

Press cuttings from church events over time. These include the demolition of the old church.

## Demolition of church is opposed

By DEREK BROWN

THE Redundant Churches Fund (RCF) has lodged a formal objection with the Church Commissioners against the decision by the Redundant Churches Advisory Board (RCAB) to grant a demolition certificate for the eighteenth-century St Matthew's Church at Lightcliffe, near Halifax.

The RCF, which offered to pay for the preservation and upkeep of the church tower, claims that it was not properly consulted before the RCAB reached its decision.

It is believed to be the first major disagreement between the two bodies, which were set up under the Pastoral Measure of 1968. There have been four other objections to the proposed demolition, including one from the Ancient Monuments Society.

St Matthew's, a Georgian church, was closed for worship about 1960. It is listed by the Department of the Environment as a building of considerable architectural and historical interest, but the Department has no statutory powers over Church property.

Miss Mary Jates, secretary of the RCAB, said: "The architectural merits of the church rested largely on the quality of the contents. Vandalism has destroyed all that." The board had considered the expenditure of public money through the RCF would not have been justified.

**Money available**  
The RCAB advised the Church Commissioners on about a hundred church buildings last year. The chairman is Lord Fitcher, a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons who is an authority on Roman churches, and the board members include the distinguished architects Lord Esher and Mr John Brandon Jones.

The board considers the merits of church buildings from photographs and reports prepared by the staff. The Lightcliffe church was inspected by Miss Jates before the board made its decision.

A spokesman for the RCF said it acknowledged that the nave and chancel of St Matthew's were beyond preservation. "But members of the Fund thought that the tower, which has also been spoiled by vandals, is still of interest and importance," he said, "and they were willing to make the money available for its main repairs."

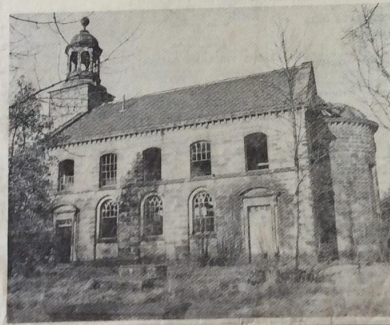
demolition certificate because the Pastoral Measure says that the Advisory Board has to consult us about money available for the preservation of any church which has been declared redundant, where it has to be preserved or demolished. In this instance we were told in their decision after it had been taken.

"We have enough funds to maintain any church of historic or architectural interest," said Dr William Oddie, secretary of the Ancient Monuments Society, who has sent a letter to the Church Commissioners supporting the RCF case. In it he says that the vandalism to the church had taken place because of the "dereliction of duty on the part of those who had the legal and moral responsibility for the maintenance of this eighteenth-century building."

The society agrees that the church and nave are beyond repair, but it is urging the Commissioners, who will consider the objections within the next few weeks, to retain the tower, which is a local landmark.



The eighteenth-century church of St Matthew at Lightcliffe, near Halifax, photographed inside and outside by Tom Sturtard.



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## Church tower may be saved

Yorkshire Post Reporter

EFFORTS to save the tower of an 18th century church which has been recommended for demolition after extensive vandalism appear to have succeeded.

Over the past 10 years the old church, formerly St Matthew's, at Lightcliffe, near Halifax, has been systematically wrecked. Last year the church authorities decided the only practical solution would be demolition.

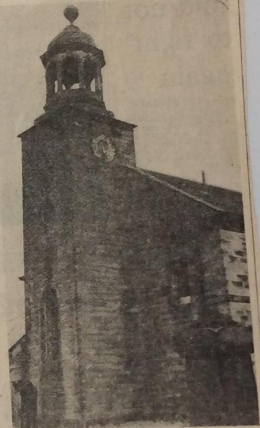
Two months ago, as reported in the Yorkshire Post, the Ancient Monuments Society wrote to the Church Commissioners to protest at this proposal pointing out that the church was listed as a building of architectural or historic interest.

### TOWER LEASE

Now a scheme has been drafted which would allow the tower to be leased by a Leeds-based organisation known as the Friends of the Redundant Churches and the remainder of the building demolished.

This society, which is concerned with the preservation of historic churches, has agreed to be financially responsible for the tower.

Mr. C. B. Beveridge, personal assistant to the Rt. Rev. Eric Trevelyan, Bishop of Wakefield, said yesterday: "Once this arrangement has



ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH, Lightcliffe, near Halifax. (A Yorkshire Post picture.)

been approved, I think all parties will be satisfied.

"The building has been very concerned about the possibility of vandalism, particularly to children playing in the building in view of the state it is in. He has been anxious to get it pulled down purely for that reason."

"Apart from that it is very difficult for the Church to justify spending money merely on preserving bricks and mortar when it could be better spent on the actual work of the Church."

On the other hand a number of societies interested in architectural matters have been anxious to save the building preserved. Apparently this church and particularly the tower is a fine example of Georgian architecture."

# Hooligans tear apart old church



Mr. C. R. Johnson, of Leyburn Avenue, Lightcliffe, near Halifax, a churchwarden at St. Matthew's for 22 years looks at damage done by vandals at Lightcliffe Old Church.

E.P. Reporter

A church that was probably the pride of a village when it was built nearly 200 years ago now stands as an empty shell, wrecked by vandals and shorn of anything valuable by thieves.

It is now awaiting demolition, which will, because of its condition, no doubt be welcomed by people who were once anxious to preserve it.

Formerly St. Matthew's, Lightcliffe, near Halifax, but for many years known as Lightcliffe Old Church, the building is an example of what can happen to a church when it becomes redundant and authority being given for demolition.

## BISHOP CONCERNED

The problem is one with which the Bishop of Wakefield, the Rt. Rev. Eric Treacy, is concerned. He has said he hopes the new General Synod of the Church of England will soon amend the Pastoral Measure which requires an interval of one year between redundancy and demolition order.

The Bishop says it is a national and not merely a local problem, but examples of vandalism in the West Riding include attacks on St. Mary's, Savile Town, Dewsbury, and St. John's, Barnsley, and Lightcliffe Old Church as one of the worst.

In fact, the Old Church had become disused before the Pastoral Measure was adopted by the Church Assembly, but the vandalism origin when related to the time which has passed since it was used for regular worship.

## BUILT IN 1775

The church was built in 1775 to replace Eastfield Chapel, and when a new St. Matthew's was built 100 years later a few hundred yards away, it was decided to retain the Old Church as a mortuary chapel, because its grounds were the village cemetery.

Funerals took place regularly until about 12 years ago, but with more people choosing cremation it became increasingly difficult to keep the church clean for the rare occasions it was required, explained the Vicar, Canon Frank White.

For the same reason, the annual service which had been held for continental remembrance, was discontinued about nine or 10 years ago.

## BOX-PEWS SMASHED

Since then however, the place has been wrecked. Not a window is left, the old-style box pews have been smashed into matchwood and all the lead from the roof and elsewhere has been stolen.

The historic organ has gone, stolen pipe by pipe. Even the bell, weighing about 3cwt, was taken.

The Vicar said vandals and thieves had got in despite the windows being screwed down and locks on the doors being repeatedly replaced.

## LIGHTCLIFFE OLD CHURCH

University of Manchester, School of Architecture. Mr. — Readers may not be fully conversant with the program of the Lightcliffe Old Church, etc. where the tower has recently been rescued with help from the Friends of Friendless Churches and some comments have appeared in your paper.

Lightcliffe Old Church was badly damaged by vandals and the nave was demolished some time ago but the fine tower has been retained and cleaned and repainted like an Italian campanile on the old church site.

The tower at Lightcliffe is an important Victorian one of the 19th century. The restoration work included closing the openings in the walls and a new oak door has been fixed at the base of the tower. Inside, some of the stonework of historical interest, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, are preserved.

The site of the church has not as this stage, been improved, but helpful suggestions for landscaping and use of the area have been made by Councilors E. Arncliffe and H. Hoyle.

Here is a unique opportunity for the local authority to take the initiative with a scheme for environmental improvement.

The Friends of Friendless Churches have been instrumental in the substantial work on the tower and there is evidence of an Lightcliffe. The local residents may not be aware of the fact that the tower is a ruin of the county. Yours sincerely, LEO T. L. MARSHMAN.

## Memorial garden plan rejected

A SUGGESTION that Brighouse Council should turn Lightcliffe Old Church yard into a memorial garden has been refused by two council committees.

Instead it was decided to order the Vicar of Lightcliffe, Canon F. White, to tidy up the graves and mend its front gates at the earliest possible opportunity.

Councillor Edward Arncliffe had both been concerned at the overgrown condition of the church tower, the only remnant of the old church. They suggested a memorial garden with a statue and flowers would be an attractive amenity for the area.

Councillor Hoyle had had discussions with Mr. White and he had no objection. A letter had already been sent to Mr. White recently asking that the church grounds be tidied up. The Town Planning and Redevelopment Committee suggested voluntary organizations could be enlisted to help.







An awning protects the Celebrants of Holy Communion at the open air service in celebration of 450 years of church history in Lightcliffe. The altar stands on the site of the East End of the original 1529 church.

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## The tl in fou

A black and white photograph of a religious ceremony in a park. A group of people, including men in clerical robes and women in long dresses, are gathered under a large white canopy. A large crowd of people is visible in the background, and trees are visible in the distance.

THE four-hour leisure centre debate boiled down to a split between those who wanted to stick with the revamped scheme and those who supported the Calderdale, Greater Manchester, scheme.

But the rest should be spent on improving other facilities. Councillor Patrick Phillips (Lib Greetland-Stainland) said the committee should look at which areas of Calderdale really needed new sports facilities, rather than plumping for a big centre. Calderdale Sports Council member Mr Harry Denton said local people would get better value

The money would end up being used to offset cuts in education and the social services.

Chief Architect Mr William Clarke said that to build at North Bridge, with access roads and car parks, would need the bulk of the £1.8m.

He warned that to build anything smaller at North Bridge than a 120ft by 120ft plot would cost more money than the £1.8m.

**CELEBRATIONS** for the 450th anniversary of *Lightside* Parish Church started last night with a floodlit Eucharist held on the site of the old St Matthew's churchyard. An exhibition of old documents, photographs and copies of original deeds are also on show in the St Aidan's Room in the Church. The festivities will finish tomorrow with a pageant by children from the Sunday School, based on national events over the last 450 years. The first *Lightside* Church, as it was built in 1529. It was rebuilt in 1730 and St Matthew's was built in 1875.

**Picture:** The Rev David Wilding, the vicar, and several local clergy take part in the service.

# Rugger player fought four men

The invitation was declined, said Mr Parker, one saying: "We don't fight four to one. That is not our style."

Barnes started dancing round, saying he would take them all on. Keith's brother, Jeffrey, was struck on the side of the face, fell and banged his head on the ground.

Then Keith got a blow on the head as he bent down to look at his brother, and his glasses were dislodged. Jeffrey Wager collapsed after being struck in the face by Barnes.

Mr Wishart was punched on the nose and fell back into the road in a dazed condition. He saw Barnes strike Michael Wager with his forehead, alleged Mr Parker.

Michael Wager went to assist his brother, Jeffrey, and was struck by Barnes on the face.



## Civic Trust fights to save an old church

**A**n eleven-hour bid is being made by Halifax Civic Trust to save the 105-year-old Lightcliffe Old Church which is almost certainly destined for demolition. Vandalism over the years have wrecked the once fine interior of the church built by a Lightcliffe man who, in 1770, made a special voyage to Russia to bring back timber for use in the construction of the marvellously elaborate roof.

The structure of the building is believed to be basically sound. With its distinctive west tower and dome, it is regarded by experts as a fine example of Georgian architecture of the period.

And the Civic Trust wants to see the building preserved and suitably restored and modernised. That is if a use can be found for it.

One idea is that the church— which has been wholly out of use for about the last ten years— should be converted into a multi-purpose hall for societies and clubs to hire.

### Views sought

And to test the feasibility of the idea, Mr. George Parker, secretary of the Civic Trust, has written to secretaries of social, cultural and sporting organisations in the Brightside and Halifax areas asking for their views.

"We hope sufficient organisations will show an interest to get the idea off the ground," said Mr. Parker.

If the interior was converted it would be large enough to seat 250 to 300 people at ground floor level for a lecture or film show.

"The hall could be adapted to suit many purposes including some indoor sports activities, theatre, musical performances and exhibitions," said Mr. Parker. But unless there is a positive response the church, which from a distance still carries an air of its former greatness, seems doomed.

In the opinion of the Wakefield Diocese Redundant Churches Committee the building should be pulled down because it is apparently of no further use. A final decision now rests with the Redundant Churches Commission in London. Once again, the key factor is—Can any use be found for the building?

### Burial chapel

It has not been used regularly for worship since 1870 when the new St. Matthew's Church at Lightcliffe was built, though it continued in use as a burial chapel up to a few years ago.

The Vicar of Lightcliffe, Canon P. White, wishes the Civic Trust well in its efforts.

"I have tried to preserve the building and failed," said Canon White. In the last year or two he had come round to the conclusion that the building was not likely to be saved.

The Civic Trust was right in assuming that the building could not be preserved unless a use could be found for it.

It was the only major building

of its period in the district and one of the special points of interest about the church had been its furnishings, almost unspoilt examples of 18th century workmanship. Today, the contents had been removed or smashed by vandals.

The old church was built in 1770 designed by Mr. William Walker of Crow Nest, Lightcliffe, who made that long journey to Russia to secure stocks of timber.

### Listed by Ministry

Designed after the style of the famous architect John Carr of York, it was one of the first churches in the country in which cast-iron shafts were used in the construction, to support a three-apsed gallery.

The church is mentioned in Nicholas Pevsner's 'Pioneers of Modern Design'—one of the

touchstones of architectural merit—and in recent years has been listed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government as being of special architectural and historical interest.

The Georgian Group has asked the Civic Trust if there seems any hope of saving the remains of a 'splendid' church.

Mr. Parker claims the building adds a lot of style and character to the environment in that part of Lightcliffe.

"Architecturally it is a fine building—and it would be a shame to see it demolished. But we have got to be realistic and the building can only be saved if it can be put to good use," said Mr. Parker.

**Picture:** An interior view of the old church. They are gathering wood and metal which will be sold for St. Matthew's Church funds.

## YORKSHIRE POST

LEEDS FRIDAY JANUARY 15 1971



ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH, Lightcliffe, Halifax, is threatened with demolition but the Ancient Monuments Society wants at least the tower to be preserved. (A Yorkshire Post picture.)

## Plan to demolish old church 'provocative'

Yorkshire Post Reporter

THE Ancient Monuments Society has written to the Church Commissioners to protest against plans to demolish the 18th century St. Matthew's Church at Lightcliffe, near Halifax.

The letter refers to acceptance by the commissioners of a certificate from the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches, that

the building is of such small historic or architectural interest that its demolition would not be objectionable.

"Since this church is a listed building this certificate is a provocative. The Redundant Churches Fund, which was set up for the express purpose of maintaining such buildings, is now prepared to take over the responsibility for at least the tower of the church."

The letter adds: "We hope therefore to hear from you that a scheme vesting the tower in the Redundant Churches Fund, so that it can be put to good use, is being considered."

But within the last few days, Brightside Council has served a notice on the diocese to say that the building is a dangerous structure.

Until about 10 years ago an annual service was held for sentimental reasons but then it was decided they should be discontinued, since then the church has been overgrown and a window is

left, the old style box pews have been smashed and all the lead from the roof and elsewhere has been stolen.

The historic organ has been stolen, pipe by pipe, and even the three cwt. bell is gone.

Yesterday, the Vicar of Lightcliffe, Canon Frank White, said he felt that the society's opinion would have been true a few years ago but vandalism had altered the situation.



# TIME STANDS STILL AT LIGHTCLIFFE

TIME has come to a standstill at St Matthew's church, Lightcliffe. The stationary hands of the clock high up in the tower point to twelve o'clock and are likely to stay that way for quite a long time—possibly until the new year.

Silent, too, are the bells which for years have regularly chimed for the quarter-hour, 12 for the half-hour, 18 for the three-quarter hour and 24 for the whole hour.

The villagers, as well as motorists and pedestrians passing along the main road through Lightcliffe miss being kept up to the minute. But time is stopped in the interests of progress.

While the clock and chiming mechanism have been dis-

mantled and sent to a Leeds firm to be electrified, the eight huge bells are being brought down from the bell tower to be re-cast into a lighter peal. It is some years since the bells have been rung regularly by hand.

## Lofty perch

The job of re-casting the bells will be carried out John Taylor and Co. of Loughborough—"home of the bells"—and expert bell dismantler and hanger Mr Eric Fowler is in charge of seeing that the bells are lowered safely to the ground, by means of chain, rope and pulley, from their lofty perch in the 65ft high tower.

The bells have probably never been dismantled since they were erected when the church was built in 1875. Biggest of the bells is the one-ton tenor which will be reduced to a quarter of the weight when the new peal is cast.

For the last ten years the daily job of winding the cumbersome clock mechanism has been done by local schoolboys who attend the church.

The clock modernisation is costing about £700. The church will use two legacies totalling £450 and Brighouse Corporation has made a £50 grant. Money-raising events and subscriptions are expected to make up the full amount.



Picture shows Mr C. R. Johnson (church warden), Mr Martin Brooksby, and Mr Eric Fowler standing by the bells before they are taken away.

*Lightcliffe News*

12/8/70

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# Courier

Monday, April 1, 1971      A      3p

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## Church demolition sets two tricky problems

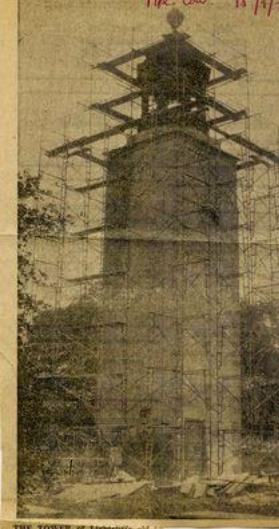
**DEMOLITION** contractors pulling down the old St. Matthew's Church at Lightcliffe have two tricky problems to contend with. One is clearly shown in this picture taken by 'Courier' photographer Hanson Carter today.

The main tower, at the end of the shattered skeleton of the church, has to be preserved, and the demolition 'banshee' has to be carefully directed so that the 40ft tower remains intact.

The contractor's foreman, Mr. Jack Kirby of Quilley, said: "It's a matter of taking some parts down literally stone by stone. So far it has gone very well and the tower is unharmed."

The other problem has been failing masonry and possible damage to graves. "Although the graves are only a few feet from the walls of the church we have got over this one by putting steel sheets over the tops of the stones," Mr. Kirby said.

11pc. cov. 15/4/71



**THE TOWER** of St. Matthew's church is being given a face lift by stone cleaning specialists. They are removing dirt which has accumulated over the 150 years since the church was built.

It was built by Mr. William Walker, of Lightcliffe, who made a special journey to Rome in 1775 for the timber and was used as the Parish Church of Lightcliffe until the new St. Matthew's Church was built in 1871.

Last year the church was in such a bad state that the Church Commissioners decided that it should be demolished. But they agreed to preserve the tower.

The Friends of Friendless Churches is now responsible for the upkeep of the tower. The masonry has been preserved, the windows have been replaced by wooden louveres and a door has been inserted.

Now the final touch is the sandblasting of the stone which is being done by Bradford sandblasting Ltd. under the supervision of an architect instructed by the Friends.

Any monuments the church has will be kept in the tower. The cleaning work is expected to be completed tomorrow.

T + A

Bob H. 15/4/71.

## 'Friends' save tower



The Georgian tower is all that remains of St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe, and it is to stay thanks to the Friends of Friendless Churches, who have leased it because of its historic and architectural interest.

The main part of the church, which was built in 1775, had to be demolished since it had been out of regular use practically from the time a second church was built in the parish in 1871 and vandals made it a favourite target.





Philip Tordoff

I was recently going through some 'vintage photographs' which I have accumulated over the years. The two enclosed copies may be of local interest to you, as they were taken sixty years ago, the exact date being 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1960. This was the year before I started teaching at Hipperholme Grammar School, and I was still using a rather primitive Brownie box camera at the time. In addition to the surviving tower, part of the old church is visible, not long before it was demolished. There were two severe gales in February, 1962, when some of the windows were blown in, and of course vandals got in and caused further damage - including that to the organ, which I believe was a Snetzler instrument. The young man in the tower was no other than Geoffrey Armitage, son of the much-feared George Armitage, headmaster of the Junior School. At that time, Geoffrey was going out with my late sister, Margaret, and he told me he had keys for the church and tower, so he showed me round. I understand from Bob Horne that Geoffrey himself has also died.

The other picture shows the view from the tower in the direction of Shelf, with the viaduct being clearly visible. John Brooke was particularly interested in both photos.

It has been a great pleasure to hear from you and to see the photos.