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Bledington Church

by J. E. K. Cutts
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BLADINGTON CHURCH.

By J. EDWARD K. CUTTS.

THE Antiquary, more especially, perhaps, the lover of mediæval lore, has pleasures undreamt of by the majority of prosaic, matter-of-fact people, for so much of ancient times remains as will enable him to people the old towns, villages, mansions, and churches, with the characters and scenes of the past.

As we walk through the quiet, unpretending country villages, where (especially in the stone-built homes of the Cotswolds), there is so much left untouched that breathes of the past, with what interest we mentally call to mind that we are walking through the identical streets that one unceasing stream of wayfarers, for perhaps nine centuries, has passed through, that we are looking at the same houses that our forefathers have looked upon, and feel we are observed, as we pass, by descendants of the same people, bearing, perhaps, the same names even, of those that have looked curiously, through the same windows, at the travellers of former days. We note, here humble though comfortable and substantial cottages, there a house or two more detached and speaking of greater wealth, perhaps the property and heritage of once comfortable and substantial yeoman families, and, standing apart from the village, is the old manor house that had, may be, a knightly owner; peeping over the trees we see the church tower, or spire, and we, naturally, soon find our way thither, for there, whatever fortunes may have happened to the rest of the village, we are almost sure to find abiding tokens of the wealth and piety, the phases of religion and changing scenes of the old village life. We walk round the church and into it, read the monuments, and scan the building, inside and out, for evidences of its history.



BLADINGTON CHURCH.

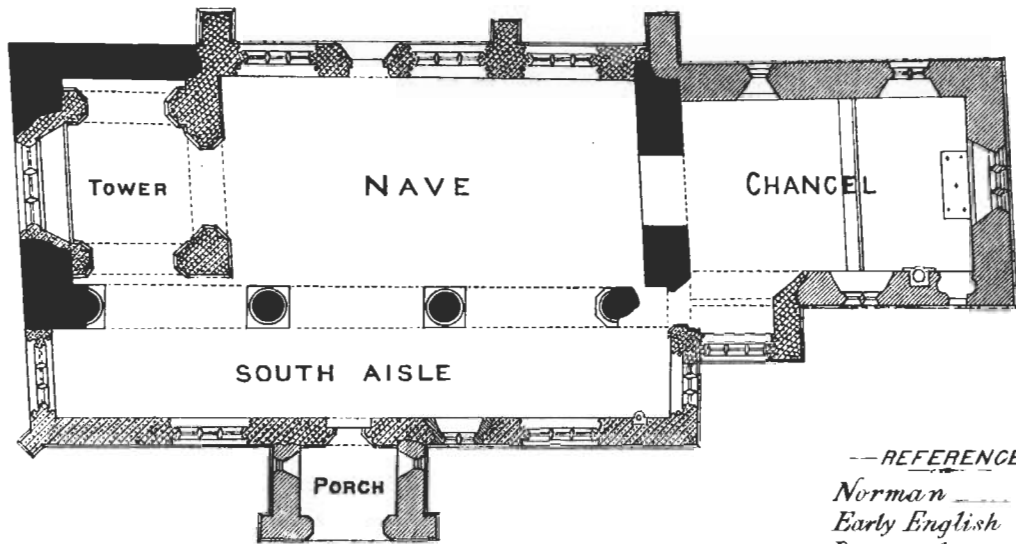
The village of Bledington is one that has thus excited such pleasurable thoughts. In some parts it is dark, almost gloomy, with orchards, in others it is busy with cottages and houses interspersed. There is one quaint little footway, or lane, that leads us diagonally across the village, fenced from the orchards and gardens that it winds between, by stone flags set on edge, and brings us to the object of our present paper—The Church.

St. Leonard's Church, for thus it is dedicated, now consists of chancel, nave, south aisle, porch, western tower, and on the south side of the chancel, is a feature that was erected, no doubt, partly as a hagioscope between the chancel and south aisle, and partly as a chantry chapel. The church was founded in the twelfth century, and comprised nave, chancel, south aisle, probably a porch and a bellcote. Of this church remain the east and west walls of the nave, and possibly the chancel walls, as well as the bases and pillars of the nave arcade, the font, and the chancel gable-cross; but though these walls remain, the features in them have mostly disappeared. The Norman bellcote is still *in situ*, for, to quote the words of another writer on the church, "the good benefactors of former days seem to have had some special regard for this member of the sacred fabric. The later Perpendicular parapet and cornice stop suddenly and reverently short as they approach it—perhaps there was some tradition connected with it, or with the bell that had swung there for generations, calling all within its vibrations to adoration at the mention of the Thrice Holy Name." There remains also the jambs of the chancel arch, which are quite square and plain, with a chamfered abacus, the arch to this is pointed, and is in two chamfered orders, and was probably inserted when the arcade was re-modelled in the thirteenth century. The north-west quoin of the church is early in character, being formed of double stones, one of which is marked with a cross of the type, generally denominated consecration crosses. In the thirteenth century the church was much altered by the insertion of windows, &c. The east window, of three separate lights externally, but contained internally under one moulded arch, resting on moulded caps and angle shafts, one of the north windows of the chancel,

and the piscina being Early-English; the nave arcade was re-modelled, the bases and pillars of the older church being retained, and fitted with new caps working from the circular pillars into mouldings of an irregular octagonal form, the cardinal sides of which are 9 inches smaller than the other four, giving the caps a very bold and effective appearance: no two caps are moulded alike; the arches are pointed and of two plainly chamfered orders finished with a chamfered label. The porch is also Early-English, and has a little lancet window on each side. The next alteration of which we have remains, was the insertion of the three-light Decorated window with reticulated tracery in the west wall of the nave; and, I believe, the two-light windows on the south side of the chancel and aisle are of the latter part of the fourteenth century. Up to this period, the church no doubt remained the same in general outline and features,—it had no tower or clerestory, and still retained its high pitched roofs,—but it is evident, from the extent and beauty of the features which remain to be described, and from the inscriptions and effigies in the painted glass of the windows, that there resided here, at about this time, some wealthy, munificent and pious people (probably wool staplers), and to their zeal the church is indebted for further alterations, and its present interesting aspect. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the tower was built, and evidences remain to show clearly that it was done in the following manner: The tower stands on three arches within the old Norman nave, the west wall of the tower resting on the west end wall of the old nave, and a hole was cut through the high pitched roof, to allow the tower to emerge as it was built, leaving a portion of the original roof and west gable as a lean-to, on the north and south sides of the tower; the rest of the nave roof remained unaltered in pitch, as is evidenced by the weathering on the tower. The access to the latter is by means of a ladder across the west end of the aisle, which goes up to a doorway (under the aisle roof), opening into a staircase in the upper part of the tower. The two-light window on the north side of the chancel is probably of the same date. Some years later in the century, the church assumed the magnificent aspect of which we now see the remains,

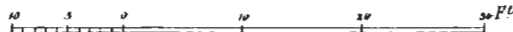
for now were added the clerestory of four three-light windows on each side of the nave ; the processional door, and the lower range, of four three-light, square-headed tracery windows, on the north side of the nave, with the brackets and canopies in the broad hollow moulding of the jambs ; the lead-covered flat roof, over the nave, with its principals resting on wall-pieces, moulded into shafts with caps and bases, supporting tracery spandrels, all carried on stone corbels ; the intermediate principals of the roof are supported on corbels with shields, and there are little anomalies in the arrangement of these, which seem to show that portions of an older roof were worked in, the whole showing traces of colour. The aisle roof is of this date, and possibly the aisle walls were re-built about the same time, for they are thinner than those of the rest of the church, as are the walls of the chapel ; all the features in the aisle and chapel are of this date, except the two-light windows already mentioned. The part that is here designated a chapel, deserves some special mention, for it is not only an unusual feature, but a very pretty one. A reference to the plan (*Pl. XIV.*) will show its formation, and the engraving *Pl. XIII.*) shows its outward appearance. The recess is covered by a flat stone ceiling, this is divided into two parts by an arch springing from over the centre of the arch into the aisle, and from the corner, formed by the splay on the east side of the recess, the arch is double-cusped and four-centred, and is supported on angel corbels ; the main cusps terminate in good foliage carving, and the spandrels are filled in with open tracery. The ceiling on the chancel side of this arch is flat and plain, but within the arch, it is enriched with six arched and cusped panels, placed head to head. It can well be imagined that the whole, with its painted glass in the window, (described later on), forms a most pleasing and picturesque feature. We must not forget to mention that the arch and some of the steps to the rood-loft still remain, and on the north side of the chancel arch are remains of a shallow niche, which has been flanked by buttresses, pinnacles, and arched with a cusped and crocketed head, and we must finish this description with the mention of the stained glass and the seats.

Plan of S^T LEONARDS CHURCH, BLEDINGTON.



— REFERENCE —

- Norman* ————
- Early English* ————
- Decorated* ————
- Perpendicular* ————



Of later date are some of the bells; the hour-glass stands by the pulpit, the communion rail, with Jacobean ballusters, (the rail and sill being formed out of some older moulded oak-work, possibly portions of the old screen; and the sundial on the south-west corner of the aisle parapet. There are also, in the parish chest, an old book-cover with chain, an old copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs, and a black letter printed circular-letter of the date 1668, requiring a collection to be made for re-building the London churches after the great fire of 1666. Among minor matters we must not omit to mention the piscina on the south side of the aisle; the remains of an old hinge stamped all over with Lombardic "A"s, and a corbel in the east wall of the chancel, on each side of the east window.

We have, as yet, only just mentioned one of the church's chief remaining beauties—the painted glass—this, with the sculpture in the jambs, must have made the church glorious, and the remains that exist make one feel unhappy that so much should have either been removed or allowed to drop to pieces during this century. The clerestory windows were filled with kneeling effigies, with inscriptions, and over them, scripture or legendary subjects; of these, several effigies remain, and the subjects of our Lord and S. Mary Magdalene, and S. George and the Dragon, (S. George being an interesting example of the armour of the period). In one of the lower windows on the north side, is a large portion of a crowned female saint, in blue mantle, under which, she wears a sleeveless robe trimmed with fur, and holds a rosary in one hand and a sceptre in the other. In another light, is the upper half of a S. Christopher, and in yet another light are the upper parts of some building showing finials and lead covered roofs. In the tracery lights are many pieces of glass of interest, amongst which is one piece bearing a slip of a tree, with a scroll inscribed with the words, "In Gadis Hal." The chantry window has the figures of S. Bartholomew, S. Matthew, S. James, S. Andrew, S. Matthias, and S. John, in the tracery, and in one of the lower lights is a remnant of the coronation of the Virgin.

In conclusion, we will note here some inscriptions recorded in a MS. in the Bodleian library (Wood, C. 10, A^o 1676); these were

under the portraits in the windows, but have now mostly disappeared. In the four upper windows were these inscriptions :—

In No. 1. “Orate p. aīa Thome Eyre et p. aīabus Thome Andrews senioris et Agnetis ux². sue MCCCC.LXX. ;” this is under their proportions (kneeling effigies). “Orate p. bono statu Henrici Byschop et Margareta uxoris sue ;” this is under their proportions.

No. 2. “Orate p. bono statu Thome Smyth et Agnetis ux². sue ;” this is under their proportions in the first light. “Et Domini — Malyn Vicarii de Bladdington ;” this is under his proportion in the second light.

No. 3. “Orate p. aīabus Thome . . . et Agnet ux². sue ;” this under their proportions.

No. 4. “Orate p. aīabus Wiff Water et Agnet ux². sue . . . et hæc Fenestra ;” this under their proportions.

In the four lower windows :—

1. In the upper, next the pulpit : “Orate p. Nicholao Hobbes et Agnet ux². sue quorum aīabus.” This is under their proportions.

2. “Orate p. Nicholao Hobbes et Ag’.” This is under the proportion of a man between two wives.

3. Nothing.

4. Nothing but Scripture History.

Anyone having the time and opportunity would no doubt find much interesting information as to bequests and the date of these windows, &c., in the wills of these people, and it is much to be hoped that they may be hunted up and put on record in the Transactions of the Society.

PLAN OF ODDINGTON CHURCH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

PLATE XV

