

THE LOW SIDE WINDOWS OF HAMPSHIRE CHURCHES.

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Very little interest has been taken in these openings in the walls of the ancient churches of our county, and the references to them in the pages of the *Papers and Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archæological Society* are few and far between, and can easily be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The publications of the Archæological Societies of several other counties, *e.g.*, Surrey, Sussex, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, etc., etc., contain detailed lists, with photographs and descriptions, of these curious openings, and it is with a view to remedying this omission that this paper has been written.

The term "low side window" is not altogether a satisfactory one, for the openings to which it is applied are not always, although they are generally, placed near to the ground, and on a lower level than the general fenestration of the church.

As a rule, the side wall of a church is the position where they are to be found, but exceptionally they occur in other positions.

With regard to "window," this is the most unfortunate part of the whole term, for in the strict sense they are not windows at all, never having been glazed originally, but always closed with a shutter.

Still, the term "low side" window has, in the absence of a better, been generally accepted, but, in using it, the reservations mentioned above should be borne in mind.

It is not easy to write down a definition of low side windows, their ages, shapes, positions, and architectural details are so very various, and the ordinary text-books often do not even mention them. However, some description seems necessary, and a low side window may be defined as a peculiar opening, generally of small size, which is found especially in churches erected in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, and its usual position is in the south wall of the chancel, near the south-west angle, and sometimes in a similar position in the north wall; and it is not very uncommon to find two openings in a church, opposite to one another, at the western angles of the chancel. Occasionally a low side window may be found in the side wall of an aisle or of a chapel, and exceptionally in an east or west wall, and even in a porch.

It is generally placed at no great distance from the ground, and on a lower level than that of the adjacent fenestration, and it may be either an independent opening, or placed immediately beneath another window, from which it may be divided by a transom. The low side window or its lower part, if it has not been interfered with, is generally found to be blocked up with masonry, but this may have later been removed, and when examined no glass-groove can be seen, showing that it was not originally glazed, and on its inner aspect (and also sometimes on its outer) a rebate or rectangular recess may be observed, into which a wooden shutter closed or a wooden frame fitted. The hinge hooks on which the shutter, opening inwards generally, hung, and the iron bars which formed a grating to close the aperture on the outside, and the bolt-holes are frequently to be seen, wholly or in part, remaining in the surrounding masonry. The opening generally has a marked inward splay on each side inside the church, and a flat sill is often present, which in some cases certainly could be used as a convenient seat.

Some other details may be added. Most low side windows, judging from their architectural features, date from the XIIIth and XIVth centuries; they may be a part of the original building plan, or they may be insertions in earlier walls, and a few are said to be of Norman date, but this is doubted by some authorities. Others, but these are rare, are of XVth century construction, and they often appear to be of conventional design, as if an opening of this kind was at this late date looked upon as a necessary ceremonial part of every church plan, a low side window being included in the equipment of altars generally.

Very occasionally a stone seat has been found in close connection with a low side window, as in the well-known example at Wigginton, Oxon., illustrated in Bond's *English Church Architecture*, page 682; and a book rest has also been found in rare instances.

No mention of these peculiar openings occurs in the earlier writings of ecclesiologists, and Mr. Houghton thinks the first definite allusion to them appears in a description of Hurley Church, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1839. From this time onwards a furious controversy has raged as to the purpose for which they were originally constructed; and although some seventeen theories have been advanced, no hypothesis can claim to explain the size and position of all of them. The subject remains a mystery, and has been called "The Sphinx of Archæology."

The various theories which have been advanced to explain the purpose of low side windows are here outlined, and, as far as possible, in chronological order.

I. **The Lychnoscopic Theory.**—In 1840 the Cambridge Camden Society suggested the name "lychnoscopes," and in the third edition (c. 1840) of *A Few Hints on the Practical Study of Ecclesiastical Architecture* the following explanation is given of their use:—

"The following hint is thrown out as to its real use. During the three last nights of Passion Week lights were kept burning in the Holy Sepulchre, and at all times in chantries and upon high altars. The windows probably served for those whose business it was to keep them in, to satisfy themselves that all was right; the other windows being too high for the purpose. Hence they generally occur on the south side, because the Easter Sepulchre is generally found on the north, and they are less common in Perpendicular Churches, because the windows are usually so low as to render them unnecessary. In old parish registers we sometimes find the item, 'Paid for watching the Pasch-light.'"¹

In the fourth edition the Society stated that the opinion stated above appears to be untenable, and, as a matter of fact, the Easter Sepulchre and the high altar can seldom be seen from the position of the usual low side window; and Mr. Francis Bond states that "plenty of parish accounts show that men were paid to stay *inside* the church to watch the Easter Sepulchre"; and another objection is that the low side window is sometimes on the same side, viz., the north, as the Easter Sepulchre.

II. **The Leper Theory.**—In *The Church of our Fathers*, published 184-, Dr. Rock first brought forward this theory, which has taken such hold on the popular imagination that all L.S.W.s, together with most squints, are generally grouped together by the unlearned as "Leper windows," and it seems impossible to get rid of the term. Dr. Rock says that architectural evidence of a person having slept in the building is found in some parish churches, where the door or doors were fastened from *within* the church by a strong spar of wood, which was drawn out of a long, narrow hole in the wall. These persons, *Inclusi* or *Ankrets*, were very often in priests' orders, and therefore said Mass and usually had the bishop's permission to hear confessions.

A distinguishing part of ankret rule seems ever to have been the use, for all communications with lay folks, of a barred, small window, and this was on the frequented side of the church, generally the south, where they would be overlooked, and to hinder any shadow of suspicion falling upon the ankret.

¹ I am indebted to the Librarian, The University Library, Cambridge, for permission to use the library and copy this extract.

People were fond of asking ghostly advice of the ankret, and he mentions that Richard II, before going to Smithfield to meet Wat Tyler, "went to Westminster Abbey, then to the church, and so to the high altar, where he devoutly prayed and offered, after which he spake with the Anchore, to whom he confessed himself."

Dr. Rock therefore seems to have considered the primary use of the L.S.W. was for the anchorite to give advice and hear confession through, but, once formed, it was found, instead of merely one, this L.S.W. might be made to answer several very useful ritual purposes. Among the other purposes, he mentions the administration of Holy Communion to and the hearing of confessions of lepers, and also for passing food and fuel through for the use of the recluse.

Most ecclesiologists will agree that in the mediæval church there were windows of somewhat similar character to the ordinary L.S.W., and that through these a recluse might converse with anyone seeking advice, and even hear confessions, but the anchorites' windows used for these purposes were generally openings in the external walls of the anchorites' cells.

The Ancren Riwele (Anchoresses' Rule), a book written in the XIIIth century, says: "Hold no conversation with any man out of a church window, but respect it for the sake of the holy sacrament which ye see therethrough."

Anchorage were generally on the north of the chancel, sometimes, but rarely, on the south; and very exceptionally in some other position, as for instance at Chester-le-Street, where the most complete anchorite's house now remaining in England is at the west end of the church, on the north side of the tower. The cell usually had three windows, and through one, towards the chancel, the recluse partook of the Blessed Sacrament; through another, on the opposite side, which was small, narrow, barred, and shuttered, he received his food, and held communication with those outside; and the third, closed with glass or horn, lighted the dwelling.¹

The remains of a window of the first kind can be seen in the north wall of the chancel of Yateley Church, Hants, where there was probably an anchorite's cell to the north of the chancel, which has now disappeared. This is not a L.S.W. as we understand the term; and the other two kinds of windows have now generally disappeared, with the walls of the cell which contained them. Nevertheless, the second kind, which was small, narrow, barred, and shuttered, must have been, except in its situation, very like the L.S.W. as we see it to-day.

¹ Rotha Mary Clay and Eileen Power.

We can therefore agree with Dr. Rock, that a certain kind of window resembling a L.S.W. was to be found in connection with some early churches, and that confessions were heard through them, but disagreement must be expressed with the idea that they were used by lepers for any purpose. Lepers were obliged to live in houses set apart for their use, lazar-houses, and to these chapels were attached, where the inmates could receive Holy Communion. They were forbidden to enter the churchyard and to come anywhere near a church.

In Hampshire leper houses or hospitals were common, and generally under the patronage of St. Mary Magdalen. The largest was on Magdalen Hill, Winchester, and there were others at Southampton, Andover, Christchurch, and Newport, Isle of Wight.¹

Mr. Francis Bond, in *English Church Architecture*, quoting Mr. A. Hamilton Thompson, gives an instance which shows that there was no necessity for lepers to use L.S.W.s, for at Burton Lazars, near Melton Mowbray, where there was a very important leper hospital with its own chapel, the chancel of the parish church contains two L.S.W.s. In this case it seems most unlikely that the lepers, who could communicate in their own chapel, would wish to kneel on the ground on the outside of a small window in the parish church for that purpose.

In *The Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, vol. xviii, the Rev. J. Penny mentions a window in Tarrant Rushton Church, which he thinks "gives some colour to the opinion that lepers were not admitted within a church, and that it was at such a window that they took part in the service."

The window in question is a lancet, until recently blocked, placed unusually low in the west wall of the north transept, within a few yards of which there was formerly a leper hospital, and the door by the side of the window "has within the memory of some been called The Leper's Gate."

He is inclined to think that the north transept was the chantry of the hospital. This seems a most unusual and unlikely arrangement; but if the lepers had a chapel to themselves in this position, it would be natural for them to communicate, confess, and perform any other religious duties within their chapel, and there would be no necessity to use a window for these purposes.

There is an ordinary low side window on the south side of the chancel of this church.

¹ T. W. Shore, *Proceedings, Hants Field Club*, vol. ii, pt. I, p. 46; and *V.C.H.*, vol. v, p. 418.

Considering that lepers were not even allowed to enter a churchyard, we may agree with the late Dr. Cox, that "the modern popular notion of 'leper windows' is an absolute impossibility."¹

Nevertheless, it is only fair to add that there are antiquaries of experience, whose opinion we cannot entirely disregard, who believe in the leper theory, and, however impossible it may appear in the light of existing knowledge, we must still bear in mind that it may contain some element of truth.

III. The Confessional Theory.—This has a strong and effective advocate in Mr. P. M. Johnston at the present time, and, as we have seen, it was mentioned by Dr. Rock; and, early in 1844, a writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (I, 375), called attention to a letter, bearing upon the subject, from Richard Bedyll, Clerk of the Council to Henry VIII, to Thomas Cromwell, then engaged in a visitation of the Monastery of Sion. The quotation, which I give in full, is from the Camden Society's Letters, edited by Mr. Wright, and transcribed by Mr. F. T. S. Houghton, in his excellent paper, *The Low Side Windows of Warwickshire Churches*:—"We have sequestered Whitford and Litell from hering of the ladys confessions; and we think it best that the place, wher thes frires have been wont to hire utward confessions of al commers at certen tymes of the yere, be walled up for ever; ffor that the hering of utward confessions hath been the cause of much evyl, and of much treson which hath been sowed abrode in the mater of the Kings title, and also in the Kinges graces mater of his succession and mariage."

It will be seen that this letter refers to one church only, and that a monastic one; but it certainly gives sanction to the idea that the practice of confession by friars through a window to all comers was not uncommon, and it may indeed have prevailed in parish churches. On the other hand, it gives no proof of the practice, except in the case of one monastic church, the opening in which was probably blocked up in consequence, but there is no documentary evidence whatever of a general order having been given at this time to block up these openings in all parish churches.

In this connection Mr. Christopher A. Markham, in a paper on *The L.S.W.s of Northamptonshire Churches*, says: "It seems probable that some general order was issued during the reign of Henry VIII, that all L.S.W.s should be blocked up, but I believe no such order has been found amongst the State Papers"; and he instances the analogous case of the melting up of all chalices and the making of the Elizabethan cups between c. 1564 and c. 1575, for which there must certainly have been a general order, but here again it has never been discovered.

¹ *The English Parish Church*, p. 306.

The rules made by the Church on the question of confession may here be examined, and their bearing on this theory considered. Bloxham, writing in 1882 (*Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture*, vol. ii, p. 124), says confessional boxes are found nowhere in the churches of this country previous to the Reformation. Private confession of sins to a priest in preference to public confession is said to have been recommended by Leo the Thracian, Emperor of the East, c. A.D. 458.

Then follow a number of enactments important for our subject:—

Compulsory auricular confession was established by or at the time of the fourth Lateran Council, held A.D. 1215.

"By the Council of Durham, held A.D. 1217, the confessions of women were to be heard without the veil¹ and openly, *in propatulo*, as far as outward appearance was concerned, but still not so as to be heard by any."

"By the Synod of Exeter, A.D. 1287, women were to confess openly and without the veil; not that they should be heard by the public, but seen."

"By the Constitutions of Walter Reynold, Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 1322, the priest about to hear confessions was to choose some common place in the church where he might be seen of all indifferently, and was not allowed to exercise that rite, especially as regards women, in obscure places except from urgent necessity, or from the infirmity of penitents."

Here, then, we have the rules relating to confessions, and the places where they were to be heard by *parish priests*, and there can be no doubt that, from the XIIIth century onwards, there was a great extension of the use of auricular confession, which continued up to the Reformation. But about this time an event took place, the foundation of the Mendicant orders of preaching friars, which was to produce an immense influence throughout Christendom, and may have had an intimate connection with the making of L.S.W.s. The Dominicans, the Preaching or Black Friars, were founded A.D. 1216, and are said to have arrived in England in A.D. 1221. The Franciscans, the Friars Minor or Grey Friars, were founded A.D. 1210 (or 1223), and are said to have come here in A.D. 1224. Many peculiar privileges were granted to the friars.

¹ The mode of hearing confessions was probably not always the same; one "use," and this an early one, may have been for the priest to be seated in the chancel, close to the chancel arch, and the penitent in the nave, the two being separated by a *velum* or curtain, and illuminations show another "use," the priest sitting in open church in front of the chancel screen.

In A.D. 1265 Pope Clement IV empowered the Friars Minor (Franciscans) to preach, hear confessions, and give absolution and enjoin penance without the assent of the parochial clergy.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 1287, granted licence, and in A.D. 1300 he delivered his mandate for the admission of the Friars Minor to hear confession without the assent of the parish priest. The friars were introduced into the Diocese of Winchester by Bp. Peter des Roches, and the Dominicans or Black Friars established themselves on the north side of the City of Winchester about 1230. Subsequently the Franciscans or Grey Friars, the Carmelites or White Friars, and the Austin Friars obtained houses within the city, and in Southampton the Franciscans possessed a friary in 1240.

Whatever may have been the conditions in other parts of the country, in Hampshire the Winchester registers, as well as like episcopal records, show that the friars were often under the direct control of the diocesan, and it would appear that here the friars were not one and all armed with the power to oust the secular beneficed priest from his pulpit, and to hear confessions just as they listed.¹

Still, the friars were held in great esteem, and enjoyed a very considerable popularity; they were all trained men, and far better educated than the ordinary parish priest, and one cannot help thinking that to confess to someone whom you did not know, and whom you would probably never see again, might appeal with great force to most penitents.

We have seen that confessions were ordered to be heard openly, especially as regards women, but, still, not so as to be heard; and it is necessary to consider how this rule would affect the friars. The parish priest would hear confessions in an open place in the church, in the presence of at least some members of the congregation; but the friars travelled about the country from church to church, and, having no fixed time for services, might often find only one person present. It has been argued that it was to meet cases of this kind, and to avoid any occasion for scandal, that the low side window came into existence, or at least into common use, and it is pointed out that most of them are on the south side of churches, the most frequented part and the side overlooked by the village; and so the penitent outside, in full view of the village or road, could confess to the friar inside through the small opening, and separated only by the fixed grating. Thus both the ordered conditions would be observed, and, as the friars frequently travelled in pairs, the two low side windows, often to be seen on opposite sides of the chancel, also receive a reasonable explanation.

¹ V.C.H., ii, 15.

But the strongest argument in favour of the confessional theory is derived from a comparison of dates. Low side windows, with a very few doubtful exceptions, can be shown by their architectural details to begin to appear in the XIIIth century, and as this corresponds with the establishment of auricular confession, and with the advent of the friars to this country, and their power to hear confession and give absolution, it is held to prove that this was the reason why they were first constructed, although subsequently they may have been put to other uses.

The seats and book rests, which are occasionally found in connection with low side windows, are also claimed by the advocates of this theory as being for the use of the priest when hearing confessions, or when waiting for penitents to arrive.

Mr. P. M. Johnston, while admitting the difficulties which a small number of exceptional examples offer, is an ardent supporter of the theory. He says, in *The Low Side Windows of Sussex Churches* (*Sussex Arch. Col.*, vol. xlii, p. 170): "If we look for some sufficient cause for the enormous number of these low openings, which suddenly appear—practically as a new feature—after about A.D. 1250, we can, I think, find no theory which will 'hold water' better than this confessional one, remembering what an enormous impetus to the systematic and compulsory use of the practice was given by the advent of the friars."

The opponents of the theory ridicule the idea of confession through a window, but many undoubted cases can be brought forward to prove that anchorites heard confessions through a small, low-set opening long before compulsory auricular confession was established in A.D. 1215. Contemporary illustrations are brought forward showing confessions being made in open church, and Mr. Francis Bond, in *English Church Architecture*, asks why the priest should move to a hole in the wall which would give him toothache or a stiff neck, and why the penitents should kneel outside on the damp grass. But the most serious objections concern openings which are either so low down that both the priest inside and the penitent outside would have to lie down, or so high up that both would have to climb ladders (Bond). In the first class, when the sill is at or near the ground level, it is only necessary to call to mind how often the ground in the churchyard has been found to have risen during or since the mediæval period, and the numerous cases in which the floor level in churches has been altered.

But the second class, where the window is at some considerable height from the ground, is always brought forward by the opponents of the theory as their strongest point, and the three examples constantly mentioned are the openings at Prior

Crauden's Chapel, Ely, at Winchester College Chapel, and at Leeds Chapel, Kent.

A few months ago I made a careful examination of the very beautiful low-silled windows at Prior Crauden's Chapel, which consists of an undercroft, now disused, and an upper story, formerly the Prior's private Chapel. The windows in question are situated opposite each other in the north and south walls, and three or four yards nearer the west than the east end. Seen from the outside, they are cinque-foiled lancets, with sills about 10 or 12 feet from the ground.

Internally they are marvellously enriched with an ogée-headed, crocketed rear-arch, with sub-arches supported by shafts, with caps and bases and a profusion of foliage, and surmounted by panels containing defaced sculptured human heads.

The south-west window is 63 inches high and 18 inches wide; its sill is flat, 15 inches deep and 35 inches from the floor. It is not rebated, and there is nothing to show that it has ever been closed by a shutter, and it contains modern glass, and has modern iron bars and does not open.

The north-west window is similar, but has a modern iron casement, which opens.

In the sense in which the term is ordinarily used, these openings are not low side windows; they are part of the original design of the Chapel by Alan Walshingham in the second quarter of the XIVth century. Mr. Houghton considers that they served to illuminate the readers' desks.

The second example is more interesting to our Society, as it concerns the Chapel in Winchester College, and it has been quoted by writer after writer for the last 80 years as an argument against the Confessional theory. The original source of the error is to be found in the *Archæological Journal* for 1847 (vol. iv) in an important paper by J. H. Parker on low side windows. On page 323 he states:—

"A very singular example occurs in Winchester College Chapel. On the south side, near the screen, one of the lights of a three-light window is divided by a transom, with an arched head under it; the hinges of the shutter remain. It is now blocked up by one of the buttresses of the tower, which was built about 50 years after the Chapel; but as the foundations are known to have given way, this buttress is probably of later date. The low side opening is about 10 feet from the ground, both inside and outside, which does not seem to agree with any of the theories for its use."

One can quite understand that subsequent writers on the subject have considered that such a very clear and detailed statement, by so eminent an archæologist, did not seem to require verification.

It is quite evident, however, that Parker mistook the doorway of the rood-loft for a low side window, and his "buttress" is purely imaginary, for on the other side of the doorway there was, and still is, a turret containing a flight of steps, and there never was any "buttress of the tower" in that position.

This is the conclusion reached after a thorough examination of the Chapel, with the valuable assistance of Mr. Herbert Chitty, M.A., F.S.A., till lately Bursar of the College, and now Keeper of the Archives. And here I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Chitty, who evidently knows and loves every stone of his College, and who most willingly placed the whole of his knowledge at my disposal.

To make the matter clear, it is necessary to understand the various alterations which have, from time to time, been made to the Chapel. The subject is fully discussed in Mr. Chitty's paper on *The Winchester College Bells and Belfries*, in the *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club*, vol. ix, pt. I, pp. 39 *et seq.* (1920), to which the reader is referred.

It will be sufficient here to state that Wykeham's belfry, which was finished by c. 1394, was replaced (possibly not on exactly the same spot) by one erected by Warden Baker between the years 1473 and 1481. Baker's tower, owing to bad construction, had various remedies applied to it in 1671, or earlier, and in 1772; but in 1862 W. Butterfield took down the whole structure, and rebuilt it on similar lines and on better foundations.

During Baker's alterations in 1473 (which included the building of Thurburn's Chantry on the south-west of the Chapel), he removed Wykeham's rood-loft, and made a new one more to the east, and he built a turret containing a winding stairs outside the south wall of the Chapel to give access to his new rood-loft. This turret blocked up, and still blocks up, the west light of one of the lofty three-light Chapel windows, viz., the fourth window from the east in the south wall, and next to Thurburn's Chantry. Below a transom in this blocked-up light, Baker placed an arched doorway, now also blocked, and by the stairs and this doorway access was gained to the new rood-loft.

It is only fair to mention that, in Parker's time, much less was known of the various alterations described above, which have since been elucidated by the study of the College accounts, etc.; but a consideration of all the known facts now shows that there is no "low side window" now, and there is no evidence that there ever was one in Winchester College Chapel.

The blocked opening (the date of the blocking is not known), 6 feet in height and about 10 feet from the floor, which may be seen in the south wall of the Chapel, with hinge-hooks for the door still present on the west side, was a doorway leading to a former rood-loft.

Bearing in mind Parker's statement that there was an external as well as an internal opening, and to prevent any possible misunderstanding, it is necessary to add that the rood-loft doorway opened on to the stairs contained in the turret, and could never have been visible from the outside, but the turret and stairs are continued upwards, and eventually opened on to the roof of a chamber, which has since been entirely removed. A blocked doorway, by which this roof was reached, can still be seen externally, but it has no relation to the rood-loft opening, and is at a great height from the ground.

The photograph shows the three-light window, with its western light blocked from top to bottom; the blocked rood-loft doorway occupies the lower portion, and on the sinister side of this is one of the arched openings, through which Thurburn's Chantry is visible.

The third example, at Leeds Castle Chapel, which is surrounded by a moat, is unknown to me personally, but Mr. Houghton, in *The Low Side Windows of Warwickshire Churches*, states that the arrangement of windows there is very much like that of Prior Crauden's Chapel, the small, low-silled window has no provision for an internal shutter, but there is a rebate externally.

The supporters of the Confessional theory may therefore claim that one of these three examples, *i.e.*, the one at Winchester, which has been so often brought forward to disprove the theory, is really not a low side window at all, and that, in respect of the other two, a considerable amount of doubt may be entertained.

Denmark seems to be the only country, besides our own, in which low side windows are at all numerous, and Mr. Houghton, quoting from the writings of Dr. J. M. Neale and Mr. Ambrose Bryson, considers these Danish examples give strong support to the Confessional theory, for "most of them are so small that it is difficult to imagine they were used for any other purpose than to hear through." Many examples found there are circular, and in all cases they are blocked with masonry.

IV. The Symbolic (Vulne window) Theory supposes the low side window to represent the *wound* in Our Saviour's side. There are many objections to this theory, for instance, why are there often two windows?



THE SO-CALLED LOW SIDE WINDOW IN WINCHESTER COLLEGE CHAPEL
WHICH WAS REALLY THE DOORWAY TO THE ROOD-LOFT.

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V. **The Offertory Theory** supposes that offerings to priests were made through these openings, and was brought forward by Mr. Paley in 1846. It is based on a passage in Martène, the translation of which is given by Mr. Houghton thus: "The ankerhold should be so near the church, that at Mass the anker may offer his oblations through the window of his ankerhold by the hands of the priests." This obviously is not a low side window, but the opening between an anchorite's cell and the church.

VI. **The Eucharistic Theory** suggests that these windows were used for administering the Holy Eucharist to persons outside the church. Among other objections to this idea, there is no evidence that such a practice ever obtained.

VII. **The Ventilation Theory.**—That a low side window was occasionally opened to let in a little fresh air may be taken for granted, but the whole idea of ventilation is quite modern.

VIII. **The Sanctus Bell Theory.**—This theory was strongly supported by the late Dr. J. Charles Cox, and at the present time its advocates include many eminent antiquaries. Mr. F. T. S. Houghton writes of it in *The Low Side Windows of Worcestershire Churches* as the theory "advocated by the majority of competent ecclesiologists at the present time"; and Mr. Francis Bond, in *English Church Architecture*, thinks it gives a "more probable explanation" than the other theories offer.

It was first brought forward by Mr. J. J. Cole, in 1848, in the *Archæological Journal*, V, 70, and he points out that the low side window is generally on the side of the church on which the village was situated, and his suggestion is that they were for the purpose of ringing a hand-bell through, when, during the Mass, the words, "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus," were reached, and again at the Elevation of the Host.

In support of this he quotes the following passage in the *Constitutions of Archbishop Peckham* (1281), which are included in Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, written c. 1430 (edition 1679, III, 23, p. 231): "In elevatione corporis Xⁱ ab una parte ad minus pulsantur campanæ ut populus qui celebrationi missarum non valent quotidie interesse, ubicunque fuerint, sive in agris sive in domibus flectant genua indulgentias concessas a pluribus episcopis habituri," i.e., "at the Elevation of the Host bells shall be sounded on one side at least, so that those people who have not the leisure to take part daily in the celebration of the Mass may, wheresoever they be, whether in the fields or in their houses, bend their knees, and thus receive the indulgences granted by many bishops."

On this injunction of Archbishop Peckham's, Lyndwood makes the following comments. On the plural form "bells," he

says: "You are not to understand that it is intended that many bells should be sounded at the same time in one church, because it is sufficient that one be sounded; the plural is used in respect of a plurality of churches, and those bells ought to be rung which can be heard at the greatest distance; this is sufficiently obvious for the reason which follows."

On the words "Elevation of the Host," he notes "this is done that people may adore it," "bend their knees," "at any rate in spirit." On "those people" he remarks: "They should turn in the direction in which the building lies where the ceremony is proceeding, on account of which these ordinances are made."¹

Much depends on the meaning of "ab una parte" in the above quotation, and this phrase is quite indefinite; it may mean that the bell was to be rung on one side of the church, but it may equally well mean that the bell was to be struck on one side, i.e., it was to be "tolled."

Mr. Bond gives the following meaning of the passage: "That in all churches the bell is to be rung from at least one side of the church, i.e., if it is not possible to ring a belfry bell (which, of course, would be heard in all directions), a hand-bell, which will be heard in only one direction (being rung from a low side window), might be used." Mr. J. B. L. Tolhurst, on the other hand, writing in the *Transactions of St. Paul's Ecclesiological Society*, vol. ix, says the phrase "is much more likely to refer to the bell than to the church," and this view is held by other writers.

The usual custom was, in the greater churches, for a little bell to be rung near the altar at the "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus," and a big bell in the tower at the Elevation; but in parish churches this would have been impossible, for in most cases the priest would only have to assist him at Mass a single person, the parish clerk or a boy, and, as the tower was usually at the western end of the church, a third person would be required.

When, however, the parish church had a central tower, the bell could be rung from a point not far from the altar, as indeed is the custom at the present time in Romsey Abbey.

But parish churches seldom had a central tower, and it may be that this deficiency led to a bell being fixed to the chancel screen, a plan adopted in several churches in Norfolk and Suffolk; or, more commonly, to the building of a bell-cote on the eastern gable of the nave, when the bell could be rung from the entrance to the chancel. Many bell-cotes are still to be seen in this position.

¹ The whole passage, which has often been misquoted, has been very kindly transcribed and translated for me by Mr. Houghton.

See also *The L.S.W.s of Worcestershire Churches*, by F. T. S. Houghton.

They are not common in Hampshire; there is, however, a somewhat doubtful example at Chilcomb.

Dr. Cox, in *The English Parish Church*, cites another passage in support of this theory; it is late in date, and refers not to a church, but to a house:

"In Nicholas's *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation*, it is stated that in the days of Queen Mary the Papists at Poole re-established the Mass, and built an altar 'in olde Master Whyghts' house; John Craddock, hys man being clarke to ring the bell and too help the priest to Mass, untill he was threatened that yf he dyd use to putt hys hand owtt of the wyndow to ring the bell, that a hand goon sholde make hym too smartt, that he shoulde not pull in hys hand agayne with ease.'"

The supporters of the theory urge:—

That the population was usually on the south of the mediæval church, and the low side window generally faces south, and in those cases where the opening faces in a direction where there were few or no houses, they explain that the low side window was really a part of the equipment of an altar, and so might be placed near any altar; that it is not necessary to suppose that the bell was always passed through the opening (there are many low side windows where this is impossible), the ringing having become, after a time, a purely ceremonial act which only required the opening of the shutter and the ringing of the bell inside the church, and in the same way the windows high up in the walls are explained.

The opponents say:—

That the population was not always on the same side as the opening; that the theory does not explain the two openings¹ which are often present on opposite sides of the chancel; that the opening is too small in many cases to be of any use; and that the grating would still further impede its use if it was intended for a hand and bell to be passed through; that a bell rung at a low side window would never have been heard in many a village, and that many of these openings were very difficult to approach on account of the stalls and their occupants.²

They also point out that there are many cases of low side windows and bell-cotes which are of the same date, and that therefore it is unlikely that they were built for the same purpose.

¹ Mr. Houghton's comment on this is "the history of the two openings at Northfield, Worcestershire, is illuminating—the second was constructed when the population had spread from the valley on the south of the church to the high ground to the north of it."

² J. B. L. Tolhurst.

IX. The Evil Spirits Scaring Theory.—This old theory was, in 1901, most ably reintroduced in an exhaustive paper in *Archæol. Eliana*, xxiii, by the Rev. J. F. Hodgson, in which he sets forward the view that low side windows were constructed for the purpose of scaring evil spirits out of the churchyard by a light placed on the flat internal sill. He points out that, at a funeral, lights were placed round the bier, and this was repeated at the tomb on each obit day, and that in France there are churchyards with lanterns containing lights set on the top of pillars, but he fails to show that these lights were intended to frighten evil spirits. And again, why place a light in the draught of an unglazed window, where the wind would extinguish it? Mr. Johnston gives a good reason against this theory, which is supposed to have been adopted in Christian times from far older pagan practices, when he points out that, in such a case, you would expect the openings to be most common in Saxon and Norman churches, and less common during the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, whereas exactly the opposite really occurs.

X. For Viewing the Rood.—This theory is plausible, for the Rood or Crucifix on the chancel screen could be seen from the outside through most low side windows. But it would be the back of the figure of the Saviour which would be seen; and if the purpose of the opening was to obtain a view, it would certainly have been constructed in such a position that a front view could have been obtained.

XI. The Additional Light Theory.—There are several reasons against this theory, and very little can be advanced in its favour.

There are many chancels which are almost too well lighted, and yet contain a low side window; and why were some of the openings so small or so low down? and how account for the shutter and the universal blocking up?

XII. The Incensing Theory supposes that the acolyte passed the censer through the opening, so that the charcoal might be blown to a red heat by the draught before the incense was put on, but the grating would prevent this.

XIII. The Hagioscopic Theory is that the openings were intended to enable a person outside to see the Elevation of the Host; but this idea has been almost completely abandoned, for it is impossible to see the altar through the ordinary low side window.

XIV. The Distribution of Alms Theory.—There is no documentary evidence of the giving of alms to beggars outside the church through windows, and the grating would be inconvenient.

There are other theories, such for instance, XV, that low side windows were used for the display of relics to pilgrims and others, and it is well known that many churches containing these openings lie on the principal pilgrims' routes, *e.g.*, to Canterbury.

That they served, XVI, for the ringing of a bell to give warning of the approach of a priest; XVII, for holes for archers.

XVIII. A New Theory.—A lecture, delivered by Mr. Arthur D. Sharp, March, 1923, is published in the *Transactions of St. Paul's Ecclesiological Society*, vol. ix, parts II to IV. In this Mr. Sharp gives some evidence that in country churches the priest and the clerk had seats in the chancel, facing east, with backs to the screen, the priest on the south and the clerk on the north, and that they would occupy these seats during the recital of the Canonical Hours, and so would spend a very considerable time in church daily. Almost at daylight they would go to the church and lock themselves in for security, as robbery and even murder of a priest were not unknown.

He suggests that low side windows were for the general convenience of the priest and clerk; they gave light to their books, and would enable them to see what went on, and, if necessary, communicate with a person outside, and be a guard against misuse of the churchyard. The position of the openings is determined by the position of the seats, and the use may be compared with the anchorite's parlour window. The grating was a precaution against robbers, and, with the change of religion, the Canonical Hours were no longer observed, and the low side windows became useless, and were blocked up with masonry.

One of the most serious objections to this theory is that the openings were, in most cases, not glazed; but closed by a wooden shutter, and, in order to obtain any of the conveniences mentioned, the priest and clerk would have to sit in a continuous draught.

Having now stated and reviewed all or most of the theories, the question may be asked: Is there any one of them which offers a reasonable explanation of the original purpose for which the whole of these openings were constructed? And the answer is undoubtedly, No.

It is well to bear in mind that it is possible, and perhaps probable, that they were not all constructed for the same purpose, and that it is even possible that their primary *raison d'être* was for some secular purpose. When we pass on to consider the uses to which the openings were eventually put, the matter is greatly enlarged, and we can then reasonably discuss a number of theories, and the most important, and those which will appeal to most enquirers, are the Sanctus Bell, Confessional, Leper, Light, and Ventilation; but it must be never lost sight of that these are

only theories or intelligent guesses, and not facts. Also we should not forget, as is so often the case, that, because a thing is made for one purpose, it is quite reasonable that it should be used for others. For instance, if a low side window was originally constructed, let us suppose, for confessional purposes, it could be used subsequently for bell-ringing, and might be of use to give extra light and for ventilation.

If their original purpose is ever discovered, it may be that it will be in consequence of some early illumination being found, which will immediately explain the whole meaning, or some early manuscript will be unearthed, which will give a clue to the mystery.

Failing these, we have to fall back on a patient examination of all existing examples, and here every detail, however unimportant it may appear, should receive due notice. When a great number of these openings have been collected, examined, and tabulated, it may be possible to find some feature which is common to all, and, if that could be attained, the key to the solution of the problem would be in our hands. It is impossible not to admire the enthusiasm of those eminent archæologists who so ably advocate this theory or that, but the interests of truth are no less advanced by the careful collecting and describing of existing examples; and of all the details which may be found in the fabric of the church in their immediate vicinity, and even in more distant parts of the building and its surroundings. After a careful review of all the theories, and an examination of many existing examples, and a study of the descriptions of a great many more, I have come to the conclusion, which I do not think for a moment is original, that the true purpose for which the low side window was first constructed has yet to be found.

Low Side Windows and Mass-clocks.

Incised Sundials or Mass-clocks have been mentioned by writers in connection with low side windows, and the suggestion has been made that there is something in common between them. My notes contain an entry of a dial on a low side window at Botolph's Church, Sussex, and Mr. Johnston mentions this example and two others, viz., Rustington and Ford, in the same county, where a dial is found in close proximity to a low side window; and he adds: "It is, I think, not unimportant to record other instances of its occurrence, as it would seem to connect *external* approach to the window with certain times of the day."

These dials, unless they have been moved, are practically always found incised on some portion of the south wall of a church, and it is on this side that the low side window is most common, and it is also quite usual for a dial to be found on the jamb or other part of a window; and out of the thousands of

these time-markers still to be seen on church walls it would be strange if a few were not found on the jambs of a low side window. From a practical point of view, I do not think the low side window is an advantageous position for a dial, for the most common situation for this opening is at the west end of the south wall of the chancel, and this, in many cases, is close to the projecting south aisle or south transept, either of which, by cutting off the sun's rays, would render the dial useless in the afternoon. It was Dom Ethelbert Horne, F.S.A., who first pointed out that if you approach a church by the usual path, whichever part you first come to, there you will most likely find the dial; and it has been generally supposed that these time-markers were primarily for the convenience of the bell-ringers and the priest, in order that Mass might be celebrated at the right time. Many Mass-clocks have little holes at the ends of, or taking the place of the lines, and it has been suggested that the priest might place a peg in one of these holes, and so notify to the congregation the time of the next Mass. The friars may have made use of the dials in this or in some similar manner, and I commend this idea to the advocates of the Confessional theory.

I have not discovered a Mass-clock incised on a Hampshire low side window, but I have collected and described¹ the dials which some 50 of the churches in the county possess, and of these churches 14 have low side windows.

A table is appended, from which it may be seen that, in seven churches, the low side window and a Mass-clock or Mass-clocks are or were formerly placed in close proximity, but before any inference can be drawn from this, it will be necessary for a like comparison to be made in other counties.

¹ In *Sundials, Incised Dials, or Mass-clocks*.—S.P.C.K.

A List of Churches in Hampshire which possess both Low Side Windows and Dials.

CHURCH.	LOW SIDE WINDOWS.		DIALS.		REMARKS.
	NUMBER.	POSITION.	NUMBER.	POSITION.	
Breamore	1 ? 2	1 N.W. chancel ? 1 E. end N. wall of nave	3	1 S. porch 2 S.E. angle of S. trans. Priests' door	Close together. See photo.
Chalton	1	S.W. of chancel	1	S.E. angle of nave	
Chilcombe	1	N.W. of chancel	1	S.E. corner of chancel	In the first the dials are close to the L.S.W. See photo.
Fordingbridge	1	S.W. of chancel	1	1 S.E. corner S. aisle 1 W. end of chancel	
S. Hayling	1	S.W. of chancel	4	1 priests' door 1 S.E. corner chancel	
Headbourne Worthy	1	S.W. of chancel	1	Tower which is at S.W. of nave	
Herriard	1	S.W. of chancel	10	8 on buttress S.E. angle of nave 1 jamb of S. door 1 inside church	Close together. See photo, which shows some of the dials.
Houghton	1	S.W. of chancel	1	S.E. angle of S. aisle	
Kimpton	2	1 N.W. of chancel 1 S. of S. trans.	1 ? 2	1 S.E. angle of S. trans. ? 1 near the first	Close together. The dials and L.S.W. of S. transept are close together. See photo. Must have been close before L.S.W. was blocked externally.
Monk Sherborne	1	S.W. of chancel	1	S.E. angle of nave	
Sherborne St. John	1	S.W. of chancel	5	1 over S. door 1 E. of S. porch 1 S.W. angle of nave 1 S.E. angle of chancel 1 ditto E. face E. of N. chapel	The nave window, with dials, is shown in photo, and is not far from L.S.W.
Soberton	1	S.W. of chancel	? 1	5 on E. jamb of S. nave window	
Stoke Charity	1	S.W. of chancel	6	1 on W. jamb ditto	
Timsbury	1	S.E. of nave	1	S.E. angle of chancel	

Low Side Windows and Squints.

The low side windows of Hampshire are not very numerous, but, considering the small number of examples still existing, there is one class of opening which occurs in much larger proportion here than in at least some other districts.

I refer to those low side windows which are structurally combined with squints, and of which there are such excellent examples at Kimpton, Soberton, Sopley, Houghton, and Holybourne. It is difficult to find the correct numbers in other counties, but I believe—

Northamptonshire, with 148 L.S.W.s, has 2 examples.

Warwickshire, ,, 72 ,, ,, 1 example.

Worcestershire, ,, 34 ,, ,, no examples.

Sussex has a very large number of L.S.W.s, and perhaps has two examples; and Surrey, with a large number, has one; but in the last two counties I am not sure if the two are structurally combined or only close together.

The two squints at Kimpton connect the west of the chancel with the north and south transepts, and at Houghton with the north and south aisles. At Soberton and Sopley the squint is between the chancel and the south transept, and at Holybourne between the chancel and the north aisle.

Squints generally command a view of the altar, and probably were constructed for that purpose, but it is quite possible that they were *used* for other purposes. Mr. Johnston thinks it possible they were used for confessional purposes.

Further investigation into this question seems advisable, and might throw some light on the purpose of the low side window; and it is well to bear in mind that there are probably quite a number of examples where the two structures, although not actually combined, are still in close proximity to one another.