

Vicars of Hensingham St John

By I.S. Nicholson

The first Vicar was the aptly named **Charles Church** from 1811 to 1817. The Church was consecrated on 22nd July 1811. From Caesar Caine's History of the Churches of the RD of Whitehaven we know that he was the 4th son of Revd Charles Cobbe Church of Holy Trinity Church, Whitehaven. He was born on 9th September 1785 and educated at St Bees School then Trinity College, Cambridge intending to be a lawyer. He then moved to Jesus College and was ordained on 21st December 1808 and was a Curate at Beckermeth, Cumberland. He was ordained Priest on 21st June 1810 and presented to Hensingham- the Church had been built by his maternal Uncle, Anthony Benn. In 1812 he strongly opposed the formation of a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Whitehaven. In 1814 he became an evangelist of the Simeonite School, and was strongly Calvinistic. In January 1816 he attended the BFBS in Whitehaven. On 19th December 1816 he sailed with his wife and young child to be a missionary in India, a post secured for him by Revd Charles Simeon of Trinity Church, Cambridge. In 5 years he worked at Cuddalore, Vizagapatam and Madras. He learnt to speak both Tamil and Telugu. Sadly he lost 2 children and then developed an abscess on the liver. He departed India for England on 6th March 1822 for his health but died at sea on 15th April 1822 and was buried in the oceanic depths. His widow died on 29th November 1858.

George D Whitehead 1817-1832, not on CCed, or in earliest Crockfords

Robert Whitehead 1832 to 1851, not on CCed, or in earliest Crockfords

The 4th Vicar was **John Morduant Lowther** from 1851 to 1865. He was born in India around 1824, and was ordained in 1850 so Hensingham was his first posting as a Vicar. After Hensingham he was Vicar of Whicham, County Durham (not Cumberland) from 1865 to 1872 then of Bolton, near Wigton, Cumberland from 1872 to his death in 1888 as a Bachelor. This is where he had served his brief Curacy (according to the 1851 census). According to 'The Lowther Family' by Hugh Owen he had held Whicham in plurality with Hensingham from 1855, although there is significant doubt about that statement-if it is true he must have been absentee from Whicham until 1865 as the Hensingham Vestry Minutes show he was very active here. He oversaw the erection of a chancel in the Old Church.

The 5th Vicar was **William Henry Wilkinson** from 1865 to 1910. He was ordained in 1860 and was Curate of Escomb, County Durham from 1862 to 1865 before coming to Hensingham. He died at Newcastle, where he was awaiting an operation, on 5th August 1910 aged 71 after a long and painful illness (source- History of the Church of Hensingham, by CEA Blackburn). He was buried in grave 1C11 at Whitehaven Cemetery on 9th August (not the Village Cemetery as might have been expected). This grave was that of his wife's family, she had predeceased him on 17th December 1905. The Reredos of the new Church was given in his memory by his brother, Arthur, of Windsor in 1913.

The 6th Vicar was **Charles Eliel Anderson Blackburn** from 1910 to 1918. He was ordained in 1905 and was Curate of Stratford on Avon with Shotton and Liddington from 1907 to

1910 then of St Mary with St Stephen, Wolsingham, County Durham from 1905 to 1907. He had been educated in France, as he was the son of a missionary. (Note-the 2 previous postings are from the official Church History written by the man himself but are opposite in order to Crockfords). His very first service in Whitehaven was to assist at the Memorial Service for the Wellington Pit disaster of 11th May 1910, held at St. Nicholas' Church on 16th December 1910. He started at Hensingham 2 days later- still in the Old Church, but with progress well under way on fundraising for the new Church [the one which exists in 2014]. He officiated at the last service in the Old Church on 24th September 1911 after which services moved to the Sunday Schoolroom. The foundation stone of the New Church was laid on 7th November 1911. The new Church was consecrated on 1st July 1913 and the eight bells dedicated on 14th August 1913. The organ was dedicated on 26th November 1914. In 1918 he moved to Corbridge-on-Tyne with Halton, in Northumberland. On his departure he was given an illuminated address, a silver salver and a cheque for £150- the latter he gave back to augment the living. In 1926 he arranged with Revd Edmund Freeman (his successor) for the bell from the Old Church to be given to a friend of his for a mission Church in the Seychelles Islands. He was Rural Dean of Corbridge from 1929. In March 1918 a stained glass window was placed in the North Aisle in memory of Lieut. Leonard William Armstrong, killed in WW1 on 19th May 1917.

The 7th Vicar was **Edmund Freeman** from 1918 to December 1940. He was ordained in 1890 and served Curacies at Jesmond, Newcastle from 1890 to 1893 and Christ Church, Calughton 1893 to 1903. He was then Vicar of Donnington from 1903 to 1918 before coming to Hensingham. During his tenure at Hensingham the new Church Hall was built across the road from the Church in 1924/1925. This was replaced in the 1990's by a new Hall built as an extension to the Church.

Frederick Gibson March 1941 to January 1945 (note this Vicar is not listed in A History of Whitehaven by Daniel Hay who incorrectly says that Revd Freeman was here until 1945, but his existence can be derived from the Parish Registers).

Francis MA Farrer April 1945 to August 1952

Philip Truswell September 1953 to October 1959

The 11th Vicar was **John Whittaker** from June 1960 to 1967. He was born in 1927 and trained for the ministry at Oak Hill Theological College. He was ordained in 1955 and served curacies at Blackpool St Thomas 1955 to 1957 then St Helen's Parish Church 1958 to 1960 before coming to Hensingham. Subsequently he was Vicar of Skelmersdale St Paul 1967 to 1977, of Great Faringdon with Little Coxwell, Oxfordshire 1977 to 1983 and Rural Dean of White Horse from 1980 to 1983 when he retired to Faringdon, Oxfordshire. From 1988 to 1995 he was also Curate of Broughton Poggs with Filkins & Broadwell, and from 1995 to 1996 Curate of Shill Valley & Broadshire. He was also Chaplain of the West Cumberland Hospital.

From 1967 until his retirement in September 1990 the 12th Vicar was **Canon William (Bill) Kelly** (note this is NOT the same William Kelly as was at Maryport- there were two Canon

William Kelly's in the Diocese of Carlisle at the same time). He was born in 1925 and retired to Carlisle in September 1990 (where he was born). In around 1970 the font was moved to the front of the Church, the Altar was brought forward and the chancel floor lowered, levelled and carpeted. (reference the Church Diamond Jubilee booklet). He was also Chaplain of the West Cumberland Hospital.

From the "Whitehaven News" of 6th September 1990 we know that he worked on the LMS Railway shortly before the War then served at home with the Royal Engineers in WW2. During the war he received the call to be ordained and was trained at Bristol Theological College and St John's College, Durham. He was ordained at Lanercost Priory in 1952 and served his curacy at St John the Evangelist, Carlisle. In 1955 he became Vicar of Flimby and then in 1964 Vicar of Barrow-in-Furness St John's. From 1975 to 1984 he was Rural Dean of Calder and Honorary Canon of Carlisle Cathedral. One of his sons, John Graham Kelly (born 1960), went into the ministry in 1994 after an initial career as a Solicitor. In 1992 the Church Clock (which had been out of service since 1982) was restored in his memory as he died in late 1991.

From 1991 to 2003 the 13th Vicar was **Ian George Mainey**. He was born in 1951 and trained for the ministry at Oak Hill Theological College. He was ordained in 1987 and served his curacy at Denton Holme, Carlisle from 1987 to 1991 before coming to Hensingham. He moved into a newly built Vicarage on the north side of the Church (the old one was on the south side of the church). As of 2014 he is at Birkdale St James, Merseyside.

Since 2003 and to date (March 2014) the 14th Vicar has been **Fergus Tom Pearson**. Born in 1958 he was trained for the ministry at Oak Hill Theological College and was ordained in 1992. He served his title at Mildmay Grove St Jude & St Paul., London to 1995 then spent 2 years in Australia. He was then Curate of Heatherlands St John, Salisbury to 2003 when he moved to Hensingham as Vicar.