

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 30: THE PARISH HOUSE

The term Parish House has been in use since the 1760's and is defined as:

"A church building or house that may provide space for the parish office, clergy and staff offices, classrooms, choir rehearsal room, and meeting rooms. It may also include a chapel, a nursery, a kitchen, a library, or storage space. The parish house is typically a separate building from the church that is near the church."

and indeed, that describes well the different functions to which our Parish House has been applied over the years. However, as we entered the 21st century the title was less well understood and so it was re-named the Church Hall. However, as this is a history, we'll continue to use the traditional name, Parish House, here.

The foundation stone of the Parish House was laid by the Revd. J.N. Philpott (Rector 1893-1918) on Saturday 27th October 1928. The order of service for this memorable occasion notes that:

"When the offerings have been presented and placed upon the Holy Trinity Table the Clergy and the Choir shall precede the Congregation to the site of the Parish House, singing 'Jesus, thou hast willed it.'"

As usual, the valiant efforts to raise the necessary funds were not quite sufficient to complete the full project. The original plans, approved by the Borough Council in March 1927, show:

- a grander entrance lobby, with a ladies' cloakroom and toilets to the east of the main entrance and a men's cloakroom and toilets to the west,
- a much larger stage (but no Guildroom). There were steps down to a basement under the stage which contained a chair store and heating chamber,
- the rear lobby was called an "artistes and service lobby",
- our current toilets were men's and ladies' dressing rooms (but the other way round),
- and our kitchen was a kitchen!



Holy Trinity Parish House, now known as the Church Hall



Inside of Parish House


We have a copy of a letter from the architects, C, J. Dawson, Son & Allardyce, dated 3 January 1929, to the Borough engineer & Surveyor which explains that:

"Owing to lack of funds it has been found necessary to omit the permanent entrance Lobby and Cloak Rooms for the present and to substitute a temporary Porch constructed of coke breeze slab walls. The floor of this temporary Porch will however be permanent and will be wood block on 6" of concrete as on the approved plans".

The reply stated that:

"We should much prefer to build the walls entirely of brick, half brick thick, in Portland cement mortar as suggested by Mr Turner your Deputy and as this will be stronger than the breeze with brick piers we assume this will be approved and have therefore instructed Messrs. Jas. C. Flaxman & Sons to proceed at once with these walls half brick thick in cement".

Interestingly, a plan dated February 1927 shows that at this time it was still intended to extend the church by building both a chancel and a north aisle, as Comper had originally proposed. Sadly, that has not yet come about.


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Advert for Jas. C. Flaxman,
builders of the Parish House,
from an SUFC programme of the
1935-36 season

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 31: "THE 2006 IMPROVEMENTS".

- Our church gets a much-needed makeover.
- Where did the money come from to pay for all these improvements?
 - What set the deadline for the work.

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)