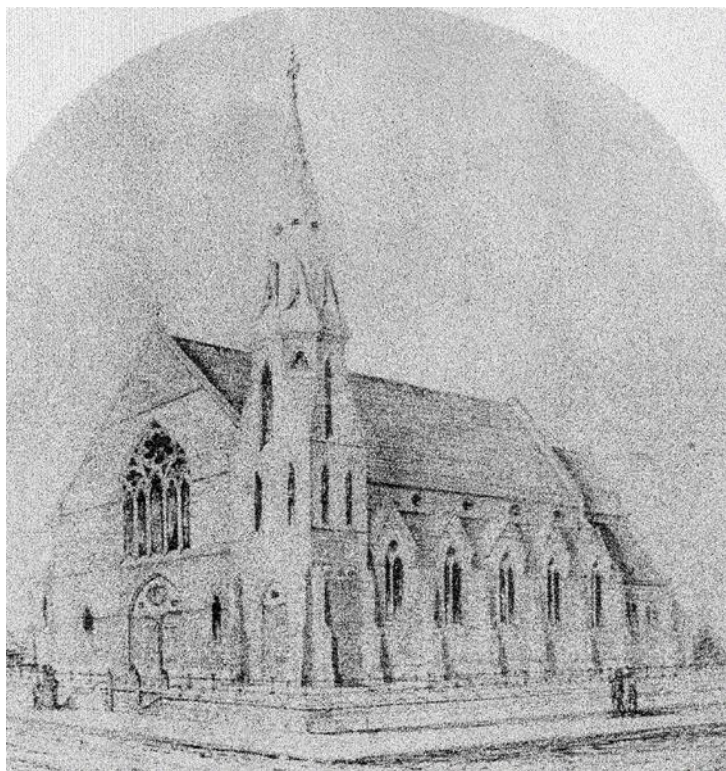


THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

THE HISTORY OF ST ANNE'S, BERMONDSEY 1869-2019



FOREWORD

by the Vicar, Canon Gary Jenkins



2019 marks the 150th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone for the present building of St Anne's, Bermondsey. The church, meaning the people, was already in existence and as such is older than the building, yet it is good to look back and thank God for this provision of a house for the people of God in this part of Bermondsey 150 years ago this year.

BEFORE THE BUILDING WAS BUILT

Some five years before the building of St. Anne's Church the Reverend J. T. Wilkinson started preaching as a kind of mission priest to the inhabitants of the district in the open air. Originally with just six people for his congregation.

He gradually increased his congregation, until he was encouraged by The Surrey Church Association who erected him a temporary iron Church in Alma Road, in which the congregation grew to over 200 people and the first recorded Baptism in the Church was on April 4th 1866.

During the period of his preaching in the iron Church he canvassed vigorously for funds to build a permanent Church. Raising some £1400 with the help of some of the lay members of his Church, to which the Surrey Church Building Association added £1000, leaving only £400 of the £2,800 estimated cost of building by the September of 1869 when the corner-stone of the Church was laid by Alderman and Sheriff Cotton.

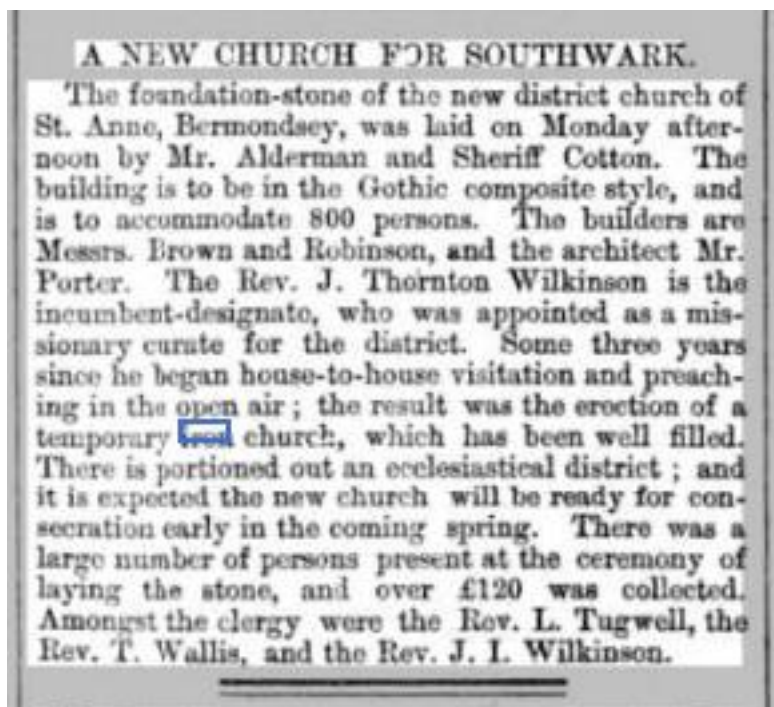
The new Church was to be 150ft long and 44ft wide and would have a small spire and seat about 700 people. Work had commenced some 2 months before the corner-stone ceremony and would be finished about the following March. The site valued at about £1500 was donated by Mr R. J. West, of Alscot Hall, Gloucestershire. The architect was Mr Alfred Porter and the builders Brown and Robinson of Worship Street, Finsbury. The building was to be of white brick, with Bath stone and red brick facings.

About 700 people took part in the services at the ceremony

of the laying of the corner-stone which took place in the afternoon of Monday 27th September 1869. There were many clergy present on this day and the Rev. G. Calthorpe addressed the people gathered there followed by the Rev Joseph Wallis and Rev L. Tugwell.

Alderman and Sheriff Cotton was very pleased at being given the honour of laying the corner-stone of a Church in the neighbourhood he had wandered over as a boy. He also had a lot of business interests in the area so he was affected by whatever went on locally.

Touching upon the services of the church, he said that he was sure, from what he had heard of Mr Wilkinson that the preaching in the church would be evangelical, and appeal to the heart, not to the eye and ear solely. He would not impose upon them by coming before them in glowing and



gaudy vestments and go trying to please the eye. He said the work of the great Creator could never be done by pleasing the eye merely and this remark was greeted with cheers.

The population of the Parish was about 7000 people who until the Rev Wilkinson arrived had received no religious teaching at all. Praise and prayer completed the ceremony at which time there was a collection which raised over £79. lls.

Soon after the corner-stone for St. Anne's was laid there was to be another Church foundation stone laid in the Bermondsey area which had a population of 70,000 people. Even when these two new churches were finished they still only reached a small percentage of the population.

The vicar of St. James Church in Jamaica Road had given his blessing to the Rev. J. T. Wilkinson in his preaching and establishing St. Anne's Church that in time would become a separate parish. Also at this time the old parish of St. Mary Magdalen is over 23,000 people with only a parish Church and a small chapel.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE NEW BUILDING

The ceremony was fully reported in both the *South London Press* and the *Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Advertiser* of Saturday, July 23rd 1870.

St Anne's was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Winchester, as the parish of Bermondsey was in his diocese. This could have been done some weeks earlier, a date for the ceremony had even been announced, but at the last moment there was a disagreement with the Bishop over the "right of presentation" (who can appoint the Vicar) and it was feared that there might be a long law suit. Rev. Wilkinson had with the agreement of Rev. Duguid Brown, Vicar of St James', and the advice of the Surrey Church Building Association arranged to place the patronage of the Church with Simeon's Trustees. He had received subscriptions on that understanding. The dispute was, however, settled and the right of presentation was given to the following: Archdeacon Utterton, Rev. E Auriol, Rev. W Cadman, Sir Thos Tilson and Mr B Donkin, with the understanding that the Rev. J Thornton Wilkinson was to hold the living during his lifetime.

The cost of the Church was approximately £3,500, at the time of the consecration ceremony only £200 was still outstanding. The style of the Church is that of about the end of the 12th century. The interior is of plain brickwork, without any plastering, with little decoration except bands and arches of red brick and carved cap-heads. The roof is open timbered and stained. Much has been achieved at small cost. The Church was not ornately decorated as its parishioners would be working class people living in poor and overcrowded conditions.

The Bishop arrived punctually at 11.30 am and was received at the main entrance by several clergymen, including the Ven. Archdeacon Utterton, Rev. J Bowstead, rural dean; Rev. Lewen Tugwell, Rector of Bermondsey; the Rev. R Marshall Martin, Vicar of Christ Church; the Rev. J Beck, Rector of Rotherhithe; the Rev. Mr Bassett, of St Phillip's, Old Kent Road; and the Rev. Duguid Brown of St James'.

Among the large congregation (although at short notice) were: Mr Fisher, the churchwarden, Mr Donkin, Dr Colquhoun, Captain Bevington and the architect Mr Porter, of Grange Road. The Bishop was formally requested to consecrate the Church and he headed a procession which marched up the centre aisle towards the communion table repeating the 24th Psalm as they went, the Bishop and ministers alternately.

The Bishop then took his seat and the deed of trust was presented to him which he laid upon the communion table and then he read a series of prayers from a book entitled "Form of Prayer and Ceremonies used at the Consecration of Churches, Chapels and Burial Grounds in the diocese of Winchester." Miss Wilkinson played the organ and the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire) was sung by the congregation.

The Bishop then read portions of the Communion Service and after the Collect for the Queen added three prayers from the book mentioned above. The epistle (Ephesians 2.13) was read by the Rev. John Bowstead and the gospel (St John 2.13-18) by the Archdeacon. After the Nicene Creed the Bishop ascended the pulpit and preached what was reported as a very impressive sermon around the text of the 18th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and part of the 10th verse, "I have much people in this city."

He went on to comment on the poverty in the area and the

dangers of overcrowding, having seen only the other day a contract issued for five hundred houses to be built in the close area around the new Church. He also spoke of the need for pastoral care and how people become careless and indifferent to the religious teachings if it does not exist. The Bishop then returned to the communion table and read the offertory sentences, during which a collection was made. He then read two prayers after which the sentence of Consecration was read by the Registrar, signed by the Bishop. The public service ended at one o'clock and those who wished to stay had Holy Communion.



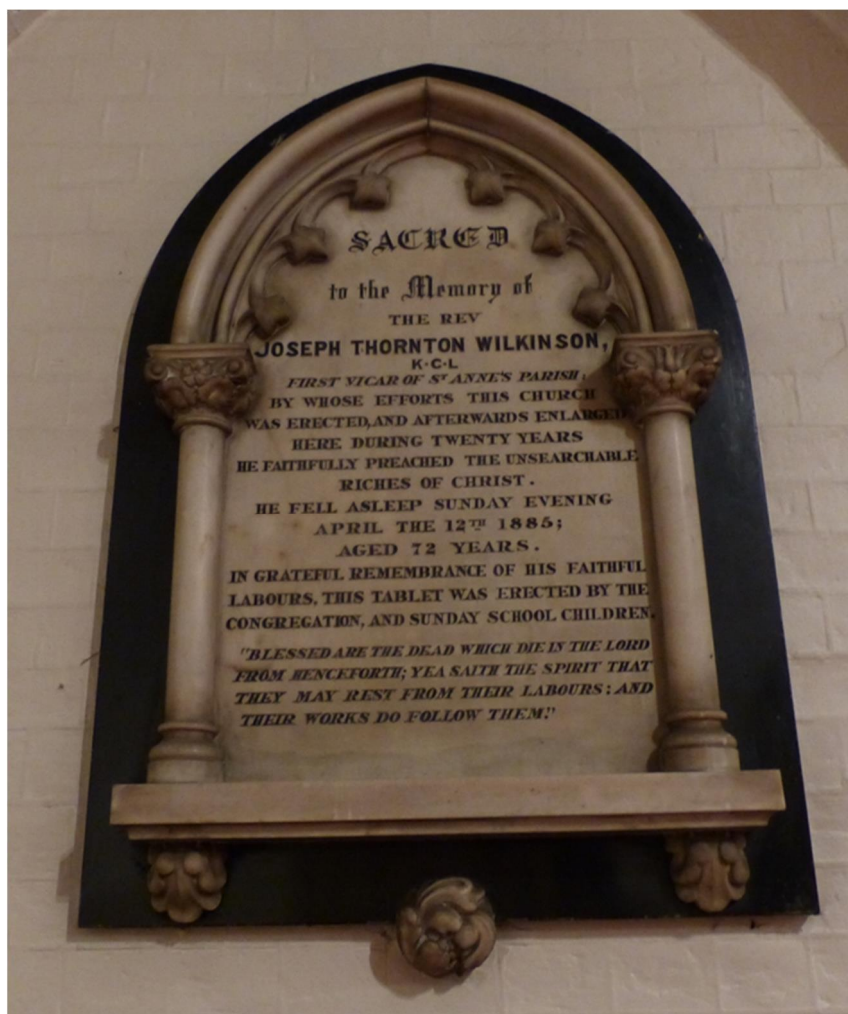
THE MAN WHO STARTED IT ALL

Reverend Joseph Thornton Wilkinson came to Bermondsey about 1864 and started preaching in the open air, with the blessing of the Vicar of St James'. Dressed in his black gown he used to talk to little groups that gathered round him. So wrote a reporter in the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Advertiser in 1870. In an article headed Preachers of Bermondsey, the writer notes Wilkinson's "unobtrusiveness and general kindness", and goes on to say: "he has not a great intellect, but he has a large heart which is full of Christian love".

In the *Southwark Recorder* he is described as "A preacher of the gospel in sincerity and truth and with a constant desire to work with all Christian people ... he was always courteous and full of charity in conversation ... it would not be possible to fill his place with one more gentle or more discreet"

He must have had a lot of energy as by 1866 he was preaching in a very well attended corrugated iron Church near what is now Thorburn Square. As the population got bigger the new parish of St Anne's was carved out of St James' parish. Already past 50 Rev Wilkinson raised by his own efforts much of the money to build the new Church where he remained vicar for a further 15 years. St Anne's had no side aisles and a different organ (probably a smaller one).

During the latter part of Rev Wilkinson's life he raised £1,000 to enlarge the Church which was carried out before his death. He also managed to collect £600 for the building of the vicarage which was also finished before his death and £750 towards the building of a Church hall, built after his death, in 1887. He was ill from



February of 1885 and despite appearing to improve at different times he was found in a coma on the morning of 12th April 1885. He died at 7.30 in the evening without regaining consciousness, at the age of 72.

His funeral took place on Friday, 17th April 1885 before a congregation which filled St Anne's. The cortege consisted of a

hearse and five carriages which carried the mourners, including his youngest brother and his nephew and niece. His last surviving daughter, Margaret Ellen, had already died in 1878, aged 37, and his wife, Anne, died in 1879. His other daughter, Josephine Anne, died on 23rd May 1854 at the age of 15. The "Dead March" was played by a Miss Barrington on the organ. After the service the cortege re-formed and proceeded to the cemetery, where the last rites were performed before a large audience.

A memorial service was held on Sunday, 19th April at St Anne's Church. The sermon was preached by the Rev C D Lawrence, the Rector of Bermondsey, and was based on the words "So he giveth his beloved sleep". He described Rev Wilkinson as "being a faithful minister, a consistent servant, and ready for his end - his work was finished; his mind was set on Christ".

A memorial marble tablet to Reverend Wilkinson was placed in his memory on the south wall of the chancel and unveiled at a service on Thursday, 9th July 1885 in front of a large congregation. It says "Here during 20 years he faithfully preached the unsearchable riches of Christ". It was paid for by the congregation and Sunday school children.

KEY EVENTS 1869 TO 1998

The corner stone was laid in 1869 and the building was consecrated in 1870.

The first recorded Baptism was on 4th April 1866. This must have been in the Iron Church. The first recorded wedding was on 25th February 1871. When the Church was first built it had no side aisles. These were added in the early 1880's. The Church finally became a parish in its own right in 1871 when £200 per year was granted for St Anne's by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

The current Church hall was completed in 1887 but it seems from newspaper clippings that there was some sort of meeting hall in 1885. The hall cost £1500 and could hold 450 people and was opened by the Bishop of Rochester on the 5th March 1887. The Mission Hall was presented a piano by Mr. E. Huntley Cooper at this time.

There are several memorial tablets in the Church in memory of J. Thornton Wilkinson, his wife and daughters (see page 8). The Church does not appear to have had any real major changes since the 1880's. There have only been three vicars who have stayed more than 10 years, the first two and Harold Carson at the end of World War 2 (see page 16).

The area around the Church grew very quickly in the 1870's and 80's with the coming of the railway yards and much more industry but still remained a comparatively poor area with people living in overcrowded conditions in terraced houses. Several other Church-

es were built around this time in the area, a few years after St Anne's including St Augustine's in 1875 - 1883.

St Anne's had a very large Sunday school following for many years. One report on an outing stated there was over 500 people present.

The organ at the beginning was probably much smaller than the present one. About the turn of the century a bell was added to the spire The font is a typical Victorian font as is the lectern and pulpit.

In 1970 the Church had their Centenary Thanksgiving Service attended by the Bishop of Southwark.

In 1997 the repointing and decorating of the outside of the Church and hall was finished. This took about 30 months of Saturdays and was carried out by 51 young offenders with 5,063 hours of community service and materials cost £2,500.

The Church hall was the centre of community activities for many years being licensed for music and dancing and there were many clubs that were held there

In the late 1960s Thorburn Square was redeveloped with St Anne's as its centre. The Vicar, David Shreeve, wrote in the Parish News at the time that there was difficulty getting the council to pave the short road to the Church. Almost the same comments had been made by a churchgoer in a newspaper article in 1870.

ST ANNE'S TODAY

In 1981, there came an event which was to mark a significant turning point for the congregation of St. James. The Vicar of the neighbouring parish, St. Anne's at Thorburn Square, John Martin, resigned and the Diocese, aware of the pressure of falling clergy numbers, approached Henry Whyte to take over as Priest in-Charge. Henry agreed on condition that he received support and assistance from the Rector of St. Mary's Bermondsey, then Tim Wooderson. This was the start of what was to become, eventually, the Bermondsey Group Ministry, comprising St. Anne's, St James and St. Mary's

After Ted left, it took a whole year before our next vicar was installed, but Colin and Anita Smith provided valuable cover along with Snowy and Bill. **Stuart Wilmot** arrived from Milton Keynes with his wife Sue and children Nathan and Naomi; Stuart had served previously in Brixton and Spitalfields. With Snowy and Sybil firmly settled in 2, Thurland Road, Stuart and Sue followed Ted and Audrey into 10, Thorburn Square.

Stuart started off as Priest-in Charge of both St. Anne's and St. James, with Jolyon Bradshaw having the same status at St. Mary's. The Bermondsey Group Ministry was formally established in May 1996, with the Salmon Youth Centre, the new name for CUM under its new Warden, Revd. Bob Mayo, also a member of the Group. At this point Stuart and Joly were given the freeholds of their respective parishes. In the same period, the long-planned mergers of St. Au-

gustine's parish with St. Anne's and the subdivision of St. Crispin's parish between St. Mary's Rotherhithe and St. James finally took effect, thus considerably increasing the number of people in the pastoral care of the Vicar of St. James with Christchurch and St Crispin and St. Anne with St Augustine.

In 1993, Colin and Anita Smith moved to Brockley and the Diocese agreed to the exceptional step of putting Snowy "on the payroll" as a curate. Snowy began to concentrate on St. Anne's, where Sybil served another period as churchwarden. They retired from St. Anne's in 1998 and moved to a house in Rotherhithe purchased by the Church Commissioners

After Stuart Wilmot left in 2002, Stewart Hartley became vicar of St Anne's in 2003. Two assistant clergy who had a particular focus on St Anne's in their ministry were: Martin Miller (1999-2005) and Louise Vincer (2006-2011).

In the final year of Stewart Hartley's incumbency (2011-2012), the two parishes of St. Anne and St. James became part of a new a United Benefice.

In December of 2012 Gary Jenkins became the new vicar of the United Benefice, and in September 2013, Captain Paul Warren CA, was licensed as the Urban Missioner to the united benefice, working across both parishes, but with a particular Sunday focus at St Anne's.

ST ANNE'S FUTURE

St Anne's Church in Bermondsey began, not with a building, but with a preacher who proclaimed the Gospel on the streets of the parish. A congregation of just six people grew, by God's grace to a congregation of two hundred which had its home, not in our present building, but in an prefabricated iron church, a 'tin tabernacle' (as they were popularly called).

In due course our present building was erected and in 2019 we celebrate and commemorate the laying of the foundation stone in 1869.

But what of St Anne's in the future?

Today the congregation continues to meet Sunday by Sunday for worship and the ministry of the word of God. The Church Council is actively pursuing the repair and refurbishment of the building, and St Anne's continues to proclaim the 'unsearchable riches of Christ to the people of Bermondsey, in partnership with its sister church of St James.

As we go forward into God's future we do so in confidence knowing that 'all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose' (Romans 8.28).

Canon Gary Jenkins

Vicar



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ACTIVITIES, PLEASE VISIT:

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