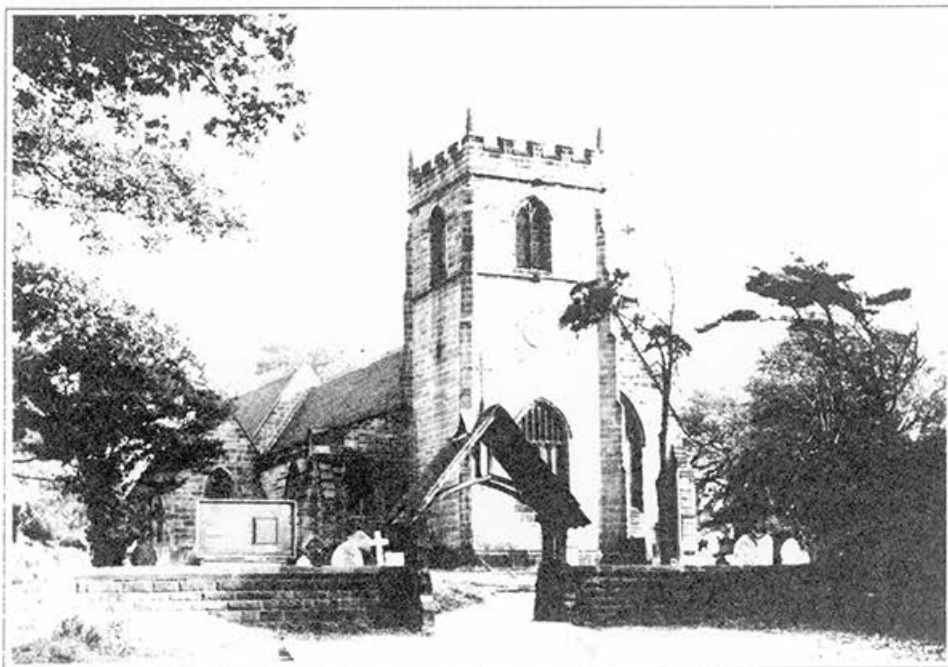


## CHAPTER 1 EARLY DAYS

We are this year celebrating the 60th anniversary of the laying of the Foundation Stone of our church - and there will not be many of the present day Essingtonians who will remember it! Nevertheless, we are a mere babe-in-arms when compared with our neighbours. The church at Bushbury, St. Mary's, was built in the 12th century so that when our first 'Iron Church' was built in 1859 St. Mary's was already 700 years old.



*St. Marys Church, Bushbury.*

Whilst therefore, we had no official identity as a parish in our own right until 60 years ago, we did have a church of our own - though a mission church of Bushbury - from 1859.

Before that date the history of the Church in Essington is largely a matter of conjecture. Certainly there would have been Anglicans and certainly if they wanted to attend Divine Service or to get 'hatched, matched or dispatched' they would have to make the journey to Bushbury (or perhaps Bloxwich or Short Heath) - and in the middle of the nineteenth century that would have entailed a major effort. Perhaps small groups of committed Christians met in each other's homes or perhaps they used a room in the new school (built 1846).

White's directory of 1851 tells us that "Essington is a place of 1600 acres and 629 souls. The school for boys, girls and infants was built in 1846 and is licensed for Divine Services performed by the Curate on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings. The Wesleyans have a Chapel built in 1834."

Apart from this, previous to 1859 all is supposition. What we do know is that in the years immediately before 1859 a more than usually energetic Vicar of Bushbury, Rev. William Lister, prevailed upon Squire Vernon to make available (but only on a lease!) a piece of land adjacent to the school, newly built in Hobnock Road, for the building of a Church. Rev. Lister was, by all accounts, a remarkable and well loved man. During his incumbency he increased the number of services at Bushbury from just one Sunday morning service, revitalised the Sunday School, arranged educational lectures for the parishioners, started Friendly Societies, and Clothing Clubs and generally livened the place up. The new Church at Essington was just one of his many ventures during his 25 years of office (1839-64).

The 'Iron Church' as it was officially known, was built and licensed for Divine Services (including Holy Communion but not marriages) in 1859. For those who do not remember the building, it was situated next to the school on the corner of Hobnock Road and Bognop Road, on a site now occupied by five modern houses. The site occupied an area of 0.292 acres.

The building had no great architectural virtues. It was to all intents and purposes a large shed, 26 yards long and 10 yards wide, clad and roofed with sheets of corrugated iron, painted green and with a chancel at one end and an entrance porch at the other.

There is no record of the interior furnishings in the early days but they would undoubtedly be modest, probably lit by oil lamps and quite possibly without any heating at all, though by 1908 permission was being sought for the erection of a coal house, so presumably the church had acquired some form of heating. Worshippers were hardy in those days! Nevertheless, despite its unimposing exterior, inside were panelled walls, polished pews, quite beautiful old hanging oil lamps and generally it gave the impression of being clean and well cared for. By the time of its demolition in the 1960's it had acquired electric lighting, two large coke stoves, running water and a kitchen and toilets.



The Iron Church, Essington.

Once again there are no written records of the Church activities (the first minute book available starts in 1908) and so our imagination must fill in the details. There would no doubt be Harvest Festivals, Sunday School Anniversaries, Summer Fetes and Christmas Fayres, money making activities galore - and lots of headaches in generating sufficient income to pay the bills, modest as they would be.



Interior of The Iron Church, Essington.

There was a mini-crisis in 1891 when the lease for the ground on which the church stood came up for renewal. The document which the Squire submitted for the churchwardens' signature described the plot as being 26 yards long and 10 yards wide - the exact size of the church building! And furthermore he reduced the period of notice from 12 months to 6 months! When the vicar and churchwardens queried this, the vicar of Bushbury made the pointed remark that "The Church was built by public subscription towards which the Bushbury people largely contributed to benefit the people of Essington." The Squire relented to the extent that the period of notice reverted to 12 months but he maintained his insistence on the size of the plot, reasoning "that he might want to put a building on the land outside the church but that they could carry on using the ground as before." As the Vicar and Churchwardens paid a rent of only 1/- per annum they were hardly in a position to argue!

Nevertheless, regular attempts were made afterwards to buy the whole plot but the Squire would not budge. Eventually in 1946 the then Squire agreed to sell - at 3/- per square yard.

Edm

by Divine permission Lord Bishop of Lichfield, To all Christian people to whom these presents shall come,

GREETING.

WHEREAS it hath been represented unto us by the Reverend William Lister  
Bishop of Bathurst, that the Vicar of the Parish of St. Andrew and Rectory of Lichfield  
and Thomas Bradburn and Joseph Bickford bachelors thereof that there  
is an old church lately built at Evington in the Parish of St. Andrew aforesaid  
about 800 persons used to the said church, who have no church  
accommodation and that it should be a great convenience to such persons if  
we would grant my licence for the performance of divine service for the  
administration of the Sacraments and the churching of women in the said church  
and that it be a proper place in which divine service and other services  
of the church may be performed

NOW KNOW YE that We, the said John, Lord Bishop of Lichfield, taking the premises into our serious consideration,

Have thought fit to grant, and by these presents, by virtue of our power Ordinary and Episcopal, as far as by Law we may  
or can, Do hereby give and grant our full Leave, Licence, and Authority unto the said William Lister -

and to his Curate or Curates lawfully appointed and licensed to perform divine service, to administer the  
Sacraments and to perform the service of churching of women in the said church

\_\_\_\_\_ , according to the Rubrick of the Church of England, and not otherwise or  
in any other manner, Saving always to Ourselves and our Successors our Episcopal rights and the dignity and honour of our  
cathedral Church of Lichfield, and also saving and reserving to the Vicar - of St. Andrew -  
aforesaid and his successors all rights, profits, and perquisites heretofore due and belonging to him and them. IN

TESTIMONY whereof we have caused Our Seal (which in this behalf We use) to be hereunto affixed. DATED this  
twenty second day of January in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty nine  
and of our consecration the sixteenth.

J. Lichfield