

**SOME ACCOUNT  
OF  
THE CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST  
AT  
BISHOPSTONE,  
IN THE  
COUNTY OF WILTS.**

**WITH THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF ITS ARCHITECTURE,  
BY OWEN B. CARTER, ARCHITECT, WINTON**

**SEVENTEEN ENGRAVINGS BY MR. JOHN LE KEUX**

**LONDON  
JOHN WEALE  
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On the stream anciently termed the Chele, afterwards the Chalk-bourne water, and now that of Stoford, which flows through the hundred of Chalk, and to the south of that district, lies the insulated portion of the hundred of Downton, named Bishopstone. The parish by which it is occupied is also called Bishopstone, from its ancient lords, the Bishops of Winchester. It is not mentioned by name in Domesday Book, although it is included in the description of Downton, given in the survey of the hundred made in the third year of the reign of Edward the First. The manor, co-extensive with the parish, continued in the see until the Reformation. Whether at that time it followed its prebend in the church of Salisbury, which, being seised as a lay impropriation, was granted to Sir William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke, or whether it was obtained in the exchange of episcopal estates under the Act of 1st Elizabeth, has not been ascertained. It is at least certain, that Henry Earl of Pembroke was lord of the manor in 1582, and died seised of it nine years afterwards, since which time it has uninterruptedly continued, and still remains, in the possession of that noble family.

The church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and deserves the peculiar notice of the antiquary, as affording a variety of decoration which may fairly indicate the fostering influence of its early episcopal patrons. Its principal addition was evidently made during the prosperity of the Bayntons, about the time of Henry the Sixth, when it appears that the windows were emblazoned with their arms.

The Bayntons were at that time the proprietors of the neighbouring tithing of Fulstone, or Fullardstone, upon which some remains of their castellated residence exist, consisting of a round tower, now used as a dove cote. According to Aubrey, it was a "noble, old-fashioned house, with a mote about it, and a drawbridge, and strong high walls embattled".

The church, as it at present exists, consists of a nave, transepts and chancel, with sacristy on the north side. There is also a singular erection attached to the end of the south transept, which has been variously called a Lich-ward, a tomb and an almonry. The latter is probably its most appropriate designation; but, it will be found fully described in the accompanying delineations, some of our antiquarian readers may hereafter be enabled to throw a new light upon the subject of its application. The ground-plan comprehends also a north porch of considerable projection, above which was formerly a parvise, or record loft. The priests' door or entrance to the chancel is also sheltered by an elegant porch or hood, which may be regarded as unique of its kind.

The style of the building ranges from the early part of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century: the principal material employed in its erection is the Chilmark stone; and its appearance when viewed from the beautiful grounds of the neighbouring rectory is extremely picturesque and pleasing. The colour of the stone (which is a warm grey) conduces not a little to the effect of the building; but this will be better understood by the perspective views which it is proposed shortly to add to the geometrical drawings we have now given.

The nave, with the exception of some insertions of the fifteenth century, is evidently the most ancient portion of the existing edifice. The north and south door-ways are of early English character; that on the south side disused, and its space internally occupied by some rich tracery in panels. The west doorway is also closed, and a rising platform with seats, and an excellent organ, occupies the place of the late unseemly gallery. The

west doorway has a four-centred arch, and is evidently an insertion of the fifteenth century, as are also the north and south windows of the nave. The west window is of three lights, trifoliated and of decorated character. The ceiling is of late date and nearly flat, the tie-beams supported by brackets and spandrels resting upon small corbels.

The transepts, together with the chancel and arches supporting the tower appear to be of contemporary construction, and are of late decorated character, exhibiting in their detail much that is singularly beautiful and instructive in its design. The tracery of the windows is particularly good; the jambs well moulded, and worthy of notice on account of several peculiarities, the mullions in some of the transept windows being simply chamfered, whilst the section of the tracery in the heads is of equal richness to those in the chancel. The situations of two chantry altars are marked, the one in the north the other in the south transept. by niches, brackets for statues, and other usual accessories. The niches are of good decorated work and the piscina in the north transept a very elegant model of its kind. It is ogee-headed, trifoliated, with a hood-mould finialled; in the hollow moulding are introduced the rose and ball flower alternately. The drain is destroyed, but the chamfered shelf remains. Of these niches, &c., we have given ample delineations. The ceiling of the north transept is of wood, coved and ribbed, with bosses at the intersections; whilst the south transept is vaulted with stone, having bold moulded ribs springing from sculptured corbels. These corbels, which are principally ornamented with busts, as also the bosses at the intersection of the ribs, are extremely bold in their execution, and have all the characteristic excellence of the period to which they belong. The groining also exhibits traces of illumination.

Beneath the window at the northern extremity of the transept, is a large sepulchral recess formed within the substance of the wall, under a segmental arch; the arch multifoliated, extending across the transept, the canopy terminated on either side by pinnacles. In the hollow moulding of the arch, the ball flower ornament is very thickly set. This recess is traditionally termed "The Founder's Tomb;" and the style of its architecture and important situation render it not unlikely that such may have been its original destination.

Under the opposite window - the south window of the transept - has been lately erected another monument, which is not more remarkable on account of its elegance, than from the melancholy circumstance which led to its position in this church. It is in commemoration of the late rector, the Rev. George Augustus Montgomery, M.A., and consists of an altar tomb surmounted by a deeply moulded ogee canopy, richly crocketed, finialled, and pinnacled. The back of the recess is diapered, and the hollows of the principal arch profusely ornamented with the rose ornament. On the tomb is inlaid a processional cross of brass enamelled, surrounded after the same fashion by a legend recording the circumstances of his death, and having the emblems of the Evangelists at the angles. The front is decorated with quatrefoils bearing shields charged with armorial bearings in brass enamelled.

The window above this tomb has been carefully taken out and restored, and is now filled with stained glass representing the Resurrection. It is said that a portion of the glass is imitated from a church in the city of York, which has been lately lost or destroyed. The window is well executed by Wale, of Newcastle. The design forms a portion of the memorial to the late lamented Rector, and is (together with the tomb) from the pencil of the celebrated Pugin. The effect is altogether rich and good, and much enhances the interest of this portion of the church.

The canopy of the piscina near the above tomb is of modern design, and the finial of the opposite monument is an introduction of the same date. It is of later character than the work to which it forms a termination, as will be perceived upon reference to the plates.

The arches supporting the tower are recessed, the wall chamfered, the recessed arch chamfered also, both continuous, and having a chamfered termination at the bottom. The arch opening to the south transept is of different form, being a pointed segment; the jambs, however, similarly chamfered to those of the other arches. A stone seat surrounds the south transept upon its west and south sides, as will be perceived on reference to the sections.

Upon the platform under the tower, which is at present elevated one step above the nave, are placed the pulpit, reading-desk, and font. The two former are composed of various fragments of continental carving, collected and arranged by the late Rector; the latter is ancient, but has been enriched by some modern panelling. The ceiling under the tower is formed by the belfry floor, the massive beams of which are supported by stone corbels. It may be observed, that the floor line of the nave and transepts appears to have been raised above the original level.

The chancel is approached by one step from the tower platform, and is lighted by four windows, a portion of one on either side being stopped by the erection of the sedilia and sacristy. The east window, though not so elegant in form as those on the sides of the chancel, is very highly decorated, the tracery approaching the flamboyant, and the window arch slightly ogee-headed. It consists of two principal compartments, each subdivided into two lights, trifoliated. Over the head runs a hood-moulding, with returns running horizontally to the side walls, and thence, along them, over the heads of the side windows. A bold string course or surbase moulding, also surrounds the interior of the chancel under the windows, forming a label or hood-mould to the inside opening of the priests' entrance. There are two niches awkwardly placed in the jambs of the east window; but as they are evidently of late introduction, and have not been very successfully restored, we have omitted them in our geometrical drawings. The platform for the altar is approached by three steps, and the reredos is composed of richly carved oaken panelling, of foreign character, and arranged by the late reverend Rector. The altar table is of dark oak, also well carved, and has on each side a piscina, groined and ribbed, and recently illuminated with the usual inscriptions. The altar rail is of oak, and consists of a series of open lozenge-formed panels, with foliations or cusps. Above the altar table is a good copy in miniature of the Descent from the Cross, by Rubens.

The sacristy on the north side of the chancel is approached by a door communicating almost immediately with the outer platform, and is a valuable example for the purposes of a modern vestry or robing room. It is about 10 Feet by 8, and lighted by two small windows containing some fair specimens of painted glass. At the north-east angle of the church, and commencing in the sacristy, is a spiral staircase leading to the vaulting over the chancel, and from thence to the tower, to which it is in fact the only mode of approach. The sacristy is covered by a leaden roof of low pitch, having a parapet, plain on the north and east sides, but elegantly pierced on the west, the piercing being trifoliated. The staircase turret at present terminates in a flat roof covered with lead; but this was evidently not intended to be the original finish, the steps being carried up to the under side of the roof-bearers.

On the south side of the chancel we find remaining, in tolerable preservation, the very fine sedilia, or seats for the officiating priests. They are relieved from the wall, and present a rich composition of pinnacles, with finialled and crocketed gables to each seat. The appearance of the pinnacles in our elevations is rather heavy, but the effect in execution is perfectly bold and good.

Of the external porch communicating with the sedilia we have furnished a perspective sketch, for the purpose of giving a better idea of its extremely picturesque and original character, than could have been obtained from the geometrical drawings. The structure is of stone, elegantly groined, and exhibiting in elevation a foliated arch under an ogee gable, crocketed, finialled, and springing from grotesque heads, similar to those on the pinnacles of the sedilia to which it more immediately conducts. The eccentric manner in which the corbelled springing for the support of the arch is derived from the buttress is worthy of notice.

The groining of the chancel is similar to that of the south transept, the eastern-most bay exhibiting on its sculptured bosses the evangelistic symbols.

The chancel windows are filled with modern stained glass, the design in some degree resembling the ancient glass in the south transept of the neighbouring cathedral of Salisbury. There are also some fragments of old glass in the heads of some of the other windows. The modern glass was inserted by the late Rector, and the seats on each side of the chancel were ornamented with old panelling, under the same super-intendence.

The end windows of the north and south transepts and of the chancel, have above each a small triangular window, trifoliated, with spherical sides. These windows are connected with the ogee dripstones of the windows, and form their terminations in place of the more usual finial. The parapets of the transepts and chancel exhibit some singular ornamental panelling in relief, of which we have given detailed representations, as well as of the gabled terminations to the buttresses, which afford some singular varieties in detail. It will be observed that the nave appears to have received its buttresses at the time of the erection of the transepts and chancel, their character and workmanship being evidently of the same date.

The tower is a plain embattled structure of two stages, the upper containing three bells. It is perpendicular in style, and was evidently built some time after the suspension of the alterations made by the erection of the present chancel and transepts. Had these been carried out at the time in question, we should probably have seen an elegant tower and spire occupying the place of the present unpretending structure.

It has been before observed, that the staircase turret to the chancel roof appears to have been also left in an unfinished state. Its termination would most probably have been pyramidal, if completed by the original builders.

The windows of the nave are unprovided with dripstones, and, as before observed, are of perpendicular character. Of the building attached to the south end of the transept, I am unable to give any further account than is contained in the suggestions already thrown out; and of its details (which are extremely curious) we have given ample delineations. The perspective sketch represents it in its present state; and the niche-like form which the upper torus of the plinth mouldings is made to describe in the angle of the buttresses, will not escape the notice of our readers. The groining is covered externally with a weathered roof of flagged stone, and the appearance of the whole is singular and picturesque.

Beneath its arches are at present deposited portions of two ancient memorials of monumental character; one of which, ornamented with a plain ball ornament, apparently served as a base to the tomb which formerly stood under the ancient decorated canopy occupying the north end of the transept.

The registers of the church are of no higher antiquity than 1560. The church plate is very handsome, and was given by Bishop Earle, who was sometime rector. A.D. 1663.

We may close our sketch of this very interesting church by observing that its present state evinces the great care and attention which have been bestowed upon it, both by the late and present Rectors; the former of whom left a bequest for the further improvement of the church by the introduction of appropriate seats in lieu of the former unsightly pews which encumbered the nave and transept. At the time when the accompanying sketches were made, these and other improvements were in progress under the superintendence of the present Rector, the Venerable Archdeacon Lear, for whose kind assistance and condescending attention during the examination of this church, the writer of these remarks has to offer his most sincere and respectful thanks.

**OWEN B. CARTER**

**Winchester, March 25, 1845.**