



6 ST PETER'S CHURCH

... suddenly Stainforth was on its own ...

What changes the break-up of the ancient parish of Giggleswick must have made in the pattern of life in all the villages involved. Today, visitors presume that St Peter's was built on the site of an earlier church, but until 1842 Stainforth had no church of its own, and for hundreds of years villagers had travelled from here, and from Settle, Langcliffe and Rathmell, to worship at St Alkelda's in Giggleswick. That is where they and their families and friends were baptised, married and buried. Church-going then was not as much a matter of option as it is today, it was 'expected', and Sunday was a day apart in the week, precious time off work, special clothes, Sunday School, a chance to mix with people outside the village. It is difficult for us now to imagine the significance of the change in routine, for suddenly Stainforth was on its own, with its own vicar to join the other figures of authority. One can guess how much excitement, interest (and certainly controversy) there was in the small community; village life would never be the same again.

Dawson sisters

It was the 'spiritual advantage' of the parishioners that concerned the Dawson sisters who initiated the building of the church in Stainforth, and St Peter's was built and initially endowed totally with private money by members of the Dawson family, with the help of others in the village. The three sisters, Jane Constantine Dawson, Mary Long Dawson and Elizabeth Hutton Dawson were daughters of Richard Dawson, rector of Bolton by Bowland church for 53 years, and also the last of the Dawson squires of Halton Gill. Their mother too was a parson's daughter, and a brother, until his death at the age of 27, was chaplain to Lord Ribblesdale of Gisburne Park. Mary and Elizabeth were spinsters, but Jane was the second wife of Pudsey Dawson of Hornby Castle, who was in fact a distant cousin of the sisters. A wealthy man, he supported the scheme with enthusiasm. It was Elizabeth who, in 1860 at the age of 78, was to buy back Langcliffe Hall for the Dawson family.

It seems likely that the sisters greatly enjoyed the project, for a few years later they were busy spending over £400 rebuilding and refurbishing the tiny chapel at Halton Gill, where they dedicated a stained glass window to their father's memory. We hear that they made 'constant visits to Stainforth' from Marshfield in Settle, where they were all living at the time, first to consider alternative sites and later to 'follow closely every detail of the work', and the

site they eventually chose for the church and churchyard was at the west end of the village and owned by James Foster of Townhead.

Building the church

The three cottages standing there at the time with croft and sheepfolds were bought and then demolished. It is not known if the tenants at the time (John Hardacre, John Metcalfe and Edward Morphet) shared the same enthusiasm for the chosen site. A date stone (1684) from one of these cottages can now be seen over the front door of Riston House in the village. It is said that Anthony Sharp, who died in 1891 and had served as clerk at the church from the time of its consecration, had asked to be buried on the site of the cottage where he had been born, and you can see his grave directly on the right as you enter the main gate.

The account for the building work (as quoted by Brayshaw) makes interesting reading:

To Amount of Contract for Mason's Work done by Hargreaves & Jackson	728.15.	4
To ditto for Gate Posts and Font	25.	0. 0
To ditto for extra work	295.13.	0
		1049. 8. 4
To Amount of Contract for Joiner's work done by Wm Waddington	360.	0. 0
To ditto for extra work	25.16.	11
		385.16.11
To Amount of Contract for Slaters' & Plasterers' Work done by Mathew Jackman	85.10.	6
To Amount of extra bill not yet known		
To Amount of Contract for Plumbing & Glaziers Work done by J Jackson	64.	0. 0
To Amount of Painters' Work done by Jas Brennand	36.	0. 0
To Amount to Anthony Spencer for Lime & Leading as per bill & rect.	11.11.	0
To Amount paid to Wm.Metcalfe for Men's Dinners	5.	0. 0
To Amount paid to Thomas Tatham for Lime	8.18.	9
To Amount for Iron Gates and Work to John Hartley	19.10.	0
To Amount to Mr Sharpe and Clerk to the Works	70.	0. 0
To Amount to Jas. Foster for filling up pits & cleaning	9.	0
	£1,736.	4. 6

The church, as handed over by the donors in 1842, was 'adorned and furnished with a Communion Table, Font, Pulpit and Reading Desk and all other things necessary for the performance of Divine Ordinances'; endowment and repair funds had been set up and trustees appointed. Considerable sums of money were contributed by property owners in the village to support the church; the names of Armitstead, Brown, Foster, Preston, Redmayne and Stackhouse, all figure largely here, as they had done through the history of the village up to this time; names that were to disappear one by one over the following years. In practice, it was to be quite a time before



St Peter's Church - photo courtesy Ronnie Chapman

the separation of the parishes was 'technically' complete, and Giggleswick church continued to elect churchwardens from Settle, Stainforth, Rathmell and Langcliffe as it had always done, for another 50 years.

Continuing work

Built in the Perpendicular or late Gothic style, the church's main entrance is at the west end through the tower, the single aisle leading to a small chancel, and the small vestry in the north east corner is balanced at the south east by a side entrance and lobby. We know that in 1873 the church was 'thoroughly improved at the sole expense of John Knowles Esq, JP, of London', and there have been other renovations over the years so it is not possible to say what the first congregation saw, but now the interior is simple and light. For the first 20 years or so, the only stained glass would have been in the east window, which shows the four apostles Mark, Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and in those early days most of the windows were fitted with blinds, whether to keep out draughts or perhaps the sun we can only guess.

The remaining stained glass windows are all memorials. The north-side window commemorates the Reverend William Richardson, vicar of the parish until 1865, and on the west there is a memorial to Thomas and Jane Redmayne of Taitlands, who died within a few days of each other in 1862 and whose only surviving son was to die six years later at the age of 26. Two other windows on the south side are also memorials to families who contributed to the endowment of the church: Thomas and Elizabeth Brown who lived at Brookhouse Farm and owned much land in the village are remembered by their daughters, and an illustration of the Good Samaritan 'Go and do likewise' commemorates the lives of Thomas and Elizabeth Foster, brother and sister, who lived at Stainforth House and died unmarried. The name Knowles, linked by marriage with one branch of the Foster family, appears in a memorial to the short life of Richard Martin Knowles, 1861-1885, on the third window on the south side, on the lectern, and on a memorial tablet to John Knowles, who died in 1877.

A different time

There is a great deal that we do not know about the early days of St Peter's, but we can see from the minutiae recorded in the churchwardens' account books that some things were managed rather differently in the 1840s. Apart from endowments and donations towards the upkeep of the church, each family in the regular congregation also paid a yearly sum for 'sittings' in the pews. The wealthiest families would occupy two pews, one for themselves and one for their tenants and servants. In 1843, for instance, Thomas Foster from Stainforth House paid for eight sittings, five at the top price of 10 shillings (50p) and three at the 'concessionary' price of 4 shillings (20p). Later prices were reduced, and always the 'bench seats' were free.

Coals and candles appear regularly in the accounts, as do almanacks for the vicar, sweeping brushes and bell ropes, together with penny loaves from the village baker and port wine for the celebration of Holy Communion three or four times a year. At first the only mention of heating is the instruction to the sexton to see to the lighting of a fire in the vestry, but later there is talk of blackleading the stove and by the 1890s it seems there was some form of paraffin heating.

The church was actually opened in October 1841, although the three bells, from the foundry of Thomas Mears in London, were not delivered and hung till the following June. The consecration took place on Thursday 29 September 1842 in the presence of Thomas Longley, Bishop of Ripon and Dr Gilbert, Bishop of Chichester. One of the earliest expenses was £4 paid to a Singing Master for forty lessons, numerous payments to individuals for ringing and singing, and for the playing of the bass fiddle. Probably the singing lessons (forty seems rather over the top!) were in order to ensure a fine performance at the Service of Consecration, which must have been a great excitement for all concerned.

There are many entries for repairs, new strings and 'sticks' for the fiddle, until the 1860s when a harmonium was installed, and eventually a salary of £5, supported by a special fund, paid to the 'harmoniumist'. In 1852, bells all over the country tolled for the funeral of the Duke of Wellington, and Stainforth was no exception; an extra shilling going to the ringer for the job. In the churchyard, trees were felled and Thomas Parker, the village carpenter, paid 15 shillings (75p) for an ash; rubbish was cleared, and a one foot wide strip each side of the gravel paths was neatly mown so that voluminous Victorian skirts could pass with ease.

Remembrances

The only memorial in Stainforth to the Dawson sisters, apart from a small inscription on a communion flagon, is a coat of arms in stone on the exterior of the church, high above the east window. To celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ, a new stained glass window is to be installed at the west end of the church, the design reflecting the seasons and the variety and beauty of the countryside around Stainforth. Through the plain windows in the north wall the congregation can look at the magnificent beech tree across the lane and watch the light on the hills.

The lives of other parishioners and past vicars are remembered and celebrated in many gifts and additions to the church over the years, too many to list here, but range from the altar cross given in 1900 to the hearing loop installed at the end of the 20th century. Back in the early days of the church, in the 1840s, Miss Alice Preston had left her house in Stainforth to Elizabeth Hutton Dawson with, it is believed, the clear intention that it should become the parsonage for the parish, although this is not specified in her will. Alice Preston, who was also one of the largest contributors to the endowment of the church and whose generosity to the school is recorded on the contemporary notices inside the church porch, was the then owner of Sannat Hall Farm, and her house—or rather its predecessor on the site—is one of the few we can identify with any certainty in the village as far back as 1605 when it was known as Cheritreegarth. In the 18th century it passed from the Foster family to the Twisletons of Sherwood House, and from them, in 1780, to William Preston of Sannat Hall. Elizabeth Dawson handed it to trustees for the accommodation of the vicar and now it serves as the vicarage for the combined three parishes.

In the 1950s, George Staveley, who had lived and farmed in the village, gave the church clock and he also bequeathed a considerable capital sum, thereby enabling the fabric of the church to be well maintained and allowing for the installation of a fine custom-built pipe organ, completed in 1986.

Rural changes

Changes in the life of the church in the village, as elsewhere, have reflected changes in the rural way of life and in society generally. Vic Williams, who



Stainforth Sunday School 1947. From left to right, back row: Jean Armes, Doreen Forster, Hazel Sharp. Second row: Vera Maunders, Tom Sharp, Margaret Dinsdale, Brian Richardson, Rosie Syers, Richard Lambert, Peter Maunders. Front row: Derek Forster, Margaret Forster, Maureen Raynard, Thelma Middleton, Neville Chapman, Anne Dinsdale, John Thistlethwaite, Joan Richardson, Pat Marklew, Enid Middleton and Sunday School teacher Dorothy Forster. - photo courtesy Jean Clunie (nee Armes)

was brought to the village as a small baby in 1902, later looked back on his days as a choirboy with pleasure: the church packed on Sunday evenings and large gatherings of ‘thirty or so young fellows on the bridge after the services’.

Mr Thomas Foster Knowles gave Christmas parties for the choir at Stainforth House, where the boys and men were entertained separately because of the beer being served. The Temperance Movement seems to have been well supported in Stainforth. The school, from the 1870s until its closure over 100 years later, was a Church School and with the church itself two minutes walk away, the vicar and squire would have been familiar figures to the children, through Sunday School, parties, school visits, and the sea-side outings, which were subsidised in the 1920s and 1930s by Mr Foster Knowles.

In 1923, the two benefices of Langcliffe and Stainforth were united for economic reasons, but not without protest from a few of the parishioners of Stainforth reluctant to accept another change. Their petition voiced fears that the parishioners of both Langcliffe and Stainforth would suffer as a result of having to share a priest, and it seems that Thomas Foster Knowles's offer to raise £1,000, ‘the income of same to be available for the parson as long as the parish remains a distinct parish’, was dismissed by the Church

Commissioners who felt that Mr Foster Knowles did not have the support of the majority of the parishioners. Counsel for the objectors to the scheme at the Appeal before the Privy Council, stated that as Stainforth had an agricultural population and Langcliffe an industrial one, it would be preferable to reunite Stainforth with Giggleswick!

Now, happily united both with the parishes of Langcliffe and Horton, Stainforth is fortunate to have the vicarage in Stainforth and the choice of three very different churches at which to worship.

Nowadays, both local people and visitors to the village are glad to find the church and churchyard kept open and cared for and the visitors' book is full of appreciation for a place of quiet and prayer, and it is also a good place to remember all those people, churchgoers or not, who have lived and worked in the village and have no memorial.

Sources

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