

An Account of Breinton Mission Church

by Bronwen Wild

This story has been drawn entirely from a "book" compiled by Gill Wall of Manor Farm, Breinton in 1990 which she made in memory of the Mission Church. The building itself is now a private house currently lived in and owned by Mrs. Sally Weekes. Gill included in her "book", information from Parish magazines, from the minutes of Breinton PCC meetings, photographs she took herself and those she borrowed and one or two articles from the Hereford Times.

Until 1884 non conformist services had been held in the chapel of Chapel House. In this same year these stopped because a Mission Church or Hall with "bell and clock" was built on land belonging to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on the opposite side of the road. It was consecrated by the Bishop of Hereford and weekly services began to be held there. This was a very necessary enterprise both as a church and as a community resource for this isolated part of the Parish. The road was a mere muddy track and the Parish church of St. Michael's was a long walk away---particularly arduous in inclement weather. Two people have suggested that there might have been another reason why the Mission Hall was built. A new tiled floor had recently been laid in St. Michael's and it was said that the people who worshipped there were reluctant to have it sullied by the muddy boots of the farm labourers from the Common! I have to assume in addition, that the dissenters who had subscribed to the non-conformist persuasion on one side of the road, did not object to suddenly finding themselves worshipping according to the rites of the Anglican Church , on the other side!

Gill Wall also discovered the original Church Institute Rules in the old vicarage (now Breinton Grange).The document wasn't dated but was probably written before the Hall was enlarged in 1914.

There was to be an "association of Church men and Parishioners united for mutual good in various ways."

It would have been an exciting time for those who lived on the Common for in the days before universal electricity or personal transport, life for modest country people must have been very constrained.

A library/reading room was established and occasional lectures were given on "interesting and instructive subjects."Members (men only!) could bring their wives, mothers or sisters along to these. Useful information was also available there like new postal regulations or how to get in touch with benefit societies and when army clothing was available for "cheap disposal." Remember , this was long before the welfare state! There was to be an annual social gathering of members families "for tea and friendly intercourse."

Subscriptions for ordinary members (villagers) was 1/-;more affluent people paid half a crown or 5/-.

In 1905 a clothing club was started and deposits by 37 members that year amounted to £19-8s-6d while the contribution of 9 wealthier members came to £5!

Classes in Domestic Economy were started for young women or "in plain words, Household Duties, plants and flowers and basket making." Village boys could also learn how to prune the fruit trees in the local orchards.

The 1950's were particularly busy years at the Mission Church. The vicar for the most part of this decade was the Rev. Redmond and he took a keen interest in the Mission Hall.

Someone, possibly Mrs. Hyde, was employed at £5 p.a .to keep the church clean and light the fire. When the church clock stopped the Rev. Redmond had it repaired at his own expense. The curtains were repaired and though the whole place needed decorating, it was always thoroughly cleaned for Harvest Festival. It must have been a happy place for in 1954 there were 150 communicants!

Sadly, our kindly vicar became very concerned that the church was growing increasingly dirty. He described it as in a "deplorable and filthy state." Mrs. Hyde was given immediate notice and her place was taken by a Mrs. Crooke! The last we hear of him he is thanking everyone, especially the carol singers, for going out over Christmas and collecting enough money to pay for the Church bus which went to both churches. They collected £33-10-9d and in 1955 a total of 886 people used the bus. This money was enough to buy 5 doz. new prayer books as well!

Sometime in the 1990's, clearing out the Mission room prior to the sale of the Mission Church, Gill Wall found a notice printed 27 years previously. It read;

WORKING PARTY

Helpers to distemper and paint here between 1st-5th June at 6-30pm. All welcome. Please bring paint, distemper and brushes if possible.

Estimates to have the work done had been alarmingly high so the congregation, with the help of the vicar, the Rev. Bill Haynes who promised to rub down the paintwork, decided to do the work themselves . (And there is a photograph to prove it!).

It is this same vicar about whom Trudy Brookes tells a lovely story. Trudy was living at this time at Whitestone, almost next door to the Mission Church.

"One evening I turned up for the evening service and I was the only one. Bill Haynes asked me if I would like him to take the service or if both of us went home we would be in time to watch the popular TV serial, The Forsyth Saga." That is what they decided to do and Trudy hadn't very far to go She also added that Bill gave the best of sermons with which statement many would agree .(Gill!)

In January 1984 several young people, under the Youth Opportunities Scheme, repainted the Mission Church and Room. The Rev. Haynes said in January that "they are doing excellent work" and by March he was thanking everybody for cleaning the inside after the redecoration. It is ,he said "now all glorious within " and should remain so for many years to come. Nevertheless, In 1987 further "necessary repairs and alterations " were needed and this time professionals were brought in. The door and inside were painted, part of the roof was treated for woodworm, tiles were replaced, a window was releaded and the boiler was serviced. And at Christmas Mr. Tony Morgan of

Heron Hill presented the Church with a beautiful silver bowl which he had made himself in memory of his wife Margot. It was she who had been responsible for the making of the new blue curtains in the church which can be seen in the photographs.

As well as the rather mundane business of keeping the Mission Church in good repair, it is also testimony to the great affection in which the church was held to see, in Gill's photographs, some of the articles, both decorative and devotional, which beautified the altar. There is a pair of brass vases given in 1915 and which seem to have often been filled with the wild flowers that Gill Wall loves so much. A Mrs Hickman gave the communion cruet in memory of her husband and there is an oak book stand given by Miss Baker in memory of her mother. It was carved by a Mr. Arkwright of Breinton Lodge. Miss Baker apparently loved singing at the concerts which were held at the Church. Mention must be made of the organ; bought in the early '40's for £10 and sold in 1990 for £40!

The Lea family gave the altar rails and altar stools in memory of their seven sons and son in law who had served in WW1, one of the boys, Harry Lea, dying in action in 1917. Many years later, just before the church was sold, a great many members of this family were invited back to visit and there is a splendid photograph of them all in the archive!

Many of the people whose names appear in this collection are very much alive and active in the Parish to this day and it has been a delight to follow their connection with the Mission Church in its pages! However, there arrived a time, somewhere in the late 1980's, when it became apparent that the future of the Mission Church needed serious thought. It was not being used nearly as much as formerly. It was clear that much more extensive and expensive work was needed to bring it up to the standard required of a modern, public building. In addition, times had changed. People had cars and could get more easily to St. Michael's Church. Neither did they find the things that had once provided amusement and education to their liking any more.

At the same time, the parish church of St. Michael's also needed extensive and very necessary renovation. The woodwork needed treating and there was rising damp. The church would need to be redecorated afterwards. Outside the roof needed attention. Estimates suggested that this would cost around £5000! It was decided that the Mission Church should be sold and eventually planning permission to convert it to a private dwelling was obtained.

Initially there was some fierce resistance to this idea from a small group of people. A petition was organised and signed by forty two people, not all, it was pointed out, regular attendants at the Mission Church services! The petition asked the PCC of St. Michael's to consider transferring the 9am Communion Service to the Mission Church for a trial period of six months to see whether it would be better supported. Covenants were promised amounting to £520 pa for five years as well as a donation of £350 to repair the building. Several letters representing this point of view were sent to and published in the Hereford Times. Many offers of building and decorating work were offered for free. It was clear that a considerable number of people were willing to make a huge effort to keep the Mission Church.

Eventually, on June 4th, 1990 there was a meeting of the PCC at Manor Farm, Gill Wall's home. A heated and sometimes acrimonious debate took place with everyone invited to put their point of view. Eventually a reasoned and pragmatic conclusion was reached, summed up by one member who said, "the PCC's job is to keep a consecrated place of worship open for the whole parish-in

other words ,the Parish Church, where weddings, baptisms and funerals could take place. The PCC must put St. Michael's first as the Mission Church could not be self supporting. " She also pointed out that at the moment they were without a vicar and the Archdeacon had no information as to when they might expect to get one!

Finally, a proposal was put to the meeting that "The Mission Hall be sold as soon as possible and the proceeds invested." The motion was carried with ten people voting in favour and two against. There was a great deal of genuine grief at the inevitable conclusion and these pages end with a comment taken from the Breinton School Log Book of many years before this date, when the headmistress, a Miss Moir, had said ,"the school closed permanently this afternoon to the great sorrow of all concerned."

"The same could be said about Breinton Mission Church when it closed on the evening of June 4th 1990," were Gill Wall's concluding remarks here and she determined to make this "book" in memory of a beloved place.

This was not quite the end of the story for the Mission Hall had yet to be sold and the interior dismantled.

The Church was put on the market at an asking price of £78,000. I am not sure what it finally sold for. Pages 89 and 91 in the archive give a description of the Mission Hall in Estate Agent language as well as a list of the "Covenants imposed by the PCC in order to protect the privacy of adjoining parishioners."

The dismantling process must have been a difficult and poignant business. The altar cupboard was cleared out and the books in the Mission Room were sorted. Some of these had been given in memory of members of the congregation and they were returned to the families or taken to St. Michael's. On July 2nd, the overgrown land around the Mission hall was cleared too. There is a delightful photograph of Bruce Wallace and Ann Powell loading the altar rails and stools onto Bruce's trailer ready to take them to St. Michael's.

A little oak table, together with the brass cross, vases, plate and wooden candlesticks were all made into another altar. This time the altar rails created a partition round a little chapel which was created in a corner of St. Michael's; it was to be called "The Mission Chapel" and was to be used for early morning Communion and private prayer .The Bishop of Ludlow came and dedicated both the chapel and the altar rails at the Harvest Festival Service.

A huge and beautiful Scandinavian Maple had sheltered the Mission Church on Breinton Common and before the sale Gill wall dug up several tiny saplings, planting the best and strongest on the South side of St. Michael's churchyard in March 1992

The Mission Furniture was sold in September 1990 at a Grand Auction in the village hall. The altar cupboard fetched £16 and was bought to go into Breinton Grange, the old vicarage. Seventeen chairs at £1 each went to The Bay Horse and two benches went to Swainshill Farm. The harmonium as I have mentioned ,sold for £40 .

A very wistful comment was heard afterwards noting that "All of it, not far away."