Bygone Sandbach

Another “Bygone Sandbach” presentation was given by Pauline and Stephen Minshull to Sandbach History Society on 3rd of November.

A large collection of photographs of Sandbach through the ages was built up by Mrs Minshull's late husband, John, and has been continued by his son, Stephen. On this occasion, the presentation – which focused on the Sandbach Crosses, St Mary's Church and the area around them – had been newly compiled by Stephen Minshull. Using a sophisticated method of digital overlay and reveal, Mr Minshull demonstrated how particular features had evolved over time.

The presentation began with an aerial view of the town centre from 1928. It clearly showed the church and the Crosses, alongside the town hall, allotments, The George bowling green, Commons mill and the water tower. A second slide showed the same view in 1953.

It was explained that the Sandbach Crosses are Anglo-Saxon and date back to the ninth century. Extensive research on them has been carried out by Dr Jane Hawkes of the University of York (see *Sandbach Crosses: Sign and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, 2002).* Large, freestanding Christian crosses, known as high crosses or standing crosses, first appeared in Britain during the early eighth century. Famous examples, like the Bewcastle Cross in Cumbria and the Rothwell Cross in Scotland, date from this time. An artist's impression of the larger Sandbach cross, taken from Hawkes's book, showed it originally to be brightly coloured and inset with metalwork.

The first documented evidence regarding the Sandbach Crosses dates to 1585. It is no coincidence that Sandbach's market charter dates from 1579, just six years earlier; Hawkes theorised that two crosses were gathered from other locations and erected in what is now the market square as market crosses to attract traders.

The Crosses were partly demolished by Puritans in the seventeenth century. However, in 1816, various pieces were gathered from around Sandbach and beyond and were reconstructed.

A number of slides illustrated how the market square developed, with various buildings constructed around the edge – some of which have long since been demolished. These included The Lower Chequer (1500s); The Black Bear and The Crown (1600s); The Market Tavern (1700s); Church House (early 1800s); and St Mary’s church school (1841).

The arrival of the railways in the early nineteenth century brought affluence to the town, and five silk mills were constructed. The market developed further, and a photograph from 1888 showed an earlier town hall (demolished in 1891) alongside a market square packed with carts from which goods were traded. Other photographs showed several shops, scattered around the central area of the town, selling a wide range of goods. Sandbach did not get its

own chip shop, however, until 1910 when Florrie's chip shop opened next door to The Black Bear.

A number of slides from earlier times showed pieces of stone at the corners of the Crosses to protect them from motor vehicles. These stone fragments are, in fact, the remains of three smaller crosses, and two tomb slabs. In 1958, they were moved to St Mary's church, adjacent to the west door. They are a scheduled monument.

Another scheduled monument can be found near the south porch of the church: the remains of a medieval churchyard cross. The top was cut off at 4ft 4 in on the instructions of Cromwell's parliament and later served as a sundial.

Several close-up slides showed the outstanding iconography of the two Crosses, and an explanation of some of the interesting details was given using Hawkes's interpretation.

Photographs showed how Church House once stood on the site now occupied by an estate agency. Originally the vicarage to St. Mary's, it had been used from the late eighteenth century to accommodate the curate. From 1841, when the church school opened, it was also used as accommodation for the masters, mistresses and pupil-teachers. The building was demolished in 1969.

The entry in the Domesday Book (1086) records that Sanbec (Sandbach) had a priest and a church, but no details were given about the building. The building which George Gilbert Scott restored in 1847-1849, could be dated to around 1500, but evidence points to it having evolved from an earlier structure. Scott extended the building by 36 feet to the east to include a separate chancel and side chapels. He encased the whole building in new stone from Mow Cop, rebuilt the south porch (the gift of Miss Sarah Sibson), and rebuilt the tower, which was in a dangerous state. The unusual feature of a path running through the tower was commented on.

The church had a ring of four bells as far back as the sixteenth century and currently has a ring of eight. In 1938 the bells were rehung, and photographs showed them lying on the ground at the foot of the tower.

Stephen Minshull had put together a collection of photographs of interesting architectural details of the interior of the church including gilded roof bosses (ornate decorations at the junction of roof beams), stone and wooden corbels (roof supports), and label stops (figureheads at the intersection of arches) thought to represent individuals such as Richard I and his wife, Queen Berengaria. The church has a good collection of stained-glass windows, and one in memory of Canon Betts (vicar from 1942-1964) was singled out for attention.

The final set of slides showed the alterations carried out to Front Street – a mixture of Victorian and much older houses – which was blocked off when the churchyard was extended and "squared-off" in 1874.

John Minshull, who started the archive of photographs, was remembered in a photograph from 1959 taken outside Eachus and Son, printers, on the corner of Market Square, where Mr Minshull was an employee. Also shown was the equipment used to print *Challenge*, the church magazine that he edited from 1964.

The presentation ended with a 360-degree panoramic aerial view of Sandbach in 1928, which had been cleverly stitched together by Stephen Minshull.

John Higgins
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