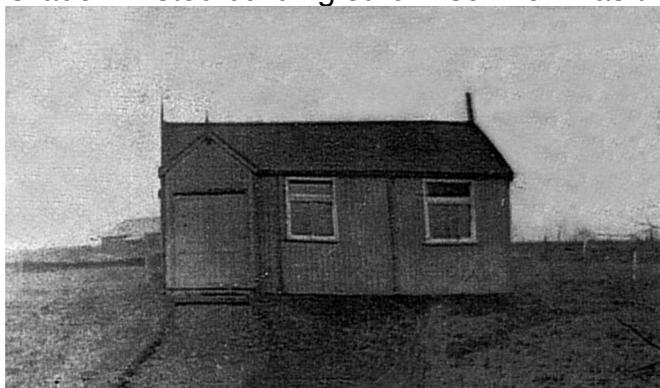


5. St. Matthews RC Church



Restrictions on Roman Catholicism began to be lifted after the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829. Subsequently, a Catholic chaplain was retained for the private chapel of the Riddells of Cheeseburn Grange some 8 miles west of Ponteland. They had kept the faith alive in very difficult and often brutal times for Catholics, their priests and protectors, and they were now able to follow their faith more openly. In the later 19th Century the priest used to travel to Ponteland from Cheeseburn to say Mass in a rented cottage in the West End of the village, and also in a cottage next to Neasham House (a Grade II Listed building otherwise known as the “Doctor’s House”).



A significant change came when, in 1903, the first church dedicated to St. Matthew was opened in a wooden shed (pictured) on the present site. Later, in 1947, the then chaplain, Father Doyle, ceased to be the resident Chaplain at Cheeseburn and moved permanently to Ponteland.

Father Doyle began straight away to plan for a new church on the same site as the wooden shed, and from that date until the completion of the church and

presbytery in 1950, services were held in Smith's Café, which then occupied a site on the opposite side of the road and was a popular venue with cyclists. With the arrival of the new building, the original wooden shed was moved to behind the Church and served as a chicken-coop for the hens which were kept by Father Doyle's housekeeper. The local Catholic population subsequently increased such that the church had to be further extended, and these works were completed in 1978. The shed, which had given so many years of service, finally disappeared when a new Parish Hall was erected in 1992 on the same site. [1]

The Church itself is of brick and slate construction and presents a pleasing modern façade to the road. In a very real sense, it symbolizes the long journey to re-establish a significant Catholic presence in Ponteland.

[1] "Images of England; Ponteland." Pub. 1999. ISBN 0 7524 1806 8
John Turner. Tempus. pp. 57 & 64 – 66.