



A short history of St Mark's Church Bromley, Kent

This booklet was originally written by Mr Robin Waldron in the early 1980's, drawing on a history of St Mark's by Mr F. L. Cooper. It has been revised to reflect developments since then in the church fabric and in St Mark's spiritual service to God and the community.

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Bromley Beginnings

The Latin name for Bromley, Bromlega, means ‘the heath where the Broom grows.’ In Roman times, and even in the Eighteenth Century, the countryside around Bromlega (or Bromleag), was woodland and heath, with plentiful blooms such as can still be seen on Hayes and Keston Commons. Until shortly before World War II, Broom Day was an annual event in the Bromley calendar, with sports, funfairs and processions during which people wore broom in their button-holes.

In A.D.862, as is recorded in the Charter of that year preserved in the British Museum, King Ethelbert of Wessex and Kent granted ‘ten ploughlands at Bromleag’ to his minister. In the Tenth Century a Charter from King Eadgar granted to the Church of Rochester ‘ten measures, which the inhabitants of Kent call ‘sulings’, in that place where the tillers of the soil have already given the name Bromley’. A ‘suling’ is as much land as can be ploughed in a year by a yoke of oxen, about 180 acres.

The Bishops of Rochester occupied Bromley Palace (later Stockwell College and now the Civic Centre). This is said to have been built by Bishop Gundulph of Rochester and restored by Bishop Gilbert de Glanvill in 1184. The Chapel at the Palace was rebuilt by Bishop Sprat (said to be the one who ‘could eat no fat’) who resided in Bromley between 1684 and 1713. In the Palace grounds a spring with medicinal virtues was discovered and dedicated to St Blaise, said to have the same properties as the waters at Tunbridge Wells. It attracted many visitors. St Blaise was patron saint of wool-combers and throats. People made the sign of the cross with a finger dipped in the well for throat complaints. When the Bishops left the Palace and the Lord of the Manor bought it, he had to allow people access to the well for healing. Having been long lost, the well was rediscovered in 1754 by a Bishop’s Chaplain, Reverend Harwood (hence the Harwood street name), who put a thatched roof over it. The well is still there in the Palace grounds.

In the 1800s the town grew rapidly, its character being changed by the coming of the railways and the growth of the residential accommodation for those working in London. Being a market town, it drew many visitors, numbers increasing as roads improved and fears of highwaymen on the road across Bromley Common receded.

There has been a church in Bromley since the chapel dedicated to St Blaise was built. Its precise date is not known, and it may have been a shrine, rather than chapel. It is not mentioned in Domesday.

The original Parish Church of Bromley (of which St Mark's became a chapel-of-ease) was of Norman origin, and dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, a practice common in the Roman Catholic Church until the Tenth Century. Possibly its original dedication was to St Blaise (or St Blaize), or to St James, since Bromley Fairs were traditionally held on St James's Day and on St Blaise's Day.

The parish church was restored at some time prior to 1400 and, like St Mark's, was largely destroyed in the Second World War, and later rebuilt. In the Nineteenth Century other churches such as St Luke's, Holy Trinity and Christ Church were built to serve the needs of the growing population.

Near to Bromley South Station the River Ravensbourne, which rises at Caesar's Well, Keston, is joined by the Bourne Water, a stream which descends intermittently from Hayes Lane, and Keston Stream, which rises at Keston and forms lakes in Holwood Park. At the corner of Sandford Road a house named 'Streamlet Place' used to stand, noted on a map of 1868. Another rivulet descended from the lakes in Bromley Palace grounds so that the river had a considerable flow of water. It continued under the railway to form a lake in Mill Vale, and then ran past Glass Mill Pond and on to Shortlands Bridge, passing the foot of Martins Hill. The Glass Mill has given its name to the lane that runs down from the Market Square to Shortlands, crossing the Ravensbourne on its way, and the Mill Pond is still there.

At Streamlet Place was another stream, which rose south of Toot's Wood (between the present Broadoaks Way and Pickhurst Park) and descended between Stone Road and Westmoreland Road, through the grounds of New Farm. All these were originally open streams, and are now mainly culverted. Before that, floods at Westmoreland Road by the junction with Hayes Road occurred frequently. A flood in September 1968 covered the whole of the Shortlands valley, with water eighteen inches deep in Westmoreland Road.

The first St Mark's church in South Bromley

In the 1880s there was already a worshipping congregation in the Bromley South area, and there had been talk for some years of building a local

church. In 1884, the Reverend A. G. Hellicar, then Vicar of Bromley, had received the gift from Mr Samuel Cawston of an iron church with furniture and fittings, which was formerly standing at Addison Road, Bromley Common. This iron church was erected in what is now St Mark's Road, Masons Hill, on a site kindly lent by Mr Eley Soames, and served as a place of worship until 1898. In 1891 the Bromley Record wrote, 'It is possible that a fund will be started to replace the iron structure in which the congregation of St Mark's has been worshipping for the past five years'.

In 1897 the decision was made. The site at the foot of Westmoreland Road was purchased by Mr Thomas Dewey and Mr Eley Soames for £500. In 1896 a meeting was held at South Hill Wood, Mr Dewey's house in Westmoreland Road, when the plans of the architect, Mr Evelyn Hellicar, son of the Vicar of Bromley, were approved. At that time the site was a very rural one, as described by an article in St Mark's News:

'The old lane, leading down from the main road to where St Mark's now stands, led to countless treasures for the children who peered through the broken slats of the old oak fence that bounded it on the school side. A long field sloped down to the banks of the Ravensbourne that flowed through the lush grass, buttercups and daisies in abundance, and in the early months of the year we found the deep golden cups of the marsh marigold. Of course, they always grew well out in the water, so that wet shoes and a scolding were inevitable. And since its name refers to its use in church festivals in the middle ages as one of the flowers devoted to the Virgin Mary, how strange that St Mark's Church should stand in the very spot where these glorious Spring flowers charmed so many young children – the children of bygone days. There too we found the pale pinkish Lady's Smock, a four petalled flower belonging to the crucifer, a cross-bearing family. Sometimes the field looked white with the countless pale blossoms, such was the charm of the old lane to me.'

When the river alongside St Mark's was open, the choirboys used to come straight out of church and play games jumping across it while still in their cassocks. Mr F. L. Cooper writes:

'The stream ran fast and deep along the South side of the church, and in the early 1900's we choir boys had difficulty in jumping from bank to bank; this water had its source at Holwood and is really the 'Blackbrook', joining the 'Ravensbourne' at the South West corner of the Church garden. When in full spate the combined waters often

overflowed into Hayes Road and Westmoreland Road, but in 1936 it was culverted, being finished in 1937.'

The second St Mark's church

Work began on the building while fundraising continued. On Saturday 22nd October 1898 the new church was consecrated by Dr Walsh, Suffragan Bishop of Dover, accompanied by Canon Murray, the Rural Dean, as Chaplain, and Sir John Hassard, KCB, Registrar of the Diocese of Canterbury. On the Sunday evening the church was so crowded that many worshippers could not gain admittance.

Only the bottom part of the tower was built originally, housing the main porch. The tower was raised to its full height in 1903, and dedicated on 10th January 1904. It was built of brick, faced with red bricks from Dunton Green, and decorated with Douling Stone from Shepton Mallet in Somerset. Keen observers will see that the bricks used for the completion do not quite match the original. The tower measures 94 feet from the floor to the top of the pinnacles and the base is 21 feet square exclusive of the buttresses. Access is via the spiral staircase in the South West buttress.

In 1903 the Parish of Bromley, including St Mark's, was transferred from the Diocese of Canterbury to that of Rochester.

The War Memorial, intended as 'both a memorial and a thank-offering', was planned in 1919. Sadly the original did not survive the 1941 bombing.

In 1937, St Mark's was licensed by the Bishop for banns and marriages. The first marriage was solemnised in January 1937 between Miss Nora Smith (daughter of Mr Sidney Smith, Churchwarden) and Mr K. L. Wood.

Proposals to divide the parish to constitute St Mark's as an independent parish had been debated on several occasions from 1908. In 1940, after much hard work on the part of many benefactors, St Mark's took its first steps, with the inauguration of its own Parochial Church Council (PCC). On 12th June 1941, the Reverend K. H. Jocelyn was licensed as Priest in Charge, by the Bishop of Rochester, with Acting Churchwardens Mr Sidney C. Smith and Mr Bernard Ayling, Church Secretary Mr A. E. Baker, and Treasurer Mr H. J. Davis. In 1947 the Reverend J. Alban Davies (a former Rugby International for Wales) became first Vicar of the Parish. From 1898 the former church was used as a church hall in St Mark's Road. The site had been purchased in 1913 for £275 from Mr Edgar Soames, brother of Mr Eley Soames (who died in 1908). It was replaced

by a new church hall on the same site in 1930, built with a legacy of £5,000 left by Miss Alice Soames, who died in 1928. The PCC met in the Soames Room in St Mark's Hall, and the hall was also used for theatricals - only one show is known to have been abandoned, when in November 1936 the cast, orchestra and audience all ran out on hearing Crystal Palace was on fire.

Services resumed in the church hall when the new church was destroyed in the Second World War, as commemorated by a plaque that remained in the hall until its sale in 1976. The building was then reconstructed as the H. G. Wells Centre for the Bromley Labour Party.

The original vicarage in Hayes Lane remains in use. Originally the curate's house was located in Pinewood Road, but in 1994 these premises were sold and replaced by the present house in Matfield Close. It is thought that part of the original church site was sold to raise funds, where North House and South House Hayes Road now stand.

Destruction in 1941

On Wednesday 16th April 1941, Bromley suffered a violent air raid attack. This started in the evening and went on into the early hours.

‘Many public buildings and shops besides private houses were seriously injured or destroyed; amongst the latter, both the Mother and Daughter Churches, viz. St Peter and St Paul's and St Mark's. The Church was struck apparently by a combination of incendiary and high explosive bombs. There was a serious fire in the South-West corner of the Church and garden and just inside the main entrance from the Porch. The whole of the Nave and North and South aisles were unroofed. The gallery was fallen, the font in situ but badly broken, the War Memorial Board broken and displaced. All window glass was destroyed and much of the stonework of the apertures broken. The pulpit and pitch pine seats were broken or covered with wreckage from fallen timbers. The East and West windows had their stone and brickwork broken, smashed and forced outwards on to the garden turf. In the Chancel much of the carved reredos and the Holy Table were in situ, slightly damaged. The organ was quite destroyed.’

Some of the salvaged articles were taken to St Mark's Hall. The reredos was protected by tarpaulins. Only the tower was left undamaged.

Eight churches in Bromley were bombed in that one night as a specific 'church raid'. Some believe the traitor 'Lord' Haw Haw helped the raiders to pinpoint them, as he once lived in Bickley, and mentioned Bromley in his Nazi broadcasts.

Many of the original features were lost as a result. The original church was Perpendicular Gothic, and furnished in classic High Victorian style. The East window originally featured a central principal window flanked by three panes either side, forming seven stained glass windows surmounted by a gothic arch. There were originally two bays on the south side, leading to the Lady Chapel. The windows depicted the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove surrounded by angels, with a vision of the Cross above and the Fall below. On one side was the Blessed Virgin Mary and on the other the Angel of the Lord. The West window contained fewer lights than the present one. The original font, which used to stand at the west end, survived the bombing but was knocked over by a lorry taking it away for storage. The Chancel Screen, the gift of Mr & Mrs H. M. Mansell in memory of their son, Lieutenant Leslie Wyndham Mansell, divided the Choir from the Nave. It was designed to be surmounted by a Rood consisting of a crucifix and two figures, but this feature was never added.

The 1953 rebuilding

An annual service was held the bombed church, witnessing the intention to rebuild. Meanwhile reconstruction was rapid. The new church was designed by T. W. G. Grant and built by David Nye and Partners. The original foundations were reused, preserving the previous dimensions and shape, and the nave arcades were incorporated into the new structure. The lower part of the chancel arch was also saved, along with the Victorian carved capitals, the choir stalls and sedilia.

On 3rd June 1952 H. R. H. The Duchess of Kent laid the corner stone for the reconstruction, and in 1953 St Mark's was rededicated by the Bishop of Rochester, Dr C. Chevasse, in presence of the Vicar, Reverend H. J. A. Edwards. In preparation for the reopening the War Memorial garden was replanted with rose trees, the main garden planted with flowering trees and bushes, and the lawns were returned.

A tour of the present building

Opposite the porch entrance is the most recent addition, the **Church Room**, which was dedicated in October 1980 by the Bishop of Rochester, Dr David Say. Doors on the right lead into the church itself.

Inside the church, the parabolic arches supporting **the Nave roof** were considered revolutionary in the 1950s and emphasise the feeling of height. They are made from sixteen laminated thicknesses of mahogany and each weighs a ton and a half. Beside the doors is a plaque recording the bombing and rebuilding.

To the right is the **Choir Vestry** surmounted by a **gallery**, above which can be seen **the west windows**, installed in 1956, which celebrate the missionary church in Africa, India and the Pacific. These portray:

Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891) Bishop of the Niger. Born in Ochugu, West Africa, he was carried off as a slave in 1819 and rescued three years later by the British Navy. At 19 he was baptised and educated at a Mission College. Whilst on the Niger expedition of 1841 his report so impressed the Church Missionary Society that he was invited to London and ordained. He took part in the Niger expedition of 1854 and was consecrated the first black Bishop in 1864. A Doctor of Divinity of Oxford, he translated the Bible into Yoruba.

Bishop John Coleridge Patteson (1827-1871) English Martyr Bishop, was educated at Eton and Balliol, and became an outstanding linguist, pastor and educator. He founded the Melanesian Mission and went out to the Pacific Islands in the ship 'Southern Cross'. He was a missionary for 16 years before being consecrated Bishop of Melanesia in 1861. Aged 44, he was murdered by natives in Santa Cruz.

Bishop Vednayakam Samuel Azariah (1874-1947) was born in Madras State and brought up as a Christian. He aimed to evangelise the Indian people, to help the Indian Church and to unite Christians in India. In 1912 he became Bishop of Dornakal, the first Indian Bishop of the Anglican Church in India.

Scenes from the bishops' lives are also shown, with God's command: '*Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*'.

Turning towards the altar, in the **North Aisle** is the present **Font**. The wave patterns in the stonework denote its purpose as a place of baptism. In the north east wall is the **Corner Stone**. Walled up in a cavity behind it are the Order of Service of Rededication in 1952, a set of coins from the 1951 Festival of Britain, and copies of the parish magazine, local newspapers and 'The Times'. The Coats of Arms on the right of the Clergy Vestry door (and on the Lady Chapel screen in the South Aisle) are those of the old Borough of Bromley, depicting the ravens of Ravensbourne, and the Diocese of Rochester.

The **organ** has three manuals and was built by Rushworth and Dreaper of Liverpool in 1954, incorporating salvaged elements of the original instrument. It was restored and refurbished in the 1990s. During rebuilding the console was relocated to the Lady Chapel, just behind the South Pier of the Chancel Arch.

The present **lectern** depicts St Mark's winged lion and is in memory of Mr Richard Ayling. It was carved by Mr John Crawford of Ashford after the war. The **choir stalls** are those salvaged from the old church. After the war the screen between the Choir and the Nave was not replaced, opening and lightening the church.

Above **the altar** is the fine restored **reredos**, the gift of Sir Thomas Dewey, the Charter Mayor in 1903. Many of the present vestments, kneelers and altar frontals were embroidered by his descendant by marriage, Janet Dewey. The reredos, originally intended to be of alabaster, was in fact carved from oak by Mr George Rose of Haddenham in Buckinghamshire and installed in 1923. It has flanking panelling on the side walls, incorporating sedilla and piscine, and standard candlesticks. On niches are figures of St Michael and St George, both killing dragons, given in 1924 and 1927, respectively by Mr Rose and his daughter. The altar rails by John Crawford are in memory of Mrs Frances Poulton.

The figures represent, from left to right , **St Justus**, first Bishop of Rochester, who commenced the building of Rochester Cathedral in A.D.604, holding a sword for justice and wearing a stone round his neck for penitance; **St Augustine**, first Archbishop of Canterbury, sent to evangelise England in A.D.597, holding a cross; **St Mark**, Patron Saint with his gospel; **St Peter**, one of the patron saints of Bromley parish church; **St Gregory the Great**, the Pope who sent St Augustine to England, wearing the papal tiara; and **St Mildred**, a Kentish royal princess, daughter of King Egberts cousin, Domneva. She became Abbess of Thanet, a

foundation of A.D.680 destroyed by the Danes in A.D.850 but restored by King Canute, and then endowed by King Egbert. The monastery was situated near Minster on the Isle of Thanet. She holds a model of her nunnery, and a dove on her shoulder signifies the Holy Spirit.

The **central panel** of the altar was renewed after the war, with the text '*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*'. This serves both as an invitation to receive communion, and recalls the church's destruction just after Easter in 1941 and its post-war resurrection.

The **east window** replaces a much wider Perpendicular window blown out by the bombing. It was designed by E. Liddall Armitage and executed by J Powell and Sons, and depicts *God the Holy Trinity*. The hand of the *Father*, who creates and holds the world, is at the very top, with the *Holy Spirit* in the form of a dove below, with *Jesus Christ* enthroned in majesty. His hand is raised in blessing, and the orb symbolises the redeeming power of the cross. Beneath this we see the scene at the empty tomb on the first Easter morning, '*He is risen*'. On the left is *St Mark*, his winged lion overhead, and below he is depicted writing his Gospel, possibly in the great library of Alexandria. On the right is *St Peter*, and above him crossed keys, symbolising the power of the kingdom of heaven. Below we see the moment when Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, '*Thou art the Christ*'.

The medieval style **hatchments** feature the royal coat of arms, commemorating the rededication in Coronation year, and a composite, incorporating the arms of the Bishop of Rochester, Sir Thomas Dewey, St Mark's principal benefactor, and Reverend H. J. A. Edwards, Vicar in 1952. Their respective initials appear alongside.

The **Lady Chapel** was dedicated as the chapel of the Annunciation in the name of the Reverend L. J. Elwin in 1911, one of the early Curates-in-Charge. Much of the structure survived the bombing, although his memorial tablet on the west wall was damaged. The interior was much simplified during the reconstruction.

The **window** is a post-war replacement by the Whitefriars Glass Works, whose trademark of a tiny white friar is visible in the bottom right hand corner. Small coloured flecks of glass recall the bomb damage. The central light depicts Archangel Gabriel's message to Mary that she is to bear the Christ child, with the Holy Spirit symbolised as a dove above her. To the right, we see Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth; and to the left, Mary as a child with her mother, St Anne, being taught to say her prayers.

In the **South aisle** is the **Book of Remembrance** and above it the **Memorial Board** listing local servicemen killed in the Great War, which was rescued from the bombed church. At the rear is the **Children's Corner**, and glass cases and bookshelves containing reference and archive material.

Many articles and fittings in the church were contributed as generous memorial or commemorative items, or funded by legacies. These include silver candlesticks, the sanctuary lamp, the altar cross, vases and frontals, vestments, and more prosaically, sound equipment, carpets, books, garden shrubs and bench, and the like, which are vital to a modern church. Colourful and individually designed kneelers were stitched and donated by members of the congregation in the 1990s. In 1989 the **'Friends of St Mark's Church'** was formed, and their donations have financed significant enhancements and refurbishments, including the Chancel platform, staging, a new public address system, a video link, emergency lighting, toilets, ladders, piano, service books and bibles. St Mark's is most grateful to all our benefactors.

Outside is the replacement **War Memorial**, which previously stood nearer the gate. On the south side of the church is the **Garden of Remembrance**. The **tower** was cleaned and restored in 1987. The old pinnacle, which now stands adjacent to the tower door, shows its parlous condition before the work was done. The clock is original, and is wound manually once a week.

Worship and Community at St Mark's

St Mark's aims to nurture a welcoming and positive Church presence in Bromley South, bringing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit into worship and the wider community. All are welcome here, and we seek to look beyond ourselves and our immediate surroundings. We are one of the few churches which is open to visitors throughout the day, seven days a week.

Our clergy and many other church members play active roles in St Mark's Voluntary Aided Primary School. The school dates from 1898 and moved to its present site in Aylesbury Road in 1984 from Mason's Hill. The old premises are now used by Bromley's youth services.

For many years St Mark's was closely associated with Bromley Hospital, offering pastoral service to patients, relatives and staff. This came to an end in 2003 when the hospital was amalgamated into the Princess Royal

University Hospital at Farnborough and the site sold. Similar links persist with Bromley Police Station; the Bertha James Centre, which caters for the elderly; the Rainbow Day Nursery; the Phoenix Pre-School, for children with special needs; and other charitable and voluntary agencies in the parish. Ministry involves church members taking part in modern outreach activities, such as street pastors and house visiting. Pastoral and leadership connections exist with many local welfare, social, civic and business organisations, whose representatives attend St Mark's from time to time. There are two services each year attended by the 3rd Bromley Scout Group, which was founded by a former curate of St Mark's, the Revd. A. G. Parham, and the 1st Bromley Brownies. The premises are used by many groups, and the church is a popular concert venue.

Relations between St Mark's and other local churches are strong. In 1990, Bromley Central Methodists shared St Mark's whilst awaiting the completion of their new church, the old one having been demolished to make way for the Glades Shopping Centre. Each Church held its own service on Sunday mornings but on Sunday evenings the service was combined. A similar sharing arrangement was undertaken with the Bromley Salvation Army Temple Corps between August 1992 and October 1993, during the refurbishment of their temple. In 2010 St Mark's gladly played host to St John's Coptic Orthodox Church until they secured their own premises in Elmers End, and currently in 2011 an Elim Pentecostal church uses the church room for services.

Prayer and eucharistic worship is at the heart of St Mark's, and services usually follow a welcoming, traditionally reverent style. We are particularly blessed in terms of music, and St Mark's choir is in popular demand for guest visits to various cathedrals and churches. Evensong is sung twice a month. Families and children feature strongly in the life of St Mark's, and are catered for by a thriving Sunday School and youth group, a mothers and toddlers group and special Children's services. We have numerous activities and groups which offer spiritual depth, enrichment, cheer, comfort and encouragement to all who take part. You are most welcome to join us.

If you have enjoyed your visit, why not become a Friend of St Marks? Membership costs £25 per year and is open to all who feel attachment or admiration for our people, work and building. Your support will help in maintaining the fabric, furnishings, and the pastoral work of St Mark's.