

## THE NORRIS CHAPEL AT CHILDWALL

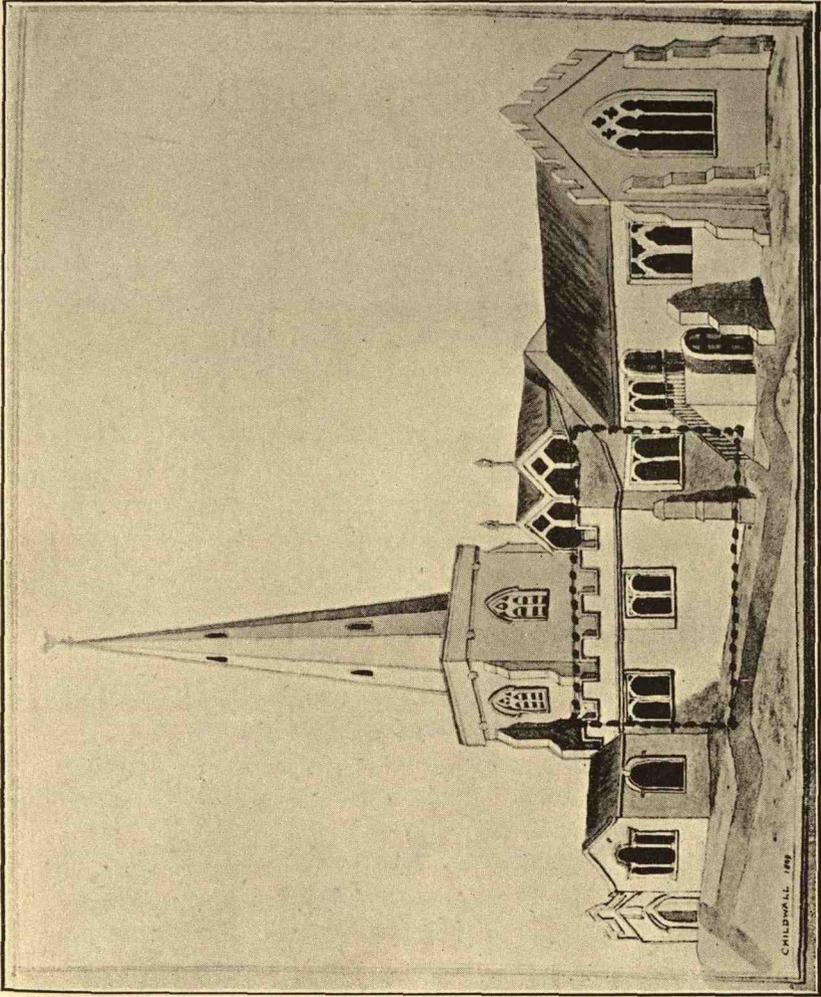
*By Charles R. Hand*

Read 1st February 1917

---

IT was recently my good fortune to acquire several relics of George Nicholson, the noted artist, including three of his sketch-books and three finished pencil drawings. The first book comprises drawings of the walls of Chester, Pulford Church, and other places, two being dated in 1820 and a third in 1821; the second book contains views in Liverpool and district and North Wales, the delicacy of the pencil work being remarkable; the third book is all that was accomplished of a projected series of illustrations for Byron's poems—six finished pen and ink pictures, and two unfinished ones. The pencil drawings are a view of "Bromborough Creek from New Ferry, Oct. 15th, '35" (size 11 in. by 7 in.); and others of "Vale Crucis" and "Dee" (each  $9\frac{1}{4}$  in. by  $6\frac{1}{4}$  in.).

The second book contains the drawing of the interior of the south aisle or Norris Chapel in Childwall Church, dated 6th April 1825, reproduced at p. 66. The view of the exterior of the church from the south-east, dated 1809, is photographed from an unsigned drawing in the Binns Collection in the Liverpool Free Library, vol. xii. p. 13, and has not before been published. These are apparently the earliest known views extant of the outside and inside of this part of the church.



SOUTH-EAST VIEW OF CHILDWALL CHURCH IN 1809

The dotted lines indicate the position of the Norris Chapel

There is no known record of the building of this chapel, but it is referred to on 12th December 1484, when "Thomas Norris of Speke, 'to the pleasure of God, encesse of His service and for the helth of my sawle and alle myne antecessors and for the helth of the sawle of John of Lathum, prieste, sumtyme parson of Aldeforth, and all cristen sawles,' founded a chantry [called the chantry of St. Thomas the Martyr] in this chapel."<sup>1</sup>

During the years that followed there is very little reference to the chapel. In 1563 it contained painted windows in memory of members of the Norris family, and was then doubtless fully furnished. But by the year 1736 the name of Norris of Speke had ceased to exist, and in 1797, after the sale of Speke Hall to Richard Watt, the stone pavement which covered the floor of the chapel was broken up, the brasses torn from their positions, the tombs of the Norrises desecrated, and their remains removed to the churchyard. The Ashtons of Woolton Hall are recorded to have used the vault under the chapel for the purpose of burial. The glass in the windows was probably also at this time taken out, and no trace of it is known to exist.

The only original fittings remaining are the brasses commemorating Henry Norris and his wife, now fixed within an arched recess on the wall of the south aisle; a handsomely carved bench-head fixed to the front pew, bearing on a shield the arms of Norris and Harrington, probably put up by Edward Norris, who died in 1606; and an oval marble medallion, measuring 3 ft. 6 in. on the south wall, inscribed:

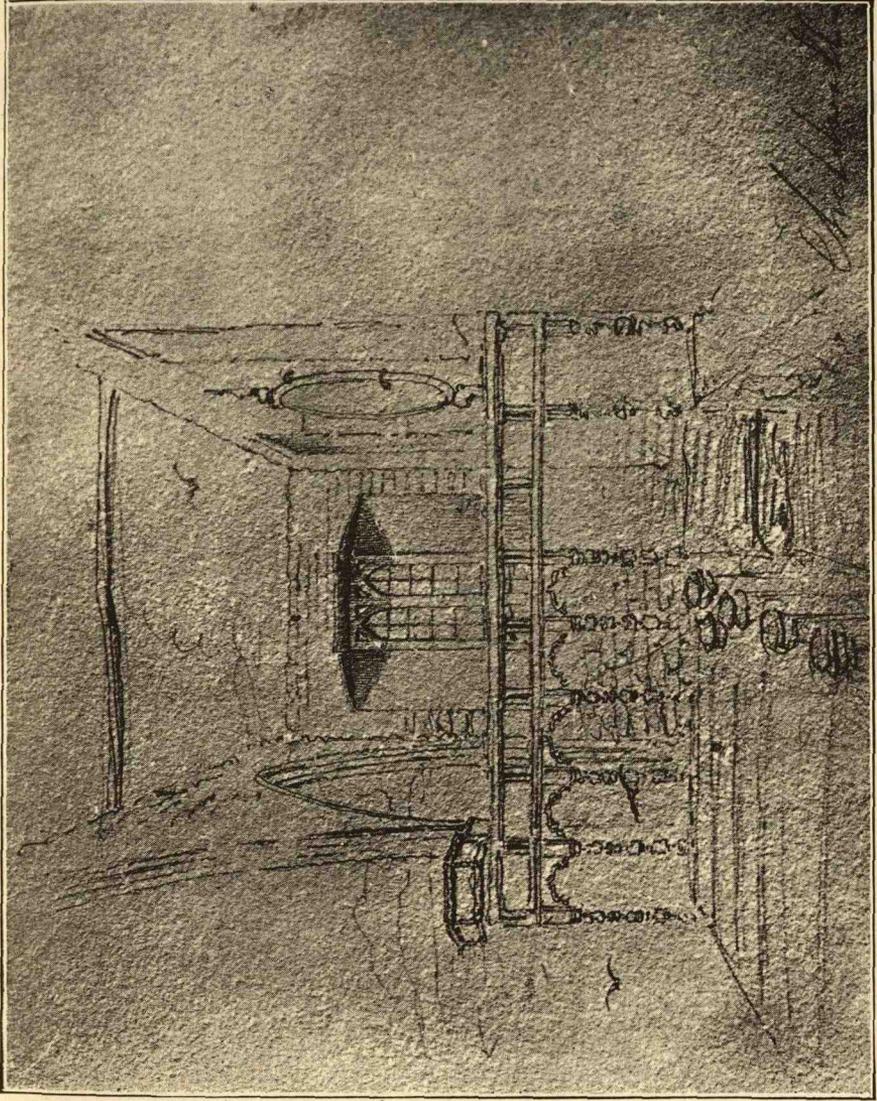
"Here vnder lyes intir'd the body of John  
Garway, Esq<sup>r</sup>., 1683."

<sup>1</sup> "Notes on Childwall," by Mr. R. Stewart-Brown, in the Society's *Trans.* vol. lxxv. (1914), 95, where further particulars will be found.

John Garway was the son of Sir Henry Garway, a wealthy London merchant and a noted Royalist. His sister Katherine was married to Thomas Norris of Speke. He was a great benefactor to Childwall, and was buried there on 21st March 1683.

The chapel—indeed the church generally—appears to have been sadly neglected, for in 1822 it is reported to have been in a very bad state. The beams in the roof, including those of the Salisbury Chapel (immediately adjoining the one-time Norris Chapel) “were decayed and sunk, the pews rotten, the roof dangerous.” Another account says that “the old church had no proper floor except the earth—the wooden floor being all worn and rotted away”; and a few years later it is recorded that “before the renovation of the church in 1853 the floor was of earth, and children kicking into it with their heels would sometimes dislodge a human bone.” Nothing, however, was done for many years.

The church was visited by George Nicholson, the Liverpool artist, in 1825, and a pencil drawing of the old chapel then made by him. The drawing is only small, as was the chapel, but it gives the impression of a building of substantial dimensions. It is, nevertheless, accurate in its proportions. The chapel measured 18 ft. 3 in. from the screen to the east wall; at the east end was 7 ft. 8 in. wide; and from the first pier to the south wall 8 ft. 1 in. This pillar is 25 in. thick, and its height 8 ft. 10 in. from the floor to the bottom of the capital. The west end of the parclose or aisle screen, enclosing the chapel on the north and west sides, which competent authorities, in agreement with me, consider early Jacobean, was 8 ft. 10 in. in height, and 9 ft. 6 in. wide; the width of each bay being about 15 in. The capital slightly overhangs the screen on the extreme left. I have made every enquiry



THE NORRIS CHAPEL AT CHILDWALL IN 1825

from the relatives of the Rev. Augustus Campbell, vicar from 1824 to 1870, as to the disposal of this interesting relic, which was probably removed in 1853, but, I regret to say, without success.

Just a word or two as to what the drawing really shows us. The sacred building is seen roofless, with one decayed beam only resting on the top of the walls, and the interior utterly abandoned and desolate. The east window seems to have been very deeply recessed, and in 1825 was probably of plain glass with a wooden framework. The Garway tablet and oak screen are the only old fixtures shown.

I have collected much interesting information about the artist and his elder brother Samuel, and am able to say that Samuel was born in 1801, and George in 1802, both in Manchester, correcting the date given in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and Bryan's *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*.

The whole of the Nicholson drawings mentioned have passed into the possession of the Manchester Corporation for the Public Library, who have kindly given permission for the reproduction of that accompanying this article.