



***St. Michael-on –Greenhill***  
***Lichfield***

***A tour of the church***

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## **THE TOUR**

The word "church" of course primarily refers to a gathered body of Christian believers. Nonetheless in popular usage it has come to refer to the building in which such a body of believers meet. And some such places have very long histories of their own. One such is the church of St. Michael on Greenhill in Lichfield. This is a very ancient worship site and has probably been the focus of some type of ritual activity for the last 1500 years. The church itself is less ancient, first appearing in the historical record in the twelfth century but it has an interesting story to tell.

In this tour we tell something of this story, looking at how the church has developed over the centuries, how it has been used for worship in the past, and how it is used today. It begins at the church porch with a walk around the outside of the church and then takes us inside the church. Here the tour is split for convenience into four further sections.

The font

The Nave

The Chancel

The High Altar

## OUTSIDE CHURCH

We begin our tour of the outside of St. Michael's church at the main door to the porch on the north side of the church. Above the door we have a number of heraldic devices and in the centre, above the door, is a carved figure of the Archangel Michael with the devil, represented by a serpent, defeated at his feet - one of the classic iconographic representations of the angel, in his role as conqueror over evil. The church's only external gargoyles are to be found on either side of the door. Most of this decoration dates from the 1840s when the porch was rebuilt. The upper devices seem originally to have been an ornate E and an R but have been overlaid with a crown and a shield. Similar devices are found on the side of the porch, where a date of 1842 can be discerned. Walking to the right, we pass the crenelated north aisle, possibly dating from Tudor times or earlier.



**The left-hand  
gargoyle**



**St. Michael and the  
serpent**



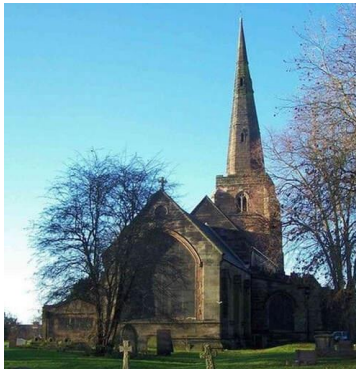
**The right-hand  
gargoyle**



**Chancel and East End in early  
1830s**



**South view after the  
restoration in the late 1840s**



**The chancel today, showing  
the east window**



**The chancel today with  
narrowed lancet windows**



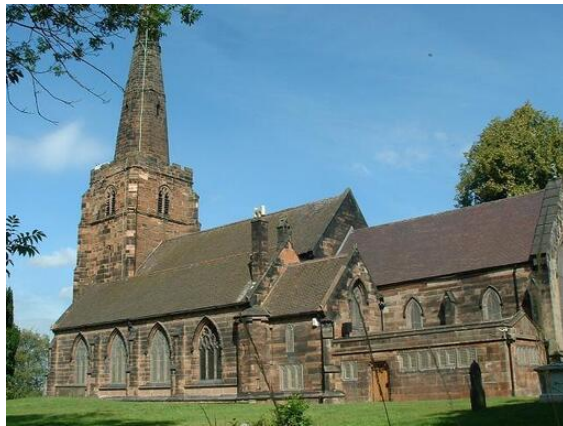
**St. Michael and heraldic  
shields**



**The north aisle**

At the end of the aisle we reach the chancel. This has changed a great deal over the years. Up until the middle of the 19th century it was the same height as the rest of the church with high clerestory windows and quite wide lower windows as shown in the water colour painting of the 1830s. However, in the 1840s a major “restoration” was carried out to make it conform to the prevailing view that all churches should be “gothic”. “Restoration” here should probably be read as “ecclesiastical vandalism”. The chancel was lowered, the windows narrowed to lancets and the east window split into three smaller windows as shown in the picture from the late 1840s. Many of these changes were undone in the 1890s and the east window restored to its original shape as we see today. The height however was not changed and the narrow windows in the chancel remain to this day.

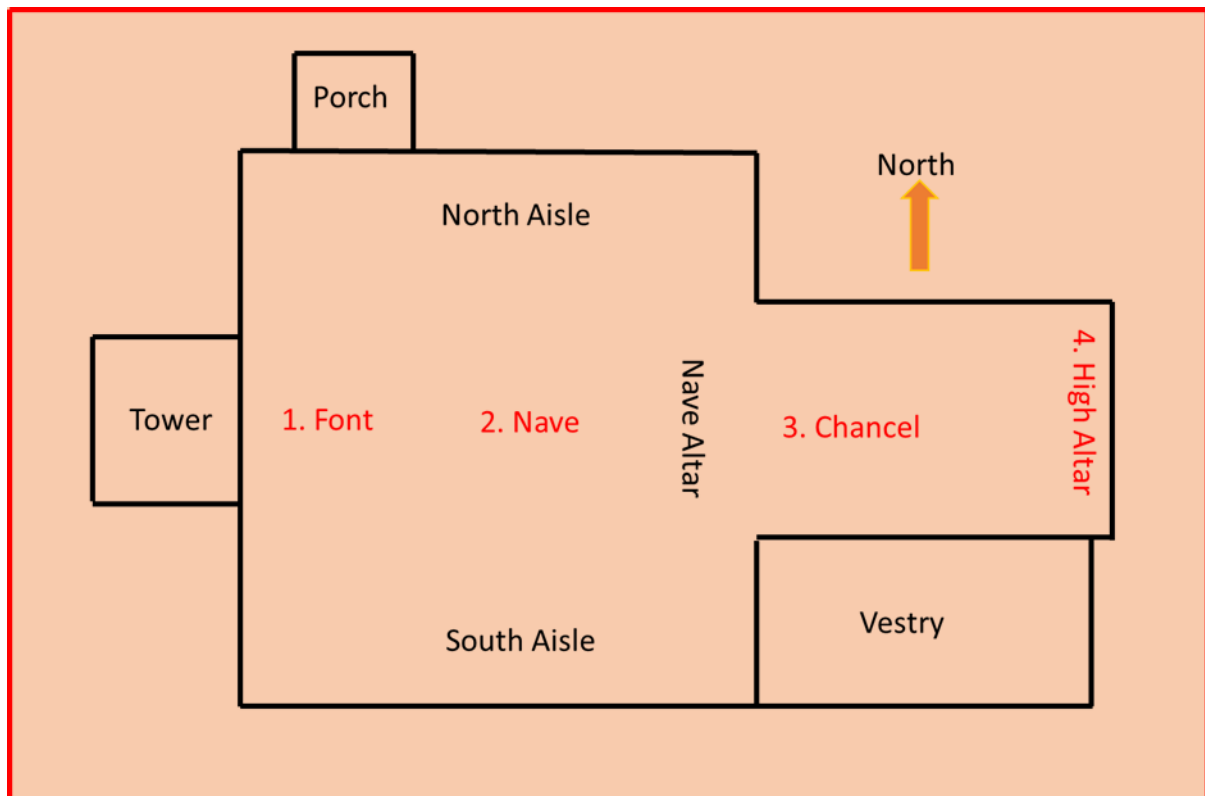
Passing around the church we come to the 1920s choir vestry and the Victorian vicar’s vestry and stove hole. Prior to the 1840s, this was the site of the family tomb of the Donegall’s of Fisherwick Hall, Fisherwick then being part of the parish. We continue in the same direction along the south aisle, which probably dates from the fifteenth century or earlier. The aisle used to contain the main external doors to the church, but there is no sign of them now. Continuing in the same direction we come to the tower. The steeple we see here is not the original one, which was blown down by “a great tempest of wind” in 1594. The small door gives access to the first-floor belfry, from where the peal of six bells is still rung. Passing around the tower we arrive back at the church door. We enter the church now for the next part of the tour.



**The south aisle, vicar and  
choir vestries**



**The south aisle and the base  
of the tower**





## **THE FONT**

The tour continues at the back of the church, at the end of the centre aisle and in front of the font. As we look first to the front of church, the areas containing the central rows of pews is the nave and the pews to either side are in the North (left) and South (right) aisles. Beyond the pews we see the nave altar from which most services of Holy Communion are celebrated. The coloured frontings, hangings on the altar, reflect the seasons of the church's year - green for most of the time, but purple for Advent and Lent, the seasons of preparation, and white for Christmas and Easter, as the church celebrates the birth and resurrection of Jesus. On a few days of the year the hanging will be red - during Holy Week when the events of the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus are remembered, and at Pentecost when the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated. The seasonal banners at the front of the nave also reflect the seasons.

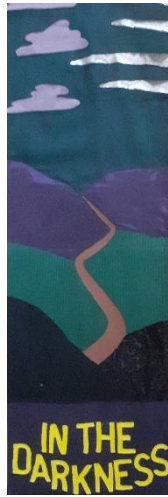


**The nave and aisles**





**Advent**



**Christmas**



**Passiontide and Easter**

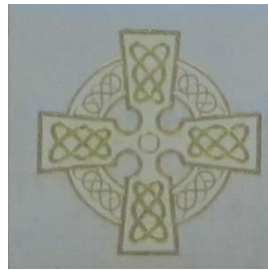
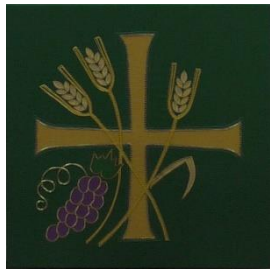
**Pentecost**



**Creation and Harvest**

**Angels**

## **The church banners**



## The altar hangings

Beyond the nave altar we see the chancel with its choir stalls and the large East window, with the high altar at the very front of church in front of a wooden carved reredos. We will look at this area in more detail later. Looking in this direction, perhaps the most prominent feature of the view is the huge coat of arms hanging above the chancel arch. These are the arms of Queen Anne and were given by a churchwarden and a member of the congregation in 1711, perhaps in a desire to obtain favourable consideration for funds by Queen Anne's Bounty, a fund that was used to augment clergy stipends in poorer parishes.



**The Queen Anne Arms**



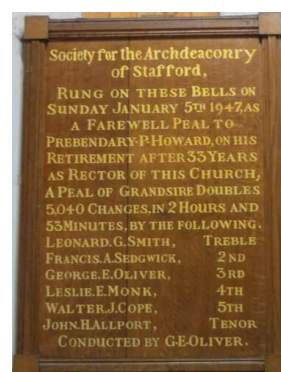
**The font**



Turning around towards the back of church, we see and can walk around the font with its rather worn stonework, which dates from the seventeenth century. Many generations of Lichfield residents have been baptized here - formally the initiation rite into the church, but also an important community rite of passage. Beyond the font is the base of the tower, where there is now a small kitchen and toilet facilities, with the belfry sitting on the next level, accessible via an external door. In the early nineteenth century, this part of the church would have looked very different, with a gallery for the singers above. The belfry contains a peal of six bells dating from 1722 that are still in use. It contains a number of plaques, recording peals of bells for specific occasions. Two of these are shown below - one to mark the retirement of Percival Howard after his 33-year tenure as vicar in 1946, and one marking Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee in 1977.



**The Belfry**

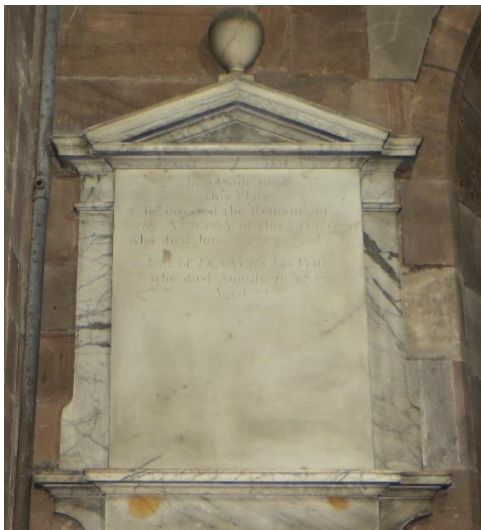


**The Percival Howard peal**



**The Silver Jubilee peal**

On the back wall there are, amongst others, monuments to John Newton (d 1724) one of whose sons went on to be Dean of St Paul's, whilst the other founded Newton's College in the Cathedral Close, for widows and unmarried daughters of clergy. In addition, we can see the memorials to Richard and Felicia Hammond and their daughter Mary Cobb, all friends of Dr Johnson, and Joseph Rochford, a former curate of St. Mary's in the city centre.



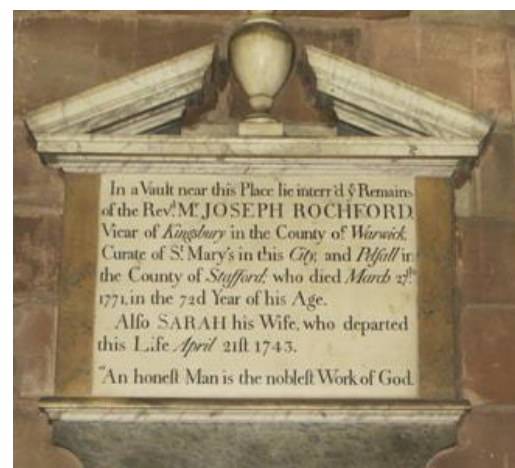
**The Newton memorial**



**The Hammond memorial**



**The Cobb memorial**



**The Rochford memorial**

To the left, on the south wall, there is a stained-glass window that is rather enigmatic but seems to eulogise motherhood and femininity. Certainly, the Old Testament character of Ruth can be seen in the middle panel, with the corn she has gleaned from the fields. The female figures in the two outer panels are not so easily identified. The subject of this window may partly be explained by noting that it is in memory of Mary Coxon, who is described (in the bottom right-hand corner) as a "devoted mother".

On the west wall to the right, somewhat obscured by the inner porch, there is the "baptism" window, which depicts little children being brought to Jesus. Originally, the font was positioned much closer to it than it is now - at the traditional placing near the church door.



**The Motherhood window**



**The Baptism window**

## THE NAVE

The tour takes us down the centre aisle between the pews over the commemorative floor slab to Joseph Adey, Gent. And his wife Mary", praising their devotion to family and the needy, to the second Station at the floor slab in memory of Michael Johnson, Samuel Johnson's father. The Latin text was composed by Samuel but the original monument (of which this is a copy) wasn't commissioned till 1784, just before his death.



**Joseph Adey memorial**



**Michael Johnson memorial**

The English translation of Johnson's text is as follows.

*Here lies MICHAEL JOHNSON a man of fearless and steadfast courage unmindful of danger and patient of toil, whose trust as a Christian was strong and fervent. A father who worked devotedly for his family. A bookseller of no mean skill for his mind was trained both by books and by business. His spirit was so staunch though constantly oppressed by misfortune*



*he never failed himself or his family. His language was so guarded that no word was ever wrung from him under pain or passion that could offend the ears of pious or chaste. Born at Cubley in Derbyshire in the year 1656 he died in 1731. Beside him is laid his wife SARAH a descendant of the ancient FORD family. Industrious in her home though known to few outside it, the enemy of none, she was distinguished by a keen intellect and a shrewd judgement always sparing others but never herself, with her thoughts ever fixed on eternity, she was graced by every description of virtue. Born at Kings Norton in Worcestershire in the year 1669 she died in 1759. Also their son NATHANIEL born in 1712 who, when his powers both of mind and body were full of promise, died in 1737 closing a short life with a pious death.*

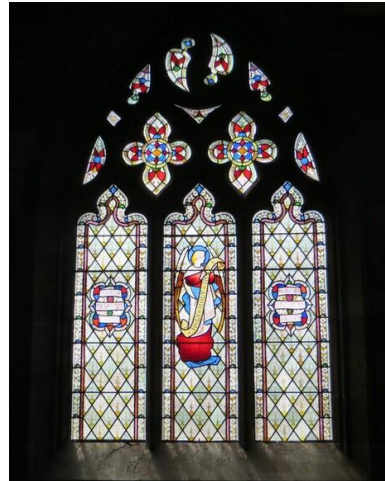
In the north wall there is the “Resurrection” window that shows the resurrected Jesus appearing to the women who came to his tomb on the first Easter morning, commemorating the most important event in the Christian story. On the south wall there are two simple Sanctus (Holy) windows containing angels holding the words of the heavenly song of praise to God from various places in the Old and New Testaments. It will be seen that angels in their various guises appear quite regularly on this tour and the others, perhaps not surprisingly in view of its dedication to the archangel Michael.

All around, in the pews to either side, there are numerous kneelers. The majority of these show the image of the cross that is a part of the iconography of the archangel Michael,

often appearing on the shield he holds in his battle with the devil. We will see this image elsewhere on this tour. Many of the kneelers also contain dedications of different sorts and are worth a study in their own right.



**The Resurrection window**



**One of the Sanctus windows**



**Pew kneelers**



**St. Michael cross on pew kneeler**

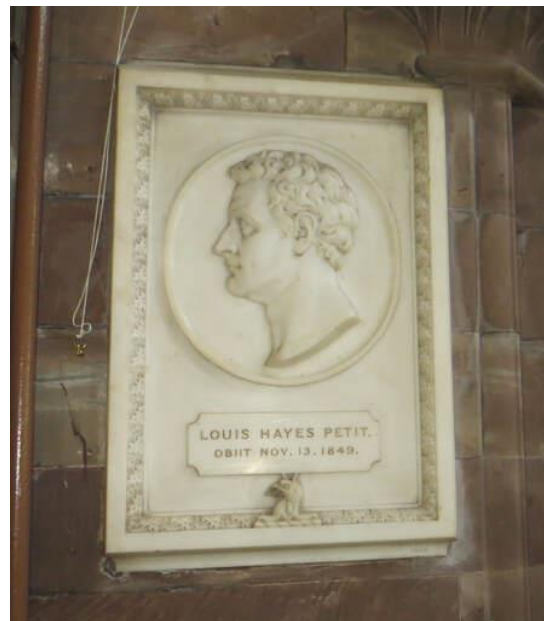


**The wedding kneeler**

At the eastward end of the north aisle, we have the “Jacob” window illustrating the Old Testament story of Jacob. The central section shows his dream of angels ascending to and from heaven. Next to this window we have the striking marble memorial to Louis Hayes Petit, a former MP, member of a wealthy Lichfield family and uncle of John Louis Petit whose grave is featured in the churchyard tour. The area in front of this window and monument is now a place for quiet prayer and reflection, where one can light a candle either as an act of prayer, or in remembrance of a loved one.



**The Jacob window**



**Louis Hayes Petit memorial**

On the other side of the Chancel arch there is a simple wooden pulpit embellished with carvings of angels. Some of these can be identified as specific archangels (more on these below), but others aren't identifiable.



**Gabriel**



**Uriel**



**Angel with chalice**



**Michael**



**Angel with arms  
raised in praise**



**Raphael**

**The pulpit and its angels**



The door that can be seen to the right leads into the vestry - the clergy robing room. The brass eagle lectern is currently positioned, out of use, close to this door on the South side of the church. Its large size means that it is not very movable, and these days a smaller, more portable lectern is used for Bible reading. The eagle is standing on a globe, and represents, through the depiction of the strongest of birds, the power of the Spirit of God taking the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus read from the Bible, out into the world.



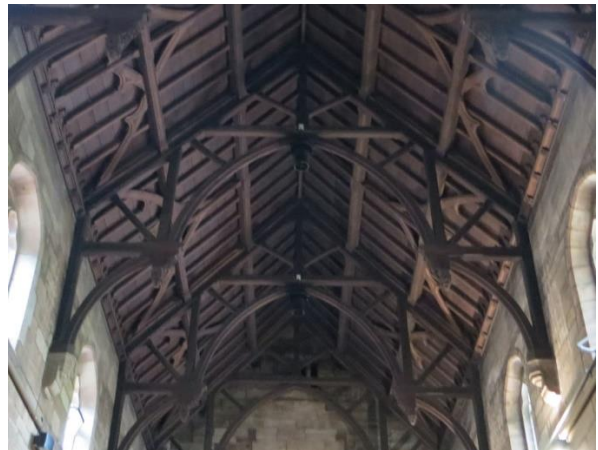
### **The Eagle lectern**

When the church was first built it looked very different. In the 12th century it consisted of just of the nave, without the North and South aisles, and the chancel was only about half the current length. There was no tower. Nor was it as high as at present, with the whole church being the height of the current chancel. Turning to the back of church and looking up at the internal wall of the tower, a vague outline of the original roof line can be seen on the back wall, and the

narrow (lancet) opening was originally an external window. The wooden roof construction, dating from the 1840s is also worth looking at.



**West wall**



**The wooden roof construction**

Between the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries the tower and the north and south aisles were added, and the nave and chancel were raised with the addition of the clerestories - the windows high up the wall. The chancel was also extended to its present length at some point, with the addition of the large east window. Between the time of the reformation and the nineteenth century it remained substantially the same, although various parts were rebuilt from time to time - including the spire after it blew down in 1594. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a great deal of work was carried out on the church to make it conform to what was, at the time, taken to be the most appropriate gothic form. We will discuss these changes further in what follows.



## THE CHANCEL

The next section begins at the entrance to the chancel. Just before the chancel step on the left are floor tile memorials to two Bishops of Lichfield—Bishops Lonsdale and Selwyn. To the right, just by the pulpit, there are three very similar memorial tiles to the Durrad family. William Durrad was the Lichfield's first station master at the original Trent Valley Station, and he was churchwarden in the 1850s. One cannot help but suspect that these tiles were placed in direct imitation of those of the Bishops' on the other side of the chancel arch and were an indication of the perceived status of the family.



**The Bishops' memorials**



**The Durrad memorials**

As was mentioned earlier, the restoration work of the 1840s mainly concerned the chancel area. It was lowered to its present height and the walls plastered and the windows rebuilt to the required lancet form, and the east window converted into three narrow lancet windows. An ornate ceiling was constructed beneath the roof. All in all, these changes amounted to large scale ecclesiastical vandalism, in particular the destruction of the east window, and most of

these were wisely undone in the late nineteenth century. But much that was original was unfortunately destroyed and lost.



**The chancel from the crossing**

As we enter the chancel, we can see the carved wooden clergy and choir stalls, again well provided with angels. The modern electric organ is on the right, the site of a number of other instruments since the nineteenth century. Before that there was a small organ on the gallery at the west end mentioned above. The organ pipes above the organ and on the east wall of the nave are all that is left of the earlier

instruments and are purely decorative. On the end wall of the chancel, partially obscured by the organ is the 1863 monument to Dr. Thomas Rowley and his wife Fanny, listing his charitable bequests to the Infant's School and for the establishment of the Boy's school.



**Organ**

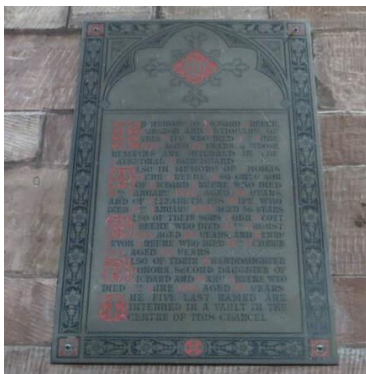


**Clergy stall**

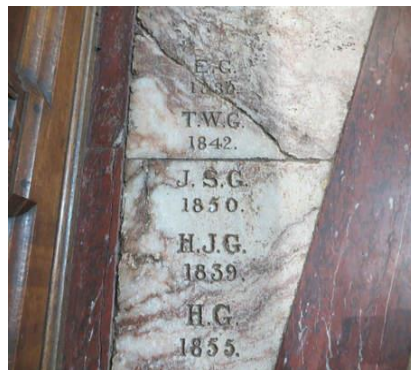


**Rowley monument**

On the north wall of the chancel, we find the memorial of Richard Greene, Surgeon and Antiquary (d 1793) who is buried in the Cathedral, and his family, many of whom died in the 1830s and 1840s were interred in a later tomb in the centre of the Chancel. One of his grandsons, another Richard, banker, magistrate and churchwarden, was largely responsible for the 1840s restoration of the chancel and seems to have taken the opportunity to install a family vault in the process.



**The Greene memorial**



**The Greene vault**



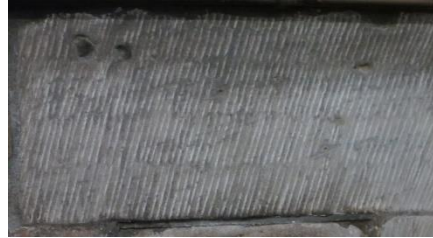
**Richard Greene  
(1716-1793)**

On the north side of the chancel there is an obvious break in the stonework at the point where the original chancel ended. On the organ side there are numerous stones that seem to have been deliberately scoured. In the right light it is possible to glimpse vague indications of text below the scouring (at least if you have a good imagination). Perhaps we have here an indication of deliberate defacement of memorials during the turbulent periods of the Reformation

and the Civil War. Or perhaps the scouring is simply the result of preparing the walls for plastering.



**Old end of chancel**



**Scoured stonework**

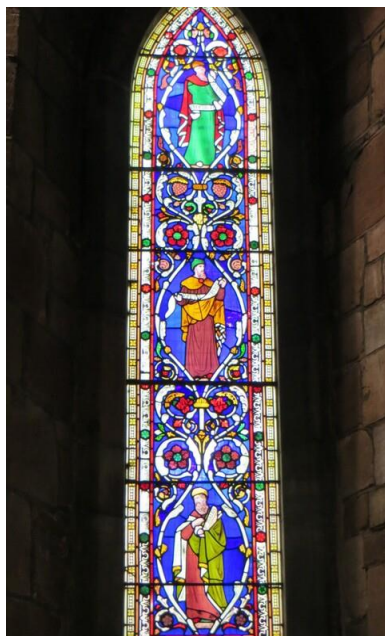
Halfway down the chancel on the north side, we can also see here an effigy dressed as a medieval lawyer that was found in the nineteenth century restoration, together with his dog at his feet. This is usually taken to be William de Walton, who left the church money for masses to pray for his family in 1344. However, in reality there is no certainty that he is the one represented here.

The lancet windows on the north side remain from the restoration of the 1840s, replacing much wider windows. The two outer windows illustrate Old Testament prophets, whilst the central window again concentrates on angels - the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus, the angel who appeared to Jesus when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest and execution and the angels who appeared with Jesus at his ascension to heaven.

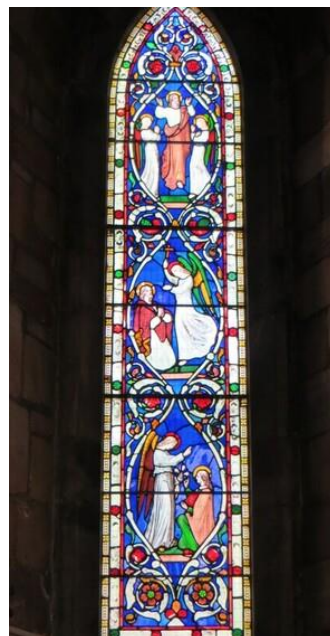




**The medieval effigy behind the choir stalls**



**Prophets**



**Angels**



**Prophets**



## THE HIGH ALTAR

At the front of the church, we come to the high altar. Until recent decades when the more mobile altar in the crossing has been used, holy communion would have been celebrated from here - and indeed it still is for early Sunday morning prayer book services. The front of the altar is, unsurprisingly, decorated with numerous angels with musical instruments and censers for incense. Behind the altar we see the reredos, with its carved figures of the four archangels. From left to right we have Raphael (with a staff and a fish), Gabriel (with a lily), Michael (with a shield and standing on the devil) and Uriel (with the solar disk).



**The High Altar**



**The Reredos**



**Raphael**



**Gabriel**



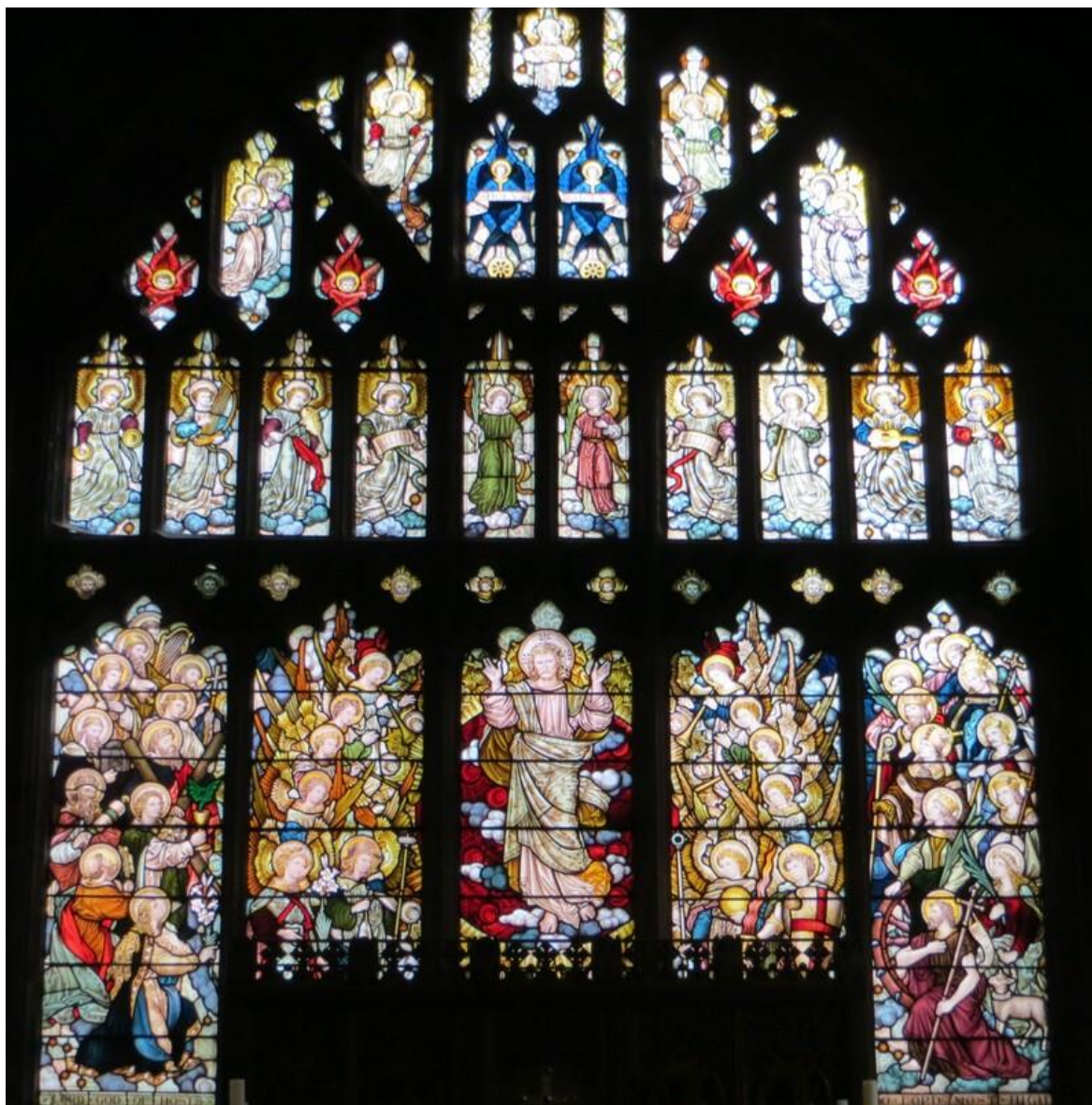
**Michael**



**Uriel**



Above the reredos is the large east window, depicting the Ascension of Jesus. The central figure of Jesus ascending to heaven is surrounded on all sides by angels. At the bottom of the lights immediately to the left and right of Jesus, partly obscured by the reredos, we again have the four archangels - Gabriel and Raphael on the left, and Uriel and Michael on the right, with the same attributes as on the reredos. Above them we have the serried ranks of angels.



**East Window**

Beyond the angels on the left we have representations of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles. On the outer column from the bottom these are St. Peter (with the keys of heaven), Ezekiel (with a scroll), Nehemiah (holding a depiction of Jerusalem that he rebuilt after the exile), Daniel (with a staff), Isaiah (with another scroll) and David (with a harp). On the inner column from the bottom these are the Virgin Mary (with a lily), St. John (with a chalice), St. Andrew (with his cross), St. Thomas and St. Philip. Beyond the angels on the right, we have representations of the saints, martyrs and church figures. On the outer column from the bottom these are St. Agnes (with a palm branch, signifying she was a martyr), St. Alban, St. George (with his flag on his shield), a bishop, a nun and a monk. On the inner column from the bottom these are the John the Baptist (with his staff), St. Catharine (with her wheel and a palm branch), St. Thomas a Becket (with a sword through his head!), St. Oswald (crowned) and St. Stephen (again with the martyr's palm branch).

In the row of smaller lights above Jesus we have angels with a variety of musical instruments. There is an intriguing mistake in the upper row of angels above the figure of Jesus, where the wording on the scrolls they are holding shows that these figures were inserted the wrong way round - which apparently occurred when they were placed back in the window after a 20th century renovation.





**Prophets and Apostles**

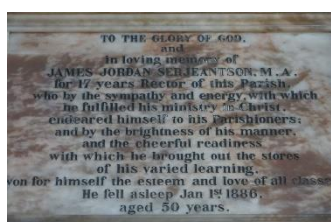


**Saints and Martyrs**

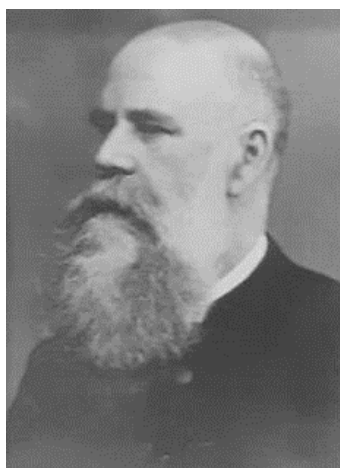


**The misplaced angels**

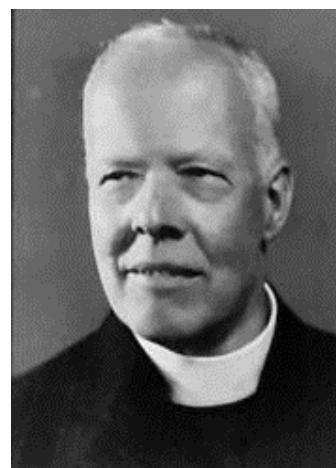
Clustered around the altar are a number of memorial plates to clergy who have served the parish in the past - James Sergeantson (Rector 1869 to 1886), Otho Steele (Rector 1893 to 1913) and Percival Howard (Rector 1913-1947). The latter also served as an army chaplain in France during the First World War.



**James  
Sergeantson**



**Otho Steele**



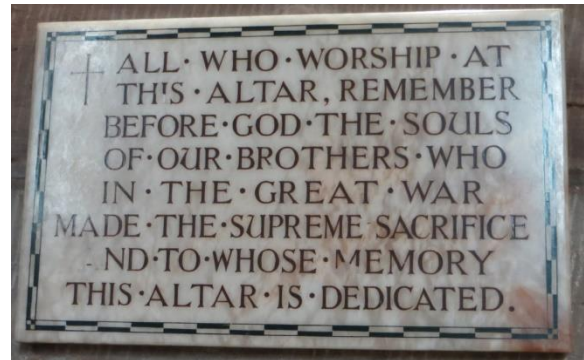
**Percival Howard**

On the left of the altar there is a memorial tablet to those of St Michael's parish who died in the First World War, together with an altar dedication. On the right there is a small brass plaque erected in 1728 commemorating Michael Lowe of Tymore, founder of the Lowe's Charity "to provide yearly 12 caps and coats for the benefit of 12 poor men, inhabitants within the City of Lichfield"

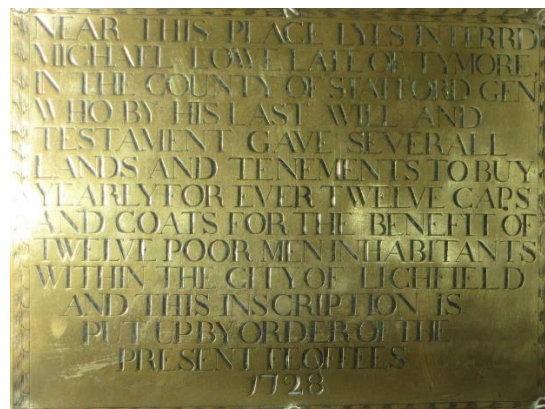




**Great War memorial**



**Altar dedication**



**Lowe memorial**

To the right of the altar there is a credence niche in the wall that is used for the communion vessels during the early morning service. This dates from the 1890s. The rather worn tiles that decorate it were found in a vault to the north of the altar that was entered by stairs beneath the altar. Presumably the heraldic devices on the tiles offer a clue as to who might have been the occupant of the tomb.



### **The credence niche**

At this point, we turn and look back down the church from the altar - the view seen by clergy and laity alike during the giving and receiving of communion.





More information on the history of the church and churchyard can be found on the author's web site at <https://profchrisbaker.com/historical-studies/st-michael-on-greenhill-lichfield-a-history-the-ebook/> . A searchable database of the memorial inscriptions and burial registers can also be found there at <https://profchrisbaker.com/historical-studies/the-churchyard-at-st-michaels-lichfield-registers-and-records/>