

St Mary's church and the Bridgwater newspapers

By Tony Woolrich – 16/07/2021

Part 3-1868-1879

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This sequence covers the reordering of the church when the aisles were widened; the inauguration of the Willis organ the 1878; drainage problems of Wembdon Road Cemetery; the choir; fund-raising; the clock; and chimes

1868

6 May Disorder at St. Mary's –Topsy teenagers

1869

17 February Report of new church [Holy Trinity].

9 April Report of Vestry Meeting.

1870

27 April Meeting about free seats at St. Mary's.

17 August Letter complaining about sale in St. Mary's of photographs and drawings of the building in aid of funds to help pay for the cleaning

1871

28 June Letter about new organ at St. Mary's.

6 September Note about opening of St. Mary's organ — advertisement on front page.

3 September Letter asking for early closing in local businesses so people could attend recital; Report of opening of St. Mary's organ. Has history of project since 1868. Full list of music at recital and at service afterwards

1872

17 January List of subscribers to the organ fund, with full accounts of costs etc.

13 January Letter about the State of the mechanical church chimes. They played at 1, 5 and 9 o'clock.

17 April Meeting of pew-holders, very noisy and aggressive

1873

Great deal of detail in this year about the drainage problems of Wembdon Road Cemetery.

5 February Town Council discussed the St. Mary's church chimes and the clock.

12 February Town council discussed the clock and the chime mechanism. Letter about these.

26 February Letter about St. Mary's Clock.

16 April Meeting of St. Mary's seat holders; retirement of J. R. Smith of churchwarden.

23 April Long report of vestry meeting; election of new churchwardens — uproar.

30 April Letter about St. Mary's choir; note the churchyard was closed in 1854, and that it was surrounded by wells.

18 June Organ recital and choral service. Joint choir of St. Mary's and ladies and gentlemen of the town, including non conformists. Comment in sermon about congregation not singing. meeting of Parishioners about the State of Wembdon Road cemetery.

24 September Town council meeting about the church clock.

12 November Note about resignation of Mr Hare, St. Mary's parish clerk and appointment of Mr G. H. Hobbs. This was a paid post and there were 3 candidates.

1874

15 April St. Mary's seat holders meeting. Says Vicar's official duties ceased after morning service, the afternoon one was paid by the Council and the evening one by the parishioners..

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22 April Presentation made to Rev Jones, visiting preacher at St. Mary's. His last service had a congregation of 1500.

6 May Town council discussed the picture in St. Mary's, says it was not insured, and agreed it would be; brief note about the chimes.

1875

17 February Horrific letters from dissenting ministers about holding funerals at Wembdon Road cemetery. Too much water to dig grave to proper depth. Coffins floating as the burial service was read. Said to be the responsibility of St. Mary's churchwardens and representatives of the dissenting churches.

21 April St. Mary's seat holders meeting. Lots about the choir.

13 October Report of organ recital and harvest festival at St. Mary's. Letter from Samuel Chapman on the history of St. Mary's choir. Says that 12 or 15 years before [c1860] treble voices were sung by ladies. Boys introduced and wore surplices, but not the men.

27 October Letter about the wearing of surplices by the choir.

3 November Letter about St. Mary's choir. Says 3 girls sit in the choir, but are not seen to sing.

10 November Letters about St. Mary's choir. Both say ladies sang in it.

1876

Papers for Jan- June missing from the bound volume microfilmed.

19 July Letter from Samuel Chapmen about audited seat holders accounts at St. Mary's. Books appear muddled.

31 July Letter from Rev Fitzgerald about this.

2 August. Letter from Chapman in response to this. Letter complaining about the alterations to the churchyard boundaries without a vestry meeting to discuss the matter first.

27 September Letter about churchyard boundary changes.

12 November Report about repairs to the Chancel of St. Mary's. Stated to belong to the Corporation due to their receiving the tithes.

19 November Letter about choir discipline.

1877

14 March Report of a civic service with detail of fund to replace the glass in the windows at the west end of the church.

11 April Report of St. Mary's Vestry meeting

18 April Note of death of Orlando Haviland MD aged 49

2 May Obituary of Alderman J. R. Smith (1821-1877).

9 May Town Council's discussion of picture in St. Mary's. Also St. Mary Street improvements. Demolition of warehouse and cottages on site of present south gate. See also editorial for April 11

16 May Letters about sale of picture and Town Council discussion of this.

23 May Letters about St. Mary's picture.

30 May Town Council discussion of warehouse on S side of churchyard and new gates. Also alterations to the chancel - tiling etc.

6 June Denial by church officers they will put in new gates, simply move the old ones from opposite Silver Street.

20 June George Lockyer appointed clerk & sexton of St. Mary's.

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- 13 July Report of choir outing to St. Audries
- 25 July Report of meeting to discuss the restoration of St. Mary's. Mentions repaving the church.
- 8 August. Somerset Archaeology & Natural History Society meeting in Bridgwater.
- 15 August. Very full report of the SANHS meeting and account of their tour of St. Mary's church, with reports of the discussion.
- 21 November Proposed restoration of St. Mary's church. Aim to widen the nave walk, which together with the walks in the aisles etc throughout the church will be newly paved with encaustic tiles. Mentions brass Standard gas lamps and hot-water heating

1878

- 2 January Issue missing
- 6 February Announcement that St. Mary's would be closed until 1st Sunday in March.
- 20 April Evensong held in Town Hall, 600 people came;
- 6 March Sunday morning services to be held in Town Hall;
- 13 April Leader about proposed bazaar to raise funds for restoration at St. Mary's
- 17 April Letter about St. Mary's picture being taken down for photography
- 1 May Leader about Holy Trinity; St. Mary's vestry meeting — election of wardens.
- 22 May Archdeacon's visitation to St. Mary's;
- 19 June £100 paid out by Council to St. Mary's for work on Chancel.
- 26 June Note that St. Mary's was due to reopen on 30 July.
- 3 July Note of meeting of St. Mary's seat holders. Adjourned for a week. Some seats to be removed; 18" seats were normal.
- 10 July Report of seat holders meeting. Mention of dispute between the organist and choirmaster; letter about this.
- 31 July Leader about the restoration of St. Mary's; very long article about restoration — important. Says blue lias paving taken up and replaced with tiles. Red tiles and dado to walls as well. Centre, cross and side aisles widened. List of music at the afternoon organ recital.
- 7 August. Continuation of above report, account of the speeches etc. Note that *Pictorial World* of previous Saturday has illustration of the town bridge and other places in the town, also a map of Somerset.
- 6 November St. Mary's church bazaar.
- 13 November Note that St. Mary's bells were out of order and could not be rung without damage to the fabric of the tower; Town council report - item on St. Mary's restoration.
- 20 November Letter about St. Mary's bells, letter from Mr Fitzgerald about collections for schools in Bridgwater.
- 27 November Letters about church collections, including an interesting one from the Vicar of Holy Trinity about his fees.
- 4 December Concert in aid of St. Mary's restoration fund; note about St. Mary's bells.
- 11 December Letters on restoration and on the bells.
- 18 December report of the concert in Town Hall in aid of St. Mary's restoration fund. Full list of music.

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25 December Note of vote of thanks to organisers of the concert. Note of state procession by Town Council to St. Mary's. Report of town council discussion on restoration of the chancel and picture.

1879

1 January Note about costs of restoration work; note that St. Mary's was not decorated. It was beautiful enough.

8 January Watch Night service at St. Mary's. Town Council report that money had been paid to church for cost of restoration; note of insurance.

5 March Letter about gas lights being turned down in St. Mary's to heighten the effect of an organ recital.

16 April Account of restoration of St. Mary's bells.

23 April Report of St. Mary's Vestry meeting.

30 April Rude letter about standard of organ playing at St. Mary's.

7 May Town Council meeting — Discussion on St. Mary's chancel; letter about church organ.

14 May Letter about St. Mary's organ.

11 June Long report on St. Mary's church bazaar in aid of restoration.

18 June Leader about church bazaar.

17 September Meteor fell near St. Mary's church tower.

5 November Harvest thanksgiving held at St. Mary's.

19 November Letter about misbehaviour of choir man — dismissal.

26 November Mayor and corporation in church; letter about St. Mary's chancel.