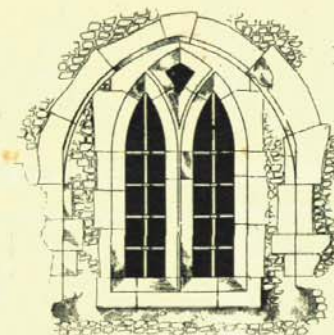


The Chapel in Westbury Park. West Meon. Hants

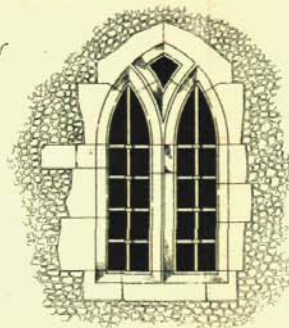
References to Plan & Sections.

Original rubble walling shown thus...
Dressed stone in quoins, &c...
Parts subsequently blocked up...

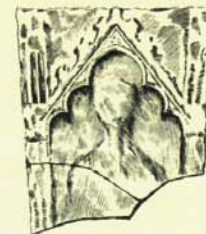


Inside

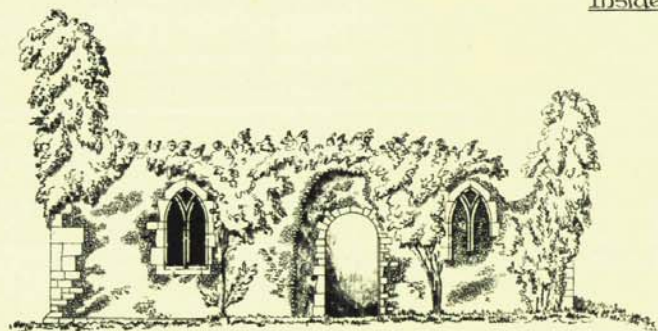
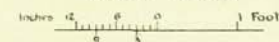
Remaining Window
on South side.



Outside



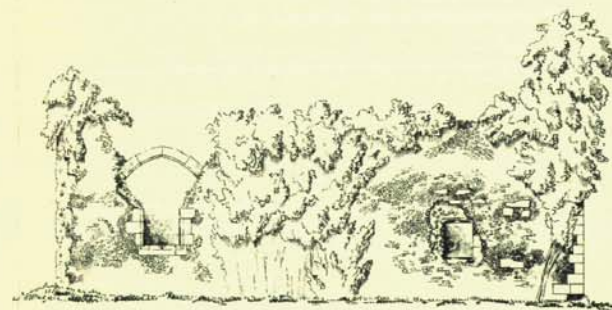
Tomb slab.



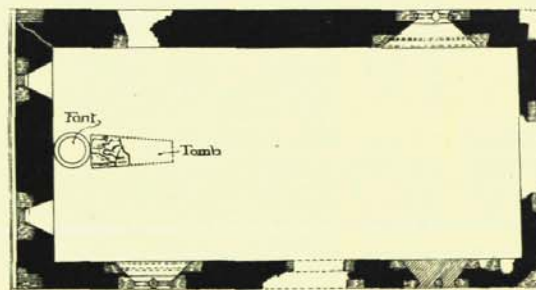
South Elevation.



West Elevation.



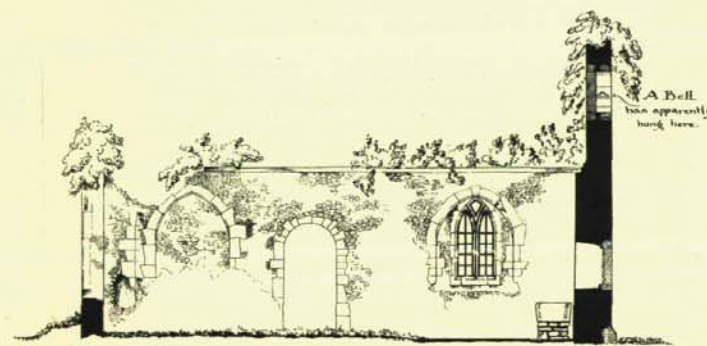
North Elevation.



Plan



Cross Section.



Longitudinal Section.

A Bell
has apparently
hung here.

Mess et del
A.C.H. Nott
A.R.C.B.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPEL IN WESTBURY PARK, WEST MEON.

By N. C. H. NISBETT, A.R.I.B.A.

On the occasion of the hospitable reception of the Hampshire Field Club at Westbury Park, by H. Le Roy Lewis, Esq., on the 29th May, 1890, it was thought desirable that some record of the chapel, as it now stands, should be preserved. Mr. Lewis readily gave his permission and the accompanying measured drawings were accordingly made. The history of the Manor of Westbury, dating from Saxon times, has been fully dealt with in a paper read by Mr. T. W. Shore on the occasion of the visit,¹ and it is here proposed only to refer to points suggested by an architectural study of the chapel.

This building, which on the Ordnance map is called the Church of S. Nicholas, stands just within the Park about 200 feet south of the road connecting East and West Meon. The orientation is as nearly as possible due east and west. The font shown on the plan is at the west end and the same drawing shows the position of the east window. The walls are constructed principally of flint rubble with stone quoins to the angles, and similar dressings to the openings remain, although the eastern gable has suffered, owing no doubt to the large opening required for the east window below. The thickness of the walls varies, that on the north being nearly three feet. Whether the builders so constructed that portion which would be least exposed to the sun's rays intentionally in order to protect the building from damp it is impossible to determine. It is worthy of note however that the thinnest wall is toward the driest quarter—the east.

The entrance is by means of a door on the south side—a very usual position, although it is frequently found that when

¹ Hampshire Antiquary and Naturalist, vol. i, p. 82.

a public road runs to the north, as in this instance, the door is placed on that side, or at the west end. In this case the convenience of the owner of the neighbouring manor house (who was probably the founder of the chapel) was sufficient reason for adhering to the usual practice. Only the internal arch of the door remains. This is round, a form often used in such a position long after the pointed arch came into general use. Of the external arch nothing remains but the eastern jamb, which is constructed of Purbeck stone in a kind of "long and short" work. This seems to have been done to avoid interfering with the inner jamb, which is of another stone, so that the dressed stone does not extend the full depth of the doorway, neither is it in the same straight line. Mr. Le Roy Lewis states that he remembers the external arch, before it fell, and it was of the same shape as the remaining one. From the mere form of the arch there is no reason to doubt its being the original one, but from the other points noted above it would seem possible that the doorway is not exactly in its original state.

On each side of the door there is a window of two lights. One still remains in very fair preservation, as is shown by the details given at the top of the accompanying illustrations. It consists of two "lancet" lights divided by a "true" mullion, with simple tracery in the head, as distinguished from the mere placing side by side of two "lancet" windows, an earlier phase in the history of window development.

This feature is important in attempting to determine the date of the building. In centres of architectural activity such tracery is to be met with early in the thirteenth century; but allowance must be made in more secluded districts, especially in small buildings of this class, which would not be of sufficient importance to secure the services of workmen other than those easily obtained in the vicinity. If this be taken into consideration it would not be unreasonable to place the date of this building at the close of the thirteenth century or early in the fourteenth. This seems to coincide with what little historical evidence exists on the subject. The window to the east of the door, and that opposite in the north wall, were both similar to the one just described, as, although the former is now blocked up, the

tracery is still visible externally, while all that remains of the latter agrees with the others. All these three windows had internally a wide splayed opening spanned by a pointed "drop" arch, shown on the longitudinal section, which, in each case, still remains.

In connection with the blocked up window in the south wall is a somewhat curious feature. To the east of the splay from which the internal arch springs, are the remains of what appears to be the angle of another splay, as though the width of the opening had been reduced during the original construction of the building, and another splay formed without removing that already built. Just below is a broken recess in the position probably occupied by a piscina, although no remains are visible.

In the east wall was a large window, of which nothing remains but the opening shown on the plan, the splays of which have been strengthened with brickwork. The original stone dressings still remain externally to a height of about 6 feet from the sill, which is missing, so there is no positive evidence as to the number of lights; but, by taking the width of the opening and allowing for the mullions, it would appear to have been a window of three lights. A loose and very much weathered piece of stone, to be seen on the south side, may have formed part of a trefoiled head. Mr. Le Roy Lewis, from his recollection of the window when he first knew it, confirms these points—both as to the number of lights and their having trefoiled heads. The east elevation is not shown in the illustration, as there is nothing to add to the information given by the plan and section taken together. The west wall has two small square headed windows about 3 feet above the ground, widely splayed inside and now partly blocked up. In the gable above are two openings which extended through the full thickness of the wall, having flat segmented arches, now filled up on the inside. The northern exhibits traces of a bell having been hung there—a fact of some interest, as from an inventory (1554) referring to East Meon and its two chapelries, of which Westbury was one, it is noted that at "the chapelle of Westbury" is "one hanging bell." ¹

¹ "Peter Lombard" (Rev. W. Benham, F.S.A.) on East Meon and Westbury Churches. Hampshire Antiquary and Naturalist, vol. i, p. 62.

None of these openings have any distinctive feature about them to assist in determining their date. The sides are square edged; but both in the upper and lower ones the heads have a slight chamfer. They are probably original, although work of so simple a period might belong to almost any period.

There still remains to be described a small opening in the north wall near the west-end. It is about 3 feet from the ground, and judging from the size and position of the timber lintel and sill was internally about 2 feet 7 inches high and 2 feet wide. Of the dressed stones only three, which formed the internal jamb on the west side, remain. Externally the walling is very much broken away, so that it is impossible to say exactly what it was like or for what purpose intended. Such openings are often found in churches and are known by a variety of names. They are sometimes called "leper windows," although apparently without any good authority. "Low side window" is another term; while it is certain that some of them were of the nature of "squints" or "hagioscopes," to enable a person outside the building to see the altar. A glance at the plan shows that this was not the purpose here, since, although the ruined condition of the wall has considerably widened the splay, we cannot suppose this to have been the object for which this opening was constructed. It may be observed also that the purpose of a hagioscope would have been served by the small lower windows at the west-end. Another theory as to the purpose of "low side windows" may be considered, to which the fact that this example is placed in the wall nearest to the road, and easily accessible to those passing by, may give some clue and support.

In the year 1265 A.D. Clement IV granted to the Franciscan friars the right to preach, hear confessions, and give absolution, without the assent of, and even without consulting, the parochial or secular clergy. In 1287 the same order obtained a similar privilege from the Archbishop of Canterbury, although his mandate to that effect was not delivered until 1300. The Franciscans were not the only order thus favoured by the Popes, who seem to have placed the Dominicans in a similar position. These orders gained great

popularity during the thirteenth and following centuries. It has even been stated that the people were unwilling to receive the sacraments from any other hands than those of the friars "to whose churches they crowded while living, and were desirous to deposit there also their remains after death." Piers Ploughman alludes to the "asoiling"¹ (*i.e.*, absolving) by the friars, and it has been thought by some antiquaries that the low side windows are connected with the practice of hearing confessions. In support of this hypothesis the following is quoted. Thomas Bedyll, clerk to the Council in the reign of Henry VIII; and one of the Commissioners for the suppression of the Monasteries, in reporting the doings of the Commissioners, thus writes:—"We think it best that the place wher thes frires have been wont to hire outtward confessions of al commers at certen tymes of the yere be walled up and that use to be fordoen for ever."²

This may hardly be deemed conclusive, as it possibly refers only to an arrangement met with in conventual buildings.

In the description of Westbury chapel, published in the Hampshire Antiquary, (vol. i, p. 62) this small opening is not mentioned, but two windows with large splays are spoken of as in this wall. Possibly this account was written from memory and the fact that the north and south are different escaped notice. The only point now to be observed which would in any way support this account is the fact that there are a few stones built into the wall near this opening which it is just possible may have formed part of a window like that now remaining on the south side. The wall however shows no signs of having been disturbed to such an extent.

Nothing remains of the roof except portions of the wall plates *in situ* and three of the old tie beams, now on the ground, the dimensions of which are about 11in. by 3in., and 15ft. 6in. in length.

¹ "And flittyng fond ich the frere that me confessede,
And said he myghte me not asoile but ich sulver hadde,"

To restitute resonabliche, fro all unryghtful wyning.
Vision of Piers Ploughman.

² Letters relating to the Suppression of the Monasteries, Camden Society, No. xxvi, p 49.

The font at the west end is circular, perfectly plain, and is probably the original one belonging to the building as a chapel of the parish of East Meon.¹ The original base is gone, and it now rests in Westbury Chapel on some fragments of old stonework.

To the east of the font is the upper portion of a monumental slab, probably in its original position, as the remains of a tiled floor seem to fit the sloping sides of the slab. The style and workmanship of this interesting fragment are distinctly of fourteenth century character. The weathered and worn surface of the stone render it extremely difficult to portray, but it apparently consisted of an effigy (of a knight?) under a cinque foiled canopy, above which was a crocketed gablet. There were evidently three crockets on each side and a finial at the apex. A close examination of the edges of the slab shows that the chamfer, which can be traced some distance from the top, is stopped just above the point from which the gablet and canopy spring, thus leaving a "boss," usual in such a position, while above it, on each side of the canopy, there appear to have been pinnacles, similar to those found in the monumental brasses and stained glass of the period.

The personage commemorated by this fragment is unknown, but a probable conjecture may be gathered from facts recorded in Mr. Shore's paper above referred to, from which it appears that at the time of the Domesday Survey, Hugh de Port held Westbury, and Gozeline held it under him. In the time of Edward the Confessor it had been held by Ulnod directly from the king. In the latter part of the reign of Henry III, the manor was held by John "of Westbury," as a knight's fee, being part of the barony of Robert de St. John. If it be remembered that William, son of Adam de Port (mentioned in the inscription at Warneford), took the name of St. John from his mother, heiress of Roger de St. John, it will be seen that it had remained in the same hands since the

¹ The neighbouring church of West Meon was rebuilt in 1843, and it was considered possible that the old font had been removed to Westbury. This however is not the case, as that relic is preserved in the church of S. Edmund, Lombard Street, of which the Rev. Canon Benham, a native of West Meon, is now vicar.

conquest. In 15, Ed. II (1322)¹ Robert Lewer (or Le Ewer) obtained a license to crenellate his manor house at Westbury, and about the same time he also obtained a grant of "free warren." After this, *viz.*, in 27, Ed. III (1354), an inquisition was held at Westbury, consequent on the death, without issue, of Edmund de St. John, son and heir of Hugh, and the lands were divided between his two sisters. From this it appears, that as tenants in chief, the same family had held it for nearly 300 years from the Conqueror's grant to their ancestor, and it is probable that Robert Lewer, who most likely made addition to the existing house before obtaining his license to crenellate, held it, like his predecessor John of Westbury, as a knight's fee, of the St. John family.

Taking into consideration the apparent date of the monument, there would seem to be at least a probability that it marks the tomb of Robert Lewer and that the erection of the little chapel was carried out by him at the same time as the work at the house. It would be interesting to know whether John "of Westbury" was an ancestor of Robert Lewer, as he must have held the manor to within 40 or 50 years of the granting of the license to crenellate, which was usually considered as a kind of finishing touch to a mansion which had been gradually growing in size and importance. Considering the slow rate of progress at which building operations were generally carried out, it is almost necessary to give John of Westbury the credit of commencing the remodelling of the house. These notes however can only touch on such points as are suggested by the architectural character of the building, and it must be left to others to clear up the subject of its history and of the ancient occupiers of Westbury.

While the present proprietor is anxious to protect, as far as possible, the remains of the ruined chapel standing in the Park, he regrets that he is unable to attempt anything of the nature of an actual restoration which might involve other responsibilities which he is not prepared to incur.

¹ A royal licence was required in mediæval times before a subject could rebuild or fortify his existing house. "*Concessit mihi quod muros reficere possim . . . et facere crenellos.*" Charta Galcheri ann. 1218. Ducange Lex. art. Ballium. The term *crenelle* (or old Eng. Kernel) appears sometimes to signify a battlement, but usually means the embrasures of a battlement, or loopholes, or other openings in the walls.