

ART. XVI. – *The Parish Church of St Hilda, Westward.*

By REV. F. B. SWIFT.

THIS 18th century church occupies a picturesque situation above a deep ravine on the south and overlooking the Wiza beck to the north. It is a plain, rectangular building of sandstone with a slate roof. The windows are all alike: three on the north and south sides and one at the east end, and each is a group of three lancets of equal height. At the west is a small tower with a spire surmounted by a cross. This tower makes an interesting variation in the plain style because below the rigging of the main roof it broadens out into an arch which forms a recess containing the church door. On the east gable is a stone “spear-head” finial supported by four small columns.

The church stands on the site of an earlier one erected about the middle of the 16th century for the benefit of the inhabitants of the forest or chase of Westward. How the latter, the first church of Westward, came to be built is recorded in the great survey of the possessions of Henry Percy, 8th Earl of Northumberland, made in 1578. Part of the section dealing with the chase reads (spelling modernized):

The New Kirk. There is no advowson of benefices appendant or belonging to the said chase, for that the whole grounds and compass thereof are of the parish of St Mary’s at Carlisle, distant from thence five miles at the least, in consideration whereof Thomas late earl of Northumberland (brother unto the said earl) procured the erection of a church there now called the New Kirk in Westward whereunto the whole inhabitants within the said chase have resort, and all the sacraments there ministered unto them by a curate or stipendary priest found of their own charges saving for his mansion house and certain grounds thereto adjoining, which he hath of benevolence and at the will and pleasure of the said earl as after appeareth in the Survey among the tenants at will.¹

It will be noticed that the chase was previously in the parish of St Mary’s, Carlisle, the church of which was for long in the nave of Carlisle cathedral.²

The above Thomas, “late earl”, born 1528 and executed 1572, was the 7th earl of Northumberland. Whether he built the church at his own expense or was the principal mover in the undertaking is not clear, but its foundation appears to have taken place between 1557 and 1563. In the former year Queen Mary Tudor created him Baron Percy of Cockermouth and Earl of Northumberland and restored to him part of the lands held by his uncle Henry Percy, the 6th earl, who, shortly before his death without issue in 1537, had given all his possessions, which included the forest of Westward, to the king. As the estates remained vested in the crown until Thomas’s “restoration” in 1557, it seems unlikely that he could have caused the church to be erected before the year just mentioned.³

That the church was in existence in 1563 is proved by a document of that year which gives the answers of John Best, bishop of Carlisle, to queries sent to him by the Privy Council about the state of his diocese. In the list of “Parsonages within the deanery of Carlisle” is,

Westward. The newchurch in the forest of the Westward annexed to the foresaid St Maries of Carlill. One curate. Howseholders within the same 66:⁴

The fact that this statement occurs under "Parsonages" indicates that the new church was not a chapel of ease in St Mary's parish but had full parochial rights. What exactly is implied by "annexed to St Maries" is uncertain.

Thomas Denton, Hutchinson⁵ and others are mistaken in attributing the foundation of the church to the monks of Holm Cultram, whose monastery in any case had been dissolved before the church was built.

The style "new kirk" did not remain long in general use though it occurs occasionally in the next two hundred years. For instance, it is on the brass in the west wall which commemorates the gift of land by Mrs Frances Barwis in 1657 for the benefit of the poor.

The Dedication to St Hilda

It would appear that the church was not given this dedication when built for in nine Westward wills proved 1564-1576⁶ some of the testators describe themselves as "of the parish of the new church of the Blessed Trinity within the Westward", and each of the nine directs his or her body to be buried "within the new churchyard of the Blessed Trinity" there. Of the wills inspected from 1576 to 1612, however, none mentions this or any other dedication.

Unless a mistake was made in the 1564-1576 wills, which seems unlikely, the name of St Hilda (614-680), the famous abbess of Whitby, was assumed later. It is not surprising that this happened because it must have been held in memory locally for a long time as it is enshrined in the name of nearby Islekirk – St Hilda's Kirk. In 1215 King John granted the hermitage of St Hilda, which Roger Goki late hermit held, to Holm Cultram Abbey and the monks established a grange there. In 1374 it was reported that though land had been given to find a chaplain to celebrate at Hildkirk chapel none had ever done so and the said chantry "was altogether withdrawn and brought to nought".⁷ The chapel does not appear to have been revived, and from the 15th century to the end of the 17th the grange (Islekirk Hall) was the seat of the prominent Barwis family. The church possesses a "steeple chalice" bequeathed by one of them in 1670. (See Appendix A).

The earliest curate of Westward so far discovered was Robert Stoddart whose name occurs in the diocesan records, 1571-1576.⁸

Bishop Nicolson's Visitation

The bishop visited the church on 18 June 1703 and in his notes says that he was glad to find Mr Holme, the curate, surrounded with so good a number of scholars "though I could have wish'd to have seen them elsewhere than in the chancel, and spoiling Mr Barwis's monument (at the west-end of the church) with writing their copies upon it. The lads gave a good account in Horace, Virgil, etc.". He continues with a description of the church interior:

The Quire-part is onely separated within, and indecently crowded with Seats; insomuch that there's no coming at the North Side of the Altar, in observance of the Rubrick. The Reading-Desk and Font exceedingly out of order. On the Cross Beam, under the pair of principals which is next to the Communion Table, is a plate of Brass fixed with the following inscription.

“Frances Barwis (she was Relict of the Great Barwis, who dy’d in 1648 without Issue) gives to the poor for ever a parcel of Ground Lieing in Wigton called Stanke Banck which is now let for XXXXs. in the Year; whereof XXs. to be given yearly to the poor of Westward, the 21st day of December, and Xs. more the 25th. of March and X the same day to the Poor of Wigton-Town. The same to be given at New-Kirk. Feoffees in Trust The heir of Ile-Kirk. The Minr. of New-Kirk. Successively John Watson of Stone-Raise. Mungo Dalton of Swinestey. And their Heirs. The first lease began the 6th of August 1657. P.M. sculpsit.”

The bishop noted that “the Church (Quire-part and all)” was repaired at the general expense, Mr Grainger’s new erected pew though complained of “was decent and substantial” and the inscription on Mrs Barwis’s tomb at the west end was defaced and her husband’s much damaged. He concludes by giving the last mentioned inscription in full. (See Appendix B.) (*All the brackets in the above extracts are the bishop’s own.*)⁹

The next prominent person to make notes on the church was the Rev. John Waugh in his capacity as chancellor of the diocese 1727-1747. He describes it as “in very good repair, new seated and ornamented, but still crowded about the alter (*sic*)”. The value of the benefice was £30, and in 1747 there were 155 families in the parish.¹⁰

In spite of Waugh’s favourable comments the church had to be rebuilt towards the end of the century.

The Rebuilding

Faced with this expense, the parishioners petitioned the justices at the Penrith sessions, 9 October 1771, for a brief to raise some of the money. The petition describes the parish church as greatly decayed and in such a ruinous condition that it must be wholly taken down and rebuilt. The cost was estimated at £1,068. 7s. 2d., exclusive of the old materials.¹¹

The churchwardens’ account books contain only two sets of minutes dealing with the rebuilding, the first being for a vestry meeting held in church 3 January 1782, when it was noted that the brief had raised £81, and that as this was not nearly enough the house and land-owners had appealed to the earl of Egremont (lord of the manor) and Sir Philip Musgrave for financial help. Henry Fletcher, esq. (of Clea Hall) had promised that if the parishioners raised the amount of 100 purveys he would give the balance needed to complete the work. It was resolved that the churchwardens and overseers should collect the purveys. Slow progress was made in carrying this out and it was not until 1785 that a vestry meeting in September decided that the church be rebuilt in the churchyard and the parish assist in leading the principal materials needed.¹² Apparently with all the money in hand, the church was rebuilt on the site of the old one in 1785-6. The exterior has not been altered since then.

It would be at this rebuilding that part of the table-shaped monument of Richard Barwis of Islekirk (d. 13 February 1648), mentioned by Bishop Nicolson as at the west end, and evidently by now very dilapidated, was fortunately saved by being inserted in the west wall inside the church. It consists of two squares or frames having dog-toothed moulding. One holds the well preserved brass of Richard’s epitaph and coat of arms. (See Appendix B.) The bishop was mistaken in saying this brass was much damaged, but

correct in describing that commemorating Frances, Richard's wife, as defaced. The other frame holds the brass recording her gift to the poor which in the former church was fixed to a beam near the east end. (*See earlier in this article for the inscription.*)

Renovation and Restoration

By the 1870s it was felt that considerable improvement in the interior arrangements was necessary. The church had a west gallery, in which were a barrel organ and choir seats, a plaster ceiling, three-decker pulpit and narrow box pews each of which had two long seats on which people sat facing each other, making kneeling almost impossible.¹³ A faculty having been granted, 19 April 1877,¹⁴ the gallery was removed, a screen erected a few feet from the west end to make a vestibule, the ceiling was replaced by one of carved wood and a new altar provided. The pulpit, vicar's stall, font, choir pews and the open oak pews in the nave all date from this time. The windows were reglazed, the doors and stove renewed and general repairs to the structure carried out. The total cost was about £760 raised by voluntary contributions. The work was undertaken in 1877-8 and on completion the vicar, the Rev. Robert Wood, reported to the bishop ". . . we may fairly say that we have now a well-fitted and respectable Parish Church . . . the sittings to be all free".¹⁵

Minor restoration work, including the provision of hassocks and chancel lamps, was carried out 1896-7. Alterations and improvements in the present century include: new altar and low reredos 1935; electric lighting 1958 and electric heating 1964. In 1966 a two manual reed organ with electric blower was placed at the west end and the harmonium which had stood south of the altar since the 1877 restoration was removed.¹⁶

Like its predecessor, the church outwardly has no division of nave and chancel but the internal arrangements mark the difference.

Miscellaneous

THE BELL. The inventories for 1749 and 1777 list "two small bells". Apparently at the 1785-6 rebuilding they were disposed of and replaced by a new one, still in the tower, which the late Mr B. L. Thompson says is by T. Mears and dates about 1785.¹⁷

SUNDIALS. Not far from the west door is a pedestal sundial on which is a much weathered inscription which appears to read: "Watch and Pray /Time Hastes Away/ Lat: 54: 50/ 1776". Leaning against the pedestal is another dial which is not dated and has lost its gnomon. In the churchwardens' accounts under 1772-3 is "John Crosthwaite stone for a dial 3s".¹⁸

CHURCHYARD. On 31 October 1901 the bishop of Carlisle consecrated one rood and 5 perches which were added that year to the north and west sides.¹⁹ The main gates are a memorial to the fallen in the two world wars.

PARISH REGISTERS. They begin in 1605 and, except those in current use, are now at the County Record Office, Carlisle.

Appendix A

Mrs Frances Barwis, widow of Richard Barwis of Islekirk, in her will dated 12 March 1669, proved 2 April 1670 (Carlisle R.O.), says "I give and bequeath to the parish and church of Westward a gilt cup with a cover for ever for the use and service of the Lord's

Supper". There is no doubt that this is the "steeple chalice" belonging to the church. The book on old Church plate in this diocese describes the chalice as being of silver gilt repoussé work with a baluster stem (with flying supports), rising from a foot decorated in the upper part by acanthus leaves. There are four marks: (1) B B, maker's mark; (2) Leopard's head crowned; (3) Lion passant; (4) Small italic s, London date letter 1635-6.

A supplement to the above book says that the cover is also of silver gilt repoussé work; that it is domed shaped and surmounted by a triangular steeple carried by three flying supports which terminate in the heads of animals; and that it is "an elegant specimen of the steeple covers of the early 17th century". There are three marks: (1) Lion passant; (2) v, though not very clear, probably the London date letter for 1637; (3) not legible.²⁰

Appendix B

The epitaph on the brass in memory of Richard Barwis reads:

A MEMORATIVE EPITAPH FOR THE EXCELLENTLY/ACCOMPLISHT GENTLEMAN RICHARD BARWISE/ LATE OF ILEKIRK ESQ: HE DYED THE 13TH OF FEBR./1648 IN THE 47TH YEARE OF HIS AGE.
BELOWE GOOD BARWISE, CLOS'D IN BODY LYES
WHOSE SAINTLY SOULE, IOYES CROWN'D ABOVE YE SKYES
CYTIES WISE GUIDE COUNTRIES CHEIFE ORNAMENT
IN GRACE AND NATUR'S GIFTS, MOST EMINENT
GRAVE PRUDENT, PIOUS STOR'D WITH VERTUES BEST
EXCHANGINGE LIFE FOR DEATH BY DEATH LIVES BLEST
OF WHOME TIS SAYD NONE HERE LIVED MORE APPROVED
NONE DYED MORE MIST, NONE MIST WAS MORE BELOVED
WHOSE VERTUOUS WIFE IN SABLE THOUGHTS DOTHE MOURNE
HER TURTLES LOSS, TILL LAYD NEERE TO HIS URNE.

Oh pittye great soe choyse a Couple should
without Grand issue be reduced to mould,
Nor can they well while here they leave a name
shall them survive till they revive againe.

DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.
VIVIT POST FUNERA VIRTUS.

Below this is the coat of arms of Barwis impaling Musgrave (Richard's wife was Frances Musgrave of Hayton Castle) to the left of which is a symbolic figure of Truth seated holding a palm branch in the left hand and from whose mouth issue the words: TRYE'D HONORD LOVED THUS FROM THIS WORLD HE'S GONE. On the other side is similar symbolical figure with the word "Fame" and holding a palm branch in the right hand from whose mouth issue the words: WHERE HE LEFT SCARCE SOE IUST WISE GOOD A ONE.

It will be noticed that Bishop Nicolson calls Richard "Great Barwis". This was because of his remarkable strength.

The family always spelt its name "Barwis" or "Barwys" but sometimes other people added an "e" to it as in the above epitaph.²¹

Notes and References

- ¹ Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle (C.R.O.), D/Lec/301; Whellan 264.
- ² Nicolson & Burn (ii, 139) mention a dispute over tithes in the reign of Edward I.
- ³ Henry Percy, the 6th earl, had transferred his possessions to the king because he feared they might be confiscated when his brother, Sir Thomas Percy, was attainted in 1537. He thought that by taking this action the estates might ultimately be restored to his heir, as indeed they were in 1557. See Edward Barrington de Fonblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy from the Conquest to the Opening of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Richard Clay & Sons, Bread Street Hill. For Private Circulation only 1887), vols i & ii.
- ⁴ C.R.O., Kendal, TL1030.
- ⁵ C.R.O., Carlisle, D/Lons/L/Thomas Denton MS. History 1687/88; Hutchinson, ii, 398.
- ⁶ C.R.O., Carlisle. The wills with year of probate are: Annas Gaytt 1564; Thomas Harrison 1565; Thomas Key 1569; Janet Chaliver 1570; John Myrus 1571; Guy Bryscoe 1572; John Barras 1574; Mabel Martindale 1574; and Annas Brysco 1576, all of Westward. No dedication is mentioned in John Ecton's *Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum* (London, 1742) and John Bacon's *Liber Regis vel Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum* (London, 1786).
- ⁷ F. Grainger and W. G. Collingwood, *The Register and Records of Holm Cultram* (Kendal, 1929), 76, 144f.
- ⁸ C.R.O., Carlisle, DRC/3/1.
- ⁹ *Miscellany*, 5-7.
- ¹⁰ C.R.O., Carlisle, D/MH.
- ¹¹ C.R.O., Carlisle, Quarter Sessions Petition, Michaelmas 1771, no. 24. The petition is signed by John Pape, minister, Thomas Rook, Michael Dand and John Bouch, churchwardens and some of the inhabitants including Henry Fletcher (of Clea Hall), Thomas Grainger, Joseph Jefferson and Joshua Lucock.
- ¹² C.R.O., Carlisle, PR/56/17.
- ¹³ The late Sir William H. Bragg was born at Stoneraise Place, Westward, and lived there until he was seven. Mrs G. M. Caroe in her book *William Henry Bragg 1862-1942 Man and Scientist* (C.U.P 1978) includes some of his memories of Westward church before the alterations of 1877. His mother was Mary, daughter of the Rev. Robert Wood, vicar of Westward 1824-1884.
- ¹⁴ C.R.O., Carlisle.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, DX/48/1. The previous small font is now outside near the church door.
- ¹⁶ Carlisle Diocesan Registry: Consistory Court Books 3-4.
- ¹⁷ CW2, lxxiv, 94.
- ¹⁸ See no. 12.
- ¹⁹ Carlisle Diocesan Registry.
- ²⁰ R. S. Ferguson (ed.), *Old Church Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle* (Thurnam & Sons, Carlisle 1882), 66, illustration 59. Mrs H. Ware, *A Supplement to Old Church Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle* (Thurnam & Sons, Carlisle 1908), 13, photographs after 62. The steeple chalice is kept in a bank for security reasons and therefore is seldom seen.
- ²¹ For a photograph of the brass see CW1, xiii, 150, plate xii. For the Islekirk Barwises see CW2, l, 135; li, 117 and lv, 328f.
- For the early part of the parish registers and other items of interest see CW1, xiii, 103-117: *Early Registers of the Parish of Westward* by the late Rev. James Wilson. The Book of Frances Barwise's Legacy mentioned on p. 104 is now missing.