

THE HISTORY OF
THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE DIVINE, LYTHAM.

The first recorded beginnings of St. John's are found in a Minute Sheet preserved in the church safe. This relates that " At a meeting of Gentlemen held at the Clifton Arms Hotel, Lytham, on Friday, 27th of November 1846, the best means of providing additional Church accommodation for the rapidly increasing population of the Town was taken into consideration; when it was unanimously resolved ' that an additional Church should be erected and a suitable endowment provided; the future funds should be raised by subscription' "

A footnote states that 'Thomas Clifton, Esq. has kindly consented to provide the necessary site for the Church and liberally to contribute towards its endowment.' An appeal was issued with the first list of subscribers directed ' more particularly' to the Visitors of Lytham for whose accommodation it was principally undertaken.

Building was apparently begun in 1848 (the year in which the 'Market House' was built on an open space, formerly the Ornamental Gardens) and by the following year the 'Committee of Management' of the new Church had incurred a considerable overdraft with the Preston Old Bank. In order to liquidate this a Bazaar was held in the new Market Hall in August, 1849. This was well advertised in the ' Preston Pilot', the ' Manchester Guardian', the ' Poulton Chronicle' and ' Courier'.

A Mr. J.W.Shellard of Manchester was the architect and his first payment was a note for £100 and Thomas Darwen made the Screens for the Church for £12.10s ! An account from the Clifton Arms was for supplying the workmen with 'Shilling ordinaries' for lunches with Ale.

The original Church consisted of the Nave with side aisles separated from it by pointed arches and circular columns, a very small Chancel, and a Porch and Tower surmounted by a spire of 140ft.

The first Vicar was the Rev. W.H.Self who lived at the Dower House (later the Vicarage) at a peppercorn rent payable to the Clifton estate. The first entry in the Baptism Register was on the 29th April, 1849 of Rachel Cookson of Clifton Street. There were no marriages for the first two years until the Church was consecrated and the Deed of Assignment as an Ecclesiastic Parish was signed in April, 1851. The first couple to be married were Henry William Fell, a Cabinet-maker and Sarah Winstanley, a confectioner, this was witnessed by the wife of the Vicar, Mary Self. The first burial was Arthur Lloyd in a vault beneath the green space at the South-west corner of the Memorial Chapel.

A programme of enlargement was started almost immediately. The Choir was extended Eastwards flanked by Vestries. The transepts were built from the old Chancel to form a crossing in 1856 at a cost of £1,464 plus architect's fees of £78. The new heating system cost £54.

THE WINDOWS.

On the West wall on entering the church is a single light in memory of Mr. Bannerman of Our Lord with a child on his knee and the text 'Suffer little children to come to Me' - this used to be over the old font. The West window was given in memory of James and Elizabeth Fair by their children and depicts a Madonna in the centre of each light. The panels show the Baptism of Jesus, His Presentation in the Temple His visit to Jerusalem and the Nativity. The light in the Baptistery was given in memory of Thomas Fildes (1840 - 1887) and contains a figure of Our Lord and the opening words of St. John's Gospel. In the North wall of the Baptistery the window shows the Fishermen of the Lake and our Lord walking on the water. The windows of the North Aisle are all of this century and designed by a member of the Royal Academy, the first shows St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, then comes St. Stephen the first Martyr followed by other Apostles. The Rose window in the North Transept is in memory of Thomas Miller of Singleton Park.

The East window of three lancets combines the Christian Graces and St. John the Evangelist in the centre. This was installed in 1888 by public subscription as a tribute to Bertha Lelgrade, Baroness Grey de Ruthyn who had done much for the new Organ. The face of Charity is based on her portrait. In the Memorial Chapel, the two side-lights of the East window were separated when the old Scholars' Chapel was converted after the Great War. These lights were given by the first Vicar in memory of his wife, Mary, in 1859 and contain figures of the Virgin Mary - on the left the Mater Dolorosa and on the right the Stabat Mater. The centre light - a Crucifixion - was installed in 1922 by Mr. Frederick Walmesley.

The three windows in the South wall of the Chapel represent the three Synoptic Evangelists - St. Mathew and St. Luke with St. Mark in the centre, surrounded by the Arms of the Royal Artillery, the Royal Navy, the King's Own, the Loyal North Lancashires and the Lancashire Fusiliers.

The South Transept's three lancets represent the Call of the Sons of Zebedee - the Master in the centre over a scroll bearing the words 'Follow Me'. St. John is to the East and St. James to the West with Zebedee in the boat. The window was given in memory of Thomas Clifton the Founder and Patron of St. John's who died in 1851.

The South windows show the Saints of Northern England, St. Cuthbert, St. Wilfred, St. Stradda, St. Hilda, St. Aidan, St. Oswald, St. Ethelburga and St. Paulinus. They were installed early in the century and were the work of a famous stained-glass artist named Webb and some show his 'rebus' - a spider's web. The Clerestory windows show scenes from St. John's Gospel and over the approach to the South door are the symbols Alpha and Omega from the Revelation of St. John the Divine and the early Christian cryptogram 'I.H.S.'

STONE CARVINGS

There are few churches of St. John's age with so much carved stone. Three of the original four Runic crosses still surmount the easterly gables. There are thirty-one masks and an angel carved from Yorkshire stone. Six of the masks are on the exterior, the arch of the West door (the original entrance) springs from the masks of our Lord and His Mother. The arch of the South porch springs from representations of King Ethelbert and St. Augustine. St. Edward the King and one-time Patron Saint of England looks out East gargoyle fashion from one foot of the Chancel gable, while Thomas Clifton, the Founder, keeps watch over the Vestry door.

Inside the Church are twenty-five masks, one at the foot of each arch of the Nave and one supporting each of the fourteen flying columns. These are Royal and Saintly characters and include, St. Cuthbert, St. Chad, King Oswald and Queen Ethelburga. In the Chancel Queen Victoria is opposite William Musgrave who was Archbishop of York at the time of the Consecration of the Church. Next to him is Edward Prince Lee, the first Bishop of Manchester. Along the South side are S. Hilda (Abbess of Whitby) and in the South wall of the Sanctuary, a woman with a cloth gag (1 Corinthians 14 v.34!) On the North wall of the Sanctuary is an excellent half-length carving of the Angel Gabriel and, on the North side of the Choir, the masks of the Clifton family.

MEMORIALS

The Lych Gate at the entrance to the Church yard is of English oak and was erected in 1897 in memory of the Vicar, the Rev. T.G. Smart by the parish.

The Church Wardens' staves were given by a former Churchwarden Mr. Walter Dean.

The Canopy of the Font was given by the Teachers and Scholars of the Sunday School in 1920.

The Screen between the Baptistry and the North Aisle was originally a Chancel Screen and was given by the Rev. William Pilling in 1881.

The Litany Desk was given by the men of St. John's Bible Class in 1921 in memory of men from the class who died in the War.

The Screen between the Choir and the War Memorial Chapel was dedicated by the first Bishop of Blackburn (Dr. Herbert) in 1934. It was erected by the parish in memory of their third Vicar the Rev. John Gilbertson- Pritchard.

The High Altar was given in 1899 and the original Altar was moved to the Memorial Chapel.

The Communion Plate was given by Thomas Clifton in 1849.

There is a tragic memorial in the South Western portion of the Church yard where a stone Cross records the death of seven children from Manchester in 1863 who were drowned in attempting to ford the Ribble. Five children were from one family and their ages were from 10 years to twenty-five.

The new Choir Vestry was dedicated on the last day of S. John's first 100 years in memory of Charles Thelwall (Churchwarden 1938-47).

Canon Shields of S.Cuthberts presented the Processional Cross to commemorate the Centenary of S. John's.

THE BELLS

For the first twenty-five years of its life S. John's was dependant on one bell which was sold in 1875 for £22.7.6d. A peal of bells was then installed for £518, the tenor bell costing £95 being given by the Rev. William Pilling. The names of the Vicar and Churchwardens are inscribed on the No. 4 and No. 5 bells so they may have been partially responsible for them.

The inscriptions on the bells are in Latin but read:-

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| No. 1. | Devotion, death and happiness bid us sound |
| No. 2 | O Lord, open Thou our lips |
| No. 3 | And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise |
| No. 4 | Grant Thy people salvation (R.Rainford and A. Whiteside Churchwardens) |
| No. 5 | Lord have mercy upon me (T.G. Smart, Vicar) |
| No. 6 | The glory is to God (William Pilling, late Vicar of Arnsby
caused me to be made) |

In 1911 the first full peal was rung of 5,040 changes by C.H. Kerr, D.McLellan, R. Cardwell, J. Tipping, J. Hardman and T. Allanson. In June 1913, a peal of Minor in fourteen methods was rung by a team including E. Tipping.

THE ORGAN

The original Organ was installed in 1848, two and a half years before the Consecration. This was removed to the original Clergy Vestry in 1874 and enlarged at a cost of £349 and a Water Turbine was purchased for £40. It was further improved in 1888 with the help of Bertha Lelgrade and at this time the tablet to her memory in the Sanctuary was erected with the balance of money raised. An electric Blower was installed in 1934 as the water power was now insufficient.

The new Organ, costing £2,730 was placed in the North Transept with the detached Console in the Chancel. A 'Discus' Blower provides wind pressure and drives a 16 volt generator.

After the opening of the new Organ and its dedication, it was first played in public by Dr. Francis Johnson, Organist of York Minster.

THE WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

In 1917, the idea of a War Memorial Chapel was suggested by Mr. Martin-Lee and welcomed by the Vicar, the Rev. J. Gilbertson - Pritchard. The Baptistry was removed at this time from the West end of the Nave to the foot of the North Aisle and the Screen dividing the then Choir Vestry from the South Transept was moved to separate the new Baptistry.

The windows were altered, the floor laid with Italian mosaic and the walls pannelled and a Memorial Tablet and the names of every Lytham soldier and sailor who had died for their country were engraved. The stonework was all done in the yard of J. Stother and his workmen were J.E.Myerscough, O. Cartmell and W.J.Cartmell.

The Chapel was dedicated on 20th April 1921 by the Lord Bishop of Manchester (Dr. William Temple, subsequently Archbishop of York and Canterbury). The Memorial Tablet, given by Mrs. Jacob Parkinson was dedicated in May, 1922. The total cost of the Chapel was £1,828 exclusive of many gifts and 6,738 hours of work had been put in.

The Chapel was actually completed to the original design until May 1934 when two carved oak Parclose Screens were dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Blackburn (Dr. Herbert) as a memorial to the Vicar who had undertaken this work for the ennobling of the Church. The cost of the Screens was £ 98.

ST. JOHN'S PARISH SCHOOLS.

The original School was erected on a site conveyed by Mr. Clifton on the 11th June 1851 under the authority of the Schools Site Act to the Minister and Churchwardens of St. John's Church. A plaque states the School was erected by contributions from the inhabitants of Lytham aided by grants from the Council of Education. There were three rooms providing an area of 8 square feet per scholar.

In 1879 the 'Lytham Charities' gave a grant of £50 p.a. which increased to £100 in 1863. In 1880, it was suggested that the Charity should take over the School but there was determined opposition and the matter was in abeyance until 1899 when it became one of the three Schools administered by the 'Lytham School Charities' and funded at £450 p.a. but having, also, a body of Managers, who were members of the original Trust. The first Managers were:- Charles Birley of Bartle Hall, Augustus Wkeham Clifton of Warton Lodge, Robert Crozier, a chemist, Thomas Fair and James Fair, land agents, Luke Fisher, a doctor and Edward Mellor and James Needham of Lytham, Thomas Miller of Singleton Park and James Parkinson of Moss Hall Farm.

The Vicar and Churchwardens conveyed to James Talbot Clifton the School by an indenture in 1898, who, in turn, conveyed it to the Trust. The Commissioners approved a scheme for enlarging the School to a sum of £1,100 but the final total was £1,730 the balance apparently being made up by Public Subscription as stated on the plaque over the main door. In 1929 the annual payment to the Schools was raised to £750.

The new building was erected on the site of the old Master's house and Nos. 22 and 24, Warton Street were purchased and demolished together with an old cottage at a cost of £60. The Heating apparatus cost £60 and the Playground £35. The Infants moved into the new building in January, 1913.

In 1922, 74 Warton Street was purchased as a Curate's house, it was occupied by the Headmistress of the Infant's School for some time then leased to the Lancashire Constabulary.

ST. ANDREW'S MISSION.

This addition to the Parish was undertaken in the time of the Rev. J. Gilbertson-Pritchard and largely financed by a Mr. Cornforth of Mythop. The site was leased by Mr. John Talbot Clifton to the Vicar and Churchwardens for a peppercorn rent of half a crown p.a. It is a semi-permanent building of corrugated iron with a wood lining and contains a hall of 50ft by 20ft with ante-rooms to hold 100 people. Over the entrance porch there is a turret in which is mounted an old ship's bell. The only date available from the past is the taking out of a Policy of Fire Insurance in April 1901 (£200 on the building and £50 on the furnishings).

The Clergy of St. John's were first in charge of the Services, then the Headmaster of the Schools, Church Army Officers and Lay readers.

The Mission was used as a temporary Reception Area for evacuees in 1939..

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