

THE RESTORATION OF CLOPTON CHURCH.

During the year 1882 several churches were added to the already long list of restored edifices of the county. Only one month of the present year is gone before we are called upon to perform the pleasant duty of recording an important step towards the restoration of another of the ancient churches of Suffolk. Clopton Church is now in the builder's hands, and the foundation stones of a new chancel were laid yesterday (Friday), when there were special services. The Church, which stands in a very pretty vale, on the high road from Woodbridge to Debenham, was a small structure, with a shallow, archless, plain chancel. This, we happen to know, has been an eyesore to the present rector, the Rev. S. Hooke, who, from the time he entered upon the living, some four years ago, made up his mind to restore the Church as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Clopton, however, is only a small parish, the sum required was considerable, and the rector is hardly the man to undertake any work unless he can see his way to carrying it through successfully. He has consequently, very properly, bided his time, and yesterday he had the gratification of witnessing an important step in a work which he has from the first desired should be carried out, viz., the laying of the foundation stones of the new chancel. There is no mistake about the thoroughness of the alterations. The nave has been in the hands of Mr. R. Tooley, builder, of Ipswich, since last July, and in the interval the roof has been stripped, the timbers cleaned and restored, and covered with new boarding and felt. It has now an open roof, which is a very good example of the middle of the 14th century period. The walls are of rubble flint work with Ancaster stone dressings. The old high-back pews have been removed—in fact, a clean sweep has been made of the interior. The windows of the nave have been restored and filled in with Cathedral glass, the walls re-plastered, and the floors are being laid with wooden blocks and encaustic tiles. The nave is to be benched, and a new pulpit and reading desk are to be provided. Perhaps the most important part of the new work, as far as it has been carried out at present, is the erection of a handsome chancel arch. The chancel, which we have previously referred to as being so plain, was erected about 100 years ago of brick and flint. This has been pulled down, and the old stone quoins and free stones found in the walls were evidently portions of the chancel which was pulled down a century ago. The re-building of the chancel has been commenced. The old flint materials will be used, and the roof will be recovered with the old tiles. It will have an open timber roof similar to the nave, the ends of the hammer beams being embellished with carved oak bosses, and the cornices embattled. The chancel will be provided with solid oak benches, with handsome poppyheads. The East window will be a three-light with handsome stone tracery. The new chancel will be in a style in keeping with that of the church itself, which is Perpendicular. The sum expended in the restoration of the nave will be about £800, and the new chancel will cost about £500. In addition to this it is intended as soon as possible to erect a new vestry, which will cost an additional £150. This, however, is not part of the present contract. The tower will also, doubtless, in course of time be restored, not, we would say, that its condition is at the present time alarming or unsightly. It is a massive, squat structure, and instead of being at the West end, is on the South side, and so is the tower of Burgh Church, which stands on high ground a few hundred yards off. The architect is Mr. Herbert Green, of Norwich, and we doubt not, judging from what has already been done, that the restored church will do him credit, as the builder's work, so far as it has gone, does Mr. R. Tooley.

The ringing of the very musical peal of six bells yesterday afternoon, shortly after two o'clock, announced the special service, which was fixed for three o'clock. The weather was stormy, and this, no doubt, kept many away. There was, however, a good attendance of the villagers. Amongst the ladies and gentlemen present we noticed the Rev. Canon Potter, Rev. Canon Hedley, Rev. F. S. Barry, Mrs. Atthill, Miss Hooke, Miss Turner, Mrs. Steele, Mrs. Burch, Mr. Catt, and Mr. Chapman and Mr. Dowsing, churchwardens. The Rector had received letters expressing regret at inability to attend from Earl Nelson, Rev. Canon Moor, Rear-Admiral Sir G. N. Broke-Middleton, Bart., Rev. H. and Mrs. Wilkinson, Miss Newland, &c. A special form of service had been printed for the occasion of the laying of the foundation stones, three in number, one in the centre of the East wall of the chancel, under the window above the plinth, and the others in the two Eastern angle buttresses. The service commenced with the hymn beginning, "Christ is the Foundation of the house we raise," followed by prayers read by the Rector, and the lessons, from Isaiah xxviii., 9—17, read by the Rev. Canon Potter, who afterwards delivered a brief address, in the course of which he said the words he had just read ought to find a place in the heart of every one present. We should do our best to make our lives in conformity to it, line upon line, precept upon precept, in order that the little ones, the young lambs of the flock, applying the Word of God to their own hearts, their own lives, might grow in grace and in meekness for the kingdom of heaven. God is laying, continued the venerable Canon, a new corner stone here. Many centuries have passed since the church which you are now restoring was first built. I have for many years as Rural Dean, together with my brother Rural Dean, the Rev. Canon Moor—who is, I regret to say, not able to be here to-day—recommended something being done so as to make it more and more worthy of His name. We almost despaired of seeing anything done, but we are this day taught that we should despair of nothing in this world. The time has come when a new corner stone is to be laid, and you will have a House of God more worthy of His name. I hope you will find real profit and pleasure in coming to the restored House of God. When I remember that these walls used to be covered with green moss and other things, it seemed to me as if no one cared for the house of God, as if a little expense was grudged, lest they should have to lay out money for that for which they cared not. Did they care for their own souls? Had they a knowledge of the Saviour? Did they love the Saviour? Did they incline to be of the number of God's elect, His children here, in order, when they departed hence, they might be received into the glory hereafter? Canon Potter proceeded to remind those assembled that these were questions they needed to ask themselves, and not grudging an offering to the cause of Christ on earth.

The Rev. S. Hooke said the Hon. Mrs. Thellusson would have been there that day to have laid one of the foundation stones had not the weather been so unpropitious. He would ask a dear friend—a great benefactor to the parish—to lay the first stone.

Mrs. Atthill, of East Ruston, Norfolk (one of the rev. gentleman's congregation when at Yarmouth), then laid the centre stone, and the others were laid by the Rev. Canon Potter, and the Rector, the latter gentleman remarking that he considered it a high honour and privilege to lay the foundation stone of this sacred House of Prayer. He was thankful to Almighty God for the mercies He had so richly bestowed. That one and all present that day might be spared to see the work of restoration completed was his earnest prayer, and he hoped they might return to God's House with joy in their hearts, and praise upon their lips.

The concluding hymn, "The Church's one Foundation," was then sung and the Blessing pronounced. The offertory amounted to £14 13s. 6d. A large number of the school children were present at the service, each child wearing a white favour. They were afterwards presented with buns and oranges at the Rectory.

In the evening there was Divine service in the Mission Church (a very spacious ecclesiastical building—internally at least—constructed out of an old barn on the Rectory grounds), when an admirable sermon was preached by the Rev. E. L. Savory, rector of Palgrave.