

Mr Painter preached his last sermon on 21 August 1966 and the new vicar was inducted on the 20 October 1966, a very short inter-regnum. Mr Tomline remained vicar for some 24 years the longest serving incumbent since our first vicar, Mr Eager. Stephen and his wife, Evelyn produced three daughters whilst living at the vicarages and they all remain friends of many of the present members.

Mr Tomline had strong convictions about gambling which he expressed in the church magazine on several occasions, and very early in his ministry he made his views on money raising very clear to the PCC, *that raffles, draws and similar means are to be withdrawn, that Christian principles should be prevailing, to teach to give without chance of reward.*

The church building and grounds saw many changes:

Traditionally the back of the altar table at St Stephen's had been placed in contact with the east wall of the chancel, the minister did not stand behind the table when conducting the communion service. Shortly after Mr Tomline's arrival the table was moved forward to the position it is today.

It had been the custom to have a plate at the back of the church to receive the congregation's donations at a Sunday service; this was replaced by the now usual collection taken during the service by the sidesmen.

The font was moved from its original position at the back of the church near the entrance door on the north side, to the present baptistery in the south east corner of the nave in 1971. The baptistery commemorates the life of Mr Eric Patrick, a long time church member and Reader.

In 1975 the Memorial Hall was opened, formed in the area at the back of the church, by the removal of pews and the font, the lowering of the floor and the construction of a glass partition to separate the room from the nave. The normal entrance to the church was moved from the door in the north wall to our present entrance in the west wall. At the same time the small kitchen was created. A lot of the work in these major changes was undertaken by the men of the parish. The Memorial Hall commemorates the life of Mr Bob Clarke, a former churchwarden and very hard worker for St Stephen's. When the Archdeacon of Manchester opened the room, he said it should be *used as a place of Christian Fellowship, where no harsh or unkind word will be spoken.*

The inscriptions on the tombstones in the church yard were recorded by the Men's Fellowship, prior to the removal of the majority of the gravestones and the grassing of the area. More trees and shrubs were planted, and a pleasant green park produced. The cost of the work (£5,000) was shared between the church and Audenshaw U. D. C. and future maintenance transferred to the local Council in 1974.

The external walls of the church were cleaned, again with help from the Audenshaw Council and the Government in 1973. It is perhaps worth recording here that Audenshaw Urban District Council ceased to exist in 1974.

The electrical wiring in the church was renewed by the men of the fellowship in 1977. In 1980 the church was re-decorated at a cost of £3700 and in 1981 the oil central heating was replaced with a gas fired boiler, and this again was undertaken by the men of the parish.

The pulpit was the subject of considerable debate in the early eighties. Some people felt that the pulpit should be removed completely, since its position and height obscured the congregation's view of the altar. Another faction wanted to leave the pulpit alone, whereas a third wished to retain the pulpit but move it closer to the wall and reduce its height. At one stage the magazine reports that the pulpit was to be removed but some months later there was a change in heart and the PCC voted as follows, seven votes for the lowering and moving of the pulpit, five votes for the complete removal of the pulpit, with four people abstaining, presumably since they wanted to retain the status quo. The matter finally was resolved in December 1984, when a Consistory Court presided over by Judge Spafford resplendent in wig and robes approved the PCC vote. The pulpit was to be lowered, moved and turned!

The original high pulpit presumably was to ensure the preacher could be seen from all parts of the gallery. The present pulpit is not visible from the gallery pews closest to the chancel wall, and nor is the altar. With the original short chancel, this would not have been the case. If you want to hide from the vicar sit in these pews!

In 1987 the organ blower needed replacement having done over fifty year's service, and a special fund was started to realise the £2000 required.

On Spring Bank Holiday Monday in 1987 a gross act of vandalism occurred when many of the church windows were smashed following a canal boat race. The damage amounted to £1500, and Mr Tomline wrote in the magazine *where have we failed*, a very Christian attitude of assuming the responsibility for other people's sins. The Ashton riots of 1868 when the Roman Catholic churches were vandalised were said to have been religious in origin however misguided. The Audenshaw vandals of 1987 did not need any reason, but all vandals are to be pitied.

In 1986 the clock fingers and face were repainted, with Mr Shackleton of Dukinfield being lowered from the belfry on a boson's chair to the clock faces, a feat that produced considerable local interest.

Changes occurred in the form of Sunday Services; previously Holy Communion was said at 8 o'clock followed Matins at 10.30 and Evensong at 6.30. Mr Tomline introduced a Family Communion as the main service replacing Matins, a change which was occurring in many parishes. Two readers were licensed in 1984, and Mrs Maureen Gooding was licensed Reader in 1989, a position she occupies today.

The youth club was encouraged; it met in the school room on Friday evenings and again in the Vicarage on Sunday evenings after evensong. There were special events notably "Squash's" at the vicarage on a Saturday night lead by Pete Lewis and the Liverpool Raiders. The group also performed at the church services on the next day. After a short time the Friday meetings were discontinued, but the regular Sunday evenings were a great success along with sporting events and day trips. In 1979 the Youth club became the Youth Fellowship, began meeting on Friday evenings in the Memorial Hall. The Sunday evening discussions ranged far and wide; it is recorded in 1971 that *the youth club have spent weeks discussing Guard Dogs, after which the vicar was bitten by a guard dog. A discussion on hanging was cancelled.* The youth club for the teenagers closed in the eighties, but a youth group with some half a dozen members continued to meet for discussions.

There was a Children's Club which ran on a Sunday morning; this later became the Sunday school. There was a junior youth club in two parts, for children aged seven to eleven (the Adventurers) later to become the Fun Club, and for the over eleven, before joining the Youth group proper. The programme included work on the pre-Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, and camps notably at Keighley. The groups again met in the Memorial Hall.

It is interesting to note that there was less and less use of the day school buildings, dances now being held at St Paul's centre or the Scout Headquarters in South Street, and youth meetings at the back of church.

A Young Wives Group flourished, it was described in one magazine as a Junior Mothers Union (!). It was extremely active, organising regular talks and discussions as varied as flower arranging and family planning, running a buffet disco at the vicarage which the nuns in the convent next door thoroughly enjoyed, garden parties, and nights out presumably away from the young husbands. For a number of years the Young Wives sang carols around the parish at Christmastide raising money for the Children's Society.

The Young Wives worked closely with the Mothers Union in supporting all the church activities. It is hard to add to what work the MU did for our church and the church in general, but perhaps it is summed up in the September 1975 issue of the magazine in which is written *the branch continues to be a more than ordinary organisation within our church, because we can always be sure that if no one else is Mary and if no one else is Martha, someone else in the Mothers Union is.*

The Men's Fellowship was extremely active during the earlier years of this period, the group met once a month initially in the Railway Hotel (the present Boundary). It then moved to the Church (Inn!) and then met in a room in the Hanging Gate. In one of the magazines it is written *serious discussion is usually on the agenda as well as the drinking.* Besides the intellectual activities the men were keen, practising sportsmen. It is surprising how the names of some gentlemen who could now be kindly described as middle aged appears in the magazine as brilliant performers on the football field and cricket pitch of the sixties and early seventies. The work in the church on the Memorial Hall and in the church yard has been mentioned above, but the men also helped to clear the Tramp's shelter in Manchester after a bad fire. The shelter was established to help men who had fallen onto hard times, by the then Bishop of Middleton, and the Bishop visited the fellowship on several occasions. The men ran dances notably Valentine's day dances at St Paul's, giving the money to help disabled old people have a trip out. At one of these dances one of the organisers astounded the guests by dancing the Viva Espana with one of the ladies. It was revealed later that he had been having dancing lessons for six months. Towards the end of the eighties the regular meetings stopped, but the support given by the men of the parish to the big events such as the Christmas Fair and Garden Party remained very strong.

When Mr Tomline arrived there were no uniformed youth organisations associated with our church, the scouts having had to leave and the guides closing down, but in 1967 a company of the Church Girls Brigade was started for girls of six and upwards. The company ran very successfully until 1976. The activities included marching, singing and dancing, playing drums and bugles and annual camps at Bowley Camping Lodge near Great Harwood. The Company attended church parade one Sunday in the month.

In 1969 a Company of the Church Lads Brigade was formed, meeting in school at first on a Wednesday and then on a Friday evening. At one period they had a drill sergeant and obviously took smartness very seriously. They played five-a-side football, learned life saving at the baths, Morse code, and worked on the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. They had annual camps at Edale and Great Harwood. Social events along with the CGB were barbeques in the vicarage garden and a model village exhibition in school. Unfortunately the Brigade closed in 1975 through lack of leaders.

Co-operation with our neighbouring churches increased particularly with the Methodists at Red Hall and Guide Lane and with what had become the United Reformed Church at Bridge Street. Joint meetings were held regularly including the Christmas Carol Service and the Whit Walks on Whit Sunday morning with a short joint service towards the end. The relationship with St Paul's and their priest Father Keane was also very good and in 1985 St Paul's joined the Whit walks.

A popular event with the youth groups of the Audenshaw churches was an annual "It's a Knock Out" competition held in St Stephen's church grounds.

Other than the regular weekly giving from the congregation, the two main money raisers were the Garden Party and the Christmas Fair. The events were very successful both financially and socially. Several of the Garden Parties had special themes: Victorian, American, and The Twenties. Perhaps the tradition of dressing up and playing parts had not disappeared.

The parish outing by coach occurred each year in early summer; places visited included Worcester, Lichfield, Arley Hall, Newby Hall and Weston Park.

The church magazine saw many changes since its first issue in 1899. Up to 1976 the magazine had been type set usually with the *Home Words* as an insert. It was then replaced with a typed and duplicated magazine to reduce the cost. Up to 1978 the magazine included adverts from local traders but these were then withdrawn.

Mr Tomline and his family left the parish in September 1990 to become the vicar of Newhey. He was a much loved man who had contributed greatly to the parish.