



NOTES ON

St. Mary Church, Hemel Hempstead.

BY TREVOR DAVYS, ESQ.

We have before us a very remarkable Church, built in the best age of the Norman period, and retaining almost the whole of its ancient ground plan and elevations.

We find that at the time of the Conquest the Manor was equally divided between the Abbots of St. Albans and the Saxon Kings, and that William 1st gave the Royal moiety to his half-brother—Earl Moreton. St. Albans retained its right till the dissolution, but in 1277, Edward, Earl of Cornwall, granted his share to the Rector and Brotherhood of the College at Ashridge; the patronage of the Vicarage previously with the Crown, passing at the same time, and the College presenting John de Grantham in 1322.

* Sir Adolphus Cary was younger son of Sir Edward Cary, of Aldenham, and brother to Henry, the first Viscount Falkland, who was buried in Aldenham Church; as the Rev. K. F. Gibbs has obligingly informed me.



THE PHOTOGRAPH BY A. G. BROWN

ST. MARY'S, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, HERTS.

At the dissolution both St. Albans and Ashridge were deprived of their rights, and the patronage of the Vicarage was conferred by King Henry VIII on the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's on the nomination of the Bishop of Lincoln, in whose diocese it then was. By an Order in Council, dated May 15th, 1852, the right of nomination was transferred from the Bishop of Lincoln to the Bishop of Peterboro'; and by an exchange on June 20th, 1874, it was transferred to the Lord Chancellor, thus returning after the lapse of many years to its ancient patron the Crown. It would be most interesting if we could connect the Church as we see it, with any of its patrons or lords of its Manor. Its architectural character clearly points to the time when the Abbots of St. Albans and the Earls of Cornwall jointly held its Manors, and when the influence of the former must have been largely felt in all ecclesiastical matters. The work is that of a master of architectural art, as it had developed in the 12th century, and must be regarded as one of the finest examples remaining of the work of that period. It is dedicated to St. Mary, and consists of a nave, N. and S. aisles, N. and S. porch, N. and S. transept, central tower, surmounted by a lofty lead spire, a chancel, and a chamber on the N. side of it, and a modern vestry.

Unfortunately there are no known records of this Church, and the style of its architecture is, consequently, the only means of approximating its date. Mr. Cussan dates it "from about 1150," but looking at the architecture it appears to be more ancient. Mr. Clutterbuck goes too far back and calls it "Saxon"; 1244 is the earliest date of institution they give, when it was presented to Zuy de Palude, by the Earl of Cornwall. The nave which is 72ft. 3in. long (internally) and 19ft. wide (from face of piers), has a Norman arcade each side of six bays, with circular piers, square bases, and square indented caps, with various forms of the cushion ornament. Mr. Clutterbuck says "there are grotesque heads on these caps." but I have failed to see them. The width of the two Eastern respond bays is 8ft. 10in., each; the others 9ft. 2in., the circumference of the piers being 8ft. 8in. All the arches are semicircular, the two respond arches, East and West each side of nave, have different designs in the zigzag ornament peculiar to this style; all the others are plain moulded, a billet moulded label running

round all; on the isle sides they are quite plain. On either side of the nave, over the centre of each bay, is a round headed Norman clerestory window, with an engaged shaft in each jamb; in the South clerestory wall there is part of the arch of a perpendicular window, the rest cut away, and a new window like the others, only in different stone, inserted. It is well the perpendicular architect did not get any further, or this fine Norman clerestory would have been destroyed. The Western doorway into nave is considered to be the richest example of a Norman doorway we have in this country. There is a good engraving of it in Mr. Clutterbuck's history, which shews it before it was restored by Mr. Christian. The chief peculiarity about it is the inner and outer orders of the arch, which are of decorated character, and must have been inserted later. The caps to shafts, of which there are three in each jamb, are carved, mostly with foliage, but in the Southern jamb figures are introduced, which are evidently intended to represent Adam and Eve with the serpent. The font, which now stands in the nave, is, according to tradition, constructed by piecework. The base is considered to be the original base, but the upper part, which is square, with carved figures and chariots and horses, (having no reins) is supposed to have been brought from Italy.

Mr. Cussan describes the nave roof as "being semi-circular or waggon headed, and like those of the aisles is ceiled with plaster"; but since that was written it has been restored to its original form, now shewing a remarkable feature in a Baldachino, which appears to have covered a people's altar at the East end of nave.

The aisles are each 9ft. wide, and are lighted by "Perpendicular" windows. They both had galleries, which were removed in 1846. The four arches that support the tower are horseshoe shaped; the Western one has a projecting zigzag moulding, which gives a beautiful effect; the caps on which they rest are mostly carved with the cushion ornament.

On North and South side of the tower there is a transept. The South transept 21ft. 3in. long, and 17ft. wide, is lighted by three windows only, the Western one being the original Norman window, which internally is partly blocked up. In the South wall is a small ogee shaped pecina, with cusps.

The North transept is completely filled by the organ. In the Eastern wall is a small doorway, which probably led on to the rood loft. Turning to the chancel we are at once struck by its having a square East end, instead of an apse, which one would expect to find in a chancel of this date. The length is 36ft., width 16 ft., the roof is stone groined, with large ribs springing from square indented caps, supported by circular shafts. High up in the N. E. wall is one of the original round headed Norman windows, of which there were five. This window formerly looked out into the churchyard, but now looks into the upper floor of a Vestry, built in about the reign of Henry VIII. From this one remaining window, with its zigzag arch and cushioned caps (the shafts to which are missing) one can imagine what a stately exterior this must once have been. The East window is of "Perpendicular" style; the two in South wall are modern "Decorated," inserted instead of the perpendicular ones, which in their turn took the place of the original Norman windows; the shafts to the hood moulding in one of these windows appears to be the "Perpendicular" ones re-used. On the North Side of the chancel is a small stone groined chamber. To what use it was put I can't find out for certain, but should imagine it to have been a sacristy, and then later converted into a chapel. The arch in the South wall looks as if it had been pierced for a squint, to enable the worshippers to see the altar.

The brass to Robert Albyn and his Wife on the West wall of S. aisle is worth inspection. The part missing of the French inscription is supplied in Mr. Clutterbuck's history, who gives a complete account of the monuments in this Church, so I will not go into them.

Such is the Church as it now remains to us, in comparatively perfect preservation. It is, therefore, devoutly to be wished that, on all accounts it may be handed down to posterity not merely by the graphic and descriptive art, but by the skill and anxious care of the architect, and the well directed labour of the artisan.

NOTE.

There was to have been a separate paper on the tower and spire, but owing to pressure of business, the gentleman who was to have read the paper, could not undertake it.

A few words seem necessary to explain the illustration, which is taken from the south-east.

The Norman tower which carries the later spire, is one of the richest examples we have in this county with its fine belfry windows. The lead spire is uncommon in its plan, it being formed by one square placed diagonally on another square, thus producing eight valleys, which gives a beautiful effect.

Stevenage Church (which we visited last excursion) has a lead spire of like plan, though not such a fine example.

Godalming Church in Surrey is another example.

A list of the eight bells with their different inscriptions is given in Mr. Thomas North's book on the Hertfordshire church bells.
