

UPTON OLD CHURCH.

Upton Old Church is an edifice peculiarly interesting, not only from its antiquity, but from its containing the mortal remains of one of the most celebrated astronomers of modern times, and also from its being considered by many the scene of "An Elegy written in a Country Churchyard."

Not many years ago this venerable House of God was left in desolation — presenting a sad spectacle of neglect



FIGURE FOUND IN STONED OLD CHURCH, AD 101

and ruin, for the great increase of population in the parish made it necessary that some larger and more commodious building should be erected for the assembly of God's worshippers. Accordingly, the present Church, abutting on the Windsor Road, was built some sixteen or twenty years ago, and the privileges and status of a Parish Church conferred on it, so that the time-honoured weatherworn temple (where our forefathers for many a century had worshipped God) was left to the owls and bats. Still it grieved many to see its beauty laid low — God's servants "thought upon her stones, and it pitied them to see her in the dust." After many desultory attempts to rescue it from destruction, in the years 1850-51 vigorous efforts were made to accomplish its complete restoration, and at the same time to enlarge it without injuring its architectural beauty, so as to afford sufficient Church accommodation for the still rapidly increasing population of the parish. What lover of antiquity can but rejoice at its timely restoration, for it had strong claims upon the Archaeological as well as the Christian world, being in itself one of the most perfect specimens of that style of Ecclesiastical Architecture which preceded the Early English? There are, indeed, abundant data from which to fix the period when the Church was first erected.

The outer wall, as seen from the public road, shows that the nave was originally about two-thirds of its present length. There are the traces of a doorway and a small window in that part of the wall exactly at the middle of the length of the primitive structure. The outer walls of the nave, tower, and chancel, it would be as well to state, are of flint, interspersed with conglomerate, having a venerable and pleasing appearance. When the nave was lengthened, the doorway was removed to its present position, and a square headed debased Perpendicular window was placed over it. This unsightly innovation has been blocked up, and four Circular-headed windows, and one large window, filled Avith stained glass, occupy the north side of the nave. At the west end is a window of the Early Perpendicular period, of very good design, which has also been restored. It would appear, from the numerous additions made to the fabric at different times, that the Uptonians

of 600, 400, and 300 years ago were as busy with their Church building as their descendants of the present day have been. The following would be about the dates which we should ascribe to the building:— The Church tower and shorter nave were built about the year 1050; then the nave was lengthened and the present roof put on about the year 1250. It then remained without disturbance till about 1400, when the painted windows at the side, and the larger window at the west end, were put up; and at some time, in addition to this, the tower was heightened some nineteen feet, perhaps to receive a greater number of bells. But when the "ivy-mantled tower" came to be examined by the architect, it exhibited unmistakeable signs of decay, and it was deemed advisable to take this part down to the extent of nineteen feet. This was a work of greater difficulty than had been anticipated, and comprised the removal of an enormous quantity of solid brick-work. When the tower was first built, there is every reason to believe that it was surmounted by a conical roof, in the Norman style, so common in Sussex, where most of the Churches were erected soon after the Conquest, and common, indeed, throughout the diocese of Chichester, the earliest English See. The original tower would seem to have been erected in the eleventh century, and now that the brick-work has been removed, the conical roof has been replaced, and the tower made to look, as much as possible, the same as it did under the Norman dynasty. The outer wall of the tower, with the windows, has been thoroughly restored. Previous to the restoration and enlargement of the Church, the nave was ceiled, and when the ceiling was removed a fine symmetrical roof was found, the timbers as perfect as when they were first put in. The intervals between the rafters have been plastered, and the timbers oiled, and the roof now assumes a rich brown colour, contrasting favourably with the other portions of the nave. The old nave is separated from the new aisle by a handsome and exceedingly well executed stone arcade, consisting of pointed arches, with Norman mouldings and Norman capitals to the pillars. At the east end of the new aisle there are the three arches which in the old building separated the nave from the tower and chancel. They have been repeated here

exactly as they were before — they have been simply removed from the east end of the nave to the east end of the aisle, and one of them is perhaps the greatest Archaeological curiosity in this country. It is a wooden arch, elaborately carved, with three mouldings of the Early English dog-tooth pattern. It is very beautifully executed. Work of so much richness and such great antiquity is very rare indeed. Violence and decay have removed most of the contemporaries of this venerable relic: but it still remains, and is likely to endure for generations to come, the wood being, like that of the roof of the nave, as sound and good as ever. Within this aisle are the Commandments, &c., illuminated by Mr. Willement. The roof consists of open wood-work of the Early English period. At the west end are two lancet-headed windows. Over the south door has been placed the following illuminated legend:— "By ME, if any man enter, he shall be saved, go in and out and find pasture." The Font, an old circular basin, carved with pillars and circular arches, is in very good preservation, and is doubtless coeval with the oldest portions of the Church. The Chancel affords a better example of Ecclesiastical Architecture than one would at first imagine from the exterior plainness of the Church. The roof is by no means lofty, but very strongly groined.

The two small circular-headed east windows are filled with stained glass, by Willement. One represents S. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr (to whom the Church is dedicated), with the Monogram *IHV*. The other, S. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr, with the Monogram *XPI*.

Those on the south side of the Chancel are Memorial windows — one portraying our Lord's Resurrection from the Dead, with the legend — "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Underneath are the following verses:— "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. xv. 20.) The other represents our Lord addressing a kneeling woman, with the legend — "Take up thy cross and follow Me." Underneath is the following inscription :— "To the memory of Mary Sophia, the beloved wife of William Bonsey, Esq., of Belle Vue, in

this parish, who died Nov. 20, 1850. Aged 65 years. Also of Sophia, youngest daughter of the above William and Mary Sophia Bonsey, who died Nov. 1, 1848. Aged 29 years."

An old Piscina was discovered during the restoration, which has been placed in its proper position. A portion of the Chancel floor is still paved with the Mosaic tiles of an early date.

During the repairs rather an amusing incident took place, which may be deemed worthy of record. The Rev. T. H. Tooke (to whose indefatigable exertions we are indebted for the successful and complete restoration of this venerable edifice), entered the Chancel one morning just as one of the labourers was scraping the groined roof with all his might. "I've almost got him quite off, Sir," said the man, "he'll soon be off." The *he* alluded to by the honest fellow, was the painting on the roof, and it is needless to say that his hand was speedily stayed. The pattern was carefully examined by Mr. Willement, and so impressed was he with its beauty and propriety, that he restored it at his own expense.

It may here be noticed that in various parts of the Church, relics of ancient paintings and inscriptions were discovered beneath the whitewash. The only intelligible fragments, however, were a picture of the Magi offering their gifts to the Infant Jesus, at Bethlehem. The figures were indistinct, but the manger was plain, and so were the forms and colour of the oxen feeding in it — one red, the other black, with very long horns. There was also at the foot of this fresco, a little to the right, a kneeling figure, and a scroll beneath, inscribed with the words (the initial letter being in red)—"Dne..... tuas adipleto."* These frescoes were probably executed in the thirteenth century. In various places, just where they might be looked for, were found the red crosses, surrounded by a nimbus, which marked where, at the former consecration by the Bishop of that day, holy oil had been put on the wall: those in the Chancel were highly foliated, and enriched with colour and gilding. We cannot help regretting that some of those coloured and very characteristic traces of a former day could not be preserved — still more deeply does the writer of

* Or " adiplebo," the penultimate was very hard to decipher,

this article regret that he lost the opportunity of taking a copy of them, for it was with no little pride that, day after day, perched upon a ladder, with the point of his penknife, he carefully removed the whitewash, and gradually exposed to view the long hidden fresco; but, to his great vexation, when he visited the Church with an artist friend, who had kindly promised to make a copy of the drawings for him, he found that the zealous labourer had but too successfully scraped the wall, and "got him quite off."

In taking down the south side for the erection of the new aisle, a small statue (of the Byzantine period) was found plastered in the wall. All the fragments unfortunately have not been recovered, but enough to enable us to form a correct idea of its original condition. It was intended to represent the Holy Trinity in Unity—the Ancient of Days, in the form of an aged man, wearing a crown or tiara, seated on a throne, holding with His left hand the Cross, on which our Blessed Saviour is hanging, while His right hand was apparently a little raised, as if in the act of blessing mankind through the medium of His dearly beloved Son. The symbol of the Holy Ghost, in the form of a dove, hovered on the wing between them. The whole piece was highly ornamented — the long flowing garments of the Father were beautifully coloured, and bordered with a gold band. The image of God the Father (though the head is now wanting) is clearly known, from the colossal size of the hands and feet, the manly breast, and the majestic attitude of the body. The Saviour's hands and feet are not nailed to the cross, He is, as it were, voluntarily supporting Himself. The annexed Engraving is a very faithful representation of this valuable relic.

In the Churchyard there are some curious "uncouth rhymes" on the frail memorials erected, to mark the last sleeping place of the hamlet's rude forefathers. Here is one —

" Weep not for me, my children dear,
Nor yet for my past sorrows fear :
While here on earth I did remain,
My marriage life was grief and pain."

Here is another which somewhat excites our curiosity —

"Here lies the body of Sarah Bramstone, of Eton, Spinster, a person who dared to *be just* in the reign of George the second.

" Objit Jany- ye 30th, 1765. Aged 77."

What a satire on the age !

We must not neglect to refer to the venerable yew, which is supposed by competent judges to be from six to seven hundred years old, and the ivy which covers the tower. It is usual to associate the idea of an ivy stem with the tendrils of a weak and graceful parasitical plant, but this has grown into a mass of veritable timber, full four feet in breadth, and of a consistency plainly indicating the growth of centuries. Hakewill, in his "History of Windsor and its Neighbourhood," tells us that this Church was once on the point of losing its verdant honours, for the farmers had, poetically speaking, sacrilegiously combined against them, declaring that they were the harbour of the noxious sparrow; but, thanks to the fostering protection of Archdeacon Heslop, the Church still wears its mantling verdure.