



**A short account of the principal events
in the history of the
Church of Saint Chad's Norton-in-Hales,
from the year 1850
to the year 1890,
when it was written by Mr John Eardley.**

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For a period of 30 or 40 yrs prior to 1850, the living of Norton had been held by many successive rectors, none of whom, however, remained very long - with the exception of the Revd Hugh Ker Cockburn, who held it probably for at least half of this period. It is likely that during the whole of this time there was no material alteration or addition to the fabric of the church, or the manner of conducting the services, was made.

The late Revd F Silver was inducted to the living in May 1850. He found the parish and its general surroundings in a most deplorable condition and immediately commenced the work of transformation. The youths of Norton at this time were reputed far and wide for their general depravity, but the influence Mr Silver brought to bear soon changed this condition of things.

His attention was first directed to the Schools, which he found in a most dilapidated state. These he rebuilt at his own cost. He also encouraged the farmers of the parish by presenting them with a new steam thrashing engine and machine. He provided at free cost a parish doctor, who attended on stated days, and he built a surgery - the present Reading Room - which he kept well furnished with drugs.

He instituted Sunday evening lectures at the Rectory, which were so well attended that the accommodation soon became insufficient, as a result, a new room attached to the Rectory was built, which furnished ample accommodation for those popular lectures and which was hereafter termed 'The Lecture Room'.

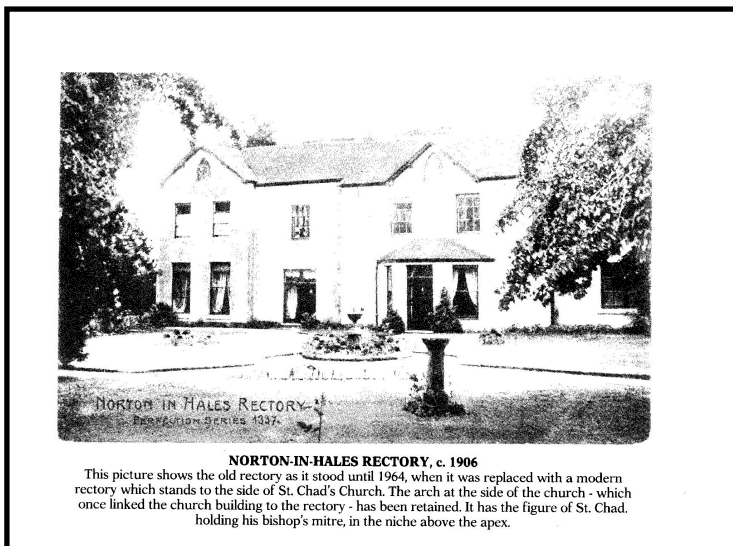
He was mainly instrumental in the establishment of an Agricultural Society, confined to the parish, which did good works for several years. He also organised a Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society at which public questions were debated and lectures frequently given. All these and many more like institutions worked well for some and obtained for Mr Silver widespread and well - earned popularity and fame, which were not bounded by the confines of the parish.

The Church also received his attention, and he found it necessary to increase the accommodation by the addition of a south gallery. He also built a porch over the principal entrance. The Church Tower at that time contained only three bells, one of which was cracked and produced, when rung, a melancholy and discordant sound. The belfry floor was on a level with the west gallery and was approached through it. Beneath

this floor was the vestry, and to the left of the vestry door stood the same stone font which is now fixed outside, on the north of the present west entrance.

There were, at that time, two entrances to the Church, both on the south side, a small one into the chancel, and the principal one about two or three yards from the tower. The Church contained two aisles - a narrow one on the South wall and one much larger near the North wall. The nave was fitted with oak pews, or rather boxes, of sundry shapes and sizes, to suit the space available for each. Nearly all were numbered, and some of them had the names of the owners inscribed on brass plates affixed, to the pew doors. The pulpit was near the north wall of the chancel, just outside its arch, and the reading desk not far from it.

The chancel contained two large square pews, which were ornamented with some fine old carved oak. It also contained the two recumbent marble figures which are now on the south side of the principal entrance beneath the tower. These pews were owned respectively by the owners of the Bellaport and Brand estates. The former was on its south side and the latter on the north.



And so everything belonging to the church and parish went smoothly along for a period of fourteen or fifteen years. Mr Silver's popularity was great, and, on account of his connection with the Brand estate as a Trustee, was mainly instrumental in, remodelling the cottagers dwellings, in the re-arrangement of the farms,

and in the general sanitary condition of the village.

About this time he conceived the idea of a thorough restoration of the church. A public meeting of parishioners of the church was held to discuss the subject, at which a good deal of bitterness was manifested at the proposal, by a section of the parishioners. The church wardens at that time were a couple of quiet, good meaning sort of old men, who

cared but little what Mr Silver did, or how it was done, so long as they were not much troubled and he found the cash.

On a vote being taken at this meeting, a decided majority was in favour of the proposal and the work was shortly afterwards commenced, the services in the meantime being held in the Lecture Room. The objections were based principally on the fact that the old prescriptive right of sittings was to be taken away. Mr Silver had previously been in correspondence with the owners of the Bellaport and Brand estates as to their rights in the chancel, and with both of them he had arrived at a sort of loose, verbal understanding. But the former died just twelve months after the opening of the new Church, and the latter only survived another year.

Unfortunately, to save expense, Mr Silver omitted in the work of restoration two all-important matters; he failed to employ a properly qualified architect, acting in that capacity himself and he repudiated the idea of obtaining a Faculty, so as to legalise all that was done.

Both these omissions ultimately caused him an infinity of misfortune, anxiety and expense, as will be seen thereafter. More than this, he most unfortunately employed a man of well-known doubtful character as to strict honesty and integrity, to do the work, a circumstance which also proved a great factor of trouble hereafter. But the work was begun and finished in about twelve months, and the new Church was reopened by Bishop Lonsdale on the 2nd May, 1865. There was a special service at which the Bishop preached, or delivered an address, and afterwards there was a dinner for the parishioners in the Lecture Room which his Lordship attended and which was followed by great rejoicings.

The chief cost of the restoration was borne by Mr Silver and the farmers supplied the team labour. The cost of the new peal of bells, however, was chiefly raised by subscription. The cracked one was recast and three new ones added. This was executed by Warner & Sons of London, and the work of fixing and hanging was considered a marvel of ingenuity and skill when the limited space of the tower was taken into consideration. The present clock and carillon were subsequently added, and supplied by Thwaites and Reid, also of London. The arrangement of the complicated mechanism has been, and is still, a theme of admiration to all who have seen it.

The churchyard was levelled and the grave-stones were laid flat. The site of the cemetery was given by the Rector, who also laid it out and erected the Chapel, and the consecration service of this took place the same day, after the opening of the church.

On the Sunday following the opening day, Mr Silver and his son undertook to conduct to his seat each parishioner and his family. A plan of the seats had been previously arranged, and each family was seated according to its rank and need. This arrangement is still in tact as regards a few of the old families. It was also arranged that non-parishioners and visitors should remain in the porch at the morning service until the commencement of the 'Venite', when they would be admitted to occupy the vacant seats in any part of the Church. This plan fell through in a little over a month.

And so things went on tolerable smoothly for a few years until an incident occurred which proved a harbinger of trouble to Mr Silver on account of the complications arising from it, a trouble which shortened his life evidently and resulted only with his death.

His son, when at college, made the acquaintance of a young gentleman who was in due course invited to Norton, Young Mr Silver was then invited to Runcorn, the residence of his college friend. Whilst there he made the acquaintance of his friend's sister. This young lady was ultimately a visitor at Norton.

The first Sunday at Church she sat next to Mrs Silver in the third stall in the Chancel - South. This stall had been used by Mr Coulson at all times during his residence at Bellaport. He was somewhat disconcerted, and during the week following he and the Rector had a very sharp altercation respecting this seat, which resulted in the former intimating to the latter that he had no legal right to a sitting in the Chancel. The following Sunday Mr. Coulson came to Church very late; during the reading of the First Lesson, and he quietly walled up to the Chancel. On his seeing Miss Chadwick again occupying this same seat he turned round, and deliberately retracing his steps left the Church. At this time Mr. Norcop, Senior, of Betton Hall, occupied the first stall in the Chancel-north, and his son had a chair in the nave opposite the pulpit. Mr. Silver, being a man of peace, tried hard to bring about a reconciliation with Mr Coulson, and with this object asked Mr Norcop if he would mind giving up his sitting to him.

This occasioned great offence to Mr Norcop, who penned a letter to Mr Silver full of bitterness towards Mr Coulson on account of his action, and in which he also intimated his intention to leave the Church forever, a threat which he unfortunately carried out. But for this incident, Mr Norcop, in all probability, would have been a worshipper in Norton.

After this, Mr Coulson and his family only attended the Church occasionally, and occupied the seats in the Chancel - north. Not being quite satisfied as to the rights of his tenants to their sittings, as well as his own, he entertained the idea of building at his own cost and for his own sole use and that of his tenants - a new north transept. He obtained the consent of the Rector and the Churchwardens, and applied for a Faculty.

Mr Griffin, the owner of the Brand estates, was at this time residing in France, and information was by some means conveyed to him of Mr Coulson's application for this Faculty. And as the transept was being built partly over Mr Griffin's family vault, he at once gathered that Mr Coulson was infringing on his rights. Accordingly, he at once instituted legal proceedings in opposition to this application for a Faculty.

This lawsuit soon began to assume large proportions when Mr Silver stepped between the pair and having the power as Rector to veto the proceedings, he used it and so put a stop to what might have been a prolonged and expensive suit.

The Rector then undertook the work, completed it at his own cost and afterwards formally presented this extra accommodation free to the parishioners. Soon after this, Mr Griffin applied to the Rector and Churchwardens for the exclusive right to the seats in half the area of the transept - east, such seats being over his family vault, which was granted two months afterwards, Mr. Coulson followed suit, by making a similar application for the exclusive use and right of all the stalls in the Chancel-north, which was also granted, minutes of these applications were duly entered in the Parish Minutes Book.

But not withstanding these concessions, they conferred no legal right on either party. And so matters went on in this loose, slipshod way for several years more until the death of Miss Coville, which event formed the commencement of another epoch of this little history..

Mr Coulson had a natural desire to secure by Faculty the new vault he caused to be built under the west side of the new transept, before the interment of his step - daughter, and as no time was to be lost.

Mr Silver made an express journey to Lichfield for the purpose of making this application on Mr Coulson's behalf. The weather was intensely severe, and Mr Silver suffered much from the journey. The result was that a sort of provisional Faculty was granted to Mr Coulson, on condition that the Rector made a general application for the Whole Church. This he very reluctantly was obliged to do, but it was sadly against his wish and desire. The necessary notices were placed on the Church doors in due time, and before many weeks elapsed, Mr Griffin and Mr Coulson both joined issue in their opposition to this general application.



The Old Rectory

The expensive law - suit which followed lasted about four years, and at its termination things were left pretty much on the same footing as they were before.

It was, in fact, a compromise amongst the legal gentlemen engaged, who, without doubt, were at on the proceeds of this quarrel, which should never have been commenced.

None will ever know, except those intimately acquainted with this, the vast amount of anxiety and suffering Mr Silver endured during the pending of this suit. And when to this was added the great grief at the premature death of his only son, followed by a very sad domestic trouble, it was no wonder that his health broke down completely.



The New Rectory

The latter years of his life were spent in comparative seclusion. He persisted in conducting the services when he was physically unfit to do so, almost to the last, and his death occurred under peculiarly painful circumstances. The contents of the Rectory, Museum and Picture Gallery, which had been a life-work to get together, were soon afterwards sold and dispersed in all directions. And the rooms containing these valuables were demolished in course of time, to make way for the reconstruction of the Rectory on a plan better suited to modern requirements.

**(The following information was added in 1933 by Chas. Chadwick)
1914.**

Without having first obtained a faculty, and without the knowledge or consent of the Vestry, the Revd W L Gantz removed the large pair of standard candlesticks dedicated to the memory of Hugh Ker Cockburnne of Bellaport from the chancel, on 27th. February, 1914. These he sold to the Revd. Dr. Greenwood, Vicar of Market Drayton, who placed them in the chancel of St Mary's Church, Market Drayton on 11th April 1914, after having removed the three lamp brackets each carried.

A petition signed by the parishioners of Norton in Hales was sent to the Lord Bishop of Lichfield, stating what had taken place and asking him to have them returned to Norton - in - Hales. On June 26th 1914 they were removed to the Parish Room, Market Drayton and the Vicar, Dr Greenwood, notified the parishioners of Norton that they might fetch them from there. was place June Norton they might fetch them from there.

The parishioners replied that they expected them to be returned to St Chad's Church, from whence they had been taken. The candlesticks were restored to St Chad's Church on Monday 10th August 1914 within six months of their removal. The Revd D L Gantz resigned the living on January 10th 1915. During the time of his successor, the Revd D R Roberts, the living was handed over to the Church Pastoral Aid Society by the patron, Hugh Ker Coville.