, whereas that which crowns the west wall rises about eighteen inches higher than the corresponding aisle battlement. The lower half of the east wall is of massive construction and of nearly the same thickness as the adjoining north aisle wall. It would be interesting to have both these walls opened, when I think it very probable we should find concealed beneath the Decorated details, some portion of the Norman masonry *in situ*. The west wall is much less substantial, and the thinness of the walls of the towers at once proclaim their later origin.\* There are three doorways in the N.W. turret—one gives entrance to the turret on the ground floor, another gives access to the parvise, and the third to the roof—all of the same design, square-headed, with rude carving on the lintels. The existence of a doorway opening into the parvise clearly proves that when the towers were built, a parvise was either contemplated or already existed, and as there is unmistakable evidence that the parvise was no part of the original design, it follows that the towers were also built subsequently to the main portion of the porch. The proof that the parvise is of later date is to be found on the archway opening into the church, the upper portion of which is cut through by the beams which support the floor above. The low, flat ceiling under this floor entirely destroys the fine proportion of the interior, giving it a depressed and stunted appearance. This would be

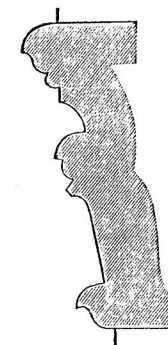
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to some extent obviated if the present floor—which is about two feet above the level of the nave floor—were lowered to its original level.

The entire porch is much in need of repair, and unless the work is speedily taken in hand some valuable features will be lost. Let us hope we may have one of those careful and conservative restorations which will assist, instead of confusing and misleading the antiquary; and should some hidden fragments be brought to light, they may help us to arrive at a more definite opinion in assigning an exact date to this interesting but perplexing porch, which now offers some curious and difficult problems to the student desirous of making out its architectural history.



ABACUS.



PIER CAP.

The memorials of the dead within these hallowed walls are numerous. The pavement contains many stones, but the brasses that once represented effigies and recorded names and dates have mostly disappeared. Only one perfect brass of ancient date remains, and a portion of another. There is, however, one mediæval monument which merits especial notice, not only for its architectural beauty, but from the fact that the person to whose memory it was erected was probably a great benefactor to the fabric, and may have been the founder of the present church.

It consists of a beautifully carved altar-tomb—the south side being the most enriched—with four canopied niches on each side, elaborately carved and diapered with roses, surmounted by the recumbent effigy of Sir Humphrey Littlebury, encased in armour of the costume of the year 1388, his hands conjoined and raised in prayer, on his arm his shield, his head resting on his crest (a woman's head in a close-fitting net), and his feet supported on a lion. Between the niches there are eight shields repeating the coat of Littlebury alternately with Kirton.

This monument was originally erected in the Littlebury Chapel, at the east end of the north aisle, but for some unexplainable reason it was removed to its present position at the west end of the aisle. The stone-work is still in a tolerable state of preservation, although every bit



bit of colour has been cleaned off. Sir Humphrey Littlebury was not buried beneath the floor of the church, but within this tomb, and his bones still repose under his effigy. Some years ago, when the upper slab was removed, the bones were exposed.

In this parish "the curfew tolls the knell of parting day," as it did in every parish in the days of William the Conqueror, but is now discontinued generally in our towns and villages. A peculiar custom prevails here of ringing the curfew at seven o'clock on Saturday evenings, instead of the accustomed hour of eight. It is singular how several ancient ringing customs have lingered on in spite of all attempts to suppress them. In my boyhood the angelus bell sent forth its warning note morning and evening, as it did in Præ-Reformation days; but the most curious custom which has lingered on to our own time is one which was specially forbidden by Cromwell's Injunction of 1536: This is the "Knowling of Aves," and consists of ringing a bell for about five minutes at the end of the morning service on Sundays.

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Although the storms of five centuries have swept around this majestic pile, it still rears its head towards heaven, as true and as upright as at first, ever pointing upwards, silently reminding us of the vanished past, associated with the chief joys and sorrows and ever varying fortunes of the men and women who have lived, and worked, and suffered, and died beneath its shadow. Apart from an antiquarian and ecclesiological interest there is a personal attachment of the parishioners to the spot on which their forefathers have worshipped from the earliest times—the font and the churchyard adjoining in which generation after generation have successively been baptised and buried, have for them a peculiar charm.

I have tried to invest the stately tower and soaring spire, and the varied grouping of turret, porch, and gable, with a new interest; I have noted its main architectural beauties; I have pointed out some of the ritual arrangements in vogue before the Reformation; I have explained how the work of construction proceeded; I have at least opened the way for further investigation. If any who have followed me are stimulated to examine for themselves this interesting edifice, or if I have smoothed away any old prejudices, I shall be amply repaid for any time or trouble I have expended in preparing this paper for your Society.

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