

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

1 Kings 8. 22-30
 Hebrews 12. 18-24
 Matthew 21. 12-16

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
 Amen.

On Thursday 21st August 1862 a ceremony marked the laying of the foundation stone of the Church of St Stephen to be built at the Rocquettes in the parish of St Peter Port. The proceedings commenced at two o'clock in the afternoon with the Divine Service, which was performed in the Town Church. The prayers were read by the Revd Charles S Guille, one of the curates; and a sermon was preached by the Revd John Doyle Kennedy, the Rector of St Sampson's. For his text, Revd Kennedy chose verses 6 through 9 of the 122nd Psalm: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers. For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.'

At the close of the service the clergy, the committee of the church and a large number of the subscribers repaired to the site of the building, in a field which had been given by the Brock family. The ground was decorated with flags and flowers, and the foundation stone, which was also dressed with flowers, was seen suspended over the spot on which it was to be deposited. Preparatory to the ceremony the children of the National and Sunday Schools of St Peter Port, numbering about six hundred with their superintendents and teachers, were assembled in the area marked out for the building.

Several of the members of the committee and some of the ladies and gentlemen who had contributed towards the building fund were gathered round the spot where the

stone was to be laid, as were also a number of local clergymen wearing their academic robes.

At four o'clock His Excellency Major-General Slade, the Lieutenant Governor, along with Mrs Slade and Miss Slade, entered the ground and took their places near the foundation stone. Verses 1 through 5 of the 84th Psalm were then sung by a choir which had been organised for the occasion, and by the children of the schools. A service was then conducted by The Dean of Guernsey, who was dressed in his surplice. He led those present in a reading of the first verses of Psalm 122, which starts out as follows: I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'

The Dean of Guernsey then spoke. He stated that he had supported the project of building the Church of St Stephen because 'its purpose is the glory of God and its result is the salvation of souls'. The idea of the Church of St Stephen had not originated with the Dean, far from it; the idea was entertained by several influential families before the Dean even came to the parish of St Peter Port. The Dean then said that he had acted in the best interest of his successors and of the parishioners generally, by having the Church of St Stephen placed on the footing of a church within the parish of St Peter Port (that is, the Town Church), and served by a curate appointed by the Rector of the Town Church.

As he continued, the Dean said that he did not know whether he would live long enough to see the work on the Church of St Stephen completed, and (I quote) whether 'his ears would be gladdened by hearing the voice of prayer and praise ascend from within the walls of St Stephen's'; but if he did not, 'what one has sown, another will reap, and the way will have been paved for more shepherds to minister to the flock'. The Dean stated that his only prayer was that 'the glad tidings of good things, contained in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, may ever sound forth

hence, and that children's children to many generations may bless God for having put it into the heart of the supporters of the Church of St Stephen to provide them with spiritual food'.

The Dean then closed the service with a benediction; and the children, accompanied by many others who had assembled, adjourned to a field at the Ivy Gates which had been kindly lent for the occasion by Mr De Lisle Dobrée. Here were laid out long tables at which the children took their places, and where they were regaled with an unlimited amount of tea and cake. The children then dispersed about the field and amused themselves to their heart's content with various games and dances, which were kept up with great spirit until about eight o'clock. Everyone present acknowledged that the day had been blessed both by lovely weather and good cheer.

Today, as we celebrate our Dedication Festival at St Stephen's, it is refreshing to hear that the laying of the foundation stone of our church was witnessed by so many people from the island; and that the Dean, and those influential families behind the building, were keen to build a church that would glorify God and lead others to faith.

As we consider the foundation stone of St Stephen's, we are reminded (in the words of the second chapter of the first epistle of Peter) that our Lord is not only a 'living stone', but the 'corner stone' of the Church;¹ and that we, also like 'living stones, are to be built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'. Today, may we be encouraged by the devotion and perseverance of our predecessors; and may we humbly and truly offer ourselves up to be living stones dedicated to the glory of God and to the flourishing of his Church here in Guernsey. Amen.

¹ Cf. also Ps 118. 22-24; Rom 9. 33; Matt 21. 42; Acts 4. 11-12; Eph 2. 20.