

Chapel of St. John of Beverley North Parade

On North Parade near the corner with Duke Street there is a sign carved in the stone relating to The Chapel of St John of Beverley which is shown here, but nothing more to indicate it ever existed.



The wording would now be thought pejorative but clearly was not at the time which indicates that it has a certain antiquity. The article which follows was originally published in January 2017 in Guidelines, the magazine for the Mayor of Bath's Corps of Honorary Guides and describes what is known about this chapel.

Chapel of St. John of Beverley Audrey Woods

St. John of Beverley was born at Harpham in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and possibly came from a noble family who ensured he received a good education. He was a friend of the Venerable Bede and it is from him we know John was a member of the Whitby community under St Hilda. He was noted for his scholarship and was renowned as a teacher throughout his lifetime. In AD 687 he was consecrated Bishop of Hexham and it was in Hexham he is reputed to have taught a deaf boy sign language, making him the first teacher of the deaf. From Hexham he was given the prestigious Bishopric of York and around AD 700 he founded Beverley monastery in East Yorkshire to which he retired somewhere around AD 717.

During his lifetime, and also after his death in 721, many miracles were associated with him which later led to his canonisation in 1037. Henry V won the battle of Agincourt on the anniversary of this event and made St John one of the patrons of the Royal Household; his feast was celebrated annually on May 7th, the date of his death. Two ceremonies to remember the saint are held; on the Sunday nearest to May 7th there is a civic ceremony, and on the Thursday nearest to his death the well dressing in his home town takes place. Many chapels used by the Deaf are named after St John.

It seems little attention was given to helping the deaf until 1829 when Monsignor de Haerne was working as a Catholic priest in Moorslede, Belgium. His concern and interest led to him becoming Director of the Royal Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Brussels. In 1870 he founded the first Catholic school for the deaf in England in a suburb of Sheffield. This was known as the St John's Catholic School for the Deaf and was run by the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. In 1875 the school, with just 14 pupils, moved to Boston Spa, near Wetherby which still flourishes with 250 pupils, although the nuns left in 1998. The school is now

at the forefront of new techniques and ideas, and in 1989 one of their girls was the first to have a cochlea implant. Here in Bath a school for the deaf and dumb opened in 1843 at 8 and 9 Walcot Parade. This was not run by nuns, but three ladies are listed as residents there and it is possible they were the Matron and members of the teaching staff. There are very few records but one for 1931 tells of expensive alterations to the wash house, bathroom, cloakroom and larder. It was also reported that bathrooms and lavatories were sweet and clean, that bedrooms were clean and well ventilated, and the children's diet was good and varied. Three children had been in the sickroom and one pupil had died, but there was no information as to what the sickness had been. On a happier note, there were charabanc jaunts into the country. Boys attended up to the age of 10 and girls until they were 13. Day pupils were free but boarders paid £12 annually. In about 1868 an industrial school opened at 12 Walcot Parade where tailoring, sewing and basket weaving could train pupils for work. This was probably begun by an unnamed daughter of a vicar. The establishment moved to Poolemead House, Twerton in 1933

And what of the Chapel in the basement of the house that began the search? No record has been located to tell us when it was first opened, but it was used for worship and as a social centre until it closed in the early 1990's due to funding difficulties. I found that in the 1960's, the deaf residing in Devizes often came to Bath for social events but went to Trowbridge for worship. In 1949 it was reported that there was an excellent attendance at church services. The account book for 1950 starts 'carried forward' so there must have been an active group, but there is no record of where the chapel was although there is mention of a social gathering once a month in Holy Trinity Hall. The records for the Salisbury Diocese indicate that in 1960 there was concern at the lack of inclusion for the deaf in the north of the diocese and great efforts were made to involve the deaf in Trowbridge, Devizes and Warminster in social events. In 1965 there was a dedication ceremony of a deaf centre in Trowbridge by the Bishop of Sherborne, the Minister of which was Alan Mackensie. After 2001 there is no more mention of this centre.

I am very grateful to the many people who helped me piece the above information together. The Archivists of: Bath Abbey, St John's Roman Catholic Church, Royal National Institute for the Deaf, Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, Boston Spa School, Bath Record Office, Wiltshire and Swindon Historical Centre, Poolemead House, Twerton and the invaluable assistance of those who shared their personal knowledge.

Other sources: *Bath Chronicle*, *Bath Gazette*, Wikipedia.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Compiled by Mike Macklin

Other Premises and Locksbrook Cemetery

The 'Bath Institution for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb' was established by the family of Rev Fountain Elwin who came to Bath in 1832. The 1841 Census shows Fountain Elwin (aged 55), Rebecca Elwin (aged 55), Jane Elwin (aged 25) and Fountain Elwin (aged 30) living at Beaufort Buildings East but they moved later. The Institution occupied various premises in Walcot Parade and Vineyards and for more about these please see Peter Higginbotham's website <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BathDeaf/>.

One of those attending the Institution was an African girl known as Mumu, later Annie Jane Elwin. There is an article about her at <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/library-rnid/2015/02/> which quotes from Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education for October 1892,

"In 1846 she had been rescued by a British Cruiser from a slave ship and placed, with her liberated companions, in the school at Charlotte, established by Government for the purpose of receiving and educating liberated slave girls, and now under the charge of the Church Missionary Society. On hearing of the case, the committee of the Bath Deaf and Dumb Institution offered to receive this girl free of expense. Mumu was accordingly sent to England, and very soon made rapid progress in her lessons. She was of a very amiable, teachable, and affectionate disposition, and her health, too, was remarkably good. The instruction she gained

in a period of about five years was attended with the happiest results. After due preparation, and at her own earnest desire, she was admitted by Baptism into the Christian Church and received the christian names of Annie Jane [she also received the surname Elwin]. She then became deeply anxious that her mother should learn the truths of the Gospel and constantly prayed for her. Her father, who was captured, had been cruelly put to death before his child. She was afterwards, for a short time, in service of the Church Missionary College at Islington, but, subsequently, she returned to Bath, and remained in the Institution until her death, which occurred, after a short illness, in May, 1866. She died beloved and regretted by her friends, teachers, and companions. Her love of the word of God, her simple reliance on her Saviour, and her conscientious endeavours to discharge faithfully the humble duties of her station, evinced that this once heathen girl had become a Christian not only by profession, but also in deed and in truth. Certain marks on her forehead proved on inquiry that she was a princess in her own country."

The 1861 Census shows Annie J Elwin as a house servant at the Rectory at Holbrook, Suffolk aged 21. The head of household was Reverend Charles Frederick Childe but he was away on Census Day visiting Elizabeth Landon at 16 Royal Crescent, Bath with his wife. He had previously been Principal of the Church Missionary College in Islington. Charles Childe's daughter aged 30 and two sons aged 14 and 16 were at the Rectory and the Vice Principal of the Church Missionary College was visiting. This is presumably during the period that Annie Elwin was described as being '*in service of the Church Missionary College*' but, since she is not described as a visitor, she must have been employed at the Rectory.

Annie J Elwin died in May 1866 at the age of 25 or 26 and was buried in Locksbrook Cemetery where there is a memorial stone which additionally commemorates four children, presumably from the Institution, including George Spear who also came from Africa.

There is a paper by P J Bendall here

https://www.batharchives.co.uk/sites/bath_record_office/files/Mumu.pdf with more information about her, the four children and the location of the memorial at Locksbrook Cemetery.