

## Kirk Langley Church.\*

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### TWO "RESTORATIONS."

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By REV. R. L. FARMER.

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THE "Church in the Long Meadow," so conveniently situated opposite the old Rectory house, and just sufficiently retired in the lane off the main-road, is one of those dignified, soundly-built structures for which we are indebted to the skill and thoroughness of early builders.

Of the original foundation there are practically no traces. The whole fabric seems to have been rebuilt in the decorated period at the beginning of the 14th century; the walls of the nave being raised in the 15th century to provide for the clerestory and flattened roof, as was so frequently the case with other churches.

Standing at the west end, the marked southward inclination of the chancel is clearly noticeable. The late Dr. Cox in his book entitled *The English Parish Church*, remarks:—"It may be well to point out that another popular notion that the builders deliberately planned a deviation of the chancel to one side, in order to denote the bend of Our Lord's head upon the Cross, is also a mistaken notion, for where such deviations occur they were the work of men building a century or so apart from each other, and arise from the methods used in the construction of churches."

Now, without resting upon the supposition that, "as Christ upon the Cross His Head inclined," so the builders

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\* Read at the Archaeol. Soc. Excursion, 16th Oct., 1918.

planned the chancel to lean to one side, one would have liked a somewhat clearer elucidation from so eminent an authority as Dr. Cox, of the reason for this so frequent occurrence. Even though a century or so lay between the times of building, this hardly accounts for being so much out of line in construction.

One would like also to know whether the inclination was always towards the south? As far as my own recollection serves I do not bear in mind a reverse case.

I may call your attention to the building up of what was once the main entrance on the north side, and also on the same side, seen from the exterior, an early priest's doorway long blocked up.

Over the window at the east end of the south aisle will be seen, outside, the arched moulding of an earlier widow.

But it has not been my intention to dwell on the architectural features of the church, my purpose is rather to speak of two separate periods of reconstruction with regard to the interior arrangement and appointments of the church.

First, I beg leave to allude to two most worthy men, who, a hundred years ago, were parson and squire of Kirk Langley.

In 1820, the Rev. Henry James Feilden, M.A., was presented to this living by Godfrey Meynell of Meynell Langley.

The manor of Langley had in very early days been divided into two moities, one part distinguished as Kirk Langley, because within it stood the church, and the other part as Meynell Langley from the holder's name. The one church served the whole manor.

The Meynells dated back to the times of the conquest. I presume they hailed from the neighbourhood of Mesnil in France of which we have heard so much during the war. During the latter part of the Great War, it has

been our privilege at Shardlow Rectory to shelter and nurse a wounded French-Belgian soldier named Ferdinand Mainil who helped to dig the first trench against the Germans.

The present squire of Langley's two officer-sons, have played their gallant part against the same common enemy.

The Meynells have throughout their history shown a deep attachment to their country, and to their ancestral home. Four times, if not five, their Hall and property have passed, generally by marriage of an heiress, into other families; but it has as many times, after an interval been regained or purchased by a direct descendant bearing the name of Meynell.

The Godfrey who last re-linked together the whole estate, was the one, I believe, who presented the living to Mr. Feilden in 1820. Now this Godfrey Meynell, who was High Sheriff in 1811 was a man of cultured tastes, and an antiquarian whose researches have been drawn upon by many writers. Dr. Cox frequently acknowledges his indebtedness to him for information. His manuscripts and sketches are treasured at Meynell Langley.

Now let us turn from the squire to the parson instituted in 1820. He remained rector until 1885, i.e. 65 years. It was my privilege to serve as curate during the last six years of his ministry.

The main thought I bear of him is his deep spirituality. He was an ideal pastor, commencing each day's work by taking the scripture hour in the Day School, even up to 86 years of age. How well I remember that morning when—his written sermon on "they shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels," lying on the table before him, he sank unconscious in his chair, uttering but two words "more sanctification."

Mr. Feilden came from a well-known and honoured

Lancashire family. One saw in him at once, a clergyman and a gentleman, with clean-cut features, and remarkable kindness of expression. Out of doors, he was always dressed in black, with a swallow-tailed coat, high collar and broad white neckcloth, a silk hat, a fob with a gold seal, and generally a long cane with a silk tassel.

He married a Miss Meynell, aunt to the present squire, whom also, when she was an infant, he baptized.

In his early days he was an expert archer, and took part in many of the local tournaments at that time when archery was revived in the country houses. But his two favourite pastimes were, water-colour landscape painting and veneering of wood, in both of which he was unusually skilled.

Here then you have a very remarkable fact. Two men—the one the patron, the other the parson; the one a thorough antiquarian, and the other an artist—both men of culture and refinement, agreeing and combining in such alterations in their Parish Church, which they loved, as we to-day hold as acts of vandalism, and look back upon with sighs of regret.

There are two facts in connection with this which we have to bear in mind. The first is the very low ebb to which ecclesiastical architecture had sunk at the beginning of the 19th century. These two good and well-meaning men lacked competent advisors. There were none, or at least none sufficiently prominent to attract attention.

In the second place we must acknowledge the strange strength and fascination of what is termed "fashion." It seems wonderful that even ugliness can over-ride the sense of beauty—and that which is unseemly can overbear all that is fitting and appropriate, when the gust of a particular fashion is sweeping over the popular mind. How else can we account for the casting out of carved oak benches, and the other changes wrought in this church in 1839?

Let us try to realise the church as it remained 50 years afterwards, and as I remember it in 1890.

First, the great square wooden pulpit, with square reading-desk below it, stood at the west end not far from the tower.

The nave was filled with commonplace high deal pews with doors, all facing west; so that the whole of the congregation sat with their backs to the altar.

It was the fashion to have a gallery. The church does not lend itself kindly to such an erection, for the arcades are somewhat low. However, of course there must be a gallery, and so one was thrust in above the south aisle for the length of the two western bays.

Near the reading desk, on the right, was a smallish pew on which was inscribed in plain, black Roman letters "CHURCHING PEW." Those were healthy days when motherhood was not a matter of which to be embarrassed. The presence of a lady, and the usually elderly attendant in this pew, was deemed a sufficient indication to the clergyman to read the appropriate service, and he was, in so doing, generally correct.

The whole of the woodwork was of course painted, with that usual comb and finger cloth manipulation so delightful to the house-decorator, which they call "oak-graining."

The next thing of importance which I recollect was the heating apparatus. This consisted of lengths of stove-piping, lolling like great branches in mid-air, striking their roots here and there into stoves upon the ground. One branch found an outlet through the east window in the north aisle, another stove-pipe ran in a slanting direction parallel with the gallery.

There was no elevation of the chancel floor, except the one kneeling-step at the altar-rail.

There was a small ungainly vestry, now removed, on the south side of the chancel, to make an entrance into

which, a doorway was cut through the first sedilia. It must be remembered that the present chancel floor has been raised. At that time it was sufficiently low to give length to the doorway.

The altar then in use, was the one now in the north chapel. Underneath it were the red square tiles now preserved in the south chapel, some bearing a crown over the letters STE, and others MICH, = for Saint Michael is the dedication of the church.

The altar was covered with a crimson cloth, quite similar to the one which has been in use in my present church at Shardlow for 80 years. When I was a boy, nearly all churches, as far as I recollect had altars draped in crimson velvet. I suppose it was a kind of survival of the old Sarum Red.

The chancel roof was in those days, as it is now, high-pitched externally. But in the interior there were two exposed beams, and a low plaster ceiling.

The central window at the east end, now containing coloured glass so beautifully descriptive of the TE DEUM, then held plain glass with the exception of those admirably painted Meynell coats of arms, dated 1654, now removed to the Twyford Quire.

However, having thus pictured to you the church as it was a few years back, you will realise the efficient and careful supervision exercised by the recent rector, the Rev. Francis W. Meynell, in the true restoration carried out during his incumbency, 1885-97.

He has in a large measure, brought the character of the church back to the design of the original builders, and indeed, I can hardly imagine the condition of the church ever to have been more perfect than it is to-day.

There is no need for me to touch upon the monuments within the church:—the alabaster Table-tomb to Henry Pole in the Twyford Choir, the inscription and the quarterings upon which are given in Dr. Cox's book on

*Derbyshire Churches*; nor the incised tomb-stone; nor yet the series of Meynell tablets.

I may perhaps just refer to two of the past clergy who have ministered within these walls:—

(1)—In the Elizabethan List of Clergy (1602), mention is made of Thomas White, Master of Arts, “no preacher.” He can hardly have been considered illiterate, having taken his degree. Was it his theological standpoint, or his political opinions which condemned him only to read the authorised Homilies?

(2)—During the Commonwealth, one, Robert Seddon, a Presbyterian, of Lancashire birth held the living. In the Registers he entered the births of children, but not their baptism. His nephew Timothy Seddon was one of the first 18 legally qualified Nonconformist preachers in Derbyshire. He was licenced at the Sessions in 1689 in accordance with the Toleration Act.

The rector, the Rev. W. Ramsay Sparks has kindly promised to show to you the Kniveton Plate belonging to the church. There were 7 such sets, given at a cost of £50 each, to the several parishes of Ashbourne, Bradley, Brailsford, Mugginton, Kniveton, Osmaston and Kirk Langley, by Lady Frances Kniveton, second wife of Sir Gilbert Kniveton of Bradley, one of the co-heirs of Sir Robert Dudley. Charles I granted a patent allowing her the title of Duchess Dudley. At the Restoration, Charles II confirmed the grant.

We congratulate the rector of Kirk Langley on the safe keeping of this plate. The sets at Ashbourne and Brailsford have long disappeared.