

St Martin's Church Brampton

After a very busy, somewhat pluvius day RFS members piled into the Brampton Parish Church. The unusual ground plan and the contrasting angular boarded ceilings were immediately noticeable but the real highlight was the well-known set of Pre-Raphaelite windows.

This Church represents Philip Webb's only venture into church design. A local reformer Henry Whitehead wanted a church that was attractive and welcoming to ordinary people, and above all offered open access to all with no pew rents.

Webb met the brief by providing a simple square church with clergy stalls in the centre and a chancel area without a chancel arch or screen – no separate area for the ordained. The low benches make the church feel open. It is all rather reminiscent of a 'democratic' 18th-century church layout, not without some limited similarities to St Mary the Virgin, Whitby. The stonework, however, looks back to the period of late Romanesque heading into Early Gothic, but

is blended with local vernacular Border architecture with its heavy extended roofs.

The particular period of 'original' Gothic was the one that was strongly advocated by Webb's mentor G. E. Street, and was also preferred by Burges. Interestingly Street also had strong views about churches being open to all and free of pew rent. These social and architectural priorities are of course typical of the Pre-Raphaelite/Arts & Crafts movements, of which Street, Burges and Webb were all adherents.

Webb, however, differed from his colleagues in that he believed building design should not slavishly follow the style of one particular era and should be practical; in this he shows a leaning to Arts & Crafts rather than academic Gothicism. Brampton is therefore best seen as an Arts & Crafts church.

The church has aisles on each side of the nave but with completely different roof designs. The north aisle consists of wooden vaults/gables of which the apexes and supporting beams are at right angles to the nave (the beams



Fig. 13 South aisle looking towards to altar (Photo Jeremy Rycroft)

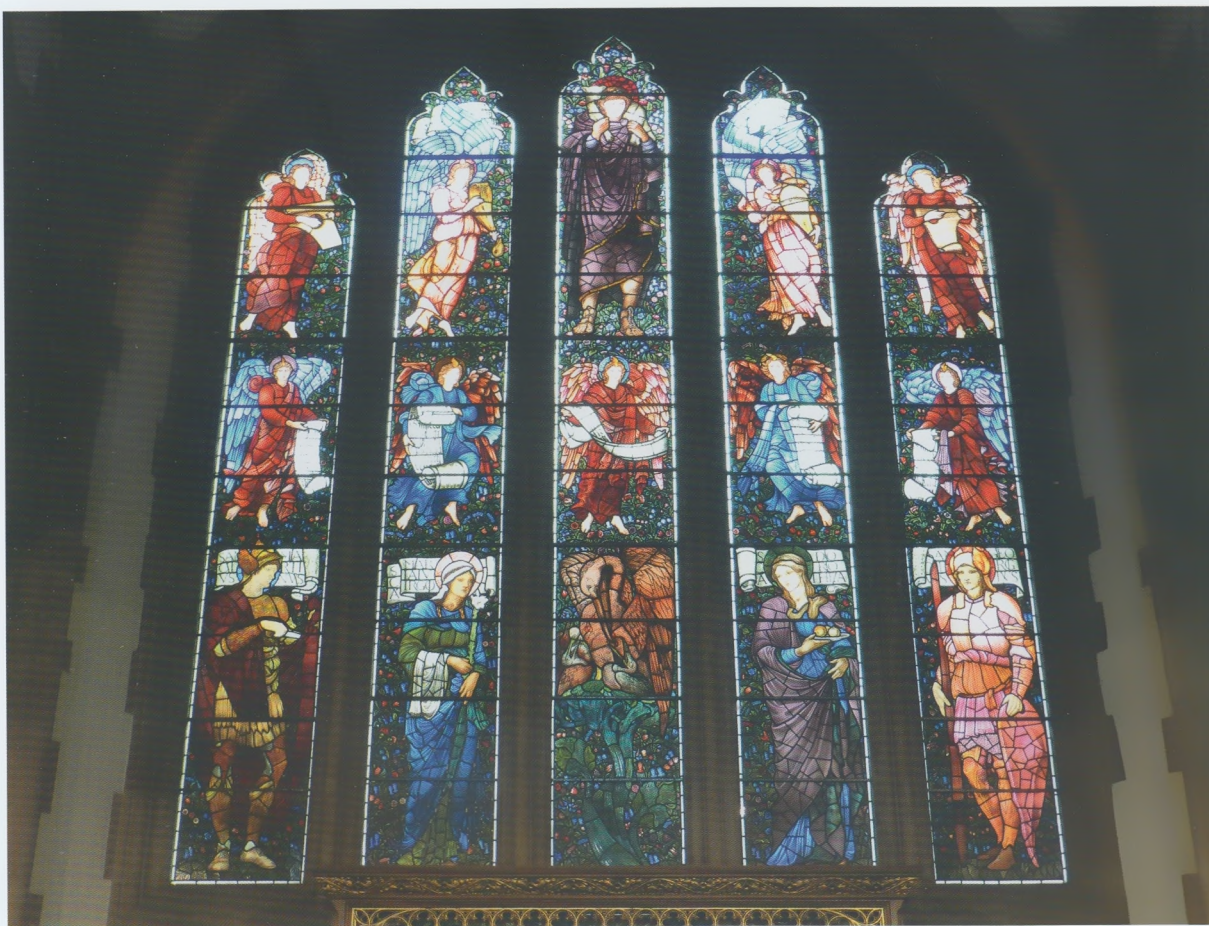


Fig. 14 The Burne-Jones designed, Morris & Co. manufactured east window (Photo Jeremy Rycroft)

connecting to the columns of the north arcade). The nave has a continuous longitudinal vault drawing the eye to the East Window. The south aisle is curious (Fig. 13). Beams run between the south wall and the south arcade as on the north side, but are separate from the main ceiling construction; this aisle's sloping roof is ceiled by a top and upper middle section that are flat and sloping respectively, running east west between the aisle windows; below this runs what can best be described as a continuous blind gallery – a continuous vertical section supported by a continuous curved bracket-like section.

These wooden plank ceilings are more village hall or even servant's hall, than grand Victorian Gothic church. They hopefully made the local population feel at home.

The highlight remains the Pre-Raphaelite windows designed by Burne-Jones and manufactured by Morris's workshops (Fig. 14). The stonework of the windows is generally in the form of two cusped lancets with elements of bar tracery. The scenes cover a small but excellent Adam

and Eve; patriarchs and prophets; St John the Evangelist; the Annunciation; Faith, Charity and Hope; and other biblical scenes.

The East window, consisting of five lancets, portrays Christ surrounded by angels above five figures: to the left St Martin and the Virgin Mary, to the right St Dorothy and St George; and in the centre a very beautiful 'Pelican in her Piety' for which the drawing was done by Webb himself. The flowing design and the range of reds and blues, pinks and purples make a huge impact, though a pink armed St George is a little unusual but not unwelcome.

Hidden away upstairs was a mid-19th-century wood carving apparently copying an earlier portrayal of St Martin, the patron saint of the church. It was probably carved in the Alps and possibly brought back from a European tour. It deserves a little more love and a more prominent position.

Jeremy Rycroft