



Building the Church

Henry Lonsdale described how the church came about:

'All these works originated with Sara Losh—nay, more, they were designed, and developed, and completed by herself. She was the architect and superintendent of the works *ab initio*, and in most instances the moulder of the natural-history forms gracing the ecclesiastical building. Bound by no commonplace rules, and following none of the stereotyped lines of masonry, she directed the workmen in their operations from day to day. Like a master-mind, loving her work, she carried her church-building and other designs in her brain, and from the foundation to the finishing of the superstructure never had to undo what had been done according to her directions. As she only engaged country operatives who had never shown the slightest feeling for art, she made her mouldings in clay, and then taught the mason how to work them in stone; and marvellously well did she succeed. The diverse forms—borrowed from botany, conchology, and other zoological divisions; from quaint mediaeval architecture and fossilised structures—to be found in the doorway, windows, and other parts of Wreay Church, are well done, and to Sara Losh is due the credit of their constructiveness.'

Canon Hall examined the accounts:

'Miss Losh also left very minute accounts showing how much was paid for everything used in the course of building and for the labour employed. The total cost was £1088 10s. 4d. This included £150 as the estimated value of wood cut at Wood Bank and Woodside, but not certain gifts such as two ebony panels from Paris, bronze eagles supporting the Holy table, books bound in wood, and the angels above the chancel arch and on each side of it. There is no payment for an architect. Miss Losh was her own architect and designed every detail of the Church as well as its general plan. The work was carried out by the village masons and builders, named Hindson, the son, William, being responsible for the stone-carving. . . . Miss Losh sketched or modelled the various ornaments and he reproduced them in stone. The wood-carving was chiefly done by Mr Scott, living at Dalston.'

The Hindsons, from the nearby hamlet of Mellguards, had been stonemasons and builders as well as farmers for several generations. It is almost certain that this small rural church was one of the largest and most demanding works that William Hindson had been employed on. The total money he received was £361. 5s.10d. - a third of the total cost of the works - but this included materials as well as labour.

William Hindson, junior, was paid a total of £29.1s.8d. for the stone carving. A footnote to Sarah Losh's accounts explains that: 'Some deduction should have been made from the bills of Wm. Hindson, Junior, as they included the oratory palm tree and poor Smallwood's monument, but to set against these, there is the female head in the chancel arch, which he finished and was paid for, some years since for a different purpose. & which in intrinsic value may fully outweigh them.' The note that this accomplished piece of work was done 'some years since' suggests that William Hindson had been carving stone to a high standard for some time. Hindson will have carved the windows and the door on the west end and the figures on the chancel arch.

John Scott from Dalston was responsible for the carving of the stork and eagle lecterns and Robert Donald, who was the gardener at Woodside, cut the sinuous carving of the gourd plant which runs round the door frame.

Many of the villagers gave of their labour without charge during the building of the church. For instance, on June 14th, four men - Pickering from Bridge End; David Robinson; Mr Robinson and Tom Longrigg - volunteered and five men provided carts. Mr Wm. Slack lent two carts; George Brown, Thomas Morley and George Graham, all from Foulbridge, lent one each. Two days later, on 16th June, there were five volunteers: Henry Gill of Little Barrock, William Birbeck of Burnthwaite, Mr. T.Slack of Intack, James Longrigg and William Porter.

Sarah Losh was the mind and heart who created St Mary's and William Hindson, father and son, and the other villagers were the hands who built the church.