

DESTRUCTION OF ST ETHELBERT'S CHURCH, HERRINGSWELL

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES FROM 1869 AND 1870

(These have been re-typed so that they can be read easily: Source: unknown)

DESTRUCTION OF HERRINGSWELL CHURCH BY FIRE

- On Sunday morning last, during the celebration of Divine Service in Herringswell church a passer by observed the thatched roof of the church was on fire. An alarm was immediately given, and the congregation which was not very numerous, quickly dispersed. The flames, fanned by a strong westerly wind, made rapid progress, and all hope of saving the church was soon abandoned. The labourers and others, however, under the direction of the Rector succeeded in saving the new organ and some of the internal fittings of the church. About three hours after the announcement of the congregation the engine from Mildenhall arrived and was useful in preventing the extension of the fire to the neighbouring property. Several neighbouring cottages caught fire, but the flames were extinguished without much damage being done. By three o'clock nothing but the bare walls of the church and tower remained, and the fire, with the exception of a few beams still smouldering under the rubbish, was extinguished. The fire is believed to have been caused by the stove pipe getting red hot, in consequence of an accumulation of soot in that portion which came in contact with the roof. The church was not insured.

(2 March 1869)

HERRINGSWELL CHURCH

To the Editor

SIR - On Sunday last this church was destroyed by fire and upon application being made to me for horses to take the Mildenhall fire engine to the spot, I could not supply them and it was a considerable time before any horses could be procured, and for this delay I am blamed. I consider that if any blame is attached to anyone it is to the Vestry Clerk for more than a month since, I gave him notice that I could no longer supply horses for the conveyance of the engine, and it was in his place to enter into arrangements with some other person for their supply.

By inserting this letter you will greatly oblige.

Your obedient servant

THOMAS HEARD, White Hart Hotel, Mildenhall,
6th March 1869.

HERRINGSWELL

RESTORATION OF THE PARISH CHURCH

Our readers will remember that on the morning of Sunday, the 28th of February, 1869, the ancient parish church of Herringswell was almost entirely destroyed by fire, shortly after having been partially renovated at an outlay of 170/-. The walls had been made good, both inside and out, the font had been restored, the church had been newly roofed with a reed thatch, a drain had been made around the sacred edifice, and a wall had been built for the enclosure of the churchyard, besides some minor improvements; and the

Parishioners were rejoicing in the good work already effected, and contemplating fresh efforts in the same direction, when this disaster occurred. The fire broke out during the performance of Divine service, through the over-heating of a store-pipe which passed through the thatch and set it on fire, and the flames, fanned by a strong westerly breeze, spread so rapidly that by three o'clock nothing remained but the bare walls of the tower. A small organ, which had recently been resented to the church by the Rector at a cost of 70/-, was carried out by some of the congregation, and was thus preserved from destruction, together with some of the internal fittings, but in all other respects, the church was a complete ruin. The Rector (the Rev. Octavius Hammond) and his parishioners, though they might well be disheartened by this event, at once decided on making an effort to restore the sacred edifice on a scale not previously contemplated, and after Lord Arthur Hervey, then Archdeacon of Sudbury, and the Rev. W. B. Lott, Rural Dean, had been consulted, a meeting was called in furtherance of the project, and the views of the Rector and others interested in the matter met with cordial and substantial approval. W. Gilstrap, Esq., lord of the manor and patron of the living, promised the handsome sum of 500/- towards the work; Mrs. Mure of Herringswell Place, with like munificence, gave 500/- more; the Rector contributed 100/-; the two Church wardens, Mr Richard Webb and Mr. Alfred Kent, 20/- and 25/- respectively; the Church Building Society added 40/-, and the Ely Diocesan Building Society 25/-. Fortified by these promises of support the Committee specially sought the advice of Mr. Arthur Blomfield, architect of London, and the work was contracted for jointly by Mr. Whitmore, of Newmarket and Mr Aldous of Tuddenham, by whom the restoration has been carried out to the entire satisfaction of all concerned. The stone-work was entrusted by the contractors to Mr. Hopson, of Bury, who has executed his portion of the work in an equally satisfactory manner. The three ancient bells in the tower fell to the ground during the progress of the fire and were broken to pieces they have, however, been recast by Mr Taylor of Loughborough. The cost of this work is in addition to the general contract,, which was taken by Messrs. Whitmore and Aldous at 1250/-.

The church, which is undoubtedly of very early origin, is dedicated to St. Ethelbert, and consists of nave, chancel, and tower, with a chapel on the south side of the nave, a south porch, and a vestry on the north of the chancel. It contains many interesting features and the construction of the tower supports is especially curious and deserving of investigation, the arrangement of the columns, flying buttresses, &c., indicating the work of different periods. The new roof of the nave, which forms an angle of about 75°, is of open woodwork, constructed of Memel deal,

Stained in harmony with the new oaken benches, and is of a bold and handsome character. It is divided by three moulded principals, which spring from stone corbels and meet beneath collar-beams, and the triangular space above the latten is filled with foliated tracery. The waggon-headed roof of the chancel is of the same material, divided into panels, in the centre of which are paterae of various designs, and both this and the nave roof are enriched with a battlemented cornice. The roof of the chapel on the south side is also waggon-headed, but is of a plainer character. The windows on the north side of the church are Early Decorated in style, except the centre one, which is Perpendicular. At the east end is a fine Decorated window of three lights, which we hope some day to see filled with stained glass; a few fragments placed in the south window of the chancel are all that remain of the earlier adornments of the east window, which was partially filled with stained glass at the time of the fire. The stonework of the windows is entirely new, and the original tracery has been carefully followed in their restoration. The font, which is octagon in shape, on a circular base, has been reconstructed of Ancaster stone, and amongst various interesting architectural details may be mentioned a very elegant double piscina on the south side of the chancel, a holy water stoup at the north-east corner of the porch, two niches on either side the east window, the deeply recessed and beautiful moulding of the vestry doorway, &c. Special mention should also be made of the handsome proportions of the chancel arch, which has been entirely rebuilt. The floor has been laid throughout with Staffordshire tiles, those in the nave and south chapel being red and black, arranged chequerwise. The chancel, which is raised two steps above the nave, is laid with ornamental tiles, and the space around the communion-table, reached by other two steps, is divided from the rest of the chancel by a handsome altar rail of brass, supported on iron standards. The exterior walls did not require much further renovation, but thatch has as a matter of course, been discarded for the roof which is now more substantially covered with red Staffordshire tiles.

15 March 1870