

St Mary's Luton

Celebrating 900, Building for 1000



The period 2021 – 2035 sees the 900th anniversary of the construction of St Marys Church Luton. At the same time, as a church we anticipate new development on Power Court to our east, and the possibility in time of the Mall to our north. We hope over the period of our 900th anniversary to build a strong and sustainable future for the church as it enters its tenth century of ministry at the heart of Luton. As we look forward it helps to remember our past and its context.

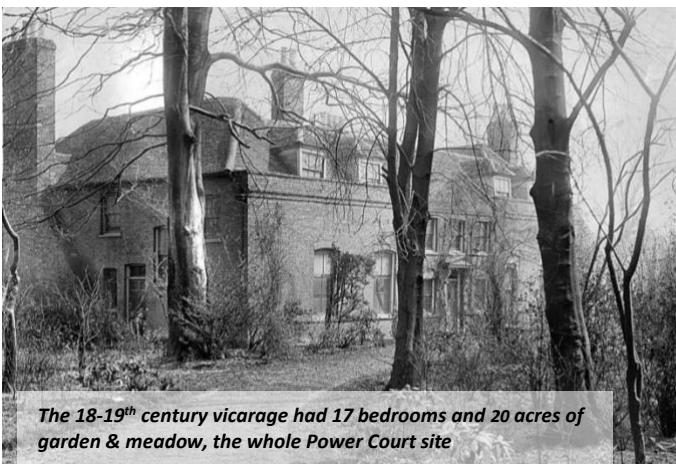
Context: Four scenes in the life of Luton

1. Until 1900. St Mary's Church has stood at the heart of Luton for around 1200 years. Today's church building was begun 900 years ago in 1121 and consecrated in 1135. For most of its first 800 years it was central to a prosperous market town which served surrounding fruitful farmland. By 1600 the hat making



trade made Luton even more prosperous, growing significantly in the nineteenth century and reaching its peak in the 1930's. Luton was established as the

southern centre of Bedfordshire and St Marys as its civic church alongside St Paul's in Bedford, and remained such until the 1980's. Glimpse St Marys in its beautiful green oasis of a churchyard and one could still imagine what once was.



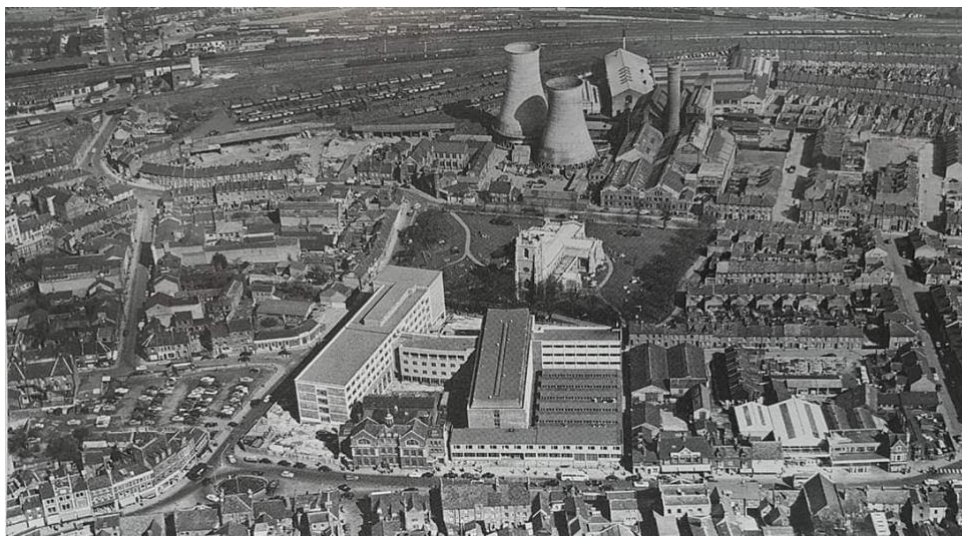
The 18-19th century vicarage had 17 bedrooms and 20 acres of garden & meadow, the whole Power Court site

2. 1900 – 1970. For the majority of the twentieth century St Marys had a very different outlook. Vauxhall Motors plant which begun in 1907 had the effect of transforming the town into an industrial town, with its labour needs



served by increasing numbers, first immigrants from elsewhere in the nation, and later from Ireland and the commonwealth. That development was enabled by power from Luton's own power station, developed on the site of the old St Marys vicarage and surrounding fields

just opposite the church. For several decades the market town and industrial centre stood alongside each other in uneasy tension; both were sources of prosperity yet pulling in different directions. No image is more iconic of this than that of St Marys alongside a power station with its two cooling towers.



3. 1970 – 2020s. Change came again for the church with the demolition of the power station in 1972, to be replaced by a light industrial estate, Power Court, with a dual carriage St Mary's Road now placing the church at the edge of town centre. Economic challenges through the 1980's and ultimately the closure of a substantial part of the Vauxhall works in 2002, with its impact on a large



associated industry, saw Luton become a post-industrial town with deprivation among the highest in the south of England. Within 30 years of its development Power Court was again run down and empty. Only the opening up of new university buildings oriented towards the church has seen an increase in passers by. Again symbolic, St Mary's has for fifty years stood on the edge of the town centre, for many just a glorious view through the picture window of the Mall, glimpsed while driving by or from the bus stop.

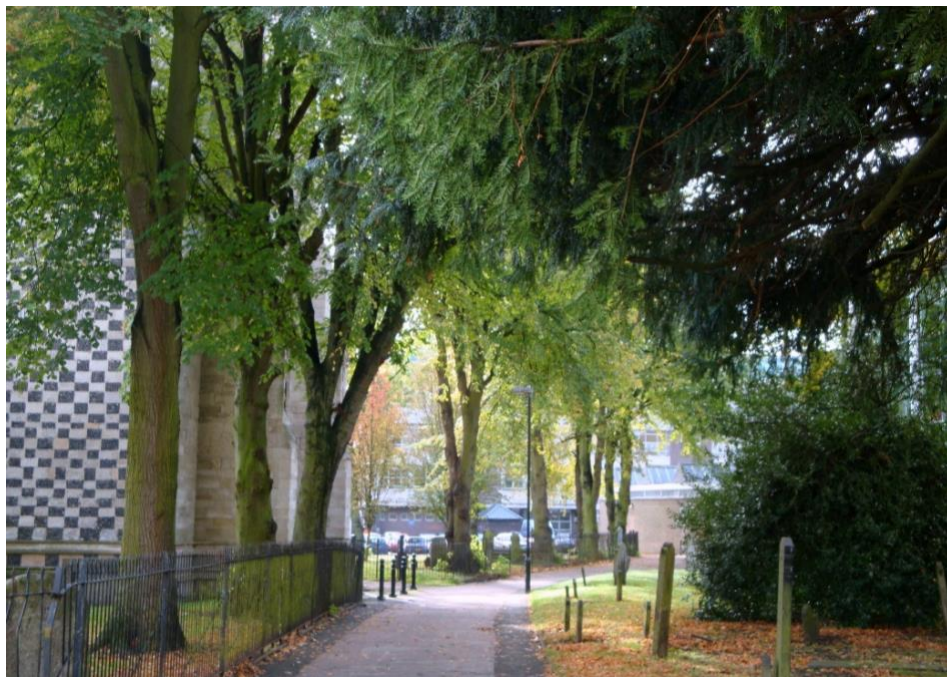


4. 2020s onwards. The 2020's see St Marys anticipating a new future. The plans by Luton Town FC for a new stadium, housing, retail and leisure on Power Court means the barren area east of the church running



from Crawley Green roundabout to the Luton station is set for regeneration. At the same time the new Town Centre master plan anticipates demolition of our end of the mall and replacement by apartment blocks with ground level retail and leisure. The challenge to all this is of course significant development in the post Covid,

economically challenged environment. Yet it is not too far fetched to imagine St Marys, surrounded by its green churchyard at the centre of a new urban village.



Celebrating 900; building for 1000.

Many challenges and opportunities await St Marys as we think about celebrating 900 years of our wonderful church and looking ahead to the next 100 years.

Among them:

- **900 years of this magnificent building**

Our future challenge/opportunity: Safeguarding St Marys heritage for the future. Increasing access to the church for visitors.

- **900 years at the centre of the Luton community**

Our future challenge/opportunity: Responding to a new context for the church in the Luton community – Luton Town Football Club stadium & Power Court development, and Mall redevelopment. Landscaping for the new era, using both churchyards as a green and restful space for all and giving better access to church and hall.

- **900 years as a gathering place for Luton**

Our future challenge/opportunity: Making sure the church is easily available for use by the Luton community. Improving access and facilities. e.g. welcome, hospitality, chairs, staging,

- **900 years of St Marys serving and seeking the good of the community.**

Our future challenge/opportunity: Laying strong foundations for the church's work in the ever changing Luton community to continue Reimagining the civic role of church in a rapidly changing town, paying particular attention to St Mary's playing a significant role in catalysing a new vibrant community in Luton. Developing the work of St Marys Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, with focus on social and community cohesion in the context of regeneration.

- **900 years of a worshipping Christian community at heart of town.**

Our future challenge/opportunity: Adapting as necessary our wonderful facilities to serve the future mission and ministry of the church. Developing funding to enable resilient ministry to multicultural & multifaith Luton.

This brings together heritage, our future civic role, our physical place, our service to community and our 'core business' as church. The church will

look at how it uses the time frame of 2021-2035 to look at these five strands. It is important to note:

1. This period will give the church a long enough period to have separate a number of discrete but interrelated streams, each with its own own core identity and objectives and funding streams.
2. The overall project is big enough to attract the involvement of key people from within the church, the town and beyond.
3. It allows us to do something quite significant in Luton that people can buy into in different ways, and thus secure the church in the town's future.



The Friends of Luton Parish Church.

'The Friends' as a charity has been a vital part of St Mary's story since 1965, raising well over £1million to help in maintaining the fabric of the church and enhancing its beauty for future generations. Projects funded include conservation stonework; revision of church lighting; repositioning of the pulpit; provision of internal glass doors; and protection of the stained glass windows. Their work will be a vital part of the work anticipated; while we would hope through it to see the Friends strengthened for their future role.

October 2022: Work so far.

Our thinking about this project began in 2019 as we concluded the huge task of renewing St Marys church heating that had dated from 1865! The prospects for the future were made mention of at the Friends annual service in October 2019, but in early 2020 as we were about to look at what it would mean we went into lockdown. We are now picking up this project after 2.5 years, thankful we still have a further 13 years before we complete our 900!

Current work involves replacement of existing chairs with lightweight stacking chairs making the church space much more flexible for the many uses it has each year; and renewal of the boiler in the 1969 extension. The St Albans Diocesan Advisory Committee have been consulted over possible work in improving facilities in the church, and work in our churchyards.

Renewing our churchyards.

As the Power Court site is developed over the next three to four years we hope to to be able to renew our churchyards in such a way as to enhance their role as a resource to the community, especially those living in flats in the vicinity of the church, studying at the university or working in the town - as well as passing by on the way to a Luton game! It is also an opportunity to make entry to the church easier and enhance our welcome. And also importantly we must safeguard and environmentally enhance this vital green space in the centre of town.

Celebrating 900; Building for 1000 is a developing project of St Mary's Church, Luton. For more or updated information contact Celebrating900@stmarysluton.org or see www.stmarysluton.org

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