



<i>Year</i>	<i>Parish</i>	<i>Formed out of</i>
1841	Bedminster, St. Paul . . . . .	Bedminster
1844	Bishopsworth, St. Peter . . . . .	Bedminster
1861	Bedminster, St. Luke (united in 1956 with St. Silas) . . . . .	1. Bedminster 2. St. Mary Redcliffe
1883	Ashton Gate, St. Francis . . . . .	1. Bedminster 2. Bedminster St. Paul
1883	Knowle, Holy Nativity . . . . .	Bedminster
1902	Windmill Hill, St. Michael and All Angels	Bedminster
1902	Bedminster, St. Aldhelm . . . . .	1. Bedminster 2. Bishopsworth St. Peter 3. Bedminster St. Paul 4. Ashton Gate St. Francis
1929	Bedminster, St. Dunstan . . . . .	Bedminster St. Aldhelm
1935	Knowle, St. Barnabas . . . . .	Bedminster

The present parish of St. John the Baptist Bedminster is adjoined by the parish of St. Aldhelm Bedminster on the west; by the parish of St. Paul Bedminster on the north west; by the parish of St. Luke with St. Silas on the north east; by the parish of St. Michael and All Angels Windmill Hill on the east (as to part) and on the north as to the remainder. The parish of St. Dunstan Bedminster lies to the south west and that of the Holy Nativity Knowle to the north east; that of St. Barnabas Knowle to the south east: each is contiguous with part of the parish of St. John. The parish of St. Francis Ashton Gate lies to the west and its parish church is only about half a mile from St. John's. Finally the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe with Temple lies immediately, though just not contiguously, to the north. Each of the parishes named has its own parish church and parish organisations.

Physically, the present parish of St. John the Baptist Bedminster is divided into two portions, which division is marked by a railway line and embankment. The railway does not constitute any real barrier separating the two halves but there is a certain difference of character between them. The northern portion, the natural centre of the old parish, contains the parish church. There is in it a purely residential area to the north west, adjoining the parish of St. Aldhelm Bedminster, which it is proposed should be united with that parish. The estimated population in 1961 of this area was 1,300. The church itself occupies the centre of this half of the parish which was much damaged in the 1939-45 war. Although some few houses have been rebuilt, this area is now largely industrial in character, but there is a small residential quarter at the north eastern tip. In 1961 the population of this portion was estimated to be 950.

The portion of the parish which lies south of the railway is of a rather different character. Apart from a small group of private houses, which adjoins the railway, it consists of a development of Council houses, made in and soon after 1930, and populated initially by persons rehoused from other parts of Bristol. It is convenient to refer to this area as the Marksbury Road area: its population in 1961 was estimated at 4,950. As regards residential population, therefore, it can be seen that the centre of gravity of the parish now is, and, since before the 1939-45 war, has been away from the parish church and in the direction of the Marksbury Road area.

Very soon after the housing development there, the pastoral needs of this area attracted attention. To provide for them the Mission Church of St. Hugh was built in 1931. This Mission Church, which consisted of a

simple but unattractive building, was located on the south eastern edge of the Marksbury Road Estate and was staffed by a non-resident Priest in charge with the help of members of the congregation of the Parish Church. In recent years the services there have been maintained under increasing difficulties: the congregations have declined and the building has been subject to constant and wanton damage, caused, it appears, by persons coming from outside the area of the parish. In November 1962 the Church was closed.

The Parish Church of St. John's itself was a substantial mid-Victorian building in the Gothic style with a seating capacity of 600 erected in 1855 in replacement of an earlier church. It was severely damaged through enemy action in 1941 and remains as a ruin with only its outer walls and tower left standing. Since then all services and other parish activities have been conducted in a parish hall adjacent to the church site. In spite of these difficulties, which have increased since 1960 when the last incumbent left, there has remained a faithful and devoted congregation carrying on not only divine worship, such as they had been accustomed to, but other parish activities. Naturally and inevitably the congregation has declined (the number of Easter communicants has fallen from 150 in 1953 to 73 in 1964) but down to 1960 a surpliced choir with high standards was maintained, affiliated to the Royal School of English Church Music, as well as trained servers; daily mass was celebrated; collections at the services showed a regular increase. Two Sunday Schools are carried on in the vicinity. The Parochial Church Council has showed itself to be energetic and alive to the needs of the parish. A number of persons came to the church from outside the parish, indeed there are more non-residents on the electoral roll than residents. Evidence of the devotion and loyalty of this congregation and its parish workers is abundant and uncontested.

It is now necessary to refer to the churchmanship both of the parish and also of the surrounding areas. St. John the Baptist Bedminster has a long tradition, reaching back to the time of the Oxford Movement, of the form of worship known as Anglo-Catholic. The Choral Mass, the use of Plainsong Propers, lights and incense, the wearing of vestments appropriate to the Church season, and the reservation of the Sacrament have been practised there and it is clear that these forms have attracted to the congregation persons from areas outside the parish. St. John's is not the only church in this part of Bristol which adopts the Anglo-Catholic form of worship. Anglo-Catholic forms are used at the churches of the Holy Nativity Knowle, St. Francis Ashton Gate, and St. Dunstan Bedminster, none of them more than three quarters of a mile from St. John's. Of the other neighbouring churches, St. Mary Redcliffe and St. Aldhelm are described as "above central", using vestments, reservation (in the case only of St. Mary) but no incense, St. Michael and All Angels Windmill Hill, and St. Paul as "central" using vestments and reservation, and St. Barnabas Knowle as "Evangelical". It is therefore the fact that all of the three parish churches to which, under the scheme, portions of the parish of St. John's are to be transferred, differ from it to some extent in churchmanship.

There are certain other matters that require mention in this preliminary narrative. The first relates to Town Planning. The area, which under the scheme it is proposed should be united with the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe with Temple, has been zoned for some years for industrial purposes. It was so zoned when first consideration was being given to the reorganisation of the parish. According to this version of the development plan the population in this area of the parish (i.e. the St. John's area, not including the north-west area) would have been reduced by 1981 to 200. Recently a modification of the development plan has been proposed which would increase the residential element and provide for a population of about 1250. In addition there would be an increased residential element in the area lying just outside the parish to the north, but so close to it that some part of the population there might naturally come to St. John's. The plan for the development of the surroundings of the church of St. John's includes the creation of a precinct with a shopping centre surrounded by a ring road, involving the removal of the remains of the church and its burial ground. This plan has not yet been

submitted for ministerial approval and, if approved, will take some years to complete. Their Lordships are of the opinion that the present scheme, in so far as it relates to the removal of the parish church, must be considered on its own merits without any assumption as to whether or not the proposed development plan will be adopted, with or without modifications. Furthermore their Lordships do not consider that it would be safe to make any assumption that the population of the St. John's area is likely to be increased to any substantial extent. Even if the plan for more residential accommodation is accepted as it is (and it will be many years before it could become a reality) the area will remain predominantly an industrial or shopping area and the difference between the highest and lowest population figure is not so great as fundamentally to affect the issue now to be decided. The fact that the area is to be of the character mentioned does not of course necessarily mean that it is not in need of a church or of some church institution in its midst.

Next there is the question of war damage. There is a substantial claim in respect of the damage to the church of St. John's, amounting to some £40,000. This would probably not be sufficient to provide for the rebuilding of the Church, but their Lordships are satisfied that finance would be no obstacle to that being done. Financial considerations in fact form no part of the present scheme: without going into detail it is probable that what is proposed by the scheme would cost rather more than to reinstate the church where it is; but again finance should present no difficulty for the scheme. The factor which is of importance, on this aspect, is that it is necessary, in order to be sure of obtaining the War Damage grant, that any work of rebuilding, or building, should be completed by 1968. This makes it necessary to reach a decision as to the fate of the existing church and precludes the alternative of waiting upon town planning developments.

The first steps towards reorganisation of the parish were taken in about 1954: at this time it was contemplated that the resident population of the St. John's area would be reduced, by 1981, to 200 persons. In May of that year a meeting took place between the Bristol sub-committee of the Diocesan Pastoral Committee and the Parochial Church Council. The Chairman at this and at most of the following meetings was the Venerable P. G. Reddick, Archdeacon of Bristol, but the composition of the sub-committee changed somewhat as the years passed. At this meeting the main proposal considered was that the parish should be reorganised. The future of St. John's was discussed and the view of the Parochial Church Council was strongly expressed that it should be rebuilt on the present site. As regards St. Hugh's (then in operation as a Mission Church) suggestions were made that there should be a resident priest there, or that it should become a separate parish. One member of the Council is reported to have stated that if St. Hugh's Church were closed, he would feel that the church had failed in its opportunity in that area. No decisions were taken. So far as formal meetings are concerned, nothing further took place until January 1959 when there was a further meeting between the same parties. The Archdeacon explained that the interval was due to the difficulty of providing an alternative site to that of the present church. The proposals put before the meeting were that St. John's should be rebuilt at a new site which had been found in the Marksbury Road area, and that the north west area should be transferred to St. Aldhelm. The minutes record that there followed a full discussion with various arguments expressed against the Pastoral Committee's proposals. These arguments are summarised in the minutes and correspond closely with many of those raised in the present appeals.

More than another year elapsed before the next meeting was held, in November 1960. The Archdeacon opened the meeting by stating that the point of disagreement between the Pastoral Committee and the Parochial Church Council was the question of rebuilding St. John's on the old site. After referring to the consideration which had been given to the whole matter by the Church Commissioners and the full Pastoral Committee, he said that a more comprehensive scheme had now been framed, which involved not only the rebuilding of the church on a new site but the union of various parts

of the benefice with adjoining benefices. The main features of the present scheme were (with some unimportant variations which were not ultimately adopted) then outlined and submitted to the meeting. The Council was asked to consider the suggestions and submit representations. This, it appears, was done. Following upon this two further meetings took place, in January and December 1961. It is not necessary to refer to the record of these meetings in detail. It shows that all the features of the present scheme were laid before the Parochial Church Council of St. John's and, at the latter meeting, of the three Councils of St. John's, St. Michael and All Angels and St. Aldhelm's; the objections on the part of St. John's were fully stated. A counter proposal was indeed formulated by them that the centre of the parish should remain at St. John's and that St. John's and St. Michael's should be worked from there. On the question of resiting the Church, complete disagreement persisted between the two sides. There followed the preparation of the draft scheme and its approval by the Church Commissioners in May 1963. Objections were duly made by the Parochial Church Council of St. John's in July 1963 and these were heard by the Church Commissioners' representatives early in 1964. The scheme was certified on 17th March 1964.

The objections of the Parochial Church Council on the one hand and of Mr. E. E. Joyce on the other are stated in their respective petitions and their Lordships will now examine them. The Parochial Church Council, as is natural, places much stress on the traditions of the parish, the long period during which there has been a church on the present site of St. John's, its situation at the natural centre of the parish, the century-long manifestation of the Anglo-Catholic form of worship. They point to the survival in an active form of the worshipping congregation and of parochial activities centred on St. John's as evidence of the validity at the present time of the parish's traditional role. They contend that even though the character of the central part of the parish may have changed, there is still a genuine need for an Anglican church there, as is witnessed by the presence of other denominations, and they believe that the removal of the church would amount to an abandonment of the Church's responsibilities. As regards the future development of this part of the parish they say that the plans are still uncertain and capable of modification: there may be provision for more residents, and it would be quite possible to alter the site of the road so as to leave intact the site of the church. As to the proposed new site, they say that the Church Commissioners have failed to appreciate the character and needs of the area: it is one which contains a number of persons of other denominations—a majority, they say, of Roman Catholics, but their Lordships do not consider that this is proved by the evidence—and the residents have shown no desire for a church in their midst. Indeed, as the failure of the St. Hugh's Mission Church has shown, there is a positive antagonism to Anglican worship in this part of Bedminster. The proposed new church is inconveniently located and less well served by bus routes than is the existing church. The proposal that the Marksbury Road area should be administered as a daughter church of St. Michael's and All Angels is, the Council maintains, not satisfactory: the two parts of the parish are ill-adapted to fit in with each other owing to the geographical conditions. The existence of two churches in this comparatively small parish is not justified and the relation between them is not clearly defined. They claim that there is no practical difficulty in restoring the existing ruined church: the cost of so doing would not exceed and might well be less than that of erecting a new church and the proposed ancillary buildings. Finally they submit that insufficient attention has been given to the traditions as regards worship and the other living characteristics of St. John's: the Diocesan authorities and the Church Commissioners have been preoccupied with administrative considerations and have kept themselves too far removed from the life of the parish: the Council and its supporters have a greater appreciation of what is needed.

Finally they draw attention to the fact that the scheme makes no provision for the continuation of the two Sunday schools in the parish (which are in the north and north-eastern portions); these will not fit in with the new parishes in which the scheme will place them.

Mr. Joyce, in his separate petition, speaks as one who has had an active connection with the church for 44 years. His wife is superintendent of one of the Sunday schools. He testifies to the spiritual strength of the congregation of St. John's and to its musical standards. He too maintains that there is a future for the church on its present site in spite of changes, actual and prospective, in the neighbourhood; he too disputes the wisdom of the plan to erect a new church where it is proposed; the Church and Diocesan authorities are in this respect out of touch with reality—they have a housing estate obsession. And he is doubtful of the benefit of the proposed union with St. Michael and All Angels.

Their Lordships have no doubt as to the sincerity and serious character of the opposition to the scheme. The Parochial Church Council (which includes representatives of the Marksbury Road area) is against it, apparently in unanimity. The former incumbent, the Revd. Basil Minchin, who was Vicar of Bedminster from 1945–1960, thinks that there would be a future for a church on the old site whatever the planning authorities may decide and thinks that the new site would not provide a suitable centre for the parish. Some 20 members of the Mothers' Union in the parish express dismay at the proposed dismemberment of the parish which would result in the splitting up of their branch and there is evidence that others feel strongly that their religious and community life will be affected adversely by the scheme. The objections, as well as being sincere, are substantial, they touch at many points the "traditions needs and characteristics" of the parish matters which the Pastoral Reorganisation Measure 1949 section 3 (2) requires shall be taken into account.

The case for the scheme is mainly put forward by the Lord Bishop of Bristol, and, in more detail, by the Archdeacon, the Venerable P. G. Reddick. Both state, as their primary reason for supporting it, the pastoral needs of the Marksbury Road area, which in their opinion cannot properly be served from a parish church on the present site of St. John's. They regard the failure of the mission church of St. Hugh's as due to the character of the building and the absence of a resident priest, and as strong evidence that there is a need for a properly established church to be sited there. They consider that the change in the balance of the parish which has progressively taken place in the last thirty years requires that the centre of the parish should be resited and that it would be wrong in the altered circumstances to rebuild the parish church on its former site. They are satisfied that the old centre of the parish can be satisfactorily served by St. Aldhelm and by St. Mary Redcliffe: indeed they consider that the staff of the latter, which has experience in the services of an industrial parish, would be well suited to look after the mainly industrial northern section. They recognise the need for a parish centre in the older portion, but think that what is needed is a parish hall, located near to the site of St. John's. The city authorities have indicated that they are willing that a site for such a hall should be provided. With regard to churchmanship, the Bishop, while recognising the tradition of St. John's does not regard the differences between the churchmanship there and St. Aldhelm or St. Mary Redcliffe as fundamental. He points to the fact that those members of the St. John's congregation who are not content with the forms of worship at these two churches have within easy reach three churches offering an Anglo-Catholic service. The Archdeacon, as well as referring in detail to the consideration of the scheme by the Diocesan Pastoral Committee, expresses his own views in the same sense as those stated by the Bishop and adds that the three parishes with which it is proposed that portions of St. John's shall be united all have an active parish life. The incumbents of each of those parishes (in the case of St. Michael and All Angels the Rev. B. W. Jones who is priest in charge) have given particulars of this in some detail and have stated their belief that they can satisfactorily care for the areas to be allotted to them.

The united views of the Bishop, the Archdeacon and the Diocesan Pastoral Committee are obviously, as such, entitled to great weight and their Lordships would not lightly depart from them. Their Lordships, however, in view of

the opposing opinions, have examined them with care and anxiety on their merits as these appear from the evidence. They are able to come to the following conclusions.

First, there is no doubt that very full and careful consideration has been given, through all the stages of formation and preparation of the scheme, to the needs of the parish and the view of the parishioners. Admittedly on the fundamental matter of the site of the parish church, there has been, for some years, a clear difference of opinion between the Parochial Church Council on the one hand and the Pastoral Committee and the Bristol sub-committee on the other which discussion and negotiation have been unable to resolve. But this disagreement has not prevented a very full discussion of the other elements of the scheme, and it is clearly impossible for a case to be made out that the scheme has been framed by reference merely to the map and without regard to the real needs of the parish.

Secondly the decision to resite the church has been reached on purely pastoral considerations—namely on the need for more effective care of the Marksbury Road area. That this is a legitimate and proper consideration, there can be no doubt. As to the grounds on which the decision has been reached it is true that no detailed survey or examination of the Marksbury Road area appears to have been made, and there may be some substance in the appellants' contention that the area is one of mixed denominations with no pronounced religious character. But it seems to their Lordships impossible to say, after all the consultations which have taken place, in which every point of view could have been and probably was put forward, that the pastoral need of the Church of England in this area either is non-existent or is not greater as regards the establishment there of a permanent church than that of the old centre of the parish. Such is the considered view of the diocesan authorities and their Lordships do not feel that they can disagree with it. The same is true of the corresponding decision that it would be wrong to re-erect the church on its old site. No doubt room exists for a difference of view as to the future character and population of the surrounding area: but their Lordships find it impossible to say that the diocesan authorities have come to their decision against rebuilding the church on any false opinion as to the matter: on the contrary so far as any estimate of the future is possible, that decision seems to their Lordships to be the best that can be made. As regards the traditions of the site and the form of worship, their Lordships are clear that these matters have been fully weighed by the diocesan authorities and they see no ground for believing that opposition to the traditional form of worship at St. John's has played any part in forming their decision. They were glad to note that a suggestion to that effect was not pursued by the appellants in the presentation of their case.

Their Lordships therefore accept the necessity of the decision not to rebuild the church on its former site and to erect a new church in the Marksbury Road area. This decision once accepted, there appears to their Lordships to be every justification for the reorganisation of the old parish and the union of the three parts of it with the adjoining parishes: that seems to their Lordships both to be in the interest of the several parts of the old parish and in the wider interest of this portion of the diocese. Their Lordships need not comment on the remaining elements of the scheme which are of a consequential or administrative character. They will humbly propose to Her Majesty that the scheme be affirmed.

**In the Privy Council**

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*In the matter of an Appeal against a Scheme for rearranging the benefices and parishes of Bedminster; St. Aldhelm, Bedminster; St. Mary Redcliffe with Temple, Bristol; and St. Michael and All Angels, Windmill Hill, all in the diocese of Bristol, and for authorising the taking down of the ruins of the church of St. John the Baptist, Bedminster, and the appropriation of the site to other uses.*

**THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND EDGAR E.  
JOYCE**

v

**THE CHURCH COMMISSIONERS FOR  
ENGLAND**

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DELIVERED BY  
LORD WILBERFORCE