



The Church Re-opened 1850

The picturesque church of Bremhill was re-opened for Divine Service by the Bishop of the Diocese on Thursday last, the 24th instant. The fabric has been for the last seven months in the hands of the builders, and although some of the work, especially in the chancel, remains yet to be completed, the lateness of the season made it advisable to re-admit the congregation as soon as possible, and to execute at leisure "the things that remain".

The church consists of a nave, with north and south aisles, a fine square massive tower with buttresses and battlements, and an ancient, but unpretending chancel. There is a portion of rude masonry in the tower, which, from the particular quoining of its long and short work, had been pronounced by antiquarians as one of the few specimens of genuine Saxon architecture remaining in this country.

The nave itself is said by the late Canon Bowles, in his history of Bremhill, to stand upon Norman pillars – it may be doubted whether they are not rather of the early English character; the aisles have been rebuilt in Tudor times, and probably at the same period with the porch, the roof of which, most elegantly carved in stone, represents the Lamb among the vines, and, in addition, the united roses of the houses of York and Lancaster, clearly fixing its date to the reign of Henry VII

The chancel is probably on the age of the nave. It contains side lancets of good proportion and deep splays (for which memorial windows are being painted by Mr Hardman of Birmingham), but the square headed window at the east is more suited to a barn than a church, and is only kept in countenance by the barbarous architecture of its opposite neighbour in the west.

We understand that the eastern window will be immediately replaced by a triple lancet, for which special sums have been contributed' and that in the tower, by a handsome perpendicular window of five lights, already designed, but deferred for the present for want of funds.

The whole of the nave has been rebuilt and together with the aisles, re-roofed. The outer walls and windows of the aisles are, indeed, the only portions of the body of the church which have not been levelled to the ground.

Great care seems to have been taken to re-construct the whole closely after the original model; and the church probably at this moment represents, as nearly as possible, the interior as it stood after its additions at the end of the fifteenth century. In order to effect this, the usual process has been gone through of removing a hideous gallery, opening the tower arch, giving back space stolen for a parish vestry room to the church, and exhibiting the interior building in all its first proportions. The proportions constitute the chief beauty of the fabric.

We have seldom seen a country church more true and pleasing to the eye in this respect; whither we measure the length, or height or breadth – or whether we scan the dimensions of the pillars and arches- the effect is equally satisfactory. The old oak seat ends in this church is of considerable celebrity, and it has been carefully preserved and brought into the fullest use. Wherever it would bear handling, it has been taken out of its worn and shattered case and re-set in massive new oak, presenting the appearance of a dark old picture in a new frame. The effect thus given to the middle passage in particular is both new and striking.

The pulpit, the gift of Mr Ellis Fletcher, is of stone from an elegant design of Messrs Manners and Gill (the architects who have superintended the work), and is in process of being elaborately sculptured.

But perhaps the most ornamental feature in the whole is the oaken reading desk, beautifully carved by the Rev Francis Fisher, late Curate of Bremhill, and now Vicar of the adjoining parish of Hilmarton. The windows of this church are its principal defect. We should like to see these much amended. When the work already in hand is finished, there will, no doubt, be a great improvement here, but there is scarcely one in the whole building which does not claim the attention of the architects. This done, we think that the time honoured sanctuary at Bremhill will bear comparison with any parish church in the Archdeaconry.

The services on Thursday were extremely well attended. The Marquis of Lansdowne arrived at the Vicarage at eleven o'clock, with Lord and Lady Shelburne, Lord Glenelg, and the Dean of St Paul's; the Bishop of Salisbury came with Mr and Mrs Sotherton, and Mr and Mrs and Miss Heneage from Bowden; and these were followed by the majority of the gentry and clergy of the neighbourhood.

The bishop proceeded from the vicarage to the church, attended by about 40 of the clergy in their robes, who entirely occupied the chancel. The vicar of Bremhill read prayer; the vicar of Hilmarton the first lesson; the vicar of Calne the second; and the bishop preached a sermon, listened to with the greatest attention, from Psalm CXVIII vv 22 and 23 - "The same stone which the builders refused is become the head stone in the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes".

The alms of the congregation, collected at the offertory, exceeded on hundred guineas. - The Rev Matthew Wilkinson, Head master of Marlborough College, preached, in his usual powerful style, in the afternoon, from Hebrews X 23, 24 & 25.

the children of the school held high festival in their schoolroom, tastefully decorated for the occasion; and all the proceedings of the day appear to have terminated (in spite of the rain, which poured incessantly from 2 o'clock) to the entire satisfaction of all parties.- "We wish you good luck, ye that are of the house of the Lord".

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