

237 years ago (from Church News June 2012)

Earlier this month we welcomed our Quaker friends to Kingston URC while their premises are rebuilt. Did you know that in 1775 our congregation took over the Quaker meeting house when we were without a home?

In the mid 18th century the Quakers occupied a small brick building at the corner of Union Street and Eden Street – close to the site of our present foyer. At that time the Independent church (forerunner of Kingston URC) was worshipping in a building on the opposite side of Eden Street, roughly where the Kam Tong Chinese restaurant is now.

The Quakers had erected their building in 1673, but in 1773 it became vacant when they acquired their current site in Eden Street. In 1775 the members of the Independent church with evangelical leanings decided to form a new congregation, and they acquired the lease of the disused Quaker meeting house.

There are no known images of the old Quaker building, but a former member of our church, Mr Fred Barber, an architect - who incidentally was responsible for designing our new halls in the mid 1970s - drew an impression of how it might have looked based on information in contemporary records.

Twenty five years later the lease on the old Quaker meeting house ran out and our church (which by this time had become Congregational) took the bold step of building a brand new chapel on a site immediately to the east of the old meeting house. The land was provided by William Ranyard, a prominent Kingston tallow chandler. The new chapel was so close to the old meeting house that the windows in the east wall of the meeting house had to be bricked up.

This Congregational chapel was rebuilt on the same site and on a grander scale in 1856, and of course is still in use today. Meanwhile the meeting house was rebuilt as shops, but its east wall was not demolished, and within living memory the bricked up windows were visible from the open passage which ran along the west side of our sanctuary.

In 1975, having stood for three centuries, the last remnant of the original Quaker meeting house was demolished to make way for the URC foyer!

John Fisher