

# **Eppleton Parish and All Saints Church**

**By Martin Lewins**

Before the parish came into being there were two areas which were built on, the High Downs Square and the Low Downs Square. Once Eppleton pit was opened in the early 1830s more men were needed to work it. A railway connection was made with the Hetton Railway, running from the Lyons Colliery to Sunderland. A 600 foot tunnel helped link the Eppleton line with the Hetton line, close to the Three Tuns cabin. Above this tunnel, close to the present Regent Street was the school yard for the school near to High Downs Square and a reading room. There is no recorded date for when the school was built but the brick reading room was built in 1832. Jane Street and William Street were built in 1872 and they were followed by Barrington Terrace in 1875. In 1882 the houses, numbers 7 and 8 Barrington Terrace were made into one for the curate and his sister. The Rev. Breffit who conducted meetings there as well as the reading room stayed for about a year. The two dwellings were then returned to two separate houses again. Meanwhile number 36 Barrington was to be used by another curate, the Rev. Ellis, for a short time, a dormer window being installed by the colliery owners. There were 40 houses in the street and number 36 was the only house with a dormer window.

This period was a far cry from 1822 when the longest railway in the world had opened and the engines were travelling at 4 mph. In the USA by 1860 there were 30,800 miles of railway and by 1880 94,000 miles. Thus wheat prices which were £3. 7s 0d per ton in 1865 fell to £2 10s 0d per ton by 1884. The world was opening out and steam trains were much faster.

The meetings in nos. 7 and 8 Barrington Terrace were well attended together with the new reading rooms at the top of Downs Lane which had now become too small for the numbers attending there. With permission from Mr. William James Thom, headmaster of the colliery school, meetings could be held there. At the end of May 1883 the Rev. Ellis replaced the Rev. Breffit as he had to move on. On November 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year 10 Downing Street announced the formation of new parishes including Eppleton which had previously been part of Hetton which in turn 100 years previously, was part of the parish of Houghton-le-Spring. The first vicar of the new parish was the Rev. W.H. Illingworth and he resided in Church Road. The first official meeting of the parish took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1883 in the school. Mr Thom was elected as Peoples Warden and Mr. Lishman as the Vicar's Warden. The verger was Mr Bell and Mr Laverick appointed as the bell ringer. A cleaner, Mrs Wilson was also appointed along with a number of sidesmen. The school was not the ideal place for the church services and a temporary altar and communion rail was made which could be put away as the area was used by the infants school during the

weekdays. Toilets were in the schoolyard next to the bottom of the garden of No. 1 Railway Terrace. A large brass collection plate and four collecting bags were presented to the Eppleton parish from the parishioners of Newbottle as a gift. The reading rooms continued to be used for meetings to raise funds. The highest point opposite the new Jane Street was allocated to build the new church 63 metres west to east and 28 metres north to south. Within this area was a parcel of land for a vicarage which measured 97m by 40m plus more for a tennis court and a cricket field. Overall there was 5 acres and a promise from the local coal-owners that no coal would be extracted under the church or the vicarage and grounds. A datum line was drawn and the parish boundaries came into being. The land where the church was to be built was blessed everything being passed on All Saints Day 1883.

Mrs Pescod was attending Sunday School at this time and sometimes went along to the church service as well. Miss Allen, the music teacher, played the piano and there were fifteen to twenty Sunday School teachers and two to three hundred children going to Sunday School. It was the same at the services. The day came when the Bishop of Durham asked the Rev. Illingworth to move so there was a short interregnum. A curate from Houghton was to look after some of the services. The Rev. Reed, also a new incumbent was installed. Meanwhile the ladies of the church were raising funds.

The Rev. R Hindle began his vicariate on Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> 1886 and he proceeded to be a man of vision and a sportsman. He resided in Church Road. From my notes going back to 1939 when we were not attending school and for something to do I was unable to find out the name of the firm of architects who carried out the building direction. The Rev. Hindle formed a building committee, he was the chairman, Vicar's Warden, Mr Lishman, Peoples Warden, Mr. Thom, Mr Birch (Doctor), Mr Robinson (architect) and Mr William Johnson. The drawings had been prepared ready for presentation to the committee and on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1886 the first sod on the new church site was cut by Miss Lishman of Eppleton Hall. At a later date in August with Mr. William Johnson invited to attend to give the necessary explanations, the various tenders were discussed, proposed, seconded and agreed. Mr Boyd Cleasby of Darlington who submitted a tender of £3,380 was accepted as the builder of the new church. The contractor was to sign the contract as soon as possible to get the work to start quickly. At the next meeting in mid October Mr Adamson of Sunderland was appointed Clerk of Works. Three members of the committee were to be drawn up as a quorum and work closely with the Clerk of Works. At the next meeting in January 1887 Mr Adamson was to go to inspect the Normanby bricks at Brasside (now Frankland). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1886 the foundation stone for the church was laid by Mrs Lindsay Wood, and a silver trowel was used and presented to her after the event. I visited the brickworks in 1956, there were two rows of cottages there with the brickworks on the far side. A two and a half inch Normanby brick was preferred to the three inch and the increased time and labour for its use meant a change of £60 extra in cost which was accepted by the committee. The architect instructed that ash wood would be used for the floors rather than concrete.

For the heating of the church another contractor was brought in on the recommendation of the architect. The contractor was Mr. W Truswell, his offer to supply, including all flues, two coke fired furnaces for under £60, the hot air ducts already formed and a 12 inch pipe to extract the smoke overhead into the chimney. These furnaces did excellent work within the chancel but when the furnace was first lit, blue smoke would enter the church and one had to cover the metal grills with door mats otherwise the chancel had to be dusted again. The duct leading within the organ chamber had to be walled up in 1939 because the heat dried out the bellows and the pipes would lose voice. The furnaces lasted right up until 1955 when they were finally demolished. By and Large they did a good job.

The damp course laid under the foundation stone is 1 inch slate, still sound after many years. Only the metal vents surrounded by stonework rusted away and had to be replaced. On December 10<sup>th</sup> 1887 the church was dedicated and consecrated by Bishop Lightfoot. With Sundays being the Sabbath it had taken 346 working days to complete the project, not including inclement weather of which there could have been between 20 and 45 days in all, a good effort all round. The Darlington firm brought some of its own workmen and had them lodge near the site. Many local tradesmen were also engaged. The materials for the site were brought in mainly by horse and cart as there were no lorries in those days. The scaffolder would have been local and having watched Mr William Leech's men when building private houses after the second world war using wood and rope and lashing two poles together with a skill which is now long forgotten. The scaffolder worked with an axe fitted with a hammer head, which he uses as a lever for tightening the lashings as well as for hammering in the wedges and beating the turns of the rope into position. The splicing band was used to join two poles together, this was three turns of the rope around each end of the poles then the end tucked under the turns, the other end also tucked under the rope. The ropes were tightened with wooden wedges. There was no slipping when handling the heavy stones to form the turret at the west end of the church to house the bell.

It was the intention of the congregation to obtain a second bell. Mr Laverick the bell-ringer was in agreement with this but circumstances at that time meant the decision was to pay off the loan for the building, and as Mr. Hauxby pointed out to me Mr. Thom, the Peoples Warden was collecting for the new lectern. Although a pensioner at the time he mentioned the Canon Law which determined the actions within the church in a certain order.

Between 1889 and 1898 there were a great many changes in church personnel at lower levels. A number of vacancies remained unfilled at points during the last decade of the century. During the period 1893-4 sufficient money was raised to purchase a new organ designed and voiced for the church. The new organ at a cost of £400.00 was installed in 1895. In April 1898 plans were set in place for the erection of the church hall in George

Street. It was a wood and corrugated iron affair and it took on the name of the "tin pot hall". It was popular for dances to be held there and many visitors danced the night away. There was Quadrille Party Ball dancing, Schottische Waltz, lancers, Polka Mazurka, Quadrille etc. and many more. As in Scotland the custom was for the boys to sit on one side of the hall and the ladies on the other. My mother said that when she was young and lived at Houghton this custom did take place there and at the end of each dance the man returned his partner to her seat. There was never any rush at the beginning of each dance as the ladies would have a dance card, and the man would ask her to pencil his name in for dances during the evening. There were at least 24 dances in the programme. Dancing was always done to a live band usually consisting of two violins, piccolo, cornet and bass fiddle. There were no modern dances or drums at first and the evenings turned out to be very lively indeed without any drunkenness.

I have never been able to find any reference in the church or parish to the Boer War which took place in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. Perhaps it passed Hetton by. In 1902 a screen was erected in the church and a new carpet laid the following year. The first appointed bell-ringer Mr. Laverick passed away in June 1904 and the same year illness prevented the Rev. Hindle from carrying out his duties as chair of the AGM; the Rev Breffit took his place. Mr T. Lishman resigned as Vicar's Warden and Mr G.Ford took on the duties of People's Warden following the death of Mr Widdowfield. At a special meeting in July the Rev. Hindle appointed R.S.Hindle to the post of Vicar's Warden. At the Easter meeting in the following year (1905) Mr. George Ford was appointed as Vicar's Warden and Mr. Hauxby as People's Warden. Mr W.G. Lawson, who had been elected as one of the sidesmen also acquired a parcel of land on the south side of the church with space for a large garden and within keeping with the west end of All Saints and the vicarage.

At the 1907 Vestry meeting, a new Vicar's Warden was appointed, he was Dr. McCormick and he gave to the church 4 wood collecting bowls and four brass handled collecting bags. The following year new coconut matting was laid in the aisles, a gift from the sidesmen. In 1910 a new asphalt path was laid around the church so tidying up the outside, and in 1911 a brick palisade wall and rail was erected at the east end of the church to match the church walls. It was in this year that the Hetton Coal Company was taken over by the Lambton, Hetton and Joicey Collieries and Mr T Lishman retires and went to live in Harrogate.

Having been in the post for two years as curate the Rev. Ellis moved to Brandon and he was replaced by the Rev. J. Barbuir in 1912. Two years later an Assistant Curate Mr Atkinson was appointed and John Thirkell became the Vicar's Warden. In 1915 the Rev. Robinson Hindle finally took well-earned retirement and he went to live in Bolton. His place was taken by the Rev. L Cowling who took up the vicariate. In 1916 four sidelights were fixed in memory of the late Miss Lishman and centre lights were erected as a memorial to the

men of the Great War which was still continuing at the time. Finally in 1917 Mr Cowling made W.G.Lawson the Vicar's Warden.

The rest of the detail regarding All Saints church can be followed in another instalment.