

All Saints Church, Northampton

14 July

We were greeted by Father David McConkey at the main church of Northampton, who soon found our enthusiasm for his magnificent church rather taking over! Apart from the west tower and crypt, the medieval church was rebuilt on a somewhat smaller scale after much of the town was burnt down in 1675. The committee set up to oversee the planning entrusted the centre of the town, including All Saints, to Henry Bell from Kings Lynn, and there are strong parallels with that town.

The ground plan of the church is a Greek cross and there seems to be inspiration from Wren's St Mary-at-Hill in London, as well as excellent plasterwork by Edward Gouge who worked for Wren. We also saw some fine late 17th century woodwork, although the reredos was altered in the 1880s and the pulpit cut down from an imposing three-decker and given a rather awkward base in 1866.

The slender openwork oak baluster altar rails are particularly good, as is the mayor's seat, also of 1680, if a little over-enthusiastically gilded. The judge's chair, royal arms, seats and table from the consistory court, now in the north aisle, are an interesting survival, and could well be by the same maker as the high altar table. Of 18th century work, there is a fine gilded rococo cartel clock (c.1760) on the front of the west gallery.

78 Derngate

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Apart from the involvement of a Scottish architect, 78 Derngate would seem to have little to do with the vernacular. Nevertheless the trust that now runs the house showed us a fascinating gem. Quite late in life, while living in London, Charles Rennie Mackintosh was approached by the wealthy model maker, W.J. Bassett-Lowke, to modernise this unassuming and compact early 19th century four-storey terraced house in a unique way. In 1916 some £6500 was spent on the house which had cost just £250 to buy. Its recent restoration after later changes has been made possible by Bassett-Lowke's keen photographic skills in recording the interiors. Because of its size and ancillary requirements, the trust has taken over three properties to do so.

It is not known whether Mackintosh ever actually visited the house, but clearly Bassett-Lowke contributed considerably to the designs himself, including the walnut oval dining table and circular marble-topped table in the dining room. Much of the furniture was made by German prisoners of war on the Isle of Man, an exception being

that of the main bedroom (one piece in situ) which is probably Heal's. The house is full of amazing futuristic features and ingenious devices, with much of the important Mackintosh furnishings reproduced from originals now at the V&A and British Museum.

Mackintosh also designed a nearby country 'cottage' for the Bassett-Lowkes and then a larger house for them in Northampton when wartime restrictions passed in the 1920s.

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