

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

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Pugin at Holy Cross Church, Lichfield

Nick Beveridge

The small Catholic chapel of the Holy Cross, Lichfield, was built by resident priest John Kirk and opened on 11 November 1803. This was the first Catholic building in the city since the Reformation and it was permitted in law by the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1791. The Act did still stipulate certain restrictions on the look of Catholic places of worship and the building could not have a tower, steeple or bell, so what was built had the appearance of a typical Georgian town house of the well to do gentry. Within the house one half was made into the presbytery, the other half the chapel. In order to avoid any ostentatious entry into the chapel from the road, the congregation made their way into it by way of the main front door of the house, then up the stairs, along the landing and down another staircase into the chapel.

In 1829 the Act of Catholic Emancipation (Third Roman Catholic Relief Act) was passed by Parliament. This Act removed most of the remaining restraints in law against Catholics, including restrictions on their places of worship. In 1833 Dr Kirk asked his friend Joseph Potter, a Lichfield architect, to create a new frontage for the chapel half of the building as there was no longer any statutory need to disguise or hide it.¹ Potter also made several other substantial alterations which included a small extension for a new sanctuary and a new raised roof over the entire chapel side. There would also be a bell tower. The works were completed in 1834 and the church reopened on 23 September that year.

According to Pugin's diary for 1837 he visited Litchfield [*sic*] on 30 August 1837 and in his diary for 1842 a list of Myers' expenses included an entry for 'Litchfield screen' at '50.0.0'.² The accompanying note states that 'The Roman Catholic Church of Holy Cross, Lichfield, by J. Potter, was furnished with a screen and other fittings by Pugin in 1841'.



The earliest known photograph of the interior in 1890 shows no obvious signs of Pugin's involvement. However, a new memorial altar ensemble was installed in 1922, part of which remains and incorporates a decorated tabernacle door that could have survived from Pugin's fitting-out of the building.

Although it does not resemble any other tabernacle doors by Pugin with which I am familiar the design of the sacred monogram IHC looks typical of his work and its location at the centre of crossed orphreys is reminiscent of other items in his output, such as vestments and altar frontals. Therefore, this is possibly the only remaining evidence of Pugin's involvement at Holy Cross.

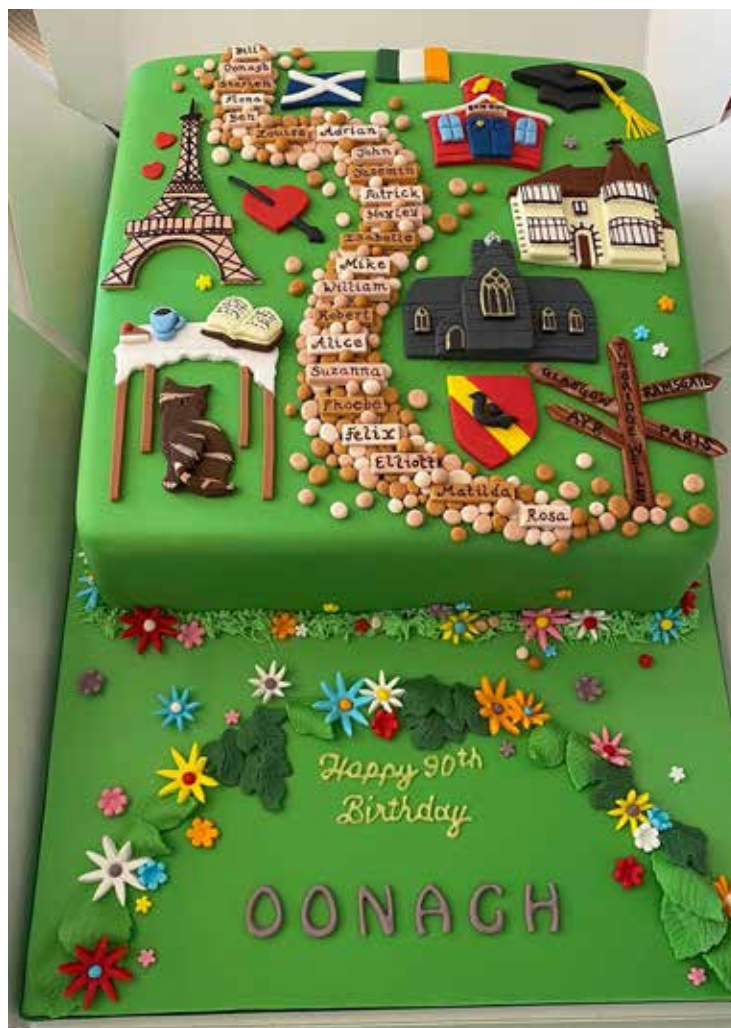
I wish to thank Gerard Wilcox for all his help, including the image of the tabernacle door, and for permission to use material from chapter 2 of his Parish History of Holy Cross.

Endnotes

- 1 Potter was to design the chapel at St Mary's College, Oscott and whom Pugin replaced to furnish and decorate the interior
- 2 George Myers was Pugin's favoured builder; Wedgwood, 1985, pp. 38, 54

A Cake to Remember

A happy couple of photographs of intrepid and popular Oonagh Robertson, one of the very first members of the Society, celebrating at her 90th birthday party in August. She was the first Treasurer we had, and now her daughter Fiona Newton is Membership Secretary and her granddaughter Alice Berendt our current Treasurer. Three generations of close involvement with the Society! Note in particular how St Augustine's church and the arms of Pugin feature on this remarkable cake.



A Footnote to the Shrewsbury Dish

James Joll

Following his report on ‘A Shrewsbury Commission Rediscovered’ in the Society’s February 2022 e-newsletter, referring to an important Pugin dish for sale at that time at Mallam’s auctioneers, Oxford, James Joll now adds some further informative comments.

Pugin’s anxiety over the best materials to be used for Lord Shrewsbury’s dishes and the condition of the Mallam’s example when purchased meant that it was important to analyse it while it was being conserved. Jacky Ramsay, principal colleague of the expert metal restorer and conservator Rupert Harris, is responsible for cleaning off the accumulated grime. He is confident that the base metal employed is German or nickel silver. This can only be confirmed by XRF (X-ray fluorescence). First used in China, this alloy became known as ‘paktong’ when exported to Europe. Nickel silver, consisting of an alloy of copper with nickel, and often zinc, was first perfected as a material in Germany in 1823 and introduced to England in 1830 when Elkington took out a licence to make it. Nickel silver proved an excellent base for silver plating and traces of silver have been found on the dish in question.

As many Pugin enthusiasts will know, the Hardman archive in the Birmingham central library provides



Fig.1 Private collection



Fig.2 Bard Graduate Center, New York. Oscott College, Birmingham. Photo, Graham Miller

much information about the work designed by Pugin and how it was carried out. Hardman kept every document relating to his business and the bundles of invoices from his suppliers, sorted by month, include quantities of brass tubing from a bedmaker for candlesticks, receipts from railway companies for goods delivered, and even supplies of tea and coffee for the works. There are also considerable numbers of invoices from his sub-contractors. These include at least four patent electro gilders and platers, two of whom had a hand in finishing the dishes for Lord Shrewsbury's dining hall.

Smith & Cox seem to have plated seven, including the Mallam's example, probably also the other 24in example, and, in addition, the 30in one, as they charged 60sh on 22 April 1851 or twice the price of the two 24in models, and only 18sh for each of the smallest four 16in ones. But what about the proposed gilding? Here Hardman turned to Thomas Fearnley, also in Birmingham, whose invoice for 30 April of that year lists 'gilt in parts' for a total of six dishes, itemised by size. These include the three largest ones made. As almost all the silver plating has disappeared from the Mallam's dish it can be no surprise that there is absolutely no sign of any gilding which would, of course, have been laid down on top. Pugin was sufficiently concerned to produce



Fig.3 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Photo, Simon Cuthbert.

at least one drawing, whereabouts unknown, colouring yellow the parts he believed should be gilt, but that is probably for the 30in dish. There is no evidence of how he wanted the others to be treated, though the central Talbot lion must be a prime candidate. The Mallam's dish, therefore, will stay as it is unless more cast iron (as one might say) information about its parcel gilding is forthcoming.

The design of the dish, with its eight circular medallions containing a capital T, which protrudes beyond the circular rim, had a number of precedents in other Pugin objects. His textless work, *Designs for Gold and Silversmiths* (Fig. 1) published in April 1836, contains a chalice and paten, the latter with eight well expressed medallions linked by concave arcs edged with rope mouldings. A year or so later he designed a covered flagon and basin in silver for Oscott College, Birmingham. (Fig. 2) Very plain in all respects, there are the same eight protruding medallions. Bishop Willson bought two offering basins in brass from Hardman in 1846-8 which are very similar; one is illustrated in Brian Andrews' catalogue of his exhibition *Creating a Gothic Paradise: Pugin in the Antipodes*. (Fig.3) This motif even figured in Pugin's ceramic designs for Minton. A coloured drawing of a plate with this shape was shown in the catalogue, No.115, of the New York Bard Graduate Center 1994



Fig. 4 Bard Graduate Center, New York

exhibition, A.W.N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival (Fig.4); in the catalogue entry it was questioned whether this plate had ever been put into production. The second dish turned up at auction last month. One of four silver plated 16in ones with a gothic S at the centre.

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This e-newsletter was edited, designed and typeset by Dr John Elliott

After 23 editions of the e-newsletter it is Goodbye from me as I step aside for a new editor.

It has been fun producing the e-newsletter which started life as a stop-gap means of communicating with members during the Covid lockdown, but which quickly developed a momentum of its own.

A huge thank you to all those who contributed material for publication and to those of you who read the result. I wish you a happy, holy and peaceful Christmas and may 2023 grant you your hopes and desires.