

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Origins.

Holdgate takes its name from Helgot, the Norman landowner who held the manor, known in Domesday as Stanton, along with sixteen others in the county, as the sub-tenant of Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. Helgot chose Stanton as the site of his main residence, and erected a castle, the earthworks of which may still be seen. This castle, one of three mentioned in the Shropshire Domesday, was one of the earliest in the county. Domesday also mentions a Church and a priest at Stanton, which indicates the existence of a pre-Conquest foundation. A new church was consecrated by Bishop Geoffrey de Clive (1115-1119) within the perimeter of the castle. Though twelfth century work survives in the present building, it cannot confidently be dated to c. 1120.

The Portionists.

One of the most interesting features of Holdgate Church in the Middle Ages was the apparent survival of a pre-Conquest arrangement to provide clergy. From Saxon times a number of churches, notably in the West Midlands and the Diocese of Exeter, had been served by small bodies of resident clergy who were given a share of the income of the benefice, known in Shropshire as "portionists." This arrangement still survives in the county at Burford, and formerly existed at Wroxeter and Pontesbury. At Holdgate the portions took their names from the orders of the clergy who held them, namely the priest's, deacon's, and sub-deacon's portions. It is possible that this indicates the endowment of a full "team" of clergy to provide a higher standard of liturgical performance of the services than was normal in a small church. The separate existence of the sub-deacon's portion lasted until the 1630s, while that of the deacon survived to 1888. During the later Middle Ages, and for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Rector was generally a non-resident whose duties were performed in his absence by the holder of the deacon's portion.

A Description of the Building.

Holy Trinity Church consists of a Norman Nave, C13th Chancel and West Tower, and a late Victorian South Porch. When the Tower was built, the builders did not take down the Norman West front of the Nave, which was preserved within the Tower which now abuts and rests on it. The Chancel may also be a remodelling of a previous, shorter, Norman Chancel. The Porch replaces a mediaeval predecessor presumably of similar design.

The Exterior.

The Tower is slightly wider than the Nave. Its lower stage is C13th Early English, while the upper section is C15th with characteristic gargoyle water spouts of the period. The curiously crude carvings of rosettes and interlacing on the pinnacles may be of similar date, or indeed may be later.

The West Wall of the Nave has a central buttress which presumably originally supported a bellcote, and is pierced high up by a simple round-headed splayed window. The Tower doorway may be C15th, but the other opening, made up of re-used materials and probably the head of a window or door, is impossible to date with accuracy.

The Windows of the Nave, where not renewed, are of the Decorated style of the C14th. The South Door is Norman work of very high quality. It has two orders of shafts, a hood-mould, and an inner moulded arch which forms the doorway. All of this is ornamented, the outer order with zig zag, the inner order with beak heads. The ornamentation does not, however, appear to have been done consistently for the eastern capitals have volutes, whereas the western have foliage. The hood mould has pellets on the eastern, and zig zags on the western parts, and even the beak-heads give way to faces in places. A nineteenth century engraving in Eyton's *Antiquities* does not show these variations. This may indicate either artistic inaccuracy, or that the door was badly re-arranged by the Victorian restorers.

The Chancel has two Early English lancets in the east wall, and Decorated windows on the North and South sides nearest the altar. Evidence of a nineteenth century watercolour suggests that the tracery of the square-headed South window is not *in situ*. The stonework of the Chancel reveals at least two phases of building, with some quoins high on the East wall reminiscent of pre-Conquest work at Diddlebury. High on the South wall is a *shiela-na-gig*, a pagan fertility figure also found locally at Church Stretton, Diddlebury and Tugford. It is not shown on the nineteenth century watercolour referred to earlier, but this may indicate artistic prudery.

The Interior.

The West end of the Nave was partitioned off to form a school in the early C19, which explains the absence of pews beyond the font. The tomb recess in the South wall of the Nave does not have a slab or monument. The lintel of the window on the South side of the Chancel is formed of an incised cross on a stepped plinth, which may have come from the tomb recess. Both date from the C14th.

The Chancel Arch, like the roofs and ceilings, dates from the restoration of 1894-5. It is suggested that the square aumbry in the North wall of the Chancel may be a primitive Easter Sepulchre, which would be an unusual survival in the area. The arch above the piscina is a re-used lancet window head, complete with groove for retaining glass.

The Furnishings.

The Font is a fine example of the C12th Herefordshire school of carving. It is a so-called chalice font, related stylistically to those at Castle Frome (Herefordshire) and Chaddesley Corbett (Worcestershire). The leaf scrolls at the base of the bowl are a motif possibly imported from Normandy via the West Country.

The benches in the nave probably date from the late Middle Ages, and in some cases were converted into box pews in the eighteenth century. The Chancel formerly contained Stalls for the officiating clergy. A C15th misericord depicting fighting gryphons survives, though removed from the Church for safe-keeping. It was probably part of the set at Enville Church, Staffs. The carved C17th Cressett Family Pew is related stylistically to examples at Ditton Priors and Cleobury North (from Burwarton), and formerly stood against the North Wall. The Communion Rails are late C18th, and formerly enclosed the altar on three sides. The Royal Arms of George II dates from 1757, but is badly faded.

The Chancel contains four Brasses to members of the Cressett and Minton families of Coates. The earliest commemorates Edward Cressett (d. 1672), while the most recent is that of his great-grandson Edward Minton (d. 1781).