

The Ancient Chapels in the Valley of Holnicote.

BY THE REV. F. HANCOCK.

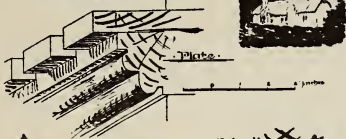
THE Holnicote Valley, which comprises part of the parishes of Selworthy, Porlock, and Luccombe, is bounded on the north by the sea, on the west by the Dunkery Range, on the south by the Grabhurst Hills, and on the east by the North Hill. The valley is about three miles long, and averages about a mile in breadth, and evidently formed at one time an arm of the sea. The rich soil and its sheltered position seem to have made it always fairly populous. At present it contains the following hamlets:—Bossington, West Lynch, Allerford, Brandy Street, Holnicote, East and West Luccombe, Selworthy proper, and Tivington. The manor and advowsons of the two adjacent parishes of Luccombe and Selworthy were held by the St. John family in the thirteenth century, from whom they passed through an heiress to the family of Arundel, from whom they have descended to the present owner, Sir T. D. Acland. The principal landowners in the parish of Selworthy seem, however, to have been from time immemorial to the death of the last direct representative of the family in 1701, the Steynings, of Holnicote. Holnicote was purchased from Mr. Steyning's nephew, W. Martin, of Oxton, in South Devon, by Richard Blackford, of Dunster. This family held it for two generations, and then on the death of its infant heiress it reverted to her aunt, Elizabeth Dyke, of

Pixton, who brought it as her dower to the Sir Thomas Acland of the day.

Within this valley there still remain many quaint old cottages and farmhouses, still unimproved off the face of the earth ; and besides the churches of St. Mary's, Luccombe and All Saints', Selworthy, three tiny chapels. On the south side of the parish, in the centre of the hamlet of Tivington, we find a little chapel, the west door of which, by the way, commands a very beautiful view down over the Holnicote valley and across the channel to Wales, dedicated to *St. Leonard*. The careful plans which Mr. C. H. Samson has most kindly prepared of this and the other chapels give us in full the proportions of this chapel and the two sister buildings.

The chapel had a thatched roof, supported on moulded oak beams rising from behind a pretty oak wall plate, which with the beams, is shown on Mr. Samson's plans. The roof was formerly open, but of recent years boarding has been affixed between the beams. A small window and a door have been blocked up on the south side, and a cottage stands against the east side of the building. During some recent alterations to this cottage the remains of a large square-headed window were found in the east wall of the chapel. I have been unable to discover the builder of the chapel, but it was evidently erected for the convenience of the inhabitants of the hamlet of Tivington, which is situated nearly two miles from the parish church. A very old lane, scarcely more now than a watercourse, leads in a very circuitous fashion from the chapel to the site of the at one time important manor house of Blackford, which was burnt down within the last few years. The ancient pigeon house, very like the well-known one at Dunster, still remains. The history of this manor is not very clear. In 1483 it appears to have been granted to Sir Thomas Everingham, one of the knights of the royal body of the castle and borough of Barnstaple, and his heirs, as part of the estates of Thomas St. Leger, for his services against the

Chapel of St Leonards
Civington Selcorthy



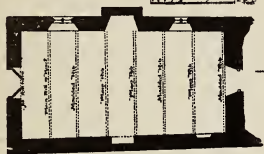
Section



Window



Roofed Rib



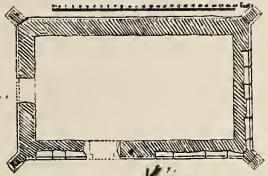
Plan

A window in ancient building
at East Lynch Farm Selcorthy



Chapel of St Saviours
Tacombe

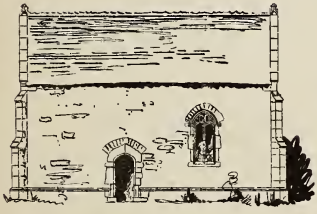
Plan of Remains



Plinth

amson Del

Lynch Chapel
Selcorthy



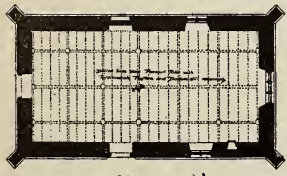
South Elevation



East Elevation



West Elevation



Plan



Section A B



Elevation

Plan

Piscina w. S. Wall



Label Mould

Arch. Mould

Profile of Buttress

Window

amson Del

rebels. Clearly, however, a little later on it was the property of the Steyning family. This family were great friends to the church, They rebuilt the beautiful south aisle of the church in 1490, and it is possible that they may have built the chapel of St. Leonard (supposing it to be of so late a date) or rebuilt it, for the use of their tenants at Blackford and Tivington.

Crossing the head of the valley, we enter the picturesque village of Luccombe; and passing the pretty Rectory, and leaving the church of St. Mary with its fine tower on the left, we ascend a steep hill to a four-cross-way. The road to the north leads to West Luccombe and Porlock; the one on the east to Holnicote; and the highway on the west climbs the side of the moor, clothed at this point with fir woods, towards Cloutsham and Dunkery. And we must observe that, besides these four roads, a very ancient track leads off, through the woods and along the moor side, to the hamlet and church of Stoke Pero. Of this further on. At this point, immediately opposite this ancient way, we find the scanty remains of another chapel, about two miles from that of St. Leonard. When the Archæological Society met at Minehead a few years ago, Mr. Weaver, in an article written shortly afterwards, spoke of the few mounds by the roadside, which alone marked the site of this chapel. The owner, subsequently, kindly gave me permission to excavate the ground plan of the chapel, of which Mr. Samson has kindly made the careful drawing and taken the two beautiful photographs, which lie on the table. At a depth of about two feet below the surface, and beneath the roots of a dead tree, I found some old knives, and a curious silver instrument of which I have been unable to ascertain the use. The chapel had for generations, until recently, been used as a stone quarry, but a few pieces of window jambs were found in the ruins, and the footing of the walls still remains; and a rise in the ground at about two feet from the east end indicates probably the site of the altar. There were apparently three doorways to the

chapel. This chapel is dedicated to St. Saviour, an apt dedication, as the mother church of the parish is dedicated to St. Mary. Through the kindness of Mr. Elworthy, I am able to quote the following extract from the Drokensford Register. August 13, 1316:—"Geoffrey de Lucombe to have Chantry in Chapel 'intra curiam suam' de Lucombe, served at his own cost 'salvo jure matris eccl.'" This can refer to no other place than the chapel of St. Saviour, and gives us the date of its foundation *i.e.* in 1315. The Lucombe family held the manor of Lucombe before it passed to the St. Johns. I cannot but think that "Geoffrey" must be a mistake for "William," who, after John Roges was compelled to resign the benefice of Lucombe, in 1312, was presented to that benefice by John de Lucombe, presumably his father or brother, resigning the richer benefice of Nettlecombe to return to his native village. But he was somewhat of a rolling stone, for we find him in 1324 exchanging benefices with the rector of Over Stowey. It is difficult to see with what object Geoffrey or William de Lucombe could have built this chapel. There is no evidence of there ever having been any population in its immediate neighbourhood; and the lie of the ground seems to forbid the supposition. The chapel, however, commands the first view, coming from Lucombe, of the sea, and lies at the foot of the moor. Is it possible that De Lucombe built the chapel and had masses said there at his own cost, to commemorate his escape from shipwreck or some great peril on the wild hills above? The chapel seems to have been held in considerable repute, and to have attracted the devout offerings of the faithful, *e.g.* Thomas Coppe of Selworthy by his will, dated 20 November, 1533, leaves a "shepe to S. Savyour, as well as to the store of our Lady in Lucombe." But in 1548, no chantry is returned as existing in the parish of Lucombe. Probably by that time, the churchwardens or others interested in the building, had prepared for

the coming storm by selling the sacred vessels and furniture, perhaps even the material of the chapel itself.

It is worthy of note that the chapel of St. Leonards, at Tivington, is situated immediately at the point where a very ancient track from Dunster descends from Grabhurst hill to the main road ; and that the chapel of St. Saviour at Luccombe is situated, as I have stated above, where the ancient present way ascends towards Stoke Pero. I cannot but think that these facts point to these two chapels having been served by a priest from some clergy house or from the priory at Dunster, who, Sunday by Sunday, sung mass at these two chapels, and then passed on to the tiny moorland church of Stoke Pero.

Descending the hill to the picturesque banks of the Horner, we pass through the hamlet of East Luccombe, and following a footpath which crosses the main road from Minehead to Porlock at New Bridge, we reach, in about two miles the hamlet of West Lynch, which is separated by the Horner stream from the larger hamlet of Bossington. Bossington belongs ecclesiastically to Porlock, but for lay purposes has been added to Selworthy. Here, in a romantic situation beside the Aller stream which just below joins the Horner, and close to a very ancient house, stands a pretty chapel of the late Perpendicular period. Mr. Samson has prepared such accurate drawings and such good photographs of it that little need be said by me about it. Until within the last few years it was used as an outhouse, but has now been put in order for Divine service by Sir T. Acland. There are nice carved bosses on the roof, and a tradition exists that the beams of the roof were supported as in the south aisle of the parish church by angel brackets, but that these, as emblems of popery, were removed about fifty years ago. The chapel Mr. Samson considers to be of the same date as the south aisle of the church. I have taken considerable trouble to discover its history, but have been unable to find much of interest concerning it. The Manor of

Bossington until the Reformation belonged to the abbots of Athelney; and it seems possible that one of the last abbots may have built or re-built this chapel for the convenience of his tenants, and that the old house with its carved oak windows and heavy doors and bars adjoining, which appears to be of about the same date as the chapel, and which by tradition is called the priests' house, may have been a grange of these abbots. At all events it seems more than probable that this chapel and the south aisle of the parish church were built by the same architect. The doors on the north, south, and west are remarkable in so small a building. Possibly they may have been so placed for processions. On each side of the altar is a stone bracket on which, no doubt, at one time stood an image.

The altar table, at present standing in the chapel, was removed from the parish church some years ago, and put into the chapel after its restoration.