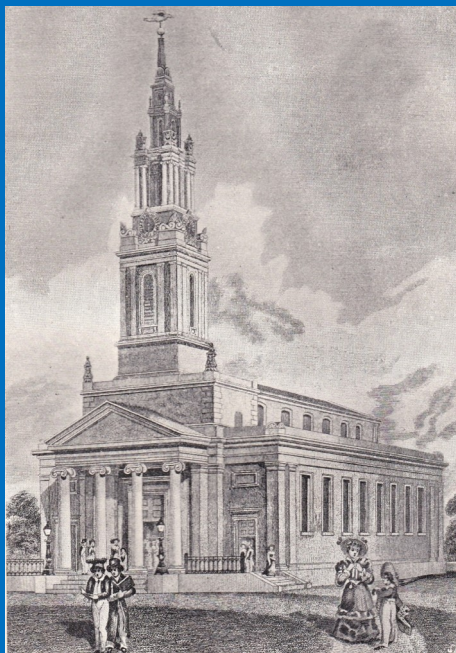


A Short History of St James, Bermondsey



Early Years

Travellers through Bermondsey all know St James' Church as a landmark - by road, rail and from the air, the dragon on the steeple rides calmly amid the tower blocks and acres of housing estates. Before 1829, when the church was consecrated, the only

church in the whole of Bermondsey was the Parish Church of St Mary Magdalene at the end of Bermondsey Street. In 1724 at the Bishop's Visitation, it was recorded "In Bermondsey there are 9,000 people".

After Waterloo, in 1818, an Act of Parliament was passed to raise a million pounds as a national thank-offering for peace, and as a memorial to the soldiers who had fallen. South London secured seven of the so-called Waterloo Churches. Through the persistence of a group of Bermondsey churchmen, the needs of our area were pressed, and in 1821 they bought the land which forms our churchyard.

The Chairman of the Committee was William Nottidge, a wool-stapler; with him were two brothers, William George and Richard King Watts, tanners; John Harcourt, Thomas Keeton and Martin Carter, all builders, Robert Rich, who commanded the Bermondsey Volunteers and Dr William Harrison. Then came 6 years delay - the committee wanted a tower and a spire but there was not enough money. They devised a scheme - to build a crypt under the church in which



bodies could be buried; this would provide a steady income. On this security the trustees received permission, by Act of Parliament, to raise £3,000. With a liberal grant on the part of the parishioners and the gift of the Commissioners, the contract for the building of the church for £21,412.19.5 was signed and the first stone laid in 1827. Dr Sumner, Bishop of Winchester, consecrated the 'building designed to hold 2,000 persons, of whom 1,200 were accommodated in free seats' on May 7th, 1829.

James Savage, the architect, modeled the church on designs of Greek Temples; with galleries round three

sides and the organ in the west. Competent authorities declare that St James' Church is the finest of the Waterloo churches. A glorious peal of 10 bells was cast by the famous foundry of Mears of Whitechapel. A four-faced striking clock, costing £160, was put in the tower.

The First Century

Big changes came to Bermondsey in the first decades of the Church's life. In 1834 work began on London's first suburban railway, with London's first railway terminus located in the parish, and the line being carried on a viaduct of 1,000 brick arches. The Church School was opened in 1841 at a cost of £2,200 and soon had more than 500 pupils.

A cholera epidemic that swept across Europe in 1832 claimed a third of its London victims in St James's Parish. It returned in 1849 and in some houses, all died.

The 1851 Religious Census found that the three Anglican churches in Bermondsey had 2,350 worshippers in the morning, and a similar number in the evening.

By 1878 St James had the largest Sunday School in London. The Vicar, William Allan, was famous for his 'baptism sweeps' through the parish designed to encourage families to bring their newly born offspring for baptism. So fruitful was this practice that on one Sunday, alone, the Vicar personally baptized 111 infants.

Into the Twentieth Century

In the early part of the twentieth century, George Balleine, vicar for thirty years from 1908 led a lively church that included a staff team of a dozen, ten Sunday schools, and three mission halls. He worked closely with Christian Socialists, Dr Alfred Salter, and his wife, Ada, in their efforts to improve the lot of the very poor people who lived in Bermondsey at that time.

One project that came to fruition in 1921 was the Joyslide in the Churchyard, provided for local children, at the instigation of Arthur Carr of the Peek Frean biscuit factory.

Heavy bombing in the Second World War brought massive change to the area, destroyed St James School and the Vicarage, damaged the church building and killed many people.

In 1961 the church was closed for worship, but re-opened in 1966, and then the renewal of both the building and congregational life began, with an infusion of young people from the Cambridge University Mission under the leadership of Revd Michael Whinney, its warden who became the vicar of St James in 1967.

In the 1980s and 1990s St James was a pioneer of Ordained Local Ministry and three local men were ordained to serve as ministers to the people of Bermondsey.



St James today

St James has been here in Bermondsey for nearly two centuries and this history is only a beginning.

The Church today is vibrant and active with a congregation of all ages and backgrounds, drawn from many countries in the world.

Jointly with our sister church of St Anne's, St James, together with our Church of England primary school, is here to serve the people of Bermondsey and bring the Good News

of Jesus Christ to our community.

Jesus is at the centre of all that we do and we pray that this glorious building will reflect his love among us.

Please join us for any of our services or midweek activities and find out more about St James Church by visiting our website:

www.godlovesbermondsey.co.uk

Pictured below: Restored and regilded, St James's dragon weathervane, returns to Bermondsey in 2018



This leaflet was produced with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund 2018/19