GROWTH IN A PARISH

SAINT LUKE ELTHAM PARK 1904—1940

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in fellowship and gratitude

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PREFACE

This history came out of our wish to clear more space in the choir vestry safe. Records that had not been touched for well over half a century revealed a fascinating picture of parish life. But writing it up has not been easy. One of the special problems of local history is that it easily becomes a series of unconnected stories or a list of unrelated facts. So perhaps I should explain how I have approached the subject.

First, I have kept the story to the first 40 years because that is the period that provides the most interesting documents and the best grounds for coming to any conclusions. As it is, there are some significant events that have left no written traces. I know, for instance, that there was a big upset between the Vicar and some of the choir in 1916 or 1917. But in the absence of clear evidence I have not wanted to say anything about it. That sort of problem becomes more acute as the documents become duller. I suspect that if I were to come much closer to the present I should run the risk of passing off our guesses and impressions about people and events as the final word; and that is a burden I do not want to carry.

Secondly, I have tried to give the sort of detail that will help us see our place of worship with new eyes. Even empty screw holes can tell a story. The Church is rooted in the past, as well as the present. To forget that is to be guilty of ingratitude and —even worse— to limit our experience of the communion of saints in earth and heaven.

Thirdly, I have tried to explain some of the things that may lie behind the ebb and flow of the life of our church. Problems that are put into context often seem less overwhelming. It is also true that some of our easy assumptions suddenly become less easy. This may help us understand not only our present but also our future.

My special thanks go to Mr Henry Martin, whose long memory and vigilant eye have rescued me from more than one error. Miss Margaret Evans generously allowed me to make full use of her scholarly researches into the history of Eltham. Mr Kenneth Richardson of the South London Ecclesiological Society helped me considerably with some sources. I am also glad to acknowledge the work and publications of the Eltham Society.

John Thewlis, Vicar
Feast of the Venerable Bede 1992

ELTHAM PARK ESTATE

PLANNING THE PARISH

BEGINNINGS

The story of the parish starts when the Bexleyheath line was built in 1895. Well Hall station was opened and the village connected to the capital by a good train service. By 1900 Cameron Corbett MP had acquired the Eltham Park estate for housing development. Eltham had been a sleepy village, but now it was to become a commuter suburb.

To begin with, the area remained part of the ancient parish of Eltham. Pastoral care of the new arrivals was the task of the curate, who opened a Sunday School in the temporary buildings that later, became the Gordon School. But it was an age of small parishes and church expansion. Wesleyans and Baptists were already on the scene. Loyal Anglicans felt that the Free Churches should not be allowed to have things all their own way on the estate. With more houses on the way and a new station planned (Eltham Park, originally Shooters Hill), in 1903 the Woolwich Church Extension Association decided to support forming a new parish.

The boundaries were very wide: up to Shooter's Hill Road on the north and to the old manor boundary on the east. The inhabited part was at first very self-contained. The tramway to Woolwich was not to be built until 1911. Westmount Road beyond the church to the Welcome Inn was not to be metalled for another quarter of a century. Deansfield Road (now Rochester Way) had to wait for the construction of the Progress Estate before it would lead anywhere. The way out to the village was past Well Hall Parade; or, if you preferred, past empty lots to the bigger houses at the bottom of Westmount Road.

In forming the parish, as often was the case in those days, there was a proviso that seems strangely unjust to modern eyes. Any parochial fees (basically, funerals, weddings and churchings) would go, not to the new incumbent, but to the Reverend Elphinstone Rivers as long as he remained Vicar of Eltham. The priest of the dusty new area would therefore be paid a minimum stipend without endowments or emoluments. Between £100 and £200 of the stipend would have to be raised locally. At least to start with, it was going to be payment by results. S.Luke's was not a plum living.

There was nothing outwardly distinguished about the first priest, appointed as Parish Missioner in April 1904. Walter Pountney Rowley had not been to university, almost certainly because his family could not afford to send him there. Instead, he had attended the High-Church theological college at Lincoln for three years from 1881. He was now in his forties and clearly had no powerful friends or backers. But the Bishop of Rochester spoke warmly of his work as curate in two difficult parishes (Holy Trinity South Wimbledon and All Saints West Dulwich). He was faithful and hard working, and not likely to waste his first big opportunity.

OUTSIDE HELP

From the very first, the parish had powerful friends. Chief amongst them was the chairman of the Woolwich Church Extension Association, Captain Sir George Vyvyan KCMG RN JP of Forest Lodge, Shooters Hill and the driving force behind all the planning. Without his help, as it turned out, certain vital grants would never have been obtained and the church would not have been built.

But over the years an even greater contribution was to be made by Everard Hesketh, the man who re-founded the Dartford engineering firm of J & E Hall and turned it into the world's leading marine refrigeration manufacturers. His capacity for hard work was legendary. His commercial vision and acumen were considerable. Above all, Hesketh was by any standards a remarkable Christian man. He never failed to turn up for the funeral of an employee; he started a non-contributory benefit scheme; and in 1897 he quietly got the Vicar of Dartford to make sure that some of his striking workmen got a proper Christmas dinner.

Though he worked in Dartford he lived at Beachcroft in Court Road. By no means everyone in Eltham welcomed the newcomers of the Corbett Estate. Hesketh's view was different. He decided to make S.Luke's his spiritual home. The practical benefit of his support was to be enormous.

There were other well wishers too. A 'Well Hall Building Fund's subscription list of September 1904 shows that out of a current total of about £450, there was one donation of £50, two of £20, seven of £10 and nine of £5 each. Going on for half came from wealthy outsiders. Again, the 1908 annual dinner of the by then flourishing S.Luke's Cricket Club shows that the honorary vice-chairman was Sir John Puleston, a deputy Lieutenant of the county of Kent.

It was upon outsiders that the new priest would be counting for day-to-day help in the parish. There were soon to be six volunteer District Visitors, responsible for keeping an eye on the homes in the streets assigned to them. Two of them lived in the parish: four did not. There was never any lack of support from inside the parish. But leadership and money always tended to come much more from outside. The whole venture had been undertaken by a few eager and generous people. This was a pattern that was going to repeat itself for the next thirty years.

SOCIAL PATTERNS

The people moving into the parish were modest. The big £700 houses were being built south of the railway: S.Luke's was the area for property that was half the price. Corbett seems to have built only one double- fronted house in the parish, 145 Westmount Road; a coach house survives in the garden on the southwestern corner of Westmount Road and Dumbreck Road. The pattern was to change only a little in the years shortly before the Great War. Somewhat larger houses were to be built in Eltham Park Gardens and parts of Greenvale Road. This is where the registers show the solicitor's and stockbroker's clerks lived, and in 1916 the advertising manager of *The News of the World*.

For the rest, it was a parish of clerks, salesmen and travellers; of manual workers and domestic servants; of teachers and the occasional schoolmaster; and of tradesmen like tailors, compositors and jewellers. There are some faint oddities: a tea taster, a stained-glass artist, a botanical collector, a music hall artist, and the captain of a tug. In the very early days there were even a couple of farm-labourers. The infant mortality was the lowest in the borough and by 1913 so was the birth rate.

They were decent folk who had to work for their living. Many of them were what we would today call commuters. As time went on, many more of them worked in and around Woolwich Arsenal and the garrison. When Colonel Barrington-Foote, formerly of the Royal Artillery, opened a Grand Bazaar in January 1908 he made a rather unhappy reference to this fact. He was, he said, 'particularly glad to come to where the church was placed in what he would term a somewhat poor neighbourhood. He did not think there were any great houses in Well Hall.' Indeed there were not: though we need not suppose that people liked to be called poor.

But perhaps it was significant that the Vicar was not going to live in the parish: it was felt there was not a suitable house. He rented a double- fronted dwelling at 25 Balcaskie Road. Quite a lot of those who worshipped at S.Luke's came from this more spacious part of the Corbett estate. Some of them had started off in the northern part and 'bettered' themselves. But there were also others who, for reasons no longer clear; obviously preferred S.Luke's to S.John's or Holy Trinity. This is one of the most important facts about the first thirty years of the parish, and it is worth repeating. For one reason or another, the leading laypeople so often came from outside.

THE MISSION HALL

The formal start of the parish was very modest. In March 1904 the Vicar of Eltham sent out a leaflet appealing for funds to construct a mission room. The illustration shows a five-windowed building about 50 feet by 20 feet with a porch at either end and two separate WCs. (It now forms the basis of the Parish Lounge.) The cost was estimated at £700: in fact, it was a little more. About £224 was in hand and £150 had been promised in grants. Another £125 was needed before work could start.

On Tuesday 26 April 1904 a public meeting of all those 'interested in the Well Hall Mission' was addressed at Roper Street schools by the Bishop of Rochester. It comes as something of a shock for those who know something of S.Luke's more recent history to see that amongst those present was the young Maude Absolom, who was accompanying her parents and who in later years was to be S.Luke's foremost honorary lay worker.

The Bishop had introduced the new Parish Missioner in glowing terms. His first services in the new parish were held in an upstairs room at 16 Deansfield Road (now 552 Rochester Way) on Sunday 8 May 1904. Work on the mission hall began quickly, and it was opened on 22 September 1904 with a congregation of over 300. During his address, the Bishop of Southwark told the congregation that 'he was walking from his house at Blackheath a short time ago to perform a duty at the Eltham Parish Church when he wandered from his way and stood in the midst of picturesque trees and waving grass. That spot was now the parish of S.Luke's.' It is an interesting sidelight on how quickly the area had changed. It is an even more interesting sidelight on the pressure that suffragan bishops worked under in 1904.

BUILDING THE CHURCH

EARLY ARRANGEMENTS

SAINT Luke's was not to become a parish in the strict legal sense for another five years. But for most practical purposes that did not matter. The first parish meeting took place on Thursday 13 October 1904. It is important to remember that in 1904 there was no such thing as a Parochial Church Council. Occasional gatherings like this one were the only means of talking over parish affairs. Of course, the Easter Vestry was held each year for the election of churchwardens. Even so, despite the very large congregations, this one opportunity for church democracy could usually only attract attendances of between thirty and fifty.

In 1904 people were still avid readers. One of the first decisions was to start a parish magazine in January 1905. It had a bright and elaborate cover (with cherubs) and a monthly High-Church inset The Sign. Each month the Vicar wrote a wonderfully Victorian but always curiously touching letter, full of exhortations to come to share in the joy of Holy Communion at the Eucharist.

FUND-RAISING

High on the agenda was raising enough money to pay off the debt on the hall and to finance the building of a permanent church. The first great effort was a grand three-day bazaar that started on Wednesday 7 December 1904. Messrs Wilkins Brothers of Liverpool provided the decor, the stallholders all wore a distinctive flower badge and the stalls were arranged to look like a street in Delhi. We are told that 'a very animated and attractive sight was presented to visitors as they entered'.

Many of the stalls have featured in one form or another at bazaars ever since. But rather more intriguing to our eyes are the three-course supper that was offered for Is 6d (7'/4p), a shooting jungle, a fairy well and magic pump; and the fact that, as the Eltham Times put it, 'in a picturesque retreat Miss Rathbone's mandolin band discoursed sweet music.' All this in a dual-purpose church hall measuring fifty feet by twenty feet that had to be cleared and re-ordered in time for divine service on Sunday morning.

This event was the first of many that continued to be held long after the church had been built and consecrated. In December 1909 a two-day bazaar had all the usual items on sale and the promise of music, competitions and other amusements each evening —including mysteriously entitled 'phonofiddle selections'. It is obvious from the entrance ticket that the best

time to go was on the Thursday afternoon, because that would cost a shilling (5p), whereas on Friday it was sixpence, and both the evenings only threepence. Enterprises like these made a very important contribution to parish finances. Even today £320 profit is not to be sniffed at: the bazaar in 1973 made £414. In 1908 that sort of sum was immense.

A PERMANENT BUILDING

A good deal of money would be needed. There had been no guarantee that S.Luke's would ever come out of the mission hall. There seems in fact to have been a lot of heart-searching about building a permanent church at all.

But the new mission priest had made a great impact on the area. His services were renowned for their heartiness. As early as December 1904 there were 250 children in the Sunday School, and the boys' classes in particular were overcrowded. Perhaps the fact that Rowley was a keen cricketer had something to do with it: though we should bear in mind that the Sunday School had already been started by the curate from S.John's some time before. Thirty candidates were confirmed in 1905. S.Luke's seems to be mentioned more in the local press than any other Eltham church. Within a year services in the hall were filled to overflowing.

THE COST

If Rowley was building up a viable parish, then he deserved an adequate church. The population was expected to rise to about 4,000. The aim was therefore to build a church that would seat 800 —that was the sort of assumption you could make in 1905. But the authorities thought that it would be prudent to start more modestly. A church that could seat 500 would be guaranteed a grant of at least £350 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. In July 1905 this is what was decided upon.

The total cost was expected to come to about £8,000, in 1905 a daunting amount. A manual worker would be lucky to be getting 30s (£1.50) a week. A compositor or skilled fitter would be getting 40s (£2). When it was introduced on a very limited scale in 1908, the old-age pension was 5s (25p).

What Vyvyan, Hesketh and their fellow organisers wanted was for the people who actually lived in the parish to feel that they had paid for their own church by 'small and regular subscriptions'. But there could be little real hope of that. Difficulties at the Arsenal had brought unemployment; in many homes there was no money to spare.

So once again it was outsiders who came to the rescue. Sir George Vyvyan gave £100 outright, and Everard Hesketh promised 100 guineas in instal-

ments. Even then, if it had not been for Sir George's contacts through his deputy Mastership of Trinity House, vital grants would not have come through and the church would not have been built at all: even Hesketh was doubtful. By the time the foundation stone was laid, all bar £1,500 of the builder's contract price of £4,315 had been raised. At a public meeting on Saturday 22 January 1910 it was thankfully announced that the total building debt of £5,297 11s (£752 Os 1 Id was for the hall) had been wiped out. It had taken six years, and about £2,500 had been raised locally. Comparative costs are difficult, but we can probably say that in modem terms the buildings had cost at the very least half a million pounds.

So we can be all the more thankful that the Building Committee was absolutely determined that if the job was worth doing at all it was worth doing well. The foremost church architect of the day, Temple Lushington Moore, was commissioned to draw up plans, and Goddards of Dorking won the tender. Moore's fees came to £275. Looking back after over 80 years, we can see that the parish got excellent value for the money.

DEDICATION AND CONSECRATION

The foundation stone was laid on a gloriously fine day, 7 July 1906, by the Bishop of Southwark's brother, MP for the University of Oxford. A year later, on 5 July 1907, the church was dedicated by the Bishop himself. In his address, Dr Talbot reminded his hearers that there was still a great deal to be done. There was, for instance, no organ. Music for the great service was provided by Mrs Rowley at the harmonium and also by the players of the Eltham Park Baptist orchestra —a remarkable piece of ecumenism for 1907.

As yet, the church was dedicated and not consecrated. The distinction lies in the legal status of the building and its curtilage (i.e. the surrounding land). The patron of the old parish of Eltham was away in China and his consent was needed before consecration could take place. So a second great service was held on 7 July 1908, and everything, apart from the hall and the land in front of and behind it, was solemnly separated in sacros usus. The final legal assignment of the parochial area took place in March 1909, and it is from this date that the marriage registers were kept.

EARLY YEARS

THE ORIGINAL CHURCH

THE church was left open all day for private prayer. It was long and lofty, with sombre walls and plain leaded windows. The north aisle and the nave were much as they are now, though there were originally more chairs. Though it was always slightly below ground level, it was not Moore's fault that the north aisle is now so dark. When he designed the church the houses nearby had not been built, and the hall was half the size it is today.

There was still no south aisle, though some of the windows now installed there were in the original south wall. The east windows, like the other windows, were plain: the present not very distinguished stained glass was installed in 1958. In fact, so much light came in through them that in 1912 the church officers decided to ask Moore what could be done to reduce the glare.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BUILDING

To get an idea of what Moore intended at S.Luke's, we have to stand at the west doors and look to the east. We have to imagine that there was no screen and no south aisle. Our gaze in 1907 would have travelled past the marching pillars straight up to the fairly plain high altar. If Moore had had his way there would also have been a great cross over the chancel step. The interesting tunnel effect along the windows of north wall was one of Moore's trademarks, as was the elaborate cross on the foundation stone by the font.

With the font on your right and the holy place in the distance, the architect was putting before you the whole of the Christian pilgrimage. You entered the Church by baptism and through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ you were bound for heaven. You went up for the foretaste of heaven in the Blessed Sacrament, and you came back down and out again, strengthened for the business of work in the world. Moore was himself a high churchman —witness the fact that in the north wall of the sanctuary he put a cupboard suitable for an aumbry for the Reserved Sacrament— and S.Luke's reflects the tradition.

SOME EXTRAS

The plans show that what is now the organ chamber was meant to be the 'north chancel aisle' with seating for 43. The pattern of tile and floorboard can still be seen there, though one suspects that it was simply a device to

increase the seating and so guarantee grants from outside bodies. The organ was meant to be in a gallery, or perhaps even in what is now an upstairs storeroom.

Moore was a precise as well as an imaginative man. The pulpit was at first intended to be on the south side, but at a late stage was switched to the north because then there would be marginally fewer seats out of the preacher's sight. A shaded drawing survives to show the care with which Moore worked this out.

But there are one or two puzzles. Moore provided for a tower at the south-east corner of the church. Just why he should have put a tiny inaccessible gallery above the west door is a mystery. One strikingly modem note is his intention to make room for an electric ventilation fan in the roof, but nothing ever came of it and we have no indication why. And the story behind the curious shields on the ends of the beams is itself curious. At the last moment Moore apparently told his clerk of works that he wanted some ecclesiastical designs. Somewhat nonplussed, the clerk of works turned to the local estate agent, D.R. Cole, who was also a member of the Building Committee. The result is what we can see: and they still look like an afterthought.

Obviously there had to be more than just bare walls. Once again, outsiders came to the rescue. Sir George and Lady Vyvyan gave the choir stalls and their panelling. Mr Lindemans of North Park gave the pulpit; Mr Powell the altar; Mr and Mrs Cuff the sanctuary rails; and Mr and Mrs Hesketh the altar curtains, frontal and furnishings. The designs are those of the architect and the quality of the wood excellent. We are fortunate that they form a stylistic whole.

THE SCREEN

The first big addition to the interior was a departure from what Moore had wanted, and it has been a source of controversy ever since. Screens were fashionable furniture, and it was not long before S.Luke's wanted one. Moore's design had provided for a simple open screen with a cross or crucifix. But this was not to the taste of the Church Completion committee who asked him in 1913 to provide them with something more elaborate. He never did, and the design finally chosen in July 1914 was by Hedley and Douglas Pollock and executed by Dart and Francis. It added two extra end-panels to Moore's choir stalls, six uprights and a crossbeam. The tracery was later added by Weatherley, who also provided the war memorial, and it was installed in memory of Mrs Rowley in 1921. Though it is a fine piece of craftsmanship the same cannot honestly be said of the design. It was about this time and possibly through this disagreement that Moore parted company with S.Luke's, to our very great loss.

MORE FITTINGS AND DECORATIONS

The first organ was bought in 1907 from S.Barnabas Rotherhithe for the princely sum of £35: we can imagine its range and quality. An electric lighting system was installed, and it did duty for another 70 years. Heating was by means of a coke boiler and hot-water radiators and pipes.

The first of the embellishments came in 1910 when the Misses Carter anonymously donated the copy of Caravaggio's Ecce Homo. Their father had come across the young artist many years before and had been impressed by his work. It is a large picture and not easy to display —hence, one suspects, its donation! It started in the chancel, on the west side of the pillar by the organ. For many years it hung on the pillar on the north side of the nave. Then it was removed to the middle of the south wall. At present [1992] it is on the south wall of the Lady Chapel. Where it really belongs is not easy to say.

THE WORSHIP

S.Luke's very quickly got the reputation of hearty services with music that was bright and congregational. Mrs Rowley was organist for the first four years, and no doubt that helped. All services of course came from the Book of Common Prayer, though there was a Children's Service on the second and fourth Sundays at 3.30. Rowley did not wear vestments (for his generation a sign of very 'advanced' views) but he did wear a stole.

The best-attended services were Matins at 11 and Evensong at 6.30. But Rowley was always exhorting his flock to make the Eucharist the centre of their spiritual lives. 'Give me, my dear people, this reward,' he once wrote, 'more than I know I deserve, the reward of feeling that I have in some small way helped you to a deeper and truer love and recognition of the Church's worship.' As well as the Eucharist every Sunday at 8, on the first and third Sundays there was a 'second celebration' at 12.15 after Matins. From June 1909 on the third Sunday the Eucharist was choral. The Litany was said publicly every Wednesday and Friday at 11, and on Wednesday evenings at 8 there was Evensong and address. On saints' days throughout the year, and on Thursdays in Advent and Lent, the Vicar was careful to offer the Eucharist at 7 in the morning.

When Rowley went on sick leave for six months late in 1913, his locum was the Reverend H.Sutherland Gill. The choice may have been significant: both his sermon topics and his later career as Vicar of S.John Upper Norwood show Gill to have been even more openly in the high church tradition. His work at S.Luke's was very much appreciated, and he was given a handsome presentation when he left in May 1914.

CHURCH AND PARISH

With no public houses on the Corbett Estate and cinemas only in their infancy, Eltham's churches and chapels were the chief focuses of social life in the years leading up to the Great War. This was especially the case for the children and young people of the parish, and it goes a long way to explain why choir and Sunday School were so popular.

Though the hall seems only to have been used for church functions, this was how S.Luke's felt it was serving the needs of the area. Church allegiance was not too much to ask. Between 30 and 40 children were baptised each year, pro rata perhaps twice as many as in the 1980's.

We therefore read of a Christmas Tree entertainment for 250 children and their parents in January 1905, at which six trees were decorated and lit in the hall. In December 1905 it was the turn of the children themselves to perform a musical comedy Bluebell to raise £6 7s 3d for the building fund. There were separate Bible classes for boys and girls on Sunday afternoons at 3, the boys meeting at 28 Beech Hill and the girls at 37 High Street. For a time, from autumn 1909, there was a morning Sunday School at 10 as well as the one at 3. A communicants' guild met monthly on the Saturday evening before the first Sunday in the month.

Walter Osborn Langridge

Frederick Bacheldor

Walter Pountney Rowley

as temple Moore wanted it as it was built

Vicar, first churchwardens and sidesmen
Vyvyan is on the Vicar's right, Hesketh is fourth from the left

This was an age when Temperance principles were still very general. The Band of Hope was the junior branch, and it met 50 strong in the hall on Tuesday evenings. Numbers seem to have fluctuated quite seriously. Modem youth-workers should take heart from the fact that the leader in 1909 wrote in the parish magazine that he could not be held responsible for the bad behaviour of his boy members in the street!

Less obviously religious was the Young Men's Social Club, which opened in November 1909 for church members of fifteen years and over, and which started off with 25 members. There was a Mothers' Meeting every Monday afternoon: in 1911 it became a branch of the Mothers Union. A Ladies' Working Party met every Wednesday afternoon. The needs of the wider church were tackled through a thriving Missionary Association.

Of more general interest were the lectures on the outlines of English history, given in 1905 on alternate Wednesdays by Lieutenant Chamberlain RN; some talks on the Zulu War; and in May 1912 an 'Entertainment in Aid of the Titanic Disaster Fund', which raised £12 9s.

The sole venture into the realm of politics came with Lloyd George's proposals to disestablish the Church of Wales. The Vicar wrote vehemently against the measure and he organised several meetings.

OVERWORK

Rowley worked extremely hard. He had the ability to attract talented people and to inspire an immense amount of love and loyalty. Photographs show him to be white-haired and serious. Memories after 70 years are not always reliable, but certainly towards the end of his ministry here he was less than light-hearted.

He did not work alone, and he could always depend upon his district visitors. By 1912 there were nine of them, covering Grange Hill, Deansfield, Dumbreck, Elibank, Craigton and Dairsie roads. Fr Gill during his brief ministry in 1914 said that he had never come across 'such a splendid band of willing workers' as he had found at S.Luke's.

From April 1909 until May 1913, Deaconess Mary of the Rochester and Southwark Order of Deaconesses helped the Vicar. According to the rules of the time, that help had to be pastoral and not liturgical. Rowley was responsible for finding £20 of her annual stipend: in 1913 he was driven to organising a Jumble Sale to raise the sum.

The heavy burden of all the preaching, catechising and worship therefore fell upon the Vicar. We should remember that he belonged to a generation that set a high value on pulpit eloquence —and eloquence takes a good deal of preparation. Shortly before his resignation he is to be found complaining in the parish magazine that he really should not have to be going round to seek out confirmation candidates: the parents of candidates should be seeking him.

In February 1911 he felt the work was getting too much for one man, and he appealed to the parish for £40 a year towards the cost of an assistant priest. The parish found the money readily enough, but neither the Ecclesiastical Commissioners nor the Additional Curates Society could at that time give any grants. Rowley was left to carry on as before.

His health was quite obviously breaking down. The parish registers show several unexplained patches of erratic handwriting. Each year he took the month of August as a holiday, and went off to Ireland or Austria. But first Mrs Rowley began to stay away for an extra month or so; and then in 1913 the Vicar himself had to prolong his holiday. By December of that year he had become so ill that he had to take six months' sick leave.

FR ROWLEY'S DEPARTURE

When in 1915 the population of the parish doubled and tripled within the space of a few months, Rowley quickly realised that he was no longer the man for the job. Fields where the Royal Artillery had exercised and manoeuvred their gun carriages were about to be built over. The Progress Estate and the Government huts were a vast new challenge that called for a much younger man. The screen, a particular project for both him and his wife, had been installed. It was time to move. He had been offered the rectory of West Heslerton in the archdiocese of York, and he decided to accept it. Harvest Festival on 25 September 1915 was his last Sunday in Eltham.

Though he never used the tide, W.P. Rowley deserves to be called Father more than most. S.Luke's owes more to him, perhaps, than to anyone else. He started his ministry in a bedroom and ended up in a fine church. Easter communicants had numbered 85 in 1905 and 252 in 1913. There was a soundly based congregation and a lot of outside help and support. He had taught the Faith and begun a sacramental tradition that his successors have under God been able to develop and strengthen.

Above all he loved his people and his people loved and valued him. At a farewell ceremony he was presented not only with a silver salver but also a cheque for 100 guineas —equivalent to a year's income for some of his parishioners. Both gifts, according to the press report, caused him very great emotion. If he was leaving his successor an enormous task, he was also leaving him a good inheritance.

The expanded parish in 1916

A NEW CHALLENGE

THE NEW VICAR

WITHIN a very few weeks of Fr Rowley's departure his successor had been appointed and inducted. Herbert Frederick Tomkinson MA began his ministry at S.Luke's on 25 November 1915. Ordained in 1906 and previously curate at the big parish churches in Croydon and Lambeth, he came to his first living with all the enthusiasm of an energetic and eligible bachelor in his very early thirties.

He was also, as they used to say, 'better connected' than his predecessor. He seems to have had an income of his own (his father was a successful stockbroker). His mother was for a time the honorary president of the Mothers Union, and her 'fireside chats' in the parish magazine show a grand and condescending lady. He himself was a Cambridge graduate in classics and theology, and the author of the popular confirmation manual My Prayer Book: for Men and Boys. To modem eyes it seems a very dated work that speaks of scout camps and army barracks. But it is firmly sacramental. In this respect the tradition of the parish was not going to alter very much.

AN ORGANIZER

His letters in the parish magazine show an important difference. Where Rowley had exhorted, Tomkinson gave statistics. He was a gifted organiser with clear ideas of what needed to be done. He was going to be in his element as the population of the parish expanded.

Like his predecessor, he worked very hard. He was a busy man and intended to be at the head of a busy parish. In Easter week 1917 he wrote 78 letters, made nineteen visits, gave eleven interviews, attended three meetings, performed two weddings and two baptisms, gave one confirmation class, attended the choir practice, was present at six services and entertained a total of seventeen guests at mealtimes. Unlike his predecessor, he said so in the magazine.

NEW RESOURCES

And also unlike his predecessor he did not work alone. He brought with him to the parish his friend and fellow-curate at Croydon, Maitland T. Dodds MA. They set up house at 13 Elderslie Road and afterwards at 59 Glenesk Road, and shared the work of the parish between them. Dodds had spent a year as an army chaplain, and knew at first hand much of what was being suffered by the men who had been called away from home. He also had a

vast popularity with the young men and boys of the parish, notoriously one of the most difficult areas of ministry.

Because the war had meant that missionaries on furlough could not very easily return to their duties abroad, S.Luke's had the benefit of three women workers, one for the Progress Estate and two for the huts. For the same reason, funds were available for yet another assistant priest. The Reverend H.M. Hadrill MA joined the staff in the autumn of 1917. Deaconess Grace had arrived the previous year. There were now two licensed lay readers as well. Teaching and visiting were still the two foundations of parish work, and Tomkinson was very fortunate that there was now a large enough staff to cope.

MORE HELP FROM OUTSIDE

We tend to think of lay ministry as a recent invention, but this is not the case. As well as his team of six professionals, Tomkinson had the services of a great army of visitors, helpers, teachers, scouters, monitors and church officers. The number of district visitors increased dramatically. Their name was changed, perhaps significantly, to Lady Visitors. Armed with copies of the parish magazine they put a human face on S.Luke's by visiting the houses in their areas. By August 1917 the circulation of the parish magazine had risen from 370 to over 1,000.

But it is just as obvious that the Lady Visitors very rarely lived in the roads for which they were responsible. The Vicar was still finding so many of his key people from outside the parish.

This continued appeal to outsiders was a major factor in Tomkinson's success. There can be no doubt that his 'eligibility', and that of Dodds, helped as much as his energy... But there were other factors too. S.John's seems to have been a somewhat aloof church. Fr Hall at Holy Trinity was not to everyone's taste. Wealthier Eltham residents seemed happy to come to S.Luke's. So with such a large staff, the special conditions of a war, and Fr Rowley's legacy, it is not surprising that success bred success and numbers increased.

MORE NEW HOUSES

There was a difficult task ahead. The Progress Estate had been started in January 1915 and was finished by the end of the year. The Government huts were announced in September and completed within twelve months. The stable population of about 4.000 had doubled and tripled.

It was also a rather different sort of population. There was of course full employment —these were homes for arsenal workers. Yet certainly amongst the huts in particular there were real social problems: people uprooted from all over England, numerous children and a good deal of sickness. Rowley had never baptised more than 57 children in any year, and in 1914 there had been only 32. But in 1916 the figure had rocketed to 125 and to 208 by 1917. Adult baptisms appeared more frequently, and it was not uncommon for whole families to be baptised at once. The explanation for this sudden upsurge can only be intensive visiting perhaps backed up by the fear of war. Weddings were also more frequent: ten in 1915, 29 in 1916,42 in 1917.

On top of all this, soldiers and young women munitions workers were in billets and lodgings. There were air raids. A bomb was dropped at 215 Grangehill Road, though happily there were no casualties. Though the Gordon School was a favourite place of refuge when the alarm was sounded, the church was used as well —a matter of real importance for people living in the prefabricated huts. A military hospital was nearby. The Church's opportunity was greater than it had ever been.

FIRST STEPS

Tomkinson made certain obvious changes straight away. Visiting preachers became more frequent, amongst them his brother Cyril. A War Corner was set up near the font with a list of those serving, together with a fine crucifix and lamp found in a junk shop by Mr Atkin-Berry, one of the lay readers. In June 1916 an appeal for a new organ was launched, and despite the war it was bought and installed within a year by Noterman, with the aid of Belgian refugees. Its rather eccentric construction —it was apparently made out of three other instruments— suggests that money was tight. Because the hand bellows were so heavy to use, the organist Mr Homier with great ingenuity designed and installed a hydraulic blowing device, of which traces can still be seen.

Matins and Evensong were still the most popular services. Monthly communion was what most people expected. Communicants at 8 and 12.15 increased fairly slowly and certainly not as fast as the population was rising. Rowley's tradition of a weekday Eucharist was built upon, and by 1918 there were celebrations each Tuesday at 8 and each Thursday at 9.15, though numbers stayed low.

The new Vicar was not as 'moderate' as some of the congregation might have thought. Confessions now occasionally appeared in the register of services. The Blessed Sacrament was reserved in Temple Moore's aumbry.

What went on in the Children's Church in the hall was obviously pretty 'high'.

Above all, Tomkinson knew that Matins and Evensong did not have much appeal for the young. So in January 1916 he introduced a 'Parish Communion' at 9 o'clock once a month in place of the celebration at 8. In the same way in June 1918 Matins on the third Sunday was replaced with a Choral Eucharist. It was through these means that communicant numbers began to rise.

CHILDREN'S & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The biggest growth points were with the young. A small silver cross was presented to each child who could recite to a teacher the Collect of the day. About a year after his arrival Tomkinson set up the Children's Church. It met in the hall at 10.30 every Sunday for shortened Matins (!) and once a month for a Children's Sung Eucharist. It used the sanctuary that Father Rowley and his flock had used in 1904. There was a warden, for many years Mr S.M.Home; there were organist, choir, servers, sidesmen and a registrar. There were portable lights, candlesticks, a processional cross and an altar cross, a sacring bell and several frontals. Throughout the 1920s Children's Church attracted and kept the loyal support of well over 120 worshippers of various ages.

Confirmation was at the age of thirteen. Then, of course, began the hard struggle of how to hold the youngsters afterwards. In 1919 a Young People's Service was started. It catered for the fourteen to 20 year olds, and was held in church every Sunday afternoon at 3. One Sunday a month was devoted to 'World Problems', and often a special speaker was brought in. Sometimes instead of a sermon there was a question and answer session. By 1924 there were 160 on the books, of whom just under half were confirmed, and an average attendance of 110. The responsibility of seating, reverence and visiting absentees was entrusted to 20 monitors. And if that was not your style, you could join the dozen or so who regularly went up to the reader Mr Ebbs' house in Balcaskie Road at 3 for a boys' Bible Class instead.

SOCIAL ACTION

The hall became the centre of a good deal of community activity. Here too, much of it centred on the young. Within a very few months of their arrival, Tomkinson and Dodds had started a scout group. The Girls' Friendly Society made its first appearance, and the Band of Hope disappeared without trace. Youngsters liked their two new priests. The girls thought them very

handsome, and one old boy remembers pogo-stick demonstrations during confirmation classes in the study at Glenesk Road.

Since the war was at its height, the Vicar allowed the churchyard to be used for allotments. With his goodwill, a YWCA hut was built on the vicarage site at the corner of Crookston and Westmount, and a lady worker was installed in the hut next door. Each Sunday one of the clergy would go up to take a short service after Evensong.

Most important of all, Tomkinson realised that the new parishioners badly needed a nurse. He announced the idea in April 1916 and by May a nurse had arrived. Patients had to pay her for each visit, but S.Luke's guaranteed her salary. In her first two years she paid an incredible 7,462 calls, an average of about 70 each week. A clinic was held in the hall every Thursday afternoon. On Sunday October 13th 1918 a lecture on VD was given in the hall at 3.30 —'for men and lads only': an interesting contrast to the sort of lecture that might have been expected at S.Luke's only ten years earlier.

As the war ended, the social need continued. With so many people employed in the Arsenal the coming of peace brought real problems. In co-operation with the Baptists, the Wesleyans and S.Barnabas £253 was given out in relief between Easter 1920 and Christmas. The possibility of soup kitchens twice a week was raised: Mr Henry Martin remembers collecting pease pudding and faggots from the hut on the corner of Earlhall and Glenesk. S.Luke's was attempting on a parish scale what Everard Hesketh had done at J. & E. Hall's at Dartford, and was doing it very well.

POST WAR

THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

THE war ended in 1918 with S.Luke's looking a very different sort of parish. More changes were to come. After a lot of campaigning, the Enabling Act was passed in 1919 and the lay members of Anglican congregations were given far greater responsibility for the affairs of their parishes than before. Under Hesketh's guidance the response at S.Luke's was of textbook quality.

The PCC had 30 members, each of whom served on at least one committee —finance, church property, literature, general purposes, and nursing and health. The full Council met five or six times a year to receive and approve the committee reports. Members were elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. It comes as a real surprise to find printed voting slips and a real competition for places. It comes as less of a surprise to see that the people who collected most votes —like Hesketh himself—often did not live in the parish.

There was a vast amount of paperwork and bureaucracy; all made possible by the unwearying efficiency of Miss Dolly Staig, the assistant secretary. Committee contacted committee by letter. The earliest PCC minutes were printed. This was not to everybody's taste. In the twenties there were to be three attempts to make the PCC more of a live force and less of a rubber stamp for the powerful committees. The attempts failed, and perhaps it was just as well. There was a lot of talent on the PCC—surveyors, land agents, civil servants and businessmen. But naturally enough there was not always immediate agreement and there seems indeed to have been some rivalry. The committee system was probably more manageable.

SIZE

S.Luke's was the only parish in Woolwich deanery to have three clergy. After Dodds left to look after S.Barnabas parish, the Reverend W.R.A. Brown MC AKC (renowned as the priest who always kissed the babies he baptised) and the breezy and dominating Reverend R.H.S. Gobbitt MA joined the staff. By 1918 there were 500 Easter communicants and by 1924 743. A thousand children attended a special Armistice service in 1918. In 1918 and again in 1922,1923 and 1924 there were over 100 confirmation candidates. On special occasions there were so many worshippers that the sidesmen could not find room for those who came late. By 1923 the parish magazine had a circulation of 1,355 and there were 45 distributors. So numerous had the leaders, helpers, deliverers, collectors, visitors and monitors become that

in October 1924 Miss McDermott founded a Church Workers Association 'to promote friendliness, goodwill and co-operation' amongst its 74 members.

With size went a certain formality; it was in any case still a formal age. Hierarchy and authority were built into the system, and obedience to clergy, teachers and leaders was one of the things that could still be assumed. It was also an age of social distinctions. Before the war, the housing had been roughly of the same type, though not the same size. Now at least a third of the parish was living in substantial but temporary huts. There were more obvious contrasts in the standard of living.

Although strangers were always said to be struck by people's friendliness it must also be said, that some people who moved into the area found that the wealthier worshippers could be rather distant. Often these were the very people in responsible positions. This goes far to explain a significant fact. In theory, anybody and everybody now had the opportunity to become involved in running the church. Nevertheless there was a good deal of apathy.

The electoral roll had anything up to 700 names on it: but rarely more than 100 turned up for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, and in 1923 there were only 66. The parish obviously felt that the wealthy and able people in the congregation were also the natural leaders. So often, it was they who would be expected to find the money. Once again we should realise that the driving force tended to come from outside the parish.

CARE OF THE BUILDING

The care of the building was one of the PCC's most important duties, and several important decisions were taken. The elaborate tracery in the screen was dedicated in February 1921 in memory of Mrs Rowley at a cost of £110. A war memorial was set up on the north wall of the sanctuary, with Mr Atkin-Berry's lamp above it. Patriots could see the lamp as the 30 eternal flame of remembrance: others as showing that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved a few feet away.

At Easter 1923 a stained glass window in the north aisle was finished. By now Mr Hesketh was in his middle sixties and getting hard of hearing. In February 1924 he therefore anonymously donated a Churchphone (an early form of audio-loop). There were microphones on the Vicar's stall and the pulpit, and eight points in the north aisle where an earpiece could be plugged in and the preacher heard without difficulty.

On a more mundane level, in February 1921 a cold tap was installed in the upper vestry at a cost of £10: for 71 years it was all the plumbing we had.

The dark and damp downstairs vestry was concreted in 1922 after an outbreak of dry rot, but it has remained cold and dark from that day to this. The PCC discovered in the summer of 1923 that, though the organ had only been in for seven years and the hydraulic blower for less, major repairs were going to cost £600. Eventually much trouble was saved by the introduction of a conventional electric blower.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL GROWS

Ironically, the worst problem facing the PCC was caused by a success story —the Sunday School. It is hard today to realise how fundamental the Sunday School was to church life. Despite the war and despite the general shake-up that society was beginning to undergo, this had not yet changed. One of Tomkinson's first acts as Vicar was to hire a tin hut in the Gordon School each week to cater for the children from the Progress Estate. But at first the Sunday School did not grow very quickly. In his first two years, Tomkinson and his colleagues saw the roll go up from 370 to 540, but the average attendance crept from 280 to only 312. Despite the massive rise in population, this was not many more children than in the very early days of the parish.

Things improved when in the autumn of 1920 the YWCA hut on the vicarage site was bought for £170 by three anonymous benefactors. This, together with the scout hut on the same site, meant that the Sunday School and all the organisations could be catered for on church premises. By 1920 there were 160 infants under the superintendency of the redoubtable Miss Absolom and 500 juniors under Mr Hall. Gobbitt, the curate for the huts, kept up the numbers with his great enthusiasm.

The results continued to be remarkable, and to our eyes even startling. In 1923 the eight to thirteen year-olds seem to have gone down to a little over 400, but there still had to be two sittings, at 2.45 and 3.45, and 30 teachers who did a double shift. By 1924 those 30 teachers had become over 50, and a weekly training class was conducted by an instructor from S.Christopher's College Blackheath. Miss Absolom's infants had gone up to 200. By 1924 the combined Sunday School figure was said to be 750.

ORGANIZATIONS

In the early twenties the hall and two huts were the centre of a good deal of other activity as well. The Mothers Union met on the second Monday of every month. An informal Women's Fellowship met every Thursday afternoon. The Church of England Men's Society enjoyed a rather precarious existence. The GFS continued to flourish. Scouts and Guides used the huts

on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, a Boys' Club met on Mondays, and on Wednesdays there was a Mixed Club 'for social intercourse and dancing for young people of both sexes'. Best supported of all was a thriving Sports Association, which had branches for football, cricket. Badminton and tennis, and had the use of a full-size billiard table and a boxing ring. On top of all this there were the usual fund-raising and parish events, bringing even more people on to the premises.

CHURCH OR HALL?

NOT ENOUGH ROOM

THE penalty of success was being cramped. The congregation had clearly outgrown the hall of 1904. As though to prove the point, there were so many stalls for the 1923 Bazaar —sixteen or seventeen— that with great reluctance S.Luke's had to hire the hall in Wellington Road. Naturally, being S.Luke's, the thing was carried off in style. There was a continuous motor service to take customers into Eltham and a printed timetable was issued with the parish magazine.

More serious was what Gobbitt had begun to say about the Sunday School. It was not just that there was not enough room for those who were coming. He was certain that children were being turned away.

Even the church was not big enough, it seemed. There had always been plans for a south aisle. Now the matter was becoming urgent. The 1921 census revealed that the population of the parish was just under 14,000. Just as the population had increased, so had the number of those who wanted to worship on special occasions. The trend had begun in 1918 with the special Armistice Service held at 8.15 on Monday 11 November with the military trumpeters the Vicar had got over from Woolwich had to be perched in the gallery above the high altar.

On other occasions too, people were being turned away. Tomkinson felt that the extra 300 seats planned for in 1904 should be provided without delay. He launched an appeal for £4,000 in September 1918 and the church completion fund began in earnest. In the publicity, he pointed out to the parish that people were better off than they had been before the war; and as the church had supported them, it was only right they should support the church.

RISING COSTS

However, his optimism was short-lived. With the Armistice had come massive layoffs at the Arsenal. Instead of an establishment of 50,000 men and 25,000 women, there would now be jobs for only 10,000 men. Parishes like S. Luke's were faced with big social problems. It was not tactful to talk of enlarging the church.

Temple Moore had died in 1920. His plans for a tower and south aisle were entrusted to his former pupil J.B.Tolhurst of Beckenham. It was only in the spring of 1923 that Tomkinson could begin the large task of applying for

grants. On one of the grant applications, he was asked to describe his parishioners. He did so in the following bald terms: 'small clerks, arsenal and dockyard workers, unemployed'. Two-thirds of his parish he reckoned to be 'poor': not a very promising source of revenue.

The scheme would now cost in the region of £7,000, an eloquent comment on how prices had risen since 1907. Tenders were double what the parish had expected. Tomkinson told the magazine readers of his regrets in January 1924. Only a month before, he had high hopes of starting work on church completion. Now it was all going to have to be postponed until 1925.

A DIFFICULT CHOICE

The PCC had a difficult choice. Either they could try to extend the church or they could build a new hall. Probably crucial was what Gobbitt told the Finance Committee in October 1924. At the moment there were 700 children in the Sunday School. With an adequate hall, he and the teachers reckoned they could add another 200 children to the books. On the one hand, worshippers were being turned away from the church a few times every year. But from what Gobbitt was saying, 200 children were as good as being turned away from the Sunday School every week.

Put like that, there seemed no real choice. The Finance Committee recommended that a new hall should be built and church completion should be shelved. The Vicar and full PCC were a little more hesitant. The final plans for the church included space for vestries where teaching could take place. They thought that tenders should be invited for both projects before they took the plunge one way or the other.

FR TOMKINSON GOES

Meanwhile, Tomkinson had decided to move. In the summer of 1924 the living of Raines Park had been offered to him and he decided to accept it. He left in November after nine years at S.Luke's.

He had been Vicar at an exciting time. The average weekly number of communicants had risen from 30 to 90. Where Rowley had been preparing 30 confirmation candidates a year, now it was often over 100. Instead of 50 baptisms, there were 200 and more. The church was often full and the hall was bursting at the seams.

Apart from his own energy and enthusiasm, he had been a good leader with a good team. He had been fortunate in his assistant clergy. Dodds in particu-

lar had had a great personal following, and so had Brown. Gobbitt knew his figures, having been a naval paymaster during the war and an accountant before it. The number of active lay people was high. The war had also given Tomkinson three lady workers and a deaconess. The Tomkinson years are understandably still looked back on as a golden age.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

But there are signs that all was not quite as well as it seemed. First, it is odd that the rise in numbers came in the early twenties, when the staff was down to three priests, and not between 1916—1918, when the staff had been seven. S.Luke's was part of a national trend of rising church attendance after the war.

Secondly, the rise in numbers had only kept pace with the rise in population. Baptisms, it is true, were four times what they had been in Rowley's day. But weddings, confirmations and Easter communions were only up threefold: and Rowley had a third of the population and less than a third of Tomkinson's resources. So, even taking into account the effect of the war and its aftermath, it is not easy to say that proportionately the parish's active congregation was expanding.

Thirdly, confirmation candidates seem to have fallen away very rapidly, despite all the efforts made to keep them as regular communicants. There were 214 new communicants between 1923 and 1924: but at Easter 1924 numbers had only risen by 40.

Fourthly, neither the Progress Estate nor the huts provided so very many active members. The 1923 electoral roll contained 553 names. Just over half came from Corbett houses. Just under a quarter lived outside. Fifteen percent lived on the Progress Estate; and only seven and a half percent lived in the huts. Yet it was in these two latter areas that most of the parish lived. The registers do not show any great social differences amongst the three areas of the parish: which makes the phenomenon all the more curious.

None of this should blind us to the vigour of S.Luke's under H.F.Tomkinson. By any standards, through him and his colleagues the lives of many were touched with the Gospel. But he was leaving behind him some major decisions that a successor would not be able to avoid. Even more than W.P. Rowley he would be a difficult man to follow.

PEAK YEARS

THE THIRD VICAR

WALTER Osborn Langridge MA came to the parish early in 1925 as a priest in his middle thirties. Like his predecessor he was a Cambridge graduate in classics and theology, and had been organ scholar of his college; in fact, he had to act as choirmaster for his first two years here. He was a clear high churchman: he introduced more frequent weekday Eucharists, and for the first time confession every Friday evening was advertised in the parish magazine. For the moment he was unmarried.

He had a good mind, and wrote clearly and well in the magazine; he was once said in the local press to have preached a sermon 'in his characteristically thoughtful way'. He was emotional —he is remembered as having wept during certain hymns. He was shy —he is also remembered as having failed to recognise people in the street. He was obviously not the easy-mannered, self-confident bachelor that Father Tomkinson had been. And halfway through his incumbency he was to marry a young woman from within the parish. It is likely that this had an adverse effect on his popularity in some quarters.

RESOURCES

To begin with he had round him the same strong characters as had Tomkinson. Everard Hesketh was foremost amongst them. Apart from all his other contributions, he ran a church bookstall whose fame spread beyond the parish. The Woolwich Town Clerk, Sir Arthur Bryceson, was for a time a sidesman. There were still quite a number of surveyors and estate agents in the congregation: Davey, Ambler, and Cole. The PCC was talented, though difficult to handle. Throughout his time in the parish, Langridge would find this a mixed blessing. And despite all the lay helpers and workers (Langridge could count on 143 in 1926), no one could ever be found to attend to the church garden!

Even so, people were not afraid of launching out. In May 1925 the General Purposes Committee wanted to buy a piece of sports ground in the Footscray Road for £1,400. This would have given S.Luke's Athletics Union its own cricket ground, football pitches and tennis courts. The debt would take fifteen years to clear and the PCC threw the plan out as unrealistic. But it is a sign of the liveliness of some minds.

There was one serious handicap. Soon after Langridge's arrival, the ordained staff was to drop from three to two. S.Luke's had a population of

15,000: but 'the basis of parish work is visiting, and especially the visiting of the clergy,' the Vicar once wrote. 'As we are understaffed and less visiting has been possible, numbers have dropped.' Instead of over 100 confirmation candidates, in 1925 there were only 44; and instead of 230 baptisms, there were 130. There were no less than 770 Easter communicants in 1925, but that was for the first and last time.

BUILDING A NEW HALL

No sooner had Langridge arrived than he had to take the decision that Tomkinson had escaped: should there or should there not be a new hall? What Gobbitt had at first imagined was an 80-foot extension across the bottom of the old YMCA hut on the corner of Crookston Road. Builders told him that this was not feasible. So, arguing his case with vigour, Gobbitt managed to convince his new Vicar and the PCC that a hall for the children was more important than a south aisle for the church. The decision was made in March: by April Gobbitt had gone to a new post.

Plans were drawn up for a building of 48 feet by 29 feet, providing a stage and seating for 250, anteroom, committee room and lavatories. It would be joined to the end of the old hall and have an attractive neo-Georgian frontage to Westmount Road. In deciding to build a new hall, the PCC was taking a big risk. Estimates were for £2,000: the final cost was nearer £3,000, and there was still £980 to find when the hall was opened by the Chislehurst MP Waldron Smithers on 6 March 1926 and blessed by the Bishop of Southwark. The question was whether it was going to prove a wise investment

YOUNG PEOPLE

In his speech at the opening, the Bishop spoke about the 'modern problem' of children of twelve who drifted away from the Church. For Dr Garbett, the solution was obvious: it lay in the whole network of organisations lying between Sunday School and Church, 'through which,' he said, 'congregations would become larger.' That of course was why the hall had been built. Langridge was entirely in agreement: 'whatever happens and whatever else there is to do, the spiritual welfare of our young people should have the first place in all our parochial life.'

And for a time things looked very encouraging. Amongst the PCC papers is an account for the Eltham Sunday Schools Excursion to Herne Bay held one July Saturday in 1926. Of the 933 local children who took pan in the trip and the Tenpenny Tea, nearly a third came from S.Luke's.

The Vicar's report to the 1928 Annual Parochial Church Meeting also makes fascinating reading. There were now, he stated, 60 Sunday School teachers and helpers. A primary department of 160 was divided between the two huts. There were 300 children in 21 classes in the middle school. Twenty Guides met in the committee room and 35 Brownies in the anteroom. The old hall held 150 seniors under the Vicar's watchful eye. At the same time about 100 members of the Young People's Fellowship met in church. 'These figures show that our opportunities, if we will use them aright, are very great. There ought to be no fear that with all this promise our church life will grow stronger as the years go on.'

CHURCH AND WORSHIP

Since the very beginning, the constant aim of the all the parish's clergy had been to make the Eucharist the main focus of parish life. Since the middle of the war, they had also thought that this was the only hope of keeping hold of young people. That was why the Children's Church, as we have seen, went in for much more 'advanced' ritual.

It was an uphill struggle, to judge by weekly communicant numbers. In 1905 Rowley could expect 14; by 1912 there were 28. By introducing a 'Parish Communion' once a month, Tomkinson managed to double that. But by 1922, even with three priests on the staff, three masses on a Sunday, and three times the population, numbers had only risen to 74. Langridge did slightly better, if not in absolute terms, at least in terms of a percentage of his congregation. From a peak of 90 in 1925, the average fell to 77 in 1928 and to 67 in 1931. What made it more frustrating was that numbers could fluctuate wildly and inexplicably from week to week.

DEVELOPMENT

H.F.Tomkinson, unlike his Anglo-catholic brother Cyril at nearby S.Stephen Lewisham, moved very cautiously in making changes. He seems to have introduced reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, but apart from this he made no attempt to bring together what went on in the Hall at 10.30 and what went on in the Church at establishment Matins at 11. That was another problem left for Langridge. In March 1927 the two churchwardens, two former churchwardens and 34 other petitioners asked Langridge to introduce a weekly, not monthly, Eucharist at 9.00 with music and full ceremonial; it was to be the first step towards a Parish Eucharist. Langridge took the matter to the PCC to sound them out.

The debate was a lengthy one. There were those who apparently found it difficult to believe that this was not going to be the thin end of the wedge.

But as Langridge pointed out there was no wedge. Some people had apparently come to S.Luke's during and after the war because, for whatever reason, they had thought it was a comparatively 'moderate' church: and they would still be fully cared for at Matins and Evensong. For their part, all that was required of them was tolerance of those who represented the deep sacramental tradition of the parish. Langridge's main point was that S.Luke's was big enough to cater for everyone. 'If one likes red and another likes blue, you don't satisfy either by mixing colours and giving them purple.'

It was not an easy meeting, but by the end of it Langridge felt justified in going ahead. As a result, the sanctus gong made its first appearance at S.Luke's in 1927-8; mass vestments, made by the ladies of the parish, were worn for the first time at Christmas 1928; and Miss Cole and the servers presented a thurible, first used for the special office of the Guild of the Servants of the Sanctuary. The Vicar felt able publicly to thank the officers and PCC at the APCM for their "loyalty and happy co-operation in the life of the church family

USING THE NEW HALL

A glance at the hall timetable below is enough to show how vigorous a family S.Luke's was in the mid-twenties, not just where youngsters were concerned but the community at large. The congregation itself was able to use it to the full at a vastly successful Family Evening held one Thursday as part of the 1927 patronal festival. 'Really something great in the art of keeping the late hours,' said the District Times; and the normally austere Vicar was to be seen on the platform thumping the piano and leading the community singing until 11.30.

Not all the users met with universal approval. The hall had not been open four months before Miss McDennott told her fellow church councillors that 'she was of opinion that the New Hall was being used by people who did not appreciate that it was a Church Hall, as she had seen men and girls smoking and parading up and down in front of the church and the steps of the hall after 10.30 at night. She considered that such use of the hall was contrary to the purpose for which it was built, and desired that some steps be taken to prevent the use of the Hall being granted to such people.'

To avoid complaints from neighbours it had already been decided that 'orchestras' would have to be confined to four players who would use only piano and strings, not 'drums or comets'. This did not stop the arrival of the first complaint about a wedding reception in September 1926. Yet without outside users, the church would have been in very serious difficulties indeed. Even before the new hall had been built, revenue from the old hall

and the huts was less than the running cost. There are clear signs that resources and even tempers were becoming more stretched.

DIFFICULTIES

EXPANSION SLOWS DOWN...

By any reasonable standards, 750 children in the Sunday School was an astonishing achievement. So was the fact that at Easter 1925 there had been 743 communicants. But the hall had been built because Gobbitt hoped that the 700 children of 1924 would become 900. By February 1929 there were only 50 teachers and 600 children. And over 100 children were being confirmed every year. But adolescents were simply not staying: if they had, the Easter communion figure would have been over 900.

A PCC committee was set up to look at the problem in April 1929. Its report has a very familiar ring to it.

The youngsters wanted more freedom; they had far more outside attractions now; they lacked leaders with the right touch; and there was not 'a suitable service' for them, whatever that might mean. The obvious things to do were therefore to find the right leaders and train them; divide the youngsters into groups; have discussions; and encourage Nature Study (sic).

In order to get 'a more suitable and attractive service', the committee recommended that the boys should control it and help to conduct it (under guidance, of course). They should decide on the topics, the speakers should often be changed, and there should be 'an entire absence of stiffness and formality'. This meant in effect some form of non-Eucharistic worship. The suggestion was therefore at odds with the main thrust of the clergy's teaching.

...AND STOPS

What actually was done was that an Advent Social was arranged; a Children's Corner put into the church; twelve boys were trained as servers; and the S.Luke's Guild founded for young communicants between fourteen and eighteen. The Guild met every Thursday evening. The response was so encouraging that in October 1930 a senior guild was started for those over eighteen who had not wanted to leave. Almost at once, numbers in both sections dropped. No one knew why.

The one question nobody had asked was why there had been so many youngsters around in the first place. It was assumed that it was because of the Faith. But the real reasons may have been quite different: heavy and sustained parish visiting, post-war optimism, quite a lot of success, lack of

competition, good habits. The truth was that S.Luke's was beginning to level out.

NURSING CARE

Signs of 'mushrooming' had been there for some time. Very instructive is what happened to S.Luke's Nurse. The newly formed PCC in 1920 took over as guarantors of her salary, and a Nursing and Health Committee was set up. The charges were set at a shilling (5p) for a single visit, and 5s 6d (27'/ip) for a week of daily visits. The nurse stayed in as great demand as ever.

But by 1923, whilst Tomkinson was still Vicar, people were beginning to ask whether S.Luke's could afford to continue its support. There was a budget of £125 a year. An interim statement of account that summer showed that there was likely to be a bad shortfall. So far, church collections had accounted for £26; subscriptions had brought in £15; a dance raised 11 guineas; and the patients themselves had paid only £8 10s 3d.

In the end there was not a deficit: but the little crisis had set people thinking. By the beginning of 1926 S.Luke's had begun to withdraw from the nursing venture. There was to be a Provident Nursing Association that would be independent of the church and spread throughout Eltham. Only subscribers would be able to use it, though for a modest 2d a week plus fees. Within a year, the parish had severed its connections altogether and the 'S.Luke's Nurse' was a thing of the past.

OVERSTRETCHING

Gradually the fear was growing that the church had bitten off more than it could chew. Everard Hesketh had for a long time been a supporter of the regular giving scheme called 'Duplex'. One of his constant worries was that S.Luke's was not standing on its own feet but depending on the generosity of a few people like him. At his urging and, as he put it, 'as an act of faith', loose collections were abandoned in 1926 and the 46 congregation urged to join the envelope scheme. It never worked well. In 1928 only 158 out of an electoral roll of 708 had become Duplex contributors. Retiring collections had to be introduced to make up the shortfall. By 1931, loose collections were back for good.

Things were not generally easy in the later twenties. The hall had cost a tremendous sum: £3,766 15s 10d in the end. Paying the curate was becoming a problem —in 1930 there was a £70 shortfall on his account as well. That year the PCC books were £102 in the red. Three years later the deficit was

£238. Reserves had to be drawn on. "There is no doubt,' said Langridge in 1929, 'that we are as a congregation not so well off as we were a few years ago.'

The Sunday School treat had to be abandoned: the fare to Herne Bay was three shillings, but only a quarter of the scholars could afford it. From 1930 the Easter offering dropped and continued to drop. The hut was sub-let to the scouts in an attempt to cut expenses: the church had wanted to give it to the Royal Eltham Scouts Association back in 1928 in an attempt to get out of spending £250 on plumbing, but the scouts had declined. The verger resigned because his wages were reduced by ten shillings a week in consequence.

The future of a third of the parish's area was in doubt. The Government Huts had never been intended to be permanent. Gradually they were being sold off to private companies, with an eye to redevelopment. Of course, the huts would be replaced with other, better houses. No one could expect that the population would remain the same. New inhabitants might turn out to be richer, but they would certainly not be as numerous.

Most unsettling of all, some of the old stalwarts, big contributors through Duplex, were no longer in evidence: some had died, others like Hesketh were moving away. Subscribers dropped in 1931 from 186 to 160. S.Luke's was finally beginning to lose the support of the rich outsiders who had drifted to her ten and twenty years earlier.

CHURCH COMPLETION ONCE MORE

Easter communicants were dropping. The pressure on seating was therefore less. The foundations of the old hall were beginning to give trouble. Yet this was the very moment at which the PCC decided to build the south aisle, at an estimated cost of £7,000. We must ask why.
There may be two answers. First, if you have approaching £4,000 in a special deposit account that has patiently been gathering interest for ten years, then it is not easy to turn it to other uses. Couple it with promised grants in the region of £2,500, and only a few hundreds of new money would have to be found.

Secondly, and perhaps more important, there was the psychology.
Numbers were not as high as they had been, but they were still very high.
In no sense did S.Luke's look 'unsuccessful'. To abandon the project of completing the church would raise eyebrows inside and outside the parish.
For the past 25 years S.Luke's had been a growing concern. That growth had raised all sorts of expectations.
Since 1904 expectations had been expressed as bricks and mortar. In

February 1930, and again two years later, the final appeal was launched.

The completed church as Tolhurst intended

CHURCH COMPLETION

PLANNING THE EXTENSION

A SLIGHT hitch came to light when the PCC realised that, since the recent removal both of Mr Hesketh and of the PCC Secretary Miss Staig, no-one knew exactly what papers were where, and how much had been paid to the architect on account.

With that eventually sorted out, the business of revising plans could begin. The new aim was to construct a south aisle. Baptistery, Lady Chapel and vestries by way of new work. The existing building was to have lavatories installed in the old downstairs vestry; and the archway between the upstairs vestry and the organ was to be blocked in. The 60 foot tower that Tolhurst, like Temple Moore before him, had originally wanted to provide, was to be left out, at an estimated saving of £2,184. This was not to the taste of some people and the plan had its opponents. But the PCC approved the revised plans in October 1932 with 17 out of 24 members in favour.

THE PROBLEM OF A VICARAGE

To complicate matters, at this very moment another long-deferred problem raised its untimely head. Like his two predecessors, Langridge had not got a permanent vicarage. He had to find his own accommodation: first in two rooms at 173 Westmount Road, and later at 141. By 1933 he was a married man with two small daughters. He felt that he wanted somewhere more suitable to live.

The original intention at S.Luke's had been for the vicarage to be next to the church, but this was an idea abandoned almost at once. Instead, in 1914 the plot of land on the corner of Crookston Road and Westmount Road had been bought for £400. It is ironic that, with so many estate agents connected with the church, the land should have turned out to be badly waterlogged and therefore unsuitable for building.

In March 1933 the pre-Corbett Park House came on to the market and an inspection was made. The Diocesan Surveyor was quite impressed with it, but the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were not. It was old and it was huge. More promising was 44 Westmount Road, which had come on the market for £1500. Doing anything at all on the vicarage site would cost over twice as much as that. Both the Commissioners and the Bishop of Southwark thought that the purchase of 44 Westmount Road should go ahead.

The Vicar called a special PCC meeting in July and put the matter before them. He said that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners would provide £400; another £400 might possibly come from the sale of the site. There was only £25 in the vicarage fund, but there was another £340 in a contingency fund. The parish would have to find only another £300. There was £120 over in the church extension fund: this could become the new contingency fund.

When it came to the vote, the PCC could not agree. For the first time there was a tie. Six days later eleven dissatisfied members called a second special meeting. This time the vote was much clearer. Not only was it emphatically against buying a vicarage: it was almost as emphatically against the Vicar. Too much was being asked of everyone. Not even the remonstrations of the Bishop of Woolwich two months later could sway them. It is very obvious that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, S.Luke's was not only running out of money, she was running out of steam.

… AND OF THE OLD HALL

Whilst not jerrybuilt, the Hall of 1904 had not been meant as a great permanent structure. The foundations were scanty, and by this same summer of 1933 they had been causing problems for three years, though the PCC had constantly put off coming to a decision.

Suddenly, big cracks began to appear in the east wall, and the keystone over the east door had to be shored up. The architect could see that underpinning would be of no real use and that the whole east wall would have to be reconstructed on a bed of ferrous concrete. It would cost £394. The PCC felt this was more than they could afford.

The District Surveyor, who had got wind of the situation, forced their hand. He wrote on September 22nd to say that unless work began within four days, he would serve a dangerous structure notice.

With the vicarage business on the one hand and the south aisle on the other, this indignity was nearly the last straw. Somehow the money was found, and three-quarters of the old hall survives to this day.

THE SOUTH AISLE COMPLETE

But by this time people's reserves were getting low. In an increasingly frantic effort to cut costs, PCC made their most inconvenient decision ever, and abandoned the plan to put a lavatory in the old lower vestry and reposition the stairs: a modest £60 was saved. It has taken us sixty years and £10,000 to remedy it. On the other hand, a new font was needed for £70, and that was purchased.

Mansells of Croydon won the tender, and undertook to provide everything including furniture for £6,076 10s —£900 less than anyone had expected. Whether this affected the quality of workmanship is a moot point. There is no doubt that, whatever the reasons, over the past 60 years the south aisle and vestries have caused more structural problems than the rest of the church.

The faculty (which included permission for lavatories) was duly applied for, and work started in August 1933. By 17 February 1934, the whole thing was finished and the Dedication Service held, with friends old and new filling the church. S.Luke's was 'completed' after 30 years and could now seat 700. The church and hall complex was the biggest of any Anglican Church in the area.

GREAT CHANGES

All that was wanted now was people to fill it. The area was on the brink of yet another enormous change. The government hutments were coming down, and Bilton and Morrell houses were going up. The process was to go on throughout the thirties. The parish registers suggest that the new arrivals came from slightly higher up the social spectrum: white and blue collar instead of manual workers. The big point was, however, that the population of the parish was now between 9,000 and 10,000 —two-thirds of what it had been in 1920.
It is both sad and ironic that church completion had come just at this moment. S.Luke's had been planned by Victorians; she had expanded under the special pressures of war; now she was entering a completely new era. There were fewer adults and fewer children. No longer could you assume that people would want to come to church as a matter of course. Adapting to these new conditions was to prove the greatest challenge of all.

A 'NORMAL' PARISH

With the building of the south aisle, the great days of S.Luke's were over. PCC meetings now became rather mundane affairs: there were few major decisions to be made. The wealthier and able outsiders, who had contributed so much in the past, had begun to fall away and were not replaced. S.Luke's was quickly becoming an 'normal' parish.

Within the year Fr Langridge himself was on the move. He was a tired man. For nearly a decade he had tried to meet expectations that were becoming less and less realistic. His task cannot have been made any easier by the fact that he clearly shared those expectations himself.

His achievement was considerable: he had been the one to put the original vision into bricks and mortar. His failure was that of virtually everyone else: he did not read the signs of the times. Yet how could he have done? He had no way of knowing that he and his people were at the beginning of a new, and some would say a downward, trend.

He did not wait for preferment. Instead he arranged to exchange livings with the Reverend Frederick Bacheldor AKC, the Vicar of Par in Cornwall: significantly a quieter spot.

ANTICLIMAX

PRE-WAR

FATHER Bacheldor's biggest problem was that he came to a parish that was feeling a little blank and more than a little tired. Everything that they had worked for they had now achieved. Adjusting to this was not easy for anyone, least of all for the new priest.

The High-Church sacramental tradition of the parish continued to deepen —even more than his predecessors, Bacheldor was unashamedly a catholic Anglican. In 1936 Mr Cole presented the pulpit crucifix, as he had presented the processional cross ten years earlier. One particular enrichment was the high altar reredos. It was planned in 1937 as a Coronation Memorial, and the design that was approved had four riddell-posts and curtains on three sides. What was installed was rather different: two riddell-posts and a canopy. One suspects that, as with the chancel screen, the architect's views may have been over-ridden. As a piece of design it was rather a mistake.

Various other schemes for completing the church's interior were discussed: a new boundary wall, two screens for the Lady Chapel, a narthex at the west end, a rood on top of the chancel screen, a wooden surround for the new aumbry in the Lady Chapel, a new organ, a better garden—and a vicarage. None of them came to anything.

In particular, hopes for a vicarage were continually disappointed. First a plot of ground in Dunvegan Road became available: it was inspected and found to be unsuitable. Next, 61 Glenesk Road came on the market. The PCC got as far as making an offer of £1,400, but the vendor would not accept it. Then 44 Westmount Road became available once more, and once more the PCC rejected it: it subsequently became the Methodist manse ... It was not until just after the war that 107 Westmount Road was bought; those of us who have lived in it will say it was worth waiting for. But Bacheldor had to follow the S.Luke's tradition of living in rented accommodation outside the parish, at 23 Westmount Road.

Most significant is how through the thirties the balance of power in the PCC shifted to people who lived in the parish. In the late twenties, top of the PCC poll was always Everard Hesketh, the industrial tycoon of Beachcroft in Court Road. Within not much more than a decade, top of the poll was Will Charie, a clerk in the financial section of Siemens and living in a terraced house at 159 Grangehill Road. These were two thoroughly faithful Christian men. Each of them exercised a deep influence on the life of their parish church. Will Charie in particular was an unswervingly loyal worship-

per through six decades and nine incumbents. But they came from very different backgrounds and had very different gifts. They represent the difference between the old era and the new.

The years just before the war continued to be full of financial difficulties. The Finance Committee in November 1936 set an appeal target of £2,100 for all the schemes listed above. It was all very well for architect Tolhurst to say that the church badly wanted colour in it. Very little money could be raised. Deficits of between £80 and £100 became a regular feature of PCC accounts. Matters came to a head in the spring of 1939 when the deaconess had to be given the sack, and the organist volunteered to have £25 knocked off his honorarium.

There was the usual problem of work with young people. There were tensions in the Athletics Association. Numbers on the electoral roll fell from 744 in 1931 to 568 in 1939. Easter communicants held steady, though Baptisms were down. At his last APCM, in April 1940, Bacheldor said that he hoped the appointment of his successor 'would bring a revival in the life of the parish'. It is easy to see these as the words of someone who felt he had failed.

WAR AGAIN

Then came the Second World War. The Reverend Frederick Witcomb BD, Vicar from 1940 until 1948, was as zealous as Fr Tomkinson had been two decades earlier but he did not have the human material to work with. The effect the second war had on S.Luke's was the opposite to that of the first. Then, people had come into the parish in droves: now they were going out. Conscription, bomb damage and evacuation all took their toll.

The hall was requisitioned by the Home Guard from 1941 to 1944. The stained glass and the Children's Corner beneath it (to the Vicar's secret delight) suffered damage from enemy action in 1944. PCC meetings became even less interesting. Organisations operated on a much smaller scale. Baptisms rose, but Easter communicants fell. When 1945 came, the revival in church life was not nearly so marked as it had been in 1919.

CONCLUSION

THE QUESTION OF ENERGY

FOR 30 years, S.Luke's had been a pioneer church facing obvious challenges. It was no-one's fault that after 1934 it was not the place it once had been. The very clear practical aims had been achieved. Accepting that a different vision was needed was not easy.

There was almost bound to be a sense of and-climax. People were financially weary. Huge sums had been raised, first for the old hall, then for the church, then for the new hall, then for the south aisle. Said Churchwarden Neame in January 1926, 'The generosity of the congregation attending S.Luke's has been wonderful and I hope it will become proverbial.' But there was a limit to that generosity. Moreover, the big sums had come largely from imaginative outsiders. Where would S.Luke's have been, for instance, without Everard Hesketh?

Hesketh himself realised only too well how much people depended on him. For years he had been urging the congregation to stand on its own feet. That was why he had so eagerly advocated the Duplex envelope system. As we saw, it never caught on. In 1929 less than a quarter of the people on the electoral roll were subscribers, and of that quarter less than a third gave more than a shilling a week.

The people coming into the parish in the thirties might have been a little better off than the hut dwellers they were replacing. But they were not wealthy. Very often they were buying their first homes and did not have much cash to spare: that had not been the case quite so much back in 1904. These were certainly not people who could replace the rich established outsiders who in the recent past had given so much to S.Luke's.

THE QUESTION OF APPEAL

Next, there was the question of what money should actually be raised for. Building a church and two halls had some clear point. Buying a vicarage or putting in a couple of ornamental screens did not. S.Luke's life had revolved round clear issues of bricks and mortar. Once the buildings were complete, people did not quite know what to do. It is no wonder that enthusiasm was harder to find in the thirties.

At the same time, the huts disappeared. In their way they had been as important a goal as the building projects. Unmade roads, crowding, some problem families: all that appealed to a great many worthy people both in-

side and outside the parish who wanted to be practical Christians. S.Luke's was a place where things were done. Once the huts had gone, one suspects that much of the appeal, even the romance, went too.

It is clear that there was less and less reason for local people to see S.Luke's as the up-and-coming parish that deserved support. For the first time since 1904, the actual inhabitants were now the ones who would have to direct the parish's life.

QUESTIONS OF COMMITMENT

The decline in church attendance raises questions about commitment from within the parish too. Church attendance from 1904 to 1940 was never a simple reflection of how hard the clergy were working. If it had been, numbers would have been at their peak in 1917 when the staff was at its most numerous. Admittedly, it looks as though clergy visiting was the crucial factor in getting children and adults baptised. And it is likely that the immense army of monitors, teachers and visitors provided a network that chased up absent and errant children. But building up the numbers of worshipping adults was a much more subtle business.

Personalities had a large part to play. People had respected and loved Rowley. Tomkinson had a different sort of popularity, and certainly curates like Dodds and Brown had immense personal followings. Without Gobbitt's energy the Sunday School would never have expanded in the way it did. It looks as though things 'came together' in the early twenties. Langridge and his colleagues were no less faithful, but they do not appear to have had the same charisma and they did not have the same success.

God's ways with the soul are mysterious, and only He can judge spiritual depth. But we should be foolish not to wonder whether greater numbers really meant more committed Christians.

THE QUESTION OF YOUTH

If personalities weighed with the adults of the parish, this was doubly so with the youngsters. Before the First World War, Sunday School was an accepted part of respectable life. As long as the teaching methods of the state schools and the Church were not so very different, turning up for lessons on Sunday as well from Monday to Friday was for a reluctant child a bore rather than a chore. But with Avery Hill College so close, the standard of teaching in the two LCC schools in the parish was high and getting higher. By contrast Sunday School probably looked increasingly dreary. What might have been all right before the Great War was fast becoming out of date.

The Church was no longer the only source of entertainment and fellowship. If the Church was going to hold its own with the young, the personality factor was going to be even more important. Dodds in particular had gifts in this direction, and Gobbitt was a highly successful superintendent of the Sunday School. They were not easily replaced.

QUESTIONS OF GEOGRAPHY

Even though the clergy and church leaders put a lot of work into the huts and the Progress Estate, the backbone of the electoral roll remained stubbornly Corbett. It was not that the social classes were different. The church registers show that though there were three sorts of housing, there was broadly one sort of inhabitant. This picture is confirmed by the unpublished researches of Miss Margaret Evans and by personal reminiscences. The 'resistance' to becoming integral parts of S.Luke's congregation sprang from other causes.

The Progress Estate formed a unity of its own. Because it was built on land that Corbett had never owned, it was —and is— difficult to get from one estate to the other, except along Rochester Way and a single footpath on to Grangehill Road. The style of architecture set it apart from the older housing and also from the parish church. It was built for Arsenal workers, and its links were always strongly with Woolwich, and politically with the Labour Party there. Thanks to the tramway, indeed, it might even have been easier to shop in Woolwich than in Eltham.

Whatever the reason, S.Luke's never made quite the impact there that we might have expected. Experience with the Progress Estate shows that preaching the Gospel and receiving it is a far from straightforward business.

QUESTIONS OF INVOLVEMENT

The huts posed a different problem. They were hastily constructed on land that Corbett never got round to developing. Geographically they formed part of the old parish, but architecturally they emphatically did not.

The roads were not made up; the huts were temporary and not always well sited; they took a lot of careful maintenance to make them look substantial. Couple this with the few problem families that any estate can provide, and it is easy to see how the inhabitants could view themselves as even less a part of the parish than the Progress Estate. One of the ex-missionaries who worked there during the Great War felt that there was such an inferiority complex that the huts really needed a separate church of their own.

Both here and elsewhere in the parish the S.Luke's Nurse was particularly important. As we have seen, the church's sponsorship ended in the middle twenties. The reasons were financial, but the results may have been more than financial. Perhaps it is coincidence, but one cannot help noticing that this is the moment when numbers at S.Luke's begin their slow decline.

Did people feel that they had to support the church if the church nurse was to support them? Did they drop their support for the church when she went independent? Or did they come to church because they felt the church cared? Did they fall away when they felt that the church cared no longer? Or was the practical side of the Gospel more important to them that the spiritual? Perhaps they did not know themselves.

THE SPIRITUAL QUESTION

The enrichment and embellishment of the church throughout this early period seems to have been patchy and even incoherent. It is almost as though there was no agreement on what the building should be saying to the worshippers. Focal points were lacking. Since the walls were intended to be so plain and dull, this was a serious defect. Even the war memorial is curiously low-key. Nothing of real substance was to appear between the installation of the screen in 1915 and the coronation reredos just before the Second World War. The two styles clashed even then!

There is only one area where, despite all difficulties, growth has been steady, constant and unspectacular: the parish's Eucharistic worship. Matins had become the main Anglican service within a few decades of the Reformation. Even in Tomkinson's time, weekday masses occasionally had to be cancelled because there was no congregation. (The custom of receiving the Blessed Sacrament fasting made for unnecessary complications, of course; late-morning and early-evening masses were until very recently thought to be out of the question.) But in their various ways the clergy and laity of S.Luke's from 1904 until today have deepened and extended a solidly Eucharistic tradition. It is what holds us together and enriches us, and it is a tradition we should prize.

A DIFFERENT SORT OF PARISH

This has been the story of S.Luke's spectacular years. Settling down to what looked like a lower level of achievement had its problems. Expectations had been raised by the talented outsiders of our early history. The parishioners who were left could not in the end meet them. There was a lot of heart-searching and no doubt some feeling of guilt too, much of it misplaced.

Organisation, initiative, thinking broadly: these were gifts that became scarcer at S.Luke's from the thirties onwards. But in becoming more low-key the church seems to have become friendlier. It seems also to have reflected more faithfully the strengths and weaknesses of the area that it serves. That is as it should be in a Church that is parish-based.

In the end, the history of any parish is less about spectacular achievement than about patience and faithfulness. The true Church is not the building but the Body of Christ. The life of that Body is expressed not in bricks and mortar but in crucifixion and resurrection. That truth has been clear throughout the history of our parish, and throughout all Christian history. By God's mercy we shall see it clearly in our own day as well.

LAUS DEO

Appendix

list of churchwardens

1904— Sir G Vyvyan, W.Parkinson, D. Cole
1905
1906—MrH.W.Horswill Mr J. Hall
1907
1908— Mr F.W. Clark Mr J. Hall
1913
1914 Mr R.A.M. Walters Mr J. Hall
1915— Mr R.A.M. Walters Mr G. Yewen
1916
1917— Mr R.A.M. Walters Mr W.G. Chapman
1918
1919 Mr R.A.M. Walters Mr J.Davey
1920 Mr G. Yewen Mr J. Butcher
1921 Mr AJ. Milne MrJ.Denton
1922— Mr J. Hall Mr J. Davey
1923
1924 Mr G. Smith Mr F.S. Neame
1925 Mr J. Davey Mr F.S. Neame
1926 Mr G. Smith Mr G. Ebbs
1927— Mr A-E-Usherwood Mr G. Ebbs
1928
1929 Mr A.E. UsherwoodMr H.W.L. Evans
1930 Mr C.G.Williams Mr H.W.L. Evans
1931— Mr C.G. Williams Mr W.G. Powell
1932
1933 Capt F.C. Prime Mr W.G. Williams
1934— Mr W.G. Powell Capt F.C. Prime
1936
1937— Mr H.S. Pallant Mr A.E. Caches
1951
1952— Mr W.E. Powell Mr C.G. Grant
1957
1958— Mr W.E. Powell Mr J. Hawke
1966
1967 Mr W.E. Powell Mr L. Bannister
1968 Mr T.Longman Mr L. Bannister
1969— Mr T. Longman Mr M. Atterton
1970
1971—Mr J.Jordan MrM. Atterton
1973
1974 Mr J.Jordan Miss R. Manners
1975—Mr D.Francis Miss R. Manners
1976 Mr D. Francis Miss R. Manners
(from 21 October Mr J. Jordan
1977 Mr D. Francis Mr R.L.S. Cushen
1978—Mr E.G. Mercer Mr R.L.S. Cushen
1986
1987— Mr TJ. Ede Mr R.L.S. Cushen
1991 Mr TJ. Ede Mr R.L.S. Cushen
Mrs J.H. Poston/rom Michaelmas)
1992 Mrs J.H. Poston Mr R.L.S. Cushen

list of faculties granted

1915 chancel screen
1919 war memorial
faculty records 1926—1930 are not available
1930 children's corner
1932 church completion
1938 high altar
1946 Reproduction peal of bells
1947 Lady screen
1954 Absolom memorial reredos
1958 east windows
1963 revision of children's corner
new boiler and oil storage tank
1967 churchyard walls,
vestry floor & decoration
1968 south aisle roof
Powell memorial table, chalice and paten
1971 portable font
1972 external repairs
donation of cross & candlesticks to S.Mary Henstead
1978 electronic organ
new gas boiler
1979 re-wiring
nave altar and platform
reduction of seating to 275
1980 west doors
new radiators
1981 public address system
1982 gas radiator system
1985 removal of boilerhouse chimney and
transfer of bell
1989 public address system
1991 south aisle roof
1992 wc and kitchen facilities in north-west porch
replacement of curtains
transfer of war memorial
refurbishment of high altar