

William Railton – architect

Some of our most prominent 19th century buildings were in the spotlight last month when Tony Jarram came to tell the Local History Group about the life of William Railton. Tony is a member of our group who has studied Railton, indeed last month he hosted (with Lynne Dyer) an exhibition about him at Loughborough Library.

Railton was born in London in 1800, and lived and worked in the capital all his life. In 1833 he won a commission from Ambrose March-Phillips de Lisle (the son of the owner of Garendon) to build a magnificent manor house and chapel on his Grace Dieu estate, which today forms the heart of Grace Dieu School.

Railton's new patron next bought a nearby plot of land to build a monastery for a community of Trappist monks, and asked Railton to design some early buildings. This was to be Mount St Bernard Abbey, which was consecrated in 1837. But when money was soon raised for more substantial buildings it was Augustus Pugin who became the architect.

Meanwhile Railton was designing identical churches for Woodhouse Eaves and Copt Oak: both churches were also consecrated in 1837. Shortly afterwards he was appointed chief architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and built more churches at Groby and Thorpe Acre.



St Paul's at Woodhouse Eaves.

The following year he won a competition to design a monument in Trafalgar Square for the Nelson Memorial Committee. The column itself was built by 1842, but because the Committee's funds were inadequate the lions round the base were not added until 1867.

In 1842 Railton returned to Leicestershire and designed Beaumanor Hall for the Herrick family: unusually for him this was to be in the Jacobean style. It was his last major commission in the county, although Tony believes he did design the Herrick alms-houses in Woodhouse in 1856. He died in London in 1877, apparently without ever having had his photograph taken!

Roger Berkeley