

## **No. 31: 'Holy Trinity: passing on the legacy...'**

Holy Trinity first opened in October 1819 and was the result of the vision of its founder, local philanthropist, magistrate, banker and land-owner Benjamin Haigh Allen. Allen inherited Greenhead Hall from his uncle, aged just 18 and as a fervent evangelical Christian and member of the Parish Church of St Peters in town sought to build, at his own expense, a second Anglican church in Huddersfield to serve the rapidly rising population.

Allen lived life to the full, serving his town to keep the peace at a time of the Luddite rebellion; providing for the education of its children; serving on the committees to provide sanitation, the canal, roads and was the founding chairman of the Huddersfield Banking Company. ***"His philosophy might today be dubbed 'compassionate conservatism' or 'tough love'.... To be 'useful' was central to his Evangelical faith."*** [1]

Allen's legacy is still very evident across Huddersfield and not least in the life of the church he had built, but his earthly life was to our modern views, cut short in its prime; although of course, life expectancy two centuries ago was about 40.

In this month's blog I am going to investigate what happened after Allen's death and the impact this had on the church.

Allen's death, on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1829, was caused by 'inflammation of the brain' (encephalitis). The Leeds Mercury reported his funeral:

***"A public notice had been given of the intention of the inhabitants of Huddersfield to pay every possible respect to his memory, and accordingly on the day of his interment all the shops were shut up, and at ten o'clock in the morning from six to seven hundred gentlemen assembled at the Parish Church dressed in deep mourning and wearing white gloves.... They proceeded with the most profound silence – a silence that was not broken by the vast concourse of spectators, amounting to about ten thousand – to Greenhead.... Funeral sermons were preached [the following Sunday at St Peter's, Ramsden Street Independent Chapel and at Trinity in which...] many hundreds attended that could not gain admittance"***

In the funeral sermon Rev Benjamin Maddock noted that Allen as a magistrate was ***"a terror to evil-doers, not more by the legal authority with which he was invested than by the weight of his personal influence, [but that the] poor had, in him, a willing and zealous advocate."*** [2]

Allen was buried in the family vault in the crypt at Holy Trinity, beneath the vestries. There is a memorial to him on the chancel wall.

Allen's vision for the building of Holy Trinity fore-shadowed the national programme by the Church of England, following the 1818 Church Building Act (often known as the 'Million'



***Memorial to Benjamin Haigh Allen  
- south chancel wall***

Act) where Parliament voted to spend £1 million to build churches in areas of rapidly growing population. Locally, St Paul's (now the University's concert hall), All Saint's Paddock (now mainly a ruin) and St Stephen's Lindley were all opened in 1828-31. Growing congregations in these 3 additional churches as well as at Huddersfield Parish Church and the ever-increasing number of non-conformist chapels and churches meant that Holy Trinity rarely needed its 1500 seats that were originally provided.

As founder and patron of the church, Allen had considerable control over the appointment of clergy and the running of Holy Trinity. Upon his death, the patronage of the church passed to his wife, Sarah and it was she that appointed the next minister. Very soon after Allen's death the incumbent, Rev Benjamin Maddock resigned to take up the prestigious post of Vicar of Tadcaster.

We have the following record of services in the 1830s. The church clerk was a man called John Burke of Birkby. Burke occupied the 'clerk's desk', the third and lowest deck of the triple-decker pulpit, in the centre of the nave. Apparently, he was elderly and prone to falling asleep in services, when he would have to be woken by the vergers, of similar age. During services, the clerk led the congregation in the saying of the responses, prayers and the Amens. He also gave out the hymns. The second deck had twin reading desks, from which clergy read prayers and readings, facing the congregation and reached by graceful curved staircases. Above that was the pulpit itself, from which sermons were preached. The pulpit was high enough to command the balconies. It was accessed by a long straight staircase from the chancel behind it. A sounding board was constructed over the pulpit in the 1830s in an attempt to amplify the speaker's voice.



*Photo of the triple-deck pulpit still in use at St Mary's Church Whitby.  
(Sadly no illustrations remain of the pulpit at Holy Trinity)*

Trinity's third incumbent, Rev Henry Mithy served between 1830-34. He came to Trinity at the age of 30. He had suffered with consumption from infancy and was described of "delicate disposition". After studying at Westminster School and Oxford, he travelled in Switzerland, Italy and Russia to improve his mind and health, before his ordination. His life was one of sadness, his first wife died soon after they were married. Mithy served as curate in Cheltenham and remarried there, before his move to Holy Trinity.

Henry Mithy lived at Westfield, the house next to the church. Described as "of fine character, religious, cultured and lovable", he threw himself into the work, but after two

years he ruptured a blood vessel. He was sent to South Devon to recover, the congregation raised the funds to allow him to go, but he never regained full health and resigned due to ill-health in the autumn of 1834. He moved to Hastings, and died of influenza in 1837, aged 37.

Mithy worked hard at building up the faith of the congregation. The following is an account of his work:

***"He began the public duties of the Lord's Day at the Sunday School, which he diligently superintended. In the Church, a large building and very difficult for the voice, he had a full service, without any assistance, morning and afternoon. In the evening he assembled the Bible Classes with the School Teachers in the Chancel, and gave them Catechetical lectures. There was a weekly meeting in the Schoolroom (at Greenhead), for the exposition of the Sacred Scriptures; after which, those who took advantage of a parochial lending library being invited to change their books, he would take occasion to drop many sentences of suitable and pious exhortation. He held a Cottage Lecture at some distance from the Church every week, and once a fortnight he was in the practice of receiving into his house, or meeting at their houses in succession, many of his parishioners, who thirsted for spiritual knowledge, and of reading with them a chapter of the Bible.***

***But to describe his parochial labours would be to account for the employment of every day in the week, and almost of every hour of the day. Each morning brought with it its specific demand; now the Infirmary (which opened in 1831); now the School, now the houses of the sick and afflicted in this or other quarter of the district."*** [2]



**Rev Edward Acton Davies**

Sarah Allen appointed the Rev Edward Acton Davies to serve as her children's tutor at Greenhead. He served as Assistant Minister during the ten months while Henry Mithy was away convalescing. During this time he fell in love with Sarah Allen and they got married in 1833 and the following year had a son, Edward Whitacre Davies.

After Henry Mithy resigned due to ill health, Sarah appointed her new husband to be Holy Trinity's fourth minister.

It was during Davies' incumbency that the first Church Committee was formed. Its first meeting was held in the vestry on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1835. It seems the committee was largely self-appointed but many of the names of the first members are recorded on the church walls on memorials to them, suggesting they were probably the more affluent and influential members of the church. Church finances were becoming an issue with the system of rented pews realising less income as more members moved to the new local churches.

Davies had three Assistant Curates, during his time at Trinity. One used to preach for around an hour, much to the annoyance of the congregation, for it was said he was not skilled at preaching! Davies fell ill in 1838, and he went to Hastings to recover. He had been away for nearly a year, when he wrote to resign as Incumbent on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1839. The third assistant, Rev. Naason Maning appointed early in 1838, became Holy Trinity's fifth minister in 1839.

Edward and Sarah Davies and their family moved to Martley in Worcestershire. Greenhead was leased and finally sold in 1848. Sarah died in 1865 and Edward in 1880.



Naason Maning (pictured right) was the first incumbent to serve for any period of time, becoming the last to serve as 'Perpetual Curate' in the parish of Huddersfield. He served until 1857, the year Holy Trinity was granted parish status and his successor became the first Vicar.

One of the sayings of Jesus, recorded in John 10:10 is "**I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly**" [NKJV]. One thing we never find out about ourselves is our legacy on the lives of others after we've gone. May we always live our lives to the full, as demonstrated in some of the early members of Holy Trinity, in order to serve Jesus in our time and for those who will follow on from us.

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