

St. Cuthbert's, Wells.

BY MR. B. FERREY.

ST. CUTHBERT'S Church is a large and very interesting building, chiefly of the Third Pointed Period, and possessing the usual characteristics of churches in Somersetshire. The nave piers, and some of the windows, are of earlier date; and the weather-mould of the original roof is still visible on the east side of the tower, inside the church.

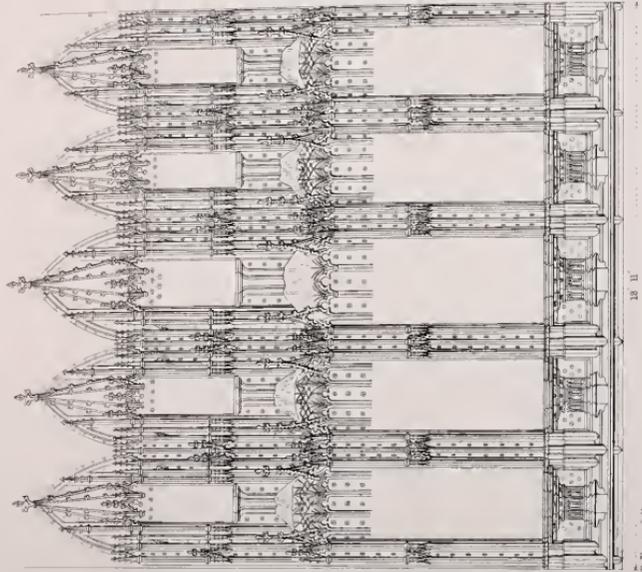
The church consists of a west tower, nave, and aisles, with chantry chapels both on the north and south sides. Transeptal chapels have also been added on the north and south sides, in which the reredos, the drawings of which are submitted to the meeting, were discovered. There are porches on the north and south sides of the church, each having a parvise over. The chancel has aisles; and the sacristy, on the north side, is original. The tower of the church is well known as one of the finest examples in Somersetshire. The first of some interesting discoveries was made about last August in one of the chapels before mentioned, on the north side of the nave (dedicated to the Holy Trinity), and consisted of a fresco, life size, of our Blessed Saviour, clad

in a russet-coloured garment, with a red cloak on his shoulders, and holding in his left hand an orb surmounted by a cross—his right hand in the act of benediction ; the feet were bare. The monogram *ihc m'cy* repeated ten times on the ground of the fresco ; at the foot are the words '*Salvator Mundi*,' and over the head of the figure, an angel with outspread wings, holding a shield with the five wounds, on an azure ground. The fresco, when first discovered, was, I am informed, in a very dilapidated condition, parts of the colouring having since been restored. Eastward of this chapel, and immediately adjoining it, is one of the transeptal chapels, dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin. On the east wall of this, the reredos was accidentally discovered by the removal of some panelling.

It will be seen by the drawing that the design was most magnificent, the groining of the niches being of peculiar richness, and the execution of the whole work exceedingly delicate and beautiful. The centre of the lower range of niches is larger than the others, and probably contained the figure of the Blessed Virgin ; the groining of the canopy was very different from the others, and was much richer. The centre of the upper range of niches may probably have contained the figure of our Saviour ; the sacred monogram being there several times introduced.

In this, as in the reredos on the other side of the church, the niches were found filled with fragments of figures, all more or less mutilated, and with their faces turned to the wall, to give a smooth surface for the plastering by which they were concealed from view. In one of the windows on the north side of the chancel, which had been filled up to receive some plastering and panelling, were also found an immense number of fragments of figures, canopies of niches, pinnacles, and other ornamental portions. Every





15' 0"

F.T. Dolman, del.

18 11

ELEVATION OF REREDOS
AT EAST END OF LADYE CHAPEL
ST CUTHBERT'S CHURCH, WELLS, SOMERSET

SCALE OF FEET

10 FEET

8

6

4

2

1

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

one of the figures was headless ; and it is observable that those on which iconoclastic fury had been principally bestowed, were the Blessed Virgin and the figures of ecclesiastics. Many of these were of great beauty, and the colouring and gilding were as fresh and bright as though only recently executed. At the time I was at Wells, no attempt had been made (or rather had only just begun to be made) to classify and arrange them ; but I have no doubt that since October last, (the period of my visit to Wells,) some progress has been made in ascertaining the appropriation of the various fragments.

The blue lines in the upper canopies on the drawing indicate a presumed restoration of those portions, the whole of the projecting parts having been of course removed, to make a smooth face for the plaster. The lower range of niches present indications of what seems to me a great singularity, viz. of having had *double* canopies. On one of the compartments I have ventured to show something of what I conceive to have been the design, leaving the other compartments as they exist at present. The colouring and gilding generally is somewhat dilapidated, but enough remained to enable me to make a restoration.

The reredos on the south side of the church is altogether of very different design, as will be seen by the drawing, and, as I think, of later date than the other. It was discovered nearly at the same time with that in the Lady Chapel. The chapel in which it exists is known both as St. Cuthbert's Chapel and as Tanner's Chantry ; on the south side, on the removal of some plaster, was found a mural inscription, in black letter :—‘*Anniversarie Thomae Tanner est in festo Ste. Katerinae.*’ The recumbent figure of Jesse was evidently very boldly and beautifully executed, but, with the exception of the feet and

some portions of the drapery, little more than the outline remains ; traces of the stem issuing from his body exists, and are shown in the drawing. The design of this reredos has not so much variety as the other, the niches being exactly similar in every instance, and the execution not so good in some respects ; a portion of it has been entirely destroyed, as will be seen by reference to the plan, on which this part is indicated merely in outline. From the appearance of the masonry of the window on the exterior, and the general clumsiness of the interior, I am induced to think it must have been brought to this spot from some other part of the building, and, after its insertion, the niches that were there previously were destroyed. Some of the figures that remain hold in their hands scrolls, with inscriptions referring to the history of Jesse and his descendants ; and it may therefore be fairly assumed that they originally filled the niches in this reredos. I may add here, that no trace of the original altar exists in either instance.

A range of niches on a smaller and less elaborate scale in the east wall of the north aisle of the chancel, and a *piscina* and *sedilia* of the Middle Pointed Period on the south side of the chancel, were also brought to light, together with the original entrance into the sacristy, which had been closed up, and a modern entrance substituted. Of all these I took memoranda, but have not had time hitherto to draw them to scale. I hope to lay them before the Society at a future meeting.

In conclusion, I think it right to add, that the churchwardens of St. Cuthbert's Church, and indeed all the officials, have shown the greatest zeal in endeavouring to preserve from further injury, to the utmost of their power, these most interesting memorials.