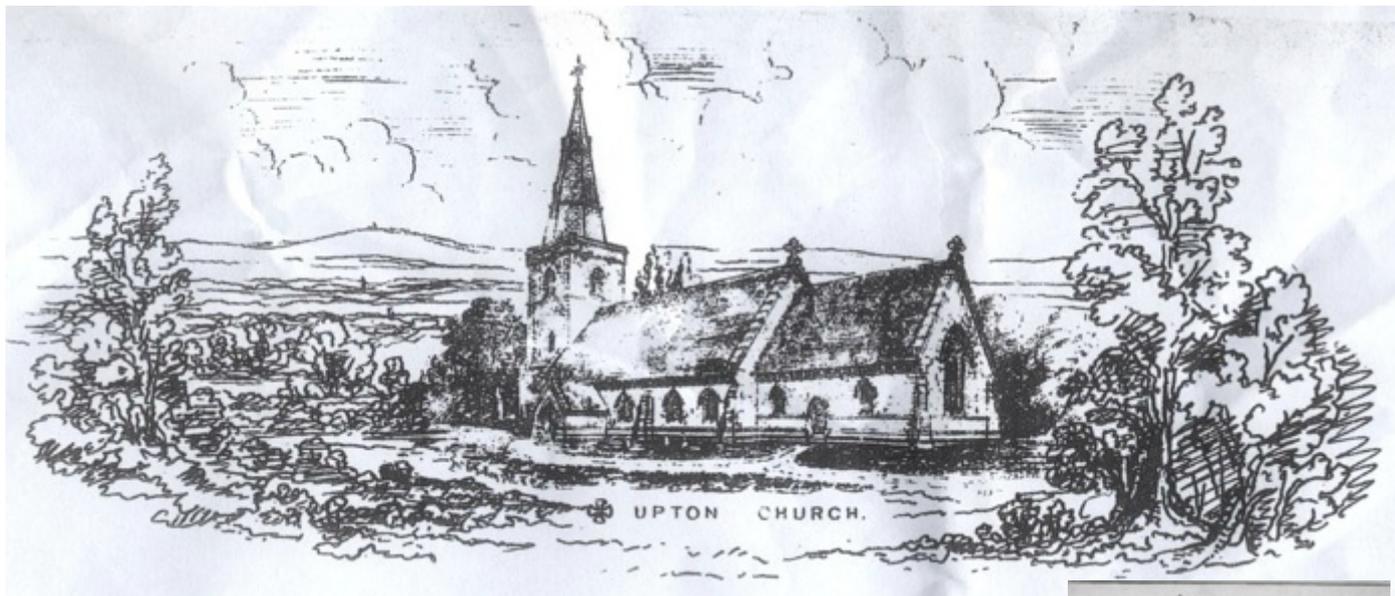


Church of the Holy Ascension



The Churchyard is entered through the Lych Gate over which is carved a short prayer: *'Grant, O Lord that through the grave and the gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection'* The gate was a gift of the Potts family who lived at 'The Oaks', (now the golf clubhouse). From the Lych Gate the path leads to the church with its 93ft spire.

Entering the Church through the porch with its side seating there is a plaque recording the grant of £100 towards the building fund from the *'Incorporated Society for Promoting the Enlargement of Churches'* on condition that *'184 seats should be reserved for the poorer inhabitants of this parish for ever'*. Going on into the Nave these seats can be seen. Apart from the *'free'* seats Upton Parishioners would have been able to choose where they sat by paying a seating fee, those paying the highest fee would have first choice. The recommended rate was 7 shillings per seat or 2 guineas per pew; pew rent was paid in advance twice yearly and was used for various church needs such as cleaning, repairs, candles and two shillings for the Bishop.



The focal point of the church is the altar and associated with it, the east window. When the church was built there was an 'Ascension' window in this position but in 1885 it was removed, to where is a mystery. The space left was increased by 3½ feet and the new window, the crucifixion scene, put in.

Built as a chapel-of-ease to St. Mary's on the Hill, Chester, Holy Ascension was under the ministry of Rev. William Massie. The first Sunday Service was on 4th June 1854, conducted by curate Rev. Henry Ireland Blackburne. The singing was led by Colonel E Evans-Lloyd of Plas Newton, at first with a pitch pipe until the following August when a harmonium was provided. A tablet on the North Wall records his 30 years service as organist. He was also treasurer of the Church School, and churchwarden from 1854 until Upton became a separate parish some 30 years later.

William Massie died in January 1856, aged 50, there is a memorial to him on the floor of the south transept and his picture hangs in the vestry. The churches he built and the Chester Archaeological society which he founded are continuing signs of his life and work. His successor at St. Mary's was Canon Charles Bowen whose grave is in Upton Churchyard near the Lych Gate. For the first fourteen years of its life, Upton Church was a Chapel of Ease to St. Mary's and was served by various clergy from the mother church, but from about 1868 the Reverend H M Towers was curate-in-charge until the appointment of the first vicar in 1882.

The Duke of Westminster appointed his son's tutor, the Reverend Wilfred Sparling MA, to be the first vicar. He was a Cambridge rowing 'blue' who was ordained at St John the Baptist Church in Chester and served as curate-in-charge of St. Barnabas. He died on 10th May 1933 having served Upton for fifty years. His grave is in the old part of the churchyard and a record of his long ministry is carved on the wall near the lectern. Seven years after his appointment it was decided that the new parish should have a vicarage and by the efforts of Colonel Evans-Lloyd a fund was started, supported locally and the balance made up by the Duke. The decision to build was made in March 1889, the foundation stone laid by Mrs Emily Logan on August 15th of the same year and the vicarage finished and occupied eleven months later!



Unknown, Unknown, H Griffiths, Ms Morris, P Snelson, Mrs Stacey, Mr Stacey, Ms Corfe and Ethel Corfe

Mrs Westbury, Ms Davies, Ms Duff, Mr Westbury, Rev Sparling, Ms Smethurst, Emily Griffiths, Betty Harrison, Frank Hewitt.

For more on Rev Wilfred Sparling – see also under ‘people’

Wilfred Sparling’s successor was the Rev. F.S. Gardner Brown who stayed only three years before being replaced by the Rev. T O C East whose ten year tenure included the difficult days of the Second World War. In 1946 he left Upton to become vicar of Neston.



Rev. T O C East with members of the parish

With the end of the war came a building boom and the population of Upton increased rapidly. The man to whom the chance came to deal with this new situation was the Rev. J Wheldon Williams and the impact of his leadership and ability was felt immediately.

A high point was reached on the occasion of the church’s centenary in 1954. For this occasion the church was not big enough to accommodate parishioners during the eight days of celebrations. It was necessary, therefore, to hire a marquee together with 500 seats and a stage. At Festal Evensong on the first Sunday the preacher was Canon S J Marriot, Sub Dean of Westminster Abbey, there then followed 8 days of services, dramas, concerts, and parties until the final Festal Evensong when the Lord Bishop of Chester preached. The marquee was on the open field between what was then the British Legion hut and the War Memorial. The hire charge for tent, seats and stage was only £111.

During the months following the celebrations, several possibilities for enlarging the church were considered but the plan finally adopted in September 1955 was to build transepts. The first phase included a south transept and new choir vestry. Completed by the end of 1957, these were consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Chester on 16th February 1958, and none too soon either, Easter Communicants were rising in number, there were 841 in 1956.

Plans for the north transept, were put on hold as there was a more urgent need, the decision to build a new Church Hall was taken within a month of the south transept consecration. Two sites were considered, one roughly where Grangeside now is, and the other at the end of the Vicarage garden. On this latter site the hall was built and opened in September 1959 by Mrs Ellison, wife of the Bishop of Chester. A dance took place that evening at five shillings per head. Money for the hall had actually been partly raised by an unusual method - door to door collections by approved volunteers round Upton houses.



1957 after the addition of the south transept



1959 the newly opened Church Hall

Then the north transept, clergy vestry and organ project went ahead. The organ was not entirely new. Overhead platforms were built at the west end of the church to carry the pipes, and a detached console was placed by the choir-stalls. An opening recital was given by Dr Roland Middleton, the organist and Master of Choristers at Chester Cathedral. All this work was consecrated by Bishop Eric Mercer the Suffragen Bishop of Birkenhead on 7th May 1967. By this time

new choir-stalls, communion rails and other furniture had been designed and installed, all in beautiful light oak and all given in memory of various church members whose names are recorded on small bronze plates.



The Rev. Wheldon Williams, died suddenly in July 1969. The Rev. Fred Lapham came to Upton in 1970 then moved to Warrington in 1981, the present incumbent Rev. Glyn Conway has been in office since that time.

The Vicarage Garden Party has been a major annual event for many years. Post-war everyone looked forward to this occasion, good weather was 'ordered' and usually happened. In Wheldon Williams' time it was nicknamed 'Vicars Weather'. For many years Kay and Alix Joseph arranged the Rose Queen ceremony and a beautiful bouquet was given by Peter Snelson from his rose nursery. Entertainment was arranged by Miss Gladys Davies, usually country or maypole dancing, latterly local schools or youth organisations have been important participants. Successive Rose Queens

were crowned by well known ladies of the village but in 2004 the mould was broken when Brian Cox officiated.



Some past Rose Queen ceremonies with Rev Wheldon Williams and with Gladys Davies

Some interesting first events, recorded in the parish register:-

The first baptisms were on 4th June 1854, five babies were baptised

The first marriage was solemnized on 1st June 1875, between William Holland and Mary Ellen Stockton.

The first burial was on 1st December 1853, that of E. Smith.

The first confirmation service was on 27th March 1893 when there were 21 candidates.

From Stan Whaley's memoirs, 1920s

For many years, the Upton Sunday School had an excursion in August, going alternately to Rhyl and New Brighton. This was a major event in the village because it was still something of a thrill to ride in a coach and Jimmy Hazelden's good nature allowed everyone in the village to join in, including some who had never once been near the Sunday school. The chance of a free ride was too good to miss and the expenses of the outing were defrayed by the church. But it was on these annual outings that Jimmy showed what a tremendously generous person he was. He bought many of the pupils ice creams, and always insisted on treating the teachers to tea. On the New Brighton outings, he always took us to the fun fair and for a ferry boat sail over the Mersey. Sometimes the old Vicar (Rev. Sparling) joined us as well, but for him it must have been an ordeal and he used to walk slowly up and down the promenade until it was time to return. He was conspicuous because of his saintly white beard, his black shovel hat and his umbrella.





Vicarage Centenary celebrations 1989

