

CHAPTER 4
J.C.FORREST

J.C.Forrest died almost 65 years ago and so there will not be many people left in Essington who remember him in the flesh, yet for those connected with the Church in Essington the name is almost legendary.

In the village are a number of road names which pay tribute to men who served Essington well - Hawthorne Road, (W.E.Hawthorne), Parkes Crescent (Councillor Parkes), Kingsway, (Dr. King), Tudor Court, (C.Tudor), Vernon Way, (The Squire) and Forrest Avenue, (J.C.Forrest).

So who was this man who was held in such esteem that our Church building, (whose Foundation Stone was laid by his widow) is dedicated to his memory? Briefly, he was an industrialist and a philanthropist - his daughter, Muriel, once ruefully remarked that his only interest in making money was so that he could give it away!

John Charles Forrest was born on March 15th, 1859 in Spain where his father was a railway engineer. Mr. Forrest Snr. (Jacob) had great difficulty with the Spanish workmen who were Roman Catholics and whenever there was a Saint's Day of the least dimension they took the day off to go to mass at some distance. Jacob Forrest, therefore, engaged a Roman Catholic priest to live with the men and hold services on the spot! It worked, and the line to Madrid went ahead! His son, John Charles, had a similar knack of getting the work done and keeping the workmen happy.

The family returned to England in 1866 to live near Mold in Denbighshire. Eventually, after a brief flirtation with tin-mining, J.C. went to Bristol University to study coal mining. He then spent some time with a Mr. Peter Stigson and in 1882 secured the post of manager of Witley Colliery, Halesowen.



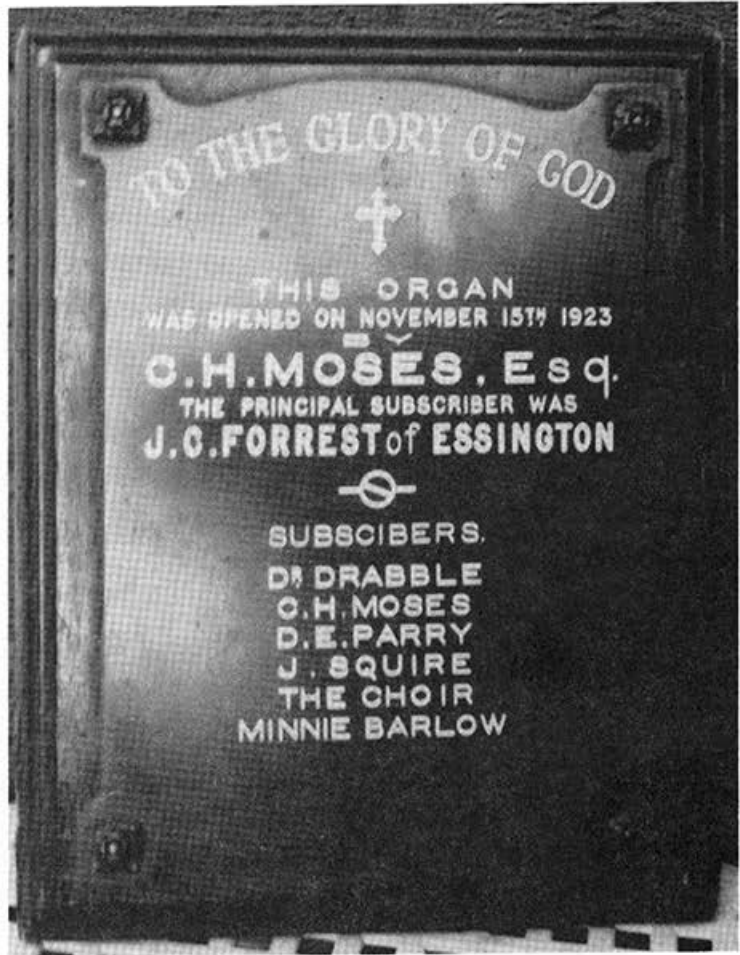
Mr. J.C. Forrest

He married in 1884 and lived at Witley Lodge, Halesowen. In 1892, J.C. Forrest was offered the job as manager of Holly Bank Colliery. A Mr. Broughall was living in Holly Bank House and as he did not want to leave, the Forrest family rented Moseley Hall (now Moseley Farm) for £50 per year! Four years later when Holly Bank House had been altered (it was previously surrounded by a moat) the family moved there and Holly Bank House was to be their home for the next 31 years.

The chequered history of Holly Bank Colliery is chronicled elsewhere, but managing Holly Bank (and eventually

Hilton Main) was only one of Mr. Forrest's commercial interests. At one time or other (and often several at the same time) he was a Director of a Slate Quarry in Llanberis, Managing Director of Wm. Harrison at Brownhills, Manager of Mid-Cannock Colliery, a Director of the John Russell Tube Works in Wednesbury and a Director of Noah Hingley's Anchor works.

His connections with, and generosity towards charitable institutions in the district are legion but here in Essington we remember him for his work at Holly Bank, his work on the Parish Council and his work as Churchwarden. In old Minute Books, both Parish and Church, there are numerous references to his generosity. In 1910 the Church Council proposed "a vote of thanks to Mr. Forrest for his liberal financial support during the past year"; in 1911 : "thanks to the Squire and Mr. Forrest for defraying the cost of renovating the Church"; in 1913 "thanks to the Squire and Mr. Forrest for their generous financial help"; and so on, virtually every year, until his death. Nor was this help confined to the Anglican Church - a plaque in Allen's Rough Chapel lists J.C. Forrest as the Principal subscriber to the cost of the organ. Neither was his generosity merely parochial - in the Church accounts for 1920 when £112. /13/1 was sent to the Church Missionary Society £100 of this was donated by J.C. Forrest.



Organ Plaque in Allen's Rough Methodist Church

The Parish Council too was equally appreciative of his help for in 1898 we read "that the Parish Council, having heard the report of the deputation who interviewed the Postmaster at Wolverhampton, approve the report and guarantee the sum of £30 per annum to the Postmaster General for granting a Telegraphic Station. That the offer of the Holly Bank Colliery to give a sub-guarantee to the Council for the above £30 be accepted with thanks."

Again in 1905 "that the Parish Council desires to place on record the thanks of the Council to Mr. Forrest and the Holly Bank Colliery for lighting a part of Essington."

These generousities, one feels, were only the tip of the iceberg. We shall never know the true extent of his philanthropy - and from what we hear of the man, nor would he wish it.

Finally, we quote from the sermon given by the then Bishop of Lichfield, (Dr. Kempthorne) at the laying of the Foundation Stone in 1932:- "The Church would be dedicated to the great apostle, St. John the Evangelist, and to the memory of one who bore a great affection for that place, Mr. J.C. Forrest. It was largely through his generosity that the building of the Church had been possible. He himself was a humble follower of our Lord and those who knew him best knew how he tried to carry his Christianity into his daily life. They knew he could be trusted and that the last person he would think about would be himself."

John Charles Forrest died suddenly on November 2nd 1927 at the age of 68, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Mary's, Bushbury.

The full extent of J.C. Forrest's benefaction to Essington Church will never be known for he was a man who went to some trouble to 'hide' or disguise his generosity so as not, in his own words "to drown the efforts of the rest of the parishioners".

Nevertheless from a study of accounts and letters it is safe to assume that of the £5,000 which had to be raised by the people of Essington, certainly 35% and possibly 45% came from his own pocket. It is clear also that Mr. Forrest used his influence and business 'know how' to tap other sources of income.

Small wonder that the Bishop said that it was owing to Mr. Forrest's influence, work and generosity that the building of the Church had become possible.

JOHN CHARLES FORREST

BORN 15TH MARCH, 1859.

DIED 2ND NOVEMBER, 1927.

Of whom, as of David, it might be said, "after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep."

Few have lived a life of more active usefulness. A man of great ability, known far and wide in the industrial world and trusted and respected by every class. Nowhere was he more loved and honoured than by those amongst whom he had lived for so many years—in Bushbury and in Essington. His sudden death filled us with a sense of almost hopeless bereavement and desolation, for he was the soul and inspiration (often in secret) of innumerable kindly actions. Behind the vast and complex activities of his business life was the quiet consistency of an earnest and deeply spiritual nature. His was a practical faith from which emanated a courageous optimism that stirred and stimulated the weaker to renewed energy and hope. The full extent of his labours for the good of his fellows, especially in our Parish, will never be fully known on earth. A staunch and loyal Churchman, the reality of whose faith was such as to give a vision that reached beyond the confines of one line of Christian thought to a sympathetic appreciation of all.

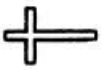
He believed in the power of the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ and was an earnest supporter of both home and foreign Missions, and had long associations with the Church Pastoral Aid Society and the Church Missionary Society. In the matter of our own great Parish, he was keenly interested in our problems of Church Extension and a member of the Bishop's Commission and Committee appointed to enquire into and deal with the question of Church Extension in the Wolverhampton District.

At Essington, where he lived, it was his long-sustained wish and endeavour to see the provision of a new Church and the district made into an independent Parish. In the wisdom of God he was taken before the realisation of his hopes—but we, who are left and have entered into his labours, look forward to the time when that Church shall stand as a memorial to a noble life—although his most enduring memory will always be within our hearts.

Our mourning mingles with the sorrow of his nearest and best loved, but knowing him for what he was the pain of mortal severance is lightened by the knowledge of his reward.

"What to thee is shadow, to Him is day
And the end He knoweth;
And not on a blind and aimless way
The Spirit goeth."

J. T. C.



The new Church of S. John the Evangelist,

ESSINGTON.



The Church is designed to be the Parish Church of the future separate Ecclesiastical Parish of Essington, and is to be Dedicated to the memory of the late Mr. J. C. Forrest.

The Site of three acres for the Church, Churchyard, and later a Vicarage, has been bought by money raised by the people of Essington.

The whole of the cost of the Church and equipment, with the exception of £1000 promised by the Bishop's Appeal Fund, and a gift of furniture from S. Peter's, Wolverhampton, and £700 still required, has been raised in the Parish.

PARISH OF BUSHBURY WITH ESSINGTON.



The Essington Church Building Committee announce that the Foundation Stone of their new Church will be laid by Mrs. J. C. Forrest, and the work Dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Lichfield, on Friday, September 30th, at 6 p.m., and hope to have the pleasure of the presence

of.....

and friends.

R.S.V.P.
Rev. J. T. Crathorne,
Bushbury Vicarage,
Wolverhampton.

P.T.O.