

*This is a scan of the text of a booklet written by Alan Wood to mark the 1983 Centenary
of the Congregational/URC Hall in the Upper High Street*

It may have crossed your mind as you entered the doors of this Hall, just how many other people have passed through this entrance. The answer must run into hundreds of thousands. Even just after it was first built, thousands were using the ample accommodation that it provided. As you read this account it will become apparent that the history of the Hall is in fact a history of the organisations which have met within.

The story really begins with the re-uniting, in 1878, of the Church Street Chapel and the Parade Church, as the Congregational Church in Epsom. In 1880, the deacons of the Church had come to the conclusion that the premises in Church Street and the Parade were no longer suitable for the Sunday Schools' growing needs: at that time about a hundred children met together at Church Street and about 200 at the Parade. They therefore decided to erect a new building specifically to accommodate the increasing number of children.

Mr. T. H. Norman was the chief instigator and benefactor of this new Hall building, and in the minutes of the Sunday School Teachers' Meeting of 3rd May 1881, "*Mr. Norman announced the purchase of a site for the new Schools.*" The building was to be erected by Dove Brothers of Islington from designs by Mr. W. T. Church, a little-known architect.

The foundation stone was laid by Evan Spicer on 27th July 1882, and two memorial stones were laid by Mrs. T. Norman and Mrs. Horace Marshall. Mr. Spicer is quoted as saying, "*it is hoped that the building will open free of debt*" and many pledges were made that day.

The builders must have progressed very well as the first recorded Sunday School Meetings in the new Hall were on 7th January 1883 when, in the morning, 280 were present with 34 teachers, and 356 children and 45 teachers attended in the afternoon. To assist their worship, Mrs. T. Norman had presented them with an American organ which was greatly appreciated.

In the *Epsom Herald* of the 6th January 1883, it was stated that the official opening of the Hall would take place on 24th January, but due to Mr Norman's illness, this had to be postponed until 8th February when he had recovered sufficiently to attend the ceremony. The building was declared open by W. Gage Spicer who was a leading international Congregationalist. Contemporary reports state that the building costs were £2,716 7s 3d and, as hoped, it was opened free of debt,

Immediately, the Hall took its place in the life of the town, as the *Herald* of 17th February reports: "*a Penny Reading was given in the new Sunday School on Monday evening when there was a crowded audience*". Under the leadership of Mr. T. H. Norman as Superintendent and staff of 46 teachers, the Sunday School rapidly grew to a membership of well over 500, in fact, at one Magic Lantern Lecture there was an audience of 541 children.

The social conditions of the times are seen when one reads that the School was closed for two months because of an outbreak of Scarlet Fever, and it wasn't sure that all the scholars would return when it re-opened.

It is possibly interesting to note that each year the Sunday School would have two treats, one in the summer at The Wells, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Norman, and in the winter, at the Sunday School, a "tea and entertainment", the entertainment often taking the form of a Magic Lantern Lecture. One of the special services that were held was the Flower Service and Prize-giving, this was arranged for the date of "Show-out Sunday" during the Epsom Race Meeting as a counter-attraction to the dubious enticements of the Downs.

In 1884, a Sunday School was started by the Parish Church, and this caused slight irregularity of attendances, but numbers were generally maintained at around 500 each Sunday. Great importance was put upon regularity and large attendances, as is shown in the minutes of that time.

The Band of Hope, a gospel temperance society, was formed on 21st October 1884. The members pledged to abstain from intoxicating drink as a beverage, and by 1890 the group had 587 members.

The original design of the front steps must have proved inadequate, as in 1885 it was decided to construct a wider top step and a new flight; at a cost of £19 13s 8d, and two iron side rails were added at an extra cost of £12,

In 1887, it was suggested by Mr. Gow, a Church deacon and Sunday School teacher, that a week-night activity should be organised at the Hall to retain the interest of the older boys, and it was Mr. Gow who organised the Band of Hope Cricket Club in 1889. By 1891 however, the funds could not stretch to 6/- for a pair of wicket-keeper's gloves (and so Mr. T. H. Norman paid this expense).

In the same year the summer treat was an outing to Bognor and for the winter treat the entertainment was provided by a team of hand-bell ringers. While on the subject of entertainments, the winter treat for 1893, a Magic Lantern Lecture, was not successful as there was insufficient gas pressure to light the Lantern! The membership of the Sunday School had increased to 765 by that year, that being the high point.

So we now see the users of the Hall settled into a more or less regular routine; the Sunday School meeting twice each Sunday, with the leaders showing great concern over the somewhat continuous slight fall in numbers; their winter treats in the Hall, and the summer treats by special train to one of the south coast resorts; their Anniversary Services each February followed a few days later by the Public Entertainment, the highlight of their year; the Band of Hope meeting every Tuesday with their special services and treats, the Cricket Club continuing, and then the Sunday School starting a Cricket Club in 1900 on a £3 budget. Other happenings worth mentioning are the purchase in 1898 of new hymn books for the Sunday School, and then in 1900 asking Mr. Frank Harsant to teach singing to the children; in 1895 the formation of a Boys' Brigade company was discussed but came to nothing on that occasion.

In 1903 Mr. Woolford the caretaker gave up his post to Mr. Ede, and we get the first mention of this famous family in the annals of the Church. Mr. Ede was caretaker, full time, until 1920; Mrs. Ede taught in the Sunday School for many years; his daughter, Miss Ede, started the Band of Hope Orchestra in 1908, some of her musicians progressing on to the Royal School of Music, ran violin classes, started and ran the Girls' Life Brigade and even found time to help her father in his caretaking duties; and J. Chuter Ede, never a Deacon but obviously a 'doer' who even then showed signs of things to come (he later advanced to the position of Home Secretary and Epsom's Charter Mayor).

The Church made use of the Hall too. Possibly due to the increasing dilapidation and small size of the Church Street Chapel, evening services were held there for many years. During the rebuilding of the Church the Bishop organ was dismantled and re-erected in the Hall, the platform being specially strengthened to receive it. A licence was obtained to allow weddings to take place there, the first being that of Mr. Charles Longhurst, a Deacon and Miss Nell Elson, daughter of a Deacon, and both Sunday School teachers, on 6th July 1904.

In 1905 the organ was reinstalled in the newly built Church, and there followed much discussion on the continuance of evening services at the Hall. It was decided to hold them monthly, but these services acted in competition with those held at the Church, so were eventually discontinued.

With the opening of the new Church and the need to boost the finances, the Trustees felt that secular lettings could be made, and the Trust Deed was varied to allow this. Badminton was the first regular letting of this kind, and in spite of many lapses and changes in leaders over the years, is still going today. Perhaps as an antidote, at the same time Miss Robbins started the Christian Endeavour group at the Hall.

In 1907 certain alterations were carried out, including making the main doors open outwards and the fitting of an exterior light above the steps, and in 1908 the main Hall got electric lighting. In 1911 modifications were made to the platform railing to make it easily removable.

The Hall Management Committee had got the Hall free from rates, but certain groups considered that they were in breach of the conditions and felt that they should leave, so in 1910 the Hall was rated and could then be let with a clear conscience; a special sub-committee was formed to deal with lettings. Charges ranged from £2 2s for the Main Hall to 5/- for a small downstairs room. The Epsom Brotherhood was one of the more lucrative lettings, having a yearly contract which enabled them to pay £10 10s for room hire valued at £78 3s.

1911 also saw the start of three-day sales of work. This is hard to imagine now in these times of 3-hour Jumble Sales!. The hirers got a guinea reduction for the three days which cost them £5 5s. The use of the Hall had increased so much that in 1912 it was stated that 20,000 people had visited the Hall through lettings and 30,000 for Church purposes.

Due to the increased use of the Hall, the Management considered it necessary to install a fire escape and fit fire appliances, and in 1918 the Urban District Council recommended a second exit and iron staircase, and the fire hydrant.

New Youth Groups were started around this time. Miss Ede's Girls' Life Brigade was started in 1916, and carried on under her leadership into the forties, and in 1919 Mr. B. E. White started the Boys' Life Brigade. The Girls' organisation flourished for many years whereas the Boys' Life Brigade went through a bad patch until the organisation merged with the Boys' Brigade in 1926. It is interesting to note that as the 5th Mid Surrey Boys' Brigade developed from the 1st Epsom Boys' Life Brigade, the B.L.B. forage cap was retained in the B.B. in preference to the well-known "pill-box".

The only war service the Hall saw in the 1st World War was the allocation for a short time of four rooms for recruitment.

After the war the Hall was in use every day of the week for Church and Youth organisations, causing quite a headache for the letting sub-committee especially when approached by outside organisations wanting the occasional let. Facilities were improved in 1919 with the addition of electric light downstairs and in 1920 with the purchase by the Girls' Life Brigade of gymnastic equipment including a gymnasium beam.

A full time let during the day was well-established by 1923 with Miss Gray's School. This primary and infant school occupied the whole building and continued for over twenty years feeding schools like Rosebery and Epsom County Boys' School.

In 1924 the Licensing Committee of the Surrey County Council required work to be carried out to bring the Hall up to the standard required for dramatic performances. This then enabled the Epsom Players to put a play on for a one-week run, and was the first of many dramatic productions over the next fifty years.

Then in 1926 Mr. T. H. Norman died. Many tributes were made at the time to this great man who had been Secretary of the Parade Church since 1875, had bought the site in 1881 and delivered it to the Trustees in 1882, had been the prime mover behind the building, was Superintendent of the Sunday School since 1883 and had been almost non-stop on the Lecture Hall Management Committee and the Diaconate of the Church. We wonder what he would think of the Hall today.

However, the life of the Hall went on; but continued use by Church, Youth and outside groups was taking its toll of the fabric of the building.

The costs of the Lecture Hall were increasingly worrying to the members of the Finance Committee, the deficit had been getting larger each year; on 25th June 1928 the Deacons received a letter stating the 1/- rent had been paid for one window. Although many times it was suggested that the Lecture Hall Committee should have a meeting, it was not until 29th May, 1928 that they finally met to discuss this problem. The Committee received the impression that the expenses were too high; it cost more than the Wesleyan because the Hall was rated, and had a full-time caretaker. The Committee put forward the suggestion that the societies using the Hall should each make a contribution towards its upkeep. A meeting was held at the Lecture Hall for all the leaders of organisations with a view to asking them this.

On 29th October 1928, the Lecture Hall and Finance Committees met together and proposed that estimates and sketch plans should be obtained for the erection of two lock-up shops in front of the Lecture Hall. In the following year, at a Deacons' meeting on 28th January, it was recommended by the Finance Committee that two shops be erected in the forecourt of the Lecture Hall at a cost of £1,000, subject to the Trustees approval, only three of whom survived. The Deacons therefore arranged a special meeting for 4th March to elect sufficient Trustees to bring them up to the full quota of thirteen. The proposal for the erection of the shops was then carried and it was decided to seek expert outside advice, Mr. B. E. White being put in charge of this task.

Because of the deficit in the Lecture Hall account, the rental for Miss Gray's School was increased to £95, but she had the use of the gymnasium apparatus free. It was suggested that a

portable platform should be placed in the Hall, but this idea was rejected. The forms belonging to the old Sunday School were disposed of, some of these were taken to Epsom Downs Station for the use of Mrs. Shelbert who would often cater for large parties of children.

It was in March 1930 that the proposals regarding the shops were passed, the architects commissioned for the design work were Williams and Pettitt, and Skelton's tender of £912 was accepted on 14th August. By 3rd November, one of the shops had already been let, and the other was due for completion in December. It is recorded that in 1931, both the shops were let to Flora and Stella Campbell.

During this period the Hall continued, to be used regularly by organisations associated with the Church, these included Boys' Brigade, Girls' Life Brigade, Regnal League, Girls' Guild and British Camp Fire Girls. Following the affiliation between the Girls' Guild and the Camp Fire Girls under Mrs. Stowell, they were warned against poaching from the Girls' Life Brigade under Miss Ede. 1930 also saw the start of a new temperance organisation formed by Mrs. B. E. White, called the White Ribboners. The Church also used the Hall for its own purposes; each Sunday the Boys' Brigade Bible Class worshipped there in the morning and the Sunday School was still held in the afternoon and on 14th and 15th May a Maytime Fair was held which was a great success, and raised the grand total of £257 1s 3d. In 1931, Mr. B.E. White and Miss Ede were congratulated following the Girls' Life Brigade and Boys' Brigade Displays. A suggestion was made, though there is no evidence whether it was acted upon, that the Camp Fire Girls led by Mrs. Stowell be asked to superintend the cleaning of the lavatories, it was also suggested that £10 profit from the forthcoming Bazaar be put aside to provide a curtain at the rear of the stage. One suggestion that was raised by the Deacons in 1931 of providing a reading room for the un-employed, was not acted upon.

To help offset the deficit more lettings were made including those of the Brotherhood Male Voice Choir and the Banstead and Ewell Prize Band, but the deficit still gave cause for concern. A Jumble Sale was arranged in November 1932 to raise funds for the Lecture Hall and this realised about £16. In February 1933 the Baptists paid £1 1s to hold their Tea Meeting there.

Annual Church events held at the Hall at this time included the Sunday School Parents' Social and the Harvest Supper – or 'Harvest Home' as it was sometimes known. An extra event held there in 1933 was the wedding reception of Mr. and Mrs. R. Wood on 11th March.

The Regnal League made themselves very useful around this time, they had offered to decorate the Primary Room in 1932, and in April the following year Mr. Lewis had offered the resources of the Regnal League to spring-clean the vestibule at the Hall, there having been a fire under the front staircase. This work was duly completed, and as quoted from the Women's Church Council Meeting of 28th July, had been "*done in splendid manner*". It was not all work for the Regnal League; senior members of the Boys Brigade joined them to play badminton with the Club formed by the League in 1930.

One purchase made for the Hall in 1939 was that of a much required piano, and this was offered at just the cost of carriage.

The outside lettings continued, still trying to bring in extra cash for the Lecture Hall fund. One such letting was for an Ideal Home Sale which was held on 31st October 1933. For this the Hall was categorised into rooms of a house. The sale opened at 3 p.m. and went on until 10 p.m. in the evening. In the following year it was let for a hair-dressing demonstration to take place.

On 4th June 1935, Mr. Saunders resigned from the Sunday School Superintendency, and he was presented with an inscribed watch. Also in that year on September 16th a farewell party was held for the very popular Congregational Minister, the Reverend E. Hitchcock. Over two hundred people attended the get-together at the Lecture Hall.

The new Superintendent of the Sunday School was Mr. John Warner, and the number of children on the Roll was over 300, with a staff of 15 to 20. The teachers included Ethel Coombes, Olive Girt, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, Anne Longhurst, 'Pony' Moore, Joyce Osmond, Mr. and Mrs. Stowell, Alice Taylor and Muriel Warner.

At that time movable partitions in the Main Hall could be formed into about eight classes; the other classes, including the Primary Department, were held in the hall and rooms below. Frequent tea

parties were arranged, probably because Mrs. Shelbert, who managed the Tea Rooms at Epsom Downs Station, being a Church member, could quite easily organise them at the Lecture Hall.

The Sunday School Anniversary was always a great annual event, and with a school of over 300 there was ample talent to present a very good concert on the Monday evening after the special services on the previous day. These concerts were always well supported by the parents wishing to see their children perform, that the Lecture Hall was almost bursting at the seams.

Another notable annual event was the Sunday School outing to Bognor or Littlehampton, and a special train from Epsom had to be arranged for this trip.

In 1940, the evacuation of children away from the bombing together with the depletion of the staff on war service meant that the Sunday School could not continue.

There was increasing concern over the cleanliness of the Hall; back in 1934 it had been closed for the month of August whilst repairs were carried out by Uden and Company, and also there was the bad condition of the sink and poor method of heating water, which were left to Mr. H. Longhurst to deal with; the Guild Room was decorated by Mr. Hook. In 1936 it was proposed that there should be new lighting installed, and the following year saw a hand rail erected for the front steps, new rear gate, work done on the boiler and in the kitchen, and the removal of partitions in the Upper Hall, as they were no longer required by the Sunday School.

A new piano was purchased from Weston's in 1936; donations were received for this, but the Women's Church Council had to hold a Cake Sale in January 1937, to defray the outstanding £2, and in 1937 a first aid kit was provided for use at the Hall.

As 1937 was the Coronation Year of George VI, the Girls' Life Brigade all wore tunics of red, white and blue at their Annual Display.

At a meeting of the Sunday School teachers on 26th July 1937, it was decided to reorganise the Sunday School Service. The Minister, Reverend S. John Bates, promised to conduct the service each week for six months, and it would be known as the Young People's Service, it was to be held between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Sunday afternoons. The Primary Department would continue under the leadership of Miss Gibbs. A circular about this was sent to all parents and distributed to all houses in the district where there were children. This Young People's Service made a very promising beginning.

A Grand Bazaar was suggested to celebrate the two hundred and fiftieth Anniversary of the Church. This would take place on 2nd, 3rd and 4th November, 1937, and would be based on the theme 'Old Epsom'. The children's choir performed at the Saturday afternoon session of the Fair.

The job of 'letting manager' fell to Mr. Moseley in 1937, and in January the following year it was decided that more particular order was to be made as to the various societies who used the rooms at the Lecture Hall, and so put the arrangements on a more definite and business-like footing.

1938 was a very active time for the Church at the Lecture Hall, that being the two hundred and fiftieth Anniversary. On February 14th a Valentine's Party was held. The Hall was decorated with a gross of balloons, and refreshments were provided by the Women's Church Council. Admission was by ticket at 1/- each, and the profit was to be given to the Church Calendar Fund. It is interesting to note from the Women's Church Council minutes that the party was "*a great success, but next time refreshments should be more substantial and more in quantity*". Another Social was held on Vestry Day on 27th April and on Saturday 10th September, the London Missionary Society arranged a Country Walk for about 60 young people, and they visited the Lecture Hall for tea at the invitation of the Women's Church Council. Mrs. Shelbert was asked to provide a good tea at 1/3d per head, and she was to see that the "*tables are daintily set out*". A reception was also held at the Lecture Hall on 30th November, the invitation was extended to many old members and friends of the Church; 175 people accepted the invitation. There was also a cookery demonstration given by the United Dairies at the Hall.

A Gift Day was held on 20th April 1939, to raise money for the 250th Anniversary Fund. Reverend Bates sat for two hours at the Church collecting donations, and the grand total of £123 was realised. In the evening a social was held at the Hall.

There was a certain amount of concern about the damage that had been done to the Hall by the societies meeting there, and it was suggested that a sub-committee should be formed among the users, to try to improve matters. There were still new organisations wanting to use the premises, and in 1939 Mr. Charles Watkins applied for a Badminton Club to use the Main Hall on Tuesday evenings.

It was always useful to have a Hall that could be used at short notice. Many garden parties were arranged by various members of the Women's Church Council, and when the weather was wet they would be moved to the Hall.

The War in 1939 brought many changes to the Lecture Hall. It was recorded in the Women's Church Council minutes of that year that it would be too expensive to 'black-out' the Principal Hall, but the lower rooms should be blacked-out, and that the long room under the entrance steps should be prepared as an air-raid shelter, and the windows boarded up. The Camp Fire Girls who each week had distributed the Church flowers, decided that because of the black-out they could no longer carry out this service. The Young People's Service returned to the Hall on Sunday afternoons under the leadership of Mrs. Gibbs, and Miss Ede was invited to take the Primary Department. The Church safe was also removed to the Lecture Hall during the war, and according to the Deacons' minutes of that time it would be returned to the Church when 'appointed persons' had been appointed, which occurred in 1946. The services of Mrs. Scott, the assistant caretaker who had been appointed in the previous year paid at a rate of 5/- per week, were dispensed with because there were reduced lettings during the war.

The fellowship group 'Four Ships' arranged a social in aid of the Knitting Circle, on 1st April 1940. This was attended by about fifty friends who enjoyed a very pleasant evening of competitions and games, raising £3.9s.6d. for the Wool Fund.

The basement at the Lecture Hall was still being used as a school, and so the Management Committee requested that the building should not be requisitioned for military use, though permission was granted to allow the Hall to be used as an emergency medical unit in the event of an air-raid. It was also offered as a temporary sanctuary for refugees and those made homeless.

Also during the war the men and women in squads of six or seven people, who were on fire-watching duty every eighth night, would sleep downstairs, at the Lecture Hall, with men in one room and women in another, with many mice. The camp beds, stirrup pumps and tin hats were provided for them by the A.R.P.

The minutes of the Women's Church Council meeting of 29th July, reveal that it had been proposed to provide a Club and Canteen for soldiers at the Lecture Hall, in conjunction with the Y.M.C.A. Preparations for this Club went ahead throughout the Battle of Britain, and at the height of the air raids on London, and eventually on Tuesday, 8th October, 1940, Epsom Services Club and Y.M.C.A. was opened by Mrs. G. Wills Taylor, with Alderman G. Wills Taylor, the Mayor at that time and first President of the Club, in the chair. By October 1941 the Club was 'one of the best equipped and most flourishing Clubs in the South of England. It provided a Canteen with two kitchens, cloak rooms, a lounge, library, reading and writing room, table-tennis, billiards and darts. There was a staff of 150 volunteers from around the town to look after the needs of the servicemen and to maintain and do the housework of the Club. Entertainment was also provided, arranged for by the Entertainments' Secretary, Miss Doris Elphick.

All the rooms at the Lecture Hall were put at the disposal of the services seven days a week from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., and so the Girls' Life Brigade moved to Lintons Lane School, and it was while they were meeting there in 1943, that Miss Ede resigned. As a small service the older girls had a rota for washing and wiping-up on the Sunday afternoons at the Club, and on one Boxing Day they swept the Upper Hall to give the caretaker a day off.

Money had to be raised to pay for the black-out curtains, and so a Brine and Buy Sale arranged by the Women's Church Council was held on 19th November 1940. Unfortunately this was not very well advertised and it only managed to realise £3 15s 8d, the amount required being about £25. Another Bring and Buy Sale was held on 26th March, the following year, and this was much more successful, making a total of £9 0s 3d. Yet another Bring and Buy Sale held on 5th October 1943 realised £6 16s 4d, even though it had been poorly advertised, and was not well attended.

In 1942 the Hall continued to be mainly used by the Epsom Services Club, and as it could be used as a place for refugees, it was given a lower rating. If it was ever needed for this purpose then the Services Club would organise everything.

Campbells, who were the tenants of both the adjoining shops found they were unable to continue renting both premises, and therefore the rent was reduced by £50 per annum in 1942. The caretaker's wages were increased from 65/- to 70/- per week.

In 1943 the Y.M.C.A. and Services Club decorated the Hall, using paint that had been purchased at cost price.

1943 saw the start of the publication 'Forces Flash', this was the forerunner of the Congregational Church's News Letter, and was produced to keep members in touch with the Church friends who were in H.M. Forces.

The Women's Church Council held a Bring and Buy Sale on October 25th 1944 to raise money to pay for Christmas greetings from the Congregational Church to those friends working with H.M. Forces abroad and in other parts of England. This was very successful and raised £7 1s 8d for the purchase of Christmas Remembrance booklets.

Also in 1944 the local Jewish community requested use of the Lecture Hall for their Day of Atonement. This was their first introduction to the premises in Upper High Street.

During its time at the Lecture Hall, the Epsom Services Club would celebrate each anniversary of its opening with a week of celebration, and a service of thanksgiving at the Congregational Church. It was a very sad occasion when the Final Closing Social Evening was held on Wednesday, 27th July, 1945. A special programme was arranged by Miss Doris Elphick, and the well-known baritone, Ian Wallace took part in the entertainment. The Mayor spoke of the good work done by all the people involved in the Club from its commencement.

Church socials are always very popular, and another one was organised on 4th January 1945 the refreshments, as was so often the case, were provided by Mrs. Shelbert. The Harvest Supper with tickets at 1/6 each was also supplied by Mrs. Shelbert, and took place on 1st October. This was a great success.

In March 1945 a Youth Club was formed, but it was also reported that the Girls' Life Brigade disbanded. The equipment belonging to the Girls' Life Brigade was to be kept for the other youth groups meeting at the Hall. The new caretaker of the Hall was Mr. Thornton, on a salary of £3 10s per week.

The Campbells vacated the shops, on the Lecture Hall forecourt in 1945 and after several enquiries they were let to Williams Fine Arts. In 1946 these new tenants applied for the use of Room 1, but this was refused.

The Women's Church Council were kept very busy at the Hall in 1946; on 12th January there was a successful Christmas Party; on 22nd May the Annual Church Meeting was held there, refreshments being provided by Mrs. Shelbert; on Wednesday, October 9th, there was a special Church social for friends to meet Rev. E. Hitchcock who had been made Minister Emeritus of the Church the previous Sunday; also a social for Rev. E. Hitchcock's ministerial Jubilee celebrations, and a special tea for the Rev. Bates' 10th Anniversary were arranged. In addition to these local events, the Ministers, about 25 of them, of the Surrey Congregational Union, were invited for tea at the Lecture Hall on Tuesday, 2nd April, and on Wednesday, 3rd there was a meeting of delegates, followed at 5.15 p.m. by a tea at the cost of 1/- each. About 300 people were served.

Some of the tablecloths which had been used by the Y.M.C.A. were greatly in need of repair, and so a working-party was arranged to set about this task.

A number of repairs and alterations were made at the Hall in 1946; the Youth Club levelled the gallery floors the gate latch was repaired the window bars fitted; the billiard table was re-covered; the sign was replaced; room 7 was set aside for ladies, and chairs were bought for the Hall. More societies moved into the Hall; there was the formation of the Girl Guides under the leadership of Miss M. White and also the Brownies, led by Miss Patsy White, The Guides were an open Company and seemed to fulfil a need in the town, as it rapidly grew to a Company of 60 Guides. The Jews had the use of the Minor Hall on Saturday and Sunday mornings, as a Synagogue.

In 1947 it was decided that the societies should help to pay off the deficit, and so a Christmas Fair was arranged by the Youth organisations. This was very well attended and raised about £130.

Outside lettings were again encouraged, and Surrey County Council was regarding a canteen for school meals for Epsom County Secondary Boys' School. This began in September and brought in an income of £200 per annum. The Ministry of Food hired the Hall for a demonstration of 'bottling food'. Miss Gray's School was closed, except for the infants, but even that was running down. Mrs. Gosling managed to keep this open for another year.

The annual Harvest social was held on 29th September, and perhaps it was a sign of the times, although it was a success, it was written in the Women's Church Council minutes that 'the refreshments were not very plentiful or varied'.

Mr. Thornton resigned his post as caretaker in 1948 and he was succeeded by Mr. Morden of West Ewell, who used to attend the Sunday School, in December. The societies cleared the Hall before the new caretaker took over.

At the least excuse, parties and socials, etc., were arranged, and so on 7th January the annual Church Party was held; members of the Church were invited by Minister and Deacons to an evening of games, competitions and supper refreshments. On Sunday 1st February, a tea party was arranged to welcome a young American graduate, Miss McMaster, who was visiting the Church: the heads of various Church organisations received invitations. Then, on 31st March, a Thanksgiving Day was held at the Church in the afternoon and the Hall in the evening when a film was shown and refreshments provided. The Minister and Harrison Longhurst received gifts for L.M.S., who required £50, the Home Churches Fund, who received £75 and £150 for the Congregational Church. The Harvest Supper on 22nd September was reported to be 'better than usual', but it was a sad occasion as it was a farewell party for Rev. S. J. Bates.

The Women's Church Council decided that the carpet on the Lecture Hall stage should be collected and shampooed by the Patent Steam Carpet Beating Company (Thornton Heath), as it had not been cleaned since the Hall was used by the Services Club and Y.M.C.A. during the war. Also the brown velvet stage curtains needed cleaning, and so were sent to the 'Woodcote Laundry'. The Council also decided that there should be an improved method of hanging the curtains.

The newly formed Youth Centre was managed by a Parliament of 16 young people, and in 1948 they started a Youth Centre Wall Magazine beneath the gallery in the Main Hall. In April they performed the play 'Quality Street'.

1949 began with the Junior Church having a party on 3rd January, followed by the Church New Year Party on 5th. Gift Day was held on April 27th at which the church organist, Mr. T. W. Hutt, organised a musical programme and the Guides performed a play. The amount of £298 was raised. The Annual Church Meeting was also held at the Hall. The Boys' Brigade were asked to perform their sketch, 'The Smuggler's Cave' at the Harvest supper, and this was well received. A re-union of servicemen was held on 5th November, prior to Remembrance Day when the Memorial would be unveiled in the Church.

The Youth Centre was very active, and the members decorated the Minor Hall and the School Room. They also held a Jumble Sale, and a Christmas Fair that realised £81.

There was a change in the Captaincy of the Boys' Brigade when in September, Mr. Thornton resigned, but his post was soon filled by John Dearing who became Captain in November the same year. However, in 1950 John Dearing resigned and was succeeded by Mr. L. Palmer. Also in 1949 Mrs. Warner took over as Captain of the Girl Guides from Miss White, and the Company flourished.

In July 1950 it was discovered that the Main Hall ceiling was dangerous, the work on this was completed in September, at a cost of £212. Also in that year the Hall was rewired.

The annual production of the Youth Centre was 'Dear Octopus' which was greatly enjoyed as can be seen from the News Letter of the time. Other social events of 1950 were the Harvest supper in the form of a buffet, on Wednesday, 8th October; an Autumn Fair which raised about £15 on 28th October and a Christmas Party for L.M.S. on 13th December and on 29th August a tea was provided at the Lecture Hall for the children of Southsea Congregational Church, after their outing to Chessington Zoo.

The Baptists asked if they could have the use of the Lecture Hall for their Sunday School, but this application was refused, and in 1951 the Congregational Sunday School was restarted.

Once again the Lecture Hall Committee was concerned with the finances of the Hall. It was felt that the caretaker was not giving value for money. The fences were in need of repair and the outside lavatories needed to be cleaned up and painted. The Youth Club volunteered to decorate the upper kitchen in the holidays.

It was decided that an Autumn Fair would be held. This event would give an opportunity for the various societies of the Lecture Hall to make a corporate effort to help with expenses.

'Arms and the Man' was the 1951 production from the Youth Centre and was performed on 5th, 6th and 7th April. On 1st October a member of the Congregational Union spoke at the Harvest supper.

The Boys' Brigade suffered the loss of about thirteen officers and senior boys, due to National Service and other reasons; two others, Pamela Austen and Hugh West were married and moved away. John Dearing was therefore asked to return as Captain of that organisation.

In 1952, the usual social events took place at the Hall including a New Year Party, Annual Church Meeting, Harvest supper, Autumn Fair and another Church Party. In addition to those a special anniversary party was arranged for Rev. S.E. Baker on 3rd March and the Youth Centre received a visit from Jack Crump, who was the Olympic Team Manager, and in April the Centre produced 'Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure'.

In July, more repairs were carried out at the Lecture Hall including those done to the stairs, corridor and floors of some rooms. The Youth Club were asked to decorate the School Room. In the following year repairs were made to the back fence and gutters. The outside toilets were to be padlocked because of the use by the general public. A grand piano was presented in October 1953 for use in the Lecture Hall, by Mr. and Mrs. Johnston.

Surrey County Council ceased using the Lecture Hall as a school canteen in March 1954, and the Hall Committee suggested that for reasons of economy they could now dispense with the services of the caretaker, and each society would have to be responsible for leaving the Hall clean after use.

In addition to the usual events held at the Hall each year, the Boys' Brigade held a Battalion Church Parade there on 14th March. From September the Crusaders under the leadership of Mr. Weller met on Sunday afternoons. On the August Bank Holiday the wedding reception of Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Smith was held there.

March 1955 saw the last Church A.G.M. to be held at the Lecture Hall. About fifty people attended, and they heard amongst other things that the Sunday School now had an average attendance of 45 between the ages of 4 and 15, and they had just welcomed four new teachers.

The Youth Club was restructured in 1955 and a Management Council was formed. The new-formed Youth Club presented a concert on 16th April, and the Boys' Brigade Display returned to the Lecture Hall after being held at the Baths' Hall the previous year.

More changes were made at the Hall; a new boiler was installed, the shops took over Room 1, a cleaner was hired at the rate of 3/~ per hour and there was no longer a full-time caretaker. The Lecture Hall Committee also discussed certain matters including sanitary conditions.

Amongst the money-raising events, the Gift Day produced an excellent total of £450, and a Missionary Bring and Buy Sale raised about £30.

Other outside lettings in 1955 included a furnishing exhibition by Courts, and a recording from the Cavendish Chapel in Manchester, of a 'Faith-Healing Service'.

There must have been quite a storm in July 1956 as it was reported that flood water backed up in the storm drains into the boiler room and damaged the boiler. After fitting a non-return flood trap to prevent the recurrence the Committee were allowed to insure against it for an extra premium of £2 10s 0d!

For the second time in five years the land behind the Church in Church Street came on the market. The first time, in 1952, it was considered too expensive at £3,500, and then in 1957

negotiations were actually started, with surveys of the land and approval of draft plans; but the Diaconate eventually did not feel able to recommend the scheme to the Church, so it was dropped.

So the Hall could breathe again; still with its Church activities and Youth Groups and outside lettings. But the Boys' Brigade was giving cause for concern. It was in 1957 in the charge of two Warrant Officers, neither connected with the Church, and attended by only a few boys, and there was no one to take over the Captaincy. A well-considered report on the Youth Groups recommended closing the Boys' Brigade and starting a Scout Troop under the leadership of Mr. R. H. Denman, a King's Scout. The Scouts started in April 1959 and for a short time both Boys' Brigade, and Scouts ran concurrently, but the Boys' Brigade finally lapsed in October. Miss Florrie Sprinks, who had as a girl, been with the Girls' Life Brigade, and who had been officer in charge of the Life Boys, changed uniform once again and became Akela over the Cubs

Also around this time the Lecture Hall Sunday School developed into the Young People's Service, which was held in the Hall at 2.45 p.m. on Sunday afternoons.

A new 'closed' Youth Club was opened in 1959, but it did not last long. The other Youth Groups were all now going strong and presented a very successful joint Display in November 1959.

In September 1959 one of the Scouters left, but the gap was soon filled by Mr. Graham Warner, son of John and Muriel Warner, who took out a warrant in 1960.

Also in that year the mortgage term on the shops was completed. The lease on the shops was soon to fall due and the tenants, Epsom Photo Finishing, had wanted to renew. The rent advised was £850 per annum.

Then July 1961 saw the Hall again being used as a Church, following the fire at the Church Street premises. This fire had destroyed the old Bishop organ, and singing at the early services at the Lecture Hall were led by a rented electronic organ which most people considered most unsatisfactory. Later a Walker Positif was purchased and installed in the gallery, with the idea that it could quickly be reassembled in the rebuilt Church.

Saturday evening lets were cancelled to give time to prepare the Hall for Sunday Worship, and the people of the Church cleaned up the Hall to make a pleasant sanctuary again. The other organisations continued to meet as normal.

Due to the enforced loss of revenue a successful application was made to get the rateable value reduced from £25 to £15.

It was while services were held at the Hall that the Rev. Stephen E. Baker answered a call to Littlehampton, and on 12th December 1962, Rev. D. Ellis Lewis was inducted to the Church.

17th November 1963 saw the re-opening of the Church and the Hall settled back to its old routine. Following professional advice, the land on which the Lecture Hall stands was put on the Land Registry.

The third generation of Youth Club was started on 11th October 1963 under the leadership of Mr. R. Chase. Up to 50 young people met on Fridays between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. paying 3d. for the privilege. There was an enterprising Drama Group, in 1965 performing a pantomime 'Goody Two Shoes', and they opened a Coffee Bar in Rooms 9 and 10 in 1966.

In 1964 Mrs. G. Smith took over the Brownies who in 1966 produced their pantomime 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'. There are continual reports of fund-raising Jumble Sales by the various groups, together with necessary maintenance, repairs and re-decoration.

In 1960, Mr. Frewin resigned as Letting Secretary. He had been doing this job very industriously for many years and the Church was very grateful for the way he had helped the Hall pay its way.

In 1960 the Scouts were in difficulties following the death of Mr. R. H. Denman, and after a short time of leadership by Mr. J. Cole, in October the Scout Troop was disbanded.

In the middle sixties Mr. G. Jones took over the Youth Club which in 1967 had over 100 members. Unfortunately very few were attached to the Church. In 1969 the leadership went in turn to Mr. G. Spencer and then to Mr. R. Ede, and following the lack of leaders, and too much of the more rowdy element, who caused considerable damage to the Hall, Mr. Ede resigned from the Church and the Youth Club was finally closed.

In 1969, there had been a fresh proposal to sell the Hall to developers. A certain amount of difficulty was experienced with the tenants of the shops with regard to compensation but this was ironed out. Then in July 1970 it was decided not to proceed with this development, and the organisations carried on.

Following the demise of the Scouts, Mr. G. R. B. Smith revived the old Boys' Brigade, starting with a Junior Section of 10 boys, with the help of Mr. R. Ede, Mrs. G. R. B. Smith and Miss V. Coombes. They met in the Longhurst Room at the Church from January 1971 and moved into the Hall in the September.

The Building had deteriorated quite alarmingly in a few years and plans were made to refurbish the Hall, The Guides, who had moved up to the Longhurst Room in October 1970, wanted to return, but uncertainty as to the future made immediate plans hard to formulate.

The Boys' Brigade started a Company Section in September 1972, which met with a Company in Ewell, and in 1973 put on their first Annual Display.

Earlier in 1973 a decision was taken to sell to developers again. This scheme was to comprise shops on the frontage, offices above, a Hall 'sideways' across the back, with parking space underneath, with access from Depot Road. However, before the scheme got under way, doubts about the stability of the developers and dissatisfaction with the area available to the Hall users caused the scheme to be dropped.

Inspections by the Insurers and the Fire Authorities led to the Hall being declared 'unsafe' and subsequently closed, the organisations had to meet at the Longhurst Room. A complete professional refit was out of the question, so some joinery work including repairs on fire exits, etc., was done professionally, and the complete re-wiring of the Hall upstairs and downstairs, including the fitting of new lights in the Main Hall, and a certain amount of re-decoration, was carried out by Mr. A.R. Wood with the able assistance of Miss V. S. Coombes. The completion of this mammoth task enabled the Girl Guides, Brownies and Boys' Brigade 'to return home'.

The latest user is the Laine Theatre Arts, and the Hall now echoes each weekday with the sound of music and dance.

For the past eight years the Hall has continued to be used by organisations almost every evening. The Guides, under Mrs. M. Dover and Mrs. J. Denman, who had taken over from Mrs. Warner in 1956, continued, and these two Guiders having earned their Long Service Awards in 1981, relinquished control to Mrs. G. Martin, their Captain today.

The Brownies, still in the charge of Brown Owl Mrs. G. Smith are small in number, but still act as a good supply to the Girl Guides.

The Boys' Brigade, under the leadership of Mr. G. Jones, has gone from strength to strength and now comprises about eighty boys in four sections and a stable group of about twelve officers. They have had a band since 1974 and had a Display Item in the Royal Albert Hall Display in 1931, the first time since 1949.

The Badminton Club, though now only small, still meets regularly under the leadership of Mrs. V. S. Wood.

Church activities have included a Farewell Party to Del and Lynn Lewis, an 'Almost Valentine's Day' Party (on 13th February!) and numerous jumble sales, fairs, Harvest Suppers and so on – in fact it has been a Church Hall.

People have complained about the Hall, and there is just cause for the complaints. It is hard to keep clean, it is expensive to heat and there is no parking space adjoining the premises, toilet facilities leave a lot to be desired and the stairs are steep and awkward.

But all in all, the accommodation it provides has nurtured thousands of people through this hundred years, and we can thank those people of vision of so long ago for what is to them, their Memorial, and to us, Our Hall.

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