

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin,  
at Kingston.

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BY THE REV. ECCLES JAMES CARTER.

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**T**HE subject which I propose to bring before the meeting this evening, is the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, at Kingston.

When I first undertook to read a Paper before this Society, I never had the privilege of attending any of its meetings, but having now been present at the last one, I feel that an apology is due from me for occupying the time of this assembly with so very meagre a production as constant parochial occupation enables me to present. Having heard the scientific and elaborate Paper on Steeples in general, read at the last meeting by my friend Mr. Petit, illustrated with a profusion of drawings in that style, for which, I think I may say without paying a bad compliment to any artist, that he stands unrivalled ; and having heard, also, as much as time permitted me of that very learned discussion on (to my ignorance) the most mysterious of all subjects, the Egyptian Hieroglyphics, by a gentleman

whose very name every lover of ancient music must hold in nothing short of veneration, I certainly felt that anything I could produce would be very unworthy the attention of an assembly accustomed to be entertained by such deeply edifying effusions as these. Still I have persevered in my intention of bringing the subject I proposed before this meeting, and I have done so because I conceive that such an association as the present, is as a vast river to receive the tributary streams, however insignificant in themselves, of the surrounding district, and to waft the general influence of these to places which otherwise would be unaffected by them.

I presume, also, that it is of great importance that a record of the actual state of any monument, at a given time, and especially of churches, should exist in some central depository, and be accessible to persons who may have an interest in such objects. And although the general and more scientific papers will be the most interesting, yet the dry detailed account of individual churches may, after all, prove the most valuable. From no little experience and observation on such subjects, I have good reason to know that the account of a church, or, indeed, of any public monument, requiring restoration, is seldom read without good effect, and I might add that it very rarely happens that any general interest can be excited in the cause without some detailed account being brought, in this manner, before the public.

I have, therefore, as I said, persevered in my intention to bring forward the subject of this Paper, though I confess most sincerely that I am almost ashamed to bring it forward in so superficial a manner as I am now compelled to do, from want of time to devote myself to this special object, which, to handle properly, requires the investigation of

many books and documents to which I have been unable to gain access.

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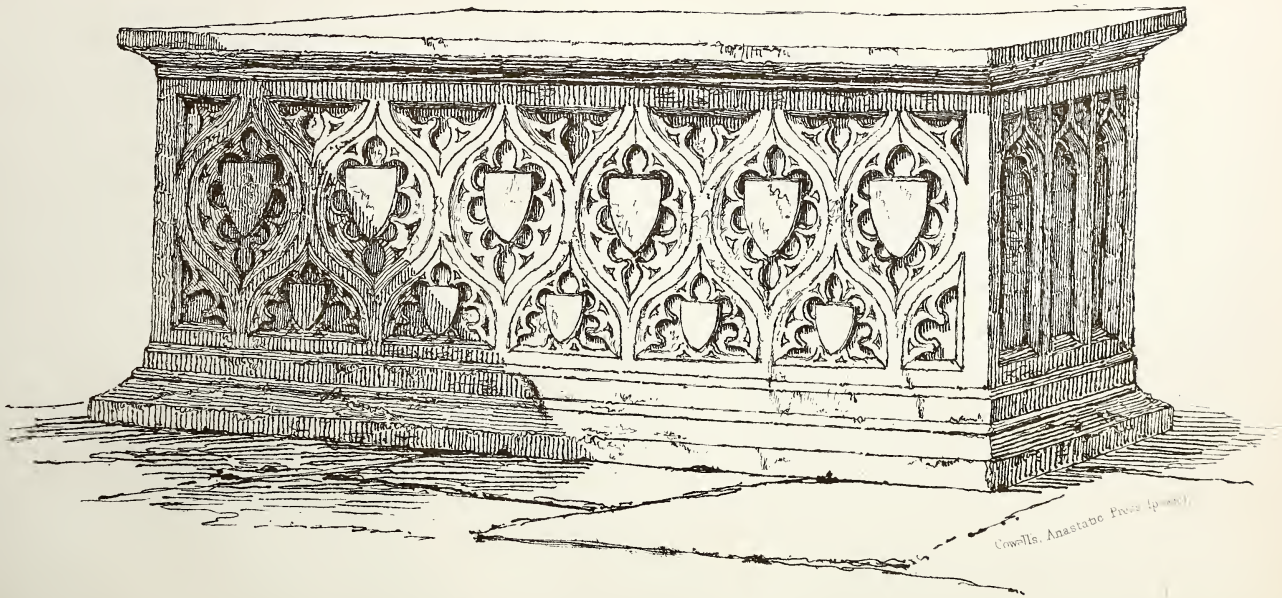
The village of Kingston is situated about three miles north of Taunton, on the south side of the Quantock Hills. The Church, which is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, stands on a slight eminence on the right, about 150 yards from the high road to Bridgwater. Its tower is an object of attraction to most passers by, and the Church appears to be generally characterized as a beautiful one, from the impression, no doubt, that it is in keeping and accordance with the tower. Leaving the tower for the present, I cannot say that any part of the Church (saving, perhaps, the porch and bench ends) presents an appearance worthy the appellation of beautiful, but it contains some curious and many interesting features, and if rescued from the effects of modern barbarity, and restored to its pristine condition, might perhaps vie with most parish churches in this district. It is dedicated, as I have said, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and contains a chancel 32 feet 2 inches long, by 17 feet 7 inches wide; a nave 40 feet 7 inches long, by 18 feet 4 inches wide; a chancel aisle, on the south side, running the whole length of the chancel; a north and south aisle to the nave, a porch on the south side, and a western tower.

Having no documents to refer to, I cannot profess to give dates, for the more one studies such subjects the more convinced one is that attempting to assign accurate dates from the style of the features in the buildings, without documents, is a very dangerous experiment. As to the point which has been so much mooted of late days, of architectural nomenclature, I shall content myself, on the present occasion, with using the old terms of Rickman, without meaning any disparagement to those which have been since invented.

The chancel, then, is clearly a Perpendicular erection. The east window is of that style of five lights, containing twelve small compartments in the tracery; on the north side are two windows of three lights each, and on the south one of the same character as the east one, and bearing that usual want of proportion to the chancel so commonly to be found in Perpendicular work, and which, in my humble opinion, renders every chancel containing it perfectly ugly. A barbarous oak panelled wainscoting runs round the whole walls above the altar steps, and prevents, at present, the discovery of any of the usual appurtenances of the altar, found in ancient Churches. The platform on which the altar stands, is raised two steps above the level of the chancel, and the chancel again one step above the floor of the nave.

The west end of the chancel, on the north side, is opened to the north aisle by a Perpendicular arch, and it is plain that the east end of the north aisle was used as a chapel. The whole pillar supporting the eastern side of this arch, and forming the respond, has been cut away, except the capital, which, with its corresponding cap, contains the ordinary Perpendicular embellishments of foliage and shields.

The South side opens by an arcade of three Perpendicular arches into the south aisle, which contains a small door, of the same style, in the north angle of the east wall, no doubt used by the chantry priest who performed the usual services in this chapel. There is in the south wall at the east end, a small aumbry, which clearly proves the former existence of an altar. There is some variation in the caps of these pillars, and also of the moulding of the pillars themselves. The two caps to the east are perfectly plain, but the next one consists of the body of a man bearing the capital on his shoulders (as far as my observa-



Tomb of the Warres of Westercombe.

tion has gone, rather an unusual feature in Perpendicular work, in the position it is placed.) The other caps contain the usual pateræ of this style. The two pillars supporting the easternmost arch vary, there being a kind of swell chamfer between the three quarter columns, whereas the lower pillars contain hollows between the columns; and on the west side of the first pillar there is a bracket with foliage, which was either placed there to receive offerings, or, it may be, held an image or a light, but from its construction I incline to the former opinion. It is remarkable also, that the caps are not all on the same level.\*

The grand feature of this aisle is a splendid tomb belonging to the family of the Warres, of Hestercombe. It is covered with a slab of Purbeck marble, 9 feet 6 inches long, by 4 feet 6 inches wide, moulded on the under edges. The sides of the tomb are composed of Ham-hill stone, divided into six compartments of shields, held between the cusps of flowing tracery. These shields have been emblazoned with the arms of the Warres, and their connections, the tinctures in some places being still visible. The height of the tomb is 3 feet 10 inches. From the style of this tomb I should be disposed to assign a date not later than the middle of the third Edward's reign; and if this be correct, then it is clear that is more ancient than the aisle in which it stands. Still the points of the cusps appear more Perpendicular than Decorated in style, and there may be just causes of doubt whether the tomb is as early as its general appearance leads one to suspect. The

\* Since the above was written, the yellow wash has been removed from these pillars and arches, and it is plain that the easternmost arch has been added since the lower ones, which accounts for the variation observable. A solid wall, no doubt reached as far as the second pillar, the western half of which formed the respond, and it was most probably opened to the chancel to give a view of the great altar from the chapel.

position of this tomb is somewhat remarkable, being neither in the centre of the aisle nor under an arch ; and it would appear that the aisle has been widened, which has thrown the tomb and the arch leading into the Tetton aisle, out of the centre.

There is a two-light Perpendicular window in this aisle, with a very Decorated cut about it, and placed in a position which appears something like a recess in the wall. The other window is the same as those on the north and south sides of the aisle,—large four-light windows, thoroughly debased, without any tracery or cusping whatever in the head.\*

In descending from the chancel to the nave, we miss that grand feature, a nave arch, without which it seems hardly possible to imagine a correctly formed Church. The defect, we know, was supplied by the Perpendicular builders, by the substitution of those splendid screens of this style, many of which still remain ; but this feature has, alas, been destroyed here, and a screen, probably of the date of George I., which did stand there, was removed some twenty years ago to the back of the gallery, where it now stands ! The nave is divided from the aisles by an arcade of four arches of Early English date, supported by three cylindrical pillars, eighteen inches in diameter, and two responds. On examining the two eastern responds, where the Early English and Perpendicular work join, it appears that

\* Since the above was written, the south aisle of the chancel, beyond all doubt originally a Chapel of the Warres, has been appropriated by faculty, with the consent of the rectors, to the occupiers of Hestercombe, for the use of themselves, their tenants, and dependants residing in the parish of Kingston. The hideous four-light window has been removed, and a two-light, after the pattern of the one existing, put in its place. Part of the wall has been rebuilt, and a new roof is in process of construction, the old one being thoroughly decayed and unsafe.

the Early English part was not the original termination of that part of the Church, as there is more than the half pillar, which leads to the supposition that the Early English nave extended farther east than it does at present, and, indeed, the whole arrangement of this part of the Church is more incomplete than Early English builders were wont to leave their work. The caps of these pillars vary in design, but contain nothing but plain mouldings. The bases contain a fine specimen of the "water mould." The material of these pillars and bases appears to be a very hard sand stone, of a greenish and reddish tint, but the taste of former days has covered them with a coating of paint, to imitate green and white marble, while those in the chancel, composed of Ham-hill stone, are covered with yellow ochre, as are all the windows. The whole of the walls are plastered and white-washed, and the whole masonry of the exterior is bedaubed with a coat of rough cast, which destroys the whole effect of the building, and of course, prevents the discovery of the date of the walls. The two westernmost bays of the south aisle are appropriated to, and kept in repair by, the owner of the Tetton property, and are commonly called the Tetton aisle, and are divided from the aisle by a Perpendicular arch running across it from north to south, the arch which was before mentioned as being thrown out of centre by the supposed widening of this aisle.

At the south side of the westernmost bay but one, is situated the porch, which is partly internal, and contains a beautiful specimen of fan tracery vaulting, springing from engaged columns in the four corners of the porch. The column in the north eastern angle is cut away and corbelled off, no doubt to admit of a stoop, which may still be concealed under the plaister. The internal doorway of this



porch has a depressed four centred arch, and over it is a niche, with a sort of coronet canopy, which, no doubt, contained the figure of the Saint of the dedication.

At the west end of the nave is a lofty gallery, arranged, as well as may be, to represent a scene at the back of the stage of a theatre, and this blocks up one of the boldest features in the Church, the tower arch, which opens into the tower, and, if open, would give a view of a fine Perpendicular western window. The mouldings of the arch are very bold, and, as near as can be ascertained, continuous.

The ground floor of the tower is covered with staircase to the gallery, clock case, and closet for rubbish of all descriptions, and gives the usual evidence of the *moral evil* of blocking off any part of the Church, to say nothing of the destruction of all proportion. The north aisle is filled with hideous high pews in which, at least one third of the accommodation which might be obtained for worshippers is lost, and we have some valuable specimens of these enormities in the Church, in the south aisle, as well as at the west-end of the nave.\* The roofs also sadly disfigure the Church, being all of them plastered and white-washed. Though the nave and south aisle show the longitudinal and transverse ribs of the timber roof, but these are covered with blue paint. The roofs themselves appear to be of the cradle kind, so common in these parts. In the nave roof are four dormer windows of modern date, which are not only a sad desight, but are a great evil in

\* A faculty has been obtained, since this account was drawn up, in accordance with the resolution of vestry, for the removal of all these pews, and the funds are alone wanting for carrying it into effect. Any contributions towards this good work, forwarded to the vicar, will be very thankfully received. The pews in the chancel have been removed since the appropriation of the south chancel aisle to the Hestercombe property.

construction from their weakening the roof, and exposing part of it unnecessarily to the weather.

There remains yet one feature to be noticed in the interior, though it would take a very long time to describe it, in the bench-ends and fronts of the stall work. The carving of these, is for the most part deep, and very elaborate, and some of the designs very chaste and beautiful. These have also suffered, though from good intention, by being varnished; whereby the whole artistic effect of the carving, in the play of light and shade is destroyed. If any one has any doubts about this fact, they may be convinced within an hour, by taking a survey of those in Kingston Church, and then going on to the adjoining Church at Broomfield, where the beautiful ends remain in their primitive integrity. There is one astounding difficulty, however, to be accounted for by surveying Kingston alone, and that is how the taste of any age could have so degenerated as to have induced or allowed persons to destroy a whole aisle of these costly relics, to put up those evidences of pride exclusiveness and bad taste yeleft pews.

The Font of good Perpendicular design, stands at the west side of the last pillar in the north aisle, but it has been treated with no greater respect than the pillars.

I fear I have exhausted the patience of my hearers before coming to that feature which most persons would examine first, perhaps to the exclusion of all others. I must yet detain you one minute longer, to mention the only piece of masonry which has not suffered from the barbarism and mendacity of rough cast, the south porch. The front of this contains some fine sculpture in niches, alas empty, and in the pierced parapet of quatrefoils, and there are also some bold corbel figures at the angles of the cornice, after the manner of Gurgoyles.

To come at last, then, to the tower, I believe I must content myself on the present occasion with giving a general opinion, that it is one of the most correct and classical of its date in this neighbourhood, though I confess myself quite unequal to the task of drawing a comparison between it and other towers of this style. I believe, also, that detailed accounts of these towers, written by a much abler hand, have been read before this Society, and no doubt that of such a tower as Kingston has been included amongst them.

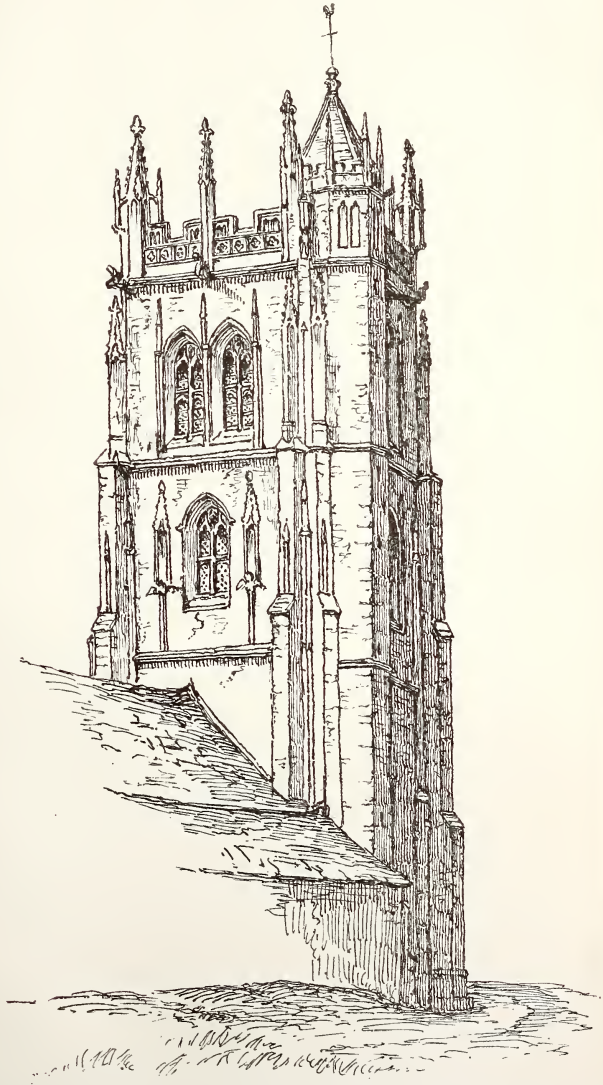
There is, as I imagine, rather a peculiar feature in its construction, inasmuch as its breadth from north to south exceeds its length from east to west. This plan was probably adopted to suit the width of the Early English nave.

It consists of three stages, the angles being supported by bold square buttresses, surmounted with pinnacles, which disengage themselves at the bottom of the blocking course of the gorgeous parapet which crowns the whole.

In the second stage there is one window on each face, with niches, supported by angel brackets on either side of them, except on the north side, where the window is plain, the space being occupied by the staircase turret which stands at the north east angle, and is terminated in a conical cap.

The third stage contains the bell chamber, where are six bells of good tone, one of them being a black letter bell. There are two windows on the east, south, and west sides of this stage and but one on the north, for the reason before assigned.

The parapet is turreted and battlemented and has a pinnacle at each angle, from which are bracketed out four flying pinnacles from the level of the cap moulding, and not from the base of the parapet, as is usually the case.



COWELL'S ANASTATIC PRESS, IPSWICH.

Tower of the Church of St. Mary, Ringston.

The whole arrangement gives that net work appearance to the parapet, which, I believe, may fairly be characterized as the "Gloucester battlement," the tower of Gloucester Cathedral forming, as I imagine, the type of all the Somersetshire towers of this character, and intended, doubtless, by their pious builders, to lead our minds upwards from these material and perishable structures to that Temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

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