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THE ECCLESIOLOGIST, VOLUME III



THE

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ILLUSTRATIONS TO VOLUME III.

	Page	El.,		Page
Flowered quarries .	. 20	Church-yard Cross .		137
Monograms of the Holy Na:	me 48	Saxon Doors and Windows	240	139
Early-English Lancets .		Sigillum C.C.C		184
Rayly Boofs	104 106			

INDEX TO VOLUME HI.

Pene	There
Alters and Alter-screens 5	CHURCHES restored—
Altar-candlesticks 160	Albury 154
Altar-clothe 62	Bicknoller 58
Altars, original High 30, 160	Ashton, Long 28
Altar-screens	Bodiam 57
Altar-stones 30, 32, 95	Boston 88
Applitants appropriate	Brasted 29
Architects approved: — Mr. Allen 86	Bury S. Edmunds
Mr. Butterfield	Burwash
	Combuidas & Complehests 91 196
Mr. Carpenter ib. Mr. Derick 85	Cambridge, S. Sepulchre's 21, 128
Mr. Ferrey 150	Dunster 156
Mr. Harrison . 54, 159	Eastbourne . 55
Mr. Hayward 113	Ely Cath., Bp. Alcock's chapel 58
Mr. Kirk 151	Etton 56
Mr. Sharpe 24, 86	Exton 155
Architects condemned :-	Foulmire 88
Mr. Barry 44	Harston 32
Mr. Blore 99	Hereford Cath 113
Mr. Carver 158	Iffley 152
Mr. Cottingham 113	Impington 32
Mr. Kennedy 86	Isfield 155
Brasses, monumental . 60, 61	Kemerton 28
Chancels, arrangement of . 161	Keevil 114
Chancel-seats, exterior . 52	Kingston-by-sea 155
CHURCHES, new	Langford Budville 157
Barnstaple, r 150	Lewes 158
Beeding, c 151	Longstock 156
Birmingham, P 113, 150	Lowton 155
Clapton, c 28	Michael church 55
Cleeve, c 22	Monksilver 156
Clifton, c	011.11
Coalpit Heath, P 113	Orchard Portman . 157
	게 되는 그 모든 내가 하다 하다 가게 되었다면 하는 그 없는 그는 것이 되었다.
	Poynings 155
Glossop, c	Rothwell 114
Gordon square, c 32	Savoy chapel 57
Hull, c 150	Shoreham, New 156
Jedburgh, r 113	Shoreham, Old 155
Kensal Green, c 149	Stouting 58
Kirkham, P 28	Taunton 156
Lever Bridge, c 86	Tavistock 155
Lianliechyd, c 86	Thurlow, Little 57
Malvern, Great, M 149	Thursley 88
Morpeth, c 151	Treborough 157
Nailsea, .M 25	Wigan 128
Plymouth, c 54	Wilbraham, Great . 114
Purbrook, P 54, 88	Windsor 152
Redhill, c 23	Witley 88
Rouen, c 112	Yaxley 55
Sausthorpe, P 151	CHURCHES desecrated or abused
Seasalter, c 150	Banwell 27
Thelwall, r 86	Bishop's Lydiard
Trevor, P. 85	Brabourne . 64
Tunbridge, M 151	Bradley
Woodmancote c. 54	Breden 28

INDEX.

					Page	P P	ago
CHURCHES, desc	crate	d, &	c.—c	ontis	used.	Crosses, memorial	61
Brent Eleigh					94	Ely, Ladye Chapel of .	95
Bridgham	•		12		94		158
Brockley				•	91		168
Bullingham					62	Fresco paintings . 30, 56, 57,	
Caerleon		.*			68	Glass, stained . 16, 91, 107, 1	
Cambridge, S.	And	irew			160	Knights, cross-legged, list of in Lincl.	
Cannington					27	Leicest. Hunts. and Beds.	7
Chiddingfold					28	At Winchelsea	61
Christon					27	Lancet windows .	65
Cottesbroke	•				64	Lecterns	29
Coventry				•	30	Llandaff cathedral	10
Cow-Honeybo	urne				63	Meetings reported of CAMBRIDGE	20020-1
Cowthorpe	•300				29	CAMDEN SOCIETY, 44, 75, 77, 1	14,
Deerhurst					59, 96	116, 132, 1	
Dineder			100		59		183
Elstead				.00	28	Of Oxford A. S	84
Evenham			0.0		29		184
Flaxbourton					28	Nepdlework, church .	48.
Gloucester, 8.	Nie	icias	25.		63	Organs . 1,	85
Grewelthorpe				•	92		186
Hardwicke					63	Reviews on	
Hendred, East		×			93	Hall's Observations .	11
Holsworthy					94	Bristol Arch. Mag 13,	
Horwood				•	95	Bp. Mant's Architecture	13
Kildwick	•				64	Cockerill's Lectures .	37
Limington				•	64	Robertson's 'How?' and Hierurgia	
Langwm Isap					91	Anglicana	49
Malmesbury	•00				128	Aunt Elinbr	51
Melford, Long					58	Van Voorst's Fonts .	51
Moulton					63	Abbeys of Yorkshire .	51
Newton Dixto	n			3 0	68	Hierologus	52
Newton Tracy					95	Gilmor on Pues .	79
Norton .				*0	63	Architect. Canonica .	80
Othery					27	Overbec	83
Overstone					63	Durandus translat.	88
Perahore	•00		*		63		118
Pyworthy					95		119
Rippingale					59		120
Romsey Abbe	y				128		121
Rolvenden					64		124
Shobrooke	•				95		26
Slangham				*	160	Bowman's Architecture . 1	126
Steyning	•				160	Oxford Guide, Part 2 . 1	140
Stratford Toni	ıy			200	64	Pugin's Glossary . 1	141
Tamworth			26		94		144
Tarrant Gunv	ille			. 1	58, 96	Harington on Consecration 1	147
Tawstock	•01		90.00		95	Analysis of Architecture .	ib.
Thakeham		3.			160		48
Tolland			•		30	Close against Architecture 1	175
Walsoken		900		*	26	Rio de la Poésie Chrétienne 1	181
Wapenbury					30		184
Wedmore					93		185
Whittlesea	•				57	Instrumenta Ecclesiastics 1	187
Wighill				20	93	Roofs, wooden 72, 1	01
Woodford					94	Saxon churches . 20, 94, 1	38
York, S. Cuth	bert	's		•	93	Towers 1	173
Church-yards					129	Triptych 1	160
Cope preserved					160	Waller, Mesers.	60
Coronse lucis				¥3.	127		135
Crosses, church-	yard				137	Westminster Abbey .	97
Restored			2	8, 25	9, 157	Westminster S. Margaret's, stained	
Profaned	•			stern.	62	glass in	24
List of, in Lei	cest	ershir	e, Li	ngol	D-	Yorkshire Society	53
shire, and E					91	100 St W	

THE

ECCLESIOLOGIST

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"Bonec templa refeceria"

Nos. XXV. XXVI. SEPTEMBER 1843.

ORGANS.

FEW things give more trouble to church-arrangers or church-builders than the position of the organ. The instrument has grown so enormously from the "paire of organs" once accommodated in the rood-loft, that in parish churches, if allowed to retain the same place, it would quite block off the Chancel; and in cathedrals, where it generally is found in that place, if it does not shut up the Choir, yet it very materially and very incongruously destroys the vista of roof; besides being at least an unseemly substitute for the Rood once displayed there, and a most unfit adjunct for that part of a church which essentially symbolizes that death, rendered happy by the Saviour's Passion, by which the Church Militant is divided from the Church Triumphant. It is this solemn symbolism which we would make the strongest argument against using the Choir-arch in any case for the organ. We are not speaking, however, so much of cathedrals as of parish churches; in which the necessity, now beginning to be universally felt, of bringing the Chancel once more into use for the Communion-service, is operating very beneficially in removing organs, royal-arms, and flying pues (like those most inexcusable and irreverent examples in Great S. Mary's, Cambridge, Saffron Walden, Deal, Minety, &c.) from this position. The next place however to which the organ seems likely to retire, is one of the Transept-arches, in large churches, as at S. Alban's. There is certainly less impropriety in this arrangement, although in this case also the vista of roof is often spoilt, and a most useless and obtrusive screen rendered necessary to support or disguise the framework. But the chief objection, arising from its too great proximity to the Choir, will be discussed hereafter. The west end is the most usual place for the organ in parish churches : and who does not recollect a hundred instances in which a fine window is blocked by a hideous organ-case, surmounted by indecent angels blowing trumpets between crowns and mitres, and resting on a flaunting western gallery with prominent seats for the singers? Under this VOL. III.

gallery will be some free seats, and the despised Font; its cover, should it chance to have one, being mutilated or incomplete (as at S. Edward's in this town), from the want of height. We have seen a publick Baptism performed under a western gallery, and we doubt whether any more painful sight could be witnessed: the people in the body vainly attempting to pierce the gloomy recess, (in this case the part under the gallery was groined in plaister, and was like a crypt), and the people above in the gallery—truly it was a publick Baptism to them! We have thus shown the evils of each position, and we shall be justly asked, "What place then do you recommend?" At one time we felt some difficulty in answering this question; we were alive to the inconveniences of every ordinary situation, but did not clearly see

how they could be avoided.

The subject of Church musick is one which has always occupied much of our thoughts, more particularly as bearing upon this point in the arrangement of churches, although we have hitherto only touched upon it en passant in the Ecclesiologist. This might arise, perhaps, from the disgraceful neglect of this church-art in our University. miserable and effete singers running about from choir to choir, and performing, to a crashing and bellowing of organs, the most meagre and washy musick; how could Churchmen learn anything, under such a system, of the depth and majesty and sternness and devotion of true church musick? But the exertions of the Motett Society * of London, the example of S. Mark's Training College at Chelsea, and the high principles respecting this art maintained by our contemporary the English Churchman, have already done wonders in showing what are the nature, rules, and requirements of old church musick. It is now beginning to be recognised that church musick is almost exclusively vocal: at any rate the Gregorian chants, the canto-fermo, and the responses, according to the original musical notation of our Prayerbook (beautifully edited by W. Dyce, Esq. and published by Mr. Burns), clearly are better without any instrumental accompaniment whatever. It is said, we know, that an organ is necessary to lead, and keep together, and give body to, the voices. We reply (1), In practice it is not necessary, as may be shown by experience. We might refer to the success which has for some time attended the efforts of one of our members, the Rev. E. Shuttleworth, of S. Mary's, Penzance, where we have heard the whole service intoned admirably without instrumental accompaniment. (2), Were it necessary now-a-days, it would be open to grave objection; both from the positive evils thus introduced, and because it can never be allowed to patch up one wrong by another. Church musick was a part of church worship ages before the organ was brought to its present perfection: therefore there can be no a priori necessity for an organ in church musick. We confess we can see no objection to the use of a violoncello or horn to steady the chant in some cases. "But the organ is an improvement." In what respects? In that it drowns the voices, that it gives such opportunities of display

[•] We must take this opportunity of acknowledging for ourselves, and making known to our country readers, the extreme courtesy with which strangers are always permitted to attend the meetings for practice of this Society.

to the ambitious organist, in that it has practically introduced an entirely new kind of musick into our churches, in that it is opposed to the very theory of ancient church musick, of antiphonal chanting, and generally of hearty congregational singing? Let us not hear of such "improvements." Like the improvements in architecture itself, and other church-arts, the effect has been entirely to supersede the old ways, to bring in a showy but hollow secularity without a particle of solemnity or devotion. So much for its effect on worship: but we must not forget the disfigurement and mutilation of our churches to admit the monster-organ, nor the evils of an additional, and very often troublesome, official burdening the parish in many cases with a stipend equal to, or greater than, that of the curate; nor the depressing effect on musical taste generally, which has certainly followed, may we not say has been (partly at least) caused by, the extinction of the purely vocal musick of the Church. Church musick was now done by deputy. In cathedrals, before the Venite exultenus, the organ must now needs thunder a chant ;- for in the multitude of modern "chants," so called, who could tell which an organist might choose? then came "expressive" playing to represent sea and mountains, or thunder, or the like; it did not much matter whether the voices were heard at all, so that no wonder the choir never mustered in force, when it was not even necessary for one side to be complete: the old-fashioned idea of antiphonal chanting, the distinction of Decani and Cantoris, is now quite superseded; for the organ plays louder than all put together, and does the antiphonal part, when it chooses, all by itself, by its stops. The organ an "improvement" indeed! We owe to it in great measure the disgraceful appearance of most of our choirs at the Divine office: we have seen in cathedrals two vicars-choral on one side, and perhaps three boys on the other. Antiphonal chanting is of course out of the question. The men sing indifferently to either verse; and we have known the boys laugh and play till they both got to the same verse, and so, neither side wishing to give up, the Psalms ended by a sort of antiphonal duet between the organ and whole choir. We shall only hint at those obnoxious "Services" which cannot be performed without an organ-a new characteristick this of church musick-and which therefore have naturally enough entirely superseded (except where the officials are in a hurry, and so substitute a chant, particularly for the Benedictus, should that chance to have been set instead of the Jubilate,) the authorized musick for the Hymns. The direct effect of organs may also be shown thus: -compare a church where metrical psalms have been wont to be lustily sung with no accompaniment except (perhaps) a bass; and the same church, when some illjudged liberality has given a barrel-organ. We do not hesitate to say that we think nothing can be much more revolting than to hear the feeble singing of a congregation to a jingling, shaking, barrel-organ, which plays about three tunes like "Cambridge New." Give us the hearty singing of a conventicle before this. We repeat, that we believe it is to the general use of organs that the great falling off in musical power at the present time is to be attributed. That people can sing is shown by the example of conventicles and our own congregations in some country parishes; and