

## Rev James W Gilbertson MA

James Gilbertson was the incumbent of St Mary's Church Allithwaite in the first part of the twentieth century. He succeeded John Hammersley when he retired due to ill health [1] in 1907. This article provides a social account of church and village life in Allithwaite at the time of his incumbency. The main sources used are census records, press cutting scrap books, Crockford's Clerical Directories and Church Council minutes. Newspaper articles from local papers were not digitised at this time, and have therefore only been subject to a limited search during the war years.



Fig 1. Rev James W. Gilbertson. Image by kind permission of St Mary's Allithwaite Church Wardens.

James Williams Gilbertson was born in Middlesex in 1861, a son to David (an Army Lace Maker) and Catherine. James, studied at Trinity College Cambridge and obtained a BA in 1883 and a MA in 1887. He was ordained a deacon in 1883 and a priest in 1884 in Cheshire [2], and he served in 5 parishes between 1883 and 1897 (Seacombe, Stow, Wallasey, Wybunbury & Daresbury). In 1897 he became the Perpetual Curate at St Albans, Stockport until 1907. In that year it was announced that James was appointed as

the Vicar of Allithwaite by the Bishop of Chester [3]. The vicar received the princely vicarage together with an income, the majority from Mary Lambert's legacy and managed by the Bishop of Chester, which amounted to £200 net [2]. He was instituted by the Bishop of Carlisle at Rose Castle on 5 August 1907.

He married Ethel Blanche Cogan (born 1868) at Stratford, Suffolk on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1887 [4]. They had three children: Catherine Mary (born 1889), Winifred Ethel (born 1891) and Basil James (born 1893). In the 1911 census, Ethel, Catherine and Winifred were living at the vicarage in Allithwaite, They had one domestic servant Florence Johnson living in the vicarage. However, at the time of the census, Basil was an apprentice fitter and turner living in lodgings in Barrow-in-Furness and working on manufacturing gun mountings [5].

### The Early Years in the Parish

At the beginning of his incumbency in Allithwaite, the Parish comprised of the fragmented hamlets of Allithwaite, Kents Bank and Cart Lane. Allithwaite village was in a period of growth, and Lower Allithwaite had a population of 538 [5]. In the village there were a butcher, two grocers and two inns and there was a Fire Station at Allithwaite Farm [5]. In 1909 a New Village Hall was opened with Services held occasionally [6]. By the time James arrived, community life was well established with many church and social groups. During the years up to the First World War, the active church groups are recorded [6]. Groups included Sons of Temperance, Allithwaite Men's Meeting, Women's Class, and the Allithwaite Church Workers Class. James soon became involved in the community as a member of the Allithwaite Technical

Instruction Committee and as one of the Managers of the School.

The vicar was the centre of activities in the village, both ecclesiastical and social, He officiated at two events for the notable Lamb family [7]. In 1910 he conducted an interesting and pretty wedding between Mr Jas Robinson of Toronto Canada and Miss Annie Lamb [8]. The former was a valued member of the church choir and Annie a Sunday school teacher. They sailed for their Canadian home on 21/4/10 by the SS Corsican. A year later on one Saturday evening, the vicar churchwardens and choir assembled in the Institute for the purpose of wishing God-Speed to Messrs Percy Lamb and Harry Higgins, two valued choir men who are about to sail for Canada. The company were entertained for tea by Miss Rothwell of Kents Bank. The vicar gave them both a bible and prayer book and he hoped they would use them daily. Mr Ridehalgh encouraged them to shun the saloons and gambling places. In true tradition of the time, there followed a short musical programme [8]. He also officiated at the funeral of his popular warden, Mr Arnold of Kents Bank in 1913 [9].

Sporting activities were developing well in the community with the opening of the Allithwaite Village Hall in 1909, with the adjacent bowling green and croquet lawn (fig. 2). In 1911, William Robinson was the club chairman and B Smith of Kents Bank the secretary [10].



Fig. 2. Village Hall with new bowling greens –about 1909 .  
Photograph Edward Sankey [11]

The football club, originally formed in 1898, continued to thrive with their headquarters at the Old Brewery [5], was especially evident in the 1920's when the records of results appear regularly in the Lancashire Evening Post. There is also a record of Grange Golf Club (9 hole course) in the Allithwaite Parish in 1911, with an address of The Links, Fellgate, with E.W. Bloomfield as Hon. Secretary and F.W. Hill as Greenkeeper [12]. The Clubhouse was at Middle Fellgate and the course extended north and west up to Wartbarrow Lane (1910 OS map).

## The Chattels, Buildings and Grounds

Many improvements and additions to the church and grounds occurred in the pre-war years whilst James was the vicar at St Mary's. The present organ, manufactured by Albert Keates of Sheffield [13], was installed in 1909 and cost £350. The funds were raised by subscription, a sale of work, and a donation of £120 by Mr A Carnegie. In 1912, the curtains behind the altar were replaced with an oak reredos with side panels in the sanctuary, designed by Austin & Paley and paid for (£210) by Miss Simpson of Kirk Hey. At around that time the communion rail was moved one foot towards the west, and a stone step replaced the wooded one. Three months later a cross and candlesticks of brass were placed on the alter table, a gift from Mr & Mrs Bell of Kents Bank [14]. New choir and clergy stalls, donated by the Simpson Young's children of James and Alice, formerly of Abbot Hall, were also installed around that time [13]. By 1912, the chancel refurbishment was complete, and looking very much as it does today (fig.3). Earlier in 1910, a memorial plaque was placed in memory of Richard Rostron Young (the eldest son of James Simpson Young), and around that time a memorial plaque was mounted on the south wall of the chancel in memory of the previous

vicar, the Rev John Hammersley. In 1918, Mr H. Beswick Royds donated a handsome silver Chalice and Paten in memory of his parents [14].

## **The First World War**

Undoubtedly, the First World War had a dramatic impact on the Parish, with nearly all the young men, amounting to approximately 20% of the community, leaving to serve their country in one capacity or another. There is a full and most fascinating account of those who served in the book entitled *The Allithwaite Boys* [5]. During the War, Choral Communion was held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in the month at 10:30 and a daily service was held at 9am and 5pm [15]. In 1916, the pattern of Sunday Services was at 9:30am, 10:30am, and 6:30pm [16], and something for the children in the afternoon [17]. Evening services were moved to afternoons in the winter to help comply with the lighting order. Also for a short time, the Evening Services were held in the Institute due to problems in blacking out the church windows [15]. There is one account of Easter Services during the war: "There was a marked fall off in the number of visitors this Easter. On Sunday there were three celebrations of the Holy Communion, in addition to the usual matins and evensong services and a special service for children in the afternoon, all of which were conducted by the Rev J W Gilbertson, vicar. The church decorations were pretty and effective. Mr W J Lamb provided at the organ, read the lessons and gave an address to the children" [18]. During the War, the Church of England Men's Society continued to meet in the Institute [19]. The Women's Sewing Guild was also busy raising money towards the church finances with a sale of work [20]. It was a most difficult time for the community in 1916, when it is recorded that "during the week a number of young married men left the village for army service, in one case a

business and home being broken up" [20]. In 1916, there was a National Mission and Rev Gilbertson planned weekly bible study, to administer Holy Communion when most convenient, and to conduct Sunday evening open-air services in the village [21]. At the end of the previous year the Rev Gilbertson gave a series of lantern lectures on the British Army the pictures and descriptive address constituting enjoyable entertainment [22]. Later in the War years, Rev Gilbertson will have been called upon to conduct memorial Services for each of the local lads as the news filtered through from the battlefields and three announcements have been found in the local paper [23] [24] [25]

The Gilbertson's son Basil is one of the 57 young men listed on the Roll of Honour board, mounted on the internal west wall of the church. Basil became a Royal Navy volunteer Reservist and from 1918-1919 served at the Royal Naval Air Service Base at Eastchurch in Kent [5]. He was demobilised on 5 March 1919.

Three of the brave men who died in action and are commemorated on the memorial are mentioned briefly here because of their connections to the Church. Isaac Brockbank died at Ypres in 1916 and is buried in the Artillery Wood Cemetery, Belgium. His wife Mary visited the area in 1922 and brought back the wooden cross which had marked his grave. This cross is still displayed in the church [5]. A brass memorial plaque was placed on the wall near to the organ in 1919 to commemorate the life of airman Frank Wood Chadwick who died in action in 1918 [5] [14]. Robert Thompson, who died in action in August 1918, was described as an amicable, quiet, lad, and much esteemed by the clergy, organist, and choir of the Parish Church, where for several years he occupied the post of organ blower [26].

Peace Day (19 July 1919) was celebrated in Allithwaite with much enthusiasm by all

classes of the community. An open-air service opened the proceedings, attended by over 100 parishioners. The Rev James Gilbertson led the prayers and the address was given by Mr C Scales, the Wesleyan minister. Sports for the children began at 1:00 on Mrs Walker's field, followed by tea in the church grounds. Over 300 adults were also supplied with a free tea after which sports for men and women were held. James was one of the judges [8]. The races listed were: 100yds for different age groups for children and adults, boys and adults quarter mile, skipping race, scouts half mile, hop skip and jump, wrestling, women's egg & spoon. There was also a race for under 5's when 17 ran, and all received a prize of 6d.

Immediately after the War, the PCC were concerned with commemorating those who served, and funds were raised by subscription for a memorial on the outside east wall (cost £16) and a garden to commemorate the fallen, a Roll of Honour for those who returned. The Roll of Honour board cost £23, some of which was raised by subscription. The fund was started by the donation of the money left when the Scout Group was disbanded. There was a shortfall of £1-15-00, which as often happened, the wardens covered. At the Vestry Meeting in April 1920, after a design and quotation had been received, William Lamb proposed the East window in the chancel be replaced with a stained glass window [14].



Fig. 3. St. Mary's Church Allithwaite chancel with memorial window.

The window was installed by local tradesmen in September or October 1921. In May 1921, a window was delivered from the manufacturer Morris & Co. However the Church Council did not accept the window as it was not constructed to the agreed design. There followed a protracted dispute which involved James exchanging numerous letters with the company, copies of which were recently found in the records in the church safe. Even after the delivery and installation, the dispute continued, as the company were invoicing for £270 when the original estimate was for £230. It appears that the church eventually paid the full amount. For further information see the article on the website [27].

## The formation of the Church Council and records

The Minute book from 1907 to 1930 records the events during James Gilbertson's incumbency at St Mary's Church [14]. The original minute book was lost, and up to and including 1913, and the replacement book contains only notes that record the principal events. From 1914 until the end of 1919, the minutes are of the annual vestry and parish meetings, when the wardens, sidesmen and lay conference representatives were nominated / elected, and the vicar thanked everyone for their contribution to the parish during the past year. At the Easter Vestry Meeting (19 April 1919), the vicar explained the Enabling Bill Church of England Assembly (powers) Act 1919, and the following December the vicar announced that there were over 200 persons who had signed the forms of declaration (the first electoral roll). It was resolved that the Church Council will comprise of 14, i.e. 9 elected members, the wardens, lay representatives (and the vicar). The first CC meeting was held on 7 Jan 1920, even though it was 1921 before the CCs were formally approved by the Parochial Church Councils (powers) Measures 1921 Act. The Council resolved

to meet on the first Wednesday of the month, but this only lasted until June when they decided they would only meet when necessary.

In the 1920's the Church Council functioned as committee in charge of the business affairs, approving the payment of each and every invoice. The wardens continued to manage the financial affairs 'as had been the custom hitherto'. It was not until 1930 that the Church Council became responsible for the finances and appointed a treasurer. The Church seems to have been generously supported by Parishioners. For example in 1923 the receipts were £231 and expenses £200. Around this time Allithwaite also paid the quota for the Rusland Parish for a few years up to 1929. It was tradition to present the offertory collection from Easter Day to the vicar. In 1928, a letter was received from the secretary of the 'Legacies Fund' pointing out that an effort should be made to raise the living of Allithwaite by £45/annum as many livings were inadequate and that good men were scarce [14]! The parish were asked to contribute £300 towards the £1000 capital fund required to generate the said income. A public meeting later agreed to raise the funds through a Garden Fete and Sale of Work.

Although the Bishop of the Diocese had suggested that Church Matters should form part of the work of the Church Council, there is very little evidence of this in the minutes. One issue discussed was the proposed revision of The Book of Common Prayer in 1928. There was obviously some uncertainty about the status of the revision at the time as it was recorded the minutes that the Vicar said it was not illegal to use the new prayer book at the Church Council meeting in October 1928.

The Church Council were extremely diligent in maintaining the church, which included redecoration, repair of the church roof, installation of a new boiler and

cleaning the church twice a year by the Church Workers Guild. However there were ongoing problems of the dilapidated state and management of The Institute, and these issues appear not to have been resolved satisfactorily over a long period of time [28].

## Church Life after the War

The Church was a central part of community life, with a third of the Lower Allithwaite district registered on the electoral roll. The Church was well supported financially, and there were many events such as rummage sales, sale of work, concerts and tea-parties organised to raise funds. There were also the regular social events: Parish Tea, Dances, Concerts, Children's Christmas Parties and Children's sports. The minstrel troupe, formed in the 1890's [28], also continued to perform at various events. The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides are mentioned, and straight after the war the Young Men's Club was formed at the Institute [14]. A few years later, this changed in to the Men's Club. The Church Council regularly discussed issues relating to the Club and the poor state of repair and use of the Institute.

The Church Council minutes show that Psalm Boards were to be made by Mr Knipe in 1923. Gates at the bottom of the church drive were ordered in 1920, but it took some years before Mr Burton, the joiner from Cartmel, delivered the gates, and then there followed a lengthy dispute over the payment of the invoice. Eventually the Council paid him the amount agreed on the contract, and not the higher amount on the invoice. Later in the 1920's the Church Council explored the possibility of purchasing some land to extend the burial ground. However, Mr Jackson eventually declined to sell the land.

Mr Lamb was the organist and choirmaster at St Mary's Church during the time of Rev

Gilbertson. In the war years, the choir, “which for many years had consisted of ten men and ten young ladies was augmented by the addition of 12 choir boys robed in new cassocks and surplices. The boys had undergone training under the vicar and choirmaster and they had acquitted themselves well” [20]. The choir continued to be well supported by the Parishioners in the 1920’s with regular fundraising and collections to support the annual choir suppers and outings [14]. For example there was a motor trip to Blackpool in 1922 when the fund raised was £15-11-2. There is also a record of another trip in 1923 when the Church Council arranged for the LMS railway to put on a special train to Southport. One choirboy will have helped at communion and was supplied with a red robe. However there was an occasion when the Church council discussed a ‘problem with choir and youth behaviour’. There was also a problem with the organ blower, who had a tendency to play truant in June 1923. The Council suggested that in future the organ blower would be paid 3d after the service, presumably instead of a regular fee!

people's warden for over 30 years. However, a press cutting has recently come to light from Jan 1885, (fig 4) reporting that he was presented with a cabinet in token of appreciation of his services as Parish warden for many years past [8]. The inference from this suggests that he was warden for over 40 years. Matthew had farmed at Blenkett Farm in Allithwaite since 1871 (census) or earlier, and he was succeeded as warden by his son James. The brass lectern was installed in church in 1914 in memory of Matthew.

A complete list of the wardens in office during James Gilbertson's incumbency is shown in table 1.

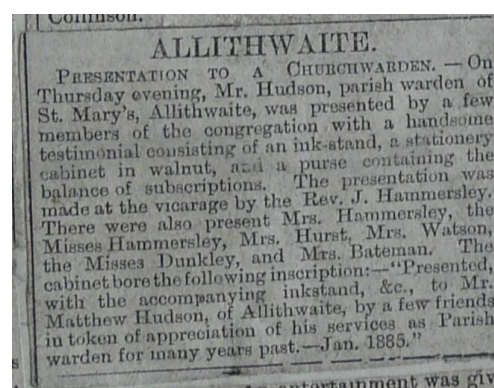


Fig. 4. Presentation to Matthew Hudson in 1885. [8]

## Those who served the Church

Mr William Lamb was a stalwart of the Parish at this time. He was the lay-reader from 1910, organist, choirmaster and ever-present on the church council, serving as Diocesan / Deanery representative. The small commemorative plaque records his long association with the church, spanning approximately 47 years, and the public donations in his memory funded the installation of electricity in church. In 1929, Mr Lamb, regularly presided at services at St Mary's during Rev. Gilbertson's long-term illness [7].

Mr Matthew Hudson departed this life in 1913 after serving the church as the warden for many years. The church council minute of 27/2/13 noted that he was the

Year	Vicar's Warden	People's Warden
1907	Wilson / W S Ridehalgh	Matthew Hudson
1908	W S Ridehalgh	Matthew Hudson
1909	W S Ridehalgh	Matthew Hudson
1910	W S Ridehalgh	Matthew Hudson
1911	W S Ridehalgh	Matthew Hudson
1912	C C Arnold	Matthew Hudson
1913	C C Arnold	James Hudson
1914	William Blair	James Hudson
1915	William Blair	James Hudson
1916	William Blair	James Hudson
1917	J R Garnett	James Hudson
1918	J R Garnett	James Hudson
1919	J R Garnett	James Hudson
1920	L Chapman	Harold Walker
1921	Nathan Halhead	Harold Walker
1922	Nathan Halhead	Mr Morris
1923	H Walker	W Blair
1924	H Walker	W Blair
1925	H Walker	W Blair
1926	Mr Molyneux	W Blair
1927	Mr Molyneux	W Blair
1928	Mr Molyneux	W Blair
1929	Mr Molyneux	W Blair
1930	Mr Molyneux	W Blair

Table 1. Wardens of St Mary's Church Allithwaite 1907-1930

Mr Arthur Molyneux was a warden and Church Council Secretary from 1926 until 1930. In 1911 he was living at Allithwaite Lodge with his wife and daughters, and was the owner of a French Garden and Nursery. After a chequered service record in the First World War, he returned to the Lodge [5]. William Blair, a warden from 1914-1916, and 1923-1930, was a stone mason and house builder from an Allithwaite family that lived on Church Road.

Miss Mary Ann Dunkley, the former headmistress at Moorhurst School in Kents Bank, was very involved with the church in Allithwaite. She was the organist from 1873-1882. She led the Band of Hope. She was a school manager at Allithwaite School. She was involved in musical productions and entertainment. Miss Dunkley died on 28 November 1928 and a brass tablet was placed in Allithwaite Church by her former pupils 'as a token of affection and gratitude'. A second plaque was placed on the organ to commemorate her time as organist and recorded that her former pupils raised 10 guineas towards the organ restoration.

## End of an Era!

James served as Rural Dean from 1922 until 1929. He died on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1930 after a lengthy illness at the age of 68, and his body is interred in Allithwaite cemetery (fig. 5). It was the end of an era. The Rev James Gilbertson served the Parish for 23 years, and he was one of three priests who had been in post for the 65 years since the building of the Church was completed.

His 'faithful and devoted service' is remembered on a plaque mounted on the south wall of the chancel (fig. 6). James had a 'vicious' red and green parrot which was a real chatterbox. After he died Mrs Gilbertson gave it to the lady who lived in

Ash House (opposite the Church on Church Road) [29].



Fig. 5. James Williams Gilbertson's tombstone in the Allithwaite burial ground.

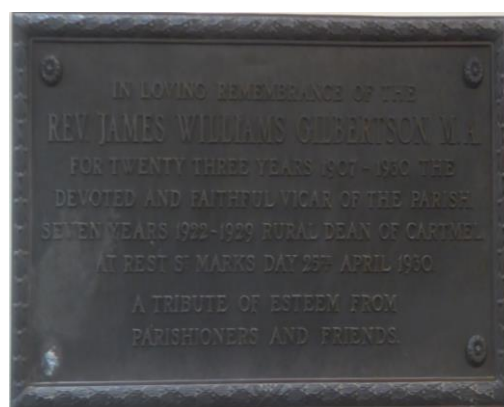


Fig. 6.. Memorial tablet to Rev J W Gilbertson.

Ethel, James's wife, was ever present at Church Council meetings and as you may expect helped and organised church functions. She lived to the grand old age of 90, and died in Alton, Hants in 1959. After the First World War, his son Basil was a motor mechanic [30] and garage salesman [31] in Portsmouth. Records show him travelling back from Australia in 1945, and at the age of 51 as an admiralty civilian living in Alton, Hants [5]. He married Elsie in Southend in 1955 at the age of 61 and died there in 1974 at the age of 80 years old. Winifred did not marry and died in Battle, Sussex in 1976.

*Phil Rowland January Jan 2016 v2*

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