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Hawkesbury Church

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HAWKESBURY CHURCH.

BY W. WOOD BETHELL, *Architect.*

THE only known early history of this church is that given by Atkyns and Rudder, and, according to these authorities, it appears that about the year 680 a college was founded here for secular canons by Oswald, nephew of King Ethelred ; that in 984 King Edgar, at the intercession of the Bishop of Worcester, introduced Benedictine monks ; and that its impropriation belonged to the Abbey of Pershore, in Worcestershire, from the time of William the Conqueror, or possibly earlier, until its dissolution.

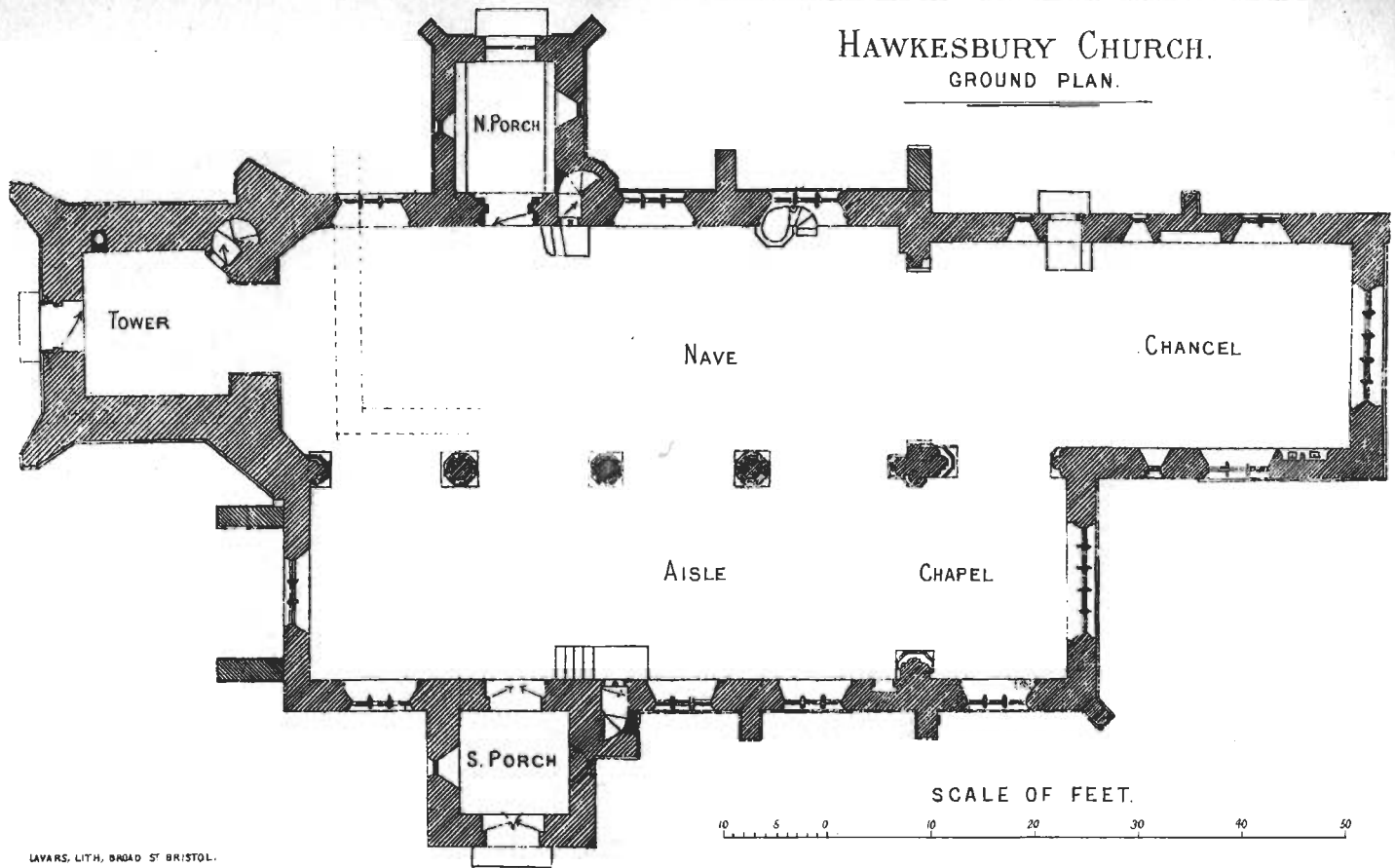
The church is dedicated to the blessed Virgin Mary, and consists of a chancel, nave, south nave-aisle a chapel at the east end of this aisle, north and south porches, with a parvise over each, and a tower at the west end of the nave. (See Plan, *Plate I.*)

In the tower is a room furnished with a fireplace and chimney, as is also the case in each parvise. The chimney in the tower runs up about 15 feet in the north wall and then passes out through a small wrought stone opening in the face of the wall. The tower turret is at the north-east angle up to the roof level, then it changes to the south-east angle.

The building dates from the Saxon period, and contains work of every age from that time to the present. The only visible Saxon remains are the two bases (these bases are not level, that on the east side being about 2 ins. higher than the other) of the shafts to the inner doorway of the north porch, probably the work of the Benedictine monks in the 10th century. Then comes the Norman doorway on the top of these Saxon bases, and in order to make the capitals level, one shaft was made longer than the other ; proving that the ancient bases were not disturbed when the Norman work was built.

HAWKESBURY CHURCH.

GROUND PLAN.



LAYERS, LITH, BRAD 57 BRISTOL.

Then follows the Early English period, to which belong the greater part of the chancel, the stones of the chancel arch (this arch was rebuilt and widened at a much later date with the result that it pushed out the north nave wall and a buttress was built to support it), the greater part of the south aisle, the lower part of tower arch, part of the north porch and other minor portions.

There is an Early English coffin-lid with a floriated cross carved on it, built into the south-east angle of the south porch; and another built into the north wall of the nave, near the pulpit; there are also signs of others in various parts of the building.

To the next period, the Decorated, belong the nave arcade (some portions of which, if not the whole, were taken down and put up again when the chancel arch was rebuilt), and the tower up to the roof line of a former roof.

And to the last Gothic period, the Perpendicular, belong the roofs of the nave and aisle, the nave clerestory, the south porch and parvise, the greater portion of the north porch and parvise, (there is a stone seat on either side of this porch, and there were once two niches over the outer doorway, but some years ago they were walled up), several windows in the nave and aisle, the chapel, the chancel east window (this window has been replaced by a three-light early English one, traces of which are visible) the addition of 2 feet in height to the chancel walls, some alterations to the lower stage of the tower and the whole of the upper stage, the doorways to the rood loft, of which the staircase has long since disappeared, an elaborate stone pulpit, a stone in the base of which is an ornamental one of Norman date; and one or two fragments of oak screens in the two archways leading to the chapel.

Then came the Reformation, when the chancel and chapel evidently became roofless for a time until the present roofs were put on, either at the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century; the roof of the north porch is also of this date; stained glass, screens and wall paintings also, as usual, disappeared at this period.

The floor of the chancel is about 2 feet below the ground outside, as the ground slopes up from west to east, and, in consequence, the floor slopes up also about 18 inches.

From the Reformation time to the present, the existing roofs over the chancel, chapel and north porch, the high oak square pews,—all of these pews west of the pulpit were erected at the same time, and are of Jacobean character, those east of the pulpit were put up at various times, and are made up of Elizabethan and Jacobean oak work ; the inscription of texts upon the walls at two different times, the font, the building of the buttresses at the west end of the aisle, the erection of a gallery at the west end of the nave, and various coats of whitewash represent all the work done during this time.

On one of the two buttresses at the west end of the aisle the date 1736 is cut, probably the date of the erection of these buttresses, which were evidently put up to support the gable, which was being pushed over by the roof ; and on the outside sill of the east window of the chancel is carved 1672, probably the date of reglazing the window.

Such is the history of the church up to July, 1882, when I commenced the work of restoration. Mr. Gyde, builder, of Pitchcombe, near Stroud, being the builder.

The principal works which I have carried out are as follow :—Removing the whole of the plaster and whitewash from the walls and roofs, and pointing the walls.

As there is a great difference of opinion respecting the treatment of the interior walls of old churches it might be well for me to give my reasons for the course I have adopted. It must be remembered that in this church, as in most others, the plaster consisted of several layers put on at various ages. In mediæval times a thin layer was put on, about $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch thick, on which figure subjects, saints and foliage were painted in distemper ; this work extended not only over the rough walls but also over the wrought stone jaubs, arches, &c. Then came the Reformation period, when these paintings were covered with a coat of plaster

on which were painted texts ; this again, at a later period, was covered with another coat of plaster and more texts ; then, in due time, these last texts were whitewashed over, again and again ; the total thickness amounting to about an inch, and all in such a very decayed state, that it was absolutely necessary to remove it, and nothing could be saved but a few bits of the mediæval work here and there. Now, considering this history of the plaster ; the question comes, how to treat the walls thus laid bare ? Some say replaster ; but I would ask those of this opinion which of the above periods of plaster would they restore ? or whether they would follow the modern fashion of putting on an inch of plaster, left unpainted, and too rough for any future decoration. Now I do not consider either of these methods are quite according to the spirit of the present age. The mediæval method is no doubt by far the best, but few would care to see our churches again covered with such crude paintings, quaint and interesting as they are. I am, therefore, strongly of opinion that when the time comes for these walls to be decorated they should have a thin coat of plaster on the rough walling only. Not on any wrought stone, although it was done in mediæval times. And then paint these walls in the best manner we are able with figure subjects. No decoration can, of course, be better than glass or marble mosaic work, but this can scarcely be thought of in an old village church, on account of cost. And there is also some difficulty in fixing it to old walls, so that it shall not project beyond the face of the wrought-stone jambs, &c. But until the windows are filled with painted glass, I am decidedly against doing anything to the walls beyond pointing them. In the meantime let them remain bare ; it has, to say the least, a certain amount of age and dignity attached to it, and also enables archæologists to study the history of the church far better than if the walls were all covered with unpainted plaster, looking very spick and span.

The other works have been—removing the gallery, opening out the staircases to parvises, putting a new oak roof on the nave, an exact copy of the old, and covering it with lead, repairing the other roofs, altering and re-arranging the oak seats, providing new oak stalls, sedilia and altar rails, laying oak blocks under all

seats, relaying the passages with the old paving stones and monumental slabs (the mural monuments remain untouched), restoring the Norman doorway, repairing all the mullions, tracerics and string-courses, replacing the 18th century window at the east end of the chapel by one of the same design as the original, sufficient old fragments having been found to do this ; reglazing the whole of the windows with cathedral glass, repairing the stone pulpit, repairing the tower, and fixing a lightning conductor, providing new oak doors with wrought iron hinges, an oak tower screen, wrought iron chandeliers, &c., &c. A heating apparatus, by Grundy, has also been provided ; and a deep gutter formed round the building where required.

In carrying out the above works, among other interesting relics discovered, may be noticed an Easter sepulchre, a double piscina in the chancel and a single one in the chapel ; a monumental slab, which once contained a very elaborate brass to a bishop or abbot, some 12th century coffin-lids, a holy water stoup in the north porch, rood loft doorways, fragments of ancient glass which were collected and put in the window adjoining the pulpit, also a few floor tiles, &c., &c.

Also in digging out the ground for the heating chamber at the west end of the nave, foundations of a wall were found underneath the north wall of the nave, west of the porch, and crossing it at right angles, then returning about 2 feet north of the present arcade (the tower centres between this wall and the existing north wall of nave). These foundations possibly belong to buildings erected by the secular canons in the 7th century or they may be as early as Roman times. Also near these foundations were found some very large human skulls.

Such is an account of the work which was completed by the date of reopening, the 9th of April, 1885, but although so much has been done, there are still many things which require attention. The most urgent of which is the panelling of the chancel and chapel roofs ; restoring the south porch and exterior of the chancel ; and sundry repairs to the exterior stonework.

In carrying out these works my object has been, first, to make the church in accordance with the requirements of the present time, and, secondly, in so doing, not to interfere with its past history except where actually obliged.

This was not exactly the order of things in mediæval times, for then churches were continually being rebuilt and altered to suit the fancies and requirements of the age in which it was done, and very little respect was paid by architects to the work of their predecessors. They, however, had a style of their own to mark the work they did ; but we have nothing except the individuality of the architect (we are not in want of a new style at the present time, but we want more honest work)—and this absence of a modern style is probably the chief cause of the many opinions of the present day as to the proper mode of restoring a church—and we architects are given a great deal of advice on the subject. But I am convinced that if those who criticise were to study more the architectural history (and by history, I mean the spirit of each age, not merely being able to distinguish the date of the work) of an ancient church like this, side by side with the history of the Church of England, they would realize the fact that good or bad architecture has more to do with the employers than the architects.

Architecture always has and always will be the outcome, or rather history in stone or wood, of the work being done by the church, and the architecture is good or bad according to the nature of that work done by the church.

The work which has lately been done to this church, was not, and could not have been, carried out at the end of the last century, not because no architect was forthcoming to do it, but because the Church of England did not require it.

But times have changed, and in these days the Church has so much vitality that it shows itself more or less in all our churches. And although it is true that a great many restorations have been made, and many new churches built, which are more in sympathy with the last than present generation, still, as church principles advance, so will bad architecture be less and less seen in our churches.