St. James the Great Parish Church

The large parish church of ST. JAMES THE GREAT consists of a chancel, nave, north and south aisles, and a west tower. There are also modern vestries north of the chancel and south of the tower. The sequence of the earlier development of the building is a little uncertain owing to the proximity of the various periods, added to the marked differences in detail, and some confusion caused by later alterations. Probably the south arcade dates from the latter half of the 13th century and the north from the early 14th century, but the similarity of the windows in both aisles suggests that after the north aisle was built the south aisle was widened to 9 ft. to match the other. The chancel, built of rubble, is of severer detail and may have followed soon after the 14th-century north aisle; it is of great length compared with the nave and has large windows. The west tower was evidently erected in several successive stages: the lowest 10 ft. in the early 14th century, continued up another 8 or 9 ft. about 1340 with ashlar walling, the west window having moulded jambs rather like those of the south doorway, and completed c.1400 in ashlar of larger stones.

The clerestory was added early in the 16th century: there seems to have been some trouble from weakness in the arcades, especially the northern, which shows inequalities in the arches resulting probably from partial reconstructions, and most of its capitals have been rather crudely remoulded. No important changes occurred before the 19th century, but there was some deterioration, as a description of 1858 mentions that the chancel was heavily buttressed on the north side and its windows had lost their tracery. The closing of the side doorways and insertion of the west doorway were done before that time. Scars and repairs in the arcades are evidence of the damage caused to the masonry by the erection of galleries in 1841. Probably the vestry south of the tower was then added. Since then the church has been well restored, the chancel windows provided with tracery, and the north vestry and organ chamber added.

The chancel (about 45 ft. by 20 ft.) has an east window of five trefoil lights and modern intersecting tracery in a two-centred head with a hood-mould. The chamfered rear-arch also has a hood-mould with modern foliage stops. In the north wall is a similar window of three lights also with modern tracery. At the west end is a modern archway to the organ chamber and between the two a pointed doorway to the vestry; this has a chamfered order which is ancient, the reveals to the vestry being modern; probably the doorway is original but reset inside out. In the south wall are two windows like that in the north wall; east of the second is an original priests’ doorway with chamfered jambs and hollow-chamfered pointed head. In this wall is a double piscina, all of modern stonework. The filling in below the eastern window is of ashlar (the rest of the wall being of rubble) and may indicate a former sedilia recess.

The walls are of lias rubble, the east wall cemented, and have chamfered plinths and a moulded string-course below the windows. At the angles are square buttresses of ashlar, also intermediate in the south wall; the plinth and string-course pass round the buttresses. The west end of the south wall is of ashlar and seems to have been a buttress rebutting
the south arcade; from the way the stones of the south-west window are fitted to the ashlar courses it is evident that the ashlar is the earlier. On the face of the south buttress is a scratched mass-dial. The roof is of the 18th century or later and of trussed rafter type covered with tiles.

The chancel arch is a very plain one of two chamfered orders continued in the two-centred head, interrupted only by a kind of bonding course at the springing level that is only of one chamfered order. The north half of the arch is distorted.

Plan of Snitterfield Church

The nave (about 53¾ ft. by 20¼ ft.) has a north arcade of four bays with octagonal pillars and semi-octagonal responds. The east respond has no base. The other bases are original, varying in height from 18 to 21 in.; they are of two round moulds and have square sub-bases with moulded stops to the octagons above. The capital of the west respond, 9 in. high, is of good normal contour of the early 14th century. That of the easternmost pillar, of an entirely different contour, may be of the same period re-tooled, but the others are of crude peculiar forms that may have replaced the original early 14th century capitals some time in the 16th or 17th century.

The arches are of two chamfered orders: they do not spring directly from the pillars, but die on to octagonal super-pillars (tas de charge); they are two-centred, but are more or less distorted; and there is little doubt that the arcade was largely rebuilt at some later medieval period; the voussoirs vary in size from the original small stones to later large ones. Assuming the clerestory wall to be in a straight line, there is a curvature in the arcade wall to the north so that the clerestory wall overhangs it over the third and fourth arch. The walling in the haunches is of small rubble with a patch of larger stones above the west respond.

The south arcade, also of four bays, is of late-13th century date. Each pillar is a circular group of eight round shafts and hollows; some of the shafts are filleted. The responds are half-pillars; the bases, of octofoil plan, are of two rounds and a hollow and stand on chamfered square sub-bases; in the middle base the square angles are carved with ivy-leaf spurs. The capitals of the pillars are unusually large (17 in. high); they are of circular plan with a scroll moulded abacus, a small mould below it, and a large bell springing from the hollows, the shafts being carried up straight into it. The half-round capitals of the
responds are of a more normal size (10 in.). The arches are two-centred and of two hollow chamfered orders, the outer small, with medium to large voussoirs. The masonry between and above the arches is of ashlar of different periods: the western half is of small courses, but in the eastern half the courses are larger and of two dates. This may be the result of partial rebuilding to straighten the wall before the clerestory was added. The clerestory is built of ashlar in large courses and is lighted on each side by four early 16th century windows of two trefoil four centred lights under three centred main heads, partly restored. Above are plain parapets with moulded string courses.

The roof is of almost flat pitch and is divided into four bays by main horizontal beams that are supported under the ends by battering wall-posts and curved braces, on modern wood corbels: the wall-posts are packed behind by modern posts. All the main timbers are chamfered. The roof is probably of the early 16th century; as the trusses are shorter than the space between the walls it is said that the roof was brought from elsewhere, probably from Fulbrook Castle. It is covered with slates. On the east and west walls of the nave are the lines of the earlier high-pitched gabled roof antedating the clerestory.

The north aisle (8¾ ft. wide) has three north windows of the early 14th century: the first and third are each of two pointed lights and plain spandrel in a two centred head with an external hood-mould and moulded rear-arch. The mullions and jambs are moulded, the latter rather elaborately in three orders with filleted rolls. The middle window is a modern adaptation of the original north door-head raised to a higher level: below the modern sill are the straight joints of the former door opening. There is no west window. The walls are of rubble of rather thin stones. Two north buttresses are modern, the north west diagonal buttress is of old ashlar. The north wall has an original moulded stone eaves course.

The south aisle (9 ft. wide) has an east window very similar to those in the north aisle. The eastern of the three south windows is similar, but the sill has been heightened. The second is the old south doorway lifted higher and fitted with a modern mullion, and below are the straight joints of the former door opening. The third window resembles the east window, with slightly different mouldings. In the west wall is a lancet window with wide splays and hollow chamfered segmental pointed rear arch. Its exterior, covered by the modern vestry, is hidden by plaster.

The walls are of coursed ashlar and have chamfered plinths and hollow chamfered eaves course. At the south east angle is a pair of square buttresses, another intermediate east of the (former) south doorway, and one at the west end: the last retains the original tabling or capping of two courses, but on the others they are cemented. Equidistant west of the south doorway was another buttress, now indicated only by a break in the masonry. The aisles have lean-to roofs of uncertain date covered with lead.

At the east end of the south wall is a former locker or reliquary 2 ft. deep and 2½ ft. wide recessed behind to the east, the rebated doorway being 1 ft. 7½ in. wide.

The west tower (about 15 ft. square internally) is divided externally by a string course into two stages, the lower including the clock chamber. It has a plinth 6¼ ft. high of four chamfered stages. At the north west angle is a pair of square buttresses of ashlar. The
south western stair turret is of unusual treatment; it projects from the angle as three sides of a large irregular hexagon and is splayed across the angle inside, with a pointed doorway: near the top of the lower main stage it is tabled back. The lofty archway from the nave is of three continuous chamfered orders towards the nave, and of two orders, in the pointed head only, towards the tower. The west doorway has a four centred arch and is said to be a modern insertion, presumably made when the side doorways were blocked. The west window is of three lights and late 14th century tracery in a two centred head. It has a transom, below which the jambs are of early 14th century mouldings, but above the transom they change to plain chamfered orders.

These details and the masonry of the walls indicate that the lower stage of the tower is of at least three periods. Up to about 3 or 4 ft. above the plinth the walls are of rubble, probably, with the plinth, of early 14th century date. Above that up to the level of the tops of the square buttresses and the moulded window jambs they are of coursed rough ashlar in fairly small stones of slightly later date. Above that level up to the parapet the masonry is of more even ashlar in larger stones, probably of c.1400. At the same level also the north west angle is provided with a diagonal buttress in place of the lower square buttresses and there are also diagonal buttresses to the other angles. The projecting stair turret has the same changes of masonry, but is carried up a little higher. In the earlier ashlar it has two trefoil loop-lights; in the later a shorter and wider ogee headed loop light. About 6 ft. below the clock chamber floor it decreases in internal width and changes to the more normal stair vice contained within the bounds of the square angle up to the bell chamber. The clock chamber has a tiny south light with an ogee head, below the string course. The bell chamber has an embattled parapet with a moulded string course having gargoyles at the angles, now perished. The diagonal buttresses reach nearly to the string course and carry angle pinnacles, restored above the parapet. In each wall is a pair of windows, each of two trefoil lights and late 14th century form of quatrefoil in a two centred head with hood mould and carved defaced stops. The roof, of low pyramidal form, has massive cross beams. The lower ceiling is of modern pitch pine.

The font is of the early 14th century; it is octagonal; the bowl has upper and lower mouldings and a hollow below in which are projecting carved heads at the angles; these are of men of various callings: one has a bishop’s mitre, another is a knight, others have caps, probably academic and legal, and another a close fitting hood. The stem and chamfered base are plain.

The communion table to the altar of the south aisle has thin turned legs, of c.1700. The communion rails in the chancel are of c.1630 and have turned balusters: the gate posts have flat ornament and moulded upstanding heads: the top rails are carved with incised running foliage. The pulpit of c.1730 has five sides of a hexagonal tub, with oval panels having raised key blocks to the four arcs and jewelled spandrels; above these are open frieze panels.

In the quire stalls are incorporated two carved standards and panelled desk fronts of c.1500, perhaps brought from elsewhere. The standards differ a little: the northern is faced with an elaborate window tracery design and has a shouldered head and a vine leaf and
grape poppy head. On the front (south) vertical edge is a carved post (showing Italian Renaissance influence) on which stands a small figure of an ecclesiastic holding a rounded object in his hands: in the crook of the right arm is a long staff with a foliated head. Over it is a canopy with a demi rose soffit. On the back edge, just below the shoulder, is a half-angel with a shield. On the inner face are the initials IN (in Tudor-Roman style) in a knot suspended from an open hand above, and on either side is a small female figure with a foliage tail. The southern has similar tracery and a shield with the crowned arms and supporters of Henry VII. The figure on the front post is that of a bishop. At the back is the half angel with a shield, and on the inner face the letters IN as a monogram in Lombardic letters, and foliage. The poppy head is carved with roses and foliage. The remainder of the two blocks of seats is modern, but east of them are a shorter seat and desk on either side. The desk fronts each incorporate four bays of panelling: each bay has sub cusped trefoil heads with crockets and finial and foiled tracery above. The muntins have posts carrying small figures mostly winged, some draped and some apparently nude, and holding objects intended perhaps for musical instruments.

A framed board in the quire vestry recording charities up to 1682 is probably of that date. In the tower are two painted hatchments of the Earl of Coventry's arms; 18th century. There are six bells, one of 1758 by Abel Rudhall, the others of 1874 and 1887.

The communion plate includes a large cup and cover of 1735, and a large flagon and salver of 1751 given by the Dowager Lady Coventry. The registers begin in 1561.