



The Brudenall Monument at Stoke Mandeville : An Appeal.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON
ARCHÆOLOGICAL JOURNAL."

SIR,—The Church of St. Mary, at Stoke Mandeville, near Aylesbury, is a fourteenth century edifice, with additions of a later date. This ancient and interesting Church was, not long ago, abandoned by the parish, and a new Church—of the red and white toy-brick style of architecture—was erected on a site which is certainly more convenient for the villagers, whose religious fervour was possibly not proof against the discomfort of a ten minutes' walk across the fields in order to attend divine service in the building where, for some five hundred years, their ancestors had worshipped. I have not yet been able to ascertain the date of the abandonment of the old Church. I believe it to have been some 25 years ago, but that is immaterial to my present purpose, which is to call attention to the deplorable condition of the building and (more especially, because the matter is more urgent,) of its contents.

The outer fabric of the Church appears—to one without any special knowledge—to be, as yet, fairly sound ; and the church-yard seems to be kept in good order. But the windows are broken ; ivy has crept inside the building, and it is pretty to see the swallows darting up and down among the arches of the nave. Ceilings and woodwork are, of course, crumbling and collapsing ; bits of old pews and worm-eaten doors and shutters lie tumbled about, with other ecclesiastical wreckage in various stages of decay—here a rickety wooden pulpit on its side, there a broken desk or book-rest, to which scraps of red cloth still adhere. The floor is strewn with plaster, broken glass, and loose rubble of all kinds ; and the columns of the arches are scrawled over with names and dates from which (and from still more offensive evidences) it may be gathered that the place is a common resort, especially at Bank Holiday time, of persons whose motives for visiting it are neither religious, archæological, nor artistic. Access is easy. At present the chancel door

stands open, but should it be locked a ready means of entry is provided by a broken window, the ledge of which is conveniently near the ground. The vicar of the parish (which is a very poor one) informs me that he has repeatedly, and at his own expense, attempted to protect the building from damage by man and by weather, but that he finds it impossible to do so; he also tells me that sacrilegious invaders have actually tried to disturb the tombs, of which the heraldic slabs are still decypherable among the dust and dilapidation of the floor.

In this scene of desolation stands a monument which, for reasons of piety, archæology, and art, must be rescued and preserved. Originally it was, no doubt, in a more elaborate setting, which has vanished; but the essential portion remains—the life-sized recumbent figure of a little girl, carved in white marble, in Elizabethian costume. The details of the dress, the lace ruff, the hair, &c., are treated with much delicacy; at the head of the figure are the marble effigies of two babes in swaddling-clothes; traces of colour are observable throughout. A rhymed inscription—unpolished in versification, but touching in sentiment—tells us that this is the tomb of Mary, Thomas, and “Dorathy,” children of Edmund Brudenell: “Upon Good Fryday at night my Doll departed”—and the like. This monument is mentioned in various books dealing with local antiquities, but no description that I have seen does justice to its beauty and interest. It bears no date, but so strongly resembles (in the treatment of the swaddled babes, &c.) the well-known tomb in Aylesbury Church of the wife and children of Sir Henry Lee (dated 1584) that it is probably of about the same period, and possibly by the same hand. If the Brudenell monument stood in a museum as an example of Elizabethian sculpture, it would receive ample attention. If it was in a village church in Normandy it would be the pride of the place; tourists would visit it from the neighbouring town, and a *café* close by would drive a flourishing trade.

The sculptured figures have, of course, suffered from time and barbarism; this happens even to monuments which are carefully looked after as the Lee tomb already mentioned. But, situated as it is, the Brudenell monument is exposed to far greater danger. Visiting it last week, I noted with great regret the signs of quite recent bad treatment. The fingers of the principal figure, and the nose of one of the babies, had lately been damaged and chipped; the fresh surface of the broken marble and the crumbled fragments

lying there showed this beyond doubt. On the cheek of the little girl was a hard lump of red dust—some light-hearted vandels had thrown half-a-brick (there are plenty to hand) at her. Sooner or later—it is only a question of time—her head will be broken off and sold to some collector of curiosities in London. So will a fine example of the sculptor's art be lost for ever, sacrificed by indifference and cruel neglect. Poor Edmund Brudenell and his "Doll!" I say nothing about the other reasons, obvious enough, for preserving the tomb.

What can be done? The Church itself cannot, I suppose, be saved. It seems a pity, but no one can be expected to spend money on a building which is of no use. But the Brudenell tomb *can* be preserved, and at small expense. It is nobody's duty, it would seem, to make the Church weather and vandal proof, and it would be a short-sighted policy to fasten up the doors and windows in order to preserve the monument, while taking no steps to prevent the roof falling down on the top of it. The best course would be to obtain leave to remove the statues and the slab on which they rest, together with the inscription and shield of arms, to another Church. Aylesbury would suit them better than the new Church at Stoke. If no Church will accept them, they should find a place in a museum. Who the authority competent to give leave for such removal may be (whether it is in the power of the Bishop of the diocese, and whether any representative of the Brudenell family would have to be consulted), I know not; but I cannot suppose that anyone who knew the circumstances would withhold his consent.

I venture to direct the special attention of the Bucks Archæological Society to the matter, to beg them to visit the monument for themselves, and to consider what action should be taken. I shall be happy to contribute towards defraying any expenses which such action may entail, but it should be taken soon, or it will be too late.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES STRACHEY.

Terrick House, Ellesborough,
Butler's Cross S.O., Bucks,
August 12th, 1898.