East Ham South Methodist Church

East Ham Chapel  Built  1885

Centenary Celebration of the Opening of the East Ham Chapel on Saturday and Sunday 13th-14th July 1985
INTRODUCTION

As we read the various recorded extracts, the names of a number of persons are mentioned and it is obvious to many they are just names. Nevertheless, they left behind a legacy of their dedicated efforts to build a church of brick, which was destined to house a fellowship of men, women and children in order to further the work of declaring the Christian message in an area which was poised to receive the greatest population explosion, coupled with the equally great industrial expansion that this part of the country had ever witnessed.

Sir Arthur Bryant, the Historian in his book "The Lion and the Unicorn" states ... "that even in our age of vast machines and scientific wonders, the Gothic Cathedrals still stand as the greatest works we men have ever made. We can destroy them but we cannot replace them. We have not the faith, we have not the power. From human creation comes faith."

Those earlier pioneers whose endeavours are recorded herewith would not have the skill of the great craftsmen - the stonemasons, woodcarvers, carpenters and designers of the stained glass windows, of the great days of the Gothic Cathedrals to which the Historian refers.

The six Labourers, the Engine Driver, the Chemist, the Gas Fitter, the Blacksmith, the Decorator, the Dairymen and the Builder, stepped out in faith to build a Church, which when completed did not possess any special Architectural features of note, it was nothing more than a plain rectangular structure with a roof. The eight large windows, supplying the maximum amount of daylight.

Except for some internal alterations which have been carried out through the years, the main structure has remained unaltered.

Little did the Church officials and members realise that within a few years the Royal Group of Docks would be expanding on such a scale, and in addition the Beckton Gas Works were also developing and employing more skilled and unskilled workers.

The Docks were receiving not only cargo vessels, but passenger liners, which arrived in ever increasing numbers. Through the ensuing years hardly a Sunday service passed without a visitor from the Docks.

Merchant seamen of all ranks could be found worshipping in the Church and the occasional visit of soldiers from the Barracks at Woolwich and on one occasion an R.A.F. Fighter Pilot. Some of the seamen were regular "customers" with visits spaced over intervals of three, six or twelve months, depending upon the length of the sea journey and returning from South Africa, South America and Australia.

On the isolated occasion, a family was welcomed who were emigrating to another country and spent their last hours in England in fellowship with the congregation at High Street South Chapel.

A word of explanation is necessary at this point. The Church is sited on the main road and public transport passes the door and the new arrivals when making their way to the shops or the City of London by train, bus or underground train, would be able to read the Church notice board, offering the invitation to share in Sunday Worship and through the years many responded to that invitation.
On the 13th July 1972, the members of the East Ham High Street South Methodist Church (ex Primitive) celebrated its Centenary and the occasion was marked by the publishing of a brief history of how it all began in a small dwelling house in July 1872.

The writer of the booklet found it necessary to explain that in order to piece together the history of a town, village, a church or person, the chronicler is almost entirely dependent on local records and certain information is often available from the local archives, although sometimes limited.

It was therefore necessary to point out from the very onset that the principle sources of information available in order that the brief history could be produced, was based upon references made to two books by the Rev. R.S. Blair - "Reaching the Masses" published in 1884, which makes reference to the Chapel in a chapter entitled 'Mission Work in East Ham'. The second book referred to was written by a former Mayor of East Ham, Mr A.J. Stokes, entitled "From Village to County Borough". This book was written and published some 35 years later than the book by Rev. R.S. Blair and it is fairly obvious that most of Mr Stokes' information came from the 'Mission Work in East Ham'.

There is also an additional reference about the Chapel in another book, "Nailing up the Old Barn Door" also written by the Rev. R.S. Blair.

THE BENEFACTOR

The final details given in the Booklet of 1972 describes how a certain benefactor, himself a Churchman, made an offer to the Rev. R.S. Blair.

The offer was governed by certain conditions:

"His offer, a site of land with an area consisting of some 620 square yards, at a nominal rent of £1 per annum for 999 years, carrying with it an important condition stipulating that a temporary place of worship be erected on the site, and that it should be replaced by a substantial brick built Chapel and school room at a value of some £600 within a space of 10 years. The benefactor sealed his offer by subscribing the sum of £20 to the project."

The officials and members of the church accepted the offer and the new brick building was completed at a cost of £1,123. 18. 2d. of which £573.18.2d. had been raised by the time the building had been opened.

THE AGREEMENT & TRUSTEES 1885

The Records give details regarding the Agreement:

"The land for East Ham Chapel is held by an Agreement between Thomas Mathews Esq. of East Ham of one part and Richard S. Blair, Martin Gleghorn, George Brewster, Wallace J. Everatt, Thomas Forsey, Edwin Adams, John Adams, William Adams, Henry Miller, Charles Davis, George Batten and William Junior of the other part."

Term of Lease to be granted 999 years from 29th September 1880. Ground rent for £1 per year payable at Michaelmas. Condition a permanent building to be erected within ten years of the value of at least £600.

Signed: RICHARD S. BLAIR
SEPTEMBER 28th, 1880
On 29th March 1883, the Primitive Methodist Chapel, High Street South, East Ham was certified a place of Meeting for Religious Worship. It is necessary to point out that the Certification was given and referred to the Temporary Building erected in 1880.

The names and descriptions of all the Trustees on the Constitution on last appointment made on the 21st day of November 1885:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edwin Adams</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>Linden Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Reed</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Hall</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Staines</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Norminton</td>
<td>Engine Driver</td>
<td>Vespasien Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Davis</td>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>Oakfield Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Drane</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>Cato Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Miller</td>
<td>Gas Fitter</td>
<td>Talbot Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Sanders</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>Telham Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Crane</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>Cock Row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Everatt</td>
<td>Decorator</td>
<td>Barking Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Forsey</td>
<td>Dairyman</td>
<td>Windsor Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Osbourne</td>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Oakfield Road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reading through the list of the men who volunteered to become Trustees, we are reminded that such responsibility taken in those days meant that as a Trustee he placed his whole possessions in jeopardy, if required to make good any serious financial loss if incurred by the Church and its property.

**INFORMATION - TREASURERS ACCOUNT BOOK**

For the details regarding the life and work of the Church from 1885 - 1921, we are limited to the information as recorded in the Treasurers Account Book. In general the details are mostly single line references which needed clarification as to the various items of income and expenditure, consistent with the usual practice. Nevertheless the Accounts reveal some interesting facts.

It appears that the Stone-Laying Ceremony and the opening Dedication of the Church took place over 2 days - the 12th and 13th July 1885. It appears that arrangements were made for a solitary police constable to be in attendance at a cost of 2/-d.

The Foundation Stones can be seen at ground level in the front of the building, and placed on behalf of the following:

**THE FOUNDATION STONES**

**SUNDAY SCHOOLS** - which included North Woolwich, Beckton, Custom House, West Ham and East Ham - 13th July 1885

Mrs E. Harley
R.S. Blair
H. Taylor - 13th July 1885
Thomas Mathew Esq.
Mr C. Chicken - Builder - 13th July 1885

Canning Town
Local Preachers - 13th July 1885

THE TALLEST BUILDING

On completion, the new Church at the time was easily the tallest building in the area and situated in a semi-rural environment with four farms in close proximity with Lucy's Fruit Farm and adjacent on the north side of the new building.

Within a few hundred yards south, there were three other farms, namely Holloways Farm, Henry Hollington's Farm and Manor Hall Farm - this farm bordered on the area occupied by St. Mary Magdalene the Parish Church of East Ham, which stands on an ancient site. The present church was built about 1130 AD.

In addition, there were a few isolated dwellings in the surrounding area from White Horse Road and the Parish Church such as the Farm houses and cottages.

In Vicarage Lane, a solitary house and a small school and the Vicarage, hence the name given to the Lane and two Lodges one on each corner of the lane at the junction with the main road, i.e. High Street South. It appears that Flanders Road was the footpath to Barking Town.

The area immediately opposite the new Church, by now locally known as 'Battens Chapel' stood the Almshouses built in 1834 by Giles Breame.

The Whitehorse Inn stood in the area now occupied by the Rancliffe Road, entrance to Central Park. On the opposite corner, two rows of cottages Crosby Row and Salt Box Row, at the corner of Rancliffe Road.

THE ARRIVAL OF INDUSTRY

Ere long the peace and tranquility was to be shattered forever for it was inevitable that the great industrial monster, already gathering strength, was bracing itself for the plunge. History tells its own story. Within a few brief years it had ploughed its way through this entire area and the village of East Ham was numbered, with others, who have suffered a similar fate in such circumstances.

The great Royal Group of Docks was already expanding and preparing itself to accommodate the vast numbers of ships which were to bring their merchandise from the four corners of the world, and to make their return journey with cargoes of a different kind.

The new Beckton Gasworks had also set out upon its great task of supplying the City of London from its new riverside home.

These events heralded the closing of an era. The area as such was about to change its role. Cabbages and cattle were no longer the priority but men and houses. Men for the dockyard and men for the gasworks and houses, hundreds of them, in which the ever increasing population was to make its home.
The reasons given for the limited information drawn from the Treasurers Account Book has already been explained.

For the additional information regarding the life and work of the Church, we are indebted to a certain Mr Arthur Sharpe, one time Sunday School Secretary for over 25 years. His collection included a varied selection of local newspaper cuttings from the East Ham Recorder, East Ham Echo and the Stratford Express, for the years 1912 - 1922.

In addition, the collection included extracts from the "Joyous Tidings Magazine" covering the years 1908 - 1910.

It is of note that some of the recorded events occurred within the living memory of some of our elderly members but of course when they were of tender age.

The first indication we have on the progress being made in the new Church is indicated by an extract from the "Joyous Tidings Magazine" for January 1908 which recorded a review of the work for the year 1907:

**REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE CHURCH 1907**

During the year just closed all the friends at our East Ham Church have been working very hard for the improvement of the various societies which have proved highly successful. We have a good number in our Band of Hope and the Christian Endeavour Society are experiencing good and prosperous times with the young.

The young peoples Guild, with a membership of 60, are doing work for the Church and the average attendance throughout the year has been remarkable.

During the year we have succeeded in getting together a first class band and choir. Thanks are due to Mr W. Herm Ebdon (conductor) to whom it is a credit.

We are pleased to report also that the Chapel has just been fitted with incandescent burners which has made a delightful change in the appearance of the Church, both from the outside as well as the interior for which we have to thank Mr C. Staines (Junior).

Now after such a year of success we hope to continue and as the Church is being surrounded by new streets and houses, we are looking forward to a successful and prosperous year even better than the one just ended.

**CHURCH BAND**

There are a number of observations coupled with some interesting facts regarding this report the first one being the Band. It is some 20 years ago or more that a door steward approached a gentleman as he entered the Church for the Sunday morning service. The Steward approached the man and having extended his hand in an act of welcome, he noticed that the man hesitated in the lobby and looked back over his shoulder.

The Steward enquired as to whether the man had lost something. "No" said the man, "I was looking at that door step. The last time I crossed that step was 51 years ago." He went on to explain that he played in the Church Band when he was a young man. Incidentally it is on record that some of the Church members did gain London College of Music, Honours Certificates.
LIGHTING

Regarding the improved lighting referred to in the report, it appears that the means of illuminating the new building was achieved by the use of naked gas flame jets, known as "fish tail burners" suspended at the end of supply pipes from the ceiling plaques still visible. The "delightful" appearance referred to was achieved by the use of the "modern" incandescent gas installation using the now out-dated gas mantle.

In the expenditure column of the Treasurer's Accounts, a number of entries are recorded for the replacement of globes and mantles. The cost for the original installation of the improved lighting was £4.5.3d. (£4.28p).

THE EARLY 1900's

The new streets and houses referred to in the Report, are of course the roads so familiar with us all, which in the 1910's were built and hundreds of houses erected. So from 1910 the empty spaces were filled on both sides of the main thoroughfare, which is now known as High Street South.

The solitary rows of cottages were closed in, and the small row of Alms-houses dwarfed and isolated. It is of interest to note that one of the founder members, and his wife, lived at no. 4 - Mr and Mrs W. Graves.

Further evidence of the transformation that was taking place in the immediate area was the necessity to widen the roadway in order to accommodate the enormous increase in traffic to meet the needs of the Beckton Gas Works and the Royal Group of Docks. Not forgetting the public and private transport required for the people employed in the various branches of shipping and manufacture.

The result was that the new Methodist Church Building had to forfeit some eight feet of its frontage. Fortunately only the boundary railings were involved.

In compensation, the Church received a sum of £50 and the East Ham Parish Council arranged for the necessary legal proceedings and paid the cost for the work to be carried out.

PIANO REQUIRED

On Saturday, 9th May 1908 a special meeting of the Trustees was held to discuss a matter. For a long time the Church had wanted a piano.

Representatives of almost every Society of the Church were present and it was decided that a piano be purchased at a cost of £30 from a Mr J. Benstead (apparently a good friend of the Church).

It is to be paid for by the Societies by means of 1d. a week subscription and donations.

By July 1909 something like £12 had been collected, and the members were reminded to keep up their contributions.

No further reference is recorded so it can be assumed that the outstanding amount was paid to Mr J. Benstead.
SOLEMNIZATION OF MARRIAGES

Another major step in the life of the new Primitive Methodist Chapel is recorded in the Document authorising the Solemnization of Marriages and issued on 17th April 1913 and the first wedding ceremony took place on 21st July 1913 and again referring to the Treasurer's Accounts we learn that the couple received a gift of a Bible and Hymn Book at a cost of 7/9d.

With reference to the encouraging report in 1908 reviewing the work of the Church in 1907, special mention was made regarding the Young Peoples Guild, with a membership of 60 and the average attendance described as "remarkable" it comes as no surprise that some eight months later we read the following:-

JOYOUS TIDINGS MAGAZINE - AUGUST 1908: "Proposed Football and Cricket Club". A scheme is on foot to form a Cricket and Football Club in connection with the young friends at our East Ham Church.

All those who are interested in the games are heartily invited to put themselves in touch with Mr. P. Cobley (temporary secretary) from whom full particulars can be obtained. Older members are asked to become honorary members of the Club. Further particulars in our next issue."

Apparently, this announcement received an early response for we read in the September 1908 "Joyous Tidings Magazine":-

"East Ham Football Club: We are pleased to report that the newly formed Football Club and Cricket Clubs in connection with our East Ham Church, are making fine progress. Meetings have been held and all the young men are showing keen interest in the new venture. A field has been placed at the Club's disposal (gratis) by Mr. Hewitt and is situated in the Central Park Road.

The team is affiliated with the South Essex Auxiliary Sunday School League. The following are the officials of the Clubs:

President: Mr. Rhodes
Chairman of Meetings: Mr. H. Miller
Secretary: Mr. P. Cobley
Treasurer: Mr. C. Staines
Asth. Treasurer: Mr. A. Lock
Captain of Team No.1: Mr. W. Crane
Vice Captain: Mr. G. Filer

A junior team for the younger boys of the Church has also been formed. The Captain being Master Allison with Master C. Filer as Vice Captain. Mr. Batchelor is trainer to the Club.

Cricket of course, will be played in season. The Secretary would be pleased to receive dates from Club Secretaries and the friends of the Church are asked to become honorary members of the club.

EAST HAM P M (PRIMS) FOOTBALL CLUB

On 19th October the first game in connection with our East Ham F.C. took place on their ground at Ranciffe Road, when they met the Waverley F.C. from Leyton in a 'friendly'. Our players were in fine form, winning by 5 goals to nil.
EAST HAM P M (PRIMS) CRICKET CLUB

In a report on the Churches work for the past year dated January 1910, we read that the Cricket Club has had a record year and were successful in winning the Shield presented by the South Essex S.S. Auxiliary.

TUESDAY EVENING FELLOWSHIP

The newly constituted Senior Christian Endeavour and Class Meeting took place on Tuesday 17th March 1908, and 7 members attended. It was resolved to form a Senior Christian Endeavour and Class Meeting combined. The leaders appointed were: Mr G.H. Edwards to assist Mr W.H. Pinhorn as leader and Mr J. Hall and Mr J. Crane as Vice Presidents. The Fellowship Meeting still held every Tuesday evening is a continuation of that first meeting held on 17th March 1908.

THE FLOWER & TEXT FOR THE PREACHER GIVEN EVERY SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE

A copy of the record in the minutes of the Committee Meeting of the Junior Christian Endeavour held in October 1927, the following was recorded:-

"The members decided to give the Minister a buttonhole with a text on Sunday and they now bring farthings each week with which to buy the flower. Miss Armon suggested that we should use our Bibles in the future, and the members agreed to do so. Miss D. Armon (secretary)."

THE 1914 - 1918 WAR

In August 1915 the Trustees of the Church took out an Aircraft Insurance against Air-raid damage and Insured the Buildings for £770.

NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL BUILDING

The new Sunday School was opened in October 1921, and was named the "Memorial Hall" in memory of the young men of the Sunday School who lost their lives in the 1914 - 1918 War. The new building consisted of two ex-Army huts and by removing the side sections and brought together, made quite a sizeable room. A brass plaque with a shaped back board was placed on the wall of the Sunday School on which the names of the Young Men were engraved.

The Opening of the New School Premises and the unveiling of the War Memorial was performed by the Mayor of East Ham assisted by the Mayoress, Mr and Mrs A.H. Wiseman.

ALBERT V. ALLISON, FREDERICK GEO. HARRIS
ROBERT W. ARMSTRONG, ALBERT P. HALL
CYRIL C. MAGUIRE M.M.

When the School building was dismantled in 1951, the Plaque was transferred to the Church building, alongside the 1939 - 1945 War Memorial.
During the first thirty years of the life of the Church, financial assistance for the work was given by various people, including the active members who were extremely generous. The records confirm the extent of their activities.

The loyalties of the Church members were encouraged by monetary gifts from Sir J. Bethel, Sir Peter Griggs, Sir W.P. Hartley, Miss E. Lacey and Mrs R.C. Mckin.

In addition, the Gas Light & Company who occupied the Beckton Gas Works (now known as North Thames Gas) made a contribution of £25 towards the cost of the new School Building. Maybe they were influenced by the fact that many of their employees' children were members of the Sunday School, and for a number of years gave donations to our Sunday School Anniversaries.

Finally, it is necessary, once again, to emphasize that the various incidents gleaned from the scanty records at our disposal, although only giving us glimpses of the efforts made by our predecessors, we are encouraged by their dedication to establish a Christian fellowship in an area which expanded to an alarming degree. For the population of East Ham in 1881, one year after the opening of the first Church on the present site was 10,706 and by 1910 the population rose to 96,018.

The period covered by this short history covers less than 50 years. Bearing in mind that in July 1985 the Church celebrates its 113th Anniversary.

In the introduction, the book by Rev. R.S. Blair entitled "Nailing up the Old Barn Door" was mentioned, in fact the title he gave to the book was an actual assessment of the growth that was taking place in the area.

As Superintendent Minister of the Circuit he took part in the erection of five new Chapels and the enlargement and alterations of two other Churches, within six years.

In addition, he was responsible for 14 preaching places, with a membership of 800 members. Yes, "Old Barn Doors" were being nailed up, but other doors were being opened.