

Preface from the Rector

The present building is the second recorded on the site, replacing the chapel erected c1556 by the Dean and Canons of the Collegiate Church, Manchester, which we know now as Manchester Cathedral. At the time of its construction, 1814-16, it was a spiritual and administrative hub for huge swathes of what is now called Greater Manchester. For a few decades thereafter the Dean and Canons still collected their duplicate fees, and to this day remain Lords of the Manor of Newton.

It saw daughter churches come and go across Clayton, Moston, Failsworth, Bradford and Droylsden. All the other churches, and the chapel of ease, in Newton Heath are gone too, the last being St Wilfrid's, in 1998, which already had St Ann's dissolved into it in 1974.

It is pretty much the last visible vestige of Newton Heath's 'greatness'. Economically things had been sliding since the Great War. Peace time after WW2, the 'loss of empire' and the apparent economic expediency – regardless of social cost – of importing product more cheaply from our former 'dominions' saw rapid de-industrialisation and the loss of those certainties of factory or mill, shop floor or clerks' offices.

Aspirational housing schemes and the demolition of handsome, reassuring civic buildings, after Local Government Reorganisation in the 1970s, saw the wrecker's ball "finish of what Gerry didn't" as some used to say. The result is, arguably, a portion of a ward within the city limits which lacks the cohesion it once enjoyed, for all the social stratification and deference of the pre-war years, pre-Baby-boom.

The Narthex displays speak of more prosperous and optimistic times, which some might describe as the halcyon days of the parish.

In the main body of the church you will see representations of statutory and voluntary bodies which help Newton Heath to cohere. We celebrate all those who are represented and we all pledge to develop relationships old and new centred today in the parish church of this community which occupies such an historic and iconic footprint of land and at its heart.

Whilst we continue to look forwards, we are aware that clues to solutions for present problems lie in some of the patterns, shapes and structures of the past.

You are all very welcome.

The Reverend Andrew Wickens, LL.M, FRSA, ARCM.

Rector, Newton Heath.

September 2023

A Brief History of Newton Heath

Newton Heath, or Newton as it was often known, is now an industrial and mainly working class residential area. The old township boundary ran along the present boundary with Failsworth to the River Medlock, along the river to a point beyond Hulme Hall Lane, along the now culverted Shooters Brook, (across what is now the Bradford Road area of Miles Platting), to behind the White Hart Inn on Collyhurst Street. It then followed Newton and Moston Brooks back to the Failsworth Boundary. There was also a small area of land called newton detached, known as Kirkmanshulme, which belonged to the township and this district included Belle Vue Gardens. There was a boundary stone stating this which stood at the junction of Stockport Road and Kirkmanshulme Lane for many years.

The earliest evidence of man's influence on the locality is that of the Romans who built one of their roads through the area. Between 79-84 A.D. Agricola built forts at Castlefield, Manchester and Castleshaw, on the moors above Oldham. The road which connected these forts ran under what is now Briscoe Lane and Gaskell Street and went across to Roman Road, Failsworth. When excavations were made in Gaskell Street in 1856 the old Roman Road was found. It was 24ft wide, had a gravel surface and was supported by logs to give buoyancy over the boggy parts.

Little is known of the district for the next 900 years or so when mention is made of Newton in the records of Manchester Collegiate Church, now the Cathedral. The Collegiate Church owned a large part of Newton and still does to this day. Other major landowners were the Byron family, who lived at Clayton Hall, the Chetham family and later the Greaves family who resided at Culcheth Hall.

The heath itself started at Miles Platting, near the White Hart Inn, and followed either side of the present Oldham Road. It then ballooned out until it reached the Failsworth boundary. There were four gates on the heath, Culcheth Gate, situated near the present Culcheth Gates Inn, Cheetham's Gate, which stood on Briscoe Lane, near the school, Dean's Gate, which was where the Dean Brook Inn now stands and Greaves Gate which was adjacent to the junction of Droylsden Road and Terrance Street. The heath was a very wild and lonely place and the only buildings on it were All Saint's Church and Parsonage.

During the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries the population of the district was very small and activities were mainly centred around the four village greens. Goose Green was off Dean Lane, near Warden Lane and was named from the large flocks of geese which grazed there. Bull, bear and badger baiting took place there together with games such as football, rounders and shinty, a type of hockey played with curved sticks. Hobson's Green was near Dob Lane Chapel and was mainly used by Failsworth folk. Botany Green, near Greave's Gate was notorious for being very often waterlogged. A man used to charge 1d for carrying people across on his back. Crown Point Green, off Briscoe Lane, had a maypole.

One of the busiest areas in the district was Millhouses, situated on Millstream Lane between the Failsworth boundary and Clayton Bridge. There was a corn mill, (one had stood on the site since the 14th century), an inn, butchers, grocers, tailors, cobblers and smithy. In 1757 a mob attacked the mill in the belief that the miller ground human bones to powder which he added to the flour. At the annual wakes in August the rush bearing took place. This was one of the highlights of the year when the rushes were built up high on a flat cart and decorated with flowers, garlands silverware. The rushes were taken to the parish church where they

were strewn on the floor for warmth. Other pastimes included wrestling and footracing which took place on the heath.

The main occupation of the inhabitants was agriculture. Barley was grown pigs and cows kept. Coal mining also took place, this being mentioned as early as 1674. Refugees from the religious wars in Europe settled in the Manchester area and brought their weaving skills with them. The weaving of linen, imported from Ireland, became common, and with this industry came the bleach works. Linen bleach works were built along the banks of the river Medlock and Moston Brook and became an important part of the area's livelihood. As part of the bleaching process: the linen had to be laid out in fields to dry and there were strict penalties for this linen. A 19 year old youth, George Russell, was publicly hanged on Newton Heath in 1798 for stealing from a bleach croft.

With the coming of steam power during the 19th century other industries developed. These included silk weaving, cotton spinning and weaving, heavy engineering together with glass making and the manufacturing of matches.

The population grew rapidly during this time. In 1801 it was 1,295, in 1841, 6,127 and in 1871, 18,079. With the breakdown of the agricultural system the people came into the area to find work in the mills and factories that were being built. They were mainly working class people and rows of cheap, small terraced houses were built to accommodate them. These were concentrated in the Oldham Road, Old Church Street and Droylsden Road areas. Some large houses were constructed in the vicinity of Clayton Bridge, particularly around Windsor Road and these were occupied by mill owners and professional people.

This movement of population was aided by the improvement in communications. Oldham Road, then called Newton Lane, was greatly improved in 1803 and in 1804 the Rochdale Canal was opened. This made a great impact on the district as many mills were built upon its banks in order to make use of its water for steam power and transportation of goods. In the 1840's two railways were laid through the area. They both connected Manchester with parts of Yorkshire. One line ran via Miles Platting, Park and Clayton Bridge stations and the other via Miles Platting and Newton Heath. As a result of these developments a large engine repair depot, engine sheds and carriage works were erected by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Co. which employed a large number of local people.

With the rise in population Oldham Road and Old Church Street developed into a shopping centre of mostly small shops. Various churches and schools opened in their vicinity. There were three Methodist chapels:— the Wesleyan's, Hall St. and Culcheth, a Ragged School, a Salvationist Army branch and various other places of worship. This population boom made the old method of Local Government impractical and in 1890 the inhabitants of Newton Heath voted to go back into Manchester.

During the 1920's and 30's a large council estate was built on both sides of Briscoe Lane. In the 1970's large scale demolition of the Victorian small houses took place and the sites have been taken up by modern housing and light industry. Coal mining, glass making and the textile trades have all disappeared from the neighbourhood.

Source: *Looking back at Newton Heath* Newton Heath Historical Society (1993) Willow Publishing.

The Rector adds:

Newton Heath didn't benefit as much as other areas such as Beswick - nor Miles Platting (the other half of our electoral ward) - from the urban regeneration associated with the arrival of the Commonwealth Games (2002) and the building of the City of Manchester Stadium and the Sports Village. It's that little bit further away from the centre.

However, it's not all bad news: far from it. Former industrial sites on the north side of the Oldham Road contain sleek new offices and headquarters for none other than Greater Manchester Police and Fujitsu. These abut the old Sharp Electronics factory and depot which has been repurposed as a hub for entrepreneurs in tech, arts and media, and known as *The Sharp Project*. Hollywood films have been mixed there; albums recorded and produced; TV soaps and Christmas specials and ads filmed on the large sound stages. Dean Lane Station is now the Newton Heath and Moston tram stop making the city centre just over 10 minutes' away. The last year has seen the building of new social, first-time-buyer and private family housing in its historic core, with more to come on the vast Jackson's Brickworks site: hundreds of mixed homes, with the promise of a new High School, to replace those lost in recent decades, which will surely help to restore community cohesion. All Saints' will have many new souls to serve.