



INTERIOR OF BREADSALL CHURCH AFTER THE FIRE.

## The Destruction of the Church of All Saints, Breadsall.

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REQUENT allusions have been made in previous volumes of this *Journal* to the manor, church, and priory of Breadsall. The church was, alas! nearly destroyed on June 4th, 1914, by a dastardly act of incendiarism. It was the fifth church which had been destroyed within a twelve-month by those insensate, criminal women who termed themselves "militants," and who in their mad wickedness were warring against God. In addition to those actually destroyed, they had within the like period attempted the destruction of eighteen other churches. From an archæological and historical point of view this Derbyshire act of sacrilege is the worst of all these outrages. Such a shameless act of vandalism, worthy of the Kaiser's hordes, deserves chronicling in these pages, for it involved the obliteration of such a wealth of old ecclesiastical detail.

The church of Breadsall was certainly the most interesting and attractive of all the village churches of Derbyshire. It consisted of chancel, nave, north aisle, south porch, and west

tower and spire. There was a church here at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1087.

This Saxon church was of stone, as is proved from the fact that several of the stones in the tower are dressed in pre-Norman fashion, and have been re-used. There was also in the chancel wall part of an ancient Saxon cross, but the pattern on this stone has shelled off with the action of the fire.

In the twelfth century, judging from the dimensions and character of the south doorway, the Normans built here a church of some size and pretensions. The architect for the restoration of this sorely-injured fabric, Mr. Carøe, F.S.A., made the discovery that the eastern portion of the chancel is also in reality Norman work, with later Perpendicular insertions. A Perpendicular window on the south side has been placed under a previous Norman window, whilst the great east window has been pierced through Norman walling. About half of the north wall of the chancel is Early English of thirteenth-century date, including a lancet window. Mr. Carøe's ingenious and highly probable theory, which seems to fit this confusion of styles, now exposed, is to imagine a central Norman tower which fell and destroyed the newer works, leaving the Norman east end intact. If this was the case, the recessed Norman archway at the east end of the north aisle would have been in the north wall of a north transept, and thus all this early work would harmonise admirably.

At an advanced period of the Early English style, about 1240-50, there was a considerable reconstruction, including a particularly fine west tower, which is of exceptional interest and construction. It was originally built to carry a spire, but the tall, graceful, octagonal spire, with two tiers of small windows, is of fourteenth-century or Decorated date. The battlements and the covering of the stairway at the south-west angle are obviously fifteenth century.

After the Black Death, about 1360, three lofty square-headed windows, each having five quatrefoils in the upper

tracery, were inserted in the south wall. These windows are of a highly exceptional character, reminding us of those in the chancel at Tideswell; they had just been reglazed before the fire. One of these three three-light windows is in the chancel, though of just the same proportion and structure as the others. There is now an outer buttress marking the division between the nave and chancel, but this feature, which is not to be reproduced, was a modern addition of last century.<sup>1</sup> The removal of the old chancel arch was probably effected at the same time as the insertion of these windows. During a considerable restoration of 1877, when the mistake was made of inserting a new chancel arch, some remains of its Norman predecessor came to light.

The south porch, though repaired in a later Georgian style, is also of Decorated date, as well as the three-light window at the east end of the aisle, and a similar window adjoining it at the north wall.

The five-light east window of the chancel, and a smaller one on the south side, were good Perpendicular insertions of about the middle of the fifteenth century, together with other work in the north aisle. It was at this time, or possibly somewhat earlier, that the walls were raised and the roofs rendered nearly flat, but several corbel stones of the interior and the weather-moulding on the east front of the tower show the high pitch of the original gable.

The chancel has three sedilia of equal height, with shields in the spandrels of the arches above them; also a piscina niche with a single drain. At the west end of the nave the large font was of good but simple fifteenth-century design, possessing the exceptional feature of an embattled rim. This font was very much damaged by the fire.

The timber-work of the church, the whole of which was reduced to ashes, was of considerable value. It included a

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<sup>1</sup> There is a good water-colour drawing of the south side of the church at Breadsall Lodge, showing the buttress; it was painted by the late Mr. Vawser, about 1870.

fourteenth-century door, with good ironwork; several effective early sixteenth-century benches, with the arms of the old local families of Curzon, Dethick, Dunne, and Illingworth; a pulpit, in the construction of which old bench-ends had been incorporated; a chancel screen, containing a large number of original portions; and an altar table, which was a very fine example of late Elizabethan style, with bulbous or "melon" legs. The church also contained a most curious and elaborate reading-desk for a set of chained books, the only one of its kind. It consisted of a double-desk with folding lids, which could be fastened at the top with a single padlock. On each side were four volumes, bound in rough calf and secured with chains attached to the bindings. The following were the books: *Jewel's Works*, 1619; *Burnet's Reformation*, 2 vols., 1679 and 1681; *Cave's Fathers of the Church*, 1633; *Cave's Antiquitates Apostolicæ*, 1634; *Cave's Primitive Fathers*, 1637; *A Collection of Cases to Recover Dissenters*, 1694; and *Josephus's Works*, 1702. There were also two old chairs, which came from the priory, and were given to the church by Sir Francis Darwin.

As to monuments, various old fragments discovered during the considerable restoration by the late Mr. Robinson have disappeared, whilst several tablets in the chancel have been hopelessly damaged. The tablets which were moved under the tower in 1876-7, were eight in number. Of these seven were quite destroyed or rendered illegible. The eighth, to the celebrated Doctor Erasmus Darwin, 1781-1802, "physician, poet, and philosopher," who held the priory estate, is smoke-stained, cracked, and otherwise damaged. The five bells crashed down to the bottom of the tower, and were all cracked or broken; they had interesting inscriptions, one of 1725, two of 1728, and two of 1786.

The valuable modern organ was wrecked, and the memorial oak chancel stalls were destroyed.

Amid all this grievous desolation, a beautiful and remark-

able piece of mediæval sculpture, 2 ft. 5 in. high by 1 ft. 5 in. broad, was apparently preserved undamaged. It represented a Pieta, or the Blessed Virgin with the dead Christ on her knees.<sup>1</sup> It was found under the flooring of the west end of the nave in 1877, and I had the honour of being the first non-parishioner to see it, and helped to raise it from its place of concealment. This figure probably stood at the east end of the north aisle, which served as the Lady chapel, under the charge of a special chantry priest. Immediately after the fire, this Pieta, which had been placed on a bracket near to its original position, was very properly boarded up for better preservation; but, alas! within a few days it fell forward on its face, carrying away the boarding. It was then found that the stone bracket on which it was supported had been cracked by the fire in a part which was concealed by the figure. At first sight it seemed impossible to restore it, but Mr. Carøe wisely put the remains into the hands of Mr. McCarthy, a very competent sculptor in such things, and he has made a most admirable and most wonderful restoration of it, chiefly through the use of powdered white marble. It turns out that this lovely piece of sculpture is of Italian marble, and not of the far more readily worked Chellaston alabaster, as had hitherto been supposed.

This figure is now affixed to the wall of the temporary church close at hand, reverently fitted up in the chief room of the old Over-Hall of Breadsall Manor, which was for several centuries the seat of the Dethick family. There it will remain until the restoration of the parish church has been accomplished.

All that the fire left of this ancient church, which was in good order and a joy to behold, were the bare walls and the mere shell of the tower and spire, all in a much damaged condition and threatening to collapse. The estimated cost of rebuilding and refitting the church is £11,000. Of this sum £6,280 has been received from the Fire Insurance Company.

<sup>1</sup> See Illustration in Dr. Cox's *Derbyshire Churches*, vol. iii., p. 522.

An appeal for at least £4,000 is now (December, 1914) being made. Colonel Woodforde, of Breadsall Lodge, is chairman of the rebuilding committee.