

The Start of the Church

It is now hard to imagine a time before St Philip and St James church, tucked down Larkhay Road and at the heart of local life. But for at least 500 years, up to the church's opening in 1851, Hucclecote came under the parish of Churchdown, and churchgoers had to trek one and half miles along what was then Lark Lane to St Bartholomew's, the 12th century church on the top of Chosen Hill, crossing the brook at Pitt Mill, or going down Churchdown Lane to get to the same destination. To help accommodate them an extension had been made to this church in the medieval period, a south aisle known as the Hucclecote aisle because it was specifically for the use of Hucclecote residents.

Over the years, and particularly as the population of Hucclecote grew in the 19th century to around 400 in the middle of that century, this trek proved increasingly unpopular, the road up the hill at that time being, especially in bad weather, extremely rugged and muddy. It was also pointed out at the time that St Bartholomew's could only hold 247, and the population of the parish was now more than 1,000.

It is reported¹ that the vicar of Churchdown bought a site in Hucclecote, a field behind the main road later called Parson's Piece. This was intended for a church with churchyard, vicarage with plenty of lawn and a school with a playground. This however did not receive the support of the Diocesan Committee who decided their funds should go to building churches in towns and more thickly populated areas.

But suddenly an anonymous gift of £1000 was given to the Church Building Fund of Hucclecote. The name of the donor has since been disclosed and he was a clergyman by the name of Bradshaw, the son of widow living in Chosen House. He had inherited a large fortune from an uncle, and his gift to Hucclecote encouraged other donors, among them being the Dowager Queen Adelaide who gave £10. It is believed the widowed Mrs Bradshaw had been Lady in Waiting to the Queen, and it is through this connection the gift was made.

Then, following a further gift of land by local landowner and High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, Edmund Hopkinson of Edgeworth House, the foundation stone of St Philip and St James was laid on Thursday Feb 25th 1850 by Rev T Murray Browne, the Rural Dean (and the father of a later incumbent of St Philip and St James). Over 300 were present and witnessed prayers being led by Rev Robert Smith, the incumbent of the parish of Churchdown, and the chanting of Psalm 84 by several local clergy and members of Gloucester Cathedral Choir.

After this ceremony the church was built by local builder Charles Niblett of Gloucester Stone Works, in a 13th century style to a design by the local architects' firm of John Jacques & Son who were also responsible for the Mariners Chapel in the docks and the original Hucclecote Methodist Church. The remaining costs of the project were borne by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese (Right Reverend James Monk), a local eccentric philanthropist, the Rev Dr S. W. Warneford, the Dean and Chapter of Bristol, and the Gloucester Diocesan Church Building Association under whose latter auspices the church was founded and directed.

And then on Wednesday 30 April 1851, the church was consecrated by the Bishop, one of three churches consecrated on the same day by the ailing Bishop who was then suffering from 'chest complaints' and was fortified by 'the stimulus of cordial medicine.' The other two churches were Highnam and the rebuilt St Michael's Gloucester. A report on the services appeared in the *Gloucester Journal* on the following Saturday. The consecrations of the three were also featured in *The diary of a Cotswold Parson* by Rev F E Witts. He commented that the new Hucclecote church was 'a small, simple building lately erected in

¹ Our Village History. Hucclecote WI 1999.

the populous rural hamlet of Hucclecote, in the parish of Churchdown; this place of worship was much needed for those inhabitants who dwell at a distance from the ancient church perched on the summit of the insulated outlyer from the Cotswolds so prominent in the Vale of Gloucester, and known by the corrupted name of Chosen Hill.'

The newspaper report described St Philip and St James as 'the little new church erected in this pretty village ... The sacred building, which lies a short distance off from the left of the road, was crowded by an attentive congregation, including the principal residents of the neighbourhood and numerous rustics, who, however, demeaned themselves in the most respectful manner.' An 'excellent' sermon was apparently preached by Edward Bankes, who held a number of clerical positions in plurality (in a way which was increasingly frowned on in the mid-19th century), but seems to have lived in the close at Gloucester Cathedral, where he was a canon, along with holding another canonry at Bristol Cathedral.