

Local Parish Church welcomes the Archbishop of York to preach at a service of Evensong on the 150th Anniversary of the Laying of its foundation stone.

Archbishop of York returns to old stomping ground to preach at a service of Evensong on the 150th Anniversary of the Laying of its foundation stone.

The Parish of St James the Great, Ryhill, Havercroft with Cold Hiendley and Winterset welcomed the 98th Archbishop of York, The Most Reverend and Right Honourable The Archbishop of York and Primate of England, Stephen Cottrell to both preach at Evensong and to give Benediction on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone on Sunday 16th May 2021.

Even though the celebrations were unable to include Congregational singing and the numbers of those attending had to be limited due to the current COVID pandemic, the spirits of those who had gathered from the parish and its sister parishes of St Luke's, Grimethorpe with St Paul's, Brierley, as well as All Saints, South Kirkby, were not dampened, not even by the loud thunderstorm which was overhead for some of the service.

This was the first public engagement in person for the Archbishop of York not only in the Diocese of Leeds, but in the Northern Province outside the Diocese of York.

During his sermon the Archbishop asked several questions of those gathered:

"Why do we have a Church here in Ryhill? Why was the foundation stone of this church laid 150 years ago today, I gather right underneath the pulpit? Why did they put a Bible underneath the foundation stone? Why are we here this afternoon, on this very wet afternoon?... Someone said to me recently that the Christian faith was just a prop, and I said to them "Yes it is, what's yours?" I'm not ashamed to say I lean on Jesus, that I need what I find in this Church and in the Church of Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the one who helps us through life and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is like medicine for the heart and for the soul."

At the end of the Service those who attended were each given a packed Afternoon tea to take away and enjoy safely, and the Archbishop visited Victoria House, a local Nursing home situated at the side of the Church to see some of the residents.

The Priest in Charge of the parish, the Revd Canon Paul Cartwright said, "It was a great joy for the parish and our newly formed team of parishes to be able to welcome the Archbishop of York to Ryhill for this special anniversary. Christians have worshiped Jesus Christ and hallowed the area through prayer for over 150 years, and we pray that this will continue into the next 150 years. The date coincided with our usual pattern of evensong and so we were able to make the most of it, even though we are currently living with COVID restrictions. To have Archbishop Stephen with us to attend his first public service in person in the Northern Province outside of the Diocese of York was very special, and I thank God for the Archbishop's ministry, encouragement and powerful preaching."

Link to picture download site.

<https://we.tl/t-79VwpOFjoT>

Looking down the aisle of a church, wooden pews with people standing, and ceiling on view

credit: Benjamin Cartwright

Background

The Archbishop of York has previously held the role of the Diocesan Missioner for the Historical Wakefield Diocese

History

The Parish of St James the Great Ryhill, Havercroft with Cold Hiendley and Winterset

Early years

According to tradition there was in Ryhill about the time of the Norman Conquest a Shrine known as the Hermitage of St James. Its location is thought to be near the spring which later became known as the Priory Fountain and the village's main water supply. It was also piped to the Priory at Nostell. This building still exists and can be found in the field to the rear of 'Woodlands' on Nostell Lane.

Between the years 1100 and 1540 the spiritual home of Ryhill was the Augustinian Priory of St Oswald at Nostell. In 1540 the Priory of Nostell was suppressed which ended all ministrations by the monks.

The Church of St Michael and Our Lady at Wragby built in 1533 (within the grounds of Nostell Priory) for the next three centuries catered for the needs of Ryhill people.

The Parish Church was two miles from the village with a population of 300 in 1865. A barn at Rycliffe Farm was adapted and used for services and named 'The Mission Barn'.

St James Church

In 1867 James Piers St Aubyn, Architect, was commissioned to prepare plans for the new Church, the site being offered by the Winn family of Nostell Priory. The Architect designed a Church in the French middlepointed style to seat 150 people in the nave, with an apsidal Chancel, and an organ chamber and vestry on the south elevation. At the west end of the building a fleche was provided to house a bell.

Due to a lack of funds, it was decided to build the nave only, the remainder to be added on at a later date. The foundation stone was laid on Tuesday 16 May 1871 in the presence of a good number of people. The stone, at the north-east corner was laid by Mrs Hanson-Freeman. The ceremony was preceded by Morning Prayer in Wragby Church, at which a good congregation was present, including many local clergy. After the service the congregation assembled at Ryhill at 12:15pm. The service commenced with the hymn; Onward Christian soldiers sung in procession. It is usual to place beneath the foundation stone coins and newspapers of the day, with a view that, if in future ages the Church should be destroyed, the date of the building may be known to those who discover the coins. At Ryhill, instead of coins, a Bible, enclosed in a leaded case, was placed beneath the stone. Ryhill Church, then rests upon the truth of God, as he has revealed Himself in His Written Word.

On the 3rd of February 1874, the Church was opened by the Most Reverend William Thompson, His Grace the Lord Bishop of York. The Church was not then consecrated, although the Archbishop was willing to perform the ceremony. It was thought better that consecration should be deferred until the church was out of debt; it was, for the present merely licensed by the Archbishop for the performance of divine services. The Archbishop preached from the words, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. The Church was dedicated in the name of St James, thus reviving an old dedication which was in the parish prior to the Norman Conquest.

In the course of two years, the Church was ready for consecration, and on Thursday, 16 March, 1876, the Archbishop of York performed the ceremony.

For a time the Church carried on as a chapel-of-ease to the Mother Church of Wragby, but it soon became evident that Ryhill and Wintersett must be constituted into a separate ecclesiastical parish. By an Order of the Queen in Council, dated October 1876 a separate parish was formed, comprising of Ryhill, Wintersett and parts of the parishes of Royston, Felkirk and Sandal Magna.

The Church remained in its unfinished state until 1885, no funds being available to complete the building. Bequests from Revd Henry Stuart, Vicar of Wragby and Mrs Priscilla Winn of Nostell Priory enabled building work to re-commence.

The foundation stone of the Chancel was laid by Miss Emma Winn of Nostell Priory on Tuesday 7th July 1885. A silver trowel was presented to Miss Winn to mark the occasion. The Chancel was ready for the opening on March 25th 1886 at a service held at 3:30 pm, the sermon was preached by the Rural Dean, the Archbishop being unable to attend due to other numerous engagements.

A fitting memorial in the form of three stained glass windows in the Apse was provided by public subscription in memory of those persons who had taken great interest in the building of the Church. The central window and the one to the north in memory of Henry C Stuart and the third window in memory of Priscilla Winn of Nostell, Henry C. Stuart (Priest) and Eleanor his wife.

The Church was now complete and had cost £3,000:00 to build.

The beauty of the interior was greatly enhanced by memorials dedicated by Cosmo Gordon Lang, Archbishop of York on Monday 4th July 1921. These were the War Memorial (1914 – 1918) which took the form of the rood: the furnishings of the English Altar and Altar rails in memory of William Henry Cannon, Vicar for 18 years.

In 1927 Ryhill and several neighbouring parishes were transferred from the Diocese of York to the Diocese of Wakefield, thus severing another link with an ancient foundation.

In 1936, to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Consecration, a chime of 8 bells was installed in the existing Fleche by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough. The bells were dedicated by the Bishop of Wakefield on the 10th of May.

The Church was extended by the provision of a Choir Vestry/meeting room and enclosed porch. A service of dedication was performed on 1st November 1963 by the Rt Revd Eric Treacy, Bishop of Pontefract.

On Easter Monday, 30 March 1970 the Church was severely damaged by fire, the Vestry, Organ and Chancel roof were destroyed and extensive smoke and water damage caused, many cherished items perished in the fire. Miraculously the stained-glass windows and Altar table survived the fire. On Easter Day 1971 the Church had been fully restored and was Re-Hallowed by the Rt Revd Gordon Fallows, Bishop of Pontefract. Dedicated at the same time was a new pipe organ built by JW Walker and Vestments and Altar Frontal made at St Peter's Convent, Horbury.

The Church was again extended in 1988 when St James Centre was built and incorporated into the Choir Vestry, this provided a function room, toilets and kitchen.

Havercroft was not originally part of the new Ecclesiastical parish of Ryhill but remained in the Parish of Felkirk with Brierley until the 1920's when a portion of Havercroft was transferred to Ryhill and again in the 1990's when the remaining part of Havercroft was added to form the ecclesiastical parish of Ryhill, Havercroft with Cold Hiendley and Winterset.

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