

**CHAPTER 11.**  
**ST. AIDAN'S, NEWTOWN**

Residents who have come into the village in the last twenty-five years will not remember St. Aidan's Church, Newtown. This was situated at the bottom of Long Lane at the junction with Stafford Road on a site now occupied by a modern bungalow.

There seem to be few, if any, written records of the early days at St. Aidan's. The Mission Room, as it was then known, was erected at his own expense by A.L. Vernon Esq., who also paid the stipend of the Lay Agent. This was in 1897 and the building was licensed in 1898. The first Lay Agent was Mr. E. Evans who was still there in 1904. By 1908 the Lay Agent was Mr. William Elsworth and at a later date (1930's) Mr. Joshua Eveson filled this position.

When St. Aidan's was licensed in 1898 it was not licensed for Holy Communion services and this led to some confusion in the early years. A letter from A.L. Vernon, Esq., dated 17th June 1903 and addressed "Dear Sir" (presumably to the then vicar or curate) reads as follows:-

"There is no Newtown licence for Holy Communion. I do not wish one.  
The Bishop knows my views on the subject and has allowed H.C. to be administered there.  
Yours faithfully,  
A.L. Vernon."

On the same day, 17th June 1903, Rev. Geo Hemming, then based in Darlaston, wrote to a clergyman friend (possibly his successor in Essington) as follows:-

"No licence has been granted for the celebration of Holy Communion at Newtown. The circumstances are these. When the subject was mentioned to the Bishop he said that a Rule of the Diocese was that in a Mission Room it was required that a certain space in the room must be marked off and kept separately for the purpose of the Holy Communion. This could not be done at Newtown. After a little more had been said about it, his Lordship gave a kind of verbal permission for an occasional celebration but generally he wished that the communicants be encouraged to attend at Church. Something like this was accordingly done.

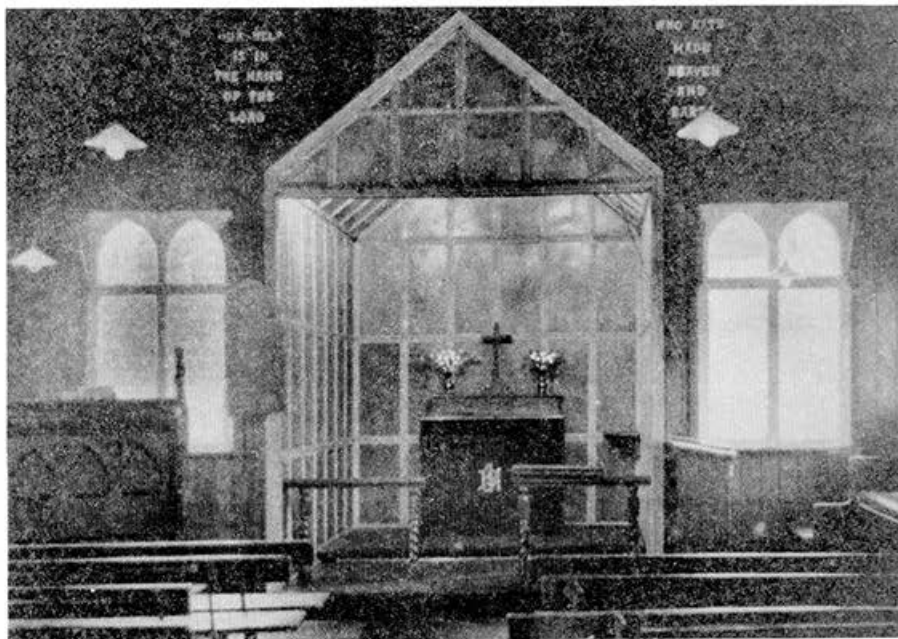
With kindest regards, Yours sincerely,  
Geo. H. Hemming."

Perhaps it was these "occasional" celebrations of Holy Communion that A.L. Vernon objected to. About 1930, or shortly after, St. Aidan's underwent a major reconstruction when the church was 'turned round' so to speak, the door and chancel changing ends. Perhaps the purpose was to provide the 'certain space' that the Bishop had referred to 30 years previously.

The re-dedication ceremony was performed by Dr. Kempthorne, the then Bishop of Lichfield, who changed into his robes in one of the nearby cottages.

Whatever the purpose of reconstruction the Church was re-licensed in 1932 and this time for "Divine Services and Holy Communion." In those days, and indeed until our present St. John's Church in Essington was built in 1933, both Essington and Newtown formed part of the Parish of Bushbury. St. Aidan's and the old Iron Church (situated next to the present village school) were mission churches of that parish. When Essington became detached from Bushbury, St. Aidan's became a Mission Church of St. John's.

From an article in a Church magazine of 1963 it is clear that in pre-war years, St. Aidan's was at the heart of the social lives of the people of Newtown. In the days when travel was not so easy as it is today, the Lay Reader was to all intents and purposes in complete control of the Church, even though it was part of the Parish of Bushbury. Names such as Mr. Evans, Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Eveson were prominent. During the first world war and afterwards, St. Aidan's appears to have been a flourishing place with fine times such as harvest suppers...Sunday School Anniversaries (with tiers of seats up to the ceiling), conducted by the then choirmaster, Mr. Vaughan...Bible classes every Thursday...children's tea parties...flowers and other decorations for special occasions being brought from the Hall (Hilton Hall)...Rev. Crathorne coming from Bushbury to take Communion services.



The Chancel of St. Aidan's Newtown, after 1930.

Structurally the church was built of corrugated iron and its exterior appearance was not unlike that of the old Iron Church (photograph elsewhere) in Hobnock Road - though much smaller of course. The schoolroom at the side was in fact as big as the church and was heated by a large open fireplace. Water was never laid on to the church and this must have been a major inconvenience, both for cleaning and for catering. Services were held each Sunday conducted by the Lay Reader (Mr. Eveson and Mr. Knight are names which come to mind); there was also a Sunday School which closed about 1965 when a new leader could not be found.

(Joshua Eveson, a member of the Church Army, worked in the offices of Holly Bank Colliery and was ordained at the age of 58. He then became curate at Blakenall Heath, Walsall and later Priest-in-charge at Chadsmoor where he died in 1945.)

Communion Services were held each Wednesday morning and once a month on Sundays, after the service at the Parish Church when the vicar became available.

Furnishings in the church were very modest, the seating consisting of long wooden benches and the floor being just bare boards; music was provided by a harmonium donated by local residents.

By the 1960's however, the Church at Newtown was in decline. Changing social habits, with many people now more mobile, led to a serious diminution of congregations. In the early '60's a great effort was made to boost morale by refurbishing the buildings. The interior was painted, the old wooden benches replaced by attractive chairs, a new oak altar rail was installed and the chancel and the aisle were carpeted. A significant contribution to the cost of all this came from the patrons of a local public house, The Freemasons Arms, in Stafford Road.

The interior of the church was now very attractive and while things improved for a time the resurgence of interest was short lived. In 1964 Evensong at St. Aidan's was reduced to the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month, but all to no avail.

In 1969, after much discussion and heart searching, St. Aidan's was closed, the site sold, the building demolished and a modern bungalow erected there.

The lectern and the chairs in the side aisles of our present St. John's are those which were placed in St. Aidan's in the early 1960's refurbishing. These are the only reminders of St. Aidan's, apart from the nostalgic memories of the older generation.



Jos. Eveson with Newtown Parishioners 1930's



JOHN AUGUSTINE by Divine Permission LORD BISHOP of LICHFIELD, TO ALL Christian people to whom these presents shall come,

GREETING

WHEREAS it has been represented unto Us by THE REVEREND JOSIAH THOMAS CRATHORNE, Clerk, Vicar of Bushbury-with-Essington in the County of Stafford and Diocese of Lichfield and FREDERICK THOMAS VARTY and HENRY JAMES WINSTONE Churchwardens there THAT there is a Mission Church named SAINT AIDAN situate in the Newtown District in the Parish of Bushbury-with-Essington aforesaid, distant from the Church there Five and a half miles or thereabouts THAT upwards of Four hundred Persons reside in the immediate vicinity of the said Mission Church who have no Church accommodation and THAT it would be a great convenience to such Persons if WE would Grant Our Licence for the performance of Divine Service in the said Mission Church and THAT it is a fit and proper place in which Divine Service may be performed.

1. a. l. 4. 2

NOW KNOW YE that We, the said JOHN AUGUSTINE, 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 Leave, Licence, and Authority unto the said Josiah Thomas Crathorne and to his Curate or Curates lawfully appointed and licensed to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and to perform the several Offices of Divine Service in the said Mission 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 also saving and reserving to the Vicar of Bushbury-with-Essington aforesaid and his Successors all rights, profits, and perquisites heretofore due and belonging to him and them.

Nothing herein contained shall extend or be construed to extend to the Publication of Banns of Matrimony or to the solemnization of Marriage within the said Mission Church. Every Baptism which shall be celebrated in pursuance of this Licence shall be duly registered in the Register of Baptisms belonging to the Parish Church of Bushbury.

IN TESTIMONY whereof We have caused Our Seal (which in this behalf We use) to be hereunto affixed. DATED this Twenty Fifth day of November in the year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and thirty two and in the Twentieth year of Our Translation.

The above is the 1932 Licence for Newtown, which now permitted Celebration of Holy Communion, but which still excluded marriages.