

*This is a 2020 transcription from the 44-page A5 booklet
published by Epsom URC in 1988 to mark their tercentenary*

INTO THE FOURTH CENTURY

HISTORY OF EPSOM UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

TERCENTENARY 1688-1988

by PHYLLIS & WINIFRED CARY

with a Foreword by Rev Geoffrey Dunstan
Minister of the Church 1987 - 1996

THE STORY OF THREE HUNDRED YEARS

FOREWORD

The publication of this book in our Church Tercentenary Year is a timely event which will be welcomed by all our people, near and far. Here is a concise authentic history of the Church's beginnings, its growth and setbacks over the last three centuries. All available records have been closely read and, a mass of information has been carefully sifted, and here we must thank Phyllis and Winifred Cary for the time they have given in researching the records, talking with people and finally writing the story for us. We are indeed indebted to them for their painstaking work. The story which emerged is that of a fellowship of people organising themselves around great convictions, moving and growing in the face of many difficulties, especially in the years of repression against Nonconformity and the upheaval of two World Wars, and taking its place as a Church and being a witness to the truths of the Christian Faith here in Epsom.

Perhaps some of you whose association with the Church goes back into the past may feel that more references should have been made to individuals whom you have known; people who, at one time or another made valuable contributions to this Church's work and witness. It must have been difficult for the writers to omit such names, but they have been sparing in personal reference in view of the purpose they had in mind, that is to tell the story of a community and of the growth and development of a fellowship.

One value of reading and studying history is that it saves us from the sin of taking things for granted. When we know what our forefathers achieved and the cost of their achievement, we feel we cannot sit lightly to the great heritage into which we have entered. So this record of zeal for the Church of Christ, of sacrificial service for the Kingdom of God, is now placed in our hands to be a source of inspiration to us and to those coming after us. Our predecessors believed in the future and, at cost to themselves, felt it worth striving for. They were confident that after them would come people of like faith and conviction to carry on the work that they began. We have received much, we have much to give and to His Name be the glory.

GEOFFREY DUNSTAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Tercentenary Committee requested a further history of the United Reformed Church at Epsom for the Tercentenary Year. We had gained some experience of gathering information of history of Churches from our work with the archives of the United Reformed Church Historical Society in the Library at Church House and so we offered to write this history. We are indebted to the Library for many sources of our information, especially of personalities.

We began by reading the history "Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Congregationalism in Epsom" by the late Mr. F. L. Clark, M.A., and we wondered at first, how we could possibly enlarge upon any of the early history. In our attempts to find proof of the founding date of 1688 we began an interesting search which led to our finding out something of the local Conventicles of the period. A visit to the Surrey Record Office at Kingston upon Thames, introduced us to the "Court Rolls" of the Manor of Epsom and thus to matters concerning the early history of our Church. We gained information about the gift of land, at that time copyhold, by Elizabeth Faulkner in 1720. This land later became the freehold land on which our present building stands. We are greatly indebted to the local historian Dr. H. R. Lehmann for his assistance with the Latin translations and interpretation of the Court Rolls.

Visits to Dr. Williams' Library "sparked off" our researches into the history of the Little Chapel (Bugby Chapel) at the time of the secession about 1780. This also necessitated a visit to the Record Office in Chancery Lane. We are also indebted to Dr. Williams' Library for information of ministers in the "Surman" File and for sight of the letters written by Mr. Hankey to Joshua Wilson, the "Evans" list, the "Thompson" list and Walter Wilson's Volumes about the Churches in and around London about the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.

We also acknowledge the help given by many members of our congregation for information of happenings in more recent times and particularly to Alan and Valerie Wood for the facts concerning the Church Hall taken from their "Centenary History".

PHYLLIS AND WINIFRED CARY

MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH

FRANCIS YOWELL or YEWELL	1688-1690	JAMES THORPE	1879-1881
BENONI ROWE	1690-1699	WILLIAM SUMMERS	1883-1906
THOMAS VALENTINE, M.A.	1699-1755	HENRY ATKINSON	1907-1910
JOHN SOUTHWELL (Assist)	1738-?	THOMAS LISTER	1911-1913
JOHN THAWYER/JOHN PEIRCE? ..	1756-1764	LLEWELLYN PARSONS	1914-1916
WILLIAM HOGHTON	1764-1771	EBENEZER HITCHCOCK	1917-1935
WILLIAM SUTTON	1772-1783	JOHN BATES	1936-1947
JOHN ATKINSON	1807-1820	STEPHEN BAKER	1949-1962
JOHN HARRIS, D.D	1825-1838	DAVID ELLIS LEWIS	1962-1977
WILLIAM JACKSON	1838-1842	ALLAN BUTLER	1978-1986
THOMAS LEE	1843-1878	GEOFFREY DUNSTAN	1987-
CHARLES HARRISON	1878		

SECESSION PERIODS

SIGNATORIES IN THE LITTLE CHAPEL REGISTERS

REV. WM. HUNTINGTON	1779
REV. JOHN TOWNSEND	1781-1783
REV. GEORGE GILBERT	1785
REV. WILLIAM BUGBY	1785-1792
REV. RICHARD TROTT	1795-1811

AT THE PARADE CHAPEL

REV. WM. ELLIOTT1850

REV. BOARDMAN

REV. J. REDFORD.

MAY BE OTHERS

REV. CHARLES HARRISON1875-1878

(Charles Harrison ministered at the Church Street chapel during the last part of 1878)

HISTORY OF EPSOM UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

PART ONE. 1688-1805

THE BEGINNINGS.

"The dissenting interest at this place was in existence at the Revolution in 1688". (Congregational Magazine 1826).

From the 1620's Epsom, a mere village at that time centred around St. Martin's Church, began to rise to fame as a watering place. During the season in early summer, well-to-do people came to stay for a time, people such as Samuel Pepys in 1663 and John Evelyn in 1673, whose brother Richard lived in Epsom and recorded their experiences of such visits. No doubt, during the Commonwealth this activity was well-regulated and decorous. With the Restoration in 1660 however, and the fashion of the Court of Charles II to descend upon Epsom in some numbers, it became a more riotous place. Numerous Inns and Coffee Houses had arisen, though still inadequate, as Pepys found in 1673, when he failed to find lodgings on a visit to Epsom. In 1690 Ballrooms were built and two rival Bowling Greens. Horse racing had taken place on Banstead (i.e. Epsom) Downs since Elizabethan times. This was an additional attraction to the gayer set. In 1684, the London Gazette announced that "the Post will go every day to and fro between London and Epsom during the Season for the drinking of the waters", a journey of two to three hours. This was one of the first regular coach services to the outside of London.

The "Wells" were situated to the south of the village on the Common, and had been discovered early in the Century by a cowherd whose cattle refused to drink water from the springs. It was already known that magnesium sulphate had been detected in the Epsom Water supply. About 1621 the area around the spring was enclosed by a circular fence, and a shed was erected to shelter the drinkers of the water. This place became known as the "Wells". The fencing off was an encroachment of common rights and these were lost.

The area is now built over and can be seen as an enclave on the common. The roads follow concentric circles around the original well and its fencing.

During the Commonwealth, 1649-1660, Nonconformists and Episcopalians had all worshipped together under the Parish priests sympathetic to the Commonwealth form of Presbyterianism. The Act of Uniformity in 1662, on the Restoration of Charles II, demanded that the priests and congregations should subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles and other demands of the Episcopalian Church. If the priest refused to conform, he was ejected from his church, frequently taking with him the Nonconformists in his congregation. In our area Mr. King of Ashted was ejected and also Mr. Batho of Ewell. The priest at Epsom, Robert Ewell or Yowell seems to have conformed. It would appear that some of the Nonconformists of our area met together at Ewell to set up secret meetings or Conventicles at various houses at different times. In 1669, the ecclesiastical records of the survey of the Bishop of Winchester, tell us that Presbyterian Conventicles were known to be held at the house of Mr. Cutler, a brewer at the Malt House, Ewell and that the widow Mrs. Holmes housed another. Mr. Batho and Mr. King both ministered at Ewell, as well as a Mr. Symms from Kingston upon Thames. Ewell, at that time was head of the Deanery of Win ton, of the Diocese of Winchester, and was of greater ecclesiastical importance than Epsom.

This was also a period of the famous early chapels in London, such as Bury Street and Mark Lane, which were served by well-known Nonconformist preachers. To these London Chapels merchants and gentlemen of the Nonconformist persuasion resorted when they could, although they were illegal and often had to move or close. If such people had country houses or actually resided out at Epsom, now becoming a popular residential area, they would require a similar meeting at that place. There is no mention in the Ecclesiastical Records of 1669 and 1672 of any Conventicle at Epsom. However, the Surrey Quarter Sessions (held at the Surrey Record Office, Kingston) state that Francis Yewell of Ebisham was indicted for holding a Conventicle in 1667. He was further indicted in 1676 for holding a Conventicle in his house in Epsom on 14 May and again on 21 May. As the first of the Bishop's survey was made in 1669 following the first indictment, the omission of an Epsom Conventicle from this survey would show that Francis Yewell and his group exercised vigilance. Francis Yewell was a schoolmaster.

THE CONVENTICLE PERIOD 1688-1729

So the Epsom Meeting began under the leadership of Mr. Francis Yewell or Yowell, who Mr. F. L. Clark suggests could have been the Nonconforming son of the Epsom Incumbent. Walter Wilson, in his account of the London Churches written about 1820, states "the people of Epsom made choice of Mr. Ewell as their Minister". The Court Rolls tell us that Mr. Francis Yowell lived in a house to the east of that belonging to Mr. Crick in Church Street in a 1684 survey. This situation is repeated in a 1694 document. Also Crick's house lay north of "Isaacs", one and a half acres of which abutted the site of the later Meeting House according to a document in 1705. It probably stood somewhere near Dorling's old printing works by the Depot Road Car Park. It was quite usual in those days for the Meeting to begin its existence in the house of the leader. Mr. Yowell appears to have died about 1694/5. The original Meeting Place must have been somewhere quite near to the site of the present Church.

Only two years after its official founding, the congregation secured its second Minister, Benoni Rowe, known to the Nonconformist community of London merchants at Newington Green, some of whom had country houses at Epsom and other nearby places. Benoni Rowe came to Epsom in 1690.

He was born in 1658 and grew up during the period of persecution of the Nonconformists following the 1662 ejections. His maternal grandfather Thomas Scott was a member of the self-appointed body who condemned Charles II to death and was a great Parliamentary figure. Scott's daughter Alice married William Rowe, the Scoutmaster-General at that time. Benoni was their son, and he was educated at the Newington Green Academy founded by Theophilus Gale and subsequently taken over by Thomas Rowe, originally no relation. Isaac Watts and many other famous preachers of that time were educated there. Later, Benoni married Thomas' sister, Sarah Rowe. Thomas Rowe's father, John Rowe, had been ejected from the Independent Chapel in Westminster Abbey. Benoni's son Thomas married Elizabeth Singer, a well-known writer and poetess, some of whose works were published by Isaac Watts.

Like his father-in-law John, Benoni's services as a minister would have been occasional and frequently interrupted during the latter years of the persecution. So when Benoni came to Epsom in 1690 this was his first proper pastorate. He lived, not near the Meeting House, but on the north side of the Town Pool, that is at the west end of the village. We are told that he had "excellent talents for preaching and a most lively and engaging conversation". He was a great friend of Isaac Watts who described him as "my intimate friend". Benoni gave the Long Prayer at the induction of Watts at the Mark Lane Chapel in 1702. Despite Benoni Rowe having been an able preacher, such a Meeting did not have an easy time, but this did not seem to restrict the growing number of "hearers" at the Meeting House. It existed on sufferance and freedom to worship was limited. For over thirty years it met in an old building, probably in Church Street, which was later converted to a private house. Baptisms, marriages and burials had to be according to the Prayer Book, and the Church Rate had to be paid by everyone. The Meeting would have tended to be isolated in its own circle and have little to do with the

fashionable activities of Epsom at that time, and of which they probably firmly disapproved. Benoni Rowe left Epsom in 1699 or 1700 to return to London to a pastorate at Fetter Lane. He died at the age of forty-eight and was buried in Bunhill Fields, the last resting place for so many of the great preachers of his time, for they were refused burial in a Church of England Cemetery.

It was during this period of modest existence that the Rev. Thomas Valentine, M.A. took up his duties as Minister in 1699/1700. He came from a well-known family of Churchmen and preachers in the Lancashire area. There were many Thomas Valentines of this Presbyterian family, but this one seems to have been the exception in preferring not to train at the Presbyterian Frankland Academy at Rathmel, Lancashire. He obviously desired to obtain a degree, but being a Nonconformist he could not read at an English University. Scotland, however, was by then firmly Presbyterian and willing to accept him. Thus he became a graduate at Edinburgh in 1697, and he came to Epsom not long afterwards.

The "Happy Union" of 1690 linked Independent and Presbyterian preachers into one body and there was great hope for a time that these two groups would join together; but this hope was not realised until 1972; and the Church in Epsom was served at times, by Ministers of the Presbyterian persuasion.

We do not know a great deal about his ministry, although the fact that he stayed for fifty-six years would seem to imply satisfaction on both sides. He was unfortunate enough to break his leg in 1716, and was granted an award of twenty guineas by the London Fund. A year's salary only amounted to fifty to sixty pounds in those days.

Epsom was still enjoying considerable popularity, and nearness to London was a great factor, and the trade boom just before the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720, brought more and more rich merchants to seek rural life in the town. Despite constant and easy contact with the Metropolis no member of a Nonconformist community could hold national or public office there, nor could he hold a commission in the Army or Navy or attend an English University under the laws of the Test Act and Corporation Act, which were not repealed until 1828. However some rich merchants, Sir John Hartopp for one, who had a house in Epsom and was fined seven thousand pounds for not attending the Episcopalian Church, were prepared to pay the fines "incurred. The religious fanaticism and purity of objective, typical of the 1662-1689 persecution period, had given way to what was still a whole-hearted conviction, but one tempered by a somewhat worldly attitude, which allowed "occasional conformity", that is attending the Episcopalian Church a few times a year in order to qualify for public office. Later restrictive Acts, like that of 1711, put a stop to this also. So our Meeting at Epsom would have consisted of local gentlemen and their families, merchants, some more humble farmers and- artisans. Market gardens were quite well-developed in the area to supply London Markets and the local fashionable households in the season. Merchants would live much of their time in London, especially in the fashionable Nonconformist Newington Green area, and have a "country house" in Epsom. Such people tended to keep themselves apart from the gayer life of gaming, dog-fighting and horse racing, probably using the Coffee Houses to talk trade and discuss politics with their peers.

Such a gentleman was Sir John Hartopp, who lived mainly in Newington Green, but had a house where Church Close now stands, opposite the end of Worple Road known as the "Acacias". The young Isaac Watts joined this household in 1696 as tutor to his son John and stayed until he was inducted as minister at Mark Lane Chapel in 1702. Watts stated that his public preaching commenced in 1696. The tradition that Isaac Watts preached to the community in Epsom should be considered according to the known facts. Whilst tutor to John Hartopp Junior from 1696, if Isaac Watts had preached at Epsom, it would have been in the old Conventicle building, which was probably a large barn or similar building converted for the purpose of Meetings. However after his call to Mark Lane Chapel and his removal from the Hartopp family, Watts' ill-health and a search for quiet and fresh air in the country may have led Sir John Hartopp to invite the now-famous preacher to stay with him at Epsom. Thus he could have preached in the Chapel on the present site after 1720. Watts is recorded as having preached at the Hartopp's evening prayers.

John Toland, a great thinker of this period, and like most dissenters, a supporter of the debated Hanoverian Succession, tried to get various political people to adopt his views. Disillusioned by failure he retired to Woodcote, then a separate village from Epsom, to his "Hermitage". Later he emerged to find a kindred environment in the Church Street Chapel. In his description of Epsom in 1711, he writes in a postscript to one of his letters, "we have prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays and two sermons every Sunday, not to speak (unless among friends) of a Dissenting Meeting House."

Dissenters were barred from the Universities and had to turn to business pursuits, and because they were serious minded folk they were often very successful. They had respect for one another, and master-worker relationships were good, adding to the success of their enterprises. They were consequently disliked by the masses, partly because of their success, and partly because of implied criticism of their own morals. It was not unusual for the Meeting Houses to be stormed by the mob and windows broken. Was it to this that Toland was referring when he wrote "not to speak (unless among friends) of a Dissenting Meeting House"? These actions by the mob increased the withdrawal of Dissenters within their own community, and attempts to champion their cause were unpopular with most politicians.

THE MEETING HOUSE PERIOD. Circa 1600-1756

As the fame of Epsom Spa dwindled due to competition from greater spas such as Cheltenham and Bath, as well as sea-bathing, attempts were made to keep Epsom in the public eye. A certain Dr. Livingstone has been blamed for fraudulently setting up "New Wells" in the town behind the public house now known as the "Albion", which was then a Coffee House, in opposition to the true wells on the Common and so ruining the reputation of the spa; but Mr. F. L. Clark by his study of the Court Rolls has shown that the situation was quite different. Livingstone was providing new and improved accommodation as a resort for the fashionable folk of the town and for such as would continue to visit it. The "water" he served was free and he claimed no healing properties for it. As time went by even the "New Wells" failed to keep the fashionable set at Epsom.

The Dissenting community seems to have prospered in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries in Epsom. Examination of the "Evans" list at Dr. Williams' Library reveals that there were three hundred "hearers" at Epsom in 1715 (page 114). "Hearers" described those who attended the Meetings. It also reveals that in some years preceding the 1715 entry the Rev. Thomas Valentine had the occasional assistance of one called George Anderton, but that had now ceased. A search did not reveal the name of Ewell or of any hearers there, and there were surprisingly few entries of Meetings for the County of Surrey, but those recorded mostly had a large number of hearers. With Epsom later declaring itself and having eminent preachers like Benoni Rowe and Valentine, it would appear that the Dissenters who had met at Ewell, now attended the Meeting House in Epsom.

By 1720, the Dissenting Community felt strong enough to wish to erect a purpose-built Meeting House more worthy of the large number of hearers. This must have become apparent to a local lady, one Elizabeth Faulkner, who owned considerable copyhold land in Epsom. In her will dated 20th June 1720 she left a parcel of land of one quarter of an acre from her estates for the purpose of building a Meeting House upon it. According to the Court Rolls the will was not entered and proved until the following February, but in order to expedite admittance, executors of her will, Mr. Stanley West and the Rev. William Harris, (Principal of Hoxton Independent Academy) approached the Lord of the Manor, John Parkhurst, for admittance to this parcel of copyhold land facing Church Street, and this was granted on 24th November 1720. We have made use of this date for our Church Anniversary as this is the only recognisable beginning of the acquisition of the land, which at that time was copyhold. The Court Roll survey of 1750 indicates that this parcel of land was now registered as freehold in the name of the Rev. Thomas Valentine. When the land became freehold it could no longer be mentioned in the Court Rolls.

It may have taken a little time for the first building to be erected, for the earliest licence which has been traced is that granted by the Surrey Quarter Session for a group of Dissenters, whose minister was the Rev. Thomas Valentine in the year 1724.

Little is known of the next thirty years and perhaps it was due to the "proprietary and moderation" in which the Rev. Thomas Valentine discharged his duties in his "sacred office for over fifty years", (quoted from the tombstone to Valentine in St. Martin's Churchyard), that did much to hold together this community when Epsom itself was slipping back into obscurity, only to be disturbed twice yearly for Race Meetings in Spring and Summer. The early Eighteenth Century has been described as one of "moral squalor". Efforts like Charity Schools and Improvement Societies were "like good deeds in a naughty world". Reformers were branded as spoil-sports. Enthusiasm for any cause was an anathema and liberalism led to complacency.

The Meeting Houses of this period were plain, domestic in style, not unlike a house, but with large windows giving good light within. In the north of the Country they were stone built, but in the south they were usually built of brick with stone quoins. The lintels in the north would be stone slabs, but in the south most likely oak.

CHAPEL INTERIORS

Internally they were a plain oblong shape, well-lit by windows with small leaded panes. The wooden pulpit stood against the long wall opposite to the door. In front was a desk for the clerk or precentor who led the singing, and before all this stood the Communion Table surrounded by the Communion Pews. In our vestibule is a stone bearing the date 1846 and it records the fact that only twelve inches lay between the Chapel walls and the next property, and this suggests that the long side of the oblong shape lay across the land parallel with Church Street and we know that the graveyard lay between it and the roadway. These Chapels often had box-pews for warmth, and this form was probably demanded by our merchant members for their greater comfort. We know from records that they had them at the turn of the Eighteenth and beginning of the Nineteenth centuries. Traditionally the singing was from the Psalms. It was Isaac Watts who complained to his father of the "harshness and uncouthness" of the Psalter used in his Chapel, only to be told to "compose something better". Thus in 1707 Watts began his prolific hymn writing which was to cause severe argument and even schism in many a Chapel congregation. Scriptural exposition and long prayers led to sermons of one or two hours. Preaching, at that time, lacked in vitality and personal appeal, but gained its strength from sound doctrine, dignified delivery and intellectual appeal. Two such services on a Sunday, morning and afternoon, were quite a strain on the pastor and it is recorded that in 1738, Thomas Valentine had the assistance of one John Southwell.

From about 1720 there began a period of theological ferment with the spreading of new ideas and the development of new sects like Socinianism, Arminianism and Arianism, mainly attempts to simplify the Gospel after the involved theological discussions of the Sixteenth Century, but all tending towards Unitarianism. We do not know how our Chapel stood up to these influences at this period, but it seems to have resisted them.

THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL: DECLINE AND ECLIPSE, 1759-1805

In Britain this was the period of the great Evangelical Revival. Up till now, the Nonconformists had been only too thankful for "Toleration", wishing to live in harmony with Anglicans and not to give offence. Now a more aggressive attitude took over and Nonconformists began speaking about their beliefs whatever the cost; for example, men like Whitefield and Scott. Within the Anglican Church itself, dissatisfied revivalists gathered around John Wesley. Emphasis was now placed upon personal conviction and dedication. There was a growing awareness of social deprivation and the need for the education of the masses. The Industrial Revolution was under way. Sunday Schools began, which in turn gave women the opportunity to work in the Chapels. The London Missionary Society was founded in 1795.

The Chapel at Epsom could not take full advantage of these changes. After 1720 all attempts to revitalise the "Wells" gradually petered out, while greater watering places were becoming more sophisticated than Epsom in its hey-day. Epsom slipped back into its former village status. A few large houses were built for Government officials and merchants, but in the main the population declined. Elsewhere Congregationalists were organising themselves into County Associations, and there were renewed movements to repeal the restrictions of the Toleration and allied Acts against the Nonconformists. The French Revolution in the 1790's however, stirred a great horror of revolt in the hearts of the British, and a halt was called to such movements until well into the Nineteenth Century.

There has been some controversy as to who took over at Epsom after Thomas Valentine. Mr. F. L. Clark gives his reasons, based on a gift in the will of Sir John Hartopp junior, to the Rev. John Peirce who is said to have resided at Epsom. A number of other Divines also lived in Epsom, for example, the Rev. John Atkinson, and other tutors at the London Academies. His supposition disregards the entry in the "compilation of Churches in and around London" by Walter Wilson from (1781-1847) in which he states that John Thawyer was the Epsom minister from 1757-1764 and that he was ordained at Epsom. This information was quoted by no less an authority than Waddington, Chairman of the Congregational Union in his "History of Congregationalism in Surrey", (1866) and also by more than one directory of London Churches of the Nineteenth Century. These same authorities quote Wilson for the fact that John Hoghton was our minister from 1764 to 1771. The latter left Epsom to take up a career in the legal profession and so perhaps, was not very interested in the religious movements of the time, and so hastened the slide of our Chapel into further decay.

Then came William Sutton in 1772, who originated from Bridport. His name appears in the "Thompson list" in Dr. Williams' Library as one of the nine signatories from Surrey Churches to one of the petitions to Parliament in 1772 for more freedom for Nonconformists.

While the decline in the population of Epsom was no doubt a prime cause for our Chapel's decline at this time, it was probably not the only one. As was common with so many new ideas abroad, there was a secession from our Chapel about 1780. It may have been that William Sutton was a confirmed Presbyterian, which label he was given on the petition to Parliament, and therefore his doctrines and methods of Church Government did not suit the Independents, or that the seceders were led away by some other outside influences. This was happening at other Chapels, for example Dorking Chapel became Unitarian for a time.

There were preachers in Epsom at this time with strong non-restrictive Calvinistic tendencies. For example William Bugby obtained Licences (now in Southwark Central Library) for meetings in houses in Epsom in 1777 and 1778. It would appear that some of the Church Street Congregation joined this group and by 1779, the Little Chapel was founded and built in what is now Prospect Place, at that time an area called Harris Hearn. This building still stands today and is in use as the local Synagogue. The registers for this congregation at the Little Chapel are extant and preserved in the Public Record Office. While they probably had few permanent ministers of their own, a number of ministers' names are recorded in these registers as having conducted baptisms and burials. The first name is that of William Huntington in 1779, the eccentric coalheaver (self-styled) from Kent. His doctrines were Calvinistic, strongly flavoured with Antimonianism, which was followed by those who lived by what they believed to be God's Laws, and could do no wrong since they had already been saved by grace. Huntington, believing himself to be under the direct inspiration of God, damned all who differed from him as "crazy fools or incarnate devils". He preached over an area from Richmond and Kingston to Ewell and Kent. Some of the Epsom Congregation seem to have believed and followed him. Later this Chapel is referred to as the "Old Huntingtonian Chapel" in a Baptist register, but it is marked on ordnance survey maps as the "Bugby Chapel". This was the congregation which Dr. John Harris, minister of the Church Street Chapel designated "Ultra Calvinistic" on an official document in 1837. There is a portrait of Huntington in the National Portrait Gallery.

John Townsend follows in the registers of 1781 to 1785. Earlier he had actually been ousted from the Independent Chapel in Kingston by Huntington. At the dates mentioned he was minister at the Jamaica Row

Chapel in Bermondsey, and seems to have been a man of good works, for he was instrumental in founding Lewisham, later Caterham, School for the sons of poor Nonconformist preachers, the London Asylum for Blind, Deaf and Dumb Children, and was one of the founders of the London Missionary Society. The Rev. G. Gilbert follows as a signatory in 1785. Mr. William Bugby built the Chapel in 1779 together with Rose Cottage for his son, the Rev. William Bugby, but the latter does not appear on the registers until 1785. He appears to have had a longer association with the Chapel, the last entry being in 1792, and may actually have been minister over this period. At Southwark Central Library Licences show Bugby's name at Leigh (1785), Hedley (1785), Effingham (1786), and Betchworth (1788). He was also minister at Brockham Hill Chapel, which has also been described as a Huntingtonian Chapel. Thus he must have ministered to all these chapels on a type of circuit. Following Bugby comes the Rev. Richard Trott, whose name appears on the registers between 1796 and 1811, although the entries become rather scarce after 1800. Two burials are mentioned, but it is not recorded where the interment took place, although the Chapel was known to have its own burial ground.

The preservation of the Little Chapel registers was due to the 1837 Commission on Church and Chapel registers, requesting all non-parochial registers to be deposited in the Central Registry Office. Charles Young was handed these registers by his father who attended the Little Chapel about 1800, when it appears the congregation was dwindling in numbers. He had kept them safely and when the registers were requested, he handed these documents to the Rev. John Harris, minister of the Church Street Chapel, and which Young was now attending. Harris completed the form and he described the old congregation at the Little Chapel as "Ultra-Calvinistic". These registers illustrate that after 1785 the extension of the stamp duty of 3d. to registration of births and baptisms in non-parochial groups, appears to have given some official sanction to this.

Meanwhile at the Church Street Chapel the Rev. William Sutton stayed on until 1783, when he left to become an usher at Gore Street Academy, Hackney, and later went to Oakingham where he died. How much longer the Chapel remained open we do not know, but it was probably closed by 1785. Such an experience as that at Epsom was not unusual at this time. Dorking, after becoming Unitarian, closed. Similarly, congregations at Reigate and Guildford faded, but in the case of Epsom, may we say, the Nonconformist cause lived on through the Little Chapel until such a time as it revived in Church Street. In the meantime the demise was a sad one. Pownall in his History of Epsom, published 1826, writes of the state of the Chapel in 1803 as follows. "The old Presbyterian Meeting House at Epsom, in Surrey, formerly a place of fashionable resort . . . had for many years been attended by persons of opulence and their families, but the congregation declined until it was reduced to so low a state that the doors were closed". Gordon Home writes "the Chapel fell into a sad state of dilapidation, and was in 1803 used as a barn; indeed so ruinous was its condition that the heavens could be seen through the roof. The large square pews remained at the sides of the building; but the central portion was filled with agricultural implements. Tattered curtains and mouldering hymn-books completed the dismal condition of the place."

It would appear that the Chapel was actually sold, since Pownall refers to a Mr. Shaw as the owner in 1803. During these years of obscurity various applications were made to the owner of the place and amongst other purposes for which it was desired, was the repairing of it.

One question remains at this point. Pownall was not the only writer to refer to our Chapel as Presbyterian. Our early ministers were often of opposite persuasions, Independent and Presbyterian. It seems likely that the Rev. William Sutton was Presbyterian. It was not unusual in the early Eighteenth Century for ministers of either persuasion to be called to a Nonconformist Congregation, in fact the ministers, if not the Congregations, belonged to a joint union at that time. An Independent Chapel would have been almost entirely self-governing with little or no allegiance to a higher authority. A Presbyterian group would be responsible to a local Presbytery, but we have no trace of such connections. Elizabeth Faulkner from whom the land for our Meeting House derives, made a Mr. Stanley West and the Rev. William Harris her executors. The latter was President of the Independent Hoxton Academy. This would suggest that her sympathies were with the Independents.

PART TWO

RENEWAL AND CONSOLIDATION. 1805-1880.

After the building had languished for some years, a group of people felt urged to restore it to its former use. A certain Mr. Burt, availing himself of his friendship with Mr. Shaw, negotiated with the owner for its use. The owner claimed that it would cost him three hundred and fifty pounds to replace it with a new barn, indicating a rent of fifteen pounds per annum. Mr. Burt argued that it was in such a dilapidated state that it would cost considerably more to put it into the condition of a new barn and was therefore worth much less than the sum on which he based the rent. Finally, Mr. Burt obtained a lease on the Church Street Chapel building for ninety nine years at the sum of twelve pounds per annum. Mr. Burt and other friends set to work to put the building in order at a cost of nearly five hundred pounds, made up in part by subscriptions. It was re-opened on July 19th, 1805. Mr. Hughes of Battersea, Mr. Clayton of Walworth and Mr. Dore of London, together with Mr. Bowden from Tooting, took part in the service and celebrations. The Chapel was put into Trust and supplied from Hoxton Academy until 1807, when the Rev. John Atkinson came to live in the neighbourhood during his tutorship at Hoxton and pastorate at the Academy Chapel. So he came to preach at Epsom regularly and eventually took

over the pastorate until 1820, when he removed from the district. He also ran a small classics school for boys of Epsom.

When the owner of the Chapel died in 1813, he was found to be in considerable debt to the Treasury and his property was sold off. Andrew Burt bought the property and made it over to a board of eleven Trustees, which included two City merchants, a Banker, and two Master Ironmongers, for a fee of ten shillings each. One of the ironmongers Mr. Pelliat was in charge of drawing up the Trust. Another Trustee was Thomas Wilson, a wealthy London merchant who was Treasurer to the Hoxton Academy and a generous benefactor to ailing Nonconformist Chapels like Reigate and Dorking. He gave a considerable sum of his own money to repair the building and later saw that the pastoral supply from Hoxton was maintained. It is interesting to note that the Trust Deed of 1813 sets out a definite Calvinistic Basis of Agreement. Was this because some or most of the Calvinists from the Little Chapel had by now rejoined the Church Street Chapel? Progress was steady until Mr. Atkinson moved to take a tutorship at Wymondley in 1821 and his place was taken by Mr. John Gurney who had assisted Mr. Atkinson at his school. Although the son of the Rev. William Gurney, minister at St. Clement Danes 1807-1843, he proved to hold some very objectionable doctrines, based on Antimonianism. Members were shocked and dissatisfied. The 1813/14 Trustees had been empowered to appoint and remove ministers and it would appear that these powers were used to remove this undesirable influence. With the lack of suitable management and dwindling congregation, the Chapel was again closed and fell into disrepair. Again Mr. Thomas Wilson came to the rescue with another four hundred pounds. Also "Several families of Epsom, who felt the spiritual want of its inhabitants, provided one hundred pounds for the re-establishment of an evangelical ministry". (Evangelical Magazine 1825.) Described as "large", accommodating some 500 persons, it was soon subscribed to and the Chapel was again supplied from Hoxton.

Later in 1825, came one of the Chapel's most distinguished ministers, the Rev. John Harris. He was born in the village of Ugborough in Devonshire, the son of a draper. His delicate health caused him to seek occupation in reading, listening to sermons and study. He joined the Bristol Itinerant Society at an early age and became known as the "Boy Preacher". It was our friend Thomas Wilson who sent him to school and then to Hoxton Academy. John Harris came to Epsom for his first pastorate and his thirteen years there were to be a preparation for his career as a famous preacher and writer. The "quiet seclusion" of Epsom and the "limited character" of the pastorate enabled him to pursue his studies. (Obituary, Congregational Year Book 1856). Elsewhere he is described: "Although neither a fluent nor a theatrical orator, the excellence of his matter attracted crowded audiences." In the later years of his ministry at Epsom he wrote his famous essay on "Mammon, Covetousness the sin of the Christian Church", published in 1836. For this and his other writings Brown University, U.S.A granted him a Doctor of Divinity Degree. He left Epsom in 1838 to take up a theological tutorship at Cheshunt College. In 1850 he became Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology and Head of New College, and later its Principal. He was Chairman of the Congregational Union in 1852, but his health lasted only another four years, and he died in 1856, and was buried in Abney Park Cemetery. His ministry at Epsom seems to have been a happy one and the active Association formed by him for the visiting of the poor throughout the Epsom area to promote religious welfare was founded in accordance with the changing ideas of his time. A Sunday School with some fifty children was one result of this work. In the year he left Epsom he married a local lady.

In 1838 John Harris was succeeded at Epsom by the Rev. William Jackson. It is significant that this was the first year in which a Diaconate at the Church was appointed. Jackson trained at Highbury and was ordained and inducted to his first ministry by his own father, who was for forty-three years minister at Stockwell Green Independent Chapel. William had been offered a Chair in Classics, but was determined to be a pastor. He has been described as being "secluded and unostentatious in habit, conscientious, evangelical and humble in his prayers. He had an ecumenical outlook, stating that while he was Nonconformist by conviction, he was a lover of all good men and would claim for others the right of private judgment." The congregation continued to increase and Mr. J. Saintsbury, a church member entered Marchants College in 1840 to train for the Ministry. In 1842, William Jackson moved to Melksham and later to Bungay. He died in 1856 at the early age of forty-four years.

The early years of the Eighteenth Century had seen considerable changes for the Dissenters. The Toleration and associated Acts had been repealed in 1828, allowing Nonconformists to hold public office. Some restrictions remained, such as the Church Rate and the right to marry in a Chapel, and especially they were still debarred from the Universities. The great Reform Bill of 1832 swept away out-dated ideas of representation of the people. The Industrial Revolution was well on its way with its attendant conflict of ideas and interests. Social patterns were changing gradually; sympathy for the poor was growing and philanthropy abounded. At Epsom too, there were changes. The founding of the Board of Health in 1850 resulted in some "cleaning up", such as the draining of the Epsom Pond at the west end of the High Street and replacing the old watch tower with the present Victorian Clock Tower. In 1847 the Croydon and Leatherhead Branch of the London and South Coast Railway had arrived with its station in the newly constructed Station Road, now Upper High Street.

By 1848 the number of public coaches had decreased and eventually disappeared and with them the bustle of the Inns. With the departure of the "navvies" who built the railways, a strange silence seems to have

descended upon the town. Dickens wrote of it in 1851. "A straggling street, an undue proportion of inns, a large pond, a pump and a magnificent clock tower make up the picture of the Metropolis of English Racing and the Fountain of Epsom Salts". (A little behind in his information it would seem.) By 1849 Epsom had its own gas works, and it was about this time that Sunday afternoon services in the Chapels gave way to evening services, probably because of better street lighting.

Organised horse-racing had taken place on the Downs since 1739 as an annual event. The Grand Stand held nearly five hundred people. The Clerk of the Course, Mr. Henry Dorling, who printed the race cards, rented the stand from the Association to make it a home for his large family. During the Races the family went on holiday to the seaside. One of his daughters was the famous Mrs. Beeton.

The Epsom area was one of the last to be enclosed, at least in the south, in the year 1869. Until then the land beyond the High Street and Church Street was mainly open fields, rising gently southwards to the Downs, enhancing the rural aspect.

The "Social Gospel" was emerging together with the dawn of "popular preaching". It was an age of enthusiasm, energy and eagerness to propagate the Gospel and to reform society. It was also a period of moral smugness and showed a definite decline in moral piety, with a lack of intellectual discipline. For the Chapels, the age of security was over. Education was a burning question; a more general education was required than that offered by the private academies. The alternatives were voluntary schools run by the churches of various denominations and State education, which it was feared, would be dominated by the Church of England as the Established Church. When the previously "disciplined worshipping fellowship" widened to become a more popular gathering, there were often more "hearers" in the Chapels than committed members. This trend was to continue for some decades.

The Rev. Thomas Lee followed the Rev. William Jackson in 1843. He came of farming stock from Bedworth. He first worked for the Coventry and Birmingham Canal Company and unfortunately his father was drowned in the canal. At the age of twenty-three years a change of heart sent him to Highbury College to train for the Ministry in 1839. Epsom was his only ministry. He was renowned for his scholarship, high principles and stern endeavour, but he did not enjoy good health. In those days the ordination and induction service took the whole day, starting at eleven in the morning with an adjournment for dinner at 2.30 p.m. at the King's Head and another service at 6.30 in the evening.

In 1846 the Chapel was extensively renovated. (There is a photograph of the pre-1904 building with a plaque bearing this date).

It is perhaps not surprising that following the renovations, the Church accounts began to show a deficit. A silver chalice and two platens had been acquired, and there was also some disagreement between Mr. Lee, some members and the deacons. The rift seems to have deepened over the years and resulted in some degree of desperation on the part of those who cared for the Church. The Rev. Mr. Lee took much upon himself, for example he made a rule for the regular attendance at Church Meetings, but with the poor attendance and with Mr. Lee breaking his leg, this resulted in no Church Meetings at all for a time. A strong-minded group of members decided to separate themselves from the Church in 1850 and met together for the first time at the "Spread Eagle Inn". Such splits were by no means unusual at this time when strong-minded Victorian Churchmen disagreed with the status quo. Later this group of seceders erected a wooden building in the Parade together with a Sunday School for some seventy children. It was known as the "Temporary Protestant Evangelical Chapel". The Parade Chapel was ministered to by the Rev. William Elliott, a Rev. Mr. Boardman, and the Rev. J. Redford and others, until 1875.

There was also a Sunday School at the Church Street Chapel, which according to Swete was attached to the British and Foreign Bible Society. But all was not well there and the situation worsened. The following information was found in some letters at Dr. Williams' Library. In 1847 Mr. T. Hankey wrote to Joshua Wilson, son of Thomas Wilson, who had been benefactor to the Chapel and a Trustee of 1813, and said "The Chapel has been for several years in the hands of Mr. Lee, the Pastor, who had the sole and unrestrained control of the place. He is a very respectable man in character, but holds peculiar ideas, and preaches to a few people (or very few) every Sunday. The whole affair has come to a point at which it is just enabled to exist and nothing more. It utterly fails as a place of worship and depends for its existence upon a lady who keeps a school and whose scholars generally attend. The pastor clings to it as a means of scanty support, and is not likely to make way for a revised state of things". Mr. Hankey goes on to say that he has heard that a new Trust Deed has been drawn up, all the 1813 Trustees being dead, with Mr. Lee's son and some friends as Trustees. He adds: "I think the whole thing is illegal and in my opinion improper and seems to place the Chapel in the power of private friends. Such a deed being allowed to remain, there seems no chance of putting the spiritual affairs of the Chapel again on a proper footing during the life of the minister". Mr. Hankey then begs Joshua Wilson, as son and heir of one of the original Trustees to enquire into the situation, to find some of the original Trustees' successors, these to use their powers under the 1813 Deed to remove such a minister as Mr. Lee, should a

majority of Trustees be in favour. Joshua Wilson applied to become a Trustee in 1867. The Rev. T. Lee remained at the Chapel until 1878, when he retired.

It was some years before the schism between the two Chapels was healed. In the year 1875, the Rev. Charles Harrison became minister at the Parade Chapel. His career began at a Lawyer's office in the Temple, but feeling a call to the ministry he entered Hackney College in 1837. He had four pastorates between 1842 and 1864 and engaged in social and supply work in London, Somerset, Croydon and Newmarket. At the Parade Chapel he was much esteemed for his uniform kindness of spirit, unselfishness and faithful friendship. "He was a man of high principle, scrupulous of honour and fortitude. He always had a special liking for the young, and all through his life succeeded in attracting them to himself. His preaching made a faithful appeal to the heart and conscience". (Cong. Year Book Obituary.) Harrison Longhurst, who became a great benefactor to our Church was named after him.

The good offices of the Surrey Congregational Union finally helped to heal the breach between the two congregations and the Rev. Thomas Lee retired in 1878 aged 62 years, and not in good health. He is said then to have taken up agricultural activities, and later by his nephew Mr. A. Lee, that "he cultivated his own land and understood farming."

The Rev. Charles Harrison took over the pastorate of the re-united Church for one year in 1878. New Trustees had been appointed to replace the 1813 Trustees ten years previously in 1868. A special Committee of Deacons and members were appointed to look after Church affairs, but was abolished in 1882. The Rev. Charles Harrison resigned the pastorate at the end of 1878 "with characteristic self-sacrifice", probably believing that a fresh minister was needed to finally heal the split. He died at Epsom in 1889 aged 75 years and remained a bachelor throughout his life.

PART THREE

LATE VICTORIAN ENTHUSIASM. 1880-1914

The Rev. James Thorpe came to Epsom in 1879. He had been at Wendover, Bucks. until 1875, and then spent four years at Dalston. His was a short ministry, but characterised by a growing activity and enthusiasm in the church. During the latter days at the Parade, this congregation had considered a better building and Mr. Thomas H. Norman had obtained and presented a site situated in Station Road, now Upper High Street, for the building of a second Congregational Church (according to Harrison Longhurst). However, following the union of the two congregations plans were made to erect a new Sunday School on this site instead of a second church. In 1881 James Thorpe left to take up a pastorate at the Albion Chapel in Nottingham. The Sunday School Committee set to work to plan the building of the Lecture Hall which was opened in 1883, promising to be a valuable asset to the work of the church and a very great use to the town.

It was not until 1883 that our next appointed minister arrived, the Rev. William Summers, and the dawn of a great pastorate and one of the greatest periods of activity and expansion in the history of our Church. The Rev. William Summers was a Londoner from Bethnal Green and was brought up at Victoria Park Chapel and Sunday School. He trained at Hackney College and had pastorates at Smethwick, Ringmere and Mere between 1869 and 1883. He came to Epsom when the old Chapel building was old-fashioned and out of harmony with modern tastes, while the new Gothic style Hall in Station Road was in an important area. It was Mr. Summers who conceived the idea of holding the Sunday Evening Services in the large School Hall. These soon became a valuable feature in the life of the town. (Cong. Year Book 1917.) His preaching was evangelical in spirit, less conventional, earnest, but simple. He was known for his pleasant manner and he radiated purposeful energy, which attracted many new members and intensified the activity in the church.

A notice of a Bazaar held just after the opening of the Lecture Hall describes the work of the Sunday School, which became very well organised in a very short time under the leadership of Mr. T. H. Norman with its 575 scholars, 52 teachers, meeting upstairs and downstairs, in the kitchen and anywhere they could be accommodated. New activities ranged from Band of Hope (1884), mission work, efforts to raise money for local charities, and by 1893, a Christian Endeavour to bridge the gap between Sunday School and commitment to the Church.

The latter half of the Nineteenth Century had been a period of transition, with old creeds and beliefs being challenged, following the developments in medicine and the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1860. It was also a period of Empire and Missionary fervour. The growing adulation of worldly success and pride in commercial prowess was common among churchmen. With greater desire for education and knowledge came also a desire for concerts, plays and circuses. Richly ornate buildings were erected and it was also a great time for Chapel rebuilding. By the Eighteen Nineties dissatisfaction with the much renovated Meeting House was intensified. However, it was felt that the time was not ripe. Epsom was also rapidly expanding as a residential area. The old High Street with its clapboard or weather-beaten old red-brick walls and small paned windows, contrasted with the more modern London-side of the town. Along Hook Road (formerly Kingston Road) had arisen a cluster of yellow-brick, blue-slatted cottages of artisan type by 1901.

Meanwhile the building committee had been at work and in July 1904 the Foundation Stones of the new church were laid. Sunday Services were held in the Lecture Hall. At a cost of £3700, it was opened in March 1905, free from debt. It was Neo-Gothic in style with red bricks and stone facings. The old Chapel had stood long-wise across the plot; the new Church turned end-on to the road. The old graveyard was replaced by a pleasant garden. The removal of the graveyard necessitated the tracing of the descendants of those buried there and the removal of the remains to Epsom Cemetery. The headstones can still be seen, arranged along the north walls. The Congregational Year Book of 1906, described the opening of the new Church at Epsom with the words: "The new church has been erected on the site of an old church (Oct. 1846). It takes the place of the antiquated, incommodious, dingy structure, which was a most inadequate representation of the position and influence of Congregationalism upon the rapidly advancing town".

It is interesting to note that in all probability, the old 1846 building had the same foundations as the first Chapel of the early Eighteenth Century. It had had several renovations, the 1805 and 1846 being the chief, the latter considerably altering the appearance of the frontage. It is also interesting to note that in the wall on the right of the doorway was an opening through which the coffins were passed at funeral services. So passed the Old Meeting House, considered inadequate for the prosperity and development of this period.

The style of the new Church building was late Gothic with traceried windows. The tower on the north side rose to 50 feet and was turreted. The roof was surmounted by a 30 foot spirolet copper spire. The building was entered by a large porch and it accommodated five hundred people. The floor was designed to slope twenty one inches from the main entrance of the nave to the rostrum giving the main body of the Church an easy view of the speaker. The pews were made of Orham wood and stained. The gallery was reached from the tower, the heating chamber was housed in the tower, and the building was lit by electricity. There was a central pulpit and the choir sat on each side. The "Bishop" organ, which had been removed from the former building to the Lecture Hall during re-building, was placed centrally at the back of the apse behind the pulpit and fitted with new electrically operated bellows.

Mr. Summers saw the new Church completed. In 1906 after twenty three years service at Epsom, he decided to retire at the age of sixty-two while still vigorous. He was known for his pleasant manner and cheerfulness and he had done much to foster in the Church the great spirit of enterprise which existed during his ministry. He died in 1915.

So the Church entered into the twentieth century with considerable hope and enthusiasm, with a flourishing Sunday School, meeting twice every Sunday. The Hall was under the energetic influence of the Ede family, the husband as caretaker, the wife as a teacher in the Sunday School and a daughter organising the Band of Hope. Mr. Chuter Ede gave valuable service to the Church despite his public duties. Sunday Evening Services and committee meetings were sandwiched in between a full programme of youth activities. To finance the Hall's growing upkeep costs, it was planned to open it to public lettings, thus incurring liability to rating, which was a vexed problem for a time. When finally the idea of being rated was accepted there began a long period of regular and occasional lettings to non-church bodies.

With the retirement of Mr. Summers, the Rev. Henry Atkinson came to Epsom from the Adelphi Chapel in Hackney, London. He came originally from Lincolnshire, and began his working life as an ironmonger, and then later, as a solicitor. Eventually he read Theology in America and at Paton College, Nottingham. He was an ardent amateur photographer. He stayed for four years and left to take up a pastorate at Muswell Hill in North London.

The closure of the old Public Hall at the Quadrant brought more applicants for the regular use of the Lecture Hall. There was the Literary Society which used it from 1900 to 1930, when the Ebbisham Hall was built. Other users included the Chrysanthemum Society, the Gas Company and Electric Company for demonstrations. The Brotherhood, founded back in 1910, had a club, library and meeting rooms there. They were not the only ones to pose the problem of smoking in the rooms used by the Sunday School. There were many church and public social and fund-raising activities as well as dramatic productions, although the latter had been excluded from the original Trust Deeds. However with Mr. Norman on the Management Committee, this did not seem to be questioned.

Mr. Atkinson was followed by the Rev. Thomas Lister in 1911, who came from Ormskirk and Providence Chapel, Middleton. In that year the Evening Services were re-organised and Moody and Sankey Hymns were used to supplement the existing Congregational Hymnal. Mr. Lister stayed with us for only two years and returned to his native North County, to Matlock Congregational Church, and the Rev. Llewellyn Parsons succeeded him in October 1914.

The First World War shook Society to its foundations and many questioned the validity of the Gospel by which their fathers had stood for so long. Ideals were shattered giving place to bitterness, cynicism and loss of faith. Many churches lacked the activities of their men and young people away on active service; many had no minister. Epsom was fortunate in suffering rather less. The Hall was requisitioned for recruiting purposes for a short period at the beginning of the war. After a long and active ministry, the Rev. Llewellyn Parsons came out of retirement at the age of 72 to minister to Epsom. He soon created an atmosphere of affection that none could

resist. He attracted many with his preaching. To the great sorrow of the congregation he died of pneumonia in 1916, and the church was without a minister until the coming of the Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock in 1917. He began his working life in the printing trade, but under the influence of the Rev. Mr. Shermin of Forest Gate he trained for the ministry at Paton College, Nottingham. He was married and ordained in the same year, 1896. He began his ministry at Woodford Green, and this was followed by a pastorate at Weybridge, 1910-1917. "His forthright character, patience and vital personality, together with a great aptitude for making friends, was a real asset. It was his nature to be always alive to the things that mattered, especially in relation to his Christian Faith, which was unshakably centred on the Master he so faithfully served". (Cong. Year Book 1959). He took up the reins and helped us through the remainder of the war years. At the time of writing, his daughter Mrs. Edith Wood still worships with us and has been a member for 70 years.

In 1917, the Lecture Hall was officially registered with the Land Registry as the "Congregational Church Hall". Then began a long series of repairs and improvements.

POST-WAR EMERGENCE AND INTER-WAR GROWTH. 1920-1940

Spiritually, the First World War had been a major tragedy. The appalling losses, dreadful expense and scale of operation led to shattered ideals. The Churches in general emerged "much cast down though not destroyed". Now they were led into greater co-operative efforts to rebuild their faith, both in Britain and especially in the developing international scene. Lambeth Palace's call for Christian Unity in 1921 and various International Conferences struck the same note.

With the war over our Church seems to have entered into another period of real activity. It was a great development era in the town of Epsom, with expansion accelerating until just before World War Two. Many large hospitals were built between 1903 and 1927, bringing a large number of workers to the town. The Church Hall was in great demand every day of the week for Church and youth activities, as well as for public lettings. In 1916 Miss Ede started the Girls' Brigade; the Boys' Life Brigade was launched in 1919, but it went through a bad time and was later merged with the Boys' Brigade in 1926. In 1923 Mrs. Gray started her Infant and Primary School and this was to remain for some twenty years. Soon after the War, the Kingsdown Road Manse was purchased as a War Memorial. The founding of the Women's Church Council was just another indication of the growth in the part being played by women in the life of the Church. In 1926 Mr. T. Norman died and the Church remembered a great benefactor from the days of the old Parade Chapel and all through the first decades of the Twentieth Century as manager of the Hall. Mr. Hitchcock too, took a very active part in supporting the various organisations. In 1922 his services were recognised in his election to the Presidency of the Surrey Congregational Union.

However, financial strictures at the Hall led to a decision in 1930 to erect two lock-up shops on the Hall forecourt, from which relief could be taken. There were also structural changes at the Church. The two vestries behind the pulpit were converted into one large room, called the Church Room, with a servery (now the Flower room) to the right and the Minister's vestry to the left. This was done in memory of the minister's wife who died in 1926. The Church Room was used on Sunday mornings by the Junior or Children's Church which had been started by Mr. Hitchcock in 1934 and which flourished from the start. He was also responsible for instigating the Annual United New Year Service held at the Parish Church. In 1933 Mr. Hitchcock married again to "the gracious lady who was to be the loving companion of his last years".

In 1935 Mr. John Warner took over the Sunday School from Mr. Saunders who had served as Superintendent since Mr. Norman gave up. There were then over three hundred children, and some fifteen to twenty teachers, some of whom are still with us in 1988. There were a number of associated youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Life Brigade, the Regnal League, who did yeoman service redecorating the Hall, and the British Camp Fire Girls, who helped to distribute the Church flowers. The Boys' Brigade held their Sunday Bible Class at the Hall. A new piano was bought in 1933. Partitions served to divide the Hall into various classes for Sunday School, while other classes were held in smaller rooms. A new Temperance organisation called the White Ribboners was formed. Anniversaries were a great feature of this period with so many children to choose from for talent. A concert on Monday followed the Sunday Anniversary Services.

In 1935 Mr. Hitchcock retired to live in Guildford, where he did much to care for the village churches of that area. Later he was to return to Epsom to live. In the following year, 1936, the Rev. John S. Bates came to Epsom from the Old Meeting House, Norwich, an even older Nonconformist congregation than our own. The Church continued to flourish and membership increased, and the Hall continued to be so well used that repairs and refurbishments seem to be constantly required with the resulting hard work and money-raising efforts. In 1936, the afternoon Sunday School Service was re-organised and taken by the Minister.

The celebrations for the Coronation of King George VI in 1937, were followed the next year by the 250th Anniversary of the founding of our Congregation. Activities included a Valentine Party, walks, a Grand Bazaar and a Gift Day, as well as a number of socials and dramatic performances. The 250th Anniversary was a good moment to sponsor the rebuilding of the organ. This had been an on-going idea since the early nineteen thirties, when cleaning and overhaul of the old "Bishop" organ was necessary and plans were considered in

1938, but were brought to a stand-still by the advent of the Second World War in 1939. After the War, it was found that the cost of a new organ had greatly increased.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

With the declaration of war in September 1939 some changes took place immediately. Blackout conditions altered and restricted evening activities, especially Youth Organisations. At first it was considered to be too expensive to blackout the large Hall in Upper High Street, but this was eventually done for the Services Club. Reduced lettings led to the departure of the assistant caretaker, Groups such as the Knitting Club, sprang into life, as folk knitted for war-time needs. Miss Gray's school continued in the basement, keeping that free from requisitioning. The Hall was soon designated an Emergency Medical Unit and a place for homeless refugees. Fire-watchers organised their night-time vigils and in October 1940, the Epsom Services Club and YMCA were opened, and said to be one of the best-run Services Clubs in the south of the country, with two kitchens, cloakrooms, lounge, reading and writing rooms, table tennis, billiards and darts. Entertainments were arranged from time to time and the whole town was represented by voluntary staff. Since these rooms were open from 2-10 p.m. every day, some of the Youth Organisations were moved elsewhere. Unfortunately the Girls' Life Brigade did not survive the move to Linton Lane School. In 1943 "Forces Flashes" was issued to keep church members in touch, and this became the fore-runner of the Epsom Congregational Church's News Letter. Christmas remembrances for those serving away from Epsom could be seen as a foreshadow of the present system of Christmas remembrances when the Women's Church Council remember at Christmas all those who are house-bound or have removed from the area and are known to them. The Club activities and associated celebrations seem to have been a real source of comradeship, which was missed when the Club closed in July 1945.

1940 had seen the evacuation of many of our children while staff of youth organisations were much depleted, so that the Sunday School had to be closed. Miss Gray's School dwindled and closed in 1947, except for the infant section. Wartime activities had taken the toll yet further of the Hall and its equipment, leading to another spate of repairs and improvements during the next eight to ten years. The Jews held their synagogue meetings there and outside lettings were renewed in 1946, for example, the Meals Canteen for Epsom Boys' County Secondary School which lasted until 1954, and the Crusader Class on Sunday afternoon.

In 1946, we celebrated the election of the Rev. E. Hitchcock as Minister Emeritus of our Church. Socials and dramatic performances were frequent. In 1947 the Rev. John Bates resigned his ministry and there began a two year interregnum. The church seemed to have picked up the reins quite quickly at the end of the War and progressed with renewed energy.

POST-WAR VICISSITUDES.

In 1949, the Rev. Stephen Baker from Rhyl was inducted as our minister. He had begun his working life as a tea salesman. In 1923 he entered New College and afterwards ministered at Redbourne, Hants, Lower Clapton, London, the Tabernacle at Newport and then at Rhyl. He also had a long period of social service and activities outside the church as well as being Secretary of the N. E. District of the London Congregational Union and as Vice-president of the Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society. He led our Church in coping with the rapidly expanding town, now a 'dormitory' for London's professional and executive people. The Junior Church expanded beyond all expectations and there were hopes to provide further accommodation for the youth and children's work. Meanwhile the afternoon Youth Services continued, but gone was the old form of Sunday School, although a few children were still taking the Scripture Examinations. Wedding receptions were held at the Hall including that of Raymond and Gwyneth Smith, two members of the Church at the time of writing. A Youth Club was formed and run on a democratic basis as an experiment and became very active. John Dearing took over the Boys' Brigade from Mr. Thornton to be followed by Mr. Palmer.

In 1952 the land behind the Church was for sale but the price was considered too high. It came on the market again in 1957, surveys and negotiations were made, only to be dropped. With so much needing to be done to maintain the Hall in proper condition it had been hoped to build a new hall in Church Street. In 1957 the Boys' Brigade was replaced by a Scout Troop led by Mr. Denman, with Florrie Sprinks in charge of Cubs. The Sunday School was re-organised as the Sunday Afternoon Young Peoples' Service.

In 1957 Mr. Harrison Longhurst died. He had been a life of great service to the Church and he was a very generous benefactor, and the Church was to benefit later by his bequests.

Post war years saw great changes in general attitudes towards the Church and to the Christian Religion in general. These changes were reflected in a more Liberal Theology. Younger preachers were tending to discard many of the old traditional forms of thought.

RIISING FROM THE ASHES. 1961-1963

At the Church, concern had been expressed about the structure of the building and the tower was no longer used as a boiler house. Consequently an exhaustive survey was made and plans for re-building were considered. Then a disaster struck in July 1961, a fire destroyed the roof and upper structures of the Church

and gutted the interior. The congregation had again to retreat to the Church Hall for their services, and an electric organ was hired to lead the singing. Later a Walker Positif organ was purchased. The 'Bishop' organ installed in 1905, had been destroyed in the fire.

Plans for re-building were put in hand immediately, but completion took a considerable time, and for some two and a half years the Church wrestled with trying to fit all its activities into the Church Hall. The foundation stones were laid early in 1963 and the rebuilt and re-designed Church was opened later in that year on November 16th. It consisted of a larger building constructed within the walls of the old Church, with a new structure at the front. The Church had been enlarged by demolishing the apse and building a new chancel on the site of the original Church Room. The gallery was re-constructed to house the choir and organ. With a lighter roof and re-formed windows at the side, the inside was given ample natural light. The pews were salvaged, re-polished and put into place. The Longhurst Room, as it was to be called, was built over the porch, and could be section ally divided; the kitchen and small committee or choir room were built over the vestibule. A slender aluminium spire surmounted by a golden ball and Cross rose above these new rooms. Half the cost of re-building came from insurance claims, the remainder was raised by members and friends. The Moderator, the Rev. W. A. James, officiated at the dedication service with many others assisting.

It was during this period of re-building that the Rev. S. Baker left to go to Littlehampton in 1962. Mr. Baker was a hard-working and caring minister who gave his time and energy unstintingly, but was never quite satisfied with his own efforts. His wife Winifred supported him wholeheartedly in his ministry. She was the Chairman of the Women's Church Council, the Social Hour, (forerunner of the Afternoon Fellowship) and the Young Wives' Group, which later became the Women's Evening Fellowship, now the Church Fellowship. She also looked after the Manse in Kingsdown Road, with none of the present labour-saving devices to help her. Mr. Baker spent many hours at the Lecture Hall running a Youth Club which served a need in the town. At the time of writing Stephen Baker and his wife live at Thame, near Oxford.

The Rev. D. E. Lewis came to Epsom in December of the same year from Shipley in Yorkshire. A Welshman, he trained at Brecon in 1941, and served the Union of Welsh Independents until 1948, when he moved to Harrison Road Church in Halifax where he stayed until 1958 when he moved to Shipley. It was a severe winter that year and snow covered the ground for the first few weeks of his ministry, but he entered quickly into the excitement of a new Church building, as well as coping with the problems of having services confined to the Lecture Hall. His out-going and friendly nature helped to build up the welcoming attitude of our Church today.

Apart from the re-building of the Church, a new Manse also had to be purchased, which added to the work of the Church Officers at this time. Once the new Church was opened endeavours were made to return the Church Hall to its original activities. In 1964 Mrs. Gwyneth Smith took over the Brownies and continues as their leader to this day. The Youth Club was re-organised once again under the leadership of Mr. Chase in 1968.

In 1965 the Epsom Church entered into a Covenant with Ewell Congregational Church, whereby the two churches undertook to co-operate more closely than before, with the two ministers serving both Churches, and, where possible, work should be integrated and duplication of effort avoided. A Covenant Service was held on 14th March 1965, led by the Moderator, the Rev. W. A. James.

Between 1969 and 1973 there were proposals to sell the Hall to developers. Plans were approved by the Council, but just before contracts were made for the re-development of a building to include a Church Hall, a subsidiary of the Development Company went into liquidation, and as a result the scheme had to be abandoned.

In 1968 the Scout Troop was disbanded for lack of leadership, but in 1970 Mr. G. R. E. Smith revived the Boys' Brigade starting a Junior Section with ten boys and three helpers, meeting at first in the Longhurst Room and moving later to the Hall. The Guides now meet in the Longhurst Room. The Boys' Brigade Company Section began in 1972, at first meeting together with the Ewell Company.

INTO THE FUTURE

1972 marked a significant stage in the long history of our congregation. While much was being discussed about unity of the churches countrywide, the two main branches of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century non-conforming Churches, the Independents or Congregationalists on the one hand, and the Presbyterian Church in England on the other, believed that they, at least, should unite together. There was much discussion, both at official Church level and among the congregations of both orders. When agreement had been reached at the higher official level, a vote was taken in each of the local Churches. The majority, including the Church at Epsom, agreed to the Union and a Bill was presented to Parliament. After many years of discussion, a solemn Act of Union was celebrated at Westminster Abbey in October 1972. So Epsom Congregational Church became the Epsom United Reformed Church. We welcomed some changes, such as the formation of an Eldership in place of a Diaconate, and elder-led groups; the monthly Church Meeting was retained.

In 1973 the Hall was declared to be unsafe by the insurers and Fire Authority. Once again it was "all change" and the organisations had to fit themselves into the Longhurst Room, whilst a mixture of professional and amateur work was done on the Hall so that Youth Organisations could return to the building.

In 1975, the Harrison Longhurst Bequest for an organ was realised. His wife to whom he had left a life interest in this fund had died in 1968. In his will Harrison Longhurst had left enough to bring the Organ Fund up to a level sufficient to make a possible purchase. After much search a suitable organ came to light at the Presbyterian Church of St. John, Forest Hill, S.E. London, which was closing down. It had been built in 1905 by J. N. Walker & Sons, builders of our own Positif organ. Some pipes were too large for our building, but by using some of our own Positif pipes, it was found possible to adapt the organ for use in our Church. During 1977, Mr. Ralph Arnold re-built and assembled the organ in the choir gallery and established the new console in the 'well' of the Church. The Inauguration Recital was given on Wednesday, 14th September 1977 by Philip Moore and the organ was dedicated the following Sunday.

In 1977, the Rev. Del Lewis decided he should retire from the full-time ministry. Growth during his ministry at Epsom was due in no small measure to Del's unique pastoral gifts, in which he was faithfully supported by his wife Lynne, both of whom had an extraordinary memory for faces and names. Del had a preaching style that was greatly appreciated by many. His was not an intellectual ministry, but one that built on the surer foundations of love, friendliness and compassion. His retirement was in name only. He held a part-time ministry at nearby Walton on the Hill from 1980-1987, and continued his chaplaincy work at the RAF Rehabilitation Centre at Headley and at Epsom Cottage Hospital.

The Rev. Allan Butler came to Epsom in 1978. His previous pastorates were at Freemantle, Southampton 1950-1962, and at Hayes Free Church, Kent, 1962-1978. He was yet another of our ministers who began his working life in a quite different sphere and his love and interest in things rural and agricultural was one to which he often referred. Soon after commencing his ministry at Epsom, the Rev. Jonathan Evans at the Ewell Church retired, and under the 1965 Covenant, Allan Butler had to act as Interim Moderator for the Ewell Church. It was a long and frustrating interregnum and it was not until 1981 that the Rev. Richard Church was appointed minister at Ewell.

Our Youth Organisation have continued to offer facilities to the youth of Epsom. The Guides had been captained over the years by Mrs. Muriel Warner from 1949-1956, followed by Mrs. Dover and Mrs. Joan Denman, who both retired in 1981 and were given long service awards. Later Mrs. G. Martin captained the Guides until her removal to Eastbourne, and subsequently Miss Elaine Edwards took over. The Boys' Brigade flourished under the leadership of Mr. G. Jones and his faithful assistants. The Leadership of the Junior Church passed into the capable hands of Mrs. Joan Young, and throughout Mr. Butler's ministry the staff met regularly with him for preparation using "Partners in Learning".

In 1981, the Church lost one of its long serving officers in the passing of Mr. A. P. Smith, who had served the Church so well as its secretary from 1946-1976.

In 1983 the Laine Theatre Arts moved from Ebbisham Hall, when it was demolished, to our Lecture Hall and this provided an added source of income until 1987 when they moved away.

The aim to expand our activities and to have all the organisations on one site was renewed in 1982 when the parcel of land behind the Church once again came on the market. This time arrangements were completed and the land acquired. Since the area of land was greater than our requirements, a part was re-sold to developers for the erection of two private houses in The Grove and this realised a sum in excess of the original purchase price and we were able to clear all expenses incurred and realise a little profit. Preparations of plans for building a Hall and committee room and a new minister's vestry were put in hand and submitted to the Local Planning Committee, but sadly, the application was refused. A subsequent appeal to the Department of the Environment was also refused. In 1984 outline modified plans were submitted to the Local Planning Committee for the building of committee rooms and a minister's vestry on to the rear of the Church. These were accepted and an architect worked on plans for the new building, for which tenders are now being sought. Mention must be made here of the thorough and painstaking work put in by Mr. George Smith (Senior) and members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee in their efforts to secure for the Church the best possible solution to its present accommodation problems.

More changes have come to our youth work with the resignation of Mr. G. Jones as Captain of the Boys' Brigade, which passed into the capable hands of Mr. Phil Castle. He and his assisting officers have carried our Company from strength to strength. They have an excellent band, much in demand. In many fields they have won Battalion and Nationwide awards. This says much for the devoted service given by his team of officers. We have seen the Bible Class on Sunday mornings increase in numbers and are pleased that girls have asked to join this group. The expanding Bible Class has little accommodation and we hear the strains of their praise from time to time in the Church. There is also a Youth Club run on Sunday Evenings in the Hall.

The life of the Church seemed to fall to a sad low for a year or so in the mid Eighties, but with determination and renewed vigour, revived when it took notice and studied much of the information which came from the

Central Office of the United Reformed Church at its Church Meeting and particularly in its two House Groups. The Church began to experience a new desire for mission.

Work amongst the adult congregation is also worthy of mention. The Afternoon Fellowship meets regularly by the week, for a Bible Study once a month and talks on many interesting topics, and it is loyally supported. The Church Fellowship meets monthly and is now also running a Drama Group. In addition to the pastoral work done by the Elders, mention must be made of the Women's Church Council which for many years has been responsible for running the domestic side of the Church, and which assists the Minister in pastoral work and regularly distributes the Church Flowers. They are also outward looking and run a monthly Coffee Morning to aid local and nationwide charities, and provide a much appreciated opportunity to meet friends. With Mrs. Daphne Dawe as President and Mrs. Marjorie Thomson as Secretary, the work goes on quietly and efficiently. Mrs. Marjorie Thomson has served the Church faithfully in many capacities over very many years.

Towards the end of 1985 the Rev. Allan Butler announced that he would retire from the full-time ministry at the close of 1986. His last year with us was a memorable one and he gave us of his best. He had battled on through eight not very easy years, and had seen us to more hopeful times. It was with sadness that we had to bid him farewell, but we shall still value him as our friend together with his wife Marion. He will be remembered for his ambitious efforts at Harvest and other Festivals of the Church's Year, when he saw that it was tastefully decorated. We shall remember him too for his sermons - particularly by the few who attended the evening services - and for his pastoral work and concern for the Church which he so much loved. On the last Sunday afternoon of 1986 there was a great gathering at which we bade our official farewell to Allan and Marion. Many friends from his two previous ministries made the journey to Epsom to wish them well, and presentations were made to them both.

In 1987, the Church entered into a period of interregnum, which was ably guided by the Rev. Richard Church of Ewell as its Interim Moderator. Our Provincial Moderator had warned us that we might be in for a long interregnum and we organised ourselves to meet the challenge, prayerfully, and thoughtfully. We mustered our resources and shared out the work. The Church was well supplied with visiting ministers and a few lay preachers, and the evening services were held in the Longhurst Room and conducted by various members of the Church. At the end of the year our Church membership showed a net increase over losses by death and removal, the first time for some years, which showed the Church's determination to make it an active interregnum. During that period two of our members Mr. Maurice Young and Mr. Percy Roberts served us well as lay preachers. Maurice Young had served the Church as Secretary some years previously and he was responsible for obtaining the pulpit supplies during the interregnum, and he also ably guided us at this time. Percy Roberts has unstintingly, over the years, given of his time as a lay preacher both to his own Church and to the churches of the Wimbledon District Council. He has also served as interim moderator to some of our inner City Churches in which he has shown a great interest in their attempts to continue their witness against great odds.

Seven months into the year we were given the name of the Rev. Geoffrey Dunstan, a minister at that time in Namibia, South West Africa, who wished to return to England to a United Reformed Church Pastorate. The Church considered the situation very carefully and took the unusual step of interviewing the candidate with a telephone call to Namibia in which the elders had a conversation with Mr. Dunstan. As a result it was decided to take the name of the Rev. Geoffrey Dunstan to Church Meeting and a decision was made to call him to the pastorate at Epsom. He accepted and was inducted on 22nd October 1987.

When Allan Butler retired, by a previous arrangement, he acquired the freehold of the Manse. Although delighted that Allan and Marion had a home for their retirement, the Church had to face the purchase of a new manse with much concern. House prices in Epsom were "Sky High", and the one hundred per cent increase we had provided for was not sufficient, but a solution was found. On the retirement of the Rev. D. E. Lewis, the church has purchased for them a property in Leatherhead for their lifetime. We learned that they would be very pleased to return to their native South Wales. There they found a home of their choice which the Church purchased. The property at Leatherhead was sold, which allowed the purchase of a new manse in a pleasant area close to Epsom Downs.

INTO THE FOURTH CENTURY

Epsom United Reformed Church enters into its Fourth Century in the year 1988, with a new minister to begin a new era in its life and witness to the town and each is steeped in its own unique history, a history which links them to one another. The Church is looking forward to the ministry of the Rev. Geoffrey Dunstan with interest and enthusiasm and is ready to share in it with him.

Where does our Church's future lie? To what will be directed as we enter our Fourth Century? We pray that the Holy Spirit will be active in our Fellowship, and lead us in our Christian calling in this part of our land to meet the spiritual needs of the community which we seek to serve.