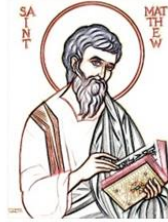


St Matthew's

ASHFORD



History of the Parish

The first mention of a place of worship in Ashford is given in a record in the reign of King Edward I, dated 1293, granting a dispensation of taxes during the time of the Crusades. This ancient chapel, dedicated to Saint Michael, had a south door of Saxon architecture with zig-zag mouldings. The location of the chapel was some 50 yards in a direct line from the east window of the present church. The famous antiquary, Reverend Daniel Lysons, visited St. Michael's chapel shortly before its demolition in the last decade of the 18th century. He mentions in his *Parishes of Middlesex* that there is a tomb in the chapel's chancel to Peter Storer of the Inner Temple, who died in 1750. A plaque over his grave in the present churchyard indicates the precise position of the sanctuary.

In the centuries following the Norman Conquest, the little village of Exeforde was ceded to the Collegiate Church of St. Peter at Westminster (Westminster Abbey), until the Dissolution of the Monasteries c. 1539. In the Domesday Book (1086): "Exeforde is in the Spelthorne Hundred and hath 1 hide (124 acres) value being for fourteen shillings and is held by the Count of Mortain. The jurisdiction lay in Staines".

From Saxon times until the middle of the 19th century St. Michael's Chapel was a 'daughter church' - along with Laleham - of the Parish Church of Saint Mary's, Staines. Served by curates sent by the Vicar of Staines, these clerics were "removable at pleasure"!

By the end of the 18th century the population of Ashford had risen to about 400 and the chapel became too small for the needs of the parish. In 1795 a report stated that the structure was "in a ruinous state". One William Walker of Chertsey made a survey, reporting that it would cost £1,000 to take down and rebuild the old chapel. A committee met at The King's Head public house in July 1796 and appointed James Pope, Master Bricklayer of Feltham to commence work. Ashfordians were as generous in those days as they are now, and twelve parishioners readily agreed to bear the cost. A new chapel was built of plain brick with a small steeple. It lasted only sixty years, in sharp contrast to the 700 years of its predecessor.

The coming of the London and South Western Railway to Ashford Halt in 1848 led to further growth in population; During the Bishop's Visitation in 1850 he was informed that there were only 32 'free' seats for the Poor, and as a consequence "many are being driven into Dissent". The report led to the building of a new church. William Butterfield, an architect of considerable fame, was appointed, and the foundation stone was laid by Colonel J.S. Brownrigg on 11th July 1857. The Governors of the Welsh Charity School for Boys and Girls (latterly St. James' Senior School for Boys) generously offered to pay a quarter of the total cost of some £4,300. A 'Faith Hope and Charity' window for the East End of the new church became available by

courtesy of St. Mary Magdalene's, Littleton, and a number of memorials from the old chapel were re-erected in the Lady Chapel. On a pillar at the south-west corner is a fine brass with portraits of a family who knew the village in Tudor times. They are Edward Goode and his wife Agnes, shown standing on a grassy mound, he with bobbed hairstyle and wide sleeves to his fur-trimmed gown, she with 16th century head-dress, fur-trimmed cuffs, and a girdle hanging to her feet. Their children are in groups below.

When the Church of St. Matthew was consecrated on 26th June 1858, over 90% of the total cost had already been raised, thanks to the generosity of the Welsh School, whose low pews in the South Aisle "given in perpetuity for use by the pupils" can still be seen.

It is a complete mystery as to why the dedication was changed from St. Michael to St. Matthew. One view is that the Church Commissioners felt that the new church should have an Apostolic dedication, as only six churches in the Archdeaconry of Middlesex had the name of one of the Apostles. Another is that it was a slip of the tongue, but once consecrated, it could not be changed back! Anyway, St. Matthew's was completed in 1865, and the Parish was finally separated from Staines. It was made a 'perpetual Curacy', a benefice in the gift of the Lord Chancellor. The Reverend G.W. Seppings, who had just succeeded the Reverend D.S. Govett as Curate, was appointed the first Vicar. The Reverend F.R. Dickenson succeeded Mr. Seppings as Vicar in 1873. It was then agreed that a vicarage be built for £1,923 on a site opposite the Church, generously given by Mrs. Miller of Ashford House.

By this time the population had risen to 1,019, and this growth was further increased by the coming of The West London District School in 1872 in District Road (now Woodthorpe Road). At the turn of the 20th century the Vaughan and Rowland Hill Almshouses in Feltham Hill Road were established here. The Convent of the Good Shepherd was built on a large site now occupied by Convent Road. It was an enclosed Order of Nuns, caring for 'inebriated' women.

The Church was renovated in 1895, and extra land for the extension of the churchyard, thanks to the gift of the Clifford family of The Clock House. A number of important events in the life of the parish occurred during the incumbency of Dr. Alfred Thornton (1900-1923). A new organ was installed in 1902; in 1906 a Mission Church was opened in Napier Road, Ashford Common; a Church Hall in Stanwell Road was opened two years later; and in 1912 a daughter Church, dedicated to St. Hilda, had its foundation stone laid by the Bishop of Kensington. As Dr. Thornton came from Whitby, the design closely resembles that of St. Hilda's Parish Church, near the foot of the famous Yorkshire Abbey.

Upon Dr. Thornton's resignation in July 1923, the Reverend Strachan Rogers (1923-1939) was instituted on 23rd September 1923 by the Bishop of Kensington.

Between the two World Wars the Church was enriched by various bequests.

The Reverend Ernest Street was instituted in 1939, and was Hon. Chaplain to the Forces, serving the troops in the Army pay Corps in the Welsh Girls' School (which had been evacuated to Powis Castle in Wales) and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (R.E.M.E.) in their workshops and barracks in Convent and Feltham Roads. Upon his appointment as Archdeacon of the province of Santiago, Chile, he was succeeded by the Reverend Victor M. V. Jaggin (1949-1971). His

incumbency was the second longest in the Parish, and under his inspiration Ashford Church of England School was remodelled, with fine new classrooms, and a School Hall. Ashford C.E. School is the oldest Church School in Spelthorne Deanery, and was originally founded in 1817 in Feltham Hill Road. In the 1860 's the Lord of the Manor, James Mann, gave land in Denton Road (now School Road) for an all-age Church School.

In 1958 the daughter Church of St. Hilda became a Conventional District under a priest-in-charge, and 16 years later in 1974 St. Hilda's became a Parish in its own right. Consequently the old Church Hall in Stanwell Road was sold to the new parish, and St. Matthew's Church Hall was built in 1960 on land acquired close to the N.W. corner of the churchyard.

Following the sudden death of the Reverend Victor Jaggin in 1971, the Parish was faithfully served by Deaconess Jean Reed during a long Interregnum (1971-72), assisted by visiting clergy from Staines Deanery.

On 23rd September 1972 the Reverend Ian L. Robson (1972-1977) was instituted. During his incumbency the Church School became a First and Middle School, teaching children up the age of 12. Another long Interregnum followed (1977-78) after the appointment of the Reverend Ian L. Robson as Vicar of St. Mary Abbots, Kensington.

The Reverend Barrie Hodges was instituted in May 1978. A campaign for *Time and Talents* was successfully launched and *Explorer* and *Teenage* organisations founded. Sadly, following a brief illness, the Reverend Barrie Hodges died on Palm Sunday 1987, and the third Interregnum (1987-1988) ensued under the able leadership of the Reverend Jean Reed, who had been ordained Deacon on 22nd March 1987.

The Institution and Induction of the Reverend Ralph Horton as Vicar of St. Matthew's Church by the Rt. Reverend John Hughes, Bishop of Kensington and the Venerable Timothy Raphael, Archdeacon of Middlesex, took place on the 5th September 1988. Under his able leadership Father Horton launched the Stewardship Renewal programme with opportunities for Service and Commitment to the life of this 800 year old place of worship in Ashford.

Long may this Church in the ancient Spelthorne Hundred flourish to teach and preach the Gospel (God's Spel) - God's good news of the Redemption and Salvation of the World as the Parish of Saint Matthew's looks forward to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Rev. Ralph Horton retired after 24 years as Parish Priest November 2012.

On 3rd February 2014 Fr. Stuart King SCC was licensed as Priest in charge by Rt. Rev. Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham.

Original research and document Vernon Gosling, 1989 updated January 2013, January 2014 and November 2015.