

# The History of St John's Church

Scunthorpe was a small agricultural township in 1861 with a population of 368. By 1911 the introduction of steel making had seen the population grow to 10,171. There was a need to extend the church provision due to the expansion of the steel industry. Also, in 1890 Crosby was designated a new ecclesiastical district separate from Frodingham, so a new church had to be built.

Rowland Winn the first Lord St Oswald gave the land to the town and built the church of St John the Evangelist at a cost of £20,000 (equivalent to £1.2 million today). The church was completed in 1891 and was consecrated on 15 April 1891 by the Bishop of Lincoln.

St John's Church was designed by architect J.S.Crowther and built of local Frodingham ironstone. The design of the church has many similarities with Manchester Cathedral as Crowther had restored the cathedral just before working on St John's Church. Crowther also designed an ornate font, pulpit and choir stalls for the church and St John's was the last building he worked on before he died in 1893.

The church was funded and maintained by Lord St Oswald who gave a yearly donation of £20 until 1907 and then after 1909 he gave £150 a year. Each ironworks usually paid £5 yearly. The first Reverend was Edmund Akenhead. He paid towards the vicarage, cross and curates' salary, while his wife paid for the altar and font. Later on, Reverend Boughton tried to make the church more self supporting.

The demise of the church was mainly due to its location, as the town developed in a westerly direction the congregation dwindled. The final service was held on 29 April 1984.

This impressive project attracted over £1.6 million in support from Arts Council England, The European Regional Development Fund and The Single Regeneration Budget. Today, 20-21 Visual Arts Centre offers exhibitions, activities and events for residents of North Lincolnshire, as well as regional, national and international visitors. Now in its eighth year, the centre has attracted over 350,000 visitors.

The name 20-21 was chosen because the project commenced in the 20th century and came to fruition in the 21st century. It also makes reference to the phrase 20-20 vision i.e. perfect eyesight - ideal for a visual arts centre.

In 1997 North Lincolnshire Council decided to restore the grade II \* listed building of St John's and find a use for it which would benefit the community. Many ideas were considered, from a local flea market to a homeless shelter. After years of debate and research it was finally decided the church would be converted into an arts centre. It took 15 months of construction work to restore the church to its former glory and extend it on its south side with a single storey building designed by architects, Allen Todd. 20-21 Visual Arts Centre opened to the public on 19 May 2001. Over 2,500 visitors came to the opening day.

# From Church to Arts Centre



St John's Church



visual arts centre

Thank you for visiting 20-21 Visual Arts Centre. We hope you have enjoyed your visit and come to see us again soon.



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20-21 Visual Arts Centre - 2003



St John's Church and shops on Scunthorpe High Street - c. 1904

For a month in April 2007, Tabitha Moses worked at 20-21 Visual Arts Centre, gathering local memories and photographs of weddings held at St John's Church. From these images she produced *Bride and Groom*, two collections of wedding-day trinkets: bride and groom images made into corsages or charms from vintage fabric and accessories. A 'wedding book' was made by a gallery assistant to accompany the exhibition.



'At 20-21...looking at the neo-gothic designs in the building and seeing the crossovers with design in Islamic buildings was very exciting', Halima Cassell



Halima Cassell worked as an artist in residence in the former nave area, for 12 weeks in 2008. A ceramicist with Islamic roots, Halima was inspired by the buildings ironstone pillars, geometric architecture and intricate stone carvings to create works such as *Sacred Conversation*, a group of six double seat sculptures in unfired clay.(pictured left).

Over the years, many of the artists visiting 20-21 Visual Arts Centre have been taken by the carving and architectural beauty apparent in the former St John's Church. Artists in residence have taken direct inspiration from the church and its history for their work.

## Inspiring Artists

