

## History of St. Cuthbert's Church High Etherley



St.Cuthbert's Church High Etherley

### 1. Brief Description

A brief description of St. Cuthbert's Church at High Etherley from information gained during research into Durham Cathedral Library, local history booklets and extracts from previous writings about the Etherley area.

In 1832 St. Cuthbert's "Anglican" church was built under the patronage of the Bishop of Durham, William Van Mildert, costing a meagre £700 and was later restored in 1867 and 1901.

Evidence of the importance of support given by the Stobart family, the principal landowners and colliery owners at the time, can be found in the church in the form of a stained glass window placed in memory of John Henry Stobart and the church clock presented in memory of William Culley Stobart.

### 2. William Van Mildert – (extract from the Durham Cathedral Library Van Mildert Letters)

#### Biography

William Van Mildert (1765-1836), bishop of Durham (1826-1836), was born 6th November 1765 in Southwark, the son of Cornelius Van Mildert (1722-1799), gin distiller, and his wife, Martha, née Hill (1732-1804). Van Mildert studied at the Merchant Taylors' School, and Queen's College, Oxford, 1784-90. Ordained priest in 1789, in 1790 he became curate of Witham, Essex where he met Jane (1760-1837), daughter of General Douglas, whom he married in 1795. In 1795 Van Mildert was given the living of Bradden, Northamptonshire, by Cornelius Ives, his cousin and brother-in-law; in 1796, he became chaplain to the Grocers' Company and rector of St Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside, London. In London he joined the high church campaigning group the Hackney Phalanx, served as treasurer of the SPCK 1812-15, gave the Boyle lectures of 1802-5, was preacher of Lincoln's Inn, 1812-9, Bampton lecturer in 1814, and in 1823 published a ten-volume edition of the works of Daniel Waterland. In 1813 he became regius professor of divinity at Oxford and a canon of Christ Church, bishop of Llandaff May 1819, declined the archbishopric of Dublin in 1820, instead becoming dean of St Paul's in commendam with Llandaff, and in 1826 Van Mildert became Bishop of Durham.

The University of Durham was founded in 1832, primarily through the vision and determination of Van Mildert, and Charles Thorp, archdeacon of Durham and prebendary of Durham Cathedral. Van Mildert and Thorp saw the foundation of a university in Durham as a way of deflecting popular criticism of church wealth, and averting the danger that, unless the church itself redeployed some of its surplus, a reforming government would wield the scythe for it. They were eventually successful in persuading the dean and chapter of Durham to support the scheme and redeploy some of their property to provide an endowment. The struggle to win recognition and adequate endowment for the fledgling institution had to continue after Van Mildert's death in 1836 under his successor as bishop, Edward Maltby.

The William Van Mildert Coat of Arms



### 3. Local History of High Etherley

This description of Etherley Parish was written in the short historical book by Brigadier-General Conyers Surtees in 1923.

‘Etherley Parish is an ecclesiastical parish some three miles west from Bishop Auckland, which includes the scattered village of Etherley and the agricultural Hamlet of Morley’ 1923 ‘Etherley Parish is a hamlet of scattered houses, having a colliery, school, three public houses and a few tradesmen.....’

The book further describes the area as being ‘rich in coals, freestone and other minerals, with coalfields chiefly worked by drifts from Escomb and Witton Park and is sparsely populated.....’.

Further confirmation of this broad picture of our parish can also to be found in the ‘History of Durham’ by Mackenzie and Ross published in 1834 where it states:

‘Etherley Parish is a hamlet of scattered houses, having a colliery, school, three public houses and a few tradesmen.....’

Early statistics taken from the 1851 census list the population as comprising of 482 males and 479 females inhabiting 214 dwellings. At that time, surprisingly, there were a total of 30 uninhabited dwellings within the Parish.

Today the population of Etherley Parish stands at 2431 inhabitants with all dwellings having piped water, bathrooms and inside toilets. Not so very long ago, fifty years in fact, the picture was very different with a parish population of 1835 - over 40 dwellings without piped water, 365 dwellings using outside toilets and a staggering 405 dwellings with no bathroom.

### 4. Etherley in the 1800's

At the time of the 1851 census the majority of the working population was employed locally, primarily in coal mining and agricultural work.

Before this time few traces of coal mining activity were evident, although there is evidence coal extraction going as far back as the 1600's. Scattered farms were characteristic of the predominant occupation in the area. Early in the 19th century there were three local pits in operation, owned by

the Stobart family, these being the Mary Ann Pit, the Jane Pit and the George Pit. The Mary Ann is said to be the oldest of the three collieries.

At that time transportation of coal was expensive and inefficient and in 1821 an act of parliament was authorised to begin construction of what was to become the World's First Passenger Railway: The Darlington/Stockton Railway. In 1825 the Jane Pit was used as the terminus for the line which started at Witton Park Colliery, followed the inclines at Etherley and Brusstleton, continued via Shildon and Darlington and ended on the banks of the River Tees at Stockton. Today English Heritage has categorised Etherley Incline as an ancient monument and as such is protected. The Incline is designated as a public footpath and from Low Etherley to Greenfields makes a pleasant area for walking. It is, however, fascinating to remember that Etherley was linked to a momentous and historical event in the development of rail travel in the country.

### **5. The Mining Years**

With the birth of the railway came cheap and efficient transport and as a result coal mining in the area expanded rapidly. New collieries were sunk at Etherley and in the surrounding areas and as a consequence there was a marked change from agriculture to coal mining as the principal employment. This inevitably led to an influx of newcomers requiring homes – some new properties were built by private enterprise, but more often houses were built by the colliery companies in a style that typified the mining village of the time.

However, despite Etherley and Toft Hill being in a mining area the style and characteristics of the properties being built certainly did not suggest this. A reason given for the distinct difference between Etherley and other colliery villages was that Henry Stobart, owner and head of the local mining company, made his home in the village of Etherley and the majority of the houses in the village were reserved for officials, clerical staff and others working at the residence of Mr. Stobart and were distinctively better in design and quality. Mr. Stobart eventually became known as the squire of the neighbourhood.

Coal mining continued to dominate the area for the next 100 years and mines were sunk and operated until the early part of the twentieth century. The George Pit, latterly known as Old Etherley Colliery, closed in 1917 and the closure of Jane Pit in April 1925 caused the loss of 255 jobs and was one of many economic disasters to befall the area.

Since the closure of local pits the only link with the coal industry has been a succession of surface mines. Southfield surface mine located at Brusstleton is the only operational mine within the Parish and nearing completion.

### **6. Religion in Toft Hill and Etherley**

Around the mid nineteenth century several important developments took place within the Parish. Due to the development of the railways and the continued expansion of coal mining there was a steady increase in the population and as a consequence provision of additional housing and places of worship was made.

The growth of Methodism in the area resulted in the Toft Hill Wesleyan Methodist Chapel being built at Quarry Heads. This opened in 1829 costing £240 and seated 150 people. The building was eventually replaced by Methodist Chapel located on South Road which opened in 1861.

In 1832 St. Cuthbert's Anglican church was built costing a meagre £700 and was later restored in 1867 and 1901. Evidence of the importance and support of the Stobart family, the principal landowners and colliery owners at the time, can be found in the church in the form of a stained glass window placed in memory of John Henry Stobart and the church clock presented in memory of William Culley Stobart.

A further place of worship – the Primitive Methodist Church – also existed at Toft Hill. This building was recently demolished and two dwellings now stand in its place. In 1864 The Etherley Literacy Institute was built costing £500 – this building consisted of a large lecture room, reading room,

recreation rooms, library and bathroom. The library held 400 volumes of high class literature and for a small membership cost of one shilling per quarter, residents had access to these books – quite a privilege in those days.

## 7. The Church

By 1829 the population of Etherley had grown rapidly and the elders of the Established Church began to feel the need for a place of worship in Etherley.

There were already Anglican Churches in the area, St. Andrews at South Church, St. Helens at West Auckland and St. James at Hamsterley but in those days the roads were very bad and dangerous, public transport was non-existent, private horse transport was expensive and beyond the pocket of most people. People slithered down the hill to West Auckland and struggled back up the again to go to church at St. Helens.

Etherley formed part of the Chapelry of St. Helens and a petition was made to Bishop Van Mildert at Durham requesting a Chapel at Etherley:-

*The humble petition of the Parishioners and other inhabitants of the Chapelry of St. Helens Auckland and the Parish of St. Andrew Auckland in the County of Durham and your Lordships diocese ..... that owing to the great and increasing population of the said Chapelry, insufficient to contain the number of persons willing to attend divine services therein that..... to remedy which, in part, a chapel be erected and built at Etherley, a Township within the Chapelry.... the same intended to as and for to ease the said Chapel at St. Helens Auckland and complete with every necessary requisite for the celebration and performance of Divine Service and Ceremonies of the Church of England as now by law established and also for the celebration of Marriages, Baptisms and Burials.....*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1831 Sir Robert Eden, of Windlestone, who was His Majesty's Commissioner for the Building of New Churches:-

*Sir Robert Johnson Eden in the County of Durham, Baronet, in consideration of the sum of five shillings paid, do hereby grant, convey and release... that freehold parcel of ground at Etherley in the County and Diocese of Durham..... building now be erected and called Etherley Chapel.*

In 1831 William Ramshaw, a joiner and builder at Bishop Auckland designed and built, in conjunction with Bishop Van Mildert built the Church at Etherley. Little is known about William Ramshaw or the detail in the building of the church.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1832 the church, “affording comfortable accommodation for about 350 persons” was opened for divine service and on July 10<sup>th</sup> was presented with a stone font by Archdeacon Thorp.

Rev. George Watson became the first Rector of Etherley and on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1832 the church and churchyard were consecrated by Rev. Dr. Gray the Bishop of Bristol.

It is worthy of note that in 1847 the “see of Manchester” was formed with the “Order of Council No. 1018 and the gazette of August 5<sup>th</sup> resulting in:-

*At the Court of Osborne House... the appointment or exchange of ecclesiastical patronage among Archbishops and Bishops the magnitude of their diocese when newly arranged shall afford an adequate quantity of patronage to the Bishops of the new sees...*

*In Table III of the order... to the Bishop of Manchester and his successors: Eaglescliffe, Elwick Hall, Washington, Sadberge, Penshaw, Esh, **Etherley**. Perpetual Curacy.*



As a consequence all priests appointed to the Parish of Etherley since that time have been under the patronage of the Bishop of Manchester.

### 8. The Church at Etherley as we know it



## **9. Rectors**

1832 – 1865	George Watson
1865 – 1876	William B. Findlay
1876 – 1885	James Moore
1885 – 1886	Isaac W. Milner
1886 – 1888	William E. Houldey
1888 – 1909	Charles Atkinson
1909 – 1919	Harold R. Hopwood
1919 – 1928	Lionel S. Merrefield
1928 – 1954	Lewis Evans
1955 – 1958	Stephen F. Park
1958 – 1963	William E. Ainley
1964 – 1970	George Maddison
1970 – 1977	Richard W. Bateman
1978 - .....	David G.F. Hinge

## **10. Church Wardens**

## **11. Index**

- 1 Brief Description**
- 2 William Van Mildert**
- 3 Local History of Etherley**
- 4 Etherley in the 1880's**
- 5 The Mining Years**
- 6 Religion in Toft Hill and Etherley**
- 7 The Church**
- 8 The Church at Etherley as we know It**
- 9 Rectors**
- 10 Church Wardens**
- 11 Index**
- 12 Acknowledgements**

## **12. Acknowledgements**

- 12.1 Durham Cathedral Library**
- 12.2 Etherley Parish Church by Peter Kilmister**
- 12.3 Historical book by Brigadier-General Conyers Surtees in 1923.**