

A Brief History of St Thomas' Church, Eaton



Prior to the church of St Thomas being built, the spiritual needs of the parishioners of Eaton had been met by the Parish Church in Tarporley and the 'Mission' in Eaton. The 'Mission' also known as the 'Recreation Room' and latterly the 'Reading Room' was built in 1873 and is now a garage at Church Cottage. In addition to the Sunday worship an evening service was held each Tuesday followed by a Bible class for men.

Desire for a place of worship in the village increased and in July 1895 a meeting was held and 90 men and women voted unanimously for the building of a small church in Eaton. Land was donated by the Earl of Haddington and Messrs Reece Brothers drew up plans for the new church and Mr John Vernon was the contractor.

The foundation stone containing a Parish magazine, coins and a newspaper of the day, was laid by Mrs Jessie Hughes, wife of the Rector of Tarporley, in the absence of Mrs Jane Mann of Bowmere. The ceremony was attended by a great crowd, many of whom laid bricks at 6d a brick.

The Church cost a total of £2,000 and on 26th May 1896 the Dedication and Opening ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Chester. The day was described in the parish magazine "There was a clean smell of paint everywhere you went, strings of flags and air balloons vied with the lovely pink flowering thorn on the village green. There was a crowd quiet and orderly in the road at 2pm. When the door opened the Church was filled in a few moments." Following the service a fete was held with games and stalls, music was provided by the Tarporley Band. Tickets were given to widows and poor people. Three hundred and fifty people were fed.



Further land was donated for a burial ground and this was consecrated in July 1915. Whilst preparing the burial ground a large slab of stone was found. This was identified as the old Crab Mill stone or press. The west end of the Church is partially on the site of a cider mill which was once attached to the Alvanley Arms (now Silver Birches cottage).

Items of Interest within the Church

The Bell

Originally a small bell was positioned on the roof of the boiler house and operated by a rope in the vestry. At funerals a boy, perched on the roof, struck the bell with a hammer at one minute intervals, for which he was paid one shilling. In July 1930, a bell turret of timber was erected at the West end of the Church and a bell donated by Mrs Florence Brooks was installed. It replaced a stone cross, now in the churchyard. In 1956 a new bell was installed. The bell is an ex Canadian

locomotive bell. It weighs 2-cwts and previously belonged to Steam Locomotive No 1090 which began service in Canada in 1913 until it was replaced by a diesel engine in 1954.

The Font and Baptistry

In 1936 the Baptistry was built and the vestry enlarged by the Hon. Marshall Brooks who also donated the pulpit, the communion rail, the choir stalls, the font cover and the reredos.

The Font is made of sandstone with a carved oak lid which is operated by a pulley system.



Stained glass windows

At the East end of the church is the Sanctuary in which there are four beautiful stained glass windows which were installed in 1900 in memory of Mrs Felicia Mann. The first of the four windows on the left of the altar depicts St Catherine of Alexandria, also known as St Catherine of the wheel. According to tradition she was a saint and a virgin who was martyred in the early 4th century by the pagan emperor Maxentius. She was condemned to die on a spiked breaking wheel but the wheel was miraculously destroyed in answer to St Catherine's prayers and so she was beheaded.



The next window depicts St Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine who made Christianity the official faith in his empire. Tradition says she went to Jerusalem in search of the true cross hence she is usually portrayed with a cross.

The first window to the right of the altar is of St Thomas, known as Doubting Thomas, who is best known for questioning the resurrection of Jesus when first told of it.

The final window depicts St John, known also as the Beloved disciple. Tradition holds that he outlived all the apostles (who were martyred) and ultimately died of natural causes.

The Altar

On either side of the altar are two beautiful angels carved in wood by Mr William Crank, who was the first church warden at St Thomas, and in whose memory the processional cross was donated by his family. Prior to this a processional cross was loaned when necessary by St Helen's church.

for more views of St Thomas', please see the Photos page of this website

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