

Restoration of the Tower of Taunton Saint Mary Magdalene.

*At a Meeting held at the Market House, Taunton, May
14, 1852, to consider the state of the Tower of the
Church of Taunton St. Mary Magdalene.*

REV. H. PARR, the Vicar, in the Chair.

Present—Messrs.

Stevens, } Porter, } Edwards, } Badcock, H. Badcock, R. Baker, Beadon, E. Chard, Coker, W. Cox, A. C. Fisher, T.	Church- wardens.	Giles, W. Hayman, Hucklebridge, Jeboult, May, Pinchard, Pring, Rawlinson, Rendell, Small, Smith, Rev. F. J.	Sutton, C. Sweet, Todd, Major Trenchard, F. A. Trood, H. Turle, Welch, Woodland, W. Woodford, W. Wright,
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A Report of the state of the Tower, with plans, from
Messrs. Carver and Giles, was laid before the Meeting.

A Summary of the Report with an Estimate having been read,
it was moved by Mr. R. BADCOCK, seconded by Mr.
F. A. TRENCHARD, and *resolved unanimously*,—

That this meeting receives the Report obtained by the late
and present Churchwardens, as to the state of the Tower,
and offers its best thanks to those gentlemen for the course
they have taken.

That the Report fully satisfies this meeting, that imme-
diate proceedings are necessary for the repair and restora-
tion of the Tower: with reference not only to its orna-
mental character, but to the security of the fabric of the
Church.

It was moved by Mr. H. BADCOCK, seconded by Mr. JEBOULT, and *resolved unanimously*,—

That it is the opinion of this Meeting, that the necessary sources for proceeding with such repair and restoration, should be raised by parochial rate, and subscriptions in aid thereof, and that the Churchwardens be requested to convene a Vestry Meeting, in order to consider the said report, and the propriety of making a rate for the purpose of raising such sum, or to take such other steps as may at such Vestry Meeting be agreed on.

It was moved by Mr. E. BEADON, seconded by Mr. PINCHARD, and *resolved unanimously*,—

That previously to the convening of such Vestry, the proceedings at this Meeting, and a summary of Messrs. Carver and Giles's Report be printed and circulated for the information of the Parishioners and the Public, under the direction of the Vicar and Churchwardens.

The Churchwardens announced their intention to convene such Vestry Meeting.

HENRY PARR,

Chairman.

Subscriptions in aid of a proposed rate have been promised by the Right Hon. Lord Portman, Lord Lieutenant; the Right Hon. Lord Ashburton, Impropiator; the Ven. the Archdeacons of Taunton and Bath; F. H. Dickenson, Esq.; and other influential gentlemen in the county. Further subscriptions are requested, which will be received by the Vicar, by either of the Churchwardens, and at the different Banks in Taunton.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT.

IN brief my report is, that the Tower is in a very bad state. That the evils affecting it have not been produced by one great radical defect, but rather by a number of causes operating in various ways.

The Foundations appear to be solid and secure, and the walls, (though not so massive as in some other instances,) are of considerable thickness. And yet many of the present evils must have manifested themselves shortly after the completion of the building.

The chief of them is the want of sufficient strength in the great arches supporting the Eastern and Western walls, from the absence of proper relieving arches over them. This deficiency has at an early period produced vertical fractures in the superimposed walls, extending to nearly half their height, and in spite of all the remedies yet applied (in the shape of iron tie bars and cramps,) these settlements have extended, until large portions of the walls are almost ruinous.

The mode by which I propose to remedy this evil, is by inserting even now, proper relieving arches, and then restoring the walls above to a sound condition.

The second great cause of mischief seems to be, the defective construction of the masonry of the walls behind the ashlared fronts. Almost every where, large flints and stones are built in without regard to their position, and without any secure bond; hence vertical joints are seen with scarcely a break, often six or seven feet in height, the result has been, that every tendency to settlements, or unequal pressure, has shewn itself by long vertical fissures opening. Fortunately the excellency of the mortar, has served to retard their extension.

The whole Tower is faced on its exterior with dressed stones laid in courses; hence the fractures seen on the interior surfaces do not correspond with similar ones on the outside; in each case they generally follow the joints of the

masonry, which is (as I have said) different in kind ; nearly all the larger cracks do however extend quite through the walls, producing loose work inside, and bursting out the surfaces of dressed stone on the exterior.

By inserting long bond stones across these fractures, as high up as they can be traced ; by bonding the walls to each other at all the interior angles ; and by the iron plates proposed to be used as bonds, the walls will I believe be far better calculated to resist pressure than when they were erected.

A third great cause of evil, has been the decay of the sand stone, with which the plain faces of the exterior of the Tower were built. This stone is evidently quarried not far from the town, probably at Norton or Bradford, and forms one variety of the "new red sand stone group." It seems generally to have been well selected, and is very hard and compact where not decayed. It is at the angles and buttresses, that the decomposition has become so serious, and wherever the stone has been exposed on more than one side to the action of the weather. All these exposed parts must be re-built with the more durable stone from the Hamden Hill quarries. This latter material is that with which all the ornamental features of the Tower are constructed, including the parapet and pinnacles, the windows, string courses, arches, &c. It belongs to the class of "inferior oolites," and ranks high as material for building. The quarries were worked by the Romans, at a very early period. There is a great difference in the quality of the beds. The best stone being whiter and more expensive to work from its hardness and closer texture. This has led to the use of the inferior stone in great quantity, until an opinion has prevailed that the better beds were exhausted. It is certain however, that excellent stone can yet be obtained by paying a rather higher price for it. In St. Mary's Tower, there is a large amount of good stone little injured by the wear of 350 years. Unless laid in its bed, that is, with the grain or strata of the stone horizontally as dug from the quarry, it however will not endure either weather or vertical pressure long, and the decay of the Ham Hill stone work throughout the Tower, is limited by the extent to which it has been used with a vertical bed. Unfortunately nearly all the prominent features have suffered from this cause. The jambs of the windows are generally

sound, while the parapet though renewed in portions at least more than once, is now again ruinous. In the restoration of these parts wherever practicable, the stone must be used in its bed, or decay will again speedily commence. These are the principal causes which have reduced this magnificent building to so lamentable a condition. And when we consider that it contains 8 bells suspended at a height of 90 feet from the ground, which with their framing, altogether are nearly equivalent to a weight of 15 tons,* and that this ponderous mass is so often set in violent motion, we shall be only surprised that greater evils have not ensued. The bell ringing has no doubt increased the defects alluded to. I am inclined to believe that the Tower will be quite qualified to resist this strain when strengthened by the modes proposed.

Another source of mischief has been the fall of water from the roof to the ground, on the north side; much of the decay on this side of the building, is to be attributed to this cause, and when any restoration takes place, the water must be conveyed down by a proper pipe fixed within the Tower.

Having thus laid before you the result of the investigation undertaken at your request, I have little further to add. We have undertaken the, in some respects not pleasant duty, of making the public fully acquainted with the decay of a very noble edifice. It does not perhaps form a part of our commission to dwell on its great merits. Well known throughout England as the Tower of St. Mary Magdalene in Taunton, is, any eulogies would be superfluous.

The duty of those to whom the task of reparation shall be confided, must be limited to one object. The restoration of every feature and moulding to as good a condition as that in which its original builder left it. Old stones should not be re-cut to make them look like new. Lichens and moss are more picturesque than new ashlar. Where necessary the old work must be cut out, and new inserted, and if for a time the Tower wears rather a party coloured aspect, it will be preferable to that of one uniform smartness, and will soon tone down to an agreeable hue again.

On the succeeding sheet will be found a list of the por-

*I cannot answer for the strict accuracy of this weight, the bells not being all marked.

tions of the building already lost, or in danger at present of falling; and also an estimate of the cost of the entire restoration. It should be added that the work may be undertaken in two portions and may be spread over a few years. If the sum of £1800 can be raised during a term of a year and a half, the work can be commenced, and many of the more serious evils arrested, and by the expiration of this term a further sum would perhaps be found. I believe that the upper stages can be restored by a scaffolding built out from the windows, and this will prevent the serious inconvenience which a permanent frame work raised from the ground would cause.

Interruption would of course ensue to the bell ringing, but not to the church services.

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours very faithfully,

CHARLES EDMUND GILES,

To the Vicar and (for Carver and Giles.)
Churchwardens of the
Parish of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton.

Portions of the Tower which have either fallen, or have been removed for safety at different times.

Three of the large pinnacles in the middle of the parapets on either side. Portions of the third are lost, and when the whole has fallen, all authority for the restoration of this feature will have perished.

Two of the small overhanging pinnacles at the angles of the parapet have been more than half removed, and the two remaining are on the eve of falling.

All the gurgoyles which were excellently carved, are almost obliterated, fragments only remaining.

Many portions of the large pinnacles and of the parapet are lost.

The whole of the battlements and pinnacles of the stair turret have fallen, and only a few fragments remain on the roof inside, or at the edge overhanging.

Nearly all the small pinnacles on the faces of the buttresses have perished.

The richly carved niches are so much decayed, that in a short time their restoration will be only conjectural.

All the carved angels and heads amounting to more than a hundred, will soon retain no traces of their original design.



TOWER OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE'S CHURCH
TAUNTON.

Portions of the Tower which are at the present time in danger of falling.

Portions of the battlements of the stair turret, weighing more than 2 cwt. are in imminent danger, being quite detached and overhanging the wall.

At the north eastern angle of the parapet, the small pinnacle projecting from the larger one, and overhanging the north aisle, rests entirely on a very decayed and dangerous gargoyle. This pinnacle weighs probably nearly 10 cwt. and is disjointed, crooked, and at its centre shattered so much, as to render it extremely dangerous.

The great pinnacle at the north eastern angle of the parapet is falling apart. The finial is splitting asunder, and many fragments are likely soon to be precipitated on the roof of the church.

At the south eastern angle of the parapet, the small pinnacle is in a dangerous state, and portions of the great pinnacle are quite loose.

At the south western angle of the parapet, the small pinnacle is quite unsafe, and several cwt. of stone may fall at any time. A stone weighing about eight or nine pounds has fallen, and has been caught by the projecting neck of the decayed gargoyle, where it is just balanced, and overhangs the corner at which the school children play between school hours.

The great pinnacle at this corner has also many very dangerous portions.

The great pinnacle and the small overhanging one at the north western corner, are in a similar condition with the preceding.

The pinnacle in the centre of the parapet on the north side has portions quite loose which would fall at a touch, the small shaft in connection with it, depends for support on the legs of the gargoyle, which are worn away and reduced to the diameter of an inch.

All the great pinnacles surmounting the buttress are dangerous. Four of them are in a frightful state and will fall before long, they weigh more than 10 cwt. and two would fall on the church.

The buttresses on the north side of the west front is undermined and separating from the wall. A great portion now rests on about eight inches of masonry much decayed. Above two tons of masonry will probably slip at once when this stone gives way.

There are many hundreds of smaller features and fragments of stone, scattered over the entire surface of the Tower in a falling condition, and on the west front are several iron cramps and ties, weighing about 15 lbs. each, which must fall soon, one is particularly threatening, and one has lately fallen weighing 9 or 10 lbs.

An Abstract Estimate of the cost of a complete Restoration of the Tower of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton.

	£	s.	d.
Restoring all the Windows, Panels, String courses, carved features of every description, rebuilding the entire Parapet and Pinnacles, rebuilding the Buttresses and Angles of the Tower, with the best Ham Hill stone, in a thoroughly good and substantial manner - - - - -	2648	16	3
Restoring the exterior faces of the Tower wherever requisite with sand stone, and including pointing, and all masonry of every description necessary for the works proposed to be executed in the accompanying Report, as "restoration of fractures and settlements," and for "strengthening and binding the interior angles," &c.	372	3	4
All Iron work of every description necessary for bond plate or for stays, &c. - - -	71	13	2
Relaying the Lead work on the roof with the gutters, &c. - - - - -	42	10	0
Woodwork to Roof and the several floors -	60	0	0
A Scaffold to reach to one half the height of the Tower, and adjusted to fix as a cradle scaffold from the several floors, allowing for the value of the materials - - -	400	0	0
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	£3595	2	9
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May 3rd, 1852.

The Report of Messrs. Carver and Giles in full, with the Drawings and Plans, may be seen at Mr. Porter's, North-street.



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