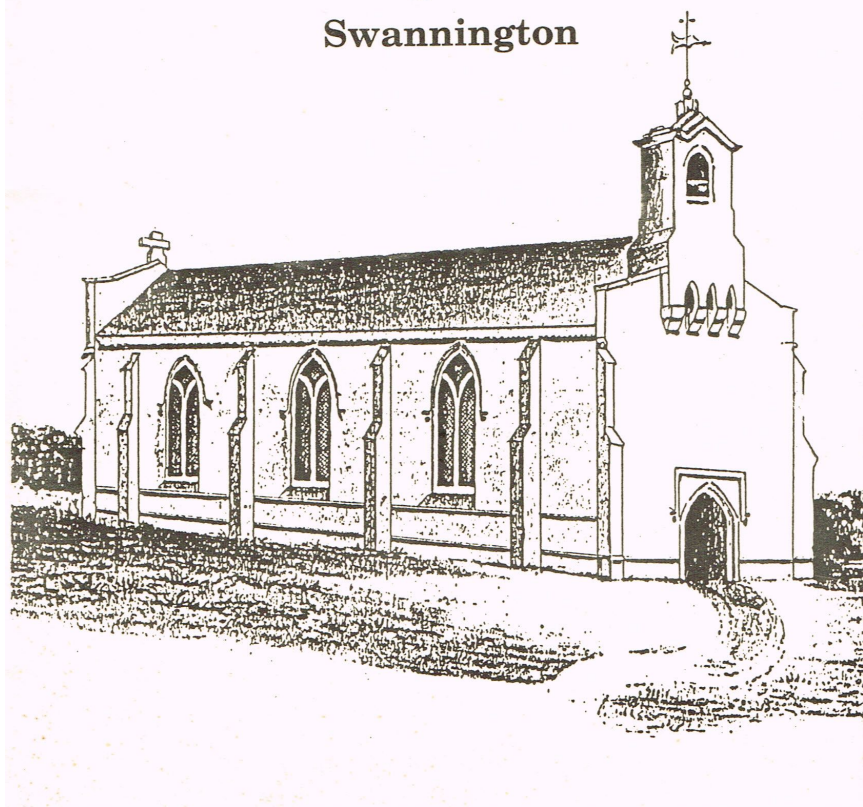


A Brief History of St George's Church Swannington



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2.

INTRODUCTION

In 1831, The Rev. J. Curtis, headmaster of The Free Grammar School, Ashby-de-la-Zouch and perpetual Curate of Smisby, described Swannington as "formerly a hamlet, but now part of the chapelry of Whitwick, containing 1539 acres, 541 inhabitants, 114 houses In 1825 a Chapel was erected at the north extremity of the township, for the accommodation of such inhabitants of Swannington and Thringstone as are most distant from Whitwick".(1) This we now know as St. George's Church, Swannington with Peggs Green.

For its origin we have to start at Coleorton.

THE SITE FOR THE CHURCH

Sir George Howland Beaumont, 7th Baronet (1770-1827) resided at Coleorton Hall which had been rebuilt in 1804. Sir George was an amateur artist of great distinction, connoisseur, patron and friend of many artists and writers. Visitors at the Hall included Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Constable, Scott & Sir Joshua Reynolds.

William Wordsworth records walking with Sir George and discussing the siting of a new church. "During the month of December 1820, I accompanied a much-beloved and honoured Friend in a walk through different parts of his estate, with a view to fix upon the site of a new Church which he intended to erect." Shortly afterwards Wordsworth wrote sonnets entitled "Church To Be Erected" and "New Churchyard".(2)

No doubt discussion occurred among the "literati" on many topics including the siting of this new church and the Rector of Coleorton, who was also vicar of Whitwick, Rev. Francis Merewether, M.A. would also have been present. However it was later revealed that Lady Margaret Beaumont claimed to have chosen the site so that the chancel would be built where Sir George had stood his easel.

It was mainly due to the dogged persistence of the Rector that the church was actually built "on behalf of the townships of Swannington & Thringstone in the parish of Whitwick, the Archdeaconry of Leicester and the Diocese of Lincoln". The population of the whole parish of Whitwick in 1821 was 2916 of whom 541 lived in Swannington and 1181 in Thringstone. The parish consisted principally of framework knitters and was considered almost, if not quite, the poorest in the County of Leicester.

Mr. Merewether gave notice of Vestry meetings to be held in both Swannington and Thringstone in July 1821 to discuss the possibility of the building of a church. Various other meetings took place but there was considerable opposition to the idea. About 200 people signed a petition addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury objecting to the proposed building. The main objections included:

3.



The Rev. Francis Merewether M.A.

4.

1. The vast majority of the parishioners lived within 1.5 miles of Whitwick Parish Church and none lived farther than 3 miles.
2. As the proposed site was under dispute as to ownership between the Marquis of Hastings and Wigston Hospital, no one was competent to sell the site.
3. Whitwick Parish Church was large enough to seat all who wished to attend.
4. As many had recently given land from their estates to build a new church in Charnwood Forest (Oaks in Charnwood 1815) and because of the depressed state of agriculture and being burdened with the poor and other parochial rates, they would find it impossible to make any contribution to the new chapel.

However Mr. Merewether was undeterred. The estimated cost of the chapel, size 71 ft. x 28 ft. x 20 ft. high would be £970 including the duty on the bricks. By September 1821, £290 had been raised by voluntary subscription and he wrote to the Incorporated Church Building Society for financial help. In 1822 the society agreed to give £450 towards the construction of the Chapel on condition that 380 of its 450 seats were to be free and unappropriated.

The following year Mr. Merewether claimed that sufficient money had been raised and asked permission from the Church Commissioners for the building to commence. In 1824, Merewether, as agent for His Majesty's Commission for Building New Churches contracted with Wygston Hospital and William Fenton, Esq. to purchase the land and minerals for a chapel on a site of area 2 roods and 29 perches and the foundation stone was laid on St. George's Day, April 23rd 1825. The building was supervised but not necessarily designed by William Matthews of Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

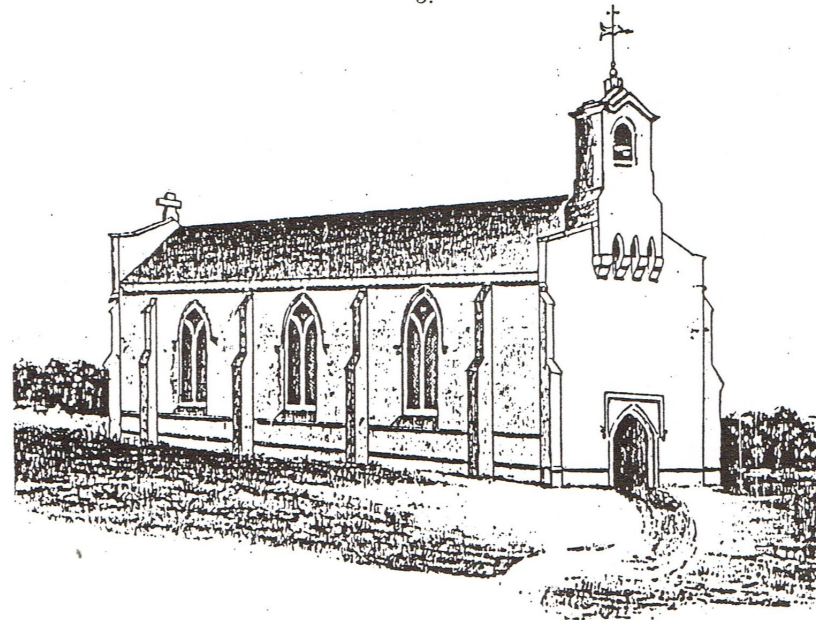
There was still opposition. Certain freeholders of Swannington, because of Commoners' Rights, gave notice that if Mr. Merewether and the workmen commenced digging foundations for the Church, they would be treated as trespassers. They continued digging and notices of trespass were served. However on the advice of solicitors they continued. The Commissioners agreed that there was no case of trespass and the building proceeded.

On December 16th 1825 a letter was sent to the Incorporated Church Building Society informing them that the Chapel of Ease for the townships of Thringstone and Swannington in the parish of Whitwick had been completed, seating 450 of which 380 were free. A plaque would be displayed inside the church acknowledging the Society's gift of £450. The letter was signed by F. Merewether (Minister), Thos. Grundy and Rich. Potter (Principal inhabitants) and Edward Handford and William Matthews (Surveyors).

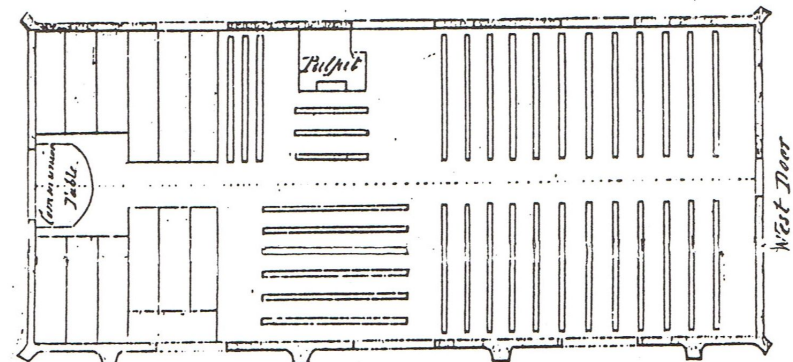
A copy of the original drawing of the church and seating plan sent to I.C.B.S. in October of the following year hangs in the Vestry.

On July 4th 1827 was signed the conveyance of Land and Minerals at Swannington between on the one hand William Fenton of Thorpe Hall near Leeds and the Chaplains and Poor of Wigston Hospital and on the other hand The Commissioners for Building New Churches. It was agreed that the cost of the land was £39 and the coal and other mineral rights £175.18s.10d to be divided between Wigston Hospital and Mr. Fenton.

5.



GROUND PLAN.



Chapel of Ease

CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH

The church was consecrated by John, Bishop of Lincoln, in August 1827 and the sermon preached by Rev. F. Merewether, Rector of Coleorton, Vicar of Whitwick, Chaplain to Marquis of Lansdown.

The total cost of the church had risen to about £1,100, most of which was raised by voluntary contribution including gifts of £50 from King George IV (Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster) and £50 from Sir George Beaumont.

The parsonage was completed in 1832, Lady Beaumont donating £400 towards this building. Unfortunately she died before it was completed.

The surveyor was Mr. Chaplin and the cost was £1,200. On completion the Rev. Matthew Drake Babbington took possession and applied to the Commissioners for Building Churches and to the Bishop of Lincoln to assign a District to the Chapel of St. George in Whitwick. In 1833 The Rev. F. Merewether wrote a printed address of farewell to the inhabitants of the Chapelry of St. George and, as an appendix, a description was given of the boundary line of the district included in the Chapelry.

It is noteworthy that at this time the address of the Parsonage was Thringstone Parsonage, Ashby de la Zouch.

BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES

The first baptism, that of Thomas Perkins aged 17 of Swannington, took place on 18th November 1827 and the first funeral, that of William Springthorpe aged 2 of Thringstone occurred on December 9th of the same year. Strangely the church was not authorised for the solemnisation of marriages until 14th April 1853 by the Bishop of Peterborough. The first marriage was between John Fletcher and Hannah Smith, both of Swannington, in that year.

On April 20th 1829, Joseph Varnham, aged 24 and of Thringstone, and two others were hanged at the new Welford Road gaol on a charge of horse stealing. (3) The following day, the body was interred in St. George's church yard - it was the 22nd burial. Sadly we note in the register that only a week before, the burial service took place for his father, William Varnham, aged 48, of Thringstone.

The death penalty for cattle, horse and sheep stealing was abolished in 1832.

The oldest gravestone found in the churchyard, the 23rd burial, was that of John Bird of Thringstone who died on 17 July 1829. Other C19 memorials include:-

1835 Thomas Hill aged 21

1837 Frederick Rushton aged 3

1863 "In loving memory of Harry Clements whose death was occasioned by the breaking in of water at Califat Coalmine". 8.10.63.

1879 Francis Barkby of Peggs Green - "For 52 years respected clerk and sexton of the parish, aged 71". Also his wife.

In 1865 the churchyard was extended by about an acre to the south and west of the church. The consecration was performed by George, Bishop of Peterborough.

ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL

IN THE PARISH OF WHITWICK

The Consecration of this Chapel by THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN will take place on THURSDAY, the 23rd of August, 1827,; when

A SERMON

will be PREACHED by the Rev. FRANCIS MEREWETHER Vicar of the parish

Service will begin at Eleven o'clock precisely. Forms of the Service may be had price 6d. at Mr. Beadsmore's Ashby N.B. The admission into the Chapel by tickets, will take place between Ten and half past Ten, after which the doors will be opened to the public. Pew-holders tickets (eight each) and Subscribers tickets (one each transferable) may be had at Mr. Beadsmore's Ashby, till Wednesday; and at the Chapel door, at a quarter before Ten o'clock on the morning of the Consecration.

8.

FORM FOR
THE SERVICE
 WHICH WILL BE OBSERVED
 AT THE CONSECRATION
 OF
ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL, WHITWICK,
 On *THURSDAY, the 23d AUGUST, 1827,*
 BY THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD
 JOHN,
 BY DIVINE PERMISSION,
 LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

A SERMON
 BY THE REV. FRANCIS MEREWETHER, M.A.
 RECTOR OF COLE ORTON, VICAR OF WHITWICK,
 AND CHAPLAIN TO THE MOST NOBLE THE MARQUIS OF LANSDOWNE.

LEICESTER:
 PRINTED BY T. COMBE AND SON.
 AND SOLD BY BEADSMORE, ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH.

1827.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

9.

EARLY CLERGY AND THE CHURCH SCHOOL

The Rev. Matthew Babington remained at Swannington until 1847. In the 1841 Census, Matthew, Hannah, 3 students and 3 servants are all recorded as living at the Thringstone Parsonage. Mr. Babington's son, Churchill, refers to attending his father's school at Thringstone, although no doubt the number of pupils would have been small.

Babington was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Hunt who recorded in the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census that the church had a total of 460 "sittings" of which 380 were free. The attendance on March 30th 1851 was 150 general congregation plus 130 "Sunday Scholars".

The Rev. Samuel Smith who followed wrote that "as from Quinquagesima 1852" he was introducing "two full services every Sunday not alternate morning service one Sunday and afternoon the following week". This incumbent was also prepared to preach out doors.

The Loughborough Monitor (4) reports that, "On Sunday last the Rev. S. Smith D.D. visited Lymby Hall and preached an excellent sermon in the open air. The colliers were particularly invited and a numerous congregation, including several of the residents of the Hall, were quiet listeners to the eloquence of the learned Doctor, whose mission, it is hoped, may be not entirely without some good results."

In the four years between 1851-5, the population of Swannington rose from 822 to over 1100 due to the sinking of new coal mines in the vicinity. As there was no regular school in the village, the Rev. Dr. Smith instituted an appeal for the erection of a day school to accommodate 108 children and a schoolmaster's house, the total cost being £1,000. A grant of £300 was received from the National Society and the remainder raised by public subscription.

Contributors included Earl Howe of Gopsall Hall, Sir George Beaumont, Rev. F. Merewether, Rev. Dr. Smith and Swannington, Coleorton and Snibstone collieries.

The Ashby-de-Zouch News and General Advertiser for November 28th 1863 (5) reports that the annual Missionary meeting was held in the National School Room. Dr. Smith was in the chair.

Dr. Smith was succeeded at Swannington by the Rev. John Hewitt in 1857 but he returned to be appointed Vicar of Whitwick on October 24th 1864 following the death of Rev. Francis Merewether. The living of Whitwick is a gift of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (then Queen Victoria) and at that time worth £400 per annum with 200 acres of glebe and a house.

Samuel and Francis Smith had 10 children (6 sons and 4 daughters). The two youngest, Temple Chevallier and Beatrice Gertrude were born in Heidelberg (1857) and Wiesbaden (1859). On January 1st 1869 the vicar wrote:-

10.

A LETTER

TO THE

INHABITANTS OF THE TOWNSHIP

OF

WHITWICK:

FROM

THE REV. S. SMITH, M.A.

Incumbent of St. George's,

LATE CURATE OF WHITWICK.

ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH:

PRINTED BY W. AND J. HENTALL.

M.DCCC.LII.

11.

"To prevent all mistakes I have recorded that on this day I assumed my mother's maiden name of Pyemont instead of my hitherto name of Smith." Signed S. Pyemont D.D. Vicar.

In 1866 as vicar of Whitwick, he presented Frederick Thorpe Pearson as perpetual curate to Swannington.

He was the author of three tracts of local interest; "A letter to Mr. Kidger," written in 1850 (6) replying to the accusations that he had criticized the Catholics." A letter to the inhabitants of Whitwick". (7) (1852) proposing a levy to increase the size of Whitwick Church Yard and another tract, "Is it True?" (1869) (8) in his own defence explaining how the Ashby Magistrates had unfairly fined him £1 with £2.3s.6d costs for allegedly assaulting a Whitwick man.

The Whitwick school logbook for 1870 records -

"February 7th. Monday - very wet morning - small attendance - Rev. Dr. Pyemont visited and complained of boys in lower classes being dirty - gave H. Stevens half penny for having a clean face. Admitted Annie Moore.

May 12th Thursday. Rev. Dr. Pyemont visited in the morning - heard the boys sing, and gave them half-holiday, it being his birthday."

Dr. Pyemont died on 14th March 1875 at Pau Basses, Pyrenees, France as a result of blood poisoning.(9).

THE FIRST VICAR

In 1866 the Rev. Frederick Thorpe Pearson was installed as curate in charge of St. George's Church. Six years later the Leicester Advertiser(10) reported, "On Sunday last, the roads leading to St. George's Church were thronged with pedestrians, all apparently having one object, namely to hear the service connected with the opening of the new organ." The sermon was preached by the Rev. H. Fearon, Rector of Loughborough and Archdeacon of Leicester. A full choral service was sung by Whitwick Parish Church Choir, beginning with the processional hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers".

This organ, built by Banfields of Birmingham and installed on the south side, was used until the 1950s and several older members of the congregation remember "pumping the bellows" while it was installed in the organ chamber loft, south of the chancel. It has not been possible to ascertain whether there was an earlier organ - there is no reference to one in the original plan of 1826. In the 1831 Visitation of Leicestershire Churches it is reported that out of 191 churches visited, only 23 organs were found of which four were small hand or barrel organs. (Brandwood - Leics. Churches 1825 - 50).

The year 1875 was very important in the life of Swannington Church. The London Gazette of June 29th 1875 (11) reported that at the Court of Windsor on the previous day, in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, with the consent of the Right Reverend William Connor, Bishop

12.

of Peterborough, humbly presented that in their opinion a district chapelry should be assigned to Saint George's Church and specific parish boundaries be designated. In other words St. George's became a separate church and the incumbent now became the vicar. So the Rev. Frederick Thorpe Pearson became the first vicar of St. George's church and the vicar of Whitwick (Rev. Augustus Francis Tollemache) its first patron.

At this time Wyggeston Hospital made a grant of £220 towards the Church Endowment Fund for this new parish to be formed out of the parish of Whitwick.

A memorandum written by a later incumbent, stated:-

"All claim for Fees from the Vicar of Whitwick was given up in AD 1860." Vide Burial Register for 1860.

This is corroborated by the London Gazette of June 29th 1875 page 3293 when a district chapelry was assigned to this parish.

Verified by me
James Barnes Brearly
Vicar of St. George, Whitwick."

November 14th 1894.

On August 8th 1878 Mr. Pearson conducted 47 baptisms. The church still possesses a Bible dated 1870 with the inscription "F.T. Pearson - incumbent."

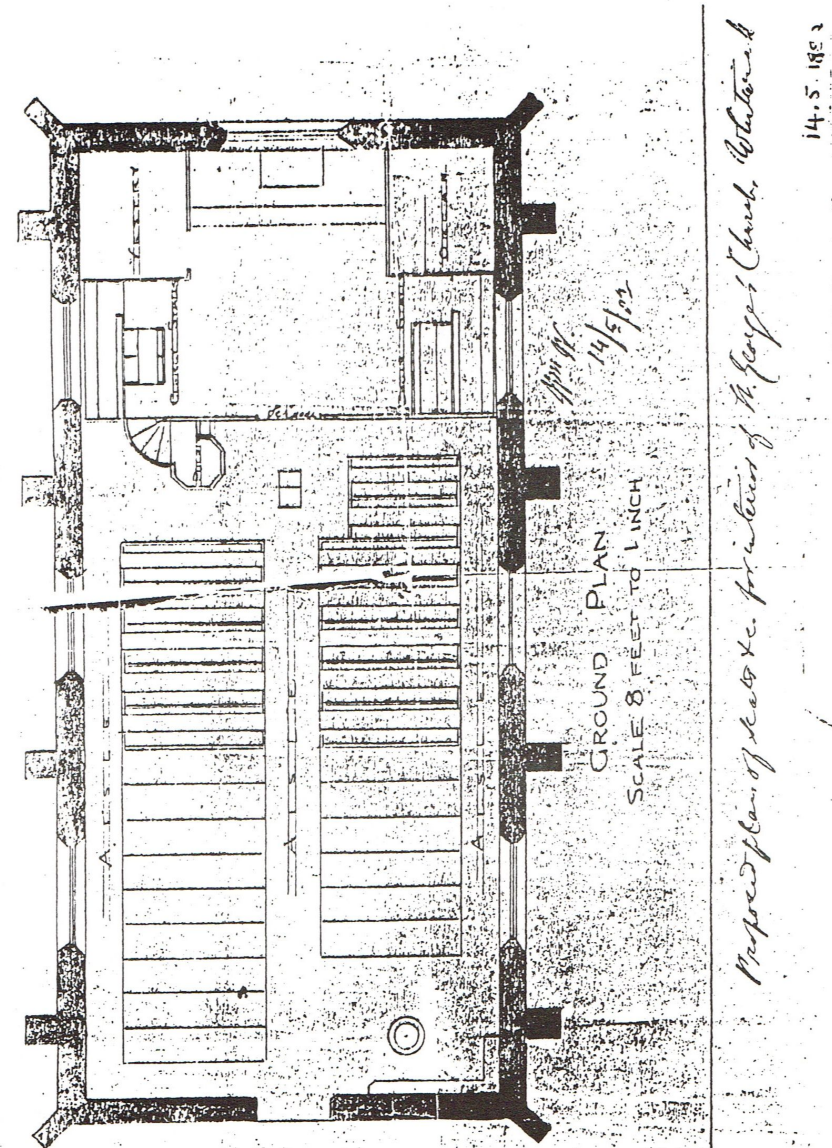
In June 1882, Mr. Pearson, with his church wardens Thomas Atkins and William Henry Johnson, applied to the Bishop of Peterborough for a Faculty to make certain alterations in the church. These comprised, "a rearrangement of some of the seats at present occupying the East end, a new reading desk, pulpit and choir stall and an open screen between chancel and nave. Also the organ and vestry to be removed into the south chancel and the church newly floored".

The pulpit was to be placed in its present position. It was formerly on the south wall (as shown in Merewether's plan). The Leicester Chronicle(12) September 23rd 1882 reported, "The church was reopened with a full choral service and the sermon was preached by Bishop Mitchinson to only a moderate number of persons, owing no doubt to the rain, which fell during the greater part of the day. Notwithstanding upwards of £12 was collected".

Twelve months later, the Leicester Chronicle(13) recorded a bazaar held in the National Schoolroom for the purpose of reducing the debt existing on the recent renovation and redecoration of St. George's Church.

Mr. Pearson conducted his last baptism (Norman James Toon of Peggs Green) on 30th March 1893, his last burial (Albert Edward Coe aged 9 months) on Friday March 31st and he himself was buried on the following Wednesday. The little baby Toon followed him in the burial register. The Pearson family is buried in two graves in the churchyard.

13.



Proposed plan of seats for interior of St George's Church, Whitwick 14.5.1882

14.

SWANNINGTON NEW SCHOOL AND THE CHURCH EXTENSION.

The Rev. John B. Brearley only stayed at Swannington for a short period but was responsible for the building of Swannington New School and Mission Hall, opened on September 28th 1894. Kelly (1895) states that the Hall was used as an Infants' School during the week and for Divine Service on Sundays. Both buildings are now incorporated in the present Swannington C of E Primary School. A photograph of Mr. Brearley, staff and scholars of the new school hangs in the entrance hall of the school.

In 1895, Mr. Brearley left to become vicar of Burscough, near Southport. He was succeeded by the Rev. John H. Bailey, formerly vicar of Burscough Bridge about 1 mile from Burscough. In 1900 there were some very ambitious plans for the church. It was decided to make extensive alterations and the proposed plan, together with the Faculty, is kept in the church safe. The East bay was to be cut away and a large chancel built, the estimated cost being £1,300 - £1,400. It was also proposed to build a tower at the West end and also to extend the Lady Chapel both north and east. As £1,200 had been promised including £75 from I.C.B.S. it was agreed to limit the work to the chancel, vestry, organ chamber, north chapel, north porch and doorway in south porch. Several graves at least 30 years old had to be moved.

Work began in September 1900 under the guidance of G.H. Fellowes Prynne (Architect), the vicar, acting as clerk of works and the two wardens William Henry Johnson and John Richards.

Due to the difficulties in raising funds during the Boer Wars (1899-1902) the contract was cancelled before the new building was roofed. When work stopped in February 1901, the vicar worked every day, assisted occasionally by one boy (probably Mr. Edgar Mee who died in 1983 aged 93) for 2.5 years. Details of this terrific manual effort and the Dedication of the new chancel on St. George's Day 1904 can be read in the Coalville Times(14).

A photograph showing the new chancel in about 1907 hangs in the vestry. It is interesting to read in the local paper(15) that complaints had been made to Ashby R.D.C. about the "unsightly" shed near the Church used by the vicar to store tools.

Kelly (1908) reports that there are 266 sittings. The living is a vicarage, net yearly value of £150, with residence and 12 acres of glebe, in the gift of the vicar of Whitwick and held since 1895 by the Rev. John Hooley Ella Bailey, M.A.

In the vestry hangs a pre World War 1 photograph of the choir of 27 with the choirmaster Mr. Adcock.

15.

SWANNINGTON NEW SCHOOL.

St. George's Vicarage,

Swannington,

August 14th, 1894.

Dear Sir

The New Building will be opened by the Lord Bishop of Peterborough, on Tuesday, August 28th.

Morning Prayer, Holy Communion at 11.15 a.m. when a Sermon will be preached by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese.

The Clergy are desired to bring Surplice, Hood, and Stole. (white)

There will be Luncheon at Lady Beaumont's House for the Clergy of the Deanery who desire to stay.

Will you kindly signify your intention of being present at either the Opening Service or at the Luncheon, so that the necessary arrangements may be made?

The Opening Services will be continued on subsequent days

The Offertories at all the Services will be devoted to the providing of additional furniture and for the work of the Mission during the next twelve months.

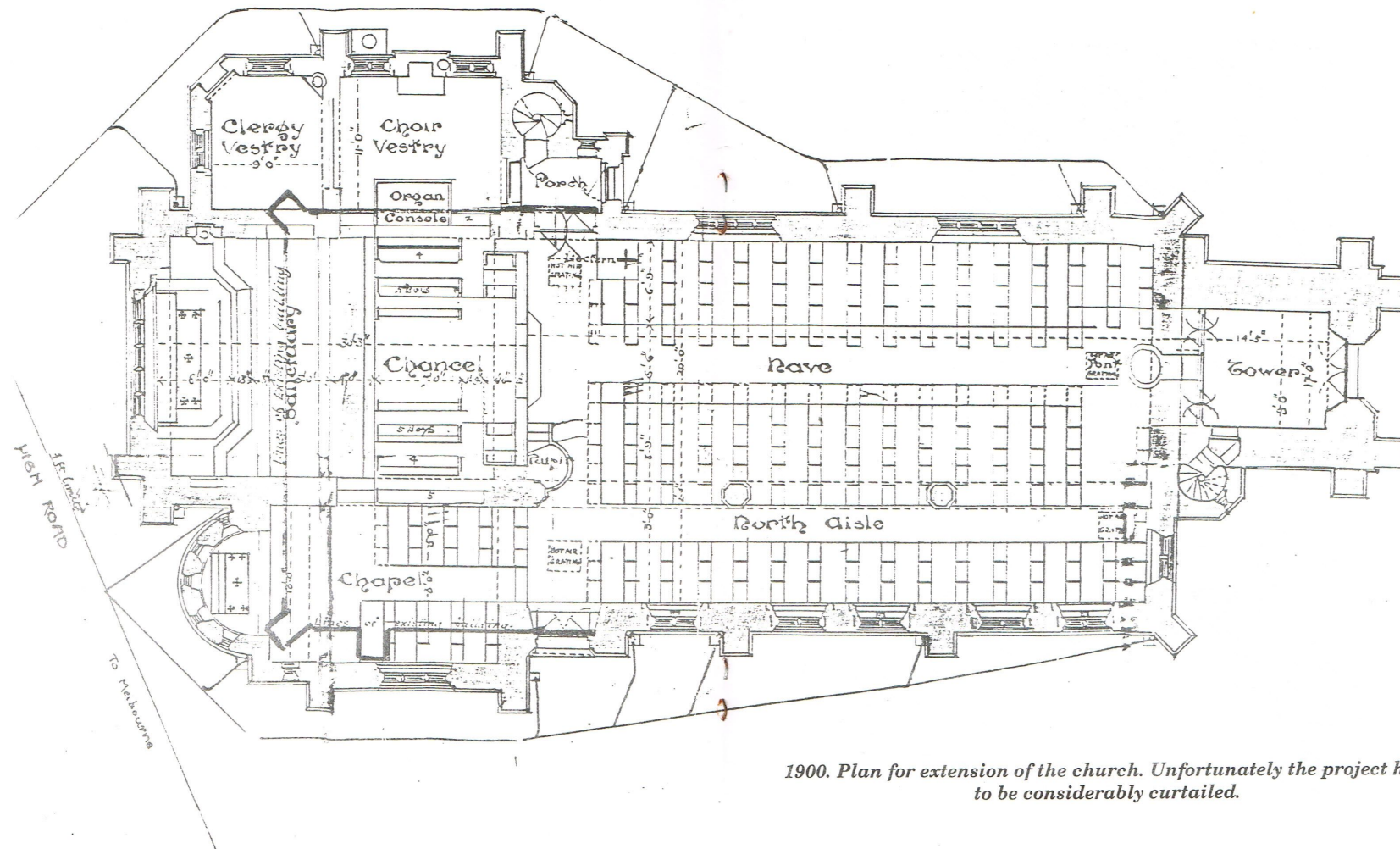
Believe me,

Yours faithfully,

J. BARNES BREARLEY.

16.

17.



1900. Plan for extension of the church. Unfortunately the project had to be considerably curtailed.

SCALE 0 10 20 30 40 50 FEET
 (SEALED) as Approved by
 (Signed) Approved April 28.1900
 GEO. H. FELLOWES FRYNNE
 ARCHITECT

18.



Interior of church about 1907.

19.

1913 - 1945

The Rev. Greenwood Robinson became vicar in 1913 and shortly afterwards Divine Service ceased to be held in the Mission Hall. In 1915 the vicar and churchwardens Messrs. Thomas Atkins and Charles Atkins applied for a Faculty for various alterations and additions including a west porch. However lack of funds prevented most of this work.

It was agreed to install a communion rail and tile the Sanctuary floor, both the gift of the family of the late Rev. F. Pearson and his wife Louise who died in August 1914. A new pulpit, reading desk and lectern, all three items having been given, were also placed in the church.

The choir continued successfully and in a 1931 photograph, the vicar, Mr. T. Adcock (organist and choirmaster) and 25 choristers are seen. Mrs. Sarah Robinson died in 1930 while her husband was vicar. He died in 1943. They are both buried in the churchyard.

The Rev. Willy Wray was appointed to the living in 1932. A keen sportsman, he started the Boys' Club at the Vicarage aided by Sir George Beaumont and Mr. Bill Smith, the Sunday School Superintendent.

In 1933 electric light was installed and the former oil lamp holders were converted into electric lamp holders and are still in use. When the Bishop of Leicester came to dedicate the new lighting, someone was deputed to switch on at the back of the church when the Bishop said "Let there be Light." Unfortunately when the Bishop said these words nothing happened. The Bishop repeated the command. Again nothing happened and the churchwarden had to walk to the back of the church to discover that the appointed operator had fallen asleep and so he "switched on".

The vicarage was installed with electric light at this time at a cost of £34, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners agreeing to pay half the cost.

A church magazine was introduced and the Mothers' Union founded.

The four windows of the nave were renovated by Walter Moss and the pews brushgrained with varnish in 1935. In the following year a heating system was installed which together with a cellar for the boiler cost £306. Electric light was installed in the cellar. In 1938 the East window was repaired and rewired.

Both in 1935 and 1939 there were slight changes in the boundaries of Swannington and Coleorton.

During the war years (1939-45) Mr. Wray served as an army chaplain, returning at the end of hostilities for a short period before moving to Belton. While he was away on war service, the Rev. C.W.J. Perry, vicar of Osgathorpe, took charge of the parish.

POST WAR YEARS.

In 1946 the Rev. Robert Loxton Williams was appointed vicar. Mr. Williams is remembered as a rather shy bachelor living with his parents at the vicarage. A keen cyclist, he usually carried his Jack Russell dog in the cycle basket. Also in 1946 a new parish magazine was produced at a cost of 3d per copy.

By now the 1872 organ was becoming unreliable and in 1947 the gift of an American Organ (harmonium) was gratefully received. In 1951 the old two manual hand pumped organ was removed and a new instrument built by S. Taylor & Co. of Leicester (builders of the large organ at De Montford Hall, Leicester) was installed in the old choir vestry on the north side of the chancel. This new two manual instrument with exhaust pneumatic action cost £1,050 and was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. H.A. Maxwell, Assistant Bishop of Leicester. Much technical advice on the choice of organ was kindly given by the Rev. C.W.J. Perry and the money raised by various means including a sale of work, a garden fete at Swannington House (Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Toon), a carol service, the sale of printed cards and also letters of appeal.

The Rev. W. Wray was invited in 1948 to dedicate the tablet containing the names of those killed in the 1939-45 war and in 1954 the standard of the British Legion (Swannington Branch) was laid up in the church. In 1957 the parish quota was set at £81.

When the Rev. Leonard David Barnes was inducted in 1959 after an interregnum of 17 months, he was surprised to learn that Evensong began at 6.25 p.m. It was explained that this was necessary to make the church service coincide with the local 'bus service. In July 1961, Mr. Barnes married Miss Mavis Harvey. The service was conducted in St. George's Church and all members of the P.C.C. together with their partners were invited to a buffet luncheon held at the vicarage.

At the Annual Vestry meeting held in April 1963, both wardens announced that they wished to resign for health reasons, Mr. W. Wardle after 23 years and Mr. J.A. Robinson after 24 years. As appreciation of their service over so many years it was agreed that two churchwardens' wands should be engraved with their names as a permanent memorial to their long and loyal service to St. George's Church.

Repair work continued at the church between 1958 and 1960 when the nave roof was reslated. Also the church bell was rehung by John Taylor of Loughborough at a cost of £83 and the heating system repaired. In 1965 a water tap was installed in the vestry, an antiquated fireplace removed, being replaced by a "Courtier" type convector heater (gift of the churchwardens) and the vestry was limewashed and the ceiling painted. Also the British Legion Standard was removed from the Chancel where it had been laid up and was hung above the War Memorial Tablets on the South wall. In 1966 the building was inspected by the Leicester firm of Architects: Pick, Everard, Keay & Gimsom. They reported that the general condition of the church was very poor indeed due to three main factors:

1. Subsidence.
2. The siting of the building in a very exposed position.
3. The general repair in recent years had been inadequate in arresting damage caused by continual delapidation.

Also the original building had inherent defects e.g. inadequate damp proofing and poor stonework.

A very gloomy picture! In fact in 1958 the Coalville Times(16) had reported that many parishioners thought that the only possible future solution was to demolish the church and build a new one nearer to the centre of the village.

The N.C.B. (British Coal) admitted responsibility for the subsidence damage and offered to build another church on a nearby site (Peggs Green), enabling them to extract coal on the existing site. However the money offered by British Coal was not sufficient to build a similar church and so the offer was refused by the Church Commissioners. Accordingly the existing building was repaired and the bill paid in 1969. During the repair work, a large steel arch was placed at the chancel arch to support the chancel roof.

During Mr. Barnes' tenure the "Young Sowers" group for 9-14 year olds was introduced, meeting one evening per week. An appeal was made for a piano. This coincided with a similar appeal by the local police who received several offers, one of which was given to the church. Unfortunately tragedy struck on July 3rd. 1971. While using a scythe in the church yard the vicar collapsed and died, being found later by a parishioner. He left a wife and three children, Andrew (8), Stephen (7) and Alison (3). The funeral took place in the church, followed by interment at Stapenhill Cemetery. Mrs. Barnes now lives in Stapenhill (Burton-on-Trent).

In 1972 the Rev. Philip Edgar Hunt was appointed vicar. A period of great activity ensued. The brambles in the church yard were cut and the whole area tidied. The metal arch was removed from the chancel and the gap between the chancel arch pillar and north wall bricked. The exterior projection on the north wall (part of the 1900 restoration work) was removed. The church was rewired and the organ repaired. The church choir was reformed, new choir robes made and Mr. R. Lord appointed organist/choirmaster.

The "150" anniversary of the church's construction was celebrated in 1975. The church was beautifully decorated with flowers and also on show was a facsimile of the Domesday Book of 1086 giving Sueniton as one of the two manors of Whitwick (Witewic). The Gresley Male Voice Choir gave a concert, the Bishop of Leicester preached at the Sunday evening Church service and on the following evening a tableau, "History of Swannington", written by the vicar, was performed by the children of Swannington Primary School. Also a four page history of the church was produced by Mr. Hunt(17) who earlier had written the hymn "Within our homes, O Lord, do thou our families bless", with music composed by Mr. R. Lord, organist.

Also in 1975 there was amalgamation of the benefices of Coleorton and Swannington so that the Rev. P. Hunt became also the Rector of Coleorton - an interesting historical link with a former Rector of Coleorton - the Rev. F. Merewether. Mr. Hunt wrote a similar four page history of St. Mary's Church, (18) Coleorton and a combined parish magazine was produced. Unfortunately in the same year Mr. Bernard Hodges died, a worshipper at St. George's for 50 years and a member of the P.C.C. for 43 years. He had served both as churchwarden and treasurer.

The Golden Jubilee of the Leicester Diocese was celebrated by a massed Communion Service on June 13th 1976 at the Leicester City Football ground and both Coleorton and Swannington parishes were well represented.

Mr. Hunt left Swannington in September 1978 and the Rev. R. Parkinson was inducted in June 1979. Family service was introduced the following year. Also extra lights were fitted in the chancel to shine on the altar. In 1981 the church garden fete was held at "The Grove" courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Shell. Formerly it had been held at Mount Pleasant Farm, home of Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, but the farm had been sold. Before that venue, the fete was held at the vicarage. Social and musical events continued including a visit of the Ivanhoe Singers, flower festivals and the annual children's festival. On St. George's Day, 1983, the church flower festival had as its theme the 150th Anniversary of the Leicester-Swannington Railway, opened on June 17th, 1832. Various parishioners loaned railway relics and diagrams which were on display and a four page history and guide to the exhibition, written by Mr. Tom Kelly, was available. In this year St. George's Church became a listed building.

In the following years under the M.S.C. scheme, much restoration work due to subsidence damage took place. Major repairs to the roof, a new damp course and a new floor in the nave were some of the improvements, together with the whole interior repainted. Amazingly church services in the building continued without a break. The concrete ramp and handrail to the west porch were built, the west doors replaced and a toilet installed in the vestry. Unfortunately the plans to restyle the interior west entrance giving extra rooms had to be abandoned and the original structure was reinstated. One day in November 1984, Mr. Parkinson was surprised to observe smoke rising from an area of the churchyard. This was caused by some underground coal seam which had heated in some way and the smoke rose through the grass from the fire under the surface. Coalville Fire Brigade was called and dealt with the problem.

About this time the church lost through death two leading members of the congregation; Mr. J.R. Lord organist and choirmaster for almost 15 years and Mr. T.J. Turner, PCC secretary for 50 years and the last chairman of the Ashby R.D.C. Mr. Turner had also served as choirboy, Sunday School Superintendent, Treasurer, Server and Deanery Synod Representative.

On April 21st 1986 the title of the benefice was changed from Whitwick St. George to Swannington St. George. Mr. Parkinson retired on January 2nd 1987 and there followed a two year interregnum when the parish received much help from the Rev. P. Lawrie (vicar of Whitwick) and the Rev. B. Matthews (vicar of Thringstone). During this period, Coleorton Parish expressed a wish to be linked with St. Helen's Church, Ashby and so a new Swannington Church magazine was introduced.

In March 1988 it was proposed to unite the benefice of St. George, Swannington with St. Michael and All Angels, Ravenstone, the new benefice being called the benefice of Ravenstone and Swannington. Both the Swannington vicarage and the Ravenstone rectory were sold and a new rectory was built at The Limes near Hoo Ash roundabout, half way between the two churches.

On February 4th 1989, the Rev. Kerry Emmett was licensed as "priest in charge" at Swannington Church by Bishop Godfrey Ashby. On the first Sunday in May 1989 at Ravenstone Church, he was inducted Rector of Ravenstone and Vicar of Swannington in the combined benefice by Archdeacon Hughie Jones. The patrons are the Lord Chancellor and the Vicar of Whitwick alternately; in this instance the Lord Chancellor.

A GUIDE TO ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH.

Originally this rather plain edifice of brick, rectangular in shape with large wooden Y tracery windows, contained the pulpit on the south wall and seating on three sides. A communion table stood under the east stained window. At the west end stands an attractive broad bellcote with one bell. The bellcote is supported on a corbelled-out projection which also appears inside.

During the years 1900 - 1904 the east end was considerably enlarged at a cost of £1,700 under the direction of G.H. Fellowes Prynne as architect. The east bay of the 1825 building was cut away and a large chancel was built. However the restricted nature of the site meant that the new chancel was not on the same axis as the nave and so the chancel arch sits awkwardly placed towards the south side of the nave. The barrel vaulted wooden roof together with four very beautifully carved and coloured wooden bosses are attractive. The east window consists of five lights depicting the Birth of Christ and Visit of Shepherds.

From the west door there is an unimpeded view right up to the east end which together with the red carpet, makes the approach to the high altar quite imposing. On the south wall, the British Legion standards hang beside the list of names of men killed in the two world wars. The rather elaborately carved eagle lectern stands beside the vicar's stall. The wooden communion rails were presented in memory of the first vicar and the plain altar cross in remembrance of a former village schoolmaster and organist. The rather simple yet elegant oak pulpit stands at the side of the Lady Chapel altar, in front of which is a plain lead-lined sandstone font.

On the north side above the book of remembrance hangs a list of all the incumbents. At the back of the church near the wooden screen is a plaque acknowledging a gift by ICBS to help pay for the 1900-1904 extension work. The present seating capacity of the church is about 150.

Outside, the well maintained churchyard contains 1.5 acres of land.

INCORPORATED CHURCH BUILDING SOCIETY - I.C.B.S.

Unlike the Church Building Commission which was concerned with the building of new churches, the I.C.B.S. gave the majority of its grants to restoration and extension work. Of the 57 new churches in Leicestershire and Rutland built between 1818 and 1914, the society contributed to only 18 of them of which Swannington was one.

A grant from I.C.B.S. was regarded as a useful and prestigious addition to fund raising. No doubt it was to spur local effort.

From the I.C.B.S. Year Book for 1927

Swannington	Total seats	Free Seats	Grant
1822	450	380	£450
1900	264	264	£75

(Church Building and Restoration in Leics. 1800 - 1914) (20).

SWANNINGTON CLERGY

Francis Merewether M.A. Oxon.

Rector of Coleorton 1815-64, Vicar of Whitwick 1819-64 died at Coleorton Rectory. Was responsible for the building of St. George's Church. Eldest son Francis became Postmaster General in Australia also Chancellor of Sydney University.

1827 Henry Walford M.A. Cantab.

b about 1803. Conducted first baptisms and burials at Swannington and officiated as curate at Whitwick 1826-8. At Whitwick was followed by John Wordsworth (son of William). Later became Vicar of Sittingbourne Kent. Author of "Unitarian Controversy" a Tract published by Hextall of Leics.

Robert Drummond M.A. Cantab.

b 1805 son of Admiral Sir Adam Drummond and grandson of Duke of Atholl. Although his name is not on the list of Swannington clergy he frequently officiated at St. George's until the arrival of Mr. Babington. He was friendly with the Wordsworths and visited them at Rydal Mount. Became Vicar of Feering (Essex) 1829-66.

1828 Matthew Drake Babington M.A. Cantab.

b 1788 d 1851. P.C. Whitwick 1828-51, P.C. Sheepshed till (?) 1831 P.C. Oaks Chapel 1838-51. Later Chaplain at Messina, Sicily where he died. Father of Churchill Babington, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, Disney Prof. of Archeology also Rector of Cockfield, Suffolk.

1847 Thomas Hunt.

b. London 1790. On census night 1851 was living at vicarage with Elizabeth aged 64, unmarried daughter aged 23 and two unmarried servants. Ecclesiastical Census 1851 states average church attendance; morning 80 adults plus 100 children, afternoon 100 adults plus 120 children. Services alternate weeks.

1851 Samuel Smith M.A. D.D.

b 1815 in Leeds, Graduated at Durham in 1843 with first class honours in Maths and Physical Sciences and Modern Law. Various prizes. In 1851 Census was living at Whitwick Vicarage (Silver St) aged 36 with a Yorkshire wife, 5 children, 2 pupils and 4 servants. Later 3 daughters received bequests from the Dalby Estate. He introduced 2 church services every Sunday. Mainly responsible for the erection of Swannington School in 1855. A very colourful figure. In 1864 was appointed Vicar of Whitwick. In 1869 changed his name to Pyemont. He died from blood poisoning in Pau (S. France) in 1875.

1857 John Hewett M.A. Cantab.

b Aylesbury in 1824. Headmaster of Bloxham Grammar School and Curate of Bloxham 1853-6. After various curacies returned to teaching as Senior Classics Master at N. London College School 1874-8. Author of "Verses of a Country Curate" and Histories of Exeter and Ely Cathedral. Editor of "The Sealed Copy of the Prayer Book." He died in 1886 at Claybrooke, Leics.

1866 Frederic Thorpe Pearson M.A. Oxon

b 1822. Before coming to Swannington he was curate at Loughborough. m Louisa (10 years younger) in 1853. They had at least 6 children including Hugh Atlay who died of typhoid fever at St. Vincent in 1897. In 1875 St. George's became a separate church and Mr. Pearson became its first vicar. The family is buried in two graves in the churchyard, Mrs. Pearson died in 1914. Miss Julia Pearson left a bequest in 1938 for the maintenance of the two graves.

1892 John Barnes Brearley M.A. Dunelm.

After curacies in Lancs, he stayed only three years. However he appears on a school photograph of 1893 and was responsible for building the Swannington New School and Mission Hall in 1894. He left to become Vicar of Burscough Nr. Southport.

1895 John Hooley Ella Bailey M.A. Cantab.

Scholar of Corpus Christi College and Junior Optime. Formerly Vicar of Burscough Bridge (1 mile distant from Burscough) and earlier Forces' Chaplain at Portsmouth and Aldershot. On St. George's Day 1904 the new chancel was dedicated. Mr. Bailey was mainly responsible for the actual building after the builders' contract had been cancelled due to lack of finance.

1913 Greenwood Robinson B.A. London.

b in Bradford. Rather outspoken, very emotional, a good preacher. Always willing to supply medicines to his parishioners. Appears on the 1931 choir photograph. Always wore a black skull cap. Mrs. Sarah Robinson died in 1930, he in 1943. They are buried in the churchyard.

1932 Lawrence Willy Wray.

Wycliffe Hall. Curate at Donisthorpe before coming to Swannington aged 32. Originally a Baptist, he was born at Countesthorpe. A keen cyclist riding on continent and bowls player. Wrote "Pathos of Parenthesis". Saw war service as an Army Chaplain 1939-45. He returned to Swannington for a short period and then became Vicar of Belton. Mrs. Wray continued visiting during the war period. They had 1 son and 1 daughter (Queenie). He was guest preacher at St. George's weekend April 1978.

C.W.J. Perry. Kelham.

Vicar of Osgathorpe and acted as curate to the parish 1939-45 while Mr. Wray was on active war service. Mr. Perry left Osgathorpe in 1946.

1946 Robert Loxton Williams. London College of Divinity.

Formerly Curate-in-Charge of St. George's Conventional District, Marfleet (Kingston-on-Hull) 1938-46. A bachelor, rather shy who lived with parents (former missionaries) at the vicarage. Left Swannington to go to St. Albans as Rector of Aspenden with Layston and Buntingford. After retirement moved to Hulland Ward, Derbyshire and died in 1985.

1959 Leonard David Barnes, Lincoln and Edinburgh Theological College.

Before his ordination, Mr. Barnes worked in business as an accountant in Leicester and was a licensed Reader. After training, Ordination and several curacies including Knighton, Leicester, he became vicar of Swannington terminating a 14 month interregnum presided over by the Rev. L.J. Chesterman (Vicar of Thringstone). He married in 1961 and the three children were probably the first young people to live at the Vicarage for many years. In 1971 he collapsed and died aged 58.

Opposite page: The Choir in 1931 with the Rev. G. Robinson (Vicar) and Mr T. Adcock (Organist & Choirmaster).

1972 Philip Edgar Hunt, Leicester and Launde.

Born in Melton Mowbray, former owner of bookshop and news agency. Keen historian, author of "Notes on medieval Melton Mowbray" 1965, "Story of Melton Mowbray" 1957, also guides to St. George's Church 1975 and to Coleorton Church 1976. In 1968, after two years at Leicester University and 1 year at Launde Abbey, Mr. Hunt was ordained and for three years was curate at Blaby before being appointed to St. George's Church. Here and later at Coleorton (after being appointed Rector in 1975) he re-formed the Mothers' Union and built up a flourishing Swannington Sunday School. In November 1978 he retired, returning to Melton Mowbray. An Incumbents' Board has been attached to the North Wall of the church in memory of the Rev. P. Hunt.

1979 Raymond Parkinson B.A. Bristol. Tyndale Hall.

Mr. Parkinson came to the combined benefice of Swannington and Coleorton after being vicar of Holy Trinity, Ashby for about 10 years. During his time at Swannington, considerable renovation work was done on the church. The Electoral Roll membership was examined and a more realistic total produced. Mr. Parkinson retired in January 1987.

During the interregnum, the Coleorton benefice was combined with that of St. Helen, Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

1989 Kerry Charles Emmett B.A. Dunelm, St. John, Nottingham.

On May 1st, Mr. Emmett joined us as Vicar of St. George, Swannington and Rector of St. Michael and All Angels, Ravenstone.



CHURCH OFFICERS.

	VICAR	CHURCHWARDENS	P.C.C. SEC.	ORGAN	ELECT ROLL
1926		See restored			
1928	G. Robinson	H. Brooks,	M. Johnson		
		L. Page,			
1929	"	L. Page	"		32
		J. Mee			
1930	"	"	"		"
1931	"	"	"		"
1932	"	"	"		"
1933	L.W. Wray	"	T.J. Turner		38
1934	"	"	"		"
1935	"	"	"		52
1936	"	W. Smith,	"		
		J. Walker			
1937	"	"	"		
1938	"	"	"		78
1939	"	"	"		
1940	"	"	"		
1941	"	W. Wardle,	"		
		J.A. Robinson			
1942	"	"	"		
1943	"	"	"		
1944	"	"	"		
1945	"	"	"		
1946	R.L. Williams	"	"		
	(des)				
1947	"	"	"		
1948	"	"	"		
1949	"	"	"		
1950	"	"	"	A. Lord	
1951	"	"	"	"	
1952	"	"	"	"	
1953	"	"	"	R. Preston	
1954	"	"	"	"	
1955	"	"	"	A. Lord	
1956	"	"	"	"	56
1957	"	"	"	"	
1958	Vacant	"	"	"	
1959	Vacant	"	"	"	
1960	L.D. Barnes	"	"	A.Lord	56
				Mrs.	
1961	"	"	"	Willmott	82
1962	"	"	"	"	
1963	"	"	"	"	
1964	"	D. Armstrong,	"	"	95
		B. Hodges			

1965	"	H.C. Hardy,	"	?	
		B.Hodges			
1966	"	H.C. Hardy,	"	?	96
		D. Armstrong			
1967	"	"	"		
1968	"	"	"		
1969	"	Mrs. M. Clarke,	"		
		Mrs. D.J. Marshall			
1970	"	Mrs. M. Clarke,	"	Mrs.	93
		M.J.Allen	"	Hopwood	
1971	"	"	"	"	
1972/3	P.E. Hunt	B. Hodges,	"	"	
		M.J. Allen			79
1974	"	"	"	J.R. Lord	99
1975	"	B.Hodges,	"	"	
		D. Armstrong			
1976	"	"	"	"	
1977	"	J.L. Toon,	"	"	97
		D. Armstrong			
1978	(with Col.)	"	"	"	
1979	Vacant	L.T.Kelly,	"	"	
		D. Armstrong			
1980	R.N. Parkinson	"	"	"	
1981	"	"	"	"	
1982	"	"	"	"	
1983	"	M. Allen	Mrs. B. Sansome	"	
		D. Armstrong			
1984-5	"	F.D. Slater,	"	*	35
		D. Armstrong			
1985-6	"	"	"		
1986-7	"	"	"		
1987-8	Vacant	"	"		
1988-9	"	"	"		
1989-90	K. Emmett	M.J. Allen,	Mrs. M. Armstrong	31	
	(Rav.)	D. Armstrong			
1992	"	M.J. Allen,	K.J. Roberts	29	
		Mrs. J. Burton			

* Details of organists no longer given.

All information from Leicester Diocesan Directory.

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Also copies of:-

Alumni Oxonienses compiled by Joseph Foster.

Alumni Cantabrigienses compiled by Venn.

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Canterbury Press, Norwich (Publishers of Hymns Ancient & Modern).

Church of England Record Centre.

Leicestershire Record Office.

Lincoln Record Office.

Reference Library, Bishop St., Leicester.

Lambeth Palace library for permission to reproduce the 1826 sketch of the Church.

Leicestershire Record Office for permission to reproduce picture of Mr. Merewether.

Also many other friends who have supplied me with their personal reminiscences of St. George's Church, together with photographs, cuttings etc. which have been inserted into four large volumes containing much more detail of the Church's history. These volumes are available for examination by any interested person as this booklet offers the bare outline of the story. While every effort has been made to be accurate with dates, personalities and contemporary spellings, I apologise for any mistakes.

The whole of the proceeds will be given to St. George's Building Fund.

BERNARD DAWS,

Swannington. July 1993.



Cover of pre-war Parish Magazine 1938.