

DISCOVERIES AT LLANBLETHIAN CHURCH, GLAMORGANSHIRE.

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THE church of Llanblethian (situated about a mile and a half from the town of Cowbridge, Glamorganshire) has been undergoing extensive alterations and repairs during the past year under my supervision, during which time very many interesting remains have been from time to time brought to light; most notably a crypt underneath the south chapel, and the walled grave of a priest with a chalice. The high, old-fashioned pews when cleared away revealed the site of the altar and piscina, also the existence of a recessed tomb in the south wall. In excavating for the drainage, a sepulchral-effigy stone was found with an incised slab underneath, built in to form a foundation for the south-west buttress of the tower, which is of Perpendicular style (about the middle of the fifteenth century).

Fig. 1. This sepulchral slab served as a step to the entrance gate to the churchyard for many years. It is broken in two. It is a flat coffin-lid belonging to the twelfth, or earlier part of the thirteenth, century, and is of limestone about 2 ins. in thickness.

Fig. 2. This stone was found under the effigy (fig. 5), built into the foundation of the south-west buttress of the tower. It is of Sutton stone, and 8 ins. in thickness. It must have lain in this position since the year 1450, when the tower was built.

Fig. 3. This slab was found reversed over the walled grave of the priest discovered in the south chapel over the crypt some months back. The inscription

is in Lombardic capitals of the thirteenth century,

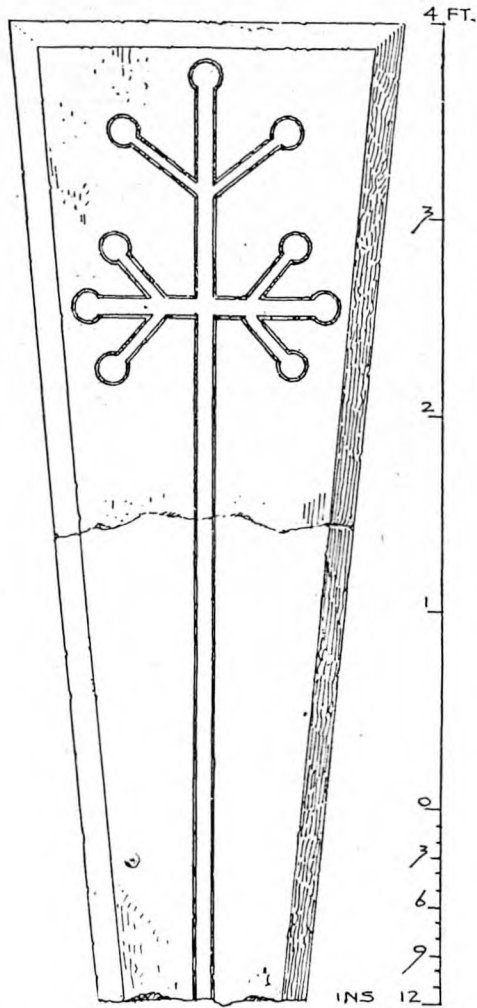


Fig. 1.—Sepulchral Slab found in use as threshold of entrance to Llanblethian Churchyard from road.
Scale, $\frac{1}{2}$ linear.

and in Anglo-Norman French. It appears to read—

DAME : EME . . T : LA : FEMME : VVATER : TORIG :
GIST : ICI : D(IEV) : (O)EL : ALME : EIT : MERCI

Fig. 4. This is one of the most interesting stones

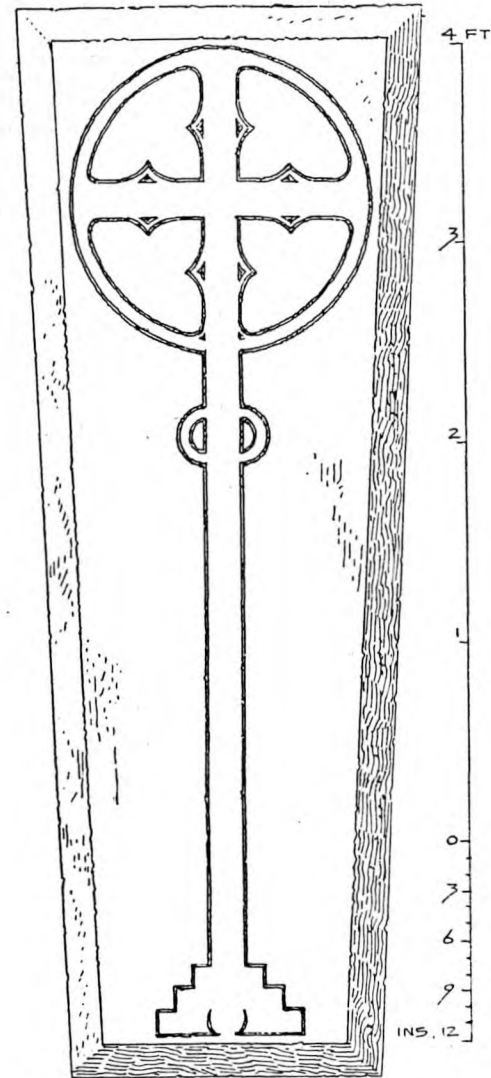


Fig. 2.—Sepulchral Slab found under Effigy beneath buttress of Llanblethian Church.
Scale, $\frac{1}{2}$ linear.

found. It was built up in a small Norman window

in the north wall of the chancel. It is no doubt the

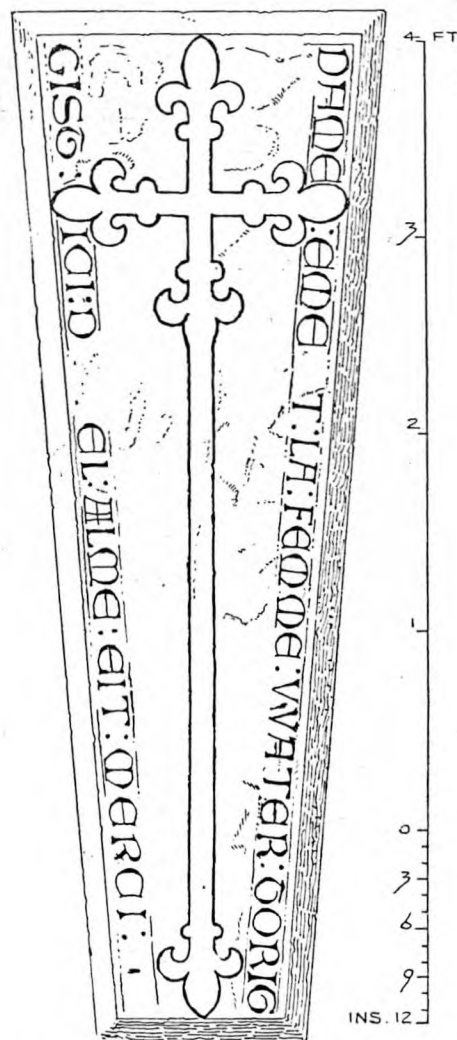
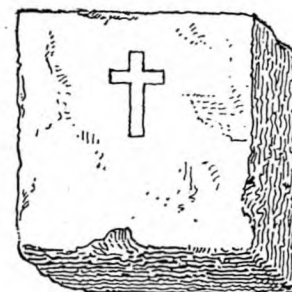


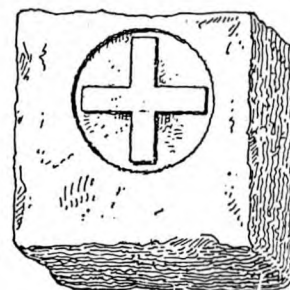
Fig. 3.—Sepulchral Slab found at Llanblethian Church.
Scale, $\frac{1}{12}$ linear.

Norman consecration stone, and is about 11 ins. square and 4 ins. in thickness.

Figs. 5 and 6. A sepulchral-effigy stone found under the tower buttress. The face is destroyed, probably to allow the stones of the buttress being laid on a flat bed. This stone, together with the other slabs, etc., will be placed in the crypt, where they may be seen for the future.



Back.



Front.

Fig. 4.—Consecration Crosses at Llanblethian Church.
11 ins. x 11 ins. x 4 ins.

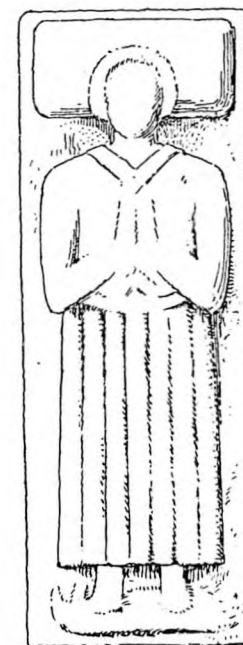


Fig. 5.—Effigy found beneath buttress of tower of Llanblethian Church.
Scale, $\frac{1}{12}$ linear.

Fig. 7. On the north wall of nave, under the cornice, this wall decoration was found, representing a saw, sword, and scourge in red and yellow colour. Drops of blood of a dark red colour were represented under the teeth of the saw, point of the sword, and the lash of the scourge. The roses were also of a deep red colour.

Fig. 8. This fourteenth-century piscina was hidden

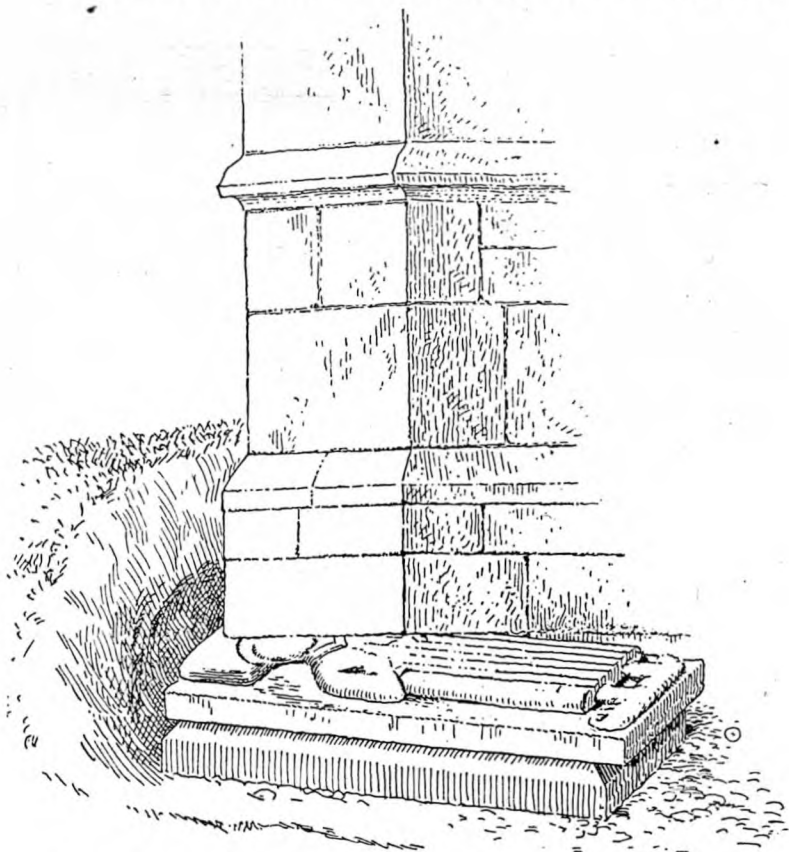


Fig. 6.—Butterss of Tower of Llanblethian Church with Effigy beneath.

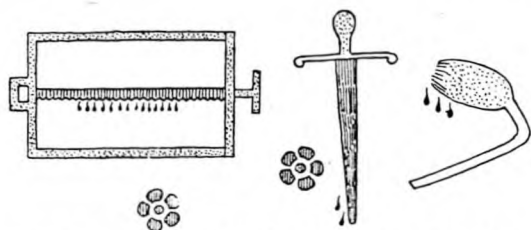


Fig. 7.—Wall-Painting on North Wall of Nave of Llanblethian Church.

from view behind the old-fashioned high pews. It is

in the south wall of the chapel, and is constructed of portions of twelfth- and thirteenth-century remains. The jamb is made of a small coffin-lid 1 ft. 10 ins.

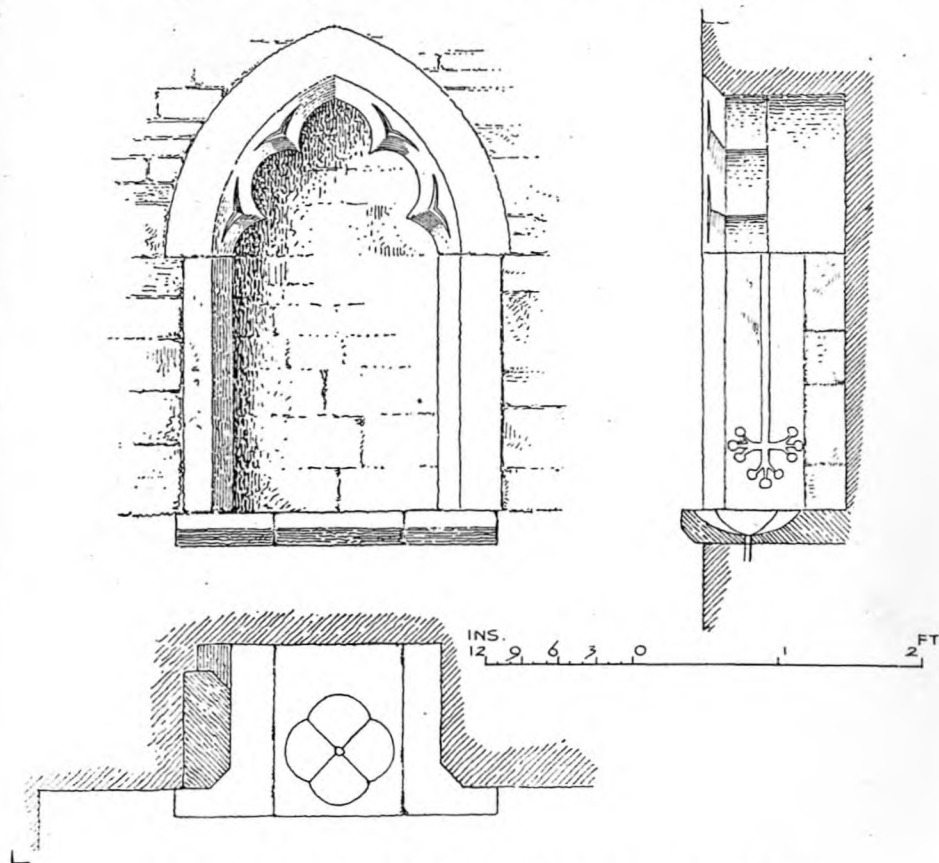


Fig. 8.—Elevation, Section, and Plan of Piscina in South Wall of Chapel at Llanblethian Church.
Scale, $\frac{1}{16}$ linear.

in length, which once, possibly, covered a stone coffin of a child.

There is also a very fine sepulchral slab built into the west entrance of the tower, of early thirteenth-century date. It forms the step, but this will also be removed and placed with the rest in the crypt.

Figs. 9 and 10. There was brought to light during the restoration the grave of a priest of the parish, over which a sepulchral slab (fig. 3) was placed face downwards, which, on being removed, disclosed a stone-built grave containing the remains of (without doubt) one of the early priests, for, on examining

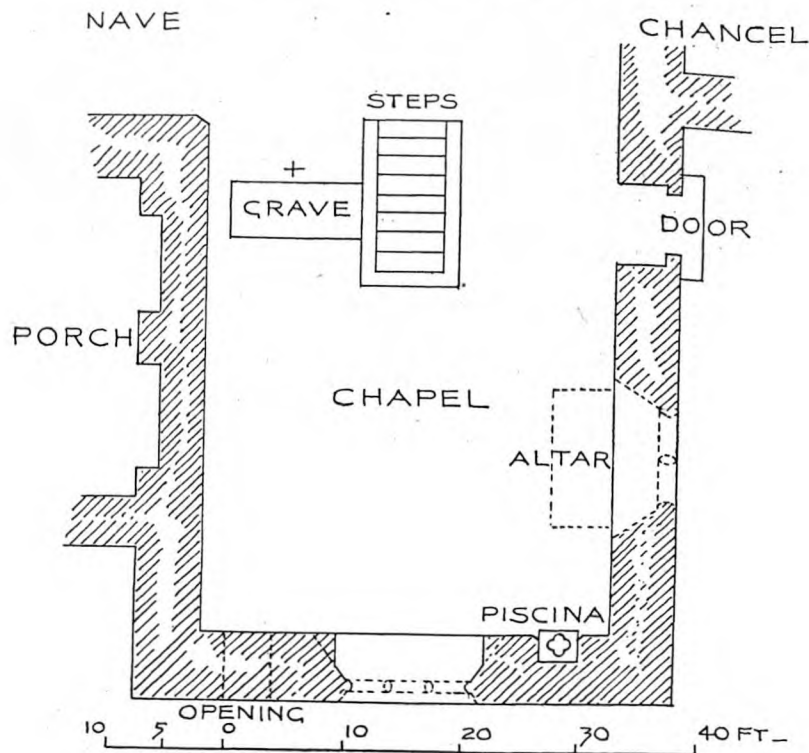


Fig. 9.—Plan of Chapel at Llanblethian Church, showing position of Priest's Grave.

the walling of the grave, a small recess was found on the south side, about 6 ins. square, and standing in same was a pewter chalice.

Fig. 11. The chalice is of Romanesque or Norman type, $3\frac{3}{4}$ ins. in height, the bowl being 4 ins. in diameter. Chalice of this type were used for burials

only as late as the fourteenth century, and they were generally placed on the right-hand side of the body, near the shoulder, and contained consecrated fluid. The early chalices were very small, with shallow

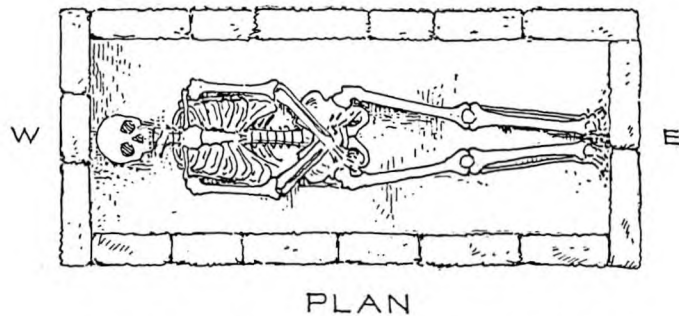
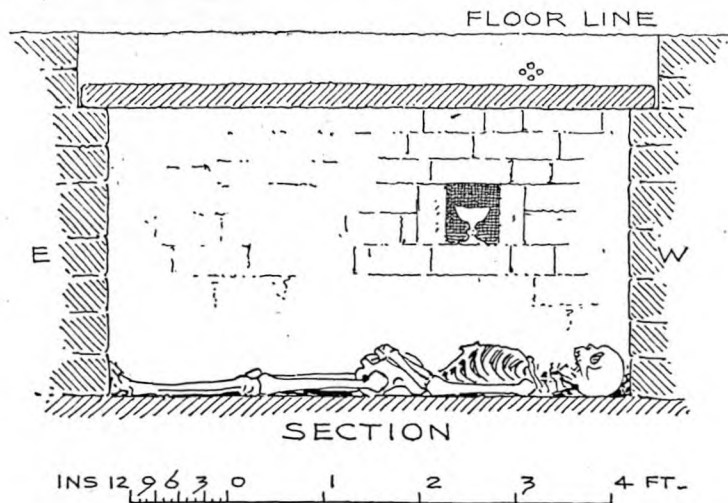


Fig. 10.—Priest's Grave in Chapel at Llanblethian Church.

bowls, whilst those of later date were much larger and more conical in form, leading us by a definite step to what may be termed the Gothic type, from about the end of the fourteenth to the early part of the sixteenth century, or the end of the reign of Henry VII; many

of them showing features of great beauty. During the time of Henry VII, chalices lost their Gothic feeling and a complicated foot with a flowing outline was added to them, also elaborate stems with bowls of hemispherical form.

The chalice found at Llanblethian must be of fourteenth-century date, for the south chapel, wherein this grave lies, was built during this period, and several portions of early thirteenth-century sepulchral slabs have been made use of in building up this addition to the original church. The chalice is of pewter, but owing to its great age little of the metal remains, and unless very carefully handled it would fall to pieces. I do not know of any other chalice being found in a recess



Fig. 11.—Found in Priest's Tomb at Llanblethian Church.

of this kind, though a similar one was found at Hereford some years past in the grave of Gilbert de Swinfield, Chancellor of the Choir, A.D. 1297. Strange to relate, the slab covering the grave at Llanblethian is to the memory of a woman, the inscription being in French of Norman date, the word "Femme" being clearly traceable; so that this stone must have been taken from the nave to cover the priest buried in the chapel. This grave is situated close to the entrance to the crypt.

The crypt, which is 17 ft. long by about 15 ft. wide, is reached by means of a flight of steps leading down from the transept floor. At the bottom of the steps are remains of iron hooks on which a door once hung. The chamber is lighted by three small openings, which were covered up with earth on the outside, and is arched with stone from east to west, giving a height

of 7 ft. to the crown of the arch. The whole of this chamber was filled with the remains of about two hundred and fifty individuals, together with portions of stone coffin-lids of thirteenth-century character. The remains have been carefully deposited in one large grave in the churchyard. The transept (as it was supposed to be) over this crypt has been proved to be a side chapel, for on the plastering being removed, the outline of an altar with a fourteenth-century window over has been brought to light in the east wall, as well as an arched recess for a sepulchral monument, and a piscina in the south wall. I do not know of any other church in the county which has a crypt of this description. The church, which stands in such a commanding position, was at one time of great importance, and was no doubt surrounded by a large village.