



Original image given to St Thomas's church by local artist David Scott c1980s

## New life for St Thomas's after 16 years

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On July 4<sup>th</sup>, the Sunday closest to St Thomas's Day (3<sup>rd</sup> July), more than 150 people came to the rededication of the Parkgate premises by the Bishop of Chester, The Rt Rev Dr Peter Forster, and, after the service, enjoyed refreshments in a marquee.

They were welcomed by the Vicar, the Revd Neill Robb, who, with members of St Thomas's congregation, was joined by people from the rest of the parish, supporters and others from near and far, many with happy memories of this as a lively worshipping community, others newly looking forward to what it will become. They were all enjoying this wonderful occasion on a bright and sunny Sunday afternoon in Parkgate. Twenty children from Parkgate Primary School Choir sang a gospel medley and performed a spiritual piece entitled 'Refuge' and it was good to see so many of their families.

Remarkably, present on the day were no less than six Deputy Wardens, between them spanning many years of St Thomas's history. Lesley Irvin and Belinda Ludlow, the two current Wardens, were joined by Jan Rigby, David Johnson, Robin Hughes and Christine Hamill-Stewart, all of whom had served in that capacity before the 1994 closure, as well as, from fifty years and more ago, a former verger, Molly Bushell, whose family preceded her in their care of this building, and continue to do so today.

Michael Potts, Chairman of the Bishop's Trust, read from 1 Chronicles 29, which refers to King David charging his son Solomon with building the temple in Jerusalem. *Oh Lord, our God, we have brought together all this wealth to build a temple – but it all came from you and it all belongs to you.* Chris Storer, Reader with special responsibility for St Thomas's, read from John's Gospel, ch 20; the well-known story of Thomas the Doubter and how he came to believe. Curate, Alison Harris, gave the intercessions, praying particularly for the body of the church and for the community of Parkgate.

The church was full of voices praising God in prayer and song in continuity with those of past generations to whom this building has been important, wafting out through open doors amongst the Sunday strollers.

Bishop Peter picked up the continuity theme, referring to Philip Larkin's description of churches as '*serious places on serious earth*'. Buildings, he said, witness events, happy and sad, possessing an aura of significance in people's lives. They take their place as signposts of faith on the journey of life.

He affirmed the tremendous vision, tenacity and commitment of the people of Parkgate and the Bishop's Trust for the Restoration of St Thomas's that had taken the church from the dark, disused place which he last saw on a visit ten years ago, to the light, spacious and airy building we saw on Sunday, ready for the use and service of the community. Perhaps, wondered the Bishop, if more churches faced closure there would be other revivals! St Thomas's had clearly provided a signpost for the community; it was wonderful to see it restored; he prayed that this great facility continued as a beacon and a witness.

The pattern of services at St Thomas's is still being established; currently there is a regular 9.30am Sunday morning and one on Wednesdays, usually 10.00am, but an evening is also being tried, with some variations – watch for notices. There are plans for a Sunday group for children 9-12 later in the year. Interest has already been expressed in weddings and christenings and from local organisations. The building will be available for use by the community which has contributed so much to its reopening. It was designed and funded with that in mind and some necessary permissions are urgently awaited. A local committee comprising representatives of the Trust and the congregation is being set up.

Beryl & Robin Hughes

8<sup>th</sup> July 2010