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Celebrations are planned to mark the 150th anniversary of St John the Divine Church in Horninglow later this month.

A special service on Monday, October 24, will mark the anniversary of the consecration of the Horninglow Road North church and will kick-start a year's worth of special anniversary exhibitions and events.

Building of the church began when the first turf was dug by local farmer John Hopkins on November 21, 1864, on land donated by the second Marquis of Anglesey.

John Hopkins of The Poplars in Rolleston Road financed much of the building project with contributions also coming from close family William Hopkins of Dunstall Hall. It was Martha Hopkins, John's wife, who laid the foundation stone on December 27, 1864.

With the first turf dug, work started on building the church at a rapid pace.

The building was designed by architect Edward Holmes of Birmingham and cost £5,935 to build with the main contractors being Lilley and Elliott of Ashby.

It was unfortunate however that builder Mr Elliott didn't live to see the church completed – he died in July 1866 age 58.

Building the church wasn't without its pitfalls as one worker – Joseph Perceful – fell around 90ft from the spire. Luckily he survived and was described as being 'pretty well again'.

Work was finally completed on the spire in 1865 with the weathercock fixed in place on October 28.

The first peal of the bells rang out on June 29 1866, with the Rolleston Ringers pulling the ropes.

The church was then officially consecrated by John Lonsdale, the Bishop of Lichfield, on Wednesday, October 24, 1866 with Rev John Auden preaching his first sermon on the Sunday to a crowded congregation.

At the time of St John's being built, Marston's still had a thriving brewery site in Horninglow and it shouldn't come as a surprise to see brewery money helping to fund the church.

Famous brewer John Marston is listed as one of the major benefactors of the church alongside the Hopkins, Turner, Tunley and Loverock families.

Further brewery links are then revealed among those who attended the official consecration in October 1866 with the list of guests including the mighty names of Sir Oswald Mosley, Mr Worthington, Major Bass, Mr Gretton and Mr Lowe, all of whom graced the collection plate very generously.

The first Horninglow parish priest, Rev John Auden, served from 1867 until 1877 and was the grandfather of the world-famous poet Wystan Hugh Auden.

It's no surprise therefore that when St John's wanted to celebrate its centenary in 1966,

the guest of honour was WH Auden who read some of his poetry following a special celebration ceremony.

St John's has had its share of problems over the years as one of its two Epiphany lights was damaged in a storm in the 1920s and then the building was damaged by tremors caused by the Fauld explosion in 1944. The church bells were also rare as they were made of steel.

This alone caused many headaches as what may have been financially economical at the time proved costly over the years.

The six bells now at St John's were originally from the Holy Trinity Church at Batley Carr in West Yorkshire. These replacement bells were installed in 1996 and the first ring took place on Monday October 21, 1996. The bells were dedicated by The Archdeacon of Stoke.

Now this month, the church is set to mark its 150th anniversary with a service at 7.30pm on Monday, October 24 and a special history day led by historian Dennis Bladon on Saturday, November 26.

Readers are asked to share their memories of the church in preparation for this history day.

Organisers would love to hear your memories and to share your photographs of St John's over the years.

Words supplied courtesy of Stephen Sinfield / the Burton Mail



Weekend at Hemingford Grey in 1987. Queenie Morris, Philip Farren, Doris Collett, Vi Leedham, Vera Wilson, Peggie King, Joan Dean, Jean and John Wood, Beryl and Charlie Lester, Pat Parker, Rose Jefferies. Picture by Philip Farren



In the kitchen at the old St. Johns Church Hall in Rolleston Road.

Picture by Philip Farren



Past and present clergy at the 125th anniversary celebration in 1991