



REDOS IN NORTH TRANSEPT.
WHEATHAMPSTEAD CHURCH, HERTS.

Reredos in the North Transept, Wheathampstead Church,
Herts.

BY THE REV. CANON DAVYS.

THE DRAWING BY MR. F. TREVOR DAVYS.

This was discovered during the restoration of this interesting Church in 1865-6. The Transept has been from time immemorial a private chantry, and the reredos rose at the base of its east window, above an altar at the level of its internal sill. The window had been blocked up, but on opening it the reredos was found, as well as the tracery of the window, in a very perfect condition, with the original stanchions and some very interesting fragments of stained glass, *in situ*. The exact date of the present transept is not known, though it may be put at circa 1370. The central tower or campanile of the Church was rebuilt, with the aid of an indulgence from Bishop Oliver Sutton, of Lincoln, the then diocesan, in 1290. John de Leicester being then the rector of the parish. It took the place of a Norman tower, from the top of which, according to local tradition, King John reviewed his army before fighting the Barons,* but though a beautiful chancel of the lancet period, preceded the new tower, the original chancel being Norman and apsidal in its termination†; the transepts appear to have been rebuilt some 80 years later than the tower of 1290.—At that time it would seem that Mr. John Bostock, who had married Miss Margaret Macri, of “Mackery End,” according to modern spelling, was a principal land-owner in the Parish, and the proprietor of the North Transept, where their Monumental brass happily remains, with some Latin verses, evidently by the hand of their wonderful son, “John of Wheathampstead,” twice Abbot of St. Albans. It would be interesting indeed to refer the work in this transept to the Abbots’ Father, and it is far from improbable that he was the builder of it, for the Leopard’s head, apparently the heraldic badge of the family is seen, both in the stained

* It is believed that the King’s Army crossed the river Lea in two columns, one by a ford below the mill, and the other at the ford by the “New Bridge.”

† The foundations of the Norman Apse were discovered when a tunnel for the trackers had recently to be made on the enlargement of the organ, beneath the present chancel floor.

glass of the window, and in a sprandrel of the Reredos. The character of this work is so much like that of the shrine of S. Alban at S. Albans, that we might almost believe that the artist of that beautiful work was invited by Mr. Bostock to execute this Reredos. If so, he did not remain to finish it, and it was never permitted to be touched by another hand, for some of the adornments remain in block, and the intended figures were never placed on the brackets to receive them. It need hardly be added that no tool has been allowed, since its discovery, to touch this beautiful and valuable work.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since the foregoing was written, some very valuable points have been brought to light through researches, for which I am greatly indebted to the Rev. H. Fowler. It appears from documentary authority (Gest. Abb. II. 107. also the Liber, Benefactorum, Cott. MSS. Nero D. VII. fol. 19), that the shrine of S. Alban was the work of Abbot John Maryns, who ruled from 1301 to 1308. "*Tumbam marmoream quam jam cernimus fecit fabricari.*" This would make it difficult to support the suggestion, that the artist of that shrine was employed by Mr. Bostock so late as 1370; and leads me to refer the whole work to a somewhat earlier period and to a remarkable proprietor. For it has been found that Abbot John Bostock had an uncle, John Macri, his mother's brother, who from being proprietor of the Macri property became Prior of Tynemouth, and lived to the age of 100 years, as it is calculated. This John Macri, also called John of Wheathampstead, was present at the election of Abbot John de la Moote in 1396 (v. Gest. III. 425.) Abbot Wheathampstead himself states in Amundesham vol. I. p. 215, that this person was his uncle. "*Priorem Johannem avunculum nostrum.*" Margaret Macri, afterwards Mrs. Bostock, was then the sister of John Macri, of Tynemouth, and they were brought up together at Macri End.

The suggestion will therefore be, that the reredos was erected during the proprietorship of John Macri, and we can thus better dispose of the long interval, which would otherwise have elapsed between the erection of the bell tower in 1290 and the erection of the transept according to our first calculation. A very interesting

reference to John Wheathampstead, Prior of Tynemouth is found in the Registrum, vol. I, p. 311. Anno 1458, John Bamborough, Sub-Prior of Tynemouth, wrote a life of John (de Wheathampstede) late prior of that house, and sent the book to Abbot John Wheathampstead, nephew of the Prior.—“*produxit foras in medium unum opus satis egregium ; in quo, una cum moribus et conditionibus, vita Sancti Johannis, Prioris ecclesiae jam dictae, non minus foecundo quam facundo eloquio declarata est. Quod opus direxit and Superiorem suum, Dominum Abbatem, praefati Prioris ex parte sororis nepotem.*” This life of his uncle must have reached Abbot Wheathampstead, seven years before his own death in 1465. No date is to be found on the brass of Mr. and Mrs. Bostock, but Mr. Boutell assigns it to circa, 1435, at which date all the building works in the transept must have been for some time completed. It may be interesting here to note, that at his death in 1465 the Abbot John must also have been a very aged man, for, at the time of his resignation in 1440, the brethren assert (Amund. II. 288.) he has reached the evening of life, “*Jam dies advesperascit tuae perigrinationis, inclinataque pene est usque ad occasum solis.*”

The abbot himself then complained that he was feeble and ailing. He was then absent from S. Albans eleven years, from 1440 to 1451, and he died in January, 1465. So, that, putting his age at 60 or 70 in 1440, he would have been, say, at least 90, at his death.