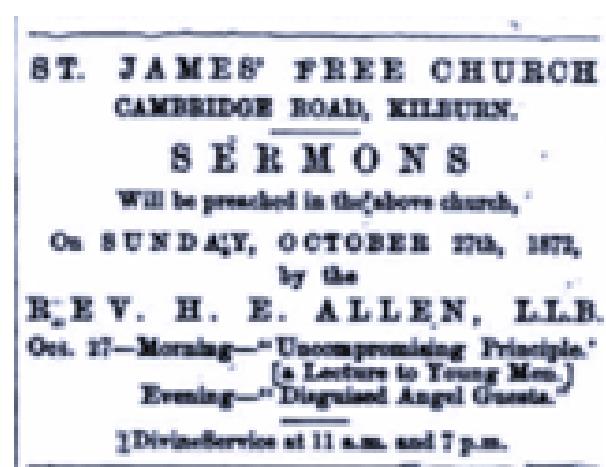


ORIGIN STORY: TIN TABERNACLE AS A CHURCH

In the beginning

In the beginning, a developer named James Bailey acquired an undeveloped area of land to the north of the Edgware Road (now Maida Vale). This land was part of the rural parish of Willesden but due to the increase of omnibus services and the growth of the railway, it now appeared to be an ideal location for middle class suburbs with an easy commute into central London. Between 1861 and 1867, Bailey constructed several roads around the triangular Cambridge Gardens. These were lined with Italianate style villas and the area began to be known as Kilburn Park.



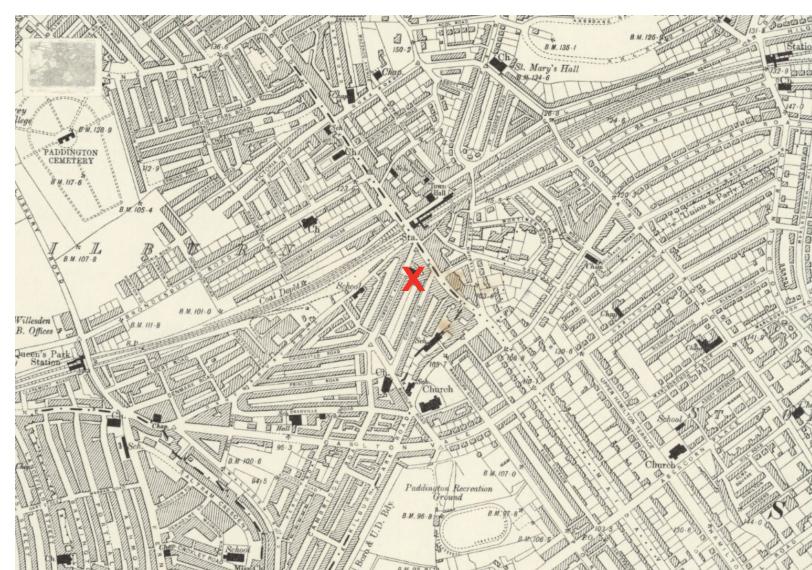
The Kilburn Times, Sat 26 October 1872.
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The Congregational Church

In 1875 the local branch of the Congregational Church relocated to the Tin Tabernacle. The Congregational Church are an independent or non-conformist denomination, in which the congregation autonomously run their own church's affairs, there is no central governing body. During its time as the Congregational Church, the building hosted the weekly meetings of the Kilburn Choral Society and various charity events.



The Kilburn Times, Fri 15 October 1886
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OS Map 1894 to 1895
Red X marks the location of the Tin Tabernacle
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Cambridge Hall

By the end of the Victorian period, the mania for church building and religion had started to wane and many groups were amalgamating creating a surplus of buildings. Maps of Kilburn from the 1890s show that within a half mile radius of the Tin Tabernacle there were at least ten other religious buildings. By 1894 the Tin Tabernacle had fallen into disuse and was taken over by another Christian group who renamed it Cambridge Hall. It was still used for religious services but the working-class community it served had a greater need of a more general venue.

Cambridge Hall began to be used for concerts, lectures and charity events. The poster for a Pierrot show held in 1914 is still on display in the building. Many religious buildings served multiple functions during the inter-war period and some were converted or even demolished. Perhaps the Tin Tabernacle survived because of its size (the 1894 OS map states that the building could seat 650), but by the time Cambridge Hall closed at the outbreak of WW2, this iron structure, intended to last five years, was facing an uncertain future. Until the Sea Cadets came aboard...

VICTORIAN RELIGION

The Victorian era saw a boom in church building and a revival of religion in general. Changes to various laws allowed much greater religious freedom; industrialisation and the growth of cities saw a greater number of the working class be drawn to non-conformist groups such as the Methodists, Baptists and Quakers; and workers arriving from over-seas increased the non-Christian population.

- Catholic Emancipation Act 1829 – permitted members of the Catholic faith to sit in Parliament
- Marriage Act of 1836 - allowed non-conformists and Catholics to be married in their own places of worship.
- The Religious Disabilities Act 1846 - removed the last restrictions against dissenters and Catholics
- The Jewish Relief Act 1858 – permitted Jews to sit in Parliament
- The Universities Tests Act 1871 - opened the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham to students and staff of all faiths and none.

Tensions between the multiple different faiths and groups led to the founding of so many new churches that one could be found on almost every street. The 1851 census revealed that out of the nation's worshipping population, nearly half were non-conformists. Non-conformist places of worship were often called chapels or meeting houses but some were known by other specific names such as gospel halls or tabernacles. It is into this age of religious fervour that our Tin Tabernacle was born.

Written by Emily Abrehart, volunteering for London Historic Buildings Trust. Supported by Michael Copeman, Historic Building Specialist. Thanks to the project partners and project team for ongoing support and input.

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