

# The Restoration of Berrick Salome Church

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## SUMMARY

*The parish church of Berrick Salome in south Oxfordshire was restored in 1890. This is an account of why the restoration was undertaken, who initiated it, what was altered and what conserved, the discoveries made during restoration works, and how the money to pay for it was raised. The outcome of the restoration scheme was the conservation of much medieval and Jacobean building fabric, albeit with the application of exterior decorative features which have offended some architectural critics. The extent of the works seems to have been limited by both the funds available and the increasing appreciation in the later years of the nineteenth century of the need to conserve historic buildings.*

## INTRODUCTION

St Helen's, the parish church of Berrick Salome, lies at the end of a lane to the east of the village, close to the northern edge of the parish (SU 6239472), some 5 km north-east of Wallingford. St Helen's is a small medieval church of Norman origin. It has an early Romanesque south door with an unmoulded round arch springing from simple imposts which appears to date from the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> The Norman window to the east of the door is a reconstruction, as will be seen. The only other obviously Norman feature is the font, which is decorated with a pattern of interlaced beaded circles (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The quality of the font, in contrast to the lack of any other early decoration in the church, might suggest that the font was brought from elsewhere. The dedication of the church to St Helen is unusual in the region, and elsewhere this dedication is thought to be often associated with early churches.<sup>3</sup> Based on this, some writers have tried to make a case that there was a church in Berrick long before the Conquest,<sup>4</sup> but there is no documentary or archaeological evidence to support such a theory.

For most of its history Berrick was a detached chapelry of Chalgrove, about two miles to the north-east, and was served by the same incumbent. The advowson belonged to Christ Church, Oxford, which also owned most of the tithes in Chalgrove. In 1891 Berrick Salome, a small parish of 600 acres, had a population of just seventy-five.<sup>5</sup> The church probably also attracted worshippers from Berrick Prior, Roke and Rokemarsh, which all lay just over the Berrick boundary. The population of Berrick and these hamlets totalled 335.

## THE RESTORATION IN CONTEXT

The nineteenth century saw a national revival of the Church of England. The repair of ancient churches and the building of new churches became a priority. Nationally between 1840 and 1876

<sup>1</sup> National Monument Record, Swindon, number 248032.

<sup>2</sup> A similar pattern forms part of a more complex carving on the font in Lewknor church, and on the font in St Martin's, Canterbury.

<sup>3</sup> C. Holmes, 'From Saxon Royal Vill to Medieval Manor', in K. Tiller (ed.), *Benson. A Village through its History* (Wallingford, 1999), pp. 48–9. The only other dedications to St Helen in Oxfordshire are at Albury, near Thame, Benson, and Abingdon (formerly Berks.).

<sup>4</sup> For example, R.E. Moreau, *The Departed Village: Berrick Salome at the Turn of the Century* (London, 1968), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Census, 1891.



Fig. 1. The Norman font.  
Photograph by the author.

almost 80 per cent of old churches were restored, extended, or rebuilt.<sup>6</sup> In the same period in the archdeaconry of Oxford, 190 churches, some 69 per cent of the total, had had at least £500 spent on them, a total expenditure £405,834. In Aston deanery, in which Berrick lay, 75 per cent of churches had been rebuilt or restored. Berrick, however, had had no significant expenditure at all.<sup>7</sup> The restoration of St Helen's thus came relatively late and at a difficult time for rural areas after some fifteen years of agricultural recession.

#### THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

An indication of the poor state of repair of the church was given as early as 1759 in Archdeacon John Potter's parochial visitation book:

All the elder bushes, weeds and banks of rubbish to be grubbed up and cleared away from the walls of the chapel, especially on each side the porch. The buttresses on the north side to be repaired and pointed. The roof of the chancel on the north side to be new ripped, a little lath and plastering wanting at the west end of the church over the roof of the chancel... to be mended. The cracks in the chancel walls to be mended and white washed, the inside of the chancel to be scraped and cleaned.<sup>8</sup>

In 1784 and 1788 the chancel and the chancel windows were still said to need repair. Pews were repaired in 1840 and the chancel walls in 1844.<sup>9</sup> In 1854 Bishop Wilberforce asked a number of

<sup>6</sup> C. Miele, 'Their Interest and Habit: Professionalism and the Restoration of Medieval Churches 1837–77', in C. Brooks and A. Saint (eds.), *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society*, (Manchester, 1995), p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1876 (125) (125-1), Church Building and Restoration, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> OHC, MS Oxon. Archd. Papers, d 13, f. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* c 52, f. 37; c 36, ff. 168, 179.



Fig. 2. Berrick Salome church from the south-east by J. Buckler, 1822. Used by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MS Top. Oxon. a. 65, no. 86).

questions prior to his visitation. The incumbent, Robert French Laurence, answered the query ‘Is your church or chapel in good repair?’ by saying ‘The churches are not as I should like to see them: but they are not in very bad order.’<sup>10</sup> John Buckler’s drawing of 1822 (Fig. 2) shows a church in apparent good repair. A photograph taken in the 1860s (Fig. 3), however, shows evidence of disrepair, including defective weatherboarding and missing roof tiles.

The church’s condition had worsened by the 1880s, as local newspaper reports make clear:

The church before its restoration was in a deplorable state. Externally, the walls were falling outwards, some overhanging their base as much as twelve inches, with many a crack and settlement, this ruinous state of things being largely caused by defective foundations. The roof tiling was in dilapidated condition, and, through want of a damp course, the damp rose up the walls, causing the rough cast plastering to perish, and mildew and fungi to flourish. Internally, the plastered ceilings, whitewashed walls, and rough brick and tile pavement gave a cold and depressing aspect on entering.<sup>11</sup>

The most damning description of the church just before its restoration was that of Revd J.E. Field, vicar of Benson:

<sup>10</sup> E.P. Baker (ed.), *Bishop Wilberforce’s Visitation Returns for the Archdeanery of Oxford in the year 1854*, ORS, 35 (1954), p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser*, 19 December 1890, p. 8; *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 20 December 1890, p. 7.



Fig. 3. Berrick Salome church from the south before restoration, c.1861–5. Photograph of original by the author, courtesy of Dr Marian Shaw, churchwarden.

Few churches could present an appearance less interesting and attractive than did this before its recent renovation. It was emphatically one of which people would say, and often did say, that there was nothing in it to be preserved, and it must be destroyed and rebuilt entirely.<sup>12</sup>

#### COMMISSIONING THE WORK

The initiative in promoting restoration schemes often came from new incumbents: one study has shown that two-thirds of restorations were started within five years of an incumbent arriving in a parish.<sup>13</sup> This was certainly the case in Berrick. In 1885 the Revd Robert French Laurence was made bankrupt and gave up the living after fifty-three years. He was replaced at Chalgrove and Berrick by the thirty-year old George Blamire Brown, a graduate of Keble College, Oxford (1876) and Cuddesdon Theological College (1877). He moved to Chalgrove from Ewelme, where he had been curate since 1881, and stayed until 1902.<sup>14</sup> Brown began his efforts to restore Berrick church within four years of his arrival.

The new incumbent chose the Oxford architect Alfred Mardon Mowbray (1849–1915) to design and supervise the work. Mowbray described himself in an affidavit as experienced in superintending the building and repairing of houses and other buildings.<sup>15</sup> His other Oxfordshire

<sup>12</sup> J.E. Field, 'Berrick Church, Oxfordshire', *Quarterly Journal of the Berkshire Archaeological and Architectural Society*, vol. 2, part 2, (1891), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Miele, 'Restoration of Medieval Churches', p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (London, 1903).

<sup>15</sup> OHC, MS Oxon. Dioc. Papers, c 1757.

church commissions included the new churches of St Michael and All Saints, Lonsdale Road and St Mary and St John, Cowley Road, both in Oxford, a mission church in Murcott, and a restoration of Albury church.<sup>16</sup> On 23 January 1889, Mowbray wrote to the Brown saying that he would 'undertake the restoration of the church in a thorough conservative spirit consistent with modern requirements, and as economically as possible'.<sup>17</sup> The vicar replied the next day expressing his fear that:

the work will not present much scope for the exercise of talent and taste.... The church is very small, seating about a hundred people.... The church presents few interesting features, much of the architecture is of the debased style. The east window, which is very bad, will have to be replaced, it will be for you to advise as to the style of the new one. I myself am inclined to something simple of Early English character, a Decorated one would in my mind show up by contrast the imperfections of the building as a whole. I shall ask you therefore to consider the propriety of having two lancet shaped windows, but in this, as in all other details I shall welcome your candid opinions. A further consideration will be the possibility of working up the oak of the present pews for more open seats. The roof will no doubt require renewing, at present there is a ceiling which of course must be swept away. You will understand that no steps have been taken for raising the required funds, for it appears desirable first of all to have the plans and estimates before us. I must impress upon you the need for bearing in mind the probable extreme difficulty we shall have in raising money, the work therefore must be planned so as to be as inexpensive as possible compatible with a thorough restoration.<sup>18</sup>

#### TENDER ACCEPTED

On 22 August 1889 Mowbray wrote to Brown with the tenders received for the restoration work. Mr Holly of Nettlebed offered to do the work for £1,286 10s.; Mr Granville of Pyrton for £932 10s.; and Mr Smith of Lane End, High Wycombe for £655. Granville and Smith were then invited to send in detailed particulars of their estimates; Holly had already done so. Mowbray advised that 'if Smith's estimate is then satisfactory I should advise you to accept it, as his estimate is very near the amount the work should cost in my opinion'. Mowbray added that 'Smith, I know, would do his best to satisfy us as he built a church under me last year for the Hon. Revd Randal Parsons at Sandhurst [the Mission church of St Mary, now demolished]'.<sup>19</sup> Smith was duly appointed to do the work. The total estimate of £655 included a new vestry (£100), works to chancel, without furniture, (£105), works to nave (£270), works to tower (£75), and chancel fittings (£105).

#### FUNDRAISING

Fundraising in a poor agricultural parish was not going to be easy. Promises of £100 were received from Magdalen College, Oxford, the largest landowner, and £25 from Christ Church, the patron of the living. The incumbent accepted financial responsibility for the £105 required for the chancel, which he planned to raise from the Queen Anne's Bounty by taking out a mortgage on the benefice. He also secured the agreement of the Charity Commissioners to the raising of £100 on church lands. By the end of December 1889 £357 had been raised or promised; £298 was still needed.

An application was made to the Oxford Diocesan Church Building Society on 31 December 1889. At this stage Brown doubted whether the money could be raised:

<sup>16</sup> N. Pevsner and J. Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 909.

<sup>17</sup> OHC, PAR/30/11/C/1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 4. Architect's drawing of the proposed south elevation of the church, taken from the appeal leaflet published in February 1890. Used by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MS Top. Oxon. c. 105, fol. 52).

It is hoped that these plans may be carried out in their entirety, but if compelled to modify the extent of the work the restoration of the tower could be postponed, the building of the new vestry could be abandoned, and the expenses for the chancel fittings curtailed.<sup>20</sup>

The diocesan architect, J. Oldrid Scott of London, son of Sir George Gilbert Scott, commented on 15 January 1890 that 'the plans have been made with much care – the specification is very complete'. He suggested changing the pitch of the gable to the new vestry, porch, and dormers to harmonise better with the rest of the building. He also suggested allowing more light under the gallery by substituting a three-light window for the existing two-light window at the west end of the nave. On 22 January Mowbray agreed to the first suggestion and to the second suggestion 'if necessary'.<sup>21</sup> In the event it was not necessary, as will be seen. The Society awarded a grant of £24.

The search for funds was widened with the publication of an appeal leaflet in February 1890. This was signed by Brown and by churchwarden B.E.B. Belcher, of Ivy House Farm.<sup>22</sup> The printed leaflet included a photograph of the church as it was, and a drawing of 'the church as, it is hoped, it soon will be' (Fig. 4). It also included, rather selectively, the above quote from Scott, and supportive words from Archdeacon Edwin Palmer: 'I have examined the plans for the restoration of the church at Berrick Salome, and am thoroughly satisfied with them. The church is small but interesting. I venture to think that this work deserves the support of churchmen.' The support of the bishop, William Stubbs, was also invoked:

You have my most cordial good wishes and sympathy in your effort for the restoration of your interesting little church at Berrick Salome. I most sincerely wish you all success in the improvements contemplated and hope that you will be well supported both by your

<sup>20</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c. 105, f. 55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. ff. 51–2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. ff. 53–4.

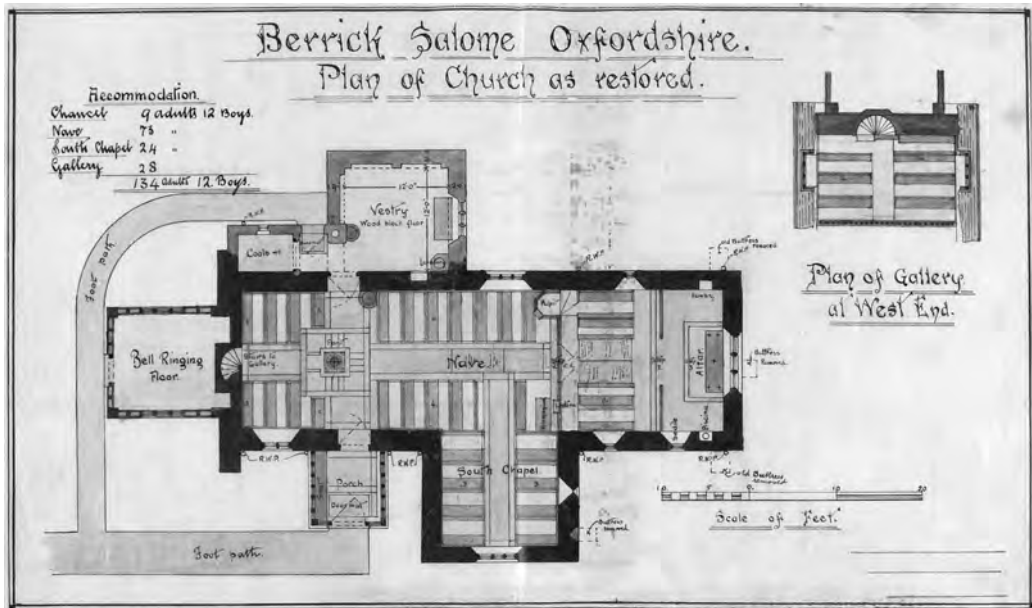


Fig. 5. Architect's plan of the proposed layout of the restored church, deposited with the Incorporated Church Building Society (file 09436). Note that the 'Norman' window made up from fragments discovered during the restoration works and inserted between the porch and the south transept is not shown. Courtesy of the trustees of Lambeth Palace Library.

neighbours and by friends further off. I saw much in the views and plans that seemed to me well worth the effort to conserve and improve.

A short news item appeared in the local newspaper: 'It has been decided to restore this quaint but interesting church. Six hundred and eighty pounds is needed of which about £300 is secured. Mr A.M. Mowbray is the architect, whose plans have been approved by Mr J. Oldrid Scott (the diocesan architect).'<sup>23</sup>

#### INCORPORATED CHURCH BUILDING SOCIETY

Also in February 1890 Brown wrote to the Incorporated Church Building Society (ICBS).<sup>24</sup> Their grants were primarily intended to increase free seating in churches and chapels. They required the provision of a lightning conductor, fire insurance, the display of a board recording their grant, and an annual collection for the society as conditions of making a grant. They also required a plan of the restoration to be deposited with them and this has survived in the ICBS archive (Fig. 5).

On 28 March Brown sent off the application with four sheets of plans, specifications of the proposed works, two photographs, and supporting documents. The application was signed by Brown, the bishop of Oxford, and Edwin Palmer as both archdeacon of Oxford and chairman of the governing body of Christ Church, the patron, and Mr Belcher, as churchwarden. The proposals were to repair the church and increase the number of free seats by eight giving a total of 146, including twelve for children, and to provide kneeling boards. The existing box pews, which dated

<sup>23</sup> *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser*, 21 February 1890, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Alias the Incorporated Society for Promoting the Enlargement, Building, and Repairing of Churches and Chapels. This section is based on Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS file 09436.

from 1636, were also to be cut down and rearranged. On the application form Brown describes Berrick Salome as a very poor parish engaged chiefly in agriculture; seventy-five out of the 1881 population of 105 were described as 'poorer inhabitants'. Given the very small increase in the number of seats proposed it rather looks as if the proposed increase in seating was intended to bring the proposals within the scope of an ICBS grant, so that funds could be secured to adapt the existing pews.

The ICBS committee of architects considered the proposals and commented on 3 April that the wall of the coal cellar was too slight, that a two-inch air space should be left between felt and roofing, that the roof pitch of the new vestry was too sharp, that the vestry windows should be in a Decorated style to match those in the chancel, and that the eaves height needed to be raised. Mowbray responded to these criticisms on 7 April. He accepted the points on the roof pitch, style of window tracery, and eaves height. He stated that he always left the required air space but took issue on the coal-cellar wall:

the cellar wall is shown to be fourteen-inch brickwork, which in my opinion [is] amply thick enough considering the walls are only seven feet high and the span five or four feet between the walls, however if the Society demands it, and the vicar consents to incur the additional expense, I have no objection to build the wall any thickness you specify.

On 9 April the committee of architects approved the proposals 'with the explanation and undertaking supplied'. On 21 April Brown wrote to the Secretary of the ICBS thanking him for the grant of £20.

#### QUEEN ANNE'S BOUNTY

The funds the incumbent needed for the works to the chancel were to be financed by a mortgage of £100 on the benefice from the Queen Anne's Bounty (QAB). A plan of the chancel before and after restoration was included with the mortgage papers.<sup>25</sup> In accordance with QAB procedures, the bishop appointed two neighbouring clergymen, the rector of Brightwell Baldwin and the vicar of Watlington, to report on how long the incumbent had been in post, what dilapidations he had received, and on whether the state of the church was because of his wilful neglect. They reported that on assuming the incumbency in 1885 Brown had been entitled to £158 of dilapidations from his predecessor for wear and tear to the church fabric during his incumbency, but that this had not been paid because of Laurence's bankruptcy. They also certified that the chancel needed repair and that its state was not due to the wilful neglect of the incumbent. The Revd Charles Powys of Rofford, near Chalgrove, and the Revd Francis Powys of Bournemouth were appointed to receive and apply the QAB funds. In the event only £50 of this loan was taken up.

#### THE RESTORATION

On 27 March 1890 the vestry, chaired by the vicar, approved the restoration scheme at their meeting in the church and adjourned to the Chequers Inn.<sup>26</sup> Work began in the summer, some eighteen months after the original commission to the architect.<sup>27</sup> The walls of the chancel, which had been undermined by grave digging, were straightened, and partly rebuilt. This allowed for the removal of the buttresses shown in the pre-restoration illustrations. New buttresses proved, as the architect hoped, not to be necessary. The east window in the chancel was reconstructed with

<sup>25</sup> OHC, MS Oxon. Dioc. c 1757.

<sup>26</sup> OHC, PAR/30/11/F/1.

<sup>27</sup> This description is based on Field's article, on the report in the *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser*, and on a comparison of before and after illustrations.



intersecting tracery similar to that shown in Buckler's drawing (Fig. 2). A damp-proof course was installed and a drain built around the base of the walls. The roofs were re-tiled and overhanging gables with bargeboards formed. The old weatherboarding was removed from the tower and porch and replaced with blind wooden arcading above a stone plinth, 'Jacobean' windows and doors were fitted, and the tower clad with bands of tile and shingles (Plate 5). The sun-dial on the gable of the transept was reduced in height.

Inside the church, the walls were stripped, repaired, and re-plastered. The south wall showed two building phases, the original and an upper part added in 1615 when the present roof was erected. The north wall of the nave showed three stages in the building, the original wall, the middle part, probably Early English or Decorated, and the upper part (Jacobean). Remains of scroll pattern wall paintings were discovered but it was not possible to restore them.

The inner arch of the south doorway was repaired and the blocked north doorway, with its pointed Early English arch, was reopened to form an access to a new vestry. In the jambs of these two doorways was found the head and sill of a small Norman window. These were used to construct a new Norman-style window immediately to the east of the south door.<sup>28</sup> This met the diocesan architect's request for more light in this part of the nave and so avoided the need to convert the two-light south window at the west of the nave into a three-light window.

The two brick-mullioned, Jacobean windows in the nave were repaired. In the western part of the sill of the three-light window, on the north side of the nave, the sill of an Early English window was discovered and this feature was left exposed. The Jacobean window in the south transept incorporates the stone mullions of a Decorated window. A fragment of tracery from a Decorated window was found during the restoration. The cusped, Decorated chancel windows were repaired and fitted with 'cathedral' glass with ruby margins; in the rest of the windows similar glass but with clear margins was used. A fragment of medieval glass was fitted into the Early English lancet east window of the transept.<sup>29</sup> This window seems to have been moved from another position, presumably from the nave wall where it was fitted when the transept was originally built, possibly in the fourteenth century.

The piscina and aumbry in the chancel were repaired. Wood-block, stone, and tile flooring was laid and a single chancel and double altar steps were provided. The box pews, dating from 1636, were reduced in height and re-arranged. The old wooden altar rails were refurbished to form a low chancel rail, and a new altar rail was installed. The Norman stone font was cleaned and placed on a new plinth in the centre of the nave near the doors. A new altar, choir stalls, lectern, and replacement pulpit were fitted. A few inlaid medieval floor tiles were found and were re-laid just west of the chancel step on the north side of the nave.

The removal of the arched plaster ceilings over the nave revealed an oak Jacobean roof erected in 1615 (Fig. 6). This date is carved on the chancel beam and on a plaque fixed to the beam which also gives the names of the then churchwardens, John Hambelden and Henry Wisse. This roof and the oak transept roof were repaired. A new panelled, match-board ceiling was fitted over the chancel. The west gallery had been erected in 1676; a carving on its principal support beam records the date. The whole gallery was moved back some feet and placed on new carved stone corbels with inscriptions 'Born of water', 'and of the spirit'.<sup>30</sup>

The new vestry, with a three-light Decorated east window, was built on the north side of the nave. Externally the vestry has stone quoins and rendered walls with timber framing and tiling on the west gable. Internally there is a panelled ceiling, wood block floor, recesses for surplices, a safe for parish registers, a coal store, and a stove (which was moved from the nave). The seventeenth-

<sup>28</sup> This window is not shown on the plan deposited with the ICBS.

<sup>29</sup> This depicts a bee or other insect and the inscription '*CIT HANC SIT*'.

<sup>30</sup> St John's Gospel, 3, 5.



Fig. 6. Interior looking west, showing seventeenth-century roof and gallery, repositioned font and remodelled pews. Photograph by the author.

century communion table, the parish chest of 1638, and the royal arms of George II were also moved to the vestry.<sup>31</sup> A wash basin in the vestry shown on the plan was not provided and the plan for two niches, presumably for statues, in the chancel was abandoned.

#### PAYING THE BILLS

The final cost of the restoration was £699. Details of how the money was raised are set out in a printed statement of account in October 1891, signed by Brown and the churchwardens, B.E.B. Belcher and A. Rudd.<sup>32</sup> Mr W. Smith, the main contractor, was paid £531 14s. and Messrs Knowles and Son of 36 Holywell Street, Oxford were paid £46 for sundry alterations and repairs to the church in 1891.<sup>33</sup> The architect's fees and expenses were £57 16s. 9d., fittings cost £40 4s. 3d., and other expenses amounted to £24 5s. 1d.

<sup>31</sup> The royal arms have since been hung above the vestry door on the nave wall.

<sup>32</sup> OHC, PAR/30/12/F/3. Belcher was the parish's churchwarden, Rudd the incumbent's.

<sup>33</sup> It is not clear why Smith did not complete all the works. Smith's account of August 1891 starts 'Third attempt to put it right', which perhaps suggests that there were problems: OHC, PAR/30/11/F/1.

Sources of income	£	%
Magdalen College (principal landowner)	£100	14%
Christ Church (patron)	£35	5%
Incumbent (loan from QAB)	£50	7%
Other subscribers	£317	46%
Collections	£38	5%
Church building societies	£44	6%
Mortgage on church lands	£109	16%

The list of subscribers included Lord Macclesfield (£5), H. Morrell MP (£2 2s.), F. Parker MP (£2), and W.H. Smith MP (£5). This latter subscription had been noted in the local newspaper in August 1890:

Among the contributors to the fund for the restoration of this little church is the Rt Hon W.H. Smith MP who has sent a cheque for £5. The work is now approaching completion and it is hoped that the reopening service will take place about the end of October when the bishop of the diocese has expressed his willingness to be present and to preach the sermon. A very fine specimen of a Jacobean roof has been opened to view by the removal of the plaster ceiling. Many contributors have kindly responded to the appeal for funds. Further contributions will be gratefully acknowledged by the vicar of Chalgrove-cum-Berrick Salome, the Revd G. Blamire Brown, Chalgrove Vicarage, Wallingford.<sup>34</sup>

There are familiar local family names amongst the subscribers: Ruck-Keene, Weller, Belcher, Hedges, and Wilder. Perhaps most notable in the list are fifty-one clergymen, who together contributed just over £110, 16 per cent of the total. Analysis shows that they mostly fell into three groups: incumbents from nearby parishes, diocesan clergy – the bishop, the archdeacon, rural deans, and canons of Christ Church – and a geographically widely scattered group who, like the incumbent, were graduates of Keble College, Oxford. Brown had spread his net widely. Subscriptions from parishioners totalled £22 17s., just under 3.5 per cent of the total.

In February 1891 the architect certified to the ICBS that the church had been ‘re-seated and repaired in a substantial and workmanlike manner’. On 2 March the incumbent and three principal inhabitants, B.E.B. Belcher, Charles Rudd, and Mary Weller, also signed an ICBS certificate that the works had been completed, that they enclosed a copy of a ground plan which had been fixed up in the vestry, and that the church was insured in the Ecclesiastical Fire Office for £500. The first premium, of 8s. 9d. on 5 October 1890, is recorded in the churchwardens’ accounts.<sup>35</sup> The ICBS tablet recording their grant was fixed up on the south interior wall, close to the main entrance. The vicar had received the tablet from the ICBS in early January 1891 only to find that the amount of the grant was given as £25 not £20 and the date was given as 1889 not 1890. The tablet now hangs in the vestry and shows signs of the amount and date being corrected. The grant was finally paid on 19 March 1891.

#### REOPENING THE CHURCH

On 19 May 1890 a licence was granted by the bishop for the use of a room in the parish, suitably furnished, for church services during the restoration of the church. The faculty fee was £2 3s. 6d. No record has been found of where the room was, but the Chalgrove register of services confirms that services continued to be held in Berrick while the work was being carried out.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser*, 8 August 1890, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> OHC, PAR 30/4/F1/1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* PAR/57/1/R7/1.

A special service to mark the reopening of the church was held on the afternoon of Monday 15 December 1890. The bishop of Oxford had planned to be present but he had to attend the funeral of the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. His place was taken by the bishop of Reading (James L. Randall). Lengthy accounts in the *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser* and in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* the following Friday and Saturday reported that despite wintry weather the church was full and list the eleven surpliced clergy who attended. 'Miss Olive Weller presided at the harmonium and carefully accompanied the village choir, the whole of the musical service being heartily rendered.' The bishop then preached a sermon on the text 'Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people'.<sup>37</sup> A very full account of the sermon was included in the *Advertiser's* report but omitted from the report in the *Journal*.<sup>38</sup>

#### RESTORATION OR REPAIR?

The lateness of the restoration of St Helen's church was probably fortunate in terms of the conservation of old building fabric. Very many restorations in the mid nineteenth century had swept away remaining medieval and later fabric in favour of a speculative reconstructions of what the architect felt might originally have been there, or what he thought should have been there. Concern about the fate of old churches led to the setting up of the Committee on Conservation of Ancient Architectural Monuments and Remains by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1864. The architectural profession was seen by some as the villains of the piece, lining their pockets with 5 per cent fees on church works. A wider concern about destructive church restorations led to the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) by William Morris and others in 1877. RIBA, meanwhile, started issuing advice to its members arguing for moderate intervention and respect for original features.<sup>39</sup>

What effect did the change in attitudes to church restoration have on the works to St Helen's? Mowbray's offer to 'undertake the restoration of the church in a thorough conservative spirit consistent with modern requirements, and as economically as possible' appears to show some sympathy with the new approach and he seems to have been more respectful of the existing fabric than some earlier restorers might have been. Brown's wish to have Early English windows in the chancel was more in tune with the previous school of restoration.<sup>40</sup> Mowbray, however, wanted to have Perpendicular windows in the new vestry but was thwarted by the architect's committee of the ICBS who wanted Decorated windows to match those in the south side of the chancel.<sup>41</sup> Generally, ancient features were preserved during the work. The internal and external walls of the nave and transept were rendered after repair. What is difficult to explain is why Mowbray resorted to blank timber arcading, bands of shingle and tiles on the tower (Plate 5), and the heavy and ornate barge boards on the gables, an approach of which SPAB would not have approved. His treatment of the porch, which also included blank arcading, was more successful in recreating a 'Jacobean' style. Perhaps he thought this treatment of porch, tower and gables complemented the Jacobean features of the church which were retained, or perhaps he was influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and the late nineteenth-century fashion for tile hanging on houses and public buildings. The incumbent from the outset stressed the need for economy and doubtless the need to contain costs made repair a better option than wholesale alterations.

<sup>37</sup> Book of Isaiah, 56, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser*, 19 December 1890, p. 8; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 20 December 1890, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Miele, 'Restoration of Medieval Churches'.

<sup>40</sup> OHC, PAR/30/11/C/1.

<sup>41</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS file 09436, f. 12.



Fig. 7. Berrick Salome church in 2010. Photograph by the author.

#### THE REACTION

There is no way of knowing who wrote the accounts of the church restoration for the *Berks. and Oxon. Advertiser* and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. They clearly knew a great deal of the detail and it is possible the author was the incumbent or the architect. Whoever it was, they were pleased with the restoration:

Great care and artistic taste have been shown by the architect, Mr A. Mardon Mowbray F.R.I.B.A., of Oxford, in the planning and supervision of the work, and his instructions have been carried out in a workmanlike manner by the contractors, Messrs R. and G. Smith, of Lane End, High Wycombe. The whole restoration may be pronounced as most successful. All ancient features have been carefully and reverently preserved. The new work, especially the carved oak barge boards to the gables, and the dormer windows, together with the artistic treatment of the wooden tower and porch, call for particular notice [see Figs. 3 and 7].

Field also considered the restoration a success:

[the restoration] affords an excellent illustration of what can be effected by thoroughly conservative restorers ... The architect, Mr. Mowbray, of Oxford, is to be congratulated on the success of his work. The result is a church of Jacobean character with earlier features embodied in it, and with a simple chancel of the fourteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

'Exceeding real necessity' was the judgement of an article in the *Builder* in 1926 on the treatment of the tower and porch.<sup>43</sup> More recent critics have been less kind. Jennifer Sherwood, Nicholas Pevsner's co-author of the Oxfordshire volume of the *Buildings of England* series, described the church as 'a hideous application of all the trappings of fashionable late nineteenth-century

<sup>42</sup> Field, 'Berrick Church, Oxfordshire'.

<sup>43</sup> Anon., 'Berrick Prior [sic.]: An Unspoiled Hamlet', *The Builder*, 130 (1926), pp. 786–7.

domestic architecture to a church',<sup>44</sup> and 'one of the most brutal Victorian restorations in the county'.<sup>45</sup>

Any assessment of the merits of the restoration must be a matter of personal taste, something over which architectural critics have no monopoly. Richard Lethbridge in the *New Shell Guide* described 'the small church down a track ... restored in a curiously cottagey style and ... rather engaging'.<sup>46</sup> Those who know the church well and most visitors would be more inclined to Lethbridge's view than Sherwood's. The interior of the church does not have the idiosyncratic features of the exterior but retains the quiet and peaceful character of an ancient church (Fig. 6; Plate 6).

#### CONCLUSION

The restoration of St Helen's is a testament to the determination of the Revd George Blamire Brown. The surviving records of the restoration give an interesting glimpse of the bureaucracy of late Victorian England which whilst producing plenty of paperwork still enabled decisions to be taken very quickly by early twenty-first-century standards. Fund-raising was as difficult then as now. Reliance had to be placed on college and clergy donations and on loans to finance the restoration; only a very small proportion of the total costs could be raised from a poor rural parish.

The results of the restoration were technically sound: the walls are still upright and there are no signs of major damp problems. Some periodic maintenance and repairs have been necessary and a few other changes have been made.<sup>47</sup> Some of the external architectural features introduced in the restoration have been criticised but an appreciation of the need to conserve ancient buildings seems to have played a part in the restoration, particularly inside the church, aided perhaps by limited funds which prevented more radical alterations.

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<sup>44</sup> Sherwood and Pevsner, *Oxfordshire*, p. 452.

<sup>45</sup> J. Sherwood, *A Guide to the Churches of Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1989), p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> R. Lethbridge, *The New Shell Guide to Oxfordshire and Berkshire* (London, 1988), p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> Electric light was introduced into the church in 1938 and electric heating in 1954. The pulpit and choir stalls were removed in 1983.



Plate 5. Berrick Salome church tower, looking east. Photograph by author. [Tiller, p. 89]



Plate 6. The interior of Berrick church, looking down from the gallery. Photograph by author. [Tiller, p. 94]