

DISUSED CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,
STOKE MANDEVILLE.

Having been asked by the Committee of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings to examine and report upon this building, I reported as follows:—

SITE: The site was ill-chosen, being low and consisting of a wet-lying stiff clay, which may account to some extent for the village having forsaken it, the church now standing about half-a-mile away from any dwelling, excepting a farm house. A remarkable feature of the site is a moat which may still be traced on all four sides of the churchyard. In addition to this apparent moat the ground has been much disturbed beyond it, to the south and west, by excavations. I incline to think that the purpose of this moat was not so much to keep cattle from the churchyard as to endeavour to make the church itself drier.

PRESENT CONDITION: The building is now a sad sight. It has been disused, except for an occasional funeral service, since 1886, when a new church was built in the village. The chancel is still covered with tiles, and is now kept locked, but the nave is open to anyone, and has been, for two or three years, stripped of its roof, except the fine low-pitched Perpendicular trussed principals. Ivy has its own way everywhere.

ITS PARTS: The church consists of chancel, nave with south aisle, north porch, and a brick tower, meanly built, apparently in the 17th century, within the nave, the west, north, and arcade walls being utilised, and a thin arch built within the nave to carry its eastern wall.

CHANCEL: The chancel must date from the early Norman time, if not prior to it, judging by the very small semi-circular chancel arch of plain square section, and its impost. The width of chancel being 12ft., that of the arch is only 5ft. 10in. Other detail of this period does not now appear. The piscina, and a lancet, widely splayed inside, above it, are of the 13th century. There is a priest's door on the south side, only 1ft. 10in. between the stone jambs. On the same side is what might perhaps be claimed as a "low side window" of two lights, though its sill is little lower than those of neighbouring windows. The north wall—so far as one could see for its ivy covering—seems to have been unpierced. The east end now has diagonal buttresses which were probably added when the three-light Perpendicular window was inserted there.

NAVE: The nave, about 38ft. × 18ft., open to the weather, is separated from its aisle by quite a good 14th century arcade of three bays carried upon plain and robust octagonal piers with well-moulded capitals. Two plain chamfered orders, the chamfers finishing upon carved stops at about 10in. above the capitals. Of the same period is a good reticulated two-light window in the aisle, near its eastern end. The south doorway is also of the 14th century. The north wall of nave may probably belong to the Norman building. Its north-east angle is without buttress. This wall has been pierced with what was probably a three-light Perpendicular window which had its tracery cut away and wood framing inserted, for economy in glazing, in the 17th or 18th century. The north doorway is of the 14th century, and the timber porch protecting it, a century or more later. There is a clerestory pierced by two windows only, one near the south-east angle of nave and one near the

north-west. Flanking the east window of aisle were two corbels, at about 5ft. from the floor, which seem to have had to do with some kind of reredos, that which remains complete having a carved head. The trussed tie-beams seem, from the floor to be at present sound, but, as now exposed, must gradually decay. The wall-pieces with curved struts are not now supported by corbels, but depend from the ties. There are open cusped panels in spandrils of trusses.

FITTINGS: Of fittings nothing practically remains. The removal of the Royal arms in a frame, Commandments, &c., from above the chancel arch, has revealed the usual 17th century texts from the Bible; and, under them are indications of wall painting—probably, in this position, the Last Judgment. A memorial to a child, Dorothy Brudenel (circa. 1584), has been moved to the new church.*

DILAPIDATIONS: A continuous rent appears in the wall dividing nave and chancel by the falling outward of the north wall, and owing to the squints on each side of the arch having greatly weakened the abutments. The tower, rather thinly built in brick upon a bad foundation has become dangerous. The arcade is in good condition, but ought to be protected from the weather.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Ivy and other growth should be cut away. I recommend that, to avoid the destruction which its fall would cause, the tower should be taken down to the line of the nave roof, and

*The Members of our Society are referred to RECORDS, Vol. viii., pp. 88 and 153, where will be found reprint of a letter by Mr. C. Strachey to the *Bucks Herald*, 1897, urging that this monument should be rescued and preserved; and, p. 153, an excellent sketch of the history of Stoke Mandeville by the late Mr. John Parker, with admirable photo-illustrations of the ruinous little church by Mr. S. G. Payne. At that time the nave roof still had its lead covering. My visit was paid in July of this year, and I had the advantage of the company of our Member, Mr. A. H. Cocks. The Vicar gave us every facility for our inspection.

the whole nave then covered with corrugated galvanized iron.† Lime concrete should be used to stop defects in floor by which emanations, especially at the west end, proceed from intramural interments. Ties should be inserted at each end of nave to hold walls together. At the west end the timber plate, if in one length, might be utilised for this. Liquid cement and sand to be poured into wall rents.

The parish is a poor one, and outside help would probably have to be asked to carry out these recommendations. In my opinion this is a case where the Society's aid and influence are greatly needed and would be well bestowed.

W. NIVEN.

† I was not surprised that this recommendation evoked a protest from the Committee of the S.P.A.B., and it was only made because of the lightness and cheapness of this hateful covering, and because, owing to the flatness of the pitch, it would hardly be seen from any point of view. The Secretary wrote: "We propose to ask the Vicar if he will try to raise funds if we will provide him with an estimate of the cost of the work."