

ST PETER'S CHURCH ADDERLEY SHROPSHIRE

40 pence

Front cover photograph by Albert Edwards



Window at the Church of Adderley St Peter
Photograph by John Piper
(Tate Gallery Archive)

Situated on the borders of Shropshire and Cheshire in an area of considerable natural beauty, the village of Adderley has a long history. It was a Saxon manor before the Domesday Book, belonging to one Eldred or Eldredelei from whom comes the name Adderley. After the Norman Conquest the manor formed part of the immense area given to Earl Roger of Montgomery by William the Conqueror. In the Middle Ages Adderley grew into a large market town - larger and more important than Market Drayton at that period - mainly because it was on the main road for conveying salt from Nantwich to the Midlands. There has almost certainly been a church on this site for more than a thousand years but of the pre-Conquest and mediaeval church we know little.

There are three distinct parts of the church, built at different times: the Kilmorey (or Shavington) pew built in 1635-37; the tower erected in 1712, replacing a former structure which had become unsafe: and the main part of the church (chancel, nave and south transept) built in 1801. In 1956 the church was adapted to meet the needs of a very small parish with a population of about 300. A partition has been placed on the west side of the transepts and the nave remains as the church in use while all east of the partition is in the care of the Redundant Churches Fund.

Entering through the south door the visitor is in the nave of the old church, built in 1801. Curiously there is no porch although the previous church had two. Only two other churches in Shropshire are without porches. The door itself has a massive lock and fine brass fittings.

The church is plain, light and airy - a pleasing example of the unadorned Georgian style. The walls are of stone, lined with brick, matching well the stone of the tower which was built a hundred years earlier. The windows have Gothic style tracery in cast iron - a feature which is unusual elsewhere but occurs in this part of the country with the great furnaces of Ironbridge only 25 miles away and the iron industry of Shropshire unrivalled in England in 1801.

The font is of considerable interest. It is Norman, of one piece and in the shape of a block capital. It is believed to date from the middle of the 12th century. It has a very large basin in which a sturdy infant could be immersed. The sides are decorated. An inscription, added later, runs round -

'Hic male primus homo fruitur cum conjuge pomo'
(Here wickedly the first man enjoys with his wife the apple)

It seems a strange inscription for a font though maybe the thought is that the Fall and Redemption go together. (A 19th century visitor observed sourly that it must be the work of 'some celibate cleric saturated with scripture'). For many years the font formed the base of a sundial in the churchyard but it was re-admitted c 1900.

Much of the woodwork dates from 1801; there are Jacobean type communion rails; the altar is of stone on spiral wooden columns. The old oil lamps have been pleasingly retained and converted to electricity. On the north side are memorials to the Kilmorey family, on the south side to the Corbet family. The Creed and the Lord's

Prayer, now displayed above the entrance door, and the Ten Commandments now over the vestry entrance, were originally behind the altar in the chancel.

The tower well represents the period when it was built - 1712-13. It is sturdy, solid and severe in the Classical style with few decorative details. The west window which Dean Cranage calls 'a very peculiar thing' does not somehow seem to fit the wall opening, though it is of the same date as the tower.

In the 18th century there were already three bells and they bore respectively these inscriptions:

1. SIR JOHN CORBETT. BARANET. 1671. THO MOLLINOR WILL GRENEWOLLER CW T(bell)C
2. Sancta Maria Virgo Intercede Pro Toto Mundo.
3. I sweetly toling men do call to taste on meate that feeds the soole. 1604 WB IB RF RH H0

No 1 is by Thomas Clibury of Wellington and no 2 by an unknown founder c 1400. No 3 by Henry Oldfield of Nottingham was recast in 1914 by James Barwell of Birmingham.

This Georgian church did not please some later Victorians of the Gothic revival school. An article in the British Archaeological Journal of 1894 speaks sarcastically of the 'improvement' of 1801 by which there has been 'substituted in true Georgian fashion, a fabric square and smooth without and within whitewash and glare.' Another traveller, Fletcher Moss, writes in 1910, 'the church is of the horrible classical style, a "restoration" done when the Low Church was triumphant.'

Passing through the door in the partition, the visitor comes to the old nave and transepts, the part of the church vested in the Redundant Churches Fund in 1977. In the north transept is the

Kilmorey pew which is of particular interest both architecturally and historically.

For centuries the two chief families in the parish were the Corbets of Adderley and the Needhams of Shavington. The Corbets were patrons of the living in the 17th century and both families, between whom no love was lost, were advancing in status: John Corbet was created a baronet in 1627 and Sir Robert Needham, sheriff of Shropshire in 1606, was in 1625 created Viscount Kilmorey. In the ensuing years the rivalry of these two families centred on the parish church where the Corbets had the prominent pews in the chancel but the Needhams, who had a private chapel at Shavington, had no place of prominence in the church. It was of course unthinkable that they should sit with the common people in the nave. In 1625 Lord Kilmorey approached the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry for the licence to build an aisle or transept for his family use but the Bishop did not feel he could grant this against the wishes of the patron. The families were now becoming more estranged as Lord Kilmorey supported the King and the Corbets the Parliament in the gradually unfolding struggle of the Civil War.

In 1635 the second Lord Kilmorey did obtain from Archbishop Laud the necessary licence and by 1637 the pew in the north transept was completed. One Sunday in 1642 however, Lady Corbet, who had got possession of the key of the pew from the parish clerk, occupied the seats with her family and servants throughout the service. Later in the same month there was actually a fight between the servants of the two families in the church itself. Lord Kilmorey, thus under pressure, asked Laud for help but by this time the Archbishop was in the Tower with troubles enough of his own. Under pressure from Lady Corbet, the churchwardens removed the screen at the entrance to the pew and put it at the west end of the church. Thus the winning Corbets reigned supreme in the church until well into the

18th century; but passions cooled and by the end of that century the Kilmorey family were able to enjoy their pew in peace.

The pew itself was heavily restored in 1822 but there is much that is original to 1635-37. The massive Jacobean screen is surmounted by the shield, with 16 quarterings, of the 2nd Viscount who built the pew: above the shield is a phoenix, also to be seen elsewhere; it was presumably this screen which was removed to the west end and replaced at a later date, probably in 1822. The main work of the pew is in the mixed Decorated and Perpendicular style which was characteristic of the Jacobean Gothic period. The tracery of the north window was inserted in the 1822 restoration and here are the arms of the twelve Kilmorey Viscounts; bucks' heads, which were a feature of the Needham arms, being conspicuous. In the east window is recorded the creation of the Viscountcy and of the Earldom. The roof (1822) displays the arms of the Needhams and also of Cranage and of Bromley, families joined in marriage to the Needhams. On the west wall of the chapel is a double door, the inner one being part of the 17th century altar piece over the top of which are written the opening words of the First Commandment; again the Kilmorey phoenix surmounts the door.

The south transept contained the family pews of the Corbet family so that after 1801 both families were properly seated in appropriate places. In this transept is a large-scale and very informative memorial, by Carline & Son of Shrewsbury, to Sir Corbet Corbet who inspired the 1801 re-building.

In the old chancel there are Kilmorey monuments on the north wall but the most notable memorials in the church are two brasses on the chancel floor. One is of Sir Robert Needham, in Tudor armour, with his wife Agnes together with their seven sons and two daughters. He died in 1556. The other is of an ecclesiastic, dated 1390. The figure is either a bishop or a mitred abbot as he holds a pastoral staff; but the

head is missing and there is no inscription. There is a panelled 18th century pulpit. In the south wall of the chancel is a recess for an organ though never used as such.

From the top of the tower can be seen little but cows feeding on the rich pasture land of Shropshire. The world has passed Adderley by; the clash of Kilmorey and Corbet is remote; neither of their family houses is still standing; no descendants live in Adderley. But in the churchyard is the 18th century mounting block which speaks of other days and outside the church gates stands the broken shaft of the old market cross which was smashed at the Reformation - a reminder that the church and the village have ancient roots; and still the people of the neighbourhood come, as they have for centuries, to lay before God their joys and sorrows, to pray for their needs and to offer their thanks.

Michael Charlesworth



The Needham brass

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Photographs opposite and on the back cover by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

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Overleaf: the Kilmorey pew in 1975

The Kilmorey arms

