

NOTES

PAINTING IN PENN CHURCH

The most important discovery of its kind for very many years has been made recently in Penn Church. In the course of general re-decoration and repairs some oak boards, covered with lath and plaster, and in bad condition, were taken down from a space in the east bay of the roof immediately above the chancel arch. These lay in the churchyard for a week or more before a workman accidentally found some colour on them and informed the Vicar, the Rev. K. W. Mumford. I was called in to inspect them, and found that the sixteen boards fitted together to form a panel painting of the Doom, or Last Judgment, 12 feet wide and 6 feet 6 inches high in the centre. I was entrusted with the task of cleaning, preserving and re-assembling the painting—a work that is just completed after five weeks. As a result, one of the most impressive examples of a medieval panel painting of the Doom in this country has been preserved. It has been returned to the Church, but not placed in the roof again, where its detail would be lost. Instead, it has been mounted on a specially-constructed framework and fixed in the south aisle. There are only five other Dooms on boards in England, three of them tympana from the upper part of the chancel arch: so the Penn example is a great rarity. It is incomparably the richest in colour, being in a wide range of oil pigments. The iconography is somewhat unusual, since the receiving of the Saved into Heaven by St. Peter, is omitted, as well as the mouth of Hell; while the general Resurrection receives meagre treatment. The main scheme is Christ in Majesty flanked by Angels with Passion Symbols and blowing trumpets, with the Virgin and Twelve Apostles grouped below. It is a re-painting about 1480 of an earlier painting of about 1400, in which certain scenes were more profusely illustrated, the weighing of souls for example being painted out under

the green foreground of the later work. A fuller account, after thorough investigation, will be published elsewhere later.

E. C. ROUSE.

WORK IN LITTLE MISSENDEN CHURCH

The Vicar of Little Missenden, the Rev. W. H. Davis, has continued his admirable work of investigation and conservative restoration of the Church of St. John Baptist, in consultation with Mr. C. M. Oldrid Scott, F.S.A., and Mr. E. C. Rouse, F.S.A. As a result, many interesting features have been revealed; and we publish the results as a record for the future.

The 15th century south porch timbers have been repaired and some portions that were missing (like the original cornice, etc.), have been restored. The 14th century south doorway has been repaired and new mouldings added in stone to replace the clunch portions that had perished and been replaced by plastered brick in the 18th century. It was found that the outer arch had formerly had a label or hood-mould that had been chopped off. The interior arch was likewise repaired and missing portions were completed in stone, all old material being re-used wherever possible. In the flint rubble wall many pieces of moulded stone were found, including jambs of the former 14th century S. aisle windows, and the round head of a small Norman single light, or perhaps one side of a small trefoiled light, broken away at the cusp. A pair of early iron hinges were also found in the wall, and several encaustic tiles of patterns already known in the church. All these items are preserved. The ancient flint work has been exposed wherever possible, re-pointed and preserved.

There was a serious settlement at the S.W. corner of the S. aisle; and this was underpinned and a new angle-buttress built. In stripping the original quoins, three well-preserved mass dials were found.

The mutilated quoins of the Norman W. arch of the S. arcade have been repaired with new stonework. The original facing was found in place in parts, and a fragment of the original abacus moulding found in the pier enabled the old design to be exactly reproduced.

The mutilated and blocked up W. side of the tomb-recess arch in the N. Chapel has been restored; and in so doing a further portion of the painting of the Majesty has been recovered. Also in the N. Chapel, the further stripping of the interior plaster, put up when the extensive 18th century repairs were done, has revealed part of the splay of a 13th century lancet *in situ*, with original plaster and painting still intact. A new oak lintel has replaced a decayed one in the S.W. window of the Chancel: and the patchwork of cement, brick and plaster that formed the mullion of the W. window of the S. aisle has been replaced in stone.

Alterations to the heating system enabled investigations to be made as to the original floor level. This was found 8 inches below the present floor—or on a level with the chancel and N. chapel. At the bases of two piers parts of encaustic tiles were found *in situ*; and the pattern of the tiled floor could be traced by the impress of the vanished tiles in the cement. The piers were apparently surrounded by the small square $4\frac{1}{2}$ " or 5" encaustic tiles; and perhaps a pavement of them extended on the W. of each pier before the nave altars (it will be remembered that there is a Crucifixion painted on the W. face of the W. pier on the N. side, presumably backing an altar). There was then a band of narrow dark brown glazed tiles, $2\frac{1}{2}$ " wide; and the greater part of the floor seems to have been of plain red tiles, probably unglazed, 9" square, set diamond-wise.

Three windows of excellent stained glass designed by Mr. Gerald E. R. Smith and executed by the A. K. Nicholson Studios, have been placed in the Church as memorials,

POSSIBLY SAXON BURIAL AT PITSTONE

On the 17th of June, 1936, at Pitstone Chalk Pit, 500 feet O.D. and about half a mile N.E. of Pitstone Church, I saw what appeared to be a bone projecting from the chalk, high up on the cliff face; a few days later my son extracted from the chalk about 14 inches from the surface, the upper part of a left tibia and fragments of a right tibia and fibula.

On the 7th and 8th of July we uncovered the remainder of the skeleton which was lying extended in a supine position, head towards the E., lower extremities to the W., the skull was almost vertical, with the chin resting on the chest; it was small and the bones of the vault were very fragile, breaking with a touch.

The other bones extracted were those of the vertebral column, pelvis, clavicles, scapulae and ribs in fragments, right humerus, radius and ulna entire and some bones of the right hand which were lying on the right edge of the pelvis, the left humerus and part of the left radius and ulna.

The lower part of the left radius and ulna, and the hand could not be found; the left arm appeared to be extended outwards from the body.

The skeleton lay on the upper disintegrated surface of the chalk beneath the top-soil; there were a large number of small rounded calcareous nodules beneath the skull and the vertebral column. No beads, ornaments or metal were found, but in the top-soil was the point of a paleolithic hand axe and a piece of burnt flint.

The right femur measured $17\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the epiphysis of its lower end was not united. The pelvis was of the female type, and the third molars were not erupted.

Dr. F. G. Parsons expressed the opinion that the bones were those of a Saxon female about 18 years old, and 5 feet 4 inches, or 5 feet 5 inches in height. He also thought that others might be found near it in the chalk.

T. G. PARROTT.