

A History of Roundhay St John



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Editor's note

Contributors have researched and documented this History recognising that Roundhay St John played a huge part in the history of the Township of Roundhay. The congregation's and Clergy's influence cannot be underestimated, or the importance of this Church to the people of the Township and the fast growing city of Leeds.

We have tried to reveal a little of the people and events behind the Church and Township. Knowing something of the people behind the growing needs of this thriving community and their backgrounds helps us understand what may have led them to achieve their personal goals.

Eventually Roundhay became a suburb of Leeds and Roundhay St John finally became a parish quite separate from Barwick in Elmet.

St John's Church is not just made of grey sandstone. It is what it stands for that makes it so special. Before beginning this research I did not appreciate its importance or the wealth of history surrounding it.

I should especially like to thank Peter Oldfield for the material and research he donated, much of which appeared on the website www.stjohnsroundhay.co.uk, now redirected to www.oakwoodchurch.info; and Neville Hurworth for his knowledge encouragement and support.

We are not trained historians but have tried hard to base our description in contemporary evidence rather than heresay.

If we are mistaken or mislead then I apologise and assure you that we will welcome any factual corrections, additions and advice about alternative sources and opinions.

There is more information about Roundhay St John to be found in the archives and on the internet. This History is a work in progress. If anyone wants to contribute articles; help me expand on what is already written below; or join with me in researching and writing the more recent history of Roundhay St John, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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February 2014

A brief history of Roundhay St John's Church

The Township of Roundhay was originally in the Parish of Barwick in Elmet.

Thomas Nicholson owned Roundhay Park and the Manor. He lived in the Mansion in Roundhay Park and dreamt of building a church for the residents of Roundhay, all 186 of them. He died before he could bring his dream to reality.

Thomas was a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and was buried in the Quaker Burial Ground in Leeds. His half brother and heir Stephen Nicholson was able to fulfil Thomas' dream. Stephen also built a school and almshouses. An enabling Act of Parliament was passed in April 1824 and building of the church started in September that year.

The building was designed by architect George Taylor.

Roundhay St John was consecrated in January 1826 and the first regular service was held there on 12th March 1826.

The first priest was Charles Musgrave, who was also the Vicar of Whitkirk and later became Archdeacon of Halifax. He styled himself 'Perpetual Curate' of St John's. People often assume that the parish of Roundhay came into existence with the church, but it didn't. It remained within the parish of Barwick in Elmet. The first resident priest was Reverend Thomas Davis, perpetual curate from 1840 until his death in 1887. The first person to be styled Vicar was T Noel Pearson, inducted by the Bishop of Knaresborough in October 1923, but even he did not have a parish. The parish of Roundhay St John, with its present boundaries, was only created in 1972, during Reverend Gordon Wood's time as Vicar.

In 1868 William Nicholson Nicholson, the then Lord of the Manor died and was buried at the church. The Mansion and land was later sold to John Barron who bought it for the people of Leeds as a park, which opened in 1872. The church building was not sold.

Changes were made to the building in 1885. It originally had plain glass windows but they were replaced by wonderful stained glass windows. Until 1885 services with music had been provided by a form of barrel organ, with a limited selection of tunes. In 1885 the chancel was extended, choir pews and the organ were installed and a robed choir was formed, Heating was improved and a new pulpit was installed along with 'modern' pews for the congregation. Apart from the installation of electricity and First World War memorial on the east wall, the church building has changed remarkably little since then.

The crypt holds the remains of the Nicholson families and many notable people of Roundhay, including six Lord Mayors of Leeds. Several Lupton's are buried in the south section of the graveyard so Kate Middleton, now Duchess of Cambridge has ancestors resting there. The Lupton family also donated a beautiful stained glass window.

Through all this time relations between the churches of Roundhay St John and Roundhay Methodist were cordial and several prominent Methodists were buried at St John's. Though there were some shared services, in the 1990s with the arrival of Roger Goodson Place at Roundhay St John and Peter Crew followed by Tim Morris at Roundhay Methodist, the two churches became much closer and began to work together on a more regular basis. There were many more shared services and other joint activities.

The two churches entered a formal covenant to work together in 1998 and in 2006 began to share the Roundhay Methodist building.

On 14th November 2013 the churches of Roundhay St John and Roundhay Methodist formed an Ecumenical Partnership taking the name Oakwood Church. On December 1st 2013 they enjoyed their first unified service.

Meanwhile, in 1992 Roundhay St. John's School had closed its doors on Wetherby Road and reopened in a new building on North Lane.

In December 2010 the church building known as Roundhay St John on Wetherby Road was bought for £1 from the Church Commissioners by the Pentecostal City Mission Church (PCM) who became responsible for the upkeep of the north graveyard, which is still in use, while covenants attached to the acquisition of the church required them to stabilize the south graveyard by 2015 and allow access to the north graveyard for those wishing to tend to the graves of loved ones.

Unfortunately the building and grounds have not been adequately maintained and are falling into disrepair. A sad time for those people who have many family connections and memories associated with this building.

A Yorkshire Evening Post Newspaper article published on 8th December 2012 claimed that 'Leeds City Council now looks set to spend nearly £12,000 to repair the Grade II listed church and will recover the costs from the owners' _ _ _

History of the building known as Roundhay St John

Roundhay St John was built in the Township of Roundhay within the Parish of Barwick in Elmet. To build Roundhay St John an Act of Parliament needed to be passed before anything could be done.

The Rector of Barwick drew tithe from Roundhay until 1806 when the owners Thomas Nicholson and Samuel Elam, being anxious to free their estate from tithe, bought some land in Barwick from Sir William M Miller and, with agreement from the Archbishop of York, exchanged them with the Rector for his Roundhay tithes.



It may be helpful to know a little about what those posts meant as defined in 1850

Rector A clergyman who has the charge and cure of a parish, and has the parsonage and tithes; or the parson of a parish where the tithes are not impropriate: in the contrary case, the parson is a Vicar.

Curate Is a clergyman in the Church of England who is employed to perform divine service in the place of the incumbent, parson or vicar. He must be licensed by fixed estate in the curacy; he may be removed at pleasure. But some curates are perpetual.

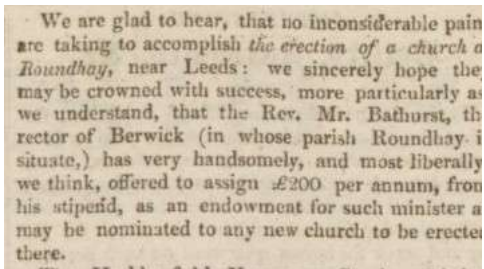
Thomas Nicholson had bought the Roundhay Estate with Samuel Elam in 1803. Samuel Elam wanted his land for property development. Thomas Nicholson wanted to use his land for the comfort of himself, family and friends. Thomas built himself a grand Mansion with grounds including lakes, follies and walks within his parkland. It was Thomas' dream to build a Church but he died in 1821 before he could see one being built. It was left to his wife Elizabeth (nee Jackson) and then Thomas' half brother Stephen Nicholson to realise his dream.

It was always part of the great scheme to build a School and Alms houses as well as a Church but those would come later.

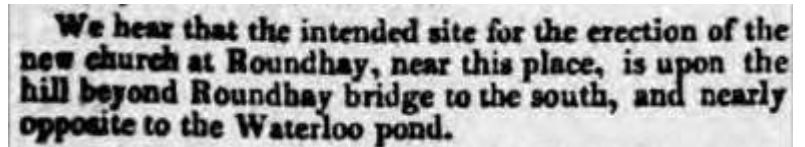
In 1824 the Act of Parliament was passed allowing the building to be built.

Roundhay St John was about six miles from the parish Church at Barwick in Elmet and about three miles outside Leeds centre on the road to

Wetherby. The population of Roundhay was nearly two hundred at the time that the act to build a church was requested. There were no other places of worship belonging to the established Church in the local Seacroft or Shadwell area, so there was a real need.



We are glad to hear, that no inconsiderable pains are taking to accomplish the erection of a church at Roundhay, near Leeds: we sincerely hope they may be crowned with success, more particularly as we understand, that the Rev. Mr. Bathurst, the rector of Barwick (in whose parish Roundhay is situate,) has very handsomely, and most liberally we think, offered to assign £200 per annum, from his stipend, as an endowment for such minister as may be nominated to any new church to be erected there.



We hear that the intended site for the erection of the new church at Roundhay, near this place, is upon the hill beyond Roundhay bridge to the south, and nearly opposite to the Waterloo pond.

12th May 1821

Leeds Intelligencer Thursday 27th November 1823

The bill to build a church was signed by King George IV on 12th April 1824.

An Act for building a Church or Chapel of Ease, in the Township of *Roundhay*, and Parish of *Barwick* in *Elmet*, in the West Riding of the County of *York*. [12th April 1824.]

The Act of Parliament stated that, towards the support of the Church or Chapel that it was the responsibility of Stephen Nicholson, his Executors or Administrators, to transfer the sum of three thousand three hundred and thirty three pounds six shillings and eight pence in three pounds per centum (Centum meaning one hundred) Consolidated Bank Annuities, into the names of the Archbishop of York, the Reverend the Rector of Barwick in Elmet, the Reverend the Vicar of Leeds, and the Reverend the Minister of St John's Church in Leeds for the time being.

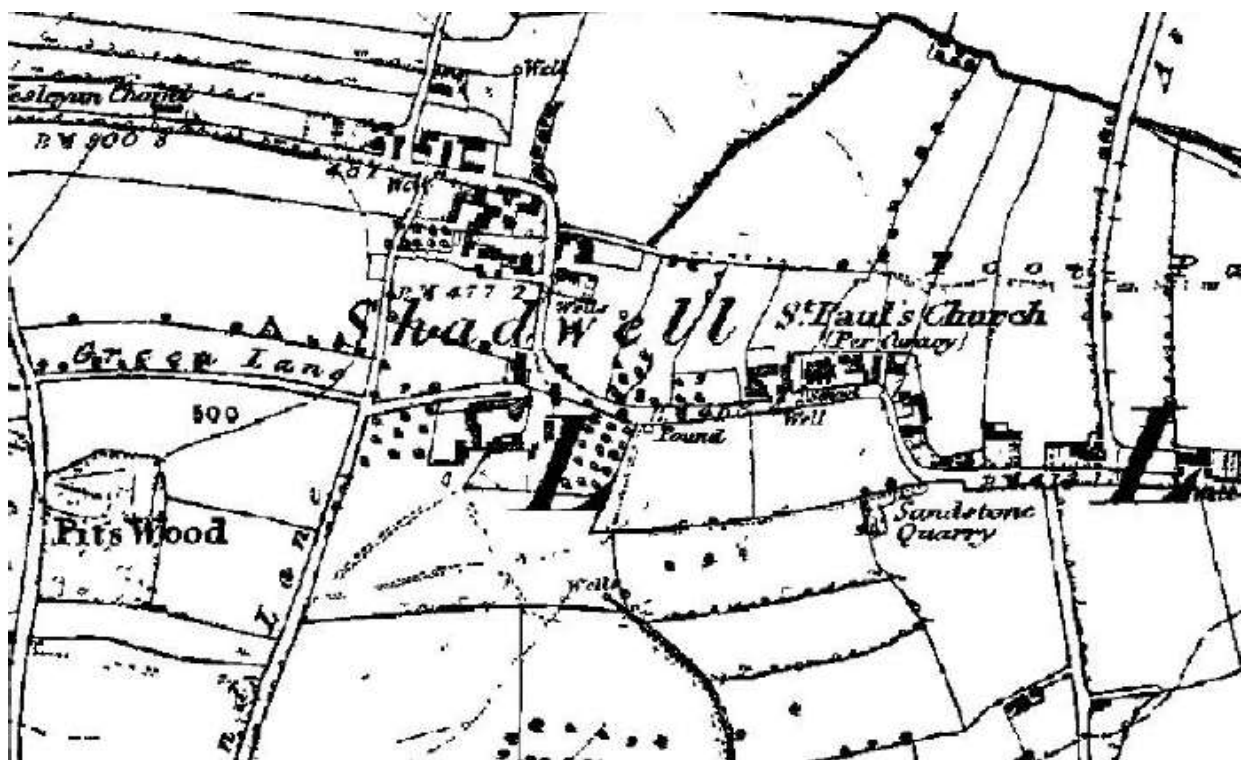
The Act also stated that a burying place was to be made in the Cemetery or Burial Ground to be within four feet of the walls of the Church or Chapel. Also there was to be built upon the land a place of residence of the Minister of the Church or Chapel.

Also the banns of Matrimony may be published and marriages celebrated, and that all Marriages, Christenings and Burials should be registered in the Public Register Books to be provided and kept for that purpose.

Copyright The law prevents us from reproducing this Act of Parliament. If you would like to read the detail it is available to buy from the Houses of Parliament at modest cost. (See Acknowledgements below)

Roundhay St John was designed by Thomas Taylor 1777-1826 who was an Artist and Architect. He first worked for James Wyatt and later established a practice in Leeds. He was one of the pioneer's of the Gothic Revival style in churches. Thomas Taylor had already designed the Union Bank on Commercial Street, Leeds which was part owned by Thomas Nicholson.

The stone used for the church building was grey sandstone, quarried at Shadwell. The first edition of the ordnance survey shows a sand stone quarry on land bounded by Main Street and Hobberley Lane, and the place named Pits Wood. Some local cottages must have housed quarry workers in the early 19c.



Shadwell 1938 Ordnance Survey map showing quarries

The first stone of a new church was laid at Roundhay, Yorkshire, on the 22d ult. by the Hon. and Rev. W. H. Bathurst, rector of Barwick in Elmet, in which parish the site of the intended church is situated. It will be of the gothic order of architecture, built in the form of a cross, with transepts, and a gallery on the west end. The expenses of the erection are to be defrayed by property bequeathed by the late Thomas Nicholson, Esq. for that purpose.

The first stone was laid on 22nd September 1824 by the Reverend William Hiley Bathurst MA, Rector of Barwick in Elmet. Three to four hundred people attended the ceremony. Ale, roast beef and plum pudding were handed out to children, wives and workmen in the school room afterwards.

Cambridge Chronicle Friday 1st October 1824

In a cavity in the stone prepared for their reception, Mr. Nicholson deposited a purse containing a specimen of each of the gold and silver coins of the realm, which were covered with a plate bearing the following inscription:—

This first stone of the church, to be called ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, at Roundhay, was laid on the 29th day of September, in the year of our Lord, 1824.

By the Rev. William Hiley Bathurst, M. A. Rector of Barwick-in-Elmet, and late student of Christ Church, Oxford.

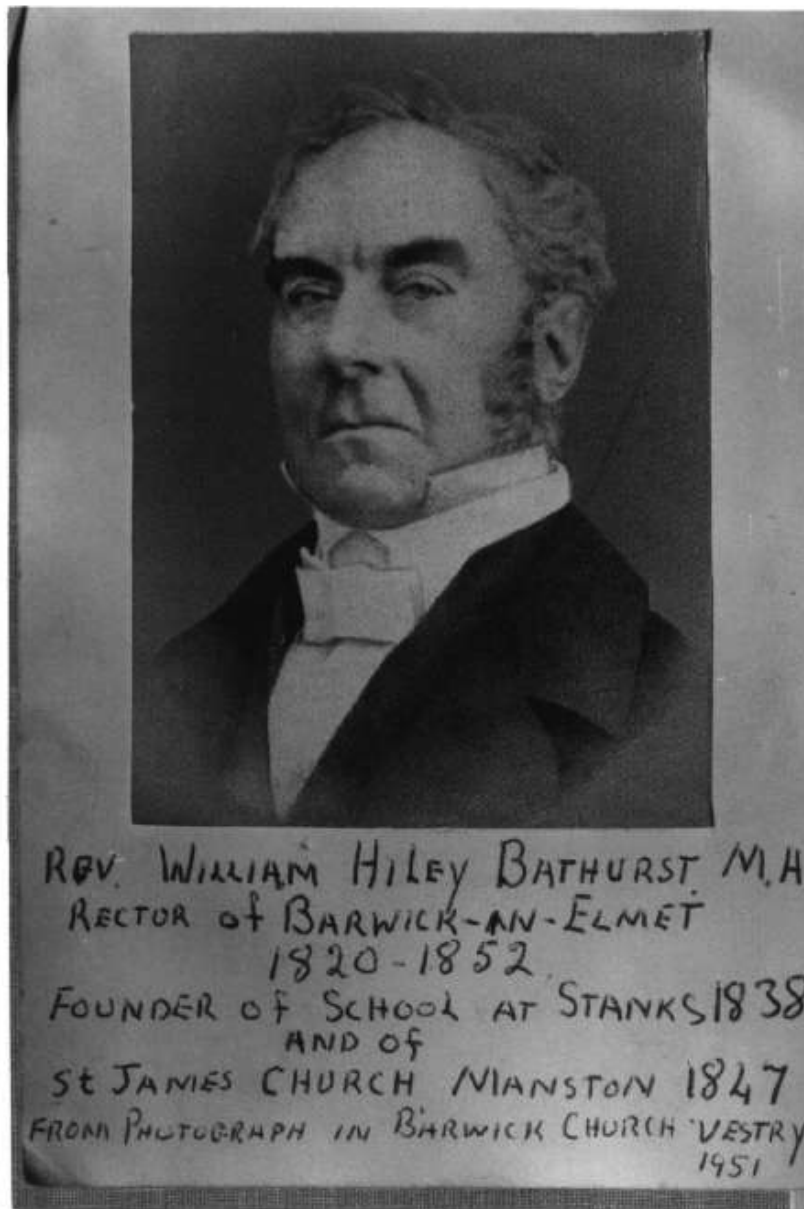
This Church was built and endowed by STEPHEN NICHOLSON, Esq. of Roundhay, the patronage of which is vested in him and his heirs for ever, by a special act of Parliament, obtained in the fifth year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Fourth.

Thomas Tappin, Architect.

The following Clergy and Gentry were present on the occasion, many of them in their carriages:—*Clergy*—The Hon. and Rev. H. Bathurst, Vicar of Barwick-in-Elmet; the Rev. R. Fawcett, Vicar of Leeds; the Rev. Charles Musgrave, Vicar of Otley; the Rev. F. Cookson, Minister of St. John's, Leeds; the Rev. Miles Jackson, Minister of St. Paul's, Leeds.—*Gentry*—Thomas Tennant, Esq. Mayor of Leeds; Edward Wake, Esq.; John Hebblethwaite, Esq.; Peter Rhodes, Esq.; John Rhodes, Esq.; John Gott, Esq.; James Brown, Esq.; Walker, Esq.; John Goodman, Esq.; J. B. Ainsley, Esq.; Tenson, Esq.; Charles Barr, Esq.; Christopher Bolland, Esq. and R. E. Payne, Esq.

Leeds Mercury 25th September 1824

List of Clergy and gentlemen present

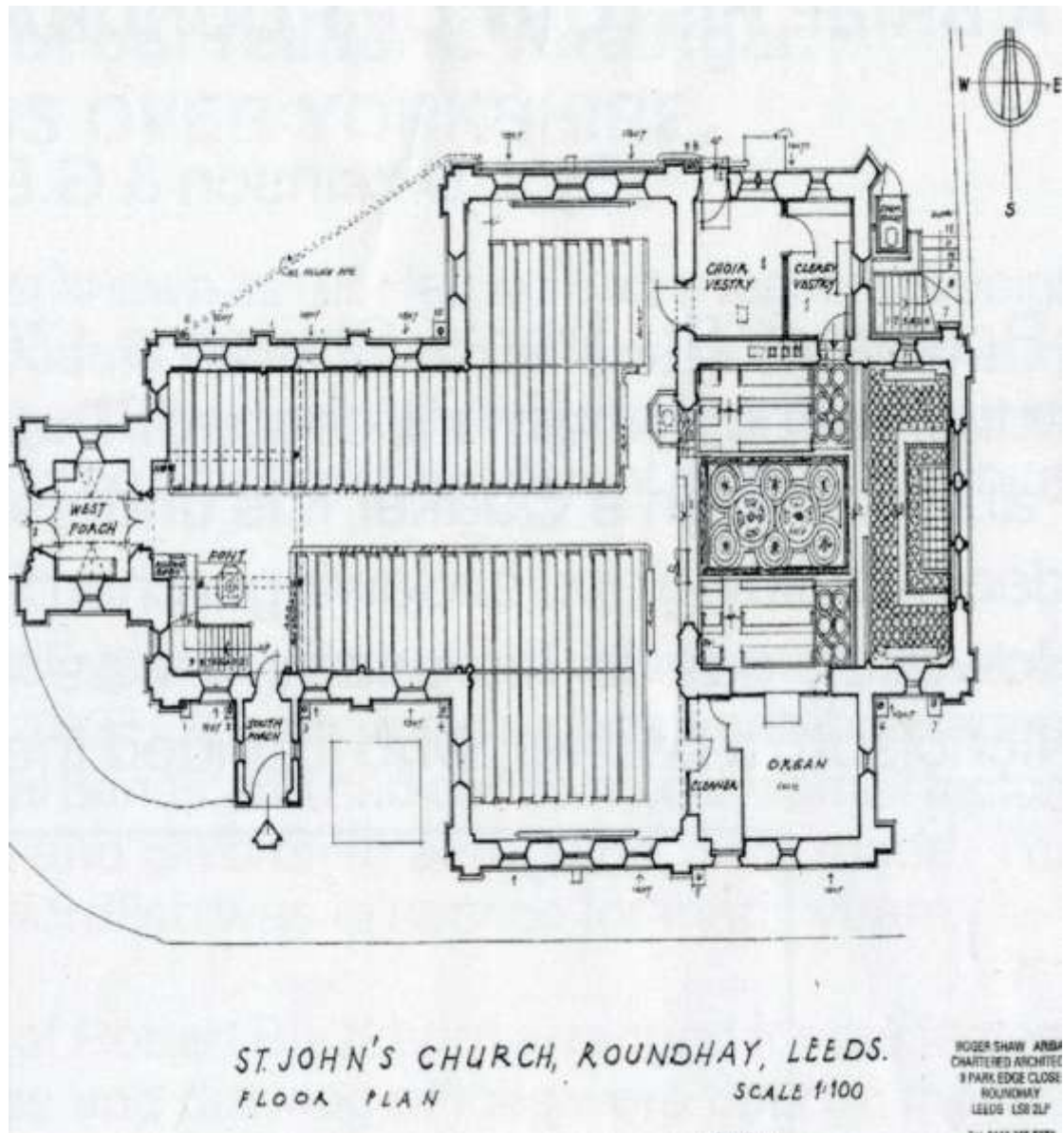


Rev. W H Bathurst, Rector of Barwick-in-Elmet 1820 to 1852

Reproduced by kind permission of the Barwick-in-Elmet Historical Society

Reverend Bathurst married Mary Ann Rhodes at Roundhay St John in 1829.

He also wrote a book *the singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in 1830. The Barwick-in-Elmet Historical Society has a second edition copy.



The Chancel was just fifteen feet long and there was only one vestry and a barrel organ. The pews were high, each having its own door as was the fashion of the time. The windows were plain glass so with crimson blinds so that in the summer months when the sun shone brightly the congregation was not blinded.

A School and Alms houses were built next to the Church and opened in 1837.

Goodall's Illustrated Royal Handbook to Roundhay Park published in 1872, states

There is a handsome stone church, in the early English style, with a square tower and elegant spire. The interior is pleasing, containing nave, chancel, centre aisle, a good organ, and three bells, also several beautiful monuments. The church was dedicated to St. John, built and endowed pursuant to the will of T. Nicholson Esq., who also founded the school and six alms houses, which are a great ornament to the village. In 1839 Rev. Thomas Davis, M.A., formally curate of All Saints, Worcester, was appointed incumbent, now vicar. The living is stated to be worth £364, which is derived from an investment in 3 per cent, Consols, perpetual rent charges upon the glebe lands in the Parish of Barwick in Elmet, and the usual fees augmented from Queen Ann's Bounty.

Goodall's Illustrated Royal Handbook to Roundhay Park A reproduction is in print but the digitised original can be read at no cost on [Google Books](#).

What is Queen Ann's Bounty? In England the collection and payment of annates to the pope was prohibited in 1534 by statute. It was in this year that Thomas Cromwell passed the Act in Restraint of Annates. However, from 1532 annates were withheld, pending statutory abolition. At that time the sum amounted to about £3,000 a year. In 1534 the annates were, along with the supremacy over the church in England, bestowed on the Crown; but in February 1704 they were appropriated by Queen Anne for the assistance of the poorer clergy (Queen Anne's Bounty). In 1890, the total sum distributed was £176,896.



Nave



Font

In 1888 John Hawthorne Kitson of Elmete Hall gifted a Reredos, believed to have been brought from Italy by Sir Robert Armitage of Farnley Hall, Middleton. Unfortunately we only have a black and white photo.



Altar table, new in 1922, with the Reredos behind

Editor's Note A Reredos is an altar piece, or a screen or decoration behind the altar in a church, usually depicting religious images. It can be made of stone, wood, metal, ivory, or a combination of materials. The images may be painted, carved, gilded, composed of mosaics, and or embedded with niches for statues. Sometimes a tapestry is used or other fabric such as silk or velvet.



St John's Church Organ

The first record of any organ of any kind in the Church was a kind of barrel organ worked by handle, and playing a very limited number of tunes. Later a small organ was erected in the gallery and remained there until the enlargement of the Church in 1885. This was then disposed of to St. John's Church, Briggate in Leeds, and the present two-manual instrument was installed in the Chancel by one of the finest organ builders in the Country, Foster and Andrews of Hull; famous for its quality of construction and pipe-work.

This instrument had of course a hand pump, but a mechanical blower was installed in 1938, and the whole instrument was largely rebuilt in 1951 by Nelsons of Durham. This firm replaced what would have been a fine mechanical action with a pneumatic system which has progressively deteriorated during the last 50 years. However, the organ has a classical sound, greatly revered in the district and particularly well suited to the Church; so in 1995 an Organ Fund was set up in order to begin major renovations in stages.

In 1997 the first stage of electrifying and restoring the pedal action was completed. This work involved removing all the Pedal Pipes, soundboards and valves for restoration. The pneumatic motors could then be dispensed with, and a new transformer/rectifier fitted, along with jacks to the pedal board, before all the pipes could be put back in place. There was then a delay before the next stage due to troubles with the swell organ which required attention without delay.

However, in 2000 the restoration of the wind system with associated trunking and blowing plant was completed. This again involved the organ being out of action for some time, during which the bellows were completely taken away for repair and renewal before re-fitting in the vestry (which had been added to the Church in the enlargement carried out in 1885). Originally it had been anticipated that 4 or 5 stages would be needed for the full overhaul and electrification; but by this time it was felt that completing the work in one final third stage would be the cheapest and easiest way. Even so the cost of this is in the region of 25 to 30 thousand pounds (and much more in Euros!!!) and therefore the Organ Fund is desperately in need of "topping up" if this work is to be completed in 2002.

Mr Jackson, our Organ Builder and Tuner, was not able to commence the renovation in that year, so work did not start until late February 2003. At

the present time many of the swell and great organ pipes are out in the church, and the soundboards are in the workshop. Already the display pipes at the front of the organ have been cleaned, and the new console is beginning to take shape with the new keyboards and pedal boards in position, and the new stops in position for wiring to new electric motors. It is hoped that late summer will see completion of all the electrification, so keep looking out for big celebrations; and more topping up of the organ fund!!

By Colin Brigg

Editor's note The picture below is of an early 1820s crank operated English barrel organ. We don't know if it is similar to the first organ at Roundhay St John but hope the picture might indicate what that may have looked like.



End