

## SOME NOTES ON HEYSHAM CHURCH AND PARISH

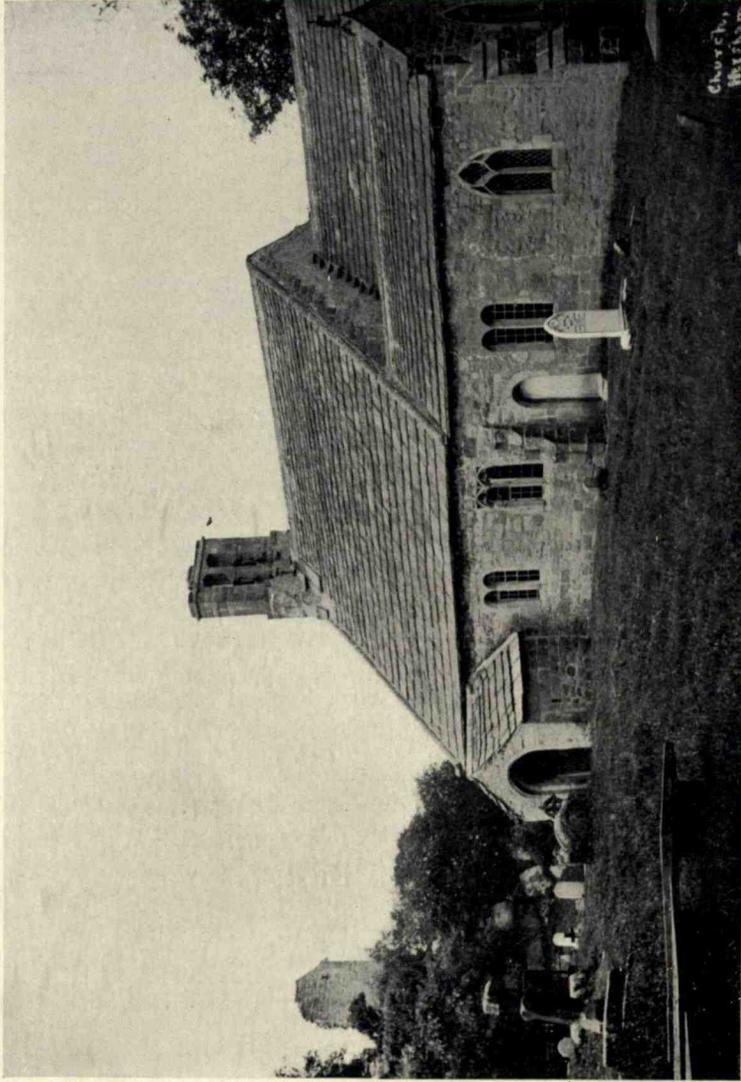
*By E. M. Grafton*

Read 14th January 1904

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THE original foundation of the Parish Church of St. Peter, at Heysham, is of a very early date, probably the seventh or eighth century. Masonry of rude, axe-hewn stone, wide-jointed with almost imperishable mortar, small doorways with single-stone arched headings, on imposts of long and short stones, point to a pre-Norman origin. Parts of the western end, and a former portion of the north wall of the church, with a small arched door, removed in building the present north aisle in 1864, and rebuilt on the south-west side of the Churchyard, are of this character.

The plan of this first early Church would be that of the present nave, from the western wall with its blocked-in ancient doorway to the chancel arch and screen, where probably—judging from the few English remains of Churches of that date—would have been a screen wall with a small archway and arcading on each side opening into an apse or square-ended presbytery. The massive chancel arch is without moulding or ornament, except cable-twisted capitals or impost mouldings from which the arch springs; there are no pillars or piers distinct from the wall. These great stones are of



ST. PETER'S CHURCH, HEYSHAM

To face p. 150.

an early type, probably belonging to the oldest part of the Church.

What is now the south aisle would be the next addition, some centuries later, when the southern nave wall was mainly removed, and arches and pillars placed supporting the roof instead. The windows in the outer wall show the transitional forms of round-headed Norman, with small cusped trefoil-headed lights.

Later than this the small chancel was built to replace the still smaller, early eastern part of the Church, a guide to its date being given by the unglazed window, opening formerly to the outside, now into the modern continuation of the south aisle. The tracery of this window, of flowing Decorated type, approaches to the best English examples of what is known in France as *Flamboyant*, or like the forms of waving flames, dating this part of the Church about 135c.

It is considered by a well-known modern authority<sup>1</sup> on Church architecture that the south aisle and chancel arch were rebuilt between 1400 and 1540—judging from mouldings and slight indications of Perpendicular work; if so, much of the rough hewn stone, and to some extent the original type of work, seem to have been employed again.

There is no masonry or stonework of any later date till we come to the quite modern addition of the northern aisle and the tracery of both east and west windows, altered and inserted in 1864.

The older fittings of the Church are interesting; there are fragments of good wood-carving, probably Decorated, used again in the modern wooden screen; the font cover is modern, of Jacobean design, the font itself having little indication of date, but probably early from its solid plainness. There is no

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Micklethwaite.

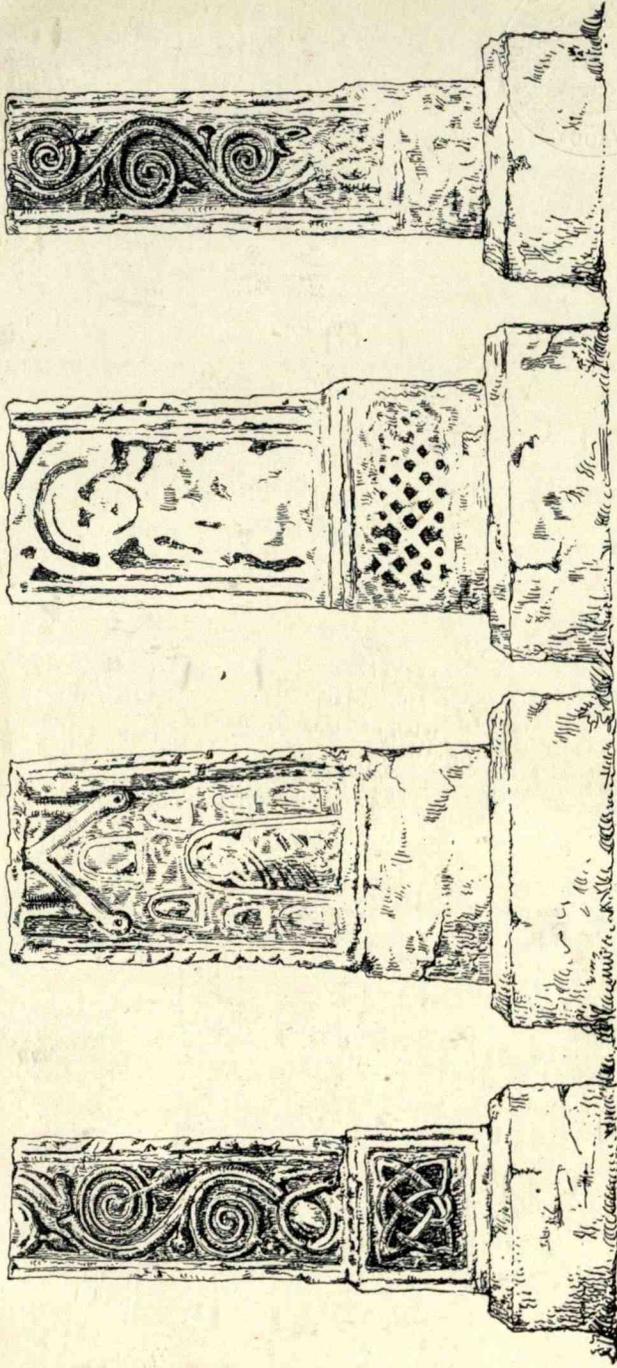
old glass. A very fine monumental slab,<sup>1</sup> now placed upright at the west end of the north aisle, is of good Decorated thirteenth-century work; the beautiful floriated Cross, springing from pierced Calvary steps, has head and arms terminating in foliations, groups of branches and leaves, of very good design.

Other slabs of stone preserved against the inner wall are of interest in showing the sequence of history, but of no artistic value, rudely cut and lettered, as is often the case in northern seventeenth-century work. Two of these stones in the south-eastern aisle record dates of the rectors of the parish of no special interest. Another in the eastern chancel wall is easily dated by its reference to William Ward as "Pastor of this Church," he being noted in the Oliverian Survey (of parishes in England during the Commonwealth) as "a Painful Pastor" of his flock.

A stone in the north wall has an inscription relating to the rebuilding of some portion of it in 1737 by the Rev. Thomas Clarkson, rector of Heysham and vicar of Chipping, curious for its reference to an old house "of the Greese in this town." This long low building, now divided into cottages, reached from the lower road by a flight of stone steps, from which it apparently takes its name, was once the rectory. The derivation of "greese" from "gradus" has some parallels in the use of the word in an early New Testament translation, where it is found in Acts xx. 40—"Paul stood on the *greese* and beckoned with his hand unto the people"—and in some Lancashire records of the same date reference is made to the "turn greese," *i.e.* the winding stone stair of Eccles Church tower.

Taking together the amount of very early work in the present Church, with the still more remarkable ruin of the Church of St. Patrick in the upper

<sup>1</sup> See lithographs, Cross, Plate No. II.

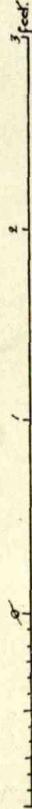


W. Face.

S. Face.

N. Face.

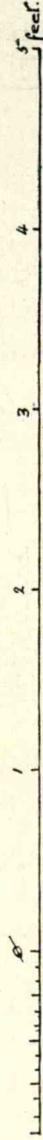
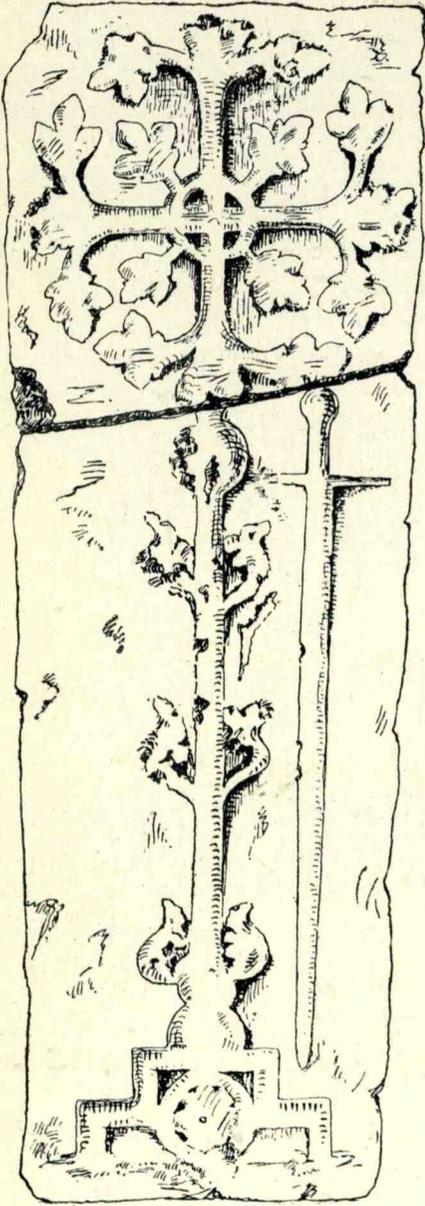
E. Face.



Scale of Feet

PORTION OF SHAFT OF RUNIC CROSS, ST. PETER'S CHURCHYARD, HEYSHAM

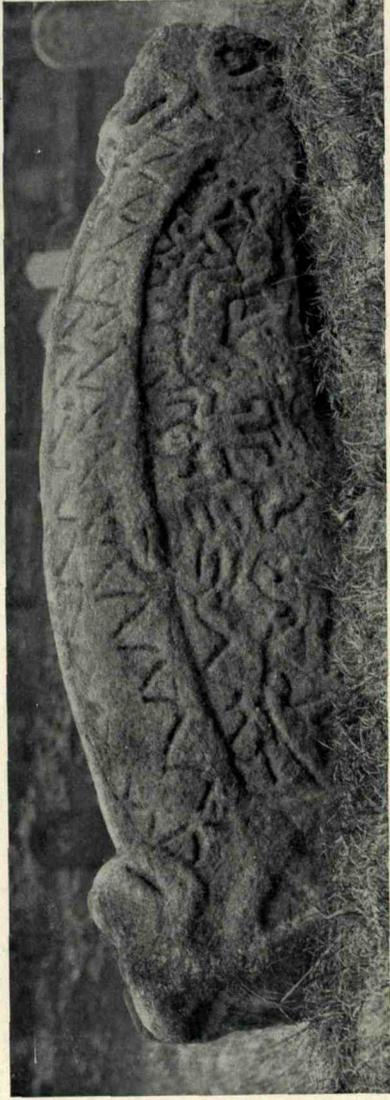
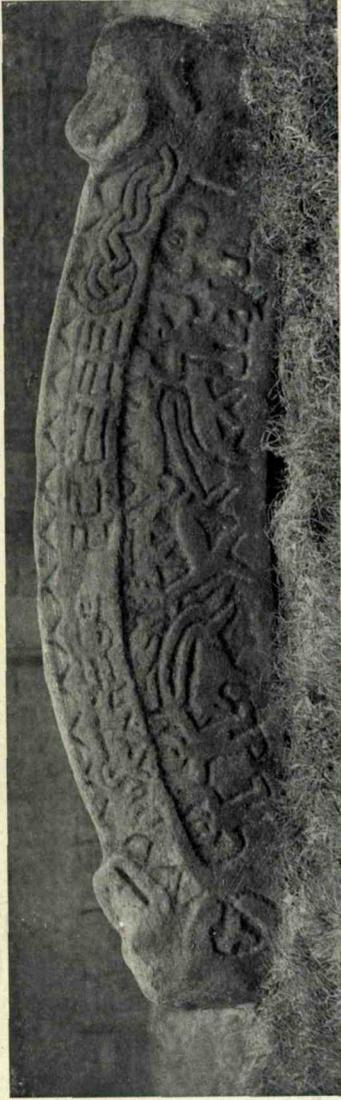
PLATE II.



## Scale of Feet

CROSS IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, HEYSHAM

To face p. 153.



TWO FACES OF HOG-BACKED STONE

part of the Churchyard, and examining the most uncommon series of rock-cut tombs, sepulchral slabs, the great hog-backed stone, and beautiful sculptured cross shaft, all surrounding the two churches, we recognise this as one of the most interesting places in the north of England.

On the left side of the Churchyard path near the gate is a portion of the shaft of a cross,<sup>1</sup> the four faces of which are illustrated here; there are many other examples of similar design and sculpture in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Scandinavia, as also in Italy and other parts of the Continent, some as late as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but the finer work of this, with some other northern English crosses, probably dates it between seven and eight hundred. Dr. Browne, the Bishop of Bristol, one of our first living authorities on architecture and sculpture of this period, refers to this cross shaft as "very curious," and speaks of the singular carving of, probably, an early church on the northern face, with little crosses springing from the point and eaves of the gable roof; three windows in the upper part and four below, on each side of a door or opening filled by a figure of some Saint in swaddling or grave clothes, represented like this both in English carving and in mosaics of the same period in Italy. On the southern face is one large figure, whether of the Blessed Virgin and Child, or, as is sometimes thought, of some Saint connected in some way with the dedication or history of the Church, is hard to say.

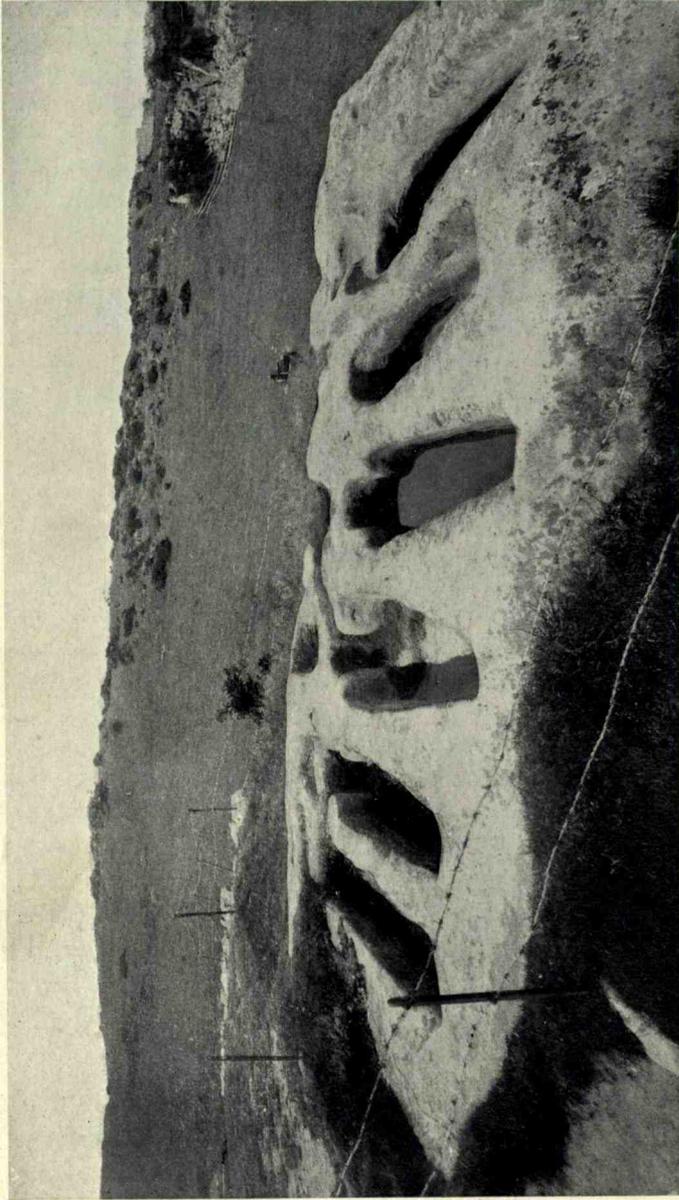
The beautiful twisted pattern of the east and west faces, with its shoots or buds or apples between each curving spiral, is well known in early Christian art. It occurs again on the cross in St. Wilfrid's at Halton, in the Lune valley, at Eyam, in Derbyshire, and elsewhere. The serpent below is thought to

<sup>1</sup> See lithographs, four faces of Cross, Plate I.

represent the ancient Norse legend of Yggdrasil, the sacred ash-tree, with its snake or dragon guarding it, twisted below, frequently used by early Christian teachers to illustrate the story of Paradise, the Serpent, and the Tree of Life. On the eastern side the beautiful triquetra, or three-looped knot, an ancient emblem of the Holy Trinity, is plainly seen below.

On the right of the footway, nearer the Church, is another old sculptured stone of what is known as the hog-back or roofed shape; there are others like it in Durham, Yorkshire, and Cheshire, and in Scotland. The Bishop describes it as "a solid mass of stone some 6 feet long, and 2 feet thick, (originally) laid over some ancient grave. The zigzag lines along the top are probably the rude representation of tiling or shingling. There are several examples of tiled stones of a very striking character in various parts of the north, the idea probably being that the solid gravestone represented the last house of the dead person, and the gable-shaped top its roof." A remarkable stone of this type, but only slightly ridged, and with no indication of a roof or penthouse, at Overchurch, in the Wirral, between the Mersey and the Dee, bearing the earliest Cheshire example of a Christian inscription in Runes, the old Norse alphabet, tells us that "the folk reared this beacon," *i.e.* landmark or monument, "to Ethelmund." It would be deeply interesting to know to the memory of what great warrior in Church and State our Heysham "Beacon" was sculptured and set up.

Both beautiful stones are in the lower Churchyard, a typical one in shape and position as regards the Church, in early English custom—oblong, though irregular owing to the natural form of the ground, with a narrow margin on the north, as is usual in an ancient churchyard. Quite recently the Churchyard has been added to by enclosing a little field



ROCK-HEWN GRAVES IN UPPER CHURCHYARD, HEYSHAM

*To face p. 155.*

between its north wall and the sea, and in taking down this wall and levelling the ground, several more sculptured slabs, and a curious massive base stone, almost Roman in its type, have been found. One oblong stone, with a cable moulding all round the edge, is thought by the Bishop of Bristol and Canon Greenwell to have been the base of the Cross. Another recumbent slab has again a beautiful and uncommon Cross in raised work upon it. Probably the Cross stood originally in the middle of the Churchyard, not in its present position. Following the pathway, with its worn stone steps, we come to the top of the headland where the tiny Chapel of St. Patrick stands, unique in England, with its rare and lovely view, its dedication, surroundings, and fabric of extraordinary age taking us back to the days and eventful history of the Saint, British by birth, Irish by adoption and lifework, Roman and British by descent. Dim and unrecorded are the links which bind "the little grey church on the windy shore" to the story of the hero-Saint, but name and legends and traces of pilgrim journeys to the place all speak of him.

Below the western face of the hill a wide green field stretching to the rocks above the sea is called "The Barrows," an early name for a burying-place. North, it looks over the sea and shining sands of Morecambe Bay, bounded by the Lancashire and Westmorland hills of the Lake Country; east, to the fells behind Lancaster, Clougha, and Abbeystead; beyond these to the fine outlines of Wherside, Pen-y-ghent, and Ingleborough on the Yorkshire border. Cut in the living rock round St. Patrick's lie curious, ancient, rock-hewn graves, six on one side, two again rather apart, one only the size of a little child, and parts of two or three others showing through the turf elsewhere. Three are straight sided, the rest body-shaped; all have a square, deep-

sunk hole for the shaft of a Cross at the head, all lie east and west.

On the narrow ledge of rock between the cliff's edge and the nearest grave, are hollows and markings, shown by rubbings taken some years ago to be weathered remains of an interlaced design like that on the Cross, probably covering the smoothed and bevelled surface of the rock between the burial-places when first carved out. The walls of the little roofless Church are thick and solid, with outer faces of large, rough-dressed, axe-hewn stones and core of rubble, all welded together in a mass of almost imperishable mortar, made in Roman fashion with burnt shells for lime, poured in hot between the irregular stones. One very small arch in the southern wall gave access; its long and short angle stones and carved head, with curious grooving hewn in one single piece, mark its early date. A bevelled upright stone in a gap in the same wall shows trace of a window light; the eastern gable stands; the west and most of the northern walls are gone.

The Churchyard itself on the lower level is remarkable for the number of sepulchral slabs of varied dates. Two are Calvary Crosses, that is, with the Cross raised from a foot base of steps; a third, inside the Church, already mentioned, is very fine in proportion and design. One has the harp, short and broad, of an Irish bard; another bears the chalice for a priest's grave. Two beautiful earlier slabs are difficult to date, as there are, it is believed, no others known exactly like them. The stones are narrow, with designs covering only about two-thirds of the field, one with a short broad Cross headed like the hilt of a sword, the other with double arms and a second narrow, even-limbed Cross superimposed on the first—an uncommon form. These are all in raised carving; one later slab only is incised, of Lombardic design, origin-

ally holding a brass which has long ago disappeared. No one can examine the long series of treasures of archæology without being impressed by the sense of the continuity of history read in them, pointing back to a remarkable origin, neither parochial nor in close connection with any local religious foundation of the ordinary type, but with evident proof of the ancient veneration in which the place was held from earliest times.

Traces of Christian Ireland of primitive days, English again, so far back that, as is pointed out by specialists in the art and symbolism of the earlier pre-Norman centuries, the sculptured stones are thought to point to the overlap and co-existing beliefs of the heathen and Christian Northern English; in Yggdrasil the sacred ash-tree of Scandinavian myth, and the Tree of Life in Paradise, whose wood formed the rood in Beowulf's Saga, with the serpent at its foot, as the dragon guarded the ash's treasure in the Norseman's legend. Then a Norman coffin hewn out of a single stone, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth century monumental slabs, down to the two or three centuries before our own day, in which period all true reverent delineation of the rest of the dead died out, and instead of the Cross shapes, or peaceful sleeping figures with clasped hands of prayer, we see only the clumsy lettering of records of personal doings and merits on the ugly small squared stones of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Happily in this instance we are spared the classic tastes in pagan cherubs of our forefathers of much the same period.

Inside the Church, in the dividing wall between the chancel and south chapel, an old chalice has been placed in a small hollow recess. It is of lateen, a mixture of pewter and silver, and was found in a priest's grave during the alterations in the Church. There are two old holy wells in the

village, though their dedications are lost. One, just outside the Church gate, had formerly an arched head, full of long, slender hartstongue ferns hanging into clear deep water, within my own recollection, but the walling on the bank above gave way a good many years ago, and the carved stones fell in, were broken, and have disappeared. The well was ruined by clumsy re-building, and the water drawn off for utilitarian gardening purposes. The other well, the best spring in Lower Heysham, was always known as "the Saintry Well," and lies up a narrow footway, or Pad-gate, to use the familiar dialect word, off the road. Some years ago a pump was put down, near, to make the water supply more accessible and the well itself less liable to misuse and choking with stones and rubbish as the population of the place increased, and it is now neglected and little used. I have never been able to hear or find any trace of the original dedication of either well.

In the upper village, about a mile from the Church, is a fragment of very early buildings, of much the same character as the older work in the parish Church and St. Patrick's Chapel. This fragment is up a little lane, ending in a field-path on the west of the road running through the village towards Middleton; beyond two cottages called the Fold, behind a very old barn full of courses of fine solid masonry—the ruined part has a section of a broken arch still left. Its use and proper name is unknown, though it is referred to in old county histories by the rather absurd name of Lord Montague's Bathing House, possibly a trace of the Lord Monteagle of Flodden fame, who held property by marriage in Hornby and Heysham at that date. The place is nearly a mile from the sea, behind a rocky knoll, the highest ground in the parish according to the Ordnance Survey. I well re-

member the predecessors of the two Fold cottages, very picturesque, but dark, low, and tumbling about the ears of the inhabitants, the walls full of old roughly hewn stone in great blocks, and the upper storey reached by an outside stone stair—altogether a little group of curious old buildings. The village is full of sixteenth and seventeenth century stone cottages, solidly built, with the pretty labels over the doorways, so characteristic of North Lancashire, Westmorland, and Gloucestershire, pathetically incongruous now amongst the common red brick houses and little shops, vulgar, inartistic, and ugly, springing up all round, in the changed conditions of what was, so recently, a little old-world place.

Keen lovers of the beautiful work of the old days of history are most desirous that steps should be taken to preserve the precious sculptures in the Churchyard from risk of injury from the crowds of sightseers visiting the place. Let me appeal to the members of this Historical Society to interest themselves in a matter so vital to the archaeological records of our county, and have public attention called to the crying necessity of safeguarding these priceless treasures before it is too late.

Turner's beautiful water-colour of Heysham, formerly belonging to Mr. Ruskin, and considered by him one of his finest early drawings, done originally for Dr. Whitaker's "Richmondshire," may be in the memory of some present to-day. An outline of Church and parish history, drawn from charters and other authentic sources, will add all that is known.

The village, Hessam, not the Church, is mentioned in Domesday Book amongst the lands given to Roger of Poictou by the king, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, in which North Lancashire was reckoned at that date. Rather later, we find

the *Church with a third* of "the town"<sup>1</sup> granted by Earl Roger, with St. Mary of Lancaster and certain lands, in 1094, to the *Abbey of Séez*, near Alençon, in Normandy, of which he was founder,<sup>2</sup> and under which it was held until the dissolution of alien priories in 1414.

Heysham is mentioned in many old charters, in the *Valor*, or *Taxation* of the only English Pope, Adrian Brakespeare, *Nicholas IV.*, in 1291.<sup>3, 4</sup> Registers of alien priories are uncommon, but in a very beautiful *Register of Lancaster Priory* in the British Museum,<sup>5</sup> "*Cartæ de Hesham*," occurs in its lists of charters.

In an *Inspeximus*, or *Confirmatory Charter* of the fifteenth year of *Richard II.*, "*Hessehn cum tertia parte totius villæ*"<sup>6</sup> . . . is again referred to, under the gift of Roger of Poictou to Séez. In the reign of Henry V., when the Church lands in England held by foreign priories were re-annexed and bestowed on English foundations, the Abbey of Syon, in Middlesex, was endowed with Lancaster and Heysham, of which it held possession until the general dissolution of monastic foundations under Henry VIII.

The patronage of the Rectory of Heysham is stated to have been occasionally exercised by the Crown even before it was severed from Séez. Since the dissolution it has been sometimes in the Crown, more usually in private hands. The presentations and institutions of the rectors appear in the Episcopal Registers of Chester from 1568, and are given in

<sup>1</sup> See "Monasticon Anglicanum," vi. 997. "Séez St. Martin de Sagio," edition by Caley, Sir Henry Ellis, and Bandinel.

<sup>2</sup> Several Deeds in Madox's "Formulare Anglicanum," pp. 52, 53, 100, *et alia*.

<sup>3</sup> Taxat. P. Nicholas IV., pp. 307, 309, 328, 329.

<sup>4</sup> Plac. de Quo Warr., pp. 386, 387; Abbrev. Plac., p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> British Museum, Harleian MSS. 3764.

<sup>6</sup> Register of Alien Cells, quoted Whitaker's "Richmondshire," 236, 237; also see Aungier's "History of Syon Abbey."

full in Harland's edition of Baines' "History of the County Palatine of Lancaster." There is an interesting reference in *Kuerden's MS. History of Lancashire* to a charter granting "an Hospitium for the use of pilgrims resorting to St. Patrick's Chapel at Heysham."<sup>1</sup> Where the hospice was is not stated, possibly in Lancaster. Dr. Kuerden, who wrote about the end of 1600, and whose valuable collections of material for history are partly in the Chetham Library in Manchester, partly in the Heralds' College in London, conjectures that the chapel was unnoticed amongst the dissolved chantries from being entirely supported by the oblations of pilgrims, and therefore presenting no object to the Commissioners of Survey.

A grant of land, of which the deed is amongst the *Duchy of Lancaster Records*,<sup>2</sup> 1274-1286, from Adam de Hesayn, was held by the tenure of rendering yearly one arrow on St. Patrick's Day; and the long tongue of low, jagged rock stretching out into the bay below the Church bears the name of St. Patrick's Skier, the sharp edged or divided rock, the curious old Norwegian or Icelandic word linking us both with the northern invaders and settlers who left traces of their Norse tongue in so many sea-places, and with the famous Saint who was wrecked, so tradition has it, under the, then, lonely little headland.

The earliest existing book of Parish Registers begins in 1658, too late a date for anything of remarkable interest, beyond the recurrence of still familiar local names, in a parish which was, until

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kuerden's MSS., Chetham Library, Manchester, 1 vol. folio, p. 535; 1 vol. quarto, p. 674 (transcribed in same library by John Palmer in six vols.). Several volumes in the Heralds' College, London, c. 1690.

<sup>2</sup> Duchy of Lancaster Grants in Boxes, Cart. Miscell., Box B., No. 26. On general subject, see also papers on Lancaster meeting of Royal Archæolog. in Journals, December 1898, March 1899.

recently, almost isolated and little known. Some of the entries of sums collected by King's Letters, as the custom was, in Church, strike us now as very curious applications of charitable offerings—"collected by the Churchwardens and Overseers of this Parish, the first day of Aprill anno 1661, the sum of four shillings and sixpence for the Children and inhabitants of Saint Bartholomew and Saint Bennet within the City of London." In the same month and year "towards the reliefe of Thomas Bury (? not very legible) of Horncastle in the county of Lincoln—Gent."—"for the rebuilding of St. Mary's Church, in Scarborough, one shilling"—in 1662, "for the relief of the poore Protestants of the Dukedom of Lithuania, ten shillings and sevenpence"—"for six families in St. Martin's in the Fields, by fire, under the hand and seal of George (Hall) Bishop of Chester, published the 9th day of November, 1661, being the Lords Day, after the first Lesson, by William Ward, Parson of Heasham."

The sepulchral stone of the said parson already referred to as in the chancel is very quaint in arrangement and spelling :

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