

# St John the Evangelist, Carlisle

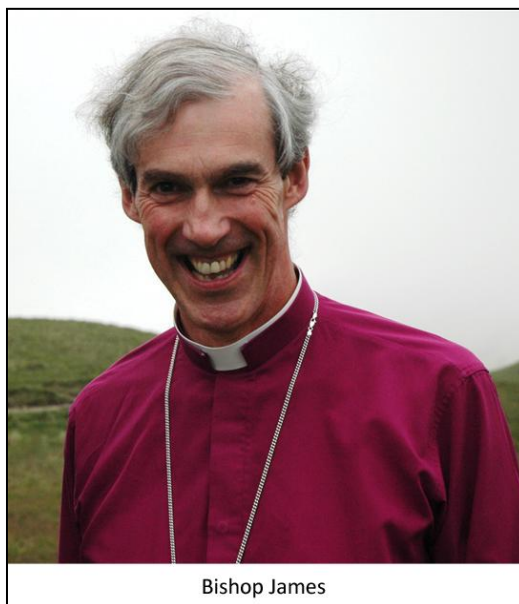
## 1867-2017



## Crisis and Choice

## Foreword by the Bishop of Carlisle

Many congratulations to everyone at St John's as you celebrate 150 years of faithful worship, discipleship and service to the Community! I have always enjoyed my periodic visits, and have been especially impressed by the imaginative re-ordering of the building. But of course, "the Church" is first and foremost the people, and I would like to pay tribute to the succession of committed laity and clergy who have presided through good times and difficult times, sharing their faith through deeds as well as words and welcoming a huge variety of newcomers and visitors. St John the Evangelist is well-known, and rightly so, for its biblical preaching and dedicated outreach "in season and out of season". It isn't a big or flashy church, but it exemplifies the pursuit of good teaching and engaged discipleship which lies at the heart of the Diocesan "God for All" Strategy. So, my thanks go to the current congregation as you continue to fan the flame of faith – and of course to our gracious God who has inspired motivated and sustained it all.



Bishop James

James Newcome  
Bishop of Carlisle

## Introduction by the vicar Steve Donald

### Crisis and Choice

The parish motto verse for 2017 is **Isaiah 7:9**, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all”. The context of this verse is crisis and choice. King Ahaz of Judah and his people are “like trees shaken by the storm” as they face the threat of invasion. The prophet Isaiah is told by God to meet the king as he makes his military preparations and challenge him to trust in the promises of God for deliverance.

Throughout the history of St John’s recorded in these pages there has been crisis and choice. From its inception in 1867 St John’s has struggled. It struggled to be born and its history has been one of almost perpetual struggle. When I came here in 2005, the then Bishop said “See what you can do. It will probably close in ten years!” Thankfully St John’s has rallied and we are seeing the beginnings of growth twelve years on. In 2013 the parish boundaries were extended to include St Andrew’s Botcherby, giving us more opportunities.



Steve Donald

During the Victorian age and since, many missionaries were sent out from Britain’s shores and several missionaries and ministers were sent out from St John’s. By 1979 the then vicar Rev Roger Frith, writing in the parish magazine, admitted that “It has become very obvious in recent years that our country is declining spiritually and morally, and it has been repeatedly stated that it is the sinful, selfish human heart that needs changing and only a spiritual revival will accomplish this”. Whilst Britain has sent out many missionaries in the last 150 years we now need missionaries to come and help us evangelise Britain and bring to the nation that spiritual revival and moral change that Roger Frith recognised as critical. Thirty-eight years after Roger Frith’s comments it is even more urgent.

One of the things God has been doing at St John’s in recent years is to widen our vision of the global church through folk who work with Operation Mobilisation worshipping with us and by our links with Taiwan through the Diocesan Intern Scheme. In partnership with the Diocese we have had a succession of seven young ladies from Taiwan coming over to help us. Ria, the last one to join us, now belongs to a church in Taiwan that is only one and a half years old, called “The Prayer for the Nations Church”. Ria asked me to do a five-minute video for her church on cross-cultural mission and address the question “Why has St John’s had the vitality to last 150 years?”

In the following pages of this booklet, we hope to give you some answers to that excellent question. Christian ministry is tough and we face many crises and choices. What do you do

when you meet a fork in the road? During its 150-year history St John's has often had to answer the question Joshua posed so passionately to his own people:

*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)*



## 1. Crisis and Choice – A Difficult Birth but a Gospel Vision (1867-1900)

The moving spirit behind the setting up of St John's was Francis Close, after whom Close Street is named: a man with heart and vision like Joshua. He was Dean of Carlisle Cathedral from 1857–1881, dying in post as the oldest Dean in the country. Dean Close's gospel vision was clear and determined but it took considerable struggle to birth the parish. The centenary booklet describing the opening of St John's puts it like this:

*The church was well filled. The Dean took his text from Luke 14:15-24, the Parable of the Great Banquet. He said he felt a weather-beaten mariner tossed with the tempest during a long voyage of three years with many trials and difficulties, but now at length with flowing sheet and bended mast – entering peaceably into the haven.*



Dean Francis Close

As a mark of respect to our founder Francis Close we have decided to rename our church hall "Dean Close Hall". This was at the suggestion of our church warden Stuart Langhorn "to remind St John's to continue to be true to Francis Close's vision". Stuart also wrote "One thing that has been clear to me as we have prepared this booklet is that society, culture, times may change but man's heart does not so the need for an unchanging Gospel and a faithful God to his people has never diminished".

### How was St John's built?

Francis Close was nominated in 1856 by the Prime Minister Lord Palmerston as Dean of Carlisle Cathedral and Vicar of Christ Church. Close was a keen evangelical who, as the vicar of Cheltenham, had become widely known, with a considerable impact on education and a reputation for strong Protestant views. Samuel Waldegrave, a man of similar convictions, had become Bishop of Carlisle in 1860. Together they shared a strong desire for new churches to be built to minister to the growing population, and St John's was one of those, opened in 1867, ten years after Dean Close arrived in Carlisle. The church was built by national subscription from monies largely raised by Dean Close from his friends and supporters across the country.

### Why was St John's built?

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Carlisle had only two parishes: St Mary's and St Cuthbert's. In 1828, however, it was decided to build a "chapel of ease" (a chapel to serve people living far from their main church) for St Cuthbert's Without (the part of the parish

outside the city boundary). In September 1830 Christ Church was consecrated in Botchergate (now sadly demolished, the land forming a small park behind the new block of flats). When both Dean Close and Bishop Waldegrave arrived with their evangelistic zeal, the division of St Cuthbert's Without began in earnest.

The beginnings of St John's are described in the Centenary Brochure, St John the Evangelist, Carlisle 1867-1967:

*The St Nicholas area comprising it was alleged some 4,500 persons, principally weavers, mechanics, railway labourers and small shopkeepers with but a few gentlemen's houses. These were for the most part strangers to the church. It was therefore, a matter of urgency to provide the Bread of Life and Water of Salvation for the Spiritual wants of these who so deeply needed them. So, it was proposed to build a free church [i.e. not having paid pews] in this most populous part of the Parish (St John's).*

### **12<sup>th</sup> March 1863 was a significant date**

We are indebted to the publication "A Suburb of Carlisle LINTON HOLME" by Marie K. Dickens for the following information that "A preliminary meeting of the St Nicholas Building Committee was held at the Deanery at 12 Noon, and the church, subsequently to be called St John the Evangelist, was born... St John's Anglican Church was erected in 1867 in Victorian Gothic style, situated on the corner of Close Street and London Road. We see from parish records that many of the people living around the Linton Holme and Greystone area worshipped at St John's".

### **The founder dies but the work goes on.**

**"God buries His workmen but carries on His work." – Charles Wesley**

The September 1986 parish magazine records an excerpt from the September 1883 magazine giving a tribute following the Dean's recent death:

*So fresh are these things in the minds and memories of some of our friends that they can now see, as it were, that portly figure and beautiful countenance, and hear still the musical voice that stirred their hearts with the account of "the old, old story of Jesus and His love".*

## 2. Crisis and Choice Through Two World Wars (1900-1945)



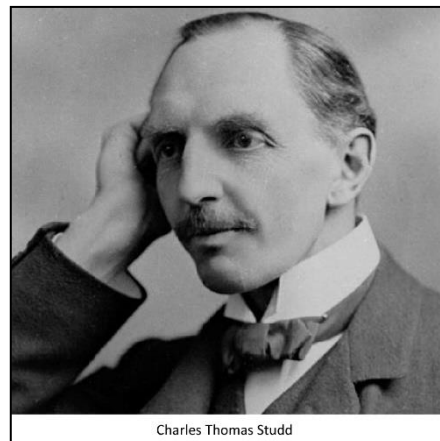
Gilbert Arthur Barclay

The two world wars during this period affected St John's as deeply as the rest of the country. Life in many ways would never be the same, but the gospel flame lit by Dean Close was kept alight at St John's.

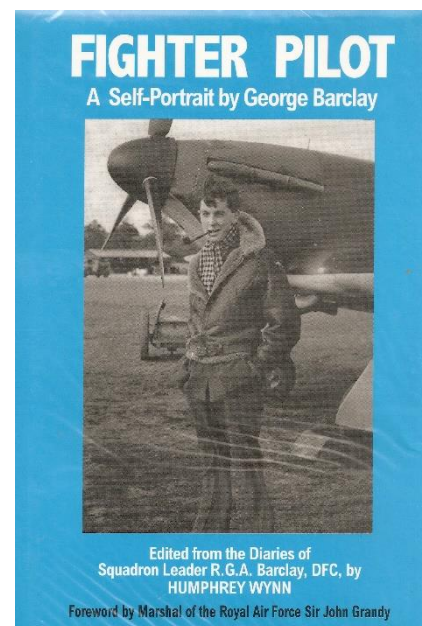
Rev Gilbert Barclay was vicar from 1912 and then went to be an army chaplain 1915-1919. Barclay's wife was a daughter of C.T. Studd, who once visited the parish on 11th February 1915 for a parochial tea held in the Church Hall. It consisted of a limelight address entitled "Two years in the heart of Africa". Studd was a pioneer missionary statesman who said and lived out the now famous words "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for him".

Later, in the thirties, Barclay became Home Director of the World Wide Evangelisation Crusade with an international reputation for a gifted ministry.

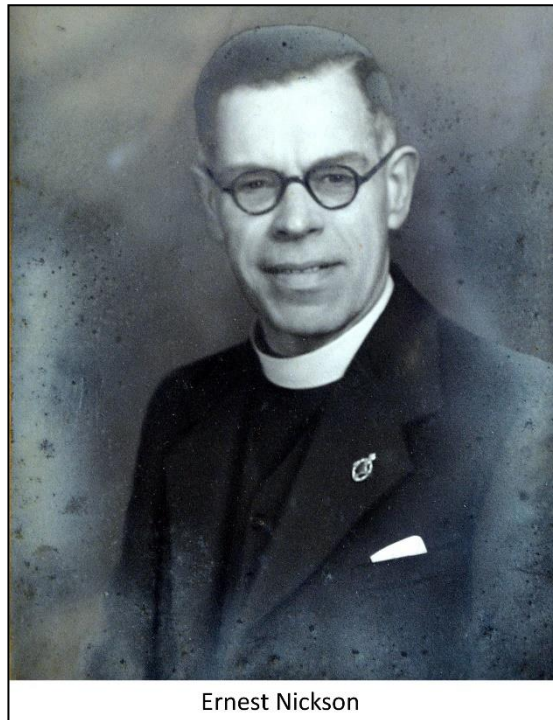
Two of his sons, George and Charles, were killed in action during the Second World War. George Barclay was killed aged 22, leading a Hurricane squadron during the 1942 Battle of El Alamein in Egypt. He had been a fighter pilot in the battle of Britain and survived being shot down three times and escaped from the Germans in occupied France. He had kept a secret diary which his parents did not find until several years after his death. This has been published by his brother Richard with help from historians and is entitled: "Fighter Pilot: A Self-Portrait" by George Barclay and Humphrey Wynn. It makes an interesting read.



Charles Thomas Studd



During The Second World War many of the parishioners went to serve, including George Wightman who was a medical orderly in the navy. The organist and choir master Bill Bonner was also away in the forces, and Gordon Nickson and John Byers filled the role temporarily until his return. The church hall was requisitioned by the army and the Sunday School had to meet in the church itself.





### 3. Crisis and Choice Through Post-War Britain into the New Millennium (1945-2000)

In the foreword to this booklet, the Bishop commended the present parish for its “imaginative reordering” but he was also keen to stress “the church” is first and foremost its people. In this section and in the one that follows we will see how buildings can either help or hinder the gospel among the people. It will also show once again the need for God’s people to choose to trust him in crisis.

#### Money is a gospel issue

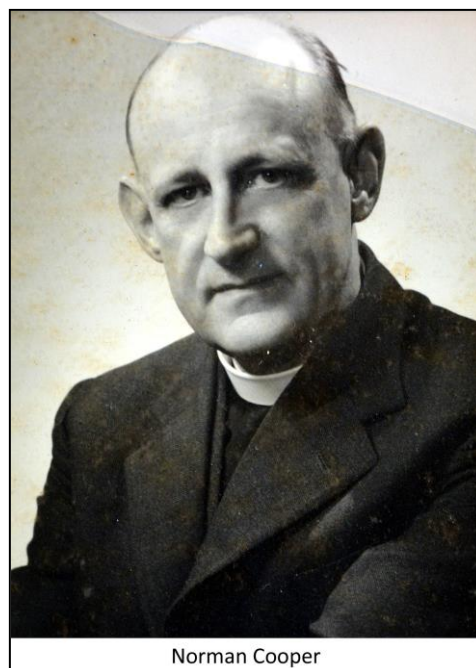
The church relies on the generous giving of its members in time, talents and treasure. Not being a rich parish, St John’s has often been stretched when facing a crisis and choice during its 150-year history. Two issues were to the fore in this post-war period: paying off the debt regarding the vicarage and providing a hall that could enable the church’s ministry to flourish. Dean Close’s vision was to remove as many barriers as possible to the ordinary folk of Carlisle coming to know the gospel and accepting the invitation to The Great Banquet. For this to happen there needed to be a suitable house for the incumbent and a suitable hall for the church’s activities. Vision is critical, as **Proverbs 29:18** in the Authorized King James version renders it: “Where there is no vision, the people perish”. When God’s people meet a crisis there is a choice to trust in their own resources like King Ahaz (see **Isaiah 7**), or to trust in God as his later successor Hezekiah was able to do (see **Isaiah 37**). Big or small crises should drive us to our knees in prayer to seek an answer. Out of a crisis at St John’s has often come a vision that started very small but then mushroomed.

#### The vicarage debt

These articles come from the Church magazine *The Challenge*.

#### ***The Challenge* June 1953 Gift Day**

*It is most encouraging to see the way in which St John’s folk are rallying to the challenge of the vicarage debt. It is obvious that the great majority recognise that it was sound policy to dispose of the old and cumbersome building which had long outlived its usefulness as a parsonage house. Some who have hesitated to approve this drastic action may be interested to know that since the new house has been completed, a letter has been received from the Rev Gilbert and Mrs Barclay, with a wistful enquiry about the practical business of selling an old and building a new house, since they have found their present overlarge rectory in Kent an undue domestic and financial burden.*



Norman Cooper

### ***The Challenge June 1953***

*Regarding the New Vicarage, we now have £444 to pay back to the Church Commissioners...When we consider that our liability about a year ago was in the region of £1,100, it is most heartening to see how the loan has so far been reduced.*

### **The need for a new Church hall**

When the old church hall was judged unsafe in 1976 and could no longer be used, slowly a vision to build a new one developed and gradually monies came in. Vision, according to **Isaiah 64:1-2**, begins with holy dissatisfaction:

*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!*

Whilst Roger Frith came to St John's parish near the end of his ministry (I am reliably told that it was Roger who had prepared the ground for the development of Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle under David Holloway), he still had a passionate desire to see the Lord glorified through the growth of his Church. Often vision grows and develops over a long time, expressed in small but significant ways that express holy dissatisfaction. We know from the widow's mite and such texts as "Do not despise the day of small things" (**Zechariah 4:10**) that it is not the amount involved but the right heart response to God that matters. A small spark of vision can sustain hope in God and eventually fan the flame for action and change.

### **"Steadying the ship"**

There were fundraising activities in Roger Frith's time, notably, amongst others:

- a) **January 1979** – a sponsored "Knit-In" which yielded 523 inches and raised £335
- b) **August 1979** pennies in Smarties tubes had raised £116, along with other events, donations and legacies so that **the Building Fund** stood at **£10,546**.
- c) **January 1980** reported the "Toy Factory" held at Dick, Edith and Elizabeth Pugmire's home making soft toys had a busy year raising £450. The same sum was raised the next year. No mean feat for 35 years ago!



## The Church under threat?

A Report in the Cumberland News 16th June 1979 came as a bit of a shock:

*A Carlisle church will be knocked down to make way for the City's inner ring road. St John the Evangelist in London Road along with the Parish hall and Vicarage will be demolished, although no date has yet been set for the construction of the road.*

In 1980 St John's longest serving vicar, Rev Peter Bye, arrived by which time the plans to construct the inner ring road had been dropped!

## The need for a hall

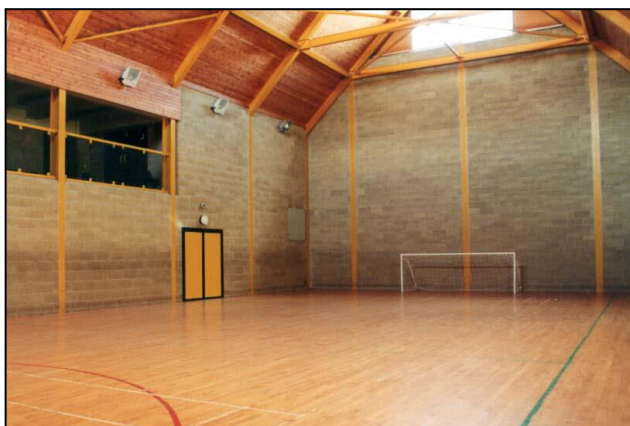
However a crisis remained for the church. What was to be done to improve the facilities for the wide range of church activities? As has been said the old hall was in a bad state of repair and had been unsafe for use since 1976. This caused a crisis for where to host the Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts and Junior Sunday School. The cry went up "What we need is a hall!" When Roger Frith retired and Peter Bye came all sorts of ideas for a multi-use church building were considered and rejected.



Peter Bye

## A generous provision

Providentially, the council decided to close the Greystone School which was next door, now combined with Brook Street Infants to form a Primary School for both Infants and Juniors on the Brook Street site. There were plans to develop the former school into a Community Centre (the now popular Greystone Community Centre which did such sterling work during both the 2005 and 2015 floods). Since St John's had retained rights of entry and use of the old school this right was relinquished in exchange for enough land to build the present hall. Since the Council were keen to develop the Greystone centre they were also minded to be generous in the giving of compensation for the old hall! So, through the providential working of God monies were provided in the crisis to provide the wonderful facilities we now enjoy.



Compensation for the Old Hall was received in May 1985 for £140,000 plus interest. The cheque sent to the church was for £185,193.51! This allowed the hall to be built with some of the capital left over.

**The Magazine for May 1986** carried an expression of thanks by the late **Norah Shepherd** (a faithful member of St John's), which expressed the feelings of all St John's folk:

*Please may I share a few thoughts as a result of our recent Annual Meeting? I could hardly believe my ears when I heard how the Lord has provided the money to build our new Church Hall. He has given us much more than anyone of us ever imagined. This to me is a challenge to all of us in St John's Family. We have this wonderful verse in the Old Testament: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (Malachi 3:10) ... I believe the Lord is speaking to each one of us and the question we need to ask ourselves is what is our response going to be? "If all the world were on our side, and God against us, what could the world avail us?" – Archbishop Cranmer.*

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20)*

### **Young peoples' work at St John's**

St John's has always been very concerned about young people, and that continues to this day with a strong link to three local primary schools. It's worth quoting at length from the Centenary Brochure to get a flavour of its importance more widely as:

*St John's has always been conscious of its mission to the children of the parish. Sunday Schools have been part and parcel of the Church's work from the beginning... The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the use of what we might call the organisational movement proper, as the Girls' Friendly Society; the Boy Scouts; Girl Guides; the Boys' Brigade, all with junior sections as well. St John's was not slow to take advantage of this movement... [Including] For Scouts, Donald Ayers; for Guides, Ethel Bell; for Boys' Brigade, Ernest Tinnion... A feature of the Scout work has been the number of men who entered the ministry from the troop.*

Scouts who went into full time ministry include Alan Pugmire, Russell Barnett (ex- vicar Aikton and Great Orton and retired to Houghton), Reg Bright and Clive Porthouse.

### **George Wightman: a tribute by Don Ayers, *Together* magazine Feb 1991**

This article was chosen because it captures the spirit of trust in response to crisis seen in the history of St John's at its best. George was a lifelong member of St John's 1903-1991, "a devoted and popular member of St John's... It was generally thought that George would enter the Ministry of the Church" but he decided instead to look after his handicapped sister Joan and became a Licensed Lay Reader, serving in the diocese for fifty years.



These words, left by George and read at his funeral, sum up his faith:

*Before putting out to sea it is the custom for the captain to call his men around him and ask,  
"Are we all here?"*

*And the men reply, "Yes, sir, and in God's care."*

*"Is there anything then to be afraid of?" asks the captain.*

*And the crew's answer rings out, "**No, sir, there is nothing**".*

*And so they put to sea again.*

*"Within God's care, whatever may be,*

*Anchored in port, or in the troubled sea,*

*With God aboard we need not fear at all, Whatever storms arise or fate befall.*

*The peace he gives no trouble can assail,*

*Against His presence nothing can prevail.*

*HOW FINE IF WE THE SAILORS' FAITH WOULD SHARE*

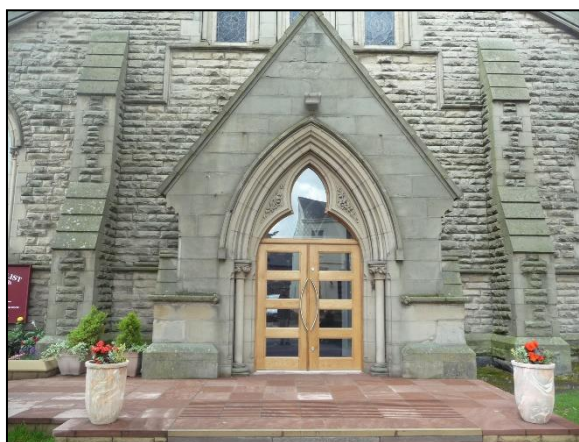
*AND SAIL LIFE'S SEA FOREVER IN GOD'S CARE".*



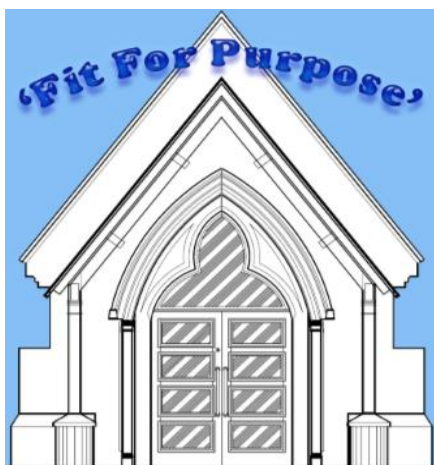
George Wightman

#### 4. Crisis and Choice 2000-2017

In the previous section, we saw how buildings can either help or hinder the work of the gospel. Instead of the vicarage and the church hall, this time the crisis was what to do with the church building that was expensive to keep yet was very restricted in what it could be used for. What we needed was a building fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What choice would we make? To stay as we were and slowly sink, or seek a new vision from the Lord? What about the vision of the founder who preached at the opening service about inviting everyone to the Great Banquet and removing any unnecessary obstacles – like the heavy wooden doors on the front of the church that made it look like a fortress rather than a house of prayer? Slowly a vision began to form among the leaders and the people.



#### 2010 refurbishment of St John's to be "Fit for Purpose"



When the project got going and we produced a leaflet outlining the vision and appealing for prayer and financial support, some members of the church (mainly elderly) had serious misgivings. At the PCC we decided that each member of the PCC would take a share of the membership list and go visit them in their homes and listen to their concerns and report back. This, alongside regular presentations in church services, kept communication going from the leaders to the members and back to the leaders. This was crucial.

When the project went ahead and was completed only one person decided not to come into the new building. On

When the project got going and we produced a leaflet outlining the vision and appealing for prayer and financial support, some members of the church (mainly elderly) had serious misgivings. At the PCC we decided that each member of the PCC would take a share of the membership list and go visit them in their

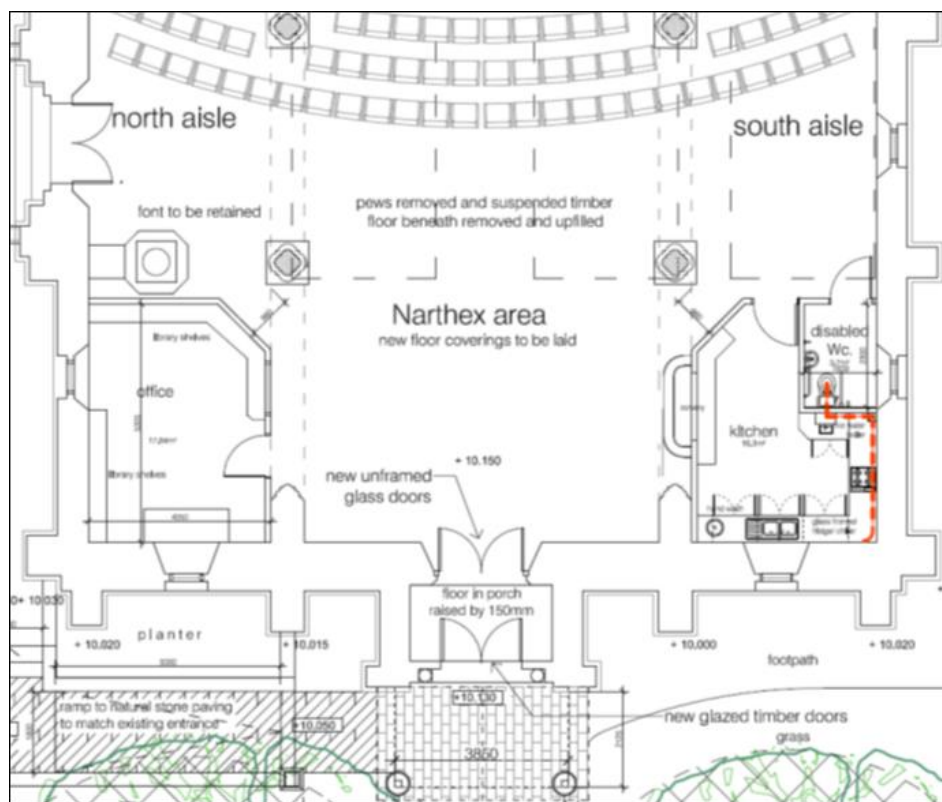
Vision for reordering the church building so that it is...

**'Fit For Purpose'**

A resource for Church and Community Use

**2009**

the first occasion when the underfloor heating was switched on one Sunday morning, several older ladies kicked their shoes off and danced with joy (quite unusual in our church at any time I might add!). They said they had waited fifty years to feel warm in church! Constant and varied communication was essential in winning almost everyone over to the vision.



Plans were drawn up to provide kitchen, toilet and office that would enable the church space to be used flexibly for all sorts of occasions and not just for Sunday worship.

### **“How much did it cost?”**

The final cost was £230,000 and the parish raised all the money without going into any kind of debt! Since it was opened in 2010 we have not looked back. In 2013 there was an extension of the parish to include St Andrew’s Botcherby. We needed to apply the same vision of the founder we had used for St John’s so that everyone could be welcomed to the Great Banquet and all unnecessary barriers to sharing the gospel removed.

### **Refurbishment of St Andrew’s to be “Fit for Purpose”**

After some years getting to know the people and running two very successful community events during Hope Carlisle – a hog roast attended by 300 people on Melbourne Park and a cleanup of Botcherby streets – a vision began to develop to reorder St Andrew’s as a mission church to Botcherby. Plans were accepted by both Council and Diocese for a complete refurbishment but phase one, costing about £20,000, installed a new kitchen and toilet and included decoration and new carpets, making the building ready for use.

### **“Statement of Needs” for proposed reordering of the building July 2014**

Our Vision is intentional whole-life discipleship to the glory of God. We want to make disciples of Jesus Christ in Botcherby and train and equip new disciples to be disciple makers in Botcherby. This “mission to Botcherby” supports having a presence here in terms of keeping and developing St Andrew’s church building as a base from which we can infiltrate the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in culturally sensitive ways, leading to the forming of a mature and growing local expression of church in Botcherby. The building could be a great asset in that goal by involving the community in its use, particularly the local tenants group and as a meeting point for worship, training and mission, as well as a base for several local community groups to meet.



Before



After



## **January 2016 first phase opening on Good Friday**

Ministries now include a regular coffee morning, Messy Church and a weekly home group. Plans are under way to launch a new 4pm weekly service from Easter Sunday this year.

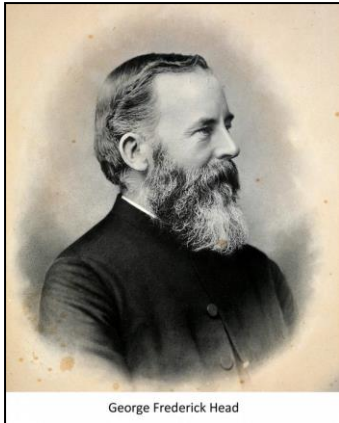
In the introduction at the beginning of the anniversary booklet, I mentioned the key question asked by our former Intern Ria: “Why has St John’s had the vitality to last 150 years?” By now you will have seen how St John’s (and now St Andrew’s) have met crisis with vision and faith. Another good question would be, “What evidence is there today of vitality and hope in the continuing ministries at St John’s?”

## **Missionary support**

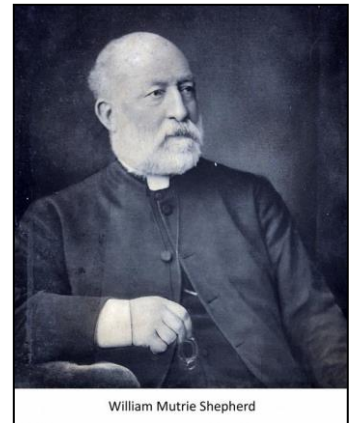
The Church supports seven mission agencies through prayer and planned giving. Each Society has a church rep who promotes its work, distributes literature and encourages links with mission partners. Monthly coffee mornings held at St John’s raise funds and awareness of each of these missions. The societies are:

- Bible Society
- CPAS
- Crosslinks
- The Leprosy Mission
- London City Mission
- Northern Inter-Schools Christian Union (NISCU)
- Operation Mobilisation

In addition the church supports the annual Christian Aid collection, and the Samaritan’s Purse Christmas Box Appeal.



**VICARS  
OF THE PARISH OF  
ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST**



- 1867 George Frederick Head MA
- 1873 William Mutrie Shepherd MA
- 1896 Thomas Alfred Chapman DD
- 1899 Charles Trevor Horan MA
- 1904 John Lawrence Cobham MA
- 1912 Gilbert Arthur Barclay MA
- 1915 Frederick Charles Costeloe MA
- 1920 Philip Henry Potter MA
- 1924 David Taylor Wilson MA
- 1931 Ernest Nickson BA
- 1945 Vincent Norman Cooper MA
- 1956 Fred Pickering MA
- 1963 Philip Hindley Wood MA
- 1972 Roger Eatherley Frith MA
- 1980 Peter John Bye BD
- 2005 Steve Donald MA



## **Groups run by St John's members**

Visitors to St John's frequently comment on the warm welcome that they receive, and members of the church find support, friendship and fellowship amongst the many groups that take place. A visiting preacher once talked about "loving people to church" and many of the groups have aided this whilst also encouraging the members of St John's.

Women's Friendship Club

Crèche

Mums and Toddlers

Bowling Group

Big Breakfast

Ignite

Messy Church

Music Group

Prospects Rainbow Club

Home Groups

Prayer Meetings

### **Women's Friendship Club**

At St John's on the last Monday of each month the Women's Friendship Club gather in the lounge to journey into different countries, or learn about different hobbies, occupations and arts. A short sample of where they have ventured and what they have learned is as follows: Visit to the Vancouver Rockies, visit to Iceland, and a visit to The East Coast of Australia. Art subjects have covered a specialist on the history of ladies shoes, making your own jewellery and appreciating poetry. Care in the community told us of the Hospice at Home and the wonderful work that they do for the terminally ill; care in the community from the Salvation Army; and how to understand and help those suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Depending on the subject quite often the Ladies consider that the meeting should also be open to men, and these meetings are very popular.

The meeting welcomes Churchgoers and non-Churchgoers and they look forward to seeing new faces.

The Friendship Club supports Operation Christmas Child and they help to decorate the Church for Christmas.

Everyone likes the cups of tea and refreshments that are always served at the end of each meeting.

### **Crèche**

Infants and children have always been welcome at St John's; indeed, there is a play area within the church. The congregation has always been tolerant of the sounds of children playing or crying, however it was recognised that some parents felt uncomfortable, worrying that they were disturbing everyone else.

In 2015 a team of volunteers decided to run a Crèche thus filling the gap until children are old enough to join Sunday school, and allowing parents to relax and concentrate on the service.

The numbers are small but enthusiastic and we pray that the provision of a Crèche will encourage young families to join us at St John's.

### **Mums and Toddlers**

The Mums and Toddlers group has been running very successfully for a number of years now, it not only attracts mums, dads, grandparents, and childminders, but also attracts the children of children who attended the group years earlier!!

The group meets on Wednesday mornings during school term time from 10am for an hour and a half, with refreshments served mid-way through. The children have the opportunity to get involved with a number of varied activities; these include playing in the ball pool, soft toys, running around in the sports hall, playing with slides and larger toys. The sports hall is part of the parish centre from where the group operates.

The group also goes on trips. These are usually in the local area, and recent trips have included Trotters Farm and Walby Farm Park.

### **Bowling Group**

The Bowling group has been running for over 10 years having initially been helped by some funds from the Council to buy equipment. It is open to Church and non-Church members giving the opportunity for exercise and socialising. There is provision for 2 mats, thus the possibility of 4 teams, and more people are always very welcome to join. Physical fitness is not a requirement and training is given to beginners. The group meets in the Sports Hall each Monday at 2pm and is followed by tea and biscuits.



### **Big Breakfast**



In January 2016, we began a Men's breakfast once a month and although this was well attended it was decided to include the ladies as from December 2016.

It is now relaunched as the "Big Breakfast", open to everybody. We have our Big Breakfast on the



third Saturday of every month at St John's. It starts at 9am and we enjoy a full cooked breakfast followed by a different speaker each month, from both within and outside the



church. It is a time of great fellowship and is geared to spiritually feed those who are hungry for the Bread of Life.

### **Ignite**



In 2011 a youth group was restarted at St John's, filling a need for the youth of the church.

Able assisted by the Taiwanese Interns the group has explored Christianity and fellowship through teaching, prayer, games, meals and sleepovers. As well as Friday evening they now also run their own Bible study evening, and regularly take the lead in

the Sunday service. From quiet beginnings of games and meals the group has matured in faith and in years and now regularly take the service with a refreshing outlook and confidence.

The youngsters who attended the first Ignite meetings are now taking on the role of Ignite leaders and so St John's is fortunate to know that amongst us we have future stewards, PCC members and wardens.



### **Messy Church**



St John's branch of "Messy Church" began in 2009. Following the principles of Lucy Moore, founder of "Messy Church", it provides an after-school group where we explain the Christian faith to children and their carers, bolstered by crafts and conversation. The session always finish with a shared meal.

The sessions take place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month, beginning after school. We begin with a biblical

story or theme, which over the years has taken the form of a story, presentation, or drama, including puppets and DVDs. The children then enjoy crafts which are linked to the theme of the day. We end the day with grace and a communal meal.

In 2016 we moved our meeting place from St John's to St Andrew's in the hope that we could reach out to the families in Botcherby. At present we have 3 regular families – 7 children, and have just welcomed 2 new children from Botcherby.



## Music Group



St John's has had a regular music group for a number of years now. They play most Sundays, morning and evening. The style of music varies from the older traditional hymns to the more modern hymns and songs from contemporary songwriters.

The organ is used only very occasionally, sometimes at Christmas or if specifically requested for a funeral or a wedding. Most of

the time the music is lead from the piano, with guitar, saxophone and drums.

The music group are always looking out for more musicians and lead vocalists.

## Prospects Rainbow Club

In early 2014 the local Prospects Club at Hebron Church had to close, this left adults with learning difficulties without a club in which to express their faith. This closure affected several of our church family, both attendees and carers. Prospects had always promoted independence and confidence alongside Christian teaching. A need was there for these people and discussion took place between carers and Prospect members; volunteers offered to help and so as Prospects closed a new group was born at St John's. It was called the Rainbow Club for its symbol of hope with the motto of "God always keeps his promises".

Rainbows is a Christian group who meet once a month for singing, drama and crafts, always linked to a biblical theme.



Periodically they contribute to services, for such occasions as Harvest and Ability Sunday and at Christmas they hold a Nativity Play.

In 2015 the Rainbow group enrolled with the national Prospects Club and in 2016 changed their name to Prospects Rainbow Club.



## **Prayer support**

If we want to get to know somebody really well, we spend time in their company and speak with them often. It is the same with God. Jesus spent nights and daylight hours speaking with his Father. We need to do the same.

Prayer is important in the life of St John's, the fuel that keeps us running. Members of St John's have plenty of opportunity for communal prayer alongside private prayer and the regular Sunday service.

Every Thursday Morning at 07:30

The first Monday of every month at 13:00

The first Wednesday of every month at 19:30

## 5. Conclusion: Crisis and Choice Through 150 Years

St John's and St Andrew's are facing the future with confidence in God and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the 150-year history of the parish crises have been overcome by weak people trusting in a powerful God, which gives hope for the future. King Ahaz (Isaiah 7) sadly trusted in his own resources with tragic results. Years later his successor Hezekiah (Isaiah 37) met a huge crisis with faith in God and triumphed over adversity. In his greeting the Bishop of Carlisle said St John's "exemplifies the pursuit of good teaching and engaged discipleship" and this is what we are seeking to continue as we face very turbulent times in the world at large and in our church and nation.

These turbulent times include discussion regarding the issue of women bishops. In 2016, St John's PCC passed the women bishops legislation to enable it to continue in its Complimentarian position regarding male headship. Whilst maintaining a very good relationship with our diocesan bishop we look forward to developing a close working relationship with Rod Thomas, the Bishop of Maidstone, who was chosen to represent our conservative evangelical constituency and facilitate its flourishing within the Church of England. Rod works under the authority of the diocesan bishop and is coming to St John's later this year to lead a confirmation and a commissioning.



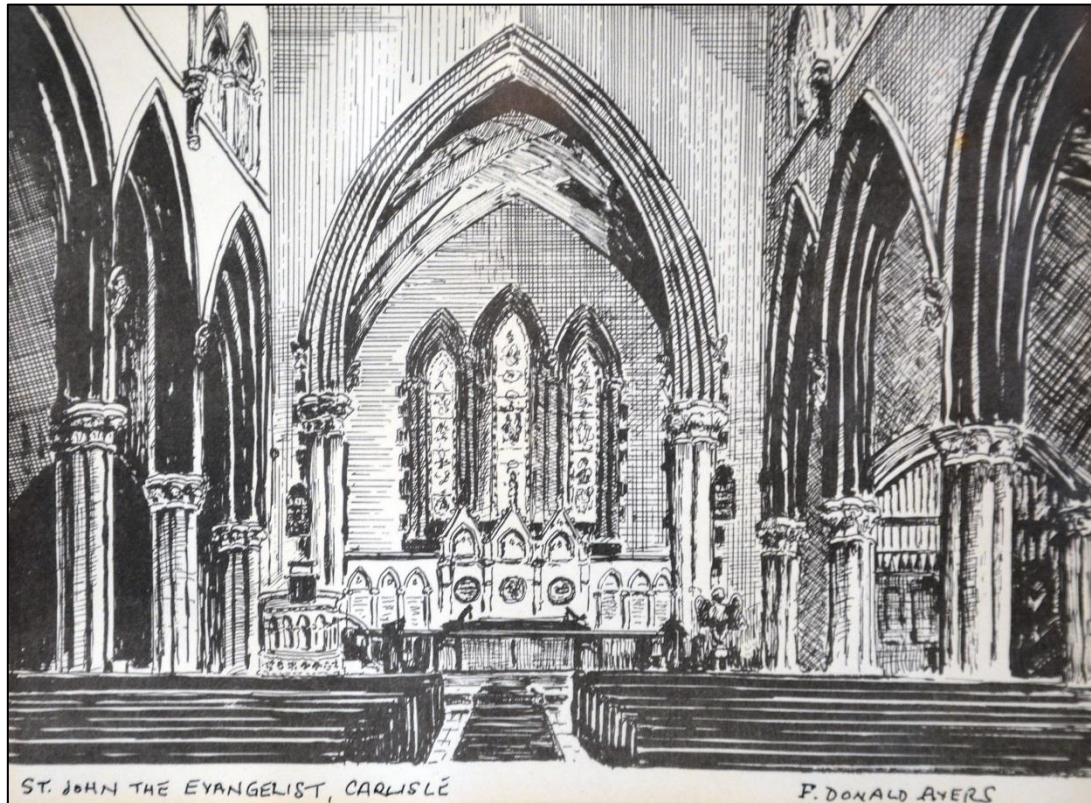
Speaking of turbulent times, three vivid memories of this parish will remain with me always. We had just arrived in the parish in 2005 when the first flood happened. I was struck by the resolute and Christ-like response of St John's both to its flooded members and also to the community. In 2015 the same character came to the fore. The Sunday service was not abandoned but those who could gathered and prayed for church members and those in our community affected the second time. This also involved loving action. Just as in the first flood, members of St John's donned wellies and gloves and helped clear out furniture and carpets for members of the church who had been flooded.

The same indomitable Christian character had been shown a year earlier in 2014 when St John's helped Botcherby residents in a clean-up of their streets. After finishing the work on Saturday, putting all the unwanted furniture and mattresses on the roadside for the council lorry to collect as arranged by Hope Carlisle, we were told that because of some miscommunication the rubbish could not be collected until Tuesday! Having worked all day the team from St John's selflessly took this mountain of rubbish to a gated compound kindly provided by Metal Box, a nearby factory, literally going the proverbial second mile. All this illustrates what we have been studying in our home groups recently: Paul points to the need to love in word and deed when he writes "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well". (**1 Thessalonians 2:8**).



As we stand at something of a crossroads in our nation and denomination may we at St John's continue (as those before us) the vision begun by our founder Dean Close to welcome everyone to the Great Banquet of our Lord Jesus and to do all we can to remove any unnecessary barriers to sharing the glorious gospel of new life in Christ. May God keep this parish on the narrow way so that when we face a fork in the road we make the right choice by seeking and obeying God's word.

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." **(Jeremiah 6:16)**



ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, CARLISLE

P. DONALD AYERS





