

Malcolm Warburton, Diocesan Tourism Officer, visits St Margaret, North Elmsall

French village church in Yorkshire

THE juxtaposition of two neighbouring places sometimes displays a surprising contrast — and so it does with the two Elmsalls.

South Elmsall is a typical former mining town south of the road between Wakefield and Doncaster. North Elmsall, is a small rural hamlet on the other side of that main road. It is the exciting little church here that is the subject of this article.

St Margaret's at North Elmsall is one of the diocese's — if not the county's — hidden gems. I have yet to discover any book on Yorkshire churches that gives it so much as a mention.

John Betjman's thorough guide to English Parish Churches ignores it — as does the West Riding volume of Pevsners architectural guides. Yet, here we have a unique example of a small late Victorian gothic church.

It was completed in 1897, architect unknown but in the style of a small French village church. This is because the sole benefactor was the equivalent of the local squire, namely Mrs H Longueville Jones, of North Elmsall Lodge.

No expense was spared. with only the best materials used. Hammer-dressed Calverley sandstone for the exterior walls

Sights of the Diocese



Hidden gem: ' French village church' with a sumptuous reredos, right, worthy of a great cathedral.

with dressings of fine Ancaster limestone from Lincolnshire.

Red ashlar from Carlisle lines the interior walls with blue Pennant stone shafts supporting the window tracery. The ceilings and fittings are of best-quality oak, and there is Irish marble on the high altar. And so it goes on, but the best is yet to come.

Ten year after the completion of St Margaret's, Mrs Longueville Jones found the money to provide a sumptuous

reredos. This was installed in 1908, and is the focal point of any visit to this small church.

Worthy of a great abbey or cathedral, the three panels consist of carved figures using high-quality plaster with tracery in Caen stone imported from Normandy. The centre figure of Christ in Majesty, but with hands extended in welcome, is surrounded by devoting figures of Northern Saints, often to be found in our

Yorkshire churches.

So the familiar figures of Bede and Oswald, Paulinus and Chad, Wilfrid and William of York are joined by Margaret of Scotland, the church's patron, Hugh of Lincoln, Alban, Mary Magdalene and others, in a riot of colour.

I could tell you more, but this lovely little church almost has to be seen to be believed. Do go there some time if you have not done so already.