

THE CHURCH

In the Domesday Book compiled in the 1080s in the reign of William the Conqueror reference is made to a church and priest in Middleton. This was not of course the present building which was erected in stages in the 12th and 13th centuries but would have been a more primitive structure probably of wattle and daub constructed when the village began to form from a scattered settlement in the late Saxon period.

Christianity had existed in Britain during the Roman occupation and Eborius of York was among the three British bishops who attended the Council of Arles in AD 312. When the Romans departed in AD 410 they were gradually replaced by the Angles, a Germanic people who joined the Parisi the local tribe and brought with them the worship of pagan gods. Knowledge of this period is very scanty but in due course the incomers established the kingdom of Deira which later formed part of the larger unit of Northumbria.

A defining moment in the conversion of the area to Christianity came as a result of the marriage of King Edwin to Ethelburga a Christian princess from Kent. The king had promised to respect his wife's religion and possibly adopt it himself. This he did in York in 625 and the culmination of the conversion process took place two years later in 627 with the destruction by the high priest Coifi of the pagan temple at Goodmanham a few miles from Middleton and said to be near the royal palace.

In some historical notes a former rector of Middleton describes the process of mass conversion that took place in later centuries:

“When Saint Wilfred was Bishop of York, from 669 to 677 AD, missionary priests were sent out to convert the Wolds. They came from Saint Wilfred's own monastery of St Andrew at Hexham, and where they were able to plant a mission church they gave it the name of the great church at Hexham from which they came, viz, St Andrew's; possibly these mark the track of the first Christian priests who settled on the Wolds, and who came from the Monastery of St Andrew at Hexham”.

Whilst converting the population the missionary church took the precaution of incorporating certain pagan traditions and practices to ease the process.

In the two centuries after the Norman Conquest substantial churches appeared throughout the East Riding and the rector's notes continue:

“the church of Middleton was anciently a Rectory of Patronage and in the jurisdiction of the Collegiate church of St John of Beverley. In the year 1236 the church was assigned to the Precentorship of St John of Beverley, and the first rector was named John de Sculcoates. In 1273, the Provost of Beverley ordained a Rectory appropriate to the said Precentorship.

The chancel of the present church of St Andrew's is Early English, and dates from the year 1280. The nave is in the Decorated Style and dates from the year 1360 and there is also a very fine Norman Font in the church in a good state of preservation which dates from about the year 1100”.

The religious upheaval following the Reformation in the 16th Century and the Civil wars in the 17th would no doubt have been reflected in the interior of the building and we can only guess at what desecration may have taken place.

A more modern description of the church appeared in Allen's History of Yorkshire in 1831:

"The church is a rectory, dedicated to St. Andrew, valued in the king's books at £15.3s.4d.: patron, the Rev. John Blanchard. It is of great antiquity, and consists of a nave and side aisles, and a chancel. On the west end of the roof is a neat little octagonal turret, having a dwarf spire, with pinnacles, etc, all of modern workmanship. The west end has three lancet windows, and on the south side is a modern porch. The chancel displays several lancet windows, both in the sides and at the east end. The interior is spacious, and was new-pewed and beautified by public subscription, in 1821. The nave is separated from the aisles by four pointed arches, resting on alternately circular and octagonal columns. The chancel is large; in the south side are three pointed stalls, and at the west end of the nave is an ancient and elegantly formed font. It is circular, with eight attached columns, which support an ornament of Norman workmanship. The whole is in good preservation."

And in November 1865 the building was visited by an eccentric MP Sir Stephen Glynne bart, brother-in-law of the Prime Minister Gladstone, who had a lifelong passion for visiting churches. His somewhat critical opinion reads:

"Nov. 1865. This church has nave with north and south aisles, large chancel and tower at the west end. The tower is engaged in the west end of the nave and of poor modern work, having been built in 1830.

The chancel is spacious, and has Early English lancets, triple at the east end, the others single; but on the south, near the west end is a two-light Decorated window. The chancel-arch is pointed, on octagonal shafts. The nave has a Norman doorway on the south, the outer arch on shafts with abaci and scalloped, the inner on imposts. The nave arcades are dissimilar, the northern arches are pointed, with circular columns having capitals. The southern arches are low with alternate circular and octagonal pillars; on each side four arches. The south-east respond is a corbel. The windows of the nave are mostly square-headed. The north aisle has been rebuilt in brick and stone, and has debased windows. The exterior is much patched in brick and stone. At the west end of the aisles are lancets.

The font is Norman; the bowl circular, with stem surrounded by shafts".

A report in the "The Hull Packet" newspaper for the 7th February 1873 painted an unappealing picture of its pre restoration state:

"For a long time the condition of the sacred edifice was the source of much regret to the parishioners, the walls being in so crumbling a condition and the tower so dilapidated, that it can scarcely have been seen to have been water tight".

The report then goes on to say "instead of the dingy barn-like appearance the old Church has presented for years, we have now a structure of an elegant open aspect".

After reading these extracts it comes as no surprise that the church was ready for a thorough Victorian makeover and a directory of the 1890s records the changes together with other descriptive notes.

“It consists of a chancel, nave, aisles, south porch and western tower containing five bells, and a clock presented by an anonymous donor. The chancel, which is unusually long, measuring 40 feet by 21 feet was erected about the year 1280, and the nave about 1360. The church underwent a thorough restoration in 1873 by F. M. Teale of Doncaster at a cost of £3000. The tower, which had been erected in 1830, in lieu of a small octagonal turret with dwarfed spire added in the previous century, was rebuilt, as also were the walls of the aisles; and new roofs were placed in the nave and chancel, which were at the same time re-seated with pitchpine benches. All the old and interesting features have been retained. In the chancel are three ancient sedilia, the piscine, and a curious aumbry. The font is supposed to be the work of the 12th century. The circular basin rests on eight attached columns and above one are carved three stars. Four pointed arches divide the nave from the aisles on each side. These spring from pillars which were formerly alternately circular and octagonal, but are now with a single exception all circular. The east window of three lights is filled with stained glass representing the types of the Old and the antitypes of the New Testament by Lavers, Barrand & Westlake 1872. Three windows in the south aisle are memorials of Ann Crowe, who died in 1852, William Crowe who died in 1843 and Ann Crowe who died in 1882. The windows of the north aisle are all plain glass, as is also the west window of the nave. The pulpit is carved oak, and the reredos is of the same material in beautiful panel work. There are tablets on the walls of the chancel to the memory of Revs. C. S. and Edward Brearey, and the Revd John Blanchard former rectors of the parish. The churchyard was enlarged in 1860. There are four ancient tombstones here; three of them bear incised crosses, and the fourth, which rests on six small pillars (modern), has the figure of a man rudely carved upon it. These stones were brought from Kiplingcotes and are believed to date from the middle of the 12th Century. The figure is supposed to be that of the founder of the church. Another tombstone, interesting from its antiquity covers the remains of the Rev M. Crouch, MA who died in 1660. The organ is a very fine instrument purchased at a cost of £200 was presented in 1876. The register dates from the year 1678.”

In addition to the memorials already referred to there are various commemorative brass plaques and a roll of honour. A niche in the chancel arch contains a bronze age beaker c2000 BC discovered in a gravel pit.

A glebe terrier of 1770 states that the furniture of the church consisted of 2 good bells, a cloth for communion table, a surplice, a pewter flagon and 2 small silver cups weight about 16 ounces while in 1895 the contents comprised:

CHURCH PLATE

Silver flagon, silver chalice, silver paten and cruet.

Iron chest for registers (kept at the rectory), 1 bible, 1 prayer book, 1 litany book, psalter, hymn books and prayer books for organist, choir and congregation. Book of offices.”

The following is a description prepared in recent times of the stained glass windows.

“THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS in the south aisle depict Bible scenes including The Lord is my Shepherd” and the story of the good Samaritan.

The lovely EAST WINDOWS depict Bible scenes from both old and new Testaments including the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and Ascension of Christ.

The chancel is illuminated either side by TALL LANCET WINDOWS. Seven of them were re-glazed in 1981 with stained glass leaded lights in richly coloured symbolic designs by Mr Younger working in collaboration with Mr Sims the York architect.

The three windows on the NORTH SIDE represent God the Holy Trinity. Alpha and Omega symbolises God the Father, the creator, the beginning and the ending.

The Chi-Ro and star design stands for Jesus Christ. The dove descending into the cruciform halo speaks of God the Holy Spirit.

SEVEN is the scriptural number for completion, fulfilment, perfection. Each window has three vertical bands representing the spiritual dimension of life and four horizontal bands representing the material world shot through with the spirit. Where these bands intersect are TWELVE points of bright colour, twelve being the scriptural number for the universal church, (the tribes of Israel, Christ's apostles etc.).

The WINDOWS LOOKING SOUTH correspond with those on the North and loosely represent the material elements of air, earth, water and fire.

"AIR" with a suggestion of star motifs corresponds with God the Creator and in this connection the Alpha resembles a compass.

"EARTH" links in with God the Son and incorporates the idea of season of the year, sun/moon shapes and harvest colours.

"WATER" recalls the grace of God's spirit in Baptism and the chalice and twelve brightly coloured "grapes" symbolize Holy Communion.

The fourth window "FIRE" overlooking the sanctuary is composed of fiery reds and ambers and incorporates the cross of St. Andrew Patron Saint of our Church who gave his life bringing people to Jesus.

These windows dedicated on 22 February 1981 by Bishop Wimbush were bequeathed by the late Marion Ada Moate in memory of her parents. They are a major contribution to the beauty of the Church particularly when sunlight fills the Chancel with richly coloured shafts of light".

In 1904 the churchyard was closed for new burials and the present burial ground provided.

As with all places of worship Middleton Church has over the years had its share of structural and financing problems. In January 1978 Allan Wood and Partners of Hull carried out a survey and reported ominous cracks in the fabric of the church and the Rev Parlow reported that the building could become redundant if other people did not become involved in its upkeep. In April 1981 the clock weights fell into the vestry. In May 1986 it was reported in the Parish magazine that the finances were on a sound footing.

In March 1992 new communion silver was purchased following a burglary.

Over the years there have been long periods when the church bells were silent and then restored. John Goodrick took an active interest in this. One such restoration occurred in 1972 and was welcomed by Ted Dooks retired railway man who had taught many villagers to handle them.

The bells can still be rung today if the ringers are available.

GEOFFREY WISHER (Author)

