

## FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE

**Editor's Note:** The first account here is from *The Earthen Vessel and Christian Record* the October 1, 1866 issue), pages 312 – 316. The shorter account is from Walter Banks "Cheering Words" magazine Oct. 1866 page 161. This gives us a little insight into the life of the church at that time.

### **First Anniversary of the opening of the New Surrey Tabernacle**

Twelve months have rolled away since the New Surrey Tabernacle was first opened for the public worship of Almighty God—for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the ingathering and building up of some portions of the Church of the Redeemer. That was a most suspicious epoch in the history of that section of the Christian family in this country; and it is pleasing to be able to record the fact that the happy tide of prosperity which set in to aid and to carry on the great enterprise of the building committee has never failed. The work has been nobly and honorably completed; and in the New Surrey Tabernacle, in Wansey-street, Walworth Road, may be seen a building for sacred purposes, as beautiful as it is comfortable; as substantial and as useful as any we have ever had the pleasure of beholding—or could ever desire to behold in this lower world.

The first anniversary was holden Tuesday, Sept. 18, 1866. Mr. James Wells, the minister, preached a sermon in the afternoon from those most suitable words, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." A sermon as full of Gospel truth—of Christian experience—of grateful acknowledgments, and of hopeful anticipations, as perhaps was ever delivered even in that, or any other pulpit Mr. Wells has occupied. This testimony has been confirmed by the voices of many who heard and enjoyed the same. Mr. Wells has now stood nearly forty years in the ministry; one steady tide of growing success has followed him: the Lord has been with him: the Lord's truth has been proclaimed most unflinchingly and faithfully by him: the Lord's people have, instrumentally, stood by and supported him; health and strength have been wonderfully bestowed upon him; and in all the physical, mental, and spiritual powers of a man in the prime of life, he still stands like an iron pillar, a brazen wall, and a defenced city. And when several hundreds sat down to tea on the anniversary day, a scene was presented which must have made angels rejoice, while an immense assembly of saved sinners on earth could most heartily sing—

"We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food,  
But more because of Jesus' blood;  
Let manna to our souls be given,  
The bread of life sent down from heaven."

Mr. John Carr, the worthy treasurer, and deacon, commenced the evening meeting by reading,

"Guide me, O thou Great Jehovah;!"

which was sung (the whole congregation standing) by the rolling, swelling, and harmonious notes of more than 2000 cheerful hearts and tongues, feelingly and powerfully echoing the warmest desires of millions of the ransomed. Especially was the last stanzas touchingly read by Mr. Carr, and heartily echoed by the people,

"When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of deaths and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises I will ever give to thee."

Mr. Timothy Baugh offered an unusually earnest and appropriate prayer, and Mr. James Wells then said, that although it had been announced in the Earthen Vessel, that Mr. Thomas Pocock would take the chair that evening, yet Mr. Pocock had wished to reserve his work in that department until next Good Friday, when they hoped to see an end to the remaining portion of the debt now on the building; consequently he (Mr. Wells) would occupy that position on that occasion; and in his opening remarks, he did so pleasingly betray the emotions, feeling, and desires of a real Christian, that the whole body of the people received his address with joyful acclamations. He said, he stood amazed at the Lord's goodness unto them. The glorious gospel of the blessed God had brought them together, and it still held them together, and peace and prosperity were enjoyed by them. "Never," said Mr. Wells, "during the whole thirty-nine years and a half of my ministry, did I ever feel my responsibility more than I do at the present occasion. When I enter that pulpit, and see the many hundreds of immortal souls gathered together, it causes my soul to pour forth earnest prayers to God, that if it was His will not one might depart without receiving some good." Mr. Wells thought too much must not be expected from any minister. If a man was of a warm and earnest spirit, full of zeal to the Gospel, it was quite possible he might sometimes jump over the traces; but for any little misunderstanding ministers ought not to be reproached. "I retain," (said Mr. Wells) "no revengeful feeling to any who have protested against me. No: not even to my own beloved and venerated brother John Foreman; for if he was to come here this evening, and to say, I was too hasty, I should say, 'I think so too,' but then John and James might be as united again as ever; and I will not disguise the fact, that to be separated from some with whom I have walked for so many years, has, at times, caused me sorrow."

This Christian-like and loving expression was received by the ministers and by the meeting generally with strong feelings of sympathy; and it only seconded the resolution secretly laid in our own heart previously, that when we issue our Free Grace Ministers' Photographic Gallery, we would place John Foreman and James Wells in the center together; and over them, J. C. Philpot, and underneath John Kershaw; filling in the corners and surrounding spaces with the faces of a host of brethren, who, in their way, have been useful to some thousands in Zion.

Returning again to our notes, we observe, in his opening address, Mr. Wells said, "I feel proud to see so many ministers present; so many independent minded men, who act not under the influence of any clique or association; but who come, each one for himself, to express his attachment to the Lord—to His truth—and to wish us God-speed. We most heartily thank them for their company. As regards myself, I may say, I am unaltered, and I have nothing of which to complain, not even of Mr. Philpot, who I certainly would have answered when he implied I had evidently some dark chambers in my mind, so that he thought the people at the Surrey Tabernacle were in a very awkward position, for no one could tell what I might bring forth next. I say, (said Mr. Wells) I would have answered Mr. Philpot, but then he is a good man; and I do not like fighting with good men, so I let it pass."

In the course of the evening, Mr. Wells very sincerely acknowledged the efficient labors of the building committee. They entered upon their work most gracefully; they went through it gracefully, and they had retired from it gracefully; and they deserved the lasting gratitude of all who experienced the comfortable

advantages of such a beautiful and commodious building as they were now favored to meet in. The New Surrey Tabernacle is now put in trust as a place for a Strict Baptist Church; and Mr. Wells' remarks as regards the future were received with strong feeling of approbation. He said, there were some houses building on the spare land which was left beside the chapel, three of them would pay the ground-rent, so that when the present debt was removed, the Tabernacle would be a free building; "and if my successor (said Mr. Wells) should obtain a good congregation, the income derived from the three houses will enable you to do good in many directions, helping other churches or ministers as the case may be."

Mr. Butt, one of the deacons, and the secretary of the Building Fund, then rose and read the following report, which he informed the assembly was the statement of the deacons of the place, and was indorsed also by their pastor:—

In presenting a short statement of circumstances as they have occurred through the year we have been privileged to meet in this building, we feel it no small mercy that our beloved minister has been continued in health, and that the Lord has favored him with his gracious presence and support, and rendered his ministry a blessing to many, so that the word has been attended with power to the hearts and consciences of the people. We have witnessed with pleasure the increase and attention in the congregation at the various services, all tending to shew that our labor in the erection of this house for the service of God, has not been in vain.

We have received into the church ninety-six persons, including those standing for baptism on the first Wednesday evening in October. In these additions, we have witnessed with much pleasure many from the families who have long stood connected with the church and congregation coming forward to declare what the Lord hath done for their souls. May many such seasons be renewed in future years.

The building is invested in trust as a Strict Baptist Church.

The building Committee closed their labors in May, when the accounts were laid before them, audited by Messrs. Fielding and Nicholson; they rejoiced in what had been accomplished, notwithstanding the trouble and anxiety of so great an undertaking, and look back with pleasure and surprise at the completion of their work.

On Good-Friday an important meeting was held, when £500 was presented to our pastor as a testimonial of love and affection for his long and faithful services as pastor of this people.

At that meeting a suggestion was made, and a subscription entered into, that the secretary should try and collect by the anniversary the sum of £500 towards the debt; £418 has been paid over to the treasurer, and the remainder will be before the close of this meeting.

The deacons recently resolved to erect six dwelling-houses upon the surplus land at the back of the chapel; full particulars of which will be given at our meeting on Good-Friday in 1867, just, observing that this is altogether independent of our subscriptions.

The Ladies commenced collecting in August, 1863, and are continuing their labors of love with untiring zeal; their determination is to go forward till such time the sum required is raised. We feel the thanks of this meeting are due to them for the energy they have displayed in this department of our work.

The subscriptions and collections from last September to this day, amount to £1,350. In the space of three years, the amount of cash received by donations, subscriptions, and collections, has realized the large sum of £8,343 lis. 2d. The entire cost of the building is £10,423 19s. 8d.; the particulars will be found in the cash statement.

A debt now remains of £1,489 6s. 3d. At this are we discouraged? By no means. Our old motto abides with us: "Faith laughs at impossibilities, and says it shall be done." The deacons have no wish to press upon the friends unnecessarily, at the same time some are even now desirous of taking steps for the extinction of this balance at our meeting on Good-Friday next; the matter lies with you. Fear not, be of good courage.

Cash Received:	£	s.	d.
Subscriptions, Donations, and Collections	8,292	12	5
Boxes at doors (5 months)	50	18	9
Interest per Bankers ...	148	4	0
Donation from the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers...	105	0	0
Donations from the Members of the Surrey Tabernacle Benefit Society ...	60	0	0
Sale of the Old Tabernacle ...	406	18	3
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	9,063	13	5
Loans from Friends ...	1,685	0	0
	£10,748	13	5

By Payments:	£	s.	d.
Cost of the Erection of The New Surrey Tabernacle, Including Furniture gas, And every expense	10,423	19	8
Interest on Loans	79	0	0
Repayment of Loans	250	0	0
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	£10,752	19	8

Mr. Butt added, the debt of £1,489 now remaining on the building, he trusted would be liquidated by the next Good Friday. He last evening received a registered letter, and on opening it, found £20 towards their fund. He read also a letter from a friend to whom Mr. Wells' published sermons had been a great blessing, enclosing a mite with an expression of thankfulness to God for such discourses.

Mr. John Carr, as the treasurer to the fund expressed the pleasure he felt in meeting the friends again. As far as being treasurer was concerned, he had experienced no trouble or anxiety. In comparing the balance with the Secretary's statement, he found it exactly the same; and the money had come in as fast as it was required, so there had been no anxiety respecting that. When he looked back at what had been accomplished, and saw what great things had been done, he could not help exclaiming with the poet,

Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
Hither by Thy help I come.

Mr. Thomas Stringer, in an excellent and warm-hearted address, congratulated the church, the pastor, and the people, on their position; he was thankful to be associated with their pastor, and with them as a church. They had a new Tabernacle, but it was the old Gospel in it; and it appeared they were well supplied with the truth; the money was plentiful, and all appeared happy; and he prayed that the unity that evidently existed between pastor and people, might still continue.

Mr. Timothy Baugh said that meeting had suggested to his mind two or three thoughts: 1st, that the truth of God is a living power; 2nd, the great need of cultivating thankfulness to God; 3rd, that the circumstances associated with the anniversary services proved the falsehood of the charge of Antinomianism brought against those who believed in the sovereignty of divine grace and mercy. 4th, That God had put great honor upon the pastor of the church; and then, having expressed the pleasure he felt when the announcement was made by Mr. Butt, respecting the desire of himself and his colleagues to assist poor churches, he closed with a very spirit-stirring peroration, and resumed his seat amidst much cheering.

Mr. Thomas Jones said, it appeared to him that, if there was such a thing as "a happy family." it was the people at that place. They appeared to "have all things and abound." There was a good understanding amongst themselves. He was glad to find the pastor's mind had been exercised; it was necessary to a fruitful mind; and he found men more useful who had these exercises and troubles. The speaker then related an interesting conversation given of the late Lady Huntingdon and "Old Berridge" on different degrees in glory; concluding by expressing the pleasure he felt in hearing that the Lord's blessing had attended the word delivered in that place to the conversion of many souls.

Mr. Thomas Pocock explained why he had not occupied the chair on that occasion; he was to be reserved for Good Friday, should he be spared so long, when he hoped to see as large a gathering, then and there to extinguish the debt.

T. J. Messer in a lengthened address, said he should first ask them to pray for their minister, that his perceptions of the whole truth, as it is in Jesus, might become increasingly clear. Secondly, that his love to his Divine Master might be hourly intensified. Thirdly,—that in all his public ministrations he might be enabled to exhibit Christian fidelity and affection, in unbroken and beautiful combination. Fourthly, — that as the shadows of his existence lengthened, and he approximated nearer and nearer to the "Golden City" his labors might be more and more successful. Fifthly, that he might be honored with an investiture of power from on high, patiently to bear the attacks of his opponents; and sixthly, that his life of incessant activity might, if God so willed it, be honored with a triumphant end, and that when all connected with his earthly toil "was over and done," his ransomed spirit might bask in the gorgeous light of the city of many mansions. Mr. Messer's address was listened to with much interest.

C. W. Banks then related some interesting circumstances connected with his first hearing "that strange man" (Mr. Wells) many years since, in the old Tabernacle. He also enlarged upon some of the errors of the present day, and pointed out very clearly their deleterious effects upon the public mind. He said it was now becoming popular in some circles to ask the question, "Did the Old Testament Saints belong to the Church of God?" Writers, editors, ministers, and others, are saying "No!" What does this mean? It intends a heavy blow at three of the grandest pillars of the Church's faith. First: It means to overthrow the oneness of the true Church of God. Secondly: It denies the retrospective efficacy of the atoning sacrifice

of " the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." And thirdly: It aims at the entire extinction of the revealed and recorded experiences of the Old Testament saints. Mr. Banks said it was to him a source of much thankfulness to find, that it had pleased the Lord so abundantly to bless Mr. Wells in that place. Many anxious thoughts he had experienced respecting it; but to his mind, the Lord's blessing was more than any argument they could produce. He prayed earnestly the same might not only continue but increase.

The Doxology was sung at the close of Mr. Banks's address; and the first anniversary of the New Surrey Tabernacle ended, unmistakable evidences of the Divine approbation having been realized by both speakers and people.

We were pleased to see the platform crowded with ministers and laymen, among whom we recognized C. W. Banks, T. Baugh, I. Comfort, Drake, J. Flory, H. Hanks, H. Hall, T. Jones, T. J. Messer, Henshaw, Geo. Hearson, Parsons, Luke Snow, Steed, J. Webster, P. W. Williamson, G. Webb, and Messrs. T. Pocock, J. Carr, Snowdon, J. Beach, Albert Boulden, Lawrence, Reynolds, H. Hutchinson, T. Mitson, Evans, and a host of happy faces besides.

#### THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE

PRESENTED a good and grand sight on Tuesday, Sept. 18. The immense platform was thronged with ministers and gentlemen, while the Tabernacle was crowded with many hundreds of Christian friends. The minister, Mr. James Wells, delivered an address so full of Christian charity that many wept for joy, and all were highly pleased. He really was as mellow and as ripe in grace as though he was just going home, and yet as cheerful and strong as a young man of five and twenty. Before the Lord, and angels, and men, I do solemnly declare (whoever may be disposed to be sour, to say hard things of James Wells, and to condemn the "Village Preacher"), I do not think there are many men more highly honored of God in this day, than is the pastor of the church in the New Surrey Tabernacle. Even good Thomas Jones; that fiery-flying cherubim, T. J. Messer, Thomas Pocock, and others, said the same thing in their speeches. As to Mr. Pocock, although I suppose he is on the road toward 80, he seemed to anticipate the meeting next Good Friday, and many meetings after that, with all the confidence of a man in his prime. I began to think that the minister, and deacons, and friends, all have grown younger since they have removed to their New Tabernacle; in fact, one beloved brother, who has been many, many years on the road, has just married again; and looks like one setting out afresh. Well, they are a happy people. The Earthen Vessel contains a good report of their meeting. So, I must say no more here; only that there were "CHEERING WORDS" by wholesale. I began to question whether the millennium had not really begun.