

The Reverend John Harwood Hill, F.S.A.

Gerald T. Rimmington

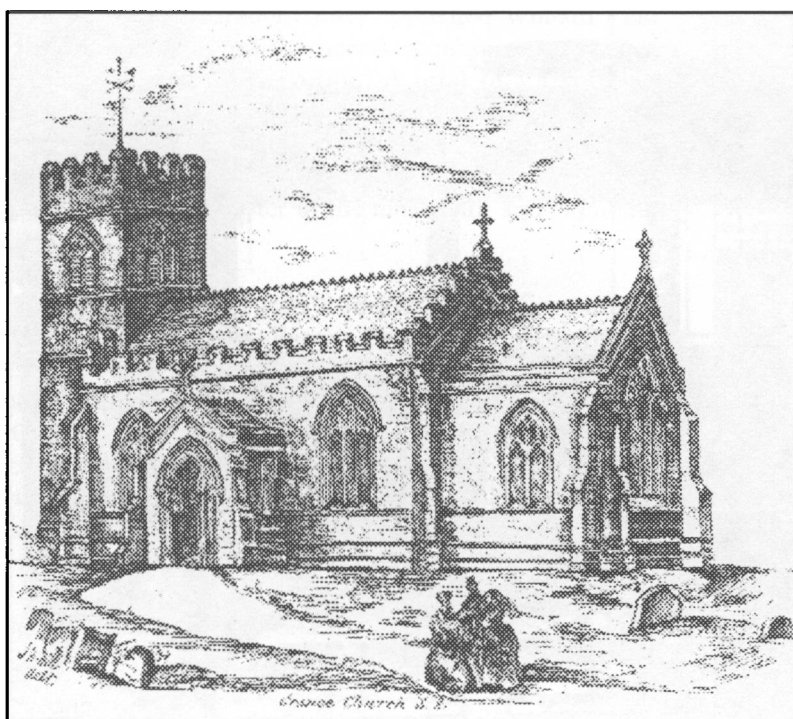
Despite the fact that he merited inclusion in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and was one of the greatest contributors to the activities of the newly formed Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society (now the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society), the Reverend John Harwood Hill was not mentioned in the anonymous essay written and published to mark the centenary of the Society.¹ There were several possible reasons for this strange omission. In the first place, Hill was not a founder member. The Society was formed at a meeting on 10th January 1855;² Hill was not elected to membership until 30th June 1856.³ Moreover, the Society was inaugurated mainly to promote the 'study of ecclesiastical architecture', the chief impulse being 'the study of Gothic architecture that is associated with the Oxford Movement'.⁴ Because of this, T. K. Bonney, the archdeacon of Leicester, was the initial chairman, and the Society's leadership was mainly from the ranks of the gentry and the clergy. All the rural deans were elected to the committee *ex-officio*, and they 'dominated and inspired the greater part of the work that the Society undertook'.⁵ As a relative newcomer who was not known to be associated with Tractarianism and who was low in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Hill took some time to establish himself within the Society. However, he was elected to the committee two years after becoming a member, and was to be one of the most important contributors to the development of the Society.

Born in Louth, Lincolnshire, in 1809, Hill was the son of Robert Hill of Lincoln and Leamington. Robert, who

was presumably a substantial landowner, was wealthy enough to send his son to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, where he matriculated in 1830 and graduated in 1834. Subsequently he was ordained deacon in the diocese of Carlisle and, a year later, priest in the diocese of Peterborough. For a short time in 1835 he was curate at Corby, but was soon lured to nearby Deene Hall, where he became the Librarian to the Earl of Cardigan for two years, an experience that must have whetted his appetite for the study of antiquaries, at which he excelled.

In 1837 the living at Cranoe became vacant, and since Lord Cardigan was lord of the manor, owner of all the land in the village and patron of the living, Hill was preferred as the rector. He was to remain at Cranoe for the rest of his life. Situated 'on a gentle slope on the north side of the Vale of the Welland' the village was, if not idyllic, certainly very pleasant.⁶ By 1841 Hill was also vicar of Welham, on the north bank of the river Welham, whose patron was the Lord Chancellor.⁷ Across the vale, as Norman Pye says, there were 'the good fattening pastures of south-east Leicestershire; the combination of little arable land, extensive areas of grassland', the result of de-population in the later middle-ages, which had produced 'a quality of emptiness that is sensed in parts of east Leicestershire'.⁸

Both of Hill's parishes were very small. There were less than 250 people altogether. Moreover, the numbers continued to diminish throughout his ministry. Cranoe had 137 people in 1841, but only 121 in 1871. Welham similarly had 121 in 1841, but only 73 in 1871.⁹ Consequently, few ecclesiastical changes, apart from the reconstruction of church buildings occurred. At Cranoe evensong was held at 6.30 p.m., while matins was read at 11 a.m. or 2.30 p.m. on alternate Sundays at each church. By 1883 all the town churches and many of the village churches in Leicestershire held eucharistic services at least monthly or even weekly, but at Cranoe and Welham, Hill, the non-Tractarian incumbent, continued to celebrate only quarterly, as his predecessors had done in the eighteenth century.¹⁰



On the other hand, until the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression, Hill's parishes were fairly prosperous livings. Cranoe was valued at £181 in 1831; by 1877 the clerical income had risen to £300. Similarly Welham, which had clerical income in 1831 of £98, was

Hill's illustration of Cranoe Church.

worth £240 in 1877. The average income of Leicestershire clergy in 1877 was £370, with a median income of £300, so that Hill was among the 43 per cent of clergy with incomes between £300 and £599.¹¹

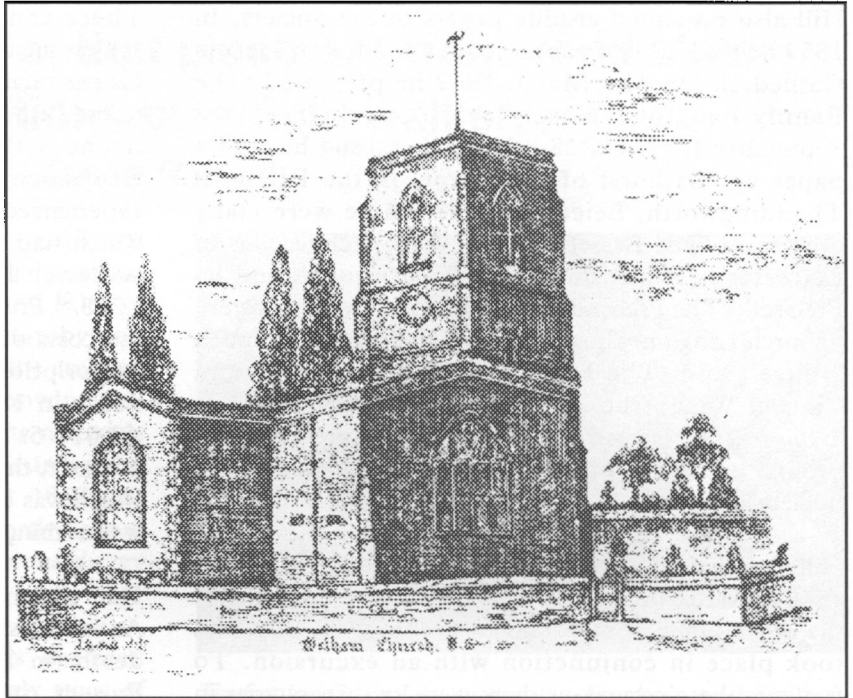
This left Hill with little clerical work and a reasonable income, although he had to spend a considerable sum in rebuilding the rectory in 1838, to house his growing family.¹² There were two children by that time. By 1851 there were seven offspring, and he and his wife employed three live-in servants.¹³

From time to time the church buildings gave cause for concern. There was a thunder storm that caused the Cranoe church to collapse, and Hill had to spend much time and energy in ensuring that it was rebuilt in 1849.¹⁴ Three of the stained glass windows were made by his artist son, Frederick.¹⁵ Restoration work at Welham also demanded his attention.¹⁶ In addition, he planned and supervised the rebuilding in brick of the church at Tur Langton.

There was, however, much time left over to spend on his antiquarian hobby, which Hill pursued with much vigour and skill. While at Deene Hall he had compiled a 'black-letter' catalogue of the library 'with pen-and-ink etchings of his own'. Thereafter most of his writings were illustrated with his own skilfully executed etchings.

At the time of Hill's election to the infant Society he was engaged in the preparation of a two-volume publication, *The Chronicle of the Christian Ages*. Dedicated to Charles Noel, Earl of Gainsborough, who headed an impressive list of subscribers, it was published at Uppingham in 1859. It consisted of a 'record of events – ecclesiastical, civil and military, comprehending every remarkable occurrence from the year 1 to the end of the year 1858, with tables of contemporary sovereigns, lists of the Prelates of the Church of England, men of learning, genius, statesmen, warriors, etc'.¹⁷ It gave the kind of information that would be available in later publications like Whittaker's *Almanac*, and must have taken several years of painstaking work for one man to produce. It certainly underlined his growing authority within the Society.

Subsequently, Hill produced several publications remarkable for their depth of information and the quality of the etchings. There was the *History of Langton, Family of Langton, Archdeacons of Leicester, Bishops of Peterborough* and the *History of Market Harborough*. The latter, which appeared in 1875, was dedicated to the Duke of Rutland, who appeared as one of a list of subscribers headed by Queen Victoria. Also including the history of several parishes in the Gartree



Hill's illustration of Welham Church.

Hundred, the work was a detailed account of 'the lords of the Manor and their Pedigrees, and a list of the Patrons and Rectors of each living'.¹⁸ It had taken many years to produce; according to Hill this was 'partly owing to the time required in making the etchings done by myself, partly for want of a sufficient number of subscribers'.

Within the Society Hill was clearly a 'livewire', helping to determine the nature of the organisation as it proceeded in its early years. As we have seen, he was not unusual in being a clergy member. A list of the committee in 1863 shows that besides the rural deans, there were five other clergymen among the membership. He was, however, the most energetic. Early meetings of the Society were in part devoted to the exhibiting of artefacts. During 1859 Hill exhibited some Roman coins which had been found near the manor house at Medbourne. At the next meeting he produced 'a very large shoeing horn, said to have been that of the Abbot of Glastonbury'. At the end of the year he presented extracts from the diary of Humphrey Michell, who had been rector of Blaston St. Giles between 1707 and 1711. This was followed up on 27 February 1860 by his exhibition of 'a pedigree Of Sir William Burton, of Stockerston, which had been drawn up by Humphrey Michell, one of his descendants'. Later in the same year he exhibited rubbings of a brass effigy of Sir John Wantyng of Wimbush. At yet another meeting he 'laid upon the table a quantity of rude masses of baked clay, which he supposed to be Roman handbricks'. Exhibitions like these continued long after Hill's death and were an important feature of the bi-monthly meetings of the Society.

Hill also presented erudite papers to the Society. In 1859 he read his first paper, about a window in Lincoln Cathedral. On 31st March 1862 he presented 'The Family Langton. 'Nosely' was the subject on 28 September 1863. On 28th November 1864 he read a paper on 'Bathurst of Holthorpe, in the Parish of Theddingworth, Leicestershire'. There were many others, on 'The Bassett Family', 'The Archdeacons of Leicester', 'The Bishopric of Peterborough and its Prelates', 'The Prebendaries of St. Margaret, Leicester', 'Church Langton Church and its Founders', 'Campden House', and 'The Halfords of Welham'. He and Vincent Wing, who had twelve papers published in *Transactions* between 1856 and 1872, were the most prolific presenters of papers in the early years of the Society's existence.¹⁹

Hill also chaired many of the bi-monthly meetings from 1860 onward. In addition he was largely responsible for the organisation of the summer meetings, which always took place in conjunction with an excursion. To facilitate these excursions there were local secretaries in key areas of the county, Hill himself being local secretary for the Market Harborough area. On 26th September 1861 Hill chaired a meeting in Lutterworth. The following morning there was an excursion to various churches in the area. The report in *Transactions* notes that 'two coaches, with four horses in each, and several other vehicles were at the door of the Denbigh Arms Hotel, to convey the members and their friends to various places'. It is noteworthy that, whereas the earliest meetings had a variety of chairmen, once Hill had begun serving as a chairman the task was regularly exercised by him. Perhaps this was a recognition of his skill and enthusiasm.

Despite all his activities Hill was very much a family man. At the 1851 census, he and Maria Ann, then aged 36 years, had five sons and two daughters, ranging in age from sixteen to two years. At least one of the sons died at a very early age. Albert Edward Hill, aged four years in 1851, had a stained-glass window installed in his memory in 1870 at the church in Welham.

Just as Hill was preparing his *History of Market Harborough* for publication he was hit by two family deaths. In the preface he refers to the 'irreparable loss, which I sustained when the first sheets of this Book went to press, which doubly increased last month by the sudden death of a talented son, who fell a victim to erysipelas, whilst carrying out his arduous duties in the Hospitals'. Maria Ann, his wife, died in October 1874, aged 59 years. His son, John Daniel Hill, M.D., F.R.C.S., staff surgeon to the Royal Free and the Royal Orthopaedic Hospitals and honorary surgeon to the 1st Middlesex Artillery Regiment, died, aged 37 years, on 14th April 1875.²⁰ Hill was consoled, however, by the fact that another of his sons, Frederick Roberts Hill, had been elected to membership of the Society on 25 May 1863 at the age of 21 years.

There can be little doubt that Hill's antiquarian achievements were gained at some cost to his career and his personal finances. Apart from becoming a Surrogate to the Bishop of Peterborough for the issue of marriage licences there was no other Church of England recognition or preferment. Near the end of his life he experienced the early years of agricultural depression, which had begun to reduce his income. By 1899 his successor at Cranoe was receiving an income of only £218.²¹ Probably the bringing up of his family as well as the costs of his publications that were not covered by subscription, reduced his capital. By the time of his death in 1886 his personal estate was stated to be £3,016 5s 7d gross. When his debts had been paid, however, this had been reduced to £1,833 3s 10d, all of which was bequeathed to his second wife, Sarah. There was nothing left over to give to his children.

Hill, who had been elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1871, was described after his death (in *Transactions*) as 'a frequent contributor of Papers on all kinds of subjects, bringing great archaeological knowledge and minute and unflinching patience to his antiquarian researches. His illustrated books will long remain an authority on the churches he has portrayed and described'. A fitting epitaph indeed.

- 1 *The Leicestershire Archaeological Society 1855-1955* (1955).
- 2 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 3 Much of the information about Hill comes from early copies of *Transactions of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society* and J. A. Venn (ed.), *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, Part II, Vol III (1947), 317.
- 4 *Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, 3-5.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 6 *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (1899), 64.
- 7 N. Pye (ed.), *Leicestershire and its Region* (1972), 10.
- 8 *White's Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (1846), 496, 528; *White's Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (1877), 197, 630.
- 9 *Wright's Directory of Leicester* (1883-4), 337-8.
- 10 *White's Directory* (1846), *passim*; *White's Directory* (1877), *passim*.
- 11 G. T. Rimmington, 'Late Victorian clergy income: the Leicestershire Evidence', *East Midland Historian*, 9 (1999), 13.
- 12 *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXVI, 401-2.
- 13 Census Returns, 1851.
- 14 *Dictionary of National Biography*, *passim*.
- 15 *Kelly's Directory* (1899), *passim*.
- 16 *Dictionary of National Biography*, *passim*.
- 17 J. H. Hill, *Chronicle of the Christian Ages* (1859).
- 18 *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, *passim*; J. H. Hill, *The History of Market Harborough* (1875).
- 19 *Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, 7.
- 20 Hill, *History of Market Harborough*, preface.
- 21 *Kelly's Directory* (1899), 64.