

## KESSINGLAND AND WALBERSWICK CHURCH TOWERS

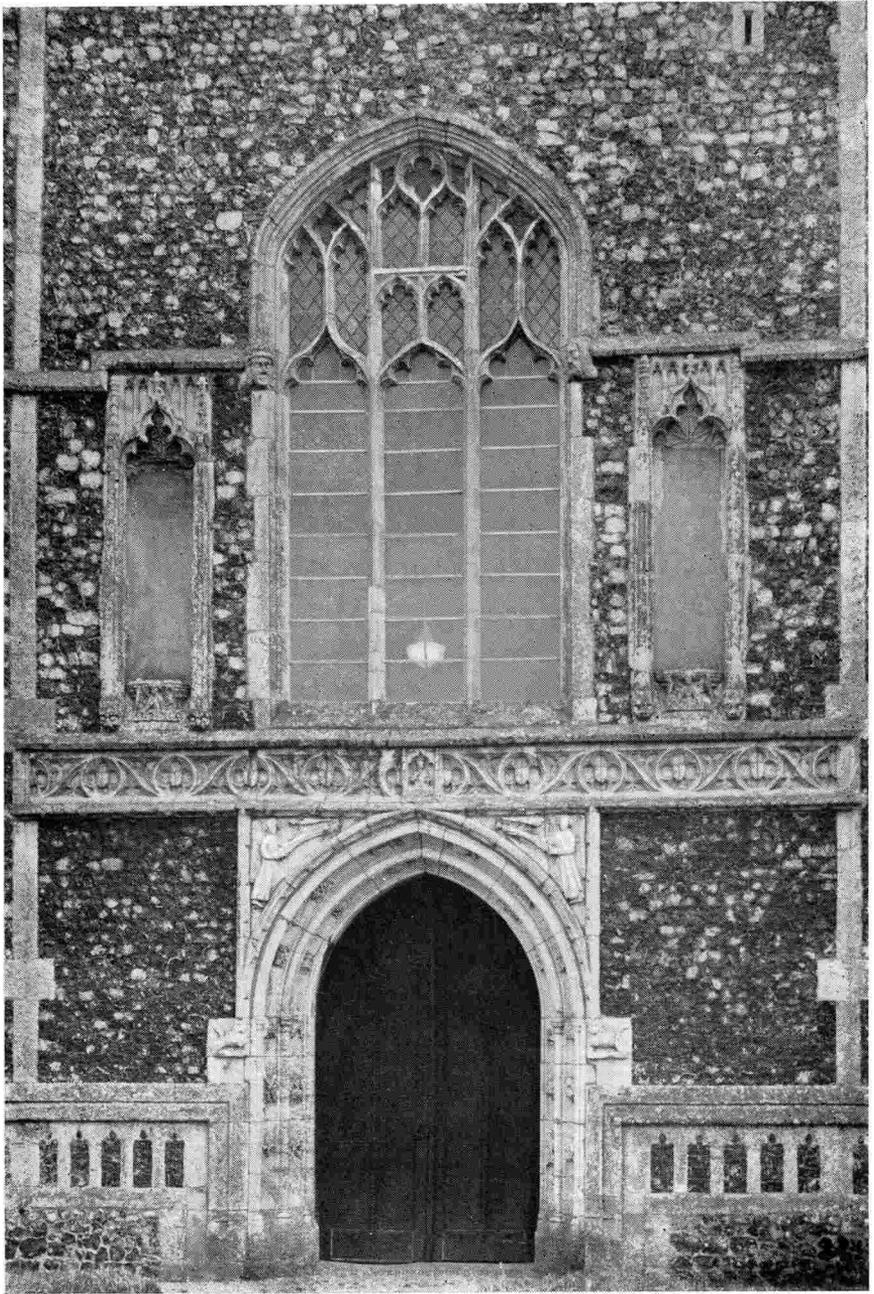
By THE REV. C. CHITTY, M.A., RECTOR OF KESSINGLAND.

The notes which follow about the building and probable dates of these two fine Church Towers contain what would have been the subject matter of the talk their author was prevented by severe illness from giving on the occasion of the Institute's visit to these two Churches on June 7th, 1950. They are in the main a reprint, though with suitable variations and additions, of articles that appeared in the Kessingland Parish Magazine for September, October, and November, 1949. The main conclusions, here given in greater detail, will be found summarised at p. 94 of *The Gothic World* by John H. Harvey, F.S.A. (Batsford, 1950), where also, at Figures 82 and 83, are illustrations showing the architectural similarity between these two Towers. The Parish Magazine articles referred to above are those also mentioned by Mr. Harvey at p. 141, where he also gives certain Will and other references which are here repeated. I should add that neither the original articles nor these notes would have got written had it not been for the great help that Mr. Harvey has given me, both personally and in his various publications. Nor if Miss M. J. Becker had not found and noted for me the three wills about the bells, on which some of the conclusions depend. I must therefore here tender my thanks to them both. I have to thank Mr. Fred Jenkins of Southwold for permission to use one of his many fine photos of Walberswick for the purposes of Plate XXVI a. Plate XXVI b has already appeared as Fig. 101 in Mr. Harvey's *Gothic England*; I have to thank the author and Mr. A. F. Kersting, the photographer, for permission to reprint it here, and also Messrs. B. T. Batsford, Ltd. for kindly supplying a block for the purpose. The photos for Plates XXIV and XXV were taken for me by Mr. Ford Jenkins of Lowestoft.

A 15th century flint and flush-work building was not built in one consecutive operation, like a modern one, but by stages covering many years. A Tower, and in fact any wall, of these materials, would have risen at the rate of about 10 feet a year, all the work being done in the summer months between Easter and Michaelmas. As, without the 18th century brick parapet, Kessingland Tower rises 96 ft. 2½ ins. above the original ground level (which is 3 inches below the present one), we can safely allow 10 years for its building at 10 feet per year, and add a further year for the laying out and getting ready to start—11 years in all. But these would only be

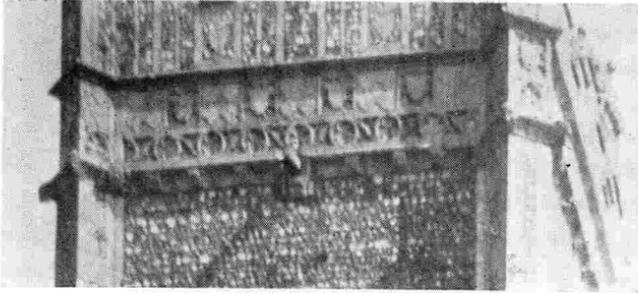


Kessingland Tower



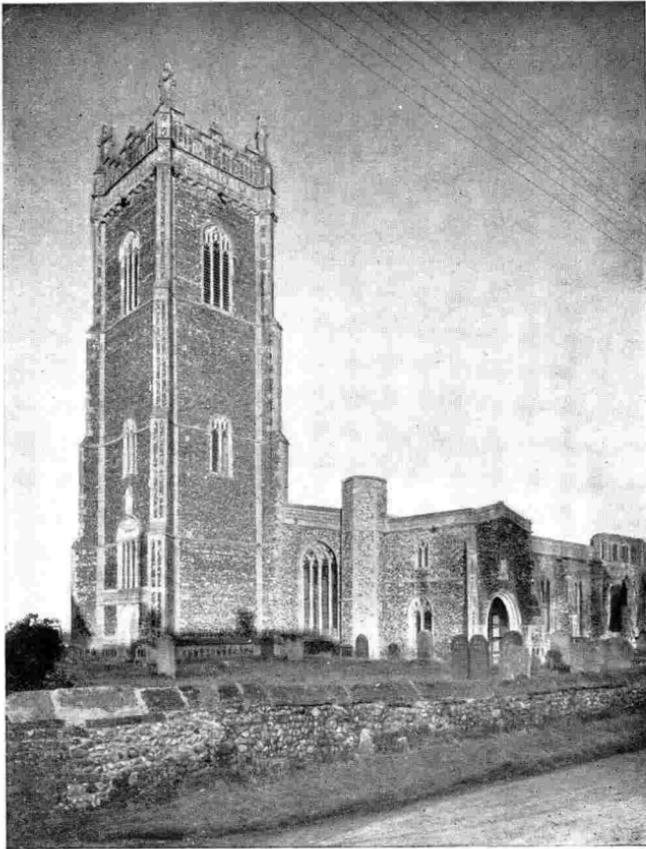
Kessingland — West Front.

PLATE XXVI.



*a*

Walberswick — Stone band in parapet.



*b*

Walberswick Tower.

consecutive years (or rather summers) if there was no break in the proceedings. We can see for ourselves that there was such a break. For the pattern of the flushwork on the face of the buttresses changes abruptly half-way between the first and second string courses (at about 35 feet up), from vertical stripes to the chequerwork which is such a marked feature of the upper portion. Below this point the windows that light the stair are merely straight slits (see the uppermost of these shown at top right-hand corner of Plate XXV), but above it they are little crosses. And above the second string course the arrangement of the quoins, which bind the buttresses to the walls, is quite different from that below it. These can only mean one thing; at about this point the architect or master mason was changed, the original being no longer available, perhaps because he had died. There would, of necessity, be an interval of no work before the new master-mason was found and appointed; here he carried on with his predecessor's general plan, but in it incorporated his own new ideas and patterns. We must, therefore, allow a somewhat longer period than 11 years for the building,

If we compare Kessingland Tower (Plate XXIV) with that of Walberswick (Plate XXVI *b*), leaving out of consideration the ornamental parapet of the latter, which was added after the main Tower was finished, it will be noticed that the proportions of both are similar. In each case the height between the two sections of upper string courses is several feet more than that between the two lower sections, a fact that gives to both Towers that appearance of dignity which makes both such marked features of the landscape. The pattern on the buttresses on the lower portion at Kessingland is the same as that on the whole of those at Walberswick, as is also the arrangement of the quoins and the shape of the window slits. Kessingland, being two feet wider at the base,<sup>1</sup> is proportionately higher. The similarity is so great that we begin to wonder whether Kessingland was not intended to be a 'bigger and better Walberswick'. At the top of Walberswick Tower, in the lowest of the many courses of stonework in the parapet, there is a carved pattern that will at once be recognised as being the same as that immediately over the west doorway at Kessingland, in which is seated the little figure of St. Edmund. (See Plates XXV and XXVI *a*). The only difference between these stone bands is that the Kessingland one is provided with little shields—which would not have been visible at that height at Walberswick. And this pattern is to be found at no other place in the neighbourhood. We are forced to the

<sup>1</sup> Kessingland is 24 ft. 4½ ins. square at base—outside measurement taken above the plinth and allowing by calculation for the parts covered by the buttresses. Walberswick is 22 ft. 4½ ins. on the same basis. I was present when Mr. Harvey took both these measurements for me with a surveyor's tape.

conclusion that both Towers were the product of one mind, and, because of the positions of the stonework pattern, that Kessingland was being started at about the time when Walberswick was being finished. At this point, for the sake of clarity, we should also note that at Kessingland a Tower was added to a Church already completed in the previous century, whereas that at Walberswick was added to one that was subsequently rebuilt later in the 15th Century.

Now Walberswick is one of the very few places for which the original contract for building still survives, only two others in Suffolk, for Helmingham<sup>2</sup> and Little Thornham,<sup>3</sup> being now known. It is in the British Museum (Brit. Mus. Add. Ch. 17364; a transcript made for me from the original by Mr. Harvey is reproduced at the end of these notes). It shows that Walberswick was begun in 1426, that the master-masons were to be Richard Russell of Dunwich and Adam Powle of Blythburgh (i.e. Paul—not Powell as has been often stated), and that the details were to be copied from the Towers at Tunstall and Halesworth. Such specification of features of one building to be copied in another new one was a common medieval building procedure.<sup>4</sup> And it is inconceivable that these should have been specified by name if the Tower at Kessingland was already in existence to copy from. Kessingland must therefore have been begun at a date later than that of the start of Walberswick. And as, from its height, it can be calculated that Walberswick took about 9 or 10 years to build, and taking the two similar patterned bits of stonework into consideration, we arrive at 1436 or 1437 as reasonably possible starting dates for Kessingland.

This Richard Russell, the leading mind in the building of both of these very fine Towers, would, in the early 15th century, have been as master-mason a man of substance and importance. In Mr. Harvey's book *The Gothic World*, already quoted, there is a very valuable chapter (Chap. III, pp. 39-52) dealing with the social and financial status and so forth of these medieval master-mason architects; in it he entirely refutes the older theory that they were just 'one of the lads' and that just anybody could superintend the building of medieval edifices. Russell was a citizen of the then greatest sea-port town in East Anglia, both Kessingland<sup>5</sup> and Walberswick at that time being also sea-ports.

<sup>2</sup> Bodleian Library, Tanner MS. 138, fo. 87. For abstract of contents see T. D. Atkinson, *Local Style in English Architecture* (Batsford, 1947), pp. 157-8.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings, Bundle 76 no. 30 (circa 1485-6), from which the nature and terms of the contract appear from the legal proceedings taken against the master-masons for faulty workmanship.

<sup>4</sup> cf. T. D. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, Appendix II, pp. 159-161, where a long list of such buildings, with authorities, is given. The Walberswick contract is here mentioned.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Gardner's *History of Dunwich*, p. 115, where the Port of Kessingland is mentioned in an Inquisition for Wreck of the Sea of about 1237. There is plenty of other evidence for this statement which is too long to reproduce here.

He is recorded as one of the two Members of Parliament for Dunwich in 1427,<sup>6</sup> and three times one of the two Bailiffs of the town (1429, 1430, and 1440),<sup>7</sup> corresponding to Mayor elsewhere. During these years of his importance, his name appears on Rentals for Dunwich in respect of land held there.<sup>8</sup> In that for 1436-7 he is shown as paying 13d. rent for the year. But in the next available Rental, that for 1441-2, his name no longer appears. If then he was Bailiff for 1440, but has disappeared from the Rental of the following year, and his name is thereafter no longer recorded anywhere, it seems reasonable to suppose that he died at that time, perhaps in office. And his death then would exactly fit the sudden and marked change in the building and design of Kessingland Tower already noticed. For the point above which the change occurs would have required about 4 or 5 years to build up to, and 6 or 7 more summers would be needed for completion. Allowing an interval of a year or two for the finding of Russell's successor, the rest of the Tower could just about have been finished by the autumn of 1449. And here it should be noted that the carving of the arches at the top of the eastern bell-chamber window was never finished off suggesting that the stonework was put in unfinished in order to get the whole work completed by Michaelmas instead of waiting for another summer. The Wars of the Roses were already in the air, the Duke of Suffolk was murdered in May 1450, and building would have stopped for several years owing to the unsettled state of the country.<sup>9</sup> This is probably why the Kessingland parapet was never completed; that the stone for it had, at some time, been collected on the site, is suggested by two boat loads of stone being taken from Kessingland to Walberswick, one in 1475 and the other in 1483;<sup>10</sup> the idea being that the stone lying idle was at those times sold by Kessingland, where no further building on any scale took place, to Walberswick where rebuilding was being done on a large scale.

Further, from another surviving building contract, that for Helmingham (1487-88),<sup>2</sup> where the Tower has considerable resemblance to that of Kessingland, we learn of a clause prohibiting the hanging of bells until the Tower had been erected for 4 years. So that if this very sensible provision was common practice, and if

<sup>6</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> B. M. Add. Ch. 40704 shows he had not begun to pay rent as early as 1403. P.R.O., S.C. (Rentals and Surveys), 11/886 covers years 1427, 1427-28, 1428-29, 1429-30, 1430-31, 1431-32, 1432-33, 1433-34, 1435-36, 1436-37—this last being the final year mentioned in the text. B. M. Add. Ch. 40728 is for 1434-35, and P.R.O. S.C. 11/887 is another version of this. B. M. Add. Ch. 40729 is for 1441-42, and shows no rent from Russell.

<sup>9</sup> *cf.* the graph of fluctuations in building at p. 160 (1947 edition) of John Harvey's *Gothic England* (Batsford, 1947 etc.).

<sup>10</sup> See entries on pp. 39 and 51 of the Rev. R. W. M. Lewis's *Walberswick Churchwardens' Accounts, A.D. 1450-1499*, (Private publication of 1948).

Kessingland Tower was in fact finished in 1449, we should expect them to begin to think about bells in 1454, after the elapse of 4 completed summers. And that is exactly what we do find. In that year two men of Kessingland, Robert Thurston<sup>11</sup> and John Bewcher,<sup>12</sup> both made their wills in which they left money for bells, and in Bewcher's will they are called 'the new bells.' Thurston's will was made on the 'Sabbath next after the Feast of St. Edmund' (Sunday, November 24th) 1454 and Bewcher's on some date in the same year. The further dates of Probate, though given in the footnotes are here quite immaterial to our purpose, as what we are considering is what was in the mind of the testator on the day or in the year when he made his will, not when he actually died. This is the first known mention of any Kessingland bells. There is also another will, but of a few years later, which has been quoted elsewhere—that of Joan Mawsey<sup>13</sup> or Mawfey who made her will on July 28th 1459 and left 1 mark (26/8d.) for the work on the bells. In terms of our modern, 1951, devalued currency, Thurston's bequest of 3/4d. would be worth somewhere between £13 and £16, Bewcher's of 6/8d. double those amounts, and Joan Mawsey's of 26/8d. as much as from £106 to £133.<sup>14</sup> There are other wills about the bells of later date, showing continuous care for them, but the next extant one is of 1485,<sup>15</sup> and those quoted seem to be the starting point.

For all these reasons it seems most likely that Kessingland's Tower was finished about 500 years ago in the autumn of 1449. On St. Edmund's Day, Nov. 20th 1949 Kessingland observed the 500th anniversary.

<sup>11</sup> Ipswich Probate Registry, Vol. I, f. 104. Date of Probate not known.

<sup>12</sup> Norwich Probate Registry, Neve, ff. 40, 41. Made in 1454, but said to have been proved in 1456.

<sup>13</sup> Ipswich Probate Registry, Vol. II, f. 29. Proved 27th Oct. 1459. She describes herself in the will as the widow of Richard Mawsey or Mawfey, and Crisp's Calendar wrongly ascribes the will to her late husband.

<sup>14</sup> See John Harvey, *The Gothic World*, p. 42 for how to do the necessary sums. I have given round figures, omitting shillings and pence.

<sup>15</sup> Norwich Probate Registry, Aubry, f. 90. Will of Agnes Wattys, made 12th Nov. 1485. Proved 4th Nov. 1486.

## APPENDIX I.—THE WALBERSWICK CONTRACT (B.M. ADD. CH. 17634).

This bille endentyd witnessith that on the tewesday next after the feste of seynt Mathie Apostle the fourte zeer of Kyng Henry the Sexte <sup>1</sup> a comenaunt was makyd by twyn Thomas Baugot Thomas Wolfard William Ambryngdale & Thomas Pellyng of the town of Walbureswyk on the one partye and Richard Russel of Donewich & Adam Powle of Blythburgh masons on the other partye that is to seyne that the fornseid Richard & Adam schal make or do make a Stepel joynd to the Cherche of Walbureswyk fornseid with foure botraas and one vice <sup>2</sup> & tqwelve foote wyde and sexe foote thikke the walles <sup>3</sup> the wallyng the tabellyng <sup>4</sup> and the orbyng <sup>5</sup> sewtly <sup>6</sup> after the stepil of Dunstale <sup>7</sup> well & trewely & competently a dore in the West also good as the dore in the stepel of Halesworth <sup>8</sup> and a wyndowe of foure dayes <sup>9</sup> a boue the dore sewtly after the wyndowe of thre dayes of Halesworth and thre wyndowes atte nethir soler <sup>10</sup> and eche wyndowe of two dayes and foure wyndowes atte ouerer soler the wyndowe of thre dayes sewtly after Halesworth. The fornseid Richard & Adam shal werke or doo werke on the stepel fornseid two termes in the zeer' saf the ferste zeer' zeerly in the tyme of werkyng of setting & leying that is to say bitwixen the festes of the Annuncyacion of our lady & seynt Mychel Archaungel

<sup>1</sup> This is either Tuesday 25th September 1425 or Tuesday 26th February 1425/6, according to whether 'seynt Mathie Apostle' means St. Matthew (Sept. 21st) or St. Matthias (Feb. 24th). Both dates given are within the 4th regnal year of Henry VI, and neither precludes the summer of 1426 from being 'the ferste zeer' in which the 'setting and leying' would be the only work done.

<sup>2</sup> Vice=spiral staircase.

<sup>3</sup> These stipulated dimensions appear to be those for the lay-out of the foundation walls. If, as seems reasonable, the walls are 4½ feet thick above the plinth, as are those at Kessingland, then by subtracting the extra nine inches on the outside of both walls represented by the 6 feet of the foundation part below the plinth, we arrive at 22 ft. 6 ins. as being the square of the tower above the plinth. And this is only 1½ ins. greater than that taken with a tape, and quoted in the text of my paper. It seems that a complete set of accurate measurements for archaeological purposes has never been taken at Walberswick, as it has at Kessingland (see Appendix II). This is a pity.

<sup>4</sup> tabellyng=string courses.

<sup>5</sup> orbyng=panelling.

<sup>6</sup> sewtly=nicely, decently, in the best manner.

<sup>7</sup> This must refer to Tunstall Tower being in four sections divided by string courses, and the general idea of how Walberswick is to be made. By departure from the model both in proportions already noted, and in other details, such as the large 3 light bell-chamber windows, Russell and Paul built something far more impressive than is their specified model.

<sup>8</sup> On the other hand the Walberswick 'dore' is almost a replica of the Halesworth one. Both are of soft oolite limestone, which has not weathered well. This was not repeated at Kessingland, where the doorway is much more elaborate, and is of hard magnesian limestone. For map of the provenance of these stones see T. D. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>9</sup> dayes=lig hts.

<sup>10</sup> soler=story.

but if it be other maner consented on bothe partyes and the fornsaid Thomas Baugot Thomas William & Thomas schal fynde alle maner of mateer to the stepel fornsaid that is to say free stoon lyme & calyon<sup>11</sup> water and soond<sup>12</sup> and alle maner thyngge that nedith to stagyng & wyndyng & schouellis & alle maner vessel that is nedeful to the stepel fornsaid and an hows<sup>13</sup> to werke jnne to ete and drynke & to lygge jnne & to make mete jnne and that be hadde by the place of workyng. The fornsaid Richard & Adam schal take of the fornsaid Thomas Baugot Thomas William & Thomas for the zarde werkynge xlyt scheelynggs of laughfull money of Ingland and a cade of full heryng eche zeer in tyme of werkynge and eche of hem a gowne of leuere<sup>14</sup> ones in the tyme of werkynge so that they scholden be gode men & trewe to the werk fornsaid.

(*Indented but not sealed*).

<sup>11</sup> calyon=flint.

<sup>12</sup> soond=sand.

<sup>13</sup> For details about these masons' lodges see Harvey, *The Gothic World*, pp. 16-17. The whole of Chapter I, in which this comes, on 'The Production of Gothic Art', i.e. building methods etc, is most valuable for an understanding of how Russell and Paul went to work.

<sup>14</sup> gowne of leuere=gown of livery. For the practice of giving livery to specialist craftsmen see Harvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7 with notes at p. 141 bottom line. For illustration of a master-mason wearing such a gown see Fig. 19, p. 61, of Harvey's *The Plantagenets* (Batsford, 1948), showing Henry III discussing a building with him. The third figure in the group is a courtier of some sort. For a master-mason directing operations see Fig. 46 of Harvey's *Henry Yevele* (Batsford, 1944), and for special clothing being given to Masters of the first rank, see *ibid.*, p. 30.

APPENDIX II.—MEASUREMENTS OF KESSINGLAND TOWER, TAKEN BY MR. JOHN H. HARVEY, F.S.A. AND THE AUTHOR IN JULY 1948.

	ft.	ins.
<i>Height.</i> Original ground level to 1st String Course	22	2
1st String Course to 2nd ditto.	22	2½
2nd ditto to 3rd ditto	26	0
3rd ditto to Gargoyle ditto	25	10
	<hr/>	
Total height built by Russell & Master II	96	2½
18th century brick parapet	1	10
19th century (?) stone pinnacles	1	4½
	<hr/>	
Total actual height	99	5
Less difference between original and present ground levels	0	3
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Present visible height to pinnacle tops	99	2
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<i>Base.</i> Outside measurement from wall to wall	24	4½
Buttress splay above plinth	3	1

(Similar measurements at Walberswick for these last gave 22 ft. 4½ ins. and 2 ft. 6 ins.).

The centre of the Kessingland west doorway is offset 4 ins. to the north of the centre line, and the west window 2 ins. This clearly was done to allow room for the insertion of a wider west doorway on the original Walberswick lay-out as planned, and yet leave room for the start of the vice. This shows Russell's ingenuity as an architect, for most people who have been accustomed to see these things all their lives have never noticed this. For possible similarities between this Kessingland west doorway and that of Salle, Norfolk, see p. 32 of *Salle*, by Canon W. L. E. Parsons (Jarrolds, 1937).

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(The blocks for Plates XXIV and XXV were kindly supplied by Mr. Chitty.—Ed.)