

CHAPTER I

THE STRUCTURE

HORSEHEATH Church in the Deanery of Camps, Cambridgeshire, is built upon a site which we have reason to believe has been inhabited by man from very early times. We have found many specimens of Neolithic man's craft scattered over the fields in the parish. No Celtic remains have been discovered, but ample evidence of Roman occupation was yielded in 1910 by the author's excavations in a field called Hanging Hill, abutting upon Worsted Road, and the very name of Horseheath is of Saxon origin. Whether the Christian Saxons built a church at Horseheath we are unable to say.

In the Domesday Survey of Horsei, as Horseheath was then designated, no mention is made of a church, but, as the commissioners were not obliged to make any return of the churches, there is no significance in the omission. Although the formation of parishes—an organization for church purposes—began in Saxon times, we do not know when it was that Horseheath became a parish forming part of the diocese under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Ely.

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Probably the first stone church at Horseheath was built after the Norman Conquest, about the middle of the twelfth century. How funds were raised to build it, or who the founder was, are points shrouded in obscurity. The maintenance of the services, the repairs of the church fabric, or rebuilding, were, in early times, the sacred trust of the parishioners. No doubt the first church built of stone at Horseheath stood in the same position as the church of to-day—a position not without interest, a little to the south of Wool Street—frequently called the Roman road, and by the most extensive moated enclosure in the parish. This early church was perhaps of the simplest form, smaller than the present church and composed of nave and chancel, with no aisles, clerestory or tower, built of local flint, with chancel arch, windows and doorways of Barnack stone. In fact, the only distinctive architectural remains we have to-day of this early church are the pieces of Barnack stone, worked with the Norman zig-zag pattern, that are built into the walls of the present church. Three varieties of such zig-zag moulding may be seen in the interior of the nave walls. These pieces of stone would form part of the Norman church at Horseheath in which Guy de Burgh and Ralph Weaver took sanctuary in 1260¹ after they had killed Robert le Bode of Shudy Camps. Unfortunately these malefactors escaped from the church, and, in consequence, the villagers were fined.

Restorations, or alterations made in the Norman church during the thirteenth century, are exceedingly

¹ P. R. O. *Cambs. Assize Roll*, 82.

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difficult matters to determine, and were it not for the fragments of masonry which appear to have Early English stops upon them at the bases of both the chancel and tower arches, there is apparently nothing to show that any work was done that might possibly be attributed to the Early English period. We would mention that these fragments of masonry, which somewhat resemble Early English work, at the base of the tower arch, occur in conjunction with a piece of Norman moulding, similar to that built into the walls of the nave, some of which is near the roof, whilst other pieces are near the foundation of the walls, so that the position of the Norman worked stone does not assist in determining Early English construction. And we may perhaps assume that the Norman church had little, if any, alteration effected during the Early English period. In any case, the church to-day, which is dedicated to All Saints, affords ample evidence of such restoration which practically amounts to its having been entirely rebuilt in the fourteenth century, during the Decorated period.

When the rebuilding of Horseheath church in the fourteenth century was completed, the ground-plan of the chancel, nave, tower and south porch was the same as that of to-day. (See plan.) The position of the buttress by the north door of the nave, which now forms part of the vestry, makes it improbable that there was originally a north porch. And if we picture a high-pitched roof on the nave, coming down lower than the present roof, over smaller windows, the external appearance of the church would probably represent its original construction. The church is

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chiefly built of flint, and, as will be seen by the plan, the tower has suffered less from restoration than any other part of the church. It is embattled with stone, and is divided by three string courses, the lower one of which on the east face marks the high-pitched roof of the fourteenth century nave. Perhaps the chief points of interest in the tower are the newel staircase, the two fine gargoyles on the north and south faces—ornamented with grotesque heads of animals, and the drip-stones terminated by the head of a man and the head of a woman over the windows in the upper storey. The drip-stone over the west window in the belfry has the same terminals. The tracery in this window is a good example of Decorated work.

Although the south porch has suffered a good deal from restoration, the fourteenth century windows and inner doorway still remain. It is a curious coincidence that a piscina has been placed in this porch in the position of a holy water stoup. This piscina may originally have been in the nave in mediaeval days, when there would most likely have been an altar on either side of the chancel arch. The piscina for the altar on the south still remains, and, although it has been restored, the Barnack basin is evidently of the fourteenth century. Possibly here, if not on the north side of the chancel arch, was the chapel of Our Blessed Lady, to which chapel, John Pettit of Horseheath, in his will dated 1512¹, bequeathed a cow for keeping a light for ever. The sedilia in the chapel on the south are of the plainest.

¹ *Cons. Court of Ely*, Vol. E. f. 75.

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The north and east portions of the chancel are work of the Decorated period. In the subsequent restorations on the south portion of the chancel, the same style of architecture has been retained. The principal feature in the chancel during the fourteenth century was the stone High Altar. Seats or stalls would be provided in the chancel for the officiating clergy, and also a seat for the patron, then the Earl of Oxford. The chancel was probably divided from the nave by a beam on which the rood was placed.

The fourteenth century nave with its high-pitched roof, its smaller windows, altars on either side of the chancel arch, and the spacious floor strewn with rushes or straw, without pews, is now changed almost out of recognition. There would undoubtedly have been wall paintings, and painted glass in some of the windows, in fact one of the most interesting relics preserved in the church to-day is the small shield, checky, argent and sable¹, impaling gules, fretty, or, a bordure, argent, semée de fleur-de-lis, sable, for Audley, which family held one of the three manors in Horseheath during the fourteenth century.

Practically all the alterations effected in the structure of the church during the fifteenth century were confined to the nave. The high-pitched roof was replaced by the present flat roof, and the walls were raised to suit it. The large windows of six lights were inserted, and were probably soon enriched with coloured glass. It is possible that the fifteenth century, or Perpendicular roof, was originally built with a stone battlemented

¹ This coat occurs in the arms of the Priory, Austin Canons, at Royston, Herts.

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parapet, for the present brick parapet is of much more recent date, and certainly not the parapet towards the repair of which Robert Pettit of Horseheath, in his will dated 1524¹, bequeathed the sum of forty shillings. Some of the carving on the interior of the roof at the west end of the nave is still preserved. Cole tells us that, in 1742², in the centre of the roof there were the arms of the Bishopric of Ely carved, gules, three ducal coronets, or; probably these arms, and most of the other carving, disappeared when the roof was repaired in 1764. The tower and chancel arches were raised during the fifteenth century, and the fine wooden screen was put in the chancel arch. This screen has been well preserved, and retains traces of colour on the panels of a conventional floral design, in red and white. Over the screen in the fifteenth century was the rood-loft, upon which stood the great rood or crucifix with the attendant images of S. Mary and S. John. The rood-loft staircase has entirely disappeared, but the upper and lower doorways, at the most easterly corner of the north wall of the nave, still remain. The carved spandrils of the arch in the lower doorway are good, that on the dexter side represents a cross proceeding from a heart, a somewhat unusual design.

The octagonal font at the west end of the nave is also a good piece of fifteenth century work. (See illustration.) The basin is of Barnack stone, whilst clunch is used for the pedestal, where less durability is required. Clunch, we should mention, was also

¹ *Addit. MS.* 5861, f. 177.

² *Addit. MS.* 5802.

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The Font, Horseheath Church.

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used for the raising of the tower and chancel arches, for the nave windows, the rood-loft doorways, and for the restoration of the piscina by the altar on the south of the chancel arch. This piscina has a crocketed ogee hood-moulding over the niche. Another piece of fifteenth century work is the Purbeck marble altar tomb (see page 39), of which we have been able to give a conjectural drawing from the broken fragments discovered in the Rectory garden, forming part of a rockery. It is possible that the original position of this tomb was in the south chapel.

Probably seats for the congregation were first introduced in the nave when the fifteenth century alterations were effected, though the days of high pews had not yet come.

At the present time there is an entire absence of painted glass in the nave windows, except for the few fragments that are used indiscriminately. Nothing however remains of the subjects that formerly adorned the fine Perpendicular windows in the nave, some of which subjects were still in existence when Cole visited the church in 1742. Therefore, we attribute the loss of the painted glass in Horseheath Church to the hand of the nineteenth century restorer, rather than to any destruction wrought at the time of the Reformation, when, it appears, little was done to disfigure the so-called superstitious pictures in the windows. In one of the north windows, in 1695¹, there remained beneath some good coloured glass the words "propitietur Deus Amen A° Dn° M° CCCC." This was certainly some of

¹ *Harleian MS.* 6821, f. 50.

the original glass, put in after the fifteenth century alterations. From Cole's account of the glass in 1742¹, we find, that, in the middle lower light of the north window in the nave next the chancel arch, there was a large picture of the Blessed Virgin with *Stã Maria* at her feet. This figure was perfect except that the head was missing. In the other five lights of this window, there were pictures representing stories from the New Testament. One representing the Lord's Supper being almost perfect. There were also in this same window two shields which bore the arms of the patron, the Earl of Oxford. Quarterly, gules and or, with a mullet in the first quarter. Cole remarks that altogether there were no less than seven shields in the windows which bore these same arms. Fragments of these shields have been inserted in the east window in the chancel. In the middle window of the nave, on the north, there were several pictures of saints, but the upper part of them had gone, and in the lower centre light of this window, there was a shield bearing the arms, baron and femme, 1st the four usual bearings of the Alingtons, but the 3rd and 4th quarters were broken, and filled with other glass. The 1st and 2nd remained, namely Alington, sable, a bend engrailed between twelve billets, argent; and Argentine, gules, three covered cups, argent, impaling barry of six or eight, ermine and gules. This shield represented the arms of William Alington and his wife Elizabeth, whose monumental slab now lies within the chancel arch. In the window on the north, next the tower, there were the remains of two saints, and

¹ *Addit. MS.* 5802.