

HISTORY

THE CHURCH & VILLAGE OF CANTLEY

The earliest record of St. Wilfrid's Church is in the Domesday Book, which was a census of land, taken for tax purposes on the orders of William the Conqueror and completed in 1086, some 20 years after he came to the throne of England as William I. The original Domesday Book was written in Norman French but a translation called the "Dom Book", covering the old West Riding of Yorkshire, was produced in 1809 by the Revd. William Bawdwen, who was Vicar of Hooton Pagnell, Nr Doncaster from 1797 until his death in 1816.

The following translation appears in this book:

**"Land of Gaisford Alselin West Riding
Manor in Brantone and Canteleia (today known as Branton & Cantley)**

Tochi has fourteen curactes land and one oxgang and a half to be taxed. Land to fifteen ploughs. Gaisford or Geofry Alffelin has now there two ploughs, and fix vilaines, and two fokemen and five borders having fix ploughs and a half. There is a church and a priest"

The term 'plough' mentioned was not the machine or implement as we know it today but a land measurement, being the amount of land which could be ploughed by an ox team in one day.

We do not know when the first church was built in Cantley, nor how much of it, if any, forms part of the present church. However, the decoration on the arch of the South door is similar to that around the West door of Lincoln Cathedral which is known to date from approx. 1032. The oldest part of the present church dates back to 1257 and the West Tower was added some one hundred years later.

The location of Cantley church remains something of a mystery. It was built on a minor lane between Cantley and Branton in a location which was inconvenient for both these old settlements and that of High Ellers, which has now completely disappeared. The church stands on a mound but instead of facing due East, it is turned some 50 degrees towards the North. It is possible that the church was founded on a site used for earlier worship. Alternatively, it may have been the site of a Romano-British pagan temple or burial ground associated with the 2nd Century pottery kilns, traces of which were unearthed when road and housing construction took place in the area in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s

The church's dedication to St. Wilfrid suggests a Roman connection and an early foundation although, according to Torre's "Archdeaconry of York" dated 1229, Cantley Church is shown as being dedicated to St. Wilfrid and St. Nicholas. Pope Gregory instructed his missionaries to Britain not to alienate the native population, by the wholesale destruction of their religious buildings, but to convert the pagan temples to Christian use.

The original Cantley Village may have been a collection of wattle and daub buildings close to the church. There is a theory that this settlement may have been destroyed by the outbreak of the plague, commonly referred to as the Black Death, which raged throughout Britain at various times but which struck Cantley in 1547. The survivors of this outbreak, with their primitive ideas of sanitation and hygiene, moved to what is now the village of Old Cantley. This theory is given further credence by the fact that precautions were taken when the excavations for the foundations of the North extension to the church were carried out in 1988, in case a plague pit was uncovered. Whilst several unmarked graves were found, there was no evidence of a plague pit.

There are records of the church going back to 1215 in the archives at York. Prior to the formation of the Diocese of Sheffield in 1913, the Parish of Cantley formed part of the Diocese of York. Until the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, the Manor, the Church and its associated lands all belonged to Worksop Priory. They then passed into the hands of the Childers' family, or had some connection with that family, since part of the Arms of Worksop Priory form part of the Childers' family Arms

The church suffered from neglect in the 17th, 18th & early 19th Centuries due to absentee incumbents. The Archbishop reported, on one of his very infrequent visitations, that“There is a priest but they do not have a Bible”. Another incumbent, who held the living for almost forty years, requested permission from the Bishop to reside in Doncaster because he found the climate more congenial to his health!

The Patronage and Lay Rectorship of St. Wilfrid's Church passed into the hands of the Childers' family who resided at Cantley Hall. Two prominent members of the Childers' family were:

- William Walbanke Childers – Canon of Ely from 1803 to 1833
- Charles Childers – Rector of Armthorpe from 1833 to 1843

In 1874, during the incumbency of William Eardley, a restoration of St. Wilfrid's Church commenced under the direction of George Gilbert Scott (later Sir George Gilbert Scott). Scott was at the time rebuilding St George's Parish Church in Doncaster (now Doncaster Minster) following a fire there. There are signs on the East wall of the West Tower of a much higher pitched roof to the Nave and there are unconfirmed reports that the church had a thatched roof which was replaced by the present roof of Yorkshire stone slabs at this time. A brass plaque on the West wall of the Nave records the completion of this restoration work and the re-opening of the church on 18th July 1886 by Dr. Thompson, Lord Archbishop of York.

William Eardley was Vicar of St. Wilfrid's Church from 1870 until his death in 1892. His appointment may well have been due to connections, through marriage, of the Eardley and Childers families, which are recorded on a monument under the West Tower. On his death, the Revd. William Meaburn Tatham was appointed Vicar in 1893. Father Tatham, as he was known, was an Oxford Graduate and keen sportsman, gaining a Blue for both cricket and soccer. Fr. Tatham created both cricket and soccer teams in the Parish which played in local leagues until the outbreak of World War II. He was

also a keen golfer and one of the original members, if not a founder member, of Doncaster Golf Club

During the ministry of Fr. Tatham, the old school at Branton was closed and replaced by a new National School which stood at the crossroads on the opposite corner to where the present McAuley Catholic High School now stands. This National School was demolished in the early 1970s when the new St. Wilfrid's Church of England Primary School was opened in Valley Drive, Branton. After its closure, the old school in Branton was converted into a Chapel of Ease, dedicated to St. Mary, but eventually demolished in the early 1980s when it became redundant. The bell from the old school was firstly a school bell and then a church bell. It now hangs in the present St. Wilfrid's school and is once again a school bell.

It is probable that, during his time at Oxford, Fr. Tatham came under the influence of The Oxford Movement, which caused him to revive the Catholic tradition at St. Wilfrid's which has continued to the present day. Fr. Tatham was not popular with the powers that be and during his entire ministry of more than forty years, the Diocesan Bishop never set foot in the Church.

In 1894, under the direction of Ninian, later Sir Ninian Comper, a further restoration and extension of the Church was carried out. It is probable that Ninian Comper had been at Oxford at the same time as Fr. Tatham because, not only was he the supervising architect for the work but he was also Godfather to a number of Fr. Tatham's ten children. During this restoration and extension work, the North wall of the Nave was opened out into the present arches and a new South aisle was added. Retro Chapels were created at the East end of each aisle. The one in the South aisle was dedicated to 'Our Lady' whilst the one in the North aisle was known as the 'Jesus Chapel'. The 'Jesus Chapel' was later removed when the Church was further extended in 1988/1989.

Following a fire in 1905, which severely damaged the Rood Screen, Ninian Comper directed further restoration work.

In the 1930s, Father Tatham realised that a further extension was necessary to meet the needs of a growing parish and Sir Ninian Comper agreed to do this. Unfortunately, the death of Father Tatham in 1936 and the outbreak of World War II prevented this from taking place.

In 1981 further restoration work and improvements were carried out, including a steel bell frame to replace the old wooden frame and the installation of both an up-to-date lighting system and a modern gas fired heating system. Laurence King, the architect who supervised this work, was the architect responsible for the design of the Chapel of The Guild of All Souls in the grounds of the Shrine Church of Our Lady of Walsingham and was also Warden of The Guild of All Souls.

A considerable amount of both public and private sector housing was constructed within the parish in the period from 1960 – 1985 and although two conventional districts were created, which later became the parishes of St. Hugh, New Cantley and St Francis of Assisi, West Bessacarr, it was clear that St. Wilfrid's Church was too small to meet the needs of the population of the revised parish. Work commenced on an extension to the North side of the church in November 1988 and was completed in April 1989. The

architect was Donald Buttress, a recognised authority on the work of Sir Ninian Comper, as well Surveyor of the Fabric to Westminster Abbey and consultant architect to a number of our cathedrals. Donald Buttress designed the new North Nave, incorporating the windows from the original North wall into the new North wall, and used the screen which was originally part of the 'Jesus Chapel' to connect the old and new Naves. The extension was consecrated by the Right Revd. David Ramsey Lunn, Lord Bishop of Sheffield, on 6th May 1989. A large part of the cost of this extension was met through the sale of St. Hilda's Hall & Chapel, and its adjoining land, located on Bawtry Road, Doncaster.

The organ at St. Wilfrid's is approximately 100 years old. It is a small instrument of two manuals and pedals with six manual stops and two pedal stops. The organ was extensively re-built in 2001 by Andrew Carter of Wakefield.