

THE HISTORY OF FULFORD CHAPEL AND ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH

The old yews in St. Nicholas churchyard on the high ground at the north end of Fulford point to the church being a very early place of worship, and it was certainly well established as a Chapelry in the 14th century, being listed among the Churches of Pirehill Hundred in the Parish of St. Michael's Church in Stone, together with Darlaston, Meaford, Oulton, Moddershall, Tittensor, Beech, Hilderstone and Aston.

It was visited by the commissioners of Henry VI in connection with the inventory of Church ornaments soon after the introduction of the second prayer book of that reign (1422-1461). They found one chalice of silver without paten, one bell in the steeple, one cloth for the altar, and a surplice for the Curate. 'Beresford's Historical Notes' states that "*the chapel is said to have been in existence before 1552 and was dedicated to St. Nicholas*", *the school being held in the north aisle until a school was built in 1785*". A local squire, Mr. Shalcross, gave the money for the building of the north aisle which was named after him in 1649.

From the painting that William Walsh did of the old Chapel in 1814 it would appear that the Chapel was built in about the 13th century and that it was built using Keuper 'white' sandstone that had been quarried behind Fulford Manor Farm for centuries. It measured approximately 14 metres by 10 metres and is shown as being of mixed architectural styles, with the east window being Early English and the two tiny side windows appearing to be Norman.



William Walsh's 1814 painting of Fulford Chapel, held by St. Nicholas Church
(Photograph by the author, courtesy of the Vicar and Wardens of St. Nicholas Church)

In the 15th Century Stone Priory suffered from its quality of management and this had brought about the suppression of the Priory in 1536 by Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII because of its poor financial straits. This led to the Kings' Commissioners removing 'Images and pictures from Fulford Chapel' in 1538.



Rev. John Knight
(Photograph courtesy of Randle Knight)

In 1775 Rev. John Knight became the perpetual curate of Fulford Chapel. He had been baptised in Bidulph in Staffordshire on 8th February 1747 and had then moved to London where, on 23rd July 1769,

he had married a lady named Elizabeth Hall at the church of St. Sepulchre-without-Newgate. They had then moved to the vicarage in Milwich in Staffordshire where Elizabeth gave birth to a son named Edward was baptised in Milwich on 10th October 1780. Dr. Edward Knight eventually became Mayor of Stafford in 1822. Sadly Elizabeth died on 4th June 1795 and three years after, on 4th September 1798, Rev. John married Mary Fox at All Saints Church in Milwich. In 1770 John had become Curate at Milwich and then he became Vicar there in 1772. His father Samuel Knight then purchased the right of presentation to Fulford and duly presented his son to be perpetual Curate. He was Perpetual Curate from 1775 until his death on 27th March 1800 aged 53. He is buried at All Saints Church in Milwich.

Fulford's Church Registers started in 1800 and the Bishops Transcripts in 1809 (Fulford baptisms from 1745 to 1796 are recorded in the Stone registers. Sadly the pre-1754 marriage records were lost when the old church was taken down in 1825).

In about 1822 plans were put into motion to build a new Church close to the site of the Chapel and donations were asked for from the local community. The estimated cost of taking down and rebuilding the church was £1,150 but only £144 .11s .9½d. was collected and so an application was made by a John Stevenson Salt, Gent, for a charity to be set up, and this was granted by Royal consent on "3rd June on Fourth Year of the Reign of George IV" (1823) because "*the Chapel at Fulford is a very ancient Structure, and through length of Time has become so greatly decayed, that notwithstanding the inhabitants have done all in their Power to preserve it in Repair, yet the same is now in a very ruinous Stae, and an increased Population has rendered the Chapel too small to accommodate those Persons which desire to assemble therein.....*". The charity document went on to state that "*Churchwardens and Chapelwardens together with Ministers, or some of the substantial Inhabitants of the several Parishes and Chapelries.....throughout Our Counties of Stafford, Derby, Salop, Warwick and Worcester, and our County Palatine of Chester, are hereby required to go from House to House in the Week Days next following.....and We do, by these Presents, nominate, constitute, and appoint Richard Clarke Hill Esquire, Walter Weston Coyney Esquire, John Dunderdale Clerk, Thomas Heath Gentleman, John Stevenson Salt Gentleman,, and the Minister and Chaple Wardens for the Time being, Trustees and Receivers of the Charity to be collected. GOD SAVE THE KING*".

Just how much money was raised from these house to house collections is not known, but we do know that it was done with the aid of voluntary subscriptions from many people, including:-

The Most Noble the Marquis of Stafford		£25.0.0
Lord Viscount St. Vincent		£10.10.0
Thomas Allen Esq.	<i>Great Fenton</i>	£25.0.0
Thomas Swinnerton Esq.	<i>Butterton Hall</i>	£12
The Rev'd. William Oliver		£10.10.0
Mr. Thomas Heath	<i>Saverley Green</i>	£20.0.0
Mr. William Hyatt	<i>High Fields</i>	£15.0.0
Mr. Samuel Hughes	<i>Lane End</i>	£10.0.0
Mr. William Bowers	<i>Hilderstone</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. William Nicholls	<i>Knenhall</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. John Adderley	<i>Moddershall</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. George Harris	<i>Gorsty Birch</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. Thomas Reade	<i>Spot</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. John Turner	<i>Newcastle</i>	£7.10.0
Mr. Luke Copeland	<i>Fulford</i>	£5.5.0
Mr. James Clews	<i>Cobridge</i>	£5.5.0
Mr. William Shaw	<i>London</i>	£5.5.0
Mr. David Robinson	<i>Cross Gate</i>	£2.2.0
Mr. Edward Kendrick	<i>Gayton</i>	£2.2.0

Rev'd. William Oliver, the Incumbent of St.Nicholas in 1825, and Thomas Heath, the Chapel Warden, recorded other benefactions too:-

Thomas Shalcrofts of London gave an Annuity of £5 upon Lands at Walton for ever. One half for the Poor of Stone. The other half for the Poor in Kibblestone Lordship.

Thomas Porter Esq'r. gave £4.10. Yearly for Educating Apprenticing and Clothing three poor Children from Lands at Prestwood and Forsbrook & payable at Michaelmas.

William Savage gave £3 Yearly for the Poor of Hilderstone and 10s. Yearly to the Poor of Fulford for ever.

George Hyatt gave £2.10s. Yearly payable on St.George's Day principal money in the hands of Trustees.

Thomas Shalcrofts of London and Mrs.Mirable Bennett gave £2 Yearly for Educating poor Children

and 1 shillings worth of Bread weekly to the poor from Lands at Spot payable at Christmas and Midsummer.

Thomas Reade gave 20s. Yearly for ever to the poor of Kibblestone.

Thomas Hall of Spot gave an Annuity of 20s. for ever charged upon Lands late Roger Bradbury's in Hilderstone. One half for 20 poor Householders in Stone. The other half for 20 poor Householders in Kibblestone, Hilderstone, Fulford & Saverley.

Mr. Hyatt's Hay Meadow is subject to the payment of 20s. to the poor and 20s. for Educating poor Children. Yearly for ever due on Good Friday.

William Potts Gent'n. gave 10s. yearly to the poor from Lea Croft payable at Lady Day.

John Batkin gave 5s. yearly to the poor from Tythes of Spot payable on St. John's Day.

Charles Arblaster gave 5 in loaves yearly for ever to the poor from the Hurstead near Hilderstone.

There were twenty-six pews in the old Chapel, which measured approximately 45 foot by 32 foot. Thirteen of these were rented and thirteen were free. The rented pews were situated in the Shallcross aisle and were allocated to:-

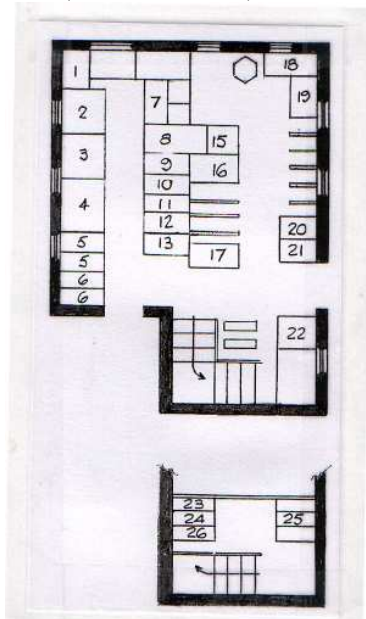
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| 1 - Robinson Withington | 8 - Mr. Gerrard's Farm |
| 2 - Mr. John Adderley | 9 - Mr. Wooliscroft's Farm |
| 3 - Ralph Banker | 10 - Mr. Bowers |
| 4 - L. Fenton | 11 - Mr. Nicholls |
| 5 - Mr. Colclough and Mr. Fernyhough | 12 - Mr. Mountford |
| 6 - Mr. Richard Fallows and Mr. Snow | 13 - Mr. Thomas |
| 7 - Mr. Richard Fallows | 14 - free |

The pews in the old part of the building for which no rent was paid were allocated to:-

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 15 - Mr. Hyatt | 19 - Fulford Hall |
| 16 - Mr. Hughes | 20 - Mr. Copeland (late Bentley) |
| 17 - Mr. Hill's Nether Farm | 21 - Mr. Turner (Badkin's Farm) |
| 18 - Fulford Hall | 22 - Mr. Thomas Heath |

Four of the free pews were in the gallery and were allocated to:-

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 23 - Mr. Hill's servants | 25 - Mr. Thomas Heath |
| 24 - Lord St. Vincent (Mr. Read's Farm) | 26 - Lord St. Vincent |

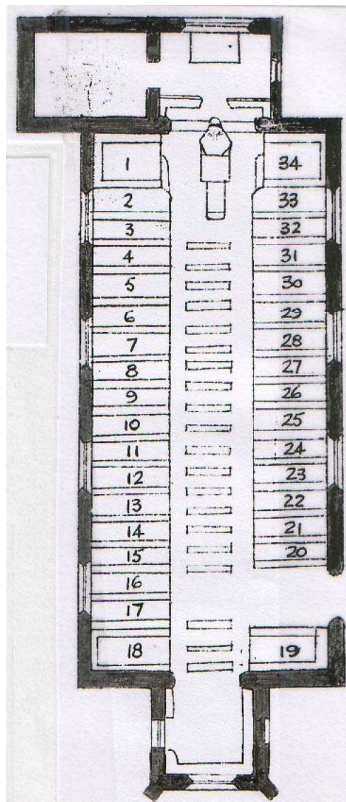


This plan was drawn by the author and is based on one held by Staffordshire Record Office

The present church, designed by C.H. Winks, was built close to the site of the old chapel in 1825, thanks mainly to the efforts of Rev. William Oliver. It is a brick structure measuring approximately 25 metres by 9 metres and consists of a nave, apse, south porch and embattled western turret. This rebuilt church increased the free sittings from 30 to 138 and it is the only one in Staffordshire which is dedicated to St. Nicholas.

- 1 - The Minister
- 2 - Samuel Colclough and Charles Colclough
- 3 - The tenant of Manor House Farm and Samuel Snow

- 4 - Mr. Thomas Heath's farm, Saverley Green
- 5 - Benjamin Witherington and 2 sittings for the tenant of R.C.Hill Esquire
- 6 - Mr. William Hyatts, Stallington
- 7 - The tenant of R.C. Hill Esquire's farm at Fulford
- 8 - Mr. W. Bowers, Hilderstone
- 9 - Mr. Thomas Mountford, Bury Hill
- 10 - R.C. Hill Esquire, Nether Farm
- 11 - $\frac{2}{3}$ Mr. John Turner's Farm, The Brooms, and $\frac{1}{3}$ Mr. Samuel Hugh's Farm,
- 12 - Stallington Hall
- 13 - $\frac{2}{3}$ Lord St. Vincent's tenants. Spot, and $\frac{1}{3}$ Mr. Reader's tenants, Cotwalton
- 14 - 5 sittings Mr.John Dunn, Hilderstone and 1 sitting Mr.Kendrick
- 15 - free
- 16 - free
- 17 - Minister for the singers
- 18 - Minister to let
- 19 - Minister to let
- 20 - free
- 21 - $\frac{1}{2}$ Mr. Thomas Heath, Saverley Green, $\frac{1}{2}$ with 2 sittings for Ox Leasows and
1 sitting for Mr.David Robinson, Spot Gat
- 22 - Thomas Allen Esquire, Farm at Fulford
- 23 - Lord St. Vincent, Farm at Spot
- 24 - Mr.Richard Fallows, Stallington Grange
- 25 - 4 sittings Mr.Luke Copeland and 2 sittings Mr.Harris, Gorsty Birch
- 26 - Mr.John Thomas, Knenhall
- 27 - Mr.William Nicholls, Knenhall
- 28 - Tenant, Stallington Hall
- 29 - Mr.Samuel Hughes, Farm at Fuiford
- 30 - Mr.John Adderley, Modershall
- 31 - Mr.Richard Fallows, Stallington Grange
- 32 - Mr William Fenton, Fuiford
- 33 - Fulford Hall
- 34 - Fulford Hall



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There is no precise information of the incumbents at Fulford prior to 1682, but as a Chapel of Ease of the Parish of Stone, Fulford was probably served by clergy from there. The past Incumbents of the church, recorded continually since 1682, were:-

Thomas Lees	1682	Curate in Liber Cleri
Edward Orme	1686	
George Hichcock	1686	Nomination as Curate and Schoolmaster
John Cotterell	1692	Curate in Liber Cleri
John Peploe	1711	Curate in Liber Cleri and Schoolmaster
Rowland Taylor	1719	Curate in Liber Cleri
Adam Fernyhough	1725	Curate in Liber Cleri
John Knight	1776	Licensed to perpetual curacy
William L. Wragge BA	1816	Licensed to perpetual curacy
John Dunderdale	1821	Licensed to perpetual curacy
William Oliver	1825	Licensed to perpetual curacy
George Coppin	1871	Licensed to perpetual curacy and to perform divine service in the schoolroom during the rebuilding of the chapel
Daniel Davenport	1880	Licensed to perpetual curacy
Harry W.B. Wright	1908	
William Edward Drinkwater	1915	M.A.Oxon, Clerk in Holy Orders
Lionel S. Longridge	1921	
Arthur Edward Smith	1937	
Robert Edward Jones	1945	(Forces Chaplain in the Middle East 1939/45)
James Arthur Lloyd	1954	
Rupert W. Thompson	1961	
Harry Myers	1980	
Philip David Brookes BA	1987	
Malcolm Griffin BA	1996	
Cathy and Peter Dakin	2001	

Three early 19th century watercolour paintings of St. Nicholas are known to exist. William Walsh painted the old Chapel in 1814 and his painting is hanging on the west wall of the Church. The painting appears, from the position of the tombs, to show a view of the chapel from the south-west with the tower at the east end. Then in 1835 Thomas Peploe Wood painted the new Church and five years later J.C. Buckler also painted it. Their paintings, both showing the same view, with the tower at the west end, are to be found in the William Salt Library in Stafford.

In the early 1800's Fulford gained the reputation as the Gretna Green of North Staffordshire on account of the numbers of runaway couples being married in St. Nicholas Church. The parish registers show that in 1828, no less than 84 marriages were solemnised, most of the couples coming from the Longton district of Stoke-on-Trent. It was at around this time that the Incumbent became sorely troubled by people dumping their rubbish in the churchyard and so put up a notice saying "*This churchyard is intended for the ashes of the departed and not for the refuse of the present generation*"

In 1831 the Topographical Dictionary of England recorded that "the living is a perpetual curacy, in the archdeaconry of Stafford, and the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, endowed with £200 private benefaction, £200 royal bounty, and £1200 parliamentary grant, and in the patronage of W. Allen, Esq."

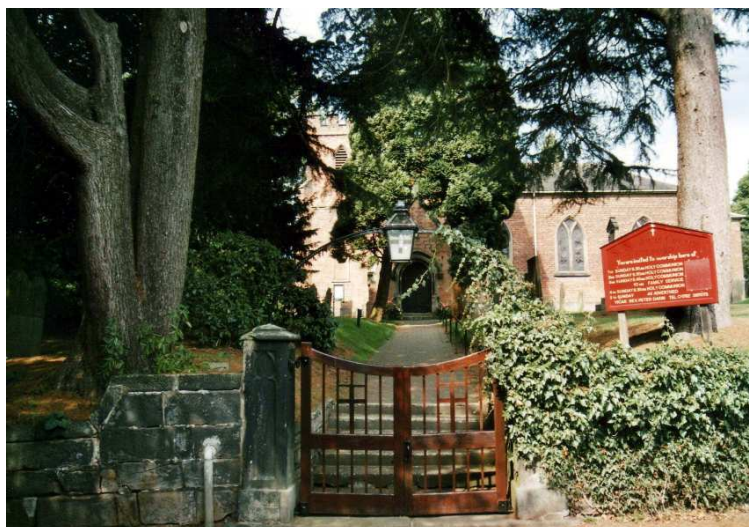
In about 1872 it came to light that whereas banns of matrimony and marriages conducted in the old Chapel in Fulford were lawfully published and solemnised, the new Church of St. Nicholas had not been consecrated or licensed for the solemnisation of marriages when it was built in 1825. An Act of Parliament was therefore passed on 26th May 1873 identifying that any marriages conducted between 1825 and that date should be deemed legal and St. Nicholas was duly consecrated and licensed for marriages.

In 1878 a new chalice was purchased at a cost of £10.12.6d and local events were organised to offset the cost of a new organ which was eventually installed in 1906.

In 1897 the Church was restored at a cost of about £250. The new burial ground was consecrated on 21st June 1898 and the extension at the north end of the burial ground was presented to the parish by Frederick Wildblood and his children and was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield on 4th October 1942. The stained glass window behind the altar is dedication to Frederick Wildblood's wife Georgina.

Rev. William Edward Drinkwater was the Vicar of Fulford in 1915. He was the son of Rev. M.J. Drinkwater and had been born in Antigua in the West Indies in 1869. He was educated at

Hurstpierpoint and gained his M.A. at Exeter College in Oxford where he also played for their Association Football Team. He married Sarah Gertrude Mather, the daughter of Rev. George Mather at Huntley Hall in Staffordshire in 1900 and became the Vicar of Tean in 1905. Before becoming Vicar of Fulford he was Chaplain of Huntley School in Marton, New Zealand in 1907, and after leaving Fulford was Rector of Checkley from 1921 to 1934. He was a keen fisherman.



The gateway and path up to St. Nicholas Church

There are two bells in the Church tower. The oldest bell is Pre-Reformation in origin and is of considerable interest, reputed to have been cast by John Wooley in Nottingham between 1524 and 1536, and so it has rung out over Fulford Village for nearly 500 years. The other bell is of 19th century manufacture and used to hang in the National School.

New additions to the Church, and other donations made during the 20th Century have been:-

- 1936 - An eagle lectern in memory of Ralph Stanier and bearing the inscription 'God is Love', donated by his wife and family.
- 1937 - New oak choir stalls and a new oak pulpit were installed as a gift from Mrs. Averill Wood of Wood's Nest, Stallington Road, Blythe Bridge, at an estimated cost of £198.10s.0d.
- 1938 - Electric lighting was installed at an estimated cost of £49.1s.6d, plus £6.14s.6d. for the cable from the road, and was paid for by public subscription.
- 1945 - A brass sanctuary lamp with the inscription "To the Glory of God and in grateful and loving Memory of very dear Parents Fred and Georgina Wildblood" was installed as a gift from a member of the congregation at an estimated cost of £18.
- 1954 - Thirty-two replacement oak pews and wall panelling, donated by Albert Edward Jenkinson in July, and made with oak donated by Percival Forster.
- 1962 - A new oak Altar Table to replace the present altar table and tiled alter platform in January. The oak for the table was donated by Percival Forster.
- 1962 - A stained glass window which depicts St. Nicholas and St. Chad, donated by the Wildblood family in May, and also contain a dedication to Frederick Wildblood's wife Georgina.
- 1986 - A memorial window in the north wall, donated by Jack and Evelyn Mersh in memory of members of their family who were tragically killed in an accident.



The Mersh family memorial window

1992 - An annex complete with vestibule, toilet, refreshment facilities and seating was added to the outside north-west corner of the church.

Close to the main entrance to the Church a stone calvary was erected in memory of John Adams, Cyril Allerton, William Cotton, Wilfred Poole, William Powers, Ralph Saxon, Thomas Scott, Charles Shipley, William Wenlock and Roland Wild who were all from Fulford Parish and who all gave their lives in the World War 1.



The stone calvary and roll of honour dedicated to the men of Fulford who lost their lives in the Great War



St. Nicholas Church in 2006



The interior of St. Nicholas Church in 2006 *

There were two other churches in Fulford in addition to St. Nicholas Church of England Church. There was a Calvinistic Chapel which is still standing in Vicarage Lane. The pulpit was taken out in the 1940's after which the building was used as a store by a local farmer. In about 2003 the Chapel was bought by Dean and Helen Christopher of 'The Beeches' since which they have lovingly restoring it and made it their home.

Then in 1860 a Wesleyan Chapel that was erected in Fulford Road at Cross Gate by John and Elijah Hill from Spot Acre. It was subsequently modified a few times including the addition of a front porch in 1910. The main stone above the front door was laid by Mr. J.G. Hill who is believed to have been the person responsible for the building of the Chapel itself. Other stones in the porch bear the names H. Fieldhouse, J. Bedson, J. Arnold and H.S. Proudlove. A schoolroom was built onto the side of the Chapel in 1929 on land that had been bought from Joseph Jenkinson, a local builder, for £5. The pulpit was also built in 1929 by Mr. William Palfreyman, a blind coffin maker and general joiner.

The original heating in the Chapel was by means of a large coke-fired stove pot in the centre aisle but this was later replaced by a boiler that was installed at the back of the Chapel by Geo. Hall of Hanley. The lighting at this time consisted of four hanging oil lamps which were lit and cleaned and filled with oil by the caretaker who was paid £10 per year for his services, which also included cleaning and dusting the Chapel, attending to the gardens, and general maintenance. Electricity lights and fires were then installed in the early 1900's.

Membership of the Chapel was fairly constant at about 25 to 30 over the years. The Chapel also had a Sunday School which had about 30 scholars. There were three services held every Sunday, Sunday School at 11-00am, afternoon service at 3-00pm and evening service at 6.30pm. In 2003 the Methodist Minister there was Rev. John Palmer who had taken over from Rev. Leslie Marsh and he was later superseded by Rev. Andrew Baker. Organists over the years have been Thomas Rushton, Phyllis Johnson, Elizabeth Hawkins, and Avis Hawkins. Sadly the Chapel held it's last service on 14th December 2008 after almost 150 years of worship. In 2010 it was bought by a private developer. Four memorials from the Chapel, two that commemorated young men from Fulford who were killed in the First World War, and two recording the involvement of the Hill family in the Chapel, have been relocated in St. Nicholas Church



The old Calvinistic Chapel on the right



Crossgate Methodist Church

At nearby Hilderstone Christ Church had been started in 1827 and was dedicated on 31st July 1833. Since 1980 St.Nicholas Church in Fulford and Christ Church in Hilderstone have been under one vicar, living in Tudor Hollow, Fulford.

The Old Vicarage in Vicarage Lane and just a short walk from the Church was built by Rev.George Coppin in about 1880 on a piece of land known as Gorsty Birch. It was a large and very spacious building which is now a private residence, the current Vicarage being at No.20 Tudor Hollow. Suprisingly the Old Vicarage saw only one child being born in it when Rev. Lionel S. Langridge and his wife were blessed with a daughter.



The Old Vicarage

(B&W photograph courtesy of Blythe Bridge & Forsbrook Local History Society)

In the summer of 2001 an ongoing survey of every interment at St. Nicholas was completed and produced in book form by Roger Keight, and this was followed by the recording of every grave inscription which was undertaken by Roger Keight and Robert Carter on behalf of The Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry in 2006. Copies of both books can be seen at Stafford Record Office, or by contact with Roger Keight himself.

The first recorded burials in the churchyard were in the area at the east end of the church in 1815. By the following year some burials were taking place at the front of the church and by 1820 the area at the west end of the church was also being used. It is a stark reminder of the times to see that of the 376 interments which took place between 1815 and 1837, 116 of them, 31%, were children beneath the age of 10, with these deaths being split fairly evenly throughout the twelve years. On the other hand 59 of the people, 17%, who were buried during those twelve years had lived to beyond the age of three score years and ten, with one of them living to be 100 years old. Comparing this with the period of 1915 to 1937, there were then only 112 interments with only 4 of them, 3.6%, being beneath the age of 10 and with 40 of them, 36%, being more than three score years and ten. It will be interesting to see the statistics for the period 2015 to 2037 inclusive.