Burstwick, All Saints

The Beginning

It is not possible to state the exact date when the Church was built at Burstwick as there is no mention of the Church in the Domesday survey of 1086. However, it is recorded that the crusad-er, Stephen, Earl of Albermarle and Lord of the Manor of Burst-wick, who resided in Burstwick Castle, granted the revenues of the Church of Burstwick to Albermarle Abbey in France in 1115. The revenues were collected by a small community established by Albermerle Abbey at Burstwick near Skeffling, who forwarded the revenues to France.

In 1228 the Church was appropriated by Walter de Gray, Archbishop of York and in 1229, William de Wysebeck was appointed Vicar of Burstwick. This is the first recorded appointment, so it is likely that before 1228 the Church was served by itinerant monks from Burstall Priory.

In 1395 the establishment at Burstall was sold by the Abbot of Albermarle to the Abbot of Kirkstall, near Leeds, as it was feared that the English monarch, who was then at war with France, might seize the Priory. Thus, the Church standing in 1115 would have been built by the Normans on the present site and the structure as we now see it would have been built around the Norman core, although nothing so early can now be seen.

The Present Church

The Church has seen many additions and alterations to its appearance and structure since Norman times. No part of the original Norman building is now identifiable. The chapel on the South side of the nave, forming half a transept, was added to the building in the 14th century, but the lancet window therein is probably pre 1300.

The base of the tower was added in the 14th century together with its West window and arch to the nave. This part of the tower is partly built of dressed stone but the upper part, which is perpendicular and embattled, embodies boulders and rubble. The tower is of three stages and has corner buttresses. The West front contains a large window with a small niche above the point over the central light, and the top of the tower has neat stone battlements. The bell chamber within the tower was erected in 1455 and is reached by a narrow spiral stairway set within the South-West corner.

In the 15th century the North aisle was added to the nave and divided from it by four pointed arches resting on octagonal columns. At the same time the chancel, with its arch and deep casements, was reconstructed with dressed stone. It is interesting to note that the chancel is deflected South from the line of the nave. This is probably the result of an attempt to align the chancel more closely to an East-West direction; since the nave is some 50 out of alignment with the compass points.1

In the South wall to the right of the Altar there is a large sedilia, a small piscina with a drain, and a very small rectangular credence niche. The North-East chapel, now used as a priests vestry, contains an interesting monumental stone on the floor inscribed to Sir Matthew Appleyard. Sir Mathew lived at Burstwick Hall Garth and was a devoted Royalist who suffered in the Commonwealth but lived to see the Reformation.

The South transeptal chapel was a chantry chapel. It was the custom during the 14th and 15th centuries, that when a person of importance or distinction died, the relatives founded and endowed such a chapel. Many of these chapels were destroyed during the reformation.

A plain granite font of Norman origin stands at the west end of the Central aisle. In the 1850's it was surmounted by a handsome Gothic top, carved in wood, but this no longer exists.

Hatchment

Beneath an arch between the North aisle and central aisle is suspended the church's most remarkable treasure. This is a painted wood panel or hatchment which has on one side the Royal arms of Charles I, and on the reverse a painting depicting the execution of Charles on the scaffold in front of Whitehall in 1649. It shows the Kings head being held aloft by an executioner, and a woman in the crowd fainting at the sight. It carries the date 'ANNO DOM 1676' and two Latin verses condemning the wickedness of rebellion and regicide.

Bells

It is recorded that in 1552 the belfry was hung with two bells, but in 1856 only one bell is mentioned, weighing 17 cwt. This bell was recast in 1887 by Taylors, and is now the 12 cwt Tenor. The other five bells were cast in 1907, also by Taylors, to complete the ring.

In 1960 repairs were made to the tower and in 1972 the bells were restored by the Beverley and District Society.

There are no records and few memories locally of ringing apart from some chiming, but in 1974 the Vicar, the Revd. T. Gill re-cruited a new band of ringers. Lessons began under the leadership of Richard Jolly, and on Easter Sunday April 14th 1974 the bells were rung for the first time by an all Burstwick band. One of those ringers, Eric Acey, is now the tower captain. Since 1974, the bells have been rung regularly for services, until 1989 when the tower was found to be in need of some major repair work. The bells were silent for three years, during which time the ringers were made welcome by the Hedon band, and continued to practice regularly. Structural work on the tower was completed in 1992 and the bells of Burstwick now ring out once more.

Pauline Acey

1. Note that this might also be a representation of Christ's head drooping to one side on the Cross.