



Architectural Notes in the Neighbourhood of Cheltenham

J. L. P

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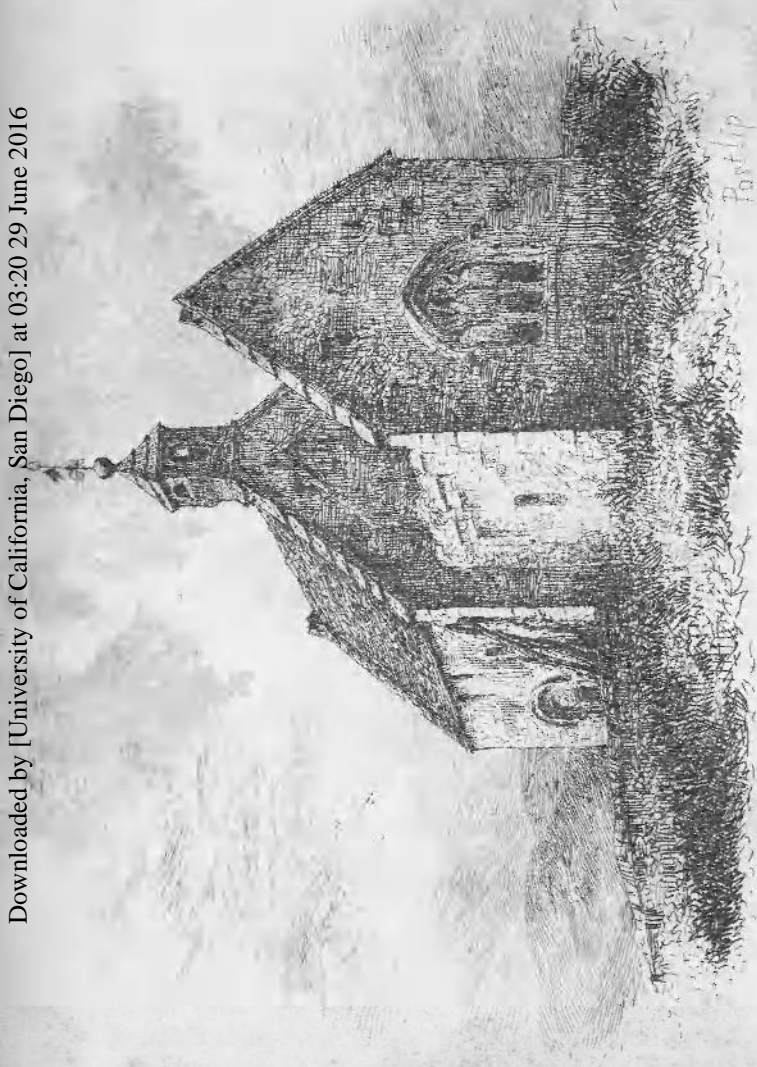
ARCHITECTURAL NOTES IN THE NEIGHBOUR-
HOOD OF CHELTENHAM.

IF there are any spots in England which do not afford to the lover of medieval architecture several objects of interest within the reach of moderate excursions, assuredly Cheltenham is not one of them. In its immediate vicinity are Gloucester and Tewkesbury; its own church, a fine cruciform structure, presents two specimens of art which are perhaps nearly unique, the rose window in the south transept, and the beautiful turret-shaped piscina in the chancel. And in every direction we meet with village churches, which will be found worthy of examination. It is to some of the least known of these that I propose to call the attention of the reader.

But I would first say a word or two upon Tewkesbury church, a building which I am not aware has received that amount of illustration it deserves. Its grand Norman features, as every one knows, are the magnificent arch in the west front, with the elegant turrets by which it is flanked, and its rich central tower. The arch is filled up with a late window, erected in fact in the seventeenth century, though probably in imitation of an early Perpendicular window which preceded it, over a pointed door, which from its inelegant form and proportions I cannot believe, in spite of its mouldings, to belong to a good period. The wall in which these stand, which is between six and seven feet in thickness, appears to contain no vestige of Norman work. Nor is this all. A vertical break in the masonry, close to the impost of the arch, in fact corresponding with the salient angles between the shafts, shews that at least the face of this wall does not coincide with that of the original wall; that this arch was deeper by at least a flat sur-

face in the jamb, of greater or less width ; and that either the wall was thinner than the present one, its interior face occupying the same position, or else that it stood back altogether, as in the front of Peterborough, forming a magnificent porch or atrium. I confess I wish we could prove this latter arrangement to have been the true one, for I am convinced no other could have given a grander effect to the arch, but I have not yet been able to discover in the masonry within the church any indications which might ratify the conclusion. The masses however extend upwards of thirteen feet from the west wall to the first pier-arch, which is narrower than the others in the nave ; and the circumstance that no remains exist of a Norman door in the west wall (a feature generally untouched even when later windows are inserted) leads us to suspect that the whole wall belongs to a period subsequent to the Norman.

Some rough masonry seen in the clerestory wall between the vaulting and external roof of the aisle, gives reason to suppose that the original Norman design under Fitz-Hamon (in the reign of Henry I.), included two western towers, which probably were never brought near to completion ; the present turrets might be the work of his successor, Robert, earl of Gloucester. The same also appears to be the case with the upper part of the central tower, which differs not only in architectural character, but in masonry and even material, from the lower. This lower stage is perfectly plain externally, with two simple round-headed windows on each face ; within, it is ornamented by an arcade enclosing a narrow gallery, and by other arches engaged in the wall, clearly intended to be seen from the body of the church, from which it is now excluded by a vaulting in one of the later styles. The interior of this stage of the tower is of regular smooth masonry, though somewhat wide-jointed, and of a material very similar to Caen stone. The upper part of the tower, which is much enriched externally, and exhibits a range of intersecting arches, is perfectly plain in its interior ; which is faced with red sandstone, of a masonry much less highly finished than that below, in fact, giving no indication that it was intended to be open to the church. From this I cannot help thinking that Fitz-Hamon's structure was completed, in execution at least, if not in design, with a central tower consisting only of the present basement-story, and having much



the same character with that of Romsey church. I merely throw out these as suggestions; perhaps some more careful antiquary may have given the subject a closer examination.

As a good specimen of pure though enriched Norman, I may name the ruined chapel of Postlip, near Winchcomb. Like many other churches and chapels in Gloucestershire, it has a fine old manor-house very near it. This is principally Elizabethan, though part of it exhibits Perpendicular features. The chapel indeed seems to have been touched by the same architects who designed or added to the hall, for its east and west windows are late Perpendicular, and its belfry evidently belongs to a later period, probably that in which the Elizabethan part of the hall was built. There are some good chimney-pieces of the last named period remaining in the house (which is now only tenanted by labourers.) Among the farm buildings is a fine old barn, which appears to be of the Tudor period; the coping of one of its gables has the figure of a man standing upright. On the right hand side of its entrance porch or transept is a niche.

But to return to the chapel. It consists of a nave and chancel, the belfry (as we have seen, a comparatively modern one) stands over the chancel-arch. On the south side is a fine doorway with a semicircular arch of one order, supported by a shaft, and enriched with chevrons on the surface of the archivolt. The label is ornamented with balls on its inner surface, and the arch is filled up with a transom covered with scale-work, above a band of work not uncommon in advanced Norman, which may be described as a series of St. Andrew's crosses. The same appears on the capitals of the shafts. The nave has one narrow Norman window on the south side, eastward of the door, and a corresponding one on the north side. It has also the remains of a north door. The chancel has one window similar to those of the nave on each side, the internal splays being very deep.

The later features are, in the nave, a pointed plain niche on the north side near the chancel-arch, and a trefoiled piscina on the south side. The roof is a timber one which seems as late as the sixteenth century. In the chancel is a plain pointed niche on the north side, which has no appearance of having been used as a piscina. There are neither sedilia, piscina, nor door, on the south side of the chancel. But the principal feature is the chancel-arch, a round one,

of two orders, enriched to the westward, with the chevron (on the surface of the outer order of the archivolt), the billet (in the label), and the ornament I have already mentioned, in a band round the inner order of the arch, and the abacus of the capitals. The eastern face of the arch is comparatively plain. The outer order of the arch (to the westward) is supported by a shaft occupying the usual position between two salient angles. The inner order on a larger engaged shaft. The base has the claw that appears at Romsey and in other examples; and its mouldings shew it to be very pure (though not the earliest) Norman. This chapel is now only used as a barn, and the chancel is altogether unroofed.

Its dimensions are

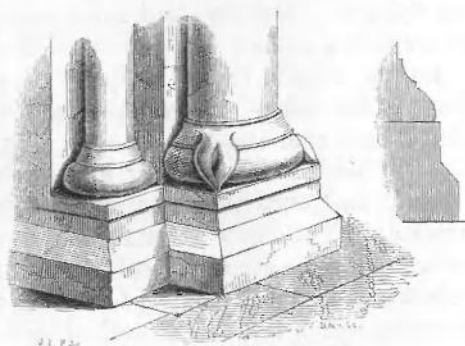
	FT.	IN.
Width of nave internally	16	5
Length (to western face of chancel-arch)	29	0

N.B. It will be remarked how very nearly this proportion agrees with that given in Professor Cockerell's *Observations on William of Wykeham's works*.—(*Proc. of Arch. Inst.* 1845. William of Wykeham, p. 34, 35.)

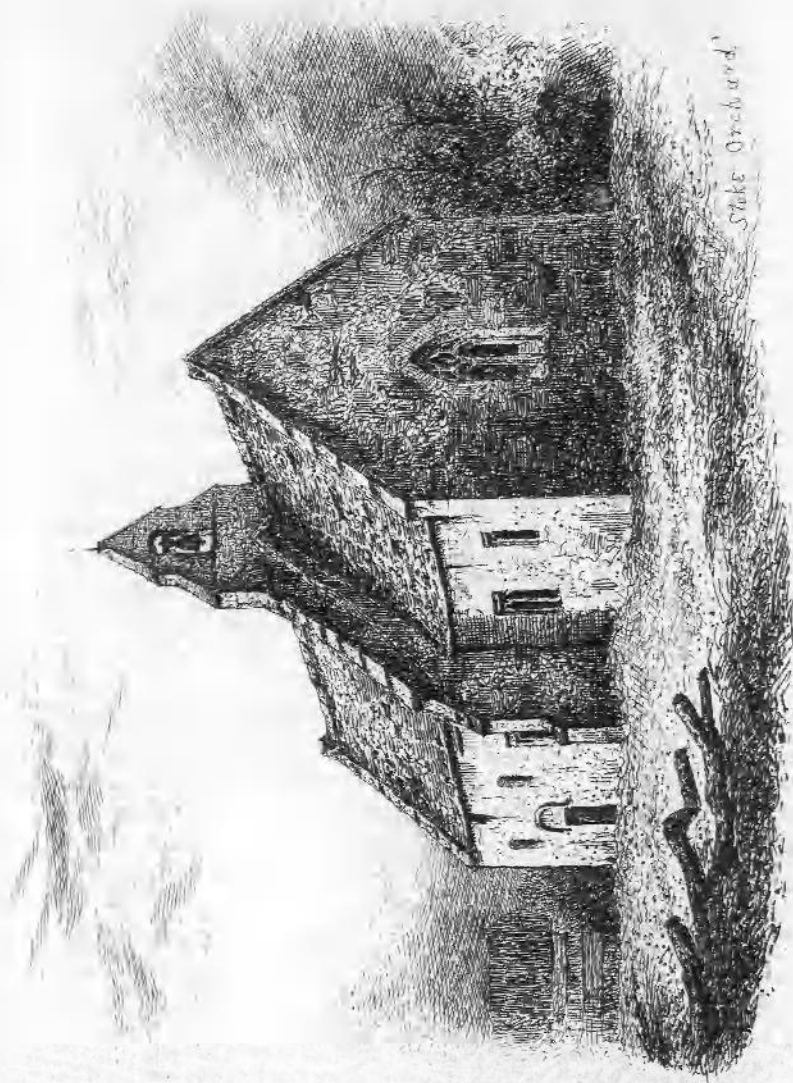
Depth of chancel-arch	2	9
Span of ditto	8	9



Chancel arch, Postlip



Base of shaft of arch, Postlip.



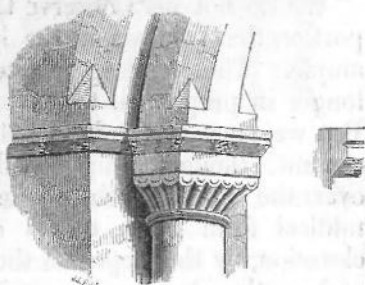
Length of chancel (from the east face of chancel-arch) . 14 9

Width of chancel 14 2

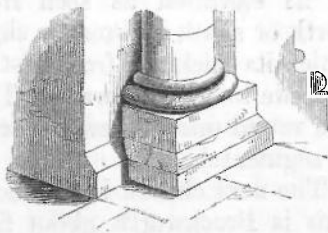
The side walls of the chancel are about 2 feet in thickness, the other walls about 3 feet.

The manor-house and chapel of Postlip stand in a very secluded spot among the hills to the south-west of Winchcomb, about four miles from Cheltenham.

The chapel of Stoke Orchard, in the parish of Bishop's Cleeve, is in many respects similar to that I have just described, though evidently of a later date as regards its Norman portions, while the parts which are added, or rebuilt, are of an early Perpendicular. This edifice also consists of a nave and chancel, with a belfry over the chancel-arch. The nave has a small round-headed west window, with a very deep splay; the width of the window itself being only 8 inches, while that of the aperture on the internal face of the wall is 5 feet 7 inches. It has no west door, but a south one very plain; at present square-headed with a semicircular label. A north doorway is a little richer, having a round torus in the jamb, but without any capital; it has a label with a very concave inner surface. The door has some good iron-work. The other windows of the nave, with the exception of one inserted, are of the same description with that at the west end, though somewhat smaller. The impost of the chancel-arch is that of a Norman arch of two orders, the lower one resting on an engaged shaft, the section of whose base approaches to Early English, as will be seen by comparing it with that of Postlip. The arch itself is pointed, of two chamfered orders, and I take it to belong to the same period with the central belfry and the chancel, viz., early Perpendicular. To this date probably belongs also a buttress on the north side of the nave, and those supporting the chancel-arch. The windows on the side of the chancel are square-



North Pier of Chancel arch, Stoke Orchard Church



Base of North Pier of Chancel arch, Stoke Orchard Church

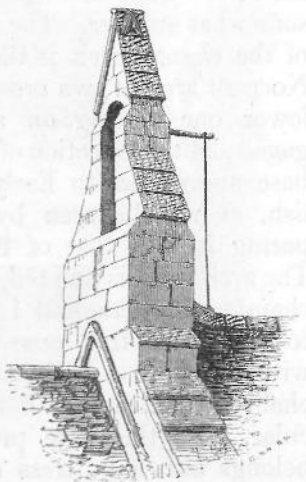
headed, though with arches and foliations to the lights; the eastern window is a pointed one of two lights. The piscina occupies the usual place in the south wall of the chancel, its recess is a simple round arch with a chamfer. There is no chancel door. The font is a fine cylindrical one, of Norman character, with an arcade of intersecting arches. The dimensions of this building are as follows;

	FT.	IN.
Breadth of nave internally	19	10
Length (to western face of chancel-arch)	44	5
Depth of chancel-arch	3	0
Span of ditto	7	4
Breadth of chancel	12	9
Length of ditto (to eastern face of chancel-arch)	18	5
Thickness of the side walls of the nave	2	7

Those of the chancel seem much the same. The west wall is probably thicker.

Height of wall of nave	12	8
Height of wall of chancel (to spring of gable)	12	3

We do not here observe the proportion that appears in the last example. The building is altogether longer in proportion to its breadth. But we must not omit to notice the elegant, though simple bell-turret over the chancel-arch. The pyramidal form given to its eastern elevation, by the slopes on the north and south sides, is also carried out in its elevation as seen from the north or south by smaller slopes, by which its thickness from east to west is made to taper upwards. The arch is a round one, somewhat depressed or segmental.



Bell-turret, Stoke Orchard Church

The next church I shall notice also contains Norman work. This is Brockworth, about five miles from Cheltenham, near the Painswick road. It presents a very picturesque outline,

having a central tower finished with a peculiar kind of high-pitched roof, without parapets. Westward of the tower is a small south transept or chapel, and westward of this is a south porch. The nave has a north aisle.

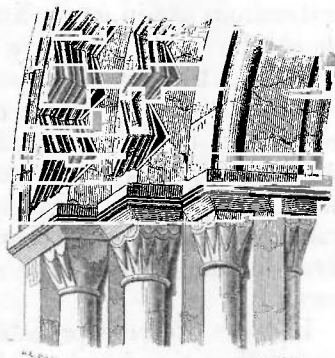
The east and west arches of the tower are very rich, especially the latter; that is, on their western faces, the eastern ones being comparatively plain. The chevrons are set in an oblique manner, which is difficult either to describe, or to draw accurately. Such specimens ought to be modelled. And I should remark that in the Norman examples in this neighbourhood, great richness and variety is given by the different ways in which the chevrons are set; some being on or parallel to the plane of the wall; some to the surface of the archivolt, and some on a surface forming an angle with both. The church of Bredon in Worcestershire, which I shall notice presently, exhibits very beautiful instances.

The west arch of the tower at Brockworth, has three orders to westward, resting on shafts; to the eastward it has only two. The eastern arch has two orders, on a semi-cylindrical pier; its western face is enriched with chevrons. Both of these arches are semicircular.

The chancel is Decorated, and has a south door, and a piscina, of which the basin projects, resting on an angular engaged shaft. Its niche is a pointed arch without foliation or label. The roof of the chancel is a cylindrical timber one, something like the frame of a ship. Part of it is boarded, and ornamented with ribs and bosses. The pulpit is of wood, with Perpendicular panelling. The font is round, without



Brockworth Church.



Capital of the north-west impost of
Tower arch, Brockworth.

much ornament; from the mouldings of the base, I should say it was of a transitional character, between the Norman and Early English. The capitals of the piers between the nave and the north aisle have the ball-flower. This aisle has an enriched flat boarded roof, beneath a cylindrical one of timber frame-work, such as has been noticed in the chancel. I look upon these roofs to be of different dates, as the ship-timber roof (as we will call it), which is a local feature, and often met with in Gloucestershire, frequently exhibits ornaments which prove that it was intended to be seen from the church, and not concealed by a flat boarding.

The west window is a good Decorated one of three lights, the tracery lights being triangular and foliated. It has no subordinate lights, I mean those caused by the piercing of spandrels, or spaces between the principal lights.

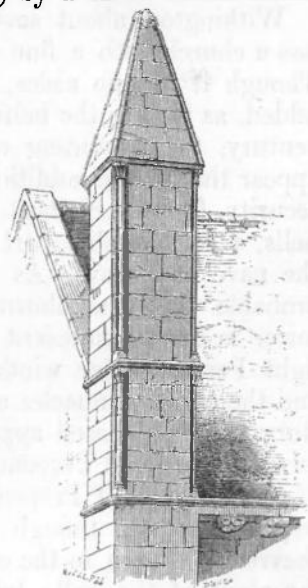
This interesting little church is now under repair, and the restorations are in good character. I sincerely hope that if it should be found necessary to rebuild the tower, care will be taken not to alter its proportions or present character in the slightest degree. Near the church is part of a fine old manor-house, now used as a farm-house. The lower part is of good stone masonry, with buttresses, it appears to be of a very late Perpendicular. The upper part is timbered, and has a gable with a beautiful barge-board. The barn and other farm buildings also shew some good masonry of the same period.

Bishop's Cleeve is probably better known than the churches I have described, and therefore I shall only remark in it a piscina in the south transept, which exhibits one of those curious coincidences between the Norman and Decorated styles which are sometimes (though oftener in castellated than ecclesiastical architecture) so close as to perplex the student. There seems to be no doubt that this piscina is Decorated, both from the niche, and the base of the shaft; but the capital of this shaft has a purely Norman appearance. It adjoins a beautiful Decorated tomb with a cross-legged effigy.



Piscina, Bishop's Cleeve.

Bredon church (in Worcestershire, about three miles from Tewkesbury) is a very remarkable one. The tower, which is Decorated, and has a lofty steeple, stands between the nave and chancel, but has no transepts. The nave, the western part of which is late Norman, has on the north side a porch of the same style, eastward of which is an aisle of only two pier-arches, but with three bays as regards windows, its east face being a continuation of the west wall of the tower. This aisle, as well as the chancel, is Decorated. The south aisle is a fine Early English one also of two bays, each of which has two couplets of trefoil-headed lancet windows, the lights being divided from each other (internally) by a shaft which stands free. This aisle terminates to the eastward in the same manner as the other, and does not reach to the west end of the church. The west end is flanked by square turrets, somewhat similar to those at Cleeve, though not so rich. The western arch supporting the tower is pointed, but is enriched with chevrons on its western face, and Norman capitals appear in the impost. The eastern arch is of a later character. The chancel, which is Decorated, consists of three bays, and has sedilia, piscina, and (on the north side) a Decorated tomb with a rich canopy, in the position which is sometimes occupied by the Easter sepulchre. On the south side is a later tomb. There is no door on the south side of this chancel. The churchyard contains some old tombs. This church has been lately much repaired, but its original character does not seem to have been in any way destroyed or injured. It is altogether worth a very careful examination.



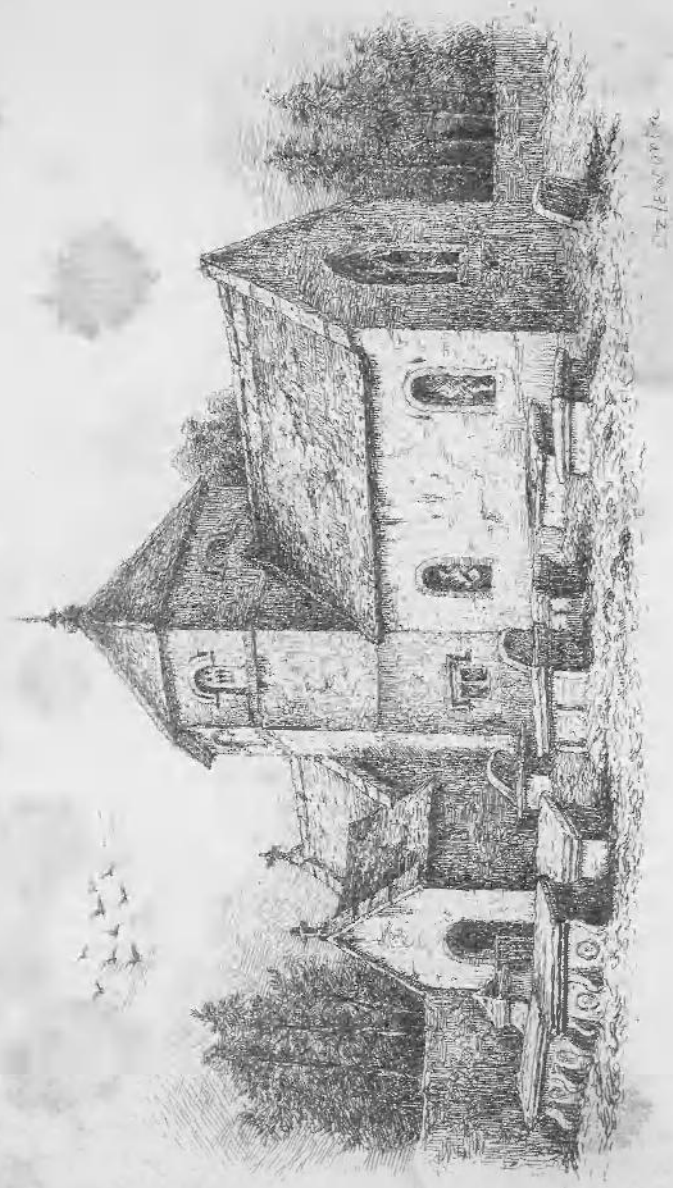
Turret, Bredon.

Badgeworth church, about three miles south-west of Cheltenham, has a very beautiful north aisle of a somewhat early Decorated character. Its windows are of two lights, with a foliated triangle in the head, and profusely enriched with the ball-flower, even to the foliations of the lights. Their mould-

ings are numerous and much varied. There are some remains of painted glass in these windows, also of Decorated character. The church is dedicated to the Holy Trinity, but this chapel to St. Margaret. It appears that Hugh de Audley, earl of Gloucester, and Margaret his wife, were seized of the manor of Badgeworth, 21 Edw. III.^a May we infer from the dedication a probability that this Margaret was the foundress, and so fix a pretty accurate date to this specimen of Decorated architecture? There is some Decorated work, but of a much inferior character, in the rest of the church. The tower, which stands at the west end, is a fine one, with panelled battlements.

Withington, about seven miles south-east of Cheltenham, has a church with a fine central tower and a south transept. Though it has no aisles, it has a clerestory range, evidently added, as well as the belfry story of the tower, in the fifteenth century, to a building of an earlier date. And it would appear that in this addition beauty was consulted rather than security, for a very short time ago, during the ringing of the bells, a considerable part of the facing of the north wall of the nave gave way. As there is no northern transept, it is probable that the abutment to the arches supporting the tower is hardly sufficient. The belfry story has a fine four-light Perpendicular window with a crocketed ogee canopy, and the corner pinnacles are very elegant. Those of the clerestory have a debased appearance, though the windows themselves are of good Perpendicular work, and contain fragments of painted glass of Perpendicular character. The south doorway is Norman, though late; it is richly ornamented with chevrons. These, in the outer and inner order, are parallel to the plane of the wall; but the intermediate order is convex, and has the chevrons so disposed round it, as to form a range of diamonds facing diagonally; each of these has a small knob in the centre. The chancel and lower part of the tower are transition from Norman to Early English, though with insertions. The western arch of the tower has Norman shafts in its impost, but is pointed, and the architrave, on its western face, is enriched with some bold convex mouldings. It may be remarked that the superior enrichment of the western faces of transverse arches is a very general feature in this district.

^a Atkyns' Gloucestershire.



In the chancel is a trefoil-headed lancet window, the interior splay of which forms a pointed arch, which is enriched by chevrons on the surface of the archivolt. The other lancet windows in the chancel are also trefoil-headed. The south transept is Decorated.



Window, North side of Chancel, Withington.

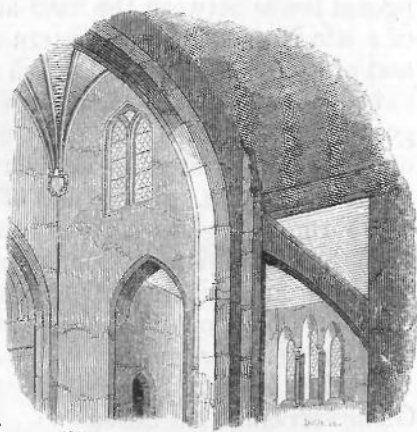
Swindon church, about a mile from Cheltenham, has been partly rebuilt, but still retains its curious Norman western tower, of an hexagonal form. The only other instance of this kind of tower with which I am acquainted is at Ozleworth, also in this county; of which I therefore send a sketch, though it is not strictly within the limits which I proposed to keep in my excursions. Ozleworth church has an hexagonal tower between the nave and the chancel. It must be of a late Norman, as the western arch supporting it is pointed, and of a decidedly Early English character. This is much enriched by a kind of ornament which might have been suggested by the variety of ways in which the chevron is laid upon the architrave in late Norman, and of which we have noticed examples. It consists of a bold open-work of cylinders forming angles with each other, (as in the Norman chevron,) but of different inclinations, and in different planes: several examples are to be found in transitional buildings. Ozleworth is about eleven or twelve miles from Stroud, in a south-western direction.

Having read in Atkyns' Gloucestershire that Sevenhampton church was built by Mr. John Camber, who lies buried in the chancel, having died in 1447, I expected to find that most valuable thing, a church of one style, bearing a certain date. A glance however shewed me that it has not this claim upon our attention, as it ranges from Early English of a very rude cha-



Sevenhampton Church.

racter to a debased Perpendicular. Nevertheless it is a building of great interest, and no doubt a considerable part of it, especially the central tower and a south porch, the outer door of which has the tracery of the spandrels pierced, belongs to the date assigned. The front of the south transept has a triplet of lancets, and the chancel has likewise indications of Early English. The north transept has a late Decorated window; and the chancel, some early Perpendicular work introduced. But the principal feature is the curious insertion of the central tower. Though on approaching the church it seems of very good dimensions, yet it is considerably narrower than the transepts, and somewhat narrower than the nave. Its western piers consequently are detached, though there are no aisles to the church, and as they are not very massive, they are strengthened by flying buttresses in the interior, from the piers to the corresponding angles between the nave and transepts. The tower is open to the interior considerably above the roof of the transept, and has a north and south window: above these is a vaulted roof. Neither these windows nor the belfry windows have their lights foliated, though the latter are of very good composition. The tower presents a fine bold outline, from the stair-turret at the south-east angle. The south porch is close to the transept, which has a string-course resting on brackets on its west side, stopped by the face of the porch. This church is little more than a mile to the north-east of Whittington, which is on the London road, about five miles from Cheltenham, well known as exhibiting the remains of a fine old Elizabethan manor-house, with a little church adjoining it.



Inside of Sevenhampton Church Tower.

Brimpsfield, near Birlip, offers another instance of singular construction in the insertion of the tower, which is also central, and much narrower than the nave. The church consists merely of a nave and chancel. The tower rises directly

from the floor of the church, its east wall resting upon that of the nave, and its other three walls independent of any other. The west wall has a large pointed arch, quite plain, of one order, with a simple chamfer; the chancel-arch is round. Through the north and south walls of the tower are curious openings into the recesses formed by its projection into the nave. These openings consist each of half an Edwardian arch, with a plain chamfer, resting upon a massive engaged column of Early English or early Decorated character; a sketch will explain this better than any description. There is (at present) no eastern window, but the masonry of the east wall has not a very ancient appearance. The font has some delicate panelling. Altogether this church, though of no great promise as seen from the Cirencester road, (via Herminia,) well repays the trouble of diverging to it.

I need not inform the reader that the above notices comprise but a small portion of the ob-

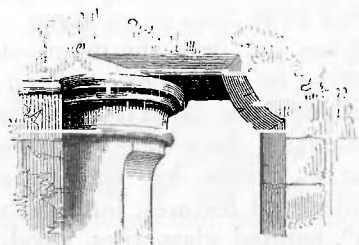
jects of interest in this neighbourhood. The little cross church of Dowdeswell, though of late character and exceedingly simple, exhibits much beauty of proportion, and some



Brimpsfield Church.



Inside of Brimpsfield Church, shewing Tower.



Opening through the South Wall of Tower, Brimpsfield Ch.

Norman remains lately dug up are preserved in it, which may have belonged to an earlier structure on the same spot. At Leckhampton are some good monumental effigies in the churchyard. The ruined chapel of Sudely castle is a well-known Perpendicular specimen of great beauty.

It will be observed that we have a very satisfactory gradation of Norman work, from the early parts of Tewkesbury (indeed we may include the Saxon of Deerhurst) to the transition, as seen in Bishop's Cleeve, Bredon, and Withington. There is less of the Early English than in any district I am acquainted with, though it is not devoid of specimens, as the chapter-house (as it is called) of Tewkesbury furnishes a fine example. Of the Decorated and Perpendicular there are abundant specimens, some of the highest beauty: indeed the Perpendicular of Gloucester cathedral is almost a peculiar style by itself. We also notice the great variety exhibited in the village churches, as regards outline and character. We have every sort of tower; the plain one without parapets, the embattled tower, the pinnaced tower, the parapet and spire, and the broach spire. Of the latter, Shurdington offers a fine instance; it is one of the most taper spires of masonry that I ever saw. And the central tower or belfry seems to occur more frequently in this district than many others in England. According to Atkyns' Gloucestershire, which though it gives a very short and meagre description of each church, generally enables us to form some idea of its plan, there are upwards of forty examples in the county; I have certainly seen more than half that number myself. Wiltshire also contains many instances. In Northamptonshire, a county remarkable for the beauty of its churches, it would be difficult to find more than six or seven.

It has not been my intention to give a minute description of every building I have visited; I trust I have said enough to induce the church antiquary who may be resident at Cheltenham for a time to give special attention to the village churches within his reach; he will find not only curious architectural features, but also valuable specimens of decoration^b, painted glass, tiles, wood-work, as well as monumental remains, that will amply reward his research. I. L. P.

^b Among minor decorations I might remark the painting in one of the monumental chapels in Tewkesbury church, and

the altar-cloth at Winchcomb, which has embroidery belonging, as far as I can judge, to the fifteenth or sixteenth century.