

MARYPORT'S FREE CHURCH - CHRIST CHURCH ON THE HARBOUR

Perhaps a good starting point for this story is a report in the "Adair's Maryport Advertiser" for September 1st 1854: "Mr Wood, . . . the contingent remainder of a scholar and a gentleman . . . was preaching to the loiterers on Lazy Hill. He was taken to the lock-up and was apparently pleased by this." Lazy Hill is the name once given to the site of Christ Church, Maryport, then it was a popular place for itinerant preachers.

On New Year's Day 1872, there was a terrible storm. This storm meant that the foundation stone for the "New Church" could not be laid, so that part of the ceremony had to take place the following day.

A service at St Mary's, where the incumbent, Rev Alfred Oates, preached had taken place as planned on the first day of 1872 but the storm did not abate till the evening so it was on the second day of the year that Mrs Senhouse laid the stone (doubtless with the help of Mr Marshall who was to be the builder of the church); this was fitting as she had given the land for the church. The trowel and mallet she used were presented to her. Mr Joseph Mark placed a box beneath the stone which contained; coins, local newspapers, a New Testament and a short statement of the history of the work. The estimated cost of the "Mission Church", as the new church was often called, was £1,500 and all but £200 had been raised.

The above has been taken from the "Maryport Advertiser" for January 5th 1872. This newspaper was run by Robert Adair who, with Joseph Mark were the driving force behind this church. At first it was called "The Mission Church", the original lectern Bible and Missal being presented to "Maryport Mission Church, AD 1872", before long the present name of "Christ Church" was adopted, the earliest reference I have found using this name is from the newspaper for Oct 11th 1878. In the town, it was quipped that it should be called "St Marks". "The New Church" and "The Free Church", were other names used in the early days, especially by the local paper.

Senhouse Street between Crosby Street and the High Street, is where these two worthies lived.

Robert Adair had been instrumental in establishing a secret ballot for eight town trustees in 1833, the first of its kind in England. From his address 27/29 Senhouse Street (now an OAP club) he ran the local newspaper, sold books and stationery, was a printer and had the postage stamp agency; in 1857 he tried (unsuccessfully) to get Dickens and Collins to speak the Aetheneum Club in the High Street at the time when they stayed at the Golden Lion

Next Door at no 25 (now the Town Hall) was Joseph Mark who ran a Drapers, but more importantly was the actuary of the Maryport Savings Bank since its inception in 1842; no 25 being also the address of the bank. Joseph also had the agency for the Cumberland Bank for 30 years

until he resigned 1860, Robert Adair saying "this will be regretted by our townsmen, as all who have occasion to seek advice from Mr Mark (and who has not?) can bear testimony to his uniform civility and anxiety to render his services." Still in this stretch, at no 39, we find Charles Eaglesfield, an architect who was responsible for many of the churches and chapels in West Cumbria, including Christ Church.

When Maryport was created by Humphrey Senhouse in 1749, he built St Mary's Church as a private chapel in 1760. The chapel was dedicated to St Mary in 1763, (note that the town was named by Humphrey Senhouse after his wife, the chapel came later). Other denominations followed as the town grew: the Quakers came in 1772 followed the next year by Presbyterians, Wesleyans in 1806, Baptists 1807, The first Roman Catholic Priest came in 1838, Primitive Methodists in 1839 and the Furnace Road Chapel dates from 1861. All these buildings were in the upper part of the town, none of them were conveniently situated for the growing population "Downstreet" (or for the sailors who were present in large numbers, 300-400 vessels in the harbour at a time - and the Seamen's Institute didn't open until 1890) The "Downstreet" part of town was a poor area and the only Anglican church where sittings were free was the parish church at Crosscanonby, in those days sittings had to be purchased. Education and health were also a worry in the Downstreet area.

On April 11th 1862, reporting on the St Mary's Chapel Centenary*, Robert Adair suggests that a new church should be built in the lower part of town. This is the first reference I have found to the need for a new church. In the October 31st edition it was stated that 32 families were wanting pews in St Mary's, again the editorial calls for a new church. The paper often had adverts for auctions for the pews at St Mary's. Over the years various palliatives were suggested such as enabling those without pews to occupy pews where the owners had not turned up. This didn't solve the real problem which was that St Mary's was too small and, as a private chapel which had to charge for sittings, resentment was caused. **I realise that the dates don't exactly correspond, these however, are the published dates.*

Moving into 1863, Adair pens an editorial (Sept 11th) about a new church, "it ought to be a privilege by the more wealthy inhabitants, to contribute so important a boon to the poor, and one that might prove, at the same time, the most honourable and lasting monument to the families themselves . . . but the rich have made no sign - and we now turn to the poor for a response." Another editorial the next week and he now rails against paying for pews. By the next week it looks as if Adair is mustering his forces - there is letter from T Morrison Dixon of St Mary's Ilkeston (a native of Maryport) in which he reminds folk that Rev Featherstone (incumbent of St Marys 1845-50) said that the people of Maryport were the most generous to be found anywhere, in four years Maryport raised: £900 for National Schools and the Master's House; £400, new steeple for St Mary's; and £120 for a new organ. He suggests calling a public meeting and mentions the names of many local inhabitants who could be involved.

November 6th carries a notice of a public meeting to be held on Wednesday 18th of November in the courtroom. The notice is also in the Nov 13th edition with an editorial in which Adair hopes for an ecumenical approach - quite a revolutionary idea for those times.

The report of the meeting is in the paper for the 20th. Mr Senhouse was called to preside and said that when the chapel was enlarged in 1834, it was considered by many that a second church in some other part of town would be preferable. The first resolution was proposed by Rev Bewsher, seconded by Mr Mark was for a church in the lower part of town for residents and sailors. Eventually, the 17 persons listed as being present passed four resolutions:

"1) That it appears to this meeting that further Church provision is required for the inhabitants of Maryport, especially those living in the lower part of Town, and that to supply it a new *Episcopal Church or Chapel appears to be called for.

2) That for providing the necessary funds for the erection of such a Church or Chapel and for the purchase of a suitable site for the same, Subscriptions to be entered into.

3) That the following Gentlemen namely: J P Senhouse Esq, Robert Ritson Esq, Rev. Brewster, Mr Addison, Mr Tyson, Mr T Walker jnr, Mr Thompson, banker, Mr K Wood, Mr Hurthwait, Rev. Mayhew and Mr Mark be, and they are hereby appointed a Committee for carrying the object of the meeting into effect.

4) That Mr Thompson be appointed treasurer, and Mr Tyson secretary to the Committee."

**The Anglican Church was often called Episcopalian at this time.* The editorial for the following week (the 27th) says that the meeting was not as well attended as hoped and that there were no "dissenting ministers or their Christian friends at the meeting". This should have been no surprise to Adair as the notice of meeting which he had printed invited "all friends of the established church" to attend. The Rev Bewsher (incumbent of St Marys) who issued the notice was obviously going to have none of this ecumenical talk! Just to emphasise the need for the church, we learn that St Mary's needs 11 pews and 32 more sittings.

A letter printed on Dec 4th says that a hospital on Lazy Hill will be better than a church, but the next it is reported that the incumbent of Maryport is having a meeting with the Bishop who is looking at statistical returns etc. Robert Adair does not want this to be forgotten as his editorial for Jan 1st 1864 says the "New Church is not slumbering" Mr Senhouse and Rev Bewsher had an interview with the Bishop of Carlisle. The church-to-be is called "the poor man's church" as sittings will be free.

On February 4th there was a meeting to consider the Bishop's reply and we are told that the subscriptions will start in a week or two. A Bazaar is suggested at which "we" will contribute articles to raise £5 - the "we" means the Adairs; around this time the daughter sold fancy goods in the shop. However, the next reference seems to be Aug 5th

when fears are expressed that the New Church will not happen as money is not forthcoming.

In the November 25th newspaper, Robert Adair fumes that ". . . the remedy (to a private chapel or a walk to Crosscanonby) by building a new church in the lower part of town has utterly and disgracefully failed, because the proposition - which all joined in advocating as an urgent necessity - was not cordially supported." He notes that dissenting interests are gaining strength.

it is nearly two years until mention is made again. On October 12th 1866 there is another public meeting regretting that the New Church was not done. Mr Senhouse says that he wants to keep the corner known as "Lazy Hill" and reserve it for a new church. It seems that a building is being rented for services and a Sunday School and that there is a town missionary. Mr Mark is reported as in favour of a New Church, a new committee is formed, oddly without Mr Marks although it has the power to co-opt. Next week we read that the "Committee for the New Church have been canvassing with tolerable success. . . . feeling is growing for a new church instead of a temporary building and a town missionary". An anonymous letter in support of a new Church suggests £800 - £1000 will be needed, instead of a missionary; it says that "Dissenters have erected places of worship on every hand, we of the Church of England fritter away our time and do nothing". On November 9th comes the last mention until 1870 - Adair thunders "the New Church must be free".

It seems that "the Town" as represented by Messrs Senhouse, Adair and Mark want a New Church and feel that what St Mary's is doing (creating a mission with a Town Missionary) is going to hinder the creation of a new church. Rev Bewsher then Rev Oates (who came to St Mary's in 1867) arguing that ministering to souls must come before the building; an argument which continues today in all parishes. The story of the mission as told by Rev Oates in his report, is to be found at the end of this article.

It is reported on Feb 15th 1867 that "the Branch Chapel in connection with the lower part of the town's Church of England, which has lately been fitted up, was opened for public worship last week and was well attended. The scripture reader and home missionary is now actively engaged". By September divine service is being performed in the afternoon in the "new church" (meaning the branch chapel or mission room); a letter in the paper stating that though intended for the poor, when there is a popular preacher it is "crowded with St Mary's folk". At the end of 1870, Rev Oates called a meeting about a large schoolroom, Mr Mark saying he thought a church was needed. It seems as if the ball is back in play!

Events moved fast during 1871 and 1872. In January 1871 it is reported that subscriptions are coming in for the new church on Lazy Hill, £500 being raised by the end of the month. An attempt in June to have a hospital instead met with little apparent support (every edition of

the paper seems to report a death at one or other of the industries in Maryport), and on October 6th 1871 the project is launched with an advert inviting tenders. Presumably the design had been done by now; as the architect was the firm of Charles Eaglesfield and son. I wonder if they were paid for designing the church, or whether Messrs Adair and Mark persuaded them to do the design for free. Published information suggests that Charles snr had finished practising by this time but both he and his son were present at the opening of the church. It has been said that the roof over the chancel was made to resemble an upturned boat, but I think the resemblance is fortuitous, the shape of the structure is dictated by the semicircular shape of the chancel end.

The next week the tenders have been accepted. No provision had been made for warming, gas lighting, an organ or harmonium, chancel furniture, communion plate or books. Just to make sure the sittings in the new church are free, there are several references over the next few weeks to paying for sittings at St Mary's. The next event noticed by the paper is the laying of the foundation stone on the 2nd January 1872. Strange as it may seem, I cannot find where the foundation stone is; of course it might not have had an inscription (none is reported) in which case it cannot be easily identified. Traditionally the North East corner is where the stone will be but, Christ Church is not oriented East-West.

By May, it is thought that the spire and clock should be added to the church and in October a subscription list is opened. The spire becomes a virtual certainty by October 18th. The only sour note is a letter in November saying that the church lacks light and asking why another church is needed.

Finally, on December 12th 1872, the church was opened. It had taken less than a year to build. Mr Marshall had been the contractor for the masonry, using stone which had come from the Nertherhall quarry; joinery was by Mr Dent from Cockermouth, slating by Mandle of Maryport, glazing and plumbing by Piele from Workington and the plastering by Johnston of Carlisle. The Bishop preached at the opening, comparing Maryport to Joppa, rejoiced that the new church was similarly situated and that "this occasion was the opening of the door of the church to the Gentiles." he could not conceive of a greater blessing to Maryport than a church like this. A luncheon was then served for 80 or 90 in the schoolroom in Nelson Street at which the Mr Senhouse presided, the Bishop of Carlisle responding to a toast to "The Church of England" At this time the question of establishment or disestablishment was being hotly debated and the Bishop had a few words to say on this subject. In the evening there was a large meeting held, again in the schoolroom, and the Rev Oates read his report (appended to this article).

The "Advertiser" was proud to say that it had agitated for the church ten years ago and acknowledged the help (in 1862) from Rev. J Ritson, Rural Dean in Rugby who was "anxious for free sittings". Mr Adair certainly knew how to marshal his forces in this respect! The

gestation was more protracted than ten years; Mr Senhouse had said that many felt another church was needed back in 1834 when St Mary's was enlarged. The following week it was reported that the New Church was well patronised "by the class for whom it is intended".

The only reference for 1873 is in May when it is said that the New Church steeple is to be finished next week. A year later, the Bishop of Carlisle took confirmations at the New Church - no fewer than 116 young people being confirmed. Sadly, this year the death occurred of Joseph Senhouse, who had earmarked his land on Lazy Hill for the church.

In this year, 1874, a letter was published from a subscriber asking where the New Church clock was, the money subscribed for the spire was also for a clock - there are currently just blank faces on the steeple. In Sept 1876 we are told that Mr Briggs is actively engaged in obtaining subscriptions for the New Church clock. This business occasionally surfaces until, on November 1st 1878, an editorial says that a large sum was collected for the clock. It is pointed out that many people who are not Anglicans had contributed to the fund for the clock, and handed over to the Committee. This "fund was mysteriously absorbed or expended on other matters connected with the Church." Mr T H Ismay was one of those who had contributed and has signified his intention of having the clock erected at his expense. Mr Ismay lived in Liverpool but was born in Maryport - and if the name seems familiar that is because he was founder of the White Star line, owners of the Titanic. The editor goes on to suggest calling the clock "The Ismay Clock". On December 6th, the paper states that T H Ismay has paid for the clock and expresses the hope that the Trustees will light it for nothing. The January 17th 1879 edition has a letter from Ismay thanking the trustees for lighting the clock.

The clock is a flatbed clock with an anchor escapement and has the name "Wilson, Maryport" on the small dial on the clock itself. I don't know whether Wilson (a well known local clock and watchmaker) actually made or merely supplied the clock but it is a tribute to the design and construction that it still keeps good time. It strikes the hours on a bell, although this facility has not been used for some time which I think is rather a shame. The bell itself is quite large and is not a traditional bell-metal bell, it is a steel bell made by the firm of Vickers in Sheffield; they were well-known in those days for their steel bells. Unfortunately, being steel, the bell is so corroded now that the only part of the inscription still present is "S LIMITED" which I think is the tail end of "VICKERS LIMITED". As was the practice at the time, the bell is in a frame and complete with wheel and stay for ringing, rather than just chiming. Now it is no longer rung or chimed but struck by a clock hammer.

So, by the start of 1879, the New Church is called "Christ Church" and the clock is visible over the harbour enabling the sailors to see and hear what the time is and acting as a welcoming beacon. Internally, the church was quite rude and simple, although no pictures have come

to light. Up until 1881 an American (reed) organ had been used. The Rev Oates said that originally there was no provision made for an organ but the Bishop suggested putting in an organ chapel and an American organ (a reed organ) was used. In 1881 a member of the congregation purchased a second-hand organ for the church. At the time the organ was bought, the church was going to pay Mr Mark (for it was he who paid for it) but later we learn that he gave it to the church. The organ was from Lairthwaite near Keswick and had been made for James Stanger in 1832 by Elliot and Hill who were probably the best organ builder in Britain at the time. The original specification of the organ is on the National Pipe Organ Register, N03577. It was installed by Nicholson of Newcastle (he was responsible for the St. Mary's organ as well as others in Maryport). The magnificent case is virtually all original although the pipes were then gilded, there were no pedals and the keyboards were recessed into the case instead of projecting as now. Mr T Dawson was the organist, Jackson's Te Deum, and the anthems "Sound the Loud Timbrel" and "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains" were sung by the choir at its opening.

Christchurch then settled down into the normal existence for an Anglican church, although not a parish church it effectively functioned as such for the Downstreet area of town. In 1885, Joseph Mark's wife Mary died, followed in 1890 by Joseph himself. In his obituary we learn that he was the secretary of Christ Church and fulfilled the role of Churchwarden (Christ Church had no Churchwardens at this time). Elizabeth Senhouse, who had laid the foundation stone and given the site for the church also died this year. Robert Adair had died the year previously.

The next major event recorded in the newspaper was when Joseph's son, Richard Yeoward Mark had the church "restored" or "renovated" at a cost of £600. When built, the interior was somewhat bare as there was no money to spare for frills, this "restoration" can almost be regarded as finishing off the church. The windows and chalice being specifically dedicated to Richard's parents. An article in "The Advertiser" for June 17th 1893 says that the Bishop re-opened the church on Wednesday and it lists what was done:

Plaster was replaced with portland cement, the windows were internally enriched with small shafts, moulded heads and jambs. The aisles laid with solid wood blocks in herring bone pattern. Stained glass to the chancel (to the memory of Joseph mark and Mary his wife by their son). The choir stalls were improved and an additional stove to the East end. The vestry was built and a much needed side entrance added. The porch laid with tiles, the old flags being laid in the old vestry which was converted to a coal cellar. Pulpit frontal provided and the pews were furnished with black and red felt. A solid silver flagon for communion. The organ was renovated and tuned. Centre woodwork re-varnished and the ceiling re-coloured and etc.

There is a coloured photograph taken soon after the work was completed.

Sadly, Richard died in 1894, aged 51, so did not enjoy the results of his munificence for very long. He had followed in his Father's footsteps in the church. He had married only recently but the marriage would not have taken place in Christ Church because it was only licensed for weddings in 20??. In 1904, his widow, Martha Watson Mark, had the organ rebuilt to its present form by Alexander Young of Manchester. The rebuilding was very sympathetically done and the organ still has much of the character of the original Elliot and Hill organ from Lairthwaite; in particular the magnificent case has been scarcely altered. Presumably there was a service to open the rebuilt organ, as there had been to open it when first acquired, unfortunately by this time the paper, although still called "Maryport Advertiser" was based in Whitehaven and nearly all the local news relates to Whitehaven, Cleator Moor and Frizington. Strangely, the plaque on the organ recording the rebuilding of it is the last reference to be found in the church to the Mark family. Ten years after Richard's death seems a long time but the reason is perhaps to be found in Richard's obituary where it says that Richard may have died intestate, with the result that his widow would only get £500 from the estate.

Christ Church celebrated its Jubilee on Sunday 10th 1922, and a commemorative text recording the event hangs in the church. On this it says that the church was dedicated by the Bishop of Carlisle on Dec 12th 1872. In fact the church was not dedicated then as far as can be ascertained from the reports of the time; we do not know whether the church was ever formally dedicated.

The centenary of the church was celebrated in 1972 and for this, a history of the church was produced by Nora Woodgate. I hope that we will be able to celebrate 150 years in 2022. As a feature of Maryport's harbour area, Christ Church has almost iconic status. It appears in several Lowry paintings - the tip of the spire in "Maryport" of 1960 (I think he painted this picture standing on the slipway). A pencil drawing of Christ Church "The Church on the Quay, Maryport" drawn in 1959 recently sold for £37,250. This is similar to the painting "On the Quay", from 1954, which sold for £216,500 in 2007. The Duke of Devonshire owns the lovely painting of the harbour with Christ Church in the centre which has been re-produced as a postcard. There is a very hurried sketch of the church and harbour is still for sale, and Lowry's friend, Sheila Fell, also painted pictures which feature Christ Church. I am sure that there are more pictures out there which as yet are not well known - have you got one in your loft?

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