

Then and Now: From Arable to St. Mark's Church



St. Mark's Church stands on a plot of land on the corner of the Queensway and St. Mark's Road, adjacent to Madam Road roundabout. It is surrounded by the homes of its parishioners, mostly red brick, and built since the silver jubilee of Queen Elizabeth the second. North Worle, from the Madam roundabout, along St. Mark's Road and back to Ebdon Road has a fascinating history, and has perhaps undergone greater change than any other corner of Worle.

If we go back to 1838 and the Tithe Map we find a field system sporting a wonderful array of names: Castle Batch; Lamas Pitts; The Leg; Madam Three Acres and Vurdills. This last name, Vurdills, is the spot chosen to build the new St. Mark's Church in 1977. It would be good to find that 'Vurdills' has some relevant significance, but I have been unable to find any. The only references seem to

indicate that it is a surname.ⁱ In 1838 Vurdills was owned by Edward Stephens and tenanted to Isaac Printer. The land is described as pasture.

An obvious feature of this area was the course of Madam Rhyne and Madam Lane, wending their way through the landscape until the rhyne turns sharply east at Four Acres, but the lane goes merrily on before dying out. The curved feature indicates the parameter of the raised ground at Castle Batch. A pleasant spot, we suspect, mostly surrounded by open grassland. It is here that we find the water features of 'Lamas Pitts' and 'Castle', which it is still possible to locate today.





The aerial picture, left, was taken in July 1946 and reminds us that very recently there were fields, all cultivated or used to graze livestock. We can still see Madam Rhyne winding away to the north east but now the remains of the W.C. and P Light Railway line is visible in the landscape.



The photograph, left, taken in 1949 gives us an appreciation of the rural idyll. It was taken on the bend of what is now Bideford Road, south of St Mark's Church. Madam Rhyne can be seen to the left of the photo and the man with arrow is in Madam Lane, near the culvert.

By 1977 the plot of land where St Mark's Church now stands was owned by Amy Gertrude Day, who sold it to Second City South West Builders Ltd. One of the conditions of the planning permission for extensive house building was that a Church should be provided and the ownership of the land [Vurdills] was transferred to the trustees of the Ecumenical Parish of Worle. The area became known as Church Meadows Estate and the building of St Mark's Church commenced in late 1979/early 1980. The building work was completed and the first service held in March 1981.

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ⁱ It seems that Woodfall's Practical Treatise on Law of Landlords and Tennant, 1856 quoted the case of Birdwhistle v Vurdill. "It is part of the law of England that the law of the country where a marriage is solemnised shall be adopted". Entitlement to a dower appears to be the primary issue here.