

WELCOME to St John the Baptist's Church this heritage of over 500 years of worship. It's amazing to think that the first people who prayed in a building on this site would have spoken very different English to us and worshipped in Latin. There would have been no organ or pews and in many cases the Nave of the church would have been used as a kind of indoor public space, for markets and meetings and anything else that needed shelter from the inevitable north Halifax wind. The first vicar would not have officially been allowed to marry or have children. As you will read long before all of this changed and not long before it changed again later, and again and again! In fact, the one thing that never changes for a St John's vicar is that it changes.

Through all of these changes one thing has remained: the commitment of this church on a hill to reach out to the surrounding community with the love of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit for the Glory of God the Father. Each of these people you will read about, and the many others they represent are "Living Stones," so that it is not the physical building we are celebrating but rather the spiritual one that God is building in every generation. The work of these people has often been unsung, but their collective work is obvious in the vibrant church you see today.

In or around 1150 Caelum, now Coley Hall was established. Caelum translated from Latin as Heaven. As a Saxon settlement (contained in records) Caelum became Ceald Leah (roughly translated Ceald absence of heat and Leah translated as scrub land) became Coley. Coley became a centre for the Order of St John of Jerusalem and pilgrimages were undertaken from Coley to the Holy Land.

Coley Church is a land mark for many miles around. It stands on almost the highest ground between Bradford and Halifax. Our aim is to make the church a revival island again in an urban landscape to serve the three townships of Hipperholme, Northowram and Shelf and much further to Brighouse, Halifax, Bradford, Huddersfield and Queensbury, by lighting the tower and the stain glass windows on the inside to promote it as a place of pilgrimage.

Imagine the medieval scene, the weary trudge of the servant's footsteps each Sunday, as they walked from their places of abode and work in Coley, Shelf and Northowram, to attend the weekly, and compulsory, 'Act of Worship' at the Halifax Parish Church, now Halifax Minster. The landowners went by carriage, but for the workers this was never an option. The footpaths were uneven, the causeway down by the side of Coley graveyard was steep and dangerous and slippery when wet, the pathways through Chelsea Valley, Shibden Valley, Kirk Lane, up and over Beacon Hill on the Magna Via, never a Roman road but a medieval footpath into Halifax, was arduous.

Our church recently repeated this walk, one sunny Sunday and found that it took over an hour, lovely in the sun, but dismal in the cold and wet. When the servants got to Halifax - there was the walk home again, to continue their work in the fields, house and kitchens. Sermons were long in those days and it would have been interesting to have been a fly on the Halifax Church wall to see how many parishioners stayed awake!

This journey was equally daunting by carriage, as the 'roadway' to Halifax involved the same sheer route up and over the Beacon Hill, treacherous for the horses and impossible in winter. So it was bound to be that someone thought progressively.

The people of Coley had a long association with public worship, dating from the time of Henry de Coley circa 1336. The Knights of St John of Jerusalem, Hospitallers, were stationed nearby. The Thorpe family, with others took a great interest in the new movement of the church and became chief founders and

patrons of the new benefice. Thorpe executed a deed of gift in around 1500, which would be the foundation of the chapel on this site. In 1513, on land bequeathed by local men, Coley became a "Chapel of Ease" to Halifax Parish Church. Its location was equidistance from the townships of Northowram, Shelf and Hipperholme and mid way between Halifax and Wyke, being one of the highest locations in the area, and therefore could be seen for many miles around. It would have been a considerable relief for all, to be spared the Sunday trudge to worship.

In 1513, the original church some 28 yards long and 13 yards wide was built including a tower. In 1515 the church was enlarged and it reported that it was one of the first churches to contain pews. Around 1530, a school, located at the church, was formed and Rev'd Thomas Standeven was made school master 1563. Later, Matthew Brodley was a pupil at the school and in 1648; he endowed money for Hipperholme Free Grammar School to be erected. There is still a very strong link between the church and the school today who hold several school services in church.

The church was not without its problems and in 1546 Henry VIII endowed all the church property to Sedberg School, but locally the people stoutly resisted the confiscation of the property of the church. In the course of time the church passed into decay and in 1631, the church was enlarged again, still possessing a tower and two porches. Drawings show the church to be a plain one-cell aisled building with square Tudor windows, no clerestory, two south entrances and a tower at the west end.

In 1711 the church was rebuilt and an inscription was placed over the West door commemorating the event. Eventually, in 1818, the old church was entirely replaced by a new one on the same site. The original rough masonry was used in the footings of the east wall and the record in the form of an inscription of the previous enlargement was retained and built in the tower in the clock chamber. The foundation stone of this entirely new building was laid on the site of the ancient Church on February 26th, 1816.

Like so many so-called "Million pound" churches, Coley is styled in what is commonly known as "Commissioners Gothic". A local architect was employed, William Bradley who was described by Miss Anne Lister mistress of Shibden Hall as "not a man to depended on, very idle, not fit to be an architect".

James Parker wrote- "unfortunately in the worst period of ecclesiastical architecture the present church was built". Coley church is essentially a Georgian preaching box, though with gothic trimming. Regency gothic was thought to be a bastard style with columns made of wood. The windows are in the 18th century style with no historical precedent. On three sides of the church was built three galleries known as 'Cleveland Churchwarden' Galleries, which brought the maximum number of within earshot of the preacher.

Being fairly new, the church was not re-ordered until 1901 and the architect was Charles Hodgson Fowler, architect to the Dean and Chapter of Durham. The main alterations were that the side galleries were removed as they were no longer needed as Coley parish had planted new churches in the surrounding areas of Queensbury, Shelf, Halifax and Northowram between 1844 and 1913. The chancel arch was widened, vestries built and the memorial plaques relocated, the organ removed from the west gallery to its present position, and a new vestry built. The re-building involved considerable disturbance of the dead with some tombs still remaining in the undercroft in their original places.

A plaque was erected in memory of the deaths of Messrs Lister, Cockshot and Greenwood who

contracted anthrax during the removal of the graves from the undercroft in 1901. The then Bishop of Wakefield, opened the re-designed church on September 14th 1901. Eighteen windows are stained glass depicting scenes from the bible, the oldest was installed in 1863 the rest in the early 1900, and all with a story of their own, only four of the 22 windows are plain glass. These windows are very beautiful, in good condition to date, and the artwork and craftsmanship are an excellent record of church architecture.

The tower houses one of only 180 turret clocks produced by Thomas Cook and was made in 1875. It is unique as it is fitted with a single 5 leg gravity escapement coupled with a 30 second remontoire, which drives the hands, making our clock a very special time piece. These clocks are beautifully engineered pieces of art. Each tower has a large clock face so is visible on all directions. The clock is still working after 129 years and keeps accurate time.

The tower forms an intergral part of the west end structure of the church and on the inside west wall, there is a unique double sided Coat of Arms, approximately 2.2 m tall and 1.5 m wide with one side is the coat of Arms of Queen Anne 1707 to 1714 and on the reverse side is the Arms of George III dated 1804. Its uniqueness is that the unicorn is on the left and not on the right of the central carved badge. This probably had been the chancel screen. Other coats of arms plaques are a George III amended with a V for Victoria as well as a painting of the arms of Victoria. There is a model of the church made of wood by John Northend aged 18 years built in 1840 carved with the only tool a pen knife. The church plate, which is displayed in York Minster, dates back to 1571 to 1632. A new balcony and stairs, within the nave, was built in 1996 to commemorate the life of Norman Lister, grandson of the Mr Lister who died from anthrax

We have a list of all our Vicars over 500 years of worship on this site since the first vicar in 1513 and there few parishes in the ancient Parish of Halifax that can show so large and unbroken list of incumbents. There is a list spanning 150 years of Curate of Coley. In 2013, St John's Church, Coley, celebrated these last 500 years with a year of worship, praise and rejoicing.

This church has been a place of gathering, a place of joy and a place of sadness sometimes, but always it has been a place engraved on the hearts of local, and some not so local, people. Over the centuries the loyal and hard working people of Coley have poured their fervour and love in a passionate conviction of the worth of this "Church on a Hill". Our church is visible from all parts of the compass as far away to the south as Emley Moor (20 miles), the heights of Queensbury (13 miles), the west beyond Wainhouse Towers Sowerby Bridge (18 miles) and the east beyond the M606 (15 miles).

Those who walk by, those who will come in, both the sacred and the secular will be touched by the sense of history and of presence within the walls of Coley Church. There is warmth and a sense of peace within the church and the prayers and worship of all the saints who contributed so very much to the ambience of the building, give testimony to the heritage of this place and to the proposed proactive continuity for future generations.

Over the years many folk made their mark on the history of Coley Parish. The Rev'd Oliver Heywood, who was vicar in 1662 was removed from office as he would not conform to the new church rules. He started the local non-Conformist movement and became a Presbyterian minister in the area, building a church in Northowram. Captain John Hodgson, a Coley worshipper, broke away and formed a Congregational Church locally. Matthew Brodley, born in the Parish and educated in the school, now known as Hipperholme Grammar School in the early 1600 founded by the church and was aided to become a successful and wealthy goldsmith and jeweller, eventually appointed Paymaster to King Charles.

What connects our church with John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State, the answer is John Kerry's mother

is directly descended from Rev'd Richard Denton. The Rev'd Richard Denton took some parishioners from Coley to New England, in America, where he introduced Presbyterianism in the America and is credited with establishing the first Presbyterian Church in America.

Herbert Jackson Jnr, wood carver, installed screens in the church and was the son of Herbert Jackson wood carver renowned throughout Yorkshire and surrounding counties for his ornate carving in the 20's and 30's. These eccentrically carved screens are to be seen in Coley church today.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron is directly descended from Thomas Whitely of Coley and Margaret Bothes of Shelf, who were residents in the Parish of Coley.


To display our heritage, part of the balcony will be converted into a museum/display area of our long history using the artefacts and photographs we have stored in the church. One feature will be the Knights of St John's carved stone symbol taken from the Chapel House Inn, it's one of three known plaque in the area, one at Coley Hall and the other at Upper Edge Farm. Other features will be photographs of past Vicars from 1896 to the present day.



The fixed items inside the church will form a heritage trail for the young and old. This will be developed in conjunction with a Heritage Outdoor Trail encompassing the different historic landmarks in the close vicinity.



Using material research for our 500th celebrations a book will be written and published. For people searching their family history a full data base of births, marriages and death will be produced.

To emphasis the "church on a hill" concept, we shall locate cameras on the tower to show a 360° view to show the reverse view of the church on the hill. As access to the tower is restricted we shall install a camera, linked to the computer to show the clock and its workings.

Our story is special



  built on a hill the height of the tower is 780 feet above sea level

  the tower houses a clock produced by Thomas Cooke and Sons of York,. Restoration of the hands on the clock was undertaken, and requires to be wound up twice weekly. The clock is fitted with a single 5 leg gravity escapement coupled with a 30 second remontoire, which drives the hands, making our clock a very special time piece. Thomas Cooke only made about 180 turret clocks and ours was made in 1875 and is one of the larger clocks produced. Thomas Cook ceased production in 1885.

  can be seen from all points of the compass from many miles away

  have eccentric carved crests and plaques,

  we were defiant

  it's a place of pilgrimage for both secular and sacred. Every Sunday 160 footfalls of people cross over the threshold. Visitors come from all over the world to research their ancestors who have emigrated from Coley and surrounding district. Former students of the Grammar School come to show their families their early years as the school birth place and are grateful to know that Coley Church continues to hold services in the church. The secular pilgrims are many people who walk their dogs and the numerous walkers walking the historic local walks many of which include the church location.

To explore the church log onto

<https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=dJe9ZzjFwzV>

Booklets available for download

Stain glass windows

Trail inside church

List of past Vicars

Historic walk around Coley

Famous people with association with Coley.

War memorial 1914 – 18

Memorial plaques and windows