

# **Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church**

## **A Guide**



# **Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church**

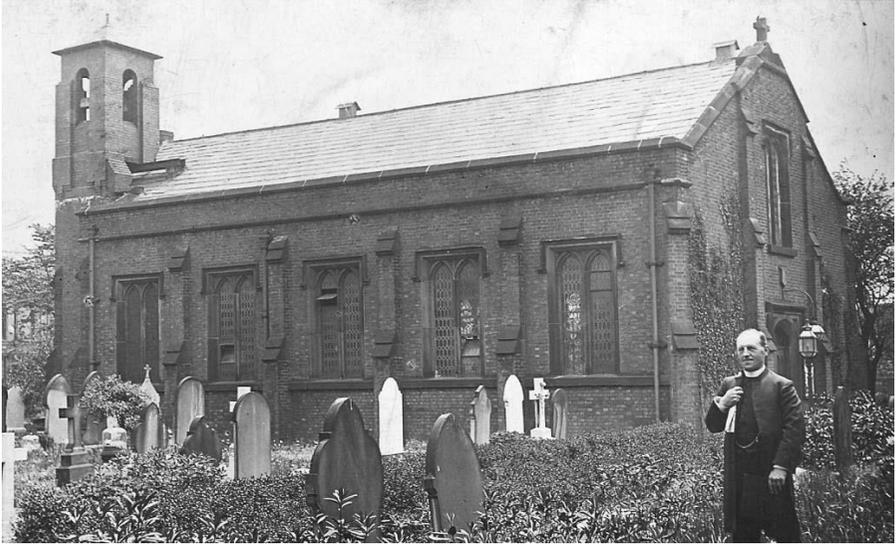
## **A History**

There has been a Church of England church building in Abram since 1838. It had been felt a church was needed in the scattered township of Abram for some time. It was determined by Sir Henry Gunning, then Rector of Wigan, and some leading landowners, to take steps to have a church built in Abram.

The following were chosen to form a committee:

Sir Henry Gunning, Rector of Wigan,  
Revd. E Sibson of Ashton and Revd. E Hill,  
J H Kearsley Esq. MP of Higher Hall, Abram,  
J Whitley Esq. Brookside,  
A Ackers Esq. Bickershaw Hall,  
J Lord Esq. Standish Hall,  
R Worsley Esq. Golborne Hall,  
W Ince Anderton Esq. Euxton Hall  
Messrs Gerrard Marsden and Catterall Leach.

To proceed with this building the bricks were given by T Leigh of the Hermitage, Winwick. The building cost approximately £2000 out of which sum The Church Diocesan Society gave £350, The Incorporated Society £200 and Mr Bevan £500. Along with these people Mrs Bevan of Laurel House, Lowton on her death bequeathed the sum of £500 towards the building and £200 towards the endowment. The first stone was laid on the 9th March 1836 by Sir Henry Gunning and on Saturday 9th June 1838 the building was consecrated by the then Lord Bishop of Chester and dedicated to St John the Evangelist.



*Photos:*

*Top: The original Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church external*

*Bottom: The original Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church internal*

On 19th July 1907 a meeting was held with the Bishop of Liverpool, the Vicar of Abram the Revd T F Brownbill Twemlow, Mr J H A Whitley JP, Mr H E Johnson JP and Mr John Smith JP to consider the possibility of building a new Parish Church to replace the original which was in a bad state of repair and had become unsafe due to mining subsidence. The following is an extract from that meeting:

“The meeting was unanimous in thinking a new church is necessary; it was decided to form as strong a committee as possible to carry out the work.

The only way that this great work can be accomplished is by obtaining the sympathy of the outside world for:

- a) Our own people consist of men and women employed at surrounding collieries and mills
- b) Last year our people paid for a Mission room costing over £300
- c) They are now contributing £70 per annum towards the stipend of an assistant Curate.

The new church will cost £7000 and we cannot raise this large sum ourselves. Towards this sum, however, the Bishop has promised to try and obtain from the Bishop of Liverpool's grant fund a grant of £500.

Mr J H A Whitley has generously given us entirely free of all legal costs a capital site of an acre of land adjoining the present church and has also added to this the sum of £500. Canon Mathew promised £100 to the fund; Dr James (Headmaster of Rugby) £5; Owen Leaman Esq (Editor of Punch) £2.2.0. In a letter it is impossible to give, in full detail the many reasons and the great

need there is for a new church for this Parish. I may say, however, that the Bishop in a recent speech spoke of our church as the poorest in the diocese.”

In December 1907 the bell which was placed on the church roof over the front porch fell down and Mr John Smith JP of Crankwood Road, Abram is quoted as saying that something would have to be done as “The church was falling down round our heads!”

Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War enough money had been raised to commence building the church, but the war intervened and by its end inflation had doubled the cost of building. The money to build the present church was finally raised in 1935 and the first sod was cut on the same site adjacent to the original building on the 10th July by the Rev T F Brownbill Twemlow.



*Photo:  
Cutting of the first sod on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1935*

The church was aligned north to south not the usual east to west, probably because of the geological structure of the land. In excavating the foundations it was found that there was such a quantity of sand that it was necessary to sink columns down to bedrock. The architects were Austin and Paley of Lancaster and the builders were Messrs Thoms. The total cost was £13, 616.12.0; this figure included all furniture, fittings, hassocks, cassocks, hymn books and carpets.

The church was dedicated on January 30th 1937 by the Bishop of Warrington Dr Gresford Jones.



*Photo:*

*A rare photograph showing the original church before demolition and the new church*

# Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church

## A Guide

**Inside the Church** (*entering through the main door*)

**The Stained Glass Windows:** Along the back wall were cut from the East window of the old church. They made a memorial window to Helen Dixon, wife of the first Incumbent John James Dixon, who died 20th May 1856 aged 44. The windows depict the four apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with their emblems.

**Block of Cannel Coal:** Dug from the local Maypole Colliery in memory of the once major industry in the area.

**The Font:** This was taken from the old church and installed on a new base.

**Copper Ewer:** Inscribed 'Pentecost 1910' the ewer was bought from offerings made at 'churchings' (a Service now named 'Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child'). First used to fill the font at Pentecost 1910, it replaced the former enamel jug.

**Stone:** In the West wall behind the font is a stone recording the consecration of the church with the names of the Vicar and Churchwardens.

**Incumbents:** The board lists the names of the Incumbents of the church since its foundation in 1838.

**Chadwick Memorial Tablet:** This records Adam Chadwick a member of a local family. The Chadwick's paid for the first school in Abram, and left property and sums of money for the education of the children of the parish.

**Elizabeth Bevan Memorial Tablet:** Elizabeth bequeathed £500 and £200 endowment to this church. Her residence was Laurel

House, Lowton. She died 30th December 1833. The tablet was originally in the old church

**Ackers Memorial Window:** The window depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and Dorcas with the poor coming for clothing. Underneath is the entwined monogram AA and CE standing for Abraham Ackers and Catherine Ellen his wife. The crest of the Bickershaw Ackers, a lion holding an oak leaf is in the other light. It was donated by his surviving children in 1885 and was moved from the original church.

**War Memorial Tablet:** The original table commemorating the dead of the First World War was dedicated on 11th June 1921. It had a specially designed mount enabling it to be easily removed when the new church was built. A matching tablet was added to commemorate the dead of the Second World War.

**Book of Remembrance Case:** The book and case were donated by the family in remembrance of Mr George Bate who was Churchwarden for thirty years.

**New Book of Remembrance Case:** This was donated by the family in remembrance of George Vincent Rowlands.

**Portable Font:** This was donated by the Sunday school in memory of Brenda Shaw a Sunday school Teacher.

**Stained Glass Window:** Jesus calling the apostles James and John donated by Mrs Radcliffe Wood in memory of her husband.

**Organ:** This was taken from the old church, where it had been installed in 1887, renovated, cleaned and changed from hand-blown bellows to electric, at the cost of £172.10.00. The makers were W E Richardson & Sons London, Manchester and Preston.

**The Chancel:** The Altar Cross was taken from the old church, as was a brass plaque on the side wall in memory of the Revd.

Hewitt Lynton, Vicar 1878-1901. The plaque was placed here by the parishioners, who also purchased a silver communion set and offertory plate. The Altar, Litany desk, Bishop's chair, stools, Prayer desk, candle holders, processional cross and kneelers were all given by various people in memory of loved ones.

**The East Window:** The stained glass window above the altar was dedicated Easter Day 2002. The congregation saved small change and the window was bought to celebrate the millennium. The window was designed by Linda Walton of Design Lights.

**Consecration Cross:** Found carved in the stone near the plaque in memory of Revd. Hewett Lynton. Here in 1937 the Bishop of Warrington Dr H Gresford Jones, laid his hand and made his mark of consecration as he said "This dwelling is God's habitation, it is a possession above all price which may not be spoken against". The cross is cut into the wall within a symbol of eternity.

**Altar Rails:** These were donated by the Sunday school at a cost of £49.17.6

**Choir Stalls and Prayer Desk:** These were given by Mr J H A Whitley in memory of the Whitley family.

**Lady Chapel:** The High Altar of the old church was renovated and placed in the Lady Chapel. The candle holders and cross were donated in memory of loved ones.

**Prayer Candle Stand:** The candles are used every time a Service takes place and whenever the church is open. It has been used to help many people to pray.

**Stained Glass Windows:** There are three stained glass windows in the Lady Chapel:

- Over the Altar “Christ reigns supreme” given in memory of the Gorton family
- “The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary” in memory of Thomas Frederick Brownbill Twemlow, Vicar 1902-1911.
- “The Nativity, the visit of the shepherds” in memory of Richard and Margaret Bennett.

**Foundation Stone:** On the pillar at the entrance to the Lady Chapel (to the side of the pulpit) is the Foundation Stone, laid 7th December 1935, by Orlando, 5th Earl of Bradford in the presence of Albert Augustus Chavasse, Lord Bishop of Liverpool.

A receptacle was placed beneath the stone containing a copy of the Service, the parish magazine, plans and specifications with the names of the architects and contractor and all church officials. Children from the village had been asked to give ‘a foot of pennies’ towards the cost of the new church; envelopes were tied together to make a foot in measure.

It was said that if the envelopes were to be laid on the road they would stretch from where the traffic lights are now near Platt Bridge to the Dover Bridge – one end of the village to the other. When the Foundation Stone was being laid the children and others put all their envelopes on the stone and as George Sharratt and Betsy Berry had raised the most money their envelopes were placed beneath the Foundation Stone too.

**Pulpit:** This was donated by the Mother’s Union at the cost of £127.

## **Stained Glass Windows:**

Over the 'North' door – “The Epiphany, the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus” in memory of the parents of Elsie Lowe.

“The Parable of the Sower” a gift of Arthur and John Pimblett  
1960

**Mothers Union Banner:** This was embroidered by three members of the Mother's Union.

**Stained Glass Window:** Memorial to John Jones Dixon the first Vicar of Abram depicting “I was hungry and you gave me food.

## **Outside the Church**

**The Clock:** The clock was bought by public subscription to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935. It was decided by the local council and the church that the new church was the most appropriate place in the village for the clock to be installed. The cost was £150; there is a stone on the tower wall commemorating the gift. The clock is still maintained by the local community today via Abram Tenants and Residents Group.

**Bell:** In December 1907 the bell turret of the old church collapsed; the parish magazine says narrowly missing a lady just entering the church. A new tower was built to hold the bell and the bell itself was recast adding a considerable amount of metal to increase its weight from 1cwt. 40lbs to 5 cwt. 1qr 6lbs. Its note is C sharp.

Inscribed on the bell is “The night cometh”

1837 recast 1907

T F B T Vicar

W S SM Wardens

The cost of the bell (£41.18.1) was defrayed by Mr John Smith of Crankwood Road a colliery owner. The money for the tower was

raised by donations and was completed and the bell re-hung in time for the New Year to be rung in.



*Photo:  
The Maypole Colliery Disaster Memorial*

**Site of the old church:** The site of the altar of the old church is marked by a marble tablet, taken from the old building. The tablet commemorated the gift of £200 by the incorporated Society and the condition of the gift that 200 seats in the church should be free (This was in the days when it was customary to pay rent for pews. Pew rents were later replaced by offertory collections).

**Old grave stones:** Near to the site of the old church are the oldest gravestones dated 1838.

**Ackers monument:** A Gothic mini-steeple, black with pollution, marks the resting place of Abraham Ackers, of Bickershaw Hall and his wife Catherine Ellen. Abraham Ackers was one of the partners of Ackers Whitley Coal Company. The Census for 1851, describes him as a coal proprietor of 4 mines employing 179 men and a landowner farming 120 acres and employing 5 farm labourers. He died in 1864 aged 68. Other members of the family also have monuments in the churchyard.

**Maypole Colliery Disaster Memorial:** Nearer the wall is the monument commemorating the 75 men and boys who died in the explosion at the Maypole Colliery in August 1908. The monument was erected in 1929. It was cleaned and renovated at the expense of the National union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board in 1983 when a service was held for the 75th anniversary, and also in 2008 through a lottery grant to make the centenary.

## **Dates in the History of Abram St John the Evangelist Parish Church**

1835: Decision made to build a church in Abram

1836, 9th March: Foundation stone laid

1838, 9th June: The church building is consecrated

1907, 19th July: A meeting is held to consider building a new church

1907, December: The church bell falls down; this was instrumental in initiating moves to get a new church building

1909: Estimated cost of new church building £7000

1918: End of the First World War and building costs have doubled

1921, 11th June: Abram War Memorial dedicated to those who died in the First World War

1935: Money finally raised for new church

10th July: First sod raised

7th Dec: Foundation Stone laid

1936: The clock to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of George V (1935) is bought by public subscription

1937, 30th January: The new church is consecrated

1982, 5th December: Dedication of the new brick built Mission Church of the Good Shepherd Bamfurlong (to replace the older church)