

Sandbach History Society

Report on February 2022 meeting

Richard Vickery: Stained glass windows at St Mary, Sandbach

The February meeting of Sandbach History Society was held at St Mary's Church, Sandbach when Richard Vickery, a member of the Society, gave a presentation about the stained glass windows in the church.

Mr Vickery said that when he had been researching the Bradwall Reformatory School, opened in 1856 and owned and managed by a local landowner, George William Latham, he found that there were eight windows in St Mary's church dedicated to members of the Latham family. This led him to carry out a study of all the windows, and produce a booklet, as part of the church's Heritage Project.

The church was substantially restored, in the Gothic Revival style, in 1847–49 by George Gilbert Scott and the windows (21 in total) date from then or later.

The windows memorialising the Latham family are in the Chancel and the Bradwall and Wheelock/Lady chapels on either side. The east window is a memorial to Dr John Latham (d.1843) and his wife Mary (d.1841). He was an eminent doctor who bought Bradwall Hall in 1801. The window, which depicts scenes based on Jesus's life as described in the Litany, was manufactured by Thomas Ward and installed during the restoration.

Of the eight Latham windows Mr Vickery said his favourite was the one in memory of John Henry Latham (d. 1843) by his father because it was very personal. The window depicts the Four Evangelists. John Henry was a very promising student at Oxford and heir to the Bradwall estate but he died at the age of 20.

That window, and nine others, was manufactured by William Wailes who became one of the most important manufacturers of stained glass between 1840 and 1880. He was influenced by Alexander Pugin and the Gothic Revival style. His windows can be seen in a number of Cheshire churches, including Nantwich St Mary and Chester Cathedral. Wailes's windows were bright and cheerful, said Mr Vickery, and his use of cobalt blue became a distinct feature.

Three windows depicting the life of David can be found in the north aisle. They are dedicated to members of local families: George Twemlow (d.1808), Thomas and Mary Broome (d. 1829 and 1825) and Charles and Francis Rickards (d. 1831 and 1860). The windows are the gift of Charles H Rickards, a Manchester businessman, in memory of his ancestors. He was born at Oak Farm, Betchton and was a generous benefactor of St Mary's, contributing to the restoration of the church and presenting the marble tablet and bust of Rev John Armitsted in 1876. A window in memory of Charles H Rickards, depicting David and Solomon, was installed at the west end of the church in 1887.

Other local families are commemorated including the Percivals who owned Brook Silk Mill. In the south aisle, Eliza (d. 1848) and husband Ralph (d.1853) are remembered. A little further along is a window in memory of Elizabeth Holbrook (d. 1873) which depicts the story of

Dorcas making clothes for the poor, the parable of the Good Samaritan and the lesson of the widow's mite. Nearby is a plaque which explains that the Hon. H Holbrook provided the church with the illuminated clock and chimes in the tower. Henry Holbrook was the son of Elizabeth who had emigrated to Canada and was, at one time, a minister in the Canadian government. He returned to England to live at Parkgate and is buried at St Mary's.

There is one window manufactured by Charles Kempe - in the north aisle - commemorating Judge Joseph St John Yates (d. 1887), a high court judge who lived at Bradwall. Kempe was another well-known stained glass manufacturer whose more subdued style than Wailes defined a later 19<sup>th</sup> century style.

Two windows were installed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One commemorates Canon Reginald Betts, vicar of St Mary's from 1942 to 1964 and is a pictorial setting of "Suffer the little children." The other shows St Michael standing on a dragon and St George standing on a dragon, flag in hand, and is in memory of the men of the parish who gave their lives in the Second World War.

Mr Vickery ended by saying that as well as a memorial to past members of the community, the windows were also important in providing instruction and reminders of the power and love of God. Nowadays they are often seen as a decorative addition to the building but in the past they were a proclamation of the Christian faith.

He acknowledged the help given in carrying out the research, not only by members of St Mary's Church but also Andrew Lamberton, who has produced a history of the stained glass windows at St Mary's, Nantwich; Richard Tucker who took the photographs; and Canon David Ashworth who was responsible for the detailed explanation of the symbols contained in the east window.

Copies of a fully illustrated booklet, giving details of all the windows, is available for £5 including postage, with proceeds going to the church, and can be obtained by contacting the author via [vickeryfamily@hotmail.com](mailto:vickeryfamily@hotmail.com)

The next meeting will be held by Zoom on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March at 8.00 pm when Margaret Roberts will talk about "Educating Cheshire: County Training College, Crewe (1908-1974)". Visitors are welcome to attend virtually; please e-mail Richard Vickery on [info@sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:info@sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk) or view the Society website [www.sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk) for further details.