

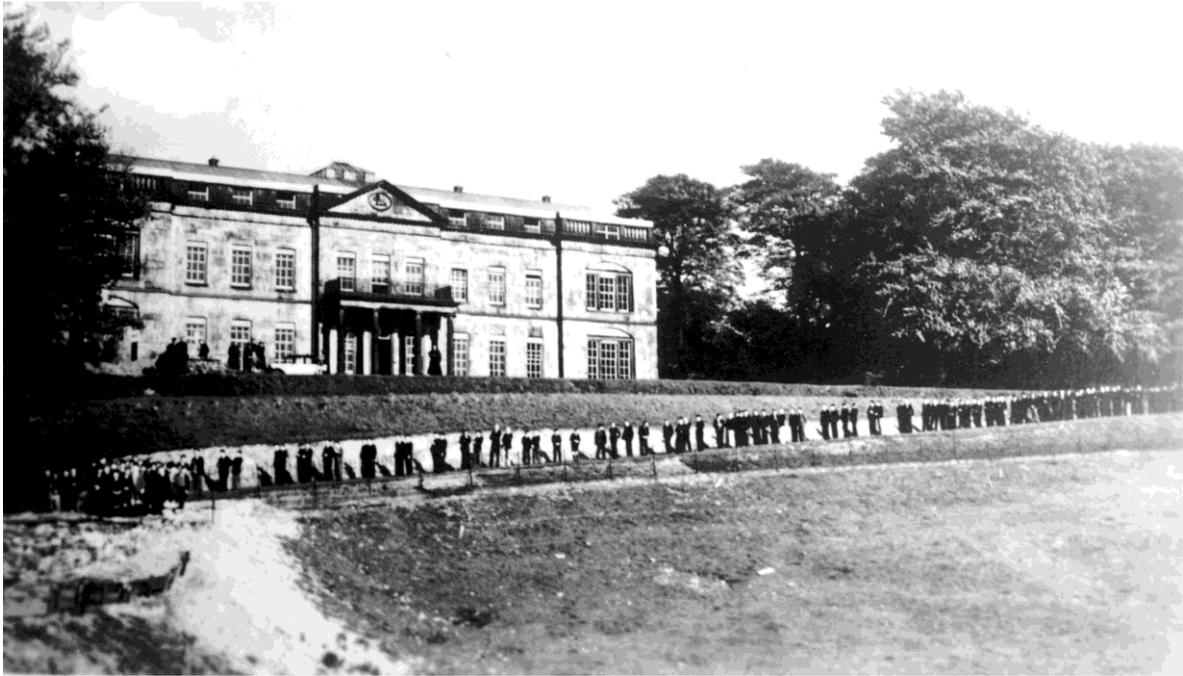
A Search for the Men Who Built the Shrigley Church

1st April 2009 marked the 75th Anniversary of the cutting of the first sod for the building of the Church of Saint John Bosco at Shrigley on the day of his canonisation in 1934. The completion of the work of building this church was marked by a solemn opening five years later on July 24th 1938.

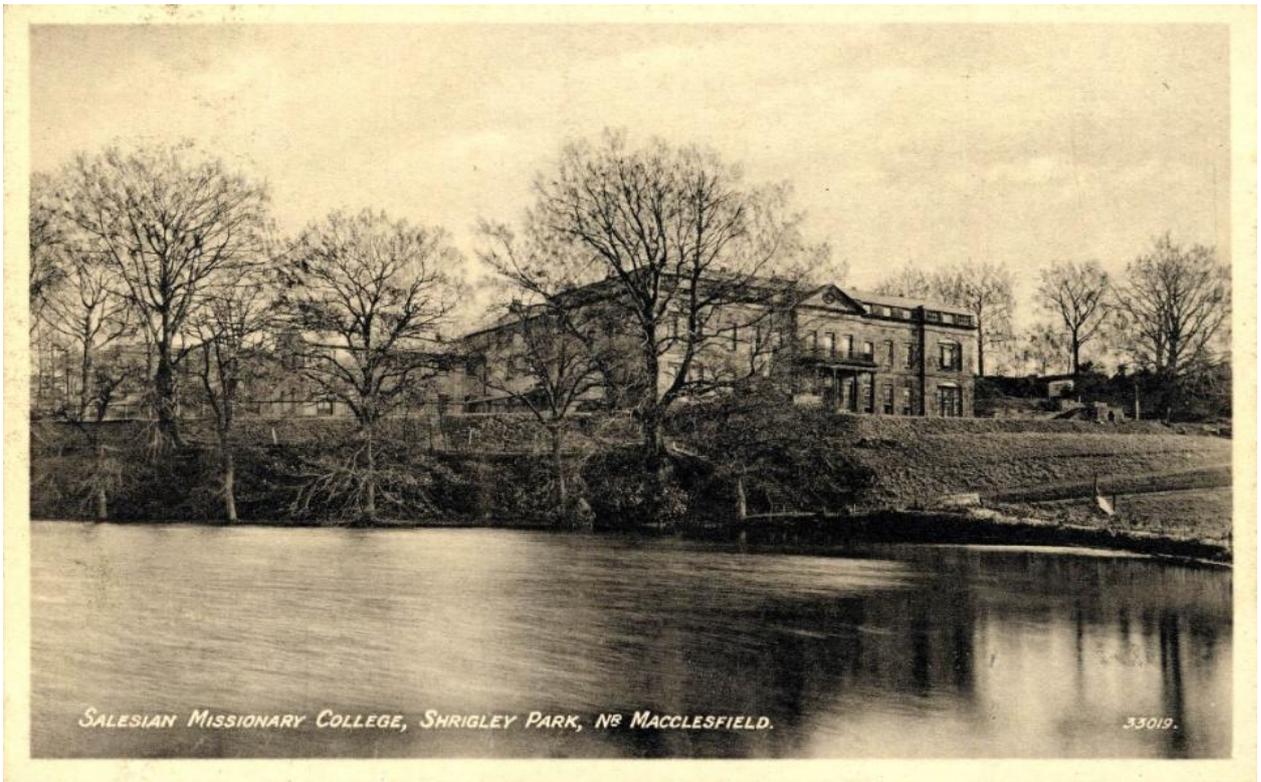


The cutting of the first sod on 1st April 1934

It was appropriate, therefore, for the Shrigley Association to mark the anniversary. Though the building no longer serves its original purpose, its enduring magnificence proclaims to any observer what that purpose was, and the Salesian and Shrigley Association Archives have a substantial collection of photographs to show the work of preparing the site, quarrying the stone, completing the building and landscaping the surroundings.



Shrigley before the church was built



Early work on the site of the church can be seen



The ground plan has been marked out, workmen are on site

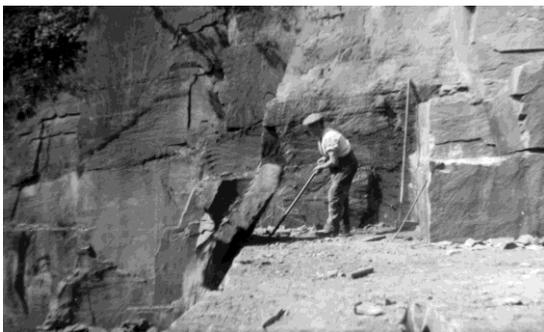
Faded, sepia coloured photographs may be attractive to some people but they must be given a focus to have general appeal. The unknown men, the quarrymen, the builders, the stonemasons, the roofers and the artists who are seen in these photographs who created the finished monument, collectively have the power to invest these old photographs with something more than nostalgia. Their hard work and craftsmanship are evident in what they created. The building methods of an earlier age and the harsh climate of Shrigley's hilltop location are to be seen as challenges that were faced and successfully overcome.

Who were these men - not the Salesians who willed the result, nor the architect who created the design – but who were the working men who built the church? Did they have personal stories that are still worth telling as part of a project to mark their achievement? Most, if not all of them, must have died long ago. Do they have descendents who can tell us about their lives?

Because a local firm, John Clayton Limited, of Sunderland Street, Macclesfield, was responsible for the work, the men it employed must have been local too, living in Pott Shrigley, Bollington, Macclesfield and other places within easy reach of the site – workmen's bicycles can be seen in a shot of the quarry – it might just be possible that if the photographs could be publicised someone might exclaim, "That's my grandfather!" or "That's my father!" and be able to give names and personal details of men long dead.



The quarry



Quarry masons at Shrigley

Louise Davenport, then PA to the manager at the Shrigley Hall Hotel, suggested that a search for such people might begin at 'the drop-in centre' in Bollington. What she was referring to was *The Bridgend Centre* in Palmerston Street. Its publicity leaflet states that its aim, as a Community Social Enterprise, is 'Putting the Heart back into Our Community'. Ann Mayer, the Community/Heritage Worker on the staff, welcomed the enquiry and suggested the use some of the photographs in a display which she would mount prominently to appeal to the many elderly people who use the centre who were the target audience in the search.



The appeal for help

Fred Watts advertised himself as a Wholesale and Retail Confectioner and Tobacconist of Water Street, Caterer for Missionary Sunday at Shrigley Park. Fred had a daughter, Alice, Derek said, who did darning of socks for the boys at the college. Other than that, Derek was unable to help with the search for those who worked on the building of the church.

The mention of darning socks, however, led Peter Roebuck to remember that there was a reference in a footnote in his book, *The Foundation Decade at Shrigley*, to a photograph in an early edition of the *Salesian Bulletin* of a group of local women who did this kind of work for the College. Fr Patrick Sherlock SDB, Provincial Secretary, found and copied the photograph and accompanying article for us.



Blessed John Bosco's Guild

This group was known as *Blessed John Bosco's Guild*, which was, in the words of the article, "composed of ladies from the neighbouring towns, who come regularly to the College to mend and look after the boys' linen". This photograph was subsequently passed on by Derek to Fr Francis Mageean SDB, parish priest. Visiting a parishioner, Harry Potts, born 1921, he showed him the photograph. He not only confirmed Derek's information about Alice Watts, and identified her, but also identified his own mother and an aunt as members of the Guild in the photograph.

Although this information was of interest as relevant to the history of Shrigley in its first decade, it did not advance the search for the identification of the craftsmen who worked at Shrigley.

While many of the elderly who had seen the display had been interested, none had come up with any identification of the men working at Shrigley. However, on the day when it had been arranged for the display of photographs to be collected from The Bridgend Centre, where they had been on display for a month or so, there was a request that produced a lead.

Ann Mayer had a note, written that very day, naming someone who had not visited the centre, but who wanted to see the photographs as he had an uncle who had worked as a stonemason on the Shrigley church. She gave the address and phone number of John Plant who lived in Bollington Cross.

John Plant looked thoughtfully at the display, focussing on the best of the enlargements. He exclaimed, "That's my uncle!" as he identified his Uncle Jim, James Lynch. He spoke most movingly of a man who was more than the name 'stonemason' implied. He was a man of learning, of wide interests and talents, a compassionate and devoted family man. As a young boy, John had listened and learned things from his uncle. He remembered his uncle's hobby of collecting rock and fossil samples, something that had led, he thought, to his uncle's choice of profession. He spoke of his interest in astronomy, of his correspondence with Sir Bernard Lovell, astronomer at Jodrell Bank, the space exploration and tracking centre a few miles away near Holmes Chapel. His uncle was a musician, as was John himself.

Most movingly, he spoke of James's care for a son who had had a serious accident while travelling by bicycle to his father's place of work at Shrigley. Though the details of the accident were unclear and not fully explained, details of the effort that the father James put into the rehabilitation of his injured son, also called James, were vivid still. The need for the son to relearn how to write, with left rather than right hand, was indicative of the level of injury sustained in the accident. The son's subsequent achievements, of playing chess well enough to be able to beat a British Grand Master, and of acquiring an education that led to a successful life and career were both fostered by the father's devotion.

Unwittingly John made an error in identifying his uncle in the collection of photographs. A picture of his uncle was eventually found, but not amongst those initially displayed. However, John was fired by our search for information on the builders of Shrigley's church. He took our display, intended only for The Bridgend Centre, to ask Fr Mageean if it could be displayed at St Gregory's Church to continue the search for information. The display was put up there for several weeks.

John also knew that his uncle had another child, a daughter, and though he had lost contact with that side of his family, he had exchanged Christmas cards with his uncle's daughter for many years. Though he had not seen her for a long time, he still had her address.

A letter to Mrs Joan Handley in Macclesfield, asking for information about her father, included a copy of the photograph John believed to be of her father. The letter went unanswered for a week or two, then one evening there was a phone call from a young lady, ringing from Cambridge, introducing herself as Sue Lynch, niece to Joan, granddaughter to James Lynch. Joan was now in a home and unable to answer her own post. Sue travelled up from Cambridge regularly to visit her aunt and attend to her affairs. On her visits to Macclesfield Sue stayed in her aunt's now empty house.

Her first piece of information came as a shock. The man in the photograph thought to be James Lynch was definitely not her grandfather. There was a problem. John Plant had said the man was his uncle. Sue Lynch said the man was not her grandfather.

John would have been closer in age to his uncle than Sue, a young lad when James was in his prime. Sue, born much later, would have known her grandfather when he was precisely that, a grandfather, a much older man. John had discussed the man in the picture with few doubts.

How could the conflict be resolved? It was clear that the two of them were talking about the same man. There was no doubt about that. They both spoke of his talents, his interests, about the accident to his son, the devoted care that had been lavished on the boy who had had such a bad accident, the person who was, in fact, Sue's father. Anecdotes were related in almost identical terms. Surely a grand-daughter could not be wrong about her grandfather. Equally surely, a nephew could not be wrong about an uncle who had played such an important part in his young life.

Conversation with Sue and John made it clear that James Lynch was much more than a builder of walls. This man had worked on the Macclesfield War Memorial, responsible for much of the lettering on that monument. He had had a long and distinguished career, as was evidenced by an article about him from an edition of The Manchester Evening News from November 1951 illustrated with a picture of him working as a mason. He had worked on the Leek Clock Tower, on churches in Alderley Edge and other public buildings in the area.

Though the achievements of James Lynch were not in doubt, the identification of him in photographs was a problem. The resolution of the difference was no closer, as Sue initially identified Philip Tilden, the architect of the Shrigley Church, as her grandfather. Undoubtedly both men had similar features, the pictures being examined were scans of photographs over seventy years old. Sue thought Tilden's picture, from the 1930s, and her own from the 1950s both showed the same man.



Philip Tilden, left, Architect

To compare two photographs, one of Tilden in the 1930s, the other of Lynch in the 1950s, and to come to a quick conclusion was not easy.



Philip Tilden, left during the building of the church, right at its opening its opening 1938



James Lynch in 1951

Sue Lynch began going through her aunt's possessions, looking for anything relevant to what could establish her grandfather's role in the building of the Shrigley church. John Plant already shared that purpose, and having seen the 1951 photo of his uncle, he was sure he had got the wrong man in his earlier identification. This was an easy mistake to make under the circumstances.

By the time Sue and John met, however, Sue had been through more papers and had come up with fascinating details of her own father's accident, which John had referred to, on the

road from Macclesfield to Pott Shrigley all those years ago. More importantly, it clarified her father's and her grandfather's roles on the Shrigley workforce.

The first impression of the son's accident, from John, was that he had been riding his bike, bringing his father his lunch, as a son would, from home to work, perhaps because he had forgotten it in the morning. However, there had been more to it than that, and the reason was, as Sue Lynch knew, that the accident had given her father what he called an out-of-body experience, interesting in itself but with further details that are pertinent to the original purpose of seeking to know more about those who built the church.

James Lynch, the elder, had been born in Macclesfield in 1897 and had attended Macclesfield Art School. He married Miriam Plant at Macclesfield Parish Church in 1920 and had two children, James born in 1921 and Joan in 1922. During the war, Lynch had seen action in France on the Somme and other battlefields serving with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He had met his wife while on leave.

The junior James Lynch's accident is best appreciated in full from his own hand-written account, illustrated by the sketches he added.

I was masoning for a firm of builders, on a new Chapel for a Salesian Order College; the site was near by the college at the small village of Pott Shrigley, some 7 miles from Macclesfield. There was my father, who was the foreman, 2 other masons, 3 quarry masons, known as stone dressers and myself, the apprentice.

I enjoyed the work, as I drove the chisel with the hammer, I felt the stone followed my very thought. I was right handed.

As the youth in the group, I would do, when asked, other tasks that came along. The circumstances of my last task would lead to a most extraordinary experience.

I was asked to go to Macclesfield, by bicycle, and fetch a heavy mason's mallet from the mason's yard. As the firm's lorry was returning to Macclesfield, I put the bike on the back of the lorry and got a lift back to town.

Back in town I picked up the mallet and started my journey to the chapel site; I was pedalling nice and steady when, at about two miles out, I saw, at about 100 yards ahead, a lorry. In those days (1930s) lorries could not go too fast at the best of times, and this was loaded. The road was a good road with a footpath on one side.

I stepped up speed to a fast lick, in the hope that I might steal a tow from the back rail rod (one held on with one hand to the back rod) of the lorry. As I approached to grab this rod, I was then moving at speed, I began to lose control of the bike and I veered over to the right hand side of the road, and saw for one fleeting moment, an oncoming lorry. Then, black out.

Then I was aware that I was looking at myself from about 6 to 8 feet above in the air and about 8 feet away. At this point I would like to mention that I am very myopic and in normal circumstances would not see a face, let alone details at that distance.

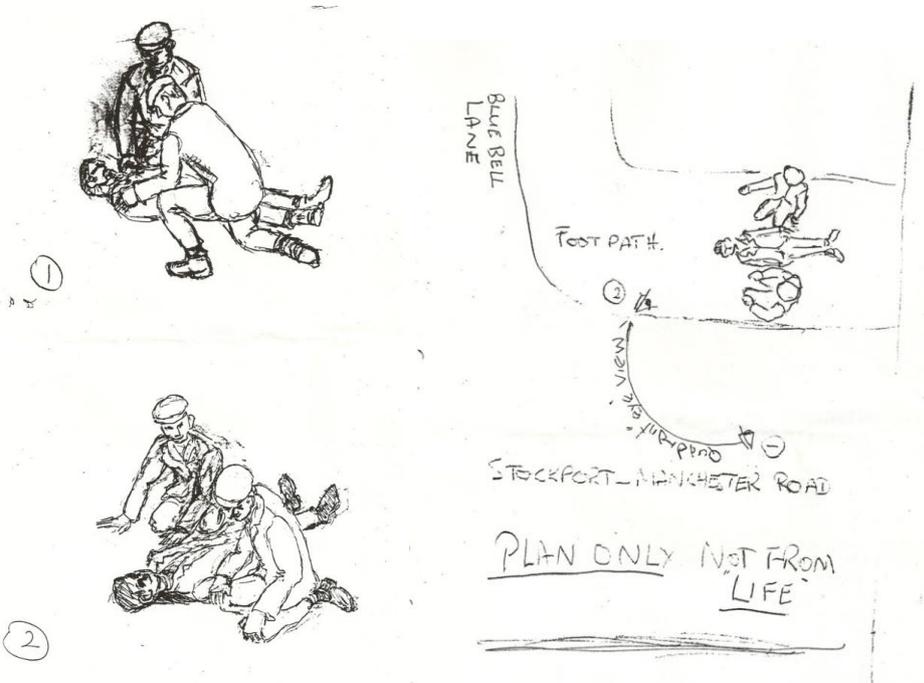
I had been placed on the footpath, that was on the left hand side going out of town. I saw myself and two men, both were kneeling beside my prostrate body, one of the men I knew, he was the village

policeman P.C. Twigg, a very tall, thin man and well known in that area (known as Tytherington) the other man I did not know was a stoutish, smaller man.

From my vantage point (that is Jim 'A' in the air) I could see myself (Jim 'B') lying on the footpath with my legs going away in perspective and my head nearer to Jim 'A', my right side being the nearer side. P.C. Twigg knelt beside the prone body of Jim 'B' on the right hand side. He wore a flat cap, a dark jacket and trousers, though not matching. I (Jim 'A') noticed that P.C. Twigg wore black boots with cycle clips. The other man was on the left hand side of me (Jim 'B') was similarly dressed though I (Jim 'A') could not see his boots as the body of Jim 'B' obstructed the view. He also knelt.

I awoke in hospital. I had received a blow heavy enough to fracture the left hand side of my skull leading to some brain damage. But I was young enough to recover and to become a successful artist, but now I am left handed.

I have thought many times since of the experience of "seeing myself". Did I die but the strength of my "self-hood-ness" that was left in my body pull back a kind of essence that was trying to escape? Or did I touch another dimension of a parallel universe? Without spectacles!



The fact that the young man was actually employed on site at Shrigley is of great interest, and leads to speculation about his age when the accident occurred. The first sod of the church was cut in April 1934, when the boy would have been 13 years old. The church was completed and opened only in July 1938, when he would have been 17 years of age. As there were, in Peter Roebuck's words "long periods of inactivity ... and it was only from the early autumn of 1936 that building work became rapid and sustained" it must be deduced that it was well after this date, when the superstructure had risen well above the foundations, that mason's skills would have been in full demand, and the request for young James to go to the mason's yard would have been made. So perhaps his accident took place sometime after late 1936, possibly 1937. There was severe weather in the winter of 1937 and 1938, when snow lay on the building site for several weeks. The sense one gets from

the tone of the account that it was likely to have been in better summer than in bad winter weather.

Most interesting in the account of this accident, is the information that the elder Lynch was foreman in a workforce of seven, including 3 quarry masons.

Sue Lynch's aunt, James Lynch's daughter, sadly died in 2008. Sue continued work on clearing her family papers. During this she came across some photographs and negatives showing her father and grandfather at work in the 1930s. The photographs of James Lynch cleared once and for all the confusion between him and Tilden, who was, obviously, a much taller man than James Lynch.



James Lynch, left



James Lynch, centre

Only one of Sue Lynch's photographs can be identified as taken during the building of the Church, at Shrigley itself, though it might be argued speculatively that the one above right shows work being done on what might be a marble altar, which could be one of the seven Shrigley altars. In this photograph, below, James Lynch is third from the left. In all the photos we have of him, his status in the group is indicated by his always wearing a collar and tie. That this is a picture taken at Shrigley is clear. If we compare it with one from Fr Bill Boyd's Album which is in the Association Archive, the caption of which tells us that the photograph was taken in 1935.



A previously unseen photograph from Sue Lynch's collection



'Church under construction (Shrigley 1935)' – Fr Bill Boyd's Album

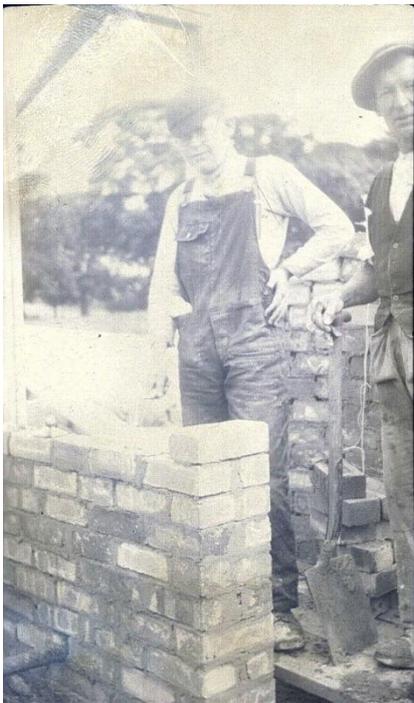
The workman on the extreme left appears more clearly in another archive photograph. This, interestingly, is the man John Plant initially identified as his uncle in the next photograph.



From the Shrigley Archive

(The location of the taking of this photograph can be identified precisely as being adjacent to the doorway carved during the 1950s by Fr Luke Connaughton, along the corridor that now leads up to the Health and Fitness Centre of the Shrigley Hall Hotel.)

Another photograph – unfortunately in a poor state – shows James Lynch the younger, Sue’s father, John’s cousin.

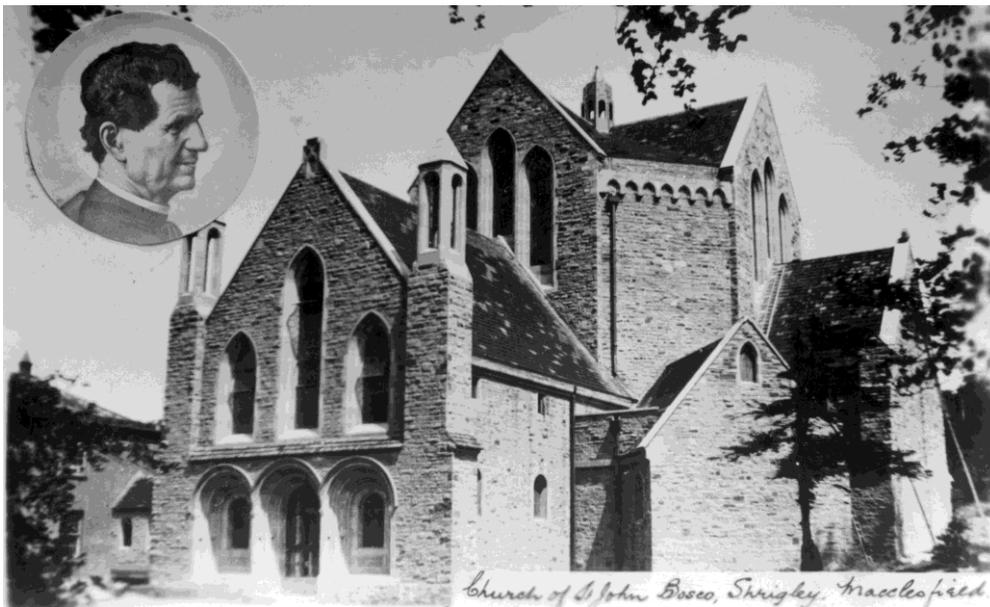


James Lynch, the son

He is wearing spectacles, having referred to himself as ‘myopic’ in his account of his out-of-body experience. In that experience he saw himself clearly without spectacles. If that is a trowel in his right hand, then the picture shows him before his accident, as after it, he wrote, “I was young enough to recover and become a successful artist, but now I am left handed”.

What has been found out about James Lynch shows that the foreman in charge of the masons on the building of the church was a talented, able and caring man whose story deserves to be heard. His son, also a worker, however briefly, at Shrigley, we know to have had an unusual story to tell. Had work been begun earlier, in the search for those who built the Shrigley Church it is likely that the other men who appear in archive photographs would have revealed themselves to have been, each in his own way, as worthy of our attention.

As it is, they have only our admiration for the workmanship that produced the still distinctive building that was the Shrigley Church of Saint John Bosco.



Mike Kilduff

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