Places of Worship in Dulwich

East Dulwich Grove United Reform Church

Active
United Reformed
East Dulwich Grove, SE22 8RH

East Dulwich Grove United Reform exterior

East Dulwich Grove United Reform exterior and interior

Historical summary
Dulwich Grove Congregational Church's origins begin in 1875, when local residents sought a new space for worship due to overcrowding at Nunhead. Land at East Dulwich Grove and Melbourne Grove was purchased for £800, and after plans were drawn, the foundation stone was laid in December 1878. The Lecture Hall (now the Church Hall) opened in July 1879, and the church was formally constituted in October with 52 members.

James Cubitt designed the permanent church, which opened in June 1890 after initial scaling down. Additional features, including the chancel, side galleries, vestries,

parlour, and kitchen, were completed by 1904. The church faced major disruption during WW2 when bomb damage in 1940 left the sanctuary unusable, forcing the congregation to relocate to St James Church of Scotland on Goose Green. Post-war reconstruction began in 1946, aided by volunteer builders, though the hall remained under council use until 1966.

The church has long served as a community hub, hosting worship, youth groups, and social activities. In 1972, the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church merged to form the United Reformed Church. In 1981, the Churches of Christ joined this union, followed in 2000 by the Congregational Union of Scotland.

Architecturally, the Gothic Revival red-brick church features a nave with transepts, a bellcote with spirelet, a notable broad wooden arch, and a modified post-war chancel. The adjacent hall, opened in 1879, has undergone many interior changes.

Historical background

The story begins in July 1875 where on a printed notice residents in the burgeoning residential East Dulwich area had called a meeting to discuss a “new and suitable place for Divine Worship” due to the Congregational Church at Nunhead becoming increasingly crowded. So it was that a plot of land on the corner of East Dulwich Grove and Melbourne Grove was purchased for the sum of £800; plans and specifications were drawn up, tenders obtained, builder Mr Cox appointed and the foundation stone laid on 14 December 1878 with the opening of the Lecture Hall (now the Church Hall) following on 10 July 1879. Now having a church building, the only thing remaining was to constitute the church: this followed on 10 October that year when Dulwich Grove Congregational Church accepted 52 men and women into its membership.

The church pressed on with its desire to build and having scaled down his plans – eschewing vestries and side galleries to a later date – James Cubitt’s design for the church finally came to fruition and was opened on 11 June 1890. It was to be another 14 years until the buildings were finally completed with the addition of chancel for organ and choir, two side galleries, two vestries, side gallery to the church hall, church parlour, and kitchen.

WW2 saw Dulwich Grove decamp to St James, Church of Scotland on Goose Green. With the ending of the war came the need for reconstruction nationally, and at a local level for the church. It was a time of returns – of those young men fortunate enough to be returning from the battlefields, and returning to the church home after years of grateful accommodation at St James’ Goose Green. The reconstruction of the church began earnestly in Spring 1946 aided in no small part by the efforts of amateur builders who flocked to the task volunteering day and night to get the damaged church building fit for purpose once again, especially as the hall was still requisitioned by the Borough Council. It was not until 1966 that the church hall once again became available to the church.

In October 1972, the spirit of ecumenism saw the Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England agree to join together to form the

United Reformed Church. In 1981, the Churches of Christ joined in this union, followed in 2000 by the Congregational Union of Scotland.

Ministers
1880 S. G. Kelly
1882-5 W. C. Preston
1885-88 D .Alexander
1888-99 Henry J. Haffer
1899-1904 Albert Swift
1905-8 J. H. Edwards
1908-13 G. C. Britton
1913-20 T. Sinclair Phillips
1921-24 A. Rowatt Maxwell
1925-36 G. B. Dibden
1937-49 W. E. Allen
1951-53 H. T. Davies
1953-57 W. J. Llewellyn Phillips
1960-70 T. G. Dyer
1971-77 J. C. Davison
c1979 T. O. Williams, K. J. Summers, R. J. Hall

Source: Southwark Local Studies. The Dulwich Grove Story 1879-1969 by Norman Singleton ref P285.8DUL. The Dulwich Grove Story Part Two 1969-2000 by John Key ref PAM 285.8. Centenary Souvenir of Dulwich Grove URC 1879-1979: