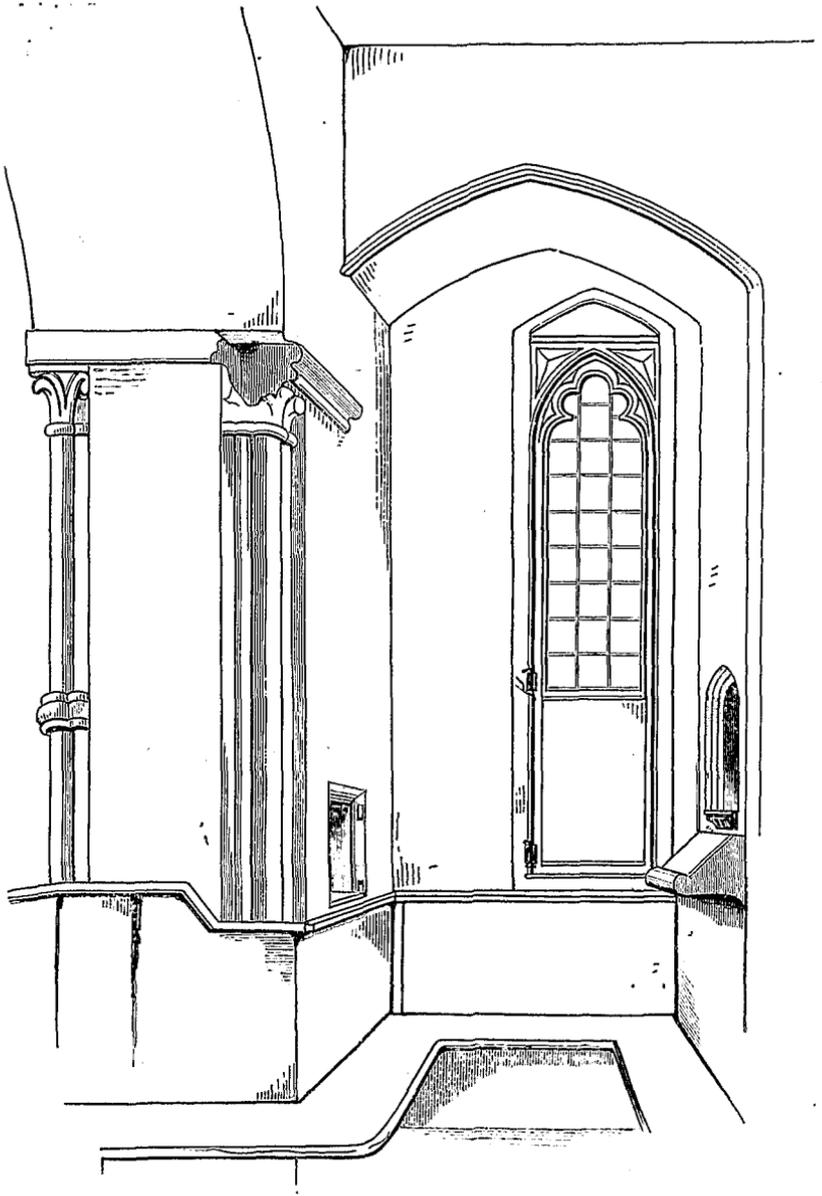


LOW SIDE WINDOW IN DODINGTON CHURCH.—  
LETTER FROM ARCHDEACON TROLLOPE.

*Leasingham, Sleaford,*  
*July 13th, 1872.*

DEAR MR. ROBERTSON,—I am exceedingly sorry that I cannot reach Kent in time to attend the Meeting of the “Kent Archæological Society,” and especially its Excursion to Dodington, and other Churches, on the 31st inst., as I should have had much pleasure in offering my opinion, as to the remarkable low-side window in that church, according to your request, on the spot, had this been possible. Under these circumstances I will venture to write, shortly, respecting that most remarkable specimen of those windows which throws more light upon their former use than any other in England, except one in Elsfield Church, Oxfordshire, which is of the same character and of equal ecclesiological value. Sometimes these are separate from the other windows of a church, smaller than the rest, and on a lower level; but, perhaps, more frequently *below* one of these, and divided from the upper, or ordinary, portion by a transom. Their peculiar characteristics are the lowness of their position, and that they were never originally glazed, but simply provided with a shutter and protected externally by iron bars, or a grating. Their usual position is towards the west end of the chancel, and one of these is often found in churches dating from the 12th to the 15th centuries, but some-



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times two of them. Such an arrangement was common in secular buildings, *i.e.* glazed lights above, and shuttered ones below, during the Mediæval Period, for the purpose of dividing the office of giving light and air to halls, etc.; and in some instances low-side windows in churches served only as ventilators apart from the rest, on the right principle of letting in air at a low level, and also occasionally to prevent any interference with the series of subjects painted upon the glass of the windows proper; but I cannot think that this was the *principal* reason of their construction, and certainly not the *only* one, as clearly demonstrated by those of Dodington and Elsfield. The first is a late specimen of the 15th century, originally, like all others, fitted with a shutter only, of which the hinges and bolt-hole still remain, although now glazed. But the especial point of interest, in connection with this window, is a stone desk projecting from its splay, and a little arched niche above it, most distinctly evidencing that this window was certainly used for *some* religious purpose, at which a service book was used, and either a crucifix, or the host, was displayed. Confession, or the administration of holy Communion, naturally suggest themselves—administered under peculiar circumstances.

Putting aside, as untenable, the suggestions that such windows were intended for the use of the paschal light watchers, between Good Friday and Easter Day, and that they served for the reception of alms, or the distribution of the same, and being assured that they were used by a priest within, ministering to some person or persons without,—from the arrangement of this window and its accessories, confession seems to be the most probable use to which it

points, but possibly the administration of the holy Communion also,—both under peculiar circumstances, as in the case of infected persons.

Such a custom was probably never strictly authorized, but yet apparently became common, and is akin to the necessary practice, still in vogue, of not taking a corpse into a church which might infect the living, at the discretion of the minister, and especially in the case of those formerly, so often, suffering from that common mediæval complaint in England, leprosy, arising from the long use of salted meat, and the dirty habits then prevalent.

We have no doubt but what the practice called “outer confession” did prevail commonly, and I fully believe that these low-side windows were used for this purpose,—*i.e.* that when a person could not be safely admitted into the church, he could fulfil the duty of confession on the outside of it, whilst the priest received his confession within, pronounced absolution, and perhaps also occasionally administered a reserved host to the sufferers, who thus drew near to the house of God, and earnestly desired to benefit by the ministrations of the Church and her priests. Reference is made to the practice of “outer confession” in monasteries in a letter from Thomas Bedyll, one of the visitors appointed by Cromwell to examine the monasteries when their plunder by Henry VIII. was contemplated. This speaks of the Nunnery of Syon, which he visited Dec. 17th, 1534, wherein he says:—“We have sequestered Whitford and Littell from hering of the lady’s confessions; and we think it best that the place where these friars have been wont to hear uttward confessions of all commers, at certain tymes of the yere, be walled up, and that use to be

for doen for ever, for the hering of uttward confessions hath been the cause of much evyl," etc. (MS. Cott. Cleop. C. IV. fol. 109.) It may, however, be said that this only refers to a *monastic* practice; but the actual existence of very many windows remarkably well adapted to this use in our parish churches, and of very different periods, seems to prove that the practice of "outer confession" was general. Then, possessing these low side windows for this purpose, the occasional administration of the host by the same means to diseased persons, whose presence would be dangerous in the congregation, was natural, and was illustrated by a mural painting discovered a few years ago in Eton College Chapel, which represented the converted son of a Jew receiving holy Communion through one of these small windows.

With best wishes for the success of your Kentish Society, and of your own labours, believe me

Yours very faithfully,

EDWARD TROLLOPE.

[When this letter was read to the members of our Society assembled in Dodington Church, the Rev. R. P. Coates suggested that the low side window may have been connected with the cell of an anchorite, or "Anker." In Darenth Churchyard he had found traces of a cross wall, at right angles to the chancel wall, just beyond one of these windows. This looked as if an anchorite's cell might formerly have existed there. Where no graves were in the way, Mr. Coates suggested that excavations should be made outside the low side windows, for the purpose of tracing whether cells had existed contiguous to them in the churchyard.]