



Newsletter Special 130th Anniversary 1876 to 2006

The beginnings—a brief History

In 1876, 130 years ago, two particular things happened here in Brighton!

1. The Building

The Primitive Methodists moved from their previous Chapel in High Street to new premises in Viaduct Road (originally built as the 'London Road Chapel'). The opening services were on Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 September 1876.

In January 1880 the church was re-decorated throughout for £52.10s. 1d by a Mr Parker who generously gave £5 back as a donation!

The Methodists wanted to move to a larger building in a main road position and by 1894 their records show that an ideal situation came to hand in the site at 88 London Road. (Brighton & Hove City Mission have based their work there for the past few years, but need to move their base as the Methodists are closing the Church at the end of April 2006.)

An offer of £2200 for the old building in Viaduct Road was accepted from Mrs George Gates with the intention for it to become the Railway Mission.

(A brief history of the Primitive Methodist Church, Viaduct Road, Brighton by James A Funnel)

2. The Brighton Railway Mission work

Earlier in 1876, a Miss Parkinson had been approached by one of the porters to see she could facilitate a meeting for Railwaymen who were on duty on Sundays. Because of the illness and then death of her brother, she was unable to do so, but she knew someone who could—Mrs George Gates.

So, **130 years ago on Sunday 19th March 1876**, Mrs Gates held a little service at the Brighton Central Railway Terminus with a small congregation of a ticket collector and two porters!

Soon the attendances became too large for the waiting room and a larger room within the Railway works was granted by Mr John Peake Knight, the then General Manager of the London & South Coast Railway Company.

These places were outgrown with the steady development of the Railway Mission. (The Annual meeting of the Railway Mission in 1882 at The Dome was attended by over 3,000!) After 17 years in the Library, The Directors of the LB&SCR 'had been compelled by extra business on the railways to drive the Railway Mission out. Mrs Gates said that the Directors had treated them with every kindness and had placed the room at their disposal without charge, so that up to the present the Mission had been carried on without asking for sixpence.'

The Viaduct Road Premises

Finally, the present hall in Viaduct Road was purchased in 1893. So keen was the interest aroused by Mrs Gates that the whole of the money for the purchase was collected in nine months.

"Tuesday 15 May 1894 was a day of much interest and happiness to all connected with the new Railway Mission Hall. It was not that of laying a foundation stone but of giving the first blow to the wall which divides the two portions of the building. As the one portion is crowded to excess, all were longing to see the middle wall of partition down. Mrs Gates. Mrs JP Knight widow of our late respected General Manager, Mr & Miss Sykes, Dr Morgan and Mr George Gibbins, a Brighton Architect, who has most

graciously given his services freely as a donation to the work, were present with about 300 of our own members."

(The original shutter partitioning has only recently been replaced with the new sliding/ folding partition.)

The building was dedicated on 4 July 1894 by the then Countess of Chichester, and opened entirely free of debt. 'The enlarged Hall will now seat nearly 500 and its capacity was fully tested on the evening of 7 October when large numbers remained standing throughout the service and many more were turned away from the doors who could not get in for want of room.' (The premises comprised the Main Church Hall, Vestry, Back Hall, Kitchen and scullery with outside toilet.)

Additional room for teaching children was required and the property adjoining, the Coach House and Stables at the rear of the Church premises entered by a passageway below the first floor rooms of no 12 Stanley Road, was purchased by Mrs Gates in 1895 and formally opened on 16 February 1896. (This part of the premises is known as the Stanley Road passageway and the Primary Room.) The work of the Sunday School expanded and the premises were extended by the building of the Upper Hall at first floor level, staircase from the Stanley Road Passageway and the

building out of two toilets over the passageway at the rear of the Hall and supported at first floor level.

These additions were opened on 20 December 1902.

The Sunday School work expanded still further and with money provided by a Mrs Divall, Mrs Gates purchased the adjoining house at 71 Viaduct Road to provide a permanent home for the Senior Department of the Sunday School. (The house was known as 'the Schoolhouse' and the buildings were registered under the marriage acts as 'the Railway Mission Hall and School-house' until the change of name to Calvary Evangelical Church on 1 January 1984. It was then registered with the simpler description 'Calvary Evangelical Church'.)

Mrs Gates passed away on 23 July 1911. The funeral Service was held in the dinner hour on Thursday 27 July at the Mission Hall. Not only were a large number of the workers at the Brighton Railway Mission present, but with them were evangelists and workers from all parts of Brighton and Hove, who recognised the value of the labours done by Mrs Gates in so many years devoted service.

Pastor Charles Spurgeon conducted the service and his address touched all hearts. Mrs Gates was a great lover of

the word of God, and in nothing did she more rejoice than in a Gospel plainly preached, of free Grace; nor did she forget to show her appreciation to those who presented her Saviour as the sinners only hope. She was truly a woman of one book, and that book the Bible, for she loved it and prized it highly.

(Railway Signal June 1894 and September 1911, Brighton Gazette & Sussex Telegraph Sat 25 November 1893.)

The Brighton Railway Mission now Calvary Evangelical Church (since 1984) has continued that good tradition of 'The Word' and 'Mission'.

The closure of the Brighton Railway Locomotive works took place in the late 1950s and the 'railway houses' around New England Road demolished in the 60s.

Traffic Signals

Traffic lights have been at Preston Circus since 1935, though from 1929 they were 'Brighton's well-known semaphore signals'.

See A History of Brighton & Hove: Ken Fines 2002

On December 10th 1868 the first traffic signals began operating at the junction of Bridge Street, Parliament Street and Great George Street, London.

By night alternating red and green gas-lit lanterns 20 feet above the traffic were rotated by a policeman pulling a lever and by day semaphore arms operated.

They were designed by John Peake Knight, to help reduce the large number of pedestrians killed each year on London's roads. Mr Knight was a railway-traffic manager, with the LB & SCR and later became its General Manager. You will see a memorial stone to his memory in the main hall of Calvary Evangelical Church Brighton—commemorating not his invention of traffic signals—but honouring his work as a much loved Sunday School superintendent here at the Brighton Railway Mission, Preston Circus.

The National Work of the Railway Mission— 125 years!

The National Railway Mission was founded in 1881, 125 years ago this year. This brought together not only the Railway Mission Work, which had spread like wildfire across the Railway System in those early years by others such as Emma Saunders of Bristol, but also the Railway Boys' Mission and other Christian railway work.

Later it spread internationally (mainly as fellowships of Christian Railway people, but with a recent part-time Chaplain/Missionary appointed in Switzerland) with work in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Canada and the USA, South Africa. At one time also Japan and Australia.

The International Railway Mission has also spread into the former Eastern Europe, Hungary and Estonia.

Ministry

In the 1940s the Railway Mission HQ was at No 71 Viaduct Road. In 1948 Ewart Helyar commenced his Christian Ministry here at Brighton (when local membership was introduced). Ewart was later based at Railway Mission work in Colchester, Watford, Purley, Derby as well as serving for a number of years as Railway Mission General Secretary. (Subsequently he has served as Pastor of Lindfield Evangelical Church, and South Street Free Evangelical Church Eastbourne (where he continues to serve on the eldership).

Philip D Gomersall started his Railway Mission Ministry here in 1964, he succeeded Ewart as General Secretary, later Executive Director.

Pastor Joseph Percy was part-time minister from around 1954 to 1963. The late Pastor Les Hill was called to the part-time ministry in 1964 and later we saw great blessing among students, one of whom is our preacher for our Thanksgiving and Anniversary Service on Saturday 18 March 2006. Pastor John Copley was our first full-time Elder in the mid-1980s to 1989.

Pastor Philip Wells was inducted as Assistant Pastor in 1974, later being called to the full-time ministry following the death of Les Hill in 1989.

Rod Thomas was called to the Eldership alongside Pastor Philip Wells for a number of years until he retired and moved to North Wales in June 2005. We are glad that Rod is taking our evening service on Sunday 19 March 2006.

We are an independent church with links and exchanging prayer information with the Mid-Sussex Group of Churches. We have much appreciated their prayer support during the period of uncertainty and negotiations with the premises as well as the ministry of brethren from Haywards Heath Evangelical Church and others on a regular basis. Our preacher for the morning service on Sunday 19 March 2006 is Pastor David Sprouse of Cuckfield Baptist Church

Uncertainties...

In the late 1950s the then Railway Mission Committee decided that the Brighton Railway Mission should be sold! The local congregation resisted this, and eventually, the order was rescinded and so the work here at Viaduct Road continued. A bequest by Mrs Glen enabled us to purchase No 70 in 1969, with both houses being greatly used in the work amongst Students and Young people.

But in 1997/98 the roof needed repair and the first-floor WC additions began to part company with the rest of the building after nearly 100 years! Before we spent substantial amounts of money, we needed assurances of security of tenure. However, the Railway Mission Committee took a decision to sell the property, though they agreed that we should spend funds limited to having the dangerous first floor additions demolished, the Upper Hall re-roofed (though not ceiling repairs) in order to make the buildings safe and limit any further weather damage. Later, we closed both the upper and main halls as parts of the ceilings came down.

The houses were sold, and funds relating to No 70 came back to us, registering as a Charity in 2001 to enable us to invest funds and hold property. We endured a period of great uncertainty and much prayer as we entered talks and negotiations with

the RM Committee. As a Church we sought the Lord as to our future (or not), but no opportunities to move became available.

We tried out hired premises in Preston Park Avenue for one Sunday, with an option for using it in the future on a regular basis. But even that became unavailable.

Finding the way forward...

Although we met in the Back Hall, using only the rear entrance, the Lord continued to bring visitors to our Sunday Services and we had a real sense that the Lord had placed us at Preston Circus through the vision of Mrs Gates, and that He had not changed His mind. Other doors seemed firmly closed.

God moves...

Holland Road Baptist Church had their premises re-roofed. The Contractor gave us a very 'good' quote and there were 'just enough' good reclaimed slate available to re-roof our premises. Then 'out of the blue' two sources of funds became available the same weekend, totalling, guess what? Just sufficient for the work. The snag was that the quote and the slates were only available if the order for the work could be placed imminently.

Meanwhile, the Railway Mission Committee (extremely unusually) had unfinished business and had to adjourn to a continuation meeting (in 30+ years it hadn't happened before).

Graciously, they agreed to meet Pastor Philip Wells, Rod Thomas (who mainly conducted our negotiations with the RM) and Chris Fry.

Permission was given for the roofing work to go ahead, but also, crucially, for the order for sale to initially be put on hold (and later rescinded) and to see if there was a way forward to reach an agreement about the Brighton Premises.

Ian Markey and Cliff Perry led for the Railway Mission/ The Mission Trust Corporation and Pastor Philip Wells and Rod Thomas for Calvary. (Ray Wingate being on both committees and having a good knowledge of the history also attended. Steve Hotston (RM) and Steve Ellacott (CECB) were also involved). Some of the negotiating meetings were held at Chertsey Street Baptist Church, Guildford (the Pastor is John Benton) as a 'mid-point' for each side to travel.

Talks were tough at times and it almost seemed impossible that a way through could be found, but by God's Grace it was—and our Thanksgiving service on March 18th is a testimony to that!

Blessings...

The Railway Mission have seen much blessing: in financial support for their work from the Railway industry; in the way that God has used the Railway Chaplains in the large incidents, including 7/7; and in the regular routine day-to-day work of the chaplains, including those with the London and other City Missions.

Calvary has also seen God blessing, in numbers and the work and the considerable amount of refurbishment work carried out since the roofing work started at the beginning of 2005. We continue to pray that the Lord will build his Church and that the refurbished buildings will be used for his Glory and the extension of His Kingdom here at Preston Circus. We returned to the main hall at Christmas 05.

Brighton & Hove City Mission...

BHCM was founded in 1849 as the Brighton & Hove Town Mission, changing the name to reflect the status of 'City' granted to Brighton and Hove. They had used part of the premises of the London Road Methodist Church at 88 London Road as their base for a number of years, sharing part of the premises with the Boy's Brigade Office.

Following the decision by the Church Trustees to close the Methodist Church and join the work to the Dorset Gardens Methodist Church BHCM had been seeking earnestly for new accommodation, but without success. The closure date was set as the end of April 2006 and a 'deadline' had been set by BHCM to find new premises by the end of November 2005.

Doors seemed firmly closed and nothing seemed available. Calvary were aware of the situation and had joined prayers for their situation. In February 2005 we had a 'brainstorming day' to seek the Lord about how we should use our premises for the Church work. We didn't seem to need the Upper hall for the immediate and medium term needs of the work. Funds did not allow refurbishment work to be started on it in the near future either.

Although negotiations were almost concluded with some final touches needed, the months ticked by until the Railway Mission agreed the preamble and memorandum of agreement should be finalised. We agreed it at our October Trustees and Members Meetings and the Railway Mission / The Mission Trust Corporation at theirs on the 29 November 2005, when it was finally signed. Our October meetings also agreed to offer BHCM the use of the Upper Hall

as we had the 'green light' for the agreement. The RM Committee concurred.

So, Pastor Philip gave Brighton & Hove City Mission the 'good news' and the e-mail response came quickly back:

Date: Thu, 3 Nov 2005

Subject: BHCM

Dear Ray,

We are really delighted at the offer of accommodation at Calvary but very much aware that a good deal of work needs to be done before we can move in. Our deadline is the end of April 2006. Philip has ask me to contact you to arrange a meeting with yourself and Chris Fry. Can you let me know the best times for you.

Many thanks.

Tony Smith
Brighton and Hove City Mission

The Lord Provides (Jehovah Jireh)...

We didn't have funds to refurbish it the Upper Hall, nor did Brighton & Hove City Mission....except....

Calvary Evangelical Church Brighton
(founded in 1876 as the Brighton Railway Mission)
(Regd Charity No: 1089327)

E-mail: mail@calvary-brighton.org.uk Website www.calvary-brighton.org.uk

that 'just in time' BHCM received a legacy that has enabled work to proceed.

It looks like the legacy is just the right amount, the work required will just be within the budget, and it looks like the work can and will be done just in time for the deadline 'move' date. Nothing is impossible with God!

We are still working on an agreement relating to the sub-let but all three parties are working towards that in a spirit of Christian fraternity, on the basis that the funds will be an 'advance' of rent over a number of years.

How good is the God we adore...

Continue to pray for God to use the Railway Mission, Calvary Evangelical Church Brighton, and Brighton & Hove City Mission in this partnership in the Gospel—to the Glory of His name and the extension of His Kingdom. We thank Him for all that is past and trust Him for what is to come

Ray Wingate
(Church Secretary/Acting Treasurer)

18 March 2006