Early Days of a Society

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IN the 1840's many historical and archaeological societies, both national and local, came into being. The movement of which they were the expression can be traced back to the Gothic whims of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill, the follies of landscape gardeners, the writers on architecture, and romantic novelists, especially Sir Walter Scott. A new and more serious phase began with state provision for new churches in 1818, and religious intensity followed with the writings of Welby Pugin and the Tractarian or new high church movement, which began in Oxford in 1833. A related movement began in Cambridge in 1839 for the study of Gothic architecture and ecclesiastical antiquities. Its original purpose had been 'to ensure dignified and decent forms of worship rather than to interfere with architectural arrangement'; but it was at once clear 'that the architecture of churches, and especially of old churches, would be affected inevitably and immediately.'

At that time many churches were dirty and neglected; along with a desire to make them clean and seemly went a desire to restore the importance of the altar and chancel, erect or restore the rood screen, be rid of galleries and pews, and remove three-decker pulpits. A new dogmatism went the length of asserting that Gothic was the only Christian form of architecture, and that the Decorated, or Middle-Pointed, style was more moral and more holy than other Gothic styles. This was the gospel of the Cambridge Camden Society; and when its Romanizing tendencies were denounced there followed the resignation of some of its episcopal members, including Bishop Kaye of Lincoln.

The society influenced church building for fifty years, and in his Gothic Revival Sir Kenneth Clark pays tribute to their sincerity and enthusiasm. As to their attitude to the restoration of churches, however, he is scathing:—

"The difficulty of restoration lay in this, that most English churches are a patchwork of styles. There are two ways, said the Camden Society, of restoring a church built at different periods: either restore each of the various alterations and additions in its own style, or restore the whole church to the best and purest style of which traces remain. Of these alternatives the Society unhesitatingly recommended the second. Now there were few restorable churches in which some fragment of 'decorated' could not be found. Perhaps there was a porch or chancel, perhaps only a window, and forthwith the whole church was transformed to suit it. But sometimes the architect was faced with a church built too late to include any detail of 'decoration'. Should he restore 'perpendicular'? Surely not. Surely his manifest course was to pull down the whole church and rebuild it in a real and natural style.'

The second volume of the Ecclesiologist, the organ of the society, had two Lincolnshire references. In the course of an attack on the use of cement, it commented that the restoration of the Bishop's doorway at Lincoln Minster was lately commenced in cement, and the heads
of the statues actually stuck on, but in consequence of a quarrel with the workman employed, they were happily knocked off again. Another passage said that 'a Louth Camdenian' need hardly inform them that the state of the Lincolnshire churches was dreadful; and the case of Boston, which he mentioned among others, was sufficiently infamous throughout England; and the church at Quarrington had recently been incumbered with pewrs.

It is no surprise therefore that when the Lincolnshire Society for the encouragement of Ecclesiastical Antiquities was formed in 1844 the movement centred at Louth. It changed its name several times in the course of its history, in 1853 accommodating Nottinghamshire, then part of the diocese, by becoming the Lincoln Diocesan Architectural Society. The visit of the Archaeological Institute to Lincoln in 1848 gave it an impetus, as also did the restoration of Stow Church, undertaken in the teeth of the ill-feeling of the parishioners, who refused to bear any share of the cost of repair. In its seventh report, adopted in 1850, the society expressed good hope for the future, and noted that in most parts of the county a kindly feeling had arisen towards them; 'nothing but this accident, which compelled the selection of Louth for our headquarters, a place not at all central or conveniently placed with reference to the larger part of the county, has prevented our meeting with more general support.' The decision to move to Lincoln was taken in 1856, and it was followed, as was hoped, by a large increase of membership. The society held meetings in various parts of the county. When there were excursions for the inspection of churches the members generally travelled, it seems, in carriages; but in 1849 a special train was run on the East Lincolnshire Railway to Cleethorpes, and the committee hope that in consequence of the extension of railroads through Lincolnshire, they will be enabled for the future to offer an excursion of this kind, as the usual finale to the meetings of the society.

The long series of Reports and Papers of the Associated Societies began in 1850, the other member societies being in the first instance those of the archdeaconry of Nottingham, the county of York, the county of Bedford, and the St. Albans Society. The constituent membership changed from time to time, but the Lincoln Society was always faithful, and usually provided officers for the joint enterprise.

Bishop Kaye was president of the society. He kept a kindly but cautious eye upon it, and to him were submitted the rules and annual reports for approval. Noblemen and other grandees were patrons and vice-presidents. Architects naturally joined, and some devoted laymen; but clergy were the backbone of the society.

The society did not to begin with share the more fanatical views of the Cambridge ecclesiologists. They early picked out the Kirkstead chapel of St. Leonard, 'whose small size, and the great purity of its architecture'—of Early English style, be it noted—'render it a very good model for a small village church; and though in these days we cannot expect to see the groined roof carried out (nor perhaps is it desirable in so small a building) yet if the likeness were preserved in other respects, and a plain wooden roof of appropriate character substituted for the groining, a church would be produced at a moderate expense, which would contrast most favourably with many modern erections.' Probably the first publication of the society—apart from annual reports—was an architectural description of the church, partly for propaganda and partly to raise funds for its restoration. It was published by Parker of Oxford in 1846.

The Gothic bias, however, was too strong to allow what a later generation would call justice to be done to non-Gothic buildings. The climate of opinion was against building new churches in styles other than Gothic, and there was not many Georgian churches in the county to come under the society's notice. One of them, St. Peter at Arches, Lincoln, now partly rebuilt at St. Giles, was reported on in 1867: "This last year the interior of this church has undergone extensive repairs. The old dilapidated ceilings of the north and south aisles have been removed, and new ones of suitable character have been put up . . . The central ceilings and arches have been
relieved with coloured designs suitable to the architecture, and the apsidal chancel has been tastefully decorated, so as to harmonize with the rest of the church. The application of colour to this church has shown that buildings, which are themselves unattractive, may be rendered not only cheerful, but pleasant to the eye and churchlike in effect."

In 1869 they reported on the effort made at Gainsborough parish church to make the best of a bad (Georgian) job:—
"This church had no provision at its east end for a choir, and the level of its semi-circular apse was very low. To obviate this the floor of the easternmost bay has been raised two steps, and the sacrarium elevated proportionately. The space thus raised has been fitted up with richly carved oak stalls for the clergy and a surpliced choir, enclosed within a low carved oak screen, and is paved with well arranged tiles. A very handsome pulpit of open wrought iron work, coloured and gilt, upon a marble and alabaster base, has been substituted for a very indifferent predecessor. The lower portions of the apse, pillars and walls have been carefully and successfully painted after a well-studied design. An embroidered hanging of crimson velvet has been placed over the holy table, and the walls of the apse hung with green serge cloth, relieved with stripes of crimson."

It is difficult not to suppose that this transformation gave rise to misgivings about popish tendencies among parishioners accustomed to an early eighteenth century preaching church.

It was to be expected that a society formed at such a time for such a purpose would confine its membership to members of the Church of England and its attention to that Church's sacred buildings. One of the most distinguished architects in the county, Edward James Willson, was a Roman Catholic. Although he could do work for the dean and chapter—who were not thought sound on the new architectural gospel—and collaborated with Welby Pugin, he never became a member. Nor was there any place for dissenters. When in 1857 the Rev. G. B. Mellor, a Wesleyan minister at Grimsby, was proposed for election as Mr. Mellor, it was declared that the proposal was displeasing to a portion of the committee, and his name was withdrawn.

As burial boards came into being and new cemeteries laid out to take the place of crowded churchyards, the subject of cemetery chapels became an urgent one. A distressing tendency of the new boards to treat Anglican and dissenter alike called for a statement of the society's position in the report for 1854:

"One fashion, we are happy to say, which at one time threatened to become popular, has met with the neglect it deserves. We mean the plan for placing the two chapels, one for the use of the Church, and the other for dissenters, in the same building. We are happy to say that in most, if not all, the new cemeteries in Lincolnshire, they have been placed apart in different parts of the ground. We think a mistake has been committed in making the two buildings, in almost every case, so exactly alike; for if there is any essential difference between the Church and dissent, and if the buildings do in any way reflect the religious prepossessions of those who rear them, we should have imagined that both Churchmen and Dissenters would be anxious that the buildings appropriated to their use should mark the difference by their outward appearance."

It was delicately put. The Newark committee of the society put it more bluntly in their own minutes. They sought to mark the distinction between ecclesiastical and consecrated, and unconsecrated and schismatical buildings. When Mr. Drury's design for the cemetery chapels at Lincoln was examined it was not approved, because it placed the two side by side; and it was suggested that transomes might be introduced into the windows of unconsecrated buildings. In the event the Lincoln plan went forward, though the Anglican building enjoyed the additional dignity of a spire.
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A study of the work of church 'restoration' and repair, for good and ill, in Lincolnshire would be of great interest, and could perhaps best be undertaken by an architectural historian; but if parish historians in sufficient number were forthcoming they might collectively produce a like result. The part played by the advice, criticism and influence of the society might then be assessed. In default of such extensive study it is possible to give only a few examples of the society's comments on plans submitted to them, or on the buildings when erected or 'restored', from the annual reports. In 1856 the committee, with full self-assurance, refer in terms of praise to the ruthless destruction at Stickney:

"(It was) re-opened in January last, having been now completely restored to, perhaps, more than its original beauty. Mr. Butterfield has here ventured to remove the whole of the 'perpendicular' work, which had so completely transformed the building as to render it, to all appearance, a church of the latest period. A few years ago, the chancel was entirely rebuilt in the most beautiful Decorated style; and about one-third of the nave nearest the chancel was restored at the same time, with high-pitched and tiled roof, leaving the remainder to be completed afterwards. This completion has now been most successfully carried out. They understand that the Rector (by the members of whose family and himself the whole has been done) set an example which they would commend to imitation, of leaving the work entirely under the control of his distinguished architect."

It is a solemn warning that architects should be kept in hand. The committee were not always so laudatory. They could be severe in their criticism, and they could write more in sorrow than in anger, as they did about the new church at Cold Harworth in 1863:

"Its character is as opposite to its conventicle-like predecessor as possible, and is not the better for having oscillated so far in a contrary direction; for, while we repudiate the necessity of building churches in a mean and tasteless manner, we are of opinion that an undue amount of ornament robs them of that grave dignity which is so accordant with the services and sentiments of the Church of England. It is very evident that the liberal builder of this church desired it to be the best that could be produced; but had there been far less decoration used in its composition, we should have been better pleased. Mr. Crofts, of Islington, was the architect employed, who professed to have designed this church 'in accordance with the characteristics of the decorated period—freely carried out'; but had there been more of the fourteenth century spirit thrown into this composition, and less nineteenth century freedom, the result would certainly have been much more satisfactory."

A neat contrast with modern opinion is presented by the comment of Professor Pevsner:—

"a showpiece of High Victorian self-confidence at its most horrible".

The cathedral had no part in the movement. Its clergy, though they nominally held office as vice-presidents, contributed not at all to the society's work. Architectural repair carried out there by Willson was approved by the Ecclesiologist, but a storm broke out over the design by Westmacott for the 'tomb' monument for Bishop Kaye. The society complained that instead of the universal medieval custom of representing monumental effigies in an attitude of devotion, full length, gaze upwards, hands in prayer, they were being offered a person on a couch in attitude of extreme exhaustion, exhibiting, not the triumph of the Christian over death, but of death over the Church. The dean also opposed the design, but the battle was lost to a majority of lay subscribers. The dean told them that the chapter could refuse to admit the monument to the cathedral if they thought such a course desirable in consequence of the nature and character of the work; but they did not carry disapproval to this length. Sir Charles Anderson later read a paper to the society on monumental sculptures, saying that the idea that in a recumbent figure the head should be turned to show the features (as Kaye's did) savoured of the Green Room.
Sir Francis Hill

There followed an attack by the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Ecclesiological Society on the methods of repair adopted at the cathedral by the Dean and Chapter architect, J. C. Buckler. At a meeting of the latter society Sir Charles Anderson said he had visited the building, and found that the work was very much overdone, and that harm had ensued. The colour given to the cathedral was frightful, and destroyed its beauty in point of colour. Mr. Street and Mr. J. H. Parker also joined in criticism.

The Ecclesiologist quoted with warm approval the comments of the Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury:

"But against whose acts have these learned bodies spoken so loudly? Against those of the Cathedral Chapter, consisting of five persons. Of these, two from infirmity are utterly incapable of taking a part in the duties belonging to their position, and two others ingenuously confess that they have no knowledge whatever of architecture. It is left therefore to the remaining one to seize the reins of the capitol government, and to direct the repairs of the cathedral... What then does he do with the fabric fund?... In the case alluded to, which may be termed that of the 'R.I.B.A.' and the 'E.C.' versus that of the Lincoln cathedral chapter, the best Gothic architects, in conjunction with some of the most notoriously talented unprofessional men of taste, have one and all said 'What you are doing to your cathedral is most mischievous, as well as most unnecessary, and such operations, when absolutely called for, require the constant presence of a skilful architect; while he who is responsible for that 'feeling process' spoken of, and against which we, as representatives of public opinion, very strongly protest, after ordering the same to be carried out, employs no architect whatever to watch the works, and, as far as he himself is concerned, leaves the cathedral to 'whistle its lament to the winds' for nearly two years.'"

The newspaper presumed that the cathedral would resent the dangerous liberty taken with it by commencing a crumbling process calculated to last for many years to come, and thus to point to the author of the mischief protested against, long after he had in his own person participated in the same dissolving process.

The Lincoln Society were silent on this great matter, and indignant individuals like Anderson had to find other platforms from which to thunder. The idea of plain speaking about so august a body as the dean and chapter must have been embarrassing to the country clergy who generally spoke for the society. Precentor Pretyman was the principal object of attack, and doubtless one of the members of the chapter who confessed to having no knowledge of architecture was W. F. J. Kaye, archdeacon of Lincoln, and son of the late bishop, who was a stern evangelical, and who would have preferred to remove church ornaments rather than restore them.

While the battle was raging Bishop Jackson was paying tribute in honeyed words to the work of the society, saying that it was a source of great satisfaction to him to perceive that the work of church restoration had been carried out more successfully in the diocese of Lincoln than in any other diocese in England.
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"He had frequently witnessed, on his visits to the different churches in his diocese, unfortunate alterations which had been made some twenty or thirty years ago, and upon which large sums of money had been expended, and now they were found to be a misfortune rather than a benefit. . . . On the whole, he had no hesitation in saying that the Society had been a powerful and successful means of aiding and improving the great work of church restoration."

The society in turn paid tribute to the liberal pecuniary assistance and the great personal exertions of the bishop in the same cause.

It would be of great historical interest to assemble all the information available about the founders and leading members in the early days of the society. They were mostly country clergy, and much must be known about them. The honorary secretaries were the Rev. Irvin Eller of Saltfleetby St. Clements and Mr. James W. Wilson of Louth, and the honorary treasurer the Rev. Edmund Smyth of South Elkington. The Rev. F. P. Lowe of Saltfleetby All Saints was occasionally in the chair. Charles Anderson was an honorary member. Their family connections, education, and (in the case of the clergy), the names of their patrons might all tell something about the origins of the movement in Lincolnshire.

About one prominent member much is known already. Edward Trollope belonged to the Lincolnshire squirearchy on both sides, his mother being a Thorold. He became rector of Leasingham in 1843, archdeacon of Stow in 1867, and bishop suffragan of Nottingham in the diocese of Lincoln in 1877. On the occasion of his death in 1893 the Lincoln Diocesan Magazine referred in particular to his publications, chiefly contained in the Reports of the Associated Architectural Societies,

"of which body he was for a long period general secretary, and eventually president, vice-president, chairman of committees. Of the Lincolnshire Society he was one of the earliest and most active members, and to his powerful influence and unwearyed exertions in promotion of its objects, the signal success which has marked its proceedings for so many years is mainly attributable. The great work of church restoration, for which it was originally set on foot, which has raised our parish churches from the ruinous and squalid state in which they were almost universally half a century since, was greatly helped forward and wisely guided by him. Indeed, the generally satisfactory condition of the Lincolnshire churches and their decorous arrangements may be said to be in great measure either directly or indirectly his work.

Bishop Trollope, till the last two years, took the lead at the annual excursions of the Society, undertaking the onerous task of describing each church or ancient building visited, for which he had prepared himself by a general round of inspection, and presiding over the meetings with the genial courtesy which was his special characteristic. At the bi-monthly committee he was a practical attendant when his health and other more pressing engagements permitted."

His many diocesan activities were additional evidence of his ability and his immense energy. He was a born organizer, becoming secretary or chairman of any body to which he belonged, and by 1867—rather like Mr. Pickwick—he was perpetual chairman of committees of the society. Tribute was paid to his courtesy; yet he does not seem to have attracted the tribute of affection which some other men, notably Frank Massinger, drew to themselves.

A few incidents affecting him are worth recording. In 1857 he read a paper on Somerton Castle and the imprisonment there of King John of France. The Duc d’Anjou, son of the French King Louis Philippe who went into exile in 1848, was living in London, and he was invited to the society’s meeting. He did not come, but in 1858 the secretary (Mr. Trollope) reported the result of a visit paid to the duke by a deputation consisting of Sir Charles Anderson, the Rev. George Atkinson and himself for the purpose of presenting the Duke with a copy of several of the papers lately published by the Society in which he was known to take great interest. These had been handsomely bound in blue morocco adorned with the Duke’s
Arms and Coronet, and after having been placed on a satin cushion also adorned with the Duke's Insignia embroidered in gold and coloured silks, was duly presented to the Prince at the close of a short address from the Secretary.

The prince replied in French, and entertained his visitors to a sumptuous déjeuner. What he thought of this comic incident is not recorded. Later he was elected a patron of the society; he returned to France and entered into French politics, but his name remained at the head of the list of patrons until it was silently dropped in 1900, he having died in 1897.

In 1861 the clergy and laity of the diocese and others presented to the cathedral a magnificent carved oak pulpit in recognition of Trollope's exertions in the cause of ecclesiastical architecture and church restoration. It was designed by George Gilbert Scott, who, in acknowledgment of his help, was elected an honorary member of the society.

Then in 1875 Mr. Freeman, the historian of the Norman Conquest, read a paper at a meeting at Grantham on 'the Early History of Lincolnshire'. It was not printed in the annual report. At a committee meeting later the honorary secretary was directed to ask the chairman of the Grantham local committee if he knew by whom, and on whose authority, Mr. Freeman was asked to read a paper; and it was resolved that 'the committee having considered the manner in which the Archdeacon of Stow was treated by Mr. Freeman in the course of the recent excursion, beg to express their deep regret at the occurrence, and their deep sense of the Archdeacon's valuable and long continued service to the Society.' The explanation called for was duly forthcoming from the local secretary, though not recorded, and it was considered sufficient. It was easy to clash with Mr. Freeman. Clearly the archdeacon had a keen sense of his own dignity.

By the time of Trollope's death in 1893 the society had changed both in fortunes and in direction. Membership was falling. Nottinghamshire was transferred from the diocese to the new see of Southwell in 1884, and the society changed its name from the 'Lincoln Diocesan Architectural Society' to 'Architectural Society for the Counties of Lincoln and Nottingham' in the hope of retaining support; but presently the Thoroton Society came into being, and attracted members who might have joined. The agricultural depression was discouraging payment of subscriptions, and it was complained in the Diocesan Magazine in 1894 that although there were 750 clergy in the diocese not 50 of them were members. Interest was shifting from architecture to history, and a new generation of antiquaries were resorting to a study of the records: Venables, Maddison, Massingberd and Cole, to name only a few. A little later still higher standards were reached in the work of Professor Hamilton Thompson, Canon Foster, and Professor Stenton. The society had moved a long way from ecclesiological dogma.

Notes

1 M. S. Briggs, Goths and Vandals (1952), p.160.
3 ii (1843), pp.37, 140.
5 iv (1845), p.238.
6 xii (1861), pp.222-6.
7 x (1894), pp.1415; and see Dictionary of National Biography.