**Church history 1989-Present Day**

In **1939**, James Eccles wrote ’The History of Halewood’ commemorating 100 years since the building of St Nicholas Church, Halewood

**1989**  Rev Jeremy Tyndall was the minister who had been in residence since 1987. The 21st of June that year marked the 150th anniversary of the opening of St Nicholas Church, when a special service was held, commemorative pottery was commissioned and other events to mark the occasion took place. The previous incumbent, Canon Owen Eva had written a history commemorating those 50 years, called ‘Riding the Changes’ which was to be available that year and the Church School held exhibitions. In the old Church School which was then the Church Hall, a concert was held by the Bentley Operatic Society

**1992** Andy Heber, Church Social Worker, based at Church House had started a Christian listening service at James McColl House in Kempton Road in order to help people who had suffered bereavement or other losses. In 1992 Andy did a presentation in St Nicholas Church about the Acorn listening charity and its aims. Members of the congregation then came forward to volunteer and were subsequently trained by Acorn to facilitate a more flexible listening service with more listeners.

**1994** Knowsley Council had a Children’s home (built on what had been Church land) next door to the Church. By 1994, policy had changed and the home announced its closure. The idea that the former home could become the new Church Centre came to fruition in July 1995 when the new Church Centre was officially opened by the Bishop of Warrington. Bids to own the Centre had had to be submitted and a team of three (Reverend Tyndall, Methodist Bill Royden and Anglican Tom Beesley) was set up to tender against a property developer. After the sale and before the actual opening, valuable work was done by volunteer members of the congregations of both St Mary and St Nicholas to provide living accommodation for 5 families, the rent from which would help towards running costs, paying a mortgage etc. The main hall became the Church Hall with subsidiary rooms off and a large kitchen. There was also storage room, space for a vestry and two offices, one for the Church secretary and one for Listening Ear which was now growing in size by training more listeners. Everyone helped with the joinery and decoration involved in such a mammoth task. Members of the congregation of both Churches, contributed on a regular basis to help pay off the 25 year mortgage involved.

**1995** Official opening of the Church Centre by the Bishop of Warrington

1995 Reverend Jeremy Tyndall left Halewood Parish go to Canada. St Nicholas remained in interregnum for nearly three years.

Listening Ear had now outgrown their small office and listening room and took over one of the 4 bedroom flats adjacent to the new Church Centre where they have remained to this day.

**1997** Reverend Alan Jewell was appointed from St Helens where he had been a curate.

**2000** It was being recognized that St Nicholas needed updating. The stained glass windows were gradually fading and the whole Church needed restoration. A committee was set up which was initially, (at the suggestion of Mr Les Richardson, Junior Church Leader) called the Fungus Fund! At that first meeting it was mentioned that Canon Eva had thought that some of the stained glass windows were by William Morris and Co. so members took a trip to the Liverpool City Library to access the definitive book by A E Seward who had compiled a history by visiting all those Churches listed in the Morris and Co catalogue. It was discovered that out of the 21 stained glass windows in the Church, 17 were designed by the pre Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones of Morris and Co of which the three in the sanctuary were unique.

The restoration was projected to cost £355,000. Jan Fleming, the Church Bursar and Tom Beesley, started seeking for grants and a fundraising committee was also set up. Grants were successful from; Veolia, Ibstock Cory, Biffa and Awards for All. The fundraising group held community events in the new Church Centre each month most of which were well attended and a considerable amount was raised by quizzes, murder nights, wine tasting, race nights, film nights, barn dances, mulled wine and mince pie evenings, musical events, make up parties, bingo nights and sponsorships (such as Reverend Jewell absailing down the Church tower and a pram push with the reverend as the baby).

**2001** Listening Ear acquired funding for four of their experienced listeners to undertake a 3 year counselling course leading to a diploma. It had been recognized that the listening service did not always meet the needs of clients.

**2003** Tarbock had had their own Sunday morning service since 1938. This now ended as numbers had dwindled.

Phase1 of the building project. A company called Design Lights came to remove the first window to be restored. The stained glass had suffered over the years due to the fumes from oil lamps. The company deconstructed the windows pane by pane on a light board, some of the facial features of which had disappeared altogether. The grant of £50,000 covered the restoration of 14 windows and the specialist cleaning of the others. The unique large window in the north transept had had a protective Perspex cover adhering to it and this was also removed.

Listening Ear started a project for children called Butterflies. It was specifically aimed at loss to begin with using the “Winston’s Wish” model and people from that organization came up to Liverpool to train those who volunteered to listen to children.

**2004** Phase two of the restoration of the Church began. This comprised the major part of the building work: re-ordering the Church including the re-siting of the nave to a central aisle. Installation of a toilet and redesigning the rear of the Church, creating a closed porch with disabled access, complete internal decoration, new heating, lighting, carpet, chairs and pews. While this restoration work was carried out the services took place in the new Church Centre which was now used extensively by groups and organisations. Brownies, Guides, a toddler group, lunch club, drama group, Mothers Union, Church Meetings, Listening Ear training and various craft groups all met there. Vestry hour took place each Thursday evening for people to book weddings and Christenings.

**2006** A grant from Awards for All enabled the graveyard to be plotted and recorded. The popularity of the internet meant that people were more easily able to research their family history and the parish office was receiving requests for information about family graves and no one knew where they were. According to the 1939 history of Halewood, the graves were numbered at one stage but there was no record. So the job was taken on to find out where the graves were, who was in them and how they had been numbered all those years ago. Also to make out a definitive list so that future queries could be answered more easily and a grave pinpointed. Part of the remit was to research some of the older graves in order to learn via the internet site, Ancestry, the history of some of those buried within. This research was to be shared with local schools and a graveyard trail brochure produced.

**2009** Phase two of the building work on St Nicholas was almost completed and more money had been raised by inviting the congregation to sponsor one of the new pews or chairs whereby a brass plaque would be attached for posterity, naming the donor or donors. One of the last restoration tasks undertaken was to restore to its former glory, the Fleur de Lis over the Sanctuary. Tom Beesley who had trained as a signwriter, undertook this task admiring as he did so, the skill of the original artist.

**2012** Fundraising was to continue for Phase 3 to replace and re-site the Church bells. Because of the weight of the bells which were at the top of the tower, which was built on to the Church in 1883, ringing had now caused damage and a pinnacle had fallen off. Ringing had to stop and the last ring took place on Christmas Day 2009. This project included replacing the existing bells for a lighter set and re-siting them below the clock mechanism which also had to be moved. A steering group was established comprised of Church members and ringers in order to raise the approximate cost of £220,000. This was chaired by Alison Shacklady, one of our Readers whose determination drove the project throughout. The sum was raised from grants from various bodies including English Heritage and the All Churches Trust, donations and fundraising. A lot of the practical work was undertaken by members of the Merseyside Restoration Group. The old heavy ring of 8 bells being replaced by a lighter set of 6 which came from the Royal Ejsbouts Foundry in Netherlands, the company which made the 2012 Olympics bell. Funds were raised by bringing the community together to enjoy: a table sale, barn dance, bag packing, recycling (with bacon butties), bells books and candles sale, male voice choir, Thornton’s chocolate evening, a pudding event, sponsorships, selling themed tea towels and mugs. Such was the determination of the Rector and the community to raise funds, that a “naked charity calendar” for 2013 was produced featuring male members of the community along the lines of the notorious WI Calendar!

**2013** The Bells dedication service took place on 13th July. The old bells plus fixtures and fittings, were purchased from us by St Stephen’s Church, Barborne, Worcestershire who had a tower but no ring of bells. Funds raised more than covered the cost and some of the the remainder was used to pay for the repair of the flagpole.

**2014** Our Rector, Reverend Alan Jewell left Halewood to take up a new position in Chester Diocese.

As the existing Garden in Remembrance in the graveyard was almost full, it was proposed to find a new area to be consecrated.

**2015** Reverend Frank Cain was appointed Rector from Chester diocese in October

**2017** Reverend Frank Cain left St Nicholas in January for an appointment in Walton.

Interim Minister Richard Gedge was temporarily appointed in January.

In March St Mary`s Church celebrated not only their 50th Anniversary but also the fact that they were the second longest running Local Ecumenical Partnership. The service was led by Dr Sheryl Anderson, Chair of the Methodist District and Rev Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool, preached the sermon. The service was attended by former clergy, members of the Methodist Circuit and past and present friends. Jane Durham, team vicar introduced the service.

On 22nd May a terrorist exploded a suicide bomb at the Manchester Arena as it was emptying after a concert. Many young people were killed or badly injured. Megan Hurley a local girl who had attended Halewood Academy, was one of those killed. On 30th June a memorial service was held for her which was attended by over 800 people, many of whom stood outside St Nicholas where the service was relayed. it was simultaneously broadcast on Radio Merseyside. The service was presided over by Reverend Richard Gedge and Reverend Jane Durham, team minister.

The first peal on the new set of bells at St Nicholas was rung on Saturday 11th November for 2 hours 39 minutes (6-0-1 in B) 5040 plain Bob minor. First peal : 5 rung by a team of 6 all of whom learnt at this tower on the original set of 8 bells.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission contacted the Church regarding our war graves. Nine graves were identified from both world wars and a brochure prepared by Ken Allen with a potted history of each person buried in St Nicholas graveyard with photographs of each gravestone. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission provided a plaque to be placed at the entrance to the Church.

Two regular fundraising events ceased to be this year, the Church Garden Fete had been a regular event for many years, raising money for both the Church and Church school on whose grounds it took place. It was held on the last Saturday in June which hadn’t always promised good weather and volunteers had often battled the elements to provide a good day for all. Local farmer Tom Harrison had played an integral part with his tractor and trailer to transfer equipment from pillar to post. The work involved, setting up the tents, gazebos and stalls the night before and then taking them all down again after the fete had closed was hard work and the people involved were getting older. Coordinating the event was time consuming too and although younger members of the community had become involved, with the pressures of work these days it was agreed that it was no longer viable.

The annual Christmas Fair had taken place in the Church Centre since shortly after it opened. Stalls by the Brownies and Guides, book stalls and games, a raffle and tombola and afternoon tea were all popular. The highlight of this event was Father Christmas (Bob Hatchard) in his grotto. Like the Garden Fete this popular event was set up the day before, to prepare the grotto and stalls and then it all had to be taken down and put away at the end of the day. Sadly the same people were involved and as a result it went the same way as the garden fete.

**2018** The Garden of Remembrance was now very near capacity**.** It had been hoped to use The Copse area near the old Rectory for the new area. A faculty was obtained but it proved to be too complicated to use the Copse so instead an area adjacent to the houses on Court Avenue was identified. Lee Dunning was able to get a team of volunteers from Jaguar Land Rover to clear and prepare the space. The “lads” from JLR worked tirelessly despite some pretty awful weather conditions and funding was received from Knowsley Council’s Environmental Fund which contributed to the costs of materials.

**2019**  Reverend Martyn Woodsford from Adelaide, Australia was appointed as Rector in January.

On Thursday 8th April the tenor bell was tolled at St Nicholas for 7 minutes at 7pm to support the citizens of Paris after the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral (joining the national ringing)

**2020** On 14th February the bells at st Nicholas were rung by the Liverpool University Ringers. 5040 changes of Cambridge Surprise Minor.

March 2020 will remain in everyone’s mind as the start of the global pandemic. It was Covid 19, a Coronavirus and the first strain to hit us was the Delta variant which could be deadly.Things would never be the same again. In January there were warnings from China where it first appeared, and by March we were all in lockdown, able to only go out once a day for an hour to exercise and food shop. By law, under the lockdown, Churches had to close although graveside funerals, (with just 15 people allowed) burials and burial of ashes were allowed. Church closed in March 2020 and didn’t reopen until September 2020 with restrictions in place. Masks had to be worn.

When we reopened numbers were limited and a booking system was put in place by Tracy Woodsford for those wishing to attend a service. Strict rules were in operation for weddings and funerals (numbers for which were still limited by law). Church was to close again in November 2020, when the Delta variant of the virus again became widespread, and did not open again until after Easter the following year, on 18th April 2021.

The NHS continued to be overwhelmed especially in ITU with people unable to breathe. The news reported the number of dead each evening. Boris Johnson, the prime minister issued regular bulletins on TV. People were encouraged to help the more vulnerable. Nowhere was open, Church services and other meetings were held on zoom, people were isolated and had to work from home (including school children and university students) and the usually bustling city streets were deserted. The Government provided a furlough payment and loans to tide workers over. Fortunately a vaccine was invented by scientists, both here in England but also in America and mass vaccinations took place. Most people had 3 or4 shots but some objected and refused the vaccine thinking it a conspiracy. The pandemic would continue for 2 years.

**2021** On Saturday the 10th April the tenor bell at St Nicholas was tolled at noon in thanksgiving for the life of the Duke of Edinburgh. It was tolled again on Saturday 17th April for his funeral which took place at Windsor. Because of the pandemic the Queen was masked and left to sit alone during the service. On 18th April church opened once again, with restrictions.

**2022** In January Reverend Woodsford left us to return to a parish in Adelaide, Australia.

On 24th February the rules regarding the pandemic were relaxed and people encouraged to go back to work. Masks were no longer compulsory and those with Omicron, the latest, less lethal strain of the Corona virus, did not have to isolate as it was deemed no more lethal than the common cold or flu. Borders to other countries opened and people started to book holidays once more. Over 150,000 people had died and the virus was still with us.

**2022** Reverend Woodsford had wanted internet access for the Church so that services could be streamed to those unable to attend. Joe Barlow took on this project when Reverend Woodsford left the parish and was successful in obtaining a grant. The internet was installed, via the internet at the Church Centre using an unobtrusive dish and antenna, and the first service to be streamed took place on Thursday 24th March.

Pam Beesley March 2022