

ST. CHAD'S CHURCH
SOUTH HILL



A SHORT
HISTORY OF A
LANCASHIRE PARISH

1791 - 1991

J. C. COWBURN

Location Map

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. St. Chad's, South Hill | 7. Prayer Station (Stone) |
| 2. Site of Cross, Higher Copthurst | 8. Site of Cross |
| 3. Denham Hall | 9. St. Helen's Wall |
| 4. Wallcroft Farm | 10. Wood End |
| 5. Slate Delph | 11. St. Bede's |
| 6. Brindle Workhouse | 12. Crook Hall (Lisieux Hall) |



Introduction and Acknowledgements

TO mark the occasion of the Bicentennial Anniversary of the foundation of St. Chad's Church, South Hill, a lifelong parishioner Mr. J. C. Cowburn has undertaken the task of compiling a history not only of the Church itself, but also of the Parish and its surrounding areas, going back in time over several centuries.

The preparation of this history has necessitated a great deal of research by Mr. Cowburn to whom we are greatly indebted. To assist him in his work, I am aware that he has been generously provided with information, notes, cuttings and photographs by many people, and I would like to mention in particular Mr. J. Lord of Shaw Hill, Whittle-le-Woods, who supplied a location map, and also H. M. Records Offices, and the Lancashire County Libraries, who were able to supply very valuable information.

I would like to place on record, on behalf of the Bicentennial Committee, our appreciation firstly to the writer, for undertaking the project, to Mrs. Mary Hodgson, a parishioner, for the illustration for the front cover, and then to everyone who has in any way contributed to this work.

I sincerely hope that the parishioners of St. Chad's will feel that the efforts in producing this history will prove to have been well worthwhile.

J. T. SHERRINGTON
Chairman, Bicentennial Committee

June, 1991

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CHAPTER I

The Early Days - The First Priest

THE earliest priest one can find to have served this district was a priest with a Saxon name. He was Father Ughfried and he is mentioned as being stationed at Brindle in 1123. He travelled around saying Mass and attending to the religious needs of the people. The places where Mass was said were called stations, and the first station to be mentioned in Heapey was in the year 1533.

There is, however, strong evidence to prove that this church existed long before this date. The Victoria History of Lancashire states that in 1276 Wheelton was part of the huge estates of the Abbey at Whalley and the Sherburnes of Stonyhurst. Sir Thomas Quetton, from whom Wheelton derives its name, was the chief tenant and made provision for the priest visiting the area. He provided a chapel, and as Heapey then came under the Wheelton district, it is safe to assume that the church mentioned in 1533 is the same one.

In the year 1539, three years after the first act of the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII, the lands belonging to Whalley Abbey were confiscated and sold to Sir Richard Hoghton. Ten years later, during the reign of Edward VI, the church at Heapey was confiscated for being used for 'superstitious practices'. The saying of Holy Mass, displaying statues, and other religious articles, came under this heading. Not many people wanted to buy the building when it was put up for sale, for fear of being classed as sympathisers, and it was eventually sold for one pound five shillings and eight-pence.

CHAPTER II

Brindle and Whittle-le-Woods

WHEN William the Norman conquered England, Brindle formed part of the Parish of Leyland. At a subsequent period, prior to Henry VIII, it was made into a separate or independent parish. Not far from where the Manor House of Brindle stood, now known as Denham Hall, there is a spring of water. The well-known historian of those times, Dr. Kuerden, says in his notes *"It rushes straight upwards into the midst of a fayre fountain, walled square about in stone and flagged in the bottom, very transparent to be seen, and a strong stream issuing out of the same"*.

This spring was, and is known as St. Helen's Well, where again according to Dr. Kuerden *"The Catholics of this district assembled to celebrate Mass"*. The faithful came from Brindle and Whittle-le-Woods. An interesting custom used to occur on St. Helen's Day at the well. The Catholics would assemble there for Mass, and afterwards throw pins into the well as a symbol of 'pinning their Faith' in the Catholic Church. This expression of course is in common use to this day.

In 1228 a gentleman named Edmund Fitton paid 2d. a year rent to the Abbey of Whalley for an ox-gang of land. (An ox-gang is a measure of land as much as an oxen can plough in a year). He had also to provide for priests visiting this area. It was around about this time that the Monks from Stanlaw Abbey set up a House at Brinscall at a place called Munshull, now known as Monks Hill.

CHAPTER III

The Reformation

DURING the reign of Henry VIII the lands belonging to the Abbey at Whalley were confiscated; later the Catholic Churches were confiscated, and Catholic priests had to fulfil their calling in secrecy. When Elizabeth I became Queen of England, and later when James I became King, the persecution had reached its intensity. Jesuit priests travelled the area celebrating Holy Mass at places which were called stations. Obviously news had to be passed around where Mass was next to be said. One of the methods used was to lay the week's washing on the hedges outside the house where Mass was to be said.

One of the priests who travelled this area was the great martyr St. Edmund Arrowsmith. Many places are associated with him, and it was on one of his visits to this district that he was taken prisoner. He was captured on Brindle Moss, whilst on his way to visit friends living at Wicken Hall, Withnell in 1628. He was taken to Lancaster Castle for trial before Justice Yelverton on the charge of 'being a Romish priest'. He was hung, drawn and quartered at Lancaster in 1628 at Lancaster Castle.

Wheulton and Withnell Catholics were closely related and both used to attend the Church at Heapey, which I have mentioned before, so it would seem obvious that during his many visits to his friends, this great Martyr would attend to the needs of the people of South Hill.

The people from South Hill, Heapey, Brinscall, Withnell, up to the opening of the present St. Chad's Church, used to bury their dead in Brindle churchyard. Crosses were erected by the wayside where the burial party would rest on their way to Brindle. Prayers were said and sometimes Mass would be celebrated. One such cross was erected in a place then called Cophildhurst, now called Higher Copthurst. No trace can be found of the cross but it is likely to have been destroyed or altered during the time of Cromwell. Weeping stones were also placed by the road side. On these, the coffins were placed whilst the bearers rested. One such stone can still be seen on the right hand side of the road about 150 yards from Lower Copthurst Bridge on the road to Brindle. On this stone is a large cross, and round the side some inscriptions can be seen, but not deciphered. Another stone was also by the side of Black Lion Brow, but during the reconstruction of the road the stone was removed and all trace of it was lost. However, two Holy water fonts were rescued from oblivion by Father Nickson and placed at the front of St. Chad's Presbytery. Removed again by thieves since.

In 1349, during the reign of Henry III, the great plague swept across England killing one and a half million people. Common graves were dug and mass burials took place to cope with the great number of dead. This area must have suffered greatly. Just after World War II such a common grave was unearthed in Brindle churchyard. According to a reliable witness, approximately fifty bodies were laid side by side forming a wall of bones three or four feet high. The bones were taken up and re-buried around the graveyard wall.

There is an interesting item concerning Edmund Campion, now St. Edmund. In 1581 during his visit to Lancashire, Father Campion said Mass at Eastertide in Denham Hall. The residents then at the Hall were the Burgess Family who previously had resided at Towneley hall, Burnley, where Mr. Burgess was bailiff to the Townleys. Mr. Burgess made the famous 'Martyrs' Altar'. The family moved to Denham Hall when it became too dangerous to stay at Towneley Hall where Mass was said regularly. In 1611 the Burgess Family moved to Wood End Farm in Clayton-le-Woods taking the altar with them. Two martyrs used the altar there, Father Edmund Arrowsmith and Father John Woodcock. Thomas Burgess was instrumental in the building of St. Bede's Church by purchasing the land in 1794 on which St. Bede's was eventually built in 1824. There was a chapel on the land in 1794 in a private house.

CHAPTER IV

St. Helen's Well and Brindle Mission

WHEN the Catholic churches were confiscated during the 'Reformation', other places of worship had to be found for the faithful Catholics. Mass was said in many secret places, and one such place was St. Helen's Well.

In the mid 17th century there resided at Denham Hall, Brindle, a family by the name of Gerrard. They were wealthy people and they obtained property at Houghton which eventually became known as Houghton House. When their property became too heavily taxed to retain, the Brindle Gerrards moved to St. Helen's Well, where they provided a place for Mass to be said. A Jesuit priest by the name of John Penketh or Birkett was at that time, c. 1699 and in subsequent years, the mission priest. The Gerrards retained their faith and the name is still well-known in this district.

Fr. Birkett or Penketh S.J., can almost be called the father of the present South-Hill parish. He was born into an ancient Catholic family of Penketh's who acquired considerable estates at Acton and Bridge in Trafford. After studying at St. Omer's College he was eventually ordained priest at the English College in Rome in the year 1656. In 1666 he was sent on the English mission to his native country, the county of Lancashire. After many years great work he was arrested by a Justice of the Peace who had received many favours from Fr. Birkett. According to the report of the arrest, Fr. Birkett was journeying to a remote village, Wheelton, where his ministrations were desired. He was detained at the house of the Justice of the Peace, and ultimately sent to the Lancaster Castle, where he was tried at the Spring Assizes under the indictment, 'for having taken Holy Orders in foreign parts and returning to this country against the statute of 27 Elizabeth'. He was offered his freedom if he would renounce his faith and priesthood. This he refused to do, and consequently was condemned to death. Through the influence of friends his execution was postponed. There is some confusion as to where this great priest died. Some chroniclers state that he died in 1701, whilst still at the mission at St. Helen's Well, and others say he died in captivity at Lancaster Castle. This latter would seem the more likely, because in the Castle burial register is this record:

1680, 25th Dec. Mr. Birkett, a prisoner

One thing about which the chroniclers agree is that Fr. Birkett died a wealthy man, having come from a wealthy family.

While in gaol at Lancaster, Fr. Birkett wrote many letters. One dated February 1678 says among other things, and I use the original writings:

"My trustie for the houses and grounds was James Gerrard, late of Wheelton, (died 1728) deceased. Nowe the power remains in his executors, viz. Birgett his wyfe, yong William Boardman of Winell (a protestant) and John Whittle of Wheelton, catholique. Some fewe od things as bed, chests, books, etc., are inventoried and inclosed with the leases etc. in a box committed to the custodie of Robert Shephard (of Sefton) or John Whittle of Wheelton."

The letter goes on and finishes:

*"My last will and testament - and to remember my poor soule.
This is my owne voluntarie act I have hereunto put my hand the
day and yeare above written.*

John Birkett"

Fr. Birkett also left approximately four hundred pounds, a princely sum in those days, for the improvements of the mission at St. Helen's Well. It is interesting to look through the lists of Recusants of this and later periods, names of people who no doubt have descendants living in the present Parish of St. Chad's. Recusants were classed as 'Papists' and 'Fanaticks' by men of affairs at that time. The following letter was written by Sir George Downing, after whom Downing Street is called:

"Sir,

I have acquainted the Lords commissioners of the Treasury with yours to me of the 21st instant, and it hath been read in the presence of his Majestie, and his Majestie directs that you doe attend Mr. Attorney Generall with the names of all Recusants of whom convictions are returned into the Exchequer with their respective qualitties and places of abode.

Sir,

Your very affectionate humble servant,

G. Downing.

22nd June 1671"

The fine was uniformly £20 per month for each adult, except one half for a wife. The number of convictions listed on August 18th 1671 in Lancashire was 5,496. Listed Recusants in Whittle-le-Woods were: Richard Cowper,

husbandman and his wife Elizabeth; Alice, wife of John Morris; Hellen, wife of Hugh Tootel; Thomas Garstang, yeoman, his wife Elizabeth; John Hilton, carpenter; Anna, his wife; Janet Cocker; William Astley; William Pope, husbandman; Agnes Hughes; John Garstage, husbandman; James Garstage; Elizabeth Melling.

Recusants in Wheelton were John Whittle, Junior, husbandman; Dorothy Whittle; John Whittle, yeoman; his wife Anna; Richard Whittle; Oliver Whittle; Roger Worsley; John Breares; Hellen Breares; Henry Blackledge and his wife Anna; Margaret Blackledge; Lawrence Oram; his wife Jamma; Isabel Hilton; William Breares, tailor; James Critchloe, husbandman and his wife Emma; John Critchloe; Hellen Critchloe; Anna Simpson; John Simpson; Mary Simpson; Bridget Gerrard; Alice Wilkinson; John High, husbandman; his wife Margaret; John Hilton, husbandman, and his wife Katherine.

Recusants in Heapey were Lawrence Worthington and his wife Jana; Alice Worthington; John Pearson, blacksmith, and his wife Margaret; Margery Blackledge; Evan Pierson, blacksmith; Robert Brothurst and his wife Grace; William Charnock; Robert Martin and his wife Margaret.

Recusants in Brindle. The name Gerrard appears no less than 9 times. Garstangs, Sharrocks, Blackledge, Bateson, Walmesly, Waring, Hilton, Livesey, Clayton. These are the names which appear most often in the Brindle list. But the name most closely connected with the Mission at St. Helen's Well, was the name Cowpe, Coupe, or Coop. More will be written concerning this family.

List of Recusants in Reign of Charles II

1 Bedford	077.
2 Bucks	095.
3 Berks	085.
4 Cambridg	075.
5 Huntingdon	034.
6 Dorset	041.
7 Essex	096.
8 Hertford	031.
9 Lancashire	5496.
10 Leic	1855.
11 London	052.
12 Middlesex	052.
13 Surrey	010.
14 Devon	042.
15 Norfolk	041.
16 Newcastle	077.
17 Somerset	00.
18 Suffolk	020.
19 Stafford	068.
20 South Devon	024.
21 Sussex	025.
22 Wilts	028.
23 Lanc	025.

10236

1 Isle of Wight
2 Chester County
3 Chester City
4 Cornwall
5 Cumberland
6 Derby
7 Durham
8 Gloucester County
9 Gloucester City
10 Gloucester City
11 Bristol City
12 Hereford County
13 Leicester
14 Lincoln
15 Monmouth
16 Northampton
17 Nottingham
18 Northampton
19 Oxford
20 Rutland
21 Salop

22 Warwick
23 Worcester
24 Westmoreland
25 Wiltshire
26 Wales

That Account as to the principal charge: stands this,

Bedford	04770.
Bucks	07440.
Berks	05100.
Cambridg	05100.
Huntingdon	02240.
Dorset	02240.
Essex	04000.
Hertford	02980.
Leic	112140.
Lanc	7049640.
London	04600.
Middlesex	00950.
Surrey	00040.
Devon	02760.
Stafford	02760.
Newcastle	1540.

In All
277090.

So that

In these 23 Counties & Cities
wherin any Recusants are
Certified into the Book
it may be observed.

1. That none of the Recusants are here mentioned except for Earl of Banbury in Middlesex, whose conversion is taken once legally discharged by a plea of conformity.
2. Very few of the considerable Recusants in England, it being very rare throughout all the Book to meet with the Addition of Knight or Esq.
3. It is not certain by this Book that all the Recusants have mentioned are Papists, but probably many of them are Separatists.
4. It is more than probable that the Number of Recusants in these Counties from whence no Conversions are Certified may at least Equally if not Exceed the Number Certified.
5. The same Names are many times repeated in several places it probably may be the same persons.
6. Seeing by Law the penalty of Recusancy runs on for ever after the first Commission till conformity, it may be worth the Labour to compute how much one may the Conversions Certified do amount to as they now stand upon Law and from thence will may reasonably conclude that there is more than 100000 Recusants due to the King, from Recusations being left that Recusants etc. most of these four or five years standing or more.

CHAPTER V Fr. Birkett's Fund

THE fund left by Fr. Birkett S.J., towards the establishment on a firmer basis of the Jesuit Mission at St. Helen's Well, was first utilized by a priest by the name of Thomas Eccleston, alias Holland during the lull in persecution at the accession of James II to the throne, by the erection of a chapel at Brindle. Fr. Eccleston S.J. was one of the Ecclestons of Eccleston Hall. He came to Lancashire in 1677 and served this district until November 25th, 1698, when he died still in charge of the mission at the age of 55.

With the revolution breaking out soon after the erection of this chapel, little use was made of it. In 1715 after the Jacobite rebellion in Scotland and Northern England, 'The commissioners for forfeited estates, and estates given to superstitious uses' came to Preston. The Reformation was in full swing again, and on the 23rd June 1718, the protestant curate of Brindle swore before the commission.

"That the house in which Thomas Coop (Coupe or Cowpe) inhabited was built in the latter end of the reign of James II for a Popish chapel, and had often been used as such, and that Thomas Coop paid no rent to any person except to Mr. Richardson, a reputed Popish priest."

Fr. Richardson S.J., a Lancashire man, succeeded Fr. Eccleston in 1698, as the mission priest. On July 7th, 1718, Thomas Coop was brought before the Commission and was examined on oath concerning his house. He gave evidence that:

"The house in which he lived was built as a Mass House by one Holland (Eccleston) a priest, and was by him used as such during his life; that the ground where on the same stands is said to belong to Mr. Gerrard, and that he, this Thomas Coop, hath lived in the same house some 20 years, and that he hath not paid any rent for same, nor has any person ever demanded from him."

The Commissioners seized the property, and Mr. Evan Gerrard of Brindle, whose family had owned the land for generations, and in whose name it stood, was afraid to claim it for fear of being fined and or imprisoned. It could have been purchased for a comparatively trifling sum, but no one dared. The

confiscated house remained unoccupied until 1734, when it was converted into a workhouse. The bell, after remaining buried for many years, was dug up and sold to Eccleston Chapel, and the proceeds handed over for the benefit of the house and chapel at Slate-Delph, Wheelton. The altar rails were also removed to Slate-Delph. After the confiscation of his church, Fr. Richardson opened another chapel in the district, very likely at Wood-End, Clayton-le-Woods, and continued to serve the mission until his death on September 12th, 1728, aged 66.

The Coupes eventually became quite important people in the district. They began a dye works and the place they used for stewing the wood bark to obtain dye is still known as the 'stew yard'.

Brindle Workhouse, or what remains of it, can be seen to this day. It stands on the north east side of Denham Hill at the junction of Top o'lane and Walmsley Fold. The lane in which it stands is still called Workhouse Lane.

There are varying reports as to the exact location of St. Helen's Well. The farmhouse is still in use and inhabited. The exact position of the well can be reached by crossing the open land, known as the Stew Yard, Whittle-le-Woods, up to the canal and after crossing a stile proceeding along a footpath which runs parallel to the canal. Doubling back into the fields, one comes to a natural depression in the land and is surrounded by willows and the like. Here there is a grotto-like construction, substantially built, upon which are some inscriptions, unfortunately not decipherable. Since the building of the M61 the site cannot now be located.

CHAPTER VI

Slate Delph, Wheelton

IN 1729, from a deed dated May 1st of that year, a yeoman by the name of William Blackledge and his son, sold to Mathew Talbot of Wheelton, and to Anne Richardson "a small parcel of land in his field, with the privilege of the use of the upper room or garret of his house for a chapel, beside some other privileges". This was Slate Delph and the property was purchased with the money left by Fr. Birkett for such a use. Previous to the purchase of this property, Mass was said in the house of William Blackledge, known as Wall Croft, now occupied by another Catholic family, the Noblets.

In the year 1870 a chronicler by the name of Hewitson reported that:

"Mr. Robert Blackledge of High-field House, Brindle, a Catholic, has in his possession several very ancient Catholic vestments, the history of which cannot be made out, but which were probably used in a private chapel connected with some of his ancestors. One of the vestments is very ancient from the character of the embroidery upon it. It is evidently 500 or 600 years old. Mr. Blackledge has also in his possession a pewter chalice and paten, but these are of more recent make, and tally with the style used in 1720 when a close eye was kept on church property, and when, by way of keeping 'hands off', it was necessary to make sacred vessels of common metal. It is known that the Blackledges lived at Wallcroft certainly in 1590 and probably before. The Blackledges owned property on the eminence opposite, this being Slate-Delph, Wheelton."

So it would seem that Mass was said at Slate-Delph as far back as 1270. The house at Slate Delph is still standing and in use. It can be reached by a narrow soil lane branching off the Wheelton - Brinscall road at the bottom of Briers Brow.

The next priest to serve the mission was Father George Palmer, S.J., who came from Eccleston in the year 1730. He served the mission until he returned to Eccleston in 1748. His place was taken by Father Cornelius Morphy, S.J., who was the Father Superior at that time of all Jesuits serving in Lancashire. By this appointment it would seem that this mission was considered to be an important one. There is an amusing occurrence relating to this Irish priest. The Church was still persecuted and gangs of priest catchers roamed the



Slate Delph, Wheelton - where St. Edmund Arrowsmith celebrated Mass

countryside hoping to apprehend priests for the reward relating to their capture. A gang of such men heard of the presence of Fr. Morphy at Slate Delph and came there to capture him. Several of his parishioners hearing of this attempt, hid themselves behind a hedge leading to Slate Delph church, being determined that if Fr. Morphy should be captured, to rescue him or lose their lives at the hands of the gang. The priest catchers found Fr. Morphy at home but they did not capture him. As the recording says of the incident:

"Fr. Morphy using his national aptitude for soothing conversation, softened the hearts of the priest catchers, they going away empty handed."

The good Father's friends, still hiding behind the hedge, heard the fellows laying the blame on each other for not bringing him away, and so they remained until the gang had gone.

Fr. Cornelius Morphy S.J. left the mission in 1748 - 49 and was replaced by a son of the grand Catholic family of Gillibrands of Gillibrand Hall, Chorley. His name was Fr. William Gillibrand, S.J., and he came to Slate Delph in 1749 and opened a boarding school there, which was attended by boys from Liverpool and other parts of Lancashire. During Fr. Gillibrand's time at Slate-Delph, a son of the Coupe's of Brindle was born at South Hill in 1754. He came from the family who had lived at that confiscated church opened by Fr. Richardson. This boy was named Thomas Jerome, and eventually became Dom Thomas Jerome Coupe, O.S.B. Previous to him two more locally born children were later to become priests, namely John Anselm Bolton, who later became Dom Anselm Bolton, O.S.B. He was born at South Hill in 1735. Also George Clarkson, born 1739, about whom more will be written.

Fr. Gillibrand remained at Slate Delph until December 1763 when the mission and school were taken over by a second Fr. Richardson, S.J. He was credited in 1767 with a congregation of 295 in the report of the Bishop of Chester, who puts him down as resident at Heapey-cum-Wheelton, in the Parish of Leyland. Fr. Richardson gave up the boarding school and removed to Ellingham, in Northumberland about 1772. He was succeeded at Slate Delph by Fr. James Le Motte alias Lancaster, S.J. a Lancashire man who came shortly before his death there on September 17th 1772 aged 60 years.

CHAPTER VII

South Hill

FOLLOWING the passing of the Relief Act in 1791 which allowed Catholics to build churches, Fr. George Clarkson wasted no time in purchasing land at South Hill. He arranged with an architect Mr. Ashton to draw plans for a church on the site, and work commenced immediately. Stone was brought from as far away as Accrington. The building ran from east to west. It was galleried to provide more room. The position of the windows and door can be seen from the graveyard. One of the main benefactors was Mr. Blackledge of Wallcroft Farm, Wheelton. A plaque was erected in the church in his honour and remained on the east wall near the sanctuary. It remained there until it was removed during the time that Fr. Pilson was parish priest. The plaque can be seen on the wall of the 'barn' at the top of the graveyard. Parishioners must have been buried near to and on the south (Chorley) side of the church because during the restoration work after the fire of 1959, many human bones were exhumed from under the main body of the present building. In 1793 Bishop Gibson confirmed 110 people, and by the year 1812 Fr. Clarkson S.J. found it necessary to enlarge the church. He extended the church further to the east. He was not able to continue his work, for in the following year, in 1813, aged 74 he died. He was the first priest to be buried in the vault in the churchyard.

South Hill, Whittle-le-Woods, was part of the Leyland Parish at the time of the first building. The Leyland Parish also included Euxton, Cuerden, Clayton-le-Woods, Whittle-le-Woods, Hoghton, Withnell, Wheelton and Heapey. St. Chad's took over as the main chapel of the area encompassing Heapey, Wheelton, Brinscall, Withnell and Anglezarke. It is important, when thinking of these times, to realise the conditions the parishioners had to endure in order to attend church, and likewise the hardship endured by the priests travelling in the parish. There were mud-tracks for roads, hedges and copses touching and still the fear of being victimised for being a Catholic. When we think that in present times the Second World War is spoken of as being only yesterday, so it was in 1791. It was only 46 years previously that saw the start of the Jacobite rebellion. This area of Lancashire contained many supporters of the Jacobite cause, and Catholics in general were regarded with suspicion. Nevertheless the parish continued to increase and another Jesuit priest Fr. Francis Massie became parish priest in 1813. It was during his time at South Hill that in 1819 a child was born at Brinscall Hall and christened Daniel Henry Haigh. He was born an Anglican, but eventually at Oxford University, when

becoming an important member of the Tractarian movement, he became a Catholic. He was a man of great learning, and was the chief authority on Runic inscriptions. He founded a Benedictine House at Erdington in Warwickshire. It is more than likely that he became co-founder with Newman of the Oratory School. Father Massie died in 1822, and was succeeded by Fr. John Weston. He left in 1828 to become Chaplain at the estate of Marmaduke Middleton, Esq. of Stockheld Park in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The appointment must have been an important one, as a regular visitor to the house was Mary, Duchess of Norfolk. Some sort of exchange must have taken place, for in 1828 from Stockheld Park came a 'Wigan' man, Fr. John Fairclough, S.J. He served the parish until his death in November 1832. He was only 45 when he died and is buried in the vault.

The next parish priest was a Somerset man from Stone Easton. He was Fr. John Beaumont S.J. He arrived on November 26th 1832 and died at Clitheroe in 1857 aged 70 years. During his time at South Hill a chapel was opened at Weld Bank by Fr. George Gibson in 1847. Fr. Gibson was moved to Hornby to succeed the great historian Rev. John Lingard D.D. Fr. Beaumont was the last S.J. to serve the parish. On the wall in the middle porch of the church is a sampler of the original church. It was found in an attic in a moth-eaten condition. Having been gifted to the church, Fr. Songhurst had it carefully restored. It gives some idea of the size and shape. It was possibly because of the small size that the next priest to serve at St. Chad's, Fr. James Berry in 1857, immediately began improvements on the building which must have been badly needed. A chronicler of the time describes the church as having an "inconvenient, ungainly interior." The main body of the church was added, and the sanctuary, thus becoming cruciform. By the time Fr. Berry died in 1867 the building was taking on the shape as it is now.

Fr. John Doherty became parish priest in 1867 and continued the improvement of the church by having a tower built on the south side of the building which, according to the same chronicler "was strong and dull looking, has a heavy pepper castor top, containing a quantity of massive belt arrangements, which, when seen in operation from a distance, with the lever wheel moving, looks for all the world like the head gearing of a colliery." Fr. Doherty died in 1872 and was buried in the vault. Vandalism is not peculiar to the present time, for it was during this time that the cross, which had been erected over the priests' burial vault, was broken off half-way. A new cross was added and it is quite easy to see the new piece. Part of the original cross is on the wall of the barn in the graveyard. It would appear that Fr. Doherty was assisted in the last

year of his life by Fr. Thomas Tobin who arrived at the parish in 1871. The chronicler Hewitson visited the church in 1872 and the following is his account:

"About two miles east of Whittle, up a narrow and circuitous road, I came upon St. Chad's South Hill. It is a strong and complex stone building and stands on the side of a hill. The tower contains a good sounding bell, also a clock which for hours on the day of our visit stood at 25 minutes to seven." (Some things never change - my words).

"The site of the chapel is excellent. It commands a beautiful view of the wild undulating mountainous land east-ward; Chorley, with its spires and factory chimneys sits pleasantly in a long hollow to the south, about two and a half miles distant; and westwards there is opened up an expansive plateau, varied with towns, villages and farmsteads and bordered at the outer rim with the Irish Sea. The building which is dedicated to St. Chad has now a capacious and imposing interior; the only drawback being the heterogeneousness of architectural detail; the place looks like three or four little chapels of different proportions rolled into one building. Barring this the interior is good. The church has a beautiful sanctuary, is richly decorated in many parts, and has a profusion of stained glass windows. The chancel walls are draped in gold, green and amber; the altar is massive and handsome. Above and at the rear of the altar is an exquisitely stained three light window to the memory of Robert and Mary Blackledge; to the right there is another richly stained glass window bearing at the bottom of it the names of James Spencer, William Walmsley and Hugh Walmsley; to the left, a window of similar proportions and well stained; has at its base the names of William Rainford and John Roscoe. Nearly all the windows in the body of the church are stained and of the memorial kind, the chief being in the side walls towards the south of the edifice. Here on one side there are a couple of large choicely coloured windows, put up by John Withnell Esq., to the memory of his Aunt - Alice Spencer, who died in 1843, and his Aunt - Ellen Bullen, who died during the same year. On the opposite side are two windows of the same size, artistic in treatment and fine in general tone; one of them was erected by

Robert Blackledge Esq., in memory of his sister Elizabeth; the other is to the memory of the Revs. George Clarkson, Francis Massey, John Weston, John Fairclough, and John Beaumont. Between these two windows is a mural tablet to the memory of the Blackledge family of Wheelton.

This church has an east and west transept, galleried, with a gallery at the south end, it will accommodate 500 persons, and has an average attendance of about 400. There are about 500 Catholics in South Hill district and they are principally working people - people employed in the mills, in agriculture, etc. There was a numerous and very orderly congregation during our visit, and it embraced few of those angularities and oddities which might be expected in an out-of-the-way hillside-country like this. A few large umbrellas, large enough to sleep in, and two or three ancient bonnets and ancestral waistcoats could probably have been picked out, excluding these, everything was regular, correct and conventional, and there was an earnestness in the general devotion worthy of all commendation. The singing of the choir was excellent, and the organ playing was good.

The priest stationed here is the Rev. Thomas Tobin. He is an Irish gentleman, has all the brisk brogue of one, and is a very homely priest. His immediate predecessor was the Rev. Fr. Doherty - a blithesome peculiar soul, with a liking for hunting horses, agricultural shows, meetings and other things. Father Tobin came from Liverpool (where he had laboured earnestly for about twenty years) in November 1871. He is a middle aged gentleman, with a full round face, and a little patch of sandy hair in the dimple of his chin. As a preacher he is earnest in style, but says "dearly beloved brethren" a little too often. In the sermon we heard him preach, he used the phrase 47 times, and we hope it did the congregation some good. Father Tobin is a man of good, social qualities, he is pleasant in disposition, pacific in temperament, has a fair stock of foresight and shrewdness, and he will live on contented terms with all about him. Contiguous to the church, there is the presbytery, plain in style of architecture. On the eastern side there stands a very superior looking school, belonging to the mission; and it has an average attendance of about 70 children."



School Photograph - Four generations ago - approx 1895



Interior of St. Chad's Church at time of Father Holden - 1900



St. Chad's School taken about 1918

That completes Mr. Hewitson's report on St. Chad's in 1872. Fr. Tobin continued to serve the districts of Whittle-le-Woods, Wheelton, Heapey, Withnell and Brinscall. Due to the increase in the number of parishioners and the difficulties involved ministering to such a large area, it became necessary to open another church. It was therefore, in 1884 on June 22nd that Fr. Tobin laid the foundation stone of a church in Withnell dedicated to St. Joseph.

In the summer of 1888 this industrious priest went to Ireland for a holiday. Sadly he became ill and was unable to resume his ministry at St. Chad's. He died in Ireland on November 6th 1888 aged 70.

In November 1888 there came to St. Chad's a priest who was much loved and respected by parishioners and people of other denominations. This was Fr. George Holden. He came from a family of some wealth which he used to improve the church. But his main asset was his wonderfully pleasant manner, sense of humour and compassion. He set about improving the interior of the church by extending the sanctuary to its present shape which was previously semi-circular. Behind and above the altar was erected a magnificent crucifixion scene of the figures of Christ, crucified, Our Lady and St. John. Above the altar was an elaborate and beautifully carved reredos of oak. The wings of the altar consisted of an arrangement of St. Chad's crosses of pink and white marble. A lady altar was erected in the east transept and a christening font in the nave. Outside the church, steps were built both east and west of the church to replace the original entrance which was originally between the church and school. The original lych gate can still be seen.

Fr. Holden completed the construction of the presbytery and vestries, which more or less completed the main improvements. On the completion of the building work a census was taken, and the number of parishioners was returned as 768. As has been stated earlier, he was much respected by all denominations. He formed a very strong friendship with the vicar of St. Barnabas's Church at Heapey, Rev. Mr. Reynard, thus becoming an early supporter of ecumenism. He was frequently seen about the parish on his bicycle which he used until very late in his life. He suffered from ill health later in this period, and was obviously in great discomfort when saying Mass or Benediction. I had the privilege of serving at his last Mass before he died. After saying Mass he had difficulty in arising from the altar steps after saying "Prayers after Mass." He collapsed onto the vestry table and he died on January 5th 1936. A number of parishioners and priests from many parishes packed the church at his funeral, and a great sense of



Father Holden, Parish Priest 1914



St. Chad's Schoolboys F.C. 1922

Our Parish Church
in the 1930s



School Hockey Team about 1932

loss was felt in the area amongst young and old. He was laid to rest in the vault in the graveyard. I was able to go into the vault and see the coffins of the previous parish priests. It was a somewhat disturbing experience for a young boy.

Fr. Holden was followed as parish priest by Fr. Vincent Nickson in 1936. An academic at Ushaw College, he was ordained at English Martyrs Church, Preston, in 1919. One of the first things he did was to organise fund raising for a memorial to Fr. Holden. The memorial was in the form of a figure of Christ crucified which is to be seen at the front of the church. He arranged the parishioners into Guilds, St. Anne, Children of Mary, St. Agnes and St. Joseph. Various appropriate banners were purchased and used at the many processions on feast days. During his ministry the church porch was improved, the steps at the front of the church and the churchyard were also improved. The outstanding event for which Father Nickson will be most remembered was the introduction of the ceremony in honour of Our Lady, which has come to be known as 'Roses Sunday'. This ceremony has continued for over 50 years. There were some raised eyebrows amongst the men of the parish when they were asked to carry flowers to the church on a Sunday afternoon in late summer, and then place them on the altar of Our Lady. In those days it was not looked upon as a very manly thing to do, it was the ladies job to carry flowers, and I remember my father walking to church carrying his flowers behind his back. However things were to change dramatically, when at 3 o'clock on the first Sunday afternoon, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Tommy Cowburn collapsed and died at the top of the church steps carrying his bunch of roses to Our Lady. There was never any more embarrassment about carrying flowers again.

During this period, Father Nickson also erected a new magnificent pulpit and a new baptistry. One of the most controversial improvements was the replacement of the crosses of St. Chad at the sides of the altar, by the plain slabs of marble now there. There can be no doubt that as an organiser and worker for the church Father Nickson had no superior. He died suddenly whilst on visit to Carlisle in March 1952, and he is buried in the vault in the churchyard.

Father Pilson was the next priest to arrive in 1952. A late vocation ordained at Upholland College in 1932. He had a memorial tablet placed on the burial cross in memory of Father Nickson. His main immediate problem was how to raise extra money for the recently introduced



Father Nickson's Silver Jubilee Celebrations - August 1944



Father Nickson with the 'Children of Mary'

Father Frank Ellison's Ordination Class





St. Chad's Sale of Work - November 1955



Interior of St. Chad's Church,
up to the time of the fire
in 1959.

From sorrow to joy -
After the fire of 1959

education fund. An extra collection of one shilling was taken at the end of each Mass and there were some grumbles about that princely sum. Father Pilson was something of a visionary insofar that he forecast the drug epidemic, abortion and even euthanasia. His main achievement was to come in 1959. Parishioners arriving for the 8 o'clock Mass on Sunday March 8th that year, on a day when a bitterly cold east wind was blowing, were met by the sight of fire engines and smoke billowing from the roof of the church. By 9 o'clock most of the roof had collapsed, the organ, the magnificent reredos, the parquet floor in the sanctuary, the benches, the wooden altar rails, the oil painted stations of the cross, it seemed as though everything was burning. By late morning many of the men of the parish were trying to salvage what could be saved, such as statues, candelabra, etc. The two silver perpetual light holders were destroyed and other altar fittings.

Amongst the men who were seen working in the church was the Vicar of St. Barnabas' Church, Heapey, Rev. Loxham. With sleeves rolled up, he worked as hard as anyone. Mass was arranged to be said in the school and the club. Various offers were made for alternate places, the parishioners of Wheelton and Heapey Church of England offered both St. Paul's Church in Wheelton and St. Barnabas' Church, Heapey. The offers were gratefully declined as it was found that the school could be utilised as a suitable place for Mass. A fund raising Committee was quickly set up, and this Committee became very active indeed in raising money for the restoration fund, including door to door collections on a weekly basis. Other monies poured in from all over the world, America, Australia, Europe and Ireland, and also from other denominations. Following the fire it was found that the buildings were under-insured, but nevertheless within eighteen months the church was re-roofed and re-built inside. New floor coverings, a newly designed sanctuary, organ and double-glazed windows. Fortunately the stained glass windows which Father Pilson had installed in the east and west transepts and the other stained glass windows had survived the fire. New stations of the Cross were made in Liverpool. These were paid for by parish families and the names of some of these families are to be seen in the inner porch, but other families who donated wished to remain anonymous. Evidence of the fire can still be seen as burn marks on the church benches.

During the re-flooring of the church, numerous human bones were unearthed from under the nave of the church which would seem to



Crowning the Statue of Our Lady - May Devotions, about 1960

St. Chad's Parish Youth Club presented Aladdin in 1960



indicate that this is where the first graveyard was. It is not generally known, but Father Pilson told a few of us that when he first discovered that the church was on fire, his first thoughts were for the Blessed Sacrament. He could not walk and see where he was going because of the smoke, so he crawled towards the altar, finding his way by touch. When he finally reached the sanctuary suddenly the smoke lifted and he was able to see the Tabernacle. He was then able to collect the chalice and ciboria. Not wishing this action of his to be construed as anything out of the ordinary, he suggested that nothing should be made of it, and up until now his wish has been respected.

Another new innovation took place during Father Pilson's ministry, and that was the introduction of Lay Readers on Sundays at the 10.15 a.m. Mass. We started off with two Readers, but this eventually increased to three in number, all men. As one can imagine traditions die hard, as they say, in a parish as old as ours, and it took some time before the parishioners could become used to seeing a Layman standing at the lectern.

Father Pilson was a much respected and loved priest and it was with great sadness to himself and his parishioners, when due to ill health, he retired to Liverpool, where he died some years later.

Father George Songhurst was the priest chosen to succeed Father Pilson and he put St. Chad's on the map. Small in stature, but by no means vocally, he was a member of the B.B.C. religious team, a wonderful preacher and communicator. Anyone who heard his sermons could not help but be impressed by his eloquence. This little country church became more widely known in this country and abroad through the B.B.C. radio broadcasts which have taken place over the years. These have included People's Services, Midnight Mass with His Lordship Bishop Harris, the then Auxiliary in Liverpool taking part, and a broadcast on World Service which brought acknowledgements and appreciation letters from amongst other places the U.S.A. and South Africa.

In the autumn of 1971 Father Songhurst, representing the older Parish priests and a Father Smith representing the younger curates, visited Ars in Central France for a week, during which time they portrayed their respective views on the lifestyle of the Cure D'Ars. This film was subsequently shown on T.V. on at least three occasions.

During the time of Father Songhurst's ministry at St. Chad's, he also made alterations to the church, including the building of a new inner porch

at the rear; this was erected for the benefit of families and children to use during services and over the years has proved to be a great asset.

The next milestone in Father Songhurst's ministry was when the parishioners realised that he was about to celebrate his 40th Jubilee as a priest. So it was arranged for His Lordship Bishop Gray, the then Auxiliary in Liverpool to be the Chief Concelebrant at the 10.15 a.m. Mass on a Sunday. Along with many visiting priests, all was set for a wonderful occasion, with the Jubilarian present amongst us all. Sadly for Father Songhurst and his visitors and not least his parishioners, on the eve of the celebrations Father was struck down with illness and was confined to bed, unable to move. It was decided to continue with the planned celebrations, and so we all assembled at Mass on the Jubilee Day to join His Lordship and the other priests at Mass. In order that Father could at least hear the singing in church, the doors between the Church and the Presbytery were allowed to remain open. Many tears were shed that day by all of those who were fortunate enough to be present, the occasion being a very moving one. Not long after that Father Songhurst was forced to retire through ill health, and for many years now, has been hospitalized in Liverpool.

Father Songhurst was followed by a priest not unknown to many parishioners, Father Robert Billington, who had served many years before as a curate at St. Joseph's, Chorley. Father Billington made no secret of the fact that during the time he was a curate at St. Joseph's he always had the ambition to become parish priest of St. Chad's. The parish was indeed lucky as well to be served by such a kind, understanding and gentle man. It is perhaps better not to expand too much as he may well read the comments and become embarrassed, but he can be assured that he is still very much loved, respected and prayed for by his ex-parishioners.

Whilst Father Billington was in the Parish, the organ which had deteriorated needed replacing and a new one was installed. Father was very particular about who should play the new instrument and on some occasions Mr. Bill Snape, parish organist for over fifty years, had virtually to 'vet' those who asked to play at weddings.

At this time the parish was very fortunate in having amongst its parishioners two gentlemen who devoted a lot of their time and energy in maintaining the grounds and the graveyard in good condition, two men



Father George Songhurst with 'Children of Mary' - May 1970



Father Robert Billington,
Parish Priest 1978 - 1990



St. Chad's Club, Bowls Team, 1980

A recent picture of St. Chad's Church, South Hill



who were well-known, Mr. David Shorrock and Mr. William (Bill) Kellett. Alas these two parishioners are no longer with us, having gone to their eternal rest some years ago, but we should be truly thankful to them for all their devoted and unstinting work for the parish. Our good fortune has continued in that respect, because another parishioner Mr. William (Bill) Billington has taken over their mantle. The grounds are in a pristine condition thanks to Mr. Billington.

Reference is made earlier in the history to 'The Reformation' and to a 'Wicken Hall' where St. Edmund Arrowsmith was on his way to visit when he was captured in 1628.

An event took place on the 18th June, 1984, which again is a milestone in the history of the area. On a beautiful summer's evening with the birds singing away in the trees, Father Billington and Father Smith from St. Joseph's, Brinscall, along with other priests from neighbouring parishes, assembled with a large congregation of people from various parishes at a very hallowed site at Old Wicken House, Withnell. This site is on land farmed by the Livesey family for over 350 years. Many of that family still live in the St. Joseph's and St. Chad's Parishes, and in neighbouring Parishes. Mass was concelebrated at this very holy spot, the sermon being preached by the Very Rev. Canon Ripley from Ashton-in-Makerfield. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be present that evening will never forget the great privilege of being able to venerate the Holy Hand of St. Edmund Arrowsmith at a place where he must have trodden on many, many occasions. This was a truly historic occasion for the people of this part of Catholic Lancashire.

Stemming from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the role of the Laity in the Church, Father Billington introduced Lay Ministers of the Eucharist to help on Sundays, a move not wholly accepted in a parish so reluctant to change! But now increasingly seen as a great help.

At the beginning of 1990 rumours abounded that Father Billington was soon to announce his retirement, and it was with genuine sorrow that we heard officially in February that he would be leaving us the following month. His successor, Father Alexander Fleming arrived from Liverpool on 28th March.

Subsequently Father Billington returned to the Parish to celebrate Mass with us, followed by a Social to mark his 40th Anniversary of Ordination,

and to provide an opportunity for parishioners to express their thanks for his devoted work and priestly ministry among us.

And now we welcome Father Fleming who has been with us just over twelve months; may he enjoy a happy and fruitful association with this Parish. No doubt changes will continue to take place, and maybe in another hundred years time, the history for this Bicentennial celebration will be continued by another good parishioner of St. Chad's.

Vocations from the Parish

The Parish of St. Chad's, with its surrounding areas of St. Helen's Well and Slate Delph, has been privileged to have a number of vocations to the Priesthood amongst its parishioners, spanning over 350 years.

In 1607 a parishioner named Oliver Critchlow or Critchley was born. He was on his way to Douai College in 1624 along with his brother William, when he was captured and thrown into the Tower of London. Another brother Richard was also captured on the Thames and was imprisoned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. All these men were eventually ordained at the English College, Rome, and used the alias Foster, because of the difficulties experienced at that time.

Other vocations were to follow from the area including:

Dom John Anselm Bolton, O.S.B. 1735 - 1802.

Dom Thomas Jerome Coupe, O.S.B. 1754.

Dom William Dunstan Garstang, O.S.B. 1736 - 1814.

Father Robert Garstang, who died in 1869.

Father George Clarkson, S.J. 1739 - 1813.

Canon Levin Waring, later Parish Priest of St. Robert's, Catforth, Preston.

Father William Westhead, later Parish Priest of St. Hugh's, Liverpool.

Dom. F. O. Blundell, O.S.B. who was born at Crook Hall.

Dr. Francis G. Ellison, later Parish Priest of St. Peter & Paul's, Mawdesley.

Father Henry Pass, of the Holy Ghost Fathers.

Papal Awards

During the past 35 years the Parish has been honoured by presentations of Papal Awards to some of its parishioners.

In February 1956, Miss Lucy Livesey, a former parishioner, received the 'Bene Merenti Medal' from His Lordship the Bishop of Lancaster, for her services as Housekeeper to successive Parish Priests in the Lancaster Diocese, including The Very Rev. Canon Klomp for many years.

In October 1970, Mr. Tom Sherrington received the 'Bene Merenti Medal' from His Lordship Bishop Gray, at an Anniversary Dinner and Dance held at the Town Hall, Chorley, to mark his distinguished services to the parish over a period of 70 years, as Bell Ringer, Church Collector, School Manager and many other duties.

In 1975 Dr. P. J. J. Wren received the 'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice' from His Lordship Bishop Gray, at a ceremony held at Lisieux Hall, Whittle-le-Woods, for his distinguished services to the mentally handicapped.

In 1985 Dr. Wren was also honoured by being invested with the Papal Knighthood of St. Gregory by His Grace Archbishop Worlock, the investiture taking place at St. Chad's.

In February 1989 Mr. Bill Snape received the 'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice' from Father Billington at St. Chad's, for his distinguished services as Organist and Choirmaster in the parish for over 50 years, and for his work for Catholic education in the area.

ST. CHAD'S.

The poets tell us of the scenes
Of pretty hills and dales,
In England, Scotland, Ireland
And in dear old Wales.

They tell us of great noblemen
And of fair maidens too,
The deeds of sailors long ago,
~~Who were ever staunch and true.~~

These little verses that I write
Are not of any fame,
But of our little country Church
With St. Chad's for its name.

It does not boast a martyr's grave,
Or a famous saintly shrine,
But often we can hear the hymn—
"Sweet Sacrament Divine."

Each morn we hear its Angelus bell,
The call for us to pray
"Behold the Handmaid of the Lord."
A prayer we love to say.

It's priest, a real good friend is he,
With his kind and gentle way,
For each and every one of us
He will never cease to pray.

It's children daily go to school
Where they are taught to pray,
"Not for to-morrow and its needs,
But, Lord, just for to-day."

They learn to say the Rosary
By their good teachers (three),
And bear the burden of Life's Cross
With sweet humility.

So now my story I must end
And when my time is no more,
Then lay my body there to rest
With friends laid there before.

In this Churchyard where they await
Saint Gabriel's bugle call,
To Heaven above where love abounds
And peace and rest for all.

J. Livesey, Chapel Lane, Heapey.

PRICE 2d.

Proceeds in aid of St. Chad's Club.