

SOUTHALL LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

Newsletter Number Eight.

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SOUTHALL CHURCH HISTORY.

In the social histories of our country it is an oft repeated statement that communal life in earlier times revolved round the church, the inference being almost given that this state of affairs existed solely in historical times and no longer is it true. In fact it is only a half truth, whilst today, perhaps, a more materialistic attitude prevails, and the psychiatrist is usurping the office on the Parish Priest, it is error to suppose that the church has ceased to be a centre of spiritual and social life radiating its influence in many directions.

One of the greatest changes that time has wrought, is that in the days of our forefathers the parish would be small and compact and under the direct influence of only one church, whereas today the parish tends to be large and populous, and, more important, there are many sects and dissenting churches, each administering to the spiritual and social welfare of its members. In many cases the churches draw their greatest support from the more intellectual sections of society so that it is a mistake to judge the influence of the church solely upon the members of its members.

Thus it is that Church History-play-8 a very important role in the study of local origins. It is a very simple matter to reel off the names of half a dozen Southall churches - Holy Trinity, King's Hall, St. Anselm's, Western Road Baptist, Barn Mission, Salvation Army - but why did these churches arise? Did population growth make the need, or did an evangelical church create spiritual desire?

To answer some of these questions, we must know something of the history and development of Southall churches, and it is our intention to use the Newsletter as a vehicle for the transmission of the churches story; it is in this field that we look to every member of our society to help record a great and important page in the Southall Story. The editor requires your help. It may well be that you are just the person to write the history of your church, or failing that perhaps you are in a position to supply many facts and are content to let another put them together. Again, you probably know the person who could be approached with a view to getting the facts. It now behoves you, as a member of your local history society to contact the editor in this matter.

In this issue we learn something of the rise of the Methodists, and for this we are indebted to our able secretary, Miss Jean Cooke.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.

A NEW FORM OF MEMBERSHIP.

In response to a number of requests, the committee has, for a trial period of twelve months, instituted an "Associated Membership". This new form of membership is needed to provide a bond between the Society and those interested people who, for various reasons, cannot attend our meetings but who to be kept informed of our work and progress. It will thus cater for many Southallians who now live else here, and also for the numerous citizens who, owing to active participation in other local bodies, just cannot find the time to fully satisfy their historical curiosity by being an active and attending member of the Southall Local History society.

The subscription to this membership will be 2s.6d. per annum, and Associate Members will be entitled to receive all issues of the Newsletter and any other Bulletins that may be issued from time to time. The Subscription will not include a free copy of the Transactions volume, which, of course, all members purchase separately.

It is obviously a benefit to the Society to have a large supporting body of Associate members, and we do ask all members to interest their friends in this project, whether the good folk live in the Borough or have now moved elsewhere.

There is always the engaging prospect that some of these Associate Members will be moved to attend one or two meetings and decide on full membership. Will every member please take every opportunity of publicising this new service.

(Miss) Jean Cooke
Hon. Secretary.

THE MARTIN BROTHERS - POTTERS OF SOUTHALL.

Despite the harmony in which they worked together as craftsmen, The Martin Brothers, Southall's famous family of potters, led a far from harmonious family life. In fact, so violent were some of their disagreements that on one occasion two of the brothers threatened to throw up their part in the business and emigrate. This fact was revealed to members of our Society upon the occasion of the talk given by the Borough Librarian, Mr. H.V. Jordan on the "The Martin Brothers and Their Work". Specimens of their work have found their way into all parts of the world and the Borough Library has a fine collection. The four men whose skill and co-operation produced a unique pottery might well be remembered by some-of Southall's older inhabitants since their work-shop was in production up to 1923.

The eldest brother, Robert Wallace Martin, was the cornerstone of the business born in 1843 he lived to the ripe old age of 80 and died in 1923. He was primarily the sculptor but with a wild sense of humour which is revealed in some of his grotesque, yet strangely beautiful pieces. He was deeply religious and a lay preacher of the Plymouth Brethren.

Walter Fraser Martin, who died in 1912, was dour and taciturn and kept his trade secrets to himself; true, he did eventually make a record of them in a code known only to himself - and the code died with him. He had long strong arms which enabled him to throw exceptionally tall pieces; he also looked after the chemistry and the firing.

Edwin Bruce Martin was a quiet charming man who lived until 1915. He threw the smaller pieces, experimented in the decoration and took over the firing when Walter died.

The youngest brother, Charles Douglas Martin was perhaps the most handsome of them all and undertook the running of the Business side of the firm. On one occasion he did produce a piece for firing in the shape of a feathered creature which forever after was always referred to affectionately as "Charlie's Bird". Despite his reluctance to part with their best work, the profits which nevertheless were made enabled each brother to draw thirty shillings per week plus an annual bonus.

The history of the Martin Brothers is dominated by Robert. At school he showed promising ability in the Art class and although he started work in a candle factory at an early age, he soon began to develop an undoubted talent. Whilst laid up with a broken arm as a result of an accident, he practised drawing with his sound arm using as a subject, a statue provided by his father. He next worked on the stone carvings for the new Houses of Parliament then being built, under Sir Charles Barry who was the architect for the enterprise. About 1860 Robert went to the Lambeth Evening School of Art where he struck up a friendship with George Tinworth the great English artist in terra-cotta, and in 1864 both were admitted to the Royal Schools. In 1865 he won five pounds in a competition for the design of a medal. He was greatly encouraged by his visits to the Doulton Pottery Works where he was able to get his early pieces fired. In 1871 he went down to Devonshire to study the various clays and thence to Staffordshire for the necessary "know-how". The next year he worked in a Fulham Pottery but in 1874, with his brothers, took a crucible

kiln at Shepherds Bush. This kiln was not entirely suitable for the firing of their pottery and after a batch had been completely spoiled, the brothers began to seek a more satisfactory place. They visited Southall where they were offered the old gasworks buildings, but finally decided on a derelict soap factory at the end of the present Havelock Road near to the canal on the site where a celluloid factory now stands. Their raw materials, clay and coal, are both dirty and bulky and for their transport water is ideal - and in those days an arm of the canal ran right up to the very door of the factory. There was little likelihood of the smoke from their factory chimney offending the few inhabitants of those then rural parts, and all they needed to complete their plan was five hundred pounds to build the kiln and the living accommodation.

The head of the firm of Nettlefold the screw makers put up a hundred pounds and four other sponsors the remainder. All the sponsors got their money back in kind, part of which was a tiled fireplace which has since come into the possession of the Borough Council and awaits a suitable setting.

The brothers removed to Southall in 1877 (incidentally by water) and in 1878 the first output, marked "R.W. Martin, Southall" was made. The word "Bros" was incorporated in 1882. As a part of their expanding business, a shop in Brownlow Street, W.C.1 was acquired in 1879 through the good offices of Mr. Nettlefold. This served excellently for their trade until it was destroyed by fire in 1910, although it was said that the firemen and not the fire caused most of the damage. The shock of the fire was too much for Charles, he needlessly blamed himself for its occurrence and quickly went into ill health and died the same year.

After Walter passed away in 1912, Robert and his son Clement, with Edwin carried on but in 1915 the latter died and the active existence of the firm virtually ceased. Finally, when Robert died in 1923, leaving behind much unfired work, for a decade no firing took place until the 1930's when Captain Butterfield, a one-time apprentice, together with the surviving Clement, attempted to get things, going again. But the pottery never attained its former activities, and smoke ascended from its chimney for the last time just after the second World War when the whole place went up in flames as a result of being struck by lightning during a thunderstorm of almost unprecedented violence.

Thus ended the existence of the pottery which during its lifetime had taken in its kiln up to six hundred pieces at a firing when eight to ten tons of coal were needed during the three days required to raise sufficient heat to harden and to glaze the products of these ingenious brothers. A further three days for cooling off, and then the appraisal of the batch would be made; on average one third perfect, one third secondary but saleable, and one third useless except for a few fit for re-firing next time. The salt-glazed stoneware, the inspiration for many pieces of which had been found in the abundant wild life then to be found in and around the quiet reaches of the canal at Southall, was produced from clay brought from Poole and Torrington.

The Martin Brothers contribution' to ceramics was indeed a notable one, and their work reveals that as time went on so did their technique improve, and although their contemporary critics and later connoisseurs vary in their opinions from praise to disdain, the Brothers integrity and craftsmanship are worthy of memorial.

H.J.

NOTES AND VIEWS.

The Spring issue of the newsletter was so well received that all copies have disappeared; over twice the normal printing was made, but still we receive requests for copies. If any member has spare copies will they please hand them to Mr. R. Specer, or to any member of the Committee.

Well, we've had a fine selection of speakers during the summer giving the usual top quality talks. Although the attendance at St. Mary's Church, Norwood was quite fair, it could have received better support from our membership. Many of those present were visitors. However, all enjoyed the visit and Brian Hanson must be complimented on his gifts as a guide.

Right up to date with an extremely interesting September meeting from Archie Hilson's crew. As the Chairman said at the close of the meeting, "what a wealth of information and a variety of facts". The team on this project are to be congratulated and encouraged to complete this research, for it is certain that this must be completed and give satisfaction to all concerned.

Elsewhere are details of our new membership, so here's a chance to help the society by doing a little canvassing amongst your out of town friends and relations. Finally, what about buying a set of maps "Transactions No.4" for a Christmas present. Solve your gift problems!

THE BEGINNING OF METHODISM IN SOUTHALL.

The earliest record of Methodists meeting in Southall is of a small society which met in a house in Park View, opposite the Red Lion Coaching Inn in the Uxbridge Road in 1838.

At this time there was held in Southall a weekly cattle market which was second only to Smithfield; The scene was mainly of open fields and farms, with groups of houses and shops. The coming of the Great Western Railway in 1839 brought rapid developments so that by 1859 the scene was changing and it was in the first half of that year that the Methodists started a Sunday School. Meeting at first in the same house in the Uxbridge Road, this Southall Wesleyan Sunday School moved shortly to a new Chapel which was opened in what is now South Road, but was earlier known as Southall Green Lane, in July, 1859.

No records are available of the early years of this Sunday School, but in 1867 the first Teachers Meeting was held and from then on the Minutes of the meetings have been preserved. There were problems concerning premises, unsuitable furniture and low funds but the pioneer project prospered and in 1876 a new school room was built. In 1906 a new Chapel was opened on a site now occupied by the King's Hall.

By 1915 plans had been laid for the erection of a large Mission Hall to cater for the spiritual and social needs of the town. The Rev. J.A. Broadbelt did much to make it possible for so great a project to be put in hand in wartime, and soon the new Chapel so recently built was demolished to make way for the King's Hall. The Sunday School played its part in raising money by selling books of "bricks" and in 1916 this great central hall was opened. The new building provided rooms for each of the graded departments of the school and ensured adequate facilities for the work of the Sunday School for many years to come. Thus both School and Church have gone forward in their work.

I wish to acknowledge the help received in compiling this account from the brochure published on the occasion of the King's Hall Methodist Sunday School Centenary in 1959.

J.E.C.

THE PASSING OF BRENTFORD GAS WORKS.

Earlier this year, in February, Brentford Gas Works made gas for the last time. The event appears to have passed by largely unnoticed, unrecorded, and without comment, and although the works could hardly be called an attractive amenity to High Street, Brentford, it was one of the oldest gas works in the world. At its peak in the thirties, the works produced some 17 million cubic feet of town gas per day, (enough to fill Southall's giant holder just over twice) and there were 320 employees on the station's payroll. Now the station will be reduced to the boosters, two holders and a staff of only two per shift. Ironically Brentford becomes a holder station of Southall, a works originally built to supplement Brentford's capacity in the 1860's.

The Brentford Gas Company was formed as a private company in 1820 to produce gas for the lighting of Kensington to Brentford turnpike road and for 143 years from that date, the works was in continuous production. What a wealth of Station Engineers it must have seen. In 1821 the company became statutory and extended its territory to Hounslow and within a few years had encompassed Acton, Ealing, Hanwell, Southall (excepting Norwood), Heston Twickenham and Barnes, and was to push even further afield in the ensuing years. So drawn out was its territory, in fact, that for the first twenty years the company failed to pay a dividend. In 1851 the company was driven out of Kensington and Fulham by other companies and, across the river in Surrey, out of Richmond by another rival. This was really a blessing in disguise as now with a more compact area, the company's fortunes were to flourish and in the mid-1860's the Brentford Gas Co. was looking for a new site.

The site at Brentford was ideal, situated as it was on a backwater of the River Thames. Coal could be brought direct from the Durham coalfield in the Company's own colliers, but there was one snag - there was no room for expansion. So at the suggestion of John Frederick Evans, chief engineer of the Gas Light & Coke Co, who was on the Brentford Board the company built in a large way at Southall, on the western fringe of its territory with easy access by railway and the canal which joined the Thames at Brentford Docks.

The following fifty years or so were ones of continuous expansion in the expanding suburban belt of West London. Many smaller rivals were absorbed: Staines and Egham District Gas Co and Sunbury Gas Consumers Co in 1915, Harrow and Stanmore Gas Co in 1924; and Richmond Gas Co, the old rivals, in 1925. Right from the earliest days relations had always been of the friendly nature with the Gas Light and Coke Co and many of the GLCC's directors sat on the Brentford Board, so it was no surprise that in 1926 the two companies were amalgamated, and GLCC taking over Brentford's £250,000 overdraft. So after 105 years the Brentford Gas Company lost its individuality.

Brentford works was located on two sites on the North and South sides of Brentford High Street, with areas respectively of 4 and 42 acres. The whole producing portion of the works was on the south side including coal and coke storage, and was bounded on the one side by a backwater of the Thames and on the other by the High Street, and was a narrow strip of land 1600 feet long and only 120 feet wide. Soon after the amalgamation an ambitious programme of modernisation was embarked upon, and the works as they were at the end dated largely from this period (1929-1935), with the exception of certain gasholders, the governor house and some purifiers. The South Works was skilfully adapted to its purpose by the use of belt conveyors and other mechanical means to cater for all material handling. Coal gas to the tune of 9½ million cubic feet per day was manufactured in intermittent vertical retorts of German design but British manufacture. Carburetted water-gas, 9½ million cu. ft. per day was made in two Humphrey and Glasgow sets. The existing purification system was modernised as was the ancillary plant.

Of Brentford's four holders, the 3½ million cu. ft. waterless one dates from this time, but only two holders remain today, and the other, a water sealed type, is now a hundred years old.

The whole of the South Works is to be completely demolished, and the site sold - presumably to the Council who are planning to build a shopping precinct there. The Booster House and valve-room together with the remaining gas holders are to be retained, and the station has become yet another holder station of Southall.

Brentford's closure does not in any way indicate a fall in the demand for gas, far from it, but it's continued use would have been uneconomic as . Southall's capacity has been more than doubled to 82 million cu ft. per day during the last year with the introduction of the new "gas from oil" plant. However, I doubt whether many tears will be shed over Brentford's departure, as for 143 years the local atmosphere has scarcely been of the highest purity.

A.H.

PROGRAMME 1964.

- Sept 14. Short Papers by Members.
- Oct.12 Ancient English Churches (with colour slides) L.R. Jones Esq, Historic Churches Preservation Trust.
- Nov.9 History of Wembley. A.H. Murgatroyd Esq.
- Dec.14 Annual General Meeting.

In a previous issue the editor appealed for information concerning Mr Hamm, so far the result is blank silence. There must be someone among our members and correspondents who know a little about him, so please be more forthcoming and jot down all you know and hand it to the editor.