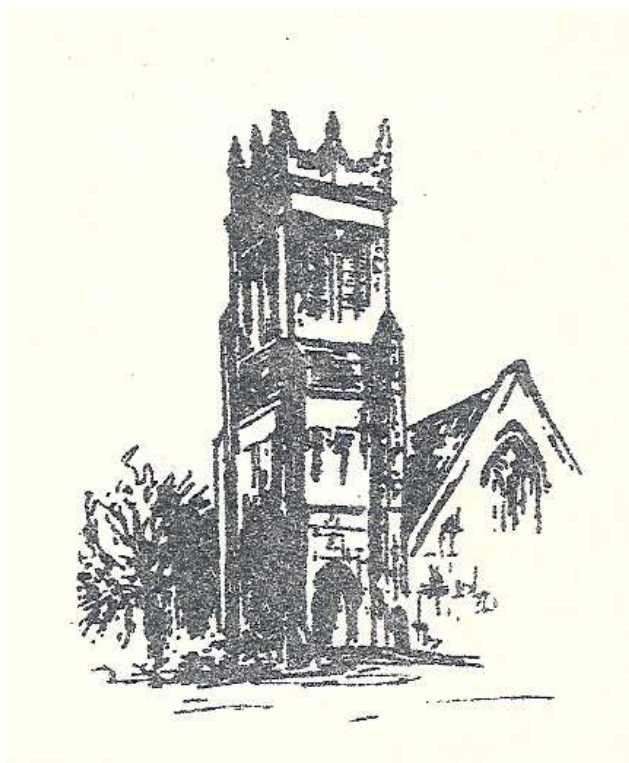


The Church of St Mark, Bromley

A short history



This booklet is an updated version of that written by Robin Waldron in the early 1980's, much of the information in which was drawn from a history of St Mark's by Mr F. L. Cooper. The result is offered as a tribute to the life of the Church and to those who have been associated with its history and its future.

Reprinted January 2005

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Beginnings

The Latin name for Bromley, Bromlega, means “the heath where the Broom grows.” In Roman times, and even up to the Eighteenth Century, the countryside around Bromlega, or Bromleag as it was also known, was woodland and heath, with plentiful blooms such as can still be seen on Hayes and Keston Commons. Up until shortly before World War II, Broom Day was an annual event in the Bromley calendar, with sports, funfairs and processions to celebrate the occasion and the wearing of Broom in the button-holes of the community at large. Sadly, since the war it has not been revived.

In A.D.862, as is recorded in the Charter of that year preserved in the British Museum, King Ethelbert of Wessex and Kent granted “ten ploughlands at Bromleag” to his minister. In the Tenth Century a Charter from King Eadgar granted to the Church of Rochester “ten measures, which the inhabitants of Kent call ‘sulings’, in that place where the tillers of the soil have already given the name Bromley”. A ‘suling’ is as much land as can be ploughed in a year by a yoke of oxen, about 180 acres.

The close connection of Bromley to Rochester is further evidenced by the occupation of Bromley Palace (later Stockwell College and now the Civic Centre) by the Bishops of Rochester and it is said to have been built by Bishop Gundulph of Rochester and restored by Bishop Gilbert de Glanvill in 1184. The Chapel at the Palace was rebuilt by Bishop Sprat (said to be the one who “could eat no fat”) who resided in Bromley between 1684 and 1713. In the Palace grounds a spring with medicinal virtues was discovered and dedicated to St Blaise; it was said to have the same properties as the waters at Tunbridge Wells and attracted many visitors with ill health. St

Blaise was patron saint of wool-combers and throats. People made the sign of the cross with a finger dipped in the well for throat complaints. When the Bishops left the Palace and the Lord of the Manor bought it, he had to allow people access to the well for healing. Having been long lost, the well was rediscovered in 1754 by a Bishop's Chaplain, Revd. Harwood (hence the Harwood street name), who put a thatched roof over it. The well is still there in the Palace grounds.

In the Nineteenth Century the town grew rapidly, its character being changed by the coming of the railways and the growth of the residential accommodation for those working in London. Being a market town, it drew a considerable number of visitors from outside and these increased as roads improved and fears of highwaymen on the road across Bromley Common receded in the face of more frequent traffic and an organised police force.

There has been a church in Bromley since the chapel dedicated to St Blaise was built near to the Bishop's Palace, though the precise date is not known and there is some dispute about its nature as it may only have been a shrine. The old Parish Church of Bromley, of which St Mark's became a chapel-of-ease, was dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, a practice common in the Roman Catholic Church until the growing status of the Pope caused it to diminish in the Tenth Century. As Bromley was then a very small hamlet, it perhaps did not need a large church and none is mentioned in Domesday. Nevertheless, the Parish Church was of Norman origin whether its original dedication was indeed to St Blaise (or St Blaize) as some believe, or to St James, since Bromley Fairs were traditionally held on St James's Day and on St Blaise's Day. It was restored at some time prior to 1400 and, like St Mark's, was largely destroyed in the Second World War, being rebuilt since. In the Nineteenth Century other churches such as St Luke's, Holy Trinity and Christ Church were built to serve the needs of Bromley residents, but the population continued to grow and with it the need arose for another church.

Just near to Bromley South Station the River Ravensbourne, which rises at Caesar's Well, Keston, is joined by the Bourne Water, a stream which descends intermittently from Hayes Lane, and Keston Stream, which rises at Keston and forms lakes in Holwood Park. At the corner of Sandford Road a house named "Streamlet Place" used to stand; it is noted in a map of 1868. Another rivulet descended from the lakes in Bromley Palace grounds so that the river had a considerable flow of water. It continued under the railway to form a lake in Mill Vale, and then ran past Glass Mill Pond and

on to Shortlands Bridge, passing the foot of Martins Hill. (The Glass Mill has given its name to the lane that runs down from the Market Square to Shortlands, crossing the Ravensbourne on its way, and the Mill Pond is still there and has recently been improved).

At Streamlet Place there also descended a stream, which rose south of Toot's Wood (between the present Broadoaks Way and Pickhurst Park) and descended between Stone Road and Westmoreland Road and through the grounds of New Farm. All these were open streams, but now much has been culverted. Before that, floods at Westmoreland Road by the junction with Hayes Road occurred frequently and at one time a flood covered the whole of the Shortlands valley as well. The last major flood was as recent as September 1968, when the water lay eighteen inches deep in Westmoreland Road. When the river alongside St Mark's was open, the choirboys used to come straight out of church and play games jumping across it while still in their cassocks.

It was on this site, by the junction of these many waters, that in 1897 the decision was taken to build a new church as a chapel-of-ease to the Bromley Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul. The design was by Mr Evelyn A. Hellicar and the church was dedicated to St Mark.

There was already a worshipping congregation in the Bromley South area as will be seen from the following.

The first St Mark's in South Bromley

In 1884, the Revd. A. G. Hellicar, then Vicar of Bromley, received the gift from Mr Samuel Cawston of an iron church with furniture and fittings, which was formerly standing at Addison Road, Bromley Common. This Iron Church was erected in what is now St Mark's Road, Masons Hill, on a site kindly lent by Mr Eley Soames, and served as a place of worship until 1898.

For some years prior to that there had been talk of building a church in South Bromley and in 1891 the "Bromley Record" wrote, "It is possible that a fund will be started to replace the iron structure in which the congregation of St Mark's has been worshipping for the past five years".

The site at the foot of Westmoreland Road was purchased by Mr Thomas Dewey and Mr Eley Soames for a sum of £500. In 1896 a meeting was held at South Hill Wood, Mr Dewey's house in Westmoreland Road, when the

plans of the architect, Mr Evelyn Hellicar, son of the Vicar of Bromley, were approved. At that time the site was a very rural one, as described by an article in “St Mark’s News”: -

“The old lane, leading down from the main road to where St Mark’s now stands, led to countless treasures for the children who peered through the broken slats of the old oak fence that bounded it on the school side. A long field sloped down to the banks of the Ravensbourne that flowed through the lush grass, buttercups and daisies in abundance, and in the early months of the year we found the deep golden cups of the marsh marigold. Of course, they always grew well out in the water, so that wet shoes and a scolding were inevitable. And since its name refers to its use in church festivals in the middle ages as one of the flowers devoted to the Virgin Mary, how strange that St Mark’s Church should stand in the very spot where these glorious Spring flowers charmed so many young children – the children of bygone days. There too we found the pale pinkish Lady’s Smock, a four petalled flower belonging to the crucifer, a cross-bearing family. Sometimes the field looked white with the countless pale blossoms, such was the charm of the old lane to me.”

Mr F. L. Cooper writes: -

“The stream ran fast and deep along the South side of the church, and in the early 1900’s we choir boys had difficulty in jumping from bank to bank; this water had its source at Holwood and is really the ‘Blackbrook’, joining the ‘Ravensbourne’ at the South West corner of the Church garden. When in full spate the combined waters often overflowed into Hayes Road and Westmoreland Road, but in 1936 it was culverted, being finished in 1937.”

The Second St Mark’s

While the necessary funds were being collected, work was already proceeding on the building, and on Saturday 22nd October 1898 the new church was consecrated by Dr Walsh, Suffragan Bishop of Dover, under commission from the Archbishop of Canterbury, accompanied by Canon Murray, the Rural Dean, as Chaplain, and Sir John Hassard, KCB, Registrar of the Diocese of Canterbury. On the Sunday evening the church was so crowded that many intending to join the congregation could not gain admittance.

The church tower was not built until 1903, in which year the Parish of Bromley was transferred from the Diocese of Canterbury to that of Rochester. It was dedicated on 10th January 1904. It was built of brick, being faced with red bricks from Dunton Green, decorated with Douling Stone from Shepton Mallet in Somerset. The tower measures 94 feet from the floor to the top of the pinnacles and the base is 21 feet square exclusive of the buttresses. Only the bottom part of the tower was built when the church first opened as it housed the main porch and the tower was not raised to its full height until 1903. The bricks used for the completion do not quite match and this fact is visible since the tower has been cleaned.

The War Memorial, which was intended to be “both a memorial and a thank-offering”, was planned in 1919.

Over the years there was discussion about the provision of a parsonage for the church, and proposals to divide the parish so as to constitute St Mark’s as an independent parish were to be debated by the Church Committee on several occasions from 1908 onwards.

In 1937, St Mark’s was licensed by the Bishop for banns and marriages. The first marriage to be solemnised took place in January 1937 between Miss Nora Smith (daughter of Mr Sidney Smith, the Churchwarden) and Mr K. L. Wood.

In 1940, after much hard work on the part of many benefactors, St Mark’s was made into a Conventional District, as the first step towards becoming a separate parish, and had its own Parochial Church Council. On 12th June 1941, the Reverend K. H. Jocelyn was licensed as Priest in Charge of the Conventional District of St Mark, Bromley, by the Lord Bishop of Rochester. The Acting Churchwardens were Mr Sidney C. Smith and Mr Bernard Ayling. Mr A. E. Baker was Church Secretary and Mr H. J. Davis was Treasurer. In 1947 the Reverend J. Alban Davies (a former Rugby International for Wales) was made first Vicar of the Parish.

From 1898 the old Iron Church was used as a Church Hall, the site in St Mark’s Road being purchased in 1913 for an amount of £275 from Mr Edgar Soames, brother of Mr Eley Soames, who had died in 1908. It was replaced by a new Church Hall on the same site in 1930, built with a legacy of £5,000 left by Miss Alice Soames, who died in 1928. She was commemorated by the Soames Room in St Mark’s Hall, which was used as a meeting room for the Parochial Church Council. The hall was also much used for theatricals - only one show is known to have been abandoned,

when in November 1936 the cast, orchestra and audience all ran out on hearing Crystal Palace was on fire!

The existence of the hall was the means of ensuring the continuation of worship for the parishioners of St Mark's when in the Second World War the church was destroyed and services continued in the Church Hall. This was commemorated by a plaque that remained in the hall until its sale in 1976. The building was then reconstructed as the H. G. Wells Centre for the Bromley Labour Party.

The sale of the hall was in many ways a sacrifice but its maintenance constituted an expense the Church could ill afford in the 1970's.

The Destruction

On Wednesday 16th April 1941, Bromley experienced a most violent air raid attack. The Minute Book records that this started in the evening and went on until between 4 and 5 a.m. on the 17th April. The Minutes continue,

“Many public buildings and shops besides private houses were seriously injured or destroyed; amongst the latter, both the Mother and Daughter Churches, viz. St Peter and St Paul's and St Mark's. The Church was struck apparently by a combination of incendiary and high explosive bombs. There was a serious fire in the South-West corner of the Church and garden and just inside the main entrance from the Porch. The whole of the Nave and North and South aisles were unroofed. The gallery was fallen, the font in situ but badly broken, the War Memorial Board broken and displaced. All window glass was destroyed and much of the stonework of the apertures broken. The pulpit and pitch pine seats were broken or covered with wreckage from fallen timbers. The East and West windows had their stone and brickwork broken, smashed and forced outwards on to the garden turf. In the Chancel much of the carved reredos and the Holy Table were in situ, slightly damaged. The organ was quite destroyed.”

The reredos is said to have been protected over a long period only by tarpaulins. Some of the salvaged articles were taken to St Mark's Hall where Church services were held on Sunday 20th April and thereafter. Only the tower was left undamaged.

Eight churches in Bromley were bombed in that one night as a specific “church raid”. Some believe the traitor “Lord” Haw Haw helped the raiders to pinpoint them all, having once lived in Bickley; he did mention Bromley in broadcasts for Nazis. The idea was to “wipe Christianity off the face of Bromley”.

The original church varied from the present structure in several respects. Not only was the present Church Room not then in existence, but several features existed which have been altered in the rebuilding.

There were originally two bays on the south side, which became the opening to the Lady Chapel, dedicated as the Chapel of the Annunciation in the name of the Reverend L. J. Elwin in 1911. The East window was originally composed of a central principal window flanked by three panes on either side, making seven windows filled with stained glass and surmounted by a noble design of patterns merging into a gothic arch, while the Chancel Screen divided the Choir from the Nave of the church. Until the reredos was installed there was a backcloth behind the altar. The window in the Lady Chapel contained the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove surrounded by angels, with a vision of the Cross above and the Fall below. On one side was the Blessed Virgin Mary and on the other the Angel of the Lord. The West window in the present church also differs from the previous one in the number of “lights”.

The Chancel Screen had been the gift of Mr & Mrs H. M. Mansell in memory of their son, Lieutenant Leslie Wyndham Mansell, and was to have been surmounted by a Rood consisting of a crucifix and two figures, but the faculty for this addition was not obtained.

The Rebuilding

After the war, for some years, the nave arcades stood like a monastic ruin. They were incorporated into the present church. The lower part of the chancel arch was saved and the Victorian carved capitals kept, as were the choir stalls and sedilia from the old church.

In 1953 the rebuilt church was rededicated, the corner stone having been laid by H. R. H. The Duchess of Kent in 1952. Each year between the destruction and the rebuilding a service was held in the bombed church and the spirit of St Mark’s parishioners was indeed unquenchable. The War Memorial garden was replanted with rose trees, the main garden with flowering trees and bushes and the lawns turfed; everything possible was

done to match the magnificent interior being prepared for the reopening under the Reverend H. J. A. Edwards, by the Bishop of Rochester, Dr Chevasse.

The Present Church

Entering by the porch, the visitor will see immediately opposite the entrance to the most recent addition, the Church Room, the dedication of which was attended in October 1980 by the Bishop of Rochester, Dr David Say. Turning to the right, the doors lead into the church itself.

Inside the church, by the side of the doors, is a plaque recording the bombing and the rebuilding.

To the right is the Choir Vestry surmounted by a gallery, above which can be seen the West windows which celebrate the Missionary Church in Africa, India and the Pacific. The three people portrayed in these windows are, from the left:

BISHOP SAMUEL AJAYI CROWTHER (1809-1891) Bishop of the Niger. Born in Ochugu, West Africa, he was carried off as a slave in 1819 and rescued three years later by the British Navy. At 19 he was baptised and educated at a Mission College. Whilst on the Niger expedition of 1841 his report so impressed the Church Missionary Society that he was invited to London and ordained. He took part in the Niger expedition of 1854 and was consecrated the first black Bishop in 1864. A Doctor of Divinity of Oxford, he translated the Bible into Yoruba.

BISHOP JOHN COLERIDGE PATTESON (1827-1871) English Martyr Bishop, was educated at Eton and Balliol, and became an outstanding linguist, pastor and educator. He founded the Melanesian Mission and went out to the Pacific Islands in the ship "Southern Cross", spending 16 years in missionary work before being consecrated Bishop of Melanesia in 1861. When only 44 years old, he was killed by the natives while on missionary work in Santa Cruz.

BISHOP VEDNAYAKAM SAMUEL AZARIAH (1874-1947) was born in Madras State and brought up as a Christian. He had three main aims: to evangelise the Indian people; to help the Indian Church to play its rightful part in the world; and to unite the Christians in India into one Church. In 1912 he became Bishop of Dornakal, the first Indian Bishop of the

Anglican Church in India, and is remembered as a man of prayer, a great evangelist, a born teacher and able administrator.

At the base of the windows are the words of Our Lord's great commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature". Scenes from the lives of the three bishops are also depicted.

Turning in the direction of the altar, in the North Aisle is the Font, not the original one that used to stand at the West End, but a new one, as the original was broken during clearing up after the air raid. Here too, in the North East wall is the Corner Stone laid by the late H. R. H. Princess Marina, then Duchess of Kent. In a cavity behind this stone are preserved a copy of the Parish Magazine, copies of both local newspapers, and "The Times". The ceremony took place on 3rd June 1952 and marked the progress of reconstruction of St Mark's, which was completed in July 1953. The Coats of Arms on the right of the Clergy Vestry door and on the Lady Chapel screen in the South Aisle are those of the old Borough of Bromley (not the London Borough), depicting the Ravens of Ravensbourne, and the Diocese of Rochester.

The Organ is the restored original organ, but with the console moved across the Choir to the Lady Chapel, just behind the South Pier of the Chancel Arch. A screen used to divide the Choir from the Nave but this was not replaced after the war, thus opening and lightening the church.

The Lectern depicts St Mark's winged lion and is the successor to the original lectern which was moved to the Lady Chapel and was the gift of Mr & Mrs T. C. Dewey. The present lectern is in memory of Mr Richard Ayling and is by Mr John Crawford of Ashford.

Above the altar is the fine restored Reredos, also the gift of Sir Thomas Dewey, the Charter Mayor in 1903. Many of the present vestments and altar frontals were embroidered by his descendant by marriage, Janet Dewey. The Reredos, originally intended to be of alabaster, was in fact carved from oak by Mr George Rose of Haddenham in Buckinghamshire. The six figures from left to right are those of Justus, first Bishop of Rochester, who commenced the building of Rochester Cathedral in A.D.604; St Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury, sent to evangelise England in A.D.597; St Mark, Patron Saint of the Church; St Peter, one of the two Patron Saints of the Mother Church, St Peter and St Paul, the Parish Church of Bromley; St Gregory the Great, the Pope who sent St Augustine to England; and St Mildred, the Abbess of Thanet, a foundation of A.D.680

destroyed by the Danes in A.D.850 but restored by King Canute later as a restitution. St Mildred was the daughter of Domneva, cousin of King Egbert who made penance to her and endowed the monastery situated near Minster on the Isle of Thanet, when the Wantsum Channel separated Thanet from Kent by a width of some four hundred yards. (Is the model of the Church she is holding meant to be that of Minster in Thanet?)

On the niches are figures of St Michael and St George given in 1924 and 1927, respectively by Mr Rose and his daughter. The Altar rails by John Crawford are in memory of Mrs Frances Poulton.

The East Windows show, in the centre, the Risen Christ in Glory, with the Resurrection as in St Mark's Gospel below; on the left is St Mark surmounted by his Coat of Arms, and below, writing his Gospel; and on the right, St Peter, surmounted by the keys, and below, in Caesarea Philippi where he proclaimed Christ.

The Coats of Arms, in the form of medieval style hatchments, are the Royal Coat of Arms (because the church was rededicated in Coronation year) and on the other side a composite Coat incorporating those of Sir Thomas Dewey, who contributed so much to St Mark's, the Bishop of Rochester, and the family of Reverend H. J. A. Edwards, Vicar at the time. Their respective initials appear alongside.

The two matching silver candlesticks for the altar were subscribed by the congregation in memory of Dr W. S. Hunt, a Churchwarden.

The altar backcloth in the Lady Chapel, which was a gift of St Luke's, Bromley Common, was removed in 1980 as worn out, having served its purpose since 1953. Other fittings were given by St George's, Bickley, including the altar and frontals that came from St Michael's Church. The sanctuary lamp was given in memory of Leslie Fostal, as were the cross and vases.

The Lady Chapel Windows depict the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the symbol of the Holy Spirit above; to the right, the visit of the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth; and to the left, Mary as a child with her mother, St Anne. All these windows are from the Whitefriars Glass Works.

Returning along the South aisle we come to the Book of Remembrance and above it the Memorial Board, which was rescued from the bombed church, and shows the names of those of St Mark's Parish who gave their lives in

the First World War. At the end of the South aisle is the Children's Corner, indicating the special place held by children in the life of St Mark's.

Outside the church is the War Memorial Cross, a replacement of the original, which was demolished in the Second World War. This was moved from its previous site nearer the gate when the car park was made. The flowering trees were given by Mr F. L. Cooper in memory of his family. On the South side of the church is the Garden of Remembrance for the burial of ashes.

Access to the tower can only be obtained by special arrangement. The spiral staircase is located in the South West buttress. The cleaning and restoration of the tower was completed in 1987 just before the October gale - the old pinnacle, which now stands adjacent to the tower door, shows its condition before the work was done. Luckily no damage was suffered in the gale.

St Mark's School, which for many years occupied the premises on Masons Hill, moved to Aylesbury Road in 1984.

From January to July 1990, the Bromley Central Methodists shared St Mark's whilst awaiting the completion of their new church, the old one having been demolished to make way for the new Glades Shopping Centre. Each Church held its own service on Sunday mornings but on Sunday evenings the service was combined. During the refurbishment of their citadel, a similar sharing arrangement with the Bromley Salvation Army Temple Corps was undertaken between August 1992 and October 1993. This was thought to be the first ever such partnership between an Anglican church and the Salvation Army. Relations between St Mark's and the other churches in Bromley remain strong to this day.

In 1989 the "Friends of St Mark's" was formed. Membership is £12 per year and is open to all who feel attachment or admiration for St Mark's and, by helping towards the maintenance of fabric and furnishings, share responsibility for supporting the Church in its task of offering a place for all to worship. Significant contributions by the "Friends" to the church include the installation of the Chancel platform, to provide for flexibility in the presentation of worship and to accommodate the many music groups that use the church as a concert venue; the enhancement of the public address system; the provision of a video link between the church and the church porch or Church Room; and the provision of new service books at the introduction of "Common Worship" in 2000.