

St. Paul's, Zealand

The story of Anglican worship in the Upper Keswick Valley stretches back to the period of Loyalist settlement and the formation of York County in 1786. At that time, the present Parish of Bright was part of the parish of Queensbury. The Rev. John Beardsley may have been the first missionary to travel to the remote portions of these districts, when in 1789 he baptized 112 people between Fredericton and Woodstock. In these early years, services were infrequent and held in the neighbouring areas of Prince William, Dumfries, Queensbury, Douglas and the Keswick Valley in barns or in shaded groves in the summer and in settler's log cabins in the winter.

The first church building in the Zealand dates from the early 1840s, when the Rev. John Dunn, the first rector of Douglas, reported in 1843 to the Church of England Society that there was an unfinished church in the Upper Keswick Settlement. Later, in the mid-1850s, and under the rectorship of Rev. G. Goodridge Roberts, there is a record that over one hundred people on average were attending Sunday worship in Zealand. By 1866, the original St. Paul's Zealand, sometimes known as "the Upper Church", was not meeting the needs of the local people and the decision was made to construct a new church next to the original building. The second St. Paul's Church was consecrated by Bishop John Medley on January 2, 1868.

The parish of Bright was formed the following year. It included the lands west of the Keswick River that had once been part of the parish of Queensbury. In the midst of the political debates surrounding Canadian Confederation, the new parish was named in honour of one of the greatest English orators of the time, a spokesman for Parliamentary reform, and member of the British Parliament, John Bright, (1811-1889). St. Paul's Church, Zealand, built in the Neo-Gothic style, serves as a landmark in the Keswick Valley, a building that reflects the rich heritage of the parish and of Keswick Valley itself. The church has been lovingly maintained over the years, with repairs and renovations made to the facade and interior fabric of the church by local parishioners.

Gregg Finley