

The Day School

Bishop Sumner was not only interested in making the church more effective, but also in educating the children of the working classes and he encouraged the building of church schools.

Christ Church had a day school from the time it opened in 1849. The large room under the east end of the church was used as a classroom where boys and girls were taught to read and write and master arithmetic. This was before the act of 1870 when schooling became compulsory. We know that 760 children attended the school in the schoolroom below the church. The lectern in church was given in memory of one of the teachers, Elizabeth Harrison.

At the Annual Vestry Meeting of 1880, it was reported that the school was full to overflowing and that a separate school building was urgently needed. A piece of land bordering Borough Road was purchased from the Earl of Shrewsbury and a school with separate departments for boys, girls and infants was built. It was opened on St Michael's Day, September 29th 1883. It was known as a higher grade school and had a reputation for very good teaching.

On Sundays before St Michael's Church was built some of the rooms were used for worship. The folding screens which separated two or three classrooms were drawn back and a Communion Table placed at one end. Desks were pushed back and rows of chairs put out. Elderly past pupils can still remember one classroom being called the Chancel Room.

During the Second World War the school was badly damaged in an air raid on March 9th 1941 and the few pupils who had not been evacuated moved into the Woodlands School and shared their building until 1954 when a new school was opened on the original site. This became a church maintained school.

Christ Church keeps a link with the school by having three members of the church on the governing body. The Vicar is usually the Chairman of the Governors. The clergy pay a weekly visit to the school to take assemblies and at festival times the children and teachers are invited to join the congregation at morning worship.

St Michael's Church

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many streets of small houses were built in the parish between Borough Road and Woodchurch Road. To meet the needs of these people, services were held on Sundays in the church school on Borough Road. As the congregation grew, it became clear that a daughter church was needed.

A piece of land in Carlton Road was purchased for £788 and Bishop Thornton laid the foundation stone on St Michael's Day in 1896. The new church of St Michael's and All Angels was consecrated on January 6th 1898 and was a Chapel of Ease to Christ Church until 1902 when it became a separate parish.

The new church flourished and was extended in the west end in 1907. The building was smaller than Christ Church and had a gallery over part of the nave. The total seating was 800. It lacked a large room below the chancel; the vestry and choir rooms were quite small compared with Christ Church.

In 1906, Rev A.E. Rowan became the second vicar of the parish and stayed until 1946. During his time the church gradually declined, especially after the two world wars. A retired missionary, the Rev Cook, took over for two or three years and was followed by the Rev A. Rowland. When he left it was decided to close the church and unite the two parishes once more. The last service was held on November 9th, 1958 and was conducted by Rev Laurie Skipper, Vicar of Christ Church. St Michael's Institute, built on adjoining land in 1924, was retained by Christ Church for a number of years, latterly as a Youth Centre, but was finally sold in 1969.

Pew Rents

Last century pew rents were common in most churches. Parishioners chose where they would like to sit and paid for each sitting. The cost of a sitting might vary from one to five shillings, old money. Families were large in those days and some had more than one pew allocated to them.

The name of the family was printed on a card attached to the end of the pew and no-one else was expected to sit in those seats. Families often left their Bibles, prayer books and cushions in the pews.

A few seats were free for visitors. In Christ Church, 414 seats, chiefly in the galleries, were free while the remaining 800 were rented. In St Michael's

Church, all the seats on the north side of the centre aisle were rented and those on the south side were free.

when people visited another church, perhaps when they were on holiday, they usually asked the Wardens or Sidesmen at the door where they might find a free seat and the sidesman would escort them to a place.

Pew rents were paid quarterly or half-yearly. In 1899 pew rents amounted to £90 at Christ Church and £82 at St Michael's. Each year a Pew Renter's Warden was elected at the Annual Vestry Meeting. In 1882 he was paid £10 for his work.

At the consecration of Christ Church in 1854, a document was drawn up which stated that the Church Wardens were allowed up to £50 a year from the pew rents to provide salaries for the Verger and other officers of the Church and to provide vestments, books, bread and wine for Holy Communion. The sum of £50 could only be altered by consent of the Bishop of Chester.

Pew rents had been abolished in most churches by the time of the Second World War in 1939.