



Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City
Date:	30 July 2021
Classification:	For general release
Title:	Commemorative Green Plaque to Reverend Dr John Clifford, world-renowned Baptist Minister and social reformer at Westbourne Park Baptist Church, Porchester Road, W2 5DX
Wards Affected:	Bayswater
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The Green Plaque Scheme is funded by sponsorship, which has been secured for this plaque
Report of:	Richie Gibson, Head of City Promotions, Events and Filming

1. Executive summary

Victorian Nonconformist Minister John Clifford (1836–1923) rose from being an apprentice in a lace factory to become an outstanding leader in the Baptist community and a world-renowned social reformer.

He became a Minister at Praed Street Baptist Church in Paddington in 1858 where he remained until 1876 when the growth of his congregation led to the opening of a new chapel in Westbourne Park.

In the 1870s he emerged as a leader of the Baptist Church in England and held several senior positions including Presidency of the National Baptist Union in 1888, National Council of Evangelical Churches in 1898 and Baptist World Alliance, 1905-11.

He became a national political figure in 1899, helped to establish Westbourne Park Institute in Paddington to provide free adult education amongst many other achievements of national and international significance.

2. Recommendation

That the nomination for a commemorative Green Plaque to Rev Dr John Clifford at Westbourne Park Baptist Church, Porchester Road, W2 5DX, is approved.

3. **Reasons for decision**

Rev Dr John Clifford was a social reformer ahead of his time and has strong links with the local area as Minister of Praed Street Baptist Church and Westbourne Park. This strong local connection aligns with the aims of the Green Plaque scheme to create a sense of local pride and highlight local history.

As a Westminster resident, preacher, writer, propagandist and ardent Liberal and socialist politician, he became a powerful voice in the Nonconformist movement. He was an eloquent speaker, social reformer and opponent of sectarian bias in schooling.

4. **Policy context**

The Green Plaques scheme aims to highlight and improve awareness of Westminster's diverse cultural heritage and social history, provide information for visitors and to create a sense of pride in neighbourhoods.

5. **Background**

John Clifford was born in Sawley, a small village near Beeston in Nottinghamshire in 1836. His father worked as a machinist in a lace factory and was a follower of Chartist leader Thomas Cooper. After a brief education at the local school, 10-year-old Clifford gained employment in a lace factory which created a lasting impression that drove his social conscience. Over the next few years Clifford educated himself and by the age of 16 he had risen to the position of book keeper.

He was baptised at Beeston Baptist Chapel in 1851 and after two years as a lay preacher he was recommended by his church to the Midland Baptist College in Leicester where he began his training in 1855 before beginning an outstanding career in London.

Praed Street Baptist Church

In 1858, Clifford became a minister at Praed Street Baptist Church in Paddington. From here he attended University College and worked at the British Museum. He took his BA in 1861 and BSc in 1862 with honours in logic, moral philosophy, geology and palaeontology at London University. He achieved a MA in 1864 and law degree in 1866. He married Rebecca Carter in 1862 with whom he had four sons and two daughters.

By 1876 the growth of his congregation at Praed Street Church had grown considerably and a new chapel was opened in Westbourne Park. Clifford was a strong supporter of social reform and self-help and believed the church existed "not only for our spiritual improvement, but also and specifically for saving the souls and bodies of the people in the neighbourhood in which we are located."

He helped to establish Westbourne Park Institute in Paddington to provide free adult education, the Mutual Economic Benefit Society for sickness benefit, the Westbourne Permanent Building Society to encourage saving, and a labour bureau for those seeking work.

As a minister in London in the 1870s Clifford emerged as a Leader of the Baptist Church in England, holding several senior positions including the Presidency of the London Baptist Union (1879), National Baptist Union (1888) and, when the first Baptist World Congress was held in London in 1905 and resolved to form the Baptist World Alliance, Clifford was unanimously elected as president.

Clifford had become the father of social Christianity among Free Church men and

women in Great Britain. He felt that the message of Christ could be explained in the light of growing knowledge and experience. His attitude to new interpretations of the Bible put him into conflict with the conservative Charles H. Spurgeon, the celebrated Baptist minister of Victorian England, who declared that Clifford's evolutionary thinking and liberal theology threatened to downgrade the church with Unitarian ideas.

Politics

Clifford was a strong supporter of the Liberal Party. In 1899 he became a prominent campaigner against the Boer War and became president of the Stop the War Committee. He was a critic of the Union of South Africa's negotiated terms at the end of the war. He supported the disestablishment of the Church of England, Irish Home Rule and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. He was an advocate of Trade Unionism and strongly supported the Matchgirls (1888) and London Dockers (1889) in their struggles for better pay and working conditions.

Clifford became a Christian Socialist and in the 1918 General Election deserted the Liberals and instead supported the Labour Party. He joined the Fabian Society and wrote a series of pamphlets on social issues.

1902 Education Act

The proposed 1902 Education Bill attempted to overturn the 1870 Education Act created by William Gladstone. The 1870 Act had been popular with Nonconformists and socialists who, having been elected by ratepayers in each district, were able to obtain control over local schools.

The new legislation abolished school boards handing over their duties to local councils through new Local Education Authorities and for the first time, church schools were to receive public funds. Nonconformists and supporters of the Liberal and Labour parties campaigned against the proposed act, resenting the idea of Nonconformists contributing to the upkeep of Anglican schools. The school boards were also believed to stand for enlightenment and progress.

John Clifford led the campaign against the legislation on the basis that rates were being used to support the teaching of religious views to which some rate-payers were opposed; sectarian schools, supported by public funds were not under public control and teachers in sectarian schools were subject to religious tests.

Clifford argued that people who disagreed with the proposed Education Act should refuse to pay a portion of the rate to be spent on church schools. The National Passive Resistance Committee was set up with the motto "No Say, No Pay". Rate refusals started in the spring of 1903 but within weeks the Anti- Martyrdom League was formed to pay the rates that passive resisters withheld.

Despite the opposition, the Act was passed in December 1902 and Clifford wrote extensively about the legislation with a readership of hundreds of thousands.

Over the next four years 170 men went to prison for refusing to pay their share of school taxes. Clifford made 41 court appearances over the next 10 years.

The passive resistance movement, with Clifford as its chief leader, played a large part in the defeat of the Unionist Government in January 1906 and his efforts were then focused on getting a new Act passed. Following years of failure to find a practical solution to the education problem, a compromise which gave the denominationalists their say, was agreed.

Legacy

Clifford authored 99 books and pamphlets and edited denominational newspapers. His contributions were honoured by heads of government and institutions. In 1883, the Freewill Baptist Bates College in Maine USA conferred on him an honorary doctorate which he gracefully declined preferring to be known as the Pastor of Praed Street.

Clifford retired as Pastor of Westbourne Park in 1915, although he continued to remain connected to the church at various levels. He was appointed a Companion of Honour in the 1921 New Year Honours List, one of the first to receive this accolade.

He died on 20 November 1923 while attending a committee meeting at the Baptist Union headquarters in Southampton Row. Since his death, historians have accepted the important part he played in the development of the passive resistance movement. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King acknowledged his influence in their campaigns for independence and civil rights.

The church moved to a new building in 1876 and was bombed at the end of World War II. The building was replaced in 2019 and the Green Plaque is proposed at this site.

6. Financial Implications

The cost of production and installation will be covered by the sponsor, Westbourne Park Baptist Church.

7. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications for the proposed plaque.

8. Consultation

The nomination is supported by members of the independent Green Plaque panel due to Clifford's strong connection to Westminster, his important role in the community and his national and international standing.

The panel is chaired by Cllr Paul Swaddle. Members are: Adrian Autton, Former Development Manager, Westminster Archives and Local Studies; Helen Glew, Senior Lecturer in History, University of Westminster; Rachel Anthony, Committee Member, Westminster Guides and Colin Thom, Senior Research Associate, Survey of London, UCL Faculty of the Built Environment.

Westbourne Park Baptist Church are the plaque sponsors and own the site of the proposed plaque. The nomination is supported by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the London Baptist Association.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any
of the Background Papers, please contact:
Claire Appleby on 07971 026 113 or cappleby@westminster.gov.uk**

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Other implications

Appendix 1

Location plan showing Westbourne Park Baptist Church and the site of the plaque installation at 1:1250 scale.

Appendix 2

The proposed placement of the Rev Dr John Clifford Green Plaque on Westbourne Park Baptist Church, Porchester Road, W2 5DX.

Appendix 3

Wording and layout of the proposed Green Plaque.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE**

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation in the report entitled Commemorative Green Plaque to Rev Dr John Clifford at Westbourne Park Baptist Church, Praed Street, Paddington, W2 5DX.

Signed

Cabinet Member for Finance and Smart City

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

1.1 There are no resources implications arising from this report

2. Business Plan Implications

2.1 There are no Business Plan implications arising from this report

3. Risk Management Implications

3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

4.1 There are no health and safety and wellbeing issues arising from this report

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

5.1 There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report

6. Impact on the Environment

6.1 There are no environmental issues arising from this report

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report

8. Staffing Implications

8.1 There are no staffing issues arising from this report

9. Human Rights Implications

9.1 There are no issues relating to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report

10. Energy Measure Implications

10.1 There are no energy measure issues arising from this report

11. Communications Implications

11.1 The communications team will be made aware of the proposed Green Plaque