

## SHRAWLEY PARISH CHURCH

### HISTORICAL AND OTHER NOTES FOR VISITORS

The Parish. The parish is of about 1800 acres in extent and some two miles across in each direction. It is bounded on the east by the River Severn and on north and south by brooks flowing into the river. The population of some 400 people is in four straggling settlements, three strung along the main road and one, Sankyn's Green, on the lane leading to Great Witley up which is the Church, Old School, and modern Rectory.

History of the Parish. There was a good ford across the river at Shrawley and there seems to have been a road running across into Wales from early times which may have been used for the salt traffic from Droitwich. The hundred of Dodding-tree which includes Shrawley, was granted to William's standard bearer, Ralph de Toni, after the Battle of Hastings. There were fortifications on the west side of the ford - probably pre-conquest in origin. The main settlement seems to have been near the ford and castle. Early maps mark this as Great Shrawley and there were still houses there until within living memory, though all have now disappeared.

In the later Middle Ages Shrawley (like its neighbours Great Witley and Redmarley Adam) was held of the honour of Elmley Castle and in 1534 was granted to King Henry VIII's last Queen, Catherine Parr, for life. It was acquired by Thomas Vernon of Hanbury in 1700.

It is said that during the Rebellion the Castle was bombarded by Cromwell's artillery before the Battle of Worcester. Nothing of it now remains. The mound is known as Oliver's Mound. Excavations have revealed stonework and a well. There is a "Battle Meadow" across the river.

Shrawley had a place in the early history of the Industrial Revolution. There was a seventeenth century water-driven iron mill and blast furnace (now excavated) on the Dick Brook below Glazenbridge, the brook being locked for access from the Severn. Glass and pottery were made in the same area. There was much brick-making in the Village at one time.

The Church. The Worcestershire antiquary Habington writing in the early seventeenth century, says that "Thys Church... mounted alofte on a hyll, sreeneth a Lanterne of the shyre." Nash (c.1780) saw on the south side of the churchyard and "olde, decayed chapel", so there may have been a earlier Saxon building, of which no trace can now be seen.

There is a scratch dial on the South nave wall. The base of the fourteenth century churchyard cross near the south door is of interest.

The Chancel of the church is good early Norman with its narrow windows high up, narrow door and cable and dog-tooth ornament. The windows piercing the buttresses on north and south are unusal.

The Nave is also Norman, but later. The fine arch over the door suggests a date of about 1170 but the rest of the Nave is perhaps 30 or 40 years earlier and only a generation later than the Chancel.. The original south door probably resembled the blocked north door which is well seen from outside. The north-east window in the nave is original and parts of the original decorative string course remain on the walls.

During subsequent centuries the windows were enlarged and the walls strengthened. The big south window is fifteenth century, much altered, and the south-west window was enlarged in the eighteenth century to light the gallery. The 3-light window in the north wall is Victorian, and replaced, as more "correct", an ogee window which offended the taste of the rambler, Noake (1848). The flat buttresses are original; the protruding ones were added in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The church was re-roofed and embattled parapets added during the fifteenth century. The north parapet has had to be replaced in simpler form and the south one is much decayed. The porch was also added in the fifteenth century, but the brickwork is 200 years later. The tower, too, was built in the fifteenth century but collapsed and was rebuilt 200 years later. Its west door is c.1845. The little brick vestry, with its ogee window, was added in the eighteenth century.



The church suffered comparatively little "restoration" in the nineteenth century, and the "improvements" were confined to the chancel where the blocked north and south windows were re-opened and the great pulpit removed. The chief alteration was the large round-headed chancel arch. The earlier arch is known to have been "acutely pointed" (Noake), and had in its turn presumably replaced a round-headed Norman arch (which might have been re-erected to make the enlarged south doorway in the fifteenth century). The walls of the chancel were scraped clear of plaster at the same time and the east wall was rebuilt for the second time, its three narrow windows being replaced by new ones in a Norman style but of modern conception. There is a little evidence for the work having been done under G.E. Street, c.1870. The new chancel arch was structurally too large and can be seen to have weakened the fabric, necessitating the erection in 1936 of the two large buttresses against the south wall.

Furnishings. The font is probably Norman, a good deal repaired. Its decorative work is strangely irregular. The holy water stoup at the side of main door was added in the fifteenth century. In the chancel there is a good fourteenth century aumbry and cupboard, used for locking up the books and plate; it would have had a door and been panelled. The gallery, font-cover and pulpit are seventeenth century - the last-named no doubt the top deck of the old "three-decker". The box pews are early nineteenth century. A small band accompanied services from the gallery until some hundred years ago, lit by a dormer window at the north end which was removed in 1921. At Noake's visit c.1848, "the services were conducted quietly, decently and in order. the barrel organ... has now ceased its gyrations... a few sinners and instrumentalists now supply its place and make a tolerable choir. ... There are no free sittings but the gallery and chancel are open to those who have not sittings allotted to them".

Habington and Nash described some mediaeval heraldic glass in the east and north of the chancel. The east window had 3 lights with a kneeling priest in the centre (John Rawlins, Rector 1462-71), flanked by heraldic glass. The present east window dates from 1920. (by James Powell Ltd. Whitechapel)

There are monuments to members of the Vernon family, whose main seat was at Hanbury, near Bromsgrove, and to the Severnes, an older family in Shrawley, and hatchments of both families. Noake says that the verses on the memorial to Mary Elizabeth Vernon were by Wordsworth, who was, he believed, a friend of the family. As he wrote when the lady's brother-in-law was Rector, the attribution may be genuine. The royal arms are to be dated before 1816.

The painting behind the altar is by Walter P. Starman, F.R.S.A. The list of Rectors dates from 1318 and contains 46 names. The registers date from 1537.

There are six bells cast in 1705 and 1772 by Rudhall of Gloucester. The tenor bell weighs 12 cwts. There is a small priest's bell which was found (it is said on the castle mound) early last century. The bells have now (1976) been removed for re-hanging, and the fifth for re-casting, at Loughborough.

Recent work to the church includes oil-fired heating, an electric organ to replace the harmonium and redecoration. A good deal of repair has been done to the fabric inside and out, including the rebuilding of the north parapet to the Nave and of the four pinnacles on the tower. The south parapet is now receiving attention. Contributions towards this work and that to the bells will be gratefully received.

J.G. Barnish  
Rector

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