

Major Alterations to the Church

1878-1880

In 1881 major alterations were made at the east end of the church which was extended to make two new exit staircases. These are the staircases we normally use today. The extension added two more rooms below, our present kitchen and the area including the church office and ladies toilet. The alterations were discussed at the Annual Vestry Meeting in 1878, when Canon Robson commented on "the smallness of the egnefs" (exits) from the church, the unusual height of the pulpit and the impossibility of rendering the musical portions of the services effectively with the organ at the West End. It was proposed that an architect should be consulted and so long as the work was no more than £1,000 the alterations should be carried out. A faculty was obtained and at the March Vestry Meeting in 1880 the plans were accepted at the cost of £1,130.

1881

In 1881 the organ was moved from the back of the nave gallery to its present position and the choir moved into the chancel. The pulpit was lowered and as the result of a special bazaar to raise the money a clock was placed in the spire.

1925

In 1924 the church was struck by lightning, causing damage to the organ and setting the roof of the south transept on fire. The church had to close for several weeks while the transept was boarded off. From the insurance money and voluntary contributions, it was decided to make several improvements. An opening was made high up in the wall of the south transept between the gallery and organ chamber. A new screen of oak replaced a glass screen at the west end (main entrance). A new heating system was installed, and electric wiring was renewed. One or two box pews were removed from the nave and transepts to make an open space in front of the chancel steps and the walls of the whole church were redecorated.

In Rev Taylor's incumbency more seats in the nave were removed and all the pews were spaced out to give room to kneel in comfort. Later, in Rev Skipper's time, seats in the chancel on the north side were removed to make a new choir vestry.

District Visiting Society

In order to reach the large number of nonchurchgoers, especially in the new industrial towns where the population was growing rapidly, Bishop Sumner established 'District Visiting Societies.' One such society was begun at Christ Church. The parish was divided into districts and each district had a voluntary visitor from the congregation. Her duty was to call from time to time to provide 'spiritual benefit and temporal comfort.' 'Spiritual benefit' included encouragement to attend church and to read the Bible to the sick and housebound, to discover which children attended school and Sunday School and to give advice, encouragement and exhortation as seemed necessary. The visitors reported to the clergy on cases needing pastoral attention. As regards 'temporal comfort', the visitors encouraged habits of cleanliness and forethought in managing their wages. The opening of a savings bank account was encouraged, and visitors were authorised to add "one penny to every eleven pence placed in their hand."

In 1906, Christ Church had nine district visitors. They were Miss Ashbridge, Mrs Birken, Mrs Hardwicke, Miss Longworth, Miss Pelling, Mrs Reynolds, Mrs Smethurst, Miss Smethurst and Mrs Sumner. A special account was opened with the North and South Wales Bank Ltd., Oxtou Branch. In one year the ladies collected £110-6s.

Christ Church Homes for Destitute Children

The Homes were opened through the efforts of Canon Robson and were originally at 54, 56 and 58 Mount Grove, a road running between Borough and Woodchurch Roads. In March 1899, new premises in Kings Mount were secured by the Church Wardens, F.M. Kirby and Douglas Muir.

At the time of the removal, there were 20 boys and 19 girls being cared for. Visitors were welcomed at the Homes any day after 11am and parishioners were encouraged to go and see for themselves.

The Homes were maintained by money and gifts in kind given regularly by the congregation. In 1898 the alms boxes yielded 12/7d. From the monthly Parish Magazine, the Cloughton Messenger, we read:-

"We simply want:

1. Gifts in kind sent regularly, for example, bread, sugar, flour etc.
2. Cast off clothing - boys suits especially needed.
3. Things that can be cut down to size."

As a result of this appeal, one month later the following list was printed in the Messenger:-

"Gifts of bread - Mr Higham, Mrs Couche, Mrs French,
Miss Birkett, Miss Gibson, Mr Young, Mr Ross, Mr Payne

Dripping - Mrs Horlick, Mrs Thompson, Miss Gibson

Sugar - Mrs Muir, Mrs Graham, Miss Muir

Rice - Mrs Muir, Mrs Graham, Miss Muir

Currants - Miss Cox

Gooseberries - Mrs McDowell

Fruit and Vegetables - Miss Muir

Eggs and Sago - Mrs Muir

Oatmeal - Mrs Laurie

Bats and Balls - Miss Grimwood

Four pairs of shoes - Mrs and Miss Dove

Sweets - Miss Dove's Junior Working Party

Tea - Mrs Hargreaves

Clothing - Mrs Laurie's Sewing Party

Milk daily Misses Williams."

An extract from the Cloughton Messenger 1902 says:

"During 1901 there were 22 girls and 20 boys in the Homes. Of these, eight were sent into domestic service and four have been sent to Canada. There have been good reports of all of them. One boy who had been troublesome in the Home wrote from Vermont, Canada:

"Dear , Jam getting older and can care for myself better. I have bought my own clothes for four years back. I intend to fight my way through. I now intend to earn a good name for myself and I shall help your boys bye and bye. I mean to do all I can for the people who have helped me. If I can I am going to try and get through college yet. Give

my love to all the boys, tell them they ought to try their very best to do what is right, to be obedient, truthful and kind. Tell them they will be very sorry if they do not do their best with you. I blow that by experience. From one of your boys, James."

Further extracts from the Cloughton Messenger read:

"Girls are trained for Domestic Service, boys to Canada or an office or with a farmer, milkman or coachman. One is in the Post Office in Liverpool.

"Children are placed well away from Claughton so that they cannot be dragged down to their former life. There are several children whose parents were in good circumstances but 'through sin and weakness' fell. In two cases, the father died.

"One little girl aged two years came from the S.P.C.C. She was in such a bad condition, she was sent to the Convalescent Home in West Kirby. After a few months she was well again.

"One girl has gained the Appreciation Prize at the Higher Grade Schools. Her teachers consider her suitable for a pupil teacher and the committee have consented to allow her to enter as one."

Fund Raising

"Tuesday June 4th at St Aidan's College - a Sale 11.30am to 6.30pm in aid of the Homes."

"Miss Allan, Buckingham House, Palm Grove - a Garden Party and Maypole, June 8th 2.30pm. Entrance 1 sh."

"Five little girls held a sale of things they had made themselves. The sale was held in Winsom's garden, 12 Devonshire Place. The girls were Winsome Castle, Dorothea Johnston, Olive Blood, Margery and Nellie Moore. They raised £5-1 Os."

A letter in the Messenger, October 1901, from the Manager of the 'Home' to Sunday School children read:

"Dear Young Friends, The children are working hard in the little spare time they have, to provide themselves with boots and shoes and also to give you all a very happy afternoon. This year it will not be held until Friday 27th December at 3 o'clock in Christ Church schoolroom. We are sure you will want to tell your brothers and sisters and friends who are home from school about it. Even our baby

wants to say a piece of poetry to you if her courage does not fail her when she sees so many before her.

"We hope to have a table with groceries and any useful household requisites. We are sure your mothers will patronise this table. Our little friends will flock to the toys around the Christmas tree. We hope you will remain for tea.

The Manager of Christ Church Homes."

The Seaside Holiday

If there were sufficient funds the children were taken each year on a summer holiday to West Kirby for two weeks.

An extract from the Claughton Messenger, August 1890 reads:

"The Managers of the Homes for Little Children think it may be interesting to friends who have contributed to the holiday fund to hear how the holiday is managed.

"Mrs Christian of West Kirby is always willing to let us have an empty house at 15 shillings (75 pence) a week. The bedding is carted down by the Oxton Carriage Company for 9 shillings and bare necessaries are taken. The children sleep on the floor and Mrs Hunt, confectioner of West Kirby, kindly lends a trestle table and some forms, so friends will see that the children are not pampered in any way but get a much needed rest and change during the fortnight."

"£1 1-13s was put into the Alms Boxes on Sunday July 15th. This will not be sufficient to meet all the expenses but we feel confident our friends will send a little more for the holiday expenses."

The Closure

The Homes were closed at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 when the children had to be evacuated. The Matron at that time was Miss Norbury. The boys home was destroyed by a bomb during an air raid and the girls home badly damaged. The land remained derelict until 1963 when it was put up for auction and sold. Flats were later built on the site. The proceeds of the sale formed the endowment of the Christ Church Fund for Children, a registered charity operating for the benefit of children in need in the borough of Birkenhead. The charity is still active today, with trustees mostly drawn from the church and school.