



J.H. & Co. sculp.

Hawarden Church. Flintshire.

HAWARDEN CHURCH, FLINTSHIRE.

THE calamitous and destructive fire which, early in the morning of October 29, laid waste the parish church of Hawarden, will probably still be fresh in the recollection of the readers of this Magazine. An occurrence so nearly unexampled as the burning of a church by the hand of a robber or an incendiary, will have drawn more attention to this sacred edifice than it has hitherto received, notwithstanding its ample dimensions and somewhat remarkable plan. We therefore think that a short account of it may not be without interest, and as happily the whole of the outer walls and the tower are still preserved, the church may be said still substantially to exist, its external outline unbroken, its chancel comparatively uninjured, and, as we hope, after a short time to appear in renewed beauty of a higher order than before.

Seated on a commanding eminence overlooking the estuary of the Dee and the adjacent plain, Hawarden Church may be observed as a conspicuous object by travellers on the Holyhead Railway, and even from the walls of Chester its tower is not indistinctly seen. The plan, if not exactly picturesque, is such as to produce a certain amount of dignity—the tower being central, though not very lofty; but the architectural character is generally plain and unpretending. The arrangement is as follows: a nave with north and south aisles, a tower in the centre, which the aisles pass without transepts, a large chancel, on the south side of which is an aisle or chapel co-extensive with it. The remarkable feature is the want of the cruciform plan, though the tower is in the centre—a disposition not very often seen, but which occurs at Fairford, in Gloucestershire, St. Giles', Northampton, and elsewhere. The nave and aisles are nearly equal in height, without a clerestory, and present externally a hard, unbroken line of ordinary battlement; but to this some relief is given by the south aisle of the chancel being wider than that of the nave.

There are no indications about the church of any work anterior to Edward II., and many of the original features have been swept away by modern repairs, chiefly in 1764, when the interior of the nave underwent considerable alterations, the arches and pillars were coated with plaster, and new windows inserted of a very objectionable kind. There remain, however, two small windows at the west end of the aisles, which, though closed up, still preserve their Edwardian tracery. Of the same date are the lofty arches which divide the nave from the aisles, three in number on each side, of unusually large proportions, and springing from massive octagonal pillars with plain capitals. The south and west doorways are Perpendicular, of rather elegant character, and the south porch, though plainer, is of the same date. The roof of the nave, now completely destroyed, was of the age of James I., not bad of its kind, but of a flat pitch, and rather unsuitable to the lofty arcades beneath it. The tower stands on four pointed arches, of which three are equal in height to those of the nave, and much of the same character, except that above the capitals there is an ornamental chamfer of rather an unusual sort. The eastern arch opening to the chancel is lower and plainer, which somewhat injures the effect of the interior. In order to strengthen the north and south arches of the tower, some small flying buttresses have been added on each side, which may be seen just under the roofs of the aisles.

The whole of the nave, with its aisles, now presents a scene of ruin and desolation, laid open to the sky by the destruction of the roof; and all the fittings, including the fine oak open seats so lately erected, have perished in the flames. The outer walls are entire, and seem pretty sound, but the pillars are much shattered, and the north-west pier of the tower considerably weakened, so as to be in a dangerous state. The tower itself is uninjured, and the fire was happily, though with difficulty, kept away from the bells and clock.

The chancel has suffered little material damage from the flames, except in its roof, which was somewhat similar to that of the nave, but of still inferior quality. This part of the church retains little of its original character, except one small Edwardian window on the north side, and three very fair sedilia on the south of the altar, communicating with each other by openings in the piers. Some questionable alterations had been made about the chancel and south chapel in 1814, but these have in a great measure given place to recent more appropriate changes. New windows have been inserted and filled with stained glass, and oak stalls, of excellent design and execution, replace the former pews. It is a most happy circumstance, for which all those interested in the church must feel ever thankful, that all these valuable objects, lately introduced at considerable cost, should have been spared.

The south aisle is known by the name of the Whitley Chancel, having originally belonged to the Whitleys, of Aston-hall, whose vault and monuments it contains. It is divided from the chancel by three pointed arches, upon multangular piers, which seem to have been tampered with, and are still covered with plaster. The eastern part has been for some time used as a vestry, and is divided from the sacarium by the wall in which are the sedilia. The organ, now destroyed, was placed so as to form a partition between the vestry and the Whitley Chancel. The east wall has at present no window.

There are monuments to the Ravenscrofts in the chancel, and some others, but not calling for particular observation.

The walls of the church are chiefly of sandstone, not of very fine or durable quality, nor is the masonry remarkably good. The tower is, however, of superior construction, and its stonework better preserved. It is of Perpendicular character, and very massive, having a battlement and large double belfry windows. The original roof both of the nave and chancel was of higher pitch than the more recent one, as may be seen from the form of the west gable, and from the mark against the east and west walls of the tower. It is not easy to say what was the exact appearance of the nave before the alterations of 1764, but there are indications of a double tier of windows in the aisles, an uncommon arrangement, but probably an introduction of debased character.

The chancel and south chapel remained unaltered until 1814, previous to which date both seem to have been in a neglected and unsound condition. In that year extensive repairs were made in this portion of the church, and the south wall nearly rebuilt. The Whitley Chancel, which till then had been private property, was made over to the use of the parish, and filled with pews. But these alterations, so well intended, were unfortunately made in a very bad style, and subsequent improvements have now left hardly a trace of them.

The work of restoration is now in the hands of the eminent architect, Mr. G. G. Scott, who will, we cannot doubt, maintain the original character

of the church, and at the same time avail himself of the opportunity afforded for carrying on such improvements as are consistent with it.

The church is dedicated to St. Deiniol, a Welsh saint, who was the first bishop of Bangor. Though there was a church at Hawarden before the Norman Conquest, the present one is evidently entirely the work of a much later period. It is also singular that there should not be in it any traces of the Montalts, the Montacutes, or the Stanleys, the ancient illustrious possessors of the neighbouring castle.

The parish was until lately a peculiar and exempt ecclesiastical jurisdiction, of which the Rector was Ordinary, but late Acts of Parliament have assigned it to the diocese of St. Asaph^a.

The dimensions of the church are as follows:—

	ft.	in.
Length of the nave, including the tower	71	0
" chancel	48	10
Width of the nave	16	9
" each aisle	11	6
" the chancel	20	9

The Kidderminster Play-house denounced by a Baxterian.—In the "Letters of Henderson," the celebrated actor, occurs the following passage:—"The summer of 1734 he passed at Edinburgh, and it was observed that the *Reverendi* and *Reverendisimi* laid aside their ancient prejudices, and appeared in a play-house, to behold Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Henderson. How different were the sentiments of this people in the days of that severe scourge of dissipation, John Knox, when the representation of a play would have excited horror, and the whole company had been devoted to destruction, as a regiment under the banner of the woman of Babylon."—(Vol. ii. pp. 254, 5.) To this passage there is the following note:—"These prejudices were not peculiar to Scotland: the same narrowness of sentiment pervaded a numerous class of people in this kingdom not very many years ago. On a set of itinerants being once tolerably well received at Kidderminster, in Worcestershire, a Mr. Watson nailed a card, with the following lines, upon the door of the barn where they enacted, which was dignified with the name of 'The Summer Royal Theatre':—

'How art thou fallen, oh! Kidderminster;
When every spulster, spinner, spinster,
Whose fathers liv'd in Baxter's prayers,
Are now run gadding after players.
Oh! Richard, couldst thou take a survey
Of this vile place, for sin so scurvey,
Thy pious shade, enrag'd, would scold them,
And make the barn too hot to hold them.'

Who were the "spulsters?"

[Probably the winders of the yarn on bobbins were the "spulsters." The winders are still called something like that in Scotland. We have some recollection of having read of a "spool of yarn."]—*Worcestershire Notes and Queries.*

^a Within the parish are three daughter churches, all erected since 1821:—St. Matthew's, Buckley; St. Mary's, Broughton; and St. John Baptist, in the township of Pentrobin.