

In 1930 the parish was at fairly low ebb, there appears to have been discord between various members and there was a debt of over £400 (circa £13,000 in today's terms). Much of the cost of running the day school lay with the parish and repairs were needed on both the church and school buildings.

Rev. Stanley Lane was curate of Ashton Parish Church before coming as vicar of Audenshaw. His strong point was finance and he undertook to place the parochial finances on a strong and sound basis.

He set about his task with vigour and enthusiasm and was greatly supported by the young church wardens, Mr R. Clarke and Mr H. Hardern. Both the wardens were bachelors when appointed, but within a few years both had married young ladies from the church. Incidentally Mr Lane also married a local girl whilst he was serving at Ashton Parish Church.

It was Mr Lane's idea to have a children's corner and he had Children's Church on a Sunday morning.

In one of his first letters in the church magazine Mr Lane makes the following statement: *if anyone had anything to say, he hoped they would say it to him, instead of creeping around corners* and announced his aim of getting the church out of debt. Throughout his ministry in Audenshaw, Mr Lane also drew the parishioner's attention to the wider aspects of the Christian world, actively encouraging money raising for the new churches in the new housing estates in Wythenshawe and for the Church Missionary Society, a cause supported to this day.

A free will offering scheme was started in 1932 with a very clear aim of raising £6.00 per week (£200 today). There was a large Christmas Fair and countless whist drives, domino drives and beetle drives (not the death watch variety) such that at the beginning of 1932 the church was out of debt, a tremendous achievement. At one of the whist drives the Vicar's wife wrote her initials O. L. on her score card, the steward when checking the cards at the end noted the unfamiliar initials and called out "O, 'ell". There was a pregnant pause and then laughter!

Repairs and improvements to the church and school continued throughout Mr Lane's ministry with the full support of the parishioners: pointing of the church exterior, new down spouts and iron gutters, new heating pipes and radiators, new electrical conduits, repair to the supports of the south gallery pronounced unsafe due to dry rot, a new lightning conductor fitted to the steeple, repairs to the Lych gate, repairs to the school and decoration to the church house (now part of the school).

By 1936 the church finances had improved to such a degree that the parish could afford to pay for a curate and Mr S. W. H. Bird was appointed to help Mr Lane.

The church had a large number of organisations, each belonging in a real sense to their church. It is difficult to form a complete picture of what these organisations did, but reading the accounts on the parish magazine you do get the feeling of a great deal of enthusiasm and enjoyment. To illustrate this unity of purpose the stalls at the Christmas Bazaar in 1932 reads as follows:

Mothers Union	general and fancy drapery
Girls Friendly Society	flowers, fruit, chocolate and sweets
Girl Guides	stationary and handicrafts
Refreshment Committee	groceries and cafe
Boy Scouts	handicrafts
Sunday School	toys, fancy goods, and children's corner
Men's Committee	hardware

The bazaar ran for two days with concerts given by the scouts, guides and Calvert School of Dancing in the evening, £273 was raised (£9000 today).

Mr Lane wrote in 1932 *"there is a complete absence of trouble-making in every organisation"*

The Mothers Union which was formed in 1901, had fortnightly meetings with speakers, services and social activities.

They went on annual outings, distance appeared to be no obstacle, visiting among other places Stratford on Avon, Warwick and Leamington going from Audenshaw Station; Scarborough during which trip the train broke down; Leeds, York and Rippon; Morecambe and Ingleborough; Sandringham.

The M. U. members helped with the refreshments at most of the social activities; in 1936 to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of the church they catered for 400 people sitting down to a grand tea in the school.

The Girl Guides were formed in 1928 and in the thirties had some 36 members divided into five patrols; Red Rose, White Heather, Swallow, Shamrock and Robin. They met each Thursday in School, the meetings always finishing with a camp fire song, taps and dismissal. They also were very active outdoors with hikes (for example *Haughton Green to Marple returning under the long tunnel by the canal wading in parts*), camps at Alton Towers (before it was a fun fair!) and Brockhurst near Wem and many other places. They also took on the Scouts at cricket after the Whit walk in 1933, the report reads *the scouts annihilated the guides at cricket on Lumb lane field* but this was probably written by a man! Our guides however beat Denton Wesleyan Guides by 80 runs to 33 (2 innings each team)

The Scouts (4th Audenshaw) were formed in October 1931 with Mr Lane as Scoutmaster, who promptly went to Gillwell Park for a training. He was enthusiastic in all things. The Troop once established had Fox, Bulldog, Squirrel and Hawk patrols with meetings every Tuesday in School. The meeting night later changed to Friday. The annual camps were great occasions organised by Mr Lane, a room in the vicarage being used by the scouts to prepare gadgets for the great event. Week long camps were held at Llandulas, Ludlow, Llanbedroch (*the best ever*) and no doubt other places. In 1937 two scouts gained the Kings Scout Badge and went on the world Jamboree in Holland.

There has been a church choir at St Stephen's from the earliest days, during Mr Lane's incumbency it consisted of men and boys, however women and girls had been in the choir in Mr Swallow's time. There were up to 40 singers in the choir in the thirties. The following account of the choir activities comes from Mr Albert Kemp.

Joining the choir, some sixty four years ago was, to an eight year old boy quite an experience. Selection was not only on the ability to sing in tune, but also on having a sufficient reading standard to cope with the psalms. The headmaster of the day school usually gave the recommendations.

The weekly choir practices were on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The first was for boys only and the second for boys and men. In the winter the practices were in the clergy vestry where warmth was provided by a coal fire, and in summer time, in the chancel. Usually the accompaniment was a foot pedalled harmonium and the biggest boys helped the choirmaster to carry this heavy instrument into the centre aisle of the chancel. Since there was Matins at 10.30 a. m. and Evensong at 6.30 p. m. each Sunday (with the exception of Matins being replaced by Choral Communion once a month), choir practice was always a busy time. Hymns, psalms, and anthems provided a wide musical experience for a young boy, but nothing quite as bizarre as his initiation into the choir by the older boys. This was in two parts. The first part was 'Meeting the Red Devil'. Adjacent to the north east corner of the church was a high column gravestone in the centre of a square plot with granite posts at each corner connected by chains. The initiation consisted of new choirboy walking around this grave three times when, on the third circuit, he would meet the Red Devil. It was only revealed later that the spectre was a senior choirboy. At the time, and in the dark, it was quite a frightening experience. The second part of the initiation was in the choir vestry (now used as the west entrance to church). In one corner of the vestry is a small door giving access to the shaft down which the clock weights travel. The probationer choirboy was put in this cupboard and older choirboys dropped old hymn books on him from the gallery level. After these 'rites' the new entrant was a fully accepted treble by his peers.

For the choir the highlights of the year were Stainer's Crucifixion on Palm Sunday, School Sermons after Easter, Flower Sermons on the Sunday nearest to the 26th June, the anniversary of the consecration on the church, Harvest Festival, on occasions a Choir Festival in November and the service of lessons and carols at Christmas.

The Sermons Sundays had morning, afternoon and evening services each having different preachers. For some reason these occasions seemed to provide the ideal atmosphere for young choirboys to get the 'giggles' and it was not uncommon for a visiting preacher to look down from the dizzy height of the pulpit with a very stern gaze at any offending boy. Though on one occasion it was not the boys who displeased a visiting preacher. It was the custom to switch off all the nave lights for the sermon leaving a single light over the pulpit. This did not suit the visitor who began "would the good verger kindly switch on the lights as I cannot preach in the dark". This was enough to start the 'giggles'.

The Choir Festival was really to give our congregation the opportunity to hear the anthems which we had sung at the Diocesan Choirs Festival. This was held in Manchester Cathedral on a Saturday afternoon and evening, and parish choirs filled the cathedral. The afternoon was taken up with a rehearsal of all the music and was conducted by the then organist and choirmaster of the cathedral with an assistant up in the loft providing the accompaniment. In modern slang the conductor would be described as having a very short fuse, and anything which he did not like would be indicated by him hissing loudly and banging on his desk with his baton. Usually this was in connection with the singing, but on one occasion it was the assistant organist who earned his wrath. The conductor stopped everyone, and looking up at the organ loft shouted, "Stop playing those piggish notes and come down eight feet". We had a vision of an organist climbing down the choir screen and only later did we learn that he was referring to the length of organ pipes being played.

Travelling to and fro from the Festival was by hired coach (in those days called a char-a-bang) and the only other occasion in the year when this mode of transport was used was the big 'perk' of being a chorister: the annual choir trip. This was a full day on the Saturday following the Whit Friday Walks. The destination was either Southport or Morecambe. Arriving about mid-day, the first item was a three course lunch after which we were free to roam. Southport was a favourite place because a good cricket pitch could always be found on the sands. The main aim of the match was to bowl the choirmaster who had a reputation as a stonewaller, but the boys always lost and he retired from batting with his reputation intact. (these games were taken very seriously in 1935, the verger had his hand broken) After tea each boy received some spending money and was free to go to the fairground until about 7 p. m. when the coach left for home. Singing was of course part of the journey home. This was loud and strident with the choirmaster becoming more and more anxious and repeatedly called "Boys, boys, remember it is Trinity Sunday tomorrow" But all good things come to an end and the natural physiology is that boys' voices 'break'. At least, this meant that a duty rota for servers was easily compiled, but this involved getting up early for the 8 o'clock Communion (and even earlier on Easter Sunday!!!)

The Girls Friendly Society was perhaps the oldest organisation associated with the church. It was founded in 1888 by Miss McDowell. It was run for many years by Miss G. Wright and Miss E. Wright and in 1931 there were 18 Associates, 62 members and 74 candidates. The following extract is from the record book of that year "Branch activities have been mainly in the direction of competition work (dancing, drilling and singing), and we are proud to think that we not only succeeded in gaining four "firsts" last year, but that success went to the candidates also, who secured the Shield and the Inter-Diocesan Shield for their Log-Book. In addition to lectures, a jumble sale has been held, not forgetting a concert by "The Jovials", a Flower day for blind babies, and a whist drive in December for the Church". Perhaps the most important event in the GFS year was the Diocesan Rally and Festival held in October.

There was first a service in the cathedral at which all the banners of the various GFS branches were carried in procession, and then following tea, a Rally in the Houldsworth Hall. Our GFS banner was carried to the cathedral in a special box, except on one sad occasion at which on opening the box it was found the banner was still in St Stephen's. It should be mentioned that our ladies although not church choir members were still very good singers. The GFS choir in white dresses and blue veils sang at the wedding of Margaret Hudson an active GFS member to the church warden Mr Robert Clarke in 1931. During the thirties the membership of the GFS fell but the branch continued providing girls with useful and enjoyable activities. During the later second world war years, the numbers fell further and there were no branch meetings, older members meeting in their own homes. In 1947 these senior members with great regret decided to officially close our Branch.

In 1935 Mr Lane started a branch of the Church of England Men's Society, there had been a Men's class attached to the Sunday School for many years, but this was a new venture, with talks and activities on a wide range of subjects.

There was a football team attached to the church, although not blessed with great success, it was awarded the Herald Cup for Sportsmanship in the Ashton and District Sunday School League in 1938.

Amateur Dramatics featured as an activity in most of the organisations. In the magazine are articles on great Christmas concerts by the Sunday school, the concert party "The Jovials", a Mystery Play during Holy Week produced by the vicar, a Mothers Union play "Not so far away", and a concert party "The Night Owls".

*The church continued as a social as well as a religious and educational centre in Audenshaw at a time of economic depression (the slump). In 1932 Mr Lane wrote *young people of 17 and 18 years who are compelled to spend three or four years of inactivity at the most impressionable period of their lives* words that are equally true today.*

The Crowning of the "Rose Queen" started in the 1930's and continued with a break into the 1950's.

The Church continued to receive beautiful items; crocheted cloths for the altar, new altar frontal and pulpit fall (given by the M. U.) and a prayer book for the sanctuary. Two major items were added in this period: In 1936 Mr Greaves (vicar) the church warden heard that a new lectern and choir stalls had been put into Taxal church, Mr Greaves and the Vicar paid a visit to Taxal and found the "old" lectern in a sorry state of repair in a cellar and they struck a deal to buy it for £7-10-0.

It was paid for from some money given to the church by the daughters of a Manchester City Alderman, Mr John Harrison who had been married at St Stephen's. Transporting the lectern provided a problem but an anonymous friend came forward and the eagle came to its new home in Audenshaw. The present Reredos was given to the church in 1938 by the GFS at a cost of £97- 10- 0 (£3,000 today) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the branch. It was made by the Craftsman's Guild of London.

Whitwalks continued but with a change of band from the New Mills Band to the L. N. E. R. Silver Band, and the fun and games continued to be enjoyed in the afternoon.

A new innovation was the holding of a special service on Mothering Sunday in the middle of Lent, with a presentation of a bunch of violets to the mothers in the congregation.

In 1939 with the out break of war, changes had to be made. The school could not be used initially in the evening, but money was soon raised for the blackout material. Young men from the choir, Sunday school and Scouts joined the Forces. The women folk raised money for parcels and knitted gloves, scarves, blankets and hats. The stained glass east window was removed, to prevent it being damaged in the air raids and replaced by one of plain glass.

*In the very dark days of 1940 joint services were held with the local Methodist churches, Red Hall, Guide Lane and Shepley Road. Mr Lane writes in the magazine *Men of Christian living, be they Roman Catholics, Free churchmen or Anglicans cannot help leading mankind to a grander view and ennobling conflict.... It is a conflict between anti-religious and religious ways of life.* The great danger with which the country was faced drove what were up to then competing Christian faiths together. This first example of Audenshaw Churches together does not seem to have lasted any significant length of time no mention being made in 1941 of joint services.*

Towards the end of 1941 Mr Lane announced he was leaving the parish to take up the living of Newchurch in Rossendale.