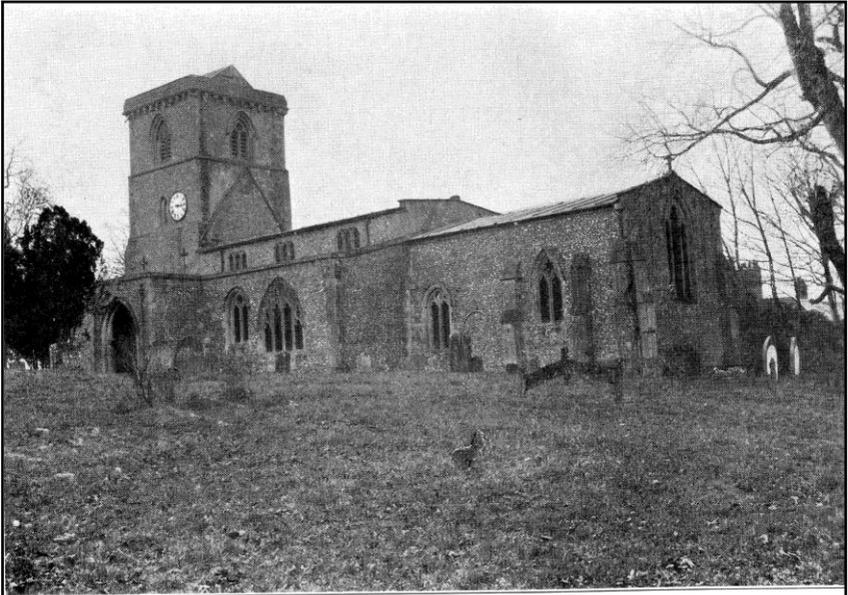


SOME NOTES ON BLEDLOW PARISH CHURCH.

Possibly all that can be written about the Parish Church of Holy Trinity Bledlow, has been written in the Victoria County History or in the Ancient Monuments Report, for Buckinghamshire, yet there may be still one or two small items of interest which these authorities have overlooked or passed by without much stress, which must be my warrant for making these few notes on this most beautiful and interesting building.

The church, which was re-built early in the 13th century, takes the place of an older building of the 10th or 11th centuries. It is said to have been originally cruciform, with a central tower, but I cannot myself find any authority for this statement.

It would appear from the remaining quoins of an opening at the east end of the north aisle that this must have been the arch of the apse at the east end of the Norman Church, and this is borne out by the existence outside of a narrow vertical off-set with quoin stones, which has a capping stone, of possibly the 13th century, added when the church took the place of the former building. Amongst some stones discovered in walls during the last repairs to the church some eighteen years ago, under the auspices of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, is a portion of the head of a window—undoubtedly of early 11th century workmanship—as well as some small pieces of shafting stones of the same period. The north wall of the same aisle as far westwards as the second window would appear to be of earlier work than the rest of the church, and would help to bear out the theory that we have here the site of the original pre-Norman building. The small round-headed north doorway, which has evidently been re-built at a later period, may have belonged to the 12th century building of which some stones with zig-zag mouldings and a small portion of a font basin were also discovered at the same time of reparation.



BLEDLOW CHURCH FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.

For the rest the present church is almost wholly of the 13th century, with the exception of one large 14th century window in the south aisle and one somewhat earlier in the north aisle. Its chief glories are the beautiful north and south arcades of c. 1200, with their magnificent circular columns with foliated octagonal capitals, differing slightly in each one; and the splendid south doorway of about 1260, which, in spite of the much-worn bases of its external detached shafts, retains much of its original colour decoration; as well as a pair of very early oak doors, which bear traces of their original fine ornamental hinges.

In the 14th century porch of the south doorway is an exceptionally large "Holy water stock," which has for some reason remained undamaged through the ages.

In the west tower, which has a very fine corbel table, many of the corbels are carved with delightful grotesque heads; there is a blocked window in the apex of the moulding of the original steep-pitched roof. This formerly gave into the church and enabled the ringers in the loft to see into the church.

Of internal original decoration there are some remains of foliage in the spandrels of the arcade arches, with some masonry pattern—all of the 13th century: and on the north wall of the north aisle a great figure of S. Christopher carrying the Holy Child, the design being carried over the north door, and showing the hermit in his tower thrusting his hand, which clasps a candle, out of the window to guide the Saint across the water.

Behind the hermit's tower is seen an embattled house with gabled roofs, and fruit trees on the walls. The background is diapered with flowers, and there are remains of an ornamental framing to the composition.

The painting was discovered during the drastic "restoration" to which the church was subjected in 1877 under Sir Gilbert Scott. It had been much damaged by the insertion of a wall tablet in the 18th century. The painting appears to be of the 14th

century. There are also some remains of painting over the south doorway. This shows two kneeling beggars—one supported on a crutch—and above is a hand in benediction. It is difficult to determine the subject of the painting, but it might possibly have represented St. Frideswide giving alms to the poor. At the east end of the south aisle is also the fragment of a diaper of flowers. 17th century texts in yellow framing have been painted on the walls, but these have mostly become obliterated, with the exception of the Creed, into which a poor modern pulpit has been fixed, on the north side of the chancel arch, and the Commandments in a recess, formerly a window opening at the east end of the south aisle.

It is perhaps curious that no monuments remain in the church earlier than the 18th century, with the exception of a little brass to Master William Heron, priest 1525, now on the wall in a recess on the north side of the chancel, and some few fragments of stained glass: notably three shields of arms in the large 14th century window in the south aisle, for Edward III., Henry of Lancaster, and William de Bohun, Earl of Northampton. Yet these did not escape the notice of Anthony Wood, who mentions under the date of December, 1649: "The church here (Bledlow) were " some armss in the windowes, and an inscription or " two on grave stones, of which A. W. took notice " according to his then capacity, but afterwards " obtained a better method of taking them. These " things are here set down because they were the first " matters of that nature that A. W. took notice of. "

The church has undergone several "Restorations," one during the incumbency of the Rev. John Davey in 1777, when the chancel floor was lowered about five inches from the sanctuary steps to the chancel arch, and the sanctuary paved with stone with black marble set diamond-wise. The lowering of the chancel floor accounts for the impractical height of the low side window on the north side, which makes it impossible to reach, but with the floor at a higher level the clerk could easily reach the window for the purpose of ringing his handbell at the elevation of the Host.



BLEDLOW CHURCH: NAVE AND SOUTH AISLE.

Dr, John Davey, who was also Master of Balliol College, apparently loved the church well, in spite of his alteration of the floor level, as it must have been he who took up the little brass of Wm. Heron from the floor when he re-paved the sanctuary and preserved it in the recess referred to above.

It was also during his incumbency that Johnshall Cross presented the altar piece and reredos, now in the south aisle to the church. The painting was executed by Samuel Wale, one of the original Royal Academicians, and the Reredos designed by William Gwyn, also a member of the Royal Academy. This Reredos had originally " three sham teepers, " as they are described in the Churchwardens' accounts for 1777—one on the top of the pediment and the other two on either side below. Only one is now in existence, and stands on the window sill close to the altar.

This same Dr. Davey was at one time curate of Bledlow. He became vicar in 1775, and held it until his death in 1798. He was also Master of Balliol College in 1785, and held two College livings in Lincolnshire, and Great. Woolstone, Bucks at the same time as Bledlow. He is notable for having restored the use of vestments in the church, for we find repeated entries for " washing the Albe " in the churchwardens' accounts during his incumbency. He was buried in the churchyard, but by his will ordered that no monument should be set up to his memory, either within or without the church.

Whilst speaking of monuments, it would be most interesting to know for whom the two tomb recesses in the south aisle were made. They were evidently built at the same time as the large 14th century window above them was enlarged, but no record re-mains as to who was buried there. It is quite possible some remains of the effigies may have existed until the time of the last restoration, and been carted away as rubbish, as the local tradition is that Sir Gilbert Scott removed two wagon loads of stone from the church during the time he was dealing with it and deposited it upon pathways in the village.

Perhaps the two brackets in the chancel—one of limestone and the other of clunch, which seem to have been parts of pinnacles, and are now fixed to the walls on the north and south sides—may have been from the remains of some canopy tomb of the late 14th century destroyed by this over-zealous restorer.

Scott also contemplated restoring the high-pitched roofs of the nave and chancel, but funds sufficient were not forthcoming at the time. Although the high-pitched roof would have given better proportions to the tower, it is perhaps well that the proposed restoration was never carried into effect.

Externally there are one or two objects of interest. The outlines of three or four "mass clocks" are to be found on the buttress close to the now-blocked-up south door of the chancel. The base of the 15th century churchyard cross stands near the south porch. Immediately below the large 14th century window of the south aisle is a much-worn tomb slab, having a stone standing at the head with a modern inscription to Margaret Babham, foundress of the flannel charity, 1672,

On the north side one of the buttresses rests upon a large Denner Hill stone, but whether this existed in the original building or was placed there during the Scott restoration is unknown. The low side window on the north side of the chancel has its original iron bars.

It is much to be regretted that no one living in the parish is able to give any intelligent information as to the appearance or condition of the church previous to the Scott restoration in the seventies of the last century, but it is hoped that these few desultory notes may inspire some reader who remembers Bledlow Church in the days before Scott laid his hands upon it to give such information to the writer, who would be most grateful for any help in preserving the history of this noble building

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