

Christ Church, Barnston celebrates 150 years.



2021 sees the 150th Anniversary of the consecration of Christ Church, Barnston. In 1994 a History of the church was written by Alan Dakin, a parishioner for over 60 years, and Church Warden, also for many years. It is with grateful thanks to Alan's meticulous research that this 'potted' history is written.

Although only built in 1871, there had been a Christian presence in Wirral since pre-Norman times, and even as far back as Saxon and maybe even Celtic times. The Domesday Book (1086) records the presence of a priest in the extensive township of Landican (Landeckne) which encompassed many villages of which Barnston (Bernestone) was one.

Our parish was formed in November 1870, and Christ Church was completed and consecrated by the Bishop of Chester in June 1871. It cost £3000 to build, given by the two daughters of a wealthy Liverpool merchant, Joseph Hegan whose memorial tablet is in the wall below the west window in the church.

The architect was George Edmund Street (1821-1881), an assistant to Sir George Gilbert Scott, grandfather of the architect of Liverpool Cathedral, (and the iconic red telephone boxes!). Street was a specialist in the Gothic Style and he was a noted architect of his day responsible for many notable buildings, including the Law Courts in London. The building is acknowledged as one of the foremost examples of High Victorian Gothic Revival design.

Although the red sandstone of the area was plentiful, Street chose to use the more durable white sandstone from Storeton Quarry, also used for Birkenhead Town Hall, and other Wirral churches and buildings.

The Vicarage and Coach house was completed after the consecration of the church, meanwhile the Vicar lived in the Manor house across the road. In 1870, the Education Act for compulsory education was passed, and the day school (now the church hall) was built.

Before completion of the church building, services were conducted by the first appointed Vicar, the Rev. Crawford Logan, in a local barn. His original grave was at Woodchurch, but it was later disinterred and reburied in our churchyard. Since the Rev. Logan up to the present day, there have only been 9 incumbents, the longest serving being the Rev. Allen George Glenn, who served for 46 years from 1875-1921. Many of us will remember the second longest serving Vicar, Henry

Leslie Williams, who served from 1953-1984, a period of 31 years, as well as serving as Archdeacon of Chester from 1975-1988.

Changes and additions to the church itself have been many over the years. Electric lighting replaced oil lamps and candles as late as 1936. There have been many attempts to ensure effective heating and finally in 2003, gas heating replaced the oil-fired central heating installed in 1961. In 1949, the present altar rail with its motifs "The Pelican in her Piety" and "The Pascal Lamb" replaced the existing brass altar rail, as part of the Second World War memorial.

The windows, all stained glass are works of art showing the changes in taste over more than a century, and all except the east window, have been given over the years in memory of loved ones. The painting above the altar is a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" in the Refectory of S.Maria della Grazie, Milan. Our painting, also painted in Milan, was bought by T.B.Forwood for 1500 Italian Lire in 1877. (The writer of this article has tried to discover to what this figure would equate in modern terms but has been defeated! Suffice it to say, it was expensive!) T.B.Forwood lived in Thornton Manor and was a generous supporter of Barnston Church and School.

Two plaques in the chancel are engraved with the names of the 37 parishioners who, in two World Wars, laid down their lives for their country, and whose names are read each Remembrance Sunday.

Externally, other additions and developments have been made. The churchyard, originally measuring some $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre, drained and levelled at a cost of £52, has through the generosity of the late Viscount Leverhulme, twice been extended, in 1958 and 1962. The earliest grave is that of Amy Thomas, who died in 1871, aged 2 years and 8 months. Another includes, on the gravestone, the name of Thomas Evans, one of the 1198 people who lost their lives in the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. There are also 3 war graves in the churchyard, two from WW1 and one from WW2.

The churchyard gates were designed and made in 1960 by William Barlow. Barlow's ancestor is reputed to have shod the horses of the army of William of Orange before it embarked for Ireland from Hoylake. The gates contain designs of the Cross over the whole world, the Cheshire wheat sheaf, and the Horn of the Master Forester of Wirral.

In concluding his history of our church, Alan's final sentence was unworthy of precis, or alteration, and so is quoted here verbatim, with grateful thanks.

"It is hoped, therefore, that this 'mini-guide', to its history, evolution and many features of our church will have filled a gap and encouraged visitors and worshippers to look around and feel in Christ Church, Barnston, the warm welcome that awaits them all.

"We love the place, O God, wherein thine honour dwells."

Hymn, 1854 William Bullock

We shall be celebrating this anniversary on the weekend of September 11th/12th with a Victorian Tea and Fair in the Vicarage Garden on the 11th, and a visit from the Bishop of Chester, the Right Revd. Mark Tanner, on Sunday 12th at 6:00pm. More details to follow!

Coral Greenwood, March 2021