



Re-opening of Aldbourne St. Michael's Church 1867

Aldbourn is a pleasantly situated village, of some considerable size. It is a very ancient place: It is said that it suffered from fire in the Roman times, and that John of Gaunt who resided either here or in the immediate neighbourhood gave it a charter. Aldbourn was a place of some note even in the memory of man, on account of its bellfoundry:- an occupation which has now become a thing of the past at Aldbourn. The bells in Aldbourn church, said to be one of the finest chimes in Wiltshire, were cast in the village, as were many other chimes still to be heard in the neighbourhood. The church is conspicuous from a long distance, on account of its tower, a noble building of great height and size. It is approached through the village green, whereon stands a pillar which once supported a cross. The church had become seriously dilapidated, and one of the ambitions of the worthy rector, the Rev. G. P. Cleather, and his wife was to restore it. Soon after Mr. Cleather's institution to the living they set out about the task, seeking to procure subscriptions and obtaining funds – a task which none but those concerned in church buildings or restoration can appreciate. Their efforts, however, were crowned with success, and the pleasing gathering of Wednesday last must have been very gratifying to the rector and his wife, and the energetic churchwardens and committee who have co-operated with them. The old church was of mixed style of architecture – a not unusual feature in many of our old churches – and in the restoration the original has to a certain extent been preserved, though there has been more unity and harmonisation introduced. The building now consists of a nave with an aisle on each side, and also a north and south transept, with two small chapels. The nave is divided from the aisles by four expansive gothic arches, on each side, supported by massive pillars, all of which have been restored to much of their ancient beauty. The bents of the arches dividing the south side are different from the rest, and represent the beautiful zigzag moulding of the Norman period. The building is very efficiently lighted by several wide Gothic windows on each side, and now that the organ loft and gallery have been removed, the massive western window shows to advantage that portion of the church. There is, however, 'ample room for a few stained glass windows, and doubtless they will be contributed.

The edifice has been newly floored, tiled and seated; the seats are of polished deal, and will hold, we believe, about 800 persons. The whole of the chancel is entirely new, and on entering the west end presents a very chaste appearance. This part of the restoration has been liberally borne by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It is paved with ornamental tiles, and the altar is raised, surmounted by a very tasteful reredos, consisting of a cross formed of Minton's tiles, specially made from the design of the architect. Convenient stalls are provided for the choir. The organ, which is a very meagre contribution to the musical portion of the service, is situated in the south chapel. The exterior of the building has undergone considerable improvement, it now having an inclined slated roof, in place of the former flat and leaden one. The lead has been taken off and the new roof raised over it, so that all the original wood-work remains.

The Church contains two imposing tombs, one of which bore the date 1641, and a Latin inscription set forth that it was raised in honor of Edward and William Walronde, gentlemen; the other had no inscription, but it is said to be a memorial of some of the ancestors of the ancient Wiltshire family of the Goddards, as were some brasses found in another part of the church, which were restored to their places.

The architect is Mr. Butterfield, well known for his talent and taste in erecting ecclesiastical buildings. The total cost of the restoration has been about £2000. To obtain that sum great efforts have been made, and all classes have shared in the pleasant task. Mr. T. Chandler, one of the churchwardens, gave £200, and members of his family did their share, Mrs. Chandler contributing to the building fund needlework to the value of many pounds. Others gave according to their circumstances, and the restoration may be truly termed a parochial matter. Of course, there yet remains much to be done towards internal beautifying. The font and pulpit may with propriety be replaced, and the organ is hardly suited to the restored building. These are matters, which can be supplied as occasion offers, and doubtless there will be warm hearts and willing hands to accomplish what is needed. As the building now stands it is an ornament and credit to the parish. Mr. John Phillips of Swindon, was the contractor, and he has executed the work in a manner which did him credit. As the builder of that immense structure, the Swindon Corn Exchange, Mr. Phillips has acquired fame throughout the county, and the work at Aldbourne Church will add to his well-deserved reputation.

Early on the morning of Wednesday week the bells of the tower sent forth their chimes over the surrounding town, and towards eleven o'clock the village green presented a most enlivened aspect, being covered with persons proceeding to the church. At eleven the Bishop of Salisbury, preceded by the churchwardens and choristers, and followed by between thirty and forty clergy in their surplices, moved from the rectory in slow procession around the churchyard, and, entering at the tower, proceeded up the centre aisle to the chancel. The choristers, it should be mentioned, were from Lambourne.

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The North Wilts Herald ,Saturday, 31 August 1867

OPC Notes

The above article continues with details of the church service at the conclusion of which a collection was made which amounted to £107 3s 4d. The article continues with details of those who attended a luncheon attended by 200 persons.

This article will be extended when a more complete copy of the newspaper page is sourced. The copy we have accessed for the first part of this covers two columns of the newspaper - the second column being cut short during the digitalisation of the newspaper.