

Amesbury:

Its Abbey, its Church,
and its Saint.

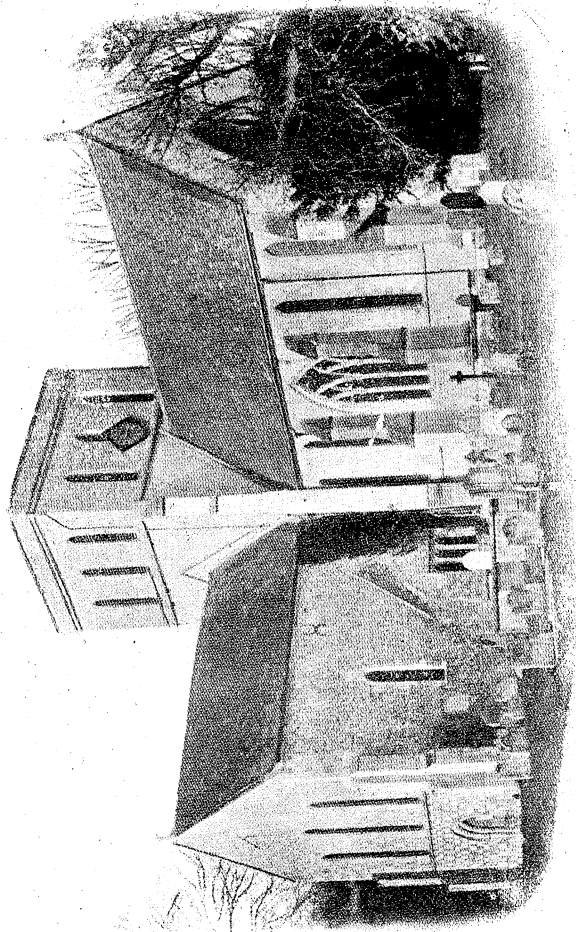
Notes compiled by Ethel F. Windley.

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AMESBURY CHURCH FROM S.E.

Amesbury and its Abbey.

THE History of Amesbury, as gathered from various scattered sources, is of great antiquity, as might be surmised from its neighbourhood to Stonehenge and Avebury, and from its position among downs crowned to this day with ancient British earthworks, scored and pitted with neolithic Ridgeways, Cattle Tracks and Dew Ponds, and studded with the countless Barrows and Tumuli of Salisbury Plain. According to the Welsh Triads Amesbury was, in British times, the seat of a great monastery for 300 monks, the "Choir of Ambrosius," or "Ambrius." This was one of the three principal Choirs, or Monasteries, of the Isle of Britain "which perpetuated the praise of God without rest or intermission."¹ This monastery was destroyed by the cruel pagan Gurmundas, or Guthran, who over-ran all this country in the 6th century. If the romantic story of Guinevere may be taken as history, it was to this "holy house of Almesbury" (as Tennyson writes in his "Idylls of the King") that the Queen fled from the Court of King Arthur, where also he found her and bade her farewell on the eve of his last "great battle in the West"; and where she lived on, repentant, dying at last as the beloved and honored Abbess. There was, no doubt, a Saxon Church here, as, according to Florence of Worcester, a Synod was held at Ambresbyring (Amesbury) in King Edgar's reign by Dunstan the Archbishop, 977, and here in 980 the Queen Elfrida founded her celebrated Benedictine Nunnery in expiation of her crime in causing the

¹ It is alluded to as "in Monte Ambrii" which would point to the position of the Monastery being on the opposite side of the River Avon on the rising ground known as Vespasian's Camp, an extensive British earthwork.

murder of her stepson King Edward the Martyr, at Corfe Castle.¹ Elfrida placed her Abbey under the patronage of St. Mary and St. Melor, St. Melor being an unfortunate young Prince of the 6th cent., son of a King, or Duke, of Cornwall, and whose cruel murder, instigated by jealous ambition, bore a singular resemblance to Elfrida's own dark deed. Mention is made of Amesbury in 901, when King Alfred the Great died, having bequeathed in his will, "lands at Ambresbury" together with some other neighbouring lands, to his son Ethelward:—"which are all that I have in the West of England."² Here on Easter Day, 995, Ælfric, Bishop of Wiltshire, was chosen Archbishop of Canterbury in the presence of King Æthelred and all his Witan. Of this Ælfric the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles say, "he was a very wise man, so that there was no sager man in England." Here, too, in 1188, was born that great lady, Ela Devereux, Countess of Salisbury, wife of William Longespée, the natural son of Henry II. and "Fair Rosamond." Wm. de Wanda, then Precentor of the new Sarum Cathedral, in his account of the removal from Old Sarum, makes beautiful mention of this Countess Ela as "a woman worthy of renown, inasmuch as she was full of the fear of the Lord." She endowed the old S. Nicholas' Hospital with a grant of land; she was the foundress of Hinton Charterhouse in Somerset, and also of Lacock Abbey, of which she was chosen to be the first Abbess, and where she died, and was buried in the Choir of her Abbey Church. The beautiful tomb of her husband, and that of her son, the Crusader, may be seen in Salisbury Cathedral. Her estate at Amesbury was Amesbury Comitis, or Earls; but the spot where the mansion stood is now unknown. Another celebrated name in connection with Amesbury meets us in 1235, when "Michael

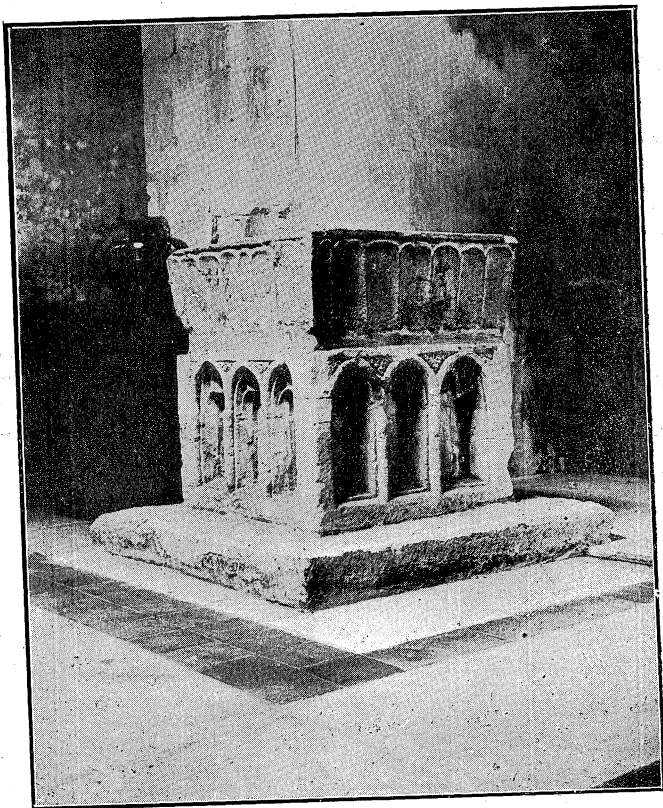
¹ "Yet Alfred" (Elfrida) "the Luther Queen that Seynt Edward slough
Of hure trespas before hure dethe repentant was ynough
And rered two Nonneryes, Whorwell that was
And Ambresbury that othere to beete hure Trespas."

(2 lines from Robert of Gloucester.)

² Two silver coins of Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great, were found in digging a grave in the Churchyard of Amesbury Church.

of Ambresbury" was made Abbot of Glastonbury, a man "found provident and modest, circumspect in business, well experienced by many Tryals in secular Affairs" as his biographer records. This Michael presided in the Government of Glastonbury almost 18 years, "diligent in exhorting and instructing the young ones; always free from Reproaches, hard words, or Austerity, tho' much provok'd."

But, to return to follow the fortunes of Amesbury Abbey, and going back in thought to the year 1177, we find a crisis in its history, for the nuns had incurred the anger of the King, Henry II., and owing to their unworthy conduct and wrong living they were expelled—30 in number, with their Abbess, and the Abbey given over as a Cell to the great Abbey of Fontevault in Anjou, from whence a Prioress and 24 nuns were sent over to Amesbury—the Prioress being inducted by Richard of Canterbury in the presence of the King. From this time this Abbey increased in power and was much in favour with royalty. Many noble ladies took the veil here, notably Eleanor of Brittany, the daughter of Geoffrey Plantagenet, and sister to Prince Arthur; she died and was buried here, 1241. Princess Mary, 6th daughter of Edward I., with her half-sister Leonora, and 12 other ladies of the nobility, retired to the Abbey in 1283, and four years later (to quote the Chronicles of Lanercost), "My Lady Eleanor, Mother Queen of England, now for Christ's sake despised the withering flower of this world, wherein she formerly delighted, and on the Feast of the Assumption was made a nun at Amesbury, where she had already dedicated her own daughter" (grand-daughter?) "to God. For love of her my Lord the King, her son, increased the wealth of that house with large rents." This lady was the beautiful Eleanor of Provence, widow of Henry III.—mother of Edward I. In 1501, Katharine of Arragon, after her arrival in England, lodged in Amesbury Abbey in the course of her journey from Exeter to London. Not long after came the fateful year of 1540, and the downfall of the Abbey. Stout resistance had been made by the spirited Abbess Florence Bormewe, to the

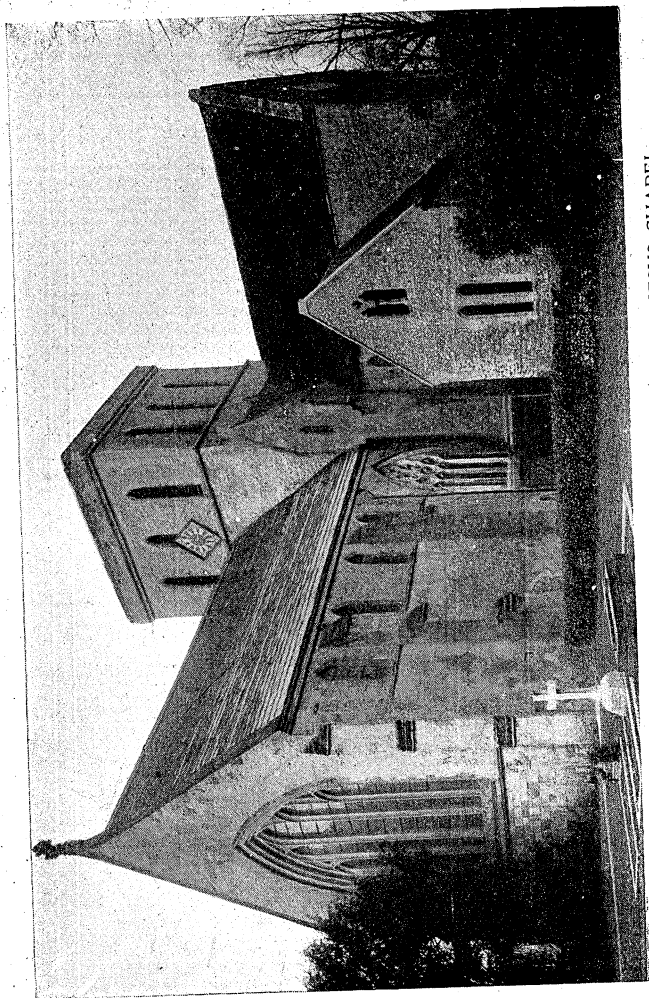


THE FONT.

emissaries of Cromwell, but surrender had finally to be made to the King's commands by Joan Darell, the last of the Abbesses. The Abbey was dissolved, many of the buildings destroyed, and the remainder given by the King as a private dwelling to the Earl of Hertfort, afterwards Protector Somerset. At the present time nothing remains standing of the monastic buildings, and it is a modern house replacing one of Inigo Jones' building which now stands on the site, and bears the name of Amesbury Abbey—that once famous place, which with its precincts "including garden, orchards, fish-ponds, cemetery, etc., covered 12 acres of ground." The Abbey Church, however, remains, though shorn of its glory. The cloisters are gone, two of the side chapels also, and the spire which stood on the great tower; some 40 feet also of the length of the nave have disappeared (comparing the present with the former measurements), and this work of destruction was begun on a Good Friday, in the year of grace, 1540.

Amesbury Church (St. Mary & St. Melor).

Still, the old grey Church as we have it to-day possesses a fascination all its own, and proves an engrossing object for study, by reason that while there are points representing the successive stages of architecture from the 8th to the 20 century, Amesbury Church presents difficulties and perplexities most stimulating to the archæological mind. **Saxon times** are recalled by the relic preserved in a glass case in the nave, i.e., the head of a Churchyard Cross of the 8th century with interlacing design, and cable pattern running round the outside. Further, in a recess in the nave wall beside the north-west Pier supporting the tower stands the lower part of a very early pillar discovered in the Norman wall. This fragment of pillar, if indeed Saxon as has been suggested, provides a most interesting link with the Church of Queen Elfrida's day. The oldest part of the Church (apart from this questionable pillar) is the **Norman Nave**, high in the walls of which may be seen the original windows (now



THE CHURCH FROM NORTH EAST SHOWING THE JESUS CHAPEL.



NORMAN PILLARS.

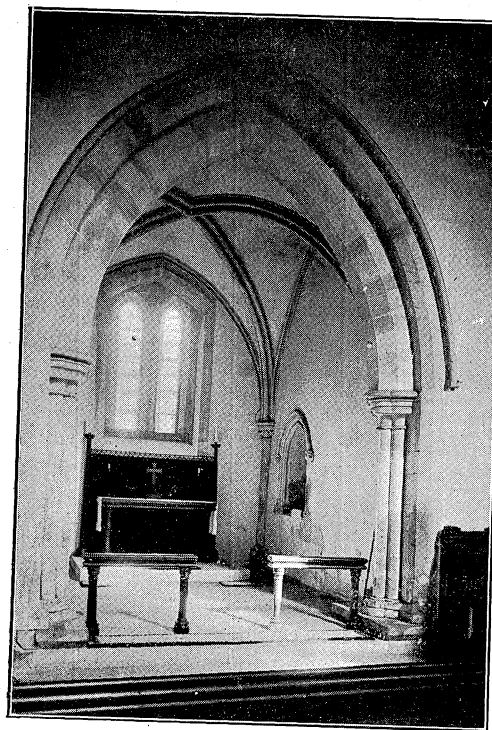
blocked up) round-headed and deeply splayed. The South wall was originally an outside wall, but was pierced through in the 15th century for the throwing out of a South Aisle. In the North wall of the Nave the Norman windows have been cut into and replaced by Perpendicular windows, but looked at from the outside of the Church the original outlines are clearly seen. A further survey of the exterior will be rewarded by the sight of more Norman work. There is the original Stone Corbel Table running under the Nave roof on the North side; as also it does on the South side, though there it is more difficult to trace owing to the addition of the South Aisle. Again, beyond the North-West corner of the Church may be found a beautiful ruined cluster of pillars of 12th century late Norman work, which may have formed part of an entrance from the Church (with its then longer Nave) into the Cloister Garth. The Cloister itself was on the North side of the Nave (as in the case of Canterbury and Gloucester, which also were like Amesbury,

Benedictine Foundations) and the string course marking the Cloister Roof may still be seen, and one or two old Corbels which supported the beams, half-hidden by the ivy on the walls. This North wall of the Nave is a most interesting part of the exterior of the Church. It will be seen that where it approaches the North Transept wall there is, low down, a more modern piece of walling. Here may have been some entrance in Norman days, into the Church from the Cloister, especially as, just within the wall at this spot, stands the stump of the ancient (Saxon ?) pillar, before noticed, which doubtless must have carried an arch. (The blocked up doorway in the North Transept wall was a later entrance, of the 13th century, from the Cloister into the Church.) Returning to the interior of the Church, we find one more instance of Norman work in the bowl of the old Font, which will be referred to later,—and now we come to the work of the **Early English Period**. Here notice must first be drawn to the Chancel and Transepts, with their great lancet windows and the piers and arches supporting the central tower. One of these piers, the South-Western one, was ornamented later with Perpendicular panels, and on the face of the North-Western pier may be found a small Consecration Cross, near the recess containing the remains of the old pillar.¹ The side walls of the Chancel deflect considerably towards the North as in the case of so many Cruciform Churches.² There were once three 13th century Chapels opening out of the Transepts, but only one remains. This is a beautiful example of Early English work with its double lancet window, stone vaulting and fine double piscina. This is the "Jesus Chapel": the other two Chapels were dedicated respectively to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. John. Above the arch of the Jesus Chapel is

¹ In the Pontifical it was directed that, at the Consecration of a Church, the Bishop should himself make the Consecration Crosses, "the Mason being at hand." The Mason would first make four small holes or dots as a guide to the Bishop, who would then with chisel and hammer form the Cross.

² Whether or no it was originally so intended, such deflection has for long suggested to pious minds the bowing of the Saviour's Head upon the Cross when He "gave up the Ghost."

a door which gives entrance into a loft, which would suggest a Priest's Chamber but for the fact that there is no flooring. It is lighted by a particularly beautiful little window of two

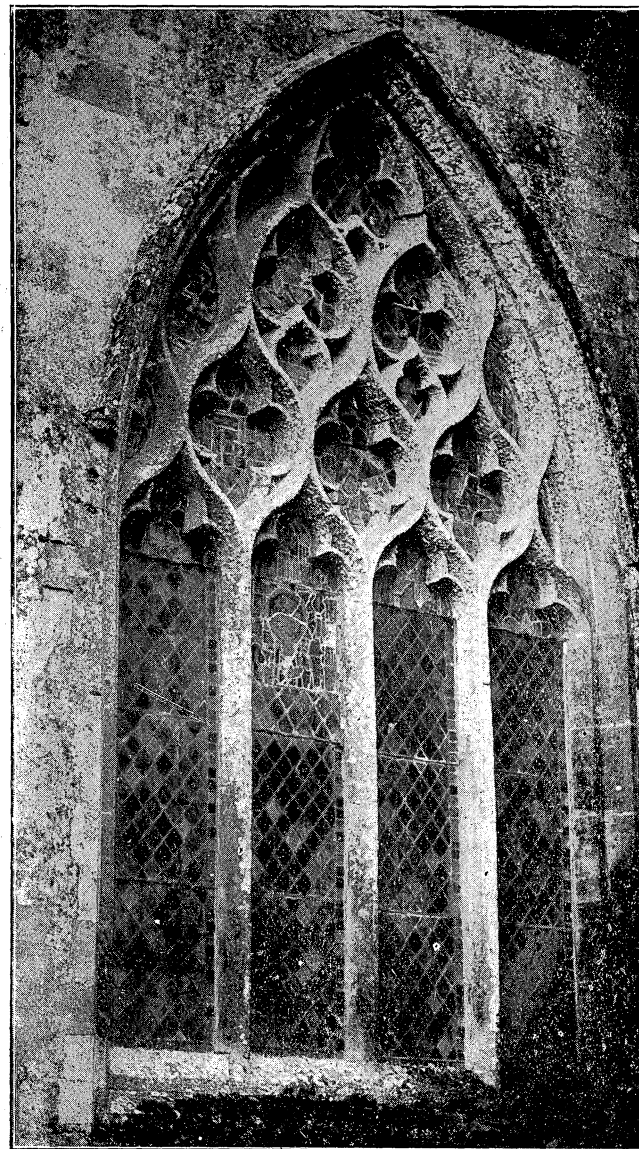


JESUS CHAPEL.

trefoil-headed lights divided by a pillar with foliated capital and with a quatrefoil opening in the head: date about 1280. It has been suggested that the window may have been used for a "Churchyard Light." Traces of the two missing Chapels can still be seen, the hoodmould of the one shewing between the Jesus Chapel and the Chancel arch. The other Chapel stood in a corresponding position in the South Transept: a groove in the wall marks the spring of the arch, and on the outside of the Church the entire line of arch is visible with the weathering for the roof. The three Chapels were apparently added after the Transepts were built, for the hoodmould of the arch of the Jesus Chapel cuts clean across the roll moulding which runs round the North Transept Wall. In connection with this Chapel the Rev. Canon Jackson made the following

interesting comment :—"Henry III. provided for the founding in Amesbury Church Obits for the Souls of Prince Arthur of Brittany (the King's first cousin, murdered by King John), for that of Eleanor, his sister, and for the Souls of the King himself and his Queen. Is it not probable that there was a Chapel and Altar at which these Obits were celebrated, and may not the elegantly built Chapel" (the Jesus Chapel) "have been erected for that purpose?" Before leaving the North Transept notice should be taken of the blocked up doorway, which led from the Church into the Cloister. It is said that formerly an underground passage from the Abbey led up into the North end of the Transept, and recently while the work of excavating for underpinning that portion of the building was in progress, a small doorway below the level of the ground was discovered, on the outside, which had been at some time built up, but which would seem to bear witness to the truth of the tradition. It will be noticed that the lancet windows in the North side of the Chancel are partly walled up. This was to allow of some buildings, probably Priest's Chambers, being placed against the outer wall, into which chambers a small early English Priest's door (now blocked up) led from the Chancel. The weathering for the roof of this building may be seen outside, and also a large Aumbry in the wall. The three lancets at the end of the South Transept are not original, they were inserted in the restoration of 1863, under the Architect Butterfield, to replace some 18th century work, but no doubt they represent the original idea as we see it in the old lancets of the other Transept. Another, and less happy piece of work done in 1863, was the removal of the beautiful Perpendicular East window and the substitution of the present one. The corbels which terminated the hoodmould of the older window now support the Credence Table.

The **Decorated** or 14th century period is represented in the Church by two fine windows in the Chancel, that on the South side being the earlier, (1315—20 c.) with its geometrical tracery, and that on the North the later, with tracery flamboyant

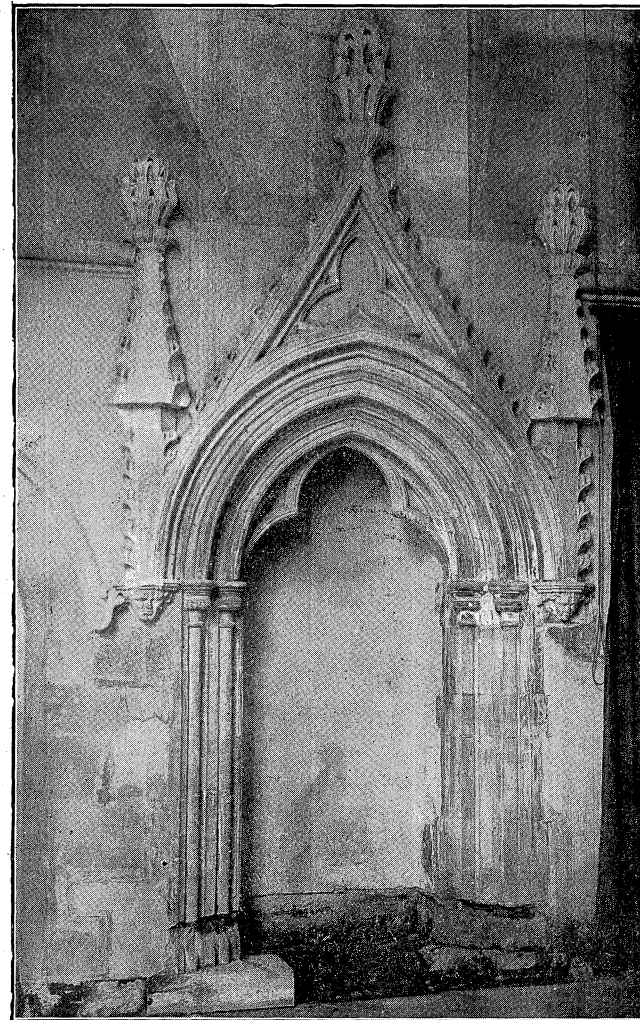


THE GUINEVERE WINDOW. (From the exterior).

in character and uncommon in detail, both trefoils and quatrefoils being used. The corbels of the scot window arch to this window are finished with ballflower ornaments. The fragments of the old stained glass seen here are of various dates, and most interesting;—thirteenth century hatched grisaille pieces (date about 1260) which may have come from the lancet windows of the Chancel—some 13th century Lombardic lettering, and a small 16th century quarry (a golden sun) below the top trefoil. The brighter coloured pieces, of the female head and the glass in the adjoining light are 15th century, and may have originally belonged to the Perpendicular East window, which was done away with. The head, above mentioned, having been taken for a representation of Queen Guinevere, has given this window the name of "the Guinevere window," but, to quote the opinion of the well-known architect, Mr. C. Ponting, "the figure is that of the B.V.M.—see the halo, also the crowned 'M' on the robe, which latter is *blue*. It has been suggested that the small figure is that of S. Rosalia receiving a chaplet of roses from the B.V.M.—she also holds flowers and a palm in her hand. There is a small bit of figure work, however, of the date of the stonework—part of a crowned head in outline. Is it possible that this did actually represent Queen Guinevere?"

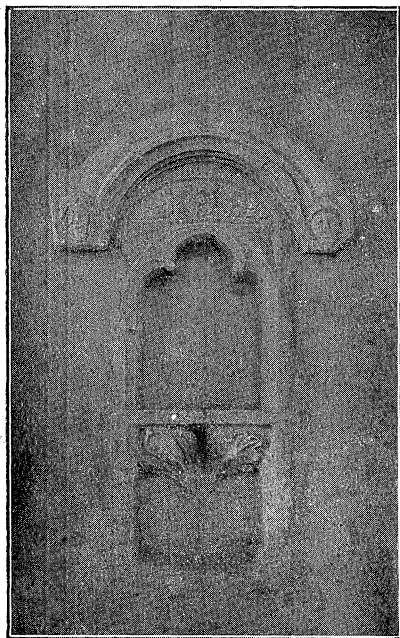
Another example of Decorated work may be seen at the North side of the Sanctuary in the richly moulded recess, with a canopy ornamented with crockets and pinnacles, and finished with carved heads supporting the corbels. Many suggestions have been offered as to the purpose of this recess. It goes by the name of "the Abbess's Seat"—and this it possibly may have been—again, it may have held the head of a tomb, or it may have been an Easter Sepulchre, though not of the ordinary form.

We come next to the work of the 15th century, or **Perpendicular Period**. Here we have the throwing out of the South Aisle, when the South wall of the Nave was pierced through and the Pillar built (in 1906 it was found necessary to rebuild this Pillar up to the Capital). This piercing of the wall must



THE ABBESS'S SEAT.

almost immediately have had a weakening effect upon the South-West Pier of the Tower, and necessitated the insertion of the great block of masonry, which, though so unsightly, is still of interest as preserving the faint outline of a frescoed figure (on the Nave side) representing the hapless little Patron Saint of the Church—St. Melor.



PISCINA IN SOUTH AISLE.

He was mutilated by a cruel uncle, having his right hand and left foot cut off—and about the year 544 he was murdered, at the age of 14. His relics were brought to Amesbury, where they were preserved as the objects of great veneration.¹ The South Aisle may originally have been a Chantry Chapel, as there is a beautiful little Piscina in the wall near the Archway opening into the Transept. Across this Archway a screen and small altar may have stood, and close to this spot two stone coffins were found under the floor, a third coffin being found almost immediately beneath the inserted late Perpendicular window in the East wall of the South Transept. The head of one of these coffins stands now against the North-West Pier of the Tower. Near the large South door of the Aisle is a holy water stoup, in which has been placed a small stone head of a woman wearing a fillet or crown, and showing

¹ For further details see p. 26.

signs of having originally been coloured. This is apparently a relic of some lost monument. Traces of a doorway are seen in the West wall of the Aisle, and on the outside some building evidently adjoined the Church wall. The old South door itself is worthy of notice with its primitive fastenings of latch and bobbin. Unfortunately the original bobbin was stolen, and it has been replaced by one made of Glastonbury yew. The key is weighty and interesting, and is attached to the door by an old book-chain with its swivel, which enabled the reader of the chained book to use it with greater ease.

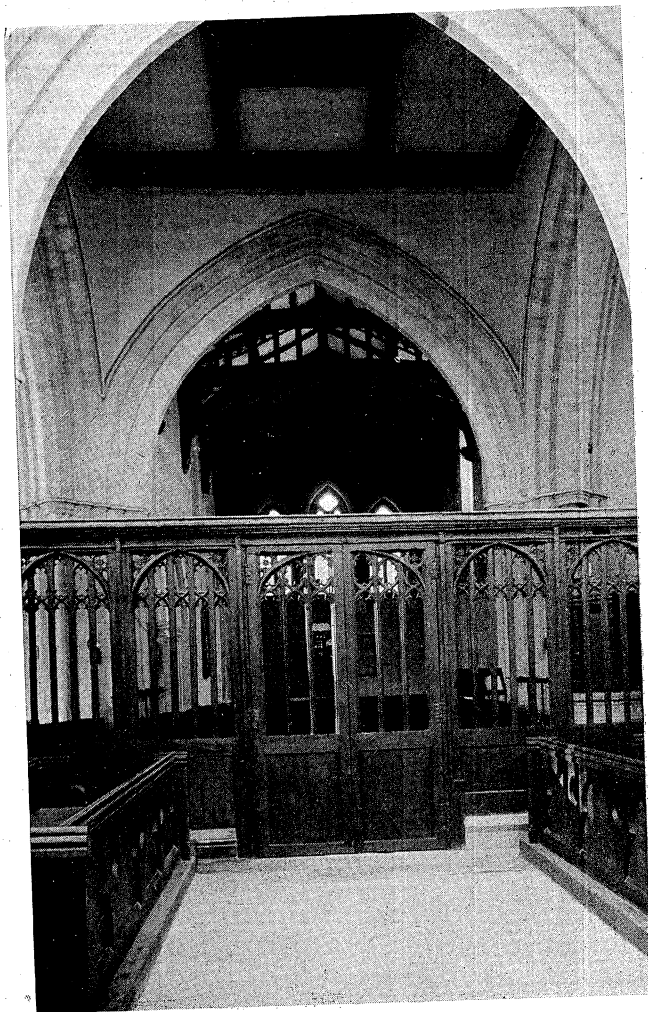
But, more beautiful than the stonework of the Perpendicular period in this Church is the wood-work. The Chancel Screen (about 1420 A.D.) is particularly interesting and has seen many vicissitudes, having been removed from the Church, recovered after some 60 years, restored and replaced in 1907 in its former position. There are signs of return stalls having been on the Eastern side of the Screen, and also of two small side altars having stood against its Western side.¹ (as at Patricio in Breconshire). The tracery of the Screen is very charming, and is unusual in its cusplings. Evidently there was originally a rood loft above, as is proved by the holes for the beams and supports.

The Nave roof is probably of the same date as the Chancel Screen—i.e., 1420 c. It is of chestnut wood, and when seen in an advantageous light shews much interesting and curious carving; the double cusplings beneath the brackets in particular being very rare.² The head on the Corbel next to the last at the West end of the South side is said to represent the Romano-British King Aurelius Ambrosius, from whose name "Ambrosius,"—Amesbury, the ancient "Ambrosebury," or "Ambresberia" took its name. This King succeeded Vortigern as King of Britain in 465.

The Transept and South Aisle roofs are of later date than the Nave roof, being about 1510. The Corbels in the North

¹ In such cases the Dedication of the Altar to the South was usually to "Our Lady of Piety," and that of the Altar to the North to "St. Anne."

² One other instance is to be seen at Bere Regis, Dorset.



CHANCEL SCREEN AND NAVE ROOF FROM EAST END.

Transept are of a uniform design of winged Angels holding escutcheons, while those in the South Transept and South Aisle are of varied, and sometimes very grotesque, subjects :—a monster head devouring a man grimly represents Judas Iscariot in the jaws of Satan, a not uncommon device. This is in the South Transept. In contrast to this is the beautiful female face on the centre boss of the centre rib. Another boss shews a grinning head with white teeth, and yet another, the Crown of Thorns. These last two devices occur also in the South Aisle roof.

Another treasure recovered within the last few years and restored to its place in the Church is the ancient font, which had been destroyed and the pieces buried beneath the Chancel floor. It has a Norman bowl of Purbeck marble mounted on a Free-stone base of Decorated period,—with deep trefoil-headed panels. When being restored, distinct marks were found beneath the bowl, showing it had originally stood on four round pillars. There are traces on the top of the bowl of old fastenings of a ~~cover~~.

The two mural tablets on the North wall of the Chancel, as also the small brass to Editha Matyn, 1470, and the tombstones with which the Chancel is paved, and a marble slab in the sanctuary pavement bearing a touching inscription, were all recovered in 1908 from their long interment—since 1853—under the chancel flooring. Two of the original diamond-shaped paving stones were also found and are now placed beneath the Credence Table near the spot where they were dug up.

During some underpinning work, one or two oak piles were found under the South-East buttress of the Tower, and the small Altar Cross in the Jesus Chapel is made of this old oak.

x cf. S E Wildes
"Inquestone".
p. 96.
96.

The Bells.

The Church possesses seven fine toned bells :—

1. The treble bell cast by J. Wallis,¹ 1619, with the inscription, "Come at God's Call."
2. Has been recast at some time.—No inscription.
3. Bears the words, I. Corr. 1723."²
4. Bears the words, "Chris. Ingram and John Walters, Ch. wardens, James Wells, Aldbourne, Wilts., fecit 1801" (recast).
5. Bears the words,
"Be stronge in faythe, prayse God well,
Francis Countess Hertford's bell. I.W. 1619."
6. Bears the words, "Richard Hays, Thomas Francis, Churchwardens.

All thoo' it be onto my lost
I hoop you will consider my cost. C.T. 1713."

This latter inscription is now lost, as the bell was recast in 1880 by J. Warner & Sons, London, at the expense of the Rev. A. W. Phelps (in memory of his wife, who died in 1879), with the following beautiful words :—

"Born to die . . . Died to live."
"The love Thou gavest I give to Thee
With Thee I joy, Lord weep with me."

7. Is the old Sanctus Bell, separate from the peal.

¹ Bellfounder, Salisbury.

² Bellfounder, Aldbourne, Wilts.

"Ambresberia."

The following verses on Amesbury and its Church appear in a small book of poems published by Elliot Stock, entitled "Thoughts and Fancies."

By dip of down, by sweep of stream,
I dream, I dream;
Where wealth of woodland ways enfold
An old stronghold,
Mossed o'er this many a year in silence deep
Of dreamful sleep.

Where village ends in meadows green—
Half hid, half seen—
The grey church stands, a sealed book
And many look,
Wonder and ponder, and so pass away,
Forget, or pray,

Moved by some sacred relics kept
From Time, who swept
The past away, nor left but these
Few memories
To tell the story of repentant queens
And bygone scenes

When ancient dwellers on this sod
First heard of God :
When British monks, in pagan days,
To Him sang praise ;
Till trampled into silence by the beat
Of heathen feet.

When stood the Saxon's cross to view
As strange and new ;
When cloisters echoed to the tread
Of feet long dead ;
When shone the blessed vision of the Grail
On maiden frail.

When passed within the awful Ring
Weird worshipping ;
When Britons, to high feasting come,
Met treach'rous doom,
And 'neath the calm breasts of the plain around
Found burial ground.

When o'er primeval downs there pressed
True knights on quest ;—
A doomed King, to pardon one
By sin undone ;—
Great ladies, seeking from the world release
In convent peace ;—

Pale nuns, forced quit the cloistered state
They violate ;—
While foreign praise, like incense rolls
From purer souls ;—
A fateful Queen, brief resting from far Spain,
With bridal train.

And then the day of ruin falls
On Abbey walls,
The home of prayer and peace is passed
Away at last.
And all the bygone tale of days must seem
A dream, a dream.

But in the Church's shadows still
Strange echoes thrill ;
Old loves and prayers and longings wake
And murmurings make
Amid the cold white silences,—then cease,
And melt in peace.

* * * * *

While still the sanctus bell rings clear :
While still we hear
“ Be strong in faythe—praise God well—
Frances, her bell ” ;
While still the “ shriving bell ”¹ when Lent comes in
Bids own our sin ;

While on the ear the summons fall
“ Come at God's call ! ”
Present and Past join hands again
In this old fane :
And living hearts arise to guard the ancient trust
Through faithful ages kept by them who now are dust.

E. J. W.

¹ A bell called “ the shriving bell ” is still rung on Shrove-Tuesday, a survival of the old custom, calling the faithful to confession before the coming in of Lent.





THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH.

St. Melor.



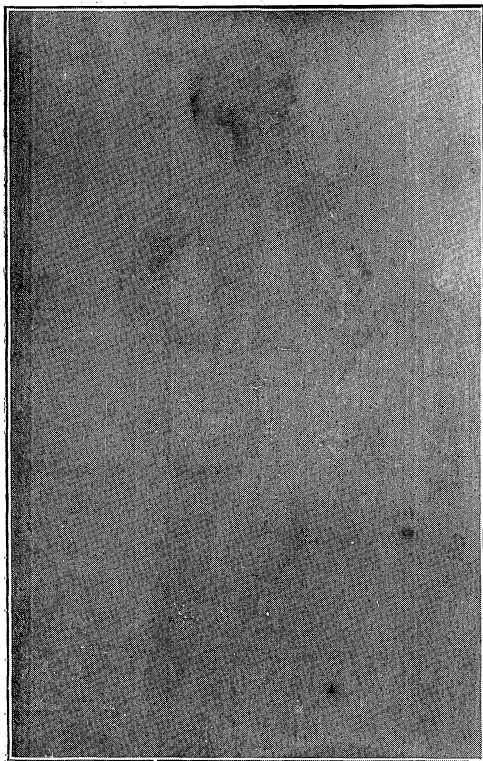
St. Melor, or Melorus, the little murdered Prince of the silver hand and brazen foot, is one of the many "Saints" of the dim past whose stories though most probably founded on history reach us, if in an uncertain form, yet with all the added fascination of ages of romance and legend.

About the year 530¹ Melor was born to Melyan, king or duke of Cornwall and Devon, and of Brittany, whose wife was Aurilla, of the race of Rivold. Melyan (whose name is commemorated at Mullion, and St. Melyan's in Cornwall, as well as in many places in Brittany) was son to Budoc I. and had a brother Rivold (or Rinaldus) who though himself possessing lands in Domnonia in Brittany, given him by King Arthur his cousin, was ambitious to rule also in Melyan's domains. "At length in the seventh year of Melyan's dukedom, at the instigation of an evil spirit, whilst a council of leading men was gathered together to make plans for the advantage of the country, Rinaldus (or Rivold) coming into the council itself killed his brother Melyan,² and began to reign in his stead." The little Melor was then but 7 years of age, and the cruel Rivold sought to take his life also, but was frustrated by the intervention of the Bishops and Clergy. Rivold however succeeded in crippling the poor child by cutting off his right hand and his left foot, unmoved by the tears of the mother who besought him on her knees to spare the lad. This

¹ Some martyrologies give a much earlier date, 411, for St. Melor's death, which would place his birth 397. But the later date connects him with the St. Melor of Brittany, and the Rev. S. Baring Gould gives 544 as the date of martyrdom; which would give 530 as the date of birth.

² "This probably took place not far from Par, where are a Lan-melyan and a Merthan close together, indicative of a place of martyrdom."—*Baring Gould*.

horrible deed was done in order that Melor should never reign in his father's stead, for according to ancient Celtic law no cripple might ever bear rule.



REMAINS OF FRESCO IN AMESBURY CHURCH
SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT S. MELOR.

were told of him, and his ways were noted with awe. He had been supplied with a hand of silver and a foot of brass in the place of the lost limbs, and when out in the woods one

¹ A window in the North Aisle of the Cathedral at Quimper shows a picture of St. Melor.

The poor little maimed prince was then taken to a monastery, some say in Cornwall, to be kept in safety and educated by the Church, but in any case we find him later "in Coenubio Corantini" the monastery founded by St. Corentin at Quimper,¹ in Brittany. Here Melor, "increasing in piety and innocence day by day," earnestly studied the scriptures, and was in great favour with the Abbot and his fellow students, and gradually wonderful tales

day "at a certain summer season" nutting with the Abbot, it was seen that Melor was using the silver hand as though it were a hand of flesh, as he reached the branches and plucked the fruit. Again, once while playing with his companions he threw a stone far into the air, and where it fell, immediately a spring of water sprung up, and the boys brought home this and similar strange tales to the Abbot, and so around this little prince who had suffered so much and whose personality was so attractive, there grew a halo of unusual sanctity. But his education for manhood was not neglected. He was to be trained in boyish exercises as far as possible, and for this was put under the guardianship of one Cerialtan, who had a son named Justin of about the age of Melor, and with whom apparently he was on most friendly terms. But as time went on, and Melor being now 14 years old, his wicked uncle became alarmed at hearing that a certain agitation was being made in favour of his nephew, with the object of restoring to him his rights. Rivold sent for Cerialtan and bribed him with a promise of rich rewards, and as much land as he could see from the top of Mount Coc, if he would put Melor finally out of the way. Cerialtan agreed, "and the bargain of iniquity was struck." He confided the plot to his wife, but she was horror stricken and seized a moment when her husband was absent to fly with Melor for refuge to the Regent Conmore, whose wife was a daughter of Budoc I. and Aunt to Melor. But this apparently proved a fruitless effort, and tradition here summons up confused and tragic scenes of terror and flight, of the lad's escape from place to place, of his concealing himself in the sudden miraculous hollow in the earth still shewn as "Guele-san Velar"—the "bed of St. Melor," between Carhaix and Lanmeur in Brittany¹—then on in the direction of Boiséon when night overtook him, a refuge was taken at a farm in Plouigneau, now called "Gouer Velar," or the rivulet of Melor. On leaving the farm next morning, fasting, the fugitive ascended a hill, and fainted from exhaustion. Where

¹ A Chapel was built afterwards over the spot.

now stands a small chapel dedicated to him at Coel-sao-bell, "Wood of the long ascent." On he pushed to Boiséon, where the enemy overtook him, and near Lanmeur the cruel deed was done, Cerialtan did him to death, finally beheading him; placed the head in a bag, and leaving the body, started off to Rivold to shew his prize and to claim his reward. Was the body found, by peasants perhaps, and reverently brought to the old wooden house in Lanmeur known as Cambr-ar-Sant, or "Chamber of the Saint"? And was it here that, as the Latin Legend says, an old Nuisse of St. Melor's boyhood, "Coming to the house in which the body was lying, saw both God's Angels, and lights shining with divine splendour"? An even more ghastly version of the tale is that which pictures Cerialtan, accompanied by his young son Justin, enticing Melor away with reassuring words to a certain castle, where they rested for the night, occupying one bed, Melor lying between the treacherous pair, such rest being considered a sign of intimate friendship,—in the morning, so this tale goes, Cerialtan rose, and, Justin holding the head, beheaded the hapless prince. Father and son then fled from the Castle, Justin "pleased with his share" carrying the head, when on climbing the Walls of Carhaix, "agreeably to the just judgment of God, he fell from the ramparts and died of a broken neck. But Cerialtan, taking the head and fleeing, when he was nearly fainting from thirst, speaking to himself he said, "Woe is me, the most wretched of all men, and worthy of every penalty and torture, what shall I do because tormented with the drought of thirst, I faint and die." And when he was many times repeating these words, the boy's head burst forth into human words, 'directing him to strike his staff into the earth when a spring of water should appear.' This, Cerialtan did, and refreshed by a draught conveyed the head to Rinaldus (Rivold) and he, receiving it with great joy, said, 'Rise and climb to the top of the mountain and whatever you can see adjoining I willingly give you for a possession.' He, then climbing the mountain and hunting to see round about, was deprived of the sight of

both his eyes and, prevented by sudden death, perished, and his flesh melted like wax at the appearance of fire." A somewhat different version says that Rivold first put out the eyes of Cerialtan, and then led him up the mountain, sarcastically offering to bestow on him the promised reward of all that he could see. But judgement was to fall also on Rivold himself. On first receiving the head of Melor from Cerialtan, in his triumph he gloated over it and touched it, and immediately he sickened and, three days after, miserably died. Strange tales follow in connection with the burial of the murdered boy "in the spot of his martyrdom. He was found apparently above ground the next day, and when the same thing happened although the corpse was buried in three different places, having taken counsel they place the Saint's body on a waggon to which two untrained oxen were fixed, and they sent them off without a guide whithersoever the divine virtue should wish to direct it." When the waggon with its sacred burden, thus drawn, reached a certain spot and halted, the crowd there present were not satisfied and made efforts to remove it, but "the waggon was so divinely fixed and immovable that by no art, no contrivance, in short by no excellence of man, could it be moved," so finally "giving thanks to God, they interred the body with honour in the same spot, where beseeching his help they were accustomed with joy to obtain the wished for healing." The traveller who visits Lanmeur, at the present day, will find beneath the Church lately re-built, an ancient Crypt with a healing fountain dedicated to St. Melar, the date of which has been attributed to the period immediately succeeding the death of Prince Melar. Here are two squat pillars "with many-headed writhing serpents carved in relief round the granite drums," and the spot is regarded with peculiar veneration by the inhabitants of the district. The story of Melor has been sculptured on the pulpit of the Church, and may it not be the two granite pillars of the old Crypt guard the spot where so long ago this little British and Breton Saint was finally

¹ See "Bretons at Home," F. E. Gostling.

laid to rest? To proceed now with the story and to come to the point at which the connection with Amesbury appears:—"After the course of many years strange (foreign) preachers carrying everywhere about the shrine with the relics of St. Melorus, having traversed the districts, exercising the office laid upon them, at last arrived at Ambresbury and placed the holy relics upon the altar. Having finished their office of preaching they wished to take the relics along with them, but by no means could they be moved from the altar, cleaving to the altar like adamant. Distressed with grief and perplexity they departed, having received a large sum of money from the Abbess." And so came the relics of St. Melor to Amesbury, where they were preserved as the objects of great veneration by pilgrims in the Middle Ages. Capgrave testifies to their removal from Cornwall to the Abbey of Amesbury, and it would seem probable that the "foreign preachers," in bringing the relics from Brittany would first visit the land of St. Melor's birth, and the various places dedicated to him, St. Mylor in Cornwall with its ancient Celtic Churchyard Cross, the Church at Linkinhorne¹ in Cornwall, and the ruined Chapel of Holditch (now a barn) in the parish of Thorncombe in Dorset, may possibly mark the resting places of the preachers on their way to Amesbury. But the relics were not allowed to remain altogether undisturbed there, for legend goes on to tell us that there came a time when "certain sons of iniquity entering by night the Church of Ambresbury take away with them the Shrine of St. Melorus, and tearing off the plates of gold and silver they fling away the chest with the relics in a certain cave."² But a certain priest rising at break of day saw a radiant pillar of light descending from heaven upon the cave, and drawing near to the place he found the shrine and handed it over to the Church." And yet one more tale is told—and we might

¹ Linkinhorne-Llantighern, "the Church of the King."

² There is a famous cave, known now as "The Diamond," in the side of the old British earthwork (Vespasian's Camp) on the opposite side of the river to the Church.

believe it, in substance—in connection with the Church of Saxon days: "St. Melorus appeared by night in a certain Sacristy saying, 'Godric, rise quickly, behold the vault of the Church often shaken with wide gaps appears to hasten to speedy ruin,' and when he had repeated the same words a second night, on the third night he appeared and said, 'Godric, rise quickly, take with thee the images and ornaments of the altar, depart as quickly as thou canst, for the danger of thy death is doubtless at the doors,'—and when he had gone out, the whole vault fell in after him involving the entire surface of the surrounding area." Here the legend leaves us, abruptly concluding with the words: "But leaving earthly things, the heavenly things with the crown of martyrdom belong to the Calends (1st day) of October." And on the first day of October St. Melor is usually commemorated, although in some places, especially where a much earlier date (411) of his martyrdom is given, January 3rd is the day assigned to him. He is invoked in Mabillon's Litanies and is also represented in the paintings of the English College in Rome (plate 28). Many places in Brittany besides those above mentioned are dedicated to him, Loc-Melar, Meilars, Tremelior, St. Meloir des Ondes, and numerous chapels.

(Note.—The passages quoted above are translations from the Latin of "Nova Legenda Anglie," Horstman's Edition).

References.—Nova Legenda; Bollandist Fathers, Acta Sanctorum; Exeter Martyrologium; Martiloge of Syon; Lives of the Saints, Rev. J. Baring Gould; Lives of the British Saints, Rev. J. Baring Gould; Studies in Church Dedications, Arnold Foster; Bretons at Home, F. A. Gostling; Stanton's Menology, etc., etc.



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