

History of the Parish of St. Nicholas, Newport.

Newport

The ancient suburb of Newport was just outside the old city walls, and was approached through the North Gate of the Roman city, now commonly called Newport Arch. It is thought that Newport, as an area, began life after a large number of people had become homeless as a result of the building of the castle and the cathedral, which was consecrated in 1092. Newport had its own market and the first St. Nicholas Church probably dates from that time.



The Ancient Parishes of St. Nicholas and St. John Baptist.

The two churches of St. Nicholas and St. John Baptist date from the 12th century, being granted by King Henry 1 (1100 - 1135) to Bloet, Bishop of Lincoln. The church of St. Nicholas stood in Sastan's (or Saxtan's) Gate at the present corner of Newport and Church Lane. St. Nicholas was very popular in the Middle Ages, being the patron saint of merchants (and of very many other groups, including sailors, travellers, children and prisoners. It is said that he was the patron saint of more causes than any other saint!). The position of the church of St. Nicholas just outside the city walls was, therefore, most appropriate, as merchants, and others, could stop there to pray and ask for protection from their special saint before facing the dangers of the countryside beyond. This church was rebuilt in approximately 1280.

The church of St. John Baptist stood about half a kilometre (approximately a third of a mile) from the North Gate, near to the site of the present day Bishop Grosseteste University, and survived until 1545 when it had to be demolished because of general decay. St. Nicholas continued as a place of worship, but in 1602 the chancel was in a state of decay owing to the neglect of the patrons (the Dean and Chapter). In 1643 St. Nicholas, and also the church of St. Peter-in-Eastgate, were destroyed to prevent Royalists using the buildings as cover, and it is possible that the stones from the buildings were used to help fortify the city walls. Thus, from 1643, these two ancient parishes had no place available for public worship. The spiritual needs of the parishioners were entrusted to local clergy and the benefice of St. Nicholas was preserved by the preaching of an annual sermon in the churchyard. As the years passed parish business was carried out in the local public house "The Turk's Head".

The Growth of Newport.

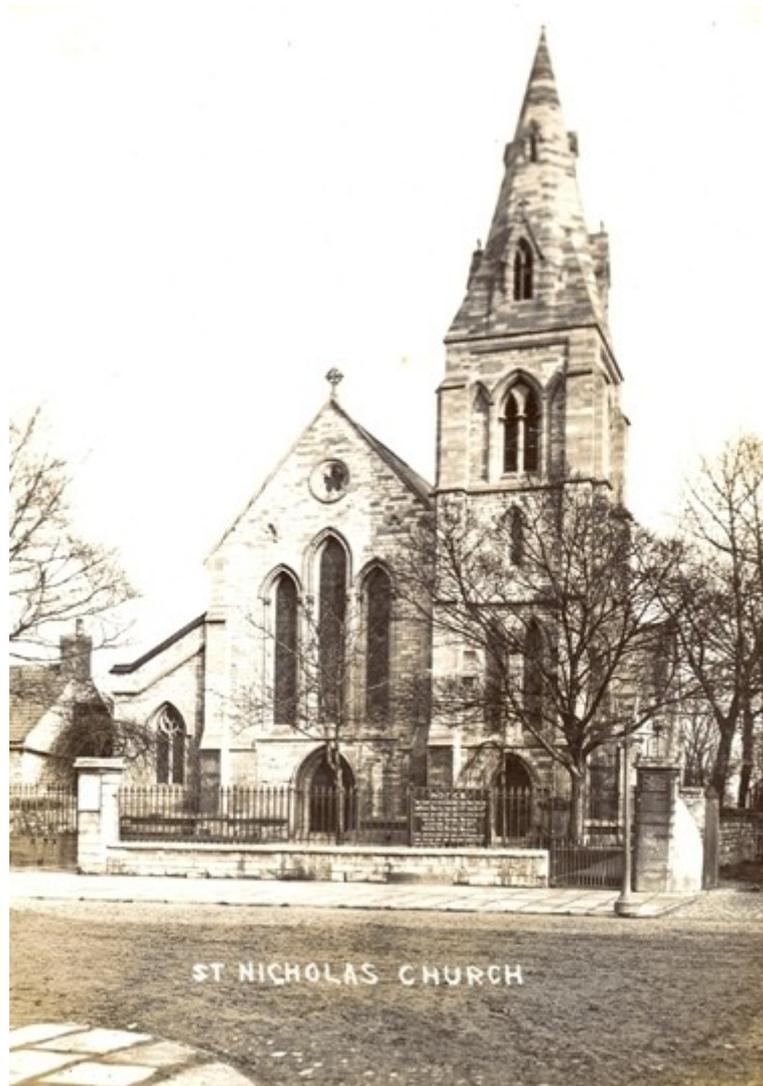
Over the years Newport continued to grow in size and, by the 1830's, covered quite a large area. This increase in size had also brought with it a great many social problems. In 1822 a local architect and antiquary, Edward James Willson, had written to Subdean Bayley with the following observations: "Newport it seems to me is in more need of civilisation than any other part of the City. There is no church, no person of the least influence, no checking of the grossest rudeness and insubordination".

The Lincolnshire Advertiser wrote in 1835 about the need to provide churches within reasonable distances of centres of population. The article went on: "We are led to these remarks from the great increase of the City of Lincoln without Newport Gate, forming as it does a town to itself while there is not a church within a considerable distance to which the population may repair on the Sabbath. The natural consequences of this is that the inhabitants generally are either complete heathens or violent sectarian bigots. We do most sincerely trust that some steps will be taken to remedy this crying evil".

Some steps were indeed taken and, in 1838, after much discussion, it was decided to erect a new church upon a site offered by the Rev'd. J. Wilson, which was more or less in the centre of the "town" of Newport. The architect was Mr. (later Sir) George Gilbert Scott, who, previous to this, had gained a reputation for building workhouses. He won a competition to design the new St. Nicholas. The foundation stone was laid in April 1839, and the building was consecrated on 24th November, 1840 by Bishop John Kay.

The New St. Nicholas Church

1840 - 1901



The new St. Nicholas Church consisted of a nave, with a south aisle and a tower with spire. There was no proper chancel, no stained glass windows, no statues and little adornment. But, to the population of Newport, it was their new church, and the "Chronicle" reported that "the church was greatly admired by the multitude". The Communion Plate used on the occasion of the Consecration was a magnificent gift from the then Sub-Dean, Thomas Manners Sutton. An article in the "Chronicle" of 4th December 1840 said: "The Communion Plate is of solid silver, beautifully chaste in design and ornaments, and sized to the use of a large parish church. The elegant and expensive Altar Cloth, with a rich cushion, hangings of the pulpit and reading desk were presented by the already great benefactor, the Rev'd H.W. Sibthorpe of Washingborough". The silver of 1840 remains our pride and joy today.

Various changes were to take place during the first fifty years. The pews were renovated and the pulpit moved to a more commanding position. The old harmonium was replaced by an organ in 1868, built by the local firm of Nicholson of 21 Newport, at a cost of £217 19s 0d, (two hundred and seventeen pounds and nineteen shillings). The organ was purchased with the help of subscriptions and personal donations, including one of 2/6d, (two shillings and six pence - twelve and a half pence today), from a widow, who said that she found enjoyment from this valuable enrichment to the worship in the parish church.

In 1879 a Faculty was granted for a large number of changes, but, sadly, many had to be postponed because of financial difficulties, including a new north aisle. However, a three light stained glass window was installed at the east end depicting the Crucifixion at a cost of £260, the money being raised by subscriptions and guarantees.

On Easter Monday 1879 the death occurred of William Cooke Norton of the Manor House, Newport. He had lived in the parish for thirty years and had been a churchwarden at St. Nicholas for twenty-five of those years. In his will he left a sum of money to the church, which enabled other improvements to be made. In 1880 a further three light stained glass window was added in the south aisle at a cost of £160. A new reredos was placed in the chancel in 1882 as a gift from the family of William Cooke Norton, and was intended to be a memorial to him. This cost £140. Also in 1882 the Working Men's Committee presented a gift of a new lectern. The two light east window in the South Chapel, depicting St. Peter and St. Paul, is dedicated to the memory of George Wileman who died on 25th March 1889, aged fifty-nine. A gallery had been erected in 1841, but, by 1891, it was declared unfit to be used by adults or by children, on sanitary and other grounds, and was taken down. It had not been used for some time, and the children had been transferred to the Church of St. Matthias, at the junction of Yarborough Road and Burton Road, the newly built Chapel-of-Ease erected in 1890-1. The vicar throughout most of this period was Canon Frederick Blenkin (1861 - 1901), and a memorial brass plate to his memory is fixed to the north wall near to where the pulpit stood in his day. The inscription on the plate includes that fact that he "preached so eloquently during his long ministry of 40 years".

Charles Hodgson Fowler

1908 - 1910

Considerable changes were to be made during the twentieth century, which would transform the Gilbert Scott church and give it the appearance that we see today. The architect chosen was Mr. Charles Hodgson Fowler of Durham, and the cost was estimated at £3000. The church was to be

considerably enlarged and extended at the east end. The east wall was to be taken down and rebuilt to make a much larger chancel. The faculty for the alterations specified that each dressed stone was to be numbered to help in the erection of the new east wall. A new side chapel at the end of the south aisle was to be made, and on the north side there was to be a new organ chamber and new clergy and choir vestries. The long awaited north aisle was to be built, and the font moved from the west end of the nave to the west end of the north aisle.

A daunting task lay ahead. Amid all of the alterations allowance had to be made for the continuation of public worship. Most of the internal fittings were to be carefully removed for reuse in the new building, with special attention being given to the stained glass windows, in particular the large east window. In April 1909 the "Chronicle" reported that St. Nicholas would have to be closed for public worship as the building work had now reached a critical stage. Finally, in 1910, the alterations were completed, and, on 10th March 1910 a crowded congregation assembled to witness the Consecration of the transformed St. Nicholas. The service was conducted by Bishop Charles Corfe, the first Bishop of Korea, who officiated in the absence of the Bishop of Lincoln, Dr. Edward King who, sadly, had died two days earlier. The Church of the 1840's had been enlarged on an extensive scale and "it had become the building which we still cherish today" wrote Henry Wilson in his history of St. Nicholas in 1987.

1910 and Onwards...

Significant changes to the fabric have taken place since 1910. In 1923 oak panelling was placed in the Peter and Paul Chapel in memory of the 139 men of the parish who fell in the First World War. In 1926 a two light stained glass window was placed in the south wall in memory of the Rev'd Edward Tucker Leake who had been the vicar of St. Nicholas for seventeen years. A new altar rail was added to the Peter and Paul Chapel in 1930 "In loving memory of Fanny Latham", followed by the placing of an aumbry for the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in the south wall in 1931. These changes took place during the incumbency of the Rev'd Patrick Clay, who is commemorated by the six teak wood candlesticks above the High Altar. A Book of Remembrance containing the names of 27 men who lost their lives in the Second World War was placed in the Peter and Paul Chapel. Other work carried out during this century include alterations to the roof of the Nave and several major restorations of the tower and spire, and, in the 1980's, of the exterior stonework. The New Vestries, together with toilets and a small kitchen were added in 1985.

The remainder of the twentieth century proved to be a very busy time for St. Nicholas. To celebrate the 150th Anniversary the church was completely decorated, with new carpeting being laid and a new lighting system installed. Various artefacts and gifts were introduced including Stations of the Cross, a Book of Remembrance, new oak doors for the West Entrance, and changes were made

both in the Peter and Paul Chapel and the Military Chapel in the North Aisle. A flagstaff was erected outside and a Garden of Remembrance was dedicated on the south-east side and so began the burial of ashes in that area.

Between 1989 and 1999 no less than eight stained glass windows were introduced; five along the north wall, one at the Baptistry, one in the West Window and finally one in the south wall next to the spire door. In each case glass had come from redundant or demolished churches and each was donated by parishioners.

In 1998 the whole of the Church was re-roofed at a cost of £61,000 and a £51,000 project was begun to refurbish the organ. This was completed just after Easter 1999.