

COUNCIL FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP, 83, London Wall, London EC2.

HALTHAM UPON BAIN, ST. BENEDICT (LINCOLN) Referred under the Pastoral Measure, 1968.

LOCATION: Haltham is a small hamlet consisting of a handful of houses about eighteen miles east of Lincoln on the road between Horncastle and Coningsby. The church is at the end of a small cul-de-sac at the northern end of the village, on a slight hillock.

PLAN: nave of three bays with north aisle and south porch, small west bell turret; chancel.

DATE: the nave is late fourteenth-century, the chancel fifteenth-century. The church was much restored from near-dereliction in 1880 and 1891.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION: at first sight, this humble little building seems to be rather unprepossessing. This is chiefly because of the lack of dignity imparted by the quaintly low bell-cote at the west end of the nave roof. But this church is as interesting in its way as many of its more ambitious colleagues.

It stands in the middle of flat fenland on a slightly elevated hump (about four feet above the surrounding land, but even this small eminence is noticeable here), in a small churchyard which displays a variety of headstones, some quite attractive, but for the most part not unusual. South-west of the church is the octagonal base of a cross on a square plinth together with some worn fragments. There is a particularly unsympathetic group of white marble headstones with kerbs and green chippings north of the church.

The building dates of the church divide quite clearly from outside at the junction of the nave and chancel, and must have been even more distinct before the nineteenth-century restoration when the chancel was thatched and the nave lower and leaded. Now both roofs are slated, but the distinction is evident in the architecture of the walls, the nave being the older part. The window in the south wall of the nave is simple with Y tracery and no surround or dripstone.

The stonework is of greensand and has been cemented over in some places which has resulted in worse decay than was there before. There are also some old iron ties but these seem to apply to movement which has long since ceased. The west wall is supported by two brick buttresses which do not perform their function adequately. The west wall is of greensand up to the eaves. Above this level the gable is of brick, part of the nineteenth-century work which by raising the pitch of the roof engulfed what was a small turret for the bell so that now it hardly rises above the ridging.

At the foot of the west wall is a round-headed doorway (now blocked) with a continuous moulding round the reveal. Sitting close on top of this is a three-light Perpendicular window with trefoiled lights. Above, in a small recess in the brickwork, is a slightly sinister head, a smooth egg-shaped stone with primitive features of a stylized sort. Above this another head projects from the wall. Both are grinning in rather an eerie and unsettling way.

The north aisle is evidently later, or has been reconstructed, since it is built of smooth ashlar masonry in squared blocks. There is a west window of two lights with ogee heads under a flattened triangular head with mouchettes in the corners.

The north wall of the aisle has a blocked doorway in the centre with a head unusually set at the point of the moulded surround. The window to the right is of two cinquefoiled lights and that to the left has three lights with wide, mismanaged cusps. The aisle projects awkwardly beyond the junction of nave and chancel so that it has to be covered by a hipped roof. The north-east corner leans outwards in spite of the buttresses against it. The east window is like that on the north wall.

/The chancel

The chancel is much more refined than the nave, about a century later in date. It is roughly symmetrical with (moving from west to east) a pair of low-side windows, each of two trefoiled lights (the northern pair blocked); then east of these are two-light ogee-headed windows and then three-light windows on the same patterns further east, so that the chancel gets progressively lighter towards the altar.

The east wall itself (which is that seen as the church is approached from the village) is a set-piece, with finely detailed angle buttresses crowned by small, carefully moulded gables. The east window between them is of noble design and size more typical of churches further south in the county and also more associated with large buildings (it resembles work at Grantham, for instance). The four main lights have ogee heads and are grouped in two pairs with pointed quatrefoils in the head of each. Above, between the pairs, there is a particularly attractive composition of flowing tracery in a rather leaf-like design. First two small lobes fan out, then a larger pair reaches further to left and right above the main lights. In the head of the whole design is a pointed quatrefoil like those lower in the tracery, giving uniformity to the design. The members are delicately moulded in a most refined way which has fortunately weathered well. The iron stanchions and saddle-bars are of considerable age and, although they have been structurally detrimental, they are an important element in the design of the window, preventing the main lights from seeming too large.

The only feature on the south wall which differs greatly from the north side is that here there is a priest's door, very small and set very low indeed (even allowing for some increase in ground level round the church). It has an ogee head like the low-side windows and is carved with some graffiti ostensibly dating from 1723 (which may well be so).

The south porch is the latest part of the exterior of the church with an elegant, if severe, entrance which is a simply moulded two-centred arch flanked by renewed angle buttresses capped with crocketed pinnacles. The roof of it is entirely nineteenth-century, as is the tiled floor within and the wooden benches along each side.

The inner doorway is round-headed, and appears to be Norman although the tympanum does not rest comfortably on the imposts. These are uncarved and unmoulded, with canted corners. From the east side, a small corbel projects to carry the tympanum. There are more graffiti dated 1659, 1743 and so forth.

The exterior of the church might lead one to expect that the nave of the church would be less interesting than the chancel, but although the architecture of the chancel is certainly better, the main interest inside the church is centred upon the nave. The reason for this is the furnishing of the two parts, and again, as outside, the dividing line is the chancel arch. Each part belongs to a tradition quite different from the other. Although the nave has a Victorian roof, it has survived otherwise virtually untouched since the eighteenth-century, and so carefully (or cheaply) was it refurnished then that much of the mediaeval woodwork has survived.

Architecturally, the nave is (as outside) plain. The west bay is taken up entirely by the internal structure supporting the belfry, very much on the pattern of some Essex churches. The wooden uprights and braces are mediaeval, as is the ladder which leads to the trap-door in the roof of the ringing chamber. The panels of wood run vertically, and halfway up the wall is a group of panels painted with the Royal Arms of Charles I. To the left of that are the panels of the Ten Commandments, arranged without care for the proper order so that they are illegible. The painting is in any case very faded. Three steps lead up to the small door which leads into the ringing chamber, which like the rest of the nave, is floored with attractive red mediaeval bricks.

/The north arcade

The north arcade which divides the nave from the aisle has three arches, the west one much narrower than the others and more pointed, the rest wider than semi-circles. The piers are surprisingly slender octagons, both with octagonal stone seats round the base (although the eastern one is engulfed in the floor under the pews). The capitals are foliated and the chaufers of the arches are very bold and deeply cut. The impostes at both ends are corbels with heads beneath them.

The pews in the nave face the pulpit which occupies an elevated position in the south-east corner - those on the north side of the central alley face south and those on the south side face east. Exceptions to this are the precentor's stall just below the pulpit which faces north and the box pew opposite it which has seats arranged round three sides as usual. There is also a richly carved screen along the north and east walls of the north aisle which encloses a family pew in two parts. This is said to have belonged to the Dymoke family, (a worn ledger slab in the chancel floor apparently covers Robert Dymoke although since this was reported in the Church Times for 1915, the lettering has become virtually illegible). The chancel arch has been rebuilt in an odd way, supporting a very thin wall and without any decoration save two tiny heads, one at each side at the springing of the arch. The corbels for the former chancel arch remain, that on the north side a moulded semi-octagon with a flower below, and opposite a completely different design incorporating two heads. There is yet another carved face set in the infillir of the north door, this time a wrinkled woman's head.

The mediaeval wooden screen has been cut down, but again, as with the remarkably complete set of bench-ends, the useful portions were employed in a new way when the nave was arranged for preaching. The wide ogee arch from the central opening separates the precentor's seat from the chancel, and two smaller ogee arches from one of the sides have been reused to form a decorative back to the box pew on the north side of the alley at this point. Thus the surviving portions of the screen occupy roughly their right position, but a few feet lower than before.

The chancel has quite a different atmosphere from the nave, much lighter as a result of the large windows and less cluttered as a result of nineteenth century re-furnishing (how lucky that the nave survived this). The architecture preserves its mediaeval quality well, the walls whitewashed as in the nave, although the roof was entirely renewed in 1880, and, like that in the north aisle, is carried on ugly angular corbels with none of the character which the mediaeval craftsmen imparted by use of the carved heads which may be seen at so many places in this church. The fact of the restoration of the church in 1880 and 1891 (which was no doubt much needed structurally) is recorded on a brass plate on the north wall of the chancel near which hangs a copy of a print showing the condition of the building before this time - with thatched chancel and lower leaded nave roof.

To the north of the altar is a plain square canopy and in the south east-jamb of the south-east window is an angle piscina with two ogee arches supported on a polygonal colonette. The fluted bowl is unusually well-preserved. Corbels for statues flank the east window. The oak furnishing in the chancel, although strongly made, are out of keeping in style and colour, and the reredos is mean and not of anything approaching the quality of the fine window tracery above it.

FURNISHINGS AND FITTINGS

1. Sculpture - much has already been mentioned under this heading in the architectural description, and it remains to describe here the finest piece. This is the tympanum over the south doorway, evidently Norman in date, of semi-circular shape. It is, as Professor Revesner says, a 'barbaric jumble of motifs', many of them inexplicable or indecipherable. The main feature is a Maltese cross in a roundel in the centre round which are various patterns (leaves, a rosette, some differing and a strange interlacing knot). A defaced object which may be a figure stands to the left of the cross.

/2. Woodwork

2. Woodwork - this is the most notable feature of the church. a) Eleven of the benches (the majority) seem to preserve their original ends with curved elbow rests and small lozenge-shaped poppyheads. Some of the eighteenth-century numbers are still discernable and at least one of the poppyheads has a shield of arms - a sword between a crescent and a rosette. The seats have in most cases been replaced when the seating plan was altered.

b) The Dymoke family pew is L-shaped with four bays of the arcaded screen along the north wall and three returned along the east wall. The lower part of the front has tracered three-bay panels, then the open part of the arcade has double open panels with pendant bosses of castellated form and above that, a plainish cornice with bratishing.

c) Attached to the south end of the eastern part is the only box pew in the church, with seats round three sides and knobs each side of the door.

d) The parts of the screen which survive have been mentioned already, and are finely carved with panel tracery in the spandrels and pretty cusping within the arches.

e) The pulpit is hexagonal with bold fielded panels and a wide cornice. The steps up to it have a delicate rail of wood.

3. Two ledger stones in the chancel, one apparently of Robert Dymoke, but now illegible and the other entirely without any inscription now is the mediaeval altar slab.

4. Stained glass: in the tracery of the east window are two crosses which appear to be made of mediaeval glass although it is difficult to ascertain this without closer inspection. A small frame for some scene now gone seems to be sixteenth-century.

5. Books

a) The bible on the reading desk is of 1851, in poor condition.

b) Another bible, larger, with a leather label on the front stating 'Rev. John Dymoke Rector Haltham Nov 14th 1810'. The bible itself is of 1807.

c) Large prayer book of 1835.

6. A pair of small candle-holders, one in the pulpit and one at the back of the church.

7. An iron chest, padlocked.

8. The Font is hexagonal on a square base without a stem. The bowl is deep and decorated with square flowers as in diaper work. The flat cover is prettily diapered also.

9. An oak chest in Jacobean style.

10. The registers date from 1561, 1695 and 1768.

11. Three bells - Two by Tobias Norris of Stamford, 1662. One with the inscription Q R IHV GAMBINA MRLI +, cast by John Wooley of Nottingham between 1524 and 1536.

12. The plate consists of a silver chalice of 1764, a paten and a flagon, also of 1764. There is also a pewter almsdish.

STRUCTURAL CONDITION: the latest quinquennial inspection report was drawn up in March 1970. The immediate repairs included repair to the slates, stonework (particularly urgent), rainwater pipes and the possible cost was estimated at £300, but it was said to be difficult to assess the amount of work needed on the stonework until work had actually started. The list of less urgent repairs, including re-slating of the roofs, treatment of the stonework, repairs to the windows, renewal of the floor below the bells in the cote and treatment of timbers affected by woodworm was estimated at £4,000.

OTHER CHURCHES IN THE AREA: the Pastoral Committee lists eight, all close by.

VIEWS: If sufficient outside grant aid were available to carry out the necessary repairs, then it would no doubt be desirable to retain the church in use for as long as that proved feasible. However if the church is to be declared redundant its interest would seem to make it a likely candidate for the Redundant Churches Fund, since an alternative use would spoil its atmosphere and character.

(Visited by the Pastoral Measure Assistant on 24th September, 1974)