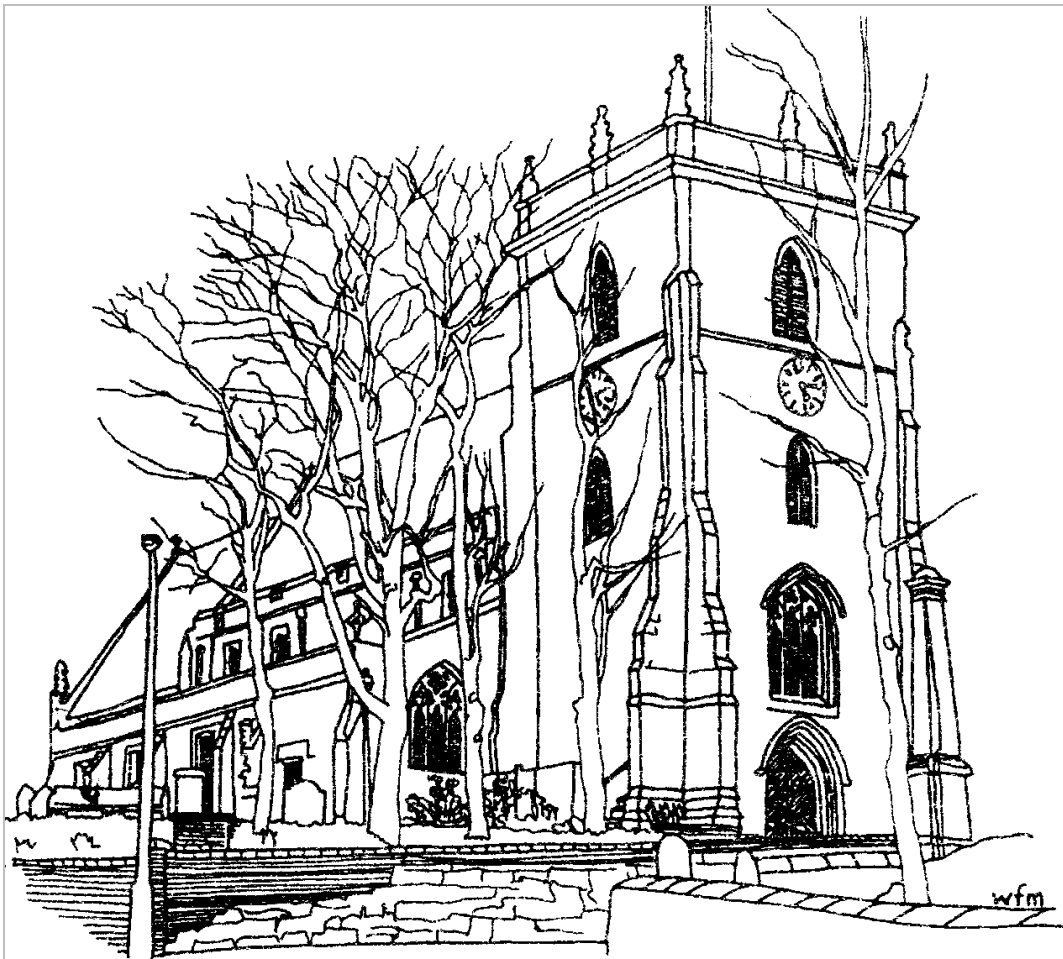


St James the Great, Audley



A Guide

The Parish Church of St James the Great Audley

By
Philip Morgan

Foreword

God has given us a beautiful building of which we must take care. It has been a place of worship for many generations of Christians, as well as a local landmark serving to remind people of the Christian faith. It is a reflection of the people who have lived and worked here. It shows the changes that each generation has brought (some generations more than others). As people change so has this church and the process continues to this day.

The first Christians knew, and those alive today understand, that the Church is not a building, but the people who worship in the building. Real Christians today, as then, are the Church of Jesus Christ, who have responded to His love for them with the love and surrender of their lives. They are those who have turned “from the best bliss that earth imparts” and found in Him “Life in all its fullness, forgiveness of sin and the joy of life eternal”.

We welcome you to our church building, but we pray that each visitor may come to know the Living Lord for themselves, and be part of the Church of living stones of the risen Lord Jesus.

If I, as Vicar (*retired 2015*), or we as a congregation, can be of any help to you, please just ask.

Rev. Peter Davies
June 2000

Illustrations by Wendy Morgan
Audley 1986

Introduction

Staffordshire is a county not renowned for its architectural heritage. So, along with other buildings, the parish church of Audley is not an outstanding example, either of the architecture of the Middle Ages, or of Victorian restoration. However, there are enjoyments to be found in a building which, in the pattern of its architecture, is characteristic of the region, and which is an important document in the history of this county.

The present church would appear to have been constructed during a relatively short building

programme in the fourteenth century, the whole restored according to the architectural and liturgical principles of the mid-nineteenth century. Both the tower and chancel display features associated with the 'Decorated' style in architecture and were probably part of a substantial rebuilding of the church in the first half of the fourteenth century. The nave and aisles were rebuilt c.1365 and display features associated with the 'Perpendicular' style.

The whole church was substantially restored between 1846 and 1856, in part to the design of Gilbert Scott, who removed some of the idiosyncrasies of the design of the surviving medieval church but introduced others of his own.

Historical Outline

The origins of the church and its early history are at present speculative. The parish of Audley later included the chapelries of Talke and Betley and may originally have also included Balterley. In the fourteenth century the rector unsuccessfully resisted the claims of the neighbouring Cheshire parish of Barthomley to collect tithes in Balterley. The large size of the parish and its association with Barthomley suggests that Audley may once have formed part of a Minster parish centred on the ancient church of Saint Bertoline at Barthomley.

The formation of the parish and the building of the church at Audley is probably therefore to be associated with the development of the lordship of the Audley family from the early twelfth century.

The family were established on lands in north Staffordshire which had not been assigned to new Norman lords at the time of the Domesday Survey and took their name from the village. A castle motte survives to the north of the church (across the main A 52 road) and is associated with their lordship in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century Henry Audley (d.1246) acquired further estates and moved the caput of the honour to a new castle at Heighley, 3 miles to the south-west of the church.

The existence of this church is first documented in the foundation charter of Hulton abbey (Staffs) in 1223. In the endowment of this new Cistercian house Henry Audley granted the monks lands in north Staffordshire and an annual pension often marks (£6 13s 4d) from the revenues of the church at Audley. There is little evidence of this thirteenth century church still extant, although a tomb of the period (in the canopied tomb on the exterior south wail of the chancel) does survive.

The Audleys retained the patronage of the church into the fourteenth century. In view of the architecture of the tower and chancel, they too are probably to be credited with the rebuilding of the church, although the precise identity of the donor is at present unknown. Nicholas, the first baron Audley (d.1299) and his eldest son, Thomas (d.1307) seem unlikely. A younger son, Nicholas (d.1316) is a possible candidate although his son, Sir James Audley of Heleigh (d. 1386) is perhaps the lord whose tenure of the estate most closely matches the architectural detail of the building. Unfortunately, Sir James Audley's will specified that he wished to be buried at Hulton abbey.

The rebuilding at Audley which in architectural terms belongs to the period 1310-1340, may therefore have been undertaken as an act of filial piety perhaps as late as the 1330's or 1340's.

In 1349 the rectory was appropriated by Hulton Abbey and in 1369 a vicarage was established. A dispute concerning the appropriation had the result that the abbot did not exercise his rights of patronage fully until 1385. During the same period another local gentry lineage, Delves of Apedale, prospered initially in the following of Sir James Audley of Heleigh and later in the military administration of Edward, the Black Prince. In 1352 the family acquired the nearby Cheshire manor of Dodington and in 1365 received a licence to crenelate their mansion there. A tower house or pele tower of this period still survives. Sir John Delves, the builder of Dodington, had achieved prominence as a courtier in the household of the Black Prince and in the administration of the Principality of Aquitaine, and may also have been the builder of the nave and aisles at Audley.

The abbot retained the rectory until the dissolution, although it was leased after 1517. Thereafter the patronage passed into the hands of minor local families, in 1611 the vicar, Edward Vernon, founded a free grammar school adjacent to the churchyard, but the church appears have undergone a period of relative decline from the later seventeenth century. Substantial repairs were necessary in the mid-eighteenth century and for a time the vicar chose instead to reside at the chapel at Betley and appointed a curate to serve at Audley.



In 1844 Charles Philip Wilbraham was appointed to the living and under his influence the church was restored and the centre of the village remodelled. In 1856 William White was employed to construct a row of houses, shops and a church hail opposite the church in the Gothic style, thus echoing the restoration of the church which had proceeded according to the same principles.

Architecture

Tower

The visitor enters the church through a west door into the tower created by Gilbert Scott in the restoration of 1846-56. The tower itself is the earliest surviving part of the church and was built in the first half of the fourteenth century. This is apparent in the continuous moulding on the arch to the nave. The battlements are a later addition. Until the restoration of the church the tower also had an east window which was lost when the nave roof was heightened. The tower would appear to have formed part of the same building programme as the chancel, perhaps with a nave without an aisle of the type to be seen at Norbury (Staffs.), built c.1340. The nave was, however, rebuilt in the late fourteenth century, following the same ground plan as its predecessor.

Nave and Aisles

The nave arcades are Perpendicular in form and were probably part of the rebuilding which added the north and south aisles c.1365. The clerestory was originally lit by quatrefoil windows, but mullions were inserted, probably in the early fifteenth century and had reached the third bay of the nave westwards from the chancel. Gilbert Scott restored a version of the original clerestory when this part of the church was rebuilt in 1855. The original arrangement is shown on a sketch by Buckler of 1840.

The north aisle was the family chapel of the Delves family and was in existence by 1369 when Sir John Delves, whose effigy is currently in the chancel, bequeathed vestments and plate to an altar here. John Delves (d. 1429) paid for the aisle to be re-roofed in a will of 1420 and for monuments to be erected over the tombs (now lost) of his grand-father (Henry Delves d.1396) and father (John Delves d.1394). Thereafter, however, the Delves were customarily interred at Wybunbury church in Cheshire.

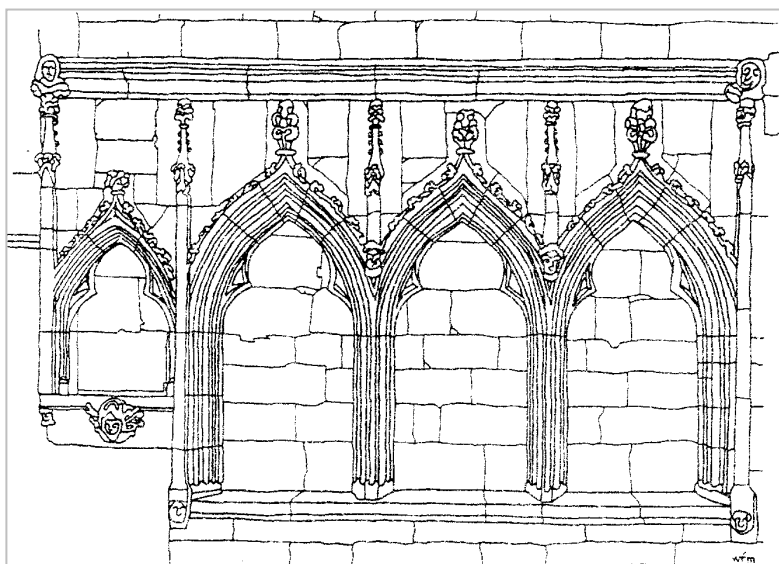


The insertion of the mullions in the north aisle, and perhaps also the clerestory of the nave, is probably therefore to be associated with their patronage during the period 1365-1430.

The south aisle contained a lady chapel by 1369 and was the original site of the brass to Sir Thomas Audley (d.1385). Until the restoration by Scott it retained its original windows, which are shown in the sketch of 1840. These were replaced with the present windows to the design of those in the north aisle by Scott. The west window of the aisle, with its misleading baliflower decoration, may also be his.

Chancel

The chancel was rebuilt in the early fourteenth century and displays some notable features of the Decorated style. The sedilia on the south wall of the chancel is especially noteworthy, as also the canopied tomb recess on the north wall. The east window is by Scott, with glass by William Wailes who was then (1851-2) also employed at the new church in Chesterton. The original tracery is shown on the sketch of 1840.



A blocked north door led to a vestry demolished during the restoration. A stoup can clearly be seen on the exterior of the north wall of the chancel.

The chancel also contains several tombs, none in its original position. The effigy of Sir John Delves (d.1369) in the tomb recess on the north wall was originally in the north aisle and is identified by the heraldry on his chest. The tomb was sketched by William Dugdale in its original site in 1667 and was moved to its present position during the restoration of 1846-56.

Delves' effigy ousted that of a vicar, Edward *Vernon* (d.1622), which currently lies on the chancel floor. Vernon is chiefly remembered as the founder of a free grammar school in 1611. In a sketch of the eighteenth century his effigy is shown on a tomb chest with an iron screen. Some sculptural fragments, including a single weeper in armour may once have belonged to this tomb.

On the south of the chancel by the Lord's table is a brass to Sir Thomas Audley (d.1385), a younger brother of Sir James Audley of Heleigh (d.1386). The brass is a product of the London B school and originally included an elaborate canopy, partially lost during the move from the south aisle in the restoration. The inscription in Anglo-Norman reads: "Here lies Sir Thomas Audley, brother of Sir James Audley, lord of Heleigh and Redcastle, who died on the 21st January in the year of grace 1385 on whose soul God have mercy and pity. Amen".

A second brass set on the north wall of the chancel, originally in the chancel floor, commemorates William Abnett (d.1628) of Wynbrook House in Audley.

Furnishings

The present furnishings of the church are those of the Victorian restoration, most obviously the threefold floor division between nave, chancel and sanctuary, with their elaborate tiles. Of this date also are the chancel stalls and pulpit.

The font, however, is early sixteenth century, though not, of course, in its original position. A few seventeenth century stalls are also to be seen at the west end of the nave, with a later altar. Some of the eighteenth-century pews can be seen reused in the flooring of the tower. Some slight evidence, in the form of damaged stonework, is also to be seen of the chancel screen and a gallery which stood at the west end of the nave during the eighteenth century.

Sources

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After word

We believe that this church building continues to hold a significant place in the hearts of many people today. It is our aim to keep it in good order and available for all, for many generations to come. There are two things that help this happen.

1 That the main structure should be given necessary attention as work is needed. To do this we need at least £10,000 every year in addition to our annual day to day running costs. If you value this building, then you may like to contribute to the restoration work of the church.

2 It is a place that is used by people and reflects the people of today. This means that as others in the past have changed the building for its better use, so we today need to follow their example to ensure that it remains a 'lived in' and well used building. This needs to be done with sensitivity and care, retaining that which is good and developing that which needs improving for the greater glory of God our Creator and Saviour.