

HOLY TRINITY

STALYBRIDGE





Introduction

Holy Trinity Church, Stalybridge - or Castle Hall Church as it was originally known - has from its inception had a threefold mission to worship God, to create community and to serve the neighbourhood. In the pages of this booklet you will find the stories of some of those who from earliest days have sought to fulfil that mission.

There are inspiring stories of faithfulness and service throughout the generations which testify to the love of God which is to be found in Jesus.

This beautiful church building continues to stand today as a beacon of light and hope to a needy world, and the people who comprise the church today continue to offer themselves in worship to God and in service to one another and the world.



Putting Down Roots 1846 - 1861

The coming of the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the cotton trade caused the population of Stalybridge to rise from under 200 to nearly 21,000 between 1750 and 1850. The Bishop of Chester – The Right Reverend J Bird Sumner, later Archbishop of Canterbury, was concerned that there was no Anglican Church nearer than Stockport to nurture the spiritual needs of this large population. The Church of England was given permission to rectify this omission and new parishes were formed. The parish of Castle Hall came into being in February 1846. The next year Revd Thomas Floyd BA was appointed to be the first vicar.

At first the church met in the home of a Mrs Simpson in Back Grosvenor Street, but as numbers increased rooms were hired in the Foresters' Hall for services and a Sunday School.



Picture left -
Castle Hall
Rooftops
(Taken from
Tameside
Heritage
Archives)

The foundation stone was finally laid on the current site next to the house and gardens of Castle Hall. There was a large procession through the town led by church and Sunday School officials, members of civic organisations and local townsfolk. The completed church was dedicated to the Holy Trinity and was opened for Holy Communion on June 27th 1852. The church was consecrated by Bishop Graham of Chester and the first sermon was preached by Chancellor Raikes.

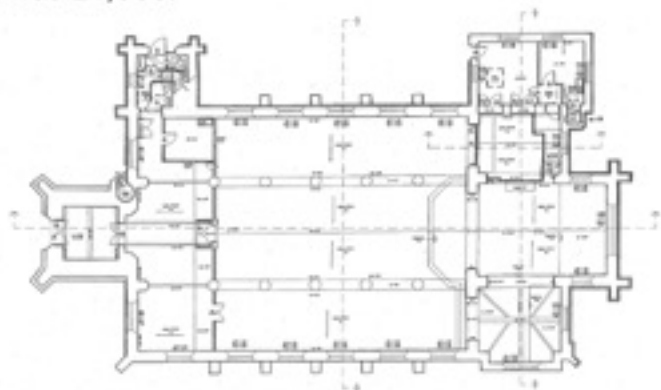


Picture left -
The silver
trowel that was
used to lay the
foundation
stone

Picture right - The
engraving on the trowel



The church was built in the perpendicular style of coursed, tooled, snecked Pennine sandstone. It has a square tower at the West end and this holds a peal of 8 bells. The round apertures on three sides of the tower may have been intended to house clocks. The cost of the building was £4,500.



As you come to enter the church by the West door you can see a paved area on either side. This land was consecrated for burials between 1853 and 1977. The raised table tomb is of Dr Daniel and Mrs Barker. At ground level are three gravestones of Edwin Shaw, Henry John Atkinson and John Simpson and their families. They all played an important part in the early life of the church and parish. The burial ground was officially closed in 1856. The land was originally surrounded by iron railings but these were taken away during World War II to support the war effort.



Picture top - Floorplan of the church

Picture above - Holy Trinity with the iron railings c1937

A committee was formed to raise money for a peal of 8 bells. 400 people donated and £500 was raised. This was enough money to buy the bells and have them hung by Mears of London. The bells arrived at Stalybridge railway station and were given an enthusiastic welcome. The people and church officials processed through the town to Holy Trinity Church. The inaugural service for the bells was held on New Year's Day 1853. The bells were re-cast and rededicated in 1926 and there was another procession round the town to accompany the bells back to Holy Trinity.



Picture left -
peal of 8 bells in
the tower

Picture below -
Bell with an
inscription from
1926 when the
bells were re-
cast

John Jones, a local poet, was inspired to write a commemorative poem, which began:

*'Hail, Stalybridge,
since new delights are thine,
No longer bow to
Ashton-under-Lyne;
For thou canst now, with
presumptuous glee
Boast of harmonious bells
as well as she'*



The Cotton Famine 1861 - 1865

With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, the Stalybridge cotton mills rapidly ran short of cotton, as most of the raw materials came from the southern states. By the particularly harsh winter of 1862-63 only five of the town's thirty-nine factories and twenty-four machine shops were employing people full-time, and 7000 unemployed mill and factory workers were reliant upon the government's Cotton Famine Relief Fund for help.

In March 1863 the so-called Stalybridge Riots broke out – a protest against the decision to pay relief by vouchers instead of cash. Arguing that this system would be impractical to manage, and that it showed a lack of confidence and trust in the workers, Revd Thomas Floyd agreed to travel to London to present the workers' case to the Mansion House Relief Committee on their behalf.

Thanks to his efforts, a grant of £500 was secured for the local relief committee, to be paid to the workers in cash.



Picture above - Revd Thomas Floyd

Many local clergy and wealthy townspeople gave generously at this time by setting up soup kitchens and the like. Castle Hall School opened for Sunday School classes in 1863, but delayed opening as a Day School until 1864, to allow the building to be used for weekday classes for the workers. Holy Trinity opened these classes to all the unemployed in the parish, not just their own members.

Reaching Out 1861 - 1899

The first Sunday School classes were held in a house in Back Grosvenor Street, and it is likely that, in addition to religious and moral instruction there was also some form of teaching in reading and writing. Revd Thomas Floyd also began regular monthly meetings with the teachers for prayer and instruction in Bible Study.

Picture right -
Castle Hall
School class
photo c1884
(Taken from
Tameside
Heritage
Archives)



By the end of the nineteenth century, Castle Hall Sunday School had more than 500 scholars on the registers – including infants and young men and women who attended Bible classes there.

The Day School started in January 1864 with one class of twenty-nine pupils, but numbers there also grew quickly. Revd T. Floyd had a special interest in the welfare of the young people of his parish and the opening of the schools gave him the opportunity to extend the work of the church among children and young people.

The adults of the town were not forgotten either; during the years 1875 to 1881 social and 'mutual improvement and support' societies were set up, including the Band of Hope Temperance Society, the Young Men's Society and the Mothers' Meeting which went on to become the Mothers' Union.

In 1882 the Holy Trinity Mission Hall was opened in Brierley Street and was used for the holding of church services, a Sunday School, special evangelistic events and other activities such as Band of Hope meetings, the Scripture Union and the Mothers' Meetings.



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1897 saw the celebration of the Parish Jubilee and the side chapel was built to mark this. At the same time as the organ chamber and vestries were added. On completion of the work, the Bishop of Chester came to celebrate the "work so cheerfully undertaken".



Picture top - Holy Trinity Mission Hall

Picture above - Chancel prior to re-ordering with organ in new position

Picture left - Side Chapel prior to re-ordering

The organ was originally in the gallery at the West end of the church, but once the organ chamber was constructed in 1897 to celebrate the Jubilee, the organ was moved into its present position. It is a three manual pipe organ installed by Alexander Young and cost £750 in 1852.

The church's influence in the town was not restricted to schools and leisure societies, however. Stalybridge was incorporated by charter on the 8th March 1857 with a corporation of a mayor, six aldermen, and eighteen councillors. By 1900 the church stood on Trinity Street at the heart of the town's civic centre. Edward Atkinson for example, when not leading the church choir and Sunday School, also served as a councillor and alderman for eight years.

The church's concern to reach out to the community in which it was situated can be seen clearly in two advertisements for a lay worker and a curate placed by the then vicar, Revd Charles Sutcliffe in 1883 and 1891:

*"Wanted: an earnest Worker ... accustomed to mission services
and Bible Classes"
and
"Curate wanted... evangelical; one fond of mission work
preferred"*



Picture above - Revd Charles Sutcliffe and his wife

Picture right - Revd Charles Sutcliffe and Curate Revd W. French



A New Century 1900 – 1925

As the new century began, the cotton trade was flourishing and several new spinning mills opened in the town, together with a growing number of parks, schools and public buildings such as Stalybridge Library which opened in 1901.



For several years Stalybridge flourished but, within a few weeks of the declaration of war in August 1914, a Relief Committee was again set up to help the unemployed mill workers as virtually all the town's mills closed when the buying and selling of their raw materials stopped temporarily.

Picture top -
Holy Trinity
garden party in
the vicarage
garden c1908

Picture right -
Memorial to
Elizabeth Gill



From the beginning of the war military and auxiliary hospitals were needed, initially to provide care for Belgian refugees, and later for returning soldiers. Elizabeth Gill, the wife of one of the church wardens, was typical of many women who volunteered in these hospitals.

On the first Sunday in January, from 1916 to 1918, special Days of Intercession were held in all churches. In January 1918, King George V issued a proclamation that prayers should be offered for all who were involved in the war effort, both abroad and at home. By the end of that year, however, those prayers had been answered, and the Armistice was declared.

The first news was received at the Town Hall at about 11 o'clock on Monday morning, the 11th November, and on obtaining full confirmation, the Mayor gave the order for the flag to be raised. When the flag went up on the Town Hall the bells at Holy Trinity began to ring.

Later all of the ringers assembled and the ringing continued throughout the day.

William Fawcett, the oldest ringer in Stalybridge and the surrounding area, who had been retired for many years, was so overjoyed when the news came through that he went straight to Holy Trinity and took part in a peal of bells. William had been a ringer at the church, and had actually rung the bells sixty three years before, to celebrate the fall of Sebastopol and the end of the Crimean War.

Picture
right -
Holy
Trinity bell
ringers
c.1904





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The town war memorial was unveiled in November 1921. 24,000 people attended, virtually the entire population of the town. The choristers of Holy Trinity joined with those of other churches in a 400 strong choir at the ceremony.

A year later Holy Trinity unveiled its own memorial to the young men it had lost from its congregation. The war memorial is made of marble with the centre panel of Saint George picked out in gold leaf on coloured mosaic. It is to commemorate the parishioners who lost their lives in the Great War between 1914 and 1919. A tablet was added below this to commemorate parishioners who lost their lives in the second World War between 1939-1945. The family of one of these men, Worsley Gill, though only being of modest means themselves, donated the stained glass windows in the side chapel in his memory.



Picture above - Unveiling of the town war memorial.

Picture above right - Stained glass window donated in memory of Worsley Gill



Picture right - Holy Trinity war memorial

Hard Times 1926 – 1945

In the years following the Armistice life resumed more or less as normal. The regular life of the church continued and that included, of course, the Scholars' Walks (or the Whit Walks as they are now known). Each Whit Friday morning the local churches or chapels employed bands to lead traditional processions through the streets. In the afternoon the whole church would go up to the local fields for a time of games and fellowship. In 1926 there were 500 scholars, 36 teachers and 60 Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, as well as the church officers and clergy followed the church's banner for the Walks.



Picture top - Whit walks with
Rev'd C. Sutcliffe c1909

Picture middle - Whit walks
1910

Picture bottom - Whit Walks
c1950's



Through the Twenties and Thirties the church's social clubs continued to flourish, with a newly-formed Castle Hall Orchestra, a Young Men's Cricket Club, and a Women's Guild, formed in 1928.

The Young Men's Society continued with their annual service in the month of October when the church was filled with young men on a Sunday evening - most of them having first taken part in the ringing of the bells before a service at the War Memorial in memory of former members of the society.

For Stalybridge at that time a wonderful period of prosperity seemed to be opening. Mills and factories could not produce goods fast enough and wages had risen, but by the late '20s the post-war boom in cotton production was at an end, and firms had to resort increasingly to short-time working. There was increasing competition from overseas.

The Great Depression which followed through the 1930's had a devastating effect on the town. By 1932 seven of Stalybridge's largest mills had closed and more than 7000 were on the dole. Soup kitchens and 'handouts' returned to the town.



Picture left -
Holy Trinity
Brotherhood
c1909

Made by A. J. Young

Holy Trinity Brotherhood c1909

The Second World War brought work back to the town, however, with mills working overtime to get the cotton out and sent to weaving sheds for khaki, tyre brake linings for jeeps and webbing for uniforms. Trade flourished and there was no unemployment.

As with the rest of the country, Stalybridge experienced strict food rationing, intensive black-out periods and frequent air-raid warnings, but bombs fell mainly in open country and there were no civilian casualties. Days of Intercession were again called for and special services were held at Holy Trinity.

On May 8th 1945 the war in Europe finally came to an end. People poured out into the streets, bonfires and beacons were lit and there were flags everywhere. The bells of Holy Trinity, which had been silent from 1940 – 1944, rang the official victory peal to signify that the war in Europe was finally over.



Picture above - Street party after World War II

Still Growing 1946 – 1999

1947 saw the celebration of the centenary of the parish of Castle Hall, and this was marked at Holy Trinity with special services and celebrations.

Stalybridge now began to expand, with new homes being built on new estates. Councils nationally were being encouraged to clear the slums and in 1955 the first post-war slum clearance was implemented. Unfortunately for Holy Trinity this included Castle Hall which was cleared and redeveloped, although this was not completed until the early '70s. Families who had been faithful members of the church were re-housed on estates on the fringes of the town and the congregation began to change as a result.

In 1976 the Mission Hall closed, because of the redevelopment and falling numbers, and in 1977 Holy Trinity merged with Christ Church. In that year the area at the back of the church was set aside and dedicated as a church lounge. The new properties in Castle Hall were attracting young families and a lounge area allowed the church to welcome families, including small children, in a more informal atmosphere. The screening extends the full width of the church and was given by members of the Mission Hall after it closed.



HOLY TRINITY MISSION HALL, STALYBRIDGE

Picture left
- the interior
of the Mission
Hall

Picture right - A view towards the rear of the church prior to the lounge area being created



Picture left - A view towards the rear of the church following the installation of the lounge area

Picture right - A view inside the lounge area after it had been installed. The plaque visible recognises the contribution that the Mission Hall made to the life of the parish



1990's Re-Ordering of the Church Building

Re-ordering of the layout of the interior of the church in 1995 also served to make the building more versatile. The pews were replaced by chairs, which could be moved when needed to provide a large open area, and the choir stalls were removed. The heavy wooden doors had already been replaced with glass ones in 1990, making the church and its activities more visible and more welcoming.



Picture left - View of the front of church including the pulpit and baptism font prior to the re-ordering

Picture right - A view into the church body prior to the re-ordering





Picture left - A view towards the front of the church prior to the re-ordering

Picture right - A view into the chancel prior to the re-ordering



Picture left - Candle-lit carol service prior to the re-ordering

Pictures show the work during the re-ordering. This included stripping out the pews, installing underfloor heating and extending the chancel stage at the front of church



The re-ordering project was first discussed in 1992 but it was two years before development began. A project brochure contained a forward by Rt Revd Michael Baughan, Bishop of Chester, which encouraged everyone to 'go for it in faith'.



The church closed in the spring of 1995 and the services moved to the Parish Hall (formerly Castle Hall School) for 6 months. The budget was around £170,000 which was entirely paid for by members of the congregation. Although there was a financial shortfall of £20,000 when the work began, by the time work was finished it was fully paid for. The official opening was about a month or so after services returned to the church at which the Bishop of Stockport presided.

The first service was on 8th October 1995. Re-ordering of church buildings can be controversial but after the project was completed everyone was thrilled with the work.

Pictures right -
The church
following the
re-ordering



In the Centre of the Town

The area surrounding Holy Trinity has changed considerably since the birth of the church, though the church in many ways has remained at the centre of the town with a desire to serve its community.



Picture above - A view towards Holy Trinity in 1910



Picture left - An aerial shot of Holy Trinity and the area surrounding it prior to the re-opening of the Huddersfield canal

Picture below - A view towards Holy Trinity following the re-opening of the canal

Holy Trinity's central location provides the church with many opportunities to serve the community and surrounding neighbourhood as the town continues to grow and change.



Serving the Neighbourhood

Whether through the Mission Hall and education classes for the poor, or through more recent forms of service such as Street Pastors and Foodbank, the church has always sought to serve the neighbourhood and the wider community.

Styles of worship have also changed through the generations involving choirs, the organ and bands but once again the central desire has always been to worship God and bring Him glory.

Picture top - Revd Charles Sutcliffe and the 7th Stalybridge Scouts

Next picture down - Castle Hall school choir c1910 outside the old vicarage

Picture right - Church choir c1999

Picture bottom right - Gospel Choir 2014

Picture below - Street Pastors



More than a building...

Throughout the history of Holy Trinity are the testimonies of many people that have engaged with the community and a desire for worship and mission.

The stories of those involved speak volumes of God's grace and love and the desire to share that love with everyone.

We hope that in reading this booklet some of those stories may have been brought to life. From the humble beginnings of meeting in a house with just a few people, the church has grown into what it is today. We are excited about what tomorrow brings and all the stories yet to be told.



Acknowledgments

In 1 Samuel 7:12 we read

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'

We rejoice in everything God has done in bringing this church to life and how he has helped and guided the many generations involved through the years.

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HOLY TRINITY

STALYBRIDGE

Holy Trinity has a tremendously rich history which is rooted in the lives of the people of the town.

Our hope is that through the pages of this booklet you will come to know more about the heritage of the church and its core values of

Worshipping God,
Building Community and
Serving the neighbourhood.

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