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Thomas Trivitt

Thomas Trivitt was born in Taunton, Deane, Somerset, England in 1813. He married, in 1848, Elizabeth Dunkley, a lady from Norfolk County and the same year emigrated to Upper Canada where he settled on the present site of Centralia. Becoming the first clerk of the township of Stephen, he held that office for several years. In 1852, when the Fifth Division Court of the County of Huron was organized at Centralia, he became its clerk. The court was later moved to Exeter but he retained the post. In 1857 he was named a Justice of the Peace.

Mr. Trivitt was a medium-sized man who had inherited an ample fortune which he looked after carefully by sound investments and simple personal habits. Evidently he had three main interests – birds, flowers, and theology. He was a scholarly man, well read theologically, and held very decided opinions on both politics and religion.

A warm friendship grew between Mr. Trivitt and the Clergyman, S.F. Robinson. Mr. Robinson was convinced that “the people of Canada need only to be shown what the Church of England is, to make a wonderful revival”. With this Thomas Trivitt agreed. This probably explains why Trivitt Memorial was built on such a grandiose scale.

Mr. Trivitt offered to become the donor of a new church in Exeter and on the 5th of May, 1887 Bishop Baldwin gave his consent to the plan.

Mr. Trivitt’s proposal read: “Thomas Trivitt, Esquire, proposes to the Churchwardens and congregation of Christ Church, Exeter, and to the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron, that he will erect on the Hamlin Lot, Main Street, to be deeded to the said Incorporated Synod, a substantial and commodious new church at the minimum cost of at least \$5000, any outlay beyond this amount to be entirely at his own option. The size and style of architecture to be decided on by a building committee composed of the Bishop, the Incumbent, the two Churchwardens, and the Donor, assisted by the advice of competent architects, as well as of the congregation occasionally called together by vestry meetings for that purpose (the said Churchwardens and congregation undertaking to provide the said site, properly drained and prepared for building, and also everything necessarily required within said church when built, such as heating, lighting, seating, etc., together with the appropriate Church organ) – when being guaranteed the following conditions, viz:- First, that the said Church for all time be called and known as “The Trivitt Memorial Church” – and second – that the Donor be allowed to have permanently placed within said Church as soon as consecrated, and at any spot he may choose, either a window or mural tablet with this inscription, or its equivalent, viz: ‘This Church was erected by Thomas and Elizabeth Trivitt as a grateful memorial of the many Divine favours conferred upon them, and was consecrated for the worship and service of God by the Right Rev’d Maurice Scollard Baldwin, DD., Lord Bishop of Huron, on the... day of... A.D. 1888.’



The cornerstone was laid by Bishop Baldwin on the 1st of August 1887 according to the service appointed by the Provincial Synod. Mr. Trivitt read an address to the bishop and handed him an engraved trowel with which his Lordship “well and truly in the Name of the Eternal Trinity laid the foundation stone”. In the cornerstone were place papers, both historical and biographical, with newspapers, coins, etc.

The plans for the church were drawn up, at a cost of more than \$1500, by the firm of Peter Jones and McBride of London and are a replica of a portion of Exeter Cathedral.

It is a fine specimen of early Gothic architecture, consisting of a nave, transepts, chancel, and tower – all substantially built of local white brick. Ohio sandstone trimmings are liberally used throughout and every opportunity of creating a massive and solid effect was utilized. The bosses, finials of the towers, some portions of the belt courses and the five Ionian crosses which finish each gable, are beautifully carved. The northern entrance is enhanced by a handsome open porch while the main entrance on the western side of the tower is through a double arch of lofty height and beautifully moulded. Each arch is supported on a pair of New Brunswick granite pillars with carved capitals.

Inside the walls are sand finished and painted. The woodwork is of white pine, stained an oak shade. The interior dimensions are: nave, 79 feet by 38 feet; chancel, 25 feet square; transepts, each 25 feet by 14 feet. The seating accommodation is 600 and with extra seats, 1000.

The tower is solid and massive, 17 feet square outside, not including the buttresses. It rises to a height of 92 feet. A spiral oak staircase in the turret in the southeast angle leads from the vestibule to the first floor. From here the top of the tower is reached by a well-built staircase. The belfry was specially built to hold a set of chimes.

The chancel rises three steps above the floor of the nave and contains the organ loft on the north side. The ceiling of the chancel was paneled in squares, painted blue with gold stars, and forming a groined arch over the organ loft. The door to the east of the organ loft leads to the crypt or basement where the coal cellars and gas-lighting machines used to be. A temporary Vestry was placed under the organ loft.

Trivitt Memorial Church was opened on the 23rd of December 1888, one week after the closing services in Christ Church. The bell, in “its new home”, rang for the first time that morning at 7:30 to call the people to the first service – Holy Communion, at 8 o’clock. The largest number of communicants (61) in the history of the parish were present. During the balance of the day three more services were held. At each of them Bishop Baldwin preached to congregations overflowing the seats; 650 at 11 o’clock; 850 at a Confirmation Service in the afternoon; and 1200 in the evening – a total of 2700 persons.

But Mr. Trivitt was not yet finished with his generosity to the parish. At a Special Meeting on the 17th of February 1890 the Rector announced that Mr. Trivitt had offered to provide \$2000 for a Rectory, \$2000 for a school-house (Parish Hall), and a Vestry, \$2000 for the purchase and installation of a Peal of Bells, and \$6000 which, at his death, was to be used as an Endowment Fund. It was Mr. Trivitt’s wish that the new buildings conform as nearly as possible with the architectural style of the church.

The church was consecrated by Bishop Baldwin on the 1st of December, 1889.