ST. ANDREW'S WATERSIDE CHURCH MISSION AT GRAVESEND

Home to the Fourth Portal

There is a sense of calm beauty as one enters this former seafarer chapel, nestled by the Thames in Gravesend. With stunning stained glass windows and a beautiful ceiling representing an upturned boat, it is a rare kind of place.

St. Andrew's construction was to serve the waterside community of Gravesend, Kent. In the mid-19th century, the river Thames, flowing alongside Gravesend, was alive with shipping vessels waiting to load cargoes or passengers and emigrants heading for Australia, New Zealand and the Americas. Smaller boats supplied the everyday needs of the larger ships, and the crews of these boats lived with their families and livestock on board a collection of hulks and old barges moored just offshore. If the tech company Deliveroo was around in the 1800s, would these same crews be using such an app to serve these large vessels?

Fourth Portal Attraction
Besides the beauty, the innovation associated with the building was the attraction for the Fourth Portal to move in.

A large £1000 donation from the daughter of Rear Admiral Francis Beaufort, KBE, who created the Beaufort Wind Scale, helped pay for the construction, alongside donations from townsfolk, including Charles Dickens. The Beaufort Scale is still used today for the Met Office marine forecasts, an empirical measure for describing wind intensity based on observed sea conditions. Plaques and windows dedicated to the HMS Terror and Erebus, two doomed ships searching for the Northwest Passage in 1845, were influential. The ships were full of cutting-edge technologies, including steam engines, the first canned food and early photographic equipment, and the Daguerreotype camera was amongst many innovations.

Literary connections to the church made important contributions to social change. Charles Dickens lived nearby, John Keats and Benjamin Franklin left England from the church steps, and the opening page of Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad begins on the beach outside.

Although the building of the church was to inspire religious teaching, the use of the word 'Mission', within the formal title, should not be underestimated. The mission was to encourage education, health and improving lives. The mission of the Fourth Portal is to demonstrate how innovation and technology can improve the lives of everyone while reducing the damage humans have done to the natural world.

Fourth Portal could not have a better home than St. Andrew's Waterside Church Mission at Gravesend. Come and visit www.fourthportal.com/gravesend.com