

An English Church in Lille: early days

We know there were English residents in the Lille area from the first half of the 19th century. They were workers or businessmen, and were mostly engaged in commerce or manufacturing, particularly in areas related to the busy textile industry of the time.

The French Reformed church looked after their spiritual needs, and it was not until the middle of the century that services were held in English, mainly by a certain Mr W B Edwards and other lay people.

There is a brass memorial plate to the memory of Mr Edwards and his wife, and the brass lectern was also given in his name.

For the first time, services were held by an ordained minister from 1848-1857 and a memorial window to Reverend W Meston can be seen in the church vestry.

Dès le début du 19^e siècle, il y avait des ressortissants britanniques dans la région de Lille, surtout en raison de l'industrie du textile. Sans Eglise anglicane, c'est l'Eglise réformée qui s'occupait de leur santé spirituelle. Vers le milieu du siècle, un certain Mr Edwards et son épouse organisaient des offices en anglais et une plaque se trouve dans l'église en leur mémoire, ainsi que le pupitre en bronze.

Le premier prêtre anglais est arrivé en 1848 et le vitrail de la sacristie était installé en son nom.

A permanent home

Services were held in different rooms not only in Lille but also in Croix and Armentières, but by 1860, there was the first proposal for a permanent place of worship.

A plot of land originally belonging to the military and ceded to the town of Lille was given over for the building of an Anglican church. The cost of building the church was to be born entirely by the British community in Lille and once complete, although the building would belong to the town, it would be destined exclusively and in perpetuity for the usage of the Anglican church, in the charge of an Anglican minister.

The church was built in a modern Gothic style, but based on 13th century French Gothic – the capitals of the front door columns are good examples of this style.

The East end of the church is however in the form of a half octagon, a compromise between the usual English square and the French semicircle.

The church was consecrated on Ascension Day 1870 (Thursday 26 May).

La ville de Lille a donné en perpétuité un terrain pour la construction d'une église anglicane, aux frais de la communauté britannique.

Construite en style néo-gothique, l'église était dédiée en 1870, le jour de l'Ascension (jeudi 26 mai).

Notez la forme de l'abside en demi-octogon, un compromis entre le demi-cercle français et le carré anglais.

Improvements

The church hall beneath the church was fitted up and was used not only for the Sunday school and various church gatherings, but also by the British Institute, formed in 1868 to provide a library and entertainments for British Residents.

The harmonium was replaced by an organ, which originally ran on water power. This generally worked well, but on occasions when the water power failed, so did the organ. Afterwards, thanks to generous donations and subscriptions, a new and “superior” organ was installed in an organ chamber on the south side of the chancel, and removed from its original position next to the west door.

The ground around the church was paved: at the time, the church was entirely free-standing. The original gutters can still be seen in the present covered passage leading to the lavatories, which were not added until much later.

La salle sous l'église servait non seulement pour les différentes activités de l'église, mais aussi pour l'Institut britannique, sa bibliothèque et ses spectacles, et divers divertissements à l'intention de la communauté britannique.

Des orgues plus élaborées ont remplacé l'harmonium d'origine et même l'instrument à énergie hydraulique qui se trouvait à côté de la porte d'entrée et qui « lâchait » à des moments inopportuns. Le terrain autour de l'église a été carrelé. On peut voir les caniveaux d'origine dans le passage vers les sanitaires, installées beaucoup plus tard.

The Great War

On 13 October 1914, after a siege and heavy bombardment, Lille was occupied and came under German administration.

The Lillois were cut off from the rest of France: only 25 km from the front, it became a garrison town for the German army. Newspapers, cafés and the theatre were all renamed, and clocks and watches had to be set to Berlin time, one hour ahead.

The occupation lasted 4 years and 4 days. There were restrictions of all sorts, and extreme food shortages leading to malnutrition.

But all through this time, the Reverend D Moore refused to leave, and held services every Sunday. The marble tablet and honour roll bear witness to these years.

Le 13 octobre 1914, après un siège et un intense bombardement, Lille est envahie et passe sous administration allemande.

Isolée, à seulement 25 kms du front, Lille devient ville de garnison et les Lillois doivent régler leurs montres à l'heure de Berlin. 4 ans et 4 jours de souffrances et de privations.

Mais pendant toute cette occupation, le Révérend Moore refuse de partir, et il y avait un office tous les dimanches.

La plaque et le tableau d'honneur témoignent de cette période.

The Inter-war years

Bomb damage, broken stained glass windows and a leaky roof were all repaired or replaced during this time; electric light was installed and a new heating system too.

It was also decided to repair the hall floor and walls, build 2 cloakrooms and install lavatories; it was at this time that the passageway to the east side of the church was covered in.

Thanks to the town hall, the roof and the stained glass windows were replaced, but all the other works were paid for by donations and fund-raising events.

Pendant ces années entre les deux guerres, les dégâts des bombardements, les vitraux cassés et un toit qui laissait rentrer l'eau étaient tous réparés ou remplacés. Un éclairage électrique et un nouveau système de chauffage ont vu le jour.

Il a été décidé de réparer le sol de la salle sous l'église, de construire 2 vestiaires et d'installer des sanitaires ; c'est alors que le passage à l'est a gagné un toit.

Grâce à la mairie de Lille, les vitraux et le toit de l'église ont été remplacés, mais les autres travaux étaient financés par la communauté britannique à l'époque.

World War II

After France and Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, a new British Expeditionary Force made its way to France. Some of the troops were billeted in and around Lille.

Many of them came to Christ Church, and many to the British Institute hall beneath the church, which was used for social events as well as for the library.

Older members of our congregation can remember dances and music and the excitement of meeting the soldiers when they were children.

But in 1940, the battle for Lille was over and the Germans took over. Many British people were evacuated, others were interned. There was no permanent chaplain and indeed no regular services for many years, although the rural Dean and visiting priests came to Lille when the city was liberated in 1945.

En 1939, des troupes britannique sont envoyés en France, et certains étaient logés à Lille et aux alentours. Beaucoup d'entre eux venaient à Christ Church et profitaient des divertissements proposés par l'Institut Britannique. Certains membres de notre congrégation se rappellent encore ces événements.

Mais en 1940, la bataille de Lille est terminée et les Allemands occupent la ville de Lille. L'église n'a pas eu de prêtre permanent pendant plusieurs années, seulement quelques offices de temps en temps.

The last 70 years

The difficulties in post-war France and England, the decline of the textile industry, together with changes in society, all had their effect.

Congregations declined and for some years, there was no permanent Anglican priest in Lille; services were held less frequently. Fortunately, there were always visiting priests from Britain or other cities in France and Belgium to minister to the congregation.

New life and a new era came with the appointment of a permanent priest in 1998 and Christ Church is going from strength to strength.

We minister to our own congregation, try to reach out to the local community and support charities in France, in the UK and abroad.

There are services every Sunday – we would love to see you if you feel like dropping in. If you want to find out more, go to our website <http://christchurchlille.fr>

Oh and yes, we have wifi ...

Welcome!

Les difficultés des années d'après-guerre, le déclin de l'industrie textile, les changements dans la société : tous ont eu en effet sur la vie de l'église.

Le nombre de fidèles a baissé et pendant des années, il n'y avait pas de prêtre en permanence, mais des prêtres qui venaient soit de Grande Bretagne, soit d'autres villes en France pour les offices du dimanche.

Un nouveau départ a vu le jour avec l'installation d'un prêtre à Lille en 1998 et maintenant, l'église est en pleine expansion. Outre nos activités au sein de l'église, nous avons aussi un regard vers l'extérieur et nous avons une mission de soutien de certaines œuvres en France, en Royaume-Uni et à l'étranger.

Nous serions très heureux de vous accueillir le dimanche si vous voulez nous rendre visite. Pour plus d'informations, voir notre site web <http://christchurchlille.fr> (qui est en anglais, mais il y a une fonction traduction si nécessaire !)

Oh oui. Et nous avons le wifi ...

Vous êtes les bienvenus !

