

Notes on St. Margaret's church, Dunham Massey, Altrincham.

Commissioned by George Harry Grey, 7th Earl of Stamford and Warrington. Dedicated in memory of his sister, Margaret. (d. 1852) Building started 1851, stopped, restarted 1853, completed 1855.

Consecrated 13th June 1855.

Final design by

William Hayley, architect, of Manchester.

Built by Bowden, Edwards and Forster, Manchester.

Clerk of works was

Mr James Garbet.

Caen stone work by

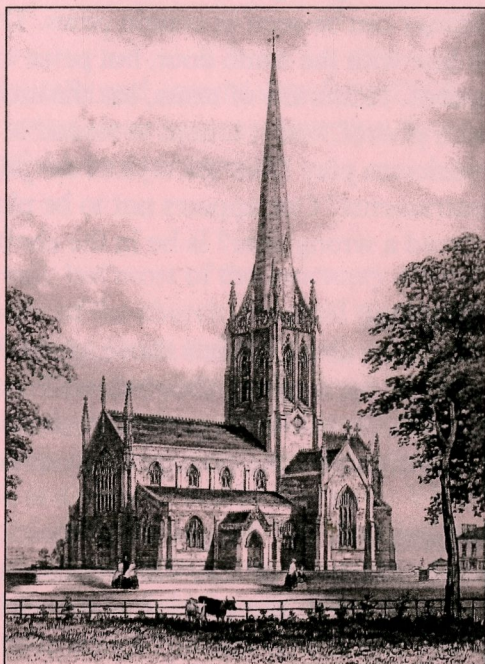
T. R. Williams, Manchester.

East and original west

windows by T. Willemont,

of London. Other stained

glass windows by W. Sinclair of Cheetham Hill, Manchester.



St Margaret's around 1860

Exterior

Perpendicular style, brick-built, faced using Yorkshire wall-stone, with Ashlar stone dressings from Hollington. West end extended in 1923 as part of a grandiose First World War memorial scheme instigated by Rev Hewlett Johnson, who later became the famous "Red Dean" of Canterbury. The work was never finished, hence the bare brick externally. Note provision for a spiral staircase in the northwest corner outside. Spire and much of the original intricately carved stonework has been removed or simplified over the years.

Nave Roof

Fine hammer-beam roof, said to be based on the medieval roof of Westminster Hall, London. Note the exquisitely carved angels.

Nave

Pews mostly original. Positions of original wrought iron gas light fittings can be seen in certain pews. There was once a crossing aisle in line with the south door, but pews were later added in these spaces. Pillars are of stone, but the arches are actually brick, faced with plaster, and coloured to resemble stone! Fascinating carved musicians play from the tops of the pillars. Can you identify the instruments? One appears not to be playing an instrument – has he played a wrong note? Is he in the choir? Is he the organist?

West End

Extension as mentioned above, gallery added in the 1990's. West window not original. (See below) Font still original, carved from Caen stone, moved to present position in 1923. Examine the heads of the figures – can you spot the one wearing a hat?

Windows

Many examples of fine Victorian stained glass, by several different manufacturers, some added as memorials, etc, at various times. Many depict well-known biblical scenes. Most notable is the superb East window – partly hidden by the marble altar reredos – which depicts the principal men in the bible. The original West window matched this, and depicted the women of the bible. (This has been in storage in the crypt since 1923). To either side of the main altar are windows dedicated to the memory of the very popular first vicar, Rev. John Kingsley. The delightful rose window situated high up in the Stamford Chapel is one of a pair. The works of the old organ in the transept opposite hide its twin, although it can be seen outside.

Stamford Chapel

Currently awaiting redevelopment, in the southeast corner is the 7th Earl's own private family chapel, which even included its own entrance, complete with elaborate stonework above the door outside. There are no memorials to any of the Earls of Stamford here. (The 7th Earl and his second wife are buried in Enville, Staffordshire. The 8th Earl lived in South Africa. Memorials to the 9th and 10th Earls are in Bowdon church). Well worth a glance is the Altrincham Charter Panel, made by the Altrincham branch of the Embroiderers' Guild to

celebrate the 700th anniversary of the royal market charter, granted by Edward I to Hamo de Masci of Aldringeham in 1290.

Chancel

Original marble floor, but choir stalls and screens date from 1913. Look up to see the grotesque carved stone bosses supporting the ceiling beams and the tracery of the central trapdoor.

Sanctuary

Again, original floor and altar rail, but most of the sanctuary altered in 1905-6, on the 50th anniversary of the church. Original plastered walls were relined with pink Runcorn stone and the reredos of Derbyshire alabaster was added. Floor supports in the crypt had to be hastily rebuilt some years later to take the weight! Look behind the reredos to see the East window in all its glory, and the original Caen stone altar reredos, which is a copy of that in the Henry VIIIth chapel, Westminster, with 7 sections reflecting the 7 of the window above. Finally, note the recently cleaned ceiling, whose wonderful colour had been obliterated by dirt and grime for many years.

Pulpit and lectern

The original pulpit was of Caen stone, and probably matched the font. It was also situated rather closer to the centre of the chancel step, in front of the current choir stalls. There was also once a matching reading desk on the opposite side of the step. The current pulpit dates from 1903, and the sounding board was added in the 1920's. The lectern is original, of brass on an iron base.

North wall

Various memorials are mounted on the wall, including a clock placed in memory of Ben Johnson, which is a copy of one in Magdalen College, Oxford.

Organ

In the north transept, cleverly built around the window. Original organ by Hill of London, 17 stops and 2 manuals - quite exceptional for its day. Extended by Augustus Guer, a one-time French organ builder, in 1876, and further altered by Wadsworths in the 1920's.

Restored and cleaned for the centenary of the church in 1955. Currently out of action, requiring £200,000 worth of restoration. A top of the range modern digital organ, a Johannus Rembrandt 4900, supplied by Makin of Oldham, is now in use. Music has always been a strong tradition at St. Margaret's. There was even a paid, surpliced choir of 10 boys and 7 men in the early years – very unusual outside the major cathedrals at the time.

Clock and bells in the tower

The ten bells are the original ring of ten cast for the church at the illustrious bellfoundry of John Taylor of Loughborough, Leics, in 1854. The foundry records tell us that the first to be cast was the tenor bell, on Friday 27th January 1854. The last bell was cast on 10th August. The bells remain the earliest complete ring of ten from the Loughborough foundry in existence, the heaviest bell weighing 25¾ cwt. They were rehung, but deliberately not retuned, in 1974. An additional chime of 14 lighter bells was added in 1857, also by Taylors, for the clock to play tunes on.

The original clock was ordered from William Taylor of Oxford, another member of the bellfounding family, although he died in September 1854 and his apprentice, one Mr Brand, is thought to have finished the job. It played eight different tunes, including the hymn tunes New York, Hanover and Old 100th.

Joyce & Co. of Whitchurch, Shropshire installed the existing clock in 1914. The 14 chiming bells and parts of the old clock were sold for scrap to help defray the cost. It is a modern flatbed movement with double 3-legged gravity escapement and chimes Westminster chimes on the bells. It was fully restored and converted to electric winding in the 1980's by Mr Ray Clayton of Blackburn. The clock faces and hands are original, but now illuminated by electricity, rather than the original gas lighting!

**St. Margaret's is a working church, not a museum piece.
Please feel free to look around.**

We have just spent £½million on repair work to the tower and east end, but we need another £½million to complete the restoration of the 7th Earl's great edifice!