

CHAPTER ONE

Thomas Howe Baxter



'This Church of Saint Faith is dedicated to the glory of God as a thankoffering for the revival of Catholic Faith and Doctrine in the Church of England during the sixty years reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria.' So reads the inscription on the north chancel wall of St. Faith's, carved deeply in the sandstone as a witness to the intentions of its founder and a permanent reminder of the special, and often controversial place this church has held in Crosby in the seventy five years since its foundations were laid.

For it is probably true to say that, for better or for worse, St. Faith's has always stood for something distinctive in Crosby: an uncompromising and unavoidable building, standing uncompromisingly for a special order of worship and an emphasis which for many years set it well apart from the mainstream of Anglican worship in the area. As a result it must often have seemed something of a citadel set in hostile territory, and its successive priests and congregations saw themselves as Defenders of the Faith, an embattled minority witnessing to a style and pattern of worship generally conspicuous only by its absence, not only in the local area but also in the Liverpool Diocese as a whole.

For when St. Faith's was built, the Oxford Movement was little more than half a century old, Keble, Pusey and Newman still remembered, and what they stood for and rediscovered in Anglicanism generally misunderstood, if not actually feared and hated. The new emphasis on order in worship, authority in the church, regular Celebration of the Eucharist and a limited use of vestments and ornaments in church, moderate though it seems by today's standards, was

sufficient at the turn of the century to inflame the tempers of loyal Protestants who, deeply suspicious of Rome and all its ways, saw in the Anglo-Catholic movement not merely a devoted attempt to deepen spiritual life and restore some of the ancient principles and practices of Anglicanism into a church which seems sadly to have neglected them, but a sinister campaign to sell out to the Pope and restore rule from Rome by the back door. And in ultra-conservative, Protestant Liverpool, although there were fewer of the dramatic battles for the faith, vicious lawsuits and personal attacks that happened so often in London and elsewhere at the time, there was nevertheless a strong and genuine feeling which showed itself in hostility and bitterness at the time of the foundation of St. Faith's and which left a legacy of suspicion and isolation for the first half century of the new church's life and beyond.

If the rapid development of Christian thinking and ecumenical initiative have, thankfully, largely relegated these differences to the pages of history, the pace of urban development has meant that Crosby itself has also changed almost out of recognition since the turn of the century. George Houldin in 'Fifty Years' sets the scene in 1897. Waterloo and Crosby were separate Urban Districts, Waterloo was a mere strip along the coast and Waterloo Park separated from it by fields and half-completed roads. St. John's Road was little more than a cart track: 'one could stand at Thorndale Road and see the barges moving slowly on the canal near Ford.' There were no shops in St. John's Road, Crosby Road was a country lane with a scattering of large houses, and although Merchant Taylors' School's new buildings had been erected in 1878, from their grounds one could see the cemetery at Ford over the cornfields on the opposite side of Liverpool Road. Cows grazed on what is now Victoria Park, and open fields stretched from there to the railway, and the quiet rural districts of Waterloo and Crosby had still to experience the rapid rash of urban development which in the next half century was to remove much of their character and turn them into little more than the northernmost of the continuous suburbs of Liverpool and Bootle.

'At this time Queen Victoria was the reigning monarch, and no more loyal place existed than Waterloo, for the people in every walk of life looked upon her with very real affection. They emulated her views on religious matters, too, for she held Lutheran opinions, and in this scattered area there were no fewer than five churches, four of them with

the Protestant flavour strongly marked.' Needless to say, it was not at the good Queen's suggestion that the inscription on the wall of the choir at St. Faith's was written.

Squire Houghton of Waterloo and Squire Myers of Great Crosby owned most of the land in the area. Douglas Horsfall, our founder, was the cousin of the latter, and in 1897 approached him with a view to buying land for the building of a church. He was a devoted builder of churches, but Squire Myers is said to have regarded this particular request with some surprise. "Why on earth do you want to build a church miles from anywhere?" he asked. "It will not always be miles from anywhere," replied Horsfall. "Right. If you are fool enough to build a church, I will be fool enough to give you the land" - and he did. From the windows of his residence the squire watched the laying of the Foundation Stone by his cousin's small son Robert (a photograph, of this event, survives; the stone can be seen outside the North porch), and he saw the walls of Accrington brick and Runcorn sandstone-dressing grow in the course of time.



Laying the Foundation Stone

He is reported to have remarked, "You asked for land for a church, but you are building a cathedral." The work went on, and with it came the single-line tramway which passed the church and ran from Seaforth to Crosby and which in 1900 began to be operated by electric cars owned by the Liverpool Overhead Railway. Both tramway and, sadly, the Overhead Railway (the famous 'Dockers' Umbrella') are now things of the past, although the extra width of much of Crosby and Liverpool Roads still bears witness to its original presence. But its original coming marked the beginning of the process which was to bring the town round St. Faith's and make its founder's prophecy come true.

St. Faith's was designed by architects G.E Grayson and Ould, who were responsible for several Liverpool churches of the period, notably St. Ambrose, Everton, and All Hallows, Allerton. By the time its famous inscription was in place, disquiet over the purpose of the new church was beginning to grow. The Protestant reformers in Liverpool began to make the weekend pilgrimage to what is now the top of Fir Road and engage in noisy demonstrations. Long after the church was dedicated they continued to protest every Sunday: it was the erection of houses on the ground around the church that eventually hampered these demonstrations, although far from silencing the opposition.

Despite the storms the work went on, and by March 1900 the church was ready for its consecration. 'But there was a snag. Dr. Ryle, the first Bishop of Liverpool, had died, and the new Bishop (Chavasse: whom history was to prove hostile to Anglo-Catholic churches anyway) was not yet enthroned. Such an influential churchman as Douglas Horsfall was not to be deterred by this, and he approached the Metropolitan, who agreed to consecrate the new church on April 21st, and so the district had a visit from an Archbishop of York for the first time in history.'

The 'Waterloo and Crosby Herald and Formby, Bootle and Seaforth Gazette' published on the day of consecration reflects in its pages the moods and the issues of the time. The Alexandra Assembly Rooms, Blundellsands suggests itself for your private dance or ball, and boasts electric light throughout. The Lancashire Dental Institute Ltd offers 'Guaranteed sets from 21/-' and will provide 'Gas extraction 2/6 or Painless, with Freezing, 1/-'. On Good Friday and Easter Monday (the previous week) the paper reports Seaforth Sands thronged with hundreds of holidaymakers, with the 'Aunt Sallies' and other sideshows coming in for 'a good share of patronage'. Pierrots were due at Waterloo Town Hall 'following their appearance in the Italian Riviera area'. The Church of England Society for providing homes for waifs and strays were holding a three-day sale of work, with music daily by a ladies' amateur orchestra, while down in Bootle a man had paid 11/2d for a pint of milk but had found it to be deprived of its cream: the Bootle milk dealers were fined 5/- with costs.

The same issue has much to say about St. Faith's. A preliminary meeting had been held some months before in Waterloo Constitutional Club to introduce

the first incumbent, Mr. Baxter, to his prospective congregation, 'to afford those interested an opportunity of learning his views and intentions over the conduct of divine worship.' Mr. Baxter had said that there were three things which he would like to be the keynote of services at the new church: 'reverence, heartiness of worship, with everyone realising that they had a part to play if the services were to be acceptable to God, and that the services should be "thoroughly English".' Mr. Baxter was an Englishman from the bottom of his heart. It made him indignant to see people introducing into the church customs which were not authorised by the Prayer Book and which were repulsive to the English character. He wanted a service whose ritual was, in his own odd words 'quite dignified', and one which was not slovenly. There would be an opportunity of receiving Holy Communion every Sunday, and in that service he would feel bound to take the Eastward position and use altar lights: this he had done in his previous parish in London and felt conscience bound to introduce them here.

It is an interesting comment on the religious controversy of the day that Mr. Baxter should have felt the need to justify the modest amount of ritual that this report suggests. These were the years of lawsuits against those suspected of Popish practices, and of the imprisonment of recalcitrant priests, and St. Faith's was to experience its share of such antagonism and hostility for many years to come. A letter from an R.Griffiths in the Liverpool Daily Post of two days before complained of the impending arrival of the Archbishop of York, and the threatened procession that was to accompany him. 'As most people have heard of the idolatrous nature of the Northern Primate's consecration, is it not high time that Protestants roused themselves and repudiated these iniquitous proceedings which are surely being introduced into their beloved church without their assent?' he enquired rhetorically. He did not explain the idolatry at which he hinted, and the Crosby Herald, in its report of the Consecration service, refers to 'The usual Office for the Consecration of a Church' and goes on to give many interesting details about the proceedings themselves.

Mr. G.E.Lewis, the first organist, engaged a professional orchestra for the service, and composed much of the music. There were no fewer than nine hymns, including 'All people that on earth do dwell', 'The King of love my Shepherd is' and 'Bread of Heaven, on Thee we feed'. It was a beautiful day, the paper records, 'the sun shining with summer

warmth.' The Archbishop, his chaplain and the Diocesan Registrar were met at Waterloo station by Mr. Barron, J.P. and taken to St. Faith's in his carriage. There were 'few vacant seats' in the new church (designed to hold 800) when the long procession wound round from the vestry to the door. Cross-bearer, choir, clergy (five canons and 23 ordinary), registrar, mace-bearer, chaplain and Archbishop approached the door. Dr. Maclagan knocked thrice on the closed door and Mr.H.Douglas Horsfall 'founder and benefactor of the £16,000 church' let him in. The service proceeded, with the processional blessing of the various parts of the church sandwiched between psalms and hymns and lessons. The deed of consecration was read and signed by the Archbishop with the words: 'By virtue of our sacred office, we now declare this Church to be duly consecrated and for ever set apart from all unhallowed uses in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.'

The Archbishop took as his sermon text Ephesians 4.12: 'And these were his gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ.' His sermon today reads somewhat repetitively and long-windedly, but its theme is relevant enough. Every member of the church had his part to play, and all were called to be saints. The life of a priest was the most blessed and beautiful on earth, and his work should take him into his people's homes. St. Faith's purpose was 'the fulfilment of the likeness of Christ in our individual lives'. We would not become saints by sudden transformation: it was the work of a lifetime and we should be like the 'shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

The service ended with a collection of £25 and a hymn specially composed by the Vicar of St. Agnes Ullet Road, a church which must have been pleased to see St. Faith's arriving on the scene to share its outlook. It would then appear that Mr. Horsfall instituted a good St. Faith's tradition, for it is recorded that 'he entertained the Archbishop and Clergy to lunch at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, where many toasts were drunk'!

But all was not sweetness and light. History records also the presence in church of a Mr. Wise, a prominent anti-Ritualist, and a few of his friends. There was apparently no disturbances, although Mr.Kensit's militant Protestant followers were in the habit of making loud disturbances at services they

found disagreeable. Mr. Wise contented himself with gathering a crowd round him on 'waste land opposite the church', there being no shortage of that commodity in 1900. He declared the church to be, as indeed it was, 'wonderfully arranged for carrying on the highest form of ritual.' Producing a cross and beads, he declared that this kind of thing was being given away in the new church, and he accused the Archbishop of wearing a gold cross and beads around his neck - a habit of which he ought to be ashamed.

He resented the bringing of 'that Popish-monger' to consecrate the place, and called St.Faith's already a 'half-way house to Rome.' He urged the good people of Waterloo to keep a close watch on their new church. As yet, he admitted, they had no candies or confession, but he predicted that they certainly would have them by the next Easter. At this there came a voice from the crowd, and one of the 'good people of Waterloo' said to him: 'Go home and go to bed !'

But of course neither Mr Wise nor the petition he had received urging him to refuse to consecrate 'this Mass House' had prevailed with the Archbishop, although a previous Bishop of Chester had refused to dedicate St. John's Tuebrook thirty years before. And the next day being the first Sunday after Easter, somewhat inappropriately perhaps, usually known as 'Low Sunday', the congregations made their way to the new church for its first services. The church they entered would have seemed very plain and unadorned to our eyes. As George Houldin records, there was only the High Altar at that time; behind it hung a dark red curtain the width of the wall; upon it rested a cross and just two candlesticks. The only other candies illuminated the pulpit; all the other lighting was by gas. The reredos was not yet in position, nor was the organ: a piano led the singing until August. The seven sanctuary lamps were there, but there was no Chancel Screen and no Lady Chapel. At the west end there were no name boards, only a 'great expanse of brick'; pews filled the whole church, those on the south being 'paid pews' in keeping with the customs of the time, but those on the north (Crosby) side and in the two transepts being 'free and unappropriated'.

'It was to this large new church,' Mr Houldin records, 'that the congregation made their way on the first Sunday, under the guidance of the Reverend Thomas Howe Baxter, the first Priest-in-Charge.' He was never Vicar as such; until the existing incumbents of St Mary's, S. Luke's and St John's, out of whose parishes ours had been carved, retired, the incumbent

of StFaith's was known technically by the curious title of Perpetual Curate, suggesting perhaps more of a threat than a distinction. Mr Baxter's first service was the 8 am Holy Communion: he administered to 21 communicants and collected 7/5. The Vicar of St Agnes preached at 11 am Mattins and Canon Samuel Crawford Armour, illustrious headmaster of Merchant Taylors' and a great supporter of St Faith's, preached at Evensong. The pattern of services in those first months was for a regular early celebration and a 6.30 pm Evensong, with Mattins at 11 followed by Litany or by Communion. Morning collections and communicants were small in quantity and number: 20 or so people at 8 or 11, and rising above 40 only at Christmas or Easter. Evensong, however, seems always to have been well attended at St Faith's as elsewhere in those days. 'At the choral services,' we read, 'the Processional Cross preceded the choir which, each Sunday evening, during the singing of a hymn before the service, processed down the south aisle and up the nave before entering the chancel.' This modest ceremonial was agreed with Mr Baxter who 'gave an undertaking not to make changes in this procedure, and often though he wanted to, be it said to his credit, he never did.'

The first Register of Services illuminates with occasional marginal comments some of the events of those early years. On May 14th 1900 'Daily Mattins and Evensong commenced' although not entered daily, and a week later the Relief of Mafeking was celebrated with the Te Deum and two verses of the National Anthem There were '12 or so' at Whit Monday Mattins and no-one at all at Communion on St Barnabas Day. Mr Baxter 'read himself in' on August 5th: XV of the Articles at Mattins and the other XXIV at Evensong; a week later 'part of the organ was used for the first time.' St Faith's was beginning to make itself a name in musical circles '...for the Choirmaster felt that a Church that was like a Cathedral should possess a Choir like a Cathedral, and so successful was he in procuring this, that the "singing at St Faith's" became the talk of the district and people came from far and near to hear it.'

At the first Christmas services there were 107 communicants at three services but 'no sermon' at Evensong, and no collection recorded, so perhaps there was no service either. Obviously Mr Baxter found it an uphill task introducing the people of Crosby to regular weekday worship, never something for which the Anglican church has been especially noted, but George Houldin records that it was a

different matter on Sundays. 'The saintly and loveable character of the Rev. T.H.Baxter was already showing its influence, for the regular attenders grew in number, and it is on record that three times in the first year the church was full - and it holds 920!' This latter seems a dubious statistic: the seating was officially for 800, and to get even that many for Merchant Taylors' School Services seated in anything like comfort today practically requires the use of a shoe-horn. Nevertheless it is obvious that Evensong was a very fashionable and popular service in the 1900s, and the appeal of fine preachers and good music, together with the absence of television and cinema often produced bumper congregations.



St Faith's showing its 1900 isolation.

On January 22nd 1901 at 6.30 p.m. is recorded in the Register: 'Death of Her Majesty Queen Victoria of Blessed and Glorious Memory', while on February 10th 'A Notice appeared in the "London Gazette" that an order had been signed by the King (Edward VII) in Council assigning a consolidated chapelry to the consecrated church of Saint Faith.' That Lent there began Wednesday night services and Sunday afternoon Children's services. On Good Friday the church was 'well-filled for the Crucifixion' (!) and a total of 153 communicated on Easter Day, although the main service of the day was Choral Mattins. Whether Mr. Wise's predictions had come true is not clear, but there were certainly the candles he feared behind the altar, and he would not have been pleased with R.F.G. Smethwick's sermon on the first Anniversary of the Consecration, for its subject was 'Ritualism'.

On September 15th the Dead March was played 'a.m. and p.m. for President McKinley, assassinated'. On a happier note, on the 25th, 'an illuminated address was presented to the founder in Waterloo Town Hall by Canon Armour of Merchant Taylors' from the Parish and Congregation.' By contrast we read of a 'Clinical

Celebration' at 70, St John's Road for B. Croft, who died a few days later: the first recorded funeral at S. Faith's taking place on October 4th, with 'full choir'. The dedication of the reredos, the work of Salviati of Venice, on All Saints Day, 1901, saw a renewal of controversy and protest in Waterloo. Mr. Houldin takes up the story. 'This wonderful work of art set the district aflame again, for such a treasure was not to be found in any Anglican church anywhere. The central panel came in for much criticism as being completely "Popish". (it records the Crucifixion, with the figures of the four Evangelists, and the beasts that represent them; also portrayed are the six-winged Seraphim of Isaiah: the whole finished with gilded and inlaid mosaic work). A charge of idolatry was levelled at all who, as had been the custom since the church was opened, bowed before the altar, and once again began the series of protest meetings organised by the Protestant Reformers. For many, many weeks, worshippers were heckled again with the shouts of "Change here for Rome!" Only the stalwarts could endure this, and they did, and as others saw them steadfast, they returned. The Bishop was appealed to and he paid the Church a visit and reported that "there is nothing in the ornaments or furnishings in the church which are contrary to the tenets of the Church of England".' Luke-warm approval, perhaps, but sufficient; with it, and the passing of the years, a gradual process seems to have begun whereby the pattern of worship and the ritual adornment that we take for granted today were introduced

S. Faith's Day, 1900 had not been observed (nor, incidentally, have I been able to discover what had prompted Douglas Horsfall to dedicate his Crosby church to St Faith of Aquitaine, Virgin and Martyr), but in 1901 there were four services on October 6th (a weekday: 'very stormy and wet'). On Tuesday 15th at 8 p.m. and in the presence of the Bishop of Liverpool we read 'Whole Nave filled. The founder of the Church was present at Evensong.'

And so the pattern emerges. Odd notes bring the past to life a little. 'Collection for Food and Betterment Association providing 1/2d dinners to poor children'; 'Deep Snow'; and two or three amusing and unintentional juxtapositions and comments. 'Mattins: Rev. R.F.G.Smethwick appointed Rural Dean' and at Evensong the same day 'Dead March in Saul for Rural Dean.' Then there was 'Anthem: "And behold there was a great earthquake". Stormy night' and finally 'Rev. W.A.Reeves at Sefton. Very Wet.'

By Easter Sunday 1905 Mr. Baxter was administering to 196 communicants, with 81 at one service, the highest recorded to that point. The Bishop gave his special permission for a Lantern Service, and on St. John the Evangelist's Day there was 'no-one present' again at 7 a.m. The Parish Hall was opened in 1906, although without the rooms behind the corridor or up the stairs. It was much used for badminton in those early days, and had a greater floor-space than today. Mr. Howarth, a member of the church, had supervised the work and especially the laying of the floors; these were so highly valued that boys could only play there if wearing 'rubber-soled tennis shoes.' There were no Scouts - the organisation had yet to be formed by Baden-Powell in fact - but there was a Boy's Club.

Two revealing events in 1907 and 1908 show that prejudice was dying hard in the streets around S. Faith's. In 1907 Fr. Herring, of S. John the Baptist, Toxteth, a church now demolished, came to preach. He was singled out for the particular wrath of the ever-present Protestants, who 'wreaked their vengeance on him as he came to S. Faith's in his carriage, hurling stones through the window. The abrasions on his face received attention in vestry from the Warden, Dr. Gay.' The next year Bishop Chavasse came to preach. Apparently he was of no great size and given to waving his arms violently and caught his lawn sleeve in one of the pulpit candle flames. 'He tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the fire, and but for the timely intervention of a sidesman, the consequences might have been unpleasant.' The headlines next day read 'Bishop on Fire in Crosby Church', and the incident was generally held to be a judgement on S. Faith's for being so idolatrous as to use candles in the first place.

Mr. Baxter was quite capable of taking the offensive himself, however, if only within the church. In his Lenten Notes in a 1907 Parish Leaflet (the earliest form of the parish magazine) he has some strong words on self-denial. 'Possibly the health - and morals - of some would be improved by taking less beer, spirits or wine.' And two years later, in December 1909 he was further moved to declare that 'the attendance on weekdays is miserable'.

In 1909 Mr. Baxter begins to record numbers at Children's services: usually 80 or 90. That August we read: 'Very hot, very fine. Lady in fit carried out of church during Evensong.' The weather in 1910 and 1911, however, at least as seen through the S. Faith's

vestry window, appears to have been inclement ('Very wet - storms severe frost - deep snow'). In 1910 the rest of the Hall was added and 'our leading choirboy, Stanley Whinyates, was appointed to the Chapel Royal (St James), which was an indication of the efforts of Mr. Lewis to build up a worthy choir.' In Lent 1911 Daily Eucharists appear for the first time: numbers range from 2 to 13, and the invariable collections vary from 2d to 6/1. By Easter 1912 there are 353 communicants. Soon after we see 'Dead March for those lost on the Titanic', among whom was the Chief Engineer, Joseph Bell, whose death is commemorated by a brass plaque on the wall of the south aisle. Following 7 a.m. communion on Ascension Day there was 'Breakfast for Men in Parish Hall'. 40 present and 4 ladies.' Even more cheerfully, next Easter, 'the largest morning congregation we have ever had was present at 11 a.m.' 72 of them communicated. On July 11th the choir watched the King open the Gladstone Dock; on August 24th the organ was cleaned; on August 13th the church was cleaned; on September 4th Mr. Baxter oiled the bell.

After this burst of activity the records badly declare the Great War to have started on August 2nd. That year saw the replacement of Mr. Lewis by Mr. J.W. Waugh, F.R.C.O. 'one of the most brilliant organists of his day.' By next Easter the communicants were up to 393, and the Vicar was clearly succeeding in building up a regular communicant membership which has been a feature of St Faith's ever since. But this was to be his last year. Limited as to what he could achieve at St Faith's by the undertaking he had made in 1900, and feeling that the time had come to make 'further advances in the ceremonial', he decided to leave St Faith's and arrange 'for a successor who would not be bound in the same way. And so he arranged an exchange of livings with the man who was to become his successor: the Reverend Harold Bentley Bentley-Smith, Vicar of East Coatham, near Redcar, Yorkshire. His last Sunday was October 3rd, 1915: Mr. Bentley-Smith was inducted and instituted on 15th. This briefest of interregnums must have been a great relief to the Wardens of the time: they would have been hard-pressed, doubtless, to provide the sort of service to which St Faith's congregations were now accustomed had the gap been longer. And so 'we said good-bye to the faithful and saintly priest who had steered the ship safely through its troubled seas.' Mr. Baxter died in 1926, and there are two windows to his memory in the South aisle. A new era was about to begin at St Faith's.

