

# Fit for Purpose

The re-building of  
Esher Green Baptist Church in 2013



## **Our 25<sup>th</sup> year bonus**

A number of celebrations around April, 2008 were held for our 25th year anniversary since the church reopened in 1983. It had been closed for 6 years before that. Little did we know that within a few months of our anniversary we would be experiencing the answer to prayers for a new building we had been making for many years during that time. We would be in for an exciting 5-year story. Here it is!

In 1989 we had moved our Sunday morning services to the Assembly Hall at the nearby Esher High School where we had some contact through the ministry of our Youth Workers. This was on account of the space restrictions at Park Road. We became crowded at less than 100 seats, and we needed more rooms too for Sunday School activities.



Pre redevelopment meeting hall at Park Road

Nearby Esher High suited us well as the Hall would seat over 200, and we could use a number of classrooms – it also had good parking facilities. The downside, which we had to tolerate, was that every Sunday we would have to set out all of the chairs and our PA equipment. The latter then had to be stored in a very inadequate cupboard where it usually tumbled down on anyone who opened the door! However, our very dedicated (they had to be) stewards were there every Sunday by 8.30 am, together with the day's musicians, and all smartly set up for the 10.30 service, for nearly 25 years!



Esher High School Assembly Hall

During most of that period the supersonic Concorde also had to be tolerated as it regularly interrupted either worship or preacher. And we ended with a miracle there too as the School itself began its own major redevelopment in 2013 so we would have to have moved from there shortly anyway. We were of course therefore delighted to be able to move into our brand new building, with its Victorian aspects retained, on Sunday December 8<sup>th</sup> 2013.

## **The build-up begins**

It was on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2008 that we held one of our monthly Prayer Meetings at Park Road. It was decided to have twos and threes walking round Esher in prayer for the neighbourhood, and aspects associated with the buildings we passed. Two members paused at the back of the shops near to the Bear pub where there was a small, modern, office building for sale. It looked as though it could suit professional businesses, but, desperate for better space of our own, we would consider anything. The church had been praying for many years for an alternative building, or for the garden land at the rear of us. At various times we had wondered about the Odeon Cinema (when that once seem destined to close), some disused squash courts near the Bear, and also the old Tudor St. George's Church, behind the pub. Our Pastor Lee Johnson had enquired about the More Place building, then a restaurant, now demolished, but that was for sale for millions. Nothing had turned up. However, the sale was reported to Lee on returning after the walk. Lee investigated and found that the office block was for sale at £750,000, and was probably not suitable. That did however stimulate him to have a surveyor look at our own building. The surveyor estimated that, if we were able to buy the small piece of garden land belonging to the house next door, No. 4, Park Road, we might be able to build a new hall to seat 250 – more or less what we now have. Just at that time, John Plant reported that good contact had then been made with

the owner of No. 4. who had just asked for some access from our property so that some work could be done on the house - prior to selling! This also included No. 2 as that had been divided within that property some time before. We had tried many times to arrange a sale with our neighbour. The previous owner had been a stonemason, using the rear land and the old garages which it included as a yard for his work.

This was a most exciting contact. It became even more so when, on arrival at the Church on September 13<sup>th</sup> for a Mens' Prayer Meeting we saw 'For Sale' notices on the No. 2 and 4 houses! Of course, we really wanted neither of the houses but we did want the excess garden land at the back of number 4. This reached round the rear of our own existing church building and then carried on to include three garages with a small garden patch behind them. The latter ran along the back of the gardens of the cottages further down Park Road.

## **Purchase and planning**

At a Church Members' Meeting at the end of September 2008 the Members authorised the purchase of both properties and an offer of £800,000 was accepted by the owner, as against the sale price of £895,000. There had already been offers to buy the land at the rear, approached by the driveway running along the left side of our building. However, it was quite soon agreed to sell us No. 4 only, for a lesser price, which was a further benefit for us. It then took

the owner some months to sell No. 2, to the present neighbour.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October we had a Gift Day to supplement our coffers. Fortunately, we still had funds left from the sale of a house we had in Claygate, sold when our previous Minister Paddy Beresford left. The proceeds had not been fully used when we purchased a different property for our new Pastor and his family. We also had some cash in the bank, so altogether we were able to buy No. 4 and its land, which was completed on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2009. We held a dedication service for the use of the land on February 22<sup>nd</sup> as we walked around the rather desolate patch.

Then the work began to secure planning permission for re-building on what was still a very tight site. We would take the first step on a journey which would take us three years to complete.

Plans were drawn up by a design company for a building at the rear to house two stories of new rooms which also included demolishing the old kitchen and side entrance foyer which was behind the front worship hall. The design was in the same style as the Victorian building. The plans were submitted on August 19<sup>th</sup>. They were refused on 9<sup>th</sup> November on grounds of traffic, amenity, and redevelopment in a Conservation Area. Of course we went to appeal, but the very nice Inspector sent up by the central planning authority at Bristol confirmed the refusal. However, he

did dismiss many of the Council's grounds for refusal and we were determined to carry on.

## **More planning**

This prompted a big re-think as to our approach which, in the end, produced a much more satisfactory result. The Lord was in the storm! We knew that our aim was right, and that God had provided the adjoining land, so it was not difficult to press on. We also knew that some of our neighbours were against the redevelopment, but we wanted to be able to reach out to the local area with good facilities, and not to be restricted to a building which was eminently suited to the Victorian age.

Our alternative plan was to engage a complete army of professionals. This cost us dear, but eventually achieved the desired result. We engaged architects, quantity surveyors, mechanical and electrical consultants, structural engineers, health and safety experts, an acoustic consultant, a landscaping consultant (yes, that came in somewhere!), planning consultants, fund raising advisors, solicitors, and finally a barrister. We were spinning with advisors, plans and decisions for the next 18 months. Our professional team worked hard to produce an entirely new design which placed the new worship area on the rear land we now owned with the site of our former rear hall.

## GROUND FLOOR PLAN



## FIRST FLOOR PLAN





The old worship hall at the front was to remain but to have a floor inserted divided up and down into separate rooms. The main entrance door was to be made in the middle of the front façade with the original front doors turned into windows. A small front terrace would be built which would aid the regulations requiring disabled access through the main door. This was possible as we found an old Victorian photograph showing that originally there had been a similar frontage. The whole would be as environmentally friendly as possible, within our budget, which included wooden-cladded rear walls for the new worship area. This was also designed to be a separately functioning facility.

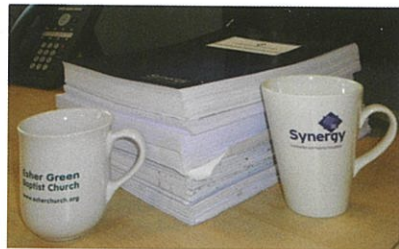
After a false, but helpful start with the local Council officials, we finally submitted our new plans in 2011, and with their support. However, we were rather fearful of the same refusal from the Planning Committee as the neighbours remained opposed to any expansion of the church. The refusal came on June 13<sup>th</sup>. So again we appealed to the Planning Inspectorate at Bristol. This time there was no open meeting. Instead the Inspector paid a visit to the building, and on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, wrote to us allowing our appeal! And there were no conditions attached which might have restricted our timings or other use of the building.

Our many years of prayer and persistence had proved successful for us in the end.

## Finding the money

Now of course we had to find the £1million plus to pay for the work ahead. On November 18<sup>th</sup> we held a further Gift Day which again helped significantly towards this. In addition of course we planned to sell the house at No. 4 Park Road, after we had fenced off the required land at the rear. We would also sell the small flat we owned at Farm Road, previously occupied by our Youth Workers. Both of those properties were let until they were eventually sold. Further, our Treasurer, Bob Burnaby, was able to secure 15-year loans from the London Baptist Association. We also obtained helpful grants from a few charities to whom we wrote. By the time building began in March 2013 we were fully funded, subject to the two property sales which were completed during the construction period. The generosity of our members has been a vastly uniting experience.

Tenders for the re-building were sent out in November, 2012. We accepted the lowest, which was slightly below our estimated figure, from one of the preferred contractors, Neilcott

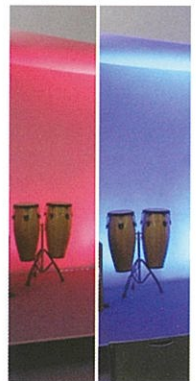


Our mile-high tender documents

Construction. They began work on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2013.

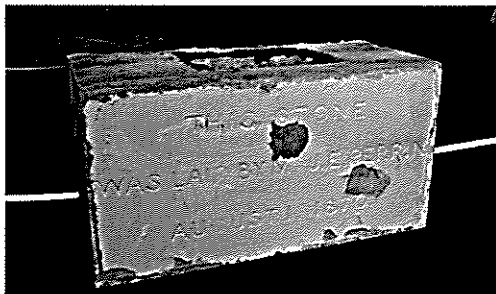
## The building phase





We then entered a nomadic period since the church building was totally handed over to the builders. It enabled us to experience a good time of relationship with fellow churches in the area which we would not otherwise have had. We held our Members' Meetings and some other events at Holy Trinity Church, Claygate, our monthly Prayer Meetings at the Church of the Holy Name, the Roman Catholic church also in Claygate, and our Youth meetings were held at the Quaker Meeting House, Claremont Lane. The latter was in fact the very first venue for our services when the Baptists first began to meet in Esher in 1852.

We also had another dramatic and totally unexpected link with our past during the building. In April, Doug Dalgleish, our very good Site Manager, rang up Lee Johnson in some excitement. The builders, in taking down the brickwork of the old rear church

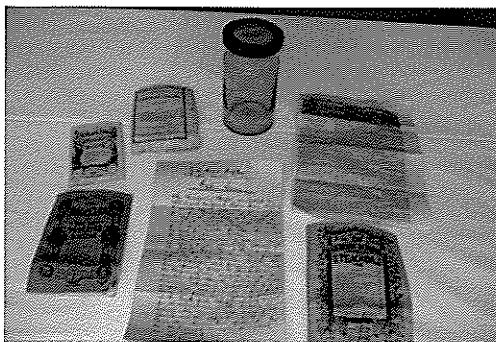


Foundation stone with recess for time capsule

hall had carefully taken out a foundation stone embedded in it, at our request. We wanted to preserve that elsewhere in the new building. This was laid, as we could see from its inscription, on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1870, at the building of what was to be the Sunday School Hall. Completely unknown to us however, placed in a carved-out space in the middle of the top surface of the

stone, and thus invisible, was a glass preserving jar in very good condition. In spite of the surrounding wall being demolished it had remained intact. Doug carefully kept this for Lee to examine. It proved to contain items of folded printed Sunday School material and a beautifully written 'Address', as it was called. This was signed by the then church leaders headed by the Rev John E Perrin to us on the occasion of their new extension! It was very moving to find this communication, a real link with our forebears of 143 years ago.

The letter referred to the front worship part of the church erected two years previously in 1868. Fortunately, we have traced some descendants of John Perrin and his wife Julia (who laid the 1870 foundation stone), and who expect to be at our official



Thanksgiving Service  
Contents from the time capsule  
for our opening on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2014. The items are pictured here, together with the Address. The clarity of the original material, now kept by the Church is perfect. What was also encouraging was to read the aims of their plans at that time for the new building, being:



This find enabled us to have publicity for our redevelopment in the local press, the *Surrey Advertiser*, and on *BBC Radio Surrey*, apart from it being recorded with interest at the *Surrey History Centre and Archives*, at Woking. A number remarked on the unusual nature of finding a time capsule as opposed to installing one.

News for Esher and Thames Ditton

## New time capsule placed in church

by Kitty Dann



had been a great focus for church members both young and old.

A TIME capsule was included in an Esher church where it will be unharmed for the next 100 years.

Earlier this year artefacts in a glass jar from 1875 were discovered in Esher Green Baptist Church in Park Road, which a large slab was removed from the church foundations as part of ongoing renovations.

After studying the contents of the jar, which contained perfectly preserved booklets and papers relating to the church, the church community decided to create a new time capsule for a future generation to discover.

On Tuesday August 27 the new piece of history was installed in Esher Green Baptist Church.

Les Johnson, pastor at Esher, said discovering the time capsule and the resulting project to install another

redevelopment team, said "The old time capsule we will be keeping for people who might want to see it."

"The documents in there have to be kept flat, and we are going to keep those in a safe."

Mr Bradley said a lot of people had been involved in supplying the material to go inside the new time capsule.

He said: "One of the kids' church teachers got up a questionnaire for them."

"They did a survey with a link square in the top where they could draw their pictures."

While the renovations take place the church is based at Esher High School although some meetings are held in various Esher churches.

Mr Bradley said: "I think people are excited to come back, now we see all the new rooms to come back here."

The time capsule has gained interest and I think some of the end values for us have been linking us right back to mid-Victorian times.

"Whether they will still be here in 2113 I don't know, but we certainly won't be. It will be exciting for them."

If all goes to plan, building work should be finished on the site towards the end of this year.

Mr Johnson said: "Excited is the word."

"We are pleased that it looks like we will be opening on time."

"We expect to be in here in December with some sort of opening ceremony in the new year."

The time capsule itself, constructed by a company called Ridgequest, is made of steel.

It is inscribed with the date it was buried and when it should be opened.

**Surrey Advertiser**

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, the Elders and the Property Redevelopment Team prayed on the site for the good continuance of the building. Most of this occurred during a summer of unusually good weather, and with no accidents. Doug Dalglish had also been able to establish good relationships with the neighbours. The building was finished on time, and we duly held our first Sunday Service on December 8<sup>th</sup>, when most of the building was available, with the remainder over the following week.



## Home at last



## The ending and a new beginning

So what does the result now look like? The whole is carpeted with a mid-green or light mauve flooring, helping to give a pleasant light feeling. All of the interior doors and skirting boards are of light beech wood. Wall decoration is also very light, in silver-grey or a white, except for feature walls in some rooms. The stylish lighting gives a subdued but wholly sufficient brightness. We now benefit from several very usable rooms of varying size as well as screens throughout. Heating and lighting is automated. Our new PA is the most up-to-date.

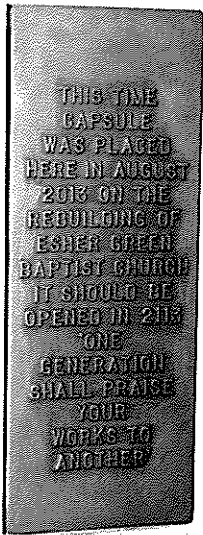


The vision and sound mixing desk

The rear worship hall, which has two roof lights, has several triple glazed, long, vertical, narrow windows with the heated and ventilated air coming through ducting at ceiling height. That part of the building had to be specially considered in order to reduce escaping noise to the minimum for the benefit of our surrounding neighbours. It has no opening windows for that reason.

It is interesting to record that our Property Redevelopment Team (PRT) had 33 meetings since it first met in 2008 to plan the project. There were 17 issues of *'The Promised Land'* written to inform

members of progress – or sometimes, lack of it. Besides this there were regular meetings of the Design Team professionals, sometimes jointly with the PRT, and numerous site meetings to liaise on progress. Decisions were taken on the financing, carefully monitored by the Treasurer through the maze of contract documents. Furnishings and colour schemes were decided. And we had an excellent Move Team who humped everything out of and back to Park Road while



New time capsule

we had a temporary local office nearby. Thankfully, our bank balance withstood all of this as we have been pretty much on budget, although we now face the continuing funding of our loan repayments. Fortunately, we do not anticipate a further project of this nature for the next 100 years as far as we know!

And that leads to our final remarks to record the time capsule we ourselves were prompted to install. This is placed in the wall (in fact an old chimney breast) in the new first floor front room. It contains material from our Sunday Schools and Youth, letters from the Elders and some members, photographs, and a copy of our book concerning the church history from 1852 to 2008, *A Tale of Two Churches*. The contents are sealed into a lead capsule with text moulded into the lid which itself remains exposed like a plaque. Our successors are

advised that it should be opened in 2113 and it has the message from the book of Psalms: *'One generation shall praise your works to another'*.

We can do no better than to conclude this account with the words ending the 1870 Address from the old time capsule:

*'Finally it is hoped that this school will stand as a perpetual testimony that, to the utmost of their ability, they [the Church members and Congregation] seek the present and future welfare of the rising generation.'*

We can only add to that our, *'Amen, Come Lord Jesus'*.

## **Dramatis personae**

### **Property Redevelopment Team:**

Responsibility for implementing the project.

Lee Johnson	<i>(Liaison with Professionals and Contractors)</i>
Bob Burnaby	<i>(Finance)</i>
Sue Higginson	<i>(Interior furnishing &amp; equipment)</i>
Elsbeth Nottage	<i>(Health &amp; Safety)</i>
John Bradley	<i>(Minutes, Publicity &amp; The Promised Land)</i>
(Jenny French)	<i>(Initially minute writer)</i>

Mike Taylor undertook all audio and visual design and installation.

### **Design Team:**

*Architects:* MEB Design Ltd., John Marsh, Alex Wood

*Employers Agent/Quantity Surveyors:*

Synergy Construction & Property Consultants:

Rob Buckley, Stuart Hawkes

*Structural Engineers:*

Angell Thompson & Partners: Steve Burbridge

*Electrical and Mechanical Engineers:*

Elementa Consulting Ltd., Simon Ebbatson

*Construction, Design and Management Coordinator:*

Sweett (UK) Ltd., Elspeth Nottage

*Acoustic advisor:* Tim Lewers

### **Other Professional Services:**

*Planning Consultant:*

Colin Smith

*Fundraising consultants:*

Fundraising Consultants Ltd.

Sarah Squire

*Solicitors:* Robinsons Solicitors

Stephen Marshall

*Photography:*

Jon Wilson

### **Contractors:**

Neilcott Construction Ltd., Site Manager Doug Dalglish,

### **Move Team:**

John Burgess Al Stevens

Alan Osborne Maurice Johnson (until Autumn, 2013)

**Loan Finance:** London Baptist Association

### **Charity Donors:**

Veolia Environmental Trust

The Norwood & Newton Settlement

Allchurches Trust

Golden Bottle Trust

The Beatrice Laing Trust

Reigate Baptist Church



EGBC Meeting Hall in late Victorian days

**This booklet is dedicated to:**

*All who have had anything to do with the redevelopment of Esher Green Baptist Church in 2013 and before, whether through prayer, giving, or service.*

Written and compiled by John Bradley

Designed by David Smith

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