

TOP o'th' STEPS



A History of St Chad's Parish Church, Rochdale

by K H Dixon

Based on the original book by A S Wild

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Foreword

Over 20 years have elapsed since “Top o’th’ Steps” was first published. In writing a new revised edition, I hope I have done justice to the late Arnold Wild’s original scholarly work, upon which I have drawn heavily. I have been concerned to re-arrange some parts in the interests of greater clarity, fill in some gaps, and add further information which I feel will be of interest to the general reader, whilst omitting some sections of only specialised interest. Many of the additions have been culled from researches in the Church’s extensive records of the past, particularly Churchwardens’ meetings and Accounts in the 18th and 19th centuries.

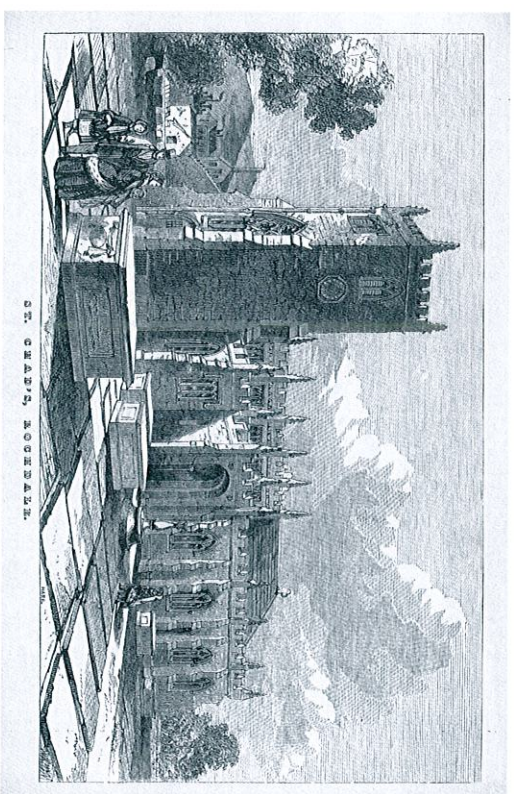
K.H. DIXON

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K. H. D.



St Chad's in the early 1800s, before the raising of the tower and removal of the clock

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Situated on an eminence overlooking the busy town of Rochdale, the Parish Church of St Chad has been a geographical and spiritual focal point for at least 800 years. In common with that other famous local enigma – the ‘Roman Road’ over Blackstone Edge – the origins of the Parish Church are hidden in the mists of antiquity.

The first written record of the existence of the Church is in a document of 1194 which refers to Geoffrey the Elder, Dean of Whalley, as Vicar of Rochdale. Hence the 800th anniversary was celebrated in 1994 with a visit by Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip.

However, the dedication to St Chad argues that the Church may have been of much earlier foundation. Ceadda, or St Chad as he became known, was born in the 7th century and educated under St Aidan in

the monastery on Lindisfarne. He is known to have made several missionary journeys on foot in the north before being consecrated Bishop of Mercia in 669 and establishing his episcopal seat at Lichfield. He died soon afterwards in 672. It is not impossible that he founded this church in Rochdale on one of his journeys. In the window dedicated to him in the south aisle, he is pictured preaching in Rochdale and his image is over the south porch holding the church in his hand. St Chad is much venerated in the Manchester diocese; there are five other churches dedicated to him, but none is of ancient foundation except Rochdale. However, there are two in North Lancashire - in Poulton-le-Fylde and Claughton - which are. There are no remains of a church of earlier foundation except the so-called "Saxon Wall" at the northwest boundary of the churchyard. This consists of some 30 feet of slabs of local stone slotted into uprights. It was found partly buried and re-erected in 1903. The authority for describing the wall as "Saxon" is obscure.

The fact that there is no mention of a church in Rochdale in the Domesday Book (1086) is not conclusive. Lancashire, due to the difficult terrain and sparse population, was not as thoroughly surveyed as elsewhere. (The population of the whole of Lancashire in Norman times was only around 10,000). However, it is recorded in the Domesday Book that Ganel the Thane held two hides of land (about 240 acres) in Rochdale from the King. It was Ganel who, according to local legend, commenced to build a church on the north side of the river Roach, but every night the stones were removed to the top of the hill by supernatural means until it was decided that this was where the church was meant to be and here a church has stood ever since.

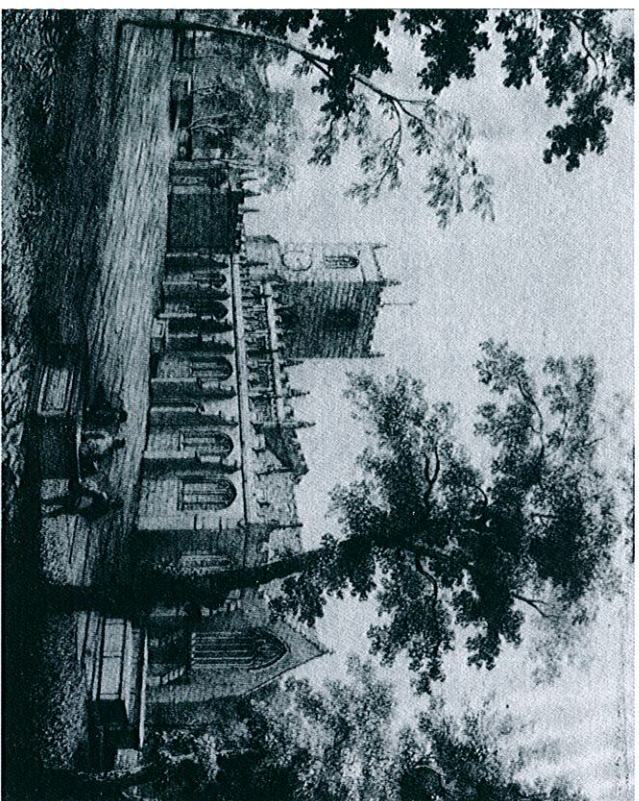
Ganel was in the highest order of Thanes by virtue of his holding his land direct from the King. Therefore, it can be assumed that he had

a church. Before 1194, Adam de Spotland gave land for the Love of God and to save his soul and his wives, his ancestors and succession to all the Saints and to St Ceadda and the Church at Rochdale. In the late 12th or early 13th century, a William Stapelton gave a plot of land at Saddleworth to build a church. In so doing he said that he had sworn on the relics of the holy saints at St Chad, Rochdale, to found this church at Saddleworth. To have relics indicates that the earlier church had cherished these relics for some time. These are all pointers tending to support the belief that there was a church in Rochdale before 1194.

The patronage of the church passed to the Cistercian monks of Stanlow. In 1296 they moved to Whalley. In 1536, John Paslow, Abbot of Whalley, was executed at Lancaster for his part in the rebellion known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. Two years later, Henry VIII let the church and patronage to one of his pages, Henry Parker, for 21 years after which they reverted to the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was confirmed by Edward VI. It has been pointed out that the fact of the Archbishop of Canterbury being for so long patron had an important bearing on the type of parson who became Vicar of Rochdale. The result was that, instead of local parsons being appointed, those who held the Living were mostly men of distinction who represented the various opinions and fashions in the Anglican church.

The original Rochdale parish was very extensive covering an area of over 58,000 acres and stretching as far as Todmorden to the north and Saddleworth to the east. It was 10½ miles from north to south and 9 miles from east to west. It was anciently divided into four townships: Hundersfield, Spotland, Castleton and Butterworth. Such was the extent that, as the population grew, what seem now

extraordinary numbers of baptisms, marriages and confirmations, were carried out at St Chad's. In 1837, when there were only two other churches in Rochdale, 1560 baptisms took place, including 175 on one day – February 16th. In 1838, 518 marriages were celebrated at St Chad's, including 34 on one day. Eventually 33 parishes were carved out of the original Rochdale parish.



St Chad's Parish Church before 1829, from an original stone engraving

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard was the burial place for the dead of Rochdale for several hundred years. The level of the churchyard is much higher than the surrounding ground due to the number of interments which have taken place there. It has been estimated that it contains the remains of some 5,000 persons (including over 500 buried at the time of the Great Plague in 1623). The oldest remaining gravestone is dated 1659 and the churchyard was closed to further burials in 1813. Burials then took place in the "New Burial Ground" across the road until 1855. This contains a further 2,000 graves and it is estimated that about 6,000 persons have been interred there. Since 1855, Rochdale burials have been at the Municipal Cemetery in Bury Road. An exception to this was the last interment inside the church which was that of the daughter of the Lord of the Manor, James Dearden, in 1858. Many of the gravestones are sad memorials to past high levels of infant mortality; many are also the more interesting because of the local custom of including in the inscriptions the address and occupation of the deceased. In 1970, a large number of the gravestones were removed and placed to form pavements. This and the landscaping of lawns and rose beds were executed at a cost of £7,000 by Rochdale Council as the town's contribution to the then church restoration. The Council now accepts responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the churchyard.

Next door to the Church is the Old Vicarage built in 1726 by Dr Samuel Dunster (Vicar 1722-1754) and said to be modelled on his house in London. John Wesley stayed there on one of his visits to Rochdale. Between the Old Vicarage and the churchyard is a wall, which until 1977 extended the whole length of the churchyard. This was built in 1760 by Dr James Tunstall (Vicar 1757-1762) to humour

his wife who did not want her seven daughters to acquire Lancashire accents by contact with the choirboys and other local children.

In front of the church stands a sundial, which was purchased in 1783 for £4.4.6d, and the War Memorial originally dedicated in 1921 and restored by Canon Alan Shackleton (Vicar 1986-1997) in memory of his mother.

In the north west corner of the churchyard is the previously mentioned "Saxon" wall.

In the northeast corner is the flight of 122 steps from the town centre, first mentioned in 1660 when the Churchwardens' accounts record that eight loads of "great stones" were brought from Blackstone Edge for the "steps". The steps and the path from the top of the steps have the status of an "ancient highway" pre-dating the Highway Act of 1835. The path passes the Town Stocks last used in 1822. These bear the date 1668 and the initials WW. At one time there was a William Woodley serving as captain of the town watchmen. The stocks used to stand in the street outside the churchyard but in 1891 they were re-erected inside following the building of the Lychgare in 1890.

A short distance from the east end of the church is the fenced grave of Tim Bobbin (John Collins, 1708-1786) the Lancashire poet and caricaturist with the inscription – "Here lies John and with him Mary, check by jowl and never vary, no wonder that they so agree, John wants no punch and Moll no tea". This is a wry comment on Tim who enjoyed a glass of ale as much as anyone.

THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

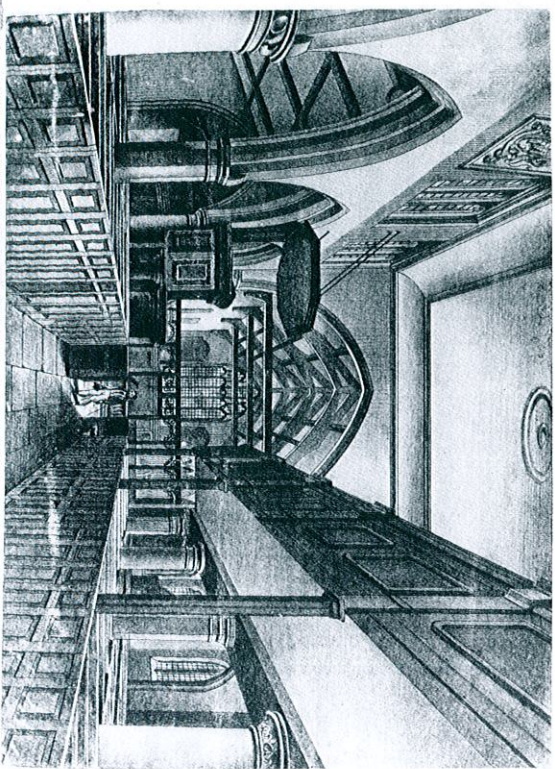
The church is now classified as a Grade II* listed building of special architectural and historic interest. It presents a handsome, well-proportioned and harmonious appearance, although it has, in fact, been subjected to much re-building, restoration and enlargement over the centuries. It is "Queen Anne in front and Mary Anne behind", in that the south side is well built of ashlar stone, whereas the stonework on the north side, which is not subject to the same close inspection, is altogether rougher.

The nave and the lower tower incorporate the oldest parts of the present church. They contain some work dating back to the 14th century and possibly earlier. In the 16th century an upper row of windows or clerestory was added and the church given a lot of features of the Perpendicular style. Both north and south aisles were re-built at different times in the 19th century. The Nave was re-roofed in 1856 and in 1873 a new south porch was added and the tower raised by 35 feet to 95 feet, the architect being WH Crossland who was also responsible for Rochdale Town Hall. The porch is crowned by a welcoming figure of St Chad holding the church in his hand. Both on the porch and elsewhere on the church are some impressive gargoyles and on the south side of the tower is a curious ancient carved face.

In 1885, the chancel was completely re-built and much enlarged. A clerestory was added and it was extended by two bays from the point marked by diagonal buttresses.

Also, the nature of the stone changes from the Rosendale millstone grit of which the main body of the church is built, to the Yorkshire sandstone of the extension. Beneath the east windows are carved the head of Queen Victoria and three fishes representing the river Roach.

The architect of the new chancel was JS Crowther who also did much work on Manchester Cathedral and designed the new chancel for Littleborough Parish Church dedicated in 1890.



The church with its gallery and three-deck pulpit before 1829, from an original stone engraving

THE VICARS OF ROCHDALE

Entering the church by the porch on the south side, we pass boards on which are listed the 45 vicars since 1194, commencing with **Geoffrey the Dean**. Not all have been models of virtue. It is recorded that **Richard de Perebald** (Vicar 1302-1317) was in 1306 fined 20 shillings for hunting and killing deer and **Gilbert Haydock** (Vicar 1522-1554), the last appointment of a vicar by the Abbots of Whalley, refers in his will to his "bastard children". However, several have been distinguished men for other reasons. There have been many Deans, Archdeacons and Canons, amongst them **Henry Tilson** (Vicar 1615-1635) who became Dean of Dublin Cathedral and then Bishop of Elphin in Ireland. More recently, David Bonser (Vicar 1982-1986) was subsequently Bishop of Bolton.

Thomas de Boulton (Vicar 1317-1349) was almost certainly a victim of the Black Death, the bubonic plague which killed a third of the population at that time. No successor was appointed for nine months, a long inter-regnum in those days. **Henry de Marland** (Vicar 1426-1455) was the only local man to be appointed until **Alan Shackleton** (Vicar 1986-1997) who hailed from Milnrow.

Robert Bath was Vicar (1635-1662) during the Civil War period. Although originally a High Churchman, he accepted "The Solemn League and Covenant" and became a Presbyterian. At the restoration of the monarchy in 1662, he would not renounce the Covenant and so was turned out of the Living together with his curate. He took up residence in Deepdish where his preaching drew a large following. He died in 1674 having become in effect the founder of Nonconformity in Rochdale.

His successor, **Henry Pigot** was Vicar for 60 years (1662-1722) until he died at 94. He was thus St Chad's longest serving Vicar and the oldest to die in office. The Galleries, west and south, were erected in

the church in his time and were not removed until 1855. In 1678, the church sent to London £20.1.11½d, the proceeds of a collection towards the re-building of St Paul's Cathedral after the Great Fire.

Samuel Dunster (Vicar 1724-1754), the builder of the old vicarage, died in office aged 81 and was succeeded by **Nathaniel Forster** (Vicar 1754-1757). A distinguished scholar, both an Oxford DD and a Fellow of the Royal Society, he died young at 41. He was followed by **James Tunstall** (Vicar 1757-1762). The concern of his wife to keep her seven daughters apart from the choirboys has already been mentioned.

It was during the vicariate of **Richard Hind** (1778-1790) that the sundial in the churchyard was installed in 1783. His successor was **Thomas Drake** (Vicar 1790-1819) whose name is commemorated in that of one of Rochdale's main streets. The next Vicar (1819-1839), **William Hay** was also a barrister. His was not a popular appointment as, shortly before, in the capacity of Chairman of the Salford Quarter Sessions, he was responsible for reading the Riot Act at a gathering of some 50,000 in St Peter's Fields, Manchester. The crowd was dispersed by sending in yeomanry cavalry. The resultant bloodshed, including eleven deaths, became known as the Peterloo Massacre. When Hay's successor, **Dr John Edward Nassau Molesworth** (Vicar 1839-1877) took over he found a church "in a state of great collapse and stagnation". In 1840 he called a meeting of ratepayers to set a 'halfpenny rate' to pay for necessary repairs. This gave renewed impetus to the running controversy about the payment of church rates. By law, they were payable by all households, whether supporters of the Anglican church or not. In a town such as Rochdale, said to have more chapels, and therefore more dissenters, than any other town of similar size, this was a prime source of discontent and Molesworth found a large part of the population ranged against him, led by the Quaker politician John Bright. There were major scenes of disorder

verging on riot, so much so that troops were called in to keep order. On one occasion, Bright occupied the pulpit in the Church and engaged Molesworth in argument speaking from one of the galleries. The meeting having adjourned to the churchyard, Bright and Molesworth harangued each other from tombstones. Eventually, 6,594 of the townspeople voted for the rate and 6,481 against. Faced with such a narrow majority of 113, Molesworth wisely decided not to proceed with levying the rate and no further attempt was made to do so in Rochdale. The practice was abolished by Parliament nationally in 1858.

Having made a very bad start, Molesworth subsequently endeared himself to Rochdale and left his mark on the Town in many ways, although he was always an irascible man, quick to take offence and he and the first Bishop of Manchester were not on good terms. He was a descendant of Viscount Molesworth who had served William III in Ireland. William was godfather to one of the Viscount's sons. Hence, Nassau, the Dutch Royal Family name, became a traditional Christian name for eldest sons in the Molesworth family. The Countess of Wessex, the wife of the present Prince Edward, is Molesworth's great great grand-daughter and visited the Church in 2002 when she was presented with a portrait of her ancestor. Another interesting family connection lies in the fact that, after the death of his first wife, Molesworth married in 1854 a widow, Mrs Bridges, having met her at the marriage in London of one of her daughters to his son Guilford. Mrs Bridges brought with her to the Vicarage her son Robert, aged 12, who was subsequently a chorister at St Chad's. He eventually became Sir Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate, in 1913.

It was during Molesworth's Vicariate that, prompted by the development of the town, building leases were granted on the Church glebe lands around the centre. Rochdale consequently became a very rich living. In 1866, the Rochdale Vicarage Act vested the Rochdale

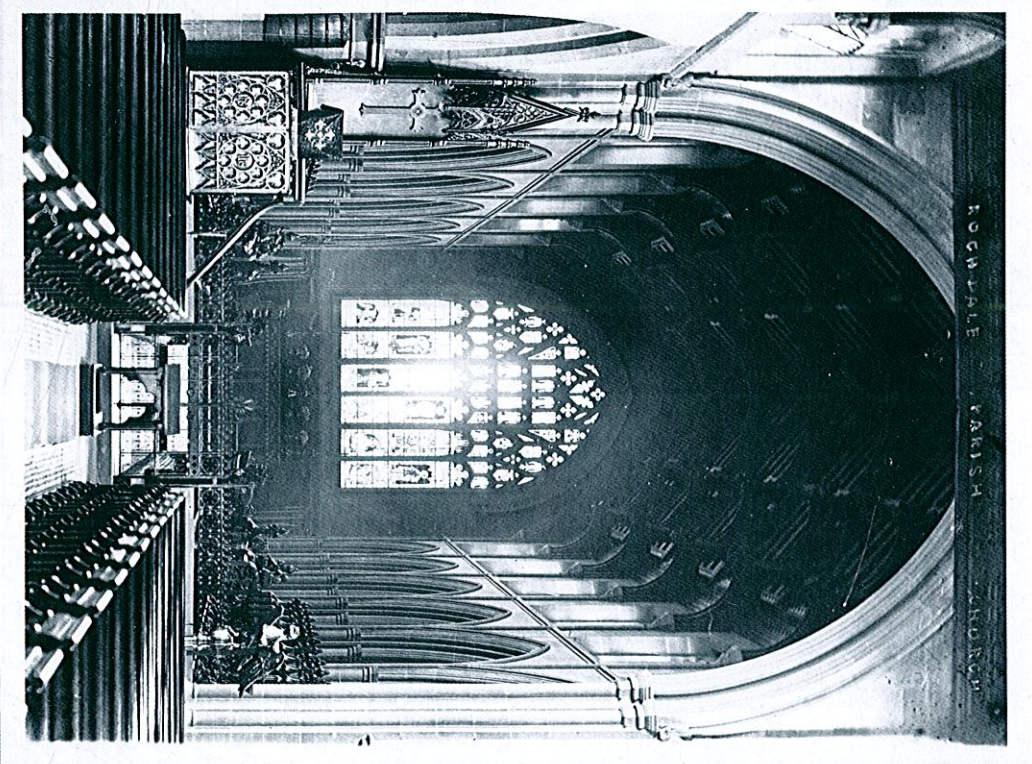
glebe lands in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, so making funds available for the building of new churches to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population (in the 19th century the population of Rochdale increased tenfold from 8,500 in 1801 to 83,000 in 1901). Under the terms of the Act, Molesworth was to have £4,000 pa and his successors £1,500 pa (these sums should be multiplied by 40 to compare with today's values).

Dr Molesworth died in office aged 87, having been Vicar for 38 years. He was buried at St Martin's, Castleton, one of the many churches he had been responsible for founding. It was reported at the time that his funeral procession from St Chad's was nearly a mile long.

Molesworth's successor was **Dr Edward Maclure** (Vicar 1877-1890). His memorial is the entirely rebuilt and enlarged chancel and the lengthening of the Trinity and St Katherine's Chapels, together with a very fine new organ. He made St Chad's what is called a "Double Apostles' Church" ie 12 arches in the nave and 12 in the chancel. In the course of raising the funds for this extension, Dr Maclure acquired the nickname of the "Arch Fiend". It is said that in enlarging the chancel, he had an eye to St Chad's becoming a Cathedral, since the possibility of the Manchester Diocese being divided was being much discussed at the time. Indeed, he also had plans for a Chapter House and a Library and a wealthy parishioner presented the church with a Bishop's crozier. However, not long after the new chancel was built, Dr Maclure was appointed Dean of Manchester and Rochdale was nominated as no more than the Seat of an Archdeaconry.

The next Vicar was also a distinguished man – **Dr James Wilson** (Vicar 1890-1905), ex Headmaster of Clifton College and a noted mathematician and theologian. The more recent vicars included another Molesworth, the great grandson of the first – **Gilbert Edward Nassau Molesworth** (Vicar 1948-1953) – **Harry Nightingale** (Vicar 1953-1970) who carried out the last major restoration, and **Alan**

Shackleton (Vicar 1986-1997) who received HM The Queen and Prince Philip when they visited the church to mark the 800th anniversary celebrations in 1994.



St Chad's Nave and Chancel before 1907

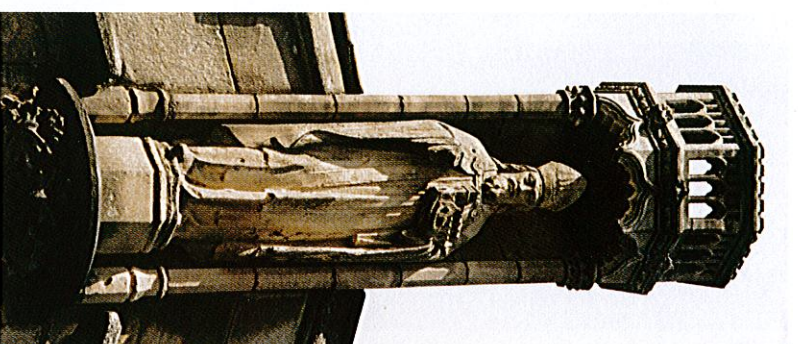
INSIDE THE CHURCH The Tower

The Tower is now well proportioned having been raised in height by some 35 feet to 95 feet in 1873.

The lower part of the Tower, including the fine Gothic archway into the nave, is considered to be amongst the oldest parts of the existing building, probably dating back to the 14th century. At the springing of the archway, there is a carving on each side of a curious face almost pagan in character. Maybe these faces are crude representations of the 'Green Man'.

In contrast, the West Window, which became more prominent with the raising of the tower, is filled with stained glass of exceptional beauty and workmanship. The design is by Sir Edward Burne-Jones executed in the workshops of William Morris. The window was installed in 1875 by Mr CM Royds in memory of his parents. It depicts Faith, Hope and Charity, or Hope, Charity and Faith in the order in which they appear in the window. It is not unique in that somewhat similar designs are used in windows by Burne-Jones in six other churches, including Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. However, the St Chad's window is the only one which wittily portrays the opposites below the main figures: despair, hate and doubt. In the evening, when the setting sun illuminates this window, the colours are of a deep, rich, jewel-like quality. The upper lights depict biblical stories illustrating Hope, Charity and Faith: Noah's ark and the rainbow, Mary Magdalen washing Jesus' feet and Abraham ready to kill his son, Isaac.

In the southwest corner of the tower, a circular staircase let into the wall gives access to a ringing chamber. The first mention of bells at



St Chad ... in stone. With the church in his hand, he welcomes worshippers and visitors from above the porch.

St Chad ... in glass. In this window on the south aisle, St Chad - Bishop of Lichfield in the 600s - holds a replica of Lichfield Cathedral.



St Chad's today, looking towards the Burne-Jones 'Faith, Hope and Charity' West window.



The 'Faith, Hope and Charity' West window, by the pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones and craftsman William Morris.



The Church today.

St Chad's was of 'fyve grete bells' in 1552. They were all cast by Rudhalls of Gloucester. Between then and 1787 the number was increased to eight. They have since been much in use and have been re-tuned and re-hung. The Churchwardens' accounts contain many entries for substantial disbursements for the refreshment of the bellringers on occasions such as coronations, birth of royal infants and famous victories by land and sea (including in 1827 the Battle of Navarino, which suggests that sometimes 'any excuse....?').

The belfry contains a board placed there in 1795 with the following inscription:-

You gentleman that Ringers are
Please read these Rules and take great care
No Bell oerturn for if you do
Six pence you pay before you go
If you brawl, swear, ill words express
Your forfeit then will be no less
Who offends by tongue or fingers
Must forfeit pay to the Ringers
Then meet in love and part in peace
It will your comfort much increase
Observing time your peals to ring
And humbly pray for GEORGE our KING'

Tim Bobbin and John Barnish (1760-1829), the Clockmaker, have been suggested as authors. The verse cannot, with certainty, be attributed to either, but for over 200 years St Chad's Bellingers have kept these precepts before them.

The Tower had for some years carried a clock. This having become unreliable, in 1787 Mr John Barnish of Toad Lane was commissioned to make a new chiming clock. The chimes played 7 tunes, one for each day of the week:-

Sunday	104th Psalm
Monday	Lovely Nancy
Tuesday	Life let us Cherish
Wednesday	Ipswich
Thursday	Portpatrick
Friday	103rd Psalm
Saturday	Britons Strike Home

Mr Barnish was paid £350 for the clock plus "4 guineas pa" for servicing it, no small matter as the clock had to be wound twice a week and the chimes twice a day. However, Mr Barnish conscientiously looked after his clock for many years. It was eventually removed after his death in 1872, having for sometime played only 'Lovely Nancy' and 'Life let us Cherish'. The octagonal stone clock faces were considered too useful to discard and they are still to be seen as part of the flooring of the Tower and the Vicar's Vestry. Ironically a major reason for the clock's removal – a clash with the carillon in the tower of the new Town Hall – would no longer have been of concern after its destruction by fire in 1883.

A brass plate was fastened to the clock frame reading "This clock and chimes made in the year of our Lord 1789 by John Barnish, Clockmaker in Rochdale, Dr Hind, Vicar, Benjamin Shaw, John Kay, Benjamin Meanly, John Wordsworth". This plate is preserved on the wall of the Vicar's Vestry.

Below the Tower are some interesting memorials. One particularly fine tablet, erected by his fellow townsmen, commemorates Lieutenant John Hopwood, killed in 1813, aged 22, in the final battle of the Peninsular Wars against Napoleon at Bayonne. This gives the lie to the myth that the officers of Wellington's Army were all aristocrats. He was the son of the landlord of the 'King's Head' in Lord Street. He was an officer in the local Militia, the home defence volunteers, who was given a commission in the regular army, in the famous 95th Rifles, in return for raising a company of 50 Rochdale men for service in the Peninsula. Thus, Rochdale has a close parallel with author Bernard Cornwell's eponymous fictional hero – Richard Sharpe – also in the 95th Rifles.

Another tablet of different interest high up on the north wall of the Tower was erected in 1807 by John Entwisle and reads as follows: -

"To perpetuate a memorial erected in the church of St Peter at St Albans (perished by time) this marble is here placed to the memory of a gallant and loyal man, Sir Bertine Entwisle, Knight, Viscount and Baron of Brybeke in Normandy and sometime Bailiffe of Constantine, in which office he succeeded his father-in-law, Sir John Ashton, whose daughter first married Sir Richard le Byron, an ancestor of the Lord Byrons, Barons of Rochdale; and secondly, Sir Bertine Entwisle, who, after repeated acts of valour in the service of his sovereigns, Henry the 5th and 6th, more particularly at Agincourt, was killed in the first battle of St Albans, and on his tombstone was recorded in brass the

following inscription – “Here lyeth Sir Bertine Entrwisle, Knight, who was born in Lancastershyre and was Viscount and Baron of Brybkeke in Normandy and Bailiffe of Constantine who died fighting on King Henry the Sixth party, 28th May, 1455. * On whose Sowl Jesus have mercy.” How true all this is and whether it has a genuine connection with the Rochdale Entrwises is doubtful.

In 2002 one of the pinnacles on the Tower was torn off as a result of the flag becoming wrapped around it on a windy day. Fortunately, no one was standing below at the time.

The Nave

The Nave is separated from the aisles on each side by rows of six Gothic arches set on pillars alternately round and hexagonal, and with triangular chamfers at the base of the arches, features which it has been suggested indicate that the itinerant masons responsible for the building had worked at Canterbury where the Cathedral incorporates similar features. These pillars are considered to be amongst the earliest parts of the church, probably dating back to the 14th century and possibly earlier. The fact that heads carved around the capitals of two of the pillars have been defaced as if with an axe, is thought to be Puritan vandalism. The Puritans did not believe that depiction of the human form had any place in a church. Rochdale, during the Civil War, was a Roundhead garrison town with 1,200 men stationed here to guard the pass over Blackstone Edge into Yorkshire.

At the rear of the Nave are the Churchwardens’ silver tipped staves. The silver hallmarks have been almost polished out of existence, but they appear to date back to the early 19th century. Although in recent times there have not been more than four Wardens, there are six

* *The first battle of St Albans actually took place on May 22nd, 1455.*

staves. Their design and number suggest that they were originally the Parish Constables’ staves. However, a note by Dr Moleworth in 1871 says that in the late 18th and 19th centuries, up to ten Wardens were sworn in for various districts.

The finely carved wooden pulpit was installed in 1907 and is by Hatch of Lancaster. The centre piece is of Christ delivering the Sermon on the Mount, flanked by the figures of St Peter and St Paul. In the south aisle is an ancient muniments chest probably dating back to the 16th century. There is also a fine bronze bust by Gerald Greenhalgh of Heywood, of Canon Nightingale (Vicar 1953-1970), responsible for the last major restoration when pews were replaced by chairs. The visit of HM The Queen and Prince Philip in 1994 on the occasion of the 800th anniversary is recorded on a wall plaque in the South aisle and an illuminated copy of the Town Council resolution passed on that occasion can also be seen there. Hidden away in the Vicar’s vestry is a dignified memorial to the Holt family by William Coleburne dating from 1713. Pevsner rather patronisingly says that this could not have been more up to date in a London church.

The Font

The design of the Font suggests that it may be as old as the 13th century. The fact that it had provision for locking certainly means that it is pre-Reformation when holy water was in demand for witchcraft. It has had an interesting history in that in 1893 it was found buried in the churchyard by the vergger when planting a tree. It seems likely that it was buried on the instructions of Richard Bath, the Vicar during the Civil War period, since infant baptism had no place for Puritans. It has since been used at the baptism of many

infants, including, in 1898, Grace Stansfield of Molesworth Street or Gracie Fields as she was better known. The font has been in its present position since 1969, the baptistry having been moved around the church several times before then.

Stained Glass

Besides the Burne-Jones West window, the church contains a number of interesting and attractive windows of 19th and 20th century stained glass. The east window is a fine example of a Te Deum window, based on the wording of that canticle. The windows in the clerestory in the chancel appear to be representations of the 12 apostles. However, the figure in the fourth window on the northern side, unlike his bearded fellows, could well be a Victorian gentleman. It has been suggested that this is a representation of JS Crowther, the architect, possibly instead of Judas.

The east window in St Katherine's Chapel is a very curious hotch potch. It illustrates the story of Mary Magdalene anointing the feet of Jesus. The scene appears to be taking place in a Tudor Hall with mulioned windows and the participants are dressed variously in Middle Eastern, Elizabethan and Italian Renaissance garb. The feast includes a splendid peacock and a number of fruits not to be found in the Palestine of Jesus' time.

In the Trinity Chapel is some good heraldic glass by Thomas Willement (1786-1871) whose work can also be seen at Hampton Court and in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

In the south aisle, installed in 1933, is the St Chad window with the fanciful scene of him preaching in Rochdale. There is also a very colourful window nearby in memory of Sir Clement Royds which

depicts him kneeling before St Michael in the role of a donor, as if in an 'old master' painting.

The first window in the north aisle by the font depicts the Virgin nursing the infant Jesus venerated by the Magi and the Shepherds. This was presented in 1870, at a cost of £42, by the Sunday School children who paid for it by weekly collections of pennies over a period. The third window dedicated to Dr Molesworth shows Christ being taught in the Temple. It was the gift in 1878 of teachers from all over the country who had served their apprenticeship at Sparrow Hill School for Boys, a school with a reputation throughout Lancashire.

The Organ

The organ of excellent quality was originally installed by William Hill of London in 1885 at the time of the re-building of the chancel. As is not unusual with church organs, it has been renovated from time to time, with a major re-building by Harrison & Harrison of Durham in 1959 when the console was moved to the Chancel.

As early as 1532 an organ appears in an inventory, when only two other churches in Lancashire are known to have had organs. The Churchwardens' accounts of 1705 contain mention of an organ and there are subsequently many entries for repairing the organ and paying the organist's salary.

In 1720 it was noted that it was the responsibility of the organist to keep the organ in order "as far as his skill will reach", also "begetting gratis six poor boys to sing". It is clear from several entries in the Churchwardens' accounts that the organ at this time was in the west gallery. In 1776 it was agreed to erect

“a small loft or pew over the seats at each end of the organ for the use of the singing boys”.

In 1804, it was recorded that “the large parish church of Rochdale has contained an organ beyond the memory of the oldest person now living and no written documents in the possession of the Churchwardens enable them to trace or state the particulars of its foundation with any sort of accuracy”.

The position of organist at St Chad’s appears to have been a sought after post, as there were several elections held for it in the 18th century. Filling the vacancy in 1804 was particularly contentious and it was decided to seek Counsel’s opinion on who was entitled to vote. The opinion obtained from the Worshipful Maurice Swaby, Doctor of Laws, still did not settle all argument. Eventually, the poll took place over four days, the voting being in person by signature or mark. Some 1,500 voted with the following result:-

John Redfearn	1004
Edward Ellinhorpe	296
Solomon Smith	207

This appears to have been the last time that the post was filled by election.

In 1820, the salary of the organist was increased from £20 to £30, after many years unchanged at £20.

In 1854 at the time of re-building of the north aisle and removal of the galleries, the organ was moved from the west end to an organ chamber on the east end of the north aisle.

In the first issue of the Parish Magazine in 1867 is the following notice by the Choirmaster – “It will be observed that the times of practice by

our Parish Church Choir are given in the calendar for the month. These are inserted to give the congregation an opportunity of attending them for practice, in order thereby to increase the heartiness of our congregational singing”. His enthusiasm was such that in the same year there is a reference to special choir practices at 6.00 am on Sunday mornings. The attendance is not recorded.

The Chancel and Chapels

The Chancel was much enlarged in 1885 at a cost of £10,000 (equivalent to half a million pounds today) and the Chapels of St Katherine on the north side and Trinity Chapel on the south lengthened. Both these Chapels are believed to have been founded in 1487.

The St Katherine’s Chapel contains a number of laid up standards, including the colours of the 6th Territorial Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers (now amalgamated with the Royal Fusiliers). This was recruited in Rochdale, Middleton and Todmorden and fought at Gallipoli. The altar cross and candlesticks are by the modern silversmith Leslie Durbin, and the altar rails are by the modern Kilburn bearing his mouse trademark. There is an interesting “brass” (actually copper) memorial on the north wall to Susannah Gartside, dated 1668. It depicts two skeletons from whose mouths issue the words “As you are, so were we: As we are, so must you be”. Also, there is a Hebrew word meaning lily or beautiful. The Latin inscription translated is “Here lies buried Susannah Gartside, wife of Gabriel Gartside of Rochdale and daughter of James Gartside of Oakenroyd, who departed on the 7th day of August in the year 1668. In memory of his very dear mother, Samuel Gartside has created this.

Lilies flourish among thorns. Virtue (flourishes) after the funeral.
For the good have eternal life".

There is also commemorated on the north wall of the chapel a tragedy at sea:

"In memory of James Richard Elliott who was wrecked on the Pegasus off the Farne Islands July 20th 1843 and who was interred at Holy Island August 19th, aged 36 years; also of his nephew William Bowen, son of Cap Elliott of 37th Reg who was lost at the same time, aged 6 years."

The brass lectern was given in 1905 as an appreciation of the services of Dr James Wilson (Vicar 1890-1905) and is a copy of a lectern which then was at Newstead Abbey, the former home of the Byron family. The chapel also contains a sideboard dated 1643, the year of the creation of the 1st Lord Byron of Rochdale, said to be a present to him on this occasion.

Trinity Chapel was founded in the reign of Henry VII by a Brotherhood formed to worship the Holy Trinity. The Brotherhood consisted of Mr Adam Marland, Sir Randolph Butterworth and Sir James Middleton. Sir James was the priest and he was instructed to pray daily for the souls of Randolph Butterworth, his mother, brother, sister; also for his friend the Duke of Buckingham. The foundation deed is dated 1487.

The chapel became the property in 1665 of Alexander Butterworth of Belfield, purchased from James Marland of Marland. Alexander Butterworth gave over his lands shortly before his death in 1728 to Richard Townley who had been his steward. The chapel was included in his estate and so passed to Richard Greaves Townley who, for £650, sold it to James Dearden in August 1823. Dearden also

acquired at this time the Lordship of the Manor of Rochdale from Lord Byron whose family had held it since 1519.

In plans of 1823 the chapel is marked as the Squire Chapel but in 1855 is called the Manor Chapel. It was sometime after 1883, when a Faculty was granted incorporating the chapel into the church, that the chapel was once again known as Trinity Chapel.

Prior to coming into the possession of James Dearden the chapel was furnished in the style of a drawing room, but so were the box pews in the remainder of the church. There were two stained glass windows.

The window on the south wall bore the initials ^BAG 1602 representing Alexander and Grace Butterworth. The east window was also of the 17th century and dated 1633, bearing eight coats of arms. These arms were partially duplicated in the roof where there were six coats of arms. The families represented by the arms were Butterworth, Birdeshull, Barry, Ashton, Belfield and Clegg. In a second compartment was displayed Townley of Belfield. The eight arms in the window were six as above, with one defaced and one broken. In the roof were carved oak bosses.

In 1886 Trinity Chapel was extended by 20 feet and the oak roof was replaced by one of deal. The Sidesmen's oak collection plates, still in use, were made from the oak bosses of the roof in 1900 by Henry Hoyle.

A new wall had been built in 1815-1816. It was necessary to adapt to the new measurements the east window of the chapel, in the centre of which were emblems of the Trinity, with the Virgin at one side and John the Baptist on the other. So the window was sent to Messrs Willement of London, where it was destroyed by a fire. Mr Dearden then replaced the lost window with the present window of The Last

Supper. Willement was also responsible for the heraldic window in the chapel to the memory of Simon Dearden. This depicts the Dearden arms and those of Belfield and Ingham, families connected by marriage, and displays prominently the Dearden motto – “Dum Spiro Spero” – whilst I live I seek.

In 1883 Trinity Chapel was incorporated into the church and the cost of restoration was included in the general restoration costs. Mr Dearden gave the furniture from the chapel to be placed in the body of the church. The screen on the north side of the chapel was moved to the north aisle to balance the west end screen of Trinity placed forward, east of the little south door. Some portions of the screens are original 17th century work.

Fishwick quotes at length from a book, “Popular Genealogists or the Art of Pedigree-Making”, regarding the monuments and brasses that James Dearden set up in the chapel. When James Dearden’s Arms were registered in 1841 his lineage could be traced to Richard Dearden of Whitefield who died in 1630. Richard Dearden was a yeoman, not a knight or lord, and neither this gentleman nor his predecessors was entitled to carry arms. The quotation says that in the centre of the chapel was the figure of a cross-legged knight with the arms of Rochdale on his shield. Alongside was a Bishop with mitre and crozier, claimed to be Dearden Bishop of Lichfield in the time of Stephen, who of course had to be buried in Rochdale, not Coventry, as is usually accepted as the burial place. The knight bore the arms of the legendary Lord Racedham, which is a martlet. This bird can still be seen in the few tiles left along the south wall of the chapel, below the brasses. The bird also appeared on the old coat-of-arms of the borough prior to the 1974 Local Government reorganisation. The martlet also appears on the arms of the local family of Chadwick.

The effigies are now buried under the floor and only two slabs remain set in the floor. These are of a pointed cross or a decorated sword pinning down a beast which could be a boar or small hind. The other slab is that of a priest which from the robes could represent an Abbott. A common priest would not fit in with Dearden’s ideas of his ancestry. The brasses are still on the walls. These represent: 1 - James Duerden at prayer, 1609; 2 - Oliver Duerden wearing armour, with a sword, 1545; 3 - Ottwell Duerden armour as figure 2 but the tabard depicts martlets; 4 - Richard Duerden kneeling in armour, 1586; 5 - Richard Duerden standing, 1630. Each brass bears an inscription in English or Latin.

A paper published by Rev. Austin Chadwick describes the condition of the brasses in 1936. The brass to James Dearden was obscured by a radiator and the dates on other brasses cannot be read. These brasses are sometimes believed to be genuine. Even Arthur Mee thought so and complains, in his book “The King’s England”, of their obstruction by a radiator and a harmonium. However, the opinion of an expert, a Mr Greenhalgh, called in by the Vicar, Rev. G.E.N. Molesworth, in 1948 was that, as was generally believed, they were fakes. They were not earlier than 1847, but accurately represented the period from which they purported to date, and had been executed by a skilled artist well versed in the brasses of the time, and that with care they should last another 800 years!

The paper by Chadwick, whilst stating that Fishwick had the wrong dates for the deaths of James and Richard having not read the brasses correctly, itself makes a blunder. It says that James Dearden purchased the chapel from Lord Byron, when the Byrons had never been in possession of the chapel. That the ecclesiastical authorities allowed all these spurious monuments was, according to Fishwick,

because they had earlier permitted the Entwistle monument, now on the north wall of the tower. This monument bears the false claim that an Entwistle had fought at Agincourt. So they could not refuse Dearden permission to display his own fantasies.

Genuinely ancient are the altar table and rails in the Trinity Chapel which date back to the 17th century and were those in the former chancel.

The pews beyond the choir stalls towards the altar are arranged in the collegiate manner, possibly with thoughts of a cathedral in mind. Some are very old and were originally in the Trinity Chapel. They are carved with ecclesiastical coats of arms and those of prominent local families, including the arms of the 4th Lord Byron. The pew on the southern side nearest the altar was bought by Mr A Royds in 1865 from Canterbury Cathedral and may be 15th century. It is carved with curious fighting animals. Amongst these seats, it must be assumed are the "Yeomen's Seats" to which there are several references in the archives without its being made clear who had the rights to these seats and how many there were.

The piscina to the right of the altar is adorned with representations of Gamel the Thane and Geoffrey the Dean – a nice touch of Victorian romanticism.

The roof of the Chancel is a fine example of double hammer beam construction adorned with a heavenly orchestra. At the springing of the arches are 28 carved angels with outstretched wings, each playing a musical instrument.

MISCELLANEOUS

The following are interesting snippets from notes of Churchwardens' Meetings and Accounts:-

- 1642 "For getting our Rishes and sweeping Church 5s.
1645 "For carrying off plate into Yorkshire in
tyme of danger". 1s.4d.

It is evident from several entries in the Accounts that hedgehogs and moles were aids to keeping the insect life in the rushes on the church floor under control:

- 1669 14 hedgehogs 2s.4d.
moles 4d.
1699 1 houghhogs 4d.
1700 3 houghshogs 6d.
1705 3 hedgehogs & 4 moles 10d.

1756, 24 October - Meeting "to consider making an umbrella or some useful machine to keep the Minister from wet and cold this winter and to preserve the surplus and books from wet when interring the dead".
Agreed Churchwardens shall buy a new umbrella.

1773, 13 April – Church entered through a window and communion plate, surplices etc. stolen. Plate recovered as result of information from an accomplice (given five guineas reward). Thief Edmund Tattersall caught and transported.

In 1779 there was another break in by two persons. They were again caught and committed to Lancaster Assizes.

1780, 7 November – Meeting agreed "that a person be appointed at the yearly salary of one pound one shilling who should make it his business, during the celebration of Divine Service and at funerals on

Sundays, to be attending in the churchyard and keeping good order therein and for that purpose shall be provided with a loose greatcoat and hat not exceeding the sum of fifty shillings and that the same be kept in the vestry”.

1783, 29 January – “6 boys wanted to sing chants and psalm tunes to the organ. Parents wishing to have their children taught to signify their desires to the Vicar and Churchwardens. None under 10 years of age will be admitted”.

1811, 7 July – The Bishop of Chester confirmed 1,830 candidates. “Churchwardens provided for clergy and attendants 16 bottles of wine, one seed cake and one plum cake. After the confirmation, the Wardens and Constables adjourned to a cold collation”.

1829, 12 May – “That our Churchwardens be requested to attend at all times when sacrament is to be administered to ascertain the real quantity of bread and wine necessarily used and that no white wine be purchased as it is not used for sacramental purposes.”

1840, 18 April – “The Trustees under the will of Dorothy Holt of Castleton to meet to elect six poor girls to be taught the Church catechism and to read, knit and sew, three of them must be settled inhabitants of Castleton and the other three of Castleton or Rochdale.”

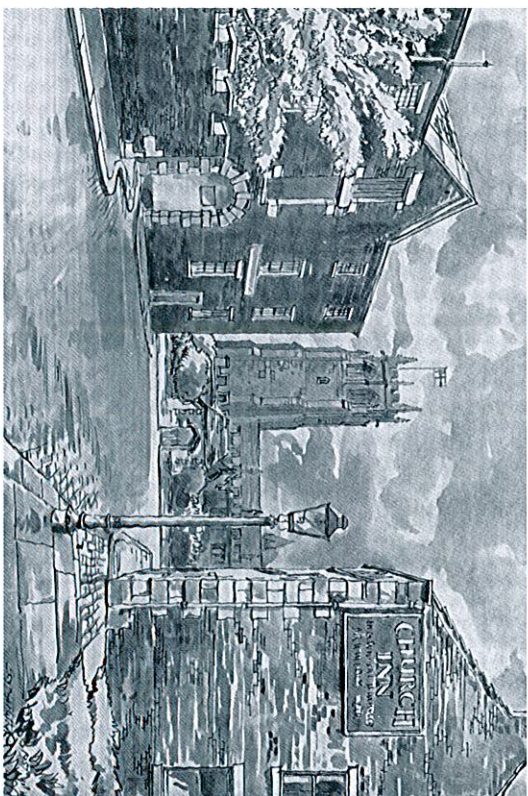
1877 – Numbers in Sunday Schools given as follows:-

	Boys	Girls	Total	Teachers
Sparrow Hill	234	380	614	37
Ann Street	383	469	852	32
The Gank	73	60	133	6
	<u>690</u>	<u>909</u>	<u>1599</u>	<u>75</u>

The cost was given as £73.8s.7d or about 10d per head! By 1919 the numbers had declined to 695 but there were still 71 voluntary teachers.

FINALLY

This ends the short history of the church and I hope that you have a new sense of this place, this 'Auld Church'. But what of the faces that occupied the pews and pulpit? Henry Pigot described by an old early-Victorian lady as a small eighty year old man with long scant white hair: Dr Dunster arriving at church on horseback, falling up the three-decker pulpit steps forgetting to remove his spurs. The long church rate dispute. The Quaker wearing his hat in church. John Bright standing in the pulpit so that parson Molesworth had to address the people from the gallery. Dr Molesworth himself, the wealthy autocrat. The ordinary folk sitting in the free pews, a weekly rest from the toil of the mill. The crocodiles of Sunday School scholars coming from Coventry Street and up Drake Street from the Fold to all enter at the West Door. So many hymns and prayers over so many decades have filled this place.



St Chad's, seen from Church Stile in 1957

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