

## Were James Fegan & Charles Spurgeon friends?

Now Fegans and Spurgeons have united to form one charity, with a shared vision and mission, we have been keen to understand just how similar the two charities' heritage actually is. Did James and Charles ever actually meet? **With the help of keen historian and Fegans Old Boy, George Savage, we have identified lots of parallels...**



### Humble Beginnings

**Charles Spurgeon** was born in Essex in **1834** to a family of nonconformist ministers, he received a limited formal education. He then broke with family tradition in **1849** by becoming a Baptist. He attributed his conversion to a sermon at a Methodist chapel, which he had only entered due to a snowstorm. By **1854**, preaching had taken him to London where he became England's best known Baptist preacher.

### A Home for Children

**1867** A generous £20,000 donation from an Anglican widow, Anne Hillyard, enabled Spurgeon and his associates to open the Stockwell Orphanage in London. By **1877**, girls were also welcomed into the orphanage and over 500 children lived there. CHS died in **1900** but his work to improve the lives of children carried on. They even had a visit from the Duchess of York, who later became the Queen Mother. **1939** During WWII, the children living in Stockwell had to be evacuated to St. David's in Reigate, Surrey. In **1951** a new Spurgeons home in Birchington, Kent opened and by 1953 all of the children were relocated there. It remained open until **1979**, when children were then sent to smaller homes or foster families.

**James Fegan** was born in Southampton in **1852** and home educated until the age of 10. In **1869**, he joined a firm of brokers in London and experienced an intense religious conversion whilst reading a Greek play. The following year, he began teaching evenings at a Ragged school in addition to his City job. Time spent with the boys opened his eyes to the dire living conditions and inspired him to rent a cottage where destitute boys could come for shelter and education.

**1872** With a loan of £5 from friends, Fegan established his first children's home in Deptford. Further homes were then established in Greenwich and in Ramsgate. In **1900** with donations from friends, Fegan then bought an old school in Stony Stratford where he opened his first orphanage. He lived there with his wife, Mary, for 23 years. To provide a better life, Fegan helped the boys emigrate to Canada and in **1911** he opened the Goudhurst training farm in Kent to better equip them in Canadian farming techniques. Fegan died in 1925, but Mary continued his work until she died in **1943**. In the 1960s, Fegans' homes aligned with a national shift to smaller residential homes. In total, they provided care for over 7,500 children.

**Two remarkably similar stories; social action motivated by Christian faith within the same decades, funded by generous donors to transform the lives of vulnerable children...**

150 years later and the similarities remain, yet now we are working together for a greater impact! And as for the friendship question? Well, we have found no formal records of James and Charles being friends, but they were certainly aware and inspired by one another's work.