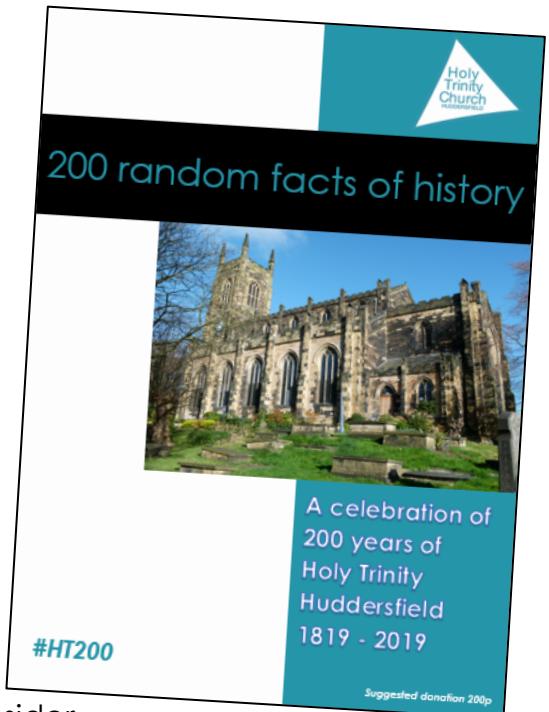


No. 34: 'Holy Trinity in 200 random facts of history'

I liked this title and thought it was going to be a neat and easy way to write this month's blog. All I had to do was find some random facts and write them down. At first I thought they could all be number related, but this became increasingly tricky. Then I thought they could all be images, suitable for those for whom reading is not really their thing, but finding a range of pictures to cover the full length of the church's history wasn't easy either. I also thought I could include some random quotes. I ended up blending all 3 ideas. Before long I noticed the word and page count was getting very long and well beyond my original scope of a (brief) monthly 'snippet' of history. In fact, it struck me I'd effectively written a book, so that's what it has become.

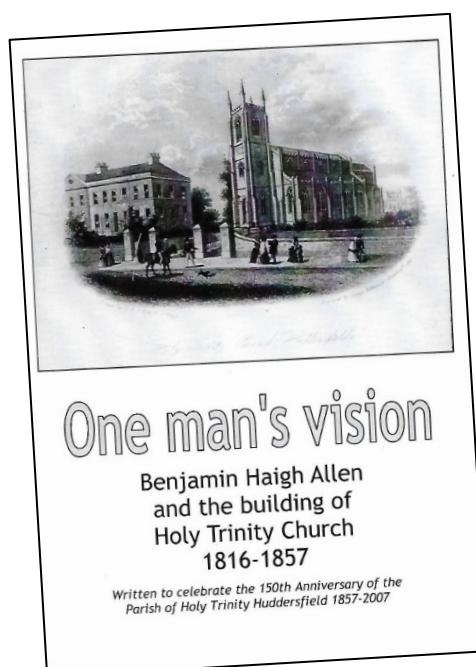
When we first started considering how to mark the 200th anniversary, I had thought of writing a book but quickly decided it was going to be too much work..... As a mild obsessive, I have discovered over the years that Holy Trinity's history is dangerous territory for me and becomes all-consuming, almost an addiction.

I settled for republishing a booklet called 'One Man's Vision', a history of the foundation of Holy Trinity originally printed in 2007 to mark the church's 150th anniversary of becoming a Parish Church. 'One Man's Vision' was, in many ways, rather late. The research for it had begun way back in 1994. At that time Holy Trinity was in the process of planning to reorder the church's interior, a project expected to cost a huge sum of money. A meeting was held to consider ways we could raise funds and at that meeting someone suggested I could spend a few days of my school holiday writing a booklet about the church's history. You could say '...the rest is history'. I wish I could remember whose idea it was.



So, I decided against a booklet for the 200th, but then have gone ahead and done it anyway, almost without realising it. The 'Churchwarden's Blog', the monthly historical snippets was my replacement idea.

I realised in writing '200 random facts of history' that the church's history is entwined in its people's histories. It has certainly been the case for me. By searching through the church's and my own photo collections I have been reminded of so many ways that my family's lives and Holy Trinity's life overlap and overlay each other. I suppose you could say that it is part of what it means to be part of the church family. I was a newly married, young Humanities and IT teacher when it was suggested I spent a couple of days researching Holy Trinity's history, a quarter of a century later perhaps I'll find a new obsession?



But now I've got a new problem – having written a 28 page, 8000+ word book with over 100 photos instead of the September blog, I still have to come up with a snippet.

I'm just back from holiday. I vowed to myself to have a 'phone-free fortnight', to avoid email, Facebook etc. But lying on a sunbed by the pool, I just couldn't resist the temptation and saw an email pointing me to a news article in the Guardian for Wednesday 14th August. The following is quoted from the article but it's worth a read in full - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/14/several-lives-lost-note-reveals-early-details-of-peterloo-massacre>

The article is about the horrific news story of 200 years before, of the Peterloo Massacre. "On 16 August 1819, up to 60,000 working class people from the towns and villages of what is now Greater Manchester marched to St Peters Fields in central Manchester to demand political representation. Their peaceful protest turned bloody when Manchester magistrates ordered Yeoman – a private militia paid for by rich locals – to storm the crowd with sabres.



Engraving of the Peterloo massacre (National Archives)

"Most historians agree that 14 people were definitely killed in the massacre – 15 if you include the unborn child of Elizabeth Gaunt, killed in the womb after she was beaten by constables in custody. A further three named people are believed to have either been stabbed or trampled to death.

"The name, Peterloo was 'a bitter pun, comparing the cowardly attacks by the Yeomanry and soldiers on unarmed civilians to the brutality suffered at Waterloo' (Robert Poole).

"Dressed in their Sunday best, tens of thousands of demonstrators flocked from miles around, carrying banners and flags. Unusually for the time, the crowd included a sizeable number of women, clad in white to symbolise their virtue as they joined the fight for suffrage.

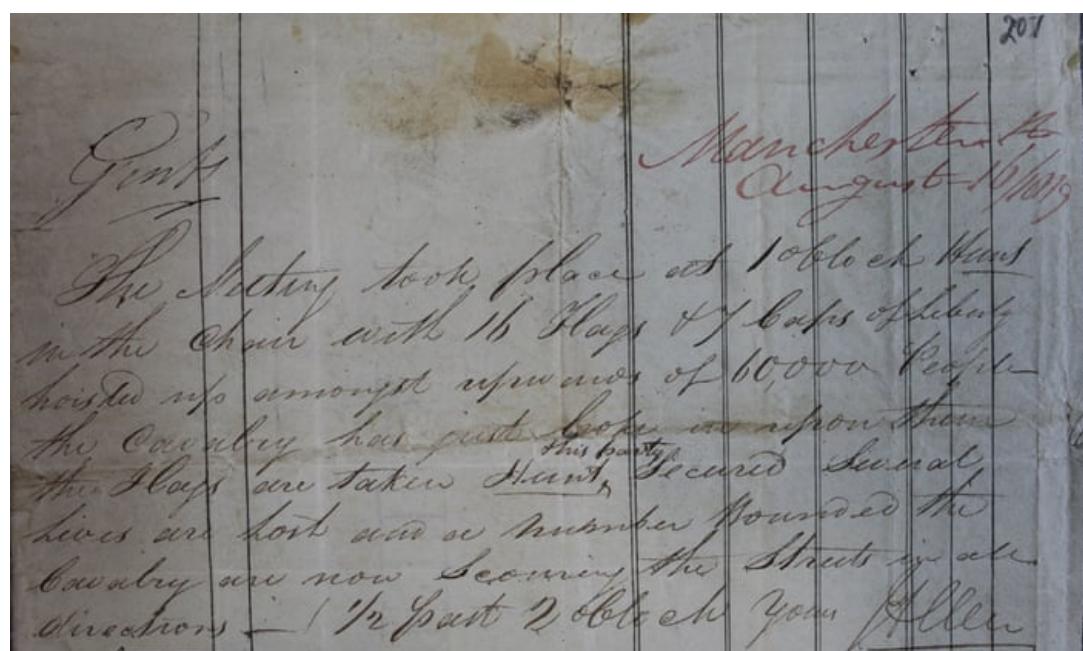
"The protesters wanted political reform. The years leading up to Peterloo had been tough for working class people and they wanted a voice in parliament to put their needs and wants on the political agenda, inspired by the French Revolution across the Channel. Machines had begun to take jobs in the lucrative cotton industry but periodic trade slumps closed factories at short notice, putting workers out on the street. The Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815 with the Battle of Waterloo, had taken a heavy toll on the nation's finances, and 350,000 ex-servicemen returned home needing jobs and food. Yet those in power seemed more interested in lining their own pockets than helping the poor.

"At that point, only the richest landowners could vote, and large swathes of the country were not represented in Westminster. Manchester and Salford, which then had a population of 150,000, had no MP, yet Oxford and Cambridge Universities had their own representation. At the time the extension of the vote to all men, let alone women, was actively opposed by many who thought the vote should be restricted to those of influence and means.

"Peterloo was important as it paved the way for parliamentary democracy and particularly the Great Reform Act of 1832 which created new parliamentary seats, particularly in the industrial towns of the north of England. It also led to the establishment two years later of the Manchester Guardian by John Edward Taylor, a 28-year-old English journalist who was present at the massacre and saw how the 'establishment' media sought to discredit the protesters."

It was against this political and social backdrop that Holy Trinity Church's story opened, but there is a further link. The article states that the first recorded account of the atrocity was written by Benjamin Haigh Allen, the founder of Holy Trinity Church. Allen, "a young magistrate from Huddersfield was in Manchester to monitor events. [He wrote the following] barely an hour after the massacre on 16 August 1819."

"The meeting took place at 1 o'clock. Hunt in the chair with 16 flags and 7 caps of Liberty hoisted up amongst upwards of 60,000 people, the cavalry has just broke in upon them, the flags are taken, Hunt and his party secured, several lives are lost and a number wounded. The cavalry are now securing the streets in all directions, ½ past 2 o'clock, yours H. Allen."



Allen's account of the Peterloo massacre. (National Archives)

The hastily scribbled note was penned on a scrap of paper and was immediately dispatched from the scene in Manchester to Whitehall by horse-drawn carriage, arriving more than 24 hours later.

It would be fascinating to know Benjamin Haigh Allen's view of the events he'd witnessed. My belief, based on the information that I've learnt about him, is that he would have been shocked by the heavy-handed actions of the Manchester Magistrates. In the lead up to Peterloo there had been a large military presence in the Huddersfield area to help maintain law and order following the Luddite insurgency in 1812, but an atmosphere of relative calm existed compared to the panic of the events at Peterloo. Allen was always philanthropic in outlook and this earned him great respect across all classes and was reflected in the mass expression of grief at his 'untimely death', aged 36.

The press reported over 10,000 marked the route of Allen's funeral procession from the Parish Church to Greenhead and Holy Trinity. Rev. Benjamin Maddock said of him in his funeral address "The poor had in him a willing and zealous advocate". He left not only a church, but a town with better education, transport, water, banking, law and order, and opportunities for the poor to improve themselves. Allen was living in times of great national change and uncertainty. Maybe one thing we can learn from history is that, in many ways, little changes....

For more information about Benjamin Haigh Allen, copies of the republished 2007 book, 'One Man's Vision' are available at £3 from the Parish Office. I hope I have also whetted your historical appetite enough to purchase '200 random facts of history' which will be available from the Heritage Open Day weekend, September 20-22nd for a suggested minimum donation of 200p!

Further information about the Open Days is available at <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/holy-trinity-church48>

Andy Barber
September '19

With thanks to the Guardian and David Griffiths.



Memorial to Benjamin Haigh Allen

