

Scissors Paper Stone

Blog 6:

Who Was John Newton Mappin?



John Newton Mappin - with permission Picture Sheffield

Who was John Newton Mappin, who donated £14,000 for the building of St John's? A Google search for the Mappin name lists various Sheffield University buildings and Mappin Street in the centre of the town. These places are named to honour the philanthropy of Frederick Thorpe Mappin, John Newton's nephew, who was a steelworks owner, local politician and later MP for Hallamshire. Mappin & Webb, the luxury silverware company, is also listed, an internationally known success story of Sheffield and London. This enterprise is the culmination of the complex business activities of various members of the Mappin family - but not of John Newton Mappin, who did begin his working life in the metalworking trade of his father, but later became a brewer. There is also a Google Tripadvisor entry for the Mappin Art Gallery, which dismally, and misleadingly, states that the location is permanently closed.

John Newton Mappin has slipped from modern view, but in his time he was described as one of Sheffield's 'best known' men. As previous blogs have made clear, highly skilled craftsmen in the building trades created St John's, and the cutler James William Harrison provided the land on which to build it. In this and two later blogs I'll investigate the shadowy benefactor, John Newton Mappin, who gave around £14,000 or £1.5 million (in today's values) so that the church could be built.

The building project was part of the Vicar of Sheffield's Scheme of Church Extension of around 1877 to build an additional nine churches in Sheffield in five years. At a meeting reported in the Sheffield Independent of January 1877 the Archbishop of York said of Mappin that (he) 'is a very practical person and almost as soon as I heard he was going to build this church he made his appearance with a roll of plans under his arm'. Whether or not Mappin intervened graciously in the work of E. M. Gibbs, St John's architect, the building work progressed quickly. By May 1878 Mappin had held a 'rearing dinner' for the 100-strong workforce to celebrate the completion of the outer walls and roof (as reported in Mary Grover's blog of 15 January 2024).



Mappin Brother advertisement - with permission Picture Sheffield

At the opening of St John's in April 1879 at which Mappin was present, it was said that, 'Much thought and care and anxiety have gone along with the gift ... every power of the giver was employed in it. His liberal hand, his thinking head, his daily watchful mind, have altogether brought this house to its completeness'.

And after Mappin had died, at the laying of the foundation stone in 1887 for the new St John's after the old one had been destroyed by fire, Archdeacon Blakeney said that his 'great desire was to glorify god and do what was right in his day and generation'. Blakeney said he believed 'that Mappin never did anything that gave him greater satisfaction than the building of the church'.

Mappin's reputation as a good churchman is frequently mentioned in newspaper reports, and one of them says that he 'wanted an evangelical not a ritualistic clergyman' for St John's. His interest in the evangelical may have come from early experiences at the Howard Street Independent Congregationalist Church, where his birthdate of 13 February 1803 is recorded, and where he was baptised, and from Mount Zion Chapel, where his nephew Frederick Thorpe Mappin maintained he 'had an association' in his early years.



Howard Street Congregational Church - with permission Picture Sheffield

John Newton Mappin was a generous church benefactor in other ways. He was Churchwarden at the Parish Church 1854-58, now the Cathedral, a role which required both religious commitment and responsibility in practical matters and for keeping accounts. In 1857 he paid for the large stained glass window behind the high altar there, the first in coloured glass in the church. Alterations to the chancel required the old one, which was not coloured, and which he had also paid for, to be replaced. This was dedicated to James Montgomery who was much mourned at his death in 1854 as Sheffield's renowned hymn writer and social reformer. It's possible that Mappin knew Montgomery through mutual philanthropic interests. The window



Portrait of John Newton Mappin - photo credit Sheffield Museums

shows, as well as St Matthew, Moses, David, and St John, Mappin's coat of arms, and the crest and motto of the Mappin family, together with the words 'The gift of John Newton Mappin, churchwarden, 1857'. It was reported that Mappin, as ever a hands-on benefactor, 'being anxious to secure first-rate talent, invited several artists in stained glass, six of whom sent in designs. Mr Mappin consulted some friends and selected Thomas Baillie and Co. of Wardour Street, London', a prominent company which had exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

Mappin was also involved with the building of St Luke's Church, more often called the Sale Memorial Church, in memory of Dr Sale, Vicar of Sheffield, who died in 1873. A meeting to organise this was held at the Cutlers Hall with many eminent gentlemen and churchmen attending. Mappin is mentioned in a newspaper report as a member of this committee, and as is so often the case in press accounts of his philanthropy, at the end of the report is a list of wealthy subscribers, a roll call of Sheffield's eminent family names, with his name at the top of it, contributing £500 (about £52,500 at present values).

League tables of charitable giving like these appeared frequently in the press. They made it possible for readers to assess the relative wealth, piety and respectability of the subscribers who were listed in such detail. These characteristics were cherished by the Victorians, and helped secure the giver's social status, ensuring that they were 'well known'.

In my next two posts I'll look at Mappin's other acts of civic generosity and his work as a brewer, and make the case that he should be remembered for his role in the development of Sheffield's cultural life.

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The first Ranmoor church – with permission Picture Sheffield.