

THE RESTORATION OF ST. WILFRID'S CHURCH, FARNWORTH.

THE term "restoration" has been, unhappily, so often misapplied to the wholesale and reckless destruction of valuable ancient work, and its displacement by modern Gothic and imitation "periods," that it has gained an evil repute with true antiquaries. It is, therefore, the more welcome to be able to record an instance of its application in its true and original sense, to the conservation of such ancient work as remains in the Church of Farnworth.

This Church, about forty years since, suffered seriously from the wrong process of so called restoration, when a fine oak decorated roof was removed from the nave, on the plea that it was constructed on wrong principles, and had thrust the north arcade and north aisle wall out of the perpendicular. As a matter of fact, these had been undermined at their foundations by an enormous number of graves, both within and without the walls, the soil beneath the floor proving to be a mass of human remains. This roof was of very scientific construction, and consisted of principals, arched below the collar beams, the arches springing from bracketed wall pieces, the precursors of the later hammer beams. The feet of these wall pieces were not carried on corbels; their effect was to distribute any thrust of the roof over a large space of wall, and to brace the walls together. Thus, the leverage that would have arisen from the use

of corbels was avoided. The present corbels were added when the modern deal roof replaced the ancient one of oak. Between each main principal was a secondary one, with a collar beam, and without arch or wall pieces. A careful drawing of this roof and the interior, in its then condition, was made by the writer, shortly before its destruction.

The north aisle, removed at this earlier restoration, was roofed with well-moulded ribs, divided by purlins into panels, and had a moulded oak cornice, with well-carved square flowers in the hollow moulding. The arcade was early decorated work, and its eastern bay was fitted as the Bold Chapel, separated from the church on the west and south by oak screens, the mullions of which were moulded and set very closely together, the heads of the openings being cinquefoiled, with two trefoiled sub-tracery openings above. The ceiling of the chapel was low, being flat, and of oak, set in below the aisle roof, and divided into square panels by oak ribs, each panel being sub-divided by diagonal ribs, crossing from the angles. The monuments were in great disorder, and the mailed recumbent effigy had been set upright, and built into a kind of pedestal up to the knees.

The north arcade, north aisle, and chapel were rebuilt, the original features not being followed; and the Bold Chapel was rebuilt in the early decorated style, thus destroying all suggestion of its original date and structure. The east end of the chancel was also rebuilt, the east window being a copy of the original. The remainder of the church had been fitted up in the early Georgian era, with pews and galleries at the west end, and both aisles and pews intruded into the chancel. The south chancel aisle, and the Cuerdley Chapel, which forms a south transept, with a circular stair

turret at the south-west angle, were also filled with galleries of the most ungainly type.

The works recently completed consisted in the removal of the galleries and the comparatively modern pews. Those which were of any antiquity and of oak have been used for lining the lower part of the walls, and the seventeenth and eighteenth century names, dates, and initials cut upon them have been preserved. Some of the best of these, with panels in geometrical patterns, divided by moulded ribs, are used to line the chancel. New open oak seats, of simple but pleasing character, with traceried panels, are placed in the nave. The fronts and ends of the chancel stalls are richly traceried, and their cornices are carved with running foliage. The oak pulpit is also elaborately carved with tracery panels. An oak screen divides the south chancel aisle from the church, and is used as an organ chamber for the new organ. The roof of this chamber, which was of modern and poor construction, has been replaced with oak; and the ancient oak roof of the north aisle, with its crenellated cornice, and that of the Cuerdley Chapel, have been repaired and cleaned. The tower arch, formerly blocked up, is now open to the church, from which it is divided by a seventeenth century screen, having turned oak pillars in the upper portion.

The various changes made in the original church had been effected in the most ruthless fashion, the stonework hacked, the capitals of the north arcade and portions of the arches having been hewn off, to make way for the galleries, and one of the piers of the chancel arch treated in the same way, to accommodate the pulpit. No fragment of the ancient fittings had been spared, except the lower part of the screen of the Cuerdley Chapel, which was ornamented with a fine linen pattern in the

panels. It is to be regretted that the plan of restoration could not retain this *in situ*, as the frame was much decayed, but the panels have been re-used in the holy table.

The internal walls had originally been covered with a thin coat of fine plaster, most likely intended for painted decoration ; almost the whole of which had been stripped off, only a patch here and there remaining. One of these, barely a foot square, showed part of a shield of arms, with *four fleur-de-lys, Or*, in the Cuerdley Chapel. The devastation of all the original features of the church was something almost incredible, unless a wilful obliteration of them was intended. The repairs have made good the damaged mouldings ; the stonework has been pointed and replaced where seriously damaged.

The font, which had been removed to the north aisle, has been replaced near its original site, towards the south door. It originally stood in the south aisle, where provision for drainage was found below the floor.

The Church is now, in spite of all its losses, certainly internally, a beautiful structure. The ancient massive flat oak ceiling of the chancel, divided into square panels, sub-divided by diagonal crossed ribs, with boldly carved bosses at the main intersections, gives great character and dignity to the building. The arcades of the nave, carried on octagon pillars, with variously moulded capitals, are well-proportioned, and are made visible by the removal of the galleries. A new vestry has been built on the north side, in character with the chancel, which latter is mostly late perpendicular in style, with some remnants of decorated work.

During the restoration, evidences of the successive rebuildings and extensions of the Church, of a very interesting character, were disclosed.

At the west end are traces of the original side walls and part of the west end of the building, which show it to have been a structure without aisles, which may possibly have been the plan of the original church, and may be late Norman or early English. No moulding or detail, however, remains, to give a definite date. The first extension seems to have been the addition of a north aisle, about 1280 to 1300 A.D. The arcade for this was not set upon the ancient line of external wall, but about six feet to the north of it. The south wall has also been first, probably, moved a similar distance northwards, and the fine roof, destroyed some years ago, then put on. The next enlargement appears to have been the addition of a south aisle, its arcade being set in from the original outer wall of the south side in the same proportion that the north arcade was set outwards. This alteration is distinctly of later date than the north aisle, and though still within the fourteenth century decorated style, it is in a state of transition to perpendicular work. At this period, too, the present tower was added; but as this stands centrally to the nave of the earlier church, as indicated by the position of the junctions of its side walls with the west end. During the relaying of the floor, the lower part of the west wall crossing the tower arch was uncovered, proving that the earlier church was without a western tower, and the wall had been opened, and the present late fourteenth century tower inserted. The tower, does not stand on the axis of the present building, but on that of the earlier one. Some alterations were made in the north aisle in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

It is probable that the chancel of the thirteenth and fourteenth century church ran continuously with the nave, and had no chancel arch, but a rood

screen only. Part of the masonry is of fourteenth century date. Almost at the close of the perpendicular period it was rebuilt, the east window put in, and the present panelled roof laid over it. As this is of lower pitch than the nave, a chancel arch became needful, to enable the builder to adapt the two roofs of different pitch to each other. This was rather clumsily done, by building piers for the arch against the most easterly pillars of the north and south aisles; the space between the pier on the south and the pillar being filled with rough masonry. Between these piers was thrown the new chancel arch. Foundations of rough stone, for a rood screen, were found below the floor, when that was being re-laid. Below the chancel floor were found fragments of the ancient stalls and bench ends, which had been sawn up to make timbers to carry the flooring, and were, unhappily, past restoration. In the south aisle also, near the Cuerdley Chapel, fragments, including the cill and middle transom of a screen, were found, well moulded, and with traces of red colouring. The bench ends had been carved with panelled tracery of perpendicular character, the poppy heads being of curious form, somewhat trident-shaped, and very rudely carved, resembling closely those found in a similar position at Madeley, in Staffordshire. One of the ends of the chancel stalls, in more perfect condition, with good panelled tracery, and a well-cut poppy head, was found before the earlier restoration, in the town, and was taken away and used to ornament a cottage rockery.

Messrs. Paley and Austin were the architects for this later restoration; but the chief credit for the protection and conservation of the old work lies with the Incumbent, the Rev. J. Wright Williams, who acted throughout as a kind of clerk of the works, and continually consulted the Historic

Society of Lancashire and Cheshire as to the best methods of preserving the ancient features, which he also himself carefully noted and considered during the progress of the works.

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POSTSCRIPT TO THE PAPER ON
SUBMERGED LANDS.¹

IN the Rev. W. Thornber's excellent *Historical and Descriptive Account of Blackpool*, published in 1837, a record is given of lands and villages submerged at comparatively recent periods. In the case of the very large lost tract of low land at the mouth of the Ribble, now called the Horse Sandbank, some confirmation seems to be given to the theory that the Ribble and the Mersey had, within the range of historical ages, a common estuary, across a wide tract of marsh now represented by sandbanks. Mr. Thornber says:—

“‘In the reign of Mary, 1554, a sudden irruption of the sea,’ says Dodsworth, ‘took place at Rossall Grange. A whole valley, called Singleton Thorpe, was swept away by its fury. The inhabitants were obliged to flee from their ancient spot, and erected their tents at a place called Singleton to this day.’ In the reign of Edward I, Thomas de Singleton resisted the king in an action to recover the manor of Singleton. The site is known as Singleton Skin. Two large stones on the shore, called Lower and Higher Gingle, appear to refer to two ancient mansions of that name in the township of Whittingham, parish of Kirkham, which belonged to the family of Singleton. To the south of Blackpool, a village named Waddon Thorpe and an extensive tract of land, now termed the Horse Bank, have been swept away. In Furness, also, a great part of the parish

¹ *Ante*, p. 56.