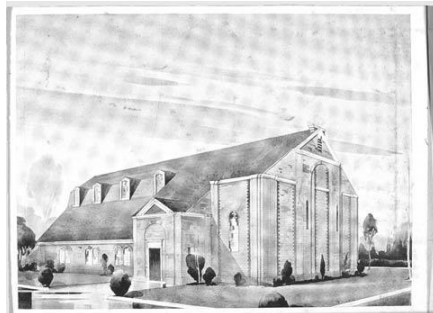


A History of St Faith's Church, Lee-on-the-Solent



1933 – 2008

75th Anniversary Year

A New Church for Lee-on-the-Solent

When people visit St Faith's for the first time they are usually surprised by the beauty of the interior. In the Hampshire and Isle of Wight volume of 'The Buildings of England', Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's most interesting comments about St Faith's were:

'Demure outside ... inside original and impressive'.

'Strange and slightly jazzy chancel fittings'.

'A wide south chapel, against the middle part of the nave, adds a little spatial complexity'

In terms of Church history seventy-five years is not such a long period of time, but this fine building is more than just a piece of good architecture. It represents an important facet of community life and development. It is not just the work of architects and builders but the faith and labour of hardworking parishioners who have been committed to keeping the church in good condition as a place of worship and a meeting place for the community for generations to come.

The Church, like Lee-on-the-Solent itself, is relatively new. There is no mention of Lee in the Domesday Book although in the 11th Century the land belonged to Count Alan of Brittany. In 1236 a sub-tenant Gilbert le Bret, held a land holding known as the Manor of Ly and another sub-tenant Roger Markes, also held land. The two manors became known respectively as Lee Britten and Lee Markes, names which survived at least in law until the abolition of copyhold lands in the 1920s and which exist now only as road names in Lee and Stubbington.

By the end of the 14th century Lee Markes had become the property of Titchfield Abbey, and after the dissolution of the monasteries, with Lee Britten, it became the property of the Earl of Southampton. For the most part, and for many centuries, what we now know as Lee was little more than a hamlet of a few houses and farms. But there is a religious twist!

Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight (founded in 1132) required a mainland base to land and keep a boat. Hamo Le Breton granted them a piece of land close to Browndown Point with permission to land at any point along the seafront. When Titchfield Abbey was founded in 1232 Lee became the mid-point between two monastic communities and the landing point for essential journeys. Rents and tithes were paid to the monks at Titchfield (Premonstratensians - the same religious order as the community at Mondaye in France to which St Faith's relates today). At the Reformation when both monasteries were closed, the nearest

parish churches were at Rowner and Crofton, and the land which eventually became Lee was used mostly for farming and grazing.

By the mid nineteenth century, Lee still had no church building and not many houses but the community was growing. A Victorian developer and member of Queen Victoria's court, Sir John Robinson, had seen the potential of Lee as a seaside resort so development began. For the second time in its history the proximity of Lee to the Isle of Wight (and to Osborne House in particular) was a significant factor in its development. Roads were laid out (a place dedicated for the Parish Church in appropriately named Victoria Square) and plots of land sold for building development. A 'tin church' dedicated to St Faith was built, the second dedication to that saint in this deanery so clearly a saint of some importance at that time in Victorian England. Within the context of Victorian grandeur and optimism, a child saint was chosen for her simplicity, purity and courage when facing martyrdom under a period of Roman persecution. The tin church was seen as a temporary place of worship to be replaced when Lee had sufficient population to build and sustain it. The Parish of Crofton (created out of Titchfield) had responsibility for the new church and curates were sent down to take services before one eventually became priest in charge. The Vicar of Crofton between 1874 and 1901 was the Revd Pitt Cobbett who not only planted the seed of a Church in Lee but still in a way influences it today. A recent bequest of Revd Cobbett's last surviving relative is being used to help fund a Youth Minister to work in this parish and neighbouring parishes of Rowner and Bridgemarky.

Housing was increasing and the community was sufficiently established so that a school, a tennis club and sailing club were all formed at around the same time. The airfield was built and people were beginning to say – "We need something more significant than a tin church".

In the 1920s discussion began about the possibility of Lee becoming a separate parish. There were plans to develop the seafront with the tower complex, hotels, flats, a swimming pool and of course the railway. The High Street was filling with shops and Lee was certainly becoming a place to come to and was thought to be a community with a future. The Diocese of Portsmouth at this time did not exist – we were part of the Diocese of Winchester, and the then Bishop, Bishop Garbett, agreed that a new church at Lee should be built.

Seely and Paget

Architects John Seely and Paul Paget were asked to design a church. This was their first major commission. John Seely, the son of Lord Mottistone, and Paul Paget the son of the Bishop of Chester, were certainly gifted but there was no doubt that their being well-connected helped in their receiving this work. Their previous



St. FAITH'S CHURCH (INTERIOR). SEE-ON-THE-SOLENT



The old St. Faith's



The new St. Faith's, which completed 1933 from the old St. Faith's on right side of picture.

Views of the old church

- Top left: *Inside view.*
- Top right: *View from Milvil Road*
- Bottom left: *View from the south.*
- Bottom right: *The old church behind the new, just before it was demolished.*

project had been a restoration of Mottistone Manor on the Isle of Wight (on which the architect Edward Lutyens remarked on their drawings “Well boys, you’ve got it absolutely right. *Mottistone Manor – and you’ve kept it modest in manner*”) and their subsequent commission was the restoration of Eltham Palace, a former home of Henry VIII but soon to become the magnificent Art Deco home for the Courtauld family in south London. After this they worked on commissions by friends J.B.Priestley and John Betjeman, on building further churches such as St Mary’s Islington, and also on the restoration and maintenance of City of London Churches and buildings (Lambeth Palace, Fulham Palace, the Deanery and Canon’s House of Westminster Abbey) some of which were damaged during the war. Paul Paget’s final post after Seely’s death was as chief surveyor to St Paul’s Cathedral.

These two men were quite a remarkable pair. Having met at Cambridge they formed what Paul Paget himself described as a ‘marriage of two minds’. John Seely was the creative architect whilst Paul Paget managed the business. They enjoyed the company of the great and the good, especially in the pre-war years. They worked with architects Oliver Hill and most notably Sir Edward Maufe

whom Paget humorously described as being 'exactly like Guildford Cathedral'. Maufe was designing the cathedral at the same time that Seely and Paget were working on plans for St Faith's.

It is quite possible that the drawings of St Faith's were worked on at Seely and Paget's country retreat known as 'The Shack' on the Isle of Wight. The Shack, visited by J.B. Priestley and the Courthaulds, was an architect designed 'shepherd's hut' with every imaginable 1930s luxury. The Shack, now located at Mottistone Manor is owned by the National Trust and open to the public.

This was a time of local promise and of good things to come, but alongside this was the rise of dictatorships and fascism in Europe. The wider church reacted to world events in 1925 when the Catholic church introduced a new feast 'Christ the King' - an attempt to say that Christ stands above secularism and human political strength. Above the High altar, Seely and Paget installed the symbol of Christus Rex which is a key to interpreting the design of this building.

Many people comment on the remarkable arches in St Faith's and of how the building might represent an up-turned boat, an image often used to describe church design but the shape of these arches is quite distinctive. Paul Paget (in an interview for Country Life Magazine) said of St Faith's - "It was thought pretty dashing in those days because 'the partner' (which is how he usually referred to John Seely), had formed a theory that the most stable form of structure was the catenary arch". A catenary arch is the form that a chain naturally takes when dropped but suspended from two points. Every segment of chain pulls on every other segment of chain, giving the hanging chain its curved shape. The chain is almost vertical near the points of suspension because this part of the chain has the most weight pulling down on it. Toward the bottom, the slope of the chain decreases because the chain is supporting less and less weight. "So the church is composed of a series of reinforced catenary arches, which were cast *in situ*, thought quite a job in those days... then a number of churches followed in the London Diocese and elsewhere." (Country Life Magazine May 1937)

Looking at the arches today they remain a statement of strength and power but there is no evidence to suggest that an upturned boat was the model for their design, apart from the church's proximity to the sea. Strength and power are perhaps the keywords and it is possible to see in the shape of the arches of the side aisles a sharper and more defined shape – that of upturned bullets. By identifying the Church with a saint who, as a young girl, was martyred under early Roman persecutions and who was a symbol of purity, courage and faith, Seely and Paget took power and strength of faith as their theme, with arches resembling up-turned chains and bullets as if turning 'swords into ploughshares' – a strong and creative place for people of faith and peace.

Very few of the architect's drawings still exist though one set indicates provision for a shorter nave with a porch at the west end rather than the south porch which we use today. Possibly due to lack of funds, Seely and Paget worked on a building that might be extended at a later date since these drawings indicate the fitting of temporary weather boards on the west wall. Subsequent confidence that the money would be found obviously persuaded the parish to go for the larger building which we know today.



Laying the foundation stone 16th May 1932

A Living and Changing Building

The foundation stone at the east end of the Church was laid by John Seely's father, Major General The Rt. Hon John Edward Bernard Seely C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Lord Lt. of Hampshire on 16th May 1932 and simply proclaims the words "To the Glory of God." Just over a year later St Faith's was dedicated on 21st June 1933 at a cost of £10,188 of which at the time of dedication, £2000 had still to be raised. Such was the involvement of Seely and Paget in the design of the Church that the order of service indicated that 'no gift would be accepted for the inside of the church without them being consulted'. The painting of the Woman of Samaria (a gift of C.E.Pilcher Esq), the sanctuary lamp (a gift of Miss Adams), the Sanctus Gong (a gift of Mr and Mrs Adams) and a framed version of the Mothers' Union Prayer (a gift of Mrs Noster) are just a few examples of how local people contributed to the fabric.

The architects had planned for the inclusion of a velvet curtain to hang behind the High Altar but this along with reading desk cushions, kneelers and candle sticks had to wait until funds were available. Three curtains were eventually hung behind the altar for a period but proved unpopular and were removed. The internal colour of the church has become increasingly blue with successive decorations and whilst this is not in accordance with the architect's plans, the colour scheme remains a popular feature. There is no evidence to suggest that blue ceilings were ever part of the original plan and even the wall at the east end of the church behind the high altar was originally white.

We know nothing of the origin of the roundel in the Lady Chapel featuring the Virgin Mary, although it pre-dates the church itself.

Churches however are living buildings and they begin to change the moment people are introduced! In the autumn of 1933 Mrs Georgina McCausland offered to fund the design, manufacture and installation of windows in the Lady Chapel in memory of her husband Lt General Edwin McCausland who died in 1923 (the window featuring St George over the conquered dragon) and her son Major Frank McCausland who died in January 1933 (the window featuring a kneeling knight). These windows would have needed the approval of Seely and Paget and still fit with the theme of Christus Rex. St George has conquered evil and carries his sword pointing down whilst what he carries upright is the cross and flag of St George. The obedient soldier in the adjacent window is kneeling, hardly a fighting position, with sword to the ground and looking up to the cross of Christ. It may just be, however, that in trying to get the emphasis of peace over war they neglected to get their facts right – Frank McCausland was in the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scots and not the 1st as indicated in the window!

Brass plaques in the Lady Chapel were transferred from the old tin church. The first is a dedication to Reverend Edmund Davys who was the first Priest-in-Charge of the old church from 1894 until his death in 1901. After his wife's death (aged 38) in 1872 he had been a missionary in China with CMS and his ministry here was a retirement ministry where for seven years he was clearly generous in giving of his time, experience and pastoral care.

The second plaque is not for a priest but a doctor, James Priestley who died in 1903, aged 38 from blood poisoning. He was a medical practitioner in Lee. The plaque was paid for by his widowed mother. Little more is known about him other than what is inscribed in the plaque itself.

At the dedication service it is, however, difficult to imagine the response of the congregation who listened to Bishop Lovett. In fact many would not have heard him at all because whilst the acoustic of the building is superb for choral music it proved to be a disaster for the spoken word and over the years many different sound systems have been installed in attempts to conquer this problem. The

building however, was impressive, the architects having also designed all of the furniture and fittings for the chancel and sanctuary. The original wood fittings of the choir and high altar furniture and communion rail incorporate English-grown cedar of Lebanon. The choir area was extended to provide a curved dais for a nave altar in 1995 and the new wood rail was constructed from Douglas Fir.

The Bishop of Winchester donated and dedicated the window at the west end of the church in memory of Bishop Theodore of Winchester (1924-1932). This window was originally for Winchester College Chapel (the school of Paul Paget) but was abandoned on account of the war and was adapted and finished to fit its present position. The window was removed and restored in 1994 by the Salisbury Cathedral Windows Department.

The small windows in the chancel became the focus for controversy over the years. Designed by the architects they were manufactured according to a new process of plain-glazing. Early congregations blinded by sunlight at first had the windows stained, then boarded over and then uncovered as they are now.

In 1935 a separate ecclesiastical parish of Lee-on-the-Solent was created so that the new building became the parish church. Between 1939 and 1946 the church was used for the parade services of HMS Daedalus on Sunday mornings. As a thank offering for this use, the officers and ship's company presented a bell which was hung in a new bellcote above the west wall and dedicated in October 1949.

The First Vicar – Revd Douglas Hunter

On 16th May 1944 during one of the last air raid alerts, an anti-aircraft shell fell on the vicarage and caused the death of the first vicar, Douglas Egbert Hunter. The shell hit the corner bedroom where he was sleeping and he was thrown across the room. He died on the way to Haslar Hospital. Mrs Hunter was outside by the back door and was only slightly hurt. Douglas Hunter was 60 years old and close to retiring on health grounds having given so much of his energy and enthusiasm to the building and organization of the new church. He was remembered as a hard working parish priest and a kind and loving husband to his wife and loving father to his two daughters.

Pinned up Douglas Hunter's roll top desk was a notice:

“If you ever feel blue find something to do
for somebody else who is sadder than you.”

The reporting of his death, although just three weeks before D-Day was subject to newspaper censorship. The Portsmouth Evening News that day simply said that there was a 'noticeable attempt at concentrated bombing over one coastal area' and the next evening that 'the vicar of a south coast town was fatally injured by an anti-aircraft shell which struck the vicarage'. Three days later censorship was lifted and the Hampshire Telegraph reported that 'the corner of the vicarage where his bed was situated was demolished'. The Bishop of Portsmouth conducted Douglas Hunter's funeral in St Faith's and afterwards the cremation at the new crematorium in Southampton. His ashes are interred close to the south porch of the church.

It was in his memory that alterations to the high altar were made by re-facing the original concrete design with *Gris Moucheté*, a Belgian stone. The work was completed in 1948 and consecrated on Whit Sunday that year. The architects Seeley and Paget designed the altar at no charge as their contribution to Douglas Hunter's memorial, having been themselves frequent dinner guests at the vicarage at the time that the church was being built.

Considering the design of the church in the years preceding the war, there is a tragic irony about the fact that it was an anti-aircraft shell that came through the vicarage roof fatally wounding the dedicated priest who had made himself ill by working so hard to establish the new church. Douglas Hunter maintained St Faith's in high church tradition with incense and sanctuary bells but since his time the church has changed considerably with the different priests who have come and served here.

Memorial work after the war became a feature of Seeley and Paget's work. An example of such work can be seen at St Mary's Church, Petworth where they designed a new altar in memory of two teachers and twenty-nine children killed in an air raid on the village school there.

The Lowry Family

After the first world war the Lowry family gave a wooden hut to the church for community use – this wooden hut in the High Street became a focal point for community life. William Lowry (a retired tea planter) born in Ireland and his wife Annie born in Chester settled in Lee-on-the-Solent around 1900. They had four children – William, Auriol, Catherine and Cyril. All three boys served as officers in the Army during the Great War and all three boys were killed in action. On 4th June 1915, William Lowry aged 25 died in the Gallipoli campaign. On 25th March 1918, Cyril Lowry aged 20 died on The Somme and on 23rd September 1918, Auriol Lowry aged 20 died in the 4th Battle of Ypres.

William & Annie Lowry wanted some suitable local memorial in tribute to their sons. As Lee had no parish hall they offered in 1923 to purchase a surplus YMCA wooden hut at Gomer and to have it erected on a suitable site which they also bought and donated to St. Faith's primarily for Church purposes. The PCC readily agreed and the hut was established on the eastern side of where the British Legion is now located. It was named the Lowry Memorial Hall (usually referred to as the Lowry Hut) and was regularly used for all sorts of functions.

By 1970 the Lowry Hut was in a poor state of repair and the PCC agreed to sell the land with the proceeds going to building a new hall adjacent to the church – to be known as the Lowry Room and was opened in November 1979 at a cost of £35,000. Under the leadership of the then vicar, a former army chaplain, Revd Ken Kendra, the Lowry Room was built to the north side of the church and replaced what some in the community thought of as a 'parish hall' (the old Lowry Hut) with a small 'church hall'. There was some outrage in the community which felt it was losing its village hall. However the church ensured that the room was a success and saw the formation of Lee Voluntary Care providing a lunch club and a playgroup.

The Lowry Room however was too small for many functions whether for church or community use, and so the Church decided in 1996 to build a Parish Centre which would incorporate the Lowry Room but importantly add a further large hall to the complex for both church and community use.



The old 'Lowry Hut'

The Changing Church

Music has always played an important part in the life of the church. The first organ, installed in 1936 at a cost of £400, was dedicated by Bishop Lovett. It was restored in 1961/2 and totally refurbished in 2005/6 by Henry Willis and Co. at a cost of £60,000. In the last 100 years however, the two churches on this site have been served by just two organists Mr Hawkins and Mr John Witham. Over the years the choir has changed and developed. The choir has participated in RSCM events and enjoyed many choir camps and other activities. A great many young people have known St Faith's through involvement in the choir.

Other key projects undertaken have included the redecoration of the church in 1958 and 1992, the re-ordering of the chancel to accommodate a Nave Altar in 1995, the installation of a new sound system in 1996 and the replacement of high level Windows in 1998. The floor was re-sealed in 2005. New Heating Systems were installed in 1937, 1952, 1982 and 2005.

The moderate re-ordering of the Church in 1995 to accommodate a Nave altar followed a controversy over initial plans that would have involved the removal of lecterns and choir stalls. The final design which extended the sanctuary area to create a dais with movable communion rails enabled the congregation to gather around the altar and has proved popular.



The Parish Centre

The Parish Centre, completed in 1999 at a cost of £365,000, was made possible owing to a bequest from Ronald Bulson after whom the main hall is named. Ronald Bulson (1919 - 1970) was not always sympathetic to the church - he once wrote a letter to a vicar and, wrapping it round a brick, threw it through a vicarage window - but he was enthusiastic about the church's role in community. With much fund-raising and a £66,500 grant from the National Lottery, the Parish Centre, designed by architect Michael Warren, was completed. Bishop Kenneth Stevenson laid the foundation stone (to the left of the main entrance) on 25th June 1999.

The Church and Parish Centre are situated on Victoria Square and over the years the site has been transformed from being a very large and often overgrown Vicarage garden to offer the surroundings it does today. The Vicarage was fenced around in 1981, the new car park laid out in 1999 and a Garden of Remembrance set out in 2000. There is no burial site in Lee so this Garden provides a much valued place for the interment of cremated remains by bereaved families who continue to maintain the garden. The garden was designed, laid out and planted over one weekend by the family and friends of Roger John Hurley, a young man who died tragically at work in 1999.

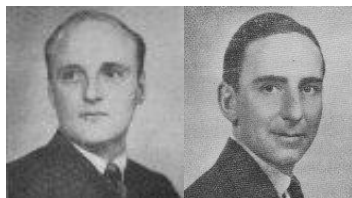
St Faith's today sits somewhere within the liberal catholic tradition. The more catholic traditions of 'bells and smells' of the 1930s have gone although incense is often burnt in the Lady Chapel at midweek services. The Lady Chapel is the place of daily prayer and is considered by those who use it regularly as the 'engine room' of the church. All activities due to take place in the centre on any day are prayed for at Morning Prayer, as is the ministry and mission of the church in the community.

There is evidence in early magazines that Douglas Hunter had to badger people to come to church but they did so in great number, as they do today when the average number at the Parish Eucharist is around 180. Lee has, however, grown significantly since the Church was built and the hamlet of one hundred years ago has become a busy community seeking market town status with a population of around 10,000 people. Politically conservative it often resists change and still many people defiantly refer to 'the village' which it clearly is not. In many ways new housing has been good for the community and local economy but the majority of those who work commute elsewhere to do so. New housing and flats mean that Lee is not just a seaside place for retirement. The schools are full and there are plenty of young families and it may well be that eventually our church buildings are not big enough!

The church recognises that it is fortunate to have a building in good repair, in a great location and good facilities. It is not complacent and recognises that some of the challenges that lie ahead are as great as they were for those who allocated

land to the monks at Quarr, to those who first built the tin church, then the present building, and those who have managed the changes that have taken place since. The review of current assets in terms of land and buildings, the nature of church growth and patterns of church attendance, suggest that the church buildings on this site will have to continue changing in the coming years.

Architectural journalist Stephen Bayley wrote that ‘architecture is more important than politics because nothing has so much influence on people’s behaviour as their surroundings’. This church building and the buildings that have been developed around it exist to enable the Christian community to fulfil their vocation. Probably John Seely and Paul Paget, had they had a free hand, would have renamed the Church ‘Christ the King’ but fortunately the name of St Faith was there already. The child who gave her life for Christ in the Roman persecution of 304 remains an inspiration for Christians in a world where the temptation is simply not to believe. The church dedicated to her enables Christians today to express not only their faith, but also their confidence in God.



Architects: John Seely and Paul Paget

Incumbents of Crofton

Pitt Cobbett MA	1874 - 1901
Richard E Leigh MA	1901 - 1926
Hugh P Metcalfe BA	1926 - 1947

Priests-in-Charge at Lee-on-the-Solent

Edmund Davys MA	1894 - 1901
William F Aston MA	1901 - 1908
JB Bourne MA	1908 - 1910
EW Morley BA	1910 - 1912
TN Rathbone Griffin MA	1912 - 1921
Charles R Hall BA	1922 - 1927
Eric H Dixon LTh	1927 - 1930
Douglas E Hunter BA	1930 - 1935

Vicars of Lee-on-the-Solent

Douglas E Hunter BA	1935 - 1944
Kenneth M Robathan MA	1944 - 1954
A Oswald Sills MA	1955 - 1965
Derrick Halliwell	1965 - 1970
Kenneth Kendra OBE MA	1971 - 1980
Michael Kenning BA	1981 - 1992
Peter Sutton BA	1993 -



Douglas
Hunter

Kenneth
Robathan

Oswald
Sills

Derrick
Halliwell

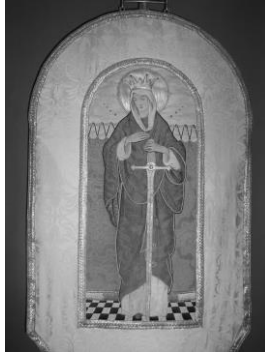


Kenneth
Kendra

Michael
Kenning

Peter
Sutton

St Faith



In Agen, now in Southern France in the year 304, a young Christian girl named Foy (from the Latin Fides) refused to make a sacrifice to pagan gods and was put to death on the orders of the Roman Governor Dacien. He had her roasted on a brazen bed and then beheaded. Other versions of the story record a miraculous shower of rain extinguishing the fire and necessitating the subsequent beheading. Other Christians from Agen, among whom were Bishop Caprais, moved by her example, submitted in their turn to an agonising fate.

In the 9th Century a monk allegedly stole the relics and took them to the abbey-church in Conques, a popular stopping place for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The abbey at Conques was re-dedicated to St Faith and, discreetly glossing over its highly questionable acquisition, grew and prospered. Crusaders and pilgrims going to the shrine of St James at Compostella invoked her intercession and heaped treasures and gold on the community. The celebrated reliquary jewel-encrusted statue of the saint dates from this time and has long been revered as a memento of her life and death



Acknowledgements

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An extended form of this History of St Faith's Church can be found on the Church website:

www.stfaithslee.org

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