



St. Mary's Church, Iffley, Oxfordshire

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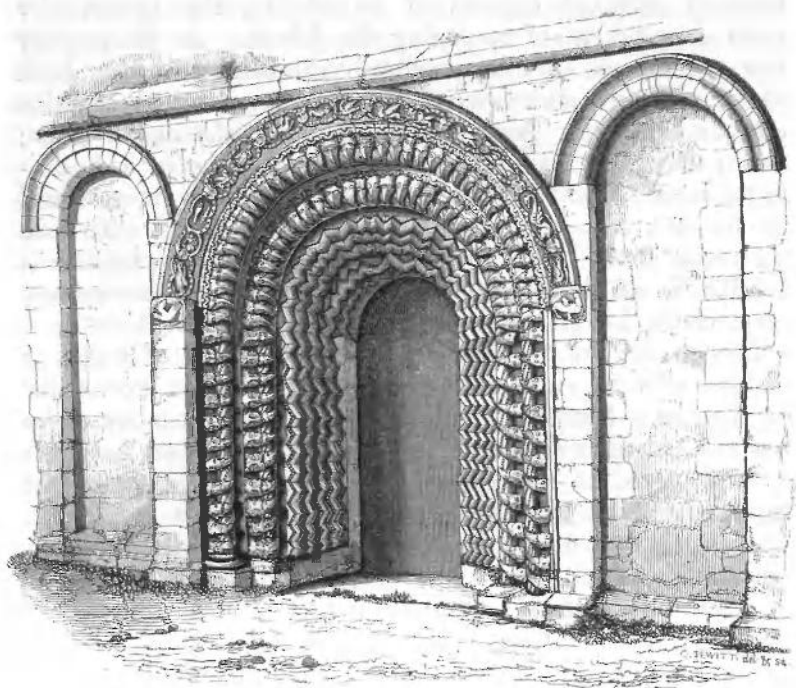
E. Mackenzie.

J. H. Le Keux.

INTERIOR OF OFFLEY CHURCH.
[LOOKING WEST.]

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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, IFFLEY, OXFORDSHIRE.

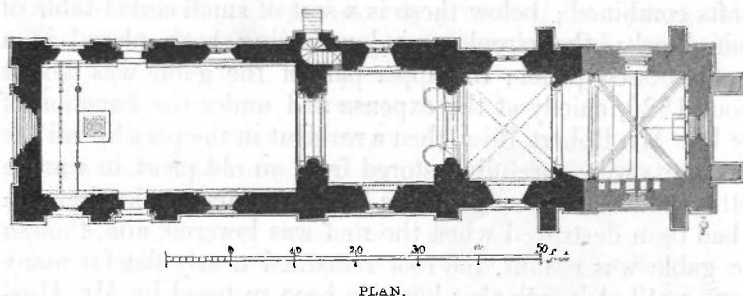


WEST DOOR

SOME apology may appear necessary for introducing into the *Archæological Journal*, an account of a church so well known as Iffley; but as no satisfactory history or description of it is accessible to the general reader, and it is acknowledged to be one of the best examples of rich Norman work, the following notes may, to some extent, supply the deficiency.

This interesting church has been described as Saxon, and as early Norman, and even Dr. Ingram, in his valuable *Memoirs of Oxford*, seems to entertain considerable doubt as to the precise age of the structure. But a careful comparison of it with other examples of which the history is more accurately known, such as the work of William of Sens at Canterbury, and of Bishop Alexander at Lincoln, leaves no

doubt that Iffley church belongs to the latest period of the Norman style, no portion of it being, probably, earlier than 1160, and the whole finished within ten years of that time, with the exception of the eastern bay, which was added about fifty years afterwards. The church, which was given to the priory of Kenilworth by the lady Juliana de St. Remi, in the time of Henry II., is not mentioned in the recitation of the charter of confirmation at the beginning of the reign of that king, and it is most probable that the monks rebuilt the edifice soon after it came into their possession, according to the usual custom of those times^a.



The ground-plan is a simple oblong, (drawn out to rather a disproportionate length by the addition of the eastern bay,) with the tower in the centre. The west front is remarkably fine and rich Norman work, and the deeply recessed central doorway affords perhaps one of the best specimens in existence of this style. The dripstone is ornamented with some of the signs of the zodiac, and with birds, winged lions, and a cherubim; the two next orders are ornamented with beak-heads, the inner arch with zigzags only^b. The tall and narrow blank arches on each side of this rich central doorway are plain, the buttresses are also quite plain, and the strings are not continued round them.

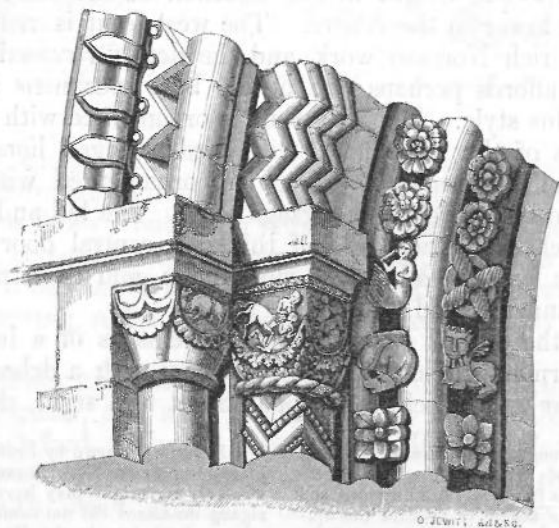
Over the central doorway are the remains of a large circular Norman window (oculus), filled up with a debased Perpendicular one, which, it is apparent at first sight, should be

^a The resemblance between the west doorways of Iffley and Kenilworth churches, has frequently been noticed, and helps in some degree to confirm this opinion. There is a good engraving of the Kenilworth doorway in the Builder for August, 1847, which may be compared with that of Iffley here given.

^b It was well shewn by Professor Willis in his lecture on Norwich cathedral, that whatever its origin may have been, the zigzag ornament did not come into general use until late in the Norman style. The earlier parts of Norwich are without it, but in the later portions it begins to appear.

removed, and the circular window restored ; nevertheless during the late restorations under the judicious care of Mr. Hussey, it was not deemed expedient to attempt this, there being no evidence to shew how the circular space was filled up, although many think that the window at Barfreton, so well restored by Mr. Hussey, would have afforded an excellent model, or the one at the west end of the Temple church, London, both of which are of nearly the same age.

In the upper part of the west front are three small windows enriched with zigzags, and coupled shafts, with a beaded ornament twisting round them, and sculptured capitals to the two shafts combined ; below these is a sort of small corbel-table of plain blocks, the circular window having been placed in a large recessed panel ; the upper part of the gable was rebuilt about 1820, chiefly at the expense and under the direction of the late Mr. Robert Bliss, then a resident in the parish, and the ornaments were carefully restored from an old print, in a much better manner than might have been expected at that period : it had been destroyed when the roof was lowered, and, though the gable was rebuilt, the roof remained nearly flat for many years, until at length that has also been restored by Mr. Hussey to its original pitch.



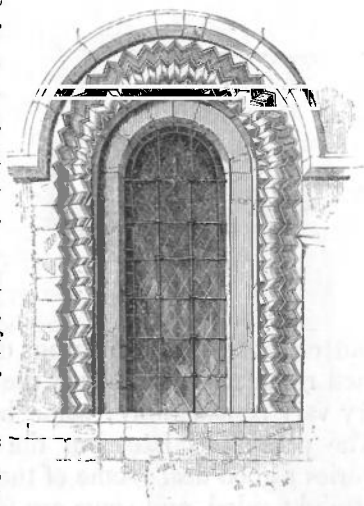
IMPOST OF SOUTH DOORWAY.

The south doorway is very rich and good Norman, the arch

enriched with roses and other ornaments, both on the soffit and on the face of the inner order; the jambs are ornamented with large square flowers, and other sculpture; the shafts of the second order are also enriched, one with the zigzag, the other with the diamond pattern, both beaded^c. The outer order is plain, the shafts not enriched. The capitals are all richly sculptured, and on one of them occurs the Sagittarius or mounted archer, which has been supposed to be a proof that the work was erected in the time of King Stephen, but there does not appear to be any good authority for this notion. This doorway stands in a shallow projection, to give greater depth to the arch; it was formerly protected by a porch.

The north doorway is also good Norman work, but much plainer than the south, and presents no remarkable features.

The windows nearest the west end on each side remain in their original state, with round arches enriched with the zigzag ornament, and are good examples of late Norman windows, which are not very common, the original windows of most of our Norman churches having been replaced in later styles, or altered to suit the taste of a subsequent age. All the other windows of Iffley church have been either rebuilt, or altered by the insertion of later tracery, but the arches of the Norman windows remain; the hoodmoulds round the heads of these windows on the exterior are continued horizontally as strings along the face of the wall.

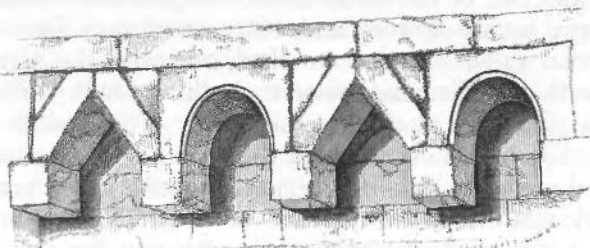


Window, South side

The parapets of the nave are carried upon corbel-tables, the corbels being generally plain square blocks, but in one part, nearly over the south door, two of these blocks are carved into the usual grotesque forms, and it appears as if the whole had been intended to be carved, the work of carving being commonly executed after the blocks were placed.

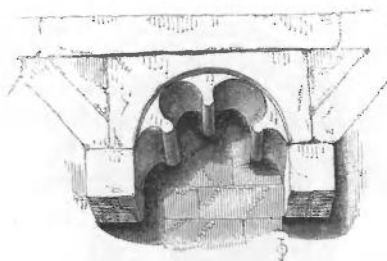
^c There are shafts exactly similar to these in the transition work of the cathedral of Chartres.

The central tower is very massive, being the whole width of

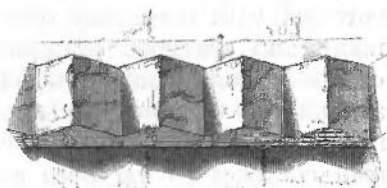


Corbel table, North side Tower.

the church, and square, but rises very slightly above the ridge of the roof: the upper part is enriched, the lower part plain; the



South side of Tower

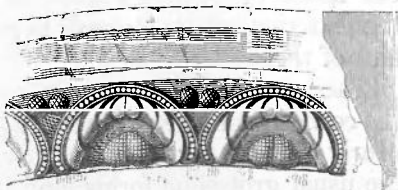


String on Tower.

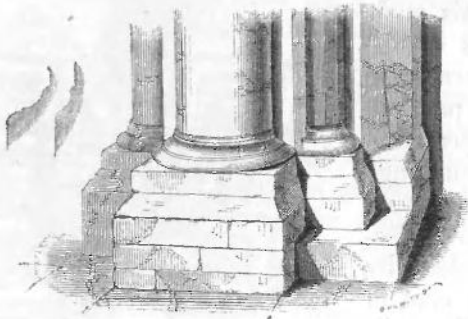
buttresses are flat, the strings die against them, and are not carried round, as is frequently the case. The windows of the belfry vary considerably; some being worked, and others plain. The parapet is late, but the corbel-table is original, and it varies a good deal; some of the small arcs are round, others are straight sided, and some are foliated.

The tower-arches are very rich, and many of the ornaments are of uncommon occurrence; some of them resemble sun-flowers, others pine-apples or fir-cones. Two of the shafts in the jambs of each of the tower-arches are

of black marble. The bases of the shafts are of late Norman character. Under the tower is a flat boarded ceiling, which was renewed in the late repairs, but the arrangement appears to

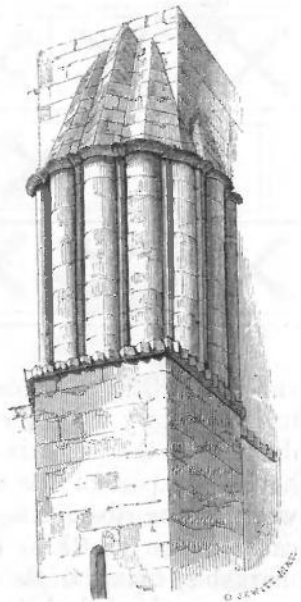


Moulding of Tower-arch.



BASE OF TOWER-ARCH.

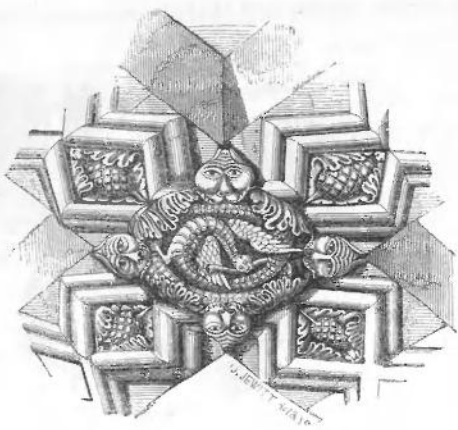
have been always the same. On the north side of the tower is a square stair-turret, ornamented in the upper part with a sort of shafts, and a peculiar zigzag string, and finished at the top by a sloping stone roof dying into the face of the tower below the corbel-table; the original entrance to the stair-turret was from within the church, but a modern entrance has been made from the outside. In the thickness of the south wall of the tower is the staircase to the rood-loft, introduced in the fifteenth century, with two doorways, one from the floor, the other to the loft, both now blocked up; this appears to have caused the removal of a Norman window and the introduction of a Perpendicular one, to suit the new arrangement, and the opposite window was made uniform with this. At the east end of the nave, and joining on to the tower, are recesses in the wall now plastered over, which were the places for two chantry-altars, an arrangement which was very customary.



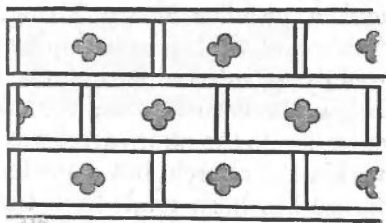
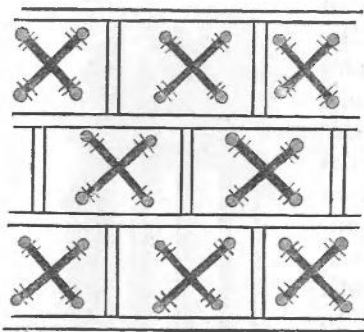
Top of Staircase Turret.

The first bay of the present, which was the whole of the original, chancel, is, like the rest of the work, rich Norman, with a good groined vault, the ribs very boldly cut into zigzags,

with a curious boss of four heads in the centre; on this vault were remains of the ancient pattern with which it was painted, and which appeared to be of the same age with the vault itself, but this is now effectually concealed by another thick coat of whitewash. The walls of this part of the church have evidently given way at some period, and caused a disturbance of the vault



Boss of Church Vault.

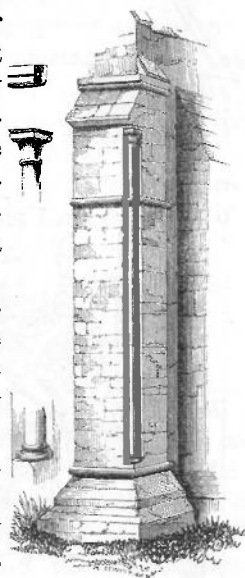


Pattern on the Vault.

and ribs. This settlement may have taken place in the thirteenth century when the east wall was removed, and the introduction of the two windows of a somewhat later period may have been part of the alterations caused by it. The zigzag work on the ribs is singularly irregular, without any apparent cause. The shafts in the corners of this bay are very remarkable, being triple shafts under a single capital, and the spaces or channels between the shafts are filled with square flowers richly carved in a variety of patterns. On the outside of this bay the hoodmoulds of the Norman windows are continued as strings, as in the nave, as far as the original Norman buttress, but not round it nor beyond it. The windows inserted in this bay are good early Decorated.

The eastern bay of the chancel is pure Early English, and on careful examination is evidently an addition to the length, and

does not replace an earlier bay, or an apse. It has a good Early English vault, with ribs and shafts, and strings, all of which have very decided and good Early English mouldings: the sedilia, piscina, and ambry, are also good specimens of that style, and the windows are single lancets. The junction of the old work with the new may be clearly traced both on the exterior and in the interior. On the exterior it takes place on each side, in the middle of a flat buttress, which is made wider than usual on this account, with a joint all the way up it. In the interior the vaulting shafts in the angles of the Norman work caused some difficulty in the removal of the east wall, which has been got over in an ingenious, yet rather clumsy manner, the shafts being left in their places, and the wall cut away behind them in an oblique direction, receding to meet the new work, as may be observed on the plan: to cover this awkward junction a small arch with the zigzag cut upon it is introduced, forming a sort of tall panel of the intermediate space, which is in fact the thickness of the original east wall. The buttresses at the eastern angles, although flat and resembling Norman, have very decided Early English shafts recessed in the angles. Over the east window in the gable is a small Norman window, or air-hole, with the zigzag all round it; this was probably in the same situation in the original east wall, and was used up again in the new work.



Buttress at the north-east angle.

The vault of this eastern bay appears to have had too great a thrust for the strength of the walls, and additional buttresses were added at the sides in the fifteenth century, which sufficed for a considerable period, but latterly the east wall was found to be thrust so much out of the upright as to become dangerous, and two massive buttresses have been added at the east end which are more useful than ornamental, but seem likely to answer their purpose.

The large square font, with its detached shafts or legs, is too well known to require further description. The church is entirely fitted up with open seats in good taste, and has been put into thorough repair.

I. H. P.