



**THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ST. PETER, KINVER**

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Kinver Parish Church with Foley Chapel in the foreground

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PETER, KINVER

A Short Guide and History

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The Interior

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, KINVER

This short account of St. Peter's Church, Kinver, is based upon the much more comprehensive history of the parish and church by the late Mr. Herbert Grainger, published in 1951. His scholarly grouping of the historical associations of the place, enhanced by his personal devotion to the church and its vicinity, have found expression in a most valuable fund of information for all who are interested in the history of our land.

TO ANYONE who approaches Kinver, its noble church, standing high on the rocky eminence known as Kinver Edge, is one of the first landmarks to greet the eye. The site affords magnificent views of the surrounding countryside; it was in prehistoric days fortified as a military defensive post; and it may well have been used for devotional purposes even before Christianity came to the land.

As to when it became first dedicated to Christian worship, it is difficult to make any definite pronouncement. There is a legend that a small church was built during the reign of a Saxon King, Wulfhere, who became a Christian, and was later responsible for the appointment of St. Chad as first Bishop of Lichfield. This would give an approximate date of about A.D. 700.

For authentic records, the historian naturally first turns to the earliest written source of information which can be said to have any foundation in fact—Domesday Book. This 11th-century survey gives interesting information as to the local population and ownership of land in the Parish, but makes no reference to ecclesiastical matters other than a brief mention of a Priest. This would not necessarily imply the existence of a church building.

But by this time the Normans had established themselves as a dominating power in the land and had laid down the principles of ecclesiastical architecture which

set in motion the great Gothic revival. The earlier Saxon churches, of a more primitive type, were for the most part replaced or adapted in accordance with the new ideas brought in from the Continent.

For evidence that the present church had its origin at about this time we may turn to the building itself. For it has all the characteristics of a structure, built up in the grand traditions of the great English styles of architecture, superimposed upon and using much of the material of an earlier building of the Saxon or Norman type.

Thus, there are parts of the structure which are unmistakably of the Norman period, say early 12th century. There is indeed reason to believe that some of these early remnants disappeared in comparatively recent restorations (see page 9), for Bishop Lytton who visited the church in 1743, has recorded the existence in the North wall of an arch of undoubted Norman origin, and other writers of the period have also confirmed this. But though this arch is now no longer to be seen, there are certain traces of this building which can be attributed to the Norman period. Chief among these are the two flat buttresses on each side of the tower. It is also possible to observe the remains of an original Norman string course on the exterior wall, and an examination of the inner wall of the south side also reveals some old grey stonework, some very typical Norman ornamentation which the Mediaeval Masons later incorporated into their wall. This was common practice at the time and in other parts of the church: e.g., the window sills, some of the older stone still remains contrasting with the red sandstone used later.

To sum up, we may attribute to the site a Norman church of considerable importance and dignity, probably built about A.D. 1100 on what may have been the site of an earlier Saxon church. This Norman building was replaced (or rebuilt) during the 14th or 15th century, probably at intervals, using mostly red

sandstone but also incorporating some of the old stonework and introducing many of the characteristic styles of Gothic ornamentation which during all that period developing into their fine flowering, known as the Perpendicular. This was the church as we see it today, though many additions particularly that of the north aisle in 1976 have altered it in detail.

THE EXTERIOR

THE TOWER is of conspicuously massive conformation with parapet and battlements. It was built of the red sandstone used in the 14th century reconstruction, but the two Norman buttresses of the old church, earlier referred to, were retained, marking the corners of the earlier church. On the south side can be seen the traces of a staircase which was built in the 18th century to give access to a gallery which was at that time constructed in the church.

The tower contains a fine peal of bells, which were reconditioned and re-hung in 1920 with the addition of two new bells, which made up the full peal of eight. The bells have Latin inscriptions and the ringing chamber contains an old rhyming copy of 1741 of the bell ringers' duties and penalties for their non-observance.

The south wall of the church belongs also to the 14th century building, the windows having all the graceful style of what is known as the Decorated Period, which marked the transition from Early English to the Perpendicular style, which is well exemplified by the later East window of the chancel. On the north side, the Foley chapel at the East end stands out, evidently a later addition, while the former north wall of the north aisle itself dated from the mid 19th century, when a new north aisle was added. This led to the destruction of the old north wall and the disappearance of the Norman arch referred to as existing in the 18th century by Bishop Lytton.

THE INTERIOR

THE NAVE is separated from the North and South aisles by two arcades, of which that on the south side belongs to the 14th century rebuilding, while their matching counterparts on the north side were added in the 19th century when a new north aisle was built. Galleries which were constructed at the west end and over the south aisle in the 18th century have now been removed.

Some old structural and ornamental details are worthy of observation, viz., the Norman stonework, already referred to (see page 6) on the south wall, and nearby, above the south door, some traces of mural paintings. There are some traces of mediaeval drapery, with the remains of Latin texts in black letter script, superimposed. In the north-east corner of the nave are the remains of a staircase leading to a doorway with Norman characteristics, probably giving access to a now demolished rood loft, and in the south-east corner the remains of a buttress which seems to mark the extent of the Norman nave. On the easternmost pillar of the south arcade may be seen an inscription bearing the names of two churchwardens.

At the west end of the Nave has been preserved some beautiful remains of mediaeval carved woodwork which are probably parts of screens now demolished.

The pulpit was originally a three-decker, restored in 1903 by a member of the Foley family. It still retains a touching Latin inscription referring to the original donor, Richard Blockley, who thus perpetuated the memory of his love for the church. It is dated 1625.

The lecturn is modern, and commemorates the donor's daughter, a mother's tribute to her child who died the day before her fifth birthday.

The font is modern, but stands on an older pedestal of indeterminate date.

Memorial tablets include one above the pulpit to the memory of Jonathan Newey, who was Curate and Vicar for 54 years, and is recorded as "a good and brave little man" and one in the north aisle recording the

names of those who subscribed to its building, and pews allotted to them.

Preserved in a glass case is a copy of an original charter granted by King Charles I in 1627 to the men of Kinver. It is signed by Cardinal Wolseley, and bears the great Seal of England. The original with many of the ancient registers, is now kept at the County Record Office in Stafford.

In another case are preserved some chained books. These comprise a number of the usual 17th and 18th century devotional treatises, together with a Hammond's Paraphrase (1702) which bears the signature of Thomas Wilson, sometime Bishop of Sodor and Man.

THE CHANCEL

THE CHANCEL of the original church did not extend so far to the east as at present, the previous eastern limit being marked by the piscina and sedilia to be seen under the south window of the south chapel. The extension took place during the 15th century and its beauty is greatly enhanced by the noble Perpendicular window at the east end.

This beautiful window of five lights comprises a representation of the Ascension in the centre, with the Crucifixion and the Mother and Child on either side, while the outer light depicts scenes in the life of St. Peter the patron saint of the church.

A major restoration of the chancel was carried out at the beginning of the 20th century in memory of the Rev. J. Hodgson, who held the living from 1867 to 1901. This included the provision of new choir stalls, the moving of the organ a little further to the west, the repairing of the chancel rails and repanelling around the altar (see page 13).

A curious old notice-board preserved in the chancel refers to an arrangement for the cost of repairs which was apportioned at different rates to various parishioners, who took the responsibility for paying.

To south and north of the chancel are the Grey Chapel and the Foley Chapel respectively.



Boy Bishop

Rogation Sunday



THE GREY CHAPEL

THIS CHAPEL is separated from the chancel by an arcade of brickwork which is somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the building. It appears that these arches were added at some time to strengthen the roof supports. A wooden tablet dated March 7th, 1741, nearby, referring to the cost of repairs gives rise to the supposition that this may have been the date when the arches were inserted.

The tomb which now stands under the east window was at one time in the chancel itself, and its removal to its present position has resulted in its being considerably mutilated. The figure is that of Sir Edward Grey who died in 1528 during the reign of King Henry VIII. Much of the brass inlaid work has now disappeared, including the many coats of arms, but there remains one tablet depicting his two wives, his seven sons and his ten daughters. The Grey family had landed interests in Kinver, and always took a close interest in church affairs.

Over the door is a large tablet to the memory of Sir William Talbot of Whittington Hall and Stourton Castle, with a long Latin inscription. This was erected by his son William who became Bishop of Durham.

In one window are represented the arms of Sir John Hampton who died in 1472. He was buried in what is known as the Foley Chapel, on the other side of the chancel, but this coat of arms was placed there by a former Vicar, John Hodgson, in 1891.

THE FOLEY CHAPEL

IT IS BELIEVED that in pre-Reformation days this beautiful chapel was a chantry dedicated to St. Mary. It is chiefly notable for the tomb of Sir John Hampton and his wife. His family were Lords of the Manor of Kinver, residing at Stourton Castle, during the 15th century. He was a stout supporter of the Lancastrians and held many important offices, including that of

Constable of Chester Castle and Ranger of Kinver Forest.

At a later date the chapel became the property of the Foley family. This was about the year 1672 when they purchased the advowson of the living and it became the burial place of many members of the family.

The chapel is a good example of the best Perpendicular style, with a graceful arcade separating it from the chancel; it underwent a thorough restoration in 1856, which was about the same time as the former north aisle was built and the two may have been carried out simultaneously. Among the brass memorial tablets in the chapel is one recording the fact that the repairs were carried out by a member of the Foley family.

MODERN DAYS

DURING THE 19th and 20th centuries great improvements and additions have been made to the fabric of the church and to this has been added a vigorous growth of the Christian Ministry and finds its central focus in the old church on Kinver Hill, and its driving power in those who have given faithful and devoted service to the spiritual guidance of the parish.

The first organ was installed in 1833, during the incumbency of the Rev. George Wharton, and it was during his time that it became necessary to hold services in the school in order to provide for the large number of worshippers, leading eventually to the erection of a new north aisle.

His successor, the Rev. John Hodgson, was responsible for the building of the old Vicarage, and a major restoration of the church under the direction of Sir Gilbert Scott also took place during his incumbency. He was a man of conspicuous energy devoting much of his time to the organisation of education in the town, as well as many other and varied interests.

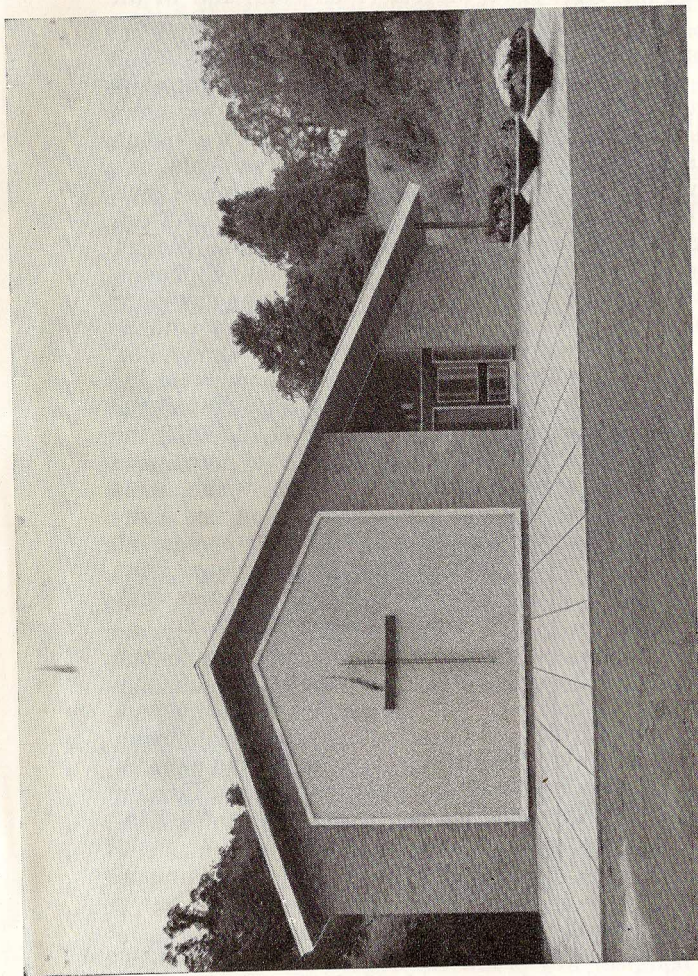
In 1901 he was succeeded by the Rev. T. A. Cooper Slipper, who had the present fine organ installed and was responsible for the installation of the present fine peal of bells.

Subsequent improvements included the completion of the organ, and interior fittings during the incumbencies of the Rev. J. A. Mercer (1935-1943) and of the Rev. J. C. West (1943-1954).

Since the Rev. Donald W. Watson was instituted in 1955 a great number of additions and alterations in church buildings have taken place. The huge Victorian Vicarage at which the Rev. Baring Gould, as a visitor, wrote the hymn "Now the day is over", was sold, and a new Vicarage was built lower down Vicarage Drive. The builders were local, Messrs. Basterfields of Stone Lane, Kinver, and the Diocesan architects, Messrs Wood, Goldstraw and Yorath, of Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, designed it. Later, further along the site given to the church by Major Harcourt Webb, a new Church Hall was built to replace the old wooden army hut. This is a magnificent building of very modern design and has added greatly to the community life of the parish. It was dedicated on September 17, 1961, by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield, who also gave permission that weekday services could take place within it. It was designed by Messrs. Leonard J. Multon and Partners of Edgbaston, Birmingham, and built by Messrs. K. S. Rock and Co. of Wolverhampton. A large cross adorns the wall in the sanctuary, and this was the work of the sculptor, A. John Poole of Birmingham.

The large organ in church was restored at a cost of £4,000, and the console was moved across the chancel to its present position. All the churchyards are now closed as no further land can be used for burial, owing to the proximity of the water bore hole. The churchyard immediately around the church, with the Garden of Remembrance along side it, is kept tidy by the Kinver Parish Council.

A very successful Arts Festival was started in 1967, with the Vicar as its director. The open side aisles of the church were thronged by craftsmen at work, a large stage covered the pews in the centre, on which national dancing, drama and music were performed, the Churchyard also had outdoor activities such as



The New Church Hall

sheep shearing, gun-dog handling and goat keeping, and refreshments were served in two large marquees. In 1974 the number of people attending, on the three days of the Kinver Arts Festival, was 11,000. Both the Birmingham and London departments of B.B.C. Television made films which were shown on television. The progress of this festival was halted by a very unfortunate happening.

It was discovered that the stonework and timbers of the Victorian North Aisle were in a dangerous condition, and as the adjacent Nave structure had been seriously weakened by the 19th century work, the stability of the whole Church was threatened. A major reconstruction scheme was subsequently undertaken on the north side with extensive restoration of the mediaeval Nave roof. All through one winter the side of the Church was demolished and services were taken in the South Aisle, with only polythene sheets to protect the congregation from the elements. The Parish Communion, at which most parishioners worship, was held in the Church Hall.

The new North Aisle and reopened Nave were completed in 1976 and were rededicated by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield at Parish Communion on July 18th, 1976.

The cost of the work had doubled owing to the fact that planning permission was refused by the Seisdon District Council and the Staffordshire County Council. The Parochial Church Council decided to appeal against this decision, and engaged Mr. Nick Budgeon, now a Wolverhampton M.P., as their barrister and Mr. John Roper of Messrs. Rowland Tildesley and Harris of Bilston as their solicitor. This was done with great success and permission was granted to go ahead, even though the cost had doubled. The building work was carried out by Messrs. W. Sapcote of Birmingham and the architect was a parishioner and Church member, Mr. John Greaves Smith.

The exposed Nave timbers can be seen as a superb double-collar rafter roof design, now considered earlier than 14th-century dating and possibly the original Nave

roof. The shortened rafters and braces on the north side are supported by the new upper arcade plates of the aisle structure, and the thrust is carried to the ground along the spring roofline through the heavy raking buttress beam down to reinforced stone bases. The aisle structure is a frame of laminated pine with a solid 2—3 inch plank roof slope, all in its natural colours. A dormer window at the eastern abutment with the Foley Chapel gives daylight to the restored chapel window. This has been re-glazed by remodelling the best of the Victorian gable window glass, and the work was carried out together with the modern glass, in the west window, by Mr. W. Pardoe of Lye. The lower walls of the aisle are built of re-used Norman stone re-claimed from parts of the Victorian walling, but long lancet windows on each side of the buttresses space out the old stone into panels and allows the outside to be glimpsed from with-in. These narrow margins of light are carried round the edges of the roof and reach up, above the triangular west window, to a high clerestory light which admits south light to the roof, reflecting into the aisle. The whole is a simple expression, using forms and materials of the 20th century, of the function of the aisle which, with little change to the overall external composition of the Church, is designed to support and complement the soaring mediaeval Nave roof.

The cost of the restoration amounted to approximately £72,000.

In February, 1978, the Lord Bishop of Lichfield made the present Vicar a non-residentiary Canon of Lichfield Cathedral.