

THE CHAPEL OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST, NEEDHAM MARKET.

THE history of this chapel is not difficult to discover with the help of the Suffolk Collections made by the late Mr. Davy, who visited the place on 23rd October, 1826, and whose notes I have consulted.

Needham, in the Archdeaconry of Suffolk and in the Deanery of Bosmere, is a hamlet in Barking, to the church of which parish this building was a chapel of ease. It is dedicated to the glory of Almighty God in honour of S. John the Baptist, and is now a perpetual curacy.

There are no register-books belonging to the chapel. Needham Market marriages are solemnized at Barking, where also those dying in the hamlet are buried; but baptisms take place in the chapel, and are afterwards registered in the Register-book of Barking.

The hamlet must in early times have been a place of constant resort, for it stands on the great road between Ipswich and Bury; and is distant but one mile and an half from Beacon Hill and Bridge Place, in the adjoining parish of Coddendam, where the ancient Roman road branches off in a nearly straight line for Norwich. Accordingly, we find that as far back as the 13th century Needham was celebrated for the market that was then held there.

Chancellor Tanner's volume in the Norwich Diocesan Registry contains the following extract relating to the market:—

Hugo Epus. Eliens. hab. mercatum apud Nedham in par. de Berking die Lunæ ubi Burgenses de Gippô quieti de Theolmio. . . .

Fin. Suff. 29. Hen. iij. n. 123.

—From this statement we learn that Hugh, Bishop of Ely, who was either Hugh *Northwold* (A.D. 1229), or Hugh *Balsam* (A.D. 1257), held a market in the parish of Barking,

on the *Monday*, to which market the burgesses of Ipswich used to resort. Ipswich is distant about 9 miles.

It is a wide leap from the reign of Henry III. to that of George III., in whose reign occurs the next notice I have found of this market. In an advertisement, dated 5th Dec., 1776, it is stated that the market on the Wednesday at Needham, which, on account of the distemper, had for some time been discontinued, would again be held on the Wednesday following, and that merchants and others had promised on that day to attend. I believe there has been no weekly market at Needham for several years past.

The yearly fair is still held on the Feast of S. Simon and S. Jude (28th Oct.), and on the morrow after that festival.

Needham is said to have once been famous for its woollen manufacture. But I have not succeeded in finding particulars relating to its reputed staple.

The object here of chief interest is the Chapel of S. John the Baptist, of which a ground plan is given in Plate I. In the interior it measures 92 ft. 6 in. from east to west, and 29 ft. 10 in. from north to south. It is entered by a door in the west end, and also through a south porch. The east window has five lights; the rest of the windows have three lights each.

The building is commonly spoken of as "the church," but incorrectly as it seems; for I am not aware of any instrument which has constituted the hamlet of Needham an independent parish, with the chapel for its parish church. It may be well to point out that the word "chapel" describes a place of worship (other than the parish church) solemnly set apart for divine service by an act of episcopal consecration. It is a proper and distinctive term in the Church of England, having for centuries been used to designate chapels belonging to religious houses, college chapels at the universities, to say nothing of the Chapel Royal; all of which buildings have been consecrated by the bishop. Accordingly, the best informed of those who have separated from the "State Church" have consistently enough avoided a title that savours of what they consider super-

CORRIGENDA

In the Memoirs on Needham Market Chapel.

PAGE

245 Line 5 from bottom, for *quieti de Theolmio* read *quieti de Theolonio* ;
i.e., free from toll.

246 Last line, after “consider” insert “the.”

249 Chapel Inscription :—*Hē* = hem or them ; her = their.

250 Inscription on North buttress :—For “God’s people” we should
probably read “God souls,” *i.e.*, “good souls.”

stitution of consecration; and have called their places of religious assembly, meeting or preaching-houses.

It will be seen from the ground plan that the chapel has no distinctly-marked nave or aisles: the west end of the interior being screened from the west wall by a gallery, and boarding carried up to the roof, where is a small but most unsightly bell-cot.

The style of architecture shows the chapel to belong to the fifteenth century. It is no doubt an excellent specimen of the Perpendicular Period. On the south side of the chapel, near the east end, is a very interesting priest's doorway (Plate III., fig. 3), having an E.E. dripstone, worked in from some older building. The door is a fine specimen of carving, and measures about 6 ft. 9 in. by 2 ft. On its upper part may be seen (and both beneath three crosses) two shields of arms, which help us to discover the history of the fabric. Davy states that two similar shields were formerly to be seen on the south porch.

The blazon of one shield is as follows:—"Gules, three ducal crowns or, one and two, instead of two and one." This is the shield of arms of the see of Ely. Now the manor of Barking, with the advowson of the rectory, belonged to the conventual church of Ely from the time of King Edward the Confessor until the year 1561. In that year, being the fourth of Queen Elizabeth's reign, in the episcopate of Dr. Richard Cox, of King's College, Cambridge, the see of Ely was by Act of Parliament robbed of this, together with other goodly manors, and received in exchange only the paltry pension of £135 7s. 3d. Queen Elizabeth transmitted the property to her successor, King James I., who, having the keenest relish for ready money, sold it to Sir Francis Needham. Thus, until the fourth year of Queen Elizabeth, all this property belonged to the see of Ely. The building of the chapel must, therefore, from the circumstances of the case, be attributed to one of the bishops of that see.

The other shield bears this blazon:—"Gules, a lion rampant in a bordure engrailed, arg." This coat enables

us to connect the chapel with a particular occupant of the see of Ely; for, as we learn from Dr. Henry Wharton's *Anglia Sacra*, these arms were borne by Dr. William Grey, the twenty-sixth bishop of Ely. Dr. Grey had been a Procurator or Proctor of the King of England at the court of Rome, and received from King Henry VI. the temporalities of this bishopric on the 6th day of September, in the thirty-third year of his reign; was installed on the Feast of S. Cuthbert, 20th March, A.D. 1458; and on Tuesday (in die Martis), the 4th day of August, 1478, about five o'clock after noon, as the accurate chronicler informs us, departed this life in his manor house at Downham; and on the fourth day following was carried after noon and buried in a carefully specified spot in his cathedral church; having sat as bishop twenty-four years, eleven weeks, and two days. During these twenty-four years of his episcopate he must have built this handsome chapel; and, indeed, it seems to have been one of the earliest of his works of piety; for Chancellor Tanner has an extract in his book, referring to the chapel as early as the year 1463:—"Ecclesia Sti' Jois de Nedeham market, 1463."* Thus the main walls were then built, and built so well that the chapel has served as the place of public worship, from that time to the present, for the people of Needham, who must always have blessed good Bishop Gray as one who had truly loved their hamlet, and, like the centurion of old, had built them a synagogue. The bishop also appropriately adorned the fabric with three splendid crosses, two of iron and one of stone.

It is not at all surprising to find that, as anciently (2 Cor. ix., 2), the good bishop's zeal provoked local efforts amongst the pious people of the place. This was especially the case as regards a certain lady, a dame whose good works will ever be had in remembrance, but whose name is written only in the Book of Life; for in the records of earth she is, and will probably always remain, anonymous. This unknown lady, a resident perhaps at Barking Hall, joined

* Brosyard, 313.

heart and soul in the work of the bishop ; seconding all his noble efforts to provide religious ministrations for her poorer neighbours. Probably she bore a coat of arms—certainly she had a name ; yet, neither the one or the other would she consent to have placed on the fabric, the erection of which she had done so much to promote. All she would allow to be inscribed thereon was the initial of her christian name—the letter A.—D. A. (or Dame A.), which, together with the letters T. R., perhaps the initials of another benefactor, were formerly to be seen over the south porch ; the initials D. A., by themselves, appearing still on the top of the buttress, at the north-east corner of the chapel, just above the small and handsome niche, as shown in Plate II., figs. 3, 4, and 5 (enlarged in Plate III., fig. 6). Although the lady thus desired to remain anonymous, she permitted the following inscription, beneath a small bust of herself in stone, to be placed on the chapel, where it may still be seen high up over a small tablet in the wall on the south side:—

“ Pray we alle for grace
 For hē y^t [i.e., her that] hath holpe y^s [i.e., this] plase
 God reward hē for her ded
 And heaven may be her mede.”—(Plate III., fig. 2.)

This good gentlewoman may very possibly have also been the *unknown benefactress* referred to in the following inscription, which appears over the door of the alms-house in the street:—

“ This Alms-house for eight poor widows or widowers belonging to this place, was originally built and endowed by some benevolent individual *whose name is now unknown* ; further endowed by the late Samuel Alexander, Esq^r ; repaired and in part rebuilt by public subscription, A.D. 1836.”

And in connection with these works of practical benevolence may be mentioned the local tradition to the effect that for the excellent path between Barking and Needham, the hamlet is indebted to the generosity of two *unknown* ladies, who had the causeway made along the Causeway Grove.

The six buttresses on the south side of the chapel are inscribed with the following prayer, reading it from west to east:—

1. Christ
2. I H S
3. haue
4. merci
5. on
6. us.—(*Plate III., fig. 1.*)

—Some of the buttresses have niches with ogee heads, crockets, and finials; the pedestals, on which formerly stood figures, are supported by angels bearing scrolls.

In one of the north buttresses is inserted a stone, ten inches square, inscribed with another prayer:—

I H S . haue
 merci . on . al
 l . God's . . .
 [people]

—(*Plate III., fig. 5.*)

THE PIERCED BUTTRESS.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature about this chapel is the buttress at the north-east corner.

The ground plan, given on Plate I., will enable the reader to form a correct idea of its position with regard to the rest of the fabric; and the accompanying scale drawings (Plate II.) of the buttress by itself, and with respect to the low side window, will, it is hoped, assist the architectural student to perceive the exact nature of the structure.

In the first place, it is necessary to distinguish this pierced buttress from a flying buttress. Flying buttresses are commonly found spanning the roof of an aisle, and supporting the clerestory wall above it. A flying buttress is also occasionally found in front of a priest's door, and supporting the wall above it, as in the chancel of Eye church. But it will be seen from the illustrations that this is a buttress of an entirely different sort. It does, indeed,

support the wall ; but it covers no doorway, and is evidently intended for some reason to be passed through. The passage through it (Plate II., fig. 2) appears to have been used ; but it is not easy to determine for what purpose. The soffit of the arch is splayed from its crown. From the crown of the arch to the base is 6 ft., and from the base to the ground is about 2 ft. 6 in. Fig. 3 is an elevation of it from the north, A. ; fig. 4, north-east, B. ; fig. 5, east, C.

Now, for what purpose could this curious passage have been intended ? That the designer had some other object than mere ornamentation in constructing it will, I believe, be generally allowed by any person who visits the chapel.

(1.) First of all, it has been supposed to have some connection with the adjoining low side window, which, on this account, has been introduced into the illustration (Plate II., fig. 3A.) in its exact position with regard to the buttress. Our Secretary has kindly referred me to the *Archæological Journal* (vol. iv., 322) for a paper on low side windows, in which mention occurs of a pierced buttress ; but the buttress (l. c.) is pierced in such a manner as to admit only *the hand of* a person. The opening is not large enough, as in the Needham example, for an adult to walk through ; so that, unfortunately, this reference does not help us.

(2.) It has also been suggested that the buttress may have been pierced to permit a passage from a supposed former building, annexed to or nearly abutting upon the chapel. But there is no evidence of any such former building. The buttress seems at the first to have been completely finished—sculpture, lettering, and all—and quite independently of every other object.

(3.) Could not this high stepping-stone have been built for a horse-block ? A horse-block* was formerly a very frequent erection near a church ; and a step of some kind would have been especially convenient for the priest here, when he mounted his pony or cob in riding away after his daily service was ended, either to the other chapel-of-ease

* Still correctly termed in Suffolk a jossing-block.

at Darmsden, or back again to the mother church at Barking. I offer this conjecture without being quite satisfied with it myself; for I do not know of another buttress at all resembling the present. I trust, however, the reader will not put the suggestion aside merely on the plea that it is of too utilitarian a character. Even in those distant times, care was bestowed on what was useful as well as on what was æsthetic and beautiful, as we may conclude from the extremely probable tradition about the causeway-path already mentioned.

(4.) It has been suggested that the opening was designed to be used in the process of ecclesiastical discipline; but the conjecture does not commend itself to the writer if it does to the reader.

These, then, are four possible theories as to the use of the buttress. I do not think any of them entirely satisfactory; and would therefore say in the words of Horace: "Si quid novisti rectius istis Candidus imperti."

Local tradition states that when the members of the Corporation of Eye were in the habit of beating their bounds, they were accustomed to *pass through* this buttress—no easy feat for a corpulent alderman to accomplish. But the nearest boundary of the borough of Eye is distant some twelve or fourteen miles from the hamlet of Needham Market; and I have not succeeded in discovering any connection whatever between the borough and the hamlet that could have given rise to so unaccountable a tradition. Possibly there is some confusion of Aye or Eye with Ely.

THE ROOF.

The chapel roof is of a very unusual type, and deserves careful elucidation on account of the scientific principles displayed in its construction. And I am particularly indebted to Mr. E. C. Hakewill, of Playford, in this county, for assisting me in the following description of it:—

An arched ceiling of white plaster (Plate II. fig. 1, letter *c*) at present spans the chapel from wall to wall. But the explorer who will mount the gallery and climb nearly

up to the bell-cot will find himself in a lofty and spacious chamber, formed by the upper members of the old roof. The roof, which is handsomely carved, may be described in two portions: its lower portion being that towards the east, and its higher portion being that towards the west, containing the five clerestory windows.

i.—EASTWARD AND LOWER PORTION OF ROOF.

For a length of about 32 feet from the east wall we find a single hammer-beam roof with arched ribs, the rafters being continued at a good pitch to the apex. In this eastern part of the lower roof there are four bays, formed by five pairs of arched ribs; one of which is placed against the east wall, and one close to the truss which commences the system of the higher roof.

ii.—WESTWARD AND HIGHER PORTION OF ROOF.

The west portion of the roof containing the five clerestory windows consists of five bays formed by six trusses, including the one above mentioned, as coupled with the first truss of the lower roof; and, at a distance of about 4 ft. from this sixth truss, a seventh is added westward, for the purpose of together supporting the bell-cot. This western portion of the roof differs in construction from a hammer-beam roof in this respect, namely: that the rafters are *not* carried up the apex, but are skilfully framed into the upright struts (fig. 1, *g g'*) which run up and carry the higher portion of the roof (fig. 1, *a*), and support the clerestory, on the south side only. The clerestory is thus suspended at a distance (*g'*) of about seven feet off the wall. And each truss is completed by an arched collar or straining-piece (fig. 1, *b*), framed through the upright struts (at *f* and *f'*) into the outside rafters about three feet below their junction with the struts.

It will thus be seen that the roof is not only of an unusual description, but is a most ingenious piece of carpentry, constructed on truly scientific principles; and, had it escaped the ruthless hands of ignorant church

destroyers, we should now have possessed a fine and very remarkable specimen of a late XVth-century roof.

The injury which these persons have perpetrated on this masterpiece of carpentry is very great. They have taken away the whole of what was a deep cornice (formed by the hammer-braces) along the walls, whence the plastered ceiling now springs. They have cut off the *junctions* of the hammer-beams *with* the lower part of each upright strut; have removed the hammer-braces, and have managed to save the roof from falling in only by inserting a rough beam of fir timber (fig. 1, *eee*), and morticing it through each of the struts into the rafters, a little above their precious ceiling. After this achievement, they proceeded to saw off pendants, corbels, brackets, &c., and all else that would otherwise have appeared beneath their ceiling; and, further, completely destroyed an entire system of longitudinal arches, from strut to strut, west to east, leaving us to judge of their effect by the morticed grooves only, out of which they were taken. The interior height of the chapel from the paving to the ceiling (fig. 1, *d* to *c*) is 28 ft. 8 in.; from the ceiling to the clerestory roof (*c* to *a*) is 16 ft. 4 in.; making the total internal height, 45 ft.

I am glad to hear that Mr. Hakewill (who has kindly given me the above admeasurements) has been invited as architect to report upon this chapel; and I heartily endorse the opinion he has expressed about the roof, that although its restoration is likely to be a difficult and expensive work, yet possessing as it does so many fine points, at present concealed, it will amply repay the cost and trouble required to bring it back to what it was when first Bishop Gray saw it completed.

It appears that the interior fittings of the chapel were not at once provided, nor indeed until some forty years after the walls were erected. For Chancellor Tanner has made this extract from a will at Norwich:—

“To the making the deskys yn the chapel of Nedeham 1504.”

Wills Gam. 29.

It seems probable that at first temporary book-rests had been set up, which in the year 1504 gave place to more substantial and more costly desks.

Some thirty years later the chapel is again mentioned in the following extract:—

“Acta in Capellâ Sti Jois Bap^t. de Nedham market 1 Jul. 1533.”

(Tanner.)

Vol. Will. Rackh. 32.

After the enforced sale of this property to the Crown, Needham declined in prosperity, so much so that it seems the witty Thomas Fuller, for some time an Essex rector, coined a proverb about the unfortunate person being on the road to Needham.

Then came troubled times and troublesome visitors; amongst others, the iconoclastic William Dowsing, a name which all haters of sacrilege and admirers of the fine arts will continue in these parts to hold in execration. Dowsing, on 5th February, 1643, gave orders in this chapel to men—who came with axes and hammers that they might brake down all the carved work thereof—to destroy the two fine old iron crosses and the stone cross that then appropriately ornamented the fabric.

At length the cloud passed away; the superstition and bigotry of the Directory had ended; due reverence in public worship revived. And with the revival of the Establishment came the Restoration of the Monarchy. And in token, perhaps, of gratitude to Almighty God for the king's happy return, Sir Nicholas Bacon, a neighbouring resident, gave to the chapel, among other things, a holy bible, with this inscription:—

“Ex dono Nicolai Bacon de Shrubland Militis Balnei Anno D'ni 1663.”

T. Martin's Church Notes I. 358.

In the year 1747, Needham received an augmentation grant from Queen Anne's Bounty, and thereby became (it has been supposed) an ecclesiastical benefice distinct from Barking.

In the year 1785, the chapel bell was cast by W. Mears, of London; and then, perhaps, the present unsightly bell-cot was erected over it.

There is little or nothing else I think to call for further notice, unless it be the fact that the name of "Priestley Wood" in the parish sometimes reminds people that Dr. Joseph Priestley, the great natural philosopher, who unhappily lapsed into materialism, once lived here. He died in America in the year of our Lord God 1804.

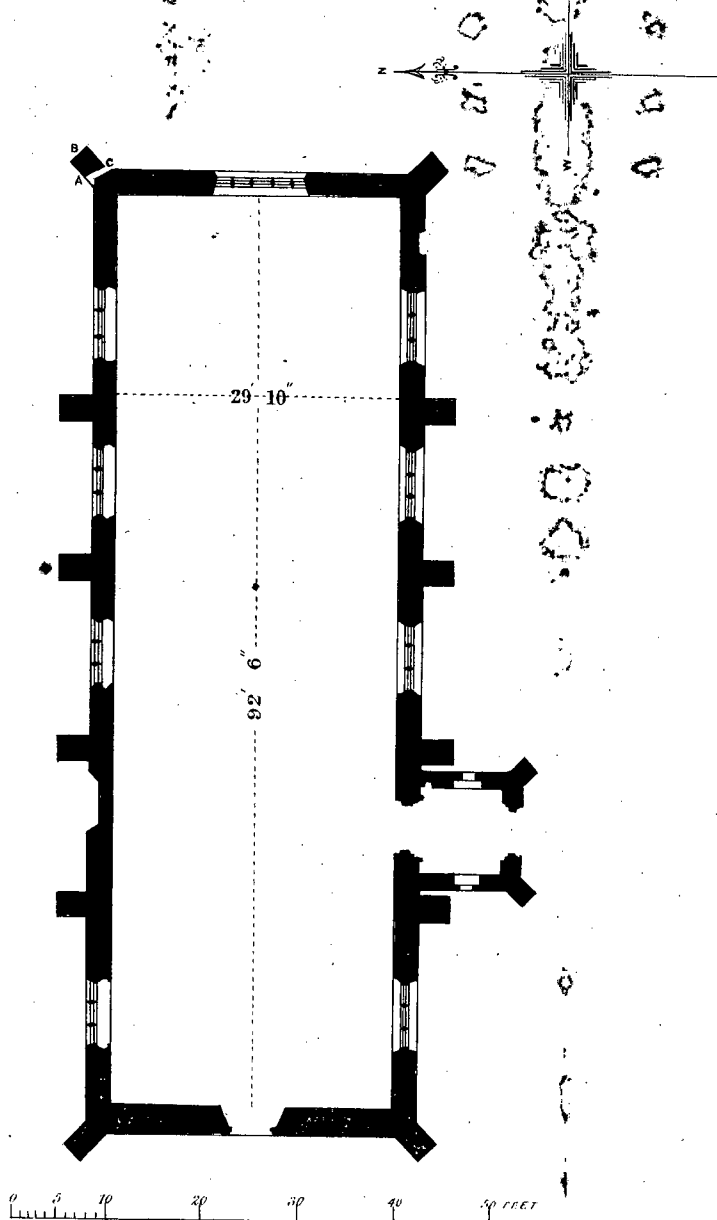
The contemporary issue of that old-established paper the *Ipswich Journal* will inform the curious investigator of forgotten events, that in the year 1829 the ancient chapel was disfigured by the erection of the hideous "three-decker" pulpit; &c., still existing straight in front of the altar.

These arrangements, however, it should charitably be remembered, are the fault of the time rather than of the restorer. But in the present day they seem more in keeping with a modern preaching-house than with a place of worship in the thousand-year-old Communion of the Church of England. Yet, such as they are, every person competent to form an opinion would decide that it were far better that the chapel should continue in its sad neglected state, than that the shell of the noble fabric, erected by Bishop Gray, should be sacrificed to the claims of local talent, or serve to display the ignorance of some hedge carpenter that might be favoured with the job.

31st August, 1871.

W. H. SEWELL.

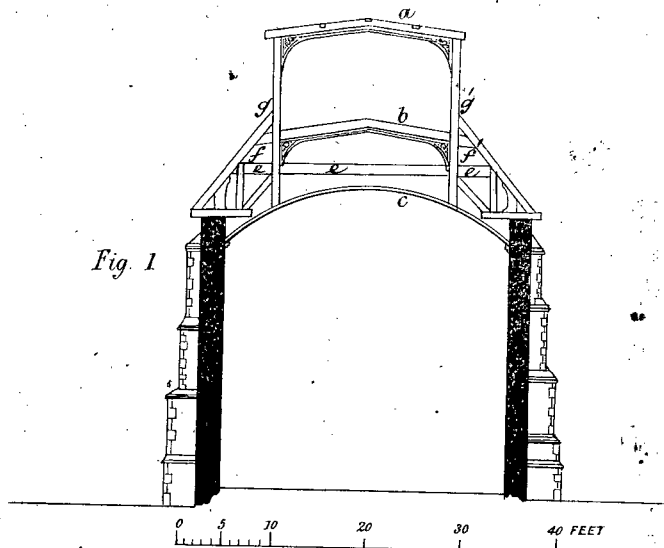
THE CHAPEL OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST,
NEEDHAM MARKET, SUFFOLK.



Ground Plan.

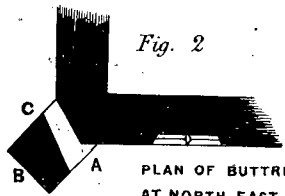
H. Siggers for J. Darlin.

Fig. 1



SECTION OF ROOF.

Fig. 2

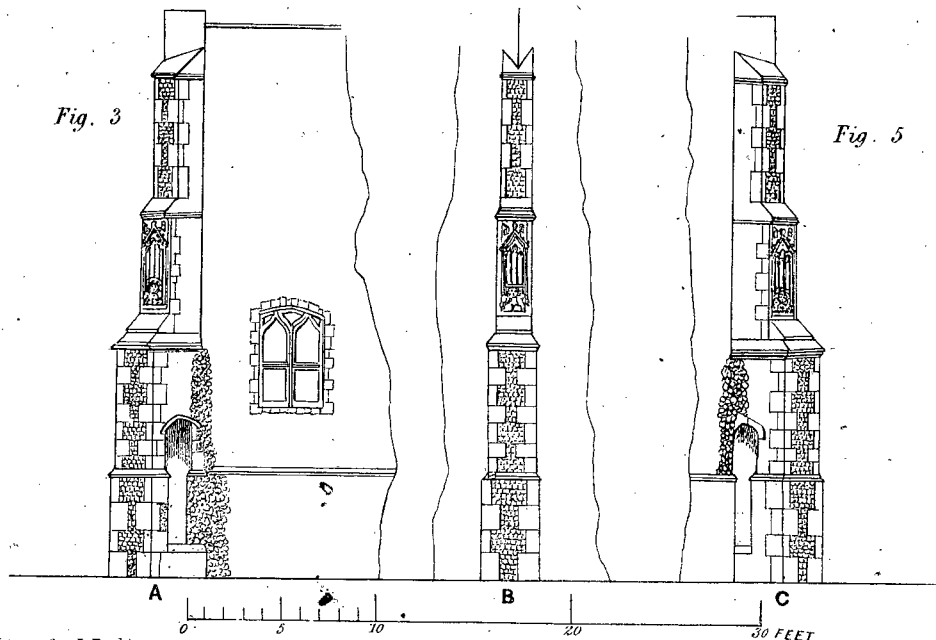


PLAN OF BUTTRESS AT NORTH EAST ANGLE.

Fig. 4

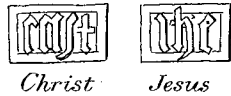
Fig. 3

Fig. 5



ELEVATION.

H. Siggers for J. Darkin.



Christ

Jesus

Fig. 1

INSCRIPTION ON SIX SOUTH BUTTRESSES.



have



mercy



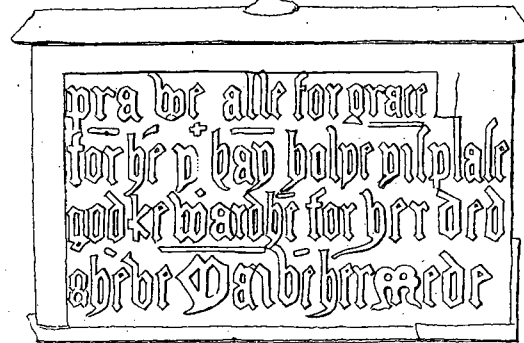
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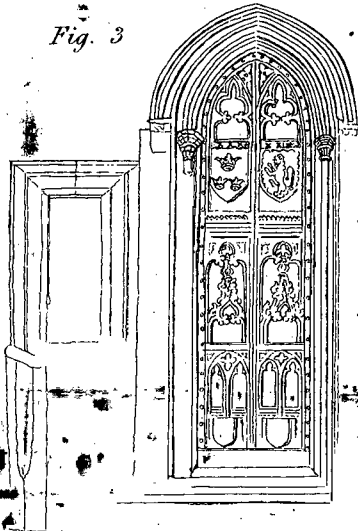
Fig. 2

INSCRIPTION OVER SOUTH DOOR



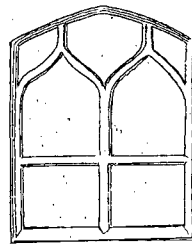
*Pray we all for grace
For her that hath holpe. this please
God reward her for her deed
And heaven may be her meed*

Fig. 3



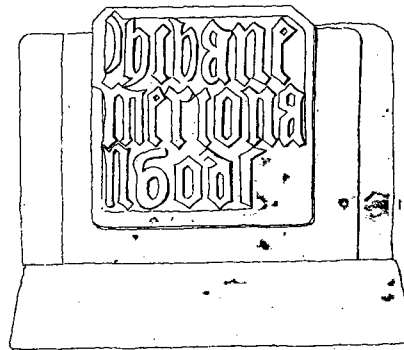
DOOR, SOUTH SIDE OF CHAPEL,
EAST END.

Fig. 4



LOW SIDE WINDOW
NORTH SIDE OF CHAPEL.

Fig. 5

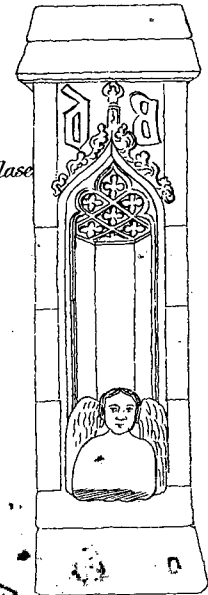


INSCRIPTION ON THE SECOND BUTTRESS
NORTH SIDE OF CHAPEL.

I. H. S. have mercy on all Gods perhaps it should have finished with people

W. Metcalf & Sons, Litho. Cambridge.

Fig. 6.



BUTTRESS AT THE
N. E. ANGLE.