

MMT NEWS

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The Eyre Mortuary Chapel, Bath

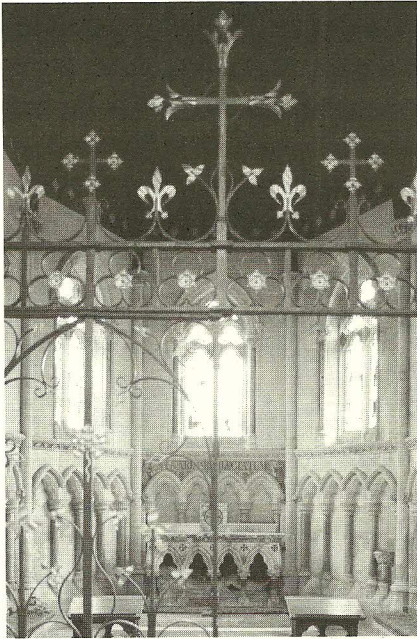
Bath Abbey Cemetery, on the road up to Prior Park, is celebrated as the finest cemetery laid out by John Claudius Loudon (1843-44). It rises up the hill in terraces. Less well known is Perrymead Roman Catholic Cemetery, adjoining it on the hillside above. The land was bought in 1856, as the vaults beneath the Orchard Street church were full, and it was consecrated in 1858. Its charming chapel (attributed to 'Mr Hill', but surely more likely to be by Charles Hansom) was consecrated in 1859.

The cemetery is dominated by the striking Gothic chapel built

as the burial place of the Eyre family in 1859, and consecrated by Bishop Clifford of Clifton in 1863. The Eyres were a recusant family from Derbyshire. In the late Middle Ages they established themselves at Hassop Hall, where they remained until the line failed in 1853. The Perrymead chapel was built by John Lewis Eyre (1789-1880). His uncle Fr Thomas Eyre, first president of Ushaw College, the seminary near Durham, seems to have been the great-grandson of Rowland Eyre of Hassop. His mother, Mrs Catherine Eyre, of Bath, on her death in 1840 left £3,000 for the building of Catholic churches in Cardiff and

Swansea, and his elder brother Thomas (1786-1866 - buried in the chapel) ensured that her wishes were carried out.

In 1817 John Lewis was living in York, married to Sara (1790/91-1825), daughter of William Parker of Kingston-upon-Thames. They had five sons (of whom four became priests) and six daughters. After Sara's death, John Lewis married in 1828 Augustine Pulcherie (1797-1876), daughter of Armand Dumesniel, Marquis de Sommerey, of Bath (buried in the cemetery). All that is known of John Lewis's occupation is that he became a director of the



Interior of the chapel

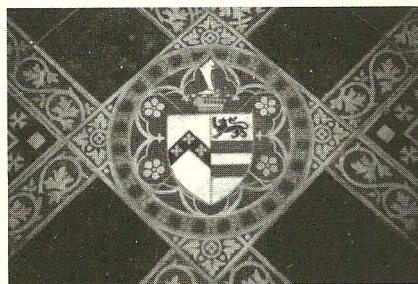
South Western Railway Company. In 1843 he was created a Count of the Lateran Hall and Apostolic Palace by Pope Gregory XVI, and in 1847 Pius IX made the title hereditary. It was inherited on his death by his third son, Charles Petre Eyre, first Archbishop of Glasgow.

The Eyre family had acquired in 1570 the estate of Newbold, in Derbyshire. This included a medieval chapel, which was restored in the 1850s to serve as a burial chapel. It is sometimes said that the Bath chapel was built because the vault at Newbold was full, but this is unlikely: Newbold continued to be used for family burials until 1928.

John Lewis Eyre's architect at Perrymead was Charles Francis Hansom (1817-88). He is less well-known than his elder brother Joseph Aloysius, whose pupil he was, but he was at least as good an architect, if less adven-

turous. He began practice in Coventry, where the parish priest, Dom Bernard Ullathorne, OSB (later first Archbishop of Birmingham) made a point of recommending him in preference to Pugin, whom he thought extravagant. He used to say that he 'could do all that Mr Pugin could'. In 1846 or 1847 Hansom followed Ullathorne to Bristol, where he practised for the rest of his life. He was in fact one of Pugin's most devoted disciples, and often commissioned stained glass, tiles and metalwork from him.

Hansom did a good deal of work for the Benedictines. This included the new church of St John the Evangelist in South Parade, Bath, which was a Downside mission. Built in 1861-63, it marked Hansom's turn to High Victorianism. The splendid spire was added in 1867. The Eyre chapel is still



The tiles in the porch

thoroughly Puginian, though its tall proportions and canted apse give it a French flavour.

The whole building is detailed with the greatest care. The Bath stone masonry has alternate smooth and hammer-headed bands, which produces a rich texture. The roof is covered with fish-scale tiles. On the

south side rises an octagonal turret with a spirelet above the bell stage. Within the turret a spiral staircase goes down to the crypt. The south porch is approached up a flight of steps. Over it is carved the family coat of arms, with supporters and the motto 'Neminem metue innocens' ('Fear no one if you are innocent'). The gutters drain through carved lions' heads (characteristic of Hansom). The porch is paved with magnificent Minton tiles, as is the whole chapel; they include tiles with the family arms and monograms.

Around the whole interior runs an arcade with Derbyshire marble columns, which also flank the traceried windows above. The mouldings over these terminate in carved heads. All the windows are of two lights except the west window which is one of three lights. Over the door is a recessed blank window. The roof has arch-braces supported on stone half-columns, and diagonal boarding. The western bay is divided from the eastern three by a fine, tall screen of iron, made by Hardman and Co. It incorporates flat floral pieces, and is crowned by crosses, based on those in the family arms.

The altar is of alabaster; in the centre of its gradine is a panel painted with similar crosses. Beneath the altar four open arches, with colonnettes of Irish serpentine, reveal a stone figure of the dead Christ, carved by Boulton of Cheltenham. Behind is a panel of black and white marble. Above the altar is a



The family group

scroll; it is inscribed ALTARE PRIVILEGIATUM, and held by angels, prettily painted on metal.

The stained glass is by Hardman and Co. In the west window are St Peter and two other popes, above a family group. The side windows represent the saints after whom members of the family were named. Left of the east window are St John the Evangelist and St Pulcheria (a Byzantine empress). The only furniture consists of a pair of prie-dieus and an empty vestment-chest.

The crypt has a remarkable series of three transverse arches and groin vaults, supported on slender shafts which look like stone, but are said to be cast iron. The effect is aptly compared by Rory O'Donnell with the work of Viollet le Duc. Each bay has shelves for coffins on either side. There is a flight of steps (for coffins) on the north side, blocked by a glazed iron grille. Further light comes in through rows of three glazed circular holes on either side.

The earliest burial is that of Thomas Eyre (died 1866).

Others include Monsignor Vincent Eyre, Rector of Hampstead (died 1871), a son of the Count, who, with his brother Fr William Eyre, SJ, assisted Bishop Clifford at the consecration, and the Count's grandson Monsignor John Grainger (died 1898). The most recent burial is that of Allan Carruthers (died 1995). The chapel belongs to a trust administered by his widow, Mrs Belinda Carruthers, of Walton Cardiff Manor, Tewkesbury. It was restored in 1992 with grant aid from English Heritage and Bath City Council.

An open day will be held at the chapel on Thursday 7 July, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Peter Howell

The Birmingham Visit, Part II: The Cemeteries

Toni Demidowitz, Conservation Officer for Parks, Gardens and Cemeteries for Birmingham City Council proved an expert and enthusiastic guide for our tour round Key Hill and Warstone Lane Cemeteries.

Both were built in the early 19th century as private cemeteries following the acute burial problems in churchyards following the nine-fold rise in the population of Birmingham before 1831. Both slope down to Icknield Street and were laid out to be seen from there.

Key Hill

Key Hill was built in 1832 by gentleman dissenters, to provide secure and permanent plots for all, although it was used almost exclusively by dissenters. The Birmingham General Cemetery Company looked at three sites; Edgbaston, Aston and Key Hill and chose Key Hill as it was dry (to aid rapid decomposition of bodies) and close to the town although in the country near the famous Guinea Gardens. It was laid out in a sand quarry and the burial plots advanced as the sand quarry was worked out by the Guardians of the Poor. Quarrying ceased in the 1930s. The sand is of an excellent quality for casting - very valuable as it adjoins the Jewellery Quarter.

The leading architect, Charles Edge (1) laid out the Birmingham General Cemetery in a formal layout with picturesque planting and a Greek revival mortuary chapel on a platform surmounting the Registrar's house, so it provided a focus and could be seen from Icknield Street. Plans for an Egyptian style building are lodged in Birmingham Library but this proved too expensive for the company. In addition there are gate piers, built in the local sandstone, and railings. The chapel had decayed and been repaired with cement but in 1952 it was bought by the City Council who demolished it in 1966. The cemetery itself was closed to further burials in 1982. The range of catacombs cut back into the sandstone were built in



Key Hill: The catacombs

four stages; 1835-40 (2-storey), 1852, 1857 and 1862 (these are 3 deep with passageways). These were gas-lit, as at Warstone Lane, by the 1820s. Until 1857 there was a series of hairpin bend paths leading up the cliff above. These cliffs have now been cut back and an informal layout with meandering paths laid out above the catacombs. An exedra built of brick to match the original walls, with slate name stones, commemorates those whose graves were moved to Handsworth when the Metro Railway was built in 1995 over the gate to the sand quarry. Planes complete the exedra.

The first phase of planting was deciduous and evergreen shrubs but by the 1860s and 70s planes were introduced. Their leaves flutter in the breeze and produce a flickering light very suitable for this situation. Weeping ash, weeping birch and weeping elm - all funereal trees - also were planted.

The informal layout has views to St Michael's church, Soho, where Matthew Boulton had his house and manufactory. It was

laid out by Luke Pope in the late 1830s with the grandest monuments being placed along the walks. The walls at the back of the cemetery have been built to shore up the sandstone cliff which is very friable and liable to collapse, although the wall along Key Hill Drive was rebuilt in the 1935 style to match that on the opposite side.

Key Hill is not locked at night so it is very heavily vandalised - many gravestones have either been pushed over or lowered for safety by the council. Funding is being sought to maintain the planting and remove the planes planted on top of the catacombs, to repair the gate piers and replace the gates.

Warstone Lane (2)

This 1848 Grade II cemetery was built by an Anglican Cemetery Board formed in 1845. The mortuary chapel was Gothic Perpendicular built above the rim of the sandpit in a Derbyshire stone, by Hamilton and Medland of Gloucestershire. It had two long wings either side and formed the focal point for

the cemetery. It served as a parish church (1858-74), was bombed in World War 2 and demolished by the City Council in 1958, six years after it was acquired by them. The railings also disappeared at around this time.

The 2-tiered semi-circle of catacombs in the sandpit have a castellated parapet and a central passage back to the centre from whence a Bramah lift operated to lower the coffin from the chapel (cf. Kensal Green Cemetery). There was a mix of columbaria and vaults but by the time the catacombs were completed in 1888, fashions had changed and not many of them were taken up. One that was belonged to John Baskerville, of 'Baskerville' typeface fame, who eventually was laid on a shelf here, after being kept at home - it is said he did not want to be buried below ground.

The garden in front of the catacombs, now graced by a cluster of trees, was laid out by Richard Vertegans (3) with concentric paths and low planting so that they could be seen from Icknield Street. There is very little original planting, although there are plenty of poplar trees from the 1930s poplar mania in Birmingham. Amongst the unwelcome new plants are Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed, which is damaging the graves.

Above the catacombs there are the remains of a lime avenue curving from the Tudor Gothic gatehouse, now closed, to the chapel. The gatehouse has been

