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ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH

1980

# A SHORT HISTORY OF ST. GEORGE'S, RUGBY

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THE STORY of St. George's goes back beyond the dark days of the second world war, to the years following the first world war and the troubled times of the nineteen thirties. The time when the world was without the numerous cars, aeroplanes and other forms of modern transport, the days of unemployment and poor wages. It was during this period that the authorities within the Coventry diocese conceived the idea of erecting "Hall Churches" to meet the spiritual needs of the people who were beginning to live in the large new housing estates which were being built in the rural spaces around the edges of the larger towns.

Hillmorton Paddock was one of the first areas to be considered, because the Parish Church (St. John the Baptist) was a long distance away from the new Paddock housing estate. The Vicar of St. John the Baptist rallied his flock, who responded most generously, the site for a Hall Church being purchased in St. John's Avenue, at the northern end of Fisher Avenue.

Two Trustees were appointed, the Vicar of St. John the Baptist (the Rev'd. F.S. Corby) and Mr F. Mann.

In 1935/36 the Bishop of Coventry (Dr Mervyn Haigh) launched a public appeal for £65,000 to build a number of Hall Churches throughout the diocese. One of these was to serve the needs of the new 'Ashlawn Estate', Hillmorton, as the old estates of Ashlawn, Paddock, Brown's Farm and Catesby had now become.

When the time came to build the new Hall Church in 1939, it was found that the Rector of Rugby (Canon R. Brook) with a more substantial P.C.C., was in a much better position to handle the important details, particularly as the second world war with Germany was about to take place. Building a new church in such times demanded planning and not a little determination. The well known Ecclesiastical Architect, N.F. Cachemaille-Day, F.R.I.B.A., was retained to design the new building. Building materials were secured, and on March 9th 1940 the Foundation Stone was laid by Mrs H.N. Sporborg. Designed to hold a congregation of 250 the Hall Church of St. George, a daughter church of St. Andrew's Rugby, was dedicated on September 14th 1940, by the Bishop of Coventry.

A list of Gifts used in the Hall Church will be found in the Order of Service used on that occasion, and some of these donors are fortunately still with us today.

The Rector of Rugby appointed a new staff priest, the Rev'd. T. Pritchard, to be the first curate of St. George's and a provisional Church Council was constituted:-

Rector's Warden	-	Mr C. E. Coombe
People's Warden	-	Mr R. F. Bache
Secretary	-	Mr C. Richardson
Treasurer	-	Mr. G. C. Corin
Organist & Choirmaster	-	Mr C. A. Hall
Trustee	-	Mr F. Mann

Other members of this provisional Council were Mrs R. C. Richardson, Mrs Gurney and Mr Twynham. The Council was confirmed on 4th March 1941 when the first Annual General Meeting was held.

For the first few years of the life of St. George's, the war had a considerable effect on Church life. The Sunday Services could only be held in Daylight at 8 am, 9 am and 3 pm. During these services the Verger, Mr Edwards, would sit outside the Church to listen for the sirens in case of air raids.

The windows in the new Church were set high in the walls so that in the unfortunate event of bombs dropped by enemy aircraft landing nearby, the glass in the windows would fall outwards and not on to the Congregation.

The Priest-in-Charge arranged for communicants to have breakfast in the nearby Paddox School, which was a very successful enterprise.

A Sunday School started with junior and senior groups and St. George's started to become what was originally envisaged - a neighbourhood church.

It is on record that the local firewatchers practised on the Green, next to the Church (the site of the present St. George's) as the Curate's house had not been built because of the war regulations.

The P.C.C. offered the land at the side of the Church to the Borough Council for use as allotments at a nominal rent of 1/-d per annum, although this offer was never taken up because of the cost of fencing and the rough nature of the ground.

There was also a plan in 1941 for the new St. George's Church to become an Emergency Information Centre, if in the event of heavy air raids the permanent centre, then situated in Albert Buildings, Rugby, was severely damaged.

During the dark days of war the new Hall Church of St. George apparently prospered. The annual sale of work started, the sewing party flourished, and during its first nine months of life St. George's received over £600 from donations, collections, the sale of work and the efforts of the sewing circle. Meanwhile furniture and fittings were constantly being donated to the Church. The early days were notable for the spirit engendered during times of extreme hardship, much of which was due to the first Curate, Tom Pritchard, and an era was to end in April 1945 when he left for pastures new, being succeeded by the Rev'd. Dennis Page (now Bishop of Lancaster).

1945 was also the year of the St. George's Ladies: the sewing circle was the strongest organisation within the Church, the flower guild and the Mothers' Union were well supported, and ladies were first admitted to the Choir, while with the end of hostilities the first post-war organisation was started - the 4th Rugby Girl Guides, who were expected to attend Evensong one Sunday a month.

The new Curate, Dennis Page, who had up to this time been living in digs with Mr & Mrs Corin, married Miss M. Clayton, and the Church Council purchased a house at 7, Boundary Road, for Mr & Mrs Page to occupy, which was later taken over and administered by the Parish. Congregations continued to increase and many of the organisations recruited new members, and indeed prospered.

In 1947 plans for a Curate's house to be built next to the Church had to be indefinitely suspended due to the building licence restrictions.

In 1950 Dennis Page left St. George's for Norfolk, and was replaced by the Rev'd. Michael Webster. The first Secretary retired and was replaced by Mr A. Wilkinson.

In 1952, the first major expense in the life of St. George's took place, when the original organ was replaced at a cost of £337, and Mr C. A. Hall, the first Organist and Choirmaster, left Rugby.

The Church A.G.M. of 1953 is the first time in the Church records that the then Rector of Rugby (Canon P.C.A. Carnegie) placed before the congregation the idea of a new, permanent, Church of St. George. Also at this AGM Mr R.H.C. Taylor replaced Mr A. Wilkinson as Secretary.

Michael Webster left St George's in 1954, and the Rev'd. J. Hampton became spiritual leader. The seeds of a new Church were beginning to germinate, and by

the time of the departure of John Hampton in June 1956, the idea was openly being talked about. In 1956 the Rev'd. A.A. Coldwells became Curate-in-Charge and St. George's was promised priority in the Bishop of Coventry's new building appeal programme.

By 1959 the Bank overdraft had been erased and a genuine and successful effort had been made to contribute generously to the Bishop's appeal, through covenanting by the congregation, and the R.C. Richardson memorial fund. By the 1960 AGM some £5000 had been raised by the congregation, and greater things were yet to come.

The appointment of Mr Denys Hinton, R.I.B.A. (now Professor) as architect to the new Church of St. George greatly encouraged contributions, and by late summer in the same year the amount collected was £10,695.

By the end of 1960 some £12500 had been allocated towards the estimated total cost of £25000, from the Bishop's Appeal Fund to build a new Church next to the original Hall Church of St. George on the Ashlawn Estate at Rugby.

This heralded a new era for St. George's. In 1961 Mr D. Dernie became Choirmaster and Alan Coldwells announced that he would stay until the new Church was completed.

Also in that year Mrs Hayes gave up the leadership of the M.U., and Mrs Sporborg, who had started it, and who had laid the foundation stone of the Hall Church

in the dark days of 1940, passed on to a greater existence. Alan Coldwells, in his capacity as Curate-in-Charge, took a very long, hard look at all the many facets of the Church, the needs of the community, the Church within the community, and the Church as a social and cultural centre; he also explored the intricate details of what sort of building a congregation needs to further its spiritual life. This was not at all an easy task, so trying to avoid too many conflicts of interests, he issued a questionnaire to the congregation. The questions posed were demanding and from the resultant discussions a brief was prepared by the Church Council and given to the architect.

Some nine meetings were held between the Council and Mr Hinton, and eventually a design was agreed which fitted the strict financial straitjacket of £25,000. The only part of the new Church which could not be accommodated within this limit was in fact the Organ, and this had been foreseen by the Council. An organ was later purchased at a cost of some £2,500, an electronic model constructed by the Miller Organ Co. of Norwich. The money for this was raised by subscriptions from the congregation, and many friends, in approximately six months, due mainly to the untiring efforts of Mr G. T. Rowlands.

The design of the Church was conceived to suit the users of the new building. The windows are arranged to have the effect of concentrating light over the free-standing Altar, this effect being further enhanced by

a skylight above the Altar in the ceiling.

The Lectern/Pulpit is found to the north of the Altar, and is complemented on the south side by the Choir Stalls and the organ.

Probably the most striking feature is the Font and the Baptistry window, which greet the visitor from the outside. The Font is made of Nornton Stone and is surrounded by a "pool" of Swedish glass mosaic which flows from the outside world into the community of new life. There is then a step of descent to the Font in order to symbolise the meaning of baptism (that is, a descending into the death of Christ, followed by a rising with him into the Easter life). The sculptor of the Font and the Dove above it was Mr John Bridgman.

The Hallowing of the site, conducted by Bishop John Mc Kie, Assistant Bishop of Coventry, took place on Sunday, August 20th 1961, and the completed Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt. Rev'd. C.K.N. Bardsley, C.B.E., M.A., D.D. on Saturday 24th November 1962 at 3 pm.

The first Holy Communion was celebrated by the Bishop on Sunday, 25th November at 8.45 am.

The new Church with its lattice steel roof beams and its small balcony Chapel prompted the Bishop of Coventry to remark, "It strikes one the moment one comes in as a place of work, for worship is work".

St. George's was designed to seat at least 350 but when necessary can seat nearly 500. The Choir Robes

(made in the Rev'd. L. Mortimer's time) also move away from the traditional cassock and surplice, comprising a specially designed two-tone blue robe. The marble and brick Altar and the Golden Cross suspended above it, give the last touch of simplicity to a very individual Church building.

The Wardens at the time of consecration were Mr F.Twyford and Mr A.R.Whittle. The Council were Mesdames Hayes and Elmer, and Messrs F.Bryant, R.Francis, R.Goodall, R.Jones, P.Leibert, R.Reeve, G.Rowlands, S.Watling and G.Corin. Mr Corin was the only remaining member of the original Council still serving on the Council at the time of the consecration of the new building.

With the consecration of the Church the Curate who had perhaps more influence than anyone else on the design, and ideas incorporated in the building, the Rev'd. A.A.Coldwells, took his leave of the congregation, returning soon to marry Miss M.P. Hemsley on January 5th, 1963.

He was succeeded by the Rev'd. J.Key. During the curacies of John Key and Nick Richards, St. George's grew, prospered and happily managed to maintain a modern Church outlook and serve the local environment, as well as preserving many old church traditions.

The first experimental Series 2 Communion Services in Rugby were held at St. George's, and the Church continued to expand. The Musical Traditions more than kept pace with the vigorous and healthy Church serving the area.

In 1974 whilst the Rev'd. L. Mortimer was Curate, a Cross was added over the pulpit. This "Christus Regnans" Cross is made of metals and was donated by Mrs Batchelor's family. The Cross was constructed by sculptor Leicester Thomas, and comprises an Iron Cross framing a bright Brass Cross, the two having a common centre of an 'eternity' ring of silver.

In 1975 one of St. George's regular communicants, Councillor Cyril Orland, became Mayor of Rugby, and it was a natural step for the annual Mayor's Sunday Service to be held in his Church.

Lawrence Mortimer moved on to Coventry in 1975, and after a nine month interregnum he was replaced by the Rev'd. K. Maudsley.

St. George's seems to have been strengthened by the long interregnum, during which time the laity managed to maintain regular services and enjoyed their independence.

In 1977 a Flower Festival was held, and this was remarkable in that it was entirely financed by organisations raising the money to buy and arrange the designs of Mrs Joan Richardson. It proved successful and was the first time that the local modern Church had attempted such a venture. The Designer, Mrs Richardson, described the building as 'having a few difficulties'!

Money had also been raised for a new (white) Altar frontal, which was designed and made by Mr Christopher Perkins. He later generously donated a second (green) one which matches the first in both style and beauty.

In 1979 the Rev'd. Martin Greig replaced Keith Maudsley, who moved to new duties in Cambridge. With the closure of Holy Trinity Church in Rugby and the gradual demise of the original electronic organ, the Council made the decision to accept the major part of the pipework of the old Holy Trinity organ, and only had to find the money to finance the installation and necessary additions to create a new organ, still a major project. It is being built by Mr R.Young, a local organ builder who has an intimate knowledge of this particular instrument, as he was a former organist of Holy Trinity Church. This decision meant that for the first time for many years St. George's Church is faced with an uphill struggle to find the finance required for this project.

St. George's Church was originally intended to be a local community Church, and in the days of the second war was a considerable focus of attention. The spirit of those days and the foresight of those who worked, helped, and worshipped, must never be forgotten as an act of faith.

Today on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of our Church, the present generation of worshippers must look back to the previous occupants of the seats within St. George's and say 'thank you' for the opportunity of worshipping God in such an edifice, and look forward, not to the problems

of paying £10,000 for the organ, or the increasing problems of maintenance of a 17 year old building, or the heating costs that have risen astronomically in the last few years, but for the wider issues of making St. George's a community Church, a building frequented by people who care for their neighbours and friends, and who will tackle together the evangelistic issues and the expected fall in Clergy numbers, and be ready to be tested for their Christian beliefs. Most of all to be able to pass on to their successors at St. George's, a Church designed and built, to the greater glory of God.