



THORNDON ALLSAINTS, SUFFOLK.
c.860.

RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF ALL SAINTS, THORNDON.

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The illustrations accompanying this paper are reproduced from early photographs of Thorndon Church interior before its restoration in 1866.

Photographs of interiors taken at this early date are not plentiful, which is to be regretted as the drawings which are more in evidence often idealize the real, being biased by the ego of the artist and his idea of fitness and decorum, and really bedizen dissolution.

Hypothetical interiors thus pictured have saddled Victorian restorers with a measure of odium which they do not always deserve.

It was not excess of wealth or zeal that inspired them but stern necessity that impelled them to a choice of evils.

Church life and activities had languished for so long that necessary repairs had been neglected and the condition of many church interiors was deplorable; decayed woodwork and fittings, roofs and floors gave evidence of the extent of the neglect.

The proposition before the restorers was similar to that before dentist and patient. The tooth is too decayed for "stopping." It must come out. Is the gap to be left or restored?

At the beginning of this century the condition of Thorndon interior, prior to its restoration, was well remembered by the elder inhabitants. Some of them had attended day school held in the chancel and remembered sitting over a "brass image." This brass has disappeared but may be covered by the organ. But before alluding to the interior I must point out that early camera lenses forshortened interiors abnormally and from the illustrations Thorndon Church appears a very small church and the photographs fail to convey

the fact that it easily seats 400 persons and that the nave is 66 ft. (exactly a cricket pitch) and the chancel 42 ft. long, a total of 36 yards, interior measurement.

Under the nave floor were large vaults which were occasionally flooded, the water rushing in with such violence that the noise of the coffins knocking together was distinctly audible, and as a result of this ebb and flow of water the atmosphere rising through the flooring was anything but pleasant.

In fact the flooring over these vaults, down the centre of the nave, was so thin and worn that the passage-way had seats and forms arranged over dangerous places lest the unwary should unwittingly set one foot in the grave.

The roof leaked badly and with water from above and water from below all basilar wood work was in such a decayed and dangerous condition that an ascent to the three decker pulpit, especially by a visiting preacher, was anticipated by the congregation with mixed emotions.

The pulpit sounding-board having performed the function of an umbrella for many years had with the greater part of the church wood work to be placed on the retired list.

The three decker itself was removed from the north wall of the nave to that on the south and shorn down to a simple pulpit.

The box pews of unpainted deal were re-made and the gallery which was painted black and bore in gold lettering an inscription containing an account of Sir Edward Kerrison's connection with the Reformatory School, was taken down.

In this gallery the Reformatory boys used to sit on Sunday muffled up in huge red comforters.

When the vaults were filled up the monumental stone slabs were removed from the chancel and replaced down the centre of the nave.

A Communion Table is remembered as being a "very ornary table" and as being moved about in the church and employed for all sorts of purposes.

The rows of pegs by the south door, on which hats and coats were hung during service, were removed and the faces of the figures on the font which had been smashed in Puritan days were trimmed and new faces carved and attached. The font itself being moved from under the gallery to the correct place, midway between the south and north doors.

The west window behind the gallery, which had been bricked up, leaving only a fan-light at the apex, was opened up and the present window put in.

The walls were carefully scraped and examined for Mural paintings without the hoped for result, but the labour was not lost as the door and stairs to the rood loft were discovered in the north wall, as well as the piscina on the south of the altar and the holy water basin in the south east angle of the outer wall of the porch, all of which had been bricked up and plastered over.

The beautifully carved triple-canopied reredos of oak and the altar table were presented at the restoration by the late Poet Laureate, Dr. Robert Seymour Bridges and his sister Julia Mary Bridges. Dr. Bridges was a brother of Mrs. Glover, wife of the Rector of Thorndon.* His father dying when he was a child he made Thorndon Rectory his second home during his Eton and Oxford days. The room at the extreme west of the house being known as "Robert's room."

This reredos was made in England with the exception of the central group of the Last Supper, which was carved in Belgium.

Tradition has it that on two occasions Thorndon Church has been partly destroyed by fire and evidences in confirmation of this were found during the restoration.

All that can be gathered of the architectural history of the church from structural evidence has been recorded on many occasions, but there are reasons to support the conjecture that the church once possessed certain

*The Rev. W. Glover, of St. Mary's, Bungay, was presented to the Living of Thorndon by his father, Archdeacon Glover, in 1861. The restoration of the Chancel was commenced by him in 1866 with help from Q.A.B. The restoration of the Nave was commenced towards the end of 1869.

features that have not been noted, especially that it had a south aisle, built in the Decorated period and extending from the tower to the level of the rood—which was burnt down somewhat late in the 15th century and never rebuilt.

Why the north and south walls of Thorndon Church were not a pair had long puzzled me. The north wall being of earlier construction and showing considerable batter whilst the south wall presents a patched-up appearance and is straight, without any batter, and is obviously a reconstructed later wall.

Also when some decayed floorboards were being replaced the joists were found to be supported on ashlar and carved stone of the Decorated period, among them being massive pillar plinths.

As Thorndon Church now consists of a nave only there must have been formerly something for these pillars to support, as arcade either to an aisle or chantry chapel.

The marks of fire at the south west end of the church suggests that an aisle was burnt down and not rebuilt, the material being moved inward instead and used to build the south wall. This wall taking the place of the arcade formerly dividing the aisle from the nave where the pillars stood, the pillars thus became useless and were scrapped. The result was to leave the church in its present state as a building with a nave and no aisle.

It is interesting to note that Thorndon Church was the repository of the parish weights and measures.

The weights and measures of capacity being stored in the church whilst the church structure supplied the measures of length.

The nave supplied the standard 22 yards, which is the breadth of an acre, this multiplied by 10 gives the length, and supplies the exact statute acre.

The ox goad was the common measure, and the peasant would know that the nave gave him the length of 4 goads, which he could tell off on his 10 fingers for his furlong (furrow-long) and 4 goads broad and 40 long gave him his acre measurement.

Other lesser measurements were supplied by subdivisions of the nave or by width and height of porch and arch, but these marks have disappeared.

The length of Thorndon chancel is 42 ft., but chancels were sacrosanct and never commercialized as was the nave, and their measurements are arbitrary.

When upon our Excursions we visit churches very few archæologists appear to notice the site on which the church stands for if they did you would not so often hear the astonished question "Why is the church so far from the village?" or "What an out-of-the-way, or funny place, to build a church?"

The site of Thorndon Church is noticeable. It stands upon a mound enclosed by a circular fosse overlooking the large lake that formerly lay at its foot.*

The original circle has been considerably squared by the roads, garden and field that surround it, but was probably one of the solar circles of the Bronze age, other evidence being found in Thorndon of Neolithic and Bronze age culture.

It is the same size and probably of the same period as Stonehenge.

It differs from Stonehenge in having no stone work and this may be because Thorndon has no local stone or because the stones have been removed. Anyway stone is not necessary to solar worship as the cult of the stone belongs to an earlier worship which the solar superseded. It certainly incorporated it but only for symbolical and utilitarian purposes, much in the same way as Christianity later on took over this site and transformed the earlier forms of worship, for the pioneer Christians were not advocates of iconoclasm.

Lacking both the power and will to destroy, their policy was to leaven the lump of heathendom by peaceful permeation.

When they came to Thorndon they would find her people ready to welcome their more enlightened creed, for on account of her advantageous situation on a river, alongside a Roman road and with a lake as a harbour

*Proceedings, Vol. XVII, Plate p. 222.

she possessed every requisite, then known, for inter-communication with the outer world and would be in a position to acquire the latest news, knowledge and merchandise from island and overseas.

Topographical advantages that raised the standard of civilization of such a settlement far above that of a less happily situated neighbour. The former being well acquainted with the use of metal whilst the latter were still in the stone age.

It was in these more polished localities, such as Thorndon, that Christianity first found a footing, amid progressive people who felt no mental stimulus nor moral incentive in the crude creeds of nature cults which they regarded as puerile and impotent. The pulpit must always be in advance of the pew.

By some such open door Christianity appears to have entered Thorndon and become established at a very early date, during the period when Celtic rites and worship held sway and before the departure of the Romans permitted the subsequent immigrations of disturbing elements to sweep away Celtic influence, and dilute its rites and ceremonies.

The earliest Christian missionaries found England as their Master found the world, entirely heathen. They did not destroy, because you cannot destroy evil without destroying a great deal of good with it. They pronounced it good but the ingredients badly mixed. They did not introduce a new religion for the root was from the beginning, but amended and reformed it upon Gospel lines.

In Thorndon they found that in "feeling after God" the people had made a shrine on the highest point of the crest of the Dene which gives to Thorndon its name.

This situation implies an early site as only high ground would be occupied, the lower lands being marsh and jungle.

This shrine took the form of a circle, which is the base of many imitative rites which we call "sympathetic magic" and salvation by similars and as representing



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the sun, fulfilled the functions of the sun, especially in its vivifying powers of life and birth.

Bodies were therefore burned or buried therein that they might be re-born.

Cremation served a double purpose. It hindered the ghost from troubling the neighbourhood and also the flames carried the spirit of the departed beyond the world "ad plures."

In this circle fire festivities and funeral games were celebrated either at Beltane or Saman for the Celtic year was divided into two seasons, Summer and Winter. The Summer from May 1st to November 1st. Winter from November 1st to May 1st.

New Year's Day was Saman, November 1st, and in this connection we must remember that the early Celts reckoned time by nights, a method which we observe by retaining fortnight, month (moon), eves of festivals, etc.

It is not difficult to understand the veneration paid to fire and the sun, but we must not think that fire and solar worship meant that these were looked upon as God.

This is a popular error, what was worshipped was the "power behind" the "Hidden One," of which these were manifestations and agents, as were the idols to which the heathen in his darkness bows down, in the same spirit that a Christian makes the sign of the Cross, in recognition of the Presence.

Fire ritual and funeral games were celebrated in this circle, now our Churchyard. The former being very comprehensive and including a means of communication between the living and the dead. Offerings and gifts from the living being placed in the arms of the fire to be transformed and conveyed by the flames in fitting form to the departed.

Funeral games, associated with ancestor worship, took the form of dances. The earliest form of prayer, for the heathen then, and savages to-day, express themselves in dance. They dance their sorrow and joy, their love and rage, as well as their magic and religion.

These games and fireworks attracted people from far and near and to provide refreshments for them, stalls for selling provisions and requirements for sacrifices and the various ceremonies were erected in this spot and became the nucleus of our Village Fairs, which for many years after Christianity was established, were held in the Churchyard and their banishment may be the cause of the late appearance of grave stones and the effect of their introduction.

The Roman occupation affected the religions of England but little. Her Pantheon was too broad and her army too polytheistic not to include heli-olatory and pyrrhonism in her theosophy, and religion was much the same before and after her withdrawal.

Men's minds and bodies were becoming more educated and civilised and crude nature and stone cults had yielded place to the more intellectual and moral sun and fire worship, which in turn was not satisfying and something better was desired.

The hour had come for Christianity and Christian missionaries found the people receptive and malleable so that with Christian tact and patience they built upon heathen foundations the Church of Christ.

From the dedication of our Church to All Saints, which falls on November 1st,* we may with certainty conclude that of the two fire festivals Saman and Beltane, Thorndon observed the former, which was held on New Year Day, November 1st, to celebrate Saman.

It was impossible for teachers of an incipient creed to break the thousand threads that bound the people to age old sites and ritual which linked the living with their venerated dead, but by the substitution of the Festival of All Saints none of their customs were abused, but all were elevated to a higher moral sphere.

Naturally Saman, New Year's day or rather night, was a most important commemoration and in order to raise the tone of its rites by Christian teaching of a similar type, the Christian Festival of All Saints was placed on

*At the time of the Reformation many church dedications were altered but pre-Reformation wills attest that Thorndon All Saints persisted.

November 1st, of All Souls on November 2nd, and Hallow E'en on October 31st. Of course this was done gradually as necessity demanded, for many of the Christian festivals were moveable and were fixed when and where required.

That Saman is not yet dead is obvious if we carefully consider the games, customs and superstitions of Hallow E'en and All Souls Day, not forgetting the fire festival of November 5th, for folk memory is tenacious and Guy Fawkes but an excuse for an hereditary urge. Nor is the dancing at the funeral games quite forgotten for when many years ago I enquired why there were no graves on the north side of the church, I was told by an unlettered ancient that he had heard tell that it was because folks did not like to be danced on. As he could not read it could only have been an oral tradition handed down to him. I do not doubt its truth for dancing was prominent in the religions of Old Testament days and did not fall into discredit much before Tudor days, when it took the form of church processions, which were often rhythmetical and took the form of a musical march, three steps forward and two backward.

These processions forming up in the Galilee (so called from galil, a wheel) and wheeling round the church, were such a necessary part of the service that in churches hemmed in by buildings such as Needham Market, a flying buttress was specially built to allow of the processions passing under it in order to get round the church.

Thorndon Churchyard now writes R.I.P. on her dead and their bones no longer rejoice in the dance. She has also seen her Burnt Sacrifices† pass into Bone Fires and now into bon fires over which the children leap instead of "passing through" them. She has seen the sacrificial bull delivered from sacrifice, only to be baited and now best forgotten.

Possibly the origin of many puzzling church dedications and obscure saints—of whom Hagiographers state

†Having been questioned as to the origin of Burnt Sacrifices—considering that the stench of burnt flesh is repellent?—An answer is that they are a most potent fetish being "imitative rites" and imitate the rising sun. Which appears to burn up the stars with fiery rays as it rises in morning splendour.

that nothing is known—may be discovered in some former pagan god. Thus testifying to the success of the earliest Christian missionaries in converting not only the heathen, but the heathen system to Christianity.

Perhaps the powerful fire gods Col and Tan may be found now, the one as a king, the other as a saint. The functions of the former being preserved in Old King Cole “who called for his pipe” and is represented as smoking. The latter as St. Ann on account of the similarity of sound.

In St. Anthony we can imagine Tan as doubly suggested, as otherwise it is difficult to account for erysipelas being called St. Anthony's fire.

“Life is arched with changing skies
Rarely are they what they seem
Children we of smiles and sighs
Much we know but more we dream.”