

## **A History of St Mark's**

### ***Introduction***

*The history of St Mark's is one of people as well as buildings and I have found it fascinating to discover how much we know about some of the characters from our past. Most of this history is taken from an account of 'St Mark's Church, New Milverton, and Its Parish' by Lyndon F. Cave in Random Papers published by the Leamington Society in 1985, and from other materials in the possession of St Mark's.*

Sidney Tyrrell May 2000.

### ***Early Leamington.***

At the beginning of the 19th century Leamington, though growing rapidly, had not yet begun to expand into the Milverton area, but during the 1830's houses were built up Milverton Hill, what became Church Hill, and along Warwick New Road. The land was part of the old medieval parish of Milverton, with its church of St James. This part of the parish, at its southern end, was wedged between the parishes of Warwick and Leamington Priors (the official name of the Parish of Leamington).

The wealthy families living in these new houses could not attend the Parish Church of All Saints, as this was not maintained by their parish rates, and so they had to travel to St James's, (Old) Milverton. They found this inconvenient, and there was a demand for a chapel nearer at hand. After much discussion between the Vicars of the Parishes of (Old) Milverton and Leamington Priors it was agreed to provide a new chapel, even though it would reduce both their incomes.

### ***How Church Hill got its name, and the Pepper Pot was built.***

The new Milverton Episcopal Chapel was built in 1836, on a site given by the Earl of Warwick at the top of Church Hill, (which took its name from the chapel), at the corner of Milverton Terrace. Because of its small round classical style tower, which housed one bell, it soon became known to the locals as 'the pepper box', or the 'pepper pot' chapel. It was 115 feet long and 54 feet wide, having room for 800 worshippers. In the gallery was an organ built by Hill of London, which had previously been in the Chapel Royal at St James Palace.

The chapel had a large congregation of influential locals, including the Earl of Warwick who had a private pew. The first minister was the Rev J.H. Smith, and he was succeeded on his retirement in 1871 by the Rev Charles Carus-Wilson.

### ***A long serving organist arrives.***

In 1875 George Kennett came from Folkestone Parish Church to be the organist at 'the pepper pot', and remained as organist in the parish for 62 years, transferring to St Mark's when it was built.

### ***The Carus-Wilson Family : an ecclesiastical dynasty linked to Jane Eyre.***

The Reverend Charles Carus-Wilson, who was the second minister of the Milverton Episcopal Chapel, came from Westmoreland where his father, the Rev William Carus-Wilson had helped establish a boarding school at Cowan Bridge for the daughters of clergy . Charlotte Bronte and her sisters were at this school in the summer of 1824, and when 'Jane Eyre' was published in 1847, 'Lowood' was intended to be Cowan Bridge, and Mr Brocklehurst, the Rev William Carus-Wilson.

As the Chapel was becoming too small for its congregation it was decided to build a new church, and Charles Carus-Wilson started planning .

### ***St Saviour's is built in Heath Terrace.***

At the time his sister, Frances, Lady Wheler, lived at Limerick House which stood in Warwick Place next to Bertie Terrace, its grounds extending to Guy's Cliffe Road. Frances had married Sir Trevor Wheler, but he died in 1869. In 1872 Lady Wheler paid for the building of St Saviour's in Heath Terrace, on a piece of land adjacent to her garden.

Although St Saviours was never actually consecrated for public worship it was used for children's services and mission work largely among the poorest people of the parish and the servants of the families who attended the Chapel. It subsequently became St Mark's Church Hall. In 1984 it was sold to Emmanuel Church, an independent evangelical church, to help finance the building of the new church hall on part of the Vicarage garden adjacent to St Mark's.

### ***The new Parish of New Milverton is formed.***

In 1875 an Act of Parliament created a new parish by dividing the original Milverton Parish into two. The parishes were known from then on as New Milverton and Old Milverton. to distinguish them, although at that time there was no new church and the name of St Mark's does not appear on the documents authorising the parish. The first vicar was the Rev Charles Carus-Wilson.

Just before the new parish was created Lady Wheler died, bequeathing a sum of £9,000 towards the cost of erecting a new church. Her estate was divided between her two brothers, the Rev Charles and Edward Carus-Wilson, and they placed the whole of the residue into a fund of £40,000 for building the vicarage and church. This was an extremely large sum in 1875.

### ***The building of St Mark's s started, or at least the Vicarage is.***

Lady Bertie-Percy, the grand-daughter of Bertie Greetheed of Guy's Cliffe, gave the site for St Mark's, which was then an apple orchard stretching from Rugby Road to the end of St Mark's Road.

The Vicarage was built first, being finished in late 1875. It was designed by George Gilbert-Scott, junior, the son of the famous nineteenth century church architect of the same name. The original architect's drawings for the Church and Vicarage are still preserved in the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

These have been kept together with many letters which passed between the architect and his clients, which throw light on the problems faced by an architect whose client, the Rev Charles Carus-Wilson, spent long periods in Switzerland while the Vicarage was being built.

The building was designed in the 'French Chateau' style, had 18 bedrooms, and cost rather more than the family had anticipated, resulting in economies being necessary in building the church. The family moved in on or around 3rd September 1875.

### ***The first year.***

In his first year as Vicar , the Rev Carus-Wilson started a mother's meeting, workmen's clubs, a penny savings bank, and two clothing clubs as well as a coal club and a reading room. A singing class met under the direction of George Kennett, who had become organist of the 'Pepper Pot' Chapel at 19 and continued as the organist at St Mark's until 1938.

The first charities supported were the Church Missionary Society and the Church Pastoral Aid Society, who are now the Patrons of the church. There were two Parochial Schools, the Boys' School in Woodbine Street, which had been established for many years, and the Girls' and Infants' School, built by Lady Wheler near St Saviour's in Union Road. In 1875 there were 53 boys, 61 girls and 68 infants attending, in addition to a Night School and Sunday Schools.

***The Rev Charles Carus-Wilson dies, aged 47 and is succeeded as Vicar by his brother in law, then his son.***

The Rev Charles Carus-Wilson did not live to see the church completed as in 1877 he died at the early age of 47, after a short illness in Cannes, leaving 4 sons and a daughter. The East window is given in his memory. His wife survived him by 45 years and died in 1921.

His second son, Frederick, became the third Vicar of St Mark's in 1891, but before then the Rev Henry Maud, Charles Carus-Wilson's brother-in-law, succeeded Charles as Vicar of St Mark's. Together with Edward Carus-Wilson, he saw the church built and was its incumbent until he handed it over in 1890 to his nephew, the Rev Frederick Carus-Wilson, Charles' second son. But we are jumping ahead in time, as the church of St Mark's is not yet built!

***The building of the church.***

George Gilbert Scott, junior, produced three designs for the church, the first as early as 1873 based on his designs for St Agnes, Kennington. The second was prepared in 1874 and had a colossal tower and spire, as well as unusual double transepts. The design was severely criticised for its plainness and barn like appearance when exhibited at the Royal Academy the same year. Construction, however, did not begin until 1876, when several changes were made to this design.

The third design, the one actually built, retained the tower, though this was omitted in order to save money when the church had been started. When it was found that the cost of the building was less than had been feared, it was decided to build a tower smaller than the one proposed. The spire was never added. The cost of the church was £23,015.

***The builder, and the organist again.***

The builder of both the Vicarage and the Church was Mr G.F. Smith. His workshops and house were at the top of Beauchamp Hill with its junction with Union Road. The premises are still standing (2000), the house having been converted into flats and the workshops and yard being the site of Henry Tandy Court. The builder's business continued on that site until the 1930's when it closed and the house became a local Art School.

Mr Smith also built the houses on the site of the 'Pepper Box' Chapel after its demolition in 1882. His daughter married George Kennett, the organist at St Mark's.

***The consecration: 15 July 1879.***

It was Henry Maud who welcomed the Bishop of Worcester, Dr Philpot, in whose Diocese St Mark's then was, for the Consecration on 15th July 1879 at 3.00pm. Exactly 100 years later the Bishop of Coventry attended a special centenary service at St Mark's.

The Leamington Spa Courier for 19 July 1879 reported the opening of the church in some detail. Before the service a luncheon for the Bishop and Clergy was held in the new Church Room.

The church was full for the service, a thousand people attending, and most of the local clergy were in the procession which met the Bishop at the West Door to present the petition for the consecration, followed by the Benediction of the land and buildings with the Sentence of Dedication and the Consecration. The service followed at which the Bishop preached. There was then an organ recital.

The evening service was taken by the Bishop of Rochester, a friend of the Carus-Wilson family, and on the following day a special service was held for the workmen who had been employed on the church. These workmen were each presented with a Bible, with an inscription inside recording their work on the building. When the church was consecrated many of the internal fittings were not yet in place and the collections taken at the first services went towards paying for furniture.

### ***The clergy.***

When **Charles Carus-Wilson** died **Henry Maud**, his brother-in-law, succeeded him as Vicar of St Mark's. In 1890 he handed over to his nephew, the **Rev Frederick Carus-Wilson**, Charles' second son.

In 1898 the **Reverend Archibald Parry** became Vicar of St Mark's in 1898, but left in 1900 on his appointment as Bishop of British Guiana. He was Bishop of British Guiana from 1900-1921, and Archbishop of the West Indies from 1917-1921.

The **Rev Bertram Streatfield** (Streatfeild?) was Vicar from 1901 to 1920, and it was during this time that many changes were made.

In 1903 the new reredos, carved by Plucknett and Co., the famous Warwick woodcarvers, was fitted. That same year the church was re-decorated an electric lighting installed, being switched on on 22nd February 1903. The screen was erected in 1904, and the brass eagle lectern was given in 1906.

### ***Milverton Coffee House***

The Rev Streatfield was greatly concerned about the drunken state of many of the working men of the parish and raised enough money to buy a property, on the site of the present Stamford Gardens flats, and in October 1912 the Milverton Coffee House was opened by St Mark's Church.

This provided recreation facilities, beds for homeless men, and of course non-alcoholic drinks, so that the poorer people could be persuaded to give up alcohol which the Vicar considered was the cause of many social problems of the time. The Coffee House continued in operation until sometime in the 1930's.

### ***The Milverton Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club.***

In 1902 the Milverton Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club was formed at St Mark's Church, playing on the Vicarage Lawns. In 1928 the croquet section moved to the Guy's Cliffe Avenue ground, and became known as the Warwickshire Croquet Club. Tennis continued to be played in the

Vicarage gardens until after the Second World War, when the two clubs came together again and tennis moved to Guy's Cliffe Avenue. This club claims to be the oldest lawn tennis club in the world, having its origins as the Leamington Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in 1872.

The **Rev A. Mostyn Robinson** was instituted as Vicar on 16th December 1920. The daughter of the Reverend Mostyn Robinson wrote a description of moving into the Vicarage just before Christmas 1920 in bitterly cold weather 'being greeted by a cascade of frozen water all down the staircase. There was no lighting but candles. Someone had started to install electric light, found the job too much for him and gone off, having first disconnected the old gas lighting.'

In 1921 the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure was passed by Parliament which allowed the setting up of Parochial Church Councils. St Mark's had one shortly after the Act was passed.

In 1928 the new Diocese of Coventry was formed and St Mark's became part of that Diocese, leaving the Diocese of Worcester. In 1929 the Jubilee of St Mark's was celebrated.

In 1936 the Reverend Mostyn Robinson became Vicar of Wolvey, and was succeeded by the **Reverend Canon W.E.Daniels**.

Canon Daniels was Vicar from 1936, the year of The Abdication, until 1942. During his time at St Mark's he had 3 curates: The Rev Charles Porter, the Rev Donald Plumley, and the Rev Brian Bell.

In 1953, at the age of 80, he wrote 'Those were the Days', some reminiscences of over 50 years in the ministry of the Church of England. A picture of St. Mark's was on the front cover.

Canon Daniels came from St George's Deal. He wrote "During nine years at Deal we were offered other spheres, but not until the close of 1935, when we were offered St Mark's, Leamington, did we decide to move. The Archbishop (Lang) felt it was an important change.

I had always longed to have a really beautiful church, and here it was. It was in the 'seventies that a Lady Wheler died and left £75,000 to build a church in suburban Leamington. In those days you could build a small cathedral for that money, and Gilbert Scott the second did it. With, after improvements, windows and the like, it must have cost nearly £100,000.

Later, when I wanted to erect a memorial to Sir John Keir, one of my wardens, the only thing I could see lacking was a Lych Gate, and this was added.

The builders of the church had also built a great Vicarage, a palace, to go with the Cathedral, with two-and-a-half acres of garden, so we need never want fruit or vegetables; but of course insufficient endowment.

The service in St Mark's was beautifully rendered by an excellent Choir, under a delightful and much loved organist, Mr Kennett, who, to the grief of all, died during my incumbency.

During our six years there, four were marred by the second world war. The raids on Coventry and Birmingham made us fear for our beloved Church, and watch was kept at night. Services on Sunday afternoon instead of in the evening in the winter did not help, but in God's mercy St Mark's was kept inviolate.

The enormous house and the great expense, together with increasing years made it difficult to carry on, and when we were offered a country sphere near our beloved Canterbury we decided to return. Had I known how much we should be missed at Leamington, I wonder whether we should have moved. Move we did to Wickhambreaux and Stodmarsh, two ancient Kentish churches."

### ***The death of the first organist.***

It was in 1938 that George Kennett, the organist of St Mark's died. He was born in 1856 and had become a member of the choir of Westminster Abbey at 8, remaining there until at the age of 16 he became the organist of the Parish Church at Folkestone. He came to Leamington from Folkestone, at the age of 19, in 1875 to be the organist of the 'Pepper Pot' Chapel, and then of St Mark's, being organist in the parish for a total of sixty two years.

He married the daughter of Mr Smith, the builder of the church, and served under seven vicars. He sang the solo treble part at the controversial consecration service of Dr Temple, the head master of Rugby School as the Bishop of Exeter, which took place in Westminster Abbey in 1869, and he sang before Queen Victoria on June 21st, 1871 when she opened the new St Thomas' Hospital in London.

The Choir at St Mark's, under George Kennett, was of such quality that some of the men were chosen to sing at a command performance before King George V and Queen Mary. However, there was a rule that there was never to be more than one thing in the service that the congregation could not sing. At Mr Kennett's funeral the choir sang everything unaccompanied; they said that the organ should not speak on that day.

'**Hillie**' was a member of St Mark's for 93 years up to her death in January 1994. She remembered those days in the choir under George Kennet, when it had thirty to forty members.

"At that time the men and the boys were at the front, with the ladies standing behind the men - they didn't want a lot of screaming women at the front. The organist/choirmaster sat high above in the organ loft behind the trellis gates. There had only to be one note wrong, and the gates would fly open and a finger pointed at the offender." In those days there was also a good bell ringing team.

In 1939 the Diamond Jubilee of the church was celebrated from July 15th to 23rd, during which time there was a service to dedicate the Lych Gate in honour of Lieutenant-General Sir John Keir, KCB, who had lived in the parish for many years after his retirement from the army.

The **Reverend B.E.Eldridge** was the Vicar of St Mark's from 1942 to 1952. It was during this time, in 1951, that Christchurch, the church at the top of The Parade, closed and many of the congregation joined St Mark's.

A History of Christchurch taken from 'Royal Leamington Spa' by Lyndon Cave

Christchurch stood at the top of The Parade, in Christchurch gardens. When St Luke's church in Holly Walk closed in 1947 the congregation joined that of Christchurch, and in 1951 the combined congregations moved to join St Mark's (but as soon as they got there the heating system at St Mark's failed and everyone had to move back to Christchurch for a month or two). The church itself was demolished in 1959, but had an interesting history.

In August 1823 a meeting of the parish vestry (of Leamington Priors) decided to build a chapel in the New Town, as there was no Anglican church north of the Leam. Mr Willes generously offered to provide a site and build the Chapel; Mr Greethead supplemented this gift by presenting the land necessary to extend the road from the top of Union Parade where it joined Warwick Street to the site of the new chapel. This new road later became the Upper Parade. The new building was a proprietary chapel to be leased by a 'proprietor preacher', in this case a clergyman of the Church of England, who depended for his income on donations from the congregation.

The opening service was held on 16 October 1825. Instead of adopting the Gothic revival style then usual for churches, the architect, P.F.Robinson, chose a more controversial style based on the design of the abbey church of Jumieges in Normandy. His chapel was one of the earliest Norman revival churches in the country.

Known as the Leamington Episcopal Chapel, it became the private property of the Reverend Robert Downes, Vicar of Leamington, who conducted the services assisted by his curates. To meet the cost of maintaining and running the chapel admission was by ticket at 6d (2 1/2p) each (five for 2s), servants half price. It was never owned by the Parish of Leamington Priors, but remained the property of Mr Downes and his family.

When the Reverend John Craig became vicar of Leamington in 1839 he leased the chapel from Downes and abolished the charge. In 1829 the ground around the chapel was enclosed for use as a public garden.

The building had galleries above the aisles and seated 1,000. Originally the tower had a pitched roof, but about 1870 this was removed and replaced by the parapet with corner turrets familiar to townspeople until its demolition.

Several clergymen leased the chapel and in 1874 the Reverend J.A.Nicholson took up his duties. He made extensive alterations to the interior, and introduced a high church type of service attracting a large and fashionable congregation. Mrs Downes refused to renew the lease in 1880 and Dr Nicholson and his congregation were practically ejected from the building. They moved to the Public Hall in Windsor Street, then to the church of St Michael's and All Angels later renamed St Albans. This stood at the corner of Portland Street and Warwick Street but was demolished in 1968.

Christchurch itself was sold to Mr Dale, a prominent Warwick businessman, who conveyed the chapel to trustees 'for the purpose of being ever used for evangelical purposes'. There were centenary celebrations in may 1926, but after the second world war the bishop would not license anyone to preach in it, so it was closed.

Gladys Hinton, whose parents were married by the Reverend Frederick Carus-Wilson in St Mark's, remembered an amusing incident from the Reverend Eldridge's days.

"I took my son to the Children's Church which was held on Sunday afternoons. The Reverend Eldridge had a large dog, and every Sunday, one way or another, the dog found his way into the church during the Children's Church. The children loved this, although the Reverend Eldridge was none too pleased!"

**Bishop Houghton** became Vicar of St Mark's in 1953, the year of the Coronation, and remained until 1959. He had come from being a missionary in China, and is well known for being the author of the hymn "Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour".

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,  
all for love's sake becamest poor,  
thrones for a manger didst surrender  
sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.  
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,  
all for love's sake becamest poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,  
all for love's sake becamest man;  
stooping so low, but sinners raising  
heavenwards by Thine eternal plan.  
Thou who art God beyond all praising,  
all for love's sake becamest man.

Thou who art love beyond all telling,  
Saviour and King, we worship Thee.  
Immanuel, within us dwelling,

make us what Thou wouldst have us be.  
Thou who art love beyond all telling,  
Saviour and King, we worship Thee.

It was during his time at St Mark's that the new vicarage was built. The old vicarage was vast, with a suite of enormous reception rooms, and eighteen bedrooms as well as attic rooms. It was enormously expensive to run, so was sold and converted into flats in 1955.

**The Reverend Cecil Redgrave** was Vicar from 1960 until 1976. His one-time Churchwarden, Harry Spooner, described him as "having an impelling way of getting people involved, and soon there were all manner of groups springing up.

The parish hall (St Saviour's) was booked every day of the week. A new kitchen was added, which meant real sacrificial giving. The organ was revitalised with the console being brought down to a position behind the choir, the church completely redecorated, crumbling sandstone repaired and the church roof re-tiled."

Harry Spooner himself made history, serving for over 50 years as a Reader, firstly at St Paul's Warwick and then at St Mark's. He was the Diocesan Secretary and Registrar for Readers. In 1967 the centenary of the restoration of Readers in the Church of England was celebrated, and he joined 800 robed readers in St Paul's Cathedral to celebrate. The next day the BBC broadcast a special celebratory service from Holy Trinity, Stratford, at which he was asked, by the BBC Director of Religious Broadcasting, to preach.

During Cecil Redgrave's time the group at St Mark's supporting BCMS (the Bible Churchman's Missionary Society, now known as Crosslinks) started collecting waste paper.

Eddie Stranex had recently become the group's treasurer, and later wrote "I was led to try collection of waste paper to add to the fund. Hopefully, I took my first consignment in the car boot to a local merchant, and came away with the princely sum of three shillings and sixpence (17 1/2 p). Soon after I discovered the name and address of the firm which manufactured cartons from waste paper.

For the next 10 years the BCMS group collected paper, tied it in bundles, then helped load the truck when we had approximately 8 tons for despatch. Thanks were due to Muriel and Harold Nason for their garage to store and tie up. The total receipts from paper increased each year until we were unable to continue; by that year the total had risen to over £1,000."

The **Reverend Brian Ruff** was Vicar from 1976 to 1990. Brian's time at St Mark's was a time of much building and reorganisation to create the complex of church buildings all on one site.

In 1979 St Mark's celebrated its Centenary in style with a Carnival Float, with a giant cake, a Garden Party in period costume with a Victorian Street fair in June, a memorable Centenary Service on July 15th with the Bishop of Coventry, and a Festival of Local Arts and Crafts, and Flower Festival on the weekend of 14th to 16th September, plus an ambitious building programme.

The Centenary Building Fund Project aimed to provide improved facilities at St Mark's. Kenneth White was the architect, and he devised a scheme whereby the one large, high ceilinged Parish Room was cut horizontally, with a new staircase provided and the result was two meeting rooms: the Centenary Lounge on the ground floor and the Upper Room up stairs.

A new clergy vestry, and choir vestry with cupboards, were created, the old vestry becoming a meeting room. At the back of church pews were removed, which proved very controversial, to enable a large carpeted reception area with bookstall to be provided, plus toilets and a small kitchen. The carpet was an anonymous gift from a donor who had won on the football pools.



5 years later , in 1984, more building plans were underway to build a church hall adjacent to the church on part of the Vicarage garden. The existing St Saviour's Hall in Heath Terrace was sold to Emmanuel church to help fund the new building. A special sponsored walk, of up to 4 laps of a 5 mile circular route starting at St Mark's was walked by young and old, the youngest to complete all 20 miles (without a blister) being 6 years old. The hall was completed in 1985, at a cost of £110,000 the architect being Mr Miller.

Brian Ruff introduced a green service book which contained the services used plus hymns and choruses which were not in the standard hymn book, though before he left we had invested in Mission Praise. Another of his innovations was the appointment of a Parish Administrator, the post being held by Arwyn Bailey and subsequently by Pam Iredale. During his time at St Mark's Brian had 2 curates: the Reverend David Smith, and the Reverend Jill Waters.

Brian left in 1990 to become the Vicar of Christchurch in Bournemouth.

The **Reverend Alister Mort** became Vicar of St Mark's in September 1990.