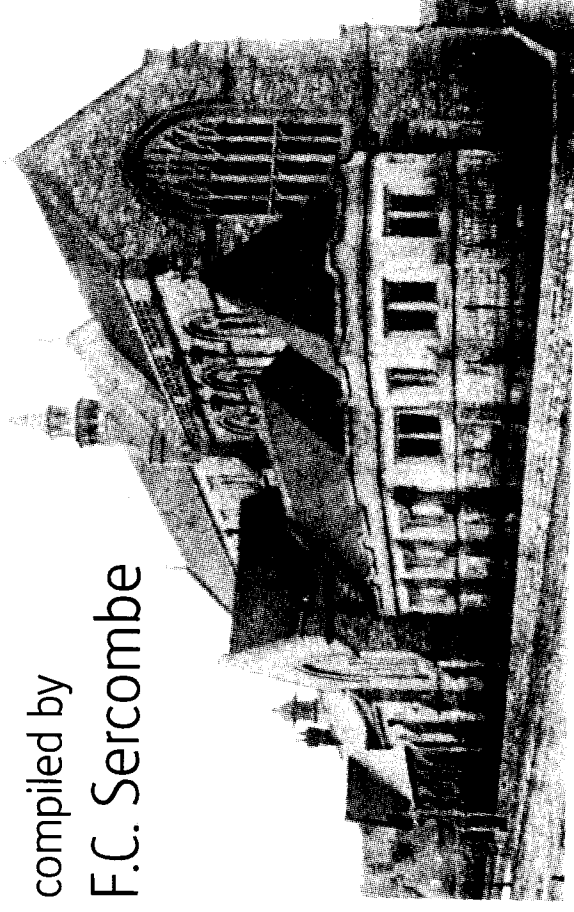


The History of Emmanuel Church, Exeter

compiled by
F.C. Sercombe



Foreword

One hundred years in the history of Christ's Church on earth is a very short span indeed, but one hundred years of this Parish Church of Emmanuel is its entire history and that is surely a moment worth celebrating. So I warmly thank Cliff Sercombe for undertaking the updating of this booklet at the time of our Centenary Celebrations.

Emmanuel - the name of our Lord Jesus Christ during his time on earth - means God With Us. In the past 100 years the congregations gathering in this building have proclaimed God With Us to our parish. Today, as one generation of worshippers succeeds to another, a small but thriving group of Christians proclaim the same message. Just as the life of the gospel continues through the passage of history so we continue to give witness to the gospel message in ways appropriate for our times.

So may God always be with you, and may the Good News of Christ continue to shine from this building and those who worship in it, as light in the world, now and during the second century of its existence at the start of this third millennium of Christendom.

Revd D B M Gill

When I offered to compile this booklet, I didn't realise the task I was taking on. However, it was most enjoyable and I owe a great deal to those who contributed, especially the late Fred Bradbeer who wrote the original book for the years up to 1964 and also to Dorcas Manning who took my notes, tidied them up and put them in to this format.

F.C.Sercombe
May 2000

The Story of Emmanuel Church,

Exeter

It was in 1886 that it was thought that a division of St Thomas was necessary and a Vestry Meeting was held on 18th November when the following resolution was passed:

1. To Purchase an Iron Church to seat 300 people, estimated to cost £300.
2. To erect this upon a piece of ground kindly granted by Sir Redvers Buller and situated at the junction of Okehampton Road, and the "field path" to Exwick.
3. To appoint as Curate-in-Charge, the Rev. R.H.Murphy.
4. That the name of the new Church should be that of EMMANUEL

Subsequently, meetings were held at the Bishop's Palace and it was decided to build a tin church to cost £300 and to seat 300 people. This was done at a cost of £279.10.0 and the opening service was held on Saturday, 16th July 1887 and on the following day, the sermon at Evensong was preached by the Bishop of Exeter.

In 1892, a committee under the Bishop of Exeter discussed the building of a permanent church and it was ultimately agreed to advertise a national competition for the design and entries to be

in by the 1st May 1896. There were 405 applications and 118 sets of plans submitted. After long discussions, the winner was a Mr Harold Brakespear of Corsham, Wilts and tenders for the building work were then asked for. The successful firm was Messrs. N. Pratt & Son of Clyst St Mary and the cost was £7,088.

The foundation stone of Aberdeen granite was laid by General Sir Redvers Buller, the inscription reading:

"In the Name of the Ever Blessed Trinity, this foundation stone of Emmanuel Church was laid on the 12th October in the year of our Lord, one thousand, eight hundred and ninety seven by General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.M.G."

A box was placed underneath the foundation stone containing copies of the day's newspapers and specimens of the current coins of the realm.

The opening of the Church was on St. Andrew's Day, 1899 at a special service at 3.00pm., the Mayor of Exeter and Corporation were present and the dedication was by the Bishop of Exeter. The consecration was on 2nd October, 1900 when the preacher was the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The church is in the early Perpendicular style of architecture (15th century). Built in Babbacombe limestone with dressings and window traceries of Bath stone, it is about 100ft in length and 70ft in breadth and has seating accommodation for 600 people. (In this connection, it is interesting to note the Incorporated Church Building Society made a grant of £370 towards the building costs, on condition that all seats were to remain free.) The organ chamber is on the North side of the Chancel, and the Chapel, Clergy and Choir vestries are on the

South side. The roof, with main trusses of the hammer beam type, is constructed of pitch pine, covered with red Broseley pattern tiles, and is supported by 12 Bath stone piers octagonal in section, with moulded and carved capitals; from these spring the arches, above which are the clerestory windows. The two arches nearest the Chancel are of greater width than the others, and form the openings to the transepts; these are well lighted North and South by large windows. The North and South aisles are roofed by a lean-to type of roof. Arches of similar detail to the Nave occur at the junction of aisles and transepts, and again at the entrance to the Chapel and organ chamber.

The Altar steps are of marble, as is the Altar top, which rests on an oak framework. The Lectern is of oak and traceried; the Pulpit body is of oak with traceried panels and carved cornice, and rests on a bath stone base, and steps with a brass handrail on wrought iron standards. The Font is of Bath stone with marble columns; the cover is of oak, mounted with a wrought iron handle and scrollwork, the whole being a gift from the Sunday School. The Holy Bible was given by Blundell's School, Tiverton, Devon, in 1900. Earlier, in 1899, this School feeling the need for a Mission in the Parish, formed, on October 25th, of that year, an organisation known as Blundell's School Mission, this was situated in Grays Buildings, Cowick St., Exeter, the Rev J.A. Prendergast being the first Missioner. It was decided to give offertories once a term to the Mission at Quinquagesima, Whit Sunday, and the Sunday of the Harvest Festival; it was agreed also, that a representative from each boarding house, should collect every term, as much as possible from the boys in his House and that the ladies should be asked to contribute needlework of a useful character to be sent to the Parish. This Mission generously provided the Pulpit, Lectern and Chancel fittings for the new Church. In the Chancel itself, may be seen

four shields, beautifully carved and painted, presenting the arms of General Sir Redvers Buller, Blundell's School, the late J.M. Snow and the See of Exeter. The building was illuminated by gas; electricity being introduced in May 1929.

Emmanuel was originally a District Church but on 29th April, 1910 became a Parish in its own right and Rev. C.H. Williams became its first Vicar. He came originally to Emmanuel in 1889 and was involved with the new church right from the beginning. He continued to serve the Parish until 1924 when he retired and he died on 12th January 1926. The chancel screen and a stone tablet were erected in his memory by parishioners and these were dedicated on the 2nd October 1926. His family on 15th January, 1928 provided the West Window in his memory. He was succeeded by Rev. E.F. Tozer.

In the early 1920's, the East Window was given as a memorial to those in the Parish who fell in the First World War, so the Church was very fortunate to have excellent stained glass windows at either end.

On 2nd March, 1924, a memorial window to the late Capt. R.F. Scott was unveiled in the south wall of the Church. The window had been provided by an anonymous donor and the unveiling was carried out by Capt. ERGR Evans RN, Capt. Scott's second-in-command on his last voyage. When the Church was bombed in 1942, the window was damaged and it was restored in 1948, the cost being defrayed by a Mr & Mrs F Endacott.

On the night of 23/24 April, 1942, two bombs were dropped in Okehampton Road, the first near the Vicarage and the second outside the Church. The Vicarage was damaged and the Vicar

and his wife had to live in the Church Hall for several months until repairs were carried out. The Church was also damaged, the roof had most of its tiles missing and the windows on the southside damaged. The interior had some damage, which was accentuated by subsequent rain as the roof was not repaired for some time. Services were held in the Church hall. The Church was re-dedicated on 31st March, 1943 when the Preacher was the Bishop of Exeter. On 8th May 1942, the King and Queen came to Exeter to see the damage done during the blitz, and in their tour of the City, they came to Okehampton Road. They stopped outside the Church and the Vicar and his wife were presented to them.

In October and December 1960, the Church was flooded and on the second occasion, much damage was done to the floors as most of the wooden blocks were lifted. Also some of the pews had moved by the force of the water. A great deal of work had to be done to restore the Church including the laying of 75% of the floor with new tiles. Once again services had to be held in the Church Hall, and the Church was again re-dedicated on the 20th June, 1961, the Preacher being the Dean of Exeter. The music was supplied by the Salvation Army Band as the organ was still out of commission.

Rev. E.F. Tozer died on 12th January, 1963 and Rev. E.E. Sadler came on 18th October 1963. The long inter-regnum was due to the fact that the Patron of the living could not be found for some considerable time. Now, the Bishop of Exeter is the Patron.

There is a stained glass window in the Lady Chapel to the memory of Rev. Tozer, and on the death of his wife, another window to his memory, and one to his wife are on the south wall of the Church, either side of the Scott window.

In 1975, it was found that the Church Hall was in need of a great deal of repair and there was little money available. It had been a recurring problem and it was eventually decided that it should be sold and the proceeds, subject to Diocesan approval, be used for a new hall. This was agreed and it was proposed that the north aisle be screened off to form the new hall and a foyer and toilets be built on the outside of the north door. Approval was received and the work completed. The three windows of the new hall on the Church side are in the shape of crosses and the glass forms the rays of the sun, the glass being made by the monks of Buckfast Abbey. Eventually, the north transept was also screened off to form a storage area.

In October 1978, Rev. Sadler retired and Rev P.J.S. Crockett was appointed on 1st July 1980. The long delay was due to the introduction of a Team Ministry comprising Emmanuel Parish together with the Parish of St Thomas and the Churches of St Andrews and St Philips. The Vicar of St Thomas became the new team Rector and Emmanuel remained a parish in its own right. However, it took several years before the team actually operated as a complete unit.

At Easter 1987, Rev Crockett left and Rev I.P. Gregory was appointed in August 1987 and he left in January 1991. Rev. D.B.M. Gill the current team Vicar was appointed in August 1991.

The Future

It is almost a hundred years since the consecration of the Church and the world has changed beyond all recognition in that period. It has been a centre of service to the people of the Parish, a centre for Christian worship, its ups and downs, baptisms, weddings and funerals. However, in these modern times, numbers attending have fallen, though fairly steady now, but this trend is national and not confined to Emmanuel. Finance in the Church of England is more important than ever and a survey of the churches in England is being carried out as to the best use of current resources. Our future may not be in our hands, but we can pray for it and only God knows what this will be. Hopefully, in another hundred years time, someone else will be looking at this and trying to bring it up to date.

Church Halls

The first was built in the early 1900's in Okehampton Street and was known as the King's Hall. It was sold in 1922 as it was too large and its successor was built in Emmanuel Road. The original Hall still stands and is now the Riverside Christian Centre. In its time it had a very mixed history. When first sold it became one of Exeter's very first cinemas and during World War II it was a factory being taken over by Messrs. Wippells for making parachutes. After that it was a warehouse and then several clubs operated there. Eventually its usage turned full circle and became religious once again.

The Hall in Emmanuel Road remained in use until 1976 as already stated. Church Organisations used it greatly, particularly up until the 1960's, as the Church was a good social centre apart from church services. This was particularly relevant between the two wars. During the Second World War, one of the London Schools, Borough Polytechnic, was evacuated to the area and classes were held in the Hall. Also, it was one of the few halls in the City where dances could be held. Eventually, it became too great a financial burden to bear and it was sold to the Northcott theatre. Great efforts had been made to keep it going, particularly by outside lets, but its condition was rapidly deteriorating, hence the sale.

The Emmanuel Young Men's Club was adjoining the Kings Hall, but its origin is unknown. It is believed to have been built about the same time as the Kings Hall and was on the Exe Bridge side. It remained in being until the early 1960's when the site was compulsorily purchased by the Exeter City Council for the re-development in connection with the new Exe Bridges. The site is now the entrance to Swan Yard. The club only had a token connection with the Church after World War II.

Church Organisations

In addition to the Young Men's Club, there were clubs for tennis, bowls, football, youth, girls and also Band of Hope, Mothers' Union, Church Missionary Society, Scouts and Guides. Unfortunately, only a few survive to day.

The Tennis Club had rented courts in Cowick Lane adjoining what is now the Franklin Hospital and only ceased to exist in name a few years ago when it was amalgamated with another club. Its connection with the Church had ended many years ago.

The Bowling Club was on land adjoining the Church Hall in Emmanuel Road until 1942 when it was badly damaged in the air raid. It never re-started and the Scouts now own part of the land where they have their HQ. The rest was sold to the Northcott Theatre

Some of the other organisations folded up as the years went by and no actual records appear to be available.