

THE CHURCH ON WEDNESFIELD GREEN

The story of St Thomas's Church, Wednesfield

1750 – 2000



Written to celebrate St Thomas's 250th Anniversary

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by Roger Poole

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Roger Poole

FOREWORD

On the eve of my retirement, as the Rector of Wednesfield when the Millennium Celebrations started, I am privileged to have been asked to write a brief foreword to this history of the parish and of St Thomas's going back over 250 years. I am very conscious of the contribution made by my predecessors and by other priests and people here during the lifetime of St Thomas's, and I pray that our beautiful church may continue to shine as a beacon of faith at the heart of this community for many years to come.

John Porter

WEDNESFIELD. With the making of keys prominent among its present-day industries, it goes back in history a thousand years to the day of a fierce battle between Alfred's son Edward and the Danes. The Danes were heavily defeated by Edward with his army of Mercians and West Saxons, and their two kings Halfdan and Ecwils perished in the battle. The red-brick church standing today is the second rebuilding of an 18th-century ancestor.

The King's England: Staffordshire – ed. Arthur Mee, 1937

ST THOMAS. 1751, but burnt in 1902 and rebuilt by F.T.Beck in 1903. He totally replaced the chancel of 1842–3 by Wyatt & Brandon. The rest must be facsimile, and apparently a good deal of the exterior may have been kept. Brick with a tower. Its pedimented doorway and the two tiers of aisle windows all have Gibbs surrounds. The tower has a top balustrade. The interior is Beck's. Three galleries. – PLATE. Chalice of 1752 by John Priest of London; Paten and Flagon of 1753 by Richard Gurney & Co. of London.

The Buildings of England: Staffordshire – Nikolaus Pevsner,
1974

***Curates of the Chapel of St Thomas in Wednesfield
1751 – 1849 and Vicars of Wednesfield Parish Church***

Cornelius Jesson jnr	...	1751
William Jones	...	1778
Charles Blackham	...	1793
William Moreton	...	1801
John Clare	...	1806
William Lee Afflett Parker	...	1839
William Stephens	...	1849
John Birch	...	1881
Francis Handley Roach	...	1915
Guy Heathman Parkhouse	...	1917
Stanley Arthur Howard	...	1932
Harry Baylis	...	1942
Frederick Norman Lewis	...	1956
Walter John Turner	...	1965
Barry Rogerson	...	1975
First Team Rector 1979		
Consecrated First Bishop of Wolverhampton 25 April 1979		
John Newcome Craig	...	1979
John Dudley Dowell Porter		1992

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In The Beginning Were The Words

We were at war with France and Spain. George II had another 19 years to reign and our first ever Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, was still in power. Handel's Messiah was yet unfinished. Jane Austen would not be born for another 34 years. The coach journey from London to Glasgow was a hazardous undertaking that took two weeks.

On 1st December 1741 an Act of Parliament was passed for the founding of a church in Wednesfield. It was to be built "upon a place called Wednesfield Green, lying near the middle of the township or Hamlet of Wednesfield, being part of the Waste of the Manor of Wolverhampton". Waste meant uncultivated land left as an open space, so that villagers had the right to graze their animals on it.

Another slight complication was the fact that the land belonged to the Manor of the Deanery of Wolverhampton but was leased out to Trustees acting on behalf of the "Rt. Hon. Earl of Bradford, a Lunatick."^[13] Although there was no actual disagreement over the choice of a site for the church, it was thought desirable to regularise the situation by means of an Act of Parliament.

The main reason for the Act was the state of the road between Wednesfield and Wolverhampton – "deep and dirty in the Winter season". The mother church was St Peter's, where Wednesfield and Willenhall people occupied the north aisle, and the actual journey to Wolverhampton must have been an ordeal.

The new place of worship was to be called the Chapel of St Thomas in Wednesfield in the Parish of Wolverhampton. Wednesfield had been one of thirteen places given to the Church by Lady Wulfruna in 970, and the Domesday Book records that the Canons of Wolverhampton, as tenants of Sanson, the Conqueror's chaplain, held in Wednesfield (or Wodnesfelde as it was then called) three caracutes of land (about 360 acres) and a wood, the boundary of which survives in the name Wood End. From as early as 1735 can be found the names of sidesmen, or collectors of lewns – the rates which Wednesfield people, as parishioners of Wolverhampton, were obliged to pay St Peter's.

Although the new church was dedicated to St Thomas, the Green itself was dedicated to St John the Baptist – hallowed thus because, apparently, it had once been the site of a pagan shrine^[1] and, in a tradition begun by Pope Gregory in 600 AD, such places were converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God. The original Green was doubtless larger than the church grounds, its boundaries possibly reaching to the canal and Rookery Street. But with the building of St Thomas's, the Green was abolished, sufficient land was allocated for highways on three sides of the chapel and so Church Street was created. The oldest buildings in Church Street (Nos 2 and 3 are listed) date back to around 1760. (One building already part of the landscape at this time was the Dog and Partridge, which, according to records and its architecture, had probably been around for over 150 years.)

The Goughs Of Oldfallings

A fanciful local ballad tells how, at the time of Charles Stuart's flight from the Battle of Worcester in 1651,

In the noon of night they brought him,
Along the toilsome way,
And they passed through quaint old
Wedgefield,
Where asleep the people lay.
"O, town of traps!" they whispered,
"Your fame our foes will sing,
For they would fain a trap obtain
To catch our Lord the King!"^[42]

Certainly, the manufacture of traps (together with keys, locks, hinges and latches) was well established here by 1741 and the Act of that year describes Wednesfield as "a large and populous place, inhabited chiefly by persons employed in the Iron Manufactures carried on in the said Parish and Township".

It was not a "large and populous" community by today's standards, but raising the necessary £2,000 to build a church was an undertaking which benefited from the wealth of Martha Gough and her family. Mrs Gough (nee Harwood, of Tern, Salop) had benefited considerably from the great wealth of her late uncle, Sir Richard Hill, who had served as Ambassador to Holland and Paymaster of the Army. She and her husband, Walter – "a pro-

found scholar and polite gentleman”^[12] – lived at Oldfallings Hall, which they built in 1720. When Walter died “of a decline” in 1730 at the age of 53 and was buried in their parish church at Bushbury, it seems that Martha could no longer bring herself to attend communion there. Instead, she would journey to St Peter’s, Wolverhampton where a house in the Horse Fair (now Wulfruna Street) was reserved for her use on these occasions. Clearly, she was enthusiastic about the Wednesfield church building project for she became the chief contributor, together with her bachelor brother-in-law Charles and two of her ten children, Walter and Richard. The latter, who died in 1744, left £250 to the church on condition building was completed and a minister appointed within six years of his death. Failing this, the money would go to Bushbury Church.

Others leading the fundraising included Thomas and William Tomkys, Thomas Hayes and John Wood, but, as the “largest contributor to the said pious and charitable design”, Martha Gough was given the right of presentation and nomination to the chapel, a right passing at her death to her son Walter and his heirs.

For some reason, five years passed before work began. But perhaps the conditions laid down in Richard Gough’s will and a realisation that time was moving on spurred the trustees into action in 1747.

On 12th May that year, Richard Wilkes of Willenhall, “Practitioner in Physic”, recorded in his diary:

“This being Tuesday, I met ten more of the Trustees appointed by an Act of Parliament for building a Chappel at Wednesfield at the house of Mr John Wood on the north side of the Green, and with my own hands assisted in setting out the ground for the Chappel and Chappelyard to stand on. May this work prove to the Glory of God and the comfort and happiness of the inhabitants.”

Building work started in December 1747 and although by 1750 it became clear that items such as pews and churchyard walls could not be completed in time, 28th August, 1750 was the date fixed for the church’s consecration by the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, Dr Frederick Cornwallis, who, 18 years later, would become Archbishop of Canterbury ^[2]. In point of fact, Wolverhampton Deanery was at that time a Peculiar – which means that it was exempt from the bishop’s jurisdiction –

but it seems that Dr Wilkes, who had played an important part in advancing the chapel’s planning and building, took a hand in arranging the involvement of Dr Cornwallis.

The Bishop arrived on the afternoon of the 27th and was taken to Hilton Park where he was to stay the night. When he discovered that the consecration deeds had not arrived from the Registrar in Lichfield, his Lordship was less than pleased and threatened to postpone the ceremony. Once again, the good Dr Wilkes took a hand, despatching a postboy to Lichfield with the following urgent message:

Hilton. 27 Aug. Ev. 9

Dear Sir,

The Bishop is here and very angry that he had not the deeds to peruse to-night; and says that unless you send your Clarke with them to this place by eight o’clock in the morning, tho’ he is very willing to consecrate the chappel, it will be impossible for him to do it; since he is determined to be in Birmingham tomorrow night; wch he cannot be unless he sets out by 3 o’clock at the farthest. I must then insist upon it that Mr Buckeridge and he (i.e. the clerk) are both here by that time, otherwise you know the damage will be irreparable and you’ll disoblige both his Ldp. and all the Goughs.

Your most obedt. Etc

R. Wilkes.

Apparently, the letter produced the necessary response; the consecration took place next day. We have no details of the actual service, but it is almost certain that no hymns were sung: at that time the Church of England line was that the liturgy should be innocent of words other than those of Scripture.

Wednesfield’s chapel-of-ease seated 150. The seats were box pews with backs about one and half metres high, keeping out cold draughts. Wealthier families such as the Goughs, Fryers and Pettits, who subscribed £20 or more had their own pews and could nominate the chapel wardens. Some family pews were handed down from one generation to another, and the Act allowed them to be

“bargained, sold, conveyed, leased.....or otherwise aliened and disposed of, in such manner, as freehold lands and tenements or inheritance can or may by law provided they are disposed of to such persons only as are inhabitants of the township, hamlet or liberty of Wednesfield.”

And, as a perk, “The chaplain may lease pews belonging to him for not more than seven shillings a year to persons residing in Wednesfield.”

As the Act required the holding of Vestry meetings and the annual election, “upon Easter Tuesday”, of chapel wardens, local administration in general fell to the Vestry, so that it served until 1863 as a unit of local government. Vestries were responsible for the state of the roads within the parish, for the appointment of Constables (known originally as Reeves or Tythingmen) and for the election of Workhouse Trustees. An outcome of the work of Trustees elected by the Wednesfield Vestry was the establishing of a workhouse in Old Heath Road, where The Jolly Collier now stands. James Cordwell was its master for many years before its closure in the 1830s, and its Mid-Wife Surgeon was William Quinton, son of an Ashmore Park farmer.

An 1827 entry in the Vestry Minute Book records that “Elizabeth North, an orphan girl is declared a pauper; the Vestry bind her in apprenticeship to James Parkes of the New Invention.”^[20]

The first church had the existing three-storey tower, surmounted by four stone finials, but its door was on the south side, and the building, 25 feet wide by 50 feet long, consisted of a nave without aisles or gallery, lit on each side by three long windows, stone faced with round heads. As now, the chancel was semi-circular, but, unlike the present siting, both pulpit and font were situated on the north side of the nave.

On 4th September 1750, the Holy Eucharist was offered for the first time. The first recorded baptism – of Mary, daughter of John and Mary Webb – was on 19th May 1751, and the first funeral (of Richard Shelden) on 13th August 1751. Noteworthy amongst early register entries were the baptism on 1st October 1752 of “Jemima WEDNESFIELD, a child left at Taylor’s” and the burial on 22nd of that same month of “Sarah Ady” – a surname that, with amended spelling, is with us still.

Until St Thomas’s became a separate parish in 1849, the only weddings conducted here were by special licence. On August 31st, 1754, for instance, Joseph Curtis, widower, married Hannah Taylor, widow, by licence.

The incumbents of the chapel were pluralists, some of them officials of the mother

church. The vicar of Bushbury, Richard Nocke conducted services at St Thomas’s from before the church was consecrated and continued to assist, probably until his death on 16th May 1757. The Revd Edward Best recorded his obituary in the Bilston Register:

“On this day died of a Dropsy at Bushbury of which parish he had been vicar about nine years Rev Richard Nock, clerk. He was about 45 years of age.”^[29]

Other sources give his age as 53.^[38]

But St Thomas’s first appointed incumbent was Revd Cornelius Jesson jnr (son of the vicar of Wombourne and Trysull), who was also vicar of Enmore in Somerset. He was nominated for the post by Martha Gough, “Rightfull and lawful Patronefs of the Chapel of St Thomas”, whose beautiful handwriting may still be admired on the 1750 form of nomination. Preserved, too, is Jesson’s less than beautiful handwritten oath of loyalty to George II, together with his declaration that he will recognise only the heirs of Electress Sophia of Hanover, “being Protestants”, as heirs to the English throne, whereas James II’s son, the Old Pretender:

“pretending to be taking upon himself the title of King of England by the name of James the Third hath not any Right or title of the Crown of England”

He was obliged also to accept the Protestant line on transubstantiation (the conversion in the Eucharist of the whole substance of the elements into the Body and Blood of Christ):

“I, Cornelius Jesson jnr do declare that I believe there is not any transubstantiation in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper or in the Elements of Bread and Wine at or after the Consecration thereof by any person whatsoever.”

The Rectors of Spaxton and Bawdrip and John Coles, vicar of Bridgewater, were Jesson’s referees, but he may have benefited from the influence of his uncle, John Jesson, a reputable lawyer in Wolverhampton and a trustee. When he was away from Wednesfield, services were taken by Richard Nocke.

Jesson died in 1778 and was succeeded by Revd William Jones, who was nominated by Martha Gough’s son, John (now “the true and undoubted patron”) and licensed as curate on 5th June of that year. From about

1770 until his death in 1793, Jones was also curate of Bushbury. One year after his appointment as Vicar of Bushbury in 1765, Revd Thomas Fletcher had suffered a mental breakdown. Although he never recovered, he remained in post until his death in 1800. Consequently, Jones had to carry out much of Fletcher's work as well as his own. On 12th February 1780, he was appointed Reader at St Peter's on the nomination of his friend, Revd Titus Neve, Prebendary of Hilton.

Presumably, Jones was the clergyman who, on 26th February 1778, conducted at St Thomas's the funeral of William Iven, aged 115 years. According to The Public Advertiser:

He was married to four wives – to the last when he was in his 105th year. The clergyman, asking him why he would marry at so advanced a period, he said, "Through principle", for he had always led a virtuous life and always would.

Records of St Thomas's history are studied with references to various charities, the earliest of which was probably the one named after John Newton, whose will of 1758 made provision for ten shillings to be paid each St Thomas's Day to ten poor widows or housekeepers. The money derived from ownership of one of the three sections of an open field called Latchfield. Another early benefaction became known as Fryer's Charity. The terms of John Fryer's will (dated 15 June 1778) charged three closes of land called Sutton's Coats in the liberty of Wednesfield with the payment of one guinea on the Feast of St Thomas each year to the local poor as follows: 20 shillings to ten old men and ten old women and one shilling to the Chapel Warden for his trouble in distributing the money. John Fryer's second son, John, (who died a bachelor in 1848) gave land for the church school to his brother Richard and John Gough.

In 1786, Coppice Farm, High Offley, Eccleshall, was purchased for £800, a quarter of which was provided by the Gough family and half by the Queen Anne's Bounty Board. The land was enclosed around the year 1847 and was let at £90 per annum to Mr George James until his death on 1884. In the 1940s, the yearly rent had fallen to £72 (of which, after Tithe and Land Tax deductions, St Thomas's received £62) perhaps due to a fall in land values during that period. In 1946, the 48.75 acres of "pretty good land" were sold for £2, 350 to Mr & Mrs J.R. Ball, tenants since 1916.

Wednesfield Villains

Beside the entry "Walter Lane buried" in a parish register burial entry for 6th September 1791 is a grim pencil sketch of the gallows. On 17th May 1791, Walter Lane senior of Wednesfield was arrested on suspicion of robbing the church of Tibberton, Shropshire. On searching his house, a surplice and napkin, part of the property lost, were discovered ^[4]. On 24th August 1791, Walter Lane and his son Thomas were tried at Shrewsbury Assizes, the former on a charge of stealing a communion plate from Tibberton and the latter on the charge of breaking into Peter Bott's shop at Newport, Shropshire. John Furber, one of Thomas Lane's accomplices, had already been hanged, following the Shrewsbury Assizes in March.

Why the Lane family engaged in criminal activity is unclear; they were respected gentry in the Wood End area and owned the Pheasant Inn (originally built in 1637), which was situated about 100 yards from the present public house of that name, and they farmed much of the surrounding land. Nevertheless, at dead of night, they would carry home to Wednesfield the spoils of their plundering, carried out mostly in Shropshire. According to local legend, they used a horse that had been trained to make the journey home unaccompanied if necessary – a fierce creature it was a mistake to try and impede and whose shoes were nailed on the wrong way round to confuse anyone attempting to follow its tracks ^[5].

In the 18th century, Wednesfield was out-rivalled by its larger neighbours in the provision of popular diversions. Seldom was there a bull-fight, for instance.....usually, only a bear or badger fight. At one such 'sporting' event in the village, there was insufficient beef to appease the large number of visitors, one of whom circulated the report: "The Wednesfield butcher had only killed half a cow, intending to feed the other half for next year!"

The Curly Wyrley

On 5th May, 1793, following the death in office of William Jones, the living was given to Revd Charles Blackham, who, at the age of 57, was curate of Pelsall and Master (ie. headmaster) of Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall where his ancestors had served as governors since at least 1694.

The only personal information we have of Blackham is that he was accustomed to have bread and milk for breakfast. The school's history records that "This operation he would combine with morning prayers in the school by taking a spoonful out of his bowl each time the boys made a response" ^[45].

Blackham had arrived in Wednesfield just two years before the opening of the canal (though at least one source dates the canal opening at 1797). At about this time, the Revd Stebbing Shaw, in his History of the County of Staffordshire, wrote: "Wednesfield, or Wedge-field as it is vulgarly called, is a village in the parish of Wolverhampton but in the Hundred of Offlow.....there are many tumuli there.....the first four or five being yet visible. The new canal, called the Essington and Wyrley, was cut through this place close to the churchyard."

The canal, possibly the highest in England, was cut to carry coal from Wyrley and Essington to Wolverhampton and Walsall. It was created without locks, going round rather than across areas of raised ground. The result was many hump-backed bridges across it and a winding course prompting the nickname the 'Curly Wyrley' Canal.



The Disreputable William Moreton

In 1797, Queen Mary's spent £731 on a private Act of Parliament authorising, amongst other things, various improvements, the sale of land and the building of a chapel (St Paul's,

Walsall). The Act also gave the school a new constitution, one clause of which read:

"No master (i.e. headmaster), usher, etc, to teach outside his School or to officiate as curate, reader or lecturer in the parish Church (i.e. St Matthew's); or perform any clerical duty elsewhere unless the governors consent."

To their draft of the Act, the governors appended the words:

"Nothing herein contained shall extend to Charles Blackham to deprive him of his present Church preferment."

However, the House of Lords deleted this addition, so that Blackham could not legally continue to officiate at St Thomas's or at Pelsall. Nevertheless, he appears to have done so until 1807 when William Cowley succeeded him at Pelsall, but, according to the signature on Bishop's Transcripts (annual copies of parish register entries) from 1801 until 1806 the Curate of Wednesfield was William Moreton. The Clergy Board in St Thomas's Church is clearly incorrect in stating 1804 as the year when Moreton's duties began here.

He was simultaneously the incumbent of St Giles, Willenhall. In May 1789, when an election had been held there for a minister to succeed the late Titus Neve, Moreton secured 67 votes as against his rival's 29.....but the Lords of the Manor refused to sign his nomination or presentation. Years of legal wrangling ended when the Lord Chancellor ordered a second poll. This took place in December 1795. Again, Moreton was successful and became minister of Willenhall. According to a memorandum in the family bible of the Perkins family, "a great day of rejoicing was held on the occasion"

Moreton was born in 1759, but details of his parentage, place of birth or education have never been traced. He was rumoured to be an illegitimate 'nephew' of George III: one was struck by his commanding presence and his facial characteristics were thought to resemble those of the Royal Family. ^[36]. He had been at college with the Duke of York, and it is said that he had powerful friends whose influence he could draw upon when necessary.

Certainly, the misgivings of the Lords of the Manor were justified: not only did Moreton become a drunkard, but also "his favourite occupation consisted of cock fighting,

bull baiting and dog fighting, and he was not averse, when opportunity offered, to a little poaching on the estates of the neighbouring gentry.”^[6] In 1791, Moreton was fined £5 “for sporting with a gun and two setting dogs, upon the Manor of H.Vernon Esq. of Hilton Park.”^[7]

The outlook of this “three bottle man” was expressed in the rhyme he was in the habit of quoting:

Let back and sides and head go bare
Let foot and hand go cold,
But God send belly good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old

But, to his credit, Moreton took good care of Bob, the old grey mare he ambled about on, and his practice of giving the animal a share of every tankard of ale he sipped caused Bob to stop at each inn they came to, refusing to budge until refreshments had been served! Moreton was noted for his delivery and for the sound construction of his sermons. Nor was he blind to his own shortcomings: he urged his flock to do as he said, not what he did and he achieved success of a kind amongst the rough population to whom he ministered.

Church life in Willenhall sank to a low level, and, no doubt due to his unsavoury lifestyle, nonconformity flourished in the town. By 1812, Moreton’s dissipation and the cost of the lawsuit to establish his right to the Willenhall curacy drained his finances to such an extent that he was obliged to make a deed of arrangement with his creditors. The trustee under this deed was Thomas Hincks, chapel-warden and a man of substance. It seems that Hincks was instructed to pay Moreton £2 per week “from the revenues of the living and to use the rest to pay off his creditors.” Moreton owed Hincks £34 but, apparently, this was never paid: in 1834, after the parson’s death, Hincks wrote “bad” across the entry of the debt in his ledger.

Moreton enjoyed walking along the field road from his house in Dimminsdale to the Bull’s Head Inn, where he would wait for the London coach to arrive with mail and newspapers. Then he would sit in the large kitchen and study the papers with his favourite tippie of rum beside him. He maintained his rakish lifestyle in the Willenhall area until his death in 1834. At his funeral service, his successor, Revd G.H.Fisher said little about the deceased, but instead took a casting-the-first-stone stance:

”may you be awakened to scrutinize your own stewardship, and instead of recording the sins of the departed, seek to be delivered whilst the Redeemer invites you, from those which are a burden to your consciences.”

John Clare v Squire Gough

At St Thomas’s, Revd John Clare became officiating minister in 1806 and served as both perpetual curate here and as vicar of Bushbury until the day of his death, 10th July 1839. The son of Timothy Clare of Bewdley, he was a Public Preacher at St Peter’s and a Justice of the Peace for the County of Stafford. Clare held strict views on Sunday observance and once fined a butcher’s servant twenty shillings for driving cattle through Wolverhampton on the Sabbath. A gift for rhetoric is seen in his printed address of condolence on the death in November 1817 of the Prince Regent’s only child, the 22-year-old daughter Princess Charlotte^[30]. In the eyes of the whole nation, she had been heir to the Crown, and Wulfrunians, their sentiments expressed officially in addresses by Clare and Revd John Reed (of St John’s), regarded her loss as “ever to be lamented and irreparable.”^[47]

For relaxation, he enjoyed shooting, but this was clearly frowned upon by Martha Gough’s grandson, John who was now the patron. Known locally as “Squire Gough”, John, though wealthier than any of his predecessors, was antisocial, eccentric and mean. At Perry Hall, for instance, he had a small deer park, “the venison of which is mostly sold at an extravagant price, though the owner is possessed of about £4,000 per annum.”^[12]

Martha Gough had died in 1768 and her will of 1766 allocated interest on the £250 her late son Richard intended for St Thomas’s as yearly payment to a curate. To this was added interest on £100 left in the 1767 will of her brother-in-law Charles Gough of Walthamstow (a rich merchant and a director of the Honourable East India Company), a sum invested in Old South Sea Annuities. In total, a Curate was entitled to £17. 10s per annum from these sources, but John Gough chose to lay down certain conditions before paying it to John Clare: the new incumbent had to abstain from his pastime of shooting and must fulfil certain ministerial duties.

Clare agreed. However, the money was not paid, and eventually, the matter went

before the Charity Commissioners. Gough maintained that Clare had not complied with the terms of the agreement. Clare, on the other hand, declared that for two years or more, he strictly performed the whole agreement, “when, finding that Mr Gough, though repeatedly urged, would not pay the interest due to him he considered himself absolved from his agreement and resumed the diversion of shooting,” though continuing to discharge his ministerial duties conscientiously. The Commissioners found in favour of Clare, stating that the patron had no right to impose such an agreement in the first place. The extra income would have been useful to Clare. Twenty years after this time, average annual income for curates was only £81.^[33]

Beating The Bounds

By 1811, Wednesfield’s population had grown to 1,248 (interestingly, 156 more men than women). [8] A regular Rogation ceremony of ‘Beating the Bounds’ of Wolverhampton parish took three days. The event was useful in identifying the various estates responsible for contributing towards the canons’ stipends, but it was the custom to read the Gospel at various points – usually under trees (Gospel trees) growing near a parish boundary, but we know that on the second day of the 1824 procession, the Gospel was first read at St Thomas’s, “the clerk being in readiness at the door,” before the travellers moved on to Essington.[36]

A Methodist Chapel in Rookery Street was opened in 1825 – the first offshoot of the Wolverhampton Darlington Street Methodist Circuit. Prior to this, a group from Bilston had brought Wesleyan Methodism to Wednesfield, and their first meetings were held in the parlour of Wednesfield House opposite St Thomas’s. When Trinity Methodist opened in 1887, the Rookery Street chapel was used as a school building.

Squire John Gough died on 8th February 1827 at the age of 79 and lies beneath the chancel at St Thomas’s^[14] His estate passed to his son John, who occupied the “New Parsonage house, garden and pleasure gardens”^[15] (near the ‘Prestwood Arms’) and also owned almost a third of Wednesfield.

It was, presumably, this John Gough who bequeathed £250 (in 3% consolidated bank annuities), the proceeds thereof to be used by the minister and churchwardens of St Thomas’s to provide coals for the poor of Wednesfield on Christmas Day. John died childless in 1844, his estate, with the exception of Oldfallings,

passing to a relative, Frederick Gough Calthorpe, who assumed the Gough surname and arms.^[16] Oldfallings was left by John’s widow, Jane Elizabeth, to her brother, John Moore Paget (1791–1866), who became patron of St Thomas’s. In 1915, his grandson sold Oldfallings Hall as an “Attractive and historic Country Mansion”^[17]. Soon after it disappeared. Our Lady and St Chad’s R.C. School stands there now.

A School For Wednesfield

Set round about the year 1837, though written in 1844–7 when he was MP for Shrewsbury, Benjamin Disraeli’s novel ‘Sybil’ presents a vivid picture of social and industrial conditions in the Midlands. His fictional town of ‘Wodgate’ is almost certainly Willenhall^[44], though Disraeli drew on his knowledge of different industrial areas, including, presumably, Wednesfield:

“Wodgate, or Wogate, as it was called on the map, was a district that in old days had been consecrated to Woden.”

On the area’s profound illiteracy, the novelist declares:

“There are many in this town who are ignorant of their very names; very few who can spell them.”

Even allowing for artistic licence, the writer described a situation serious enough to be of concern to John Clare, whose greatest contribution to Wednesfield was perhaps his fundraising for the building in 1837 of a school “for the education of the children of the labouring classes of all religious persuasions”.

Dame Schools, the standards of which were not generally impressive, were the only form of tutoring available in the area before this time and these persisted in Wednesfield until as late as 1905.

Land at the junction of New Street and Hickman Street was given by Richard Fryer, a Nonconformist, and a grant of £75 was made by the Committee for Education. The rest of the money was raised by voluntary subscriptions collected by Clare, who produced a pamphlet urging parish support for the school where children could be taught at the rate of “one penny per week for reading and two-pence per week for reading and writing.” According to Clare’s calculations, a penny a week is four shillings and four pence a year, and in four

years – at a cost of nineteen shillings and four pence – a child would be sufficiently instructed to read their Bible and learn their duty to God, their parents and their country. (As a later incumbent wryly observed, the fact that Clare’s sums are two shillings out suggests a little arithmetic was needed too!)

The building was rectangular in shape, rather lofty with a steep sloping roof.

Accounts for the year ending December 1849 show:

Salaries:	
By Mr H. Davies, Master.....	£50.
Mrs Corkindale, late Mistress, half-year ending June 24th	£10.
Miss Howis, Mistress, half-year ending December 24th.....	£10.
General Expenses:	
By Books	£3. 7. 5
Stationery, Register Books, Slates etc	£2. 17. 10
Repairs	£1. 7. 4
Anniversary expenses	£2. 4. 0
Incidentals	£1. 16. 11
	£81. 13. 6

The life of this particular school building was relatively short. By the 1850s, it was too small to accommodate children of Wednesfield’s growing population; efforts to sell the site were being made in 1882 and the building was in a state of dilapidation, “unfit for any use”^[9] by 1894.

A study of baptismal entries in the parish register gives an interesting picture of the limited range of trades pursued in the parish. In a typical month in 1833, there were 61 children baptised, their fathers being employed as follows:

Keymakers/keysmiths	20
labourers	15
locksmiths	8
trapmakers	4
colliers	3
farmers	3
hingemakers	2
wheelwrights	1
bricklayers	1
clockmakers	1
carpenter	1
trunk handle maker	1

(One child being ‘illegitimate’, no parental trade is recorded)

A Commercial Directory produced some years later accredited Wednesfield with 60 key-makers, 30 lock-makers, 22 Trap-makers, 6 retailers of beer, 2 malsters, 1 tailor, 1 saddler and 1 bricklayer.

It is still possible to read the poignant wording on an 1834 gravestone

situated by the pathway on the south side of St Thomas’s Church:

Jane, aged 52 years
Dear husband, when my grave you see
Remember you must follow me.
Your peace with God then strive to make
And love my children for my sake.

Clare’s ministry ended dramatically and tragically. Having charge also of Bushbury parish, he resided at the Deanery in Wolverhampton. It was in the cellar of that building that, on the night of 10th–11th July 1839, at the age of 75, he took his own life.

At the inquest held at the Peacock Inn, Wolverhampton and reported by the Wolverhampton Chronicle, Clare’s servant Hephylah Foster told how she found her master in the kitchen at 7 am on July 11th:

On going into it she exclaimed, “Oh dear, how dark it is,” and was going to put a basket of plate, which she had brought downstairs, upon the dresser, when, on approaching it, she looked up, and saw her master. The darkness in the kitchen was caused by the window blinds being drawn. Her master was in an upright position, with his arms down by his side, but she did not then see that he was suspended.

Foster sought the help of a manservant, who went to the kitchen in the company of John Hargrove, landlord of the Black Boy public house.

The man took him into the lower kitchen, and there he saw the deceased hanging by a rope fastened around his neck, and suspended from a hook in the kitchen beam. He had his feet upon the ground, with his knees a



The Deanery c1900.
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

little bent, but the weight of his body was on the rope ^[34]

Witnesses testified that Clare had been a changed man since the death, three or four years earlier, of his son Frederick, who had been “shipwrecked, murdered and devoured by savages in a foreign island.” Amongst his other children was the Revd George Boodle Clare, Vicar of Shareshill and, later, the first Vicar of St George’s, Wolverhampton.

Major Reconstruction

For the next six months, the Revd Edward Rathbone officiated at St Thomas’s, and, then, in December 1839, the Revd William Lee Afflett Parker of Chollock in Kent began a ten-year ministry here.

In the following June, the Revd H.R. Slade, a lecturer at Hampton Court, was invited to preach at St Thomas’s and found the church “in a melancholy state of dirt and dilapidation” (perhaps an improvement on the situation at the end of the 18th century when part of the church was reported to be overgrown with grass!)

During the period 1831–1851, about two thousand churches were built in the UK, and planners were advised that buildings should be large enough to accommodate 50–60% of the population. With its mere 150 seats, St Thomas’s was now too small to serve Wednesfield, and on 7th April 1842, a meeting was held to arrange for an application for a faculty for enlarging the church. It was reported that £1,943 had already been given towards the cost of the work and a committee (including the incumbent and his chapel wardens John Stanley and Job Bickley) was formed to undertake it. London architects, Wyatt and Brandon, were called in to design a new church in accordance with a faculty which provided for taking down

the said ancient chapel of Wednesfield and all the pews therein and to erect a new chapel on the site. ^[30]

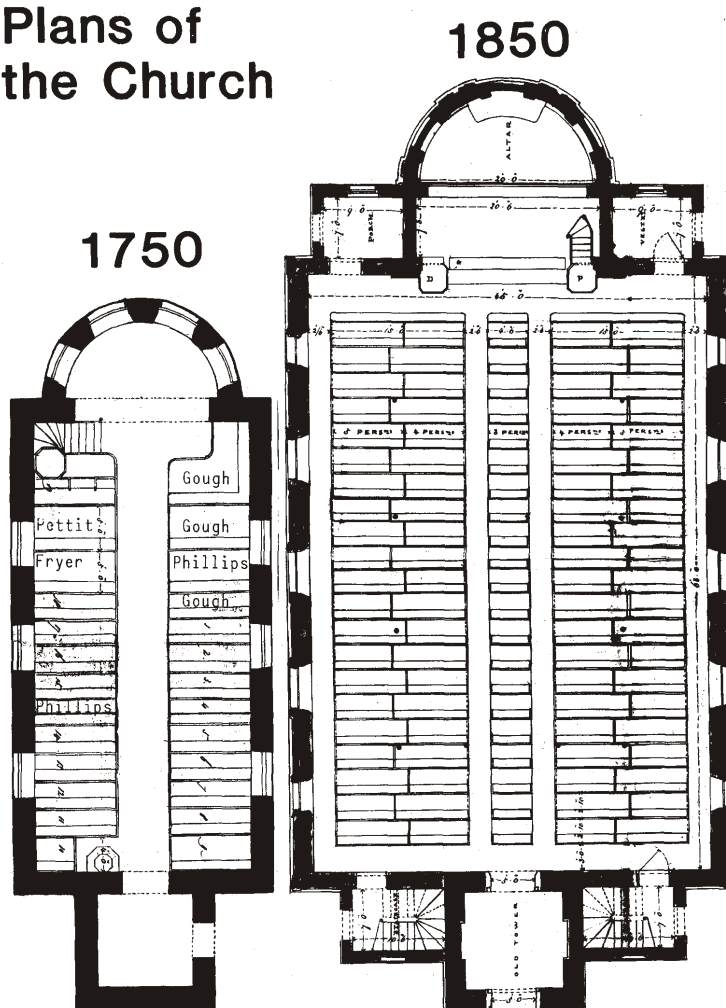
The work cost around £2,000. The tower was left intact, but the walls of the nave were taken down, the windows on either side being

carefully preserved, together with some of the brickwork. A gallery was constructed and the new church assumed its present proportions – with the exception of the chancel. In the first church this had been very small and the choir had sat close to where the pulpit is today. In 1843, the chancel was slightly enlarged, but the choir still sat in the nave. The box pews were removed and a more up-to-date design of pine and red deal panels substituted. A choir vestry adjoining the west door was added, the floor being laid with ornamental tiles ^[10]

Twenty years later, the building was described as “large and commodious” but “quite innocent of anything like architectural display. Perhaps one reason for its plainness is that the old windows were, for the sake of economy, worked up into the new building.” ^[28]

The church re-opened on the last day of February in 1843, with a Shrove Tuesday service taken by the Revd G. Frazer of St Mary’s, Wolverhampton. According to the Wolverhampton Chronicle, “The collection at

Plans of the Church



1850 plans reprinted by kind permission of Lichfield Diocesan Registrar. Ref. PWol/C/5/13.



The Church of 1843
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

Wednesfield Chapel...towards the rebuilding fund amounted to upwards of £44.”

A faculty granted on 22nd February 1843 approves the allotment of new pews as follows:

John Gough – 4 pews
George Phillips of Leamington – 2 pews
Louis Hayes Petit of Lincolns Inn, Middlesex – 2 pews
Richard Fryer of the Wergs – 2 pews

Cholera

To obtain water in Wednesfield meant carrying it home in a bucket or pail and waiting for the sediment to settle before using it.

Cholera, which thrives where water is contaminated and which had been creeping through the Black Country since the 1830s, did not seriously affect Wednesfield until the 1840s, though White’s Directory of 1834 records one (non-fatal) case ^[48]. According to the 1848 report of the Cholera Commission:

“The death rate in Wednesfield was better than Bilston, Willenhall or Wolverhampton, and Wednesfield’s rate of 28 per thousand was primarily due to the Grove Street district

of the Heath, the only part of Wednesfield affected. The streets were unpaved and abound with nuisances, there being no drains or sewers at all. There was no public lighting, the gas not having reached Wednesfield. Wednesfield consists primarily of one street and many inhabitants engaged in agriculture, being 3,535 acres and a population of 4,000. There being no burial ground, except that around the church, if the sexton dies there is nowhere to bury him.”

There followed a report on the Wednesfield districts of Moseley Hole and Portobello, where water was in short supply and gutters choked with rubbish that included dead dogs.

A year later, the daily interment of Wednesfield cholera victims was still being recorded in the parish register:

22nd September	Child in Adey grave right opposite yew tree.
23rd September	Child. Typhus Fever.
23rd September	Woman (Name indistinct) grave closed up
25th September	Baby 1 yr. Fever. In grave by herself 5'0"
26th September	Small boy. 1st fever then Cholera.
	This is the second out of this house. 1st in deep grave.

1st Not of North Gate.
 29th September Small boy 14 hrs. 4'0" in grave above Oliver.
 Was in church last Sunday.
 October 1st Boy from Buggins Lane. Wed.

About this time, the Wolverhampton Gas Light and Coke Company brought gas to Wednesfield, and a new water company was formed between Willenhall, Bilston and Wolverhampton. But mining operations at Portobello made a water and drainage system difficult. After an investigation, the Board of Health proposed the establishment of a separate board for the Wednesfield area, responsible for the provision and maintenance of adequate sewers.

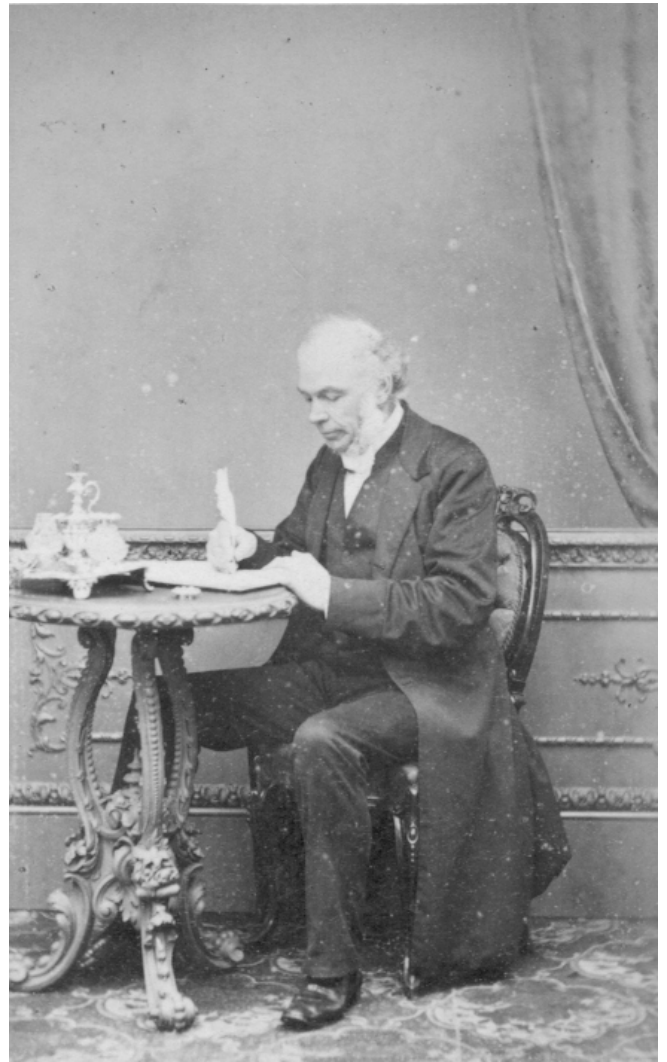
John Bate was a voluntary "surveyor" to the Wednesfield Vestry and Local Government Board between 1846–1849 and in 1851. Amongst other things, he was responsible for ensuring that holes in the highway were filled in.^[4] His family monument stands prominently in a corner of the churchyard. John Bate's father, Thomas, is buried there, and Thomas's son Frank was baptised here in 1884 but died in White Rock, British Columbia in 1980. Returning to England during the First World War, Frank had his son, F.E. Bate, baptised at St Thomas's, and, in 1981, accompanied by his wife, this great-grandson of John Bate paid a return visit to Wednesfield from Alberta, Canada.

Under the Wolverhampton Curacy Act of 1848, the Peculiar was abolished, Wednesfield parish was formed and, on 4th February 1849, the Revd William Stephens became the first Vicar of St Thomas's, an incumbency he was to hold for the next thirty one and a half years.

Also in 1849, John Moore Paget, whose home was at East Cranmore in Somerset, transferred the right of patronage to the Bishop of the diocese. Generously, in 1851 he gave a house and two to three acres of land to St Thomas's "as a residence for the incumbent of the said church"^[18] together with one thousand pounds. The vicarage field was rented out at £10 per annum.

Later, to provide a through carriageway for the Vicar's horse-drawn vehicle from the church to the vicarage, the thoroughfare now known as Vicarage Road was constructed.

John Moore Paget also gave land in 1850 for the building of the first of St Thomas's four daughter churches – Holy Trinity, Heath Town. A committee headed by Stephens appointed Edward Banks as architect, an appeal for



William Stephens

funds was made, and Wolverhampton merchant Henry Rogers, who contributed £2,000, laid the foundation stone on 4th June 1850. Built in the Victorian Gothic style, the church opened on 21st July 1852 – described by the local press as "one of the finest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture in the district".^[39] Stephens gave Henry Rogers the perpetual right of presentation, and on April 1st, 1853, from the parish of Wednesfield, the new 'District Chapelry' of Wednesfield Heath was formed. Revd Samuel Thomas Sproston moved from Chester Diocese to live in Wednesfield Heath in 1850, and (with an annual stipend of £100 paid in quarterly instalments) was licensed to officiate at the building on Wednesfield Heath. He served at Holy Trinity for twenty years, but its 'perpetual curate' did not obtain the title Vicar until 1869 and only in 1882 did the area become a Parish in the civil, as well as ecclesiastical, sense as Heath Town.

The Methodists were active in Wednesfield, too, at this time and Hickman Street Methodist Chapel was built in 1850 for

the Primitive Methodists who had been meeting in a cottage in Lichfield Road. A larger chapel was built on an adjoining site thirty-five years later, accommodating an extra 120 worshippers. Also, 1860 saw the opening of Wood End Methodist Church, originally part of the Willenhall Circuit and one of the churches that united to form the new Wednesfield Methodist Church built on its site and opening in 1983.

In fifty years, the village's population had increased fourfold from 1,088 to 4,853. Wednesfield still had a rural character to some extent. In 1851, there was much pasture land and the population included 51 farmers, 17 of whom lived in the village centre and kept cows there. But the farmers now rubbed shoulders with a large number of keymakers, lockmakers and trapmakers.

In 1851, a gas supply was laid on at St Thomas's, the organ was placed in the gallery, the South door was bricked up and the existing West door constructed. Churchwarden, John Edward Bealey gave the two Glastonbury chairs which stand in the Chancel. They were made from Wednesfield oak at a time when decorative carving was fashionable.

The work completed, St Thomas's re-opened for divine service on Sunday 26th October, when the Revd William Dalton, Rural Dean and Vicar of St Paul's, Wolverhampton, preached.

In the same year, the Church Commissioners wrote to the Parish Vestry "drawing attention to the urgent necessity of providing a new burial ground forthwith, the present burial ground being filled with corpses" and to the "extreme difficulty of finding room for interment without disturbing the remains of bodies already buried there." People complained of the stench that arose when a grave was opened or disturbed.

Stephens chaired a meeting to discuss the problem. It would have been possible to purchase a new burial ground using the proceeds of the sale of the workhouse, but it was felt that this money should be spent on a new National School and it was decided to levy a rate to provide the burial ground. The process of collecting this rate was well under way before it was found to be invalid in law. As an alternative, therefore, voluntary subscriptions were requested.

Room was found in 1852 for 13-year-old Richard, whose touching epitaph may still be

read on his stone at the south side of the church:

Though young I tried with all my heart
To do as I was told.
To please our parents when we are young
Will give us joy when old.
At night my sister and myself
By mother's side we knelt
To thank God with our artless prayer
For all the joy we felt.

But the graveyard issue dragged on until 1855, when the old churchyard was closed by Order in Council and land for the Graiseley Lane churchyard (2 acres, 0 rods, 7 perches) was bought for £313 from James Bartholomew Pidgeon, who donated one acre. The burial ground was consecrated by Bishop Lonsdale on June 6th.

On September 12th, at the age of 50, Jemima Stephens, wife of the vicar, was buried there "and the affection of some of the parishioners had delicately strewn the ground with flowers."^[19]

Also in 1855, a mortuary chapel was built in the new burial ground, and it was beneath this chapel that Stephens himself would be laid to rest years later. The chapel lasted little more than a century; by 1960, it was "in a dangerous condition" and had to be demolished.

The church bell broke in 1852 and a new one weighing over 7 cwts (almost three times the weight of its predecessor) was installed the following year at a cost of £48 – plus £19 for the wheel frame etc but less £10 for the old bell.

Stephens was so concerned at the low level of literacy in Wednesfield and at the inadequate size of the school opened in New Street during John Clare's incumbency that he set to work to build a replacement. In 1856, Wednesfield's second school building opened in Graiseley Lane on the site then known as 'Shoulder of Mutton Piece' and now occupied by William Bentley Court. Originally planned for 400, however, it was never able to accommodate so many properly, even after extensions in 1874. It was heated by coal fires and lit with oil lamps. The playground was unpaved and ashes had to be put down in winter. Each week, the boys had the task of cleaning the playground and the lavatories. Records show that, in the twelve years ending in 1864, the parish spent £20,000 for church

educational purposes, though even in 1870 only 32% of Wednesfield children aged 5 – 13 were at school. Not until 1883 was water laid on, and there was no supply to wash in ten years later whilst sewage remained as earth closets.

Following its closure in 1856, the old school building stood empty and unusedthough an 1868 document states that it was being used on Saturdays “for relieving the outdoor paupers”.^[23] By its original Deed, it was to have been run in affiliation with the British and Foreign School Society, which under Dissenting patronage, was open to all denominations – unlike the National Schools founded “according to the principles of the Church of England” ^[19]. St Thomas’s was certainly used as a British Society School, but, as the foundation stone testified, its founders had intended it to be a National School, and there now followed many years of correspondence concerning the building. The British Society forbade its sale but would allow nothing for the new National School. In the late 1890s it was let, in its dilapidated condition, to Mr Wyman, a builder, but was not finally demolished until the 1930s.

The Revd William Stephens took an active part in parish life at a time when ignorance, ill-health and poverty sent out a challenge to the reforming spirit of those with influence in the community. He was not always an easy man to deal with. His role in creating a new school may have been a prominent one, but successive headmasters failed to come to terms with his resentment of those legal restrictions which sought to limit the amount of religious education that was to be taught, and he persisted in attempting to extend it beyond the letter of the law.

An entry for 22 August 1873 by the then headmaster in the school log book reads:

“Children of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Classes taken by the Vicar in Infants Classroom for scripture at 11.15 am under protest that by doing so I was liable to be suspended from serving in the office of School Master”

Friction between Stephens and a previous Head is seen in log book entries such as the following:

“Was absent from school from 11 am today on private business”

Beneath which, the Vicar has written: “Without leave”

Nevertheless, Stephen’s visited the school daily – sometimes twice a day – and used the pulpit to encourage cash donations. When attendance had been good, he often gave permission for a half holiday and the children were allowed to play at the Prestwood Road vicarage, the extensive grounds of which were bordered by meadows where the children could romp at will. From 1863, similar treats were held annually on May Day, when the little ones were taken on a horse-drawn wagon leading a procession to the meadow.

When, as was frequently the case, attendances were not good, Stephens took appropriate action. Some parents were in the habit of keeping their children away from school to attend Wolverhampton Races at the West Park, and an 1869 entry in the school log book reads:

The Vicar came in on Tuesday and spoke to those of the 1st and 2nd class present of the evils of horse-racing and afterwards took them for a quarter of an hour on the books of the Old Testament.

Something of his character can be seen in the undated report by Stephens himself of an incident occurring during his ministry at St Thomas’s:

“On Sunday last the inhabitants of Wednesfield living near the Parish Church were alarmed, soon after morning service, by observing smoke coming from under the slates of the roof at the eastern end of the church. Assistance was immediately obtained, and slates removed, when it was found that some of the rafters had been consumed and the adjoining beams were in a smouldering state. Being discovered so soon, it was quickly put out, with but little damage to the sacred building. About two o’clock, within an hour of its being discovered, Colonel Hogg and a number of his force, with the town engine, arrived on the spot; also the engines of the Birmingham Insurance Companies, but as the fire had been subdued, their services were not required. The origin of this fire is traced to the piping of one of the stoves being fixed in a chimney which was supposed to have been the vestry chimney, but which is now found to have no connexion with it, the top, hitherto concealed, opening directly under the rafters and beams of the roof. No one until now was aware of there being two chimneys and the workmen who have been engaged in fixing the piping have repeatedly stated that there was but one flue.

Although it caused much excitement on the above-named day, the parishioners have reason to be thankful that the cause of it has been discovered, otherwise the church might have been burnt to the ground. We are requested to express, thus publicly (sic) the thanks of the Vicar and Wardens to Colonel Hogg and the Insurance Companies, and to the inhabitants generally for their extreme readiness to do what they could under the circumstances. There was no interruption to the accustomed service which commenced as usual at 3 o'clock. We would add that the vicar, seeing so large a concourse of people in the church yard, many of whom, unfortunately for themselves, never visit any place of worship, took the opportunity briefly to exhort them to attend the public ordinances of religion, that they might escape the future of the condemned, where "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

If John Birch, Stephens's successor at St Thomas's, read the above, he would have been struck by its unintended irony in the light of his encounter with a fire that was not quenched in time!

On April 1st, 1863, Stephens chaired a public meeting at the National School, "there being a crowded attendance of over 60 parishioners."^[20] It was the first of several meetings, which led to the adoption (by a vote of 38 for and 23 against) of the 1858 Local Government Act and the establishment of a local Board for Wednesfield. Although, the Board was to co-exist with the local Vestry until 1901, the measure met with opposition from villagers concerned for the freedom "to put their pig styes where they wished."^[20]

In 1866, the year when lockmaker

Thomas Squire (the uncle of Alfred) set up a Wednesfield-based business supplying iron and steel strips and wires, Stephens started evening adult education classes. Under his personal superintendence, "upwards of 50 men and women met regularly for instruction in the rudiments of social science and other kindred studies." His daughter Elizabeth was a pupil. So, too, was Joshua Dyke – brought up at No. 6 New Street but emigrating in 1873 to Canada where he became Mayor of Fort William, Ontario and one of the country's leading Methodist pastors.^[31]

In the following year, Mr J.W.Done, who was to render generous service as churchwarden at St Thomas's, established his bakery in Wednesfield, and it was about this time that a little estate called the Orchard Buildings was constructed on open ground near to the Church Bridge and running through to where Duke Street is situated. One of the streets was called Lighthouse Row because, facing the canal, the lights of its houses, glowing under the bridge arch, would greet bargees and their families approaching Wednesfield in the dark.^[21]

A Little Domestic Strife

By 1870, St Thomas's was found to be "in great need of restoration and repair....some parts of it in a very dilapidated state and...generally unbecoming a place set



Wednesfield Vicarage
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

apart and dedicated to the worship of Almighty God.”^[43]

Stephen's headed a committee formed to proceed with the necessary alterations and an application for repairs and improvements at St Thomas's was heard at Lichfield. One of the churchwardens at the time was William Bradburn – almost certainly he of the canal-side artificial manure works Bradburn and Co (though the Trade Directory also lists a William Bradburn junior operating in Wednesfield at the time as a tarpauling manufacturer).

Churchwarden Bradburn “and certain other parishioners” opposed any internal alterations until the fabric itself and especially the churchyard wall had been put in a thorough state of repair. Since he lived at Wednesfield House facing the church, the appearance of the wall was doubtless of considerable importance to Bradburn. The Chancellor found in his favour, and Stephens was required to pay £30 costs, though Mr Hodson, the vicar's proctor, gave notice of appeal to the Arches Court (until 1965, the Consistory Court of the Province of Canterbury).

By December 1870, Stephens's party had agreed to proceed no further with the appeal, but faculty permission was given for the heightening of chancel windows and the resiting of the pulpit. Also, Stephens was allowed to remove from within the altar rails frames containing the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments and to have these painted on the walls instead.

Repairs to the wall and the various changes were made at a cost of £254. 6s. 6d, the area's major landowners the Duke of Cleveland and the Duke of Sutherland donating £50 and £10 respectively.

From the Chancellor's ruling, we also know that, in some ways, attending services in 1870 would have seemed rather strange to us. The improvements he stipulated included the following:

- * That the coals be removed from the north-east porch of the said church, and that it be used henceforward for the entrance and exit of the congregation.
- * That the present stoves be removed from the centre aisle, and the church be heated by hot-air apparatus

- * That free seats be placed down the centre aisle as before

At St Thomas's, the chancel was enlarged again in 1871–72, and, in memory of his wife Emma, churchwarden John Bealey (who had earlier supported Stephens against Bradburn) gave the three stained glass windows that, amazingly, survived the 1902 fire.

Politics And Rhubarb Sticks

Emmie and Doris Beard recall their grandmother's tales of General Election violence in Wednesfield. At the age of 8, Fanny Mason had been kitchen-maid to Squire George Phillips. Election day fighting was traditional. Armed with rhubarb sticks from the allotments, men did battle in the High Street and on at least one occasion a stone was thrown through the Squire's window. Later, as his housekeeper in Well Lane, she was sent out by her master to bring in the injured, and at about midnight soldiers from Wolverhampton would arrive to round up any combatants who had not dispersed by then.

The Parliamentary Election of 1873 was the only time in the history of Wednesfield when an attempt was made to read the Riot Act. A bunch of professional pugilists arrived from Wolverhampton to influence the voting, but met with opposition. After the election, the Wolverhampton Stipendiary, Mr Isaac Spooner, dealt with the offenders so severely that he was known thereafter as “Cruel Isaac”.

The law had a long memory in those days, it seems. One ringleader sought by the police joined the army to escape and was away in India for twenty years. Nevertheless, when he finally returned to England, he was arrested!

A report to the local government board dated 9th July 1874 by a Doctor Ballard gave the population of Wednesfield (including part of New Invention) as 3,700. Twenty-five years after the cholera outbreak, Dr Ballard found that “Want of drainage is one of the most flagrant faults of the Wednesfield Local Board District. It is a matter about which the Local Board appears to give no concern whatever.” More than a page of the report deals with the trade nuisance arising from Bradburn's artificial manure works (established in Wednesfield in 1859), The reference to “offensive effluvia” is hardly surprising; the manure's ingredients included “sheep's trotters, damaged meat, horseflesh, offal, blood, fish and nightsoil” .

In 1875, the North Walsall Railway came to Wednesfield and within two years 28 trains a day were arriving at the station situated off Neachells Lane at the end of Well Lane.

On Saturday, 29th July 1876, the High Sheriff of Staffordshire, Richard H. Briscoe, Esq., of Somerford Hall, opened an infants school – sited on part of the playground area of the school in Graiseley Lane.



The Revd & Mrs John Birch

John Birch

After 32 years as “the most influential man in the district” ^[20], Stephens died on 7th October 1880 and a stone lining the churchyard path (presumably brought there from the Graiseley Lane cemetery) records that he lies with members of his family in a vault.

On February 7th of the following year, churchwardens Josiah Hyde and James W. Done officiated at the installation of the Revd John Birch, who was to serve at St Thomas’s for 34 years, assisted for much of that time by his son Howard. A plaque in the gallery serves as a memorial to the “five infant children of John and Jane Anne Birch”; presumably, the children died during the term of Birch’s incumbency here. No one alive today remembers Birch, though Iris Millington recalls that her grandmother, who de-

livered mail to the Vicarage, would stoutly refuse his request that letters addressed to the maids be handed over to him first!

“Extensive repairs and alterations” were made to the church in 1884. The organ was moved into the chancel, and the South porch was converted into a choir vestry with ornamental floor tiles which can still be seen today. According to a press report,

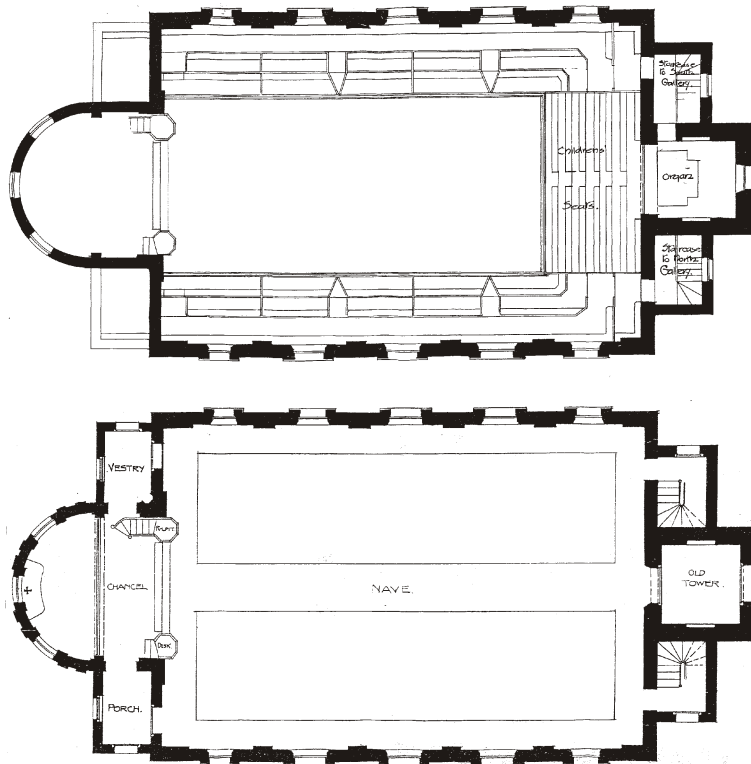
The old-fashioned high-backed seats have been removed, and others of modern construction, made of pitch pine and red deal panels, have been substituted.... The dingy sombre appearance of the walls, ceiling and chancel has now given place to highly artistic embellishments....The chancel canopy is tinted in cobalt blue, with centre rays of glory and stars in gold. The cornices and mouldings and the patterns are also picked in with gold.....and anyone acquainted with the previous interior will be agreeably surprised at the transformation that has taken place.

A re-opening service took place at 7 pm on Thursday, 4th September when the preacher was the Venerable Sir Lovelace Stamer, Bart, Archdeacon of Stoke. We know that the choirmaster at this time was a Mr Foster, while a Mr Simpson of Wolverhampton played the organ. The offertory at this service was £8. 13. 8d – a generous sum for that time, though St Thomas’s was once again indebted to the Duke of Cleveland and the Duke of Sutherland for contributing £50 and £10 respectively towards the £400 cost of the work.

An 1886 account of St Thomas’s seating capacity indicates that pew fees were still being paid at that time and that children were confined to the gallery:

Body of church	301
(assuming 20” of space per person)	
Choir seats.	72
Gallery.	125
Gallery – children	115
(allowing 11” per child)	613
Number rented:	255
Number free:	358

For about fifty years, Charles Day, husband of Fanny Mason and grandfather to the Miss Beards, was churchwarden at St Thomas’s and would sit in the gallery to keep an eye on the boys!



Architect F.T. Beck's ground plan (top picture) and gallery of St Thomas's Church as it was before the 1902 fire

It was on 28th July 1886 that Walter Pritchard died. A plaque in the gallery records that he was "For many years Beadle in this church." A Beadle was an usher, responsible for keeping order in church, and Pritchard is the only person we know of who served in this capacity at St Thomas's, though doubtless there were others. In this year, too, Mrs Price's Dame School opened in North Road, competing with the church school, though some of the children, transferring later to St Thomas's, were found to be "shamefully behind in their reading and writing and could do no arithmetic."^[32] Mrs Price's school closed in 1905.

Tuesday, 21st June 1887 saw the Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. John Birch had chaired a committee of the whole parish and subscriptions totalling £57 had been raised to finance a Jubilee celebration. A 10 am children's service was held. To the accompaniment of organ together with drum and fife (taught by Mr J.E.Fanshaw, the master of the church school), Jubilee hymns were sung, including one for which Dr J. Stainer had composed the music and which began:

English children, lift your voices
To our Father's Throne on high!
Many a land today rejoices,
Many a coast prolongs the cry –
God save the Queen!

Dusky Indian, strong Australian
Western Forest, Southern sea,
None are wanting, none are alien,
All in one great prayer agree –
God save the Queen!

At 1 o'clock, almost 1,600 children gathered in the school yard where each was given a 'Jubilee Medal'. They were then marched in procession to fields in the high street where they were given tea. About 160 old people, together with "250 teachers, committee men and other helpers" were also feasted.

The children's response could well have been more enthusiastic than that of today's more sophisticated youngsters would be. Life for many of them was far from easy and some experienced frequent temporary visits to the Cottage Homes when their parents fell upon hard times. At a cost of around £20,000 the

Wolverhampton Board of Guardians built the Homes in 1889. Covering 20 acres, they provided places for 240 children who would otherwise have been accommodated in the Wolverhampton Union Workhouse, then in Bilston Road. Some were orphans, but others enjoyed the prospect of returning to their parents when home circumstances improved, as, for instance, they did when Mander Brothers of Wolverhampton (paint and varnish manufacturers) opened their Well Lane works in the 1890s, providing about fifty jobs.

John Bealey had died by 1890 and his will left £300 (reduced by duty to £270) to be invested by the vicar and churchwardens who were to use the income from it to provide "blankets and flannel for poor windows"^[22]

In 1897, curate Hugh Tunnadine and churchwardens, J.W.Done and E.Aston appealed for subscriptions to the church's Renovation and Organ Fund. At a cost of £107, some of the main roof timbers, which had rotted at the ends, were spliced or otherwise put into good condition, and the church was then painted.

In 1898, a new organ was purchased for £303 from Messrs Nicholson and Lord, who paid St Thomas's £20 for the old instrument. The new organ was dedicated by the Bishop of Shrewsbury on 14th April, 1898, when the organist of Lichfield Cathedral, John B. Lott, played.

The story of the Church Institute began on November 18th, 1898, the date of a committee meeting at which curate Hugh Tunnadine was vice-chairman and Messrs E. Aston, T. Mason, H. W. Birch, H. Lane, J. Tomkys and F. Hyde were in attendance. It was decreed that membership should be 1/6d per quarter or 2/6d half yearly (payable in advance), and Tunnadine and Aston were authorised "to negotiate with Mr J. W. Done for the tenancy of a house to be used as an Institute". These premises served until 1902 when a move was made into rooms offered by Mrs Broomhall in the High Street, "being the three rooms over shop and the kitchen on ground floor".

Clearly, the Institute flourished. On 15th October 1902, the Secretary "was empowered to arrange for and purchase half a dozen spittoons". Soon football and cricket clubs were formed, to be followed by a Gun Club in 1903 and a Cycle Club the following year. And on 27th April 1904 the deed was signed for the purchase of a building site in Graiseley Lane. According to Mr Lane's calculations, the total cost of land and building would be around £300, and £222. 17. 10d was raised towards this sum by the Bazaar held that year.

At the close of the century, however, the church found itself in the red, with 1899–1900 expenditure of £163. 5. 9 exceeding income of £148. 9. 9, and a special appeal was made "to wipe off the adverse balance now due to Churchwardens."^[41]

Fire Terrestrial

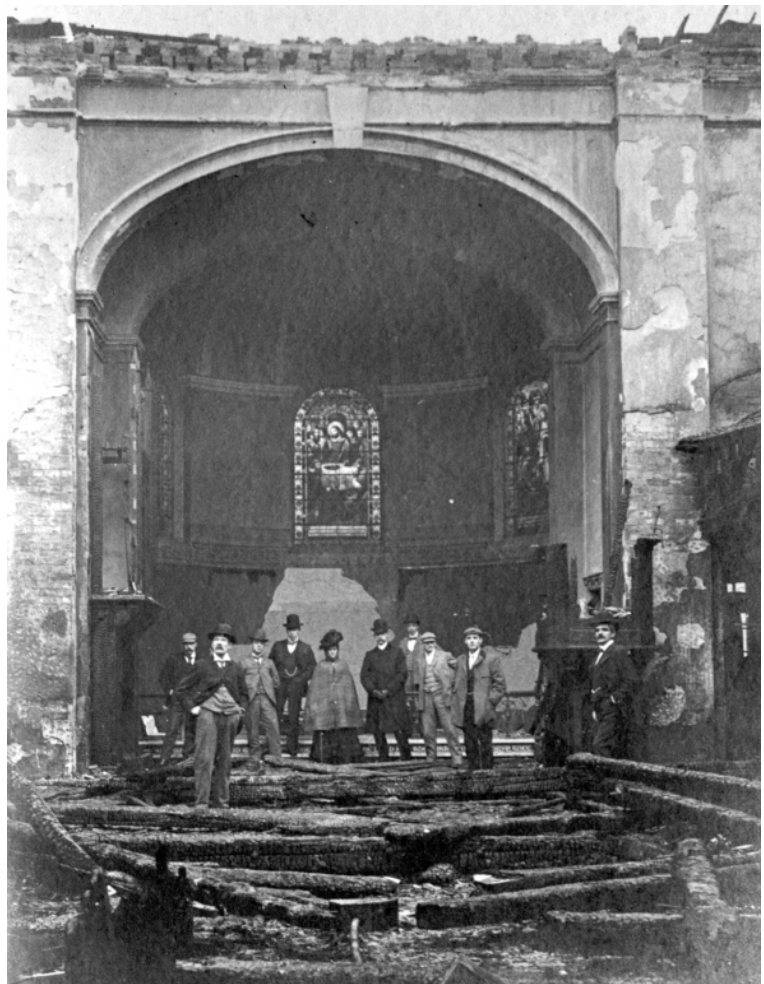
Presenting Sunday Half Hour from St Thomas's on 13th October 1985, the BBC's David Biddle introduced Charles Wesley's hymn "O Thou who camest from above, the fire celestial to impart", with the comment: "Mind you, singing of "fire celestial" will remind us here that it was fire terrestrial that destroyed this church in 1902, with a heat so intense that it's said the metal of the church clock melted right away."

There are slight variations in contemporary and later accounts of what happened on the evening of 18th January 1902, but we know that at 6.24 pm on that day, the Wolverhampton Fire Brigade received a telephone call summoning them to Wednesfield where fire had broken out in the

church. As with the incident of some 45 years earlier in the opposite corner, this fire was caused by an overheating stove pipe. From the north east corner of the church, flames spread rapidly along its whole length.

With pulsating rhetoric, the Express & Star's reporter declared: "Though there was hardly sufficient wind about to ruffle the turbid and placid indifference of the gloomy canal, the fire raged with a ferocity that bespoke the inflammable nature of the material of which the roof was composed, and lit up the interior of the building until it resembled a gigantic lantern. The flames raced on to their ultimate goal – the tower at the west-end which was reached in double-quick time. The thick volumes of smoke which issued forth from this....were soon superseded by forked tongues of flame, which in turn gave way to myriads of sparks that fitfully ascended skyward, as though scattered to the winds by the bellows of a huge forge. The interior of the tower was a veritable fiery furnace."^[24]

The telephone call to the Wolverhampton Fire Brigade was quickly followed by a telegram, and the brigade took out one of its



Studying the fire damage, 1902.

steam engines from temporary quarters in Red Lion Street. By today's standards, their progress to Wednesfield seems to have been farcically slow. Horses drawing the 2 ton 5 cwt engine became exhausted and on at least one occasion the firemen had to dismount in order to push the machine up an incline. One report claims that the men, unfamiliar with the route, took a wrong turning up Railway Street on reaching Heath Town and had to turn the horses round. Some reports claim the journey took an hour! Once arrived, however, Superintendent Stokes quickly got his men to work, and water was taken from both the canal and mains.

The Willenhall Fire Brigade was also alerted at 6-40 pm. It was under no obligation to turn out, since Wednesfield Council had cancelled the agreement between them and had failed to pay the usual £10 retaining fee, but by 6-47 pm, eight men were at the steamer ready and willing to start. Then it was learned that the man who usually supplied horses had none available in the stables, and all efforts to obtain them from other sources failed. As their captain, J.H. James, said later: "Under these circumstances, the brigade was entirely powerless."

Fire appliances were kept at Pattison & Gear's chocolate works which had opened that year at the junction of Hall Street and Well Lane, but attempts to get at these failed.

The Willenhall brigade had been summoned by a telephone call from a Mr Edge and by a telegraph from Mr T. Miller, a chemist whose premises were situated near the church and who was the first to learn of the outbreak. He had entered the church, but could do little.

Alfred Squire was Wednesfield's postmaster and proprietor of Thomas Squire & Sons. Accompanied by a Mr G. Lewis, he made his way up to the belfry where they rang the bell for about a quarter of an hour before dense smoke drove them out of the building.

The vicar, John Birch, had checked the heating apparatus between 3.30 and 4 pm and had found it working perfectly. Suffering from a bad cold, possibly influenza, he had then retired to bed, hoping to feel better by next day when guest preachers were due at St Thomas's for services in connection with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was roused from his bed with the alarming news but could do nothing except stand and



WEDNESFIELD CHURCH,

Destroyed by Fire, January 18th, 1902.

~~~~~  
**AN APPEAL FOR HELP TO RE-BUILD IT.**  
~~~~~

SIR,

The burning down of our Church has been a terrible loss to us—indeed a great calamity. The re-building of it will be a burden too heavy for us to bear alone. We are therefore compelled to appeal for help outside our Parish; and we feel emboldened to do this because we have been assured of the deep and widespread sympathy of our neighbours as shewn in many different ways.

We beg to offer for your perusal the following particulars:—Wednesfield is what is called a black country village, population 5,520, consisting of Lock and Key Smiths, Vermin Trap Makers, Miners, and Agricultural Labourers. There are no large works in the Parish, except a Chocolate Manufactory not yet in fully working order, and the branch Lead and Colour Works of Messrs. Mander Bros., Wolverhampton. The Church was an old structure, part of it dating from 1751; it was seated to accommodate about 750 worshippers; it had recently been restored, painted, &c., and a new organ purchased. It was filled with worshippers every Sunday.

Everything was destroyed except a small part of the organ; the stained windows being badly damaged but repairable. The walls of the Church and Tower are left standing, and in the opinion of the Architect will be available for re-building after considerable repairs.

The cost of re-building the Church, including provision for about 100 more seats, and some necessary improvements in exits from galleries, &c., will amount to about £5,000.

Towards this sum we think we can reckon upon £3,500 including the insurance money. The Parishioners of Wednesfield have already promised upwards of £1,000 without any outside help. They possibly may be able to raise a little more, but there their powers will come to an end as they are not as a Parish able to give large amounts, but truly they have “offered willingly” to the full extent of their means. Nonconformists as well as Churchmen manifesting the firm determination to leave no stone unturned to accomplish the speedy re-building of their much-loved Parish Church.

A large representative Committee has been formed and is now at work. Mr. F. T. Beck, Architect, of Wolverhampton, and Diocesan Surveyor, has been appointed to act for the Committee, and is preparing plans and obtaining estimates for immediately commencing building.

The Schools, which have been licensed by the Bishop for Divine Service and Administration of the Sacraments during the re-building, are far too small to accommodate the Congregations, Sunday Schools, Men’s Bible Class, &c., thus making it necessary that the work should be taken in hand at once and completed in the shortest possible time.

Will you kindly help us in this necessary work? We think you will give this appeal your earnest and generous consideration.

We are,

Yours faithfully,

In behalf of the Building Committee,

JOHN BIRCH, VICAR AND CHAIRMAN.

JOSIAH HYDE, VICE-CHAIRMAN.

WILLIAM KENDRICK, }
THOMAS S. MASON, } CHURCHWARDENS.

H. W. BIRCH, HON. SECRETARY,

Wednesfield Vicarage, Wolverhampton.

Wednesfield Vicarage,

Wolverhampton.

with the hundreds of spectators who gathered – many from the local pubs. The fire, said the Express & Star writer self-righteously, was “a magnet that was even powerful enough to draw them away from the liquor they were consuming.”

Before the heat and smoke became too intense, people helped rescue as much as possible from inside the building. The altar and a few choir stalls were carried out, together with the two large chairs given by John Bealey and made from oak grown at the back of Wednesfield House. Also rescued were the chancel’s two small chairs and a solid oak kneeler, the former said to have been made by a local man from the wood of a tree which grew on the north side of the green; they bear no date, but were certainly used in the first church and are therefore two of the oldest objects we possess. The oak kneeler-stool was saved and remained, until about twenty years ago in the family of Nellie Craven (housekeeper to Dr William Bentley).

Communion plate saved included a 1752 chalice given by Mary Harwood, Martha Gough’s daughter; a 1753 flagon given by Henry Mitton and Thomas Fisher, sons-in-law to Mrs Gough; and a 1753 paten presented by our first minister, Cornelius Jesson jnr. Fortunately, the parish records were kept at the vicarage. Volunteers took some of the rescued items home for temporary safekeeping, and although the helpers included “many characters well-known to the police”, not a single case of ‘looting’ was reported, (though the small stool and “a handsome glass cruet” disappeared and were not returned to St Thomas’s until 64 years later!)

It is said that a local retailer named Pickering rushed into his shop and tipped cigars out of their boxes into which the gathered spectators were urged to make the first contributions towards rebuilding work.

Rescue work had halted by the time the bell crashed to the floor of the tower, “to the imminent risk of those who were standing in close proximity”. The metal of the clock melted and the weather cock came crashing to the ground.

By next morning, the church was a blackened ruin. But the tower remained; the walls of the roofless building still stood, some parts of the organ were spared; and, amazingly, John Bealey’s stained-glass windows in the chancel had survived intact. “Nothing else is saved,” Birch told a reporter. “It is a poor parish and a dreadful blow. Everything was going

so well – good congregations and no debts.” Birch had been the last person to quit the burning building and public sympathy for him was considerable.

But, apart from the new organ, nothing else was fully covered by insurance!

One beneficiary of the disaster was the enterprising W.White’s Photographic Studio of Heath Town. Almost before the dust had settled, photographs of the interior of the ruined church were on sale at a shilling each. In 1977, Mr & Mrs Ken Munslow presented St Thomas’s with a set of four of these.

According to the church school’s log book, all the pupils were taken to see the ruins.

Services had to be held in the school building, and within weeks of the disaster the parish began raising money for rebuilding work – the final cost of which would be £5,487 17s 8d, including Henry Willcock & Co’s actual building costs of £4,404.

Only £1,300 was due from the Fire Insurance Office, but by March 10th – less than two months after the disaster – the people of Wednesfield had raised a further £2,200. To raise the remainder of the money required, the church’s appeal leaflet declared that:

Wednesfield is what is called a Black Country village, population 5,520, consisting of Lock and Key Smiths, Vermin Trap Makers, Miners and Agricultural Labourers. There are no large works in the Parish, except a Chocolate Manufactory not yet fully in working order, and the branch Lead and Colour Works of Messrs Mander Bros., Wolverhampton. The Church was an old structure, part of it dating from 1751; it was seated to accommodate about 750 worshippers; it had recently been restored, painted etc and a new organ purchased. It was filled with worshippers every Sunday.

(Interestingly, a year earlier the Lloyd family had begun producing seamless steel tubes in Wednesfield, but perhaps in 1902 few could have foreseen the small firm’s development into the Weldless Steel Tube Company.)

The 1903 Statement of Accounts lists about 1,000 donors, including the vicar and his family who gave £132 (something like £7,500 in today’s values). Gifts were received from 38 churches: £82. 8. 2 from St Jude’s,

£64. 1. 5 from St Mary's, Bushbury, £50 .8. 8 from St Giles, Willenhall and £16. 10. 3 from our former daughter church of Holy Trinity, Heath Town – impressively generous amounts for the time, representing in some cases several weeks' collections. Some people kept Collecting Books in which weekly contributions were entered. Collecting boxes were issued, nine of them to pubs. (The 'Pyle Cock' raised 7s 8d, 'The Vine' 7s 1d) And the gentry bestowed largesse – £100 from Lord Barnard, £50 from Lord Calthorpe and £25 from Sir Richard Paget. The largest individual donation



Wednesfield Church, Re-opened July 24th 1903

(£400) was given by "A Friend".

Coffin-maker, Gerald Turner, raised money for rebuilding by fashioning ornamental goods out of wood salvaged from the fire. Doris and Emmie Beard, for instance, have two oak brackets made by him in 1902.

According to Ada Millchamp's *Memories of Yesterday*, the bricks used in rebuilding the church were made on a site where Coronation Road joins Wednesfield Road. At the same place, bricks had been made for Willcock & Co's building of New Cross Hospital, which started life as a Workhouse in 1901. On 24th July 1903, the rebuilt church was dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield. Extensions had been made to the organ chamber, choir and clergy vestries, and improvements had been made to the gallery staircases. All the money

needed had been raised, though it was a few more years before all the internal decorations could be completed and paid for.

An interesting footnote concerns a finger of the church clock which was found in 1902 by Joseph Collins (of J Collins & Sons – Steeltrap Manufacturers, Graiseley Lane), and handed down to his son, Arthur Lane Collins, who in turn passed it on to his son George. It was this George who, as a boy, had the job, after school each night, of smoothing, preparatory to engraving, the surface of the brass plaque designed by Charles Mason (son of churchwarden Thomas Mason – Tom Watkins's grandfather) for St Thomas's Church and which commemorates the dead of the Great War. George's daughter-in-law returned the clock finger to St Thomas's in 1991. A second finger was returned well before 1991, but there is also a story that a clock finger was melted down and reshaped by a toolmaker named Alec Pritchard in his garden workshop on Cannock Road. It was said to have been turned into a candlestick, which his daughter gave to St Thomas's in the 1970s, though its present whereabouts is unknown.

In 1903, during a United Kingdom tour of his Wild West Show, at the invitation of Mr William Sidebotham, Buffalo Bill and his Indians chased through Wednesfield. One wonders if the spectacle drew as many sightseers from the local pubs as did the 'fire terrestrial' a year earlier! Certainly, many boys from the church school played truant to see the great man).

A Little More Domestic Strife

In St Thomas's that year, our imposing pulpit was installed – the gift of the Men's Bible Class, which I am told was started by curate Guy Parkhouse who was later to return to Wednesfield as one of the parish's most popular vicars. In 1909 a silver chalice and paten were purchased for ten guineas from the proceeds of a 'Cake and Apron' Sale.

In 1910, an appeal from Birch and his wardens for funds towards the £250–300 needed to decorate the church ended with the words:

"A Deputation from the Committee will wait upon you in the course of a few days to ask for your promise of a contribution to this very laudable work of making the House of God more worthy of His name and worship."



Revd Guy Parkhouse and Wednesfield Church Institute Football Club

Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

The work was part of the restoration process following the fire, but owing to a slump in trade, the climate had not been considered ideal for further fundraising. The Renovation Committee was encouraged when, at Easter, one of its members, Thomas Lewis, offered to donate a bible and a carved oak eagle lectern on condition the organ pipes were painted and the church interior decoration completed by 31st December that year. However, when the Committee set out to find the most economical means of achieving their goal, Lewis was far from pleased. He expressed his feelings as follows:

25th April 1910

To the Chairman of the Renovation Committee.

According to the treatment and meanness which I have witnessed, I feel justified in withdrawing from the Committee and all church work, and also the offer of the oak lectern. A man that hath friends must show himself friendly and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, 24th verse of the 18th chapter of Book of Proverbs.

Thomas Lewis

Lewis had attended St Thomas's for the past 64 years, but so strong was his insistence that no less than the agreed sum of £250-300 be spent, that he sent a copy of his letter to the Midland Evening News. The paper alerted Birch, who, together with the wardens, was deputed to call upon the editor in order to state that no commitment had ever been made to spending a specific sum and to express the wish of the Committee that the letter, being "so very objectionable", should be suppressed.

In fact, the final cost of the decorating was £331. 14. 10, but St Thomas's would have to wait 28 years for its new lectern. Meanwhile, the old one was relaquered!

Enter Fred Stride

The year 1910 saw two newcomers to St Thomas's. One was the present oak reredos behind the altar, made by Henry Willcock & Co. Until this time a curtain had hung behind the altar and round the whole south side of the chancel, covering the vestry door.

The other new arrival was young Fred Stride, who in that year joined the treble line of the choir when it comprised 12 men and 12 boys – all robing in one small vestry, the room which is now the office! At times it was bedlam and choirmaster Albert Wilkes would clip boys round the ear when necessary. Thirty-two years later, Fred Stride was the organist, a capacity in which he was to serve St Thomas's for four decades, and a plaque on the organ records his total of 72 years service to this church.

In 1911, to celebrate the Coronation of King George V, all the children were given a tea party on a patch of council ground, access to which was via a field gate situated near to



Francis Roach

where Bealey's Fold is today. They were marched there four abreast, each carrying a small flag, to be presented with a bag containing buns and currant cake.

A Very Good Fellow

John Birch died on 5th November, 1914, having served at St Thomas's for 33 years. He was succeeded in the following April by the Revd Francis Handley Roach, aged 41, the son of the Revd Thomas Roach, assistant master at Repton School. Francis Roach had spent twelve months (1901 – 1902) in South Africa as Acting Chaplain to the Forces during the Second Boer War, and his arrival in Wednesfield followed a ten-year ministry at St Alkmund's, Shrewsbury. Besides parish work, he did a great deal there to improve social conditions. He was elected a member of the local trade and labour council, held offices in Friendly Society work and won the gratitude of both employers and workers for his efforts to settle a strike in the building trade. At the same time, he was nominated for a commission as Chaplain to the Shropshire Royal Horse Artillery by the T.F. (Territorial Force) Association of what he described as "the most Conservative county in England"

A few years later, he was to write:

"While I can claim to understand the feelings of the working classes, I am not such a blind partisan as to be considered altogether unworthy of confidence by those who take quite a different view of life."

This was part of his self-defence during an unfortunate episode in 1917, following his two-year Wednesfield ministry – a ministry he found difficult to fulfil whilst at the same time holding the office of army chaplain. Although in 1915 he had considered Roach ideally suited to serve at St Thomas's, two years later the Bishop of Lichfield applauded his wish to remain a chaplain until the end of the war, and Roach was posted to Weelsby Camp, Grimsby. Here he was disturbed by the feeling amongst the troops, some of whom were becoming increasingly mutinous over the treatment of wounded soldiers brought home from France. Their pay reduced to 1/- per week, they received ten days leave on discharge from hospital and were immediately recalled for returning to the trenches. Meanwhile, according to The Times military correspondent, a potential reserve of over four million men were "exempted, protected and badged".

Roach sympathised with the men and felt that Government policies were eroding their patriotism and spirit of self-sacrifice.

At the beginning of August 1917, Roach had calmed an insubordinate A.i.iii draft (troops due to be sent back to the Front after recovering from wounds):

"The Adjutant was afraid to get them together for me. I persuaded him to do it, and then I talked to the men as I have done at a Strike Meeting. I got them down on their knees for prayer before they left the building, and they went off quietly." He wrote to Major-General Sir S. von Donop warning him that "before long there will be.... 2 or 3 million objectors who refuse to go on killing Germans, or be killed by them."

"The professional army," he wrote, "which existed to obey orders died in Flanders; the men of the new army have accepted military discipline for the sake of the cause but they are accustomed to think for themselves and to organise for themselves."

Roach heard that in January 1917 machine guns had been turned on a mutinous draft at Clipstone camp, Notts and that an officer had been shot. Also, he was told that when a draft of Royal Field Artillery mutinied at Ripon, four were shot dead and twenty or thirty were wounded. Roach reported all this to the Rt Hon. George N Barnes, MP, a Cabinet Minister at the War Office, who in turn wrote to the Secretary of War, Lord Derby.

The Army's top brass were not pleased. The Rt Hon. Sir J.G. Maxwell, General Officer Commanding in Chief of Northern Command, declared that Roach had been "most injudicious" in failing to confine the matter within the military sphere. His action in approaching a Cabinet Minister was "viewed with extreme disapproval by the Army Council".

As the weeks passed, the situation worsened. In August, Maxwell had referred to Roach as someone "said to be a very good fellow" and admitted:

"there is truth in a great deal of what the Padre states . . . there is no doubt that the soldiers, especially those that have been wounded, resent being sent back again and again." As to the shootings, however, the military verdict, following a prompt investigation, was that Roach had been the victim of a hoax

and his subsequent reaction had been “very meddlesome and foolish.”

By October, Maxwell and von Donop wanted Roach out of the Army altogether. But, because he had resigned his Wednesfield living and had a family of eight children to support, he was given a second chance and transferred to Withernsea, Hull, the chaplain there (J.A.Kirby) taking Roach’s place at Grimsby.

He remained at Withernsea until November 1920, when he resigned and returned to parish life as Rector of Toft Newton, Market Rasen, Lincs.

Clearly, Roach was a man whose conscience directed him to speak out, to highlight injustice and challenge the established order of things. Was his breach of military procedure the result of thoughtlessness on his part or was it prompted by a desire to prevent an Army cover-up? Was Roach really the victim of a hoax? Lord Derby, replying to Barnes’s letter, had dismissed the story on the basis that “in this country anybody who is killed must have a Coroner’s inquest.” The surviving correspondence on the affair suggests that Roach accepted the enquiry outcome, which insisted that he had been misinformed; but he was less concerned about this than about the serious effect of Government policy on the lives of fighting men. Whether or not insurgents had been machine-gunned, Roach saw the prevailing mood in British camps as tinder soon to be kindled.

Nevertheless, he was warned by Maxwell “On no account either to touch on politics, disciplinary or Army matters either in the pulpit or in inter-



Guy H. Parkhouse

course with Officers and men.” Thus, the meddlesome padre was silenced!

A March 1917 note in St Thomas’s Preachers Book recording Thanksgiving for the safe return of William Francis Roach, 2nd Lieutenant Lancashire Regiment, invalided from the Army in France, refers to Roach’s oldest son. Sadly, William never made a full emotional recovery from the war and experienced a series of insecure jobs and business failures.

Guy Heathman Parkhouse

It was during Roach’s incumbency (i.e. 1915), that the system of pew rents came to an end at St Thomas’s. In response, the Church Commissioners undertook to pay £32 per annum towards the incumbent’s stipend.



St Thomas’s Church (Post 1902)
Wolverhampton Archive & Local Studies



St Thomas's in about 1918

In 1916, the Midland Electric Corporation for Power Distribution Ltd installed electricity at St Thomas's – a project that had been considered but abandoned as early as 1910.

The Revd J. Howse was priest-in-charge for a time, assisted by Roach's curate, the Revd William J. Stuart Crump. It was on July 15 that Crump baptised little Zillah Mary Brown known to later generations as church cleaner extraordinaire, Mrs Morgan!

In the same year, 1917, the church welcomed back the Revd Guy Heathman Parkhouse. Parkhouse was not new to Wednesfield: he was married to Emily Lane, a member of a well-known Wednesfield family, and he had been curate at St Thomas's from 1900 to 1907 before moving to Heath Hayes. In 1914 he had become vicar of Mow Cop from where he returned to Wednesfield. The Parkhouses had no children and Emily's sister lived with them at the vicarage.

The country was still engaged in a devastating world war in which 123 Wednesfield men were killed. In July 1917, a Comforts Fund was able to send money to village men serving their country. In July 1918 each Wednesfield man serving abroad was sent a five shilling postal order, and at Christmas, each man serving abroad and in the navy, or who had been on active service and had returned to England, or who was disabled and had been discharged received 7/6d. Each man serving in the British Isles or who had been discharged though not disabled received 5/-.

In raising money for extending the Institute, the church had in mind the interests of serving men. As Parkhouse wrote in July 1918: "The Committee are anxious that when

the lads return they shall have a really nice commodious Institute. The New Institute and Parish Room will be our Peace Memorial."

The interests of younger villagers were not forgotten, however. On 1st August 1918, the Sunday School annual treat was held at the vicarage 400 children attended!

A processional cross was given by Mrs L.E.Green de Woolfson and Thomas Brevitt of Prestwood Road presented the Roll of Honour in memory of his cousin, Walter Cyril Horton, who was killed in the Somme offensive of 1st July, 1916. The Roll, together with the rood beam, was dedicated by the Bishop of Lichfield on 5th March 1919 "in reverend and grateful memory of the Wednesfield men who laid down their lives in the cause of freedom and righteousness during the great War of 1914–1918".

That the spirit of ecumenism was alive and well at this time is evidenced by the fact that united services were being held. Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist clergy took part in an August 1918 service at which Parkhouse preached and the curate (Claridge) played the cornet! And a 1919 Vestry minute empowered Parkhouse to arranged a series of united outdoor meetings "with the Nonconformist brethren" on Sunday evenings in the summer months.

In this year, too, the appointment of a Mr Blakemore as Sunday School Superintendent (with a yearly £10 honorarium) brought to an end a period of ill-discipline amongst the youngsters.

It was at this time that young Mary Peers (now Mrs Bert Barnard) was living at 'The Old Crown', where, for a short time, the licensee was Mary's father Enoch, a former England crown green bowling champion. This pub stood on the site of the present 'Pyle Cock' car-park and the existing entrance from Church Street was its driveway

Another memorial plaque in St Thomas's records the death in April 1920 of 80-year-old Stephen Ward (churchwarden from 1887 to 1897) who "left 500 war bonds to the vicar and wardens to be used at their discretion. They were invested with the Funds of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as a permanent endowment for the Curate Fund."



Josiah Hyde (seated left)

Jane Hyde died in 1921, and, in her memory, Josiah, her husband, erected the rails at the chancel steps.

In memory of his mother, Parkhouse gave the sanctuary lamp. Apparently, there were some who did not welcome its appearance at St Thomas's, regarding it as out of place in a "low church". It was probably Parkhouse who broadened the range of vestments here, too; previously these had been restricted to cassocks and surplices.

In 1926, in memory of his parents, an electric organ blowing installation was given by Stephen Mattox. Although most members of the Mattox family have belonged to the Methodist Church, Stephen was churchwarden at St Thomas's for twenty years (1906–26). He owned the Amos Lane keymaking factory founded by John Mattox in 1850 and our church school is situated in a road that bears the family name.

During the 1920s, construction and technology transformed the area surrounding St Thomas's Church so that, more and more, the building came to represent a past age as well as the indestructibility of Christian Faith. This decade saw the building of Nordley Hill Estate on what had been farmland, bringing Wednesfield's population to just over 6,000 in the 1921 census. Electric lighting came to Wednesfield, and from 1923 trolley buses travelled along the High Street as far as the 'Dog and Partridge', replacing the trams which had been unable to proceed beyond the narrow Rookery Street Bridge. In 1922, the original Church Bridge was replaced by the one we have at present, and in 1925 Wednesfield Park was laid out, (though its four acres would be

trebled in 1936 with the addition of King George V playing fields).

In November 1926, to raise funds for St Thomas's and Wood End schools, an ambitious Bazaar was held in the Institute. A copy of the souvenir programme has survived. It contains an introduction by Parkhouse, an anonymous history of Wednesfield which states that John Wesley once preached at St Thomas's (a highly dubious claim: Wednesfield is mentioned nowhere in Wesley's Journal) and, amongst several pages of the congregation's favourite sayings, a contribution from Freda Easthope:

"To sum up all, be merry I advise, and as we are merry, may we still be wise."

Woodbine Willie

The Great War had the effect of diluting the unquestioned certainties within European society, and there were some who saw the Church as enfeebled and irrelevant. An interesting impression of the state of the Church in England is found in a 1928 parish magazine item by an anonymous writer recently returned to England after many years in South Africa:

The Clergy will tell you of their difficulties, and their hopeless struggle against apathy and irreligion. Churches are supposed to be empty, and the country turning heathen, and the moral standard rapidly declining. But experience proves the average church is by no means empty. Worshippers are very earnest and self-sacrifice is rife amongst Christian people. Enormous sums are raised each year for Church purposes.... There are plenty of candidates for ordination, if money to educate them could be found, and already many are being educated; as far as organised Christianity being on its last legs, it was probably never more vigorous.

The fact that 600 Easter communicants were recorded in May 1928 suggests that church life remained vigorous at St Thomas's, and when, in the same month, Parkhouse announced "We can get 1000 into the church", he was confident of a strong attendance for a visit by the Revd Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy who preached at the 8 pm service on May 16th.

Chaplain to the Forces from 1916–19, he was affectionately known by the troops as Woodbine Willie; he once described his ministry as taking “a box of fags in your haversack and a great deal of love in your heart” and laughing and joking with those he was called to serve.^[35] “His vivid faith, the fruit of a deep sacramentalism, was reflected in a warmth of character which endeared him to the men of the trenches and made him the best-known padre in the Great War”^[25]. For attending to the wounded under fire during the attack on the Messines ridge, he was awarded the MC. He was valued by Buckingham Palace where he preached frequently, and was also known to a wide Christian public through books such as “Rough Rhymes” (1918), “The Wicket Gate” (1923) and “The Word and the Work” (1925). His 1928 visit to St Thomas’s was not his first, but almost certainly, it was his last, for within a year, having been ill for some time with influenza^[40], he died, leaving a wife and three children (the youngest of whom was only two years old) to subsist at their home in Worcester on an income of £150 per annum. Senior clergy launched an appeal for £7,000 and this was supported in Wednesfield.

An Australian Tragedy

Henry Lane was a prosperous trap-maker with a small factory in Wednesfield. He sent his son Arthur, a nephew of the Parkhouses, to manage a factory in Australia. Early in 1928, while sea-bathing with some friends, Arthur was attacked by a shark, which took his leg in its jaws. Bravely Arthur’s girlfriend fought it off three times; finally, however, the boy lost his leg and died in her arms on the beach. He was 25 years of age.

When the Wednesfield Group of Toc H was advanced to the status of a Branch in 1928, it was granted custody of a Lamp, and this was presented in Arthur Lane’s memory. Also in his memory, a credence table was presented to St Thomas’s in 1929, the same year in which our present altar was given by the Parkhouses in memory of their parents. The original main altar was moved to the Lady Chapel and is one of the oldest objects we possess. It was used in the first church of 1750.

Incidentally, 1929 was the year in which Fred Stride married Evelyn Gregory. And it saw the arrival in Wednesfield of Nurse Lilian

Routledge (known simply as ‘Nurse’) of the Queen Victoria Jubilee of Nurses. Fully qualified as a surgical and medical nurse, she lived at 37 Nordley Hill and there began era of stormy duels between ‘Nurse’ and Dr William Bentley, verbal confrontations recalled with relish in later years by former patients “Thoughtful and efficient, but with no time for hypochondriacs”, she was a pillar of the Wednesfield Branch of the Personal Service League. She died in 1977, but on her 90th birthday, Dr Bentley joined in the celebrations in a meeting described as being “from another age”!

Though some of his patients were in awe of Dr Bentley, his generosity of spirit was unquestioned. Mary Barnard recalls the Christmas grocery parcels he provided for the needy, and the night when pneumonia struck the children of a family he revisited in his car next morning with the gift of a bag of coal which he broke up for immediate use. In those days, the only people covered by health insurance tended to be men in employment; women and children had to pay for the doctor’s services. But when circumstances were straitened, Dr Bentley invariably waived his fee with the characteristic comment: “Let the b.....’s pay who can afford to pay!”. Like his police sergeant father before him, William Bentley served Wednesfield well.

The New School

In the parish magazine of April 1931, Parkhouse wrote:



St Thomas’s Sunday School Teachers in the 1920s

Left to Right: Harold Weston, Harry Price, Percy Lowe, Fred Griffiths, J.T. Hughes., Mrs Griffiths, Freda Easthope, Lily Bache, Iris Millington, Myra Smith, Evelyn Challenor, Dorothy Lewis, Edith Weston, ?, ?. ?
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies



Wednesfield Operatic Society, mid-1930's taken at the Picture House
('The Smack')
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

The past year has been an eventful one. In the very worst time this country has known within living memory, so far as trade is concerned, the Church in Wednesfield has built a New Senior Church School at a cost of £9,000. This is the Church's reply to those who think religion is played out.

Although the trade depression was late in hitting Wednesfield, by the start of 1932, the village had become largely a parish of the unemployed. The staple trades of trap- and key-making had almost disappeared, and many became jobless at the closing down of large factories in the neighbourhood and in Wolverhampton. Collections and subscriptions for local church work (eg church expenses, Sunday School, assistant clergy) fell from £462 in 1929 to £290 in 1933.

Yet, during this period, with unemployment nationally doubling to two million within 14 months and despite opposition from "a tiny but influential section of the community" who resented the idea of the Church being responsible for educating all the Village children, land next to the Institute was secured for a church senior school. This is now St Patrick's R.C. Primary School. (One wonders if there are many other RC schools whose foundation stones were laid by Anglican bishops!). The original intention was for the new building to accommodate 225 boys aged 11 to 14 and for the primary school (on the site of the present William Bentley Court) to be enlarged and modernised to accommodate 225 senior girls, but I am assured that from the start both buildings were co-educational. In any event, no longer would Wednesfield youngsters need

to travel to school in Bilston or Wolverhampton.

We have much to learn from our predecessors of this time. Undaunted by economic gloom and constraint, St Thomas's, with the promise of a large grant from the Bishop's Appeal Fund, set about raising enough money to build a secondary school, and the positive mood that prevailed rings out in Parkhouse's December 1930 declaration concerning the forthcoming Bazaar, proceeds of which were earmarked for school building.

The Bazaar has not yet taken place but the result is a foregone conclusion. We shall have raised £3,000 which, added to the Bishop's Fund, gives us the substantial total of £7,225..... There is sure to be a debt on the building, but it will not be more than we can carry.

The Bishop of Lichfield laid the foundation stone on 23rd June 1930 and returned to Wednesfield to dedicate the New Schools on 27th April 1931. Accompanying the Bishop was Sir Percival Heywood, CC, who "took his hat off to the people of Wednesfield, not simply because they were pioneers in the Diocese so far as School building was concerned, and the wonderful way all had worked to secure their end, but chiefly because they had sought and had worked under what they believed to be the Guiding Hand of God."

Parents of 11 – 14-year-olds who had no wish for their children to attend a church school could send them instead to the Lichfield Road School (now Wednesfield Village School), where, at some point in the 1930s, Mary Hutcheson, (famous later as Mary Whitehouse, Hon. General Secretary of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association) became Art Mistress. From 1932, children under 11 attended either Neachells Lane School or a new school in Woden Avenue (originally part of Frederick Road).

One worthy product of the church school was Ernest Adey, who, in 1931, was ordained in Durham Cathedral, prior to taking up a curacy at Holy Trinity, Darlington.

Also in 1931, at Parkhouse's instigation, a Branch of the League of Nations was established in Wednesfield. In December of that

year, he was asked by the Bishop of Lichfield to accept the Rectory of Sheldon, Stoke-on-Trent, and, reluctantly, Parkhouse bade Wednesfield farewell. "During my ministry," he wrote, "I have had no favourites and I have made a fuss of no one. I have endeavoured to be a friend and a brother to all who wanted sympathy and guidance."

Even today, this genteel parson is remembered with affection. Mary Barnard remembers his little round hat that was green with age, the Maytime country dancing on the vicarage lawn and the Ascension Day bicycle rides to Lichfield. After the morning service at St Thomas's, Parkhouse and the young people of the congregation would set out together, but so slow was his pedalling that the youngers always arrived at their destination ages ahead of the revered pastor. He would pay children 2d (quite a sum in those days) to deliver notices around the parish and the children of houses he visited always received a coin.

He served the village well. As Harold Randall recalled years later:

During his ministry in Wednesfield he was well-loved by all parishioners and especially by members of the Men's Sunday afternoon Bible Class which he founded. He visited the Church Institute ("The Stute") almost nightly and was well known for his work amongst the Sunday

School children. During his time here the new Church Schoolwas built.

The people of Wednesfield expressed their appreciation with a gift of £50, and three charabanc loads of Wednesfield folk made the trip to his institution at Shelton where he remained until retirement in 1959, when he went to live at Fossbrooke House, Lytham, St Annes. It was there he died nine years later at the age of 97.

A Man Of Norfolk

He was succeeded at St Thomas's by bachelor Stanley Arthur Howard, a native of Norfolk. After a career in business, Howard had served as an officer in the 1914-18 conflict, from which he emerged with a deep hatred of war.... and a wound which an occasional drop of whisky eased considerably! As former Vice Principal of Lichfield Theological College, his experience stood him in good stead on his first Sunday evening here. As he began his sermon, the gallery and chancel lights went out. "Nevertheless," the parish magazine reported, "he proved himself to be well able to carry on without lights."

By 1934 there was still a large debt outstanding on the church school, but this was reduced considerably during Howard's incumbency.

As stated earlier, facing St. Thomas's across the High Street stood Wednesfield House (possibly the site in the mid-17th century of the Lane family's residence ^[20] and currently the site of a supermarket). By the 1930's, it had become the home of Josiah Hyde, who had been churchwarden in the time of Revd William Stephens, Chairman of the Local Board before the Parish Council Act came into force and Chairman of the Cottage Homes Committee. A manufacturing chemist, he produced finings (a clarifying agent) for the brewing industry and the chemicals involved in the process were stored in the stables at Wednesfield House. The Hyde family had also owned Moathouse Farm. Josiah died in June 1931 and is remembered in the wording of a plaque set near the chancel steps. His granddaughter Kathleen, who died in March 1999 at the age of 98, was the last member of the Hyde family in the UK to bear that name.

D.P.

Long before St Thomas's was built, a Mid-summer festival was held in Wednesfield,



Stanley Howard



Wednesfield House Front and Garden

quite likely on Wednesfield Green, the site of the church itself. In common with other “wakes and mains”, Wednesfield Wake, as it was known, probably originated as a watch or all-night vigil on hallowed ground associated with death, and was usually followed by a market in the High Street and with revelry of a somewhat unrestrained character. In the early days of St Thomas’s, “Wake Sunday” was an important date on the calendar, and in 1932 festivities began taking the form of a Carnival.

On June 18th that year the first Wednesfield Carnival was held, with the church school’s Peggy Corbett as Carnival Queen. The Hilton Colliery Silver Band led a procession, and entertainment in the park was followed at 9 pm by a Grand Carnival Dance in the Institute. It was, by all accounts, a tremendous success. “Wednesfield was never before so packed with visitors” and “it would have been impossible to have desired better behaviour on the part of the crowds.” These were the words of Councillor David Pritchard, J.P. for the County of Stafford. Connected by marriage to the Squire family – his wife’s sister was married to Alfred Squire’s son Cyril – Pritchard was for seven years chairman of Wednesfield Urban District Council and a firm

opponent of efforts by Wolverhampton Corporation to enclose Wolverhampton within its boundaries. In 1931, Pritchard began writing for St Thomas’s magazine an informative and entertaining Civic Notes feature, a series which ended only with his death in 1938. His monthly contributions, signed simply ‘D.P.’, reveal a loyal devotion to Wednesfield and a fascination with its history....especially the more speculative elements of it. Was there ever a castle in Wood End? he enquires in 1934, for, after all, there is a Castle Inn. And he tells us that there are those who remember seeing castle-like blocks of stone lying around. He tells us, too, of the Trumpet Hole, a deep pool in Ashmore Park, into which Charles 11 is said to have thrown his jewels on the journey from Moseley Old Hall to Bentley Hall. He tells us of boulders found just below ground level in a field at March End, believed to have marked the boundary between Wednesfield and a piece of land called “Swinesfield, whose history abounds with stories of the legendary existence of a certain edible animal”.

From Pritchard – who writes of swans on a canal in which it is perfectly safe to bathe – we gain a far more favourable impression of Wednesfield in the thirties than that derived from unemployment statistics for the region or from casual visitors such as J.B.Priestley, whose 1934 dismissal of Wednesbury, Wednesfield, Willenhall and Walsall ended: “You could call them all wilderness, and have done with it.”^[26]

Certainly, the jobless situation was severe in the early thirties. The Weldless Steel Tube Company closed temporarily, and Wednesfield received a grant of £50,000 for relief schemes. Forty-percent of the Parish was out of work, in 1932, and when Reading and Recreation Rooms for the use of the unemployed opened in Rookery Street, over a hundred joined immediately. 160 poor families were to be helped with clothes and boots by the local branch of the Personal Service League.

In 1932, Howard received £41 from the Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne for the Augmentation of the Maintenance of the Poor Clergy. (Queen Anne’s Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners merged in 1948

to form the Church Commissioners). The £41 was a ten-year loan, repayable with interest, granted for the purpose of "making improvements to the parsonage house."

In December 1933, the New Invention area and that part of Wednesfield Parish north of Blackhalve Lane were ceded to Essington when



Members of Mary Done's dance school held at The Old Star in New Street

Pictured:

Jean Davenport	Beryl Picken	Jean Morgan
Elva Dunn		Thelma Williams
Sheila Evans		Dorothy Banton
Elva Dunn and Sheila Evans are better known today as Elva Done and Sheila Watkins		

St John's became a Consolidated Chapelry. Our link with Essington was to continue, each subsequent incumbent of St Thomas's being a patron of St John's.

In January 1934, former Methodist minister, Revd T.P. Thomas was ordained deacon at a special service of ordination in St Thomas's. On April 30th the old vicarage was sold and a new house purchased for £1,000 from Mrs Lilly Gertrude Lawrence; this was 'Grasmere', 27 Vicarage Road.

A Period Of Expansion

After two successful Carnivals, it was decided not to hold one in 1934, but a grand fundraising Bazaar was to be held on December 11-13. Merely in order to furnish the Men's Stall with saleable goods, an August gymkhana, attended by about 1,500, was held in the grounds of Frank Hyde's home. Geoffrey Mander MP performed the opening ceremony. Copies of the Wednesfield Cookery Book, compiled by Mrs J. Robinson, were on sale.

The success of the Bazaar was imperative. The period for which the Diocese guaranteed payment of St Thomas's debt interest had expired, and from 1st January 1935, the church would have to find an additional £87.10s per year. Furthermore, the church was in need of repair. It had not been decorated since the 1902 rebuilding, and costly work was needed on the organ. More money was required for the Sunday School and the Day Schools, and Howard was acutely aware of the fact that not only were two Anglican clergy insufficient to serve a population of 12,000, but also that Wednesfield's continued expansion demanded an appropriate response from the Church.

Because of its growth, Wednesfield was divided into wards in 1935, the year when 700 borrowers registered for membership of libraries opening at the church school and Neachells Lane School. The trolley bus route had been extended as far as the junction of Bloxwich Road and Wood End Road. "The development of Wednesfield," wrote D.P., "proceeds outwards." 1935 was the year when the open-air market appeared and when 13 acres were added to the Park. On October 14th, the Regal Cinema, with seating for 1,028, opened on the site of Wednesfield House (which had been sold at auction for £1,500) and the manager Alex Tuck, gave the first night's profits, £12. 2s, to the Carnival Committee.

Howard strove to elbow Wednesfield into the modern age:

"It is amusing to hear people talking of 'The Village'. Wednesfield is already a third as big again as the whole City of Lichfield...Let us no longer be village-minded. Let us think of the big Town of Wednesfield as it already is."

He pointed out the challenge facing the church in this town of Wednesfield:

“On the Newbolds Estate, in the hamlet of Wood End, and in the hamlet of March End new houses are rapidly being erected there should be at least two additional Curates and two whole-time Lay Workers to work up these Districts with a view, eventually, to the formation of separate Parishes.”

Wednesfield was becoming healthier, too. Only twenty years earlier, 41% of all Wednesfield funerals were of children. Now a child under 12 was mourned in fewer than one in seven burials.

In 1936, when the “unsightly and traffic-obscuring” wall that surrounded St Thomas’s was lowered to its present level, the result made people ask why on earth the improvement had not been undertaken before. Wednesfield’s Own Silver Band was formed by Mr C.H.Porter of Lewis Grove, and Alfred Squire became its Committee President. There were 74 confirmation candidates that year at St Thomas’s, including about 12 from the Cottage Homes, and St Thomas’s Football Club was formed. Its ground was in Lower Prestwood Road and the team, under their manager Clarence Haden, joined the Wolverhampton and District Friendly League in 1938.

Following a subcommittee visit to the Alleyne Memorial Chapel, near west Bromwich, where they saw a system of Radiant Heating in Operation, it was decided, in 1937, to install such a system in St Thomas’s. “It will be noted,” wrote Howard, “that the heat will be radiated downwards upon the pews, in imitation of the warmth of the sun.” Despite criticisms, at the end of the year Howard declared: “We have lost the choking fumes which used to assail us whenever the old apparatus was used to its full capacity.”

Two new charities were created in 1937. Mr & Mrs George Crutchley deposited 200 guineas with the Charity Commissioners for the institution of the ‘George Crutchley Charity’ (to provide poor parishioners with Christmas comforts) and of the ‘Mary Jane Crutchley Charity’ (for the purchase of hymnals and prayer-books). The annual interest on each was about £3. 7.6d. George Crutchley – Old George, as he was known – died very soon after the charities were established.

In December, the first parish Christmas card was sent out “to everyone who has placed his or her name on the Parochial Roll or on the Communicants’ Roll.”

In 1938, a parish link was formed between St Thomas’s and the Parish of St Louis Trichardt in the Transvaal. Each parish promised to pray for one another at least once a month.

Howard announced in the magazine that he intended visiting the public houses of the parish “at a time when I might expect a good many of my parishioners to be present, so that I might meet them on their own ground and get to know them better”. So newsworthy was such an intention in 1938 that, perhaps to Howard’s embarrassment, it was quoted in many national and provincial papers.

A new oak eagle lectern was given in memory of Joseph and Mary Day by their children, and Sir Geoffrey Mander opened the Fifth Annual Flower Show at Alfred Squire’s “beautiful home”, ‘The Hills’, Lichfield Road (now owned by Mrs Doris Squire, his daughter-in-law; her husband, Cyril, was elected

At “The Hills,” Lichfield Road
(By permission of MR. ALFRED SQUIRE)

THE SIXTH ANNUAL
WEDNESFIELD

FLOWER SHOW

Opening Ceremony at 2-15 p.m. by

His Worship The Mayor of Wolverhampton

NEW FEATURES

<p>Elkes Girl <small>(LITCOTETER)</small></p> <p>Pipe Band <small>Highland Dancing, etc.</small></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><small>Exhibition by</small></p> <p style="text-align: right;">West Midland Model Eng. Society</p>
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Sixth South Staffs. Military Band
Extra Display of Fireworks
Boy’s and Men’s Football
Stage Attractions—Dancing 9 to 11 p.m.
Floral Marquees—5,000 sq. ft.
Pet Show. Classes—Dogs, Cats, Rabbits, Misc.

Adults: Sixpence. Children: Twopence

Saturday, July 29

Notice for the 1939 Flower Show

Mayor of Wolverhampton in 1973 but died the following year.)

St Thomas’s sold over 1,000 copies of its magazine each month to a population of 16,000 within an area described by D.P. as “no longer an insular village but a cosmopolitan town.”



Harry Baylis

But a meeting held at the Institute in November that year had sinister overtones: its purpose was to demonstrate the assembling of gas masks!

A Man Of Kent

Whatever privations another world war imposed on Wednesfield, it appears to have had an insignificant effect on public health. Although the situation grew so serious that on occasions “No Beer” notices appeared outside The Boat!... “in spite of rationing and of the severe weather,” wrote Howard in 1942, “the general health of the Parish does not seem to have suffered; for the number of burials in the first three months of this year have been less than in the corresponding period of any year this century.”

Howard was clearly disillusioned at this stage in his ministry. In July 1942, he complained of collections dropping to half of what they had been ten years earlier, and his decision to leave Wednesfield was influenced by falling church attendances.

“People make the excuse that the extra war work prevents their attendance. They say they have no time – yet find plenty of time for amusements.... I have come to the conclusion that the Parish needs a new voice.... someone who could proclaim the old message in a new and more appealing manner..... We need John the Baptist here in Wednesfield.”

Howard moved to the rural parish of Stoke-upon-Tern, near Market Drayton and died in 1952.

In November – on a Saturday afternoon because of wartime blackout restrictions – another bachelor, the Revd Harry Baylis, M.A., was instituted to the living, which then offered an annual stipend of £320 plus fees. This quiet Kentishman may not have been everyone’s idea of John the Baptist, but, according to Harold Randall, though a shy person, “he endeared himself to many”. Certainly, he guided St Thomas’s finances to an improved position. At the start of his incumbency here he wrote: “We need £12 a week to meet our liabilities for our church and schools and we are getting at present from all sources about £10.5s so that we need at least another £1. 15s a week.” Yet during his first year the church contributed over £140 to outside causes.

From his predecessor, Baylis received the following advice concerning the annual distribution of handouts from the two funds, Bealey’s Charity and Gough’s Charity for Coal, for which the churchwardens were responsible, though the duty had long since been delegated to a female committee which met each December.

“I fear that desert is not so much the basis of choice as is the amount of badgering of the Committee by scroungers. Mrs Day once frankly said that her life wouldn’t be worth living if Mrs X were omitted from the list. Then, quite a number turn up *after* the short service, just to get the money. Shortly after I came, I stopped a profitable trade, where a woman charged recipients 6d each to collect their money for them. We had to see personally the absentees, to ascertain whether they were really ‘too ill to attend’”.

Baylis played an important part in the planning of both St Gregory’s, Blackhalve Lane and the church of St Augustine & St Chad.

On September 19th, 1943, the Head Deaconess of the diocese preached at Evensong – the first time in this parish that a woman had preached at a liturgical service. In the same year, Deaconess Catharine Fairbairn took up residence at 33 East Avenue and joined the clergy team consisting of Baylis, together with curates Richard Gregory and Roy A. Lord. The Deaconess is still remembered for her sick-visiting and her readiness, where the situation demanded, to incorporate in them an energetic burst of scrubbing and cleaning.

Fred Stride, who had taken over as organist from Harry Hitchen two years earlier, became choirmaster too in 1944.

August that year was the date of Wednesfield's Stay-at-Home Holiday on King George's Playing Fields. Mrs Mander, wife of the MP, performed the opening ceremony and the Countess of Shrewsbury crowned the Red Cross Queen. "Our American friends stationed locally" were invited to stage a baseball game and bring along a band to play popular selections. There was a pet show, talent contest, comic football match, tug-of-war, ambulance competition, Punch and Judy, a horticultural show, pony rides, community singing, and an evening concert by Wolverhampton Orpheus Male Voice Choir.

In 1945, at a time when casualty figures seemed extremely high, curate Roy Lord penned the following verses:

The Greatness of England

Wherein does the greatness of England lie?

In glory, empire, prestige? No! 'tis in
The Virtue of those who live and die
In her service.

These are they who resign, the uncertain
Hope of happiness for fair Freedom's
sake

And choose to resist and suffer pain
In her honour.

The Sacrifice they offer in common
Will be repaid to them singly – a praise
Written not only on stone, but on
The hearts of men.

Herein doth the greatness of England lie:
In men who know their Duty, and freely
Give their youthful lives, not in fear, but
To her Glory.

The Allies' victory in that same year was celebrated so wholeheartedly in Wednesfield that St Thomas's went so far as to broadcast a recorded peal of bells across the community.

Although average weekly communicants for the year 1946–47 numbered only 130, St Thomas's managed to give one-fifth of its income to outside causes, to offer a sexton £4 per week "with emoluments" and to pay its Parish Quota in full. Two years later, the Quota was increased by a staggering 126%, but the church was still able to install a new gas heating system at a cost of £188.

Where Saints In Glory Stand

On the third Sunday in Advent 1949, the first of the nave's stained glass windows was dedicated. The St Thomas window was given in memory of Frederick Mills, 1873–1935, (a UDC councillor for twenty-eight years) and of his wife Sarah Eleanor, 1873–1940. On the saint's right-hand side is depicted the badge worn by the Chairman of Wednesfield UDC. It includes a representation of the battle of AD 910 when the Saxon Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great, defeated the treaty-breaking Danish kings who had swept down from Northumberland with their armies to invade Mercia. In this fierce battle, which gave Wednesfield its name, at least two Danish kings were slain

When Good King Edward won the day
Upon the field of Woden. .



St Thomas's Mothers Union Outing in 1951
Left to Right: Mrs Pursehouse, Tom White, Revd Harry Baylis, Mrs Hamlin, Clarence Haden, Evelyn Stride, Mrs Manby, Fred Stride, Percy Alcock, Mr Manby, Cath Randall, ?, Mrs Guy, Arthur Adey, Lavinia Turrell, Mrs. Adey (in hat), Doris Barnes, Zak Pursehouse, Gertie White, Mrs. Humphries, Bert Barnes, Annie Day, Tommy Turrell, Mrs Proffitt, George Humphries, A. Proffitt
Front: George Yerrington, Jean Mallows, Roger Mallows (toddler) Howard Mallows, Muriel Munslow (nee Day) Mr Hamlin, Harold Randall.
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies



The Annual Boy Bishop Service began in Harry Baylis's time.

On the saint's left-hand side is the heraldic sign of St Thomas – a carpenter's square, reminding us of his work, and a spear, the instrument of his death. The apricot blossoms symbolise doubt; the heliotrope is a sign of faith. "We are thus reminded," wrote Baylis, "that it was through his questioning doubt that St Thomas was brought to his great affirmation of faith: 'My Lord and My God.'" Why the saint appears to be wearing odd sandals is a mystery!

Another stained-glass window, dedicated to St Augustine, was installed the following year. To the right are seen the arms of the city of Canterbury where Ethelbert allowed Augustine and his forty monks to live and worship. The crest above the city arms is a crown, as Canterbury has been accorded the description "Royal and Ancient". Below the shield, the motto "Ave Mater Angliae" (Hail, Mother of the English) refers to Canterbury because its cathedral church is the Mother Church of English Christianity and the whole Anglican Communion. The Arms of the Archbishopric are the archiepiscopal cross surmounted by the pallium, and having a mitre as a crest. St Augustine is shown invested as a bishop and carries his crozier. Since he began his work by founding a school, he is shown writing in a book, on the cover of which is a Canterbury Cross. On either side is a Canterbury Bell, the flower associated with Augustine.

Both of these windows (together with the St Peter window, also on the South side) were the work of Archibald John Davies, who died in

1953. His work in Birmingham and the West Midlands earned him an international reputation as a craftsman in stained glass. Between the wars, he completed a set of memorial windows on the west wall of the cloisters in Worcester Cathedral, depicting the history of Christianity in England. In one of these, the sunshine reveals a ruby sparkle through Cardinal Wolsey's cloak. In the Lady Chapel at Hereford Cathedral are imaginative medieval scenes. But one of his best-known commissions is the window in the village church at Cranley, Northamptonshire. It marks the Allies' victory and shows a meeting of Sir Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt, whose likenesses are captured in a way which demonstrates Davies's skill as a portrait painter.^[27]

In 1950, an organisation of ex-choirboys was founded – the Eohs! History does not appear to have recorded the duration of its existence!

Engraved on the church bell, on a plaque in the north aisle and also on the font is the name of a man who served St Thomas's as churchwarden at the time of the fire. Thomas Smith Mason (Churchwarden from 1901 – 1916) was father-in-law to Dr Bentley. The font also bears the name of Arthur Thomas Day, who died in 1950, having served as churchwarden for a third of a century. He had served, too, as a councillor in Wednesfield for many years, including two as UDC chairman. Part of the legacy he left to the Vicar and wardens was used to install the incumbents board in the north aisle, and Guy Parkhouse – by now Prebendary Parkhouse – returned to St Thomas's to dedicate this on Friday, 12 December 1952.



Boys Choir outing (about 1946). Revd Harry Baylis is in shorts.



St Thomas's Choir – about 1946

From the back row (left to right):

Howard Mallows, Rev Harry Baylis, Ernie Humphries, Zak Pursehouse, Tommy White, Fred Adey, Tommy Lisle, Fred Stride, Bert Barnes, Cliff Dawes, Fred Heath, Tommy Turrill, Ernie Downing, Stan Chappell, Fred Blakemore, Arthur Day, John Pickering, Jackie Beddows, ?, Brian Dodd, ? Bilham, Brian Morgan Arthur Adey, Howard Stride, Bert Nicklin, ?, Alan Tonks, Leslie Kean, Alan Lees, ?, John Bilham, Norman Lawley, Arthur Pickering, Alan Handley

In the 1951 New Year's Honours list, Baylis was awarded the King's Certificate of Good Service. This was the year when dry rot was discovered, and St Thomas's was faced with a £5,000 bill for repairs, replastering and redecorating. Stanley Howard heard the ill-tidings and, in humorous vein, wrote to Baylis:

I know another church where they had trouble with dry rot. Someone was unkind enough to say that they had so much dry rot poured out from the pulpit in the last few years that it was no wonder some of it had lodged in the woodwork! So in case my ten years and more has had any contributory effect to your trouble, I enclose a cheque towards the repair fund. Please remember me to everyone. I pray for them street by street every day.

In 1952, the beam that had been inserted when the west door was constructed in 1842 was now found to be riddled with death watch beetle, but there would no further help from Howard for in this year he died.

A Parish Hall For Long Knowle Estate

At the Annual Church Meeting in 1953, Baylis praised "Mrs Morgan, our new caretaker, for the cleanliness of the building and its furniture" Zillah Morgan's predecessor, Mrs Morby, had retired in 1949 and had been presented

with an armchair and a hearthrug! Taking over on a voluntary basis to begin with, Zillah was later paid six shillings a week, and for the past half century she has seen to it that no church in Wolverhampton has been better maintained than St Thomas's. In addition to her cleaning duties, Zillah was deemed (by a later incumbent, Barry Rogerson) to be "the best Job's Comforter in the business. (She) has kept me informed of all those who have been ill, or where there is real need."

In 1951 work started on the building of the Ashmore Park estate as an overspill area for Wolverhampton, and the County Council's Development Plan of that year aimed at a target population for Wednesfield of 35,000 by the year 1971. By July 1953, Baylis was writing of "an urgent call to erect a place of worship for the Long Knowle Estate." That year, Wednesfield Urban District Council sold a plot of land on the corner of Long Knowle Lane and Blackhalve Lane for £800, and, although early references had been to a "Parish Hall", the building that was dedicated by the Bishop of Stafford on 1st October 1954 was the church of St Gregory the Great, as the first hymn of the opening service attested:

"He, whose confession God of old accepted,
Whom through the ages all now hold in honour,
Gaining his guerdon Saint Gregory entered
Heaven's high portal."



Fred Stride with his choirboys

Constructed at a cost of £9,278. 19. 1d, it serves a district carved out of the parishes of Bushbury, Essington and Wednesfield. As the church, hall and vicarage were built in St Thomas's parish (the latter on the site of a World War 2 public air-raid shelter!), we took responsibility for financing the work, though something like half the cost came from the Church Commissioners and local firms were responsive. But since we were already considering the need for a church in the Stubby Lane area and for a new Sunday School at Moathouse, St Thomas's responsibility for the oversight of the new district ceased from October 1st, apart from our undertaking to find, for the first four years, a portion (£104 p.a.) of the stipend of the priest-in-charge, the Revd R.J.Bowler. A contribution towards the latter was raised the following year from two performances of the play *Everyman* presented by a group of teachers in St Thomas's. On May 20th, 1964, St Gregory's became a Statutory District, a step preceding its constitution as a new parish in 1966, and the Revd E. Downing was instituted by the Bishop of Stafford as the first minister of the New District of St Gregory's.

Walter John Birch, eldest and last surviving son of former incumbent Revd John Birch, left the residue of his estate to be used at Baylis's discretion in memory of his parents. In 1954, we were therefore able to have the organ rebuilt, enlarged, revoiced and improved by Henry Willis & Son Ltd at a cost of £2,023. 6. 11d and, for a further £43. 12. 6d to have the organ chamber replastered and decorated. And at some point in the early 1950s, a toilet was installed at St Thomas's!

A Mission Chapel For Stubby Lane

The £50l. 8s 1d proceeds of St Thomas's 1955 Christmas Market were earmarked for the building of a new place of worship to serve the new estate springing up in the Stubby Lane area. In the following year, Baylis announced that the new church would be dedicated to St Augustine and St Chad – “two saints whom we justly honour for their evangelistic efforts, and the fruits of whose labours we now enjoy.” By January 1957, work was in progress on both the church and on a bungalow to be known as St Chad's House. St Thomas's congregation was invited to provide



St Chad's in the 1960s.

items of equipment – kneelers, for instance, at 7s each, a 25s wafer box, two glass cruets at 27/6d each or prayer books at 7s.

On Easter Sunday 1957, a service was held in the Gwynn Morgan Hall – the first meeting in the area for those who were to form the regular worshippers attending the new church. And on August 31st, almost two years after planning began, the Church of St Augustine and St Chad was dedicated by the Bishop of Stafford. St Thomas's curate, Roger Bould, moved into St Chad's house

with his wife of one month, and began a seven-year ministry in that part of the parish.

Frederick Norman Lewis

Baylis in 1956 was appointed 'Master of the Hospital of Saint John the Baptist without the Bars of the City of Lichfield'. Four years later he was installed in Lichfield Cathedral to the Prebendal Stall of Ufton Cantoris. He died in 1973. The celebrant at his requiem mass in the Cathedral was the Revd John Howe whose parents had kept 'The Angel' in Wednesfield and whom Baylis had nurtured in the Christian Faith.

Frederick Norman Lewis, a native of Longton, had graduated from Leeds University with an Honours Degree in English and had trained at Mirfield. From a curacy at St Mary's, Stafford, he came to St Thomas's in 1956 with his wife Ann. The night of his institution was so foggy that the coach party from Stafford abandoned the trip, the vicar of St Gregory's was the sole visiting clergyman and it took the Bishop of Stafford two hours to get home again afterwards. Nevertheless, St Thomas's was three-quarters full for the event.

Whereas his predecessor had disliked being called upon at the vicarage and had insisted that those wishing to see him should do so at specified times in church, Lewis made himself more available and could be seen "at the Vicarage most mornings and evenings, outside engagements permitting".

The Christmas Market that year netted £1031. 19. 0d

A visit to Alton Towers was as appealing to a child of the fifties as to today's riders on £12 million rollercoaster marvels. The Sunday School's trip there in June 1957 took place "with no serious mishap, although two children fell into the lake, which is fortunately shallow. Both victims considered their feat to be the highlight of the day as far as they were concerned." Presumably, the trip was free for Sunday school members. For the 1959 visit, coach fare, admission and tea cost non-members 5/6d. Adults paid 9/-.

Thanks primarily to the Church of England Men's Society, Lewis was provided with "Jeremy", a smart grey van which made light work of transporting the film equipment and other apparatus that frequently accompanied him. His

impact on the parish is reflected in the increase in communion figures – the 1958 total of 11,663 being 83% up on that of two years earlier.

A Church For Ashmore Rails

Plans and discussions concerning the building of a church in Ashmore Park began in 1957, by which time some of the new houses in the area were already occupied.

There is an unsubstantiated story to the effect that the bones of St Chad were removed from beneath the altar at Lichfield Cathedral and hidden at Ashmore before being again removed and scattered. [42]

Ashmore Park had once been the rural residence of the Dean of Wolverhampton (in 1429 he was known locally as 'The Lord of Ashmore'^[20]), and, since the Chaplains of Wednesfield were in a sense the Dean's representatives, some streets on the estate are named after them. Baylis Avenue, Birch Road and Clare Avenue, for instance.

Known locally as Ashmore Rails (from the network of narrow gauge railways used to carry coal tubs from the pits), it had become an almost barren area of pit mounds with some farmland – an ideal adventure playground for children. These doubtless included the gypsy children whose parents' caravans gave Kitchen Lane its local name of Gypsy Lane. Walking over Ashmore Rails was a favourite diversion after Sunday evensong in the 1940s of the church youth club, The Guild of Youth... known locally as 'The Gilded Youth'!

By July 1958, the Urban District Council had granted a site for the new church – a stone's throw from the site of Ashmore Farm, the remains of whose moat can still be seen.



St Thomas's in the 1950's
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

But seven years were to go by before building work would commence.

Christian Aid

The parish magazine edition for April 1959 is the first one to include a reference to a Christian Aid Week collection in Wednesfield. "The aim of this week," wrote Lewis, "will be to draw attention to the plight of millions of refugees and to gain help for them." 1959–1960 was World Refugee Year, and a joint Anglican-Methodist committee invited members of all Wednesfield schools, factories and organisations to help raise £3,000 for refugee relief. A Refugee Exhibition was held in the Methodist School Rooms, Well Lane; the Regal Cinema gave a special fundraising midnight matinee; and it was planned to visit every house in Wednesfield for an envelope collection.

By the following year, Christian Aid's focus had moved from refugees to the Third World, and St Thomas's curate, Arthur Williams (later to become Vicar of Codsall) challenged the community to give a mile of pennies to help save the 12 million babies born into the world each year who "die before they are weaned."

The Sixties

The new decade saw the introduction (in January 1960) of Christian Stewardship envelopes at St Thomas's. In the initial Stewardship Campaign, 800 families were visited, and 399 pledges resulted, giving a total weekly income of £88. 1.2d.

In 1962, an aumbry, designed by N.F.Cachemaille-Day, was installed at a cost of £200, defrayed from a legacy bequeathed by Mrs Mabel Turner.

Wednesfield Market moved to the carpark area opposite the Council Offices, which MP Jennie Lee had opened five years earlier, and remained there until 1970. The Regal Cinema, which had gazed across the road at St Thomas's for almost 37 years, closed down in March 1962 when the new owners, Newland Securities Ltd of Solihull, submitted plans to use the site for a shopping development. In May the Queen visited Wednesfield and was cheered by 6,000 schoolchildren lining Lakefield Road. The Toc H Room in Graiseley Lane was opened in 1964.



Walter John Turner

In Holy Week that year, the church was packed for performances of Henri Gheon's play "The Way of the Cross", produced by Bert Nicklin and including in the cast Sheila Watkins and Iris Millington.

No Noisome Or Offensive Trading At The Rectory, Please.

In the following year, the Wood End church school that Revd William Stephens had founded was replaced by the present school in Mattox Road. Norman Lewis moved to St Chad's, Shrewsbury, and, on May 13th, the Revd Walter John Turner, formerly of the Church of the Epiphany, Oxley, became our new Parish Priest.

In October, the present Rectory (9, Vicarage Road) was purchased for £5,900 from medical practitioners Harry and Olive Wilson. Indentures dated 7 April 1897 and 5 August 1899 for the land on which this property stands state that it may not be used for the erection of "any workshop or Brass Foundry, chimney stack, steam boiler, gas engine or machinery of any kind". Furthermore, we are expressly forbidden to carry out "upon the said land and heraditament any noisome or offensive trade or business or do anything

whatsoever from which any nuisance can arise to the neighbourhood.” The 1897 indenture stipulates that the only type of building that may be erected on the land must be a private dwelling house “to the value of two hundred and twenty pounds at the least.”

Severe restrictions indeed!

But there were fewer limitations on our use of the church building, and in October 1965 John Turner held the first Pets Service at St Thomas’s. “Bring your pets along,” he invited, “birds, cats, dogs, rabbits, hamsters.” Possibly, children were welcome, too! Evidently, the idea was successful, for it was repeated annually until at least 1971.

Despite much local opposition, Wednesfield lost its independent local government status in 1966, and, together with Tettenhall and Bilston, was merged into Wolverhampton. Some members of the community were going up in the world at this time, however – mainly by lift, as they settled into the new tower blocks. William Bentley Court – named after the Wednesfield-born GP who practised here for over 50 years – was visited by teams of welcomers from St Thomas’s who were “cordially received”. Residents of the second block, Wodensfield Tower, were visited and invited to a coffee evening in the Toc H Room. And our curate, Charles Philip Collis Smith, moved with his wife from No 1 Frederick Road into Lathe Court, Pickering Road.

A Mothers and Babies Club (later, ‘The Under-Fives Club’) began meeting on Wednesdays at 2.30 pm – on the vicarage lawn when fine, in the Institute when not.



Starting work on St Alban's

January 1967 saw the introduction at Family Communion of the offertory procession, as currently conducted. St Thomas’s received the gift of a silver cross for the Lady Altar, and undertook reconstruction of the church porch, replacing the inner doors with the present glass-pannelled ones of afromosio wood and installing new notice boards with concealed lighting. The cost was borne by the In Memoriam Fund, which John Turner had introduced the previous year, and from the Arthur Adey Memorial Fund. From the In Memoriam Fund, a pair of Dutch pewter flagons were purchased in 1968 for the wine and water used at Holy Communion.

“A Long, Complicated And Costly Business”

On 22nd June, the Bishop of Lichfield, Stretton Reeve, performed the dedication ceremony at the opening of St Alban’s Church. St Alban’s Church School had opened two years earlier and the Ashmore Inn had already appeared on the scene. The building of St Alban’s was a project that John Turner referred to as “a long, complicated and costly business.” The original architect had withdrawn, but his tentative designs were developed by the Revd Anthony Hill, ARIBA. Although a site had been granted in 1958, not until 1963 was a name chosen for the new church. The Bishop’s Campaign Committee had made grants and loans totalling £11,600; St Thomas’s 1964 Christmas Market raised over £1,500 for the project; and when, in 1966, £4,000 was still required and each household in Ashmore Park was invited to buy a one shilling brick each week, 58% of families responded positively. At the opening on 22nd June, the Feast of St Alban, the church was packed and people queued outside to catch a glimpse of the service.

The total cost of around £25,000 included the building of St Alban’s House into which Assistant Curate, Revd John Smart had moved in December 1966 to have oversight of St Alban’s “when it is completed next year.” He remained there, with his wife and two young children, until 1970, forming a nucleus of people whose commitment made growth possible. He also took charge of the St Alban’s Building Fund and devoted much time and effort to the church’s involve-

ment in the annual Ashmore Park Carnival.

Within a year of St Alban's opening, plans for the building at Ashmore Park of a United Free Baptist Church were made public. John Turner deplored the idea. Under the heading 'The Crazy Gang', he wrote:

"The thought of a proliferation of church buildings in this age of ecumenical discussion and action makes nonsense of a practical quest for Christian unity. The thought of another group of people badgering the estate for money to build another church is enough to make people ask. "What are these Christians about? Have they really any idea what they are doing?"

In 1967, St Thomas's received a processional cross, the gift of Sam Adey in memory of Priscilla Adey. It is a St Martin's Cross, so called because the same design is used in St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. Guy Parkhouse died in 1968 at the age of 97, and the St Gregory window was installed in his memory.

The Series Two communion service was introduced at St Thomas's in this year, and, in memory of Reg Conway, we acquired the handsome table from which service books are handed out at the back of church.

Christ in the Concrete City was produced in church by Bert Nicklin in 1969. Unlike the 1964 drama production, however, this was regarded as a very avant-garde piece at the time and attendance was disappointing.

The Seventies

In 1970, John Turner became a member of the newly-created Deanery Synod and Mr P. Allcock of St Thomas's was appointed its treasurer. The Hayward Foundation donated £1,000 to our £4,500 appeal for work on the organ, fabric repairs and the establishing of a Capital Endowment Fund to meet future contingencies. In July, children of the Parish Sunday Schools presented in St Thomas's a 'Pageant of Caring Through the Ages'. And in December, the Christmas card rack appeared for the first time.

Three new windows were dedicated by the Bishop of Lichfield on Mothering Sunday of the following year, all designed by Bronwen Gordon at her Abbots Bromley studio. The Holy Trinity window was given by Ken Munslow in memory of his parents and it reminds us that Holy Trinity Church, Heath

Town was our first daughter church. Similarly, the subjects of the other two windows symbolise St Thomas's role in setting up local places of worship. The St Alban window was installed in memory of many Wednesfield people who had died and whose families had subscribed to the In Memoriam Fund.

1971 was not a good year for the Turners. On the very day that Mrs Turner was discharged from hospital, the vicar was ordered to take three months' rest. Although the revised Electoral Roll at that time numbered 376 names, on returning to his duties John Turner was saddened to find the 10 am congregation a shadow of its former self. "My friends," he wrote, "where are you that the Eucharist means so little to you?"

We had established a "special financial responsibility" for the Mission Hospital at Magila in Tanzania, and in March 1972, the hospital's Sister Faith spoke at St Alban's.

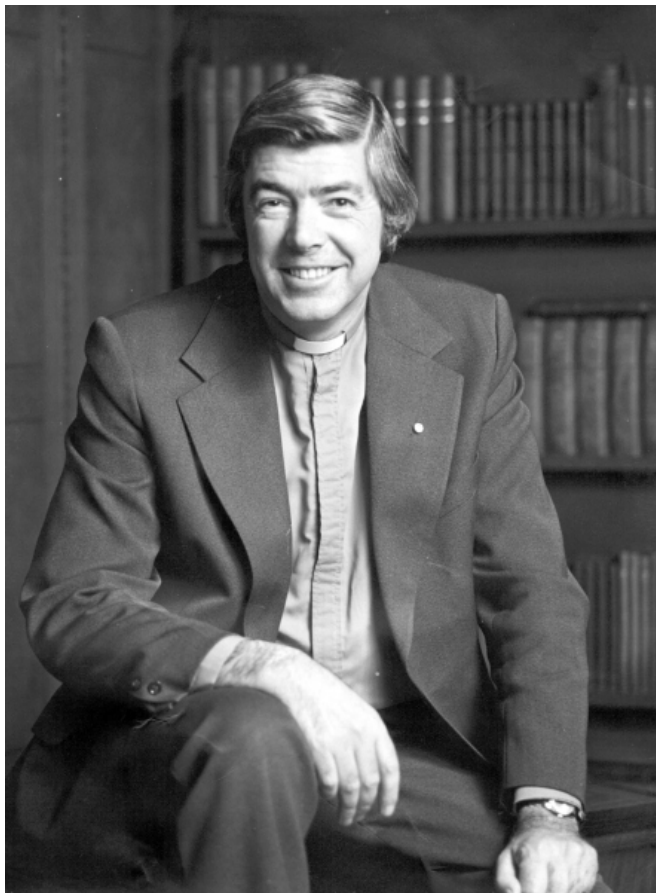
The Globe Players of Stratford-on-Avon, who had made their first visit to St Thomas's the previous year when they gave "a moving performance" of the Nativity Play from the Coventry Mystery Cycle, returned in May to present 'Everyman'. Other visiting entertainers in 1972 included Peter Lewis and the Liverpool Raiders who gave a folk concert and a folk service – both well-attended, though some people stayed away in protest. John Turner asked wryly, "What is it that makes an organ 'right' for a service and guitars 'not right'? It must involve some abstruse theological point which, in my innocence, I have overlooked."

Ecologically, the year was daunting. Having fought a successful battle with the Council at the end of 1971 over their turfing of the church's flower border (later reinstated), most of the 26 trees around the church were found to be decayed and dangerous. They were thought to be about 120 years old, but they now had to be felled. Soon after, Dutch Elm disease struck six trees in the Graiseley Lane Churchyard.

The first mention of a Christingle Service being held at St Thomas's was in 1973. This service had been revived, largely through the efforts of the Children's Society. In the same year, St Alban's Primary School presented "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat" in the church.

In 1974, the Bishop of Shrewsbury dedicated the silver cross and candlesticks given

for the High Altar in memory of Charles East (our treasurer for 14 years) who had died in 1971. (In July, brass candlesticks “associated with an old historic family” were stolen from the High Altar). The portable font was dedi-



Barry Rogerson

cated in memory of Mr J. Lloyd, and, in September, the Bishop of Lichfield dedicated the Annunciation window, given by Mrs Gladys Green in memory of her husband William Edwin (Ted).

In January 1975, John Turner left to become Vicar of Shifnal with Boningale and Rural Dean of Shifnal. June 6th saw the institution of Revd Barry Rogerson, former Vice-Principal of Lichfield Theological College and Director of Studies on the staff of Salisbury Wells Theological College.

In his first Annual General Meeting report, he thanked the PCC “for not making me live in the shadow of the previous vicar. I commend your tact....though there are times when Guy Parkhouse is an even more elusive ghost.”

The situation concerning young people in the parish was encouraging at this time. At the Sunday School held in the Institute, seven teachers taught an average attendance of 45 children, and, in November, it was reported

that numbers attending the Wood End Sunday School “have increased during recent weeks (and) it is now found that there is considerable musical talent amongst teachers and pupils.” In September, the Quest Club (started with the object of bringing together all Confirmation candidates in the parish in training for Christian living) had 44 members – though the number had fallen to 21 by the following March.

A Room By Any Other Name....

After serving as PCC Secretary for 25 years, Harold Randall resigned from the post in 1976 and was succeeded for a short time by Ashton Britten. With one of the retiring secretary’s keenest sparetime interests in mind, the vicar presented him with two books on local railways, and in expressing the PCC’s gratitude, took as his text Isaiah 6, 1 (“And his train filled the temple”)!

At a cost of around £7,000, St Thomas’s Room was constructed. Of the pews removed from the back of church to make space available for the project, Willenhall Comprehensive School bought eight rows for playground seating and St Thomas’s School had two rows. Much earnest deliberation took place before a name for the room was agreed upon. Suggestions included the Vestibule Room, the William Stephens Room, the Clare Room and the MEDE Room – an idea of Stan Rixon’s, the letters standing for the ‘Most Expensive Draft Excluder’ in the Church of England! Finally, Barry Rogerson was obliged to announce: “For all our ingenuity we had to resort to the simple answer – St Thomas’s Room.”

Norman Lewis returned on October 10th to perform the dedication ceremony and John Turner preached. The only jarring note was a young chorister’s overheard assessment of the vicar’s completed project: “He’s spoilt our church!”

Fitting out the kitchen was paid for in memory of Jeffrey Douglas Tandy by members of his family.

18 Duke Street

On October 16th, the serving of Saturday morning coffee began in St Thomas’s Room.

In 1977, Eddie Neale undertook alterations to the tower room so that the choir could keep their belongings there. In June,

Mike Alexander came to Wednesfield. On July 23, he married Vivien Simmonds and they moved into the house that St Thomas's had purchased for £11,000 in May – 18 Duke Street. During his curacy here, Mike wrote the words of our Hymn for St Thomas's Day, sung to the tune 'Angel Voices' and beginning:

Thomas knew you when he saw you,
found in you his hope;
may we learn to trust you fully
when we fail to cope.
Happy we who have not seen you,
Yet believe you,
Lord of hope.

(1991 revised version)

The Maundy Thursday Agape was introduced, soup, bread and a drink being served in St Thomas's Room after the Eucharist. Series 3 was tried but found wanting: St



Nomleas Hoey Sekonga

Thomas's reverted to Series 2, using 3 on special occasions only.

This was the year when, at a cost of £302, an audio-system was installed, and when, due to woodworm, one of the legs fell off the bishop's chair!

Nomleas

1978 was the centenary of the death of Bishop Selwyn, who, before becoming Bishop of Lichfield, had been the first Bishop of New Zealand. As part of the 'Selwyn Celebrations', Barry Rogerson was invited to participate in an exchange of priests and spend six months at the Bishop Patterson Theological Centre on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands – located in the Diocese of Melanesia. In exchange, from Melanesia, a Polynesian in his mid-twenties (one of 7,000 in a population of 180,000) was sent to Wednesfield, and, on 10th February Nomleas Hoey Sekonga took up residence in the vicarage. When the Rogersons left the UK on Easter Monday, Revd Graham Johnson and his family moved into the vicarage, too, while extensions were made to St Chad's House.

Nomleas became a popular figure in the parish. "As a priest," he wrote, "I find that the people of Wednesfield are most welcoming and friendly. I didn't have any feelings of prejudice because of my colour".

He taught the children of St Thomas's Primary School to perform Solomon Island dances, and, during a service held at the end of the Selwyn Centenary Celebrations, a group from St Thomas's Church danced in Lichfield Cathedral. At a special service in Westminster Abbey on July 7th (to mark Solomon Islands' Independence) Nomleas read a lesson. He arrived back in the Solomon Islands on 7th January 1979, but St Thomas's retained contact with him and contributed to projects such as the Rural Church Training Centre he later built.

Equal Opportunities had advanced a step in 1970 when ladies joined the sidesmen's rota. Now, eight years later, the PCC passed a motion that "we accept female servers from the age of confirmation, after consultation between the Vicar and Sacristan." The innovation was not unanimously welcomed!

Bishop Barry

1979 was an eventful year. Following a local survey, a monthly Family Service in St Thomas's School began for the benefit of families in the Mattox Road area; however, this closed the following year owing to low attendance. Evelyn Southall was appointed as our first Parish Secretary and a telephone was installed.

More significantly, however, on January 1st, the Wednesfield Team Ministry became effective, and in May, Graham Johnson and Jonathan Cooper were licensed as first Team Vicars of St Chad's and St Alban's respectively. Norman Lewis and John Turner had sown the seeds for this new development, and Barry Rogerson shaped it into what he termed "a secure structure". Two years earlier, he had written:



John Craig

"Team Ministry for Wednesfield will mean a change in status for St Thomas's Church; a letting go of St Alban's and St Chad's, so that the whole parish can become more alive.... each church will have greater freedom to develop its ministry seriously."

Although, twenty years later, St Alban's found that Team Ministry was not allowing the degree of freedom it needed, Barry Rogerson regarded it as the most important change wrought here during his ministry, a ministry which ended on April 25th when, in St Paul's Cathedral, he was consecrated first Bishop Suffragan of Wolverhampton. Although not legally an Area Bishop (the Area Scheme was not gazetted until 1992), Barry Rogerson acted as such, and, in a large diocese such as Lichfield, he saw his new appointment as the only effective

means by which bishops could operate. "It is really only a team ministry writ large." He served in Wolverhampton until elevated to the See of Bristol in 1985.

The decade ended with the arrival from Great Wyrley of Revd John Newcombe Craig to be instituted Rector of Wednesfield on December 21st, 1979.

The Eighties

The eighties began with vital reserves threatened by £5,400-worth of repairs to three of the flat roofs. (Eddie Neale and the youth club ventured inside the roof and cleared out six boxes of bird droppings, straw and two birds' eggs!). On his retirement from Wolverhampton Polytechnic, Harold Randall became our Parish Clerk, and, to commemorate their Ruby Wedding, Harold and his wife Cath gave St Thomas's a portable lectern.

In June, a musical entertainment was given in church by The Minstrels and the Jameson Singers, the former including Graham and Jane Johnson with John, Olivia, David and Patrick Craig. The event was perhaps significant in the sense that it represented two of John Craig's contributions to the life of St Thomas's: the development of high standards of music in both worship and leisure and an earnest commitment to the work of Christian Aid, to which the evening's £62 proceeds were sent.

Bishop Barry presided, and John Howe preached, at a Sung Eucharist held on December 9th to mark Fred Stride's 40 years as organist at St Thomas's (and his service to the church as a chorister for 30 years before that!) When he retired two years later, Fred claimed to have played at about 4,000 weddings!

An appeal was launched in 1981 to raise £3,000 for improvements to the lighting, alterations to the heating system in the chancel and decoration of the chancel and sanctuary. A small committee chaired by Charles Owen ran a 'talents scheme' in which individuals were given £2 and sent forth to multiply (the money, that is!) 18-year-old Chubb apprentices, Nick Ward and Ken Daly voluntarily replaced locks, hinges and bolts on the seventy-year-old churchyard gates.

The year saw the introduction at St Thomas's of the Alternative Service Book, ini-



In December 1980, Fred Stride's seventy years of service as chorister, organist and choirmaster was celebrated at a Sung Eucharist.

Picture (from left) Jack Turner, John Craig, Fred Stride, Harold Randall, Barry Rogerson, Jonathon Cooper, Bill Carr, Graham Johnson

tially on a four-month trial basis, after which the congregation was invited to buy copies for the church at £4 each. A Marriage Preparation Course run partly by lay volunteers was started, and the serving of coffee after Sunday's Family Communion began. On April 12th, Bishop Barry ordained Gerald Freeman in St Thomas's Church the first such ordination since Revd T.P. Thomas was ordained here in 1934.

1982 was a year of significant developments in the laity's sharing with the clergy in the pastoral care of the community. It saw the start of the Church Visitors Scheme, twenty visitors each taking a certain responsibility for eight families; lay administration of the chalice at Communion was introduced; twenty people volunteered to assist with Baptism Preparation evenings; and, following a March meeting between clergy and Social Services, a course of training for bereavement visitors was launched. With Evelyn Southall as Co-ordinator and Gerald Freeman chairing the organising committee, by September, twenty volunteers were available to visit the recently bereaved.

The year was not an unblemished success story, however. In September, the young people of the choir were informed that their presence at the rest of the season's weddings would not be required, owing to the fact that their behaviour had been, in the words of Church Committee minutes, "most disappointing".

Captain Noah

When the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, censured local authorities who had underspent their capital allowances, Wolverhampton Council asked St Thomas's if we would like to have the outside of the church cleaned, and so, in 1983, we were fortunate enough to lose, without charge, the coatings of factory smoke and solid fuel burning which decades of winter smog from the canal area had encouraged to adhere to the fabric. Further refurbishment featured the weather-cock which had its tail welded on and received a coat of paint. Indoors, volunteers supervised by Bert Barnard decorated the side aisles, and on November 30th Revd Alan Warner of St Gregory's dedicated the St Gregory Chapel, which would be used, said John Craig, when "On Saints Days during the year; during Lent and Holy Week and at other times we.... want to hold in church a small, quiet, devotional service, usually a Communion, with a time of silence and meditation during it."

Adrian Daffern had impressed with his virtuosity as organist following Fred Stride's retirement, but David Lloyd took over as organist-choirmaster in September, the month when Gerald Freeman left to run a village hostelry near Cambridge and when the Senior Citizens Club began its Wednesday afternoon meetings in St Thomas's Room. Ada Millichamp, four years before her death at the age of 85, published *Memories of Yesterday*, which were invaluable in compiling the present history. And the social highlight of the year was Olivia Craig's mammoth November production of *Captain Noah* and his *Floating Zoo*, a biblical cantata by Michael Flanders and Joseph Horowitz. Over 200 people were involved, and for the first time in St Thomas's history, a motorbike was ridden up the nave whilst children dressed as frogs nibbled buns in the pulpit!

In the following year, as part of her training to become a non-stipendiary deaconess, Penny Millchamp spent a three-week placement in the parish. Tessa Sanderson opened the Spring Fair, and the W.A.C.Y. Club was formed for young Christians from the three Team churches. Fr Tony Allport of St Patrick's chaired the first meeting of the Wednesfield Council of Churches (later, Churches Together in Wednesfield), a development from the forty Lent housegroups that met on an ecumenical basis that year.

History In Glass

At the Harvest Festival on October 7th, the last of the nave's stained-glass windows was dedicated by Canon John Turner. Given in memory of Councillor Joseph Dudley by his sons and produced by Oakwood Stained Glass of Stoke-on-Trent, the window depicts St Chad dressed as a bishop, with crozier in hand and bearing, in his other arm (as pictures of bishops generally do) a model of his cathedral – in this case of course, Lichfield.

The installation of this window completed St Thomas's fenestral history. We are in the province of Canterbury – hence the St Augustine window. For a long time, Wednesfield was in the parish of St Peter – hence, the St Peter window. In the 18th century, St Thomas's was built; later Holy Trinity and more recently St Gregory's were erected and were given their own separate parishes. Within our own parish, St Chad's and St Alban's were built and are part of our Team Ministry.

At the age of 69, Harold Randall died in 1985....a matter of weeks after the death of his wife Cath. He had been a Servant of the Sanctuary, for over fifty years, forty of which were spent at St Thomas's where he had also served in a variety of other roles, including Parish Warden. His awareness of the church's practical needs was reflected in the £10,000 bequest he and Cath left St Thomas's for the installation of under-pew hot-water pipes heated by a gas boiler. We have much to thank them for, especially during the cold days of winter!

Penny Millichamp joined the staff as a deaconess, and, in September, a flower festival on the theme Youth in Bloom was held during the weekend of curate Mike Dadson's ordination. A 'Living and Believing' course was held during the year; the choir sang Even-song at Southwell Minister in August, and on Friday 4th October, Radio 2's Sunday Half Hour was recorded from St Thomas's to go out on the World Service which is received by 45 million listeners.

On a grave note, Graiseley Lane churchyard was declared full!

The Rope Of Love

Women had a high profile in 1986. Gill Edwards became our first woman organist. Joan Winterbottom worked as both an or-

dained United Reformed Church minister at Oldfallings URC and as a licensed lay-worker attached to St Alban's. At a September meeting to debate the motion "This parish would welcome a woman priest to administer Word and Sacrament amongst us", 52 of the 60 persons present voted in favour. And in November, Olivia Craig produced 'The Rope of Love' at St Leonard's, Bilston, with Gill Edwards at the organ and with various choirs, including St Thomas's.

The loop system for the hard of hearing was installed, in memory of Flo Owen, but the 60% vote in favour of a scheme to lower the pulpit on to the stone plinth beneath it was considered too small a majority to be acted upon.

Between Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday, under the guidance of Mike and Rebecca Dadson, ACTS (the next youth group to materialise) undertook a 72-hour non-stop Bible reading, and in May the Bishop of Wolverhampton Christopher Mayfield joined Wednesfield clergy in Wednesfield High Street, shining shoes in front of the TV camera to publicise Christian Aid Week.

Taize

Mike and Rebecca Dadson led members of Wednesfield churches on a trip to the Holy Land in 1987. They also took members of ACTS to the village of Taize, thus introducing the Taize experience to the Parish. The Dadsons' departure, later in the year, to live and study in Israel, deprived the young people of the Parish of a couple who had committed themselves with enthusiasm to their spiritual and social welfare. But the task was to be taken on with equal commitment by Alan and Penny Millichamp, and when Penny was ordained deacon on May 24th, it was a historic moment for the Church of England as, for the first time, women became ordained clergy. At the beginning of July, Penny was appointed full-time stipendiary minister working half the time at St Thomas's and half with Peter Beresford, at St Alban's. In 1990 she was licensed to serve at St Chad's and earned the following tribute in the Wolverhampton Deanery Handbook 1993-94:

"The lady Vicar is innovative and she seems to generate enthusiasm even in those who are not regular attenders."

In November, a celebration of arts, crafts and hobbies was held in the church – the

Wednesfield Festival of Talents. There were demonstrations of woodwork, pottery, embroidery, spinning and weaving – and a fascinating photograph display of old Wednesfield.

The Institute, which had played so vital a role in the church's life throughout the century, had deteriorated badly in recent years. The last major event there had been the 1984 Christmas Fair. In 1987, it was leased to B & S Leisure Ltd who spent £45,000 on it, creating a room-within-a-room as a new ceiling and cream and wood design 'walls' were fitted into the existing brick shell. Thus, Guy Parkhouse's 'Peace Memorial' for local men returning from the Great War became the Graiseley Lane Snooker Club.

Kaleidoscope Theatre visited St Thomas's the following year. This unique drama company of mentally-handicapped young people performed *Tang of the Sea*. In April, the first of two concerts for Christian Aid was given by Patrick Craig and Lucy Winkett, the second being performed in 1991. Lucy is now a member of the clergy staff at St Paul's Cathedral.

A new lectern was given to St Thomas's in memory of Mr & Mrs Stout; it is an antique reading desk made in mahogany around 1820. Yorkshire-born and Lancashire-bred Deaconess Marian Moorhouse came to live in Wednesfield on her retirement in 1988 and became a well-loved, highly-valued member of the clergy team.

In response to the Bishop's 1989 call upon parishes to review parish life (focusing especially on what he referred to as 'Signs of the Kingdom'), St Thomas's undertook a Parish Review, and the contributions of all church groups and committees resulted in a spectacular poster display.

Town And Country In Harmony

A product of the 'Faith in the City' report was the link formed between Wolverhampton and Eccleshall deaneries, and in 1988 a group from St Thomas's visited the North Staffordshire parishes of Whitmore, Chapel Chorlton and Maer, where John Craig preached at St Peter's Church. The visit was reciprocated in 1989 when a party from the above parishes shared our Autumn Festival weekend, attending the Sunday evening 'Songs of Praise' service. Missing from the visiting group on this occasion was their rector, Revd John Porter, and prayers were offered for his recovery following surgery. He was back in action in July 1990,

however, when a Wednesfield party attended St Peter's Patronal Festival in Maer.

Dudley-born Roger Miller had come to St Thomas's as curate a year before, and, on Christmas Eve 1989, a nativity play was performed in church under the direction of Roger's wife Carolyn, a teacher at Tettenhall College.

Beating The Bounds Again

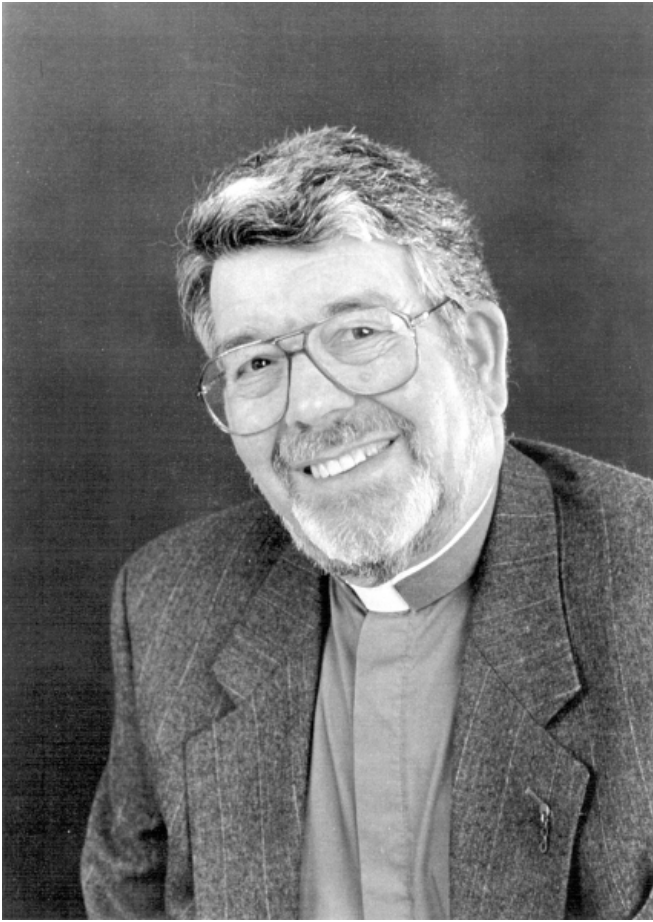
Actor Paul Alexander impressed a large audience in Holy Week 1990 with his recital of St John's Gospel, but the following month brought the sad news of the death at the age of 48 of Gerald Freeman. A party from Wednesfield attended his funeral in Oxford. "Gerald will not just be recalled as the tallest curate we ever had the joy of serving with," wrote John Craig, "but for his equally out-sized gift of friendship."

In September, the three churches took part in a sponsored Beating of the Bounds, most walkers covering the full eight mile route and raising a total of £2,119 for the Church Urban Fund.

Carolyn Miller produced a second play at St Thomas in 1991 – a drama for Holy Week – and in May we welcomed Patrick and Diane Tomalin, priests serving in the Canadian Diocese of Qu'Appelle (twinned with the Diocese of Lichfield).

In November, John Craig was appointed Precentor at Leicester Cathedral where he would be responsible for the musical side of its worship and become, in 1994, an Honorary Canon (the equivalent of Prebendary). The four coaches attending his installation were evidence of the high regard in which he and Olivia were held in Wednesfield where John had served for the past twelve years. He had actively promoted the Wednesfield Council of Churches and had encouraged the parish to appoint women deacons, such as Virginia Duncan, who had worked part-time for St Thomas's and part-time for St Alban's until September 1991 when she began working full-time at St Alban's. Penny Millichamp, whose local tutor John had been during her training on the West Midlands Course, now wrote of him:

"He has the ability to encourage when you are down, praise when you achieve, gently criticise when you go wrong, stimulate when you are apathetic, challenge when you are not



John Porter

thinking properly, and restrain when your enthusiasms run away with you!"

The Man From Maer

No-one can have foreseen that Town and Country were in such close harmony that Maer's Rector, John Dudley Dowell Porter, would succeed John Craig at St Thomas's. His induction took place on June 11th, 1992, when he declared his vision of the Church to be a Community that is "as opening and as welcoming and as all-inclusive in its loving as He (Jesus) was." He shared John Craig's strong, "inclusive" support for the ordination of women to the priesthood – a measure passed by General Synod that year. And he was to build on the foundations already laid so that attendance figures continued to rise for the next few years.

On June 28th John Porter's son Damian and Adrian Daffern were ordained. Adrian had attended St Thomas's Church from the age of ten and had served as chorister, server and assistant organist. He would serve his title as curate of St Chad's, Lichfield prior to his 1995 appointment as Team Vicar of St Bertelin's, Stafford. He returned to Wednesfield to preach on St Thomas's Day 1997.

In December, a reading in church of Dickens's A Christmas Carol by Crispin Ridge raised £230 for Cancer Research.

Roger Miller moved to Walsall the following year as Vicar of St Michael and All Angels, Caldmore. He had served St Thomas's worthily, especially during the interregnum, and the Parish would miss his sense of humour and his particular gift with children, as demonstrated in his visits to St Thomas's Primary School.

A new gold curtain was purchased for the Lady Chapel in memory of former Treasurer Charles East and former Churchwarden Bill Carr.

In 1994, Virginia Duncan and Penny Millichamp were ordained to the priesthood in Lichfield Cathedral; three months later St Thomas's curate Chris Mayo and his wife Deborah were ordained.

After 25 years as deputy warden and warden, Bert Barnard was appointed Honorary Churchwarden for Life. From the will of Geoff and Win Beddall, both of whom died in 1993, a new sound system was installed.

Three altar frontals were given in 1995, custom-made by Juliet Hemingray of Derby. One was in memory of Ken Munslow and another in memory of Bill Carr. Revd Richard Morgan came as Assistant Priest in March and spent seven months here gaining experience of parish work after serving with the Church Missionary Society in Kenya. A new youth club (WASPS) was born and, after a lengthy period of closure, 'The Boat Inn' reopened and presented St Thomas's with an ornate brass Victorian crucifix that had been given as a pub decoration! The church lost Michelle (Billie) Clemson, a former head chorister whose immense courage in coping with a terminal illness inspired everyone. In October, Jean Porter and Lesley Gelder (who had organised a successful Craft Fair two years earlier) headed a team producing a weekend 'Celebration of Crafts and Talents', which raised £1,900. The venture featured a Parish Cook Book and a Wednesfield Schools Painting Competition judged by Wolverhampton artist David Gunning.

Revd Colin Duncan of St Alban's was declared winner of the Grand Balloon Race in June 1996 when his balloon reached Italy. This was the year when several Wednesfield streets acquired humps and when St Thomas's

replaced Hymns Ancient & Modern with Hymns Old and New.

Discussions on the development of lay ministry began in 1996, and, in the following year, Area Local Ministry Adviser, Revd John Allan spoke at St Thomas's, after which a Lay Ministry Team was formed and we produced a Mission Statement which declared: "Our purpose is to love and worship God, and to make his love known to others."

St Thomas's and St Chad's applied for the necessary Bishop's Mandates. Margaret Stevens, appointed Team Pastoral Minister with responsibility for lay development and training, began work in Wednesfield on 1st April 1998. Margaret and her husband Roger had previously worked in Uganda, and in June and July, the parish was delighted to welcome at two social evenings their friends from the Soroti Diocese in Teso, Uganda, Mrs Freda Ocen, the Ven Charles Okwi and the Revds Kokas Osekeny, John Omagor and Naphtali Opwata – in England to participate in various pre-Lambeth Conference activities organised by SOMA (Sharing Of Ministry Abroad) and ARM (Anglican Renewal Ministries).



Vi Blackmoor and Revd John Porter at the 1999 Flower Festival

St Thomas's was one of the twenty Lichfield parishes nominated in the previous year to pioneer the use of revised services, and new versions of the baptism, wedding and funeral services were being tried out by the end of 1998. The premature death of sacristan Mary Homfray was a tragic loss to St Thomas's and a chalice in her memory was dedicated in 1999.

In 1998–99, John Porter, who was already Chaplain to the police and the Air Training Corps, was appointed Chaplain to the Mayor of Wolverhampton, Councillor Mrs Gwen Stafford Good, and a Civic Eucharist was held at St Thomas's on July 19th, 1998.

Pedestrianisation brought change to Wednesfield in 1999. Most High Street retailers complained of reduced trade and for months pneumatic drills roared and vibrated. But when the dust settled and motorists adapted to the now complete one-way system around the church, though retailers suffered, at least life in the Village became quieter.

In November, the Rector and his son Damian led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the party made up in the main of parishioners from Wednesfield and from Damian's church, St Anne's, Greenlands, Blackpool.

A few days before Christmas, St Thomas's lost another faithful servant – the much-loved Charles Owen, who died in New Cross only weeks after deciding, at the age of 90, that the time had come to hand over his responsibilities as Stewardship Recorder to Michael East (son of a former church treasurer).

Whilst the country celebrated the arrival of 2000 AD with fireworks, beacon-fires, a much-hyped 'river of fire' (unseen by most Thames-side spectators) and a £780 million Dome at Greenwich, St Thomas's gave away 1,500 Millennium candles and held the first Eucharist of the Millennium at midday on January 1st when John Porter tolled the bell 250 times – once for each year of the church's history.

A feature of St Thomas's Millennium-cum-250th-anniversary celebrations was the gift to itself of a second toilet (sited under the stairs in the former kitchen and suitable for the disabled) and new kitchen units, together with refrigerator and dishwasher, along the north wall of St Thomas's Room. The work was financed in large part by grants from the James Beattie Trust and funds for improving

urban churches resulting from the sale of the site of the former St Paul's Church in Wolverhampton. The bulk of the work was carried out by Don Dacre, a member of St Thomas's congregation.

On February 17th, a remarkable event took place in Wolverhampton's Civic Hall. Under the baton of Terry Green, a choir of 600 children from seventeen Wednesfield schools performed *Who Is This Jesus?* – a musical created by a team of Nottingham teachers headed by Sue Aldridge. Margaret Stevens's enthusiasm for the project inspired a team of hard-working volunteers whose efforts resulted in an exhilarating production, songs from which were later performed during Sunday services in the area by groups of children.

After almost a century, the church's relationship with the Institute in Graisle Lane ended when it was sold to the tenant who, for some years past, had hired it for use as a snooker hall. Following a survey which found extensive roof repairs necessary, the PCC felt it lacked the resources to restore and maintain the building, the value of which had fallen from £25,000 to £16,750 as a result of the survey.

After serving for eight years in Wednesfield, John Porter – at the age of 67, still leaving younger mortals trailing in his work-consuming wake – accepted a part-time post at St Anne's, Haughton, Manchester and, on Sunday, 7th May, conducted his final service at St Thomas's. Clear evidence of the affection in which he was held was seen in the size of the congregation which packed the church on that occasion and in the standing ovation received at his farewell party two days earlier.

Taking advantage of our spiritual leader's departure, an irreligious family of squirrels began rioting in the tower, in the church and even inside the organ. But the exigencies customarily attendant upon interregnums were eased in Wednesfield's case by the introduction into the clergy team of two new figures. The Revd Don Marsh came in a non-stipendiary capacity from Wednesbury where he had assisted for the previous ten years, and, though based mainly at St Chad's (by then in the fifteenth month of its own interregnum), helped out also at St Thomas's. The Revd Graham Wilde, the Free Church Chaplain at New Cross Hospital, was attached to the Team under what were known as "Ecumenical Canons", empowering him to assist at services in a limited capacity.

In Conclusion

At the beginning of July 1999, a very successful Flower Festival had taken place in St Thomas's, based on the theme "Saints in Glory". The windows, symbolising St Thomas's links with Holy Trinity, St Gregory's, St Alban's and SS. Augustine and Chad's, were embellished with floral creations provided by representatives of these churches. The display was a statement of what our predecessors achieved here.

St Thomas' first 250 years have witnessed remarkable social, economic and cultural developments. In the face of hardship, disaster and changing moral fashions, the church has stood firm to the Faith it exists to proclaim and has served the community of Wednesfield in the light of that Faith. In years to come, these pages may form the basis of a further history of St Thomas's. Whoever undertakes it will perhaps be able to amend any unintentional inaccuracies found in the present work and, without the sensitivities of the living to consider, will be free to write more openly of recent times.

But whether that history appears ten, a hundred or two hundred and fifty years from now, the new chapters it contains will feature men and women whose dedication to the Village and to the Church on Wednesfield Green will be part of a long tradition of witness and service within this community.

Though contemporary analysts predict the imminent death of the Church in England, there are still many, like John Porter, who base their confident rejection of so bleak a prognosis on the conviction that the Church is more relevant now to human life on earth than it ever was and that, amid the erosive influences militating against social stability, we have a gospel to proclaim. When those who succeed us here need encouragement or example, may they find it in the people and events

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On two evenings at the end of June 2000, Sheila Watkins produced at St. Thomas's a highly entertaining 250th Anniversary Pageant in which children from six primary schools associated with the church enacted scenes spanning the entire period of the building's

history. Once again Mrs Martha Gough declared her wish to build a chapel on Wednesfield Green; once more the Revd John Clare perceived an urgent need for a village school. The significance of this dramatic capsule lay not in its evocation of the past but also in the enactment of our church's history by young Wednesfield children – a symbol of that past-present-future link which has defended and manifested Christian tradition and belief here for the benefit of succeeding generations.

For that reason, let the pageant be the final event recorded in this history.

St Augustine and St Chad

- 1955 Planning and fundraising for “a new place of worship at the corner of Stubby Lane and Lichfield Road”.
- 1957 Church dedicated by the Bishop of Stafford on August 31. Revd Roger Bould and his wife moved into the bungalow known as St Chad’s House.
- 1961 Cross erected above west end gable.
- 1964 Roger Bould succeeded at St Chad’s by Revd Peter Hirst
- 1966 Peter Hirst succeeded by Revd Roy Harrison.
- 1968 Revd Geoffrey Staton took over at St Chad’s
- 1969 Geoffrey Staton was followed at St Chad’s by Revd Johnathan (Fr Jo) Evans. Series 2 Communion Service introduced.
- 1971 Jo Evans succeeded at St Chad’s by Revd Reginald (‘Redge’) Bills.
- 1972 The bungalow and surplus land sold as part of a deal which included the acquisition of the Lichfield Road house nearest the church as the new St Chad’s House. New ceiling tiles and heating system installed in the church.
- 1973 The new St Chad’s House completed and occupied by Revd Colin Lantsbery, who succeeded Redge Bills on 1st Jan
- 1974 New organ purchased
- 1975 Revd David Barlow succeeded Colin Lantsbery
- 1977 Revd Graham Johnson succeeded David Barlow and occupied the third dwelling called St Chad’s House - 157 Stubby Lane (former home of local GP, Dr Burton)
- 1978 Graham Johnson licensed as Team Vicar.
- 1981 The sanctuary redecorated and remodelled
- 1982 Revd Simon Guy licensed.
- 1983 Bilston Enterprise complete St Chad’s Community Centre. What was initially a limited-life “Cornish”-style structure had now been improved and extended.^[46]
- 1990 Revd Penny Millichamp licensed.
- 1994 Revd Clive Styles licensed.
- 1999 Clive Styles became Rector of the Upper Tass Valley group of parishes

St Alban's

- 1957 Planning and discussion on the subject of a church in Ashmore Park
- 1961 Preliminary sketch plans prepared by church architect, N.F.Cachemaille-Day whose designs were later developed by Revd Anthony Hill, ARIBA
- 1963 The church's dedication (St Alban's) decided upon. Building project launched by a Procession of Witness and open-air service, arranged by Revd Roger Bould, on site next to the Ashmore Inn
- 1965 St Alban's Church School opened by Bishop of Lichfield
- 1966 £4,000 still needed to build the church. Each household asked to buy weekly one shilling 'Brick Stamps'
- 1967 Dedication and opening on Thursday, 22 June, Feast of St Alban. Revd John Smart, first occupant of St Alban's House, given oversight of the new church
- 1968 Ashmore Park Carnival run jointly by St Alban's, Corpus Christi and the Youth Centre.
- 1971 Revd John.R.Tye succeeded John Smart. Girl Guide company formed.
- 1973 Upper room constructed
- 1976 Revd Max Welsh succeeded J.R.Tye. Introduction of Series 3 Communion Service. 8' cross erected on outside wall in memory of Derek Southall.
- 1977 Bell donated by St Chad's
- 1978 Purchase of Viscount CL4 organ (£1,999)
- 1979 Revd Jonathan Cooper (Team vicar) followed Max Welsh.
- 1981 Joan Winterbottom licensed as minister-in-charge of Oldfallings United Reformed Church and as lay-worker attached to St Alban's.
- 1983 Revd Peter Beresford succeeded Jonathan Cooper, who became a Franciscan postulant.
- 1989 Revd Colin Duncan succeeded Peter Beresford following the latter's 1988 move to Rugby. Virginia Duncan ordained in July.
- 1991 Revd Virginia Duncan appointed to serve full-time at St Alban's. Church extensions and alterations.
- 1992 Memorial Garden consecrated by the Bishop of Wolverhampton.
- 1999 Retirement of Colin and Virginia Duncan. Revd Duncan Clarke appointed Team Vicar.

St Thomas's Church, Wednesfield

CURATES

John Compson	-	from Netherton. 24 June 1845.
Samuel Thomas Sproston	-	from Chester Diocese 22 March 1850; to serve "at the building on Wednesfield Heath" (Holy Trinity, Heath Town)
A. Walker	1879	
Charles Hallsworth	1879	
F.C.Witty	1892 - 1894	
Hugh Tunnadine	1894 - 1899.	Became first vicar of St Stephen's, Wolverhampton in 1908.
John H. J. Dagger	1899 - 1900.	Moved on to become curate in charge at Hanley.
Guy Parkhouse	1900 - 1907	
W.B.Houldey	1910	
F Tennison	1911 - 1915	
William John Stuart-Crump	1915 - 1917	Appointed at a stipend of £140 per annum
C.H. Claridge	1917 - 1918	
Frank Hunt	1919 - 1921	
John H.Hall	1922 - 1925	Moved to St Peter's, Wolverhampton in 1925.
J.V.Philp	1915 - 1926	Lived at 31 Nordley Hill
Arthur Reginald Smith, A.K.C	1928 - 1933	Stipend: £250 p.a. Later, Vicar of Cobridge.
Cyril William Watts Banner	1933	Adored by the young ladies of the parish, but left suddenly when discovered on a canal-bank engaged in an activity not befitting a Church of England curate.
Thomas Parlas Thomas	1934 -1936	Formerly, a Methodist minister, he left Wednesfield for Weston-under-Redcastle and by 1939 was Vicar of Chapel Chorlton. During his Wednesfield curacy, he and his wife lived at "Bronwydd", Lichfield Road.
Donald Keith Robertson, B.A.	1936 -1940.	Lived at 61, Nordley Hill. Left to become curate in charge of the Parish of Skeet, near Petersfield, Hampshire. By 1968, he was a Canon.
Norman Percy Stevens	1937 -1938	Born in Willenhall, where his father was Vicar of St Stephen's. In Wednesfield, he lived at 6, West Avenue, Nordley Hill. Moved to Hednesford as assistant priest.
Eric Leonard Griffith Whitehouse		
	Sept.	1938 - 1940
Resigned in 1940 through ill-health.		
Harry Alexander Gilroy, B.A.		
	May	1940 - 1942
		When he married Bert and Mary Barnard, his surplice was so dirty it was practically yellow. "But he was a nice chap," says Mary. Moved to Exmouth. In 1959, he was Rector of Binstead, Isle of Wight, and in 1973 Vicar of St Margaret's, Eastney.
Richard Gregory	1943 -1945	Lived at 34, Wood End Road and had responsibility for Wood End area and Perry Hall Estate.Moved to St Michael's, Walsall. Stipend: £230 p.a.
Roy Archibald Lord	1944 -1946	Something of a heart-throb amongst the young ladies! Lived at 25, Vicarage Road and was given responsibility for Newbolds Estate. Moved to Tettenhall with special responsibility for Pendeford area.

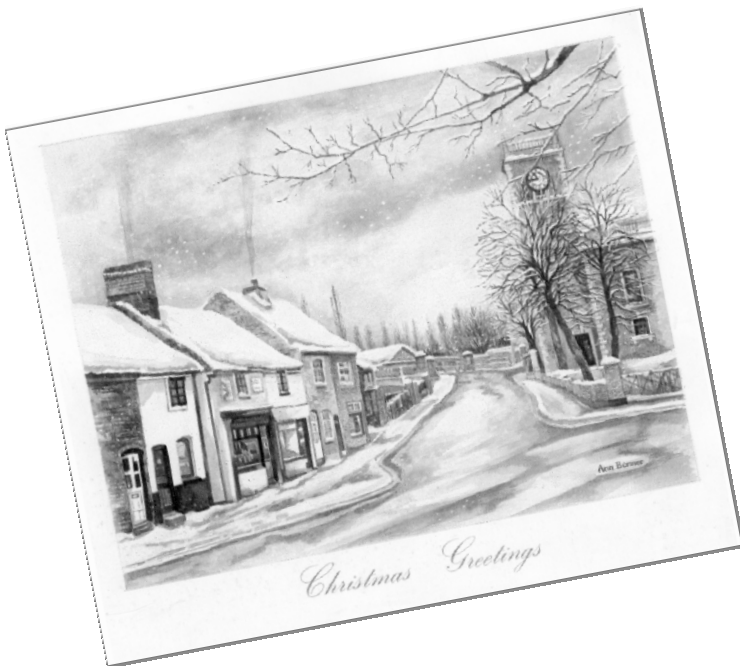
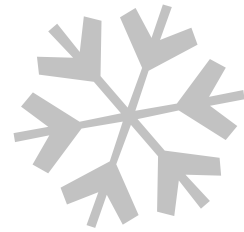
Charles Ilbert Rawson	1946 - ?	Lived at "Silverhoe", Mill Lane. Stipend: £320. There followed a considerable period during which St Thomas's was without a curate.
Arthur Roger Bould	1957 -1964	Responsible for Church of St Augustine and St Chad. Stipend: £400 p.a. Married Jane Wright on 27 July 1957. They lived at St Chad's House. Moved to Christ Church, Wellington.
Arthur Edwin Williams	1959 -1962	Born Longton. Norman Lewis conducted his marriage to Margaret Clark at Holy Trinity Church, Meir. In Wednesfield, they lived first at 10, Russell Close, later at 11, Adey Road. Sons Timothy and Nicholas born in Wednesfield. Moved to Codsall.
Charles Philip Collis Smith	1963 -1966	Lived first at 1, Frederick Road, later at 21, Lathe Court. Stipend: £550 pa. moved to St Saviour's, Green Heath, Hednesford.
Peter Thornton Hirst	1964 - 1966	In charge of St Chad's. Stipend: £640 pa. Moved on to become Rector of St Bartholomew's, Salford.
John Francis Smart	1966 - 1970	Made deacon in 1962, but taught in Walsall prior to ordination. Lived, with wife and two children, in St Alban's House with responsibility for St Alban's when building completed in 1967.
Roy Harrison	1966 - 1968	Left to become priest in charge at Maer and Chapel Chorlton.
Geoffrey Staton	1966 -1969	Born in Leek. In Wednesfield lived at 21, Lathe Court. Stipend: £625 pa. After a year in the parish, he was put in charge of St Augustine and St Chad. Moved to Cannock. In 1972 he became Vicar of St Edward's, Cheddleston and in 1977 was appointed Rural Dean of Leek, his home town – the youngest Rural Dean in the Diocese.
Johnathan Evans	1968 - 1971	Wife: Sue. In charge of St Chad's. Secretary of the Diocesan Cricket Team. Moved to Parish of Dorridge.
John Raymond. Tye	1971 - 1976.	In charge of St Alban's. Stipend: £900 pa. Taught for 15 yrs before ordination. Moved on to Cockshutt with Petton.
Reginald Bills	1970 - 1973	Ordained under the recently-introduced supplementary ministry scheme. Worked during the week as Head of RE at Highfields School until Sept. 1972, when he became Chaplain and Head of RE at St Peter's Collegiate School. Lived at his home in Short Heath. From 1971, in charge of St Augustine & St Chad until 1973, when, owing to pressure of work as teacher and school chaplain, "Redge" (as he signed himself) asked to be relieved of this post.
William John Sillitoe April - December	1971	Came to Wednesfield from Holy Trinity, Ettingshall. Married with two children, he lived at 28, Inkerman Street, Heath Town. Left to take up a curacy at March, Cambs.
Colin Lantsbery	1972 - 1975	Born in Northampton. Trained at Chichester Theological College. He and his wife Mary, a teacher, lived at 162, Kitchen Lane until the new St Chad's House, Lichfield Road, ready. In charge of St Chad's from 1st January 1974. Moved on to All Saints, West Bromwich. Now a member of the Orthodox Church.
David Barlow	1975 - 1977	Wife: Christine. Now a senior naval chaplain.

Max Welsh	1976 - 1979	Wife: Priscilla. In charge of St Alban's. Came to Wednesfield from working in Cannock, before which he had served in the Church of South India. Moved on to benefice of Milton St Philip & St James in Leek Deanery.
Michael Alexander	1977 - 1980	18 Duke Street purchased as accommodation for Michael and his wife, Vivien. Wrote the 'St Thomas' hymn. Moved in 1980 to Tettenhall Wood as Assistant Curate with special responsibility for the Church of the Good Shepherd, Castlecroft and St Thomas, Finchfield.
Gerald Freeman	1981 - 1983	Born in Hampstead. The tallest of Wednesfield's curates! Former manager of John Lewis store in Cambridge. In 1972, he entered Salisbury Theological College in 1972 where he met Barry Rogerson and Jonathan Cooper. In 1976, he was engaged in hotel business in Bournemouth; later (1978), extended operations to Torquay where he ran Oscar's. Died 1990.
Michael Dadson	1984 - 1987	Born in Manchester. Wife: Rebecca.
Penny Millichamp	1985 - 1990	Licensed as Team Vicar of St Augustine and St Chad on 31 January 1990. Retired from full-time ministry 1994.
Roger Miller	1988 - 1993	Born in Dudley. Wife: Carolyn. Moved to become vicar of St Michael & All Angels, Caldmore, Walsall.
Christopher Mayo	1993 - 1994	Born in Brentwood, Essex. Wife, Deborah, trained with him at Queens College, Birmingham and served in Bloxwich. Ordained 1994, but moved on "earlier than expected to fresh work elsewhere" (Parish Magazine)
Richard Morgan	1995	Born in Dursley, Gloucestershire. Wife: Christine. After leaving Oxford, Richard taught for nine years, then worked for the CMS in Sudan and Kenya. Served as Assistant Priest at St Thomas's for just over 7 months to gain experience of parish work in order to enter full-time Ministry. Moved to St Mary the Virgin, Therfield with St Faith's, Kelshall.
Duncan James Clarke	1999 -	Served two periods of a ministry in Trinidad, returning to this country in between to work as a prison chaplain. Joined the Wednesfield team for a term of six months at a time when St Gregory's, St Alban's and St Chad's were without clergy. Lived at 92 Amos Lane, home of the late Dot Foster. On September 27, he became Associate Minister at St Alban's.

WEDNESFIELD TEAM PASTORAL MINISTER

Margaret Ruth Stevens	1998 -	Husband: Roger. Born in Uganda, Margaret returned to that country for one month each year, revisiting projects she had initiated there and running training workshops. Before coming to Wednesfield, she was employed by the University of Nottingham's School of Medicine in the study of Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias.
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Christmas Greetings from St. Thomas's



‘T WAS EVER THUS

Parents

“On Monday I sent George Swatman back for his school fees. During the dinner hour his father came to the school house to see me. He stated that I had pushed the boy down the school steps and hurt him so badly that the boy came home crying. This was false, as I told him. He then commenced shouting vile things at me as I stood at my own door, and I ordered him off the premises. In going away, he raised his fist and said that he would smash my b——y duke. The boy has not been at school since, and if he came back I should refuse to accept him again.”

From St Thomas’s School Log Book 26 August 1887

“It is very disappointing that parents do not show more evidence of backing the efforts of the Staff, who are trying to help the children to develop Christian characters. At the beginning of Lent we asked the parents to try to come to the services in Church on Wednesday mornings, and there has been no response to this invitation.”

School Notes: April 1939

“A good deal of the waywardness of modern youth is caused by lack of parental control and discipline in the home. We have reacted so strongly against the imposed authority and the taboos of the Victorian Age, that we have swung into a licence, which we thought was a liberty.”

Revd R.A.Lord, Curate: November 1945

“It is sad and disturbing to see fairly young children roaming about in the evenings and playing on the car-parks of public-houses. This is what I mean when I ask if parents accept ‘total responsibility’ for their children.”

Revd J. Turner: 1967

Money

“Our attendances at Church have suffered during the holiday season, and our collections in Church have gone down likewise. The time has come when we must seriously think about our finances. The total collections for the first six months of the year were £88. 10. 0d less than in 1929...Our income for the first half-year was nearly £130 less than six years ago.”

Revd S.Howard: September 1935.

“The main fact is that we need £12 a week to meet our liabilities for our church and schools and we are getting at present from all sources about £10. 5s.”

Revd H.Baylis: 1943

“To be certain of paying our way with the basic necessities, we (at St Chad’s) shall require an income of £400 during the year - of £8 a week.”

Revd R. Bould: January 1960

Entertainment

“Wednesfield people will not be content with third-rate stuff. Incidentally, it is rather amazing that film producers should present to the public some of the sloppy and trashy film stories that are screened. If films of such character come to the Regal, polite intimation to the management that they are not desired will doubtless have good results.

D.P. (Councillor David Pritchard): November 1935

Clergy Numbers

“In years to come it will be much harder to find Assistant Clergy if the present numbers of those offering themselves for the Ordained Ministry does not rise. In 1969 only 420 men were ordained, compared with 592 in 1965. This means the theological colleges are feeling the pinch and a number are due to close or to be reorganised, for only 380 men were recommended last year for training.”

Revd J. Turner: 1970

Lapsed Confirmation Candidates

“You will be glad to know that about sixty of our children and adults are to be confirmed at St Stephen’s, Wolverhampton, by the Bishop of Shrewsbury on Sunday, November 17th. This should mean that the number of communicants each Sunday should increase by approximately the same amount. But will it? Experience shows that only about one-third of those who are confirmed remain as Easter communicants, and a much smaller proportion remain as weekly communicants.”

Revd N. Lewis: November 1957

Truancing

“Owing to the Blitz, the reins on the attendance have been slackened, but some children are taking advantage of this and staying away when the Blitz is not ‘blitzing’”

School Notes: January 1941

Vandalism

“If the perpetrators of certain wanton acts of destruction that have marred the beauty of the Park could be traced, legal proceedings would certainly be instituted against them”

D.P: 1931

“If the proprietors of local fish shops would impress upon their customers the undesirability of throwing fish and potato paper wrappings about the streets, they would perform a necessary public service. It is highly objectionable, particularly on Sunday mornings, to see the thoroughfares closely adjacent to fish shops strewn with greasy papers that have been carelessly thrown down.”

D.P. November 1935

“Vandalism appears to be rife in Wednesfield

D.P. March 1938

We were very distressed at finding a gang of children using the church as a playground. Fortunately, the actual damage done was small. The altar had, however, been treated in a sacrilegious manner; the organ and lectern Bible interfered with and damaged, and deliberate dirt and disorder had been caused. It is with regret that for the time being the church will have to be closed except at such times as a responsible person can be present.”

Revd H.Baylis: October 1952

“I am sorry to report an increase in vandalism in the Church, principally during lunch time and after school hours. It is now a regular occurrence to find hymn and prayer books scattered about, candlesticks and churchwardens’ staves strewn around and the altars disturbed. One day quite recently some boys were discovered standing in the nave holding stones which they were about to throw at the glass doors - ‘to see if they would break’, as they put it. Equally disturbing is the theft of parish magazines and their sale from door to door by children who often say, ‘The vicar told us to sell them.’”

Revd J. Turner 1969

“A few weeks ago I caught a man dumping two large bags full of rubbish plus polythene cartons and broken children’s toys on the edge of the churchyard. Naturally enough, he took it all back home again after I had spoken with him.”

Revd J. Turner: 1972

ITEMS WORTH QUOTING

“It was suggested....that the Vicar should again appeal to the congregation for more liberal collections to meet the church’s expenses and that he should denounce from the pulpit the practice of putting buttons into the offertory bags, which, we sadly state, has been getting more frequent of late. Proposed by J. Turner, seconded by B. Corbett and carried unanimously”

Minutes of the Easter Vestry, 1912.

“In the days of St Chad’s missionary journeys, he is almost certain to have come regularly through Wednesfield, by way of High Street and Rookery Street, when he journeyed from Lichfield to the Old Cross at Wolverhampton.”

Programme and Souvenir of the 1926 Bazaar

“At the end of last month the Wednesfield Amateur Dramatic Society gave their first two Concerts, and their performance was far above expectation.”

Magazine: April 1930

“The growth of reverence to the dead by the male sex has been remarkable in the last generation. Thirty years ago it was the exception to see hats lifted when a funeral passed; now it is the rule. It is the opposite tendency that is visible in the other sex. It is probably thoughtlessness which is the cause of women entering the Churchyard without a head covering, but it is disrespectful to the dead whether deliberate or not.”

Revd S. Howard: September 1935

“The new King, King Edward VIII, has already proved his great worth as a leader, and he is now heartily acclaimed King in the absolute confidence that he will render such kingly service to his country as will further advance its honour among the nations of the world.”

Civic Notes: February 1936.

“Mary....appeared not to notice the arrival of the three kings. Only the villain of the piece, Herod, was allowed to make any positive impression, and John Ibbs gave this character some splendid temper tantrums.”

Press review of January 1959 nativity play performed in St Thomas’s

CHURCHWARDENS’ DANCE AND CABARET

Do not miss this great social occasion organised by the Churchwardens. It will be held in Wednesfield Grammar School Hall from 7-15 to 11-15 on Saturday, February 1st. Admission by ticket 4/- (including refreshments).

Magazine: January 1964