

## **LIVING STONES**

### **The Building of Immanuel Congregational Church**

**Southbourne**

**1910 - 1965**

**N A TURNER-SMITH**

### **The Building of Immanuel**

#### **Revealed by Fire**

Standing outside, I peered through the gaunt skeleton of a broken window of the old church hall that was now in ruins, gutted by fire on the night of Whit Sunday, May 17th, 1964. Daylight was shining through the charred timbers of the roof; walls blackened and tottering; contents a shambles of burnt chairs, tables, books and all the familiar furnishings of a church hall. On the window-sill lay an open Bible, the pages scorched and sodden but, plain to see, these words: "the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is". I call quickly to a young man who was roving with his camera: "Come on! Here's a picture!" He was busy elsewhere but can testify that this is true.

I was moved to read the whole paragraph and as I read, another man stood by me also reading: "According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on that foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire". We both looked round on the ruins. "Is this the end of a story?" I asked, "or just the end of a chapter?" I turned to my companion for answer. He was gone.

On Whit Monday, as the news of the fire spread from lip to lip throughout the town it brought the same exclamation of profound thanksgiving and relief: "What a blessing it was not the Church".

But it was the Church - the Church built in the spirit of adventure in Guildhill Road in 1910 and brought thence in the same spirit two years later, brick by brick, to its present site where it settled and prospered, being known as "Immanuel, the Church in the Wood". It was the Church that from its beginning had faithfully ministered to young and old alike. It was the mother-church of a

more splendid daughter-church now standing in the foreground for all to see, while the mother-church remains in the background where the children meet to gather what they may from the wealth of simple Christian truth that awaits them there. And if the daughter-church is more glamorous in the eyes of men today, the mother is not less splendid in the eyes of God for the family that she has nurtured through the years. Nor is the Spirit that first gave her life yet fully revealed, for much remains to be seen and done in the name of Immanuel, 'God with us'.

### **The Spirit of Adventure**

The God-given spirit of Christian adventure that built our church came to us not through the people of Southbourne but from people who had a vision for Southbourne, people who met our needs with their deeds, our insufficiency with their generosity.

In the year 1910, there appeared the following paragraph in the local press of Bournemouth: "So great is the lack of facilities for Free Church worship in Southbourne that the development of the suburb has actually been hindered thereby. Families have abandoned their intention of dwelling in Southbourne in consequence. Builders and property owners are frequently asking for a Free Church as a step towards letting their houses, and visitors have been disappointed on discovering the absence of Free Church accommodation."

The answer to this challenge came from the neighbouring district of Boscombe, in fact from the Congregational Church of Boscombe, the Rev. Francis Sloper, its Minister, his friend Mr S W Chandler and a few others who together secured a freehold site in Guildhill Road for a provisional Church building. The estimated cost including the site, the building and the furnishing, was £1800. This sum they set themselves to collect with all the zeal and energy that is to be derived from the sense of a high calling.

Within a month or two they were able to announce that the Foundation Stone would be laid on Saturday 9th April 1910 at 3.30 p.m. by Dr. J D Jones of Richmond Hill who, at that time, was Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. For those who care to search for this stone it may be seen serving its continuing purpose for the Hal as it stands today behind the church on its present site.

Filled with enthusiasm this splendid little committee next announced that the Hall would be opened on Friday 1st July and on Sunday 3rd July there would be Divine Service morning and evening conducted by the Rev. A T Riceman. It was a great Opening Ceremony filled with the spirit of thanksgiving. The Rev. Francis Sloper presided and Mrs F I Bright unlocked the door. Outside the people sang "Except the Lord the temple build". After the procession had entered, Dr. J D Jones conducted a prepared Order of Service and the whole congregation joined in the hymn, now always sung on Immanuel Anniversary

occasions, "Light up this house with glory, Lord". The words used by Mrs Bright as she opened the door should be remembered: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost I declare this Hall open. May the power of the Holy Ghost overshadow it, the abiding presence of God fill it always, and the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in all its love and saving power be preached in it". Dr. Jones developed the theme in his sermon with the exhortation that the people should now truly "possess their possessions" and make this place their spiritual home. At the end of the day it was announced that gifts and promises together amounted to over £650.

Mr Riceman began his ministry at Immanuel with the unanimous support of his people and the goodwill of other churches in the town. Richmond Hill offered to support their finances with an annual gift of £25. Boscombe did the same with a gift of £15 a year and East Cliff, £10. It is also on record that "in accepting a most inadequate stipend the Rev. A T Riceman is himself making a sacrificial contribution to the work and accepting the heaviest part of the burden". He was a young man with not more than seven years experience in the ministry. Reading between the lines of church minutes it is evident that Mrs Riceman too, by her visiting and her work among the ladies of the congregation, was held in deep affection by the whole church. But the cloud of sorrow and disappointment was soon to cast a shadow over the early rejoicings of this young church, for within six months Mr Riceman was a very sick man. Before ever he came to Immanuel he had been under the surgeon's hands, and now it was evident that he must undergo yet another operation. In January 1911 he had to take to his bed, hoping that he might resume his ministry in March. But it was not to be. A second operation led his doctor to advise him to resign which he did on 3rd April.

It was a great blow to the church, though to some extent relieved by the fact, that Mr Riceman recovered sufficiently to be of considerable help along with his wife both at Immanuel and at Richmond Hill when they moved away from the district.

The immediate result of this misfortune was that the church asked Richmond Hill to take Immanuel under their wing. The response was both immediate and generous, and it is clear that Dr. Jones devoted himself unsparingly to the welfare of the cause, presiding at their meetings, writing to ministers whom the church wished to meet, advising them on points of procedure, calling upon his own church to accept new responsibilities. With typical magnanimity he discouraged any hasty decision to adopt a Congregational policy lest a minority of worshippers of a different order should be offended. And so it happened that decently and in order they deferred all question of constitution until a minister of their own choice should have responded to their call.

Then on Sunday 8th October 1911 the church was moved deeply and unanimously to ask the Rev. Baldwin Brindley to visit them a second time on the 29th in order that they and he together might consider the pastorate. He

consented, and on the following day met the committee presided over by Dr. Jones. There were questions to be asked and information given. It appears that Mr Brindley was not satisfied with the strategic position of the church. He was told that in any case he would have to wait three years before any move could be contemplated. This assertion aroused serious misgivings in Mr Brindley's mind and Dr. Jones, perceiving his discomfort, remarked, 'of course if the church were filled to overflowing they would be forced to build'. This appears to have eased the situation somewhat and Mr Brindley soothed the fears of the committee saying that he was "far from being an impatient man". Now Dr. Jones was a shrewd man and a good judge of character but it is doubtful if even he could have foreseen how far Immanuel, under its new minister, was destined to go within a matter of a few months. However, in the meantime, the Rev. Baldwin Brindley accepted the pastorate and on February 8th 1912, the Recognition Service was held, presided over by Dr. Jones. Mr Riceman himself was present to offer the Recognition Prayer and, strange to say, in view of future events, it was the Rev. Harold Brindley who preached the Recognition Sermon.

One of the first things Mr Brindley did was to call a meeting of all who were willing to bind themselves together by Covenant and to constitute themselves a Congregational Church. This was done with a good heart and to this day every new member received into Church Membership signs the same Roll at the head of which is inscribed the Covenant drawn up by that first meeting of the Church. At the head of the Roll at forty-six who joined by transfer from other churches and seventeen who signed on Confession of Faith. Some of these, at the moment of writing, are still living. Others who signed shortly after are also able to recall those early days.

From this brave beginning things went quickly from strength to strength. It was not the impatience of Mr Brindley's ministry that caused subsequent events to move so rapidly. It was the spiritual glow in his heart that set fire to those who worked with him. It was immediately obvious to all that Dr. Jones's remark about when the Hall was "filled to overflowing", was already a fact that called for a new spirit of adventure without tarrying. The Hall was now too small although it held 214. Such was the spirit of this young church under its minister that by May certain astonishing things had happened. A new site on the Carbery Estate had been purchased for £575. The Guildhill site had found a purchaser for £600. The Church Meeting authorised the total removal of the Hall for rebuilding on the Carbery site at a cost of £405. There was to be a "new bay to the length that would increase the accommodation by 100". This brought the seating capacity up to 314. The cost of this addition was £117. A kitchen was to be built and an enlargement of the Vestry for £90. Other expenses were calculated at £100. Through the generosity of Richmond Hill this considerable sum of money was advanced on loan. Finally it was arranged for the Church to be re-opened on the new site on Wednesday 31st July, by Mrs Bright, using the same key as before and speaking the same words of dedication and the same exhortation as when

the building was first opened. The preacher on that memorable day was the Rev. Silvester Horne of Whitfield's Tabernacle.

On the following Sunday, 4th August 1912, their own Minister was once more in his own pulpit to make another new beginning. Between May and the end of July worship had been conducted in a marquee on the old ground. Now the church was built in a strategic position secured for all future generations by the man who was not afraid to look into the future and to make great demands upon the generosity of his people. The approach to the church was not what it is today. It was almost rural, down a path lined with rhododendrons and sheltered on either side by tall pines. Hence "The Church in the Wood" with the ground in front up to the main road reserved for the larger church that was yet to be.

It was said of King David that it was in his heart to build a Temple to the glory of God and that God counted it well that he should so desire. Nevertheless David was not allowed to fulfil his desire. So it was with Baldwin Brindley. He longed for the day when he might build a larger and more permanent church on this beautiful site that had been acquired for the very purpose. However, it was not granted to him even to plan the church of his dreams. There were several reasons. First, time was needed to consolidate the great achievements of the first two years of his ministry. Second, the ominous clouds that foreshadowed the First World War were already beginning to darken the horizon. Third, when once the war broke out in 1914, and all talk of building expansion was silenced, it became the task of every minister in the land to live closer to the sorrows and anxieties of his people; and to this task Baldwin Brindley faithfully devoted himself until his death in 1919.

Nevertheless, always looking to the future even during those dark days, there were two other things he did that have set their mark upon the character and spirit of our worship at Immanuel to this day. In 1915, he introduced, for choir and congregation a form of Liturgy to be used on Sundays. He also succeeded raising £500 for the section of a new organ "for the permanent Church, with a view to getting half of the instrument placed in the present building for use until the new Church is built". However, fifteen years were to elapse before the old half in the old church was to be united with a new half in the new church.

### **The Spirit of Freedom**

At the time of Mr Brindley's critical illness and his resignation of the pastorate there was present at the Church Meeting a certain man who spoke of him as "a friend of many years standing, an earnest and gifted preacher who had helped him greatly". The speaker was Rev. Harold Brierley who, during the war, had suffered a serious breakdown and retired from the ministry in London and come to live in Southbourne.

Before many weeks, at the suggestion of the Immanuel Deacons, Dr. J D Jones of Richmond Hill saw Mr Brierley and asked him if he was ready to take up the

ministry again and, if Immanuel were to give him a Call would he consider it carefully. The answer was favourable and when the church invited him he accepted it on certain terms. He could only serve on a part-time basis. He must have one Sunday a month free for other preaching engagements. He must have a certain portion of the week entirely to himself to devote to literary work. He also asked for freedom to "maintain and develop the liturgical form of service that had already been adopted at Immanuel". Finally, the question of the pastorate must be reviewed after one year.

Those conditions were readily accepted by the church but, after a year when the situation was reviewed, Mr Brierley held firmly to the same conditions as before. In the circumstances the church agreed to accept them, though with some regret, but adding "we heartily invite him to continue his valued ministry among us for an indefinite period, hoping and believing that under God's guidance and blessing it will mean many years of happy and useful work together". The fact is, in the course of the previous twelve months, the church had found reason to be deeply grateful for the preaching and pastoral work of their new minister, and they were not prepared to let him go. Moreover he had honourably made known to them the reason why he felt he was not enjoying the full freedom he had a right to expect as their minister, and it was this matter that occupied their careful consideration for a time. "If I am to continue the pastorate for any length of time", he said, "I must be in the position of an independent minister and be perfectly free from any semblance of subordination". In the context of his speech he was undeniably right and there was no serious difficulty in putting things straight.

In the interests of history this must be said. Under the ministry of Dr J D Jones, Richmond Hill was the founder of most of the Congregational Churches in Bournemouth and as such they formed "The Richmond Hill Group of Churches", which received considerable gifts and loans in the early days of their foundation, as well as a measure of personal help and guidance from Dr. Jones himself and his deaconate. And, as in the case of all aided churches, the conduct of their affairs came under the benevolent if watchful eye of their supporters and benefactors. This was no longer acceptable to Immanuel because the Church had already declined further gifts. But apart from the financial issue, the theology of Mr Brierley was very much at variance with the traditional theology of Richmond Hill. All of which tended to sour the relationship of the two churches and served as a constant irritant to the sensitive temperament of a man like Mr Brierley who must always be "an independent minister" and most certainly "free from all semblance of subordination". However, the wisdom of good sense prevailed in the atmosphere of Christian accord. Immanuel was self-supporting and her minister a man of high reputation answerable only to Christ for his conscience. Richmond Hill, too, was a church with a great Christian heart. So Immanuel withdrew from "The Richmond Hill Group of Churches" with goodwill and understanding on both sides.

It must be admitted that Harold Brierley was by nature unorthodox and something of a rebel, but Congregationalism has always been kind and tolerant towards its rebels, loving them for their zeal and encouraging them in their search for Truth. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Brierley could have found his spiritual home in any other community although he introduced into the constitution of his own church a curious twist - others have used a more forceful word - in order to satisfy his own passion for freedom and independence of action. This is how it was done. In 1920 he enlarged the diaconate by six "Church Councillors". These gentlemen could be either Church Members or just members of the congregation and they could be elected by Church Members together with seatholders. Their duties and responsibilities were not defined except that they were on an equality with the Deacons in a Deacons Meeting. This action was in itself a denial of the competence and the spiritual authority of a Church Meeting composed of Church Members alone.

But the next step was even more decisive in its implications. In 1924 the Diaconate and Church Council laid down its own decision "not to hold Church Meetings at stated times but as often and whenever it was considered necessary". The decision as to "when considered necessary" was apparently left to the Minister, the Deacons and Councillors. There is no record of this arbitrary rule having been put to the Church Meeting in any shape or form, but it is significant that thereafter the Church Meeting only gathered, at most, twice a year. In short, the oversight, the inspiration and the control of the Church in future was to be in the hands of a small group of men, some of whom were not even members of the Church. This was quite contrary to accepted Congregational principles.

It may be added that this procedure is no longer followed at Immanuel.

### **The Spirit of Worship**

It was not long before Mr Brierley was encouraged to fulfil his undertaking to maintain and enlarge the liturgical order of worship that he had inherited. The result was a book of ten Orders compiled from sources which had found general acceptance in various other Free Churches. The familiar responses were appointed to be sung "to avoid the usual ragged mumbling of spoken responses". This book, only slightly amended, is still in use. For a few people, even today, it is a stumbling block and regarded as alien to our mode of worship. On the other hand it has been welcomed by many more who join us from other communions and, in that way, it serves the good purpose of uniting those who might otherwise be divided. Mr Brierley could not bear anything slovenly or casual in public worship. To him it was an offence against the true spirit of worship, and the choir knew that in partnership with him they were expected to be properly prepared and to contribute of their best. In the course of time, under the organist and choir-master, Mr A Dewdney, they were to reach

a very high standard, winning the Shield at the Southampton Musical Festival, and later the Silver Cup at the Bournemouth Festival.

In his preaching Mr Brierley was able to give something new to his generation. He was a powerful advocate of Dr. Campbell's "New Theology". Consequently he drew large congregations of thoughtful people who, in the years that followed the war were in deep need of a faith rekindled. His published book of sermons displays clearly one great theme running through them all, the intense and moving conviction that Christ alone has given to mankind the true meaning of life and the true vision of God. This was the simple yet passionate belief that shaped his theology and stirred his evangelism.

It is evident from his book that much of his preaching was inspired by his pastoral work. He had a heart for the sick in body as well as for those in distress of mind. He himself was a sufferer. He came to Southbourne a broken man and several times during his ministry at Immanuel he was compelled to rest for months at a time. But his people always supported him and waited eagerly for his return. These were the times, doubtless, when he was driven to explore the hidden resources of his own faith.

So the building of Immanuel went on. Congregations increased. The old Church was too small. In the Spring of 1922 the possibility was seriously discussed of embarking upon a building scheme for the New Church. Plans and sketches were studied. Costs were estimated at £10,000. In the circumstances it was decided to shelve the project for the time being. A year later the subject was raised again, this time by the ladies of the Working Party who announced that they had "definitely started to work for a bazaar for this object". So the matter was agreed, a Building Committee was appointed and Mr Brierley got into touch with a local firm of architects. But once again it turned out that the time was not ripe. Before a new church could be built the old one must be enlarged to accommodate the increasing congregation. So in 1923 this work was authorised and an Annexe was constructed to seat about another 100. The total cost was £650 which was paid off in three and a half years.

In 1927 the Church at last felt justified in working for the fulfilment of the long cherished dream of a New Church. A strong Building Committee was set up with Mr E J Marsh as Secretary. The Fund already had in hand about £5,500 in gifts, promises and loans. So the future looked promising. The scheme was put up for competition between local architects who were invited to send in plans to cost not more than £10,000. The Congregational Union promised £500 from "The New Church Building Fund" which had just been launched, with the added hope of being able to increase this by another £500. Dr. Jones promised £100 from a Fund of which he was a personal Trustee. All this is yet another example of how, from the beginning of the story, Immanuel has been in debt to the generosity of the wider fellowship of Congregational Churches that have always been willing to help when the need is known.

From this point the official minutes of the church has little to say about the building of Immanuel. There is a great deal about committees, finance, plans for ceremonies with names of distinguished people who must be asked to lay foundation stones, make speeches, play the organ, preach sermons, give publicity and draw in the money. But of the building itself, the architect and the builders there is almost nothing, except a brief tribute which must be searched for if it is to be found outside at the back of the church behind the apse, carved in stone: "The tribute of the congregation to Frederic Lawrence, Architect; F A Grigg, Builder; H G Eaton, Foreman, and the men who built this Church".

The great hope of Harold Brierley all along was for a church that would encourage not only a spirit of worship, but that the building itself should be an expression of the Beauty of Holiness. But how can bricks and mortar and wood and metal and glass be put together in such a manner as to proclaim the Beauty of Holiness? It can only be done by those who themselves in their heart of hearts are possessed of that same spirit. And how do these things happen? The Bible says: "I have filled him with the Spirit of God to work in gold and silver and in brass and in cutting of stones and in carving of timber, to work all manner of workmanship". That is the answer. As the Spirit of God gives the Fellowship of the Church, so the Spirit of God gives the House of God. All true inspiration is of God. And Immanuel is an inspired gift of God.

### **The Spirit of Beauty and Holiness**

One day the Rev. Harold Brierley visited Mr E J Marsh in his office at Fisherman's Walk. He came with a drawing in his hand that had been submitted by a local architect for the proposed building of Immanuel. "Will this do?" he asked. "It's not nearly good enough for the site" was the quick answer. "But why not?" Again quickly the answer: "For this reason and this and this". "Then where shall we go for a better plan?" was the next question. A moment's thought and then from Mr Marsh: "Go to Frederic Lawrence. He has never built a church before, but I believe he has the genius".

So the commission to prepare plans for the new Church was placed in the hands of Mr Frederic Lawrence, a local architect and a man of original ideas and spiritual vision.

In view of the complete lack of any other information about the plans and design for Immanuel, it seemed wise to the present writer to turn to Frederic Lawrence himself for some account of how he came to conceive the idea. I decided, in the circumstances, to ask him to write to me in answering certain questions I wanted to put to him. I did this because I didn't want any spoken answer to be coloured by my own imagination in repeating it. It is the case, however, that in his book, "The Shining Brother" he tells the story of his spiritual affinity with St. Francis and the consequences of this experience in the building of Immanuel, his first church and his first love. While not necessarily accepting his book as being a record of historical facts and events, we ought very properly to turn to the

man himself, the inspired creator of Immanuel, for information concerning this building which, as he said himself, was his best offering of love and service to God. He was first of all a Christian. He was also a mystic and an artist to his finger tips, and he had a well-trained, well-disciplined mind that gave practical shape to his visions. So I asked him: "How did Immanuel come to be designed?" This was his answer:

*"How Immanuel Church came to be designed? As my memory flashed back with the question I realised that essentially the building was a reaction against the not-too-happy days spent about sixty years ago in one or two of the small Free Churches of the Midlands. The design of the Church was an endeavour to leave over-elaboration to others, and to express in ordinary bricks the simple Matterhorn rock of Christianity.*

*The genius of Mr Brierley made Immanuel possible and the enthusiasm of a little well-defined group of people made an atmosphere magical to work in. The word "magical" is exactly right, for in that atmosphere ideas grew of themselves and became winged.*

*I would like space enough to set down the names in due order, of those who formed the group. They leap to my mind. The Building Committee, the Secretary of the Committee; Mr Grigg and his sons, not forgetting Norman; the foreman and his men. All from Colonel Cox to Mr Sims the scaffolder, all are precious memories, never to be forgotten. I salute them in passing and believe that, in whatever world they are, they remember even as I do.*

*But it is one thing to have fine encouragement and vigorous reactions against youthful miseries, and quite another to create out of these things a definite building which will hold a stated number of people at a defined and very small cost.*

*The problem troubled my mind for several weeks. Indeed, I had almost come to the point of deciding that Church designing must be left to abler men than I when one evening as I was driving home, somewhere this side of Reading, I stopped the car and stepped out under a tree by the roadside. The air was still and waiting, the sun was going down between two long islands of gold and the last birds were homing.*

*My thoughts came to rest like the birds and I drew. Line after line fell together on the odds and ends of paper I had with me. Immanuel Church was set out from the long window in the tower to the light in the apse. I was thinking technically also, for the size of the pews settled and the steel of the roof.*

*William Blake is said to have seen angels in a tree. Maybe it was in the tree under which I sat on that June evening of 1927. At any rate, beneath those branches was born Immanuel Church".*

It will be noticed from this extract that Lawrence makes no claim to any direct inspiration from St. Francis. But it is evident from the wayside experience that St. Francis was not far from this thoughts. Later he would say that St. Francis must have been present with him. Moreover, the lily-pond, the bird sanctuary and the figure of St. Francis on the lawn before the church were always for him a reminder of that remarkable experience.

But this letter of his raised another question regarding the striking difference between the exterior and the interior of the Church. The austerity of the exterior, it was pointed out to him, was so unlike the mercy and blessing of the interior. To which he offered a lengthy and enlightening answer:

*"Your mention of the difference between the inside and outside of Immanuel raises rather a curious point. The outside was designed in June 1927 as I have said. The first inside design was awful and was simply a collection of walls and posts sufficient to hold up the outside.*

*As you have mentioned St. Francis, I will tell you the facts as far as they concern Immanuel.*

*After the competition was judged in July 1927 there was a pause until Christmas 1928 - eighteen months more or less, when Mr Brierley asked me to start.*

*Midsummer 1928 was my first experience of St. Francis. This was fleeting and was only sufficient to cause me a strange but beautiful amazement. The winter of 1928-29 I was ill and had to go to Switzerland. Just before I went I had a very vital sense of the coming of St. Francis. I can only say for the benefit of the critical that this was a vital experience which has lasted to this day, May 13th 1948.*

*I came back to England and found the foundations of Immanuel say four or five feet high above the general ground level. The place seemed lit up with the Spirit.*

*Now I cannot tell you how difficult it is to create a new interior for a building already begun. But sometime in the early Spring of 1929 I was left alone in our old house of "Four Winds".*

*About six one morning I woke all fresh and well and strolled down in my dressing gown. I made myself a cup of tea and put on the gramophone. The music was the Londonderry Air, not in any sense great music but sweet.*

*In the middle of that I suddenly saw the whole of Immanuel as it is now. It literally was instantaneous. The plans were handy so I spread them out and saw that this extraordinary flash was possible as a design. It fitted.*

*I nearly went off my head and quickly put it on paper. There was, just as there was with the outside, a queer sense of certainty.*

*When the drawings were made I showed them to Mr Brierley. Abbreviating the conversation, the import was this: 'Magnificent, Lawrence! How much extra is it going to cost?' 'So much', I said, naming a considerable figure. 'No, it's no good. I am not going to inflict that on my congregation'. So that was that - for the moment.*

*Grigg came by an hour later. He is a shrewd man and understanding in many ways. I called him and he saw the drawings. We both agreed about the extra cost, but he said quickly: 'Just you do the working drawings. We won't bother about the committee and I guarantee it won't show as an extra'.*

Here follows a eulogy of Mr Grigg and more than a eulogy which I am sure he would not wish me to publish. Enough to say and it ought to be said here and now, that no one knows how much Immanuel owes to Mr Grigg, not merely in the matter of costs but even more in the kind of understanding and co-operation that grew up between these two men. But to resume:

*Now then: the R I B A considers the outside to be good. It became a standard with the greatest architectural school in Britain (the A A School) and was used as a model and is still used by several schools outside of London. It has been sketched, measured, and generally cribbed a hundred times.*

*The inside, architects don't think so much of. Now, architecturally the inside isn't a patch on the outside; but I personally think that there is a kindness, a kind of mercy about it which is human and good. If you like to play with fancies, it came after Francis, the outside came before.*

*Francis never was austere in one sense. He had human gaiety. Lads like Luther hand. So was John Wesley. Francis - no! So if you like to read into all this that Francis softened the inside, I shall not stop you."*

Here the quotation marks must be closed, for in this last letter on the subject before he died he added things that were never intended for publication. Suffice it to say, and this should be said if we are to do justice to the very conception of Immanuel Church, Frederic Lawrence loved not only the work of his mind and hands, he also yearned over the spirit and fellowship of the Church. As Immanuel was built "in deepest love and as a prayer", so he prayed that its people should live together in the same spirit.

The beginning of the correspondence arose out of a question regarding the figure of St. Francis itself. It is a feature of Immanuel that always invites questions from visitors and passers-by. In its early days it even excited the fury of those people who regarded it as an indication of our imminent departure for Rome. Twice, it is said, the head was knocked off by the malice of these strange people. But for many years now St Francis has stood upon his little pulpit in peace, ministering to the birds that flutter round and splash in the water at his feet. This is how it all began, Lawrence tell us:

*"One hot July afternoon two years after the actual building had been started, I was at a garden party given to the Poetry Society at Tennyson's old house in Haslemere. I found myself being introduced to an old lady of eighty-four. She was the widow of G F Watts, the great Victorian painter, and herself an artist.*

*I naturally found her conversation interesting to a degree. She pressed me at length to tell her about my own work. So, to entertain her as well as I might, I drew on odd bits of paper and a little tablecloth, sketches of Immanuel Church which about that time was developing itself vigorously in my mind. I showed her, too, what I was hoping to do about St. Francis.*

*Her interest in the severe lines of the building was very understanding and lively. She looked up after a silent moment. 'And who,' she asked, 'is to make the Little Poor Man?' 'Ah', said I, 'there you have touched one of my real troubles, for I have very little money to spare and it would be intolerable if the work was scamped!' 'Will you let me do it?' she asked charmingly, 'Will you let me present it to your Church?'*

*One thing can always be relied on and that is the childlike and abundant generosity of the true artist. She gaily brushed aside all my thanks and we were soon discussing dimensions and technicalities.*

*Half an hour later I was driving home through the mellow evening without a care in the world, for I had begun to feel that Immanuel was coming alive.*

*In March of the next year - 1930 - a crate was delivered to the unfinished building and there he was. We stood him up in the snow and there the Little Poor Man has preached ever since. Few things have made me happier than to find him a small pulpit in Southbourne.*

*A large photograph of the statue with Immanuel Church showing behind it hung for some years in the entrance hall of the monastery at Assisi.*

*'St. Francis makes us all one', said the Father Superior to me when I pointed out that he was exhibiting the picture of a Protestant Church. So you see, in a divided world, even architects have their uses".*

*A photograph of Immanuel Congregational Church hanging in the entrance hall of the Monastery of Assisi! That was a story too good to be hidden away in the memory of one man until it should be lost forever. And so yet another letter was called for, and here is the answer, luckily preserved for us and told in the delightful fashion we are now familiar with:*

*"It was in December 1932 that I took an early train from Florence to Assisi. I had notified the Hotel Subasio, where I am known, by a postcard of our Little Poor Man which used to be published here.*

*Arriving about 4 pm, I sat in the little hotel lounge drinking tea with the proprietor. He spoke of my postcard and asked about it, saying that the Fathers*

at the Basilica would be glad to hear that I had come. I accepted the remark as being an item of continental politeness and forgot it.

The great bell of the Basilica of San Francesco, a hundred yards away, shuddered into sound as I rose, waved farewell to my friend, crossed the dark, cloistered court and slipped into the porch of the Lower Church. Once the nave, I groped my way through the bewildering shadows of the great church itself, for there were no lights anywhere except those on the altar. Here I must linger and tell you of the church, the great half-round vault with its singing angels, the frescoes (one of the world's treasures, as I am sure you know), the old rough stones, the candles twenty feet high, and, above all, the strange shadows that seemed to hide the solid world of today and bring to life the magical world of seven hundred years ago that, producing St. Francis, ushered in the Renaissance, made Dante possible and spread new comprehension of the spirit throughout mankind.

In the crypt beneath the altar lies the body of St. Francis, and with him, each under a separate arch, are Leo, Angelo, Masseo and Rufino. I think no one could listen to the singing of the hundred friars about the altar and not be conscious of the marvellous history started by the merchant's son who gave away all that he had, and asked nothing for himself; who lost the world and really did find God.

My thoughts were straying. A little Brother was asking me if I were Signore Lawrence. He begged me to follow him through the dispersing monks. Shortly we found ourselves in the Sacristy. Standing amid the frescoes of this little place was the Father who had just left the altar.

I was presented as Signore Lawrence and was just bowing when, with the greatest affection and courtesy, my hand was taken and he said, patting my shoulder, "We are very proud to have you here". "Are you sure", I asked, "that I am the man you wished to see?" The white-haired Father then produced the postcard of Immanuel Church with St. Francis. "Did you do this" he asked, "to honour our St. Francis in England?" "I did". "Then we are very proud to have you. Will you let Father Gerard show you where we would like you to sit when you come into this church to be with us?" I touched his arm. "Father" I said "I must tell you that I am Protestant". "You would rather not sit with us?" he asked, smiling with affection. "Please let me if you will" I said, "for I love the Brothers."

And so for as long as I stayed in Assisi I was given a seat with the Brethren around the altar. "Will you," he asked, "let me have a picture for myself of your St. Francis?!" "You shall have the best photograph that can be taken," I told him, "but again I must use the word you cannot like. The statue stands before a very Protestant Church." "Why?" "Because we love your St. Francis" "Do you yourself love him?" "I do" "Then we all love him and that makes us all one"> "That" I replied, "is one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard spoken."

*He was old ad courteous and of gentle family. I asked him if he would show me the parchment that St. Francis wrote for Leo on the Mount of Alvernia. In a moment a tall cabinet was opened and the parchment was in my hands, and with it the crumbling gown of St. Francis himself.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Before me as I write is a letter written on February 1st 1933, by Father Gerard, six weeks after my visit. My photograph, he says, had arrived. The Superior had asked him to have it framed and hung in the entrance hall of the Monastery. "I beg you", he says, "to excuse me in writing so badly the English language, and, "he continues engagingly, "he send you his best love and pray St. Francis for you".

For those who look for a technical appraisal of the building it has been described as achieving dignity and effect by mass rather than by ornament. The exterior lines of the structure would be of extreme classical severity were they not relieved by a tendency to Byzantine freedom. With such catholicity of design the lily pond and bird sanctuary in the forecourt, over which the figure of St. Francis presides, is in full accord.

Within, impressions, proper to a sacred building, are bound up with the sensation of height produced by the deep-coloured glass window in the memorial tower and the lofty arch connecting the tower to the church, and with the impression of mystery produced by the golden lighting of the apse. Indeed this gold note dominates and enriches the whole interior. The pews, pulpit and lectern are of Spanish oak. Sir Banister Fletcher, in his presidential address in 1930 to the Royal Institute of British Architects, ranked Immanuel Church as one of the outstanding buildings of the year.

The Foundation Stones, four of them, all given by Mr Grigg, were laid on 14th May, 1929 by Dr. J D Jones, Dr. Sidney M Berry, Sir James Carmichael and the Rev. Harold E Brierley. On this day of great rejoicing gifts amounting to £900 were placed on the stones, of which £360 was new money. The total in hand was now over £6,000.

During the following summer Mr Brierley was given the opportunity of taking charge of the Congregational Church in Toronto for two months. This he gladly accepted with the goodwill of the deacons in the expectation that the change would give him some rest from all the nervous strain of recent months. Unfortunately soon after his return he was showing signs of serious strain again and was offered by the deacons two months holiday in the south of France. In the event two months became nearly six months and anxiety was felt lest he might not be well enough for the Opening and Dedication of the new Church which was planned for June 3rd. However, to the great relief of all he was back in his pulpit for one service on the last Sunday in May.

"Tuesday, June 3rd dawned fair and bright" writes one who remembers. It was, of course, a great day in every proper sense of the word: the procession of distinguished ministers; the crowded congregation singing "Onward Christian Soldiers"; the Call to Worship and the Dedication; the entry of the choir as all united to sing "Light up this House with Glory, Lord"; the sermon by Dr Jones; Brahms' anthem "How lovely are thy Dwellings fair". How lovely indeed! for that is the involuntary exclamation of most people as they enter Immanuel for the first time. Here is a place which in itself is an invitation to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

The following Sunday, Whit Sunday, was also memorable. The preacher in the morning was Canon R J Campbell, and at the second service Sir Dan Godfrey dedicated the organ, addressed the congregation and himself conducted the Hallelujah Chorus

So at last the dream had come true: the New Church, longed for, prayed for, worked for, standing foursquare to the world representing what Frederic Lawrence has called "the Matterhorn Rock of Christianity", softened by the merciful simplicity of St. Francis and his lily pond; and the interior with its gracious lines blessed by the golden light in the apse. What more can be desired of any place in which to worship God and find a spiritual home?

### **The Spirit That Abides**

Now the Old Church has gone and only those who remember it are able to catch even a fleeting glimpse of what it used to be or what it did. And yet, has it gone, this Old Church that built the New Church that we proudly acclaim today? Or has there just been revealed for us, through fire, the Foundation on which the Old Church was built, the Foundation that another laid, "than which NO OTHER FOUNDATION CAN BE LAID? WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. Faithfully and reverently they laid that Foundation, who ministered here. So, faithfully and reverently let us build where they also built, and may it be worthy of the Foundation once laid. We have today a church with a great drawing power, thanks to the genius and devotion of former days. Now is the time to pray for a great sending power, not of money only but of men and women who will accept the Call of the hour.

Strange things have happened to me in the course of my own on-going ministry, from one stage to the next. On each occasion I have been met by the same man, then and only then. To this day I have kept unwittingly the notes of a sermon preached by the Rev. Baldwin Brindley in my father's church. It was just after I had decided for the ministry. I find that his text was from Mt. xv11. 20. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I". His salient point was "Jesus said not I shall be there, but I am there".

When for the first time I entered the vestry of my first church in Ramsgate, I saw the photograph of Baldwin Brindley hanging on the wall. Next, when I went

to my second church at Crouch End, London, I met his brother. He often worshipped at my church. I ministered to him and was called to minister to him at the end. Again, when I entered the vestry of my last church, Immanuel, there was the portrait once more of Baldwin Brindley, one of the founders of this church and the man who brought this stricken building to this very spot.

Recently while the ground was still being cleared for a new building to be erected, I strolled down the old rhododendron path sheltered by pine trees to see how the work was going on. On my way back someone was approaching by the same path. I recognised him at once. "Hello", I said, "what are you doing here?" "I just wanted to see how the work was going on" he answered as he brushed past me. Strange, wasn't it?

### **The On Going Church**

A serious fire may not be the loftiest motive for modernising the buildings of a church, yet it may be a providential incentive. Such was the case at Immanuel in 1964, but this does not mean that nothing had been planned and done before the day of crisis dawned. Indeed, the spiritual legacy enshrined in stone by Frederic Lawrence has always served as a powerful incentive to ensure that all our work shall be worthy of the building that is in itself a call to worship. It was in this spirit that the Rev. Hartley Holloway reminded his people that a church like Immanuel ought to provide a Minister's Vestry to be a quiet place where he can pause and make ready to approach the hour of worship in quietness and confidence. This advice was seen to be good and the vestry was built by Frederic Lawrence in the year 1938. Then came the long dark night of the Second World War followed by the slow dawn of the post-war years spent in gathering together and making whole again the scattered ruins of broken hearts and broken homes. No other building could be contemplated at that time, for none was more urgent and more compelling than the building which is carried on in the lives of men.

Eventually, in February 1957, a handsome legacy came to hand from a former Primary Leader, Mrs Owen. As a result, in May of that year, the church began to consider ways in which the present accommodation could be enlarged or adapted to meet the growing needs of young and old alike. For this purpose, advice was asked of Mr Kenneth Jackman Marsh (architect), a member of the church and son of the Mr Marsh who had been secretary of the Building Committee responsible for the "New Church". It was a difficult assignment because so much was needed and so many claims were put forward, beyond the intention and limit of the legacy; a small hall, a new kitchen, cloakrooms. In the end it was decided to adopt as a first stage, his plan for a new Primary Room, the Owen Room. In the following October, Mr Marsh was asked to estimate the cost of the larger scheme, but this proved to be too big an undertaking for the time being. So work on the Owen Room was begun without delay and in July 1958 the room was joyfully dedicated on the night of the Anniversary Youth

Service which had been planned around the theme, "to help us Find the Voice of God".

Before long, after the retirement of the Rev N A Turner-Smith in October 1959, and the coming of the new minister the Rev. Kenneth Colledge in 1960, and the Jubilee Celebrations of the Church the same year, it was decided to mark the occasion by undertaking the second stage of the Mr Marsh's Extension Scheme already approved in principle. But meanwhile another factor had emerged. The Caretaker was expecting to retire in 1963 after 35 years service. Mrs Raybould was not merely a caretaker but a Care-Taker who guarded and upheld the good name of Immanuel in everything she did. She was a friend of young and old alike. She knew more of the history of the church than anyone else, and the prospect of being deprived of her service was felt to be a serious blow. In looking to the future it became evident that the church must build a Caretaker's flat. So this was added to the list of priorities. A Building Fund was opened and all preliminaries put in hand for the work to be done under the direction of the architect, Mr Marsh. It was indeed a big undertaking but by March 1963 it was finished. The old Church Parlour was enlarged to become a Small Hall. The Kitchen and Cloakrooms were added as well as the Caretaker's flat, and these were publicly opened by Alderman and Mrs Deric Scott on the 9th March.

Scarcely a year later, on the night of Whit Sunday 1964, the fire broke out that destroyed the Main Hall, the Old Church of 1910, and it was only by the timely alarm and the swift action of the Fire Brigade that saved the new buildings and even the Church itself from serious disaster.

But that too, is now past history, for within sixteen months, out of the dust and ashes of the fire, there rose a splendid new Church Hall designed by Mr Marsh. The old foundations had been extended, the old walls raised up, the Annexe restored, other small rooms added and the whole re-roofed. The interior was completely modernised, refurnished and fully equipped as to seating, lighting and heating, and hearing. The transformation was complete, and on Sunday evening, 17th October, 1965 the Hall was dedicated as before. The Rev. Kenneth Colledge conducted the service. His text: "After the fire, a still small Voice" (1 Kings xix. 12) And once again the old walls echoed back the words of the hymn they first heard fifty-five years ago: "Light up this house with Glory, Lord. Enter and claim Thine own."

"A splendid New Church Hall", but history still walks here even though it be forgotten history, for history never passes into oblivion. History unfolds itself, which only means that what is past is out of sight. It is still alive and active all around us. "The splendid New Church Hall" we say. But the Foundation is still the same and "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ". And those who have eyes to see and hearts to understand can bear witness to the fact that history still walks here. Embedded in the wall is the old Foundation Stone to remind us of the Building that can never be destroyed.

Moreover, there are other marks and signs of those who taught and those who listened and learned something here. Sometimes even there may be the same Spirit that moves and reaches out to touch the heart of someone who seeks just such a sign. History still walks here. If it were not so how else should we be Christian? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mtt. xviii. 20) Notice, not "there shall I be", but "there am I".

### **The Out Going Church**

This has been the story of an On-going Church, and the building of Immanuel has been the story of a people given to that ideal. Moreover, it is impossible to assess the extent of the personal Christian witness that has been carried into every walk of life.

Fifty-five years is not a long time in the life of a growing church, but it is full long enough for any church to take to its heart, with a sense of urgency, the last and greatest Call of her Master to his followers to "go out ....."

Since the day of her founding, Immanuel has record of only three young people who can be said to have answered to what we commonly understand by the Call to "go out". One was a young girl received into membership in 1953 who is now a graduate and an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada. The second is a young man and an ordained Congregational minister. The third, a young man, who joined the church in 1954, a graduate and an accepted candidate of the London Missionary Society. All of these were active members together of the Young People's Fellowship of those days. There is also a fourth who was a member of the same Fellowship but never a member of Immanuel. He, too, is a graduate and a minister of the Church of England.

Meanwhile, the world is ailing and looking for something that will cure its disease before all hope and faith is given up. Is it another Coming that is looked for? Or is it a church no longer seen as massive impenetrable walls and closed doors, but as a "House of Prayer for all nations" and "as living stones, built up a spiritual house acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"?

### **A Prayer for Immanuel**

O God, I give Thee thanks for the gift of Immanuel and pray that as this church was built to be an offering of love and service to Thee, so may all her people live together in the same spirit. And as Immanuel has been given the power to draw so many to worship here, grant her also the power of Thy Spirit to send them out again to serve Thee at home and in other lands. Amen

## **The Ministers of Immanuel**

Rev. A T Riceman	1910 - 11
Rev. Baldwin Brindley	1911 - 19
Rev. Harold E Brierley	1919 - 36
Rev. G Hartley Holloway	1937 - 45
Rev. N A Turner-Smith	1946 - 59
Rev. T K Colledge	1960 -