

CHRIST CHURCH – THE BEGINNINGS – AN EARLY ACCOUNT – 1850's-1943

'THE CHURCH & PARISH OF CHRIST CHURCH ST ALBANS



'This church was built in 1850 and 1851 at the cost of Mr Alexander Raphael, Member of Parliament for the St Albans Division at that time, and is a fairly accurate copy of the Roman Catholic Church at Surbiton, Surrey, dedicated to the Angel, St Raphael. On the site, previous to the building of the Church, there had stood a house known as the "Verulam Arms Tap". This was used for the sale of alcoholic drinks, and was connected with the "Verulam Arms Hotel", a house next door to the "Tap" now

known as Diocesan House (or Verulam House). A picture of the Verulam Arms and Tap, depicting them as they were in about 1823, may be seen hanging on the wall of the North Vestry. The Hotel, in about 1850, became a private residence, and was owned and occupied by Mr Raphael. He had intended on the completion of his church to present it to the Roman Catholic Church for the purpose of opening up work for that Church in this part of St A/bans and had even had a plot of land, now part of the garden of Verulam House, set aside for a burial ground and consecrated, so it is said, by Cardinal Wiseman. Mr Raphael's death, however, prevented realisation of his project. He left the building in an unfinished state, and his executors sold it to Mrs Isabella Worley, of New Barnes, on the outskirts of St Albans.

'Mrs Worley determined to make the building a Church of the Church of England, and with this end in view entered into negotiation with the Bishop of Rochester, in whose diocese St Albans - with all of Hertfordshire - was included at that time. Her efforts were successful; not only as the building taken over by the Church of England, to become in due course Christ Church, but an ecclesiastical parish formed from the ancient parishes of the Abbey and St Michael's was also assigned to it. Work was begun on the completion of the Church and the building of a Vicarage, besides which a School for the education of the children of the parish was built on the opposite side of the road. The work was completed in 1856 at a total cost to Mrs Worley for the Church, Vicarage and School of £8591-12s-0d, in addition to a capital sum which she gave to provide some endowment for a Vicar.

'The Church was consecrated on April 18th 1859, which day was the Monday in Holy Week of that year. The ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Carlisle, Dr. Villiers, acting for the Bishop of Rochester, who was then very ill, in fact on his death-bed. We are told that Dr. Villiers took as his text Nehemiah viii, 8 and delivered a sermon "in a most impressive manner, and with emphasis and action which showed that he justly ranks amongst orators and divines of the highest order."

'Mrs Worley, who became the first Patron, presented the Reverend Henry Smith, M.A. as the first Vicar. He was instituted four days after the consecration of the Church, on Good Friday, April 27^d 1859, the first Sunday services ever held here were therefore those on Easter Sunday, April 24th, 1859. Two months later the Parish, called in legal phraseology a "Particular District", was officially constituted and assigned to the Church by Instrument dated 23^d June 1859. Thus what was originally intended to be a Roman Catholic Church was started on its life as a Parish Church of the Church of England. An irregularity, however, still remained, as the School was included in the Abbey Parish; its spiritual care therefore rested not with the Vicar of Christ Church but with the Rector of the Abbey Parish. As this was an anomalous state of affairs, an alteration of boundaries whereby the School was included in Christ Church Parish was effected by Instrument dated 23^d January 1862.

'The Church is built of Bath stone in the Lombardic style and - as visitors may see - consists of nave, aisles, chancel, two vestries and a campanile at the West end containing one bell and the Church organ. There is seating accommodation for about three hundred people in the nave and aisles. The style of architecture employed is unusual in England and still more so in Churches of the Church of England. Once, however, one has got over the initial surprise, its singular beauty and lightness is found to be very impressive indeed, combining as it does the loftiness and grace usually found in our Churches with the order and regularity of its classical style. The whole is found to engender an atmosphere of quietness and peace which is so necessary in a House for the worship of God.

'As to the Church's history subsequent to 1859 - the first Vicar, the Reverend Henry Smith, held the living for 27[?] years, till his death in 1886 and in 1887 a panel in stained glass depicting the Ascension was inserted as a memorial to him the East window. It is interesting to note that besides being Vicar of Christ Church he was also private chaplain to Mrs Worley, and for this latter duty received from her a stipend of £40 per annum. He also for twenty years had a free pass to travel whenever he wished to do so between St Albans and London on the North Western Railway. Since Mr Smith's time there have been ten other Vicars, whose names may be seen recorded in the panel just inside the Church door on the right hand side. The late Lord Grimthorpe interested himself in the Church; he not only substantially increased the endowment of the living but also concerned with the building of the Parish Hall in Church Crescent. This was erected by means of free-will offerings made on the occasion of the diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and the foundation stone was laid on September 16th 1897, by Lady Grimthorpe, when the Reverend C Askwith MA was Vicar.

'Besides the window panel commemorating the incumbency of the First Vicar, there are two memorial tablets; one on the wall of the North aisle, in memory of Mr Edward William Slater Royds, who for twenty five years was organising secretary of the Hertfordshire Band of Hope Union. Mr Royds, whilst on an intended visit to his brother in Australia, developed cholera on the outward journey, died after the ship had left its port of call in the Mediterranean, and was buried at sea on June 23rd 1911. The other memorial tablet is to be found just on the left after entering the Church, and is erected in memory of the forty-five men of the Parish who fell in

