

Bunbury Church Repairs

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CONSIDERABLE interest has been shown during recent years in the repairs which are being done to Bunbury Church after the severe damage caused by a landmine in 1940. It is therefore, not out of place to indicate some of the main features of the damage and of the repair work so far carried out.

In 1950, when the official Restoration Committee was first set up, the church remained as it appeared nine years earlier. The services of the eminent architect, Mr. Marshall Sisson were secured, and the full extent of the war damage was assessed. An appeal for an estimated figure of £20,000 was then launched. Work was started immediately as further delay would have had serious consequences. The two main contractors for the work are William Browne and Son of Castle Street, Chester, and Henry Harding and Son of Nantwich, both firms of long and notable experience in this difficult work.

The most obvious damage, for example the shattered windows including the stone tracery, was not the most serious. The whole fabric had been severely shaken and a close examination revealed that the north-east corner of the north aisle was dangerously insecure, and that the nave and chancel roofs, the former Victorian and the latter mediaeval, were very badly damaged. The principals of the nave roof had been temporarily shored up as part of the original first aid shortly after bombing, but more serious damage had been overlooked. For example, one of the main camber beams above the effigy of Hugh Calveley in the chancel had been split almost in two, with a crack at one place seven inches wide. This might have given way at any time. It was therefore essential to run up steel scaffolding immediately to prevent its collapse. Although both roofs were in immediate need of attention, work was started on the chancel roof. This called for the removal, repair, cleaning and re-erection of every timber and the complete reconstruction of the outer roof.

At the end of 1951, when this work was half done, the nave roof began to give way. The action of the architect and committee in ordering the work on the chancel roof to cease and to be switched to the nave, has been fully justified. Had the roof collapsed, the slender pillars of the nave arcade might have been seriously damaged. Although winter lay ahead, the badly damaged beams of the roof were lowered to the ground and by February, the nave was roofless. The new roof was designed to be more in keeping with the character of the early 16th century nave. The impossibility of getting timber of the scantling required for such a roof, combined with the necessity for the walls to be tied together

to prevent any further thrust outwards, called for the erection of a steel frame roof with oak casing, re-inforced steel joists forming the cores of the ridge, principals, intermediates and wall plates. Around these has been built the new oak roof of considerably lower pitch than the previous one. By unblocking a fourteenth century opening in the tower, access can now be given both to the outer roof and also to the inner roof for inspection purposes. This was not possible before. There has been an avoidance of any over-elaboration in the roof, a pleasing effect being produced by the boldness of the mouldings and the occasional coloured bosses, nine to each bay. The bosses, with one or two obvious exceptions, are the patera and bosses from the earlier Victorian roof painted and gilded. At the time of writing (August 1952) this work is nearing completion.

The first work undertaken by the masons was the repair of the chancel windows, into one of which has been incorporated a small panel of 14th century glass. It had originally come from this window. Another chancel window on the north side awaits new coloured glass by Mr. Evetts of Newcastle-on-Tyne, and replaces two destroyed windows which commemorated members of the Dutton family. The glazing of the east window is in the competent hands of Mr. Christopher Webb. Sometime in the 19th century this window had been partly blocked. The original dimensions will be restored. The glazing of the clerestory windows, twelve in all, has been undertaken by Weir's of Stoke. These were formerly glazed in gaudy colours upon quarry backgrounds. The tracery lights on the south side alone remain. Two motifs, stripped from their badly damaged surroundings and repaired, have been placed against clear glass backgrounds further powdered with surviving undamaged quarries from the former windows. This gives a most pleasing effect. In all, twenty-four coloured glass windows were destroyed. Twelve crates of fragments, swept from the floor and collected from the churchyard, have been sorted and examined in an attempt to salvage any interesting features. Very few (and then very limited) reconstructions were possible. None of these windows was earlier than about 1865. Four were by Frampton, two by Shrigley and Hunt and others were reported to be by Wailes and Hardman. A Kempe window, though damaged, can be repaired. With the exception of the clerestory, the general policy respecting the clear glazing of the windows is that the 'lozenge' squares will appear in the 14th century windows and small rectangular panes in the later windows. The cast iron frames introduced in the early 19th century will not be returned to these windows.

The Royal Arms board, for long relegated to a dark corner in the choir vestry, has been rehung above the chancel arch after thorough but careful cleaning. The removal for cleaning of the wrought iron hanging for the mid-18th century candelabra,

showed that originally it had been painted blue. This colour has been retained but with the addition of touches of gold and red upon the terminal flowers. The angels supporting the wall posts of the roof, now carry shields bearing the arms of the eight families connected with the eight townships of the parish.

Quite apart from the Restoration Fund, a memorial bequest is making possible the refurbishing and repair of the Baptistry. When removing the Victorian base to the font it was found that it lay upon a foundation of incised mediaeval tiles. Beneath these was a deposit of late mediaeval glass. The 1663 font cover, for many generations painted with successive coats of brown paint, was most carefully cleaned and after careful research, it was found that the original colouring had been indian red, black and gold. The repainting in these colours was carried out by Bridgeman's of Lichfield. The freestone effigies and grave slabs which formerly 'adorned' the Baptistry have been moved to the north aisle where they are to be set up on low frames to make their inspection easier.

Much still remains to be done. Almost £13,000 of the original £20,000 has been collected, and if the full programme can be carried out, there will be at Bunbury in years to come a church of extreme beauty and interest.

A SHORT GLOSSARY.

BOSS—A carved piece of wood planted upon the intersections of the timbering of a roof.

CAMBERED BEAM—A beam which rises towards the centre from the wall posts to support the ridge and purlins of a roof, so designed to prevent sagging.

CORBEL—A projection in stone from a wall designed to act as a footing to the wall post.

INTERMEDIATES—i.e., intermediate rafters. The more important rafters used between the principals of a roof. They extend from wall plate to ridge.

PATERA—Literally 'plates,' a name given to ornamental pieces of wood planted on to the hollow of a mould.

PITCH—The angle or slope of a gable roof.

PRINCIPALS—The main rafters of a roof.

QUARRY—A diamond shaped piece of glass, sometimes called 'square.'

SCANTLING—The dimensions of a piece of timber with regard to its breadth and thickness.

WALL PLATE—The timber placed along the top edge of a wall.

WALL POST—The upright post placed against the wall, to take the thrust of the roof further down the wall. These usually rise from corbels.