

THE *Fires* OF *Bolsover Church*



FIND OUT HOW
BOLSOVER PARISH CHURCH
MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED TWO
DEVASTATING FIRES



Bolsover church has suffered two serious fires since Victorian times. The first fire was in 1897. Only the tower, the Cavendish Chapel and part of the north wall (near where the font stands today) remained.



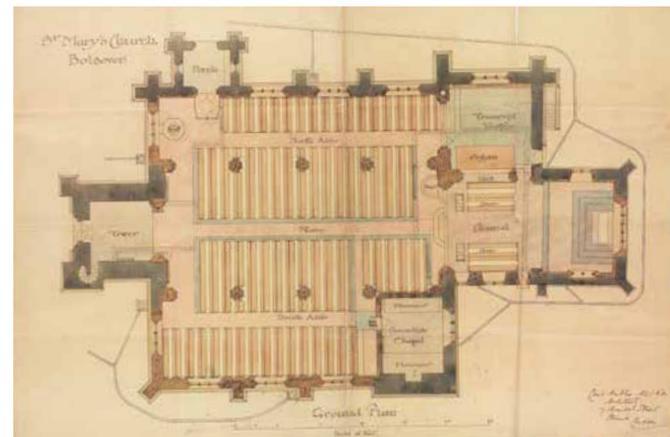
Within 18 months, thanks to efforts of the townspeople, led by the Reverend Thomas Charles Hills, the church was rebuilt and consecrated by the Bishop of Southwell.

"...on Sunday, Jan. 24th, 1897, a fire broke out in the vestry, which severely damaged the interior of the church as well as the clock and bells: the church has since been thoroughly restored at a cost of £10,000, including new seats, bells, clock and organ, and was reopened Sept. 21st, 1898: there are 850 sittings."

— Kelly's Directory of Derbyshire (1899)

Between the fires

Plan of the church from some time in-between 1897 and 1960



A major change in the post-fire restoration was the construction of a pointed chancel arch; note the elaborate leaf carving on the left and right.

Chesterfield parish church donated the 14th century font and a marble mosaic floor was laid throughout the church, of which only the portion in the south aisle survived the fire of 1960.



What was the building like before 1897?

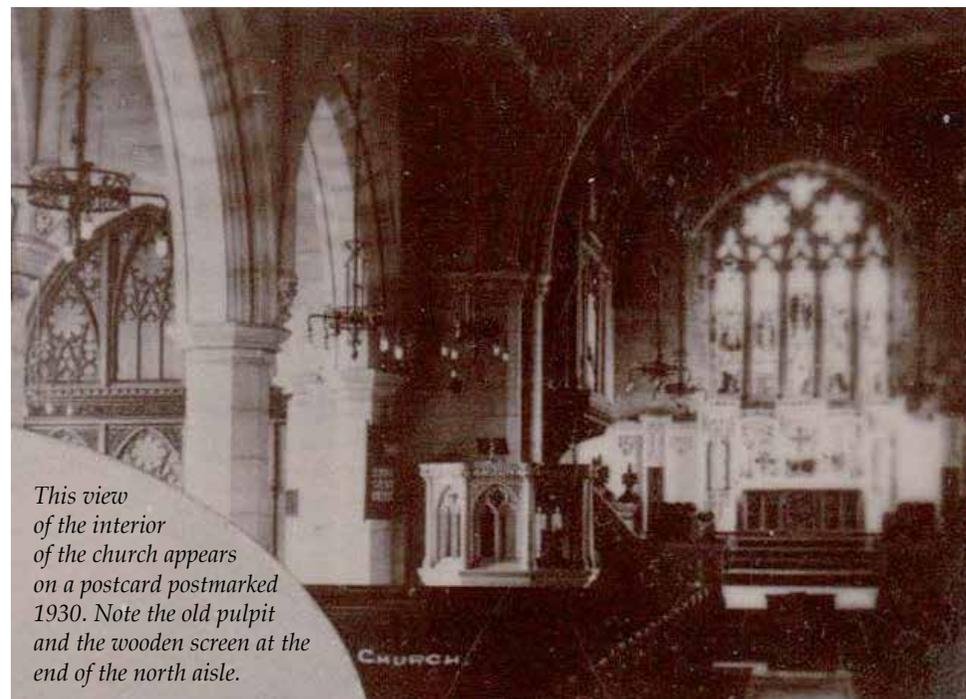
The tower, including its west door, dates from the 12th century and the building born at this period developed over subsequent centuries, in many ways following the development of the castle.

In the 17th century the Cavendish Chapel was added to the south-east corner and this was originally enclosed.

We know there had been a restoration in 1773 and that in 1823 the church could seat 480 people and was generally in a good state. There were two galleries, one for the singers and another for residents and guests at the castle. Further alterations were carried out in 1834.

In 1877-8 there was another thorough restoration and the two galleries were removed. A large north aisle was added with a north porch, vestry and organ chamber, and new bells and a clock were installed in the tower. In just under 20 years most of the hard work was wiped out.

— Source: Philip Riden (2012)



This view of the interior of the church appears on a postcard postmarked 1930. Note the old pulpit and the wooden screen at the end of the north aisle.

The second fire was in 1960. Thankfully, again the tower and the Cavendish chapel were not destroyed.

It has been suggested that this fire might have been caused by the electrics in the organ.



Above: Fire and smoke pouring out of the church (photo credit: Bolsover Civic Society).
Right: The morning after.



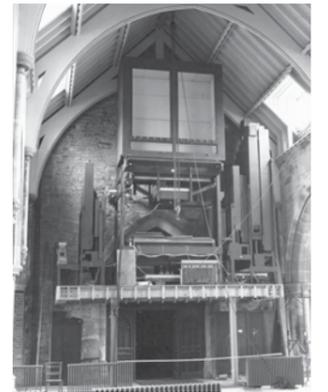
These photographs from the church archive capture the devastation of the 1960 fire.

Above and right: Parishioners survey the wreckage and begin the clean-up operation.

During the course of restoration after the fire a new organ was erected at the west end of the church. New vestries were also added in the north-east corner, the choir stalls were moved into the nave and the former vestry was converted into a baptistery.



Below: Installation of the pipes of the new organ.



In the aftermath of the fire, services, and even weddings, were held in the south aisle (facing the Cavendish chapel). A temporary altar was also erected in the Parish Rooms.



The Fire Window was installed in the early 1990s (around the time of the tower underpinning) in thanksgiving for the church having survived the two major fires and subsidence.

The window was donated by Miss Phyllis Bird of Carr Vale - a local schoolteacher and lifelong worshipper at St Winifred's in Carr Vale and at Bolsover Parish Church.

The window was made by Philip Birch. He suggested the inclusion of an image of a bird in the upper part.

The then Vicar, the Revd John Easton, and churchwardens Jim Wright and Eric Mitchell each placed a piece of glass in the window and their initials are engraved on it.



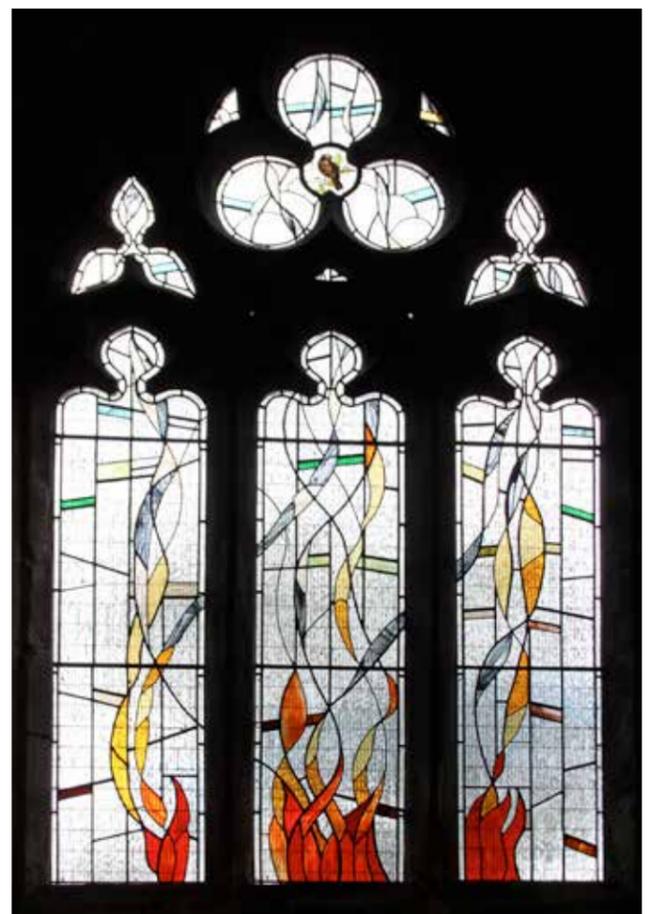
Left: New roof spars in position ready for the new chancel roof.

Above: Repair work in progress on a window in the south wall of the chancel.

The black & white photographs on this page are mostly taken from an album compiled by R.A. Chambers and given to Bolsover Parish Church.



Right: This spectacular cope, to commemorate the fire was designed and made by the late Grace Hewitt.





After the fire of 1960 many changes were carried out as part of the rebuilding process. The roofs were rebuilt and dormer windows added making the church much lighter.

New vestries were built onto the north-east corner, their shape somewhat reminiscent of a medieval chapter house. The former vestry was converted into the baptistery and the font and nativity stone relocated there.

The choir stalls were moved forwards out

of the chancel and into the first bay of the nave, the high altar also being brought forwards – nearer to the congregation – and the area behind it made into a Lady Chapel. An open screen partitions this area.

A new organ was acquired from Glasgow, refurbished by Willis & Sons and erected in a new location: the console positioned north of the choir stalls and the impressive pipes in a loft on the west wall.

In total the rebuilding and reordering were reported to have cost £70,000.

For more information please see www.bolsoverparishchurch.org

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