



History of St. Marks





A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE NEW PARISH OF OCKERHILL WAS FORMED in 1845 a curate-in-charge was appointed. On the 16th of May, 1846 the Reverend Lionel William Stanton was licenced to be Perpetual Curate of this newly constituted district.

Steps were at once taken to build the new Church. Meanwhile the White School (which was on the site of the south east corner of the present Churchyard) served as a meeting place and the School was also used for Baptisms. The first baptism in the new Church was on January 6th, 1850.

The site for the Church (3 roods and 1 perch) was given by the Lord of the Manor, Wyrley Birch Esquire, formerly of Hamstead Hall in the parish of Handsworth in the County of Norfolk.

In the year 1846 a subscription list was opened and there were liberal contributions from pious and well disposed persons amounting to £1.050. There was a grant of £600 from the Lichfield Diocesan Church Extension Society. A sum of £250 was granted from the Church Commissions and £300 from the Incorporated Society. The above sum paid for the cost of the building and at the time of the Consecration there was only a debt of £300 for furnishing, etc.

St.Marks Church (Before restoration)





The Church, of course, was never completed, the original plan included a tower and spire. As a choirboy I remember seeing the complete plan of the Church pinned on the wall of the Vestry but what became of this plan is not known. I wrote to the Diocesan registrar and also to the Ecclesiastical Commission thinking they might have a copy of the plan but with no success. The Ecclesiastical Commission said that "from the information in the Commissioners' papers it appears that the architects concerned with the erection of the Church in the year 1849 were Messrs. Hamilton and Saunders of Wolverhampton. ' "

St.Marks Church

No trace of this Firm now exists though Mr. C. O. Langley, of Wolverhampton, Secretary of the Lichfield Diocesan Trust, kindly made every enquiry.

On the 8th of November, 1849 there was a petition for Conservation signed by Lionel William Stanton, B.A., Clerk, Minister of Ocker Hill.



William Ker, M.A., Cleark, Perpetual Curate of Tipton.
John Walker.
Edmund Walker.

The Walkers at the time lived at The Hall, then called 'Walkers's Hall.'

The Church and Church yard was consecrated on November 13th, 1849, the number of sittings provided was 600 but this included a gallery at the back of the Church now dismantled.

The style of the Church is called Decorated Gothic, Built with hard blue bricks with plentiful stone dressings, even the buttresses having stone weathering but the blue brick has weathered better than the stone. The Nave is lighted with small trefoil clerestory windows. When the Church was built there was a large three-light window in the East wall surmounted by rather beautiful Rose windows (the channel was enlarged later and reredos instilled about 40 years ago.)

At the West is the three-light window surmounted by a Vesica window showing the figure of St. Mark and the Lion. A new Organ chamber was built in 1889, the foundation stone was to have been laid by the Right Hon. the Earl of Dartmouth but owing to illness his son Lord Lewisham laid stone.

There was an endowment by the Crown of £150 per year and the gift of living lies with the Crown and Bishop alternatively.

From the opening of the Church it is not easy to trace what really happened during the incumbency of the Reverend L. W. Stanton and the early says of the Reverend A. A. N. F. Solari.

A Diocesan report states that on the 10th of October, 1854 the Bishop accepted the resignation of the Reverend Lionel William Stanton, Clerk, of the Perpetual Curacy of Ocker Hill.

The Reverend A. A. N. F. Solari was appointed Vicar that same year.

I can only gather that during these early years the debt of £300 was paid but that, unfortunately, was not the end of the difficulties that faced our former fellow-christians at Ocker Hill, for very soon the new Church began to fall down, or at least, to settle badly on the foundations.



St. Marks

The plan was not good, the Church was too high and lofty but the real cause of the trouble was mining operations. It was owing to the mines that the Church was never completed, the original plan included a tower and steeple which was not safe to build.

Only a few yards away from the Church building there were two pit shafts working North east between the Church and the Railway. The land on which these shafts were working was later bought by the Church and later formed part of the Churchyard. One of the pitshafts was filled in about 50 years ago but only a few years ago the other shaft "crowned in" taking the graves with it leaving a large hole, lately filled in.

The Moat colliery again was in full swing and not only coal but water was pumped out of the mines. There was a special deep shaft North west of the Church used by the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage for pumping purposes. The drawing of water caused houses to fall in all shapes. In Gospel Oak there were many 'crooked' houses and many collapsed. What then could be expected with a tall and lofty building as the Church!

In the year 1860, only eleven years after the Church was built, there was a Report on the fabric by Messrs. Smallman and Smith, Architects and Surveyors of Stourbridge which stated that each of the five



St.Marks
Church



windows on the North aisle showed settlements, the roof at the North east end of the aisle was parted from the wall and let in the rain water. The same trouble applied to the Nave arches and clerestory windows, daylight could be seen through the cracks. There was less trouble on the South side of the Church. But the pillars carrying the Nave arches on the South side of the Nave were leaning over to the North and North East. The channel was likewise affected and worse still the surveyors thought that further trouble would follow.

It would seem that the Church was toppling over towards the North.

Then followed, I believe, a law suit to stop the mining near the Church and to recover compensation from the Moat Colliery Company.

This measure was to a certain extent effective in staving the fall of the Church but as long as the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage was drawing water the stability of the Church was always in doubt. The church was patched up, new channel arch was built. Mr Solari was supposed to be a wealthy man and we know he was most generous but I should say that during this 30 odd years of incumbency this Church building was a constant anxiety.

In the first two years of Reverend E. J. Norman's incumbency the sum of £700 was raised for repairs and further appeal for £1,000 was made. The North aisle was completely re-roofed.

The mines now near the Church are closed and as the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage Company has collapsed it is unlikely there will be any further settlement and though the coal is still there to a large extent it is again unlikely it will ever be mined as the new housing estate is built over coal site. But the Church never really recovered from the early settlement and almost each Incumbent who is now trying to raise £2,000 for repairs to the roof, etc.

From the above brief sketch it is clear it has been no easy task in forming the parish, building the Church and saving the building from collapse. It is not that the building materials were faulty – the blue bricks are as good now as 100 years ago, though the stone work is not as good, the cracks in the roof let in the rainwater and so weakened and rotted somewhat the wood work and plaster.



St. Marks

During the incumbency of the Reverend H. C. A. Colvile the East end of the Church was extended and strengthened, a new clergy vestry was built.

The interior of the Church has a stately dignity and if in some future year the tower and spire might be built its position on the Hill of God in our midst. It is the Lord's 'House, it is His place of witness. Here God proclaims His law, here the faith is taught. It is the Lord's House because God meets us here and we can thank God for the Founders, the noble example of those who have gone before us. But the best thanksgiving we can make is to use this House of God, to make use of all the sacred privileges offered here and to bring others to now and love the Faith.

*“Friends this Church stands open now for thee,
That thou may'st enter, rest, kneel and pray.
Remember where thou art an what must be,
Thine end, Remember us, then go thy way.”*





History of St. Marks

7

Dear friends of St Mark's.

The time has come to make preparations for passing a Great Milestone in the life of our Parish.

The church of St Mark, **our Church**, was dedicated on **November 13th, 1849**, so that 1949 will see the completion of 100 year's work and worship in our Parish Church.

It is hoped to plan a **memorable week of services and celebrations** in connection with this great event, but there is much to be done before this can take place.

We have, first of all to put God's House in order , for, as it is, it is no credit to us.

The Roof needs a lot of attention.

The Brickwork and Stonework needs pointing and strengthening and all this before we tackle the expense of **interior decoration**, the later much needed.

It needs no great stretch of imagination to estimate that a large sum of money is needed.

Say £1,000, it may need a lot more, but £1,000 will be a good sum to start with.

This is a big sum of money. Might I suggest that you divide the **sum by 100**? That leaves £10. Yes, if **100 families would promise to collect or be responsible for £10** over a period of say 6 to 9 months, it would mean I would be encouraged to get on with the jobs – so much needed to be done.

Perhaps £10 is too much for **You** to raise. All I ask is **How much are you prepared to guarantee?** Perhaps there are some who may feel they can guarantee more than £10. Again I ask **How much?**

I know you will all take this appeal seriously.

Come in and help – please! not only by your gifts but by sharing in the **work and worship of your parish** so that the church life of Ocker Hill becomes a force for good in the district.

Believe me to be always,

Your sincere friend and fellow working in Christ Jesus,

R. W. BELL,.

Cheques and Postal Orders made payable to S. Mark's Ocker Hill Centenary Fund.

Thank You! and God Bless You!