

## **Rev. Robert Sinclair**

Robert Sinclair (1883-1946) was the second resident Missionary of Martandam. He was born on 15th November, 1883, in Glasgow, Scotland. His father was Mr. John Sinclair who was a mason. Sinclair suffered a lot in his younger days due to the death of his father. He studied in Glasgow Theology College for two years and also in Nottingham Theology College. He was ordained as a minister in Scotland on 3rd March 1909. He came to Nagercoil in 1909 and he was given the responsibilities of Nagercoil District. On 20th December, 1910, his Holy Matrimony with Miss. Bessie Graham Smith was solemnised at the Nagercoil Home Church. Then he was transferred to Mathicode. While he was at Mathicode, he laid the foundation of Mathicode church building. Then he was transferred to Martandam to take up the responsibility of District Chairman from Rev. I.H. Hacker in June, 1919 and served till 1939.

The first task of Sinclair in Martandam was the completion of Mission Bungalow. Its work was started and left incomplete by his predecessor, Rev. I.H. Hacker, the first resident missionary at Martandam. Rev. Hacker built the down stairs of the missionary Bungalow in 1907 and stayed there from 1909. Adjacent to this building, another tiled building was constructed for the accommodating an Embroidery and Sewing School, run by Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker. (Present canteen and staff room of the college) Rev. Sinclair constructed the portico and the first floor of the Martandam Bungalow and stayed there from 1920 to 1939. Later, it was the Administrative Block of the N.M. Christian College, Martandam. The substantial rectangular tiled building built by him for housing the Boarding home for girls (1923) at the rear end of the Bungalow compound which later became the Chemistry Laboratory of N.M. Christian College

Sinclair took charge of the schools at Martandam as the Manager in 1919. He saw the existing Girls' School building weak and unprotective. The leakage of rain water inside the class room gave permanent hindrance to the students and to their studies. He decided to build a durable school building and now it forms the present LMS Boys Higher Secondary School Office Block building. Sinclair saw the Boys Middle School and Girls Middle School standing door to door. He wanted to keep the two schools away from each other. In view of that, he built another school building for girls at a distance of 300 meters away from the Boys School in 1929. It is the present L.M.S. Girls Higher Secondary School Office Block building. When the number of the missionary schools increased in South Travancore, there was a demand for trained teachers. Hence Sinclair started a Teachers Training School in May 1932

in the old Girls School building. In 1934, he built a Boarding Home for men students of the Teachers Training School. It became the Botany Department of the N.M. Christian College. The Training School functioned only upto 1945. Travancore Government introduced many changes in the field of education. Accordingly it took over 45 Mission Vernacular Primary Schools on lease and the Martandam Mission Vernacular School was one among them. Tamilnadu Government gave Rs.200 as monthly rent to the church. The vernacular Middle School is now LMS Boys Higher Secondary School. Girls Vernacular Middle School is now converted as the LMS Girls Higher Secondary School.

Sinclair wanted to establish a college after establishing schools for boys and girls. As a first step, he convened a meeting of the enlightened citizens of Martandam for consultations in 1937. But he could not carry forward his scheme owing to his wife's ill health. Mrs. Sinclair went home on furlough on 13th June, 1937 and Sinclair followed suit in June 1939. Sinclairs could not come back to India due to the Second World War. The buildings consisting of Bungalow, Sewing School, Boarding School and Teachers Training School were handed over to the N.M. Christian College in 1964 when the college was started by the Kanyakumari Diocese.

Rev. Sinclair built a marvellous stone Church at Martandam. In 1836, Rev. Charles Miller purchased a land at Martandam and established the church. Additional land was purchased by Rev. Newport and Rev. James Emlyn (30 acres). Till 1905, the Martandam church functioned under the supervision of the European missionaries of Parachalai Mission District. Rev. and Mrs. I.H. Hacker were the first British Missionaries who stayed at Martandam and conducted the ministry. The moment Rev. Hacker stayed here, Martandam became a part of Neyyoor Mission District. The arrival of Sinclair to Martandam in 1919, formed a landmark in the history of Martandam church. He was an expert architect. He was a qualified mason too. The Martandam Church was designed and built by him. It can be considered as an architectural marvel. The design of the front door of the church reflects his ingenuity and creative vision. The foundation stone was laid on 26th July, 1924 by Rev. C.G. Marshall. The church was consecrated by him on 13th May, 1933.

The condition of the Marthandam Church was so pitiable when he came to Marthandam. As the number of adherents further increased, the existing church was found very small. The existing church building was made of unburnt bricks and thatched roof. This building was used as church on Sundays and on the rest of the days as school. Sinclair

was not satisfied with the existing church as it was unhealthy and insufficient to accommodate the growing strength of the church. Therefore he wanted to construct a spacious cum strong church as a model one at Marthandam. To start with, Sinclair sent a letter to the Scottish architects to send a drawing for the construction of the new church. As per his letter, they sent a drawing for the new church. It was designed with a length of 120 feet, and breadth 50 feet as well as the height of 100 feet.

The expenses incurred on the construction work were drawn from different sources. It is said that the native Congregation gave Rs.5,000/- as donation. The income derived from the embroidery work was also spent on the construction. He got donation from his friends and relatives of foreign countries. His brother-in-law (his sister's husband), Doctor Ross, donated all the glass items which were used in this church in memory of his beloved wife. One of his Scottish friends, donated three faced tower clock which is installed in front of the tower at the height of 100 feet. Some labourers worked for half salary. All types of labourers who came from in and around Marthandam, worked for the construction of the church. Sinclair's father was a sculptural architect and he also inherited architectural taste from his father. He himself supervised the entire work and worked along with the labourers.

The construction of the church was started in 1924 and it was entrusted to Isravel Mason who was well versed in building construction. The church was constructed with dressed granite. Inside the church, six well-polished single stone pillars were installed in two rows between the side walls. Each row has three pillars. From these pillars, beautifully decorated arches were raised up to the roof. The roof was made of beautiful cement tiles imported from Scotland. The bell installed at the top of the tower was moulded at Glasgow Moulding Centre. Front altar flooring was made of marbles. Thus the structure of the Church was constructed with extreme perfection. He encouraged the native people to give more money for the Church construction. The construction work lasted for ten years and the church was dedicated on 13 May 1933. Sinclair continued as the Pastor of the Marthandam Church and with the consent of Sinclair, Rev. G.N. Moses was appointed as the Pastor of Marthandam Church on 11th December 1934. He worked along with Sinclair in the development of the church.

Sinclair was a highly pious and enthusiastic missionary in evangelistic works. He established a Revival Band and an Evangelistic Band. He was both its President and Treasurer. He bought a mini bus for Gospel work and his gospel team went to nearby areas at Puliyanvilagam, Kalachanthai, Airanthengu, Chennithottam and Kerala

for Gospel work. Sinclair donated a violin and a magic lantern to this band. The Evantelistic Band conducted convention at Mandaikadu and in the North Travancore regions. During the time of Rev. Sinclair, Christian Endeavour was established in the Martandam Church in 1930. At first, Christian Endeavour was organised by Rev. Francis Edward and his wife on 1st February 1881. In 1896, Rev. Huvert came to Quilon and worked along with Rev. Knowls at Parasalai and established the Christian Endeavour in all the Churches. Rev. A. Kesari, the President of the Travancore Church Council appointed Rev. D.M. Yesudas to establish the Endeavour in all the Churches in 1930. The aim of the Endeavour was to impart Christian knowledge to the youngsters and to train them in the way of devotion. From 1958 onwards Marthandam Church Pastor was appointed as its ex-office President.

Rev. Sinclair played a vital role in the growth and development of the Sunday School. The founder of the Sunday School in the world was Robert Raiks. In the Martandam church, it was inaugurated in 1898 by Rev. S. Mathias. The main object of the Sunday School stands to impart Biblical knowledge and Christian morals to the children and make them obedient to their parents and elders. It also aimed at moulding them as responsible citizens of the society as well as to the church and the nation. The Choir holds an important place in the church service. In 1924 Dr. Yesudas, the Secretary of the Marthandam Y.M.C.A. first organised the church choir during the time of Rev. Sinclair. Dr. Yesudas was well versed in English music. With the help of his baby organ, he taught music to the youth of the church. After his retirement an American woman continued her work with the baby organ. A few years later, Kampaslong church in Scotland presented a very beautiful and big organ to the church. In 1934, J.C. Joel from Neyyoor became the master of the church choir. Since then the church choir began to earn good name and fame in western music. Sinclair made arrangement for a convention by Sadu Singh on the Northern side of the Primary School. Some years later, he arranged for another with Sadu Kochu Kunju of Travancore as the main speaker.

Missionaries of L.M.S. founded libraries in different parts of South Travancore. In 1894, a library was started at Martandam by the then resident missionary, near the main road. Large number of villagers both Christians and non-Christians daily came to read and the total number of visitors during the year 1896 was 2562. A person was appointed in charge of this reading room. Afterwards the reading room was shifted to a separate building situated at the back side of the present church. During the period of Sinclair, the reading room was given to the Home Missionary Society. In memory of Rev. Sinclair, Sinclair Memorial Club

was founded in 1950 to promote high virtues in the youth. The club rendered valuable help to the members of church at times of wedding in their houses and occurrence of death. It developed fine arts by conducting dramas and cultural programmes in the church. It organised various Volleyball tournaments at the district level. The name Youngmen Fellowship which was inaugurated by Rev. A. Duraimoni in 1983 was changed into Sinclair Youngmen Fellowship in 1984.

Mrs. Bessie Sinclair did a yeomen service for the uplift of women. There was tremendous and impeccable growth in the lace Industry at Martandam during her period. Lace making industry was started by Mrs. Martha Mault for women at Nagercoil in 1821 to make the women independent by providing them self employment. She trained the women to make lace as a cottage industry. Later it was extended to other mission centres of Neyyoor, Parachalai and Martandam. During the period of Sinclair, Martandam Embroidery Industry became famous. As the clothes were exported to London and European countries, the Industry got huge income. The finished products were displayed in the exhibitions at Paris and London and won prizes. The income from this industry was spent for construction of churches, to give salary to the teachers and for the welfare of the poor. The LMS Lace Industry at Martandam became a centre of attraction to many poor women of the neraby places like Kanchirampuram, Karungal, Pacode, Kuzhithurai, Attoor and Arumanai. It flourished in the same building constructed by Mrs. Elizabeth Dymond Hacker till 1964. When the Kanyakumari diocese started a Christian College at Martandam, the lace industry building was given to the college. In its place, a new building was constructed for the lace industry very near to the L.M.S. Boys Higher Secondary School and still functions in this building.

Rev. Sinclair went to England in 1939 and he was not able to come back to India due to the outbreak of Second World War in 1939. To fill the gap, Rev. N.H. Harris of Christucoil, Palliyadi took charge of the Martandam church in 1939. Rev. Sinclair had many good Christian characters. He even pardoned a member of the church who assaulted him. Instead of punishing him, he gave a job in the church. Sinclair worked around the clock for the welfare of the church and people of Martandam. Sinclair took over the responsibility of a Pastor in one of the churches in England. He died on 12th September 1946 at Glascow in Scotland. The Sinclair Memorial Hall, Martandam within the Church premises was dedicated to his memory. The Sinclair Street in Martandam is named after him.