

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THURNHAM CHURCH AND GILLOW MAUSOLEUM

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South-east of Lancaster lies Thurnham Hall, a Grade 1 listed building historically associated with the Dalton family over many centuries.

Near the Hall lies the Catholic Church of St Thomas and St Elizabeth of Hungary. The Roman Catholic parish of Thurnham was established in 1785.

The congregation worshipped initially in temporary premises and then in a small brick chapel on the site of the current church. The former presbytery (1802), also in brick, survives nearby.

The present church, on a different orientation to the original one, was consecrated in 1848. The Dalton family were among its supporters and funders, which may explain the high-quality of the building and its furnishings.

The architect was Charles Hansom: his brother, Joseph Aloysius, designed St Walburge's Church in Preston.

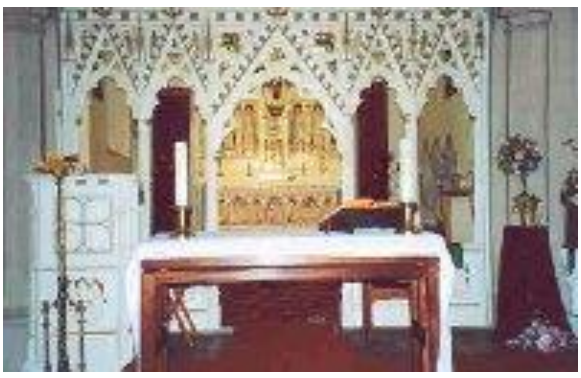
The stained glass is by the well-known Newcastle firm of William Wailes to the designs of the architect, and the brass and goldsmith work is by Hardman of Birmingham.

There are five bells by Taylor of Loughborough. The High Altar and reredos are elaborate.

The Dalton family used the Chapter House of the former Cockersand Abbey as their family mausoleum for over a century until 1861 (see Guide 88).



The Catholic Church of St Thomas and St Elizabeth of Hungary, Thurnham (Source: Author)





The High Altar (left) and Lady Chapel (right) in Thurnham Church
(Source: thurnhamchurch.net, gratefully acknowledged)

In the churchyard is the rather unexpected sight of the Gillow Mausoleum (see Guide 5). The Gillow family of furniture makers were Catholic and for Robert Gillow (d. 1838), living at Clifton Hall near Forton, the RC church at Thurnham was his nearest church.

Along with John Dalton and Richard Worsick, Robert Gillow had paid for the first church building at Thurnham, which opened in 1816. So it is not surprising that the Gillow family's Mausoleum is here.

The Mausoleum was built in 1830, predating the current church, with the first burial being in 1836. It is built of sandstone in an Egyptian style – rectangular in plan with the outer walls inward sloping. On the southern wall are four massive Egyptian-style columns with spreading capitals decorated with a papyrus motif. Inside are coffin niches.

An Egyptian design is unusual though there are examples from both the mid-nineteenth century and the interwar period. Archaeological discoveries in Egypt at these times may have sparked an interest in Pharaonic designs and the Gillows were very design-conscious in both their furniture and architecture.

It is not known for certain who designed the Mausoleum but Joseph Bonomi , an Egyptologist, has been suggested given the similarity between the Gillow Mausoleum and frontage of Bonomi's' Temple Mill in Leeds. The Mausoleum was probably never much used.





Two views of the Gillow Mausoleum, Thurnham Churchyard (Source: Author)





The Egyptian decoration on the south side of the Mausoleum (Source: Author)

Text – Gordon Clark.
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