

St Margaret's Church Scotswood

“The realisation of a dream”



St James' Heritage & Environment Group
West End Local History Series



St Margaret's Church

1917 - 2017

A Centenary to Celebrate

This booklet is based on the exhibition created for the centenary of St Margaret's Church in 2017 by St James' Heritage & Environment Group in partnership with St Margaret's Church.

Thanks are due to the following organisations and individuals:

The members of St Margaret's Church who contributed their memories, photographs and documents, and ran special events to engage the local community in the process.

The Heritage Lottery Fund who supported the production of the exhibition as part of "Bringing it back home", a project about the impact of the First World War on Scotswood and Benwell, and the Benwell and Scotswood Ward Committee who funded the printing of the booklet.

West Newcastle Picture History Collection, Newcastle City Libraries, Northumberland County Archives, Ordnance Survey and www.old-maps.co.uk for providing images.

Front cover image:

Local children celebrating the laying of the foundation stone in 1915.

The Origins of St Margaret's Church

St Margaret's Church has served as the parish church for Scotswood for more than a hundred years. An image of stability in an area which has undergone enormous changes over this period, the imposing stone building has stood at the western end of Armstrong Road since 1917.



*St Margaret's Church
viewed from the east.*

The origins of the church go even further back in time. St Margaret's was originally a daughter church of St James' in the parish of Benwell. When St James' Church was opened in 1833, it covered an area stretching westwards from the town boundary to beyond Scotswood and from the Tyne in the south as far north as the Town Moor. This area was mainly rural, with scattered farms and small villages. This was a popular place for wealthy people to live, convenient for the town but at a safe distance from the noise and smells of 19th century Newcastle.

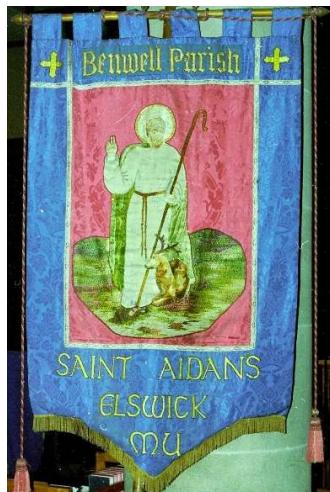
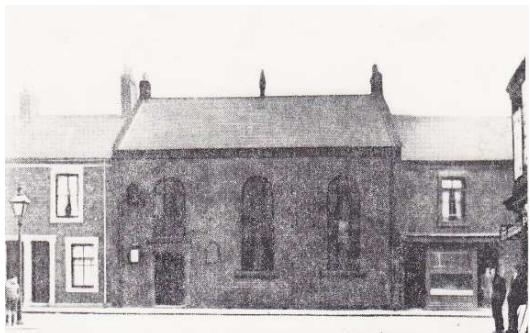
Scotswood House was one of several grand houses in the area. It was home to the Grace family, owners of a large papermill in Scotswood.



It was not long before the growth of industry along the riverbank began to change the character of the area, prompting the rapid development of housing on the former green fields, starting with Elswick in the east and spreading westwards across Benwell and Scotswood. By the beginning of the 20th century there were more than 30,000 people living in the parish of Benwell, which gave it the largest population of any parish in the North of England.

As well as enlarging its own building significantly, St James' Church also set up several daughter or mission churches across the parish to serve the growing population. St Margaret's in Scotswood is the only one of these early mission churches to survive today.

St Oswald's, pictured right, was St James' oldest mission church. It was in the Bentinck area of Elswick



St Aidan's in Elswick and St Columba's in South Benwell disappeared in the mass clearances of the 1970s, but relics of these daughter churches are still to be found at St James'.

The First St Margaret's Church

The story of St Margaret's Church predates the opening of the building we know today. Church Day Schools had been started in Scotswood in 1870, and the first Anglican church services were held in these premises in 1885. Revd C. A. Williamson was appointed to be the first Curate in Charge of Scotswood in 1892.

In 1895 Scotswood got its own church building. It was an Iron Church. This kind of building was commonly used to provide temporary accommodation for new churches at this period of rapid urban growth. They came in a sort of kit form, and were often passed on to other places after they had served their purpose.



The Scotswood Iron Church, pictured here c1900, stood on Bridge Crescent near the Tyne. It served the community for almost 20 years. Afterwards it became a cinema and later the Robin Adair public house.

Interior of the Iron Church, c1900.



A Growing Community

The early years of the 20th century were a period of growth for Scotswood. A key factor was the opening in 1899 of Armstrong's second engineering works on the riverside, adding hundreds of new local jobs to those in coalmining, paper manufacturing and other industries. Rows of new terraced housing were built to the north of the original village. In 1904, the area was absorbed into Newcastle, with Denton Dene becoming the western boundary of the city. By the outbreak of the First World War, the population of Scotswood had grown to 6,000, and was expected to increase faster in the near future.

Armstrong's works, pictured here, occupied a site east of Scotswood Bridge. The company was one of the world's major producers of armaments, and already had a large factory at Elswick.

During the First World War, employment soared at the Scotswood works. Special housing was built near the factory to accommodate the extra workers.



As Scotswood grew and changed, the need for a new church building became pressing. The condition of the existing building and its location, as well as the demands of a growing community, meant that the Iron Church was no longer adequate. The Newcastle Journal reported in 1914:

“The need for a new church is most urgent, because the present iron church has been in use over 20 years; it is now worn, too small, and inconveniently situated for the bulk of the population; the services are conducted under great difficulty owing to the noise of traffic on all sides.”

A War Church

The brochure produced for the consecration ceremony in 1917 proclaimed that 'This church will go down in history as a real "War Church".'

The new church was actually built during the First World War. This conflict claimed the lives of at least 80 Scotswood men. They are commemorated on the Scotswood War Memorial which now stands in the grounds of St Margaret's Church at the junction of Armstrong Road and Denton Road.



Pictured here in the 1920s in its original location on Denton Road, the War Memorial had to be moved in 1965 when the road was altered to enable access to the new Scotswood Bridge.

The formal decision to proceed with building a new church was taken in March 1914, just four months before the outbreak of war. The plan had been under discussion for many years prior to this, pursued with great determination by local church members who had succeeded in raising more than £2,000 - a considerable sum at that time - in the intervening years. This extract from the official brochure for the consecration in 1917 shows how the struggle for the new church and the wider conflict were seen as linked.

"It is the result of the work and prayers of many faithful souls from the early days when "The faithful few fought bravely." Right down to the present day, some of whom "Over the grave their Lord have met." Some who have been called to other spheres of labour, and some at present are serving on land and sea, fighting for their King and Country in the great cause of Freedom: while it is given to others of us to remain at our post to continue and go forward in the work of the Church which was founded by its Great Master."

Laying the Foundations

The foundation stone for St Margaret's was laid on 24th July 1915.



The procession along Ouston Street to lay the foundation stone

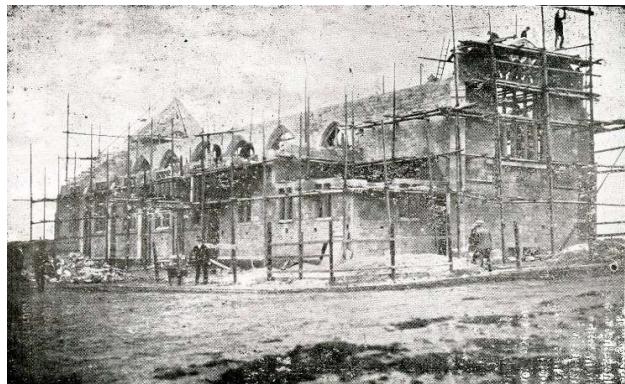
The Bishop of Newcastle, Norman Stratton, laying the foundation stone



Children celebrating the laying of the foundation stone. The buildings in the background belong to Denton Road School on the opposite side of Armstrong Road. This school had opened seven years earlier to accommodate the growing number of children in Scotswood.

The Realisation of a Dream

The land on which the new church was to be built was donated by a local landowner J. Blackett-Ord. The well known architects Hicks and Charlewood were appointed to design it. They drew up plans for a church seating 600 people at an estimated cost of £6,500.



Work began on site in 1915 and was completed in 1917. The builders were S. F. Davison of Newcastle.

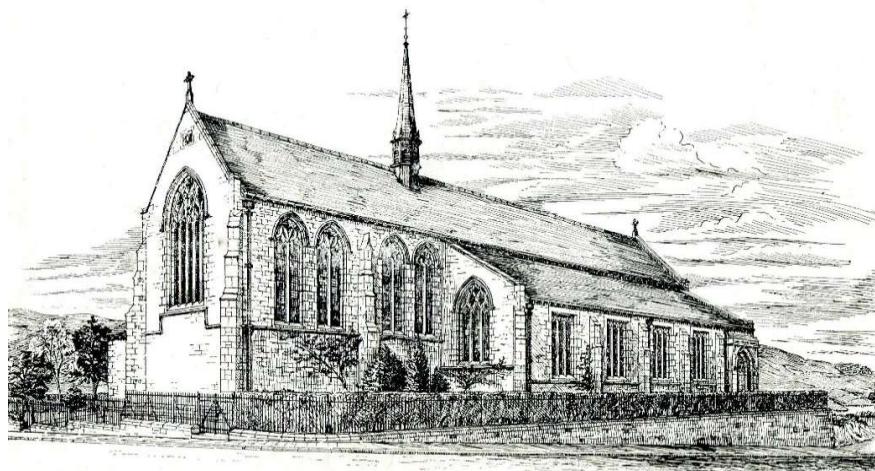
The new church was formally opened on 28th July 1917 by Miss Benson, daughter of local coal owner Walter Benson. It was consecrated by the then Bishop of Newcastle, Herbert Wild, pictured here in the church entrance.



The brochure for the consecration ceremony described the moment:

“The consecration of the New Building marks the climax of the work of the Church in Scotswood, and is the realisation of the dream of a quarter-of-a-century of the Church People in this place.”

A Changing Church

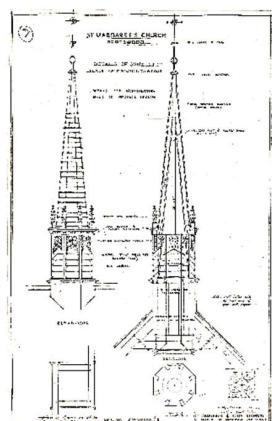


Drawing of exterior of church, 1917

From the outside, St Margaret's has changed little since it was opened in 1917, as this contemporary description shows:

“The Church is built on a site at the junction of Denton and Armstrong Roads, and commands an extensive view of the rising countryside over the Tyne.... The building is of stone, and is designed in the style that prevailed at the end of the 14th Century. The windows are traceried, and the outer doors and spire-let are of oak. The roof is covered with red tiles.”

In 1962 the spire was damaged in a storm, and part of it was reconstructed the following year, based on this original design from the church records.

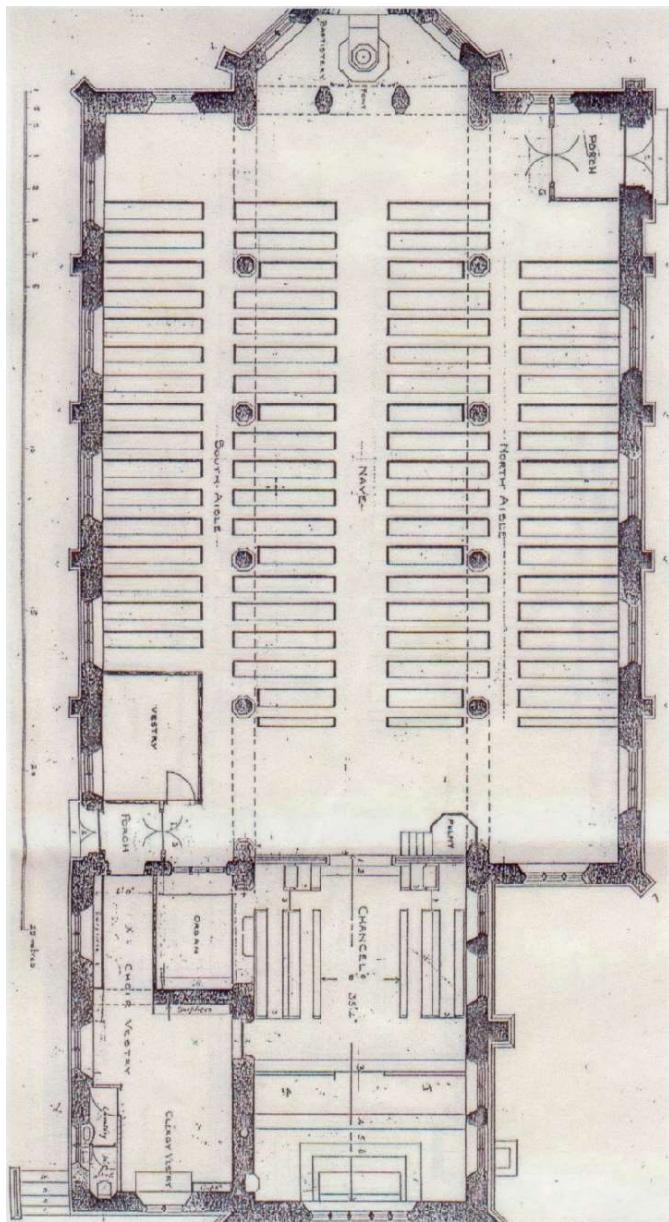


The interior of the church has changed dramatically since it was opened. In 1917 it was described in this way:

“The Building, the total length of which is 126 feet, consists of Nave and Chancel, north and south Aisles, Baptistry, Organ Chamber and Choir Vestries. The Baptistry is a feature of the building, the west wall being pierced by three arches, leading into a semi-octagonal baptistry beyond. The panelling around the walls and the Pews are of pitch-pine.”



This undated drawing, looking east towards the altar, shows how the interior looked prior to later alterations.



This plan of the original layout of the church shows the baptistery with the font at the west end of the building, and the altar at the east end beneath the stained glass windows.

By the time of its centenary the interior of the church looked very different. Instead of one large worship area extending the length of the building and up to roof height, there was now a smaller worship area and additional spaces had been created for other uses, with an extra floor inserted.

The most dramatic transformation took place in 2000, but there had been a series of efforts during the intervening years to improve and modernise the building and increase its use. In the late 1980s more extensive plans were drawn up, which included creating a meeting room at the back of the building as well as tackling the serious problems of disrepair. These hit difficulties with lack of funding and were only partially implemented.

The 2000 reordering was by far the most ambitious and far-reaching. It was the culmination of five years of work and a £700,000 fundraising programme, under the leadership of the vicar Nicholas Henshall. In his words,

“I always wanted to do something about the church building. Yes, to make sure it had a future as a church but also to make it a real gift to the whole community.”



Revd Nicholas Henshall (standing) pictured with local children

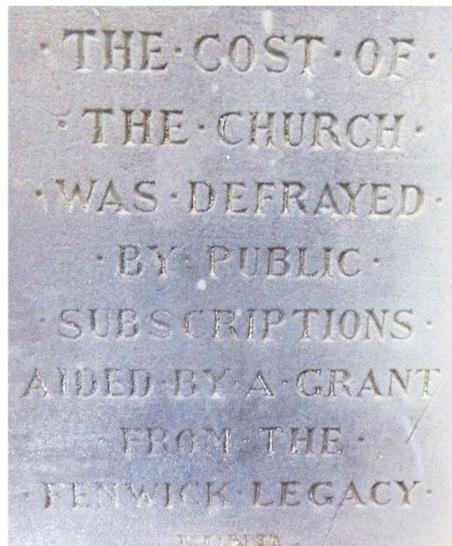


Prior to the refurbishment of 2000, an oak carving extended along the east wall behind the altar, as this picture shows. It was made by Ralph Hedley's company, and dated from the 1930s. An oak frontal was added in 1942 to celebrate the church's Silver Jubilee.

The photograph below depicts the same view in 2000 during the building works. The oak carving was removed at this time. The oak frontal is now in the church office. An extra floor was created in the east end of the building in order to provide more rooms for use by the community and by other organisations.

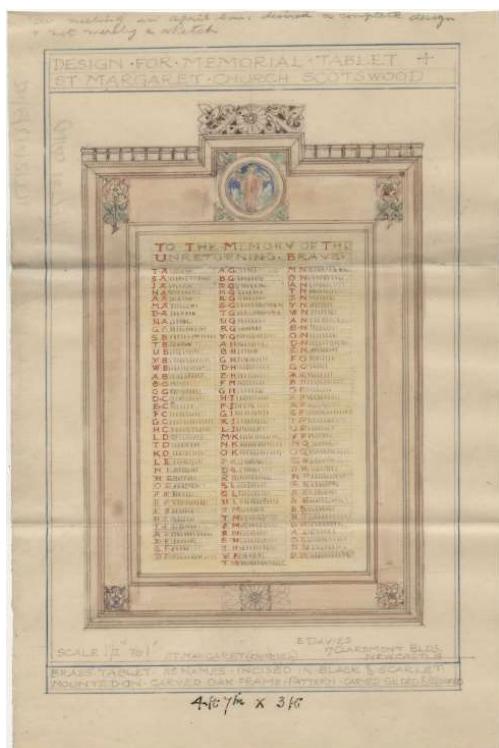


Despite the changes to the building, there are still several features remaining from its heritage.



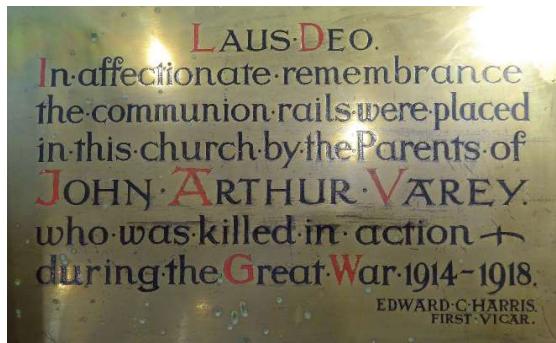
One of the original foundation stones is still visible inside the children's toilets.

One of the first additions to the new church was a memorial plaque containing the names of those killed in action during the First World War. This is the original design for the plaque which still hangs in St Margaret's. The wording was the subject of a dispute with the Bishop's advisory committee who objected to the phrase "the unreturning brave". In the end St Margaret's had their way.





The only stained glass window in St Margaret's is at the east end. It is dedicated in memory of John Armstrong Elliot who died in 1932 aged 15. The window can be viewed from the first floor meeting room.



This commemorative plaque remains in the church but the communion rails themselves are no longer in use.



The font remains in the east end of the building. This area is no longer the baptistry. It has become the main entrance to the multi-use building. Originally the main entrance to the church was from the west.



This brass sanctuary light, pictured right, was installed in 1962.



The old organ, pictured above, was replaced in 2000 by an organ from St Peter's Church in Cambois.



The eagle lectern is still in use at St Margaret's

A Parish for Scotswood

The project of building a new St Margaret's was intended not only to provide a permanent church for Scotswood but also to create a new parish for the area. The original Benwell Parish, although geographically extensive, had been manageable when the area was largely rural with only a few thousand inhabitants. The intention was to split it. Scotswood became a parish in its own right in January 1918. The plan opposite shows the original boundaries.

Scotswood Vicars

The first vicar of Scotswood was the Revd E. C. Harris who had been Curate in Charge during the period when the new church was being built. Over the next hundred years, Scotswood had ten more vicars. In 2015 St Margaret's once again joined the Benwell Team of Anglican Churches.

1918-21	Edward Harris	1975-82	John Crust
1922-27	Charles Hudson	1982-92	Hedley Scott
1927-29	Reginald Cowie	1992-2002	Nicholas Henshall
1930-54	Harry Hawes	2004-2011	Christopher Knights
1954-66	John Monks	2012-2014	Allison Fenton
1966-75	William Dobson		



The first vicars of Scotswood lived at Hawthorn House in Delaval Gardens, West Benwell – a building that no longer exists. The current vicarage was built on Heighley Street behind the church, probably in the late 1920s.

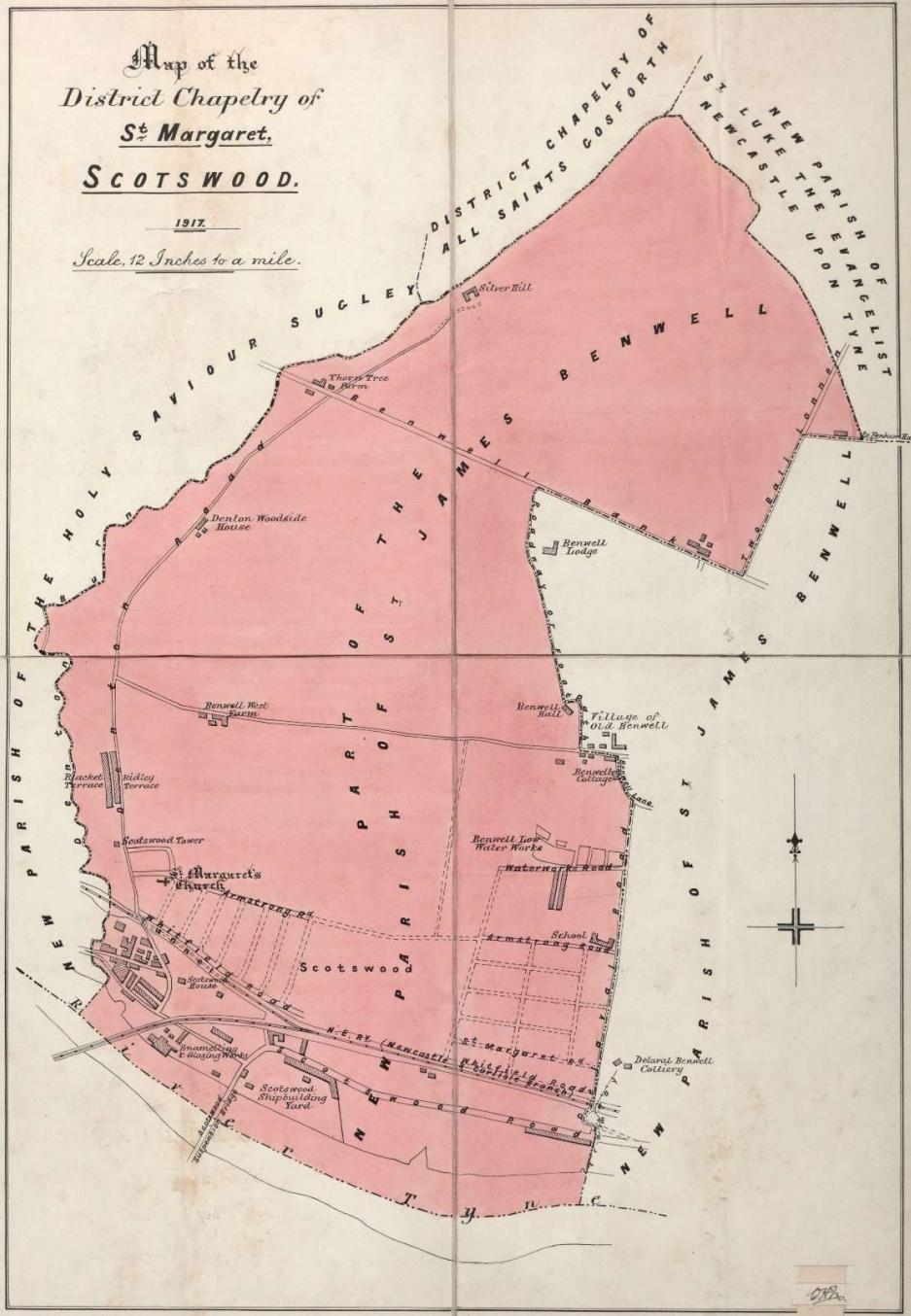
As this early photograph shows, the adjacent land where the vicarage stands now was empty when the church was built

Map of the
District Chapelry of
St Margaret,

SCOTSWOOD.

1917.

Scale, 12 Inches to a mile.



Remembering the Montagu Pit Disaster

One of the most significant events to take place in Scotswood during the lifetime of the church was the disaster at the Low Montagu Pit in 1925. This tragic event killed 38 men and boys, most of whom lived in or around Scotswood.



This contemporary newspaper photograph shows the funeral service at the pit head. From here the funeral procession proceeded to Elswick Cemetery where a stone memorial can still be seen. The pit stood on the site where the B&Q store is today.

St Margaret's has continued to commemorate the pit disaster over the years.

In 2006 a memorial garden was opened behind the church.

This plaque featuring a brass miners lamp was installed in the church in 1975 on the date of the 50th anniversary of the disaster.



Vicar's Letter.

My dear People,

As we go to press, the cloud of the sad colliery disaster is still hanging over us. Though the bodies of thirty poor fellows have been found, eight still remain in the mine.

The inhabitants of Scotswood will never forget Sunday, May 24th, which witnessed the burial of twenty-thrée recovered bodies. The very elements seemed to be in sympathy with the mourning crowds, for torrential rain fell incessantly all day.

The funeral cortège was three miles long, the first hearse reached the cemetery gates before the last hearse left the View Pit, and the Clergy and Ministers stood for an hour and a half at the grave-side before all the coffins had been lowered, and the Service could begin.

Our hearts ached for all the bereaved, but especially for those who followed the twelve hearses of the unidentified. They were given the place of honour, and came first in the procession.

As we passed through the Scotswood and Newcastle streets, the silence and reverence of the thousands of onlookers were most marked—not a man stood without his head uncovered, in spite of the pouring rain, and every blind was drawn along the entire three-mile route. Wednesday, May 27th, witnessed a similar scene, in bright sunshine, when four more of our mining friends were laid beside their comrades; while on the previous Saturday and Monday, and the following Saturday respectively, three other victims of the disaster were buried.

Their bodies lie in Elswick Cemetery surrounded by the busy life of a large commercial and industrial centre—it is as though our great city had taken them to her heart. We commend

their souls to the Universal Father knowing that He is able in His love and power "to keep that which we have committed unto Him."

Such a time as this lowers our separating walls of distinction, and appeals to our common humanity; those open graves testified to the essential unity of all God's people, for representatives of all denominations combined, and took part in the various funeral services. Your former Vicar, the Rev. E. C. Harris, came all the way from Birmingham to stand by us with his active sympathy, and on the Sunday evening he occupied St. Margaret's pulpit once more, and gave a message full of sacred reminiscences and comfort.

Everyone has been most kind and sympathetic, and God will not allow their goodness to go unrewarded.

We think of our own dear friend and Warden, Mr. Christopher Batey—his body has not yet been found, and our sympathy, love, and prayers are with Mrs. Batey and her family, and with the relatives and friends of the other seven unrecovered men.

God grant that their fearful strain and suspense will soon be over, and may He bring comfort, peace, and strength to them in their terrible trial.

I am,

Your faithful friend and Vicar,
CHARLES HUDSON.

* * * *

Mothers' Union.

Letter from Mrs. Pybus.

Dear Mothers,

On Thursday, June 11th, there will be a Service at 11-30 in the Cathedral, when the Preacher will be the Archbishop of York.

This letter from the Vicar of Scotswood appeared in the Parish Magazine of June 1925.

Church Life

Everyday life at St Margaret's was full of religious and social activities as this cover from a 1925 parish magazine shows.

S. Margaret's, Scotswood Monthly Record.

Year of Grace 1925 A.D.

Price—Twopence



"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,"—*Psalm C, v. 4*

SERVICES, ETC.

SUNDAYS—

HOLY COMMUNION 8.0 a.m.

1st Sunday in month—Mid-day,

MORNING PRAYER & SERMON 10.45

EVENSONG & SERMON 6.30

SUNDAY SCHOOLS—

Junior (Parish Hall) } 2-15 p.m.
Senior (in Church) }

UNITED BIBLE CLASS—
In Church 3.0 p.m.

CHILDREN'S SERVICE in Church—
1st Sunday in Month 2-15 p.m.

WEEK-DAYS—

HOLY COMMUNION—

Thursdays 9.0 a.m.

(also on Saints' Days)

BAPTISMS Wednesdays 6.30 p.m.
(24 hours notice to be given to the Verger)

CHURCHINGS by arrangement.

CHOIR PRACTICE in Church—

Tuesdays and Thursdays 7-15 p.m.

CHURCH GIRLS' BRIGADE—
(Parish Hall) Wednesdays 7 p.m.

SCOUTS (Iron Building)—

Wednesdays 7 p.m.

SAVINGS BANK (Parish Hall)

Mondays 6.30 p.m.

WEDDINGS—Banns to be given
to the Vicar.

Many hundreds of people have been married at St Margaret's Church.



Left: Kathleen and John Turnbull walking down the aisle on their wedding day, 12th September 1970.

Below: The wedding party of Elizabeth and Brian Graham outside the main door of the church on 5th September 1964.



St Margaret's played a major role in the community of Scotswood, running a variety of groups and activities. In 1935 the church bought land on what was to become Norland Road on the new Fergusons Lane Estate in order to build a church hall. In 1969 a new hall was built adjacent to the church. It was dedicated by Hugh Ashdown, the Bishop of Newcastle.

Pictured here when newly built, the second church hall was condemned as unfit in the 1990s, adding to the pressure for radical action.



These photographs of church life all date from the 1930s.



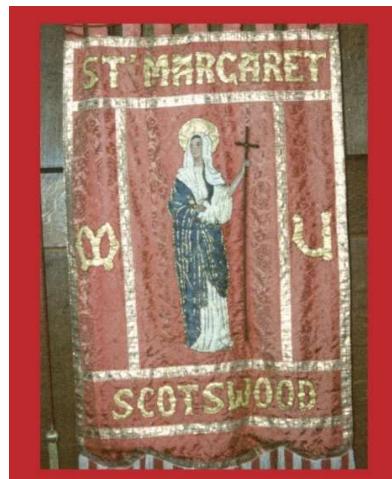
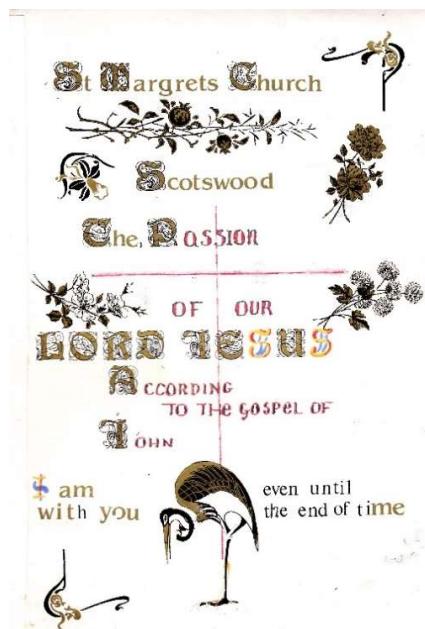
Performance in the church

Sunday School



Group pictured at the church entrance

Over the years St Margaret's has had many different clubs and activities for its congregation and the wider community.



The church had an active Mothers' Union from the earliest days

For several years a passion play was performed on Easter Sunday.



Adults and children pictured in a church pantomime, 1980s.

Children and young people have always been important in the life of St Margaret's.



St Margaret's Church Girls' Brigade was set up in the 1930s and soon had 60 members. There were fun activities such as dancing, drama and parties. Girls are pictured here enjoying a picnic.

St Margaret's winning the colours for the best company at the Girls' Brigade summer camp in 1935.



Officers of St Margaret's Girls' Brigade pictured off duty at the annual summer camp.



St Margaret's also had a Boys' Brigade – pictured here in 1931 at summer camps.



Pictured left in 1940, officers of St Margaret's Boys' and Girls' Brigades in their wartime uniforms. Baden Seymour (left) was in the Home Guard and Olive Duggan in the St John's Ambulance Brigade.

St Margaret's Church, Scotswood

The brochure produced for the official opening of St Margaret's Church in Scotswood described it as marking "the climax of the work of the Church in Scotswood, and the realisation of the dream of the Church People a quarter of a century in this place." The achievement was especially impressive as the grand stone church was built in the middle of the First World War.

Illustrated with original documents, this booklet tells the story of the origins of St Margaret's Church and how it has developed over the century since it opened, set within the context of the changing community of Scotswood.

St James' Heritage & Environment Group

St James' Heritage & Environment Group is an independent volunteer-run organisation and registered charity providing activities and resources for people of all ages to explore and celebrate the history of West Newcastle.

Email: stjamesbenwell@gmail.com

Website: <https://stjamesheritage.com>

Write: St James' Heritage & Environment Group, c/o Sunnybank Centre, 12/14 Sunnybank Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 6SD

