

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN WAVERTREE

From A Short History by the late Dr R.M. Todd
Reader at St Mary's 1948 – 2008

Beginnings

Towards the middle of the 19th century the population of the Township of Wavertree had very much increased and the existing places of worship were insufficient to accommodate the inhabitants at Divine Service.

To meet this need it was agreed to build a church dedicated to St Mary, on a site in Sandown Park given by Mr Hugh Hornby of Sandown Hall.

In 1852, although only partially completed, the church was licensed for public worship and the Rev. Samuel Fenton, M.A., was appointed incumbent.

The church at this time was a mission church in the parish of Childwall. After a delay of some three years John, Lord Bishop of Chester, consecrated the church on Monday 7th May 1855.

On 30th January 1856 Queen Victoria made an Order in Council assigning a District Chapelry to the church and lay down the parish boundaries.

Developments

By 1862 the need arose for a larger building and a faculty was obtained for enlarging the church by the addition of a chancel, north aisle and organ chamber. During 1865 this work was completed and a heating system was installed.

The original design for the church had included a west tower with spire and in 1882 this was created. The Rt. Rev. J.C. Ryle, first Bishop of Liverpool, laid the foundation stone of the tower on 5th June 1882. (This stone is set into the east wall of the present church.)

To commemorate the 70th anniversary of the consecration of the church in 1925 electric light was installed.

Disaster

On the night of 28th November 1940, the church received a direct hit from a German bomb. The organ was completely destroyed and the east end of the church was badly damaged. The nave suffered little damage and on a few special occasions services were held in the bombed church; but such was the damage done by the weather, and destruction by vandals, that it was eventually decided to demolish the building.

The site has been redeveloped for housing.

Survival

The upper floor in the church hall in nearby Northdale Road was fitted out as a temporary church and was used for Divine Services for 12 years from December 1940 to December 1952.

Redevelopment

In 1949 the Church Council agreed to purchase the Methodist church (built in 1872) in Victoria Park and convert it into the Parish Church of St Mary, Wavertree.

Very extensive alterations were carried out; all interior fixtures, including gallery and vestibule, were removed and two entrances closed. The old sanctuary became the baptistery and the east of the church constructed at what used to be the back of the building. Choir and clergy vestries were entirely rebuilt, modern sanitation incorporated and a new heating system was installed. The church was furnished with oak fittings, left in natural colour.

The Consecration

Clifford Arthur Martin, the Lord Bishop of Liverpool, consecrated the church on Saturday 6th December 1952 at an impressive service attended by a large congregation, including the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Liverpool, Mr John Tilney, M.P. for Wavertree, and many other prominent people.

The magnificent East Window for the church was designed by Mr E. Carter-Preston, some of whose windows are in Liverpool Cathedral. It was dedicated by the Bishop of Warrington, the Rt. Rev. C.R. Claxton, on Sunday July 18th 1954 during the service of Evensong.

THE CHURCH HALL

With an increase in the population of the parish at the beginning of last century, the need for a Church Hall, for use as a Sunday School and for young people's organisations, had become a pressing matter.

In 1907 a piece of land in Northdale Road was purchased and the foundation stone was laid by the Lord Bishop of Liverpool on 11th June 1910.

It was of particular importance during the war when it was fitted out as a temporary church and was used for Divine Services from 1940 – 1952.

Repairs and renovations were carried out over the years but after much deliberation and discussion it was decided that the Hall was a greater liability than an asset. It was sold and some of the money used for refitting and refurbishing the church.

The building is currently used as a nursery.

THE DAY SCHOOL

Records show that St Mary's School was in operation as far back as 1863. Links with the Church were strong and attendance at Church and Sunday School were compulsory.

Due to increasing numbers a new school was built in Rathbone Road and opened on 28th October 1872. By 1891 an additional building was added to create an Infants Department.

After the Second World War and the introduction of the Education Act, it was discovered that extensive changes would be needed to meet the new requirements. The school became a 'controlled' school and in November 1948 the local Education Authority took over all financial responsibility for the school.

In 1954 the school was reorganised as a Junior School; children aged 11 and over transferred to Olive Mount Secondary Modern School.

Changes to education and funding of schools, as well as falling numbers finally led to the school closing in 1991.

Wavertree C of E School was established in Rose Villas in September 2001 by the amalgamation of the former St Mary's, St Bridget's and Trinity District schools to cater for those who wanted their children educated in a Church School environment.

The site of the day school was sold and some of the monies raised went to fund refitting and refurbishing the Church building.

The site has since been redeveloped for housing.

Refurbishment