



St Leonard's Church
Newland

The Chapel of the Beauchamp Almshouses

An Illustrated Guide to the Clayton & Bell frescoes



by C Raphael Brownlee
Archivist

From the outside St Leonard's is an unprepossessing building; a typical small Victorian country church.

Yet nothing prepares the visitor for what they are about to see as they walk through the door for the first time.

This breathtaking church is Grade I listed for one reason and one reason only; the magnificent frescoes and decoration which cover the entire surface of the church.



“The hidden gem of Worcestershire”

A brief history of the frescoes

One of Clayton and Bell's masterpieces

The elaborate frescoes were devised by Revd James Skinner, the first vicar-warden and work on them began immediately after the consecration of the church in 1864. Frederick Preedy was commissioned to execute the frescoes but neither the Revd Skinner, P C Hardwick, the church architect or Gambier Parry, who acted as artistic advisor, were happy with his work and in 1868 the frescoes were entrusted to Clayton & Bell of London who executed the entire design. They are rightly considered to be one of Clayton & Bell's masterpieces.

Skinner used his fresco designs as an aid to preaching the Christian faith and is truly the work of a genius and the unstinting generosity of himself and his family in their donations allowed the work to continue.

He retired in 1877 and the following year the new vicar-warden, Revd Cosby White, to his great credit, consulted with Skinner regarding the designs of the frescoes for the south chancel and vestibule, so that the entire scheme could be completed.

Restoration and cleaning was carried out on the frescoes in 1973 and 1986 and since then no major work has been undertaken until last year. Overall, the decoration is in good condition but some urgent repair work is now required, together with a carefully planned restoration and re-instatement project over the next few years, so this remarkable building can be handed on to future generations in prime condition.

C Raphael Brownlee
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The execution of the Frescoes

and the Chancel Arch

The first section of the church to be decorated was the chancel arch with the 'Doom' or Last Judgment scene, which was gifted by the 4th Earl and executed by Frederick Preedy in its traditional place over the arch. He had been retained to undertake the complete decorative scheme in the church, however, the Earl & Gambier-Parry were very disappointed with his work on the chancel arch. Consequently, in 1868, Clayton & Bell were engaged to execute the entire frescoe scheme, which was also to include the repainting of the chancel arch in their own style.

Clayton & Bell repainted the arch in 1877, taking the opportunity to soften the original depiction of hell, which had caused great distress to the congregation. This close up from a watercolour in the library, painted in 1876 and presented to Skinner on his retirement the following year, shows the original scene very vividly, with the damned being cast headlong into the flames of hell.

The interpretation was changed to what you see today, though the damned still express their misery, loneliness and despair.

At the apex of the chancel arch is Christ in Majesty, his right hand raised in blessing and his left displaying the symbols Alpha and Omega. On his right is the archangel Gabriel and on his left Michael, and below are the twelve apostles.

On the north stands St Peter with his keys at the gate of heaven, beckoning towards Christ the souls of the saved who are guided forward by an angel. On the south the damned are barred from heaven by the 'angel with the flaming sword.'

Beneath the Judgement scene, on the north side stands the Blessed Virgin Mary with a lily and the texts, 'Righteous through the obedience of one person' and 'Holy Mary, Mother, the handmaid of the Lord', and on the south side Eve with the texts, 'Sinners through the disobedience of one person' and 'Mother Eve deceived by the serpent'.



A guide to the frescoes



South Nave Wall

Upper frescoes depicting the Parables

The Good Samaritan
The Great Wedding Banquet
The Talents
The Pharisee and the Publican.

Lower frescoes depicting the Beatitudes

Blessed are the persecuted
Blessed are the peacemakers
Blessed are the pure in heart

Blessed the merciful
Blessed are they that hunger
and thirst for righteousness
Blessed are the meek
Blessed are they that mourn
Blessed are the poor in spirit

The Stoning of St Stephen
Esther and King Ahasuerus
The Annunciation
this was gifted and painted by John Clayton of Clayton & Bell
Pharaoh's daughter rescuing infant Moses
Mary & Martha with Christ

The Flight into Egypt
Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ
David the shepherd boy

West Nave Wall

Left of oriel window

Upper St James

Lower St Leonard

Frieze of oriel window

Healing of the sick man let down through the roof

Right of oriel window

Upper

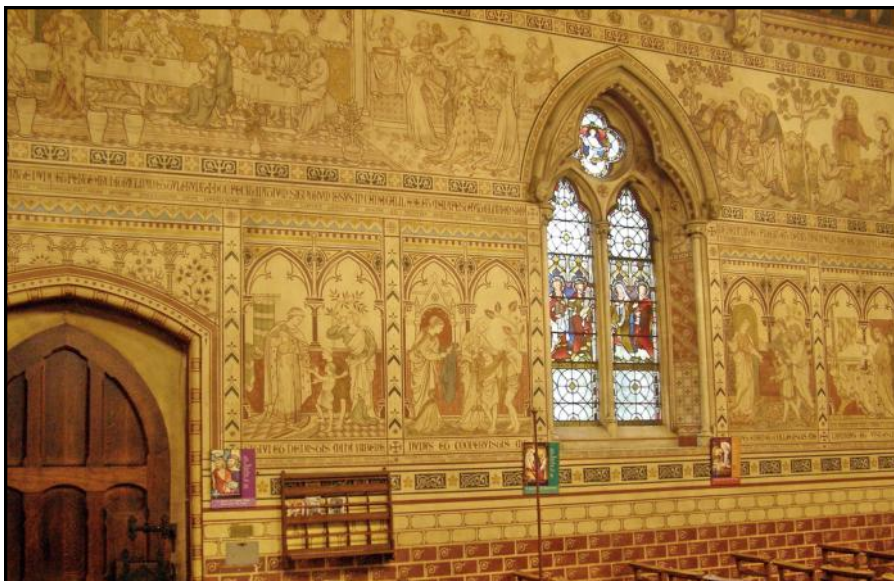
Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

Gifted by P H Hardwick, architect of the church & almshouses

Lower

Parable of the Wise & Foolish Virgins

Gifted by Skinner's children in memory of their mother



North Nave Wall

Upper frescoes depicting the Miracles

Each one the gift of a private individual

Marriage of Cana

Feeding of the Five Thousand

The Raising of Lazarus

Lower frescoes depicting the Corporal Works of Mercy

Each one the gift of a private individual

Almsgiving

Clothing the naked

Feeding the hungry

Taking in strangers

Giving drink to the thirsty

Visiting the sick

North Chancel Wall



These are the six lower frescoes panels of the female saints which were painted out in 1928 and reinstated by Clayton & Bell in 1937, see page 5. Interestingly, the six saints were not part of the original scheme shown in 1876 watercolour, see below, but were added a few years later.



Upper frescoes and extending into the Sanctuary

Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday

Lower frescoes

The *Five Virgin Martyrs*

St Dorothea, St Margaret of Antioch, St Agnes, St Catherine, St Barbara.

Sixth figure

St Etheldreda, Abbess of Ely

The lower frescoes were given in memory of George Ure Skinner from his two daughters

Sanctuary

Agnus Dei

central above altar

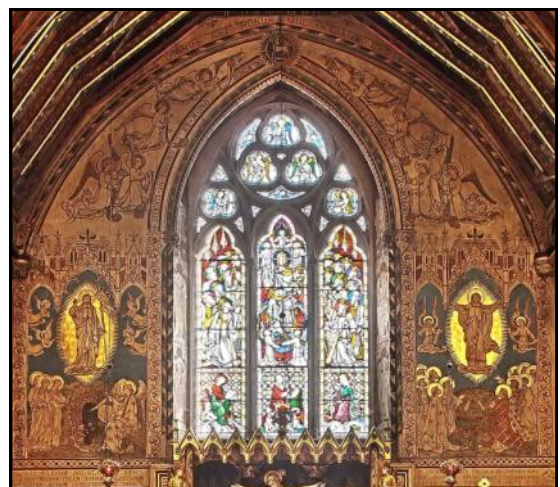
The Resurrection

left of altar

The Ascension

right of altar

Given as a thank-offering for Agnes, 18 year old daughter of Revd & Mrs Skinner, who died 1868



Melchisedec & Aaron

over the credence table

Chancel Arcade



Above the arcade

The Nativity and the Visit of the Magi

Reverse side of arcade

Christ the Vine

Underside of the arcade arches

The Six Doctors of the Universal Church

St Gregory, St Augustine, St Ambrose, St Athanasius, St Basil and St Chrysostom

The six doctors given by Revd Skinner, in memory of his brother Benny.

Chancel South Aisle

Sacristy wall facing into church

Blessed Virgin's ancestors

Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Ruth

Blessed Virgin and Child (in centre)

Blessed Virgin's earthly associates

Mary of Cleopas, Salome, Joanna, Susanna



Beside the Beauchamp Brass

Women from the Acts of the Apostles

Dorcas, Priscilla, Phoebe, Lois, Lydia

Above the window by the organ

Asaph the Recorder (A temple musician in the time of David)

Vestibule

Around the sacristy door

Eli robed as a priest

Samuel as attendant at the Ark of God

Hannah, mother of Samuel, bringing the annual offering of a coat

Opposite sacristy door

Henan the Singer (A temple musician in the time of David)

High up behind the organ

St Christopher with the Christ child (*facing the back of the organ*)

Ethan the Instrumentalist (A temple musician in the time of David) (*facing sacristy door*)

Photographic record of the frescoes and windows



Alastair Carew-Cox is an award winning architectural photographer specialising in Victorian churches.

He has exhibited throughout Europe and Japan, having produced books on Pugin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Burne-Jones but to name a few.

Educated at Malvern College and continuing to live in Malvern, Alastair has a passion for our church and in conjunction with him we hope to produced the definitive record of the frescoes and stained glass, with an eventual view to the production of a lavishly illustrated book on the subject.

The photograph on the front cover and those on the next two pages are taken by Alastair of our church, showing the fresco panels in the kind of detail which only professional photography of this standard can achieve.





Please note the home printing of these photographs does not match their true quality.



