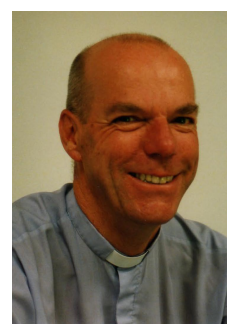
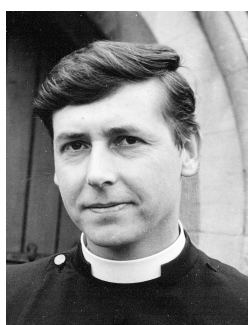
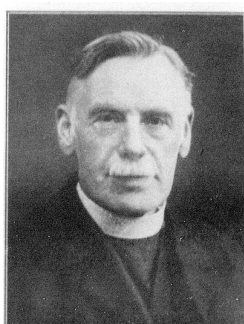
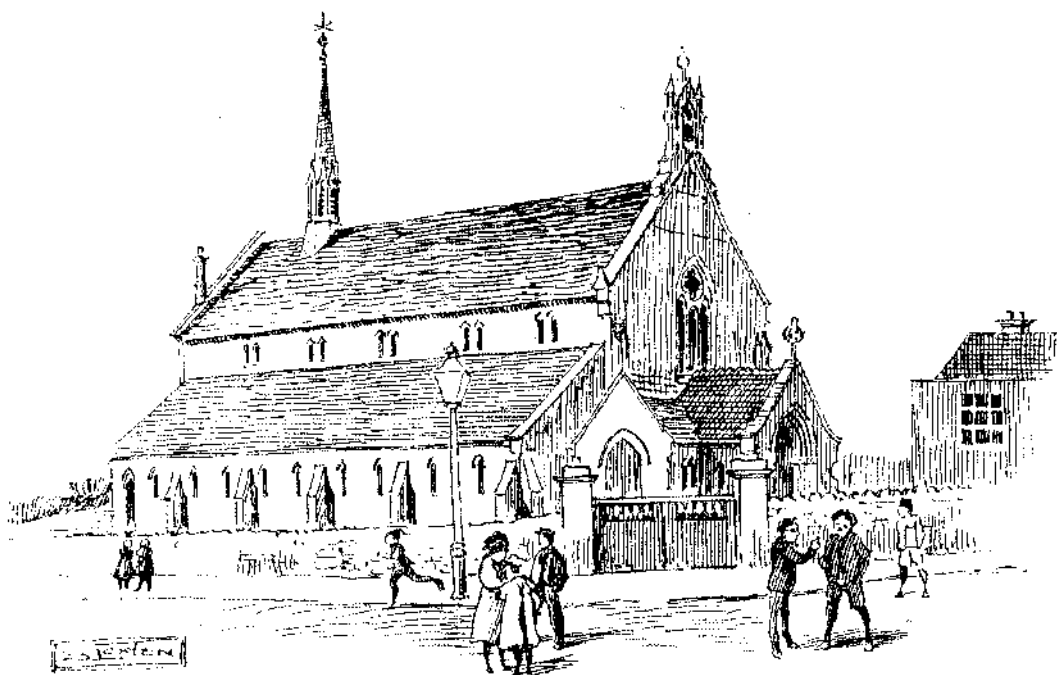




THE STORY OF ST STEPHEN'S, 1904 - 2004



Introduction

I am very grateful to Michael Hudd for researching and writing this history of our parish church. It is both informative and entertaining and will, I'm sure, add to our appreciation of all that we share.

You will find a wealth of information about the origins of the buildings as we now have them, the people who's vision made such things possible, and the life and mission of our church community over the years.

You will find reminiscences from Church members and past Vicars. There are many extracts from the Parish records. The joys and sorrows, and the challenges and the controversies that make up the life of any Church are in these pages. Through them all the dear grows and grows that St. Stephen's is a happy Church. This is a church where people have been finding faith, and have been nurtured in their faith, throughout its one hundred years. You will find many things for which to give thanks to God.

Mike takes us on a journey through time and history. It is a history of the people of this community. So when you read of these people of the past, give thanks to God for the fact that they were good stewards of St. Stephen's in their generations, and good stewards of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ here in Soundwell.

Finally, remember that the journey goes on. Our Centenary Year is a milestone, not a finishing post. Our vision of "Open Hearts and Open Doors" to the people of our parish points us outward to our parish and onward to the future together.

May God bless St. Stephen's as richly over the next one hundred years as He has over the last one hundred.

Ian Wills, Vicar of St. Stephen's Soundwell.

Acknowledgements

This history could not have been produced without the help and co-operation of many organisations and individuals. We would therefore like to express our special thanks to the following:

Bristol Central Library, and The City of Bristol Records Office,
Downend Local History Society,
The Vicar and Churchwardens of Christ Church Downend,
The Vicar and Churchwardens of St. Stephen's Soundwell,
The Revd. Canon. John Rogan of Bristol Cathedral,
Derek and Gwen Beek,
Barbara Home, Edith and Molly Summerhill,
The Revd. Jack Elwin,
The Revd. Canon Roy Harrison, and Ruby Harrison, The Revd. Canon John Whettem.

Sources

Throughout this history frequent use has been made of St. Stephen's PCC minutes, the Downend Vestry papers, and various church registers of marriages and births. All these documents are preserved by Bristol Records Office. In locating the buildings of Walter Cave and H M Bennett Pevsner's Guide, *Gloucestershire 2: The Vale and Forest of Dean* pub 2002 has proved invaluable. Copies of the *Bristol Times & Mirror* may be found at Bristol Central Library, whilst the relevant issues of the *St. Stephen's Standard* were loaned from the private collection of Derek Beek. Lastly my special thanks to Andy Foyle for his guidance on the role of 19th century architect-surveyors. Personal reminiscences appear either as a result of interviews or else from written pieces submitted after a request for Centenary memories. The notes for this book, and not loaned from third parties are now lodged in an archive at Bristol Records Office.

The St Stephen's Story, (In the Beginning).

"On Saturday afternoon there was a large attendance at Soundwell where the foundation stone of the new Church of St Stephen was laid by Colonel Smyth, on behalf of Lady Cave". So read the Church News column of the *Bristol Times & Mirror* for Monday August 24th 1903. That ceremony, a traditional precursor to all building works, marked the practical start of our Parish Church, but not, as we shall shortly see, the St Stephen's story.



During the time of William the Conqueror, (1066 and All That), Soundwell lay within the confines of Kingswood Forest. This vast tract of ancient woodland once spread from Pucklechurch in the north to Longwell Green in the south and covered the entire district of St George. Originally all this land was given over to the King's

deer, but in time people were drawn into the area. The abundance of timber, a ready source of fuel and building material, formed the first attraction. Then as areas of land became clear opportunities arose for grazing livestock, whilst beneath the earth lay large reserves of coal and building stone.

The village of Mangotsfield, (spelt *Manegodesfield* in the Domesday Book of 1086) probably grew up in just such a manner. Although the recent, (1997) discovery of a Roman coffin beneath the old school playing fields off Cossham Road push the origins of that particular settlement back to at least 300 AD. Today the church of St James and the Tudor manor house on Rodway Hill are the oldest buildings to survive though the village once played host to a second ancient manor. Much of the source material for this story arose from the reading of two volumes, Braine's *History of Kingswood Forest*, (pub. 1891) and *Our Parish*, by the Revd Arthur Emlyn Jones, (1899). This last work proves especially appropriate as a guide since it was he who briefly held the important post of Soundwell's first Curate-in-Charge. According to Revd. Jones the building we now know as St James church originated around 1222 – 1228 when one William de Putot, Sheriff of Gloucestershire, and Constable of Bristol Castle, built a chapel next to his home in the village. This was the second manor referred to above and stood on land now occupied by the graveyard to the north of St James.

By now many of you must be wondering why, since this is a history of St Stephen's we have begun our tale at Mangotsfield? And the reason is simply this, our parish, a comparatively modern creation emerged only in 1924 out of Downend, which itself was created from St James parish in 1874. Mangotsfield then was the ancient parish originally sparsely populated but of considerable size. All tithes, a form of land tax paid for the upkeep of Church property went to Tewkesbury Abbey, whilst the right to nominate clergy or *advowson*, rested with St James' Priory in Bristol. Before 1438 all the dead from Mangotsfield parish were buried at St James in Bristol, but after that date the authorities at Tewkesbury gave permission to bury at home, "*on condition the parishioners went regularly to Holy Communion and paid their church 2lb of wax forever*".

Everything was to change in 1541 when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries. In one grand royal take-over bid Henry, having first secured the richest pickings then sold or gave away the remainder to an assorted pack of favourites and hangers on. When Prior Robert Chester surrendered his house to the King he granted the Priory, its land, tithes and rights of *advowson* to Sir Henry Brayne, a Merchant Taylor from London for £667 7s 6d plus a yearly reserve rent of £3 10s 9½d.

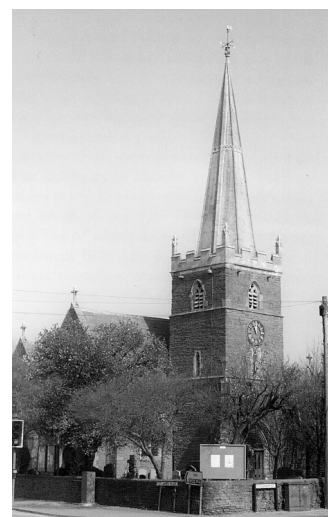
Around 1610 there was one house in Downend, *Cleeve Hill*, plus nine cottages, this had increased to seventy by 1712, after this numbers grew rapidly yet St James remained the only church hereabouts. In fact the Anglican Church was slow to establishing itself in what was then considered a rough and wild neighbourhood. In *Our Parish* Revd Jones spoke of an area noted for "*outrageous criminality*" – in thefts, murder and disturbances, and its inhabitants "*most inadequate sense of mine*

and thine". Just the sort of place you would have thought where missionary sprits would have longed to evangelise, but alas the English Church had sunk into a state of lethargy. People forever harping back to the "good old days" would do well to ponder some of his observations from that period. For example between 1769-1805 Christopher Haynes was Rector of Siston. He controlled both St Ann's and St James' yet only held services in either church once a fortnight on alternative Sundays, and even St James' first resident vicar, Revd Brodie (1822-59) ran his parish for years from Clifton!

In fact it was through the activities of like John Wesley and the other Non-Conformist preachers that vigour would eventually flow back into church life, and there are plenty examples of such activity in our area. Towards Downend agricultural labourers made up the majority of the population, whilst around Soundwell coal mines and boot making were the main employers. These were poor people, often ignored and neglected by a National Church and drawn instead into the Chapels. From the mid-1600's Quakers were recorded at Downend, Baptists established a Church in 1786 whilst the Methodists started to meet from 1804.

A New Church and Parish.

Actually, church life at St James appears to have been quite vigorous for by the 1820's they had need for a new place of worship. Downend once a hamlet had far outstripped the ancient village of Mangotsfield whilst St James was considered "*inadequate*" and in a poor state of repair. After a Vestry meeting held in 1826 the parishioners wrote to Dr John Kaye, Bishop of Bristol, seeking guidance. The Bishop agreed that indeed a new church in a central location was required. However since the parish income, (derived from the payment of tithes) would be insufficient to support an extra church and its vicar they had better demolish St James, and rebuild on another site. After much discussion it was decided to adopt the Bishop's suggestion but retain St James as well, quite possibly for one very practical reason - it would cost more to demolish than to repair! The Vicar of Mangotsfield, Revd Brodie agreed to put up £3000 of his own money towards the new venture whilst a building committee was formed headed by Stephen and Daniel Cave.



St James, Mangotsfield

The Caves were Downend's principle land-owning family and from their mansion in Cleeve Hill took a keen interest in local affairs. They established one of the first schools within the district close to the present Green Dragon Inn, and Stephen, who made a fortune with banking in Bristol, gave "*liberally*" towards the new work. When Christ Church opened in 1831 it came under Revd Brodie's care, for despite its size, over 1000 seats as opposed to St James' 300 the new church only held the status of a Chapel-of-Ease in the parish.



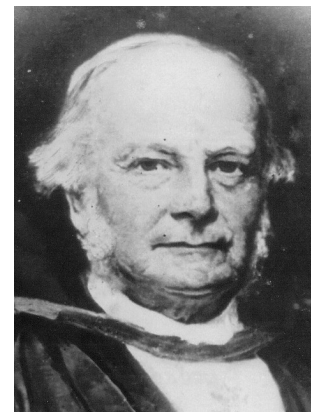
Cleeve Lodge, Downend

In 1842 Revd Brodie took on Alfred Peache as his Curate, Born in 1818 the youngest son of a wealthy Wimbledon businessman, Peache came to assist Revd Brodie following a degree at Oxford. Later after a short period in Hampshire he returned again to Downend in 1859 and when Revd Brodie died became Vicar.

The Advowson or right to nominate clergy, plus the parish Tithes originally purchased by Brayne from Henry VIII had long since become separated. Most of the tithes belonged to the Cave family and now Mr Peache senior purchased the advowson and presented it to his son, and so Revd Peache acquired the right to pick his own successor. Peache's interests ranged far beyond his parochial work. In 1857 he and his sister Kezia inherited a very large fortune.

There was no vicarage in Downend at this time so the Peache family moved into Cleeve Lodge, at present a care home, but then a comfortable freehold residence set in sixteen acres of grounds, with high walls on three sides. They had shrubberies, pleasure grounds, fruit and vegetable gardens, pasture grounds, a fur plantation, stables, coach house, summer-house and so forth. Here Revd Peache enjoyed a standard of living far and above that of the average vicar, he also saw an opportunity for others to benefit from his wealth. In 1861 he purchased the old Mansion House off Great George Street for St Brandon's School at a cost of £3000. He also bought *Mangotsfield House*, in the village, and conveyed it to the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty for use as a parsonage. Finally in 1863 he founded an Evangelical theological college, the *London College of Divinity* with the prominent Evangelical philanthropist the Earl of Shaftsbury as its first President. There was a desperate need for more clergy not just in England but throughout the British Empire, and an important feature of this College was that it opened the possibility of ordination to men who were not university graduates. In Canada Peache endowed a professorship at Huron Theological College and in 1878 he became the first Chancellor of the Western University of Canada at London, Ontario.

Alfred Peache was known as a devoted and popular minister, with the grounds of his home Cleeve Lodge, the scene of many parochial festivals. According to Revd Jones *"people came from far and wide to the "Downend Teas", tents were erected on the lawns and tons of provisions consumed"*. A special feature of all these events was Revd Peache's *"humorous speech"*, although the rather stern portrait that has come down to us does leave one wondering just how funny it actually was!



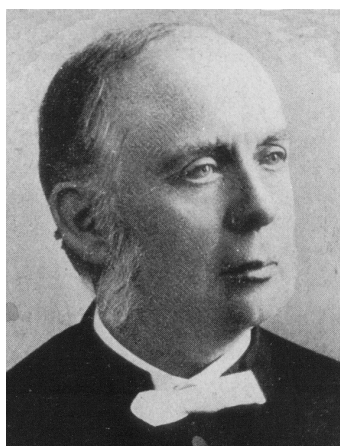
Revd. Alfred Peache

By the 1870's Downend had grown to such a degree as to warrant a separate parish church. This time Revd Peache, and Sir Stephen Cave, grandson of the original Stephen came together with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to establish an endowment fund, and so Downend became a separate parish in 1875. Sir Stephen, probably the most illustrious member of the Cave family was born in Clifton in 1820, but used *Cleeve Hill* as his country residence. Educated at Harrow and Balliol College he was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in 1846 and entered Parliament as a Conservative MP in 1859. As a member of the Disraeli government he served as a Privy Councillor, Paymaster-general, and a Vice-President to the Board of Trade. He also acted as the P.M.'s special envoy to Egypt, 1875-76 prior to the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. Alongside all this political activity Sir Stephen was also a director of the Bank of England, a fellow of the Zoological and Antiquarian Society, plus a director of the London Docks Company.

The new parish was created out of a portion of Mangotsfield with Rev. Peache, having resigned his post as vicar of St. James'. He also relinquished his right of patronage and set in its place a Patronage Trust, to select clergy at Christ Church and St. James. The Peache Trustees went on to control a total of 23 separate parishes, and he must have realised that only through such a trust could he hope to ensure the continued appointment of Evangelical clergy at each parish after his death. In the cases of Christ Church and St James the move certainly worked, as both remain Evangelical churches today.

In 1878 Mr Peache resigned and was replaced by his curate, John Walter Dann, who moved in 1879 into a purpose built vicarage, erected on land donated by Sir Stephen Cave in Downend Road. Revd Dann was another popular Vicar and well liked by his parishioners, his usual greeting to children, *"Hello my little ones"* reminding us of our own Canon Roy. Revd Dann's preferment was timely, for since his marriage in 1869 to Elizabeth Blanche Grace, one of W.G.'s sisters, he now had four daughters. A man of great personal charm and a keen sportsman it was he who founded the first village cricket team, and it was also said of Revd Dann by his grandchildren that he tried never to let a funeral stand in the way of a game of tennis! On such occasions he would turn up to officiate wearing white pumps and flannels under his cassock and surplice, and once the burial was over

would be off to the courts again. A powerful preacher, folk could still recall him years later when interviewed by the Downend History Society leaning over his pulpit and declaring, “Good people, give generously, give magnificently to this cause!”



Revd. John Walter Dann

The parish of Downend was very large, extending from the borders of Kingswood at the top of Soundwell, to Moorend, and from the top of Staple Hill where Cassell Road now runs as far as the boundaries of Frenchay and Westerleigh parishes. Throughout this entire area Christ Church remained the only place of Anglican worship, (although by now chapels abounded), with a population which now ran into thousands and could in theory fill the church many times over. By 1893 representations were made to Revd Dann at Christ Church Vestry meeting concerning the number of persons obliged to stand in the porch and wait before being shown to their seats at evening services. In his reply the Vicar observed that large numbers of “non-seat-holders, and strangers”, (a delightful term) often came to the church door at the same time and undertook to appoint three extra helpers to aid the Sexton and Sextoness get them placed at once. He also promised to spend £1 os 8d on extra hymnbooks for the strangers. Concerning this last story it may surprise the reader to know that around one third of Christ Church’s pews were rented from the vicar on an annual basis by families and individuals, (a practise which continued up until WW2). So it was clearly very necessary that persons should be directed into the correct seat!

Clearly there was a need to expand. In the early nineteenth century, education depended almost entirely upon the energy and enthusiasm of individuals and religious organisations. One such, the *National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England*, was formed in 1811, and by 1851 controlled over 17,000 schools. The Cave family had already set up a small school for the poor in a former pin factory, but in 1841 the Vicar of Mangotsfield established a National School in Downend, at first taking 100 pupils, in time this was later enlarged till there were places for 1000 children. Even this was not sufficient, by the census of 1891 the population stood at 5219 and there was need for a second school. In that same year Revd Dann first laid his plans for a school and church at Soundwell before the Bishop of Bristol where they found immediate acceptance.

We can follow the way events now unfolded through reports published in the *Times & Mirror* 1903-4. In 1891 plans to raise the necessary funds were put into action, however Downend School was full and the local Education Committee insisted this should have priority. Soundwell School opened in March 1895 and again fund raising commenced only to be knocked back when three years later further accommodation was required. Undaunted by these setbacks Revd Dann began holding church services within the school buildings and established a Sunday School. Finally the Bishop’s Commission made a grant of £1035 towards the new church and parishioners could once more concentrate upon their original task, but matters might have turned out quite differently. In his dedication speech Bishop George reviled that at one time serious consideration had been given into erecting a temporary iron building. Sometimes referred to as “Tin Tabernacles” these pre-fabricated churches saw service throughout the British Empire, where as kits of parts they could be shipped out and erected in a matter of days. St John’s on Lodge Causeway began its life in just such a way with the old iron church later serving as a hall, whilst just outside the village of Swineford a good example can still be seen, now converted to domestic use.



The iron church at Swineford

“The people of Soundwell had big ideas,” continued the Bishop, during his Dedication address in 1904, *“not content with small matters, and an iron mission hall they determined, We should like to have a church! A church of course cost very much more; but they had courage and they had faith, and so they had success.”* He then went on to praise the many fund-raisers, *“not simply for the amount but for the spirit of that gift. There was many and many a half-crown, which was as large a gift from the person giving it, and in the sight of Almighty God was as large as £100 perhaps, for God did not look upon the sum but the heart.”* A general list of funds raised however did appear alongside the Bishop’s speech:

Bishop’s Commission	£1035
Parishioners and other folk	£500
Sir Charles Cave	£200
Sales of work and additional subscriptions	£365

It can be seen that the Cave family, were still major benefactors, and their link with the new church might have been closer still had matters turned out differently. According to Alan Brooks, (*Pevsner’s Architectural Guide*, pub 2002), Walter the architect son of Charles Cave and nephew of Sir Stephen produced a design for the proposed church in 1893. Walter, whose local buildings include *Rodway House* and *Loxton Cottage* on Rodway Hill, and also *Cave Cottages* on Downend Road worked in the *Arts and Crafts* style. No drawings appear to have survived of the church project but Alan Brooks feels certain that Walter left his mark at Soundwell in the shape of the adjacent school block, (built 1894-5). We know that pressure for a new school pushed the church into second place, perhaps this event persuaded Walter Cave to drop his original project and design a school instead?

In 1880 Sir Stephen died, although his widow Lady Cave lived on until 1905. Since they had no children *Cleeve Hill* passed to their younger brother, Charles Daniel Cave, who as an absentee landlord, spending most of his time at his Clifton residence, *Stoneleigh House* or in Devon at *Sudbury Manor*, a mansion begun, but not completed by Sir Stephen. However as his donation showed Charles obviously remained committed to local matters.

Sir Stephen’s widow, Emma Jane continued to reside at *Cleeve Hill*. The daughter of Revd Smyth a Lincolnshire clergyman she too took a keen interest in parish life. Perhaps because of her upbringing, maybe or because she was childless Emma Jane appears to have devoted her entire time to good works, although there was a particularly practical twist to Lady Cave’s charity. Every winter she distributed warm blankets to the parish poor and every spring receive them back again at *Cleeve Hill*. After three years of borrowing families were allowed to keep their sheets, but only if they came back clean three years running!

The “Mystery” Benefactor.

Although the *Times & Mirror* provide quite detailed accounts of both the Stone Laying and Dedication ceremonies nothing appears concerning the acquisition of a building site beyond the brief observation that it was, *“presented to the vicar some time ago”*. This lack of hard facts has lead to a number of stories appearing over the years. The School Centenary History published in 1995 evoked “local tradition” and ascribed original ownership to a pair of sisters, Jane and Phoebe Harris, who apparently, *“kept a cooked-meat shop opposite the present Leisure Centre and lived in a big house on Soundwell Road”*. As school and church were parts of the same project this account implied the Harris sisters supplied both pieces of land, although supporting facts were conspicuous by their absence.

Whilst researching this history the present writer encountered a quite different story. This account cast the Whittuck family as benefactors and does at least have the benefit of supporting facts. As Lords of the Manor the Whittucks held considerable coal interests within the Kingswood area, and worked three pits at Soundwell. Emlyn-Jones writing in *Our Parish* identified these as, *Upper, Middle and Lower Pit*, situated respectively, at the Gladstone Street / Soundwell Road

junction – on the north side. In Middle Pit Lane, now known as Middle Road and on the Mangotsfield side of Station Road.

Wages here were low, in 1841 a Parliamentary Report found that the average South Gloucestershire miner earned between 18-20 shillings a week. However one collier, Daniel Poole, aged 50 with a family of 9 children and employed by Whittuck received only 13 shillings for his labour!

In 1845 a serious accident occurred at Upper Pit when a rope used to haul men to the surface broke causing them to fall some 76 feet. Thomas Bird, William Basset, Ben Wiltshire, and John Porter were killed outright, whilst other men were badly injured. At the inquest a badly worn rope was found to be the cause, with a local rope-maker, George Hall called to give evidence stating he had seen, “*better rope brought to his yard as junk*”. (See “*Gentlemen and Players*” by Peris Jones for the complete account, pub DLHS).

Although Whittuck seems to have escaped official censure the idea that this subsequently played upon his mind, so that he donated land as a salve to his conscience appears plausible - at least at first sight. But why surround your gift with such secrecy if the aim was to expunge a bad reputation? Also the accident of 1845 occurred almost fifty years before Revd Dann first set out his plans which seems rather a long delay for an act of contrition.

We can in fact now shed fresh light upon the whole matter, and settle things once and for all with the aid of certain newly catalogued documents from the Diocesan Archives at Bristol Record's Office. In 1891 one Thomas Whitwall Jacques a solicitor, from the firm of *Jacques, Please, & Jacques*, then of The Royal Insurance Building, 41 Corn Street Bristol, approached Revd Dann and offered him a site for his new church. Obviously his gift must have been accepted because in March of 1892 Thomas, “*delivered possession, and promised to execute a voluntary conveyance for the said parcel of land*”. We may surmise that this law firm must have been quite prosperous. *Kelly's Directory* records three other solicitors besides Thomas working at that address, Frederick and John Jacques, plus a Mr B Please. Also John (Thomas's brother?) gave his address as *Leworthy Lodge Sneyd Park*, a distinctly well-heeled locality. As we already know plans for a church were then put on hold by more pressing needs. In 1894 we find Thomas Jacques name cropping up again this time in a trust deed for St Stephen's School dated June 7th. Here it states that for £150 he sold an adjoining piece of land, some half acre in area to the, “*Minister and Churchwardens of Downend*”, as a site for the new school. Then on November 21st in the same year Thomas, who gave his residence as, *Waterdale Weston-super-Mare* filed a petition for bankruptcy at the County Court, and was adjudicated a Bankrupt on December 14th. It must incidentally have been quite a spectacular financial “smash” because in less than a year John Jacques too had filed a petition for bankruptcy.

And now things really become interesting. When the court came to look into Thomas's financial affairs it was discovered that he had mortgaged the land, along with other property on the 7th of February 1891 for £1000, one month before his initial approach to Revd Dann. The mortgagee was named as Catherine Robinson, described simply as a spinster from Southport, - a seaside town to the north of Liverpool. Precisely who she was is not explained, but £1000 in 1891 would have been a considerable sum so we certainly have a person of substantial wealth. Possibly Catherine was heiress but here I leave further speculation to those individuals requiring a romantic plot for their next novel!

However back to the realm of facts, obviously a loan of this size covered far more than just the school and church site, and must have included other properties. But in effect Thomas Jacques had given away, or sold land already pledged to another party. Alas poor Revd Dann, he must have felt like the man given a lawnmower by his neighbour who then discovers the machine was already borrowed from somebody else! Quite why Jacques acted this way can only be guessed at, the most charitable explanation being that he required cash in a hurry which he fully intended to repay as soon as possible. A more jaundiced view however portrays the entire act as a case of sharp practise,

aimed simply at postponing the evil day. After this length of time we can only speculate, and even were it possible to whiz back one hundred years in a time machine, human nature being what it is, Thomas Jacques would still probably claim that his intentions were honourable whatever the case might have been!

As mortgagee Catherine Robinson would have prior rights to the land, and could in principle have taken possession of the property, so what restrained her actions? Well in the first place school buildings already occupied part of the land, with the other piece set aside for a church. Soundwell was at the poor end of Downend parish so that there would have been little demand for houses. Indeed as anyone can observe nobody bothered to erect a home close to school or church until well into the 20th Century. Catherine might have turned a profit by seeking to extract coal or stone from the site, yet here again her options were limited. All mineral rights below one hundred and fifty feet were already taken; as confirmed in a legal declaration dated November 1908. According to this in 1906 Revd Dann was desirous of transferring ownership of the land upon which St Stephen's stood from himself and his churchwardens, to the trustees of the Bishop of Bristol's Church Extension Commission. At this time his solicitor, Henry Wilmot Wickham Atchley made a full and detailed examination of all deeds connected with the site in order to ascertain exactly who held legal claim to what. As part of this investigation he mentioned a Conveyance made on February 6th 1891 between Edward Archibald Jones and Ponting Monks concerning mineral rights below one hundred and fifty feet for the church site, and was totally satisfied with the legality of their title. Edward Jones and Ponting Monks were both local men, Jones was listed in Kelly's 1897 directory as a Soundwell butcher, whilst Monks appears with a Downend address, but no indication as to his trade. Obviously coal-mines required large areas of land so Jones and Monks title must have taken in a far larger area otherwise there could have been no prospect for economic operations, Catherine's small patch was too small to exploit - even had it contained viable reserves.

In the end Catherine Robinson may have declined to press her claim simply in order to avoid unpleasant publicity plus the accusation of filching from the Church, although its equally possible that somebody paid her off. All we can go by are the recorded facts which consist of an Indenture made between Rev Dann, Charles Julius Ryland, a Public Accountant and trustee of Jacques estate some five years after his bankruptcy. According to Atchley's declaration, once the circumstances of Jacques's mortgage came to light "*the strictest investigation followed*" with each of the parties represented by a solicitor. The eventual outcome was the Indenture of January 26th 1899 in which Charles Ryland finally agreed to release, and Catherine Robinson convey whatever parts of the church site covered by that mortgage to Revd Dann.

All this certainly gives a new twist to the official version of events as printed in the papers. Notwithstanding any story that a lack of funds delayed church construction, how could anyone start to build before they were certain of their legal right to the site? It also provides a very credible explanation as to why the site donor was never named. Thomas Jacques may have given the land, unfortunately he also created rather an embarrassing situation!

Lady Cave.

The Cave family would have been prime candidates if a "private settlement" had been reached with Catherine Robinson, indeed the newspapers referred to Lady Cave as the "*church's chief donor.*" It had been her intention to lay the foundation stone but illness intervened, and in the event a Colonel Smyth, (a relation, probably her brother), deputised in her place. Though debarred by illness however she did send a message of goodwill, expressing the desire that the new church would have, "*a most beneficial effect upon the population around,*" and hoped she would be able to attend it's consecration. Now in her 80's and increasingly confined to a bed Lady Cave's life was now marred by bouts of poor health, but even as life drew to it's close her compassion remained undimmed. This tribute by Revd Dann was read at her funeral in October 1905.

“She was a Christian lady, full of sympathy and love. And what she was during these last few years she has been down through the last quarter century only with this difference. That as the months rolled away her sympathy and love increased more and more, growing stronger and stronger till in the last years of her life it flooded her whole being. Over and over again I sat by her bedside while she was deeply disturbed through weakness and pain, when one would have thought her mind would have been fixed on her own suffering. But even then we talked over together of what must be done to relieve the wants of others, and very frequently she used to say, Can we do nothing more?”

It's obvious Lady Cave devoted herself tirelessly to the local community, which may explain why it was decided to dedicate the new church to St Stephen. For although both the Bishop and Canon Everingham simply referred to *Saint* Stephen - the first Christian Martyr, it was also the name of Lady Cave's late husband, what better way could the parishioners have chosen to honour their benefactress?

It had been planned for the Bishop of Bristol, Dr George Forrest-Browne to preside at the stone laying but bereavement, the death of his wife Mary, meant the Diocesan Missioner; Canon Everingham attended in his place. At one point during his sermon the Canon observed, *“Would it be possible to over-rate the importance or difficulty of building a church in these days, when the spirit of indifference and pleasure-seeking prevails?”* A strangely modern comment and yet another warning to folk who hanker for those “good old days.” Fifty years later at St Stephen's Golden Jubilee, Revd Frank Evans, then Vicar of Soundwell, would make exactly the same point,

“There were many then who seemed to feel no need of a Church, (but) the Church in any parish is not the material building, but people united in faith and fellowship. The primary task then as now was to bring others to a knowledge of the faith and into the fellowship of the Church. Whatever the age, there are problems to be faced, and in many ways they are alike, but there is also the promise of God's wise and loving spirit, ever at hand to guide and strengthen us in His service.”

When the foundation stone was laid a large crowd was on hand to witness the ceremony, hardly surprising in the circumstances. Edward Cole, St Stephen's acting Choirmaster was also Head of Soundwell School whilst his wife served as “governess”, or Head of the infant's section, so a high attendance of children would have been guaranteed. Former pupils would remember Mr Cole in later years with much affection. It would be pleasant to record similar warm tributes for his wife, unfortunately the Centenary booklet revealed a different picture.

“The children, however, were always afraid of Mrs Cole; a big, tall person, very stern, and very strict, who it is said once even caned an infant! On one occasion, a group of boys were playing with a tennis ball, when Mrs Cole came upon them unexpectedly. As one boy went to pick up the ball, she said, “young, man give me that ball,” so he threw it to her. “I said, give it to me,” she said; he did, but she hit him across the face! At another time she threw a book at a boy who promptly went down in a fit!”

It seems a shame that nobody bothered to record the event, but then Soundwell was a poor working class neighbourhood with things like cameras far beyond the average householders' means. However it's not impossible somebody did manage a picture which perhaps still exists, brown with age and hidden away unrecognised in an attic. So as it is we can only guess at the size and composition of the crowd. There would certainly have been large numbers of children, which as always would have ensured a large turnout of mothers, although the need to obtain a living wage may well have reduced the number of men.

Whoever did manage to be present that Saturday afternoon would have viewed an impressive company of clerics, for besides Canon Everingham eight other clergy were on hand to assist proceedings:

Canon Prideaux, Vicar of St Saviours and Rural Dean for Bristol,
Canon Alford, Vicar of St Mary Magdalene, Stoke Bishop, Bishop's Surrogate, and Secretary for the Bristol Church Extension Fund,
Revd Dann, and, Rev. S. Rowley his Curate,

Revd Welchman, Vicar of Fishponds, and his Curate Rev. R. A. Finley,
Revd E. W. Davies, Vicar of St Gabriel's,
and
Revd Tyrrell.

According to the press it was a Mr. Henry M. Bennett who as architect provided plans, in the "Early English style" for St Stephen's, he also donated a stained glass window of St Andrew (1905), which can be seen today in the south aisle. Bennett, who lived locally in Overhill Road, worked as a Surveyor for Mangotsfield Parish Council on a salary of £70, he also had a private office listed in *Kelly's Directory* as, *Liverpool Chambers, Corn Street Bristol*. It was quite usual at this time for architects to take Surveyorships attached to large companies, institutions who owned property, or to churches. These were not full-time posts, and involved responsibility for valuing land and property, assessing the level of rents, controlling routine maintenance and repairs, and occasionally designing new buildings. This last was by no means a done deal, i.e. the architect-surveyor might well do all the routine stuff, and then be passed over in favour of some personal contact of the patron when it came to the juicy work of designing the new building. Evidently, this may have been the case with Cave and Bennett the first time round. However the 1899 extension block at St Stephen's school, (now Soundwell College), is by Bennett, and the church of course followed four years later. Henry Bennett may not have been Lady Cave's nephew but even without this, and his



St Anne's Brislington. The spire was recently removed

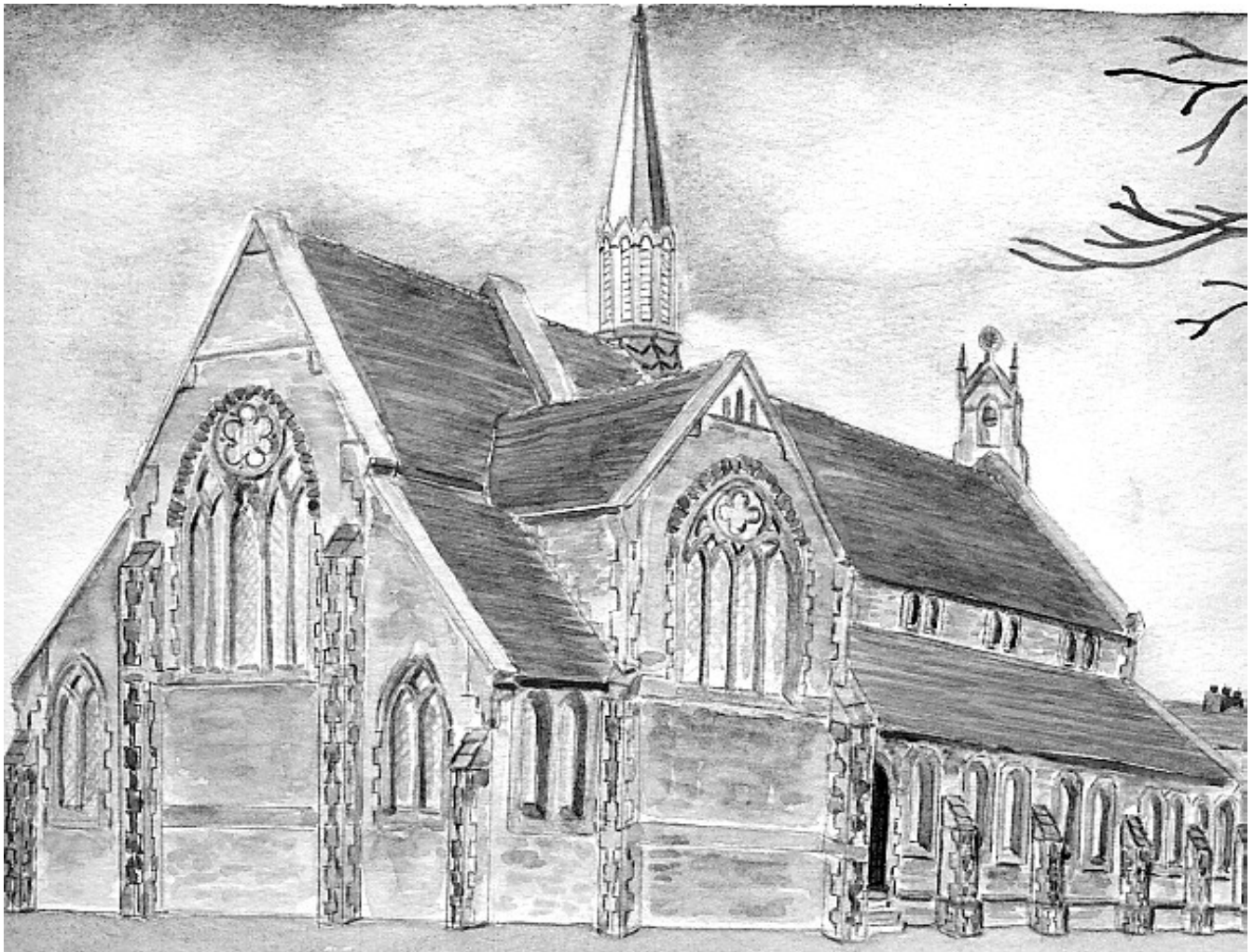
links to the Parish Council was still deeply involved in the life of Downend Church where Vestry minutes mention him as both a Sidesman and Churchwarden. In 1897 he designed their present tall oak pulpit, which was erected by subscription to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and constructed by *Edwards Brothers*, carpenters and builders of Victoria Street. And in 1913 headed a committee to consider the enlargement of the chancel, which incorporated a memorial Rose Window to the Grace family. Alan Brooks writing in the latest *Buildings of England* guide, (Pevsner 2002), in

fact credits him as the architect for this work, and also links him with *Almondsbury School*, Sunday Hill (1899-1900), and the *Parochial Offices*, now *Britton House*, Stanley Road Warmley (1900).

Nor were St Stephen's, and his work at Christ Church the only examples of Bennett's ecclesiastical output for it is known that he designed two others, The Methodist Free Church, Eastville Park, (1901), and St Anne's, Brislington, (foundation stone laid 1904). It is useful to compare these other works alongside St Stephen's. The Methodist chapel is really little more than a box with applied gothic decoration and a pitched-roof, although this could simply reflect the client's brief. St Anne's however is far more interesting, Bennett never managed to complete St Stephen's but it is obvious from an inspection of both buildings that had he been able to finish his work at Soundwell this is how St Stephen's would appear today. The two churches are not identical, certainly there are small differences in detail, but their family likeness is very strong, perhaps not identical twins, but certainly sisters!

St Stephen's church 1904.

As it stands today St Stephen's represents only one third of the original project. None of Bennett's plans survive, but despite this we can still complete his work in our minds with the aid of descriptions printed at the time and by comparisons with his finished church, St Anne's. Had St Stephen's been completed as initially intended some 800 people could have found seats within its walls. Away to the east, in the area now occupied by the hall a North and South Transept would have jutted out like the arms of a cross. Whilst the Chancel and Vestries, assuming they followed St Anne's layout, would have filled the remaining ground and extended almost to the garden wall of No 34 Church Road.



St Stephen's as it might have been, an artist's reconstruction based upon Bennett's completed church, St Anne's

An absence of funds, plus a cautious policy of building only after the money came in would appear the obvious explanation for these missing features. There was however one leap of faith so to speak. When in 1903 the *Times & Mirror* first gave details of the projected building only sufficient money was in hand to complete the North Aisle and Nave. Then early in 1904 it occurred to Revd Dann to push ahead and complete the South Aisle also – before any extra money had been raised. He wrote to the Bishop seeking advice. Revd Dann's letter has been lost, but the Bishop's reply, now lodged at Bristol Record's Office survives, pasted into an old volume of Downend parish Vestry minutes. The note hand-written on House of Lord's embossed stationery with a mourning border, (the Bishop's wife remember had recently died), reads as follows;

11 March 04

My dear Vicar,

Your letter is characteristically energetic.

If I were you, and had your faith and vigour, I should at once attack the south aisle, while the Builder's plant is all on the spot, and inform the Bishop that the opening is postponed to the autumn, unless the work can be finished before July 26.

Yours very truly

G.F. Bristol



George Forrest-Browne, Bishop of Bristol

The additional aisle cost between £700 - £800, and progress must have been rapid for by 9th July when Bishop George officiated at the Dedication Service the *Times & Mirror* was describing St. Stephen's as consisting of, "*a Nave and two Aisles.*" This time even more clergy were in attendance;

The Bishop of Bristol, Dr. George Forrest-Browne,
Revd Compton Gill the Bishop's chaplain,
Revd Dann, and two Curates, Revd De Lacey O'Leary and Revd Arthur Emlyn-Jones,
Canon Alford,
Canon John Way, Vicar of Henbury, and Rural Dean of Stapleton,
Revd H. W. Shaw, Vicar of Stapleton,
The Venerable Archdeacon Robeson,
Revd H. E. Dandy, Vicar of Kingswood,
Revd W. Brooke, Rector of Frenchey,
Revd W. Welchman, Vicar of St Mary's Fishponds,
Revd J. White, also of Fishponds,
Revd H. Cockey, Vicar of St. Anne's Oldland,
Revd T. H. Cogswell, Vicar of Wapley,
and
Revd T. Mackay, Vicar of Filton,

Unlike their earlier report of the stone laying the *Times & Mirror* now included a full list of lay persons present along with the clergy. First came the Building Committee headed by Dr Henry Skelton, a well-known medical man, he too married one of W G Grace's sisters, taking Annie as his bride at St James' church in 1872. The Skeltons lived at *Overnhill House*, a large property now replaced by the Mormon church on Downend Road. Both Henry and his wife were prominent members of Downend Church, where Annie served as honorary organist. After her death in 1900 an oak reredos was erected in the church, given by her husband and other members of the congregation in her memory of her fifty years service. Dr Skelton was reckoned by the locals to be "*a dead spit of King Teddy*" (Edward VII), and owned one of the first cars in the district, a fifteen horsepower *Calthorpe*, registration number AE 17. His coachman was obliged to turn chauffeur, but refused to drive the vehicle any faster than a carriage, which rather served to defeat the original object of motor transport!

Accompanying the Doctor were Messrs Outram, Havard, J. Bacon, T. Greenway and W. Horner. Mr H. M. Bennett the architect was also present, joined by the Building Contractor Lewis Brown another local man, from Pleasant Road, Staple Hill.

Because Revd Dann had previously established church meetings within the adjacent school a body of sidesmen; Messrs Lawrence, Hill, Bath, Turvey, Bacon, Betty, Cole, Howe, S. and B. Webley, and two churchwardens; E. E. Davis, and S. Garland had already been selected. And now this entire company headed by the Building Committee, wardens, choir, and clergy followed by the Lord

Bishop and his staff bearer processed out of Soundwell School to the singing of the hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers”, and into the new church. The Cave family gave St Stephen’s two silver plate chalices and a paten, although it is not recorded if they sent anyone to personally present them. These pieces, which are still in regular use, bear the inscription, “The gift of Walter Cave and the Rt. Hon Stephen Cave.” Walter was the architect son of Sir Charles Daniel Cave, his brother, Sir Stephen however, had been dead for 24 years so was either partly a posthumous bequest, or else another example of Lady Cave’s unaffected generosity.

Once again no picture exists to show us exactly how St. Stephen’s appeared on that Saturday afternoon in 1904. But if we could whiz back there in a time machine its very likely the following scene would that have met our eyes. In all probability not all the builder’s kit and rubble had been cleared away, (there was after all still high hopes of eventually completing the project) although the worst most probably would have been screened off. Scaffolding too composed of wooden poles and planks might still surround some of the building since it’s not entirely clear if features such as the bell turret were actually complete, or still in construction at the time of the Dedication. Beyond the east end where our hall now stands, and where the Transepts and Chancel were soon expected to rise would simply be open land, although there may have been stakes and markers left by the workmen indicating the extent of the new work. The chancel arch and those of the two adjoining aisles were here blocked off with temporary brick wall, which must have appeared rather out of place alongside the blue pennant and cream bath stone.



Early photograph of St Stephen’s interior, note the chairs and wall painting. (Courtesy of Derek Beek)

Moving inside St Stephen’s this same stone, which covered both the walls and pillars would have gleamed crisp and sharp, as yet unsullied by the effects rising damp or defacing coats of white paint. There were no pews in the new church, instead some 350 individual wooden chairs stood in their place, each supplied with it’s own kneeler. At first, despite the newspaper’s reference to choir-stalls these also consisted simply of chairs, as recalled by Miss Johnson a former organist writing in the *St. Stephen’s Standard* (1964), “In July 1904 there were no choir-stalls, just rows of chairs, and an American organ. The oak stalls arrived in January 1905 along with a one manual English pipe organ.

George Risley of Colston Hall fame”, (he also served as Master of the Choristers and organist at Bristol Cathedral), “first played this in church; he was a golfing friend of our choirmaster Mr.E.O Cole.”

The American organ, or harmonium mentioned by Miss Johnson almost certainly came from J. W. Punter whose shops in Old Market, and Broad Street Staple Hill, supplied, “*Pianofortes and American organs priced at 16gns – cash or easy terms, may be purchased at 2/- per week, warranted for 10 years.*” The Punter family, (there were nine children), lived at Hill House, a large stone property, which can still be seen to the east side of Page Park. John their father served as organist and choirmaster at Hebron Chapel Staple Hill for 65 years. Whilst his eldest son Harvey, who also played the organ at Christ Church, became a fellow of the Royal College of Organists. However despite his chapel ties John certainly felt an affinity for St. Stephen’s, donating in 1907 the stained glass window of St. Peter in the south aisle.

In 1904 most new houses around Soundwell would have been lit by gas, although some of the more isolated cottages probably still relied upon oil lamps. Gas was installed in both the new school and church but according to the centenary history its quality left much to be desired, “*The gas was extremely poor and the caretaker had to clean by candlelight. The rooms were full of smoke and sulphur. The smoke oozed through various cracks causing coughing and the teachers complained*”. At St Stephen’s Henry Bennett was certainly ready for such problems incorporating a large air vent within the short spire or fleche; although whether this solved the problem is not recorded!

In an early photograph now held in the church archives we can see how St. Stephen’s appeared when equipped with gas lighting. Running down the nave pairs of lamps in spherical glass shades appear fixed at the head of each pillar, whilst two magnificent, seven branched gaselires flank the altar table, the pulpit however, had a brace of brass candelabra. The same picture also provides an excellent view of the original Reredos and Communion Table presented to St Stephen’s by the vicar and churchwardens of Mangotsfield in 1904; it also reveals a wall painting, subsequently removed. Although transepts and a long Chancel were originally part of Bennett’s plans these features were never carried through and their connecting arches blocked off. Behind the altar the bare wall was plastered over and decorated with a fanciful Gothic arch resting upon two ornate columns in the manner of a *tromp l’oeil* painting, so that despite being flat it appeared to stand out in 3D. In all probability this work took place very early in St Stephen’s history, but exactly when, or the name of the artist remains a mystery, however it certainly added a florid touch to what was after all a rather austere interior. The last bays of the north and south aisle were partitioned off and pressed into use as Vestries just as they are today. But unlike the present structures clad in white hardboard these were topped with a fancy Gothic architrave and appear to be composed from solid wooden panels.

There are at present seven stained glass windows in St Stephen’s, five in the south aisle depicting, St Peter, St Andrew, St James, St John and St Matthew. All these figures were installed after the church was finished, but those in the Baptistry, which show, *The baptism of our Lord*, and *Christ blessing the little children*, were present at the very beginning, and were in fact singled out by the newspaper for their, “*artistic treatment*”. Whilst still in the Baptistry the inscription carved on the base of the Font should be noted, “*1904, presented by Walter Payne.*” This was the Manager of the Mangotsfield Pennant Stone Company, and in all probability suppliers of stone for the new church.

The south aisle windows are all the work of Joseph Bell & Sons, Artists on Glass, of 12 College Green. Whilst the Baptistry glass was supplied by Gay & Company, Ecclesiastical and Domestic Stained Glass Works, of 1&2, Stanley Street, Easton Road, Bristol, quite a large concern judging from the size of their advert in Kelly’s Directory.

The new church was pressed into use at once with a service of Matins at which the Archdeacon of Bristol was preacher. Of more note to the local population however, was a mass baptism presided over by Revd Dann also held that July 10th where 18 couples, with no fewer than 21 infants came together! The list of occupations recorded in the register of baptisms gives us interesting insight

into the Soundwell of 1904; 11 Bootmakers, 2 Labourers, 1 Butcher, 1 Miner, 1 Brickmaker, 1 Mason, and 1 Plasterer. The very first child to be baptised had as a matter of fact been Edith Sarah Betty, daughter of Sarah and Edward Henry Betty, a Sidesman at the Dedication.

Thanks to a legacy of £5000 from the estate of Sir Stephen Cave, Revd Dann had been able to employ two curates since the 1880's. Now he made use of that facility and appointed one of these the Revd Arthur Emlyn Jones as Curate-in-charge at St Stephen's. Born on 12th February 1854, in Collier's Row, Eddw Vale, Glamorgan, Revd Jones was the son of Revd Dr John Emlyn Jones, a noted Baptist minister, man of letters, and winner of two Bardic chairs. Little is known of his early life, but 1873 he was married at Merthyr Tydfil Registry Office, to Grace Purdy, a Bristol girl and great-granddaughter of Victory Purdy, an itinerant preacher with Soundwell connections. At the time of this marriage Arthur gave his profession as "house painter," but in 1880 took Holy Orders and from 1883 to 1889 served as Revd Dann's curate. It was during that time he wrote *Our Parish*, a history of Downend and Mangotsfield; published in 1899 it contained the following rather flamboyant dedication:

"To Lady Cave, Cleeve Hill, Downend, in Grateful recognition of many personal kindnesses and as a memorial of continuous and beneficent solicitude for the Physical, Moral, and Spiritual welfare of this "Our Parish." This brief record is respectfully dedicated by the author."

Our Parish was not the first such history, Braine's *History of Kingswood Forest* appeared in 1891, but this covered a far wider area, whilst Emlyn Jones concentrated his efforts to a single parish. In one chapter, *The Etymology of our parish* he looked in great depth at the supposed origins of various local place-names, including Soundwell. After repeating a local tradition concerning old-time miners shouting into the shaft as a means of testing its coal-bearing possibilities, and declaring, "this sounds well!" Arthur produced his own more elaborate explanation suggesting it derived from the phrase, "sound dwell," in other words a healthy place to live. Rather surprisingly the connection with water never appeared to have occurred to the author despite the proximity of other local place-names - Teawell, Hopwell, and, Speedwell.

After publishing his book Revd Jones left Downend parish for St Werburgh's where he also became organising secretary to the *Church of England Temperance Society*. Then in 1896 he returned to Downend, and in 1904 became Curate-in-charge to the new mission church of St Stephen's. Early photographs held by *Downend Local History Society* show Revd Jones as a man of muscular build and large bushy beard, which bore close resemblance to that of W G Grace. All the more appropriate then that he should have served as Vice-President to Downend Cricket Club alongside Revd Dann its President.



Revd A E Jones

Revd Jones was obviously a popular minister, and great things must have been expected of him in this new role, although his time at Soundwell would be tragically short. On November 13th 1906 he performed his 26th baptism at St Stephen's, a baby named George, the son of Mary Ann and James Summerhill, a Soundwell bootmaker, it would one of his last acts. On Friday November 23rd at 3am Revd Jones collapsed and died at his home *Cartref* in Overhill Road apparently from a stroke he was only 52. His funeral at Downend church was reported in the local press as: "*Well attended by a large company of clergy, friends, and family...the service lead by Revd Dann...and the coffin conveyed on a hand bier, a gift of the late Lady Cave*". A tall Celtic

cross set close to the main gates of Christ Church marks his grave. Whilst at St Stephen's a pair of memorial stained glass windows featuring St James, and St John were unveiled in the south aisle by the Archdeacon of Bristol in 1907.

There are few records covering St Stephens from these early days. But it's clear that once sufficient funds were secured to cover the extra cost of the south aisle building work at Soundwell

ceased. Now with a Mission church established Revd Dann was free to concentrate upon what was to be his last building project, enlarging the chancel at Christ Church. This work completed in 1913, and consecrated by the Bishop on November 29th, would mark his 47th year of service in the parish.

A year before St Stephen's received one of its earliest donations, (although the actual donor remained anonymous), in the form of a brass ewer. Engraved with the wording, "A Lenten Offering", this was clearly intended for use in baptisms, and carries the additional text, "Suffer little children to come unto me," matching one of the Baptistry windows.

With the arrival of World War 1 in 1914, *Cleeve Hill*, unused by the Cave family since the death of Lady Cave, was at once pressed into use as a Red Cross Volunteer Hospital. Photographs from this time held by the Downend History Society show the house interior fitted with rows of hospital beds, whilst out on the lawns, dressed in the special light-blue uniform reserved for injured servicemen, stand rows of soldiers.



St Stephen's does not contain any memorial to the war dead of 1914-18; this went instead to the parish church. It does, however, hold a pair of rather unusual relics from that conflict in the form of two flower vases constructed from brass shell cases. These examples of *Trench Art* were recently identified by the Imperial War Museum as the discarded shell cases from a British 18pdr field gun. Highly mobile weapons they were employed throughout the war, although these particular examples date from 1917. The surfaces are decorated with a pattern of large flowers above a stylised crown in the Art Nouveau style, and a fluted base; the latter formed by beating the shell case over a lead former, which would subsequently be removed by melting it.



*Swords into Ploughshares
Two views of the church
vases, which started life as
shell cases for an 18 pdr
WW1, field gun*

The vases at St Stephen's, being quite sophisticated examples, would have required workshop facilities and metalworking skills. In fact very little of this sort of work was actually carried in the Trenches themselves but, rather, behind the lines. These could have been produced by British servicemen (probably Army Service Corps or Engineers, as they would have had the tools and facilities) or may equally well have been purchased – local civilians were quick to cater to the market for such souvenirs. As with the Baptistry ewer the vases were an anonymous gift, but it is worth recalling the close proximity of the soldiers' hospital at *Cleeve Hill* and the possibility of a connection, perhaps a thanksgiving offering for the recovery of a loved one? Whatever the case these vases, frequently displayed upon the High Altar, form a perfect embodiment of the phrase "swords into ploughshares".

In 1916 the church disposed of its organ of 1905 and purchased a second from St Katherine's church Bishopton for £100. Miss Johnson, a former organist, recalled this event in the *St Stephen's Standard* of November 1964, when she and her brother, the then Curate-in-charge Revd Robert Johnson, had worked to raise funds. The actual dedication took place on Saturday March 11th with Harvey Punter on hand as organist. The service that day was lead by James Tetley, the Archdeacon of Bristol, whilst a special collection raised £3 towards the organ fund.

St Katherine's stood in Salisbury Road, Bishopton, erected in 1898 as a temporary church Consecration finally came in 1931. After that however, its congregation fell away and by 1954 the parish was united with St Nathanael's, the old church becoming a Parish Hall, a situation which only lasted till 1959 after which the BBC became its new tenants. Today the building survives as a group of flats renamed *St Catherine's Court*.

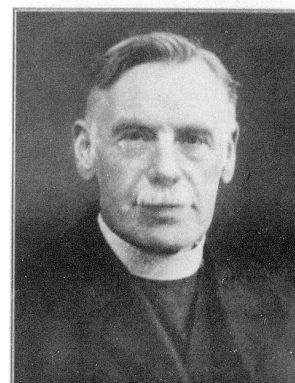
Quite why St Stephen's chose to replace their original instrument is not explained, but it can hardly have been worn out because when Revd Johnson left Soundwell in 1920 to become Vicar of Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire he took along the old organ for his new parish. This, as a matter of interest, remained in use until 1938, after which it too was replaced, taken in part-exchange for the princely sum of £2!

Revd Dann died in 1915 after a ministry of 49 years, although his widow Blanche lived on until 1926. In 1922 the Downend Cricket Club invited her to preside at the opening of their new pavilion, a memorial to her brother W. G. Grace, at the cricket ground opposite Christ Church. Fortunately upon this occasion the photographers were present, and their efforts preserved in *Mangotsfield Picture Past II* show Blanche, a tiny lady dressed in her widow's weeds, surrounded by a sea of summer hats, and straw boaters. A strangely Victorian figure she appears almost out of place, like some relic of a former age.

In fact the Old World of Revd Dann, and Lady Cave was melting rapidly away, slipping like sand through an open hand. In 1920 Sir Charles Daniel Cave authorised the auction of the Cleeve Hill Estate, and disposed of some 1,400 acres in and around Downend. The mansion at Cleeve Hill was demolished, and its park and grounds parcelled up into building plots. Today little remains excepting the street names, *Cleeve Lawns*, and *Cleeve Park Road*, some outbuildings, notably *Cave Cottages*, designed by Sir Charles' son Walter, for the estate workers, and a stone greyhound, part of the Cave family crest. Removed from the demolished mansion it can now be seen set into the wall of the Avon Local Medical Building, on High Street, Staple Hill, next to the Crown Public House.

Reverend Marcus Brown, and the Birth of Soundwell Parish.

Upon the death of Revd Dann his place as Vicar of Downend was taken by one of his Curates, David Marcus Brown, was another vicar whose actions would produce a great impact upon life at St Stephen. For just as John Walter Dann may take the credit for establishing a church building in Soundwell, it is to Marcus Brown we should look as the man who finally achieved our status as a parish. The notion of Soundwell as an independent parish had also occurred to Walter Dann in the final years of his ministry, but the project remained nothing more than a dream. Now the new Vicar of Downend took up the cause once more.



Revd. D. Marcus Brown

The task of having to organise a substantial parish with churches at opposite ends must have been immense, particularly when you also consider the matter of the schools. Up until 1947, when the Local Education Authority took control, both Soundwell and Downend schools were entirely maintained by the Church, which not only included "bricks and mortar" but also regularly checking the registers, teaching and setting of scripture exams and paying the staff once a month!

Revd Brown first raised the matter of separate parishes with the Bishop immediately before taking up his post as Vicar, only to have the idea turned down. He tried again in 1922, and this time it was accepted, resulting in much correspondence and paperwork, most of which he appears to have tackled single-handedly. We can follow events as they unfolded because Revd Brown collected all the relevant documents and letters together in chronological order, and bound them in a folder entitles *The Separation of Soundwell Parish*, and now lodged at Bristol Records Office. The first move was to contact the Peache Trustees, whom we can place and name since a full list appears amongst the papers:

Revd Herbert Lamper, Secretary, The Vicarage, Walthamstow.

Henry Thomas Alexander Dashwood Esq. Solicitor, 1. The Sanctuary Westminster.

Revd Prebendary Charles James Proctor 10. Scroope Terrace, Cambridge.

John Henry Buxton Esq. Ware, Hertfordshire.

The Right Revd Bishop John Taylor Smith DD, The War Office London, former chaplain to Queen Victoria, one time Bishop of Sierra Leone, and Chaplain General to H.M. forces 1901-25.

The approval by these august gentlemen was vital, Trust patronage provided almost all the vicar's income. It was important then not to offend the Patrons – although unfortunately this was precisely what Rev. Brown managed to achieve in an early letter to the Trust solicitor Mr Dashwood. It all starts pleasantly enough; *“Dear Sir, Obligated for your letter... etc. thanking you for your address to the Peache Trustees and the trouble you have taken in this matter”*.

Then things begin to turn serious; *“The only point which I think at the moment calls for particular notice is your statement to the effect that the vesting of the Patronage (with) the Bishop of Bristol would be a course which all interested in the Church development and Spiritual interests of Downend would welcome.”*

Finally it concludes; *“Do you consider that the vesting of the Patronage in the Peache Trustees would be a course which all interested in Church development and spiritual interests of Downend might not welcome?”*

Such was the strength of Dashwood's feelings that in his typed letter the word “not” is underlined in pen, poor Marcus Brown whatever had he said to produce such ire? Its obvious that the Trustees had viewed his comments as a form of veiled criticism, and an indication that any new parish would not promote what they described as, *“liberal minded Evangelical teaching.”* Further more there was the implication, (as they saw it) of wider support through out the parish for such changes, and what they probably feared was a move to “High Church” or Anglo-Catholic modes of worship, things the Peache Trustees had never encouraged. Clearly Revd Brown had to act quickly to mend fences, and a copy of his reply has survived amongst the Soundwell papers. After apologising for the “Chatty” style of his first letter he went on to explain that for some time the congregation at St Stephen's had for all practical purposes been a self supporting – self administering body, many of whom resented their being kept in *“leading strings”*. Their independence deserved to be acknowledged, and in any case he now found himself having to administer both parishes with a staff of only one. As to the question of Trustees it had been his belief that the process of creating a new parishes ruled out private patronage so he mentioned Diocesan patronage as incidental rather than preferable. That note seems to have done the trick, within a matter of days a small business card arrived from trustees bearing this simple message:

“I am most grateful for your letter which entirely alters the impression which perhaps I wrongly obtained from your former communication.”

After that we can safely assume that the Peache Trustees and Vicar were friends once more, although the latter probably felt rather singed around the edges! In all probability it was this incident which resulted in Revd Brown collating and retaining copies of all subsequent documents.

Not every document dealt with patronage; ownership of any new parish church would have to be vested with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of Great Britain, and many of the Soundwell papers also deal with this body. Part of this process involved justifying the need for a new parish, which the Vicar gave as increased population, *“based upon returns from the last census (1911) and some consultation with the Returning Officer.”* He also supplied a rather interesting list, which indicates exactly how far that population now outstripped the capacity of local churches.

Seating v Population

	Seats	Free	Population	New parish to take	Acres taken
Mangotsfield (Original parish)	205	All	1738	800 persons	200
Downend (parish 1874)	1027	773	9300	3000 persons	194
Kingswood (parish 1821)	660	All	11500	400 persons	40

(Note that even in the 1920's Christ Church still retained its rented pews.)

In his report to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners Revd Brown noted that St Stephen's contained 470 free seats for a congregation, plus 30 *appropriated* seats – spaces reserved for clergy, choir, or churchwardens. The new parish he planned would cover an area of 434 acres and serve a population of 4,200. Of course he still had to establish its boundary lines, and appears to have worked in close co-operation with Canon Alford - the same man as appeared at the stone laying in 1903.

Utilising both natural and man-made landmarks these began at Staple Hill Station and then followed the railway line east till it crossed Warmley Brook. It now followed the stream along to Anchor Road, crossed over and began to ascend Pound Lane, (now Road), before it cut in pretty much a straight line across open fields till it reached Crown Road. After this the line crossed over Soundwell Road and then followed the Bristol/Kingswood boundary line north until finally it returned to Staple Hill Station.

However before they were prepared to accept the notion of a new parish church the Commissioners had to be convinced that the building was sound. In fact the last thing they wanted was to adopt responsibility for a structure in imminent danger of falling down or ready to collapse into a mine shaft. To this end they commissioned surveys from architects *Caroe & Passmore*, and mining engineer *T W Morgan*. The architect's report contains much useful information concerning St Stephens. Dated April 30th 1923 it describes a building only 19 years old – still recent enough to be considered new, yet old enough for any defects to appear.

And there were indeed problems, the report mentions rising damp plus several instances of structural settlement, suggesting either poor workmanship, or else insufficient funds to complete the work properly. Because of this damp the internal walls faced with Bath stone, plus the piers of the nave arcade, already showed signs of deterioration. The architects felt this pointed to either, "*the absence of a damp course, or else some grave defect in its construction*", they recommended treating all affected areas with a preservative. As for the signs of settlement, cracks were present in the low-centred arches of the north and south aisles at the east-end, which they attributed to, "*the incomplete state of the building*" and also the west-end. Here the architects recommended, "*grouting in and cross bonding under competent supervision*", and the provision of, "*temporary shores or tie rods.*" They also identified ventilation problems - an important matter with St Stephen's still lit by gas. The original church architect Mr Bennett had already made provision for this by venting air in through the fleche, but it looks as though this was insufficient. The report's solution was to place Hopper casements in the Clerestory and west window, (although today these can only be found in the north aisle). Various other small problems were remarked upon such as missing tiles, repairs to steps, and the need for a general repainting, after which they were quite prepared to certify St Stephen's as suitable to become a parish church. The metal tie-rods, which presently straddle the nave and prove so useful at Christmas or other special occasions probably, date from this period. Although the large buttresses which now support the east-end did not appear for another 27 years.

Caroe & Pasmore also provided their own estimation of seating capacity, but despite Revd Brown's claim of 470, could only manage to accommodate 385, and spaced them out accordingly,

Nave	-	162
South Aisle	-	104
North Aisle	-	74
Chancel on oak seating	-	38
Baptistry	-	7

Today St Stephen's is equipped with pews, which provide seats for around 250, chairs can be, arranged much closer together, hence the larger tally. Even so their notion of 7 seats shoehorned into the Baptistry strains credulity to breaking point, both literally and practically!

The mining engineer's report, dated 6th February 1924 starts by providing the church's precise map reference - *Longitude 2 degrees 30min 12 sec West, 51 degrees 28 min 20 sec North*, and then proceeds to list all mining activity in the neighbourhood. Way back in the 1920's coal was still a major fuel source, and there must have seemed every reason to assume the Bristol coalfield would continue to operate for a considerable time. It was imperative then to establish exactly how far any workings might extend, and whether these might endanger the site. This would have been particularly important in light of the pre-existing agreement between Ponting Monks and Archibald Jones to exploit any mineral reserves beneath the church.

There was already one mineshaft just half a mile to the east, with a second one-mile distant in the same direction. But these were old and abandoned so posed no danger. Speedwell Pit over one mile to the east was still active, but once again its workings were not considered a threat. The main reasons for T. W. Morgan's confidence lay in a special geological feature, the *Kingswood Anticline*, which passed east west through the site. In ideal conditions coal seams run beneath the surface like layers of jam in a sponge cake. With an *anticline* the strata become pushed up and form a ridge so now it more closely resembles a stamped on Swiss Roll, all this fragments any coal seam present so it's simply not worth trying to mine it! After considering these facts T. W. Morgan were able to state with assurance, *"We certify that the site of St Stephen's Church is suitable for a Church, in as far as the underground workings are concerned."*

If St Stephen's were to operate successfully as a focal point for the community a Parish Hall would be necessary. Beyond the church building to the east stood land previously earmarked for the transepts and chancel, so a ready site already existed. Shortness of funds was clearly a pressing matter, which explains why Revd Brown immediately negotiating the purchase of an ex W.W.1 army-hut. Typically he had big ideas, and wanted to fill the entire space, but scaled down his plans after receiving the following note from Canon Alford in 1922,

"As for the Hut my own view is that 90-ft will overdo it both inside and out. A 60-ft hut would be wiser especially as the site is to go to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Be content with the 60-ft hut and do it at once or you will have to ask the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for consent."

In due course the hut arrived in Soundwell after its term of duty on Salisbury Plain, and was re-assembled by Mr T. J. Ward, a local man, and his band of helpers. Now St Stephen's lacked one thing only before it could take up its role as a Parish church – an incumbent.

At the start Revd Brown's negotiations in 1922 it had already been decided that the Peache Trustees should select the first Vicar of St Stephen's, after which the Bishop would select his own candidates. For as they wrote to Revd Brown.

"The Trustees are anxious that the first Vicar of Soundwell should be an earnest and spiritually minded man of Evangelical convictions who would start the parish on sound lines,"

As for the stipend each party would put up a share, with the bulk falling to the Diocese of Bristol, an arrangement by the by which lasted up until the time of Roy Harrison.

Obviously by holding first choice of candidate the Trustees had a good chance to set their personal seal upon St. Stephen's, but everything did not run as smoothly as they had hoped. Late in 1923 they wrote to Revd Brown to inform him of their man, a Revd Archie Cecil Osborn Hann, who at that time was serving as Vicar of St Mark's, Wandsworth, London. Everything seemed set fair, and then without reason – at least none that was recorded he turned the place down. Again the Trustees looked about, and this time came up with Brian Montague Osborne, then Vicar of St Mary Magdalene in Islington. They seemed really sure of this man describing him to Revd Brown as

"A fine fellow, an earnest worker, and a devoted pastor – just the fellow for the place."

Amongst the Soundwell papers a most cordial letter survives from Revd Osborne to Revd Brown dated December 23rd 1923, in which arrangements are made and plans drawn up to visit Soundwell early in the New Year. Later again Rev. Brown wrote to the Bishop and assured him:

“Rev Osbourne and his wife hope to come to Soundwell on March 25.th (he) writes, It has definitely been decided that I come as Vicar Designate of the new Parish to be formed.”

Once more however the Trustee's candidate backed out, although this time there may be a clue as to his motives. The living or salary, paid to the Vicar of Soundwell was set at £363, per annum (gross), plus house. In 1925 Revd Osbourne move to St Jude's church Herne Hill, a slightly larger parish than Soundwell – population around 6,000 as opposed to 4,000 – but with a stipend of £437 (net). As a married man he would surely have sought out the most remunerative parish.

Reverend Butlin, Soundwell's first Vicar.

Finally at the third attempt they found their man, James Punnett Butlin, a bachelor and former missionary from Aurangabad, Malegaon, and Poona, India. At last everything was ready, on Wednesday 26th March 1924 a service of Consecrated was held at St Stephen's, with the Bishop of Bristol, the Rt. Revd George Nickson officiating. It may possibly strike the reader as strange that twenty years had lapsed since the original act of Dedication. Possibly this was originally delayed due to the building's unfinished state, and then remained on hold because St Stephen's only held the status of a Mission church. As a matter of interest Bishop George consecrated not just the church, but the entire site, as can be confirmed by documents now lodged in the vestry safe. Meaning of course that in 1924 not only was our church consecrated but also the land upon which our hall now stands.

Also present with Bishop George that day were,
Revd R. E. Ramsey, Bishop's chaplain
The Archdeacon of Bristol, the Ven. C. H. Dickinson,
Revd P. Butlin, Vicar-designate,
Revd Brown, Vicar of Downend,
Canon G. R. Wood, Rural Dean,
Revd J. Hunter Robertson, Rural Dean of Bitton,
Revd Robert Johnson, Vicar of Somerford Keynes, and former Curate-in-charge at St Stephen's
Mr J. E. Lasbury and Mr T. Ward were also present as the acting Churchwardens.

The ceremony would have held special significance for Revd Johnson, for not only had he once served in Soundwell as Marcus Brown's curate but also upon that day his own sister, Miss Johnson was called upon to serve as organist due to the indisposition of Mr W. Jones.

Once again the *Times & Mirror* covered the story and reported the now familiar reframe of an unfinished church and the expectation of a greater seating capacity once work was complete. But whereas the original accounts spoke of *450 rising to 900* we now find quotes for just 150 extra seats, which strongly suggests the once ambitious plans had been permanently shelved. Indeed its difficult to see how anybody could have expected to realise the architect's original vision now that part of the site had been given over to a Parish Hall. Quite possibly those present already knew this in their heart of hearts. Certainly the Bishop's address paid little attention to extending the fabric and concentrated instead upon his hope that St Stephen's might become, *“a real spiritual centre, and an opportunity of showing what it really meant to be a Christian. Rise to it,”* he urged, *“and nothing will delight your Bishop's heart more than to find this a real centre of spiritual life.”*

On June 4th 1924 the dreams of Revd Dann and efforts of Revd Marcus Brown at last reached fruition, and Soundwell became a parish. As English Law dictates this was achieved by Royal sanction, and published in the *London Gazette* as Orders in Council. The precise entry ran as follows,

“Whereas the said Representation has been approved by his Majesty, by and with the advice of his said Council, is pleased hereby to ratify the aforesaid Representation, and to order and direct that the same and every part thereof shall be effectual in law immediately from and after the time when this Order shall have been duly published in the London Gazette.”

Revd Butlin was officially installed as the Vicar of Soundwell on June 6th 1924 and remained, as it's incumbent until 1927. During this time he lived in a purpose built vicarage, which stood opposite to St Stephen's overlooking the sports ground, the view across the green very different from his former life in India. After leaving the parish he turned up again in 1936 as the Rector of All Saint's Littleton Drew, a tiny village near Chippenham. Later he retired to Dawlish Warren with his sister.

Reverend George Feaver and Reverend Frederick James Hirst.

After Revd Butlin came George Feaver, our first Diocese-appointed incumbent, although his stay of barely a year made this little more than a stop-gap ministry. The next Vicar, Frederick James Hirst arrived in February 1929 and remained in office for twenty years. Another bachelor he lived with a sister as companion and housekeeper at the vicarage. It was during this period that PCC minutes begin to appear giving at last a month by month insight into parish life. One of the first entries dated 20th March 1938 concerns the gift of an oak prayer desk by Revd Hirst and his sisters as a memorial to Elizabeth, another sister who had recently died, today it stands in the Lady Chapel. On April 3rd Revd Hirst announced that a memorial cross in memory to late Verger, Mr Price would be ready for dedication by the following March, unfortunately it has not proved possible to identify this piece. Another entry dated 5/12/38 would prove to be a harbinger of future problems when Mr Harding, a churchwarden raised the matter of woodworm, which had attacked the hall chairs.



St Stephen's in the mid -1930's

War with Germany came in September 1939 and cast its shadow over the parish. We can only guess at the general reaction when at the PCC meeting of April 1940 Rev. Hirst read the following letter from the *Ecclesiastical Insurance Company*,

"The policy 195658 under the long term agreement of 5 years will be renewed on June 24 1940 – Subject to the express condition that the Risk of War and Civil War are excluded from the above policy"

As matters turned out St Stephen's would emerge unscathed, but there must have been fears for the building. Because on March 29th 1941 Sir Seymour Williams, the clerk of Warmley District Council wrote to the PCC concerned over the danger of firebombs. And requested that in future the church and hall keys should be kept in the adjacent sports pavilion – then an ARP post.

When in 1945 peace finally arrived there were some that expected the post-war world would return, but many saw it as an opportunity to build a better one. As for St Stephen's and its hall years of wartime neglect had left their mark. From now on the parish would follow the path of reconstruction and renewal. On Tuesday 25th of March 1948 the Fabric Committee, which consisted of Revd Hirst, Mr E Harding, Mr R March, and Mr G Hendy met to discuss the matter of replacement gates. During the War an increased demand for iron and steel had resulted in many buildings losing their gates and railings. Although early pictures of St Stephen's show only wooden gates – nothing there for the scrap, perhaps they'd simply rotted away with age. After some deliberation the Committee examined designs by, *Brislington Engineering*, *Stock & Collings*, and *Metal Units*, all of whom they seemed keen to stress were "Bristol firms," before choosing *Stock & Collings* design, G13. On these the ironwork was fashioned at each end into shapes which closely resembling a bishop's crosier, possibly a coincidence, but most appropriate for a church under Diocesan patronage. In all the company based at Albert Ironworks, St Philips, produced four sets, comprising double gates across the main entrance in Church Road and the Hall forecourt, plus smaller examples in St Stephen's Road and the Hall car-park entrance. A sum of £44 was mentioned, which if it

covered the entire work only goes to show how far prices have risen over time. At any rate the gates were certainly well made and still give good service. Even the double set which formally stood in front the old Hall, although removed some years ago to improve access, still survive in a domestic setting elsewhere in the parish.

The new gates were to be Revd Hirst's last contribution to St Stephen's. For in June of that year he tendered his resignation to the Bishop upon grounds of ill health. Frederick Hirst had served the parish of Soundwell as its Priest for almost twenty years. But in all that time though he may have been totally committed to his chosen vocation he never seems to have found a place in Soundwell's heart. Kind souls said he was frugal – blunter folk simply called him mean. Also he lacked the gift of working well with children, something of a drawback when you taught Scripture once a week at school. The following story comes courtesy of the school Centenary History:

“Rev. Frederick J Hirst came in to take morning assemble every Wednesday morning, followed by a scripture lesson with the top class. He was elderly, with nice black hair, which later turned grey. He was certainly not well attuned to children, for though a kind man, he seemed quite and remote. He once asked those pupils who attended “this church”, to stand on their seats, so that he could see how many families in that class went to St Stephen's! Of course, not only those who did not go to church, but those who went to other churches, remained seated!”



St Stephen's former school, (the Walter Cave block).

We might excuse this rather awkward episode by arguing that a bachelor would have little experience of children. However even Revd Hirst had once been a child, and surely must have realised that being made to stand on one's chair in class was a form of punishment. But if his teaching technique was defective he could still make an impression – even if it wasn't in the way he intended'

“Pupils still walked in twos to church for services on religious holidays. The main feature of these services seems to have been the Vicar's teeth! The children were mesmerised by his false teeth, which were forever on the move! They didn't hear a word the Vicar said because they were continually watching for his teeth to fall down!”

They do say that if you wish to know what people really think of a person just look at the monuments they erect after they're death. On January 2nd 1950 one of Revd Hirst's sisters wrote to the PCC proposing that, a stained glass window featuring the figure of St Stephen should be placed in the South Aisle as a memorial to her brother. We can assume Miss Hirst must have looked into the matter in some detail since she offered to share costs with the PCC and suggested Bells of Park Street for the work, a company by the by already responsible for the existing stained glass in that aisle. The secretary, whom I believe at that time was Mrs Gertrude Pilgrim, now wrote to Bells requesting an estimate, and then Miss Hirst to ascertain how much she would contribute. A month later the estimate arrived with the entire job coming out at between £75-80, Miss Hirst had also been informed, but no reply was in evidence. Matters dragged on into a third month, but still she failed to respond. By this time its possible to detect more than a trace of sly humour in the PCC minutes as the secretary's wrote,

“A lengthy discussion took place over this matter, but nothing spectacular came of it”

Finally Mr Huish proposed *“past talk be forgotten”* and that after one month the matter be raised again. It was, and rejected upon a show of hands – no memorial window to Revd Hirst was ever placed in St Stephen's.

In the immediately post-war period many parts of Soundwell were still undeveloped open spaces as this rather flowery description from the Mangotsfield Urban District handbook of 1946 suggests.

"It is the small householder who particularly loves this district. Soundwell has an appeal to all because it is neither a town nor a village. It is possible to enjoy quietude amid bracing air and take a stroll across Stanley Park to Siston Common and over Rodway Hill into the almost unspoilt village of Mangotsfield."

Of course in a way promotions like this were self-defeating since as more people came to enjoy the "quietude" so the open spaces vanished. But in any case there was a demand for housing and Soundwell had the necessary open spaces – so the parish population was sure to grow.

Reverend Daronwy Jones, the Fiery Welshman.



Revd. D. Jones

It was into this situation that Soundwell's next vicar the Revd Daronwy Jones arrived from Wales, he must have come as quite a change after almost two decades of Revd Hirst as his impassioned preaching and dramatic delivery regularly filled the church. These events were recalled many years later by Edith Summerhill in a talk given to St Stephen's Ladies Group:

"Vicar Jones arrived in Soundwell about 1949, he was a fiery Welshman and is remembered for his sermons, which were highly volatile – this dramatic delivery certainly had the effect of drawing the congregation each Sunday evening, every seat was filled. In an effort to put his point across, he would bang his fist on the pulpit rail, and his voice would reach a crescendo – that made you jump in your seat. Television had not yet become an everyday item in the home, so to listen to Vicar Jones in full flood was quite an entertainment in itself."

Another parishioner Brian Brown had good reason to recall Revd Jones and his preaching:

"Revd Jones, Oh my! You tried to keep away from the front seats when he was in the pulpit, the spit used to fly everywhere!"

Looking back over the years its clear that Change was afoot in Soundwell. It wasn't simply a case of more lively worship – but a greater sense of involvement. To quote Brian again, *"Before we felt Church life was organised for us – now we feel part of the process."*

Nor was the new vicar simply concerned with oratory, by 1949 he had organised a complete re-paint and restoration of the old wooden hall which really had begun to show its age. And on March 24th the entire congregation met to celebrate with a party in the refurbished building. If St Stephen's were to meet the challenge of a growing parish it was important that everything should be in good order.

After their hall the congregation turned to the actual church building, again much work was necessary. A report to the PCC dated June 13th 1949 stated that whereas the exterior remained in reasonable condition, internally the ceilings required replacing with plasterboard, the Sanctuary wall needed attention, there was woodworm in the chairs, and at the east end extra buttresses were called for to support the roof. In July St Stephen's at last bade farewell to gas mantels with the introduction of electric lights whilst reports showed repairs to the roof and ceiling were "most essential". At the same time notes kept appearing in the minutes about "preserving the stone", most likely a reference to deterioration resulting from rising damp, and attempts to arrest this damage.

This must be the explanation as to why and when all the interior stonework was first covered in white paint. In November various estimates were submitted for general repairs and redecoration with Mr Wilcox securing the job at £243. For which he promised to, *"erect scaffolding, patch and whitewash the ceiling, apply two coats of whitewash to the walls, and varnish all the beams"*. The east-end or Sanctuary was also remodelled at this time with plans supplied by the Diocesan architect. Burrough & Hannam of 17, Orchard Street, Bristol. Although none of their drawings survive, part of

the work certainly involved covering over the wall painting behind the altar. For at the PCC meeting of 29th November 1949 Mr Emmett suggested asking the contractors to apply three coats of Petrifying Distemper to the east wall, perhaps another move against damp. At the same meeting we find estimates discussed from Messrs Taylor & Sons, of College Green for the supply of new curtains for the east wall, plus carpets fitted in the sanctuary for £149 19s. It seems safe to assume that the oak reredos, installed back in 1904 was also removed at this time possibly with the aim of modernising the interior, although it too may have suffered from the attention of woodworm. The present oak altar rail, may also have been installed around this time, certainly the dedication date fits in with the other work:

“In Memory of Albert G Hasell. Lieut. RAOC, Organist 1931-1938 September 18th 1945

These Oak Rails are the gift of the Widow”

Likewise the pair of brass candlesticks, now standing upon the altar table:

“In memory of Samuel Wotton died October 25th 1923, and In memory of Edith Wotton died October 11th 1949”.

All the renovation work was complete by January 1950 and Revd Jones could happily report. *“The fabric was in very good condition – although there was still room for improvement. Furthermore he had never attended such an amicable meeting”*. Committee members were afterwards invited to stop for a cup of tea – all of which must have seemed very different for the days of Revd Hirst!

The Apse and the Peace Chapel.

By 1950 the church electoral roll stood at 240 and the PCC began to consider how St Stephen's might accommodate more people. Any notion of completing the building according to the original plans was clearly untenable, but Burrough & Hannam, the Diocesan architects, came up with a far simpler design featuring an apse. Since 1904 the eastern-most bay of both the North and South Aisle had served as temporary Choir and Clergy Vestries. Now they proposed connecting these aisles with a series of rooms built against the outside east wall and topped off with a lean-to roof. If the Vestries could be re-sited that would free up more space within the church for extra seating. The scheme plan met with enthusiastic support, but despite a unanimous vote a shortage of funds kept the plans on hold.

However not all projects failed to materialise. On February 3rd the PCC received a request from Mrs Lasbury offering to establish, at her own expense, a side altar in the South Aisle as a memorial to her late husband. Mr Lasbury had served as Vicar's Warden in 1921, and been present in that capacity at the 1924 Dedication Service.

Initially called the *Peace Chapel* that name fell out of use by the late 60's, after which it became known as the *Lady Chapel*. Faced with this confusion it would have helped to examine the original *Faculty*, but although Revd Jones had promised to obtain one at the time nothing could be found in today's archives. In an attempt to shed some light upon this puzzle Roy Harrison our former Parish Priest was consulted, and the following response obtained:

“As to the original dedication the clue is the proximity of World War II, but language and time changed it to the more familiar Lady Chapel, which also reflects the more Catholic elements within the Congregation. On the matter of Faculty – things were less formal in those days.”

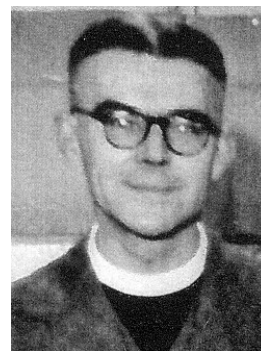
It would appear then that a case could be made for either dedication, and whilst the author has no intention of taking sides it does seem a shame that the original title – *Peace* is no longer employed. Notwithstanding Mrs Lasbury's intentions the chapel's present furnishing relate to other people. The altar rail bears a brass memorial plaque to, *“Reginald Ash 1887-1950, and his wife Gertrude 1891-1982”*. Whilst the silver cross and attending candlesticks which carry the inscription, *“To the glory of God, and in loving memory of Percy White”*, were the gift of Mrs White in commemoration of her husband. Here also can be found the prayer desk Revd Hirst gave as a memorial to his sister Elizabeth. The altar table was presented to the church by Mr March, the date

of this gift is uncertain, but cannot be later than 1966 since it appears in the church inventory for that year. The latest addition, a reproduction of Salvador Dali's *Crucifixion*, was brought by the present incumbent Ian Wills from his former parish of Pucklechurch.

Revd Jones stay at St Stephen's had not been long, in 1953 he left Soundwell and returned to his native Wales. From 1949-53 he had overseen a complete renovation of the Parish Hall, organised running repairs upon the church exterior, and prompted an interior renovation scheme. In fact in those four years that formed his ministry his passion and enthusiasm served as a wake-up call to the parish as it shook off the dust of the war years and looked towards a renewed Church.

Reverend Frank Evans v the Woodworm.

The people of Soundwell did not need to wait long for their new vicar. On June 12th 1953 Revd Frank W Evans the fifth incumbent of that parish took up his post. Photographs show him as a tall man with his hair parted in the middle, and bearing more than a passing resemblance to the writer Alan Bennett. Frank Evans would prove to be another respected and much loved Vicar although his more gentlemanly style came as something of a contrast to the wild Welsh pyrotechnics of Revd Jones! In matters of renovation and restoration however both men were as one, and almost at once the church had need of Revd Evans energy. Scarcely a month had passed since his induction when the PCC minutes sounded a warning note. The dreaded scourge of woodworm had once again reared its ugly head with the little blighters now busily engaged in chewing their way through all the chairs. Now in a situation, which must have come close to those "Four and Twenty Tailors" of nursery rhyme, fame the building was inspected first by Cowlin's the builders, then the Archdeacon, and finally the Rural Dean. All however were agreed upon the correct course of action – burn the chairs!



Revd Frank Evans



St Andrew's, Haverstock Hill

The solution of course was to replace all the old seating, and soon Revd Evans had located a quantity of second-hand deal pews from a London church. St Andrew's Haverstock Hill had been consecrated in 1866 and served a north London parish in the Gospel Oak area. This was a very poor working-class district with a distinctly High Church congregation. During the Second World War the entire area suffered badly, first from the Blitz and later from the V1, and V2 flying bombs and rocket attacks. Large numbers of people were evacuated or bombed out and St Andrews too received damage. Due to a falling population, plus the prohibitive cost of repairs the authorities decided to merge parishes, close St Andrew's, and sell of all internal fittings. Revd Evans arranged to visit the sale and took along Arthur James a local carpenter whom he considered, "A man of authority on woodwork". As it happened their journey to London took all day and around dinnertime the vicar offered to buy lunch. Alas poor Mr James was "sans teeth", and being without his false sets could only manage soup – so out of sympathy Frank Evans chose the same.

On August 17th they reported back to the PCC that the pews would make a good buy. The church floor was uneven; a problem of persistent damp having caused its wood block surface to move, but Mr Emmet set about levelling the surface in preparation. After that it was simply a case of transporting the pews to Bristol, cutting them down so they fitted neatly within St Stephen's, and finally the task of installation. According to Faculty papers dated September 15th 1953 the firm of Cowlin's did all this work, with the total cost coming out at £300. Contrary to the express wishes of the Bristol Diocesan Advisory Committee the pews received a coat gloss varnish. Clearly their appeal fell on deaf ears, but at least the pews, which look perfectly at home in their new location, now match all the other woodwork.

Cowlin's inspection however revealed far more than simply worm-eaten chairs, parts of the original "temporary" vestries needed to be replaced, the roof purlins were effected, and even the oak altar table had holes in it. A complete program of restoration was necessary and again the PCC called in *Burrough & Hannam*. At first it looked as though their original plans for new vestries contained within an apse would still go ahead, and Revd Evans applied to Cowlin's for estimates covering the work in both stone and concrete blocks. Unfortunately the old altar, which dated back to 1904, was past saving, and the architects advised its removal. However the PCC did manage to sell off the old oak for £9 to Mr Joyason, area manager of *Rushworth & Draper*, a company who maintained the church organ. Finally Revd Evans managed to obtain another altar table from All Saints Fishponds.

Then as so often happens with grand plans, reality struck home. On March 16th 1954 Mr Hannam met the PCC – his report was not encouraging. Part of his plans had involved repairing the Sanctuary floor, but this was in such bad condition that total replacement with concrete was necessary at around £550. In addition to this the new Vestries would require an extra £1,192 – far more than the parish could afford and plans were shelved whilst they looked for a cheaper alternative.

By September 1954 the PCC passed a proposal to remove the old internal Vestries, and spend £30 upon a series of temporary wood and hardboard screens. Now St Stephen's fell back on its most valued resource a band of unpaid volunteers. Under Mr Emmett a working party consisting of churchwardens, Mr Hendy, and Mr Summerhill, plus Arthur James, Bence Hewish, David Ball, and David Phillips, was assembled, and by October 13th after 150 hours labour the job was complete. Those precise details came from a diary kept by Mr A James, a carpenter and local man who over the years again and again employed his time and skill at St Stephen's.

Arthur in fact had a special trademark or practise in that he always signed his jobs, or left a message in secret, somewhere on his work. Apparently he maintained this practise even when working in church, evidence of which I uncovered in a rather unusual manner. In the main Porch there stands a wooden flower-stand. Some years ago it was loaned out as stage dressing in a Victorian play. In the process of moving the top worked loose and in re-fixing the screws the following note came to light, hidden between a joint:

"Bought 1929, Table belonged to Mrs Perry 19 Sweets Rd, Given to A James 20 Feb 1974 who cut it down for Pot stand, Top screwed on this day 26 Feb 1974, A James Carpenter".

In the interests of preserved history this note was updated and returned to its original hiding place. Today the stand can again be found in the porch, although few people who pass by can be aware of its concealed message.

It was during Revd Evan's time as Vicar that his wife established the Women's Fellowship, which remained active until 2000. This group met weekly in the Parish Hall for talks, lectures and general socialising. They even paid host to people who had worked directly with Mother Theresa, which subsequently inspired a play, written by Mrs Evans and performed by Church members. During the summer months there were outings and day trips, the most memorable being a visit to the Dutch bulb fields as remembered by Edith Summerhill:

"The plane was small and some of the members were airsick, but the sight of acres of beautiful bulbs in full bloom, windmills plus a wonderful Dutch welcome too made it an occasion the memory of which would last for ever. Many of us had never left England's shores, as this was in the 60's and we were all moving forward with the new age together!"

1954 marked the Church Diamond Jubilee, with celebrations stretching over three days. First on Friday 9th they held three services of Holy Communion, plus a Festal Evensong at which the Bishop of Bristol preached. On Saturday a special supper was arranged in the Parish Hall, followed by an entertainment. The celebrations continued that Sunday with another service of Dedication, featuring the Sunday School, the Youth Fellowship, the Cubs, Scouts, and the Girls' Friendly Society with the Dean of Bristol as guest preacher. There was as usual a Procession of Witness around the

Parish, although unlike today it took place at 2.45pm. This would have been a large crowd too, for according to Margo Cox (nee Roper), *“there were then about 300 children in the Sunday School, with myself, Mary and Ruth the vicar’s daughters, and 20 others acting as teachers.”*

The Parish magazine for that month contained a potted history of St Stephen’s by Revd Evans and noting the various improvements made over the half century. Praising the efforts of his predecessor Revd Jones in renovating the hall/army hut he remarked that, although *“old soldiers never die,”* the time must shortly come when a more permanent building would be needed. This he felt particularly pressing when plans to build extra houses in Soundwell would increase the population by another 7000. He wished more could have been accomplished, but acknowledged the importance of that *“rather austere duty”* – replacing and repairing worm-eaten woodwork. However he concluded:

“We have resolutely put our hands to the task, and it may be that what we are doing for the Jubilee will help those who come after to celebrate the Centenary!

*Enough if something from our hands have power,
To live and act and serve the future hour”.*

Your sincere friend and Vicar, FRANK W. EVANS

Reverend John Whettem, and the new Parish Hall.

In 1958 Revd Evans and his wife left Soundwell and moved to Weston-super-Mare, whilst his successor John C Whettem arrived and took up his post on September 30th. Despite his best efforts Frank Evans never did managed to rebuild the old Parish Hall, although through throughout his incumbency fund raising for the project continued. When John Whettem arrived with his family and moved into the Vicarage at 21 Gladstone Road there were two immediate problems facing St Stephen’s, a need to decorate the church interior, and concerns over weaknesses in the East wall. As Revd Whettem would later recall it was thanks to the assistance of Archdeacon Reddick that the parish achieved the first objective. When prompted by his suggestions they accepted an offer from ICI to re-decorate the church – free of charge as an endorsement for their range of Dulux paints.

Then there was the East wall, which should have gained support from the Chancel. This part of the building had never been completed and a wooden hut which, served as the Parish Hall occupied the site. By the late 50’s the wooden structure was fast reaching its sell-by date although the parishioners were still capable of staging impressive events, as this extract from the parish magazine for January 1957 shows:

“The Christmas Bazaar proved a huge success with the Parish Hall a scene of many coloured lanterns and Eastern costumes. At 3.00pm Aladdin appeared from a cave carrying his lamp and summoned a Genie who in gracious speech opened the proceedings. The kitchen was transformed into an Oriental tea-room with an array of almond branches. Every organisation took part, and the target of £100 was reached.”

Even so this veteran of World War One could not go on forever. Increasingly notes appear in the church minutes signalling its impending demise. *“Windows and other parts in bad state of repair... piano deteriorating due to damp... windows and floor require attention at the earliest possible moment... estimate for repairs £144 10s.”* Things might have dragged on for some time, but by the start of 1959 the PCC had other more alarming news to consider. Once again cracks had appeared around the Vestry arches indicating instability in the East wall. Burrough & Hannam’s plans for new Vestries within an Apse were dusted off, revised, and submitted to the Diocese for approval. These allowed for two massive buttresses as supports for the east wall sufficient to prevent any further movement of the masonry. There was also the promise of a third Vestry. When the “temporary” Vestries were first envisaged two rooms were planned for the South aisle. This probably came to nothing as it took up too much space. As matters stood female choir members changed in the north vestry, whilst all male members plus the vicar shared the south one.

The scheme for an extra vestry within an apse was approved, and the Diocese issued a Faculty for the work. From this we learn that re-constituted Bath Stone, Pennant rubble and matching roof tiles were to have been employed to match the existing building. The estimated costs were £2,000 – of which £600 had already been raised.



The Apse as planned, a reconstruction based upon the architect's plans

The PCC was certainly willing, Mrs Pilgrim the secretary wrote enthusiastically to the Diocesan authorities, "The plans have 100% support!" but alas, once more the hard realities of money cast their shadow over events. On November 3rd 1959 a letter arrived from the Board of Finance with the following request:

"Will you ask your church architect to consider the possibility of combined Vestries and Hall as additions to the church and including buttresses for the east wall. By this means there might be a saving of space."

True they were only quibbling over matters of space but it must have been clear that their real reluctance lay in advancing funds for vestries alone when the Parish Hall was on its last legs. Also by building the new hall against the old church the East wall would finally be stabilised. The PCC took the hint, and now things moved rapidly. *Burrough & Hannam* produced a set of plans retaining the buttresses from their old scheme, but in place of the apse added an extra vestry, committee room, storage space, kitchen, toilets, and large hall with a stage. From beyond the east-end of the old church the roofline carried on in much the same way as the intended chancel, except here the gable was lower so that part of the chancel arch and its brick in-fill remained visible. Perhaps in a way it was fortunate Bennett's original plans were never completed, we might have had a grander church, but where would the Parish Hall have gone?

By May 31st 1960 Mangotsfield UDC had approved the plans and *Hayward & Wooster* had supplied an estimate of £10,750. They also offered to demolish the old hall for £175, which the PCC felt to be "excessive." In the event a band of volunteers completed the task, headed by Les Reed, who would later recall, "It had to be done careful mind, otherwise people would have gone in there and just started bashing the whole thing about – it would have fallen in on them!"

Les first came to Soundwell on December 24th 1958. Almost at once Revd Whettem had invited him to join the choir, and then after a few weeks to be Sacristan and Head Server, a post he held for 39 years. It was John Whettem who first asked Les to design and build the present altar, although this work was not completed during his incumbency. For his part Les retains clear memories of Revd Whettem and offered the following amusing vignette, "I remember one Harvest Supper, a very young John going around all evening eating, he never seemed to stop!"

As a prelude to construction bore holes were drilled at the east-end, where a layer of clay revealed further reasons for structural instability. The old hall finally closed on February 18th 1961, and construction began in March. Whilst the new hall was under construction all weekday activities moved into the old vicarage in Gladstone Road. One of Revd Whettem's achievements at Soundwell

had been to build up and consolidate a thriving Youth Club, which now occupied the basement, the Women's Fellowship used the Drawing Room, and the PCC met in the Dining Room. Revd Whettem's wife Mary also started a Young Wives' group at this time, which gathered in the Kitchen. As for the Men's Fellowship they were busily employed helping the various groups settle into their temporary home.

Many fund raising schemes were launched to pay for the new work, but money was still tight and according to PCC minutes the hall plans were changed about this time in order to reduce costs with references to an altered roof, and the removal of a balcony. Quite where this would have fitted in is anybody's guess, as only the modified plans have survived, but the flat roof above the hall entrance would have made an excellent site for such a feature. In fact this part of the building, probably a result of economy measures since a pitch roof would have blended far better with the existing church, would later be plagued with leaks as predicted at the time by Donald Summerhill, a local builder and husband to Edith Summerhill. Though never a Church member Donald proved a great friend of St Stephen's always ready to give his time and skill in the maintenance of that building. He should not by the by be confused with his namesake Edgar, the churchwarden, another highly regarded local man, but no relation.

A stone wall had surrounded the old hall with access to the road through a pair of wrought iron gates, one of the sets put up in the time of Revd Hirst. One of the building contractors first acts was to demolish all this in order to create a car park, quite an advanced move for the early 60's. Much to the PCC's dismay the gates wound up on a heap of rubbish and despite Revd Whettem's assurance were not re-used in the new scheme. However the gates were not destroyed, Donald Summerhill, clearly a man with an eye for craftsmanship, obtained the vicar's permission to salvage them. Today they may still be seen at the family bungalow in Narrow Lane.

Throughout this period fund raising for the hall continued apace, in 1959 the building fund had stood at £600. By 1961, when the Diocese approved the hall plans, £12,000 out of the total £13,501 had already been promised or paid – truly a remarkable achievement! With a thought to fixtures and fittings the PCC agreed to purchase a tea trolley plus 200 new chairs. These came with black plastic seats – obviously previous campaigns against woodworm had left folk wary.

On Saturday March 3rd 1962 the Archdeacon of Bristol opened the new hall, which immediately took on the role of temporary church as St Stephen's was once again under attack from woodworm. At



Church and Hall, note the buttresses from the Apse scheme

At Evensong that Sunday the congregation were able to welcome back two old friends. Revd Evans and his wife had travelled especially from Weston for the service, with Revd Evans acting as guest preacher. Taking as his text, "The River of God which is full of Water" Ps 65, 9. He gave a "fine and helpful sermon" according to Revd Whettem, who later wrote in the parish magazine, "We were even then worshipping God in a place that spoke to us of just that, that God's blessings are always flowing towards us in Christ." There were indeed many blessings to be counted that day. Inside St Stephen's Donald Summerhill was hard at work repairing 51 holes left in the ceiling by the woodworm people. Mr Bence Huish, "my caretaker and general factotum"(Revd Whettem), lead a

group of parishioners who were busily employed putting everything else straight, all the scaffolding was lent free of charge, whilst an anonymous donor covered the entire cost.

The Parish Hall may have been the largest addition made to St Stephen's at this time, but it was by no means the only new feature to appear. The two oak bookcases for hymn and prayer books, which with their backs to the pews, were also set up inside the church. They appear to have been an anonymous gift, but were certainly special pieces made to measure as a set of working drawings were lodged along with the Faculty papers.

"Soundwell was a very friendly place, and it was lovely to work with my two long serving Churchwardens Edgar Summerhill, Ray Pitman and the Choirmaster Don Ball." These were Revd Whettem's final recollection of his time as St Stephen's Vicar although two other events did leave a lasting impression, *"the Big Freeze – Boxing Day '62 to the end of March '63, when the snow was really deep – 37 bucket loads of snow from under our roof! And the night the Cricket Pavilion burned down when we woke in the night to the sound of a furious crackling sound!"*

On April 28th 1963 John Whettem conducted his last service as Vicar of St Stephen's before taking a new post as Youth Chaplain. Afterwards at a gathering in the hall parishioners presented him with a cheque for £42. Whilst Miss Marsh gave book tokens to his three children, Caroline, Stephen, and Andrew, on behalf of the Sunday School. There were also flowers and gift-token for his wife, presented by Mrs Summerhill, received by daughter Caroline, since Mrs Whettem was unwell.

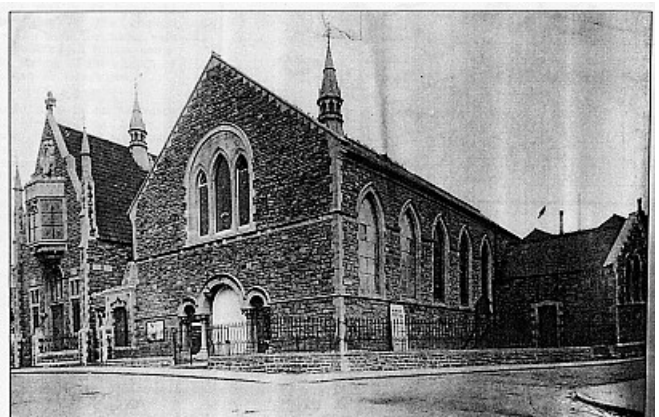
In letter of acknowledgement Revd Whettem thanked his friends for their generous gifts and promised to keep his word and purchase a new sofa with the cheque. Perhaps a reflection that vicarage furniture is seldom new or comfortable! At any rate he continued, *"whenever we sit down, we shall remember you – unfortunately it seems that we shall not be remembering you very often!"* Obviously a man who was looking forward to a busy life!

Reverend Ernest John Elwin, Change and Renewal.

After John Whettem's departure and during the Interregnum the Rural Dean, Canon Kingsley Martin served St Stephen's as Priest-in-Charge. Then in August the new vicar, Revd Ernest John Elwin arrived, a former assistant master from Tidworth Down School. Jack, as he preferred to be called, and his family, moved in at once. There was more than a touch of humour connected with his arrival, as he later recalled:

"I moved into the brand new vicarage in Sweets Road in 1963, with my wife Anne, an eight week old baby boy a goofy dog and a cat. People must have wondered what was coming when a jorum of home-made wine broke in the removal van with a very boozy smell, and when shortly afterwards whenever the vicarage doorbell rang the dog cascaded barking all the way down the stairs and skidded to meet the caller. Life was hectic: the day after my Institution, September 6th, I had four weddings to take, and thereafter my dairies are full of services, meetings, pre-baptism and pre-marriage appointments etc, etc.

The familiar round of repairs however still continued. On September 17th the PCC became concerned over the condition of the bell turret and sent Donald Summerhill to inspect the stonework. Incidentally whilst up on the church roof he was surprised to discover his own surname engraved on the bell, which puzzled him greatly since he could recall no ancestor ever making such a gift to St Stephen's. The turret was eventually put to in order at a cost of £30. But a far more expensive item appeared above the horizon. After three years hard fund raising for their new hall it had been the



Oxford Street chapel, demolished in the 1970's

Church Council's intention to make 1964 an appeal-free year. Now the organ was discovered to be in a "sorry state" and likely to give up the ghost at any moment. Advice was sought at once from the Diocesan advisor Graham Roper, who suggested two options, re-use the best parts of the old organ in a new instrument or else look for a complete second-hand one. As an alternative the committee also toyed with the notion of employing an electronic organ, said to have, "*marvellous tones, just like a pipe organ*" – plus the added advantage of costing only £650. In fact a demonstration did take place on 20th September, but presumably not everyone was so enthusiastic since matters went no further.

Meanwhile there were funds to be raised; the Ways and Means Committee elected Don Ball, the Organist and Choirmaster as chief organiser with £2,000 as their set target. Meanwhile the Revd Elwin distributed tubes of "Smarties" to be filled with 3d and 6d coins, he also, following no doubt the Parable of the Talents, "gave away money in church" to anyone who felt they could invest the cash and return a profit. In February 1965 Don reported to the PCC that a redundant Methodist chapel at Oxford Street, Totterdown had a suitable two-manual pipe organ for sale. He took a party of the PCC to inspect the instrument in question; they were impressed and authorised him to negotiate its purchase. Initially the chapel trustees wanted, "over £100", but finally settled for that very sum. Now Rushworth & Draper took over and began dismantling the instrument in preparation for its new home. In a report to the PCC Mr Joyason their area manager stressed the importance of moving quickly since he feared the mechanism might deteriorate in a disused building. Overall however he found the instrument to be in "*sound condition... in particular the pneumatic action is very lively and quick and it should fit nicely into the old organ chamber with the swell vertical shutters opening into the church and giving full tonal egress to the congregation*".

Rushworth & Draper put in an estimate for £1,040 and suggested certain modifications, as did Don, who also laid great emphasis upon treating all the timber against woodworm! By December all their work was finished, Rushworth & Draper sold the old organ to a Methodist chapel in Liverpool for £10, and the final bill came in at £1,354 0s 15d. By this means the present organ came into being, although it would certainly look rather different today if things had turned out otherwise. Included along with the original Faculty papers were plans for a pair of screens designed by Burrough & Hannam. These were intended to mask the east and west sides of the instrument, and consisted of wood panelling topped off with rows of non-speaking organ pipes. It would appear that once again financial pressures prevailed – none of this extra work had been allowed for in the original costs. However the PCC were also distinctly lukewarm over what they described as the architect's "*poor drawings*", and considered them an unnecessary addition.

In 1964 the Church of England and the Methodists were contemplating a merger and the PCC minutes shows there was much talk concerning this matter. Jack also noted many meetings and sermons, "*too many for some*", but in the end the idea came to nothing. New housing had greatly increased Soundwell's population and it seemed to Jack that there was a danger of folk losing their sense of belonging. His answer was to launch a parish magazine. Based upon a similar Methodist paper the *St Stephen's Standard* came out as a four-page tabloid newspaper with a print run of 3,000 (later increased to 3,800). Paid for by advertisements and distributed free parish-wide by a band of helpers issue one carried the following greeting from the vicar:

"There is no catch in it, people say the church is always asking for money – We're not! We're not



Topical Humour, a cartoon from the Standard

even asking you to come to church. We certainly don't want to draw you away from another church, and we're asking the Free Churches to send us their news for inclusion. We just want to be good neighbours chatting over the garden wall."

This new venture brought St Stephen's into the public eye with mention in the Press. And then within a month the church made National news again, this time with a rather unusual "double" wedding. On April 18th Terence Jordan, a project manager of Little Stoke married Jennifer Lovell from Deershurst Soundwell. Nothing remarkable there you might think, except come the great day the groom's father travelling all the way from Cambridgeshire mistook his directions, arrived at the wrong church, and missed his own son's wedding. Or so he might, had it not been for Soundwell's resourceful vicar, without a second thought Jack quickly re-donned his vestments, rounded up the choir, and simply held the wedding, hymns, prayers and a blessing, all over again! The story made the *Daily Mail*, squeezed all be it rather awkwardly between *Beatles Burgled* and *Women from Auschwitz*, and of course the *Standard* carried the entire story under a banner headline, "Twice up the Aisle". As for Revd Elwin he was totally unfazed and observed, "To us at church it seemed quite natural to try to do something to prevent the family being completely disappointed, and I was surprised it caused such a stir."

1964 marked St Stephen's Diamond Anniversary and the Church celebrated with a service of Confirmation for 30 new members at which the Bishop of Bristol presided, followed up by an evening service lead by Archdeacon P G Reddick. The following year Jack managed to secure a certain Church Army Captain, Terry Waite as the guest preacher.

In 1964 the church had just been re-decorated at a cost of £320, the nave walls were painted lime green, the ceiling picked out in orange, and the east wall coloured a dark brown. St Stephen's new looks may not have been to everyone's taste but they did succeed in gaining this glowing accolade from David Verey, (Chairman of the Gloucester Diocesan Advisory Committee on Faculties and the Care of Churches) who compiled the Gloucestershire edition of Pevsner's *Buildings of Britain*, in 1970:

"ST STEPHEN, 1903 by H.M. Bennet. Nave, N and S aisles, but no chancel. Built of rusticated Pennant rubble with freestone dressing. Bellcote at the W, turret at the E. A drastic and inspired scheme of interior decoration has transformed it into a dignified and beautiful place of worship."

Rev Elwin had plenty to say about the new look, and had no doubt of its merits. In the June *Standard* under the banner headline, "Unfinished church better for modern needs". After touching briefly upon the architect's original intentions, he wrote:

"Church design today has gone beyond the mock-gothic madness of our Victorian ancestors, and we are asking the question, What is a church building for? It is a shelter for the congregation as they assemble to hear God's word, and as they meet around the Lord's table."

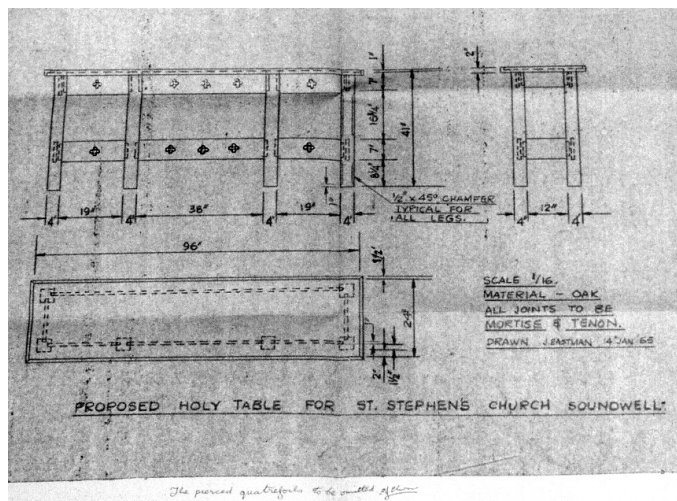
The first disciples, he explained, had met in ordinary rooms, and that around 150 AD Justin, an early Christians, had described groups of believers meeting to celebrate Holy Communion standing together around a central table. St Stephen's with its simple room-like interior was therefore far closer to the ideas of the original Church, here everyone could gather as a body rather than dividing the clergy from the congregation. "When the people gather all around, something of that feeling of the early Church can be recaptured". There were many attempts during the 1960's to put these ideas



"Simple and dignified". St. Stephen's circa 1970

into practise with Liverpool's Roman Catholic Cathedral, (consecrated in 1967) perhaps the most famous example. By August Revd Elwin was ready with his move, again the *Standard* covered the

whole story. On the 2nd and again on the 23rd he moved the Holy Table away from the east wall, out of the Sanctuary, and down into the body of the church. This he explained in his sermon was already the way with the Catholic Church, and also the Methodists. If people with such different outlooks could agree that was the best position, then it was probably the right one. Perhaps a future Church would find that here was an arrangement they could all agree upon. Generally the experiment produced an encouraging response although this practise did not become the norm. The idea of moving the Holy Table away from the East wall and taking the *Westward Position* during Communion first instigated by Jack Elwin however did continue, and remain to this day. And the Holy Table is still on certain occasions moved down into the Nave for special services.



Plans for the Holy Table drawn by J Eastman 14/1/65

his time at St Stephen's), paid for all the materials, which in those days came to £20, and the new table was ready for use on Easter Day 1966. As a matter of interest Les made the table at his place of work, had it delivered as it were in a "flat pack" to church, and then actually assembled the pieces in the North Aisle. This was not the only example of his cabinet-making skills to appear in St Stephen's. Over the years he also constructed the flower stands which fix to the pillars, a matching set of hymn boards, the Advent/Easter Candle stand, and most recently a handsome display cabinet to house our Book of Remembrance.

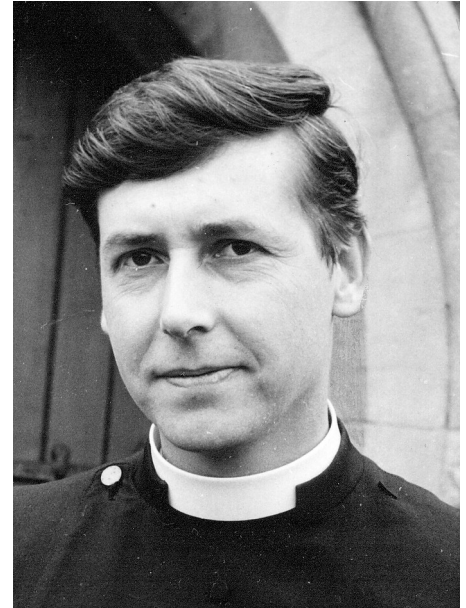
"Spiritual progress is harder to estimate, (and won't be fully assessed before the Judgement. But I think the people did advance." This was how Jack Elwin reviewed his time as Vicar of Soundwell. He introduced much that was good and new, and began the practise of holding baptisms during the main Sunday service. In October 1963 at a PCC meeting he even discussed the notion of abandoning the Baptistry altogether and using a portable font within the main body of the church. Whether or not he ever put this into practise in not recorded but the minutes show that a Mrs Webb offered the church a silver bowl for that purpose. Then there were Home Groups, Bible Studies, and of course Confirmation Preparation (with record numbers of Confirmees). During 1964 Jack began to offer guidance to all parents seeking to have their children baptised. As he explained in the *Standard*, Baptism was an outward sign that people believed in Jesus, and belonging to a Church was another. He would never turn a sincere person away, and was always ready to talk, but if anyone found such commitments too hard then he was quite prepared to offer a simple blessing instead, "without strings" just as Jesus had done when people brought their children to him.

By 1966 Jack came to the conclusion that he was not after all cut out for parish work. And now with, "three small children, the dog, and a new cat" he left Soundwell to take up a teaching post although he still continued to preach. His was a friendly parting as he handed St Stephen's over to its next Vicar, William Roy Harrison.

All these changes gave rise to further alterations in the Sanctuary. It became clear that a wooden cross dating back to the earliest days of St Stephen's, obstructed the vicar's view. Accordingly it was re-sited above the curtain pelmet on the east wall, whilst the present cross, (a memorial to Lily Palmer), dates only from 1999. All this extra attention around the Sanctuary soon revealed the old altar to be in a shabby state, "just some old table with two block-board panels screwed to it," as Les Reed recalled. The present Holy Table, originally requested by Revd Whettem, and built entirely in oak, was now constructed. Basil Britton, the Reader, (who greatly assisted Jack Elwin during

Roy Harrison, Ten Bells at Thirty-three Percent.

Roy was installed as the 8th Vicar of Soundwell on the 6th of September 1966. At his Service of Installation in time honoured fashion he first knocked on the west door, entered the church, and then rang the bell. *"It will be a good long ministry, you tolled the bell ten times,"* the Churchwarden told him. And in fact this prophecy came true, for eventually Roy would clock up not 10 – but 33 years. Still some way off old Revd Dann's 49 years, but a Soundwell record nevertheless. Roy's journey as a Priest began at Durham University where he gained first a BA and then a Diploma in Theology. From 1959-62 he served as Curate at Holy Trinity, Kingswood, and whilst there was Ordained a Deacon, and then a Priest. Next came a three years period of theological teaching in Kenya before returning to England, where after a short time as Priest-in-Charge at Great Somerford he became the Bishop's choice as Soundwell's eighth Vicar.



Revd. Roy Harrison

Roy first met with St Stephen's PCC in August 1966. At the meeting he spoke of his return from East Africa, which he portrayed as a life changing experience. A remarkably tall man, he was 32 years of age, with a head of black hair - sometimes inclined to become rather wild, and a fine melodious voice. He possessed a great fund of stories, many from his time in Africa. These he employed over the years to good effect both in the pulpit and at St Stephen's school for the children, where as Chair of the PTA he took a particular interest – whatever else happened you never got bored when Mr Harrison came to call.

The objectives of a Priest, he maintained were, *"to be true to his call and to seek and save through the work of evangelism, which respects the dignity of every individual"*. For Roy this meant that, *"no place is out of bounds and all are called to be children of God. Involvement in the political, economic, and social aspects of society is therefore vital"*. Typically he would say things like, *"I do not care much for "Religious" people", or the, "Holy Huddle", or again, "I've no time for "Exclusive" Christians with their toothpaste smiles"*. And lastly, and this goes right to the heart of his faith, *"I am no more than a beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."*

Shortly after taking up his post Roy joined the choir, an event that Les Reed has good cause to remember,

"Being a strong character Roy wanted certain hymns sung to a particular tune, but some members of the choir were opposed to this, however Roy was quite adamant and put his foot down determined to do it his way. On that Sunday the choir went on strike for the service, I couldn't because I was serving, but Roy still won the day!"

Roy Harrison was not a man to keep his head down. There might have been those who felt that a vicar should keep to his pulpit and not poke his nose into things beyond his concern. But that simply was not his way, *"Look for God's love in everyone"*, was one of his favourite themes. For Roy Christianity was not a "Sundays Only" affair – that was how he preached the Gospel, and that was how he lived his life.

In 1971 an event occurred in Soundwell, which although rather colourful, illustrated perfectly Roy's *modus operandi*. Mary Whitehouse, concerned with what she saw as the Nation's moral decay, had just launched her *Festival of Light*, a crusade against *"the moral darkness of Homosexuality, Pornography, and Abortion"*. As usual there was much pointing of fingers and beating of breasts in the National Press as papers vied with each other to unearth scandalous stories. Of course it was only a matter of time before someone discovered that not all of Soundwell's residents were living

perfect lives. Intimate details need not concern us here, for you could have discovered such things in any neighbourhood, and in any age. Indeed Revd Emlyn Jones writing in *Our Parish* almost a century before described the local population thus – “Good Christians or Fearful Sinners, magnificent friends, or terrible enemies”.

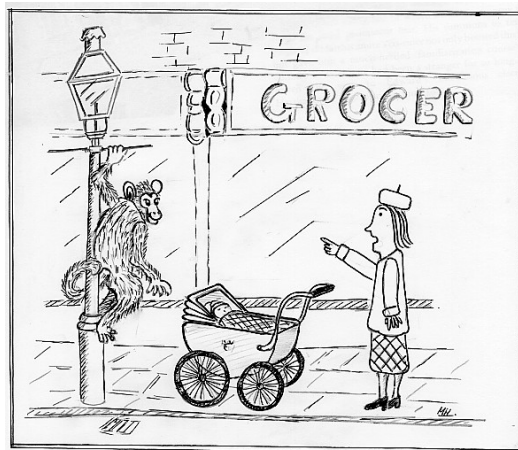
Faced with such a situation some vicars would have kept their heads down, others might have limited themselves to mouthing a few platitudes from the pulpit on Sunday. But that wasn't Roy's way, using the *Standard* he launched a blistering response and dramatically announced that, yes, it was all true, Soundwell was in fact sinking in Sin. In a piece entitled the *Secret Sins of Soundwell* he literally laid it on with a trowel listing, betting shops, under age sex, children swearing, petty theft, drug taking, and chronic alcoholism. Of course being Roy he concluded the article with a Christian message, “Sins can only be forgiven by God and his Church exists not for Saints, but Sinners! One cannot achieve goodness by one's own efforts, but only through the Grace of God and his Son Jesus Christ”.

Eventually the hubbub died down, but not before various tabloid journalists were spotted skulking in church hoping for more salacious details. However Roy being Roy he eyed those “gentleman” of the press – and simply preached on another subject!

From this one might assume that the *Standard* now functioned as a sort of “Penny Dreadful”, which would of course be totally incorrect. In the main it simply featured Parish news even if some of the pieces were somewhat bizarre. Whatever, for example lay behind this story filed in October 1970?

“Brian Brown's two year old son was recently attacked by a monkey, not in the zoo, not in a wildlife park, but in the busy shopping centre of St George. No lasting damage, but it appears there is no legal redress. Mind your neighbour doesn't buy a gorilla and let it loose in your garden. Mr Brown adds, my wife is one of the few women who has actually hung a bunch of fives on a monkey's nose.”

Of course there were still flashes of literary fireworks, and although most were unaccredited they all carried the imprint of Roy's pen. There was “Silverstone Soundwell” a complaint over the perennial problem of speeding motorists. And on a stronger note, an article entitled, “Gestapo HQ”, this turned out to be a critique of St Clement's Court, which, it claimed looked, “more like a prison block.” When the County of Avon appeared the *Standard* responded with, “Soundwell Confused” another plea over the possible loss of Parish identity – repeated in 1987 when the then Soundwell Baths became Kingswood Leisure Centre.



Attacked by a monkey!

Roy continued Jack Elwin's practise and held Baptisms during the main Morning Service, always a good plan since visiting families could mingle with regular worshipers helping them to feel themselves part of a wider Fellowship. Who could ever forget their looks of surprise and delight as the congregation burst into applause after the response, “We welcome you!” Frequently Roy chose on such occasions to base his address around the chosen name, always able it seemed to bring out the Christian message. As for his advice to Parents and Godparents he was never prescriptive, it was never the case, “now you must come regularly to church”. It was more like, “you have chosen to thank God for this child and to bring them up in the knowledge of Christ's love – it is up to you how you do this – and with God's help you will succeed.” Eventually he moved most of the Baptisms to Sunday afternoon when large numbers of families would gather for up to 12 baptisms at a time!

Roy certainly had a great flare for the dramatic – it was his idea to paint the air vents beneath the spire florescent orange! And then there was the time ... well perhaps we'd better let Les Reed tell this story,

“Roy liked to use visual aids, and on one occasion I went into the church late on Saturday night to lay up the altar for the Communion service the following morning. I entered the church via church hall and into the Vicar’s Vestry, only to be confronted by a coffin in the vestry. It gave me quite a fright, I don’t mind telling you!!! That was not all, on Sunday morning he got four of us servers to carry the coffin around the church as an aid to his sermon. The congregation was not very impressed with this!!!”

Perhaps by now it may seem that Roy was only able to create a stir – he certainly could! But on top of that he also possessed a great gift for holding the interest of children, as may be seen from the following story told by Pam Nash concerning the Infants’ End of Term Service in July 1974, which must have been especially memorable for all concerned.

“Working around the theme “God’s wonderful World” the various classes had decorated St Stephen’s with hosts of animal paintings including a purple elephant! Roy told the Bible story of Noah’s Ark and accompanied the tale with taped animal noises and storm effects, he even contrived to imitate lightning by flashing the church lights. Finally completely unannounced, but right on cue, a black and white cat walked into church, so Roy picked up the animal and lifted it into the pulpit, much to all the children’s enjoyment”.

Music has always formed an important aspect of worship in Church life at St Stephen’s. After all we have managed to wear out several organs plus a harmonium! In April 1970 the *Standard* published a vote of appreciation for Don Ball and Ivy Wilcox and their excellent rendering of Maunder’s, *Olivet to Calvary* on Passion Sunday. They also repeated the entire performance with a choir of fifty voices at Seagry church in Wiltshire. Guest performances were certainly not an unusual feature and much enjoyed, although on one occasion, as this memory of Les Reed shows, they also provided a source of unexpected humour:

“We as a choir used to put in a lot of hard work in learning and singing cantatas for Easter and Christmas, and rather than sing them just once we would get invited to perform in different churches, sometimes at Horton, Hawksbury Upton, Great Somerford and Little Somerford. (The Somerford churches were where Roy was Vicar before coming to Soundwell). We enjoyed this and used to look forward to it each year, Once we were performing at Hawksbury Upton church singing, I think it was “The Crucifixion” and Gordon Williams, (now deceased) was singing a solo and he came to the part, “There was darkness over all the land”. Suddenly all the lights went out, there was a power failure! This caused a lot of laughter.”

In 1973 Don celebrated 25years as church organist, and again the *Standard* covered this event printing his letter of thanks to all well wishers. Don marked the occasion by joining the Adult Choir for a celebratory meal at a local restaurant where there was a cake with 25 candles. Whilst the Junior Choir presented him with a music token in church one Sunday. Another musical milestone came when St Stephen’s put aside their old copies of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* for the popular *Mission Praise*, the present copies being a memorial gift of Ivy Wilcox.

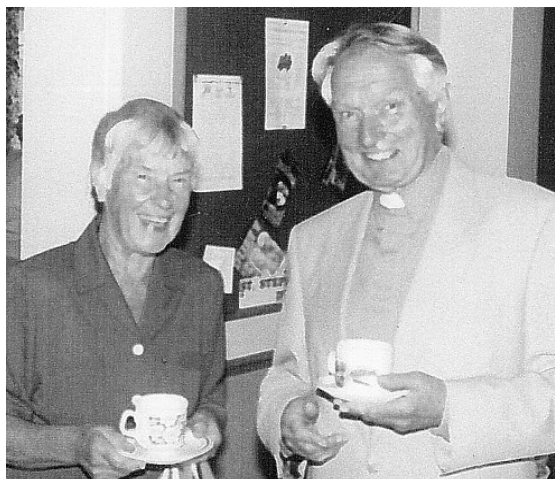
By the late 60’s Parish life had become so time consuming that Roy, who also acted as Chaplain to the British Legion was offered a curate and St Stephen’s raised the necessary funds to provide extra accommodation, a property aptly named *St Stephen’s House* in Middle Road. Stephen Eade, the first of these young men arrived in the May of 1969 and soon became known throughout the area thanks to his rusty Morris 1000 – although eventually this fell to pieces and had to be replaced! Steven had a natural talent as an artist and very soon established a Cartoon Club for local



Abstract by Stephen Eade

youngsters keen to develop their drawing skills. Although Steven sometimes produced landscapes and still life Abstract paintings were his forte. One of his favourite works described in the *Standard* consisted of “a lurid red and orange composition made chiefly from string vests and toilet-roll middles”. It comes as no surprise to discover that not everyone shared this enthusiasm for modern art. For the article continued, “I find the greatest relaxation in abstract art, and feel I can really express myself. But the other day I was told in no uncertain terms that the Abstract poster I had done for Harvest Thanksgiving was terrible!”

Stephen Eade remained at Soundwell till 1972 after which his place as curate was taken by Peter Hood who worked from 1973-76, then came Philip Dixon, and finally in Easter 1983 Tony Horne. Tony, the last of Roy’s curates came from an industrial background, having formally worked as a Manager at Berkeley Nuclear Power Station. This scientific experience could be drawn upon to great effect, and there can be few who fail to recall one particular Sunday sermon when to illustrate a



Tony and Barbara Horne

point he dipped a rag apparently stained beyond redemption into what appeared to be clear water – only to have the marks instantly vanish! Roy practically gave Tony a free hand to organise his own work schedule although he did provide special advice upon how to take funerals. Three months after he and his wife Barbara arrived in the parish Tony penned a welcoming address in the *Standard*. People had been friendly and open he wrote, time went quickly – a sure sign that ones work was enjoyable, and life was full of surprises. Did he have any regrets folk would sometimes ask him? “No”, was his reply, “for you can only have regrets if you look backwards and in the service of God you can only look forward, to Christ, the Author, and Perfecter of our Faith”.

In less than two years Tony was asked to move as Priest-in-Charge at the church of St Bartholomew St Andrews, but he and Barbara returned in retirement to St Stephen’s in 1992. The couple celebrated their Golden Wedding in the year 2000, typically they chose to make this a double celebration, holding one party for their relations and a second weekend with their “Church Family” at St Stephen’s. Tony had remained active well into his later years, his greatest pleasure coming from walking holidays in France and Spain where he followed the ancient pilgrim trails, in time clocking up over 1000 miles! Sadly in the end Tony fell ill with cancer and died in March 2000. Sadness and regret however seem out of place for a man with such faith, as it ought to be for us, all who as Christians live in the light of Christ, for us, “I am the resurrection and the Life” should never be dismissed as an empty phrase!

On Sunday 1st July 1984 St Stephen’s reached another milestone with the celebration of its 80th Anniversary. Along with the usual beating of the bounds, floats, and parade of uniformed organisations came another reason to celebrate for this was the 25th year of Roy Harrison’s Ordination. To mark the occasion Church members made a collection and presented him with a special cope. There was also a special guest at that night’s service when the preacher was Dr A L Moore, a lifelong friend of the vicar; the two shared a flat at university, with the Doctor acting as Best Man at the Harrison’s wedding.



Roy launches into "St Patrick's Breastplate" at his 25th Anniversary celebration

In later years Roy, who retired in January 1999, was made an honorary Canon of Bristol Cathedral leading to many jokes about his being “fired” by the Bishop. Although he once described St

Stephen's as, "neither particularity old, nor beautiful" nevertheless left the building in good order and repair. The blue tapestry kneelers situated in the Nave and adorned with crowns, (a symbol of St Stephen's martyrdom), were all created during his incumbency. Initially the work of Pam Nash and Ruby Harrison these were purchased as kits by the PCC as a bulk buy – 50 @ £2.50 each, and then distributed to many willing volunteer who finished them according to supplied instruction. Since then numerous donations of cross-stitch work has filled the remaining pews with a blaze of colours and designs. Pam and Ruby's nimble fingers were also responsible for the present choir surplices. Internally a new lighting scheme plus a rewiring took place, externally all the stonework was patched and renewed, whilst after the great winds of 1987, which shifted some 300 tiles, most of the roof has been replaced.

Looking back upon his time as Vicar of Soundwell Roy was moved to reflect:

"To borrow C S Lewis language I was surprised by joy after 33 years of ministry here. With my wife and three small children we did not know what to expect after theological teaching abroad and then three small country parishes. It was all very new. They say memories are made of love and that was fulfilled in my years as Parish Priest.

I shall never forget the multitude of weddings and funerals. There were many occasions of humour as well as suffering together. I recall the time when a valuable painting was stolen from a Bristol church and I had the opportunity to express my sadness to certain criminal elements within the Parish. The next day the painting was deposited at our church door. On this centenary it is incredible that you put up with me for 33% of the Parish history. One hundred years is a short span in God's sight but I wish you and the whole Parish all the very best and God's blessing in your present work, worship and witness. Yours in Christ, Revd Roy."

Reflection and Fellowship.

This has been the history of St Stephen's church, but a church is – or at least should be, far more than a mere construction of wood and stone. In fact as you must have noticed sometimes the word spelt with a small "c" and other times a capital. This is because when Christians speak of a "church" they simply refer to a building, whereas the "Church" is a body of believers who live and worship in fellowship together.

Here are a few comments from some of St Stephen's Church family:

*"When I lost my wife 7 years ago I came to St Stephen's, and as the years have gone by I have realised the Church has become to mean so much to me. I talk about my other Family, which is what my Friends and the Congregation at St Stephen's, ("My Church") ("Our Church") are to me. So many Friends I have made, such Fellowship, as you know one of them is very dear to me, I know the Lord has a lot to do with that. The warmth and Friendship has been mentioned to me by others who have joined the Congregation, who like me feel they Belong at St Stephen's". **Ken Fox***

"I joined St Stephen's Church at the age of 11 years, the first service I attended with my 2 friends was Evensong Harvest Festival 1945, the church was packed and the lovely harvest smell of fruit and veg filled the church; I have been a member ever since.

Over the years there have been many activities that all ages have enjoyed, sadly some have come and gone, but new things take their place, so the Lord's work continues to grow with the love and commitment.

The early part of our marriage, Derek being in the Navy, we lived away and worshipped at different churches in other parts of the country, but it was always special coming home to St Stephen's, it always had a special place in my heart.

There are lots of lovely people at St Stephen's and over the years a lot of lovely people have passed through and some have made a lasting impression on my life and helped me to know and love the Lord Jesus more.

St Stephen's for me has always been full of Love, Praise, Worship, and Fellowship, together with lots of fun and laughter rolled in. And I pray that the warmth and light of the Holy Spirit will continue to work and spread the Love of Our Lord Jesus in Soundwell for many years to come". **Gwen Beek**

OUR FELLOWSHIP

A meeting of good friends and true,
A Fellowship so rare
Where hearts are strong and happy, too
As we gather and prepare
To sing a hymn – burst forth in song
And then a simple prayer
For those of us who can join in
And for those who are not there,
Those days of meetings will remain
With us, though we may part
They'll stay within our memory
With this message from the heart –
"LET THERE BE LOVE"

Doris Cowie

"How fortunate we are at St Stephen's! On entering the West Door we are welcomed by two friendly faces and on walking in, the warmth all around us. There is Alan ringing the bell on our left with a smile and Lin playing a beautiful piece of music so softly. The friendly faces, the beautiful flowers lovingly arranged. The fellowship is all around as we take our seats sharing a low word with a companion, making a mental note if a particular person is not there.

The cordial feeling between us all are, I am sure, appreciated by many, enjoyed by all and. sundry In the church hall after the service, friendships are renewed, news given out over a cup of tea and sometimes serious discussions ensue. But there are mainly smiles and much laughter too. Nearly all leave with a warm feeling like a cosy cloak wrapped around us, glad that we have been in touch with close friends again, also mindful of our Lord's request to "Love one Another".

The service has uplifted us and if we have been lucky enough to have been the recipient of a "Nancy hug" then we are doubly blessed during the "Peace of the Lord" time.

Here at St Stephen's we have companionship, sociability and friendship. Sometimes we hear sad news as well as pleasant news, but we share and care and hopefully leave, having lightened the load of someone who is going through a "valley" experience.

My dictionary definition says fellowship is affability, association, brotherhood (lovely word that one) communion (another lovely one) companionship, kindness, sociability.

All these things are to be found at St Stephen's and we are fortunate participants in the warm glow we feel when we come into the Lord's presence and experience the fellowship enjoyed by all".

Jackie Sheppard

"I joined St Stephen's wet behind the ears and liturgically challenged in 2001 fresh out of Trinity College ready to start my Curacy. Everybody was very patient with me... for many months... despite me making quite a few mistakes! I had not been an Anglican for many years and so my experience at St

Stephen's was a real learning curve. I have to say though that people were very generous and laughed at me and with me whilst I wrangled with a different way of being Church, (for me that is). As the treasurer said to me recently I make him smile because I always admit when I've made a mistake.

After settling in things began to flow nicely and regular weekly worship became a joy to attend because I didn't have to think about the technicalities quite so much. This meant I was able to broaden my horizons a bit to see where I could best serve during my short stay here. So I began working to develop the Alpha course, the Baptism Preparation Course, and the "See and Know" mother and toddlers group. What excited me most was witnessing people flourish in their faith and service to God and his people in this parish. I have seen people become Christians through the patience and honesty of others, experienced people taking their time to developing those less confident, people who have never attempted something have a go, people who thought they'd like to "have a go" and do it really well. As a result, I feel privileged to have been involved in this little portion of St Stephen's history. It was like watching a flower begin to open and I hope it carries on opening and shedding seeds of God's light and love all around the parish.

My second year here took quite a different turn and not one I had anticipated. Several factors had contributed to a complete shift in my thinking; not least the CMS Lent course on Sudanese Christianity. I had been considering my future and found that God was pointing my compass needle towards Africa which was quite a surprise for me. After following things through, CMS accepted me and my husband Richard as Mission Partners to work in Northern Uganda to train Sudanese ministers. The support and encouragement at St Stephen's quite overwhelmed me. Self-effacing generosity, keen interest, and sadness at losing me characterise what I encountered, which I found humbling, encouraging and difficult to handle (in the best sense) all at the same time.

I have only been here two and a half years, but I have enjoyed the whole experience. I am so pleased that the Church wishes me to keep in contact with me as link partners through CMS, and hope I can keep them well informed about what God has for me to do in Sudan (bearing in mind the poor infrastructure there and communication difficulties).

I am very hopeful for the future of St Stephen's, and I look forward to hearing about how the Lord has blessed his work in this parish. Happy, warm, and welcoming would be how I would describe the Church. I hope that when I come back in a few years time for a visit that old faces will be there to greet me and many new ones that I don't recognise will be very much part of life of the Church".

Revd Carol Drury



Revd. Ian Wills

Reverend Ian Wills, 1999 -?

I was collated and installed as Vicar of St Stephen's on 21st July 1999, so I have not been around for very long. Yet in that time I have come to know and love the people of this Church

Sadly some are no longer with us, but we remember them fondly:

Tony Horne, loved by so many people and who was such a support and encouragement to me in my first year here; Ruth Ashley, who would make her way alone and in the dark to choir

practise because she loved to sing in our choir, and whose reading voice was so strong whenever she was asked to read the lesson; Don O'Donoghue, a genuine War hero, who loved to tell jokes with Bill Brookshaw, and who would have wonderfully informal parties with fish and chips for supper in his flat on Soundwell Road (after his funeral, and on his own instructions his family and friends met to toast him while we were serenaded by a jazz band!); Dick Gray, who talked so humbly about his faith and was so faithful and regular at Evensong until too ill to get there; Elaine Brockelbank, who was only with us for a short time, but who's strong yet unassuming faith touched

many of us; and Betty Randall who, with Charlie, thought of us all as the “Church family” and loved to sing in the choir and to join in the dances, dinners and trips away that Arthur Sheppard organises. These are a few that I remember, but you will remember so many others.

And there are those of you who are still around...

There are Derek and Gwen Beek who, together with Tony Dolman, made my first months easier by their commitment and support; Mike Faulkner our faithful Verger at baptisms, weddings, and funerals; Tony and Ollie Phipps who have been our Sacristans throughout my time here; and Geoff Harris and Jan Brookshaw our present Churchwardens who do so much behind the scenes as well as daring to give the notices at Sunday services these days!

We love to hear Lin Cooper using her remarkable musical gifts to express her faith. I think also of the happy crowds who gather for coffee some Wednesday mornings. I think of the big “Alpha Course” so many of us shared in (about 55-60 of us) back in 2000 and the deepening of faith that led to for many. I think of the fetes, fayres and other events we share together; watching David Perry having his legs waxed to fund raise for Emmaus Bristol, and hearing the choir singing sponsored hymns and carols to raise funds for our projects.

There are the dances and dinners organised by Arthur Sheppard, and can anyone who was present ever forget the “Vicar of Dibley” sketch performed by Liz Perry and Carol Drury last December? Will I ever forget Graham Lewis produce the biggest water pistol any of us had ever seen during a sermon at a parade sermon a few years ago? Then there are the happy scenes Leslie Willcox presides over so well every Christmas Eve at our Children’s’ Society Christingle Service. Helen and I remember joining Sylvia Pride, Barbara Horne and the ladies of Women’s Fellowship for their Christmas lunch in 2000 at the Star (now the Turnpike) on the day the chef walked out and Sylvia had to help serve our meals?

A rich kaleidoscope of memories of many lovely people, past and present, all of who have contributed to making St. Stephen’s the happy church it is today.

We are a happy Church, and we are an active Church. Since our first Stewardship Review Day back in February 2000 we have achieved much together.

We have introduced a team of Welcomers on Sunday mornings at the 10.30am service; introduced Baptism preparation sessions for enquiring families led by Jenny Bishop and her team; provided pew Bibles in church many of which are dedicated to the memory of loved ones; hung banners in church (thanks again to Jackie Sheppard); established a team of bereavement visitors led by Edna Morse, Rosemary Boulton and Barbara Horne; established a twice yearly Memorial Service for bereaved families; and established the “Alpha Course” (currently led by Sue Clements) as part of our mission. The PCC has now re-established the practise of giving 10% of our church income to Christian missions.

Our Baptism preparation work is now encouraging many young families to join “See and Know” (led by Sue Humphrey), and some are now attending their first “Alpha” course. As a result of this, our Sunday morning S-Club/Church in the Hall (which itself is led by Leslie Willcox Liz Perry, Sandy Cooper and their teams) is attracting more children and young families. All these things are signs of a healthy Church.

We have also extended the ministry of women at St. Stephen’s especially through the two and a half years Carol Drury was with us. Carol led the establishment of our Baptism preparation, “See and Know” and, for a time our “Alpha” courses. We are now supporting Richard and Carol as they serve God with the Church Mission Society in northern Uganda and Sudan.

Our most experienced Readers, Leslie Willcox and Graham Lewis, have in the past three years, been joined by Jenny Wiltshire, Liz Perry and Sandy Cooper. Together they make a strong team for the future ministry of our Church.

Much of the documentation from previous generations relates to care of our building, and this continues. Since 1999 we have re-laid the floor blocks in much of the church because they had been loose for years; renovated the west window; replaced the failing heating system and boiler; installed a sound system to help the hard of hearing, and installed double glazing right along the side of the Hall. We have also introduced the Advent/Easter Candle stand and the Memorial Book in its case at the back of the church (as has already been noted, thanks to Les Reed and his craftsmanship).

A church is an evolving, “living” place, because the faith of its people is a living faith. We are seeking to be good stewards of the church building in our generation just as others were in theirs. So we arrive at this centenary year with our buildings in good repair and with plans to develop and equip them to serve our community for the next one hundred years.

Then there is “Margins of Eternity”, the Rock Communion I have written and developed with the help of another whole team of people here. “Margins” has now been shared with hundreds of people here and in other churches in this Diocese and beyond. The next time we share it at St. Stephen’s will be with the Bishop of Bristol the Rt. Revd. Mike Hill, presiding during our Centenary Celebrations in July. It is a joy to see people of all ages enjoy themselves so much in their worship of God.

At a time when the national trend is of falling church attendance, we are seeing a slow but steady rise in our 10.30am Sunday congregation here at St. Stephen’s, and new people are coming to faith. We have much for which to give thanks.

A new and wonderful development for the future is the appointment of a stipendiary Curate from June 2004 to train in ordained ministry. This is a very special affirmation of our Church life and the training and support we gave to Carol Drury. The Diocese trusts us with the training of a new Curate. That is something very special to celebrate in our Centenary year.



Finally we have a clear vision for the future: “Open Hearts and Open Doors”. There are challenges for us in that vision. The details of what it means in our life and Christian service is still developing, and I hope each of you takes the opportunity to play a part in this.

As you can see there are so many people and so many memories in just four and a half years. What will the future hold? We cannot be sure, but one thing we can know is that if we stay close to the risen Lord as every previous generation has, we will find that He is faithful in every way. That is what St. Stephen’s church represents in this community – the faithfulness of God and the worship of God’s people – and that WILL always stand the test of time.

The rest, and perhaps the best, is yet to come...

Ian Wills February 2004