

## History of Harlington Baptist Church

Today's Harlington bears little resemblance to the Harlington of yesteryear. No longer a quite agricultural village famous for its cherry orchards, it has become a densely populated suburban area of West London, with housing, hotel and office accommodations now being the hallmark of the area. No longer a network of country lanes and roads, it is surrounded by the A4 on one side (the busiest stretch of 'A' road in the country), and the M4 Motorway on the other.

The greatest change to Harlington came about through the development of Heathrow Airport which began in 1946. It has altered the whole character of the area, from one that was truly rural England into one that has become widely cosmopolitan. Since the formation of the Airport, the busiest International Airport in the world, catering for 65,000,000 passengers a each year, Harlington is now very much 'on the edge of the world.'

When the Baptist Church was formed, in 1798, Harlington was a stopping and 'watering place' for horses en route from London to the West Country - a place where the weary traveler could rest. In those days the journey from Bath to London took upwards of two days - a far cry from the one-and-a-half hours it now takes by car, or the three hours it took Concorde to fly from Heathrow to New York.

Harlington is one of the oldest villages in Middlesex, London known as far back as AD 831, when its name was given in the Saxon Cartularies as 'Hygereding Tun', meaning 'farm associated with Hygered', and again in the Domesday Book as 'Herdintone'. Before the present day, 'Harlington' was known as 'Arlington', when that title was taken by Sir. Henry Bennett, when he ascended to the peerage.

### THE BIRTH OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN HARLINGTON (1798)

THE BAPTIST CHURCH in Harlington was officially formed in 1798, but was already in embryo-form some forty years before that, during which time John Attlee gave a piece of land to the dissenters for the building of a chapel. This now forms part of the present Church Hall (formerly called the Frank Peace Hall in memory of one of its ministers), and the plaque over the door bears the date 1775.

### THE CULTURAL SCENE AND A NEW CHURCH BUILDING (1864-1900)

One thing is certain, the physical face of Harlington changed dramatically once the new church building went up in 1879, built as a direct result of the 'evangelical revival' and the preaching of the Revd.C.H.Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Unfortunately, we have no architects drawings or plans, but we do have the cork model that he made. This was lovingly restored by Jay and Ros DeWitt in the late 1970's, and can be seen in one of the back rooms of the Church.

But now let us turn to John Peake 's 1979 history and the cultural and historical scene he paints for us concerning Harlington in the late 19th century.....

"Harlington was still an agricultural community. The Heywards had a farm in the middle of the village almost opposite to where the Model Railway is now. It was a self contained community producing within itself most of the necessities of daily life. There were, apart from the farmers and farm hands, the blacksmith, saddler and harness maker, carpenter, dressmaker, grocer, milkman, sweep, butcher, sweetshop, and two bakers. Our village also had at least two policemen - whose presence was sometimes requested at church concerts!....

### THE POST WAR PERIOD (1947 - 1961)

TWO MINISTRIES mark this period in our history, those of Robert William Browell (1947-1956), and Ronald Ernest Fennell (1958-1961).

At the 150th Anniversary Celebrations that same year (1948), past ministers, members and friends who had moved away, and those representing local churches and organisations came together on the Monday. There were exhibits, photographs, iced cake models of the Church (with texts), a supper, and a history of the Church given by a Deacon, Mr.



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W. Chipperfield. On the Sunday (April 11th) the meetings were chaired by Mr. Walter Ayles, the local Member of Parliament, with the Revd. B. Grey Griffith, BD., the special preacher, and Dr. F. Townley Lord, BA., President of the Baptist Union, the speaker.

In 1966 the Church, and Mr. Peace in particular, carried out a fight against a betting shop being opened near the Church, presenting their case successfully in both courts. (NB: a betting shop was eventually opened some years later further up the road!). The two Sunday Schools took 1st and 2nd place in the local Scripture Examination, Cranford winning the Shield and Harlington being runners up.

1967 saw a series of inter-Church meetings called 'People Next Door', which led to the formation of the Hayes and Harlington Council of Churches, which changed to, 'Christians Together in Hayes and Harlington' - a decision to move the emphasis away from the word 'Council' to 'Christians'.

The 'Campaigners' ended after serving the Youth of the Church for over 20 years, and other forms of Youth work and a Club began.

In 1968 the Revd. Peace became Free Church Chaplain to Heathrow's St. George's Chapel, and the Church donated an inscribed Bible for use at the Chapel's Communion Table.

During the weekend of 19th & 20th May 1979 the centenary of the Church building was celebrated - not only services of worship and thanksgiving, but a social with various members of the church and congregation dressing-up in period costume and acting out their respective roles. The local newspaper, the 'Gazette', reported the celebrations with photographs of Tom and John Beechey, dressed up as a milkman and chimney sweep respectively, with two young children alongside. The article was headed "Baptists go back 100 years", and said:

"Time travel arrived at Harlington on Saturday when scenes from 100 years ago came alive for members of Harlington Baptist Church. The trip back in time was part of the special celebrations to mark the 100th birthday of the present church building. The sweep, the baker and a milkman, 1870's style, took their places on stage to show what life was really like a century ago in Harlington....

#### CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY!

The change in society was in some ways paralleled by a different sort of change within the life of the world-wide Church. A fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit brought about some dramatic changes in styles of worship, ministry and outreach, bringing with it a dissatisfaction with the status-quo causing the emergence of non-denominational churches and fellowships. That which hitherto had been called "The Charismatic Movement" has become, at least in certain quarters, something of a 'norm'. Harlington Baptist Church, whilst not embracing all of this, has nonetheless been influenced by it, not least of all in the content and style of worship, from one that was basically one-man led with an organist and choir singing an anthem, to having a worship leader with a band and various members of the congregation taking part, with the minister sometimes giving the message and nothing more. This change didn't happen overnight. It has become part and parcel of the 1980's and 90's.

Writing in his 1979 booklet, John Peake said, "It is not easy to write current events as history". Your present author agrees, because what I now write has all taken place during my own ministry at Harlington, from 1982 onwards. I'll try to be as objective as I can, writing in the style already adopted - the third person!. This last section isn't a chronological account - I leave later historians to sort that one out! Basically, it's a random selection of various happenings and events; a section that perhaps we should simply call 'jottings'.

The Revd. Robert Michael Scott's induction to Harlington Baptist Church took place on Saturday August 21st, 1982. He arrived with a wife (Linda) and three young children (and a fourth to follow nine months later!).

The mid 1980's and 1990's were to some extent dominated by London-wide and nation-wide missions to which our church was fully involved. In 1984 we had Luis Palau's six-week 'Mission to London' held at the Queen's Park Rangers football stadium. The following year saw Billy Graham's 'Mission England' relayed by satellite-link to the Beck Theatre in Hayes; and latterly his 'Mission 89' at Earl's Court. In addition to which we had our own local mission in 1991, also at the Beck Theatre, called 'Mission Hillingdon'; plus a fourteen-strong young people's team from around the world, called 'OM' (Operation Mobilisation), who worked with us for a three-week period in 1985. Currently, we have committed ourselves to an ongoing 'in house' programme called 'Alpha', a fourteen-week series on video designed to teach people the fundamental truths of the Christian faith.

The Luis Palau and Billy Graham missions proved highly successful, and the Alpha programme seems to bear similar fruit, with baptisms following each of these, for which we thank the Lord.

Young People's work has featured highly in recent years, with the running of a variety of Youth Clubs and Fellowships, House Groups, and a series of borough-wide events called 'IT', which the Minister's wife has helped organise and run. Other activities have also been held, including Holiday Clubs and a 'sleep out' on the village green to raise awareness and money for the world's homeless. So authentic was this 'cardboard city' that someone actually brought out blankets for the young people to sleep on because they thought it was 'for real'.

The First Sipson Girls' Brigade Company was transferred to Harlington in 1983, and was re-dedicated as the First Harlington Company on September 1st 1996, under the leadership of their Captain, Hazel Little.

In the early 1980's 'A Children at Risk' Day was held with speakers from all walks of life taking part: the local Member of Parliament, a Head Teacher, a Social Worker, a Police Officer, a representative from CARE (Christian Action Research and Education), and our own Minister, who organised the event. At the time of writing our Church is fully committed to the "Safe to Grow" children and young peoples programme.

We have close links with the local school, William Byrd, where members of the church have been teachers; the Minister periodically taking morning assemblies and other events, and his wife serving as a governor.

A Palm Sunday baptism in 1993 launched the worship band, made up largely of young people with adult leaders. It has continued with different instruments and personnel ever since, sometimes going under the name 'Spirit Level'. Apart from playing for our own Church services it has livened up the worship at open-air services on the village green, the 'IT' and Girls' Brigade rallies, and open-air Songs of Praise organised by Christians Together in Hayes and Harlington. Regrettably with universities calling, the band moved on but we still have a great focus on music in worship.

Amongst the many needy causes that the Church has supported in recent years, apart from its continued support of the Home Mission Fund, the Baptist Missionary Society and Christian Aid there are some that deserve special mention:

Money and clothes - and in some cases food as well - have been sent to the Himalayan Earthquake Appeal, Albanian Relief, the SaltmineTrust Bulgarian Relief Appeal, Bosnian Relief, and OASIS help for the homeless and unemployed, and more recently to Send a Cow and Water for Life.

The Woman's Meeting continues to meet every Monday afternoon, with a goodly number of faithful and committed ladies who share fellowship, worship and ministry together, sometimes with an invited speaker, sometimes not.

Music and singing featured prominently throughout the 1980's, with concerts given by Camberley Baptist Church, the Reach Out Singers from America, and The Thames Singers.

Perhaps the one incident that shows how much things changed in Church relationships occurred in 1998), when the Rt.Revd. Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, Roman Catholic Bishop of West London, preached at our Church during the 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity'. A comment that the Bishop made in his sermon underlined this point for us, "I would guess that I am the first Catholic Bishop who has preached in your Church".

Spring Harvest has become a focal point for increasing numbers of people in our fellowship, bringing into the Church a variety of new hymns and songs. Spring Harvest is a gathering of upwards of 90,000 Christians from all over the country who meet for prayer, worship, fellowship and ministry. Two Butlins holiday villages are used over a six-week period, at Minehead and Skegness.

Tim Burns came to us in 1986, a student from the London Bible College. He met our own Tania DeWitt on the first OASIS young peoples mission team at Westbourne Park in London. They subsequently married. Tim became minister at the Vernon Baptist Church in London's King's Cross, and now ministers in Australia.

Inevitably, with three elderly buildings (church, manse and hall), maintenance has continued to be something of a headache. Questions surrounding the best use of the Church has been with us for many years; and during the interim new lighting and heating has been installed. The Hall has had a new roof and floor, And the question that was first raised back in the early 1950's is still with us, "How will any further extension of Heathrow Airport affect us?". To that question we

have no long-term answer, but as always, in this and all things, we "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrew 12v1f).

We look backward in gratitude, upward in confidence, forward in hope to the Lord Jesus Christ.