A Brief History of Christ Church Crowton.

Christ Church is an active Anglican parish church in the deanery of Frodsham, the archdeaconry of Chester, and the diocese of Chester. Its benefice is combined with those of St John the Evangelist, Kingsley, and St John the Evangelist, Norley.

The lovely Grade II listed Church which was built on the highest point of the village was designed in the Gothic Revival style by Sir John Loughborough Pearson RA., FSA. It is constructed in red sandstone, with a red tiled roof. Its architectural style is that of the 13th century. The plan consists

of a four-bay nave and a two-bay chancel in one range, a transept and a vestry on the north side, a south porch, and a two-tier double bellcote at the west end. The buttresses include a massive stepped buttress on the south side at the division of the nave and the chancel. The windows in the nave have two lights, and those in the chancel have three lights. Inside the church, the nave is divided from the chancel by a low wall and a double chamfered arch.



Sir John Pearson designed many new churches during his career, ranging from small country churches to major churches in cities. Among the latter, St Augustine's Church in Kilburn, London, "may claim to be his masterpiece". Towards the end of his career he designed two new cathedrals, at Truro in Cornwall, and Brisbane in Australia.

The church was consecrated on the 2nd November 1871 by William, Bishop of Chester. The three bells were aptly named Faith, Hope and Charity.

The Revd Charles William Spencer-Stanhope MA was the first vicar, and remained so until his death in September 1894. He provided the organ that was built in 1871 by Gray and Davidson, together with the stained glass windows above the altar and along the south wall in memory of his family. More detailed descriptions of the stained glass windows are included later in this article.

According to early church records the first baptisms were on 5th November 1871 when Emily Fond, Mary Motham, Margaret Chrimes, Mary Chrimes and Mary Lewis were baptised. The first burials followed in January 1872; on the 18th with William Stretch of Kingsley aged 31, and sadly on the 20th with Sabrina Finney of Crowton aged 22 months. The first marriage was on the 6th February 1893 when Thomas Kinsey married Alice Moreton.

The early minutes of the annual Vestry - always held on Easter Monday after Divine Service - give an insight into the early years of the Parish: in 1876 'The Choir was now in a satisfactory state, which was well exemplified yesterday Easter Day, by the way 'the service was rendered, the first day they had appeared as a surpliced choir.'

In 1889 'The Vicar expressed his thanks to God for wonderful healthiness of the parish, there having been only one adult death in 1888.'

Financial problems appeared in 1896 when it was recorded that the balance in hand was £2-10s-5d (£2.52) A worrying state of affairs, as 20 years earlier it was recorded that the Bell Ringer was to be paid £3 a year; the Verger Sexton (same man) £3 a year and the Church Cleaner £4 a year!

A number of changes have been made to the church facilities, some as donations in memory of relatives, but the majority paid for by voluntary contribution. Amongst the changes recorded are:-

- 1903. The parish was looking into the possibility of creating a Choir Vestry by converting the North Transept into a Vestry and Parish Room, possibly by filling in the archway. It was finally decided that a curtain be placed across the recess.
 - 1922. A reredos, with shelf, a cross, and two candle sticks, was installed as a replacement for curtains, to commemorate the jubilee.
 - 1926. The Lectern was replaced with an eagle pattern one in oak as a memorial to Charles Taylor Garfit and his wife Ada Maria.
 - 1929. An oak screen was added to divide transept from nave as a memorial to James Gandy and his wife Elizabeth.
 - 1935. The paraffin lamps were replaced with electric lamps.
 - 1936. The original, solid fuel, heating apparatus was replaced by electrical heaters.
 - 1946. A new stained glass window by Trena Cox, entitled "Mother and Child" was installed in the North Transept.

Trena Mary Cox (1895–1980) was an English stained glass artist and was a fellow of the British Society of Master Glass Painters. She was born Emma Trina Cox on 3 March 1895, in the Lower Bebington Urban District (i.e. not Bebbington), on the Wirral Peninsula and grew up around Birkenhead. She trained at the Laird School of Art. She had studios in Victoria Road and latterly in Watergate Street, Chester, which remained her home and, at least later, her studio, until she retired in 1972 (at the age of 77) and died, on 11 February 1980. Most of her many works are in churches in the old counties of Cheshire and Lancashire.

- 1952. New choir and clergy stalls were installed as memorial to William James Gandy, Barton Gandy, and John Gandy.
- 1970. The bells were removed due to structural problems.
- 1971. Oil fired central heating replaced the electric heaters.
- 1989. The bells were restored to western turret, with solenoid operating mechanism.
- 1991. The electrical wiring was replaced and new light fittings installed.
- 1993. The original pipe organ was replaced with an electronic model.
- 1996. A new Screen was installed at the west end of the nave to accommodate the relocation of the Vicar's Vestry and the Choir Vestry. The North Transept once again became part of the Church as a Lady Chapel with a new altar and wooden cross and new chairs. The old Vicar's Vestry was converted to a toilet and a kitchen/utility room
- 2016. The bells were refurbished and a Lightning Conductor was installed.

There are 10 stained glass windows in the church which depict each important phase of life, together with appropriate text.

The east window depicts the crucifixion of Christ. He is dying in agony and sorrow as his followers look helplessly on:- 'He was wounded for our transgressions'. Yet it is not over, for above the cross in a sexfoil light Christ is displayed in Glory, holding an Orb and sitting on a Rainbow, throne... Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

The dedication on this window reads:- 'To the Glory of God and in memory of Charles Spencer Stanhope, Vicar of Weaverham, who died Oct 29th 1871 aged 79 and Frederica Mary his wife who died May 30th 1875 aged 63'.



\$

The window on the north side of the sanctuary portrays the moment of realisation that the stranger who joined the two companions sorrowfully from Jerusalem to Emmaus after the crucifixion, was the Risen Christ:- 'Their eyes were opened and they knew him'



\$



The choir window, though no inscription confirms it, is believed to be Miriam leading the singing and dancing after the victory over the Pharaoh. It was erected by Charles Spencer Stanhope in memory of his uncle.

In the west window are St. Agnes – feast day January 21st and said to be the patron of maidens; St. Cecilia – feast day November 22nd, patron saint of musicians and singers; St. Catherine – feast day November 25th, patron saint of philosophers and librarians; St. Rosalia – feast day September 4th – and not known to be a patron!



\$



The window in the Vicar's new vestry behind the font is a depiction of Jesus blessing the children. The inscription reads <u>'Suffer little children to come</u> unto me'. It was erected 'In memoriam Alice Spencer Stanhope wife of Charles Fellows on August 14th 1892 aged 22'

In the Lady Chapel window (as described above by Trena Cox), beneath the Madonna and Child is a small portrayal of the Nativity. The window as placed 'In grateful remembrance of Ellen Kilgour Butterworth, dear wife and loving mother'



\$



The west window on the north side of the nave depicts Joseph, Mary and two angels in adoration of the infant Christ. The Angel in the quatrefoil above holds a banner inscribed "Hallelujah". It is interesting to note that it differs from other similar quatrefoils in the church in that the Hebrew way of spelling the word is used here

\$

Jesus's first miracle is recorded in the east window on the north side of the nave. When at a wedding feast the wine runs out, Mary bids the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to – which was to fill twenty gallon stone jars with water. When the master of the feast tasted it he declared it to be the best wine of all.



\$



The east window on the south side of the nave was erected in loving memory of Tinley Mason who died in 1872, by his sister Rosalie Spencer Stanhope. It shows Lazarus coming out of his tomb when Jesus called him forth. In the quatrefoil above are the words 'Jesus wept' from John 11:35 which is the shortest verse in the Bible.

The west window on the south side of the nave pictures the Presentation of Christ in the Temple to Simeon and Anna, with Mary holding the obligatory Temple offering. The words 'Mine eyes have seen thy salvation' are Simeon's and are part of a longer oration, Nunc Dimittis, which is said or sung at Evening Prayer.

Richard Thorne.

