

Broad Oak Chapel Rededication 14 May 2011

It was a lovely day in every respect. At 2.30 in the afternoon the newly refurbished chapel at Broad Oak was filled to capacity for the service of rededication. We were reminded that it had been 144 years since the building had been constructed, and how safety considerations as much as anything else had presented us with the options of either closure or extensive refurbishment. After much prayer it became clear that the Lord wished us to pursue the latter option, and with the blessing of the trustees, work commenced last autumn.

We now have a new concrete floor, a damp course (whoopee!), a modern kitchen and a new toilet. Added to this, volunteers from the chapel have repainted the exterior and carried out a multitude of jobs, with great willingness and enthusiasm, and the project has thus served to instil fresh life into our people. The trustees kindly provided 60% of the funding, and our own congregation have taken up the challenge to raise the balance, and have already donated £2000 towards the target of £10,000. As was pointed out at the service, this money has come from the congregation and not through any soliciting of funds from outside sources, which of course is the way the early church worked.

The service opened with the C of H hymn 'All Hail the Power' which has an especial link to Broad Oak in that Edward Perronet, the author, was minister of Canterbury C of H church, the mother church to Broad Oak. However, World War II put paid to the Canterbury church, and so we at Broad Oak have assumed ownership by inheritance of the grand old hymn!

Broad Oak's new exterior paint job was carried out by Philip Hill, and today chanced to be his 79th birthday. Fittingly, we embarrassed our dear chapel member by singing 'Happy Birthday' and thanked him for his at times highly hazardous labour of love.

The links with the gypsy community were acknowledged, with special thanks to Lynda and Maurice for all their support and kindness. Some of our members have taken to attending the gypsy midweek service in Canterbury, and it has enriched them.

We were delighted to welcome trustee Glynn Phillips, and C of H president Gordon Hamilton, each of whom gave messages of support and encouragement to us. It was lovely to have them with us.

The Sturry Singers regaled us with two items, beautifully sung: 'Allelulia' and 'Jesus, you are changing me'.

The message was delivered by Rev Lynda Cooke, until recently the chaplain at HMP East Sutton Park, where our minister works. Her message was impressive in that it was kept straightforward and easily understandable, particularly for those in the assembly who were unattached to any church. One of the emphases in Lynda's message, and indeed throughout the service, was that the church is the *people*, not the building, and our newly tidied up chapel is merely a centre from which the Gospel of Christ is to be proclaimed, through word and action.

We saw the fruits of our various outreaches in that two people from the art group and one from the hobbycraft group were at the service, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. Also present was our newly elected councillor for Sturry North, Tony Austin, local author Kinn McIntosh (aka Catherine Aird), some prison staff and numerous local folk and friends of the chapel. Every seat was taken!

The food was provided and served by chapel members and of course added to the air of enjoyment and optimism, as people chatted together after the service and enjoyed fellowship.

Thanks are due to all those who made the day possible, not least our own Rosie Hodgman who played the organ so admirably.

Now that we have a new chapel, we can get on with the job God wants us to do with renewed vigour!