

SURREY CHAPEL

Book of Remembrance

“O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: because His mercy endureth for ever.” — Psalm 118:1

“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” — Heb. 13:15.

SURREY CHAPEL

Book of Remembrance, 1854 - 1954

Surrey Chapel, Norwhich, celebrates its centenary in December 1954, and the suggestion has been made that some little account of its origin, history, and ministry may be of interest not only to its present membership and contemporaries, but to those who have worshipped within its walls in bygone years; and also to that wider audience scattered in various parts of the earth who know of, and revere its Founder — Robert Govett, M. A. (Oxon) — together with his successor — D. M. Panton, B. A. (Cantab.) — only through the medium of their books and writings. The aim of this narrative is not to exalt men, nor the church — grateful to God we are for the history of both — but to render our humble and hearty thanks to His name who in His wisdom and love chose and called out those who for so many years ministered at Surrey Chapel.

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.” — Psalm 34:3.

FIRST PERIOD, 1854 – 1901

Preparation and Foundation

Let us hark back to the beginning of the story. On February 14th, 1813, at Staines in Middlesex, Robert Govett was born into a well-known ecclesiastical family. With a clerical career in view he graduated from Oxford University and became a Fellow of Worcester College. He was admitted into Holy Orders in 1836 – 37 and held his first Curacy from 1837 – 41 in Bexley, Kent.

In May 1841 he came to Norwich and assumed the Curacy of St. Stephen's Church, where he attracted "crowds of the élite of Norwich" (to quote a contemporary newspaper) by his preaching and teaching.

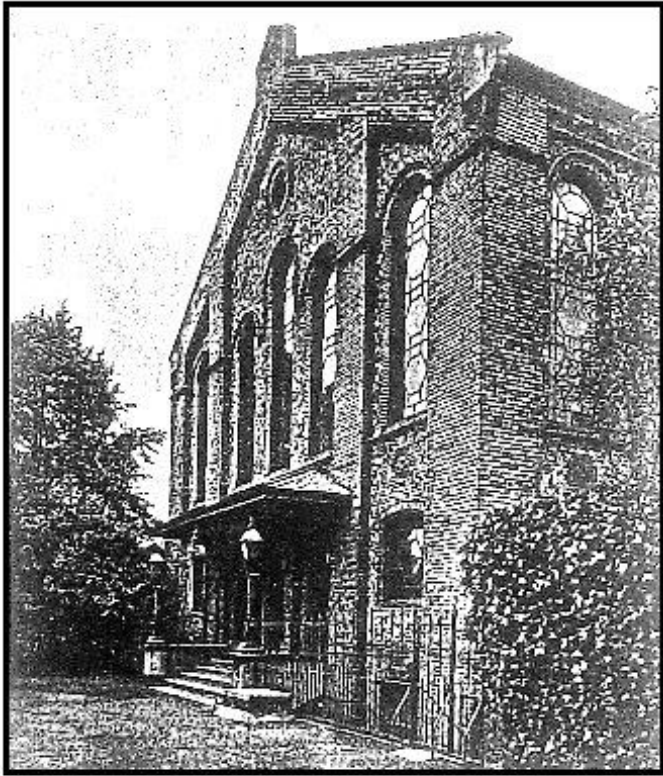


Robert Govett, M.A., In Early Years.

Then a doubt arose in his mind on the practice of Infant Baptism, and this led the young curate to a careful study of the whole subject of Christian Baptism in the New Testament. A visit to St. Mary's Baptist Chapel, where he witnessed for the first time the rite of Believers' baptism by immersion, convinced him at once of its Scriptural ordination, and a few days later he was baptized himself at St. Mary's by the minister — Rev. William Brock.

This precipitated a major crisis in the life of Robert Govett; for knowing that he could no longer continue to baptize infants, only one course was open to him, namely, to resign from the curacy of St. Stephen's and to withdraw from the Church of England. Being a man of intense convictions he took this step and "went out, not knowing whither he went." This was in 1845, the year that the first train ran from Norwich to London, and it was said that the two major topics of conversation in Norwich at that time were "Govett" and "The Railway."

The fact that his secession from the Established Church resulted in considerable personal and financial loss by no means daunted the young zealot. Family opposition deprived him of a large sum of money: he forfeited his salary: and obligatory resignation from his Fellowship at Oxford meant a further loss of income.



Surrey Chapel, Norwich: Main Entrance.

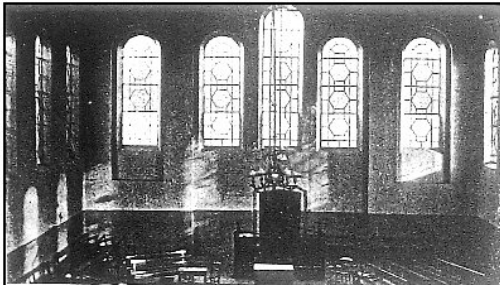
A large number of sympathizers followed “Mr.” Govett from St. Stephen’s Church, and in a short time he was holding services in a building (seating 1,300) known as Victoria Hall, in St. Andrew’s Street. Here he preached the gospel and expounded other truths in the Word of God for nine years to congregations steadily mounting in numbers until a larger building became necessary. Hence in the year 1854, a large grey brick and split flint building was seen in the course of construction on the west side of Chapel Loke, and situated between Ber Street and Surrey Road. It was “Ebenezer Chapel”, Surrey Road (more recently known as “Surrey Chapel”), a silent and impressive witness to a young clergyman’s

obedience to the Scriptures at all costs, and his refusal to compromise: characteristics that endured to the end of his long life and ministry. At that time one of the largest chapels in Norwich, it seated 1,500 and in its early years was often seated to capacity. Nine-tenths of the cost of the building was borne by Mr. Govett himself. He received no salary as a minister, but there was a “Pastor’s Box” in which gifts might be placed. He lived at the house adjoining the Chapel, the known as No. 12 Chapel Loke, and later as Surrey Lodge.

The church was not affiliated to any denomination, and was registered simply as “Christian”, “Undenominational”. Mr. Govett’s teaching was based on the Scriptures alone. “What saith the Scriptures?” was a phrase often heard from his lips, and the answer — when found — was final.

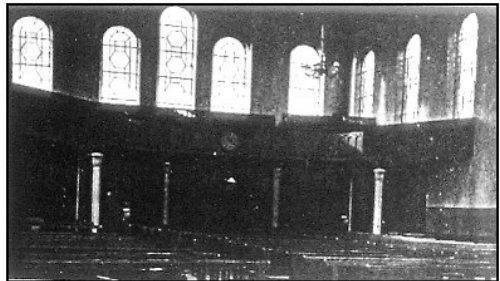
Beginning with the Gospel of the Grace of God, and Eternal Life a free gift through Jesus Christ, there followed the doctrines of (1.) Works after faith and Christian responsibility; (2) Reward according to works — whether good or bad — meted out at the Judgment Seat of Christ; (3) The Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth; entrance into the highest reward but conditional; (4) The literal fulfillment of promises to Israel; (5) The literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, and of the Apocalypse. All these Scriptures and many others formed the doctrinal foundation laid — and built upon — by Mr. Govett for over 50 years, and after him by his successor Mr. D. M. Pantou.

Surrey Chapel Interior, North End, 1900 Approx.

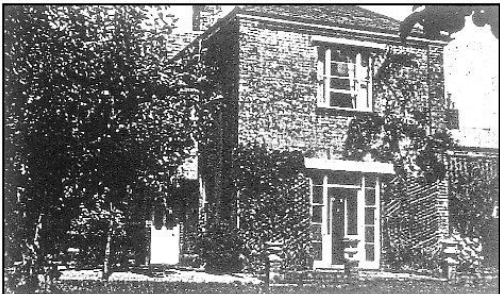


(Not original pulpit.)

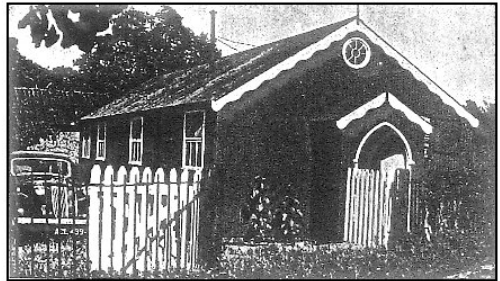
Surrey Chapel Interior: South End, 1900 Approx.



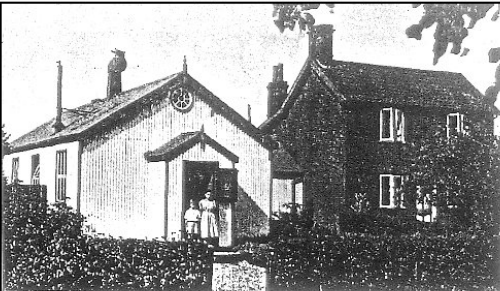
Surrey Lodge: Pastor's Residence



Chapel At Saxlingham Nethergate, Opened 1887



Salem Chapel, Great Moulton, Opened 1890



The worship in Surrey Chapel was marked by extreme simplicity. There was no music, but a large choir of young people led the singing which was tuneful and hearty; the choirmaster starting the tunes by the aid of the wooden pitch-pipe sometimes alluded to as "the leg of the table" by the young folk. It is still in existence.

Mr. Govett's teaching was entirely expository and his notes could be held in the palm of his hand! The Lord's supper was celebrated in the evening and was open to all true believers. The pastor gave an address.

Baptism of believers was by immersion, and in the first four years of his ministry between three and four hundred members of the Church of England were baptized. Two prayer meetings were held weekly, and a short one before the Sunday morning service. During those years of high spiritual level in the church there were hundreds of conversions, and a flourishing Sunday school. Small village churches were formed or helped at Stoke Holy Cross, Bramerton, Great Moulton, Swardeston, Saxlingham, Nethergate, and various other villages; and brethren went to these on Sunday to minister the Word and celebrate the Lord's Supper.

First and foremost Robert Govett was a man of prayer. No visit was paid, no visitor received, no matter discussed without prayer being offered first; and many there were who bore testimony to strength and encouragement given as a result of an interview with Robert Govett.

In addition to his ministry at the Chapel Mr. Govett had gained a wide reputation in England and America as a Biblical Expositor, and tributes to his writings came from many sources — including his old University and Cambridge — and such

preachers as Rev. C. H. Spurgeon held him in high esteem, writing on one occasion “Mr. Govett wrote 100 years before his time and the day will come when his works will be treasured as sifted gold.” The titles of some of his better known books may be of interest. Most are out of print now except where reprinting has been done.



Robert Govett, Towards the end of his ministry.

Isaiah Unfulfilled was written at the age of 26 while he was at St. Stephen’s Church. Commentaries on John’s Gospel, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, Sermon on the Mount, Prophecy on Olivet, Unexplained Parables of Matthew 13, Second Timothy, Church of Old, and many others followed. In his own judgment, and by general consent, his finest work was the *Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture*. Originally published in four volumes, this was afterwards abridged into one volume, a popular edition. For a long time out of print, this has been recently reprinted in America and is now available. Scores of tracts, pamphlets and sermons were also published.

Mr. Govett was of a retiring disposition and was not well known outside the Chapel, but there were signs he was not quite the recluse that was usually supposed. As he neared the end of his ministry the membership had visibly declined in numbers. Many of the original members had died or left the city, and of those remaining a good proportion were their sons and daughters.

As the end drew near various young men were invited to stay at Surrey Lodge, and assist the aged Pastor somewhat in the capacity of curates. One of them remained even months, and of him, more later.

Though Robert Govett felt his end was not far off he preached with great vigor at the age of 87, only a few weeks before his death, and the month’s illness which terminated his life was rather the collapse of a worn-out personality than a specific complaint.

His faithful friend Mr. William Dix (himself now with his Pastor in the Presence of their Lord) ministered to him to the very end. As Robert Govett had lived, so he died, in the atmosphere of prayer; for his last word — though he appeared to be unconscious — was a fervent “Amen” to a prayer. This was on February 20th, 1901.

He was laid to rest at the Rosary Cemetery in the presence of a goodly number of people, including ministers from other Churches in the city.

SURREY CHAPEL MISSIONARIES — THEIR FIELDS OF SERVICE AND DATES OF DEPARTURE.



THE MISSES HUNTER CHINA, 1906



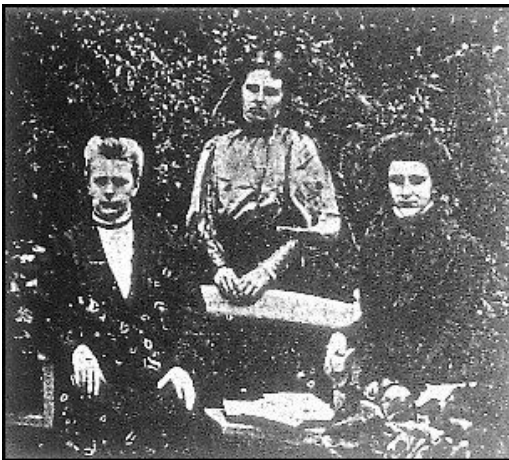
MISS HELLEN M. DIX CHINA 1912



MR. AND MRS. CARVER CHINA, 1907



MISS HILDA BOND CHINA, 1917



MISS BARBER, MISS BALLORD,
MISS SLAPP CHINA, 1909



MISS GRACE BOND CHINA, 1920



MR. H. F. ROE EGYPT, 1921



MR. & MRS. H. BRIAULT BRAZIL, 1921



MISS ELSIE TILNEY ALGERIA, 1920



MR. E. J. LONG TUNISIA, 1923



MR. STANLEY MILES TUNISIA, 1921



MR. HARLOD POWLEY
BELGIAN CONGO, 1925



MISS OLIVE DICKERSON EGYPT, 1926



MISS PAULINE STAMMERS SYRIA, 1938



MISS LINDA FINCHAM EGYPT, 1945



MISS MARY WELANDER CHINA, 1945



MISS JOAN STAMMERS
SOUTH INDIA (DOHNAVUR), 1939



LIEUTENANT COLONEL COOKE
JAPAN, 1948



MR. AND MRS. WINDSOR GIBRALTAR, 1951



MISS RUTH DIX
SOUTH INDIA (DOHNAVUR), 1949



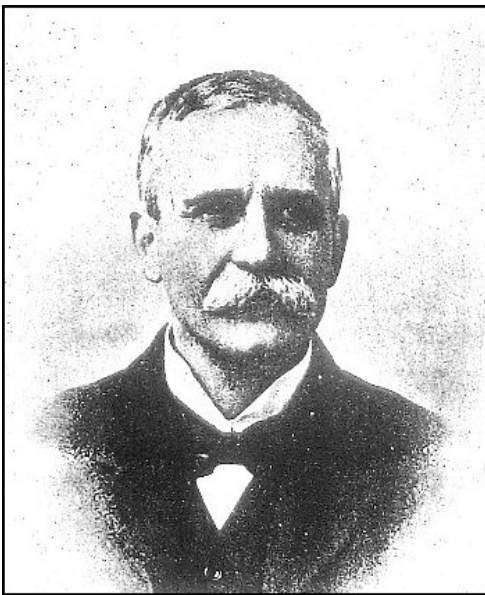
MRS. KATHLEEN HORSEMAN
BECHUANALAND PROTECTORATE, 1953

SECOND PERIOD, 1901 - 1924

Building on the Foundation and Scattering the Good Seed

During the interval between the death of Robert Govett and the appointment of a successor, the little church gladly accepted the wise and kindly advice of Rev. Thomas Phillips of St. Mary's Baptist Church, and formed a committee to manage affairs. Neither they nor he knew that God had already chosen a new Pastor and for at least seven years had been training him for the office. A brief account of the young "curate" who had lived seven months in the house with Mr. Govett is interesting and significant, in the similarity of the spiritual experiences through which both of them passed.

His name? David Morrieson Panton.



Born in Jamaica in 1870, of a Church of England family, his father being an Archdeacon, and his uncle Archbishop of the West Indies, he came to school in England in 1885. Two years were spent at the Old Hall, Wellington, and a further two years at St. Lawrence's, Ramsgate. From here he went to Cambridge University, entering Caius College to read law in preparation for a legal career. But God had other plans for the would-be barrister. He brought him under the influence of a godly "coach" who — amazingly enough — was himself a follower of the teaching of Robert Govett through his writings. With other undergraduates D. M. Panton absorbed the truths of Scripture from the lips of this man, often sitting up far into the night in their eagerness to learn.

The seed fell into good soil, but the harvest varied.

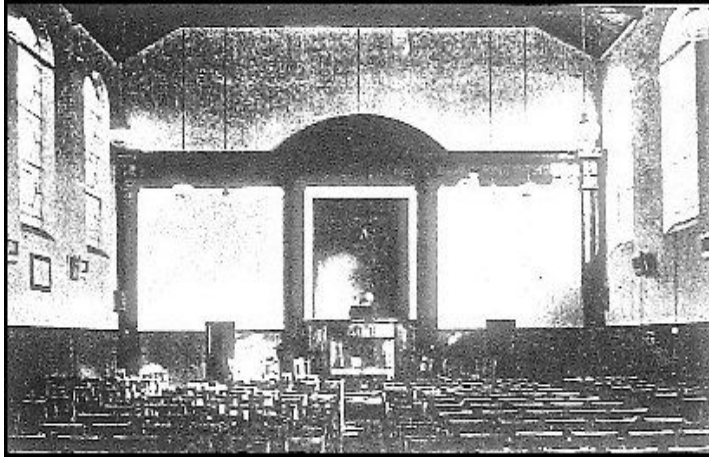
For D. M. Panton the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount meant the end of all thought of law as a career: his life henceforth must be one of devotion to the Gospel.

Like Robert Govett, when he saw for the first time the truth of baptism by immersion, he obeyed it at once, and came out of the Church of England. After taking his Degree he returned to Jamaica to face his family.

Back again in England after a few years, he was appointed Resident Warden at the Ipswich Social Settlement where he remained four years. It looked as though he

would have to resign when authorities there cast their vote in favor of a Unitarian representative in the Brotherhood. To quote his own words: — “It will be impossible for me to go on after the Settlement has thus officially flouted the revelation of the Sacred Trinity, and subordinated faith to expediency.”

But God again intervened, and an invitation was received from the little church at Surrey Road inviting him to become their pastor. Knowing this to be in the will of God,



Mr. D. M. Panton — the young “curate” of the seven months service — accepted it, and in October 1901 began his ministry in Norwich. From the beginning he was respected and loved by his flock, not only for his gracious and dignified personality, but for the stand he always took on matters of church doctrine, yielding no points where Scripture or precedent were involved.

His 24 years of “full-time” ministry were fruitful indeed, and greatly blessed of God. The undenominational traditions were maintained, also the doctrinal position of the Church. That the Holy Spirit was at work was abundantly evident in the large attendances at the prayer meetings and Bible readings, as well as on the Lord’s Day. Conversions were the usual thing and baptisms followed.

The Sunday School also was a hive of Spiritual activity, and reached a peak of over 600 scholars and 60 teachers and officers.

Conversions were numerous and many of today’s teachers were scholars of this period.

Added to these signs of a “live” Church was a new and widening missionary interest. Mr. Panton had a great influence over young folk in spiritual matters, and being intensely missionary-minded himself he often stressed the yielding to God of the whole personality. Many were the young men and women — and some older — who surrendered their lives to God for service overseas or in the homeland during this period of his ministry.

But God had shewn his servant that he too must fulfill a wider ministry, and implanted in his heart the desire to broadcast through the printed page the truths he had taught at Surrey Chapel. As a result of this, and of the generous offer of Mr. Frank Tweedale to supply the means necessary for its launching, the first issue of the “Dawn” magazine appeared in April 1924, and in spite of wartime setbacks, necessitating changes in publication, it has maintained its ministry throughout the world ever since. In addition

to being Editor of the "Dawn" Mr. Panton has written many pamphlets and booklets. Of these some are out of print, but the "Judgment Seat of Christ" has just been reprinted in Canada. Many have gone all over the world, and some are translated into other tongues. Unfortunately the pastor's health was not equal to the dual load of church plus magazine, and in view of this he retired from the ministry so far as to preach only one Sunday in each month as a rule. This was, of course, a big blow to the church, but when counsel was needed, or on special occasions D. M. P. was always "get-at-able" and willing to help.

Like his predecessor, he received no stated salary (nor does he receive any income from the "Dawn"). The funds of the church were free-will offerings alone, and of these the Pastor received a percentage. No debts were allowed, no sales of work, or other begging methods of raising money for God's work. In addition to money gifts sent to missionaries other tangible proofs of love and fellowship could be seen yearly in the Chapel during Whitsun week. Materials and garments of all descriptions, fancy articles, woolen and wooden goods, hand-sewn patchwork bedspreads and cot covers, and a host of other things were displayed every year until wartime restrictions made not only the purchase of materials difficult, but their carriage almost impossible. Throngs of interested visitors testified to an exhibition that was unique and well worth seeing, but marveled that nothing was for sale.

Uncounted hours of loving labor spent in homes, in sewing and woodwork classes, both adult and juvenile, were represented. One wonders whether the opportunity will ever come again?

THIRD PERIOD, 1941 - 1951

In 1941 Mr. Panton made the final break from Surrey Chapel and came only on special occasions from Sheringham where he had been living for several years. The church carried on, the pulpit being served by visiting speakers, missionaries, and local brethren, while enquiries were being made by the committee concerning a possible pastor. In 1947 the name of John D. Clark was introduced to the church. He was a missionary in Ecuador under the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and a nephew of Mr. Panton. Arrangements were made for him to come over to England for two months and occupy the pulpit at Surrey Chapel. It did not take Mr. Clark even that amount of time to win the affection of the church members, who were unanimous in their invitation to him to become their pastor. After he had made the necessary arrangements, Mr. Clark returned to Norwich in August 1948 bringing Mrs. Clark and two of their sons. He was welcomed into the Pastorate at a special tea and meeting.



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Surrey Chapel was his first experience of pastoral work and he must have found it arduous: but for 3 ½ years he gave devoted service, not only in the pulpit but in personal interviews and visiting, and in doing many personal kindnesses. No request for a visit from Pastor Clark ever went unheeded no matter whence it came. In these duties he was ably assisted by Mrs. Clark, whose gracious personality endeared her to the young folk and to the women, at whose meetings she was always a welcome speaker.

But “once a missionary — always a missionary”; and gradually the recall to Ecuador was felt, becoming more and more insistent as time went on, and in December 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Clark and family returned to the mission field. They worked for a year in the United States before going on to Quito in Ecuador, from where Mrs. Clark now broadcasts the Gospel in Spanish and English from the radio station H. C. J. B. Much of the Truth that he learned from his two predecessors at Surrey Chapel is now going out over the air to many peoples.

Since then the church has had no pastor, but carries on in faith and hope for God to reveal His plan for the future.

EBENEZER

CONCLUSION

This little survey of a century filled with the blessing and testing of God, enriched by His saving grace, and kept by His power, fills our hearts with deep gratitude and love and a sense of our obligation, first to the Head Who “loved the Church and gave Himself for it”, and then to the Ministry throughout the years who under God kept the Faith pure and preached the whole counsel of God.

Last — and not least — let us contemplate the many members who in bygone days made valuable contributions to the life and well-being of the church. Many of them are unknown to us even by name; most of them — if not all — would protest at the thought of their names appearing in print; but it is certain that they are recorded in the Book of Remembrance which is being written of “them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His Name.” Their service was not spectacular but they were men and women of prayer and action. They ministered to the needs of the poor and sick; they taught the young the Way of Life, and the path of a Christian; with loving generosity they gave to Church needs, and when necessary they worked in the Chapel with their hands. “They rest from their labors”, having left us of a later generation the privilege and responsibility of maintaining the heritage they helped to build up. May God help us by His grace to be worthy of that charge, that Surrey Chapel may continue faithful to the end.

*Let us watch through the hours of darkness,
Let us wait for the breaking day,
Let us strive for the crowns of the Kingdom of Christ,
And the glory that fades not away.*

Robert Govett

(A much loved chorus of the old days.)