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Notes on the Church of Wotton-under-Edge

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NOTES ON THE CHURCH OF WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE.

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THE Church is dedicated to S. Mary the Virgin, and stands in the tything of Sinwell.

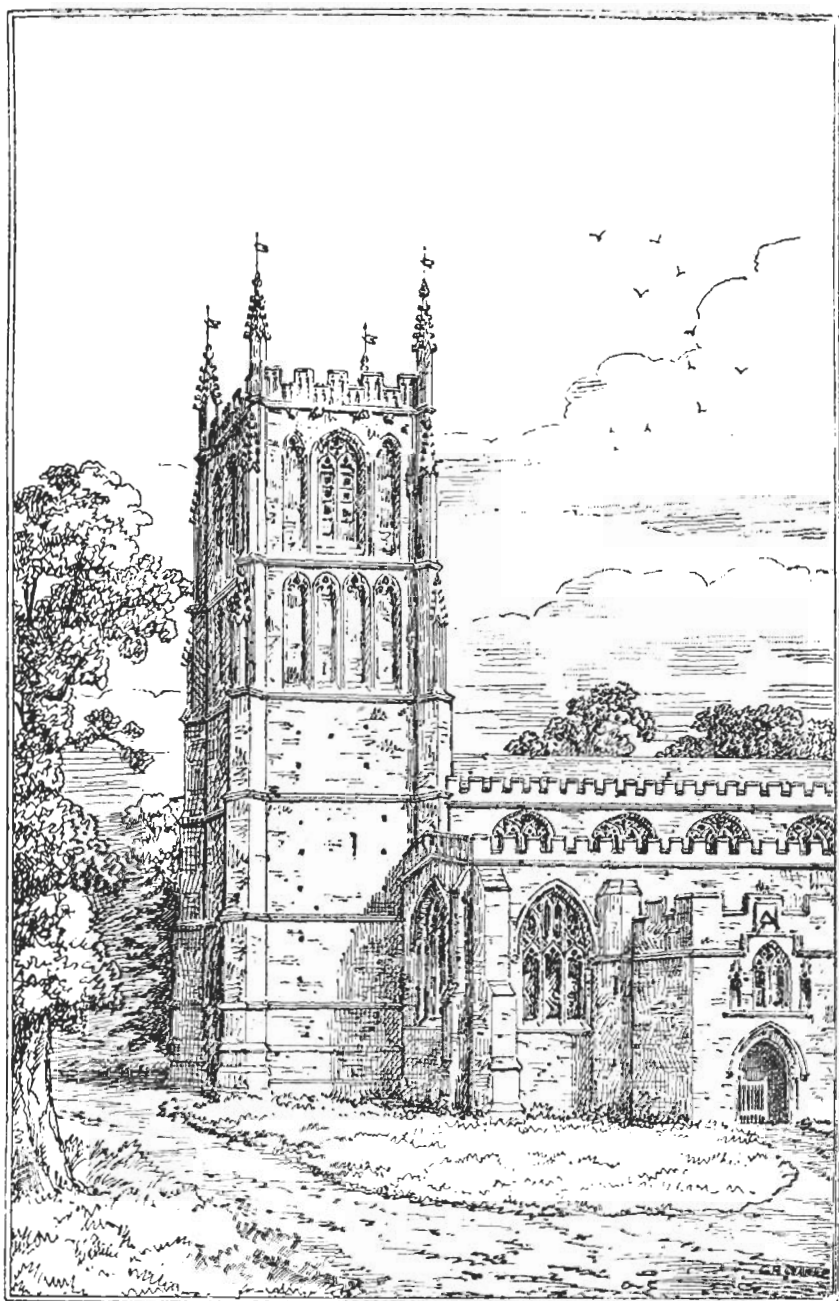
It consists of nave, north and south aisles, chancel, tower, south porch, and chapel on the north side.

There are no remains of earlier work in the building than the arcades of the nave, the doorway of the south aisle, the east window, and the walls up to, and certainly as high as, the window sills of nearly the whole church, with the exception of the tower, from which we are led to believe that the present church was erected in the 13th century, and that it then consisted, as it does now, of a nave, north and south aisles, chancel and south porch (from this latter a very handsome early English doorway was removed when the present modern doorway was erected).

The drip-course in the tower wall shews that the roofs of this church were high pitched, and the nave, at that time, had no clerestory windows.

The church was, no doubt, a complete and perfect edifice, to which was added, in the 14th century, the two lower stages of the present tower (ball flower ornament), and this was again added to by two more stages in the 16th century.

We now come to the first great change which took place after the erection of the present church, but how, or why effected, no one can now say ; possibly the roofs may have failed, or the desire to obtain more light by the erection of a clerestory over the nave arcades, and the insertion of larger windows in the church itself may have induced the men of the 15th century to remove, as they undoubtedly did, the high pitched early English roofs and windows, and to build windows in their own style (Perpendicular) and to erect clerestories, and to place roofs of very flat pitch,



PARISH CHURCH, WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE.

covered with lead over the whole building, as they were prior to the third, and much to be lamented era in the History of the Church which took place in the early part of the present century.

The roofs and fittings were undoubtedly of oak. Screens existed at the chancel arch, and across the north and south aisles, and altars at the east end of the north and south aisles, as well as of the chancel, and painted glass in most of the windows.

The chapel on the north side was dedicated to S. Katherine, as tiles with her wheel were found beneath the floor.

From this period (15th century) small alterations and additions to the building were made.

We now come to the last great change to which this building has been subjected. At the commencement of the 19th century the old oak roofs, and the clerestory, the screens, and the old oak seats of the nave and aisles were removed; and new roofs and windows, such as we now see, were erected; by this a debased character was given to the church.

In 1838 the chancel arch was removed from its old position to where we now see it, and two new bays added to the nave arcade. In 1882 and 1883 the chancel was restored to its original dimensions by the addition of the present screen, the nave was refloored and reseated, the galleries at the west end were removed, throwing open to view the fine tower arch and western wall of the nave. The clear view now obtained of the western wall of the nave reveals unmistakeably the history of the present church.

Paintings of S. Christopher and other saints formerly adorned the western wall.

There were formerly several chantries in the church: one dedicated to S. Nicholas, one to S. Katherine, before mentioned, one to All Saints, and one to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The chapel of S. Nicholas is said to have adjoined the south porch.

At the east end of the south aisle there formerly stood a chapel in which there was a squint giving a view of the high altar. The squint is still preserved, and the remains of the doorway leading to the chapel from the south aisle can still be seen;

this chapel may have belonged to Lisle House, which is close adjoining.

The Organ is the work of Christopher Schnider, the son-in-law of Father Smith. It was built in A.D. 1726. It originally stood in the church of S. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, and was the gift of King George the 1st to that church. It cost 1500 guineas. Handel was engaged to open it, and used often to play upon it.

In A.D. 1800, it was removed from S. Martin's-in-the-Fields and sold for £200 to the Rev. Dr. Tattersall, Vicar of Wotton-under-Edge, and given by him to the parish church.

The Parish Registers date from the year A.D. 1571, and are in a good state of preservation.

There is a fine brass to Thomas 4th Lord Berkeley, and his wife Margaret, A.D. 1392, and a matrix to Richard de Wotton, Rector, c. 1320.

NOTE.—I am indebted to Mr. F. S. Waller, of Gloucester, for much of this information.