

No. 27: 'Holy Trinity's schools and a dark legacy.'

I'm writing this month's blog during the 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity', which was first observed in 1908 and runs between the feast days for St Peter and St Paul. Sadly the Christian Church has more often been known for its divisions rather than its unity and one of the fiercest periods of division in the history of the churches in Huddersfield was in Victorian times. The divisions were specifically focussed on the provision of schools, so in this month's blog I shall investigate these issues and their legacy to this day.

One of the frustrations for many years for families in the Marsh area and in the streets surrounding the church is the lack of school provision. Holy Trinity has had no state school within its parish boundaries in living memory, except for Greenhead College of course (and until recently Kirklees College). 2018 marked the return of primary education to Holy Trinity's parish, with the opening of Brambles Primary Academy in Cemetery Road. So what are the reasons for the absence of a primary school in this part of Huddersfield for so long?

As discussed in the blog for September 2017, Holy Trinity once ran two schools. The first opened in the 1830s in Portland Street and the building is still in use as First Class Nursery. At its height this school catered for 500 pupils aged between 5 and 13 years. Classes were large, boys and girls were taught separately with up to 180 pupils in each using a monitorial system where older children helped to teach the younger ones.



The school was funded in almost equal part by donations and by the 'Weekly Pence' that the school children were charged. The school finances were a frequent concern to the Church and fundraising for the schools was a major part of Church life.

The school on Portland Street served the large and growing population in the streets around Highfields and Springwood, almost all of which have now completely disappeared.

In 1865 the church's second school, The Marsh Memorial School, opened its doors to infant aged children. By the 1860s Huddersfield had spread into the previously rural hamlet of Marsh and the population of the area was rising rapidly. The backstory to the opening of the Marsh School was not all positive. Holy Trinity had become a parish church in 1857 and its parish included the area of Marsh and was keen to serve its new parishioners. However the Church of England was also keen to prevent the spread of the Nonconformist churches and I wonder whether the decision to build a school in Marsh,



which was intended to also be used as a place of worship, was to compete with the newly opened Marsh Methodist Church which had opened in 1863 on the site which is now Tesco's. [Gledholt Methodist Church opened later in 1890 and the two churches merged in 1965 and the Marsh chapel was demolished].

The Marsh Memorial School was named in memory of Sarah Allen, the wife of the church's founder, Benjamin Haigh Allen. She died shortly before the school opened.

The new school was built on Westbourne Road on the site which is now the car park at the end of St James' Road. The school was licenced for public worship and weekly Sunday services were later held there. The school also allowed the formation of a second Sunday school in addition to the one held at Portland Street.

To attend a church school required church attendance. The 1851 census showed over half of Huddersfield's population being Nonconformist. It is possible that one of the reasons for building the school was so Holy Trinity could grow its congregation at the expense of the Nonconformists.



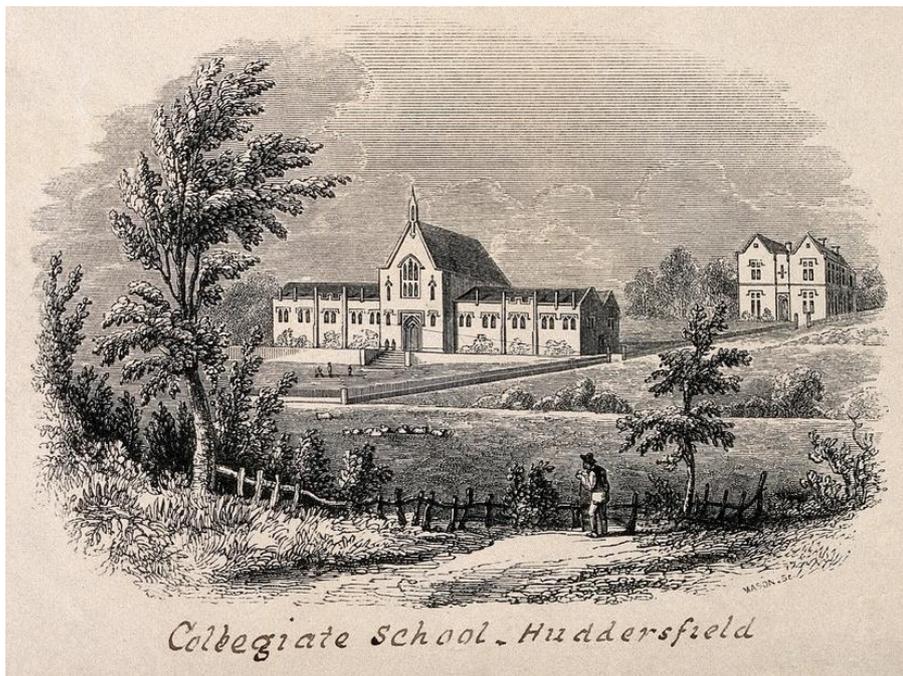
Nationally, political debate about children's education was growing and there was increasing concern about the lack of school provision in growing industrial towns such as Huddersfield.

The 1870 Education Act required partially state-funded board schools to be set up to provide elementary education in areas where existing provision was inadequate. At this time, most schools in Huddersfield were provided by the Church of England. A local school board was elected to establish schools paid for largely by rate-payers. The board's schools also charged fees, but poor parents could be exempted.

Huddersfield School Board was dominated by the Nonconformists and angry debates followed because rate-payers, who were also Anglican, were required to contribute to the new 'Board' schools in addition to the church 'National' schools.

A survey carried out in 1870 of all schools charging less than 9d per week showed there was a severe shortage of school places in Huddersfield and estimated a further 4000 places would be required by 1881. The area surrounding the town centre was relatively well served by the church's 'National' schools, including Portland Street and Marsh, so the Board set about building 3 new schools further out of town, in Lindley, Dalton and Lockwood. There was often strong opposition to plans for building 'Board' schools in the more central areas of the town, including Spring Grove in 1890.

The School Board passed a local bye-law in 1873, making education compulsory for children in the area aged 5-13 for the first time. (Children aged 10-13 were required to attend part-time). Education became compulsory for children in England aged 5-10 in 1880. Records show that attendance rates were low by today's standards with children often taking time off if needed to go out to work or if families couldn't afford to pay.



Few children attended school after the age of 10 and there was little provision of secondary education in Huddersfield. There were small grammar schools with Anglican foundations, in Almondbury, Longwood and Fartown. The town had two proprietary schools providing secondary education, both formed in 1838 in opposition to each other, one, Huddersfield Collegiate School being Anglican and the other, Huddersfield College being Nonconformist.

The Collegiate School was located just outside Holy Trinity's parish boundary on what is now Clare Hill. It provided education for older boys, some of whom were boarding pupils. The school occupied a six-acre site, possibly including the land that is now occupied by the Brambles Primary Academy. It was founded by the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Ripon (Huddersfield was then in Ripon diocese) and the Vicar of Huddersfield was the first President.

The Huddersfield College was located in the parish and its building was occupied until recently by Kirklees College for its Performing Arts Department. The College provided for secondary education for boys of the town's Nonconformist population. The competition between the two schools was felt to be wasteful at a time when most children couldn't afford to attend either. Over time the College grew and the Collegiate declined. Eventually after considerable acrimonious debate the two were merged in 1885 and the Collegiate buildings sold, becoming known as the Albany Hall. Albany Hall was briefly a roller-skating rink and was used as a social venue for many years before its demolition in the 1970s.

The College closed in 1893 and was taken over by the School Board, opening it as a new Higher Grade School, providing free secondary education for the first time. This later became a boy's grammar school, before it moved to the Huddersfield 'New'



College building in 1958. The original New North Road College building was then used by the Huddersfield Technical College which eventually became Kirklees College. The building, now listed Grade II has recently been sold and is to be developed into 25 luxury apartments.

The Huddersfield Municipal High School for Girls, later known as Greenhead High School, opened on the site of Greenhead Hall in 1909. It was the town's girl's grammar school and has maintained strong links with Holy Trinity since its opening.



When the Kirklees secondary education became comprehensive in 1973, New College and Greenhead became Sixth Form Colleges.

Holy Trinity's location put it in the middle of the town-wide debate about educational provision. Its two schools were an expensive draw on the church's finances and fund-raising to pay for them was a regular aspect of parish life, although a government grant of £360pa was received by 1889. With the making of education compulsory the numbers of pupils at the schools increased. The school leaving age was raised to 11 in 1893 and to 12 in 1899.

In 1891 the Marsh school and the younger years at Portland Street became free for pupils. The Marsh school was extended in 1894, but numbers at Portland Street started to decline after slum clearances and the opening of Spring Grove.

The 1902 Education Act saw the Huddersfield Education Authority taking control of all the Board and National schools. This relieved the church of the financial burden of running the schools, although it was still responsible for their buildings and their upkeep.

Portland Street School developed a poor reputation and became known as a 'rough school'. Its numbers declined and so in 1935 the church decided to close the school. It only had 87 pupils left and so they were transferred to neighbouring schools. With the site being leasehold the building reverted to the freeholder which by that time had become the Huddersfield Corporation.

There may originally have been some expectation that the Marsh school would grow from just having infants' classes to having older children as well, but the site was not large enough and twice the playground was reduced in size to permit road widening. With the political situation of the School Board building schools in Lindley and later Oakes, Birkby and Paddock, there seemed to be insufficient need in the Marsh area, so it remained an infant's school. Recruitment of staff became increasingly difficult. In the teacher shortage after 1945 it was left with just one teacher, Miss Livingstone.

In 1947 Miss Livingstone was appointed Head at Oakes School, leaving Marsh in the hands of a single supply teacher. In the very heavy snows that winter, the supply teacher refused to open the school single-handedly. No replacement staff could be found and the school never reopened.

The lack of schools in this area is largely due to the closure of church schools and the School Board policy of the 1870s to build schools further out of town. I suggest this is a direct legacy of the Christian disunity between the Anglicans and the Nonconformists of over a century ago. Sadly the church is still blighted by division, hence the continuing need for a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Arguments between churches about doctrine do little for our witness to those of no faith or seeking God. In our 200th year let us celebrate the things that unite us as the body of Christ and repent for the darker days of our history marked by our division.

Andy Barber
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