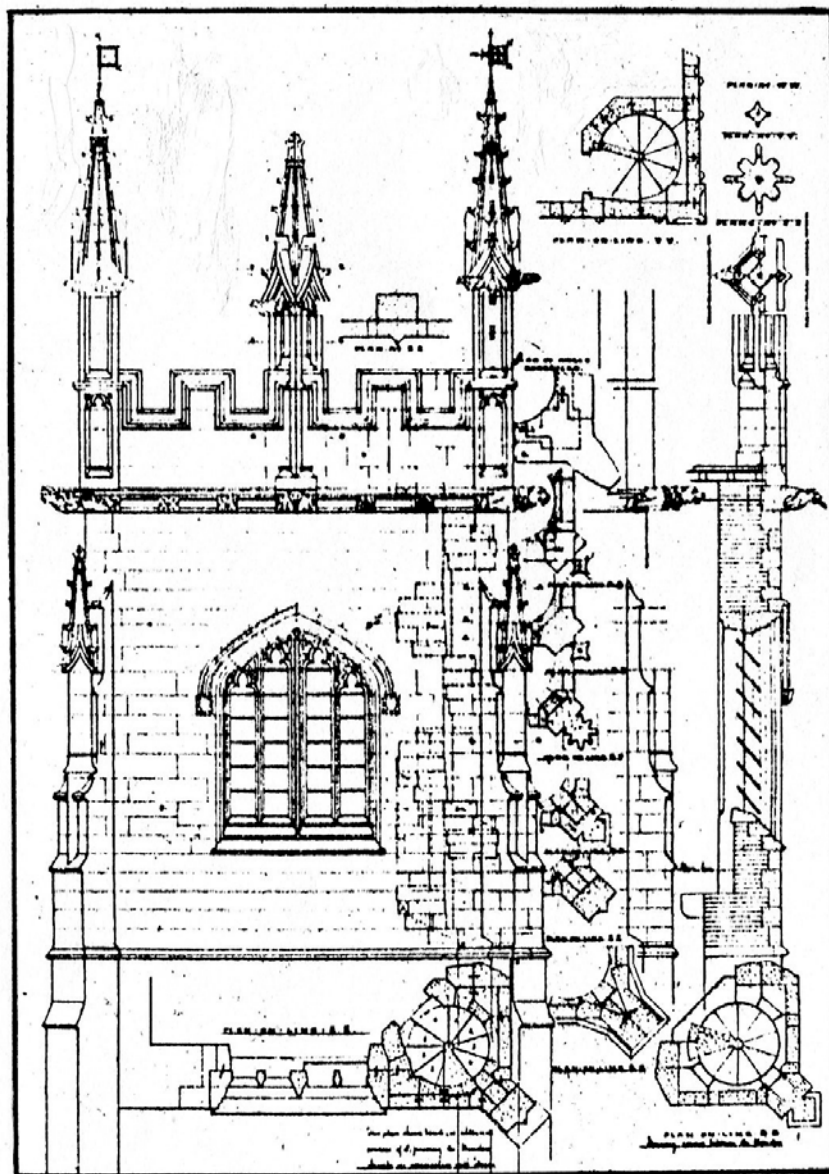


**NOTES ON
THE REBUILDING OF
BOWDON PARISH CHURCH
1860**



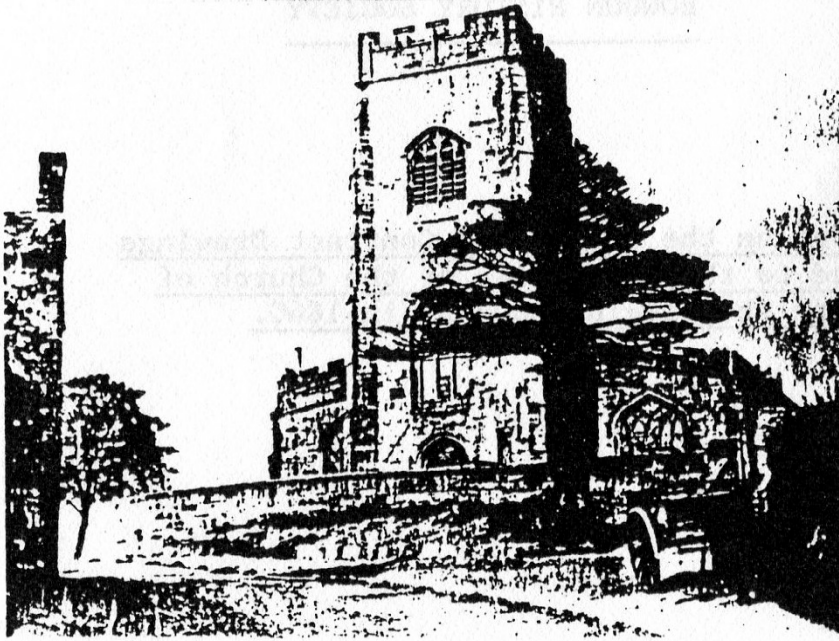
Ronald Trenbath

BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY

A Report on the Survey and Contract Drawings related to the Rebuilding of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Bowdon, in 1860.

In 1983, shortly before his retirement, Canon Maurice Ridgway handed me Survey and Contract Documents in connection with the rebuilding of the Parish Church, Bowdon, between 1858 and 1860. Before depositing these with the Record Office at Chester, I made a selection of twenty items which were photographed and presented, with the following paper, to the Bowdon History Society on Monday, the 8th October, 1984.

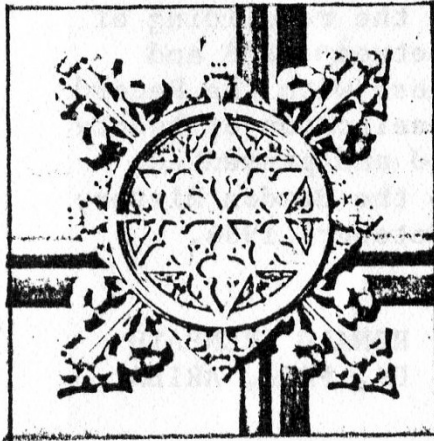
RONALD TRENBATH
DA, FRSA, ARIBA



Bowdon
Old
Church
IN
1858

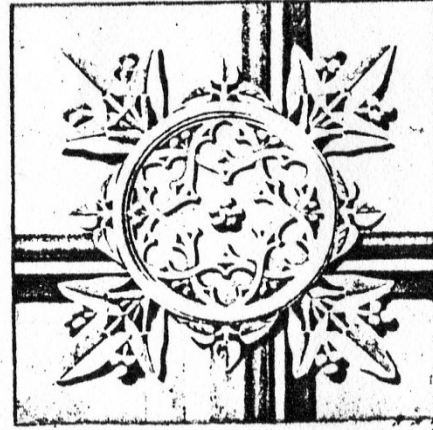
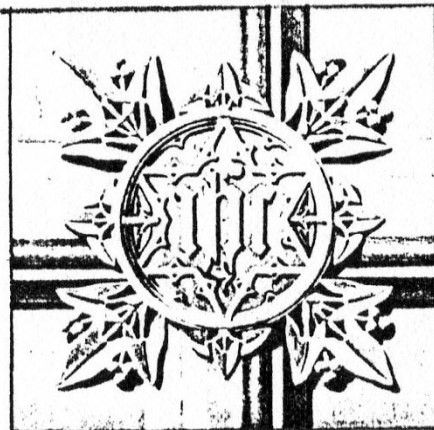
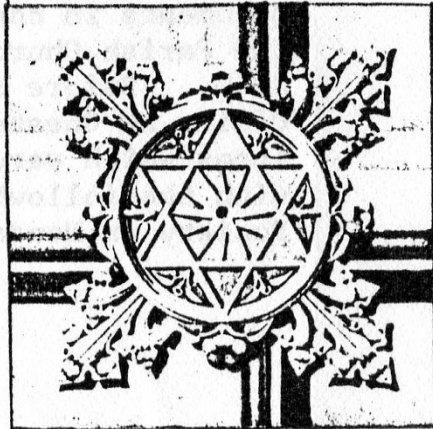
Bowdon Parish Church.

Pl III.



Details of Wood Carving

Placed in Spire



BOWDON PARISH CHURCH, CHESHIRE

A Report on the Survey and Contract Documents related to the Rebuilding of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Bowdon, in 1860.

In 1858 W.H. Brakspear, a Manchester architect, who had transferred his practice to London and unsuccessfully competed against Barry in the Palace of Westminster Competition, was commissioned to submit a scheme for restoring or rebuilding Bowdon Parish Church.

The documents relating to this project included a survey of the existing buildings, a scheme for restoring them, a scheme for completely rebuilding them and contractual drawings and specifications for undertaking the scheme finally chosen.

The documents are of interest in three respects, firstly that the survey, together with contemporary photographs, provides considerable evidence concerning the old church which was ultimately demolished and rebuilt between 1858 and 1860; secondly they illustrate the contemporary attitude of the Victorians to old buildings and to the methods of restoration; and thirdly, they are a valuable example of mid-nineteenth century working drawings and specifications.

It might be advantageous at this point to consider the former churches on this site in the light of the evidence made available.

With regard to the pre-Norman period very little evidence is available at the present time upon which to assess the nature of the early church in Bowdon. From the Domesday Survey one learns that the village possessed a church and a priest supported by a hide of land, but the only material evidence consists of a fragment of stone with interlaced ornament cross patty in circle, a sculptured stone with figure of eight design, and a coin of the time of Edmund, which does not in itself indicate that a Saxon settlement existed in Bowdon, as it could have been

brought to the area from elsewhere. Similarly the stone fragments are too small to indicate their origin, but it would appear from wider evidence generally that the immediate pre-Norman settlement was Saxon and from the fragments of stone it would appear likely that the church was constructed of stone.

This last fact is somewhat surprising as Saxon builders much preferred building in wood and as there was not a supply of stone readily available in Bowdon, whereas there was a superabundance of timber, one would be interested to know why stone was used. Recent research shows that French influence was very much greater throughout England prior to 1066 than was formerly thought, and many of the many of the so-called stone Saxon churches were in fact Early Romanesque structures built by masons from Gaul. The Normans viewed with contempt the stagnant state of Anglo-Saxon culture and rebuilt churches designed to impress the native population with the majesty of the church and the power of their rulers, and consequently the former church in Bowdon was demolished, after the Norman occupation, and rebuilt to a design which accorded with the Romanesque principles of building often, though incorrectly, described as Norman. These principles, which originated in Lombardy, were based on Roman theories of construction whereby the arch was used to attain large spans and all features had a functional purpose.

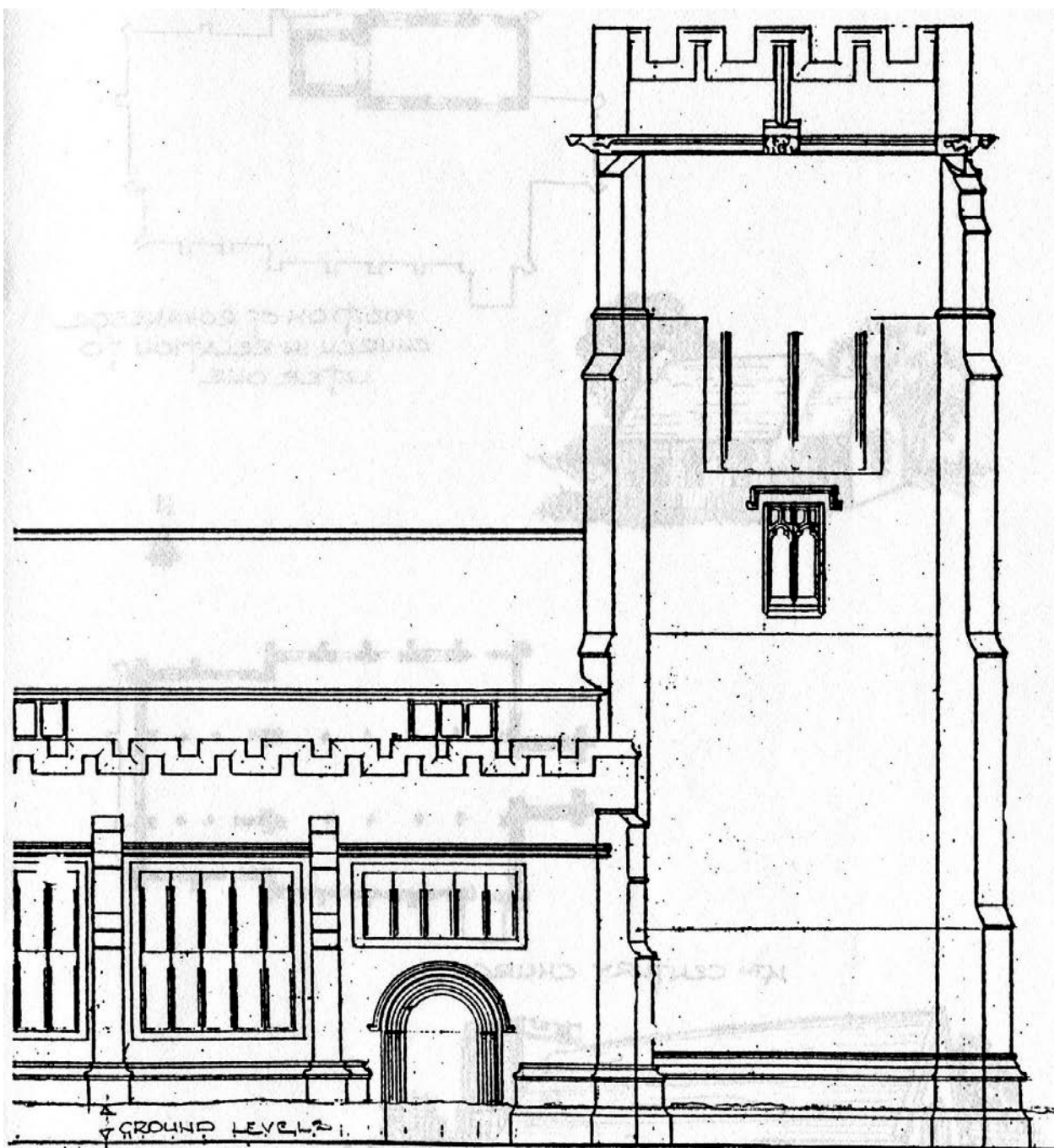
The building operations would have been undertaken by skilled craftsmen under the direction of a Master-Artificer who would be responsible for organising the project, supervising the work and making the plans, which often included the undertaking of detailed drawings of every inch of the building.

Three very important items from this period exist to provide clues concerning the Romanesque building. The first of these is a voussoir, or segmented arch stone, with saw tooth decoration, which, when measured, indicates that it originally formed part of a 14 ft diameter arch, in all probability a chancel arch. The second piece of evidence to assist in visualising this church consists of three stones with diaper ornament

sculptured on them which were features of late Romanesque design and indicate that a very much more richly decorated building may have existed than might be expected in what was then a very remote part of the country. The final clue is the recently discovered, but incomplete, survey sketch by Brakspear of the north elevation of the old churchy, which, as far as is known, was never photographed due to the limitations of photography prior to 1858 which rendered it practically impossible to photograph the north side of a building. In this sketch an interesting Romanesque doorway, 4 ft 3 ins wide and 6 ft 3 ins high to underside of springing, is shown with columned jambs but apparently no tympanum.

This last information enables the site of this early building to be located in the north-west corner of the present church; and from evidence it has been suggested that the church during the Norman period would have been rectangular and non-cruciform with a 42 ft long nave, which was a common size for Romanesque village churches in England.

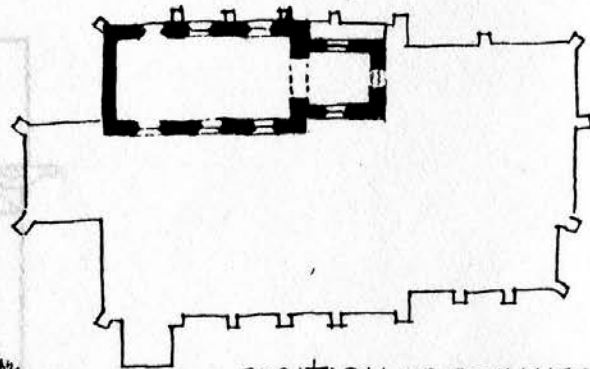
According to early records the parish church was restored and enlarged in 1320 and a tower incorporated into the structure. This operation probably consisted of building a nave, south aisle, chancel and tower on the south side of the existing church, which would initially be left undisturbed, to be followed by the replacement of the wall between the two structures with octagonal piers and supporting lancet arches and the former church becoming the new north aisle.



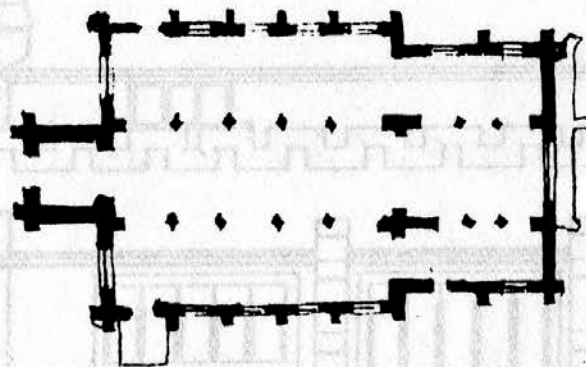
INCOMPLETE DRAWING OF NORTH FACADE OF CHURCH, 1858,
SHOWING ROMANESQUE DOORWAY

NOTE CHANGE IN GROUND LEVELS DUE MAINLY TO TIPPING
FROM BURIAL EXCAVATIONS

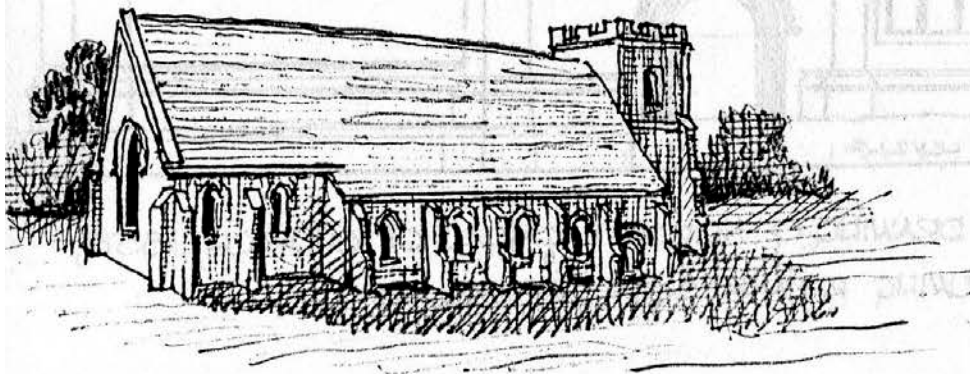
THE EARLY CHURCH IN BOWDON



POSITION OF ROMANESQUE
CHURCH IN RELATION TO
LATER ONE



14TH CENTURY CHURCH



CONJECTURAL DRAWINGS BASED ON THE 1858 SURVEY

It would appear likely that the whole building was not split by a clerestory over the nave, but covered by a single roof similar to the condition existing on the south side of Rostherne Church.

The tower would be at the south end of the church and might have been included in part of the existing Romanesque wall, and divided from the main body of the building by a large lancet arch bigger than the chancel arch.

The new external walls would include windows and doors based on lancet headed details and probably the existing windows in the north wall would be altered to match them although the doorway was never altered.

It is thought that the chancel arch framed a rood screen and loft with attendant figures picked out in colour while the east ends of the aisles were screened off to form private chapels or chantries.

The buildings of this period were characterised with more delicate detailing than formerly, with simple but more elegant features, and are generally classified as Early English, although 1320 is often accepted as the point at which this style developed into the short-lived Decorated style. Brakspear's survey indicates that decoration existed over the windows on the south elevation which might originally have been ogee curves to suggest that the Decorated influence was being experienced at this time.

Although further alterations were made to windows, doorways and the tower, and extensions carried out at the east end, it would appear reasonable to suggest that the main fabric of the church remained unaltered from this period until its demolition in 1858 or 1859.

During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries further improvements were carried out in common with many other churches in Cheshire, and it would appear from some of the detailing that an ambitious programme had been contemplated.

A new tower was built with facilities for bell-ringing and the windows in the north and south aisles were replaced with large square headed ones of a more severe and domestic nature consisting of five lights divided by a transom to take memorial glass including coats-of-arms of the local gentry.

The high pitched roof was removed, the nave walls built up to form a clerestory and covered with what would appear to be a temporary roof supported on kingpost trusses; while the side aisles were protected by flat camber beam roofs, beautifully carved and painted and supported, in the south aisle, on elaborately carved corbels. It should be noted that the north aisle was taller than the south aisle.

Exterior chapels were built on either side of the chancel; the northern one, known as the Carrington Chapel, was dedicated to St. Nicholas and that on the south side was named the Dunham Chapel. The latter had large parapets in the perpendicular style totally out of scale with those over the aisles, and the buttresses in some cases supported heavily carved finials but it would appear that these were never completed.

The parapet to the Carrington Chapel, however, was smaller than that to the adjoining north aisle.

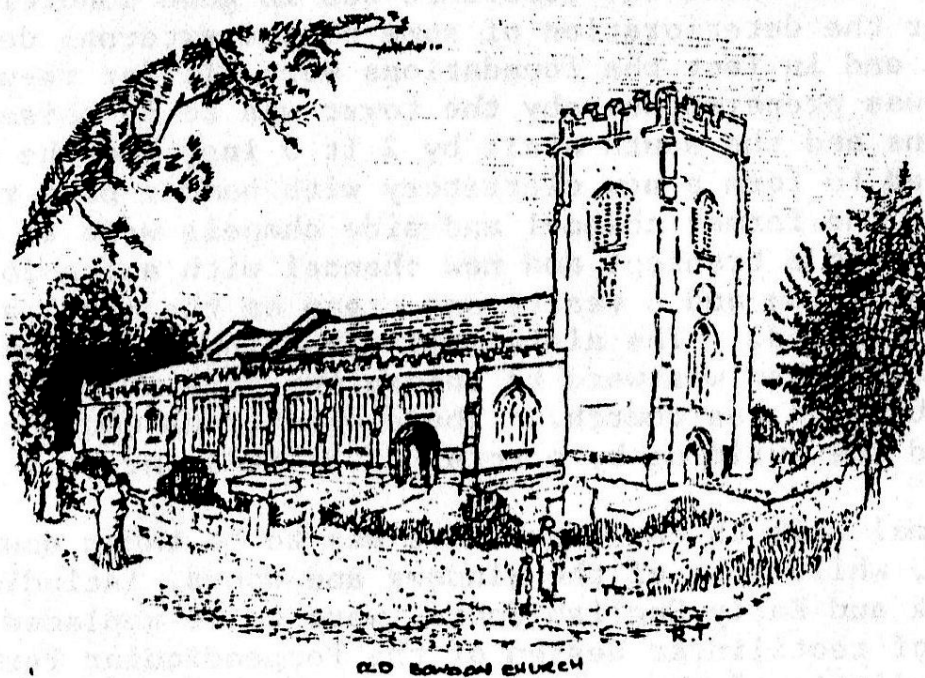
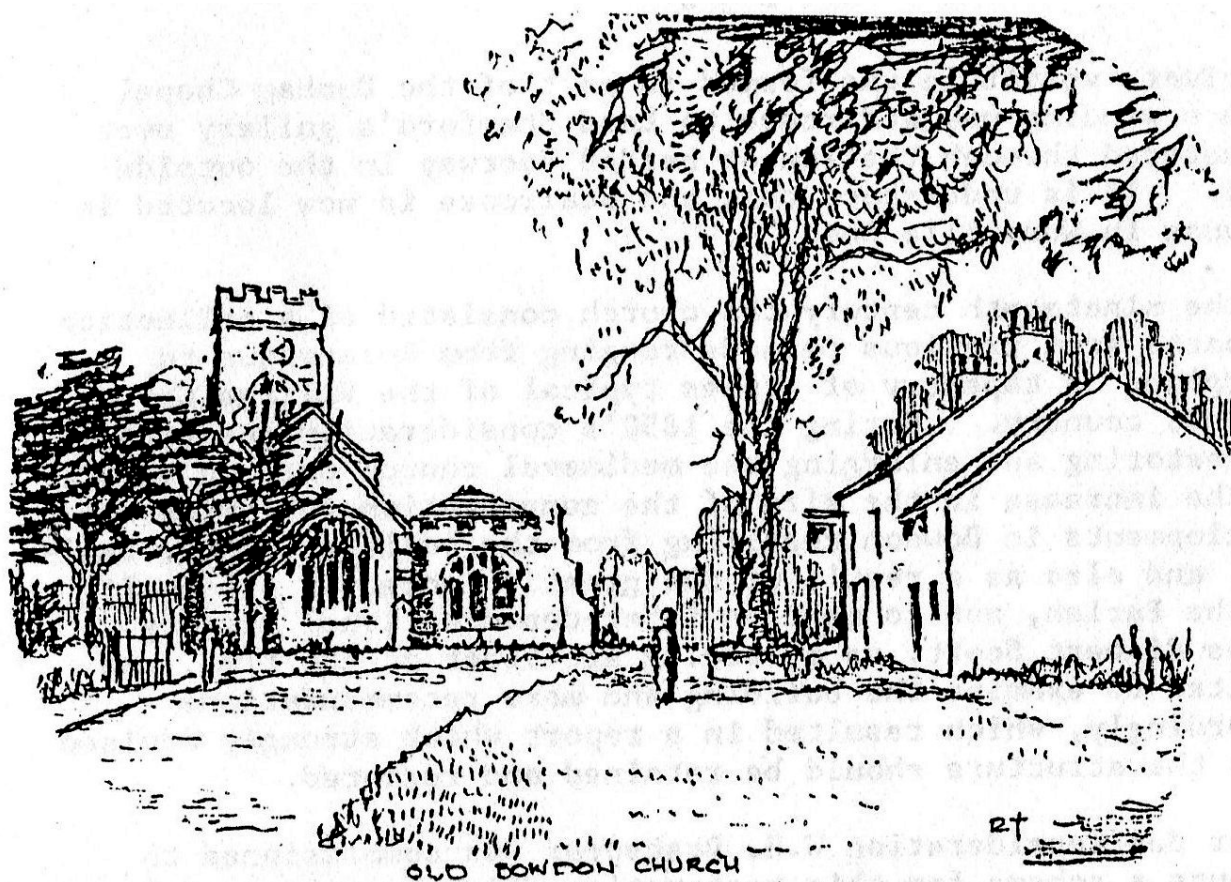
A large porch was constructed over the south entrance door, to be adorned with a wall sundial at a later period, but a lancet headed doorway further along the same elevation remained undisturbed, as did the Romanesque door on the north side.

The tower was a squat structure similar to very many others in Cheshire at this time, with corner buttresses and gargoyles, but the irregular design of the parapet on the south and west elevations suggests that a small turret may have originally occupied this corner of the tower to protect the internal spiral staircase. The difference in heights between the two aisles gave a very clumsy appearance to the west elevation.

The lack of uniformity of scale in the parapets and the temporary nature of the roof over the nave tend to indicate that a great programme of improvements at this period came to a sudden halt, presumably as a direct or indirect result of the Reformation. This interruption of the programme of improvements was not an isolated case at this period of history, for in other parts of Cheshire similar occurrences are to be noted as, for example, at Tarvin, Bunbury and Bebbington, whereas at Malpas, Audlem and Astbury the work was completed.

Any improvements which followed in later centuries were confined mainly to internal additions such as box pews, a centrally placed double-decker clerk desk and pulpit, and an organ, galleries and staircase on the north and west sides of the church, similar to existing ones at St. Elphin, Warrington.

A private vestibule was formed in part of the Dunham Chapel with a winding oak staircase to Lord Stamford's gallery over it entered through the lancet headed doorway in the outside wall. It is understood that the staircase is now located in a house in Woodville Road.



A sketch of Bowdon Church from the north based upon a survey drawing undertaken in 1858 showing the Romanesque (Norman) doorway.

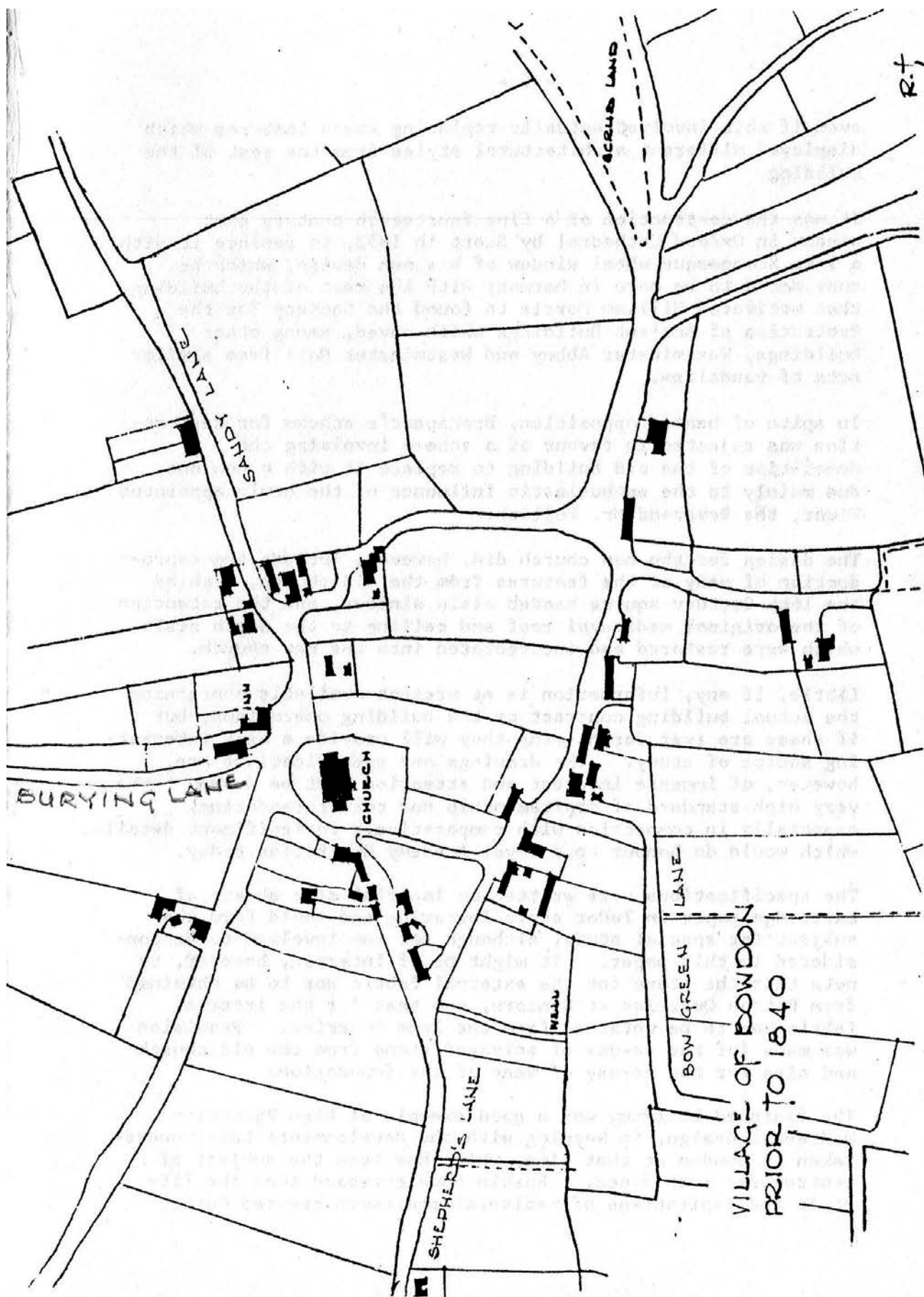
By the nineteenth century the church consisted of a collection of parts from previous periods ranging from Romanesque to Georgian; a tapestry of styles typical of the Village Church in this country. During the 1850's consideration was given to restoring and enlarging the mediaeval church due, no doubt, to the increase in the size of the congregation following developments in Bowdon resulting from the building of the rail-way, and also as a result of the greatly increased prosperity of the Parish, not to mention inter-denominational rivalry. George Gilbert Scott, as a leading architect of the time, was invited to examine the building and make recommendations accordingly, which resulted in a report which strongly advised that the structure should be retained and restored.

After due consideration W.H. Brakspear was commissioned to produce a scheme for this restoration which he commenced in 1858. From the survey already mentioned, which included taking photographs, it would appear that the entire building had sunk uniformly by about 2 ft 3 ins below the adjoining ground level, but that on the whole the structure was in good condition, except for the deterioration of some of the external decorative features, and in fact the foundations were fit for re-use. A scheme was prepared whereby the tower was to be raised by 14 ft 3 ins and the south aisle by 2 ft 5 ins, and the nave roof raised to form a new clerestory with hammer beam roof trusses. The former chancel and side chapels were to be demolished and a transept and new chancel with a Stamford Chapel on the south side and a vestry and organ on the north side were to be constructed. The aisle walls flanking the tower were to be rebuilt further westward to encase the base of the tower into the body of the church. These operations would have lengthened the building by a total of 27 ft 5 ins.

The external wall to the south nave was to be taken down and realigned, while most of the windows and doors, including the Romanesque and Early English doors, were to be replaced with new ones of rectilinear design of the Perpendicular Period, so that very little of the original church would have remained. It should be remembered that

during the Victorian Age the practice had grown of rebuilding parts of old churches to make them individually uniform and constant in design, based on a concept instigated by the Cambridge Camden Society that no building should be left as a collection of parts from different periods but should rather be rebuilt in one particular style, even if this involved actually replacing sound features which displayed different architectural styles from the rest of the building.

It was the destruction of a fine fourteenth century east window in Oxford Cathedral by Scott in 1853, to replace it with a late Romanesque wheel window of his own design, which lie considered to be more in harmony with the rest of the building, that motivated William Morris to found the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings which saved, among other buildings, Westminster Abbey and Westminster Hall from similar acts of vandalism.



In spite of heated opposition, Brakspear's scheme for restoration was rejected in favour of a scheme involving the demolition of the old building to replace it with a new one, due mainly to the enthusiastic influence of the newly appointed Vicar, the Reverend Mr. Pollock.

The design for the new church did, however, include the reproduction of many of the features from the old church, such as the 16th Century square headed aisle windows, and the retention of the original mediaeval roof and ceiling to the south aisle which were restored and incorporated into the new church.

Little, if any, information is at present available concerning the actual building contract or the building operations, but if these are ever forthcoming they will provide a very interesting source of study. The drawings and specifications are, however, of immense interest and attention must be drawn to the very high standard of draftsmanship and colour rendering, especially in connection with comparatively insignificant details, which would do honour to a Royal Academy Exhibition today.

The specifications were written on Imperial size sheets of cartridge paper in Tudor style lettering and would form the subject for special study, although far too involved to be considered in this paper. It might be of interest, however, to note that the stone for the external fabric was to be obtained from Hatton Quarries at Runcorn, and that for the internal fabric was to be obtained from the Lymm Quarries. Provision was made for the re-use of salvaged stone from the old church and also for the re-use of many of the foundations.

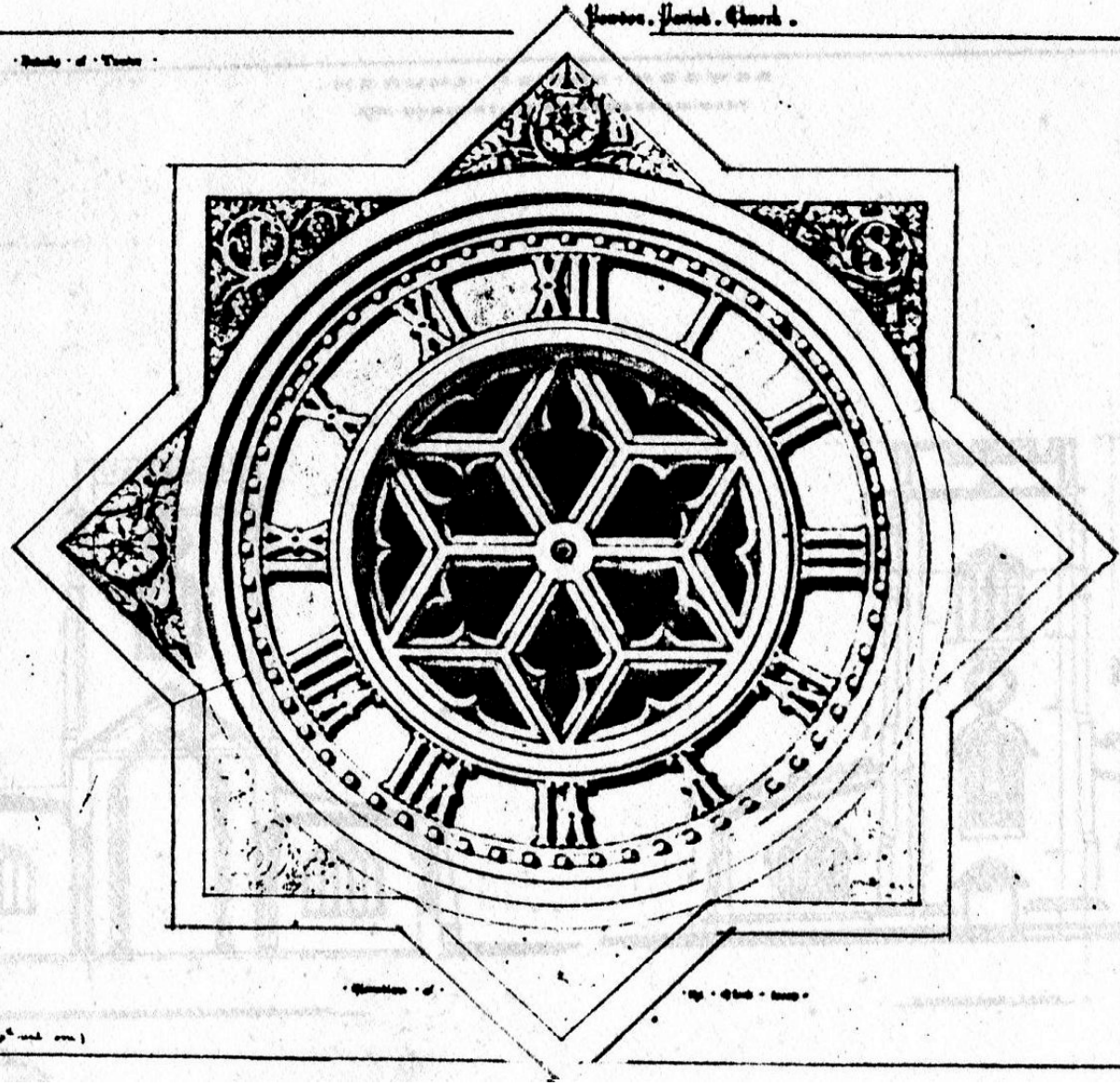
The finished building was a good example of High Victorian Mediaeval design, in keeping with the developments being undertaken in Bowdon at that time, which has been the subject of controversy ever since. Ruskin once stressed that the life style and aspirations of mediaeval craftsmen created Gothic architecture and that this could never be recreated in the totally different conditions of the nineteenth century; each

period, he held, had its own style of architecture valid for its own age and that to attempt in one age to recreate the style of another was an activity both bogus and fraudulent.

While one might consider these views contradictory from a man so immersed in the revival of Venetian Gothic design, they are in essence justified when one compares the products of the Victorian church builders with those of their predecessors in the middle ages; but in recent times these buildings have come to be accepted as representing an art form in its own right, independent of the original building from which they purported to have been copied, and it is from this aspect that one must judge the merits of Bowdon Church today.

Photos. Parish Church.

Study of Tower



Dimensions of

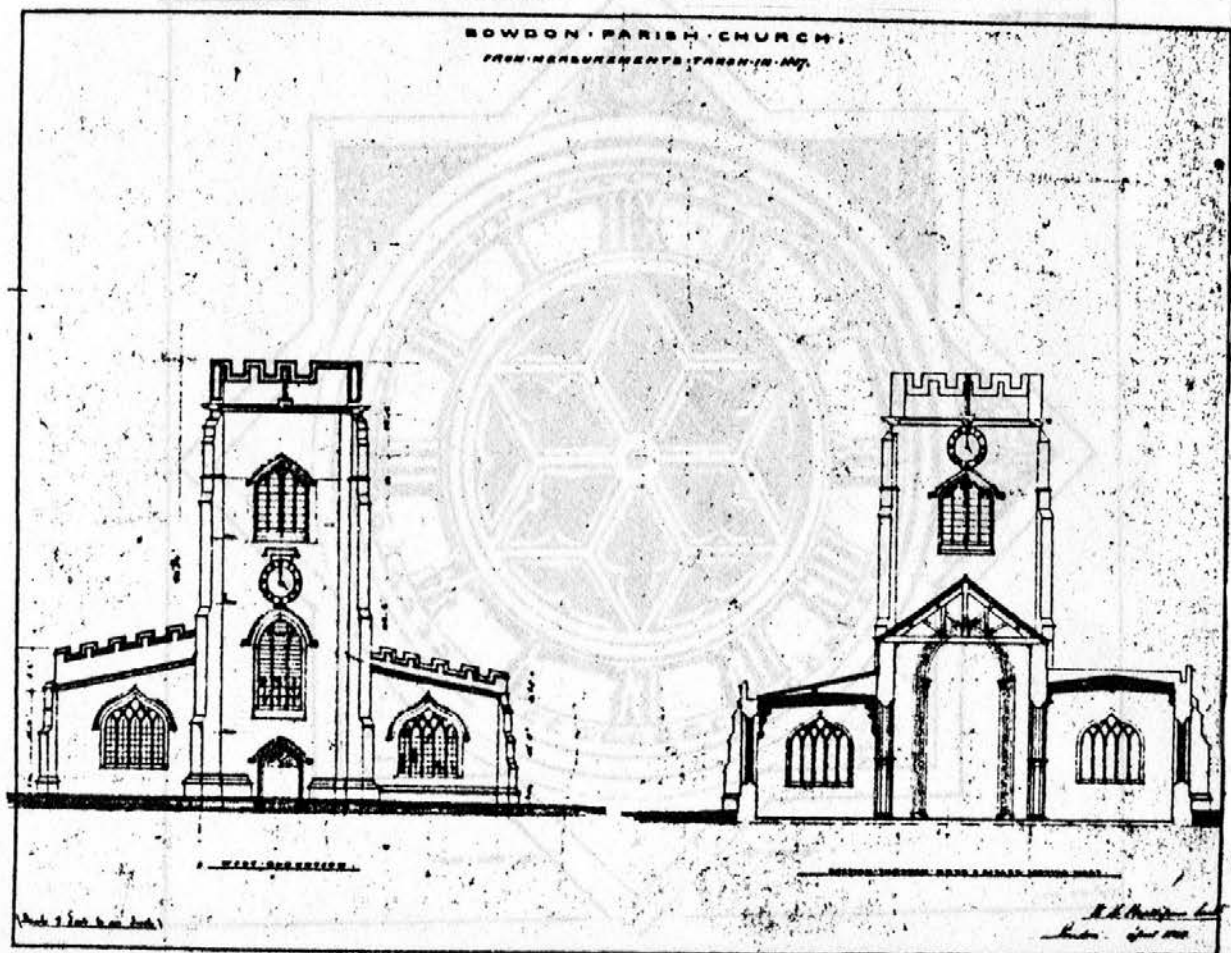
Sp. of the tower

(Sp. and area)



Bowdon Parish Church 1819

SURVEY DRAWINGS OF THE OLD CHURCH

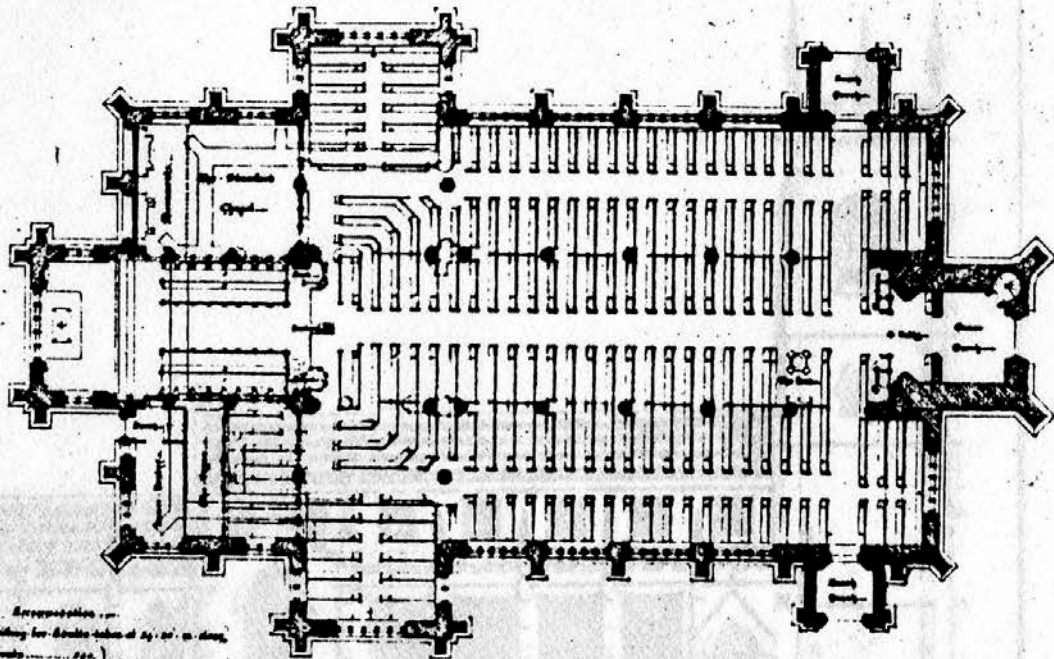


DRAWINGS FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

London - Dorset - Church - - - - -

Designs for Restoration & Enlargement - - -

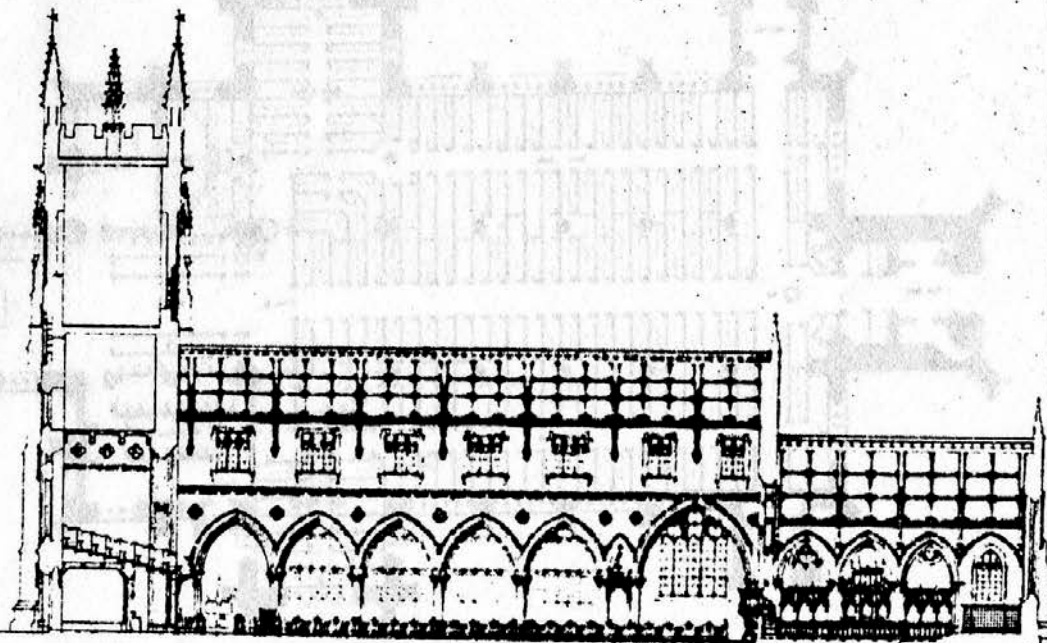




Explanations :-
 only sitting for double tables of 24 sq. ft. each.
 In Nave 170
 In Choir 100
 In Organ Chapel 20
 In Transept 10

Plan of the Ground Floor.

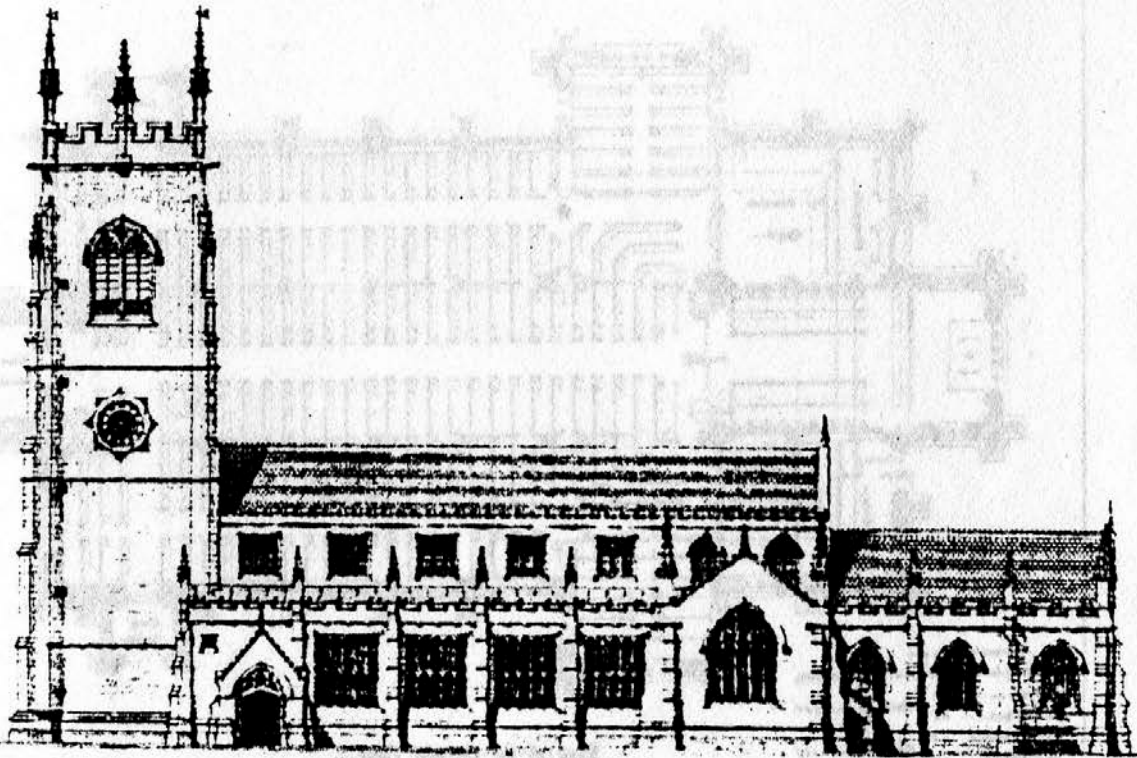
Scale of Feet 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



Exterior Elevation of the Church, -

Scale of Feet 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

DRAWINGS FOR THE NEW CHURCH

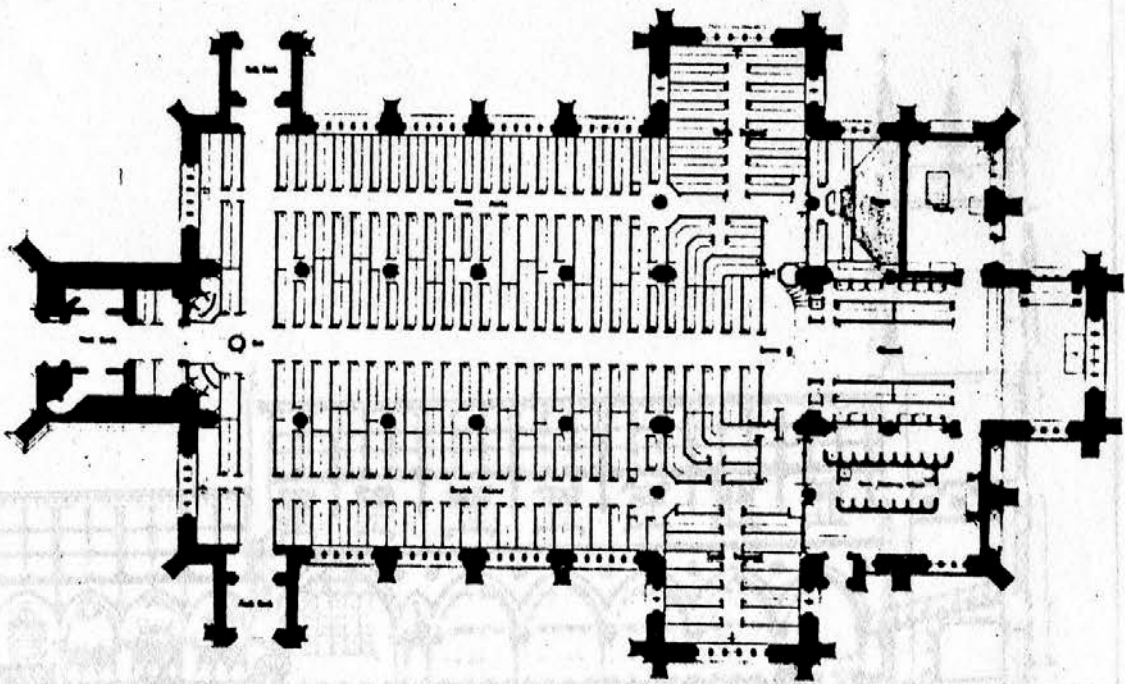


1/4 inch = 1 foot

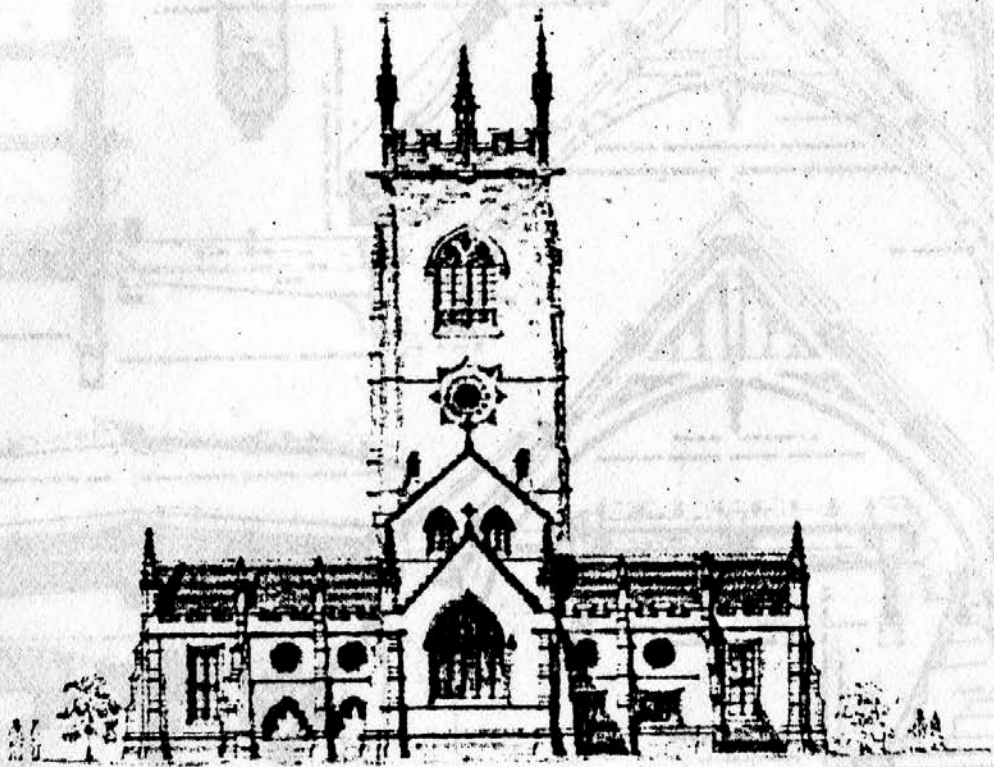
Elevation of the South Front

J. B. Thompson architect

— London Parish Church —



1/4 inch = 1 foot



Front, S. side & the tower.

Exterior of the East End.

W. & A. Mitchell & Co. Glasgow.

