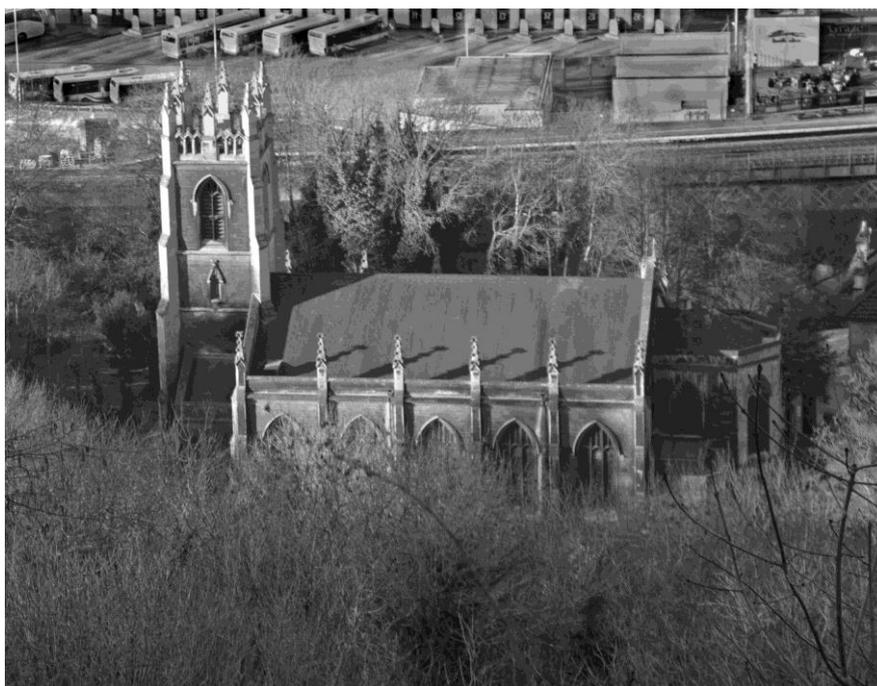


The history of St Bartholomew's Church, Lyncombe, Bath

Where do you start the story of how God is providing for his people in the area south and east of the Bath Avon? Ancient documents record that over a thousand years ago a Saxon church was built for the village/manor of Widcombe. This was repaired and rebuilt over the years, and dedicated to St. Thomas a Beckett. The current building dating from 1495 is still used for worship. The only other medieval place of worship is the tiny St. Mary Magdalen chapel in Holloway.

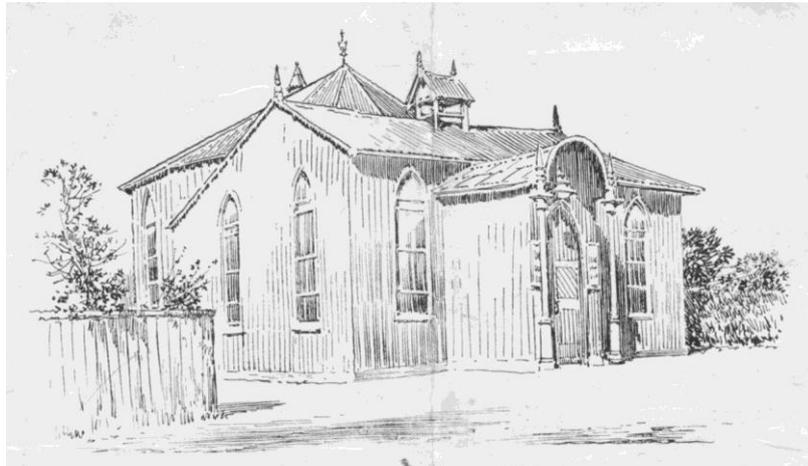
With the 19th century growth of the suburbs on the south side of the river, the small building of St Thomas's was unable to accommodate the parishioners, so the parish of St. Thomas's was divided into Widcombe, to be served later by St. Matthew's, and Lyncombe, to be served by St. Mark's (foundation 1820, consecrated 1832). The patronage of St. Mark's was with the Simeon's Trustees, thus ensuring that it and its derived congregations would be served in perpetuity by "a man of God in deed and in truth"; believing, teaching, and striving to follow God's will as revealed in the Bible. In 1870 part of St. Mark's parish was taken to form St. Luke's, South Lyncombe. The resulting £1000 compensation from the Diocese was used to build the vicarage at 5 Oldfield Road, home to successive vicars of St. Mark's and St. Bartholomew's until recently.



St Mark's Widcombe from Alexandra Park

In 1889 Rev. Samuel Rogers of Bathwick recognised that the growing housing estates of Oldfield Park needed a church of their own, and started one - the Immanuel Gospel Tent! He built a corrugated iron chapel in 1892 at his own expense, in the space between Shaftesbury Road and Lower Oldfield Park, but entered from Junction Road. This was officially "Oldfield Mission Hall" but locally known as the "Tin Tab(ernacle)". He emigrated to California and the "Tin Tabernacle" was purchased by St. Marks in 1893 to be a daughter church called St Bartholomew's. This was not a mere shed – it was able to seat 200 and had a

robed choir of 15 and a hand-pumped organ. The reason for the choice of name is so far unknown, and these days it is abbreviated to “St. Barts”.



The Tin Tabernacle

Such was the growth in population of Oldfield Park in the early Edwardian era (Lyncombe parish, at c. 10,000, was one of the largest in the diocese) that a Diocesan Commission in 1904 decided that a larger building was needed to accommodate 500-600 people. In 1906 the current site in King Edward Road was purchased for £870. At an inaugural meeting at the Guildhall in 1909 there was great public support and funds totalling £388 were pledged. Plans were drawn up. Concerns were expressed that the Non-Conformists were already building in Oldfield Park! However the new vicar of St. Marks in 1910 was against the project, though the Sunday School numbered 200 and the Tin Tab was not large enough for the Mothers' Union! Despite that, new plans were drawn in 1912 for a smaller building seating 270 at a cost of £2,300. The site was used for allotments during WW1 and afterwards. In 1916 the suggestion was made that the building could be a Peace Memorial when the war ended. Plans languished and funds were not forthcoming in the recession of the 1920s. Perhaps St Mark's centenary of 1932 galvanised some activity, boosted by two large gifts of £1000. The foundation stone was finally laid in 1936 and the church was consecrated in 1938. A salaried organist and Verger were appointed in 1937. Disappointingly the building was only about half its planned size, and a temporary breeze block wall closed the East end. The latter turned out to be God's provision in the war.

In 1939 civil defence preparations were being made; blackouts were purchased for evening services. Stirrup pumps, sand buckets, and ladders for fire watchers were acquired in 1941, and as an afterthought, tin hats! The Tin Tab was designated an emergency feeding station. In 1942 a Gift Day was held and the loan for the building was finally paid off on 15th March. Ironically the new building had a direct hit from a 250kg bomb on the night of the “Bath Blitz”, 25-26 April! Also the Tin Tab was flattened, never to be replaced, and St Mark's and Magdalen Chapel were damaged. 21 people were killed by a direct hit on an air-raid shelter in Shaftesbury Road opposite the Scala cinema (now Co-op store), and 29 elsewhere in the parish. The next morning someone fixed a notice with the single Latin word “Resurgam” (“I shall rise”) in the church grounds. This was probably an echo of a similar sign after the bombing of St. Andrew's, Plymouth in March 1941. Both churches have indeed risen again and are flourishing, sharing the gospel with their parishes and beyond.



St. Bart's the day after the Bomb

Since, in God's providence, the damage to the church was limited to the lifting of the roof and flattening of the weak east wall, the Bath stone walls were intact. The organ, Communion table, pulpit and lectern survived and were stored. Services were held at significant times in the ruins, and the Sunday School continued in Bath Girls School (now Hayesfield Upper School).



Service held in the ruins

St. Bart's was the first church in Bath to be rebuilt after the war – several were not. Financial contributions were received from Oldfield Methodist, and a church in Canada, as well as Government compensation. Work started in 1949, was completed in 1951 and the rededication was in 1952. A new church hall was built north of the building in 1954. During this period the congregation shrank at St. Mark's, possibly because of the extensive bombing of houses at that end of the parish, and between 1970 and 1972 the decision was taken to decommission St. Mark's. It is now a Community Centre. Facilities at St. Bart's were improved in 1976 by connecting the hall to the north porch of the church, enabling the installation of toilets, a vestry, and a kitchen; however it did not become the parish church until 1978, on condition that the East wall was built properly in Bath stone. After much fundraising this was completed, with interesting abstract stained glass by Mark Angus, in 1981. Other internal changes included replacing the oversized pipe organ with a high quality electronic one.



During the 1970s and 80s a number of changes took place in the building, such as removing the lectern, pulpit, and the pews that had been imported from the chapel at the Mineral Water Hospital after the war and never really fitted. The liturgy changed with the Alternative Service Book and later Family Services; modern translations of the Bible were tried, and the robed choir disbanded. This was to help bridge the gap between those inside and those in the world outside. There were numerous attempts to reach outsiders, including a coffee bar for teenagers, door-to-door visiting, a large new noticeboard (later found to be contravening the planning regulations!) and evangelistic services. 6,000 Mark's Gospels were delivered in conjunction with other churches in the zone in 1981. Increasingly, Lay church members were involved in leadership, such as home groups and Baptism preparation classes. There were also initiatives to draw the Christian denominations together, for example the Good Friday Walk of Witness which started in 1981 and still continues.

Our current Vicar, Ian Lewis, was inducted in 1991. The 1990s saw development across a broad front; in 1997 we underwent a review process called "People Building" which looked at the major areas of our church's life and witness. One of the conclusions was that we needed a new larger hall to serve both the church, especially children's work, and the parish.

This was finally completed, after much difficulty caused by the architect, in 2000. It

has been in use most days ever since, for prayer, teaching and evangelistic meetings as well as by Brownies, Woodcraft Folk, Alcoholics Anonymous, Calligraphy classes, exercise groups, and numerous parties and fun activities of all sorts! We try to provide for non-members, with a thriving Toddler group, Friends and Neighbours for the older folk, and community celebrations of Royal jubilees or commemorations of historical events such as the World Wars. We have recently started holding Remembrance Sunday services at the Memorial Gardens where the bomb fell on the Shaftesbury Road shelter.

Spot the difference!



The tradition of supporting Mission and Development Work overseas goes back to the start of the congregation. Some of the work supported both financially and in prayer has included Bible translation in Tanzania, theological training in India and Africa, an orphanage in Uganda, Send-a-Cow, rural development in N Africa, and medical work in shanty towns in Peru. We have strong links with church plants in Loches, France. Charities supported in UK include Genesis working with the homeless in Bath, Friends International befriending overseas students, summer camps for youngsters, and Farm Crisis Network.

In obedience to Jesus's call to make disciples, we have been involved in several city-wide evangelistic campaigns including Billy Graham's Mission England 1989, visits to schools and universities, and several initiatives of our own visiting homes in the parish or inviting people in to meetings to hear about individuals' faith journeys. We are aware that Oldfield Park is now effectively a major student dormitory, and started offering hospitality, friendship and the gospel message to students from 1999. Increasingly students come to Bath from all over the world, and we make special efforts to welcome them. Teaching children and young people has always been important in the life of the church. Since 2009 we have sent a number of our members on to train for ordained church ministry or youth work. We also have an interdenominational ministry training course for lay preachers and leaders in the region, run from our church centre since 2007.

Because our morning attendance was becoming too large for our building, we divided into two congregations in 2009, meeting at 9.30 and 11.15am. In 2014 we planted a new congregation, aiming to provide for the Riverside development, which currently meets at Hayesfield Lower School since there are as yet no communal facilities on the Riverside site. It is difficult for a sense of community to build up in a new residential area with no shops, schools, pubs, churches or any shared space that can be used by the residents! All these congregations have had combined Lay and Ordained leadership since 2016. We continue to

review the spiritual and practical needs of our parish, looking beyond the traditional “Hatch, Match and Dispatch” of the Anglican Church. Our vision for the future is to;
grow individuals, the church community, and our impact for Jesus in the wider world.

We claim no personal or corporate credit for any of the above achievements, preferring to see them as continuations of God’s plan from mankind’s beginning, to extend his love and forgiveness to and through us. This was demonstrated supremely by the death on the cross of Jesus Christ, confirmed by his resurrection from death, and has been continued by his spirit acting through his followers down the ages, including us!

To God alone be the glory!

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I acknowledge with thanks the extensive research in the church archives by Roland Symonds and Grace Kay. Numerous people made helpful comments on the draft version. Permission to use the pictures of the church after the Blitz and the service in the ruins was kindly granted by the Bath Chronicle.