

1922-1929: The changing Parish of Twerton as seen in the Vicars' Reviews

For much of its history, the Parish of Twerton covered a greater area of land than is the case today. Until the 1950s the parish encompassed the region that is known as Southdown. Toward the east, the parish boundary stretched as far as the bottom of Brougham Hayes, as is still the case today. When waves of 19th and 20th century housing developments took over land that had formerly been green fields, the church in Twerton came under strain to fulfil its duties to a burgeoning population.

By 1922 the Twerton Parish had three Anglican Churches to serve the people. St Michael and All Angels was the ancient church located in Twerton Village. St Peter's Church on the Lower Bristol Road had been built in the 19th century to cope with city expansion on the east side of the parish. And St Barnabas Church in Southdown had opened in 1903.

Each year there was a joint Annual Parochial Church Meeting, and the Vicar's Review at the end of a meeting described the nature of the Twerton Parish and the challenges faced by the three churches. Either written in the minutes, or published in the Bath & Wilts Herald and then pasted into the minute book, the Reviews unfold their own story of Twerton and the church.

The Parish of Twerton in the 1920s

Below is an example of the Vicar's Review printed in the Bath & Wilts Herald, and preserved among church records. This is Vicar Shephard Walwyn's Review for 1922.

THE VICAR'S REVIEW.
The Vicar tendered his sincere thanks to all who had so devotedly assisted in the work of the parish during the year. There were one or two he particularly wished to mention, and among them was Mr. J. S. Marsh, organist of St. Peter's, who after many years was still serving them regularly and efficiently. Then there was Mr. J. S. Hooper, lay reader, to whom he and the parish were greatly indebted. His multifarious duties had been added to by the administration of the Bence Charity and the providing of relief for the many needy cases in Twerton owing to the depression in trade. He was also the leader of a very large Bible Class, which had many activities, and supervised the O.T.C. of the K.R.R. Mr. Hobbs, lay reader at St. Barnabas, was to be congratulated upon his steady and faithful work. He thanked the Rev. E. G. Haskins for his cordial co-operation and gratifyingly alluded to the way in which he had united the religious and social work at St. Peter's, with most encouraging prospects. His Scout troop was going strong, also the Athletic Club. The Rev. D. G. Wright's ministry was much appreciated. Regarding the finance scheme, he said they had every reason to be proud of it, for it was bringing in £200 of new money. A considerable amount of money had been contributed to charities. He expressed himself as satisfied with the general spiritual condition of the parish, and said they could look forward to the future with confidence.
Mr. F. J. Blackmore proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the Vicar, and included in it the names of Mrs. Walwyn and Master Walwyn, and the vote was carried with acclamation.

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The review touches upon the poverty in Twerton caused by the economic recession that followed the First World War.

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Limited resources meant that St Barnabas Church at Southdown did not have a priest. It was, however, strongly supported by Mr Hobbs – a lay reader who helped keep the church afloat by selling produce from his allotments.

In 1923 the Twerton churches were feeling the double burden of financial deficit and responsibilities to the community, as revealed in Vicar Walwyn's Review.

THE VICAR'S REVIEW.
The Vicar gave an exhaustive review of the work of the church and the various agencies. The envelope scheme would be continued. The unusual amount of sickness had considerably affected the collections. At the end of 1923 the financial position was causing some anxiety, but an improvement had fortunately taken place so by the end of the year it was hoped they would be out of debt. He was convinced they needed two curates. Mr. Haskins' breakdown was due to over work, and they were very pleased to see him back. They

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In 1923 the church had a debit balance of £131 – a cause of some concern. And the many sicknesses would have put extra strain on the clergy in their role visiting the sick. Rev. Haskins' breakdown led to talk of having a curate shoulder some of the load at St Peter's Church.

In response to financial pressures it was common for the churches in Twerton to devise new schemes to raise funds. Church records are peppered with such schemes. For example:

known it. St. Peter's Sunday School had keenly taken up the free-will offering scheme, and 115 now contributed. Mr.

The Vicar's Review of 1924 mentions a way of raising funds via Sunday School.

In addition, there were other ways of trying to remain financially able:

£9 14s. 9d. At the same time the overdraft on 60, Lansdown view, had been entirely wiped off. Mr. Malcolm Carr had promised to renovate the Parish Church. The Parish Room was being renovated, many members contributing, and Mr. Blackmore lending valuable assistance.

This section of the 1924 Review makes reference to a property at 60 Lansdown View which the church rented out.

Meanwhile, the task of renovating the church was taken on by Malcolm Carr, a churchman and wealthy co-owner of the Carr textile mills on the Bristol Road.

The 1924 Review mentioned that Rev. Haskins had resigned from his position at St Peter's Church, but spoke highly of the way that he had met every task set before him.

By 1926 and 1927 the church had reached a better position with regard to its finances. There had been necessary expenditure on church buildings around the parish, but more funds had been raised.

Nevertheless, Vicar Walwyn felt that the church would be in a healthier state if worshippers were prepared to put more into the collection plate.



“If every coin in our evening collection plates were a three-penny-bit we should be quite well off,” said the Rev. Shephard Walwyn (Vicar of Twerton)...”

In 1926 the large number of infant baptisms, no less than 133, was attributed to a probable temporary increase in the birth rate in Twerton.

the Vicar said the one thing which might be regarded as sensational, is the number of baptisms—133 infants and 18 adults—as compared with 92 infants and four adults in 1924. The present indications do not, however, suggest that this rate will be maintained; it is probably only a temporary increase in the local birth-rate. The number confirmed was

Among figures indicative of the Twerton churches' level of engagement with the population, the 1926 report mentions some 508 children attending Sunday Schools in the parish.

roll. A hopeful increase was shown in the Sunday school attendances, 508 children being on the books. The educational work of the Church did not cease on Sundays any more than real religion did.

In 1928 a housing scheme increased the numbers of people served by St Barnabas Church in the Southdown area of the parish.



This photo shows the newly finished housing at Southdown in 1928. Visible are Southdown Road, The Circle, Glebe Road and other streets.

BATH'S HILL TOWN

ST. BARNABAS THE BIGGEST DISTRICT OF TWERTON.

THE NEW CHURCH HALL.

In St. Peter's Hall, on Thursday evening, the vestry meeting for the parish of Twerton was held under the chairmanship of the Vicar (the Rev. B. W. Shepheard-Walwyn), who was supported by the Rev. S. A. Bruce, Rev. W. R. Devenish, Mr. J. S. Hooper, lay reader, St. Michael's, Mr. H. A. Hobbs, lay reader St. Barnabas; Mr. A. W. Andrews, secretary of the St. Peter's Church Committee; Mr. C. E. Merchant, people's warden, and Mr. C. H. Hunt, vicar's warden. Owing to the very inclement weather there was only a small representative gathering of the three congregations of St. Michael's, St. Peter's, and St. Barnabas'.

The electoral roll, presented by Mr. C. H. Hunt, showed the following numbers: St. Michael's 268, St. Peter's 310, and St. Barnabas' 322, total 900.

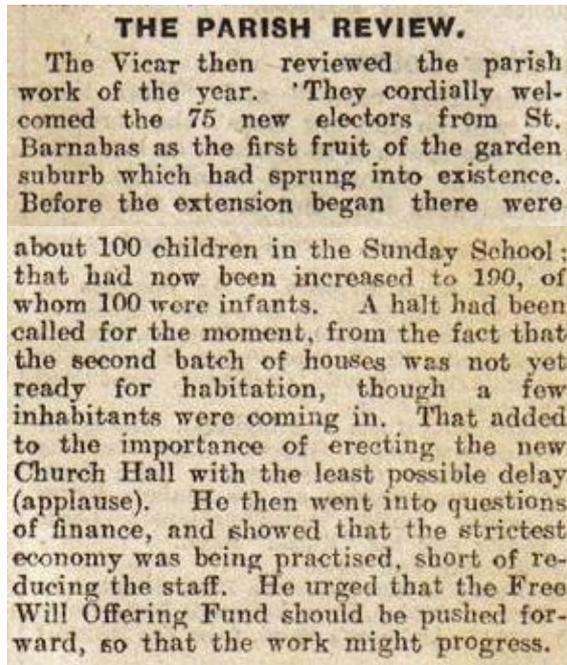
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The new housing estate added a further 75 people to the St Barnabas electoral roll, giving it more members than St Michael's or St Peter's – hence the headline opposite.

The total number of church members on the parish electoral roll now numbered 900. This was another indicator of how many people the churches served.

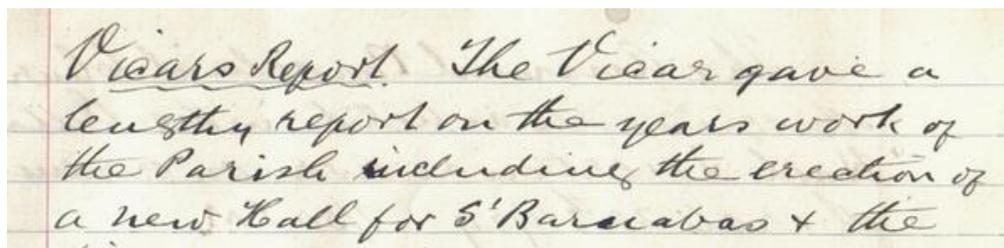
By 1928 the Twerton Parish was in debt again, with a debit of more than £47. It was also necessary to find the money to build a Church Hall at Southdown to cater for the growing population.

In the Parish Review, the Vicar welcomed the project of “erecting the new Church Hall with the least possible delay” but immediately continued into a discussion of finance. As usual, a fund-raising scheme was recommended in order to cover the costs. The Vicar “urged that the Free Will Offering Fund should be pushed forward so that work might progress.”



Work on the Church Hall began in 1929, as the Vicar’s Report written in the minute book records:

“The Vicar gave a lengthy report on the year’s work of the Parish including the erection of a New Hall for St Barnabas...”



So within about a year, the Twerton churches had responded to the new housing development at Southdown with a new communal building. An example of their on-going commitment to the people of the parish, despite the workload that was already being handled.

Vicar Walwyn of course, is the figure whom Walwyn Close in Twerton is named after.