

The notes that follow are copied from "Christ Church Wakefield, 1876 to 1926", a handwritten book by Mr Samuel Baines, a member of the Christ Church congregation and at some time Church Warden, on the occasion of the Church Jubilee, April 19th 1926. It is with help from this book, together with Clayton family photographs, bound copies of the Parish Magazines from 1891 to 1940 and my own memories and photographs of my attendance at Christ Church and both Church schools, that I have been able to write my own history.

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(nee Man)*

Before going into details at present let us try to imagine what this district would be like before the conception of the idea was formed to erect Christ Church.

This district is shown on the Ordnance Map and is described as the "softs" of the town, why? -

History shows that before the river Calder was made navigable, over the whole of this district the river spread out into a great marsh full of reeds, it was not only covered with water, but was very swampy, according to the rise of the water by floods.

When the river first became navigable in 1698, it was from Hull to Wakefield, by Selby and it finished its navigable course near the Chantry on the Bridge at what we now know as "Navigation Yard".

Later, in 1760 it was decided to make the river navigable to Salterhebble, at this time Wakefield became the centre of the grain distributing district for all the manufacturing towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Grain arriving at Wakefield had to be transhipped from the lower side of the dam to the upper side by means of carts and other conveyances, thus it can be readily seen that the lower end of the town or "softs" as it is called, became a veritable hive of industry because its wharves commenced at the low end of Thornes Lane and continued for nearly a mile up the river, its granaries and warehouses are all that is now left to us as memories. These wharves demanded a great amount of rough labour, which at that time settled in this district.

Lest we forget, let us give a great amount of credit to our friends the "Bethel" who before our time had taken in hand the religious spirit in this locality, for we find as far back as 1853 the Bethel people struggled on single handed as it were in their endeavour to lift up the spirit of the people in this particular district. At first they held services in a boat on the river; this boat they called the Bethel, this continued for some years, but later the boat began to leak and pumping operations had to be continued during the services. When the people got to know of this they declined to go on the boat again. The services were afterwards held in a hay loft near their present Sunday School which was built for them by the late J.W. Harrison esq. who was the first Mayor of Wakefield; this continued until the present Chapel was built in 1869.

One can now see how the conception was formed and that a Church should be built in this district.

In 1873, round about the time the building of Christ church was being considered, the death took place of the Rev William Hodgson of Cheltenham, the owner of considerable property in Wakefield. The greater part of this property was inherited by Mrs Disney Robinson of Torquay, daughter of the late Rev Richard Hodgson of South Villa, Wakefield and widow of the late Rev Disney Robinson, Vicar of Woolley. This lady has devoted a large portion of her fortune towards defraying the expenses of a complete Church organisation which is now to be provided in Thornes Lane. Mrs Disney Robinson proposed to build and endow a Church and Parsonage house and Mission Hall on condition that the committee provide the means for securing the remainder of the buildings. This noble gift was to the value of £8,500.

On October 20th an 'Order in Council' was published in the Church Gazette making a separate district parish of Christ Church Wakefield, under Acts 3 and 4 Victoria, chapt. 113-6-7, Victoria, chapt. 37-19-20 and Victoria chapt. 104. The parish was then formed and considered satisfactory to the other parishes concerned, one slice out of Holy Trinity parish, a slice out of St James' Thornes and a slice from the then parish of All Saints, the boundaries of the new parish to be as follows:-

Ings Beck from Denby Dale Road to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway then into the middle of Ings Road, into Kirkgate, across the bridge of the river Calder on the East side as far as the mill, then it follows the river Southwards to the Great North Railway iron bridge, then to the Great Midland Railway viaducts, into the Pitfields, whence it turns almost at right angles into Denby Dale Road and includes the houses Nos. 1 to 37 then again as far as the beck. The parish should always be designated CHRIST CHURCH WAKEFIELD and not Christ Church Thornes.

The above information was copied from a hand written book I have in my possession entitled "An Historical Sketch of Christ Church Wakefield" (1876 to the Half Century Celebrations 1926) by Samuel Baines, Park Royd, Denby Dale Road.

Dorothy Clayton