

The Parish Church of St. Cuthbert



Designed by the Lancaster firm of Architects, Paley and Austin, in the Gothic style, St Cuthbert's Church was dedicated in 1878. In 1907-08 the nave was completed and a clock tower added. It is of sandstone construction and has a slate roof. A six-month long repair of the East Window was completed at the end of January 2015, the work being funded equally by the congregation and English Heritage/Heritage Lottery Fund.

The magnificent pipe organ case is 18th century (1702) by Bernhardt Schmidt, and was brought from Kendal in the Lake District. This historic organ is supplemented by an electronic organ.

There is no churchyard adjoining the church. However, a memorial ground is set aside for the burial of ashes.

St. Cuthbert and the Church

A Brief History



Cuthbert was a monk at Melrose Abbey in Scotland and became Abbot at the Abbey. He was born around 634 and died in the year 687. Cuthbert was a skilful orator and had such a winning way that he won over the people to Christianity and gained their esteem and affection. Cuthbert was sent for by the Abbot and Bishop of Lindisfarne in Northumberland and was made prior of the monks there. He longed for a life of solitude and left after a few years, took refuge on the rocky island of Farne which is about two miles out at sea off Bamborough Castle on the coast of Northumberland. He built himself a circular hut of turf and stones, where he lived and worshiped God. He bequeathed this place as a sacred legacy "St. Cuthbert's Place". Cuthbert's affection for animals is remembered in the traditional name for the Eider Ducks on the Farne Islands, Known as "St. Cuthbert's Birds" or "Cuddy Birds". Cuthbert lived for many years on the island and would long to remain there but King Egfrid compelled him to become Bishop of Lindisfarne. Although he settled there and did his duty he did return to his island. After two years, feeling that his end was near, he returned to Lindisfarne where he died and was buried in the church there.

St. Cuthbert's Church



St. Cuthbert's Church began in Hollins Grove Street and was formed from the Church of England schools at Earcroft, Lower Darwen which was built in 1864-5 and St. Stephen's Church Tockholes; the Parish was formed out of portions of St. Stephen's Tockholes, St. James and Holy Trinity (now St. Peter's), Over Darwen. The name

Over Darwen was changed to Darwen on the town becoming a borough in March 1878. Mission began in 1864 under Rev. W.M. Haslewood, Vicar of Tockholes. In 1865 the mission school at Earcroft was built. In 1867 the Rev. F.E. Broderwick, Curate –in- Charge Conventional

District of St. Cuthbert's held services in a cottage in Clarence Street. In 1874 the new parish of St. Cuthbert was mapped out and allotted to the proposed new church. The site in Blackburn Road was given by the Rev. Charles Greenway, M.A. together with a donation of £500.

Mr Gladstone (Prime Minister) originally nominated the Rev. C.W. Firmstone to be the first vicar of St. Cuthbert's but the parishioners objected and wanted their curate-in-charge, the Rev. W.G. Procter B.A. The Rev. Firmstone withdrew and was presented with an address of sympathy and a purse containing £115 in gold.

Original and Updated Designs



This is the original design which isn't unlike the present church. The tower is different and doesn't show a clock. The two buildings with the pitched roofs on the north elevation of the drawing are as today; the one to the east end of the church being the vicar's vestry and the other the choir vestry. A movable partition separated the two.

This screen has now disappeared as the choir is so large in numbers.

Extended photo from 1907 – 1908
(note there is still no clock)



The Laying of the Foundation Stone

The 14th August was set aside for the laying of the foundation stone for St. Cuthbert's Church. The plans had been prepared by Messrs. Paley & Austin, Architects of Lancaster. The contract for building the foundations up to floor level was awarded to Messrs. Kay and Ruckledge, Builders of Over Darwen. The foundation stone was laid by Rev. Charles Greenway's daughter, Miss Charlotte Jane Greenway aged 10 years. A bottle containing the local newspapers etc. was placed in a hole beneath the stone. The hymn "O Lord of Hosts who Glory fills the skies" was then sung.

Construction

The contract for the building of the church was awarded to Messrs. Kay & Ruckledge, who were awarded the contract for building work up to floor level. The total costs, excluding heating, lighting and seating, but including the architect's fees came to £5,010.

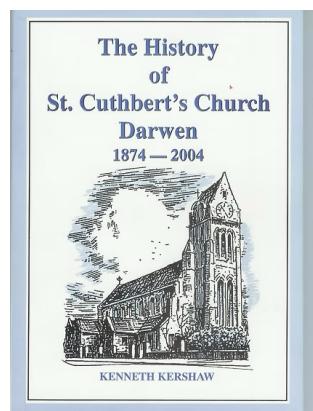
The bright red stone of which the church is built make it a prominent roadside object at the north end of the town. Its style is gothic, of the early-decorated period. The ordinal church contained seating for 462, all free. St. Cuthbert's was the first church in Darwen to have all the seats free from pew rents.

Local stone was used for the external facing of the walls, the bands of red & white stone came from the Gillies Delph. Longridge stone was used for the windows tracery and Freaked Runcorn stone for dressings. The height of the church from the floor to the cornice is 41ft and to the ceiling at the collar 57ft.

The fall in the ground level can be measured by the height of the east window sill; inside the church it is 12ft from the floor, outside the sill height is 29ft above ground level.

History of St. Cuthbert's Church -the Book

Kenneth Kershaw, who was appointed a churchwarden of St. Cuthbert's Church in April 2004, has always be interested in the history of buildings and places of interest.



He has written a book “Tockholes – A Lancashire Village” and as the once village postmaster he has spent several years researching the history of a village that once had several cotton mills and a population four times it’s present population.

Kenneth has recently researched and written a book “The History of St. Cuthbert’s Church, Darwen. The book charts the struggles and triumphs of a parish and its people, there are very interesting sections and these are just a small example.....

- The church bought a second hand organ with parts dating back to 1702, now it is famous as one of only a handful left in the country.
- In 1908 it was reported that the Rev. W.G.Rudd “came to us from the south and found Lancashire was a new and unexplored land of strange ways and sound”
- In December 1921 a new carpet was needed in front of the communion table, cost £12.50 including fitting – but it took a full year to raise the money
- In November 1939 the following notice read “In the event of an air raid the congregation are to put their trust in God – Holy Communion would not be interrupted under any Circumstances”

All details and photographs have been taken from “The History of St, Cuthbert’s Church, Darwen” written by Kenneth Kershaw and republished with his kind permission.

This is a fascinating book and there are just under 20 copies of a limited edition left for sale. The book can be purchased from either of the present churchwardens.