

**THE MARYPORT MISSION CHURCH AND SCHOOL BUILDING
COMMITTEE REPORT - MARCH 1874**

(Copied from a copy in the centenary booklet, existence of the original report unknown; put into indented paragraphs to aid readability)

"It is about seven years since a Town Mission was established in Maryport. The population was beginning to increase. many people were known not to attend any place of worship. There was neither Church nor School in the part of town occupied by the bulk of the working classes. "But what can be done?" "Church undertakings always break down here. A Town Mission is a pretty idea but it is an utter impossibility. Even if commenced, it will die in a couple of years."

Such were among the disheartening opinions expressed. Thank God, one of the things which He teaches His servants is the possibility of accomplishing supposed impossibilities; and one of the mottoes which His Holy Spirit inscribes all over Christian work is: 'faint yet persuing'.

One Sunday morning therefore, after much anxious thought and earnest prayer. a plan was suggested from the pulpit, and commended by the teaching of the text, "He was clad with zeal as with a cloak". The plan was simply this, let a mission-room be opened in one of the back streets of the Town, where short services for public worship can be held, to which aged and poor people can be invited. Also, let a Town missionary be appointed, whose duty it shall be to visit from house to house, reading the Holy Scriptures whenever practicable, and offering prayer at the bed-side of the sick and infirm.

Next day a lady met the preacher in the street. She said: "It is in my heart to do something towards the establishment of the Town Mission; will you take this to begin with?" Her gift was a £5 note. That note was a seed which by God's blessing has grown into a tree, with bright leaves and some golden fruit. A public meeting was called. The plan was favourably received. A Committee was formed to carry out the plan. In a fortnight £100 had been subscribed. In less than a

fortnight it was decided to open a room in Nelson Street, and at once seek the services of a suitable Town Missionary.

A room was found by a working man who took a kindly interest in the project. On easy terms it was hired by the Committee. The proprietor returned the rent as an Annual Subscription. Not very inviting was the appearance of this upper room of a couple of cottages. Well cleaned, and plastered, and painted, fitted with comfortable benches, supplied with a reading desk, brightened with a warm fire, lighted with gas, the wall decorated with a few Scripture texts, the dingy look was soon exchanged for a cheerful look. That little Mission Room, holding about 80 people became the scene of many a sacred gathering. Many a hallowed hour was spent there; many a worshipper has acknowledged "it was good for me to be there"; and one unforgotten moral remains: 'despise not the day of small things. The Kingdom of Heaven is as a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which is indeed the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it'

Erelong the Town Missionary came. He was the right man in the right place. Faithfulness, tact and tenderness characterised him. Respect was won, and then affection. Unhappily, health began to fail. Old friends advised change. A new appointment was unexpectedly offered. He went away. A successor was found after patient search. It was not easy for a successor to take up the ends of such work, and another change had to be made, but now a wide door and effectual had been opened. The services in the Mission-room had been prized. The hand had been put to the plough and the plough had made some distinct furrows. The Town Mission was no longer an experiment. It might fairly lay claim to moderate success. Not even the faintest heart could venture to pronounce its continued maintenance impossible. It had been maintained without difficulty at a cost of nearly £100 a year for four years. Could it be extended? could it be improved? Could a second

Curate be engaged instead of a Town Missionary? Could a good Schoolroom or a small church be exchanged for that upper room with its back stair and difficult approach.

Once more 'fears were in the way'; and perhaps it is well to have all important undertakings shaded with fears and questionings; they are like ballast to a vessel with tall masts, keeping it steady when the breeze freshens. But past experience brightened present hopes. Plans and fears were frankly stated in the same pulpit, whence a former appeal for help had been issued, happily with the same prompt and generous response. Next morning a site for a School Church was most kindly offered by the Lord of the Manor whose timely promise of aid was sufficient encouragement to persevere.

Again a public meeting was called, and a Committee was appointed by whom subscriptions were solicited. At the first meeting of the "Church Extension Committee". nearly £300 were subscribed in the Committee-room. This was a good start. The members of the Committee began vigorously to collect donations. Their success was satisfactory. Many inquiries were made about the plan. Objections were made to its simplicity, for it had been proposed to have a School on the ground floor and a Room for public worship on the second floor. "We must not have a Church upstairs; old people will not be able to attend it", they thought too of the upstairs galleries in the old Church, and how the old people had managed to reach them. They thought too, of a certain 'Upper Room' where long ago 12 disciples used to assemble, and which was the parent of all the Christian Churches in the world.

There are times, however, when silence is golden, whilst speech is silvern and if the friends of the good work were found willing to give more liberally, in order to have a Church and School distinct and separate structures - so much the better. At this juncture, the Diocesan Church Extension Society came to our help, by making a grant of £200 (afterwards increased to £230) towards the erection of the Church, before the plans were matured, on condition that they should be

submitted to, and approved by, the Diocesan architect. And here let it be mentioned, that when the plans were placed in Mr. Christian's hands, he gave most cheerfully the benefit of his experience and skill. The Diocesan Education Society also helped to clear the way, by making a grant of £75 (afterwards increased to £100) toward the erection of the School.

After much deliberation, the Committee determined to erect Church and School as separate buildings, and not in one structure, as originally proposed. But where could a site for the school be obtained? It must be 'down street'. Only one piece of land was on sale, and it was too large, and it was too large and too expensive. The case seemed hopeless, as far as the School was concerned.

At last, the site of the old Mission-room was suggested. Perhaps the building-block of which it formed a part could be purchased, and re-modelled, or rebuilt. On application, the owner was found willing to sell it at the moderate sum for which it had been purchased several years before, viz., £150. Nevertheless, this was a large sum to pay for a School site, and the funds were very limited. "Is it really suitable for the purpose proposed?", asked the Lord of the Manor at a committee meeting, when the matter was anxiously discussed. "We should be very glad to be able to obtain it", was the reply. "Then that shall be my gift", was the immediate rejoinder, "and it shall be conveyed to the Committee free of cost".

The Committee could not help but go forward. The School was commenced. Its erection was pushed on rapidly. Once let the school be ready for use, and services could be held in it, and there would be no need to hurry the work of Church building. Soon the space was cleared, and the walls rose, and preparation was made for putting on the roof; when, during a very stormy night, the end gable wall was blown down. This was our first and last accident. It was not a very disastrous accident; a week's labour put it right. In very few months a new building occupied the site of the

old Mission-room - set apart, we trust, for ever to a sacred use.

On Easter-day it was opened for public worship. The hopefulness of the Spring shone into our new room. The services were crowded. A new Hymn-book, compiled by the incumbent for the School and Mission services, was used for the first time. Meanwhile, contracts for the erection of the Church had been accepted. The foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Senhouse, on the morning of the 2nd January. It was to have been laid on New Year's Day. and a special service was announced as a suitable preliminary.

Man proposes, God disposes. Storms are not very seldom occurrences at the seaside, and sometimes they are very violent. But a storm like that which raged on 1st January, 1872 is not often experienced. Rain, sleet, snow, and a wind like a hurricane, rendered it almost impossible to get to Church. Unless the storm abated, any outdoor ceremony would be simply impossible. It did not abate until evening. The service was held in St Mary's Church, and the foundation stone was laid next day. Thus the building of the Church was commenced. Carefully and anxiously it was watched by the Committee. When summer days approached, the strike contagion found its way among the workpeople of the Church. A compromise was effected, and the work went on.

One day the Bishop visited the spot, and examined the plans. He noticed that provision had not been made for an organ, and suggested a recess near the chancel which. until an organ could be obtained, would supply additional sittings. The improvement was carried out as suggested, and it adds much to the good appearance of the Church. As yet, no arrangement had been made for warming the Church and lighting it with gas.

The aim of the Committee was to be as economical as possible and to incur no expense which was not absolutely necessary. Many a consultation took place between the two chief working members of the Committee, as to the best way of keeping down the cost. Many a time the conclusion was reiterated "We must have

everything as plain as possible; we cannot afford to have any extras". Never did thrifty housewife reckon her allowance of shillings for her household expenses more carefully, than did those members of the Committee, again and again reckon up income and expenditure, and settle every proposed incidental addition by the question "can we do without it?". Only the most needful furnishings were allowed and lessons in practical economy have been learned and practised, which will doubtless be a beneficial memory for life.

One ornament was relinquished with great regret, viz., a Spire. The architect's plan had left room for a Spire, and the hope was nursed that a Spire would one day crown the edifice. The entrance to the Church was left unfinished as long as possible, in wistful expectancy that the means would be furnished somehow. Almost at the last moment a brief report on the progress of the work was issued, with an account of the estimated cost of both Church and Spire, in which it was stated, that a strong wish had been expressed by several Subscribers, that a special effort should be made to secure the completion of the Church with the Spire. A not very general response was made. Very reluctantly, therefore, the Committee gave the order that the Church should be finished without a Spire. But when the ugliness of the finish began to be realised, and it was evident that for good appearance sake, a Spire was very desirable, another circular appeared. This appeal issued from New Committee Room, and the names of a dozen or more trades people and working men were attached to it.

The regret was expressed that the New Church had been pleading in vain for a Spire. The fact was announced that a Committee had been voluntarily formed to collect sufficient funds for a Spire, and to furnish the same with an illuminated Clock. What the old Committee could not accomplish, the new Committee would endeavour to achieve. This was a welcome surprise for the movement was altogether unexpected. The Spire Committee was self-elected. The work was undertaken of their own accord. Some Nonconformists joined with

Churchmen in advocating the plan, in subscribing to it, and in collecting for it. It was plain that working people were interested in the Church. They too, wished to have a brick in the building. Certainly some of the bricks they put in were very substantial ones. As much as a fortnight's wages were given by some, a week's wages by others. During one afternoon, in one of the poorest streets of the town, and without any large donations, two members of the Committee received in small sums nearly £10.

The Spire Committee were soon in a position to announce the success of the undertaking. They accepted the responsibility of completing the erection. They determined to decorate the Spire with an illuminated clock. Long may that Spire direct thoughts and affections heavenward during the business of life and the cares of the world. Long may the clock (not yet obtained) remind passers by that the time is short, and that he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (The report of the Spire Committee, with list of subscriptions, is not yet ready).

During the progress of the work, several valuable memorial gifts have been presented by kind friends. Communion Plate, Communion Table, with cover, Communion Chairs, Kneeling Stools, Cushions, Communion Linen, Carved Bread Cutter, Commandment Tablets, Font with Cover, Alms Box, Gas Corona, Oak Lectern, Wardrobe for the Vestry, Alms Dish, Collecting Boxes, a number of Hassocks, some Matting for the Aisles, a set of valuable Church Books, 50 Bibles, and 100 Prayer Books for free use. These form a list of presents which cannot be enumerated without special gratification. It is indeed natural to expect such gifts. it is in accordance with a custom consecrated by long and hallowed use.

Not long ago, The Princess Royal of England gave expression to her thankfulness for the recovery of the Prince of Wales, in answer to the prayers of the nation, by placing a beautiful Lectern in the Church at Sandringham, with the inscription: "I called on the Lord in distress, and the Lord answered and heard."

Very long ago, in Old Testament times, men of God said: "I will bring an offering and make vows." What place so suitable for memorial gifts as a Church, around which cluster our most hallowed associations? What place can more appropriately be made bright and beautiful by the hands and offerings of her children, than the sacred spot where we are taught to love, and then by Divine Grace and our Saviour's example, to manifest 'the beauty of holiness?' What time can be more suitable for presenting such gifts than when a New Church is being prepared for the worship of God, when every gift is a help, and every help is needed?

Not for 100 years has this privilege been possible in Maryport. Not one inhabitant of this town has ever had the opportunity before, or is likely ever to have it again. In a very sacred sense, "now is the accepted time". A privilege will have been lost, if a duty has not been left undone, which nothing in the future can possibly restore. Therefore it is a matter of rejoicing that a rich array of gifts has been presented to this "House of God", bearing witness that the inquiry has been thankfully considered in many hearts: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?".

The Church site has been conveyed, by the advice of the Bishop, to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England, the legal Trustees of Church property in the kingdom. It is thereby set apart for the worship of God according to the rites and doctrines of the Protestant Church of England. By that conveyance deed, our new Church is legally declared to be a Church of England for ever. The ecclesiastical rite of Consecration will follow as soon as the necessary technicalities have been completed, and some legal obstructions have been removed. A delay occurs not unfrequently between the opening and the Consecration of Churches - as in the case of a neighbouring Church not long ago, as in the case of our Church of St Mary's, where the delay lasted three years. it is of little consequence. The Bishop's licence has given authority for the preaching of the Word, and the Administration of the Sacraments. In the

opening service of prayer and praise, the building has been solemnly dedicated. May the Lord fill it with His glory.

It is intended that all the seats shall be free. The expenditure connected with the due maintenance of the services will be met by a grant from Ecclesiastical Commissioners, by our own voluntary contributions, and by Sabbath Day offerings. About £100 a year will be required to be made up by ourselves in this way. The Committee have not been able to provide a bell or an organ. The School property has been conveyed to Trustees, The School has been opened as Infant Day and Sunday School. The total cost, including the value of the sites, and gifts of Church furniture and the Spire, is estimated to be about £2,800.

To all who have in any way aided the erection of this Church and School, most hearty thanks are here presented; to the generous donors of the sites, who from the first have taken the kindest interest in the good work (one of whom, is, alas, no more among us); to the members of the Committee, whose every decision has been unanimous; to the Treasurer who has given counsel and superintendence every day, and has never tired of the labour which has been laid upon him; to the many kind friends who have enriched the Church with their memorial gifts; to the members of the Spire Committee, who cheerfully undertook the completion of the work at the time when its completion seems impossible; to every Subscriber who has given out of his abundance, or out of his poverty, to this House of God; to the Architect, and Builders, and Workpeople, who have spared no pains in their arduous duties. Above all, our God we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name; for putting it into our hearts to build this House, we thank Thee; for removing difficulties and raising up helpers and friends, we thank Thee; for preserving from accident, and permitting us to see the accomplishment of our work, we thank Thee; for choosing us as the instruments of thus honouring Thy name, and becoming blessings, we thank Thee. "Blessed be Thou Lord God of Israel, Our Father, for ever and ever".

What more? Let it be known, and repeated in all humility, that the work of erecting this Church and School has been begun, continued, and ended with Prayer. The sermons which pleaded for it were preceded by and followed with prayer; Difficulties and perplexities have always been met with prayer. When Subscriptions failed, or when disappointments caused despondency, prayer has been the resource. In every emergency, counsel has been asked of the Lord. The stones and timbers have been lifted on the hands of Prayer and Faith, often feeble and wavering, but still Prayer and Faith. The Maryport Mission Church, with the School - not long ago regarded as an impossibility - now stands in our midst, a distinct and practical answer to Prayer. Long may it stand. It has been built for the glory of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the preaching of the Everlasting Gospel of His Grace, for the administration of the Sacraments ordained by Himself, and for the perpetual devotion of Christian people, till the Lord come. It has been built by the voluntary gifts of inhabitant of Maryport, and other friends of the Church of England.

Here gracious God do Thou - For evermore draw nigh

Accept each faithful vow - And make each suppliant sigh;

In copious shower - On all who pray,

Each Holy day - Thy blessing pour,

Here may we gain from Heaven - The grace which we implore

And may that grace once given - Be with us evermore,

Until that day - When all the blest

To endless rest are called away.

COMMITTEE

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