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TAWSTOCK

CHURCH.

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TAWSTOCK CHURCH  
NORTH DEVON.



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED

BY

Florence Wrey.



BARNSTAPLE:

MARKS BROTHERS, 107, HIGH STREET.

1892.

TAWSTOCK CHURCH,

NORTH DEVON

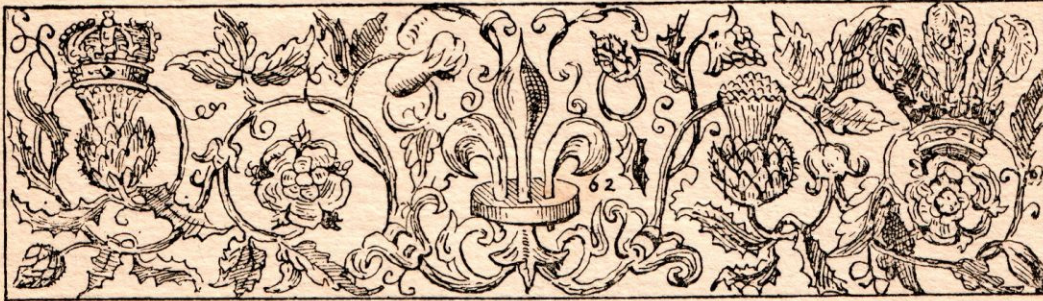
## INTRODUCTION.



I HAVE read carefully, and with very great pleasure, the accompanying account of that venerable fabric, Tawstock Church, which is so full of interest to antiquarians and admirers of ancient ecclesiastical edifices. I have been an amateur architect for many years, and will undertake to say that Miss Florence Wrey, the authoress, has entered fully, most truthfully, and graphically into every matter of interest and detail regarding the Church, which has now become so well known.

CHARLES CHICHESTER.

HALL,  
August, 1892.



## TAWSTOCK CHURCH, NORTH DEVON.

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It is said that, in these days of railways, people do not observe the beauties of the country through which they pass. Surely this is rather sweeping. Often and often has one been charmed with magnificent views, which a sudden curve of the line unexpectedly reveals.

Although the peep which we are about to contemplate has no pretension beyond that of being a pretty country seat, yet few travellers, as they are whirled along in the train, and who happen to look out of their carriage windows at the right moment, could fail to admire a certain sylvan glade on the South-Western Line, within a mile or so of Barnstaple, North Devon.

Like most old woods, those of Tawstock look beautiful at all times of the year. Yet to many they appear to greatest advantage in the autumn, when the gorgeous golds and scarlets add their splendour to the humbler tints of russet browns and greens.

Imagine you have just come in sight of a vista surrounded with hills, which are wooded by nobly spreading trees. The long, castellated house at the summit of the ground is Tawstock Court, and "on the slope which falls away gradually to the river, midway, embowered in trees, stands the Parish Church, now well known for its picturesque interior, and sumptuous monuments of the Bouchier family."

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Wandering into the Churchyard, through the Lych-gate, we see some curious epitaphs engraved on the headstones. One of the most singular alludes to an infant of eleven months, who evidently had had but a sorry time in this world, as his fond parents tell us that

"He tasted of life's bitter cup,  
Refused to drink the potions up,  
But turned his little head aside,  
Disgusted with the taste and died."

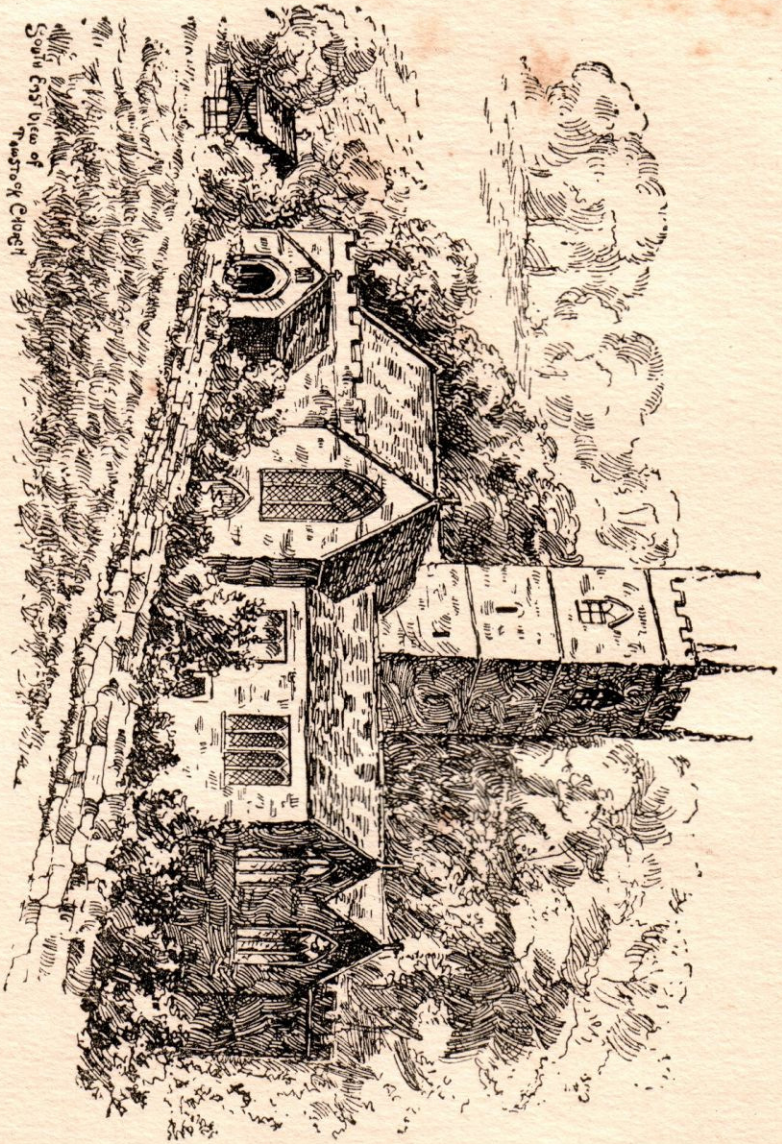


FIG. 2.

Before completing the circuit of these grey walls we cannot fail to notice two ivy-covered pillars (fig. 1), the

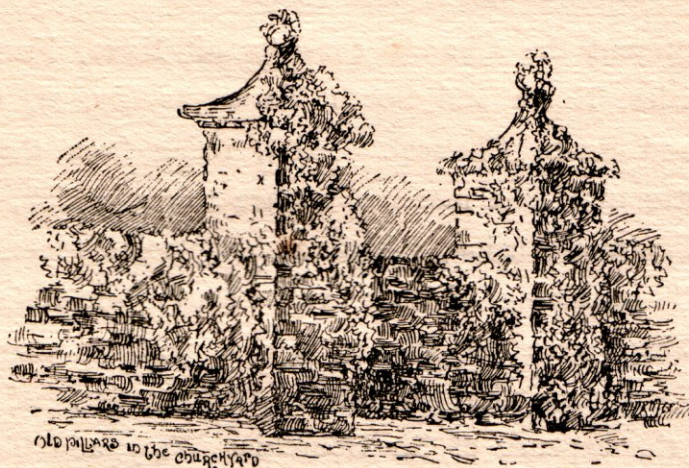


FIG. 1.

remains of a gateway, through which, in days gone by, the family from the mansion above walked to the Church, followed by their servants and retainers.\*

The Church, which is cruciform in shape, is dedicated to S. Peter. All authorities agree that it was chiefly built during the latter part of the 13th century, when the Early English style of architecture prevailed.


This edifice has undergone so many alterations and additions, besides much destruction, that the original form

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\* A print representing this is in possession of the family.

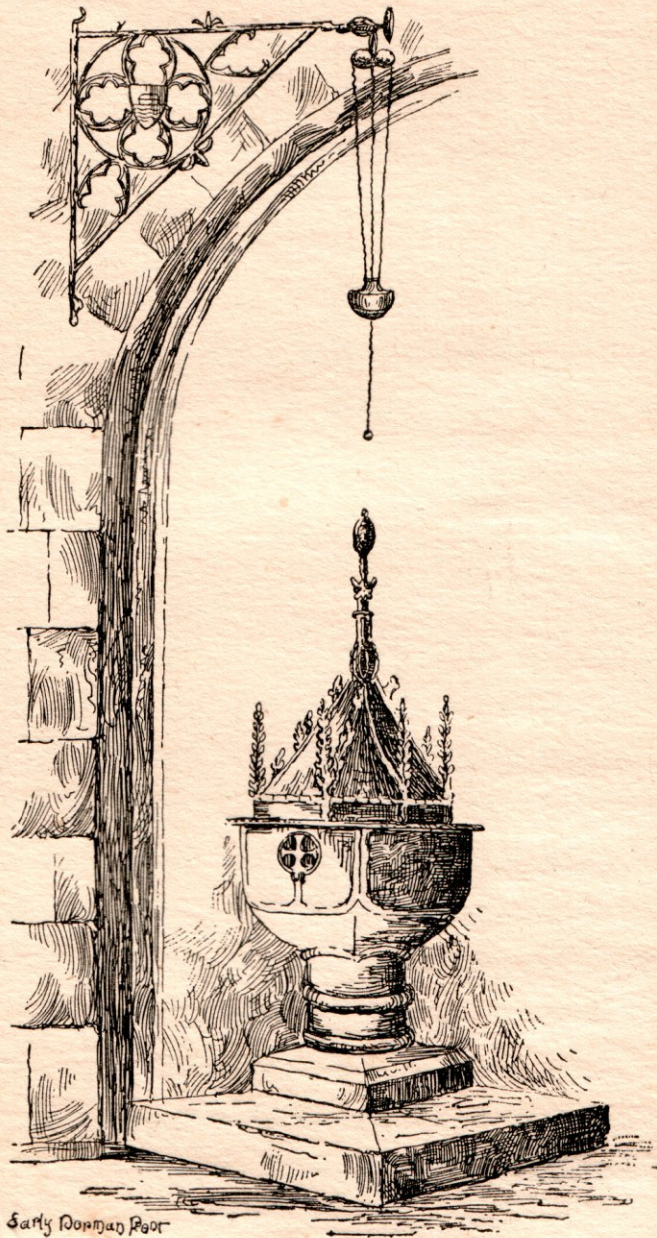


has been lost in the confusion. The nave and aisles were originally covered by one span, as may be seen when looking at the exterior of the West end.

At present the Church consists of Nave, North and South Aisles, North and South Transepts (fig. 2), Chancel proper, and South Chancel. Also, rising from the centre of the structure is a massive, square tower, which, according to Tristram Risdon, "hath a delightsome tuneable ring of bells," consisting of four very heavy pre-Reformation bells. They were all re-cast into a peal or ring of six by W.  Evans, the well-known bellfounder, of Chepstow, at the expense of Sir Bouchier Wrey, and his uncle, the Rev. Chichester Wrey, Rector of Tawstock, 1753.

It would be beyond my power to give an account of all the objects of interest in this Church; I merely propose to point out to those who love things beautiful in the ecclesiastical world a few of its most striking features.

We will now enter the edifice by the porch on the South side, and should it be a bright day a beautiful sight indeed meets our gaze, as our eyes wander over so much architectural beauty displayed in the massive piers and Gothic arches, surmounted by the cradle roof of the Nave. Looking beyond again, through the dark oak screens, we see the Chancel filled with stately monuments,



Early Norman Well

FIG. 3.

whose beauties are enhanced by strong floods of light pouring in from the coloured windows.

The best plan, in describing this Church, is to begin with the Font (fig. 3), which is placed, as usual, beside the first pillar as we enter the door, and from its shape is said to be Norman. It was often the custom in days gone by to remove an old Font into a new building, so that we can account for its being more ancient than most things in the Church. The crocheted cover is evidently more modern, probably added in 1400, about 100 years after the Constitution of S. Edmund of Canterbury, which enjoined that Fonts were "to be covered and locked. At first they had flat, movable lids, but afterwards these became highly ornamented, and were sometimes carried up to a considerable height, in the form of spires, and enriched with a variety of little buttresses, pinnacles, and other decorations."\*

The Font cover is raised or lowered by means of pulleys. On one side of the shield, in the centre of the ironwork from which the cover is suspended, an ark on rough billows is painted, and on the obverse a dove with its wings outspread.

Before proceeding further, I must call the attention of the stranger to the remarkable fact that standing at the

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\* Parker: "Glossary of Architecture."

West door he will have a gradual descent of seven steps before he reaches the Altar-rails. The sloping ground in this land of hills is answerable for the peculiarity.†

Passing therefore "down" the centre aisle, we will pause a moment and glance at the ceiling immediately beneath the Tower, which is composed of a quantity of circular arches in solid masonry intersecting each other, and is said to be quite unique in its style.

The North Transept contains a "construction of wainscot." This construction has been the subject of many suppositions. Parker, in his work on Architecture, says it is "a curious specimen, and deserves notice." Two sides of this square seat are wainscoted, a little door on hinges opening out of one of them; the canopy is ornamented with coloured bosses, and on the cornice are seen several Bouchier knots (the badge of the family). Many think that it was beyond doubt a Confessional, on account of the little shutter, but the size of the erection alone prevents one from accepting this supposition as gospel. Others, again, and I think much more correctly, suppose it to have been a sort of "state pew for the noble family of the Earls of Bath, who had much property in the parish."

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† It is a curious fact that in Bishops Tawton Church (on the opposite bank of the River Taw) this arrangement of the seven steps is exactly the reverse.

This transept also contains a beautiful little gallery which leads to the belfry. The late Sir Gilbert Scott, who, some five and twenty years ago, superintended restorations in this Church, considered this gallery (fig. 4) to be quite the best piece of carving in the building. Its beauty consists in the "vignette," which is a running



Gallery leading to the Belfry

FIG. 4.

ornament of leaves and tendrils, such as is frequently carved in the hollow mouldings of Gothic architecture.

The carving also of some of the seat-ends (fig. 5) is very quaint and interesting; the rose, pomegranate, and royal arms\* standing out boldly in the old oak. Looking at the transept opposite, one sees the walls covered with tablets and hatchments in memory of the Wrey family. The stone floor is raised a couple of feet, thus making room for the family vault beneath.

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\* Those of Henry VIII.

I must borrow the words of the proverbial guide, and say, "We will now pass on to the Chancel, which will not be found the least interesting object in this Church." The roof of the South Chancel is a very old waggon shape (fig. 6), the ribs and bosses being exquisitely carved. As to the age of Tawstock Church, the Chancel and Nave have undoubtedly the greatest claim to antiquity. The

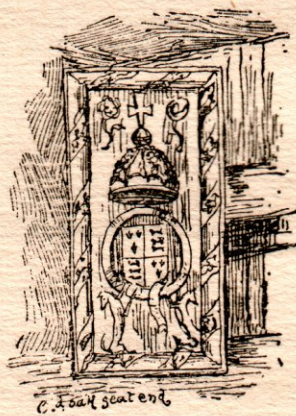


FIG. 5.

geometrical tracery in the Chancel windows, and also the sloping basement of the walls in certain places, would time the building about the latter part of the thirteenth century, when the Martyn family were lords of Tawstock.

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Perhaps a little explanation concerning the possessors of this beautiful Manor may not be amiss.

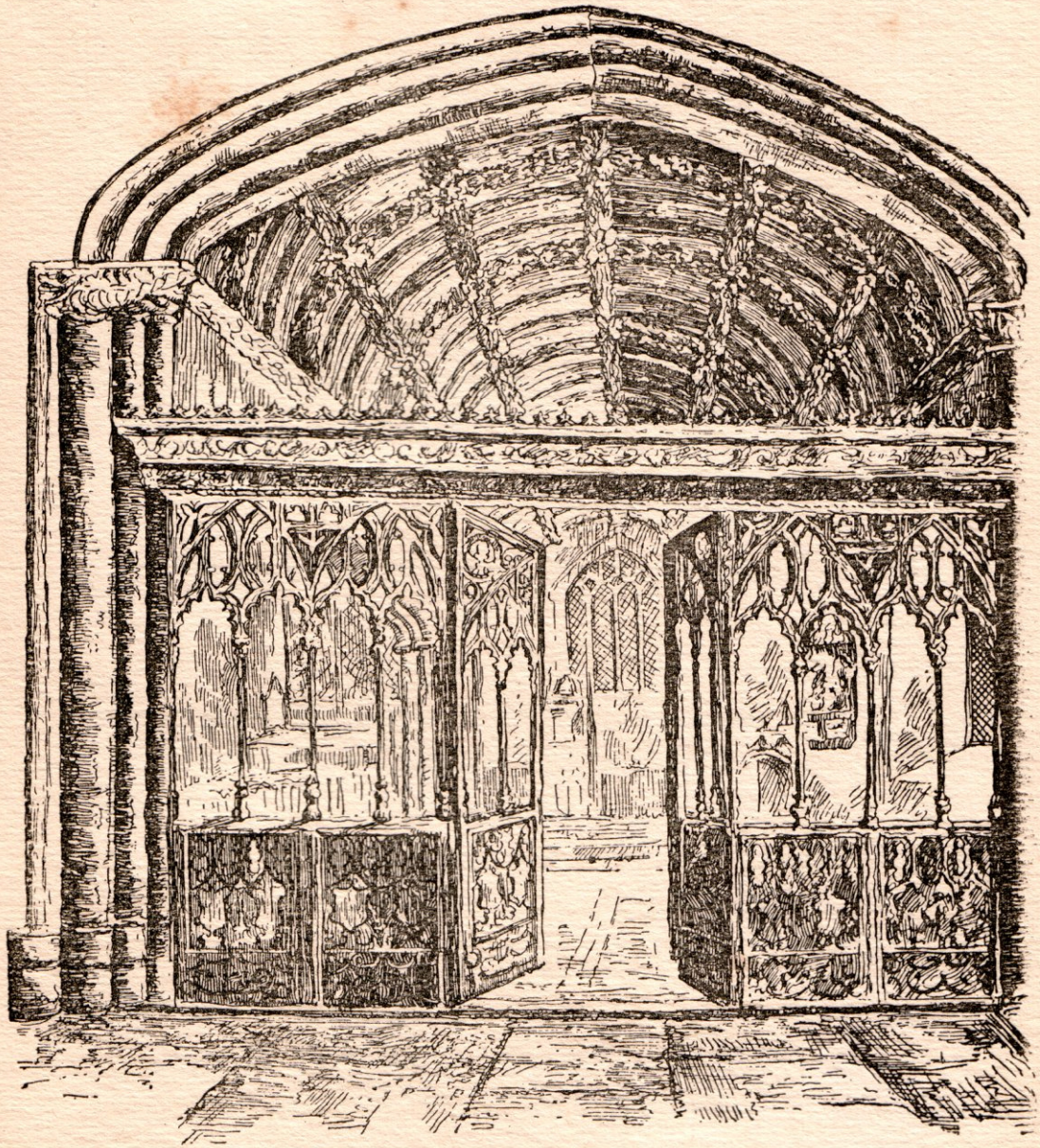


FIG. 6.

To avoid a long genealogy, which might be uninteresting to many, and also to make a long story short, I will only state that the lands of Tawstock were in 1154 owned by William, Lord Brewse, *alias* Bruce. They passed, through marriage, to the Lords Martyn, "from whom, by a long race of honourable ancestors, this Manor lineally descended in 1448 to the right noble William Bouchier, Earl of Ewe in Normandy, who had married Anne Plantagenet, grand-daughter of Edward III." Their descendant, John Bouchier, Lord Fitzwarren, was the first of the five Earls of Bath.\* He was one of the Lords who signed the letter to Pope Clement VII., threatening to repudiate the supremacy of his Holiness.

The second Earl, John Bouchier, on succeeding to the title, erected the beautiful screens, which on entering the Church immediately attract our attention by their rich but delicate carving and graceful air of antiquity. This Earl's arms and quarterings are seen over the Priest's door on the outside of the Church, empaling those of his Countess, the Lady Elinor, a daughter of the noble house of Rutland.

I ought to mention some of the splendid monuments which have given to this Church the exalted name of the

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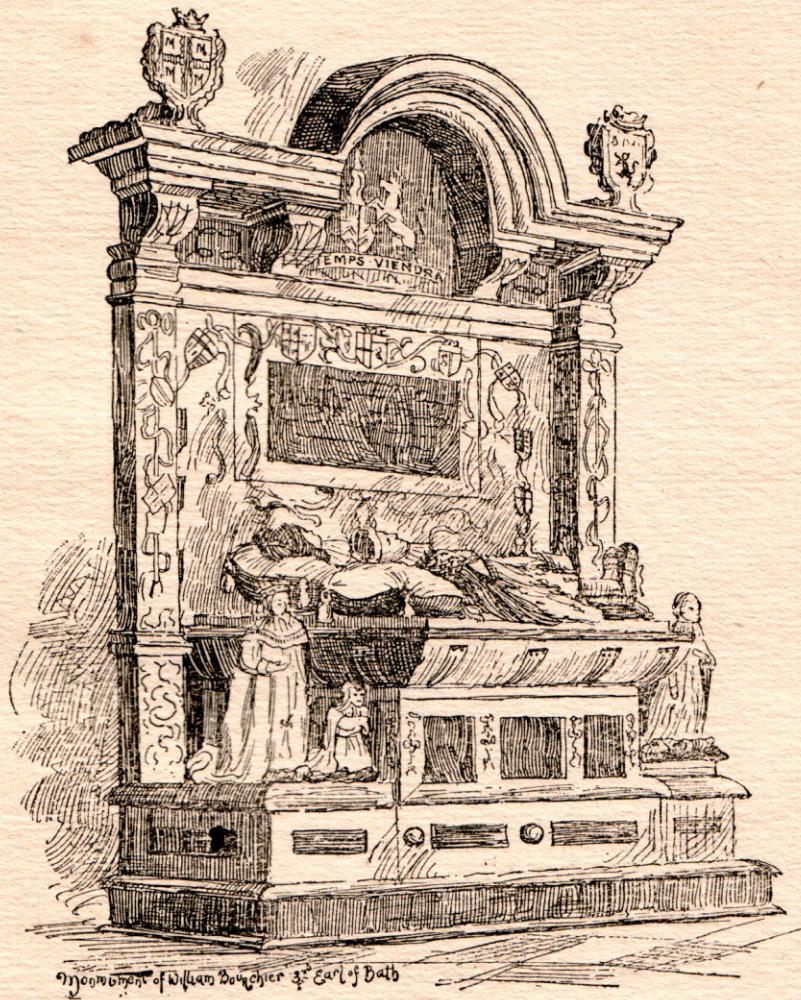
\*Date of creation, July 9th. 28 Henry VIII.



“Westminster Abbey of the West!” They may not be in accordance, in all respects, with the taste of the present times; they are, however, distinctly interesting to the lover of heraldry. Speaking of this Church, Risdon says: “Honoured it is with the sepulchres of many noble personages of the house of the Earls of Bath; amongst which the goodliest monument of all is of late years made to the memory of William, Earl of Bath, Lord Lieutenant of this county\* (1623).” This monument (fig. 7) is on the North side of the Altar, and is composed of alabaster. It was raised to the memory of William Bouchier, the third Earl, and also to that of his wife, Lady Elizabeth Russell, daughter of Francis, Earl of Bedford. It is ornamented with a large display of armorial bearings in full blazonry, the insignia of the two noble families. The recumbent life-size figures of the Earl and his Countess are folded in rich crimson robes lined with ermine, the colouring of which is still perfect. At either end of the tomb are ranged their sons and daughters, kneeling on cushions, with their hands in the attitude of prayer. This Earl was Recorder of Barnstaple, to which office he was elected at the express desire of James I., whose letter is still preserved among the records of the said borough.

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\*Survey of Devon.



Monument of William Bouchier 3<sup>d</sup> Earl of Bath

FIG. 7.

Edward Bouchier, the succeeding Earl, is described as "a man of literary and antiquarian tastes." He married Dorothy, the daughter of Lord St. John of Bletsoe. Their daughter Anne married Sir Christopher Wrey, Bart., of Trebeigh,\* from whom the present possessors of Tawstock are descended.†

Henry, the fifth Earl, dying *sine prole*, the Earldom became extinct in 1654. The tomb of this nobleman takes the form of a large sarcophagus, over which is an "elegant (?) black urn, supported by four griffins." Some of the lines from the inscription on the tomb are very quaint.

"Stay, traveller Beneath this marble tomb are deposited the mortal remains of Henry, Lord Bouchier, Earl of Bath, the envy of the present age, and a loss to future posterity. . . . He was amply endowed with easy and elegant manners. To seminaries at this uncultivated age he was a great promoter and support. To his friends a model of affable kindness, to his enemies he made kind returns. To his king (Charles I.) he was an example of injured, yet unshaken, fidelity, and towards his God he steadily observed the strictest piety. But alas! Whilst we, in such slight manner, describe these lively figures of his virtues, he is carried straightway to heaven by the surrounding weeping Angels, from this depth, into the heavenly mansions. This monument is erected by Rachel, his Countess, to his memory, which neither moth nor rust can consume." †

\*An old family Manor in Cornwall.

†Sir Chichester Wrey, the third Baronet, acquired Tawstock, Ilfracombe Manor, and other Devonshire estates, by right of his marriage with the Bouchier co-heiress, but never possessed them, as the Countess Rachel, widow of the last Earl, had them for her life, and she outlived both Sir C. and Lady Wrey. She died 1680, when Sir Bouchier Wrey inherited the estates.

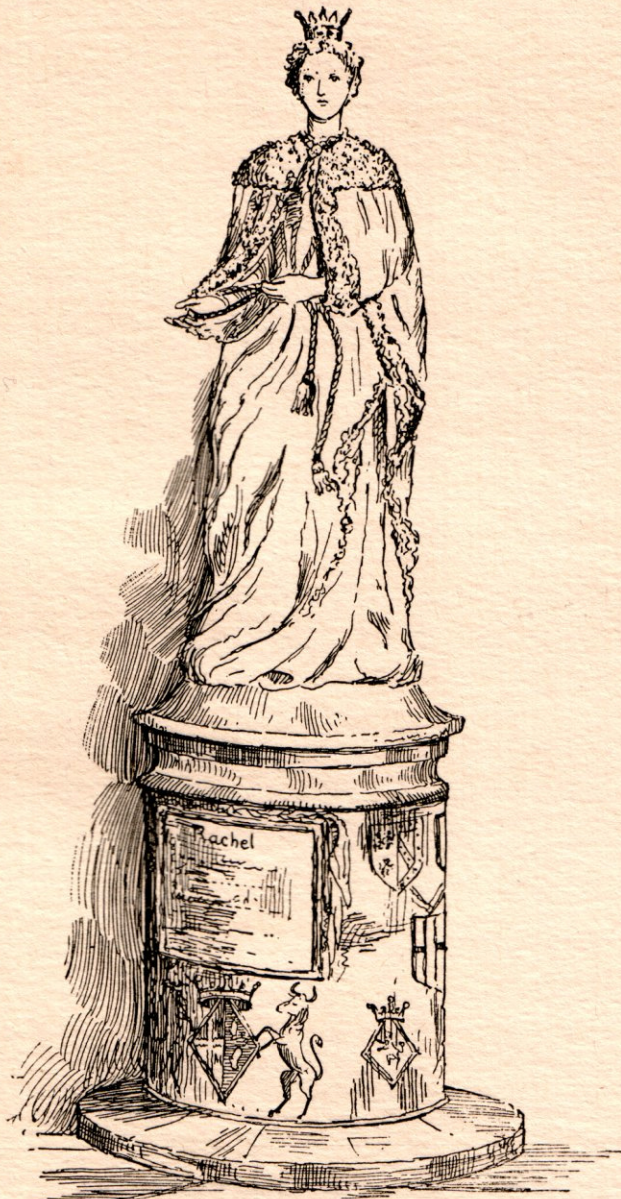
‡From translation of the Latin Inscription, by "Marland."

This Earl was voted a "Delinquent," and his estates were ordered to be sequestered, because he refused to take any notice of a command to attend the House of Lords. He was arrested at Tawstock, taken prisoner, and kept in the Tower of London for twenty weeks. Later on he was restored to favour, and held the office of Privy Seal to King Charles.

Close beside the tomb of this refractory Earl is seen the beautiful marble statue of his wife (fig. 8), the Lady Rachel Fane, daughter of Francis, Earl of Westmoreland. She stands, elevated on a circular pedestal, in a stately pose, with coronet on her head, and draped with an ermine-trimmed mantle. It is the work of Bernini, the celebrated Florentine sculptor. "She was a humble but devoted daughter of the Church of England, and in times of persecution a mother to the distressed pastors, and in these parts almost their only protectress. . . . She still in memory lives, and ne'er will die as long as grateful hearts remain in these dominions."

Against the South wall of the South Chancel is an Altar tomb with a square canopy, built in memory of Lady Fitzwarren and her infant sons, 1586.

An admirable specimen of a carved wooden figure is in a niche under an obtuse arch in the North wall of the



Statue of Rachel Countess of Bath

FIG. 8.

Chancel. It represents a lady in a recumbent position, with folded hands. Judging from the style of her head-dress, and the band across her chest, it dates back to the time of Edward III.

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Before quitting this interesting church, we will get permission to enter the vestry and look at some very valuable books, *e.g.*, Bishop Jewel's "Homilies," chained to a desk, two volumes of Fox's "Book of Martyrs," richly illustrated, &c.

In a small room immediately above, approached by a dusty flight of old oak stairs, is an ancient-looking chest, where a few sad remains may be seen of what once was a valuable collection of armour, sufficient, it was said, to equip twenty men. It was the style usually worn by Musketeers in the time of Charles I., and in most perfect preservation. There were morions, gorgets, back and breast plates, wheel-lock guns, and several bandoleers (belts worn across the shoulders, in which ammunition was carried ready for use). As late as 1832 a visitor, seeing the armour, and finding that no one apparently attached much value to it, inquired whether he might be allowed to purchase it to add to his collection. He was told he was too late, as the greater part had just been disposed of to a man in Taunton, and sold as old iron! So much for the "good old days," if people could act in such a Gothlike manner as actually to

allow an amount of valuable armour to be disposed of for such a purpose!

Another loss which we deeply regret is the disappearance of a quantity of Church plate. Dr. Oliver describes it as "abundant and extremely handsome, including an old cup with the date 1576 on the cover, given by William, Earl of Bath; a paten given in 1704 by Sir B. Wrey, Bart.; a large flagon, the gift of Edward Lovett, bearing the same date as the last mentioned; a handsome gilt cup, presented by Florence, Lady Wrey, in 1724."\* It is sad, indeed, to know that the whole of this valuable plate was stolen from the Church in 1841, and no part of it has ever been recovered.

I will merely add, for the benefit of those who remember the former cold and bare appearance of the East end of this Church, that the present possessor of Tawstock Manor has recently erected a beautifully-carved stone Reredos, consisting of a representation of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," besides making other valuable alterations in the Chancel of "Ye Parishe Churche."

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\* "Ecclesiastical Antiquities in Devon."

## LIST OF RECTORS.

1. Robert Burnel, 1273.
2. John de Pointes, October 19, 1275. Presentation by the Prior and Convent of S. Mary Magdalene, Barum.
3. Robert de Stapledon. No date of induction.
4. Edward de Sancto Johanne, September 21, 1311. Patron—Sir William Martyn, Knt.
5. Thomas de Bradford, January 30, 1313. Patron—Sir William Martyn, Knt.
6. John de Galmeton, June 20, 1313. Patron—Lord William Martyn.
7. Thomas de Hegham, August 16, 1328.
8. William Woolaston, February 9, 1366. Patrons—Sir Richard de Stafford, Knt., and Philip de Luttelegh, as Proxies for that Noble Knight Sir Ralph Bassett de Drayton.
9. William Parkere, of Olneye, May 13, 1384. Patron—Sir Ralph Bassett, Lord de Drayton and Olneye.
10. Walter Gybbes, June 22, 1390. Patron—King Richard II.
11. William de Pilton, June 10, 1404. Patron—King Henry IV.
12. John Pulton, August 1, 1435. Patron—King Henry VI.
13. Thomas Ludlow. No date of induction.
14. Sampson Combe, March 29, 1460. Patron—Sir William Bourchier Lord Fitzwarren.
15. John Bourchier, September 6, 1460. Patron—Sir William Bourchier Lord Fitzwarren.
16. \*John Bryte, September 15, 1468. Patron—Sir William Bourchier Lord Fitzwarren.
17. John Uffculme (a Monk), June 10, 1469. Patron—Sir William Bourchier Lord Fitzwarren.
18. Oliver Dinham. No date of induction.
19. Thomas Bourchier, May 25, 1500. Patron—Sir John Shapcot, Knt. (Proxie).
20. †William Horsey, March 21, 1503. Patron—Sir John Bourchier Lord Fitzwarren.
21. George Wyndam, April 25, 1543. Patron—Sir John Bourchier de Fitzwarren, Knt., Earl of Bath.
22. William Hodge, December 8, 1543. Patron—John, Earl of Bath.
23. Richard Wendon. No date of induction.
24. William Wyot, June 4, 1577. Patron—John Chichester, of Youlston, Esquire (Proxie).
25. Simon Canham, April 23, 1578. Patron—John Chichester, of Youlston, Esquire (Proxie).
26. Oliver Naylor, March 25, 1622. Patron—Edward, Earl of Bath.
27. Richard Downe, September 15, 1636. Patron—Edward, Earl of Bath.
28. Oliver Naylor. No date of induction.
29. George Bull, October 6, 1705. Patron—Sir Bourchier Wrey, Bart.
30. William Mervin. No date of induction.
31. Chichester Wrey, September 5, 1710. Patron—Florence Lady Wrey.
32. Charles Hill, June 16, 1756. Patron—Sir Bourchier Wrey, Bart.
33. Bourchier William Wrey, April 22, 1801. Patron—Sir Bourchier Wrey, Bart.
34. Henry Bourchier Wrey, January 24, 1840. Patron—Sir Bourchier Wrey, Bart.
35. Charles John Down, March, 1883. Patron—Sir Henry Bourchier Wrey, Bart.

\*This Rector resigned the living and accepted the Benefice of Marwood, also in the gift of the said Patron, May 13, 1469.

†His Rectory was, in 1535, valued at £59 12s. 1d.