

# Notes from Charles Lonquet Higgins about modifications to Turvey Church

In the year 1852 Charles Lonquet Higgins Esq of Turvey Abbey, made a proposal to enlarge and restore the Parish Church, and engaged that the whole should be done according to the designs, and under the superintendence of George Gilbert Scott Esquire. Mr Higgin's offer was accepted, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July the work commenced.

The old Chancel was taken down for the purpose of lengthening the Nave, and the foundations for the new Chancel were dug out of the churchyard. These were carried somewhat deep, and in the excavation for that purpose, more than 150 <sup>skulls</sup> were disturbed, the greater portion of which were so much decayed, that only a few of the bones remained. Whenever it was necessary to remove a coffin, the whole was carefully placed upon a wooden frame, and carried to another part of the Churchyard, where a grave was prepared for its reception.

It was also necessary to take down the whole of the Mortuary Chapel, on the north side of the Chancel, in order to enlarge the Nave, and provide room for the Organ, and Vestry.

The original Nave of the Church reached as far only as the extremity of the third arch from the Tower, the old Chancel arch which was a low one extending across the Nave in that position. The Nave was extended in length for two arches further, and the present Chancel Arch built at its termination. Four new Clerstory Windows were put in, and the Roof lengthened exactly after the pattern of the original one. It was afterwards found necessary to take down all the pillars and arches in the Nave, on both sides, to the Tower, and the Tower Arch and pillars also, in consequence of the foundations being insecure from the number of internments made in the church. New foundations carried down below the bottom of the disturbed soil, were placed under every pillar, and they were then re-erected in their original form.

At the eastern extremity of the North Aisle, a new Chapel was erected for the reception of the Organ. In making this alteration, two vaults belonging to the family of the Mordaunts were opened. They were again carefully closed, and strong arches of stone were thrown over them, above which the floor of the Organ chapel was placed.

In making the excavation for the foundation of the Chancel Arch, on the South side, at the head of the tomb of Lord Mordaunt, a stone grave was found arched at the top. There did not appear to have been a coffin. The grave was formed nearly to fit the body, and was composed of somewhat rough flat stones, laid at the bottom, others of the same kind but smaller, set up at the sides, The arch over the top was of small stones laid in lime. The body within was entirely decayed with the exception of the bones, the larger of which were tolerably perfect, when first found. On being exposed to the air some of them crumbled away. They were the bones of a man of more than the average stature, and there can be no doubt that they were those of Sir John Mordaunt, one of the privy counsellors of Henry VII, over whom the monument now in St Mary's Chapel was originally placed. The remains were carefully preserved, and again deposited on the spot where they were found.

Another body was discovered not far from the same place, which had been interred in ox-hide. The skin was still undecayed, and a large quantity of adipose substance was found covering the inner part. It was so extremely offensive, that a particular examination was not made, but the whole was carefully closed up on the spot where it was laid.

In the Mortuary Chapel on the north side of the Chancel, in the part immediately adjoining the Mordaunt vaults, now under the Organ floor, two bodies were seen lying under the large monument of John the second Lord Mordaunt, who with his two wives were buried in the church at Turvey.

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They were exposed, in excavating for the foundation of the north side of the Chancel Arch. One of the bodies, was no doubt that of Lord Mordaunt himself. The covering above was of two rough stones, and the sides were also formed of small rough stones set edge-ways. On removing one of the upper stones the skull was seen resting as on a pillow, the head bent a little forward and the chin lying on the chest. The other body which was placed a little lower, and to the left, was most probably that of the Lady Joanne Mordaunt, his second wife. She was the daughter of Sir John Farmer of Easton Neston in the county of Northampton, and was one of the attendants upon Queen Mary when she was princess. They were left undisturbed, and were carefully closed up again to remain in their resting places until the Morning of the Resurrection.

The roof of the Nave was taken entirely off, and repaired where necessary, as well as that of the North Aisle. The roof of the old Chancel was repaired and lengthened and placed over the Organ Chapel. At the Easton extremity of the Organ Chapel, a New Vestry was built communicating with the Chancel.

The various floors in the Tower, having through age become very much decayed, and unsafe, they were all taken up and relaid with sound, two inch oak plank. A new roof was also put over the Porch.

The lead covering of the Church which was in many places thin and broken, was taken from the whole of the Nave and the North Aisle and Chapel and was replaced with new.

The four windows in the Chancel are the work of Hardman of Birmingham as are also the brass Coronas, the two Candlesticks upon the Communion Table, the Lamp, and the Standards for candles in the Church and Chancel.

The Windows of the Nave, are composed of quarries by Messers Powell of Whitefriars, London. The floor of the Nave, as also of the Chancel, is laid with encaustic tiles from the manufactory of the Messers Minton.

A Furnace and Flues for hot air was erected under the Tower, and along the Aisle with branches into the Side Aisles and was constructed by Headon of Trowbridge.

In excavating for the hot air apparatus in the middle Aisle of the church, and for the foundations of the Pillars, a large number of bodies were discovered. They appeared to have been buried for the most part without coffins. Nothing remained but the larger or harder bones. Sixty bodies at least must have been so disturbed. The bones were replaced as nearly as possible in their original position.

The Organ is by Messers Hill, New Road, London, and contains five distinct organs, viz Choir, Great, Swell, Tuba, and Pedal. The Compass is from CC to f in alt, 54 notes. There are four rows of keys, and each row goes through. The Pedal Organ has a compass from CCC to d, 27 notes and contains a 16 feet stopt, 16 feet open and a 16 feet reed. There are 37 drawstops and couplers commanding 26 stops, all of which go through, excepting the Flutes and the Dulciana. The decoration of the Organ Pipes was executed by Fisher.

The whole of the Nave of the church, the Side Aisles, Tower, and Chancel were repewed with seats of oak, from designs by Mr Scott.

Under an arch in the wall of St Mary's Chapel, a Fresco Painting was found, representing the two Marys' at the foot of the Cross. It was carefully picked out, and as much preserved as possible. A glass frame was then placed over it, in order that it might not sustain further injury. It is much to be regretted that a large and interesting fresco, immediately over the same on the Chapel wall was destroyed.

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The interesting remains of two very early windows were discovered on the south side of the Nave, over the arches. The plaster was picked off, and they were left as little disturbed as possible. A Low Doorway in the east wall of the Tower, opening from the Nave of the church was also found. Both windows, and the doorway may be seen from the Middle Aisle.

During the alterations the tomb of Lewis, Lord Mordaunt, which stood at the East end of the Mortuary Chapel on the North side of the Chancel, was removed and placed under the window, at the West end of the North Aisle. The Monument of Sir John Mordaunt and Edith his wife, which had been removed into the North Chapel by the Reverend Leigh Richmond, was restored as nearly as possible to its original position.

Kind and Valuable Presents were made to the Church by several persons. The Reverend Wm. B Russell gave the very handsome Carved Oak Pulpit, made from a design of Mr Scott. Miss Gorst of Preston, Lancashire Presented a Lectern of Carved Oak, also from a design of Mr Scott. Colonel Higgins of Picts Hill gave the West Window of the Tower, formed of quarries by Messers Powell, and Mrs C. L Higgins presented an Alms Dish, executed by Keith of Westmorland Place, after a design by Butterfield, bearing on its back the inscription +In honorem Dei et in usum ecclesie de Turvey: fest: pasch : Ano Stis 1855+

Furniture was also provided for the Church, consisting of the following articles. One Cover for the Communion Table of crimson cloth, with a cross of gold coloured silk braid, and crimson fringe.

One Cover for the Communion Table of crimson velvet, with the sacred monogram embroidered in gold coloured silk, and a partly coloured fringe, knotted on the velvet.

One Cover for the Communion table for Festivals, of white and gold coloured silk, having in its texture the sacred monogram and cross and having a gold coloured silk fringe. Two fair white linen cloths of Damask for the celebration of the Holy Communion. Two fair linen cloths of the same Damask to cover what remaineth of the sacred elements. Two lawn veils, edged with lace. Two stout linen cloths for covering the Communion Table. Two Pede Mats. Two worked stools for kneeling at the Communion Table, with covers. Kneeling Cushions of red cloth for the Communicants. One Pulpit hanging of red cloth with crosses of needlework. One Pulpit hanging of crimson velvet with gilt designs. One reading desk hanging of red cloth and needlework. One other reading desk hanging of red cloth, with device. One large curtain for the south door, leaded. One large curtain for the North door, leaded. Two curtains for the Organ pew. One worked kneeling stool for the reading desk, with cover. One brass lighting rod. One brass extinguisher or rod.

All these alterations and restorations having been by the Gracious Providence of God brought to an end, and the work completed, the church was re-consecrated and opened for Devine Worship by Thomas Lord Bishop of Ely on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1854

The Lich gate at the entrance of the churchyard was erected in the year of our Lord 1856. it was from a design by Mr Scott.