

## Some Notts. and Lincs. Easter Sepulchres.

BY ERNEST WOOLLEY, F.S.A.

**T**HE subject of Easter Sepulchres in England appears to be little known.

Although perhaps St. Albans and Hertfordshire antiquities may have the first claim upon the pages of our Transactions, I am grateful to the Society for throwing them open to my notes accompanying the illustrations of a few specimens in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. May it not be that there are traces or records of such things in our county of which I am not aware, or which may be found by research?

• In the Society of Antiquaries *Archæologia*, Vol. XLII., page 263, of 12th March, 1868, there is an exhaustive account of the Ritual by Alfred Heales, F.S.A., from which much of the following is culled.

Shortly, the original ceremony was, in Saxon times, the deposit, in a hollow place with a curtain or door, of the Cross wrapped in a cloth, on Maundy Thursday, to be kept there until Easter Eve, when "two or more Bretheren remove it singing Psalms."

In subsequent times three Hosts were consecrated on Maundy Thursday according to the Sarum use, which was the practice most likely to have been followed throughout England and Scotland, with some slight variations of ritual.

The Office of Rome prescribed two Hosts, which was apparently the custom on the Continent of Europe. One Host was then deposited, with the Cross, in the Easter Sepulchre. These were restored to the Altar on Good Friday, when, after the Mass of the Pre-sanctified, followed by Vespers, they were returned to the Easter Sepulchre, which was thereupon watched with lighted candles until Easter morning. On that day, before Mass and before the ringing of the bells, the Host was carried back to the Altar "Then they take the Cross out of

the Sepulchre and the chief of them begins 'Christus resurgens' and they proceed in procession to the Presbytery," and the Cross is put once again in its usual place.

In the Hereford use, before deposit in the Sepulchre, the Cross was laid down before the door and washed with Wine and Water and then covered with a linen cloth.

This Easter Sepulchre custom was kept up until after the Reformation, "as appears by the Visitation Articles of Archbishop Cranmer, 2 Edward VI."

The Easter Sepulchre itself was usually in the North wall of the Presbytery, or Sanctuary, near the Altar. Heales enumerates a good many such instances and a few on the South or East wall. In numerous cases a Founder's Tomb was used for this purpose, such as that at Irnham.

There was evidently some temporary erection, to supplement either the fixed Sepulchre or Founder's Tomb, in the shape of a removable framework of wood covered in with decorated hangings after the fashion of a Tabernacle. No instance appears to be extant, but I gather that there is some evidence of them in accounts and inventories of parish properties. Heales quotes Leverton, Lincolnshire, 1555 "Making of sepulkure Howysse iij<sup>d</sup>. For paynting a clothe for the saym ij<sup>s</sup>. For feycheyng of the Sepulkure clothe from the Paynt<sup>r</sup> att Boston ij<sup>d</sup>."

It is noteworthy that in 1484 Sir Charles Pilkington leaves for the repairing of the Sepulchre at Worksop five Marks.

As regards the fine streak of Easter Sepulchres, running in an irregular line from Lincoln through Navenby, Heckington, Irnham (Lincs.), and Hawton, Sibthorpe and Arnold (Notts.), they all seem to reflect the influence of the same school or band of masons. Whether that influence came from Lincoln or York I am not competent to settle but, in the absence of material evidence to the contrary, I hold the Lincoln view, and in that I am supported by a friend whose knowledge is, I believe, trustworthy. They all date in the first half of the 14th century, and, except Irnham, are on the North of the Presbytery or Sanctuary.

## LINCOLNSHIRE SERIES.

## LINCOLN.

Heales remarks that the superstructure of that in Lincoln Cathedral has been destroyed. There is no trace of anything to show that there ever was such a superstructure. In "Armour of England," J. Starkie Gardner, 1897, there is a picture of the Sleeping Soldiers restored. I trust that it may be a prophecy unfulfilled, if prophecy it is. There can be few finer instances than this specimen in the Presbytery at Lincoln of an Easter Sepulchre, though some of the others are more complete in representations of the events following the Crucifixion and Burial.

## NAVENBY

That at Navenby has a charming simplicity about it. The soldiers are not sleeping apparently, but stand upright, and over the Sepulchre, on either side of the finial above, stand an Angel and one of the two Women at the Tomb.

## HECKINGTON.

In the Heckington illustration I omit the four sleeping soldiers because they are so much damaged. Their pose, though, indicates what the excellence of their sculpture must have been. The two Women and Angels are on either side of the Sepulchre and over it Christ stands fully clothed, and the scene is therefore, I suppose, preparatory to the Ascension, and is flanked by Angels which probably were censuring. The sculpture in the cornice is similar in character to that above the Compton Tomb and North door next to the Easter Sepulchre at Hawton.

## IRNHAM.

The Founder's Tomb at Irnham formerly stood in a bay of the arcade dividing the North Aisle from the Chancel, but has, in modern times, been removed to the East end of the Aisle which extends to the full length of the Church. It is the tomb of the Luttrell family and was used as an Easter Sepulchre. This family claimed descent from the Norman chief of that name who came over with William the Conqueror and settled at Luttrellstown, Co. Dublin (Burke's Genealogical History of

Extinct Peerages, 1883). The 5th Baron died in 1390, whose truly magnificent brass lies on the floor of the North Aisle.

The sculpture on the tomb is glorious. In the right corner a Shield Lion Rampant and in the left corner a bend with Shamrock Leaves between Six Martlets, the Luttrell arms. The centre finial represents the Virgin and Child, and the left finial the Crucifixion, both sadly damaged. The small niche canopies have minute heads of exquisite workmanship. The main niche ceiling bosses are also very good.

## NOTTINGHAMSHIRE SERIES.

### HAWTON.

Hawton I consider is the gem of the whole group. Not only is the sculpture first-rate, but the story of the Resurrection and Ascension is complete.

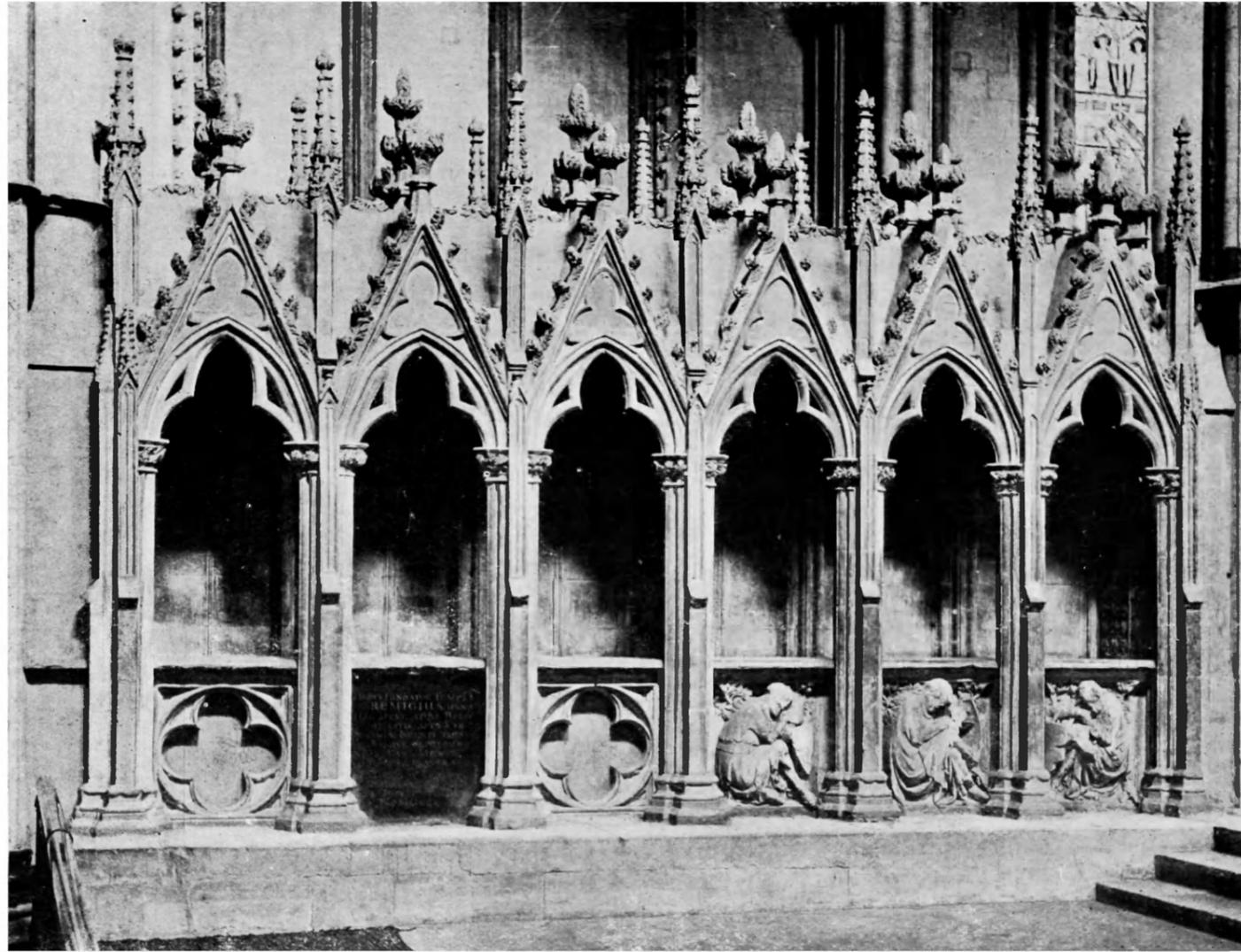
The four sleeping soldiers are wonderfully natural. Two of their shields bear heraldic lions, the other two grotesque faces. The Sepulchre and the scene of the Resurrection are set off by a background of very lovely diaper leaves and roses respectively. The Weeping Mary kneels by the Risen Christ, and behind, in the recess, stand two other Marys with boxes of spices, and an Angel kneels on the extreme right. The sculpture unfortunately here also is sadly damaged.

The top scene is that of the Ascension. The Eleven, bare-footed, with the Virgin shod, stand gazing up at the clouds where, in the centre, Christ's garment is visible, as were His feet. On either side of Him a censuring Angel is flanked by the Angel Choir.

### SIBTHORPE.

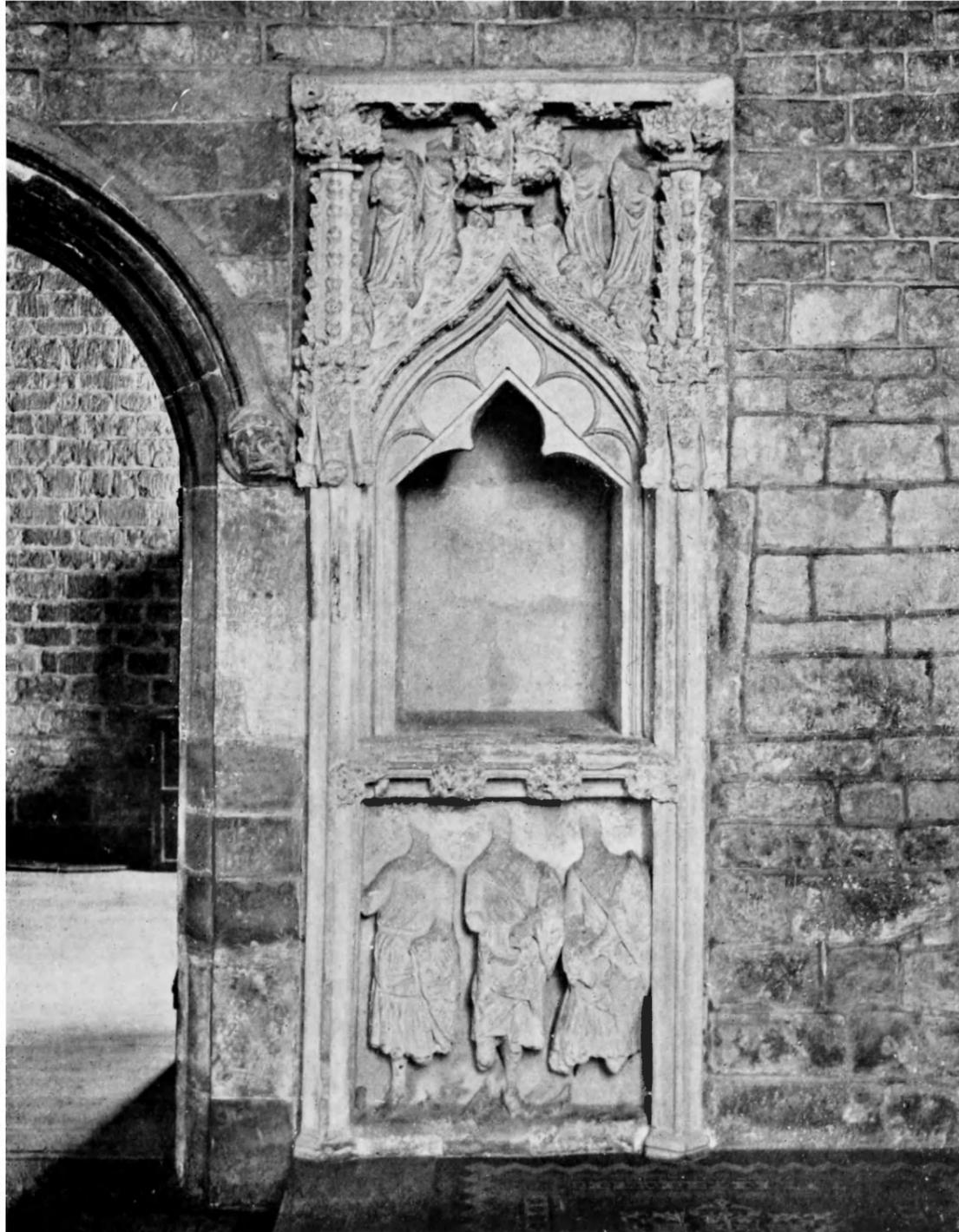
At Sibthorpe the sculpture has been recently painted, which does not in my opinion improve it. Fortunately this village, being somewhat off the beaten track, has escaped the defacement suffered by the others.

On either side of the Sepulchre two sleeping soldiers. The Risen Christ stands on the finial above, His right hand in blessing, His left holding a long staff Cross with the flag of the Resurrection. He is attended by two Angels swinging censers.



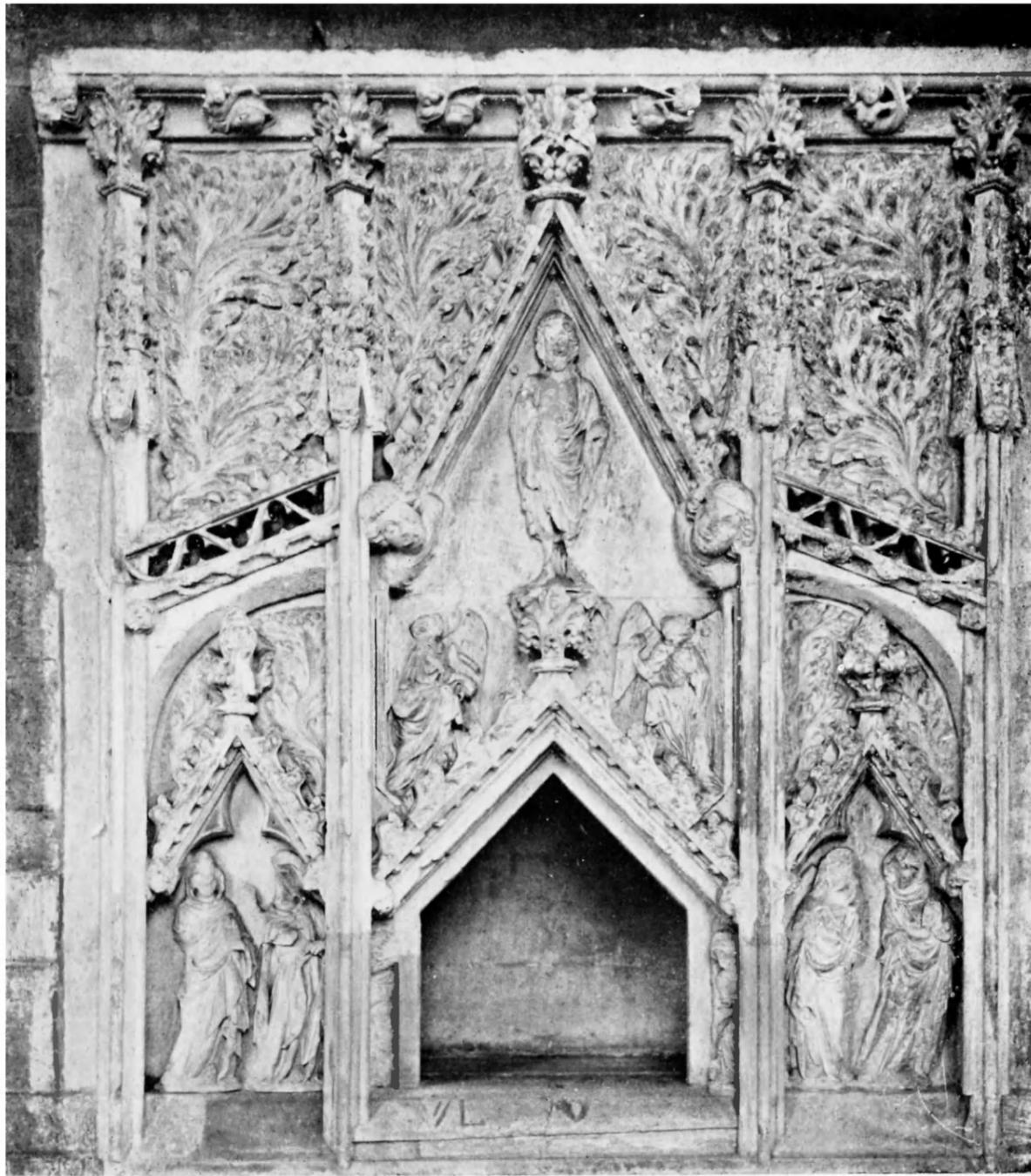
EASTER SEPULCHRE—LINCOLN CATHEDRAL.





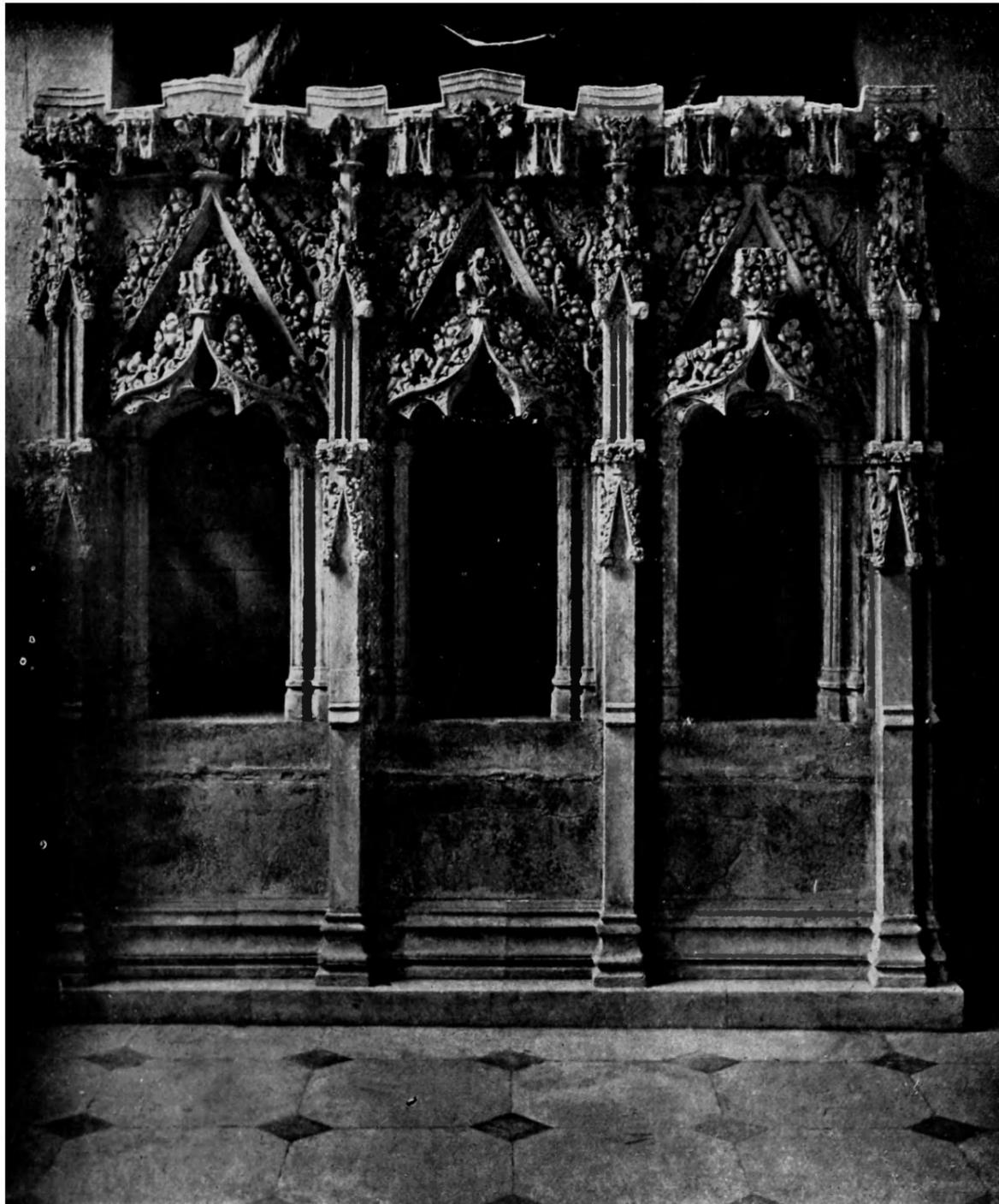
EASTER SEPULCHRE - NAVENBY.





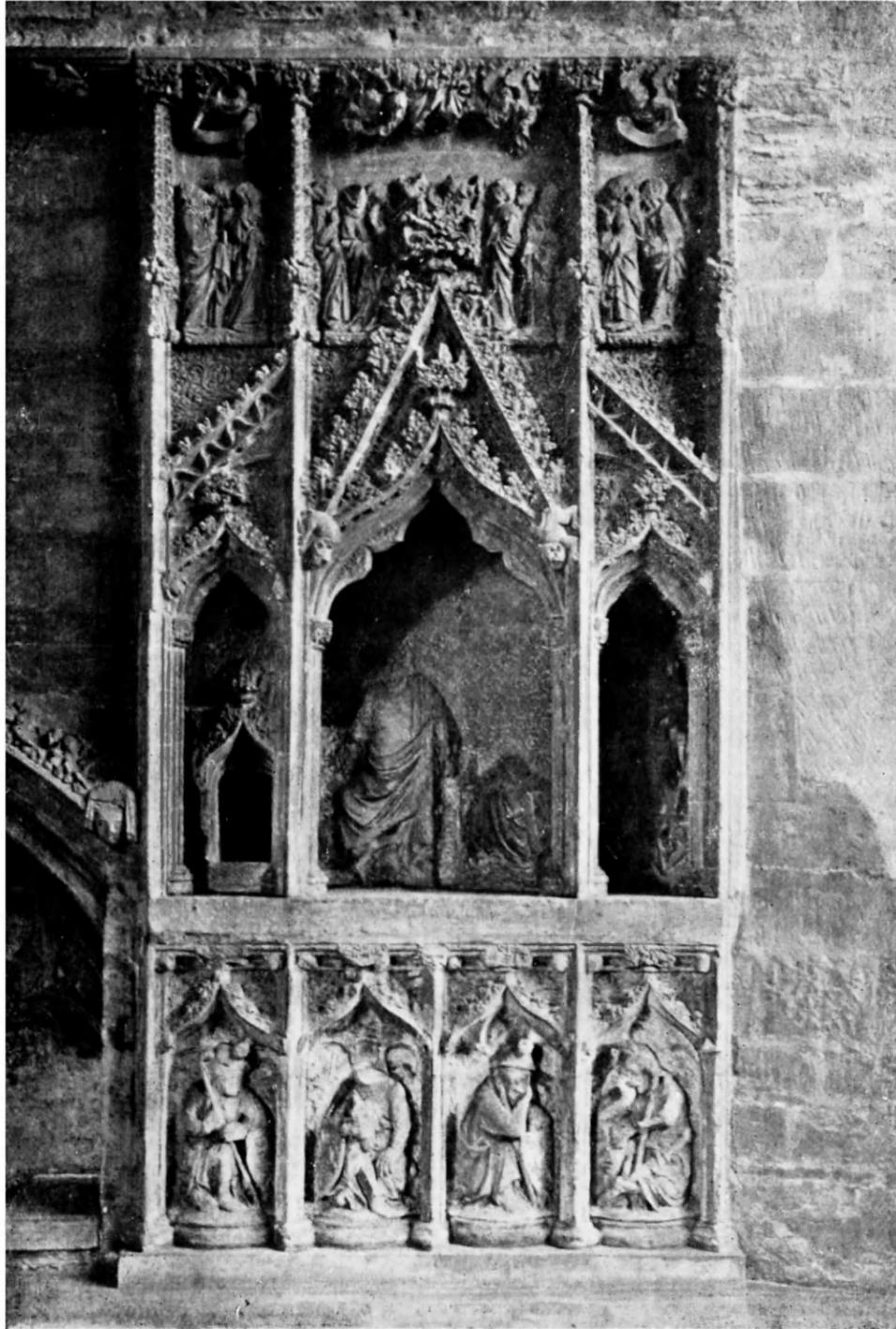
EASTER SEPULCHRE—HECKINGTON.





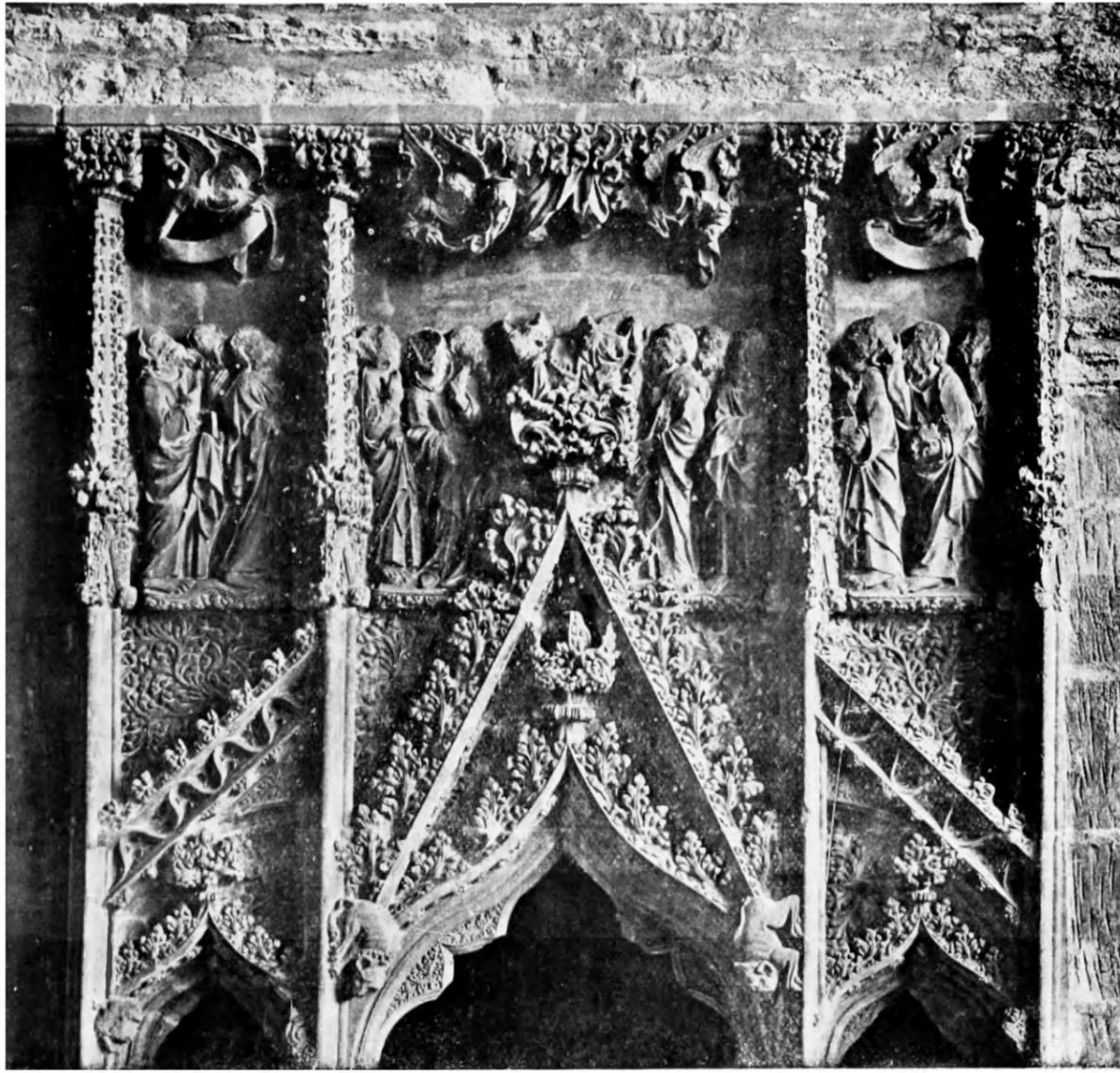
EASTER SEPULCHRE—IRNHAM.  
(The Luttrell Tomb.)





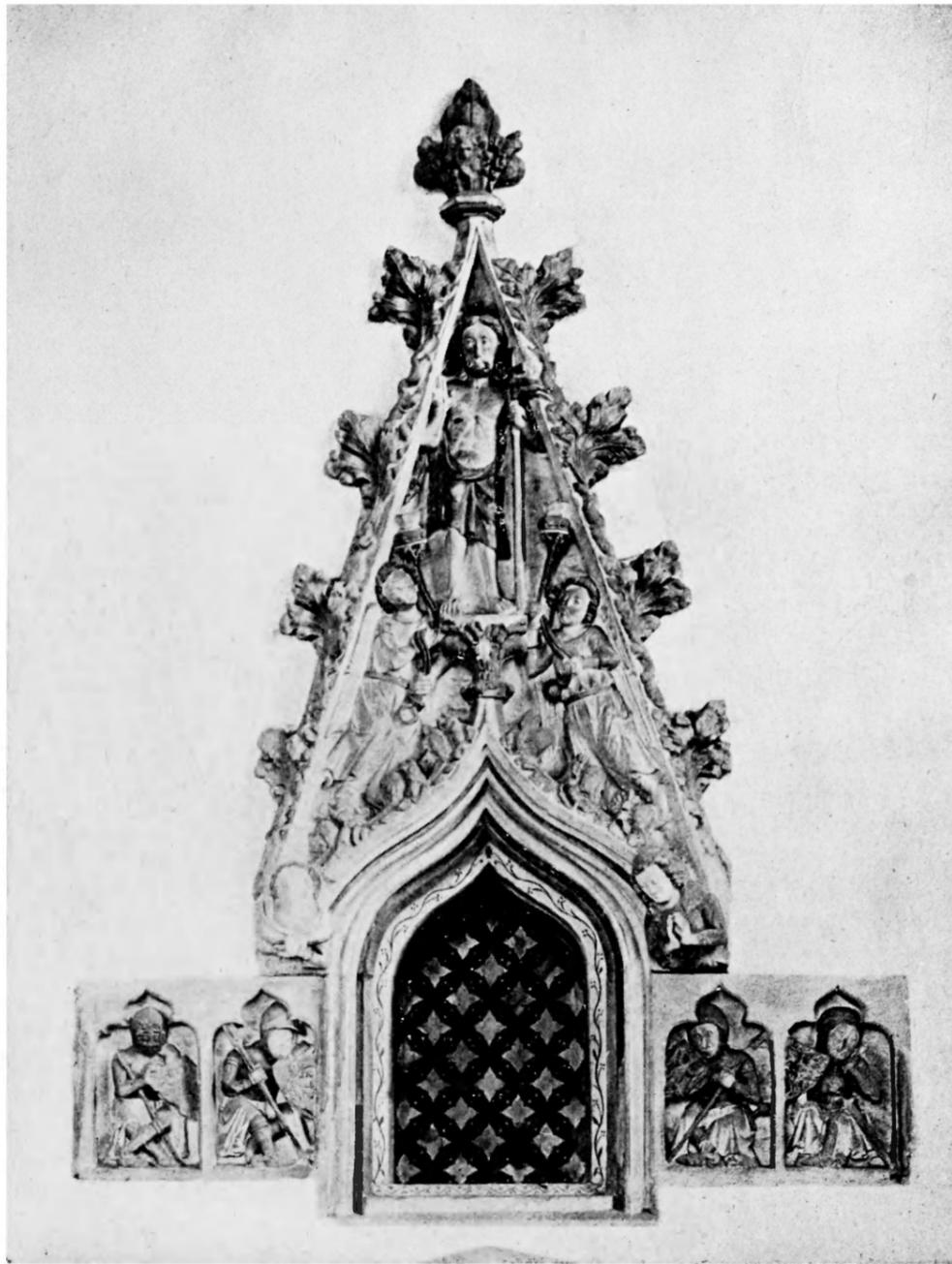
EASTER SEPULCHRE—HAWTON.





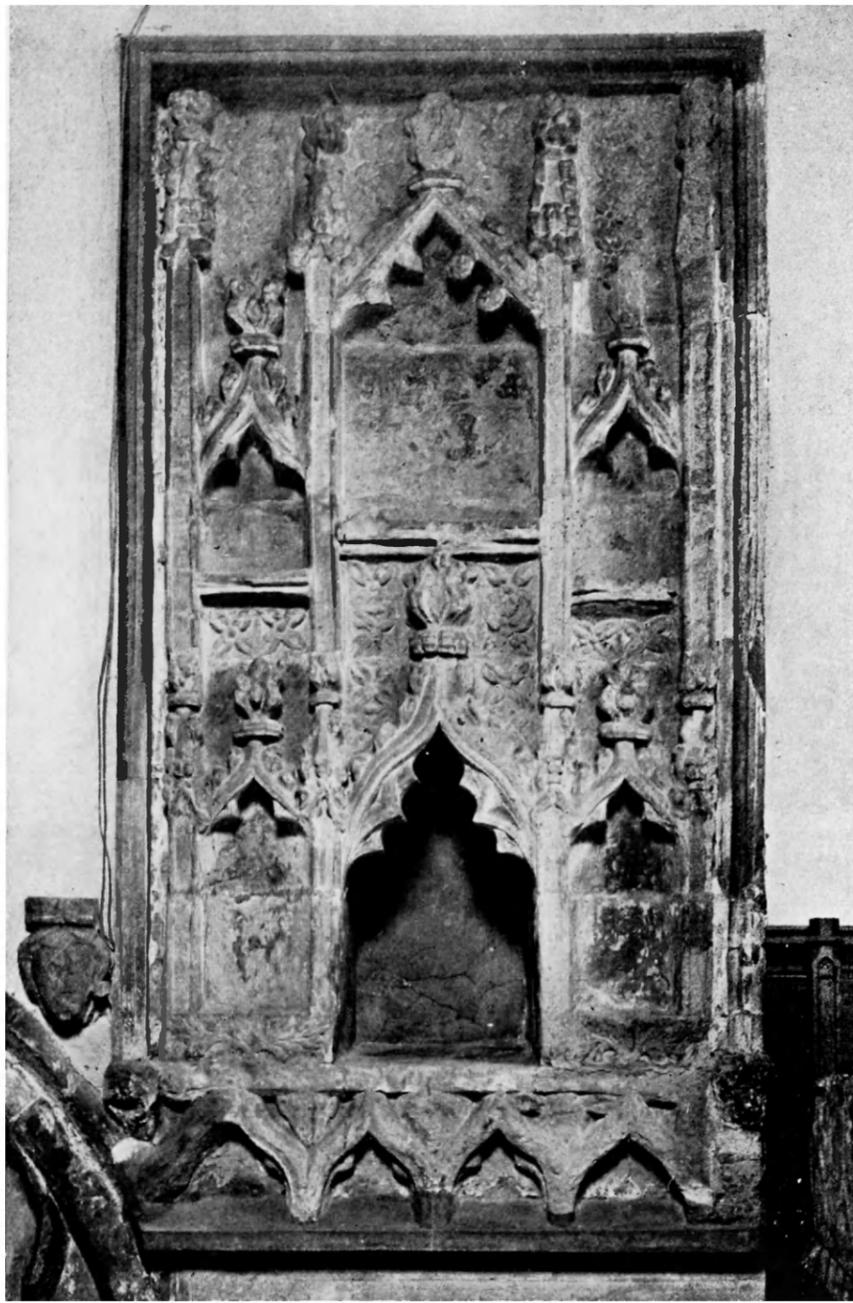
EASTER SEPULCHRE—HAWTON.





EASTER SEPULCHRE — SIBTHORPE.





EASTER SEPULCHRE—ARNOLD.





FRAGMENTS OF EASTER SEPULCHRE—FLEDBOROUGH.



FRAGMENTS OF EASTER SEPULCHRE—FLEDBOROUGH.



## ARNOLD.

At Arnold the sculpture is all destroyed, but in its prime it must have pretty nearly equalled Heckington, though the diaper four-leaved flower may not have been quite of so fine a character as the foliage at Heckington. The indications under the Sepulchre point to niches for the sleeping soldiers, and the Vicar tells me that these are now being restored. At the side is a head bracket for a candle.

## FLEDBOROUGH.

A signpost on the Dunham-Tuxford road has the legend "To Fledborough only." The lane ends at the gate of a field on Trent-side after passing the solitary Church and Rectory. The Church was restored some years ago, when some fragments of an Easter Sepulchre were found and built into the North wall for preservation. The modern Aumbry is probably in the place where the Sepulchre was originally.

One panel of the Sepulchre, 37 by 17½ inches, contains three sleeping soldiers, nine inches high. The other panel, 29½ by 9 inches, has the Risen Lord with crossed nimbus, His right hand in blessing, while His left most probably held a long staff cross with flag, like that at Sibthorpe. On either side is a censing Angel, and the finials of two arches appear between them and the Christ.

Higher up in the wall a fragment of arch is built in, which evidently formed part of the Sepulchre, having the same ogee form and rich crockets and finials and suspended shields. Intersecting the wall plate are two finials end to end, which look as if they also may have belonged to the Sepulchre.

*[The illustrations are from Mr. Ernest Woolley's photographs, except that of Lincoln, which is attributable to Mr. S. Smith, of Lincoln.]*

*The blocks have been very kindly lent to us by Mr. Ernest Woolley, who desires to acknowledge the courtesy of the Thoroton Society (Notts.) in consenting to the publication of a paper on the subject in our journal, a somewhat similar one, with the illustrations, having been contributed by him to the 1924 Vol. XXVIII. number of their Transactions.*

*Some of the illustrations also accompany a report of a lecture by Mr. Woolley on the same subject in the Transactions for 1924 of the Harrow Architectural Club.—Ed.]*