

If you had visited Holtspur in the early 1930s you would have found three farms situated along Holtspur Top Lane and very little else. Towards the middle of that era development was just beginning. Houses were being built from what is now the Harvester (originally the Kings' Head) up to and including Holtspur Close and Ivins Road; this development was taking place on both sides of the lane and many of these original houses are still there. There were a couple of houses at the lane end of what is now Mayflower Way, with footpaths leading towards the station and the new town. Towards the end of the war a small group of prefabs were also built in Mayflower Way (these were replaced in the early sixties by houses and flats). There were a couple of shops in the lane and the garage on the opposite corner to the King's Head on the A40.

This small community was in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Woburn. There is a boundary stone on the A40 dated 1827, although in the parish of Woburn there appears to be no Holtspur people in the parish register and, in fact, the area was served by the Rev. P.F.R. Roulth, Rector of Beaconsfield.

Several far-sighted people began to realise that this area would again begin to grow as the war ended and homes were needed. The churches in Beaconsfield and Woburn were both a considerable distance for many people to travel, remembering that private cars were not readily available due to petrol rationing and the buses were few and far between, especially on a Sunday.

A far-sighted member of the PCC, Mr Robert Trench, made a very generous offer of £500 to buy land in Holtspur for its own church if it could become part of the Beaconsfield parish. This finally happened on 12 December 1946, a notice appearing in the London Gazette. As the war ended austerity and shortages were very much in evidence, but the residents of Holtspur started a Church Fund, subscriptions were invited and fund raising events took place.

But where to build the church? Holtspur was nothing like it is today just a ribbon development along the lane with the farms further down the lane. It had no centre or area where people would meet. The present day site was finally decided by the committee and was rented from Lord Burnham at a peppercorn rent of ten shillings a year. The chosen site was in Mayflower Way and adjacent to the footpaths that led to the station and the new town, which travelled diagonally across what is now Cherry Tree Road.

The original building was a cedar shingle building with a concrete floor, lined walls and would seat 80 people costing then £1000. This was erected in 1949 by Mr S. Strickland and some willing helpers, in just over a fortnight. The church was called St Thomas as the joining of Holtspur to the parish of Beaconsfield took place on St Thomas' day (21st December). The church was dedicated by the Bishop of Buckingham on the eve of St Thomas' day and the first service was held on the 20th December 1949.

The building was primarily a church but the need for a community hall was soon apparent and the new church took on this role as well. The building being a wooden one made the congregation feel that fire extinguishers should be installed, a wise move considering what happened in the future! The church was used for all manner of purposes, the baby clinic, dance classes and the newly formed Holtspur playgroup to name but a few. As Holtspur grew in the fifties the little wooden church did not have the same appeal to the new residents and the need for permanent brick built church was becoming urgent. The congregation was also beginning to outgrow the little church, Sunday school classes were being held in private homes among other things.

In 1958 Beaconsfield became one of the first parishes to introduce a Planned Giving Scheme, which is still running today. The land adjacent to the wooden church was available and was finally purchased from Lawson Estates for a modest price and Lord Burnham donated the site where the wooden church stood and the freeholds of both sites were conveyed to the church commissioners in 1959. Mayflower Way was by this time a concrete road and houses were being built along it. The planned giving campaign enabled the Parochial Church Council (PCC) to allocate £400 a year for 3 years for the new church to be considered.

The foundation stone was laid by Enid Lady Burnham on June 10th 1961. The first plans for the new church, which would seat 240, had a tower at the west end but this didn't obtain the total approval of the PCC. The architect designed a short spire on the roof but again this was not to the PCC total approval, so a square tower abutted on to the north wall finally met with approval and was built.

The service of consecration was conducted by the Rt. Rev Harry Carpenter, Lord Bishop of Oxford on December 21st 1961, which is St Thomas' day. The church was packed, in fact there was an overflow congregation in the hall viewing the proceedings on closed circuit television. The marble altar, a gift from St Michael's congregation was also consecrated as was the font, a gift from Holtspur Young Wives'.

Over the years many changes have occurred; the high altar which cannot be moved due to its weight presented a problem when it became acceptable that the celebrant should face the congregation during the communion service so a plain wooden altar table was donated in 1981 in memory of Violet Helliwell. The church has, over the years, received many gifts in memory of members of the congregation. These include the tower clocks in memory of Merrie King, the stained glass south doors in memory of Ron Johnson and the weather vane on the spire in memory of Jack and Pat Ward to name but a few.

There was an urgent need for accommodation for the clergy serving St Thomas, who were living in the town which was not suitable for serving the needs of Holtspur. St Thomas' house was built in a style in keeping with the church and was first occupied by the Rev Cyril Harris and his family in 1963.

The old wooden church continued to serve the community in many ways as a venue for the Holtspur Playgroup, the baby clinic, brownies, and as a social venue. This arrangement came to a sudden end on a fine dry sunny Friday in July. Having been used by the playgroup that afternoon, left tidied and secure but luckily unoccupied, a fire broke out, the vicar saw it and promptly called the fire brigade but as the building was almost totally made of wood, and the weather had been dry, there was no hope of saving it and it was totally destroyed. The cause of the fire was never really known but many suspected the electric wiring.

The playgroup, who was a regular user of the hall, stored all their equipment on the stage, much of which was damaged beyond use. However some was still usable but filthy, so a group spent the entire weekend in Gillian and Bob Russell's garden (at that time they lived opposite the church) scrubbing tables, chairs and other wooden things so that the playgroup could continue to function, temporarily, due to the kindness of the United Reform Church in their church at the top of Crabtree close and to reopen in September at the scout hut.

The new St Thomas' hall was built soon after this. The need for a new and much larger hall had already been recognised and an intensive money raising campaign was in operation, during 1969 and 1970. The need became more urgent after the fire. A committee had been formed to deal with all the official planning that was involved with the new building and this was sub-contracted under a direct labour scheme. The new hall was ready by the end of the year and the opening ceremony was on St Thomas' day December 21st 1970. The brass plaque was unveiled by Enid Lady Burnham and the hall blessed by the Rt. Rev. G.C.C. Pepys, the Bishop of Buckingham.

The hall has been in regular use ever since, providing a welcome service to both the church and the community, Sunday School, harvest suppers, Tom Tots, Holiday Clubs keep fit, badminton, birthday parties, exhibitions have all taken place in the hall over the years. With all this use the kitchen and toilets have had to have been updated, but the hall is generally financial self sufficient.

St Thomas has had a number of Clergy over the years all who have left their mark on the church, and are remembered with affection.

They are:

The Rev. Leonard G Reeves 1953 -63. Priest –in-charge

The Rev. Cyril E Harris 1963-68. Priest-in- charge

The Rev. Raymond J Wood 1968 – 72 Priest- in –Charge

The Rev. Rejinder Daniel 1972 - 75 Priest –in-charge (Vicar)

The Rev Clive Everett-Allen 1975-3 Team Vicar

The Rev Victor J Filer 1884-90 Team Vicar

The Rev. Peter W Lockyer 1990 – 95 Team Curate and then Team Vicar

The Rev Richard Caddell 1996- Team Vicar

The Rev Steven Painting

The Rev Narinder Tegally

The Rev Ronald A. Johnson 1986 – 98 Associate Minister.

There are many stories about the church, its congregation and activities not mentioned here which have contributed to the character of the congregation and the events at the church which have developed the character of this small but united church. St Thomas has seen many changes throughout the years both large and small but stands today as a happy and united church, always ready to welcome visitors and newcomers, looking towards the future and whatever changes and developments are to come.