

Daisy Hill Church and School, created out of the Parish of Westhoughton

As early as the 1840s steps were being taken to subdivide the parish of Westhoughton by creating an Ecclesiastical District out of the southern part and combining that with a part of the Parish of Atherton. This suggestion was made in the Westhoughton Parish magazine of 1875 (the year of the magazine's first issue) but the ecclesiastical history of the area goes back further, at least to the 1840's.

The Vicar of Westhoughton at that time was a man of deep faith and great foresight, the Rev. James Richard Alsop and the town was experiencing hard times with a high proportion of the population receiving poor relief, some people completely destitute, and 240 cotton looms and 285 silk looms idle. Indeed, Westhoughton was described as one of the poorest and most destitute places in the Diocese. Mr. Alsop was well known for his work on behalf of the weavers and for inaugurating schemes for public works in the area. He was especially interested in education and besides giving private lessons to augment his stipend, every night of the week he taught the young men who worked in the mills or down the mines and his wife had classes for women and girls. It was during Mr. Alsop's incumbency that a school was opened in 1841 at Daisy Hill, financed by Westhoughton Old Chapel (the forerunner of St. Bartholomew's Parish Church). This early school stood on the same site as the present (old) school and was used for a number of years as a Day and Sunday School. A new school was opened on the same site early in 1869 when the Rev. Kinton Jacques was Vicar of Westhoughton. Besides being used as a Day and Sunday School it was furnished so that services could be held in it and Bishop Fraser, Bishop of Manchester, preached the opening sermon there a year later, on the 25th of August 1870 (the day after he had consecrated the new parish church of Westhoughton). The jubilee of the original foundation was marked by the presentation to the school by Miss Haddock of a silk banner.

The Church works on behalf of the people for better government

The incumbency of Mr. Jacques from 1869 to 1899 saw a period of great growth in Westhoughton parish life but in his early years he had made himself very unpopular by his persistent efforts for better local government. Nothing sums it up better than the song sung in public houses at the time:

"Of its filthy state
There's been complaints by Parson Jacques
And a few more saints.
Churchwardens and millowners too said,
'Nowt but a Local Board would do.'"

A Local Board, the predecessor of the Westhoughton Urban District Council, was duly established in 1872. Mr Jacques was very much involved with the local community, dealing with matters such as the water supply, sewage disposal, street lighting, besides education and the church life of the area. During his incumbency more than £34,000 was spent on church and school extensions in the area so that by 1875 there were nearly 1,000 pupils in church schools in the parish out of a population of about nine thousand people. It was not only children who benefited: in 1887 there were Missions for the Navvies working on the new railway being cut through Daisy Hill. Besides all this it was Mr. Jacques who helped forward the efforts begun at Daisy Hill which culminated in the building of the church.

A gift to the community from Miss Haddock and Mrs Makant

In the autumn of 1875 came the news that steps were being taken to subdivide the parish of Westhoughton. Acting under the advice of the Bishop of Manchester and the Vicar of Deane (patron of the living of Westhoughton) the Vicar was trying to raise an endowment fund which would be met by a grant from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to pay the stipend of the future vicars of Daisy Hill. Subscriptions to the fund were invited. Miss Haddock was prepared to offer a site for a church, Mrs. Makant had already purchased Turner Hill to be used as a parsonage and the executors of the late R. Haddock offered £500 towards the Endowment Fund. In the Vicar's words: "With so good a beginning the work ought to be brought to a successful issue, which may God in his great mercy grant." However, there were delays in the formation of a separate parish because the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were refusing to accept Turner Hill as a parsonage.

In the meantime the school flourished and in 1876 Mrs. Makant met the cost of alterations and decoration of the school buildings and the conversion of the old schoolhouse (presumably the two-storey part of our old school) into classrooms to accommodate forty children. The school then worked to a budget of just over £267 - of this £147 was for the teaching staff, £10 for fuel and gas, £9 for repairs and cleaning, under £1 for rates and £60 for the work

of decorating and conversion. The preacher at the Annual Sermons that year was the Rev. H.H. Oliver, curate of Westhoughton, the first time he is mentioned in the magazine in connection with the parish of which he was eventually to become the first Vicar.

The foundation stone is laid

Sometime during 1878 the Commissioners must have withdrawn their objections to the new parish for the Vicar announced in his December magazine letter, "We hope to see soon the beautiful and substantial church of St. James, Daisy Hill, advancing towards completion in the next twelve months." The building contract was given to Mr. Winward of Wigan. It was given to him partly because he presented the lowest tender but also because he had built several churches to the designs of Austen and Paley, the architects of Daisy Hill, including Howe Bridge and Atherton Parish churches. The work on the building began on St. Matthias' Day, 24th February 1879, when the first sod was turned by Miss Haddock. The foundation stone was laid on the 19th of May at 4pm. in the presence of the Bishop of Manchester, but long before that time hundreds of people had gathered round the site of the new church, paying 4d for front seats and 2d for side seats. In addition to the scholars and congregation of Daisy Hill, the teachers and scholars of the Parish Church were present and by the time the ceremony commenced there were 2,000 people gathered.

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Makant, using the silver trowel which is now one of the treasures of the church and which was subscribed for by about 120 people "all of whom either brought or sent their subscriptions without being asked". The builder presented Mrs. Makant "with a handsome Mallet and Level of bay wood".

In his address the Bishop of Manchester praised Lancashire people. He said they made him feel that the work in which he was engaged was full of hope. He hoped that those who had seen the laying of the Foundation Stone "would live to see the Church rise in fair proportions heavenwards and would grow up to be good, intelligent churchmen, not tossed about with blasts of vain doctrine". That same evening the Bishop held a Confirmation service at the Parish Church when out of the 95 candidates presented 43 were from Daisy Hill.

By the end of December 1880 progress had been made in the building of the church. The scaffolding was being cleared away and it was expected to be completed by the following Easter. The Vicar was seeking contributions to the £1,000 required by the Bishop for the endowment of the parish before the consecration. In fact, this amount had not been raised by the time of the

consecration. It was not usual for a bishop to consecrate a new church until £1,000 had been found, but an exception was made in the case of Daisy Hill through the efforts of the incumbent of Westhoughton.

A local news story

The Bolton Evening News of the 22nd of April 1881 carried the full story of the consecration service of the church at Daisy Hill which began at 11.45am. Before that time Bishop and clergy assembled in the vestry. From there they proceeded "to the principal entrance of the sacred edifice", where they were met by the Rev. K. Jacques and the Rev. H.H. Oliver. Mr. Jacques presented the petition for consecration to the Bishop who said that he had read it and with pleasure acceded to it. The procession then moved into the church.

Among the clergy were former clergy of Westhoughton, the Vicars of Deane and Leigh, and the Vicar of Atherton. The Bishop was accompanied by the Rev. Archdeacon Anson, The Rev. Canon Powell, and his secretary. Among the congregation were Mrs Makant and Miss Haddock, the donors of the church.

Galatians 5. 13

The Bishop took for his text Galatians 5. 13:

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another"

He said that they were met for the solemn purpose of consecrating a new church for the service of God and in time, when the district had been legally added to it, it would be an additional unit of the parochial system of the Church of England (at the time of consecration the parish had not been legally established). In the new parish the parishioners would have all the rights the law of England assigned to them. The church had been founded at the joint cost of two Christian ladies upon whom that district had no particular claim by virtue of their having any large property in it, but they had an attachment to the place because it was where they were born. He was glad that the seats in the church were to be free for ever.

Designed by Paley & Austin, a Lancashire architectural firm

The completion of the building had been delayed by various causes. The following description appeared in the April 1881 issue of the Westhoughton Parish magazine: - "The style of architecture adopted is what is known as 'Flowing decorated or curvilinear'. The nave is 28 feet wide and 79 feet long; and the chancel is 25 feet wide and 38 feet long; the nave and chancel are under one roof, divided by a chancel arch on the north side. Opposite the choir seats is an organ transept, and to the west of this is an aisle 18 feet square, seated with children's seats and having a separate entrance. To the east of the transept is the vestry. The porch is at the south-west angle. Attached to the south side, opposite the choir stalls, is a bell turret, built of brick, and 80 feet high, for three bells under arches. The chancel is built and faced inside and out with local red brick; and the tracery of the windows, doorways, arches etc. has been worked out in moulded brick and terra cotta, from the works of Mr. J.C. Edwards of Ruabon. The west gable, above the large west window, is filled with terra cotta panelled work. The roofs and ceilings are of pitch pine covered with Coniston green slate. The nave seats are of pitch pine and the pulpit and chancel fittings are of oak. The total length of the building is 124 feet and there is accommodation for 410 worshippers.

From the very beginning, St James' Church was a gift from the community

The total cost of the structure, including the site, has been about £6,000: and judging from its comely proportions, its excellent acoustic properties, and its thoroughly handsome appearance, the money expended has been well laid out. The books for the pulpit have been given by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; the alms dish by Mrs. Jacques, wife of the vicar of Westhoughton; the font by Mr. Peter Bowden (a local farmer); and a baptismal shell by the vicar's children. The bell at present hanging in the turret was brought from the Old Parish Church when the new peal of bells, given by the late Mr. Richard Haddock, were fixed. A harmonium, the gift of the late Miss Haddock, is at present being used until an organ can be furnished." Miss Haddock had also given Communion plate. Among subscriptions to the Endowment Fund was a gift of £200 from Lord Lilford, £100 from Henry Rawcliffe of Euxton Hall, £20 from the Bishop of Manchester and £5 from Canon Powell, Vicar of Bolton. Also included in the Endowment Fund was the collection of £25 from the stone-laying ceremony.

The church site covers 2,570 square yards, and the patronage of the living

after the deaths of Mrs. Makant and Miss Haddock, would be vested in the Bishop of the diocese. Immediately after the consecration, the Bishop and clergy together with a numerous company, were entertained to luncheon in the schoolroom. After a most substantial repast the usual toasts were honoured.

First baptism and marriage services in the new church

The Rev. H.H. Oliver had the first charge of the new church, and the first baptisms were recorded in the Westthoughton magazine of May 1882:

Feb. 19 Ellen, daughter of Thomas and Mary Ellen Winward

Feb 23 Joseph. son of Charles and Catherine Hobbs

Apr. 2 Eliza, daughter of John and Ann Gregory

The first marriage recorded in the January 1883 magazine was that of James Reeve to Mary Ann Gill which took place on the 31st December 1882.

In the same issue of the magazine the Editor was bewailing the fact that "with the exception of the Cricket Field there is no place of amusement in Daisy Hill except in connection with the public houses, so that all who feel an interest in the young men at Daisy Hill must see how very desirable it is that there should be some place of recreation where they may be safe from many of the temptations that lead so many young people wrong".

The annual tea parties were still a feature of life in the village but by the end of 1882 the system of borrowing pots for the parties gave cause for complaint and it was suggested that crockery should be bought and kept for the parties. One or two subscriptions had been promised and it was thought desirable that the money required should be raised by subscription or an entertainment.

The organ is installed

A beautiful organ was presented to the church by Mrs. Makant and Miss Haddock and used for service on Sunday, 18th November 1883. The case is of pitch pine "being very choice with spotted metal front pipes, and of a beautiful design."

The following year more improvements were made in the school, again thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Makant and Miss Haddock. The old classroom was pulled down and replaced by two rooms each of which was nearly three times the size of the old one. The lower room was built for an Infant School room and the upper room made into a working men's club. The club was managed by a committee and provided all kinds of games, as well as books, periodicals and newspapers. The club with its 116 members was under the management of the committee which had power without any notice to expel any member guilty of gambling, swearing or any disorderly conduct.

Parish of Daisy Hill inaugurated by an Order in Council of Her Majesty Queen Victoria

The most important event of 1884 must have been the inauguration of Daisy Hill as a parish by an Order in Council of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The churchyard was then opened for burials in 1889, the first interment being that of a seven-year-old child, Sarah Cowburn. The stained-glass window at the East End was designed by the artist Burne-Jones, installed in memory of the Haddock family and dedicated in the Diamond Jubilee year of 1897. The reredos given in 1923 in memory of Thomas and Elizabeth Welch was designed by the church architects, Austen and Paley, and it is believed the carving was carried out in Hinkley in Leicestershire. The font was given by Mr. Peter Bowden, a friend of the Haddock family and the brass lectern was a gift from the Welch family.

First Vicar of Daisy Hill: Revd. Henry Huntley Oliver

The first Vicar of the parish was Henry Huntley Oliver who had been entrusted with the charge of Daisy Hill while he was still a curate of Westthoughton Parish Church. He remained here until he resigned on the 25th of January 1911 because of ill-health. He died quite suddenly in York only eight months later and was buried in Daisy Hill churchyard on the 27th of September 1911. He was a dedicated parish priest, giving his whole ministry to the people of this small parish and he left behind him a well-organised parish, with Day and Sunday school in good condition and a large Bible class for men. His memorial takes the form of a marble tablet depicting Christ as the Good Shepherd on the north wall of the chancel.

St James Church: sustained by gifts from the community

The communion rails were erected in 1975 in memory of the Rev. Frederick Taylor and are the work of Mr. Harry Green of Westhoughton, as are the choir stalls installed in memory of James Crompton and his mother. Their memorial also includes the rebuilding of the organ. The stained-glass window in the north transept is the work of Mrs. Norris of Bolton and was installed in memory of George Henry Ogden, Vicar of the parish from 1921-1943. Early in the incumbency of William Twidell the church was carpeted throughout by an anonymous donor.

In recent years the parish has expanded considerably with much building on several sites, all beyond the imagination of the founders and benefactors of the parish.