

Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

24th-28th August, 2018

WELCOME TO THE MARTIN LUTHER KIRCHE

Anthony Hellen, a member of our Society and Trustee of the German-Speaking Church in Newcastle, greeted us on our arrival for Evening Worship.

First, welcome to the Martin Luther Church. We are honoured to host an international gathering of Lutherans, Anglicans and people from other churches to the German-speaking Congregation here in Shieldfield, Newcastle.

Secondly, welcome to the City of Newcastle, home to two universities, particularly the University of Newcastle which was, from the beginning, closely linked with Durham as King's College. We know you are staying at one of the Durham colleges and will have found that historic city atmospheric and photogenic, but Newcastle has been around since the Romans, not just the Normans, and this great port is equally worth visiting.

As a twin-campus university it has been home to one of the UK's most important medical schools from around 1820, as well as of a full range of disciplines from the pure and applied sciences, the humanities and social sciences. Newcastle University became independent from Durham only in 1963. Durham had inherited many largely ecclesiastic buildings and may give the impression of being an ancient university, but this would be misleading! In fact, Oxford and Cambridge kept a monopoly on universities in England for 600 years until University College London was founded in 1829. North of Hadrian's Wall, Scotland was different, and the universities at St Andrews, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen were each founded over 500 years ago.

Now, the Martin Luther Kirche has no reason to feel a newcomer in this modern university city because the first meeting of a German Lutheran congregation took place in 1861, and the formal foundation occurred in 1881. Most of the early members were pork butchers from Swabia, to be followed by shopkeepers and industrial workers - immigrants who wanted to worship in their mother tongue. Their first meeting place was a terrace house at 43, Lovaine Place near the city centre in Jesmond, purchased in 1906,

This congregation was uprooted by the 1914-18 War, when many of the men were interned, and it was 1930 before things were normalized and Lovaine Place re-opened. World War 2 saw a repeat as the male members of the congregation were interned from summer of 1940, and the congregation was only re-formed, and a new pastor appointed, in 1952.

From then on the skies brightened. 75 years of the Congregation were marked by celebrations in 1955 and the great and the good turned out for the occasion, as our photographic records show. Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, President of the World Lutheran Council, presided and an official service was held at St Thomas's Church, a large city centre building. From then on the modern picture emerged. The old church buildings were compulsorily demolished to form part of the Newcastle Civic Centre. Fortunately in 1965 a new site was found on which to build a completely new church, the one in which we are now assembled.

Any church congregation reflects the changing times and society around it. The post-war world after 1945 saw Britain as one of the four occupying powers in Germany and the international dimension changed remarkably. The British Army of the Rhine became important in Laender like North Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony, and considerable numbers of German women arrived in our city region and turned up at our church as a result of marrying British servicemen, many finding a second home in this German-speaking congregation.

Today, far from being a purely German congregation, we are remarkable for our ethnic diversity. Those with German roots still predominate, with a few from Austria and Switzerland, but others have arrived from as far afield as Poland, Hungary and even South Africa. English-speakers, usually men, joined through marriage in this cosmopolitan city, as the congregation became more widely known through events like the annual Christmas Fair, the work of the German Seamen's Mission at South Shields, and cultural events, particularly music-focused. Our records show how much we were supported and given free publicity through frequent articles

in the local press and latterly by reporting on our two TV stations. Today our fellow-Lutherans in their Danish, Norwegian and Swedish congregations hold regular services here in this building, but their ministers now commute from ports like Liverpool and London.

Perhaps the most interesting influx was of former German Prisoners of War, 402,000 of whom were once interned across 1400 camps in the UK, mainly from May 1945 until May 1948. Nationally, thirty thousand "PoWs" chose to settle in Britain after 1948, but there were to be other migrants after this country joined the European Union, including European university students, young women "au pairs", and a wide range of Germans sent here to set up industrial and commercial firms.

Change, however, has become the norm, as the church leadership in Hannover has recognised the need to restructure its "estate", reduce its clergy numbers and review its operations in Britain. Fewer clergy have led to the closure of some congregations across Britain and to a greatly increased workload for clergy. Newcastle is now linked with the Edinburgh congregation and run from Scotland. Our joint pastors now commute from the Edinburgh base to their congregations in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Newcastle, with less regular services held in Inverness and Teesside.

No-one knows what will be the final outcome of so-called *Brexit* next year. Already some Germans who were church members here, working in areas like the health services, schools and universities, have left or are planning to do so. Nevertheless, in historical terms we are used to such change, even uncertainty, and will survive, as we did for two long periods of the wartime internment of German nationals and enforced closure.