

# ST MICHAEL AND ST MARY MAGDALENE, EASTHAMPSTEAD: NOTES ON THE REBUILDING 1865~1873.

## HUGALL'S DRAWINGS IN THE R.I.B.A. LIBRARY.

The Parish Church stands on an ancient site. The current Church is the second known to have stood on this site. It was built from 1865 but retained the Tower base from the earlier Church. The architect was John W. Hugall. He was born in Sculcoates near Hull. His practice started in York but soon he moved south to London and was active in Cheltenham, Oxford and Reading from 1850. Hugall's last known work is 1878.

Hugall is not one of the better known Victorian architects but his reputation was clearly higher in his own lifetime than today. There are churches, country houses, schools and village halls built by him across the country. Hugall never seems to have developed his own architectural style. Although some small motifs are used on several of his buildings, none of his buildings are instantly recognisable as designed by him. Instead he appears to have been able to turn his hand to any architectural style that was required.

Hugall's drawings for the New Church are part of the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects and are housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. There are eleven drawings in all. Six are entitled "*The Church of St Michael, Easthampstead, Berks*" and dated April 1865. Four are entitled "*The Church of St Mary and St Michael, Easthampstead, Berks.*" but are not dated. The numbering of these four suggests there were at least eight in this series. Most intriguing is one drawing entitled "*A proposal for the rebuilding of the Tower*" dated September 1873. All eleven drawings are tinted with watercolour. Some have comments written by Hugall himself. What these eleven drawings reveal is the process behind the building we have today.

All public buildings are never completed as planned. Changes in the design are always made usually due to the rising building costs. From the drawings it is possible to tell that the design of the new Church went through at least three different revisions.

The earliest drawings show a Church which was never built. It would have been very different from the present building. The Nave was two arches longer than the present Church. Most of the windows were to be of the low arched design in the north wall of the north Aisle. The Tower would have been unrecognisable. It was to be faced in stone. The total height would have been the same as the present Tower but the top third of the total height would have been taken up with a large wooden broach spire. The design is not as exciting as it sounds. The Tower and Spire would have looked dumpy beside the height of the Nave roof and the Church as a whole would have been a dull and unimaginative design. It lacked the dramatic impact of the present Church which is probably why it was never built.

The second set of drawings show a Church almost the same as the present building. However the charm of the present Church comes from the fact that changes were made between what was planned and what was built. Both the Nave and the Chancel were to have been longer. Where there is now only one window between the Porch and the Downshire Chapel there was to have been a longer stretch of wall to fit in a buttress between two windows. On the other side of the Church there would have been another arch to balance the length. However it is the loss of that planned length in both the Chancel and the Nave which makes the attractive grouping of roofs and shapes on the south front of the Church. The loss of length also accentuates the dramatic impression of height inside the Church and brings the Altar closer to the congregation.

A sizable omission from the planned Church may explain some of the peculiar features of the north Aisle. There was to have been a north Transept to mirror the Downshire Chapel. This may explain the small arch across the north Aisle, the buttress now inside the Annexe and the different roof heights in the north Aisle. All these features were designed to carry the weight of the high Transept walls that were never completed. The decision not to build the north Transept must have come soon after the Aisle had reached roof height left these redundant features.

There is no explanation in the drawings of the wooden arch brace in the Nave roof which rests on small marble columnettes. It may have to do with the planned north Transept. Had it been built it would have been the same design as the Downshire Chapel with a large window that would have flooded the area in front of the Chancel arch with light. This would have created a space called a Crossing.

In a large Church or Cathedral the Crossing, the point where the two Transepts meet the Nave, is an important architectural and circulation space. Today the Nave is one space. Hugall may intended it to be two spaces; the Nave, which was to have been longer, and the Crossing between the north and south Transepts. The wooden arch brace on marble columnettes would have marked this important division.

There is a similar a wooden arch brace in East Garston in west Berkshire. Hugall restored East Garston in 1875. He wanted to put in a stone Chancel arch but the Vicar thought it would obscure the congregation's sight of the Altar. So Hugall put in a wooden arch brace to mark the division between the Nave and Chancel. The Crossing at Easthampstead was never built but the wooden arch brace still went in as a decoration with no real function in the revised design.

The marble columns of the Chancel arch are cut short by the heavy shelves or corbels. This could have been because a screen across the Chancel was planned but not built. That is usually the reason for this feature in other churches. However the plans do not include a Chancel screen. In the plan the Chancel was to have been a third longer. This would have allowed both the choir and clergy stalls to fit into the Chancel. The drawings show that the Chancel arch was planned with marble columns that went down to the ground. However the Chancel was built much shorter than planned so the Clergy stalls had to be pushed under and not behind the Chancel arch.

One of the drawings is entitled "A proposal for the rebuilding of the Tower" which is dated September 1873. It is the design for the present Tower which is usually thought to have been completed in 1867.

The rebuilding of the Church started with the Chancel in 1865, the Nave was finished but probably not roofed in 1866, and the Church reopened in 1867. It has always been assumed that the Tower was also completed in 1867. It is now likely that the Tower was completed in late 1873 at the earliest. This would explain why the Tower is joined to the Nave in a clumsy manner. High up on the west wall of the Nave a stone wall seems to push through into the Church. There is also a lump of masonry jutting out to the west wall of the Aisle. This second phase of the rebuilding may be linked to the early death of Arthur, 5<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Downshire, in 1873 but needs further research.