

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 22: MEMORIES OF THE PAST

The best records of the past are those provided by eyewitnesses. Here are some wonderful memories of Southchurch and of the area a little beyond, written by Barbara Livings who lived in the parish for many years:

"I recently received two "Trinitas" church magazines which gave me great pleasure. You see, Holy Trinity was my childhood church. My name was Barbara Bayley and I lived at 35 Beaufort Street.

One of my first memories was being carried in my mother's arms to the Mothers Union, held in the barn. Quite a few meetings later I remember Mrs Welch, the Rector's wife, beckoned me up to the stage, whereupon she gave me a picture book to look at with pretty "pop-up" pictures.

Mother and I always attended Evensong and sat in the Old Church on the left-hand side fairly near the pulpit. My brother Luke was a choirboy and once sang a solo at Christmastime. His ego was somewhat deflated on being told by the Choirmaster "You were not chosen, Bayley, because you have the best voice, but because you have the most nerve", but I thought he was great!

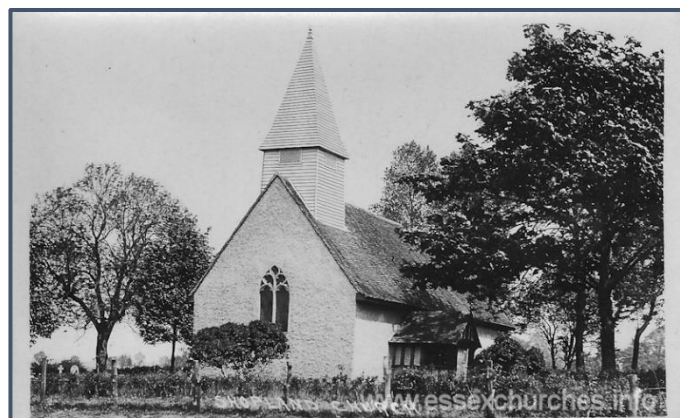
The Revd Welch was the Rector, Mr Membury read the lessons and Mr Garrett was the Treasurer, as I remember. I remember the Chancel being built, and the Rector being very ill with yellow jaundice a year or so before. His ambition was realised in the building of the Chancel. The new Rector was the Revd Elphinstone and I attended confirmation classes held in his study in the old Rectory. I was confirmed on 27th June 1934 by the then Bishop of Barking. I still have the little book we were given entitled "My Prayer Book" and the verse written in it by Canon Elphinstone was John 15v4.

The item which sparked off these memories was the news of Miss Daisy Stockdales retirement. She was my Sunday School teacher, her father was the Superintendent and her sister 'Rene was also a teacher until her marriage, I think. Lessons were held in the church school.

We lived in Southchurch and within a few minute's walk we were in fields and meadows, or, on a Sunday to Holy Trinity, 'our Church'.

Summertime was when our church attendance on Sunday evenings changed. Every other Sunday we would wend our way to some "far-flung" county church a few miles walk away, and an early start essential, no leisurely walk of a few minutes on those Sundays.

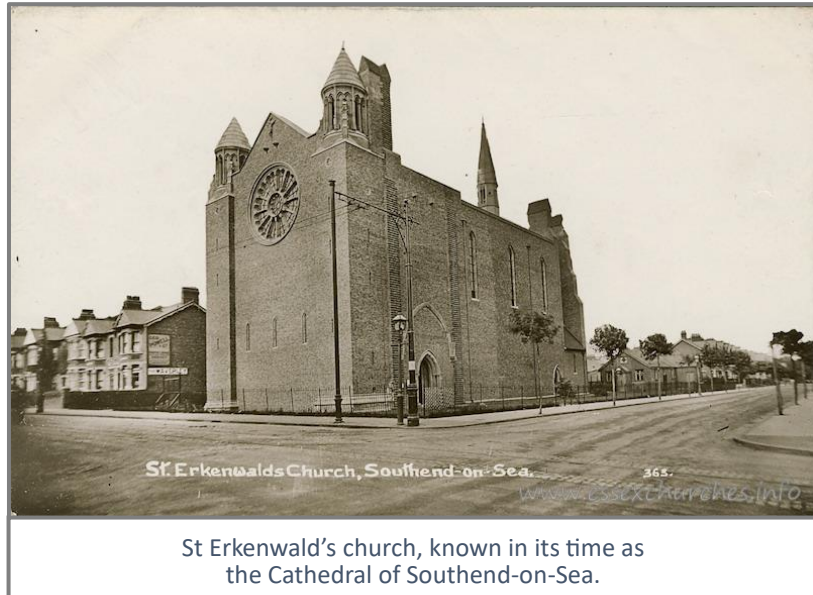
Shopland held our favourite church, about 2¼ miles away. Through cornfields and meadow pastures, over stiles and through "kissing gates" we went. Our one dread was finding horses or cows in our path, which would perhaps entail a detour, thus making us late for the service. The church was small, musty smelling and had high box-pews, so high that as a child, until the preacher got into the pulpit, I saw nothing apart from the ceiling or the sidesman with the plate. There was no choir and, including the Vicar and his wife, who was the organist, there were never any more than nine souls at Evensong. Alas this church has long gone.



Church of St Mary Magdalen, Shopland. There's an interesting history of this church [here](#).

Another church, Christ Church, was just off the front in Warwick Road, about a couple of miles from where we lived. Past Holy Trinity we went down a lane, across the level crossing and on through the fields, with the last one, as usual, full of cows! The church was but a step away from the meadow; a modern church, wide, light and airy and very short on stained glass windows. I remember the Vicar, the Revd Cotrell-Smith, having housemaid's knee at one time, and hobbling around with a stick, unable to kneel down. Little did I know as I sat there then that the sister of my future husband was to be married there at some future date.

St Erkenwald's was a large town church. No country walk to this one, just suburban streets, and it was here, at about 10 or 11 years of age, that I was a Guide attached to the 3rd Southend troop. The tall slender spire, painted green and quite a landmark in those days before tower blocks blotted the area, caused quite a thrill one Guide night when the Vicar, the Revd Holyoak, took us up there. The view, spellbinding to our young eyes, included the sea, of



course, only a short walk away and the Kursaal amusement park which was almost next door. Wordsworth's lines "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie", said it all. It was here, as a child, I first heard the "Alleluia" chorus sung by their splendid choir, and I still feel uplifted whenever I hear it.

St Mary's Prittlewell about a mile from the High Street was the church the Girl Guides attended for their Renewal of Promise service once a year. It was a large church and was the only one with a peal of bells, so that held a double pleasure for us on that day. Several years later the service was held in the Astoria cinema (later renamed the "Odeon") but it never seemed the same somehow.

These then were the churches of my childhood. Like most churchgoers I have added many more to the list and I look forward to adding to the number of these holy places during future travels, God willing."

Barbara Livings

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 23: "The Architects of the New Church".

- Our new church is designed by 'one of the major church architects of the 20th Century'.
- Find out why Comper chose the strawberry as his signature on stained glass windows he designed.

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)