

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, FINCHLEY.

BY ERNEST H. RANN.

FOR a considerable number of years the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society has kept watch on the various proposals which have been made for the alteration and reconstruction of the parish church of St. Mary the Virgin at Finchley.

This ancient church, which in all probability was originally a chapelry built of timber in the forest of Finchley during the period of the Saxon Heptarchy, was re-erected in the early part of the twelfth century, but no vestige of it remains except a few Norman zig-zags and other small carved ornaments, which are to be found built into the wall at the west end of the church under the tower.

The Norman church gave place in the fifteenth century to a Gothic building with a low embattled tower, and this in 1872-73 was "restored" by Mr. Billing. On removing the east wall of the church he found that at one time it had been continued further eastward, so that originally the chancel was much larger. He also discovered, beneath a coating of whitewash, a life-size figure of St. George and the Dragon; and under the flooring a monumental brass of fifteenth-century date.

In the work of "restoration," on this occasion, the east end and south wall of the chancel were destroyed, the chancel being extended eastward and a new south wall built so as to open into the south aisle, which had then been erected, the old south wall of the church being pulled down for that purpose.

For many years the church had admittedly been below the requirements of the parish in the matter of accommodation, and the Society, while acknowledging



BOSSSES FROM ST. MARY'S CHURCH, FINCHLEY.

the need of enlargement to suit the use and convenience of the worshippers, has therefore confined its activities to an attempt to ensure that, in any alteration of the church structure, proper regard should be paid to the preservation of those ancient parts which various rebuilders and "restorers" had suffered to remain.

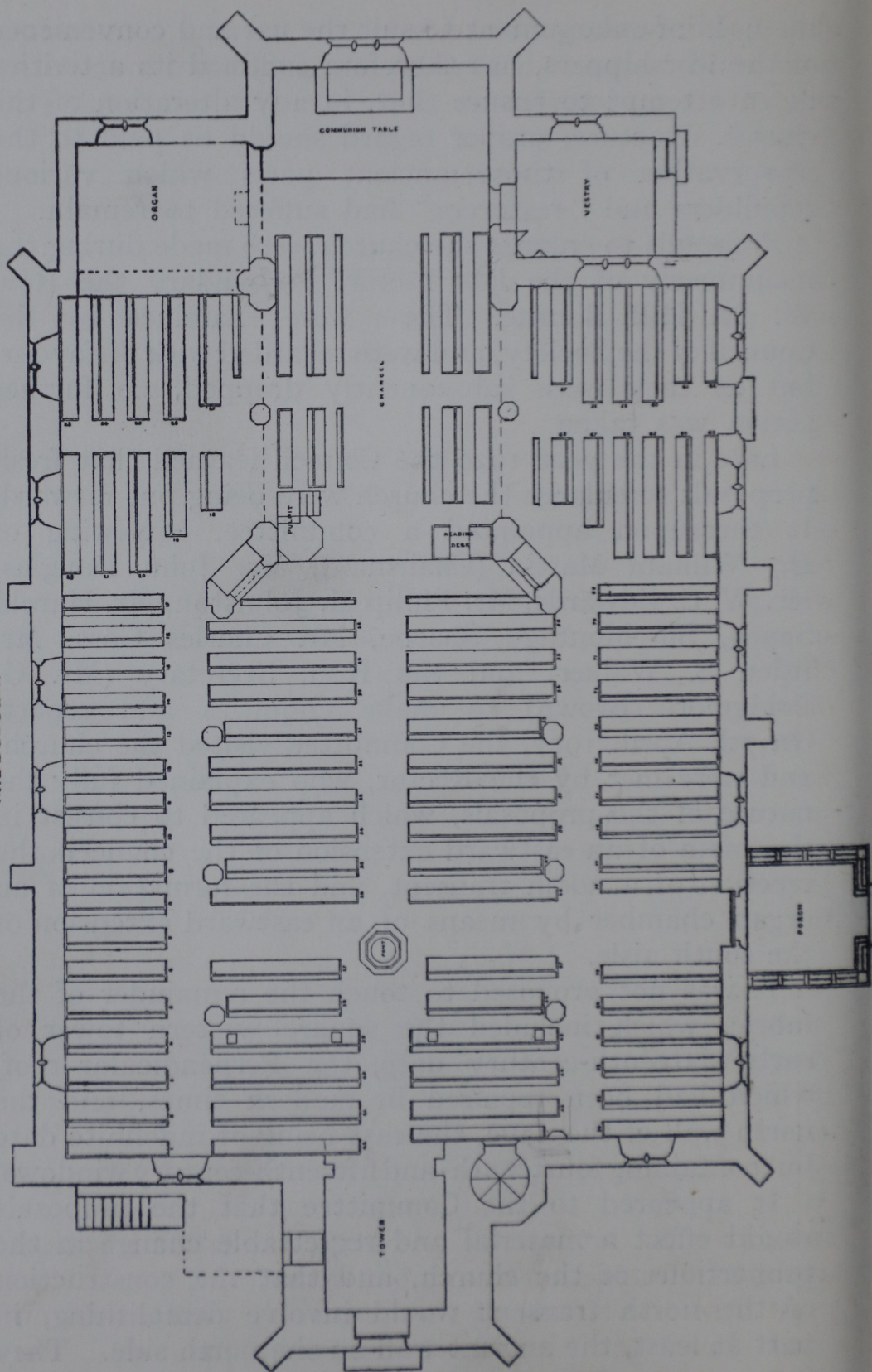
Proposals to enlarge the church were made during the incumbency of the late rector, Prebendary the Rev. W. St. Hill Bourne. These were examined by the Council of the Society, and were regarded with disfavour, but as they were subsequently dropped, no further action was taken

Late in the year 1926 the Council learned that fresh proposals to enlarge the church were being put forward. It thereupon appointed a committee, consisting of Dr. William Martin (Chairman), Mr. John Douglas, Mr. W. C. Edwards, Mr. Philip M. Johnston, Mr. Harold Sands, Sir Montagu Sharpe, Mr. Charles Goss, Mr. Allen S. Walker, and the Hon. Secretary (Mr. G. Bridgmore Brown) to make enquiries and report. On 7th April, 1927, the Committee visited the church, and were met by the Rector, who explained fully the nature of the proposals, which appeared to consist in the main of an eastward extension of the chancel, the erection of a north transept, and the formation of an organ chamber by means of an eastward extension of the south aisle.

It was not proposed to touch the remainder of the fabric, which included the square western tower of early sixteenth-century date, the Perpendicular roof, which had been repaired in modern times, and the north wall of the nave, the east being of indefinite date but containing fourteenth- and fifteenth-century windows.

It appeared to the Committee that the proposals would effect a material and regrettable change in the proportions of the church, and that the construction of the north transept would involve demolishing, in part at least, the ancient wall on the north side. They

PLAN OF
ST. MARY'S, PARISH CHURCH, FINCHLEY,
MIDDLESEX.



also took into account the fact that extra accommodation could be provided by an extension on the south side, where no interference with ancient work would be necessary.

On the recommendation of the Committee, the Council of the Society wrote to the Rector pointing out that, in their view, certain parts of the church, including in particular the north wall, were worthy of preservation as ancient features, and asking that any extension might be made on the south side.

A general meeting of the Society was held at the church on 16th May, 1927, when the proposals for enlargement were explained in detail. At the conclusion of the meeting a resolution was passed expressing the opinion that the alterations and additions "would be regrettable in view of the fact that they would interfere with the mediæval proportions of the building and its simple character and appearance as a type of village church, a type of village church which is gradually disappearing from Middlesex."

On 9th June, 1928, Mr. Francis Henry Launcelot Errington, Chancellor of the Diocese of London, held a sitting of the Consistory Court in St. Paul's Cathedral to hear a petition by the Rector, the Rev. Stewart Frederic Lewis Bernays, for a faculty for carrying out the proposed works for the enlargement of the church.

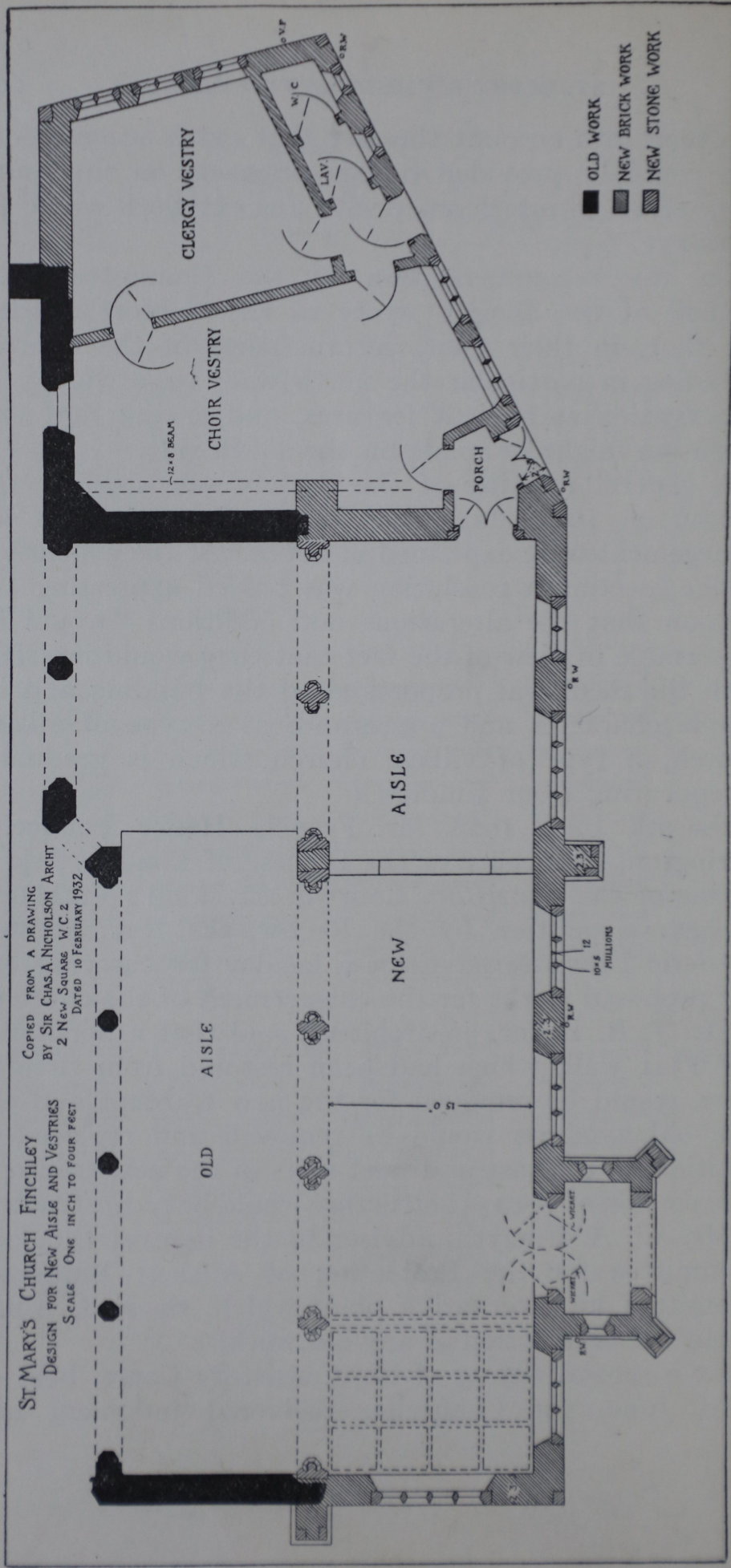
Mr. J. B. Baker, an architect, said that a portion of the 1541 wall, which had been restored from time to time, would be removed for the new transept and the two old windows would be removed and replaced in position on the east and west sides of the new transept. The portion of the 1541 structure would be reconstructed.

Mr. W. A. Forsyth, adviser to the Central Diocesan Committee for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, submitted an alternative plan, which, he said, would avoid the destruction of any old work.

At a second sitting of the Consistory Court, held on 23rd June, the Chancellor delivered judgment and

ST MARY'S CHURCH FINCHLEY
 Design for New Aisle and Vestries
 Scale One inch to four feet

Copied from a drawing
 by Sir Chas. A. Nicholson Archt
 2 New Square W.C. 2
 Dated 10 February 1932



- OLD WORK
- NEW BRICK WORK
- NEW STONE WORK

refused to grant the faculty for the enlargement of the church.¹ He pointed out that the plans for the alterations had not in their final stage secured the approval of the Diocesan Advisory Committee, who stated that they were unable to sanction any scheme which would involve the destruction of any part of the church; and they suggested further consultation with Mr. Forsyth, whose plan, if carried out, would not interfere with any old work. The onus, said the Chancellor, was on the petitioners to prove that the needs of the parish demanded the proposed enlargement of the Church, and further that the suggested alterations were the best possible. They had, the Chancellor thought, proved the desirability but not the necessity of the enlargement; the occasional overcrowding and inconvenience were not enough to justify their scheme. He was not convinced that it was beyond the wit of a present-day architect to increase the seating accommodation without interfering with the older parts of the church or its general scheme. In refusing the application he did so without prejudice to any application based on increasing needs or on plans which would provide for additional space without infringing on the older work. Accordingly he refused to grant the faculty for the enlargement of the church.

The matter remained quiescent for a period of four years, when another petition by the Rector and churchwardens was brought forward. There was no opposition on this occasion.

Mr. Errington held a Consistory Court in St. Paul's Cathedral on Saturday, 6th February, 1932, and at the end of the hearing he granted a faculty authorising the enlargement of the church.²

The petition on this occasion recalled that since the previous petition had been dismissed (on 23rd June, 1928) a large number of new houses had been built in the parish, raising the population to approximately 8000. The accommodation of the church consisted of

525 permanent seats and 30 drop seats, and the attendance at morning and evening services caused the building to be uncomfortably crowded.

The works for which the faculty was asked were the building of new and enlarged vestries on the south side of the church; the erection of a new south aisle on the side of the existing south aisle, and the repair of the roof of the chancel, the tower, and the fabric of the church generally. The proposed alterations, it was stated, would afford accommodation for an additional 130 worshippers. The enlargement, which would be built on part of the consecrated churchyard, would involve the removal of certain memorial windows, tablets, and brasses, which would be re-erected in other suitable positions in the enlarged building. It would also involve the disturbance of certain vaults, headstones, and footstones, and the headstones and footstones would be arranged in new positions in the churchyard, which it was stated had been closed for burials since 1860. The work would cost approximately £5000.

The Chancellor, in granting the faculty, said that the plans providing for the further accommodation needed would not interfere with the older work or impair the general appearance of the church. They had been approved by the Diocesan Advisory Committee, which had not been the case with the older scheme.

The faculty asked for was accordingly granted.

A feature of the extension of the church are 26 oak bosses, coloured and gilded, affixed to the roof, which represent those associated with the new work and the troublous times in which it was carried out. One boss designates the Rector, another Mr. Gandhi (India), while others are the rose (England) and the bear (Russia).

The extension was dedicated by the Bishop of London on Sunday, 20th November 1932.

NOTES.

1. A report of the judgment is given in *The Times* of 25th June, 1928.
2. A report of the judgment is given in *The Times* of 8th February, 1932.