

PYRFORD CHURCH.

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PYRFORD CHURCH is a small building of flint and ironstone rubble-work, with dressings of chalk and fire-stone. It consists of a nave and chancel, and is in plan scarcely altered from the form in which it was built towards the end of the twelfth century. The side windows of the chancel (one of which has been altered externally in later times), the chancel arch, the north and south doors of the nave, and the two small windows in the west end, all belong to this date. Of these features the north door alone is ornamented, the others are simple in the extreme. The north doorway is designed with zigzags in the arch, and detached shafts in the jambs, one of which alone remains, the other having been cut away to form a stoup in later times.

The church seems to have been thoroughly restored in the fifteenth century, when two light traceried windows were inserted in the east end and the side wall of the nave, replacing, no doubt, small early windows. At the same time the present massive roofs were constructed, and also the oak pews, of which we were able, when the church was restored a few years ago, to repair and keep the greater number, although they had been sadly mutilated by the addition of high tops. The simple and beautiful north porch belongs to this date.

The canted roof of the nave seems to have been originally open to the underside of the tiling, except that the wall-plaster was continued up the first or vertical cant till it met the tiles. That this was the old arrangement was proved, as I think conclusively, by the traces of colour that

were found on the upright plastering, and also by the evidence of the panelled ceiling, of which I am now going to speak.

At the eastern part of the nave-roof exists a canted or waggon ceiling covering the three end rafters, and formed of wide feather-edged and grooved boarding nailed to the underside of the rafters, and bordered with simple battlemented mouldings. That this ceiling never extended further westwards is proved by the fact that the battlemented bordering is carried up the vertical face of the third rafter from the wall, and is returned horizontally at the lowest break or cant in the roof, where the vertical plastering finished. This ceiling seems to have formed a canopy over the rood-loft, the back of which loft was carried by the great tie-beam against the wall, and the front by a beam which has disappeared, but whose mortises still exist in the wall-plates on each side. This ceiling is painted with yellow flowers and rosettes on a red ground. I show a drawing which is as accurate a representation of this decoration as I can make; but the pattern is very hard to decipher, owing to the injury it has sustained from the lath and plaster which had been put upon it, and by which it was till lately concealed.

The pulpit is a very beautiful Jacobean work, formed of *deal* panelling, which is unusual, inlaid with other woods, and framed with carved oak styles and rails. On the front panel are the initials N. B., and the date 1628.¹ I would invite you all to examine this pulpit carefully, and to observe how admirably the design and execution are adapted in treatment to the nature of the material. Before the late restoration, the pulpit was covered with thick white paint; much of the carving and all the inlaying was discovered only when this had been removed. The base had disappeared, and a new one has therefore been supplied. Some panels also had decayed, and have been restored; but enough remains to prove the durability of good, well-seasoned deal.

¹ I am sorry I cannot tell you who N. B. was, as the registers only go back to 1666.

The only specimen of old glass that exists in the church is that which fills the quatrefoil in the head of the fifteenth-century east window. It represents the Three Persons of the Trinity, and appears to be nearly, if not quite, coeval with the tracery of the window.

Throughout the church during the restoration we found traces of painted decoration. We have only been able to save a few figures and ornaments, including two consecration crosses in the chancel and one in the nave. We found, generally, two systems of decoration, corresponding to the two dates when the church was built and restored. The later system was on what I may describe as a very loose and tender coat of whitewash, and none of this could be preserved. The removal of it exposed the earlier system of decoration, which was painted on a harder plaster, which adheres more firmly to the wall.

Mr. Waller has promised us some remarks upon these paintings, and I will leave the matter to be dealt with by his more competent hands.

In concluding my remarks upon this church, I wish to say a few words, rather in the character of a practical artist than in that of an archæologist.

The great object of these gatherings is, after all, not simply the abstract study of old buildings, but the study of them as examples for our modern work; and Pyrford Church is capable of teaching more than one very important lesson to modern architects, by showing with what very simple means the most charming effects of which architecture is capable may be produced. Humble and modest as the building is, it has always seemed to me the very model of a small English village church. Its proportions are good and well-studied, its materials are the best procurable in the neighbourhood; such little ornamental work as it possesses is refined and graceful in the extreme. Nothing can be happier than the site that has been chosen for it on the brow of a steep bank overlooking the broad meadows through which the river Wey winds, with Newark Abbey in the middle distance, and the chalk hills beyond; and nothing can be more

perfectly artistic than the way in which the building is adapted to its site from every point of view. It is to these elements of design that the church owes its charm. Of positive architectural ornament it is almost bare, and none could be added without spoiling it.

Now a work of modern architecture is generally ruined by want of repose. It is crowded with features which seem one and all struggling to catch the eye, and, of course, all is unquiet. A modern architect building a church on this scale would probably introduce four times as many architectural features as we see here without producing half the effect. The contrast of the simpler examples of ancient art, such as this church, exposes at once the inferiority of the modern mode, which recognizes only, what I may call, the positive, and not the negative elements in design, values ornament by quantity and not by quality, and looks at designs in detail rather than in general conception.

If we would but condescend to work with the same simplicity and economy in the use of architectural detail, and the same thoughtful and artistic consideration for the proprieties of place and circumstance with which the builders of Pyrford Church have worked, we should have fewer of those unhappy failures in art which discredit the age we live in.
