

Rev John Hammersley MA: Second incumbent of St Mary's Church Allithwaite

John Hammersley's incumbency in the late 19th and early 20th century followed on from the Rev Robert Townson. For Robert, there was a distinct absence of information on which to assess his influence on the local community. Whilst the local Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Mercury newspapers are not currently digitised from 1871 onwards, there is plenty of source material available from newspapers further afield and the Cartmel Almanac from 1888 onwards for John. However, Vestry Minutes for St Mary's Church Allithwaite were only introduced by John Hammersley's successor.

In the biography of the Rev Robert Townson [1], I reported that Robert and John exchanged parishes, with Robert moving to replace John at Gedding in Suffolk [2]. The question is why did the two reverend gentlemen wish for a change, and how would the change affect the Parish and local community?

It is clear that the Parish was changing significantly during the period, with a gradual increase in the population later in the 19th century in Kents Bank and in Allithwaite in the early 20th century. In Allithwaite and Kents Bank west of the station, there were 80 dwellings in the parish 1881, and by 1911 there were approximately 115 dwellings [3]. Kents Bank was very much the community where the more affluent resided whereas in Allithwaite there were the tradesmen. For Allithwaite village in 1882, there was a publican, brewer, postmaster, mason / builder, mason, dressmaker, shoemaker, and a blacksmith / agricultural implement maker [4].

John was the eldest son of Dennis, a Railway Engineer, and Ann, and was born in the railway community at Ruddington

near Nottingham. The family, comprising of 4 sons and a daughter, later moved to Manchester [5] and John worked as a clerk in a Manchester warehouse. In 1865 John left to study at St Aidan's College and was ordained as Deacon in 1867 and Priest in 1868, and was curate at Kirkby Ireleth from 1867-1869 and then at Tittensor in Staffordshire from 1869 to 1871. He then moved to be Rector of Gedding where he served until late 1881, and during this period he was also recorded at being the curate in the parish of Rushbrook [6]. He married Elizabeth from Macclesfield in either late 1862 or early 1863, and their first daughter Mary was born in 1864 in Manchester and later Ellen arrived in 1869 in when they were Staffordshire.



Rev John Hammersley

Rector of Gedding

The Hammersley family grew in Suffolk with the arrival of Annie in 1874, John Dennis in 1875 and Robert Henry in 1878. In 1881 they lived in Gedding with a single domestic servant, and at this time their two older daughters Mary and Ellen were living

away from home. The 1911 census shows that they had one other child who died when young.

Rev John Hammersley featured prominently in religious activities during his incumbency in Gedding. He was outspoken in his views, giving lectures and contributing to schools and the missions abroad. He was also instrumental in organising events in the community, for example in Felsham he organised a concert in the schoolroom which the inhabitants greatly appreciated [7]. The sermons were forthright and will have left the congregation in no doubt of their duty i.e. to missions [8], to show gratitude to God [9] and on Christian Union [10] and on the errors of Romanism [11]. He was a previously a member of the Church Missionary Society [12], and later he became secretary of the Spanish and Portuguese Christian Aid Society [13].

It is apparent that John was closely involved in education too, and he had far-sighted views as expressed at a Church Teacher's Associate Conference in Sudbury on the topic of Corporal Punishment in Schools [14]. The meeting resolved that corporal punishment cannot be wholly dispensed with within schools, and that the power of inflicting corporal punishment be invested in the head master only. John Hammersley seemed more aware of the affect the punishment may have on the pupil, but the meeting rejected his resolution that no corporal punishment be inflicted in the presence of other scholars.

What was John's stance on the liturgy and did he support the ritualistic practices followed by Rev. Robert Townson? In complete contrast, in a Christian Association Lecture, he deprecated in strongest terms all approaches to ritualistic practices in the Church of England. He was glad to say that the ritualistic party was mainly confined to a section of the clergy,

and not the layman. The Ritualists were fighting for their own ideas, i.e. wax candles and petticoats, and he maintained they were fighting the battle of the Pope [15]. Clearly the congregation at St Mary's were about to experience a major change in the liturgy.

The move away from Gedding materialised with an auction of the curacy in Stowmarket. The auction of the advowson and perpetual right of presentation to the rectory of Gedding reported *the 'perpetus right to the cure of souls' was 'knocked down for £250'*. In the introduction, *'the auctioneer said that the rev. gentleman would be willing to exchange with a clergyman older than himself as he was anxious for more active employment. The duty of living was almost a sinecure and offered great inducements to anyone of literary pursuits, or seeking rest with a country life'* [2]. Clearly John was looking for a greater challenge and Robert Townson wished for a quiet life and duly the exchange occurred when the Rev John Hammersley has undertook his duties in Allithwaite in December 1881 [16].

St Mary's Church Allithwaite



Figure 1: St Mary's Church. Pat Rowland 2005

The services in the 1880's followed the pattern of 10:30am and 6:30pm (3pm in winter [17]) on Sundays, and Wednesdays alternately in Church or in the Mission room on Cart Lane. The latter venue has to date

not been identified. It is notable that there is no Holy Communion Service at 8am mentioned during John's 'living' in Allithwaite. At that time there was a great emphasis on the Sunday school, with meetings at 8:45am, 9:45am and 2:15pm, and a special service for children at 3:15pm on the last Sunday in the month [18]. Two years later the Sunday school was reduced to 9:45am and 2:15pm [19] and by 1893 there was only one meeting at 2:15pm [20]. Sunday school attendance will have been swelled by the scholars from Miss Dunkley's school at Moorhurst, and those from Kents Bank House [21]. The reduction of the number of Sunday school classes is probably due to the closure of the school at Kents Bank House around 1890, even though at that time Allithwaite school was bulging with 75 pupils [19]. John introduced a Bible Class in Sundays at 2:30pm, and continued his interests in Mission work, and on one Sunday the Rev Sheppard from Preston preached on behalf of the Church Missionary Society. The information available clearly indicates that the parish had changed from ritualism to evangelicalism, with the emphasis on biblical teaching and mission. Indeed, when John Hammersley planned for a 5-week holiday in August 1906, he advertised for 'thoroughly evangelical clergyman to take charge (for two guineas a week)' [22].

In October 1890 when Allithwaite was described as 'quite lively', John organised 15 days of special services and bible readings. It is reported that some of the villagers were sad when the mission was ended. For the event, the interior was much improved with the addition of pretty, new standard lamps, and a very handsome prayer book for the reading desk presented by Dame Helen Ratcliffe in remembrance of her daughter's marriage last June [19].

One task delegated to the vicar of Allithwaite was the distribution of the dole to the poor of the township. The amount to be distributed arose from to interest

accrued from Miss Lambert's legacy and at that time amounted to £25 / annum [18].

As expected, Elizabeth Hammersley and his daughters helped in the community. Mrs Hammersley organised the children's branch of the Allithwaite Scripture Union [19] (Annie was later secretary [23]) and the weekly mothers meetings [24]. The Church continued to encourage sobriety and Miss Hammersley was secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society and Band of Hope [18], and later when the society met occasionally in the winter, John was the secretary [23]. Miss Hammersley also helped to decorate the church with corn, fruit and flowers, with Miss Crewdson of Birkby Hall, for Harvest Thanksgiving [25]. As one would have expected, Mrs Hammersley was 'one of the ladies who presided at the (tea) trays'. The family also contributed to the entertainment, with Mrs Hammersley reading, Miss Hammersley (and Miss Metcalf) performing a duet on the pianoforte and Miss Nellie (Ellen) Hammersley singing (a well-sung song).

One task in the first year in Allithwaite was to find a replacement for the head master, Mr Walter Winson, who was leaving to assist his father in the management of the Matlock Gas Works [26]. The advert for a Certified Master [27] is wonderful as the emphasis is mainly on the Church, mentioning his churchmanship, and qualification to play the organ and train the choir (Fig. 2). There is also the mention of the expectation of a wife to take the sewing; can you imagine this as in a job specification today?

Mr William Lamb, who had previously held the post of master of Cartmel National School from 1870-1876 and played the organ at Cartmel Priory [25], was appointed to the post. Mr Lamb, who served the as the head master for 15 years, made an amazing contribution to the church and community, and acted as the organist and choir master for 47 years from 1882 at St

Mary's (see the brass plaque next to the lectern). More information on Mr Lamb's unselfish contribution to the Parish will be presented later in the article.



Figure 2: Advert for the teacher at Allithwaite school

Throughout the incumbency in Allithwaite, John contributed to education within the area. He was a member of the Allithwaite Local Instruction committee [28], and one of the school managers [29]. School attendance was of such concern that a Local School Attendance committee was appointed and John attended the monthly meetings for the Cartmel Chapelry District [30].

Deviations from the prescribed liturgy in the Church of England continued into the 1880's, and in 1884 the Mile Platting Judgement confirmed the right of the Bishop to interrogate the clergy presented to him relating to acts of ritual [31]. The Rev. John Hammersley, churchwardens and parishioners of Allithwaite posted a 'memorial' in the Manchester Courier [32] (Fig. 3) supporting the Bishop of Manchester in this judicial case and expressing an 'earnest desire for the maintenance of your episcopal authority'. The public statement also demonstrates that the whole Parish have turned completely away from the ritualism practised by the previous incumbent at St Mary's.

William Lamb and the Rev. John Hammersley organised annual summer trips for the choir and there are two reports presented here which probably occurred in the 1880's. On one occasion 26 members

of the choir travelled to Grasmere, taking the train from Cark to Lakeside via Ulverston, then steamer to Ambleside, and by char-a-banc to Mrs Brown's Prince of Wales Hotel where they enjoyed an excellent dinner. Sadly wretched weather forced the planned 'botany and outdoor pleasures' to be abandoned, instead the afternoon was spent in music and singing. Spirits were not dampened and as the weather improved the choir sang several pieces on the return journey on the boat [25]. On another occasion 21 choir members travelled to Blackpool on the steamer.

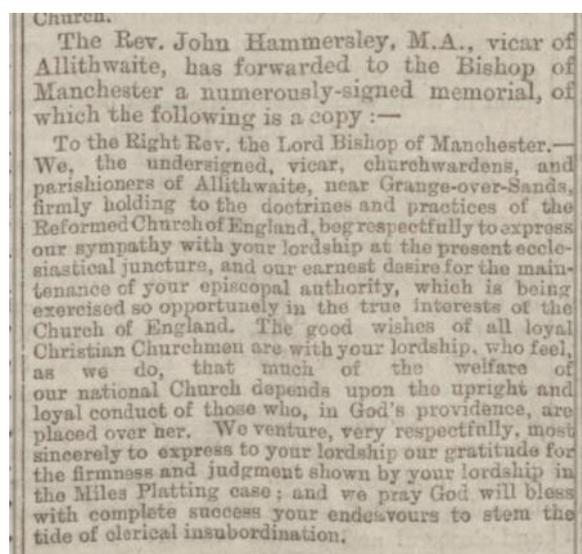


Figure 3: Letter to the Manchester Courier

Around the same time the choir made another bold statement indicating a further move away from High-Church practises of the 1870's when the men and boys of the choir agreed to dispense with the use of surplices (Fig. 4) and they also wished to form a mixed choir in future [25]. On one occasion there were special sermons and collections made on behalf of the choir, and after re-organisation by the choirmaster it was in a very satisfactory state of efficiency. The musical portion was somewhat toned down and seemed to give entire satisfaction to the congregation, and this was reflected as the amount of

contributions than has been known for many years [25]! The choir formed themselves in to a Glee Club and met fortnightly to study secular music, and they planned a series of popular readings for the benefit of the village [25].

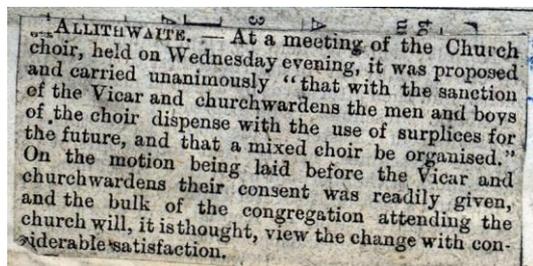


Figure 4: Church choir meeting

Another major issue for the Parish in 1888 was the question of whether to provide a burial ground for the Ecclesiastical District of Allithwaite, as the Cartmel Churchyard was closing due to 'overcrowding'. The Rev. John Hammersley chaired a meeting of ratepayers who agreed to secure the land adjacent to the church and elected a committee [25]. Further details are presented elsewhere [33].

As the population of the parish grew towards the end of the 19th century, there is a sense of widespread participation on the activities of the church and community. John Hammersley was always there to chair the meetings and offer thanks for the organisers and participants. The Institute Reading Room, established in about 1868 [34], continued to flourish with between 30 [18] and 40 members [35]. The annual Tea Party and concert, held in January, was on one occasion described as becoming increasingly popular with each succeeding year with attendance of quite a full company in the mid-1890s. Entertainment featured in all the numerous community gatherings with many individuals from the parish performing their party pieces [36]. Another example of the vibrant community life at the end of the 19th century is the programme of sports organised for the residents of the Ecclesiastical Parish to

commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee, on Mr Walker's field on 22 June 1897 [36]. The race winners were awarded splendid prizes: Obstacle, watch; Potato, concertina; Ladies, umbrella; Married Ladies Egg & Spoon, teapot; Fell, writing desk; Running High jump, clock. Perhaps the committee were more geriatric as the race winner was awarded a walking stick!

Clearly, the popularity of the church and community spirit developed during John Hammersley's residence in Allithwaite, also relied on others being willing to contribute and organise activities. Matthew Hudson was churchwarden for many years, and his service was recognised in January 1885 with the presentation of an ink stand, a stationery cabinet in walnut, and a purse containing the balance of subscriptions in token of appreciation of his services for many years [25]. He was also a member of the Allithwaite Technical Instruction committee and on the Burial Ground committee. Mr Hudson continued as the People's Warden for the whole period of John Hammersley's incumbency at Allithwaite [37]. Mr Thomas W Molyneux of Allithwaite Lodge was the President of the Allithwaite Institute Management Committee [18], the treasurer of the Burial Ground committee [18] and he hosted a treat for the scholars at the lodge [25]. Miss Dunkley, the owner of Moorhurst School in Kents Bank, organised a concerts for the children in the Mission Room in Cart Lane [25]. She was one of the managers at Allithwaite School and organised a concert in the schoolroom to celebrate the opening of the school extension around 1890. Miss Dunkley was also the treasurer for the Temperance Society / Bank of Hope who had some 60 members [18]. She is fondly commemorated in Church with plaques on the south wall and the oak panel of the organ. However, it was Mr William J Lamb who was the heartbeat of the community contributing in so many different ways. He was school master, organist, choir master

and Ulverston guardian of the poor. He retired as a school teacher in 1897 and devoted himself to community work including becoming a councillor. However, it was entertainment and the concerts he organised in the schoolroom, Institute and throughout the peninsula that brought to community together especially from 1895 onwards [25] [36].

Between 1882 and 1907 there were two periods, between 1895-1897 and 1898-1899, when Rev G A B Chamberlain formerly of Bolton was listed as a curate in Allithwaite. In August 1895 it was announced that 'he will officiate for a time during the absence of the Vicar [36]. It appears John unable to run the Parish fully from 1895 until 1899 onwards due to ill-health. During this period George Chamberlain, who resided at 3 Priory Terrace in Kents Bank [38], played his full part in the life of the Parish, presenting candidates for Confirmation, attending Cartmel Deanery meetings and conducting weddings. One notable wedding was that of William Lamb's son in July 1896. He and his wife were also active in the community. For example he attended the annual parish tea parties in January 1896 and January 1897. In the former he gave a Magic Lantern exhibition, and later he performed a humorous recital on how Bill Adams won the Battle of Waterloo [36]. Mrs Chamberlain and their daughter also contributed to the parish activities, which included conducting the weekly Women's meetings. John Hammersley returned to

his duties for a brief period in 1897 and in January, and together with George, they organised the annual Sunday school party. In 1899 the Rev J. Hammersley is recorded as the Vicar and the Rev G. A. Chamberlain as the curate [39].

John may also have received support from the Rev. Thomas Goodwin, a retired clergyman, who resided in Kents Bank and was licenced to preach in the Diocese from 1885 [6]. Another retired clergyman, the Rev Edward Prothero lived in Priory Terrace, Kents Bank from 1881-1890 [40], However there is no record of his service to the church in the area [6].

The Rev John Hammersley was obliged to tender his resignation to the Bishop of Carlisle on account of increasing physical infirmities [41] on 20 May 1907 he retired on a pension of one third of his income i.e. £96 [37]. He was succeeded by the Rev. J.W. Gilbertson [42]. John and Elizabeth Hammersley moved to Southport and lived with their eldest daughter Mary [43], and close to their son John, his wife Ethel and their young family. The occupations of the children were: Mary and Ellen, Nurses; Robert, Advertising Clerk; and John, Consultant Engineer. The Rev. John Hammersley died in 1914. His son John and his wife Ethel are interred in Allithwaite Churchyard. Rev John Hammersley is lovingly remembered on a plaque (Fig. 5) on the south wall of the chancel.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks Mrs Lamb of Killington for the loan of two scrapbooks of (mostly) undated newspaper cuttings and memorabilia from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Figure 5: John Hammersley Memorial



References

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