

XXIII.—*On Consecration Crosses, with some English examples.* Communicated
by JOHN HENRY MIDDLETON, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

Read Feb. 23, 1882.

THE Ceremony of the Consecration of a Church as it was practised shortly before the Norman Conquest is well described in a paper communicated in 1833 by Mr. John Gage, then Director, and printed in *Archaeologia*, vol. xxv. p. 235. He also gives in full the Consecration Service from an English MS. Pontifical of the eleventh century in the Rouen library.

I will, therefore, only remark that an important part of this service consisted in crosses marked upon the walls by the officiating bishop with oil of chrism, at twenty-four different places, distributed equally throughout the building; that is, three crosses on the north, south, east, and west walls respectively, both inside and out.^a The number, twenty-four, is not specified in the rubric of the eleventh century Pontifical, which only says: “Deinde in circuitu Ecclesie per parietes a dextro et a sinistro faciens crucem cum pollice de ipso crismate, dicens,” &c.; but this number appears to have been used from very early times.

It was the custom, both in England and on the Continent, to mark beforehand the places where the bishop was to anoint the walls with chrism. This was done by crosses of various shapes and sizes, carved in stone, modelled in plaster, painted (generally in red), or lastly by metal crosses affixed to the walls. In some cases two of these methods were employed in the same cross. That these crosses were prepared beforehand, ready for the bishop to put the chrism on it, is, I think, proved by the fact that many of them are in relief, and have obviously not been added after the church was finished.

^a Durandus, in his *Rationale Divinarum Officiorum*, lib. I. c. vi. gives an interesting, though fanciful, account of the meanings of the various ceremonies in the Consecration Service.

Moreover, a fine MS. Missal of the sixteenth century (Brit. Mus. *Addit. MS.* 18143) shows the bishop in the act of anointing one of these crosses, which are shown ready-painted on the walls. The illumination is a curious one, as it shows the bishop in cope and mitre climbing a ladder to reach the cross, which is placed over a column of a high arcade, inside a church. Two clerks in alb and cassock are singing out of a book; and others, apparently boys, stand by bearing a candlestick, a processional cross, and a holy water-pot and sprinkler. The crosses are gold, within circles, alternately blue and red; they are *formée* at the points, and the angles are filled up by four smaller crosses. (See fig.)



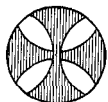
Mr. Gage mentions a Pontifical, printed at Rome in 1595, which has a print showing the bishop marking a cross "mounted on a moveable stage six steps high, the rubric requiring that the said crosses shall be ten palms (7 feet 5 inches) above the floor."^a This somewhat inconvenient height was probably selected in order that the crosses might be out of reach, and less exposed to injury. The rule was by no means universally observed, as in numberless instances, especially early ones, the crosses are quite low down.

I have selected this subject to lay before the Society of Antiquaries, first, because these crosses are rapidly disappearing under the skinning and scraping process, which our churches are one by one suffering, under the name of "restoration," a process which in most cases not only destroys the generally faint remains of consecration crosses, but also obliterates all marks of the various fittings and furniture which give life and interest to an old church. A large number of the crosses mentioned and illustrated in the following notes have disappeared in the last seven or eight years. Another point of interest is the light that these crosses throw on the re-consecration of churches or parts of churches. Further, they often afford valuable evidence as to the date of wall paintings which they cover or form part of.

In churches that are built of rubble stonework with ashlar dressings the crosses often are to be found on buttresses, angle-stones, and door-jambs: places selected on account of the smooth-dressed stone affording a better surface for painting or carving. In most cases, however, rough walling in mediæval churches, whether inside or outside, was covered with stucco. Modern "restorers" generally cut this away under the notion that bare stone walls are mediæval. Many of the crosses in my list have been destroyed in this way. One of the most curious cases

^a In Brit. Mus. Library. See *Archæologia*, vol. xxv. p. 277.

I ever met with was at North Repps, in Norfolk, a church built of roughly-cut flints in the usual Norfolk fashion. Patches of stucco, about a foot square, were laid on the walls outside to the full number of twelve, and on these the consecration crosses were painted. On going there a few weeks ago to make full-sized drawings of them I found that since my former visit the church had been "restored" and every trace of these stucco patches cut away from the walls.



Type A.

The forms of the crosses are numerous, but the commonest of all is type A. The figure is always scratched into the stone or plaster with compasses, and then generally painted.

The earliest specimen I know of this figure is at Bishop's Cleeve, Gloucestershire, where it is very deeply cut into a respond of the nave arcade (see Pl. xxxiii. fig. 1), date about 1190—1200. In this case the church has been reconsecrated in the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the choir was lengthened and the high altar moved eastwards. There is a consecration cross of this later date on each side of the west door. It should be noted that a consecration cross is often much later than the wall it is on, owing to the re-consecration of the *whole* building while only a part was new.

In some cases, when an addition to a church was a chapel complete in itself, the new part only was consecrated, and had all the twenty-four crosses. This was the case at Henry the Seventh's Chapel, Westminster, where there are still visible three small crosses in each of the aisles, and three large ones at the west end above the doorways (Pl. xxxiv. fig. 2). Another instance of this is at Arundel Church, where there still remain five large crosses painted red (of the type A), so arranged that it is evident that the nave and its aisles had the full number of crosses without counting any in the choir.

Perhaps the commonest Norman form is a cross, made by simple cuts with a dot at each end (Pl. xxxiii. fig. 24). Another early form is a plain cross with slightly expanded ends (fig. 25).

In a few instances the crosses are large, richly carved, and form a conspicuous part of the architectural ornament of the church.

At Salisbury Cathedral there is a very fine and elaborate set; eight inside and eight outside are still visible. The rest have been hidden by monuments or destroyed by "restoration." Unfortunately, at Salisbury the "restorer" has not been content with destruction, but has committed forgery as well. Outside at the west end two sham consecration crosses have been put up in the gables of the aisle doorways, which was *not* the position of the original crosses. The real

ones are of three sorts (Pl. xxxv. figs. 3, 4, and 5). The first variety inside are a cross flory, about 2 feet across, incised about a quarter of an inch into the stone. Small metal pins, the stumps of which still remain, show that this sinking was filled up by a metal cross. Traces of green stain show that this was of bronze, probably gilt. A quatrefoiled circle is painted in red with black outlines round the cross. About 5 inches below the sunk cross there is another metal pin, which may have served to fix a candlestick for use on the anniversary of the consecration or on other festivals.^a These crosses are just below the string-course, the lowest point of each being 7 feet 6 inches from the level of the nave-floor. The cross in the north-east transept has been filled up with plaster. In the south-east transept a modern tomb occupies the place where the cross should be. The cross at the west end inside appears to have been filled in and coloured, the limbs red and the points yellow. At the four points, and in two angles, are stumps of $\frac{5}{8}$ in. iron pegs.

The second variety at Salisbury, outside the church, is like those inside, except that the quatrefoiled circle is carved and moulded in stone (fig. 4). There are the same pins for fixing the bronze cross and the candle below. All those outside belong to this type except one (fig. 5), which is very richly carved; it has had no metal cross inserted but an overlying quatrefoil carved, of which a section is shown on the Plate. It has the pin below. This one cross is on the south-east buttress of the main transept. Its lower point is 3 feet 1 inch above the top of the plinth, 7 feet 1 inch above the ground. The Plan (Pl. xxxvi.) shows the position of all the crosses now visible. It will be observed that the choir and eastern part of the church has the full number of crosses on the side walls, leaving none for the nave. This is probably due to the fact that the choir was built and consecrated, as was often the case, before the erection of the nave. When the nave was built the whole church was probably reconsecrated,^b six new crosses

^a I owe this suggestion, as well as much other valuable help in working up this subject, to J. T. Micklethwaite, Esq., F.S.A. The crosses in Henry the Seventh's Chapel, mentioned above, have a wood-plug in their centre, and another wood-plug 20 inches below—no doubt for the same purpose, for fixing the metal cross, and the candlestick or lamp below. The six side crosses are 8 feet above the floor, the three western ones more than 20 feet up.

^b Durandus, *Rat. Div. Offi.* lib. I. c. vi. n. 31, gives the reasons that make it necessary for a church to be re-consecrated:—First. If it is burnt so that all or the greater part of the walls have their surfaces destroyed, but not for the mere burning of the roofs. Second. If the whole or most part of the church falls down, but not if the church is rebuilt piecemeal. Third. If there is a real doubt whether the church ever was consecrated, and no record can be found.

being put at the new west end, and the remaining eighteen old crosses anointed with chrism a second time. The height of the crosses is 7 feet 6 inches to their lower points from the floor of the church and the original ground level outside, the height ordered by the later Roman rubrics.

Another instance of re-consecration appears to exist at Chichester Cathedral. At the east ends of the aisles there are plain sunk crosses cut deep into the stone (Pl. XXXIII. fig. 7), possibly once filled up with metal. Above these there are a number of iron pins, as if for the attachment of another metal cross, added probably on the occasion of the second consecration.

The most elaborate specimens of these crosses are at St. Mary Ottery, Devon; they are carved in high relief on shields borne by angels, within moulded panels, a quatrefoil in a square. Thirteen still exist, six being inside. Those outside are placed under the centres of the windows. Inside there is one on each side of the west door. Most of them have marks of remains of iron brackets for light inside.

In some cases the central cross at the east end was made more magnificent than the others for the sake of architectural effect. Among these more elaborate forms, we may I think class the crucifix which is carved in stone under the east windows of some churches. At Chisledon, Wilts, there is in this position a medallion, about 18 inches across, within which is carved a crucifix with St. Mary and St. John; thirteenth century work. Coggeshall, Essex, has a similar crucifix, and there is another at Purton, Wilts. At Preshute near Marlborough, there is a carved medallion, 14 inches in diameter, with an elaborate floriated cross; but the church has been thoroughly "restored," and I am not sure that it is *in situ*.

List of Consecration Crosses, in addition to those mentioned above:—

Pevensey, Sussex (Pl. XXXVII. fig. 8).—An elaborate floriated cross in black and red, on inside plaster of south chancel wall.

Brooke, Kent.—The whole walls of the chancel are covered with painted subjects in medallions, 2 feet in diameter; on each side of the east window there is a blue cross with red outline and circles round it (fig. 9), placed at the intersection of two of the medallions, about 7 feet above the floor. About the middle of the north and south walls there is, on each side, another cross (fig. 10) within a red quatrefoil. The tracery of the chancel window shows its date to be soon after the year 1300. The crosses are painted *over* the subjects in the

medallions, which are thus shown to be contemporary with the walls. The rest of the church is Norman; but the position of the crosses shows that the whole building was reconsecrated when the new decorated chancel was built.

St. Mary de Crypt, Gloucester.—Cross painted red of type A on the back of a single sedile on the north side of the sanctuary.

Berkeley, Gloucestershire.—Three large crosses, $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter (Pl. xxxiii. fig. 11) inside, at west end, two high over the doorway and one on its north side. These have, unfortunately, been re-painted within the last few years quite a different red from what they were before.

Wolston, Gloucestershire.—Traces of nine crosses, belonging to at least two separate consecrations.

Inside.—1. Large red cross of type A, outline scratched on the plaster, and painted red, on east jamb of south-east chancel window (Perpendicular). (Pl. xxxiv. fig. 12.)

2. Smaller one on south jamb of chancel arch (fig. 13), 7 feet above the step.

3. Traces of cross on west jamb of south-east nave window.

Outside.—4. On west jamb of south door, 3 feet 7 inches above the floor. The shape is unusual (fig. 14). The colour was all scraped off when the church was restored, but the scratched outline is still visible.

5 and 6. Crosses with curved limbs (fig. 15). Only traces of paint remain. These are on the west buttresses of the west Perpendicular tower.

7. Traces of cross on north-east nave buttress.

8 and 9. Outlines of two crosses on south wall of chancel.

All these outside are only from 3 to 4 feet above the ground.

This little church appears to have been consecrated three times, though no crosses remain on the small fragments that exist of the earliest part, which is very early Norman. The second consecration appears to have been at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and the last when the chancel was rebuilt in the fifteenth century.

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.—There were remains of crosses painted on the inside plastering, but at a recent "restoration" the plaster was cut away, and the rough stone-work pointed. There still remains on the stone-work of the choir piscina a curious figure (fig. 16), which I think must have been meant

for a consecration mark, though it is not a cross. The colouring was all scraped off at the "restoration" of the church. The figure was blue on a red roundel. Traces of another similar one existed on the north jamb of the chancel arch. This six-leaved figure occurs so often in positions where one would expect to find a consecration cross, that it seems probable that it was meant for one.

Badgeworth, Gloucestershire.—Cross modelled in relief in plaster on north and south inside walls of chancel. Destroyed at "restoration" (fig. 17.)

Shurdington Chapelry, Gloucestershire.—Cross with trefoil ends, deeply incised (fig. 18), on east jamb of south door (Decorated), 4 feet from floor. Two crosses of deeply-cut lines, $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch, on jambs of north Norman door. A cross in a circle (fig. 19) outside chancel on south quoin of east wall, 3 feet from ground.

Priory of Stanley St. Leonards, Gloucestershire.—Cross of common early form on north Norman door-jamb (Pl. XXXIII. fig. 24).

Elkstone, Gloucestershire.—A similar cross on jamb of south Norman door.

Leckhampton, Gloucestershire.—A fine large cross of type A, outside south wall of chancel, deeply incised into the stone.

Swindon, Gloucestershire.—Cross 3 inches by 2 inches, of cuts with dots at ends, on south-east splay of Norman tower, at west, which is an irregular polygon in plan, 4 feet from ground.

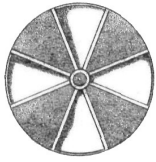
Kempley, Gloucester.—Cross in red on blue circle, painted on east wall, at the feet of the figure of the bishop. See *Archaeologia*, vol. XLVI. p. 192.

Oddington, Gloucestershire.—Cross of type A, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches across, 3 feet 6 inches from floor of porch, on jamb of south Norman door. It has a hole in the centre for fixing a metal cross. Outside north wall of chancel a cross with trefoil ends, carved in a circle, 22 inches in diameter, 5 feet from ground. Only half remains, and it is earlier than the fourteenth century wall, into which it is built.

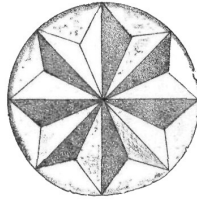
Ledbury, Gloucestershire.—Cross of type A, incised with sunk spandrels, about 3 inches in diameter on east jamb of north door.

Stowell, Gloucestershire.—Crosses of the early form (as fig. 24) outside, on west jamb of south door and on south wall near the south door.

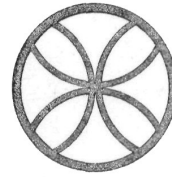
Iffley, Oxford.—An early form (fig. 20) on south jamb of west door, *circa* 1180.



20
Iffley, Oxford.



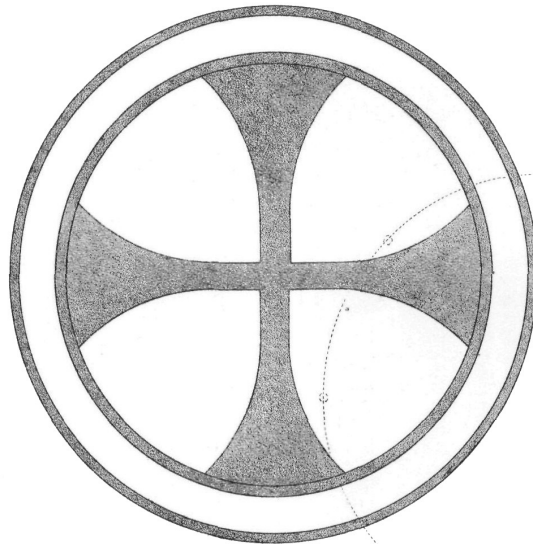
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Studland, Dorsetshire.



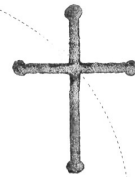
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Bishops Cleeve, Gloucestershire.



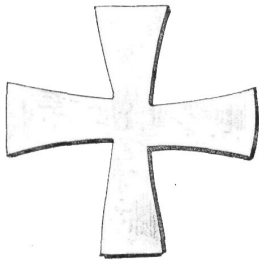
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St. Mary le Wigford,
Lincolnshire.



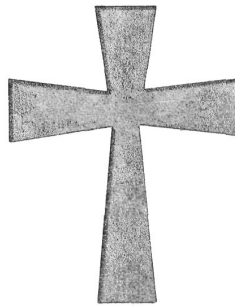
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Berkeley, Gloucestershire.



24
Stanley St. Leonards,
Gloucestershire.



25.
Ulceby Lincolnshire



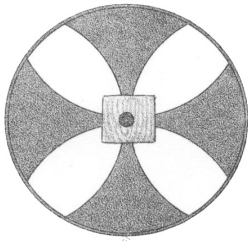
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Chichester Cathedral.

CONSECRATION CROSSES.

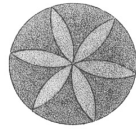
N^o 11 $\frac{1}{6}$, remainder $\frac{1}{3}$ full size.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London 1884.

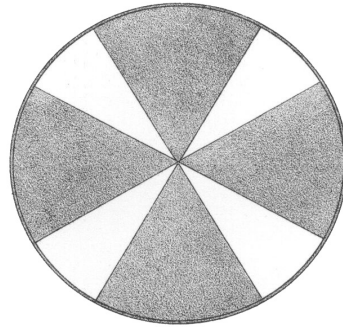
C.F. Kellith



2, Henry VIII's Chapel Westminster.



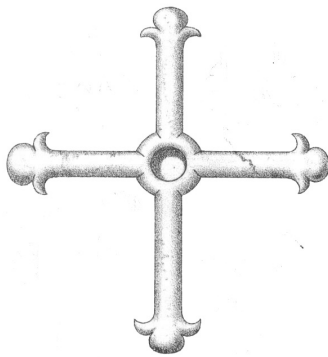
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Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.



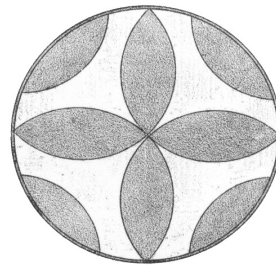
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Shurdington, Gloucestershire.



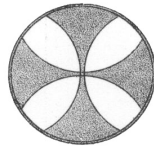
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Shurdington, Gloucestershire



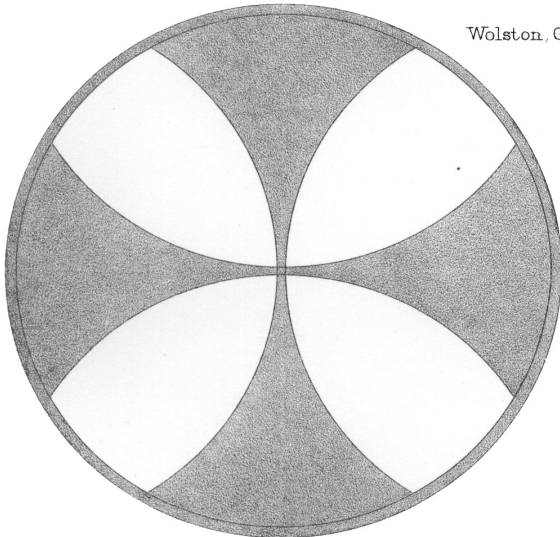
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Badgeworth, Gloucestershire.



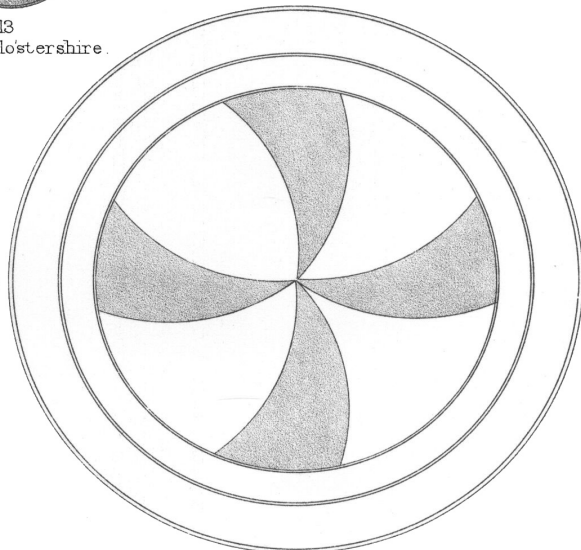
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Wolston Gloucestershire



13
Wolston, Gloucestershire.



12
Wolston, Gloucestershire.



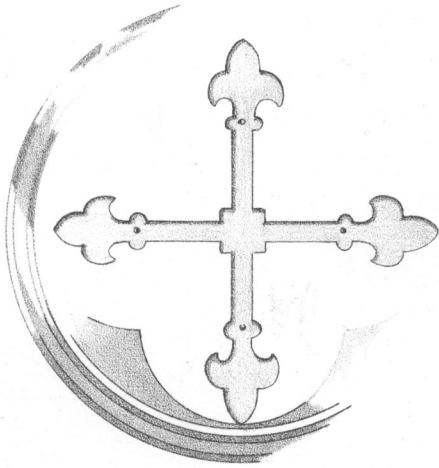
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CONSECRATION CROSSES.

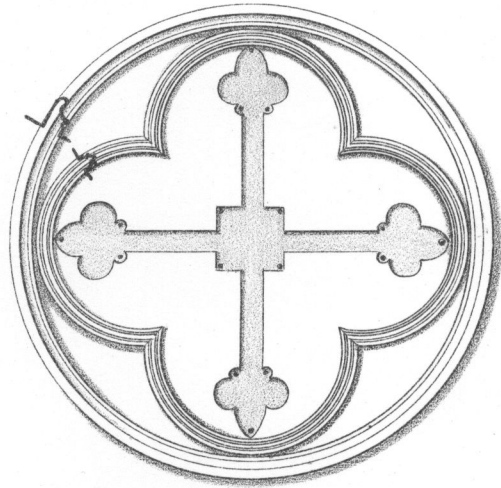
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Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1834.

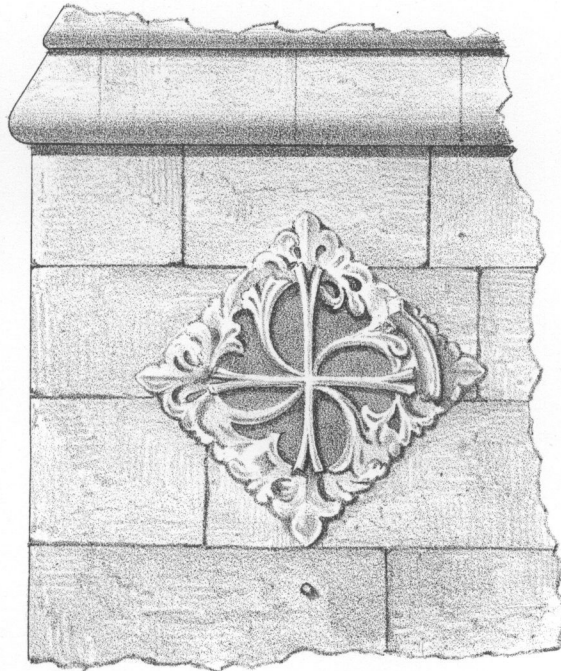
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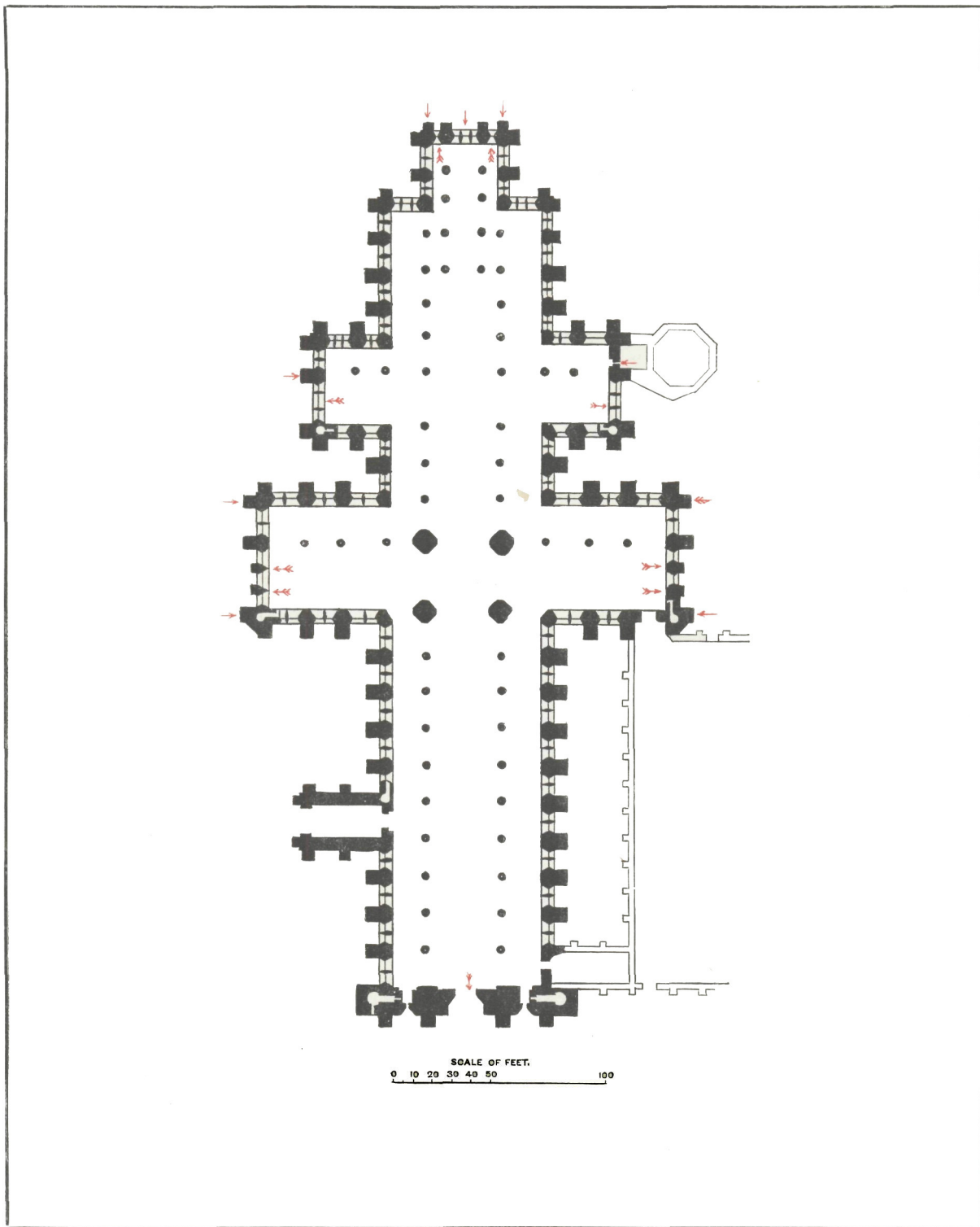

Section of
Quatrefoil.

CONSECRATION CROSSES.

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL.

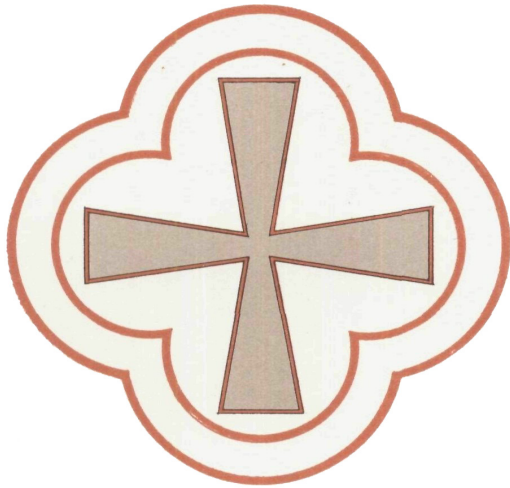
Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London. 1884.

C.F.Kell. Lith.

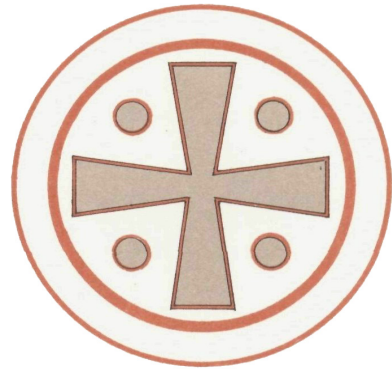


PLAN OF SALISBURY CATHEDRAL.

Showing the position of the Consecration Crosses.

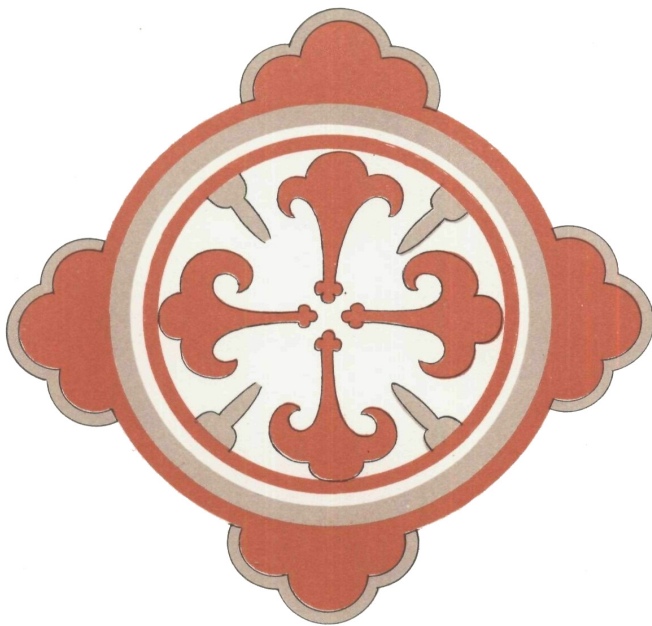


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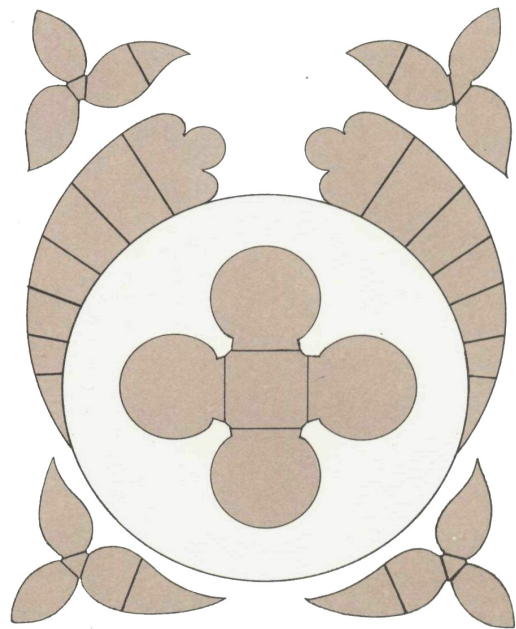
9

Brooke, Kent.



8

Pevensey, Sussex.



23

Blythborough, Suffolk.

CONSECRATION CROSSES.

Scale $\frac{1}{3}$ full size.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1884.

C.F. Kell, lith.

Studland, Dorset.—Another early form outside north wall of Norman chancel (fig. 21), about seven feet from ground.

St. Mary-le-Wigford, Lincoln.—On outside of north aisle wall, Early English (fig. 22), a small cross of type A, deeply incised.

Old Chapel, now the library, Pembroke College, Cambridge.—Remains of two crosses of type A, painted red, on east wall, inside. They are eleven inches in diameter, and are painted over some flowing decoration in black on the plaster.

Uffington, Berks.—A curious set of crosses are described in the *Ecclesiologist*, vol. xii. p. 154.

Blofield, Norfolk.—A large cross in circle, painted red with black outline, inside, on middle of north wall of north aisle.

Blythborough, Suffolk.—Quatrefoil or cross inlaid in flint (Pl. xxxvii. fig. 23), two outside east wall of chancel, 4 feet 6 inches from ground, and one on each side, on choir buttresses, just above the plinth. They have traces of paint on them. A plain square of ashlar stone is let in under the east window, and there are other square slabs on which probably the remaining crosses were painted, at various points along the north and south.

Thirsk, Yorks.—Cross inside, in south aisle (see *Churches of Yorkshire*, p. 8), since destroyed.

Little Braxted, Essex.—Two crosses, dark red in green circle, painted on plaster.

Edington, Wilts.—Two crosses, carved in stone, under west windows of aisles, date 1361.

Barfreston.—Three crosses at east end of chancel, inside, painted on plaster. Two near the corners above the stone string-course, and one below, under the east window (see drawing in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries).

Hardwick, Cambridgeshire.—Crosses inside chancel, above the paintings on the plaster (see *Ecclesiologist*, vol. xx. p. 316).

South Ferriby, Lincolnshire.—There is an eleventh-century tympanum of a door, not now *in situ*, carved in relief with figure of a bishop in the centre, and plain cross with expanding ends at each side.

Ulceby, Lincolnshire.—Cross, in relief, about $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch, with hole below for candlestick, not *in situ*. Early Norman. (Pl. xxxiii. fig. 25.)

Roscrea, Ireland.—In gable over west Norman door; a relief carved with figure and similar crosses at his feet, the whole design very like that at South Ferriby.

In the foregoing examples I have not included any from the Continent, though there are some instances, especially in Italy, where the crosses are made a very important ornamental feature.

An instance of second consecration (mentioned and illustrated in *Archaeologia*, vol. xxv. p. 275) should be noted. This is at the very early church of St. John, Syracuse, where both the earlier and later crosses, carved in relief, exist, one over the other. Under one of these pairs a tablet is let into the wall, with an inscription recording the fact that both are dedication crosses, the lower one being the older.

A graceful form of cross exists at the Ste. Chapelle, Paris, where they are carved on roundels, held by full-length statues of saints and angels.
