

The Mission Church of Grayshott

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The Mission Church of Grayshott The Beginnings in Grayshott

Prior to the formation of Grayshott as a separate ecclesiastical parish at the beginning of the twentieth century, the village was part of Headley Parish and for many years worshippers from the Grayshott area had to travel the four miles or so to Headley Church. However, as the population of Grayshott expanded, so did the number of those with no means of transport and this resulted in an increased demand for services to be held within the village.

As a result of these demands, church services were held by the Reverend Capes, Vicar of Bramshott, at a Dame school situated in the vicinity of Kingswood Lane, south of Crossways Road, on the western side of what is now the A3 London to Portsmouth road. The school had originally commenced in the area with a few pupils and was run by two ladies, after which it was taken over by a Mrs. Stock, of *Kingswood Close*, who also conducted Sunday School services for children. The school then moved to an old carpenter's shop on the Portsmouth Road belonging to a Mr. James Mowatt.

Later, services were held in a room in Grayshott School and later still, in the Institute situated in Stoney Bottom.

In 1891, a corrugated iron building was erected on land, which is now part of St Luke's Churchyard, between the church vestry and the maintenance shed. There, services were conducted by the Reverend Percy Wigan who lived at *Grayshott Cottage*, later called *Wayside*, until 1895 and he was succeeded by Reverend J. M. Jeakes, the Bramshott Curate. Then in the late 1890's, St Luke's Church was finally built. Seating up to 350 people, St. Luke's was first used in 1899 and was consecrated on St. Luke's day 1900 by the Bishop of Winchester.

As the population of Grayshott continued to increase, by now it was probably in excess of eight hundred, so did the number of people with little or no transport, horse drawn or motorised and the requirement for services to be held nearer to the peoples dwellings "for those who seldom go to church or chapel", became apparent. In July 1905, Captain Cantrell of the Church Army came to Grayshott for a six-week period and held the first Mission Service in a building in Whitmore Bottom, fitted out and loaned by Mr. Deadman. The building was actually on land in the district of a Mr. Trevelyan, possibly just on the Surrey side of the border. Initially, Capt. Cantrell held a series of Children's Services and then later a number of, sometimes open-air services on Sunday evenings. When Captain Cantrell left the area, Reverend Jeakes the St. Luke's vicar, continued the services during the winter months, initially on a fortnightly and later on a weekly basis.

At one time there were two Diocesan vans in the area, which were run by the Church Army and which visited villages in order to endeavour to attract more people to go to church or chapel. In 1907, the Reverend Jeakes requested that a van should periodically visit Grayshott but it is not known if this request was successful. In October 1911, it was reported in the Parish Magazine, that for those less able to travel to St. Luke's, Mission Services were again being held, after a lapse of three years, on Wednesday evenings in the room provided by Mr. Deadman in Whitmore Bottom/Vale. Also, for those living in the Ravensvale direction on the Portsmouth Road, Mission Services will be held "in the school room by the turning to Kingswood Lane, where Mrs. Stock conducts the Sunday School". By now, Captain Wray of the Church Army had arrived in the area for a two year period and he was to conduct the services at both venues and those later held in the Mission Rooms in Portsmouth Road. The Mission Room Portsmouth Road

Just south of Crossways Road on the West Side of the existing A3 London to Portsmouth Road, you may have noticed a wooden house called *Southdowns*, which has increased exposure as a result of the current Hindhead Tunnel road works. This building, which has been a family home for some sixty-five years, was once the Grayshott Mission Church, Bramshott Chase.

Front of Mission Church Rooms 2008

Rear of Mission Church Rooms

2008

The overall structure of the building is much as it was when first built excepting the roof covering and possibly the southern gable end. Internally, after so many years in private ownership since its conversion to a house, there is little to be seen of the original features. On the upper floors, the original trusses and crossbeams are exposed, together with the notched features. The porch-entrance all looks to be original together with the internal door, lock and door furniture.

Trusses, Beams & Notched features together with Door furniture

The question of providing a Mission Church in the area first came into being toward the end of 1911, when thoughts were beginning to move toward providing a more permanent "special purpose" building for worship in the Bramshott Chase area. It was noted that a sum of £70 per annum would be required for the provision of a lay Evangelist, such sum to be paid out of the Parochial Fund.

On 25th March 1912, it was announced that half an acre of land on the Bramshott Chase Estate, along the Portsmouth Road adjacent to Chase Plane Cottages, had been purchased by the Trustees of The Winchester Diocesan Trust Deed 1898 and others, from the Trustees of the estate of the late Miss James who had been a major benefactor of the village of Grayshott. She had lived at *Westdown* on the Portsmouth Road, just south of Hindhead and died in November 1910.

The land in question was originally in the Parish of Frensham and situated "on the north west side of the road leading from "Petersfield to Godalming". This land was part of a Conveyance dated 16th October 1884 when it passed into the ownership of Alexander MacMillen from a Henry Jesty Ellis Brake. By Coveyance dated 26th March 1886, it had then passed from the MacMillen family to Miss James.

There were a number of restrictive covenants included in the conveyance of 1912, but consent was granted for the building of "one detached dwelling house of a net prime cost value of not less than £650, or a Church or Chapel where the liturgy and rites of the Church of England were exclusively to be used and observed, or a Mission Hall or Mission Room to be used in conjunction with such Church or Chapel".

A sum of £150 had been contributed by Mrs. Macmillan of *Bramshott Chase*, H.B. Dempsey, Esq., Miss Dempsey and Mrs. Bulley to cover the purchase of the land, fencing and legal fees. Additional funds were raised through Special Appeals, Rummage Sales etc.

It was generally agreed that a Mission Room should be erected on the site and the Church Council duly adopted formal plans. The new building, designed to seat 150 people, was to be of timber construction with an iron roof and brick foundations. At a length of 50 feet and width of 25 feet, the plans included for a Sacarium, Vestry and a copper for hot water. There was to be a moveable partition so that the Sacarium could be shut off from the body of the building when the room was used for other than devotional purposes. The total cost for the building was estimated to be in the region of £300, in addition to which there was the cost of fitting out, furniture and landscaping, bringing the overall cost of the project to some £600.

The building was supplied by Boulton & Paul of Norwich, with the foundation supplied by Chapman Lowry and Puttick. The lighting of the building was carried out by Coxhead & Welch. Miss I'Anson donated a combustion stove for the heating. Other donations included curtains, a Holy Table, Cross and Altar furniture from Mrs. Dempsey, an outside lantern from Mr. Hartwell and a prayer desk and seat from Mrs. Browning. There were many other gifts received including Vessels for Holy Communion, which were donated anonymously. Seventy-five chairs had been purchased in

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1911.

(Incidentally, Boulton & Paul started life as an ironmonger in 1797. It was later to become an iron foundry, then a wire netting manufacturer and the company then became famous for the construction of prefabricated wooden buildings. In 1912, it produced huts for Scott's Antarctic expedition. Around 1914, the company turned to aircraft manufacture for the war effort, producing 550 R.A.F. designed FE.2B's, Sopwith Camels and many other aircraft.)

The overall project, including building and finance, was overseen by Dr. Lyndon throughout. Erection of the building commenced in August 1912 and was completed in October 1912 at an overall cost of £625 including the land. However, the Sanctuary, the arrangement of which was designed by Mr. Harold Gibbon could not be used until dedicated and arrangements were made for this to be carried out by the Bishop of Guildford. Led by the Mission Room Choir, taught by Miss Jelly, the dedication duly took place on 12th January 1913 in front of a large congregation, which filled the main room. Thereafter the property was mainly referred to as the Mission Room, rather than the Church, as the main room had not been dedicated. The Reverend Simms celebrated Holy Communion for the first time on 26th January 1913.

In July 1913, a bell was added to the Mission Room, a gift from St. Alban's Church, Hindhead following its purchase of a new bell.

In January 1914, Captain Wray left to take up a new Church Army appointment as Chaplain at nearby Longmoor Camp. He was succeeded by Mr. J.W. Partridge of Queen's College Cambridge, who was ordained at Farnham to the office of Deacon. Mr Partridge, who would initially reside at Mount Arlington (now Amesbury School), was to be responsible for both the Mission Room Services and the Children's Services.

On the evening of 5th January, there was a large gathering in the Mission Room to say farewell to Captain Wray, at which he was presented, on behalf of a long list of subscribers, with an illuminated address, together with a purse of sovereigns for the purchase of a writing desk. The Reverend Simms spoke of the successful work of Captain Wray, particularly in relation to the Mission Room, and said that he, Captain Wray, would always have the honour of having commenced that work and having carried it to a high degree of success.

The activities carried out in the Mission Room continued to grow, recreational as well as religious and a Cricket Club was formed in the summer of 1914.

November 1914 saw the arrival of a large number of troops and the formation of Bramshott military camp on Bramshott Common. In December 1914, Grayshott School was commandeered for billeting troops and it was decided that schooling would continue using the Wesleyan Chapel for the younger pupils, and the Mission Room for the older pupils. This arrangement continued until the summer of 1915 when the troops moved out of the schools. The Y.M.C.A. had erected three huts at Bramshott Camp for recreational purposes for the soldiers, in addition to which the Mission Room was opened five evening a week. Newspapers, writing material and games were provided free and refreshments were available at a small charge. Many of the local residents of Grayshott helped in the running of the evenings.

Parish Magazine cover 1918

Notice of Services Mission Church January

1918

Little detail is known of the activities during the war years but one assumes that this was the way of life throughout this period. In September 1918, a Harvest Festival Service was held, the fruit etc. being sent to the Bramshott Military Hospital after the service.

In January 1918, it was reported in the Grayshott Parish Magazine that the Mission Church collections in 1917 had

shown a serious decline from prior years. This was attributable to the cessation of morning services during the summer, brought about by the reduction of visitors due to the war local houses and the hostel being occupied by the military. In June 1918, it was reported that the Canadian Chaplain would be officiating at future services and he continued to do this until he left in February 1919, by which time consideration was being given to the permanent closure of the Mission Room. However, a number of Grayshott residents took up the challenge, including Mr T Wray of 2 *The Pines* and Mr Cecil Wray of *Hill View* and they brought new life to the Mission Room. Social activities increased with the introduction of Whist Drives, Men's and Boy's Clubs, Lectures and a Choir and once again, congregations began to increase.

Details of the overall activities are sketchy but they continued throughout the 1920's and much of the 1930's. In November 1921, it was reported that the Rooms were redecorated and that a piano had been purchased. Sunday School and Services continued to be held and there was a St. Luke's Mission Club Social, attended by sixty-three men and boys, in February 1922. There were public performances of a play in April of the same year and a Pantomime was held in 1923.

Reverend Albert Simms left the parish of Grayshott at the end of 1926 and Reverend E. Garth Ireland became vicar in early 1927. By 1931, services were continuing at the Mission Room but congregations were once again dwindling and in December 1931 a meeting was called to discuss its future.

In his letter in the April 1932 edition of the Parish Magazine, Reverend Ireland stated with regard to the Mission Church, the main points to consider were,

- (i) there was no endowment of the Mission Church,
- (ii) the General Fund of St. Luke's could not afford to pay the £150 to £200 a year required to run it, and
- (iii) it was practically impossible to provide either a priest or layman to take regular Sunday services there.

He reiterated these points in the May edition adding that the Church should never have been built so close to the Parish Church in the first place.

In June 1932, it was announced that the Parochial Council had adopted the resolution of the Public Meeting and was sending out a public appeal for funds. The appeal raised a total of only £10 against the estimated annual running costs of £150. The Reverend Ireland again stated that he was of the strong opinion that the Mission Rooms should be closed and that he would like to see the building moved to Grayshott as a Parish Room, although his arguments for closure were partially countered by Dr. Arnold Lyndon.

In November 1932 it was decided that services should be reduced to one a month. In March 1933 the Parochial Church Council decided to try an experiment, for one year only, of a part-time worker for the Mission Church District at a cost of £150 a year.

Following this, the Reverend Ireland stated in the Parish Magazine that he had reluctantly agreed to take the necessary steps with the Diocesan authorities to carry out the resolution but went on further to say that he believed it "unnecessary to expend work and money on the minor needs of the Mission Church".

In May 1933, Mr. P. P. Hephner came to the district to take up the appointment at the Mission Church, specifically to cover Bramshott Chase. However, the Rev. Ireland again repeated his opposition to the continuation of use of the Mission Room on its present site. He stated that the building should be physically moved as he considered "the only possible settlement is to turn the liability of it into an asset of a self supporting Church Room within the village of Grayshott". Despite this opposition, following the arrival of Mr Hephner, services recommenced, a boy's Cricket Club and

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a Choir were formed and the Mission Rooms again became quite active. In September 1933, sixty-nine people attended the Harvest Festival service.

The Mission Rooms however, continued to be a burden on the Parish, the accounts for the year to May 1934 showing a deficit of £75 after receipt of Subscriptions & Donations of £107. Added to the cost paid direct by the Parish, the overall cost to the Parish amounted to some £275. Throughout 1934 and 1935, there were repeated appeals for funds for the continuation of the services but in October 1935, the evensong service was abandoned due to so few attending.

It is not known exactly when the Mission Room was closed, but by June 1943 the building had passed into the private ownership of a Mr. J. Wright. On 2nd June 1943 consent was given by Surrey County Council for conversion of the building, by now known as the *Old Mission Hall*, to a private dwelling. It then remained in private ownership until purchased by the Secretary of State for Transport in 1994 as part of the Hindhead Tunnel development, the Title Absolute being registered on 16th January 1995.

Currently, it is unknown whether the building will be retained in its present form or demolished and the site sold for redevelopment once the tunnel project has been completed. However, it is perhaps a testament to the quality of work produced by Boulton & Paul in 1912 that the timber building remains in good order, on its original site, to this day.

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