

RESTORATION OF STOWMARKET CHURCH. The subject of restoring this noble old church has lately been mooted, and has obtained such an amount of popularity amongst all churchmen in the parish that it became a matter of necessity to do something in the matter. Consequently a meeting was called at the Assembly Room, on Wednesday last, for the purpose of taking the question into consideration: it was attended by the most respectable churchmen of the parish, as well as by several ladies. The Rev. Henry Lewis, Vicar. took the chair. and in opening the proceedings stated that he had taken the liberty of calling them together that they might consider whether it was desirable to improve and restore the parish church of Stowmarket. Ever since his arrival in the town the matter had been on his mind; he had mentioned it to many; discussed various ways of getting it done; and none offered any opposition, but most were in favour of it, if it could be done. Before asking Mr. Phipson to describe the plan of the proposed alterations, Mr. Lewis explained, at some length, how inconvenient the present enclosed pens were for carrying out the principal services and worship, as prescribed by the Church of England, in a kneeling posture, stating that the object in a church should not be to see how many could be crammed into a pew, but to have them only so full that all could worship with comfort to themselves. This would be calculated to promote a more devout and reverent feeling. After saying that, the church should present, in all parts, equality, and that the poor should be seated equally as well as the rich, Mr. Lewis stated that a painted board existed in the church, which said there were seats for 1,460 persons; 860 of the sittings were to be free for ever. This was a delusion and a fallacy, as, pack the people how they would, it was not possible to seat more than two-thirds of that number. After referring to various churches that had been restored, Mr. Lewis adduced more reasons in favour of carrying out the proposed plan, and passed on to the question of the expense, stating it to be only one of addition and multiplication, and that if they made up their minds to carry it out the expense would not be an insurmountable obstacle.

Mr. Phipson had prepared a plan, and this had been left open for builders to see, and in consequence he had received four estimates: one was;£1,900, the second £1,670, the third, by Stowmarket builders, £1,550. and a fourth £1,541. The one from the town they hoped to accept, and thus have the work (done at home. To set about the work properly about £2,000 would be required, and he was happy to say he could see his way clear for £1,000; this was encouragement for the timid. Among the subscriptions that had been promised were, Messrs. Oakes and Co., £100. R. Pettiward, Esq., £100, Charles Tyrell, Esq., £100, Major Parker, M.P., £25, Mr. Geo. Bobby, £25, R. 1. Harvey, Esq., £25, Mr. Chapman, £20, the Bishop of Norwich, £10, Arch- deacon Ormerod, £5, the Rev. C. Terry, £10, Mr. Bond, £5, Ir. Parmenter, £5, while subscriptions for three years were announced as follows:--Mr. Spencer Freeman, £50, Mr. Fox, £30, Mr. Sutton, £30, Mr. Woods, £15., Mr. Cocksedge. £15, Mr. Youngman, £15, Mr. G. Tydeman, £20, Nr. Colson, £10, and for himself and friends he would guarantee £300. After suggesting several ways for obtaining the remainder of the required sum the rev. gentleman called upon Mr. Phipson to give a sketch of the proposed restoration.

Mr. Phipson began by saying he had been requested to furnish plans, and he thought that Stowmarket Church, when restored, would be a very fine Church, the arches, &c., being of the second or decorated period. He had measured the Church throughout, and allowing 20 inches for each person it would now only seat 1061 persons. He prepared his first plan allowing a distance of 2ft 8ins. between the seats, the narrowest space permitted by the Church Building Society and it would seat 1 300 persons or about 130 more than at present. The Bishop of the diocese to whom the plan was submitted, objected to the narrow space and he had prepared a second, plan with 3 feet between

each bench: this he considered would give quite as many seats as present and by retaining the west gallery it would give an increased number of sittings.

On the north side the windows, now half blocked up would be set at liberty, also those on the south side. and after the roof had been re-formed, and the stone work put right, it would have a very greatly improved appearance. Mr. Phipson concluded by urging, on the meeting the necessity of providing the £2,000 which he considered would cover all the expenses.

Mr. Freeman then proposed-"That this meeting cordially approves the proposed restoration of the Parish Church, and pledges itself in every effort to carry out the plan." Mr. Freeman said it remained with the meeting to say whether they would decide upon the plan for benching the Church; for his part he believed it ought to be carried out, and that it would be conducive to the better worship of God.

Mr. Woods seconded the resolution, and mentioned the present disagreeable position of the sittings in the gallery, where it was impossible almost to hear and see the minister!

Mr. Bewley also spoke in favour of the resolution, giving his experience of how bad it was for the young to be placed in the gallery, where it was impossible for them to see the clergyman, and give due attention to the service.

Mr. Youngman also very eloquently urged the necessity of the restoration upon the meeting, mentioning that if our forefathers with bad means of transit and thin population, could raise such stately edifices, surely we ought not to hesitate one moment when asked to restore them. After contrasting his experience in Churches with the enclosed pews, with those that had been benched, much to the disparagement of the former, he said that it was the solemn duty of every Englishman to help in this truly English work, and concluded by suggesting that they should elect a committee.

Mr. Fox gave his experience of the parish church of Leeds before and after the restoration, and urged the claims of the proposed plan on behalf of the young, mentioning how that very many were obliged to stay away from Church because they could have no seat. He concluded by proposing "That Mr. Lewis be appointed as Chairman of the building Committee." Mr. Chapman seconded the proposition.

The VICAR explained that the seats in the Church would be allotted as nearly as possible to those who at present occupy them but to secure the seats it would be necessary to be in before the service began other-wise they would be filled up by whoever might require a seat. (applause)

Mr. Robinson said that the movement was a very praiseworthy one, and explained the existing evil in Chapels, where a certain price is put on every seat, very frequently preventing a poor person from regularly attending the place of worship.

Mr. YOUNGMAN said it could not be too widely spread that the seats were absolutely free to all the parish. The Committee were then appointed, and comprise the following gentlemen :-The Churchwardens, Porteous Oakes, H A. Oakes, Beckford Bevan, R Pettiward, and Charles Tyrell, Esquire ; Messrs. Chapman, Bewley, Youngman, Woods, Sutton, Cocksedge, Colson, Bond, Marriott, Ranson, Crispin, Archer, Langham, T. Dent, Bridges, Claxson, A.L. Simpson, with power to add to their number. An arrangement was then made for a house to house a collection, and the Committee having appointed an early day for meeting, a vote of thanks was passed to the Chairman, and the meeting broke up

THE RESTORATION OF STOWMARKET CHURCH. I REOPENING SERVICES. YESTERDAY (FRIDAY). For many months past a movement has been pushed vigorously forward in Stowmarket for the restoration of its fine old Parish Church. The matter was taken up nearly eighteen months ago by some of the principal inhabitants of the place, who felt that the condition of the Church was not creditable to the position which the town occupies in the county, and resolved to make an effort to restore the Church to something like the condition in which it was left by its builders nearly 500 years ago. A Committee was formed, and got into working order in the middle of the year 1864, the churchwardens at that time being Mr. Spencer Freeman and Mr. Richard Fox. These gentlemen have been very active in promoting the movement, and with their assistance the Committee soon found themselves in a condition to undertake the works necessary for the restoration. The town and neighbourhood were canvassed by the Committee, and subscriptions were very liberally promised. £300 was guaranteed by the Vicar, £100 each was given by Charles Tyrell, Esq., R. J. Petteward, Esq., and by Messrs. Oakes Bevan and Co. The Marquis of Bristol, Sir George and Lady Broke. Middleton, Major Parker, Messrs. Woods and Cocksedge, Messrs. Phillips Brothers, Mr. Spencer Freeman, Messrs. Marriott and Son, Messrs. Gudgeon and Son, Mr. E. P. Archer, Mrs. Hart and Mr. and Mrs. John Munsford, Messrs. George and John Boby, J. E. Chapman, George Tydeman, Henry Wright, Phillip Turner, Betts and Son, Rednall, Colson, H. J. Bridges and Mrs. Bridges, Messrs. Emery, Parmenter, Ranson, and most of the residents in the town were also subscribers, and the Committee soon felt justified in calling in the assistance of an architect (Mr. M. Phipson) and to proceed to the work of restoration and repair.

The Church was built by the Abbot of St. Osyth Priory, in the reign of Edward III, and, consequently, in the best period of the decorated style of English Architecture. It is a spacious and handsome structure and contains some fine original examples of the decorated style in the columns which support the roof of the nave and in the windows. The exterior effect of the Church is considerably marred by a somewhat mean looking spire, and the fact that the walls are rubble work, and rather inferior workmanship. The Church has, however, a fine outline, and is placed upon a commanding site. The tower is a massive and finely proportioned structure, and if the present mean spire were improved the Church would be amongst the finest entire examples of decorated work in the Eastern counties.

The body of the Church consists of nave 85 feet long and 25 feet wide. The North and South aisles are the same length as the nave, and the former is 21 feet 2 inches wide, and the latter 11 feet 6 inches. The chancel is 46 feet long by 19 wide. The roof of the nave is 49 feet from the ground. Those who are accustomed to deal with these matters will see that these are the dimensions of a very fine Church, and that whatever might be done its fine proportions could not be altogether bidden.

The Church had, however, suffered in common with almost every ancient Church in the county, from various causes, the foremost and most potent being the want of taste on the part of those who were entrusted with its keeping. The nave is supported by seven very beautiful arches, twenty feet high, on each side, and the columns are very finely proportioned of the simple form characteristic of the style in which the Church is built. These were, till recently, all but blocked by heavy galleries on each side, which occupied the space so that the capital of each column was barely clear, and the top of the gallery gave the whole side of the nave the appearance of a gigantic pigeon locker with seven immense arched openings. There was also a gallery across the West aisle, and the floor of the Church was occupied by high pews, which, although placed there so recently as the year 1812, had all the objectionable features of their predecessors of the eighteenth century. This was about as bad a state of things as could be found to exist; in fact all that could be suggested had been done to

destroy the effect which the builder intended the interior of the Church should produce, and it is a remarkable proof of the rapid growth of the present taste for medieval architecture, that these sins against architectural taste should have been committed within twenty three years of the present time, and there are, undoubtedly, many now living in the neighbourhood who contributed both to the pews of Which we compliment, and to the benches with which they have now been replaced.

Mr. Phipson regarding the Church as, on the whole, a fine example of what is now generally admitted to be the best and purest period of English architecture, set about its restoration by determining to restore it, as nearly as possible, to its original condition, and those who wish to see what bad taste can effect in marring or destroying the appearance of the interior of a Church, cannot do better than to compare the present state of the interior of the building with the representation given in the Rev. Hollingsworth's history of Stowmarket. This picture represents a view of the interior from the West, end of the Church, and standing now at that point, with the book in one's hand, the effect of the change produced is revealed at a glance, and cannot fail to strike everyone, who makes the comparison, with astonishment.

Unfortunately, the architect has not been able to restore everything, for of course the old poppy-headed benches were destroyed, or so mutilated in 1843 that they were beyond restoration. The screens, which formed the rood loft, were also removed, and made up into a pulpit and reading desk. So far as these things were concerned the restoration was not possible, but Mr. Phipson set himself to improve the remainder. The galleries were condemned, and the pew, which did not cover one third of the floor space, were also turned out, and the Church is now fitted with open benches of pine, French polished instead of being stained and varnished. These are of a very simple pattern, and the edges of the heads have merely a boldly moulded rib run round them instead of the poppy heads. Three feet of space is left between each bench, and additional comfort is secured by making the back slope and turning the seat slightly from the horizontal.

In the chancel there are a few oak benches, and these have well-executed TolpK heads, and here too are about eight of the old enc es, the sole remains of the original benching, which was removed in 1843. The floor space being now so much better filled, there is quite as much accommodation as there was with the galleries. The removal of these, of course, left the columns, upon which they had been fixed bruised, msorliced, and in some places very deeply battered, repainted in places, and, in fact, atoretner spoiled. 'they have all been carefully restored and scraped down, and for the effect produced by simple decorated pillars and arches, there js not now a finer nave in Suffolk.

The Eastern porch on the North side of the Church Is occupied by the " Abbot's tomb," a monument erected to the memory of one of the Abbots of St. Osyth. This consists of an arch raised between the column as high as the capitals, and covering a flat slab in which were monumental brasses, representing an Abbot and his attendant Monks. This tomb suffered severely in the religious troubles which followed the Reformation. It was broken open to search for treasure, and the relics of the Abbot carried off shortly after the Reformation, and the crockets and enriched portions of the stone work were defaced with no light hand by the Puritan Commissioners. The only change that has now been made in this interesting relic has been to lower the slab so as to afford a better view of the Church to those who sit in that part of the North aisle. The roof of the nave is of that description known as a trussed-rafter waggon roof. This had been plastered over, but the plaster is now removed and the roof is boarded in oak, divided into compartments by ribs of the same material with carved bosses at the points where they intersect each other. There was a bold oak coved cornice, which has been carefully restored, and the roof now presents the same appearance as when it was originally constructed.

The roof of the North aisle was till the recent alterations were made, a lean-to roof, and of so deep a pitch that the clerestory windows were partially blocked by it. Mr. Phipson found clear traces of the original roof, and he has now covered the aisle with a span roof the pitch of which corresponds with that of the original roof. The result of this change is, that the clerestory windows are now quite clear, and the North aisle is roofed with a very pretty early English roof. The roof is hardly seen from the outside, as there is a new parapet run along the North wall of the aisle, but the windows of the clerestory are well in view on that side. The material used in the roof is deal, stained and varnished. The details of the roof are similar to those of the roof of the South aisle in St. Martin's, Leicester. The ribs of this roof are circular and of massive size, and they are returned down the wall so as to take the place of principals or tie-beams. The roof of the South aisle was in good preservation, and nothing has been done but to and panel it on the inside.

The East and West windows in this aisle are new, and the mullions of the other windows have all been scraped down and restored, so as to appear equal to new, and nearly all of them have very fine tracery-the meanest window in the Church being the East window of the chancel, which was inserted a few years ago. The large West window in the North aisle is remarkable for having three large foliated openings immediately below the window cill. These openings are on the same level, and fill a space equal to full width of the window. They were blocked up on the inside and had iron bars over the outside till these restorations were made, when Mr. Phipson had the iron bars removed, cleared the openings of the brickwork, and had them glazed. Such openings are, we are informed, very rarely found; and it is even said that there is not another instance of a similar kind.

The windows in the south aisle have also been restored in a similar manner, with the exception of one, which is new. The windows are all glazed with rough plate cathedral glass, relieved by a slight border of white glass round each light. One handsome new window (a three-light window in the decorated style) has been inserted in the south chancel wall by Mr. Caleb Rose, of Ipswich, a gentleman who is the owner of the rectorial tithes. This window was made by Mr. Simpson, of Stowmarket. The windows in the north aisle were by Mr. Hopson, and the glaziers work was executed by Mr. Claxson and Mr. Gunn, all of Stowmarket.

In the chancel a considerable portion of the work has been undertaken by the ladies of Stowmarket, who undertook to supply the altar cloth, the Pre delf, stools, and chairs. These, with the exception of the chairs, which were supplied by Mr. Cole, of Stowmarket, were supplied by Messrs. Jones and Willis, of Manchester. The altar rail is of oak, and it is borne upon handsome iron standards. The altar is raised three steps above the floor of the chancel and this space is floored with Mawi's encaustic tiles. The chancel roof is of the same form as the roof of the nave, but it is ceiled with plaster. There are two good doorways, one on each side-that on the South being the communication with the churchyard, and the other opens into a mean little lean-to vestry. This excrescence has an extremely mean appearance from the outside; and it is to be hoped that the hand of the restorer may in future years be as well employed upon it as it has now been employed upon the rest of the Church.

The other structural alterations consist of the repair of the tower buttresses, the insertion of a new circular window in the tower, and the North doorway is now cleared and will be used as the North entrance to the Church in future. The tower is used as a porch with North and South doors, and as the land falls away considerably at this end of the Church on the North side, to the street, and on the South side, to the public passage known as "Cheap-side," both of these entrances will shortly be furnished with flights of stone steps. In the interior of the tower the floor of the ringers loft has been raised and renewed, it is now borne upon massive and boldly moulded beams, and the whole forms a very lofty, spacious, and handsome porch. The rest of the tower requires a somewhat considerable

outlay before it can be said to be in a good state. One buttress has now been repaired, but some of the others require similar treatment, the windows of the belfry are worn away so as to be unsightly, and the fine old tower is surmounted by an ugly brick parapet whose only virtue is that it holds the wall together at the top and prevents the damage from the weather. It is proposed to carry on the restoration of the tower, and Mr. Manning Prentice has liberally headed a subscription with 25 guineas for that work, and it is also proposed to apply a surplus of a similar amount, left from a fund collected for providing the materials for a public rejoicing at the marriage of the Prince of Wales, to the same purpose.

The lighting and warming of the interior of the Church are exceedingly well managed. It is too frequently that we find the columns of the Church encumbered with brackets or standards for the artificial lighting of the building. Mr. Phipson has, however, hit upon a method of arranging the lights which will not only leave the columns unencumbered but which actually sets them off to the best advantage. The gas standards which are intended to light the nave are placed one beneath the centre of each arch, and the aisles are lighted from the wall, bracket burners being placed opposite each column. This arrangement has a fine effect when the Church is lighted, and the play of the light upon the graceful columns and the lofty arches produces a very fine effect. The gas burners are by Dovey, of Manchester, and were fixed by Mr. Nicholls, of Stowmarket. The standards between the arches each bear five lights, and the brass mountings and enrichments upon them are very rich and handsome in appearance. The Chancel is lighted from the walls, four rows of bracket burners, six in each row, being fixed to the walls, North and South. The effect when the burners are lighted is good, and the light is abundant; but in the day-time they have somewhat too much the appearance of rows of tent-pegs.

The Church is warmed with Gihney's underground stove, which is placed in the centre of the nave in the passage between the two rows of benches. The pipe from this stove is carried up the tower so as to be entirely concealed from sight, and as coke is used the inconvenience caused by the smoke will probably only be very slight.

The old pulpit is temporarily fixed on the South side of the nave, but it is intended to replace it at some future time by a pulpit more in harmony with the interior fittings of the Church as they now stand. A new prayer desk is placed on the South side of the nave, into the South aisle, just behind this desk, is placed the organ and the seats for the choristers. The organ now in use is not the one which is to be used, and which is to be made by Mr. Houlditch, of London, who, being unwilling to run the risk of placing the new organ in a building which had been so extensively repaired, lent the one now in the Church till the new work should be more seasoned.

There was formerly a fine screen in the North aisle which separated that part of the North aisle known as the "Gipping Chapel." This screen is not now to be seen in the Church. It is hoped that the "Gipping Chapel" will be thoroughly restored by the representatives of the family by whom it was built, and, if so, probably the screen would be used in the same place, at all events it would be a pity that so fine a relic should be lost, and if not restored to the Chapel it might at least be placed in some other part of the Church.

The pews in the North aisle extended to the Chapel, and, on removing them, a very fine brass was discovered to the memory of "Ann Tyrell, who died in 1638, aged eight years and six months." Several lines of verse record the grief of the parents, and the virtues of the young lady. This brass which has been entirely covered is in fine preservation, every line being as bold and clear as when it left the engraver's hands. The whole of the building works have been executed under the superintendence of Mr. R. M. Phipson, by Messrs. Betts and Rednall, builders, of Stowmarket, and it

is only justice to them to say that the extensive works have been carried out in most admirable style, and to the satisfaction of the architect. The poppy heads of the oak benches in the chancel were admirably carved on their premises, and will bear comparison with the best work of the kind. There is still much to be done to the Church, and with the spirit and enterprise which we know to exist in the town we think it extremely probable that it may be done within a few years, and the Church will then be one which, not the town of Stowmarket alone, but the county may well be proud. The total cost of the works at present executed is upwards of £2,000.