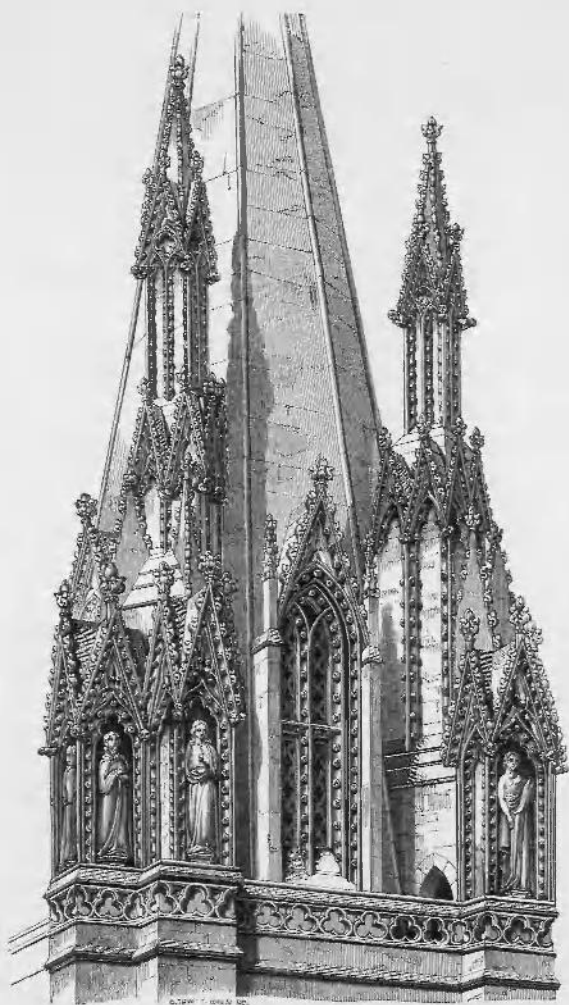


CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, OXFORD.



Pinnacles of the Tower: as restored by Mr. J. C. Buckler.

The Archaeological Journal.

JUNE, 1851.

REMARKS ON THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, OXFORD.

THE few historical notices of St. Mary's Church which are to be produced on the present occasion have no claim to the credit of originality. They are principally derived from sources of information which are universally accessible, and scarcely deserve to occupy your time, except so far as they may serve for an appropriate introduction to some observations on the fabric, for which I am indebted to the kindness of the accomplished architect¹ now employed in effecting the restoration of the Tower and Spire.

The original foundation of St. Mary's Church has been referred by an ancient and certainly not incredible tradition to the great King Alfred.

It is alleged that when, on the resuscitation of the University after its devastation by the Danes in the ninth century, that prince erected Schools of Grammar, of Arts, and of Theology within the walls of Oxford, the place of conferring degrees, and celebrating other public acts of the University, was transferred from its former situation, where St. Giles's Church now stands, to the Church of St. Mary the Virgin;² so called, as the learned President of Trinity College has observed, in contradistinction to the still earlier foundation of St. Frideswide's, which in the most ancient documents is denominated, not St. Frideswide's, but St. Mary's "prope Tamesin."³

John Rous, or Ross, a Chantry Priest of Guy's Cliff in the county of Warwick, who wrote about the middle of the

¹ J. C. Buckler, Esq.
VOL. VIII.

² Peshall, 55.

³ Memorials of Oxford, vol. iii.

fifteenth century, under the name of "Johannes Rossus," states that, "In prima dictæ Universitatis fundacione ipse nobilis Rex Aluredus infra Urbis Oxoniæ mœnia Doctores in Grammatica, Artibus et Theologia tribus locis in nomine Sanctæ Trinitatis ex suis sumptibus instituit;" and elsewhere observes that "Ecclesia Sancti Egidii, sub nomine cujusdam alterius sancti dedicata, erat locus creationis Graduatorum, sicut modo est Ecclesia Sanctæ Mariæ infra muros."⁴

In like manner, also, Brian Twyne, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, in his work published in 1608, under the title of "Antiquitatis Academiæ Oxoniensis Apologia," quotes from the Chronicles of Hyde Abbey: "Quæ Universitas Oxoniæ quondam erat extra portam Borealem ejusdem urbis, et erat principalis Ecclesia totius cleri Ecclesia Sancti Egidii extra eandem portam: modo vero est Ecclesia principalis cleri Ecclesia Sanctæ Mariæ infra eandem urbem." "Sic (he proceeds) Hydense Chronicon, quod cum Rosso tum Burlæo multo antiquius est."⁵ The Burlæus alluded to being Walter Burley, a Fellow of Merton College, in 1305, described by Twyne as "Edwardi Regis tertii præceptor longe doctissimus,"⁶ and so highly esteemed by the Parisian schoolmen as to have been honourably designated by them as "Doctor planus et perspicuus."⁷

Whatever be the truth of the popular tradition which ascribes the foundation of St. Mary's Church to Alfred, the earliest authentic recognition of its existence is found in the Domesday Survey. In that record it is stated that, "Ad terras quas tenet Albericus Comes, pertinet una Ecclesia et tres mansiones; harum duæ jacent ad Ecclesiam Sanctæ Mariæ, reddentes xxviii.^a"

Mention is frequently made of this Church in ancient writings as belonging to the king.

In a charter of the early part of the reign of King John an annual payment of xxxii^d. out of its lands was confirmed to the Church of St. Mary, the rector thereof, and his successors.

In an inquisition in the 13th of Edward I., the Church of St. Mary is stated to be in the gift of the king, and of the annual value of thirty marks.

⁴ Hist. Angl., p. 77.

⁵ Twyne, 122.

⁶ Ibid, 121.

⁷ Wood. Annals, i., 213.

At one time it appears to have been styled a Deanery ; John of Oxford, the well-known partisan of King Henry II. in his contest with Becket, and subsequently Dean of Salisbury and Bishop of Norwich, being reported to have held it under that title. It remained in the patronage of the Crown until King Edward II., on April 26, 1326, appropriated it to his new College of Oriel. At that time a Vicar was appointed with an annual stipend of 104 shillings, subsequently augmented by Henry Burwash, or de Burghersh, Bishop of Lincoln, to 110 shillings.⁸

But though the patronage of this church pertained to the king from the earliest times of which we have any account, the ancient tradition that it has also always been the principal church of the university—"principalis Ecclesia totius cleri Oxoniensis"—is supported by the authority of many ancient records. A bond for 200*l.* granted by the Chancellor and Masters of the University of Oxford, under their common seal, to the Prior and convent of St. Frideswide, as security against the exercise of jurisdiction by the former over the latter, bears date "at Oxford, in our House of Congregation, on the Feast of St. James the Apostle (25th July) in the year of our Lord one thousand two hundred and one, the third year of King John." This document Twyne supposes to have been given in the House of Congregation in or by St. Mary's Church, and adds that there are many instances of acts passed and decreed by the Masters of the University in the same church during the succeeding reign of Henry III.⁹

On the 30th December, 1274, the third year of King Edward I., Letters Patent were granted for the appointment of a Chaplain in the Church of St. Mary. It is there said, "*Cum igitur dilecti et fideles nostri Cancellarius et Universitas Villæ nostræ Oxonii (ubi suum posuerunt Trivium et Quadrivium fundamenta, ubi fons scaturit Theologicæ facultatis, ac ubi nudæ animæ filiorum hominum, venientium de longinquis, philosophiæ vestibis induuntur) in Ecclesia Beatæ Virginis, dicti loci, Capellaniam quandam deliberatione sancta nuper et provida duxerint statuendam, &c.*"¹ The expression "*philosophiæ vestibis induuntur,*" appears to allude to the investiture of Graduates with the proper habits of their several degrees, and confirms the statement quoted above

⁸ Peshall, 56.⁹ Twyne, 234, 235.¹ Rymer, ii., 43.

from John Rous, that "*Ecclesia Sanctæ Mariæ infra muros erat locus Creationis Graduatorum.*"

The termination of the controversy which took place in the fifth or sixth year of King Edward II. with the preaching friars concerning theological degrees, indicates the same conclusion. The disputations termed Vespers, and other scholastic exercises, which the friars had claimed the privilege of performing in their own houses, were then peremptorily transferred to the Church of St. Mary as the place of performing them for all academical persons. And to this it may be added that in a composition between the Chancellor, Proctors, and Masters of the University, and the Provost and Fellows of Oriel College, in the year 1409, it is rehearsed that the building called the Old Congregation House, on the north side of the chancel, belonged to the University before the appropriation of the Church to Oriel College, and even before the memory of man; "*necnon per tempus et tempora cujus contrarii memoria non existit;*" and that the Congregation of Masters had been solemnly held there from all antiquity.²

The right and interest of the University in the Church of St. Mary has also been exhibited on several occasions when they have taken upon themselves the charge of repairing the fabric. The most signal example of this kind took place in the early part of the reign of Henry VII., when, after it had been for some time in a ruinous condition, the whole edifice, except the tower and spire, a small portion eastward of the tower, and some portions of the chapel to the westward of the tower, commonly called Adam de Brome's Chapel, was entirely rebuilt, as it now stands, by means of funds supplied by themselves, or obtained by the assistance of their friends.³

In a MS. volume preserved in the University archives, endorsed, "*Registrum continens diversas Epistolas, &c., ab anno Domini, 1422, ad annum 1508,*" upwards of fifty letters are recorded, which were addressed to the king, and to various prelates and other persons, whose assistance was solicited during the prosecution of this work, from the year 1486 to the year 1490.

The series commences with the appointment of one Stephen Browne (who, if we may judge from the compliments paid him, was a person held in great esteem) to be

² Ex orig. Arch. Univ.

³ Peshall, 56.

the Proctor of the University, for the purpose of making application to those who were likely to become contributors, and of collecting their benefactions.

As this letter is not a long one, I will here introduce it as a specimen of a correspondence which at least had the merit of producing considerable influence upon those to whom it was addressed; for the appeal was answered with a liberality which provided sufficient funds for the erection of the noble nave and aisles of the present Church, the reconstruction of the Chapel of St. Mary, commonly called Adam de Brome's Chapel, and for repairing and altering the building eastward of the tower, comprising the old Congregation House and present Law School.

The nature and objects of Stephen Browne's commission are thus expressed:—

“Universis Sanctæ Matris Ecclesiæ filiis ad quos presentes literæ pervenerint, Johannes permissione divina Lincolnensis Episcopus,⁴ Universitatis Oxoniensis Cancellarius, cœtusque Regentium universus in eadem, Salutem in Omnium Salvatore. Cum nos, Cancellarius et Regentes ante dicti in nostræ Congregationis Domo nuperrime congregati, constructionem Ecclesiæ Sanctæ Mariæ, ubi antiquitus [actus nostri] solennes et jam indies per nos celebrantur, sedulo curaremus; cum que etiam nostræ facultates ad ea perficienda opera minus sufficerent; dilectum nobis in Christo Stephanum Browne nostrum procuratorem constituimus per præsentem, ad intercedendum et interpellandum nostros benefactores, petendum et recipiendum pro nobis et in nomine nostro quicquid nostri benefactores ad idem opus elargiri dignabuntur. Vobis igitur humillime supplicamus, quatenus nostræ paupertati compatiētes, ipsum ad nostrorum negotiorum declarationem admittere, nobisque in tantis negotiis succurrere dignemini intuitu caritatis. Dat. Oxon. in nostræ Congregationis Domo sub sigillo nostro Communi A°. Dni M°. CCCC^{mo} octogesimo sexto, die mensis Februarii Vicesimo Sexto.”

The letters which follow, and with the delivery of which it would appear that Stephen Browne was entrusted (for he is shortly afterwards again written to, thanked for his past services in this behalf, and requested to continue them), are addressed to a great variety of persons: such as King

⁴ John Russell, the first perpetual Chancellor of the University, was translated from the See of Rochester in 1480, and died in 1494.

Henry VII. ; John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury ; the Bishops of Ely, Winchester, Exeter, Llandaff, Hereford, Rochester, Norwich, and St. David's, and the Executors of the Bishop of Coventry ;⁵ the Deans of Lichfield and Hereford ; the Archdeacons of Hereford and St. Paul's ; the Abbots of Glastonbury, Fountains, Evesham, Gloucester, Bury, Hayles, St. Alban's, and Tewkesbury ; the Priors of Merton and Coventry ; several ecclesiastics of inferior rank to the dignitaries here enumerated, and numerous private individuals of whom nothing is recorded but their names. But the circulation of these letters probably extended far beyond those whose names are specifically mentioned, and much exceeded the number of the copies recorded in the before named Register ; for not only does it appear that the same letters were sent to several persons, whose names are set against them (such, for example, as one and the same to the Abbots of Evesham, Gloucester, and Bury ; one in like manner to the Abbots of Hayles, St. Alban's, and Tewkesbury, and one to the Vicar of Ilminster, "cum duobus aliis") ; but others have no superscription, the person being addressed as, "Honorande Rector," "Vir humanissime," or "Dilecte Confrater ;" compellations which, it may be hoped, would suit so many persons, that the letters which bear them, as well as some others which have no address either within or without, may reasonably be supposed to have been circulars, sent, according to the practice (though without the facilities) of the present day, to all those whose connection with the University was such as to furnish a presumption of their interest in the promotion of the work.

Though the nature of such letters does not admit of much variety, no two of them are precisely similar. In all, however, stress is laid upon the ancient interest of the University in St. Mary's Church, as the place where its public acts had been honourably celebrated from time immemorial.

The ruinous condition of the fabric is described in many different particulars. In one of the letters it is represented that "the leaden plates of the roof had become so thin that it would cost no small sum to replace them, and that if any one could only see it, during rain, he would be quite distressed at being utterly unable to find in it any place that would afford him shelter."⁶

⁵ Lichfield and Coventry.

⁶ No. 338.

The king is told that "without the supplies of timber, for which their thanks were due to him, and the assistance that had been derived from other quarters, no place would have long remained for the respectable celebration of any Scholastic Acts."⁷

Another correspondent is told that the Church of St. Mary is so near destruction that "it must shortly fall to the ground, if the hands of artisans be not employed in counteracting the effects of its decay;"⁸ and to another it is described to be in such a state, "*ut ruinæ potius quam statui merito dici judicarique possit.*"⁹

To John Alcock, Bishop of Ely, it is urged, that, "if Scholastic Acts are for the future to be celebrated in this church, "*non modo in aliqua ejus parte extruere, verum totam ipsam Ecclesiam (lapideos tantummodo muros excipimus) de novo ædificare necesse erit.*"¹ And in like manner the Bishop of Winchester is, in the letter addressed to him, informed, that "the church is so seriously affected by the great age of its beams, and of all other things, which no buildings can be firm or durable without, that it would often be enough to frighten any who might chance to enter it, during a storm."²

All alike complain of the deficiency of the necessary funds for effecting the desired restoration. To the king it is represented, "that the means of the petitioners were insufficient to meet charges of such magnitude, and that if they were to lay out far more than they possessed on so large an edifice, they could scarcely hope to carry even the smallest portion of it to completion."³

The archbishop is informed, that "the pecuniary means of the University were much reduced, as well from the recent erection of the New Divinity School at a very great expence, as from the paucity of distinguished persons who might replenish the academical coffers on their admission to degrees;" and it is also alleged, that "the parishioners being '*multum tenues*'—'*tam exiles et jejuni, ut ab aliis opes exigere quam ad hoc ædificium aliquas suas conferre malint,*' unless the petitioners would depart from the practice of their predecessors, they could not for the honour and credit of the University decline to undertake the burthen of rebuilding the Church."⁴

⁷ No. 352.⁸ No. 351.⁹ No. 357.¹ No. 361.² No. 362.³ No. 351.⁴ No. 360.

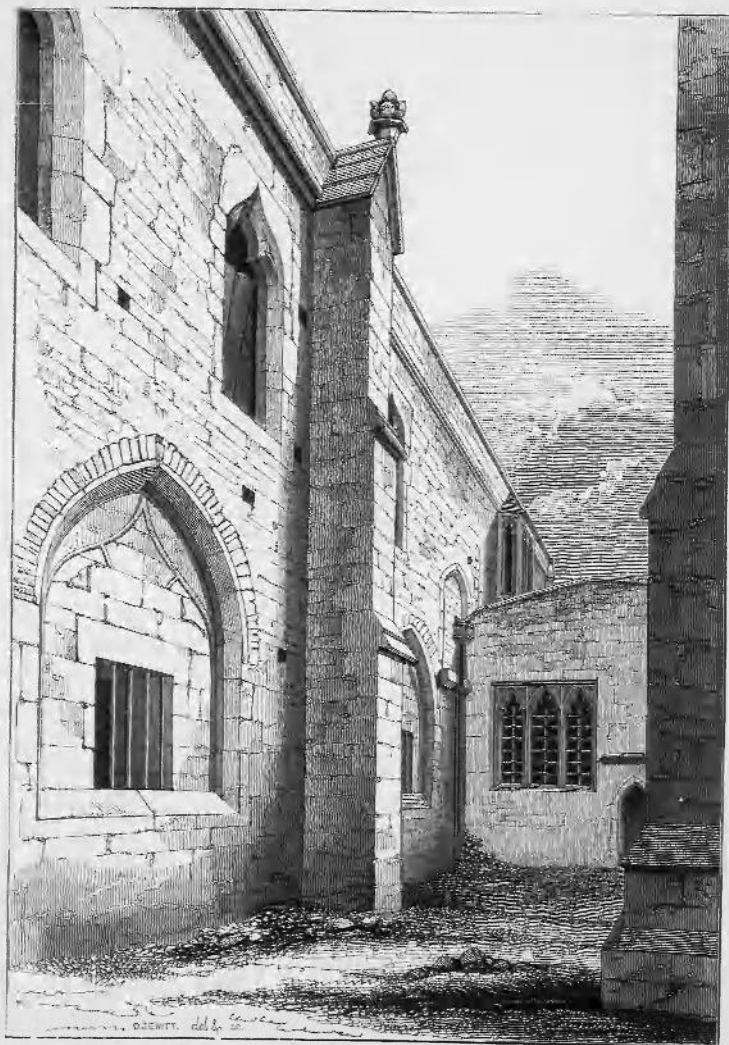
These letters, on which I fear that I have already dwelt too long, are of great interest and importance, not only because they exhibit the methods employed by our ancestors in the fifteenth century for the purpose of raising money for a public work of piety, but because they clearly illustrate the connection between the University and the Church of St. Mary, and confirm the proofs already advanced in order to show the great antiquity of that connection. Not only do they recognise the church as the place where Academical Acts were wont to be performed, but assume throughout that such acts had been there solemnised from remote antiquity, and that, in desiring to undertake the reconstruction of the ruined fabric, the University were only treading in the steps of their predecessors in all previous time.

Let it be hoped that the University may ever be animated by the same spirit of attachment to the noble monument of piety and zeal which their forefathers have bequeathed to them. The scholastic acts of the University are indeed no longer carried on within its walls; but let us trust that the University of the nineteenth century, which the providence of God has blessed with more ample means than were in the possession of the University of the fifteenth century, will be no less ready to acknowledge the obligation of bestowing as much of them as may be required (so long, at least, as we are permitted to enjoy the use of our own) in maintaining the integrity, if we cannot increase the splendour, of an edifice commended to our admiration by its rare beauty, and to our affections by a long train of deeply interesting associations.

Of the five chapels formerly existing in this Church, respectively dedicated in honour of St. Mary, St. Catherine, St. Anne, St. Thomas, and St. Nicholas, all, except the first, which stands on the north side of the Church, and is commonly known by the name of Adam de Brome's Chapel, were swept away at the rebuilding of the Church. It is, therefore, scarcely worth while to detain you with any particular account of them, and I will proceed at once to mention the ancient structure to the north of the present chancel, called the Old Congregation House.

This building appears to have been consigned to the University, though not in its present state, at a very early period. The chirograph, or bond between the University

CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, OXFORD.



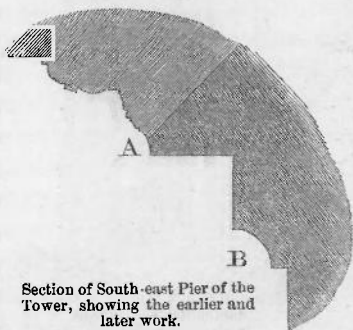
Southern side of the Old Congregation House.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, OXFORD.



Arch on the East side of the Tower,
Showing the springing of the groining of the Old Congregation House, and the mass of masonry which covers
the entrance to the Staircase.

and the Convent of St. Frideswide, executed in 1201, is supposed to have been dated from this place, under the name of "*Domus nostræ Congregationis*," and, as has been observed, it was claimed in 1409, as having belonged to the University for an indefinite period before the foundation of Oriel College, and the appropriation of the Church to that Society. It consists of two apartments, one above the other, of which the lower one is divided into four bays vaulted and groined in stone; the easternmost bay being distinguished by a transverse rib of a similar section to that of the mullions of the spire windows, and having an ogee-headed piscina in the usual position, near the east end of the south wall. The date of its erection cannot be accurately ascertained. Some peculiarities in its construction, however, indicate a strong probability that it was not completed upon the same plan as that on which it was originally designed.⁵ Its architectural features closely correspond with those of the Tower, to the east side of which it was, as it appears, originally to have been attached. The water-table on the east wall of the Tower indicates the height to which it was intended to carry up the roof. But the roof of the building, as it was completed, is of considerably greater elevation than the water-tabling, and of a different pitch. It is also observable that there are traces of the commencement of a stone staircase adjoining the north-eastern buttress of the Tower, and apparently designed to lead to the outside of the roof. This staircase not only was not finished, but its entrance was walled up, and a solid piece of masonry carried up in



Section of South-east Pier of the Tower, showing the earlier and later work.

⁵ The following note by the able architect now engaged on the restorations, Mr. J. C. Buckler, will serve to explain the curious combination of the later with the older work, as shown in the cut above:—

"I have completed the sketch I promised to forward to you. (See wood-cut next page.)

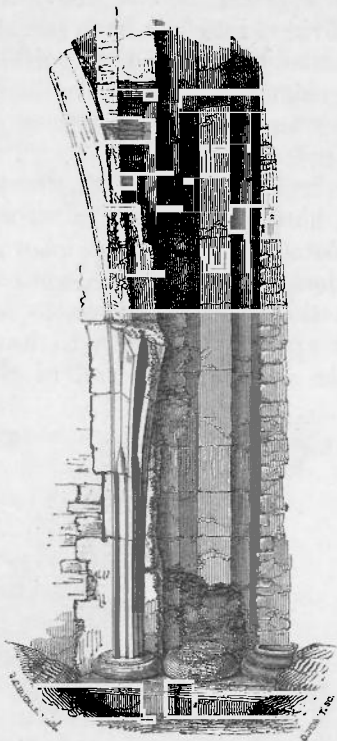
"It represents the dilapidated masonry of the south-east pier of the Tower of St. Mary's Church, and I have endeavoured to express by a tint of lighter shading the portion which, for the sake of the groining, was inserted in the somewhat

older work, with which it was so cleverly combined. You will readily observe the havoc of columns and bases, which was made in order to prepare the way for the springer of the arched and vaulted chamber.

"The hollow moulding A originally corresponded with B, but only a portion of it remains. The column in the angle between A and B was removed, but, as you will observe, the base was left, as were also other bases, one of which formed a sure foundation for the slender pillar of the groining."

the angle to the level of the capital of the piers, supporting the Tower arch. (See the accompanying illustration.)

The departure from the original plan, of which these particulars afford a very strong presumption, may be easily accounted for. About the year 1320, Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester, is related by Anthony Wood to have



South-east Pier of the Tower, showing the insertion of the vaulting rib into the older work, which is here shown of a darker colour.

begun to build (or at least to make some preparations for building) a Library over the old Congregation House in the churchyard of St. Mary's. The style of its architecture proves that the building now under consideration was reconstructed from the ground about, or not long before that time; and the preparations ascribed to Bishop Cobham may well have consisted in the adaptation of the building, completed soon after his death in 1327, for the reception of the "Solarium," or upper story, in which his books were afterwards deposited, on the conclusion of the controversy concerning the title to this edifice between the University and Oriel College in 1409. The ancient entrance to the upper story is still visible in a broad pier on the south side. The

aperture is walled up, and by what means its elevated sill was approached must be left to conjecture, the steps or platform having been destroyed when the alteration which produced the present chancel was made.

The ancient approach at the western extremity is not very easily made out; but access appears to have been gained from the rood-loft by an ante-room, built subsequently to the Church, within the court between the Congregation House and chancel, with a connecting passage on the west side of

the Turret staircase, which at this position ascends from the ground to the roof over the nave.

This building has been sometimes called the Chapel of St. Catherine, probably from the proximity of St. Catherine's altar, which is said by Wood to have been situated "at the bottom of the stairs leading from St. Mary's Church up to the said Library, and at which a priest was appointed to celebrate in every quarter of a year three masses of the Holy Ghost, and as many 'de Requie,' for the good estate of all those, living or dead, who were contributors thereto."⁶ But without attempting any more minute investigation of its history, it may be enough to state, that in the composition between the University and Oriel College above referred to, it is described as "*Domus quædam in cimiterio Ecclesiæ Beatæ Mariæ Virginis Oxoniensis, ex parte Boreali Cancelli situata Ecclesiæ supradictæ, Domus Congregationis Universitatis Oxoniensis vulgariter nuncupata, per quendam ab Universitatis quondam antiquo Scolarem, licentia prima legitima omnium quorum intersint (sic) in hac parte elemosinarie ædificata fuit et constructa per dictamque Universitatem, Cancellarium videlicet et Scholares, antequam dicta Ecclesia Beatæ Mariæ nobis et domui nostræ supradictæ fuerat appropriata, unita quomodolibet vel annexa, habita, possessa, in dispositioneque libera Universitatis ante dictæ, ante, citra, et continue in hunc diem recognitione præsentium, tam in parte inferiori quam superiori, cum omnibus suis pertinentiis, una cum libero et perpetuo ingressu et egressu ad easdem cum potestate etiam libera aliam sive novam domum ibi, si voluerint et cum voluerint seu quicumque alius, seu quicumque alii, Universitatis intuitu voluerint vel voluerint, Cancellarius videlicet et Scholares antedicti construendi,*"⁷ &c.

On the conclusion of this composition, when the upper chamber received the collections of books presented to the University by Bishop Cobham and other benefactors, the lower chamber was still employed as the House of Congregation. About the year 1480, the books were transferred to the new library, called after the name of its chief founder, Humphry, Duke of Gloucester, and the upper chamber was used by the University as another Congregation House, the two being distinguished as the Upper and the Lower House

⁶ Wood, iii., 913.

⁷ Ex orig. Arch. Univ.

of Congregation. To this use both, and especially the upper chamber, were applied, until the completion of the present House of Convocation in the year 1640. The upper apartment was, about a century afterwards, converted into a Lecture-room for the Vinerian Professor. The lower one was from that time disused and neglected; and notwithstanding its attractions as one of the most perfect and most interesting specimens of mediæval architecture in the University, it has long since served no more honourable purpose than that of an engine-house, and a receptacle for lumber.

In dismissing this part of the subject it may be proper to observe, that the members of Congregation were far too numerous to be accommodated within the narrow limits of this building. The ordinary meetings of Regents and non-Regents, which we now term Convocation, were held in the chancel of the Church; and at a Public Act, or "*Generalis Inceptio*," (whence the term "*commencement*," employed by the sister University,) the assembly was distributed, according to ancient custom, over six portions of the building; the non-Regents in the chancel; the Theologists in the Congregation House; the Decretists in St. Anne's Chapel; the Physicians in St. Catherine's; the Jurists in St. Thomas's; and the Proctors with the Regents in the Chapel of St. Mary.⁸

The rebuilding of the Church was completed in 1492; the chancel having been erected some years earlier by (or at least at the cost of) Walter Lyhert, or Hart, Provost of Oriel, and afterwards Bishop of Norwich, who died in 1472.

Of the architect of the nave and aisles I know not that we may speak with certainty. The President of Trinity believes that Sir Reginald Bray, who was High Steward of the University from 1494 to 1509, was the author of this work. It may have been so, but the only evidence advanced for it is, that he is known to have given forty marks towards the rebuilding of the Church, and that his arms with all his quarterings, impaled with those of his wife, once ornamented one of its windows. Something may also be ascribed to the well-known reputation of Sir Reginald Bray for skill in architecture; and whether the erection of the present Church be rightly referred to him or not, we may at least say that the credit of the work would detract nothing from the fame

⁸ Memorials, 3.

which he has justly acquired by the splendid memorials of his taste and skill, to be seen at Great Malvern and at Windsor.⁹

But whoever the architect of the new buildings may have been, the Church has not come down to our times in the state in which he left it. A few years after its completion in 1492, it suffered severely from a storm, the effects of which have never yet been fully repaired. All the allusions to this event that I have been able to discover, are little more than repetitions of a note by Leland, who in his *Itinerary* remarks, that "The University Church in Oxford, alias St. Mary's, was begun to be re-edified in the time of Dr. Fitz James, after Byshope of London. He procuryd much mony towards the buyldinge of it. The embatylments of it were full of Pinnacles; but in a tempestious wethar most part of them were thrown down in one night."¹

Leland began his *Itinerary* about the year 1538, and continued it for five or six years. As he does not say anything to indicate that the injuries which he describes were of recent occurrence, it may be presumed that they had taken place some time before he noted them. In the collections under the name of Holingshed, the last edition of whose *Chronicles*, during the author's life, was published in 1586, the same account is repeated almost word for word, with the additional circumstance, that the occurrence happened soon after the restoration of the edifice. "That of Oxford" he says, (meaning the University Church,) "also was repaired in the time of Edward the Fourth and Henry the Seventh, when Dr. Fitzjames, a great helper in that work, was Warden of Merton College,² but yer long after it was finished, one tempest in a night so defaced the same that it left but few Pinnacles standing about the Church and Steeple, which since that time have never been repaired."³

The time at which the reparation of these injuries was attempted, may be fixed with greater certainty. Dr. Plot, in his "*Natural History of Oxfordshire*," first published in 1677, observes that "there are many lofty spires about the country as well as city, built all of freestone, and of exquisite workmanship, such as those of Bampton, Witney, Burford,

⁹ Memorials, 3.

¹ *Itinerary*, v. viii., fo. 113 b.

² Dr. Fitzjames was Warden of Merton from 1482 to 1507.

³ Holingshed, cap. v., p. 149.

Bloxham, Spilsbury, Kidlington, &c. But that which excels all the rest is the spire of St. Mary's, in Oxford, the University Church, the battlements whereof were repaired, and thus set thick with pinnacles, as it now stands, by Dr. King, then Dean of Christ Church, and Vice Chancellor of the University, afterwards Bishop of London."⁴

Dr. King was Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1607 to 1610, and the architectural style of the pinnacles now standing on the body and chancel of the Church, as well as of those which have been recently removed from the base of the spire, corresponds so closely with the undoubted work of that period, as to leave no difficulty in the way of accepting Dr. Plot's representation.

The material employed for the construction of the pinnacles put up in the time of Dr. King, being the perishable stone found in the neighbourhood of Oxford, they have become much decayed in the course of the two centuries and a half which have elapsed since their erection. This, in addition to many serious defects in the masonry of the upper portion of the tower, having rendered extensive repairs absolutely necessary, the charge of executing the required operations has, as of old, been undertaken by the University, and it is hoped that in a few months the whole will be completed.

The general admiration which this magnificent Church commands, and the familiarity with its general character of almost all whom I have the honour to address, forbid any attempt of mine to describe them. A few remarks, however, upon its chief architectural peculiarities, which I advance with greater confidence, because they are chiefly

⁴ The following extract from Hearne's Diary is deserving of notice:—

"On Tuesday last, being the 9th of May, St. Mary's (Oxford) weather Cock fell down, as the great Bell was ringing at 9 o'clock in the morning for a Congregation. It had been loose for some time. The Cock fell upon the Church, the tail into the Churchyard. Upon this tail was fastened a piece of Lead, on which was this Inscription:—

THOMAS BOWMAN	CHURCHWARDENS
THOMAS ADAMS	
GEORGE WEST	ELECT CHURCHWARDEN
THIS STEEPLE WAS REPAIRED	
AN. DOM. 1669	

Upon the Cock was also an Inscription,

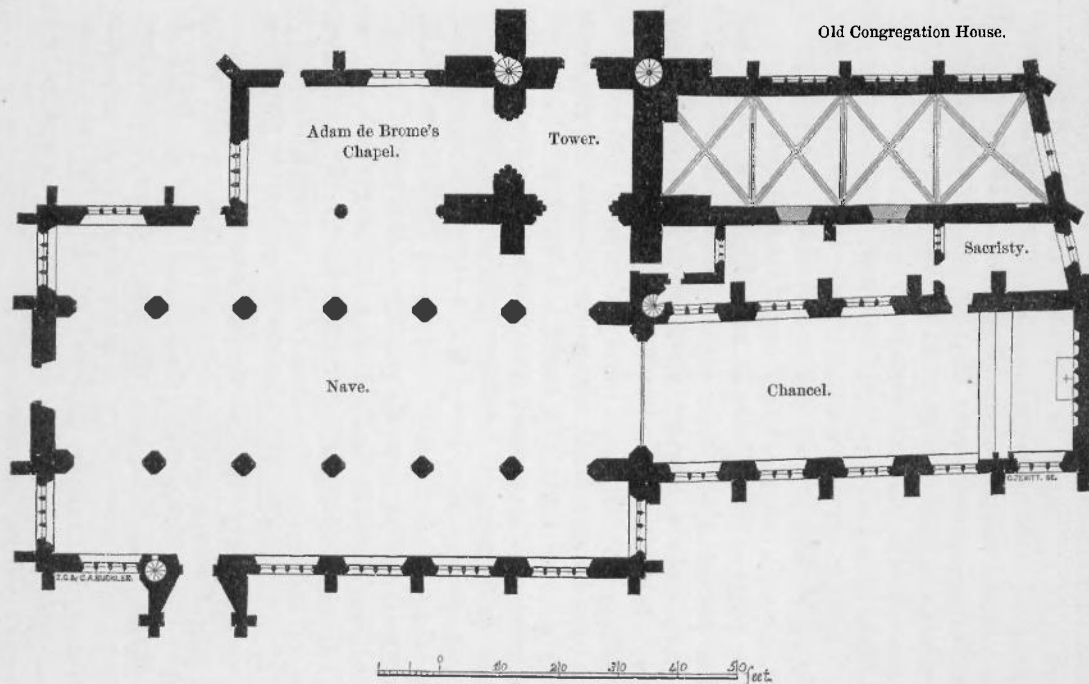
but excepting here and there a letter, defaced, yet so as perhaps with pains the traces might be explained.

"I am told the repairs of the steeple cost about 53 lbs.

"Between 20 and 30 years since, I think nearer 30 years agoe, the said Steeple was new pointed by a man who was in many parts of England on the same account. He at that time took down the Weather Cock, and 'twas mended, and afterwards he fixed it again.

"I afterwards heard, that that man was killed from some Steeple he was pointing, the rope breaking which drew him up in the Basket, or frame prepared for him.

"The oldest Church Plate for St. Marie's is of the year 1509."—*Hearne's Diary*, 1734, 142, 78, 79.



Ground Plan of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford.

due to the accurate observation and practised judgment of the gentleman whose kind assistance I have already acknowledged, will not inappropriately close this communication.

It is evident that the present Church, with its noble dimensions and symmetrical design, owes its existence to the necessity of rebuilding the ancient structure.

The progress of enlargement by partial re-edification may be traced with considerable distinctness ; the tower and spire presenting architecture of more early date than is attributable to any other portion of the edifice.

The plan of the ancient structure, which preceded the present Church, cannot now be ascertained, but the remains of large windows on the east and west sides of the Tower evidently show that this conspicuous feature was originally intended to stand clear on three out of its four sides.

On the south side of the Tower, the condition of the buttresses proves that at a certain elevation they were formed upon walls extending southward to a distance now uncertain. When the old Church was pulled down to make way for the present structure, these walls, which had belonged to a part of the interior not admissible in the new plan, were removed ; such portions only being left as were required for the basement of the massive buttresses which rise to the parapet of the Tower. The steep pitch of the gabled roof of this member is shown by the water-table descending from its apex on the sloping sill of the belfry window on each side to the outer face of the walls or buttresses.

The altitude and width of this building lead to the supposition that its length was considerable ; but as nothing is known of the figure or extent of the earlier Church, it is impossible to conjecture the manner in which this transverse portion, in union with the Tower, was connected with it.

It is doubtful whether the original design of the Tower included a north door. The present entrance on that side is of very late date, and in a debased style. It is evident, that in order to its insertion, a portion of the ancient wall was taken out and rebuilt, and that the large window above it was considerably reduced in height, and its design materially impaired by the operation.

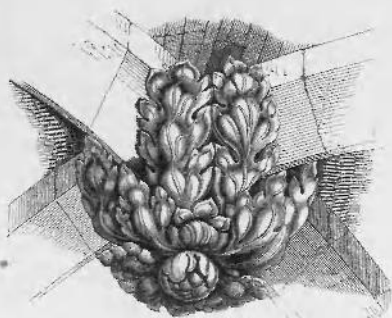
The present walls of the old Congregation House, and of the chapel westward of the Tower, both built in the reign of Edward the Second, are of the original construction ; but

the windows on their north sides were inserted when the Church was rebuilt, and pinnacles were then added to their buttresses, in order to harmonise their design with that of the rest of the building.

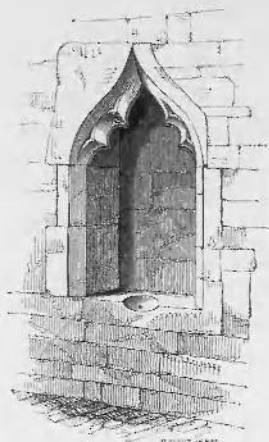
Another most remarkable alteration, for the sake of obtaining uniformity, occurs in the old Congregation House. That building (as we have seen) is groined in stone, with a room of the same extent above it; thus rendering windows in two tiers necessary. These still remain on the south side, where they owe their preservation to the obscurity of their situation; they are also indicated in the lower room on the north side, but in order to destroy this character on the exterior, windows of large dimensions, with tracery, have been inserted, which are pierced for light in the upper room, but blanked between the mullions in the lower part to the exclusion of light from the apartment forming the lower story. On the south side the windows of the lower chamber are walled up. Those of the room above have sustained scarcely any injury; but two of the number at the east end were destroyed in the fifteenth century, in order to the insertion of a bay window, which has since been rendered useless by the erection of the present sacristy.

The gradual development of a more extended plan, commenced in the earliest part of the fourteenth century, is very observable. But the intervals in carrying on the work allowed time for various changes in the styles of the architecture. Nearly two centuries elapsed from the erection of the Tower to the rebuilding of the chancel, of which the uncommon grandeur of proportion and studied simplicity have procured very general admiration, and have placed the genius which produced it in favourable comparison with that which a few years later designed and constructed the nave and aisles as they now stand. From east to west the low leaden roofs are concealed by parapets. The parapet of the chancel retains its original form; that of the clerestory of the nave was enriched with panel work, of which some traces are still visible, but was neither embattled nor pierced. The buttresses are all terminated with pinnacles; not one of which, however, is a specimen of original workmanship. Portions of several may be distinguished, and there is no difficulty in detecting those which were restored after the havoc made by the storm in the end of the fifteenth, or

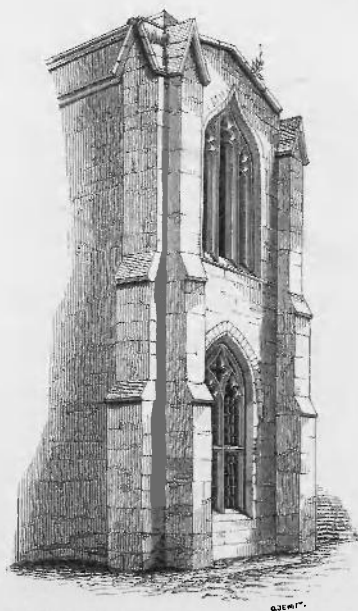
CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, OXFORD.



Boss, in the Old Congregation House.



Piscina



East End of the Old Congregation House.

(In this view the upper window has been opened, and the lower part of the lower window restored.)

beginning of the sixteenth century, and others of more modern and less laudable design.

The windows in the five bays on each side of the chancel ascend from an elevated basement to the parapet in two tiers of triple compartments, divided by a transom. Internally, the wall below the uppermost window on the north side is recessed, and decorated with panelling which terminates upon a stone bench at the height of three feet from the present floor.

The east window is in seven compartments of one height, above an uniform series of niches forming the reredos.

The sedilia, occupying their usual position in the south wall, retain enough of their ancient enrichments to show that they were of equal excellence both in design and execution. Whether the south wall contains a piscina or an ambry to the east of the sedilia, cannot be ascertained without removing the modern wooden panelling by which it is at present concealed.

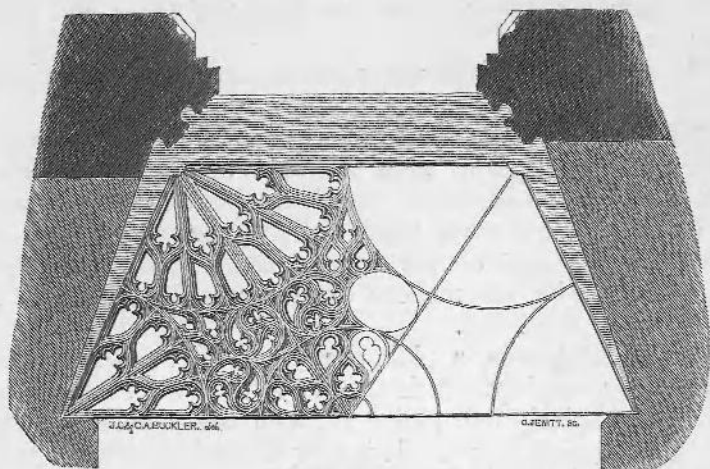
On the north side, a plain chamfered doorway communicates with a sacristy, which appears to have been introduced at a comparatively late period between the chancel and the old Congregation House. It is now disused and desecrated.⁵

The nave is of six bays, with aisles of equal width; a construction which in the west front exhibits an elevation of commanding character, and an admirable combination of appropriate architecture. But notwithstanding the admiration which has been justly bestowed upon this portion of the fabric, it must be admitted that, when compared with the chancel, it presents in the depression of the arches, in the management of the tracery in the clerestory windows, and in the treatment of some of the mouldings, some indications of that departure from the leading principles of the earlier styles which mark the progressive decline of mediæval architecture.

The porch which covers the principal entrance to the south aisle, no longer presents an exterior with any claims to admiration. It was erected in 1637, at the cost of Dr. Morgan Owen, chaplain to Archbishop Laud. The expense of its construction was 200*l.*, principally employed in producing ornaments, which do not contrast favourably with

⁵ It is understood to be the intention of the parishioners to repair and restore this structure to its ancient use.

the delicate fan groining of its roof. It cannot be positively stated that this fan groining is of the same age as the part of the Church to which it is attached, but there are indications of contrivance in its adaptation to the present walls of the porch, which serve to show that it was once a portion of an earlier structure, and has been re-applied to the position which it now occupies.



Plan of the Porch, showing the adaptation of the groining.

Notwithstanding some variations in design, there does not appear to be any great difference in point of age between the several roofs of the various parts of the Church. Those of the nave and chancel are constructed with arched timbers, and that in the room over the old Congregation House has been finished in a superior style with moulded ribs and carved bosses.

The ancient monumental remains of interest in the chancel are now limited to some slabs bearing inscriptions in Lombardic characters, the numerous gravestones having, with one exception, been entirely stripped of their brasses.

But in St. Mary's Chapel there is an altar tomb which will never be passed without notice, by those who believe it to cover the honoured remains of Adam de Brome.

R. H.

OXFORD, *June 18, 1850.*

The Central Committee would gratefully acknowledge the kind liberality of the Author of the foregoing Memoir, in presenting several of the Illustrations by which it is accompanied.