

From the Willoughby Society Archives

CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, WILLOUGHBY

AGE - REFERENCES FROM HISTORIES

"Very anciently appropriated to the Hospital of St. John without the Eastgate in Oxford" - valuations of church and vicarage are given in 1291.

In 1436 JOHN HOWARD bequeathed land in Willoughby and Kytes Hardwick "for the finding of a lamp to burn therein (Willoughby Church) forever".

The Hospital of St. John was, of course, upon the site of the subsequent Magdalen College founded by The Bishop of Winchester who "leased constantly to the descendants of RICHARD CLERKE, men of fair estate".

BROAD SUBDIVISIONS OF EARLY ARCHITECTURE

450 - 1066	Anglo-Saxon	5th to 11th centuries
1066 - 1189	Norman	11th & 12th centuries
1189 - 1307	Early English	13th century
1307 - 1337	Decorated	14th century
1337 - 1485	Perpendicular	15th century
1485 - 1558	Tudor	1st $\frac{1}{2}$ of 16th century

Transitions slow and gradual and the references to centuries are thus to an extent generalities.

WHAT MAY BE ESTABLISHED AS TO AGE ?

References to histories indicate an early church on this site, but there are few evidences remaining. There is, however, the F O N T of the early 13th century. This is in red sandstone shaped like an inverted bell, large (for immersion?) It has a simple roll moulded rim and a square stem with beaded panels on three sides. Carved below the rim on one side are two crude half figures with arms outstretched, ending in a kind of fleur-de-lis, separated by leaves shaped like fleur-de-lis.

The font is really ungainly, and it is somewhat unusual. Until recently moved it stood hard against one of the arcade pillars, slightly leaning, with the top of the bowl at fairly low level. It was assumed that the base was simply below the flooring, but in fact its base, a fairly lumpy structure, stood on what may be the inverted half bowl of another font (this may be seen in the church), the whole being some 2' 6" - 3' 0" below ground level, or at the same level, approximately, as the feet of the main pillars of the church.

It is difficult to explain how the font came to be left in the position it was. Its existence, however, confirms references to an early church. Apart from this, the church appears to date from the early 16th century, i.e., the Perpendicular period of Gothic architecture, possibly with slight indications from the Tudor period. In fact the tower bears a date which is thought to be 1530, - and this was probably the last part of the church to

be built.

There is, however, much evidence of re-building or restoration.

THE UPPER PART OF THE SOUTH AISLE has been rebuilt, partly in brick, partly in stone, including a cement rendered parapet. In carrying out this work it looks as if the pointed arches of the windows were reconstructed as four centred heads, with new tracery fitted into the old stone jambs. It was also, at some time, thought necessary to erect brick buttresses at each end of the aisle, these also rendered in cement.

THE UPPER PART OF THE NORTH AISLE has similarly been reconstructed. Here the windows do not appear to have been affected.

THE CHANCEL seems to have been almost entirely rebuilt, and twice re-roofed. The walls are in brick with angle buttresses, all rendered in cement and lined out with joints to imitate ashlar stonework. The gable profile once no doubt accommodated a roof, perhaps slated, of the same pitch or slope. This was presumably re-placed by the present very shallow lead roof, with a particularly unhappy effect upon the external appearance of the church when viewed from the north-east or south-east.

Thus it appears that the following dates may be taken as a reasonable guide to the age of the present fabric :

Main Building finishing with the tower in 1530

Original chancel said to be added in 1662 and rebuilt in 1779.

Tower said to be repaired in 1636.

General restoration about 1849.

May now be said to have been substantially restored 1963-64.

INTERNALLY

The nave is about 35 ft long and 15 feet wide; the south aisle of the same length is about 9 ft wide and the north aisle is longer (about 44ft); altogether the effect is rather of an attractive open square about 35 ft each way. This effect is due mainly to the simplicity of the two arcades. They are identical and consist each of three bays of moulded four-centred arches which are carried upwards without the intervention of capitals. This was a not infrequent though not usual practice of the time. The effect, however, is one of peculiar simplicity. The mouldings of the pillars give a lozenge shaped impression and the stonework has a strange rubbed character. The effect of simplicity is perpetuated by the use of precisely the same kind of arch for the chancel opening.

The nave floor generally is stone paved and the ceilings form plain plastered surfaces. In terms of church architecture this

sounds like impoverishment of detail. Yet it is this extreme simplicity that produces effect, particularly since the introduction of colour to the ceiling surfaces.

The south aisle has some interesting details. Its south wall has been roughly arcaded in three bays with four centred heads, and part of the heads form the rear arches of the windows. These have already been mentioned, - it is quite possible to observe externally where the reconstruction of the window heads has taken place. At the west end of this aisle the window has been built up, leaving the reveals of a rough arch. Last year the seating in this aisle was removed because of its decayed condition, and the space it occupied was paved. The open effect produced is excellent. To the west of the south doorway a new baptistry has been created on a new floor in heather brown 6" quarry tiles, with the Norman font set centrally in it.

The north aisle has the peculiarity that it extends some 10 feet beyond the nave eastwards, presumably to form a chapel. There appear to be no indications that this arrangement was not original, and the three windows of the north wall seem to be of the same age and type, except that the centre one has at some time been reconstructed. From the chapel formed by the extension access has been made to the chancel by the formation of an opening with a roughly formed half round head. In the east end of the north aisle and concealed behind the organ is a 17th century table tomb of Thomas Clerke who died at the age of 83 in 1663. All that can be seen on the tomb is the family coat of arms at one end.

The chancel is about 18 ft long and 16 ft wide. The floor is paved in red tiles which are patterned in the sanctuary which is one step above the general floor level. The roof is very shallow and has exposed trusses.

The tower is divided from the nave by an arch which differs from the rest. It is of three orders (ie three sets of mouldings in its run), the inner supported on attached shafts with moulded capitals and bases, the outer continuing to the floor on the nave side and dying into the walls on the tower side. The tower area is about 9 ft by 11 ft., and has a boarded floor. It is screened off from the nave to form a vestry. A door has been cut through to give access to the external staircase turret and in the walls above this doorway are indications of another doorway which has been blocked up.

WINDOWS

The west window is relieved with some pattern of crosses in gold but the rest of the windows are plain except for those at the east end of the south aisle and the east of the chancel.

The chancel window is in three lights, the central one depicting Our Lord. The northern light has a figure of St. Nicholas who is honoured as a special protector of children, scholars, merchants and sailors. Hence, presumably, the child and the ship also depicted. The light to the south represents St. Elizabeth against a background believed to represent Magdalen College. In the top lights are seven lighted candles. The inscription at the foot of the window reads "To the Glory of God and in loving memory of Marie Elisabeth Deane Wife of C. H. Deane, M.A., Rector, who entered into rest January 31, 1903."

The window in the east end of the south aisle depicts the crucifixion. On a scroll along the top supported by four angels is the text "It is God that ~~giv~~^{gives} me with strength of war and maketh my way perfect". At the foot of the window "In humble gratitude to Almighty God the giver of victory and peace this window is dedicated by parishioners in memory of Howard Douglas Drinkwater and William Boyes Hakesley who fell in the Great War 1914 - 1919.

OTHER INTERNAL FEATURES

The monuments are of interest and throw some light on various people associated with the church in the past.

On the north wall of the chancel a monument "SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF NETHANIEL BRIDGES DD VICAR OF THIS PARISH WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE JULY 17 1834 AGED 85 YEARS BY NATURE A MAN OF TALENT BY EDUCATION A MAN OF LEARNING BY GRACE A MAN OF GOD HE WAS FAITHFUL IN SHEWING THE LOVE AND ALL SUFFICIENCY OF THE SAVIOUR EARNEST IN HIS EXHORTATIONS UNWEARIED IN HIS LABOURS FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS HE PREACHED AND FOLLOWED XT. AND NOW SEES HIM AS HE IS.

On the south wall of the chancel a monument "IN MEMORY OF RICHARD TAWNEY ELDEST SON OF THE LATE RICHARD TAWNEY ESQ OF DUNCHURCH LODGE IN THIS COUNTY AND FOR 13 YEARS VICAR OF THIS PARISH DURING WHICH PERIOD HE WAS EVER DEVOTED TO THE SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL WELFARE OF THOSE COMMITTED TO HIS CHARGE ENDEAVOURING IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE SCHOOL AND IN HIS MINISTRY WHETHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE TO ACQUIT HIMSELF AS A FAITHFUL SERVANT OF XT. AND ADVANCE THE GREAT WORK OF SALVATION IN THE EARNEST AND SIMPLE TEACHING OF THE GOSPEL HAVING AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS INCUMBENCY PRINCIPALLY AT HIS OWN COST EFFECTED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW VICARAGE HOUSE HE WAS AT ITS CLOSE BY LIBERAL CONTRIBUTION AND PERSEVERING EXERTIONS PROMOTING THE RENOVATION OF THE EDIFICE OF THIS CHURCH THEN BUT PARTIALLY ACCOMPLISHED WHEN IT PLEASED ALMIGHTY GOD TO REMOVE HIM AFTER A SHORT ILLNESS FROM THIS LIFE TO A BETTER ON THE 23RD DAY OF OCTOBER 1848 AGED 47 BY HIS WIFE SUSANNAH JAMES YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF THE LATE C.F. BERNARD ESQ MD OF CLIFTON NEAR BRISTOL WHO DIED IN THE YEAR 1846 HE LEFT FIVE CHILDREN SURVIVING

West of the north door, lettered in oak THE CLOCK IN THIS CHURCH WAS INSTALLED IN THANKFULNESS TO ALMIGHTY GOD FOR DELIVERANCE IN THE WORLD WAR 1939 - 1945 AND AS A MEMORIAL TO REUBEN HANCOCK

THOMAS LOWINGER AND ALBERT PACKER WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES THAT WE MIGHT LIVE.

Over the north door is a well lettered monument IN PROUD AND LOVING MEMORY RICHARD JUXON PEARCE LEIUTENANT 15th/19th KINGS ROYAL HUSSARS KILLED IN BATTLE AT THE CROSSING OF THE SEINE 28 AUGUST 1944 AGED 21 YEARS ONLY SON OF WILLIAM AND CYNTHIA PEARCE AT ONE TIME LIVING AT WILLOUGHBY HOUSE BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD ALSO OF TROOPERS H DRAKE AND T DAKIN WHO FELL BY HIS SIDE GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.

A brass to the east of the north door TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN LOVING MEMORY OF THOMAS JOHN JOHNSON WHO FOR NEARLY 50 YEARS WAS A RESIDENT OF THIS PARISH THESE CHIMES WERE RESTORED BY HIS FAMILY.

Near the Children's altar a memorial IN THE COAST OF GUINEY GEORGE WATSON SON OF THOMAS WATSON OF WILLOUGHBY (AND ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S CAPTAINS AT SEA) DEPARTED THIS LIFE JULY 15th AD 1647 AETATIS SUAE 45 AND GAVE TO THE POOR OF WILLOUGHBY PROFIT OF 50 FOREVER TO BE DISTRIBUTED AS BY A DECREE IN CHANCERY SET FORTH
DEATH HATH CONTROULD A CAPTAIN BOLD
YET LOSS OF LIFE IS GAIN
ESPECIALLY WHEN CHARITY
FOREVER BOTH REMAIN

Under the window next west of the north door THIS CHAPEL IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF JENIFER LOUISE PEARCE AGED 9 YEARS ROBERT JAMES WOOLDRIDGE AGED 8 YEARS KENNETH WILLIAM WOOLDRIDGE AGED 6 YEARS.

The Thomas Clerke memorial headed under the Coat of Arms SPE FEL RESUR HIC JUXTA INHUMATUR

In the left column

HENRICUS THOMAE CLERKE DE HAC VILLA GENEROSI E REGIONE TUMULATI FILIUS COLLEGII BEATAE MARIAE MAGDALENAE OXONII NUPER SOCIUS, MEDICINAE DOCTOR, ET IN EADEM ACADEMIA PER DECENNIIUM PRAELECTOR ANATOMIAE PUBLICUS, ET SOCIETATE TAM REGIA, QUAM MEDICORUM APUD BONDURENSES, ACADEMIAE DEMUM VICECAM. ET PER QUINDECIM ANNOS PRAESES COLLEGII MAGDALENENSIS, CUI PEREM DUI DESIDERATUM RESTITUIT. TOT MUNERIBUS PERFUNCTUS COLLO TANDEM MATURE HIC INTER AVOS AT AVOSQ: EXUVIAS REPONI VOLVIT, ANNOT SALUTIS 1687 AETAT 68.

In the right column

CATHERINA, CONJUX LECTISSIMA MULTISQ. NOMINIBUS MERITO DILECTISSIMA HENRICI CLERKE MED. DRIS. ALTERA EX FILIIS GULICLMI ADAMS DE CHARWELTON IN AGNO NORTHAMPT. ARMIGERI, QUAE OBIIT 3 DECEMBER A. 3 PARTU 14 ANNO SALUTIS HUM 1669. AETATIS SUAE 33 CONJUGII 30 RELICTIS MARITO SUO MOESTISSIMO EX TRIBUS BINIS AMORIS PIGNORIBUS, FILIA SCILECET UNA, CUI NOMEN CATHERINA, UNO ITIDEM FILIOLO, CUI NOMEN HENRICUS, QUEM NONO POST MENSE MATREM COMITARI VOLVIT DENZ, SUPERSTITE ETIAMUM IN SOLAMEN PATRIS CATHERINA.

A recent notice in the new Baptistry
THIS BAPTISTRY WAS MADE AS THE RESULT OF MONEY RAISED IN THE
VILLAGE DURING THE CELEBRATIONS TO MARK THE CONSECRATION ON
MAY THE 25TH 1962 OF COVENTRY CATHEDRAL FROM WHERE THE TILE
BELOW WAS GIVEN IN COMMEMORATION.

EXTERNALLY

The tower and porches of the church are built in ashlar, that is, worked faced and coursed stonework. The remainder is in sandstone rubble with worked dressings to openings and some faces, or in brickwork rendered in cement.

THE TOWER has a heavily moulded plinth and is divided vertically into four stages or sections each separated by a stone string course. Above the highest stage is a parapet with battlements, and these are finished at the corners with panelled piers.

There are comparatively slender diagonal buttresses which rise in five stages, this time separated by sloping weathering stones except at the head of the first stage where there are small gables. These bear the figures 15 and 30 giving the year 1530.

In the west side of the lower stage there is a pointed window of three trefoil lights and this is covered by a hood mould ~~finis~~ finishing with large diamond shaped stops with carved rosettes in their centres. On the south side there is a single trefoil light to the ringing chamber. On the north side, at the junction of the tower and nave there is a half octagon stair turret which diminishes at the second and third stages. It has two openings and a door at ground level with chamfered head and jambs. On the east face is the clock in the second stage. The belfrey has windows on all four faces. These are much weathered but were of two trefoil lights and each with hood moulds formed by a continuation of the string courses.

THE SOUTH AISLE is lighted by three tracery windows each of three cinquefoil ogee lights, one on the east wall and one each side of the porch. The one originally at the west end has been blocked in and cemented over. THE SOUTH PORCH has a moulded coping to the gable ending in kneelers carved with fleur-de-lis. The entrance arch is pointed with moulded capitals which are extended to form stops to the hood mould. In the porch on both sides there are ~~single seats~~ stone benches and single light square headed splayed windows above.

THE NORTH PORCH resembles the south porch. The entrance arch is pointed with a hood mould which has large diamond shaped stops.

THE NORTH AISLE has three windows on the north side of which the eastern and western ones are original with three cinquefoil lights and similar tracery above. The centre one is a much more modern reconstruction, similar in design but with trefoil lights. There is also a window in the west end of this aisle, similar to the others but in a particularly red sandstone.

THE CHANCEL is modern and of no interest being entirely of brick or a similar material rendered in cement and partially treated with lines to represent stone joints.

INSIDE THE TOWER

Inside the tower there is a ringing chamber with a disused carillon having a wooden drum and iron teeth mounted on an oak frame, - thought to be of the 17th century. ~~There is also the~~ In the bell chamber are six bells of the 18th century, one bearing a well known inscription MY MOURNFUL SOUND DOETH WARNING GIVE THAT HERE MEN CANNOT ALWAYS LIVE.

POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

It would be an excellent thing if something could be done to change the unfortunate visual effect created by the shallow pitch of the chancel roof. This would best be done by the introduction of a false roof over to the same pitch as the gable, though it might conceivably be achieved by reconstructing the gable to a lower pitch. The present arrangement does much to spoil the appearance of the church as a whole.

It would be good to see the south porch put to a good use. It might be only a well organised store, but if the outer arch were to be windowed in and the inner door removed the porch might conceivably be made a part of the church, - possibly a place for the Christmas Crib and the Easter Garden, and so on.

There is an interesting screen of extremely good workmanship behind the Children's altar and in front of the organ. In fact the organ casing which rises above this screen does much to spoil it, and the view down the north aisle generally. Something might be done to further screen the organ. Better still might be the removal of the organ to some other position and the re-use of this end of the aisle as a chapel. This would expose the tomb, and do a lot to improve the spatial effect inside the church.