

A Brief History of Holy Trinity Lickey and St. Catherine's Blackwell

The foundation of the Parish of Lickey and the establishment of a church and school at its heart began in the early 1850's. The area at that time was remote, hilly and difficult to traverse and it was estimated that there were 1400 people living in the area who were mainly families of poor agricultural workers and even poorer nailers living in small hamlets scattered across the Lickey hills. The need for a church and school to meet the spiritual needs of the population was initiated by the vicar of Bromsgrove, the Rev. Villiers-Brown and Lady Harriet Windsor-Clive of Hewell Grange, Tardebigge.

Rev. Villiers-Brown agreed to provide an officiating minister for the new parish from the Parish of Bromsgrove and Lady Harriet gave the land for the church and school and a house as a vicarage. The cost of building the school with a master's house attached and the church, was met by public donation. The school was completed in the summer of 1854 and church services were started there November of that year.

The parish was formed from parts of the parishes of Bromsgrove, Catshill and Kings Norton and the boundaries extended to the present Birmingham suburb of Northfield, to the east into Alvechurch and to the west, Lydiate Ash and Rubery, the southern boundary much as it is today. The present boundaries were set in 1945.

The foundation stone of the church was laid in May 1855 by Lady Harriet's son, R. H. Windsor-Clive MP. The building was complete by 1856 at a total cost of £2088.18 shillings and 9 pence. It was designed by the architect Henry Day of Worcester and built in the Early English style of white stone with a tiled roof, by Messrs Robinson of Redditch.

The Holy Trinity church was consecrated by Henry Bishop of Worcester on 6th June 1856 with Rev. John Goodwin M.A. installed as the minister with the title of '*Perpetual Curate*'. A curate was assigned to the parish in 1891 and a curate supported the various incumbents until the mid 1980's. A house having eventually been obtained for him and his family at the crossroads opposite St. Catherine's Blackwell known as 'The Parsonage.'

During the early years of the parish it belonged to the Diocese of Worcester but in 1908 Lickey parish was removed to the newly created Diocese of Birmingham,

The first 50 years of the parish's existence saw the parish consolidated and growing. St. Catherine's Church in Blackwell was the first 'daughter' church to be established, as the population in the area grew. This church was consecrated on August 19th 1882 and was a wooden construction with seating for 250 people. Again it was built on land given by the Windsor family of Hewell Grange. This building lasted until 1939 at which time it was in need of significant repair. A new church was suggested and the efforts to rebuild St. Catherine's were made by the wardens who gave their time and money to the project as the Vicar, Rev. John Corbett Rowson, had enlisted at the start of WW2.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid in May 1939 and the church was consecrated on June 7th 1941. This new church is the one we know today, built in a Norwegian style designed by the architect, Mr. North of Llanfairfechan, North Wales. It's most striking feature being the west window in the shape of the Catherine wheel. Of the four 'daughter churches' that evolved from the original Lickey Parish, St. Catherine's is the only one that remains linked to Holy Trinity Church at Lickey and forms the ***Parish of Holy Trinity, Lickey with St. Catherine's, Blackwell***. In 1884 the church opened its second school in what is now known as Linthurst Road,. The building is still in use as a school. A hall was built next to the church (date unknown) but as it needed significant repairs it was sold for building land in 1985.

In 1882, at the other side of the parish, Birmingham Lunatic Asylum was opened on Rubery Hill with the Vicar of Lickey Parish offering spiritual care to the staff and patients until the hospitals own Chapel was built and a Chaplin appointed sometime around 1890. A train station opened close by in 1893 this saw the rapid expansion of the population of the Rubery area. Rubery is some 2/3 miles from Holy Trinity, the hilly terrain causing problems for those wishing to worship at Lickey and for the Vicar needing to reach the parishioners in that area. Fund raising for a third 'daughter' church was begun in September 1894. There is some suggestion that services were first held in a back room of the New Rose and Crown Inn, then in the Rubery Board School room until St. Chad's Church was completed in 1895. The school was a state school opened following the 1870 Education Act. The church was built on land given by a local resident, Miss Anna Smithfield and was dedicated on 30th November 1895 by the Bishop of Coventry. It became a parish separate from Lickey in 1933.

In 1951 St. Chad's church in Rubery created its own 'daughter church' when Stephen's Church in Edgewood Road, Rednal was established. This was on the north side of the Lickey Parish among the counsel houses built by Birmingham Corporation. Development in that area began in the 1930's to accommodate the workers employed at the Austin Motor Company in Longbridge and others erected in the 1950's as Birmingham was suffering a shortage of houses following the destruction caused by WW2 bombing. St. Stephen's became independent parish in 1957.

The third 'daughter' church established within Lickey parish was St. Andrew's in Barnt Green and what began as a Mission Hall that opened on December 1st 1905, became a parish in its own right in 1922. The present St. Andrew's church dedicated in 1913

In 1889 Robert, Lord Windsor, began to sell of plots of land along Fiery Hill Road, Twatling Road, Linthurst Road, Plymouth Road and Rose Hill. These were sizable plots that attracted the wealthy industrialists and business men of Birmingham to live in the rural area of Lickey and commute to the city from Barnt Green Station that had been built in 1846. The upkeep of the parish and improvements and developments of its buildings relied on the financial support of the congregation as unlike older churches Lickey had no rich endowments. The influx of more affluent members of Victorian society changed the *structure* of the congregations that worshipped at Lickey and Blackwell and many gave generously of their time and

money to support the development and upkeep of the buildings and the ministry of the clergy.

By the start of the twentieth century the nailing industry was declining and with it the exploitation of the nailers which had kept them in poverty for so long. Agriculture remained an activity across the whole parish but there was a growth of service trades and occupations needed to supply the wants and needs of the affluent households developing in the eastern area of the parish. The establishment of the Lickey Hills as an area of recreation for the population of Birmingham has ensured that much of the parish remained predominately rural.

The churchyard surrounding Holy Trinity church was the only facility in the area for burials and the area around the church had been almost filled during the first 60 years of the life of the parish. Once again the Earl of Plymouth came to the rescue and gave land for a graveyard extension but the land lay between Twatling Road and the Old Birmingham Road and as it was separate from the church, it needed easy but discrete access. The land was consecrated in 1912 and accessed via what is still known as the 'Coffin Way' which went along at the back of the school buildings so the school children were not aware of when a funeral cortège passed by.

The First World War left its mark on the community and as with other communities across the county efforts, were made for a war memorial to be established to mark the loss of soldiers from the parish. In 1920 the war memorial was erected in Holy Trinity churchyard paid for by voluntary contribution and labour. Names for those from the parish who lost their lives in the Second World War were added in the late 1940's. The memorial was eventually moved to its present position outside the hall on the corner of Old Birmingham Road and Monument Lane, looked after first by the British Legion and now by the local Parish Council.

Also in 1920 the first PCC was established in response to a bill passed by Parliament securing a measure of self-government for all churches. The Lickey PCC had 10 lay representatives as well as the church officers.

In 1921 an ex-army hut was acquired for use as a parish hall and this served its purpose until 1930. However, it took sometime for the site to be agreed, land to be purchased from the Plymouth Estate and the necessary funds to be raised. The committee that led this project was chaired by Sir Herbert Austin. The hall, designed by Architects Harold and John Scott was completed and opened by the then Countess of Plymouth in 1937. Over the years it has been central to the social activities of the local population used for a variety of church and community groups.

Over the years Holy Trinity and St. Catherine's have received many gifts that have enhanced the ornamentation of both churches and added to the comfort of the buildings for the benefit of all who attend them. The spiritual welfare of the congregations has been overseen and encouraged by eleven incumbents. These were documented in '*A Short History of the Parish of the Lickey*' written by Jan Pollard in 1988 and some references can also be found in the few old Parish Magazines still in held in the church archives.

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