

No.7: Holy Trinity – memories from my predecessors...

I'm indebted this month to Zillah Warry who recently passed me some research she found done by her late husband, Michael. I served alongside Michael in my first stint as churchwarden and he was also interested in local history. As an oral-history assignment he interviewed Geoffrey Ellis, who was connected with Holy Trinity all his life and served for many years as churchwarden. These personal memoirs give a fascinating glimpse into the changing life over the past 80-90 years and I hope you find them interesting as I do.

Michael wrote: *'Geoffrey has been connected with Holy Trinity all his life. His earliest memories start in the 1930s with attending the Sunday school and church infants school in St James' Road, Marsh. They continue through confirmation into the 1940s with fire watching at the church, while the crypt served as an air raid shelter and the tower as an observer post. Since then he has seen vicars come and vicars go and latterly been involved as a long-serving churchwarden in some of the changes which have taken place, in particular with the re-ordering of the church interior [in 1994-5].*

In talking with him I had hoped to learn about the differences between the congregation [of up to 80 years ago] and today, particularly in attendance and style of worship, about the ways in which church festivals were celebrated, and possibly about individual church personalities, such as eccentric vicars or wardens!

In the event there was little of this sort of information, although there were some interesting snippets. Rather it was the story of the gradual evolving from the formal, habitual churchgoing of pre-war days to the more informal, irregular churchgoing of today [c 1999?], illuminated by personal recollections.

The interview was loosely structured on chronological lines. This did allow some rambling, but a list of specific questions might have resulted in too much control and a lack of spontaneity and personal remembrance. In addition, it is difficult to anticipate what a person is going to know until he talks about it, so helpful questions cannot easily be prepared in advance.'

Geoffrey's earliest memories are of being taken to see the Sunday school and the field adjacent to it in St James' Road, Marsh. The field was used by the children of the schools to play games. The Holy Trinity Marsh Memorial [Infant] School [right] was on the site of the car



park at the end of St James' Road and the field is now the site of the houses between the car park and the former Parish Hall. Geoffrey's grandparents had moved into the area in 1904 and became active members of Holy Trinity, so beginning a century of Ellis connection with the church.

Geoffrey began school in November 1931 and remembered using chalk on slates in class to practice his writing. There were 2 schools and Sunday schools. The other one, on Portland Street, was considered a 'little bit rough'.

Geoffrey estimated there were about 250 attending the Marsh Sunday school, but he didn't like attending as he felt he couldn't draw well and there was a lot of drawing done. When he became 7, he moved into the junior department which met at 9.30 for an hour before the children were marched down to the church to attend the service of Matins which began at 11.00. The children all sat upstairs in the balcony and were allowed to leave at the start of the sermon.

At Christmas and Easter the children had to stay until the end of the service. Geoffrey remembered the church being quite full, with pews right from underneath the pulpit to the back of what is now the Welcome Area.

There were no microphones, so the vicar, Rev Soole, had to shout to be heard. It was cold in church, the women all wore hats and the men wore bowler hats to and from church, but took them off inside. 80% of the congregation came from the big houses in Edgerton, but most servants and 'workers' attended the services in the Parish Hall.

'Whitsun was the occasion when the children got new clothes, new dresses and bows for the girls and trousers for the boys'. On Whit Monday the Sunday School used a field on Rumbold Road for races and games', but the Victorian tradition of the Whit march had passed.

Geoffrey was in church on the day in September 1939 when war was declared. A churchwarden listened to the 'wireless' in the vicarage and came in to tell the vicar. Geoffrey recalled the crypt being turned into an air raid shelter, although never remembered it being used 'in anger'. The tower was used by the Observer Corps. During the war the congregation changed considerably. Evensong was moved into the Parish Hall, due to the lack of black-out in the church. The Royal Corps of Signals was stationed in Huddersfield, including some Canadian officers, one of whom married a member of the congregation.

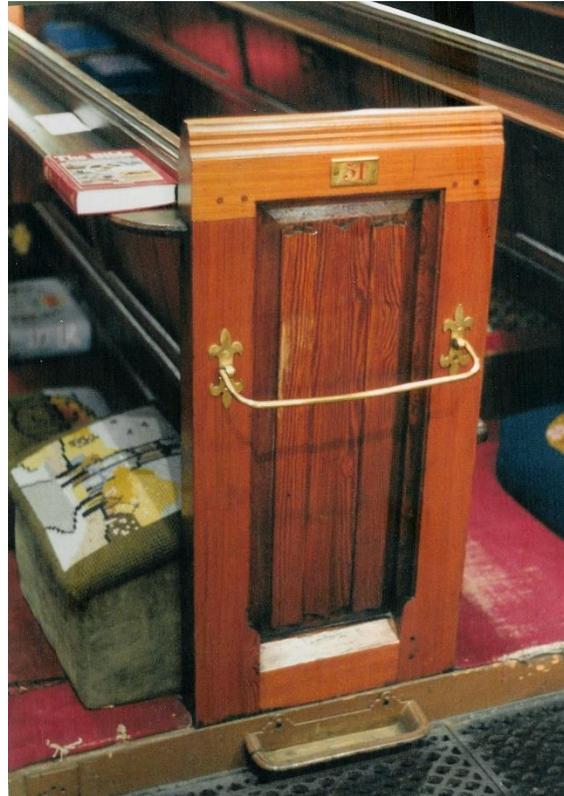
A youth fellowship group formed in 1943, led by John Winder, a curate Geoffrey found particularly inspiring. He prepared Geoffrey for his confirmation the following year. Geoffrey remembered New Year's Day in 1945, when he and a friend were the only 2 people to turn up to the New Year's Day communion service that was always held in those days. The vicar, Rev Frank Hurd, took them up the tower instead, which Geoffrey had always wanted to do and Geoffrey recalled carving his name into the plaster near the top (for a virtual roof-top and tower tour, read the May 2017 blog).

When he was 16, Geoffrey became a 'sidesman' (what we'd now call a member of the 'welcome team'). He remembered some of the Edgerton people looking down on a young lad doing this. One lady was very annoyed when he chanced to give her a prayer book with a torn page. "I wouldn't care if you have it to a visitor, but

"I'm a regular!" she announced. He was always very careful what he gave her in future! Geoffrey enjoyed being a sidesman, which also involved taking and counting the collection alongside the churchwardens.

Many of the regular congregation rented the best positioned pews, at a rate of half-a-crown per quarter per person. The pews were numbered and had locked boxes in which the pew-holders kept their own copies of the hymn book (Ancient and Modern) and the Book of Common Prayer. Pews were marked with a card with the pew-holders name. The side pews were all free. Outside the main doors was a sign that read "When the bell stops, all seats are free", entitling non pew-holders to occupy the rented pews. Geoffrey's grandparents were pew-holders.

For important funerals a canopy was put up and a red carpet was laid out to the gateway on Trinity Street. Special trams were even laid on to carry mourners to funeral services at Holy Trinity.



The winter of 1947 was very harsh and snow lay in Huddersfield for months. There was a fuel shortage and the church couldn't get coal. Temperatures in church got so cold that water which had leaked in from the roof froze to form icicles that hung down from the balcony to the ground.

Attendance declined rapidly during the 1960s and by the appointment of Jim Dearden in 1975 had declined to about 50 in the morning service and 20 in the evening. Geoffrey was delighted with Jim's appointment "He really got it going. There was a different mood; people were keen and enthusiastic, compared to 50 years ago when people just came, listened and went away again. Going to church was just a habit then..."

I remember that Geoffrey's life was always one of devotion to God and service to the church. His faith was infectious and he was passionate about it. The church bibles were donated in memory of Geoffrey and his wife, Muriel, who were keen supporters of the Gideon's. I am grateful to Geoffrey and Muriel and to many others of their generation who carried the flames of faith through some dark and changing times in the life of the church and pray that we might perpetuate their legacy in our times.

Andy Barber
June '17