

HOLY ANGELS, HALE BARNs

1958 – 2008



In 1946, Mrs Waugh, on leaving her house “Woodeaves”, donated in memory of her deceased eldest daughter five acres of land on which an adjacent “Manor House” stood derelict for the building of a church. Canon Donnelly, parish priest of St Vincent’s, Altrincham arranged the purchase of “Woodeaves” and its remaining extensive grounds to realise his longstanding dream of a school for Catholic boys in this rapidly growing area.

The Irish Christian Brothers were invited to establish the school, and from 1946 to 1963 St Ambrose College was located in “Woodeaves”, and a Chapel of Ease was formed there for the local Catholic community, Mass being offered by a visiting priest from St Vincent’s.



Woodeaves

In September, 1958 Fr Gerald McDonald, curate at St Edward’s, Runcorn, was appointed by Bishop John Murphy as parish priest, residing initially with the Christian Brothers, but with a brief to build a church dedicated to the Holy Angels.



Laying the Foundation Stone

The church was designed by Arthur Farebrother, a young Catholic architect living in Hale Barns, who had been influenced by Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight, when visiting as a chorister to hear Gregorian chant. In consequence the church incorporates a number of architectural features found at Quarr. Designed as a Choir Church, the building had to be narrower than intended as special piling was needed with the discovery of a prehistoric glacial lake under the site. The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Grasar on 15 September 1962 in mud and pouring rain. The church cost some £80,000 and was built by T Brown and Sons of Wilmslow. The completed church was dedicated on 12 March 1964.



Opening and Dedication

In 1975 200 priests and religious of the Diocese concelebrated Mass with Archbishop Bruno Heim, Apostolic Delegate, during his Holy Year visit. In 1969 Granada TV televised a sung Mass concelebrated with Bishop Grasar, and the BBC recorded "Sunday Half Hour" in the church in January 1997.

Music has featured prominently in the parish, from the robed choir in the choir stalls around the altar, to the "Little Angels" children's choir; and with professional recordings produced in the church, at least one of which, "Hymns for the Angels" – a Benediction Service organised by the Blessed Sacrament Guild with traditional Catholic hymns sung by the congregation - continues to be in constant demand as a CD. The church is used periodically for rehearsal and for concerts by Altrincham Choral Society and by the Romulus Singers, and is in frequent use by St Ambrose College. A number of former choir members now sing professionally, while a former parishioner and organist is Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral.

The debt was cleared in 1980 due to the efforts of an enterprising Parish Committee, while to this day the Ladies Blessed Sacrament Guild, formed in the early days, continues to meet the cost of altar requirements - altar cloths, hosts, wine, candles, etc. - and in 1974, provided a beautiful stained glass rose window in the Lady Chapel.

In 1989, following Vatican II, the original marble altar rails were removed, some being re-used in the ambo, and the baptismal font was moved from the adjoining baptistery to the front of the church, the baptistery becoming a parish library. In the Lady Chapel, Our Lady's statue was moved from above the dedicated altar to a side wall and replaced by embroidered panels created by the parish embroidery group. Fortunately, the high altar needed no change.



The Lady Chapel

Various groups provide a strong social cohesion, while others, including SVP, Pro-Life, Third World, and various prayer groups, engage in charitable and devotional activities within the parish and beyond, extending to involvement in Churches Together in Hale and the Altrincham Interfaith Group.

On 1st September, 1992, the parish celebrated the ordination of its permanent deacon, Rev Alan Morris.

After almost 30 years as parish priest, Fr McDonald retired in 1987, being succeeded by Fr Roger Clarke until his replacement in 1991 by Canon Christopher Dwyer. On Canon Dwyer's retirement in 2002, Father David Roberts became the present parish priest.

Deaneries having been abolished, Holy Angels is now one of four churches forming the Altrincham Pastoral Area.

Shortage of space prevents the inclusion of all the many activities and events which have taken place in this active parish from its humble beginnings 50 years ago, but more can be found on the parish website www.holyangels.org.uk

Cecilia Whelan