

c.1925

'CATHEDRAL OF THE VALE.'

COWBRIDGE CHURCH RESTORATION.

APPEAL FOR FUNDS

STORY OF ANCIENT EDIFICE.

The ancient parish church of Cowbridge, "the Cathedral of the Vale of Glamorgan," is lying desolate and half dismantled, waiting for a few generous men to enable the work of restoration to be completed.

Already £2,200 have been subscribed, and some £2,925 have been spent on the work. It is estimated that the deficit still to be made good amounts to £2,725.

The Archbishop of Wales, who has intimate associations with Cowbridge, writes:—

"I have known intimately for more than sixty years Cowbridge Church, and I strongly commend this appeal for funds to restore this church of quite unique interest.

"A G. CAMBR."

The Lord Bishop of Llandaff also cordially approves of the appeal.

Subscriptions should be sent to:—Cowbridge Church Renovation Fund, Barclays Bank, Cowbridge.

A list of subscriptions received will appear in the *Western Mail* from time to time.

THE WORK AND THE COST

Someone has very truly said that when the work of restoring or repairing ancient buildings is taken in hand it is invariably found that unforeseen contingencies create a much inflated cost. Such has been the unfortunate experience of those responsible for the care and preservation of the parish church at Cowbridge. This fine old fabric, which has aptly been described as "the Cathedral of the Vale of Glamorgan," and which in its original form was possibly used for Divine worship long before the Normans came to the country, has well served succeeding generations.

A PLACE OF REFUGE.

Cowbridge has wonderful associations. In the past ages it was a place of strategic value, and its geographical position in the

centre of the fertile Vale of Glamorgan gave to it also a commercial importance. There are records extant which show that in 1091 Cowbridge was a garrison town fortified by walls and gates and ditches, and to-day certain of these works remain to add to the picturesque and quicken the interest. The old church with its castellated tower (which at a distance gives it the appearance of an embattled turret of an ancient fortress) no doubt nobly filled its part in providing a place of refuge in the "forays" of the "knightly ages."

UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE.

But to-day it is by reason of its unique architectural features and interesting monuments that the building derives its distinguished position amongst the churches of the Province of Wales; and calls for a brief description. Of ample proportions, its main features comprise a nave, south aisle, choir and chancel. Extending the whole length of the south side of the nave and choir, and dividing it from the south aisle, is an arcade consisting of five bays. This arcade was built by Lady Ann of Warwick in 1473.

FOUR CENTURIES OF SCHOOLBOY WORSHIPPERS.

Interest in the choir and chancel is heightened by the fact that for upwards of four centuries the scholars and masters of the ancient grammar school have sat and knelt there in worship. The sittings and furniture bear eloquent testimony, in rough carvings of letters and names, to the "devotions" of the boys, many of whom in later years carved their names in the history of the Principality and the Empire. The arcading has for many years had the distinctive but disconcerting feature of leaning pillars.

RAVAGES OF TIME AND INSECTS.

Many centuries have rolled away since the old church was constructed. The ravages of time and other circumstances, particularly the death-watch beetle, have unfortunately produced disastrous effects.

Some twelve years ago it became evident that the work of renovation could not be much further delayed, and in or about 1913 a start was made to raise funds for restoration purposes. These efforts secured a sum of approximately £450, and this was eventually expended in the renovation of the tower and certain repairs to the roof. The war prevented the work of restoration being carried further.

Soon after the declaration of peace the Church people of Cowbridge again turned their attention to the work of restoring the ancient church, but the work was found to be so formidable that it was delayed until there were prospects of securing the necessary funds.

RESTORATION BEGUN.

Towards the end of the year 1924 the Church folk of Cowbridge took heart of grace, and, with a courage and fortitude greater than their financial resources, decided to proceed with the work of restoration so urgently required. The initial step was to take off the main roof of the nave and replace it with a new roof on sound and good architectural lines. This scheme was to involve an estimated expenditure of £1,800, which sum the building committee felt confident could be raised locally, and subsequent response to the appeals made proved that this was an accurate view.

The old roof comprised a weight of some 80 tons, and during the dismantling it became necessary to give careful consideration to the leaning arcade to which

reference has already been made. After very searching inquiry by all concerned, and, at the instance of a sub-committee of the Representative Body of the Church in Wales, after calling in an expert, the conclusion (reluctantly be it said) was inevitable that there was no other course to adopt than to boldly face the necessity of pulling down the arcade and re-building it on sound foundations and re-setting it—stone for stone wherever possible—in the perpendicular.

This entailed no inconsiderable feat of engineering, because the roof of the south aisle, on the inner side, had to be supported throughout in mid-air, and necessitated the erection of a forest of scaffolding and intricate centring. The photographs on our picture page will convey to the reader some idea of the condition to which the venerable pile was reduced. Upon exposing the feet of the principals and rafters of the south aisle what had always been considered a good roof was discovered to be in a very bad condition, the timbers being in a hopeless state of decay. The plastered ceiling here, too, had hidden defects evidently of long standing.

The building committee were now faced with the added task and consequent additional expenditure of removing the plaster ceiling and repairing (if possible) or renewing the old timbers in which the ravages of the death-watch beetle were most pronounced.

Every effort is being made to see that the work of restoration shall be carried out upon the best and most conservative principles; and the aim of the building committee is to restore the fabric to its pristine glories without embellishments or unavoidable costs.

TO COST £4,000.

From what has been stated it will be readily understood that the lowest estimate of the cost of carrying to completion, in its barest essentials, the work of restoration will involve a sum of upwards of £4,000, or more than double the cost of the work as first contemplated. The parishioners of Cowbridge, who are justly proud of their venerable and historic church, have faced, and are continuing to face, their responsibility with buoyant enthusiasm and courage. The task they are called upon to undertake has, however, grown to such formidable dimensions that they cannot shoulder the whole financial burden.

OUTSIDE HELP NEEDED.

It has become patent that unless aided by a generous public from the wider domain outside the walled boundaries of this small borough of 1,200 souls the work must perforce be abandoned or at the best left in an incomplete and manifestly unsatisfactory condition. Up to the present time by purely local efforts in the form of bazaars, donations, subscriptions, &c., the magnificent sum of £2,200 has been secured. This is approximately £400 in excess of the amount which the committee originally set out to obtain. The expenditure already incurred has in round figures been as follows:—Renovations to tower, £400; temporary repairs to roof, £65; in respect of contract for removal of old nave roof and construction of new roof, £2,000; cost of renovation to arcade, £460; making a total of £2,925.

In connection with the necessary renovations to the roof of the south aisle and other urgent work it is estimated a further sum of £2,000 is essential, thus bringing the deficit to be met to £2,725.