

A musical celebration at Malden

One hundred and fifty years ago the congregation of the Parish Church of St John the Baptist, in Church Road, Old Malden, were preparing for the laying of the foundation stone of a major extension of the church. This year the present congregation are arranging several events to celebrate the anniversary, with a focus on music.

The present church site may have been a place of worship for 1,000 years. The name Malden is believed to derive from 'Mael dune', or 'the Cross on the Hill', and possibly an outdoor cross once stood here, used by travelling preachers. Near the south-east corner of the church, some of the flint and stone walling of the old chancel, now part of the Lady Chapel, may date from Anglo-Saxon times. As we enter the church through the porch, below the tower, we are in the part of the church that was rebuilt in brick in c1609-11.

When the Revd William Chetwynd Stapylton arrived as Vicar in 1850, the church still consisted of the 17th-century brick nave, now the south aisle, and the old chancel. To the left, where there are now arches between the south aisle and nave, was the north wall of the building. The church needed restoration, and the architect T G (later Sir Thomas) Jackson was called in. The *Surrey Comet*, on 11th July 1863, reported recollections of the 'oldest inhabitant' that at one time 'the church was so completely buried under ivy, that the tenants of the manor farm were constantly in the habit of climbing onto the roof to collect the eggs from the hen's nests', and went on to say that under Mr Jackson – 'a rising young architect of great promise' – the church had been re-seated with open seats (replacing box pews), the roof had been opened up by removing a ceiling, new tiled floors had been laid, and a new font installed.

After the railway arrived in 1859, the population grew, from 283 in 1851 to 416 in 1871 and 525 in 1881. By 1866-7 it was already clear that the church should be extended, and initially a lean-to north aisle was added. Soon, however, it became apparent that a more radical solution was needed, to accommodate the growing number of parishioners.

A meeting of the parishioners was held on 12th October 1874, and it was decided 'that it is advisable to attempt an Enlargement of the Church'. A committee was appointed, and three architects submitted plans. Once again the proposals of Thomas Jackson were favoured. He suggested removing the lean-to aisle, building a new nave and chancel, and retaining the existing church as a south aisle. This would provide an extra 172 seats, making a total of 335, and providing improved accommodation for school children.

The *Surrey Comet* reported on 12th December 1874, 'By this means the number of sittings will be more than doubled... whilst the appearance of the little ancient church on the side on which it is approached from the road will be but very little altered. The cost of this improvement is estimated at £2,000 – a very large sum to raise in so small a parish. But the committee, nothing daunted, set to work, and... in little more than a month's time no less a sum than £1,300 has been promised...'

Mr Jackson's plan was adopted at a meeting on 18th February 1875, by which time the amount promised had risen to £1,886 13s 0d. The *Surrey Comet* reported in its edition of Saturday 3rd July 1875 that the 'interesting ceremony of laying the foundation stone' had taken place on the preceding Saturday, 26th June, at 4pm. The existing church had been decorated for the

occasion: 'Above the communion tables were panels with bunches of flowers in the centre, and above these the text "Christ, the chief Corner Stone".'

At this time Malden was part of the Diocese of Winchester, and the title Bishop of Guildford had been introduced in 1874 for an assistant to the Bishop of Winchester. The foundation stone was laid at the base of the new chancel arch by the first Bishop of Guildford, Rt Revd John Utterton, who was presented with a silver trowel by the churchwardens.

The Vicar gave an address in which he 'expressed his earnest desire that the new nave and chancel might be a place where should be shaped and formed living stones of a higher building.' After the ceremony, 'the younger members of the church choir had tea at the vicarage; and supper was provided at the schools in the evening for the adult members.

It was reported that construction was expected to be completed in November, and the work presumably went according to plan, because on 11th December the *Comet* reported that the consecration ceremony had been performed on the previous Tuesday, 7th December, by the Bishop of Winchester, Rt Revd Harold Browne.

The Bishop 'was to have been present at 11.30;' reported the paper, 'but, through the slippery state of the roads impeding travelling, he did not arrive till after 12, having come by road from Surbiton station.' As part of the ceremony, the Vicar and two former Curates, Revds G B Lewis and J S Jones, went to the place in the old church where the altar had stood and carried the chalice and paten, the cup and plate used at Communion services, to the new chancel, and a stone recording the old location of the altar was unveiled. The Bishop preached on the words 'Thy Kingdom come'.

After the service, Mr and Mrs Shand, the tenants of Fullbrooks (which stood between Avondale Avenue, Perry How and Manor Way) in the 1870s-80s, provided luncheon for numerous guests, including Bishop and Mrs Browne. Catering was by Ring and Brymer of Cornhill, an old-established firm which provided catering for numerous City events, such as Coronation banquets given by the Corporation of London. Mr Shand proposed a toast to the Bishop, who replied that 'he could not see any hardship in coming a few miles to worship in a church enlarged as this had been, and then to be received so hospitably afterwards. If they had grown cold in coming there through the snow, that had been dispelled by the warmth of their reception.'

The Vicar also spoke: 'He looked back on the past and saw unnumbered acts of kindness from many; he looked at the present and saw the work completed; and to the future, and saw how many blessings might be associated with the material fabric.' He also mentioned some specific gifts: Mrs Barnes gave the lectern, Mr Blake gave gasoliers for the west end, and a lady gave gas standards to light the chancel. According to the *Epsom Journal*, the final cost was about £2,700.

Today's congregation are not only marking this anniversary, but also working to preserve the church for the future through their Restore Project: repairs are needed to the parapet and roof and, most urgently, to the tower buttress where some of the 400-year-old bricks are crumbling. Scaffolding went up in March this year, and suitable handmade bricks have been obtained from specialist brickmaker H G Matthews (more details at www.stjohnsoldmalden.org.uk).

The first event to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the enlargement will be on Saturday 14th June, a few days before the anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone. This will be an historical-cum-choral evening at 7.30pm with refreshments including cake. It will include an historical narrative by Dr Alastair Daniel, and an augmented choir will perform a number of large-scale anthems, by composers who were active in the 1870s. Tickets cost £15, with proceeds going towards St John's Restore Fund, and can be obtained via the parish administrator (administrator@stjohnsoldmalden.org.uk).

There will be an organ recital on October 11th at 7.30pm, which will also feature music from the 1870s. Tickets are £12, available on the door. Finally, on Sunday 7th December, there will be a cathedral-style Choral Evensong with augmented choir, to celebrate the actual day of the consecration.

Our illustrations (with thanks to Marilyn Burkett) show the flint and stone walls of the earliest part of the church and the Jacobean tower, and the interior of the 1875 building.



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