

## **St. Paul's Church, Pune.**

The history of Anglican churches in Pune dates back to 1820 when the Rev. Thomas Robinson the first chaplain of Pune reported to the Ven. George Barnes, the first Archdeacon of Bombay the necessity of erecting a church in Pune. The Archdeacon in turn wrote to the Governor in Council and urged them to build a situated church for the European soldiers and English families in Pune. His request was granted and as a result, St. Mary's Church on Gen Bhagat Marg, "The Mother Church of the Deccan" was erected and later consecrated by Bishop Heber, the only Bishop in India then, on the 3rd July 1825.

For years St. Mary's was the only Church in Pune. As the years rolled on, the Christian community grew since several military as well as civilian officers were posted at Pune and sufficient accommodation could not be made available for all of them at St. Mary's Church. This necessitated a second Church for Pune and in the late 1840 the Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Carr, the first Bishop of Bombay requested for another church for Pune for the non-official or civilian and Eurasian community. However due to financial stringency the Government was unable to grant the request for several years.

It was on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1863, that the first stone of St. Paul's Church was laid " H.E. the Governor laid the foundation stone of St. Paul's Church on Saturday afternoon August 29<sup>th</sup>", and the Christian community assembled a thousand strong.

St. Paul's was ready by the middle of February 1867. The Bishop of Bombay therefore wrote to the Governor the Following letter:

### **The Governor of Bombay:**

I have the honour to request from Your Excellency in Council the Consent of Government to the consecration of St. Paul's Church at Poona - being now reported to me as ready for consecration.

The necessary sanction was received and St. Paul's was consecrated on 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1867. "This structure is of the early English style of Gothic architecture. The design was prepared by the Rev. F. Gell. The entire length of the Church is 95 1/2 feet (interior dimensions), breath 30 feet and height to corbel 40 1/2 feet. We congratulate, besides the Government who provided funds, and those who were concerned in its erection, the public also, on the completion of St. Paul's Church, which besides being a great convenience for those who live in the civil and staff lines, is an ornament to the station of which we may justly be proud. The cost of erecting the church was about Rs. 90,000/-"

## **The Great Fire:**

The date was July the 1<sup>st</sup> 1900. The time was around 12.30 p.m the church had originally a very high pitched roof of corrugated Iron sheets and for three or four days some five workmen of the PWD were engaged in soldering the sheets in order to render them watertight during the monsoons. After the gun-fire ( 12 noon) the workmen left for their meals and "it seems that in their absence somehow or other a stray spark from the workmen's stove ( which they affirm as having put out before going to their meals) must have ignited the boarding or the roof, which by the time the labourers had returned to their work, helped unfortunately by the strong wind that was blowing at the time, spread gradually away and when alarm was raised and assistance came, had taken a complete hold of the entire roof."

Soon the pews and floors were one mass of burning material and all trace of outline of the articles had gone; only the smoldering ends of the projecting joints were left of the roof. "The organ had disappeared into a heap of burning debris," says the Time of India of that same date, "covered over by red hot smoking sheets of corrugated iron, The Altar had also vanished and was lying mixed up in the burning flames; in fact the flames had licked up the church from Reredos to Baptismal font and nothing remains of burning pews, beaten every now and then into ashes by falling pieces of roofing. The beautiful stained glass windows have melted away as if by magic and the wire melting that was meant to protect them from accident had burnt up and disappeared."

Steps were then taken for restoration of the Church and it took about eleven months to do so and cost about Rs. 13,000/-. The restored church was greatly improved in the matter of ventilation by the new side doors and was expected to be much cooler and comfortable than before after a fixll year, Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1901 was fixed for opening service. The BDTA has recently donated Rs. 3, 00,000/- to this Church for renovation.