

**A SOLID BUILDING – AN OPEN FELLOWSHIP**

**A History of Beckenham Baptist Church (Elm Road Chapel) 1883-1983**

**by**

**Leonard W. J. Phillips and Robert J. Gardiner M.A.**

## PREFACE

‘Man, can these bones live again?’ . . . . .  
‘Prophesy over these bones and say to them,  
O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’ . . . . .  
and they came to Life and rose to their feet,  
a mighty host.”

Ezekiel

Many dusty archives have been perused to produce this history and the joint authors express the hope that they have been able to communicate something of the pleasure they have experienced in bringing to life again those outstanding characters who emerge from the past and the whole host of ordinary folk who together are “the Church.”

The reader will doubtless notice a considerable difference in style between the first half of this narrative and the second half. My partner in this enterprise, Mr. Robert Gardiner, writes as an historian and is sufficiently remote from his period viz. 1883-1933, to be objective in his approach. In dealing with the local history I was equally detached but when writing about the second period viz. 1933-1983, I found this very difficult as I joined the Church at Elm Road in 1933 and I was therefore considering men and women whom I had known and events through which I had lived. My comments will therefore be inevitably coloured by my own observations and impressions and I pray forgiveness if occasions worthy of comment have been missed and souls worthy of mention have been neglected.

We are grateful to all those who have been responsible for the preservation of the Church archives which are particularly rich and full. We are deeply grateful to all the writers of Church Minutes since 1883 – especially those with legible writing!

With regard to the illustrations we would have been lost without the advice and practical help of Mr. Tony Baker AIP who produced new negatives and large prints from photographs dating back as far as the 1880s.

I am also very conscious of the debt I owe to Miss Dorothy O’Dell and Miss Muriel Uglow who kindly checked my grammar, healed my split infinitives and corrected my spelling.

It is also a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to Miss E. Plincke and her staff in the Local Studies Library at the Bromley Central Library, for her advice and for cheerfully hauling up great dusty volumes of *The Beckenham Journal* from 1883 onwards for my perusal.

In writing the section on local history I was greatly helped by the following works:– “*Bromley, Beckenham and Penge 1750-1965*” by Bessie Taylor Ph.D. “*A History of Kent*” by Frank Jessup.

We hope that this small work will give some pleasure, present the truth unadorned and worthily mirror the pilgrim progression of the Saints who have worshipped down the years in Elm Road Chapel.

***Leonard W. J. Phillips***

## PERSONAL NOTE

It has always been true that historians reveal almost as much of themselves and their own times as they do of those people and the times of which they write.

Pirandello, in his play 'Six characters in search of an author' wrote – "A fact is like a sack, it does not stand up until you put something into it." I have not hesitated to fill the sacks. Working as I have been, almost entirely from documentary material, with little in the way of reminiscence to help me, I am sure that there are occasions when this history fails to catch the true spirit of the time. For these failures and any other errors of which I expect there are some, I take full responsibility. I would, however, like to thank Mrs. Aileen Penny and the late Mr. George Brush for the helpful interviews they allowed Mr. Len Phillips to record and Miss W. Evens for being so ready to respond to any questions I asked.

I also happily acknowledge the help of Rev. G. Rusling of the Department of Ministry at Baptist Church House, and Miss P. Neville, its librarian, for making available copies of 'Freeman' and Baptist Church Handbook. Other sources consulted include:– Underwood. 'History of the English Baptists.'

Marchant. 'Dr. John Clifford.'

Fullerton. 'C. H. Spurgeon.'

My main thanks must go to Tina, my wife, for her encouragement, for her patient endurance of my temper and for her careful reading and correction of my typescript. Finally, I thank Mrs. Joan Worthley for typing the fair copy for the printers. This she did at very short notice under severe time pressure, but very cheerfully.

I dedicate my section of the history to Michael Walker, for it was his inspired ministry that drew me to Elm Road where I have found such happiness.

**Robert J. Gardiner**



"The Steward's House, Beckenham Lodge Farm circa 1875.  
Site of the present Church"

## LOCAL HISTORY

The migration of population from inner London resulted directly from the building of railways, and it was that movement of population which created the need for Elm Road Chapel, as it was first known.

Beckenham was not of course created by the railways. It is mentioned in a charter dated 973 A.D., when the Danes were harrying the coast of Kent, and it appears in the Domesday survey of 1086. It was settled by the Jutes and in Saxon times formed a hundred with Bromley. It continued to be so linked until two independent urban districts were formed at the end of the 19th century. The origin of the hundred is now obscure and is variously surmised to have comprised 100 families or 100 sulungs<sup>1</sup> or units of land (maybe originally both). It certainly facilitated taxation and in times of danger provided a fyrd or Anglo-Saxon Home Guard. Kelsey, Foxgrove and Kent House were all 13th century manors.

So much for ancient history. Let us now endeavour to understand something of the living conditions of people in Beckenham from about the middle of last century. It is a sobering thought that there was a cholera epidemic in London in~ 1831 and that the first sewer, to drain the main streets of Beckenham, was not laid until 1858. The remainder of the town was not satisfactorily drained until the 1880s, the Croydon Corporation Sewage Works at Elmers End being established in 1875. Gas Street lighting first appeared in 1864 when the road from the County Bridge, over the Kent House Brook, to Beckenham Junction was illuminated. There is a record of a 3 ½ lb salmon trout being caught in the Ravensbourne at Bromley in 1869 but the brook was rapidly polluted by ammonia from the gasworks and effectively sterilised! For those who are interested in 'the unspeakable pursuing the inedible' the local hunt continued to meet until early this century. In 1849 there was a steeple chase from New Farm, Croydon Road to Sydney Cottage (presumably near where Sydney Road now runs) with the Chaffinch Brook as one of the jumps. A fair was held in the Fairfield or Tuns Field, in the Christ Church – Three Tuns Area until 1860.

Issues of the Beckenham Journal from 1883 to the turn of the century throw an interesting light on local conditions and the character of the Victorians. They reveal a very paternalistic society. When the son of Albemarle Cator (owner of the Cator Estate) came of age in 1883, the event was marked by a presentation of a hare and five shillings to every man on the estate. It is recorded that the winter of 1885/6 was bitterly cold with "great hardships for the labouring classes." There was no work, no pay and children were shivering with cold and crying for bread. Worse, the men pawned the tools of their trade for bread and were unable to work when the weather broke. The poverty trap is not a new phenomenon.

The village pound, for the reception of stray horses and cattle, was sited at Thornton's Corner where the High Street bends round up to St. George's Church and was formerly adjoined by the village cage, used by the parish beadle to lodge inebriates. There is an amusing record in the Journal of the rather inept felting of elm trees by the pound. Apparently a small boy was whipped by the top twigs as a tree fell and ran off home making a great noise, a lady bystander had hysterics and an unemployed glazier standing by threw his cap in the air when a shop window was broken.

The police station on Church Hill was built in 1884 and a consignment of revolvers was received for use on night duty. In the same year one William Morland, greengrocer, was fined 10 shillings plus 10 shillings costs for driving a pony and van furiously – galloping at 13 m.p.h.

Milk was available locally at 4d per quart (a high price compared with today's price) from The Maple Farm Dairy, Maple Road, Penge which kept 60 cows, Avenue Farm Dairy, Avenue Road and Ousley's Dairy, Sydney Road.

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<sup>1</sup> The sulung was both a unit of assessment and a peasant landholding unit, found only in Kent. Like the corresponding units in other counties, the sulung was derived from the vocabulary of ploughing, *sulh* being the Old English word for a [plough](#). The sulung appears normally to have been twice the area of the customary [hide](#) or [carucate](#), approximately 240 acres.

The name of the Rev. Samuel Harris Booth, first minister at Elm Road appears in The Journal for March 21st, 1885, as one of eight gentlemen on a committee for the administration of The Brickfields Explosion Fund for the dependents of five men killed in a boiler explosion at the Mid Kent Brick Works, Worsley Bridge Road.

The general rate in that year was 2 shillings in the pound, a reduction of 5d from the previous year.

A complaint in the press sheds some light on children's amusements:— "We have just escaped from the dangers of hoop trundling, to find our eyes in daily jeopardy from the whips of little boys engaged in top spinning."

In July 1885 there was a fire in Southend Lane and the engine couldn't go because the horse was ill! Mr. Purvis and his gallant men proceeded to the scene by cab. Apparently no one thought to put the cabhorse to the engine — maybe the cabman wouldn't have it.

The condition of the roads on the Cator Estate was a subject of complaint in 1886 when it was surmised that the Cators must be in League with the bootmakers. Almost a century later Chaffinch Road is at last being made.

These were of course the days of Empire when the energies of younger sons were expended in securing and holding far outposts. 1883 saw a great disaster in the Sudan in the annihilation of the army of Hicks Pasha and was followed by even greater disaster in February '85 in the fall of Khartoum. Whatever one's feelings about the moral issues of this campaign one is left in breathless admiration of the heroism revealed in the despatches from the front. Heroism born of an absolute confidence in the rightness of their cause and an inability to believe that they would lose the last battle. Faced by heavily armed opponents and often at an enormous disadvantage in numbers, the regiments formed square and advanced to outflank, outmanoeuvre or die. It was the spirit which built the Empire and the same spirit which achieved remarkable feats of civil engineering at home. It is an interesting fact that our church was built in 12 months from the laying of the foundation stone.

It was perhaps significant that following the reverses in the Sudan the Russians launched an attack on the Afghan border in April '85. That was of course the Russia of the Csars — it hasn't changed much. At the missionary services at Elm Road in April, the Rev. Samuel Harris Booth spoke of probable war with Russia. He protested against any attempt to rouse the war spirit, either here or in Russia. "Some of us remember the horrors and tears and deaths of the Crimean War."

The Boer War, the last of our imperial wars, seemed to cause scarcely a ripple in the life at Elm Road. There appears to be no reference to it at all in the church minutes which indicate complete absorption in domestic matters except for a minute in October 1903 reading as follows:— "It was felt that in face of the important events in our own Country as well as abroad called for Special Prayer and waiting upon God. It was resolved that next Thursday meeting should be 'Special' for our own Country and for Bulgaria and Macedonia."

Vital dates for us were those when the railways felt their way into Kent. The line to Beckenham Junction opened in 1858 and the Hayes line in 1882, but Kent House Station was not built until 1884 and Clock House Station until 1890. The effect of the railways may best be gauged by considering the population figures over this period. The figure for Beckenham in 1851 was 1,688. By 1871 this had jumped to 6,090, by 1883 to over 13,000, by 1901 to 26,331, by 1939 to 71,010 and by 1961 to 77,290.

Before the arrival of the railways all goods were despatched by carrier and two carrier carts still plied between Bromley and London in the 1880s. The 'Excelsior' Coach still made summer journeys from London to Tunbridge Wells in 1892. Tillings' Horse Omnibus ran on a route to Catford, Sydenham, Penge, Beckenham Junction from 1895 but was withdrawn in 1914. The toll gate was removed from Kent House Road in 1883 and the village pond removed from Beckenham High Street, by Thornton's Corner, in 1885.

In 1901 a joint tramway scheme was proposed on behalf of Beckenham, Bromley and Penge Councils, to run from Crystal Palace Parade via Penge, Beckenham, Shortlands Valley to Mason's Hill., Bromley with a branch along Croydon Road, Penge to link with the Croydon

system and another route through Bromley from London Road to Hayes Lane. Beckenham however feared that the tone of the district would be lowered by making it "more accessible to the working classes". Penge alone adopted trams in 1906 and these were powered from the Electric Lighting Installation and Dust Destructor Works, opened at Arthur Road, Beckenham in 1900.

Beckenham opened a bus service in 1905 and by 1913 there were five services operating in the Bromley, Beckenham and Penge area by the London General Omnibus Company.

It is interesting to record that a precision electrical engineering company, trading under the name of Muirhead, opened in Elmers End in 1895.

This was the start of industrial development although agriculture continued to be the dominant activity in the area until 1901.

Beckenham achieved local self government in 1878 when the Parish was divided into five wards, Copers Cope, Eden Park, Langley Park, Lawrie Park and Manor House. In 1894 the Beckenham Urban District Council was established and Langley Park and Lawrie Park Wards were sub-divided to make a total of seven Wards. The period 1878-1914 was one of suburban growth, changes in local government to provide services for the new population and the departure of the gentry whose mansions were either demolished or used for other purposes. Provision of local amenities included the opening of the Croydon Road and Alexandra Recreation Grounds 1891, the first public swimming bath on the site of the present Beckenham Baths 1904, the Churchfields Recreation Ground 1907 and Kelsey Park, on 26 acres of the old Kelsey Estate 1913. In 1907 Bromley and Beckenham were provided with a smallpox hospital at Skym Corner, Crofton Heath and the Lennard Hospital on Bromley Common. At that time the Beckenham Cottage Hospital had already served the community for 35 years.

The Kent County Council apparently had a conservation lobby in 1911 as it is recorded that they approached the Penge Council to ask whether it would be in favour of prohibiting the uprooting of ferns and wild plants. The reply indicated that alas Penge Common had disappeared and that there were no roadside wastes left; the area was completely urbanised.

We take good road surfaces very much for granted today but Beckenham High Street was the first street in the Town to be tarred and that not until 1905. All other roads were gravel and were watered up to four times per day in dry weather to lay the dust.

The 1914/18 War had far reaching social effects. The Balgowan and Lennard Road Schools, which had just been built, were requisitioned as hospitals, bus services were withdrawn to allow men and vehicles to be used for ambulance work and vacant land was taken over for food production. Beckenham had 114 acres of allotments and Park Langley Golf Course was let for grazing. The impact on Elm Road is graphically illustrated in the list of dead on the War Memorial in the East Transept. Minister and people shared in bereavement. There was a loss of prosperity and trade, less money available to build and maintain large houses and factories drained off domestic labour required to service them. Smaller families required less accommodation and the inter-war years saw the proliferation of medium/small size villas, semi-detached or detached, with gardens to provide flowers, fruit and vegetables for family use. The urban sprawl increased, bus services developed and the age of the dormitory suburb was with us. The Housing and Town Planning Act 1919 required local authorities to provide much needed working class or council houses. Of the 450 proposed for Beckenham, 196 only were built at Elmers End and these were completed by 1922.

Steam engines provided the motive power for passenger and goods services up to 1924 but between that year and 1929 all local lines were electrified.

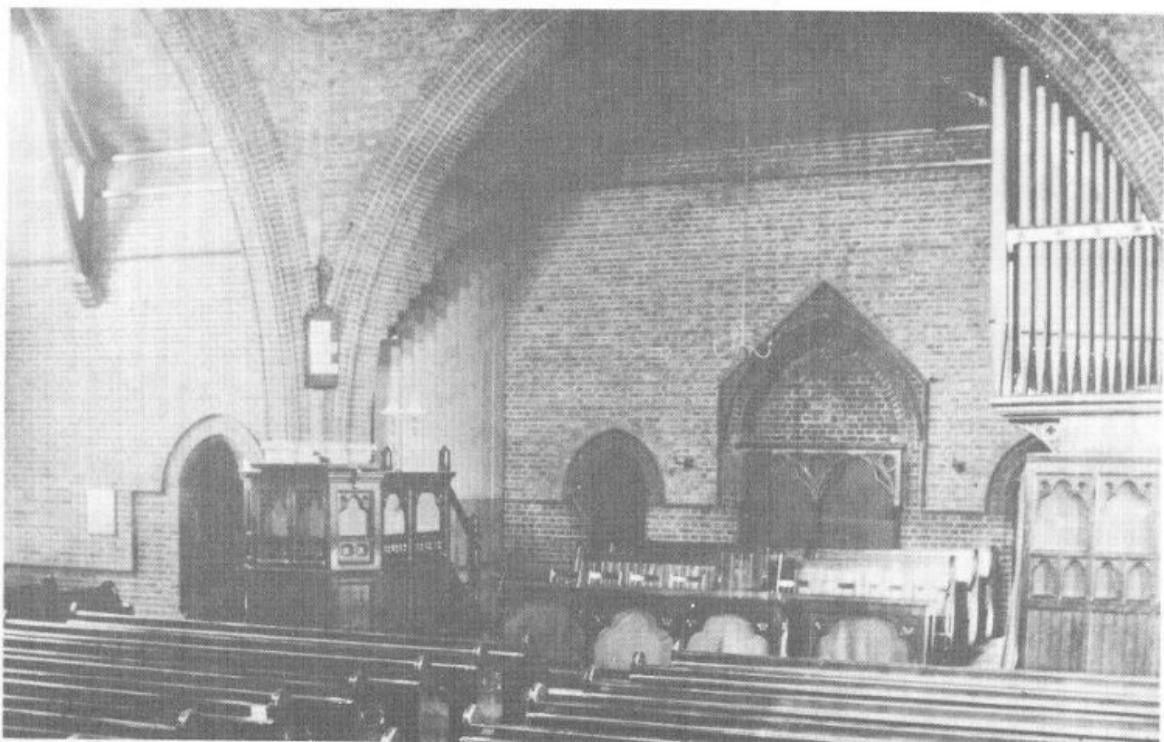
In 1928 West Wickham was amalgamated with the Beckenham Urban District while in 1932 the new Town Hall was opened on the site of the old rectory. Rectory Road was built on the rectory grounds.

Between the wars petrol buses were developed by such famous companies as Tillings, East Surrey Traction, Timpsons etc., but the 1924 Traffic Act empowered the Ministry of Transport to establish approved routes, limit the number of buses per route to give a regular service and

oust the 'pirates' who were exploiting the peak periods only. In 1933 all bus services in Beckenham came under The London Passenger Transport Board.

Those of us who left school in the early 1930s can well appreciate the demoralising effect of unemployment, for those were the years of the depression with no social security pay for school leavers and little or no prospect of a job. Things improved slowly through the decade until the opening of the 1939/45 War. The Borough sustained serious damage from air attack by incendiary and high explosive bombs, land mines dropped by parachute to give maximum blast effect and towards the end from the V.1. pilotless planes, filled with high explosive and programmed to fall on outer London. Two of these planes were responsible for the clearance of all buildings on both sides of the Beckenham Road between Mackenzie Road and Sydney Road with appalling loss of life. The Church suffered serious damage including the loss of most of its windows and extensive damage to the roofs. To this day it can be seen how the main roof support timbers in the Hall have shifted on their corbels as a result of blast.

## THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION



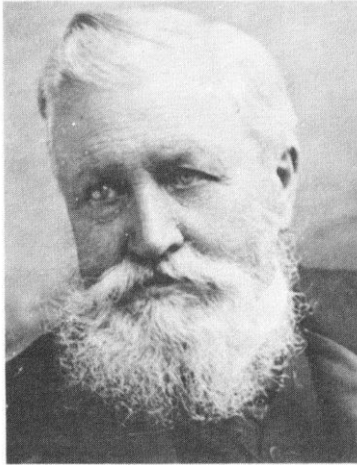
"Church before 1901"

It would surprise many Christians of our own age, I think, to learn that the Church at Elm Road was built before there was a congregation. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> chapel built at the initiative of the London Baptist Association which was concerned that the rapid growth of areas like Beckenham was not being accompanied by church building.

Already resident in Beckenham was a leading Baptist Minister, the Secretary of the Baptist Union, Revd. Samuel Harris Booth. He it was who undoubtedly led the work in Beckenham which saw the building so speedily of a 'Chapel in the style of the Thirteenth Century Gothic, designed by Architects Messrs. Mountford and Appleton, estimated to seat between 850-900 persons'. From the purchase of the Land on 10th September, 1881, it was only two years before the opening of the church for worship on the 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1883.

Booth was justly proud of it:— "We have a solid building and one which, for expense, would vie with any public building with which I have ever had any acquaintance". He also put a substantial sum of £205 towards the £5500 needed to build, furnish and equip the new chapel. He was, moreover, the only person resident in Beckenham on the Building Committee. No wonder when

the Church proper – that is the body of members – was formed in September, 1884, the name of Samuel Harris Booth stands underlined in bold hand at the head of the list of members. He laid down at the opening the policy for the Church:



Rev. Samuel Harris Booth

*“In the presence of so many who have long known me, it would be superfluous to formulate my views of truth, so as to indicate the doctrines which will be taught in this place. Perhaps there are not many whose opinions on religious truth have undergone less changes than my own. With me, the Holy Scriptures are the final law and I take as the keynote of the grand harmony of revealed religion, the old Puritan doctrine of justification by faith. To me the Saviour is the centre of all my teaching, as he is the foundation of all my joys here, and hope for hereafter. I have no difficulty in dealing with those who are moved towards a holier life – I point them to the cross – to Him who made atonement for sin and brought in everlasting righteousness. As to the fellowship of the Church, I have no new doctrine to propound. I have never held or practised other than believer’s baptism; but I have never held baptism as essential to communion. The bond in heaven is to me the bond on earth. The Church to be formed here will, therefore, be on the principle of open fellowship, subject to such discipline as is common to our Non-conformist Baptist churches.”*

**Elm Road Chapel, Beckenham.**

The London Baptist Association Chapel, during the presidency of the Rev. C. STANFORD, D.D., 1882

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**OPENING SERVICES,**  
On **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31st, 1883.**

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*9.30 a.m.—PRAYER MEETING.*

*2.45 p.m.—PUBLIC SERVICE.*

REV. C. STANFORD, D.D., will Preach.

At the close of the Afternoon Service there will be a COLLATION, with Tea and Coffee, in a Tent, kindly lent by the Deacons of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

*4.45—MEETING IN THE CHAPEL.*

Chair to be taken by Colonel GRIFFIN.

*6.30—PUBLIC SERVICE.*

REV. J. P. CHOWN will Preach.

The Revs. J. ANGUS, D.D., J. W. BOUD, J. CLIFFORD, D.D., W. CUFF, R. H. ROBERTS, B.A., T. V. TYMMS, J. A. SPURGEON, and J. R. WOOD, are expected to be present and take part in the engagements of the day.

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Tickets for the Collation (1s. 6d. each) can be had at Thornton’s Library, Beckenham; the Mission House, 19, Castle Street, Holborn, E.C.; and on the day of opening at Elm Road Chapel, Beckenham.

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**On Sunday, 4th November, 1883.**

The Rev. S. H. BOOTH will preach in the morning; and the Rev. R. H. LOVELL in the evening  
Services to commence at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

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**On Wednesday, 7th November.**  
**REV. C. H. SPURGEON**  
Will preach. Service to commence at 2.45 p.m.

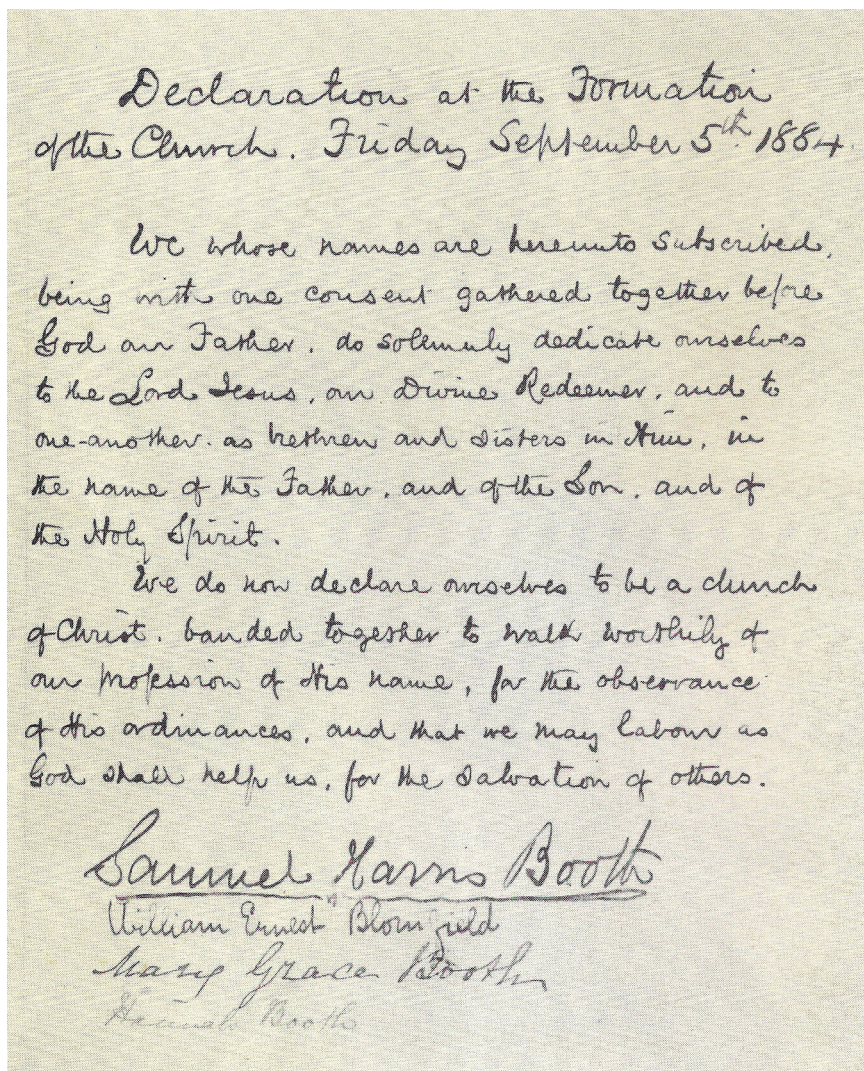
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COLLECTIONS WILL BE MADE AT ALL THE MEETINGS IN AID OF THE BUILDING FUND.

T. W. THORNTON, PRINTER, BECKENHAM.



The other man who was largely responsible for the building of the church was he who laid the memorial stone on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1882 and preached the first sermon in the completed chapel at its opening – the President of the L.B.A., Rev. Charles Stanford. The L.B.A. provided £1001/1/6d without which it seems unlikely that the church could have been built. Was it pure whimsy that led Dr. Stanford to preach on the lost coin at the church's opening?



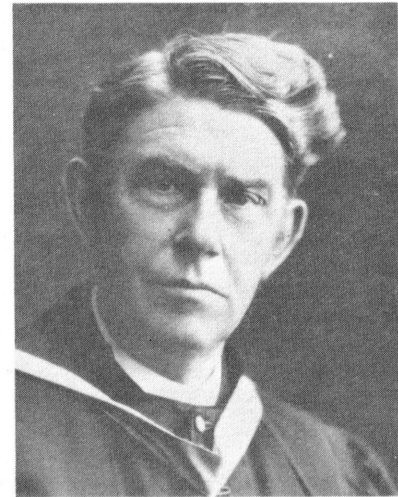
## MR. BOOTH INVITES

The happenings of the first year of the church are clouded in mystery. There were no members and so no church meetings. The whole year's activities are covered in two laconic sentences in the Church Book – "On 26th April Rev. William Ernest (sic) Blomfield, B.A. London University, accepted an invitation from Mr. Booth to become his assistant minister. On Wednesday evening, 27th August, 1884 a Sunday School was formed – a series of services on Sunday afternoons for young people having preceded it, when subject to the approval of the Church, when formed, Mr. James Foyster was chosen as Superintendent and Mr. John Parker as Secretary."

The Church itself was formed on Friday, 5th September, 1884, when 39 members signed the declaration of faith and purpose. It was also at that meeting that Samuel Harris Booth was appointed minister and W. E. Blomfield, at the tender age of 22, his Deputy. The first deacons were all nominated by the minister 'to aid the pastor in caring for the spiritual interests of the Church as well as manage the Church finance'. Messrs. Doble, Foyster and Parker were the

first deacons nominated by the minister and Rev. Blomfield was appointed as the first church secretary. This momentous meeting also saw the passing of the first church bye-laws, laying down among other things, that communion be observed on the first Sunday in the month in the evening and third Sunday in the morning; that the Church meeting be every month and that members who absent themselves from the Lord's table for six consecutive months without good reason should, on a report from Pastor and deacons, cease to be members of the church. One law passed at this meeting soon lapsed: that every church meeting should close with the Lord's Supper.

The Church's first winter seems on the surface to have been one of quiet consolidation. The monthly church meetings were largely taken up with approval of new members, many on transfer from inner London churches. Of these, Samuel Thompson, a city merchant, who had been one of the trustees, received from Walworth Road, was immediately nominated as deacon by the pastor. He was to be a powerful influence on the church's early years.



Rev. W. Ernest Blomfield B.A.

### MR. BOOTH DISMISSES

Until the meeting of 19th August, 1885, the church minutes are in the immaculate hand of Rev. W. E. Blomfield. However, the meeting of 19th August was minuted by Mr. James Foyster. Nothing of note happened and it closed as was customary, with the observance of the Lord's Supper. This change of hand in the church minute book is the first clue to the most astonishing occurrence in the life of the church at Elm Road.

On the 9th September, a special church meeting was called to discuss the motion – 'This Meeting deeply regrets that in the opinion of Mr. Booth, it was necessary to part with Mr. Blomfield on theological grounds. They further deeply regret that before discharging Mr. Blomfield he did not consult the Church.' Both major protagonists were absent from this meeting, it appears, and Mr. Thompson presided. The motion was passed by 33 votes to none with 11 abstentions. Mr. Thompson mistakenly called this vote, in a subsequent letter to Mr. Booth, 'unanimous'. It clearly shook the pastor. He replied: "I bow to your decision, merely observing that you passed the resolution without doing me the justice of inquiring the reason for my action." Perhaps the Church felt that he had had an opportunity to do so in the August Church meeting.

Mr. Booth, Mr. Blomfield, Mr. Foyster and Mr. Thompson met a sub-committee of the L.B.A. who agreed to arbitrate between the various parties. Dr. Stanford was, of course, no longer President and played no immediate part in the arbitration. Had he shrewdly foreseen the struggle? For in his letter to the church at its founding less than a year earlier, he had written: *'my heart is full of prayer... that our Great Lord may, from this moment, keep you night and day from all beginnings of wrong; from all mistakes and littlenesses through hasty feelings, words and deeds...'*

For the Rev. Samuel Harris Booth, the matter was no 'littleness'! He refused all requests to continue with Blomfield as assistant, claiming the matter to be not one of personal whim, but of doctrine – *'he has only from this day forth to preach the gospel on the lines I have laid down... and I will bless God for it.'*

## MR. BOOTH RESIGNS

He had no alternative as he saw it: *"I now resign the high office I can no longer hold... with credit to myself or advantage to you."* He retained his membership and promised to use his influence for the unity of the church. Certainly, whatever Mr. Booth's feelings were, they were very 'hasty'! The church asserted its right as an Independent Church to have a say not only in the approval of its minister's nominations, but also in his dismissals. It is clear, though, that it was not merely the precipitate and high-handed nature of the pastor's action that so angered the church. They also disagreed with him over Mr. Blomfield's theology. He indeed had been 'the means of stimulating Christian Life and of bringing many to a personal knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ',

## MR. BLOMFIELD DEFENDS

At what must have been a most lengthy meeting on 23rd September, Rev. Blomfield delivered his defence. The thrust of Samuel Harris Booth's attack had been that in the scope of Blomfield's sermons, there had been an absence of such doctrines as:

- a) that sin in the heart is ONLY atoned for by the death of the Saviour,
- b) that it was the Father's Will and the highest expression of His Love to man that the Saviour should die, in order to obtain the forgiveness of those that believe,
- c) that there must be the direct influence of the Divine Spirit in the conversion of sinners.

The following criticisms were also made: there had been

- a) a drift towards modernism in Mr. Blomfield's sermons,
- b) not infrequent statements which pointed to universalism,
- c) constant appeal to such writers as Morris, Robertson, George Eliot, Kingsley and other prominent opponents of Evangelical Doctrine.

Indeed, in his final resignation letter of 2nd October, Mr. Booth wrote –

*"The gospel I have preached is this: that as guilty and helpless, a sinner needing the Mercy of God, I cannot become one of His redeemed children except through the converting grace of the Holy Spirit; that I have no hope with God my Father but in Him who in his death became my substitute and who wrought the miracle of the incarnation, that he might suffer in my place.....By teaching these truths, we stand against the attempt to bring into our churches what is known as the 'New Theology' which teaches that such phrases as the Atonement, The Church or The Fall are only mental conceptions and not actual facts. As opposed to such nebulous theology, I have preached not about Christ, but Christ himself. I have pointed perishing sinners to the Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world. In that Old Faith I have lived and in that Old Faith, God helping me, I will die."*

Rev. James Smith, recently of Delhi, on 7th October also accused Mr. Blomfield of 'erroneous teaching'. He compared Rev. Blomfield's preaching unfavourably with that of Maclaren, Stanford, Landells and Spurgeon. It is interesting that the other great preacher of that period, John Clifford, is not among the list.

In his defence, Blomfield copiously quoted from Charles Stanford's sermon preached at the opening of the Church. It had, apparently, been reprinted in the 'Christian World Pulpit' earlier in 1884. In this sermon, Stanford had defined the doctrines 'commonly called evangelical' under seven headings: free grace, Divine authority and sufficiency of Scripture, salvation by faith alone, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the atonement, the resurrection of the dead and the Godhead of Christ.

Blomfield then proceeded to remind the meeting under these headings of key sentences from his own sermons, as evidence that he had not departed from evangelical preaching. Blomfield went further still to remind his hearers that he had not even been slack in preaching about the risks involved in neglecting the gospel. He concluded (and as the defence takes ten densely written pages in the Church Book, with good reason!), – *"This is enough! Mr. Smith has not heard me very many times and therefore is not so very competent to give an opinion of the*

*general scope of my ministry. He certainly did hear this sermon, or at any rate was present when it was preached. (I give him the credit for having been awake during the service.) How dare he then have charged me with ignoring and practically denying what I have explicitly taught. I fling back all his charges and bring against him the counter-charge that he has borne false witness against his neighbour.”*

How surprised Mr. Blomfield must have been to find no summary of this defence in the Church minutes! The minutes merely record that he spoke at ‘considerable length’. This must have been doubly frustrating when Harris Booth’s letters were reprinted in full. The fact that after Mr. Blomfield had been so peremptorily sacked as assistant minister by Mr. Booth, the minutes are clearly in the hand of James Foyster, the Sunday School Superintendent, is surely significant. For on 10th October, he himself resigned from the diaconate, and two weeks later from the Church for similar reasons to those given by Mr. Booth... *“I do so sorrowfully – the grief being chiefly because of the erroneous teaching which is generally approved by the church.”*

Mr. Blomfield must have resumed the charge of the minute book at this stage, for there appears a marginal note in his hand pointing readers forward to a full account of what he said. In this atmosphere of charge and counter-charge, where minutes of church meetings (now weekly) were inaccurately, or at least partisanly kept, and letters on both sides of the argument were sent, both officially and unofficially, to members of the church and interested parties in the L.B.A., it is astonishing to read in the minutes of the meeting of 21st October of folk entering the church both by transfer and baptism.

## **LBA ARBITRATES**

Samuel Harris Booth had appealed to the L.B.A. as the main ‘stake-holder’ in Elm Road Chapel that it should have the major say in the appointment of the successor. It is clear that the majority of deacons and members wanted Mr. Blomfield to be pastor. On the 14th October, the president of the L.B.A., Rev. J. R. Wood, suggested that the church should not confirm Mr. Blomfield in the pastorate until all his correspondence with Mr. Booth and all his sermons preached in Elm Road had been examined by a sub-committee of the L.B.A. and a favourable report sent to the Church. At this point, Samuel Harris Booth must have realised that the battle was lost, because on 23rd October, he and his wife resigned their membership.

It is easy, for me at least, to feel sympathy for Mr. Blomfield – on trial, so to speak, for his faith, so early in his ministerial career at the age of 23! But at this point, perhaps, we should also feel some sympathy for the church’s founder. He who had put so much of himself into the building of the church, both physical and spiritual – who had given so substantially of his money and had personally raised a sum of £700 for the building of a church hall (not included in the subscription to the building of the church itself), now found himself no longer a member, less than two years after he had conducted the first Sunday service in the new church. Mr. Foyster put the case well in his letter to “Freeman” (fore-runner of the Baptist Times) on 13th November, 1885:

*“Very dear Mr. Booth, we whose names are attached, recently members of the Church or congregation meeting in Elm Road Chapel, desire to manifest our affectionate regard for you and express our sympathy with you at the unlooked-for position in which you are placed. That you, dear sir, who founded the beautiful building and drew together the people, should have to vacate both your pulpit and your pew is to us a matter of profound regret, and it is so passing strange that we can scarcely realise the fact. Our comfort is, that by your resignation, you give convincing evidence that you, in these times of erroneous teaching, hold faith once delivered to the saints and we cherish the hope that your self sacrifice will bear fruit in the honour of the Saviour whose atoning death it is ever your delight to preach. May the God of all consolation comfort your heart and bring good out of what we feel to be a great calamity. Please accept this assurance of our affectionate regard and loving sympathy.”*

Cash Account  
1 Elm Road Chapel Beckenham

Dr		£ s d			Cr		
Dec 31 185-	To Pew Rents						
	Quarterly £ 150. 15 6						
	Weekly 3-13 19	184	9	3			
	Offering Boxes	30	19	4			
	Communion Funds	7	2	5			
	Special Offerings	120	7	6			
		342	18	6			
Jan 1 1860	To Balance	21	14	4			
	Less £ 14. 16 0 owing to Out Fund						
Dec 31 185-	To Pew Rents						
	Quarterly £ 150. 15 6						
	Weekly £ 13 9	184	9	3			
	Offering Boxes	30	19	4			
	Communion Funds	6	4	0			
	Special offering for Deficiency Dec 31.	82	15	0			
	Donation for out fund	30	0	0			
	Special offering for Beckenham Bibles Cash of Manual red manuscripts	7	7	6			
		342	13	6			
Jan 1 1860	To Balance	21	14	4			
Dec 31 185-	By Minister & Supplies				121	5	0
	Chapel Keeper				53	0	0
	Rate, Taxes, Coals						
	Gas				28	18	6
	Sundries				118	0	8
	Balance				21	14	4
					342	18	6
Dec 31 185-	By Minister & Supplies				151	5	0
	Chapel Keeper				53	0	0
	Water Rate £ 3 7 0						
	Coals & Coke £ 9. 15 0						
	Gas £ 10. 0 0				28	18	6
	Stationery Books, Printing, Postage etc.				22	12	5
	Advertisements				3	16	3
	Organ £ 5. 5 0						
	Organist £ 15. 0 0						
	Blower £ 6. 5 0				26	10	0
	Interest (Star Life)				22	10	0
	Widows Collection Bibles, Testament etc.				4	7	6
	Insurance				3	4	0
	Sundries				1	9	6
	Balance				21	14	4
					342	13	6

## CHURCH ASSERTS INDEPENDENCE

It is clear, though, that at this early stage in the Church's history, it had rejected authoritarianism as much in doctrine as in church politics. In a letter to all members, Blomfield had written – "I desire to preach great truths in charity. I care little for pure uniformity in our methods of statement, provided we are true in our loyalty to God, the Son and his cross. Every man must be left to his own way of putting the truth, and no system or theory or sect can represent every aspect of the truth as it is in Jesus. Every man may have an accent more or less peculiar to himself, but this should not be cast in his teeth if his speech be the universal language of the redeeming love of God."

When the L.B.A. sub-committee finally reported on 24th November, it found in favour of Mr. Blomfield in all but one respect, namely that he had quoted, with approval, from the pulpit such writers as Kingsley, George Eliot and other opponents of Evangelical doctrine. Even in this case, though the committee thought Blomfield unwise to have quoted them, it was satisfied that he had done so as 'in general, only illustrative of some passing thought or as expressed in attractive language and style'.

On 25th November, William Ernest Blomfield was appointed minister of the church and he immediately announced a baptismal service for the following Wednesday, it having been the custom to hold baptismal services on Wednesday evenings during the early years of the



## BOOTH THE PEACEMAKER

It was in the same Autumn of 1885 that at the Baptist Union Assembly in Swansea, Revd. Thew of Leicester preached a sermon that hinted at universalism. Many letters of protest were sent to the editor of "Freeman" and S. H. Booth must have been under intense strain as Secretary of the Baptist Union. C. H. Spurgeon, Booth's great personal friend and theological soul mate, admitted that he had ceased to attend meetings because 'he could have no fellowship with modern doubt'. Spurgeon had been one of the founders of the L.B.A. and it was his dynamism which had led to its building a chapel each year since its foundation in 1865.

In 1887, anonymous articles were printed in Spurgeon's periodical, "The Sword and the Trowel", criticising unnamed ministers and churches of 'heterodoxy' and spreading a 'new religion' which was 'no more Christianity than chalk was cheese'. Further articles went on to accuse these ministers of 'making infidels' and finally Spurgeon wrote himself of the Baptist Union itself 'beginning to look like Confederacies of Evil'. Spurgeon then announced his resignation from the Baptist Union. A Committee of leading men in the B.U., chaired by Booth, met Spurgeon with a view to making a compromise that would keep him in the denomination, but though they succeeded in keeping his brother James, Charles Haddon Spurgeon left. One of the major grounds for dispute was the doctrine of the atonement and those precise particulars which had brought Booth into conflict with Blomfield in Elm Road. Indeed, it seems likely that Booth himself was as concerned as Spurgeon with the 'downward trend' in the denomination, and as Secretary, must have known the unnamed ministers better than anyone. Blomfield may even have been one of them, though he was at that time not the important figure he was later to become, and Spurgeon probably had more important men in mind. Underwood, in his "History of English Baptists" even goes as far as to suggest that Booth was Spurgeon's source and some have gone further and claimed that Booth deliberately encouraged Spurgeon's followers to write their articles in "The Sword and the Trowel" to draw attention to trends he himself was concerned about.

It is certainly true that when Spurgeon was asked for the names of ministers and churches, he replied that the Baptist Union knew them and the onus was on them to deny that there were any heretical ministers. Marchant, in his "Life of Clifford", finds this unsatisfactory – but surely, if Spurgeon's source was Booth, it was perfectly reasonable, especially if, as seems the case, Booth had told Spurgeon in confidence.

Clifford was one of those who, as Vice President, had interviewed Spurgeon. He was admired, even revered by Blomfield, who was a major source used by Marchant for his biography of Clifford. He quotes Blomfield as commending Clifford's 'broad interpretation of Evangelicalism, his appreciation of the work of Biblical Scholarship, his resolute opposition to blind conservatism, his repudiation of the antagonism between Religion and Science so often proclaimed by some in our own Church, and his steadfast adherence to the New Testament idea of the Church'. Clifford was also renowned for his social radicalism, and this, too, must have been admired by the young man who dared to quote Morris, Kingsley and George Eliot with approval from a Beckenham pulpit!

It is fascinating that in the clash between a present and future major figure in the denomination in Elm Road in 1885, we see a miniature of the conflict which burst on the denomination just 2 years later –all the more fascinating as Booth played so different a role in the latter.

Three months after Mr. Blomfield left the pastorate in 1886, we read that Samuel Harris Booth was contacting the diaconate in the oblique way of writing to the President of the Baptist Union, asking that if he were to apply for membership as a 'private member', would he be accepted? On 1st September, it was agreed 'that the honour of our Lord and Master demands, and the interests of the Church requires that all differences be buried and forgotten, that bygones be bygones, and that we all unitedly stand together in our efforts and prayers for the prosperity of the cause'. Accordingly, Booth rejoined, hoping that a pastor whose doctrine and life would be such as to command the affectionate esteem of all, would soon be appointed.

## A LANCE TO HEAL WOUNDS

Such a man was the Rev. J. M. Lance, who was invited to become pastor in November, 1886. Though he had been minister at Commercial Road, Newport for 25 years, Mr. Lance was now living in Blackheath. He appears to have retired, 'having no intention of taking another pastorate'. The call was unanimous and it is clear that the church felt it needed a man of experience. It was also prepared to pay for it. Mr. Lance's salary was to be 'not less than £300 per annum for two years'. Since the total income of the church in 1886 had been only £405-7-10d., this was a considerable step of faith. It is also an interesting comment on the social status of ministers in late Victorian England. The chapel keeper's salary was a mere £36 p.a.

The ministry of Mr. Lance had two important achievements: the uniting of the church and the building of the Sunday School rooms. Mr. and Mrs. Foyster, the Revd. James Smith and his wife and George Skinner and others gradually trickled back into membership. In July 1887 the chapel was solemnised for marriage, and it is perhaps indicative of the spirit of unity that came with Mr. Lance's ministry that the first couple to be married in the church was Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Blomfield.

## THE SCHOOL ROOMS

The building of the schoolrooms had always been intended from the beginning. Samuel Harris Booth had collected £700 for a schoolroom, money that the church had controversially used to help pay off the debt on the church building. In 1887 a further gift of £100 was received from Mrs. Langworthy on the strict terms that it be specifically put aside for the schoolroom building fund and that the church add £200 to it. In his letter of thanks for this donation, Mr. Lance wrote: *'We are but a small handful of people and the burden falls heavily on the few who cheerfully bear it'*

One year later, at the meeting of the 13th September, it was agreed to build the schoolrooms. The Sunday School had been meeting behind a screen in the main building of the church, but now the congregations were becoming so large that the screen would have to be 'put back'. The Sunday School found this unacceptable, so a new building was now essential. The new accommodation would also make possible the holding of social events and other meetings. It was, however, agreed that no building should be started until the church was in possession of £700 (this would be in addition to the £700 that Harris Booth had collected four years earlier). At the same time, the chapel debt was increased from £1156 to £1856, as recognition that the £700 collected by Booth was for the schoolrooms. The deacons largely responsible for this project – Messrs. Thompson and Doble – seem to have borne the vast burden of church business along with Mr. Parker in these early years, but in 1888 a new family transferred into Elm Road – John Attenborough and his wife and John Arthur Attenborough and Marian Mabel. They were soon to become heavily involved in the life of Elm Road, particularly in the Sunday School and the Choir.

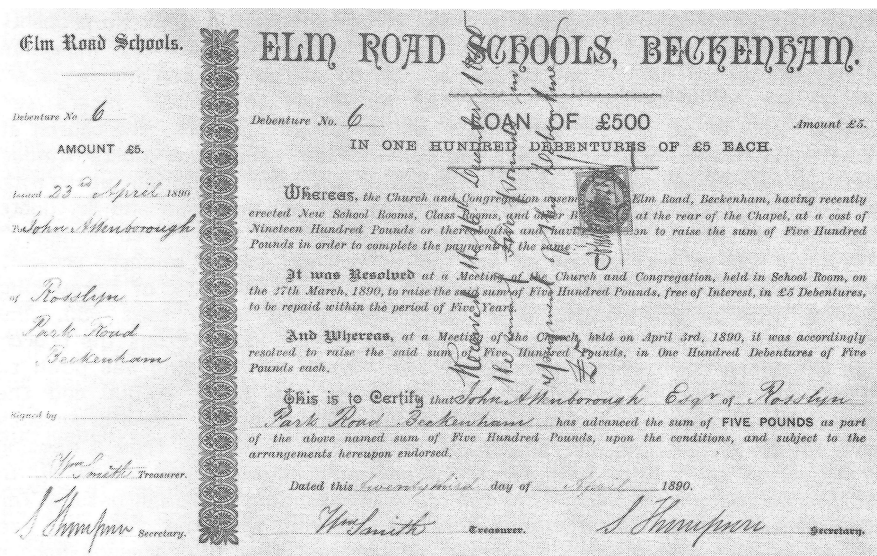
In March 1889 the screen was removed from the church, making the building of the schoolrooms imperative. At the meeting of 9th July plans were laid before the Church meeting for a 'large schoolroom that would seat not less than 200 people, an Infants' Classroom with raised seats for 60 children and a Ladies Parlour, light, airy and comfortable for worship meeting in which also the Young Women's Class should meet, youths and elder girls' classrooms, minister's and deacons' vestries, kitchens, lavatories, etc.'

Four tenders for these buildings were obtained, two from builders who were also church members. The cheapest, that of Mr. Kick, at £1644/10s. was accepted. Mr. Kick, who was a keen and regular member of the church had, however, made a 'clerical error' and the tender should have been £1744/10s. Mr. Lance assured him that the church 'would not take advantage of the error', but it was later agreed that some modifications be made to the plans to keep the cost of building down and the final contract was signed for £1575/10s. That was agreed on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1889. The Memorial Stone was laid by Edward Rawlings on 16<sup>th</sup> October.



At this moment, Mr. Richard Booth resigned his membership and within one month, his father Samuel Harris Booth transferred to Regent's Park Baptist Church. No reason is given in the minute books, and he may have moved house, but it seems that the arrangements made for the financing of the schoolrooms lay behind the affair, for in the list of subscriptions published for the stone-laying ceremony, there appears no record of the £700 Harris Booth had collected, and his name is not even listed.

S. H. Booth died in 1902. The Church Minute Book for that year fails to record his death; he was the only one of its ministers whose death has been allowed to pass unnoticed. It is an interesting irony that in his official obituary in the Baptist Union Handbook for 1903, where his death is recorded as the most important of the year, in an unusually long and detailed account of his life and ministry, there is no mention of his ministry at Elm Road. It seems to have been a sad association which both he and the church liked to forget. That obituary described him as a man 'of evangelical ardour and beautiful high Christian character'. In his conduct of the affairs of the denomination through the Down Grade controversy, he had 'excluded all elements of personal bitterness. He had all the qualities that let him be a healer of breaches and binder of brotherhoods'.



The building work proceeded quickly and by March, 1890 the schoolrooms were opened. They still had to be paid for, however, and in April one hundred £5 debentures were issued to be paid back within 5 years, interest free.

## INTERREGNUM

In June 1890 a fresh crisis hit the church when, while on holiday in Malvern, Rev. Lance suffered a ruptured blood vessel and wrote that his doctor had advised him never to preach again. The fact is that for several months Mr. Lance had felt that to maintain the expansion that the new buildings (and in particular, the massive house-building in the area) gave opportunity for, required greater energy than he felt able to give. The task of healing to which he, the experienced man, had been called, had now been achieved. The latest illness convinced him that God was preparing someone younger for the major evangelistic effort now needed. The crisis lay in whether the new-found unity of the church could stand the test of choosing and uniting behind a new minister.

It was a crisis that the Secretary, Samuel Thompson, did not want to face. He wrote that the church would have been pleased to have given Mr. Lance three months' peaceful rest, so that he could have returned to his ministry refreshed and strengthened, but he clearly recognised that this pastor whom God had called out of retirement to serve them, had now retired for the last time. Ninety-five members had been added during his ministry and the congregation more than doubled. Mr. Lance did, however, serve on the 'ministerial committee' set up to seek a

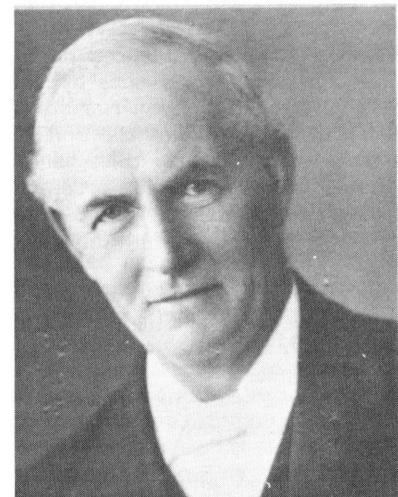
new minister – (surely something no modern minister would do). Once again, though, the men who were most involved were Messrs. Thompson and Doble; when the church voted by the somewhat inconclusive majority of 36 – 5 to invite Mr. Bennett of Lincoln to the pastorate, Samuel Thompson went all the way to Lincoln to communicate to him the result in person, only to learn on his arrival that the Rev. Bennett was visiting London. In fact, Mr. Bennett declined the invitation, writing rather neatly that on this occasion ‘the five who voted against me probably had the better judgement’. In his letter, he pays tribute to Mr. Thompson and Mr. Doble so nobly that it demands to be quoted. Church histories all too easily become lives of ministers. The truth is that ministers can achieve little without great men and women at their shoulders. The church at Beckenham clearly had at least two such. “They are such noble-minded Christian men that any Pastor in England might be proud to work with them. I shall always thank God that I have known Mr. Thompson and Mr. Doble ..... such men are few and the church that has them is sure to prosper.”

In their call to Mr. Briscoe of Rye Lane, Peckham, the 45 members present were unanimous. Once again Mr. Thompson was given the task of persuading him to accept. With slight alterations the chapel would seat 650. The schoolrooms had not only been paid for at a cost of £2,000, but the church held a balance for furnishings. The debt on the church building was down to £1,350. The area was expanding, the population now being 20,000 and the chapel was situated in the area of fastest expansion. All these arguments were put to Mr. Briscoe. For such a challenge to be presented from a meeting of 45 people says much, both for Mr. Thompson’s boldness and his faith. In fact, it probably says much, too, for his understanding of human nature, for Mr. Briscoe’s reason for refusing the call was not that the challenge was too great, but that it was not great enough and that his ‘present sphere was still the largest’.

By the time the next set of statistics was sent to the L.B.A. in October, 1891, no new minister had yet been called. There had been no baptisms during the year, only two additions by transfer. On the debit side, 8 members had been transferred, 2 had died, and saddest of all, 4 had been deleted from the roll for failure to take communion during six months without good reason. The membership had, accordingly, for the first time fallen from 122 to 110.

## REV. ROBERT STEWART FLEMING

In December, 1891, the Church called Rev. R. Stewart Fleming, 48 voting in favour and 5 against – the meeting having been held in ‘most unfavourable weather’. Mr. Fleming lived in Pitlochry, deep in the Scottish highlands. The Church Meeting not only discussed the salary he be offered – £300 – but also agreed to offer £50 removal expenses, a reminder of how difficult such a removal in the 1890s might be. Mr. Fleming accepted, openly acknowledging that he was exchanging ‘*my place of quiet retreat for the busy life of a London suburb*’. He continued: ‘*I trust that in a few weeks at most we shall have consummated a union in our Master’s service for many, many years to come*’. It was to be 37 years.



Rev. Robert Stewart Fleming M.A.

## A BROAD CHURCH

In his introduction to the 1894/5 Yearbook, Rev. Fleming wrote at length on the ‘ideal church’: “*an ideal church is one with which each member maintains not merely a nominal but a real and vital connection.... The Church is a very real part of each member’s life and absorbs a by no means small proportion of his thought and energy*”. A mere glance at the handbooks for the first fifteen years of his ministry shows how that ideal was put into practice. There were activities to suit all tastes: sewing societies, a flourishing choir, literary and debating society, Band of Hope, Christian Endeavour, tract distribution, a cricket team, a rambling and cycling club, a Missionary society, ladies’ working society and men’s and ladies’ Bible classes.

There was, too, the compassionate side of church life: the Sick Benefit Society enabled the ill to be given some small support in times of no sick pay. In his last letter to the church, Mr. Lance had written in 1891, *"I have heard lately with much satisfaction how in this exceptionally severe winter you have remembered the poor, and I am sure you will continue to do so"*. Mr. Fleming's ministry seemed to have that ideal balance of evangelical zeal and social awareness.

Overriding all was a passionate interest in youth work. The new church premises gave great opportunities for the Sunday School. The records show progressive increase from 151 scholars in 1892 to 300 ten years later. The interest in both youth and social work is nicely shown in the annual Toy Service which started in 1892. These Toy Services established a link with the Doughty Street Mission in Holborn, where 'Sisters Elsie, Lettie and Daisy' worked among the poor of the district. It is of small surprise to read that Mr. Samuel Thompson was a leading member of the committee of the Mission.

In the 1895 introduction to the Yearbook, Mr. Fleming allowed his passion for youth work to overrule his restraint – *'I do not think I need tell you at this hour of the day how sincerely I love you all... I rejoice at the mutual confidence we have in each other... You have many fine traits in which I rejoice... But why do you not yield yourselves more fully and loyally to the service of Jesus? His claims are first. His claims are just. In keeping from Him your life and your whole life you are doing Him, no less than your own eternal well-being, an injury. I sometimes fear (and you will forgive me for being so plain or if I do you an injury) that you are in danger of loving your own pleasure more than you love God. This should not be. I appeal to you by my written words as I have done so often by my voice to put from you every pleasure that bars your way to Christ. How many, how bitter will be the regrets you will save yourselves from, if in the days of your youth you take up your cross and follow Jesus.'*

## THE INCUBUS OF DEBT

The Chapel debt still had not been paid off by the time Mr. Fleming came; the schoolrooms had only been paid for by the issue of debentures which theoretically could be cashed. However, the real problem seems to have been even deeper. In his introduction to the first Church Handbook in 1885, Booth had written – *"I would respectfully but earnestly remind the members of the church of the New Testament command 'On the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him.'.... Train your children in the same Law that when they become believers themselves the habit of giving will have been long and unchangeably formed."*

The main part, roughly half, of the church's income came from pew rents. By this system members rented a pew, paying a fixed sum monthly. The system had advantages: once pews had been rented, income was known; it was easy to spot who was not present and to follow up absences with visits; attendance would be more regular, as people like to get value for money. There were, however, disadvantages of which the church became increasingly aware: visitors might find themselves having to wait for the service to start before taking a seat, if all the 'free' seats had been filled; it was not easy to increase pew rents and members who had rented seats were not prepared to make an offering; members may have had less contact with visitors who were restricted to free seats.

In addition to this income (approximately £320 per annum in the early 1890s), boxes were fixed to the wall in which gifts could be placed. In 1895 the Treasurer reported that these boxes were 'generally overlooked'. In fact, the income from the boxes in 1893 had been only £44/4/4d. In 1894, the church had had to borrow £13/10s. from the treasurer to balance its books. The church then debated whether plates should be held at the door or even passed through the pews after the sermon! In the end, a more cautious solution was tried: deacons agreed to stand at the door holding the boxes after the services.

It was not until 1907 that the other problem of 'free seats' was tackled. Then it was agreed that five minutes before the start of every service all seats would be declared 'free'. The burden of the debt on the premises fell heavy. In 1893 the Star Insurance Office, from whom the Church had taken out its mortgage, decided to increase the interest rate to not less than 4½%. Since the church was having difficulty in meeting existing payments, Samuel Thompson arranged to

pay off the mortgage himself, the church paying him back at a rate of 3½%. In 1898 a bazaar was held at which the astonishing sum of £723 was raised. It was sufficient to clear the chapel debt, and at present money values is equivalent to about £16,000! The minister referred in his 1899 Handbook to 'having escaped from the incubus of debt'. Yet, in that same year, he led the church to promise £736 to the Baptist Union Twentieth Century Fund – a small-seeming contribution towards the massive sum hoped for of £250,000, but a major one from a church so recently out of debt (in fact £1,000 was given); and in the next year, 1900, to the building of a new organ at a cost of £976.

## **A COMPLETE HOUSE FOR WORSHIP**

The church had developed a strong musical tradition from its outset. The original organist was Rest Cartwright of Dulwich, who in 1889 was living in Samuel Harris Booth's house, Oakley House, Hayne Road. It would seem likely that he and Booth were friends. By 1892 the Choirmaster was Mr. R. Boulcott-Newth, Professor of Singing at the Guildhall School of Music, who lived in Cedars Road. He and Mr. Sharland, as organist, led the church musical life for 20 years, before the latter retired in 1912. It was during this period that the church, though as we have seen, financially hard-pressed on many sides, in 1892 spent £50 on the expansion of the old organ, fitting it with new bellows; then, most ambitious of all, replaced it with the fine instrument we hear to such splendid effect today. This organ, built by Beard in 1901 was financed partly by the sale of the old organ for £175 and partly by a loan of £850 @ 4% interest by Samuel Thompson.

The church took the opportunity of installing electric lighting and moving the choir stalls at the same time. It was not surprising that in 1900 they also resorted to passing the plate through the pews, albeit before the sermon. Once again, though, it was the work of the ladies in another Grand Bazaar in 1904 which got the church out of financial trouble – this time raising £695 to clear the debt. Mr. Fleming commented in 1900 that it would be difficult to find a more complete or suitable house for worship than that at Elm Road, and that future generations would be grateful to the present members for the financial sacrifices they had made.

Certainly the organ was to attract a succession of fine musicians, including Eric Thiman who became organist in 1920. He, now a nationally known composer of anthems, solo and choral settings (many of which are still in the choir's repertoire) and hymn tunes, twelve of which are in the Baptist Hymn Book, became a leading figure in the great Free Church Choir festivals held annually in the Crystal Palace. He remained organist until 1928, for the last five years travelling from Wembley to play. It seems clear, too, that Mr. Fleming himself was a keen supporter of church music, and for many years his son, Hamish, was choir secretary. This musical tradition has been well maintained to our own day, equally supported by ministers with musical gifts.

## **FROM THREE TO TWELVE**

Samuel Harris Booth had nominated the first deacons himself, and added to their number merely by announcing them to the church meeting. In 1892 there were but three: William Smith, the Sunday School Superintendent, Samuel Thompson and Frederick Doble. It is impossible to imagine, today, the pressure on such men, holding such onerous offices and having so little obvious support, or indeed their power. No minutes of deacons meetings were kept, or if they were, they are no longer in the otherwise meticulous records of the church. In September, 1893 it was agreed to elect six deacons to serve for three years and that they be elected from 8 'brethren(!) who shall have received the most votes placed in the ballot box on the Communion table the previous Sunday'. By this system, the new diaconate was elected in October 1893 – the three new deacons being Mr. J. Attenborough, Mr. G. F. Smith and Mr. S. Toone.

This system was slightly changed in 1896; then members would be asked to nominate 12 men at Communion on Sunday. These would then be asked if they were prepared to stand and then members would be asked to vote for 7 at the next church meeting. In fact, of the 12 most heavily nominated, 6 declined nomination and so the thirteenth on the list, J. Arthur

Attenborough made up the 7. He was to be an outstanding figure in the church, serving as perhaps its most successful Sunday School Superintendent.

It is clear that the church was not wholly satisfied with its electoral system, as when the next round of elections was due in 1899, there was renewed and, it appears, heated debate. Frederick Doble wanted deacons to be elected for 7 years. Since he had already served for 15 years, perhaps 7 seemed to him short. Perhaps he was influenced by the fact that MPs served for 7 years at that time. Nonetheless, he was heavily defeated at the church meeting, as was Mr. Dickins, a future and distinguished church secretary, who argued to retain the three-year term. In the end, a compromise solution of 5 years was accepted, and the number of 7 deacons was retained. Among those elected was Rev. George Short. He was a leading figure in the Baptist Missionary Society and his portrait, painted by fellow church member Fred Dawes, hangs in Mission House. Rev. J. H. Shakespeare received sufficient votes but declined the honour. As he was General Secretary of the Baptist Union, in succession to Harris Booth, that is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that Elm Road should have been chosen as home church by so many distinguished servants of the Baptist Denomination – once again a trend that has continued to the present day.

In 1906, the minister had an open argument with his deacons over elections. The deacons had unanimously agreed that 10 deacons were sufficient. At the next church meeting the minister spoke powerfully against this, saying that 12 should be appointed, and was so confident of his position that he said 'it was undesirable that the opinion of the deacons should override the wishes of the largest number of the Church'. There were those who urged that the matter be postponed for a month and made the subject of special prayer meetings. Mr. Fleming ruled that the matter had already been discussed at the previous meeting and a decision had to be reached at this one. The matter was voted on by ballot and the minister carried the day against his deacons by 71 to 38. Perhaps to bring a quick peace the meeting then passed on to deal with a much happier matter – a suitable presentation for Samuel Thompson.

Earlier that year, Samuel Thompson had paid a visiting preacher from Cardiff £5 instead of the customary 3 guineas, without consulting the church. For this he was criticised by members, despite the fact that he had acted with the knowledge of minister and deacons. Mr. Thompson offered to pay the offending £1.17s. himself. In the event, he decided to resign as secretary and deacon. It is sad that so notable a man should have felt obliged to resign over such a trivial issue. Mr. Fleming's appreciation of him runs to three pages of small writing in the church book, and it is clear that he, along with others, tried to persuade him to change his mind, unavailingly. It appears that Samuel Thompson had preferred his years working in a small diaconate with routine church meetings. The trend after 1900 was away from that towards a more open, democratic structure. It would, however, be no exaggeration to say that he provided the wisdom, the energy, the organisational ability, indeed on occasions even the money that established Elm Road as a united, liberal, evangelical Baptist Church. He joined as number 62 on the membership role. When he died in 1912, membership stood at 333.

In February, 1904, Thompson was one of 11 including two ladies as well as the minister who were summoned to Bromley Court for refusing to pay rates. Eighteen months earlier, the Tory government, which had always supported the established Church of England, had passed through parliament an Education Act bringing C. of E. Schools under the general supervision of the Education Boards. By this arrangement, the schools retained their Anglican bias and a degree of independence, particularly in the field of religious education, but were to be financed by local authorities out of the rates. John Clifford led Baptists in 'passive resistance'. In April, 1903 members of Free Churches met at Elm Road where they agreed to resist the Act. The president of the Free Church Council said, 'Though it has become law, it is not all over'.

Over 80 non-conformists in Bromley refused to pay their rates and consequently had goods removed by bailiffs and auctioned. The auctioneer acted with much reluctance – he himself had been a passive resistor and had to auction some of his own chattels! The presence of only one bidder made for a strange auction and the sale was followed by another 'indignation' meeting. In the long run, the resisters won a partial victory most historians account for the Liberals' landslide victory in 1906 by the fact that the 1902 Education Act united the non-conformist vote, though the House of Lords prevented the repeal of the Act.

Rev. Fleming's victory over his deacons in 1906 had an unfortunate sequel: in 1908 Messrs. Doble, Attenborough, J. Arthur Attenborough, Stapleford, Short, Saw, How, W. S. Thompson and Marsland resigned en bloc from the diaconate. The resignation of Mr. Frederick Doble ended an era. He had been Treasurer from its foundation. Their resignation was followed by the final settlement of the election system, when the present method of electing 12 from 18 nominees for three years was almost immediately agreed, and the age for voting was reduced to 18. The only reform left to be implemented was the eligibility of women for the office. In April 1922 this was partially achieved when women were declared eligible for election on the same terms as men provided that they did not exceed 25% of the total diaconate. In the subsequent elections in July, two ladies, Mrs. W. Cullum, whose husband was the Church Treasurer, and Miss Phillips were successful, and became the church's first lady deacons.

## **TIMES FOR REJOICING**

The year 1908 was that of the Church's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary – an event celebrated in style with a whole week of special activities starting on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November. Monday was children's day with an evening rally at which Carey Bonner was speaker; on Tuesday the choir led a festival of praise with solos and duets by Mrs. Saw, Miss Marsland and Mr. & Mrs. Boulcott-Newth; on Wednesday there were two meetings, at 4 p.m. the preacher was Dr. Campbell Morgan; at 7.30 Rev. J. Robert Walker of Regents Park and J. Glynn Edwards; on Thursday there was another rally at 8 p.m., and, as a culmination, at the services on Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> November, the preacher was Rev. Principal Henderson of Bristol.

Anniversaries were celebrated in grand style during Mr. Fleming's pastorate, with rallies, suppers, organ recitals and illustrious preachers. At the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1920, the Rector of Beckenham shared the platform with the minister, Sir Alfred Yea, M.P. for Beckenham and Rev. D. J. C. Carlile, president elect of the Baptist Union. This event was reported in the local press under the headline 'THE UNION OF THE CHURCHES'! Not the last time, I fear, that newspapermen have resorted to hyperbole, but a significant step forward nonetheless.

The guest preacher for the Sunday and Monday of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary was W. E. Blomfield. It must have been a particularly nostalgic occasion for him, returning to his first church where his baptism into the ministry had been so dramatic – dare I say, traumatic – to the church where he had been married; returning in triumph, too, as President of the Baptist Union. How different was his status now from that when he had been forced to leave. His sermons were quoted at length in the newspapers, but no-one now submitted them to the L.B.A. for approval!

## **THE CUP OF BLESSING**

The practice at Elm Road in the early years was to pass a common cup at communion. Communion was held after the services of the first Sunday in the month in the evening and third Sunday in the morning, but the communion was separate from the main worship, beginning after an opportunity had been given to members of the congregation to leave. Numbers at those early communion services cannot have been great, possibly no greater than the 45-50 who attended church meetings. Members had to place a ticket in the collection plate and so a record was kept by the deacons 'to aid in maintaining discipline and pastoral visitation'.

By October, 1907 we read of attendances at evening worship of 900 people, and concern was expressed about the '*wisdom of allowing so crowded a congregation*'. At the same church meeting, the deacons were asked to consider the possibility of introducing individual communion cups. A letter was sent to church members asking them to vote; the replies were 94 for individual cups, 59 for the common cup, and the majority for change not being overwhelming, it was decided to do nothing for the time being.

The failure to obtain new cups to match the cut-glass pair, thus enabling the large numbers of people attending to be served, and then the breakage of one of the common cups brought renewed pressure for change. Despite this, it was not until 1913 that it was arranged to have individual cups at morning communion. No reasons are given in the church book for the change. Since, it seems attendance at evening communion was larger, perhaps the argument

of pressure of numbers worked the other way too, and the church could not afford the number of cups it would need for the evening service. Perhaps it was time that was the decisive factor. Owing to the time taken serving using only 2 cups, the one o'clock lunch may have been put in jeopardy. Certainly Mr. Fleming tended to preach long sermons; one preached on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895 runs to twelve pages of close print – well over twice the length of those of Michael Walker preached in 1977 and printed in 'From Glory to Glory'. In October, 1908 a '*friend who wishes to remain anonymous*' offered the pastor a clock for the church. The friend was asked '*to defer his gift in the meantime*'.

The practice of passing the common cup at evening communion ended with the Spanish 'flu epidemic in 1919, but seems to have been resumed at the Sunday morning services until 1920, when the gift of three further communion trays and glasses made possible the use of individual cups at both services. The old cups were eventually given to Coney Hall Baptist Church. It was not until the 1970s that communion was integrated into the service – rather, made the centre of worship at Elm Road.

## **FULL AND RUNNING OVER**

Throughout Mr. Fleming's ministry, there were frequent plans to extend the premises to accommodate this increase of members of church, congregation and Sunday School, and also to allow for the broad range of activities which he believed a church should offer its members. In 1902 Mr. J. Attenborough explained that the Young Men's Bible Class, of which he was President, had 'outgrown' the Minister's Vestry and needed new accommodation. Out of thanksgiving to God for 30 years of happy marriage and gratefulness that all their children were now members of Elm. Road, he and Mrs. Attenborough offered to build and furnish a new classroom. It was opened in May of that year and stands on the west side of the church. It was used as the Vestry during the recent building work in 1981-2 and now houses the Playgroup.

Then, in June, 1904 it was decided to look into the possibility of building 'three or four new classrooms on the South side'. These classrooms were completed by October of the same year and were paid for entirely by the Attenborough family 'from a fund at their disposal'. The minute book states:

"The name Attenborough will always be remembered with gratitude in connection with the classrooms and school – indeed with everything connected with the interests of the young of Elm Road." By 1907 the 'growing necessity for increased accommodation in Church sittings and in the Sunday School' prompted the church to commission a 'competent architect' to prepare plans and estimates for the erection of (i) a gallery at the end of the church, (ii) the enlargement of the Lecture Hall and (iii) provision of a new infants' classroom. The cost of these alterations was to be a total of £2,150. This time the Church was unable to proceed. The erection of a new classroom (£850) was deferred and it was resolved that before embarking on plans (i) and (ii) the church should have in hand a sum of at least £1,000. The increased accommodation was still needed, however, and two new pews were placed at the back and a renewed attempt was made to encourage pew-holders to pay their pew rents and arrive on time, or to give up their pews to provide more free seats. Even so, within one month, new plans were laid before the church to extend the left aisle in line with the transept at a cost of £580 and so provide an additional 70-80 seats. In the event, in 1909 major defects were discovered in the roof of the main building which, for the safety of the building, had to be carried out immediately. The contract was given to Messrs. Syme and Duncan who agreed to charge 'cost price plus 15% profit'. The total cost was £195 14s 8d – and we read no more about extensions for a few years.



"Church 1901 - 1969"

By 1912, the Sunday School had grown to 465 with an average attendance of 53 in the morning and 286 in the afternoon. With twenty classes taking place in the Hall, it must have been very crowded and the need for good discipline imperative. The challenge presented to the church by such numbers of children must have been formidable; there were 41 officers and teachers plus many 'auxiliary teachers'. As with most Sunday Schools, the major challenge lay in translating these large numbers into young church members. In the minutes of the church meeting we read frequently of the problem of 'leakage' of Sunday School scholars; this despite an excellent library of 600 volumes, a cricket team, football club, lively Christian Endeavour Society, annual 'Decision Days' and Bible Classes designed for the young. In 1912 only three Sunday School scholars joined the church, though 49 had signed Decision Cards. It was therefore resolved to start a young men's Institute. This could not be done without new buildings. The plans laid before the church in June, 1914 were ambitious:

- to build a bay onto the Infants' Classroom (present IADOM<sup>2</sup> Lounge),
- to build a billiard hall directly above it,
- to use the deacons' vestry to make space for a fireproof staircase and improved lavatory and cupboard facilities,
- to enlarge the minister's vestry (present Youth Office<sup>3</sup>) by removing the old lavatory (eventually removed in 1981) and building a bay window,
- to build a reading room above the vestries.

The church enthusiastically agreed to these plans and a committee was set up to implement them. By September, the plan was dead. The need for a young men's institute had disappeared with the young men themselves into the battlefields of Flanders.

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<sup>2</sup> (2013 now known simply as The Lounge)

<sup>3</sup> (2013 now the Church Office)



## SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY

Rev. R. S. Fleming's three eldest sons, Hamish, Allister and Atholl enlisted on the day war was declared. Their parents had felt that it was not right that all three should go together, but none wanted to be he who had failed to respond to his country's call. Mr. Fleming had already, in May 1913, been sent to Scotland until September by his doctor who had diagnosed 'nervous exhaustion'. His pulse rate was down to 44 through overwork. It is difficult to comprehend the effect the War had on him, his family and his church. The pastor reported on September 17th, 1914 that between 30 and 40 of the young men of the church had enlisted. The following motion passed at that meeting catches perfectly the national mood at that time: 'We have heard with deepest gratification that a large number of the young people associated with the church, congregation and Sunday School at Elm Road have offered themselves for the service of their country in connection with the War. We offer to all these young people our warmest congratulations upon their patriotism and commend them to God, that He may shelter them from all harm in the discharge of their duties as they may be called upon to perform.' Of course, no-one in 1914 could envisage what a devastating War it was to be, nor to what extent their sons were in danger.

Slowly the War began to make its impact. The gifts of the 1914 Harvest Festival went to the Belgian Refugee Hostel in Beckenham Road; the Church Hall and Parlour were turned into a flourishing Soldiers' Club for those stationed within the area; the 1915 deacons' elections had to be postponed because so many members were away from the church; extra insurance had to be taken out against damage to the premises by aircraft.

Then, with the news of Philip Rust's death in May, 1915, we read in the church book the first of the frequent votes of sympathy. The minister's own family received a double blow when in July 1916 their son Allister was killed in France, and then in September of 1917 Frank Reynolds, who was engaged to their daughter Aileen, died after a long and painful struggle against war wounds. Later that year, one of the deacons, Mr. Fred Marsland, died of malaria while on duty in Salonika.

The workload on those who remained must have been great, for a total of 115 from the Church were, at some time or other, involved in active service. The Church was fortunate to have received from Enfield, Mr. C. W. Neale. He was an experienced Christian who greatly strengthened the church and became Headmaster of Brockley High School. Mr. Laurence Dickins, who had already once been forced to retire from the secretaryship on the grounds of ill-health, had to come out of retirement and was acting secretary for most of the war period. J. Arthur Attenborough was given the additional responsibility of being secretary of the Soldiers' Club. In this he was so successful that in 1918 he was able to announce to the church that over 300 soldiers had signed 'decision cards', pledging among other things to read one chapter of the Bible every day. For the Treasurer, Mr. W. Cullum, it was a constant struggle to keep the Church books balanced.

In addition to the loss of his son Allister, the minister suffered a further blow. At the meeting on 3rd January, 1918 he spoke of the 'great sorrow so recently permitted in the calling away from their home of their youngest dear boy, Bobby, and of the comfort which the tender sympathy and the love of the Church had been to Mrs. Fleming and himself in this sad bereavement'.

For four years, almost every family in the church lived in constant tension, trying to follow the action in the newspapers, fearful lest their dear ones be moved to a 'more active' part of the line, trying to keep hopeful that the worst would not happen. Those at home did what little they could. In January, 1918 they sent gifts of '3000 cigarettes, socks, candles, soap, writing pads, pencils, etc. to our boys at the front'. They participated on January 6th, 1918 in the King's Day of Prayer. The minister wrote in the Handbook in 1917: "As a church, we are trying to do our duty in these difficult days. We continue to give the best of our manhood to face hardship, wounds and death. Those whose posts are at home are bearing with good heart such part of the national burden as falls upon them... Our women are as busy as our men. And if... we have to discontinue some of our accustomed activities and to put our hands to new duties, we are consoled by the knowledge that we are hastening the advent of peace."

By May, 1918, with the Americans beginning to make their impact in France, that peace looked close enough for the church to start considering the form of memorial that should be erected to the 'heroes who had fallen'. It was resolved that as well as a commemorative tablet with the names inscribed, there should also be built the Institute, the construction of which the War had so cruelly prevented.

How great was the celebration on 11th November when the Armistice was signed. Both Thanksgiving Services ended with the Hallelujah Chorus. The minister claimed it as the greatest day in the nation's history – greater than the signing of Magna Carta, the defeat of the Armada, the days when 'Cromwell delivered them from the menace of monarchical absolutism', and the crushing of Napoleon. 'It was a day that the Lord had made; it was the Lord's doing and wondrous in our eyes. It had seemed almost too good to be true to wake up and say to one's-self that the War was over. They felt like men in a dream, like the Jews when they were told they were free to return from Babylon to their own country, like the disciples when they knew their Lord had risen from the grave.'

## **SPIRIT OF UNREST**

To the church, as to the country, was now entrusted the awesome task of reconstruction. Mr. Fleming, who had once more been ordered to rest in February, must have felt that pressure more than most. His Silver Jubilee as minister had passed in the depth of the War, not celebrated in the style he would have liked, but noted nonetheless in the Minute Book. Those who knew him, comment that his illness and the War had left their mark. The fire was no longer in his preaching and he now read his well-prepared, but sometimes over-literary sermons. Eleven men had been killed, some of whom he could have relied upon to provide leadership in the church organisations. Others were not to return to the old church life.

These difficulties were well expressed by Mr. D. Reynolds (Father of Bert Reynolds) who had returned to Beckenham from Herne Bay to chair the 36th anniversary service in 1919. The local paper reported his address as follows:

"He said that they were living in an atmosphere... when everything appeared in an unstable, excited and changeful condition. He had been brought into contact during the last month with commercial, political and social life and did not know where they stood commercially, socially and politically. The order of things was so changed that they did not know what to do and so were standing their ground or standing still to see the salvation of God... There was a spirit of unrest pervading all churches. Men had been brought face to face with terrible realities. 'Think of the language these boys have had to hear, the conduct through which they have passed.'

It had been hoped that the Institute would provide the facilities that would win back such men to the church. Unfortunately it had to be postponed because it was felt wrong to build it at a time when the nation was so short of housing, and so the Institute was not formally opened until February, 1922. It was built on the West side of the church adjoining the classroom given by Mr. and Mrs. Attenborough in 1902, and housed two billiard tables. The intention was that it would be open every evening of the week and so provide on-site activities for the youth (particularly the men) of the church and neighbourhood. It was not, however, as successful as the minister and deacons hoped. Neither do many people today think of it as a war memorial, nor stop to read the inscription in the gable end outside.

Far more effective in this respect are the memorial windows in the East Transept. They were designed and made by Walter J. Pearce of Manchester and show in the left lights, 'Great-heart's mission to aid women and children' and on the right the 'Saviour's reception of the good knight at the entrance to the Holy City' – scenes from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. I have often looked up and drawn inspiration from the inscriptions – 'Be not afraid, only believe', and 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' These windows and richly decorated tablet bearing the names of the dead were unveiled in May, 1921.

## MISSION - OVERSEAS

The whole memorial scheme cost around £2,000, but it is utterly typical of the generosity of the church during Mr. Fleming's ministry that even though there was still a debt of £800 on these projects, a sum of £1,000 was sent to the Baptist Union in response to its appeal for funds to help poor ministers and missionaries. In 1921, Mr. George Brush organised a Missionary exhibition which filled the premises for three days. The parlour was turned into a medical room and the operating table displayed there was sent to India at the end of the exhibition.



There were Chinese tea gardens and in the church Hall, Mr. Attenborough presided over the 'Congo Court'. The church had long been associated with the Congo. It 'adopted', in 1900, Rev. George Hooper as its own missionary and he and his wife were strongly supported in their work at Kibokolo by the Sunday School, both financially and in prayer. Mr. Hooper had had a tough start to missionary work. He had been greeted with arrows and had to work for 11 years before making a convert. His wife was a skilled nurse and in the flu epidemic of 1918-19 not one person died in his mission station. It was only after this that his mission work 'took off'.

The Sunday School classes vied with each other as to which could raise the most money. Mr. Attenborough had pictures of steamships painted by Fred Dawes and so was able to present their totals visually week by week. George Brush recalled how on one occasion, as a boy, he tied lavender together with silk and sold it around the neighbourhood so that his class should win the competition. The Christian Endeavour Society was also active in its support of the B.M.S. In 1903 they raised £50 towards the appeal of £7,000 for a steamboat for the Congo.

The interest in work in the Congo went beyond raising money and making garments, etc. In September, 1909 a resolution was passed by the church meeting: "This meeting expresses deep sorrow and indignation at the continuance, even after the Belgian annexation, of the terrible Congo state system and appeals to the majority of His Majesty's Government to take steps to bring to a speedy end the regime of oppression and cruelty under which for so many years the helpless natives of Congo have suffered. It further urges His Majesty's Government to secure strict observance by the Congo Authorities of Treaty obligations and insist that the Protestant Missions shall no longer be deprived of their full rights under the British Convention and the General Act of Dehli to carry on unhindered their beneficial work on behalf of the inhabitants of Congo." Copies were forwarded to the Prime Minister and the M.P. for Bromley. These links with the Congo were further strengthened when Miss Gladys Pearce married Rev. W. Reynolds and then joined him in Upoto in February, 1919.

Interest in missionary work was not confined to that of the Congo. Support was also regularly given to Baptist Zenana work, and in particular to Miss Shekleton's School at Tai-nan-fu. In 1907, £11 12s. was sent by the Young People's Missionary Association to support two young

girls, San-nm and Mm-nm – a small sum, perhaps, compared with the astonishing £180 they sent to George Hooper that year, but a significant contribution nonetheless.

A new contact on the mission field was established when Dr. Vincent Dickins, son of the church secretary, went to Serampore in 1926. Since he had been brought up in the faith entirely through the youth organisations at Elm Road, the church was rightly proud of him. He died tragically in 1929. It is interesting to note that for the whole length of Mr. Fleming's ministry, Mrs. Fleming was secretary of the church's branch of the B.M.S. It is all too easy to forget the role played by the minister's wife in the life of the church. I am sure that this office was only a small outward sign of the extent of her work.

## MISSION AT HOME

Not surprisingly, in view of the practical help and concern given to overseas missions, the church's missionary commitment at home was broad and enthusiastic. The L.B.A.'s decision to build churches in the suburbs had been criticised from the start by some within the L.B.A. who thought that such churches would be to the advantage of the wealthier middle classes leaving the poor inner city areas starved of resources. At the opening of Elm Road, Rev. Tymms countered that argument saying that wherever he went he found the suburbs crowded with working men who had been driven from central London by the wholesale pulling down of houses. He found as much crime and squalor in some of these districts as in the worst rookeries of London. Certainly Beckenham was not one of those suburbs, and has, as yet, not become so. But there were areas which had their share of social problems and the Church sought to minister there.

In January 1901 Mr. J. Attenborough and Mr. Stapleford started a Children's Sunday evening service in Arthur Road Mission Hall (later to become Churchfields Road). This work was not without its difficulties. On two separate occasions in 1905 the work had to be suspended because of 'infectious diseases being prevalent in the neighbourhood', but by the end of that year the commitment was such that a 'Pleasant Saturday Evening' was also started. At the first of these, a number of 200 people were entertained with music and recitals – cakes and cups of coffee being served in the interval at ½ d. each. These evenings brought 'sunshine and gladness into the hearts of many... whose daily life is a commonplace round of dullness and sadness'.

Mr. Fleming's ministry was one of taking the Gospel to the people. One of the leaders in this work was Miss Phillips. She organised the distribution of Spurgeon's sermons in the neighbourhood. The work was based on the success of the deaconesses of the Doughty Street Mission in Holborn, which had for many years been actively supported by the church. By 1898, eight ladies were regularly involved. Week by week they each visited 30 homes and sold sermons as well as giving spiritual and practical help to those who needed it. In 1899 the number of ladies involved was 15 and the sermons were being distributed free. The work continued until 1914, and in an age when men seemed to dominate many aspects of the church life, was exclusively carried out by women.

A regular activity of the summer months at Elm Road was the open-air services. After an appeal for funds in 1905, Mr. Dickins and Mrs. Allison, who then led most of the services, were equipped with a platform and harmonium to make their work more effective. As reported in 1912 - '*Open-air work is essentially a work of faith.*' Its results were not easily evaluated, but it took place every Sunday, except when the weather utterly prevented it, until at least 1918.

The post-war period appears from the records to have been less lively. By far the most successful venture was the starting in 1918 of Scouts and Guides. From the outset they were well supported activities and have continued to be so to the present day. Many of the pre-war societies that were re-started seem to have faded. The Literary and Debating Society, a remarkable society with a membership of 178 in 1910, whose activities ranged from performances of Trial by Jury to listening to a lantern slide lecture of travels through the Holy Land on Horseback, never recaptured those heady pre-war days. Under the leadership of Atholl Fleming, it developed a Shakespearean bent and there are those who remember a fine

performance of 'The Taming of the Shrew'. The Society thus developed into the Beckenham Shakespeare Society.

## **MONEY MATTERS**

The most significant development in this period was the introduction of the Envelope Scheme in 1921. The treasurer, Mr. Cullum, wrote – *'for many years the ordinary income of the church has not been sufficient to meet the necessary expenditure without recourse to special appeals... The estimated annual expenditure of the Church... is about £920. The only two regular sources of income... are quarterly subscriptions [pew rents?] and weekly offertories.'* He pointed out to the church that subscriptions were only £400, so that offerings had to be £10 a week. The aim of the envelope scheme was to encourage members to make regular weekly offerings, having promised a fixed amount, and make up any loss through absence. Mr. L. G. Evens was secretary of the scheme. This was immediately successful, but by no means solved all the church's financial problems. Even so, in the last year of his ministry, Mr. Fleming once more inspired his congregation to raise, for the third time during his ministry, a sum of £1,000 for a denominational fund; this time it was the Ministers' Superannuation Fund.

## **END OF AN ERA**

In August, 1929, after several periods of poor health, Mr. Fleming announced his retirement. It was fitting that the Last Sunday services he led as minister, included a baptismal service. He was an energetic minister, a man of great integrity, with an amazing breadth of vision. He was well respected both in the denomination, serving as President of the L.B.A. in 1923, and in the local community. In recognition of his services to education in Beckenham, as a member of the Beckenham School Board and later of the Education Committee, the school in Witham Road was called 'The Stewart Fleming School'. He was most assiduous in his pastoral work. His daughter remembers how after a postprandial cup of tea, every day he went out visiting, and then would keep a detailed log of all visits to ensure that he regularly saw the whole membership. All attempts to get him to ride a bicycle had failed, and to the end of his ministry he did his visiting on foot. In view of the fact that he lived in Manor Road and some of his congregation (for example, the Attenboroughs and the Reynolds) lived in Shortlands, it was wholly appropriate that on his retirement, the church should give him and his wife, in addition to a cheque for £300, two armchairs, upholstered in leather.

## **THE WATERSHED**

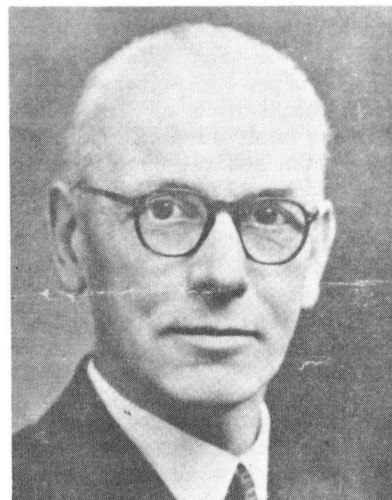
1930 was in many ways a watershed in our history as a church. Robert Stewart Fleming had left us at the end of 1929, after a distinguished ministry spanning 37 years. Members were doubtless wondering how they could possibly find anyone to succeed adequately the man who had been guide, counsellor and friend since 1892, just 9 years after the Church was formed. At that time there must have been many who could remember the early days and it was interesting to note that the Rev. Ernest Blomfield was invited to preach in May, 1930.

Down the years the Church has had a social conscience and it did not shirk expressing this in the thirties when, in company with other local churches, the application by the Regal Cinema for a seven day licence, was successfully opposed. Our share of the costs was 2 guineas.

The Rev. G. W. Harte, minister of Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol, preached at Elm Road for the first time on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1930 and the Church decided to ask him to preach again with a view to the Pastorate. This he did on November 23<sup>rd</sup> to such good effect that at a special church meeting on December 11<sup>th</sup>, it was decided unanimously to invite him to be the new minister at a salary of £600 per annum. In a letter dated December 19<sup>th</sup>., he wrote, *"I cheerfully accept the invitation which I regard as a conclusive indication of God's will. You will appreciate that I do so under a clear sense of duty when I say that my coming will probably mean a financial disadvantage to me. But I am confident of the future and quite happy that it is the Master's will that we should work together for His glory."* An honest and pragmatic response, typical of the

man. The Induction Services on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1931 were graced by the presence of Dr. Ernest Blomfield, Dr. Charles Brown and the Rev. Robert Stewart Fleming. An extract of G. W. Harte's response at the service, recorded in The Beckenham Journal, is perhaps illustrative of his ministry among us. *"My method, just a persuasive method, not to argue, intimidate or assume but to go alongside men and persuade them if I can. To me the Church is not an institution; it is a communion. I look on the Church as a family."*

So began another outstanding ministry at Beckenham. G. W. Harte was a tall, upright man with straight eyes and an engaging smile. His ministry was particularly to men. Not perhaps surprising as his faith had been tempered, when as a young man, he served as a Padre in the trenches in the 1914/18 War. I recall him telling us once of his first experience under fire in the front line. He said that he was shaking with fear until he heard the voice of the senior Padre in his ear, "Steady Harte, underneath are the everlasting arms." He founded the first Men's Contact Club at Elm Road; this attracted a hundred members in two months and the movement subsequently swept the country. He had an outstanding gift of preaching and the young people loved him. The 'Squashes' which he started, were great occasions held after evening services in the Institute Lounge. This would be packed with young people, sitting on the floor, and every possible perch including the window sills while The Padre, as he was affectionately known, would stand by the fireplace, leading the singing and inviting comment on the sermon.



Rev. G. W. Harte

In 1931 the Rev. and Mrs. George Hooper retired. These good folk had represented Elm Road on the mission field in Kibokoto, Zomboland, Congo (now in Angola) since 1900 and every boy and girl who had been through the Sunday School was familiar with their doings and adventures. They had worked for years before making their first convert, had just a handful after 15 years but left a church 1,000 strong with thousands of adherents.

Mr. Parker, who with his wife had been Chapel Keepers since 1900, died in 1932. They are worthy of note for they were of an age when pride in a job well done came before other considerations. They were devoted to the Church, familiar figures to all who came and beloved by all. It was their pride to have the place spotless and shining at all times. In his pastoral letter for the 1933 Handbook, the Minister referred to Mr. Parker's *"radiant faith which he kept undimmed to the last."* Sadly, they were not in membership. Did they feel that as servants of the Church it was not their place? Happily Mrs. Parker applied, and was received in, in 1933.

In preparation for the Jubilee Year of the Church in 1933 the Minister set the following aims:-

- 1) To maintain worthily the House of God.  
Repairs to the value of £500/£600 were put in hand.
- 2) To advance worthily the work of God in our midst.  
1933 was to be a year of personal evangelism.

These were not small aims. In today's figures they were thinking of spending £20,000 on repairs, this in the middle of the most appalling depression since the Industrial Revolution. At the Annual Church Meeting in February, 1933 the Pastor set a target of 50 new members by Easter and he had the great joy of bringing to the Church Meeting on April, 27<sup>th</sup> the names of 46 applicants, 14 on transfer and 32 on profession of faith. 44 new members were received in on May 7<sup>th</sup> when the congregation numbered 246.

The Communion Furniture in the Church was a gift made in July, 1933 by Mrs. Rose Kick, in memory of her husband Rex Kick.

An Oak Tablet recording the names of members who enter the ministry at home or abroad, was unveiled in the Schoolroom in November, 1933. This is now [1983] re-sited in the Church Vestibule.

## JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

The Jubilee Celebrations were indicative of the keenness and stamina of Church Members. Perhaps there were fewer distractions, but meetings were held every evening from Saturday to Thursday and on the Wednesday there was an afternoon service as well. Speakers included, Dr. Douglas Brown, Dr. Douglas Wilson, Rev. B. Grey Griffith, Dr. Charles Brown, Rev. G. W. Harte and two former ministers, Dr. Ernest Blomfield and the Rev. R. S. Fleming. Dr. Eric Thiman, a former organist at Elm Road, gave a recital before the evening service on the Wednesday. On the evening of Thursday, Mr. Fleming gave a wide ranging speech covering the 42 years since he came to the Church. He acknowledged the debt owed by the Town to the outstanding men who gave unstintingly of their time and talents in local government and education. He also paid tribute to the characters of the clergy in other churches over this period.

He quoted the words of Dr. Stanford, President of the London Baptist Association, when he laid the foundation stone in 1882. *"It is a pure act of faith, laying this stone and building this place of worship. We want everything. We want deacons, evangelists and pastors. We want the building and the people. We want schoolrooms and the scholars. We believe we will have all and more than all. But whence cometh our help? We cast our eyes above. Our strength is in the Lord. We would pray that strength down. Our prayers end in praise and all our songs must be set to this humble tune, 'Not unto us O Lord, not unto us but to thy name be the glory.'"* He continued, *"Of the generosity of this Church it is impossible to speak in adequate terms. Never has a call been made on your generosity to which you have not responded. The future is full of challenge and of promise. You cannot meet the demands of the new age with antiquated weapons. You must have men who have an understanding of the times: men of culture and of sympathy: men of courage and of faith: men who expect great things from God: men eager to attempt great things for God."*

At that time the Great War was still fresh in mind; it had finished just 15 years earlier, and Mr. Fleming paid tribute to the young men of the Church who had served and to the eleven (including one of his own sons) who had made the supreme sacrifice.

In 1934 the Minister and the Church Secretary, Mr. G. W. Neal, went as delegates to the Baptist World Congress in Berlin.

In October of that year the Church contributed £18.10.4d. to the fund opened after the dreadful Gresford Colliery Disaster. That sum would be over £500 in today's terms.

Until 1935 there was a platform with a handrail built across the end of the Hall, with access left to the Primary Department at one side and steps down the other corner to the door which now gives access to the Kitchen. In those days the end of the Kitchen nearest the Hall was separated by pinewood panelling to form the Sunday School Superintendent's Vestry. From this sanctum the commanding figure of John Arthur Attenborough, complete with silver tipped ebony baton, would emerge on Sundays, at 3 p.m., to lead the worship in a full Hall, before we split into classes. In that year the platform was removed to meet the demand from members for a badminton club, and a small mobile podium was made from the platform materials. This podium has long since vanished, but the sectional staging supplied at the same time is still in use.

It would be impossible to mention all Sunday School Superintendents and teachers but it is not out of place to record the death in 1936 of Mr. M. H. Cotterill, who was teaching us in the School in his 80s and always had an unfailing supply of texts for his boys. His garb was always the same; a frock coat, starched white shirt front and collar but no tie and the whole complete with one of those top hats with a rounded edge, beloved of Winston Churchill and brewers' draymen. The lack of tie was only apparent when the wind parted his waist-length beard. I see him now, leaning purposefully into the wind as he battled up Blandford Road to his home, head

down and beard, parted in the middle, streaming back over his shoulders. A saintly man and one of the last of the Victorians.

In 1936 one of our members, Geoffrey H. Woodham M.A., who trained at Regent's, was inducted to his first church at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. Also in that year we had a visit by the Spurgeon's Orphanage Handbell Ringers, probably the last occasion on which that ancient art was practiced at the Church.

It was a significant year in the spiritual growth of the Church. In October, the Young People's Circle was formed, under the inspiring leadership of H. D. Reynolds and M. O. Scroggie, both of whom were to make their marks in later years as distinguished Church Secretaries. In a peculiar way this organisation met the needs of the young people of the day and was a powerful force in moulding the lives of those involved.

## **CONEY HALL BAPTIST CHURCH**

1936 saw the opening of the work to establish a Baptist Church at Coney Hall where the extensive new housing estate was without a Free Church. In the first two weeks of July up to 200 children attended services in a tent on the site of the proposed new church at Coney Hill. By December the Minister could report that the site had been secured by the London Baptist Association and that a children's service was being held on Sundays, in the restaurant over the Coney Hill Garage, by members of The Young People's Institute assisted by members of The Beckenham Crusaders. The Church passed the following resolution:- *"With humble gratitude to God for His blessing on this Church for the past 51 years and with deep concern for the spiritual needs of the large population at Coney Hall at present unprovided with a Free Church place of worship, we respond to the call of The Baptist Union Forward Movement and gladly pledge ourselves to raise a sum of £800 towards the cost of a School Chapel and to further by all means in our power the consolidation of the work to which God has led us."*

By April 1937 there were 200 children on the register, with an average attendance of 120, and the meeting place was moved to the school in Gates Green Road. By May 2nd., the Church had raised £595 of the £800 required.

At this time we reckoned to keep in touch with and consider as "our" missionaries, the Rev. W. O. Reynolds at Kimpese, the Rev. G. D. Reynolds at Agra, Drs. Eric and Honor Wilkins in the Kond Hills and the Rev. and Mrs. Salmon at Thysville who had taken over from Mr. & Mrs. George Hooper when they retired.

The local branch of The League of Nations Union arranged for a visit to Beckenham of 14 men and women from Germany, France, Belgium and Holland to foster international goodwill and we were hosts to the party. This was just two years before the outbreak of the last European War; one or two of us visited the German Rhineland that year and had little doubt that the die was already cast.

In October, 1937 there was a special church meeting to consider the adoption of The Revised Baptist Hymnal but in view of the deficit on the Church accounts and the commitment to support Coney Hall, it was decided to postpone a decision for two years.

At the Annual Church Meeting on February 17<sup>th</sup> 1938 John Arthur Attenborough was congratulated on completing 40 years as Sunday School Superintendent.

June 25<sup>th</sup> 1938 saw the stone laying ceremony for the new Coney Hall Church and opening services were conducted on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The first baptismal service was conducted by the Rev. G. W. Harte on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1939.

Over the years there have been outstanding characters in the Church and none more so, in his quiet way, than Harry Friend, a chauffeur by trade, who died in 1939. The Minister's comment was so apt: *"All who knew him loved him. As a deacon no man ever served with greater loyalty or with such humility. Others may take his place but none will fill it with greater grace or more enduring worth. He was one of God's gentlemen."*



Also in 1939 one of our members, Miss Mabel Attenborough, visited India for the opening of The Moorshead Memorial Hospital in the Kond Hills and subsequently volunteered for service with the Baptist Missionary Society in that area.

Our former Minister, the Rev. Robert Stewart Fleming was honoured, in recognition of his work for education in Beckenham, since he came to the Town in 1892, in the opening of The Stewart Fleming School on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1939.

## **OUTBREAK OF WAR**

With the declaration of war with Germany urgent attention needed to be given to 'blacking out' the windows and in view of the difficulties of dealing with the Church effectively, it was decided at the Church Meeting in September to hold the 'evening service' at 3 p.m. and to have a fellowship meeting in the Hall from 6 to 8.30 p.m. By the end of the year over 1,000 soldiers were billeted in the neighbourhood and the Hall was opened as a soldiers' club every evening from 5 p.m. and afternoon and evening on Sundays.

The first Minister at Coney Hall, the Rev. A. J. Garnier, who had been a missionary in China, commenced his Ministry on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1940. He was an Italian national and the authorities decided therefore that he was a threat to the State. He was arrested and sent to an internment camp on The Isle of Man in June. After we had made strong representations to the Home Office he was released and was back at Coney Hall by the end of the year.

A legacy from Mrs. Neal, wife of our Church Secretary, was used to finance the purchase of the Revised Baptist Church Hymnal.

In 1940 the War began its disruptive influence on Church life with the call up of many, evacuation of others to safer areas and problems of blackout. Air raids were however infrequent until a perfect September day when the blitz began in earnest with a massive daylight raid on the London Docks.

In the autumn, we lost John Arthur Attenborough, a leading figure and devoted servant of the Church since the turn of the century. Over all that time he had served as deacon and Sunday School Superintendent and latterly his infectious enthusiasm as treasurer of The Coney Hall Church Appeal had done much to put that Church on a sound footing financially.

In September Mr. Doble's house, 4, Elm Road, was badly damaged at night by a bomb which blew all the windows out. Fortunately it was not a direct hit and the gallant old gentleman rigged a flag staff from his gaping bedroom window in the morning and ran out the Union Jack.

The Church records were transferred for safe keeping, to the cellars of Spurgeon's College and in January 1941 fire watching had to be organised with rotas of volunteers sleeping on the premises. The equipment provided was two stirrup pumps and 100 sandbags; in retrospect, a little inadequate to deal with the might of the German Luftwaffe and its fire bombs.

By this time the Church was suffering from financial difficulties and in order to meet these the Caretaker was made part time and the Minister and Organist took voluntary cuts in pay.

In May 1941 our Organist and Choirmaster, Mr. Alfred Grover, was called up and drafted into the Military Police. He still came to play whenever he could get leave.

By this time the soldiery had been billeted further away and proper canteen facilities had been provided for them. The Soldiers' Club had therefore closed and the Hall was now used two nights a week by a platoon of the 55th Battalion Royal West Kent Home Guard for training purposes.

Mr. G. W. Neal B.Sc., who had served as deacon for 25 years and as Church Secretary for 17 years, resigned as Secretary following the decision of the Church to resume services in the sanctuary. He felt that the increased consumption of heating and lighting was contrary to the national interest. The task was taken up jointly by the Assistant Secretary, Mr. H. D. Reynolds and Mr. F. D. Birkett. Both were very busy men. Bert Reynolds was living at Bickley, working at Ealing and was 2nd in Command 51st Battalion Kent Home Guard stationed at Bromley.

Having in mind that there was little or no petrol available it is difficult to understand how even his prodigious energy sufficed.

In November, 1942 a cheque for £200 was received towards clearing the deficit of £300 and the Secretaries issued an appeal for a determined effort to get the finances into the black, making it a thankoffering for the preservation of the Church from bombing. They spoke too soon, the damage was to come. By the end of the year however the deficit was cleared with £50 in hand and donations for the Missionary Ter-Centenary target of £250 had reached £500.

In December 1942, in the middle of the War, the Rev. Robert Stewart Fleming received his home call. So passed a man who served the town of his adoption with love and distinction, and to the Church to which he came he brought rare gifts of character and devotion. It was decided that a fitting memorial be erected in the Church after the War.

At the Annual Church Meeting in April 1943, at the height of the War, it was reported that 92 scholars were attending the Sunday School. In view of the absence of so many members due to the War, the election of deacons was postponed for 12 months. The Minister spoke of the losses suffered by the church 25 years earlier, after the 1914/18 War and urged the formation of a commission of enquiry to try to avoid a repetition. He suggested the following aims:-

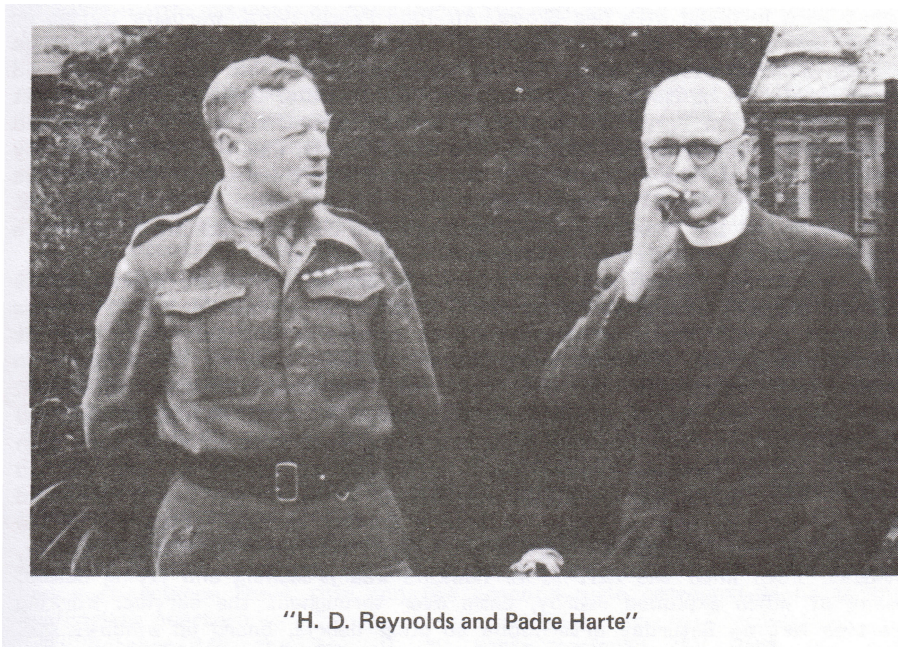
- (a) To survey the opportunities.
- (b) To scrutinise our forces, equipment and methods covering:-
  1. Internally – Services, Organisation and Personnel.
  2. Externally – Aim and Challenge to Beckenham and the World.

The Diamond Jubilee of the Church was celebrated worthily in October 1943, despite the War. As the Secretary pointed out in his notes on the meetings, they took place in the 5th winter of war, with blackout fully in force and no moon. Over 70 of the young people were in the Services and of those left most were involved with Red Cross, Air Raid Precautions, Wardens' duties or Home Guard. Paper controls made it difficult to advertise the meetings though advertisements, placed in the local press and The Baptist Times had been helpful in contacting past members and friends. Catering was difficult with rationing in force but everybody brought something and a good spread resulted for the Saturday reunion. The whole church was full for the Sunday morning service. The front part of the Church was blacked out and this was filled for the evening communion when there were 85 communicants.

In March 1944 the Church resolved to adopt the Covenant Scheme of giving; a significant step forward in our financial management.

At the Annual Church Meeting in April 1944 the deacons were empowered to co-opt deacons to a grand total of 15 in order to spread the load "in these difficult days." Those co-opted were to serve for one year only. Also at this meeting, the voluntary reduction in stipend, made by the Minister in 1941, was reinstated in view of the improved financial situation.

At the October Church Meeting the Secretary, Mr. H. D. Reynolds, reported on the damage to the premises from the flying bomb attacks which were then in full swing. Building repairs were restricted to essentials and we had already spent up to our permitted maximum of £100. He was proud to record that at no time had we failed to hold a Sunday service though for a few Sundays we were obliged to meet in the Library opposite. He recalled Sunday, August, 20<sup>th</sup> when the Rev. A. H. Hawkins was preaching and flying bombs, many of which exploded nearby, came over throughout the service. Working parties met on Saturday afternoons to clear debris, board up windows etc. often to find in the morning that their work had been undone by attacks during the night. Some of us got to know our way round the roofs very well at that time. Fortunately the Memorial Window, to those who fell in the 1914/18 War, had been boarded up at the beginning of the War and was preserved intact.



"H. D. Reynolds and Padre Harte"

Despite all these problems a thriving Youth Club was maintained (an attendance of 75 was recorded in October 1944) meeting on Mondays for drama, Thursdays for discussion and Saturdays for recreation. The Sunday School recommenced and women's meetings were to be resumed as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the bombing attacks affected attendances at services and we were again in trouble financially. A deacons' meeting was held at the home of G. W. Harte in October 1944 when attendance was reduced to four, Mrs. Grose and Messrs. Reynolds, Birkett and Phillips; the explosion of a V2 Rocket echoes down the years through the minutes of that meeting.

January 1945 was bitterly cold and with fuel restrictions and boarded up windows, water and heating systems froze solid. The net result was twelve major bursts and much flooding. Services were transferred to the gloom of the Church Parlour, where the windows had all been blasted out and boarded and half the ceiling was down.

At the Annual Church Meeting in April the resolution regarding the co-option of deacons was renewed for one year. Mr. Percy Doble was thanked for 45 years service as Sunday School Treasurer.

## **PEACE AND RECONSTRUCTION**

May saw the end of the European War and September the end of the War in the Pacific. The Baptist Union launched a Thanksgiving Fund for Reconstruction with a target of £150,000, £100,000 for the United Kingdom and the balance for the European Continent. We came under the heading of "Churches in the South East which had been severely damaged by enemy action." The estimated cost of boiler replacement, overhaul of the lighting installation and general repairs was £2,500, of which £850 was recoverable as War Damage Insurance. It was decided therefore that we could not contribute to the Thanksgiving Fund for Reconstruction, but that we would not call on that Fund for help. As a contribution to Continental Reconstruction a special appeal was made on Colonial Sunday.

At the October Church Meeting it was resolved to put in hand the first deacons' election since 1937.

In June 1946 Drs. Eric and Honor Wilkins were welcomed home after 10 years with the B.M.S. in India.

The year had its frustrations as the boiler had been condemned and the electrical circuitry was dangerous but nothing could be done until a licence to proceed was granted. This was finally received in October, a new boiler and booster pump ordered but delivery was given as four months. We were fortunate in having in membership an electrician, Mr. Gleeves, and he

contrived to wire the Hall for tubular heaters to give us a little background heat during the winter.

At this time German prisoners of war were still being held in this country, as cheap labour, fourteen months after the end of the War. The Church had a conscience about this and the deacons made representations in the appropriate quarters.

In October 1948 the Rev. G. W. Harte resigned the Pastorate, the resignation to be operative from the end of December. He was to go to Spurgeon's College as Secretary. Thus ended a fruitful ministry, loyally maintained through the darkest hours of the War. Since his induction in 1931, 350 members had been received into the Church at Elm Road. The Rev. Gordon S. Wilkins, a truly saintly man who had served from 1892 to 1927 on the mission field in India and as Pastor at Camberwell New Road from 1927 to 1934, kindly consented to be Moderator during the interregnum. He had been a deacon at Elm Road for 10 years.

Repairs to eliminate dry rot under the vestibule floor were completed in December 1946 but further dry rot was discovered behind the organ. Members were not downhearted and over the year £1,060 was raised for The Restoration Fund, bringing this to £1,896, sufficient to carry out all restoration work to the premises, when building licences were obtained. The work was completed in 1947, including the installation of new lighting and the renewal of the condemned electrical circuitry, but in 1948 one section of the boiler had still not been delivered. The source of some of the dry rot problems was removed when a tree root was found growing through and blocking the drain to the baptistry.

During 1947 the Baptist Women's League, with admirable foresight, gave £30 to establish The Manse Building Fund.

While there was, and rightly so, much energy devoted to restoring the fabric, the spiritual work of the Church was not neglected. In 1948 the Secretary could report that the premises were in use every day of the week and the Moderator said that the virility of the Church had been best demonstrated in the weekly devotional service, "Thursday Night at Eight." At the beginning of 1947 the Coney Hall Church had no oversight and spirits were low. At the suggestion of our Secretary, the Spurgeon's College Principal agreed that our member, Mr. Desmond Hall, who was in training at the College, should go as Student Pastor.

During a very cold spell in March 1947 meetings had to be cancelled owing to national fuel restrictions.

The deacons' election was brought forward one year to 1948 in view of vacancies and the need for a stable diaconate when a new minister was appointed.

As a result of the preoccupation with repairs and restoration and the difficulties of obtaining materials and building licences, the Fleming Memorial had still not been started. The proposal at that time was to install a carved oak screen across the front of the East Transept and to include therein the War Memorials and the Book of Remembrance.

At the Church Meeting in July the Rev. Gordon S. Wilkins was made Deacon Emeritus in recognition of his services at home and abroad and a further resolution congratulated Mr. Percy F. Doble and his sister Mrs. J. A. Attenborough who had joined the Church in 1888 and were celebrating their diamond jubilee in membership. The Organist and Choirmaster, Mr. Alfred Grover, was also thanked for 21 years unstinted service.

## **INDUCTION OF THE REV. ARTHUR B. JESTICE B.D.**

1948 saw continuing efforts to obtain a settlement and records indicate that the Secretary was called upon to exercise much patience. One Minister, invited to preach for a second time with a view to the Pastorate, wrote of his "crushing disappointment" when the Church turned him down, despite the most glowing tributes from senior men in the Denomination. The price of democracy appears in such cases to be carried by those least able to pay.

However, at their meeting on October 25th, the deacons resolved to make further enquiries about a chaplain in the R.A.F., the Rev. Arthur B. Jestice B.D. who had led worship on the previous Sunday. At a Special Church Meeting on November 11th, the Church, with seemingly resolution, carried a proposition, "*That the Rev. Arthur B. Jestice B.D. Chaplain to the R.A.F. be invited to the Pastorate.*" The invitation was accepted, subject to his release from duty in the Royal Air Force. In January 1949 we heard that he hoped to be demobbed in February and the Deacons agreed to buy the freehold property at 96, Cherry Tree Walk for a manse. War damage repairs to the house were nearing completion and the price was £2,200, which sum the Baptist Property Board was ready to loan at 3½ % interest. The decision of the Deacons in this matter was ratified by the Church. A welcome meeting was arranged for March 17<sup>th</sup> and the induction planned for April 9<sup>th</sup>

Church minutes, in common with all minutes, tend to get a bit humdrum, but in preparing a record such as this, one is rewarded from time to time by words which touch the heart. At the December Church Meeting in 1948 our Moderator, whom you will recall had spent 35 years as a missionary in India, made a moving comment on the news that the Government of India had renounced "untouchability" and gave a brief but vivid picture of the blessing this conferred on millions of fellow men in India.

The Annual Church Meeting planned for March 31<sup>st</sup> 1949, with the Rev. Arthur B. Jestice in the Chair, was very nearly a non-event as a cry of fire was raised at 11 p.m. on March 30<sup>th</sup> and the whole Church could well have been destroyed. The fire, which originated in the boiler house, spread to the roofs of the kitchen, schoolroom alcoves, lounge, vestries and the west transept of the Church and but for the prompt action of the Beckenham Fire Brigade would have been disastrous. Fortunately, the alarm was raised by Aileen Penny, who was then living in the Fleming family home 11, Elm Road. She alerted the Secretary, Mr. Bert Reynolds and the Fabric Steward, Mr. Walter Valler and the three of them, assisted by Molly Reynolds carried out valuable salvage work. They also ensured that all roofs were weatherproofed with tarpaulins next day to enable services and in particular the Induction Service to be held in the sanctuary. One of the warmest receptions accorded a new minister. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. We were fortunate in that the Insurance Company paid out for the replacement of all roof timbers but our surveyors subsequently assured us that the main timbers, though badly charred, were still structurally sound. This gave us a saving of £1,000 on the repairs and the opportunity was taken to found The Property Maintenance Fund.



Rev. Arthur B. Jestice B.D.

The practice of our North American cousins of addressing all and sundry by their Christian names had, by the end of the War, affected our mode of address also. Previous ministers had always been addressed formally but the Rev. A. B. Jestice quickly found a place in the love and affection of the Church as Arthur in common with his wife May.

The Induction Service on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1949 was presided over by the Rev. Henry Cook M.A., General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area of the Baptist Union, the charge to the Minister was given by the Rev. R. L. Child M.A., B.D., B.Litt. principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, and the charge to the Church by the Rev. Walter R. Marsh B.D. Hon. Chaplain to H.M. the King, Principal Chaplain (United Board) R.A.F. The prayer of dedication was given by the Rev. G. W. Harte.

The Ministry thus begun reflected the Minister's concern for people, expressed in a graciousness of temperament and manner which was a great blessing pastorally while his preaching of the Word was with power and congregations increased.

The Guide Company, led by Miss Kathleen Craske, survived the War and the Scout Group was restarted in 1949 under Mr. Laurie Farmer, including Rover Scouts although call up for National Service made the maintenance of this latter branch difficult. Valuable work among young

people was also going forward in the Youth Club under the leadership of Mr. Ron Foster who had a great talent for leading this group.

Toys from the Christmas Toy Service this year and a supply of sweets were sent to refugees in Germany.

It was a sign of the times when our Fabric Steward decided that shrubs on the Elm Road side of the Church had to go to make room for a car park.

At a Special Church Meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1950 the new Church Rules, which had been hammered out exactly by a small sub-committee chaired by Mr. M. G. Scroggie, were presented to the Church for adoption. After a long session the meeting was reconvened on February 16<sup>th</sup> and again on March 2<sup>nd</sup> before final approval, after numerous amendments and much redrafting.

The Minister completed his first year at Beckenham in March 1950 and we could record, with thanks to God, an increase of 31 in membership.

The interior walls of the Church, the roof timbers and ceiling were suction cleaned, the brickwork steam cleaned and all the timbers linseed oiled in 1950.

## **FLEMING MEMORIAL**

At an extraordinary Church Meeting in September it was decided to alter the form of the Fleming Memorial, as the oak screen suggested would be out of keeping with the pitch pine of pulpit and pews and pitch pine would be unsuitable for a carved screen. It was also pointed out that screening off the transept would lose seating for 85 people. It was therefore decided to provide stained glass windows in the West Transept to balance the War Memorial Windows in the East Transept. It was also agreed that a wall plaque and a book of remembrance be sited under the new windows. The wall plaque idea was subsequently dropped in favour of wording in the windows.

In March 1951 the Church approved the design of the windows, by W. W. Wheeler A.R.C.A., depicting the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and our Lord welcoming little children. The work was put in the hands of R. J. Baxendine & Company Limited.

The windows were unveiled by Aileen Fleming, on behalf of her mother, on Sunday, September 16<sup>th</sup> when the Rev. Sydney G. Morris, past President of the Baptist Union presided, the Minister led in prayer and an address was given by the Rev. G. W. Harte. At the same ceremony the Book of Remembrance, the gift of Mr. Percy Jones, was unveiled by Mr. S. T. Cooper, one of our older members who had been a deacon since the end of the Great War. His worship the Mayor of Beckenham, read the lesson.

To mark the Festival of Britain in 1951 a United Service of Christian Witness was held in Kelsey Park and the Church was represented in an Historical Exhibition at The Old Council Offices.

At the beginning of 1952 Mrs. R. S. Fleming won home to eternal life, just 60 years after joining us on transfer from Pitlochry, when her husband came as Minister. He would undoubtedly have acknowledged the vital contribution made by her to his ministry in Beckenham and to the part he played in the development of local education.

The Secretary's Report, at the Annual Church Meeting, gave encouraging news of youth work with Scouts and Guides flourishing and a Youth Club with 70/90 members attending each Saturday, most coming to Sunday evening service and some 30 attending Young People's Fellowship on Sunday afternoons. The Youth Club and the Fellowship were under the leadership of Mr. Douglas Cooke who exercised a most important ministry among these young people. A further sign of the changing times was the formation of The Baptist Women's League Auxiliary to cater for women who were unable to attend meetings during the day.

The issue of Junior Church Membership, which had been exercising the minds and consciences of many members for a long time, was finally disposed of following a deacons' report which refreshed thinking on the issue like a breath of fresh air. Junior Church Membership was a confusing concept and had no status; the rules on Church Membership

were quite clear. It was claimed that it had been introduced to prevent members of tender years being privy to confidential matters at Church Meetings but, as the Minister pointed out, this was a denial of membership to professing Christians in direct contradiction of the tradition of the Church. The motion carried by the Church is worthy of reproduction in full as it also clarified thought on the related subjects of baptism and membership, which had long been treated as separate issues. The proposition was:-

*“That this meeting is agreed, that the definition of Membership in the Church Rules is clear and cannot at any time bear any relation to age; the latter part of the rule, i.e. ‘whose lives show love toward God and bear evidence of their Christian profession,’ gives ample provision for wide divergence of age and maturity.*

*Co-related to Church Membership is Baptism and therefore Baptism should normally be followed by Church Membership and the Minister may bring forward the names of those about to be baptised in order that they may be considered for membership and received into the Church fellowship at the earliest opportunity after baptism. It is appreciated that membership is not dependent on baptism and depends not only on profession of faith but on evidence of Christian living.*

*The meeting is agreed that since Church Membership need bear no relation to age, the organisation of Junior Church Membership, as at present constituted, shall terminate.”*

At the Church Meeting in February 1953 Mrs. Scroggie voiced her concern at the continued re-election of progressively ageing deacons. A recurrent theme down the years.

This was the year of the disastrous floods down the East Coast and gifts of money and clothing were sent from the Church to Felixstowe Baptist Church which had been damaged and whose members had suffered much material loss in the catastrophe.

The year gave a further indication of changing social patterns with the decline in attendances at The Men’s Contact Club.

It will be recalled that this was the year of the coronation of our Queen and an order of service issued by the Free Church Federal Council was used the previous Sunday. It was suggested that those with television sets invite those without to see the Coronation Service. (Was there a time when ‘the box’ did not dominate every home?).

At the Church Meeting in July 1953 attention was drawn to the proposed bill to allow sponsored television programmes. The following proposition was carried with one dissident: “That this meeting views with grave concern the proposal to promote legislation to permit commercial television and deplores the decision to make this a party issue when men of goodwill in all parties consider it a retrograde step in the development of a powerful force in the National life.” Copies were sent to the local M.P., The Baptist Union and the Beckenham Council of Churches. Also at this meeting that formidable lady, Mrs. Mary Scroggie, desired to know whether an edict had gone forth that ladies in the Choir should wear hats in future. The Minister, gracious as ever and doubtless feeling that ‘the soft answer turneth away wrath,’ said that he had expressed a preference in that direction but that there was no question of compulsion. At the same meeting the Secretary announced that Mr. & Mrs. Walter Valler had kindly supplied an electric clock for the pulpit. The Rev. Gordon Wilkins enquired dryly whether it was an alarm clock but received no assurance.

In January 1954 the Church endorsed the two-fold plan, circulated by the Deacons, which became known as The Forward Movement and which planned for the development of the spiritual life of the Church, the redecoration and improvement of Church and Manse premises and the securing of better housing for the Minister. It was agreed to hold a conference for deacons and leaders of Church organisations that they might together rededicate themselves to Christ and His work and consider house parties for members, young people and those on the fringe of Church life. The district was to be canvassed through friends, senior auxiliaries, children of the Sunday School and the uniformed groups and there was to be house to house visitation. Every effort was to be made to consolidate the increased congregation and membership. The whole scheme was to be under-pinned by personal, group and corporate prayer backed by wider reading of the Word.

In June the Church authorised the Deacons to purchase the freehold site at 4, Elm Road and to draw up plans for a manse to be built thereon.

The Rev. Arthur Jestice, with the Rev. Donald Knight of St. Paul's took the initiative in founding the Beckenham Council of Churches and his appointment as President in February 1954 was an indication of the respect in which he was held. Miss Muriel Uglow was Church representative on the Council to which she gave many years valuable service as Secretary.

Our former Minister and beloved Padre went to his reward at the end of August 1954. He had been a brilliant and persuasive preacher who inspired faith and love in the Lord in the hearts of so many young people who sat at his feet during the years before the last War. Long tributes appeared in the local press, the Baptist Times and the Spurgeon's College Journal but perhaps the most moving was by the Rev. Gordon Wilkins in the 1955 Handbook. He spoke of "a man's man" tempered in the grim realities of trench warfare, when the anchor of his faith held and he emerged triumphant. A Mr. Great-Heart to those in Beckenham during the nerve racking days of the 1939-45 War.

In September we had the perennial spate of trouble with the boiler due to subsidence of the foundations and rusting due to constant dampness. The truth was that the floor of the boiler house was below the level of the Chaffinch Brook and was often awash in wet weather. New foundations were put in, the floors and walls were waterproofed, the boiler removed, reconditioned and reinstalled. It was given a 5 year lease of life. If you feel that boiler repairs are an irrelevance to a church history I would ask how you would persuade a congregation to come into a cold church in mid-winter. We continued to live with the problems of inefficient heating and the awful job of stoking a coke boiler until an oil fired and subsequently twin gas boilers were installed.

In October 1954 Mr. & Mrs. Norman Burnell, who had been married by Mr. Fleming in 1904, offered to provide a wall plaque under the Fleming Memorial Windows as the text on the windows was difficult to read. The offer was gratefully accepted.

A weekend conference at Spurgeon's College in September was held to promote the aims of The Forward Movement. This bore fruit at an Extraordinary Church Meeting in December when it was decided to proceed with the building of a new manse at 4, Elm Road, replace the fence between the Church and 31, Beckenham Road, reconstruct the roof well behind the organ and provide modern toilet accommodation in that area. On the spiritual side it was announced in February 1955 that we would be one of 36 Metropolitan churches to relay the Billy Graham Campaign Services from Glasgow in April. The total cost of this ambitious scheme was underwritten by Sir Cyril Black. Thursday evenings meantime were to be devoted to counsellor training, for which special tapes were provided, and an intensive advertising campaign was to be undertaken from April 1st. Christ Church, who would be relaying the services during the week after us asked our counsellors for assistance. Buses were booked to take members and friends to the Billy Graham Campaign at Wembley in May. During the relayed services in April there were 46 enquirers.

In July 1955 we were hosts to a European Baptist Chaplains' Association Conference, including British and American Chaplains, on the eve of the Baptist World Congress. Services here, following the Congress, were conducted by the Rev. G. H. Blackburn B.A., B.D. Secretary of the Australian Baptist Union.

The present pulpit microphone and directional speakers were installed in 1956.

Sunday School Outings still had an appeal in 1956. The Primary Department went to Knole Park, Sevenoaks and the Junior School went by train to Littlehampton, leaving Kent House Station at 8 a.m. and returning at 8 p.m. Happy days!

At the suggestion of Mrs. Scroggie a crèche was arranged in the Institute on Sunday mornings, with an extension speaker to enable mothers to hear the service.

That the Church had a healthy social conscience was evidenced in two matters brought to Church Meetings. Firstly a protest was to be sent to our local M.P. at the Government's proposal to introduce premium bonds with the element of gambling involved. The second was in connection with the abortive Suez operation when the following propositions were brought by



Mr. D. L. Cooke:- "That this meeting of Church members condemns the use of force by Her Majesty's Government in the Suez Area and the use of the veto in The United Nations Organisation in an attempt to prevent that body discharging its proper function."

"That a copy of the resolution of this meeting of Church Members, concerning the Suez situation, be sent immediately to the Prime Minister, Member of Parliament for Beckenham and the General Secretary of The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland."

After much debate it was evident that the meeting was divided and the proposition was withdrawn.

In January 1957 Mr. H. D. Reynolds retired as Church Secretary. He had been a deacon since 1938 and Secretary since 1941, bearing the brunt of war damage and a scattered membership during the War and holding the Church together by his energy and leadership.

In March the deacons' action in selling the Manse in Cherry Tree Walk was approved and permission was granted to proceed with the building of a new manse on the 4, Elm Road site with a completion target of September 25<sup>th</sup>. It was officially opened on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

The Rev. Arthur B. Jestice was re-appointed as co-opted member of the Beckenham Committee for Education in June, thus continuing the long tradition initiated by the Rev. R. S. Fleming.

The Beckenham Council of Churches, which had our active support, was by now a flourishing infant of four summers and was doing valuable work through its Evangelical Committee which was responsible for open air services, Billy Graham Campaign relays etc., its Ecumenical Committee in fostering inter church worship, its Social Welfare Committee focussing public opinion on the pressing need to speed up housing schemes in the Borough and its Refugee Aid Committee. It was also concerned about the problems of children in care of the County Council and the fostering of good relations with overseas students, many of whom would be leaders of their peoples when they returned home.



"Rev. Arthur B. Jestice and Deacons at the end of his Ministry"  
Standing: D. L. Cooke, C. A. E. Mendham, W. H. Valler, L. W. J. Phillips,  
M. G. Scroggie, W. H. Hadley, L. T. Farmer.  
Sitting: W. F. Holdsworth, Winifred Evens, Edith Graves, C. M. Cook.

## G. W. HARTE MEMORIAL

Mrs. Harte unveiled a memorial tablet to the Rev. G. W. Harte during morning worship on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1957. There was a moving tribute to him by Mr. Tom Williams, in the order of service:- "One quotation comes to mind, which applies so aptly to Mr. Harte that it makes him the most fitting epitaph:

'His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, This was a Man!  
And as such we salute him and praise God for his memory.'

A long and faithful association was broken in January 1958 with the death of Mrs. J. A. Attenborough who had joined Elm Road in 1888, just 5 years after the Church was built.

The Rev. Arthur B. Jestice, in a letter, dated March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1958, tendered his resignation from the Pastorate and this was accepted with deep regret at an Extraordinary Church Meeting on March 10<sup>th</sup>. Arthur and May had won the hearts of the Church by their winsome grace and humility and the mutual love was perhaps most evident in Arthur's inability to address the church Meeting himself. One of his 9<sup>th</sup> Anniversary services the following Sunday was a baptismal service. That he left on a high note, so far as the health of the Church was concerned, is very evident from the reports at the Annual Church Meeting on March 20<sup>th</sup>. At the farewell meeting on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, tributes were paid by Canon Howden, Rural Dean of Beckenham, on behalf of The Beckenham Council of Churches, the Rev. J. H. Witney, on behalf of the Local Baptist Ministers' Fraternal, Miss B. D. Hourston, Matron of Beckenham Hospital, in recognition of his pastoral visitation and Wednesday evening meetings with patients and staff, Alderman J. H. Atkins for his work on the Education Committee and his term as Governor of the Marion Vian Girls' School. From the Church thanks were given by Mrs. K. M. Price for the members, Mr. John Barret for the youth, Miss E. Graves on behalf of older members and Mr. H. D. Reynolds the Chairman and former Church Secretary.

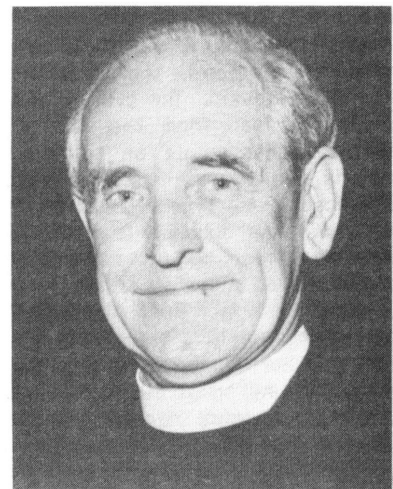
The first issue of our Church Magazine "Lifeline" was produced in July and appeared at quarterly intervals. I believe I am right in saying that there have been but three editors from the beginning, firstly Mr. C. A. Adams then our old friend Mr. J. Clifford Williams and Mrs. Diana Scott who took over from Clifford when he and Freda moved to Woodbridge.

## **INDUCTION OF THE REV. JAMES MCGREGOR TOSH M.A.**

The Rev. James McGregor Tosh conducted services on January 11th 1959, the evening service being a baptismal service. Following a unanimous recommendation from the deacons an invitation to the Pastorate was sent to Mr. Tosh from the Special Church Meeting on February 5th and this was accepted. The induction services were held on June 28th. At the morning service, when the charge to the Church was given, Dr. Henry Cook presided and in the evening Dr. John MacBeath gave the charge to the Minister.

In August the Hall floor was relaid in Canadian Maple and the roof of the Hall insulated with fibre glass to reduce heat loss.

A report from a sub-committee, on the revision of the Church Rules relative to the election of deacons, was exhaustively debated. New recommendations re the rotation of deacons by the election of four every year, with a maximum of 6 years consecutive service, was decisively rejected. At a special Church Meeting on November 5th a proposal that membership of the diaconate be restricted to baptised members was rejected and a new Church Rule VI (f) relative to Honorary Deacons was approved.



Rev. James McGregor Tosh M.A.

On Sunday January 23rd, 1960 there was a pleasant ceremony at afternoon school when Miss Mabel Attenborough presented an inscribed silver flower vase to the Sunday School, in memory of her father, Mr. J. Arthur Attenborough for his 40 years service as Sunday School Superintendent and her mother who had been a faithful member of the Church for 69 years.

The Church was not unmindful of others and for 3 years sent gifts of £50 to help the Crofton Park Church Rebuilding Fund.

A sum of £116 was also sent to the Angola Refugee Appeal Fund to help reduce the dreadful sufferings of the people in that country.

Of the total of £5,100 which passed through the books up to September 1961, one third had been devoted to outside Christian causes.

It was decided to adopt the New Baptist Hymn Book which was to be published in 1962 and 350 copies with music copies for the Choir were put on order.

We were selected to relay the Billy Graham Campaign from Manchester from June 7<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> 1961. During that time 36 people were counselled and 12 made commitments for the first time.

1962 saw further heavy expenditure on the fabric with the steeple being repaired and resingled and a decision to replace the decrepit coke fired boiler with an automatic oil fired job.

In March Mr. Graham Jordan, who had trained at Bristol Baptist College, accepted a call to Salters Hall and Dalston Junction. The Rev. J. McGregor Tosh conducted the Induction Service on April 7<sup>th</sup> when the charge to the Minister was given by the Rev. A. B. Justice and the charge to the church by the Rev. Geoffrey W. Haden, General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area.

That indefatigable prodger of deacons, Mrs. Mary Scroggie, who kept us on our toes at every Church Meeting, proposed at the April meeting that in future the Communion should be an integral part of the whole service with no break. What good sense that made; it would never occur to us now to make Communion an optional extra!

The Minister was encouraged by the number attending his baptismal classes and at the July Church Meeting 10 young people were accepted for baptism and membership. At this meeting it was also agreed to send a transfer for Mr. Ted Brown to MacKay Baptist Church, Queensland, our first transfer to Australia.

It was agreed in August to purchase the freehold property 2, Elm Road for £3,000.

A new diaconate was announced in October 1962. Mr. C. M. Cook was one of those elected but he wished to relinquish the office of Secretary which he had held for 6 years. Mr. M. G. Scroggie was appointed in his stead and Mr. J. D. Uttley was made Treasurer in place of Mr. W. H. Valler who had removed to Tankerton.

A fine missionary weekend from Friday, October 12<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup> was organised by Miss Nell Acton who never failed to keep us informed about B.M.S. work through all the years she served as Missionary Secretary. On this occasion there was an exhibition, 5 films for varying age groups and speakers from Pakistan, India and Brazil.

At the Annual Church Meeting in 1963 the Secretary thanked the Minister for his wonderful pastoral care of the Church. In his reply Mr. Tosh spoke of the buoyant spirit of the Church and of the steady but limited influx of new members. He pointed out that the Government was promoting this as Productivity Year in industry and hoped that the Church might adopt the slogan.

In July a most enjoyable garden party, in aid of the B.M.S., was held at the home of Mrs. Gee at Anerley. It was one of a number of such events held in this lovely garden down the years.

## **RECONSTRUCTION OF ORGAN**

In 1964 we were in real trouble with the organ due to old age, exacerbated by the very cold winter of 1962/3. We were advised that it was necessary to replace the old pneumatic action with an electric console and were given an estimate of £4,000. This, together with the cost of converting 2, Elm Road into flats and the need for urgent maintenance to the fabric, means that we needed to raise over £10,000, a lot of money at that time. Even the drastic step of selling the organ and installing a modern electronic organ was considered but fortunately we had, in Mr. R. W. Davidson, an organ builder in membership who could help. He advised interim work

repairing splits in the wind trunks, replacement of perished leathers and repairs to the bellows. This work was put in hand and an Organ Fund was promoted to raise the money for stages two and three. Stage two was to connect the Great and Pedal organs and one soft Dulciana stop from the Choir organ to a modern electric console, to be re-sited in the West transept instead of under the Great Organ, thus allowing the organist to judge correctly the volume of sound produced. Stage three was to connect the Swell and Choir organs to this new console. Future generations will be grateful that this very fine instrument, containing 1,554 pipes, was preserved for posterity.

Down the years we have enjoyed meeting at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Olby at Farringleys Farm, Keston and one such occasion was on Whit Monday 1964 when there was country dancing on the lawn, cricket in the meadow and a barbecue meal organised by the Scouts. Proceeds from the day went to the Baptist Missionary Society. Two stalwarts, Norman Chard and Geoff Bishop, walked from Margate to finish at the picnic that day and were sponsored at one penny per mile, proceeds to go to the Organ Fund.

In June, Delvin Knowler, who had been in membership while studying at Spurgeon's College, was ordained in the Church prior to his induction at Parkstone, Dorset. Dr. George Beasley-Murray gave the address.

Our Minister's name and his delightful accent left no doubt in the mind about his origins and in January 1965 we had a grand Burns Supper when he gave us Sassenachs a talk on The Immortal Memory of Rabbin Burns. Haggis was optional and we enjoyed Scottish dancing, songs and piping. A memorable evening and the proceeds were used to help defray the costs of 2, Elm Road.

An important decision was made by the Church in February when it endorsed a proposition from the Sunday School Superintendent, Mr. Gordon Hughes, that the Sunday School should no longer meet in the afternoons, but be integrated with morning family worship, together with The Young Worshippers to which Miss Winifred Evens had given such splendid service in the mornings for so many years. The children were to spend the first 15 minutes in the Church service and then break for their classes; a practice which has continued to this day.

The Treasurer reported in October that the total cost of 2, Elm Road, including alterations, had been met in three years.

In December it was agreed that an additional stop be included in the new organ console and a small plate fixed in memory of Richard Marsden, a young member who had died in tragic circumstances.

In March 1966 Ann Bothamley was accepted by the B.M.S. for work in India but had great difficulty in obtaining a visa from the Indian Government. She was valedicted by the Church in October 1967 but the visa did not arrive until February 1968. Her passage to India was from Venice on February 15th.

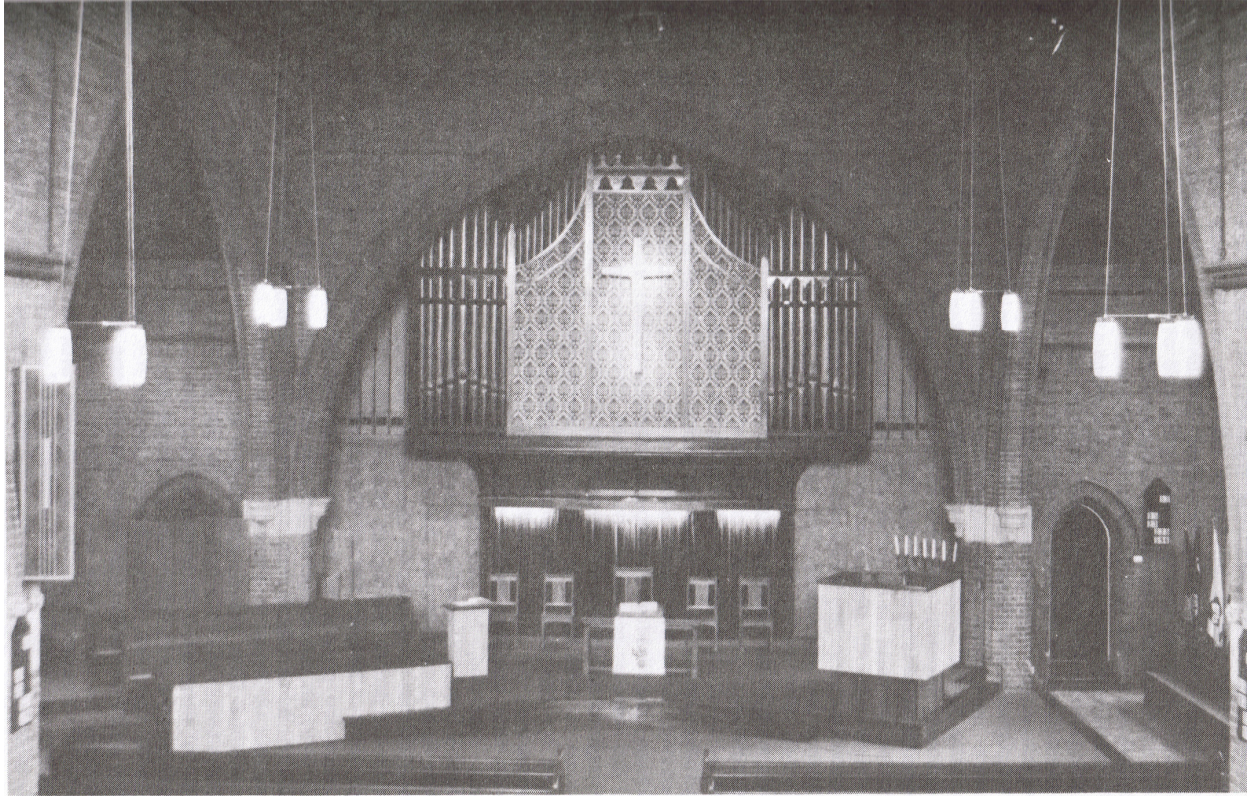
Sadly our Treasurer, Mr. Jim Uttley, had to retire in May 1967 owing to ill health and we lost a great character from the Diaconate. He had a lovely Yorkshire accent and a typical bluntness tempered by a good sense of humour and much graciousness.

An important document entitled "Baptists and Unity" was circulated by the Baptist Union to the churches in 1968, with a request for comment. The Diaconate and the Church met on several occasions to discuss this and sent the following comments to the B.U.:- "In view of the prevalent confusion among Baptists of 'unity' (the spiritual oneness of all believers) with 'union' (the merging of denominations) and the danger of concentrating on the second before the first, it was felt that the distinction should be made clear at this early stage." Regret was also expressed at the lack of reference, except at one point, that the Church be renewed for mission.

The Secretary, in his report at the 1968 Annual Church Meeting, recorded a further good year under the ministry of Mr. Tosh. The first Holiday Venture Club, for children on school holidays, had been a huge success and Family Church was firmly established. The Church Conference had been well worth while and had resulted in the integration of Communion in the Sunday services.

## RECONSTRUCTION OF CHANCEL

Remodelling of the area of the Church round the Pulpit, Baptistry and Choir had been approved in principle at a church meeting in June 1967. Firm proposals, submitted by Mr. Greening, the Architect, to a special Church Meeting in June 1968, were approved by the Church. The work, completed in September 1969, involved the removal of the old pitch pine pulpit, choir stalls and lectern, re-siting the choir to one side and providing the new low level pulpit on the other. The new woodwork, in maple and African mahogany, was in marked contrast to the rather gloomy original and was offset well by the green velvet drapes on the face of the organ. The large clear carpeted area left in the middle has been a great asset.



“Church 1969 - 1983”

A local character, Mr. Harry Morris, who had been in membership for 65 years, died aged 91 in January 1969. He was a teacher at the Boys' County School for many years and known to generations of local boys. He was a regular at the Beckenham Swimming Baths at 7 a.m. every morning until shortly before his death and claimed to have been the first one in when the Baths were originally opened.

The Playgroup crept quietly into being in November 1969. There was no mention of the event in “Lifeline” and just a brief minute records that Mrs. Gladys Aylward reported that Bromley Council had now registered the Playgroup which would open its doors on November 10th. An inauspicious beginning to what has proved a most valuable auxiliary, providing links between mothers and the Church.

Mr. George Brush, who had been in membership since before the 1914/18 War, celebrated 50 years service with The London Baptist Preachers' Association in 1970.

Members who were here in 1971 will recall a very fine night at the Music Hall when distinguished looking ladies and gentlemen in Edwardian costume entertained us and got us singing the old songs. The object was to raise money for the B.M.S. and it was a great success.

Our visit to a Home Mission Fund assisted church that year took us to the delightful little old Baptist Church at West Mailing. We were welcomed by our former members Mr. & Mrs. Paul Evans and Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Church.

Early in the year our Minister announced his intention of retiring in the Autumn and the search for a new minister was under way again.

A farewell service, to valedict Mr. & Mrs. Tosh, was held in the Church on September 30th 1971 and tributes were paid to Mr. Tosh by the Rev. Glyn Prosser, President of the South East London Council of Baptist Churches and Father Peter Strand, priest in charge at St. Edmunds and President of the Beckenham Council of Churches. Our old friend and former Treasurer, Jim Uttley, thanked Mr. Tosh for his pastoral care of the sick and aged and Louie Garters praised Mrs. Tosh's leadership and hospitality. Our Church Secretary acknowledged the manner in which Mr. Tosh had maintained and expanded the effectiveness of the Church's work and influence during his ministry.

## **INDUCTION OF THE REV. MICHAEL J. WALKER B.D., M.Th.**



Rev. Michael J. Walker B.D., M.Th.

Meantime, in July, the Rev. Michael J. Walker, Minister at Highams Park Baptist Church, was invited to preach with a view to the Pastorate and those of us who were in Church that day still recall the clarity and the impact made by this reading of the Word and his leading in prayer which had an immediate relevance to our day and situation.

At a Special Church Meeting on July 22nd it was decided to send the Rev. Michael J. Walker an invitation to be our Minister, to take over when Mr. Tosh retired, and happily this was accepted. Arrangements were made for the Family to attend the Anniversary Supper to meet the folks informally, for the Induction Service to be held on November 4th and for the first services as Minister to be held on November 7th. From the start they won their way into our hearts.

The Induction Service was an inspiring occasion with a large number of folk present from Mr. Walker's former churches. It was conducted by the Rev. Geoffrey Haden B.A. General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area of the Baptist Union and the Rev. T. Kerr Spiers B.D. gave a fine address.

At the end of 1971 a new diaconate was elected and Marcus Scroggie retired as Secretary and Deacon. He had served as a deacon for 31 years and 9 years as Secretary and had won the respect, admiration and affection of those who worked with him in the Church and in the Denomination. The members enthusiastically approved a proposal that he be made an honorary deacon.

The Minister announced his intention to involve the whole congregation, children and adults, on Sunday mornings, in the same area of concern. In January he started with a series of four Sundays devoted to the life of Moses and during Lent a series on the life of Jesus.

A coffee bar for young people was provided in the lower ground floor of 2, Elm Road at the end of 1971, the area being carpeted, provided with comfortable bench type seats and appropriate Lighting. By April 1972 however a hooligan element predominated and in May the bar was closed following interruption of a Sunday service and ugly situations at Monday and Tuesday meetings by a disruptive group. The Minister emphasised the importance of not allowing the situation to drift. 'The House of God should not be a place where youngsters were subject to stress and fear.' At the June church meeting it was decided not to reopen the Coffee Bar. The needs of the newly baptised members and the coffee bar 'heavies' were irreconcilable. The Minister emphasised the need for urgent prayer and commitment before the coffee bar could be reopened with confidence.

At the end of September we held a church conference on "Caring in the Christian Community" emphasising the need to care for new converts, young families and the lonely. The final meeting of the weekend was at 5 p.m. on Sunday, this leading into an act of worship and an

'Agape' meal, in the Hall. Following this weekend a register of resources for caring, in the Church, was compiled.

We held a quiet day at the delightful old Baptist Church at Bessels Green on September 9th, a time of peace and refreshment in a beautiful rural setting. Some will recall with gratitude the contribution by the Rev. Tom Gibbon, the Minister at Penge, on that occasion.

The dramatic presentation of "Job" at an evening service in March 1973, was a memorable occasion. The work was written by the Minister and the lead taken by John Mann. It was a very moving production. Two cloaks, embroidered for the play by Joyce Helt and Mary Broder, are still used at baptismal services.

To the delight of the Catering Committee, early in 1973 the kitchen was extended, by absorbing into it the Sunday School. Superintendent's Vestry, while a serving hatch was provided to the end alcove in the Hall.

At the Annual Church Meeting in 1973 the Minister announced that he had been asked to provide an Easter Day Service for Radio London and this was pre-recorded in the Church. Michael spoke at this Meeting of the need for all to work together for an increased awareness of the presence of God. Discussion groups, he said, had highlighted the difficulty of restructuring worship; we sometimes forget that we are speaking of holy things. What the Church is about, in the final analysis, is prayer, hearing the Word and breaking bread.

For the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Supper the Hall was transformed by Evelyn and Jack Innes and the Catering Committee. Silver candelabra appeared on the tables which were decorated in blue and orange and a delicious supper was prepared. The occasion was graced by two former Ministers and their wives, the Rev. and Mrs. Arthur Jestice and the Rev. and Mrs. James McGregor Tosh and also our former Secretary and his wife, Mr. & Mrs. Marcus Scroggie. The preacher on the Sunday was Dr. David Russell.

In the summer of 1973 by arrangement with Mr. Jestice, 13 students came down from Cambridge to run a children's mission for six days. This was led by a school teacher, Mr. Gerald Webber and was a great success. A total of 110 children attended of which 51 came from homes with no previous church connection.

A Church Conference on "Worship and Church Fabric" was held on a Sunday afternoon in October. Those participating took a picnic lunch which was followed by group discussion, think tanks and prayer. It was at this conference that the idea of enlarging the vestibule was first mooted. A further suggestion, which was subsequently implemented, was the provision of a cross in front of the organ pipes to make a relevant focal point. There was a very good Youth Weekend in October, based on the Bakewell Youth Hostel. We walked the Derbyshire Dales by day and after supper, under the guidance of John Worthley, we rocked the Hostel with the singing of Psalms.

Ann Bothamley was on furlough from the Vellore Hospital, Madras, at the end of 1973. She had to stay with her an Australian colleague from the Hospital, Marlienne Thompson and between them they organised an Indian evening with genuine Indian dishes.

In 1974 we introduced an additional Communion Service in the evening whenever there was a fifth Sunday in the month. This was to give Sunday School teachers, who were unable to attend morning Communion, an opportunity to break bread more often.

This was a difficult time when the Church was losing young married couples who, unable to meet the high cost of housing in the Borough, were moving further out. Looked at dispassionately it was an interesting extension of that migratory movement from Inner London which had prompted the building of our Church in 1883.

The deacons unanimously recommended to the Church in November, that a legacy left by Mrs. Gee be used to provide a cross, with a rich fabric backing, this to be sited in front of the organ pipes. The Church agreed that the work be put in hand forthwith.

During 1974 there were two evenings of Light opera, produced by John Worthley, to raise funds for the Minister's Sabbatical Year. We were again surprised at the wealth of talent in the Church and delighted with the performances.

In place of the normal evening service on December 22<sup>nd</sup> we enjoyed a performance of "Amahl and the Night Visitors" which was well staged in the Church and demonstrated again the value of drama in worship.

The drawing together by the Minister of two groups of people, to plan services for festival occasions and to explore different ways of expressing the Gospel, bore fruit in the enrichment of worship.

On Palm Sunday 1975 we said farewell to Ann Bothamley as she returned to Vellore. All her personal effects, including medical text books and her note books from courses she had attended at St. Thomas's Hospital during her furlough, were forwarded in two sealed drums and it was not until September that she was called to Madras by Customs only to find that both drums had been broken into and everything stolen. Her reaction was typical "Do be assured that the Lord is with me, helping me to cope with the disappointment. When I begin to wonder why, then I remember all the good things that have happened, and all the many things for which I have to thank the Lord."

In June we sent Michael and the family to St. Johns, Minnesota for his sabbatical leave and welcomed the Rev. and Mrs. Clifford Askew who moved into the manse to minister to us in Michael's absence. We could not have wished for better care or a more gracious ministry during this period.

A good Church Conference, led by the Rev. Frank Cook of Purley, was held at Aylesford Friary in November 1975. This was our first visit to this fine place for retreat and the weekend was enjoyed by a wide cross section of members from the elderly to children with their parents. The theme of the conference was "Evangelism Explosion" and we returned with much to think about. A highlight was the meeting for prayers in the beautiful St. Joseph's Chapel before we dispersed.

On Advent Sunday we had a Baptismal/Communion Service at which music was provided by the Langley Park Boys' School Orchestra. The soaring brass in the singing of The Old Hundredth was an inspiration.

At the end of this year we held a series of Christian Community evenings which were thought provoking and stimulating. One evening in particular was memorable; this was when we entertained 50 members of St. Edmund's, Roman Catholic Church, who came with their priest, Father Peter Strand, to discuss our attitudes to the Eucharist. The amount of common ground in the two communities was a revelation and was cause for thanks that we could share so much in love.

In January 1976 we recorded our thanks to Mary Broder who had embroidered a new communion table fall for Advent and was making another for use during Lent.

In September 1976 our member, the Rev. Douglas C. Sparkes, was inducted as General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area of the Baptist Union and John Elliston was accepted for training at Bristol Baptist College.

In January 1977 the Minister pressed for Communion every Sunday, arguing that this had been common practice from the Early Church up to the Reformation and with Baptists up to the last century. One objection voiced was that non-members might be embarrassed but this was countered by the thought that embarrassment was perhaps the result of the challenge posed by the service. Opinions remained divided and no decision was taken.

A considerable flutter was caused when the visit of a Sacred Dance Group was mooted but this revolutionary conception was accepted by the Church and today adds to the beauty of worship.

During this year we had the assistance of a Student Assistant from Spurgeon's College, Mr. Michael Bonser. He left us in December when he went as Student Pastor to Thornton Heath. Mr. Geoffrey Andrews, also from Spurgeon's, came in his stead and stayed with us for three and a half years before taking the Pastorate at Darnall Street, Sheffield. We give thanks to God for the pastoral care of these men while they were with us.

In February 1978 exploratory talks were started following Tony Elliston's offer to undertake full time youth work. In May the Church agreed that an approach be made to Bromley Borough



Council with an outline scheme for expanded youth work at Elm Road with Tony Elliston as full time Leader.

The Passion Play on Passion Sunday evening was a stark reminder of the cost of our redemption. We were again grateful for Michael's sense of drama and talent for production which made this a profound act of worship.

At the evening Communion Service in June we had Hadyn's Nelson Mass integrated with the service. It was sung in Latin but English/Latin texts were distributed to the congregation. It was a courageous effort and the meaning of the service was enhanced by the words and the beauty of the music.

The experiments in worship were indicative of the spiritual condition of the Church, blessed by a thriving ministry under Michael Walker and a responsive people. We were very much "one body" and the sacrament of Communion became ever more meaningful.

Harvest Supper in 1978 was noteworthy for the fact that the men were challenged to provide the meal and rose to the occasion with a grand spread; soup served from Scout dixies, York ham and salad and a magnificent confection, rejoicing in the name of Caribbean Fruit Salad, which was the creation of Bob Gardiner.

At the Church Meeting in February 1979 wide ranging objectives for worthily marking the Church Centenary were discussed. These were rationalised as follows, at the March meeting, after discussion by the deacons:- (a) Church growth. (b) Changes within the Sanctuary. (c) Work in the Hall and other buildings. (d) Outside causes. One proposal, which was not included, was for the provision of a grand piano for the Church and there remains a great need for this.

The deacons had asked Mr. Robin Weir, the Men's Movement Housing Association Architect, to consider the possibility of rebuilding the Hall to accommodate sheltered housing but he reported that the demolition of our sturdy buildings would cost £100,000 which would make the scheme unviable. He felt that such a scheme covering Nos. 2 & 4 Elm Road would be feasible. So far as the proposed modification and enlargement of the Vestibule was concerned he commented that this would be simple but expensive.

At an extraordinary Church Meeting in October 1979 it was proposed and carried that the following Centenary Projects be promoted:-

1. Remove the boundary wall in front of the Church.
2. Crazy pave the forecourt.
3. Redesign the vestibule, enlarging the area and providing armoured glass doors to the forecourt.
4. Provide a new corridor, with access from Elm Road, to connect the Parlour, Hall, new Toilets, Lounge, Youth Office, Deacons' Vestry and Church.

These works to be carried out at an estimated cost of £35,000. The estimate was subsequently revised to £50,000 and this was agreed at the March 1980 Church Meeting.

Miss Nell Acton retired as Missionary Secretary in March 1979. This was the end of an era of great and successful endeavour. She had served for 22 years, with unflagging energy and distinction, to keep before us at all times the pressing needs of the B.M.S.

The Minister produced another Passion Play for Passion Sunday evening and the Church was full for a moving performance. On this occasion the players made their entries and exits along the aisles, through the congregation. This arrangement, supplemented by crowd noises from the vestibule, effectively involved the audience in the action.

The Bromley Borough Council announced its agreement in principle to the appointment of a full time youth leader but the bureaucratic wheels ground slowly and the 90% salary grant was not confirmed until July and the maintenance grant until October when Tony Elliston took up his appointment.

At the end of October we had a splendid triple celebration for Michael's 21<sup>st</sup> year of ministry, his 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Beckenham and the Church's 96<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We heard from the Rev. Ed Nelson who was over from Emmanuel Baptist Church, Portland, Maine, the Rev. Kerr Spiers who had been Michael's fellow student at the Rawdon Baptist College, friends from his earlier churches and a recording from John and Joan Worthley who were serving as house parents to children of Australian missionaries in Papua, New Guinea. The recording was noteworthy for a contribution from the local frogs in full song!

By the Annual Church Meeting in June 1980 £33,000, had been given or promised for the Centenary Appeal The portion which had been covenanted would also attract tax refunds over the years.

In common with many local residents we voiced our concern at the news that planning application had been made to demolish the shops with accommodation over them, between Queen's Road and Clockhouse Road, and replace these with an office block. This planning application was subsequently rejected.

Ian and Christine Brown took over from John and Joan Worthley as house parents under the Australian Baptist Missionary Society in Papua in the autumn of 1980.

At this time Graham Sparkes and Andy Newman both volunteered for Ministerial training and were accepted by Regent's Park College, Oxford.

The Minister was concerned about pastoral care and this was discussed at the Church Meeting in December. It was planned to allocate approximately 20 members to each deacon so that signals could be sent to the appropriate pastoral group in case of need. Other areas to be covered by pastoral groups would be regular visits to the housebound, contact with those living away e.g. students, support for people with continuing exceptional need and care of new members.

Outreach, through visitation of homes near the Church by a regular team, once per month, was started in January 1981 and has been faithfully maintained since.

At the Church Meeting on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Michael tendered his resignation following his appointment as Tutor in Christian Doctrine at The South Wales Baptist College which included membership of the faculty of The University of Wales. He had been with us for nearly 10 years and would be sadly missed by all. The Secretary, who had been forewarned, had already obtained the consent of our fellow member, Dr. George Beasley-Murray to act as Moderator during the interregnum and the Church readily voted in favour of this arrangement.

The farewell meeting for Michael and Beryl was held on July 11<sup>th</sup>. Our Metropolitan Area Superintendent, Rev. Douglas Sparkes, presided and speakers included the Rev. Geoffrey Rusling from The Department of Ministry of the B.U., the Rev. Arthur Robinson, immediate Past President of the London Baptist Association and Father Peter Strand representing local churches. A tape, recorded by Dr. Dafydd Davies, Principal of the South Wales Baptist College, clearly indicated his delight at the prospect of working with Michael. While we said goodbye with heavy hearts it was good to know that he would be using his very considerable gifts in the training of men coming into the ministry.

Fittingly, for a man to whom the sacrament meant so much, his last service was a Communion Service on the following day. During his ministry the worship at Beckenham had been enriched by his deep insights and by his readiness to use the best from other traditions.

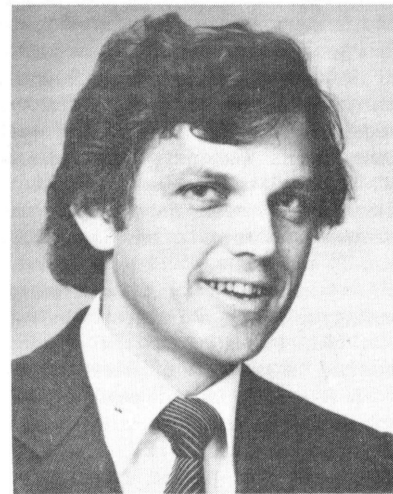
Instead of our usual Harvest Supper that year we combined it with the evening service on Harvest Sunday to make this an Agape celebration. The Rev. Geoffrey Rusling, who had been booked to preach that day, rose to the occasion at short notice. There were some 200 present, the meal being interspersed with Bible Readings, verse and songs and ending with all celebrating Communion where they sat.

## ARRIVAL OF DR. LEWIS RUSHBROOK

On the recommendation of the Moderator an invitation to preach was extended to Dr. Lewis Rushbrook, a New Zealander of mature years studying at Regent's Park College, Oxford and he preached on March 28th, 1982. At a Special Church Meeting on April 13th it was decided to send an invitation to the Pastorate to Dr. Rushbrook and the acceptance of the call was announced to the Church on April 25th.

Over forty members went to Regent's on June 19th for the Thanksgiving and Valedictory Service at which Lewis was farewelled from the College. Our former member, Bob Allaway was valedicted at the same time. It was good to share fellowship on that occasion with our former minister, the Rev. Arthur B. Justice and our students, Messrs. Graham Sparkes and Andy Newman. The Service of Ordination and Induction was arranged for September 18<sup>th</sup> and in the meantime Lewis, with his wife Kelli and the children, returned to Australia and New Zealand to say goodbye to parents and friends. During their absence the Manse was furnished by church members.

At this time we had a call for help from the B.M.S. who invited us to help furnish a cottage behind Christ Church for a Brazilian couple, Waldir and Marie Louise de Souza. Waldir was coming to study at Spurgeon's College. Members very generously rallied round and provided all that was necessary.



Rev. Dr. Lewis D. Rushbrook

On May 2nd our former Minister, the Rev. Michael Walker, dedicated and officially opened the new vestibule, which, together with the alterations at the back of the Church, had recently been completed.

The Ordination and Induction Service for Dr. Rushbrook, on Saturday September 18th, was presided over by Dr. George Beasley-Murray, the charge to the Minister and the Church and the ordination was conducted by Dr. Barrie White, Principal of Regent's Park College and the induction by the Rev. Douglas C. Sparkes. Two of the impressive moments were the laying on of hands in the Ordination and Mrs. Kelli Rushbrook's vow of commitment as a partner in the ministry. An old friend of the Rushbrooks from Canberra, Lt. Cmdr. Ron Robb R.A.N. read the Lesson and there was a full church for this inspiring service.

The Church Conference in November considered the problem of Unemployment, under the guidance of the Rev. Donald Black of the Baptist Union Department of Mission. Stemming from this the Youth Management Committee started a weekday meeting for young unemployed under the leadership of Tony Elliston, the Youth Club Leader.

A Centenary Hymn Competition has been launched and as this is written contributions are coming in from all over the country.

The new Ministry is thriving and the new Diaconate which has taken office in July 1983 is keen to make the Church a potent force for Christ in this area.

The Church has lived through the vicissitudes of a century. She saw the departure of The Clock House opposite and its replacement by the Technical School and Baths complex; she looked benignly on Ousley's cows as they progressed ponderously from the milking shed in Sydney Road to the meadows stretching from the Penge Road to Elmers End; she looked down on the Chaffinch Brook burbling across those meadows and disappearing under the road by the Clock House; she saw the rapid urbanisation of the countryside round her feet; she saw the destruction of homes during the bombing of 1939/45 when her stout walls withstood the blast. Through it all she stood like a rock and, except for a few Sundays during the flying bomb attacks, when she stood lonely and with windows agape, her walls have never failed to resound to praise and be hallowed by prayer on a Sunday. On those few Sundays she doubtless

listened with mute astonishment to the songs of Zion heard faintly from the Library across the road.

Some pragmatist will object that it's only bricks and mortar and so it is; but to those with imagination it embodies the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, and above all the worship of the saints who have met within its walls down the years, and continue to meet as one body in Christ, our Lord.

The foundation stone was laid as an act of faith; we in turn step forward into the second century of our history in faith and hope.

**THE END**