

INSCRIPTION ON E. WALL OF BLYTHBURGH CHURCH.

THE FLINT-WORK INSCRIPTION ON BLYTHBURGH CHURCH.

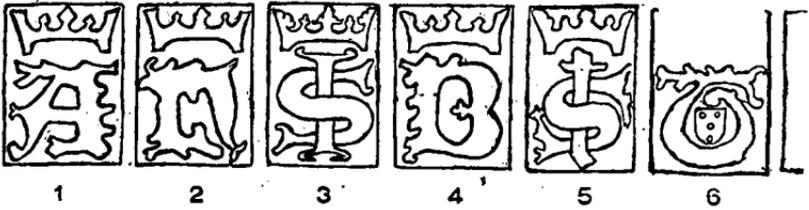
BY SIR W. R. GOWERS, M.D., F.R.S.

The remarkable flint-work inscription across the end of Blythburgh Church, beneath the east window, seems to have baffled attempts to interpret it. That which I now present was made about ten years ago, and communicated privately to several friends. An imperfect account of it is given in the Transactions for 1894, in the course of a description of an excursion to Blythburgh.* No other explanation has since been brought forward. I therefore think it well to submit to East Anglian archæologists the grounds on which that interpretation is based. If correct, it teaches some instructive lessons. The inscription must be regarded as a very striking example of a rare class. From the known history of the church its date must be 1460—80.

Of the illustrations, the first figure of the Plate presents a photograph, taken about 1878, before the partial restoration of the church, at a time when the lower part of the east window was bricked up, and when shrubs flourished within the north aisle. The other figures are from later photographs, the outlines of the elements given in the text have been carefully drawn from the letters themselves and from large sized photographs.

The inscription is of remarkable ingenuity and artistic character, and, in nature and character combined, is probably unique. It consists of fifteen elements, each being an almost square stone, bearing a design in the highest style of the flint-work decoration common in the fifteenth century. In this, as is well known, the surface of the

* I do not remember authorising it, and have only lately discovered its presence.

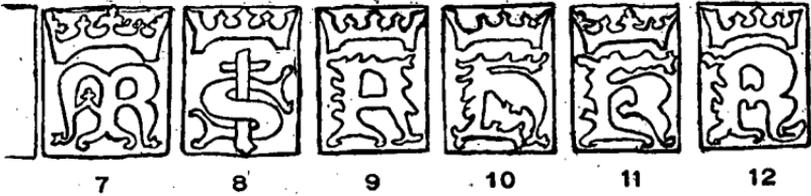


stone is lowered half an inch or more, except in the design to be presented. Over the lowered areas pieces of flint are cemented in a kind of rough mosaic work. These constitute a dark back-ground against which the stone stands out in contrast, white against black. It is remarkable how enduring these designs have been, for the most part. Unfortunately the disintegrating influence of weather, rain and frost, tends in time to loosen the flints. Thus, many of those in this inscription have fallen away, especially of the crowns surmounting the letters. Unless the process is arrested by the recementing of every loose flint, the inscription must, in time, disappear. The periodical attention would cost little, and would save it from further destruction. Many lost flints might indeed be replaced with security, since the outlines of the stone design are often distinct. Some slight degree of restoration might thus be effected.

Of the stones, that at each end is occupied by a simple ornamental design. The middle stone is blank, unworked. Probably it was left to the last, and the work intended on it was prevented by some unknown cause. Thus, there remain six stones in each side, each occupied by a letter or a monogram, and each surmounted by a crown. The style of the letters is that which is called "Lombardic."

The last element of the first half, No. 6, gives the key to the nature of the inscription: It is the letter T,* in the round shape of the style, and within it is a shield.

* There is not the slightest doubt about the letter, but it is as well to mention that Gardner (*History of Dunwich, &c.*, 1745), curiously mistook it for a V. He made some other mistakes regarding the church, evidently due to haste in observation.



This contains four round holes, all formerly, and some still, filled with flint, which have the positions of the circles in the well-known Pater-Filius shield-symbol of the Trinity. This is found, without the words, on many fonts and porches in the district, and is to be seen, with the words, in the glass of one of the north windows of this church, and also on the rood-screen at Southwold.

The shield makes it certain that the T was intended for Trinitas. The church was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The element before the T, No. 5, is St., a Lombardic S with a small t intersected; is obviously intended for Sanctæ. Sanctæ Trinitatis, on a church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, leaves no doubt as to the dedicational nature of the inscription.

It has been objected that "Sanct." would have been indicated by Sc and not by St. But S'te and S'torum were used almost as frequently as S'c in the "Inquisitiones Nonarum" (1292, but completed 1340). In it the name of each of the five churches in Dunwich is thus indicated. In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1530) the St had become so familiar that it is frequently given with the apostrophe in the wrong place, St'i instead of S'ti. S alone is also met with on old inscriptions. The objection thus has not much weight.

To turn to the beginning. We have in 1 and 2 the letters A and N. These may be taken to indicate Ad Nomina, but the justification for this assumption may be conveniently postponed.

In 3 we have the monogram "I S," met with elsewhere as indicating Jesus, or here Jesu. It is followed by B,—Beati. Beatus is the adjective almost constantly

associated with the name of Jesus. Thus the first half will read—

Ad Nomina Jesu Beati Sanctæ Trinitatis.

It was not uncommon in such inscriptions for the name of Jesus or Mary to be associated with the proper dedicational name, and even to precede this. Attention was specially drawn to the fact by Pegge,* who gives as an example the inscription on the church of Hawkesworth, Notts., dedicated to All Saints: "In Honorem Domini Jesu et Beate Marie et Omnium Sanctorum."

After the middle blank stone, No. 7 presents the well-known monogram of Mary, which contains all the letters of MARIA.† It is met with on the buttresses here, and at Southwold. Moreover (a fact of special significance), the same monogram appears within this church, on a shield projecting from the last easterly pillar between the nave and the south aisle. It is known that at this end of the aisle was a chapel dedicated to the Virgin. On the shield also the monogram is surmounted by a crown.

The corresponding chapel at the end of the north aisle is known to have been dedicated to St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin. On the last pillar between the nave and the north aisle, at a spot corresponding to that at which there is the shield and monogram of the Virgin, is a place from which something of similar size has been broken off. We can scarcely doubt that it was a shield bearing an indication of St. Anne.

Hence, it is significant that, after No. 8 of the inscription (another St, similar to that in the first half, which must have a like meaning), we have in No. 9 the letter A. Considering the important position given to St. Anne in the church, since to no other saint besides the

* Pegge, "Sylloge of Inscriptions relative to the Erection of Our English Churches." Nichol's *Topographica Britannica*, Vol. VI., No: XLI., p. 37.

† It is curious to trace the development of the monogram. Pegge (p. 23) gives from Postling, Kent, an inscription in which the A and R are blended much as in the monogram, the M is separate and so is the E, while the I is represented by a small stroke in the lower part of the R.

Virgin and St. Anne was a chapel dedicated, it is reasonable to regard the letter as referring to her. Moreover, if the letter is compared with Nos. 1 and 2 of the inscription, which are certainly A and N, it will be seen that the base of the left side of the letter is carried forward as it is in the N. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that this is meant for a combination of A and N, which would furnish all the letters of the word ANNA, just as No. 7 contains all the letters of the word MARIA.

No. 10 is the letter H. Passing this for a moment, we have in No. 11 the letter K. Since the inscription is obviously an indication of Latin words, this can only be a proper name. St. Katherine was often associated with St. Anne; a window in the church is recorded to have borne her image, and it seems reasonable to regard her name as indicated. Indeed it is difficult to suggest any other meaning of this.

No. 12 is the letter R. In a will, dated 1442, quoted by Gardner, the chancel was spoken of as proposed to be rebuilt.* The letter may thus be interpreted "Re-ædificatus" or "Re-constructus," "Cancellus" being understood. "Re-ædificatus" is, strange to say, much less common in such relation, than is "reconstructus."

To return to No. 10, the letter H. There are few saints whose name begin with this letter, only three or four, and in not one of these can the slightest recorded association with Blythburgh church be traced, or can a connection be conjectured. It seems, therefore, reasonable to interpret it as the word Honore or Honorem, so frequent in dedicational inscriptions; and to associate it with at least the last two saints indicated.

It may be a matter of opinion whether the monogram of the Virgin should be regarded as belonging to the first or to the second part of the inscription, whether it is

* Hist. Dunwich, etc., p. 123, "Lego fabricæ Cancelli Ecclesiæ de Blythborough si voluerint illum de novo fabricare, 10 marc." A similar expression occurs in other wills.

associated with *Beati Jesu* and *Sanctæ Trinitatis*, or with *Sanctarum Annæ et Katharinæ*. The point is not important, but I think other similar inscriptions countenance the former view.*

Thus, the whole inscription may be interpreted as indicating—"Ad Nomina Jesu Beati Sanctæ Trinitatis (Beatæ) Mariæ et in Honorem Sanctarum Annæ et Katherinæ (hic cancellus) Reconstructus." The initial "ad" may, however, be regarded as related also to "honorem."

Before considering the two first letters, A and N, which have been left to the last, it is important to direct attention to the curious confirmation of this interpretation which is afforded by the character of the crown over each element.

If the crowns are compared a marked difference will be seen between them. The forms of one or two cannot be distinctly discerned in the photographs in consequence of the loss of the flints and the weathering of the unprotected stone, but they can be discerned, by careful observation, to be as shown in the outline. If the forms of the crowns over 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 12, are compared with those over 3, 7, and 11 (see illustration), it will be seen that the former are simple, the latter elaborate "fleur-de-lys" crowns, with one exception (No. 9). Wherever the details of the crowns can be perceived, the elaborate crowns are over the elements which, in this interpretation, are assumed to indicate proper names, and the simple crowns over the "common parts of speech." The difference, in spite of the one exception, may be regarded as some confirmation of the interpretation here given.

The assumption that the letters A N mean *Ad Nomina* will, I know be a difficulty to archæologists, in spite of the

* The letter H has been thought to indicate a munificent donor to the church, named Hopton, whose arms are at the end of the chancel seats. The same interpretation regards the monogram for Jesus as meaning Sir John Swillington. This of course involves a totally different character of the inscription from that of which the evidence is given above. Moreover, unfortunately, there never was a Sir John Swillington, the name John was unknown in that family.

harmony of the words with those which might be used in the present day. I have not found any actual precedent, but I think the conspicuous artistic originality displayed in this inscription warrants us in dealing with it as a new problem, to be considered without slavish dependence on precedent. Yet we have inscriptions which bring us not far from that which is assumed. "In honorem" is employed almost as frequently as in "in honore." Before the accusative, "in" has almost the sense of "ad." We meet also with "in nomine sancti" We also meet with "ad gloriam Dei," and "ad laudem," as in "ad laudem Dei et Omnium Sanctorum istam cancellam de novo construxit."* Moreover, at Ropsley, Notts., 1380, we have "Ista columna ad h'm St. Michi's et nomē factoris Thom Little de Corby." The transition from these to "ad nomina" does not seem abrupt. In the last example we have "ad" with the accusative, the abbreviated "honorem." From "in honore," "in honorem," "in nomine," and "ad honorem," to "ad nomina" is not violent. The indication afforded by the comparatively plain character of their crowns, that these two letters do not indicate proper names, has also weight, but confirmation seems hardly needed.

To those who object to this interpretation, the request may reasonably be made to furnish a better one. For my own part, while I am confident of its at least approximate correctness, I am less concerned with this, than interested in the reason why, if correct, the inscription has hitherto been an unsolved problem. Even the great Parker, who furnished a note on Blythburgh to the "Churches of Suffolk," makes no suggestion as to its meaning (probably from want of time to study it), while the latest historian of Suffolk, Canon Raven, dismisses the inscription as a "riddle."

The subjects of archæology for the most part need and receive the mental culture termed "literary." But now and then they are of a nature that needs some

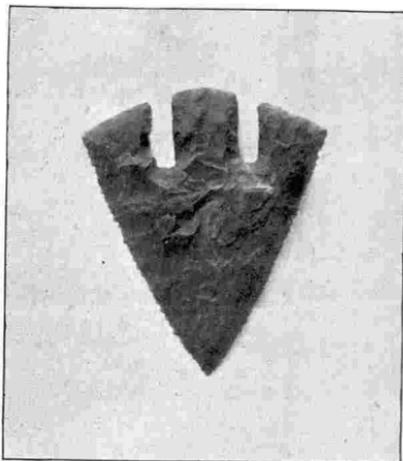
* Darton, Yorks., 1577, Pegge, loc. cit., p. 90.

measure of the methods of science. Precedent is dominant in archæology; the fact is ignored that all things have a beginning, and that now and then originality comes into play to a degree that baffles the methods of precedent, and furnishes a problem which can only be solved by dealing with it as a new thing, to be considered *de novo*, and only afterwards compared with that which has been before. Such, it seems to me, is the Blythburgh inscription.

NOTE.—I venture to hope that this paper may excite sufficient interest in the Inscription to promote an attempt to preserve it. If it fails in this, it will at least effect a record which may be useful to those who, in time to come, look with sorrow at the stones from which it has disappeared.



ANCIENT BRITISH DRINKING CUP
(ICKLINGHAM).



FLINT ARROW-HEAD
(ICKLINGHAM).

By kind permission of Mrs. C. ANDREWS, Bury S. Edmund's.

THE ANNUAL EXCURSION.

Of the many annual excursions few have been more thoroughly enjoyable and successful than that held on Thursday, 1st August, 1901. The place of meeting was Bury St. Edmund's. There was a very large attendance of members and friends from Ipswich and all parts of the district. One significant fact, which suggests great developments in the future, was that the company included many representatives of the London Society of East Anglians. In the second place, the weather was literally all that could be desired.

It was a case of being awakened early in the morning with most members, as the Ipswich visitors travelled by the 8.38 a.m. train, while those from Melford and the neighbourhood had to start an hour before that time. Mr. W. S. Spanton and Mr. E. P. Ridley met both the incoming trains, and acted as conductors over the Norman Tower, Moyses's Hall, and the town churches. Little time was spent in Bury itself, however, and the party assembled punctually at 10 o'clock upon the Angel Hill.

In six or seven large conveyances the party were driven to Horringer Green, and through the fine park to Ickworth House. Here they were welcomed with evident cordiality by the Marquis and Marchioness of Bristol, Lord Francis Hervey, and other members of the household. The impossibility was now realised, at the very outset, of making more than a cursory inspection of the many objects of interest that were brought under notice throughout the tour. Lord Bristol led the way through most of the principal apartments, pointing out the finer portraits by Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and other famous painters, and giving a brief summary of all that is known respecting the old Manor House, which once stood somewhere near the mansion. With regard to the present building, the Marquis said modestly, that it was a comparatively modern house, with no particular history, and that he had no ghosts to talk about. At the close of a visit, which was all too brief, and of which no sufficient account can be given, light refreshments were served in the entrance hall, and Canon Scott, of Lavenham, voiced the thanks of all present for the gracious old-world hospitality with which they had been received.

The route next taken was through a most picturesque part of this extensive and beautifully-timbered estate, amid continual changes of scenery, which evoked general comments of admiration. After leaving the park, a short drive along the high-road brought into view Saxham

Church, standing at the junction of four cross-roads—to Barrow, Bury, Chevington and Risby. This structure is in an excellent state of preservation, and some interesting particulars lay ready to hand for the information of all visitors. The date of the building is about 1120; it has a round tower, bearing some resemblance to the work at Norwich Castle; the walls are of enormous thickness, and the details of the interior, in which there are some fine monuments, would repay the carefully study of archæologists. The vicar (Rev. H. L. Kilner) wrote to express regret at his inability to join the excursion. The Rev. A. J. Bedell informed the party that in an adjoining fen there were to be found many rare marsh flowers and grasses, including the sundew (*Drosera rotundiflora*). Upon this temptation to go botanising the hon. secretary "set his foot," with good humour, but decision.

The next stage traversed the high road between Bury and Newmarket, and ended at Risby Church, where the genial rector (Rev. E. Symonds) was in waiting at the lych gate. One of the first features to which he drew attention were some frescoes, circa 1380, on the north wall, which have been recently uncovered. He also pointed out two arches which curiously illustrate the transition from one style of architecture to another, and one of the low windows. It is most probable that these open windows were used for the purpose of ventilation in churches (especially near the chancel), where the smoke from burning torches, candles, and incense accumulated. The Paston Letters (Vol. II., p. 226) show that it was necessary to take out iron frames from the church windows to effect this ventilation at the time of funeral ceremonies.

A most interesting paten, circa, 1580, was here brought to the notice of the visitors. The arms appear to denote that it was presented to the church by Gylbert Denes and Elizabeth his wife. The following note on the Denes or Dennis family of Holcombe Burnell, co. Devon (Harl. ms. 1091, fo. 107), may afford some clue as to the donor.

Thomas Dennis=(2) Elizabeth, da. of Hakyn Hache,
of Holcombe | of Wolley, co. Devon.

Thomas Dennis=Joan, da. and h. to Philip Loveday, of Suffolk.
of Holcombe. |

Richard Dennis= da. and coh. to . . . Hennell.

Gilbert Denes=Elizabeth

Arms of Dennis, erm. 3 bills or Danish battle axes, gules.

The church of Risby, dedicated to St. Giles, is representative, in its architecture and ornamentation, of four different periods.

The round tower, with its flint work laid in regular course in deep beds of mortar, belongs to an early period, the date of which must be left to the conjectures of antiquarians. It is built in three stages. The upper stage has two tiers of circular-arched windows believed to be

perforations of a later date than that of the erection of the tower. In the middle stage three original loops, now filled up, are to be seen, the small arches of these loops being each formed of a single stone. In the basement is a window of the 14th century. The height of the tower is 46 ft., the inner diameter being 11 ft. 4 in.

The next period is represented by a circular Norman arch in the tower, and a chancel arch sharply pointed and ornamented on the chancel side with a border of indented semi-circles and billets. It is supported on half columns with square capitals, the soffits of which are plain on the chancel side, but ornamented on about two-thirds of their surfaces—one the zig zag, the other with foliage. The masonry of both these arches is wide-jointed.

A lancet window remains in the north wall of the nave.

The third stage in the evolution of the present building dates from the early part of the 14th century, when the chancel was built, and the windows towards the east end assumed a more enriched form of tracery. They were filled with painted glass, of which the relics were collected from all the windows by Mrs. Alderson between 1840 and 1850, and pieced together by her with great skill and industry to fill the east window, and the eastern window of the south chancel wall. The frescoes, of which traces remain on the north wall of the nave, are also probably of the early part of the 14th century when the church underwent the changes referred to above.

The fourth period of activity in connection with the building of the church was in the reign of Henry VI., and subsequent to the year 1435. In that year a commission against the executors of Mr. Bambergh, a deceased rector, relating to dilapidations of the church, its chancel, books, ornaments, parsonage, walls, buildings, and closes, was issued from the Diocesan Registry at Norwich. The octagonal font, which is almost identical with that at Stoke-by-Nayland, probably belongs to this period, as also the carved and painted screen. The porch was also probably added at this time.

On each side of the screen are two large niches handsomely adorned and painted.

There is a piscina in the window of the south wall of the nave nearest to the chancel.

The ornamental carving of some of the old benches is much admired.

There are three bells in the tower bearing the following inscriptions :

- 1 *Virginis egregie vocor Campana Mariæ.*
- 2 *John Draper made me 1617.*
- 3 *Meritis Edmundi simus a crimine mundi.*

With a parting vote of thanks to the Rector, the company brought their stay to an unwilling but necessary termination.

The third stopping-place was Icklingham. It was a long drive to

this parish, the way thereto being for some distance along cross-roads which command a grand view of the heath lands lying towards Mildenhall and Brandon—open stretches of arid country crossed by the ancient *Icenhild weg*. On reaching the end of this stage, and entering the church of All Saints—which presents a solid and substantial appearance externally—the visitors looked around in blank amazement. The interior is an extraordinary picture of neglect and desolation. There are gaps in the roof; the whitewashed walls are anything but white and clean; the nave is partly filled in with the ugliest square pew ever seen, and along part of the western end there is a rough gallery of unpainted wood, approached by a ladder. It was soon explained, however, that there is another church in the parish, so that All Saints is not required for public worship, the rector (Ven. Archdeacon Cartwright) read the following interesting extracts from a report made to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings:—

“With the exception of the porch, which is Perpendicular in style, the church may be described as a building built in the Decorated style, although as a matter of fact we know, by the existence of two blocked Norman windows in the north wall of the nave, that that wall of the nave is Norman, and it seems probable that the walls of the chancel are also Norman. The reason for believing this is that when the ground plan is drawn to scale on paper, it becomes obvious that the nave and chancel together, and without the other parts of the building, form the ground plan of a typical Norman church. The whole of the Decorated work is of a fine type, and the village must have been prosperous in the 14th century, for the work is rich—the south aisle especially so, as shown by the two beautiful niches at the east end on either side of where the altar stood, and also by the beautiful stone carved cornices which run the whole length under the eaves of the south wall and below the wall plates of both the north and south walls on the inside. The windows are very fine, but unfortunately the east window has the whole of its head filled in solid. The stained glass which remains is also very good. It is worth noting that the fine western tower never had a staircase. All the original roofs have gone. The method of plaiting the reeds on the underside of the thatching, so as to avoid the use of wood battens, is interesting. The tile paving, a large quantity of which remains in the chancel, and fragments in other parts of the church, is of an unusual description. Similar paving may be found at Ely and St. Alban's Cathedrals, and also at Hertford. One of the tiles has the representation of an architectural canopy, from the design of which we know that this pavement is also 14th century work. There are six or eight different patterns formed by the shapes of these tiles, and many have ornamental patterns on them. The chancel screen, which is Perpendicular in style, has had its upper portion cut away. It is somewhat unusual in having a very large oak sill, which measures