

Holy Cross Church of England Primary School First Anniversary Celebration, 9th May, 2010

I was very pleased to be invited to come to Oldham Parish Church on Sunday 9th May 2010 to preach at a special service to mark the end of the first year of the Holy Cross Church of England Primary School, one year after following the amalgamation of St. Stephen's Infant School and The Parish Church Junior School.

Marion and I decided to come to Oldham on the Thursday before the service because it was obviously important to meet some of the staff and pupils in advance. We were warmly welcomed and royally treated by Marlene and Alan Armitage at their home in Broadway. The Armitages were our guides, chauffeurs, advisors and chefs. They were brilliant! We also kept up to date on the Election 2010 by watching their television!

Our stay almost met with a mini-disaster! I discovered on unpacking that my plastic clerical collar had been left at home. Marion was swiftly to the rescue. She cut up a piece of old washing-up liquid into the correct size and shape, and nobody noticed the difference!

The Holy Cross School was very interesting to visit. Clearly, there is a need for a new building, a 21st century building to house the school and provide the basis for a modern education. However, despite the draw-backs of the old buildings, I was able to see clearly how well the school provides for the pupils. The displays were stunning and relevant to the children. The assembly I attended was full of interesting things and very accessible to the children in the Infant Department. The staff were lively, on the ball and aware of modern ideas for the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. In the class rooms, the pupils answered my questions with such an alert and aware response. I was very impressed by the commitment and skills on show, from staff and children alike.

I was very pleased to meet Father Derek as well as some old friends from my time as Curate, from 1974-1977 on the Saturday coffee morning. For my sermon, I decided to talk about the "Invention" of the Holy Cross, the traditional story of how Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, went to Jerusalem and Bethlehem to try and find the original sites and artefacts associated with the life of Jesus. In the



legend, she eventually found what she believed to be the true cross on which Jesus died, the nails and the crown of thorns. The day on which she found these things is called in the calendar the "Invention" of the Holy Cross, or the finding of the Holy Cross. The Latin word at the root of our word "Invention" means to find, to discover something which was there and waiting to be found. I tried to get across the idea that just as people over the centuries has sailed to discover our world and how in the future, they may well sail off our planet to discover other parts of the universe, so in every school class room, pupils of all ages are engaged in discovery. They are discovering the universe through books, DVDs, the internet.

They are discovering the power of music and art. They are discovering the power of communication, of science and ideas. But perhaps most importantly, they are discovering themselves, the strengths and weaknesses, the way in which emotions shape our performance and relationships, and how to understand all these things and make them work for the best possible outcome for everyone.

In my view, every class room is a vessel of discovery and the role of the school staff in the lives of children is so important that we need to acknowledge this from time to time and express our gratitude for all that happens in our schools, all around the country as the children are guided and supported in their voyages of discovery. I was very impressed by Holy Cross School. The singing of the choir and the excellent attendance of parents on that Sunday morning are signs of confidence and growth. I hope to visit it again and see the progress being made, day by day, child by child. May God bless the work of this school.

Sunday, 9th May, 2010

Sermon at Oldham Parish Church



Newly refurbished in 1977

The Invention of the Holy Cross is observed on 3rd May and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on 14th September. In Greenford, we always observe 14th September, or the nearest Sunday, as our Feast of Title. We have a party on the Saturday night and invite a special preacher to entertain us on the Sunday morning. So it is something of a pleasure to be in Oldham as your special preacher as you celebrate Holy Cross.

I like the idea of the **Invention** of the Holy Cross. The word **Invention** means finding or discovery. It reminds us all that inventors are in fact, not creating, but finding, adding two and two together to make four. The two and two were already there, waiting to be discovered. Well done to those who make four, but they didn't create them, they just discovered them. The difference is very important.

The problems with humanity are many, but one of them is pride, hubris, a feeling that we are so great that we tend to forget the reality of life. The reality is that we are not self-made people who worship our creator, but creatures of a just and merciful God. Our task as human beings is to live together with each other and on our planet so that all may flourish. Jesus himself said this when he spoke the words: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10: 10) Abundant life is what Christians want for all people, wherever they live and whatever they are like, and whatever religion they profess. It is a great vocation.



What a shocker! Me in August, 1974

Those were the days!

Canon Harold Kirkman, himself a former distinguished Vicar of Oldham, was the Rural Dean, James Bentley was the extraordinary current Vicar of Oldham, Christopher Heber-Percy was at St. Andrew's and Charlie Shaw was in his hey-day at Holy Trinity, Waterhead, by then aged only 64, with many years to go!

Into this great situation, I arrived in 1974 and I flourished. Well, flourished enough to be posted to Holts Estate! After 3 years with James Bentley I was appointed to St. Hugh, Holts, where to be honest, I didn't really shine. In 1982 I applied for and got the post in Greenford, where I have been ever since, now in my 28th year.

I still feel at home in Oldham. My mother was born in Shaw and my great grandfather, Thomas Vickers, was Landlord of the Morning Star in Grains Road. His name used to be on the wall of the pub, just as mine is on the wall of my church. Nice, eh?



c.1980



4th June, 1977

Between 1977 and 1982, I was the Curate-in-Sole-Charge of the Conventional District of St. Hugh, Holts. This is a photograph of one of our Whitsunday processions. We don't have these in London, sadly! Can you see my tongue-in-cheek?

Here are Neil, Marion, Toby and Ben in 1975 at 157, St. Stephen's House, the accommodation provided then for the curate of the Parish Church. It was on the fourth floor of a housing stack on the Shaw Road Estate and rented by the PCC from the Council. The flats were nice enough inside.

My successor as curate refused to live in it and bought a house in smart road some distance from the church!

You can just see St. Stephen's Church through the window. The Shaw Road Estate was destroyed in due course as the Council tried to improve the quality of its provision. Blocks of flats were always going to be a poor alternative to proper houses.



It was great returning to Oldham Parish Church as a guest, but nothing quite equals the experience of being at Holy Cross Greenford, does it? Every Sunday is a special