Presentation given by Hilda Lord

at Christ Church’s Celebration service

on 28th June 2015

This church means a great deal to me. It has been an everlasting influence and source of comfort and a spiritual home throughout my life.

I was born in Bradley fold Road, just a few yards from this building. My bedroom overlooked the church and the churchyard. I was baptised here, as were my parents and grandparents and many other relatives. Many of us were married here.

At about three years old, I started going to Sunday School, where we sat on wooden forms, with our teachers sitting on wooden chests, which contained bibles and prayer books. From there our teachers led us up to church, as happens today with our Sunday school children. Later in my teens, I became a Sunday School teacher and later still I became Sunday school superintendent, jointly with others, for about forty years. In 1971, I received a certificate of thanks and commendation from the Bishop of Manchester. Things have changed much since that time, but when our present Sunday School children are led into church by their teachers during the morning service, I realise that the message of Christ’s love is being passed on to coming generations in our church, just as it has always been.

I always remember what a great occasion Sermons Sunday used to be, when in addition to the choir singing anthems etc., we had a children’s choir from Sunday School, which I trained to sing their own hymns of praise during the service. The girls all wore white dresses and veils on their heads. They sang at all three services, sitting on small chairs in front of the choir stalls. The church was always packed at every service on Sermons Sunday, with extra chairs placed at the end of each pew, and on some occasions in the evening, there was an extra service in the churchyard, as there was not enough room for everyone inside the church. An old harmonium was played for hymns outside in the churchyard. We also had a procession on Sermons Sunday morning (similar to the one we had just a few weeks ago) with the village band playing. At the end of the walk, we gathered around the church gates and always sang the hymn “The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord”. Whenever I hear that hymn, happy memories come back to me and I am sure to other members of the congregation.

We also had a procession with the band playing on Whit Saturday. The village band practised in a wooden building in Bradley Fold Road. In later years, we had a Sunday School Queen, who headed our procession with her retinue. I wonder if, this morning, there may be someone in our congregation who was one our Sunday Schol Queen (*at this point Angela put her hand up)* or a member of her trainbearers.

The week before the sermons, the churchyard was a very busy place, with great activity. Many people came to scrub and clean their family gravestones and place lovely flowers on the graves. In my memory I can still see masses of pink carnations, blue scabious and white gypsophila, everywhere you looked, a lovely sight. Living close to the back gate of the churchyard, my mother was kept busy in the week before sermons, providing buckets of hot water for people, usually old friends, to clean their family gravestones. She was also busy handing out cups of tea to many of her friends who had travelled, to attend their family grave.

Until 1964, when there were extensive repairs and alterations to the church, in addition to the present gallery, there were two side galleries, which on special occasions were often filled with people. Whilst the building work was being carried out to the church, services were held at our Mission Church, St Oswalds (which is now a Masonic Hall). A number of kind car owners ferried people to and from services there. In 1970 the mission church of St Oswald was closed, due to falling numbers in the congregation. The communion plate was given to St Andrews, Hillock; the pulpit, lectern and alter rails went to St Aiden’s mission church. The sanctuary chairs, a prayer desk and the credence table were place in our parish church.

The harvest festival was also a great occasion. On the Saturday there were many people in church, decorating the font, organ, scree, choir stalls, in fact everywhere with fruit and flowers. On Sunday we sang the usual Harvest hymns and the choir sang anthems. On Monday morning all the fruit and flowers were distributed to the elderly and sick people in the village.

In the 1930’s or thereabouts, we had a special service called Band Sunday, when the village band sat in the gallery and played for all the hymns. As I has two uncles who were members of the band, I always felt very proud of them.

At this church we have always supported the Children’s Society, which used to be called the Waifs and Strays. Until 1973 we had joined other churches at their Christingle service. Here at Ainsworth we has a small committee of six ladies who organised Bring and Buy sales etc. to raise money for the Children’s Society. We had done this for many years. It was decided in 1973 that we should have a Christingle service here in our own church and we managed to get support from many kind people who supplied the necessary goods, oranges, tape, raisins etc. in order to make the Christingles. Our small committee gathered in church on the Saturday afternoon and made about 150 Christingles. The service on the Sunday afternoon was well attended and people gave generously. The tradition has continued since that time for 42 years, more recently being held on a Sunday evening.

During my life there have been a number of vicars serving our church.

Rev Alfred wood, who baptised me. I am still in touch with members of his family.

Rev Wilfred Metcalfe. I was confirmed during his ministry. His daughter Winifred gave me piano lessons.

Rev Kenneth Bullock. I have remained in touch with Kenneth and his wife Margaret. Unfortunately neither of them are well at present.

Rev Allan Flaherty, who very sadly died at a comparatively early age. His wife Venetia takes some of our services.

Rev David Griffiths, who still attends occasional services here along with his wife Brenda.

Of course, we now have our present vicar Dave Thomson, who will be guiding us through the inevitable changes which are taking place in our Deanery. I would like to thank him and his wife Polly for all that they do for us in the parish.

More recently, we have been pleased to welcome Rev Elaine Larkin. We hope she will be happy here.

I look back with gratitude to our church, which has been such a great part of my life. To all those who have helped me, given me Christian values to aim for, and for all the friendship I have receive over my 87 years, to all those past and present, I say thank you and may God bless all of you