

ST. JOHN-IN-BEDWARDINE WORCESTER

In the year 790 AD OFFA KING of MERCIA presented the fertile lands west of the SEVERN between the Laugherne and the Teme to the SEE of WORCESTER.

For 250 years their development was arrested because of the fierce struggle with the DANES. When the firm rule of HENRY 11 had established the KING'S PEACE real progress was possible.

Under the maternal direction of St. HELEN'S small chapelries were founded at Laugherne, St. John's and Lower Wick. Of Laugherne no trace remains. What is left of St. Cuthbert's at Lower Wick may be seen in the fold yard of MANOR FARM. The chapel of St. John the Baptist is happily enshrined in the present church.

BEDWARDINE means the bread ward, or as we should say today, the Home Farm of the MANOR of HARDWICK. The dairy and farm produce of this fertile demesne was reserved for the MONASTERY TABLE. Selected fields and pastures were assigned to the PRIOR and SACRIST. SWAN POOL was a great lake stocked with choice fish and water fowl.

It was to serve the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of the Bedwardine that the Chapel of St.-John-in- Bedwardine was built in 1165. In 1234 BISHOP WILLIAM DE BLOIS made the final settlement with the PRIOR concerning the disposition of the lands given to the church at WORCESTER. East of the SEVERN the lands were assigned to the BISHOP. West of the SEVERN the lands were assigned to the PRIOR.

In 1265 BISHOP GIFFARD recommended the appointment of a resident chaplain at St. John's. In the century following, St. John's flourished, and St. Cuthbert's declined so sadly that BISHOP LYNN was moved to order the demolition of the Chapel and removal of the shrine of St. Cuthbert to St. John's.

On 17.Feb. 1371 St. JOHN-IN-BEDWARDINE was dedicated as a PARISH CHURCH with full parochial rites (except that of burial). Enlargement of the fabric began with the building of the SOUTH AISLE. Next came the LADYE CHAPEL and the additional bay to the Chancel. Finally in the 15th Century the TOWER completed the work of extension. At the Reformation all records were destroyed together with the image of St. Cuthbert, the ROOD, and the ornate fittings of the LADYE CHAPEL.

During the CIVIL WAR, St. John's suffered severely from occupation by Royalists and from desecration by Roundheads.

At the Restoration 1660 a sum of £80 was paid to cover the cost of repairs. During the 18th Century St. John's, like most churches in the country, suffered from the spirit of indifference which was characteristic of the period. The long peace which was followed by the victory of Waterloo gave the opportunity for the enlargement of the church to meet the needs of the increasing population.

12th Cent. In the N. Arcade may be seen what remains of the Chapel of St. JOHN'S. It comprised a nave of three bays, a chancel of one bay, and a narrow lean-to N. Aisle. The round piers with their heavy square capitals remain, but the semicircular arches which they once supported were cut and pointed in 1819 to enable the occupants of the N. Gallery to have a better view of the pulpit and the Chancel.

14th Cent. The South Aisle has three transverse gables, under two of which are large five-light windows with the characteristic Decorated tracery; the other gable contains a much shorter window because the main entrance to the church was beneath.

14th Cent. The Ladye Chapel at the east end of the S. Aisle was built as a Chantry probably to enshrine the image of St. Cuthbert from Lower Wick and was separated from the rest of the church by screens. In 1933 the Ladye Chapel was re-furnished for the celebration of the Sacrament by the generosity of Mrs Stallard of St. John's House. The East window of the Ladye Chapel is an elaborate example of masonic heraldry.

15th Cent. The Tower was erected in the time of Bishop Carpenter (circa 1481). It is a massive and dignified example of the 15th Century.

In 1707 the five bells were re-cast and made into a peal of six.

In 1816 the bells were again re-cast and in 1930 two new trebles were added to make the present fine peal of eight.

19th Cent. In 1819 the church was restored and the galleries erected. In 1841 the debased Gothic porch was erected and the Choir Vestry added on the N. side of the Tower. In 1861 the old lean-to N. Aisle was replaced by the present wide structure in the Geometrical style of the 13th Cent.

In 1884 the church was lengthened 30 ft and the new Chancel built to harmonise with the work of the 14th Century.

The East Window is a commentary in colour on the verses of the Te Deum in which Christ in Majesty is adored by Angels, Archangels, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs and the Holy Church throughout the world.

The Sanctuary is fine modern work. The Reredos is of oak elaborately carved and gilded with figures of the Ascended Christ, St. Wulstan, St. John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Divine, St. Cuthbert and St. Oswald.

Handsome recent adornments are the KING GEORGE V Memorial Screen, and the doors to the Muniment Room, the South Porch and the Vestibule entrance.

The Organ, rebuilt, and modernised is one of the finest in the City.

In 1957 the graveyard was levelled to produce a pleasant 'green'. The side galleries were removed in 1974, revealing the lovely windows and making the building much lighter. During 2005 the Font was moved into the North Aisle, where the pews had been removed to form an open area, and alterations were completed in the Kitchen and Vestry, now known as the Blakefield Room.

Friend, you have come to this Church. Leave it not without a prayer.

No man entering a house ignores him who dwells in it.

This is the house of God and He is here.

Pray then to him who loves you and bids you welcome and awaits your greeting. Give thanks to those who in past ages built this place to His glory and to those who dying that we might live, preserved for us our heritage.

Praise God, for his gifts of beauty and painting and architecture, handicrafts and music. Ask then that we who now live may build the spiritual fabric of the nation in Truth, Beauty and Goodness and that as we draw near to the One Father, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we may draw nearer to one another in perfect brotherhood.

The Lord preserve thy going out and coming in.

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