

Christ Church, Shaw

History of the Church

There was a Church at Shaw in very early times. It was dedicated to St. Leonard, but beyond that fact very little is known about it and nothing of it remains. In 1837 Shaw Chapel was built, when the ecclesiastical district of Shaw was formed out of Melksham as a "District Chapelry". This building was typical of the style of architecture prevailing in the early stage of what is known as the "Gothic Revival," and consisted of a nave 32½ wide, without aisles, covered by a meanly constructed, low-pitched, blue slated roof in one span; a mere recess, 7 feet deep, for a chancel; a vestry, 8 feet by 5½ feet, and a bell-cot over the west gable forming a porch to the doorway beneath. It was lighted by a row of tall lancet windows on each side and a triplet at the east end. Much had been done to improve the building by painting the walls, and by replacing the box pews by low open seats, which latter are still retained, but it had long been felt that nothing short of an entire remodelling of the structure could ever make the Church satisfactory.

In 1905, at a cost of £20,000, generously borne by the late Mr. Charles Awdry, the Church was entirely remodelled, the architect being Mr. C.E. Ponting, F.S.A., and an apse was added at the east end, and tower, vestry and Baptistry at the west end. The alterations of the old nave consists of erecting pillars and arches of oak to divide it longitudinally into three parts, cutting off the eastern part of this to form a chancel, the parts on the north and south forming transepts. The arcades of the nave are surmounted by a clerestory stage of half timber work in oak and rough-cast, with windows having oak mullions and tracery. The old vestry has been left almost intact for use as a sacristy, but the only portions of the old nave which remain are its side walls.

The tower is, like the rest of the church, treated in an entirely unconventional manner; inside it is divided into four storeys, the lowest one being the entrance porch. Externally, the lower stages are quite plain, but the belfry stage is considerably elaborated. The eight buttresses are carried to the top, and in each there is a niche containing a life-size figure. The tower has a pierced embanked parapet but no pinnacles. In the centre of it is a flèche or spire, constructed of wood and covered with cleft oak shingles, with a weathercock as its terminal, rising to a height of 100 feet. All the roofs are of open timber type, constructed of oak and covered with Westmorland green slates. At the intersection of the roofs of the nave and transepts is a tall oak flèche of somewhat elaborate design, covered with oak shingles; this contains the extract ventilator.

The interior of the Church is more ornate than the exterior. The chancel is enclosed on three sides by richly treated oak screen, that dividing the chancel and nave being especially elaborate, the aisle towards the nave having a cove with fan-vaulting. The apse at the east end has the unusual peculiarity of an angle, and not one of its sides, with a window, in the centre behind the altar; this was designed to enable the reredos to be carried up higher in the centre. In each of the four sides, two on either side of the central angle, is a tall two light tracery window having square heads like those of the aisles (the rule throughout the building being observed of giving the windows under the eaves a horizontal termination).

The pavement of the sanctuary is of black and white marble, with black marble steps. The choir stalls are of oak, and at each end are carved various coats of arms, including that of the diocese (Our Lady and Child). The font is of Derbyshire marble. The brass candelabrum in the middle of the choir was originally in Melksham Church, and was transferred to Shaw by resolution of the Melksham Vestry in 1846. It is considered to be one of the finest of its kind in the country. A similar one was transferred to Seend at the same time.

The figure sculpture was evidently the subject of much thought. The dedication of the Church in the Name of Christ was kept in view as the central point round which the whole scheme was arranged. In the niches of the buttresses on the east side of the tower are represented four of the chief prophets who foretold our Lord's coming - David, Daniel, Isaiah and Zephaniah. The four figures in the west part of the tower, towards the road, are the evangelists who recorded our Lord's coming. Flanking the entrance doorway of the porch are the two figures of Our Lady and St. Gabriel - representing the Annunciation. In a niche over the west window is a figure of our Lord as the Good Shepherd. The figures of the reredos and of the west window are described below.

All the stone figure sculpture, as well as the oak screens, stalls and other oak fittings, are the work of Mr. Herbert Read, of Exeter. The general contractors were Messrs. Hoskings Bros., of Newbury and Hungerford. The Church has been warmed by Messrs. Haden, of Trowbridge, and the metal-work executed by Messrs. Singer, of Frome.

THE REREDOS

The beautiful oak reredos that forms the background to the altar is 10½ feet wide and 20 feet high, and contains the figures of the twelve Apostles with their respective emblems. These latter take, as a rule, though not always, the form of the instrument by which the Apostle is supposed to have suffered martyrdom.

Reading from left to right, the figures are: -

Left panel:

- 1 St. James the Less - a fuller's club.
- 2 St. Philip - a long pilgrims' staff, surmounted by a cross, alluding to his missionary wanderings among the barbarians.
- 3 St. John - a cup from which a winged serpent is emerging, in reference to the tradition that one of the priests of Diana challenged the Apostle to drink a cup of poison. After St. John had made the sign of the Cross over the cup, Satan, in the form of a serpent, rose from it and flew away.
- 4 St. James the Great - a sword.
- 5 St. Bartholomew - a butcher's knife.
- 6 St. Matthew - a roll and pen.

Right panel:

- 1 St. Peter - two keys, Matt. XVI. 10.
- 2 St. Andrew - two pieces of wood crossing each other in the middle and so forming a cross.
- 3 St. Matthias - a battle axe.
- 4 St. Thomas - a builder's rife, alluding to the success of his labours in founding churches.
- 5 St. Jude - a halbert.
- 6 St. Simon Zelotes - a saw.

A figure of the risen Lord, bearing the banner of Resurrection, occupies the central tabernacle, and above that is one of St. Michael slaying the dragon, as symbolical of the triumph of Christ's Church over sin. The niches are enclosed by a frame with delicate undercut carving of vine pattern, and there is a deep pierced cresting in which are shields carved with emblems of the Passion.

It was the original intention to add the figure of our Lord to the Cross in the large central panel, but this was never completed.

The reredos, with its sculpture, and the altar were the work of Messrs. Martyn and Co., of Cheltenham.

WEST WINDOW

This window was dedicated on February 7 1921 by Dr. A.E. Burn, Dean of Salisbury, to the memory of the men of the parish who had fallen in the war.

The main design of the window consists of the four Patronal Saints of the United Kingdom and Ireland - St. George, St. Andrew, St. Patrick and St. David, each with their respective emblems. Standing above them are four Warrior Angels, selected from "The Order of Governors and Order of Messengers of God's Will." The first, an archangel (represented by St. Michael as the Warrior Saint of Christendom); the second "Virtues," the third, "Powers," the fourth, "Principalities," each shown in armour. The figures stand beneath canopies, painted on silvery white glass, and above are four angels holding a continuous scroll that runs through the four lights. On this is inscribed: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory." Borders of white and coloured glass are

introduced, consisting of the initial letters of the Saints' names, surmounted with a crown, and alternated with ornamental pieces. The tracery openings are filled at the apex with a representation of the Agnus Dei, standing on the Book with the Seven Seals; angels holding shields with the two sacred monograms, Palms and Crowns of Victory; while the eight smallest openings show emblems of the Passion. At the base of the window two angels are shown holding a label on which is the dedicatory inscription: "To the Glory of God, and in memory of the men of this Parish who fought, suffered, and died in the Great War, 1914-1919". The artist was Mr. Horace Wilkinson, of London.

INCUMBENTS OF SHAW

[Note - Shaw was at first a District Chapelry, with a Curate-in-charge. In 1843 it became a Perpetual Curacy, and in 1870 the incumbent became a Vicar.]

1838 - 1840	Thomas Henry Paddon George	Curate
1840 – 1841	William Newnham	Curate
1842 – 1848	Caleb Williams	Perpetual Curate
1848 – 1882	George Nutt	Perpetual Curate & Vicar
1882 – 1895	Francis Slater	Vicar
1895 – 1928	Charles MacKenzie Steedman	
1929 – 1955	Lionel Charles Littlewood	
1955 – 1961	Leslie William Barnard	
1961 – 1963	Tom Venables Hordern	
1964	Christopher C.B. Willis	

Source: Christ Church, Shaw c1964