

St.Helen's Church
Escrick

A History by

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VILLAGE

Before the Norman Conquest, Escrick was a small hamlet which belonged to Morcar of York. The origin of the name is probably Esc-hric, signifying ash ridge.

In 1086 there were two estates which belonged to Count Alan of Brittany. In 1100 Count Stephen gave them to St. Mary's Abbey, York. They were granted to the Lascelles family by St. Mary's Abbey for whom they had been tenants.

The estate was retained by the Lascelles family until the 16th century when it passed to the Knyvetts by marriage.

It then passed by marriage to the Howards and it was sold by Baron Howard of Escrick to Sir Henry Thompson in 1668.

In the 18th century it passed by marriage to the Lawley family and P. B. Lawley was created Baron Wenlock in 1839. The Third Baron died in 1912 and the estate passed to his daughter Irene Constance who married Colin Guerdon Forbes Adam and the estate is still in the hands of the Forbes Adam family.

The Hall (Escrick Park) which is now owned by Queen Margaret's School (originally from Scarborough) was formerly let to the Woodard Society when the School moved from Castle Howard in 1949.

THE CHURCH

St. Helen was the mother of Constantine the Great, who was proclaimed Emperor by the Roman Army in York in 306 A.D.

1252 records show that there was a medieval church of St. Helen situated on the west side of Escrick Hall. In 1781, by a private Act of Parliament, the site of that church was granted to Beilby Thompson to further his plans for improvements to the surrounds of the Manor House, on condition that he built a new church elsewhere. In consequence, the church and rectory were demolished and replaced by an ice house and a new church was built on the present site.

The church was designed in the classical style and was constructed of brick with stone quoins and dressings and was consecrated in 1783. This church was replaced in 1857 by a stone church built in the Gothic curvilinear style and was designed by Francis Cranmer Penrose, architect and surveyor to St. Paul's Cathedral, at a cost of £26,000. The money was contributed by the Reverend and Hon. Stephen Willoughby Lawley together with the Second Lord Wenlock and members of the family in memory of the First Baron Wenlock. The first stone was laid by Beilby, Third Baron Wenlock in 1856 and the new church was consecrated by the Archbishop of York Thomas Musgrave, on 1st. July 1857.

The church consists of an apsidal **chancel** with a **tower** on the north side of the chancel. A **nave** with a **north aisle** and a **south porch** with vestry above, and at the west end a **baptistery** and chapel a built over the Lawley vault. The **choir vestry** was added in 1896. The walls are of magnesian and oolitic limestone with the floors in York stone. The roof of the nave and chancel are covered in plain tiles and the remainder in lead, with the exception of the baptistery which, following the theft of the lead, is covered in stainless steel.

On 5th February 1923, the church was gutted by fire but was restored by the Hull architect, John Bilson and re-dedicated by the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang, on 25th March 1925. The stone from Huddleston in Yorkshire and Ancaster in Lincolnshire was from Kirk & Barry of Sleaford and was selected to match the pink tinge imparted by the fire.

Baptistery

This was erected at the expense of the Dowager Lady Wenlock and built over the family vault (the only remaining part of the old Georgian church), wherein lie the remains of her husband Paul Beilby, First Baron Wenlock. Other members of the Lawley family are buried in the churchyard. The baptistery is semi-hexagonal in form and has a vaulted brick roof sup-

ported by red and black pillars of Devonshire marble. Each column with a different foliated capital, over which is a turret covered in scalloped tiles. It is both a baptistery and mortuary chapel and in the centre of the floor stands the font, a survivor from the Georgian church, by Giovanni Tognoli of Rome (1844). This consists of two white marble angels with outspread wings standing back to back and supporting on their heads a translucent white marble basin. At the rear of the baptistery is a mutilated stone effigy of an early 14c. knight, reputed to be that of Sir Thomas de Lascelles of Escrick (d.1324) and made by the craftsmen of the Cheyne School of York. It was brought from the demolished church in Escrick Park and originally placed in the niche in the south wall of the church. Monuments on the wall include Beilby Thompson (d.1799) by Fishers of York, Jane Thompson (d.1816) by the Danish sculptor Thorwaldsen, and Richard Thompson (d.1820) by Mathew Cotes Wyatt. The floor contains a stone on the south with 3 brass bearings and no text and is that of Sir Arthur Robinson of Deighton (d.1636) who was Lord of the Manor of Deighton and High Sheriff of Yorkshire. A further brass inscription is to John Paler (d.1613)

Nave

The vaulted roof is oak panelled on arched trussed ribs carried on angel corbels. The chain supported

electric lights hanging from the roof were replaced by the present lighting system and, at the dedication on 22nd November 1973, the church was floodlit by tractor driven generator, there being a government ban on illuminations during the power crisis.

Seating in the nave and north aisle is of oak. At the west end of the nave above the wardens pew is a large and impressive inscription to Stephen Willoughby Lawley by Eric Gill 1907.

South Porch

The principal entrance to the church. Over this is a small vestry approached from the nave by a spiral staircase within a turret.

North Aisle

The aisle is divided from the nave by a beautiful arcade of five bays. Before the fire, the recumbent figure of Caroline the First Lady Wenlock, daughter of Lord Braybrooke, (d.1868), made in pure Carrara marble by His Serene Highness Prince Victor of Hohenlohe Langdenburg, (Count Gleichen), cousin of Queen Victoria, lay in the second bay but is now at the north west corner. It was split in three places by the fire in 1923. Note the detail of the exquisite work, especially the fine lace shawl of Saxon design. On the wall are tablets to members of the Lawley family and a painting of the Reverend Stephen Willoughby Lawley.

Tower

Situated at the north east angle of the church, the tower rises to a height of 100 feet, embattled with crocketed pinnacles and with twin two-light openings at the belfrey stage. Originally it housed a peal of five bells made by John Warner & Sons of London and given by the farming tenants of the parish. During the restoration work following the fire, a further three bells were added. In 1997 a new peal of twelve bells, plus a semi-tone were installed in a fully galvanised 14 bell frame. Cast by Whitechapel Foundry they came from St. Martin in the Bullring, Birmingham and rank about 21st in the heaviest peal of 12 in the world. The original Cookes clock was destroyed in the fire and replaced in 1924 by Newey of York. The lower portion of the tower opens with a spacious arch into the chancel to form the organ chamber. The original organ by Holditch of London was destroyed in the fire and is replaced by the present one by Wood Wordsworth Ltd.

Choir Vestry

This was added in 1896 as a thank-offering for recovery from serious illness by Lady Wenlock and is the only part of the church with plastered walls.

Chancel

This is apsidal in its termination forming a semi hexagon. The three stained glass windows in the sanctuary, representing the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi and the Ascension, were designed by John Bilson and made by James Powell & Sons, Whitefriars, London and date from the reconstruction of the church after the fire (1925). Their mark is a small white monk to be found in the right hand bottom corner of the southerly window. The vaulted roof is of oak and groined. The choir stalls are of oak in the collegiate form and given by the Whitehead family of Deighton Grove. The aumbry was installed in 1995.

Churchyard

This was consecrated in 1783 and extended in 1857. The lych gate is of oak with a scalloped tile roof. The churchyard contains the War Memorial, designed by Temple Moore and erected in 1921, to those killed in two world wars, 1914-18 and 1939-45. In the south west corner is the box tomb of John Elston (d.1830) builder of the first church on this site. The 3rd Baron Wenlock is also commemorated in the churchyard by a fine headstone designed by his widow, Constance.