

EPSOM UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

History update

1988 – 2000

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This history was written, edited and produced by Winifred and Phyllis Cary. Since it is divided into three chapters each of which is arranged under topics, it is inevitable that some overlapping has occurred resulting in some repetition, and we ask your indulgence.

INTRODUCTION

The period 1988 to 2000 has, in some ways ended on a similar note to that with which it began. For a start we have a new pastorate, three or four months old, as we did then, as well as plans to replace the Old Church Hall in Upper High Street with more modern buildings, now at the rear of the church. But so much has happened in the intervening years, that the details are very different. Attitudes have changed and relationships are more cordial, while inter-church co-operation has come a long way.

A long pastoral vacancy developed more self-reliance and fortitude, as well as patience. The long wait for a new minister has also taught us the need for less insulation .. The emergence of Churches Together In Epsom and the concept of local Clusters of churches within the United Reformed Church have contributed to this. In fact, like the Twentieth Century itself, where the accelerated rate of development has been phenomenal, our approach to the Millennium has brought us to a point we could not have dreamed of even in our Tercentenary Year.

The quest for better accommodation, has been another major factor in this period. Repeated frustrations served to precipitate a real crisis of space for the Youth Organisations, while there has been little chance for other developments such as social services and outreach to the community.

The reason for the choice of this twelve year period since the publication of "Into the Fourth Century", must be obvious in the Year of the Millennium, and we write now (September 2000) with the hope that future generations will update the history of our church. every ten years. Also the formation of the Shared Pastorate with Ewell URC marks a very major staging post in our history.

1988-1991. THE TERCENTENARY AND AFTER.

OUR NEW MINISTER

The Rev. Geoffrey Dunstan came to us on October 22nd 1987. For over a year we had been planning for our Tercentenary Celebrations in 1988. So the main activities, had already been fixed. In a sense we carried our new minister along with us into his first year which was just as well in the circumstances. Coming back to Britain after 18 years in South Africa and Namibia, having raised a family, as well as returning to pastoral ministry after work in religious broadcasting would have been a great upheaval. But the death of his wife in a road accident just before his return to Britain meant that he came bereft and alone. So by carrying him along on the euphoria of the occasion, he was given the opportunity to sort out his life, so disrupted and shattered.

But soon Geoffrey was making his own contributions, introducing the church to new ideas, such as the Ministry of Healing. After a series of speakers, regular Sunday Evening Services of Healing were arranged for the third Sunday of the month, whenever the Minister was available.

It was soon evident that the Rev. Geoffrey Dunstan was a good preacher and those who enjoyed an academic, well-thought-out sermon were happy. He was also a great pastoral visitor, often first to know who was ill or in hospital. Circumstances conspired to focus our thoughts on inter-church co-operation and subsequently on Church Unity and Geoffrey took a leading part in this. For years Epsom had been strangled by traffic and sought to build a relief road. The Council has suggested various plans over the years. The latest, at that time, was to cut a swathe from Ashley Road to Church Street, cutting across the Methodist Scouts Hall and straight through the Baptist Church. Although not directly involved, with the URC's existing building problems, it was natural to cast an eye on

the future and consider some degree of co-operation. A number of meetings were held at various levels, leaders, ministers etc. In the end the Relief Road was put on hold by the County Council and interest dwindled.

Geoffrey had a particular interest in Broadcasting from his days on Radio in Namibia. He regularly took part in broadcasts on County Sound and sometimes got the church involved as well.

"Patterns of Ministry" was now raising its head and we were being told that there was not going to be enough ministers for one per church in the URC, nor would there be enough money to pay for them if they could be found. We must begin to think about sharing pastorates and using lay-preachers and assistants. With our own new minister we were not unhappy just then, but there were shadows on the wall!

TERCENTENARY CELEBRATIONS. 1988.

Although we know that meetings of dissenters took place as early as 1 ~67, these were illegal and hence in secret. It was in 1688 that the members of this group declared themselves openly. Thus it is that our church has long been recognised as existing from that time.

The year began with a New Year Party to be followed by New Year Services, conducted by our Provincial Moderator, the Rev. David Helyar. There then followed a quieter period, during which the Planning Committee polished up its programme. At Easter came a burst of praises and joyful activity. On Easter Sunday we were led by the Rev. Bernard Thorogood, General Secretary of the URC, with the Boys Brigade buglers swelling "Thine be the glory". On the evening of a Sunday in April came a celebration of 300 years in poetry and in May two performances of Murder in the Cathedral, one at Nescot and one at Church.

There were two organ recitals, by Allan Healey, past organist at Epsom and by John Lea Morgan of Dorking. Sunday services were taken by past ministers and local ministers of other churches. A party for the children in June was followed in July by the Re-union Weekend, to which old members had been invited. This began with a Family Garden Party at "Grey Wings" home of Rupert Nicholson, followed by "Messiah from Scratch" at church, to which we invited friends from other churches to sing with us. In July also we were on air with a broadcast of our Sunday Morning Service on ITV. We were also on County Sound.

During July there was a comprehensive display of our Church History set against the history of Epsom. This lasted 9 days and was left up until the great Re-union weekend so that our visitors could see it. In October old friends again joined us for the Tercentenary Dinner held at Leatherhead Leisure Centre. There was a Youth Display and Exhibition at the same time, followed shortly by the fourth URC Entertainment (which has been held every year since). The Church Anniversary on the first Sunday in November more or less concluded the celebrations, with that of our 300th Birthday. On November 30th a memorial tree was planted for us in Rosebery Park by the Mayor.

By then we were into the Christmas season, with the Toy Service and Carols by Candlelight all adding to the festivities and providing a fitting end to a great year.

Two other items of significance took place during this year. At the beginning of the year the Rev. Del Lewis, former minister of our church 1962 - 1976, and his wife, Lynne moved from Leatherhead to South Wales. Secondly, considerable alterations were made, in mid-year to the Church rules and constitution.

1989 saw the church settling down to more normal activities, but looking forward to growth and development. Youth organisations were flourishing and active, even if the ageing Lecture Hall had broken windows and the rain sometimes came in. (see later). There were some changes e.g. .. Gwyneth Smith took over Mothers and Toddlers from Doris Swan. Holding the Harvest Supper in the Baptist Hall was also a sign of the times. In July, Phil Castle handed over to Brian Rutt as Boys Brigade Captain.

In the Summer Our Minister exchanged pulpits with the Rev. William P. McKinney from Philadelphia, who came for a month or so with his wife, son and daughter. Annual activities continued steadily e.g. .. the Drama Club produced "Laburnum Grove". There was an Art Exhibition in the Church. Family Day and BB and Guide Camps took place in the summer. Hopes were rising to finalise plans for rebuilding on the Upper High Street Site.

1990. External influences were stirring life in the church. There were developments within the Epsom Council of Churches, in the year in which Churches Together in England was founded. There was the trauma of events in Romania and we were busy raising money and collecting clothes to send out. The Epsom Council of Churches was developing working groups such as Health in the Community.

The Rev. Allan Butler and Marion were still with us as members of the church. In recognition of his service to the church and of the personal bonds between him and the members, the Church decided to offer him the honorary appointment of Minister Emeritus which he accepted.

In the Autumn the Drama Group presented "Bonaventura". But the great talking point of this year was the old Church Hall or Lecture Hall as it was often called.

THE LECTURE HALL.

By the Tercentenary the Lecture Hall was some 105 years old and becoming increasingly "aged" in style, structure and decoration. Holes in the floor and leaks in the roof, broken windows all added to the query by 1989 as to whether the Hall was fit to house the Harvest Lunch in September. For some time it was doubted whether it was worth while to be continually patching it up. There had even been minor fires, possibly caused by intruders, for the padlocks were broken more than once. Some two years prior to this date, negotiations had been going on quietly to find a developer who would rebuild the Hall for us and develop the rest of the site sympathetically to our cause.

So by the beginning of 1989 real plans were being considered. These would include the selling of the shops and Upper High Street frontage to developers; they would build a New Hall at the rear of the site. Any money left over from the sale of the frontage would be considered for building rooms at the rear of the Church. Plans were adopted at a Special Church Meeting in February. A Hall Sub-Committee met in May. The consent of the Charity Commission had to be obtained for the sale of part of the Upper High Street Site, especially as this was not for church or Sunday School use, as originally intended in the gift of Mr. Thomas Norman in 1882. Plans went ahead and much time and effort went into details of the new hall and its use and decorations.

By 1990 there had been some changes in plans put forward by the developers, but the general plan seemed to be going ahead. As the Charity Commission still had not given us the all clear, the developers began to get agitated. Property prices were falling and the original generous sum which had been agreed on was lowered. In July the Charity Commission finally gave their consent and contracts were to be completed by September.

Then disaster struck - twice! After all our planning, down to the painting colour schemes, the Developer, Marley-Bass withdrew from the agreements, claiming further falls in prevailing property market conditions, affecting their own ability to operate. This reminded us what happened in 1973. On October 7th the Lecture Hall burnt down, caused, it was believed from a fire lit by more intruders. The building was dangerous and had to be shorn up, involving considerable expense. Our dread was that the insurers would call it arson. But there seemed enough evidence that intruders were the cause. So we were back to square one again.

Early in 1991 it was agreed that the scaffolding was proving very expensive and that it would be better to demolish the whole structure and that the two shops should be refurbished and let. The cleared site could be re-surfaced and let as a private Car Park. High Legal costs had been involved to date and these measures might help to offset some of the costs. It had been hoped that by now these costs would have been met by the first instalment of payment by the developers. Now we had to struggle on until the Insurance money in payment for the loss of the Hall could be settled. This was received in May. In the circumstance ideas about building at the rear of the church were re-considered

The Report of the Quinquennial Visitation that year brought demands for extensive repairs to the church roof and other major redecorations. This set back our hopes somewhat. But we held a gift Day in March 1991 to try to meet some of our expenses. It realised over £3000, a good proportion of which was covenanted. The next problem was to seek alternative accommodation for the Youth Organisations. While the Guides were content to use the Longhurst Room, the Boys Brigade made arrangements for their various Sections to have time at the Baptist Church Hall. But this was much less than they had been used to.

Another strange property Saga developed also this year - that of the North Wall. The Epsom Club next door expressed concern at the decaying and somewhat unsafe condition of this wall. When the matter was gone into, it was discovered that the said wall did not appear on the Land Registry papers of either property. In the end it was decided to go SO/50 on expenses, though it took a little time to agree on the form which the new wall would take. This involved the resiting of the old tombstones which had been taken up from the old graveyard at the front of the church when the 1904 church was built. Some were placed along the north wall of the church and some taken to the open plot at the rear and stood against the old Stable Wall.

In the search for more accommodation for the Youth Organisations, it was decided in September 1991 to purchase two RovaCabin Units. to be erected at the rear of the church, together with storage units for large equipment.

The cost of these was offset by the gift of Maggie Hoskins to the Church in her will.

THE MINSTERIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN 1991.

This was very much a year for picking ourselves up and making new plans, for the immediate future as well as trying to look ahead. Win Cary took over as Church Secretary from Mr. G. R. B. George Smith in January. when the

latter was planning to move with his work to South Wales. This was a task she was to pursue through thick and thin for nearly ten difficult years.

The URC's "Planning for Growth" had been published and we were all urged to make a great effort to enlarge our Mission. We had already planned a Stewardship Campaign to be launched later in the year. A Prayer Fellowship was also started with a Monthly Prayer Card. A Sunday Youth Club was proposed and started. This was the beginning of the Decade of Evangelism and in March the Minister went to some lengths to explain all that was to be involved. Proposals to change the time of the Morning Service to 10.30 am were given a six-month trial. But in November this reverted to 11.00am. These were also the days of the Gulf War and our thoughts were much exercised as to the rightness of Britain's involvement.

Liaison with other churches in the area continued. Brian Rutt resigned as leader of the Boys Brigade and the Bible Class was also without a leader. The AGM in November did report that most of the Organisations had come through a difficult time in reasonable shape. In July the Rev. Del Lewis celebrated 50 years of his Ministry which was marked by his conducting morning worship, and the gift of the Lord's Prayer in lace work, now adorning our sanctuary wall. On February 15th 1991, some of our members attended the funeral of the Rev. Stephen Baker, Minister of the Epsom Congregational Church 1949-1962.

We had a long visit from the Rev. Jean Holmes from New Jersey in the summer.

1992 -1997. CHANGES, HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

MINISTERIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

By 1992 a number of things were concerning the church members, some material, some concerning the life and witness of the church. In an effort to stimulate activity amongst the members it was decided to organise a Stewardship Campaign for the following year. This was also the time when we decided to change Hymn Books to the new Rejoice and Sing. The Church Roll was revised to present a more realistic picture of the church for assessment and financial matters. An Inventory of Church Artefacts and Heritage items was suggested, since at the time of the Tercentenary it was found that individuals had a number of these in safe keeping.

Human Sexuality was again up for discussion. During 1992 we had been considering if we could seek the services of a non-stipendiary assistant, to help with developing youth and outreach work in the church. The request was refused by the District Pastoral Committee. When we decided to re-apply on different grounds, the Pastoral Committee registered it for further consideration. That year the Drama Group produced 'Quiet Weekend'.

One of our young members, Bethan Galliers, after a course of study was commissioned for Church based service in the Community. Later she was to represent the URC abroad in Jamaica and elsewhere. The 1992 AGM reported that most church organisations were doing well, but that the Boys Brigade activities were limited by lack of space and time available to them at the Baptist Church Hall. This year also saw the emergence of troubles in South East Europe. We were disturbed by what was happening in Albania and we rallied to the appeals for help.

The report of the Quinquennial Visitation, one of the last of the old-style visits, pointed out to the Elders that they should be looking into improving activities in mission, music and worship, which is exactly what we had been busy about for the last year or so. A new Christian Radio Station was being suggested at this time. We lit our first Peace Candle, presented to us by one of our members, Judith Elliss. The Minister started a Bible Study group, held in the house of Judith Ellis, who had been struck down by an acute paralysis, so as to bring something of the church into her home.

In 1993, we began to put together our ideas on Mission. Directives from the URC were propagating "Planning for Growth", while prophesying more serious problems of ministerial supply. This soon took shape in "Deployment of Ministers" in which were pictured the dire situation for any church trying to acquire a new minister, especially if on the small side.

Other changes came when Brian Rutt took over the Editorship of Bridge, when Bill Trueman died. He had served the church in this capacity for many years. In the interests of economy we began to produce Bridge ourselves, for which purpose we acquired a photocopier. Somewhere to locate this work and equipment led to the refurbishment of the old upstairs crèche as an Office. At the same time the kitchen next door was redecorated.

One of the main topics of activity for 1994 was the ecumenical project which came to be called "ON FIRE 1994". (See ecumenical paragraph.). Committees had been formed to take charge of various forms of activity and they worked hard to be ready for the great week in May 1994. In the Spring our Minister had time off to visit his family in South Africa on the occasion of the marriage of one of his daughters. Two other major talking points for this year were also of an ecumenical nature ie, The Dovecote Coffee/Bookshop and the effects of the Relief Road plans on

the various churches. It was as well that we had these other items to think about, and we could sometimes forget the ministerial problems.

1995 began with a sad loss to the church in the passing of John Warner. in January. Lay-Preacher, long-time Superintendent of the Sunday school, deacon and elder, astute in money matters, he rendered many years of valuable service to the church. It was at this time that Sister Coffey put in her request to hire the new Crèche on several days of the week for counselling. Her need for accommodation came with plans to close the Convent and to rebuild St. Joseph's Church on the site. We are very sad that in 1999 she had to give up this work when she was struck down with motor neurone disease and has since died.

"Pattern of Ministry and the Best Use of Resources" spelt out the future situation for church management and many began to wonder if Church Meeting would eventually become redundant. At a meeting at Leatherhead on the Deployment of Ministers, ideas were launched for the six churches of the Southern area of the Wimbledon District to group together for sharing ministers and other resources. This was the beginning of the concept of "Clusters" it would have a long way to go, to evolve into what it eventually became.

In Mid 1995 we joined in the celebrations for the Bi-Centenary of the LMS/CWM, and took part in some of the local meetings. Something of a crisis developed in the leadership of the Boys Brigade later in the year when three of the group leaders were obliged to resign due to changes in employment. But eventually Charles Menagh took overall leadership and others were found to help. In September Brian Rutt also had to give up editing Bridge, when a change of employment made it difficult for him to carry on. Win Cary and Alan Wood took over temporary responsibility to produce a Monthly Newsletter. By the end of the year this arrangement had become more or less permanent with Win Cary generally in charge, helped out by Alan at holiday time. It was decided to keep the simpler newsletter form and not make a fixed charge for it, hoping that more members would take and read it. It was henceforth known as the 'Newsletter'.

In September we were asked by District Pastoral Committee to draw up a statement of mission, for which we were more or less ready. The minefield of Copyright raised its head at this time and we had to get used to "toeing the line" in this respect. At the end of 1995 we lost another two very old friends in Ethel Coombes and Leslie Bidwell. Both had rendered much valuable service to the church over many years.

At the beginning of 1996 we happily sent our Minister off to Rome on Sabbatical leave to study the Waldensian Church history. For part of this time he was joined by his newly-wed wife, Sandra. However, just before he left in March, Geoffrey told us of his resignation, on accepting a call to the churches of Lewis and Uckfield in Sussex. He had been with us nine years and the Moderator thought it wise to begin a new stage in his life in a fresh pastorate. This was quite a blow to us, since we already knew the problems of getting a new minister. But we immediately made efforts to secure the services of a local URC minister as Interim Moderator, knowing that other demands would be coming up shortly. The Rev. Brian Bowyer's name was put forward and accepted in July, although this could not be formalised until Geoffrey had left us

In May we were happy to see the return of the Rev. Del and Lynne Lewis back with us, after the purchase of 12, The Croft. Having Del with us was going to mean much to us in the next two years. On August 4th Geoffrey took his last service with us, followed by a farewell reception. Now we really had to dig our heels in. In the same month we lost another very old friend in Gladys Girt, who left us another legacy much of which went towards the purchase of a portable communion set for our two retired minister's use during the pastoral vacancy. The Drama Group produced Happiest Days of your Life

There were also meetings with other local churches on the Deployment of Ministers, further developing the idea of working together in Clusters. The original idea was to divide into two groups, Dorking, Gomshall and Bookham and Leatherhead, Epsom and Ewell, with two ministers, which sounded a bit grim, ministerially. At the end of the year the URC Commitment for Life issued their big new project inviting churches to choose one of four world projects to support and study. With particular reference to the Boys Brigade, we decided on the OLODUM project to support the work helping the 'street children' of Brazil.

Early in 1987 the Cluster idea was followed up. But Ewell declined to join the second group. since they had already been having conversations with the Tolworth UR Church. This led to ministerial deadlock for us and it was decided to "go-it-alone" if we could and to seek scoping and request to declare a vacancy. We asked Mr. Bruce Stuart's advice on the matter. At this time we began short Prayer Meetings before Morning Service. We also made a Change in the frequency of Church Meetings, so that we could deal with matters as they arose. We were dismayed when we were given a scoping of only 50%, knowing the difficulties of obtaining a minister in these circumstances. But the Moderator, when consulted pointed out that a possible 75% coping was equally impracticable. By June the Pastoral Profile was complete, thanks to Archie Paterson's efforts. The June meeting of the District Council did actually vote to raise our scoping to 75%, not that this did much for us.

In mid-Summer Epsom URC appeared at the end of a long list of ministerial vacancies sent out by Church House. By now the Cluster ideas began to get a bit confused. It was suggested that we link with Bookham, which was then without a minister. So we had talks with them. Another suggestion was to group New Maiden, with Epsom and Tolworth, or even to have one bigger group of Dorking, Leatherhead, Bookham, Gomshall and Epsom with three ministers, having lost Ewell. At the 1997 AGM our Interim Moderator agreed to convey our feelings of lack of help and communication to the District Pastoral Committee.

In the middle of all this, Charles Senior, our Organist for many years, felt that he had to resign. His wife was to become increasingly ill during the next two years. He was sadly missed by the church, but still remains a good friend.

We had been under pressure from URC HQ's for some time to transfer the Trusteeship of the church to Southern Province. This came to a head in July 1997 and we had to step in line with other churches. As part of this process, the management of the Harrison-Longhurst Trust was handed back to the church, as being too small to warrant continued management at Headquarters.

Evening services had been regularly attended by some 15 to 20 members. With the coming of winter, it was thought advisable to experiment with using the Longhurst Room, where lighting and heating could be improved fairly easily, and we could have a new piano. In October we celebrated 25 Years of the URC, with special services and a lunch to which we invited representatives from local churches. This was much appreciated by our visitors.

CHURCH BUILDINGS. 1992-1997

In 1992 it was felt that something must be done about our lack of accommodation for the young people and other activities. Just at this time one of our old ladies, Maggie Hoskins died, leaving her bungalow in Stamford Green to the church. With the proceeds we purchased two RovaCabin Units. To provide a space for these the old Stable Site at the rear of the church was cleared and levelled. Two large storage units were added for 88 and Guide equipment,

In the summer the deterioration of the old Minister's Vestry, led us to level the floor at the back of the church beneath the Choir Gallery and enclose this area on each side of a central passage. This provided a new Vestry on the north side and a Crèche/Committee Room on the south side. In the following year the old vestry was shelved for the storage of the BB's equipment and band instruments. Later concrete paths were laid down and an area of grass provided an open play space.

In the summer another fire, this time at one of the Upper High Street Shops, meant more expense to re-furbish it. When the Right of Way to the rear of the church was being looked into, it appeared that when the two houses were built on land which the church had purchased, next to the Stable Block, some land became lost to the church. This had to be investigated, and in the following year was restored to us.

In 1993, following recommendations by the Quinquennial Visitors some major repairs were taken in hand. Security Lights were added to the RovaCabins, since it was dark if children arrived for meetings before their leaders the. The North Wall between the Church and the Epsom Club was finally re-built. Meanwhile the shops had been rented out and the old hall site levelled and made into a private Car Park, which brought in some considerable income. But there were no developments on the sale of this site.

In 1995 more repair works were carried out on the church. The porch lighting was renewed. In June the Family Day morning service, conducted by the Elders, was attacked by a violent thunderstorm, shattering one of the main church lights, narrowly missing one of our elderly members, as glass flew everywhere. It was discovered that this lighting system was beyond patching up and must be replaced completely, involving much expense .. Meanwhile a new Public Address System was installed involving the removal of half the back pew on the north side. This work was paid for under the Phyllis Kelway Fund, and was completed early in 1996. We were now going ahead with the complete re-decorating of the Longhurst Room, for which part of the Tom Carr Legacy was used and we also purchased an excellent new piano. It looked so different when finished and the evening service members delighted in their new surroundings.

As there seemed to be little chance of finding another developer to carry out the earlier plans to build on the Upper High Street Site, in the existing state of the property market, it was decided to return to reconsider building a permanent a Hall at the rear of the church, beginning with a general application for permission to build there, although no money was available at that time. Building permission was granted.

Many of these projects spilled over into 1996. Then came the Minister's resignation. In September we set about the letting of the Manse, having no idea how long this would be for. Work began on restoring the late C17 Hermitage

next door and there had to be considerable negotiations with owners and contractors, including obtaining the use of their yard for Sunday Parking.

It was about this time that we began to hear rumours about developers in Upper High Street next to our site .. At first it seemed that this was yet another office development. The earlier 1980's plan of development for the Hall site had been for the developers to build a new Hall for us on the rear of the site, while we sold the shops and frontage to them for development. Now our site was merely to be considered as an adjunct to the empty Gateway site next door and there would be no Hall built for us on this site. We really would now have to go back to the rear of the church. But still we had not been consulted by these new developers.

1997 began with the letting of the Manse. There appeared to be a problem about a small piece of land which the Hermitage owners would like to buy. We were willing, but it turned out the it did not belong us after all.! We thought long and hard about the consequences of selling the Upper High Street Site, so as to be ready when we were consulted. We all agreed that we must look to the future and to consider the needs of the young people of the future church. We agreed to sell the Upper High Street Site and put in requests for planning permission for building at the rear of the church for the next five years .

We also had to consider our obligations to the conditions of the Thomas Norman Trust made in setting up the Old Congregational Hall Site originally. We considered that we were being faithful to its original plans as a Sunday School, in merely removing the Sunday School activities a short distance and incorporating them in the main church. A history of the many uses which had been made of this building over the 105 years since it was built was prepared by our solicitors, who also recommended that we have the cover of a Defection Indemnity Policy.

Apparently, by this time there has been several developers interested in carrying out what were now plans to build a Cinema Complex and there had been several different offers to buy our site. We were obliged under the Charity Commission to accept the highest offer. which then stood at half a million pounds. The permission of the Charity Commission had to be sought to sell the property, But there was no legal barrier to the sale and Southern Province had been kept fully informed.

A second developer pulled out, but the original one, Summit was still interested. If they pulled out, there were still others interested. It was all very nail-biting. Meanwhile, with basic planning permission for building at the rear of the church Mr. George R B Smith and the architect went ahead to work out more details, in consultation with the various departments of our church life.

ECUMENICAL DEVELOPMENTS. 1992-1997.

This period came in the middle of talks between churches consequent to the Relief Road Plans. The Baptists had definitely thought of selling up and redeveloping on a new housing estate on the other side of town. The Methodists were still undecided, while we were involved in our own plans, since we were not actually in the area of the Road Plans. Later, the Baptists' plans were thwarted and by then the Road Plans themselves had reached stalemate.

March saw the first proposals for establishing a Christian Coffee/Bookshop, offering a "Listening Service". By May this had become the Trust, COTE, under the friendly eye of Churches Together in Epsom.

By 1993 we had begun to plan for the major missionary effort, sponsored by the Archbishop of Canterbury as an ecumenical effort to invite non-church people into our congregations. Committees were set up and we all worked hard to be ready for the great week in May 1994, accompanied by numerous prayer meetings.

ON FIRE - May 21- 29th 1994. Pentecost, the Birthday of the Ecumenical Church.

Celebrations began on Saturday, with the Open Air Party on the Court Recreation Ground. The day was a bit wet, especially for the procession and floats, but was enjoyed by many. Sunday saw the big Birthday Service in the Methodist Car Park. During the week there were a series of meetings with well-known speakers, such as Donald English, Fiona Castle, Mavis Wilson and Alien Jones, a Christian research physicist. The latter also spoke at a supper held at the Horton Hospital Hall. Parties for old and young people were held at Christchurch Hall and a Kids Club at the Rainbow Centre. Some items were open all the week, such as the Exhibition of the History of the Epsom Churches at the Ashley Centre and the Parents and Toddlers Group, both of which were our responsibility. The Birthday finale was at St. Martin's Church on the Saturday Evening.

Afterwards, there were follow-up meetings and some ideas were taken up immediately, e.g .. to promote visits to School Assemblies and to take an active part in local matters, such as Health, Safety and Security. But the main result was a real feeling of "Togetherness" of the churches. We had worked together and discussed so many matters together.

Another item was then emerging, which was to gather greater momentum and which would bring the churches together. The decision of the Health Authorities to place many mentally retarded patients back into the community was reaching the former GLC's five big hospitals up at Horton. They planned to eventually close four of the five hospitals, leaving only West Park to be redeveloped as part of the general hospital scheme. This also corresponded with the orders to build many new houses in this area of Surrey's open spaces. But a group of Christians saw this as a great opportunity to influence this development, to include much more than housing and to involve planning for the people and their interests.. This led to the formation of HELM (named after the four hospitals to be closed, under the leadership of Mr. Tom Rhind-Tutt. In September 1994 a public meeting was held at the Town Hall inviting people and the churches of Epsom to get involved.

Many ecumenical activities which we have now become used to like the Lenten House Groups were advanced at this time, with fund-raising events for the Dovecote and the Northern Ireland Children's' Holiday Scheme. A new one-off situation came when the Borough Council put forward the idea of twinning our town with a similar one in Europe. Finally, Chantilly, a French horse-racing town was chosen and negotiations went forward, with our Minister serving on the Twinning Committee as Churches Together Representative.

The Borough was also by now, expressing interest in the Dovecote Coffee/Bookshop and promised financial support. It was finally opened, after much hard work on the part of many volunteers on June 21 st 1996.

In 1997, the Horton Cluster Development and the Helm project were going ahead and with the prospect of the first new householders soon taking up residence, Helm established its 'Befriending Scheme' to bridge the gap between the remaining Hospital inhabitants and the new householders.

In March 1997 The Epsom Women's Institute applied for the use of the Longhurst Room for their monthly meetings. This was granted and they meet the first Wednesday in each month.

RISING HOPES. 1998 and 1999.

MINISTERIAL MATTERS.

This proved to be a period of hope and expectation, not unfittingly leading up to the Millennium New Year. The February 1998 Elders Day at Wimbledon was the dawn of revised ideas on the Clusters and associated Ministerial Deployment.. At this point it was to be one large cluster of five churches with three ministers. Since Dorking and Leatherhead were larger churches with their own ministers, it was up to the others to get together. So in March the Elders of Epsom and Bookham, URC's met amicably but we did feel that this had come too early for Bookham, who had only recently lost their minister, and did not understand why we wanted to hurry things on. The Rev. Brian Bowyer encouraged the churches in the cluster to get together and begin the process of calling the third minister designated to the Cluster

Then followed a period in which it was difficult to keep Church Meeting informed of developments. In April Leatherhead offered to invite a cluster meeting; but we found it difficult to fix dates and were also hearing whispers from elsewhere. In that same month came a letter from the Interim Moderator of the Ewell church offering to discuss a Shared Pastorate with us. We were both in the same borough and did actually have an earlier Covenant dating from 1965. Although we had some misgivings, our Interim Moderator encouraged us to "go for it" as the only way out of our impasse. The meeting with Bookham had been inconclusive, and they seemed not yet ready for a major commitment. The April Church Meeting agreed in general principle to Ewell's offer.

In May a joint meeting of the Elders of Epsom and Ewell with the two Interim Moderators was held at Epsom to discuss the matter. It was agreed that each should take this forward to their own Church Meetings. The May Church Meeting at Epsom agreed to go forward. So did the Ewell Church. At their June Church Meeting Epsom formally agreed to be one of a Cluster with the other five, so long as this did not preclude Epsom and Ewell proceeding to form a Shared Pastorate. On June 22nd. the Elders of the two churches met with the two Interim Moderators and the Provincial Moderator. The latter laid his cooling hand on our enthusiasms by pointing out that before a vacancy can be declared a number of procedures must be gone through. Pastoral Profiles must be made up, Terms of Settlement on the Shared Pastorate agreed etc. These documents should then go to the District Council and on to the Moderators' meeting, all of which takes time and the "holiday season" was upon us.. But at least a joint Sub-Committee was appointed to hasten these matters and to see that the documents were prepared as well as looking into the procedures for making a Call. So it was back to some diligent work and church prayers during the Summer.

Meanwhile the Cluster concept was in some disarray, some churches not being very happy.

They were now sectioned into three; Dorking with Bookham, Leatherhead with Gomshall and the shared Pastorate of Epsom and Ewell. The two smaller churches felt that they had been pushed into a situation by the other four. But

with the emergence of Base Churches and oversight from the two larger churches, they had to agree that there was little else we could do. This was agreed in October 1998

In January 1999, Epsom and Ewell received the CV of the Rev. John Crocker of Horsham .. (We had previously received another name but the two sets of Elders had agreed separately to reject this one.) By the end of the month both sets of Elders had agreed to recommend this name to their respective Church Meetings. Arrangements were made for the candidate to visit Epsom on Saturday and Sunday, February 20th and 21st. and to visit Ewell the following weekend. His visit to Epsom on the Saturday coincided with the Dress Rehearsal for "Joseph" in which our prospective minister took a keen interest.. After consultation between the two churches following his visits, it was agreed that the final vote be put to a Joint Special Church Meeting to be held at Epsom on March 21st. At this meeting, after some discussion and reservations from a few members it was put to the vote that the Rev. John Crocker be asked to accept a Call to the joint Pastorate of Epsom and Ewell churches. This was passed with a voting of over 80% for both churches. The two Interim Moderators immediately phoned John, who willingly accepted the Call.

The Induction was set for September 4th and it was decided to hold this at Ewell, mainly because catering facilities were easier there, and we could use the Recreation Ground at the back for Car Parking. The next months were involved with planning for the Induction and seeking a new Manse. Meetings of small groups with special responsibilities took place to sort out details. Then on Saturday, September 4th the great day came and it really was a wonderful one, including the weather. The Church at Ewell was packed with church members and adherents, visitors and special dignitaries. These included the Mayor of the Borough, the Provincial Moderator and representatives from many churches in the Borough. They certainly gave our new Minister a grand welcome. This also went for the reception and speeches afterward.

Then we all had to get down to thinking more carefully how our Minister was going to divide himself between the two churches. And we were soon into our first joint function, thanks to John himself. This was the visit of two executive members of the CWM to the Cluster at the end of November, to which all the six churches were invited. On the Saturday evening there was a happy social gathering with different food supplied by the six churches, based on the world regions of the CWM. Our two visitors spoke about their own work in the CWM.

On the Sunday we had our own service in which one of our visitors gave a talk

By then we were into the Christmas Season with its usual activities, this time with the added interest of the Millennium Celebrations at the New Year. A joint Carols by Candlelight service was held during December.

BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS 1998-1999.

By February 1998 a conditional contract of sale on the Upper High Street Site had been arranged subject to the obligatory 107 days for appeals. ie. until June 6th. The contract with Summit depended on their contract with Odeon Cinemas. When all these things were agreed we could go forward. Meanwhile the Shops were evacuated. By the time June arrived, the Summit / Odeon problems had not been sorted out. This went on until October when negotiations were at last completed for sale at half a million pounds. With allowances for expenditure this stood at £490,000. This money went directly to Southern Province Building Fund for investment, to be drawn on later when we needed it. By November we had the permission to sell the Manse.

Early in 1999 our architect, David Wright had produced the basic costings for the New Hall, with the quantity Surveyors giving a basic budget of £336,000 +VAT. Applications had been made to Synod for permission to go ahead, which was fully granted at the end of 1998. The next hurdle was to obtain building permission from the Borough Council Planning Department.

By April the New Manse in Windmill Avenue had been found and approved and in June the sale of the old Manse was completed. Meanwhile attention had to be given to the RovaCabins of which the roof was leaking badly. Adequate repairs had to be made, since we were hopeful that we would be able to sell these. In July we were hopeful that planning permission would be granted at the end of the month. Alas, there was another disappointment. Objections from the residents of Badgers' Court, were introduced at a late hour and the application was turned down. The main objection was the height of the building.

So the architects set about modifying the plans in the light of the complaint, planning to (a) lower the site level by removing some of the soil and rubble (b) lower the angle of the roof slope. This new planning application was supposed to have come before the Council in October, but was postponed until November. This was painful waiting, but it did go through and we are now free to go ahead with detailed plans for the actual building processes, tenders, quantities etc. The latest estimate is to begin clearing the site in March, with the removal of the RovaCabins in April. Maybe it will be finished by the end of the year 2000. But we have learned not to count our

chickens before they are hatched! Later, in September we have seen the foundation and roof structures completed and expect the opening at end of February 2001.

LIFE OF THE CHURCH AND ECUMENICAL MATTERS 1998 - 2000.

The main features of 1998 was the Pastoral Vacancy and obtaining Planning Permission for the New Hall. But there were some other interests of a pleasant nature. It began with the interior decoration of the church. For several weeks we viewed our visiting ministers through a forest of scaffolding; but it was worth it for the results. Later the old 1904 pews were varnished, a great improvement since they are all but a century old.

We were happy when some of our young people, led by Andrea Board and her husband with Paul and Sandra Bullock offered to produce the Musical, 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat', using the children and young people of the church organisations So they got to work with great enthusiasm.

Then in October the Borough of Epsom and Ewell had a exceptional visitation from the Senior Clergy of Surrey. They make it a practice to visit towns in the County from time to time; but it does not come round very often to each place. This turned out to be a very memorable occasion. Members of the clergy group went round visiting churches and other places in the Borough, with a shared meal at Lunchtime, to which Ministers / representatives of the churches were invited. The United Service at Christchurch in the evening included displays set up by the churches of the Borough as well as a demonstration of the work of Helm. The group were very interested in the latter and there was a seminar about it before the service. November brought the celebration of the 310th Anniversary of our Church and we made it a special occasion. The Morning Service was followed by a lunch, to which, amongst others we invited lapsed members of the congregation. Then we were into the Christmas season again.

1999 began with the revision of the Church Roll of members, adherents and Elders Groups.

The Flower Room was redecorated, this being a major improvement, since it had considerable problems with dampness from one cause or another. The new lighting could also be adjusted now that there were longer hours of darkness to work by.

Then in April came the climax of all the hard work done for the production of Joseph.

There were a great number of people working for it, on and off stage, using people of all ages. It was a great success and after the two performances the young people were very eager to do another production in the following year. Unfortunately April brought us a very sad loss in the death after two years of illness, of Frank Dawe. Frank's long association with the church and especially his work with the Boys Brigade was well-known to all and celebrated by the very large number attending the memorial service.. His quiet, undemonstrative energy endeared him to all and we miss him greatly.

We have also been indebted to other members of the church, now deceased. In May a rather unusual occasion occurred with the Dedication of a number of items purchased with recent bequests to the church, especially in connection with the complete re-decoration of the Longhurst Room. The Tom Carr Legacy paid for much of the actual renovation and the new piano. Betty Kirby's Legacy to the Afternoon Fellowship was used to buy 60 new chairs. The Gladys Girt Bequest was used to purchase a new portable Communion set. Meanwhile a new Fall and Communion Table Runner had been made to suit the new carpet and curtains. Family Day, again at Hessle Top, was another happy occasion. George and Peggy Smith presented a new reading desk for the Communion table in the Church

In June Helm took a big step forward. After two public meetings, Focus Groups were set up to oversee matters of Commercial Development, Education, Employment and Enterprise, Environment, Heritage and Planning, Health Facilities, Housing and Transport, Sport, Leisure and Young People. Some members of these groups have special skills, others are Helm workers. A Cluster Action Group was established. This organisation takes the work of Helm into a much wider and deeper field of work. All these are strongly supported by Prayer Groups.

We had some sad news of Sister Coffey who had carried out her counselling services in our church creche for a number of years. She has developed Motor Neurone disease and is declining rapidly. She has moved back to Ireland to be near her family and has since passed away

July also saw a visitation by members of the District Pastoral Committee. The new form of Quinquennial Visitation is a much less critical affair than it used to be and we had a very pleasant and sympathetic visit. Our financial Year was changed to end to June in order to make it possible to be able to submit Annual Accounts at the November AGM. The Hermitage, next door had been sold. and we negotiated the possibility of Sunday Parking at the rear, with the advantage of a locked bar,. For which we have a key. But August saw the beginning of a great concern for the church. The Rev. Allan Butler and Marion were celebrating their Golden Wedding in the Channel Islands, when Allan fell seriously ill. Then followed a steady decline as the hospital tried to find out what was wrong and how to

treat him. Christmas was a very low time for the family and Allan has become very frail and thin, partly because of his inability to eat. We have some good news and then he is back in hospital again.

The Induction of the Rev. John Crocker to the Shared Pastorate of Epsom and Ewell United Reformed Churches on September 4th 1999 was the culmination of much planning during the summer and co- operation between the two churches. The day itself was wonderful and we were all much uplifted. John and the family had moved into the new Manse in Windmill Avenue, Ewell some time in August. Although some alterations had been made, there was still a good deal to do to it after they moved in. Even when they held two housewarming occasions at the beginning a December the kitchen was still not completed. Soon our new Minister was putting out that while he wants to get to as many meetings in the two churches as he can, it would help if some of them were less frequent. Subsequently we at Epsom have agreed to return to bi-monthly Church Meetings, now that the urgency of the Vacancy is over. No sooner was the Induction over when the churches were collaborating to organise and cater for the CWM Weekend at the end of November. This was arranged as one of the first Cluster meetings to be held on a social level, to which members of all the six churches were invited.

Another wish of the Minister was that we should resume serving coffee after each morning service with the intention of talking to one another and to any new people appearing in our midst. In order to do this it seemed to make sense to move the time of the Morning Service from 11.am to 10.30am. This was agreed at the January Church Meeting and we hope to launch this in March. 1999 ended with the 311 th Anniversary in November and Christmas celebrations, on this occasion followed by the Millennium Celebrations!

POSTSCRIPT. August 2000

Since this account was written up to January 2000 a number of different happenings of note have occurred. With reference to the New Hall, it was not until now in August that work has actually started on the construction, due to one delay after another. But now it seems to be going ahead and we hope and pray that this will go through satisfactorily, despite all the dirt and dust penetrating the church

We have continued to lose more of our elderly members and we have marked their passing with love and respect. But one in particular was known and loved by everyone, the Revd. Allan P. Butler in April this year, after months in hospital. During his nine years of ministry and during the Pastoral Vacancy Allan, served the church unstintingly and we miss him very much, for his understanding and humour, his wit and sincerity. Our love and sympathy go to his wife, Marion and the family.

IN MEMORIAM

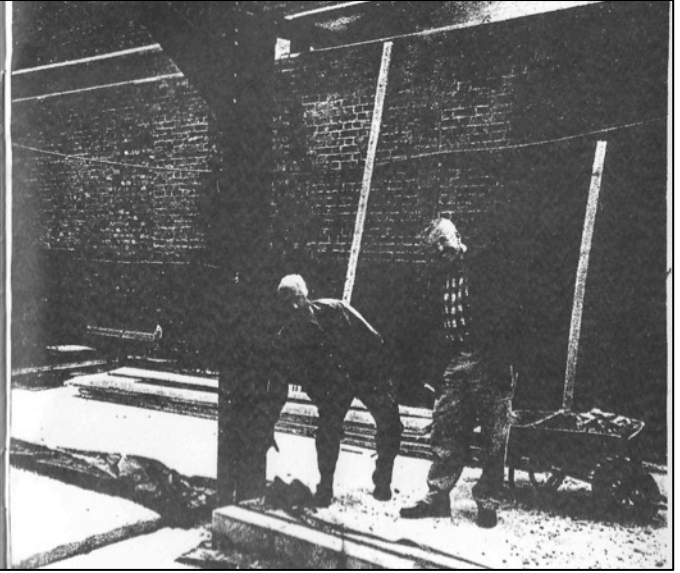
Hilary Blunton	January 1988
Phyllis Metcalf	June 1988
Charles Harvey	1989
Rob Robinson	May 31 st 1989
May Reeve	March 1 st 1990
Winifred Jones	March 1990
Mary Evans	1990
Betty Ellis	March 1991
Cecily Clark	September 1991
George Pearson	May 15 th 1991
Maggie Hoskins	1991
Nancy Roberts	November 15 th 1991
Flo White	June 1992
Evan Evans	September 17 th 1992
Jessie Hampden	September 1992
Phyllis Kelway	May 11 th 1993
Mr. White	June 16 th 1993
Bill Trueman	August 18 th 1993
Len Gessey	December 1 st 1993
Jane Evans	February 12 th 1994
Lilias Thomson	March 15 th 1994
Doris Carr	June 24 th 1994
Muriel Pullinger	July 1994
John Warner	January 14 th 1995

Tom Carr	January 25 th 1995
Amy Reader	January 30 th 1995
Marianne Pouk	September 1995
Ethel Coombe	November 7 th 1995
John Galliers	March 19 th 1995
Hilda Steed	February 1996
Howard Stokes	June 10 th 1996
Lesley Bidwell	December 10 th 1995
Gladys Girt	August 28 th 1996
Gladys Bidwell	January 23 rd 1997
Eve Ellis	August 1 st 1997
Sylvia Grimes	September 15 th 1997
Frank Dawe	April 16 th 1998
Betty Kirby	May 1998
May Waters	October 12 th 1998
Gladys Kibblewhite	December 7 th 1998
Edith Wood	February 1999
Muriel Warner	June 22 nd 1999
Francis Butchart	January 4 th 2000
Nellie Baker	March 4 th 2000
Rev. Allan Butler	April 8 th 2000
Elsie Sprinks	May 24 th 2000
Connie Head	?

(Photographs from the booklet's last two pages)



The New Hall at September 2000.



**Placing the time capsule in the
New Hall on September 5th 2000**