

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, Port St. Mary, Isle of Man. Church History 1884 -1984

A Church History is, first and foremost. the record of the love and adoration of a worshipping community; the building of the stone edifice, together with its furnishings, being but tokens of that love and worship. For long before the first stone was laid in that building we know today as St. Mary's Church the desire for such a place of worship burned deep in the hearts of St. Mary's people. As long ago as 1847 it was reported in the local press that a Chapel of Ease was to be built, and £300 had already been raised.

It was a long walk to the Parish Church at Rushen and with little or no transport in those days many were unable to attend, nor was the Church able to accommodate them, having seating for only 400, so in October 1848 Divine Service began to be held in the large schoolroom of the Schoolhouse, which was situated at the corner of the Promenade and is now turned into shops.

As time passed and with Port St. Mary becoming popular as a sea side resort because of its safe and sheltered beach together with the attraction of the herring fleet, sailing each evening, brown sails unfurled, returning each morning with a silvery catch, the need for a church in this picturesque spot became pressing.

Yet it was not until 1881 that, following a meeting held in the Schoolhouse at which the Bishop, the Right Reverend Rowley Hill, presided, Messrs. Barry & Son, architects, of Liverpool. were asked to draw plans, the Bishop's advice being that building should begin immediately.

With the work now ready to proceed the site was given by Mrs. Emily Maria Gawne, of Kentraugh, together with a donation of £400. The remainder of the money was raised by public subscription, the estimate for the church being £1,200.

Then came the day for the laying of the Foundation Stone, and the sun shone gloriously. On Monday, May 15th, 1882, at 12 o'clock, the Stone was laid by Mrs. Gawne of Kentraugh, the service commencing with the singing of the metrical psalm 84, *O God of Hosts*, the mighty Lord, verses 1, 2 and 13, after which the Bishop, the Right Reverend Rowley Hill, led the congregation in prayer, saying:

Finally. O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the prayers and intercessions of us and all others, thy servants, who hereafter, entering into the house now to be provided for thy worship shall there call upon thee: and give to all of us grace that we may prepare our hearts to serve thee with reverence and godly fear; affect us with an awful apprehension of thy Heavenly Majesty and with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, so that, approaching thy sanctuary with lowliness and devotion and appearing before thee with clean thoughts and pure hearts, with bodies undefiled and minds sanctified, we may be an acceptable people in thy sight

Then followed the laying of the Stone and the address by the Bishop; after that the singing of the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th verses of the metrical psalm 100, *With one consent let all the earth ...*

To commemorate the occasion Mrs. Gawne was presented with a truly lovely silver trowel, beautifully chased, the ivory handle carved in a twisting design.

The Church was consecrated on Friday, 25th January. 1884. At the morning service the Bishop preached about Jacob's Stone at Bethel, and in the evening he preached again, to a packed church, taking as his text. *Where is the guest chamber, that I may eat the Passover with my disciples.*

The Bishop, Clergy and Registrar, forty all told, lunched at Kentraugh.

At the time of the church's consecration there was as yet no organ, no lighting, no heating, and no porch over the door, but there were already many gifts. Mrs. Gawne of Kentraugh gave the Communion rails, also the Communion plate. The Misses Gawne gave the font. The reredos and the mosaic floor in the sanctuary were given as a memorial to the late Bishop Rowley Hill.

By 1896 the porch had been added and it was dedicated by the Bishop in April that year.

Of the first twenty years of the church's existence little is recorded, but by 1904 there were many improvements. The tower had been built at a cost of £360 and that year saw both clock and bell in place, the clock being started at 12 o'clock on March 25th. The clock and bell were the gift of Mr. Farnsworth of Manchester. The stained glass windows above the altar were erected by Thomas and Anne Lacey in memory of their sons, Herbert Wright, Walter Clucas, and Frank Dale. And on November 30th, 1904 the church was lit by gas for the first time.

Also in 1904 Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Caparn gave the eagle lectern and four brass flower vases. Mr. and Mrs. Caparn had previously given the oak casing for the organ and later a prayer desk. The prayer desk was dedicated on May 3rd, 1903.

In 1910 Mr. and Mrs. Fred A. J. Poulson, of Bootle, provided the marble pavement in the chancel. Their marriage in 1896 was the first to be solemnised in St. Mary's.

Though there is little recorded of the church's life during the first twenty years there are those who remember the years that followed. By the early part of the 20th century St. Mary's Christmas Tree was well established as an annual occasion and one of the social highlights of the winter, with an entertainment by the children and in the evening a sausage and mash supper, the supper being cooked and brought across from the cafe opposite, which is now "Patchwork". The canopied stalls and the surround for the tree were made and given by Mr. Charles Wood Leigh, and those ladies who were stall holders were responsible for the decoration of their stalls, and also for providing all the goods they had for sale.

As far back as the early years of the century, and possibly before that, St. Mary's Ladies Working Party was in existence. As the church had no hall until 1922, afternoon teas were held in each other's houses, to which gentlemen were also invited. and they were afternoon teas indeed. No tea and biscuits at those events. And at Christmas, 1907, the ladies of St. Mary's published a cookery book, and a very successful venture it was, with copies still in use, though the recipes given are not as rich as those of today.

Entitled "Favourite Recipes", and dedicated to all cooks, amateur or otherwise, it was compiled by Kathleen Caparn and Lillie Williams, with all church members, their friends and relations, contributing a recipe or household hint, including one from "Doc" Williams, the local doctor, and one from the curate, the Rev. Robert Ferguson.

Following the death in 1920 of Mr. Frederick John Caparn, his widow, Kathleen, presented the Altar Cross in his memory.

With the coming of the First World War there was little change until the Thirties. In 1930 the Ladies Working Party provided a new crimson carpet for the chancel, and with electricity becoming available for the whole of the Island, St. Mary's was wired for this

new form of lighting. Mr. Kewley of Port Erin was asked to carry out the work, the light fittings being chosen by Mr. Charles Wood Leigh, who had been entrusted to be in charge of the undertaking. Also in the Thirties an addition was built on to the vestry, the expense of this being borne entirely by Colonel C. T. Brown.

Then came the Second World War. During those years a canteen was set up in St. Mary's Hall for the boys in the Air Force stationed here. St. Mary's Church Hall had been acquired in 1922, half of the cost being the gift of Mr. Edwin Qualthrough, of Point House, the rest of the money being raised by St. Mary's people. To help towards this a Gymkhana was held at Kentraugh.

As the hall had no kitchen the money for the building of this very necessary addition was raised by St. Mary's Ladies Working Party and added some years later.

After the war, following the death of Mr. B. W. Atkinson, who had sung in the choir for many years, the church was left money for a stained glass window to be erected in memory of his parents, sisters and brother.

The increase in traffic at this time made it necessary for the narrow tree-lined road from High Street to Bay View Road to be widened, with the result that St. Mary's Church garden wall had to be demolished. It was rebuilt several feet further back, exactly as it was originally, the only small difference being that the gate no longer shuts as it should.

A literature table being needed one was supplied by Mrs. Mary McPherson in 1952. Later, when a Visitor's Book was provided in Canon Gelling's time another table to accommodate this was given by Mrs. Joan Collins.

In 1960 the Sunday School was moved from the Hall into Church, and the Sunday School children improved the church by providing a carpet for the aisle, and in 1962 the Ladies Working Party gave felt seating for the pews.

In 1970 two further stained glass windows were erected. The first was given by Mrs. Lilian Stella Squire, to the glory of God and in memory of her parents, Charles Wood and Lilian Leigh, of Willoughby, and the second, also given by Mrs. Squire, is in memory of her husband, William George Ellis Squire, formerly vicar of the parish. These windows were the work of Mr. Blair and Mr. Blyth, of Edinburgh.

Following this, other stained glass windows were received in 1972, one being given by Mr. and Mrs. John Collins in memory of Mrs. Collin's mother, Carol P. Allen. Another was the gift of Mrs. Mary McPherson, in memory of her husband, Thomas Stanley McPherson, who was at one time a curate here. A few years later Mrs. Fulton also gave a stained glass window, in memory of her husband, Keith James Fulton.

Throughout the years many other gifts have been received for the furnishing and beautifying of God's House. Brass alms dishes, one large, two smaller, were given by Henry J. Qualthrough when the church was built. The crimson Altar frontal was the gift of Miss Carrie Hodginson, made and embroidered by her. All the Communion linen was for very many years made, given and looked after by Mrs. Caparn, with Miss Barr assisting Mrs. Caparn after she was widowed and became crippled with arthritis.

The Church has also received bequests. By her Will Mrs. Agnes Maud Kneale, of Douglas, left her house, Sea View, Bay View Road, Port St. Mary, to be sold and the proceeds divided between St. Mary's Church and the Methodist Church in Port St. Mary, and in 1968 St. Mary's received £1,520.

The Rev. William Percy Allen, who assisted in this parish for a number of years, also remembered St. Mary's in his Will, and in 1983 the sum of £2,535 was received.

A gift of £1,000 from the Parish Church was made possible by the Clifford Cregeen bequest.

In recording this brief history of St. Mary's Church we may ask ourselves what it was that inspired and emboldened the inhabitants of Port St. Mary a hundred years and more ago to build it.

It was, surely, because they knew they had a Saviour. And they knew, moreover, that they *needed* a Saviour. And the reason we maintain our Church and worship there today is because we, too, know we have a Saviour, and we know, only too well, how much we need Him, and not only we ourselves, here in this quiet place, but all men everywhere.

So we pray that our Church, having stood these hundred years, may stand for many more. Yet should the forces of evil, so strong in Our world today, tear down its walls and scatter its stones, the Church of Christ will still stand, alive and undefeated, in the hearts and minds of those that are His, firm in the faith of Christ crucified, of Christ risen, of Christ in glory, knowing Him throughout the ages as Lord of Heaven and Lord of earth. Who, offering us the gift of Life Eternal made *Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*

Which truth is so supremely expressed in those words by the Rev. 11. R. Bramley,

"He is, what He was, and forever shall be,
..But became what He was not, for you and for me..."

Other Gifts to St. Mary's

- A Service Book for Communion, the gift of Mrs. Toombs and Mrs. Kinley in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. T H Doran.
- A further Service Book for Communion, the gift of Miss Lace in memory of her sister, Miss Mary Lace.
- An all seasons Altar frontal, the gift of the Rev. and Mrs. W. G. F. Squire.
- The vestry safe, the gift of Mrs. Lilian Leigh.
- Two brass alms dishes. the gift of Mrs. Phillips in memory of her husband Tom Phillips, church treasurer for many years.
- Hymn books in memory of Norah Movie, one time secretary of the Ladles Working Party.
- A kneeler for the sanctuary the gift of Mrs. K. Hampson.
- Pulpit falls, in the liturgical colours, the gift of Captain George Kinley, in memory of his wife Alice.
- Brass candlesticks and candle snuffer, the gift of Mrs. Joan Collins, the handle for the snuffer being made by Canon Taggart.
- The piano, the gift of Mrs. Edythe Bridson.
- Burse and veil sets in the liturgical colours a pew runner, and a series of kneelers. including a wedding kneeler, the gifts of Mrs. Joan Collins.
- A silver wafer box, the gift of Mrs. Ivy Brown, dedicated by the Vicar on January 9th. 1983.