

CHAPTER 8

Rev. Tutin Thomas (1884 - 1889)

During the ensuing interregnum, evangelistic Services were held over a period of three months by a Mr.G.D.Shipley from Hertfordshire. The incoming minister recorded several people as having first thought of joining the church as a result of these Services.

The exodus to the colonies was partly reversed in the case of the next minister, Rev. Richard Tutin Thomas. Soon after his birth in 1842, his parents emigrated to Canada, where his father practised as an architect. Grown up, Mr. Thomas joined the Church of Christ in Toronto and later studied for the ministry at the Congregational College in Montreal. After training he was ordained to a pastorate in Toronto.

In early life, he was afflicted by a disease from which he never entirely recovered. He therefore sought the 'milder climate' of England for the sake of his health, and became minister of a church in Pimlico, South London. He resigned this pastorate on being appointed as general agent of the French-Canadian Missionary Society, but later became assistant minister of the church at Mile End, East London.

Rev. Tutin Thomas began his ministry at Great Chishill on 18th May 1884, but when Barley Chapel was acquired in 1889, Mr. Thomas assumed this new charge also, and from 1893 the churches remained together until the closure of Barley Chapel in 1984.

Despite his sensitive health, Mr. Thomas was an energetic leader and caused a number of new enterprises to begin. A brick and flint wall was built around the graveyard, although the date of its acquisition is not known. An organ was obtained for accompaniment of hymn-singing. Mr. Thomas was obviously quite musical, for he composed a number of hymns.

It was said of Mr. Thomas that 'he was a truly Christian man, untiring in the work of the ministry, and often giving to others what he needed himself'.

A Dorcas Society for making coats for the poor was started in 1884, and a Religious Tract Society in 1887. A Bible Class was led by Mr. Thomas, and the Band of Hope was reorganised. An annual Tea Meeting was held at the beginning of each year.

A quarterly paper 'The Chishill and Barley Congregational Messenger' began publication in January 1886 and ran at a profit for church funds. New lamps and cocoa matting were procured for the Chapel, and a wooden pavement for the schoolroom.

It is recorded that during the ministry of Mr. Thomas, 43 new members were received on profession of faith.

Mr. Thomas was never a strong man, and in May 1889, his health broke down, one of his lungs being diseased, and he felt obliged to intimate his resignation from September of that year.

For two years Mr. Thomas was without a pastorate, but in 1892 he felt sufficiently recovered to accept the charge at nearby Therfield. The severe winter of 1894-1895 wreaked havoc with his health, and he died in 1895 at the age of 53 years.

He was described as 'a man of pure, unselfish character, of high integrity and having a passion for souls'.