

THE DISUSED CHURCH OF S. MARY, STOKE
MANDEVILLE, AND THE BRUDENELL
MONUMENT.

MR. CHARLES STRACHEY has written a letter which has recently appeared in the *Bucks Herald and Aylesbury News* in reference to the condition of the disused church of Stoke Mandeville, but more particularly calling attention to the unprotected state of an interesting monument in that church to the Brudenell family, which once held the Manor of Stoke. The letter was written none too soon, and it will undoubtedly receive the careful consideration of our Society. The Brudenell family is still existing, and its present head is the Marquess of Ailesbury; there is therefore encouragement for hoping that a successful effort will be made to preserve the monument, and, if possible, to protect the old Parish Church of St. Mary from sacrilege and destruction. A wise suggestion has been made to obtain a faculty to remove the monument into the new church, so that so important a memorial may not be lost to this parish. The following extracts from Mr. Strachey's letter will abundantly prove the necessity for immediate action being taken.—ED.

“The outer fabric of the church appears—to one without any special knowledge—to be, as yet, fairly sound; and the churchyard seems to be kept in good order. But the windows are broken, ivy has crept *inside* the building, and it is pretty to see the swallows darting up and down among the arches of the nave. Ceilings and woodwork are, of course, crumbling and collapsing, bits of old pews and worm-eaten doors and shutters lie tumbled about, with other ecclesiastical wreckage in various stages of decay: here a rickety wooden pulpit on its side—there a broken desk or book-rest, to which scraps of red cloth still adhere. The floor is strewn with plaster, broken glass and loose rubble of all kinds, and the columns of the arches are scrawled over with names and dates, from which it may be gathered that the place is a common resort, especially at bank-holiday time, of persons whose motives for visiting it are neither religious, archæological, nor artistic. Access is easy: at present the chancel door stands open, but should it be locked, a ready means of entry is provided by a broken window, the ledge

of which is conveniently near the ground. The vicar of the parish (which is a very poor one) informs me that he has repeatedly and at his own expense attempted to protect the building from damage by man and by the weather, but that he finds it impossible to do so; he also tells me that sacrilegious invaders have actually tried to disturb the tombs, of which the heraldic slabs are still decipherable among the dust and dilapidation of the floor.

"In this scene of desolation stands a monument which for reasons of piety, archæology, and art, must be rescued and preserved. Originally it was no doubt in a more elaborate setting which has vanished; but the essential portion remains—the life-sized recumbent figure of a little girl, carved in white marble, in Elizabethan costume. The details of the dress, the lace ruff, the hair, etc., are treated with much delicacy; at the head of the figure are the marble effigies of two babes in swaddling clothes; traces of colour are observable throughout. A rhymed inscription, unpolished in versification but touching in sentiment, tells us that this is the tomb of Mary, Thomas, and 'Dorathy,' children of Edmund Brudenell: '*Upon Good Fryday at night my doll departed*'—and the like. This monument is mentioned in various books dealing with local antiquities, but no description that I have seen does justice to its beauty and interest. It bears no date, but so strongly resembles (in the treatment of the swaddled babes, etc.) the well-known tomb in Aylesbury Church of the wife and children of Sir Henry Lee, that it is probably of about the same period (1584) and possibly by the same hand. If the Brudenell monument stood in a museum as an example of Elizabethan sculpture, it would receive ample attention. If it was in a village church in Normandy it would be the pride of the place; tourists would visit it from the surrounding towns, and a *café* close by would drive a flourishing trade.

"The sculptured figures have, of course, suffered from time and barbarism—this happens even to monuments which are as carefully looked after as the Lee tomb already mentioned. But situated as it is, the Brudenell monument is exposed to far greater danger. Visiting it last week, I noted with great regret the signs of quite recent bad treatment. The fingers of the principal figure and the nose of one of the babies had lately been damaged and chipped; the fresh surface of the broken marble and the crumbled fragments lying there showed this beyond doubt. On the cheek of the little girl was a hard lump of red dust—some light-hearted vandal had thrown half a brick (there are plenty to hand) at her. Sooner or later—it is only a question of time—her head will be broken off and sold to some collector of curiosities in London. So will a fine example of the sculptor's art be lost for ever—sacrificed by indifference and cruel neglect."

N.B.—Since the foregoing was written, information has reached me that the Marquess of Ailesbury has undertaken, with the assent of the Ecclesiastical authorities, at his own cost, to remove the Brudenell Monument into the New Church at Stoke Mandeville.—ED.