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## The Story of Essex Hall

by Mortimer Rowe B.A., D.D.

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### "What mean ye by these stones?"

The past history of Essex Hall has hitherto been recorded only in fragments, scattered widely through the pages of annual reports, weekly periodicals and many other (and more interesting!) sources of information, covering not far short of two centuries. I have endeavoured to weld the disjointed fragments into a coherent and continuous narrative, complete so far as the limited compass of a short book allows; correcting some oft-repeated errors and clarifying a few obscurities, and also including material previously unrecorded in readily accessible form.

The history of a building such as ours is closely interwoven with the unfolding record of the religious movement which gives that history significance; but only the outstandingly important events which occurred within these walls in days gone by are noted in the course of this narrative. The book has been written at the request of the General Assembly, upon the occasion of the opening of our wholly new and modern Essex Hall; hence the disproportionate space which is occupied by the final chapter.

Throughout the task I have had very great help from Dr. Dorothy Tarrant, who has been assiduous in the quest for accurate information, willingly taking the main share in the collection of material, and thus leaving me free to devote myself chiefly to the work of the scribe. To her my first and foremost acknowledgments are due.

Others whom I must thank are Mr. Charles King of Bideford, for free permission to use the charming original sketch which forms the frontispiece; our architect, Mr. Kenneth Tayler, for contributing an important chapter which, needless to say, I could not myself have written; and the Editor of *The Inquirer*, the Rev. E. G. Lee, for the loan of four half-tone blocks illustrating the new building within and without.

MORTIMER ROWE *Essex Hall, January 1959*



## Chapter 1 - The Beginnings

Down at the bottom of Essex Street, London, there is a picturesque relic of bygone centuries—the only such relic in the street, which is otherwise made up of a miscellany of far later office and similar premises, of various comparatively modern dates. At first sight the street appears to be a cul-de-sac, failing to link the busy Strand with the equally busy Thames Embankment; but for pedestrians only there is a through route, for the street ends with a lofty narrow archway of ancient ornamental stonework, closely hemmed in by modern brick buildings left and right; [ See *Frontispiece* ] and a couple of dozen stone steps lead downward beneath it to Temple Gardens and the broad Victoria Embankment humming with omnibuses and every other kind of motor transport. Further beyond, old Father Thames flows calmly by, now geographically restricted within tidy limits. But pause before reaching the foot of the steps, close your eyes and go back in imagination to the days of Good Queen Bess, and you can hear the wavelets of the river lapping at your feet; for when the Thames was unconfined this archway was the Water Gate at the lower end of the gardens of Essex House, the palatial residence of Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, the Queen's favourite; and his luxurious river-barge would often be moored below the steps to await his lordly pleasure. This fascinating old archway was seriously damaged when the adjoining buildings were shattered by one of the numerous bombs that descended hereabouts during the Second World War; but it has since been adroitly restored.

The ill-fated Earl fell from power and favour through his own folly, and was beheaded at the Tower in 1601. The size of Essex House may be judged from the fact that 300 of his misguided followers could assemble there shortly before his fall. It was described by Pepys in his Diary (1669) as "a large but ugly house". In 1666 it survived the Great Fire of London, and this piece of good fortune brings a very remarkable person into the story: one Nicholas Barbon, M.D., [ *Dictionary of National Biography, Art. Barbon, N.* ] son of Praisegod Barebones or Barbon, the Anabaptist. Either the father or the son effected the improvement in this curious surname. After the Great Fire, Nicholas, we learn, "was one of the first and most considerable builders in the city of London, and first instituted fire insurance in this country". A contemporary of his recorded that he "hash sett up an office for it and is likely to gets vastly by it". Nicholas was borne about 1640 and died in 1698. Whether he did "gets vastly by it" or not, in his will he directed that none of his debts should be paid! Quoting from an unpublished document, the D.N.B. likewise records that Essex House was still standing after 1666, and that it retained its name until "one Dr. Barbone, the son, I am told, of honest prays God [Praisegod], bought it of the executors of the late Duchess of Somerset, daughter of the Earl of Essex, not to restore it to the right owner, the Bishop of Exeter; but converted it into houses and tenements for tavernes, ale houses, cooks-shoppes and vaulting schooles, and the garden adjoining the river into wharfes for brewers and wood-mongers The writer does not seem to have admired Dr. Barbon.

Thus was Essex Street brought into existence by its planner and creator, towards the year 1680. His entrance from the Strand was a narrow passage, and though afterwards widened, it is still today a 'bottle-neck' which provokes busy van-drivers to profanity. Incidentally, we may presume that Dr. Barbon's purchase had included the freehold of the land, which long before had been owned by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, and which the Bishop of Exeter would appear to have laid some claim to inherit. From another source [ *Kent, Encyclopaedias of London.* ] we further learn that this father of all fire-insurance companies, speculative builders and town planners "demolished the [Essex] House, leaving only the pillars and cornice of the Water Gate ... and parts of the premises near the Strand"—the latter doubtless adapted and reconstructed to some extent as separate buildings.

One of these buildings, occupying the very site of our present Essex Hall and its predecessors, enjoyed the exclusive privilege, for some reason unknown, of inheriting the title 'Essex House'; and this title it retained, as we shall see, throughout the best part of the following two centuries. It was certainly a building of some size, for when the street came to be numbered for postal purposes, it was given no less than four units, Nos. 2-5. As far back as Barbon's own time it is almost certainly to be identified with a "Musick School in Essex Buildings, over against St. Clement's Church", where "concerts of Vocal and Instrumental Musick" were given, as advertised

in the *London Gazette* of 1678 [ *Dispose, St. Clement Danes, Vol. II.* ] Later, from 1712 to 1730, it is definitely named as housing the famous and extensive library of Sir Robert Cotton (d. 1631), which was Crown property, but remained in a sad state of neglect until 1753, when the British Museum Library was founded and received it as its nucleus. [ *Dictionary of National Biography, Art. Cotton.* ] Essex House next appears as an auction room occupied by a well-known book-auctioneer of high repute, Samuel Paterson, for some twenty years prior to 1774, at which date it passes into Unitarian hands, and the auction room becomes the natural starting-point of our next chapter.

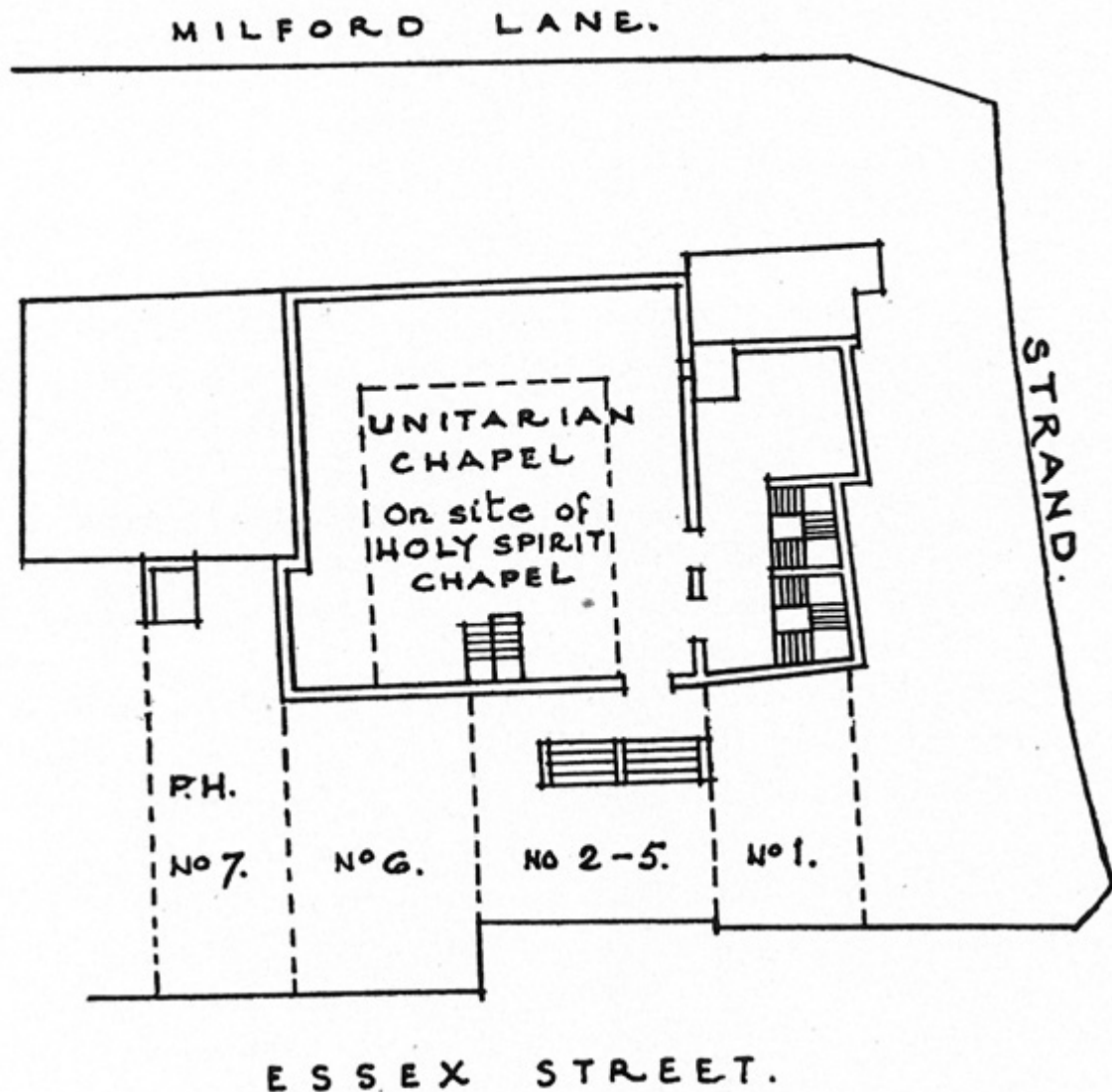
Thus far we have been recounting plain prosaic and established facts about Essex House and Essex Street, from Elizabethan days to those of George III. But interwoven with the factual narrative is an even more interesting and indeed fascinating story which begins with a verifiable basis in the twelfth century, passes quickly into obscure tradition, and ends in delightful uncertainty to-day.

Long before 'The Temple' became, as we now know it, one of the Inns of Court (in which the Temple Church still stands), the area was occupied by a settlement of the Knights Templars, ending westward at Milford Lane, just beyond what is now Essex Street. The portion outside the city boundary at Temple Bar was named the 'Outer Temple'. It is conjectured that it might possibly have had a small chapel of its own. Edward II dissolved the Order of Knights Templars in the thirteenth century, and in the following century the Outer Temple area passed into the ownership of Walter Stapleton, Lord Treasurer and Bishop of Exeter, "who settled this property upon his successors in that See and built a large house which was called Exeter Inn", - or sometimes Exeter House. *Newton, London in the Olden Time (1855)* This was the house which changed its name with successive non-ecclesiastical but aristocratic occupants, until it became 'Essex House' in the occupation of the Earl of Essex, as already related.

Now for the tradition - "The most accurate and business-like of English annalists or chroniclers of the sixteenth century", John Stow (d. 1605), author of *A Survey of London*, after referring to Essex House and its history, continues - "Then west was a Chapple dedicated to the Holy Ghost, called saint Spirit, uppon what occasion founded I have not read. Next is Milford Lane, down to the Thames. . . ." Quoting this, the late Rev. W. G. Tarrant, was inspired to compose a poem, [ *Supreme Hours (1928) p. 144.* ] with some verses will of which we wipresently conclude; but so far as we are aware he did not speculate upon the precise location of the chapel. It is reasonable to suppose that the Bishop of Exeter, in clearing the site and erecting his "large house", might include a chapel therein, or would certainly preserve and embody a consecrated building of former days, if such existed. Did the Protestant Earl of Essex, or one of the aristocratic Leicesters or Pagets who preceded him in the tenancy of the house, do away with the chapel when improving their ample dwelling? We have not been able to find a ray of light upon this, except that the Protestant Lord Paget is stated to have "rebuilt parts of the mansion". But the tradition of such a chapel *hereabouts* seems reliable enough.

Finally, there is the acceptance of the tradition by later antiquarians and makers of maps. William Newton, whom we have already quoted, author of *London in the Olden Time*, a bulky tome with a large-scale pictorial map accompanying it, is satisfied to state that the chapel "certainly stood between Essex Street and Milford Lane, upon the spot now occupied by a Unitarian Chapel" - which (let us be honest!) is pretty obviously jumping to a conclusion; and he indicates it so upon his map. That may be the reason why Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Ordnance Surveyors, when preparing in 1874 the first large-scale Ordnance Survey map of London, no less than 60 inches to the mile, honoured us with a tiny detailed plan of Essex Street Chapel (further enlarged and here reproduced), amid a commonplace area of empty squares representing the surrounding premises, and they inscribed within our plan "On site of Holy Spirit Chapel", as shown; and also it may be why, on the second and revised survey (1948), the more sceptical modern surveyors

indicated nothing but our outline site, and spread that inscription to apply vaguely to somewhere within the four-square block of buildings from Essex Street to Milford Lane and from the Strand to Little Essex Street below.



In the next chapter we shall read of the building of the Unitarian chapel on this site. The theme of its founder's dedicatory sermon was that in our Unitarian faith God himself, and not merely one of three persons in a mysterious Trinity, is the omnipresent Spirit of holiness, truth and love. And since this chapel, and the Essex Hall that succeeded it, occupied the largest single share in the very centre of that four-square block, we are determined to cherish the conviction that we do indeed stand to-day upon the site of the ancient, long-lost 'Chapel of the Holy Spirit.'

Church of the Spirit, long ago  
 The fathers to thy shelter came,  
 And all their purest joys below  
 Were clustered round thy sacred name.

Days come and go-the walls decay  
 That love doth rear so white and fair;  
 Where art thou now, and where are they  
 That sang the hymn and said the prayer?

The shrine is gone, and they are dumb;  
 Howe'er we listen, nevermore  
 Shall echo of their music come  
 Through pillared aisle and open door.

And yet across the waste of years,  
The changing world, the deeps of death,  
The spirit born within us hears  
The word the Holy Spirit saith.

W. G. Tarrant

## Chapter 2 - Lindsey's Chapel

We have traced the origin of a miscellany of "ale houses, cooks' shoppes" and what-not that filled Essex Street in the latter part of the 17th century, most of which were doubtless still there a hundred years later, with some improvement, it would appear, in the type of occupant.\* [ *This must have been so, for Lady Primrose, an ardent Jacobite, had a house there; and in 1750 Bonnie Prince Charlie, only four years after Culloden and his romantic escape to France, crossed over secretly and visited her; but suspecting that he had been recognized in the Strand, he slipped out under cover of darkness by way of Essex Steps to a boat that took him down river to shipboard and away.* ] No trace remained of the Earl of Essex's spacious house and garden except the archway of the Water Gate and the flight of narrow steps still leading down to the river-side.

"A hundred years later"-to be precise, in November 1773- far away north in the rural village of Catterick in Yorkshire, the Vicar, the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, M.A., had at last come to the momentous decision to resign his living, despite his love for the simple country folk who had been his flock for ten years, and despite their devotion to him; for after heart-searching self-examination he realized that his religious convictions were clearly Unitarian, and his conscience forbade further compromise. At fifty years of age, accompanied by his devoted wife, nearly twenty years his junior, he came to London with the full intention -strictly speaking, at that date an illegal intention-of gathering a congregation of people who would welcome Unitarian worship and preaching. His story in full must be read elsewhere, and has often been retold.\* [ *See especially Belsham, Memoir of Theophilus Lindsey; Gordon, Addresses Biographical and Historical; McLachlan, Letters of Theophilus Lindsey.* This amazing hero of ours, possessing nothing but the unsold remnant of his modest goods and chattels, most of his books and furniture having been sold to pay for his journey, came almost unknown to the metropolis, convinced that this venture was God's will, and that he would assuredly prosper it. And his faith in God was fully justified, as we know. Quickly the initial interest and support of a few influential persons in London was won, and the warm encouragement of distinguished 'Presbyterian' ministers like Dr. Richard Price and Dr. Joseph Priestley (already holding definitely Unitarian views) was spontaneously extended to him in ample measure.

Thus it came about that one day in the early months of 1774 a little group of persons-Lindsey and his chiefpledged supporters -turned the corner out of the Strand into Essex Street and stood looking at a building near the top of the street, a building which alone kept alive the proud name 'Essex House', and which (they had learnt) Mr. Paterson the book auctioneer had vacated. They entered and were shown a large room, which they could see was capable of being transformed into a simple meeting-place to seat about 300 persons. Their search was ended; terms were settled for a tenancy; application was made to the Justices to have the house registered as a Dissenting place of worship. Obstacles were encountered and delays were wantonly imposed; but here one of Lindsey's chief supporters - Mr. John Lee the barrister (afterwards Solicitor General)-proved an invaluable legal friend, especially when questions (awkward questions!) concerning the doctrine to be preached and the person to preach it needed adroit parrying. At his threat of stern action against the Justices (for he was well aware of their limited powers) the delaying tactics were dropped and the registration was granted.

It must be remembered that the law against openly anti-trinitarian worship and preaching was not actually repealed until 1813, although at the date of Lindsey's application, thanks to the growth of latitudinarianism and easy-going toleration in the 18th century, it was feasible to run the risk of its enforcement□with all discreet and due caution! Alexander Gordon, with his characteristic

combination of accurate scholarship and dry humour, speaks of Lindsey's venture as being "rather in the fashion, having the combined attraction of heresy and novelty", and also states that "one of its chief supporters had been drawn to the place by the eager report of a lady's maid, that 'a gentleman was going to open a room to preach a new religion'". [ *Gordon, Addresses Biographical and Historical, VIII and IX.* ]

There were many who feared lest he should attract unwelcome attention and be visited with the penalties of this half-obsolete law, in the permanent loss of his freedom to gather any congregation at all. Our 'Presbyterian' Unitarian ministers of that period did not indiscreetly wave the Unitarian flag. Nor is it to be supposed that Lindsey promptly put up a notice-board bearing the provocative title 'Essex Street Unitarian Chapel'. He certainly did not. Gordon notes that the first we hear of such a signboard is in 1814, the year after the repeal of the 'Trinity Act', and then only of its having been recently put up and taken down again, as if on second thoughts! However, on the Sunday following the registration - April 17, 1774 □ there assembled for worship some two hundred persons in Essex House, now provisionally Essex Street Chapel, "a much larger and more respectable audience than I could have expected", wrote Lindsey, "who behaved with great decency". He preached on the words in Ephes. IV. 3 □ "endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace". Joseph Priestley and also Benjamin Franklin, the agent of the Massachusetts Colony, were in that first Sunday's congregation, and many other persons of importance. Mr. John Lee the barrister was there, and next day he wrote to their friend the Rev. Newton Cappe of York, "After a little difficulty in getting his chapel registered at the Quarter Sessions, which I had the good luck to remove, he entered upon his ministry yesterday.... He was well attended, considering that no public notice was given of the intended service. There were about ten coaches at the door, which I was glad of, because it gave a degree of respectableness to the congregation in the eyes of the people living thereabouts." Over £400 had been subscribed by various well-wishers in London and elsewhere, including a contribution from the congregation of his good friend the Rev. Wm. Turner at Wakefield, to pay for adapting the auction-room for worship and to meet the cost of two year's rent at £50 per annum, leaving about #200 in Mr. Lindsey's hands, sufficient for the simple needs of himself and his brave and devoted wife; for meanwhile they had sold their silver to meet the cost of board and lodging in London. All well went with the great adventure; substantial numbers regularly attended the services, including for some time an officer of the Government to see if anything politically seditious was being preached. Unitarian teaching and worship were for the first time in England quietly but publicly maintained in a registered Dissenting place of worship, apart from the older Presbyterian chapels; and within a few months Lindsey wrote to his friend Dr. Jebb at Cambridge, "I have not known what entire quiet of mind and perfect peace with God was for many years till now." Three years later, in 1777, the congregation was so firmly established that negotiations were entered into, and completed, for the purchase of this century-old building. Before the end of March 1778 'Essex House' was no more, except perhaps as a postal address for the minister, and the real 'Essex Street Chapel' was opened. This was no mere patching-up and adaptation of the old auction-room premises, but to a large extent a new building, some few of whose exterior features remained until its destruction by enemy action in 1944. Evidently the foundations and also the lower courses of the old house were retained. The wall front had to be taken down, and this prolonged the work. Internally, living accommodation for the minister and his wife was provided on the level of the former auction-room, subsequently often but misleadingly described as his 'house' (it must have been, in modern language, a 'flat'). Above this floor an imposing chapel in 'meeting-house' style of architecture was erected, provided with gallery accommodation and furnished at the outset with the pulpit and, no doubt, the square box-pews shown in the centenary illustration opposite page 32; but not the organ there depicted, for at that early date only cathedrals and very large and important parish churches could boast the possession of such an aid to worship. Essex Street Chapel existed without one until as late as 1860! Rising from the centre of the lofty ceiling was a large circular lantern surmounted by a dome, as all knew the building in modern times, after its transformation into 'Essex Hall', will remember.

The opening service was held on Sunday, March 29, 1778, Lindsey preaching from the appropriate text, "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John IV. 23). In a

letter written six weeks later, he gives praise to that gallant and loyal wife of his for her hard work and practical efficiency: "It was owing to her that our new chapel was ready so soon. And she is now no less busily engaged in the habitation underneath, which we are to inhabit, and which requires much more to be done at it than we expected." Nevertheless they were glad to be there, after four years in inexpensive but miserable lodgings in Holborn.

Here an interesting legal question arises. Essex House was purchased, and the erection of the chapel was effected, at considerable cost - £1,900 for the purchase of the freehold premises and £2,000 "for pulling down and rebuilding the chapel". This heavy expenditure was certainly not borne entirely by Lindsey himself, for he was nearly as poor as the proverbial church mouse; it must clearly have been met, for the most part, by means of money raised by his supporters in London and elsewhere. Yet many years later, writing to a friend, he remarks that it included "not less than £500 of our own". In our days such a transaction would have involved the appointment without delay of a body of Trustees in whom the property would have been vested, and the drawing up of a Trust Deed prescribing the use of the building, the mode of appointing new trustees and so forth. But strange to say, it was Lindsey himself who was made the legal owner of the chapel, and it was not until five years later (1783) that by a Deed of Bargain and Sale, in return for a payment of ten shillings to him, he conveyed to thirteen trustees the freehold site and building thereon, "upon trust to permit so much of the said premises as was then used as a chapel and vestry to be used as such for the public worship of Almighty God ... and also to suffer the minister for the time being of the said chapel to use, occupy and enjoy such part of the said premises as had been fitted up and was used as a dwelling-house, and the gardens, cellars, yards and appurtenances thereto without paying any rent for the same". Note the inclusion of *gardens*; we refer to this in a later chapter.

Lindsey ministered there unaided until 1782, from which year onward his labours were shared by Dr. John Disney, Rector of Panton and Vicar of Swinderby, Lines, who like Lindsey resigned his living and left the Church of England on conscientious grounds. His wife was Mrs. Lindsey's step-sister. It is gratifying to read that "the congregation took up the matter warmly and increased their subscriptions; Lindsey was able to share with him a respectable income". In 1793 Lindsey resigned at the age of seventy because of advancing years and declining health, and Dr. Disney succeeded him; Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey continued to live in the Essex Street accommodation until he died in 1808, aged eighty-five; little more than three years later she also passed away there, in her seventy-second year.

So, in brief outline, ends the wonderful story of Theophilus Lindsey and his founding of Essex Street Chapel, and the establishment of the first avowedly Unitarian congregation in this country. We are primarily concerned, in this modest volume, with the history of a building, but we feel justified in linking this subject in its early stages with a pen-picture of the pioneer who first gave that building significance for us. More appropriate to these pages than any quotation from formal tributes to him and his work is the glimpse that Charles Lamb gives of him in *Essays of Elia* (Essay on 'My Relations'), referring to his boyhood days in the 1780's:

*I had an aunt, a dear and good one . . . She went to church every Sabbath, as a good Protestant should do . . . Finding the door of the chapel in Essex Street open one day it was in the infancy of that heresy she went in, liked the sermon, and the manner of worship, and frequented it at intervals for some time after.*

And this sentence, from a letter written by Lindsey to a friend in the very year of the opening of the new chapel (1778), should comfort the heart of every parson and trouble the conscience of every layman—"Few of the better sort attend twice a day, which shows there is a want of the zeal of our forefathers, and is a bad example, as I sometimes, but in vain, take the liberty to tell them."

The subsequent record of the congregation for almost a century is outside our province, but after that lapse of time we shall be closely concerned with it again in a later chapter. Dr. John Disney until he continued as minister until 1804, Thomas Belsham (Lindsey's biographer) followed him from 1805 to 1829, with Thomas Madge as his assistant (1825-29) and successor (1829-59). Madge was the first to kick against living in the domestic flat beneath the chapel, and after

occupying it for a few years he took up his abode elsewhere. This was the point at which no doubt 'Essex House' disappeared even as a postal address. [ A century later (1929) it was resuscitated by the late Mr. Kenneth Brown, when Nos. 12 and 13 Essex Street were pulled down and replaced by a handsome office building. His firm occupied this, and he very sensibly named it 'Essex House'. ] What use the congregation made of the vacant rooms we cannot say, except for two or three years during which the empty flat and cellars suddenly came into, and equally suddenly vanish out of, our next chapter.

Rescued undamaged from the rubble that remained when Essex Hall was bombed in 1944 is the marble slab which was built into wall between the two doors that opened into the Upper Hall and which reads:

THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M.A. SOMETIME VICAR OF CATTERICK, YORKSHIRE OPENED THIS BUILDING FOR UNITARIAN WORSHIP APRIL 17 1774 AND WAS MINISTER HERE UNTIL 1793
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### Chapter 3 - The Homeless Wanderers

We, must now turn aside from the record of Essex Street Chapel and its congregation during three-quarters of the 19th century, and tell of events that belong more directly to our story: events that will bring us back to Essex Street, once for a brief spell, and then in good earnest after an interval of thirty years.

Everyone knows that among the religious denominations in this country the Congregationalists, the Baptists and the Unitarians are all made up of *independent* congregations—i.e., each congregation is legally independent of the rest, owning (through trustees) its own church premises and more or less fiercely resistant to outside interference even from its neighbours in the same denomination. All steps towards 'central' organization, with its possibility of control from above, have encountered suspicion and hostility in these three denominations. The Congregationalists were formerly called 'Independents'; the Unitarians are descended in the main from 'Presbyterian' ancestors who failed to set up a Presbyterian system of church government in the 18th century and became, if possible, more independent than the Independents. And it must be noted that when Lindsey founded Essex Street Chapel he stood, by his own choice, alone and apart even from his Presbyterian-Unitarian contemporaries, scarcely looking to them for anything beyond their moral support, for which indeed he was deeply grateful. His very mode of worship was strange to them—a revision and adaptation of the Prayer Book of the Church of England.

And yet here is the paradoxical result. Lindsey's open and courageous advocacy of Unitarianism in preaching and worship gave considerable impetus far and wide among Presbyterian ministers and congregations who, as we have seen, were essentially at one with him, but were chary of proclaiming it openly in the existing state of the law. There was now born among these kindred churches a tendency to draw more closely together and seek to engender common and organized activity, in which Lindsey and his successors played a leading part. Let us, as briefly as possible, recall the progress of these events. [ For a fuller account, see Mellon, *Liberty and Religion*, Chapter II. ]

As early as 1783 Lindsey and Disney drew other ministers and laity into conference about the need for united action in propagating Unitarian opinions, and after a few years of informal co-operative activity, with meetings in Lindsey's house, an organized society was successfully founded in 1791, with a title that sounds quaintly in our modern ears 'The Unitarian Society for promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the Distribution of Books'. Twenty-two years before the 1813 Act removed penalties against Unitarians, this first organized denominational Unitarian society came into existence, and it continued until, after thirty-three years, it was absorbed into something larger, as we shall see.



Next, in 1806, came 'The Unitarian Fund', founded chiefly by laymen, 'for the Promotion of Unitarianism by means of Popular Preaching', and for financial assistance to poorer congregations. This also took firm root and survived until it was superseded.

Thirdly, after the passing of the 1813 Act, but while the oppressive Corporation Act and Test Act were still on the Statute Book, 'The Association for the Protection of the Civil Rights of Unitarians' was established in 1819. But by this time it began to dawn upon the minds of Unitarians that this trinity of cognate societies might well be united in one. They anticipated Robert Browning's Abt Vogler, who propounded the mystery of the musician's harmonic gift -

*That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star!*

and the starry vision came to them of a single Association for all these and another appropriate activities in the interest of our churches and their members, and for the effective defence and propagation of our faith.

Thus was brought to birth, triumphantly, in 1825, THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION. [ *By a happy coincidence, in those days of slow posts, no transatlantic telegraph, telephone or wireless, our American cousins, in complete ignorance as to the details of what was afoot, though moving towards a similar goal, founded the American Unitarian Association on precisely the same day - May 26, 1825.* ] And eight years later, for the unification and progress of the work of religious education among the young, THE SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION was established as its junior partner.

From the title of this chapter the reader will see the reason for this highly condensed outline. Now was the time, he may be forgiven for thinking, when Unitarian enthusiasm and Unitarian money should have combined to build - or to buy outright and adapt - suitable London Headquarters to house the two Associations, with full-time secretaries and a clerk or two, to organize and develop the denominational work. But that is assuming far too much, and looking back to the past through modern spectacles. Pride and satisfaction there was among the leading spirits of our movement; but in 1825 the rank and file, far away from London, would hear and comprehend but little of it. As a consequence, for just half a century, splendid and steadily expanding work was carried on by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in a series of hired office premises [ *Until 1835, at 3 Walbrook Buildings; 1835-49, at 31 St. Swithin's Lane; 1849-52, at Essex Street Chapel; 1852-74, at 178, Strand; 1874-86, at 37 Norfolk Street, Strand.* ] with no less than seven devoted part-time Honorary Secretaries, ministerial or lay, in succession, and similarly by the Sunday School Association, before the question of a permanent home of their own really came to the fore.

Then at last, in the early 'seventies, the first wave of enthusiasm for the project rose rapidly higher, almost reached its crest of triumph, ready to break and roll majestically forward - but alas! sank down again and failed most ineffectually. It is an almost forgotten story, for it illustrates to perfection the characteristic strength - and weakness - of our leaders at that period. In 1870 full recognition was accorded to "the growing desire for a large and central building" of our own. The need for it was eloquently expressed by the Secretary, the enthusiastic Robert Spears, in a horrifying description of the premises then occupied:

*It may be said with perfect truthfulness that no Committee is ever held without every one experiencing how badly the Office is adapted for such meetings. Frequently it is crowded, and felt to be in a most unhealthy state; for the attendance on the several Committees gradually increases through a deeper interest being felt in Unitarian movements. Deputations which have waited on the Committees have been necessarily sent into a little dark back room till an interview could be had. The general business of the Office is always suspended while the Committees are sitting. It is also of great importance for the sale of Unitarian literature, that to our place of business there should be a safe and easy access, entirely different from that of the present dark and narrow staircase, which all to ascend who wish to purchase books.*

The Secretary was instructed to explore possibilities, but failed to discover anything suitable. However, a building committee was appointed, the project of a proposed new building was loudly applauded by the Annual Meetings of 1872, and a £20,000 Appeal Fund was launched. No less than £12,000 was raised, the first £1,000 being put down by Mr. James Hopgood, who was especially keen on the project; but meanwhile acute controversy arose about the terms of the

Trust to govern the building when it was built or discovered and purchased. Dr. James Martineau and others strongly contended against a definitely Unitarian trust deed; Counsel's opinion was sought and debated; Martineau's 'open trust' amendment was defeated. But all this hampering controversy, coupled with the fact that explorations of possible buildings or sites had continuously led to nought, and that 'suitable premises' were now found to be available in Norfolk Street, Strand, on a 10 years' lease, brought the enterprise to an inglorious end. The whole of the £12,000 worth sixty or seventy thousand today was therefore returned to the subscribers, and the hope of permanent headquarters vanished with the donations.

Chronologically out of order, but appropriate here for other reasons, is the curiously interesting fact that twenty years earlier, in the course of its wanderings, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association had turned up in Essex Street and had been accommodated from 1849 to 1852 in "the rooms adjoining the Chapel, belonging to the Trustees and Minister thereof, having been the dwelling-place of Lindsey, Belsham and Madge"; to wit, the rooms beneath the chapel, and the cellars in the basement, specified in the Trust Deed. For some reason or other, vaguely referred to in the Annual Report as "for the sake of the public good and general harmony", the arrangement came to an end, but it strangely foreshadowed the events of thirty years later, to which we now come in the course of our record.

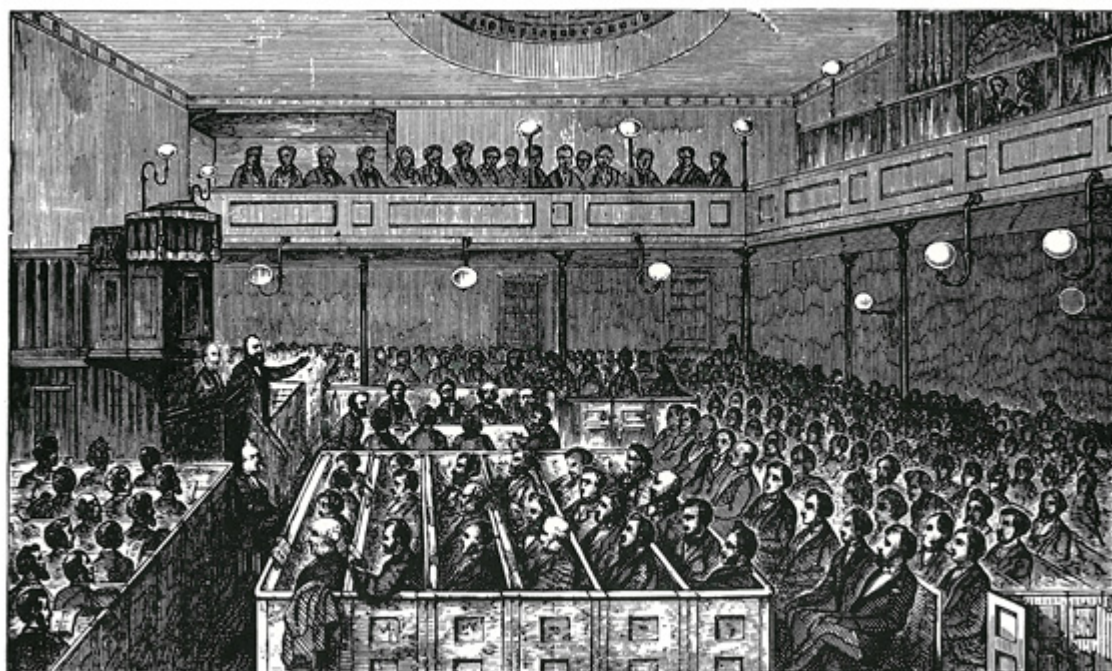
The Essex Street Chapel and congregation had flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century, but suffered an inevitable decline when the district became less and less of a residential area, and Londoners were hiving off into distant suburban regions. Many distinguished persons had been members of this congregation in their time: to name only two, for example, William Smith, M.P., to whose Parliamentary labours we largely owe Sir Robert Peel's 1813 Act repealing anti-Unitarian legislation; and Crabb Robinson, the writer of the invaluable Diaries, which are one of the precious possessions of Dr. William's famous Library. Our illustration opposite page 32 represents the service held on the occasion of the Centenary of the congregation in 1874; no doubt it is architecturally correct, but it is impossible to believe that so few London Unitarian women attended the service, and that the pews were mostly packed with men while the ladies were nearly all shown to the back seats under the galleries!

But by 1880 the congregation had sadly diminished and was seriously considering the question of closing down altogether.

It is amusing, and perhaps illuminating, to record the nearest neighbours, of the Chapel, at the top end of the street, in 1880. They were as follows:

No.	No.
1. Hairdresser	49. The Colliery Guardian office and 3 wood-engravers
2-5. ESSEX ST. CHAPEL	48. Tobacco shop, a wood-engraver and a geologist
6. Solicitors' offices	47. Builder
7. The Crown	46. Tailor
8. Baker	45. Solicitors' offices
9. Carpenter and Builder and 6 wood-engravers	44. Electrical Engineers, Shorthand writers
	43/42. Tea merchants
	41/40. The Essex Head
Lower down the street solicitors' offices predominated, with another news, paper office, a weighing-machine maker and more wood-engravers. Small hope of a congregation from near by on Sundays	

And at the same time the two Associations were facing the prospect of losing their Norfolk Street premises when the lease expired in 1883. Discussions were entered into; the Charity Commission was approached for permission to utilize the building as headquarters of the two Associations; the Commission refused, and stipulated that the property must be valued and sold, and—in harmony with the Trust Deed of 1783—that the proceeds must be devoted to the erection of a chapel and a minister's house elsewhere. Otherwise, they would be subject to a Charity Commission Scheme for their future use.



ESSEX STREET CHAPEL: CENTENARY SERVICE, 1874

So the thinking-caps were donned again, and brains went successfully to work. The premises were valued £15,000, and the valuation was approved by the Charity Commission. The homeless wanderers accepted the challenge—but what a pity that the £12,000 of 1873 had gone back to its donors! The departing congregation joined hands with an existing one at Notting Hill Gate, which for ten years had possessed an 'Iron Church' on a freehold site purchased by a leading member, Sir James Clarke Lawrence, and they had already raised a building fund of over 4,000. The British and Foreign Unitarian Association agreed to purchase Essex Street Chapel for 15,000, and launched an appeal for £25,000 - £10,000 of it for reconstruction purposes, to turn it into Essex Hall. Sir James and his brother Edwin sold the Notting Hill site to the joint congregations for £5,000—an other valuation approved by the Charity Commission—and handed the money over to the Essex Appeal Fund. Mr. Frederick Nettlefold bought No. 1, Essex Street, a hairdresser's house and shop in 1880, next door to the Chapel (familiar in later years as 'Lawrence House') for £2,300, and gave it as a contribution to the Fund—destined in the future to prove an invaluable extension of the available premises. These now, in 1885, passed into the legal hands of the newly appointed Essex

Hall Trustees, and into the practical hands of the Unitarian Architect, Mr. T. Chatfield Clarke, and the builders, ready for the work of destruction and reconstruction. So, thanks to the Charity Commission, everybody was happy: the Essex Street congregation and their Kensington friends in the possession of ample means to erect Essex Church and Manse; and the denomination at large in the possession of a home for the homeless at last!



ESSEX STREET AND THE STRAND FIFTY YEARS AGO

We began this chapter with a reference to the Baptists and Congregationalists; let us return to them in conclusion, for their story, in regard to the progress towards denominational unity and the acquisition of permanent headquarters, is astonishingly similar to ours. Throughout the greater part of the 19th century neither the Baptist Union nor the Congregational Union had premises of their own, with even a modest full-time staff. The Congregational Union built Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, in 1875; previously they had occupied a series of temporary and inadequate quarters. The Baptist Union, ending the century with some years of accommodation in their Missionary Society's offices, built and opened Baptist Church House in Southampton Row in 1903. Thus there is nothing exceptional in the 'inevitability of gradualness' which marked our parallel Unitarian advance!

## Chapter 4 - Transformation and Extension

### 1. Blue Prints and Builders

Writing in the opening weeks of 1959, with the recollections vivid and fresh in our minds of the erection of the present imposing Essex Hall and its ceremonial opening three months ago, it is difficult to record the celebrations of the corresponding event in 1886 without subconsciously emphasizing comparisons and will contrasts; but we try and leave the reader to do this for himself when he recollects this chapter while reading the later ones.

First of all, however, let us hear just precisely what was done with the old chapel building to convert it into Essex Hall. Many have been the friendly but futile arguments in our time between ourselves and other equally aged survivors from the 19th century who never saw the Essex Street Chapel, as to this and that uncertain point about the transformation; points which-if only we had known it-are mostly disposed of once and for all by a brief and crystal-clear account written in 1886 and unearthed from an obscure column in the pages of *The Inquirer*. Here it is, with a few minor omissions:

The building, formerly Essex Street Chapel, has undergone complete and entire remodelling, based on the lines of the old structure, though preserving the main walls, roof and floors.

The works throughout have been of a very difficult and peculiar character-viz., to cut light into all portions of the building, to

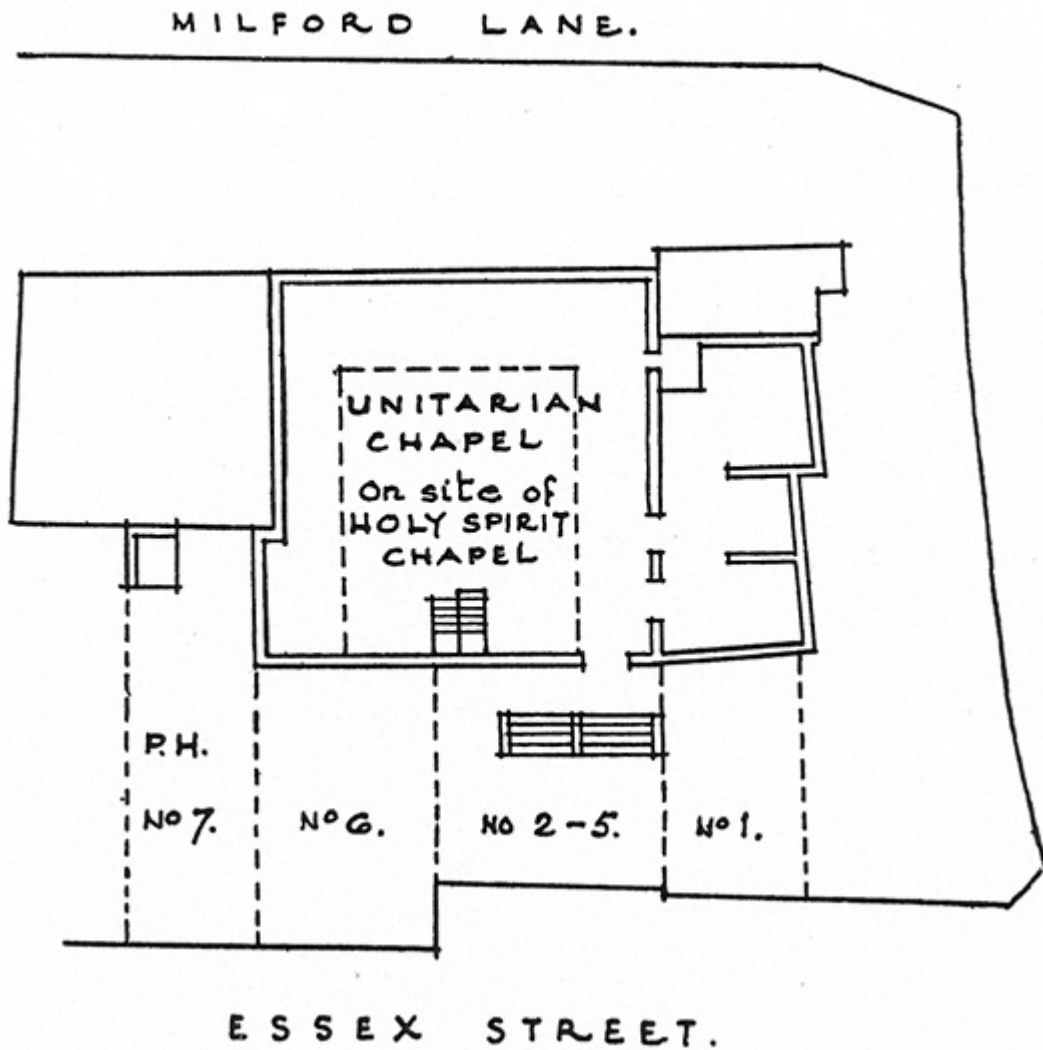
remove walls, arches, vaults and partitions, and to carry the whole of the lower floors by girders and columns so as to open up even the lowest portions of the building, and to readapt the same on all floors to its altered uses.

The entrance to the old chapel was approached across an open courtyard, which has now been built over, a shop for the sale of books etc. coming out to the frontage of the property. The new stone entrance is divided into two handsome flights of steps leading to the upper and lower ground floors respectively. The lower floor has been partly excavated, and is now of a good height, and very well lighted. In this floor are rooms for the Sunday School Association, the *Christian Life* and *Inquirer* newspapers, a good library or reading room, stores for books, and a large kitchen. Approached from this level is the new council chamber, a spacious room lighted from a large skylight and with a handsome horizontal light to the same.

The upper floor has been turned into fine suites of offices, and is entered by a large tiled hall, out of which the grand staircase ascends. To the left of the entrance is the book sale-room of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association, and close to this room are the Committee and Secretary's rooms. The rest of the floor is occupied by offices.

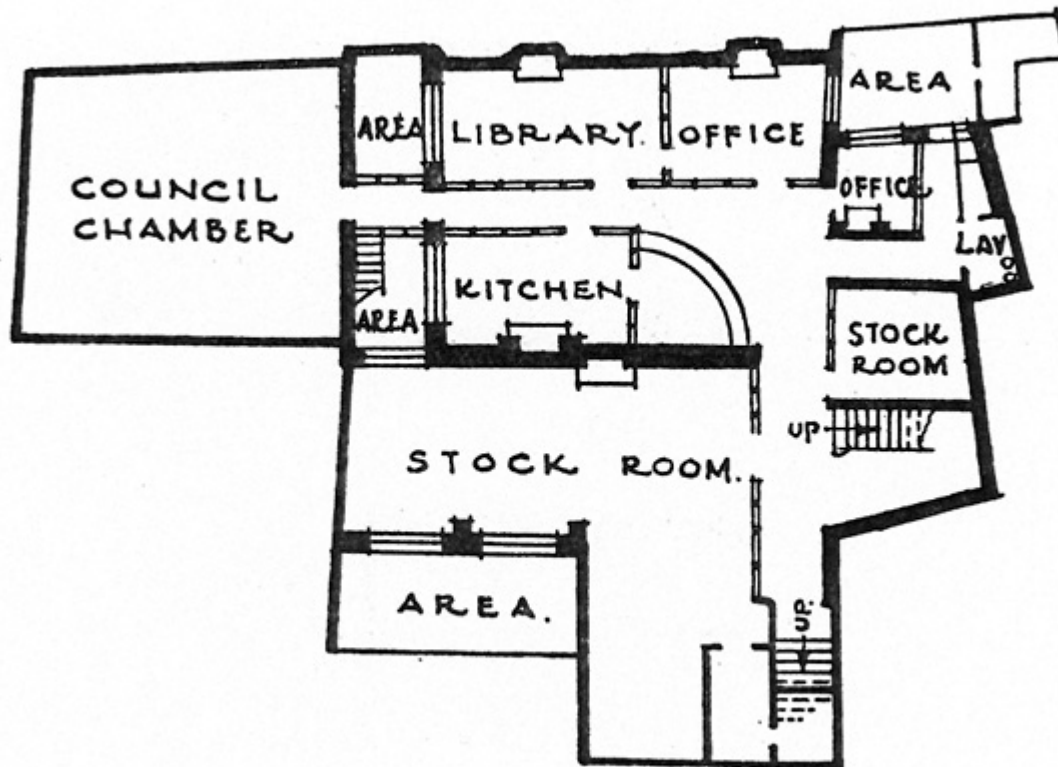
The large hall has been constructed on the first floor, where the old chapel formerly stood; but here a great change has taken place, the old blank walls being now pierced by the formation of handsome windows all round the hall. The old galleries have been swept away, and a large new gallery running along the eastern end only has been built, capable of accommodating nearly zoo persons. The old ceiling has been taken down, and the dome treated with new sashes, pilasters and caps of fibrous plaster. The glass in the dome is tinted, and gives warmth and brightness to the hall. The platform is against the west wall, and is approached from a small retiring room close by it.

The front of the building towards Essex Street has been finished in Portland cement in the classical style, with Ionic pilasters and caps, and the whole is finished with a central pediment. The works have been carried out at a cost of about £6,000.



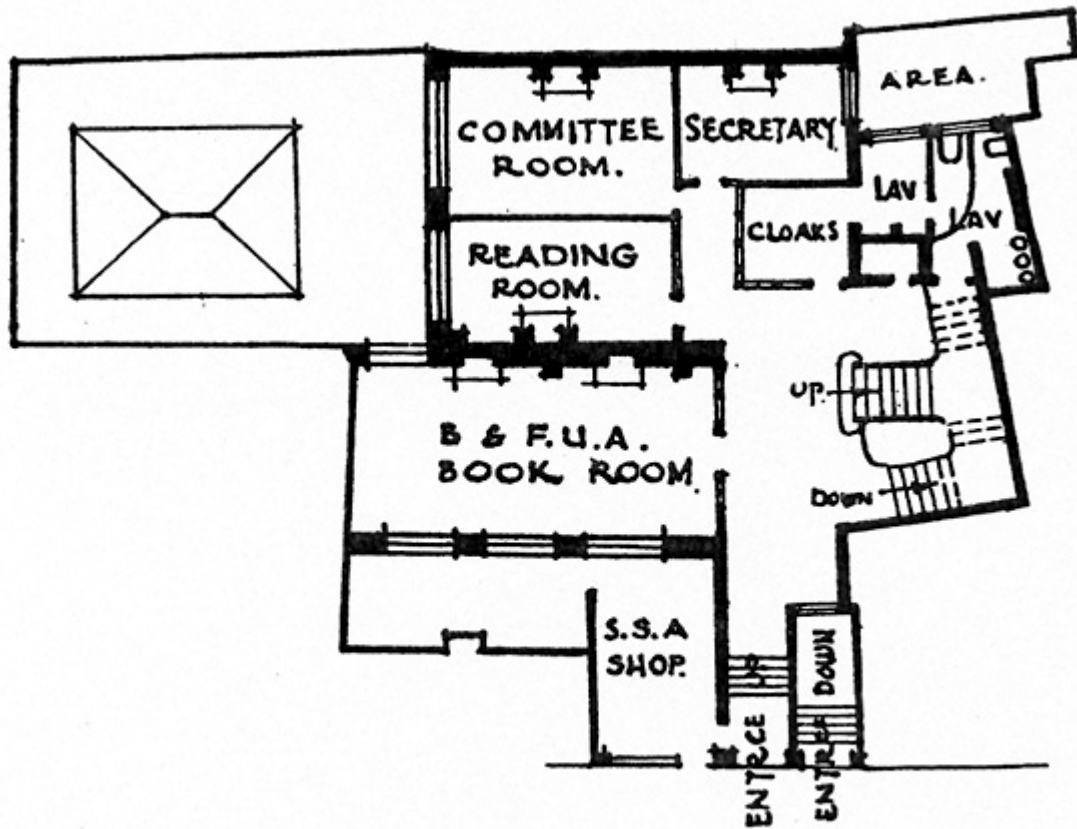
From this, coupled with a study of the large-scale Ordnance Survey street map of the period, these several points are made clear at last:

- (i) The floor level of the 'cellars' was lowered *by excavation* and the cellars transformed into decent rooms.
- (ii) The mystery of Lindsey's 'gardens', mentioned in the Trust Deed, is solved: they are represented by the blank square at the top left-hand corner of the chapel plan opposite, and they were at the bottom of the deep square well lying on the south side of the chapel, hemmed in by buildings all round, and were likewise excavated to the same level, walled and floored and roofed over to create "the new Council Chamber", better known to us as the Lower Hall.



## B A S E M E N T .

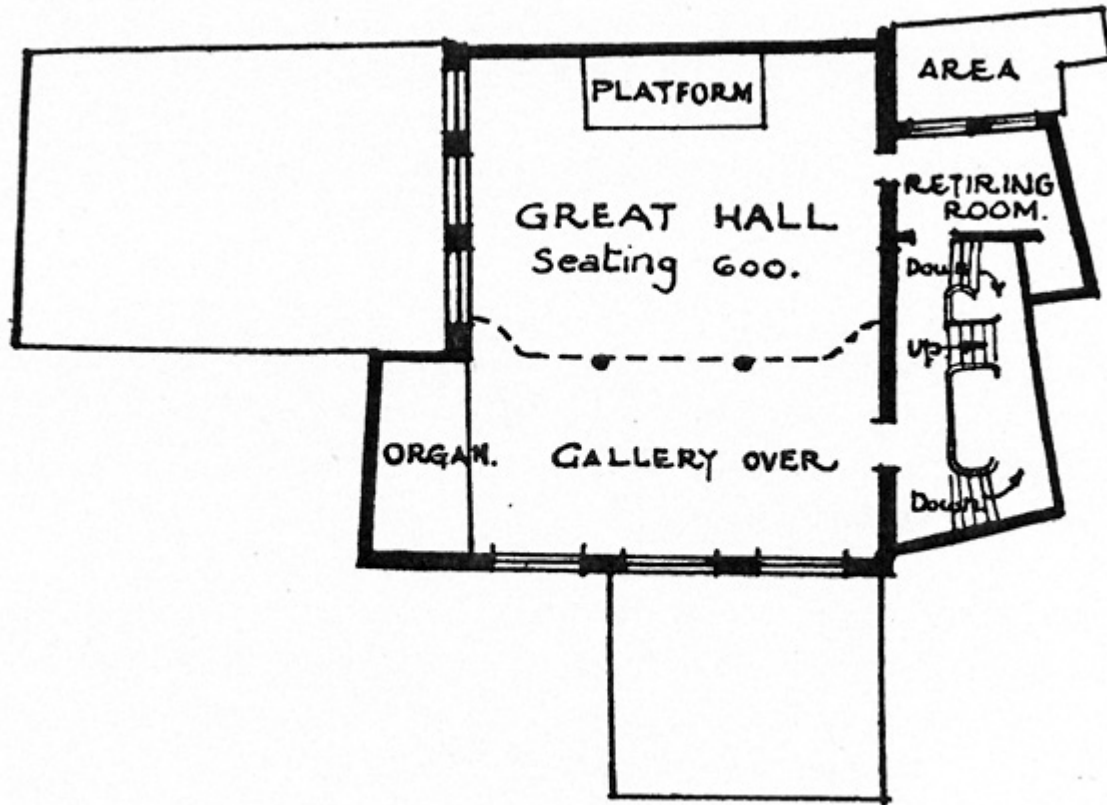
(iii) The Upper Hall corresponded with Lindsey's chapel only in regard to its bare four-square walls, then without windows, and its ceiling and circular lantern. The chapel was approached across a small courtyard from Essex Street, leading to a short flight of broad steps and a doorway which doubtless gave entrance both to the parsonage flat and, by an internal staircase, to the chapel above. This courtyard approach was abolished and the space used to construct display-windows for the Bookshop and its separate entrance on the street; the Upper Hall was entered quite otherwise, from the new vestibule and up "the grand staircase" to twin doorways, with a further stairway to the large gallery.



GROUND FLOOR

(iv) Clearly, since Mr. Nettlefold's gift of No. 1 Essex Street figures as his initial contribution of £2,300 in the first list of subscribers, it must have been his expectation that the architect would find the site of it advantageous in planning the reconstruction of the building. However, no such use was made of it; the architect ingeniously planned his entrances, vestibule, "grand staircase" and new rooms above and below, on the area represented by the mysterious irregular portion on the right of the plan of Lindsey's Chapel. No. 1 Essex Street remained as it was, and was rented to tenants for the next thirty years; then it became useful as Lawrence House, and finally quite invaluable to will the architect of the 1958 building, as he himself wirelate in Chapter 4.





These improvements, transformations and extensions were a very great credit to the skill inventiveness of the architect. We have endeavoured to explain them in detail, with the aid of plans; for the old Essex Hall is gone for ever, and will soon be as completely forgotten as the Essex Street Chapel premises *as a whole* are forgotten. Keen to know more about them, we remembered that one dear lady of great age, rich in memories of the past, was perhaps the only person living who was ever in the chapel. We asked her, was this so? - Yes, just once only, as a schoolgirl, about 1884 perhaps, taken by her father to hear some noted preacher. (Our hopes rose rapidly. This was only a trifle of seventy-five years ago.) The square pews, the galleries and the pulpit - she remembered them all; doubtless a lengthy sermon gave her ample opportunity to imprint them on her mind. Eager to learn more, we volunteered a little needed assistance about the approach from the street ... by way of a narrow courtyard ... a few steps leading to a doorway ... "but tell now, me: how did you get upstairs to the chapel above - where was the staircase, and what was it like?"

"Did we have to go *upstairs* to the chapel?" she replied with her own inimitable charm; and the *viva voce* examination ended in laughter.

# OPENING OF ESSEX HALL,

THURSDAY, 3rd JUNE, 1886.

CONVERSAZIONE from 6 to 7.

(TEA and COFFEE in the COUNCIL ROOM.)

## DEDICATION SERVICE

IN THE LARGE HALL, AT 7,

Conducted by Rev. Dr. SADLER, of Hampstead.

## PUBLIC MEETING

AT 7.30.

Chairman — RICHARD ENFIELD, Esq.

(President of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association),

SUPPORTED BY

F. NETTLEFOLD, Esq. (*President of the Sunday School Association*);  
Sir J. C. LAWRENCE, Bart. (*President of the London District  
Unitarian Society*); Prof. JAS. DRUMMOND, LL.D. (*Principal  
of Manchester New College*); J. T. BRUNNER, Esq., M.P.;  
W. RATHBONE, Esq., M.P.; CALEB WRIGHT, Esq.,  
M.P.; ALFRÈD JACOBY, Esq., M.P.; Dr. OLIVER  
WENDELL HOLMES (if possible); W. BLAKE  
ODGERS, Esq., LL.D.; DAVID MARTINEAU, Esq.;  
Prof. J. ESTLIN CARPENTER, M.A.; Prof. C. B.  
UPTON, B.A., B.Sc.; DAVID AINSWORTH, Esq.,  
W. ARTHUR SHARPE, Esq. (*Secretary to the Trustees of  
Essex Hall*); S. S. TAYLER, Esq. (*Treasurer of the Building  
Fund*), and others.

MUSIC AT INTERVALS DURING THE EVENING,  
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MR. WILLIAM TATE.

All this work that we have sketched in outline was carried out in 1885-86, and at last, on Thursday June 3 in the latter year, came the joyfully anticipated Opening. Essex Hall was, of course, packed to capacity. The Upper Hall was crowded to the doors. The title-page of the order of proceedings is included in our illustrations. The Hall was decorated not only with flowers, ferns, etc., but with the proud flags of Britain and the U.S.A., and behind the Chairman on the well-filled platform hung a gorgeous banner inscribed 'FAITH, FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP-ESSEX HALL, 1886'. The veteran Dr. Thomas Sadler conducted a short service of Dedication, beginning with Oliver Wendell Holmes's hymn "Lord of all being", after which followed a reading from the New Testament, an address in which he recalled the heroism of Lindsey and the fortunes of the congregation down to their departure to Kensington, and he hailed with joy the present hour. A dedicatory prayer, Emerson's hymn "We love the venerable house", and the benediction, concluded the service.

Then the President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, Mr. Richard Enfield, took the Chair, and with him on the platform were nearly all the distinguished persons named in the illustration; but Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the distinguished American author, on a visit to England at that time, was prevented from attending, and the Members of Parliament were all detained in the House of Commons by important business. On the platform also, but strangely omitted from the printed list, were the Architect, Mr. T. Chatfeild Clarke; the Secretary of the Essex Hall Trustees, Mr. W. A. Sharpe, who had been of immense service legally in the transactions with the Charity Commission; and the vigorous Secretary of the Sunday School Association, Mr. Israel Mark Wade, who, compelled to speak later on, remarked that "he would rather work for a week than speak for five minutes". Needless to say, he was alone in that respect on this occasion!

First on the printed list is Mr. Frederick Nettlefold, whose daughter, Mrs. Sydney Martineau, seventy-one years later, laid the foundation stone of the present Essex Hall; and last but not least on the list is Mr. S. S. Tayler, Treasurer of the 1885-86 Building Fund, whose grandson, Mr. Kenneth S. Tayler, A.R.I.B.A., is an Essex Hall Trustee and the architect of our new building.

To return to the Opening Proceedings: the Chairman naturally sketched the tale of events leading to the purchase of the chapel premises, and informed the audience that by a second strange coincidence \* the American Unitarian Association was now celebrating, during its Annual Meetings, the acquisition at last of handsome permanent Headquarters in Boston. He concluded with lasting praise for "those who had secured Essex Hall in perpetuity".

Mr. Sharpe enriched a short speech with a letter received from the aged and honoured leader, Dr. James Martineau, written at his distant home near Aviemore in Scotland; in the course of it he wrote, "I shall heartily share your joy in the accomplishment of a responsible and important work, wisely dedicated for the future to purposes most congenial with the traditions and associations of the spot during the last century". The speaker then reported the terms of the Essex Hall Trust, which (put very briefly) stipulates that the Trustees are to provide adequate accommodation for at least fifty years for the two societies and promote their objects, but leaves the Trustees free also to include "such other objects, religious, philanthropic or educational as they in their unfettered discretion shall deem advisable". Thus the former controversy about an 'open trust' was finally laid to rest.

Mr. Nettlefold, who was greeted, as he rose, with well - deserved and prolonged cheers for his leadership in the enterprise, moved the chief resolution:

*That this Meeting regards it as a matter of sincere congratulation that a building consecrated by more than a century of noble memories is secured for the use of the two kindred Societies, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the Sunday School Association, and feels confident that these Societies will be enabled to meet with increased efficiency the larger responsibilities which must now devolve upon them.*

He reminded the audience of Lindsey's deep concern for the objects that afterwards brought both societies into existence, and their worthiness to be fittingly housed. "These are the hopes," he said, "with which we enter our new building, believing that a grand work of usefulness can be carried on here, and that the record of the future will be in every way worthy of its past. With earnest devotion to the principles we profess, there will be no fear whatever of the future prosperity of Essex Hall." And he received a second ovation as he concluded.

Many other eloquent speeches there were from distinguished ministers and laity, some very much to the point and some not, which the curious may read, more or less *verbatim*, in the bulky pages of the contemporary *Inquirer*. We will mention only one -that of Dr. Lindsey Aspland, Q.C., grandson of the first Hon. Secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and son of the sixth. He praised the many substantial subscribers to the fund that had failed thirteen years earlier, who, although "disappointed in the former effort", had nevertheless generously come forward again and restored their donations; and he expressed his astonishment at the work of the architect-"one of the most successful transformation scenes I have ever seen, considering the difficulty of building on the old foundations".

Then the meeting ended with 700 voices, more or less, uniting in the hymn "Thou Lord of Hosts, whose guiding hand has brought us here before thy face"; and the largest audience of Unitarians ever to be seen in Essex Hall drifted slowly (there was no hurrying down that "grand staircase") out into the street. And whether they acted upon it or not, they carried with them the recollection that the Treasurer, Mr. S. S. Tayler, in his contribution to the evening's oratory, had rubbed it in that there was a £7, 0 00 mortgage on the building, which he wanted to see cleared off with all speed. (Over £7,000 had been contributed towards the £25,000 Appeal.)

Within a fortnight the Whit-week Annual Meetings of both the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the Sunday School Association were being held in the new Hall, and naturally there was an abundance of further rejoicing, although, as the Editor of the *Inquirer* cautiously put it, "Essex Hall was the subject of very general, if not universal, admiration". (Unitarianism and Unanimity are never to be expected in conjunction!) But for his part he expressed the opinion that the old building had been "completely transformed into a thing of light and beauty".

Mr. Frederick Nettlefold was elected President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and of course there was renewed exultation in the achievement. But the most startling and effective thing that happened was that the saintly Dr. James Drummond, Principal of Manchester College, a most effective advocate of total abstinence and an opponent of betting and gambling, broke with dignified and customary Unitarian methods of money-raising, by coming forward with a sporting offer to subscribe £50 before the end of the year if ninety-nine others would do the same, and so take £5,000 off the mortgage. The challenge offer was taken up; a year later it was announced that the goal of £23,000 (amended from £25,000, which proved to be an over-estimate) had been almost reached, and that "to the honour of the Rev. Dr. Drummond, the stimulus of his generous offer has powerfully contributed to this happy result".

## Chapter 5 - Three Score Years and Ten

### 1. The Hall in Active Service

So the crowds dispersed, and the days of excitement and exultation were over, and Essex Hall stood ready for the two Associations for whom in particular it had been provided, to settle down to work in their new and spacious quarters. The records of their activities are outside the scope of this booklet: they are preserved in hundreds of pages of Annual Reports and thousands of pages of minutes; [ *For the history of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1825-1925, see the centenary volume 'Liberty and Religion', by Dr. S. H. Mellon; for the S.S.A., 1833-1933, the centenary booklet 'The First 100 Years of the S.S.A.', by Arnold Broadbent.*] and the records of the Essex Hall Trustees are so purely formal that they would not keenly interest the reader if we were to compress them into an outline. We must leave all these for the most part undisturbed in their quiet resting-places, while skipping lightly from one relevant incident to another, with gaps of years between.

The building was not, of course, provided for the exclusive use of the two Associations: the Upper and Lower Halls, and one or two smaller rooms, were available for outside meetings, for the sake of revenue to meet the overhead costs and pay the heavy rates. An attractive folder from which the plans in the preceding chapter are taken was widely distributed; its description of the rooms

available is grandiloquent in the extreme, and must have been written for the honest Unitarian trustees by a professional advertising agent:

*ESSEX HALL and its well-lighted Offices provide excellent accommodation for Public Meetings, Annual Meetings of Religious and Philanthropic Societies, Educational Lectures, Concerts, Conferences, Conversaciones, Committees, Consultations, Debating Societies, Art, Scientific and Musical Exhibitions, and other purposes.*

*Legal and Professional Gentlemen will find the Rooms very convenient for consultations, arbitrations, shareholders' meetings, and creditors' meetings.*

*Clubs and Societies not wanting to incur the expenses of permanent offices will find their requirements suited in these premises.*

But perhaps the most startling statement on the folder was that while "the nearest station is the Temple", Charing Cross, Farringdon Street, Ludgate Hill and St. Paul's are "within a few minutes' walk".-Some walk!

However, Essex Hall became popular as a meeting-place, especially of progressive or left-wing movements. The Fabian Society, for example, used it for their public and other meetings for many years, and Bernard Shaw was a familiar figure on the platform. The most regrettable incident that occurred in all the period happened during the 'twenties, when American Prohibition was a matter of heated controversy, and British sympathizers organized a public meeting to be addressed by Mr. Johnson (derisively nick-named 'Pussyfoot' Johnson). Undisciplined and irresponsible opponents came in force; rowdiness broke loose and missiles were thrown, and Mr. Johnson was blinded in one eye. This was the one really bad blot upon the record of the public use of the Hall.

To go back a little and deal with denominational affairs, the first matter that properly belongs to our story is the unexpected opportunity that arose in the First World War to make excellent use of Mr. Nettlefold's gift of No. 1 Essex Street-a house with a shop-front on the street. Hitherto, as there was no immediate need for its use, it had been let to tenants. When war broke out in 1914, and by 1915 was clearly destined to be a struggle of years, a proposal gathered force, under the energetic advocacy of Mr. R. M. Montgomery, K.C., and others, to convert No. 1 into a modest hostel for soldiers and sailors, without distinction of sect or creed, passing through or making short stays in London. An appeal for funds was sponsored by Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter, President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association; British and American Unitarians generously responded, and early in 1916 'Lawrence House' was opened, the name being given because of the Lawrence family's dominant share in the fund for the adaptation, equipment and endowment of the hostel. Half a dozen bedrooms, with meal-room, rest-room, bathrooms, etc., were provided and furnished; a matron was put in charge, and from then to the end of the War the hostel was in heavy demand by our own boys in khaki and blue, and by nobody's boys as well. It is shown in the picture of Essex Hall frontage opposite this page, with its broad shop-window in use for Bookshop display purposes. After the War and the demobilization period, and until war broke out again, Lawrence House continued to serve as an inexpensive hostel for male visitors from at home or abroad, both Unitarians and others.



ESSEX HALL FRONTAGE, 1920



ESSEX HALL ENTRANCE, AUGUST 1944  
(WRECKAGE PARTLY CLEARED)



ESSEX HALL FROM STRAND, AUGUST 1944: FOREGROUND CLEARED



ESSEX HALL, 1958

It is not altogether inappropriate to mention here that this post-war type of usefulness inspired the Women's League, under the active and generous leadership of their Secretary, the Rev. E. Rosalind Lee, to search for a parallel opportunity; they found it by securing the lease of a similar house 'just round the corner' (literally two or three corners) in Devereux Court, and opened it in 1931 as 'League House'. Later it was enlarged by the addition of a house next door. Until the bombing of London began it enjoyed continuous success. Neither Lawrence House nor League House was of the slightest use to visitors after that, so utterly different were the conditions in London during the Second World War. Both had to close down. But this is to anticipate.

Two changes in the interior of Essex Hall, one minor and one major, belong to the end of the First World War and the succeeding years. The minor change was due to our American Unitarian friends, who, in recognition of the welcome given to many of their troops at Lawrence House, conceived the happy notion of spending a little money upon Essex Hall in some acceptable way. The result was the clearing of the room marked Reading Room and its complete and handsome refurnishing at their expense as a comfortable lounge, thenceforth to be known as the 'American Room'.

Considerably greater internal alterations were involved in consequence of the unification in 1925 of the independent publishing activities and book departments of the two Associations, followed by the appointment of a full-time Manager of The Lindsey Press, the title adopted already for our denominational publishing house. This called for structural improvements without and within. The bookshop entrance was set back to afford a considerably larger and more attractive display of publications; the bookshop, itself was remodelled, and at the same time a tiny office was constructed for the Secretary of the Sunday School Association, now a full-time official. These changes, however, involved for the most part mere alterations in the non-permanent partitions on this floor. Both here and in the basement below there had been many such changes, even more substantial ones, since 1886, which it would be tedious to recount, but which rendered the plans reproduced in the preceding chapter obsolete in the region of the right-hand top corner.

A few years later-in 1928-followed an outstanding event which has nothing to do with the history of the Hall, except that Hall during two critical days the Upper was the scene of crucial meetings that marked the most vital turning-point in a century of denominational history; brief notice must therefore be taken of them. By way of explanation we must note that the British and Foreign Unitarian Association had always been essentially a society of individual subscribers only; but in 1881, yielding to the pressure for a separate organization on a more representative basis, the Association initiated and encouraged the establishment of a 'National Conference', with powers not only to consult, but to raise funds and take action, on matters affecting the well being of the churches. The prime movers were unhappy in their choice of a title-'The National Conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian and other Non-subscribing and Kindred Congregations'; they hoped that liberal congregations beyond our Unitarian borders would be attracted, but in that hope they were utterly disappointed. All the more easy was it for the Conference to perform invaluable concrete tasks -e.g., the establishment of a Sustentation Fund for ministerial stipends and, later, the admirable Ministers' Pension and Insurance Fund, which offered better provision for old age than that of any other uncentrahzed denomination at the beginning of this century. The Conference had no headquarters, and only Honorary Secretaries, but its triennial gatherings were noteworthy; its Council held meetings during the intervals, and its standing committees met regularly.

After the First World War, however, it was inevitably felt that the time had come to unite the forces and conserve the resources of our denomination. Negotiations during 1926-28 resulted in the summoning of Special General Meetings of both bodies at Hall Essex on May 29 and 30, 1928, when, amid considerable uncertainty and excitement, by overwhelming majorities but not without vociferous discussion and minority opposition, Conference and Association each surrendered their independent existence and became THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES. it would need many pages to record this more fully. Henceforth Essex Hall became the Headquarters of this single representative denominational organization, [ *The British and Foreign Unitarian Association Incorporated, registered in 1915, was unaffected by*



*this step, and still exists for all appropriate legal, trustee and financial matters.* ] with the Sunday School Association in close relationship as before.

During the 'thirties the Trustees gave serious consideration to the possibility of partially or completely demolishing the aged Essex Hall and rebuilding it on modern lines. Mr. Denis Martineau, A.R.I.B.A., was consulted, and he drafted provisional plans for such an enterprise. They were carefully studied, but the Trustees were driven to the conclusion that nothing short of complete demolition was feasible, and that even so, the then existing site would present insuperable obstacles in the way of planning a satisfactory modern building. However, these discussions led to a valuable extension of the property owned by the Trustees. Just as No. 1 Essex Street had been added as a gift by Mr. Nettlefold in 1885, so now the Trustees themselves in 1938 purchased No. 6 - the Chelsea Restaurant. This gave them the ownership of the whole of 1 to 6, considerably improving the shape of the available site, and was a very wise step on their part, although they lacked the money to do it and were consequently involved in an overdraft of about £8,000.

Earlier in the 'thirties they were drawn into negotiations with a firm that had visions of developing our site and adjacent ones, if these could be acquired. This would have led to the necessity of our finding or building headquarters elsewhere in London, or becoming mere tenants in their new building. Fortunately the firm procrastinated, their time-limit expired, and the deal was off. Moreover, the war cloud was now gathering, and before it broke in 1939 all such schemes were perforce abandoned.

War came, and with it the extremest of black-out restrictions, reducing the use of Essex Hall to daylight hours only, for it was impracticable to consider the provision of movable fittings to all our great and small windows. The authorities furthermore appealed to all organizations that could possibly move out of London to do so. The General Assembly naturally looked to the working staff for their opinion about evacuating to some Unitarian or other premises miles away; and the working staff let it be known that they preferred to 'stay put'. And then, in the summer of 1940, the storm suddenly burst upon us.

The old building stood up to it manfully. The blast from nearby explosions deprived it progressively of its windows, and then blew in the weather-boarding that replaced the glass. Internal partitions between rooms shuddered and fell out of their places and were propped up again. So it went on. League House in Devereux Court (empty) and its companion back-to-back premises in Essex Street, right opposite Essex Hall, received a direct hit in January 1941 and were wrecked, and the blast expended itself upon the Hall the usual effects. There was something sympathetically apt about our sharing in the blow!

Then came the long interval between this type of air raid and the advent, in the early summer of 1944, of the horrible V1 flying bombs, cheerfully nicknamed 'doodle-bugs'. Still escaped the worst, although dreadful destruction was done within a circle of a few hundred yards in every direction. Finally, our own turn came, and that was the end of the "spacious and elegant Hall" of 1886.

In writing the biography of an individual it would be indelicate to go into the details of his last hours, but the same rule of good taste does not cramp one's style in writing of a building, and we cannot do better than quote the report which we ourselves gave to the General Assembly while the disaster was still fresh in our mind:

"Late at night on Friday, July 28th, 1944, Essex Hall was hit by a flying-bomb on the north-west area of the roofs. For the most part the building collapsed at a blow, along with adjoining premises in Milford Lane and the Strand. Fortunately there was no one in the Hall at the time. From the Strand and Essex Street next morning it could be seen that the Upper Hall was a gaping ruin, that the rooms more directly beneath the explosion had entirely disappeared, that the Bookshop, American Room and main Office were wrecked, the first and third of these containing quantities of debris from the Upper Hall; the strong-room had apparently stood fast. The basement was choked with a chaos of shattered masonry. Thus 166 years after its erection as Essex Street Chapel and 58 years after its transformation into denominational Headquarters, the historic building fell.

"A few days later, when the ruins could be penetrated to some extent, it was possible to arrive at an estimate of salvage prospects. The Stock-room, basement Committee-room and Lower Hall

proved to have suffered only from the violent effects of blast; the Lindsey Room was buried in wreckage from above. It was clear that much could be rescued when demolition proceeded far enough to render the basement premises accessible. A long spell of dry weather saved a great deal of perishable stock and other possessions from irretrievable damage.

"Immediately after the disaster the Dr. Williams Trustees were approached concerning certain vacant rooms at University Hall, Gordon Square, and their permission to occupy these rooms was readily given. Hence without a break the members of the Staff were able to carry on the work of the General Assembly and take the necessary steps for its re-establishment. The Council's cordial thanks to the Trustees were subsequently expressed and put on record.

"It was not until August 14th that the first loads of salvage - chiefly stock-room books-could be got away, and from that date onwards at intervals the Staff, willingly assisted at times by London ministers and laymen, laboured to transfer the main contents of the stock-room, along with such furniture as could be rescued undamaged or repairable, to the rooms in Gordon Square, freeing every item from the explosion-dust and debris that thickly covered it. Much of the stock was badly damaged and was accordingly discarded; far more-including in the end a considerable number of books from the Bookshop also-was recovered. As regards the remainder of our possessions at Essex Hall, the loss in office furniture, equipment, correspondence, a complete set of *The Inquirer* and other journals and books, was very heavy; but all essential records, minutes, etc., were safe in the strong-room. The last load left Essex Street on November 4th, after which demolition proceeded to its end, and the site was cleared. The Council in October expressed cordial thanks to the Secretary and members of the Staff for their unremitting labours.

"Lawrence House and the Chelsea Restaurant, right and left of the Essex Street entrance, both of which were the property of the Trustees, were so badly damaged that they also were condemned and demolished."

After that sombre record, a little light relief-When war was declared, 'outside' lettings of the Hashrank down to a few moderately attended daylight meetings, and to none at all when the bombing began. But sometime during the long 1941-44 lull, when London had respite, though not from stringent blackout rules and penalties, there was one delightful episode. The Christadelphians, who had sometimes held a large annual gathering in bygone years on a Saturday afternoon and evening in the Upper Hall, came and applied for it again. This is how the conversation proceeded:

"But you can't possibly; the four great windows are not blacked out, and nightfall comes before eight o'clock."

"We come and black them out on Friday afternoon. "How can you?"

"We will fix great sheets of thick brown paper over them."

"That would not be sufficient to allow the electric lights to be switched on, nor can you black out the tinted glass high up in the dome; besides, you know that the authorities deprecate large gatherings."

"We shall not be as large as usual, and we will be content with one heavily shaded light on the platform table."

"Yes, but what is to happen if the sirens sound and the bombs begin to fall?"

*"There will be no bombs while we are holding our meeting."*

Confronted with such confident child-like religious faith we surrendered, agreed to let them get to work, arranged to inspect the result on Friday evening from high up in neighbouring premises after dark, with the threat of cancellation without further notice if there was any trace of light visible. There was no trace, except the faintest hint of a sort of a something up in the dome, invisible from any street. So we risked it, and the meeting was held - *and no bombs fell!*

## 2. Two Ambitious Appeals

Several months before Essex Hall was destroyed, the Council of the General Assembly decided to launch an Appeal for no less than £100,000. This was announced at the Annual Meetings in June

1944, just before the flying-bombs began to arrive. Many of our churches in London and elsewhere had already been damaged or destroyed, and War Damage compensation would need to be supplemented. Money was needed for ministers' stipends and children's allowances, for post-war extension work, for publications, for the Sunday School and Youth Department, and much else; and the promise was that the £100,000 was to be expended over a period of ten years.

The moving spirit and keenest advocate of this Appeal was the Rev. John Kielty of Stockport, already a very active member of the General Assembly Council. All the necessary machinery was successfully set up-Appeal Committee, Chairman (Mr. R. Bartram), Hon. Secretary (Mr. Kielty), Hon. Treasurer (Mr. Harold Moore), district organizers and committees, and so forth, with surprising goodwill throughout the denomination. Probably no one but Mr. Kielty believed that the startling goal would be reached; the rest fell into line, thinking that if we didn't hit the moon we might well soar over the tree-tops.

Just when the terms of this cogent appeal were formulated and ready for the printing of thousands of attractive leaflets for distribution, Essex Hall. Government regulations forbade the publication of the news of any such disaster within one month, but a hasty note was immediately posted to the Secretary of the Appeal Fund, which read: "You may now include Essex Hall among the objects of the Appeal.- Matthew XIII. 28." [ "An enemy hash done this." ] A few days later *The Inquirer* appeared with a very bold but unexplained advertisement announcing that correspondence for all departments at Essex Hall must in future be addressed to Gordon Square. Needless to say, the printing of the Appeal leaflet was postponed, the formulation promptly revised and Essex Hall placed in the forefront of the objects for which the money was required. Still, Essex Hall but one of the many objects, and only a modest proportion of the new fund could rightly be earmarked for the purpose of rebuilding Essex Hall.

With the progress of that appeal we are not here concerned; it is sufficient to say that by means of subscriptions, donations and seven-year covenants it had almost reached its goal, to the joy of the believers and the confounding of the sceptics, when it was closed in April 1948, having then realized £94,905. Interest on what had been received soon lifted it up to the ,£100,000.

Meanwhile the war ended in 1945, and the Government made it clear that housing and industrial reconstruction must have priority for many years to come, and that permission for such luxuries as the rebuilding of denominational headquarters must wait indefinitely. So while the General Assembly pursued its work in Gordon Square, the Essex Hall Trustees met at intervals and brooded upon their situation. In the absence of any pressing need for an early decision about whether to rebuild on the old site, vague schemes for other alternatives found opportunity for free expression, both within and beyond the circle of trustees. Nor was it certain that we should be allowed to return unhindered by the requisition of our site or by town-planning encroachments upon its area. Cleared completely, the hallowed ground was indeed requisitioned for years and degraded to secular uses as a public car park, although we were allowed to put up a large board which throughout this period announced to hundreds of thousands of passers-by in the busy Strand:

**SITE OF ESSEX HALL  
DESTROYED BY ENEMY ACTION 1944  
FIRST ENGLISH UNITARIAN CHURCH FOUNDED  
HERE IN 1774, AFTERWARDS HEADQUARTERS OF  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN AND FREE  
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES NOW AT 14 GORDON SQUARE, W.C.I.  
"IN THE SPIRIT OF JESUS WE UNITE FOR THE  
WORSHIP OF GOD AND THE SERVICE OF MAN"  
A FREE RELIGIOUS FAITH WITHOUT CREED OR DOGMA**

Then in due course the uncertainties about our future use of the site vanished, and we knew that, subject to official approval of plans, we should eventually be allowed to build; and likewise the Council of the General Assembly and the denomination at large made it clear that the overwhelming preference was for headquarters where they were before; nor were the Trustees divided upon that issue. So an architect was appointed-Mr. Kenneth S. Tayler, A.R.I.B.A., a grandson of the Hon. Treasurer of the 1885 Essex Hall Appeal Fund, and the son of a Unitarian minister, and the chairman of our Roslyn Hill congregation: and he was requested to get busy and see what he thought he could do with the available site. He will tell the fascinating story himself in the next chapter of this booklet.

But the money-? The Trustees had practically nothing but a poor £11,600 'value payment' awarded by the War Damage Commission, plus the- Westminster City Council's payments for the year-by-year requisitioning of the car park, and so forth-a total of about £22,000. £15,000 had been allotted from the £100,000 Fund, but this was largely absorbed in wiping out the overdraft due to the purchase of the Chelsea Restaurant and the heavy loss of revenue from lettings of Essex Hall during six years of war. Obviously there must be another big Appeal. This time the Trustees would launch it, with the full co-operation of the General Assembly and the setting-up again of the machinery of the £100,000 Fund. The churches having had a respite of seven years since the former appeal was closed, this second one was launched in March 1955. Its President was Mrs. Sydney Martineau, who for more years than anyone else, long before the War, had dreamed of, and hoped some day to see, a dignified and worthy denominational Headquarters; her son Mr. F. Alan Martineau, the Hon. Secretary of the Trustees, was Chairman of the Appeal Committee; Mr. Leslie Procter of Rossendale undertook the Hon. Treasurership, with the Revs. H. Stewart Carter and John Kielty (Secretary of the General Assembly since 1949) as Hon. Secretaries. In effect, it was an appeal for £53,000 of fresh money, the denominated Target being £75,000. The first list of subscribers accounted for a good start of over £12,000, and subscriptions and promises increased this to approximately, £26,000 by the end of the year. Then, early in 1956, the Appeal was given a tremendous lift towards achievement, by a gift of no less than £20,000 from Mrs. N. Bishop Harman: a most happy incident with which to bring to a close this chapter, covering the three score years and ten from 1886 to 1956.

## Chapter 6 - An Architect's Headache

Contributed by Kenneth S. Tayler, A.R.I.B.A.

In the preceding chapter Dr. Rowe has mentioned the chief reasons why so many years had to go by before the Trustees could even be sure that they would be permitted to build a new Essex Hall upon the former site, and why further years had to elapse before there was any hope of obtaining a licence to build. He asks me to take up the tale at this point and explain the problems with which we were confronted when, by 1950-51, it was clear that in a few years we might expect to be granted permission.

Only those persons intimately concerned can know of the many obstacles that have to be overcome before plans for such a building can take shape. It is perhaps not generally realized how closely all modern building is controlled by the various local and regional authorities, under the Town Planning Act. Any scheme that we might devise would have to meet with the approval of the London County Council with its London Building Act, and also of the Westminster City Council. Their powers are surprisingly wide, and it is only after extensive enquiries have been made that the possibilities of a site can be known, even provisionally, before detailed planning can begin. Again, adjoining owners may have legal rights to light and air, which must be strictly honoured, or adjusted by negotiation, and the Essex Hall site was a complicated one in this respect. And-important beyond measure - the old Essex Hall had no alternative exit in case of fire, and the law today rightly requires this of every new public building; we were well aware that this must be included upon an adequate scale, at whatever sacrifice of space. These are but a few hints of what this chapter is about. It was not until six years after the destruction of Essex Hall that there was

any point in asking an architect - as I was then asked-to go to work on the preliminary investigations concerning the sort of building that might be planned.

First of all, the duty of the Trustees was to provide adequate accommodation for denominational requirements, and discussions were entered into with representatives of the General Assembly as to these. The idea of a large hall seating 600 persons, like that in the former building, was given up at the outset. It had occupied a disproportionate amount of space, and its denominational use had been limited, as a rule, to a few days per annum. Lettable offices would be a far more advantageous-indeed a vitally necessary-use of the space. A small hall, but larger than the former 'Lower Hall', was scheduled for the ground floor, together with a bookshop which must be made vastly superior to its predecessor. On the first floor, two committee rooms were scheduled, and four or five separate and well-lit offices. Assuming a second and third floor above, the whole of these, apart from comfortable modern quarters for a caretaker, would then be available for division into suitable rooms or suites of rooms as offices for outside firms, for the very essential purpose of bringing in revenue to meet the cost of the rates, heating, lighting and maintenance of the building. Such was the main outline laid down for my guidance.

Now was the time not only to begin making provisional and tentative plans on paper, but to take part, in conjunction especially with the Trustees' Chairman, Mr. Ronald Bantam, and their Secretary, Mr. F. Alan Martineau, in negotiations with various neighbouring owners for vitally necessary improvements in the area of our site. It would be tedious to describe in detail the discussions and negotiations which took place in order to make this difficult site more suitable for our purpose. The two diagram plans shown here may explain what was gradually effected. Fig. 1 shows the shape, on plan, of Essex Hall before its destruction, including Lawrence House to the right and the Chelsea Restaurant to the left, both belonging to the Trustees and intended for absorption into the available site.

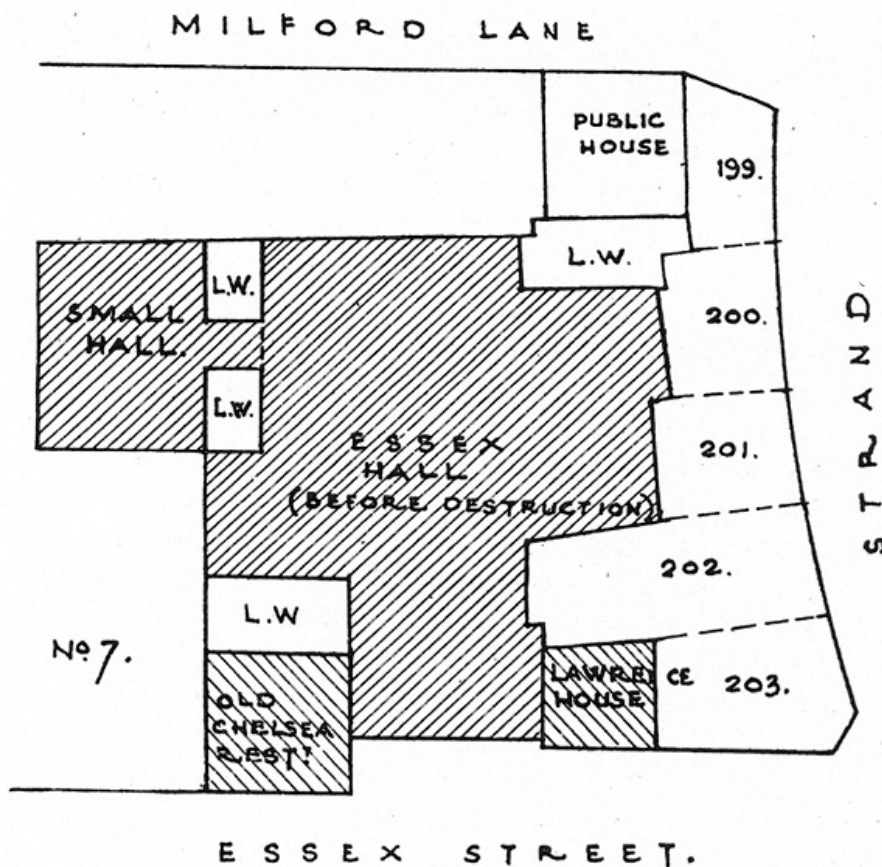


Fig. 1

The picture here shows the greatly improved ground-plan of the new building. These changes were brought about, first by selling the site of the Small Hall to the Sun Engraving Co., who were owners of No. 7 and all the other buildings that hemmed in that hall on three sides, preventing it from ever being anything but a basement room, on which nothing above it could be erected. Part of the bargain was that the Company, in return, waived their rights to light and air from the light well (L.W.) behind the Chelsea Restaurant, thus setting us free to build up to that limit. So much for the left side of the diagram. Look now at the opposite side of the jig-saw puzzle behind the vacant sites of shops, Nos. 199-202, in the Strand. This irregularity was an inheritance from the distant past. [ Compare the rough delineation of it in the chapel plan in chapter 4 ] All these sites had been bought by the Huddersfield Building Society (No. 203), who were planning a lofty new building on the total area.

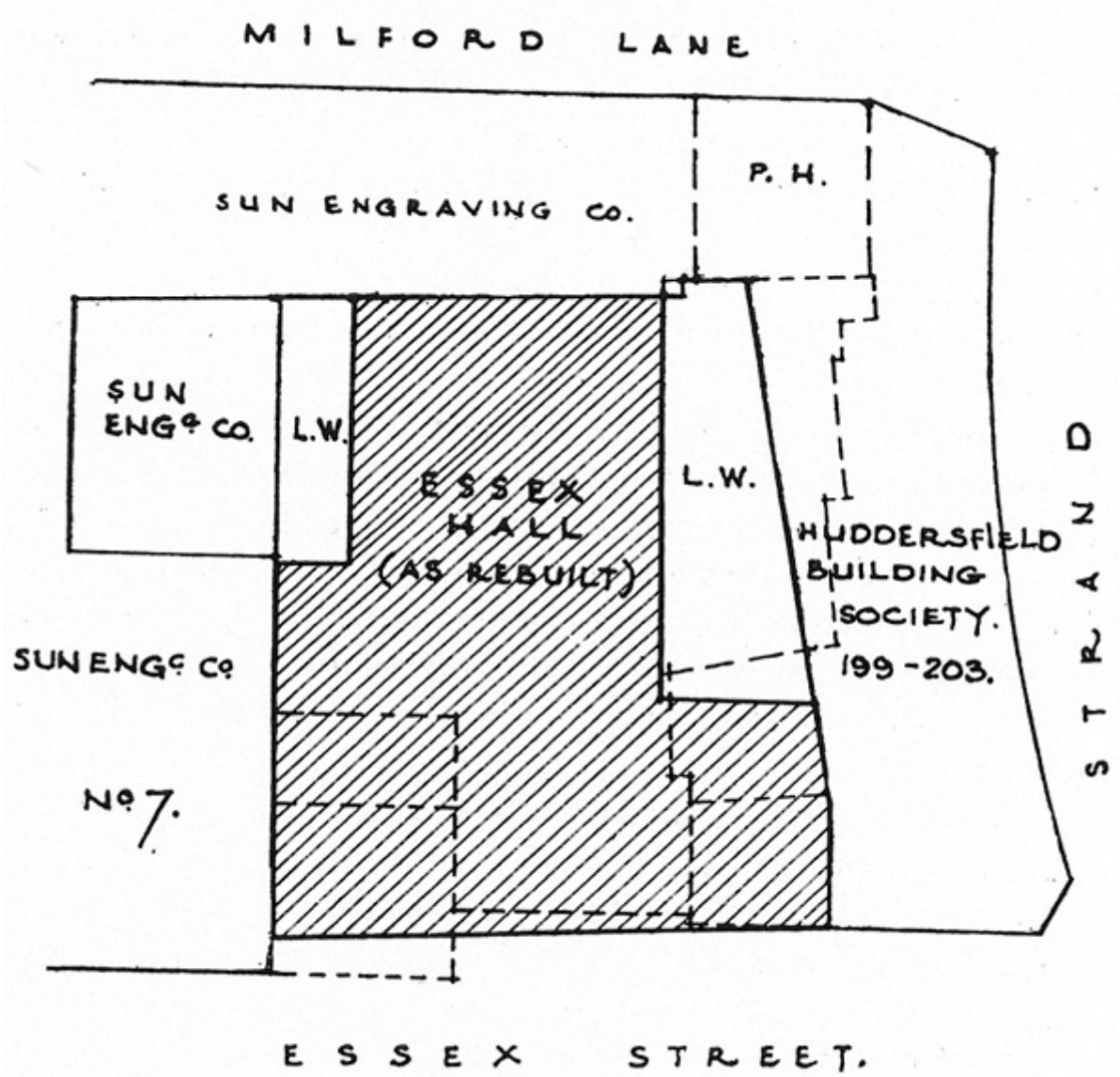


Fig 2.

The rear portion of No. 202 projected most awkwardly behind Lawrence House, and obviously constituted a major planning problem for us. After protracted negotiations this indispensable portion was surrendered to us in exchange for an equal area at the back of Nos. 200 and 201, straightening out the twists in our site and theirs, and providing for a sufficiently wide light well to give ample air and light to both parties in the back quarters of their future premises.

Delicate negotiations about give and take, and square yards of this and that, and at what price, are always apt to convince the negotiators on either side that the others are sharks; hence lengthy delays are unavoidable, and outward calm and courteous argument *pro* and *con* have to be maintained. However, at last the settlement was brought about. And during the same period the Westminster City Council cut off a strip from the site of the Chelsea Restaurant and prescribed a straightened frontage line in Essex Street from that point to the Lawrence House site, as shown.

All this took many months to arrange, but in the end we were in possession of a far more manageable plot of land. The architect's headache was over; it was now possible to go ahead, and provisionally to get on with the detailed planning of the building. His scheme was almost complete, with the required accommodation incorporated, when the headache was replaced with a nightmare of equal duration. The reader has already been informed that for years all these empty sites had been requisitioned by the local authority for use as an emergency car park, to relieve the dreadful shortage of parking space in the neighbourhood. The London County Council, as a condition of their approval of our scheme, now stipulated that parking space for at least five cars must be provided *within the building!*

Here was a calamitous set-back. Where was such space to be found, without wrecking the now almost completed plans? In the basement, of course; but we required the whole of the basement area for book-store, cloak-room, lavatories, strong-room, etc., and where otherwise were these to be provided? As for the street frontage, entrance and bookshop, all these would be ruined by the necessity for constructing a broad ramp leading down to the garage. Protracted correspondence and interviews with the Planning Committee of the London County Council seemed of no avail, until after months of frustrating argument the L.C.C. agreed to waive this disastrous condition, and Town Planning consent was received, to our immeasurable relief, in April 1956. So ended the long nightmare.

Now at last we were free to prepare the detailed drawings, specifications and bills of quantities required before we could invite builders to submit tenders. All this done, the architect waited, not without apprehension, for these tenders to come in. When they did, the lowest of five was found to be not too far in excess of the hoped-for figure, and the Trustees accepted it. The contract was signed and work began on the site at the end of January 1957. By good fortune many weeks of good weather followed, and the excavation for the foundations proceeded rapidly, unhindered by frost and snow. Various parts of the old foundations and walls were unearthed, but nothing more exciting was encountered. Quite soon the structural steel frame was erected, and by the beginning of June it was possible to arrange for the laying of the foundation stone, as related in the next chapter. After that, progress was steady and without serious interruption or delay. Perhaps to some observers, especially the future occupants, it all seemed rather slow; but the cramped nature of the site, which allowed little room for manoeuvre by the builders, made the going somewhat slower than it would have been on a more open site.

This is perhaps the appropriate point at which to say something about the building now completed - why it took the form it did, and what were the reasons for the design.

In the early part of this chapter I outlined the schedule of requirements submitted to me. Certain salient considerations did much to influence the scheme. Foremost was the meeting - hall on the ground floor, to be named the Martineau Hall, and to be used for meetings of the Council of the General Assembly and similar gatherings, but also to be registered as a place of worship and used for occasional religious services. The internal design of the hall was clearly a matter of importance, and needed careful consideration. Too much of a 'chapel' would clearly be unsuitable for the former purpose, and a definitely 'secular' character would be equally inappropriate for the latter. A compromise had to be found, and in designing it I felt that the 'Meeting House' tradition, tempered with a simple modernity, would be most in keeping with the dual requirement.

Next in importance came the Bookshop, also on the ground floor, and the committee rooms and the offices for the denominational staff on the first floor. The Bookshop was to be a vast improvement on its predecessor in the old building, and was therefore located at the front, with ample display windows and its own separate entrance from the street, as well as a second door from the vestibule, and beneath it in the basement an ample storeroom. A spacious room on the

ground floor front, entered from the vestibule, opposite the Bookshop doorway, was also reserved for Headquarters' purposes. On the first floor the offices for the staff, and the two committee rooms, were planned as an equally great improvement upon the former accommodation; the staff offices are a group of five neighbouring rooms, light and sufficiently spacious, but without extravagance, left and right along a short corridor; here also is a tea-kitchen for staff and committee Uses.

This left a large back room on this first floor, with the whole of the two floors above (except for the caretaker's flat) available as lettable offices, some 5,000 square feet in all, adequately separated from the other parts of the building, which were allotted, as described, to the General Assembly. An electric passenger lift with automatic doors connects all the floors.

In designing the front to Essex Street I decided to keep this simple in form and to rely on first-class materials and good proportion to give the feeling of restrained dignity, free from forced ostentation or an attempt to be strongly original. The facing bricks are of the hand-made variety from the Sussex and Dorking brickyards. These have been extensively used in the rebuilding of much of the nearby Temple. It may be asked why the total height is less than that of the buildings on either side. The reason is that the height of all new buildings is strictly controlled under the Town Planning Act, and we built to the maximum height allowed. The roof had to slope back above the ceiling line of the second floor, so it was necessary to have dormer windows for the third-floor rooms.

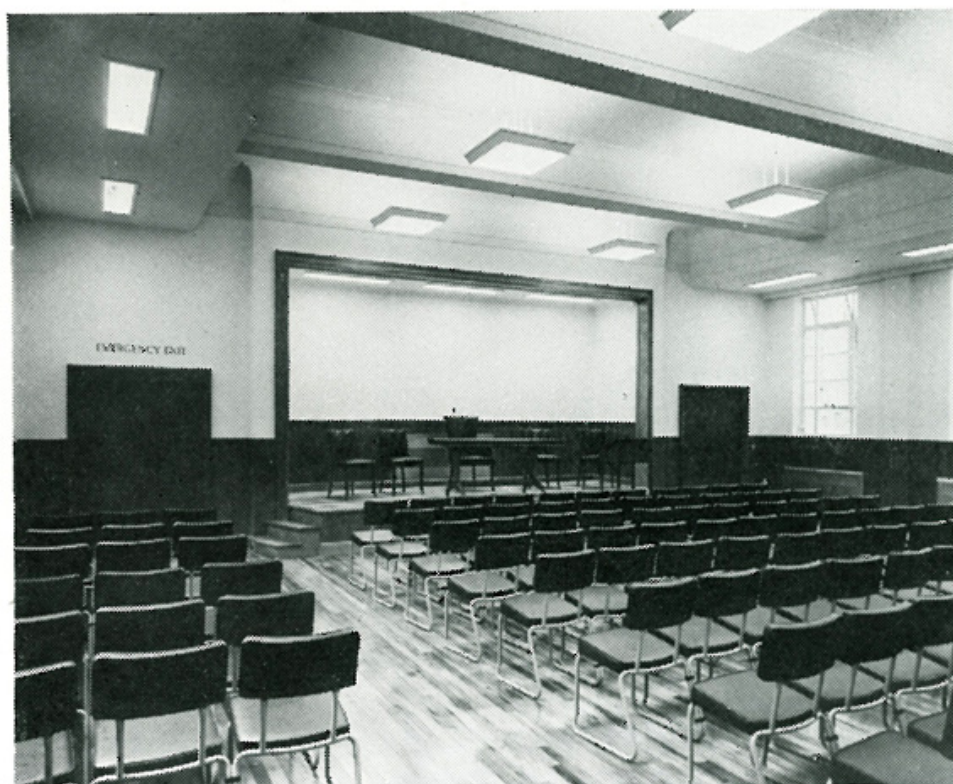
Internally, the design of buildings to-day relies less upon ornamental decoration than in the past, and more on the judicious use of carefully selected materials which will the building life and colour, but which will be easy to maintain in a clean and fresh condition. At the same time it is necessary to keep the initial cost within reasonable limits. For floors of Bookshop, corridors and lettable offices we have used first-quality linoleum. This gives a comparatively quiet floor and has a long life if kept clean and lightly polished. For the more important rooms, such as the Martineau Hall, the committee rooms and denominational offices, African hardwoods have been used. The panelling in the Martineau Hall and in the larger of the two committee rooms (the 'Lindsey Room') is in African walnut; in the latter case, with furniture to match. The smaller committee room (the 'Harman Room') is similarly but more simply furnished.

Looking back, what stands out in my mind is the way in which what seemed at first to be a complete disaster was presently recognized as a denominational challenge, and was taken up with energy and determination. I greatly appreciate the support and encouragement which were given to me by the Trustees during the months of protracted negotiations before the plans could be perfected and building work could begin.





VESTIBULE



MARTINEAU HALL



BOOKSHOP



LINDSEY ROOM

## Chapter 7 - The End of the Exile

The half-year from January to June 1957 was an exciting period. The builders whose tender had been accepted were Messrs. Foster and Dicksee, Ltd. By a happy choice the Trustees appointed Mr. W. G. Blyth, the chairman of our Kilburn congregation, as Clerk of Works. The site having been cleared and the foundations firmly established, there arose thereon a gaunt, towering, cubical skeleton of steel girders, beneath which a little platform of boards was constructed at the beginning of June, in readiness for the laying of the foundation stone, appropriately inscribed, to the right of the future Bookshop entrance.

On Saturday, June 8, this ceremonial stone-laying was performed by the one person whom all wished to see enjoying the honour of doing so - Mrs. Sydney Martineau. By good fortune for such an outdoor function it was, as *The Inquirer* reported, "a tranquil summer afternoon, with the sun shining, and silence in one of the busiest parts of London, when a splendid gathering of Unitarians, young and old, assembled in Essex Street". On the platform, to preside over the ceremony, was the President of the General Assembly (the Rev. Percival Chalk), with the Rt. Hon. J. Chuter Ede, who was to speak, and as many other representative people as could be seated on the few square yards of boarding. In the crowd were District Association and other representatives who had travelled from afar in response to the official invitation. Present also were all members of the Headquarters staff, including Miss M. Boxall and Mr. S. Hellen, who thirteen years earlier had shared with the author (then Secretary of the General Assembly) and a few volunteers the dusty, dirty and sometimes risky task of rescuing, stage by stage, everything that could be salvaged from the ruins.

The President spoke of the significance of the occasion, calling upon any who might think-or even wish-that our religious movement was doomed, to mark this day: a prelude to the days when very soon would rise upon this spot enduring evidence of the strength, tenacity and conviction that characterize our Unitarian Christian faith and its unfettered religious witness.

Before responding to the President's invitation to lay the stone, Mrs. Martineau, as full of exultant faith as ever in spite of her eighty-eight years, recalled the heroic past of this site of ours, and proclaimed our faith in the future. But ideals, she affirmed, are not enough to live on, and there was still £13,000 to be raised to meet the cost of our new building. Then, while all eyes watched her handling the trowel and spreading the mortar, the stone was lowered into position, gently tapped with the mallet and declared to be "well and truly laid". A short dedicatory prayer was offered by the author, and Mr. Ede then gave his address. Emphasizing the contrast between "a faith once for all delivered and a faith progressive and widening as the thoughts of men widen", he spoke of our site having been dedicated to the latter faith since Lindsey first proclaimed it there. Recalling personal experiences, he told of the joy and satisfaction which came to him as a working lad when, seeing R. A. Armstrong's *God and the Soul* in our Bookshop window for sixpence, he bought it and devoured its contents. With words about the great public and civic service rendered by Unitarians in the past, he uttered in conclusion a call to us to see that we likewise made it our aim to serve the needs of our day and generation.

Before the benediction was pronounced, the President rounded the ceremony by linking the day with the morrow-Whit Sunday, the festival of the Holy Spirit. As the disheartened disciples had rallied and reconsecrated themselves to the Master's work, so must we, our disaster now far behind us, derive from this day new hope and faith and courage.

We returned to our work in Gordon Square for another long year, towards the end of which, when the scaffolding was removed and the windows glazed and the building roughly completed, one could walk up stairs and along corridors and in and out of rooms and really begin to envisage what a splendid Headquarters the denomination was shortly to possess. At the end of September 1958 the great removal (and equally great upheaval) took place, with an affectionate farewell to Dr. Williams's Library and profound gratitude to its Trustees, who had afforded us a home for no less than fourteen years. A month later, on Saturday, October 25, all was ready for the Opening Ceremony. Owing to the limited accommodation in the Martineau Hall, invitations in the first instance had to be confined to the Trustees, the members of the General Assembly Council, the Presidents of District Associations and similarly representative persons; but a much larger total

audience assembled, for the vacant rooms on the second floor were filled with chairs, and under the supervisions of the Rev. T. Dalton and Mr. P. Long, an ingenious relay installation was fitted up which worked to perfection, so much so that the invisible audience spontaneously shared in the devotional service Hall as though they were in the Haiself, and cheered the speeches as though they could see those who uttered them. Mr. R. E. Brett, of the Kilburn church, officiated at the piano, and young people of both sexes from London churches acted as stewards.

By common consent Mr. Ronald P. Jones, a trustee of Essex Hall since 1909, Hon. Treasurer of the General Assembly since 1939 and a former President of the Assembly, had months before been appointed to open the Hall; but early in August he had the misfortune, while in Cambridge, to be knocked down by a motor car and most seriously injured. He was now making a marvellous recovery, but because of a fractured thigh he was still bedfast in hospital there. Nevertheless, by heroic effort he composed his opening address and had it typed for him in time for the meeting, to be read on his behalf by Professor F. J. M. Stratton of Cambridge.

The President of the General Assembly, the Rt. Hon J. Chuter Ede, was in the Chair, supported by a distinguished company on the platform, to whom reference will presently be made. The proceedings began with a brief devotional service conducted by the author, and here recorded by request. The hymn "City of God, how broad and far outspread thy walls sublime!" was followed by a Scripture Reading from Psalms T26 and 122, beginning "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like unto them that dream"; after which, prayer was offered.

## The Prayer of Dedication

*O Lord our God: we lift up thankful hearts to thee that thou hast brought us to this day of gladness and rejoicing. Trusting in thee we have hoped and planned and prepared as the years of our waiting went by; now, gathered in thy presence, we come to dedicate to thee and to the furtherance of thy purposes on earth this building, the work of our hands, and especially this Hall of Assembly in the heart of it, which from this time forth we set aside for the worship of thee and for counsel together in devout endeavour to be of service, under thee, to the world in which we live.*

*Consecrate now, O God, we beseech thee, this home and centre of our faith, and let thy blessing rest upon it and abide, so long as this house shall stand. Built in strength and adorned with quiet beauty, to thy honour and glory we humbly dedicate it. Here may thy whole truth be reverently sought, thy redeeming love be proclaimed, thy holy will be done. From this place, through thy divine guidance, may all the churches committed to our care derive fresh impulses to labour for the coming of thy Kingdom, fresh visions of a world set free from fear and wrong, fresh joy and inspiration in the practice of brotherhood and love.*

*Thanks be to thee O God, this day, for all who down the bygone generations on this hallowed site have striven to lead and direct our churches in the way of Christ. And in our hearts we name one, their first forerunner, who long ago, for conscience' sake, renouncing all that made life easy and secure, came hither a stranger to this great city, confident only that thou hadst appointed a work for him to do, and that thy guidance and protection were sure. And we to-day, across the gulfofyears, are linked with those forerunners of ours who gathered round him here to worship thee, the Father of mankind, in spirit and in truth and freedom. May his courage now be ours, his gentle piety be our heritage, and his mission be carried forward in the days that now begin.*

*O God our Father, though we pray for thy blessing upon this house that we have budded and the churches of our fellowship, we would look far beyond them and pray for closer unity and deeper harmony between all differing forms of faith. O Spirit of the living God, break down the barriers that divide from one another good men and women who alike profess and call themselves Christians; break down the barriers that divide races and nations of thy children who worship thee in diverse ways or know thee not; speed thou the day when the Prince of Peace shall be revered throughout the world, and when the knowledge of thee shall cover the earth as the waters cover*

*the sea. In his name and in his spirit we offer these our prayers, and join with one voice in the words that he has taught us:*

The Lord's Prayer followed, in which all throughout the building reverently joined: the last hymn "Father, let thy kingdom come" was sung, and the benediction pronounced. The President then took charge of the meeting, and in his opening remarks referred feelingly to the enforced absence of the Opener of the Hall, and to the good news of his progress towards recovery, in successful defiance of his handicap of eighty-two years. Professor Stratton then delivered the speech which Mr. Jones had prepared.

## The Opening Address

My first unwelcome task to-day is to offer you apologies for my absence. I consider that the invitation to be the Opener of Essex Hall is the greatest compliment that a layman can be paid by his colleagues, and equally great is my disappointment at not being able to carry it out in full. You know what happened. In this case I was the pedestrian and not the motorist. I, like Strephon in *Iolanthe*, am a fairy down to the waist, but my right leg is mortal, and my surgeon thinks it undesirable to bring me up to London on a stretcher, so to speak, and risk the chances of complete recovery. We are today celebrating the second opening of Essex Hall as a centre of religious liberty. But it is a fact, I think, that this is the third opening which has taken place here, and it is fitting that we should give a thought to the Pioneer on the site, who is responsible for our presence here.

The Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, writer and preacher, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, held the living of Catterick, near Ripon, in Yorkshire, where he had many friends of advanced views. He had become a Unitarian in theology, and on the failure of a petition to Parliament for some easing of the regulations, he felt obliged by his conscience to resign the living and come to London in order to found a definitely Unitarian congregation. In this action he was much helped by Dr. Priestley and Dr. Price and a group of supporters in the City and Parliament, through whose help the Auction Room in Essex Street was obtained and, after some alteration, opened in 1774 as Essex Street Chapel.

A few years later the premises were purchased and largely rebuilt, to provide a normal Meeting House of the period, with galleries on three sides and a high pulpit against the fourth wall. Lighting was through a dome in the flat ceiling. Living-rooms were provided to serve as a parsonage, and in the basement a series of wine vaults which were prudently retained as part of the endowment. Later on, thirteen of Lindsey's supporters were appointed Trustees of the property, who let it to him as tenant for life, with the duty of paying rates and taxes and all the costs of maintaining the building and the services. For this task he received the pew rents and other contributions from the congregation and the rents from the wine vaults, which no doubt formed a considerable part of his stipend, and gave rise to the well known epigram by a wit of the period:

*In the Spirits above  
Are the Spirits of Love.  
But the spirits below  
Are the spirits of woe.*

If the National Unitarian Temperance Association had then existed, which I doubt, its members must have been perturbed at this item in the Essex Street Chapel finances.

In order to secure more leisure for writing, Lindsey took as co-pastor Dr. Disney, who had in the same way resigned from his living in the Anglican Church. Lindsey retired in 1793 and the Chapel was carried on under the ministries of Disney, Belsham and Thomas Madge, and finally, from 1859 to 1883, by J. Panton Ham; but by this time the attendance and support had declined seriously

owing to the growing custom of living away from the city in the suburbs, so that Essex Street Chapel became more difficult to reach on Sunday except by what were called "carriage folk".

It became necessary to consider transferring the Chapel to one of the suburbs, and eventually Kensington was chosen, where services were being held in a temporary building in the Mall.

A large sum was raised in order to buy the property as a Headquarters for the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the Sunday School Association, societies which had no premises of their own, and the proceeds were used in the building of Essex Church and manse. It is perhaps appropriate that Mrs. Martineau, who laid the foundation stone here, and I who am to open the building, are both senior members of Essex Church, which I joined in 1904.

The chapel was altered to serve as the Hall which we knew, the side galleries were removed and windows provided, with staircase and doorways at the side. The wine vaults were abolished to form committee rooms and a book store, while the space between the Hall and Essex Street was used for a bookshop, with a separate entrance. The building was opened just before Whit Week in 1886 by Mr. Enfield, President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and a member of a well-known northern family, at a meeting in the Hall, which, *The Inquirer* reports, was attended by 700 people, of which a large number must have been standing. A year later this might have been impossible, for stringent rules against overcrowding came in with the creation of the London County Council in 1887. I was not present at this meeting, but I might have been, as I was ten years old at the time, and if my father had been living in London, instead of Liverpool, he might well have taken me to it, since the reports make clear that it was not an invitation meeting-in fact could not have been-since the two Associations concerned were not representative but consisted of voluntary subscribers who did not represent their congregations in any way.

My first regular contact with the Hall begins in 1908, when I was invited to join the Executive Committee of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association which was appointed at the Whit Week meetings and, through its sub-committees, carried out the work of the Association. This is therefore my jubilee year and makes me "the oldest inhabitant" by seven years, since it was not until 1915 that Mrs. Martineau joined the Committee, having been up to that time engaged in bringing up a large family.

The British and Foreign Unitarian Association was already dominated by the powerful personality of the Secretary, the Rev. W. Copeland Bowie, who had been well known in public life as a fighting member of the old School Board, which managed London education until it was taken over by the London County Council. He had all the arts of the wise Secretary - which problems should be brought to a sub-committee and which had better be dealt with in the office; but to the churches in general he is perhaps best known as combining the functions of the present Ministry Committee and its earlier local Advisory Boards in relation to pulpit vacancies. He was widely consulted in such matters and his criticisms of congregations and ministers were very shrewd and candid, perhaps reminiscent of his earlier training as a schoolmaster in Aberdeen.

It is interesting to recall that on three occasions Essex Hall was nearly lost to us. First about 1906, when the Piccadilly and Northern Railway was to be completed by the branch line from Holborn to the Strand, and our premises were regarded as a suitable site for a 'Law Courts' station; but in the end it seemed easier to develop the resultant Aldwych station along the Strand.

Again, in 1925, when the controversy about Waterloo Bridge was at its height, one of the preservation schemes was to restore the Bridge as a historic monument and build a new one a little further down the river, each bridge to have one-way traffic and the new Temple Bridge to serve the eastern arm of the Kingsway-Aldwych scheme, to be approached down the widened Essex Street. This scheme was dropped when the Labour Party in 1934 decided on a new Waterloo Bridge.

The third occasion was an offer to the Trustees to buy the freehold and Hall for private commercial development; but after exploring every avenue, particularly in the Bloomsbury district, it did not seem that the amount offered would be enough to provide for a good site and a suitable building.

We now arrive at recent history which most people here can remember-the flying bomb of the 28th July, 1944, which wrecked the building. I may have heard this explosion, as I was regularly

serving with St. Paul's Watch, and may well have been patrolling the roof of the cathedral when it occurred. The Dean certainly may have heard it, as he was on duty practically every night. There were some very fortunate circumstances connected with this event. First, that it took place during the night, because, as some of us who lived through the period will remember, the bombs might fall at any period, day or night. Secondly, a flying bomb produced one violent explosion and was not designed to deliver incendiaries, so that the contents of the rooms and bookstore were saved from destruction by fire and water, and those in the book store were, like Ezekiel's bones, "very dry". Thirdly, it happened that Dr. Williams's Trustees had, before the war, taken over two more floors of the Library at Gordon Square to enlarge the accommodation. They had cleared the space before the war began, and then it was left empty. In 1934 the General Assembly found the rooms a most welcome refuge for the next fourteen years.

The more recent history you all know, the discussions and final decision to rebuild on the old site and the raising of almost the whole of the very large sum required, since the War Damage Commission would award only a 'value payment'.

But you must allow me as a fellow architect to pay my tribute to what Mr. Kenneth Tayler has done for us, in transforming a badly planned and in many ways dangerous building into the present fine and well arranged premises, architecturally modern in the best sense, for which he has spent much of his time wrestling with the demands of local authorities with their endless protestations and requirements for alternative exits and other means of safety, now the real background to architecture in any large city.

It now only remains for me to open this building officially, which I am well able to do at a distance because the Trustees had already decided to dispense with the formal and conventional unlocking of the front door with a particular key, when the building had already been in use for a month, and all we need is a symbolical opening like that of a flower show or a sale of work.

I now have great pleasure in declaring Essex Hall officially open for the second time. May there never be the reason for a third, and may it prosper and happily fulfil all its functions as the headquarters of our denominational activities.

Supporting the President upon the crowded platform were representatives from other churches and denominations, duly appointed in response to the official invitation, to which there had not been a single refusal; in addition, the Very Rev. Dr. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, our Essex Hall Lecturer in 1950, came both as a personal friend of the Opener, who had been one of his fire-watchers at the Cathedral throughout the War, and also in good will towards us.

The President, who gave, as one reporter said, "a brief affectionate introduction of each guest, who thus came to life as a personality before he even uttered his first word", called first upon the Dean, who delighted the audience with a speculation about what some of the early Christian Fathers would have thought of his presence in "a regular nest of heretics" assembled in their new building not very far from the Cathedral; and he referred to the absent Opener as having been one of the most faithful and efficient members of St. Paul's Watch.

Next came the Rev. F. P. Copland Simmons, Moderator-elect of the Presbyterian Church of England, charged to express the greetings and good wishes of all the churches included in the Free Church Federal Council. This he did with grace and humour, after first recalling that our Headquarters and those of the Presbyterian Church had alone suffered destruction, in the latter case by day, with a tragic death-roll. He paid a tribute to our movement for its earnest quest for truth, and ended with a heartfelt "May God richly bless you in all your work".

Commissioner Ebbs of the Salvation Army claimed that without any surrender of personal conviction and loyalty, every religious communion belonged to "the armies of God", even though his own might regard themselves as "the storm troops of Christendom"; and the audience, judging by the applause, was quite ready to concede his claim.

Mr. Harold Reed of Birmingham, Clerk to the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends-the only layman among denominational speakers-rejoiced that mutual relationships between his Society and our churches were altogether friendly; and while he regretted that we were not all pacifists, he

commented with satisfaction on one important bond between us-our refusal of creeds as a basis of membership.

Finally, came our own kindred. The Moderator of the Non - subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Rt. Rev. J. W. Dyer, brought the greetings, congratulations and good wishes of his Church, the General Assembly on the other side of the Irish Sea. Then two of the party of four American friends, who had flown the Atlantic to be with us, uttered their appropriate messages: first, the Rev. Dr. E. W. Kuchler, President of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom, charged to convey also the greetings of the Universalist Churches of America. He very happily combined the international with the domestic in a speech full of good hope and encouragement. Second, the recently elected President of the American Unitarian Association, the Rev. Dr. Dana M. Greeley, who not only spoke with fine eloquence and fervour, but produced and read aloud the words of an official greeting from his Association, beautifully inscribed in colour on a scroll which will be found framed and hung in the new building.

So, with a vote of thanks from Mr. R. Bartram, Chairman of the Essex Hall Trustees, and a salutary reminder from the President that £7,000 was still required to pay for the building, the memorable meeting ended, two hours after it began; enough, but not too much, for the complete enjoyment of all three audiences. Silent but proud and happy on the limited space of the platform, or seated near by, were others who had been closely concerned in all that had reached its culmination on this day: Mr. Kenneth Taylor, the architect; the Rev. H. Stewart Carter, the Chairman of the Building Committee; Mr. Alan Martineau and Mr. L. Procter, Chairman and Hon. Treasurer respectively of the Appeal Fund; Mr. H. J. Bush, Hon. Treasurer of the Essex Hall Trustees, and the Rev. John Kielty, Secretary of the General Assembly. A witty reporter in *The Inquirer* singled out Mr. Kielty as "pregnant with unaccustomed silence ... bursting no doubt with ideas for new ways along those old paths in Essex Street".

Among other most welcome visitors in addition to those already mentioned were Dr. H. Faber, of Holland, and Judge Brooks (Chairman of the Board of Directors) and the Rev. W. D. Krieg (Secretary) of the American Unitarian Association.

Before wending their ways homeward a large number of the people present were shown round the building, and their delight in its internal character, no less than its dignified exterior, was abundantly expressed. There was no repetition of the lukewarm report by the Editor of the *1886 Inquirer*, that "Essex Hall was the subject of very general, if not universal, admiration"; this time his successor most truly and simply wrote-"It was an occasion which, if it could have been felt and seen throughout the Unitarian community, would have strengthened and moved every congregation.... Something new in meeting-places has suddenly appeared out of the ashes of the old Hall, and it will set a standard for the future." And since that notable day many other visitors have come, and seen, and departed, always with the liveliest expressions of admiration for our new denominational Headquarters.

Let us recall, in conclusion, the vision of a great-hearted Unitarian layman of the 19th century, Mr. James Hopgood, one of the prime movers of the fund that failed and the contributor of the first £1,000 towards it:

"The proposed building ought to be one worthy of the Unitarians of the United Kingdom, having regard to the position they are entitled to take as the sole advocates of a simple and pure theology; it ought therefore, I submit, to be situated in one of the best parts of London, and in its architectural character should be dignified and striking. Unless I am very much mistaken, there is no lack of members of the Unitarian persuasion who, as a pure and simple gift, would cheerfully subscribe sums sufficient to erect or procure a noble and appropriate building as the headquarters of this body."

*Mr. Hopgood wrote this in 1873. In 1958 his dream came true.*



## Epilogue

*Contributed to the special Essex Hall number of The Inquirer*

### "The Glory Hole"

"HA! ha! So you're coming to London to work in the Glory Hole!" said a good-hearted but bluntly outspoken Unitarian lady to me in 1928 when I was introduced to her as the future Secretary of the new General Assembly. Full of trepidation about my forthcoming responsibilities, I was frankly shocked to hear her speak like that of Essex Hall. I had thought that all London Unitarians worshipped the old building. As a mere provincial I had always cherished a proper respect for our London Headquarters with its romantic history and sacred traditions. And so long as it stood, during fifteen years of my daily work there, and even after it was gone for ever, I retained that proper feeling about it, and my gentle resentment towards the lady who had surprised and shaken me by her casual and irreverent remark.

But during the past month, since we packed up at Gordon Square and removed, lock, stock and barrel, into Kenneth Tayler's wonderful new Essex Hall, and got rid by degrees of the workmen and the dust and the dirt, I have completely forgiven her. My loyal affection for the long-lost building has swiftly declined towards complete extinction. After all, it *was* an old "glory hole": antediluvian, haphazard without and within, the ugliest building in Essex Street; the victim of repeated economical adaptations and alterations from 1778 to 1886, and even during the inter-war years. How can one step to-day into the handsome and spacious bookshop, now provided on street level, and not recall the former cramped and crowded shop hidden away from the street; how can one remember the miserable basement kitchen and high-up living quarters provided for the caretaker and his wife, compared with the charming cosy flat in the top story of the new building, without frankly confessing that the unflattering epithet was deserved? We who worked in Essex Hall until the day of its doom might well have been excused for quoting Omar Khayyam:

*Ali, love! could you and I with fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits, and then  
Remould it nearer to the heart's desire?*

But we never did. Indeed, when the bombing of London began, and our first task in the morning from time to time was to sweep out heaps of shattered glass as window after window went west and had to be boarded up, we began to hug the old place to our breasts, as it were, and congratulate it upon each escape from a worse fate. But at last (10.45 pm. July 28, 1944) a V1 came hurtling down in the darkness and crashed into the caretaker's empty quarters and blew half the building into smithereens and the other half into a chaos of wreckage. There was something sardonically appropriate, as well as fortunate in ultimate results, about its point of entry. But, alas for the ancient Glory Hole! Within ten minutes the news came to me over the telephone in an agitated voice. After half an hour of frantic speculation, I regret to confess that I slept the sleep of the just.

Imagine, then, "the morning after the night before", when a little group of staff, arriving one by one in ignorance, stood aghast in Essex Street at the spectacle of our business home in ruins. Wandering disconsolately into the Strand, where the shops that hid Essex Hall from view were now a heap of rubble, we saw the Upper Hall torn open wide and caught a distant view of the great

plaster cast of James Martineau's statue leaning forlornly out of the empty window frame against which it had been rudely shattered, amid a chaos of platform table, piano and chairs. So, it being Saturday, we adjourned to the nearest cafe and had morning coffee together before dispersing. And when on the morrow I was conducting services, it was with hardly suppressed emotion that I announced the destruction of our beloved headquarters. I was still genuinely staggered by the blow.

But as the famous Bairnsfather cartoon depicted Old Bill saying to his grumbling companion crouching in the muddy shell-hole, "If year knows of a better 'ole, go to it!" And what a mercy it was, in that sorrowful hour, that we knew of a few empty rooms in Dr. Williams's Library premises in Gordon Square that could be ours in the event of such an emergency. Hence on Monday morning it was "business as usual" there, with the aid of a borrowed typewriter, a table and a few chairs. Dr. Williams's Trustees expected us to be there for a few years, perhaps; it stretched out to fourteen in the end, and although during the last four we had to yield to necessity and move down (most of us) into something of a half-lit glory hole on the ground floor, our gratitude for a refuge in time of need must never be forgotten. Without that avenue of escape, our plight would have been desperate.

And now, after the years of exile, here we are in the building that was opened with joy and pride on October 25; back on the old site in the familiar street, but housed in an Essex Hall whose exterior dignity and interior beauty makes me glad that I have lived to see this day. And among our possessions is a contorted fragment of the case of the flying-bomb that destroyed the Glory Hole. I forgive the lady who coined the phrase, and the enemy who struck the blow!

M. R.

*Essex Hall, October 1958 - M.R.*

