

The Church of St Bartholomew's, Hints

The present building is the third church on this site. The first church, according to Stebbing Shaw's *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* "was very antient (sic), consisting of a nave and two small side-aisles (sic), divided by round arches and large pillars ornamented at the capitals".

Around about 1800 during the long period when the Hints Hall estate was owned by the Floyer family, it was replaced in the prevailing neo-classical style by a "truly elegant specimen of Grecian architecture upon a small and simple scale, picturesquely situated upon a bold eminence ... The Inside is very neat and has a small organ suitable to its diminutive size." Stebbing Shaw does not date it exactly but implies that it was built at much the same time that the façade of the existing Hints Hall was renovated and the gardens remodelled by William Humberstone Cawley who inherited the estate in 1793 from the last male Floyer and, on marrying his cousin Miss Floyer, added the name Floyer to his own. There is a print in Stebbing Shaw of the newly remodelled Hints Hall and the new church based on a watercolour by Thomas Girtin who died in 1802. This and the fact that the *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* was published between 1798 and 1801 gives a probable date of around 1800 for the building of the intermediate church.

By the mid 19th century this second church was in a bad state of repair and in 1877 a decision was made to replace it. The present building was constructed in 1882 and dedicated in 1883, paid for by James Chadwick, the cotton manufacturer who had bought Hints Hall in 1881-2 from Lord de Clifford who had in turn acquired it after the death of William Humberstone Cawley-Floyer in 1853. The style is known as 'Victorian Gothic Revival', which by the mid nineteenth century was considered more appropriate for churches than the neo-classical which was seen as pagan. In the *Staffordshire Illustrated With An Account of the Cathedral, Churches and all Buildings of Historical Interest*, published by Edward Brown of The Lichfield Mercury in Bird St Lichfield, the old Floyer church (described as elegant by Stebbing Shaw in 1801) was dismissed in 1899 as being "a singularly plain structure". The Chadwick church was designed by John Oldrid Scott, the younger son of George Gilbert Scott, one of the leaders of the Gothic Revival movement. The new church cost Chadwick £5000. He spent a further £4000 building the vicarage (now Chadwick House) and endowing Hints as a separate parish, separate from Weeford.

Although the two preceding churches were demolished, material references to them are still evident in the present church as it houses inscriptions and monuments which originally were in the two earlier churches. Stebbing Shaw lists several monuments from the "very antient" church as being installed in the new Grecian church by 1801. Two very plain and restrained inscribed plaques recording the deaths of members of the Floyer family, Ralph and his wife Margery in 1643 and 1609, and the deaths of their son Richard in 1674 and his wife Elizabeth in 1679 are mentioned by Stebbing Shaw. They are still to be seen in the present church on the north and south walls immediately in front of the chancel arch.

Along the north and south walls of the present church are four much more elaborate memorials with the mourning figures, sarcophagi and funerary urns popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century funerary monuments. One is described by Stebbing Shaw as being in "the elegant specimen of Grecian architecture" – that is the first of the Lawley memorials, that of the Robert Lawley who died in 1779 and his wife Elizabeth. There are three other later memorials to members of the Lawley family which owned Canwell Hall, and which were installed in the "new Grecian" St Bartholomew's, Hints, because Canwell had no parish church of its own until St Mary, St Giles and All Saints was built in 1911 as a private chapel for Canwell Hall. These monuments were stylistically out of kilter with the Victorian gothic of the present St Bartholomew's in which they were relocated but are historically interesting as showing continuity (of worship) within change (of architecture).

In keeping with the Victorian Gothic architecture of the present church, its windows are mainly of stained glass. Such windows had become unfashionable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the craft was revived along with Gothic architecture, under the influence of Pugin and others, in the nineteenth century and was therefore fashionable as well as appropriate to Oldrid Scott's design.

The single lancet windows along the north and south walls were intended to depict the twelve apostles as listed by Luke (Luke 6: 12-16), but three windows are blank (Matthew, Thomas and Matthias (who replaced Judas.) The original lancets are arranged in a structured sequence around the walls. On the south side immediately to the right as one turns through the door is St Bartholomew, to whom the church is dedicated. He is named but is also identifiable by his attribute, the knife with which he was martyred. This window has an inscription indicating that it was paid for by the parishioners. The next pair of windows depicts St Jude and St Simon, shown together because they share 28 October as their saint's day. These two windows were donated by R S Foster and A B Foster of Canwell in 1883 and 1885 respectively. The window after the chancel steps is that of St John the Evangelist, distinguished as such by the fact that in the lower level he is depicted (in the manner of mediaeval illuminated manuscripts) in the act of writing his gospel. Then comes St James with his attribute, the staff of the pilgrim. On either side of the altar are the two leading apostles, St Peter with his key and St Andrew with his X shaped cross of martyrdom. The remaining pair of stained glass windows, to the left of the organ, are of St James the Less and St Philip (whose cross was T shaped, like Christ's) shown together because they share a common saint's day, 1 May.

One of the three blank windows has now been replaced by Graham Chaplin's and Pat Follows' "Millennium Window", donated to the Church by Villagers and Friends of Hints in the year 2000. This depicts Christ as evinced in various passages in the Book of Revelations triumphing over Satan, represented as a serpent crushed at his feet. The references to the nativity and the crucifixion and the Alpha Omega monogram signify the beginning and the end.

In the east wall above the altar are three lancet windows, grouped together in allusion to the Holy Trinity. They depict scenes with a well-established Christian iconography. The left window, upper level, shows the prophet Isaiah, identifiable by the words in the scroll "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Isaiah 7: 14.) This prophecy is shown in fulfilment on the lower level, where the Nativity is depicted. The right-hand window at the upper level shows David, identifiable both by the harp which is his attribute and by the words in the scroll "For Thou wilt not leave my soul (in hell)" (Psalm 16: 10), which forms a link with the theme of everlasting life and salvation symbolised in the lower level, where Christ's emergence from the tomb at the Resurrection is shown. These two windows show how the Old and New Testaments relate to each other. The centre window depicts, at the apex, Christ in Majesty after the Ascension, underneath which is the Crucifixion, and below that, the Agony in the Garden.

Behind the altar is a reredos which, with its gothic tracery and excellent state of repair, is likely to have been commissioned at the time that the present church was built. Its central portion depicts the Last Supper, with the words "Do This In Remembrance Of Me" beneath the tableau. To each side are three angels. Those on the north side bear shields which represent Christ's robe and the dice which decided who should receive it after his crucifixion; the column and whips used in his flagellation, and the cross and the lance with which his side was pierced. Those on the south side depict a chalice, the IHS monogram and the crown of thorns and the nails of the passion.

The west windows are later than the rest, being given by Mrs Chadwick in memory of her husband who died in 1892. They were designed by Charles Eamer Kempe, whose windows are also to be found in Gloucester and Bury St Edmunds cathedrals and in Southwell Minster, and can be identified by a golden sheaf used as his trademark. The windows depict the four archangels, and below them the heavenly host. Nearest the door is Gabriel, identified by his attribute the lily (referring to the purity of the

Virgin Mary) and by the words in the scroll "Ave Maria Gratia Plena", "Hail Mary, thou that are highly favoured" (Luke 1: 28.) Next is Raphael, who holds in his left hand a staff and two fish, which recall the story of Tobias and the Angel Raphael in the Apocrypha (Tobit, 6: 3-5.) The third window shows St Michael with his sword and the dragon of evil. The last window shows Uriel, whose name means Light of God, the clue to his identity being the words in the scroll "Fiat Lux", "Let there be light". The small circular window at the apex is a modest version of the rose windows to be found in mediaeval gothic cathedrals. Its shape is symbolic, the outer circles representing time on earth - past, present and future- and the centre, with Christ's monogram IHS, time eternal.

The small organ mentioned by Stebbing Shaw was replaced in 1883. The present organ was built by Mr E J Bossward of Birmingham. It has been refurbished on several occasions since, notably in 1967, 1971 and 1974 when extensive tonal alterations were carried out by another Midlands organ builder, Messrs Hawkins of Walsall Wood. It is still played regularly at church services and for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Outside, in the church yard to the south of the church, is a war memorial which is a composite structure made from an early twentieth century sandstone cross superimposed on the base of a mediaeval cross believed to date from 1153. In the church are two framed documents. One, from 1921 and signed by the dignitaries involved, records the erection of this memorial. The other lists the villagers who served in the 1914-1918 war, with the names of those who died in action being written in red and gold.

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