

OPENING OF THE NEW PARISH CHURCH AND CONFIRMATION AT MIDDLETON-IN-TEESDALE

Thursday last ⁱ was an important day at Middleton, and was observed in a great measure as a holiday, on account of the opening of the new church and a confirmation service having been fixed for that day. The new church occupies the site of the venerable church which was pulled down in the spring of last year. The opening ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Dover (Dr. Parry),ⁱⁱ acting for the Bishop of the Diocese (Dr. Lightfoot).ⁱⁱⁱ The edifice consists of a chancel 34ft. by 15ft., with organ chamber and vestry on the north side; a nave of four bays, 50ft. square, with north and south aisles, each 12ft wide; also a south porch. The style of architecture is that known as "Late Decorated" - the English Gothic of the latter part of the fourteenth century ^{iv} - and was selected as being the prevailing style of the old church, two windows from which are rebuilt into the new work, while the three side windows of the chancel are careful reproductions of the old ones, which, unfortunately, were too much damaged to allow of their being re-used. The east window is a five-light one, and is a rich specimen of the style. The west end has a lofty window of three lights, the aisles being lighted by two-light windows of a rather local type. The clerestory has a range of square-headed windows on either side. The whole building is lofty for its width, and the interior effect is particularly good, the roofs being all of high pitch and panelled under the rafters. In the interior walls are rebuilt a number of antique sculptured monumental slabs, discovered under the foundations of the old church, and which perhaps indicated that even a more ancient structure had previously occupied the same site. The old font has been retained. The church is seated with open benches of pitch pine, those in the chancel being specially arranged for a choir, with priests' stalls at the west end. The pulpit, a special gift, is richly carved oak on a stone plinth. The altar, altar rails, and font are also of oak, all the work of Mr J. Readshaw, of Middleton, the carving being by Mr Roddis of Birmingham. The edifice has been constructed from drawings by, and under the superintendence of, Mr C. Hodgson Fowler, F.S.A, of Durham, Mr Rye and Mr Richley having been successive clerks of the works. The stonework, masonry, plastering, Etc., has been most creditably carried out by Mr H. Dougill of Darlington; the joiners' work by Mr B. Gargett of Darlington; and the plumbing, glazing, and painting by Mr J. Jackson, of Barnard Castle. The acoustic properties of the church are very good, as was evidenced both in the sermon and the musical services. The total cost of the building will not be far short of £6,000.

The detached bell-house, in the churchyard, containing three old bells, has for the present been allowed to remain. Perhaps at some future time, a tower may be added to the church, from which a peal of six or eight bells may send their music far over the picturesque valley.

In connection with the church-opening, a Luncheon was held at Mr Rodham's, the Cross Keys Hotel, at half-past 1 o'clock. The chair was occupied by Capt. Bainbridge (churchwarden),^v Middleton House; and the vice-chair by Mr R. W. Atkinson, Barnard Castle. Among those present were, the Rev. J. Ridley, Vicar of Norton; Rev. J. Gaskill, Vicar of Spennymoor; Mr John Sherlock (churchwarden), Middleton; Mr George Brownless, Broomielaw, Barnard Castle; Dr and Mrs Horsfield, Mr and Mrs W. Armstrong, Mr and Mrs F. B. Gibson, Mr and Mrs Oddie. Mr N. G. Graham, Mr Smith, Mr Vipond, Middleton; Mr Jas. Jackson, Mr J. Badcock, Mr J. Brown, Mr H. Railton, Mr. W. Aude, Mr C. Reper, Barnard Castle; etc. The repast was of a *recherché* description, exceedingly well served, and in every way creditable to the establishment.

Punctually, at half-past 2, the church doors were thrown open, and the crowd that for some time had been gathering at the gates, made their way into the edifice. The church was speedily filled to the porch, and numbers were unable to gain admission. The service, which was the usual "Evening Prayer," was conducted by the Rev. J. Milner, the rector. The following clergy were also present: The Rev. F. Brown, Barnard Castle; Rev. W. R. Bell, Laithkirk; Rev. W. A. Beaufort, Eggleston; Rev. E. Good, Forest; Rev. J. L. Low, Whittonstall; Rev. J. Gaskill, Spennymoor; Rev. G. A. Gace, Romaldkirk; Rev. J. Ridley, Norton; Rev. P. Budd, Billingham; Rev. B Hazlewood, Oswaldtwistle; Etc. The choral portion (including the singing of the psalms to the Free Chant of Mr Crowdy), was most effectively rendered by the customary choir and friends from Barnard Castle, Mr Oddie, the choirmaster, presiding at th organ.

Upon the conclusion of the regular service, The Bishop of Dover ascended to the pulpit and delivered a most impressive and eloquent sermon, taking as his text the 92nd Psalm,^{vi} and the 13th verse: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." That church, he said, which was that day opened for the first time for many, many days, was built upon the very spot where for about 800 years - he believed, however, that the exact date of the old church was not known - their forefathers had been devout worshippers. For eight hundred years had the house of God been planted on that very spot; and he hoped that those who worshipped in the new edifice might be able to see it flourish. He would compare the infant at the baptism to the young tree; the ground was made ready and dug about by solemn prayer, by the reading of God's Holy Word, by holy reflections; and then it was left to grow up and bring forth fruit under the benign and chastening power of God's Holy Spirit. Then, as years went on, it was its own fault if it did not produce good fruit. To such a human tree the public services of the sanctuary were as the early and the latter rain, giving renewed vigour and growth to the soul. How many of those present worshipping there that day in the habit of coming to God's house? It was a solemn duty which they owed to God that they should worship Him in His sanctuary. Home religion was a delusion and a phantom without public worship; those who only worshipped in their own homes were deceiving their own hearts, and were trying to excuse their absence from God's house by means of their own fireside inventions. However real a Christian's home religion might be, it was only in God's house that he would be able to worship Him in truth. Let them lift up their hearts to God while there was yet time; might their souls flourish in that house daily, weekly, and yearly, under the genial hand of the Heavenly Husbandman, until yonder, in that new earth, beneath new heavens, they should be sanctified in the overwhelming power of His love.

After a short interval, during which a collection was taken, the confirmation service was proceeded with. About 40 candidates, male and female, presented themselves; and to these the Bishop, standing at the entrance of the chancel, delivered a solemn and eminently appropriate address. The congregation numbered more than 500, including the principal inhabitants of the town and district.

We must not omit to add that, prior to the beginning of the services, the churchwardens were most courteous in explaining the details of the building, and in pointing out family tombstones in the churchyard to relatives who sought information on the subject.

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Jackson, Mr. J. Badcock, Mr. J. Brown, Mr. H. Bailton, jun., Mr. W. Awde, Mr. C. Baper, Barnard Castle; &c., &c. The repast was of a *rocky* description, exceedingly well served, and in every way creditable to the establishment.

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Teesdale Mercury 29th October 1875 p4 col 5

ⁱ The previous week's Teesdale Mercury reported: "The Bishop of Dover will open the Church on Thursday, the 23rd inst., and hold Confirmation at the same time. Special train from Barnard Castle at 11.20, and a Public Luncheon at the Cross Keys at 1 o'clock, for 2/-. Divine Service will commence at 2.30."

ⁱⁱ Dr Parry taught at Durham University after studying at Oxford. He left Durham University in 1885 to undertake a long-vacation curacy among the Norham pitmen in Islandshire, which had been a detached enclave of the County Palatinate of Durham near Berwick on Tweed.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lightfoot was consecrated in Westminster Abbey on 25 April 1879, when the sermon was preached by Westcott, and enthroned in Durham Cathedral on 15 May only six months before St Mary's was opened. (The diocese was very large and is probably a reason why Parry was asked to officiate, one of Lightfoot's earliest acts was to rationalise the diocese: for instance the creation of the Bishop of Newcastle in 1882 and an early increase in the number of rural deanships.)

^{iv} See http://www.hellenicaworld.com/UK/Literature/SidneyHeath/en/OurHomelandChurches.html#CHAPTER_V for a detailed discussion of the Decorated style

^v The Superintendent of the London Lead Company and who the fountain in Middleton is named for.

^{vi} Psalm 92 <https://www.esv.org/Psalm+92/#>