

CHAPELS SOCIETY TOUR - CANTERBURY

SATURDAY 4th OCTOBER 2008

TOUR NOTES

1 INTRODUCTION TO CANTERBURY

Canterbury can lay claim to having the oldest Church in England that is still in use (St Martin's - on the eastern edge of the City). Yet despite its links to what is now the Anglican Church, Canterbury has had a strong non-Anglican presence, witnessed by the fact that, according to the 1851 census, 49% of church attendees that day in Canterbury were not Anglican. Why was this - what made the citizens of Canterbury show so clearly that there were other denominations other than the Anglican Church? And why was this, when in some parts of rural Kent, Anglican domination reached a 69/31 split in their favour? We shall explore this more during our walking tour of this fine City.

Our story begins with Ethelbert, King of Kent, who in the 6th Century married Princess Bertha, who was a Christian and who worshipped at St Martin's Church, which had been founded during the Roman occupation of Kent. At the time of Ethelbert, Canterbury was called *Cantwarabyrig* (or *Cantwaraburh*), which means "the township of the men of Kent". So when St Augustine arrived in Kent on the start of his mission to convert the Saxons of England to Christianity in 597AD, Bertha persuaded the King to meet St Augustine - indeed, Ethelbert became converted and gave land for the construction of a Cathedral. That building lasted until 1067, when it was destroyed by fire but a new Cathedral was completed by Lanfranc, the (Norman) Archbishop of Canterbury, within seven years of being appointed in 1070. However, the most famous event concerning Canterbury occurred in 1170, when the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket was murdered by four knights who believed that they were fulfilling the wishes of King Henry II.

The medieval City was destroyed in part in the early hours of 1st of June 1942 when, during an air raid, most of the area to the south of the Cathedral and to the north of the present URC church was destroyed. An example of how little from the 1930s exists today can be gauged in St George's Street, where only the church tower and Marks & Spencer now survive. Of the causes to be visited today, the Friends Meeting House in Canterbury Lane was destroyed in this raid and the site is now marked by a plaque. The facade of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection Church (in Watling Street and almost opposite the present URC church) was destroyed on 31st October 1942 in a daylight raid - the decision was then made to join the Congregationalists in Guildhall Street (after a stint in the library of St Augustine's Abbey).

The present City is not without its critics! Modernist buildings built in the 1950's and 1960's in the east of the City were, in some cases, demolished around the Millennium and replaced by a pastiche of Post-Modernist efforts,

which in many cases block City-wide views of the Cathedral.

2 THE 1851 CENSUS AND CANTERBURY

A total of 8,980 people were recorded by Churches in Canterbury during the census made on Sunday 30th March 1851. At this point it should be acknowledged that one person could have attended several services during that day and therefore would have been counted several times : nevertheless, this exercise does give a fascinating insight into church attendance patterns and statistics. It should be remembered that attendees at the Cathedral were not included in the Census.

Nevertheless, attempts to disqualify or question the data gained nationally from this census have been made on the grounds of the weather on that day, that it was Mothering Sunday and that non-Anglican churches were guilty of “packing” their buildings with their supporters and members. Work done in the latter half of the 20th Century has compared data from this census and other surveys and found that the 1851 data could be relied upon - this is especially true of Canterbury (as well as Carlisle and Lincoln), which were all the subject of an independent census in 1848.ⁱ I am currently working on the 1851 census and Canterbury, as part of my studies and I hope to be able to report my findings to you in a future issue of our Newsletter.

A breakdown of the census for Canterbury is as followsⁱⁱ :-

Church	Total attendees	Number of meetings
Total Anglican attendance	4,563 (50.4% of attendees)	Of 13 Churches, 1 had three meetings (i.e. morning, afternoon and evening), 5 had two meetings and 7 had only one meeting.
St Peter's Wesleyan	1,420	Three meetings
Congregational	1,237	Three meetings
Particular Baptists (King Street)	685	Three meetings
Countess of Huntingdon's Connection	500	Two meetings (morning and evening)
Primitive Methodist (St John's)	281	Three meetings
Unitarian (Blackfriars)	190	Three meetings
Zoar	86	Two meetings (morning and evening)
Jews (King Street)	76	Three meetings
Friends (Canterbury Lane)	18	Two meetings (morning and afternoon)

A total non-Anglican attendance of 4,417 (49.6% of attendees).

ⁱ The “Empty” Church Revisited - Robin Gill, Ashgate, 2003 (page 22).

ⁱⁱ Religious Worship in Kent : The Census of 1851 - Margaret Roake (Editor), The Kent Archaeological Society, 1999 (pages 243 to 254).

The largest meetings attended that day were as follows :-

- ⤴ Morning : Anglican - 325 at St George the Martyr (St George's Street)
- ⤴ Morning : non-Anglican - 537 at the Congregational Church (Guildhall Street)

- ⤴ Afternoon : Anglican - 500 at St Paul's (Church Street)
- ⤴ Afternoon : non-Anglican - 195 at the Particular Baptists (King Street)

- ⤴ Evening : Anglican - 400 at St Alphage (Palace Street)
- ⤴ Evening : non-Anglican - 828 at St Peter's Wesleyan (St Peter's Street)

Overall, the largest total attendances that day were :-

- ⤴ Anglican : 1,025 at St Paul's (Church Street)
- ⤴ Non-Anglican : 1,420 at St Peter's Wesleyan (St Peter's Street)

As regards the County of Kent as a whole, it is estimated that up to a third of attendees went to Church more than once that day but even then, it was calculated that only approximately 40% of people were regular churchgoers. And even allowing for the strength of the Church of England in Kent, in Chatham, Margate and Sheerness, Anglicans were outnumbered by *Dissenters* - so perhaps their impressive showing in Canterbury wasn't so much of a surprise after all ?

3 CANTERBURY BETWEEN THE WARS

My late Father used to say that Canterbury in the 1930's was "all pubs and churches" ! From pictures and records I have seen I would say that this was an exaggeration but you are beginning to get a picture of what this city must have been like in those days.

One aspect that I found surprising was the number and variety of midweek meetings available to non-Anglicans in 1918. Of course, the Roman Catholic Church had a daily service at 8am, as well as on Thursdays at 6.30pm (and 8am, 10am and 6.30pm on Holy Days). But there was plenty of variety throughout the City (both in location and day) at other churches, as followsⁱⁱⁱ :-

- Monday : 7.30pm (Baptists)

- Tuesday: 7.00pm (Gospel Room / Mission Hall)
- Tuesday : 7.45pm (Primitive Methodists)

- Wednesday : 7.30pm (Wesleyan Methodists)
- Wednesday : 8.00pm (Congregational)

- Thursday : 7.00pm (Gospel Room / Mission Hall)
- Thursday : 7.00pm (Zoar)

iii Kelly's Directory 1918 (page 139).

There were some wonderfully named Ministers in Canterbury in the 1920s and 1930s. What about the Reverend Shadrach Evans at the Primitive Methodist Chapel ? Or the Reverend Weardale Phillips at the Congregational Church^{iv} ?

For a history of some of Canterbury's non-Anglican churches up to the 1920s, I can recommend Arthur F Taylor's *The Free Churches of Canterbury* : the Reverend Taylor was the Minister of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church at that time.

For a brief view of the main street axis in the 1920s, go to the BBC Kent website where (at the time of writing) there is part of a silent film made in about 1923/4, shown together with views of the same locations today. The reference is http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent/contents/articles/2007/01/12/canterbury_archive_feature.shtml

The Whitefriars area of the pre-war City (between Watling Street and St Georges's Street) contained an oast house, a brewery, elegant Georgian and Regency terraces, as well as a cattle market and the reputed birthplace of playwright Christopher Marlowe. There were narrow lanes in this area and between Whitefriars and the Burgate too, which were quite unsuited to the 20th Century and its traffic. Also in this area was the impressive-looking *Longmarket* (built with Caen stone), a school and a Temperance Hotel. All of this would be swept away in the Second World War or by the City Council in the 1950s.

4 BRIEF CHURCH HISTORIES

A brief history of each of the Churches that we will visit (or at least walk past) today now follows.

St Peter's Wesleyan Methodist Church

This building was designed by William Jenkins of Lambeth and erected in 1812 to replace a twelve-sided "Pepper Box" in King Street. The cost was £8,287 and which included £1,000 for the site itself. The front elevation is graceful Georgian - the downstairs arched windows that flank the entrance have been converted into doors : note that the three central windows are recessed slightly under the pediment. The original arrangements inside was that the oval gallery ran right around the building, with the organ in the semi-circular apse, which was behind the pulpit. Also in the apse was the communion table, although this was brought forward to the front of the rostrum in 1911. The pulpit itself was lowered in 1877 and had a rostrum added in 1888. The original seating arrangements were for 800 - to be seated in pews.

^{iv} Kelly's Directory 1918 (page 139), 1927 (144) and 1938 (144).

The internal arrangements were changed in 1956, when the gallery was reduced, the organ and pulpit moved and the communion table returned to the apse. The net effect of these changes, apart from changing its internal appearance, was to reduce the seating capacity. There have been recent changes both in the worship area and by extending the church building westwards - more of this during our visit in October.^v

The Salvation Army Citadel

This building was opened for worship in 1886 and was described by a newspaper as being “an old rag cutting factory” : the upper hall was fitted out for worship for about 500. However, the first night was marred by a large mob shouting outside, which then attacked some of the congregation (when leaving) by trying to trip them up with a rope : others returning to Whitstable (via what is now the West Station) had mud and stones thrown at them. I doubt if we will get such a reception from the locals in October ! This building too has been refurbished recently.^{vi}

The Anglican Catholics

This building was formerly the Gospel Room, now occupied by the Anglican Catholic Church - the Gospel Room seems to have been known also as the Mission Hall between the Wars. The Anglican Catholics had been formed in 1978 as an answer to what they saw as the creeping liberalisation of the Anglican Church - and really took hold following the decision of the latter to ordain women priests. The Canterbury Parish of St Augustine’s Church was established in 2005 and moved to its present location in 2007. The Diocese is the whole of the United Kingdom, although there are four more Anglican Catholics missions in Kent alone.

The Friends Meeting House

The original Meeting House in Canterbury Lane (which has been mentioned already) was destroyed in 1942. This building was built originally in 1688 and then rebuilt around 1772, at a cost of £133. During the 19th Century, an Adult School room was built on the first floor, with a smaller room and a lobby below.

The present building was built for about £12,000, designed by John Denman and was paid for partly by the War Damage Commission. There are two meeting rooms, holding 100 and 30 people respectively, a committee room and a flat for the warden : Norman Firth designed improvements to the children’s classrooms in 1971.^{vii}

The former Blackfriars Monastery

v The Architectural Expression of Methodism - The First Hundred Years, George W Dolbey, Epworth Press, 1964 (pages 161 to 163).

vi Salvation Army - Canterbury Corps : <http://www.canterburysa.org.uk/about.php>

vii The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain Volume 1, David M Butler, Friends Historical Society, 1999 (pages 279 and 280).

The Unitarians used to meet at one of the remaining buildings of the Blackfriars Monastery, which was built by the Dominicans in 1221, as a Chapel. The main building was demolished as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538 and is the former Refectory. The building was purchased firstly by the Christian Scientists after the Second World War and is now used by the King's School Art Department. As far as I can ascertain, there is currently no Unitarian presence in Canterbury.

The former Synagogue

This Synagogue was built in 1847 - 1848 by Hezekiah Marshall and it replaced a former building that was in St Dunstan's Street that needed to be moved when the railway was built to what is now Canterbury West station. Following a decline in numbers in the 1920's, this Synagogue was closed and the building used as a church hall for the nearby St Alphage Church. It was sold in 1981 and is also used by King's School for music lessons and small concerts - this building is now a Grade II listed building. The Jewish community now meets at the University of Kent.

The former Primitive Methodist Chapel

St John's Chapel was built in red brick and was opened in 1876. Following the unification of the Methodist cause, this congregation from 1936 worshipped at St Peter's Wesleyan Methodist Church. The Methodist Church may have had difficulty in selling this building, as it appears on their 1940 census of church buildings.^{viii} Since then this building has been used (for example) as a youth club, an Assemblies of God Church and is now used by the King's School (as the Maurice Milner Memorial Hall) for drama and fencing.

The former Congregational Church

This was designed by local man, John Green Hall, in 1876 - 1877, and built by James G Naylor of Rochester, at a cost of £5,000. The original street frontage had two spires and was fitted with a gallery internally - you could be forgiven for walking right past, as there is little today to remind one that this was once a place of worship ! However, this building was declared unsafe and was sold to Lefevre's store in 1948 - Lefevre's was taken over later by Debenhams (I believe in the 1970s). The Guildhall Street congregation moved to a temporary building in Watling Street, opposite what is now St Andrew's URC Church building.^{ix}

St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Church

Until 1855, one had to go to Hackington (outside of the City) in order to participate in Catholic worship - hence no mention of Roman Catholics in the 1851 census in Canterbury. From 1855 a house in Burgate was used until the present church was built

viii Methodist Church Buildings : Statistical Returns including seating accommodation as at July 1st 1940 (facsimile reproduction by Methodist Publishing House, 1992 - page 36).

ix The Victorian Churches of Kent, Roger Homan, Phillimore, 1984 (page 43).

in 1874/75, to the design of John Green Hall, a local man who had designed also the former Congregational church and the former St Andrew's Presbyterian church.

The first thing to notice about the exterior of this building is that on three sides it is finished in stock bricks - the reasons for this are that until 1942 the church was surrounded by buildings that were destroyed and not replaced. However, the side of the building containing the main entrance was built of Kentish ragstone with Bath stone dressing. Liturgical changes introduced following Vatican II mean that the Victorian High Altar is no longer used but a new octagonal altar in Lepine limestone is now used for all celebrations. And it is claimed that the stations of the Cross were the original ones used in Westminster Cathedral before being replaced by the famous ones designed by Eric Gill.^x

Canterbury Baptist Church

This began as a Particular Baptist congregation and used the former Wesleyan Methodist "Pepper Box" in King Street for worship - having been vacant for a number

of years, it cost about £1,300 to purchase and repair. However, they decided to build their own church building and this was built in 1864 and altered in 1889-90 by J D Smith. Seating capacity was originally for 650 persons. A turret and porch were added in 1914, when the site was extended at the front by the demolition of some houses in St George's Place.

A unique occasion occurred here on 3rd July 1942 when Archbishop William Temple attended the recognition Service for the new Baptist Minister, the Reverend Vivian Evans. Amongst those in attendance was Alderman Charles Lefevre, owner of the City Department Store and who was a deacon at this Church - he was also City Mayor in the 1930s.^{xi}

The Zoar Chapel

The "Pepper Box" (Mentioned above) was later demolished but after 1838 the Strict Baptists began to worship elsewhere - eventually, in 1845, coming to what some say is a converted water tower in Burgate Lane. Beneath the chapel floor there is a hollow space and the baptistry drains into the old well. The rounded walls of the turret end formed the pulpit of the chapel. This building was damaged slightly by enemy action in the Second World War but was only closed for a short period.^{xii}

I understand that this split from other Baptists was because of the question of open or closed communion and membership. There was also a dispute as to whether this building was an old water tower, as it could also have been a bastion in the old city wall. No doubt this point will be resolved during our

x The Church of St Thomas of Canterbury - A Short History and Guide, Christopher Buckingham, 1994 (published by the author).

xi Canterbury in Old Photographs, compiled by Derek Butler, Alan Sutton, 1989 (pages 73 and 75).

xii The Strict Baptist Chapels of England - Kent, Ralph F Chambers, The Strict Baptist Historical Society, 1956 (pages 38 and 39).

visit. ^{xiii}

St Andrew's United Reformed Church

One component of this church was the congregation from Guildhall Street (see above). Mention must be made of the church building of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection, which was built in 1797 and destroyed in 1942. To this mix we must add the Presbyterians of St Andrew's (originally in Gas Street), who had left Guildhall Street in 1875. The Presbyterian movement at St Andrew's church was started in 1880 and was opposite what is now Canterbury East Station - the site of this Church is now marked by "St Andrew's House".

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connection movement began in 1772 in Canterbury through a visit of two ministers, Mr Aldridge and Mr Cook, who preached in the streets. A small congregation was formed and visited initially by a Minister from Tunbridge Wells. ^{xiv}

The "permanent" replacement in Watling Street was completed in 1958 and it replaced a temporary structure that had been on the site since the late 1940's. This cause was joined by the congregation from St Andrew's Presbyterian Church (just outside Canterbury East Station) in 1973 when it closed - this site is now marked by St Andrew's House. The permanent building in Watling Street was demolished in April 2001 and the site was where the multi-storey car park may now be found. A brand-new and purpose-built building has been constructed for the Church on the opposite side of the road. ^{xv}

5 OTHER CAUSES IN CANTERBURY

There were other causes in Canterbury and these included (in no particular order) :-

Huguenots

The French Protestants first met at St Alphege Church in 1575 and then met in the western crypt of the Anglican Cathedral : presumably the fact that the Huguenots have met at the Cathedral was the reason why they did not feature in the 1851 census. The *Eglise Protestante Francaise de Cantorbery* meets every Sunday at 3pm in the Black Prince's Chantry, with a Huguenot service in French.

The Greyfriars

This was the first Franciscan house in England but all that remains is the chapel - this Friary was built in 1267, forty three years after the Franciscans

xiii The Free Churches of Canterbury (page 23) Taylor (publisher not known), 1929.

xiv The Free Churches of Canterbury (pages 48 and 49), Arthur F Taylor (publisher not known), 1929.

xv Welcome to St Andrew's 1645 - 1995, Reverend Derek Newton, published by the Church, in 1995
(?)

first settled in Canterbury (which was during the lifetime of St Francis of Assisi). The upper floor of the chapel is in use still for an Anglican Eucharist each Wednesday - the chapel is open from Easter to the end of September from 2pm to 4pm on Mondays to Saturdays.

Plymouth Brethren

The Plymouth Brethren used to meet in the 1920s and 1930s at the Foresters' Hall in the High Street, a building which survives in the hands of Nasons store - I have no evidence of Brethren presence in Canterbury today.

Other meetings today (not mentioned above)

There is a Russian Orthodox meeting (mainly in English) on the 3rd Sunday of each month in the Memorial Chapel of the King's School.

There are Catholic and Pentecostal meetings at the University of Kent.

Also the Barton Evangelical Church meets in the Beauherne School.

There may well be others!