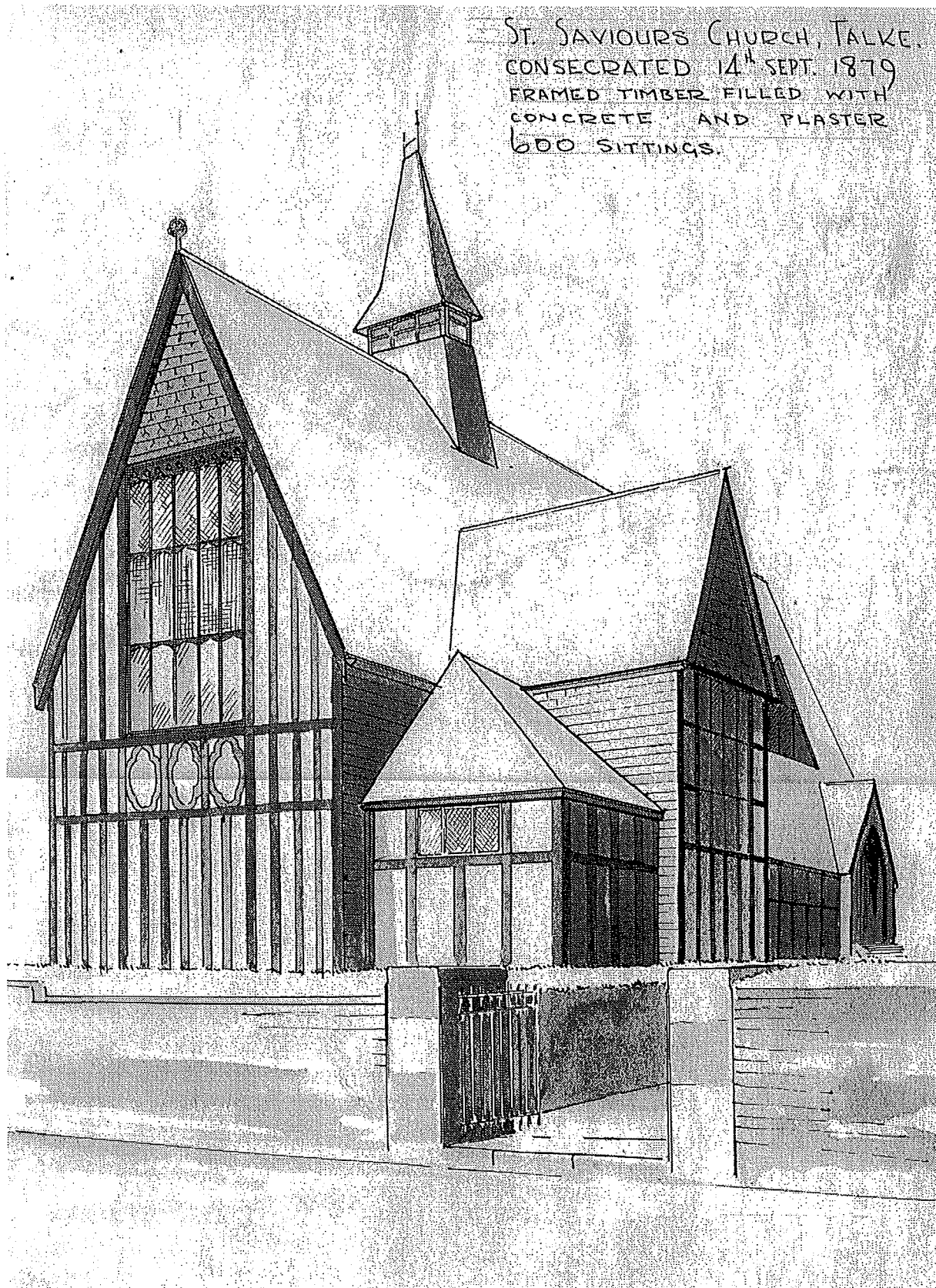


## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### St Saviour's Church and School



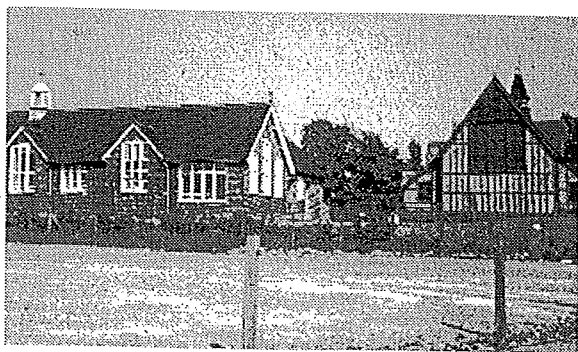
*Illustration 49*

*St Saviour's Church, pen and ink drawing by Mr Edward Ashmore*

When the Parish of Talke o'th'Hill was created in 1859, Butt Lane was part of it. The Church of Saint Martin's at Talke, though enlarged in 1832, was already too small in relation to the parish population.

A history of St Saviour's Church, issued to commemorate its half-century in 1929, explains its origins. 'The collieries added largely to the importance of having adequate accommodation ... Coalpit Hill is a steep place, and it was worse then, and a large population was growing in Butt Lane. Plans were made for a new church, originally to stand on a site next to Saint Martin's, and the proceeds of a building fund and a floral fete held at Linley Wood in 1864, together with donations, made the project possible. However, it was found to be impossible, in a mining district, to find a site 'suitable and safe against mining subsidence'. The Parish Council then agreed to erect a temporary iron church on a site donated by Mrs Marsh Caldwell of Linley Hall.'

This iron church, the first St Saviour's, was opened by the Bishop of Lichfield on April 1st 1868. Owing to the large assembly of people outside the Church as well as within, the Bishop had to preach from the porch. However, the iron church was too small and being 'subject to all the changes of temperature to which we are liable, congregations were too hot or too cold.' So in 1875, the Rev W.A. Wickham, Assistant Curate of Talke, conceived plans for a new church. Money was again raised, and F.W. Hunt, a London architect, came up with plans for a stone and brick church, modified, when subsidence was



*Illustration 50*  
*St Saviours Church of England School*  
*and the rear of the Church 1969*

again considered, to a wood and concrete structure.

A large gathering watched the foundation stone laid in July 1878. The crowd included many local clergy, notable families, such as the Marsh Caldwells, the Smith Childs, the Lawtons, Rigbys and Pooles, and craftsmen who were to work on the church, among them brickmaker James Gater, and William Cope, the blacksmith responsible for the wrought iron fittings. The total cost was estimated to be about £4,000. Four choirs, those of Talke, Audley, Chesterton and Rode, sang for the occasion. Afterwards a tea for 600 people was provided at Linley Hall, and an open-air service there attracted more than 1,000.

The Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Lichfield on 15th September 1879. It is described in Pevsner's "Buildings of Staffordshire" as 'inventive and, though quite large, decidedly human in scale and detail'. Any final debts were cleared by 1884, the Marsh Caldwell family having paid at least a quarter of the cost as well as donating the site, and Sir Smith Child a further £800. The Church rested on an English oak sill and was reinforced 'with the hope of making it secure on a site which is undermined.' It stood solid for nearly a hundred years. In 1895 further efforts resulted in St Saviour's School opening on an adjoining site, taking pupils from the 'National School' at Old Butt Lane. Miss Tute was a well known teacher at the school.

Perhaps some brief memories of my own years at the school in the early 1950s will not go amiss here. Somehow I can't recall many lessons – though we had regular spelling tests, singing 'Dashing away with a Smoothing Iron' and 'The Lincolnshire Poacher', and reading books chosen from the 'Library Table' on Friday afternoons. Occasionally we were taken on 'Nature Walks' – which were, in our view, an opportunity for running wild. We did 'Music and Movement' to a wireless in the Hall unfolding from a crouch to become trees, or dancing madly about pretending to be trolls to Grieg's 'Peer Gynt'. I distinctly remember a performance of 'The Carnival of the Animals', which we did as a circus, with Gillian Davenport in a cardboard top hat as Ringmaster.

Outside we were always being told to keep away from the hummock over the old air-raid shelters. The girls did handstands, skipping, clapping rhymes. Conkers and marbles were played in season, and chasing games such as 'Chain Tag' and the nowadays 'non-politically correct Cripple Tag', where the person who was on had to hold whichever part of their body they had been 'ticked' on while chasing the rest. I must definitely have been in the reserve football team as I can recall being helpless with laughter at our inability to control the reserve football (or 'casey') which was stuffed with newspaper, thudding across the playground like a cabbage.

tem of 'Star Cards'. Those with an adequate number of attendance stars were eligible for a book at the annual prize giving, and could take part in the annual outing to such attractions as Drayton Manor Park, Rudyard Lake, Trentham Gardens, Alton Towers or Congleton Park. At the time three or four busloads of children and parents went on these trips.

Harvest Festival saw the whole Church filled with produce, sheaves of wheat tied round the wooden pillars, large plaited loaves by the Chancel steps, and every window ledge and horizontal beam lined with fruit, flowers and



*Illustration 51*  
*St Saviour's Church interior 1920's*

One term we returned to school to learn with horror that our new teacher's name was said to be Mrs McMurder. However Mrs McDermott, when she introduced herself properly, turned out tamer than our imaginations had painted her.

The present author lived for many years in St Saviour's Street and has direct experience of the church during the 1950s and 60s until its closure. During that time there was a steady decline in Church attendance from the mid-fifties, when a large and busy congregation supported many activities. On Sunday afternoons there was Sunday School, with its sys-

vegetables; all produce was auctioned off afterwards. Charity walks took a long line of children and escorting adults round Butt Lane, ending back in the School for orange juice and a bun.

However congregations and finances diminished, and in the final years, when my mother, Mrs Margaret Leese was the amateur organist, the remnants, choir, clergy and congregation took refuge in the choir stalls beneath suspended electric fires, leaving the huge unheated nave in darkness. The Church was demolished in 1971, eight years short of its centenary.