

THE REPAIR OF OLD MALDEN CHURCH

BY

THOMAS F. FORD, A.R.I.B.A.

THE Church of Old Malden, dedicated to St. John Baptist, stands on a small hill overlooking a valley and stream on the west and is probably the descendant of a Church erected before the Conquest. The Saxon name "Maeldune" from which the modern Malden is derived is said to be capable of meaning "Mael" a cross and "dune" a hill, and it is possible that on this consecrated hill-site existed the chapel mentioned in the Domesday record.

In the year 1240 the manor came into the hands of Walter de Merton, Chancellor of England and founder of Merton College, Oxford, to which he eventually conveyed this manor with other lands, and the College has retained its interest in it until the present time.

In the year 1585 it is recorded that the Church was badly decayed and needed extensive repair, as would appear from the grant of a "brief" in that year for collecting money to rebuild the Church. This date is interesting, as two years previously the estate, which had previously been forcibly leased by Queen Elizabeth from Merton College, came into the hands of the Goode family, who apparently at once interested themselves in the decayed condition of the Parish Church.

The work of rebuilding, however, was not actually begun until 1610 and then largely owing to the munificence of Sir John Goode, at that time Lord of the Manor, who died in 1627, and is commemorated by a tablet on the east wall of the Chancel in which it is recorded that he caused the Tower and Nave to be rebuilt "from the foundations." No mention is made of the Chancel for reasons which have been

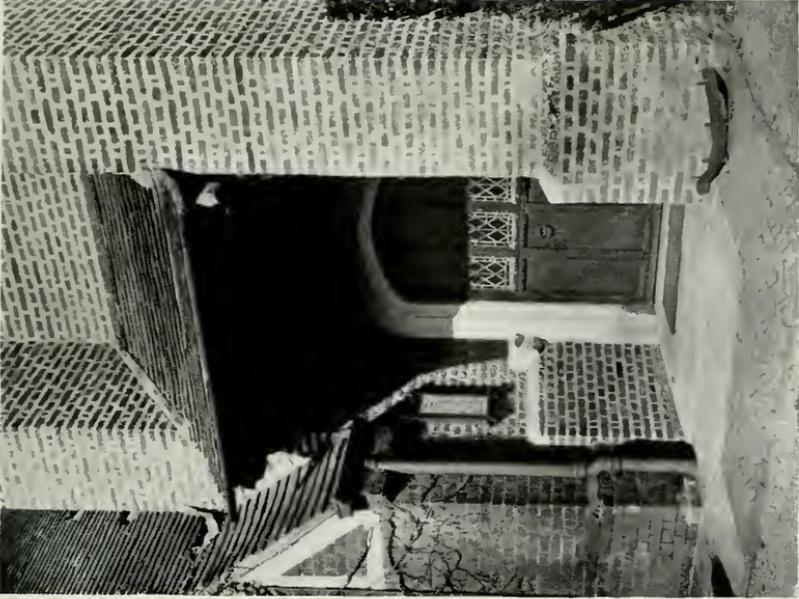
made clear by the work of repair and restoration recently completed.

The Church as rebuilt in 1610 consisted of a Chancel, Nave, and West Tower, and remained in this condition with an added South Porch until as late as 1809, at which date a print shows the building considerably overgrown but with features identifiable with those visible to-day with the exception of the porch which has since been removed. In 1863 much interior repair and renovation was carried out, and in 1867 a small leanto aisle was added on the north side with an arcade in to the Nave. This remained until 1875, when the needs of the parish led to the building of a new Nave in place of the north aisle complete with Chancel and Vestries, the Old Church thus becoming of subsidiary importance, and its Chancel being treated as a Chapel.

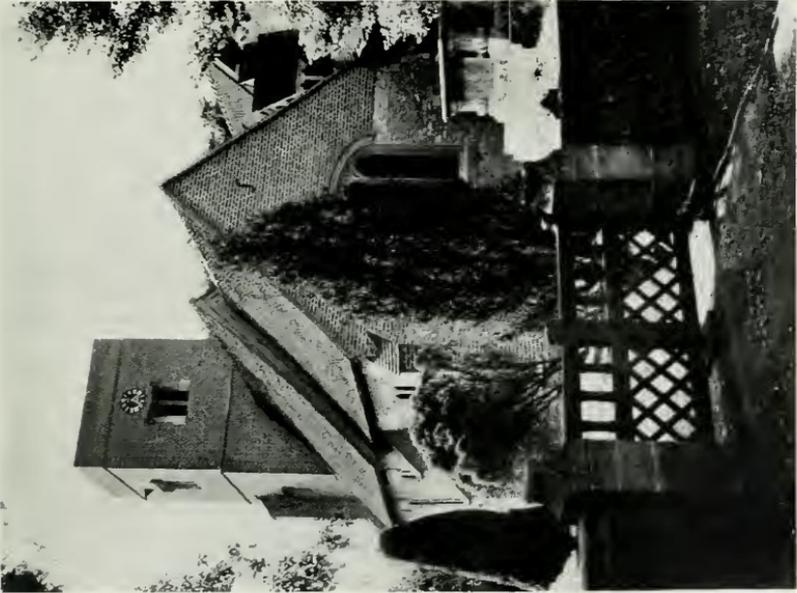
In 1926 many signs were apparent that the need for further repair was growing urgent and the necessary work was put in hand, beginning with the Tower. This, together with the Nave, was rebuilt in 1610 in a thin red brick with wide mortar joint, and consists of three stages, the walling diminishing at each stage with stone weatherings. The belfry has four two-light windows, and the clock stage three small single lights. The tiled roof is pyramidal, surrounded by a high straight parapet of brick.

The walling generally was very badly in need of repointing, and this was accordingly done in a mortar consisting of coarse sand and blue lias lime with a small proportion of Portland cement. A certain amount of replacement of decayed bricks was necessary, but as little as possible was done in this direction.

The belfry windows, which were built partly of Reigate fire stone, repaired later with a harder oolite, were again repaired, and several badly decayed stones were replaced with new Weldon stone. The central mullions had all been cut out to allow oak frames and louvres to be inserted, with the result that the heads had dropped and joints opened. The louvred frames were therefore removed, the stone heads restored to level, and new stone mullions provided in three instances, whilst in one case the actual old mullion was found in the Vicarage garden and replaced intact. All defective weather-



ENTRANCE TO TOWER, SHOWING SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DOOR.



VIEW OF CHURCH FROM THE EAST.

ings of offsets were made efficient, with pieces of rough slate bedded over the gaps.

The buttress weatherings were originally of Reigate stone, but had decayed away and were largely replaced by cement. This was removed and pieces of hard stone were bedded and dowelled to the sloping surface of the brickwork. At the same time the system of disposal of the roof-water by means of two lead spouts was restored and the existing cracked and leaking iron down-pipes removed.

The entrance to the Church is now through a door in the west wall of the tower, though the date of its construction is not clear. The six-panelled oak door itself however is of seventeenth-century date with its three upper panels now filled with glass which was inserted about 1840 to judge from its peculiar type. The door case is of Bath stone with a small two-light window of the same stone above it, the whole protected by a modern tiled pent roof. The latter being decayed was stripped and retiled, the painted glass in the doors releaded and the smooth face of the modern Bath stone dressings tooled over to improve the appearance.

CHANCEL

On the completion of the work to the Tower funds permitted the Chancel to be taken in hand. The walls here were thickly covered with Roman cement which was cracked and hollow in most places. This was removed and a most interesting piece of work was revealed, bearing out the statement in Lyson's Survey that the Chancel was only repaired and not rebuilt in 1610, and still retained its old walls of flint and stone; a condition which is now once more visible, as it was in Lyson's time, and the repair he referred to is evident in the rebuilding of the gable, in brick, above the top of the east window.

The walls were in fair condition, though patched with bricks in many places, and showed remains of old putlog holes, and the arch of the priests' door, whilst a few stones of a plinth were also visible.

The method of repair which was adopted aimed as far as possible at presenting to the elements a sound weather-resisting surface as much like the original treatment as possible. All

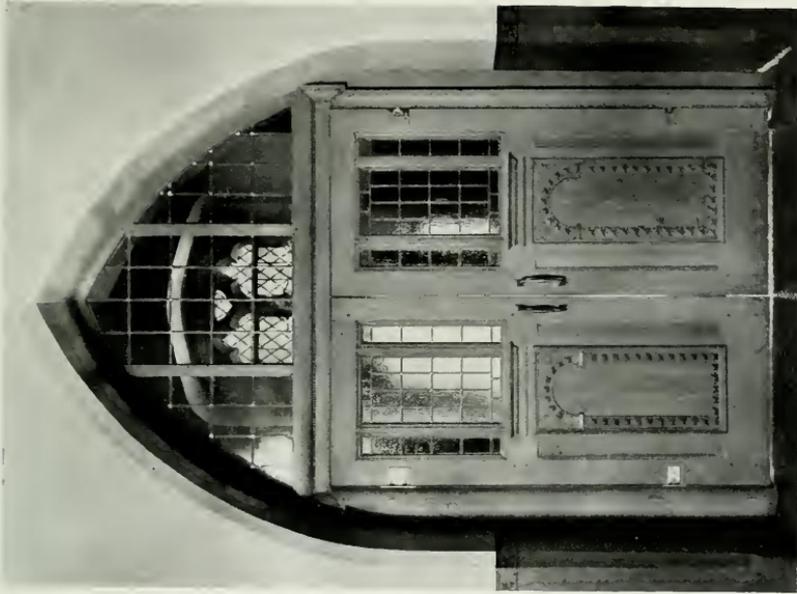
stones wherever they occurred were treated with "Silicon ester" and well pointed up, and the rubble flint work was made out to a flush face with new flints and pointed with gravelly mortar rubbed down with a brush whilst setting. The brickwork patches were left as records of the past and merely repointed and repaired. The result is a quiet, harmonious piece of work revealing interesting evidence of the progress of the centuries and the efforts made to keep the building in repair.

NAVE

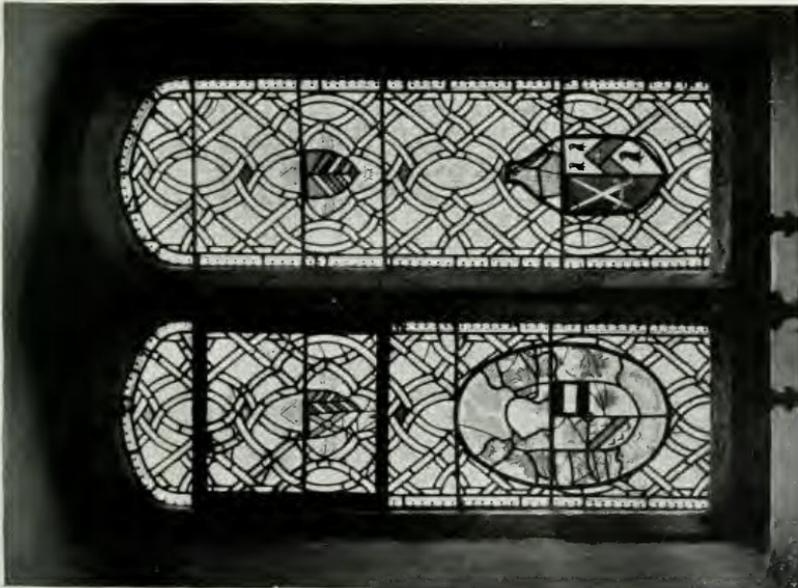
The treatment of the Chancel and the Tower only served to emphasize the condition of the Nave between them which was covered with Portland cement rendering and smothered with creeper, and the desire arose to do for this what had been so successfully done for the Chancel. The cement was first stripped off and disclosed the remains of the seventeenth-century south door case and traces of the junction of the porch walls on either side which had been destroyed after 1809. The doorway was of Reigate stone with jambs of a simple splayed type on which were found many initials and dates, the earliest being 1685. The door had been built up loosely in brick with a false plinth in front when the nave wall was rendered. This brickwork has been removed and the doorway blocked up in the form of a recess displaying as much as possible of the stonework. The old tradition that the west door into the Tower came from this position seems confirmed by the widths and shape tallying very closely.

It is interesting to note that a two-light window had been inserted over the blocked-up door, cutting down into its arch, which had thus largely been removed. This window is an insertion, as the state of the brickwork on each side also shows, and is entirely built of the harder oolite stone referred to as being found in the Tower windows. Similar stone has been largely used in the Chancel windows and in the remaining two-light window of the Nave, and in fact very little of the original Reigate stone is now visible. This points to extensive repairs subsequent to 1810 but prior to 1863, no record of which has so far been forthcoming. At whatever date it took place it was the intention at that time to render the Nave walls as the

PLATE II



NEW DOORS FROM TOWER TO NAVE, SHOWING SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PANELS IN LOWER PORTIONS.



WINDOW IN CHANCEL OF OLD CHURCH WITH SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY GLASS.

stonework of the window was kept forward about an inch from the brick face to be flush with the cement where decayed.

The plinth of Reigate stone was badly decayed under the cement and has had to be reformed, the old stones being retooled and used again as far as possible. Settlement cracks near the tower were filled in and bonded together, and the whole of the brickwork repointed. The eaves of the Nave and Chancel roofs were uncovered and the tiling made out to form a good drip, the wall plate being exposed to the air and the soffit filled in with oak boards between the rafters. All gutters and down-pipes have been removed and the roof now drips well clear of the walls on to a paving-stone slab at their base. The large brick buttresses to Nave and Chancel walls have been weathered with roofing tiles and pointed up generally after the removal of the cement.

This description is incomplete without a reference to four interesting oak panels of seventeenth-century date which once formed part of the pulpit, and which have now been incorporated into new swing-doors placed between the Tower and the Nave. The pulpit was destroyed some years ago when it was replaced by the present one of highly carved alabaster.