

The Nineteenth Century Restorations at St Michael and All Angels, Appleby Magna

by R. J. Eyre

St Michael and All Angels, Appleby Magna, is one of the largest and most impressive village churches in north-west Leicestershire. Stylistically it dates from the fourteenth century.

The building consists of a high, wide nave with north and south aisles the same height as the nave and separated from it by identical arcades of five bays. Each aisle has its own separate pitched roof and there are five large reticulated windows exactly similar in style on each side. The chancel with its high, wide arch is rectangular in shape and lower than the nave. There is a north-east chapel of the same length and height as the chancel, separated from it by an arcade of three bays and used now as vestries and an organ chamber. A gallery has been placed across the west end of the nave projecting diagonally into the first one and a half bays of the north and south aisles. The furnishings, enclosed benches and box pews, choir stalls, screens and gallery are all of oak and nineteenth century. The whole church is ceiled with a rare and most impressive groined plaster vault. The massive west tower has angle buttresses and a needle spire some hundred and fifty in height. There are no porches, the main entrance being through a west door in the base of the tower.

The story of the restorations as revealed in a remarkable and fascinating collection of documents deposited in the Leicestershire Record Office, began with a resolution passed at a vestry meeting held in April 1822 simply to repew the church and carry out essential repairs.¹ It was not however until five years later (in 1827) that the rector and churchwardens were ready to apply for the faculty to carry out the work. What followed was the most ambitious restoration scheme of the nineteenth century undertaken in Leicestershire, which left very little of the original fourteenth-century building visible in the interior and externally removed the porch and north and south entrances. The work was completed with the installation of the east window in 1879.

We know very little about the internal appearance of the church prior to restoration, but there does exist a plan, undated but on paper watermarked 1823, which shows a somewhat haphazard arrangement of old pews and no seating in the wide centre aisle of the nave, although there is evidence of benches being placed there.² A three-decker pulpit was attached to the easternmost pier of the north arcade and bases of pillars supporting a gallery are shewn in line with the westernmost piers of the arcades. There is no actual plan of this gallery which appears to have been in two parts to accommodate the singers and pupils of the Appleby Free School. Two small pews are illustrated just within the main chancel, but with no further seating there or in the Bosworth chancel (the north east chapel).³ There is no indication of the 'massive stone screen' which Nichols writing in 1811, says divided the nave from the chancel.⁴ Nichols also tells us that both church and chancel were paved in brick. Entrances are shewn in this plan in both aisles, situated in the second bay from the west in each case.

Illustrations in Nichols from engravings made in 1790 by Schnebelie and Glover shew both of these entrances, the southern one with a large rustic porch.⁵ The existence of this

porch is proved by references made to it in the restoration specifications and more recently by excavations made by David Parsons in 1975.⁶ There is no indication in Nichols of an entrance in the west side of the tower, the ground floor of which appears to have been used both as belfry and vestry.

Restoration being decided upon, in the words of the rector, The Rev. Thomas Jones, 'some eminent architects came to view the church and to give their opinions for our guidance in this business'.⁷ The first choice of architect fell upon Joseph Potter of Lichfield and we have his specification, undated, but probably of *c.* 1823 for 'New Pewing and Putting in new Galleries to Appleby Church'.⁸ The principal provisions of this specification were: to take up the present pews and the paving in the aisles between them, construct new pews of oak and deal on oak sleepers and joists; to relay the floors with Yorkshire stone replacing any gravestones in the places they already occupied and making good the paving up to them; to take down the galleries and reconstruct them in oak using the best of the old timber and supporting them on two iron columns at the front; to enclose the opening or arch leading to the belfry and put in a doorway. 'Observe — The pulpit, reading desk, clerks desk and pewing the chancel not to be taken into the estimate.'

It is interesting to compare this somewhat modest specification with that accompanying the faculty which also survives;⁹ for during the next few years the project blossomed and ambitions soared, gaining inspiration no doubt from a legacy of £1,000, for the church to be restored in a handsome and substantial manner, left by Mrs John Moore of Appleby Parva Hall who died in late February 1823.¹⁰ A year earlier Mrs Moore had drawn attention to the state of the roof, then covered wholly in lead and leaking. Perhaps the best indication of the thinking behind the restoration during this period is contained in some surviving pages from a notebook in the Rev. Mr Jones's handwriting,¹¹ (undated), with random jottings about almost everything from the kind of stone for the floors ('Take Potter to Mrs J. Moores to inspect the Hopton stone in her hall'); to what to charge for the new pews ('The price of pews in Ashby church'). There is speculation as to whether the north door should be build up 'and all funerals come in at the south door'; to 'whether benches will not be best in the middle aisle as at present'; even as to whether the contractor should have the spare lead from the roof. On 19 May 1825 comes the first surviving mention of a groined ceiling for the middle aisle in a letter from Joseph Potter to Mr Jones: 'but it would not have a good effect without raising the walls'.¹² Potter's drawings for this which accompanied his letter have unfortunately not survived but he estimated it would cost an extra £240.

Towards the end of 1825 there was the first intimation of a change of architect with letters from John Mason of Derby to both the Rev. Thomas Jones and Mr Charles Moore, son of John Moore and executor of his mother's estate. Mason evidently submitted specifications and plans, quoting a total of £1,466 3s. 10*d.* for the work, less £380 5s. for the old lead, plus £350 'if done in oak'. Mason was the architect to whom the supervision of the work was finally entrusted and who received a commission of 5% of the work for all the working drawings plus £28 for the faculty.

Anthony Robinson of Derby was up to this time the contractor chosen for the work, but later he too was replaced by William Matthews of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, who completed the contract. Unfortunately surviving records of this period do not provide a clear explanation of the reasons for these changes. It is perhaps significant that the earliest surviving Matthews letter is addressed to Mr Charles Moore who still had control of his mother's legacy.¹³ Both contractors were in contention for a considerable time. At a vestry meeting held on 4 August 1826 it was resolved that John Mason be appointed architect, Anthony Robinson contractor and Macdonald of Derby be asked to install a new heating system.

After protracted correspondence the faculty to proceed was finally granted on 17 March 1827, Thomas Jones being named as rector and John Whitehurst and Bateman Saddington as churchwardens. It is accompanied by a splendid set of plans and sectional drawings and a detailed specification with many additions and embellishments. Detailed instructions were set out according to craft. Thus the diggers get their instructions, then the bricklayers, the carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, founder, slaters, painters and glaziers. Rather than summarise the provisions laid down in the specification, it would probably be advantageous to consider and comment upon them as we look at the way they were interpreted and the extra work, unspecified and unsanctioned, undertaken.

The articles of agreement between the rector, churchwardens and William Matthews were finally signed on 6 April 1829. The whole restoration as set out in the faculty specification was to be undertaken for the sum of £2,045, and completed by 10 November 1829.¹⁵ Payments were to be made as the work progressed; after £700 of work done £500 would be paid, after £1,400 done a further £500, after £1,800 a further £500 and the £545 balance to be paid within three months of the completion of the contract. Penalties for failure to complete on time would be: one month late £50 deducted, two months £100, three months £200 and a further £50 for each month thereafter. In the event, so many changes and additions were made as the work progressed that it was not completed until 1832, it cost a total of £2,989 and the final payment was not made until 26 June 1835. By that time the Rev. Thomas Jones had died and been succeeded by the Rev. John Manuel Eschalaz, who was later to undertake the restoration of the chancel in 1871-72.

THE WORK OF RESTORATION 1829-32

The method of repewing largely followed the 1823 specification, but with the addition of brick sleeper walls supporting the oak sleepers and joists beneath the floors. All the timber, seen and unseen was to be of oak and all the fittings, hinges etc. of brass. The box pews and benches were to be of a regular size; both sides of the piers of the arcades into the nave and to the north and south aisles. A similar row of pews faced inwards along the outside walls of both aisles. The Moores' family pews backing onto the east wall of the south aisle above their family vault, were renewed in their former position. A new pulpit with reading desk and clerk's desk was to be erected, again attached to the easternmost pier of the north arcade and again entirely of oak. Seventeen oak benches were placed in the centre aisle of the nave for the use of fifty-one poor persons — a common method of providing free seats at this time. With the exception of the three decker pulpit and the seventeen oak benches, this woodwork still survives and with the matching gallery fronts is most certainly the best early nineteenth-century work of any church in Leicestershire.

The new gallery plan differed greatly from the old. A narrow portion some fifteen feet deep was erected across the centre aisle, extending diagonally for one and a half bays of the arcades and then squared off again across the north and south aisles. Two box pews were provided in the centre portion for the masters of the Free School, with a space for the organ behind them. The rest of the seating was on benches following the shape of the gallery; a rough half circle. It was built entirely of oak supported on six iron columns and was intended for the use of the school pupils and the singers.

The floors of the church were all taken up and the aisles relaid with rubbed York stone. Gravestones already in the floors were not replaced as required by the faculty specification but were probably laid beneath the floors of the pews. Extra to the sanctioned work, the floors of both chancels were repaved in stone.

When, in 1825, Potter first conceived the idea of the groined plaster vaulted ceilings he was responsible for the most dramatic innovation of the whole work. To accommodate

those ceilings the whole of the top portion of the church had to be removed. The faculty required the two outside walls of the aisles and the walls of the nave above the arcades to be raised 'as much as may be wanted' and in the event two feet were added to each. The walls of the chancels, though not included in the faculty, were also raised, this time almost six feet was added. It is interesting to note that all the work inside the building, including the raising of the walls was carried out in brick. Stonework was used only where visible on the external surfaces. Though every effort was made to match up the existing masonry, the alterations can be easily traced today.

Although the roofs were covered in lead before the restoration, it was evidently thought that after recasting there would not be sufficient to re-cover the whole building. A compromise was therefore reached, the faculty calling for the old lead to be recast at seven pounds per foot and used to form the gutters between the nave and aisle roofs and to cover the outside slopes of the aisles of the aisles facing the churchyard. The inside slopes of the aisles and the roof of the nave were to be covered with 'queen' slates. This idea provoked long discussion as to the disposal of the spare lead; the contractor wishing to keep it. Eventually the entire concept was changed, the whole of the nave and aisles received complete new lead roofs and the chancels were covered with 'imperial' slates.

As has been shown, the suggestion of a groined plaster vaulted ceiling came from Joseph Potter, but there is no documentary evidence as to whether his designs were used or whether they were modified by John Mason. In either case the idea was extended to take in not only the nave but also both aisles and chancels. Although plans of the ceilings were included in the faculty, details of their construction are omitted from the specification. However, from instructions provided for the plasterer and from William Matthews's accounts it would appear to have been mounted on a barrel-like construction of laths and the moulded groins and bosses added. It is regrettable that the working drawings made by John Mason have not survived. Perhaps the most apt comment came from one William Ward of Walsall, a contractor who, in a letter regretting his inability to accept an invitation to tender for the work said '...it being so much out of the common way and so few men have had the opportunity of seeing the execution of anything of the kind that thier [sic] would be very little chance of getting a man that understands it and I do not hesitate in stating if it is executed according to the plans thier will not be a handsomer ceiling in the Country'.¹⁶ It is a pity that when the church was last decorated the ceilings were painted the same dull biscuit colour as the walls instead of being picked out in white as they were originally.

The work specified in the faculty was exceeded in many respects but nowhere more so than in the treatment accorded to the north and south entrances to the church, both of which disappeared. The specification called for the north doorway to be bricked up 'if wanted' which in restorations of the period elsewhere just meant blocking the doorway leaving the arch and mouldings and in some cases even the doorstep *in situ*. To have done this at St Michael's would have left a considerable expanse of unrelieved masonry between the buttresses, the doorway was therefore removed completely, the wall above demolished and the whole rebuilt with plinth and mouldings matching the original with a large reticulated window identical to the existing windows in the aisle. Again the work inside was in brick and the external facing of stone well matched to the original. The faculty called for the south porch and entrance to be completely restored; new floor, new slate roof, a ceiling and new doors. In the event, the porch was completely removed and the entrance received the same treatment as the north side, with the addition here of two new buttresses. Five extra pews were needed to fill in the gangways left in the pewing plan for the south entrance.

Of the tower, the Rev. Thomas Jones in his notebook queries 'whether anything could be made of the belfry'. He suggested 'the present belfry could be raised to a higher situation and the room under the tower could be converted into a vestry unless occupied with seats for the school'.¹⁷ The faculty provided for a new doorway to be inserted in the west wall of the tower and, with the removal of the other two entrances, this now became the main entry to the church. Mr Jones's vestry under the tower became the porch, again necessitating considerable extra work not sanctioned by the faculty. The new entrance was constructed exactly as planned, the impressive Gothic doorway being incorporated within the arch of the window above. Stone steps from the carriageway outside, planned to be six feet wide were widened and a massive pair of gateposts erected crowned with huge stone vases. An entrance in keeping with the newly created grandeur of the interior. Inside the new porch the floor was paved as planned with York stone, but the ceiling which was just to be plastered became a plaster barrel vault but without groins which required raising by two feet. Evidence of this is apparent in the belfry above, where the floor is some two feet higher than its window sill. The new oak staircase giving access to the belfry which was to be erected inside against the north wall, now became a set of stone stairs erected outside between the buttresses on the north side of the tower with its own battlemented casing wall and roof. A new doorway was inserted in the north-east corner of the new belfry. The doors between porch and nave were made to occupy the full width of the tower arch and covered in brass-studded crimson broadcloth.

The two new windows were inserted in the aisles and all ten windows on the north and south sides of the church were to have identical reticulated tracery, but whether they matched before the restoration is open to doubt. Full repairs to the stonework of the windows was provided for in the faculty and would have been included in the original contract, but William Matthews in his final account charged as his fourth contract the sum of £64 extra for extra stonework to the windows.¹⁸ The coloured glass in the windows is not mentioned in any of the documents studied, but some medieval coloured glass was reused in the heads of the windows in the north aisle. The beautiful nineteenth-century glass in the heads of the south aisle windows is of some historical significance. It is reasonably certain that it was made by Collins of The Strand, London, as he is mentioned as having been responsible for work at Appleby by Archdeacon Bonney in his 1832 visitation.¹⁹ Coloured glass of this early nineteenth-century date is quite unusual in Leicestershire, the earliest being put in at Beeby in 1819 by the Rev. G. Calvert.²⁰ The east window at Barkby is of 1828.²¹ Appleby could also have been one of the churches to have cast-iron window tracery; an illustrated estimate was submitted by Wetherhead and Glover of Derby dated 14 April 1826 for eleven iron windows totalling £373. 14s.²²

All the interior walls of the building were plastered, lined out to resemble ashlar blocks. The faculty says no plastering was calculated to be necessary below the tops of the columns of the arcades but all were plastered down to floor level. Luckily the forms of the piers, the capitals and arch mouldings were all faithfully followed. The plaster has in recent years been removed from two of the piers in the north arcade exposing considerable roughing of the masonry to key the plaster and also the holes made in the pier to attach the pulpit. Remarkably, no provision was made in either the faculty or the accompanying plan for the font. Two pews had to be omitted at the entrance to the Bosworth chancel and a new font, the gift of the Misses Moore, placed there.

The chancels were not mentioned in either the faculty or the specification of 1827, but as already noted they received new roofs and ceilings and much extra unsanctioned work now followed. William Matthews submitted on 10 November 1828 a separate contract for the restoration of the Bosworth chancel for the sum of £207 and responsibility for this was

accepted by the trustees of Bosworth School. This provided for the restoration to be carried out to correspond with the body of the church and in addition pews to be provided for the tenants of the manor towards the cost of which they were later asked to make contribution. The easternmost bay of this chancel was subsequently partitioned to make a vestry, a fireplace was installed and the north window shortened to enable a doorway, complete with bootscraper, to be inserted below it.

No doubt the new arch to the main chancel was also erected at this time. In addition, the windows were restored or renewed, a new stone floor was laid and a new altar installed on new steps and with a bronzed iron communion rail. No indication is given of any seating being installed in the main chancel.

Warming so large a church was obviously a problem, and though as early as a vestry meeting held on 14 August 1826 it was envisaged that a form of hot air heating through flues under the floors should be installed, no mention of it is made in the faculty. James Macdonald of Derby was originally chosen to carry out most of the work. The stove or 'cockle' was put in a chamber constructed under the west end of the north aisle and the chimney carried up to the height of the roof of the nave. Hot air ducts were constructed under the floors of the aisles as they were relaid. This form of heating appears to have survived until 1904 when a hot water system was installed using the 'cockle' chamber as a stokehole.

Before leaving the 1829-32 part of the restoration, it is appropriate to look at the financial arrangements. Matthews evidently started work in April 1829 and received his first payment of £500 from the executors of Mrs Moore's estate on 7 May 1829. Thereafter payments were made as follows:

18 Sept. 1829	Executors Mrs Moore	£496	3	0
26 Dec.	V. Green Esq.	300	0	0
17 Apr. 1830	Mr Blackstock (churchwarden)	100	0	0
20 Apr.	Miss Moore	50	0	0
4 May	Miss Moore	150	0	0
15 May	Mr Blackstock	60	0	0
5 June	Mr Blackstock	40	0	0
19 June	Appleby School (towards gallery)	130	0	0
3 July	Bosworth School	130	0	0
30 Aug.	Miss Moore	100	0	0

Three payments were received from unlisted sources during 1831 totalling £400, six in 1832 totalling £225 5s. with a separate payment from Miss Moore of £9 17s. 5d. for the font. The year 1833 brought a total of £183 8s. 6d. in five instalments, making a total of £2,874 13s. 11d. which when deducted from his final account of £2,969 12s. 3d. left a balance of £94 18s. 4d., which William Matthews finally received on 26 June 1835.

THE CHANCEL 1871-72

The restoration of the eastern part of the church by the architect James P. St Aubyn of The Temple, London, was really a refurbishment of the chancel to bring Appleby into line with the growing fashion of a robed choir in stalls in the chancel, and the removal of the hitherto dominant three-decker pulpit. No structural works on the fabric were undertaken other than essential repairs.

There is no trace to be found of a faculty being requested or granted for this part of the restoration and unfortunately St Aubyn's plans, drawings and specifications have not survived. Joseph Lilley and Son of Ashby-de-la-Zouch were the contractors entrusted with the work, but again their original detailed estimate was not preserved. We do know that

the original estimate of the cost was £305, reduced through lack of funds to £235. 15s.²³ Not surprisingly, being Appleby, this amount was exceeded through extra work, and Lilleys' final bill amounted to £366 5s. 3d.²⁴ St Aubyn received £25 for his professional services including expenses.

Removal of the three decker pulpit necessitated the installation of three new box pews or benches and alteration to three others adjacent to the easternmost pier of the north arcade. This operation was faithfully carried out and the new work is indistinguishable from that of 1831. The small pew backing on to the Bosworth chancel was removed together with the font and in their place a long open ended pew, again made of solid oak, placed across the fronts of the box pews of both nave and north aisle. The font was installed in its present position on a new plinth and steps at the west end of the wide centre aisle. A new stone pulpit was erected against the north pier of the chancel arch. On the south side of the nave the Moores' family pews were removed and two long pews matching that on the north side erected in similar fashion. At this time it was found necessary to strengthen the floor above the Moores' family vault beneath their pews, and to renew faulty timbers on the south side of the gallery and the floors of some of the pews. The nave was redecorated.

The tenants' pews were removed from the Bosworth chancel to enable it all to be used as vestries. The smaller vestry made there in 1831 remained and the rest of this chancel was cut off from the nave by a curtain on a brass rail to become the choir vestry. A wooden floor was installed on brick and oak sleepers. The organ was taken down from the gallery and placed in this vestry, to be itself replaced in May 1872 by a new one by Coleman costing £126.

It is in the main chancel that St Aubyn's work is most apparent. The floor was taken up, the heating flues extended from the nave, and then relaid on three levels rising towards the east, using glazed tiles, decorated on the upper level within the communion rail. The altar was placed against the east wall another step higher still. The iron communion rail was replaced with one of heavy brass on wrought iron standards. The walls were panelled up to window level in oak which may account for the disappearance of the two piscinas which Nichols tells us existed in the north and south walls.²⁵

St Aubyn was also responsible for the choir stalls; two tiers of long oak benches along each side of the chancel, with handsome bookrests pierced with trefoils and cinquefoils. There are matching priests' stalls at the west ends with lower stalls in front. An oak parclose screen with carved reticulated tracery separates the vestries and organ from the chancel, a matching door giving access just east of the choir stalls; a most harmonious arrangement.²⁶ St Aubyn also intended a screen to be erected to separate his vestry from the nave, but unfortunately this was one of the items omitted through lack of money, hence the curtain. A brass lectern by Jones & Willis of Birmingham was installed on a wooden plinth opposite the pulpit against the south pier of the chancel arch.

St Aubyn had also planned to replace the east window of the chancel, but this became the other victim of Mr Eschalaz's lack of funds. It was, however, completely renewed in 1879 in memory of Mr George Moore, but whether to St Aubyn's designs is not known.

Notes

1. Leicestershire Record Office (hereafter *LRO*) 15D55/28
2. The Rev. T. Jones notebook *LRO* 15D55/29a

3. Although the Moore family were regarded as squires of the whole village they were lords only of the manor of Appleby Parva, where Sir John Moore built his Free School in 1697. The manor of Appleby Magna was purchased by Sir Wolstan Dixie in 1604 and presented to the trustees of Bosworth School in whose possession it remained until 1917. The north chancel chapel which had always belonged to the manor became known as the Bosworth chancel.
4. J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, Vol.IV pt ii, (1811), p.433
5. Nichols, *op.cit.*, Pl.LXIII, facing p.431
6. Published in *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, L (1974/5), 41
7. Letter dated 9 January 1827 to Mr Dawson of Whatton House; LRO 15D55/26a/2
8. LRO 15D55/26a/3
9. LRO 15D55/26a
10. LRO 15D55/26a/2
11. LRO 15D/55/29a
12. LRO 15D55/25/3
13. LRO 15D55/26a/1
14. LRO 15D55/26a
15. LRO 15D55/28a
16. LRO 15D55/31
17. LRO 15D55/29
18. LRO 15D55/28/48
19. LRO 245'50/2, 1
20. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Leicestershire* (Sheffield, 1846), p.429
21. LRO 15D55/245'50/4 p.20. I am indebted to Mr G.K. Brandwood for this information regarding the coloured glass
22. LRO 15D55/28/53
23. LRO 15D55/27/44
24. LRO 15D55/26b
25. Nichols, *op.cit.*, p.434
26. That portion of St Aubyn's parclose screen across the easternmost bay of the chancel was removed in the 1950s, together with the brass communion rail and the free seats from the centre aisle of the nave. The rail was replaced with one of oak on the original wrought iron standards.